

## CFCE groups introduce FAMILY GAME NIGHTS

By Emily-Rose Pappas  
Staff Writer  
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GRANBY — The playgroups at the Granby Free Public Library are a perfect opportunity for young children and their caregivers to get to know one another and make new friends.

The playgroups are put together and sponsored by the Early Education and Care Department, EEC, through the Coordinated Family and Community Engagement, CFCE, grant that is hosted at the library.

“I love supporting children and their caregivers and helping them find a love in learning, helping them find a sense of love for self, and helping kids gain skills that will be helpful for them when they go to school,” said Marti Wiechman, who runs the playgroups.

As a part of the program, and in addition to the weekly playgroups, the library is now hosting one day a month for a special family game night, which is also sponsored by the grant.



A family working together on a color-matching game.

TURLEY PHOTO BY EMILY-ROSE PAPPAS

“One initiative that the EEC encourages each program to find an alternative day and time for families with young children to join in for some programming with us,” said Wiechman. “I think that board games are a wonderful opportunity to

bring people together and for the kids to make new friends.”

Children and their caregivers can come to the library to enjoy a fun time playing games with other kids their own age, and for caregivers to meet one another.

“We wanted to make

sure that everyone felt welcome, so we included games for everyone from toddlers through the elementary school grades. We try to have some games for each developmental level and age range,” said Wiechman.

Please see **GAMES**, page 5

## Officials eye \$414K gap, weigh free cash split

By Melina Bourdeau  
Correspondent

BELCHERTOWN — Town officials outlined a projected deficit for the next fiscal year, launching budget talks that will juggle rising health insurance costs, school demands, and how aggressively to bolster the town’s savings.

Meeting jointly, the Select Board, Finance Committee, and School Committee reviewed early fiscal 2027 projections, debated whether to split free cash 50-50 or 60-40 between operating and reserves, and set preliminary reduction targets for town and school budgets while postponing final policy votes.

Selectboard member Lesa Lessard Pearson, who chaired the session, framed the evening’s work as more than a technical exercise.

“Tonight’s budget discussion is about more than numbers. It’s about our priorities, our responsibilities, and the kind of community that we want to build together,” said Lessard Pearson.

She called the gathering

“an opportunity for transparency, shared understanding and respectful dialogue” and thanked the Finance Committee, Town Administrator, town accountant, School Committee, and other boards for their work.

### Narrow deficit, clear reduction targets

Belchertown Finance Committee Chair Brian Gibbons opened with a prepared statement on the town’s fiscal position, noting that last year’s override at the May 19, 2025, election added nearly \$2.9 million in new revenue. He said Belchertown, like neighboring communities, had absorbed “significant unplanned increases” in employee health care costs as rates jumped more than 40%, but managed to do so “without losing critical services elsewhere.”

Gibbons said the town’s bond rating remains strong and that, compared with some nearby municipalities, Belchertown is entering this budget season “in the

Please see **TRI-BOARD**, page 4

## Select Board limits role in federal issues, backs land deals

“For as much as there are different ideologies in this town, political ideologies, there are a lot of basic issues that we all agree on.”

— Lesa Lessard Pearson

By Melina Bourdeau  
Correspondent

BELCHERTOWN — The Select Board confronted questions about its role in national politics, how to shore up shaky health insurance finances, and how to attract more volunteers on Monday night.

The board adopted a new policy limiting when it will

weigh in on federal issues, advanced a small but complex conservation land swap, backed a major land protection grant, and heard health insurance projections.

### Board adopts policy limiting federal commentary

After months of debate and input from residents and town counsel, the Select

Board voted to approve a “Policy on Select Board commentary regarding federal matters and civic responsibilities,” with one abstention. Jen Turner abstained from the vote.

The policy’s core principle is that the board will address federal issues only when there is a clear, concrete impact on Belchertown.

The board also worked

through how to acknowledge the U.S. and state constitutions accurately in light of the actual oath members take. After some back-and-forth over specific wording, the board agreed on new language describing their obligations.

Selectboard member Nicole Miner read the revised paragraph aloud:

“The members of the

Belchertown Select Board have taken an oath to uphold the duties of said office in accordance with the laws, rules, and regulations of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts and the bylaws of Belchertown. The members of the Belchertown Select Board honor the

Please see **POLITICS**, page 3



## Donate at new food pantry at town hall

The Helping Hutch, located at the town hall, is ready to be stocked by the community to help others in need.

## Belchertown ACO raises awareness for health of pets

By Emily-Rose Pappas  
Staff Writer  
epappas@turley.com

BELCHERTOWN — February is a time for many celebrations, from Black History to Valentine’s Day, making space for topics and people that matter most is important.

February is also National Spay and Neuter Awareness Month, where education and awareness are brought to mark the importance of spaying and neutering your pets.

The awareness is meant to help animals in many ways and to reduce overpopulation by promoting spaying and neutering procedures. The procedures have major health benefits, like preventing infections, reducing aggression, and reducing spraying or marking.

According to statistics from Spay USA, about 85% of dogs that are hit by cars are unaltered, pointing to the reality that leaving animals unaltered is more detrimental to their health than performing the procedures.

Please see **PETS**, page 11



ABOVE: Jasmine, 18-months-old, and ready to play.

LEFT: Benjamin, a 14-month-old chihuahua looking for his forever home.



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COMMUNITY

# School community seeks to pause closing of Blessed Sacrament

By Gregory A. Scibelli  
gscibelli@turley.com

HOLYOKE – In response to announcement made by Rev. Fr. Duy Le that Blessed Sacrament School was closing, calls are being made to pause the closing.

The Blessed Sacrament Parent Teacher Guild, along with families, parishioners of the church, and other supporters are asking leadership of the Diocese of Springfield to pause the closure process and engage in more dialogue and allow the existing development plan to continue so that Blessed Sacrament School can have the opportunity to demonstrate sustainability and remain open for the families it currently serves.

In a press statement submitted, it stated that while the continuing hardships of the church were well known to the families of students attending the school, there was a development plan formalized and underway. Families are asking leadership to allow that plan to come to fruition to see if the school can stay home.

The plan was developed by former Principal Susan Heavren, but she died in September, leaving the school under the leadership of an interim principal.

Families are also claiming Le held a schoolwide meeting in September 2025 and parents were told the



SUBMITTED PHOTO

Blessed Sacrament School will close at the conclusion of the school year. The closure is due to steep declines in enrollment.

school would be open for the 2026-2027 as part of the plan, which included a two-year window to demonstrate improvement.

The guild also stated numerous fundraisers were scheduled this spring along with raffles. A golf tournament was also scheduled for later this year, and more than \$100,000 had been raised for the school since September.

Two weeks ago, Le announced that the school would close in June, at the conclusion of this school year.

According a letter sent from Le to families, the school has seen a sharp decline in enrollment since 2010. The school had an

enrollment of 304 students in 2010. That number is not about a third of that in 2025 at 112.

“Over the past 15 years, enrollment has steadily declined, from more than 300 students to 112 students today,” Le said. “Following the sale of our former school building several years ago, the school’s maximum operating capacity is now 275 students. Even at this reduced capacity, we are operating at less than half of what is required to remain sustainable.”

He explained the school operates at a deficit of more than \$275,000 each year. “Despite years of parish subsidies, fundraising efforts,

and cost controls, the gap has continued to grow,” Le said. “To sustain the school with our current enrollment, tuition would have need to rise to well over \$9,000 per student. I do not believe this is reasonable for families, nor would it realistically address the enrollment challenge.”

Le said multiple options were considered in an effort to keep the school open, including grade reconfiguration, staffing structures, and financial assumptions. No matter which scenario explored, there were significant financial challenges and would cost families more to send their students to the school.

# Open positions for May town elections

BELCHERTOWN – The town election is coming up in May, and there are several positions available to run for across many boards and committees in town.

- Board of Assessors – 1 seat open with a 2-year term
- Board of Assessors – 1 seat open with a 3-year term
- Board of Health – 2 seats open with 3-year terms each
- Housing Authority – 1 seat open with a 4-year term
- Moderator – 1 seat open with a 3-year term
- Planning Board – 1 seat open with a 3-year term
- School Committee – 2 seats open with 3-year terms each
- Select Board – 1 seat open with a 3-year term

Nomination papers are now available in the Town Clerk’s office and are due back by 5 p.m. on March 30, 2026.

# Granby Democratic Town Committee to hold annual caucus on Feb. 28

GRANBY – The Granby Democratic Town Committee will hold a caucus on February 28 at 11 a.m. at the Granby Free Public Library, 297 East State Street.

The committee will elect four delegates and four alternates to the 2026 Massachusetts Democratic Convention, where Democrats from across Massachusetts will gather to endorse candidates for statewide office. The Convention will be held on May 29 and 30 at the DCU Center in Worcester.

The Democratic Committee welcomes participants. The caucus is open to all, but only Democrats registered in Granby can run for delegate. Registration will begin at 10:30 a.m., and the Caucus will start at 11.

The committee normally meets on the fourth Saturday of the month at the Granby Free Public Library. For more information on the caucus or the committee please contact Tobias Wilson at chair@granbydemocrats.com or visit their website at www.granbydemocrats.com.

# Spaghetti dinner to benefit Belchertown Scout Troop 507

BELCHERTOWN – The Belchertown Troop 507 Scouts will be hosting a Spaghetti Dinner Fundraiser on Saturday, February 28,

from 4 to 7 p.m. at the Swift River Sportsman Club.

The dinner includes spaghetti and meatballs, garlic bread, side salad, a choice of

non-alcoholic beverage, and dessert. Adults tickets are \$15, and kids aged 12 and under are \$12.

Tickets are available

through purchase through Belchertown Troop 507, and for more information, you can contact Jenn Restucci at 802-735-4938.





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COMMUNITY

## Taxation Aid Committee to hold meeting this Friday

BELCHERTOWN – The Taxation Aid Committee helps eligible Belchertown seniors with financial relief on property taxes. We focus on supporting elderly and disabled residents facing financial hardship. Join our info session to learn how we can assist you!

**Friday, Feb. 13 at 2 p.m. at the Senior Center, located at 60 State St.**

procedures to ensure the program is administered fairly, transparently, and in alignment with state law and the Belchertown Town Charter. Its work includes reviewing applications, identifying qualifying recipients, and promoting community awareness of the Aid to the Elderly and Disabled Taxation Fund.

“We are committed to making the process clear, welcoming, and accessible for every resident who may benefit from this program,” said Angela Battle, Chair of the Taxation Aid Committee. “Belchertown has always been a community that looks out for one another, and this fund is a perfect reflection of that spirit.”

The Committee is comprised of a mix of town officials and residents-at-large who bring passion and dedication to this work: Angela Battle, Chair - Member at Large; Laura Duquette, Vice Chair - Member at Large; Tyler Bergeron, Clerk - Member at Large; Sarah Mann - Treasurer/Collector; Michael Caney - Chair of the Board of Assessors

Residents interested in learning more about

Please see **TAXATION AID**, page 7

## Granby library welcomes in new staff members

By Emily-Rose Pappas  
Staff Writer  
epappas@turley.com

environment and the work itself.”

Niu officially joined as a full-time staff member in June 2025 and has taken on the position of the library’s cataloger.

“As the library’s cataloger, I’m responsible for processing and cataloging all of the library’s new acquisitions - this includes books, periodicals, media, board games, puzzles, etc.,” said Niu.

She also currently runs the Sci-Fi and Fantasy Book Club, which meets on the first Thursday of the month to discuss different books in these genres.

“Our director, Jennifer Crosby, really has been an amazing friend and mentor to me; last summer, when she told me that the library would be hiring a new full-time cataloger, I immediately applied for the position without a second thought,” said Niu.

Griffin Brown, who grew up in Amherst, has spent most of his life living in the

GRANBY – The Granby Free Public Library welcomed two new members to join their team of volunteers, and to also bring their own unique touches and ideas to help make the Granby Free Public Library a new and better place.

Wenny Niu moved to Western Massachusetts ten years ago from Marblehead, Massachusetts, to attend UMass Amherst, where she earned her BA in history. She then graduated in 2019 and got her master’s in international history from Columbia University, and my MSc in international history from the London School of Economics and Political Science.

“During my years as a student of history, I developed a deeper appreciation for libraries and archives,” said Niu. “In the summer of 2023, I began volunteering at Granby Public Library, and I instantly fell in love with both the



**Griffin Brown, ready to help everyone who comes to the library.**



**Wenny Niu, the new library director.**



Pioneer Valley and works as the Circulation Assistant at the Granby Free Public Library. He is currently working on his degree in computer science at Worcester Polytechnic Institute and is planning to get his master’s in library sciences in the future.

“I’ve always loved libraries, and throughout middle school, high school, and college, I’ve volunteered or worked at my school’s library,” said Brown. “My job at the Granby Library is primarily to help the patrons. My days consist of aiding patrons in finding items around our library and checking them out. Beyond this, I help out the rest of the staff

with short or long-term projects around the library.”

Brown has found a love working at the library, and works hard to make sure that everyone who enters the library finds what they are searching for.

“In general, the most fulfilling part of the job for me is getting to meet all of the patrons week-to-week. There are so many lovely people in this area, and it’s been a pleasure to get to know them all,” said Brown.

The new members of the staff at the Granby Free Public Library are ready to help, whether it be to help you find a book, or anything else.

POLITICS from page 1

Constitution of the United States and the Constitution of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. This is understood in its traditional non-partisan sense, as a commitment to lawful authority, due process, and responsible local governance”.

The policy is aimed, in part, at avoiding using the board as a forum for symbolic national debates.

“For as much as there are different ideologies in this town, political ideologies, there are a lot of basic issues that we all agree on,” Lessard Pearson said later in the discussion. “One of them, I think, is that we deeply care about the safety and well-being of every resident in Belchertown, including their civil rights. And for those reasons, keeping it local is the right thing to do.”

The vote came after a pub-

lic commenter at the start of the meeting urged the board not to “be neutral and take no position” on federal matters affecting residents.

**Conservation land swap and new protection project**

The board unanimously endorsed moving ahead with the next steps in a small but intricate conservation land swap intended to resolve a driveway encroachment on Article 97-protected land off South Road.

Conservation planner Doug Albertson explained that a neighbor’s driveway was found partly on town conservation land when a survey was done. In return for conveying a strip under the driveway, the town would receive a larger, more ecologically valuable piece of backland.

“There’s a known end loss policy of natural resource value,” Albertson said. “So,

it’s a simple argument, in this case, that we would be gaining something worth much more natural resource value”.

Town staff cautioned the swap will require a two-thirds vote of the Legislature and review by the state Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs because the parcel is protected under Article 97.

Town Administrator Steve Williams told the board there would be legal, recording and survey costs, but that the residents are willing to pay them. “Before we start down this path, Mr. [Berry] expends money, we want to make sure the Select Board is okay with this concept,” he said.

On a motion by Miner, the board voted to approve the request of the town planner and stormwater coordinator “to advance to the next steps of a land swap to address the driveway encroachments for the parcel on South Road”.

In a separate conservation action, the board also voted to authorize the town’s grants coordinator to submit an application to the state’s Forest Legacy-style program to help acquire roughly 127 acres between the Quabbin and Jabish Brook conservation areas.

“We have an opportunity to protect some very beautiful land,” Doug said. The yellow-shaded property “provides an important wildlife connection” and is “entirely within the state’s biomap priority area”.

Lessard Pearson praised the project’s connectivity, saying, “I love that it connects. It connects both [conserved blocks].”

**Health insurance finances are still fragile**

The board received an update on the troubled Hampshire County Group Insurance Trust, which pro-

vides health coverage for town employees and has been grappling with steep medical and pharmacy costs.

Human Resources Director Joanne Cleveland said mid-year rate hikes and cost-control measures are beginning to stabilize finances, but the trust remains in a tenuous position.

“We’ve had a few months of some medical and pharmaceutical claims that have come down, which is, you know, beneficial to the trust,” she said, noting a sizable CVS pharmacy rebate. Consultants now project a reserve of about \$2.6 million by the end of the fiscal year if current trends hold.

However, preliminary projections for July 1 renewals call for roughly a 16% premium increase on the town’s HMO and PPO plans, even with plan design changes that would add a \$500 individual / \$1,000 family deductible

and higher co-pays for specialists and hospital services.

Town officials are simultaneously testing the market through an RFP and analyzing the state’s Group Insurance Commission as a possible alternative, with an April 1 deadline to leave the trust if they choose.

“We’re going to be looking at reducing, on the town side, somewhere in a vicinity of about \$200,000 as things stand right now,” Williams said of the broader budget picture.

Board members asked about risk-mitigation tools such as aggregate stop-loss coverage and pressed for more information on reserves and monthly claim levels. The board plans to revisit health insurance options in March, when more precise quotes are expected.

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During dental school Dr. Meunier presented research nationally at the American Association for Dental, Oral, and Craniofacial Research (AADOCR) conference in Portland, Oregon through the Academic Dental Career Fellowship Program (ADCFP). He also lectured and taught dental students reflecting his dedication to both excellent patient care and continued dental education.  
Dr. Meunier has shadowed and trained alongside specialists across every dental discipline and completed one-on-one implant training through the Implant Pathway program. As a general dentist, he provides endodontics, implant dentistry, and oral surgery while referring highly complex cases to specialists to ensure the best outcomes for his patients.  
He believes in listening carefully to his patients to fully understand their needs and concerns, allowing him to provide personalized, high-quality care for every individual.  
Outside the office, Dr. Meunier and his wife, Joyce, share their home with their three loving cats. He enjoys cooking, mountain climbing, hiking and camping.  
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COMMUNITY

*Kids can enjoy the trend, too!*

TURLEY PHOTO BY EMILY-ROSE PAPPAS

Come to the Granby Free Public Library, where kids can check out a wrapped book to have a "blind date" with. The books have the codes written on the front so kids can be surprised when they get home to open their new book to read.



Belchertown Communications Committee explores improving sharing information

BELCHERTOWN – The Belchertown Communications Committee has been working on several projects to improve how town information is shared and understood, and to help streamline town operations.

One major effort is the creation of an Enhanced Town Meeting Packet for 2026 Annual Town Meeting (ATM). The updated packet will include the full warrant article text, plain-language explanations, available financial information, and relevant committee votes. The goal is to have it available to the public two weeks before the Annual Town Meeting so that the residents will have time to review it and make decisions on how they want to vote before arriving at the meeting.

"None of what we are proposing is actually new information," said Communications Committee Chair Chris Martin. "All of this information already exists and is provided in various ways

before and during the ATM, some of it verbally at the time of the vote. Providing it in advance, and in one packet, allows residents to review it at their own pace." The goal is to give residents more context ahead of time so they can better understand the warrant articles and come to Town Meeting informed. "We met with the various committees and boards involved and everyone was on board with the idea," added Martin. "The biggest change is that there is now an earlier deadline for compiling all of this information to be able to get it out in time."

And it isn't a concept unique to Belchertown. "The idea came up while we were sitting at a town meeting," said Martin, "that there had to be a better way to get information out, and we started looking at how other towns do it. Ware uses this model and they told us that it has made a significant difference in how town meeting is run and that they will never go back."

"We're really glad the Communications Committee came forward with this idea," said Town Manager Steve Williams. "This will be a big step forward in helping to get information out to our residents in a way that can help them make their decisions. Being the first time, we expect some hiccups, but in the long run it will make a big difference."

Artificial Intelligence

The Committee has also been integral in the Town's exploration of artificial intelligence (AI). As AI tools become more common, the Town is taking a thoughtful approach to understanding how they can be used responsibly to support staff and improve daily operations.

The Committee has been doing research into how other municipalities, and the state, are using AI and had a series of conversations with the UMass

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TRI-BOARD from page 1

best starting position we have seen in years."

Town accountant Jill Rossi gave an overview to the boards.

Available revenue for FY27 is estimated at about \$60.923 million, an increase of approximately \$1.946 million over the current year, Rossi said. That figure includes local receipts, the tax levy with the full override amount, an estimated \$275,000 in new growth, and state aid based on the governor's budget.

After factoring in mandatory charges, free cash policies, and fixed costs, she said, the town faces a relatively modest shortfall.

"In the expenditure budget, we have public schools at about \$36 million... and town government departments... for a total of \$61 million," Jill said [0:21:06]. "This is a deficit of \$414,000. I don't remember the last time that I've seen it's going to sound sad, but this low of a deficit in our income and expense on the first round with all requests in... So really, we're in a pretty good position."

To balance the budget under current revenue assumptions, Rossa said Belchertown Public Schools would need to reduce their request by \$215,275, while town departments would have to cut \$198,807.

Health insurance pressure and override restrictions

Town Administrator Steve Williams explained the broader budgeting context, including the impact of health insurance. The Hampshire County group insurance trust has advised municipalities to plan for a 16% to 20% increase, he said.

"Health insurance right now, we have been told the budget between 16 and 20% from the Hampshire County... insurance trust," Williams said. "We have included the lower amount in our budget for now, waiting to see what happens. That has not been voted on yet, so we have to stay tuned for that as well."

Williams also detailed how last year's override is being treated in the FY27 plan.

"We had approximately \$559,000 set aside for the firefighters, an ambulance

lease and the salary for the grant writers," he said. "That money has to be spent on those purposes. That's how it was voted."

Because of that restriction, Rossi later clarified, the \$559,000 is removed from the general "new revenue" calculation and then added back into the specific departmental lines where those expenses fall.

Free cash split: 50-50 for now, 60-40 on the table

Rossa reported that Belchertown's free cash for the year totals \$1,418,350. From that amount, \$25,000 is appropriated to the Finance Committee reserve fund, and \$108,342 is allocated as year one of a three-year repayment to stabilization for the emergency draw that helped cover last year's health insurance increase.

Those commitments leave a net free cash balance of \$1,185,008, Rossi said [0:28:52]. Under the working model for this budget cycle, that balance is split 50-50. The breakdown is as follows:

- 50% or about \$592,504 supports the annual operating budget.
- The other 50% is divided

among capital projects, stabilization and OPEB, with 65% of that half going to capital, 30% to stabilization (about \$177,751), and 5% to OPEB (about \$29,000).

Lessard Pearson and Selectboard member Jonathan Ritter also revisited the town's policy of bolstering the reserve fund each year by combining a \$30,000 base appropriation with an additional \$125,000 from free cash, for a total of \$155,000 for unforeseen expenses. Ritter noted that, even with that structure, "it's still kind of low" given the cost of potential emergencies.

While the 50-50 split is being used to model the FY27 budget, several board members emphasized that it is not yet a formal decision. The town had previously discussed moving to a 60-40 split, which would send more money into stabilization, capital and OPEB.

Selectboard member Nicole Miner said she wants both options presented side by side.

"The only other thing that I would have been interested to see is because we haven't voted on the 50-50," Miner said. "I mean, I would have

liked to have seen the difference there... because I don't think we should assume it's going to be 50-50."

Lessard Pearson agreed staff should prepare numbers for both 50-50 and 60-40 scenarios for the board to review before any vote.

Town and school next steps

Williams said he and Rossi have already begun meeting with department heads to identify reductions on the town side.

"We have everything submitted," he said. "Jill and I have already started meeting with department heads on the downside to start talking about where we can find the \$200,000 that we need to cut... That process will be ongoing for the next few weeks, and then some final decisions will be made on our end, and we'll report back with a balanced budget."

On the school side, Belchertown Schools Superintendent Brian Cameron presented enrollment data, cost-saving measures and rising student needs. The district has closed classrooms, eliminated positions and is closing Cold

Spring School while realigning prekindergarten through grade 8 to reduce operational costs.

The official said the district is serving more English learners and students requiring intensive behavioral supports.

"We know that numbers are going down, but student needs are going up," Cameron said. "We have a lot more, lot more new [comers]. We only have two [ELL] teachers district wide. We used to have one because of the need."

The School Committee's requested FY27 budget is \$36,331,226, which Cameron described as about a 2.4% increase over the corrected FY26 figure. Under the town's revenue framework, that request will need to be trimmed by about \$215,000.

The Capital Improvement Planning Committee attended the meeting but did not present. The board agreed to reschedule the capital presentation and to use a future session to review updated school health insurance numbers and the free cash scenarios.

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COMMUNITY

# Join a board/committee in your town today

**BELCHERTOWN** – The Belchertown Select Board is looking for citizens interested in sharing their expertise by serving on a Town Board/Committee. If you have time and are interested in getting involved in your Town's activities, please submit a letter of interest to: Select Board, The Finnerty House, One South Main Street, P.O. Box 670, Belchertown, MA 01007 or by email to [selectboard@belchertown.org](mailto:selectboard@belchertown.org) (unless otherwise indicated below). You may also submit a volunteer form on our website: <https://www.belchertown.org/374/Volunteer>

All vacancies are posted until filled.

The Town wishes to fill the following vacancies:

**Agricultural Commission:** The Town wishes to fill two associate member seats on the Agricultural Commission. This commission promotes agricultural-based economic opportunities; preserves, revitalizes and sustains the Belchertown agricultural industries, and encourages the pursuit of agriculture as a career opportunity and lifestyle.

**Animal Control Advisory Board:** The Town wishes to fill one (1) vacancy on the Animal Control Advisory Board. This Board works with the Animal Control Officer and the public when a complaint is brought against a dog in Town. The Board may conduct hearings as allowed in the Town Bylaw [Chapter 15] and Mass. Gen. Law ch. 140, Sec. 157 and pose conditions upon the animal owner(s) as deemed appropriate. As the

Board works with dog complaints (only), an ideal applicant would be someone familiar with dogs; a current or past dog owner or person who works with dogs, or an interested community member.

**Belchertown Buildings & Grounds Committee:** The Town wishes to fill one (1) full real estate member seat and one (1) associate member seat on the Belchertown Buildings and Grounds Committee. The committee will advise the Town and the Select Board on funding opportunities for maintaining and developing Town buildings that fit the guidelines of repurpose and/or renovation to benefit the local economy and population as well as advising on historical and cultural development opportunities. Expertise with real estate/architecture, grant writing, or historical experience to strengthen the skill set of the committee is highly preferred.

**Board of Assessors:** The Town of Belchertown is looking to fill a vacancy on the Board of Assessors. This position has a stipend of \$1,000 per year. This recently vacated position will be appointed in accordance with the provisions outlined in MGL Chapter 41, Section 11 by a joint appointment of the Board of Assessors and Select Board. The appointed individual will fill the seat's remaining term and shall perform duties of the office until the next annual election in May 2026. The applicant must be a registered voter in the Town of Belchertown.

In accordance with MCL Chapter 59, Section 21, the

Assessors shall assess all taxes duly certified to them and perform all necessary duties as defined in MGL Chapter 59. Some of the duties include the classification and valuation of all real and personal property along with setting the tax rate each fiscal year.

For further information, contact Jay Whelihan, Director of Assessments, at 323-0413, [jwhelihan@belchertown.org](mailto:jwhelihan@belchertown.org) or Steve Williams, Town Manager, at 323-0403.

**Capital Improvement Planning Committee:** Belchertown is seeking two (2) residents with demonstrated knowledge of construction, facility maintenance, fleet management, architecture, engineering, or a related field to fill a full member seat.

**Communications Committee:** The Belchertown Communications Committee is looking for two (2) new full members and two (2) associate members to help shape how our town shares news and stays connected. This group has supported projects like the Belchertown.org upgrade, Carriagetown Chronicles, and installing a broader social media strategy. We're seeking residents with everyday skills in communications, document preparation, accessibility, social media, or technology - especially individuals with practical experience using AI in workplace or business settings, to support the careful and responsible adoption of these tools in town government.

**Creative Economy Committee:** The Town of Belchertown is accepting letters of interest to fill one (1) vacancy on the Creative Economy Committee. This Committee oversees the strategic planning, municipal arts program development, outreach & marketing, activity implementation, evaluation & reporting, and coordinates arts and culture outreach for the town of Belchertown and forthcoming Cultural District.

**Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Task Force:** The Town of Belchertown is accepting letters of interest to fill one (1) vacancy on the Belchertown Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Task Force. The focus of the Task Force is to develop a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Statement for the Select Board to review and to consider adopting, to seek out opportunities to acknowledge and/or celebrate the diversity within our own community and to welcome the whole community to join in, and to offer suggestions on how the town addresses specific or potential acts of violence, including hate speech, should such acts arise in our community, region, or state. Efforts should be made to include voices from the community or communities that are directly affected. Partnership opportunities with surrounding towns to strengthen regional or state efforts might also be explored. This is a seven (7) member committee to include: A representative from law enforcement, a representative from

Please see **VACANCY**, page 13

GAMES from page 1

The first Family Game Night was held on Feb. 4, and future Family Game Nights will be meeting the first Wednesday of each month through June at 4 p.m. in the children's room at the Granby Library.

The Game Nights provide a mix of games for the competitive and cooperative kids to enjoy, as well as some movement games like Simon Says and other games to help encourage movement and improve motor skills.

Families are welcome to bring their favorite games to



TURLEY PHOTOS BY EMILY-ROSE PAPPAS  
A mom and son having some fun together at the Games Night.

play with other guests and to make new friends.

"I hope they enjoy this time of business for families, that they enjoy this time of quality time, and getting to know new people they may not have met otherwise, and make connections within their community for support and friendship," said Wiechman.

Playgroups take place at the library on Wednesday and Friday mornings from 10 a.m. to 12 noon, for kids aged birth through age five and their caregiver. This is not a drop-off group, and provides a chance for stay-at-home caregivers to meet other caregivers and give kids a chance to socialize and get school-readiness skills.



Marti Wiechman playing games, too.

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## OPINION

## SOCIAL SECURITY Matters

By Russell Gloor

### Why is my Social Security Retirement benefit so small?

#### Dear Rusty:

Can you help me understand?

I have paid into Social Security since I started working in 1978. I did have a lot of tax deductions, but I don't understand why I only receive \$350 a month from Social Security.

Signed: Befuddled Senior

#### Dear Befuddled Senior:

Your Social Security benefit is based upon your average monthly earnings for the 35 years over your lifetime that you earned the most while contributing to the Social Security program; however, your benefit isn't based on your contributions to SS. Your average lifetime earnings amount is called your Average Indexed Monthly Earnings, which are adjusted for inflation for years before you turn 60. Your earnings, your net earnings if self-employed, are provided to the SSA by the IRS.

Your AIME is subjected to a formula which calculates your "Primary Insurance Amount," which is the SS benefit you receive if you start benefits in the month you reach your full retirement age. Your personal Full Retirement Age depends on the year you were born which, if you were born in 1960 or later, is age 67. However, if you claim Social Security before reaching your FRA, you will get only a percentage of your PIA, reduced from what you would get if you claimed at your FRA.

For example, if you claimed at age 62, you would only get 70% of the amount you would have gotten had you waited until age 67, or if you claimed at age 63 you would get 75% of your age 67 benefit. The reduction is less as you get closer to your FRA; if you claimed at age 65, you'd get about 87% of your full retirement age amount.

You can see your lifetime Social Security earnings record at your personal "my Social Security" online account at [www.ssa.gov/myaccount](http://www.ssa.gov/myaccount) (you will need to first create that online account), or you can call Social Security at 1-800-772-1213 to request an "Earnings Statement" be sent to you. That statement will show your lifetime earnings by year, the 35 highest of which were used to calculate your PIA (your Social Security benefit at your FRA).

Generally, your Social Security FRA benefit will be about 40% or less of your average indexed monthly earnings.

So, to recap, your SS retirement benefit isn't based on your contributions to the program; it's based on your average monthly lifetime earnings. If you had less than 35 years contributing to the program, SS would still use 35 years in the benefit formula by using zero dollars in earnings for some number of years, which would result in a smaller AIME.

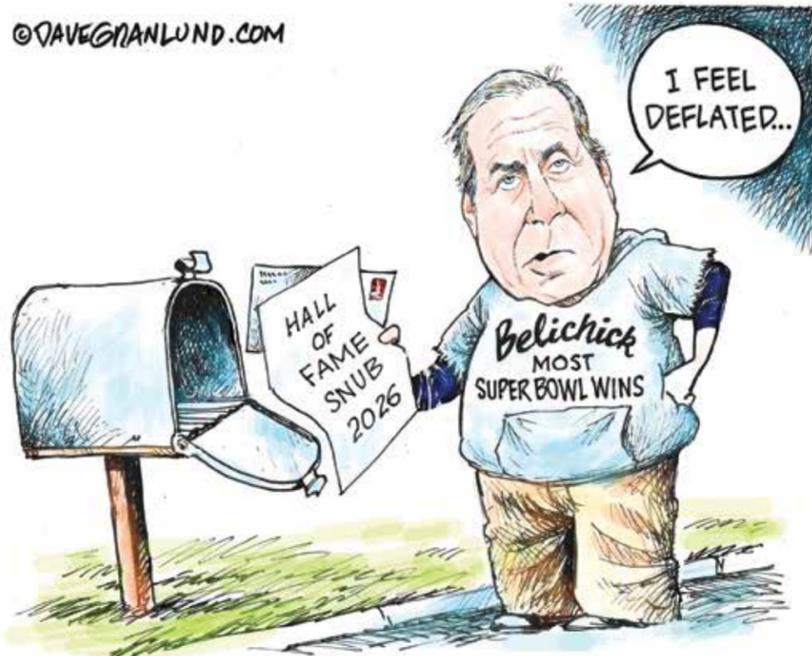
Thus, if you claimed before your full retirement age of 67, your SS benefit was reduced because you claimed early. And if you had less than 35 years of SS-covered employment, your AIME was less, resulting in a smaller PIA. And that is likely why your monthly Social Security retirement benefit is low.

One other thought to consider: if you are married and your spouse's monthly SS benefit is considerably more than yours (e.g., more than twice as much as yours), you may want to explore your options for spouse benefits.

I hope this explains how your SS benefit is calculated, but if you still question your monthly SS retirement amount, I suggest you first obtain your "Earnings Statement" to review the lifetime earnings SS has on file for you. If there are any discrepancies in your Social Security's earnings record, there are correction remedies available to you. If that is the case, please feel free to contact us again for more information.

*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](http://amacfoundation.org/programs/social-security-advisory) or email us at [ssadvisory@amacfoundation.org](mailto:ssadvisory@amacfoundation.org). Russell Gloor is a Social Security advisor for AMAC.*

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### Online seed houses offer endless choices

It's been a fun couple of weeks in the realm of gardening! While I haven't yet gotten my hands into the soil yet, I have been on the hunt for all kinds of seeds for the Old Sturbridge Village gardens: those for obscure medicinal plants, unique heirlooms, and rare native plants.

That process has led me to some interesting mail order companies that I'd like to share with you.

My mail order "go to" for herb seeds has always been Richter's ([www.richters.com](http://www.richters.com)) but when I couldn't locate a few of the items on my list there, a simple internet search led me to Thyme Garden ([www.thymegarden.com](http://www.thymegarden.com)).

Their catalog boasts over 400 varieties of herb seeds and more. The text doubles as an herbal encyclopedia of sorts, providing the reader with cultural information in addition to loads of herbal lore.

A paper copy will set you back \$2.50, but you can get a digital download for free. It's noteworthy to mention that many of the seeds are harvested on the farm in Oregon. The company has been in business since 1989, and clearly knows their stuff.

I purchased both Jimsonweed and Cotton for the Paul Roger's Herb Garden from this company.

Prairie Moon Nursery ([www.prairiemoon.com](http://www.prairiemoon.com)) is an excellent source for native plant material and seeds. This statement from their website gave me something to think about: "Native plants co-evolved with native insects and wildlife; they are deeply dependent on one another. These plants provide food and shelter to insects, birds, and other small animals, which in turn support larger predators. Native plants are the fundamental stepping stones of a healthy eco-system."

While many of us already

enjoy growing native plants, the impact of doing so goes far beyond our ornamen-

tal gardens. so that you, the visitor, see the real deal, 1830s style. I've often ordered heirloom vegetable and flower seeds from Baker Creek Heirloom Seed Company ([www.rareseeds.com](http://www.rareseeds.com)) and this year is no exception.

Their big, beautiful Rare Seed and Whole Seed Catalogs are free for the asking and seed shipping is free, also. Search over 1,300 seeds.

If you can't find what you are looking for there, hop on over to Victory Seeds ([www.victoryseeds.com](http://www.victoryseeds.com)) and there will be more heirloom, open pollinated, non GMO varieties to choose from. I love the concept of Victory Gardens, and the company does a great job of explaining and promoting it.

Victory Seeds offers free shipping on all orders over \$30 and their website provides "quick links" to each main category for easy online shopping. They also encourage seed saving practices, which is neat.

This summer, look for China Rose Radish, Tall Telephone Peas, Boston Marrow Squash and Long Green Cucumber growing in our gardens and used in our households. These were all purchased from Victory Seeds.

If you are bored one afternoon, why not take a look at what these or any number of reputable seed houses have to offer. You will no doubt expand your plant knowledge while you expand your garden!

*Roberta McQuaid graduated from the Stockbridge School of Agriculture at the University of Massachusetts. For 34 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](mailto:pouimette@turley.com) with "Gardening Question" in the subject line.*

## in the Garden

by Roberta McQuaid



tal gardens.

Prairie Moon offers seeds, blended seed mixes, plants and more, and their catalog is free for the asking. You can also download a catalog and cultural guide.

Growing native plants from seed often requires specialized treatments such as chilling or nicking and soaking, so I'd definitely recommend brushing up. I found Toothwort (at last!) and Late Horse Gentian, both for the herb garden.

Sometimes the tricky part about searching out heirloom seeds in the issue of cultivars. For example, I need a black flowered Hollyhock known scientifically as *Alcea rosea nigra*, yet what I discover are cultivars called "Jet Black" or "Black Watchman." I want the original.

Here is where seed sales at Monticello ([www.monticelloshop.org](http://www.monticelloshop.org)) come in handy. Thomas Jefferson was an avid gardener, and the display gardens around his estate highlight many of his favorite plants.

I was also able to secure seeds for unimproved versions of Rusty Foxglove and Black Eyed Susan Vine. Because of this good fortune, you will see authentic 1830s gardens when you visit the Village.

There is no printed catalog to my knowledge, but the shop has its seed sales organized in a friendly manner online. Some seeds are even harvested on site.

Speaking of authenticity, it's also important that we utilize heirloom vegetable varieties within our gardens,

to using reserves of nutrients they've stored in their bodies during the winter.

Their winter habitat is fresh and brackish wetlands with abundant aquatic vegetation on which they primarily forage. Gadwall often snatch food from diving ducks as they surface. Gadwall number have increased in North America since the 1980s. This is partly because of conservation of their habitat, wetlands and adjacent uplands.

The oldest known Gadwall was a male, and at least 19 years, 6 months old. He was banded in Saskatchewan in 1962 and shot during hunting season in Louisiana in 1981.

Christmas Bird Count  
The National Audubon

Society Christmas Bird Counts take place within a 22-day period, there are many state count circles and volunteers must be available. Despite snowy weather, compiler Jon Skinner said of the Groton-Ayer count on Dec. 14, "I was surprised that we were able to scratch our way to 81 species in such snowy conditions. It has to be a testament to the relentless nature of both our team and the birds." Two new species were added 13 black vultures soaring over Lancaster and a killdeer at Devens. Some of the other highlights were evening grosbeak in both Harvard and Groton, red crossbills in

Please see **BIRD COUNT**, page 11

### Turley Publications Letters to the Editor Policy

Letters to the editor should be 350 words or less in length. No unsigned or anonymous opinions will be published. We require letter writers to include his or her town of residence and home telephone number. We must authenticate authorship prior to publication. We reserve the right to edit or withhold any submissions deemed to be libelous or contain unsubstantiated allegations, personal attacks, defamation of character and offensive language. All unknown or alleged facts and quotations offered by the author need to cite credible, unbiased sources. Send letters to: Sentinel, 24 Water St., Palmer, MA 01069 or via email to [sentinel@turley.com](mailto:sentinel@turley.com). The deadline for submissions is Friday at 5 p.m.

### Turley Election Policy

This newspaper will print free self-submitted statements of candidacy only four weeks or more out from the election. All candidates running in both contested and uncontested races are asked to submit their statements to the editor to include only biographical and campaign platform details. Total word count for statements is limited to between 300-500 words maximum. Please include a photo. We will not publish any statements of candidacy inside the four weeks from election threshold. To publish any other campaign publicity during the race, please contact our advertising representatives. We also do not allow personal attacks against other candidates or political parties in statements of candidacy, nor do we publish for free any information about key endorsements or political fundraisers.

Letters to the editor of no more than 250 words from supporters endorsing specific candidates or discussing campaign issues are limited to three total per author during the election season. No election letters will appear in the final edition before the election. We reserve the right to edit all statements of candidacy and letters to the editor to meet our guidelines.

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## in my BACKYARD

By Ellenor Downer



Male gadwall

On Dec. 20, compilers at the Athol Christmas Bird Count recorded a total of 58 species including a Gadwall, a first time for this species during a Christmas count.

Male Gadwall have grayish-brown heads, sometimes showing cinnamon on the forehead and faint purplish iridescence on the crown. Females resemble

female mallards, but they have a thinner, darker bill.

Gadwall nest in tall vegetation near water and show a preference for nesting on islands. Their choice of nesting location gives them some protection from predators.

Female Gadwall produce an egg a day and lay a clutch of seven to 12 eggs. To meet their demand for protein during this stressful time, female Gadwall eat more invertebrates than males during this period in addition

# Have a heart: Tips for Valentine's Day

We seem to love Valentine's Day. Americans are expected to spend \$27.7 billion on Valentine's Day this year, a tad more than last year, according to Capital One Shopping. The statistic I find most interesting is that 34% of that spending – \$9.5 billion – will be for gifts that are ultimately unwanted by their recipients.

So today, I will propose some Valentine's Day ideas that cost nothing and may well be more meaningful than candy, flowers or sappy



By Teri (Dreher) Frykenberg, RN  
Guest Column

cards. Have a heart, and try one of these "gifts" for yourself or a loved one.

**Volunteer:** Volunteering

emotional well-being; and promotes mindfulness and an attitude of gratitude.

contributes to your community and to your own well-being. Research has found that giving of yourself reduces stress and blood pressure; promotes physical activity; helps cultivate

You get as much as you give, in other words. Find opportunities near you at idealist.org or search "volunteer opportunities near me" on your web browser.

**Listen:** Research shows that two out of every five people who have had a major cardiac episode experience symptoms of clinical depression, according to Northwestern University Medicine. The American Heart Association says 33% of patients who have had a heart attack experience

depression.

The combination of depression and cardiac disease can lead to poor outcomes. If a friend or loved one is diagnosed with heart disease or has a heart attack, one of the kindest things you can do is listen carefully to them. If you detect signs of depression, you can suggest – gently – that they consider being screened by their doctor.

Please see **HEART**, page 8

**TAXATION AID** from page 3

the program or applying for assistance can review the FY2026 Taxation Aid Guidelines and Application here: Belchertown Taxation Aid Guidelines and Application FY2026.

Agendas for upcoming meetings are posted in advance, and approved minutes are made available to the public following each meeting.

For additional information, please contact: Belchertown Taxation Aid Committee via the Treasurer/Collectors Office at treasurer@belchertown.org or 413-323-0400



## A Salute to Belchertown Education Foundation Corporate Sponsors

Belchertown Education Foundation has awarded 45 grants to the schools over eight years, totaling more than \$113,000. We are grateful for the generosity of our donors and corporate sponsors, who have positively impacted thousands of students over the years. Below we recognize the 2026 corporate sponsors for their commitment to the community and to the students of Belchertown Schools. We invite you to thank them and tell them how much their generosity matters.

### LEADING SPONSORS



### SUPPORTING SPONSORS



### Belchertown Education Foundation Surpasses \$113,000 in Grants Awarded!

The Belchertown Education Foundation (BEF) is an independent, not-for-profit organization run by community members who are committed to a mission of enriching education for Belchertown students. Funds are raised from the community and local businesses and grants are administered for innovative projects supporting students of Belchertown Schools. Check out the four Student Success Grants awarded for the current school year, with more information at BelchertownEducationFoundation.org:

- At-home Reading Enrichment Book Bags, Swift River Elementary School
- Elementary Makerspace for STEM Learning, Swift River Elementary School
- New Skeletal Models Improve Science Course Study, Belchertown High School
- New Equipment Enhances Cooking Skills and Student Independence, Belchertown High School

### You Can Make Positive Community Impact in Just a Few Hours a Month

We are seeking candidates to join the Board of Directors to help guide the future of the Foundation. If you'd like to learn more, we welcome a conversation and invite you to observe an upcoming meeting. We are also seeking volunteers to give whatever amount of time you can to support fundraising events. Drop us a message to let us know you're interested in either of these opportunities, at info@belchertowneducationfoundation.org.

### Donations Always Welcome!

Donations from individuals and businesses fuel our mission. Contributions to the Belchertown Education Foundation are welcome and may be made at any time at BelchertownEducationFoundation.org or by sending a check to PO Box 435, Belchertown, MA 01007. Donations in any amount make a difference and support our mission.

### 2026-27 Grant Cycle is Open!

The 2026-27 school year grant cycle is now open! Grant applications are due May 1, 2026. Teachers, program heads, coaches, administrators, and staff in Belchertown public schools are encouraged to submit applications for initiatives that support the Foundation's mission and align with the funding criteria of the Grants program. Visit the Grants page at BelchertownEducationFoundation.org to learn more.



### Community Giving: Meet Nick Shaink

Nick Shaink is co-owner of PDC Incorporated, a commercial construction organization throughout the Northeast United States. He is a resident of Belchertown where he and his wife have three children who are students in the schools. PDC has been a leading sponsor of Belchertown Education Foundation's annual corporate campaign for the last few years and Nick's involvement began in 2019, answering the call each year as a top donor to help enrich education in Belchertown Public Schools. Let's see what Nick has to say.

**BEF: What do you appreciate most about living in Belchertown?**

Nick: What I appreciate most about living in Belchertown is the sense of community. It's a small, rural town, but it's incredibly tight knit. People look out for one another, support local schools and organizations, and take pride in where they live. It's a place where relationships matter, and I'm proud to be raising my daughters in a community that values connection, education, and looking out for one another.

**BEF: Do you have a favorite teacher or mentor?**

Nick: I grew up in Hinsdale, New Hampshire, and attended a construction trades program at Keene High School. My favorite teacher was Mr. Woodbury, who taught the trades program. He played an important role in shaping my early interest in construction and helped reinforce the value of learning a skill, working hard, and taking pride in your craft. Those lessons have stayed with me throughout my career.

**BEF: Could you share with students in our community some things that have made you successful?**

Nick: I started at PDC in high school doing some of the most basic work — sweeping floors in the shop and helping wherever I was needed. What made the biggest difference for me was showing up every day willing to work hard, learn, and take pride in what I was doing, no matter the task.

I learned early on the importance of dedication, grit, and being open to learning from the people around you — especially those who came before you. Success doesn't happen overnight. It comes from consistency, humility, and a genuine passion for improving your skills over time.

**BEF: What's a fun fact about PDC?**

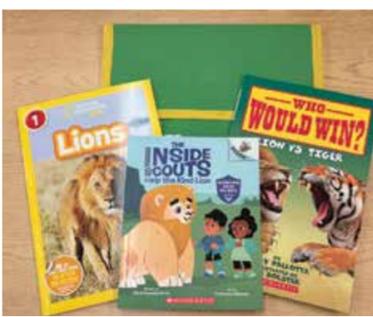
Nick: A fun fact about PDC is that many of our employees, including myself, started in hands-on roles early in their careers. We're a company built from the ground up, and that practical experience still shapes how we work, lead, and support our teams today.

**BEF: PDC has an extensive philanthropic record. What would you tell other businesses about supporting non-profit organizations?**

Nick: Supporting the community around you is incredibly important. Local organizations, schools, and nonprofits play a major role in creating strong, healthy communities, and businesses have an opportunity — and a responsibility — to be part of that. Giving back isn't just about donations; it's about investing in people, opportunities, and the future. When businesses support the communities that support them, everyone benefits. It strengthens relationships, builds trust, and helps create lasting positive impact.

My motivation to support the Belchertown Education Foundation is both personal and community-driven. My children are part of the Belchertown school system, and I see firsthand the dedication of educators and the impact that additional resources can have on students.

The BEF's mission to support academic, artistic, and athletic opportunities aligns closely with my belief in a well-rounded education. Student Success Grants help enhance learning experiences in meaningful ways, and supporting that mission is an investment not only in today's students, but in the future of our community.



### Grants in Action... Adventures in At-home Reading

School volunteer Mr. Thomas Mitchell helps fill the backpacks of first-grade students at Swift River Elementary School with exciting take-home reading enrichment book bags. The Book Bags are funded by a grant from the Belchertown Education Foundation. Reading to children during the critical early years of reading development can increase vocabulary, improve writing and critical thinking, and help children wind-down at bedtime.

ENGAGE WITH US!



**SCHOOLS**

# Granby Jr. Sr. High School first quarter honor roll

GRANBY – The Granby Jr. Sr. High School would like to extend congratulations to those students who achieved Honor Roll for the first quarter of the 2025-2026 school year:

**7th Grade Maximum Honors** – Emilie Bond, Landon Brown, Jace Cruz, Gavin Guilbert, Avery Henderson, Kyla Houle, Jude Joslyn, Savannah Kraus, Leighton Ladas, Alexa Nai, Lily Paquin, Abigail Schmieding, and Aubree Wonderlie.

**7th Grade High Honors** – Samuel Crawford, Emily Durham, Oliver Francis, Madelynn Heroux, Lillian Los, Julianna Roberts, Miley Son, Michael Sullivan, and Wallace Trafford.

**7th Grade Honors** - Justin Harvey, Oliver Helbok, Paris Hernandez, Olivia Heroux, Molly Murdza, Zoey O., Madison Parker, Cameron Shea, Emma Sicard, and Weston Tierney.

**8th Grade Maximum Honors** – Austin Alamed, Andrew Bond, Avery Gagnon, Lilyana Gagnon, Jeriel Gonzalez, Leely Kim, Caroline Koziol, Bri-Anne Kraus, Lucas Levierge, Ella Ludkiewicz, Sofia Marsh, Samantha Samonte, Ryan

Smith, Avery Tetreault, and Sophia Wright.

**8th Grade High Honors** – Conor Anderson, Haylee-May Barnes, Kaylannie Colon, Allison Cross, Kingston Cruz, Tage Flowers, Peyton LaFlamme, Travis Lemoine, Shawn McDermott, William Pula, Michaela Slater, and Alexander Tetreault.

**8th Grade Honors** - Matthew Barnes, Ava Belliveau, Kerry Bombardier, Camden Carillon, Abigail Carmody, Eloise Ciosek, Logan Dufresne, Levi Foster, Margaret Healey, Lucas Melendez, Milo Morton, Jovan Murphy Jr., Henry Stewart, Shi-Anne Thompson, and Bennett Weglarz.

**9th Grade Maximum Honors** - Rowan Cook, Allisandra Crowley, Honor DeCarlo, Arianna Mislak, Marley Skipton, Mia Smith, Avery Tipton-Wolmart, and Kaylee Vincelette.

**9th Grade High Honors** - Ella Clark, Jocelyn Curran, Addison Hill, Ruby Murdza, Raylin Paquette, Ciara Pytel, Sophia Silchuk, Stella Siudak, Marcela Tapia, and Kara White.

**9th Grade Honors** – Wyatt Ciejka, Piper Godbout,

Nathaniel Gomez, and Ciara Lopuk.

**10th Grade Maximum Honors** – Gina Auselle Casadevall, Lauren Barlow, Gianna Capone, Emily Durham, Ralph El Aouji, Abigail Esquivel, Jacob Fuller, Vitaly Gavel, Sophia Labonte, Abigail LaDuke, Anthony Misiaszek, Emma Murphy, Kaelynn Slapski, Richard Sweet, Isabella Tetreault, and Carli Zobka.

**10th Grade High Honors** - Trevor Binley, Logan Carmody, Makayla Dennis, Amelia Gardner, Chase Hauschild, Gabriel Helbok, Grace Pula, Catelyn Rivera, and Sophia Rodrigues.

**10th Grade Honors** – Reynaldo Huertas Guzman, Sophia Press, Madison Scheinost, Colin Sicard, and Jacob Weglarz.

**11th Grade Maximum Honors** – Meredith Bartosz, Logan Campbell, Lucas Ciejka, Parker Dufresne, Christopher Gregorio, Morgan Justin, Madelyn LaPointe, Brenna Moreno, Audrey Pleisch, Jaidyn Roberge, Celine Samonte, Gilmarie Vega Febres, Nathan Walsh, and Mckenna Zumburski.

**11th Grade High Honors** – Kaydence Baldwin, Joseph Barrett-Lorenzi, Sydney

Chateaufeuf, Summer Daudelin, Liam Everson, Kyrsten Gaj, Quinn Lavoie, Samuel Moure, and Kalli White.

**11th Grade Honors** – Brennan Anderson, Lyla Bergeron, Daniel Brown, Brandon Carillon, Tessa Healey, Ty Jones, Caleb Levierge, Lauren Piercey, Lydia Pike, and Eleanor Szlosek.

**12th Grade Maximum Honors** - Emma Beaulieu, Ethan Bergeron, Lea Charest, Allison Charron, Kaitlyn Curran, Benjamin French, Quinn Fuller, Jake Gagnon, Braeden Gallagher, Durant Garden, Braydon LaDuke, Mylin Laliberte, Rosalba Manduca, Allison Maslak, Keith Patterson, Anthony Santiago, Addison Scott, and Isabella Woods.

**12th Grade High Honors** - Brandon Chatel, Edward Dziok, Addison Gardner, Ava-Elizabeth Loughman, Annalise Patterson, Daniel Santiago, and Stephen Szlosek.

**12th Grade Honors** - Raymond Colon, Leonardo Esquivel, Angelina Fuentes, Jared Lapite, Blake Lashway, Faith Ramos, Jadin Rowell, Mark Tavernier, and Nathaniel Valle.

# WNEU announces Fall 2025 Dean's List

SPRINGFIELD – Western New England University is proud to announce the outstanding academic achievements of nearly 800 students named to the Fall 2025 semester Dean's List, including:

- Joseph Mares of Amherst
- Evan Stewart of Amherst
- Lily Hopkins of Belchertown
- Shay O'Neill of Belchertown
- Eric Puffer of Granby
- Alyssa Keeler of Belchertown
- Nicholas Adzima of Belchertown
- Patrick French of Granby
- Megan Mark of Belchertown
- Brody Dugger of Belchertown
- Carter Masse of Belchertown
- Alexander Galusha of Granby
- Samuel Braese of Granby
- Calahan Orzech of Belchertown
- Andrew Feldman of Granby
- Brandie Dumais of Granby
- Lauren Burby of Belchertown

- Sophia Gagnon of Granby
- Sebastian Miller of Granby

### About Western New England University

Western New England University (WNEU) is a private, nationally ranked, comprehensive institution with a focus on preparing work-ready and world-ready graduates. Founded in 1919 in Springfield, Massachusetts as a division of Northeastern College, WNEU's 215-acre suburban campus serves more than 3,700 students, including over 2,500 full-time undergraduates. More than 47,000 alumni have earned degrees through its 90+ undergraduate, graduate, and professional programs at Colleges of Arts and Sciences, Business, Engineering, and Pharmacy and Health Sciences, and School of Law. Students come from 39 U.S. states and territories and 23 countries. Of 45,104 living alumni, 30% remain within the region, residing in the four Western Massachusetts counties and northern Connecticut.

**HEART** from page 7

**Learn hands-only CPR:** Especially since the pandemic, people are hesitant to share germs with a stranger, and I can't blame them. The good news is that compression-only CPR – or hands-only CPR – is the preferred form of cardiopulmonary resuscitation.

While someone dials 911, bystanders can perform quick, strong compressions in the center of the chest to the rhythm of "Stayin' Alive," the BeeGees song, until first responders can arrive.

If started immediately, hands-only CPR has been shown to double or even triple a person's chance of survival. CPR classes are widely



offered by the Red Cross and American Heart Association, as well as at YMCAs and recreation centers.

Take part in a clinical trial: This is a different form of volunteerism. Clinical trials offer an opportunity to help researchers find bet-

ter ways of preventing and treating diseases, improving health for all. Without clinical trial volunteers, many of the medicines and scientific discoveries we enjoy today wouldn't exist.

At any given time, there are tens of thousands clinical trials taking place around the country and virtually. WGC CenterWatch (centerwatch.com) lets you browse study topics and find clinical trials near you.

**Celebrate friendship:** I've written before about the importance of social relationships, and friendships in particular, in keeping our spirits up, our hearts full and our brains working.

So whether or not you have a special someone to

celebrate Valentine's Day with this year, take time for alternate observances, such as Galentine's Day or its gender-neutral variation, Palentine's Day. They fall, technically, on February 13 – but you can pick any day in February to celebrate friendships, check up on each other's health and well-being, share healthful recipes and swap health and fitness tips. Maybe share a glass of wine, too.

**Thank a nurse:** Nursing is my life's work, formerly as a critical care nurse and now as a patient advocate who trains nurses to become advocates. I know how critical nursing is to good patient outcomes. According to the National Council of State Boards of

Nursing, though, more than 138,000 nurses have left the workforce since 2022 and almost 40% intend to leave by 2029.

Health-care consumers may not be able to do much about working conditions, pay and administrative problems, but we can help to make nurses' lives better. When you're in the hospital or doctor's office, thank your nurses for their time and care. You can also show your appreciation by nominating a nurse for the DAISY Award, a program that celebrates and recognizes nurses by collecting nominations from patients, families and co-workers. Learn more at daisyfoundation.org.

Valentine's Day began as a saint's feast day and now

celebrates all forms of relationships. Make it yours.

*Teri (Dreher) Frykenberg, R.N., a registered nurse and board-certified patient advocate, is the founder of www.NurseAdvocateEntrepreneur.com, which trains medical professionals to become successful private patient advocates. A Monson, MA resident, she is the author of "How to Be a Healthcare Advocate for Yourself & Your Loved Ones" and her new book, "Advocating Well: Strategies for Finding Strength and Understanding in Health Care," available at Amazon.com. Contact her at Teri@NurseAdvocateEntrepreneur.com to set up a free phone consultation.*



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**CLUES ACROSS**

1. Breezed through
5. Consumer protection agency
8. Criminal syndicate
11. Moves back from
13. Satisfaction
14. Feel concern or interest
15. Monetary units
16. Congressman (abbr.)
17. Israeli city
18. Restaurants
20. 2,000 lbs.
21. Grandmother
22. North, South and Central
25. In an early way
30. Foes
31. Social networking platform
32. Early term for basketball player
33. Another name for

**CLUES DOWN**

1. Sign language
2. Fashionable
3. Borough in Helsinki
4. Inability to hear
5. More quickly
6. An idea accepted as a demonstrable truth
7. Shrewdly
8. Rooney and Kate are two
9. Mediterranean port
10. Benedictine monk
12. Midway between south and southeast
14. Town in Galilee
19. Satisfy
23. Mice genus
24. Brass instrument
25. Chest muscle (slang)
26. Transmits genetic information from DNA

27. Records electric currents generated by the brain
28. Woman (French)
29. Short route aircraft
34. Pitching statistic
35. Pointed end of a pen
36. Popular sports league
37. Body part
39. Inoffensive
40. Yellowish cotton cloth
41. Feline
42. Does not tell the truth
44. Seduced
45. Spiritual leader
46. Abba \_\_, Israeli politician
47. Repair
48. Olive genus
51. Swiss river
52. Prejudice
53. C. European river
54. Keep under control
58. Father

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# SPORTS

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Shea MacLean holds the ball at the top of the arc.



Andrew Wright keeps the ball away from an opponent.



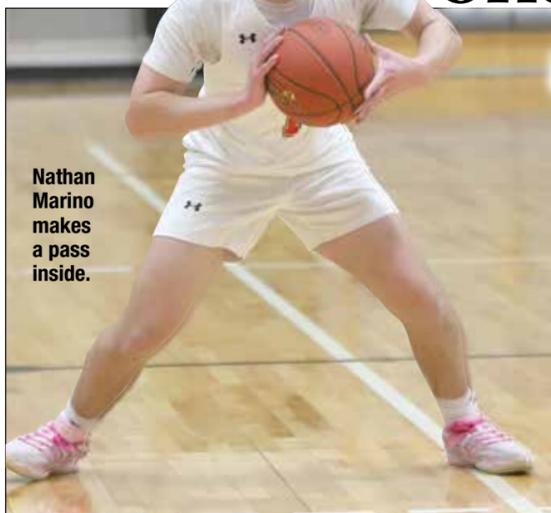
Brice Letendre brings in a rebound.



Joseph Minnon tries to keep the ball inbounds.

TURLEY PHOTOS BY GREGORY A. SCIBELLI

## Orioles suffer setback against Tigers



Nathan Marino makes a pass inside.

**BELCHERTOWN** – Last Tuesday night, South Hadley High School boys basketball defeated Belchertown 57-41. South Hadley played strong for three quarters and the scoring early held up for the Tigers. Belchertown had a tough time out of the gate and could not catch the Tigers. Both teams are 9-8 heading into the last week of the regular season. South Hadley got 22 points from Noah Hambley and 21 points from Tim Loughrey while Belchertown was led by 15 points from Brice Letendre and 14 points from Shea MacLean.



Quinten Chen tries to get around an opponent.

## New look for sectional hockey tourney

By Tim Peterson  
Sports Correspondent

**WEST SPRINGFIELD**—The 2026 Western Massachusetts high school hockey tournament is scheduled to take place from Feb. 16-19.

Six of the seven Berry Division teams will qualify for the Class A tournament.

The Berry Division teams, who are looking to qualify for the Class A tournament, are Westfield, East Longmeadow, Greenfield, Minnechaug Regional, Longmeadow, Ludlow, and West Springfield.

The Westfield Bombers are the two-time defending Class A champions. They defeated the Greenfield Green Wave, 7-3, in last year's championship match.

All six of the teams in the Fay-Wright Division will be competing in this year's Class B tournament.

Those six teams are Easthampton, McCann Tech, Amherst, Taconic, Agawam, and Chicopee High School.

Agawam defeated Taconic, 6-1, in last year's Class B championship match.

The top two teams in

Please see **TOURNEY**, page 11



Kalli White brings in a rebound.



Rowan Cook fights for a rebound.

## Lady Rams take down Ware



Brenna Moreno heads into the arc.

**GRANBY** – In a battle of two very strong teams, Granby defeated Ware 36-30 last Monday night. The key to a victory for Granby was a strong defensive effort in the second half. After being held to two points in the second quarter, the Rams came back strong, but also held the Indians to just 10 points in the second half. Granby was led by Brenna Moreno with 12 points. Amelia Orszulak and Reese McKeever had 12 points each for the Indians. Ware is now 13-4 while Granby is 14-3.

TURLEY PHOTOS BY GREGORY A. SCIBELLI



Eleanor Szlosek looks around for a good pass.

## Pioneers fall at home to rival Panthers

By Tim Peterson  
Sports Correspondent

**PALMER**—The Palmer Panthers won their previous five encounters on the hardwood with the Pathfinder Tech Pioneers by more than ten points.

The sole meeting of the 2025-26 regular season between the cross-town rivals was a tightly contested battle until the middle of the fourth quarter. The Panthers closed out the non-league game with a 10-1 run leading to a 52-41 victory before a large and enthusiastic crowd inside the Pathfinder Tech gym, last Monday night (Feb.2).

"We were finally able to pull away late in the game and it was a very gritty win for us," said Palmer boys' varsity basketball coach Missy Rocker. "It was a very aggressive game, and the referees allowed the players to play without calling many fouls. This is a rivalry game, and I was a little bit worried that it was going to get out of hand."

Following the 11-point road win, Palmer had a 9-7 overall record.

The Panthers, who slipped to 35th place in the MIAA Division 5 power rankings, needed one more victory to qualify for the state tournament for the third consecutive year.

"We do have a very difficult regular season schedule," Rocker said. "This is another tough week for us starting with tonight's game



TURLEY PHOTO BY DAVID HENRY  
WWW.SWEETDOGPHTOS.COM

Dustyn Cook rushes for the hoop.

against Pathfinder. We just need to find a way to win one more game."

Palmer was scheduled to wrap-up the regular season by hosting Chicopee Comp in another non-league game last Wednesday night and Bi-County East rival High School of Commerce last Friday night. It was also the Panthers senior night game.

Their six seniors are Matt Santos, Dylan Doherty, Chris Stapleton, Adonis Dupre, Gavin Smola, and Stephen Fredette.

"The seniors are very special players and they're going to be very difficult to

Please see **PANTHERS**, page 10

SPORTS

# T-Birds suffer loss to Toronto Marlies

TORONTO, ON - The Springfield Thunderbirds (16-24-4-2) fell by a final score of 5-1 to the Toronto Marlies (23-15-4-3) on Saturday inside Coca-Cola Coliseum in what proved to be one of the nastiest games of the season.

Simmering tensions boiled over from the opening drop of the puck on this night, a result of an altercation in the clubs' prior meeting on Jan. 23. In that contest, Marshall Rifai of the Marlies fought Springfield's Simon Robertsson and threw multiple punches at a vulnerable Robertsson when he was lying prone on the ice. Robertsson has yet to play in a game since.

On this day, Steve Ott chose to start Kale Kessy for the opening puck drop, and Kessy immediately dropped the mitts with Rifai, which

lit the fuse for three separate fights between the foes in the opening 15 seconds, resulting in 37 combined penalties in the first period, plus a game misconduct to Toronto defenseman Blake Smith.

Once the dust from the altercations subsided, the Marlies quickly threw their own punches on the score-sheet, beginning with Vinni Lettieri snapping a shot past Vadim Zherenko on the blocker side just 1:12 into the contest, giving Toronto the 1-0 advantage on a 4-on-4 goal.

Springfield's power play had a tough go to begin the night, failing to connect on

a three-minute power play from the remnants of Smith's penalty time. Despite outshooting Toronto 15-5 in the period, the T-Birds' deficit grew as Logan Shaw and Michael Pezzetta each beat Zherenko just 1:22 apart, and with just over five minutes left in the first, it was 3-0, and Georgi Romanov was summoned to replace Zherenko in the net.

Romanov more than did his part as the game moved to the second, as Romanov denied 14 Toronto offerings in the period and helped Springfield kill off a Marlie power play in the process. After nearly 120 minutes without a goal, former Marlie Calle Rosen finally got Springfield on the scoresheet with just 10 seconds left in the period, as he sneaked down the left wing and slammed a shot through Artur Akhtyamov on Springfield's 26th shot of the night to make it a 3-1 game into intermission.

However, the T-Birds did not have any offensive juice left in the tank in the third, and Romanov finally relented a power-play goal to Luke Haymes past the midpoint of the third, which restored Toronto's three-goal advantage, 4-1. Romanov finished his terrific night in relief with 26 saves on 27 shots. Bo Groulx would add an empty-netter with the T-Birds skating 5-on-4 with the extra skater to round out the scoring.

Registration has opened for the Quabbin Valley Baseball League, an over-28 recreational league, held its first meeting of 2026 to prepare for the upcoming season.

For the 2026 season, the cost will be \$215 and will include a 16th game added to the regular season schedule. During the 2025 season, the league experimented with playing on Mother's Day Saturday as well as a week-night game to allow players an opportunity to play under the lights. While the night games were very successful, the Mother's Day Saturday games were rained out. Those elements will return along with a 16th game with an opponent to be determined as the league's board explores possibilities for interleague matchups with another league

# Registration now underway for QVBL

SOUTH HADLEY - Registration has opened for the Quabbin Valley Baseball League, an over-28 recreational league, held its first meeting of 2026 to prepare for the upcoming season.

For the 2026 season, the cost will be \$215 and will include a 16th game added to the regular season schedule.

During the 2025 season, the league experimented with playing on Mother's Day Saturday as well as a week-night game to allow players an opportunity to play under the lights. While the night games were very successful, the Mother's Day Saturday games were rained out.

Those elements will return along with a 16th game with an opponent to be determined as the league's board explores possibilities for interleague matchups with another league

in the region.

For returning players to the league, the deadline is Mar. 22 at 12 noon to be registered for the 2026 season in order to be guaranteed a roster spot. There will be open practices for all players but specifically targeted at new players scheduled for March 29 and April 4 at times and locations to be announced. The draft is currently scheduled to take place on April 4 following that practice.

The season is currently slated to start on Sunday, April 19 and following the success of the six-team fall league last year, the league will also have a fall league in September and October this season.

The registration is live at [www.quabbinvalleybaseball.org](http://www.quabbinvalleybaseball.org). Players must register and

Please see **REGISTRATION**, page 11

PANTHERS from page 9

replace next year," Rocker said. "They're outstanding young men."

Palmer should be able to qualify for the Western Mass. Class C tournament, which starts this week.

Depending on the results of the Class C quarterfinal game, the Panthers will either advance to the semifinals or play a non-playoff game. Regardless of which path they take, those games will also contribute to their overall state power ranking.

Pathfinder Tech (6-7) entered the home contest against Palmer riding a five game winning streak. They were ranked 78th in the Division 5 power rankings

"I don't think that we've ever beaten Palmer in the past, but I was expecting my guys to give them a hard fought battle in tonight's game," said first-year Pathfinder Tech head coach Jeff Kularski. "I'm looking to build a culture here. I think we'll be a dangerous basketball team in a couple of years."

The Pioneers seniors are Aiden Girard (1 point), Dustyn Cook (2 points), and Angelo Rentas, who didn't play in the Palmer game.

Because they probably won't be one of the top 32 teams in the power rankings, the Pioneers will need to finish the regular season with a .500 record to clinch a berth in the state tournament for the first time in two years.

The mood of the varsity

game was a little bit somber after Palmer freshman Abees Castillo suffered a serious leg injury during the second quarter of the junior varsity game. That game was delayed for about 30 minutes as Castillo was taken by ambulance to Wing Hospital.

"The varsity and J.V teams normally practice together," Rocker said. "The players were very emotional when Abees was injured because the other players really care about their teammate. Abees is a swing player for us and it's an unfortunate injury."

Because of the long delay, the j.v. game ended at half-time, which allowed the varsity contest to start on time.

Rocker decided to make a couple of changes to the starting lineup.

Stapleton, along with sophomore Liam Mckee, and eighth grader T.J. Smola made their first career starts in a varsity game.

"Chris is a senior and I wanted to give him the opportunity to start a game," Rocker said. "I've also seen some good things from Liam and T.J. at practice. I wanted to see what they could do at the start of the game."

Doherty and junior Taydem Haley, who are normally starters for the Panthers led the way offensively.

Doherty scored 14 of his game-high 18 points during the second half. Haley scored 14 points, which gave him a total of 937 career points.

Sophomore Cassian Kowalik (16 points) and



Ian Squi Nieves attempts the layup under pressure.



Grayson Griswold tries to get a shot up in traffic.

junior Cayden Bousquet (16 points) combined to score 32 of the Pioneers 41 points. No other Pathfinder player scored more than four points.

A Haley foul-line jumper gave Palmer a 3-0 lead with 6:30 left in the opening quarter before the Pioneers put together an impressive 14-2 run.

Kowalik and Bousquet scored five points apiece during that span. Sophomore Grayson Griswold (4 points) added a lay-up and sophomore Maddox Baer buried a

jumper, which was his only points of the game.

Santos, Fredette (9 points), and Gavin Smola (5 points),

who are the Panthers other three normal starters, were on the court at the start of the second quarter, along with Haley and Doherty.

The Panthers outscored the Pioneers, 18-9, during the second stanza and the contest was tied 23-23 at halftime.

After outscoring Pathfinder, 10-6, in a low scoring third quarter, Palmer entered the final eight minutes with a slim 33-29 lead.

A Bousquet lay-up closed the gap to 33-31 with 7:35 left in regulation.

With 4:28 remaining on the scoreboard clock, the Panthers built a 42-36 lead following a Doherty old fashion three point play.

The home team responded with a lay-up and put-back hoop by Kowalik making it a two point game again.

A minute later, Fredette made an inside hoop, and Doherty hit a short jumper, which helped the Panthers pull away down the stretch. They sealed the victory by making four of six shots from the free throw line.



Cayden Bousquet takes a free throw.



Maddox Baer holds the ball just inside the arc.

## Team Mass Boys & Girls AAU Basketball Tryouts

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Spring 2026

**Cost:** \$30 Covers both tryouts (players get t-shirt)  
AAU membership needed \$28  
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**Tryout # 1:** Saturday, February 21, 2026

**Location:** Tantasqua Jr High School  
(320 Brookfield Rd., Fiskdale, MA)

- Boys Grades 4th-6th 8:30 a.m. - 9:45 a.m.
- Boys Grades 7th & 8th 9:45 a.m. - 11 a.m.
- Boys Grades 9th-12th 11 a.m. - 12:15 p.m.
- Varsity players sign up if still playing with school\*\*

- Girls Grades 4th-6th 12:15 p.m. - 1:30 p.m.
- Girls Grades 7th-8th 1:30 p.m. - 2:45 p.m.
- Girls Grades 9th-12th 2:45 p.m. - 4 p.m.

**Tryout # 2:** Sunday March 1, 2026

**Location:** Oxford High School  
(100 Caruncle Dr., Oxford, MA)

- Boys Grades 4th-6th 3:30 p.m. - 4:30 p.m.
- Girls Grades 4th-6th 4:30 p.m. - 5:30 p.m.
- Boys & Girls Grades 7th & 8th 5:45- 7 p.m.
- Boys and Girls Grades 9th-12th 7:15 p.m. - 8:30 p.m.
- Varsity players sign up if still playing with school\*\*

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SPORTS

# Worcester Railers fall to Lions in OT

TROIS-RIVIÈRES, QC — The Worcester Railers HC (21-17-4-1, 47 pts) fell in overtime to the Trois-Rivières Lions (18-20-1-3, 40 pts) in front of a crowd of 2,793 on Saturday, February 7th, with a final score of 2-3 at the Colisée Vidéotron. The Railers will play Trois-Rivières next in Worcester on Friday, February 13th, with a 7:05 p.m. puck drop.

The Lions nabbed the first goal for the afternoon, as Anthony Beauregard (1-0-1) took advantage of the heavy traffic in front of the Railers net. Worcester answered Trois-Rivières' goal in the third period with two back-to-back goals from Anthony Callin (1-0-1) to tie the game and Ryan Miotto (1-0-1) to take the lead (2-1). Egor Goriunov (1-0-1) claimed the second Lions goal with a slapshot to re-tie the game. This tally pushed the game into overtime. The final goal of the afternoon came from Lions' captain Morgan Adams-Moisan (1-0-1) for a final score of 3-2 in favor of Trois-Rivières.

Trois-Rivières secured the initial lead of the afternoon at 16:47 in the first. While Worcester saw a power play turned 5-on-3 chance in the midst of the period, the two-and-a-half-minute advantage would go unfulfilled. Worcester then went on the penalty kill and successfully barred the Lions from capitalizing. As the game neared the 17-minute mark, Trois-Rivières bested the Railers amidst ongoing traffic along Parker Gahagen's crease. While Gahagen remained tied up one side of the net, Anthony Beauregard (9th) played an opportune rebound off of a Railers' skate to score.

Shots on goal were 11-8 in favor of Trois-Rivières. The Railers went 0-for-2 on the power play, while the Lions went 0-for-1.

The Lions held on to their 1-0 lead from the first through the second twenty minutes of action. The Railers received the only power play of the period at the 19-minute mark, as Trois-Rivières' Cédric Deruisseaux headed to the box for slashing. Worcester outshot Trois-Rivières 11-10, while the Lions added another infraction to their count for a total of three.

Worcester's scoreless streak ended in the third period. Anthony Callin (15th) broke the clean slate with a breakaway goal at 4:54. Callin charged the Lions' net, where Lavallière could not stop the momentum and pushed himself over the goal line. Just thirty-nine seconds later, Ryan Miotto (10th) capitalized on an attempted clear of the Lions' net by Charles Martin. Martin pushed the puck with a backhanded pass into the awaiting Miotto for another Railers goal. The Lions tied the match with a one-timer from Egor Goriunov (2nd) at 16:44. The tally pushed the game into overtime, the third appearance for the Railers in their past four games. Trois-Rivières ended up with the 3-2 OT win, the final goal a tip on the doorstep from captain Morgan Adams-Moisan (8th), the initial shot from Darick Louis-Jean. Final shots were 39 for Trois-Rivières and 25 for Worcester. The Railers and the Lions each earned one penalty in the third, which brought final totals up to two for Worcester and four for Trois-Rivières.



SUBMITTED PHOTO

Cyan came with a tipped ear, and is thought to be a barn cat.

PETS from page 1

"We've been, for several years now, applying for grants through the Mass Animal Coalition to assist people who don't have the funds for spay/neutered to get their animals spayed or neutered," said Belchertown Animal Control Officer Anna Fenton. "The need is so great that there are people from last year who still need help."

The Belchertown Animal Control, BAC, works hard to make sure that all animals that are brought into the facility are spayed or neutered before being adopted out, and they are able to perform these procedures through donations from the community and the work of BARC.

BARC, Belchertown Animal Relief Committee, gave a grant of \$1,000 to help with the people still on the wait list to have their animals spayed or neutered. Being able to provide these services is essential for helping them be strong and healthy.

There are many controversies and misunderstandings around spaying and neutering dogs and cats, and one is that it can cause obesity, but this is very easily avoidable on the part of the owners working to ensure they are helping them exercise and lose that weight.

On social media, many people share a desire for their animals to have a litter, but it's not necessary. One of the reasons against it is for

the health of the female dog or cat. The longer a female dog or cat has a uterus, an infection called pyometra, unique only to female dogs and cats, can develop and is life-threatening and requires immediate treatment.

"The biggest thing with male dogs and cats is spraying and marking, and with cats, if the males are neutered, you won't have toms fighting each other because the pheromones are gone," said Fenton.

Members of the community can donate to the BAC's gift fund to help provide these services, and can also, when they do their taxes, donate to the MA Animal Fund, which helps with the spay/neuter voucher program.

"This program has so many people in need that they actually stopped taking requests from the public a year ago because they have such a backlog. They help the animal controls to spay and neuter the rescues from the streets, and are still working on their backlog of residents," said Fenton.

The work the Animal Control and veterinary agencies do to help ensure the safety and health of our beloved animals is essential, and as humans, it's a responsibility to care for these animals.

A dog and a couple of cats will soon be available for adoption at the Belchertown Animal Control, and have been spayed and neutered.

# Love your neighbor... donate to those in need

BELCHERTOWN – The Clapp Memorial Library's Teen Advisory Board will be collecting non-perishables at the library in their second-ever Food Drive through Feb. 13. There will be a designated donation box inside the library during those dates. Donations will be sorted by Teen Advisory Board

members on the 13th and distributed evenly amongst Belchertown food pantries. TAB is a group of 7th-12th-grade students who meet monthly during the school year to propose library programming for teens, provide input on teen services, volunteer, and have fun. New members are welcome.



BIRD COUNT

from page 6

Townsend, Lapland longspur at Fitchburg Airport and in Ayer, chestnut-collared longspur at Fitchburg Airport, American kestrel in Groton, two Baltimore orioles in Groton, eastern Phoebe in Shirley, redpoll in Lancaster and a long-eared owl in Devens. Species seen three days before or after the actual count date and noted as such were chipping sparrow, brown-headed cowbird, Peregrine falcon and sandhill crane.

Bluebird

I received an email on Jan. 26 from Jeffrey Landry. He had a visit from a bluebird on Friday, Jan. 23. He thought it was either the male parent or one of its offspring from a previous summer. He said, "For several years I have called him, 'Sunshine' and he arrived at my feeder on a bright beautiful winter's afternoon and this uncalled for visit was icing on my day's cake."

He offered to share this bluebird story. He said, "I was sitting on my meditation cushion yesterday watching my breath emerge from a deep silence and then gently return back into it. There was no counting, no manipulation, only watching, only flow. After some time had passed, I opened my eyes because I felt I was being closely watched."

"I have a bird feeder right outside of my window and sure enough a male bluebird or one of his offspring from a previous summer, was perched and

staring directly at me. Two summers ago I named the parent bluebird, 'Sunshine' and last May he returned to the same nesting box in my front yard.

Quizzically, Sunshine leaned slightly forward. He was amazingly close."

"It was beautiful, glorious to see his blue rust colored body outlined by a background of white snow still clinging to frozen lilacs and tall trees. The sight of this sent ripples of love, that became currents of joy, to course through me."

"I felt a smile stretch a mile wide across my whole being. It was like being visited by a long absent friend. Within minutes this made me get up and fill another feeder with dried mealworms because bluebirds aren't seed eaters like many of the other birds that seek nourishment here. Like my breath, the mealworms disappeared into a well of silence. A contented peaceful silence that then took flight."

Evening grosbeaks

A Cummington resident sent a photo of evening grosbeaks at her feeder. She said they are part of a flock that come to visit the feeders often.

People may report a bird sighting or bird related experience by emailing mybackyard88@aol.com or edowner@turley.com or mailing to Barre Gazette, P.O. Box 448, Barre, MA 01005. The Palmer office has a new phone system and I will be getting an extension where messages may be left. I will publish the number as soon as it is set up.

TOURNEY from page 9

Class A & B will automatically advance into the semifinals.

Prior to playing the semifinal round, the top-seeded team in Class A will be facing the second-seeded team in Class B. The top-seeded team in Class B will also play the second-seeded Class A team.

Those games will boost the team's state power rankings.

The other four teams in each of the classes will be playing in the quarterfinals on February 16.

The higher-seeded teams will be hosting the quarterfinal matches.

Any of the quarterfinal games played at the Olympia Ice Center in West Springfield will be held during the daytime. The game times on rink 1 will be 11am and 1:30pm. The games on rink 2 will be at noontime and 2:30pm.

The losers of the quarterfinals will be playing non-playoff games against each other.

The Class A semifinals are scheduled to be played at Olympia on Feb.17. The start times for those two

games will be 11am and 1:30pm.

The Class B semifinals are scheduled for Olympia on Feb.18. The start times for those two games will also be 11am and 1:30pm.

Both Western Mass. finals will be played on rink 1 at Olympia on Feb.19.

The Class B finals will be held at 5:30 p.m. followed by the Class A final at 8 pm.

The tickets prices for the semifinals and finals are \$8. Tickets are available through GoFan Only.

There is not a different price for students or senior citizens.

REGISTRATION

from page 10

then pay the league dues via Venmo or contact the league leadership if an alternate form of payment is needed.

Aside from the weeknight and Mother's Day games, other games take place Sundays at 10 a.m. outside of Mother's Day, Memorial Day and July 4 weekends. Playoffs will be in August.

This is the 30th season for the league and league officials are looking to celebrate the anniversary with a couple of events.



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**VACANCY**  
from page 5

Town Hall, and five (5) community members representing diversity in one or more of the following areas: Racial and ethnic backgrounds, Social positions with respect to gender identity and sexual orientation, social positions with respect to disability, and Age groups and prior vocational experiences. All are encouraged to apply. Please submit a letter of interest to: Select Board, The Finnerty House, One South Main Street, P.O. Box 670, Belchertown, MA 01007 or by email to selectboard@belchertown.org.

**Historic District By-Law Commission:** The Town wishes to fill a member Real Estate seat on the Historic District By-Law Commission. The Commission has regulatory control over new construction, reconstruction, alterations, movements, and demolition of all exterior architectural features of buildings and structures within the Historic District which are visible from any public street, public way, or public park.

**Pioneer Valley Transit Authority Advisory Board:** The Town is seeking an individual to represent and serve as a Liaison to the Town of

Belchertown on the PVTA Advisory Board. Interested individuals should have the time and desire to attend respective meetings in Springfield and periodically review the PVTA's services to the Town and its contiguous communities.

**Quaboag Valley Business Assistance Corporation (QVBAC) / Quaboag Valley Community Development Corporation (QVDCD) Board Member:** The Town is seeking an individual to represent and serve as a Liaison to the Town of Belchertown on the QVBAC to bring the concerns of Belchertown's residents and small business community forward to ensure that the services provided by the QVBAC/QVDCD are in line with the town's needs. The board member also helps disseminate information from the QVBAC board to Belchertown's residents and small business community, especially when there is a particular program or initiative they'd benefit from. While no business acumen is required, an interest in and or connections with Belchertown's small business community would be advantageous. Enthusiasm for Belchertown, and the ability to determine and communicate the interests

of its residents are the most important qualifications. For more information about the Quaboag Valley Community Development Corporation and the Quaboag Valley Business Assistance Corporation, please visit www.qvcdc.org.

**Veterans' Services Advisory Board (VSAB):** The Town is looking to fill one (1) vacancy on the VSAB. The Board works closely with the Town's Veterans' Agent on issues pertaining to veterans to include but not limited

to Veterans Day and Memorial Day ceremonies, war memorials, veterans' graves or any other related areas of concern.

**Zoning Board of Appeals:** The Town wishes to fill two (2) openings for associate member seats on the Zoning Board of Appeals. The ZBA is responsible for hearing and deciding on applications for Special Permits, Variances and Appeals from decisions of the Zoning Enforcement Officer/Building Inspector.

**INFORMATION** from page 4

Public Interest Technology Initiative (PIT) at the UMass College of Information and Computer Sciences. As a result, an employee workshop will be held in February by UMass PIT to explain what AI is, what it is not, potential risks, and practical ways it may be useful in municipal work. "This is the first step in the Town determining how we are going to use AI," said Williams. "It's here, it's not going away, and we

want to figure out how it can help everyone in doing their jobs."

The Communications Committee currently has two open seats and is seeking volunteers wanting to help make Belchertown's government more clear, accessible, and transparent. Those interested in getting involved in the Communications Committee can submit an interest form at www.Belchertown.org/volunteer.

**Quabbin Photo Group to host presentation on wildlife tracking for photography**

BELCHERTOWN – The Quabbin Photo Group will be hosting a presentation at its February meeting featuring Outdoor Education Specialist Jack Bonafini from the Massachusetts Division of Fisheries and Wildlife. His presentation will focus on tracking deer, designed especially for photographers.

With nearly a decade of experience in the Hunter Education and Learn to Hunt programs, Jack brings deep field knowledge and practical insight into deer biology, habitat, food preferences, and tracking techniques. This session will give you a clearer understanding of deer behavior and movement patterns, along with real-world strategies for reading sign and interpreting the landscape.

You'll come away with tools and techniques to improve your chances of meaningful, ethical, and respectful close encounters and to capture stronger, more informed wildlife photographs. Whether you're new to wildlife

photography or looking to sharpen your field skills, this informative seminar will help take your work to the next level.

Monday, Feb. 23 at 7 p.m. at Belchertown Recreation Department, 66 State St., Belchertown (behind the Belchertown Police Department)

Founded in 1984, the Quabbin Photo Group traces its roots to the Belchertown Color Camera Club, which was established in 1948 by noted local photographer Les Campbell. What began as a small group of friends meeting in homes a few times a year has evolved into a vibrant organization that now holds monthly meetings and educational programs for photographers of all levels.

For more information, visit our website at quabbinphotogroup.com or contact QPG President Mark Lindhult at mlindhult@gmail.com or Program Chair Ed Comeau at comeau@comeauphotography.com.

**PUBLIC NOTICES**

**Belchertown Conservation Commission LEGAL NOTICE**  
Pursuant to the authority of the Wetlands Protection Act (M.G.L. Ch. 131, Sec. 40, its Regulations (310 CMR 10.00) and the Belchertown Wetlands Protection Bylaw (Chapter 139), the Belchertown Conservation Commission will hold a public hearing on **Monday, February 23, 2026 at 7:00 PM in the Lawrence Memorial Hall Auditorium, located at 2 Jabish Street in Belchertown, MA 01007** to review a **Notice of Intent** permit application submitted by Ken Kozlik c/o Sherman & Frydryk for the proposed work to construct an Accessory dwelling unit at 35 Lake Drive (Assessor's Map 102-90) in Belchertown. Work is proposed to occur within the 100-foot Buffer Zone to Bordering Vegetated Wetlands. Anyone interested in this matter should appear at the time and place designated. 02/12/2026

**OFFICE OF THE SELECT BOARD TOWN OF BELCHERTOWN PUBLIC HEARING**  
Notice is hereby given under Chapter 140 of the General Laws that Goe Tani Greige of West Boylston, MA, has applied for a Used Car Dealer's License - Class II for 122 Federal Street, Inc. for the purpose of buying and selling second-hand motor vehicles at 122 Federal Street, Belchertown, MA.  
A public hearing relative to this application will be held on **Tuesday, February 17, 2026, at 6:50 p.m.** in the Select Boards Meeting Room on the first floor of Lawrence Memorial Hall, 2 Jabish Street, Belchertown, Massachusetts  
SELECT BOARD  
Lesa Lessard Pearson, Chair  
Jennifer D. Turner  
Nicole Miner  
Whitney Jorns Kuhnlenz  
Jonathan Ritter  
02/05, 02/12/2026

**Belchertown Zoning Board of Appeals Notice of Public Hearing**  
In accordance with the provisions of Massachusetts General Laws Chapter 40A, Section 11 the Zoning Board of Appeals will hold a Public Hearing on **February 18, 2026 at 6:00 PM.**  
This hearing will be held in the Planning Board's meeting room of Lawrence Memorial Hall, 2 Jabish Street, Belchertown, MA on the application from Robert Mileski seeking a special permit §145-69; to revert the building at 720 Franklin Street (Map 109 Parcel 51, Zoned AGA/AGB) into a two-unit dwelling; §145-11 Residential Use (2). A copy of

at the Town Clerk's office (Room 201) 9:00 AM to 5:00 PM, Monday through Friday, Lawrence Memorial Hall, 2 Jabish Street, Belchertown, MA. or at website [https://www.belchertown.org/committees/zoning\\_board\\_of\\_appeals/index.php](https://www.belchertown.org/committees/zoning_board_of_appeals/index.php)  
Any Person interested and wishing to be heard should appear at the time and place designated.  
Jennifer Sharrow, Chair  
Zoning Board of Appeals  
02/05, 02/12/2026

**TOWN OF GRANBY REQUESTS FOR PROPOSALS GRANBY PUBLIC SCHOOL**

**MANAGEMENT COMPANY ADVERTISEMENT**  
The Town of Granby/Granby School Committee is requesting sealed proposals from qualified firms, for the management of school food services.  
Proposals Due: **Thursday, March 19, 2026 at 12:00 p.m.**  
Requests for bid documentation: will be available via email Todd Dorman tdorman99@granbyschoolsma.net  
Proposals shall be enclosed in a sealed envelope with the following marked clearly on the outside: **Granby Public Schools**

**Proposal for Food Service Management Company,** with the bidders name, business address and phone number and sent to Attn: Todd Dorman, Director of Finance and Operations, Granby Public Schools, 387 East State Street, Granby, MA 01033.  
Bid documents will be available Wednesday, February 18, 2026.  
Pre-Proposal Conference shall be held on **Friday, March 6 at 11:30 a.m.** at 387 East State Street, Granby, MA 01033. A tour of the SFA facilities immediately following the Pre-Proposal Conference. Please contact Todd Dorman at 413-409-5393 or tdorman99@granbyschoolsma.net to verify your attendance at the tour.  
The Town of Granby/Granby School Committee reserves the right to accept or reject any and or all proposals or accept the proposal that it finds, in its sole discretion, to be the most advantageous to the SFA. 02/12/2026

**PUBLIC NOTICES ARE NOW ONLINE**

- 1 Email all notices to [notices@turley.com](mailto:notices@turley.com)
- 2 Access archives and digital tear sheets by newspaper title.
- 3 Find a quick link to the state of Massachusetts' public notice web site to search all notices in Massachusetts newspapers.

Public notice deadlines are Friday at 3 p.m.

visit [www.publicnotices.turley.com](http://www.publicnotices.turley.com)

the application may be inspected **FOOD SERVICE**

*The Sentinel*  
**OBITUARY POLICY**

Turley Publications offers two types of obituaries. One is a free, brief **Death Notice** listing the name of deceased, date of death and funeral date and place. The other is a **Paid Obituary**, costing \$275, which allows families to publish extended death notice information of their own choice (with a word limit of up to 500 words) and may include a photograph. **Death Notices & Paid Obituaries** should be submitted through a funeral home to: [obits@turley.com](mailto:obits@turley.com).

*Exceptions will be made only when the family provides a death certificate and must be pre-paid.*

**GET HIRED**

**Full-Time Advertising Sales**

- Do you want to work in your community helping local businesses connect with their customers?
- Do you want a career supporting local journalism, which tells the unique stories of our communities?
- If so, then join our team! Turley Publications is looking for an outgoing, energetic person interested in selling advertising for our community newspapers. The right candidate will assume an established territory with a portfolio of customers.
- You must be a self-starter with excellent communication and organizational skills. Basic computer skills are required. Previous print sales experience is preferred but we will train the right candidate.



**Competitive commission structure, 401k, and health plan.**

Locally Owned, **Family Business**

**Turley Publications**

Send resume & cover letter to:

Jamie Joslyn  
24 Water Street, Palmer, MA 01069  
Email: [jamie@turley.com](mailto:jamie@turley.com)



**Please check the accuracy of your legal notice prior to submission (i.e., date, time, spelling). Also, be sure the requested publication date coincides with the purpose of the notice, or as the law demands. Thank you.**

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# DL&G TREE

Tree Removal



Structural Pruning



Crane Service



Storm Damage



Stump Grinding



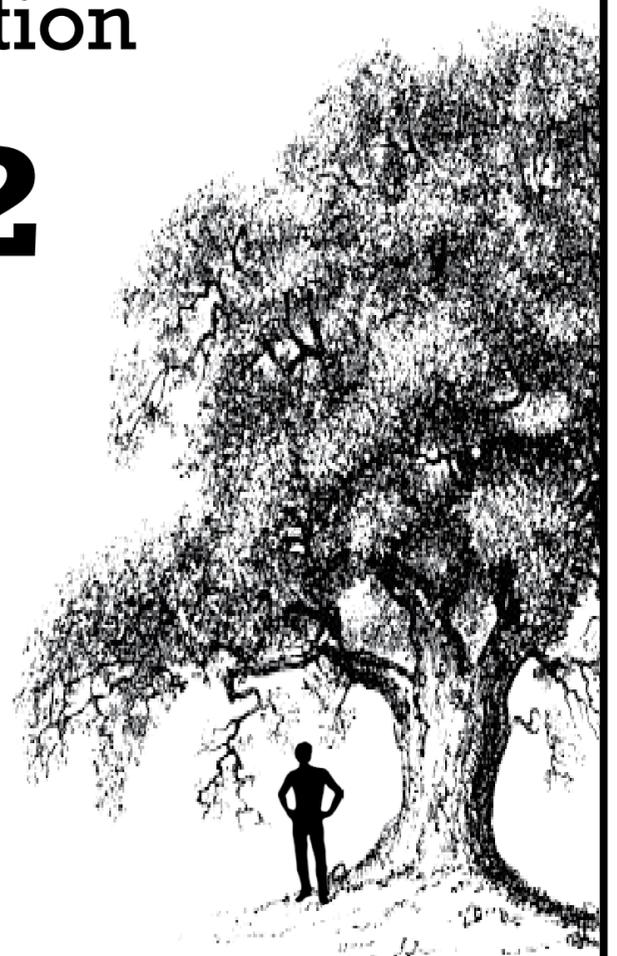
Lot Clearing



Give us a call for your free estimate and tree evaluation

**413-478-4212**

# DL&G TREE



**INSURED AND CERTIFIED**