

# QUABOAG CURRENT

REGION

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Friday, April 4, 2025

## STEAM night hosted at North Brookfield High School

By Ryan Drago  
Staff Writer  
rdrago@turley.com

NORTH BROOKFIELD – North Brookfield Public Schools hosted a STEAM night for family friends to enjoy this past week.

The family night involved hands-on activities for the whole family featuring rockets, robotics, science experiments, games, music and a lot of educational fun. Superintendent Tim McCormick said this was the first time the North Brookfield Public Schools has hosted a STEAM night and is a gateway to new programs and opportunities for students.

“STEAM technology at their fingertips,” as McCormick described it.

Many students from kindergarten to 12<sup>th</sup> grade got to enjoy some hands-on activities involving art, science, technology, engineering, and mathematics.

STEAM is an integrated



STEAM family night took place on March 25 at North Brookfield High School. Kids got to design their own murals.

TURLEY PHOTO BY RYAN DRAGO

approach to learning that engages students in collaboration and creatively solving real world problems through communication and critical thinking skills. STEAM is a way to help students prepare

for higher education and early work experiences.

Soon the North Brookfield Public Schools will be integrating many fun educational programs next year and will feature courses

falling under the five layers of STEAM. Many staff members were wearing “Get AMP’d Up” shirts during

See STEAM NIGHT  
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## Planning Board reviews local code assessment

By Paula Ouimette  
Editor  
pouimette@turley.com

STURBRIDGE – Town Planner Jean Bubon said since last June, Tighe & Bond has been working with the town to do an assessment of local code, including the review of by-laws, wetland regulations, subdivision regulations and more.

“Basically, to see if we could be doing better,” Bubon said at the March 24 Planning Board meeting. “If we could be implementing more green techniques, could we be creating less pavement... what could we be doing to protect the environment; cut down on the impervious surface.”

Bubon said some of the recommendations to achieve this is to reduce the size of parking spaces and implement a maximum parking requirement, and encourage land banking.

She said the town’s re-

quirements were reviewed using Mass Audubon standards and earned a lot of “better” and “best” practices, in addition to “conventional.”

“I was pretty happy,” Bubon said of the results.

Bubon said some of the recommendations made include revising the zoning bylaws, implementing a maximum number of parking spaces, limiting parking stall size to 30% of the current requirement and low-impact storm-water management techniques.

Bubon said they can consider these recommendations, but they don’t have to implement them.

Bubon said other recommendations include the updating of subdivision regulations, which is something she has been wanting to do anyway.

She said the assessment also recommended that driveway width be reduced to nine feet, but she rec-

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## School Committee hears update on pilot program

By Paula Ouimette  
Editor  
pouimette@turley.com

NORTH BROOKFIELD – Special education teacher Channing LeBlanc gave the School Committee an update on CATLab (Creative Action and Thinking), an innovative, interdisciplinary STEAM overlay programming which has been funded by the Mass Cultural Council.

The CATLab is in its pilot year at the elementary school, pairing artists and musicians with classrooms to combine the curriculum being taught with the creative arts.

At the March 24 meeting, LeBlanc said the teachers who participated in the pilot program, said they wanted to use music to reinforce the English Language Arts curriculum. By doing this, the students were able to create and record songs that tied into classroom lessons.

A video of each participating class was filmed of this process, with students and musicians singing and performing. LeBlanc, who is also a musician and an alumni of the Cool Kids Choir, spoke about the positive ex-

perience of performing with the students.

LeBlanc said she hopes the program can be expanded through grants and continue to grow, with the goal of having artists coming into the school every day and the CATLab involving the middle and high school students.

“We’re excited about the potential here,” Superintendent Tim McCormick said of the program.

### Review of library books

McCormick presented a list of 738 new books that have been added to the elementary school’s library to the School Committee.

School Committee members Ralph Kay and Tonya Matthews shared concerns about some of the books on the list and said they would like to further review the catalog, and whether or not some of the books were appropriate for younger readers.

Matthews said parents should know what books their children have access to in the school library. Kay said one book, “A Good Kind of Trouble”, has been banned in other schools.

McCormick said the list of books are age appropri-

ate and were vetted by the school’s librarian with oversight from both the previous and current elementary school principals.

“We do want to offer an array of books that we feel are educationally appropriate for students,” McCormick said.

Three of the School Committee members requested to see a list of the full library catalog (not just the newest additions), in order to review the titles.

“It’s worth reviewing,” School Committee Chair John Magario said.

The School Committee will continue the discussion about the library’s books at its next meeting.

### Questions about school budget

Town Accountant Shiela LeBlanc asked if the School Committee had re-voted the proposed school budget after clerical adjustments were found in the original proposal. Magario said the committee will not be voting on a final budget until contract negotiations with unions have

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PAGE 6

## Dracula arrived in New Braintree

Theatre Guild performs humorous spoof of classic tale

By Ryan Drago  
Staff Writer  
rdrago@turley.com

NEW BRAINTREE – It’s show time as the Theatre Guild of North Brookfield presents “Dracula: A Comedy of Terrors”.

The creative team behind this unorthodox and comical spinoff of Bram Stoker’s Gothic horror novel is Missy McDonald as director, Derek Ingalls as producer and Joe Chenevert as executive producer. McDonald has been performing for the Theatre Guild of North Brookfield for over 20 years, and this was her first time directing a show for the guild.

McDonald was also part of the cast as the narrator for the show. She gave an excellent introduction before the audience was “locked in” the Town Hall for the show.

Instead of fright and horror the audience was exposed to joy and laughter. Jay Valencourt played the mysterious and yet hilarious Count Dracula.

The story is set when Count Dracula is greeted by



TURLEY PHOTO BY RYAN DRAGO

“Dracula: A Comedy of Terrors” was performed this past weekend at New Braintree Town Hall. Shown on stage is Sarah Priestley, left, as Lucy Westfeldt, Adam Baker as Jonathan, and Shelley Ingalls as Mina Westfeldt.

a timid real estate salesman Jonathan Harker, played by Adam Baker, who sells properties to the shadowy Count. Dracula is convinced to leave the Carpathian Mountains in Transylvania to go to London and pursue Jonathan’s fiancée, Lucy Westfeldt.

Dracula would then make his way into the Westfeldt household where he meets Lucy, played by Sarah Priestley, Mina Westfeldt (Shelley Ingalls), and Dr. Westfeldt (Derek Ingalls). Mina falls mysteriously ill,

and the entire family must investigate and seek the help of a doctor.

What adds to the humor of this comedy version is some of the cast play multiple roles. Derek Ingalls also plays the butler and patient of Dr. Westfeldt, Renfield. When the illness of Mina Westfeldt grows, the Westfeldt family seeks the help of Dr. Van Helsing, who is played by Shelley Ingalls.

The crew did an amazing job putting the show together.

See DRACULA PAGE 5

## Sewer Superintendent seeks funding for plant clarifiers

By Paula Ouimette  
Editor  
pouimette@turley.com

NORTH BROOKFIELD – Sewer Superintendent Eric Cardenas appeared before the Board of Selectmen to seek support to apply for a federal grant in order to complete necessary work at the wastewater treatment plant.

At the March 25 meeting, Cardenas explained that the

original scope of work for the wastewater treatment plant upgrade included the replacement of the mechanisms in two secondary clarifiers, but this was not included due to lack of funds.

He said the replacement is estimated at \$1.7 million.

“It’s basically just a large tank that allows the velocity of the water to slow down and allows the solids to settle to the bottom and the clear liquid to go over the

top and down to the next process,” he said.

Cardenas said the clarifiers’ mechanisms are in poor condition, and about 35 years old. He said one is leaking oil.

“They don’t have very much life left to them,” Cardenas said of the clarifiers. “They’re an essential piece of the process...without them you pretty much don’t have treatment.”

Cardenas said he is look-

ing to apply for Congressionally Directed Spending through the Rural Development Community Facilities Program to pay for the upgrade. He asked for the board’s approval to move forward with the grant application and to have them draft a letter of support.

Cardenas said there is a 25% local match for the grant, if approved. He said they would need to dip into the department’s retained

earnings to cover the cost of the match.

The deadline for the grant is March 31. The board voted to approve and sign the letter of support to send to Senator Elizabeth Warren’s office.

### New Highway Department hire

Highway Superintendent Randy Morgan recommended the board approve the hiring of Eric Josephson as a heavy equipment op-

erator with an April 1 start date.

“He has all the qualifications that we’re looking for,” Morgan said.

### Spending requests

The Board of Selectmen approved a request to spend \$500 to have CM Geeks upgrade the hard disk drives to solid state drives to increase computer speeds and extend their lifespan.

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- community -

# C4R prepares for 2025 waterway season

Work to begin on new section of Lower Quaboag Blue Trail

By Paula Ouimette  
Editor  
pouimette@turley.com

PALMER – The Chicopee 4Rivers Watershed Council held its spring kickoff meeting this past Sunday, sharing details about water quality sampling, river restoration and cleanups, plans for a new section of Blue Trail and volunteer opportunities.

Coordinator of C4R Keith Davies welcomed people to the Palmer Historical Cultural Center in Three Rivers on March 30 and shared the history of the watershed council, which started in 2014.

Davies said at that time, the existing Chicopee River Watershed Council was mostly defunct, and he saw an opportunity to revive it and also connect it with rivers upstream. By combining the Swift, Ware, Quaboag and Chicopee rivers, the Chicopee 4Rivers Watershed Council was formed.

The Chicopee River Watershed is the largest in the commonwealth and the largest in the Connecticut River basin.

“In 2014 we did a lot of outreach,” Davies said. “We started initially with water quality monitoring.”

Davies explained the purpose of water quality sampling, which tests area waterways for bacteria to determine if the water is safe for swimming and other recreation.

“Sampling for bacteria became a basic, simple way of giving people an idea of how healthy the river is,” he said.

This year, C4R will continue its water sampling program at an expanded level, testing almost 25 sites seven times from late spring through late summer. These efforts are made possible by a group of volunteers who visit the sites on a regular basis to collect water samples.

Grant funding will help C4R sample more sites along the Quaboag River. Dona-



tionals also help to support the project.

Water quality is listed for “primary” or “secondary” use, with primary being safe for swimming and secondary for boating or fishing.

Davies said both Quaboag Pond in Brookfield and East Brookfield and Forest Lake in Palmer, have some of the lowest bacteria counts in the watershed, with numbers usually staying the in the single digits.

Davies said the Connecticut River Conservancy uses the data collected by the volunteers for its “Is it Clean?” database found on its website, c4river.org. Results are posted on Fridays after Thursday samplings.

Volunteers also monitor the water temperature when they are collecting water samples, but Davies said it will take years to track any differences caused by climate change.

C4R also works to establish and maintain the Blue Trail, which has sections along all of the rivers in the watershed.

This year, C4R is focusing on creating a new section, the Lower Quaboag, spanning from Route 67 to Laviolette Park. This effort will be funded through a Mass Trails grant.

The new section will start at an old rest area on Route 67, passing through to Water Street, then to Laviolette Park. Davies said they are working to secure permission from the Department of Transportation to install a kiosk at the Route 67 access point.

portant to keep the invasive plant’s spread in check.

He said the seeds of the water chestnut are round with spikes (similar to a mace), and it’s speculated that they get caught in the feathers of geese and fall off in the water. The seeds can last in the mud for eight to 10 years.

Davies said C4R is also working with the communities to provide basic river restoration at sites, including trash removal. C4R also teams up with various Scout troops who are participating in the Scout Waterways Program.

Davies and Emerson are also working to organize trail crews to act as stewards of Blue Trail access points and sections.

“Being a trail steward is pretty basic,” Emerson said.

Duties of a trail steward includes looking for downed trees, checking portage areas, picking up trash, talking to Blue Trail users, taking photos and reporting findings back to C4R once a month.

“It will get us a lot closer and communicate more,” he said.

Davies and Emerson said they are also looking for people to help them spread the vision of C4R.

“If you know someone who really likes these rivers, let them know we exist,” Davies said.

### About C4R

Memberships and donations help C4R with resources for basic operations, including preparing events, creating and maintaining the Blue Trail, collecting samples, writing reports and performing community outreach.

C4R has established a nonprofit relationship with the Connecticut River Conservancy, which holds and manages C4R funds for tax exempt purposes for all donors who want this coverage.

To become a member, visit c4river.org and click on “Membership/Support – C4R.”

For more information or to get involved, visit c4river.org, email chicopeewatershed@gmail.com or find Chicopee4Rivers on Facebook.

Points of interest along this section include a former hydro dam, and Davies said more will be cataloged to be included on the trail map as the project develops. Points of interest can be historical, natural, or even cautionary.

“This will connect what’s really paddle-able on the Quaboag,” Davies said of the new section.

Davies is joined on the watershed council by Jim Emerson of Wilbraham, who serves as the events coordinator. Emerson has planned a number of paddling events meant to engage and connect people with these vital waterways.

The first event of the year is scheduled for Saturday, April 19, at Indian Orchard and Putts for a clean-up followed by a paddle on the Chicopee River.

Others include Saturday, May 17, Lower Ware River; Saturday, June 14, Upper Quaboag; Sunday, July 20, Lower Quaboag in Palmer; Sunday, Aug. 17, Swift River in Belchertown; Saturday, Sept. 20, Upper Ware River; and Saturday, Oct. 11, Upper Chicopee. Details of these events will be posted on c4river.org.

Restoration efforts to remove invasive water chestnuts continue at Oxford Marsh in Chicopee and Red Bridge in Ludlow. Cleanups are scheduled at Oxford Marsh on June 7 from 12:30-4 p.m.; June 28 from 9 a.m.-noon; July 19 from 9 a.m.-noon and Aug. 16 from 9 a.m.-noon.

Davies said the June removals are especially im-

# Chess returns to Joy of Beans on April 5

WEST BROOKFIELD – On Saturday, April 5, chess will again be in session in West Brookfield at the Joy of Beans at 12 East Main St., starting at 3 p.m.

You never know who will show up, from novice to expert. So, come for an enjoyable later afternoon.

Joy of Beans is mostly known for that morning cup of gourmet coffee, but it will be available if one needs caffeine to up their game.

Of course, a spot of tea, herbal or otherwise is available as well as some delectable pastries.

# Solo/Duet poetry and music series begins April 8

WEST BROOKFIELD – Solo/Duet, a poetry and music series at the Merriam-Gilbert Public Library will be held on Tuesdays at 6 p.m. in April.

In celebration of National Poetry Month, Jonathan Blake will read poems from the collections of poetry found on the shelves of the Merriam Gilbert Library in West Brookfield. Each April reading will begin and end with performances by a jazz duet of original compositions and those from the “standard book” of America’s one true art form.

Join the library on the following Tuesday evenings: April 8, bassist Jerry Wilfong, guitarist Rich Falco/Jonathan Blake reads Gilbert and Gregg;

April 15, solo bass: Jerry Wilfong/Jonathan Blake reads from “Black Nature” and a jazz poetry performance with Wilfong and Blake; April 22, bassist Jerry Wilfong and vocalist Lydia Fortune/Jonathan Blake reads Stern and Oliver; and April 29, bassist Jerry Wilfong and percussionist Dick Hummel/Jonathan Blake reads Gluck and Wright.

This series is free and open to all. Please stop by or call the library or call 508-867-1410 to reserve your seat.

This program is made possible by the West Brookfield Cultural Council as supported by the Massachusetts Cultural Council.

# Pumpnickel Puppets present ‘Peter Rabbit’ on April 13

NEW BRAINTREE – On Sunday, April 13 at 2 p.m. in the New Braintree Town Hall, 20 Memorial Drive, the Friends of the New Braintree Library are hosting the Pumpnickel Puppets’ show “Peter Rabbit”.

Pumpnickel Puppets are presented with a cast of colorful puppet characters, audience participation, live voices and sound effects and fast paced scripts that not only entertain, but stimulate children’s imagination and creativity.

A demonstration period follows the performance giving the audience sound insight into what happens behind the scenes.

The performance will last approximately 30 to 40 minutes and are appropriate for children ages 3 and up. This program is free and open to the public.

This program is funded by the Hardwick/New Braintree Cultural Council, a local agency which is supported by the Mass Cultural Council, a state agency.

# Rural Farming Forum with Anne Gobi on April 14

WEST BROOKFIELD – Anne Gobi, Director of Rural Affairs, will be the keynote speaker at the Rural Farming Forum held on Monday, April 14 in The Grand Room on the second floor of the Town Hall, 2 East Main St. from 5-7:30 p.m.

All are welcome to come and speak with agencies and organizations working to support

local farmers, including the Quaboag Valley Food Policy Council, The Carrot Project, East Quabbin Land Trust, MDAR, Hardwick Farmers Co-op and more.

For more information, please contact Eric von Bleicken, chair of the Board of Selectmen by emailing evonbleicken@wbrookfield.com.

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## 2025 Seasonal Employment

Warren Parks & Rec. Dept. is accepting applications for Seasonal Positions including:

### Lifeguard and Summer Rec. Counselors

Job description and applications available online at [www.warren-ma.gov](http://www.warren-ma.gov) or at Town Clerk’s Office.

Mail applications to:  
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## - community -

### EQLT to host Hiking 101 class and group hike on April 12

**HARDWICK** – The East Quabbin Land Trust will host a Hiking 101 class and casual group hike on Saturday, April 12 from 1-4 p.m.

The event is tailored to adults and teenagers who are new to day hiking or who want to learn about practical considerations when out in nature. Hiking 101 will comprise an indoor discussion at EQLT's office, located at 120 Ridge Road, followed by a 1.5-mile hike with both gradual and steeper hills, at EQLT's Mandell Hill Preserve, which is located a short distance from EQLT's office.

EQLT Steward, Chris Kiraly-Thomas, a recreational hiker and Adirondack 46er (she has climbed all 46 Adirondack peaks over 4,000 feet) who has also summited over 60 of New England's 4,000+ footers, will lead the class and the hike.

Participants will learn about: choosing where to

hike, appropriate gear and supplies, how to handle basic emergencies, what to do when encountering wildlife, weather preparedness, access to potable water and proper hydration, leave no trace principles and more.

Attendees are encouraged to dress for the weather, wear sturdy shoes or boots, and bring water.

RSVP to [atrevett@eqlt.org](mailto:atrevett@eqlt.org) by April 9 if you would like to attend.

#### About the East Quabbin Land Trust

The East Quabbin Land Trust fosters a meaningful relationship with the natural world by conserving, connecting with and caring for the farmlands, woodlands and waters in the East Quabbin region of Massachusetts. EQLT works closely with community members to foster vibrant communities through engagement with the outdoors.

The work of EQLT is focused on the communities

of Barre, Hardwick, Hubbardston, New Braintree, North Brookfield, Oakham, Petersham, Ware and West Brookfield. EQLT began in 1994 motivated by concern for the loss of farmland and wildlife habitat to unplanned sprawl.

By working cooperatively with property owners, government agencies, conservation groups and other land trusts, EQLT has permanently protected 7,000 acres of land. EQLT worked with members of the Petersham community to purchase and lease The Country Store, revitalizing the heart of the town.

Over the past two decades, the East Quabbin Land Trust has also purchased and opened 6.5 miles of former railroad corridor as part of the Mass Central Rail Trail in Hardwick, New Braintree and Ware, with another 1.5-miles of rail trail slated for construction in 2025-26.

## - public safety -

### East Brookfield Police Log

During the week of March 17-23, the East Brookfield Police Department responded to 128 building/property checks, 56 directed area patrols, four traffic controls, six radar assignments, eight emergency 911 calls, five citizen assists, two assist other agencies, two complaints, one motor vehicle investigation, one motor vehicle accident, eight animal calls and 29 motor vehicle stops in the town of East Brookfield.

**Monday, March 17**  
3:17 p.m. Mutual Aid Ambulance, Out of Town, Negative Contact

**Tuesday, March 18**  
5:57 a.m. 911 Medical Emergency, Doane Avenue, Transported to Hospital

4:56 p.m. Motor Vehicle Stop, Podunk Road, Citation Issued

5:02 p.m. Motor Vehicle Stop, Shore Road, Citation Issued

5:04 p.m. Motor Vehicle Stop, East Main Street, Citation Issued

7:56 p.m. 911 Medical Emergency, Bridge Street, Transported to Hospital

**Wednesday, March 19**  
2:41 a.m. 911 Medical

Emergency, Podunk Road, Transported to Hospital

12:01 p.m. Motor Vehicle Stop, Podunk Road, Citation Issued

12:12 p.m. Complaint/Motor Vehicle Operations, Route 49, Negative Contract

7:30 p.m. 911 Medical Emergency, Flagg Road, Services Rendered

8:38 p.m. 911 Fire/Illegal Burn, Howe Street, Extinguished

**Thursday, March 20**  
8:46 a.m. Motor Vehicle Stop, Citgo, Citation Issued

12:21 p.m. Assist Other Agency, West Sturbridge Road, Dispatch Handled

5:01 p.m. Motor Vehicle Stop, East Main Street, Criminal Complaint

5:07 p.m. Motor Vehicle Stop, West Sturbridge Road, Citation Issued

6:18 p.m. Assist Citizen, Out of Town, Dispatch Handled

7:33 p.m. 911 Medical Emergency, Meadowview Lane, Services Rendered

8:02 p.m. Motor Vehicle Stop, Podunk Road, Citation Issued

8:11 p.m. Motor Vehicle Stop, Route 49, Citation Is-

sued  
9:18 p.m. Motor Vehicle Stop, Harrington Street, Citation Issued

**Friday, March 21**  
11:18 a.m. Motor Vehicle Investigation, East Main Street, Spoken To

7:27 p.m. Complaint, Howe Street, Officer Handled

**Saturday, March 22**  
12:02 a.m. Assist Citizen, Connie Mack Drive, Services Rendered

12:42 a.m. Assist Citizen, Connie Mack Drive, Services Rendered

12:53 p.m. Assist Other Agency, Out of Town, Report Taken

6:12 p.m. Assist Citizen, Connie Mack Drive, Services Rendered

9:21 p.m. Assist Citizen, Harrington Lane, Services Rendered

**Sunday, March 23**  
12 a.m. Suspicious Activity, East Main Street, Services Rendered

3:34 a.m. Suspicious Activity, Depot Square, Services Rendered

5:30 p.m. 911 Motor Vehicle Accident, West Sturbridge Road, Arrest(s) Made

### Quaboag Connector adds first hybrid van to fleet



SUBMITTED PHOTO

Quaboag Connector Transportation Manager Michael Dambrosio stands next to the fleet's new accessible van outside Ware Town Hall.

**WARE** – The Quaboag Connector recently added an accessible hybrid van to its fleet of vehicles.

The minivan has a rear fold-up ramp providing access for riders in wheelchairs.

The van is the first hybrid vehicle in the Quaboag Connector fleet and had a purchase price of \$73,000.

It was purchased with grants provided by the Massachusetts Department of

Transportation and the Health Foundation of Central Massachusetts. The Pioneer Valley Transit Authority assisted the Town of Ware with the purchase.

### New Braintree Police Log

During the week of March 24-31, the Hardwick/New Braintree Police Department responded to 12 building/property checks, 27 directed/area patrols, four radar assignments, two traffic controls, two emergency 911 calls, two citizen assists, two assist other agencies, two animal calls and six motor vehicle stops in the town of New Braintree.

**Monday, March 24**  
10:27 a.m. Assist Other Agency, Hardwick Road, Dispatch Handled

5:09 p.m. Assist Citizen, West Brookfield Road, Officer Handled

**Tuesday, March 25**  
2 p.m. Medical Alarm, Barre Road, Unknown Outcome

**Wednesday, March 26**  
6:38 a.m. Assist Other Agency, Old Wine Road, Investigated

11:40 a.m. 911 Medical Emergency, Barre Road, Transported to Hospital

**Thursday, March 27**  
4:44 a.m. Motor Vehicle Stop, Ravine Road, Written Warning

11:05 a.m. Assist Citizen, Station, Services Rendered

3:38 p.m. Motor Vehicle Stop, Hardwick Road, Written Warning

4:48 p.m. Motor Vehicle Stop, Ravine Road, Written Warning

5:51 p.m. Motor Vehicle Stop, Ravine Road, Written Warning

**Friday, March 28**  
8:29 p.m. Welfare Check, Memorial Drive, Services Rendered

### Lions Club hosts 38th annual River Race

**STURBRIDGE** – The Sturbridge Lions Club River Race will be held on Sunday, April 27 with registration at 9 a.m.

Since 1987, the 38th Annual River Race has been held on the Quinebaug River, known as the "River of the long Fish" (eels).

The first craft off will be at 11 a.m. from the famous Turners Ball Field in Fiskdale. There will be thrills, spills, picnics, and a family fun day.

The race finishes at the popular Westville

Recreation Area. Walking trails on site.

After the cold of winter, come out and enjoy the sunshine and if you

own a canoe, raft or kayak, this event is for you.

For more information, people may call Lion Randy at 603-818-3133.

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- opinion -



Did we make a mistake starting my wife's Social Security now?

Dear Rusty:  
I hope we haven't made a mistake.

My wife just applied for her Social Security benefit. She was born in May 1962 and the estimated amount of her benefit is \$1,280 per month. Her work income last year was \$5,616; however, mine was about \$65,000. I do not plan on taking my benefit until the age of 70 in July of 2027.

My worry now is about the penalty for earning too much. We figured that since her income was so low, we wouldn't have to worry about that penalty, so we signed her up, and then it hit me: what if they look at my income, especially since our tax return is filed as Married Filing Jointly. Do we have a problem, or are they just going to look at her income to determine if there is a penalty? I hope I haven't messed this up. Also, I think I read that any penalty you are assessed for earning too much is returned to you once you reach Full Retirement Age; is that true?

Signed:  
Uncomfortable Senior Citizen

Dear Uncomfortable Senior:

First, let me ease your anxiety - you haven't "messed this up." While it's true that your income will be included when the IRS determines how much of your wife's Social Security benefits are taxable, changing your IRS filing status is usually not wise. However, considering your combined income and your "married/jointly" IRS filing status, up to 85% of the SS benefits your wife receives during the tax year will be included as part of your overall taxable income as a married couple. Your wife's monthly SS benefit is about \$1,280, so about \$13,000 annually will be included in your Adjusted Gross Income when you file your taxes. You can have income tax withheld from your wife's SS benefit by filing IRS Form W-4V at your local SS office (you can have 7%, 10%, 12% or 22% withheld). Note your wife's tax obligation for this year will be less because she will not get SS benefits for all of 2025.

The other thing you are concerned about is whether your income will be counted when determining if your wife will be subject to Social Security's "Annual Earnings Test" and the answer to that is "no." At her current earnings level (about \$5,600), your wife is well below the annual earnings limit (\$23,400 for 2025) for those collecting

early Social Security benefits. So, the AET will not apply and will not reduce your wife's monthly Social Security benefit. FYI, if her earnings did exceed the annual earnings limit, it is true that some of the resulting penalty would be recovered after she reaches her full FRA of 67.

Note the distinction between "taxation of SS benefits" and the "annual earnings test" for those collecting early benefits. Taxation of benefits is always based on your joint income when filing married/jointly, but the Annual Earnings Test looks only at your wife's personal work earnings until she reaches her FRA.

As I expect you already know, by claiming now (at age 62 plus), your wife's monthly SS retirement benefit will be permanently reduced (by about 26%). Until you later claim your SS benefit, your wife will receive her reduced personal SS retirement amount. But, when you claim, her benefit amount will be reassessed to see if she is also entitled to an incremental amount as your wife. If her SS entitlement at her FRA (even though she claimed at 62+) is less than 50% of your FRA entitlement, then her benefit will increase. However, she will not get the full 50% of your FRA entitlement because she claimed her own SS retirement benefit before her FRA (more likely, she will get about 34% of your FRA entitlement).

In the end, you really did not make a mistake by filing for your wife's Social Security to start now. By the time you personally apply at age 70, your wife will have collected about \$46,000 in Social Security benefits which, I'm sure, will be helpful. And only a relatively modest amount of income tax will be paid on her Social Security benefits.

*The Association Mature Citizens Foundation and its staff are not affiliated with or endorsed by the Social Security Administration or any other governmental entity. This article is intended for information purposes and does not represent legal or financial guidance. It presents the opinions and interpretations of the Association Mature Citizens Foundation's staff, trained and accredited by the National Social Security Association. To submit a question, visit amacfoundation.org/programs/social-security-advisory or email us at ssadvisor@amacfoundation.org. Russell Gloor is a Social Security advisor for AMAC.*



Germination tests give way to garden experiments

Although the temperatures did not cooperate this past week, I have to say that spring vibes are all around me.

I saw my first blooming crocus, and even some early daffodils. The phoebe bird that makes a nest above our porch door is back, and hanging around, much to my husband's dismay!

My pepper plants are almost in need of transplanting from their seed pack, and the tomato seeds I planted last weekend sprouted in under a week. It is all so exciting! I don't think that I will ever not be amazed at the miracle of it all.

The other day I was going through my seed stash and I found two year old seeds of Loofah Gourd, Mini Popcorn, Mouse Melon and a variety of "climbing" Zucchini all of which I never planted. These purchases were "impulse buys" I guess you'd call it. I bought them but when it came time to actually plant them, I decided that my garden square footage was too precious to waste on frivolity.

But here we are and my frugal nature shines through once more. Since I bought them I might as well try and plant them; maybe one will end up being a new favorite.

But alas, does one risk planting two year old seed? What if the seeds don't germinate? Partaking in germination testing gave me a chance to get my hands in the soil, (albeit indoors) and the outcome will help me determine how much I should "over-plant" or if that will even be necessary.

Wasting a few seeds now will save time later on.

First up, the Loofah Gourd. I planted four seeds as a trial and three popped

up! That means I will be adding this to my garden come springtime.

Grow it like you would any other gourd or squash. It loves fertile soil, heat and a strong support.

When loofahs were first popular, I was a young adult and still living at home. Growing them was a project for my parents and I.

Before the first frost we harvested the fat, wrinkly looking cucumbers and allowed them to dry before peeling off the rind. What was left was fibrous matter, looking already very much like a scrubby sponge. It was a fun experiment then and it will be reminiscent to repeat it.

Next comes the Mini Colored Popcorn. This was the first to sprout in my germination test pack with five of the six seeds popping up.

I have never had extra space to grow corn, but I thought it would be fun to try these for both decoration and food. I am going to start them ahead of time, indoors in six packs and plant them out around the three week mark.

They will be spaced about a foot apart in rows about two and a half feet apart. Corn likes fertile soil, so I will amend the soil well with aged compost.

This type of corn will dry right on the plant, until the husks are brown. Then the ears will be harvested, shucked and dried some more. I have seen people remove the kernels first by using a blunt instrument such as the back of a spoon to start the kernels moving, then it looks somewhat easy to get the rest to push off.

Another fun thing to try, just to say I did it.

If you are growing sweet

corn in your garden be sure to time these apart from one another, so that cross pollination won't taint the taste of your sweet corn.

I was really hoping that the climbing zucchini would sprout in my test pack. It took a bit, but they finally did and therefore they will be added to my garden this spring.

This variety, known as "Incredible Escalator" has a vertical habit. Funny enough, there are all sorts of videos online about training zukes to grow upright, but this variety seems particularly suited to upward mobility.

Zucchini are not true "twinning" plants, however, so they will need to be tied to a strong trellis or stake to maintain their vertical nature. Because the plant is off the ground, there appears to be improved disease resistance, too.

Stay tuned as to whether this zucchini lives up to the hype in terms of productivity and increased vigor.

Last on my list is Mouse Melon. I saw these for the very first time at the Hardwick Fair in 2022, hence my purchase. Also known as Mexican Sour Gherkin, these fruits grow to about the size of a grape, but taste somewhere between a cucumber and a watermelon, growing more sour as they mature.

The seeds were tiny, not what I expected at all and only half of what I planted came up, so I will definitely be sowing double the normal rate. The vine grows long - upwards of 10 feet, so be sure to trellis to make the best use of space.

I know little more than you do about this one, but I can't wait to try it out. Will it remain a curiosity or will Mouse Melon become a regular? Will any of these?

We'll have to wait to find out!

*Roberta McQuaid graduated from the Stockbridge School of Agriculture at the University of Massachusetts. For 33 years she has held the position of staff horticulturist at Old Sturbridge Village. She enjoys growing food as well as flowers. Have a question for her? Email it to pouimette@turley.com with "Gardening Question" in the subject line.*

QUABOAG CURRENT TEAM



EDITOR  
Paula Ouimette  
pouimette@turley.com



ADVERTISING SALES  
Dan Flynn  
dfflynn@turley.com



STAFF WRITER  
Ryan Drago  
rdrago@turley.com



SPORTS EDITOR  
Greg Scibelli  
sports@turley.com

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WEB

www.quaboagcurrent.turley.com

PATRICK H. TURLEY  
CEO

KEITH TURLEY  
President

DEANNA SLOAT  
Graphics Manager



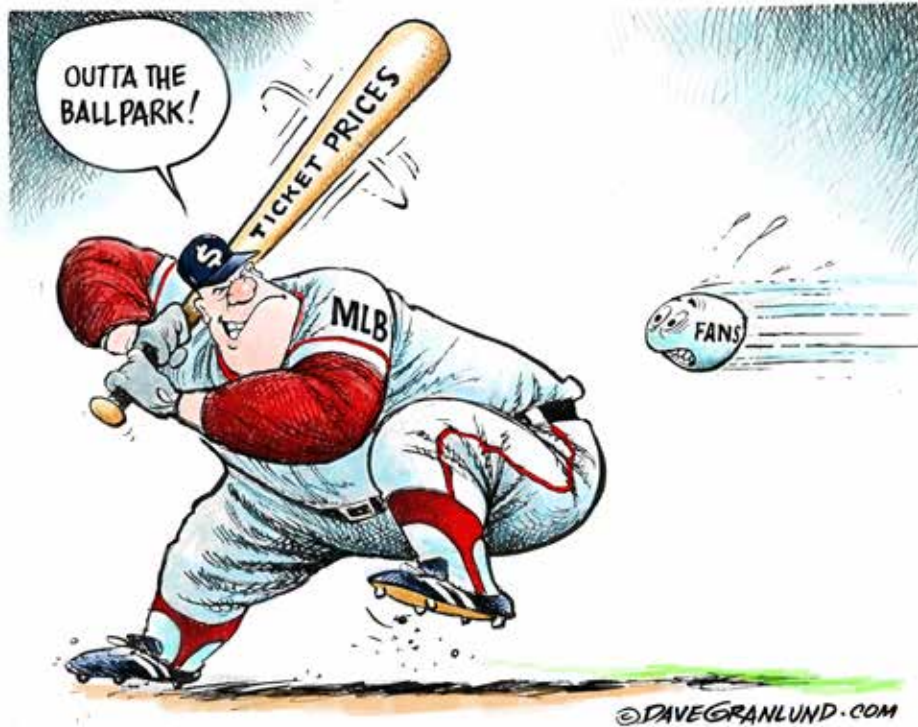
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political base? Or not hard enough?

But drawing conclusions about the meaning of an election, especially about what it says about the American people, is difficult. Most voters simply aren't that focused on politics. They aren't obsessed with the latest news from Washington or what the candidates are saying.

As Kentucky Gov. Andy Beshear writes in a recent New York Times column, "When most Americans wake up in the morning,

they are not thinking about politics." They are thinking about their jobs, their finances, their next doctor's appointment. They are thinking about feeding their families and getting their children off to school. They want to know their communities are safe.

"If you are staring at the cost of your child's prescription and wondering how you are going to pay for both it and your family's dinner," Beshear writes, "the offense of the day in Washington, D.C. or the latest crazy thing

a politician said just isn't as important."

I couldn't agree more. Those of us who write about government and public affairs often forget that we're in the minority. For most people, they may follow the news, and most of them will vote; but politics, especially national politics, isn't at the top of their daily concerns.

One of the first lessons I learned when I was in Congress was that people care deeply about local matters.

See HAMILTON PAGE 5



Comments on CONGRESS

By Lee Hamilton

Most Americans aren't obsessed with politics

The 2024 election is over, but the arguments about what it means are continuing.

Did Donald Trump and the Republican Party win a mandate to govern as they wish? Did Democrats try too hard to appeal to their

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Middle school art was displayed during STEAM night. Art is the "A" in STEAM.

**STEAM NIGHT FROM PAGE 1**

STEAM night. AMP is Advance Manufacturing Pathways and is a specialized branch of the Innovative Career Pathways program. Students will be allowed to participate in numerous classes such as Introduction to Engineering & Design, Principles of Engineering, Computer Integrated Manufacturing, and Engineering Design and Development. High School Principal John Diorio says STEAM is a great opportunity for students to get involved in multiple programs. Diorio was sporting a

"Get AMP'd Up" shirt which is a symbol of the future courses that North Brookfield high school students will get to enjoy. Students starting in ninth grade will be a part of AMP courses and will receive an AMP certificate after graduation. Diorio was excited to see a full gymnasium of students and family members enjoying multiple activities that showcase the various areas of learning. For the school's first time hosting a STEAM night, the turnout was nothing but successful. "This is a nice turnout for the first year doing this," Diorio said. Diorio believes the North



This ceramic art done by junior high and high school students of North Brookfield who will soon enjoy STEAM programs.



Kids got to build catapults using spoons, rubber bands and popsicle sticks.

Brookfield Public Schools will continue to offer STEAM night on an annual basis. One of the fun demonstrations that took place outside the school gymnasium was a rocket launch. Inside the gymnasium there were various hands-on activities including remote-controlled cars, which are a feature in the robotics course that will soon be offered at the school. Students will also experi-



Music teacher Matthew Bilz is shown on the drums as the school band performed during STEAM night

ence Project Lead the Way. This curriculum will help students understand how the knowledge and skills they develop in the classroom will be applied in everyday life. Students will learn about real-world activities, projects and study to solve real-world problems. A series of visual and performing arts will be featured as well. As an example, many middle school and high school students had their artwork displayed in the school gym. Arts of many mediums were showcased and contribute to the message STEAM sends by exploring the creativity, design, aesthetics and

human experiences explored through visual art and music. The school band also performed during STEAM night and included music teacher Matthew Bilz playing the drums alongside his band of students. Courses will include audio engineering, various art courses, architectural and industrial design, graphic design and much more. STEAM night also featured pizza and cookies for guests to enjoy. STEAM offers many great programs that students kindergarten through 12th grade will get to enjoy soon.

**DRACULA FROM PAGE 1**

er. The play featured 12 scene changes and had many props that added to the humor of the show. Handling the stage and coordinating was Paula Hinerth, Lindsay Caouette, Alexis Caouette, and Greg Afton. The set was constructed by Dave Laprade, Leah Birri, Derek Ingalls and Missy McDonald. Derek Ingalls also organized the music, sound effects, lighting design, and served as sound engineer. The lighting on stage was operated by Mara Ingalls. Sound technician was Hannah Ingalls, and spotlight was operated by Joe Chenevert. The Theatre Guild wanted to thank the community of New Braintree and the staff of Town Hall for allowing them to perform the show. Every show had a great turnout as "Dracula: A Comedy of Terrors" brought a lot of laughter and members of the Theatre Guild would surprise the audience with many funny and memorable moments. "This is a great group of actors, creators and volunteers that have helped to create the vision and breathe life into this unorthodox and wildly entertaining production," McDonald said. The Theatre Guild of North Brookfield will be presenting another show this



Dracula, played by Jay Valencourt, arrived to the Westfeldt household for a party and is greeted by Dr. Westfeldt played by Derek Ingalls, right, and Mina Westfeldt, played by Shelley Ingalls.



Dracula met Lucy for the first time during her and Jonathan's engagement party.



Dracula attempted to win the heart of Lucy Westfeldt.



Derek Ingalls also played Renfield, left, and soon fell under the command of Count Dracula.



Missy McDonald was the director of the show and is shown narrating on stage.

coming April, "Cabaret" at North Brookfield Elementary School. Shows are Friday, April 25 at 7:30 p.m., Saturday, April 26 at 2 p.m. and Sunday, April 27 at 2 p.m. and 7:30 p.m. For tickets, visit theatre-guildofnorthbrookfield.com or call 508-331-9031.

**HAMILTON FROM PAGE 4** They pay a lot less attention to national issues. They are even less worried about international affairs. Their concerns are much closer to home. In my district, the experience was the same whether I was visiting with constituents in cafes, speaking to service clubs or meeting with reporters and editors at local newspapers. People, whether they were Democrats or Republicans, were focused on their communities. They wanted to talk about a new factory, a planned road proj-

ect or the local school system. People do pay attention to the national economy, because it affects their lives. They may not know the latest inflation or unemployment numbers, but they know when costs go up for gas, groceries and housing. They care about crime, but their focus is on community safety. It's true, of course, that Donald Trump has upended our politics, putting himself at the center of every issue. The decline of local newspapers, coupled with the rise of talk radio, cable

TV news and social media, has nationalized our politics. Tune in CNN or Fox News, and you might think every national issue is a matter of life and death. Politicians often amplify this thinking as they compete to turn highly motivated voters in a tight election. But that's not most Americans. Most care deeply about their families, their neighbors and their communities.

They want the government to share those concerns. Beshear is a Democrat who has twice been elected governor of a state that just voted 65-35 for Trump. He recommends a focus on kitchen-table issues as a way forward for his party. "The focus of the Democratic Party must return to creating better jobs, more affordable and accessible health care, safer roads and

bridges, the best education for our children and communities where people aren't just safer but also feel safer," he writes. In fact, that should be a good agenda for any politician, Democrat or Republican. Meeting the people where they live and trying to improve their day-to-day lives isn't just good politics. It's good governing. We'll all be better off if our elected

officials remember that. Lee Hamilton is a Senior Advisor for the Indiana University Center on Representative Government; a Distinguished Scholar at the IU Hamilton Lugar School of Global and International Studies; and a Professor of Practice at the IU O'Neill School of Public and Environmental Affairs. He was a member of the U.S. House of Representatives for 34 years.

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The Town of Barre is seeking qualified applicants for the part-time position of Cemetery Clerk. This position is approximately 10 hours per week and the minimum hourly rate is \$15.00/hour and the maximum hourly rate is \$18.02/hour. A full job description is available upon request. Applicants must have HS Diploma or GED, with a minimum of two to three years' experience in office setting, or equivalent combination of education and experience. Interested applicants should submit a letter of interest to: Tammy Martin, Town Administrator, 40 West Street, Suite 697, Barre MA 01005 or townadmin@townofbarre.com. For further information, please contact the Board of Selectmen's Office at (978) 355-2504 x135. A.A. / E.O.E.

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**STURBRIDGE FROM PAGE 1**

commended that number be changed to 10 feet.

"When you think about driveway widths it would be great to reduce the impervious, but really they're there for a reason," Bubon said. "They're to provide safe access to that property for all types of vehicles whether it be an ambulance, police car or firetruck."

Bubon said encouraging the use of permeable pavement was also included in the assessment's recommendations, but she said the town has no way to maintain it. She said it could be used in some private developments if they had the appropriate means to maintain it.

Revisions were also recommended for the stormwater management bylaw. She said a lot of this would fall on the Conservation Agent and Department of Public Works Director.

Other recommendations include creating a list of recommended native plantings, encouraging

private roads to incorporate best practices or create roadway associations, providing opportunities for staff participation and staff-led workshops, participating in rain barrel sales, modifying and distributing public education materials from the Department of Environmental Protection and Environmental Protection Agency and considering hiring a full-time employee to oversee stormwater management.

Bubon said having an employee overseeing stormwater management would be worth looking into in the future.

**Cedar Street sidewalk**

Bubon said she and DPW Director Heather Blakeley met with Cedar Street residents about the proposed sidewalk construction from Route 20 to the Burgess Elementary School road.

"They all agreed to sign off on the easements that were needed for the sidewalks because they really want to see the sidewalk," she said.

Bubon said there will

be an article on the town meeting warrant that would allow the Select Board to enter into these easement agreements.

"If all goes well, we could have a sidewalk by the end of summer," she said.

Bubon said the town will pay for the project using funding from a Complete Streets grant. She said the school also received a Safe Routes to School grant to place a sidewalk from Cedar Street to the school.

**Noble Energy intersection update**

Bubon said they are waiting for additional feedback from the Department of Transportation regarding the design for a signalized intersection at Noble Energy. She said the design is between 90-100% complete.

Bubon said the signalized intersection is considered temporary mitigation as MassDOT is looking at creating a roundabout at the intersection of Hall Road. She said eventually the signal lights would be removed.

**SELECTMEN FROM PAGE 1**

This cost will cover half of the Town Offices computers, with the other half being taken care of in the next fiscal year. Board of Selectmen Chair Jason Petraitis said the cost of one new computer will cost more than upgrading all 10 computers.

The board also approved \$387.90 for outdoor convertible benches at the Senior Center to replace the picnic table. This expense will be paid for with grant funding.

Comprehensive emergency management plan

The board approved the comprehensive emergency management plan submitted by the North Brookfield Emergency Management Agency.

"It is basically a plan set up for in the event of emergencies for all of the departments to work together," Petraitis said. "It sets orders for who's supposed to be in charge depending on the response."

**Helipad discussion**

Petraitis said the topic of a helipad location near

the Police Station has come up, but no formal discussion has been had and there are no plans in motion to establish a helipad there.

Sheila Orsi of the Downtown Development Committee said having a landing zone designation for the area would be fine, but making it an established helipad would not be ideal for the downtown area.

**Library updates**

The board received a letter from the Hoston Free Public Library's Director Lia Tulip requesting to change the fees for faxing services. The change would allow patrons to fax for free instead of charging \$3 for the first five pages and \$1 for each additional page.

Tulip stated this change would align with practices at other libraries in the region and consider the income levels of many of the families and residents of North Brookfield.

Tulip stated that the Library Trustees supported this change, and it would go into effect on April 1.

**Senior Center updates**

The board approved the Senior Center's policies for accepting donations and for

food distribution. They also approved an updated job description for the Senior Center Outreach Coordinator.

These changes will be posted on the Senior Center's website.

The board also signed a memorandum of understanding with the Senior Center and the Ascenria Care Alliance's SNAP-Ed Nutrition Program.

Electrical aggregate contract

The board voted to sign a 36-month municipal electrical aggregation contract in order to get the lowest possible rate for residents.

**Public comment**

Brandon Avery said the Friends of the Town House have received a grant to allow them to hire a director of development for a three month period.

"That's going to help us create a business plan, help us create a plan for a capital campaign and fundraising and that kind of stuff," Avery said.

Morgan thanked John Tripp for getting chairs donated for the break room at the former Huck's building.

**SCHOOL COMMITTEE FROM PAGE 1**

been completed.

Bill King of the Finance Committee asked when the committee members expected contract negotiations to be done. Magario said negotiations are ongoing with the teachers' union and the committee has not met with the custodians yet.

The School Committee discussed having a joint meeting with the Finance Committee meeting to discuss the fiscal year 2026 school budget. Concerns regarding the budget were raised at a previous Finance Committee meeting.

**Superintendent's report**

McCormick said a recent grant for \$40,000 will allow the high school to add four distinct classes focused on manufacturing.

"These opportunities are really beneficial to supporting our students," he said.

McCormick said the school district has also completed the Innovative Career Pathways designation through the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, which awarded them another \$35,000. This funding will purchase equipment such as a bench milling machine, robotics kits, 3-D

printing machine and robotic arms.

"In total that's \$75,000 that we have now to use toward supporting these new initiatives...which we would not be able to purchase without this financial support," he said.

McCormick said another grant has allowed for himself, High School Principal John Diorio and science teacher Caitlyn Malone to attend an Applied Learning conference in Denver, Colorado.

**Administrators' reports**

Diorio said the second annual career fair was held at the high school with dozens of presenters. Students were able to choose to visit four separate classrooms, each with a different presenter, in order to learn more about those careers.

"Many of the presenters after the career day was over commented about how attentive and engaged our students were," he said.

Diorio thanked Guidance Counselor Courtney Erhardt and Adjustment Counselor Tova Margolis for putting the event together.

Diorio said the staff won the staff versus students basketball game, with the help of recent alumni and 1,000-point scorers Jose Ortiz and Lyndsey Bennett, as well

as Lola Sukharev and Colin Sukharev.

"It was a lot of fun for everybody," he said.

Diorio said 20 students from the high school will be working on fostering a sense of belonging at a Mass IDEAS workshop training. He said this is a continuation of what started last year.

Elementary School Principal Arthur Murphy said the Superintendent's Council visited both fourth and fifth grades about the offerings at the high school, including classes, athletics and more.

Murphy said staff completed an in-person training with Dr. Angela Burke of Novak Education on March 11. He said the main focus was about implementing Universal Design for Learning techniques in the classroom.

"Dr. Burke provided a dashboard of resources that the staff could tailor to their needs in the classroom," he said.

Student Services Director Amy Emory her team is close to completing the final transition to the new educational plan program.

She said DESE will be sending them scores and information to use for programmatic decision making, and it is also reviewing the English learner education program. She said the first phase of this review includes a self-assessment and the second phase will include the English learner dashboard.

"We'll be excited to finish that process up shortly," Emory said.

**Student Council update**

Student Representative Dante Giangrande said eight members of the Student Council attended the state-

wide student council conference in Hyannis. Giangrande said the Student Council received a few awards at the conference.

"This conference teaches members new leadership skills and helps to improve our council as a whole," he said.

The week prior to April vacation, April 14-17, will be Spring Spirit Week and on Thursday of that week, classes in grades six through 12 will compete in a lip sync competition. He said the fifth grade students will be invited to watch the contest.

**Electrical fire**

Facilities Director Eric Hevy said there was a small electrical fire in room 206 at the high school and students and staff were evacuated and the Fire Department was called in.

"What happened was one of the transformers in the univert overheated and melted all the electrical wires in the unit and created a small fire," he said.

Hevy said he had spare parts for the univert available and the vendor of the unit was at the elementary school at the time, and they were able to service the damaged univert and get it back up and running. He said almost every classroom has the univerts.

McCormick said the Fire Department was on hand for over an hour and did a full walkthrough of the building while students were evacuated to the elementary school auditorium.

"The students were not brought back over until we got the go-ahead from the department," he said.

Giangrande said he was in the classroom at the time the

electrical fire was identified by its odor, and he said the students evacuated quickly.

Magario said it would be a good idea to have the vendor inspect all of the other univert units.

**Facility use policy**

McCormick said the policy subcommittee reviewed changes to the use of facilities policy twice and language and fee structures were updated.

"We have broken down the groupings to four district groups," he said.

Each group category has a different fee structure, in addition to service fees for custodial and kitchen help if required.

McCormick said organizations such as youth sports would be charged a flat fee of \$500 for the season. This cost would help pay for maintenance and improvements to athletic fields and school buildings.

McCormick said this fee is less than some of the other school districts in the area. In-kind contributions will still be accepted in place of the seasonal rental fee.

He said the policy also includes a strict timeline for reserving use of a space, with 14 days required before the date of the event. There is no longer a requirement for School Committee approval.

Magario asked if language could be added to allow for the School Committee to review any use of facilities requested by non-North Brookfield groups and organizations prior to an event.

He suggested that groups and organizations that have a previous relationship with the school district be allowed without this additional review.

The School Committee will continue discussion about this policy at its next meeting.

**Departures and new hires**

McCormick announced that Emory is leaving her position at the school district next month. He said they are interviewing candidates to fill vacancies, including a high school administrative assistant.

"She will be greatly missed," he said of Emory.

He said he had two interviews with recently retired special education directors for Emory's position. He said they are looking at hiring a candidate as a consultant to work for a couple of days a week for the remainder of the school year.

Matthew asked about staffing in the sub-separate classroom, which had its teacher and paraprofessionals resign. McCormick said that the classroom is still being staffed by a long-term substitute.

**Recognitions**

McCormick recognized senior Aidan Rodriguez, who received the John and Abigail Adams Scholarship for his excellence on the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System exams. Rodriguez scored in the advanced category for both math and English.

"We wanted to give Aidan the recognition he deserves," he said.

With this scholarship, Rodriguez will have reduced tuition at any state university.

McCormick also recognized Giangrande and his sister Sophia for completing a St. Patrick's Day 5K road race in Worcester.

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# SPORTS

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## Panthers pair headed for college football

By Tim Peterson  
Sports Correspondent

BARRE— For the first time since they were in elementary school, Quabbin seniors Travis Wells and Luke Salvadore will be playing for different football team's next fall.

"Luke and I have created a very good bond on and off the field since we began playing football at the youth level in the fourth grade," said Wells, who lives in Barre. "We're always hanging out and doing things together."

Wells will be continuing his football career about 20 miles down Rte.122 at Assumption University in Worcester.

"Assumption isn't that far away, and I can always come home anytime that I want," said Wells, who's planning to study Criminal Justice. "Leaving Luke will definitely be a very difficult thing for me, but we'll always be best friends."

The Assumption football head coach is Andy McKen-



FILE PHOTOS  
Luke Salvadore is headed to play college football at Union College



FILE PHOTOS  
Travis Wells also will play college football, heading for Assumption College.

zic. During his recruiting process, Wells dealt mostly with assistant coach Kyle Ashby. "Coach Ashby is re-

sponsible for recruiting the Worcester County area," Wells said. "He would call me every couple of weeks to check in. We built a very

good relationship. I've also visited Assumption several times, and I already love the place."

Salvadore, who resides

in Oakham, will be playing football at Union College, which is located a little more than two hours away in Schenectady, New York.

"The Union football program has had a lot of success in the past," Salvador said. "I made an overnight visit there back in January. I spent the night with several members of the football team. I also had a meeting with the Union football coach. I told him that I'll work hard and always try my best. I was accepted to Union and coach (Jon) Drach recently emailed me. He told me that I would be a member of the football team. I'm very excited about it."

One of the Union assistant coaches is Erik Karlson. He was an assistant coach at Worcester State University for three seasons before moving to upstate New York. He also knows Quabbin varsity football coach Wayne Page.

Salvadore, who's also a member of the school's NJROTC, is planning to study economics.

One of Luke's teachers this year is his mother, Therese.

"My mom teaches graphic design," he said. "It's the first time that I've had her as a teacher and it's been really cool. It's a project type of a class which is like an internship."

Travis and Luke aren't the first members of their family to wear a Quabbin football uniform and play college football.

Luke's older brother, Danny, graduated from Quabbin in 2016 before playing football at Stonehill College for three seasons.

"My older brother was the main reason why I began playing football," Salvadore said. "I really wish we would've been teammates in high school. He was also a running back. We always talked after my games. I really appreciate all his support."

Travis was able to play football with his older brother, Colton, for one season.

See FOOTBALL PAGE 8

## Pioneers look for another state tourney appearance

By Tima Peterson  
Sports Correspondent

WILBRAHAM—Having been a junior varsity and varsity baseball coach during the past ten years, Phil Gallo is looking forward to coaching a varsity softball team for the first time this spring.

Gallo took over as the varsity coach at Pathfinder Tech after former head coach Kevin Aldrich became the school's interim Athletic Director in January.

"I'm very excited about having this opportunity to coach a softball team for the first time," said Gallo before a recent practice at Soccer City in Wilbraham. "This is probably the hardest working group of kids that I've ever coached. I think we're going to be a very competitive team."

Gallo had previously been the junior varsity baseball coach at Monson High School. He also coached the Pathfinder Tech varsity baseball team for a couple of years before the COVID 19 pandemic began.

Gallo, who's a teacher at Pathfinder Tech, is also an assistant coach for the Monson Post 241 Legion baseball team.

"The two sports are very similar. The biggest difference between coaching a baseball team and a softball team is the pitching," Gallo said. "While there are pitch count rules in baseball, a softball pitcher can pitch in every inning of every game. We do have a very good pitcher."

Because their softball field wasn't ready, the Pioneers practiced at Soccer City for the first two weeks of the spring season. They were scheduled to face Palmer in a preseason scrimmage at Legion Field on March 27.

"Our field isn't ready yet, so we decided to practice here for two weeks," Gallo said. "I really don't mind practicing inside because I can set up different stations and focus on each player a little bit more. This is a much bigger place than our own gym. We also don't have to deal with the elements."

Under the guidance of Aldrich, the Pioneers have posted a 38-18 overall record during the past three seasons. They've also qualified for the Division 5 state tournament each year.

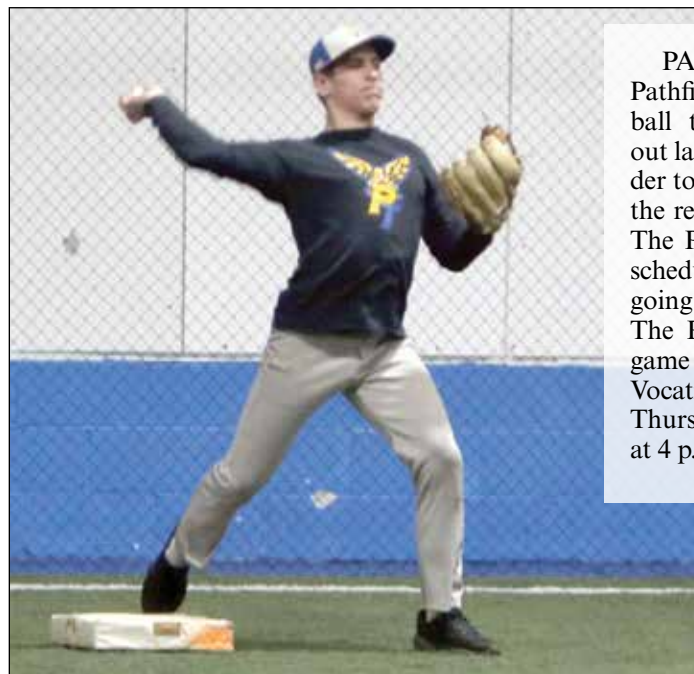
After finishing the 2024 regular season with a 14-4 record, the Pioneers defeated the Boston Charter Collegiate School, 19-4, in a preliminary round home game. It was their first ever victory in a state tournament game. They then lost at third-seeded Hopedale in the round of 32.

The Pioneers are scheduled to face the Hampden Charter School in this year's season opener at home on April 7. It's also a Tri-County League game.

"We do have an extra week of practice, which is a good thing, especially being my first year coaching the team," Gallo said. "My first goal is to win our first game of the season. Our first four

See SOFTBALL PAGE 8

## Pathfinder baseball gears up for regular season



Zander Auffrey makes a play during inside practice.



Djuan O'Dean hits in the cage at practice.



Sprints are a regular part of preseason.



The Pioneers run through drills.



The Pioneers are gearing up for the regular season this week.

## Quabbin League holding open practice for new players this weekend

The Quabbin Valley Over-28 Baseball League is looking to infuse new talent into its league for the 2025 season.

The league is looking for at least six more players to sign up to play in the league this year.

Coming up this Sunday,

April 6, practice will be held at Beachgrounds Park in South Hadley and are weather-permitting. Both practices will begin at 10 a.m. and following the April 6 practice, new players will be drafted to teams in the league as the league works to fill its open

roster spots.

Registration for the 2025 season is now open and any interested players can go to www.quabbinvalleybaseball.org to get registered, or to seek more information or make inquiries about the league. The league website

will also be updated over the next month with information about the upcoming season.

There are many open roster spots available in the league for the 2025 season, which is tentatively scheduled to begin on Sunday, April 27. The league plays most Sun-

day from late April through mid-August with playoffs following that. The league plays a 15-game schedule and typically fields six teams each year. Games are usually played at 10 a.m. with fields in Easthampton and South Hadley normally used.

The Quabbin Valley league is an all-abilities league and all are welcome to join. Eligibility is players who are age 28 and over. You must be 30 to be eligible to pitch in the league. Your age for eligibility is whatever age you will turn in 2025.

## - sports -

# Railers fall to Lions in road match

TROIS-RIVIÈRES, QC – The Worcester Railers HC (32-29-2-4 70pts) lost to the Trois-Rivières Lions (43-14-6-2, 94pts), on Sunday afternoon by a final score of 5-2 in front of a crowd of 2,346 at the Colisée Videotron. The Railers are back on the ice next at the Cool Insuring Arena against the Adirondack Thunder on Friday,

April 4 at 7 p.m. Just 24 seconds into the game Anthony Callin (1-0-1) found the back of the net for the Railers quickest goal of the season making it a 1-0 game. Tyler Kobryn (1-0-1) got the action going in the second period with a goal making it 2-0 Railers. Trois-Rivières had a quick start of their own in the third period scoring

back to back goals tying the game up 2-2 early. Then the Lions completely broke it open by scoring 3 more goals within 3 minutes of each other making it a 5-2 for Trois-Rivières.

The Railers got straight to work just 24 seconds into the start of the game. Anthony Callin (21st) ripped one into the net over the shoulder of Luke Cavallin

in net for Trois-Rivières off of assists from Anthony Repaci and Mason Klee. Callin's goal gave the Railers a 1-0 lead and was the only goal in the first period. Worcester's Michael Bullion had 5 saves on 5 shots while Trois-Rivières' Luke Cavallin had 7 saves on 8 shots.

The Railers doubled their lead in the second period with a goal from Tyler

Kobryn (10th) 6:01 into the second period making the score 2-0 Worcester. Kobryn deflected a shot from Cam McDonald at the point for his eighth as a Railer. The Railers had 11 shots on net while the Lions had 5.

Trois-Rivières started the third period off hot with back-to-back goals just over 2 minutes into the third period. Anthony Beauregard

(25th) and Morgan Adams-Moisan (21st) tied the game up for the Lions 2-2. Trois-Rivières continued to take control of the game by scoring three more goals making it a 5-2 game. Tyler Hylland (14th), Andrew Coxhead (4th) and Morgan Adams-Moisan (22nd) were the three goal scorers for Trois-Rivières as the game ended in a 5-2 final.

### FOOTBALL FROM PAGE 7

“When I was a sophomore, I was the center and my brother was the left tackle,” Wells said. “It was a great experience being on the same football team with him.”

Colton Wells was a member of the Western New England University football team during the past two seasons. He won't be playing football next fall. He has decided to focus on his collegiate wrestling career instead.

When they were in eighth grade, Travis Wells and Luke Salvatore were teammates on the Quabbin Regional junior varsity football team.

“Because of COVID, eighth graders were allowed to play for the Quabbin junior varsity football team,” Salvador said. “I also became a fullback for the first time that season. I only played tight end and defense at the

youth level.”

Salvador, who joined the varsity football team as a freshman, would switch to the running back position. He finished his outstanding high school career with more than 2,100 rushing yards, which is a new school record.

“I broke Colby Smith's school's rushing record,” Salvatore said. “He was a very good running back several years ago.”

Salvador scored his first varsity touchdown as a sophomore in the Panthers 15-12 home victory against Saint Paul Diocesan High School of Worcester.

“I remember being very excited after scoring my first varsity touchdown,” Salvatore said. “It just felt awesome.”

Wells didn't play in any games as a freshman because of an injury. He became an outstanding offensive lineman during the next three

seasons.

“I probably owe 800 of my rushing yards each season to Travis alone,” Salvatore added. “He was the best blocker that I've ever had. He would open huge holes for me. A lot of my success as a running back was because of Travis and the other linemen.”

Wells enjoyed making Salvatore's job as a running back very easy.

“Whichever way that I blocked my guy, Luke would always run the other way,” said Wells, who also throws the shot put for the Panthers indoor and outdoor track teams. “I just loved watching him run into the end zone. Those were special moments for me.”

As a senior, Salvatore rushed for a total of 950 yards on 123 carries and scored 12 touchdowns.

“When I was a junior, I had 190 carries and rushed for a total of 1,060 yards

and scored 13 touchdowns. “When I was a junior, I was very sore after every game,” he said. “We used the spread offense a lot more this past season and I didn't carry the ball as much.”

The other Panthers offensive linemen during the 2024 season were senior Cole Wilson, senior Adam Faulha, senior Ryan Wreschinsky, and sophomore Carter Bassett.

Page became the Panthers varsity football coach when Wells and Salvatore were freshmen.

“Travis and Luke both meant a great deal to our football program over their four years with us,” Page said. “They were captains this past season and did a great job, along with the other captains and senior leaders of leading by example both on and off the field. They are great young men.”

The duo were selected to the Mid-Wach E All-Star

team as seniors.

The Panthers finished the 2024 campaign with a 7-4 overall record.

“We did struggle for a couple of years,” Salvatore said. “I think dealing with the growing pains really helped us become a successful team

this past season.”

Even though Wells and Salvatore will be heading their separate ways following their graduation on June 6, they'll always have fond memories about playing on the same football teams together for the past eight years.

### SOFTBALL FROM PAGE 7

games will be difficult.”

The Pioneers senior captains are Kendra Burke, Greenly Lagimoniere, Lianna Carrasquillo, and Isabella Nompoggi. “They've been fantastic captains so far,” Gallo said. “It's like having four other coaches on the field.”

Burke, who was a member of the West softball team in the 2024 Bay State Games, is slated to be the Pioneers starting pitcher in the season opener.

She enters this season with

around 750 career strikeouts.

“It'll take a lot of hard work, but I think Kendra can reach 1,000 career strikeouts,” Gallo said. “She's a student of the game and is one of the best pitchers in our league. We're very fortunate that she's a member of our team. Only one other softball player has reached 1,000 career strikeouts.”

Burke is trying to break Jenna Maska's school strike-out record. Maska, who graduated in 2014, compiled 1,061 K's during her outstanding varsity softball career. She then played college softball at Dominican University.

Lagimoniere, who hit seven home runs as a junior, is the starting centerfielder. She's also a very good basketball player.

Carrasquillo starts at third base.

Nompoggi is a utility player.

“Isabella can play several different positions,” Gallo said. “She'll probably be our starting first baseman, but she can also play the middle infield positions and is a catcher. I don't know if she's a pitcher, but we might even try her at that position.”

Just like the four seniors, the five juniors listed on the Pathfinder Tech softball roster are all returning varsity players. They are Addison Doktor, Emily Forcier, who's the starting right fielder, Emily McNeaney, who's the starting catcher, Emily Prouty, and Jinx Ripley.

The two returning sophomores are Aubrey Ortiz, and Kyleigh Travis.

Rounding out the varsity softball roster are freshman Taylor Thornton, who's a first-year varsity player, and sophomore Carly Juda, who transferred to Pathfinder from Quabbin Regional before the start of the school year.

“While several of our starting positions are already set, we're still trying to fill the other spots,” Gallo said. “Once we get outside, we'll have a much better idea about things. I can't wait to play our first game of the season.”




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# Wings of Song chorus sings about Home at May concerts

STURBRIDGE – Capping a three-year exploration on the theme of HOME, local community chorus Wings of Song comes home once again with a pair of probing, moving concerts on Saturday and Sunday, May 17 and 18.

In 2023, the chorus sang of Planet Earth, our “Blue Boat Home” in the Universe. The following year, “Rough Seas, Safe Harbor” explored what it meant to be far from home for one or two years at

a time, then to return.

In 2025, it’s time for “Here Is My Home,” a deep dive into what home has meant to Americans and to people around the world over the years.

Home, for many of us, is our only real sanctuary, our safe harbor, the place where we can be most fully ourselves, the place where all our beloved stuff is, the place where we’re with the ones we love, the place where we prepare and share meals,

the place we’re proud to welcome our friends into.

Readers of this article will surely recognize the blessed feeling, after days or weeks of traveling, of coming home – home to your one’s place.

In “Here Is My Home,” Wings of Song will sing about yearning for home, waiting to finally go home, savoring the comforts and consolations of home, being welcomed home, the call of home, cherishing our planetary home, home as commu-

nity, home as various forms of communal expression such as music, a home “on God’s celestial shore,” having one’s home taken away by invasion or by a governmental directive, home as a particular beloved geographical region, home as reunion with those we love best.

The program won’t touch on all the meanings of home – but it’ll make a good start.

As always, there will be audience singalongs, includ-

ing the concerts’ theme song “Here Is My Home,” and also “Home, Sweet Home,” easily the most popular American song of the 1800s.

A follow-up article will profile many of the songs the chorus will be singing. Expect tremendous variety, including some fine instrumental accompaniment.

On Saturday, May 17 at 7:30 p.m., the chorus will perform at St. Joachim Chapel, part of St. Anne

– St. Patrick Parish, at 16 Church St. in Fiskdale. The next day, Sunday, May 18, the concert will take place at 3 p.m. at Elm Street Congregational Church, 61 Elm St., Southbridge.

Admission to both concerts is free, with a freewill offering collected around intermission time. Free refreshments will be served after each concert.

Both concert venues are handicapped-accessible. Arrive early to be sure of a seat.

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