

The Montague Reporter

Year 24 – No. 14

MARCH 12, 2026

\$2

editor@montaguereporter.org

THE VOICE OF THE VILLAGES

montaguereporter.org

MONTAGUE SELECTBOARD

Town Asking Employees to Shoulder Share Of Health Hike

By JEFF SINGLETON

On Monday the Montague selectboard made progress in preparing for the May annual town meeting by voting to place seven “non-financial” articles on the warrant, including borrowing funds for a new public library, removing most personnel policies from the town bylaws, and authorizing a program that could provide lower electricity prices for residents.

The board also hired a full-time police officer and a laborer/operator at the Clean Water Facility, and began the process of negotiating proposed changes in health benefits with town unions.

Town treasurer Eileen Seymour came before the board to discuss the changes, which have been offered by the town’s insurance carrier, the Hampshire Group Insurance Trust, as a way to reduce the increase in premiums the town must pay next fiscal year.

The proposal would hold the increase, which would otherwise be much higher, to an estimated 12.48%, but would require increases in copays and deductibles for town employees. Under state law,

see **MONTAGUE** page A7

Dam Pistons Ooze Oil Yet Again; Ice Blamed



CLAIRE CHANG PHOTO

For at least the fifth time in as many years, the pistons that activate the bascule gates on the Turners Falls dam have been spotted leaking hydraulic fluid into the river. According to dam owner FirstLight Power, oil staining was observed in late February and reported to the state Department of Environmental Protection, but workers could not safely access the pistons until last week, when they wrapped them with absorbent materials. The company attributed the leaks at Gate 4 to an “unusual weight of the ice buildup on the pistons.”

FirstLight replaced the aging pistons on Gate 1 last fall, and spokesperson Claire Belanger told the Reporter the company plans to overhaul the other three bascule gates over the next three years. The decision as to which gate to upgrade next, she said, involves “numerous factors,” and will be made later this year.

GILL-MONTAGUE SCHOOL COMMITTEE

Admin Outlines Restructuring, Reduction in Teaching Force

By MIKE JACKSON

GILL-MONTAGUE – Having known for months that a gap between projected revenues and expenses would require deep cuts and likely layoffs, the regional school committee approved a final FY’27 budget Tuesday night, heard about major staff restructuring plans, delayed a decision about how many school-choice students to accept, and agreed to post internally for an interim superintendent.

The vote was nearly unanimous for an operating budget of \$25,805,169 – up slightly from the preliminary budget approved in January – with one major twist: a special article request for Montague town meeting to grant the district another \$163,748 to cover instructional materials and an after-school program.

The budget includes deep cuts from level services in salaries; taking all funds into account, the “Instructional” line is actually declining

see **GMRSD** page A6

Developers Advise Town To Carve Up Farren Lot



ZAYATZ PHOTO

Tuesday’s panel at the Shea Theater brought together real estate and development experts to offer Montague frank advice about the former hospital lot.

By BRIAN ZAYATZ

TURNERS FALLS – About 50 residents crowded into the lower section of the Shea Theater on Tuesday evening, after helping themselves to some complimentary Turners Falls Pizza House pizza, to hear the recommendations of a panel of developers who had spent the day on a whirlwind tour of the former Farren hospital property in Montague City.

The volunteer, seven-person technical assistance panel – organized by the Urban Land Institute, a “cross-disciplinary” real estate industry group – considered a series of questions outlined by the town of Montague about whether or not to

subdivide the now-empty Farren lot and seek a master developer.

After the former hospital and long-term care center was demolished in 2023, the owner donated the seven-acre plot to the town. Over the last two years, the planning department has worked with consultants and the public to identify goals for its reuse; last October, town meeting voted to update the zoning bylaws to create a Village Center Mixed-Use District, intended to encourage a dense development combining business and open space with a large number of housing units.

Tuesday’s panel was advertised as an opportunity to hear expert input before the town issues one or

see **FARREN** page A8

Swift River Elementary School Faces Staff Layoffs

By SARAH ROBERTSON

WENDELL / NEW SALEM – Rising health insurance costs could force Swift River School to cut as many as six staff positions before the next school year. Educators and parents pleaded with the New Salem / Wendell school committee to do everything it can to avoid staff cuts during a virtual public hearing on the proposed school budget last Friday afternoon.

“There are many of us out here who don’t support that decision, and are willing to stand up at town meeting and say that,” said New Salem resident Lisabeth Willey, a parent of two Swift River students. “The support that our kids receive at that school is amazing, and I really worry about what happens if that changes.”

The night before the hearing, the New Salem finance committee had presented the school committee with three options representing

see **SWIFT** page A4

SCENE REPORT

Bringing It to Beacon Hill

By REPORTER STAFF

BOSTON – Montague Reporter correspondent Joe R. Parzych reported back from the Massachusetts State House on Tuesday, where he and a team from the United Arc of Franklin County joined a legislative reception hosted by the Arc of Massachusetts and the Massachusetts

Developmental Disabilities Council (MDDC) that sought to connect legislators with leaders within the disability community.

“It’s very crucial because a nationwide emergency is going on for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities,” Parzych wrote before the event. “The United

see **HILL** page A6



APRIL JONES PHOTO

Members of the Pioneer Club at the Massachusetts State House on Tuesday, left to right: Michelle, Leo, Robin, and Reporter correspondent Joe R. Parzych. (“My friends,” Parzych writes. “An awesome group of people.”)

ERVING SELECTBOARD

Town May Reissue Request For Paper Mill Proposals

By KEITH WATERS

Erving town administrator Brian Smith and town planner Glenn Johnson-Mussad reported to the selectboard Monday night that they had met recently with a party previously interested in redeveloping the former International Paper (IP) mill, which the town owns.

According to Smith, the developer brought the town’s attention to another way to go about the process. A large state hospital complex in Monson which was closed about 40 years ago, the Monson Developmental Center, was owned by the state, who as with Erving and the IP

site did not know what to do with it for a long time. The state legislature has approved the idea of offering potential developers a contract with a “no harm, no foul” contingency clause allowing either side to back out of the process within two years.

The issue of what to do with the IP property is rather pressing to the town due to the rising cost of liability insurance, and Smith seemed excited about the prospect of issuing a new request for proposals (RFP) using the Monson model.

Selectboard member James Loynd said he was not sure how the model would benefit the town, but see **ERVING** page A6



Press and Hold Left Side of Newspaper to Play at 2x Speed

No Harm, No Foul.....A1	A Desire Unsuitable.....B1
Give Us Boredom and Tedium.....A2	Numerous Decapitated Heads.....B2
The Timing of This Upheaval.....A3	Disturbance Between Brothers.....B3
Beyond the Emotional Toll.....A4	As Your Skin Ages.....B4
Circling the Drain Now.....A5	The Molten Core Murmuring.....B5
Becoming a Trip Hazard.....A6	Stress Reduction, Safety Coffin.....B6
How to Avert Such a Calamity.....A7	Holy Bowl, Ice Cube, Beauty Bag.....B7
Just to Beat That Dead Horse.....A8	While the Ballerina Functions.....B8

The Montague Reporter

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Passing It On

Now that hard numbers are in for the cost of Montague building a new downtown library, it's worth backtracking a couple weeks to an argument made publicly by one town official in opposition to the library proposal.

"This will make the municipal taxes go up significantly," he wrote. "Then rents go up, perpetuating the housing crisis. Brilliant times we are living in!!!"

That's Bob Obear, who serves on both the town's planning board and its zoning board of appeals, writing on Facebook in response to a *Greenfield Recorder* article about the library project – before any of the numbers were public.

It's a reasonable position to be concerned about the tax impact of this major project, and of Montague's share of a new tech school building, which would be even greater. The costs must be weighed against the benefits, and in the coming weeks and months the public library trustees, libraries director, and their supporters will be repeating their case that the economic benefit of the expanded public resource will be worth the investment. We're not going to argue about that here.

What was compelling about Obear's announcement is that he is not merely a taxpayer, but also a major landlord in Montague – owning something like 32 residential units spread across nine buildings, according to our quick research – and is therefore personally making decisions about how much our neighbors' rent should go up in response to his rising expenses.

The deal on the table is that the new anchor library would cost \$23.7 million, of which Montague would cover \$12.4 million, spread out over 30 years of borrowing. Using the math from the tech school bonds, we estimate this means average annual payments of \$776,823, with a tax impact of 50 cents per thousand dollars of residential value – \$3.13 per week for the median single-family homeowner.

What does this mean for Mr. Obear and his tenants? Well, many of his buildings are split between commercial and residential units and thus are charged a split rate, but the easiest is 38 East Main, an 11-unit apartment building assessed at \$935,000. The tax impact of the new library, per apartment, would come to something like \$3.54 per month.

Then there's 125-131 Avenue A, with four one-bedrooms up

stairs and three (or maybe just two) storefronts. If the split is even by floor, its \$485,200 assessment could include \$323,467 in residential value, with the library adding \$162 a year in tax – in other words, \$3.38 per unit per month.

Or 41 East Main? Six apartments and two commercial spaces, so we'll guess three-quarters of its \$531,300 assessment is residential. The \$199 hit across those six units would boil down to \$2.77 each per month.

Maybe we're missing something. We assume Mr. Obear is scrupulous and wouldn't ask his tenants to underwrite his commercial real estate expenses. But even if our figures are wildly low – let's say \$10 monthly per unit, closer to that single-family homeowner – and even if he passes 100% of the impact on to his tenants, is a rent hike of that size really enough to "perpetuate the housing crisis"?

Mr. Obear is in construction, and he deserves a lot of credit for renovating many of these buildings and bringing a number of the units in question onto the market. By increasing the total available housing stock, he has done more than most of us to ameliorate the housing crisis. We don't mean to overlook that. And we hope he is making a good rate of return on his extensive efforts.

Furthermore, the library is only one of a number of current and proposed cost drivers, amid a stressful budgeting period for local towns and schools – readers need only look back at the front page to be reminded. And it may look like a softer target than others for cuts.

But we have to wonder what compels Mr. Obear, who sits in a position of power and is likely taken seriously in his arguments by friends and colleagues, to choose the region's housing crisis as the rhetorical vehicle for his bearishness on the library project.

It's not the first time his train of thought has raised eyebrows in the *MR* newsroom. Last June, for example, we reported that during a ZBA hearing about plans to convert an old streetcar garage in Montague City into a self-storage facility, Obear "argued that self-storage would have a lower impact" on the immediate neighborhood "than housing, which might attract drug dealing." Uhh... *hmmmm*.

So, if you encounter this "housing crisis" talking point in the wild this spring, consider its source.

NINA ROSSI ILLUSTRATION



The team at the Franklin County Solid Waste Management District office, gathered last Thursday morning around a large Earth Machine compost bin. At left is Jan Ameen, holding two sharps disposal containers; Stephanie Marshall is in the middle, with a household compost bucket; and Amy Donovan presents a recycling bin. These items are all available "at cost" to residents in this paper's five-town coverage area – the Earth Machine is only \$25, and the household bucket \$5. Call the "Waste Watchers" at (413) 772-2438 to arrange purchase, or with your questions about recycling and composting.

Letters to the Editors

Discrimination is Costly

Discrimination is costly to our communities, but the misinformed policy adoption in Montague of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) working definition of antisemitism is more of a costly political tool for control than a helpful one for engaging a community. It will not end community division, nor make us all feel safer and more included.

Nor will town budgets that invest in technology to surveil the masses with Flock cameras and facial scanning, extra policing, or bombs funded from our local taxes rid our world of "terrorists" and "criminals."

Oppressive policies and tactics will never address the underlying causes of hate and disparity. They will never be tools to promote accountability or civility and discourse in our communities.

Small towns in Massachusetts should consider the parable of

Montague, and the costs already incurred. A Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request was filed to uncover information about policies concerning apartheid and divestment. This has taxed the staff of Montague over 15 hours, and residents of their tax dollars.

For what? To vilify activities that seek to oppose discrimination and oppression?

Further financial and legal burdens could be incurred in applying anti-democratic practices to reject Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) resolutions petitioned legally by the people as per town requirement. The cost of creating training programs, educational materials, monitoring and reporting methodologies, as well as the additional administrative and legal costs of implementing the vague IHRA definition could also burden a small town's budget.

So what do we do with the very real sense that we must remain vigilant and prepared for attacks from the "other" who means to do us harm?

I don't really know, but a good place to start is we open doors. We lean in. We share in dialogue and listening to one another. We go out of our way to create spaces where we can all belong.

Each one of us has a responsibility to do this, and I hope to see more discussions about who we are as a community, and how we want to live with one another in the near future.

MLK's quote speaks to where we need to start: "There can be no justice without peace. And there can be no peace without justice."

Heather Hutchinson
Leverett

CORRECTION

In our March 5 edition, our article announcing the Massachusetts Board of Library Commissioners's award of library funding to Montague (*State OKs \$11.3 Million For Downtown Library*, Page A1) included a seriously wrong date of May 19 for the annual town meeting.

We had the town election on our mind! Town meeting has reverted to its traditional date of the first Saturday in May, which would be May 2.

Apologies to anyone we inadvertently misled.

Workshops Available

What if email hadn't been invented? Then the FBI might have to get a hobby, since phone tapping would grow cumbersome and boredom might set in. I say hooray for boredom. Give us boredom and tedium, for email is the Devil's workshop.

What if videos didn't exist? Then dirty deeds might not get done. For dirty deeds without blackmail can't perpetuate the dirty deeds system.

Video is the Devil's workshop.

What if the FBI had remained unarmed? Then they might have stayed true to their mission. For an armed FBI is the Devil's workshop.

Give me a country without email, video, and armed agents and I'll give you a nation at peace with itself and the world.

Sharon Mellor Horton
Northampton

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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TURNERS FALLS AND VICINITY.

Compiled by MIKE JACKSON

It got warm and wonderful! There is still some misery in the forecast, as there always is, but spring is definitely nigh. Next Friday it begins officially, with the vernal equinox and all of that, because of where we are positioned as a planet, but in this microvicinity the *real* start of spring is this Saturday, March 14 at 11 a.m., when the **Country Creemee** flings unlocked its door, and the pumping and scooping of soft and hard ice creams begin anew. The Creemee will be open from 11 a.m. to 7 p.m. daily from here on out.

Once you are full on ice creams, there are 20 other downtown businesses you could visit... for a chance to win a gift basket valued at over \$600. How's that for a segue?

Christian LaPlante, the Chamber of Commerce staffer moonlighting as a "downtown district coordinator" for the busy and markedly non-adjacent metropolitan hubs of Shelburne Falls, Turners Falls, and Northfield, has helped set up a game called **The Passport to Turners Falls**.

(The process leading up to this shared, short-term, grant-funded position was controversial! Christian seems great, though.)

See moretofranklincounty.com/passport for a treasure map and details. It really doesn't look that hard to hit all 20 participating businesses, ranging from Booska's to Breakdown, from Ce Ce's to Sadie's, from Orla to Fab – and they are all providing, and stamping, passports, with no purchase necessary, for players to submit by month's end.

If you've ever been downtown when roving bands of people dressed as pirates are hunting for riddles to earn coins, this is a different game.

Wendell held a special town meeting on Monday. "It was 12 minutes long, and they approved everything with almost no discussion," Wendell municipal correspondent Josh Heinemann reported afterward by phone to the MR office. More details, we decided, can safely be deferred until his selectboard coverage in next week's edition.

Have you ever wanted to meet and chat with cemetery commissioners and find out what they do and whether you, too, can get in on the action?

Well, if you live in Montague, you're in luck – the **Montague cemetery commission** will be giving a public presentation Wednesday, March 25, at 6:30 p.m. at the senior center on Fifth Street.

The presentation will be followed by a question-and-answer session with the commissioners, which we imagine might resemble a scaled-down version of the Questions to the Prime Minister sessions held every week in the House of Commons over in the United Kingdom, also on Wednesdays.

If you're on the fence about attending, here's a final scrap of info you might find helpful: light refreshments will be provided.

The Valley Players, a community theater company that always donates half its proceeds to other local nonprofits, is seeking performers.

On Wednesday, March 25 at 7 p.m., the company kicks off its third season with an **open mic theater night** at the Rendezvous. "The evening will feature scenes and speeches from a wide variety of plays, old and new, chosen by the performers themselves," Valley Players prez Matteo Pangallo writes. "Anyone interested in performing a speech or scene can email info@valleyplayers.org."

Donations are encouraged – half will go to the Brick House Community Resource Center just down the street, and the other half toward the company's production of *The Tempest* this June 11 through 21 at Black Birch Vineyard in Hatfield, "which itself will be a benefit for the Center for New Americans."

Pretty sweet model. I encourage our readers to check it out. *The Tempest* is always timely, too.

I don't have a lot of favorite movies, but when I do, they're often *Matewan*, director John Sayles's grim 1987 retelling of the Battle of Matewan, a coal miners' strike in Mingo County, West Virginia that culminated in a shootout between company gun thugs and the hardscrabble town's honest police chief and mayor. *Matewan's* cast is stacked

high with talent (James Earl Jones, Chris Cooper, David Strathairn, Mary McDonnell), and it includes as a teenaged preacher Will Oldham, who would go on decades later to play a show at our Shea Theater under his musical persona, Bonnie "Prince" Billy. The main protagonist, Cooper's character, is a Wob. Great movie.

Well, now **John Sayles is also coming to the Shea**, as one of two special guests at this month's installment of the theater's free double-feature series Cinemastorm. On Wednesday, March 25 at 7 p.m., the town-owned theater flings unlocked its doors and the projecting begins of *Matewan*, followed by Sayles's 1991 *City of Hope*.

I've only ever seen about a half hour of that one, and I have no excuse.

"The film," Cinemastorm's shadowy promoters write in a shockingly pointed dig at our own town hall, "weaves together multiple storylines centered around a controversial development project, examining themes of greed, responsibility, and the struggle for integrity in a city rife with political chicanery and moral compromise."

There's usually trivia for candy prizes during the intermissions of these things, and I imagine some part of the program will also be given over to Sayles and the second special guest, Maggie Renzi, who plays Rosaria in *Matewan* and Connie in *City of Hope* and characters in six of Sayles's other films, and co-produced 13 of them, and according to Wikipedia grew up in Pittsfield.

All three of those events are at the same time on Wednesday the 25th. I imagine it'll be possible to triple-dip... someone should make a Passport.

I won't be at any of them myself, unfortunately. I'll be here at the office, working diligently to put together our March 26 edition.

What, in your understanding, is *preventing* the Earth's nation-states from descending into a **cataclysmic global war**? Asking for a friend.

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Another Letter
to the Editors

International Conflicts: Decline to Inject Them

As Wendell prepares to vote on an Apartheid Free Community (AFC) resolution – and with Leverett potentially following suit later this spring – I write to share my serious concerns about what is, at its core, a divisive and problematic proposal that has no place in local town governance.

On March 3, Vermont's State Town Meeting Day offered a powerful and instructive signal. Of the more than 20 towns targeted to vote on an AFC resolution, only eight chose to have a town vote, and four passed it (with three by small margins). Montpelier's residents – Vermont's state capital – rejected the resolution. Burlington's City Council rejected it in January and instead passed a Community Dialogue Resolution.

These decisions reflect that Vermont towns are choosing to focus on creating inclusive and welcoming communities, ensuring the safety of residents, declining to inject international conflicts into local town meetings, and on managing the nuts and bolts of their municipalities such as housing, schools, roads, utilities, conservation, construction, and buildings.

Whatever one's views on the conflict in the Middle East, municipalities are not de-

signed as a forum to address international issues. Regarding the Apartheid-Free resolution, it singles out one nation for condemnation at a level of government that has no jurisdiction, no expertise, and no legitimate role in adjudicating an extraordinarily complex international situation.

Passing such a resolution does not bring peace or justice to anyone abroad. What it does do is import division and pain into our own neighborhoods, and risks making Jewish residents and others feel unwelcome in the very communities they call home.

Municipalities exist to serve all of their residents. Building a truly inclusive and welcoming community means ensuring that all residents – including Jewish residents – feel safe, respected, and at home. AFC resolutions undermine that mission.

I urge Wendell's voters and leaders to consider whether an AFC resolution achieves that goal, or whether it does the opposite. The evidence from Vermont on March 3 suggests that many communities, upon careful reflection, have concluded it does not.

Amy Mager Northampton

OP ED **The Pain Body**

By MARA BRIGHT

WENDELL – I don't want to ignore what's going on on the other side of the planet while here outside my window the sun glitters on the snow and tree tendrils tickle the sky, bluer than blue. I've come back from a walk on the road sheltered from hearing the whistle of drones or the acrid smell of smoke in the distance. These images enter my mind and almost as quickly leave, because I don't want to give power to them. And yet in Tehran just as people were heading to work, dropping their children off at school, the first bombs fell.

Can I imagine my world turned upside down, a day I expected to be ordinary exploding into a nightmare? What do I do with that thought; is there anything to do with it?

Concurrently, I've committed to sending love and healing to the Earth with a group from across the globe. For a few minutes each morning I send healing to whatever the group has agreed to focus on for the month. This month it's the soil, rocks, minerals, and molten core of the Earth.

There's no escaping that we humans have plundered the Earth's elements to build our roads and high-rises, to fuel our automobiles, and to sow the soil and our bodies with plastics. It must be possible to sustain ourselves, to grow food without chemicals and without deforesting vast tracts of land.

I know my thoughts are influenced by Leslie Marmon Silko's novel *Ceremony* about the devastation of a whole people, who inhabited North America before my forebears came from Europe to settle here. The ripples from the taking of what was not ours inform the predicament we find ourselves in now.

The taking of what is not ours to take. My mind strays to the mountain of messages incriminating a phalanx of men who took young girls, because their power sanctioned it. No one exists to be taken. Which circles back to what we've done and continue to do to the Earth. We take her resources without honoring, without asking, without thanking.

I don't know where this ends, and I don't want to feed the pain body that already encircles the Earth. But acknowledging my pain and outrage needs to happen for me today.

Last night with friends we spoke of our anxiety around the cataclysmic changes that surround us on every front. I want to believe what those with higher wisdom claim to know – that we're in a period of transition designed to propel us and the Earth into a higher dimension of consciousness.

Maybe so. It is written, they say, the timing of this upheaval we all feel. What remains to be seen is whether we humans will wake up in time. The outcome for good or for ill is by no means guaranteed.

So, I muddle about doing the small things I can do. How important it is for someone like me to do something. I'm clear that I don't want to add to the trauma and fear, and I don't want to pretend that a *deus ex machina* will arrive to save us all.

I practice small steps, small acts of kindness, even if I have no way of knowing whether they matter.

Mara Bright is a writer and professional astrologer. She is the author of The Constant Heart, a memoir, and Finding Home, a collection of poetry. She lives in Wendell.

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SWIFT from page A1

scenarios in which three, five, or six staff positions would be cut. It chose the middle option, increasing overall spending by 2.87% while cutting the equivalent of five paraprofessional salaries.

The preliminary operating budget for the 2027 fiscal year therefore stands at \$3,577,466. Of that, benefits for current and retired employees of the school and central office together account for nearly 30% – more than one million dollars. Health insurance accounts for \$572,327, a 45.8% increase from the current year's budget.

By comparison, Chapter 70 state aid to the school is increasing by only 0.74%.

"This is such a tragedy," said school committee chair Nancy Slator. "This has nothing to do with supporting our schools, and everything to do with the cost of insurance. It's so awful that we're having to make these kinds of choices because of things that have nothing to do with the school at all."

Without the health insurance increases, the preliminary budget would have increased spending by just over 2% with no staff cuts, Slator told the *Reporter*.

The school's insurer is the Hampshire County Group Insurance Trust (HCGIT), a joint purchase group covering over 12,000 municipal employees in western Massachusetts. Last year, facing potential bankruptcy brought on by a wave of claims driven by the rising cost of pharmaceuticals, including new and highly popular GLP-1 weight loss drugs, HCGIT raised member rates by about 40%.

Wendell and New Salem officials were made aware of another 14% increase this year after drafting their towns' FY'27 budgets. These back-to-back increases are the "overwhelming driver to this budget," explained Caitlin Anderson May, finance director for the Union #28 superintendency district, which oversees Swift River and three other local elementary schools.

"This year we have a huge deficit because of the increases in health insurance," May said. "It's not a coincidence that many schools are making reductions this year."

May said a committee formed this winter to shop for other insurance providers found the main alternative, the state Group Insurance Commission, to be just as expensive, and that there would be costs incurred by leaving the HCGIT.

Last year, Wendell and New Salem's state representative Aaron Saunders introduced a successful amendment that provided municipalities opting to leave the HCGIT with a "safety net" by allowing them to pay these costs over five years.

"For any other insurance groups, we would have to apply to them," May said, "and I have to be honest, we are not an attractive customer for them to join into their group, because we are so small and carry such a high risk."

Union #28 superintendent Shannon White-Cleveland emphasized that no decisions have yet been made as to how many, or which, positions at Swift River would be eliminated.

"Nobody is happy about these cuts," White-Cleveland said. "Unless there is an influx of money

into the budget, there is nothing we can do."

Parents and teachers who spoke against the cuts on Friday emphasized the importance of paraprofessionals in the classroom for students with learning or behavioral issues.

"We are a skeleton crew held together by goodwill," said school counselor Jamie Lefebvre, speaking on behalf of the Swift River School union. "Teaching alone in a classroom with the complex emotional and behavioral needs that we see today is simply not sustainable or safe for teachers or students."

"Beyond the emotional toll, cutting staff is fiscally irresponsible," he continued. "A single out-of-district therapeutic placement in Massachusetts can exceed \$200,000 a year. Currently, several of our students remain in the district because of the support our staff provide.... Cutting staff today is a shortsighted move that will lead to a much larger, mandatory, bill tomorrow."

Some parents and teachers who spoke at Friday's meeting said the individualized attention students receive at Swift River School is part of the reason they chose to be a part of the community.

"Our work allows students with different needs and abilities to learn side-by-side with their peers while feeling supported, valued, and capable," said Michelle Wolfe, a paraprofessional at Swift River. "When support staff disappear, the support students depend on disappears with them."

"The bottom line is, the town doesn't have enough revenue to support the needs of the community," said Kate Woodward, a Wendell

representative on the school committee. "And in order to do that, taxes have to increase."

New Salem town coordinator Emily Hill said her town is one of many dealing with budgetary shortfalls caused by rising costs, HCGIT premiums included.

"The selectboard and finance committee are exploring all available options," Hill said. "However, most municipal revenue sources are limited, and ultimately any major funding decisions would need to be approved by voters."

Reached for comment on Wednesday, a spokesperson from state senator Jo Comerford's office said that stabilizing rural school budgets is the senator's "top priority." She is advocating for excess revenue from the Fair Share Amendment be given to schools experiencing unsustainable health insurance premium hikes. The appropriation would be made in Governor Maura Healey's next supplemental budget bill.

The school committee did not take a vote on Friday, and will schedule another meeting to continue the public hearing and vote on a final budget to send to the towns.

"We are hoping for better," Slator, the school committee chair, told the *Reporter*. "But that would require the people of New Salem to decide to make an extraordinary decision to support the school, even above the strong support that has always been given in the past."

Residents will vote on the towns' contributions to the school at the annual town meetings in New Salem on May 11, and Wendell on June 6.

NOTES FROM THE LEVERETT SELECTBOARD

Rural Aesthetic, Affordability Trade Off

By **GEORGE BRACE**

At its meeting on Tuesday, Leverett's selectboard heard opinions from residents on their preferences for the design of the Mill Yard Road bridge replacement. The board also responded to concerns from a Dudleyville Road resident that drainage work was scheduled to take place on his land without his permission.

At the previous selectboard meeting, Tighe & Bond senior project manager Andrea Lacasse had asked for the town's preference in material to be used in the superstructure of the new Mill Yard Road bridge. The old timber bridge has been closed for several years after suffering damage from ice floes, and is scheduled for replacement under the state's Municipal Small Bridge grant program.

The town's preference was needed, Lacasse said, so the engineering firm could seek approval from the state and move on to the next step in the project design.

Lacasse had presented three options, along with estimates of their construction cost plus the costs including maintenance during their lifecycle: steel, at \$1.57 million plus \$900,000 over a 100-year lifespan; concrete, at \$1.25 million plus \$400,000 over 100 years; or wood, at \$1.24 million plus \$2.37 million over 60 years.

Lacasse said her firm would be recommending concrete, but that the town's preference would also factor in the state's decision. The grant program covers up to \$1 million of the up-front cost.

Favoring the use of wood, Mill Yard Road resident Elliot Sherman said that the location was "quite a magical spot," and that he felt the bridge should "honor the splendor of the area."

"Anything that speaks of living in an essentially wooded area is an improvement over something that looks like it belongs on [Route] 91,"

he said. "In Connecticut."

Resident Ben Eddy said he was "all about timber bridges" and would love to see the bridge rebuilt with its original design, but that affordability was a factor for him, and that in any case the wood option was not a true "timber" bridge but would use a laminated wood composite, which could fail in less than 60 years.

Eddy said that he and his parents grew up in Leverett, and that he hopes his children will be able to afford to do the same, but that he is concerned with property taxes. He added that he liked the reassurance of a concrete bridge's 100-year lifespan.

Resident Richard Nathorst said that all three designs looked "rather beautiful," and that he would like to see an attractive, modern bridge that would last 100 years with minimum maintenance.

Lacasse said the concrete design could be improved aesthetically by adding timber railings, dyeing the concrete so it fits in better with the surroundings, and using form liners when pouring it to create a natural stone look. She said these decisions could be made at a later date.

The selectboard decided to go with the concrete option as a preference. Member Jed Proujansky called the decision a "starting point," and reiterated that the "aesthetics" could be modified later in the process.

Trees & Culverts

Resident Richard Karsten said that it looked like plans for the drainage project taking place on Dudleyville Road showed the construction of part of a culvert on his property, along with the removal of several trees, and that he did not wish either to take place.

He expressed dissatisfaction with the "notice of intent" sent to residents informing them of the work, and what he said was a lack of infor-

mation about their options for objecting.

Nathorst, a fellow Dudleyville Road resident and the driving force behind the project, replied that engineers had drawn up a plan to move the culvert so it did not impinge on Karsten's property, but that the trees had been properly designated for removal at a tree hearing.

He also said he believed at least three of the four trees were on town property, not Karsten's.

Karsten said that moving the culvert off his property would satisfy him, but maintained his objection to the tree removals. He offered to pay a surveyor to establish whether the trees were on his land or not, and agreed to meet with highway superintendent Matthew Boucher to learn more about the reasons they were slated for removal.

Other Business

The selectboard tentatively scheduled a meeting for 3 p.m. this Friday, March 13 to hear an update from Proujansky on employee health insurance options for the town.

Town administrator Marjorie McGinnis reported a flooding incident at the library earlier in the day, possibly due to an outside faucet being turned on by a contractor, though she said she had not yet received full details. McGinnis said she was filing an insurance claim, and that the town's insurer would provide a list of assessors who could promptly evaluate the situation.

The board responded to an email from resident Solomon Goldstein asking for a sidewalk to be built from the town hall to Leverett Elementary School.

Selectboard chair Patricia Duffy noted that the project was already the second-highest priority listed by the town in its applications for state Complete Streets grants. McGinnis added that the town should be more active in developing a plan for the project.

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HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE GILL SELECTBOARD

Gill, Out of Salt, Shaken by Salt Price; ‘Circling the Drain’ at Riverside; Pitching Data Center Freeze

By KATE SAVAGE

“Honestly, I’ve never been in a situation like this,” Gill highway superintendent John Miner told the town selectboard Monday night. “Our salt shed is pretty empty.”

Miner told the board his department had blown through its snow and ice budget, which is used for the salt, sand, and fuel needed to clear the town’s roads. The budget currently has a negative balance of nearly \$2,500. In addition, the department traditionally restocks the salt shed in the spring, so it is ready for the following winter; doing that now, Miner said, would add \$30,000 to \$40,000 to the deficit.

Town administrator Ray Purington suggested the department could consider buying the salt later in the summer, once the new annual budget is in.

“Unfortunately,” replied Miner, “my fear is, with what’s going on in this world right now, I can’t believe salt prices are going to come down.”

“We can’t believe any prices are going to come down,” agreed selectboard member John Ward.

The two board members present, Ward and Charles Garbiel, voted to authorize deficit spending for the highway department for its winter needs. Purington said he would research ways to cover the expenses and bring ideas to the next meeting. He said money could be taken from other budgets, or added to next year’s tax rate.

In better news, Miner announced that the state has agreed to fix the bridge over Dry Brook on North Cross Road at no cost to the town. The Funding for Accelerated Infrastructure Repair (FAIR) program will allow the state Department of Transportation to design, procure, and administer a bridge preservation project, with the goal of advertising for construction this year.

Miner said that with funding tight, he has been looking for other ways to fund road needs, including using the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) to improve Main Road.

The board approved Miner’s request to buy a back-up camera and radio for a tractor, and declared a list of equipment as surplus. This includes a 1983 Kubota tractor, a 1995 GME Sierra 3500, a nine-foot plow attachment for a truck, and calcium and sand spreaders. The items will be auctioned off by Auctions International.

Miner also announced that spring road plans include putting down new asphalt at the south end of Mountain Road.

Historic Asbestos

Members of the Gill historical commission attended the meeting with one more worry about the Riverside Municipal Building: asbestos might be present in its walls and roof. The commission found evidence that asbestos was used in the building in the 1930s, and could not find any written evidence that it was ever removed.

Ward noted that the town has already set aside funds to study the feasibility of installing solar panels on the building’s roof, and that understanding where asbestos was in the structure could fit under that project.

Historical commission member Bob Perry said the issue was particularly important because the commission wants to invite the public into the building to view the historical materials and displays it is creating.

“Does the town really want to save this building and utilize it to its capacity, or do they want a Dunkin’ Donuts?” asked Perry. “Because we’re kind of circling the drain now.”

“We are well aware of the financial crisis that we’re going to be in for the next five to seven years,” Perry added, but he touted the value of the building to the town, including for outdoor events: “That’s the only open space in Riverside that you actually have a public area to use.”

Though Perry said he wondered whether kids these days still play outside, he mentioned that when he was young it was where he would play football and baseball.

“Once it’s gone,” Perry said, “there’s no other place you’re going to replace it with.”

For next steps, the commissioners agreed to talk with the building inspector and determine which repairs need to be made before they can open the space to the public, and to try to move forward with repairing the handrails and steps.

In addition, they said they would look for ways to get the town to care about the building.

“I was at the town meeting where it was brought up to declare this building surplus,” said Ward, “and Pam Shoemaker stood up and gave a history of the building at that town hall.” After learning of the building’s history, he said, nobody voted to get rid of it.

Preserving Farmland

The Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources sent the town a notice that it is seeking an Agricultural Preservation Restriction (APR) on 7.2 acres on Boyle Road owned by Susan Kramer. It requested the town’s assistance in reducing the notice period from 120 days to 60, and on paying the owner \$14,250, which is 5% of the restriction’s value of \$285,000.

If the town pays that 5%, it has the right to enforce the agricultural restrictions; if it does not, Kramer will receive that much less in compensation for the APR, and the town will have to rely entirely on the state to enforce the restriction.

Ward asked whether the 5% town match was typical of these agreements. Purington said it was typically 10%, but that Gill gets a discount, either because it is a right-to-farm community or because it has an agricultural commission.

Purington said he had not been involved in setting up an APR in his 16 years working for the town, but did remember a time when the

town set special funds aside for it proactively. Either free cash or stabilization funds could be used for this one-time expense, he said, but it would need to be approved by town meeting.

The officials at Monday’s meeting were not certain whether reducing the notice period would affect how quickly the town had to come up with the money, so they tabled the decision until Purington could learn more about the process.

Garbiel said he felt that if the payment decision is made solely by the selectboard, all three members should be present for vote.

“We’ll evaluate our options,” said Purington. “If there are others who step forward who want to advocate for a certain option either way, that would help.”

Zoning Proposals

Purington announced that a public hearing to change the town’s zoning bylaws will be held on Thursday, March 26 at 7 p.m. at the town hall. The planning board’s proposed changes include updating the laws around accessory dwelling units (ADUs) to match recent state legislation, which aims to increase the housing supply by giving residents the right to add extra living structures, within certain restrictions.

The board also proposed updating floodplain bylaws to comply with FEMA regulations, which would allow some residents to qualify for the federal flood insurance program.

Additionally, the planning board proposes placing a one-year moratorium on new building-integrated energy storage systems and data centers.

Other Business

The selectboard approved a buy order to lock in prices for 5,100 gallons of diesel fuel and 2,400 gallons of heating oil. The purchase will not be immediate, as prices have spiked recently.

The town brokers its fuel purchases through the Lower Pioneer Valley Educational Collaborative, which will watch the market and place an order when prices are as low as possible.

Purington announced that he submitted an application for the town to be designated a Rural and Small Town Housing Choice Community. He said he thought the town had a good chance of receiving the designation, which would give it access to new state grants as well as a stronger position in other grant applications. Towns may receive the designation if they can demonstrate a certain level of growth in population or housing units, along with the adoption of listed housing “best practices.”

Holly Grosvenor was appointed to the Gill Cultural Council.

The board voted to renew the seasonal restaurant liquor license for Turners Falls Schuetzen Verein.

The next Gill selectboard meeting will be held on Monday, March 23 at 5:30 p.m. at the town hall.

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IFB #: FY-26-06

The Town of Montague seeks bids from qualified vendors to perform periodic mowing, string trimming and clean-up of seven (7) Town-owned cemeteries located throughout Montague, Massachusetts. The contract is to commence on July 1, 2026.

Questions about this IFB must be submitted via email to chrisn@montague-ma.gov no later than **Monday, March 16, 2026 at 5:00 p.m.**

Bids must be received no later than Thursday, March 26, 2026 at 2:00 p.m. and must be provided on the provided Bid Form, along with all other required information and forms. Responses are to be delivered in sealed envelopes labeled “Cemetery Maintenance Bid” and addressed to Chris Nolan-Zeller, Montague Town Hall, 1 Avenue A, Turners Falls, MA 01376.

The Town of Montague reserves the right to accept or reject any or all bids, in total or in part, as they deem in their best interest. This solicitation is being undertaken per MGL Ch30B.

**TOWN OF GILL
PUBLIC HEARING NOTICE**

The Town of Gill Planning Board will hold a public hearing pursuant to M.G.L. Chapter 40A, Section 5 on March 26, 2026, at 7:00 p.m. at the Gill Town Hall, 325 Main Road, Gill, MA. In the event of inclement weather, the public hearing will be held on April 2, 2026, at the same time and location. The purpose of this public hearing is to review proposed bylaws and amendments to the Gill Zoning Bylaws and provide interested parties with an opportunity to comment on the proposed changes. Written comments will be accepted by the Planning Board prior to the hearing.

Proposed changes include amendments to the following sections of the Town of Gill Zoning Bylaws: **1) Section 2C, Table Of Use Regulations** – to replace “Accessory Apartment” with “Accessory Dwelling Unit (ADU)” and replace “Mobile Home” with “Manufactured Home”; **2) Section 17, Definitions** – to delete the definitions of “Accessory Apartment” and “Mobile Home” and insert a definition of “Manufactured Home.”

In addition, a new **Section 4, Accessory Dwelling Unit (ADU)**, is proposed to be added to the Gill Zoning Bylaws to establish the purpose, definitions, regulations, and administration & enforcement relating to the establishment ADUs to be built as-of-right in Gill.

In addition, the existing **Section 15, Flood Plain Regulations**, is proposed to be deleted in its entirety and replaced with new language that complies with current FEMA regulations.

In addition, a new **Section 18, Building Integrated Energy Storage Systems (BESS) and Data Centers**, is proposed to be added to the Gill Zoning Bylaws to establish a one-year moratorium on Building Integrated Energy Storage Systems and/or Data Centers.

The complete text of the proposed zoning bylaws and amendments is available for inspection during the regular business hours of the Town Hall, can be found on the Town’s website at www.gillmass.org/calendar, and may be requested via email to clerical@gillmass.org.

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PERSONAL INJURY, WILLS & ESTATES, WORKER'S COMP

GMRSD from page A1

from \$13,292,488 in the current year to \$13,024,972. Rather than a list of positions on the chopping block, the committee heard an in-depth presentation by interim superintendent Tari Thomas and business manager Joanne Blier outlining a strategy Thomas called a "strategic pivot," with a mix of reduction, re-assignment, and some new positions.

"We're putting all of our weight behind the one lever proven to move the needle," Thomas said, "and that's the Tier 1 instruction."

In the educational framework known as multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS), Tier 1 is the broadest level of teaching, typically provided by classroom teachers; students falling behind are targeted for support known as Tier 2 and 3. This teaching is often, but not always, given in smaller student groups by subject specialists known as interventionists.

Thomas explained that the administration's belt-tightening strategy includes "shifting toward instructional coaching," with a smaller corps of revolving educators giving "side-by-side support" to classroom teachers, who will be encouraged to provide more "robust" Tier 1 – and even Tier 2 and 3 – teaching and hand students off to interventionists less frequently.

Though the final budget and the accompanying slides were not released before Tuesday's meeting, word had trickled down, and the committee heard several public comments at the start of the meeting warning about the impacts of laying interventionists off.

"As a father of two students who both at-

tend Gill [Elementary] and who have each used these services, I am imploring you not to cut these services," Jay Butynski told them. "Our children are a testament to how this program works for students who are below grade level, but do not qualify for IEPs."

"Student-facing positions are the ones we need to make effective change," school librarian Ramona LaTronica argued. "This continued loss is devastating for our students, and our community."

"When elementary teachers learned of the cuts to positions at the primary level yesterday, the immediate response was alarm, and concern for the students," Heidi Schmidt, president of the Gill-Montague Education Association (GMEA) staff union, told them. "This restructuring plan was not made in consultation with the teachers and staff."

And Gill first-grade teacher Jenay Hall, who said her doctorate in educational leadership had included action research on MTSS, warned that "if this budget gets voted in with the proposed staffing cuts, I can say with almost-certainty that our test scores will go down."

"This unwavering focus on Tier 1 in our restructuring," she added, "makes me wonder if educators – and the people in educational leadership positions – have a common understanding of what robust MTSS means."

According to Blier and Thomas, the administration plans to add a school resource officer, a human resources clerk, a high school librarian, and a number of mandated instructional assistants. Eighteen "non-essen-

tial hires" that had either been requested or remain vacant, they said, were not being filled as part of a "strategic freeze." These include two math interventionists, classroom teacher vacancies at Sheffield and Hillcrest, and a reading teacher retiring with no replacement.

Elsewhere, they said, the plan is for an "enrollment alignment," offsetting five Unit A reductions with six Unit C personnel.

"We're not adding positions," Thomas said, "we're realigning our leadership.... And the talent exists inside our schools right now."

Staff members who will be laid off, selected by "right-sizing" for "caseload," will be notified face to face, Thomas said; the list will include an English-language learning instructor at the secondary level. She added that the eliminations will be negotiated with the GMEA. "It's not set in stone," she said.

In brighter news, Thomas reported that Montague town officials had offered a special town meeting article to directly fund \$80,000 worth of middle and high school textbooks, \$13,748 for instructional materials at Sheffield and Hillcrest elementaries, and \$70,000 for an after-school program at Sheffield.

Blier explained that if this package were part of the overall budget, Gill's assessment, which is already going up 7.7% based on share of enrollment, would rise by 9.5%.

Montague member Wendy Thomas asked how the district planned to "mitigate the lack of Tier 2 and Tier 3 supports." She warned that the schools could see an "influx of people wanting IEPs" as students fail tiered learning.

"Don't forget – in the general classroom, a teacher provides Tier 1, Tier 2, and Tier 3 interventions as well," Tari Thomas replied. As for hiring the coaches, she said, "we have some great talent in our district, and I know these people are here."

Carol Jacobs criticized the decision to rehire a school resource officer amid the layoffs. "Maybe we could have argued for a half-time SRO," she commented.

Montague member Steve Ellis called the presentation the "most deliberate walk-through of a budget I've seen – there's a lot of love and hate in it."

The committee voted 8 to 1 to approve the final budget, with Montague member Cliff Spatcher dissenting, and then voted unanimously for the special article request.

Reached for comment Wednesday, Schmidt wrote that the GMEA was "deeply concerned about the elimination of positions which support a wide cross section of our student population.... The restructuring plan was not in consultation with any teachers or staff, nor are [the new] positions currently recognized in our collective bargaining agreement."

Other Business

After hearing the advice of Massachusetts Association of School Committees field director Liz Laffond that the current "pool" of superintendent candidates was a "puddle," the committee voted to post internally for another interim superintendency next year.

**HILL** from page A1

Arc across the nation is worried about the war affecting us, because of funding and budget cuts."

Parzych, a longtime Arc participant and official photographer, attended the reception as a member of the organization's local Pioneer Club advocacy group.

"We had an awesome time," he reported after the event. "It was hot in the State House – it was 90 degrees in places.... It was cooler outside. We were at the park eating lunch and it was 80 [degrees]."

Parzych said the United Arc had contacted the offices of state representatives and governor Maura Healey to confirm he had permission to take photos inside the building.

According to an MDCC press release, keynote speakers at this year's reception, "Protecting Our Lives: Now More Than Ever," included Sandra Heller and Craig Kinney, a mother and son who advocate together for "policies and services that make full, independent lives in communities possible," as well as Daniel O'Donnell, a member of the Arc of Massachusetts's government affairs committee who "believes that when self-advocates share their stories, real change happens."

On Tuesday, Parzych said, other things were going on around the State House at the same time, including "a petition to keep reading fun for all ages, including not banning books," and a pro-democracy protest of China. "I managed to get up close," he added.

He recounted other family members who had spent time in the city: "My aunt Joanne Parzych Olsen [attended] the Perkins School for the Blind back in the '80s," he said. "My grandfather went down to the State House in the '90s for the Big Dig project."

"It was awesome to see everyone down at the State House," Parzych told the Reporter. "Good reports and good news. Everyone is supporting the United Arc, including individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities."



Top: Massachusetts Speaker of the House Ron Mariano (right) addresses the crowd gathered in the Great Hall of the State House on Tuesday.

Middle: Advocates Craig Kinney (left) and Sandra Heller testify at the event.

Bottom: Outside, Tibetan nationalist activists rally in observance of Tibetan National Uprising Day, commemorating the anniversary of March 10, 1959, the first day of a ten-day separatist uprising in the province that was crushed despite the material support provided by a United States intelligence agency.

ERVING from page A1

agreed with the rest of the board that if it could help in finding closure for the property, the town should investigate the option.

Smith said he would consult with town counsel and return to the board.

FY'27 Requests

The selectboard met with the capital planning and finance committees to discuss FY'27 budget requests.

Library director Abigail Baines presented a request for a new staff position, at seven hours a week, to help cover Sundays. The library is popular and enjoyed, she pointed out, and one of very few libraries in the area open on Sundays.

Baines's library budget was otherwise level-funded, aside from regular wage increases.

Some repairs to the new library are already needed, though: the HVAC system is leaking a bit; a number of interior doors are delaminating; the patio around the building is becoming a trip hazard; and there is an underground plumbing issue.

Smith interjected that the plumbing issue was somewhat related to the planned senior housing project, and that engineers have suggested the two issues be tackled together, likely in FY'28. The board and committees agreed to consider all the issues.

Thomas Glennon of the recreation committee also presented a budget that was level-funded aside from wage increases, but he brought up the issue of the old Usher Mill water tower, which is rusty and non-functional and somehow became the responsibility of the rec commission when Riverfront Park was created.

"It's totally unreasonable that the recreation committee should be responsible for finding a way to remove this," said selectboard member William Bembury. "Despite the land being given to the recreation commission, the problem existed way before that happened, and the town didn't do anything about it."

The highway department had been looking to get rid of a Ford F-350 truck that it no longer found

useful, and Erving Elementary School was looking for something to plow snow with. Highway superintendent Glenn McCrory connected the dots and the truck will be transferred to the school for its plowing needs, removing an entire line item from the school's capital requests list.

Other Business

Smith and McCrory asked the town to consider creating a new facilities maintenance manager position. The position is envisioned as full-time, and would relieve them of duties they have been sharing. Smith submitted a draft job description.

Erving had been looking for a vendor of software to manage the town cemeteries, and put out a request for quotes last year. A winning bidder has been chosen: Site Industries, LLC, of Perryopolis, Pennsylvania, doing business as CemSites, which offered the service at \$27,250 for the first three years; the only other qualified bid came in at \$32,250 over three years.

The board endorsed two letters drafted by Johnson-Mussad, one in support of Rural Development, Inc. (RDI), the agency working on the town's senior housing project on Care Drive, and the other in support of state grants to replace a culvert on Bridge Street and conduct a study of Keyup Brook in terms of watershed and road relations.

McCrory reported that a pilot program to have staff remove snow in 12-hour shifts has been successful in improving staff health and well-being. His department's supplies budget for storms, however, is currently about \$8,000 in the red following several freezing rain events.

At the end of the meeting, the board went into executive session to discuss collective bargaining with the police union, as well as "the deployment of security personnel or devices, or strategies with respect thereto."

The board's next meeting will be held Monday, March 16.

Mike Jackson contributed additional writing.



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MONTAGUE from page A1

she said, these must be negotiated with an “insurance advisory committee” (IAC) composed of representatives of the town’s retirement board and its four staff unions – the National Association of Government Employees, the United Electrical Workers, and two units of the New England Police Benevolent Association.

Selectboard chair Matt Lord asked Seymour if she could provide “a sense of milestones that we could expect as this progresses.”

Seymour explained that the town must share at least 25% of the projected savings with the employees. Once the IAC has been notified of the selectboard’s recommendation, she said, as well as of the potential savings, it must meet within 10 days to consider the plan changes. After that, they are sent to a public employee committee (PEC), which in the past in Montague has consisted of the same people.

Seymour later told the *Reporter* that the PEC must then vote on the proposal within 30 days. According to state statute, if the PEC rejects the proposal it is then sent to a three-member “municipal health insurance review panel,” with a tiebreaking vote appointed by the state secretary of administration and finance.

The increase of at least 12.48% is designed to beef up the Trust’s reserves, Seymour told the board on Monday, which have been depleted by unexpected increases in claims. “Twelve and a half percent is still twelve and a half percent,” she said, “but at least they’re looking to build those reserves again.”

The board approved a motion to “commence” the changes in plan design, and then appointed town administrator Walter Ramsey as a non-voting “designee” who, along with Seymour as the town’s representative on the Trust’s board, would facilitate the meetings of the IAC and PEC.

“It is a long and very tedious process,” Seymour said, “but I think we can get it done if we start now.”

Beer, Bridges, and Bonds

Ramsey introduced the topic of the non-financial articles for the annual town meeting by noting that the deadline for departments to submit such articles would be on Wednesday. He later said the articles presented Monday were not the “final language” that will go to town

meeting members on April 6, as the town was still discussing the wording with its attorneys.

The first article would replace the existing personnel bylaws with language giving the selectboard the power to set personnel policies.

The second would establish “community aggregation” of the purchase of electricity. The selectboard would be authorized to choose a broker and lock in contracts with vendors, though residents and businesses would be allowed to “opt out” of the program and choose another source. “This needs to go before town meeting before we can look at quotes and benefits townwide,” Ramsey said.

The third would accept a provision of state law allowing Montague to convert beer and wine licenses into all-alcohol licenses without affecting its quota as set by the state. According to documents in the meeting materials, this would currently affect three businesses. The upgraded licenses would still need to be approved by the state.

The fourth would empower the selectboard to acquire easements required for the replacement of a bridge across the Sawmill River on North Leverett Road. Though this is a project of the state Department of Transportation, the town is responsible for negotiating the easements with adjacent property owners, or taking them by eminent domain, as the bridge is on a town road.

A similar situation drives the fifth article, which empowers the board to acquire easements from the Franklin County Regional Housing and Redevelopment Authority at the corner of Millers Falls Road and Industrial Boulevard for safety improvements at a bus stop and street crossing.

The final two draft articles would expedite the process of constructing a new library on Avenue A. One would allow the town to acquire a parking lot on Second Street, currently used by residents and visitors to the Great Falls Discovery Center, from the Montague Economic and Industrial Corporation (MEDIC) for the construction of the library. Ramsey portrayed this as an “addon” to a previous authorization allowing the town to use the lot on which the building would sit.

The other would give the town the authority to issue up to \$23,704,053 in bonds to design and construct the library. The state is expected to reimburse \$11,286,440 of that, and local taxpayers would

be responsible for the remaining \$12,417,613, according to the public library trustees. Ramsey noted that the borrowing will require a two-thirds town meeting majority, followed by a Proposition 2½ debt exclusion vote currently scheduled for June 24.

The board quickly voted to accept all seven proposed articles.

Other Business

At the request of police chief Jason Haskins, the selectboard hired Felix Morales as a patrol officer. Morales, who has been employed by the Franklin County sheriff’s office, has been working with the Montague department for the past year under a pilot program to train officers, and will not need to attend the police academy. Under current town policy, he will therefore receive a \$10,000 signing bonus.

“He’s a fantastic employee,” said Haskins.

The board also voted to hire Jakob Bliven as a laborer/operator at the CWF, effective March 23. Bliven has worked in Greenfield’s public works department, but since August 2024 has been at the Holyoke DPW.

CWF superintendent Chelsey Little said she had received 89 applications for the position. “I’ve never seen that before,” she said, while noting that some “were kind of maybe not serious applicants.”

“I think that speaks to the reputation that the Clean Water Facility has,” said Lord.

As the meeting drew to an end, Ramsey listed a large number of other meetings coming up in a “busy March.” These included a technical panel on Tuesday advising the town on its options for marketing the former Farren property (*see article, Page A1*); a meeting with residents of the Hill neighborhood about a planned stormwater management project in that part of town; a “community build” at town hall this Saturday to assemble window inserts intended to “help qualifying folks reduce their energy bills;” and a forum about the library project next Tuesday at the Gill-Montague senior center in Turners Falls.

The board retired to an executive session to discuss litigation involving the Laurel Realty Trust of North Adams, which owns the trailer park on Laurel Lane.

The next selectboard meeting will be held Monday, March 16.



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

Here’s the way it was on March 10, 2016: News from the Montague Reporter archive.

Planter Ruckus

At the March 7 Montague selectboard meeting, downtown Turners Falls store owner and planter coordinator Gary Konvelski questioned the legality of a recent decision by the board to encourage “planter participants” to meet and weigh in on the issue of the choice of coordinator.

Last year, a “planter committee” established a set of guidelines for volunteers tending the town-owned downtown planters, which were approved by the selectboard. Early this year, the board dissolved that committee and appointed

Konvelski as the coordinator. Another downtown store owner, and chair of the planter committee, Rodney Madison, has protested that the dissolution of the committee was premature.

Early Ice Melt

On March 5 at 5 p.m., contest judges gathered on Lake Pleasant’s Bridge of Names and eyeballed and binocularized the visible surface of the lake. They saw not a cube of ice afloat. Thanks partly to the warm weather of El Niño, the 2016 Ice Off the Lake contest resulted in the second earliest end date in the event’s history since it began in 1977.

In 2015, the contest finished on April 13.

20 YEARS AGO

Here’s the way it was on March 9, 2006: News from the Montague Reporter archive.

Buggy Scourge

Shopping carts are everywhere downtown, in doorways and driveways, parking lots, bus stops, and sidewalks. “I collect four or more a day,” said Power Town Apartments maintenance man Kim Hine.

“We consider them a safety hazard,” said Power Town manager Sharon Cottrell. “They pile up in doorways and driveways, parking lots, bus stops, in front of building entrances. Kids play on them.”

“I’d like to see all parties come together to come up with a creative solution,” said Anne Jemas, member of the downtown streetscape committee. “I don’t think they are

ever returned to the stores.” Fourth Street resident Jean Hebden chimed in: “I only knew one person who ever returned her cart, but she’s dead now.”

VY Uprate on Hold

On Monday, federal regulators froze the Vermont Yankee power increase at 105% after a measurement on Saturday recorded vibrations that exceeded acceptable levels.

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission last week issued approval to allow Vermont Yankee to increase power to 120% of its design capacity under close scrutiny because of concerns about the plant’s steam dryer, the component that removes droplets from the steam before it feeds into the turbines.

140 YEARS AGO

Here’s the way it was on March 10, 1886: News from the Turners Falls Reporter archive.

Turners Falls and Vicinity

J.G. Eppler’s canaries begin to feel the approach of Spring and the Mikado, and gives a touch of “Tit Willow” occasionally.

The St. Mary’s temperance society and the Temple of Honor have done a splendid work in this village, and many a family will bless them as long as they help so many to become useful citizens.

A club is being formed in the village, and in certain quarters fears are publicly expressed that the “old ring,” – that exclusive lot we hear so much about by the new comers – will run it. How to avert such a calamity is the serious question under discussion by a few who think the tail should wag the dog.

Louis Ferdinand, a professional tramp printer, amused himself and disgusted everybody he came

in contact with, by remaining rum-soaked for a week. After two trials in three days before a magistrate, he finally was sent to jail for 60 days.

The citizens were fearful that an original New Orleans minstrel company had struck town and disbanded, last Sunday, but soon discovered that it was only the young men of the village appearing in stylish new plug hats.

A.E. Perry had his wrist badly injured in machinery at the saw mill at Riverside, one day last week. Dr. Coy attended.

Mrs Margaret Corliss, an old lady aged 80, fell and broke her leg, yesterday.

Folks were trying the first of the week to find some comfort in the old March weather adage in which the lamb and the lion play conspicuous parts. For such there should be additional comfort in other proverbs not so familiar, but quite as trustworthy, such as

If March comes in with adder’s head, It goes out with peacock tail.



FACES & PLACES

Photo correspondent Joe R. Parzych reports:

“Joe Koperu (left), a geologist and cartographer, had a reception Saturday at the Great Falls Discovery Center for his display of prints showing the topography of rivers and their floodplains. He gave a talk and answered questions. People from all walks of life and all ages were at the event, including college students and people from different states, and everyone enjoyed the presentation.” The exhibit is on view through March 28.



JOE R. PARZYCH PHOTOS



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FARREN from page A1

more requests for proposals (RFPs) for the project.

“We think there’s a really special site in the Farren property, and so we want to do this right,” town administrator Walter Ramsey said as the event began. He added that town staff were also about to hear the panel’s recommendations for the first time, and that it would be “a lot to digest.”

“We think there’s a really special site in the Farren property, and so we want to do this right.”

**– Walter Ramsey,
Town administrator**

After introducing themselves and describing their process – which included an initial briefing, a site visit, and “stakeholder” interviews throughout the day, and will conclude with a final written report within three months – the panelists took turns sharing their observations.

Ben Murphy, vice president of real estate at the state agency MassDevelopment, called the site “shovel-ready” and pointed to its reuse as an opportunity to get the long tax-exempt property on the tax rolls, but said the town’s inexperience with projects of the Farren’s scale and general economic headwinds were challenges.

“It’s a large site, especially for Franklin County, but it’s not as large as your appetite might have been,” said Mark Mascia, of the project management firm Collaborative RED, before introducing the recommendations. “Some of you will be disappointed, but we promise you some will also be happy.”

The panel recommended dividing the Farren property into two residential development parcels – one larger and one smaller, to create an opportunity for a local developer – while retaining some of the land as “public amenity open space,” which could have flexible commercial uses, such as food trucks and pop-up markets. It recommended against seeking a master developer, an approach they argued would mitigate some risk and diversify the pool of potential respondents to RFPs.

The group projected a sketch of how this could look: a thin parcel along the back of the Farren lot could be a smaller parcel, allowing a local developer to plan for single-family, moderate-income housing. The bulk of the land would go towards a larger development – multi-family homes or apartment buildings as high as four stories, thanks to the zoning changes – and frontage along Cabot Street could be reserved for open space, perhaps including a rerouted Canalside Rail Trail bike path.

Several residents expressed frustration that the panel recommended against requiring developers to include commercial space in their proposals.

“All of the other villages in Montague do have the amenities that support a neighborhood,” Lilith Wolinsky commented, noting that residents of the neighborhood had been hoping for a coffee shop or bookstore. “This area was really vibrant for decades. When the fishing rod factory closed, everything else left in rapid succession after that. There are no anchors.”

“Just to beat that dead horse a little more,” David Jensen began, “we’re trying to create a community, and it seems like the town’s willing to take a relatively good hit on supporting this thing... What I have heard and seen is the failure to provide interpersonal anchors, which is, in this country, businesses.”

“Simply providing a few seats outside,” he added, “ain’t gonna cut it.”

Various panelists said they agreed with these comments in principle, but were advising the town on what would be economically viable. “It could be that down the road there is a conversion to commercial space,” said Emma McGurren of the Mass Housing Partnership, “but with the way the current economics are, there is a likelihood that if it was built it wouldn’t be filled.”

“If we wanted to come in here and be the most popular people in town, we could have thrown that on the plan, but we would be doing you a disservice,” said Andrew Arbaugh of Copley Wolff Design Group. “This site just can’t accomplish everything, and it shouldn’t have to.”

“This site just can’t accomplish everything, and it shouldn’t have to.”

**– Andrew Arbaugh,
Copley Wolff Design Group**

As the discussion concluded, town planner Maureen Pollock said she planned to talk with businesses such as Shelburne Falls Coffee Roasters and Tandem Bagels to find out what they have looked for in sites as they expanded. She described a vision of the open space at the Farren lot as comparable to the “Nice District” on Second Street, where Nova Motorcycles has offered an empty parking lot to food trucks, vendors, and performances.

As for the panel’s recommendations, Pollock said the town “should take them seriously.”

“These are experts in real estate and land use,” she said, “and have a lot of wealth and experience in the exact types of projects that we’re trying to do.”



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In partnership with The Gill Montague Council on Aging and Franklin Regional Council of Governments. This project is funded by the Massachusetts Broadband Institute at the Mass Tech Collaborative under the Municipal Digital Equity Implementation Program. Funding was provided by Massachusetts ARPA State Fiscal Recovery Funds.

MONTAGUE REPORTER



SUBMITTED PHOTO

In the Costa Rican cloud forest, a high-elevation region of volcanic peaks that form the country’s mountainous spine, our sports photographer Dave Hoitt is lost. He looks for answers, as we all still do, in our November 6 edition, when the Turners Falls High School soccer team had won the western title and was advancing in the state championships.

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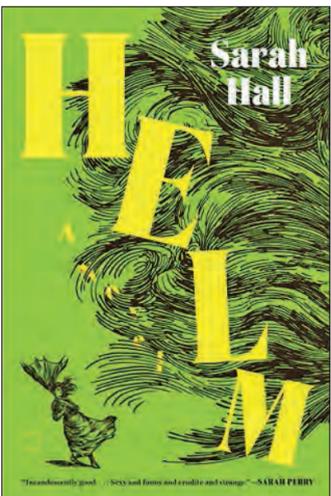
OF THE MONTAGUE REPORTER

MARCH 12, 2026

Above: It's melting fast now, but in honor of the Ice Off The Lake contest reaching its conclusion in Lake Pleasant, reader Sue Richardson shared this shot of a serene, snow-covered Lake from just a few weeks back. Farewell Winter!

BOOK REVIEWS

A Fierce Wind... and a Deep Breath



Sarah Hall, *Helm: A Novel* (Mariner Books, 2025)

Elizabeth Kolbert, *Life on a Little-Known Planet: Dispatches from a Changing World* (Crown, 2025)

on those humans.

Sarah Hall's novel *Helm* is about the Helm Wind, which Wikipedia describes as "a strong north-easterly Foehn wind in Cumbria, England which blows down the south-west slope of the Cross Fell escarpment" in the Pennine mountains; a Foehn is "a type of dry, relatively warm downslope wind in the lee of a mountain range."

In this slightly weird and engrossing book, *Helm* is a living force that shapes the land and the humans who live on it.

It has received great reviews all around – "A joy to read something so profound and playful," from the *Guardian*; "as vital, fierce, and free as the phenomenon it describes," from the *Financial Times* – and was named a Best Book of the Year by NPR, the *Observer*, and the *Independent*.

The book begins with the cataclysms that shape the early Earth, and the birth of Helm. After eons, Helm sees "upmonkeys" in the for-

ests below. Things are changing, and Helm is interested.

The reader is introduced to a cast of characters over the centuries. A Neolithic tribe led by matriarch NaNay, who is obsessed with finding a third mark, a sign, in geologic formations. Michael, a penitent, who drags a large wooden cross up to where Helm lives to atone for his sins during and after the Crusades. A poor village that sprouts up as workers come to build a railroad.

A neurologically atypical young girl climbs up Helm's peak whenever she can; she wants to marry Helm. And an atypical wife is locked up by her husband because she wants to roam free across the land, a desire unsuitable for a proper English housewife.

Helm sees it all and builds fierce lens clouds, blows, and storms, knocking over a train, scattering hay bales and livestock, ripping off roofs and sending laundry flying from clotheslines, laying low crops,

see **REVIEWS** page B4

By DONNA PETERSEN

TURNERS FALLS – Here we have two books, one a work of fiction that gives life to a force of nature, and the other a collection of nonfiction essays from one of the most prominent environmental writers of today.

Two very different books, but each rooted in the nature of a place, the presence of humans in those places – and the consequences of that presence, either on the planet or

EXHIBIT

Why Then Here Does Any One Step Forth?



IMAGE COURTESY MONTAGUE PUBLIC LIBRARIES

Duston Spear's *Original Mold*, one of a series of paintings of the same name, is at the Montague Center branch library this month as part of the exhibit *Art of the Book*, featuring works by local artists made from or about books.

By RICHARD ANDERSEN

MONTAGUE CENTER – Original works of art don't change. We do. Or the times in which we live do. These changes often affect the ways we look at what we once saw differently. Sometimes, an iconic work in the hands of a multi-talented artist can become an original and outstanding accomplishment in its own right. Such is the case with Duston Spear's "Original Mold."

Start your appreciation with a reminding image of Edgar Degas's beautifully sculpted "Little Dancer of Fourteen Years," a work so famous it sits in a room of its own at the Clark Institute in Williamstown, Massachusetts.

What many see today is not exactly how Degas looked at it in 1881. Degas knew his depiction of the ballerina Marie van Goethem – the only sculpture he didn't exhibit during his lifetime – would discomfort many viewers because it didn't

see **EXHIBIT** page B8



POLLY FRENCH ILLUSTRATION

WEST ALONG THE RIVER

METACOM'S WAR COMES TO YOUR BACK YARD

By DAVID BRULE

PESKEOMPSKUT – It's hard to imagine that anything different could have happened on a mid-March day such as this. Redwings have reached the Valley and clamor in the trees, song sparrows are piping down along the river, geese are flying two by two in nuptial flight.

Three hundred and fifty years ago, the same stirrings in the natural world would have been heralding early spring, but in the Indigenous homelands of Sokwakik, somewhere between modern-day Northfield and Vernon, more than 3,000 refugees were fighting for survival.

Whole communities of coastal tribes as well as inland tribes, dwelling in the contested space called Massachusetts Bay Colony, were seeking sanctuary from the ravages of the war they were fighting against the English intruders. This was an existential struggle: they were fighting for their homelands, their families, their way of life.

Wampanoag, Narragansett from the coast, Nipmuck, Quaboag, Nashaway, and Pennacook among many others from the interior woodlands were camped along the Connecticut River trying to survive, and to decide whether to prolong the war or undertake peace negotiations with the newcomers who were crowding them out.

In June of 1675, years of tension between Natives and colonizers reached a flashpoint when a Wampanoag of Metacom's tribe was killed in Swansea.

Full-scale war broke out which would last for 18 months in the Massachusetts Bay regions and spill out from the coast to this valley and beyond. The war would see a third of the English settlements burned to the ground, including Northfield and Deerfield, Providence, Springfield, Brookfield, and many more.

Metacom, the son of Massasoit, found himself leading a coalition of tribes that included the Nipmuck, the Wampanoag, the Narragansetts, and the Abenaki.

You may remember that Massasoit was one of the Native leaders who had helped the Pilgrims survive those early winters in the 1620s.

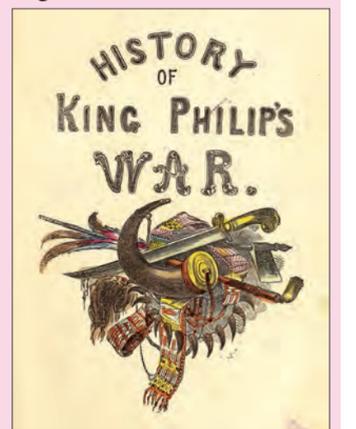
But in one generation, the small populations of the settlements that included the Plymouth Plantation, the Puritans of Massachusetts Bay Colony, and the English towns of Hartford and New Haven had exploded thanks to a massive Great

Migration outward from England of more than 75,000 colonists.

Metacom was determined to stem the tide and drive the English back into the sea.

As the summer of 1675 stretched into July, the people who had settled in the middle Connecticut River Valley from Agawam (Springfield) to Sokwakik (Northfield) did not feel the effects of what was becoming a war on the coast.

But on August 2, an ambush called Wheeler's Surprise took place in what is now known as New Braintree, and soon led to the siege of Brookfield.



The frontispiece of Daniel Struck, Jr.'s 1853 Pictorial History of King Philip's War, an engraving by William Croome.

Metacom, also known as King Philip, had escaped from the English who were trying to pin him down in southeastern New England. He was headed for Nipmuck country in the region of Mount Wachusett.

The English settlements at Hatfield and Northampton were growing increasingly worried about the river valley Indians rising up and joining Philip's rebellion, though there were no signs that any such action was contemplated by the Norwotocks living near Northampton.

Nevertheless, 100 men, commanded by captains Thomas Lathrop and Richard Beers, set out to disarm the Norwotocks on August 24, reaching their camp on August 25.

The Norwotocks had gotten wind of the plan and had fled north on the way to Pocumtuck (Deerfield). They sent the elderly, women, and children on ahead, and the adult men waited behind to hold the English off in a site just below Wequomps (Mount Sugarloaf) see **WEST ALONG** page B2

Pet of the Week



'HERSHEY'

Meet debonaire Hershey, the cat's meow. What a great smile and those eyes. Hershey is a young lad of two, a mixture of Chihuahua and Standard Poodle. He will reach about 25 pounds when full-grown.

Hershey is a very loving and affectionate pup who loves to cuddle. He likes to play with other dogs when given the opportunity, and is housetrained. Hershey spends most of his time indoors. His parents are rehoming him due to busy sched-

ules. Hershey's looking for parents who have time to love and nurture him, and take him on adventures.

Hershey now lives in Springfield. He will need to be neutered within 30 days of adoption. There is a \$25 adoption fee.

To apply, find "Available Community Animals" under the "Adopt" menu at www.dakinhumane.org. A potential adopter must submit an application, interview and meet the pet, and sign an adoption contract.

Senior Center Activities MARCH 16 THROUGH 20

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 3/16

10:15 a.m. Aerobics
11 a.m. Chair Exercise
3 p.m. Beginner Yoga
6 p.m. Cemetery Commission

Tuesday 3/17

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 3/18

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 3/19

1 p.m. Pitch
Friday 3/20
10:15 a.m. Aerobics
11 a.m. Chair Exercise
12 p.m. Pizza Party
2 p.m. Chair Dance

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 3/16

9 a.m. Good For You

10 a.m. Seated Fitness
12 p.m. Pitch
1 p.m. Yoga
Tuesday 3/17

9 a.m. Stretch and Balance
10 a.m. Line Dancing
11 a.m. Social Stringer
Wednesday 3/18

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

Thursday 3/19

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

Friday 3/20

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

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 March 17.

Luncheons are the fourth Friday at town hall. For more information, contact (413) 548-1022 or coa@leverett.ma.us, or check the town newsletter or the LeverettConnects listserv.

WENDELL

Foot care clinic is the first Wednesday of each month. The next clinic is April 1. Call Katie Nolan at (978) 544-2306 for information or appointments. For Senior Health Rides, contact Nancy Spittle at (978) 544-6760.

WEST ALONG from page B1

known as the Hopewell Swamp.

When the English entered the swale, about 40 muskets fired upon them, and the Natives held the English up for about three hours, buying time for the noncombatants to escape. The English had walked into the ambush, and had turned the neutral Norwotocks into deadly enemies.

The war had come to the Valley.

Within five days, on September 1, more than 60 Native soldiers attacked the new settlement at Northfield. The group was led by the Nashaway sachem Monoco, whose forces were accompanied by a band of Pocumtuck.

Northfield, under siege, was ordered to be abandoned by the Massachusetts Bay authorities.

By September 3, Captain Beers was once again sent on a mission to rescue the settlers. Leaving Hadley, Beers and 36 men reached Four Mile Brook in Northfield where they camped. On September 4 they marched north, once again straight into an ambush; by the end of the day 21 English, including Beers, had been killed.

By September 6, Major Robert Treat of Connecticut reached Northfield with 100 men and rescued the settlers. During this mission, the English encountered numerous decapitated heads stuck on poles. The sight so demoralized the rescuers that they quickly buried the dead and headed back to Hadley, leaving the town to be destroyed.

Major Treat led his men and the Northfield survivors back down a retreat route through the trails in the modern-day French King vicinity, across the ford at the



William Croome's illustration of the attack on Captain Beers's wagon train at Northfield, in the 1853 Pictorial History of King Philip's War.

mouth of the Millers River, up what is now East Mineral Road in Montague, on through what we now know as Lake Pleasant, down to Sunderland and into Hadley.

George Sheldon, the Deerfield historian, imagined that retreat as he wrote in 1870:

"We are left to imagine the long cavalcade, a line of strange black-looking specters, threading its way the livelong night through the gloomy woods... the panic-stricken riders peering fearfully right and left into the thickets, or crowding together in terror at the hoot of an owl, or bark of a fox or wolf, sure that each was a war-whoop or a pursuing foe."

To be continued.



DIY Bodywork For All

simple tips for self-care monthly

By JAMIE SIMPSON

TURNERS FALLS – As it's been over a month, let's say this will be a semi-monthly column.

Two weeks ago, I joined a friend for a morning class at the senior center in Turners. Officially, I wasn't quite senior enough to attend, but I was welcomed anyway. The class was a mix of aerobics and weight training, balance, strength and flexibility – and was surprisingly vigorous. There was also lots of socializing and camaraderie, along with throwback '80s tunes.

Much of the class involved hip mobility and strength, as well it should: as the hub between our upper and lower halves, our hips are crucial to nearly all movement, and as we age we become increasingly prone to hip injuries and replacements. That's why strength and flexibility of the joint is so important, not just for hip health, but for overall health.

In this column we'll look at the anatomical and functional importance of our hips, and how to keep them healthy and happy for life.

The hip joint is where the ball-shaped projection at the upper end of each femur, the large bone of the upper leg, angles up and in to "plug into" a depression on either side of the lateral pelvis called the *acetabulum*, creating a ball-and-socket joint. This junction provides an astonishing amount of stability and strength, and more mobility than any other joint in the body except for our shoulders.

To reiterate: almost all of our waking movements involve the hip joints. Luckily for us, the hips are supported in their mission by a legion of muscles, tendons, ligaments, fascia, cartilage, and more, structures that begin, end, or pass through the pelvic area. This infrastructure allows the hips to support the weight of our everything above it while keeping us in balance, whether we are still or moving, upright or upside-down.

In my previous column we cov-

ered the importance of keeping the head aligned directly over the shoulders and hips to maintain neck health. That factors into hip health as well, as long periods of time spent with our heads forward strains muscles all the way down the back and into the hips.

Here are two exercises to help keep your hips strong, and one to keep them mobile. Of course, there are elements of flexibility in strength building, and vice versa.

Hip Strength 1: Sit-to-Stand

Start in a sturdy chair, with or without arms. Sit forward so that your "sits bones" – the two bony points of your pelvis, right around where the bottom seam of a bikini bottom or briefs would be – are close to the edge of the seat.

Plant your feet flat, hip distance apart. Hinge at the waist and lean your torso forward.

Take a slow, full breath in. As you exhale, press your legs and feet down, using your upper legs and glutes to push yourself up to standing. If possible, stand using only your leg and hip strength. If you need to push with your arms to get upright, still try to make your legs do most of the work.

If you are concerned about falling, do this exercise with a friend or family member nearby. You can also place the chair close to and facing your bed, so if you were to fall you'd land on the mattress.

Hip Strength 2: Bridge Pose

Lie face-up on an exercise mat, the floor, or a bed. Bend your knees, feet flat, hip distance apart. With your legs in this position, pull your heels as close to your bottom as is comfortable.

Extend your arms on the floor by your side, palms down. Take a slow, full breath in.

As you exhale, press your feet down and your hips to the ceiling. Focus on using your upper leg muscles and glutes, engaging your abdominal and other core muscles in

your torso to stabilize so the back muscles aren't doing all the work.

Hold there for several slow, steady breaths. On an exhale, slowly lower your hips and pelvis back to the ground.

Repeat this three to five times. At the beginning you may only be able to keep your hips up for a few seconds. Over time, you can build up to holding the pose for one to three minutes.

Hip Flexibility

Lie face-up on the floor, an exercise mat, or a bed. Hug your knees into your chest. Hold them for several breaths.

Alternate hugging one knee in while extending the other leg long on the floor. Repeat three to five times on each side. Move slowly and deliberately, matching your movements with slow, full breaths.

Now plant your feet flat on the floor a bit wider than hip distance apart, knees bent. Allow your bent legs to "windshield-wiper" side to side, again moving slowly in time with your breath. It doesn't matter if your legs come all the way to the floor or not: the point is to practice range of motion (ROM) movements, and gradually increase ROM over time.

Lastly, bring the big-toe sides of your feet together, then allow your knees to splay out to the sides in a "butterfly pose." If your knees don't naturally come to the floor, rest them on pillows, cushions, yoga blocks, etc., so your legs will gradually relax. Stay there for two to three minutes, breathing slowly.

That's all for this time! Thanks for reading. Let me know if you try any of these exercises, and how it goes.

Jamie Simpson is a Licensed Massage Therapist (LMT), registered yoga teacher, and certified Roll Model Method practitioner, as well as an occasional writer. Email to bodywork@montaguereporter.org.

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'Neighbors' Group Gains State Funds, Board Member

By LEE WICKS

MONTAGUE – Last week I learned of two recently retired friends who have become volunteers for Montague Neighbors, the all-volunteer non-profit organization that matches elders with compassionate people willing to help with small chores, transportation and more.

The "Neighbors network" that started in Boston 20 years ago has expanded nationwide. It allows people to age in place with dignity, and fills a gap for help with tasks too small for a contractor, but too difficult for arthritic hands or for a person with reduced driving ability.

It is comforting to know that we have a thriving organization right here in Montague serving people from all five villages.

Montague Neighbors president Helen Gibson-Ugucconi announced this week that a \$10,000 grant from the state will be used to fund outreach, marketing, volunteer recruitment, and administrative support. Yes, even an all-volunteer organization needs resources to print brochures, mail materials, update technology, and host events.

"This grant will help us expand our reach and assist more people," Helen said. "I am grateful to LifePath for distributing the funds made available through the state budget."

In a press release Jason Molony, the Age & Dementia Friendly program director at LifePath, wrote, "Following successful legislative advocacy by State Senator Jo Comerford and State Senator John Velis, an earmark in Governor Maura Healey's FY26 state budget enabled LifePath to award \$100,000 to 10 local Village organizations. Each organization received \$10,000 to strengthen community-based, neighbor-to-neighbor supports for older adults across the region."

Senator Comerford wrote: "It's been an absolute pleasure to learn about the depth and breadth of services and support offered by dedicated volunteers. For years, constituents in local Villages across my district have taught me about the value and beauty of neighbors helping neighbors – especially in our disproportionately rural region."

Each organization received \$10,000 to strengthen community-based, neighbor-to-neighbor supports for older adults across the region.

According to LifePath executive director Gary Yuhas, "Villages are integral components of a complex web of partnerships supporting older adults across our communities. Needs continue to increase and evolve, and the increased capacity from this generous earmark will help individuals in

our communities to age well."

The following organizations each also received \$10,000 of the funding: Amherst Neighbors; Athol Kindness Connection; Easthampton Neighbors; Greenfield Neighbors; Neighbors at Home: The Northfield Village; Northampton Neighbors; Petersham Partners; Valley Neighbors (Whately, Deerfield and Sunderland); and Village Neighbors (Shutesbury, Leverett, Wendell, and New Salem).

Helen said she is also grateful for the support of business leaders, Greenfield Cooperative Bank, Greenfield Savings Bank, the Gill-Montague Council on Aging, FootCare by Nurses, and Windy Hollow Veterinary Clinic, whose early support has helped Montague Neighbors develop and thrive.

She invites anyone who wants to know more about Montague Neighbors, as a volunteer, a recipient of services or both, to visit the website, montaguevillages.org, or call (413) 672-3095 or email info@montaguevillages.org.



SUBMITTED PHOTO

Mary Averill

Montague Neighbors also has a new board member: Mary Averill, who recently retired from a position as the senior manager of Integrated Behavioral Health at Commonwealth Care Alliance (CCA).

CCA is a health plan serving dual-eligible (Medicare and Medicaid) citizens of Massachusetts ages 21 and above. In her role, Mary managed the building and implementation of a team of clinical social workers and community health outreach workers into CCA's medical model of care, with a focus on in-home care for seniors and people under 65 across the state.

Prior to CCA, Mary worked in higher education finance policy, state government, and private practice, and as a public school teacher.

In addition, Mary is a mother, photographer, and printmaker, and an outdoor and travel enthusiast. She has served on many non-profit human service boards, and has just stepped down as Chair of the Ama Ghar Home and Foundation, a children's home in Nepal.

"I look forward to getting more involved in Montague Neighbors," Mary said. "I cannot think of a more important and rewarding volunteer opportunity – keeping our elderly neighbors living at home with support as long as they are able."

HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE MONTAGUE POLICE LOG

Smoke and Fire; Catcall; Walls Shaking; Car vs. Pole; Truck vs. Pedestrian; Screaming Lurker; Football Drills

Monday, 3/2

7:03 a.m. 911 caller reporting fire alarms sounding on Taylor Hill Road. No flames or smoke. Transferred to Shelburne Control. MCFD on scene; possible chimney fire. TFFD *en route*.

8:36 a.m. Multiple reports of a two-car accident at Dell and Davis streets. No injuries. TFFD *en route* for fluids. Officer requesting tow for one vehicle.

12:35 p.m. Manager of a Fourth Street property requesting an officer presence; states decibel level of music is too high, and is rattling apartment above. Advised of complaint. Music turned down.

8:42 p.m. Caller from Prospect Street states that her neighbor's dog has been outside for hours; would like an officer to check on the dog and see if the owners are home and will let it in, as she is concerned for the dog. Area checked; no dogs located outside.

9:08 p.m. 911 caller states that a male party is drunk and threatening her life; would like an officer.

10:15 p.m. Caller states that someone at Hillside Plastics is playing loud music in their car. He and his wife are trying to sleep; they would like an officer to check it out. Officers made contact with party and advised him of the complaint. Party turned down music.

Tuesday, 3/3

12:22 a.m. 911 caller states that MPD was at her house earlier tonight; the involved male was told to leave her alone. Caller states male is still threatening her and harassing her by blowing deer horns at her. Both parties advised to stop speaking with each other.

6:11 a.m. 911 caller states there is a fire on the first floor of an Avenue A apartment building. Caller states he can see flames and heavy black smoke; states it looks like someone is trying to put the fire out with water. Call given to Shelburne Control. Received second call from male who states something caught fire in his apartment; he was able to get it outside, but there is a lot of smoke in the building. Officer on scene and multiple additional callers reporting heavy smoke in building. Officer requesting DPW to place "road closed" signs on Avenue A at Third Street and on Canal Street at the Fifth Street bridge. DPW *en route*. Officer was able to get two dogs out of the apartment with heavy smoke; they are in the cruiser. PD units clearing. FD remaining on scene.

2:36 p.m. Caller states that a car just rear-ended another vehicle at the intersection

of Turnpike and Turners Falls roads. No damage. Information exchanged.

3:08 p.m. 911 caller from J Street states that around 9:30 a.m. a party in a grey sedan pulled up next to him in the parking lot and told him he was attractive, then drove away. Caller states he hasn't seen the vehicle again and it might be just a fluke thing, but he felt scared.

3:39 p.m. Vehicle stuck on L Street. Officer assisting. Vehicle unstuck and on its way.

5:37 p.m. Report of snow machines driving up and around on the streets in the Bulkley Street area. Unable to locate.

6:16 p.m. 911 caller states his brother is drunk and getting in his face. Nothing physical tonight, but wants this on record. Told caller to call back if it turns physical or if he needs assistance. Caller called back stating he does want an officer to respond and speak with his brother, who is causing an issue. Verbal disturbance between brothers. No physical altercation. Advised one party of Section 35 options. Situation mediated for the night.

8:17 p.m. Caller from Wendell Road states he is trying to get home and is unable to make it up the hill. Officer requesting DPW be contacted. DPW states they will be on the way back out.

9 p.m. Report of minor accident at Seventh and L streets. No injuries reported.

Wednesday, 3/4

8:45 a.m. Southbridge PD requesting MPD check a Vladish Avenue address for a male party who is being charged with a restraining order violation. Address appears to be vacant; no one inside. Will pass information along to Southbridge PD.

5:31 p.m. Caller from Ferry Road states that two vehicles are parked in the road and she had a hard time getting around them. Nobody is in or around the vehicles. Officers checked area; it seems they have a showing for a house. Vehicles not impeding traffic.

6:05 p.m. Caller states that a car on Third Street is impacting traffic and is parked close to a fire hydrant. Parking ticket issued.

7:50 p.m. Caller states she received a call from a tenant with a noise complaint on Fourth Street, where the walls are shaking. Requesting PD response. Party advised of complaint.

9:49 p.m. Caller from Main Street states a male is fighting with the owner of the apartment and is intoxicated and on drugs, as she saw needles and drugs all over. Officers ad-

vised. Courtesy transport to Greenfield provided. 11:22 p.m. Vehicle repossession on Bridge Street.

Thursday, 3/5

12:16 a.m. E-911 automated voice call; vehicle and occupants involved in an accident, mapping to Turners Falls Road. Officers advised. Shelburne Control copied directly and toning FD. Caller reports losing power to their house and seeing power line poles broken in the roadway and a car flipped over near their location. Additional caller reporting a possible car crash near the involved location. Officer advises vehicle on its side; one female party, still in vehicle and conscious at this time. Officer advises road will be shut down from Hillside to Hatchery. DPW contacted for signs. Officer provided broken pole number for Eversource; advises Northfield EMS is transporting a patient, and Eversource is on the scene. Officer requesting a tow. Officer advises snow and ice have been pushed into the roadway from the accident. FD requests the roadway be cleared and for salt and sand to be thrown down. DPW advised. Eversource requesting detail for pole to be put in tonight; they also need water and sewer lines marked before they start working. Water department and DPW to be contacted. Rau's and three Eversource crews on site. Officer advises roadway back open.

12:23 p.m. 911 caller reports that one of his tenants on Montague City Road is harassing and threatening another tenant in the laundry room. Peace restored.

1:48 p.m. Walk-in reporting a minor hit-and-run that occurred yesterday at Walgreens. Report taken.

3:09 p.m. Multiple callers reporting a hit-and-run on Third Street; a young male in a dark Chevy Silverado was speeding down the road, clipped off multiple mirrors, and kept going. Clear from Third Street; officers checking area for involved vehicle.

3:19 p.m. Caller from West Mineral Road reporting that a neighbor keeps parking their truck on the road, making it impassable. Gone on arrival.

7:28 p.m. Greenfield PD requesting assistance in learning when a male party last showed up to work at Heatfab. Business closed; Greenfield PD notified.

7:54 p.m. 911 hangup; no answer on callback. Caller re-called on business line reporting a truck versus pedestrian accident on Lake Pleasant Road. Shelburne Control contacted. Patient breathing and somewhat conscious. Head

injury; unable to move. Requesting Advanced Life Support and TFFD. MCFD *en route*. Officer requesting road be shut down from Route 63 to Old Northfield Road, and that state police be contacted. Roadway reopened. Officer reached out to Baystate Springfield; no patient update at this time.

Friday, 3/6

6:27 a.m. Caller from Montague City Road advises \$100 was stolen from her kitchen at some point; unsure who did it. Officer attempted to contact caller, but unable to get through. Caller never called back.

3:39 p.m. Animal control officer executing a warrant to remove dogs from residence on Montague Avenue. Dogs removed and secured.

4:26 p.m. Caller from L Street reports that a female was just outside looking in her windows and screaming. Wants on record at this time.

Saturday, 3/7

6:40 a.m. 911 caller reporting icy conditions on South Prospect Street. DPW will check it out.

4:14 p.m. Caller from Fourth Street states the neighbor backed into his wife's car; would like to file an accident report.

5:48 p.m. Caller from East Main street states that seven kids are fighting outside the residence and he would like them removed. Officer spoke to kids, who were running football drills and not fighting at this time.

11:09 p.m. Caller from Avenue A states that the new restaurant downstairs has been having the bass really loud; it's shaking his apartment, causing things to fall off the counter. Caller states he has spoken to them and sent emails trying to ask them to be considerate, but nothing has changed. Advised of complaint.

Sunday, 3/8

1:15 p.m. Caller from Third Street states that a car is parked in his driveway; he asked them to move, and they told him [redacted]; also states the landlord has talked to them about the vehicle. Officers spoke to owner of vehicle. She is waiting to pick up her son and is only there temporarily. Caller sped off in his car; officers advised to call if he comes back, and they will return.

3:03 p.m. Sewer backup on South Prospect Street. DPW advised.

5:53 p.m. Officer flagged down on Third Street by someone reporting a large pothole in the road. Officer attempting to get a cone to put in it. Message left for DPW. Two cones in hole, which is approximately two feet wide and ten inches deep.

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REVIEWS from page B1

and raising floods.

Chapters go back and forth in time, visiting the different characters we meet, but always Helm is there. In the 1930s a meteorologist arrives, bringing heavy equipment to study Helm's realm. A glider pilot soars ecstatically over Helm to gather data. The most recent visitor is a young woman grad student, studying the microplastics the wind funnels through the mountains.

Doing a little research, I found that Helm did indeed once blow a train over, a meteorologist did set up camp below Helm and had heavy equipment hauled up the mountain, and a glider pilot did soar over Helm in 1939 to gather data. The latest New Yorker magazine has an article about increasing air turbulence experienced on planes, especially over mountains like the Andes where winds like Helm form.

A juicy, cool read. Meanwhile, Helm abides, watches, and just is.

Seventeen 'Dispatches'

"To be a well-informed citizen of planet Earth, you need to read Elizabeth Kolbert." So says Rolling Stone magazine. The author, who won a Pulitzer Prize for 2014's The Sixth Extinction, offers Life on a Little-Known Planet - a series of 17 essays, 16 of them from New Yorker articles over the years - with the usual great reviews.

"Kolbert... resolutely and brilliantly alerts us to how little we know about our precious planet," offers Booklist; Mother Jones calls it "a master class in how to write about our changing world," and the New Yorker itself listed it as one of the year's Best Books.

Kolbert's science and environmental writing is far-ranging and thoughtful, with traces of dry humor. She visited the places and

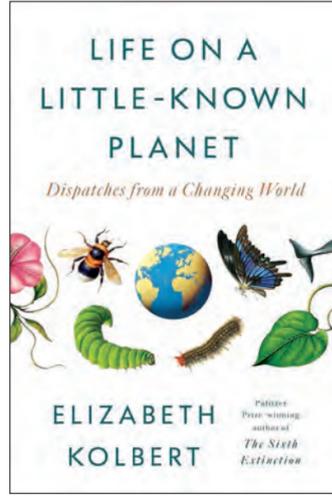
people she writes about, and she brings us along and shares her conversations there with scientists, citizens, and activists.

In "Talk to Me," researchers off the coast of Dominica in the Caribbean are trying to "understand" sperm whale vocalizations using AI, a challenging task. Kolbert uses ChatGPT to rewrite Melville's Moby Dick from the white whale's point of view; Moby was simply misunderstood.

She takes us to New Zealand ("Killing Mrs. Tiggy Winkle") as the country tries to kill off millions of human-introduced mammalian predators that are killing off native fauna and flora to extinction.

And we see how parts of the beautiful and much-lamented Glen Canyon in Utah, which was flooded in 1963 to create Lake Powell, are being revealed by the waters receding with increasing droughts.

Climate change looms large in

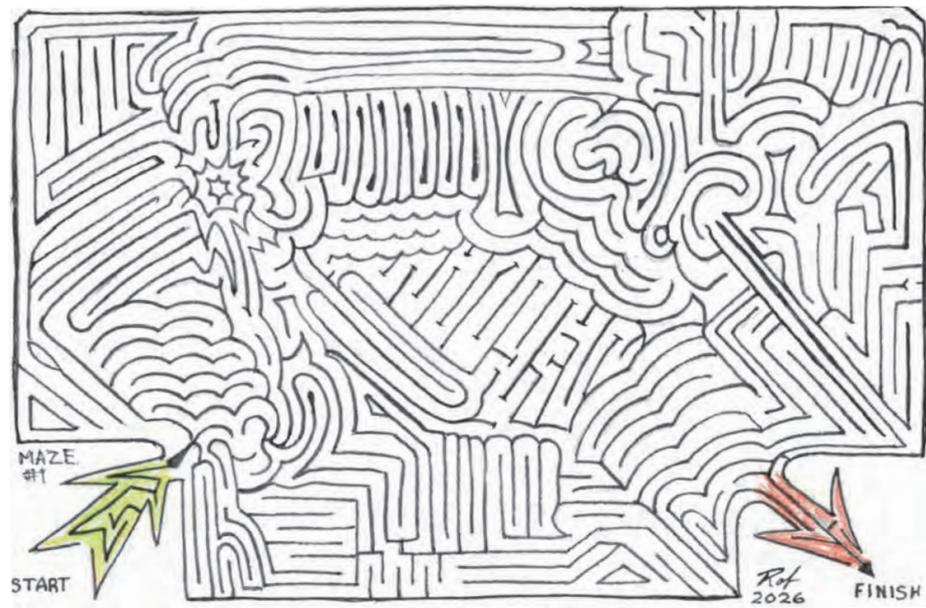


the optimistic Amory Lovins.

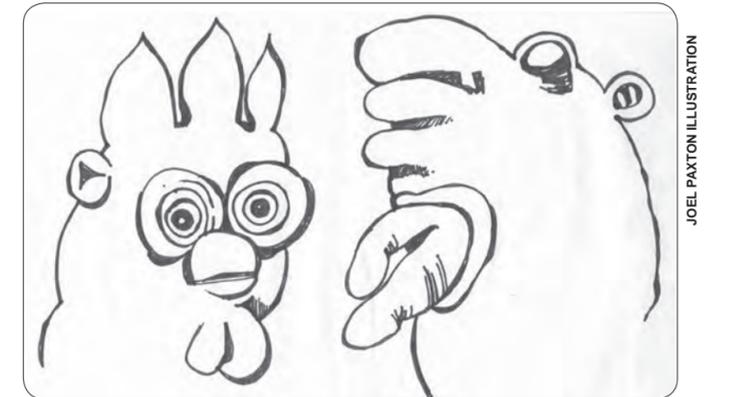
Rewilding the Netherlands; bee colony collapse; a small Danish island gone carbon-neutral. In Florida, advocates are fighting for the rights of natural objects - in this case specifically, the right of Lake Mary Jane to exist free from destructive development.

The last essay is "Last Words." The last living speaker of Eyak, a Na-Dené language spoken by a somewhat mysterious tribe in central coastal Alaska, talks a little crankily about her status as the last native speaker. As the world changes, not only nature and our environment are lost and impacted, but also cultures and ways of living.

For a break from our scary present, Life on a Little-Known Planet is a great book to read, to be informed and offered hope, and to take a deep breath. Kolbert lives in Williamstown, so it's almost local as well.



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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
(Please note we are no longer accepting mailed submissions.)

Our March Poetry Page

How curious —
the offhand hug
the perfunctory goodbye
of the loved one
we've hugged so many times,
we forget to notice their warmth, the smell of their skin, their hair, their clothes.
See you soon, we say, like always, for of course we will

And then they are not there

simple as changing the channel
shocking as falling through the universe
into breathless dark

And the world changes color, it has to,
how could it not?
We may not see it, but we perceive it:
the molten core murmuring under our feet
below layers of sediment, sentiment, buried memories excavated into searing daylight

A slide show, like back in the day, loops and loops in the mind
sometimes we seek it; sometimes it steals in unawares
Poring over a work report
we can't understand why we can't understand
then we know: it's back, she is back,
sliding us back through time
through tears and tantrums
resentment and hurts
reconciliations fragile as just-born birds,
blindly lifting tiny beaks to where mom with masticated worms waits

There is no grasping
the enormity of it,
nor the utter commonness of it

We may try to staunch the tears, hide them, share them
it matters not: they will have their way, their say
though hot themselves, they cool hotter grief in the arc of time
the same time she pulls us through
down to the dawn of our awareness
to where we see her —
her alone, her with us, her and the outward spiral of all whom she touched, pond stone
ripples reaching like sound waves over time and geography

Those tears melt our heart, again and again, yet the heart stays as strong as it is broken

When the person through whom we came into this world leaves it, she yet remains:
for the broken heart still carries her flame, part of the fire of all those we've loved and
who've left

And comes the day of our leaving
our flame joins that fire
picked up in turn by those we leave
who keep running
hearts burning, burning
lighting the way in the dark

- Anonymous
Great Falls

Early Onset

There may come a day
when I won't know
who you are.

But there will never be a day
when I won't love you
with all my heart.

- Richard Andersen
Montague

For the Princess of Montague With apologies to Emily Dickinson.

You are the jewel in our crown.
You are the hummingbird in our song
You are the hope in all our feathers.

- Richard Andersen
Montague

bait and hook me

bait and hook
my white-privileged mouth,
for I feed in a white-privileged sea.
i am white: "free from moral impurity."

lift and haul
my white-privileged body.
hold me, flapping.
for I am white: "not intended to cause harm."

let me bleed
and see your face.
for I am white: "free from spot or blemish."

keep me out
out of the water
show me
a new way to breathe.

- Sue Blauner
Turners Falls

Contributors' Notes:

Richard Andersen's first-ever poem appeared in a recent issue of the *Montague Reporter*. Now there are two more.

In Sue Blauner's poem, quotes are definitions of "white from Webster's Dictionary."

Anonymous is newish to Great Falls, loves it here, and has been writing unpublished poetry when the muses whisper in their ear for over 50 years. This poem is a tribute to their late aunt.

ILLUSTRATION: UNKNOWN, FLOWER STUDIES, CIRCA 1650

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T-SHIRTS ARE IN!**



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THURSDAY, MARCH 12

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

Erving Senior and Community
Center, Erving: *Frances
Perkins: A Woman's Work*,
performance by Jarice
Hanson. 1 p.m. Free.

Various locations, Brattleboro:
Brattleboro Luck Crawl.
Enjoy samples from more than
15 of Vermont's gastronomic
purveyors. 6 p.m. \$.

Slate Library, Gill: Local author
reading, *David Detmold*.
6:30 p.m. Free.

Marigold, Brattleboro:
*Libyan Hit Squad, Eat
the Graveyard, Squeeze
Mohamish*. 7 p.m. No cover.

Iron Horse, Northampton:
Deer Tick, LuxDeluxe. 7 p.m. \$.

FRIDAY, MARCH 13

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

Deja Brew, Wendell:
Village Neighbors Meetup.
Snacks provided. 4 p.m. Free.

Smith College Museum
of Art, Northampton:
*Hands-On Artmaking
Workshops*. Materials
provided. 4 to 8 p.m. Free.

Artspace, Greenfield:
The Art of Collage and Play.
Register at [tinyurl.com/
ArtspaceFreeArt](https://tinyurl.com/ArtspaceFreeArt). 5 p.m. Free.

Looky Here, Greenfield:
Poetry & Tarot, hosted
by CAConrad. "Bring your
tarot decks and poems."
6 p.m. By donation.

Iron Horse, Northampton:
Big Bad Bollocks. 6 p.m. \$

Montague Common Hall,
Montague Center: *Square
Dance* with musicians *Mary
Frasier and Peter Seigel*,
Don Stratton calling. Jammers
welcome. Circle dances and
beginner squares for families,
6:30 p.m.; regular squares,
7:30 p.m. By donation.

Wendell Meetinghouse,
Wendell: *Goodness Shakes*,
community dance.
6:30 p.m. By donation.

THCC, Easthampton:
Astral Bitch, Shazbot,
The Entire Earth. 7 p.m. \$.

Deja Brew, Wendell:
The Great Craic Blackguard.
7:30 p.m. No cover.

Shelburne Falls Theater,
Shelburne Falls: Pothole
Pictures presents *Waiting
for Guffman* (1996). Music
at 7 p.m.: *Dan Lederer*;
movie at 7:30 p.m. \$.

Parlor Room, Northampton:
Zoe & Cloyd. 7:30 p.m. \$.

Shea Theater, Turners Falls:
Max Creek. 8 p.m. \$.

The Drake, Amherst:
*Ganesh and Wolfe, Kryssi
& Wednesday, Ben Richter*,
DJ MentalDrift. 8 p.m. \$.

Marigold Theater,
Easthampton: *Frenchy and the
Punk, Pilgrims, Ghost Painted
Sky, DJ Azrael*. 8 p.m. \$.

Hutghi's, Westfield:
*Spring Heeled Jack, Ghost
Tones, Skarmy of Darkness*,
Skamagotchi. 8 p.m. \$.

Rendezvous, Turners Falls:
Twang Club, with DJ Brew
Foot. 9 p.m. No cover.

Canal Lanes, Southampton:
Mal Devisa, Cclcng,
LUCY. 9 p.m. \$.

SATURDAY, MARCH 14

Northfield Mountain
Environmental Center:
Magical Dish Gardens,
art workshop for ages
4 to 10. Materials provided.
Limited space, register at
www.bookeo.com/northfield.
10 a.m. to 12 p.m. Free.

Dickinson Library, Northfield:
Pi(e) Day. Celebrate 3.14 with
pie and coffee at the library.
10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Free.

Great Falls Discovery Center,
Turners Falls: Local history
talk, *The Grand Trunk
Hotel*. 2 p.m. Free.

YMCA, Greenfield:
*Mindfulness Meditation
for Stress Reduction*.
2 to 3:15 p.m. Free.

Incandescent Brewing,
Bernardston: *Jimmy Just
Quit*. 6 p.m. No cover.

Montague Elks, Turners
Falls: *Ragged Blue*.
6:30 p.m. No cover.

Leverett Elementary School,
Leverett: *Community Contra
Dance*, with bake sale.
Benefit for 5th grade canoe
trip. 6:30 p.m. By donation.

Four Phantoms Brewing,
Greenfield: *Stillwater Band*.
6:30 p.m. No cover.

Great Falls Discovery Center,
Turners Falls: *All Cooped Up
Concert*, light refreshments.
7 p.m. By donation.

LAVA Center, Greenfield:
Charlie King & Ben Tousley,
Irish music. 7 p.m. \$.

Floodwater Brewing,
Shelburne Falls: *Little House
Blues*. 7 p.m. No cover.

THCC, Easthampton: *Miracle
Blood, Sexless Marriage*,
Woundlicker. 7 p.m. \$.



Saturday at the Discovery Center:
Learn about the Grand Trunk Hotel,
originally known as the Farren House,
demolished in 1968, which stood
where a new library is now proposed.

Loculus Studio, Holyoke:
bobbie, album release show;
Cow Person; *beetsblog*;
DJ Mommy Issues. 7 p.m. \$.

Shelburne Falls Theater,
Shelburne Falls: Pothole
Pictures presents *Waiting
for Guffman* (1996). Music at
7 p.m.: *The Frost Heaves &
Hales*; movie at 7:30 p.m. \$.

Shea Theater, Turners Falls:
Double Duran, Duran Duran
tribute. 8 p.m. \$.

The Drake, Amherst:
*Happy Valley Guitar
Orchestra*. 8 p.m. \$.

Stone Church, Brattleboro:
Leftover Crack,
Pilfers. 8 p.m. \$.

Haze, Northampton:
Rival Galaxies, Echo Royale,
Snowglobe Almanac,
DJ Trusty Rusty. 8 p.m. \$.

Marigold Theater,
Easthampton: *hush puppy*,
Marxist Jargon, Sexwave,
PMS. 8 p.m. \$.

Hutghi's, Westfield:
Signature Dish, Safety Coffin,
Andyhasaband. 8 p.m. \$.

Rendezvous, Turners Falls:
*Mass Resistor, Ginger
Bug*. 9:30 p.m. \$.

EXHIBITS

Waterway Arts, Turners Falls:
Jesse Connor: New Works, oil paintings
that echo the joy, humor, and mystery of
the artist's experience, through March.

**Great Falls Discovery Center, Turners
Falls:** *Maps of River History*, artistic maps
by geologist and cartographer Joe Kopera
that reveal hidden topography of rivers
and floodplains. Through March 28.

Montague Center Library:
Art of the Book, art made from
or about books, through March.

Sawmill River Arts, Montague Center:
Neighborly, an impromptu group show
with sales going to support LUCE and
RAICES, organizations supporting the
immigrant community. Through March.

Artspace, Greenfield:
*52nd Annual Franklin County
Teen Art Show*, through April 24.

GCTV, Greenfield: *Eve Christoff's
Gallery of Work*, vibrant large-scale
paintings celebrating the natural world
and divine female energy, through March.

LAVA Center, Greenfield:
Find Your Voice, Speak Your Mind,
work by student artists at the Academy
at Charlemont, through March. *Trees*,
informational exhibit celebrating tree
projects in Greenfield, through April.

Looky Here, Greenfield:
Kids Art Show, work by youngsters
up to 12 years old, through March.

Leverett Library: *The Art of Dorothy
Masterson Bennett*, a former Leverett
resident who passed in 2024 at 92 years
old. Through April, with a reception
next Saturday, March 21 at 12:30 p.m.

Fiddleheads Gallery, Northfield:
Sixth Annual Photography Exhibit
by New England artists featuring
black-and-white, color, phone, and
camera prints, through March.

Hampden Gallery, UMass Amherst:
Fragile Connections, neon-lit sculpture
and delicately engraved glass forms
by scientific glass blower Sally Prasch.
Through May 8, with a reception April 23.

Gallery A3, Amherst: *Romanum*, Ron
Maggio's mixed-media works inspired
by Roman frescoes, through March.

Shelburne Arts Coop, Shelburne Falls:
Longing for Green, member exhibit in
a wide range of media, through March.

Salmon Falls Gallery, Shelburne Falls:
Student Art Exhibit, works by fifth
and sixth graders in the Mohawk Trail
regional school district, through April.

CALLS FOR ART

Waterway Arts, Turners Falls:
Two- and three-dimensional art
sought for *Please Touch*, a group
show of participatory art on the theme
of "connection." Artists are encouraged
to provide unique opportunities for the
audience to engage with their work.
See tinyurl.com/waterway-touch
for more info. Deadline is March 20.

Mill District Local Art Gallery, Amherst:
Submissions wanted for *Charmed*,
an invitation to explore charm as
magic, strategy, power, or survival.
Women-identifying and nonbinary
artists within 39 miles of Amherst
may submit two-dimensional works
for display in May and June. Apply at
femmelocale.com. Deadline is April 15.

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CALENDAR



looking forward...

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 25

Shea Theater, Turners Falls: *Cinemastorm* double feature, *Matewan* (1987) and *City of Hope* (1991). Special guests: writer/director/producer *John Sayles* and actor/producer *Maggie Renzi*. 7 p.m. Free.

FRIDAY, MARCH 27

Four Phantoms Brewing, Greenfield: *Drag Bingo*, fundraiser for the Peace Development Fund. 7 p.m. \$.

SUNDAY, MARCH 29

Palladium, Worcester: *Emperor, Blood Incantation*. 7:30 p.m. \$\$.

THURSDAY, APRIL 2

Beit Ahavah, Florence: *Community Passover Seder*. Register by March 29 at tinyurl.com/PassoverAhava. Bring an item that represents freedom. 5 to 8:30 p.m. By donation.

SUNDAY, APRIL 5

Brick House, Turners Falls: *Wendy Eisenberg*, more TBA. 7 p.m. \$.

TUESDAY, APRIL 7

Marigold Theater, Easthampton: *Takaat, Sunburned Hand of the Man, Wednesday Knudsen, Dust Witch*. 7 p.m. \$.

THURSDAY, MAY 7

Rendezvous, Turners Falls: *hush puppy, Mimi Fang*. 9 p.m. \$.

FRIDAY, MAY 15

Stone Church, Brattleboro: *They Are Gutting a Body of Water*. 8 p.m. \$.

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 10

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

THURSDAY, JULY 2

Tree House Brewing, Deerfield: *Earl Sweatshirt, MIKE, Surf Gang*. 7 p.m. \$.

THURSDAY, JULY 23

MASS MoCA, North Adams: *Lucy Dacus*. 8 p.m. \$\$.

SATURDAY, AUGUST 8

MASS MoCA, North Adams: *Big Thief*. 8 p.m. \$\$.

THURSDAY, AUGUST 20

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

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 3

Big E Arena, West Springfield: *Ice Cube*. 7:30 p.m. \$\$.

SUNDAY, MARCH 15

Polish Center of Discovery and Learning, Chicopee: *Locating Vital Records from Poland Online*, lecture by genealogist *Julie Roberts Szczepankiewicz*, followed by discussion, genealogy assistance, Polish craft-making, and a guided tour. Door prize, light refreshments. 1:30 to 4 p.m. By donation.

Element Brewing, Millers Falls: *Boys of the Landfill*. 2 p.m. No cover.

Stage 33, Bellows Falls: *Hiroya Tsukamoto*. 2 p.m. \$.

Incandescent Brewing, Bernardston: *Crowd the Plough*. Irish music. 2 p.m. No cover.

Brewery at Four Star Farms, Northfield: *Corned Beef Dinner*. Reserve at tinyurl.com/FourStarDinner. 3 to 6 p.m. \$.

The National Spiritual Alliance, Lake Pleasant: *Jam in the Round* music gathering. Play, sing, or listen; no experience necessary. 4 p.m. Free.

St. Kaz, Turners Falls: *Academy Awards* watch party, poutine. 7 p.m. No cover.

Rendezvous, Turners Falls: *JJ Slater, Safety Coffin, Lexi Weege's Lil Honky Tonk Band*. 8 p.m. \$.

MONDAY, MARCH 16

Dreamhouse, Turners Falls: *New Building, New Business*. Learn what a new Montague main library building would mean for businesses and organizations. 4 p.m. Free.

Montague Center Library, Montague: *Book Club*. *Ray Bradbury, Fahrenheit 451*. 4 p.m. Free.

Wendell Free Library, Wendell: *Fiber and Mending Night*. 6:30 p.m. Free.

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

TUESDAY, MARCH 17

Gill-Montague Senior Center, Turners Falls: *Your Library, Your Voice*. Learn what a new Montague main library building would mean financially for our community. 6:30 p.m. Free.

Wendell Free Library, Wendell: Book launch for *Nina Keller's Where Have All the Hippies Gone?* 6:30 p.m. Free.

Parlor Room, Northampton: *Song and Story Open Mic*. 6:30 p.m. Free.

Deja Brew, Wendell: *JT McKenna and Friends*. 7 p.m. No cover.

Shutesbury Athletic Club, Shutesbury: *Irish Music Listening Session*. 7 p.m. No cover.

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 18

Leverett Library, Leverett: *The ABCs of Dementia*. 1 p.m. Free.

Olver Transit Center, Greenfield: *Josh Shanley* discusses "The Lasting Impact of the 1936 Connecticut River Flood." Register at www.tinyurl.com/1936Flood. 2 p.m. By donation.

Wendell Free Library, Wendell: Matinee movie, *Harry and Tonto* (1974). 4 p.m. Free.



Brooklyn's *The Dream Eaters*, billed as "The Carpenters meet Slayer," headline the Shea next Friday in honor of Shea Theater Arts Center board president Christopher "Monte Belmonte" Belmonte's Birthday (Observed).

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

Montague Center Library, Montague: *Movie: Free For All: The Public Library* (2025). 5:30 p.m. Free.

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

THURSDAY, MARCH 19

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

Four Phantoms Brewing, Greenfield: *Pub Sing*. 7 p.m. No cover.

Iron Horse, Northampton: *Robbie Fulks*. 7 p.m. \$.

No Fun, Troy NY: *DJ Lucas, Papo2oo4 & Subjxt 5, Joey the Kid*. 7 p.m. \$.

Shea Theater, Turners Falls: *Valley Voices Story Slam*. 7:30 p.m. \$.

FRIDAY, MARCH 20

Great Falls Discovery Center, Turners Falls: *Kidleidoscope Story Hour: When Will It Be Spring?* Ages 3 to 6. Story, activities, and crafts. 10:30 a.m. Free.

Northfield Mountain Recreation and Environmental Center: *Spring Equinox Hike*. Register at www.bookeo.com/northfield. 1 to 4 p.m. Free.

LAVA Center, Greenfield: *Gulf of Mexico: First Amendment-Free Speech Stand-Up Fun Nite*, hosted by *Karl Meyer* and *Paul Richmond*. Sign-up at 6:30 p.m. By donation.

Nova Arts, Keene: *The Great Groove Theory, Reckoners*. 7 p.m. \$.

Deja Brew, Wendell: *Wendell Warriors, Adam S.Z. and The Inner Fiyah*. 7:30 p.m. \$.

Shea Theater, Turners Falls: *The Dream Eaters, Zara Bode*. 8 p.m. \$.

The Drake, Amherst: *Tim Eriksen & Peter Irvine*. 8 p.m. \$.

Marigold, Brattleboro: *Wolf Girlz, Match, Piss Sipper Lvl 6, Goblin Hunter*. 8 p.m. Free.



Brooklyn's *The Dream Eaters*, billed as "The Carpenters meet Slayer," headline the Shea next Friday in honor of Shea Theater Arts Center board president Christopher "Monte Belmonte" Belmonte's Birthday (Observed).

Marigold Theater, Easthampton: *Trinary System, Bunnies, Sapling*. 8 p.m. \$.

Rendezvous, Turners Falls: *Start Again, Immune Fiction*. 9:30 p.m. No cover.

SATURDAY, MARCH 21

Iron Horse, Northampton: *Student Jazz Coffeehouse with Ron Smith*. 9 a.m. Free.

Our Lady of Czestochowa Church, Turners Falls: *Easter Bazaar*. Polish food, raffles, arts & crafts. Luncheon featuring kielbasa, pierogi, etc.; frozen pierogi for sale. 9 a.m to 2 p.m. \$.

Dickinson Library, Northfield: *Northfield Mount Hermon Farm*, local history talk by *Peter Weis*. 10 a.m. Free.

Northfield Mountain Environmental Center: *Build a Bluebird House*, workshop for ages 10 and older. Materials provided. Limited space, register at www.bookeo.com/northfield. 10 a.m. Free.

Leverett Library, Leverett: Reception for *Art of Dorothy Masterson Bennett*. 12:30 p.m. Free.

Wendell Free Library, Wendell: Reception for *Watercolors by Mary Elise Flynn*. 1 p.m. Free.

New Salem Public Library, New Salem: *Crafternoons: Hammered Flower Prints*. Call (978) 544-6334 to register. 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. \$.

Darlings, Easthampton: Reading, *Shea Mowat*. 4 p.m. No cover.

Incandescent Brewing, Bernardston: *Henderson's Blues Band*. 6 p.m. No cover.

Four Phantoms Brewing, Greenfield: *Belmont/Kurtz Duo*. 6:30 p.m. No cover.

Epsilon Spires, Brattleboro: *East and West* (1924), Yiddish silent film, with live accompaniment by *Alicia Svigals & Donald Sosin*. 6:30 p.m. \$.

THCC, Easthampton: *VRSA, Holy Bowl, Chiburi*. 7 p.m. \$.

Vermont Jazz Center, Brattleboro: *Cameron Brown*, duo and quintet. Benefit for the Windham County Heat Fund. 7:30 p.m. \$.

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

Great Falls Harvest, Turners Falls: *Shirese, Slowpoke Records, unnamed band*. 8 p.m. \$.

Shea Theater, Turners Falls: *The Samples, Will Bradford, Sparxsea*. 8 p.m. \$.

The Drake, Amherst: *Jordana, the booyah! kids*. 8 p.m. \$.

Holyoke Media, Holyoke: *Eighteen Hundred and Froze to Death, Lane, Lucky To Be Me, The Nutsing Charlies*. 8 p.m. \$.

Hutghi's, Westfield: *Left Hand Backwards, She Works Without Legs, TueTewsdays, Sleep Destroyer*. 8 p.m. \$.

MASS MoCA, North Adams: *Yaya Bey*. 8 p.m. \$.

Rendezvous, Turners Falls: *Brook Batteau and the Party Emergency*. 9:30 p.m. No cover.

SUNDAY, MARCH 22

Wendell Free Library, Wendell: *Sunday Word*, writers' workshop with *Paul Richmond*. 1 p.m. Free.

Shea Theater, Turners Falls: *Rosemary Caine and Wilde Irish Shenanigans*. 2 p.m. \$.

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

Academy of Music, Northampton: *The Songs of Johnny Cash*, featuring *Ward Hayden, Lonesome Brothers, Steve Sanderson, Christa Joy, Lisa Bastoni, Deep River Ramblers*. 3 p.m. \$.

Iron Horse, Northampton: *Cass McCombs, Jennifer Castle*. 7 p.m. \$.

Rendezvous, Turners Falls: *Cattlestack, Rhubarb Duo, Beauty Bag*. 8:30 p.m. No cover.

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EXHIBIT from page B1

conform to the popular image of what ballerinas were supposed to look like: elegant creatures whose effortless movements were in themselves works of art. What Degas created is a barely adolescent child whose physical posture and facial expression reveal the toll taken by the stressful demands, and high expectations, of her profession.

Variations of Degas's "Little Dancer" have appeared from time to time in everything from cartoons to commercials to serious works of art. But few renditions equal in power the technical virtuosity, intellectual stimulation, and emotional intensity of Duston Spear's "Original Mold," a series of eight portraits originally exhibited in 1997 at the McIntosh Gallery in Atlanta.

In each painting created for that exhibit, Spear explored the concept of "doubling" – adding a copy to an original. The final canvas contained a representation of Degas's sculpture alongside a portrait of her daughter Kate, who was being substituted for as a model by her younger sister Emma.

Spear describes the genesis of what took place in an article she wrote in 2022 for *Gordon Square Review*:

"The day I photographed my daughter for a series of portraits she was pissed off. She didn't want to wear the costume I had assembled. She didn't want to put on the ballet slippers, one white, one black. She didn't want to wear her shoulder-length hair in a low ponytail. She didn't want to imitate Edgar Degas's sculpture.... It was a favor. And I, her mother, appreciated the favor.

"At fourteen, Emma's big sister was better suited to be the model for Degas's wax sculpture. She would have been the natural choice. But Kate had left. Left me and moved into her father's home. I didn't know it that day, the day I took those photographs of Emma to use as the basis for a series of portraits that I would paint for an exhibit and call it, 'Original Mold.'

"That day marked the beginning of three years without her. 'You have lost Kate.' Four words mailed to me on a blank note card, stiff cream-colored paper, under-sized envelope, my name and address pecked out in their father's calculated cursive on the envelope. Emma was standing in, doing her hurt mom a favor, knowing, as all

painters' kids instinctively know, that having an art project in front of her mother would take some of the focus off her."

With the passing of time, Spear realized that while she thought she had been painting an image of her disloyal daughter Kate under the guise of Maria van Goethem, she was unwittingly revealing through the younger model Emma her own sense of bereavement.

In Spear's visually striking revision – currently on display at the Montague Center Library along with works by other local artists – Degas's sculpture is immediately recognizable. But the now-blurred face and resistant body of the little dancer simultaneously stresses, for me, the elder daughter Kate's rebellious feelings at the time of her abandonment, the younger daughter Emma's resentment at having to serve as Kate's stand-in, and artist mom Spear's deeply felt senses of loss, pain, and betrayal.

The emotional effect of all three at the same time is so powerful as to be palpable.

I know that biographical analyses of this kind tend to influence, in limiting ways, the range of viewer interpretation. No one needs to know anything about any artist to appreciate any work of art. But I'd like to think the specific roles played by the



Edgar Degas's original sculpture, *Petite danseuse de quatorze ans*, is on display at the Clark Institute.

three people central to the creation of this outstanding work is so viscerally personal as to be immediately relevant, in enriching ways, to the life experiences of anyone who views it.

This biographically-centered review also helps explain Spear's decision to complete her canvas by repeating, in stencil form, three sentences from the two-paragraph "Epilogue" in Herman Melville's 500-page *Moby-Dick*.

The "Epilogue," which relates the narrator's rescue after Moby Dick has destroyed everything and everybody connected with the whaling ship Pequod, was added to the second edition of the great novel after readers of the first edition complained they didn't know what happened to the book's narrator. Some thought Ishmael's ghost had written the book.

Hence: "The drama's done. Why then here does anyone step forth? Because one survived the wreck."

In a recent email, Spear explains further the reason behind her choice of quotation to accompany the "wreck" that inspired the painting.

"I'm drawn to the parallel between Melville's belated textual defense and the persistence of Degas's ballerina as an art historical icon," she writes. "The stenciled text reads as an explanation, as a field of after-the-fact reasoning, while the ballerina functions as a kind of fetishized image – an object of sustained looking that resists explanation even as it invites it. By placing her in front of Melville's justification, I wanted the painting to hold both conditions at once: the desire to explain and the simultaneous impossibility of undoing the gaze."

To say Spear succeeded is an understatement.

Some of Spear's works are included in the permanent collections of the Brooklyn Museum and the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. A wider collection of her work is housed in the special collections library at the University of North Carolina.

Somehow, this "Original Mold" has escaped the clutches of these august institutions, and we Montaguans are the beneficiaries of an outstanding work of art.

The Montague Center Library is open from 2 to 7 p.m. Mondays and Wednesdays, and from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. Fridays. The final day of the current exhibit is Monday, March 30.



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SCENE REPORT

Reading History Together

By MELISSA WLOSTOSKI

GREENFIELD – A reading of several of Frederick Douglass's speeches, and discussions about them, was held at the LAVA Center in Greenfield on February 28. Individuals named Marion Carey, Nina Gross, and Nate Woodard did the reading. The event didn't start quite how I expected it to. They first did a kind of unofficial drum ceremony.

I was somewhat familiar with who Frederick Douglass was – I knew that he was a famous historic African-American who was involved with ending slavery, who also wrote up his own story as an autobiography for people to read. It didn't surprise me that he also wrote a number of speeches, and was an advisor to Abraham Lincoln.

I thought the three people I mentioned read Douglass's speeches well. The audience seemed to agree, and enjoyed hearing them nicely.

Douglass's words sounded as if they had been well-written by the man.

It was mentioned that at the time he originally gave one speech, a large crowd was there. A decent number of people were at the LAVA Center for this event, so one could say that element hadn't changed much.

One other thing that wasn't like I had thought it would be was that some of the audience members present actually did some of the readings, taking turns in pairs. I thought they read the speeches just as well as the people who did the initial readings. It seemed like all of the people who were reading understood the importance of Douglass's work about slavery.

This event was not what I would call a normal reading of something like this, but more of an interactive reading of Douglass's speeches. It was different than what I thought I would experience when I went there.

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