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# AGAWAM

## ADVERTISER NEWS

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### Mayor invites public to see new APD



Mayor Christopher Johnson is inviting the public to the grand opening of the new Agawam Police Headquarters, located at 1070 Suffield St. The moving process is ongoing and soon the Agawam Police Department will transition its full operations to the facility. The public can have a look at the completed product on Saturday, Dec. 13 from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m.

### School Committee reviews highlights on education, honors Senior Maddie Balzano

By Amanda Munson  
amunson@turley.com

AGAWAM – On Nov. 18, the school committee reviewed in the beginning of the meeting highlights on education with Superintendent of Schools Sheila Martin. Mayor Christopher C. Johnson introduced Martin and followed by stating the winner of the Massachusetts Association of School Superintendents Award for Academic Excellence.

Martin began, "This award is given to high school students that have distinguished

themselves in the pursuit of excellence during their high school careers. The criteria for this award includes the students three year cumulative average, their rank in class, and overall school citizenship. Presentations of this award are made at the beginning of each senior year to allow for the inclusion of this prestigious award and the student's credential package counts for their recommendation. We hope we aren't too late yet. I ask that the school committee and Asst. Superintendent Curriculum, Instruction, and Human Resources Cheryl Sa-

lomao and join me in congratulating the award recipient, Senior Maddie Balzano," said Martin.

Martin continued describing Balzano as a shining example of academic excellence, leadership, and service. Consistently earning honor roll recognition throughout every term in Agawam High School, Balzano is also a proud member of the National Honors Society, Spanish Honors Society, and History Honors Society.

Throughout Balzano's time at AHS, she's been recognized

SCHOOL | page 10

### Athletic playing fields get big facelifts, key maintenance by DPW

By Gregory A. Scibelli  
gscibelli@turley.com

AGAWAM – Earlier this, a citizen who raised concerns about the state of the many athletic fields in the community got action taken starting with Mayor Christopher Johnson, who formed a small task force to inventory the needs of the various fields.

Dom Pisano, the resident who spoke up about the issues, led the task force.

On Dec. 1, Pisano delivered a progress report on the many improvements to take place at multiple locations throughout the summer and fall.

A lot of credit went to the Department of Public Works, which has been understaffed not only during normal months, but during the summer as well when

extra help to keep up with mowing and other tasks is usually hired.

Department of Public Works Deputy Superintendent Peter Sadowski led the efforts on the ground, coordinating the work on the various fields. While some of the improvement work was already scheduled prior to the task force being formed, manpower was the prominent reason why some fields were not in as good a condition and improvement work had to be delayed.

Some of the biggest improvements were made at the Agawam High School varsity baseball field and the JV field. The varsity field, located behind the high school building, received overseeding, the many weeds and overgrowth in the outfield was addressed.



Multiple fields, including Shea Park shown here, have received major improvements during the past 12 months. The fields in Agawam were the subject of criticism earlier this year.

TURLEY PHOTO BY GREGORY A. SCIBELLI

The JV field, which is located at Shea Park adjacent to the dog and skate parks, was completely stripped at the end of the summer. The baseball field was completely overseeded and the grass came in very well throughout the fall despite the warmer temperatures and lack of rain for much of the season. The town will completely the field, re-establishing the dirt infield, pitching mound, and home plate areas prior to start of the spring season.

"Through this thoughtful planning and collaboration," Pisano said. "(Pete) Sadowski really took the lead and he's done a really good job. Some of these fields were in rough shape."

Pisano said overseeding has taken place at School

FIELDS | page 10

### Tax rate drops, shift remains same for FY2026

By Gregory A. Scibelli  
gscibelli@turley.com

AGAWAM – The Town of Agawam, through the mayor and a vote of the City Council has established the tax rate for FY2026.

One again, the city council unanimously agreed to the 1.59 tax shift that has been used frequently during the past several years, and was the shift in FY2025.

"It's that balance between trying to be fair to the residents and not being unfair to the businesses," said Mayor Christopher Johnson.

Due to property growth and a less than the levy limit property tax goal, the tax rate will go down by more

than a half-dollar per \$1,000 valuation.

The 1.59 shift agreed to by the council comes with a tax rate of \$14.10, down 54 cents from last year. The shift makes the commercial and industrial tax rate \$26.67. That is a decrease of \$1.03 from FY2025's rate of \$27.70.

Like most years, despite the lower rate, most residents could see tax bill increases due to property values going up. However, in the instance a property's value does not change, that property own could actually see a drop in their tax bill.

"This is a fair shift given what the history has been," Johnson said. "Average bills are going up more in Spring-

field and West Springfield than we are."

Based on the average home value, Johnson showed a \$156 potential tax bill increase for residents, well below surrounding community average bill increases.

Residential property taxpayers make up nearly 79% of the taxed popular. Commercial and industrial property make up the remaining 21%.

For FY2026, the town seeks to raise \$77,769,105 million through the tax levy, which is more than \$18 million below the levy limit.

For FY2025, Agawam maintained the lowest tax rate among similar sized

TAX | page 10

### AHS holds summit



Agawam High School Principal James Blain said prior to Thanksgiving break Agawam High School hosted a Stakeholder Summit that consisted of students, parents, teachers, administrators, and community members. The theme of "Listen, Lead, and Learn", was felt by all participants as we look to improve the student experience at AHS. The entire day was led by students. They were amazing.

SUBMITTED PHOTO



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# Restaurant Bella Cucina brings Italian cuisine to town

By Amanda Munson  
amunson@turley.com

AGAWAM – Bella Cucina, newly located on 1422 Main St., offers Italian cuisine with a variety of flavors for everyone. Serving loads of appetizers, salads, main courses like chicken, meat, vegetable dishes, mouth-watering pizza and ending with a tiramisu for dessert; Bella Cucina is a great addition to the city.

With customer and employee satisfaction coming first, Owner of Bella Cucina Perparime Abdullahu, also known as Perpy, spoke about how the first couple of months has been for the business and why she ultimately chose Agawam.

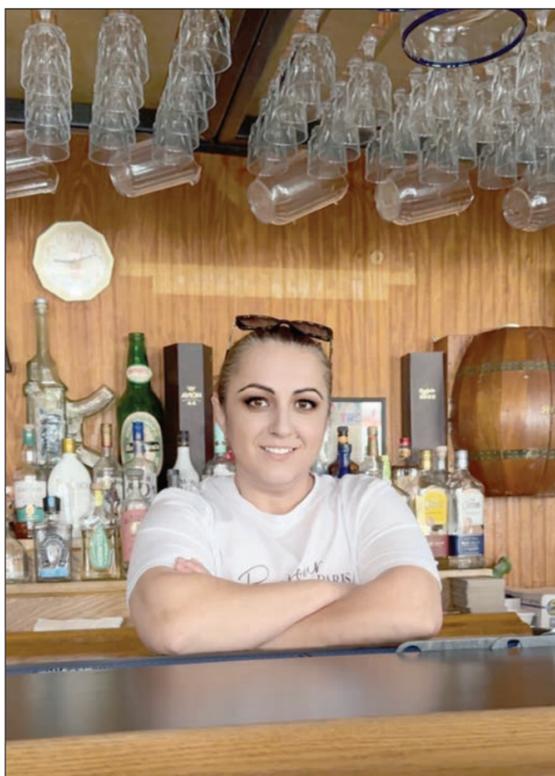
Stating the switch in management and the recent adjustment of the menus, Abdullahu began, "I'm still working on it, it's not easy with my son but we are getting there. The menu is much better, and Chef Tom is good. The most important thing right now is everybody putting in 100% out of themselves. I finally got the team who walks with me and now we're all walking in the same line and moving forward. We're here to do our best, the most important thing is we always put the customer first, no matter what. We want the customer to leave happy, that's all. I want my community to stick together. If something happens, I want my neighbor to be able to call me," said Abdullahu.

In 1999, Abdullahu came to the U.S. from Kosovo and grew up in Chicopee, later finding Agawam best to raise

her son whilst owning Bella Cucina after spending time in New Hampshire. Further explaining that her son has non-verbal autism and Abdullahu felt it was right to move back to the place her son was born in due to the acceptance of her son within the Agawam schools and the support system she immediately felt for her family.

Walking in, guests are greeted at the bar and have the option of dining in or taking out, with ample seating to each side of the building. Bella Cucina offers familiar dishes and appetizers like shrimp scampi, artichoke francaise, bruschetta, chicken francese, spaghetti meatball, special eggplant rollatini, and much more. The space allows for 80 guests in the restaurant and Abdullahu shared there's an additional 40-person banquet hall for a variety of events guests may need.

Abdullahu shared when serving food at her business, she mentioned that her favorite thing to see is the customer enjoying the food and seeing the customers every day. Abdullahu continued, "Kosovo has more of a red sauce thing with the food; we do a lot of chicken parmesan, meatballs, spaghetti; we eat bread, oil, and parmesan cheese with every meal. As I grew up, I understood that you can eat everything with a limit as long as you protect your own health, but I was always a foodie person. I would always try and taste the food growing up, my father would watch me taste the dishes growing up and if I ate it, then he would eat it too. My ex-husband was a chef, and



Owner of Bella Cucina Perparime Abdullahu, also known as Perpy, inside the bar guests see when they first walk in. SUBMITTED PHOTO

we figured this is the best we can do, both of us love food and we both work too much, and we were like this is what we're going to do for the rest of our lives. A lot of it takes 90% of you mentally and physically. It's built in me in the restaurant business to make sure my customers are happy. When I see people smile and be happy, you can tell when somebody's full. I hope when we hit the one-year mark that we have repeat customers and feedback from the customers,

and for the employees too. I hope that when they have been here one year, it doesn't feel like a year," ended Abdullahu.

The restaurant can be found at the end of River Rd. and intersecting with Main St. Bella Cucina is open Mon. through Sun.; Mon. through Thurs. 3 to 9 p.m. and Fri. through Sun. 11:30 a.m. to 9 p.m.

Servers needed, if interested, please contact Abdullahu at perpy23@hotmail.com or (475) 343-0333



Bella Cucina is located on 1422 Main St. and is open seven days a week.



The veal marsala had veal, mushroom sauce, and mashed potato on the side with seasoned veggies and made by Chef Tom.



The chicken parmesan is breaded and covered with marinara sauce, with mozzarella melted on top and finished with basil and made by Chef Tom.

TURLEY PHOTOS BY AMANDA MUNSON

## Blue Christmas Service to be held on Dec. 21

AGAWAM – Feeding Hills Congregational Church, 21 North Westfield St. invites the community to a Blue Christmas Service on Sunday, Dec. 21 at 7 p.m. This may be the first holiday season after a loss, or perhaps 2025 has been a difficult year.

All are welcome to seek hope together in a supportive worship service. Come as you are, to join for prayer, songs, and an Advent reflection. Join us as we seek hope and healing together. For more information call 413-786-5061.

## Granger School to host tree lighting at gazebo

AGAWAM – On Sunday, Dec. 14, there will be an Agawam Community Tree Lighting held at the gazebo at Granger School located at 31 South West-

field St., Feeding Hills. The event begins at 5 p.m. with Santa Claus arriving at 5:30 p.m. There will be cookie and hot cocoa available.

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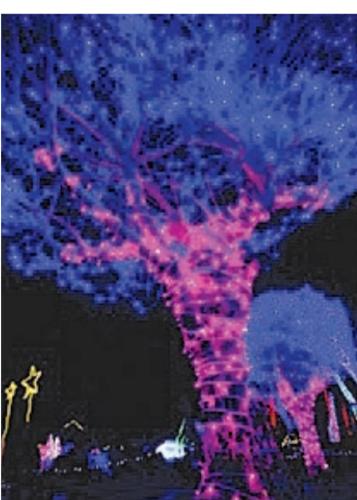


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## EARLY DEADLINES FOR ADS & LEGAL NOTICES

Christmas will bring early deadlines for all ads & legal notices to run in TURLEY PUBLICATIONS the week of December 22-26, 2025:

**Wednesday, December 17 at 2 PM for December 25 issue**

- Country Journal • The Register • Wilbraham-Hampden Times

**Thursday, December 18 at 2 PM for December 25 Issue**

- Agawam Advertiser News
- Sentinel • Quaboag Current • The Journal Register

**Friday, December 19 at 2 PM for December 25 Issue**

- Ware River News • Barre Gazette

**Monday, December 22 at 2 PM for December 26 Issue**

- Town Reminder • The Holyoke Sun • Chicopee Register

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# Lots of holiday happenings at Agawam Public Library

AGAWAM – Snow is falling and Agawam Public Library is calling. Join us for a great lineup of events for December that will keep you mindful and joyous this holiday season.

## Festival of Trees

Our annual Festival of Trees is back and you won't want to miss out. The Festival of Trees is a community-wide holiday gallery of hand-made trees displayed throughout the library. Create something truly unique by building a tree out of unusual materials like soda

cans or egg cartons. Families, friends, coworkers, classes – everybody is encouraged to join in on the fun. Completed trees should be dropped off at the library by Dec. 18. For more information and guidelines for submission, please visit the library Information Desk or go to [agawamlibrary.org](http://agawamlibrary.org). Trees will be on display at the library from Dec. 18 through Jan. 5, beginning with our Opening Reception on Thursday, Dec. 18 at 6:30 p.m. in the Cline Community Room. Come view the creative trees, enjoy the sounds of the season and indulge in some holiday treats. Please register to attend.

## Qigong

Fall Qigong concludes with three classes this month as autumn wanes and winter settles in. Related to the elements of Metal and Water in traditional Chinese medicine, our Qigong practice will focus on strengthening the lungs and immune system, increasing circulation, and nourishing the kidneys and

joints. Classes are drop-in and will take place on Tuesday, Dec. 9, and 16 at 10:30 a.m. in the Cline Community Room. Instructor Heidi Taberman will lead participants in an hour of gentle Chair Yoga on Wednesday mornings at 9:05 a.m. Classes are drop-in; please note that there is no class on Dec. 24.

Celebrate the Winter Solstice and the return of the sun at our Lantern Making & Winter Singalong event on Tuesday, Dec. 16 from 6 to 7:30 p.m. Participants will craft a wax paper lantern and illuminate the night sky with an outdoor singalong. This intergenerational program is open to all ages and craft materials will be provided. Please be sure to dress warmly for the outdoor portion of this event! Registration is required as space and materials are limited.

## Holiday Music Bingo

Looking to have some fun and indulge in the music of the season? Join us for Holiday Music Bingo on Monday,

Dec. 22 at 6:30 p.m. Get in the holiday spirit as we play bingo and enjoy some seasonal treats. Prizes will be awarded to those who have a winning bingo card.

## Adult Craft Night

Our Adult Craft Night this month will take place on Monday, Dec. 29 at 6:30 p.m. and participants will make a cute hand painted snowman ornament. This craft features acrylic paint, a wooden round, fabric and pompoms. Make a sweet snowman friend to keep around all winter long. Please register to attend these events.

## Writers Group

Our monthly programs are an excellent way for folks to pursue their interests or try out something new. Join our Writers Group hosted by Katherine Anderson on Thursday, Dec. 18 at 6 p.m. This in-person workshop is open to writers of all levels and genres. There will be opportunities for peer and host feedback, finding opportunities for submission to maga-

zines, literary journals, and presses, and more. Registration is required.

Our Career Workshops and Networking Group is a great way for mature job seekers to access career and networking resources. Our Zoom session is Marketing Plan on Wednesday, Dec. 17 from 9:30 to 11:30 a.m., but there is an opportunity for informal networking at 9 a.m. Registrants can sign up online to receive the Zoom meeting links.

## Author Book Signing

Professional wrestling fans take note. We have an extra special event coming up in the new year that you won't want to miss. Author, podcaster and former WWE media journalist Brian R. Solomon will host a presentation and book signing for his latest book, *Irresistible Force: the Life and Times of Gorilla Monsoon* on Saturday, Jan. 24 at 10 a.m. Brian's encyclopedic knowledge of professional wrestling is clearly displayed in his biog-

raphy of Gorilla Monsoon, one of the original character wrestlers in the early days of the WWF/WWF and later the "voice" of the WWF events. Don't miss this amazing opportunity to connect with this prolific chronicler of the professional wrestling world! Registration to attend this event will open on Dec. 22.

## Food Collection

Thank you to the Agawam Center Library Association for sponsoring select library programs. The library will continue collecting non-perishable food items throughout December.

## Upcoming

### Holiday Closings

Closing at 12:30 p.m. on Dec. 24, closed on Dec. 25, closing at 5 p.m. on Dec. 31, closed on Jan. 1. During the winter months, any closings or late openings due to inclement weather will be reported to local TV stations 22 and 40, as well as their websites and the library's social media platforms.



## December events for kids and teens at library

AGAWAM – There is a lot to celebrate at the Agawam Library this December. We will have fun, free programs for kids and teens, including a Lantern Making & Winter Sing-along for all ages. At the Lantern Making and Winter Sing-along we will make lanterns together and sing together to celebrate the Winter Solstice. To register for this event, or any of our other December events go to our website: [agawamlibrary.org](http://agawamlibrary.org) or call 413-789-1550 ext. 3.

Programs are listed in alphabetical order.

### Art and Stories - For ages 3 - 5

**Tuesday, Dec. 23 at 9:30 a.m.**  
Join us for a short story time followed by an art project. We will explore simple art concepts and experiment with materials. Please wear clothing that can get messy.

### Family Game Night - For All Ages

**Wednesday, Dec. 17 at 6 p.m.**  
No registration required. Bring the family and play board games together. We will have many options available, but you are welcome to bring your own.

### Family Take and Make Crafts - For all ages

**First Day of the Week and Thursdays - While supplies last - Drop-in and pick up.**  
A new Take and Make craft will be available the

first day of each week and again on Thursdays.

**Dec. 15 and 18:** Frosty the Snowman Sign, Dec. 22 and 24: Deer Hand Puppet.

**Dec. 29 and 31:** Fireworks Paper Cup Craft  
**Grow, Play and Learn Wednesdays and Fridays**  
Ages 0-2 at 9:30 a.m.  
Ages 3-5 at 10:30 a.m.

This program is provided by Pathways for Parents. No class Dec. 24 through Dec. 31. Stories, songs and skill building, led by an Early Childhood Developmental trained staff member, guiding caregivers in strengthening interactions with their child.

### Lantern Making and Winter Sing-Along - For all ages

**Tuesday, Dec. 16 from 6 to 7 p.m.**

Registration is required. Celebrate the Winter Solstice and the return of the sun! Participants will craft a wax paper lantern and illuminate the night sky with an outdoor singalong. This intergenerational program is open to all ages and craft materials will be provided. Please be sure to dress warmly for the outdoor portion of this event.

### Music With Mr. Liam - All Ages

**Saturday, Dec. 13 at 9:30 a.m.**  
Registration is required. This program is provided by Pathways for Parents. Join us

for an energetic show filled with drums, the ukulele, puppets, and comedy as Mr. Liam (Liam Hurley) plays old favorites & silly parodies.

### Open Lego Building - For grades 1-4

**Tuesday, Dec. 16 at 4:30 p.m.**  
Registration is required. Show off your Lego building skills. Use Legos to build something awesome. Creations will be put on display in the Children's Room.

**Pre-K Pals - For ages 3 - 5**  
**Mondays in December at 11 a.m.**

This program is provided by Pathways for Parents. Registration is required. No class on Monday, Dec. 29. We will provide activities to help your child to learn through playing.

### Special Saturday Drop-In Craft: 3-D Winter Ornament Craft - For All Ages

**Saturday, Dec. 27 - All Day**  
While supplies last - Drop-in and pick up. Create snowy scenes you'll be proud to display. Great for winter crafts, these 3D ornaments feature either a smiling snowman or cheerful reindeer.

### Stroller Strides with FIT4MOM - For parents & their child ages 1 month - 10 years old

**Saturday, Dec. 20 at 9:30 a.m.**  
Registration is required. This program is brought to us by FIT4MOM. Stroller Strides is a 60-minute

total-body workout with strength, cardio, and core training, all while engaging the little ones in a stroller.

### Teen After School Drop-In - For grades 9-12

**Tuesdays, Dec. 16, and 23 at 2 p.m.**

Stop by the library after school and visit the Activity Room. Play our Nintendo Switch, try out the button maker, eat snacks, or just hang out. No registration necessary. There is no Drop-in on Dec. 30.

### Teen Take and Make Craft - For grades 7-12

Available now. Stop by the Teen Space to pick up a Take and Make Craft kit. They'll be available until we run out of supplies. No registration necessary.

### Teen Trivia Thursday - For grades 7-12

**Thursdays, Dec. 18 from 2 to 3:30 p.m.**

Visit the Teen Space and answer a trivia question to get a small prize.

### Toddler Time - For 19 mo. - 36 mo.

**Monday, Dec. 22 at 9:30 a.m.**

Drop-in. Join us as we read stories, sing, and play together.

### Winter Bingo - For grades K-4

**Tuesday, Dec. 30 at 6 p.m.**  
Registration is required. Come play winter themed bingo. Prizes will be awarded every round.

## Activities available at Senior Center

AGAWAM – Here are some of the upcoming activities and events being held at the Agawam Senior Center.

### \*\*New Class Alert\*\*

### Monthly Class on Diabetes Mellitus Education

**Wednesday, Jan. 21, 2026 at 12:30 p.m.**

*in the Conference Room*  
A "DM Education Program" will be held at the Agawam Senior Center. We will be referring to materials for Diabetes Mellitus (DM) education, which cover managing the condition through

healthy eating, being active, monitoring blood sugar, and taking medications. Key topics include healthy food choices, the importance of physical activity, medication adherence, and coping with the emotional aspects of diabetes. These documents aim to empower individuals to manage their health and improve their quality of life. Gina Smus, RN, CDN will be our educator for this class. We hope you will join us. Call Kristina at 413-726-2836 to join this class.

## COLLEGE NOTES

# HCC recognizes Fall 2025 graduates

HOLYOKE – Holyoke Community College is proud to recognize the following students who will complete their requirements for graduation at the end of the fall 2025 semester. These members of the Class of 2026 were recognized at HCC's third Fall Graduate Reception on Monday, Dec. 1, in the college's Leslie Phillips Theater

and will also be invited to participate in HCC's 79th Commencement exercises at the MassMutual Center in Springfield, Mass., on May 30, 2026.

### Agawam graduates:

Lauren Parker, Karisa Racette, Aiden Therrien.

### Feeding Hills graduates:

Krista Borsari, Laurel Gielda, Amanda Hervieux, Noah Rivera.

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USDA INSP. STORE MADE BONELESS HOLIDAY ROAST PORK LOIN STUFFED W/ HAM, CHEESE, PEPPERS, OLIVES, SPICES <b>\$4<sup>49</sup></b> lb	USDA INSP. FRESH AMERICAN LEG LAMB <b>\$6<sup>69</sup></b> lb	USDA INSP. FROZEN CHEFS TOGETHER PIGS IN A BLANKET 24 PC BOX... <b>\$3<sup>99</sup></b> ea
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# Opinion

## Guest Column

### SOCIAL SECURITY Matters

By Russell Gloor

## About tax filing status and Medicare

### Dear Rusty:

I'm trying to figure out if I should change my IRS filing status to "Married - Filing Jointly" prior to getting reviewed for my Medicare Part B and Part D.

My current IRS status is "Married - Filing Single" and I noticed this filing status is more stringent. I will be turning 62 this year (2025) and I've read that Medicare will review my income two years prior to turning 65. Any input would be appreciated.

### Signed: Uncertain Senior

### Dear Uncertain:

Your IRS tax filing status has no bearing on your eligibility for Medicare Part B (coverage for outpatient healthcare services) or Medicare Part D (insurance coverage for prescription drugs). Medicare is an individual healthcare program, so enrolling in Medicare provides coverage for you only, not your spouse, your spouse's Medicare eligibility will be individually evaluated.

What your IRS filing status may affect is the amount of your Medicare Part B and Part D premiums. There is a Medicare provision called Income-Related Monthly Adjustment Amount, which sets the income thresholds on which your Medicare premiums are based and those thresholds are different if you file your income tax as a single or as "married/filing jointly."

The IRMAA thresholds can change annually and there's no way to yet determine what they will be when you are able to enroll in Medicare at age 65. They are currently \$106,000 if you file as a single, and \$212,000 if you file your taxes as "married/jointly." If your "provisional income," your combined income from all sources, exceeds the threshold for your filing status, you will pay higher than standard Medicare Part B and Part D premiums. If your income is lower than the threshold, you will pay only whatever the standard Medicare Part B premium is for the year you start Medicare and there will be no supplemental premium for your Part D coverage.

For information, the IRMAA supplements are progressive that is, the more you exceed the threshold by, the higher your IRMAA premium supplement will be. To see the current IRMAA thresholds and supplements again, these will likely change when you are eligible for Medicare visit [www.cms.gov/newsroom/](http://www.cms.gov/newsroom/)

fact-sheets/2025-medicare-parts-b-premiums-and-deductibles.

You are correct that your Medicare premium, when you enroll, will be determined by your total income from two years prior. So, if you plan to enroll in Medicare at age 65, sometime in 2028, it is your 2026 income which will determine your Part B and Part D premiums, and that income will be defined by your 2026 income tax return. Note, too, that Medicare premiums are reevaluated each year, based upon your IRS income tax return from two years prior.

FYI, there are advantages to filing your income tax as "married/jointly" vs. married/filing separately and those are best evaluated by your tax advisor. We are not tax advisors here at the AMAC Foundation. And while it's true that the IRMAA thresholds are higher when you file as "married/jointly," it's also true that your total income as a married couple will be used when determining your IRMAA premiums for Medicare. So, once again, it is probably best to consult with a qualified income tax advisor for guidance on whether it is best, financially, for you to change how you file your income tax in 2026, considering that you will be enrolling in Medicare in 2028.

One final thing: If you are still working and have "creditable" healthcare coverage from your employer, "creditable" is a group plan with at least 20 participants, then you can delay enrolling in Medicare until your employer coverage ends thus temporarily avoiding the Medicare premiums. In other words, if you have creditable healthcare coverage from an employer, you don't have to enroll in Medicare immediately at age 65.

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## Guest Column

### Christmas decoration trivia

Last week I provided you with a few tips on how to make a simple evergreen swag and wreath. Hopefully you gave it a try.

For this column I thought it would be fun to share some fun facts with you, many of which I just learned today. You see, I will be working with a group of students tomorrow and wanted to have some cool trivia up my sleeve.

I'll be bringing in all the Christmas greens I talked about a week ago and will pass them around to each student: juniper, hemlock, fir, white pine and more materials, including rose hips, pine cones and holly. Read on to see if what I share is new to you, too!



by Roberta McQuaid

trees were reserved for "the Crown." The great "Pine Tree Riot" was an act of defiance that led up to the American Revolution! One other point of interest is that pine needles are edible and contain vitamin C.

Other materials that often shows up in Christmas decorations are pine cones. What I learned today is that the correct terminology is to generically call them "cones," since they are only pine cones if they come from a pine tree! Logical point!

The hard cones we use for decorating are female and their main purpose is to keep the naked seeds inside safe. They will open and close to

For example, did you know that the Easter White Pine (*Pinus strobus*) is the tallest tree in the northeast? It also goes by the name "the Great Tree of Peace," due to the fact that five Native American tribes formed an alliance under a tall white pine; a neat correlation because the needles that are attached to the twigs are in groups of five.

This tree also has a history of being used to make ship masts, and for awhile the

GARDEN | page 5

## Dementia patients may find peace, connection in music



By Teri (Dreher) Frykenberg, RN  
Guest Column

Elaine Lebar became a TikTok sensation at age 92 when her daughter Randi posted a video of her playing "Moonlight Sonata" at her senior-living facility on the Massachusetts coast. At the time, Elaine had been living with dementia for nearly 10 years.

Randi Lebar said her mother had lost many parts of herself, but the music she began learning at age 3 was still there. "When she wasn't playing, she was lost and confused, but at the piano, she was happy and grounded," Randi said. Elaine passed away in September at age 97.

Randi, a retired orthopedic surgeon who lives in

Sagamore, told us about her mom at the New England Patient Advocacy Conference, which I hosted at Ascension University in Worcester in October. And she got me to thinking about the power of music to soothe and connect with dementia patients.

A 2018 study found that music activates parts of the brain that are more resistant to diseases like Alzheimer's, including the prefrontal cortex. Other research has consistently found that memories of music, along with the ability to play music, are often preserved longer than language and other memory skills. Yes, the brain works in mysterious ways.

Music therapy is widely recognized as a valuable non-drug therapy that can help manage many dementia symptoms, such as depression, agitation, apathy and anxiety. It can also encourage speaking and social interaction and even improve cognitive function. Family members and caregivers also enjoy the benefits of music therapy because it may make their jobs a bit easier.

There are some 8,000 licensed music therapists around the country who work with people of all ages and abilities, including those with physical and cognitive challenges. Whether or not a music therapist is on staff, some memory-care facilities incorporate music into their care of dementia patients.

Over a decade ago, residents at the Coler Memory Care Unit in New York were given iPods with personalized playlists. Results showed a decreased use of antipsychotic medications, reduced falls and fewer physical altercations, they reported. Not incidentally, staff morale improved and the approach was shown to be

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## Agawam Advertiser News welcomes letters to the editor

The Agawam Advertiser News welcomes readers to participate in this year's election campaigns by writing letters to the editor for publication on these pages. Letters of up to 250 words from local residents endorsing candidates on the ballot or discussing campaign issues should be sent to the Agawam Advertiser News, care of Turley Publications, 24 Water St., Palmer, MA 01069, faxed to 413-289-1977 or emailed to [aan@turley.com](mailto:aan@turley.com). Please include a daytime telephone number for verification purposes (it will not be printed). Letters must be received by noon Monday to be considered for

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# Opinion

## Not all mountains we climb are the same: When life and mountains meet



With wind chills in the negative single digits, it was a blustery and viewless day on Mt. Pierce in the White Mountains of New Hampshire last Saturday. But our hike wasn't about the views.

It was about rising to meet the mountain. Feeling our legs burn and our hearts race. Experiencing a rush of adrenaline as we fought the intense wind above tree line. Finding our way to the very top in a cloud so dense that the snowy ground and white sky seemed as one.

Last weekend was about allowing ourselves a distraction in the face of unimaginable pain. Accepting the peace and strength that the mountains impart. Granting ourselves permission to feel joy... and not feel guilty for doing so.

It was a weekend of letting

go. Allowing the mountain peaks to captivate us. Inspire us. Humble us.

After Saturday's adrenaline-racing adventure on Mt. Pierce, I was excited to see snow in the forecast for our hike on Sunday. For someone who will never stop believing that snow is magical, I felt like an excited 6-year old.

Which is why I was disappointed when we awoke on Sunday morning, looked out the window of the motel room, and saw rain rather than snow. "Maybe it will stop raining by the time we get to the trailhead," I said hopefully.

There was a heavy overcast when we arrived at the trailhead, but at least it had stopped raining. With no illusions that we'd get a view from the summit of Mt. Cube, upward we went. And as expected, the summit was encased in a cloud. No matter. At least it wasn't raining.

We had just started making our way down from the summit when Tom said, "Well it looks like you're getting your wish!"

I was so focused on foot placement as I carefully navigated the steep, ice-covered ledges, that I didn't notice it had started snowing! I stopped, looked up to the heavens, and felt the soft cold kisses of dozens of snowflakes landing on my upturned face. Intent on lingering, Tom and I found a relatively flat ledge and laid out our sit pad.

For half an hour, we sat with our legs stretched out



on the wet granite, sipping steaming hot cider from our old green Stanley thermos. Staring at the snow and ice-covered trees against the backdrop of a ghostly sky. Watching the snow swirl and dance with each gust of wind. Feeling cold flakes lick our eyelashes. Hearing the faint whisper of flakes landing on snow-laden branches.

This moment was in stark contrast to the adrenaline rush we had experienced on Mt. Pierce the previous day... when the wind raged angrily in ragged gusts and the cold was so harsh it stung.

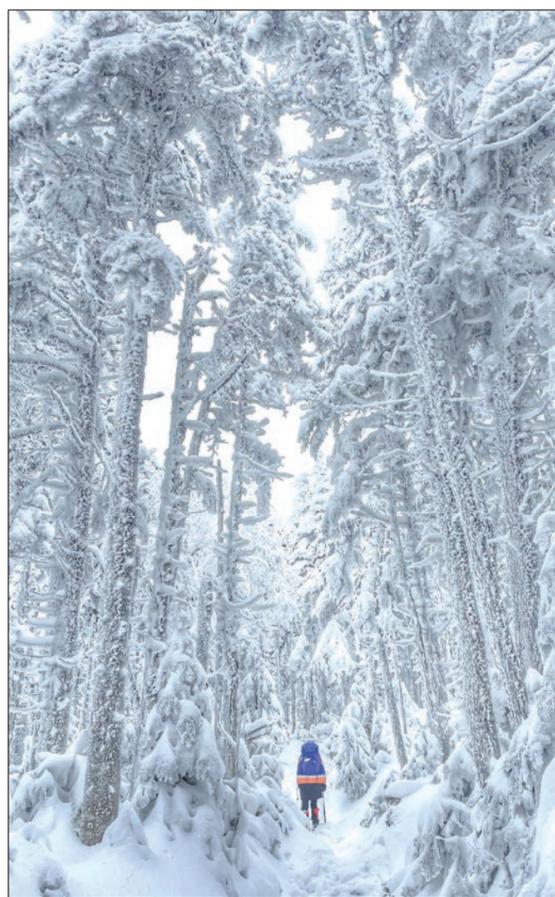
This was softer. Calmer.

It was a reminder that, in life, we are handed both. The

smooth and the rough. The quiet and the loud. The raging and the calm. And each one can hold sadness and joy at exactly the same time.

If I'm being honest, it feels wrong to find joy in these mountains when our 2-year-old granddaughter is in the fight of her life against the single deadliest form of pediatric brain cancer. But sometimes we need time to exhale. To physically distance ourselves from the pain... while still holding it in our hearts.

We're living in a season of extremes. Of conflicting emotions that are confusing to process. From the highest of highs to the lowest of lows. And it's hard to validate one,



at what seems like the expense of the other.

But if this cancer journey is teaching me anything, it's that a heart can hold deep despair-and equally-deep joy at precisely the same moment.

I can be crippled by sadness one minute and smiling with joy the next. I can be consumed with fear one minute and filled with hope the next. And I'm learning that that's okay.

I'm learning to accept that peace CAN exist in the middle of chaos. We just need to open our eyes wide enough to find it.

For those who have asked about Charlotte, thank you. The monthly immunotherapy treatments are keeping her tumor stable. She is fighting like a warrior, and we are grateful for every precious moment that we get to be with her.

Onward.

### GARDEN | from page 4

maintain proper humidity levels.

Some close so tight that they need the heat of a wild fire to have them open enough to drop their seeds! Cones can stay on a tree up to 10 years without falling off.

The kids will find it funny that dinosaurs even ate pine cones, the Parasaurulophus, to be exact! These trees belong to a group of plants called Gymnosperms, that have indeed been around since prehistoric times.

Many of our favorite Christmas trees are Fir trees (*Abies* spp.), with the Balsam Fir being one of the most common. Firs have needles that are soft and flat, and attached to twigs one by one, versus the pine that we learned attach in clusters.

An average, it takes about seven years to grow a decent size Christmas tree. According to my research, the first Christmas tree was in Latvia in the year 1510.

By the early 1800's Ger-

man and Irish immigrants had brought the custom to America but it still took some time for it to catch hold.

Juniper (*Juniperus* spp.) is another evergreen that often makes its way into our Christmas wreaths and arrangements. The species can produce greenery that is either smooth or picky.

One of the biggest draws to using juniper is that it smells nice and often has attractive waxy looking berries along with the foliage. It was interesting to learn that these berries are actually cones.

The seeds are protected well within the tough outer coating and can pass through an animal's digestive tract intact. That way the seeds can be dispersed far and wide - wherever the animal is traveling. I guess!

I've done complete articles on Holly (*Ilex* spp.) before, but I did learn a few new interesting tidbits with this most recent bout of research. The plant has a unique defense mechanism.

Lower foliage is extra

spiny to reduce deer from browsing. Upper foliage is not nearly as spiny. There are chemicals in holly berries that make the berries unpalatable to birds and other wildlife at first, but as winter goes on they begin to taste a little better.

Still the birds only eat a few at a time thereby dispersing seeds at various rates and locales. I think all of this is so interesting and so carefully orchestrated to continue the species!

Well, I hope my research has been entertaining, and I do hope that the students enjoy my show and tell tomorrow!

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



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highly cost-effective.

There are two main types of music therapy.

- Active: Playing an instrument - even simple percussion instruments - and singing appear to be most effective for reducing depressive symptoms and improving cognition.

- Receptive: Just listening to music seems to reduce agitation and may be more suitable for patients in advanced stages of dementia.

While a structured music therapy program may involve weekly lessons, art activities and guided listening, you don't need to be a music therapist to try music to help a loved one with dementia.

Here are some recommendations and caveats:

Results may vary. Dementia patients are all individuals, and they may not respond in the same way to music. The stage of their disease, personal preferences

and cultural background can impact a patient's receptivity.

Introduce it gradually. Experiment with an hour of music at different times of the day. You may find that evening or bedtime is best because many patients experience "sundowner" syndrome, which tends to increase agitation and anxiety.

Personalization seems to provide the best outcomes. Did your loved one play an instrument? You could see if their muscle memory will let them play it. Otherwise, think about the kinds of music they enjoyed before their illness and prepare playlists just for them. Some baby boomers today may enjoy some soft rock more than classical.

Be wary of loud or fast-paced music. This can increase the agitation that you're trying to reduce.

Observe the effects. Music may prompt a loved one to reminisce, improving their sense of self.

Remember that, as of yet anyway, there's no cure for Alzheimer's and other forms of dementia. All you can hope for, really, is a calmer, happier loved one who is perhaps reliving some fond memories or emotions.

As Randi said, "If it were not for her music, my mom would have just been another lost little old lady."

*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.*

#### CLUES ACROSS

- Spiritual leaders
- A type of solution
- Fortified wine
- Edible mollusk
- They precede C
- A way to compare
- Government lawyer
- "Game of Thrones" actor Ciaran
- The eighth month (abbr.)
- Very willing
- \_\_\_ ex Machina
- Makes happy
- Type of berry
- A doctrine
- Popular Dodge truck model
- Dekagram
- Naturally occurring solid
- Company officer
- Villains
- Cricket frogs
- Influential German

- psychologist
- Endured
- A female domestic
- You can get stuck in one
- Cigarette (slang)
- Fiber optics network
- Group of blood disorders (abbr.)
- Employee stock ownership plan
- Belonging to the bottom layer
- Sound
- MLB legend Hank
- Very attractive person
- Late beloved sportscaster Craig
- South Dakota
- Mocking
- Symbol for gold
- Longtime Braves pitcher Julio
- Humor
- Shawl

- Preliminary patient assessment
- Swedish krona
- Start over
- Field flowers
- Fourteen
- A visual way to interact with a computer
- Up-to-date
- Campaigns
- Touch lightly
- "Boardwalk Empire" actress Gretchen
- Violent seizure of property
- Supporter of the Pope
- Anxiety
- Body fluid
- One who's faking it
- Title of respect
- Chilean city
- City in central Japan
- Silk garment
- A form of dance
- Automobile
- The man
- Justice Dept. head honcho



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# SPORTS

## Turley's Henry, Peterson recognized for work by PVSOA

By Gregory A. Scibelli  
gscibelli@turley.com

LUDLOW – For nearly 20 years, two people have anchored the sports department at Turley Publications.

When you think of sports in the Journal Register, Sentinel News, Agawam Advertiser, or Ware River News, you think of David Henry and Tim Peterson.

Both have been members of the Turley Sports staff for almost two decades, covering every sport offered by the Massachusetts Interscholastic Athletic Association, and connecting with thousands of athletes over the course of their careers.

Their job has been to see that the deserving student-athletes who work hard and achieve milestones, league titles, Western Mass.



Turley Publications Sports writer Tim Peterson and photographer David Henry were recognized last Friday night at the Pioneer Valley Soccer Officials Association. They are pictured with PVSOA member Joe Santos.

SUBMITTED PHOTO

titles, and college success get recognized by their communities.

Last Friday night, it was their turn to be recognized for their dedicated work.

The Pioneer Valley Soccer Officials Association awarded Henry and Peterson with Letters of Commendation.

The PVSOA, which held its awards banquet at the Ludlow Polish-American Club on Dec. 5, recognized the pair for their dedicated service of reporting and photographing boys and girls soccer, impacting multiple communities throughout the region.

The PVSOA Awards Committee believed their longtime service at Turley Publications was deserving of the letters.

Peterson had a more conventional background in

sports journalism. He participated in his high school newspaper at Oxford High School and went on to work at the Southbridge Evening News.

In 2007, he transitioned to being a freelance writer for Turley Publications. At first, Peterson had an established rapport in the Palmer-Monson and Ludlow-Belchertown areas. But in recent years, readers can find Peterson in almost any one of the towns in Turley's 11-newspaper, 17-high school coverage zone.

"I really enjoy it," Peterson said. "I just love covering sports and I really enjoy watching high school soccer."

Peterson also named baseball as one of his favorite sports to cover. Peterson,

PVSOA | page ?

## Pioneer Valley Soccer Officials Association hold 79th awards banquet

By Gregory A. Scibelli  
gscibelli@turley.com

LUDLOW – There are multiple soccer officials associations throughout the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, all which are responsible for the recruiting, training, assigning, and evaluating of soccer referees that do high school games, as well as some youth leagues.

The Pioneer Valley Soccer Officials Association is the only organization that is still doing awards banquets, recognizing athletes, its members for longtime service, and contributors to the soccer community.

Last Friday night at the Ludlow Polish American Club, the 79th iteration of the awards banquet was held and the same positive vibe could be felt in the room as the PVSOA gave out their sportsmanship awards, most valuable players, and other miscellaneous awards for service, contributions and dedication to the soccer community at large.

James Duggan, who was the master of ceremonies at last Friday's banquet, said he thinks it's amazing that the PVSOA is still going strong with its banquet.

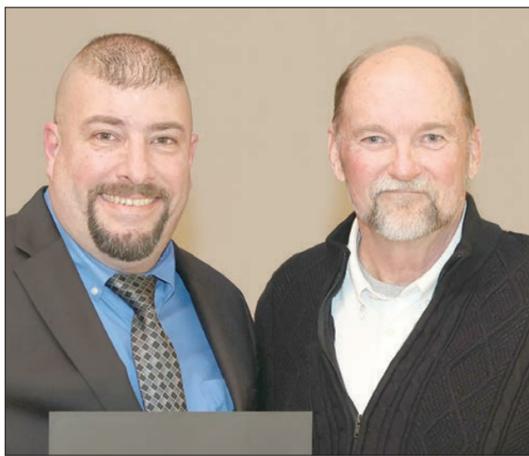
"You are all a part of history," Duggan told the award winners. "Our program gets bigger every year as we have the entire history of our awards in that program."

Chief among the recognized people at the banquet are the sportsmanship awards. Coaches like Eric Degnan of Monson girls soccer and Tom Rivet of Chicopee boys soccer, both of whom were present at this year's awards ceremony for other recognition, often said the sportsmanship awards for their teams were huge honors.

Degnan, who recently retired from coaching, said making sure his teams showed exemplary sportsmanship was even more important than winning league titles, and multiple sectional and state championships. Degnan has received nine sportsmanship awards from the PVSOA, all with Monson.

Rivet has three from the group. Two came with Chicopee boys soccer and one with East Longmeadow.

BANQUET | page ?



David DelBuono, the outgoing PVSOA President, was inducted into the Massachusetts Interscholastic Soccer Officials Association. He was recognized at the PVSOA banquet for that accomplishment by James Duggan.



Joe Santos was the Downie Award winner this year. He stands with James Duggan.



Reid Savoie receives a service award from David DelBuono. TURLEY PHOTOS BY DAVID HENRY WWW.SWEETDOGPHOTOS.COM

## AHS alum Stratton named new coach of Ludlow girls basketball

By Tim Peterson  
Sports Correspondent

LUDLOW – After serving as an assistant varsity coach and a junior varsity coach for the Ludlow girls' basketball team during the past several years, Samatha Stratton is ready to take the next step up the coaching ladder.

Stratton, who was a three-sport athlete at Agawam High School, was named as the new Lady Lions varsity basketball coach in October.

"One of my goals has always been to become a varsity basketball coach and I'm excited about coaching the Ludlow girls' varsity basketball team," said Stratton during a recent interview. "I started my coaching career here at Ludlow High School as an assistant varsity coach under Tim Brillo. I've been coaching the junior varsity team the past couple of years."

Stratton, who graduated from Springfield College, is a physical education teacher at Agawam Junior High School. She replaces Ava Adamopoulos as the Lady Lions varsity basketball coach.

Brillo retired from coaching following the 2022-23 season, but is still the Ludlow Athletic Director.

Just like any other coach, Stratton was a little bit nervous before being interviewed for the coaching position, but she was very familiar with everybody in the room.

"When I walked into the interview room, I was nervous because I wanted to do well, but I was very comfortable," she said. "I was interviewed by a student athlete, the athletic trainer (Ashley Mourao), the boys' varsity coach (C.W. Zimmer), and Mr. Brillo. I'm very passionate about basketball and coaching. I treated it like any other job interview and I was prepared."

Stratton has been an assistant junior varsity softball coach at her alma mater under Tim Murphy, who's also the Agawam girls' varsity basketball coach. She has also been an assistant coach for the East Longmeadow varsity softball team under head coach Jenna Parks during the past couple of years.

"Being an assistant varsity softball coach at East Longmeadow has been an



Samantha Stratton, a graduate of Agawam High School, will be the new varsity coach of Ludlow High School girls basketball. Stratton was previously the JV coach.

TURLEY PHOTO BY GREGORY A. SCIBELLI

amazing experience," Stratton said. "Jenna Parks is an incredible softball coach, and I've loved working with her. I'm very excited about becoming a varsity basketball coach."

Since becoming the Lady Lions varsity coach, Stratton has received plenty of support from Zimmer, who has been coaching the boys' varsity team for more than five years.

"Coach Zimmer has been amazing," Stratton said. "He has taken me under his wing and has been very helpful during the past couple of weeks. If I have any questions, I know that I can ask him or Mr. Brillo."

Just like at every other high school in Massachusetts, Stratton held her first official practice of the basketball season on Dec. 1.

Since she has been the junior varsity coach during the past few years, Stratton didn't have to introduce herself to the players on the first day of practice.

"We had a lot of eighth

graders on the junior varsity team last year, and they'll be freshman this year. I already know most of the players," Stratton said. "I just want the players to do their best at try-outs. I'm hoping that we have between ten or twelve players on both basketball teams."

Stratton played soccer, basketball, and softball at Agawam High School.

"I loved playing all three sports in high school," Stratton said. "Basketball has always been my favorite sport. My grandfather coached basketball at Classical High School in Springfield. My father coached my youth basketball teams. I'm following in their footsteps and they're my mentors."

Her father, Dave Stratton, retired as the Agawam Athletic Director a couple of years ago.

The Lady Lions, who are members of the Franklin West Division, are scheduled to tip-off the 2025-26 regular season at Amherst, who's a

STRATTON | page ?

# Sports

## Worcester Railers comeback falls short against Royals

**R E A D I N G**, PA – The Worcester Railers HC (9-9-1-1, 20 pts) fell to the Reading Royals (10-9-2-0, 22 pts) on Saturday, December 6th, with a final score of 4-5 in front of a crowd of 3,494 at the Santander Arena. The Railers are back in action on Wednesday night against the Adirondack Thunder at will take on the Royals again on home ice on January 14th at 7:05 p.m. EST.

Reading struck first with an early goal, scored by Massimo Rizzo (1-2-3), assisted by Nolan Burke (1-1-2) and Carter Berger (0-2-2) at 4:09 in the first. The Royals extended their scoring streak to two goals, the second added by Jeremy Michel (1-0-1), assisted by Rizzo and Ben Meehan (0-1-1) at 15:45 in the first (0-2). Worcester answered with

a power play tally of their own at 17:46, scored by Gleb Veremyev (1-0-1), assisted by Anthony Callin (0-1-1) and Drew Callin (0-1-1) (1-2). Reading bookended the first period with their third goal of the night from Burke, assisted by Rizzo and Berger at 19:24. Reading grabbed the only goal in the second period, a tipped shot from Robbie Stucker (0-1-1), redirected by Nick Capone (1-0-1), also assisted by Artem Kulakov (0-1-1) at 7:46. A final Reading goal was scored by Kyle Haskins (1-0-1) at 2:54 in the third. Worcester answered the Royals' fifth goal with three goals in the second half of the period. The first by Matt DeMelis (1-1-2) (2-5), the second by Anthony Repaci (1-1-2) (3-5), and the third by Lincoln Hatten (1-1-2) (4-5). The clock ran out just

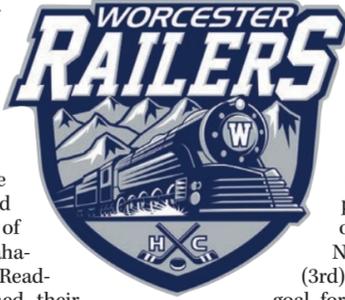
as Worcester pushed for their goal to tie the game and force overtime, but the game ended in a 5-4 Royals' victory.

Reading opened the game with an early lead at 4:09. Royal's forward Massimo Rizzo (4th) tucked the puck in between the pipe and left skate of Parker Gahagen (0-1). Reading stretched their lead to two goals with a score from Jeremy Michel (1st) at 15:45 (0-2). A chance for the Railers to narrow the gap came late in the period as they went on their third

power play of the night, which opened the ice for Anthony Callin to feed a pass from behind the net to Gleb Veremyev (2nd) for Worcester's first goal at 17:46 (1-2). T.J. Walsh headed to the box shortly after the tally for holding, which put Reading on their first power play of the night. Nolan Burke (3rd) nabbed a goal for the Royals 28 seconds into Walsh's penalty to re-establish their two-goal lead. Shots on goal were 12-16 in favor of Reading.

The Royals' fourth goal of the night came just over a third of the way through the second period from forward Nick Capone (2nd). Worcester played the period on the defensive and found themselves down a man on two separate occasions. Neither penalty resulted in a Royals goal, but Capone's scored soon after the clock ran out on Riley Ginnell's time served for high-sticking. Worcester was kept off of the board in the second which left the score at 4-1 Reading to close the second. Worcester trailed in shots on goal with nine to Reading's 12. Reading was assessed one penalty served by Ben Meehan.

As play resumed in the third, Worcester worked to cut into the Royals three-goal lead, turned four as Kyle Haskins (5th) added another to Reading's tally for the evening at 2:54. Worcester opened the floodgates on Reading's net and scored three times in the second half of the period. Matt DeMelis scored an even strength goal at the 12:41 mark to make it a three-goal game. Worcester then called its timeout and pulled goaltender Thomas Gale to give the team an extra attacker. Repaci (6th) (3-5), and Hatten (8th) (4-5) each added their own goals with the extra-attacker on to get back to within one. Despite their offensive push across the final 2:30 of the third, Worcester fell short by one as the final horn sounded. The final score was 5-4 Reading. Final shots were 41-35 Worcester, and final penalties were six for the Royals and three for the Railers.



## T-Birds get big win over Providence Bruins

**PROVIDENCE, R.I.** - The Springfield Thunderbirds (6-11-3-2) rode an otherworldly performance from their goalie to a 3-1 win over the Providence Bruins (17-5-0-0) on Sunday inside Amica Mutual Pavilion.

Vadim Zherenko had the busiest first period of anybody in the building, as the T-Birds goaltender was subjected to 15 attempts in a furious first-period push by the Bruins. Zherenko stood his ground, relenting only a power-play one-timer to Georgii Merkulov.

However, before Merku-

lov broke through, the T-Birds used their first shot on net of the day to get a fortuitous bounce and a 1-0 lead as Matthew Peca threw a puck off the legs of Hunter Skinner and through Michael DiPietro at 6:20 of the first period.

Providence wound up outshooting Springfield by a 15-2 margin in the opening frame, but the T-Birds responded with a great start to the second, as Chris Wagner found open space in the low slot and wired a perfect wrist shot over DiPietro's glove at 2:04, off a great find

from Nikita Susuev.

The T-Birds played a much more balanced second period, limiting Providence's high-danger chances and allowing Zherenko clear sight lines to deny all 11 Bruins shots that did reach the net.

The pressure only intensified in the final 20 minutes for Zherenko, as the Providence attack emptied the tank on the Springfield goal mouth with 20 shots on net in the final period, but "Big Z" had responses every single time, including a highlight-reel denial

of Christian Wolanin on a one-timer from the right-wing circle in the closing minutes.

Sam Stange eventually gave the T-Birds a breath with an empty-netter with less than 30 seconds to play to usher the visitors to a victory. Zherenko completed his masterpiece with 45 stops.

The T-Birds are back on the ice next Saturday, Dec. 13, as they pay a visit to Utica to take on the Comets; puck drop is set for 7:00 p.m. at Adirondack Bank Center.

## Cougars earn victory against Northern Essex

**HOLYOKE** – Women's basketball got back to their winning ways on Thursday night, earning a 65-59 home victory over regional opponent Northern Essex CC. The Lady Cougars dominated early on, scoring 38 points in the first half to take a 17-point lead into halftime. Holyoke was able to hold off a strong second-half push from their opposition on their way to the win.

Johany Andrade (Springfield, MA / Putnam Vocational Tech-

nical HS) played brilliantly for the Cougars, leading the team in points, rebounds and assists. Andrade scored a season-high 21 points while grabbing nine rebounds and dishing eight assists. Emily McGrail (Ware, MA / Ware HS) had a team-high four blocks for Holyoke and was second in points with nine.

Women's basketball is in second place in the New England standings with a 3-1 regional record. They are 4-3 overall and 4-1 versus NJ-CAA opponents.

### PVSOA ■ from page 6

especially over the past several years, has had no shortage of exciting competition to cover. He's been at most major championship games in Turley's coverage area, and even enjoys traveling around the state to schools he has never been to thanks to the state's new tournament format.

Peterson was not even taking much of a break at the PVSOA banquet, forgoing receiving too much recognition, and focusing his attention on the award winners at the event (see related stories).

Henry did not have a typical path to becoming Turley's longstanding sports photographer since 2006.

He had a more than 30-years career in the military in the United States Air Force. He spent many of his years working as a mechanic at Westover Air Reserve Base right in his hometown of Chicopee.

But he also spent some of his time overseas during his early days in the military.

"I bought my first SLR while I was in Thailand," Henry said. He was looking to capture moments from his tours in foreign places and began taking pictures.

He eventually built his own dark room at his home. But he did not do too much more with photography until digital became more prevalent and he was encouraged to apply to the Chicopee Register follow-

ing his retirement from the military in 2006.

He was put in contact with then-sports Editor Lou Zoldy, and has been a fixture with Turley Sports ever since. Additionally, over the years, his non-sports photo spreads have also been a huge support for Turley's mission of capturing the big events in the communities. Among other things, he has covered the St. Patrick's Day Parade in Holyoke for many years, and has done many photo spreads in Agawam, Holyoke, and Chicopee in recent years.

In accepting their letters of commendation, both thanked the PVSOA for recognizing their work. Henry recognized the student-athletes and their accomplishments as what

has found him the most enjoyment in the work he has done for the past 20 years.

Turley Sports is dedicated to the coverage of high school sports with a boots-on-the-ground type of approach, attending as many events as possible with photo or story coverage. Both Henry and Peterson's loyalty to Turley and to the student-athletes in the region personify the approach and the pursuit of that mission.

Peterson was just the third writer to be recognized by the PVSOA while Henry became the first photographer to receive a letter of commendation from the organization. The PVSOA has been awarding letters of commendation since 1979.

### BANQUET ■ from page 6

Outgoing President David DelBuono, who received an award, emphasized the importance of holding the annual event.

He said he appreciated the hard work of all the officials who continue to work

hard for the student-athletes on the playing field.

The event was attended by family and friends of the awardees along with several recognizable faces who have served as officials for many years.

Duggan said he is looking forward to having everyone

back next years for the 80th years of the awards. The banquet was established in 1946.

The PVSOA recognizes individuals with the Jimmie Downie and Larry E. Briggs Awards as well as plaques given to referees who had achieved milestone years of service.

### STRATTON ■ from page 6

league opponent, on December 11. Their home opener is slated for December 16 against Granby, which is another league game.

The other members of the Franklin West Division are Sci-Tech, Ware, Monson, and Palmer.

"I think we're in a very competitive league and we don't have to travel very far,"

Stratton said. "I just want the players to enjoy playing basketball like I did when I was in high school."

The Lady Lions, who went 6-14 a year ago, will be facing their league opponents twice during the regular season. Their non-league opponents are Mount Greylock, West Springfield, Monument Mountain, East Longmeadow, and Hopkins Academy.

Agawam High School isn't

listed on the Lady Lions regular season schedule.

The Lady Lions assistant varsity coach is Danielle Stratton, Sam's sister.

"Danielle has been my assistant coach since I've been coaching the j.v. team," Sam Stratton said. "She also played basketball at Agawam and it's nice having her opinions on different things. We get along very well, and we rarely argue with each other."

### JOB OPPORTUNITY

## newspaper correspondent

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# EARLY DEADLINE

In observance of **CHRISTMAS** for Dec. 22-26 newspapers there will be an **EARLY CLASSIFIEDS DEADLINE!** Place your advertisement no later than **Thurs., Dec. 17 at 3 p.m.**

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# Public Notices

## AGAWAM ZONING BOARD OF APPEALS LEGAL NOTICE

Notice is hereby given that the Agawam Zoning Board of Appeals will hold a public hearing at the Agawam Senior Center, 954 Main St., Agawam, MA, on **Monday, December 22, 2025 at**

**6:30PM** for all parties interested in the request of Chris Auto South, which is seeking a Special Permit in accordance with the Town of Agawam's Zoning Ordinances, Ch. 180-55 (35) and Ch. 114-5 to allow the petitioner to seek a Class II auto sales license for the increase of vehicles on the premises identified as 207 Main Street.

Doreen A. Prouty, Chairperson  
Agawam Zoning Board of Appeals  
12/04, 12/11/2025

## AGAWAM ZONING BOARD OF APPEALS LEGAL NOTICE

Notice is hereby given that the Agawam Zoning Board of Appeals will hold a public hearing at the Agawam Senior Center, 954 Main St., Agawam, MA, on **Monday, December 22, 2025 at 7PM** for all parties interested in the request of Carl Pickett, who is seeking a Special Permit in accordance with the Town of Agawam's Zoning Ordinances, Ch. 180-62 to allow for the keeping of hens at the premises identified as 729 Silver Street.

Doreen A. Prouty  
Chairperson  
Agawam Zoning Board of Appeals  
12/04, 12/11/2025

**Commonwealth of Massachusetts  
The Trial Court  
Probate and Family Court  
Hampden Probate and Family Court  
50 State Street  
Springfield, MA 01103  
(413)748-7758  
Docket No. HD25P0699EA  
Estate of:  
Frederick Blair  
Date of Death: 03/13/2023  
CITATION ON PETITION FOR SALE OF REAL ESTATE BY A PERSONAL REPRESENTATIVE**

To all interested persons:  
A Petition for Sale of Real Estate has been filed by: **John**

**J Ferriter of Holyoke, MA** requesting that the court authorize the Personal Representative to sell the decedent's real estate at a private sale.

**IMPORTANT NOTICE**  
**You have the right to obtain a copy of the Petition from the Petitioner or at the court. You have a right to object to this proceeding. To do so, you or your attorney must file a written appearance and objection at this court before: 10:00 a.m. on the return day of 12/29/2025.**

**This is NOT a hearing date, but a deadline by which you must file a written appearance and objection if you object to this proceeding. If you fail to file a timely written appearance and objection followed by an affidavit of objections within thirty (30) days of the return day, action may be taken without further notice to you.**

Witness, **Barbara M Hyland**, First Justice of this Court.

Date: November 25, 2025  
**Rosemary A Saccomani**, Register of Probate  
12/11/2025

**Commonwealth of Massachusetts  
The Trial Court  
Probate and Family Court  
Hampden Probate and Family Court  
50 State Street  
Springfield, MA 01103  
Docket No. HD25P2476PM  
In the matter of:  
John Bryant, Jr.  
Of: Agawam, MA  
RESPONDENT  
(Person to be Protected/ Minor)**

**CITATION GIVING NOTICE OF PETITION FOR APPOINTMENT OF CONSERVATOR OR OTHER PROTECTIVE ORDER PURSUANT TO G.L. c. 190B, §5-304 & §5-405**

To the named Respondent and all other interested persons, a petition has been filed by **Todd Bryant** of East Longmeadow, MA in the above captioned matter alleging that **John Bryant, Jr.** is in need of a Conservator or other protective order and requesting that **Todd Bryant** of East Longmeadow, MA (or some other suitable person) be appointed as Conservator to serve **Without Surety** on the bond.

The petition asks the court to determine that the Respondent is disabled, that a protective order or appointment of a Conservator is necessary, and that the pro-

posed conservator is appropriate. The petition is on file with this court.

**You have the right to object to this proceeding.** If you wish to do so, you or your attorney must file a written appearance at this court on or before 10:00 a.m. on the return date of **12/24/2025**. This day is NOT a hearing date, but a deadline date by which you have to file the written appearance if you object to the petition. If you fail to file the written appearance by the return date, action may be taken in this matter without further notice to you. In addition to filing the written appearance, you or your attorney must file a written affidavit stating the specific facts and grounds of your objection within 30 days after the return date.

**IMPORTANT NOTICE**  
**The outcome of this proceeding may limit or completely take away the above-named person's right to make decisions about personal affairs or financial affairs or both. The above-named person has the right to ask for a lawyer. Anyone may make this request on behalf of the above-named person. If the above-named person cannot afford a lawyer, one may be appointed at State expense.**

Witness, Hon. **Barbara M. Hyland**, First Justice of this Court.

Date: November 26, 2025  
**Rosemary A. Saccomani**, Register of Probate  
12/11/2025

**Commonwealth of Massachusetts  
The Trial Court  
Hampden Probate and Family Court  
50 State Street  
Springfield, MA 01103  
Docket No. HD20P0752PM  
In the Interests of:  
Agnes Bulifant  
Of: Agawam, MA  
RESPONDENT  
Incapacitated Person/  
Protected Person**

**CITATION GIVING NOTICE OF PETITION FOR REMOVAL OF A CONSERVATOR**

To the named Respondent and all other interested persons, a petition has been filed by: **Bolaji Mustapha** of Agawam, MA in the above captioned matter requesting that the court: Remove the Conservator of the Respondent

The petition asks the court to make a determination that the Guardian and/or Conservator should be allowed to resign;

or should be removed for good cause; or that the Guardianship and/or Conservatorship is no longer necessary and therefore should be terminated. The original petition is on file with the court.

**You have the right to object to this proceeding.** If you wish to do so, you or your attorney must file a written appearance at this court on or before 10:00 a.m. on the return date of **12/22/2025**. This day is NOT a hearing date, but a deadline date by which you have to file the written appearance if you object to the petition. If you fail to file the written appearance by the return date, action may be taken in this matter without further notice to you. In addition to filing the written appearance, you or your attorney must file a written affidavit stating the specific facts and grounds of your objection within 30 days after the return date.

**IMPORTANT NOTICE**  
**The outcome of this proceeding may limit or completely take away the above-named person's right to make decisions about personal affairs or financial affairs or both. The above-named person has the right to ask for a lawyer. Anyone may make this request on behalf of the above-named person. If the above-named person cannot afford a lawyer, one may be appointed at State expense.**

Witness, Hon. **Barbara M Hyland**, First Justice of this Court.

Date: November 20, 2025  
**Rosemary A. Saccomani**, Register of Probate  
12/11/2025

**Commonwealth of Massachusetts  
The Trial Court  
Probate and Family Court  
Hampden Probate and Family Court  
50 State Street  
Springfield, MA 01103  
(413)748-7758  
Docket No. HD24P1023EA  
Estate of:  
Victor Michael Joseph  
Date of Death: 11/03/2023  
CITATION ON PETITION FOR ORDER OF COMPLETE SETTLEMENT**

A Petition for **Order of Complete Settlement** has been filed by **Frank Kenney of Springfield, MA** requesting that the court requesting that the court enter a formal Decree of Complete Settlement including the allowance of a final account, a determination of testacy and heirs at law and other such relief as may be requested in the

Petition. **IMPORTANT NOTICE**  
**You have the right to obtain a copy of the Petition from the Petitioner or at the Court. You have a right to object to this proceeding. To do so, you or your attorney must file a written appearance and objection at this Court before: 10:00 a.m. on the return day of 01/07/2026.**

**This is NOT a hearing date, but a deadline by which you must file a written appearance and objection if you object to this proceeding. If you fail to file a timely written appearance and objection followed by an affidavit of objections within thirty (30) days of the return day, action may be taken without further notice to you.**

WITNESS, Hon. **Barbara M. Hyland**, First Justice of this Court.

Date: November 28, 2025  
**Rosemary A. Saccomani**, Register of Probate  
12/11/2025

**Commonwealth of Massachusetts  
The Trial Court  
Probate and Family Court  
Hampden Division  
Docket No. HD25P2446EA  
Estate of:  
Michelle M Littlefield  
Date of Death:  
October 1, 2025  
INFORMAL PROBATE PUBLICATION NOTICE**

To all persons interested in the above captioned estate, by Petition of Petitioner **Alexander Littlefield of Feeding Hills, MA.** **Alexander Littlefield of Feeding Hills, MA** has been informally appointed as the Personal Representative of the estate to serve **without surety** on the bond.

The estate is being administered under informal procedure by the Personal Representative under the Massachusetts Uniform Probate Code without supervision by the Court. Inventory and accounts are not required to be filed with the Court, but interested parties are entitled to notice regarding the administration from the Personal Representative and can petition the Court in any matter relating to the estate, including distribution of assets and expenses of administration. Interested parties are entitled to petition the Court to institute formal proceedings and to obtain orders terminating or restricting the powers of Personal Representatives appointed under informal procedure. A copy of the Petition and Will, if any, can be obtained from the Petitioner.  
12/11/2025

Agawam Advertiser News

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The other is a **Paid Obituary**, costing \$275, which allows families to publish extended death notice information of their own choice and may include a photograph.

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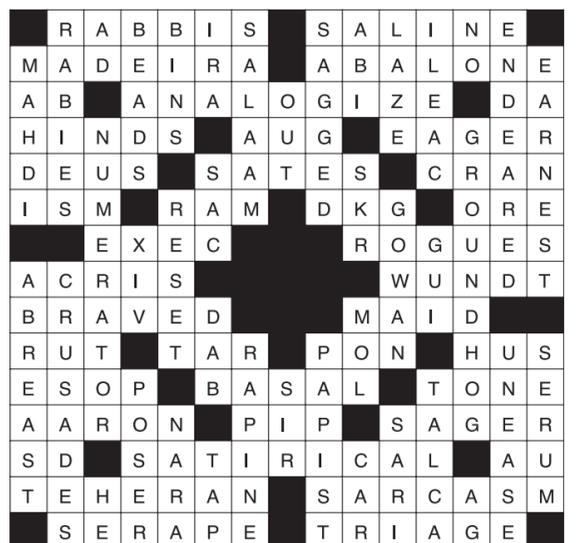
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*Public notice deadlines are Mondays at noon, Fridays noon for Monday holidays.*

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## EARLY DEADLINES FOR ADS & LEGAL NOTICES

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

- Friday, December 26 at 2 PM for January 1 issue**
  - Country Journal • The Register • Wilbraham-Hampden Times • Agawam Advertiser News
- Monday, December 29 at 2 PM for January 1 issue**
  - Sentinel • The Journal Register • Ware River News • Barre Gazette
- Tuesday, December 30 at 2 PM for January 2 issue**
  - Quaboag Current • Town Reminder • The Holyoke Sun • Chicopee Register

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## EARLY DEADLINE

In observance of **NEW YEAR'S** for Dec. 29-Jan. 2 newspapers there will be an **EARLY CLASSIFIEDS DEADLINE!** Place your advertisement no later than **Thurs., Dec. 26 at 3 p.m.**

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**OUR CLASSIFIEDS REACH 50 COMMUNITIES EVERY WEEK!**

## Grange annual holiday bazaar scheduled for next weekend

AGAWAM – Community Grange #382 will hold their annual Holiday Bazaar on Saturday, Dec. 13 from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. The Grange hall is located at 47 North West St. in Feeding Hills.

There will be wreaths, décor, ornaments, crocheted items, a large bake sale and

soup and baked beans to go. Our vendors will be S&S Handmade Soap, Trudi's Creations, Fran and Cheryl's holiday items and Paws-A-Tively Delectable.

There will be a basket raffle. Bring a non-perishable item and receive a ticket for the raffle. The food

collection will benefit the Church Cupboard at Feeding Hills Congregational Church.

The volunteers at Feline Friends Cat Sanctuary will have a drop off bin for supplies.

This a free event and the public is invited to attend.

## NAMI holding calendar raffle

HOLYOKE – NAMI-WM is holding a calendar raffle fundraiser for February 2026.

Participants will pay \$15 for a chance to win prizes awarded each day of the month.

These prizes include gift cards to various local businesses, and cash prizes. Through our fundraising,

we are able to raise awareness and provide essential education, advocacy, support groups and programs throughout your Western Mass area.

Mental health support and awareness has become an increasingly important issue with all of the changes in the world.

Our dedication and

commitment to mental health awareness and support within our communities is vital.

Our Board of Directors, along with our dedicated staff, colleagues and volunteers work together with an ongoing goal to get our services, advocacy and assistance out into the community.

## Feline Friends to appear at Grange fundraiser

AGAWAM – Feline Friends is being invited by Community Grange #382 to participate in their largest fundraiser/sale on Saturday, Dec. 13 at 47 North West Street in Feeding Hills. We will attend between 9 a.m. and 1 p.m.

We will be selling raffle tickets for a Christmas basket, Kitchen basket and Dog basket. Winners will be selected at 1 p.m. We will be selling catnip toys and collecting donations for our cat sanctuary which is located in Feeding Hills.

We are incredibly grateful for the response to our appeal for help with supplies. We have received packages at the

dental office at 532 Springfield St. (at the corner of Cleveland St.) in Feeding Hills and at the Agawam Public Library. Financial donations have arrived by check at P.O. Box 174, Feeding Hills 01030 as well as PayPal: @FelineFriendsRaffle. Venmo: @Feline-Friends. Please include name/contact information with donations if you would like an acknowledgement. Venmo donations do not provide addresses or email information.

We appreciate every single donation. Local pick up is available by calling 786-5019.

Recent donations have been received from Carol R, Dan S, Wendy H, Terry B,

Ann Marie H, Sheila K, Judy C, Gladys W, GloriaJean H, Bill M, Patricia C, Ida S, Dennis & Debbie K, Katie H, Carl & Cheryl K, Beth C, Linda K, Ken K & Irene F, Michael S, Joan E, John M and Pet Smart customers Destiny and Joan. We received a grant from the Community Foundation of Western Mass Inc. as well as a donation from Stop & Shop on Springfield St. in Feeding Hills from their Community Bag Program. Thank you all.

Feline Friends Inc. is a community-based, nonprofit sanctuary that does not discriminate against any cat based on age, gender or disability.

More information about our sanctuary may be found on our website at [felinefriendsinc.org](http://felinefriendsinc.org) or our Facebook page at Feline Friends Cat Sanctuary. Contact us with questions at [info@felinefriendsinc.org](mailto:info@felinefriendsinc.org) or by phone at 413-786-5019.



## DPW hosts used holiday light collection

AGAWAM – Frustrated with broken holiday lights, or just have a bunch that no longer suits your needs? No matter what the reason, resist the urge to throw old holiday lights in the curbside trash or recycling collection cart.

Holiday light strings are known as "tangles" in the recycling industry. Tangles are things like plastic bags, ropes, cords, hoses, wires, and light strings that jam sorting machinery by wrapping around the equipment, which is dan-

gerous for workers.

Light strings may be delivered to the Department of Public Works front office from Dec. 1 to Jan. 16. This program is for light strings only: incandescent, LED and "icicle" light strings with wires and attached bulbs. Boxes, bags, and packaging must be removed before placing lights in the recycling container. Alternative options for recycling light strings would include mail back programs such as [HolidayLEDs.com](http://HolidayLEDs.com) or [Christmas-light-source.com](http://Christmas-light-source.com)

## Santa Sprint to support Holyoke Pride Dec. 13

HOLYOKE – Holyoke Pride will launch the city's first-ever Santa Sprint on Saturday, Dec. 13. Registration opens at 10 a.m. at De La Luz Soundstage, located at 114 Race Street, and the spirited dash will follow the scenic Canalwalk on Race Street. Racers—ages 18 and older—will run, walk, or strut in Santa gear from Euphorium Dispensary to The Cubit building, raising support for Holyoke Pride's growing series of June events culminating in the 2026 PrideFest on June 27.

Participants can register online now at [holyokeypride.org](http://holyokeypride.org) for a Starting Line Pass, available on a sliding scale donation beginning at \$20, granting entry into the race and helping to fund Holyoke Pride programming. Those who want to support without running can choose a Cheer Squad Pass, which allows spectators or remote supporters to donate any



amount to benefit Holyoke Pride. The Santa Sprint is free to attend, and community members are encouraged to line the route and cheer.

"This event brings together everything that makes Holyoke special—community, joy, and the commitment to show up for one another," said Holyoke City Councilor, and Pride Committee member, Juan Anderson-Burgos. "The Santa Sprint is a fun way to welcome the holiday season while supporting Pride and the work it takes to create meaningful, inclusive celebrations for everyone."

Holyoke Pride and the Santa Sprint is sponsored by Holyoke Art, a nonprofit strengthening Holyoke's creative and cultural ecosystem. Through its fiscal sponsorship program, Holyoke Art provides administrative and financial support to grassroots initiatives like Holyoke Pride, helping community-led events thrive.

To help make this first-ever Santa Sprint unforgettable, both runners and spectators are encouraged to dress in their most festive Santa outfits—beards, hats, bells, and bright red everything—to fill the Canalwalk with holiday spirit and community pride. For race details, registration, or donations, visit [holyokeypride.org](http://holyokeypride.org).

## Wreaths Across America holding annual special event at Veterans Cemetery Saturday

AGAWAM – On Saturday, Dec. 13 at 10 a.m., the Friends of the Massachusetts Veterans Memorial Cemetery at Agawam will join Wreaths Across America in our annual mission to Remember, Honor, and Teach.

Together, we will lay Remembrance wreaths on the graves of our nation's heroes

at the Massachusetts Veterans Memorial Cemetery, located at 1390 Main Street, Agawam, MA.

Parking and Shuttle Information:

Parking will be available at Six Flags New England, with shuttles running to the cemetery beginning at 8 a.m. Please plan to arrive early to allow for shuttle

transport and seating before the ceremony begins.

The Friends of the Massachusetts Veterans Memorial Cemetery at Agawam is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization dedicated to honoring those who have served, comforting their families, and enhancing the beauty and dignity of this eternal resting place.

By sponsoring a wreath through the Friends, you help ensure that every veteran resting at the cemetery is remembered with a wreath of honor and gratitude.

For more information or to sponsor a wreath, please visit our website at [agawamfriends.org](http://agawamfriends.org) or email us at [wreathfriends@gmail.com](mailto:wreathfriends@gmail.com).

## Children's Museum announces return of 'Penguin Plunge'

WESTFIELD – Amelia Park Children's Museum announces the return of the Penguin Plunge to be held on Saturday, Jan. 24, 2026, at 1 p.m. at Hampton Ponds State Park, Westfield MA. Check-in begins at 11:30 a.m. Proceeds from the Penguin Plunge will benefit the museum.

"The Penguin Plunge is a long-standing tradition in Westfield. We are very excited that we're able to host the Penguin Plunge in 2026," said Diane Chambers, Executive Director of the museum. "We want to make this event a Plunge for the record books!" A member of the founding board, Chambers, explains that interest in the museum is at an all-time high. "We are seeing a tremendous increase in the

number of visitors we serve. Please join us as we work to enhance our facility and programs to continue serving our community's growing needs." Through the years participants and sponsors of the Plunge have helped to raise over \$370,000 to support Amelia Park Children's Museum.

Plunge participants may join as an individual or as a team. Each participant pledges to raise a minimum of \$75 from friends and

family and is encouraged to collect as many sponsors as possible. Those under the age of 18 will receive a registration discount of \$25.

There are monetary prizes of "cold hard cash" for the top three individuals or teams that raise the most money; first place - \$300, second place - \$200, third place - \$100.

A costume contest is part of the fun, and participants are encouraged to come

dressed creatively. There will be prizes for Best Individual Costume and Best Team Costume.

Register in advance online or at the Plunge on the day of the event from 11:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. Participants will receive a free 2026 Penguin Plunge T-shirt (while supplies last).

Sponsorship opportunities, registration and pledge forms are available via the museum website <https://www.ameliaparkmuseum.org/penguin-plunge> or can be picked up at the museum.

Don't want to jump in the water? No worries! Be a spectator and cheer on the brave participants. Hot chocolate, coffee, s'mores and other refreshments will be available to keep everyone warm.



### SCHOOL ■ from page 1

for numerous academic distinctions like Excellence Book Award, AP Language Composition, AP U.S. Government, Pre-Calculus Honors, and AP Environmental Science. Balzano has been recognized by the College Board, qualifying for the National Recognition School Program and the AP Scholar with Distinction Honor.

"Balzano demonstrates an unwavering dedication to learning and a deep commitment to her studies, enrolling in as many honors and AP courses as possible. During her junior year, she successfully completed three AP classes and in her senior year, she continued to challenge herself with two additional AP courses alongside dual enrollment classes in sociology and English at Holyoke

Community College. Beyond the classroom, Balzano has been a dancer and is an active member of the Empowerment Club, Diversity Club, and Project 351. She was also a member of the Varsity Gymnastics Team and currently serves as a chief within the high school," said Martin.

Balzano received the award from Martin and was congratulated by the committee members. Martin contin-

ued stating that all schools have conducted their first rounds of instructional learning walks, which are like instructional rounds that help observe teaching and learning within the classroom. With a lens of focusing on the student experience, educators can gather insight and understanding of students while enhancing communication and much more at the schools.

### FIELDS ■ from page 1

Street Park, where freshman baseball as well as local and adult leagues is played, and Borgatti Park. Borgatti features multiple softball fields. Adult and youth leagues play there, and it is also the temporary home for Agawam High School softball during the school building process.

An unneeded backstop for a youth field at Shea Park have been removed. The area was replaced with a full-size 11 vs. 11 full-size soccer field.

The Community Preservation Act Committee and City Council agreed to fund

new irrigation on the field behind Roberta Doering School, and that has been installed, Pisano said.

"The transformation has been unbelievable," Pisano said. "The side-by-side at some of the fields is phenomenal. These fields deserve to be in tip-top shape. Within seven short months, they are in spectacular shape. But there is more to be done."

He said fertilization and other tasks still need to be tackled, and is hopeful that some recent new staff members to the DPW will be able to help in that effort once the spring hits and work can start again.

### TAX ■ from page 1

communities, as well as surrounding communities. Agawam's rate of \$14.64 per \$1,000 valuation of property was 23 cents better than neighbor West Springfield. The neighboring towns have typically competed to have the lowest tax rate in the area for residents.

Johnson noted that Agawam was 18.26% below the excess levy capacity.

"We are taxing well below

the levy capacity," Johnson said. "And well below what other area communities do."

Johnson noted the top five taxpayers in the community are Eversource, Six Flags, Berkshire Power, Hood, and OMG, an industrial business.

The Assessor's office reported that new growth also has helped with it trending higher with increased residential and commercial development activity.

Residents should note that the first two tax bills

dated July 1, 2025 and Oct. 1, 2025 are based off last year's tax bills because the new tax rate has not yet been established. That is due to certification of financial information from the Department of Revenue happening during the fall months. The change in the tax bills is then reflected in the third and fourth quarter bills to account for the new tax rate. Johnson repeated that fact in case city councilors receive calls from residents wondering why

their tax bills look different during the second half of the fiscal year.

"The entire increase is in their last two bills for the new fiscal year," said Johnson. "My office will get 15 calls a year on that and the assessor's office will also get calls."

Johnson warned the council that bills could be on the increase in future years with various project debt, increases in health insurance, and other cost increases happen.

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