

The Montague Reporter

Year 24 – No. 27

JUNE 11, 2026

\$2

editor@montaguereporter.org

THE VOICE OF THE VILLAGES

montaguereporter.org

Hair Torn, Teeth Gnashed, But Gill Approves Budget Without a Tax Override

By KATE SAVAGE

On Monday, 62 Gill residents convened for two hours to pass the town's omnibus budget and avert a potential Proposition 2½ override – for this fiscal year, at least.

"It was a very difficult budget season," said Claire Chang, chair of the finance committee. "We spent a lot of time tearing our hair out and gnashing our teeth."

Chang explained that the town is facing steep increases in the cost of health insurance, school assessments, and fuel. Were the town to

use property taxes to cover these extra expenses, she said, it would surpass legally-allowed limits and require a special election to approve the tax hike.

"Given the climate, both economic and political, we felt that it was very difficult for us to ask you to vote positively for a [Proposition] 2½ override," she said.

Instead, Gill officials were recommending pulling \$222,000 from the town's general stabilization fund and around \$12,000 from its energy stabilization fund. These are

see GILL page A4

Tech Superintendent Leaves Early After Emotional, and Prayerful, Commencement

By JEFF SINGLETON and MIKE JACKSON

TURNERS FALLS – It was a lovely evening at the Franklin County Technical School (FCTS) on May 28 as the senior class and their families and friends assembled on the grounds for commencement. 129 students graduated, and an impressive number received special awards.

A major theme of the ceremony was the absence of a member of the graduating class, Christian Walker of Orange, who was shot and killed last June in Keene, New Hampshire by another teenager. Principal Brian Spadafino opened the event with a moment of silence, and several speakers mentioned Walker and his family, some of whom were present. His sisters received an honorary diploma on his behalf.

Salutatorian Adam Felle said Walker was his friend, and went on to say that "no matter the loss as



FCTS superintendent Richard Martin has come under criticism after leading a prayer for the family of a murdered student during the graduation ceremony.

a community, we continue to move forward, and honor the past with each step."

FCTS superintendent Richard Martin, who was scheduled to retire at the end of June, took the po-

dium. After thanking students and staff for their contributions to the school, Martin acknowledged that the Class of 2026 had "experienced a tremendous tragedy."

see TECH page A9

Wave of Cuts, Override Votes Follow Hikes by Local Insurer



DUSTY CHRISTENSEN PHOTO

As rising health insurance costs bear down on local governments, teachers are losing jobs, towns are cutting services – and the cash-strapped Hampshire Group Insurance Trust is trying to stay afloat. Above: Tax campaigners in Easthampton.

By SARAH ROBERTSON

WESTERN MA – The scene that played out Tuesday in Easthampton is one too familiar to cities and towns across the region: sharply divided voters heading to the polls to decide whether to raise their taxes to fund critical local services or to lay off teachers, first responders, and others to balance the books.

By a narrow margin of just 239 votes, 52% of Easthampton voters decided to raise their taxes, avoiding cuts to city services. Other communities across the region and state, however, have voted down tax overrides and are facing what the Massachusetts Municipal Association has called the

largest round of layoffs since the Great Recession.

A major reason voters have had to make that choice comes down to the ever-increasing cost of healthcare.

Central to this struggle are the financial challenges facing the Hampshire County Group Insurance Trust. The trust provides health insurance to more than 12,000 municipal employees of 73 cities, towns, school districts, and other public entities in Franklin, Hampshire, Berkshire, Hampden, and Worcester counties. It's a vestige of the Hampshire Regional Council of Governments, which officially dissolved in 2019 due to financial and governance issues.

see HIKES page A6

THE BIG PICTURE

The Affordability Committee Speaks Out

By MIKE JACKSON

MONTAGUE – Two rival committees have now filed the paperwork required to legally electioneer around the June 24 debt exclusion vote for a new downtown library: on May 7, Vote Yes for a Montague Library, with public library trustees chair Will Quale as chair and a Samuel Lovejoy as its treasurer, "to support a positive vote for the construction of a new Montague library; and on May 28, the Montague Affordability Committee, with chair Kenneth Morin and treasurer Gary Savinski, "to oppose the debt exclusion vote for the construction of a new library."

The Yes campaign extends an see COMMITTEE page A8



JACKSON PHOTO

Left to right: Chris Couture, Kenneth Morin, Pam Hanold, and John Hanold all say they feel the proposed new downtown library is simply too big for Montague.

Estudiantes del Distrito Gill-Montague Celebran El Seal of Biliteracy

By VICTORIA MAÍLLO DE AGUILERA

TURNERS FALLS – Este año, siete estudiantes del distrito escolar regional Gill-Montague obtuvieron el Seal of Biliteracy, un reconocimiento otorgado por el estado de Massachusetts a estudiantes que demuestran altos niveles de competencia académica tanto en inglés como en otro idioma.

Los estudiantes que obtuvieron el Seal este año fueron Michael Berdugo, John Ramírez Martín y Kevin Pérez Cueto. Además, cuatro estudiantes obtuvieron la máxima distinción, el Seal of Biliteracy With Distinction: Shayly Martín Ovalle, Yolvin Ovalle Mejía, Mario Pareja, y Elsee Gálvez Martín.

Dos estudiantes adicionales – Khalifa Seck, en español, y Tobias Wilson Hill en francés – también participaron en el proceso de evaluación este año, demostrando su compromiso con el aprendizaje lingüístico y el desafío de alcanzar niveles avanzados de competencia.

Otros dos estudiantes que participaron en programas see CELEBRAN page A5

Gill-Montague District Students Celebrate The Seal of Biliteracy

By VICTORIA MAÍLLO DE AGUILERA

TURNERS FALLS – This year, seven students from the Gill-Montague Regional School District earned the Seal of Biliteracy, a recognition awarded by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts to students who demonstrate high levels of academic proficiency in both English and another language.

The students who earned the Seal this year were Michael Berdugo, John Ramírez Martín, and Kevin Pérez Cueto. In addition, four students earned the highest distinction, the Seal of Biliteracy With Distinction: Shayly Martín Ovalle, Yolvin Ovalle Mejía, Mario Pareja, and Elsee Gálvez Martín.

Two additional students – Khalifa Seck in Spanish, and Tobias Wilson Hill in French – also participated in the assessment process this year, demonstrating their commitment to language learning and to the challenge of achieving advanced proficiency.

Two others who participated in dual-enrollment see CELEBRATE page A5

Crunching Data, Advocates Argue Only Regionalization Can Break 'Structural Trap' of School Shrink

By MIKE JACKSON

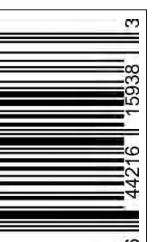
FRANKLIN COUNTY – The Six-Town Regionalization Planning Board met again this week, still toiling in near-oblivion to refine a proposal that the publics of Montague, Gill, Leyden, Bernardston, Northfield, and Warwick will weigh this summer and fall. If a regional agreement is approved by a majority of votes in all towns, a new school district will be formed,

preserving the existing elementary schools but consolidating the middle and high schools now split between the Gill-Montague and Pioneer Valley districts.

On the recommendation of its attorney, the board approved minor changes to the text of the agreements – one for six towns, and one for five which excludes Warwick – and will send the texts back to the state Department of Elementary see TRAP page A7

Gotta Keep Moving

Trying to Stay Afloat.....A1	Peering Over Their Eyeglasses.....B1
This Piece of Apparatus.....A2	Waiting to Be Asked.....B2
Better Than a Rabbit.....A3	Still Wet and Splashing.....B3
Almost Like a Win-Win.....A4	The Dryness That Shrivels.....B4
Want to Move the Needle.....A6	Like Cheese, Maybe.....B5
Approaching the Threshold Zone.....A7	Slide Show, Blood Bucket, Pride Parade.....B6
Bared Their Teeth to Him.....A9	Ice Giant, Tone Forest, Mind Left Body.....B7
Wailed and Flashed Their Lights.....A10	Forcing a Dead Stop.....B8



The Montague Reporter

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Letters the to Editors



Editorial assistant Jamie Simpson greets the end of a 6-to-10 a.m. shift at the office of this newspaper with a smile. In his monthly column, DIY Bodywork for All, he shares some of the wisdom learned through his practice, Birch Tree Bodywork. Jamie loves working one-on-one with people, but says his "real passion" is "sharing self-massage therapy balls... It's a way to empower people to experience the benefits of massage, self-care, and body awareness, and it's accessible and affordable to anyone."

Guy Alleged to Yoink Distress Flag

There was a troubling incident last week during the regular stand-out held in Gill at the intersection of Route 2, Main Road, and the Turners Falls bridge. A large man appeared in front of the protesters yelling "F--king b-tch, you can't disrespect the flag." He yanked the flag out of the ground and rushed back to his car with it. Even though the owner of the flag repeatedly demanded he return her property, he threw it into his car and sped away.

He apparently did not like the fact that the flag was displayed upside down. And we do know how this can stir up some deep emotion. But he stole the flag and endangered its owner.

Stealing is a crime. Displaying a flag upside down is *not* a crime. In fact, it is a recognized symbol of distress and protest, and protected by the First Amendment of the US Constitution. Last Friday was the

77th gathering at the bridge, which includes several veterans as regular attendees, and is a lawful expression of citizens in a nation experiencing dire distress.

Inverting a nation's flag is a practice dating back to the 17th century. It was first used by the British navy during the Anglo-Dutch wars during the 17th century. In the 18th century it was also used on American lifeboats.

In 1854, abolitionists inverted the flag at a July 4 anti-slavery rally here in Massachusetts. Sojourner Truth was among them.

Inverting the flag as a symbol of "dire distress" was codified into the US Flag Code, which dates back to 1923. It has been used as a protest symbol since at least the 1960s, and the act of doing so is protected by the Constitution.

Even right-wing extremists invert the flag. Political demonstrators

protesting the re-election of President Obama, Supreme Court Justice Alito, and the January 6 Capitol rioters all inverted the flag.

Although last week's flag incident was traumatic for both the flag owner and witnesses, fortunately no one was physically hurt. The incident has been reported to the Gill Police Department, and the flag owner has been assured that her stolen property will be returned.

Still, there is the question of a crime having been committed, and a citizen's First Amendment rights being violated. And in the fraught climate we are now living in, how do we acknowledge that others may care for the well-being of this country equally, even if their political views differ? It is time that we try harder at affording others this respect.

Edite Cunha
Turners Falls

Important Meeting!

The Prudential Committee of the Montague Center Fire Department will hold a meeting on Thursday, June 18 at 6 p.m. at the fire station, 28 Old Sunderland Road. The purpose is to present information on the purchase of a new 3,000-gallon tanker, which will be voted on at the annual meeting on June 25.

Residents of the fire district are urged to attend this session and learn firsthand details on this much-needed purchase. The district relies heavily on this piece of apparatus as there are no hydrants outside the village. The current tanker is over 30 years old, well beyond the 25-

year maximum lifespan of National Fire Protection Agency standards. This unit is also becoming increasingly expensive for repairs, having broken down and failed multiple times on emergency scenes.

With cost increases ever-certain due to new emission standards for 2027, now is the time to invest in this crucial apparatus.

Please join us on June 18 at 6 p.m. at Montague Center Fire to find out more about replacing Engine 2.

Mark Fisk
Montague Center

Wonderful Dinosaur

Public libraries are a source of pride in small towns. The Carnegie is a wonderful old dinosaur, and like many of us, its joints are creaking and achy.

I am a senior library patron on a fixed income, and a tax raise will help me to better access services provided by a modern library. The Carnegie will take on a new identity, more in line with its dignity and advanced age.

It is embarrassing that our public library cannot adequately accommodate the needs of all residents. Buildings are living, breathing entities. The Carnegie Library is 120 years old. We can't expect it to accommodate the changing educational needs of children and upcoming generations. The building is certainly not in line with the needs of those with physical challenges.

I have heard the proposed building site referred to as a park. It is a vacant lot, and as such, it will undoubtedly be developed in some

other way, should we back out of this. This "other way" will likely not be designed with the aesthetics of downtown in mind. It will be a commercial endeavor. Leave the rest to your imagination, and let's hope that's as far as it goes.

The new Franklin Tech will be expensive. We will fund this as part of our social contract with the youth of the county. What about the social contract with citizens of Montague? Public libraries are as American as apple pie, and are conceptually for everyone, regardless of age or ability. A new library will be a showcase for civic pride.

This is a once-in-a-generation opportunity, and may be the last chance for the grant, which is tax money returned to the community. We will leave a legacy for the future. And a thoughtfully designed brick building will certainly class up that vacant lot.

Nina Arnold
Turners Falls

A Smaller New Library Is Better

The Town of Montague (pop. 8,580) needs to provide a new branch library for Turners Falls (pop. est 5,800). Our Town committed to the village based three-branch concept decades ago, and it is working. As tiny as they are, the Montague Center and Millers Falls branches are accessible, creative, and thriving.

Turners Falls deserves the same.

But why is the proposed new library so oversized? The design team said at the kickoff meeting at the senior center that the new Library's collections need 2,500 square feet. There is no demand for a rooftop deck, a community center, or a *dedicated* local history room.

The Shea, Town Hall, and Discovery Center have large, underutilized meeting spaces close by. The 21,000-square-foot building is triple the size of the 7,058-square-foot Carnegie, the only Library in town when constructed.

A building this big threatens the continued existence of the other Branch Libraries and other town services. The increase in annual operating costs for the new library (another librarian, higher utility bills, evening

event staffing, and more custodians) will force hard and unforgiving budget choices throughout town government. Will we have to cut the nurse, RiverCulture, community policing, pothole patching, or a school budget to keep the three-branch system afloat?

This is unnecessary. We can build a new smaller main branch library that won't break the budget and stifle other critical needs for schools, housing, clean water, smooth roads, public safety, and our branch libraries. Why not find a site that can also include a future senior center, sharing meeting spaces? We followed that model with the public safety complex.

Our town management team can keep the state grant folks informed and engaged in our plans. The state doesn't easily walk away from its commitments. It didn't in Amherst. They are good partners.

Vote "No" on June 24, and then let us work *quickly* to revise the plans and provide a new smaller state-of-the-art library for Turners Falls.

Deborah Radway
Montague Center

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TURNERS FALLS AND VICINITY.

Compiled by MIKE JACKSON

“My dad took this photo,” regular contributor Joe R. Parzych writes. “He forwarded the photo to me so I could forward it to you, because his phone is running out of space... **Two rabbits in Gill have fun** while enjoying the day.”

Thanks to both Joe R. and Joe M.! I’ll never turn down a rabbit pic.



The “fish ladder” – i.e., the public viewing station at the **Turners Falls Fishway** – has been extended for another week after all. It used to be reliably open “Mothers’ Day to Fathers’ Day,” but was scheduled to close June 7 this year. For whatever opaque reason, it will now be open until this Sunday, June 14. There are a lot of fish.

“When we fight, we win!” I like to say that whenever something good happens for no clear reason. This joke was trumped by local hydro-power gadfly Karl Meyer, who also noticed the extended schedule and wrote to the *MR*, “This is clearly the *new* FirstLight/Hull LLC.” I am pretty sure he’s kidding.

In any case, get thee to a fishway. Seeing a lamprey in those windows gets you seven days of good luck. It’s even better than a rabbit.

You can pop over to the ‘Shway this Saturday, June 13, on a brief break from the **Unity Skatepark 10-year anniversary show** just across the street. I think I’ve already said so in this space but

I encourage everyone to go. There’s a memorial dedication at 2 p.m. – a skateboard for Jason Page – and bands start at 2:30 p.m. It’s a great lineup.

At times like this, when the town is torn over a tough (or triggering) decision and any public discussion seems to devolve into head-butting, it’s worth thinking about what sort of campaigns are most geared toward building relationships.

The first day I ever set foot in this vicinity, the very first person I saw was a teenage crust punk on the Carnegie Library lawn with a sign that said “Save our Skatepark.” I walked out onto the bridge and saw that massive, overwhelming churn of water I would later learn meant the Tainter gates were open. I stopped into a bar that had Young Marble Giants on the jukebox. I went back outside as dusk was falling – and the Rag Shag Parade was coming up Avenue A. I even saw some guy pop out of his Fourth Street office and take a photo of the parade. *They have a town newspaper?*

I wasn’t expecting to return, but I was looking for a job, and as luck would have it the first one I landed was in Turners, so 31 days later I was living here, and maybe two or three months after that the Americorps worker at the Brick House recruited me onto the “skatepark committee.” And no, I didn’t skate. They just needed fresh blood.

The campaign had already been going for over a decade – the kids and whoever else would try to help would throw a couple benefit shows and repair the awful ramshackle wooden ramps over by the park just enough to skate again. Those ramps fell apart fast, though, so every couple years everyone had to Save our Skatepark.

There was a very deeply felt sense here that Turners was not the kind of town that would ever in a million years have a nice concrete public skatepark. Years of very genuine, hard, youth-led work gradually brought the town’s adults around on the idea. Even so, I put in about four years of work before concluding it would never happen.

But then the next wave got it done.

It was a **kitchen-sink strategy**: town hall had to bring in the big grants, and everyone had to fundraise their absolute brains off, and in-kind material donations were what put it over the top. People who never would have given each other the time of day came together. Nothing wins like winning, and there was something infectious about thinking maybe this place did deserve some nice things.

Now it’s just part of the landscape. What would it take to do something like that again?

Ed Hines writes: “On Saturday, June 20 from 8:30 a.m. until 12 noon, members of the Wendell Historical Society are going to **help two Wendell neighbors** with cutting, splitting, and stacking firewood. We want show our gratitude for all your support by giving time to friends who could use a little help. We need a few more volunteers who don’t mind donating time on a Saturday morning, who value community service and who want to help lighten the load. Please contact me by email (hines@wendellhistoricalsociety.org) if you are available, even for an hour. As always, many thanks from the Wendell Historical Society.”

Okay, you heard the man...

A Thursday morning press release from the Mass. Nurses Association: “Registered **nurses at Baystate Franklin Medical Center (BFMC)**, represented by the Massachusetts Nurses Association (MNA), voted 98% on Wednesday, June 10 to reject Baystate Health’s so-called “best and final” contract offer. The vote, which ended at 8 p.m. on Wednesday, sends a clear message that nurses believe Baystate’s proposal fails to adequately address key concerns around staffing, recruitment and retention, health insurance protections, and competitive compensation needed to support safe patient care.”

... So you wanna know something funny? Well, it’s actually not funny. **Baystate is closing its urology services** in Greenfield and Northampton. They sent a letter to patients a couple weeks ago explaining that one doctor was retiring, and so, “[c]onsidering this,” the two locations were closing down and two other medical professionals “will also be leaving the organization.”

That’s not funny, that sucks. What’s funny is that I emailed our press contact at Baystate on May 27 asking about it – the person who told me “I handle media inquiries for all our entities now” as recently as April 13 – and received no response. Two days later I emailed Baystate Health’s main Public Affairs address hoping to hear from someone. No response. I emailed them again this Tuesday: “Is anyone receiving these emails?”

Guess not. This is, like, one of the main companies in our state, **unable to respond to a real press inquiry** from a newspaper. Maybe I’m wrong, but that seems like a very, very bad sign.

Send your little bits of news to editor@montaguereporter.org.

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OP ED

Double Standard for Schools, Police in Greenfield

By MOLLY MERRETT and JON MAGEE

GREENFIELD – We write this open letter on behalf of 27 current and future parents of Greenfield Public Schools (GPS) students, as well as residents without children who nevertheless care about the kids in our city. We are concerned about Greenfield’s FY’27 budget and funding priorities – notably, the underfunding of GPS, the elimination of the middle school recreation room position, and the lack of transparency in the Greenfield Police Department budget.

Greenfield is a wonderful place to live. Many of us are raising our families here or wish to do so one day. Children should be prioritized when spending taxpayer money.

We have watched with dismay as the school budget has seen cuts year after year. We see families choice out of Greenfield schools because basic services are always under threat. This year, school choice and charter school assessment is costing our city more than \$5 million.

We appreciate that Superintendent Joyal and the school committee have a plan to maintain level services in the schools this year, mitigating the mayor’s cuts with money from unfilled positions and revolving funds.

These funding sources are not sustainable,

however, given the need to strengthen and bolster GPS. If we don’t shift our priorities to invest in our public schools, families will continue to choice out to charter schools and other districts, escalating the cycle of declining enrollment, reduced state contributions, and heavy tax burdens for residents.

Chronic underinvestment harms our ability to provide quality education. Attractive schools, by contrast, will draw more families to Greenfield, boosting city revenue and school enrollment. This year the mayor proposes a 3.1% overall budget increase, but schools don’t receive a proportionate share: the mayor proposes only a 1.9% increase for schools. The police department, on the other hand, is receiving a 4.5% increase.

Why is the mayor overfunding our police and underfunding our schools, especially when – as we discuss below – the police budget features a range of poorly-justified expenses and obvious mathematical errors?

Last year Mayor Desorgher cut school funding by nearly \$2 million. The minority of city councilors who supported those cuts told the public that the schools were wasting money, and demanded that “every last cent be accounted for and justified.”

This budget season, many of us watched the Ways & Means meeting on May 11 where Police Chief Dodge presented a police bud-

get riddled with errors. The chief could not explain, let alone justify, what several large budget line items were for.

When asked why we had to spend thousands on police department accreditation, his answer was “bragging rights.” Questions about a \$10K “meetings & seminars” expense were hand-waved as “coffee and donuts” and “a Christmas party.” A \$24K “policing accessories” line item was for “whatever people need, maybe a new breathalyzer,” as well as various IT expenses that should clearly have their own budget line.

GPD expenditures in FY’26 included a tuxedo rental and an Aura fitness ring, among other superfluous items. Why do we demand transparency and accuracy from the schools – to the point where certain elected officials drove an excellent superintendent from her job – but accept a sloppy, haphazard, and opaque budget from Chief Dodge, the second-highest-paid city employee?

Unfortunately, very reasonable and basic requests for clarity and detail in the police budget have been weaponized by Dodge and others. They are whipping up fear by spreading rumors that police and dispatch positions will be cut simply because residents are asking for a coherent budget.

No one has proposed such cuts. We see this same fear-mongering – even outright threats,

in the case of a certain former chief – every time the police don’t get exactly what they want or are held to the same standards as other departments. Instead of taking responsibility for shortcomings and making do with a reasonable budget, we see scare tactics and crocodile tears about how 911 calls will go unanswered and chaos will descend on our city.

As residents who care deeply about Greenfield, its future, and its children, we ask that the schools and programs for kids be prioritized in this year’s budget and in future budgets to come. We ask for transparency and accuracy in the GPD budget, and an end to the double standard which forces austerity on our children while the police enjoy special perks and unrestricted slush funds.

This op/ed was written by Molly Merrett, Jon Magee, and 25 other Greenfield residents. It was submitted to the Greenfield Recorder on May 22, but it was never printed. On June 2 executive editor Dan Crowley told the authors he was “fact-checking” the piece, but he did not respond to repeated inquiries about it. The authors appreciate and encourage fact-checking of opinion submissions, but on this occasion suspect motives other than a commitment to accuracy are at play, and submitted it to the Montague Reporter this week to ensure its publication.

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OP ED

Vote Yes – For Affordability

By WILL QUALE

MONTAGUE – Two weeks ago in these pages, John Hanold criticized the library building project for its process of first understanding Montague's needs and then designing a building to meet them, "rather than looking at what Montague can afford."

His letter called to mind the discussion of the proposed highway garage that was the principal topic of a Special Town Meeting in March 2018. At that meeting, Peter Gorruck advanced an amendment that would have reduced the budget for the building from \$11 million to \$5 million in order to give the town "a number... that they can afford."

That amendment – "not associated with any plan," Steve Ellis noted – was discussed for about 45 minutes before being voted down. During that discussion, one town meeting member eloquently opined: "The idea of designing a facility to a particularly arbitrary cost target is, I think, the wrong way to do it. I think we start out with what the town needs, then take a look at what it would take to provide that...."

"Like many others here, I am not

a construction expert, but I have a fair amount of confidence that the effort [the building committee has] gone to for these two and a half years has been pretty substantial."

He continued:

"If we do not start this now, we will have the same issue... in the future, and it will certainly cost more... I think arbitrarily cutting it to a particular amount of money would probably result in the loss of all of the time we've expended so far, with a very unlikely result – to try to provide a facility at half the cost, after the effort that both engineers and our own residents have put into this, it seems highly unrealistic."

I fully agree with the assessment of that member, who – as you have perhaps already guessed – was John Hanold.

Addressing this topic in correspondence, Massachusetts Board of Library Commissioners library building specialist Heather Backman wrote:

"When we see library building projects outside of [the grant program that would fund nearly half the cost of Montague's library], we generally see communities spending about as much money as they would

have if they participated in our program, and getting noticeably less for their investment. We've even seen some libraries taking on additional construction projects within 10 or 15 years, because that first project didn't create an adequate facility."

To the question of whether Montague would have gotten a grant had we proposed a smaller library designed with affordability top of mind, Backman replied:

"Montague would have been unlikely to be awarded a grant if you had proposed something that did not seem as though it would enable the library to provide adequate services now, let alone providing space and flexibility to accommodate needs for the next 30 years."

That called to mind another speech from that same 2018 Special Town Meeting for the highway garage, made shortly before town meeting approved the building as designed for \$11 million:

"This committee was assigned with a job to try to make something that would fit the town. We did it by the needs. We just felt that the day this town moved into [a smaller building than the one proposed], it would already be undersized.

"You build something for [less money] that's not really what you need? We would not look good. We did not want to sell this town short. This is what we feel the town needs, to not have something come up down the line and we need more."

I want to commend Ken Morin, chair of the highway garage building committee, for those words, which so clearly and persuasively make the case that "more affordable" is not the same thing as "cheaper," and that the responsible thing to do when designing a public building is to think about meeting the town's needs for the long term, in order to make the most of our tax dollars and make a sound investment.

A hypothetical smaller library wouldn't meet our needs, and it almost certainly wouldn't even be cheaper.

Vote "Yes" for accessibility, for affordability, for a new library. Voting "No" would be an unaffordable mistake.

Will Quale is the chair of the Montague Public Libraries Trustees, and chair of the Vote Yes for a Montague Library ballot question committee.

GILL from page A1

"rainy day" funds, designed to address emergencies. The notes accompanying the meeting warrant stated: "This use of stabilization is unprecedented, at least within the past several decades."

"This was not done lightly," said Chang. "This is not a situation we can do *ad infinitum*. I'm not even sure we can do it next year."

Resident Judd Greenstein said he agreed with the use of stabilization funds, but worried about the future with costs on the rise. "Are there conversations happening across departments now to try to get ahead of that for next year?" he asked.

Chang said discussion on big-issue topics would begin this summer, but pointed to several unknown factors. If construction of a new Franklin County Technical School building is approved, Gill could be responsible for over \$100,000 more a year. "Where we're going to come up with that money is completely unknown at this point," she said.

She also pointed to the new roof needed on the Riverside municipal building, and rising health insurance premiums and fuel prices. "Who knows what the economy is going to do in the next year?" she asked. "We'll just have to ride the storm."

Finance committee member Sandy Brown said that as difficult as this year's budgeting was, "I think next year is going to be harder."

"Sooner or later, we're going to have to do some regionalization," she added.

Resident Greg Snedeker, sitting at the back of the town hall meeting room for the first time since leaving the selectboard, praised the proposed budget. "If you're following the headlines in other towns, you're seeing the overrides that are being suggested, and taxes potentially going up by 10 to 20% in other towns. This is really a well-put-together budget."

After 45 minutes of discussion, the omnibus budget passed unanimously.

Free Cash Kerfuffle

Adding to the town's difficulties, its "free cash" has not yet been certified by the Department of Revenue and therefore cannot be used. Free cash is unexpected extra revenue from back taxes or higher-than-average payments on property tax, cannabis sales tax, and vehicle excise tax.

Town administrator Ray Purington said free cash is almost always certified much earlier in the year. He explained that the town's new accountant, Cathryn Thomas, faces a steep learning curve. Additionally, she has to "reconcile her

figures with a tax collector who is literally no longer with us," Purington said, referring to Tom Hodak's death last year.

"Aimee Williams, our new tax collector, is doing a fantastic job helping fill in the gaps as best she can, and I'm confident that we will get there with the free cash," he added.

Purington said he expected the free cash will be certified within the next few weeks. It can then be allocated in the third and final part of the annual town meeting, scheduled for June 29. If the money is not allocated by the end of June, it will not be available for use until the following fiscal year.

Last year, Gill experienced a windfall of free cash: while the normal amount has been between \$150,000 to \$300,000, the amount certified was over \$600,000. Purington cautioned that the town cannot count on receiving that much money again, but that whatever the figure is, it can begin to restore the depleted stabilization funds.

School Budget

There was a much shorter discussion of the town's assessment for the Gill-Montague Regional School District, which is up 7.8% this year to \$2.1 million.

Snedeker, who is also vice chair of the Six Town Regionalization Planning Board, expressed concern over dropping enrollments in Franklin County. "Over the last 20 years, we've lost 4,000 students," he said. "We were just above 11,000 students in this county – it's down to just above 7,000 at this point. These are structural declines."

Snedeker said the combination of dropping birthrates with a drastic reduction in immigration means that the US population could begin to shrink as early as this year. "I can't stress enough the significance of... that kind of decline in the population," he said.

The motion to pay the school assessment passed by majority vote, with selectboard member Charles Garbiel casting the only vote against.

Highway Department Funding

One concern raised during the meeting was the difficulty of understanding the finances of the highway department. Sandy Brown said the finance committee had been unable to see a full breakdown of the department's funding, to see how Chapter 90 funds and grants had been spent.

Fellow member Tupper Brown said the committee might put together a formal proposal as to how they can learn about the department's financing for future budgets.

These concerns continued during discussion of a vote to use \$71,000 in capital stabilization funds to buy the department a new woodchipper. The current chipper is from 1985, clogs often, and lacks important safety features, said highway supervisor John Miner.

Voters expressed concern that the new chipper would be too big and expensive for town use. They recommended renting a machine, contracting with a professional tree service for the work, or hauling unchipped wood to the dump.

"This isn't about getting something new and shiny," said Miner. "It's about replacing equipment that has reached the end of its useful life, so the town has what it needs to do routine work efficiently and on our schedule." He said he had tried to bring the purchase to town meeting for several years, but was told it was not the right time.

Garbiel said it was impractical to try to rent a chipper or contract professionals for emergency road clearing. "I've been on here long enough to know John," he said. "He doesn't ask for toys – he asks for what we need to get the job done. You've got three guys that really bust their butts to keep this town clean. Do you want to give them the equipment to do it, or do you want them to not do it, and then complain about the branches? It's up to you."

The motion passed by majority vote, with about 10 votes against.

Other Business

Voters approved a cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) of 3% for town employees. While this is slightly higher than the 2.8% increase granted to Social Security recipients, the warrant notes explained that this decision was made to help keep pace with inflation and to "offset an almost 60% increase in the cost of employees' health insurance" over the past two years.

Police chief Christopher Redmond was given a smaller COLA of 2%, due to a recent significant salary increase. Two residents expressed concern, but Redmond spoke up: "I'm fine with it, thank you."

The town voted to transfer \$20,000 from general stabilization to an account the town treasurer can use to go after unpaid taxes. It would be used for legal fees and other expenses in attempting to recover a total of \$217,491 in unpaid taxes from 15 properties.

Town treasurer Peter Turban said any money paid to attorneys would be added to the relevant tax bill. "I consider it almost like a win-win proposition," he said.

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MIKE JACKSON PHOTO

Turners Falls High School graduated 47 seniors last Friday evening in the school gymnasium. The band played 'Pomp and Circumstance' and 'Iron Man,' and principal Loren Messina told the grads the most important skills are confidence and authenticity. "The world does not need another copy of someone else," she said. "It needs you exactly as you are."

In accordance with tradition, each graduate was given a long-stemmed rose, courtesy of the Gill-Montague Education Fund, to hand to someone whose support was important to them. Tearful chaos broke out in roughly 47 different directions. (See at left.)

CELEBRAN from page A1

de dual enrollment en Greenfield Community College, Christopher Halla y Michaela Klempner-Siano, obtuvieron el *Global Seal of Biliteracy*, ampliando el reconocimiento oficial de sus habilidades lingüísticas.

Pero, ¿qué significa realmente obtener este reconocimiento?

Durante la ceremonia de *Senior Awards* el jueves 4 de junio, Madame Megan Bendiksen, la directora del departamento de World Languages, explicó el significado y la exigencia académica detrás del logro.

Bendiksen dijo que obtener esta distinción requiere demostrar un nivel Intermedio Alto de competencia en las cuatro destrezas lingüísticas: comprensión auditiva, expresión oral, lectura y escritura. Esto significa que los estudiantes deben ser capaces de comunicarse utilizando un lenguaje organizado a nivel de párrafo y desenvolverse en los marcos temporales de pasado, presente y futuro.

Antes de reconocer a quienes obtuvieron el *Seal* este año, Ms. Bendiksen también quiso destacar a dos estudiantes que participaron en el proceso de evaluación, pero todavía no habían alcanzado el nivel requerido. "Todavía no," enfatizó, porque el aprendizaje de idiomas no termina con un examen. Siempre existe espacio para seguir creciendo, desarrollar habilidades y alcanzar nuevos niveles de competencia.

Esta idea quedó reflejada en la experiencia de Khalifa Seck, quien decidió presentarse al examen simplemente porque quería evaluar honestamente su propio nivel de español.

Seck comenzó a estudiar español seriamente en décimo grado y describió el examen con tres palabras: "desafiante, revelador y difícil." La parte oral fue especialmente complicada.

"No había mucho tiempo para pensar las respuestas." "Me sorprendió la estructura del examen porque esperaba algo más parecido a los exámenes tradicionales que hacemos en la escuela."

Sin embargo, lejos de desanimarse, la experiencia reforzó su motivación.

Hoy en día, Seck utiliza español fuera del aula en situaciones reales. Trabaja en un supermercado local y es uno de los pocos cajeros capaces de comunicarse con clientes que únicamente hablan español. Para él, poder ayudar a esas personas le produce una enorme satisfacción.

Su consejo para futuros estudiantes es simple: realizar el examen no solamente para obtener el reconocimiento, sino también para entender mejor sus propias habilidades.

Para otros estudiantes, el bilingüismo comenzó mucho antes de entrar en un aula.

Shayly Martín Ovalle explica que decidió realizar el examen porque quería demostrar algo que había formado parte de su vida desde siempre. "Hice el examen porque era una manera de probar mis habilidades en español."

En su caso, el idioma comenzó en casa. "Aprendí español desde que nací. Mis padres me enseñaron porque ellos no sabían hablar inglés."

Sin embargo, crecer utilizando un idioma no significa necesariamente sentirse preparado para una evaluación formal. "La verdad es que estaba nerviosa. No me sentía preparada

porque no sabía cómo iba a ser el examen."

Su experiencia refleja algo que muchos estudiantes bilingües descubren durante este proceso: hablar un idioma en casa y demostrar competencias académicas formales en ese idioma son experiencias distintas, y ambas requieren práctica, confianza y preparación.

Más allá de los exámenes, los estudiantes coinciden en algo importante: el bilingüismo representa mucho más que una habilidad académica. En comunidades como la nuestra, hablar más de un idioma significa ayudar a las familias, conectar culturas, abrir oportunidades laborales y académicas y construir puentes entre diferentes comunidades.

El *Seal of Biliteracy* reconoce oficialmente algo que muchos estudiantes llevan construyendo toda su vida: la capacidad de navegar diferentes culturas, comunicarse con distintas comunidades y convertir el lenguaje en una herramienta para construir nuevas oportunidades.

La importancia del bilingüismo también quedó reflejada durante la ceremonia de graduación. Yolvin Ovalle Mejía, uno de los estudiantes que obtuvo el *Seal* con distinción y co-presidente de la promoción de 2026, decidió dedicar parte de su discurso de graduación a las familias inmigrantes de la comunidad. Y lo hizo enteramente en español.

Su decisión de dirigirse públicamente a las familias en su lengua de herencia representa algo más que una elección lingüística. Fue también un reconocimiento al esfuerzo, sacrificio y apoyo de muchas familias que han acompañado a estos estudiantes durante su trayectoria educativa.

En una ceremonia tradicionalmente dominada por el inglés, escuchar palabras dirigidas directamente a las familias inmigrantes recordó algo que muchos estudiantes bilingües conocen bien: los idiomas no son solamente herramientas de comunicación. También son identidad, memoria, comunidad y pertenencia.

Momentos como este ayudan a explicar por qué el *Seal of Biliteracy* representa mucho más que un reconocimiento académico: Representa historias y representa familias. Y representa la posibilidad de que los estudiantes vean reconocidas oficialmente habilidades que han formado parte de sus vidas desde mucho antes de entrar en una escuela.

Este reconocimiento celebra logros académicos, pero también el esfuerzo, la identidad y la comunidad. Y quizás eso sea precisamente lo que hace que este reconocimiento sea tan especial.



CELEBRATE from page A1

programs at Greenfield Community College, Christopher Halla and Michaela Klempner-Siano, earned the Global Seal of Biliteracy, further expanding the official recognition of their language abilities.

But what does earning this recognition actually mean?

During the Senior Awards ceremony held on Thursday, June 4, Madame Megan Bendiksen, director of the World Languages department at Turners Falls High School, explained the meaning and academic rigor behind the achievement.

Earning this distinction, she said, requires students to demonstrate an "intermediate high" level of proficiency across all four language skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. This means students must be able to communicate using paragraph-level language and function across past, present, and future time frames.

Before recognizing those who earned the Seal this year, Bendiksen also said she wanted to acknowledge the students who had participated in the assessment process but had not yet reached the required proficiency level. "Not yet," she emphasized, because language learning does not end with an exam – there is always room to continue growing, developing skills, and reaching new levels of proficiency.

That idea was reflected in the experience of Khalifa Seck, who decided to take the exam simply because he wanted to honestly evaluate his own level of Spanish. "I wanted to test my understanding of the language," he explained.

Seck, who began seriously studying Spanish in 10th grade, and described the exam in three words: "challenging, enlightening, and hard. The speaking section proved especially difficult.

"There wasn't much time to think about your answers," he said. "I was surprised by the structure of the test because I expected something more similar to the traditional tests we usually take in school."

However, rather than discouraging him, the experience strengthened his motivation.

Today, Seck uses Spanish outside the classroom in real-world situations. He works at a local grocery store, where he is one of the few cashiers able to communicate with customers who speak only Spanish. "Being able to help those people brings me enormous satisfaction," he said.

His advice for future students is simple: take the exam not only to earn the recognition, but also to better understand your own abilities.

For other students, bilingualism began long before they ever stepped into a classroom.

Shayly Martín Ovalle said she decided to take the exam to demonstrate something that had been part of her life for as long as she could remember. "I took the exam because it was a way to prove my skills in Spanish."

In her case, the language began at home. "I learned Spanish from the time I was born," she said. "My parents taught me because they didn't know how to speak English."

However, growing up using a language does not necessarily mean feeling prepared for a formal assessment. "To be honest, I was nervous," said Ovalle. "I didn't feel prepared, because I didn't know what the exam would be like."

Her experience reflects something many bilingual students discover throughout this process: speaking a language at home and demonstrating formal academic proficiency in that language are different experiences, and both require practice, preparation, and confidence.

Beyond the exams, the students agreed on one important idea: bilingualism represents much more than an academic skill. In communities like ours, speaking more than one language means helping families, connecting cultures, opening academic and professional opportunities, and building bridges between different groups.

The Seal of Biliteracy officially recognizes something many students have spent their entire lives building: the ability to navigate different cultures, communicate with diverse communities, and transform language into a tool for creating new opportunities.

The importance of bilingualism was also reflected during the graduation ceremony last Friday. Yolvin Ovalle Mejía, one of the students who earned the Seal with Distinction and co-president of the Class of 2026, chose to dedicate his graduation speech to the immigrant families in the community. He delivered it entirely in Spanish.

Ovalle Mejía's decision to publicly address families in their heritage language represented more than a linguistic choice. It was also a recognition of the effort, sacrifice, and support that many of the families have provided throughout the students' educational journeys.

In a ceremony traditionally dominated by English, hearing words spoken directly to immigrant families served as a reminder of something many bilingual students already know: languages are not simply tools for communication. They are also identity, memory, community, and a sense of belonging.

Moments like these help explain why the Seal of Biliteracy represents much more than an academic recognition. It represents stories, and it represents families. And it represents the opportunity for students to receive official recognition for skills that have been part of their lives long before entering school.

This recognition celebrates academic achievement, but it also celebrates effort, identity, and community. And perhaps that is exactly what makes it so special.



MAILLO PHOTO

Shayly Martín Ovalle y Yolvin Ovalle Mejía dan la bienvenida a los asistentes durante la ceremonia de graduación como co-presidentes de la promoción de 2026.

Shayly Martín Ovalle and Yolvin Ovalle Mejía welcome the audience during the graduation ceremony as co-presidents of the Class of 2026.

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HIKES from page A1

HCGIT minutes show that at the end of 2024, the trust finished the year with a total of \$22.8 million. However, this March, the trust had around \$5 million cash left in the bank. Trying to catch up with rising costs, the HCGIT increased member rates twice in the past fiscal year, initially by about 20% last July and again in October by another 20%. In February the trust voted 55 to 27 to increase premiums again for the upcoming fiscal year, this time by 12.5%.

As health insurance premiums soar, municipalities and their workers have struggled to keep up with all kinds of rising costs, resulting in a flurry of tax override votes across the Connecticut River Valley. Easthampton, South Hadley, Hadley, New Salem, and other towns across the region have been pushed to vote on tax overrides – allowing them to increase their property tax levy beyond the state’s usual 2.5% cap – to maintain level funding for basic services.

Amid the turmoil, some say it is time for a systematic reckoning.

“Our healthcare system is broken and careening towards a moment where we are going to have to make some changes if we want to actually provide healthcare to everyone,” state representative Lindsay Sabadosa, D-Northampton, said in an interview with *The Shoestring*.

The reason for the unsustainable spending, according to the trust’s executive committee, is a popular – and, due to the fact that they’re under patent, expensive – class of drugs known as GLP-1s that were originally developed to treat Type 2 diabetes but that doctors are now prescribing for a wider range of issues, particularly for weight loss.

“GLP-1s for weight loss have been a significant contributor to the financial challenges faced by the Trust over the past two fiscal years,” the HCGIT executive committee said in a written statement. “This situation has presented serious challenges, especially given that the Trust has operated with financial stability for decades.”

However, Sabadosa said GLP-1 drugs are just one piece of the puzzle. She said it was inadequate financial planning by the HCGIT trustees – exacerbated by the rising cost of healthcare, economic inflation, and an aging population in western Massachusetts – that led to the dramatic increase in expenses.

“We are seeing the repercussions of year after year, after year, not increasing rates where they needed to be,” Sabadosa said. “You had people with loyalty to their towns deciding not to increase premiums, making decisions based on what was best for their communities, but not what was best for the long-term sustainability of the trust.”

Flights and Fights

As some HCGIT members are tightening their belts to deal with rising costs, others are leaving for new insurers. At least 12 municipal entities have opted to withdraw from the HCGIT and find new insurers for the coming fiscal year, *The Shoestring* has learned, and others have been considering leaving.

State representative Aaron Saunders, D-Belchertown, introduced an amendment that the state legislature passed last year to allow members to withdraw from the HCGIT and pay back their bills over a period of five years.

“The Trust does not view GLP-1 medications as the sole driver of recent cost increases,” the HCGIT executive committee wrote in response to follow-up questions this week. “While the rising utilization and cost of GLP-1 drugs have contributed significantly to claims expenses, other factors have also played a role, including overall increases in healthcare costs, higher utilization of medical services, and elevated claims activity across multiple areas of coverage.”

Among those leaving the HCGIT are the Pioneer Valley Regional School District, the Franklin Regional Council of Governments (FRCOG), and the towns of Bernardston, Leyden, Chesterfield, and Southampton, which have all opted to join the state-run

Group Insurance Commission (GIC) instead.

FRCOG executive director Linda Dunlavy told *The Shoestring* that recent premium hikes and uncertainty surrounding the HCGIT’s financial solvency prompted the decision to leave the trust.

“We made the decision after weeks of discussion and analysis and decided it was the best move for the FRCOG, our staff, and for the towns we serve,” Dunlavy wrote in an email. “The transition was difficult but successful. We arranged listening sessions with each GIC provider for our staff and retirees and for employees and retirees from other Franklin County Units also leaving the HCGIT.”

The GIC is a “a quasi-independent state agency,” established by the legislature in 1955 and managed by a 17-member commission appointed by the governor. Today it provides health insurance to more than 460,000 state and municipal employees.

Two other HCGIT members, Franklin County Technical School and the town of Southwick, are leaving to buy insurance through the private Pennsylvania-based Fern-Rock Insurance Agency, according to the trust’s meeting minutes.

The Massachusetts Strategic Health Group, Cigna Healthcare, and the nonprofit Massachusetts Interlocal Insurance Association (MIIA) are other options that western Massachusetts municipalities are choosing as they leave HCGIT.

Steep health insurance increases have also forced drastic cuts to public services across the region. At Swift River School, the shared elementary school serving New Salem and Wendell, five paraprofessional positions will be eliminated in the upcoming school year. School officials have cited much higher premiums paid to the HCGIT over the past fiscal year, totaling nearly 30% of the school’s total budget, as the primary reasons for the layoffs.

“Schools carving money from the instructional budget to pay for costs completely unrelated to education, like health insurance, is a nonsense system,” Nancy Slator, chair of the New Salem/Wendell school committee, told *The Shoestring*.

“Schools carving money from the instructional budget to pay for costs completely unrelated to education, like health insurance, is a nonsense system.”

– Nancy Slator, chair
New Salem/Wendell school committee

The Frontier Regional School District will cut seven positions in the upcoming year due in part to the rising health insurance costs. And in Easthampton, Adam Czerwiec, the president of the educators’ union, said that health insurance costs have been a point of contention between the city and its employees.

“It’s a significant cost, and with wages not going up as much as they should – and everything else going up, like gas, cost of living, groceries – it’s really hard for a lot of people to have insurance when everything is so expensive,” Czerwiec said. “I understand things go up, but that was a big hit for members. A lot of teacher assistants and administrative assistants didn’t really get their raises.”

From All Sides

Gerald Friedman, a professor of economics at the UMass Amherst who studies healthcare financing, said several major factors are contributing to the rising cost of healthcare in the United States: the consolidation of hospital systems; healthcare workforce shortages; pharmaceutical companies seeking patent-protected profits; and the fact that people are living longer, with more complex medical interventions.

“This is a major threat to the viability of local education and local government,” Friedman told *The Shoestring*. “It’s all about monopoly power reinforced by patents and trademarks.”

Federal funding cuts and new eligibility

requirements for Medicare, Medicaid, and Affordable Care Act plans could spell further trouble. Work requirements and shorter reauthorization timelines are set to go into effect next year, Friedman explained, which will reduce access to federally subsidized healthcare. This could leave the states to pay more of the cost to insure their citizens. At the same time, tax cuts at both the federal and state levels have reduced revenue.

“The people running the Commonwealth are trying to do the right thing within the system,” Friedman said. “One aspect of the system these days are federal cuts hurting us on the revenue side, and hurting us on the expenditure side.”

Last year, HCGIT’s executive insurance director, Joe Shea, retired at the age of 65. The trust chose not to replace him, instead hiring a consulting firm, the Hilb Group, to help it strategize, draft new policies, and implement cost-saving measures for the coming fiscal year.

“I think they are moving in a better direction than they were, but I also think their pool is small and it’s getting smaller, and that creates difficulty,” said Sabadosa. “I don’t think the insurance trust went through difficulty because the idea was bad, but it wasn’t properly managed, and there wasn’t proper oversight.”

Thrown Overboard

One cost-cutting measure is discontinuing coverage of GLP-1 medications for weight loss, a decision made last October which will go into effect for the coming fiscal year. The HCGIT paid out \$4.5 million for GLP-1 drugs between January and September 2025, according to HCGIT leadership. Fewer than 3% of policyholders currently use this class of drugs, they said, but it accounts for nearly 30% of the trust’s pharmaceutical spending.

“We remain optimistic about achieving stabilization, particularly with the discontinuation of these medications for weight loss,” the HCGIT told *The Shoestring*.

The GIC and the MIIA have also recently discontinued coverage of GLP-1 medications for weight loss.

“The GLP-1 conversation is a complicated one,” Sabadosa said. “There is no other type of medicine which we have decided we’re no longer covering, or we’re putting parameters around... We cannot simply not cover drugs that have health benefits.”

Sabadosa said she hopes the GIC, which commands a much larger share of the insurance market than the HCGIT, can use its power to negotiate lower rates for GLP-1 drugs.

Unions representing municipal and state employees have been pushing back against the exemption. These include the Massachusetts Teachers Association, whose president, Max Page, said in a statement in April that while the nation’s healthcare system may be broken, “We cannot use that as an excuse to deny people access to life-changing medicines.”

The MTA’s representative on the GIC, Dean Robinson, argued to commission members ahead of its vote on GLP-1 drugs that it doesn’t make sense to separate obesity from illnesses related to it.

“Fat tissue actively drives inflammation, insulin resistance, and cardiovascular damage,” Robinson said. “When a doctor prescribes a GLP-1 for weight loss in these patients, they’re treating the root cause of the heart disease and hypertension we’re already paying to manage. The proposal draws a billing line, not a medical one.”

“Same patient, same heart disease, same drug – covered with a ‘Diabetes’ code, not covered without one.”

Other cost-saving measures the HCGIT is implementing include increasing copays, imposing new deductibles, changing plan designs, and signing a contract with a new drug provider.

According to Friedman, changes like these often lead to worse health outcomes for patients.

“They are going to degrade the quality of healthcare and health insurance,” Friedman said. “Fewer people will use their plans because they have to pay more out of pocket

that they can’t afford, then more people get sick, then they get sicker and end up in the emergency room.”

Friedman, who has helped model economic plans for single-payer healthcare systems in Massachusetts and nationally, says there are better ways to cut costs. Removing the complex web of insurers, employer plans, and network negotiations from the equation could lead to significant administrative cost savings, he said. He added that healthcare providers are increasingly burdened by the paperwork – and often, the appeals – necessary to get their patients’ care covered.

“We know what to do. If we wanted to fix this, we would have a national healthcare system,” Friedman said. “The gap between the life expectancy between the rich and the poor is wider in the United States than any other country by far – not just in mortality rates but in morbidity rates, too.”

Sweeping Solutions

Sabadosa is a House sponsor of a bill that would establish a “Medicare for All” system in the state, pooling all funds Massachusetts receives from the federal Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services with state tax dollars to pay directly for healthcare for all residents.

Sabadosa said she recognizes that establishing a statewide single-payer system, which would require the federal government’s approval, is a farfetched idea right now. But she and other legislators are making plans so they are ready when the opportunity comes. Various versions of the Medicare for All bill have been introduced on Beacon Hill since at least 2013.

“We’re getting closer and closer to having support for this legislation because more and more people are struggling,” Sabadosa said. “You have quite a few states that really want to move the needle on this, and if the federal government let any one of us do it, we would be in a position to be a model nationally.”

Other bills currently before the legislature include H.4616, which aims to expand access to primary and preventative care by streamlining the insurance prior authorization process, and H.2393, allowing Massachusetts to enter the Interstate Medical Licensure Compact so that healthcare providers can practice over state lines.

“There’s no one single piece of legislation that could fix this,” Saunders said. “It’s going to take a real, concerted effort, because anytime you have a profit motive on one side and a guaranteed payday on the other, it takes oversight to use that responsibly.”

Saunders told *The Shoestring* he thinks HCGIT’s problems are “a cautionary tale of the promise of single-payer healthcare.” He said he believes that to work, a single-payer system would require not only more oversight, but the federal government’s financial and regulatory backing.

“I think what we saw with [the HCGIT] was how this can go so wrong so quickly,” Saunders said. “Part of it is not being prudent in recognizing that these costs were escalating as they were, and part of it was not adapting quickly enough.”

Others affected by the recent premium hikes say they see the local crisis as yet another sign that the United States – nearly alone among developed countries in its failure to provide universal healthcare – needs to follow the example of much of the rest of the world.

“The United States is not a poor country. We could pay for healthcare for everyone with what we spend in one day at war with Iran,” Sabadosa said. “It’s a matter of political will.”

Others say that statewide efforts could be the first step.

“I support whatever efforts are being made to create a statewide single-payer health insurance system,” said Slator, the chair of the New Salem/Wendell school committee. “But eventually we need to join all the other well-off countries that have figured out how to do this on a national basis.”

This article originally appeared this week at The Shoestring (www.theshoestring.org).



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HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE WENDELL SELECTBOARD

Feltman Quits Selectboard, Even As Logs Remain Piled Up

By JOSH HEINEMANN

At the Wendell selectboard's June 3 meeting, chair Laurie DiDonato reported that member Adam Feltman had resigned after his first year on the selectboard.

His departure leaves the selectboard with only two members – enough for a quorum, though if either has to skip a meeting the remaining member may make no final decision. The town's biweekly accounts payable warrant also needs a minimum of two selectboard signatures for bill payments to be authorized, and vendors to be paid.

DiDonato said she thought a special election to replace Feltman should wait until September 1, the date of the state primary. At that point, she said, most summer vacations will have ended and residents will be in town and ready for business.

DiDonato and the board's other member, Paul Doud, discussed ways to get warrants and other documents signed when either one is away. Electronic signatures are an option, though they present new issues. Town treasurer Carolyn Manley said different rules apply for different cases.

A rubber stamp with a signature is another option, but Manley said that any such stamp would need secure storage, and that the critical consideration is security.

Notifications

Members of the local resiliency group are among those hoping to increase the sign-up rate for CodeRED, the reverse-911 system the town can use to alert residents of impending or ongoing emergencies.

To that end, the group is considering running a booth at Old Home Day. They hope to learn what resi-

dents want, and which kinds of situations – upcoming meetings, road closures, impending weather – they want to be notified of.

DiDonato said she had tried signing up for the service using the information in the town newsletter, and was unsuccessful. She said she planned to work with town coordinator Kelly Tyler on making the process easier, and making it possible for residents to choose which alerts they want. The town also needs to train more officials on how to send CodeRED notifications.

A Facebook page might be another way to alert residents, but would be useful for a subset of residents. DiDonato said there is no downside to trying it out.

Big Log Pile

DiDonato relayed that tree warden Cliff Dornbusch told her the large, possibly hazardous, pile of logs off Montague Road is a mix. Some were put there by the highway department temporarily in anticipation of a better destination, and with Dornbusch's approval National Grid had also put some there anticipating the creation of the wood bank. They were asked not to stack them too high.

DiDonato said she had asked wood bank supervisor Sarah Butler to determine how much of the wood is still sound, and whether the state might be able to move the logs to the wood bank site, but she was waiting for an answer.

She suggested spreading the pile out, thus making the top of it lower, and said she would ask conservation agent Mary Thomas, who had identified the problem of its height at a previous meeting, if that could provide an adequate solution.

Manley suggested having a tree

company chip the logs, but Doud said most companies have more wood chips than they want.

Other Business

The board approved transferring unused money from the veterans' service account and the town report account to pay selectboard clerks through the end of FY'26.

Tyler said FRCOG director of regional services Bob Dean had told her Wendell can use the COG to make procurements of \$10,000 to \$100,000. For amounts less than that the legal process is less rigorous, requiring only "best practices." Manley suggested giving this information to departments that may find it useful.

In the time set aside for public comment, moderator Kathleen Nolan shared that she planned to begin an effort to clarify guidelines for media at town meeting. Town meetings are open meetings, but the presence of a national reporter recording video during sincere, heartfelt discussion at the recent annual town meeting was intimidating to some. There is a fear that recordings can be edited, distorting the speakers' intent, and then go viral.

Nolan said she thought a face-to-face public forum might be a better way to discuss the issue than the townwide listserv.

DiDonato and Doud agreed to review citizens' suggestions and submit their first, second, and third choices for Wendell's 2026 Citizen of the Year to Tyler, who will choose the winner, to be announced at Old Home Day.

If no selectboard member can attend Old Home Day, Tyler said she would be willing to announce the award. The board members said they thought it might be a suitable role for town crier Kathy Becker.

TRAP from page A1 and Secondary Education for review.

Up to \$4,500 of the board's scant remaining funds were approved to cover ongoing attorney fees.

Alan Genovese, the committee's chair, reported on two pieces that depend on the state legislature: allowing the agreements to be voted in each of the towns this fall at the ballot box, and an appropriation to fund a transition to a new district should the voters approve one of the agreements.

Genovese said he and Gill member Snedeker have a meeting scheduled later this month with Massachusetts elementary and secondary school commissioner Pedro Martinez.

"It would be really powerful if the commissioner says, 'We endorse your efforts,'" Genovese explained.

Montague member Dorinda Bell-Upp shared drafts of written materials making the case for the larger region – an informational flyer and a smaller postcard that included a few bullet points, a QR code, and the planning board's website, *6towns.org* – and after giving cosmetic feedback, members voted to authorize printing up to 1,000 of the flyers and 2,000 of the postcards.

It then discussed where to leave these materials, with some expressing doubts that the QR code on the postcards would draw many to the website.

"As an older person in Gill," representative Deb Loomer said, "I'm not going to scan that card while I make the check out at the liquor store."

Northfield representative Deb Potee recommended tabling in each of the towns, while advertising the times members will be tabling.

Newspaper propaganda is also being planned. Potee said letters to editors should be short, punchy, personal, and sincere, and send readers to the website.

Following the Data

The highlight of Tuesday's session was a presentation by Snedeker on an econometric model he said he had been working on for a month, crunching two decades of data from every school in Massachusetts to chart out the correlations between enrollment change and district budgets at different grades.

"The different levels are drastically different, because of the way they operate," he told the board as he shared charts mapping the curving impact. "Elementary schools have a lot of flexibility in them... When you have low enrollment at a high school, your costs become rigid. If you listen to the school committees talk, they basically admit this – there's very little if anything to cut at the high school level."

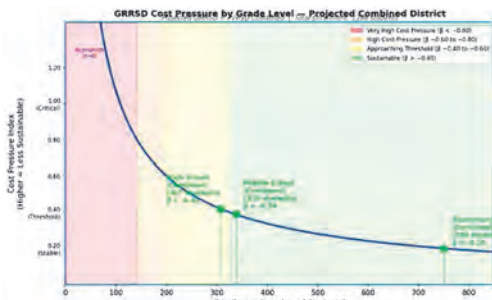
"It puts an enormous amount of pressure on the administration to cut below that level," he continued, "and so they usually go to the elementary school, where the costs are most flexible.... This actually becomes a structural trap. They begin to diminish the elementary school programs, and that's the very feeder that is feeding into our high schools and middle schools."

Plugging the current Gill-Montague en-

rollments into the model, Snedeker said, suggested that the elementary schools are still "sustainable" but the middle and high schools are "approaching the threshold zone" of that high-pressure trap.

Pioneer Valley elementary schools are at the outer limits of "sustainable," if the model is accurate, but the middle school is under "very high cost pressure" and the high school, which graduated a class of 16 last week, is practically off the chart depending on how many years are taken into consideration.

"If I were in Northfield, I'd be a little bit upset looking at this graph," he added. "The administration is basically using the Northfield Elementary School as a piggy bank... to prop up the high school, and the middle school, for that matter."



Combining all the towns into a larger district, he said, would put every grade back into a "sustainable" to "stable" range.

Snedeker said recent projections, based on Massachusetts School Building Association data, that foundation enrollment in the Pioneer district will increase in the next two years are a "head fake," and complained that

Pioneer superintendent Patricia Kinsella has been citing them to reassure the towns.

"It's going to then drop again back down to where they are by 2029, and then it's going to decline to like 87 students by 2034," he said. "And that's [from] the projections that she keeps quoting!"

The current decline in immigration, Snedeker predicted, will further reinforce the downward trend.

"Native-born US enrollment peaks in '96, and that's exactly when these [Franklin County] districts peaked," he pointed out. Since 1996, he said, Gill-Montague and Pioneer have seen 50% declines, while Mohawk Regional has dropped 55%.

"You don't have anything propping it up like the urban centers do," he said, "which was the immigrant population. That starts to decline in 2019 – that's why it's no surprise to see colleges closing."

Snedeker said he had reached out to Harvard economist and demographer David Bloom in hopes of hiring his consulting firm to vet the model.

"I'll move to do whatever to get this authenticated," said Bernardston representative Jane Dutcher.

"I am very nervous about how much money we have," Genovese said. Nevertheless, the board voted unanimously to allow Snedeker to get quotes and spend whatever money still remains in the board's account to review his model.

The board's next meetings are scheduled for June 23 and 30.

**LEVERETT BOARD OF HEALTH
NOTICE OF PUBLIC HEARING**

The Board of Health will hold a public hearing June 25, 2026, at 7:00 PM at the Leverett Town Hall, 9 Montague Road, Leverett, MA to act on a request for variances under Chapter 218 of Leverett Code provisions 218-4 and 218-9. The applicant/owner is the Friends of North Leverett Sawmill, Inc., 77 Jackson Hill Road, Leverett, MA 01054 for work (construction of a new onsite sewage disposal system) at 63 North Leverett Road. Copies of the request, exhibits, and plans can be obtained by contacting Foresight Land Services, Inc. at (413) 499-1560.

Tip of the week ...

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COMMITTEE from page A1

effort that has been grinding away in full public obscurity for quite some time. I interviewed library director Caitlin Kelley about it in these pages in October 2024 after the department submitted an 85-page application to the Massachusetts Public Library Construction Grant Program. Sitting in the Carnegie Library basement office, the horror stories she shared about the building's limitations and the obstacles to a simple solution were believable.

The official assessment process, Kelley told our readers then, had resulted in a goal of "more than three times the public space" the Carnegie offered.

"The needs have actually been the same for a really long time," she said when I asked what had changed. And this: "Montague makes this a very achievable endeavor, because people like each other."

I could never understand why there wasn't more public interest in such a potentially major project. Interest did not seem to be piqued when the price tag was announced this winter, either: \$12.4 million from the town plus \$11.3 million pledged by the state. The numbers that seemed to actually catalyze pushback came only a month ago: 81 to 3, the vote at town meeting to appropriate the town's share, provided that voters agree to qualify the debt as excluded from the town's levy limit.

Argument has been particularly fierce on local Facebook groups, and our editorial pages have also become swamped with the topic. As no one from the Affordability Committee seemed to be taking advantage of our open Letters policy, I reached out to its officers this week proposing an interview. I learned it was Mr. Savinski's birthday, but Mr. Morin called together a panel of other "No" campaigners on short notice – Chris Couture, John Hanold, and Pam Hanold – and was kind enough to host us.

The conversation was fast-moving and wide-ranging, and this transcript is only a highlight reel. I've edited and in some cases reordered it for clarity and readability.

MR: Most of what I wanted to sit down with you guys for was to hear, not so much what the arguments are, because we're getting those for sure, but the dimension of what it's like to run a campaign around an election like this. How's that been so far?

KM: Well, we're not doing a very good job. I don't have help like Pam anymore – she helped when I was on other committees! But guys got together – there's a lot of people in opposition to this. But as far as a campaign...

CC: We're just contractors and what-have-you. This isn't our bailiwick – we're by the seat of our pants. The end results are what we're looking for.

JH: I recall there was one Letter [to the Editors] calling into question where the Vote No signs were coming from.... There is no reason why the funding source for one side should be publicized, particularly when the Vote Yes campaign is quite heavily signed, and they have quite a lot of literature that they've put out.

And that's perfectly fine – each side is entitled to present their own case, and the Vote Yes people are the ones that have the initiative, because it's their proposal, but I think the Vote No people also deserve a voice. Because not everyone looks at the issue the same way, and some of the concerns that the Vote No people have been either dismissed or even called into question... I think it's important that people understand that this is not a well-funded opposition. This is, in a sense, ground-roots.

KM: I've talked with the guys, we've had a couple meetings here. Some of that on Facebook is getting a little nasty, I might say, and making accusations, and we've stayed away from that... Whenever I brought signs for people and they say "how much do I owe you," you don't owe us anything. If you want to make a donation, you do so.

I think we've got 325 signs out there. Not that I'm counting them, but I know what we bought!



JACKSON PHOTO

MR: Ken, you've been on building committees before, and ones that went out to a debt exclusion vote, so you've been on the other kind of side of this – the highway garage, the safety complex...

KM: That's where you've gotta start – I just felt this library is too big for this town. When you do the town garage, and Pam can tell you, you have X number of pieces of equipment, personnel, and everything, and then you build a building around it.

We were told we weren't going to get any more than \$6 million, according to our past town administrator. You design a garage, and then you go with the people – and it's at the people's mercy, just like this library.

That's where a lot of this committee is coming from: This library is just too much for Turners Falls. Too big, too costly.

JH: The focus of the Vote Yes campaign is on "this is a terrific library, because of all the state money we're going to get." What they forget is that the basic library size is too big, regardless of how big the grant is. There's more here than Montague really can afford, or needs, and the fact that there is a large state grant available does not really change that.

KM: People wanted to build the library, they went out and they got suggestions from town people and everything – they're the ones that set the size at 21,000 square feet. The state has nothing to do with that.

MR: I remember seeing a big spreadsheet at one point in the process. There are formulas that the library authority has –

KM: The Commission, yeah. They have demands that they want, that you have to put in there, and that's where that list develops....

It's unfortunate that this state will finance a library, and it'll finance a school, but they don't always do water or sewage treatment plants. They didn't do the town garage. Stuff that everybody uses and everybody needs.

I mean, we just graduated what, 49 kids from Turners Falls High School? It was built for hundreds of kids! It's crazy to have somebody tell me this library is going to draw people into town. The town of Montague's population hasn't changed in the last 50 years. They're flaunting this as making this community grow, but they don't have proof of it.

MR: The people on the [Montague Economic Development and Industrial Commission] are saying that this is the kind of thing that you build and you specifically get more business development, and then you get more commercial tax. Chris, you own a lot of commercial property...

CC: Yeah, I'm on the commercial side of this thing... I don't want to see that lot come off the tax rolls, that's another loss.

MR: The EDIC had the New England Wound Care proposal for that lot in 2021, 2022... That guy said Greenfield Savings Bank told him it's just not financeable. And the proposal before that was the whitewater people, when it was still the Cumby's build-

ing. Neither of those worked out...

KM: Don't get it wrong, I think the town and Walter [Ramsey] do a good job of trying to get businesses in here.... But, you know, Massachusetts isn't cheap anymore, to build anything. The exodus has already started.

CC: My biggest concern is whether, at some point, somebody's going to have an opportunity to rent from me – or at the same square foot price in Northampton. Turners is available because it was less expensive. That was one of the most attractive things about it.

KM: To get back to the library... They don't talk much about the budget, but I know Greenfield's budget went up \$189,000 in three years. So, when you get all the stuff they've got in this library, they're going to be hiring, just like Greenfield did. And I don't think they're honest with the people, they're leaving them out, intentionally or by mistake.

JH: The operating cost, I think, is unrealistic. And the idea that you will add a part-time coordinator, and yet you're going to keep the library open more hours in the week for more dedicated groups.... If you get an idea sold at the outset, then a lot of things drop in as an after-effect: "We've gone this far, we can't afford to not do the next step."

CC: We're not opposed to libraries. And obviously, the Carnegie is still going to remain.

MJ: I've heard a lot of talk about the cost of keeping the Carnegie going up.

CC: Well then what are they going to do: are they going to renovate it, are they going to rent it? Do they think they're just going to mothball that thing there? You can't do that!

KM: I heard somebody on the committee mention a museum. I said, who do you think's going to pay for that? That would be another town expense.... I said, "You people aren't thinking very far ahead." I've been living in this town for 77 years. When I go by there, that's the Carnegie Library. It's never going to be an apartment house, or anything else. I couldn't imagine anybody remodeling that.

Just like Greenfield – they say, "Our library is outdated, we can't do this and that." Well, the bank went in for \$7 million and made a nice little bank out of it. \$7 million isn't a lot, if they could have done that towards the library... But the state wags that carrot on a string under their noses, and it speeds things up....

PH: I chaired the public safety [building] committee, and then I started out in the DPW [committee] but I went away for much of it. Those two projects were single issues: nothing else was being built at the same time, there wasn't anything else happening in town.

It is so much more complex now, it seems to me, because people are going to be voting on this without having to think about, "can the tech school also be done, or is it an either/or?" Several things have come up, even since town meeting, that I didn't know were out there as significant expenses.

JH: And these are areas that we cannot avoid. We can settle for a smaller library. Be-

cause I agree with these guys – we do need a new library – but it does not need to be this large or this ambitious.

MJ: Wait, do you all think that the town needs a new library?

CC: I think the Carnegie could be revamped.

JH: ... I may be slightly out of phase with these guys. I think that Montague needs a new library, and I think the Carnegie Library is not adequate, and I don't think the site is well-suited to an expansion.

MJ: I'm realizing there's different viewpoints, but would you recommend the town not seek a state match, and just try and design from scratch, and not use the state program?

KM: I think you have to be over 10,000 square feet to be eligible for a state grant, but that's still half the size of what they're trying to do now.

PH: I wouldn't go with building a new one. I would look to see what we've got in town, and how are we using it... You have to have a dedicated building for public safety, you have to have a dedicated building or facility for fire, but things like a senior center, the town hall, and schools and libraries essentially all happen in rectangular room spaces.

KM: They should have been a little more flexible in what they were trying to push on us. I don't know if you're familiar with "the Library Things?" That's absurd. Do you know they loan out chainsaws? And they're buying kitchen appliances, there's a whole list of stuff. What if it doesn't get returned? Who are you competing with, Taylor Rental? I don't understand that.

MJ: I'm curious about the campaign, what kind of conversations you're having out there.

KN: As far as the group that's doing this whole thing, it's limited to a core group of maybe a half a dozen of us that just decided we don't think this should go the way it's gone. I know a guy who owns 10 properties in town, and it's going to kick him hard. He can pass that on in the form of rent, but unless you go to Section 8, then you know nothing happens.... They can't absorb what's going to happen. And Richie Young's the same way, he's got 10; Billy Doyle... So those guys, you know, they threw in a little bit of money.

I don't know how Ja'Duke could possibly absorb that without raising their rates. That's a million-dollar property up there. And if you put the tech school and library together, that's a tough one for businesses to absorb....

And insurance is out of control. And that competes with, you know, there goes your rent again....

And I could tell you three addresses, they said "I'm afraid to lose my house," and they wanted signs. There's a lot of older people that are nervous about losing their houses.

JH: I'm a bystander in some respects, because I'm not on Facebook... but the thing that does touch me is if the trend is in favor of a library of this size, but at the cost of all kinds of animosity, and polarizing the community the way it was with the elimination of the Turners Falls Indian logo, that would be a real downside.

CC: We're just a grassroots thing. The signs we've got are probably all the signs we're going to put out. We'll probably do a minimal amount of advertising in the papers, just a reminder to get out and vote No.

PH: If this had been a much smaller building, and if there had been a good discussion, besides a town meeting, about the other issues that were going to come up in the next two years, I would be much happier...

I have talked with a bunch of people individually, all of whom are going to vote against it with the same series of concerns that I have. And every one of us is just pissed as hell that we have to make that decision – we've all been strong library supporters all of our lives... It just feels to me like it's not a good decision, at this point in time, with what's going on in the world.



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TECH from page A1

"In the middle of your heart-break, you came together," he told them. "You came to the school to process your emotions, and share your grief." Martin then called attention to the chair left empty in memory of Walker, on which a rose bush was placed.

"If anyone feels led," he continued, "in the audience or in the graduating class, we would like to pray over the family. If we could stand up, for those that want to pray, and extend your hands to the family..." All of the school officials behind Martin on the stage, including Spadafino, school committee chair Rich Kuklewicz, administrative assistant Heather Poirier, and guidance counselor Taryn Canfield, joined him in standing and raising their right hands.

"Heavenly Father," Martin began, "I pray that you bless, protect, and comfort the Walker family. May they experience healing, forgiveness, and peace. May the Lord be with them as they continue to move through the most difficult time of their life. May the Lord bless them and keep them and watch over them. May the Lord make His face shine upon them and be gracious to them, and may the Lord lift up His countenance upon them and give them peace. And may they always know that their son Christian Walker was embraced, respected, and loved by the Class of 2026. Amen."

Martin then delivered an emotional speech on the importance of forgiveness, relating his own experience in 2023 when his son suffered a critical brain injury after being assaulted in Millers Falls. Martin said doctors at the hospital told him that night that his son would likely die, but he survived, and was present at the graduation. In the courtroom, Martin said, he told his assailants he forgave them.

"He refused to be trapped by unforgiveness," the superintendent said. "He chose to give to God."

Martin went on to say that the "T" in "FCTS" stood for "trust." "When you trust beyond yourself, you step out in faith," he explained. "Faith in your coworkers, faith in your family, faith in yourself, and faith in God. And the 'S' stands for 'service' and 'sacrifice'.... Congratulations to the Class of 2026. May God bless you, guide you, and give you peace as you step into your faith."

Though Martin's speech received applause, apparently not all members of the audience appreciated its overtly religious nature. One member of the school community, who spoke with this newspaper on condition of anonymity, said that complaints were made after the ceremony to the American Civil Liber-

ties Union, the Freedom From Religion Foundation, Americans United for Separation of Church and State, and the district's school committee.

"He has done many positive things for the FCTS community," the member wrote. "However, his comments and sermon were an abuse of his power as superintendent at a public high school in Massachusetts."

The district's staff union, the Franklin County Technical Teachers Association (FCTTA), weighed in this week with a public statement shared by president John Passiglia.

"We, as the FCTTA, want to make it clear that we were not aware prior of the contents of Mr. Martin's speech and do not support the inclusion of a religious message during our graduation ceremony," the union wrote. "While everyone is entitled to their deeply held personal beliefs, there is an appropriate time and place for expressing those views, and a public school graduation is not one of them. Maintaining the separation of church and state out of the school environment is essential and non-negotiable."

This Tuesday, Americans United sent a letter to the tech school committee from its Washington, DC headquarters.

"We have received several complaints regarding the inclusion of prayer and religious content in the Franklin County Technical School graduation ceremony," it began. "Outgoing Superintendent Richard Martin recited a prayer and a Bible verse while encouraging the audience to participate and discussed faith in God during his speech...."

"Rather than bringing the whole community together in reflection of the tragic loss, the inclusion of prayer and religious proselytizing in an official school activity conveys disrespect for graduates', students', and families' beliefs and sends the message that students who do not practice the officially favored faith are unwelcome outsiders who do not belong."

The statement advised the committee that "a public-school official praying and preaching to a captive audience violates the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution."

This clause reads that "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof." During the early 20th century, courts began to determine that the Bill of Rights also applied to state and local governments, as a result of the "due process" clause of the Fourteenth Amendment. The Supreme Court has applied the Establishment Clause to publicly-funded schools, ruling that school prayer in almost any context is a violation.

"The law prohibiting school-sponsored prayer at school events – especially graduations – is clear," the Americans United letter reads. "In *Lee v. Weisman*, the Supreme Court held that a school violated the Establishment Clause when "[a] school official, the principal, decided that an invocation and a benediction should be given" as part of middle school promotional exercises and invited a member of the clergy to deliver a prayer."

Requests for comment on the matter from the American Civil Liberties Union of Massachusetts received no response as of press time.

On Tuesday, school staff were informed that Martin, who had been scheduled to retire at the end of the month, was leaving that day. A call to the superintendent's office on Wednesday morning revealed a good deal of uncertainty as to who was in charge.

"I think they're having a meeting to figure that out," the *Reporter* was told by one member of the administrative staff.

Additional attempts to reach Martin were unsuccessful.

Much of the uncertainty was dispelled Wednesday night at a well-attended meeting of the FCTS school committee. After concluding old and new business – including an employment contract with incoming superintendent Ryan Rege, currently the principal at Pathfinder Regional Vocational Technical High School in Palmer – Kuklewicz, the committee's chair, read a prepared statement.

Martin, it clarified, had not been fired the previous day, but had voluntarily decided to take "early retirement" rather than leave his post at the end of the month as originally planned.

No further discussion was held on the matter.

"We can't let one incident mar the 17-year career of a great superintendent," New Salem representative Bryan Camden told the *Reporter* after the meeting.

Kuklewicz elaborated that the committee had received five written complaints about the prayer, and members had discussed the issue with representatives of the union and with the district's legal counsel.

Martin had developed a close and significant relationship with the Walker family, Kuklewicz said, but may have "crossed the line" in encouraging attendees to participate in a Christian prayer.

The district, he added, does not currently have a policy that conforms to state and federal law on religious invocations at school events. "Sometimes it takes an incident to create a policy," he told the *Reporter*.



LOOKING BACK: 10 YEARS AGO THIS WEEK

Here's the way it was on June 9, 2016: News from the Montague Reporter archive.

Coydogs? Coywolves? Coyotes?

Gill police chief David Hastings doesn't think the genetics of the animals that killed a local farmer's cow and two newborn calves matter very much. "I'm more concerned about a farmer's loss than [the attackers'] DNA," he said.

On June 6, when farmer Brian Peila entered his pasture to check on a pregnant cow that was down, he was confronted by 15 to 20 "of what he believed to be 'coy dogs,'" according to Hastings, which "bared their teeth to him." He got the help of Hastings, who "retrieved a shotgun" and headed for the field. Before he arrived, "Peila observed some of the dogs dragging a calf into the woods." The men found portions of what they believed was another calf in the field.

The attack was reported on the

police department's Facebook page as the work of "coy dogs," which elicited a quick response from a number of posters. Current science suggests the eastern coyote is a hybrid involving the eastern wolf and the western coyote. A peer-reviewed 2010 study found no evidence that these animals carry domestic dog or gray wolf DNA.

Upgrades in Erving

On Monday, fire chief Philip Wonkka told the Erving select-board he had received three bids for a fire department trailer, to be used as a mobile command center and to house the Gator utility vehicle. The low bid, \$11,300 from Vassar Complete Auto Service of Greenfield, was accepted. Wonkka said that because of the Gator's height, the trailer would be custom-built.

In other business, the board signed an agreement for a state grant to fund additional body cameras for police officers.

20 YEARS AGO

Here's the way it was on June 8, 2006: News from the Montague Reporter archive.

Money for NMH School...

Northfield Mount Hermon School has just received a \$10 million gift, the largest in its 126-year history, from David Bolger, class of 1950. Bolger, a real estate developer, investment banker, financier, and philanthropist, has asked

...But Not for Montague

With about 32% of registered voters casting a ballot, Montague citizens turned down a \$600,000 Proposition 2½ override request for local schools. The final vote was 812 to 576.

140 YEARS AGO

Here's the way it was on June 9, 1886: News from the Turners Falls Reporter archive.

Turners Falls and Vicinity

The sewers will be completed this week, probably.

A company will probably be organized to light the village with electricity.

Dr. E.C. Coy has built a massive, at the same time beautiful, chimney to his Montague City residence, so as to connect with open fire places in rooms in both stories.

The bridge over Fall River, near Selectman John Clark's, is to be replanked with chestnut.

Owing to the blunder of a compositor the full list of directors of the Turners Falls Paper Company was not printed last week. The omitted name was that of R.N. Oakman, Jr.

The local division of Ancient Order of Hibernians will hold their annual picnic at Central Park grove on Saturday the 19th inst. The 'Papermakers' brass band will

furnish music together with the Millers Falls orchestra. There will be a good programme of athletic sports, with adequate prizes.

Allen Brothers are doing their best to make the youngsters look well by giving them suits at bargains.

Carroll Daly had the misfortune to lose about \$80.00 the other day, going from the bank to the depot.

While R.N. Oakman, Jr., was coming out of his father's gateway at Montague City a week or so ago, on his rather high spirited horse, the animal dodged and Mr. Oakman's knee came in contact with the cap of the gate-post, inflicting quite a painful wound.

Ben. Tilden, while holding a drill, had his hand smashed by a careless striker the other day.

Rev. Sam Jones who is to speak at the grand temperance celebration at Lake Pleasant, on Monday, July 5th, and who by the way is not a colored man as many people imagine, says "there's something wrong in a preacher getting only \$400 a year, where a base ball pitcher scoops in \$5000."



PUBLIC SERVICE ANNOUNCEMENT

Greenfield Garden Club 2026 Garden Tour

GREENFIELD – Join other garden enthusiasts for the 2026 Greenfield Garden Club Garden Tour on Saturday, June 20, from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.. This year, eight local gardens are being featured – bring your friends and family to meet your neighbors and enjoy the beauty of the gardens!

Tickets will be sold the day of the event at the John Zon Community Center, 35 Pleasant Street, Greenfield from 10 am.. to 1 p.m. Tickets are \$10 per person, payable by cash or check. Proceeds support local community projects, including gardening grants for groups and organizations within Franklin County. In the last year the Garden Club awarded more than

\$2,000 to local schools, libraries and other community organizations.

In the event of heavy rain, the tour will take place on Sunday, June 21.

The Greenfield Garden Club is a community organization consisting of persons interested in gardening, with the intent to stimulate community interest in gardening; to help maintain public gardens, monuments, or other community properties; and to promote knowledge, awareness, and interest in gardening through public programs and demonstrations. For more information, visit thegreenfieldgardenclub.org, or contact Norm Hirschfeld at nhms41@comcast.net or (413) 773-0201.

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High School Sports Week: Cinderella Eagles' Clock Strikes Midnight

By MATT ROBINSON

MAYNARD – On D-Day Saturday, Franklin Tech's magical 2026 season came to an end at the hands of the Maynard Orange Tigers, 4-1, in the Division 5 quarterfinals.

Maynard High School is an interesting place. Everything is orange: the buildings, the parking spots, the uniforms, and the shirts worn by their supporters. Even the walkways have huge orange paw prints leading to the sports fields. The Maynard folks were pretty friendly, probably because they did not expect a challenge from tiny Franklin Tech after beating their three previous opponents by a combined score of 35 to 1.

The game itself was exciting and fun, and could have gone either way. When the go-ahead run came to the plate in the seventh, the home crowd grew eerily quiet.

The Franklin Tech contingent remained calm and hopeful throughout the battle, and because the dugout was cramped, coach Joe Gamache had to sit with us, giving the regulars insight into his strategies.

The Tigers' pitcher, Maddy Karlon, was good. She was very fast, but had some difficulty with her changeup. In the first inning she walked the first batter and struck out the next three.

In the bottom of the inning, the first Orange batter hit a single over the soft spot just above second base. She stole second, but many in the crowd believed that she left early. After an appeal, the play stood. A fielders' choice and a sacrifice gave the Cats one run, but a Brayleigh Burgh strikeout shut the door.

In the second, Breanna Kempf walked and was replaced on base by Ava Worden. After another strikeout Sofia Melnik scorched a double, sending Worden to third, but two more Ks sent the Eagles back into the field still down by a run.

There was a little drama in the bottom of the inning. Maynard's

leadoff batter cracked a grounder, and raced to first just as the throw came in. The ump called her safe before she reached base, then quickly called "safe" again as she and the ball both landed on first. This did not sit well with the Franklin fans, but it didn't really matter – later in the inning she was tagged out attempting to steal third, sending the Eagles back to the batting box.

While Maynard's pitcher was warming up in the third, leadoff batter Lindsey Taylor was taking note, swinging her bat each time the ball crossed the plate. The first pitch of the inning was a fastball, and came in low and inside. Taylor got a hold of it and sent the ball well over the fence to tie up the game. The Eagles and their supporters exploded, and the Tiger fans tensed up.

Tech had a couple of opportunities to go ahead. In the fourth, they had runners on second and third with no outs. Melnik hit a high fly ball into left field, but the runner on third forgot to tag up. "Tag up!" Gamache called over and over again. She returned to third, but it was too late – she would probably have been thrown out at home if she tried to score. "That's it," one of the dads exclaimed. "That run would have put them on their heels." Two more strikeouts ended the inning, and Tech returned to the field.

In the home fourth, the Maynard leadoff hit a grounder. The ball was fielded and the throw was made, and she was ruled safe, much to the delight of the home fans – though the Eagle fans loudly voiced their disagreement with the call. The next batter got a hit and two steals later, the Tigers had runners on second and third with no outs. But the Eagle D made three straight outs, sending the game to the fifth inning still knotted at one.

Taylor led off with a single in the fifth, but three straight outs squashed the rally. In the bottom of



Franklin Tech coach Joe Gamache (second from right) instructs the softball squad prior to the second inning during Saturday's MIAA Division 5 state quarterfinal in Maynard. The Eagles' "Cinderella season" ended with the 4-1 loss to the Tigers.

the inning it was the Tiger fans' turn to grumble. After two solid outs, their third batter reached on an error, but a fantastic throw by catcher Kempf picked her off. "Terrible," one of the Maynard crowd yelled.

"Just terrible," a woman echoed.

Through all this, the Eagle players stayed relaxed. They put a runner on base in the sixth, but were unable to get her home. The first batter in the Maynard sixth placed a sharp single, but the ball was bobbled and the batter made it to second. A pop to third gave the Tigers one out and kept the runner on second base.

Then, on an 0-2 pitch, the next Tiger skied the ball into the outfield for a double, giving the Cats a 2-1 lead. A walk put two on base, and a strikeout gave them their second out. Maynard then instituted a double steal, advancing the runners to second and third base.

And then it came apart for the Eagles, as a double error plated both runners and gave Maynard a 4-1 lead. Another strikeout limited

the damage.

In the seventh, facing two outs, Burgh shot the ball to the fence. It was retrieved quickly, and she settled for a single. Alison George and Charley Knight were both walked, loading the bases and putting the go-ahead run at the plate. The coach visited the circle, and the home crowd grew quiet. But a shallow popup was corralled by the shortstop, and Tech's season was at an end.

Taylor finished with two hits, including the home run, and stole two bases. Melnik finished with a double and a single, Burgh and Lyla Mickiewicz hit singles, and Skylei Lapan stole a base. The Ladies did remarkably well in the field, but their three errors really hurt them. In the circle, Burgh allowed seven hits, walked one batter, struck out seven, and allowed two earned runs.

When the game was over, the home crowd breathed a collective sigh of relief and put on a huge celebration. "That's because they

barely escaped with a win," one man surmised as the fire trucks and ambulances wailed and flashed their lights.

Another man, walking by carrying his chairs, added, "I guess they're not used to winning!"

The first man smiled and called back, "At least not this deep in the playoffs."

None of this was said in malice. The Franklin Tech Softball Eagles are used to winning, deep into the playoffs – they had already won two championships this season. But for the girls it was heart-wrenching. Some were crying, some were grimacing, and a few whispered quietly to each other as the fans and coaching staff told them to keep their heads high. Unfortunately, in high school sports, unless you win the MIAA championship, you will always lose your last game.

For the seniors it's bittersweet. They played their last high school game, but they have so much more to look forward to.




DAVID HOITT PHOTOS



Left: Franklin Tech's Charley Knight is ready for the throw to first during last Saturday's state quarterfinal game, but Maynard runner Haley Derobert is a step ahead of her. Center: Tech senior Lyla Mickiewicz connects at the plate during the sixth inning. Right: Maynard's Derobert slides into third with Sandra Johnson ready to make the tag.


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Amanda Gorman, *The Hill We Climb*

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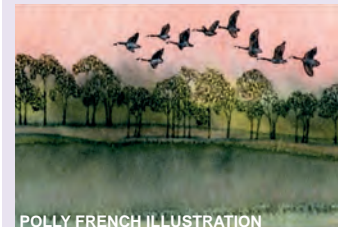


MAGGIE SADOWAY PHOTO

features@montaguereporter.org

OF THE MONTAGUE REPORTER

JUNE 11, 2026



POLLY FRENCH ILLUSTRATION

WEST ALONG THE RIVER

KNEE-DEEP IN EARLY JUNE

By DAVID BRULE

*Tell you what I like best,
'Long bout knee-deep in June...*
– James Whitcomb Riley

THE FLAT, ERVINGSIDE – Every couple of years or so, especially on a glorious day like this in early June, I get myself up to the old north bedroom where all the books and family treasures are hidden and stored.

I take out a book full of the old poems they used to teach in high school English classes, but don't any more, from the looks of things. Along with the poems of course come the memories of old teachers with names like Maurice Donovan, Bill Connelly, Fred Oakes. I can sense them peering over their eyeglasses with bemused smiles from back in the 1960s.

Digging into the book, I find the page where James Whitcomb Riley writes about this month back in the 1890s in a twangy Indiana dialect. His poem certainly does not roll off the tongue easily for a New Englander, but no matter:

*Like to jes' git out and rest,
And not work at nothin' else....
Plague! Ef they ain't somepin' in
Work 'at kind o' goes ag'in'
My convictions – long about
Here in June especially!*

Nope! That ain't (I mean *isn't*) a New Englander talking; it's clearly some Kentucky or Indiana accent. But regardless, the lazy June feeling can be shared by all of us.

Up North here in June, when we've come through another cold and snowy winter and Mother Nature decides to send along a nice sunny spring day, well, you've just got to get out and appreciate it!

Now, I have to apologize, because I am out here in the warm sunshine, being a retired gent as

I am, and a retired schoolteacher to boot. It's easier for me than for some people to get out and just laze around to see what'll happen next. Like a lot of retired folks it feels like I'm busier than ever, more so than back when I actually had to work for a living! Just the same, I do slow down from time to time to look around to see what I can see.

I can report to you that the lilacs have just about gone by, the faded lacework of those perfumy flowers just as beautiful in their aging as when they were in full bloom. The irises, too, have shot up their long-legged stems to open their graceful curving petals to the sun.

Ma belle jardinière, out flower-viewing with coffee-cup in her hand, calls me over to witness the delicate pale-yellow faces of a heritage rose, the *Tottering-By-Gently*, that opened just this morning at dawn.

Just behind the rose, the orange quince now gone by lets fading petals drop delicately, loosened by the breeze of a passing bumble bee's wing-beat.

Dozens of rose buds are swelling near to opening, soon to be rivaled by the peonies planted by grandmother Hannah. A winsome, melancholic Irish girl, orphaned young, Hannah married into this rough-and-tumble family as the last century was just beginning. I think of her when her peonies, planted now more than 100 years ago, greet the June mornings.

The first fledgling of the season, a song sparrow youngster only a few weeks old, follows a parent around the yard, his reedy plaintive call letting everyone know he wants to be fed. I hope he'll grow up safely and come around to sing his early spring song next year, when the snows and ice of late February need an optimistic note.

see WEST ALONG page B3



MONIQUE BRULE PHOTO

Peonies and Tottering-by-Gently roses bloom in the author's garden.

Above: Serenaded by vireos and Eastern wood-peewees, tree-bugging fungi thrive on trees along Gill's Mountain Road Loop Trail.

**New Ice Cream Parlor
Opens Its Doors
In Gill**

By BEN GAGNON

GILL – A new family-run ice cream parlor, Sundaes at Lena's, will have a grand opening and ribbon-cutting this Sunday at 2 p.m. at 231 West Gill Road, the site of the former Oak Ridge Golf Club. In recent years, the 133-acre site has been home to an 18-hole disc golf course.

Most of the Mayo family has been pitching in to transform the former golf clubhouse into an old-fashioned ice cream parlor with 1950s-style tables, along with an outdoor patio in front and a large deck out back. Fun for kids includes a giant Connect 4 game and a bean bag toss.

Sundaes at Lena's is the brainchild of Denise Mayo, inspired by her late mother Lena, who was dedicated to creating a family atmosphere at her home on Hope Street in Greenfield by cooking a dinner of spaghetti and meatballs every Sunday. Although Lena passed away in



GAGNON PHOTO

Standing beneath the sign for their new ice cream parlor on West Gill Road are Denise Mayo (center) and her daughters and co-managers, Jenna and Amanda.

2005, every member of the family still has a Christmas cactus cut from the original that belonged to her.

"I wanted to open an ice cream parlor in memory of her," said Denise. "Family was the most import-

ant thing to her, and this will be a way to keep her memory alive. She was very loving, very family-oriented and an all-around super woman.

It was devastating when she passed, see **ICE CREAM** page B2



'The Work That No One Asks You to Do'

By MPRESS BENNU

GREENFIELD – In this month's *Front of the Line*, I am honored to highlight Ayanna Crawford, Springfield school committee member of District 4, Ward 2 and 8.

Ayanna is also the co-founder of the Take the Mic program, which is a public speaking forum for young girls – and which will soon be accepting boys. This program works on six to 18 techniques for public speaking, such as body language and non-verbal communication. They also invite community leaders to come to speak and interact on their podcast on WTCC Radio Springfield.

On top of that, Ayanna is also president of AC Consulting and Media. She has run this business for 10 years, focusing on non-profits, press releases, marketing, event management and collaboration, and public relations. This platform is used to get messages to the community about products and services that organizations offer.

Ayanna told me her inspiration for starting this business was to make sure her children had what they needed to be productive, see **FRONT OF THE LINE** page B8



SUBMITTED PHOTO

Springfield entrepreneur, school committee member, and mentor Ayanna Crawford.

Pet of the Week



'COOPER'

Meet Cooper, a young male Chihuahua-Daschund cross, a sweet goofball who loves to play and adore kids. He will be 25 pounds or less when fully grown.

Cooper is active, full of smiles, and just wants somebody to love. He can be shy, but once he trusts you he becomes an affectionate, happy boy. He does not do well around other animals and needs to be the only pet in the home. Cooper isn't fully house-trained, and uses

pee pads at times. He needs an experienced adopter with patience and structure, and a loving home where he can feel safe and grow.

Cooper now lives in Holyoke. There is a \$50 adoption fee.

To adopt this little peanut, 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.

ICE CREAM from page B1

so the meaning behind all this is very sentimental."

The name "Sundaes at Lena's" carries a double meaning, referring to those memorable Sunday dinners. Red heart shapes in the cherries on the road sign match the red heart shapes in the petunias by the front door.

Denise and her sisters Terry and Karen helped renovate the former clubhouse, from ripping up the carpet and assembling the 1950s-style tables to choosing and hanging the checkered curtains, painting windows and doors, and hanging signs – and a memorial plaque for Lena.

A six-foot section of the old clubhouse bar was retained and relocated, with ice cream parlor stools to enjoy the view out a large window. Original wood walls were also retained. Denise's brother George is the groundskeeper, and her daughters Jenna and Amanda will serve as co-managers of the new enterprise.

For now, Sundaes at Lena's will be open from May to October as an ice cream parlor, but Denise is mulling over options like children's birthday parties and other events, such as weddings and craft fairs, that could take advantage of the spacious outdoor area. She's even considering adding a mini-golf course sometime down the road.

The Mayo family conducted an extensive search to find the perfect ice cream vendor, settling on Maple Valley Creamery in Hadley, which makes ice cream from raw milk provided by their own herd of cows. The creamery sells milk, cheese, and ice cream at the farm in Hadley, but also sells wholesale around the area, including five-gallon tubs of ice cream.

Sundaes at Lena's will carry 29 flavors, including frozen yogurt, sherbet, low-fat ice cream, and a vegan lemon sorbet. Ice cream will be served in traditional scoops or in sugar cones, waffle cones, or sug-



The memory of family matriarch Lena Mayo is honored in the name of the new ice cream parlor.

ar-free cones. Patrons may customize their sundaes from a long list of add-ons including chocolate or rainbow sprinkles, Oreo crumbles, walnuts, peanuts, crushed pineapple, hot fudge, caramel, peanut butter, strawberries, butterscotch, and marshmallows.

"I want it to feel like an old-time, mom-and-pop creamery," said Denise. "It has such a nice vibe. I can feel her presence, and her love, and that's what she would have wanted."



Preparing for Help When It's Needed

By LEE WICKS

MONTAGUE CENTER – When my mother died, I searched for her address book so I could let her friends know about the service, but few were still living. Page after page contained pencil lines through familiar names from my childhood.

My mom was 89 when she passed, and she was lonely in her final years. Now I am 80, friends are getting sick, and obituaries often deliver the sad news of someone I knew. Anyone who lives long enough will be lonely, too.

Last month I wrote about funeral planning. This month I'm focusing on the transition from middle age to old age, from wellness to health challenges, and on friendships that change as our desire for adventure is replaced by a need for the comfort of the familiar.

While various media try to convince us that "you're only as old as you feel," they ignore the reality of arthritis pain, memory loss, chronic and acute illness, and fatigue. It is inspiring to go to the gym or the senior center and see people in their 90s doing their best. We should all lead full lives for as long as we can, but the definition of fulfillment changes. Sometimes, the most important thing is finding and getting help, and feeling prepared for whatever comes next.

After a lifetime of independence, asking for help and knowing where to turn is hard. After doing some research, I found a lot of useful information.

First, finding help requires some introspection: What kind of help do you need? For how long will you need it? Can your home accommodate live-in care? Do you require help with groceries, bathing, laundry, or keeping track of your medications? Perhaps a spouse needs some time for appointments and doesn't want to leave you alone. What can friends and neighbors do, and what requires a professional?

It can seem overwhelming. For people 60 and older, contacting their local senior center is a good first step. If you don't frequent the Gill-Montague senior center, it's worth a visit. The center offers health, education, and recreation programs, and essential services such as fuel assistance, food programs, tax help, and more.

You might be directed to an Elder Care Access Point in your area where consultants and case workers can assess your needs. Some deliver Meals on Wheels; others maintain a referral list of services, and supply equipment such as hospital beds, walkers or crutches. In Franklin County, call LifePath; in Hampshire County, contact Highland Valley Elder Care.

Montague also has Montague Neighbors, a local all-volunteer organization providing rides, help with

simple tasks, and more with one simple call to a dispatcher. In the case of terminal illness, hospice and palliative care professionals can help with daily tasks, ease pain and allow other family members some respite.

Family, friends, and neighbors are often just waiting to be asked and will be grateful for the opportunity to make life a little bit easier. It's asking that challenges people. When one of my friends asks for help, I am grateful for the opportunity to be useful. If no one asks, I worry about being intrusive, stopping by at the wrong time, or cooking something my friend can't eat.

Occasionally, I hear of someone who died in their sleep at 95 after a lifetime without illness or infirmity, but those stories are rare. Without meaning to sound dramatic or depressing, it's reasonable to assume that most of us will have times when we need help with daily tasks, and it's not a bad idea to look around our homes and see what might be done in anticipation.

Knee and hip replacements have become common. During recovery, some adjustments might be needed. Handrails in the shower are a good idea. Why not install one now, instead of waiting for a crisis? A lot of people have taken out their bathtubs in favor of walk-in showers.

Some friends are considering moving to single-level housing or communities that cater to the needs of elders, but most of the people I know want to stay in their homes. Local agencies like LifePath and Montague Villages help elders age in place if this is their choice.

It seems wise to prepare for a future when we will not be as independent. LifePath publishes a monthly newsletter filled with advice and resources. You can subscribe at their website or go to the senior center or the library where someone can assist with this. The Cancer Connection in Northampton has impressive resources including support groups, massage, and Reiki therapy.

People who are looking for a place to share stories, find community and connection, talk about grief, and get some spiritual and practical mending done, can attend the Grief and Mending group that meets at the Swanson's Fabric Stash House in Turners Falls on the second and fourth Monday of every month. This group, led by death doula Dina, is free to all; sewing supplies are available and everyone is welcome to stop by. Dina is happy to answer questions. Send her an email at dinastander15gmail.com.

After my last column on green burials and funeral planning, Amber Korby, the town's cemetery sexton, told me that several people bought plots. I'm hoping this month's column will provoke thought and conversation about preparing for help when it's needed.

Help. Such a simple word, and yet so hard to say.

Senior Center Activities JUNE 15 THROUGH 19

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 6/15

10:15 a.m. Aerobics
11 a.m. Chair Exercise
12:30 p.m. Kitchen Club Movie

Tuesday 6/16

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

4:30 p.m. Office Hours with Selectboard Member Marina Goldman

Wednesday 6/17

9 a.m. Veterans' Agent
10 a.m. Outdoor Yoga at the Discovery Center
10:15 a.m. Aerobics
11 a.m. Chair Exercise
12 p.m. Bring Your Lunch Bingo
1 p.m. Food Pantry in the Parking Lot
4 p.m. Mat Yoga

Thursday 6/18

9:30 a.m. AARP
Older Drivers' Class

Friday 6/19

9 a.m. Coffee with a Cop
10:15 a.m. Aerobics
11 a.m. Chair Exercise

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 6/15

9 a.m. Good for U
10 a.m. Seated Fitness
12 p.m. Pitch
1 p.m. Yoga
Tuesday 6/16
9 a.m. Stretch and Balance
10 a.m. Line Dancing
11 a.m. Social Stringer
1 p.m. Lee Evers WWII Veteran

Wednesday 6/17

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

Thursday 6/18

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

Friday 6/19

Closed for the holiday.

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 June 16. Luncheons are held on the fourth Friday of each month 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 July 1.

Call Katie Nolan at (978) 544-2306 for info or appointments. For Senior Health Rides, contact Nancy Spittle at (978) 544-6760.

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WEST ALONG from page B1

So now Sunday has come around, the promised thunderstorms never happened, and we're finding ourselves under a blue sky, high and dry. We could use the rain.

This fine June morning coaxes me out to the table under the old apple tree. This choice spot puts me right where the local bear likes to knock down the fence and come into the yard on his rounds. I keep an eye out over my left shoulder just in case.

But so far, the only visitor is...

*Mr. Bluejay, full o' sass,
In them baseball clothes o' his
Sportin' round the orchard 'jes
Like he owned the premises!*

He is joined at his breakfast orange slice by the Baltimore oriole. Between them they could inspire a ball game, if it weren't such a lovely lazy morning.

Peaches are growing slowly in

the peach tree, full of promise for some midsummer evening of vanilla ice cream and a home-grown peach. That is, of course, if the squirrels don't steal them all! They have a nasty habit of stealing tomatoes, too, half-eating them and leaving them mockingly on the back porch.

Jenny wren warbles, and the string beans sprout, soon to be wanting a pole to climb up.

All is green and lush, and who knows how long it will last? But me and the dog don't care, 'cause...

*... when June comes – Clear my
th' oat
With wild honey! – Rench my hair
In the dew! And hold my coat!
Whoop out loud! and th'ow my
hat! –
June wants me, and I'm to spare!*

(From *Knee-Deep In June*,
by James Whitcomb
Riley, 1849-1916)



HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE MONTAGUE POLICE LOG

Unwanted RVs; Railroad Boundaries; Downtown Bears; Orchid Thief; Migratory Way Missionary; New Sinkhole

Monday, 6/1

8:21 a.m. Caller states that a goose which may have a neck injury is wandering around near the parking lot on First Street. Animal control officer (ACO) located animal; it does appear to have a neck issue, but it was observed running, flying, and swimming with no issues.

1:08 p.m. Caller reports receiving threatening messages; party is sending him photos of guns and stating that he is going to come to his house and shoot him. Advised of options.

5:12 p.m. Caller from Second Street reports that there is an ongoing and active dispute happening outside between her husband and individuals who live upstairs. Caller advises that she gave the individuals a 30-day vacate order today, and the issue stems from this and other issues. Upon arrival, officer spoke with an involved party, who was intoxicated, regarding the dispute. Other involved parties leaving for a hotel for the night. Advised involved party of eviction process. Peace restored.

Tuesday, 6/2

4:39 a.m. Caller complaining about the noise that the DPW is making on Unity Street due to the cleanup of the road. Advised DPW of complaint; report taken.

8:08 a.m. Caller from Kimberly Lane states that a camper is parked on his property and he does not know whose it is. Officer made contact with vehicle owner. He is going to move it in a few minutes.

8:44 p.m. Caller from Mormon Hollow Road states that he owns a building, part of which has been condemned, and that an RV is now parked in the area of the condemned building. Caller would like the area checked and individuals moved along, as nobody should be staying at or living near the property. Officer advises nobody appears to be at the location. Vermont plate on camper called in; not returning results.

11:17 p.m. Caller states that her soon-to-be-ex-husband came to her house while she was sleeping, took her keys, and stole her 1999 Saab and is refusing to return it.

Wednesday, 6/3

6:39 p.m. 911 caller from Green Pond Road reports that a four-year-old child was struck with a vehicle; child is unconscious and injured. Transferred to Shelburne Control; police units responding. Officer reports CPR started. Life Flight requested by Turners Falls fire department; 22-minute ETA. Officer requesting state police de-

TECTIVE unit be notified.

9:52 p.m. Caller states that people are gathering at the Turners Falls High School baseball field with coolers and they shouldn't be there; requesting officers to check area. Officer checked area and moved parties along.

11:36 p.m. Caller from Hillside Road states that he is seeing a blinking red light in the woods in an area by where the trail is and is concerned. Caller called back; he realized that it was a camera he has whose batteries are dying. Cancelled *en route*.

11:43 p.m. Walk-in states she lives in the area and stuff is missing from her home. Report taken.

Thursday, 6/4

7:33 a.m. Roadmaster from Pan Am Railways would like an officer to explain to a woman who is walking her dogs on the tracks by East Main Street that she is trespassing. Roadmaster not present upon arrival. Female party advised of complaint and advised of railroad boundaries.

8:43 a.m. Off-duty officer reporting that a large amount of paint has been spilled near Turners Falls Road and Vladish Avenue; it is still wet and splashing, and some of it got onto his vehicle. DPW foreman notified.

10:55 a.m. Multiple calls about a black bear in the street and causing a traffic hazard at Second Street and Avenue A; people are out trying to look at it and take pictures. Officers checking area. ACO advising bear is secured; bear will be released on the other side of the bridge, where it came from.

1:14 p.m. Multiple calls reporting a black bear cub running around in the Food City parking lot area. Unable to locate; Environmental Police will stay in area in case it comes back.

2:02 p.m. Caller states that a turtle is trying to get across the bike path to the water behind Food City, but seems to be struggling. Referred to another agency.

2:10 p.m. Shelburne Control reports a vehicle struck a telephone pole on Bridge Street in Millers Falls and then continued into Erving before stopping to report the accident. Pole is intact, but should be checked by Eversource. Officer requesting tow for vehicle back to owner's home address. Officer checking with Eversource truck on scene. Report taken.

3:18 p.m. 911 caller reporting a disturbance on Coolidge Avenue; party is threatening to murder others and then herself. TFFD transporting party to Baystate Franklin.

8:09 p.m. Caller from

Worcester Avenue reports

that a male is wandering around the neighborhood knocking on people's doors and asking to go into their houses. States he came to her door; her husband answered, and the party told her husband that he had cut off his ankle bracelet because people are looking for him and he has warrants. Officers advised. Male has full extradition warrant via the US Marshals Service. A 43-year-old Turners Falls man was taken into custody as a fugitive from justice on a court warrant and transported to MPD station. US Marshals Service called back in advising that the male is to be transported to the Franklin County House of Corrections and to be held – on no bail, per the warrant – until they discuss next steps for him. Warrant received.

10:02 p.m. Caller reports that people are screaming outside in the T Street area and her children are trying to sleep. Officers located and spoke to involved female, who was playing music loudly. Advised to turn music down. They will be going inside.

10:13 p.m. 911 caller reporting a single-car accident on the Canal Road bridge; vehicle is on the sidewalk with airbag deployment. Second caller reporting same, but did not see airbag. Control contacted for EMS. Control advises Greenfield PD has a three-car accident on Turners Falls Road; possibly related. Montague and Greenfield PD on scene. Confirmed airbag deployment. Road shut down, then reopened.

Friday, 6/5

9:15 a.m. Caller from Greenfield Road reporting theft; states someone ripped up plants that she had around her mailbox and under a magnolia tree in her driveway and took them away. States they also entered the driveway and stole a Japanese slipper orchid that was in a pot under a different tree. Officer spoke with caller.

5:35 p.m. Caller advises that she was messaged and told by her son that his ex-girlfriend was at his location and is currently breaking windows and yelling. Officer requesting medical help to scene for an intoxicated female party, who has fallen a few times. Shelburne Control contacted and advised. TFFD transporting female. Officer spoke to property owner, advised him of the damage, and explained the process for obtaining a no-trespass order. Male expressed he would like charges pressed for the damage as well.

Saturday, 6/6

4:19 a.m. Greenfield PD received a probation warrant for a male party; when they went to serve it, they were advised he was in Montague at a cousin's house. Officers serving a warrant on Avenue C. A 50-year-old Charlemont man was arrested on a probation warrant.

8:43 a.m. 911 caller reporting a vehicle vs. pedestrian accident at Highland Street and Grout Circle. Transferred to Control. Caller reports that she witnessed the accident, and that an unattended vehicle had rolled down a hill and hit another vehicle. No pedestrian was hit, but a woman in the vehicle was injured. Confirmed no pedestrian involved. Officer requesting tow for vehicle; operator transported to hospital.

2:41 p.m. 911 caller from K Street reports that his neighbor is threatening him and his wife about parking in front of their own house. Would like an officer present to speak to her. Officer advises he spoke to parties, who wanted it on record at this time. Individuals advised of options going forward.

Sunday, 6/7

10:36 a.m. Alarm activation at Silvio O. Conte Anadromous Fish Research Center: Zone 26, fish pass building, kitchen, interior burglar alarm. Alarm company advises keyholder is *en route*. Officer spoke to biologist on scene; he tripped the alarm. Alarm company advised. Biologist also provided Montague PD with updated gate code for site info.

12:53 p.m. Report of female shouting religious-related speech near the gate on Migratory Way. Caller states that several people in the area were alarmed. Officers spoke with party, who had a positive demeanor but was advised to keep it down. Party just in a good mood spreading the word of the Lord. Advised that was OK, but not to confront other walkers.

4:57 p.m. Caller from East Chestnut Hill Road advises he has a sick-looking fox on his porch. ACO advises fox has gone into woodline.

6:01 p.m. Caller from Montague Machine reports that a sinkhole appears to be forming in Rastallis Street in front of their building. Caller states he put a cone in front of it, but it appears to be quite deep and could become a problem if someone drives over it. DPW advised; they will check it out.

8:31 p.m. Caller from Third Street reporting theft of medication and medical supplies. Services rendered.

CONCERT REVIEW

'Earth Music Theater Live'

By MELISSA WLOSTOSKI

TURNERS FALLS – On May 31, the Shea Theater hosted a very unique concert with music that had space imagery and storytelling along with it. The storytelling was from Cady Coleman, an astronaut who has been on the International Space Station. The whole concert was called Earth Music Theater.

I really like things to do with space, and I already know about Cady Coleman through her and her husband doing a question-and-answer event for the movie *The Wonderful*, a documentary shown at the Greenfield Garden Cinemas about astronauts who have been on the Space Station. Coleman also did a book signing of her memoir, *Sharing Space: An Astronaut's Guide to Mission, Wonder, and Making Change*, after that screening.

So when this event came up, it was just too tempting for me not to check it out.

The opening was interesting. A man dressed up as an astronaut gave the show's introduction, and introduced Cady Coleman as she walked on stage. She talked about the latest official space mission, Artemis.

An image of the Artemis crew appeared on the screen, along with an image of people watching that launch. More images of them appeared, along with one of the moon and a satellite in orbit. The audience appeared to eat this up.

As Coleman described being an astronaut, some of the rest of the images of astronauts in space were also in the documentary I mentioned. The band started to play mu-

sic, alongside an image of the Earth, and then another, and then one of the instruments that seemed to be keeping up a specific tone.

An image of the Earth from the space station was seen. The rest of the music, which involved a drum set, a saxophone, and a guitar, seemed to be trying to keep a certain tone as well. They made it sound kind of mystical. This was the right fit for a show like this.

The tone of the music continued to sound the same. It paused for a minute as a video appeared on the screen of an astronaut in space, and we heard her speaking. It sounded like a poem to me. The music also didn't sound off-key in any way. A flute was also played that certainly added to the mystical tone.

One image of the Earth from space was especially cool. It showed a bunch of lights, highlighting places. At that point the tempo sped up for a bit, and the music got a little more upbeat. An even cooler image was of the Earth with a green light shining out from behind it.

Another video showed the astronaut Commander Suni Williams speaking about being over the Earth. There were images of a space station in orbit, with clouds going by. Most of the images of Earth resembled a light show. A light show that had music to it.

Finally, Coleman appeared on stage again in an astronaut outfit, playing a flute. That was another moment the audience seemed to eat up. I would call it the grand finale to the concert, and the audience really loved it.

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

– William Carlos Williams

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

Our June Poetry Page

A Casual Acquaintance

From across the street I see them
Coming closer into view
I wonder if they see me
Or if they haven't got a clue

Should I stop and overtake them
A short quick wave on cue
Or let them pass, "unnoticed"
A turn of my head will do.

But then their glance gets me
As our eyes meet in the space
I can't escape, they've seen me
I must prepare to wave

But then they falter quickly
And turn the other way
I'm snubbed! A stab so deeply
There's only one thing left to say

I owe them a dagger!
They've cut me to the quick!
If I see them in the future
A murder I'll inflict!

– Anonymous
Turners Falls

The Loss

I miss you gone forever
I feel the loss complete
A hole without a surface
A longing dark, not sweet

It's something that you said and did
And I turned the other way
I couldn't look back to see you
I trudged off alone that day

The cord was cut between us
I saw it fly away
And God alone can save me
But he won't I heard him say

I think about you daily
I should not but I do
You're ageless here inside me
Still young not old and blue

The grave alone can free me
Oh please come soon and do
For I am empty here without you
There's nothing else so true

– Anonymous
Turners Falls

Clearing the Blues

They grip so well,
like they belong,
maybe they do.
But if they
are around too long,
a hot shower may
help.
So get up
and to do this loving act,
shifts gears
locked
in the downshift position.

Asking,
"what can I do in this moment to please myself?"
and doing it, (harder done than said)
make the light
in the cave
illuminate the exit.

Blues feel
large
but they are
only
one sunset
in the continuing
sunset and sunrises
of our lives

– Leona Phillips
Capitola, California

Mental Snuggling

I wrap my memories around me
and snuggle underneath.
I am warmed and cosseted and feel safe.

I pull them closely by,
remembering an event, a smell, a touch –
Memories work to warm
my grieving heart.

In times of stress or confusion or just
stumbling through life,
a little remembering seems the thing to do.
It hardly takes up space or time.
A reminder that you are not alone,
a gentle way to remember better times, less need,
warmth entering the void,
momentary support, a bit of nourishment,
a bolstering of the soul,
an infusion of comfort,
the soaking up of a spill.

– Leona Phillips
Capitola, California

Rain

It plumps up pine needles
and waters the heart of
beloved plants and weeds
and the people who care about them.

Rain, an essential part of life,
clearing the air, ameliorating
the dryness that
shrivels and shrinks.

Much like tears, rain.
much like rain, tears:
washing away pain,
releasing proteins, soothing a heart filled with sorrow,
creating space for memories
of better times.

– Leona Phillips
Capitola, California

Contributors' Notes:

Leona Phillips is a licensed Marriage and Family Therapist with an online practice. Her poetry comes to her as problem solving and pep talks, and has since the '70s. She grew up in Rhode Island, spent many years in western Mass before moving west, and currently lives in Santa Cruz County, California. Her niece, Liana, owns Scotty's On The Hill.

Anonymous is 71 and lives in Turners Falls, a transplant since 2006 from Boston. It was the best move he's ever made. Now he lives a quiet life, and for him there is nothing better. It's a good way to go.

IMAGE: WALL PAINTING FROM THE VILLA OF P. FANNIUS SYNISTOR AT BOSCOREALE, CA. 40 BCE

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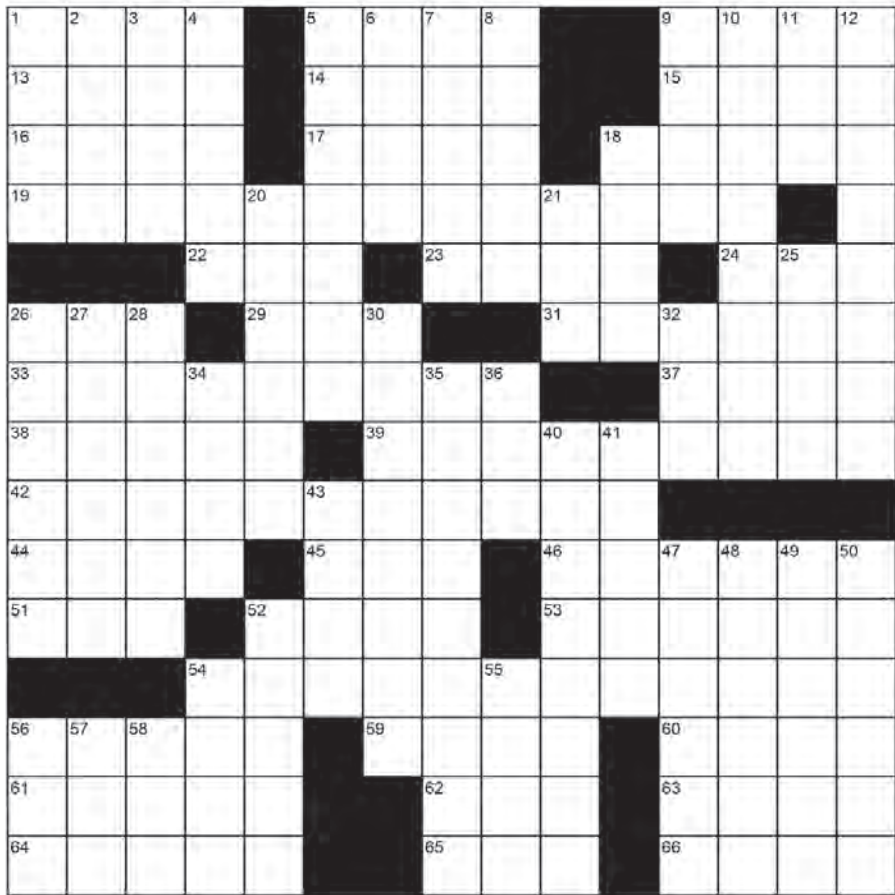
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JOEL PAXTON ILLUSTRATION

Local Gossip

threnodywilston@gmail.com



Across

- 1 Subject of Sarah Robertson's award-winning MR reporting
- 5 Cyclist's warning
- 9 Like cheese, maybe
- 13 Wild-foraged treat, recently spotted at Food City
- 14 It has Earth's highest and lowest points
- 15 One of 3 in your ear
- 16 On the briny
- 17 Bronzes
- 18 Blubbers
- 19 * Utterance of the hand with 5 fingers.
- 22 Pricey pen
- 23 "Femininomenon" musician born Kayleigh Rose Amstutz
- 24 Master's pre-req
- 26 Rum ___ Tugger ("Cats" cat)
- 29 Bobby of Boston Bruins
- 31 Ocean breeze

Down

- 33 Palm-sized blizzard
- 37 Apt name for a Dalmatian
- 38 "Rubber Ducky" crooner
- 39 Fisherman's holdings?
- 42 * Prattle of the Patch
- 44 Arduous journey
- 45 ___ glance
- 46 Bartender's tool
- 51 Potato sprout site
- 52 Latin for "let it be done"
- 53 Peter of "Lawrence of Arabia"
- 54 * Woe from Wickett Pond
- 56 Just above a D
- 59 CeCe's menu possessive
- 60 Suffix with kitchen or towel
- 61 The ___ of the Villages, MR motto, or a clue to 19-, 42-, and 54-Across
- 62 Route through Gill
- 63 Spotted
- 64 Trade shows

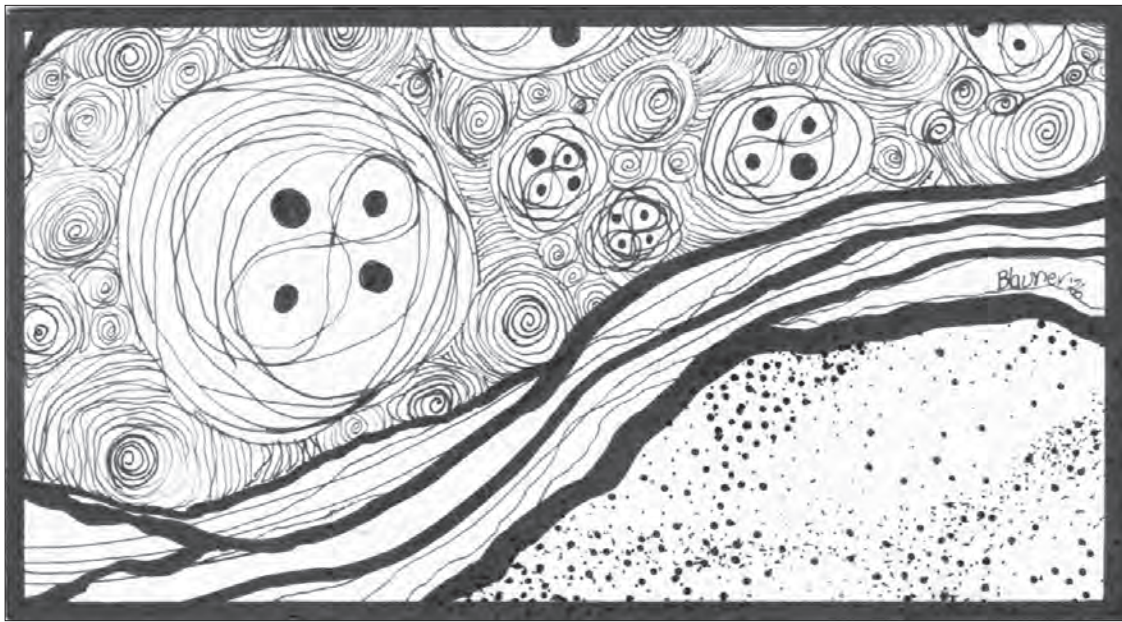
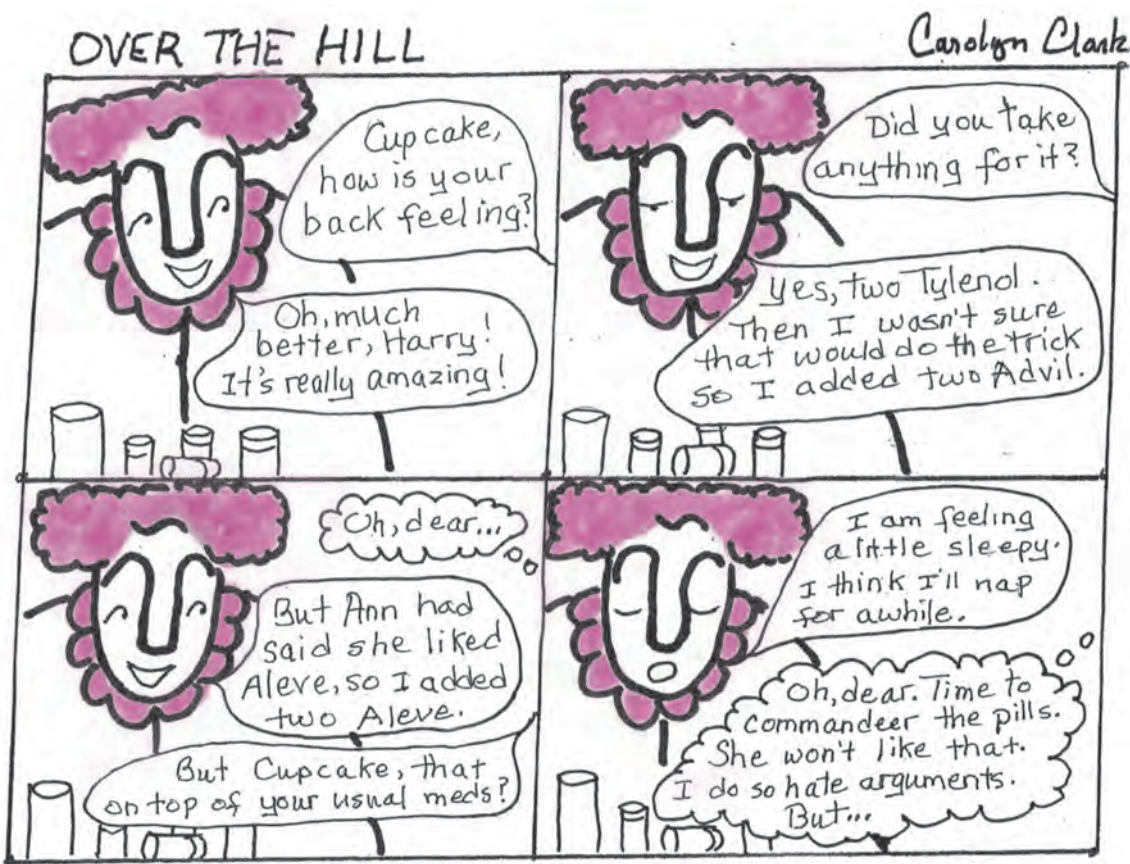
Down

- 1 Stroller
- 2 Burkina ___
- 3 Sermon's end
- 4 Sudden outpouring
- 5 One-time head of Gotham Public Library
- 6 Jacob's sibling
- 7 The Titanic, e.g.
- 8 Cattle catcher
- 9 Spell opener
- 10 Becoming more simian
- 11 Dir. from Lake Pleasant to Millers Falls
- 12 They're just
- 18 Creemee carrier
- 20 High point
- 21 More at Cocina Lupita
- 25 Some might call it an uprising
- 26 Sub-Saharan sucker
- 27 Mutinous

- 28 ___ Doctrine
- 30 "Blue Bayou" singer whose backing band became the Eagles
- 32 Word after dead, bad, or jack
- 34 ___ it (improvise)
- 35 Early adopters try them out
- 36 Abbr. at Bradley International
- 40 Regrettably, the original Jazz Singer of 1927
- 41 Variety show segments
- 43 Purple ___
- 47 Head to the setting sun
- 48 Barnyard hairstyle
- 49 One-percenters
- 50 Give in
- 52 Soirees
- 54 Dr. Pepper's hometown
- 55 Moos
- 56 Xmas ___
- 57 Comes from a kit
- 58 Sass

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THURSDAY, JUNE 11

Millers Falls Library, Millers Falls: *Recycling Myths* workshop. 4:30 p.m. Free.

LAVA Center, Greenfield: Screening, *Of Moths and Men* (2023), with local filmmaker Daniel Hales. 6 p.m. By donation.

Energy Park, Greenfield: *Jim Eagan; Joe Graveline, Nina Gross & Dust Devils; The Klines*. 6 p.m. Free.

Four Phantoms Brewery, Greenfield: *A New Blue*, open jazz jam. 6 p.m. No cover.

Northfield Mountain, Northfield: *Birds of Summer Slide Show*, with David Brown. Learn birding observation techniques during quieter months when foliage hides nests and birds are less conspicuous. 6 p.m. Free.

Four Star Farms Brewery, Northfield: *Northfield Public Library Trivia Night*. 6 p.m. Free.

Brewster Court, Northampton: *Folly of Three, Sunny D and the Tandy Originals*. 6 p.m. Free.

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

Marigold, Brattleboro: *Spikenard, Achoo, Piss-Sipper Lvl 6 Goblin Wizard X, Haitlin*. 7 p.m. Free.

Bookends, Florence: *The Star Family Singers, Emily Irving, Hoonah*. 7 p.m. By donation.

Mocha Maya's, Shelburne Falls: *Rebecca Hart Olander, Skyler Lambert*, poetry reading with an open mic. 7 p.m. Free.

Shea Theater, Turners Falls: *DJ Funky Bottoms, DJ Andujar*. In the lobby. 8 p.m. Free.

FRIDAY, JUNE 12

Discovery Center, Turners Falls: *Kidleidoscope Story Hour: Turtles*. For ages 3 to 6. 10:30 a.m. Free.

Ja'Duke Theater, Turners Falls: *JCPA Showcase*, children to seniors. 6 p.m. \$.

Incandescent Brewing, Bernardston: *Oakland Stroke*. 6 p.m. No cover.

Discovery Center, Turners Falls: *On the Lam*. Benefits the Friends of the Great Falls Discovery Center. 7 p.m. By donation.

Peskeompskut Park, Turners Falls: Movie, *How to Train Your Dragon* (2025). Meet a real bearded dragon and other reptiles from Reptile Nook, 7 p.m.; movie at 8 p.m. Free.

LAVA Center, Greenfield: Play reading, *Sidney Truant*, written by Vanessa Query and directed by Tracy Grammer. 7 p.m. \$.

THCC, Easthampton: *Feminine Aggression, Phantom Ocean, Modern Ego*. 7 p.m. \$.

Brick House, Turners Falls: *Moss Boy, Porcelain, Grazer, Bassal*. 7:30 p.m. \$.

33 Hawley, Northampton: *Asteroid B-612: A Love Story*, performance by the Hatchery Dance Company. 7:30 p.m. \$.

CitySpace, Easthampton: *Levyosn*. 7:30 p.m. \$.

Deja Brew, Wendell: *Masala Jazz*. 8 p.m. No cover.

Stone Church, Brattleboro: *Black Uhuru*. 8 p.m. \$.

Marigold, Brattleboro: *Kivimäe, The Bandit Queen of Sorrows, Vanna Pacella Power Trio*. 8 p.m. \$.

Rendezvous, Turners Falls: *Blood Bucket*. 9:30 p.m. No cover.



MIKE JACKSON PHOTO

Somehow the grand ribbon-cutting at Unity Skatepark was... a decade ago? On Saturday at 2 p.m. a memorial skateboard will be dedicated to Jason Page, and a very solid lineup of bands starts at 2:30 p.m. All ages, free, good for you.

Iron Horse, Northampton: *Film & Gender, AFK, Letters of Marque*. 10:30 p.m. \$.

SATURDAY, JUNE 13

Lake Pleasant: *Community-Wide Tag Sale*. 8 a.m. to 1 p.m. \$

Peskeompskut Park, Turners Falls: *Great Falls Farmers Market*. SNAP accepted. 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. \$.

Magic Wings Butterfly Conservatory, Deerfield: *Grand Reopening*. Family activities, farm animals, vendors, food. 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. \$.

Pratts Field, Bernardston: *Flutie 5K for Autism*. Kids' race at 10:15 a.m., adults' race at 10:30 a.m. By donation.

Northfield Mountain, Northfield: *Herb Walk* with Jade Alicandro. Register at www.tinyurl.com/nmherbwalk. 10:30 a.m. Free.

Carnegie Library, Turners Falls: *Local History Librarian Support*. 12 p.m. Free.

Downtown Greenfield: *Franklin County Pride Parade*. 12 p.m. Free.

Energy Park, Greenfield: *Kristen Ford, Parris, Indë, Mz. October Maylay, Rocky Snyder, Zoe Lemos, Star Lane Sox*, more. Franklin County Pride Festival. 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. \$

Unity Park, Turners Falls: *Unity Skatepark 10-Year Anniversary Show*. Memorial skateboard dedication, 2 p.m.; music, *Rocking Puppies, Film & Gender, Feminine Aggression, Slob Drop, Jeanines*, 2:30 p.m. Free.

Ja'Duke Theater, Turners Falls: *JCPA Showcase*. 2 p.m. \$.

33 Hawley, Northampton: *Asteroid B-612: A Love Story*, performance by the Hatchery Dance Company. 2 p.m. \$

Polish Center of Discovery and Learning, Chicopee: *Exploring Polish Genealogical Journeys*, with genealogist Robert Pine. Discussion, genealogy assistance, crafts, guided tour. Door prize, light refreshments. 2 to 4:30 p.m. By donation.

EXHIBITS

Waterway Arts, Turners Falls: *Please Touch*, participatory works by 15 artists, through August 7.

Discovery Center, Turners Falls: *Nature's Colors*, landscape and floral paintings in an abstract and expressionistic style by Kate Marion Lapierre, through June 28.

Montague Center Library, Montague: *The Divine Lives in You*, paintings and upcycled works by Donna Estabrooks, through July.

Sawmill River Arts, Montague: *Nature's Magic*, abstract landscapes by TL LaFleur; through July. *Cara Finch Trunk Show*, one-day show of whimsical paintings, this Saturday, June 13.

Leverett Library, Leverett: *Convergence*, pastel and acrylic paintings by the Friends Who Paint group, through June.

Leverett Crafts & Arts, Leverett: *Merry Melange*, creations by Mary Schreiber in media, including ceramic, pastel, polymer clay, and found or upcycled materials, through June.

LAVA Center, Greenfield: *Chaos on a Plate Presents The Rainbow Arc - Phase 1: Violet*, paintings by Donna Barrett, through July with an opening reception this Saturday, June 13, from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. *The Peace Birds Exhibit*, artistic and community responses to ongoing events in Palestine, through July.

Looky Here, Greenfield: *Emily Holt and Chris Davis*, visiting artists in residence through July. Reception Friday, June 26; closing event July 31.

Mill District Local Art, North Amherst: Forty-plus artists show work on the theme of *Charmed*, through June 25.

Gallery A3, Amherst: *Gesture and Line*, paintings by Karen Iglehart, through June.

Shelburne Arts Coop, Shelburne Falls: *Shimmer*, new-mixed media work by Nina Rossi incorporating colorshifting glass rhinestones, through July 6.

Salmon Falls Gallery, Shelburne: *Q Li Holmes*, recent paintings by the Ashfield artist; *Stay in the Day and Have the Long View*, mixed media by Dale Schwarz. Both through June.

Elusie Gallery, Easthampton: *Below and Within*, Julie Kumble of Montague and Martha Brouwer of Hadley explore the underwater world, through June.

CALL FOR ART

Bridge of Flowers Show & Sale: Apply by August 11 for the fourth annual art show in support of the Shelburne Falls landmark. Work must be for sale, with the option to donate all or some of the proceeds to the Bridge of Flowers. Details and registration at bridgeofflowersmass.org. Exhibit will be held August 14 to 16.

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CALENDAR



looking forward...

SUNDAY, JUNE 21

Epsilon Spires, Brattleboro: Documentary, *Maintenance Artist* (2025), discussion with director Toby Perl Frielich. 7:30 p.m. \$.

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 24

Holyoke Media, Holyoke: *Downtown Boys, Perennial*. 7 p.m. \$.

SATURDAY, JUNE 27

Brick House, Turners Falls: *Klezmer Music Workshop*. Emphasis on improvisation, self-expression, spirituality. Register at weathervane.community.arts@gmail.com. 1 p.m. By donation.

Peskeompskut Park, Turners Falls: *Guachinangos, Minqi Wang, Myrtle Street Klezmer*. 4 p.m. Free.

THURSDAY, JULY 2

Great Falls Harvest, Turners Falls: *Miranda & The Spatulas, Animal Piss It's Everywhere*. 8 p.m. \$.

FRIDAY, JULY 3

Tree House Brewing, Deerfield: *Mind Left Body*, Fourth of July fireworks. 5:30 p.m. \$.

SATURDAY, JULY 11

Deja Brew, Wendell: *Rhythm Inc., Amandla, Rebelle, Drums of Passion, SoulKeys, Wheel Out, Wendell Warriors, Root Fiyah*, many more. Wendell Reggae Fest. 2 p.m. \$.

TUESDAY, JULY 21

Tanglewood, Lenox: "Weird Al" Yankovic, *Puddle's Pity Party*. 7 p.m. \$\$.

FRIDAY, JULY 24

Hutghi's, Westfield: *Creative Writing, Marathon 77, Folly of Three, Concussionists*. 7 p.m. \$.

SUNDAY, AUGUST 9

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

SATURDAY, AUGUST 29

CitySpace, Easthampton: *Chicha Libre, DJ Bongohead*. 8 p.m. \$.

FRI-SUN, SEPTEMBER 4-6

Millers Falls Rod & Gun Club, Montague: *Monolord, Dwarves, Dopethrone, Savage Master, Squid Pisser, Void*, many more. Details at rpmfest.org.

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 18

Big E Court of Honor Stage, West Springfield: *Uncle Kracker*. 8 p.m. \$\$.

Floodwater Brewing, Shelburne Falls: *Psychedelic Farm Girls*. 4 p.m. No cover.

The National Spiritual Alliance, Lake Pleasant: *James Bird, Melanie Blackbird, Eric Phelps*. 5 p.m. By donation.

Ja'Duke Theater, Turners Falls: *JCPA Showcase*, children to seniors. 6 p.m. \$.

Wendell Town Common, Wendell: *Misfit Prom Parade* begins. 6 p.m. Free.

Montague Common Hall, Montague Center: Open mic, featured performers *Orlen and Gabriel*. 6:15 p.m. By donation.

Deja Brew, Wendell: *Wendell Misfit Prom*. This year's theme: "That '70s Prom." Music by *Lady Pop, Carol Devine and the Mighty Fine*; food by Diemand Farm. Benefit for Good Neighbors. 6:30 p.m. \$.

Shea Theater, Turners Falls: *Start Making Sense*, early Talking Heads tribute. 7 p.m. \$.

Brick House, Turners Falls: *babe wait, Jetties, Lou Marie, The Freeps*. Fundraiser for Great Falls Books Through Bars. 7 p.m. \$.

All Souls Church, Greenfield: *Reggie Harris*. 7 p.m. \$.

LAVA Center, Greenfield: Play reading, *Come Slowly Emily!*, written by Allison Reding and directed by Jesse Fair. 7 p.m. \$.

THCC, Easthampton: *Murder(Sword), Husbandry, Astral Bitch*. 7 p.m. \$.

Nova Arts, Keene: *Soggy Po' Boys, Mr. Bill's Bluegrass Band*. 7 p.m. \$.

1794 Meetinghouse, New Salem: *Mad Agnes*. 7:30 p.m. \$.

33 Hawley, Northampton: *Asteroid B-612: A Love Story*. 7:30 p.m. \$.

Iron Horse, Northampton: *Mary Lambert, Silvie's Okay*. 8 p.m. \$.

Rendezvous, Turners Falls: *Proairesis Duo*. 9:30 p.m. No cover.

SUNDAY, JUNE 14

Discovery Center, Turners Falls: *Pride Hike*. Meet outdoors for a 2.6-mile guided hike along the canalside rail trail. Ages 10 and up. 10 a.m. Free.

Ja'Duke Theater, Turners Falls: *JCPA Showcase*, children to seniors. 2 p.m. \$.

Unnameable Books, Turners Falls: *Shanta Lee Honeycutt, Janet MacFadyen, Rebecca Hart Olander*. Readings. 3 p.m. Free.

1794 Meetinghouse, New Salem: *Quartetto Mambo*. 4 p.m. \$.

Feeding Tube Records, Florence: *Gracious Calamity, nen specialist*. 5 p.m. By donation.

Whately Community Center, Whately: *Dúa Da Pel*. 6 p.m. \$.

Rendezvous, Turners Falls: *Buckingham Rabbits Karaoke*. 8 p.m. No cover.

MONDAY, JUNE 15

Montague Center Library, Montague: *Book Club, George Orwell, Animal Farm*. 4 p.m. Free.

Tree House Brewing, Deerfield: *Dark Star Orchestra*. 6 p.m. \$.



Reggie Harris, the upstate New York folksinger and storyteller best known for past collaborations combining traditional songs with songwriting about history, gives a concert this Saturday at the Unitarian church in Greenfield.

Wendell Free Library, Wendell: *Fiber Arts & Mending Circle*. 6:30 p.m. Free.

Peskeompskut Park, Turners Falls: *Montague Community Band*. 7 p.m. Free.

TUESDAY, JUNE 16

Greenfield Public Library, Greenfield: *Food Accessibility Panel* with Kirsten Leavitt of Stone Soup, Cathy Stanton of Quabbin Harvest, Kristina Mullin of the Food Bank of Western MA, and Caro Roszell of American Farmland Trust. Register at www.tinyurl.com/foodpanelgpl. 5:30 p.m. Free.

Tree House Brewing, Deerfield: *Dark Star Orchestra*. 6 p.m. \$.

Wendell Free Library, Wendell: Documentary, *Earth's Greatest Enemy* (2025). 6:30 p.m. Free.

134 Elliot, Brattleboro: *beetsblog, Osprey, Emily Irving*. Benefit for 69A. 7 p.m. By donation.

Daily Operation, Easthampton: *BASIC, Slant of Light*. 7 p.m. \$.

Palladium, Worcester: *Coheed and Cambria, Arm's Length, Kaonashi*. 7:30 p.m. \$\$.

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 17

Dickinson Library, Northfield: *Live Ducks*. 3 p.m. Free.

Porter-Phelps-Huntington House, Hadley: *Rosemary Caine and The Wilde Irish Shenanigans*. 6:30 p.m. \$.

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

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

CitySpace, Easthampton: *Lomelda, Plume Girl, Home Baker*. 8 p.m. \$.

THURSDAY, JUNE 18

Gill-Montague Senior Center, Turners Falls: *AARP Driver Safety Course*. Learn the current rules of the road, defensive driving, new features in cars, and more. Contact (413) 863-9357 or coa@montague-ma.gov to register. Bring lunch; beverages provided. 9:30 a.m. to 3 p.m. Free.

Discovery Center, Turners Falls: *Nice & Easy Walk*. 10 a.m. Free.

All Souls Church, Greenfield: Author talk, *Claiming Earth as Common Ground: The Ecological Crisis Through the Lens of Faith* by Rabbi Andrea Cohen-Kiener. Discussion follows. 12:30 p.m. Free.

Peskeompskut Park, Turners Falls: *Open Mic and Karaoke*. Musicians, poets, performers welcome. Food available. 4 p.m. Free.

Energy Park, Greenfield: *133 Skeele, Hope Street, Little Wild Bouquet*. 6 p.m. Free.

New Salem Public Library, New Salem: *The Beauty and Magic of the Celtic Harp* with *Ina Peebles*. 6:30 p.m. Free.

Wendell Meetinghouse, Wendell: *Spirit Circle* featuring Shell Hines. 7 p.m. By donation.

LAVA Center, Greenfield: *Open Stage*. Similar to an open mic, artists share theater, dance, music, spoken word, and more. Five-minute limit. Sign-up at 6:30 p.m., show at 7 p.m. By donation.

Palladium, Worcester: *WORM, Ancient Death*. 7 p.m. \$.

Iron Horse, Northampton: *J Mascis, Deloyd Elze*. 8 p.m. \$.

FRIDAY, JUNE 19

Discovery Center, Turners Falls: *Kidleidoscope Story Hour: Hummingbirds*. Ages 3 to 6. 10:30 a.m. Free.

Franklin County Fairgrounds, Greenfield: *Charley Crockett, The War and Treaty, Kashus Culpepper, Lila Iké, Southern Avenue, Swamp Dogg*, many more. 1 p.m. \$\$.

St. Kaz, Turners Falls: *Paw Paw Club*, with vegan sandwiches and chowder, DJs. 6 to 10 p.m. No cover.

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

Nova Arts, Keene: *Wolfman Jack, Grateful Dead* tribute; *Jair Rohm Parker Wells & Dei Xhrist*, tribute to Ned Lagin's *Seastones*. 6:30 p.m. \$.

LAVA Center, Greenfield: Play reading, *The Hungry Ghosts...*, written by CL Dukes and directed by Lauren Stock. 7 p.m. \$.

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

Rendezvous, Turners Falls: *Ollie Schechter, Magick Lantern, Bo Malcolm, Blue Ranger*. 9:30 p.m. \$.

SATURDAY, JUNE 20

Franklin County Fairgrounds, Greenfield: *Spoon, The Beths, Kurt Vile & The Violators, Tunde Adebimpe, Pawpaw Rod, Ratboys, Folk Bitch Trio, Entran de L'Air*, many more. 11 a.m. \$\$

Discovery Center, Turners Falls: *Favorite Storybook Character Day*. Art projects inspired by storybook characters. Materials provided, costumes encouraged. All ages. 1 p.m. Free.

Dickinson Library, Northfield: *Ice Cream Social* with music by *Eli Elkus*. 3 to 5 p.m. Free.

Epsilon Spires, Brattleboro: *Shape-Note Sing* with Stefan Amidon. Benefit for Rick Falcon memorial expenses. Singing school, 3 p.m., singing, 4 p.m. By donation.

Four Phantoms Brewery, Greenfield: *North Street Collective*. 6 p.m. No cover.

Millers Falls Rod & Gun Club, Montague: *Chick'n Wire*. 7 p.m. \$.

Mount Toby Friends Meetinghouse, Leverett: *Joe Crookston*. 7 p.m. \$.

LAVA Center, Greenfield: Play reading, *Calling*, written by Patricia Crosby and directed by Penney Hulten. 7 p.m. \$.

THCC, Easthampton: *Epicenter, Slaughtersun, Ice Giant*. 7 p.m. \$.

1794 Meetinghouse, New Salem: *Crys Matthews*. 7:30 p.m. \$.

Next Stage Arts, Putney: *Tone Forest*. 7:30 p.m. \$.

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CATHY STANTON PHOTO

"This was an early-morning visitor to our place in the Wendell woods," reader Cathy Stanton writes. "Maybe looking to catch up on the week's human news?"

HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE GILL POLICE LOG

Foot Pursuit; Road Rage; Sweat

Friday, 5/1
7:01 p.m. Main Road caller reported a car in a driveway on the wrong side of the road with its blinker on. Checked OK.

Saturday, 5/2
7:36 p.m. West Gill Road caller complained of neighbors riding very loud ATVs.

Sunday, 5/3
7:35 p.m. Assisted Montague PD with shoplifting suspect, Third Street. Short foot pursuit. Assisted checking the area.

Monday, 5/4
11:12 a.m. Assisted Montague PD on the Turners Falls-Gill Bridge with a BOLO for an individual regarding the shoplifting incident yesterday.

3:30 p.m. West Gill Road resident reported past dog bite.

Tuesday, 5/5
8:32 a.m. Two-car accident, Deacon Parker Road and Route 10.

9:46 a.m. French King Highway caller reported speeding, road rage.

3:38 p.m. Tractor-trailer driver reported a black Camry brake-checked him on the Turners Falls-Gill Bridge, forcing a dead stop and causing the truck to stall. Car continued toward Turners. Montague PD advised.

Wednesday, 5/6
12:24 a.m. Medical emergency, Main Road.

12:37 a.m. Munn's Ferry Road caller reports a male outside his residence yelling and shining lights. Transferred to state police.

Thursday, 5/7
12:58 p.m. Minor accident, French King Highway. One vehicle off road; driver made arrangements. Second vehicle drove away.

3:19 p.m. Report of a truck and trailer failing to stay in lanes, French King Highway. Trailer had no plate. Stopped the vehicle; no impairment; showed proof of registration. Advised plate needed to be attached to trailer.

Tuesday, 5/12
1:40 p.m. Assisted regional health agent, Main Road.

8:03 p.m. Abandoned 911 call, Elm Street. Accidental activation from an Apple Watch.

Wednesday, 5/13
4:15 p.m. Medical emergency, Elm Street.

Thursday, 5/14
7:28 a.m. French King Highway caller reported a maroon Impala ran a red light, almost rear-ended the caller, and crashed into a phone pole and curb. One person exited the vehicle.

8:31 a.m. Assisted EMS, FD with medical call, Mountain Road.

5:05 p.m. Dispatch forwarded 911 call regarding a gold Corolla parked in the right lane with its hazards on, French King Highway. Operator appeared to be slumped over.

Friday, 5/15
3:47 p.m. Report that a delivery truck struck a parked vehicle and left, Lamplighter Way.

Saturday, 5/16
5:23 p.m. Paperwork service, River Road.

5:36 p.m. Paperwork service, French King Highway.

Sunday, 5/17
11:35 a.m. Report that motorcycles struck the rear of a car, French King Highway. Multiple other motorcycles continued driving. Operator confirmed he was in the struck vehicle. EMS evaluated; transport refused; summons issued.

Tuesday, 5/19
10:13 a.m. Medical emergency, Walnut Street.

11:46 a.m. Assisted regional health agency, Main Road. Property condemned.

1:17 p.m. Tractor-trailer snagged low lines, Main Road. Area coned off for utility response.

2:45 p.m. Officer assisted Eversource while crews raised wire off the roadway.

Wednesday, 5/20
7:28 a.m. Motorist found a dog on Route 2 wearing a harness but no tags. Transported to shelter.

Thursday, 5/21
6:45 p.m. Complaint of child riding dirt bike between Wagon Wheel and Gill Mill.

6:59 p.m. Barton Cove Road caller complained about loud vehicles at a car show.

Monday, 5/25
4:59 p.m. Loose Doberman reported on the French King Highway near the Fall River Bridge. Dog safely recaptured by its owners.

Tuesday, 5/26
9:55 a.m. Callers reporting a male in dark clothing who appeared to be sweating profusely walking near the French King Bridge.

2:19 p.m. Documents received re: vehicle repossession, Main Road.

Thursday, 5/28
8:30 a.m. Injured deer in roadway, Pisgah Mountain Road.

9:18 a.m. Tree crew vehicle found in roadway near Main and Mountain roads. Crew moved the vehicle.

Saturday, 5/30
10:59 p.m. Multiple motorists reported a cow on the side of West Gill Road. Message left for the farm.

Sunday, 5/31
9:43 a.m. South Cross Road resident reported someone attempted to break into his home during the night.

11:33 a.m. CO hazard, Boyle Road.

FRONT OF THE LINE from page B1

thriving individuals in the community, and from that she built her business to inspire the next generation of business leaders. She has been doing this work for 30 years, and she believes she is supporting the next generation by being available to them, opening doors, and most importantly being a good listener.

She tends to use her own life story when she speaks to adults, because as a single mother she went through various ups and downs. She even went back to school with two young babies, but was motivated to keep pushing forward despite her circumstances.

This is the same message she shares with the young people she works with: never give up, and always aspire to be greater.

I went further to ask Ayanna about advice she would give to someone wanting to make a difference. "I would tell them to get involved in your community," she replied. "Everyone has an opportunity to get involved if they take advantage of it. So just Get Up and Do It."

Ayanna said she tends to measure her professional success by whether the people she works with succeed in their individual endeavors. For instance, she speaks a lot about her goals for herself and for her programming. When I asked her what she would like to fulfill, she mentioned that in the short term she would like to become a public author, and that in the long term she would like to leave a legacy for children by obtaining property or opening a business in another town or county.

She also said that both her parents were instrumental in her growth. Ayanna's mother was from the North and was socially conscientious and deeply ingrained in her community. She believed that you must be economically secure to leave a legacy for your children. Her

father, she said, was from the South, and was more corporate-mainstream; he believed you have to "push" in order to make it work.

Ayanna continued that both of her parents had an impact on who she is today, and on the work she implements in the community. She is both conscientious about her community and believes you have to work hard in order to be successful. She now shares this recipe for success with others, along with ways for them to become successful in their individual goals and business opportunities.

In closing, Ayanna said that her motivation for everything she does comes from a spiritual place. She says prayers and daily affirmations, and leads a robust spiritual life in which she places her spirituality above all other things. Doing so tends to give her a positive outlook on situations: where others may see a closed door, she always sees a new opportunity.

She added that she would like our readers to know that work is intentional, and beneficial to the community. "If community work is something you want to do," she said, "do it, and keep pushing. Don't ever leave your mission or your passion. And always remember that when no one is watching you or paying attention, and you continue to do the work that no one asks you to do - that's your mission."

You can find Ayanna Crawford, the Take the Mic program, and AC Consulting and Media on all social media platforms. She is also looking for volunteers, so if you're interested, feel free to send her a message.

In our summer edition of *Front of the Line*, we will be speaking with Amanda Sanderson of the Resilience Center of Franklin County, formerly known as NELCWIT.



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