

# QUABOAG CURRENT

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## Santa and the Grinch spread holiday cheer

By Ryan Drago  
Staff Writer  
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EAST BROOKFIELD – Something you never see very often happened this past week at the East Brookfield Public Library.

Santa Claus and the Grinch arrived and were under the same roof. In the past, Santa Claus visited the library, but this year he had a plus one. This was the first year the Grinch made his way to the East Brookfield Public Library.

Library Director Carolann MacMaster kept an extra eye on the Grinch to make sure he wouldn't sneak out of the library with the kids' Christmas gifts.

Everybody got together in the craft room of the library as kids got to draw their own Christmas trees. There were other coloring pages for kids to draw as

See **SANTA AND GRINCH** PAGE 5



Santa Claus and the Grinch were under the same roof as they visited the East Brookfield Public Library.

TURLEY PHOTO BY RYAN DRAGO

## Select Board recognize longtime police dispatcher

By Paula Ouimette  
Editor  
pouimette@turley.com

STURBRIDGE – Police Chief Earl Dessert recognized longtime dispatcher Toniah Mahoney at the Select Board meeting held on Dec. 15.

Dessert said Mahoney has served the Police Department as a dispatcher for 26 years.

"I've witness firsthand her dedication, professionalism and unwavering commitment to our community and our department," he said.

Dessert said Mahoney provided clear and effective guidance in a calm manner during stressful emergency calls. He said she ensured the safety of residents and first responders.

"Toniah's exemplary service and devotion to duty reflects the highest standards of public safety and she leaves behind a lasting legacy of professionalism,

compassion and dedication," Dessert said.

Dessert presented a plaque to Mahoney, honoring her retirement. The Select Board also gave her a certificate of service.

### Sergeant promotions

The Select Board approved the promotion of Patrol Officer Thomas Giordano to Sergeant. Dessert said the promotional process was recently completed, and included written testing, roleplaying and an oral interview.

Dessert said all candidates performed "exceptionally well" but that Giordano received the highest score.

Giordano has served on the Police Department since 2017. He is a Sturbridge resident and a graduate of Tantasqua Regional High School.

"He has consistently demonstrated strong leadership qualities, sound de-

See **STURBRIDGE** PAGE 5



Families and prospective students gathered in the cafeteria at Pathfinder Regional Vocational Technical High School to eat the free dinner provided by the culinary program

TURLEY PHOTOS BY ABIGAIL MCCOY

## Pathfinder career fair showcased students, shops

By Abigail McCoy  
amccoy@turley.com

PALMER – Pathfinder Regional Vocational Technical High School opened its doors to prospective students and families during its annual Career Night recently, transforming the building into a full-campus showcase of academic departments,

vocational shops, student activities, athletics, and support services.

Families were allowed to explore classrooms and speak directly with teachers, staff, and current students. During this time, a free community dinner was prepared and served by the school's culinary arts program.

Superintendent Eric

Duda said the turnout exceeded expectations.

"We had a very strong attendance...the feedback I've had directly from people seeking me out has been over the top," he said.

Duda added that visiting grandparents praised the

See **CAREER DAY** PAGE 10

## Haston Free Public Library held Santa's Workshop for children

By Ryan Drago  
Staff Writer  
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NORTH BROOKFIELD – Santa Claus needed some assistance this holiday season and called the Haston Free Public Library.

The craft room in the children's library was converted into Santa's Workshop, featuring various activities for kids to create memorable gifts. Youth Services Librarian Brianna Lamb said one long-time patron of the library generously donated all these items for the workshop.

This was the first time the library hosted Santa's Workshop and was available for use over the course of several days during regular library hours. The stations available in Santa's Work-



Obsidia Debettencourt used the beads to embellish the trinket box's latch.

SUBMITTED PHOTO

See **SANTA'S WORKSHOP** PAGE 6

## Baystate Wing's CHNA reported to food policy council

By Paula Ouimette  
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WARE – Members of the Quaboag Valley Food Policy Council heard the results of Baystate Wing Hospital's recent Community Health Needs Assessment.

Presenting the findings of the assessment at the Dec. 17 meeting were Annamarie Golden, Director of Community Relations and Community Benefits at Baystate Health and Lisa Ranghelli, Director of Assessment and Capacity Building at the Public Health Institute of Western Massachusetts.

Golden explained the purpose of the assessment, and how its data is used to help address the health needs of the communities Baystate Wing Hospital serves.

Golden said nonprofit hospitals are required to conduct a CHNA every three years.

Baystate Wing Hospital is located in Palmer, with 46 patient beds, 50 physicians and 500 employees. The hospital serves patients across multiple counties including Hampshire, Hampden and Worcester.

Golden said the hos-

See **BAYSTATE** PAGE 6

## Selectmen discussed combined water/sewer bills

By Paula Ouimette  
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NORTH BROOKFIELD – Board of Selectmen Chair Jason Petraitis said the town has now combined the bills for the Water and Sewer departments.

At the Dec. 16 meeting, Town Administrator Ron Aponte said he met with the departments to create a timeline to roll-out the new combined bills.

"The new combined bills will be sent out in the early to mid-February timeframe," Aponte said. "And any outstanding balance that's current will be included in that billing."

Aponte said the town will

still accept partial payments for the combined bills, up until the point of water shutoff, at which point only a complete payment will be accepted. A \$30 demand fee will be added to overdue balances.

He said when partial payments are received, there is now a priority with how the funds are allocated toward each of the balances.

"First, the outstanding sewer balance will be paid down, then outstanding water balances will be paid down, then it will be the current sewer balance or current sewer charges and then the current water charges or water balance will be the last as far as priorities," he said.

Aponte said everything

else will remain the same. He said on Wednesday, Jan. 7 at 6 p.m., an informational session will be held at the elementary school to answer any questions from water and sewer users.

### Lake Lashaway weed treatments

Marco Rodrigues, a resident of Lake Lashaway, came before the board to represent the Lake Lashaway Association to request financial assistance for lake treatment next summer.

"We have been focused on the water quality and invasive weeds on Lake Lashaway since 2019," Rodrigues said, with the first treatment in 2021.

He said this treatment was successful and they have

continued to conduct smaller treatments each summer to manage the invasive weeds.

"We focus on primarily the areas that are most effected and where the weed grows," he said.

Rodrigues said a survey conducted this past summer, found a significant amount of invasive weeds in the north cove area near the boat ramp.

"That treatment will be a significant higher cost than the past treatments," he said.

Rodrigues said the association has spent \$92,000 in treatments over the past few years. He said the estimate

See **N BROOKFIELD** PAGE 8

## - community -

# Mitten Tree is up at the library

By Ryan Drago  
Staff Writer  
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**EAST BROOKFIELD** – The East Brookfield Public Library, 122 Connie Mack Drive, put up its Mitten Tree during the holiday season.

Library Director Carolann MacMaster said the Mitten Tree has been a part of the library for the last five years. The idea started when thinking about how many kids or adults may not have warm clothing during the winter season.

There were over 50 items consisting of hats, mittens, scarves, gloves and socks that have either been purchased by library staff or have been donated by various donors that were placed on and underneath the tree. All that is collected gets shipped to a shelter.

Over the years, the East Brookfield Public Library has donated the items to various shelters. This year, all the warm items on the Mitten Tree are going to the homeless shelter in Worcester.

During regular library hours, patrons can drop by and check out the Mitten Tree and see if they know someone who may need one of these warm items. Anyone who knows someone that needs any of these items: hats, mittens, scarves, gloves, or socks, come to the library and visit their Mitten Tree.

MacMaster said “these items are for everybody,”



The East Brookfield Public Library is collecting hats, mittens, scarves, gloves and socks for adults and children, which are hung up on the Mitten Tree.

children and adults could use these items, especially this time of year. Donations to the Mitten Tree are still being accepted and can be dropped off at the library during normal business hours.

The Mitten Tree will be up at the library until the second week in January.

A cozy winter hat that was donated and is sitting comfortably on the Mitten Tree, located at the East Brookfield Public Library.



TURLEY PHOTOS BY RYAN DRAGO

# North Brookfield holds First Night Celebration

North Brookfield holds First Night Celebration

**NORTH BROOKFIELD** – North Brookfield Cultural Council and North Brookfield Parks and Recreation department are hosting the town’s second annual First Night Celebration.

Events throughout town will take place on Wednesday, Dec. 31, starting at noon. The town’s Waste Water Treatment plant, located at 59 East Brookfield Road, will

be open for tours from noon-2 p.m. Starting at 2 p.m. and continuing until 4 p.m., the town will host events at the following venues: First Congregational Church - Music by Professor Sorghum’s Good Time Music Review, local artist’s will show their work. Christ Memorial Church - Creche Display, meditation in sanctuary. Pizza, snacks, games downstairs.

Herard Estates Common Room - live music, poetry

reading, games, snacks. Historical Museum - open, scavenger hunt maps. Bike House Brewery - welcoming guests, snacks, games for all ages. Pets welcome.

Library - children’s crafts, face painting, meet and greet with local author Jack McClintock, Colonial themed snacks, games. Senior Center, Forest Street: music by Ravenwood; hot chocolate served.

Town Hall - open, wel-

coming guests. DJ Tabby Leblanc - playing music at the Little Park.

Businesses in town will be open and ready to welcome guests: Shaman’s Gift Shop, Jars Café, Subway, Angel Nails and Bliss Nails, Dragon Stones Gift Shop, NB Liquor Store, NB Smoke shop, Jim’s Pizza and NB Pizza Palace.

The day will end with a bonfire on the town’s common, starting at 4 p.m. and ending at 7 p.m. The Fire Department will assist to make sure the bonfire stays safe.

People will enjoy music by DJ Tabby Leblanc, and food by Long Branch Hot Dogs and Jars Café. Complete scavenger hunt maps can be turned in for a chance to win a prize.

# NBSB held successful Food and Toy Drives

**NORTH BROOKFIELD** – In the spirit of Season of Giving, North Brookfield Savings Bank is proud to announce the success of its annual Food and Toy Drives, made possible by the generosity of their customers, community members and employees.

These initiatives reflect the Bank’s ongoing commitment to supporting the communities it serves and making the holidays brighter for those in need.

During the annual Food Drive the Bank’s communities came together to donate over 950 non-perishable food items and over \$1,000 in monetary donations to support families in need. These generous donations have had a profound impact this season of giving, providing crucial assistance to individuals facing food insecurity.

To further amplify the impact, NBSB contributed an additional \$3,000 in support of the food pantry operations. NBSB’s annual Food Drive benefitted the following food pantries: East Brookfield Baptist Church Food Pantry, Sharing Cupboard Food Pantry - First Congregational Church, St. Joseph’s Parish Food Pantry, First Congregational Church of North Brookfield, Trinity Episcopal Church - Jubilee Cupboard, St. Francis of Assisi Parish Food Pantry and Palmer Food Share, Inc.

The generosity from their communities continued through the annual Toy Drive, where commu-

nity members, employees and neighbors stepped up to the plate again to donate over 430 toys for children in need, alongside more than \$1,600 in monetary donations. To extend this support further, NBSB contributed an additional \$1,250 to support those who need it the most and bring joy to children in the communities it serves this holiday season.

NBSB’s annual Toy Drive benefitted the following toy organizations: North Brookfield Police Association’s Toys for Joy Program, East Brookfield Toys for Joy Program, West Brookfield Police Association Holiday Toy Program, Ware Police Department “Christmas for Kids” Program, Belcher-town Firefighters Association Adopt-a-Family Program and Palmer Lions Club Holiday Toy Program.

“Community is at the heart of everything that we do, and the success of this year’s Food and Toy Drives is a testament to the compassion and generosity of our customers, employees and community members,” said Audrey Shampine, Marketing Manager at North Brookfield Savings Bank. “We are proud to come together to create a positive difference for those in need during this Season of Giving.”

To learn more about North Brookfield Savings Bank’s Community giving efforts and the convenient banking products and services offered, visit www.NorthBrookfieldSavings-Bank.com.

# Town hosts ‘Top Dog’ contest to improve pound

**NORTH BROOKFIELD** – The Town Clerk, Animal Control Officer and Police Department are holding a “Top Dog” contest to gather necessary supplies and materials to improve the town pound.

Items needed include lumber for interior walls, metal roofing for outdoor runs, unopened/unexpired dog food, soft dog treats, pill pockets, canned chicken/tuna/salmon, bleach/disinfecting cleaners, paper towels, laundry detergent, dryer sheets, dish soap, heavy-duty trash bags, dog

waste bags, scrub brushes/mops/buckets, towels and blankets (new, clean or gently used), T-shirts and other fabric scraps for bedding, collars and leashes, harnesses, food and water bowls, grooming supplies, durable toys, pet-safe shampoo and deodorizer, potty pads and more.

Monetary donations or gift cards will also be accepted.

The fundraiser will be held until Dec. 31 at the Town Clerk’s office.

People can bring a donated item from the above list to be entered into the raffle. Every donation will qualify for one ticket entry into the raffle to win dog tag number 1. The raffle will also include kennel tag number 1 (for kennels with five dogs or more).

Winners of the contest will be announced on Jan. 2, 2026.

For more information, call the Town Clerk at 508-867-0203 or email townclerk@northbrookfield.net.

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- community -

# Pathfinder Robotics craft fair raised funds for program



Maria Marshall of Maria's Sweet Treats, based in Belchertown, offered a wide variety of homemade cookies, including holiday flavors, stuffed cookies, and classic favorites at Pathfinder Regional Vocational Technical High School's first ever Robotics Craft Fair.



Dance Magic Crafts owner Chantelle Gauthier displayed handmade bags and accessories made with custom fabrics inspired by retro, fantasy, and pop culture.



The Pathfinder Regional Vocational Technical High School robotics team brought out their robot from the 2024 season to show to all the guests.

By Abigail McCoy  
amccoy@turley.com

PALMER – The halls, cafeteria, and gymnasium of Pathfinder Regional Vocational Technical High School were filled with energy, creativity, and community spirit on Dec. 6 as the school hosted its inaugural Pathfinder Robotics Craft Fair, a large-scale fundraising event that brought together dozens of local artisans, student programs, and community organizations under one roof.

The event, which featured approximately 38 vendors, marked the first time the Pathfinder robotics team organized a craft fair as a fundraiser. According to robotics instructor Justin



Jesselyn Allen of DuckTales Craft presented crocheted items, bracelets, mugs, and stickers at her vendor table.

Bren, the idea originated with a parent volunteer and quickly proved to be the most successful fundraiser the team has ever held.

“The robotics team is re-

ally expensive to run,” Bren said. “We’ve been very fortunate to have a lot of local businesses support us over the last 10 to 20 years, but it’s important to find new and creative ways to fund the team, especially in this economy. On paper, this idea looked great...and in reality, it’s been even better.”

Bren said the craft fair has already generated more revenue than any previous fundraiser for the robotics program. While organizers initially planned for up to 52 vendors, last-minute weather- and illness-related cancellations reduced that number to about 38.



Tree to Table carpenter Roland Lapointe showed off his handmade wooden bowls and plates.

Despite that, the event ran smoothly, drawing steady foot traffic throughout the day.

Student involvement played a key role in the fair’s success. Robotics students assisted with vendor relations, checking in regularly with exhibitors and even delivering food directly to vendor tables so sellers would not have to leave their booths unattended.

“A lot of the vendors have told us they’re really pleased with how everything is being run,” Bren said. “The kids have been incredibly helpful.”

The fundraiser supports

sized competition robot before heading into regional events at Western New England University and Revere High School.

The team hopes to qualify again for the New England Championship at the Big E Coliseum and, if successful, advance to the World Championship in Texas.

Beyond robotics, the craft fair highlighted the breadth of creativity within the Pathfinder community and beyond. Vendors filled multiple areas of the school with handmade goods, baked treats, jewelry, fiber arts, woodwork, and specialty crafts.

Among the artisans was Shelly Bourbeau, owner of Ginger Girl Handmade, who

See CRAFT FAIR PAGE 8



Rose Dupre of the Paper City Sisters displayed handcrafted holiday decorations and paper crafts created by her and her sister.



Mike Lockett of ML Glassworks displayed handmade glass art after recently launching his business following a move to the Palmer area.

## St. Aloysius Catholic School to hold annual fund drive

HARDWICK – St. Aloysius Catholic School in Gilbertville has launched its Annual Fund Drive in place of the Scholarship Drive with a pledge of \$40,000 in matching funds from an anonymous benefactor.

The fund drive runs through March 15, 2026.

Last year the fund drive raised just over \$95,000 including the match funds.

“To raise that amount of money was truly a miracle. Never in the history of our Annual Fund Drive or the Scholarship Drive that preceded it, did we ever exceed our goal to that extent,” said Roberta McQuaid, Finance Manager and Enrollment Co-

ordinator for the school.

The School Board implemented the Annual Fund Drive in place of the Scholarship Drive in 2025 to be able to diversify the use of the money earned, and thereby keep tuition affordable for families.

“The cost of nearly everything it takes to run a school has increased, from utilities to insurance, to books and salaries. It is no small feat to make ends meet. We rely so heavily on those who support our mission; we couldn’t do the good work we do if it weren’t for our donors. While I hope and pray we will do well again this year, big gifts are not a

given, and every donation, no matter the size, truly counts,” continued McQuaid. “Catholic Schools provide a foundation of faith for the students we serve, and their families benefit too. Our students work hard academically and contribute to the local community. It’s a well rounded education, and when they leave St. Aloysius for high school they are prepared to meet the challenges that lie ahead. It’s a worthwhile goal to try and keep our tuitions prices stable so that families can continue to afford a private, Catholic education.”

Tuition assistance is also available through the

Roman Catholic Diocese of Worcester and from scholarships gifted by private foundations.

For more information about St. Aloysius Catholic School or to make a tax deductible donation that will be matched dollar for dollar to the Annual Fund please visit [www.staloyuscs.com/support/](http://www.staloyuscs.com/support/). Donations can also be mailed to St. Aloysius Catholic School, P.O. Box 522, Gilbertville, MA 01031, noting “Annual Fund” on the memo line.

An Open House is planned for Monday, Jan. 26, 2026 from 3-5:30 p.m. Prospective families are encouraged to visit the school.

## FROST announces annual first day hike

STURBRIDGE – The Friends of Sturbridge Trails announces it will again hold its annual first day hike on Thursday, Jan. 1, 2026.

The hike will start at the main Leadmine Trails parking lot at 10 Old Sturbridge Village Road at 1 p.m. The hike will be easy/moderate trails of about 2 miles in length and last about 1 1/2 hours.

The hike will be led by Dave Peterkin, assisted by Dave Vadnaise. Pets, on a six foot leash are okay. This is a family friendly hike but will cover some moderate topography.

Please dress for the weather with good footwear

as trails may be snow covered and icy. Bring a water bottle.

There will be no first Saturday trail hikes on Saturday, Jan. 3, 2026

FROST is a nonprofit membership supported trail group to support Sturbridge Trails and holds/supports trail events throughout the year. To learn more about FROST and the Sturbridge Trail system visit: [www.treksturbridge.org](http://www.treksturbridge.org), or follow on Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/Friends-of-Sturbridge-Trails-476149822433894/>

One can join FrOST: <https://www.treksturbridge.org/donate>.

## EQLT hosts First Day walk on Jan. 1

WARE – The East Quabbin Land Trust will kickoff the New Year with a First Day walk on the Mass Central Rail Trail, Thursday, Jan. 1 at noon.

The walk will be held on the Church Street segment of the Mass Central Rail Trail in Ware. Well-behaved dogs on leash are welcomed.

For more information, visit [eqlt.org](http://eqlt.org) or follow East Quabbin Land Trust on social media.

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- opinion -

# German Christmas traditions celebrated by many

By Ellenor Downer  
edowner@turley.com

One did not have to look beyond the Christmas tree to realize the influence of German Christmas traditions.

As Germans migrated to other countries, they brought the tradition of the Tannenbaum or Christmas tree with them with its display of lights and ornaments. When supplies of evergreen trees diminished due to over cutting, artificial trees made of goose feathers took hold in the 1890s. In the 1930s, a toilet brush company, manufactured artificial trees from brush bristle inventory. Today, these “fake” trees resemble the real thing without the fir tree fragrance.

### Christmas tree

The Christmas tree takes center stage during holiday celebrations in Germany, evoking a profound sense of nostalgia and festivity. Within this cultural practice, families come together to partake in the ritual of embellishing the tree with ornaments, garlands and more. This act not only beautifies the tree, but strengthens familial bonds. Children as well as adult family members love to decorate the Christmas tree. In my family, my father always put on the lights and the angel for the top of the tree. My mother then placed her favorite ornament on the tree, followed



The Christmas tree is a long standing Christmas tradition.

by me and my brother.

### Advent calendars

For young children, the days in December leading up to Christmas seem to take forever. For adults, the shortening days of the year make long nights that never end. Advent calendars, another German Christmas tradition, help make the time pass from the first day of the month to Christmas Eve and Christmas Day. Advent, the arrival of a notable person, thing or event, in the Christian tradition noted

the four Sundays leading to Christmas.

Advent calendars display the dates, Dec. 1 to Dec. 25 and often have pockets or tiny doors to hold a piece of candy or other small treat. There are advent calendar made of wood or some other durable material other than paper, which can be used year after year.

Embodying the spirit of German precision, the Advent calendars stand as a testament to Germany's cultural dedication to celebrat-



The Advent wreath is made with evergreen boughs shaped in a circular. It has four candles often three purple and one pink candle with a white candle in the middle. Many wreaths use the same color candle such as blue, red or white.

ing the holiday season.

### Advent wreath

The Advent wreath is another German tradition adopted by many other countries. Many Christmas churches throughout the world observe Advent with the lighting of a different candle leading up to Christmas.

The candle for the first week of Advent is the Hope or Prophet's Candle. The second week is the Love or Bethlehem candle. The third week is the Joy or Shepherd's Candle and is the final week and is the

Peace Candle. The candle in the center of the wreath is lit on Christmas Eve or Christmas Day.

Some wreaths have purple candles for the first, second and fourth Sundays and pink or rose colored for the

third Sunday. The center candle is usually white. Although some wreaths have candles of a single color such as red, blue or white.

The circular shape of the wreath represents the eternal nature of God. The evergreen branches represents the everlasting life found in Christ.

### Christmas Eve candlelight service

Candlelit church services for Christians on Christmas is a cherished tradition for Germans over time. Worshipers gather as the night deepens and hold a lighted candle. Many churches for safety sake use battery powered candles. On church in Central Massachusetts has a crystal candle lite chandelier, which they light on

See GERMAN CHRISTMAS PAGE 9

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## SOCIAL SECURITY Matters

By Russell Gloor

### About remarrying and benefits from an ex-spouse

Dear Rusty:

I am almost 57, divorced after a 14-year marriage. My former spouse is 15 years older than I and made significantly more money than me. I am required to retire from my job at age 60 but expect to keep working in some capacity.

I have a girlfriend of a similar age to me. She did not earn as much as her former husband as she mainly raised their children. She is also divorced from an older spouse who made more money than she did. I am trying to figure out if we will be penalized if we marry or if it matters if we wait until after we reach 60 years of age. Can I claim my own benefits when I become eligible at 62, then claim survivor benefits later, whenever my former spouse passes? Is that affected if, or when, I remarry? I do not want to give up my potential survivor benefits from my ex-spouse. Are those affected if I remarry?

If I understand correctly, if I remarry even after 60, we would both forfeit divorced spousal benefits, is that right? Given that my girlfriend's former spouse probably made more money than I, would she be forfeiting her former spousal benefits if we were to marry, even after age 60?

Lastly, I am considering retiring abroad as an expat. Any suggestions about how that would affect our Social Security benefits?

Signed: Starting Over

Dear Starting Over:

With certain exceptions, benefits from a living ex-spouse cannot be collected if you remarry (regardless of your age when you remarry). So, from what you've

shared, whenever you remarry both you and your new wife will forfeit eligibility for benefits from your respective ex-spouses while they are living (FYI, there are exceptions for those who are disabled).

However, the rules are different for a surviving ex-spouse: if you remarry before age 60, you will forfeit your surviving ex-spouse benefit. But if you remarry after age 60, you retain eligibility to collect survivor benefits from a deceased former spouse. So, if you and your girlfriend remarry after you are both age 60, you will both still be able to claim survivor benefits based on your former spouses' records.

And, yes, it is possible for you to initially claim your own SS retirement benefit at 62 and claim your surviving ex-spouse benefit later after your former spouse dies. Provided you remarry after age 60 you do not lose that option, but if you were to claim a surviving ex-spouse benefit before reaching your Full Retirement Age, the monthly payment amount would be reduced, all SS benefits taken before FRA are reduced.

Note too, that if you plan to continue working after you are first eligible for SS benefits, Social Security has an “earnings test” which limits how much you can earn from working while collecting early benefits. The limit changes yearly for 2025 it is \$23,400 and if exceeded, SS will take back \$1 in benefits for every \$2 you are over the limit. And, as you likely know, claiming at age 62 will also mean a benefit payment

See SOCIAL SECURITY PAGE 6

## - editorial -

### Yes, Virginia, There is a Santa Claus

By Francis P. Church  
in 1897

Dear Editor,

I am 8 years old. Some of my little friends say that there is no Santa Claus. Papa says “If you see it in the Sun, it is so.” Please tell me the truth, is there a Santa Claus?

Virginia,

Your little friends are wrong. They have been affected by the skepticism of a skeptical age. They do not believe except what they see. They think that nothing can be which is not comprehensible by their little minds.

All minds, Virginia, whether they be men's or children's, are little. In this great universe of ours, man is a mere insect, an ant, in his intellect, as compared with the boundless world about him, as measured by the intelligence capable of grasping the whole of truth and knowledge.

Yes, Virginia, there is a Santa Claus. He exists as

certainly as love and generosity and devotion exist, and you know that they abound and give to our life its highest beauty and joy.

Alas! How dreary would be the world if there were no Santa Claus! It would be as dreary as if there were no Virginias. There would be no childlike faith then, no poetry, no romance to make tolerable this existence. We should have no enjoyment, except in sense and sight. The eternal light with which childhood fills the world would be extinguished.

Not believe in Santa Claus? You might as well not believe in fairies! You might get your Papa to hire men to watch all the chimneys on Christmas Eve to catch Santa Claus, but even if they did not see Santa Claus coming down, what would that prove?

Nobody sees Santa Claus, but that is no sign that there is no Santa Claus. The most real things in the world are those that neither children nor men can see.

Did you ever see fairies dancing on the lawn? Of course not, but that's no proof that they are not there. Nobody can conceive or imagine all the wonders that are unseen and unseeable in the world.

You tear apart the baby's rattle and see what makes the noise inside, but there is a veil covering the unseen world which not the strongest man, or even the united strength of all the strongest men that ever lived, could tear apart. Only faith, fancy, poetry, love, romance, can push aside that curtain and view and picture the supernatural beauty and glory beyond.

Is it all real? Ah, Virginia, in all this world there is nothing else as real and abiding.

No Santa Claus? Thank God he lives and he lives forever. A thousand years from now, maybe 10 times 10,000 years from now, he will continue to make glad the hearts of children.



### OPINION PAGE/ LETTERS POLICY

Letters to the editor should be 250 words or less in length, and guest columns between 500 and 800 words. No unsigned or anonymous opinions will be published. We require that the person submitting the opinion also include his or her town of residence and home telephone number. We authenticate authorship prior to publication. We reserve the right to edit or withhold any submissions deemed to be libelous, unsubstantiated allegations, personal attacks, or defamation of character.

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# - community -



Santa handed a Christmas gift to Zoey

**SANTA AND GRINCH**  
FROM PAGE 1

Santa Claus and the Grinch were ready to spend the day at the library with the kids. There were over 10 kids waiting in line to sit on Santa's lap and share what they would like for Christmas. As the kids finished sharing, Santa Claus had a surprise for all the kids who showed up. There were gift bags

being handed out to all the children after they got to see Santa Claus. MacMaster helped out handing out the gifts, while still keeping an eye on the Grinch who brought an empty to probably fill up with toys.

The children had a great time at the library visiting Santa Claus and the Grinch and thanked the two of them for bringing them laughter, joy and presents.



Kids got to draw while visiting Santa Claus and the Grinch at the East Brookfield Public Library.



Michael is shown sitting with Santa Claus during his visit to the library.



Murphy and Theodore took a picture with Santa Claus.



Library Director Carolann MacMaster snuck a picture with the Grinch. She was making sure he didn't take any presents.



Julia took a picture with Santa Claus and got to take a Christmas gift home.

**STURBRIDGE**  
FROM PAGE 1

cision making, effective communication skills and high level of professionalism," Dessert said. The Select Board also approved the promotion of Patrol Officer Richard Tracy to Sergeant. Dessert said Tracy earned the second highest score during the promotional process. Tracy has served on the Police Department since July of this year. "He brings a wealth of knowledge, training and experience that has proven beneficial to this agency," Dessert said. Tracy served as postal inspector for 23 years and has worked as a patrolman for the towns of Tisbury and West Brookfield.

**DPW report**

Department of Public Works Director Heather Blakeley said the department dealt with its first snowstorm of the season. She said there were some issues with trucks during the storm, but they were able to get through it. One truck has a major exhaust leak at the manifold and other trucks had issues with equipment icing up. Blakeley said she is requesting a transfer from the Finance Committee to repair the exhaust leak and they are troubleshooting equipment issues with the one-ton truck. "It still can plow, it's still functional for that," Blakeley said. She said another truck is already back online. Blakeley said the department is also expecting the retirement of one of its long-time employees in February 2026 and she also received a resignation from another. "We are still down one person already with the crew

and the Assistant DPW Director," she said. Blakeley said she will be adding the latest positions to the department's job listings. Blakeley said the analog heads on the town's water meters have been discontinued and they will need to switch to digital heads as they need replacing. "We don't have a choice," she said. Blakeley said this gives the department the opportunity to change how they read the meters, by using a cellular reader. They would get data more frequently, and would receive automatic weekly updates. Customers would also be able to receive up-to-date readings, which would help them detect any water leaks early. The cost of the digital head and the cellular reader are about \$350 total per meter. The total overall cost to transition all customers to digital meters would be approximately \$2 million. She recommended replacing the heads and adding cellular readers on a slow rolling basis. "We'll be able to slowly phase this in," Blakeley said. Water/sewer report Shane Moody, Veolia's Project Manager for the Water and Sewer Department, said despite the drought, the town's wells are at a good level. "As long as one of those sources don't go down, you're in very good shape," he said. Moody said Tighe & Bond has completed an acid management plan, and one of the things outlined in it is looking for another water source. "It's great that you have plenty, but you can never have enough," he said. Moody said the plan also cataloged every piece of above ground equipment, its expected lifespan, and how much it would cost to replace.

Moody said the engineers from Tighe & Bond will present the plan to the Select Board at its Jan. 20, 2026 meeting. Moody said the filter media project is continuing and the second vessel was in worse shape than the first one. "The plan is to rebuild them to get us another four or five years out of it and then we're going to have to start looking at how and where we're going to build a new water plant," he said. "The thing's from 1982, it's served its purpose and you're not going to get much longer out of it." Moody said there was a

small overflow at one of the pump stations due to the failure of an underground electric line, which caused a short. He said it was too cold for the backup battery to function. **Appointments** Dessert introduced Elisa Santos to the board to be appointed as a full-time dispatcher. He said she is currently a forensic technician with the chief medical examiner and serves as a pathology specialist at the Massachusetts General Hospital. He said she has an extensive background in criminal justice. "Her background, educa-

tion and skill set make her for a strong fit for our communication center," Dessert said. The Select Board appointed Santos with a start date of Dec. 16. The Select Board also appointed Beverly Pattee to the Council on Aging with a term to expire Dec. 15, 2028. **Donation** Town Administrator Robin Grimm said ConvenientMD Urgent Care recently opened, and to be a good partner with the community, the business donated \$2,000 for recreational scholarships for youth and \$3,000 toward the sponsorship of events. "It's a wonderful gesture

on their part and we're very happy to welcome them to Sturbridge," she said. The Select Board accepted the donation. **BESS bylaw** Grimm said the town will need to draft a bylaw for battery energy storage systems to be presented to voters at town meeting. She said the Planning Board, Town Planner, and herself, believe that placing a moratorium on these systems will help to delay any projects while the bylaw is being created. The Select Board voted to support the Planning Board's request for a moratorium.

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The wrapping and card station was part of Santa's Workshop inside the children's craft room at the Hasston Free Public Library.



The trinket box station was a popular craft featured in Santa's Workshop

**SANTA'S WORKSHOP FROM PAGE 1**

shop consist of tote bags, trinket boxes, photo frames, pottery station, jewelry, DIY ornaments, sewing, and wrapping and card station. Lamb described Santa's Workshop as a "cute idea"

that would give kids creative and imaginative ideas as they make their own gifts. Santa's Workshop first opened at the library on Dec. 15 and ran until Saturday, Dec. 20 during regular library hours. Lamb said the kids who



The tote bag station was all about decorating a bag that folks can use for a long time.



Kids could make their own holiday ornaments at Santa's Workshop

**BAYSTATE FROM PAGE 1**

pital has a busy emergency department, with 20 private patient rooms, trauma and behavioral health crisis services and CT and X-ray services. Last year the emergency department had more than 38,000 patient visits.

"Our team there is absolutely fabulous," she said.

Data for the assessment is collected through various sources thanks to the partnership of nine hospitals and insurers through the Coalition of Western MA Hospitals/Insurers.

"The coalition was established in 2012 to leverage resources," Golden said. "There's a lot of overlap."

Ranghelli shared the key findings of the CHNA, which highlighted health trends and needs across the counties.

"This is a very comprehensive and inclusive process. We use it as our starting point," Ranghelli said. "A lot of different folks have been engaged."

Ranghelli said data was collected from 300 commu-

nity members from western Massachusetts, through focus groups, key informant interviews, public health surveys and through regional advisory committee members.

The CHNA took into consideration social and economic influences, barriers to care, health behaviors and outcomes and priority populations.

The key findings for this year's CHNA showed a focus on maternal health, mental health, substance use, access to basic needs (food, housing and transportation) and difficulty with insurance and medical systems.

"Access to needs is a perennial challenge, including food, transportation and housing," Ranghelli said.

Maternal health Ranghelli reported that the level of adequate prenatal care rates have dropped by 10-20% per county, based on whether the patient has private or public health insurance.

"Access to prenatal care showed a difference based on what health insurance you have," she said. "Public health insurance had more

barriers across all three counties."

Ranghelli said higher rates of low birth weights were also reported by patients with public health insurance, especially in Hampshire County.

"Hampshire County has doubled the low birth weight for public insurance compared to private," she said.

**Adult mental health and substance use**

Ranghelli said the assessment found an increase in the rates of poor mental health, compared to findings from 2019.

"Unfortunately, we see increases in rates of poor mental health and we're seeing that across the board," she said. "This continues to be a challenge in the present day."

Binge drinking was also identified as an ongoing challenge in all of the counties. With one in five people reporting having binge drank.

Ranghelli said while there has been a more positive shift in substance use care in the community, those who use substances are still facing barriers for basic needs in addition to discrimination and

stigma in emergency rooms and other medical settings.

Ranghelli said people from the Recovery Center of HOPE were interviewed about these barriers, and that the staff leaders at Baystate Wing Hospital were responsive to the feedback received.

**Youth substance use and mental health**

In the spring, students at Monson, North Brookfield and Quabbin Regional middle/high schools were given a survey about substance use.

The survey showed that alcohol is the most commonly used substance with 20% of eighth grade students reporting that they tried it.

Mental health continues to be a challenge, with four out of 10 students reporting daily anxiety. Seventy-eight percent of LGBTQIA+ students reported high levels of daily anxiety.

Of all students surveyed, 27% reported feeling depressed or sad nearly every day.

**Common themes**

Ranghelli said there's "a lot of crosscutting themes" across the following population groups: older adults, immigrants and refugees

and young children and their parents/caregivers. Barriers include access to transportation, access to technology, earning a livable wage, access to reliable and affordable childcare and access to food.

"One of the biggest expenses for grandparent caregivers is food for the children," she said.

Ranghelli said many grandparent caregivers do not qualify for government assistance to help with food insecurity, such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program.

Older adults are struggling with housing, social isolation and loneliness, and a lack of geriatric care providers. Women age 65+ are more likely to be widowed and living in poverty than men are.

With immigrants and refugees, there is a great need for trauma informed care and practice. There are also language barriers, despite Baystate Wing Hospital having translation services.

Transportation in rural areas is still a barrier to healthcare, which can also have an impact on a person's

ability to get food.

Ranghelli said the Quaboag Connector, a transportation service based out of Ware, is trying to meet those needs.

Ranghelli said the cost of housing has continued to rise and the town of Palmer reported higher eviction rates.

"Many folks, more than a quarter, pay more than 30% of their income for housing," she said.

Food insecurity had decreased in 2021 when supports were in place, but now there is an uptick due to inflation and those supports being gone.

Ranghelli said the top searches on 413Cares were related to housing and food.

"We know we have areas where food isn't available and we have limited access," she said.

**More about the CHNA**

The 2025 Community Health Needs Assessment is available at baystatehealth.org/CHNA. The Health New England Community Health Needs Assessment will be published in January 2026.

**CRAFT FAIR FROM PAGE 3**

creates uniquely themed bags and accessories featuring pop culture, fantasy, and gaming-inspired designs. Nearby, Maria Marshall of Maria's Sweet Treats offered a wide selection of cookies,

including ginger spice, peppermint hot chocolate, cinnamon bun, Reese's-stuffed peanut butter, salted caramel chocolate chip, and Nutella-stuffed browned butter varieties.

Independent Scent-sy consultant Holly Cote showcased seasonal candles, wax melts, car bars, and

holiday-themed warmers, while Beth's Beaded Bracelets and Necklaces featured handmade jewelry. Youth entrepreneurship was also on display, including Julia's Heartmade Creations, run by 15-year-old Addison Julia, who crafts chunky yarn items such as seasonal décor, pet beds, snowmen,

pumpkins, and Christmas trees.

"I love that she's able to make things that match the season," said her mother, Deidre Cadieux. "This is a new endeavor for her, and she's really excited about it."

The fair also featured Dance Magic Crafts, owned by Chantelle Gauthier, whose work blends custom fabrics, nostalgic 1980s and 1990s themes, and costume-inspired materials into colorful bags and accessories.

Graverend Creations, operated by Bethany Larzazas, drew attention with handmade "hair loopies": decorative hair accessories designed to add flair without dyeing.

Other vendors included The Thrifted Goth, offering alternative jewelry and spiritual items; Autumn's Treasures, which specializes in crystals and minerals mined from Maine to South

Carolina; DuckTales Craft by Jesselyn Allen, featuring crocheted goods and accessories; and ML Glassworks, a new glass art business launched by Palmer resident Mike Luckett.

Pathfinder student programs were also represented throughout the building. Students sold Santa Scout ornaments as part of the Advanced Manufacturing program, while the Pathfinder Education Association hosted a gift-wrapping fundraiser. Inside the school's restaurant and shop areas, visitors could purchase wreaths, swags, holiday décor, birdhouses, stools, bookcases, and Adirondack chairs crafted by students in the horticulture and carpentry programs.

Also inside the Pathfinder restaurant stood resident school therapy dog, Scout, dressed as Santa and pre-

pared to take photos with anyone stopping by.

Community organizations and educational programs rounded out the event, including Gotta Dance, which promoted new classes beginning in January and shared details about upcoming performances and holiday events, and Code Ninjas, which highlighted its coding programs for children and teens.

As the day wrapped up, the fair stood as more than just a fundraiser. It was a showcase of student achievement, local entrepreneurship, and the strong community partnerships that support Pathfinder's hands-on educational mission.

"This has been an incredible experience for the kids and the community," Bren said. "We're excited about what this means for the future of our robotics program."

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New Year's will bring early deadlines for all ads & legal notices to run in TURLEY PUBLICATIONS the week of Dec. 29, 2025 - Jan. 2, 2026:

**Friday, December 26 at 2 PM for January 1 issue**

- Country Journal • The Register • Wilbraham-Hampden Times • Agawam Advertiser News

**Monday, December 29 at 2 PM for January 1 issue**

- Sentinel • The Journal Register • Ware River News • Barre Gazette

**Tuesday, December 30 at 2 PM for January 2 issue**

- Quaboag Current • Town Reminder • The Holyoke Sun • Chicopee Register

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**SOCIAL SECURITY FROM PAGE 4**

of about 30% less than available at your FRA of 67. So, if you plan to work after age 62 and plan to claim early SS, you should take the "earnings test" into consideration. FYI, the earning test no longer applies after you reach your Full Retirement Age.

Now, regarding retiring overseas, be aware that Social Security has limits on where you can collect U.S.

Social Security benefits. I suggest you use Social Security's Payments Abroad Screening Tool to find out if benefits are payable wherever you plan to retire abroad. That SSA tool can be found here: [https://www.ssa.gov/international/payments\\_outsideUS.html](https://www.ssa.gov/international/payments_outsideUS.html).

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# SPORTS

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## Shooting struggles as Ware edges Quaboag



WARE – Last Wednesday night, it was a battle of defense and rebounding as both Quaboag and Ware girls basketball had a tough time scoring. But Ware was able to overcome a small deficit entering the final frame for a 26-24 win over Quaboag. Ware got 10 points from Amelia Orszulak. Ware girls basketball improved to a perfect 3-0 while Quaboag is now 0-4.

TURLEY PHOTOS BY GREGORY A. SCIBELLI  
Evelyn Potvin sends a pass away.



Maddie Potvin eyes the hoop as she enters the arc.



Isabelle Manzano sends a pass toward the corner.



Reagan Grant charges into the arc.



Madeline Dufresne is pressured near the hoop.



TURLEY PHOTOS BY GREGORY A. SCIBELLI  
Olivia Holmes tries to keep possession of the ball as she heads down the court.

## Indians score win in opener



NORTH BROOKFIELD – Last week, North Brookfield grabbed a win against South Lancaster in its season opener 38-23. The Indians then faced off with Southbridge before getting a long break until the new year. The Indians will rematch with South Lancaster on Jan. 8.

Abby Lindberg tries for the in-bound pass.



Whitney Reno gets ready to shoot.



Kalyn Roy holds the ball back as an opponent approaches.

## Panthers suffer loss at home

BARRE – The Quabbin Regional High School girls basketball team fell to Lunenburg 41-29 last Wednesday night to fall to 2-0 on the regular season. The Panthers are now 0-2 on the season as they also were defeated on the road at

Leicester on Monday, Dec. 15. The girls will participate in a tournament on Saturday, Dec. 27 at Gardner High School with their first game at 5:30 p.m. The tournament will continue on Monday, Dec. 29.



TURLEY PHOTOS BY GREGORY A. SCIBELLI  
Abby Rogowski crosses midcourt for the Panthers.



Mia Ducos passes on the run.



Aubrey Torpe is pressured as she crosses midcourt.



Makenzie Casey attempts a shot.



Sienna Shaw looks for a way to get around her opponent.



Makenzie Casey attempts a shot.

## Offense gets going early in Railers win

WORCESTER – Although they are very much alive in the ECHL's North Division playoff race, they were — for one night anyway — the late Worcester Railers.

They beat the Norfolk Admirals 6-2 last Wednesday and scored a goal in the closing seconds of all three periods. Worcester got one with two seconds left in the first, 10 seconds go to in the second and 2.1 ticks remaining in the game.

Worcester's goals were all scored by different players. Ten different players had points. Parker Gahegan continued his wonderful play in net by stopping 31 shots. That included 16 of 17 in the second period when Norfolk desperately tried to get back into a game it trailed, 4-0, after 20 minutes.

That's right. The Railers had a 4-0 lead going into the second period. That had happened only once before in team history, on Jan. 26, 2019 here, in what became a 5-1 victory over Adirondack.

Prior to this game Worcester had spent most of its first periods in survival mode, especially at the DCU Center.

"I think we really tried to channel our road type of mentality," coach Nick

Tuzzolino said. "When you get into this amount of games you start pre-scouting yourself and I was pre-scouting us I'd probably say 'pounce on 'em in the first period."

"That seems to be their weakness."

Riley Ginnell, Drew Callin, Anthony Repaci and Michael Suda scored the first period goals. Matt DeMelis got one in the second period, Gleb Veremyev

in the third. Drew Callin was 1-2-3. Suda was and Repaci were both 1-1-2 and Anthony Callin had two assists.

Jack O'Leary scored both Norfolk goals. The Railers did something unusual to achieve the triumph. They beat Norfolk goaltender Isaac Poulter, a very good one just down from the American Hockey League. Prior to Friday night Poulter had put together a streak during which he allowed the Railers to score just two goals in three full games.

The first period goals were scored by, in order, Ginnell, Drew Callin, Repaci and Suda.

Ginnell converted a 2 on 1 break with a short side wrist shot from the left circle at 5:39. Drew Callin



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# Turleysports



## Athlete of the Month

**NAME:** Evelyn Potvin  
**SCHOOL:** Quaboag

Potvin was Quaboag's playmaker, leading the offense to try and create baskets in their matchup with Ware.

To nominate someone for Athlete of the Week, contact Managing Sports Editor Gregory A. Scibelli at 413-283-8393 ext. 258 or send an e-mail to [gscibelli@turley.com](mailto:gscibelli@turley.com).

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## Andrew Rogers recognized by MIAA

FRANKLIN – The MIAA recognized 21 game officials from across the state as the 2024-2025 Game Officials of the Year during a celebratory banquet held Monday, Dec. 15 at the Doubletree Milford. The MIAA annually recognizes the best game officials from the over 5,000 officials in Massachusetts as nominated by their peers. The following individuals were nominated and ultimately selected as the best in their craft: Among those recognized was longtime umpire Andrew Rogers from South Hadley. Rogers is also the umpire assignor for Western Mass. high school baseball and multiple adult leagues as well as American Legion summer baseball.

## Thunderbirds inch closer to .500 with win at Lehigh

ALLENTOWN, PA – The Springfield Thunderbirds (8-11-3-2) rode yet another phenomenal night of goaltending and special teams to a 3-1 win over the Lehigh Valley Phantoms (13-10-1-2) last Wednesday night inside PPL Center.

In a first period devoid of scoring on 13 combined shots, Vadim Zherenko carried over momentum from his phenomenal outing 10 nights earlier in Providence with eight first-period denials, including two on a Phantoms power play.



Newest T-Bird Troy Murray quickly warmed himself up to his teammates and fans, as the 28-year-old dropped the gloves with Sawyer Boulton on the first shift of his AHL career following more than 200 professional games across three leagues before his T-Birds debut on Wednesday.

Springfield's penalty kill, which has operated better than any other road PK in the AHL, continued its remarkable run with a second-period clinic. The T-Birds killed off three disadvantages, and on the third of those, Chris Wagner added his second shorthanded goal of the season, as he circled Aleksei Kolosov's net and stuffed a wraparound home at 15:57 of the middle period, making it a 1-0 game heading into the final frame.

However, the Thunderbirds once again proved they were not ruffled, and just 1:58 later, moments after Garrett Wilson committed a delay of game minor for clearing the puck over the glass, Alek Kaskimaki shuffled a rebound past Kolosov following an initial try by Calle Rosen. The second-year Finn's fifth goal of the season restored the Springfield lead, 2-1.

The penalty killers stiffened one more time, completing a perfect 5-for-5 night with a man down, and with the Phantoms' net empty in the final minute, Michael Buchinger lobbed a clear all the way down and into the yawning cage to put the nail in the coffin.

Zherenko kept up his end of the bargain with nine more stops in the second to make it a two-period total of 17 denials against the Phantom attack.

The Phantoms did not stay quiet forever, though, as Alex Bump ripped a perfectly placed shot over Zherenko's glove hand at 3:19 of the third, tying the score, 1-1.

Zherenko completed another magnificent performance with 23 stops to secure the victory. Springfield has now earned points in nine of the last 10 games, and the club has begun this five-game road trip with three consecutive triumphs.

### RAILERS FROM PAGE 7

deflected home a shot by his brother at 10:11. Repaci took advantage of a Norfolk turnover and sizzled a wrist shot past Poulter at 12:26, then Suda blasted a low shot home from 55 feet away with just two seconds left in the period. Norfolk got one back at

8:10 of the second period as the teams traded 2 on 1 breaks. Worcester's came first and when Ross Mitton came down the right side missed to the far post on a wrist shot, that set up the Admirals' 2 on 1. O'Leary scored at 8:10.

of the period. Just when it looked like Worcester would escape with the 4-1 lead, DeMelis extended his goals streak to four by putting a 20-footer past Poulter at 19:50 and the Railers were up by four again.

The Admirals were all over the Railers for most

Both teams had someone in the penalty box so it was a 4 on 4 goal.

### N BROOKFIELD FROM PAGE 1

for next summer's treatment is \$59,000.

Rodrigues said the association's membership has contributed financially, and fundraisers have been held to help with the cost of treatment.

"We need contributions from both East Brookfield and North Brookfield towns to offset the cost of that," he said.

Rodrigues said the town of East Brookfield allocated \$10,000 at special town meeting to go toward the treatment at the lake.

Rodrigues said both communities enjoy use of the lake.

Petratis said this request will appear as an article at a future town meeting.

### Letter from Parks & Recreation

The members of the Parks & Recreation Committee sent a letter to the board to address the child sized picnic table that was removed from Little Park.

"The committee decided its location along with the method of securing the table was not appropriate, creating a safety hazard and limiting access to the adjacent handicapped accessible table," the letter stated. "It was also the consensus that a more appropriate location would be at the child's play area at the North Brookfield common. The table was then put into storage, where it currently is, until the committee has the opportunity to put it in that location."

The committee said they would like to affix a plaque to the table to recognize its donation from a resident.

John Tripp, who built and donated the table, said he and his family donated the picnic table to the Little Park specifically, not just to the town.

"We donated it to Little Park in good faith that that's where it would be," Tripp's wife, Mindy, said.

Petratis said the table became town property when it was donated, and the Parks & Recreation Committee has purview over the town's parks.

The board discussed the committee's suggestion to place the picnic table on the common with a plaque, or return the table to the Tripp family.

Board of Selectmen Vice-Chair Jamie Gilman said he respects both Tripp and the Parks & Recreation Committee, but due to the issues around the removal of the picnic, he said he would be in favor of returning the table to the Tripp family.

Selectmen Ralph Kay said he is "dismayed this has become such a contentious issue."

Kay said the board cares about the Little Park and they appreciate all of the efforts to create and maintain it. He said they also respect the judgment of the Parks & Recreation Committee.

He said since the picnic table was donated to the town, the town has final say over where it is placed.

Parks & Recreation Committee Chair Brandon Avery said he would like to work with the Board of Selectmen to create a policy about donated items, to avoid a similar situation in the future.

surplus item and have it returned to the Tripp family.

### Sewer vehicle quote

Sewer Department Superintendent Eric Cardenas presented the board with a quote for the purchase of a truck for the department.

Cardenas said he is hoping to get a couple more years out of the existing truck for plowing purposes at the Sewer Department property.

The quote for the new truck is just over \$90,000. This purchase was approved at town meeting.

The board accepted the quote as presented.

### Spending requests

The Board of Selectmen approved the following spending requests from the Fire Department: up to \$1,000 to repair a broken handle on Engine 1; \$575 to repair two Motorola radio pagers; and \$523.68 to repair failed circuit boards on the pagers.

The board also approved an emergency request for \$1,779.64 to replace six batteries on Rescue 1. These batteries have not been replaced since they were originally purchased in 2019.

### Pole hearing

A public hearing was held regarding the location of a new joint-owned pole by National Grid to supply electricity to a new home on Mad Brook Road. The board approved the request.

### Snow/ice removal information

The Highway Department's standard operating procedures for snow and ice removal will be posted on the town's website, northbrookfield.net, under "Town News."

### New tax rate

Avery said the town's tax rate has been set by the Department of Revenue and it will be \$11.96 per \$1,000 valuation. Last year's rate was \$14.17.

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**CLUES ACROSS**

1. Light cavalry
5. Coconut palms
10. Rounded knob
14. Central Japan city
15. Sandwiches
16. Shape produced by a curve
17. Ancient region in modern-day Syria
18. French modernist painter
19. Grandmother
20. Mammary gland of cattle
22. Rocky peak
23. Secret plan
24. Songs to one's lover
27. More (Spanish)
30. Father
31. Chinese principle underlying the universe
32. Ballplayer's accessory
35. Together
37. A person's brother or sister

**CLUES DOWN**

1. Two-toed sloth
2. Fat from a pig's abdomen
3. Romanian city
4. Species
5. Rounded, glaciated valley
6. Spoke
7. Collection of sacred books
8. Extravagantly theatrical
9. Very fast airplane
10. Forearm bones
11. Ancient kingdom
12. Legitimate: \_\_ fide
13. Semitransparent gemstone
21. Counsels
23. Head honcho
25. Cool!
26. Touch lightly
27. Extract money via taxation
28. Dyes
29. Cloying sweetness
32. Sodas
33. Coastal village in Guam

**CLUES ACROSS**

38. Evil spirit
39. Monetary units
40. Partner to cheese
41. About Sun
42. Group of like-minded people
43. After B
44. Seaside room
45. Recipe measurement
46. Partly digested food
47. Flat-faced dog
48. People of southern Africa
49. Salts
52. Beard lichens
55. Sanders is one
56. Fencing sword
60. Ethnic group of Albania
61. Metric weight unit
63. Italian seaport
64. Longtime late night host
65. Extremely angry
66. Miami mascot
67. Mid-month day
68. Marked for omission
69. Body part

**CLUES DOWN**

34. Chemical ring
36. The bill in a restaurant
37. Car mechanics group
38. One-time presidential candidate Dole
40. Health care for the aged
41. Wise persons
43. Passage with access at one end
44. Make a wound
46. America's spies
47. Roof of the mouth
49. Plants of the lily family
50. Pinkish-red color
51. Vaccine developer
52. Mottled citrus fruit
53. A place to store garden tools
54. Rare goose native to Hawaii
57. Popular Hollywood pig
58. Musician Clapton
59. A move exposing one to danger
61. Historic Spanish soldier
62. CNN's founder

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- community -

# ABCC kicks off 'Operation Safe Holidays'

BOSTON — To ensure safety for everyone in Massachusetts during the holidays, the Alcoholic Beverages Control Commission will be conducting alcohol enforcement at local bars in Massachusetts cities and towns from Thanksgiving Eve through New Year's Eve.

In doing so, the ABCC hopes to prevent accidents

caused by impaired driving and other alcohol-related harm that often occurs at this time of year. The ABCC will work with municipal police departments and focus enforcement efforts at bars that have been identified as the last to sell alcohol to a convicted drunk driver and other high-risk locations.

"With Operation Safe

Holidays, we want to make sure everyone gets to enjoy this time with family and friends, while still staying safe," said State Treasurer Deborah B. Goldberg, who oversees the ABCC. "Vigilant enforcement and deterring bar owners from over-serving helps prevent tragedies before they occur, protecting everyone within our communities."

The program is run in conjunction with the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration's Safety Administration's Impaired Driving Crackdown, from Thanksgiving Eve through New Year's Eve, and is funded through the Executive Office of Public Safety and Security Highway Safety Division.

According to the NHTSA, from 2017 to 2021, 137

drivers involved in fatal crashes on Thanksgiving Eve (6 p.m. to 5:59 a.m.), also known as "Blackout Wednesday," were alcohol impaired. In 2021 alone, 36 drivers were in fatal crashes on that day. Also, from 2017 to 2021, young drivers ages 21-24 represented the largest percentage of drivers involved in deadly crashes. The message be-

fore Thanksgiving is simple – the NHTSA says to stop the blackout trend on Wednesday.

Alcohol is involved in 40% of traffic crash fatalities, resulting in 17,013 fatalities and injuring an estimated 275,000 people annually. Data indicates that well over 50% of impaired driving arrests originate at bars.

**GERMAN CHRISTMAS FROM PAGE 4**

Christmas Eve.

**Christmas Eve**

Christmas Eve or Heiligabend is known as the "Night of Wonder." For Germans and Scandinavian countries Christmas Eve, Dec. 24 holds a special place in the hearts of its people, as it marks the cherished tradition of the Holy Evening. This is the big gift-giving day. The eve also includes a feast.

**Christmas Carols**

Singing Christmas Carols is another German tradition. During the festive holiday season, cherished carols such as "Stille Nacht" (Silent Night) and "O Tannenbaum" (O Christmas Tree) evoke a profound sense of nostalgia and camaraderie among celebrants. Singing is an important part of the holiday season.

**Christmas pyramids**

Christmas pyramids or Weihnachtspyramiden are wooden structures adorned with intricately crafted figurines. As the candles placed at their base flicker, an age-old mechanism sets these pyramids into gentle motion, creating a mesmerizing dance.

**Lebkuchen and Stollen**

German Lebkuchen and Stollen are two baked items that are part of their Christmas tradition. Lebkuchen is a soft, nut filled ginger cookie. Stollen is a rum soaked spice cake.

**Traditional Christmas drink**

Feuerzangenbowle is another German tradition. This drink concoction involves a theatrical presentation that starts with a sugarloaf, drenched in rum, being set ablaze. The sugarloaf melts and drips into a steaming bowl of spiced wine, resulting in the popular holiday drink. T

**Christmas Pickle**

Incorporating a whimsical touch into the age-old tradition of adorning

Christmas trees, some German households infuse a delightful element of surprise by discreetly concealing a pickle ornament amidst the lush evergreen boughs. This quaint custom, known as the "Christmas Pickle," has been a cherished holiday practice for generations. Children delight in the hunt to find the "Christmas Pickle."

**Nativity Play**

During the Christmas season, children eagerly participate in Krippenspiel, a Nativity play that reenacts the timeless story of Jesus's birth. They are complete with shepherds, angels and a humble manger. Many Christian churches hold Christmas pageants during the holiday season.

Other Christmas traditions

On St. Nicholas Day (Nikolaustag), Dec. 6 shoes

are filled with surprises. St. Nicholas comes bearing small, but cherished gifts and delectable sweets. The day before, Dec. 5 marks the beginning of Krampusnacht in certain regions of Germany, where the ominous Krampus, the dreaded counterpart of the adored St. Nicholas is unleashed. Krampus roams the streets, punishing misbehaving children who end up on their lists of naughtiness.

**Christmas Markets**

In the realm of German Christmas traditions, one cannot omit the enchanting Christmas markets, affectionately referred to as "Weihnachtsmärkte." They offer an array of holiday foods ranging from sizzling bratwurst to sugary roasted almonds as well as handcrafted gifts, carved wooden toys and ornaments



No church Christmas is complete without a nativity play also known as a pageant, put on by children.

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**CAREER DAY**  
FROM PAGE 1

professionalism of Pathfinder's students, noting how attentive and confidently they greeted families.

Tables in the gym were set up for informational programs and extra curriculum information offered but mainly people entering the building were given a map of the grounds showcasing where each program can be found.

Inside the gymnasium, Pathfinder's academic teachers shared their work, emphasizing rigor, personalization, and preparation for both college and careers.

English Department chair Angela Sweeney described a "homegrown curriculum" aligned with core standards through short stories, novels, plays, and student presentations. Offerings include standard and honors tracks, Advanced Placement English in grades 11 and 12, and electives such as creative writing and modern media communication, where students analyze social media, blogs, podcasts, AI, and video games.

Social Studies teacher Laura Ann detailed a robust selection of coursework, from world and U.S. history to electives in psychology, the Holocaust, human behavior, war, and museum studies.

In the Art Department, instructor Darlene Henshaw outlined a sequence of design, drawing, painting,

and three-dimensional ceramics courses, all available as upperclassmen electives. Students can even double up during their junior and senior years.

The Science Department, represented by teacher Erin Welby, is restructuring its pacing to strengthen students' foundation in biology before they branch into anatomy and physiology, chemistry, earth science, physics, biomedical science, and tech engineering. The department offers two AP courses and emphasizes hands-on investigative work.

Foreign Language teacher Liz Cygan explained offerings in Spanish, Latin, French, and an online dual-language option. The department is promoting the Massachusetts Seal of Biliteracy, encouraging students to continue language study long enough to earn an intermediate proficiency stamp on their transcript and diploma.

Math Department chair Joshua Dusza said Pathfinder offers the full high school progression through AP Calculus and AP Statistics, along with electives in accounting, math through art, and a popular personal finance course preparing seniors for budgeting, investing, and economic decision-making.

Professional Skills instructors Elizabeth Dobson and student Lucas Roy described the required freshman/sophomore program that focuses on goal setting,



Danielle Salerno ran the table for Adult Continuing Education, giving out information to people and talking about options.

career exploration, OSHA 10 certification, resume writing, banking, public speaking, and personal development.

"It really helps them think about where they want to be and why," Dobson said.

Horticulture instructor Jeff Pronovost highlighted the wide range of environmental and outdoor skills within his program, from greenhouse propagation and landscape construction to arboriculture, including tree climbing and chainsaw work.

"We do everything from patios and walkways to full ground's maintenance," he said.

Down the hall from the gymnasium, HVAC instructors Mike Sicilia and Rafe Gould described their growing program, which prepares students to begin working in

residential heating and cooling directly after graduation.

"We're building a strong program here," they said, emphasizing the high demand for trained technicians.

In Advanced Manufacturing, instructor Adam Girard showcased the school's evolution from traditional machine shop to a modern, tech-driven program incorporating CAD/CAM, lasers, 3D printing, precision inspection tools, and industry-standard machining systems.

"Basically everything that encapsulates manufacturing," he said.

The Electrical program also reported strong interest. Instructor Eric Simard described how many students pursue electrical licensure using industry-recognized credits earned at Pathfinder, while others continue to college for specialized systems training.

Upperclassmen gain real-world experience through community job sites led by off-campus instructors.

In the Health Assisting classroom, instructor Anthony Braden laid out an academically rigorous pathway that leads to CNA certification, clinical hours in area facilities, CPR certification, EKG training, and job offers before graduation.

"Nine times out of ten,

the facilities offer them jobs once they pass the exam," he said.

The Cosmetology program, led by Cindy Rubin, presented its full spectrum of training in hair, skin, and nails, including state board preparation and specialized skills such as textured hair care, waxing, makeup, and formal styling.

Upstairs, Information Technology instructor Sarah Manson described a wide-ranging digital curriculum: web development, programming, networking, cybersecurity, hardware repair, and a student-run help desk that troubleshoots technology around the building.

One of the most expansive shops, CAD/Pre-Engineering, drew strong interest. Instructor Justin Bren explained that ninth graders work toward the SolidWorks Associate Mechanical Design Certification; a professional credential requiring roughly 1,000 hours of training.

Pathfinder even has a student who has advanced to the expert certification level, something rarely seen in high school. Seniors collaborate with other shops to build fully functional robots, with parts manufactured, painted, programmed, and wired through inter-shop partnerships.

"It's one of the biggest collaboration projects we've ever done," Bren said.

Families were also greeted by displays covering the school's wide range of student organizations.

These include the literary magazine, yearbook, drama, music, student government, Diversity Club, outdoor adventure clubs, esports, Future Farmers of America, Girls in Trades, robotics, SkillsUSA, and the National Technical Honor Society. Activities are coordinated by Jessica McCann.

Athletic Director Kevin Aldrich said Pathfinder is experiencing "a time of growth," with more than 150 fall athletes participating across soccer, golf, football,

cheerleading, and co-ops in field hockey, cross-country, ice hockey, and swimming. Winter numbers remain strong, with wrestling, boys and girls basketball, and additional co-op teams.

Pathfinder has recently added girls volleyball, which launched mid-season with 15 players and earned a full JV schedule for 2026. Aldrich praised students' dedication and the program's upward trajectory.

"We want students to be well-rounded citizens," he said. "Student comes before athlete."

Several teams have seen notable success: football reached the state vocational semifinals, wrestling holds back-to-back championships, girls basketball won its league last year, and both softball and baseball have made deep tournament runs.

Throughout the night, staff remained in the library assisting families with applications for the upcoming admissions cycle. Computers were available for on-the-spot submissions, which many families took advantage of before returning to the bustling program exhibits.

With around 800 people cycling through the building throughout the night, Duda reflected on what made the event stand out. The academic rigor, hands-on experiences, professional certifications, and strong community partnerships each play a role, he said.

But on Career Night, it was the students who stole the spotlight.

"Parents and families have been telling me how impressed they are with our students," Duda said. "The eye contact, the handshakes, the professionalism...it was music to my ears."

Pathfinder will continue accepting applications online, with staff available for assistance. Families who missed Career Night can contact the school for additional tours and program information.



The Automotive Technology program's garage was filled with cars and people roaming the building.

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**THE COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION - HIGHWAY DIVISION NOTICE OF A DESIGN PUBLIC HEARING**

**Spencer - East Brookfield - Intersection Improvements at Route 9 and Route 49 Project File No. 613097**

A Design Public Hearing will be hosted on the MassDOT website below to present the design for the proposed project in Spencer - East Brookfield, MA.

WHERE: Town of Spencer,

**- public notice -**

Town Hall, Great Room  
157 Main Street  
Spencer MA, 01852

WHEN: Thursday,  
January 8, 2026 at 6:30PM

PURPOSE: The purpose of this hearing is to provide the public with the opportunity to become fully acquainted with the proposed project. All views and comments submitted in response to the hearing will be reviewed and considered to the maximum extent possible.

PROPOSAL: The proposed project consists of improvements along Route 9 and at the intersection of Route 9 and Route 49 in the Towns of East Brookfield and Spencer. The work involves construction of a cement concrete roundabout, improved bike and pedestrian accommodations, lighting, and upgrades to pavement, drainage, pavement markings, and signage. The proposed pedestrian accommodations consist of 5-foot wide sidewalks along Route 9 and a shared use path at the roundabout. The proposed bicycle accommodations consist of 5-foot buffered bicycle lanes along Route 9 and a shared use path at the roundabout. Pedestrian and bicycle accommo-

dations have been provided in accordance with applicable design guides.

A secure right-of-way is necessary for this project. Acquisitions in fee and permanent or temporary easements may be required. The Commonwealth of Massachusetts is responsible for acquiring all needed rights in private or public lands. MassDOT's policy concerning land acquisitions will be presented in the hearing.

Project inquiries, written statements and other exhibits regarding the proposed undertaking may be submitted to Carrie E. Lavallee, P.E., Chief Engineer, via e-mail to MassDOTProjectManagement@dot.state.ma.us or via US Mail to Suite 7550, 10 Park Plaza, Boston, MA 02116, Attention: Project Management, Project File No. 613097. Statements and exhibits intended for inclusion in the public hearing transcript must be emailed or postmarked no later than ten (10) business days (14 calendar days) after the hearing is hosted on the MassDOT website listed below.

This hearing is accessible to people with disabilities. MassDOT provides reasonable ac-

commodations and/or language assistance free of charge upon request (e.g. interpreters in American Sign Language and languages other than English, live captioning, videos, assistive listening devices and alternate material formats), as available. For accommodation or language assistance, please contact MassDOT's Chief Diversity and Civil Rights Officer by phone (857-368-8580), TTD/TTY at (857) 266-0603, fax (857) 368-0602 or by email (MassDOT.CivilRights@dot.state.ma.us). Requests should be made as soon as possible and prior to the hearing, and for more difficult to arrange services including sign-language, CART or language translation or interpretation, requests should be made at least ten business days before the hearing.

In case of inclement weather, a cancellation announcement will be posted on the internet at <https://www.mass.gov/orgs/highway-division/events>.  
JONATHAN GULLIVER  
HIGHWAY ADMINISTRATOR  
CARRIE E. LAVALLEE, P.E.  
CHIEF ENGINEER  
12/26/2025, 01/02/2026

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Please email or mail your resume and cover letter to the Town Administrator, Jim Ferrera, [townadministrator@warren-ma.gov](mailto:townadministrator@warren-ma.gov) or by mail to 48 High Street, P.O. Box 609, Warren, MA 01083.

Salary range is negotiable from \$60,000 to \$64,500 and is based on relevant work experience, certifications, and educational background. Position open until filled, with a first look at resumes starting on December 22, 2025.

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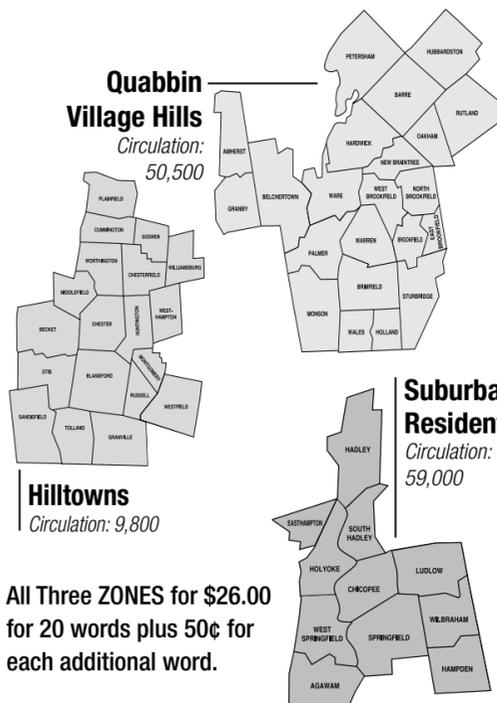
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# Brookfields Lions Club announces 37th Annual Ice Fishing Derby

BROOKFIELD – The Brookfields Lions Club will host its 37th Annual Ice Fishing Derby on Saturday, Jan. 31, 2026, at Quaboag Pond in Brookfield.

The event remains the largest single-day ice fishing derby in Massachusetts, attracting anglers and families from across the region.

A \$20 entry ticket qualifies participants for more than \$15,000 in cash prizes, including the \$5,000 Grand Prize, \$5,640 in “every five minutes” cash drawings, and \$4,375 in fish categories. Every ticket holder is automatically entered into the major cash drawings whether they choose to fish or not.

“This derby is one of the Lions’ most important fundraisers - a major undertaking that requires hundreds of volunteer hours and a significant financial commitment each year - and every dollar

raised directly supports the Brookfields Lions Club’s charitable work and community initiatives throughout the region,” according to club president Bill Cass.

Derby headquarters will be located at the Quaboag Pond boat ramp in Brookfield. Weigh-ins will take place from 7 a.m. until the derby closes at 3:30 p.m., with the children’s division ending at 2 p.m. and youth prizes awarded at 2:30 p.m. The \$5,000 cash drawing for all ticket holders will take place at 4 p.m., and a complete announcement of all derby winners will air on The Valley’s Classic Hits 97.7 FM and 1250 AM (WARE Radio) at 5 p.m.

In the event that no safe ice exists by Thursday, Jan. 29, 2026, the derby itself will be cancelled, and all drawings will be held at the North Brookfield Legion

Post 41, located below Subway in North Brookfield. No fish prizes will be awarded, but all tickets will still be valid for the five-minute cash drawings and the \$5,000 Grand Prize drawing.

As is customary for this derby, there is a “one fish per category per ticket” rule that helps ensure broader distribution of prizes and encourages a fair, community-minded competition. All qualifying fish must be caught within the Central Wildlife District.

Children up to age 12 compete separately using state minimum lengths, while young anglers who meet the adult minimum lengths may also qualify for the main le-

aderboard.

Tickets for the derby are available from any Brookfields Lions Club member, and at many long time partner locations including: K&S Bait Shop (Barre), Central Package (Brookfield), R&R Sport Shop (Belcher-



town), 308 Lakeside Restaurant (East Brookfield), Fred’s Variety & Package Store (Fiskdale), Granby Bait Shop (Granby), Ben’s Bait (Leicester), Red Ridge Bait & Tackle (Ludlow), Still Hart’s (North Brookfield), Nick’s Sport Shop (Palmer), Glenda’s and River Town Bait Shop (Warren), Mathieson Bait Shop (West Brookfield).

Following the derby, all

winners will be posted at www.brookfieldslionsclub.org, and at all ticket vendor locations.

For additional information, please contact the Brookfields Lions Club at brookfieldslionsclub@gmail.com, or visit the Club’s Facebook page at facebook.com/BrookfieldsLionsClub.

As the world’s largest, youngest and most active service organization, the mission of Lions Clubs International is to empower volunteers to serve their communities, meet humanitarian needs, encourage peace, and promote international understanding. Members of the Brookfields Lions Club are dedicated to service and support in the communities of Brookfield, East Brookfield, North Brookfield, West Brookfield and New Braintree.

## EQLT hosts ‘Space Night’ on Dec. 26

HARDWICK – The East Quabbin Land Trust’s Learning Exchange will present “Space Night” at the office, 120 Ridge Road, with PhD candidates Maura Shea and Aman Kar on Friday, Dec. 26 from 6-8 p.m.

There will be stargazing and telescopes, depending on the cloud cover. Space enthusiasts of all ages and knowledge levels are encouraged to attend.

RSVP is appreciated by not required by emailing eshea@eqlt.org.

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**NO ENTRANCE FEE**  
Mobile Home located in Waterwheel Village at 31 Edward Lane, Barre, MA 01005. This is a 55 and better community. This home includes a wonderful floor plan with very spacious rooms. Master bedroom includes a walk-in closet. Two full bathrooms. A four-season sunroom is off the kitchen. Includes two large woodsheds and a metal garage you can park under to fend off winter weather. Asking \$288,000. See listing on MLS # 73433198

**NO ENTRANCE FEE**  
Brand New Mobile Home located in Waterwheel Village at 37 Gauthier Rd., Barre. This is a 55 and better community. This home features an open kitchen/living room concept, perfect for family gatherings. Two large bedrooms on opposite ends of the home. Master bedroom has a walk-in closet and large attached bathroom. Just off the kitchen is a laundry area with door leading to back deck and yard. There is a monthly HOA fee which includes water, sewage, rubbish removal, and taxes. All exterior and interior doorways are 36" wide. Asking \$194,000. See listing on MLS # 73397436

**NO ENTRANCE FEE**  
Mobile Home located in Waterwheel Village at 32 Edward Lane, Barre, MA 01005. This is a 55 and better community. Includes large carport and two large garden sheds. Approx. living area 1,000 SqFt. Asking \$139,900. See listing on MLS # 73398863.