

Chicopee Register

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COMMUNITY

Police Department promotes bike safety at Bike Rodeo event

The event took place at Williams Park

By Kristin Rivers
Staff Writer
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CHICOPEE - Residents visited Williams Park from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. on May 27 for the police department's Bike Rodeo event.

The event promoted bike safety with stations for bike registration, bike inspections with Bob "The Bike Man" Charland from Pedal Through Youth, helmet fittings and an obstacle course to practice riding safely on the roads.

After completing the stations, residents received a bike headlight and taillight and free ice cream from the police department's new ice cream truck.

Public Information Officer Travis Odiome explained how the event came together, adding he hopes to have more stations in the future.

"Other departments were doing it, and I said to the chief last year, 'I think this is a great idea. We should get involved with doing it,'" Odiome said. "This year, our Department of Public Works actually made us a stoplight which it's remote-control so the kids can utilize that. So every year we're



Aviah, Officer Stephanie Paquin, School Resource Officer Mark Hammon, Captain Holly Cote and Hunter Davis take a photo with a Chicopee Police Department bike during the Bike Rodeo event at Williams Park.

STAFF PHOTO BY KRISTIN RIVERS

going to build it out a little bit more."

Odiome wants to make sure residents are aware of children riding bikes on the roads with school ending soon. Events like this and the upcoming National Night Out on Aug.

7 also provide education and the chance to meet officers.

"It also gives them an opportunity to see us outside of regular day-to-day operations. They can come and have fun with us here. We got our bike guys out. They're going to ride

the course with them," Odiome said. "It shows the kids we're approachable as people, not just law enforcement."

Officer David Rivera is the commander of bikes. He said

See **BIKE RODEO** page 6

COMMUNITY

Memorial Day ceremony held at Veterans Memorial Plaza



STAFF PHOTO BY DALTON ZBIERSKI

Students from Chicopee High School's JROTC program participated in the Memorial Day ceremony.

By Dalton Zbierski
Editor
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CHICOPEE - May 29 was a day of reverence and reflection, as the city gathered at Veterans Memorial Plaza to celebrate all Chicopee service members who lost their lives in the line of duty.

Elected officials, city employees and local veterans spoke during the short Memorial Day ceremony in the plaza off of Front Street. Following the event, Mayor John Vieau praised those who attended and spoke on the day's ex-

traordinary meaning.

"It's a beautiful day in Chicopee with a great turnout, and it just shows how veteran-proud this city is. They came out for Memorial Day to hear about and celebrate those who made the ultimate sacrifice. It was emotional and it was incredible," Vieau said.

State Rep. Shirley Arriaga (D-Chicopee) is a well-traveled Air Force veteran and noted that not every city and town recognizes their military members and veterans the way that Chicopee does. She said

See **MEMORIAL DAY** page 9

COMMUNITY



STAFF PHOTO BY KRISTIN RIVERS

The Chicopee High School AFJROTC holds the Presentation of the Colors as Mayor John Vieau and Jacqueline Lynch, vice president of the Chicopee Historical Society stand at attention during the 2023 Charles H. Tracy Veteran of the Year Ceremony in City Hall auditorium.

SSG Belanger, Army, receives 2023 Charles H. Tracy Award

Belanger honored for his military service and dedication to veterans

By Kristin Rivers
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CHICOPEE - The community gathered at City Hall auditorium on May 25 for the 2023 Charles H. Tracy Award ceremony for Veteran of the Year.

The recipient is SSG Brian Belanger, Army, who served from 1985 to 2007.

Belanger served at Fort Bragg in North Carolina with the 612 Quartermaster Airborne Unit, was stationed at Westover Air Force Base and activated with the 167 CSG out of Londonderry, NH.

He also served in Iraq from November 2003 to March 2005 and has been the commander at

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Candlelight Ceremony

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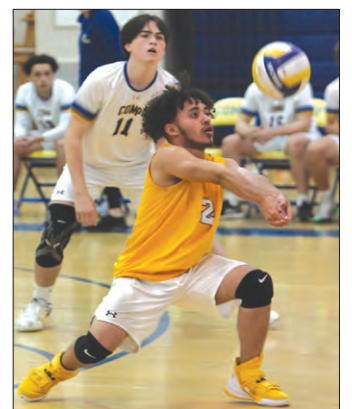
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Colts qualify for state tournament

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INSIDE THIS ISSUE



Chicopee remembers fallen Vietnam service members in candlelight ceremony

The ceremony took place at Vietnam Veterans' Memorial Park

By Kristin Rivers
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CHICOPEE - Residents gathered at Vietnam Veterans' Memorial Park on May 28 for a candlelight ceremony honoring fallen Vietnam service members.

Delfo Barabani, Jr. was the master of ceremonies.

The Chicopee High School Air Force Junior ROTC presented the colors, with Vietnam Veterans of America Chapter 111 members Frank Kolek leading the invocation and Larry White singing the National Anthem.

The poems "America" and "Hello David" were read by Larry White and Susan Zajchowski, respectively, while David Chapdelaine read the names of deceased chapter members.



(L to R) Director of Veterans Services Stephanie Shaw and Mayor John Vieau lay the wreath during the Memorial Day Commemorative Ceremony at Vietnam Veterans' Memorial Park.



(L to R) State Rep. Shirley Arriaga (D-Chicopee), State Sen. John Velis (D-Westfield), State Sen. Jacob Oliveira (D-Springfield), Director of Veterans Services Stephanie Shaw and Mayor John Vieau reflect as Susan Zajchowski reads the poem "Hello David" during the Memorial Day Commemorative Ceremony at Vietnam Veterans' Memorial Park.

The members also read the names of service members missing in action, lighting candles in their memory.

Additionally, they assisted Gold Star Families in lighting candles at the Memorial Columns, representing the 15 Vietnam War service members from Chicopee who never returned home.

Mayor John Vieau and Director of Veterans Services Stephanie Shaw laid the wreath.

Vieau thanked the organization and Gold Star Families in his remarks.

"I know how important this ceremony is to you and it is to your families and to your friends. Chicopee will never forget," Vieau said.

He then read "To the Vietnam Veteran," ending with this.

"To those 15 who never made it home, we honor you today and as a city, we mourn and remember and celebrate," Vieau said.

State Rep. Shirley Arriaga (D-Chicopee), an Air Force Veteran, said the state legislators are here to support the families.

"Our deepest gratitude is with you today and always," Arriaga said. "What you've done and what your family has

done for our country will never be forgotten."

State Sen. Jacob Oliveira (D-Springfield) said the city "always does the most to recognize and pay tribute to our servicemen and women."

"When we stand at this beautiful memorial and see the pillars of the 15 servicemen who are from Chicopee, who never made it home from the War in Vietnam, we pay tribute to each and every one of those individuals with their faces and the plaques that are on each of these columns," Oliveira said.

Oliveira said the state legislature works to ensure recognition of service members and provide services and support to Gold Star Families.

He reflected on the loss of his friend, Sgt. Joshua Desforges, who was killed in Afghanistan.

"I'll always remember Josh on this weekend and every day, but we need to do everything we can to support those families and pay tribute to those who have given so much for our nation," Oliveira said.

State Sen. John Velis (D-Westfield) reflected on his service and a conversation with a Vietnam Veteran at an event in



A close-up of the lit candles in memory of those missing in action during the Memorial Day Commemorative Ceremony at Vietnam Veterans' Memorial Park.

Westfield, who was spit at after returning home.

Velis said he will always say this when asked to talk about Vietnam.

"One of, if not one of the biggest black marks on this nation's history will be the way Vietnam Veterans were treated upon their returns. An absolute disgrace," Velis said.

Velis shared of when he was greeted by 200 Vietnam Veterans extending their hands, saying, "Welcome home," during his 2018 deployment.

"They said, 'Alright, you know what we're going to make sure? We're going to make sure not a single veteran ever has to go through that again,'" Velis said. "To every Vietnam Veteran here, I got two words for you: welcome home."

Anthony Stratford served in the Army for 12 years and was later a firefighter.

He had this message for residents. "Remember Memorial Day. It's to honor us veterans and honor people who served our country," Stratford said.

The ceremony concluded with a rifle salute by the Vietnam Veterans of America Chapter 111 led by Commander Josh Morin and the performance of "Taps" by Robert Zukanskas.

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Mitchell Clionsky, Ph.D. ABPP(CN)

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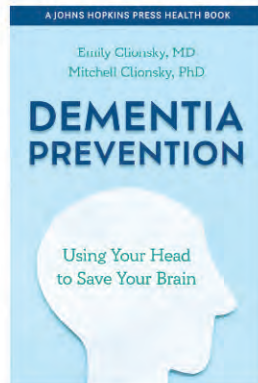
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RiverMills honors veterans with Military Appreciation Breakfast



(L to R) Martha Slowik, Linda Gauthier, Marine Corp Vietnam Veteran Sgt. Steve Tanhauser, Coast Guard EN2 Veteran Dave Patrie, Linda Gagnon and Betty Patrie pose for a group photo during the Military Appreciation Breakfast at RiverMills Senior Center.



(L to R) James Waskiewicz, Phyllis Stec, Korean War Veteran Private Walter Stec, Laura Dubreuil and Steve Dubreuil enjoy company and a great breakfast during the Military Appreciation Breakfast at RiverMills Senior Center.

Staff photos by Kristin Rivers

By Kristin Rivers
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CHICOPEE - The senior center honored veterans and their families on May 31 with a Military Appreciation Breakfast.

Private Walter Stec served three years during the Cold and Korean Wars in Germany with the Second Army Division.

"I had a few scares when I was over there, but nothing came of it," Stec said.

Stec was in college when he decided to serve.

"The GI Bill was just going to run out. The draft was still in effect, so I enlisted to beat the draft," Stec said.

Stec thanked the senior center for holding the event, adding he comes regularly with his wife, Phyllis.



Navy Veteran Richard Salvias and Christine Rumanowski had a wonderful time at the Military Appreciation Breakfast at RiverMills Senior Center.

"I'm very appreciative and I think they're doing a wonderful job for the veterans here and elsewhere," Stec said.

Stec also appreciates the resources and programs.

"As I said, I'm very appreciative. In my old age, I'm getting some benefits that I never knew I was able to," Stec said.

Stec also meets with the Department of Veterans Affairs in Leeds and on Pond Street in Springfield and reaches out to the city's Department of Veterans Services Director Stephanie Shaw.

"She's very helpful and doing a good job. I intend to see her this week to ask a few questions," Stec said.

Stec appreciates people thanking him for his service.

"I never knew what to answer to that. One of the guys on Fox said, 'When somebody says, 'thank you for your service,' just say 'thank you for being worthy of my service,' so that's what I say to them," Stec said.

Martha Slowik has family members who served, including her father and an uncle. Another uncle is missing in action.

Slowik was thankful the event honored veterans.

"I think it's great because without them we wouldn't be here," Slowik said.

Slowik also praised the senior center for its friendly staff and patrons and for helping veterans find support.

"They support everything the people around here do, and it's a nice place to come," Slowik said.

Program Coordinator Casey Conroy was happy with the opportunity to honor



Seniors, including veterans and families, enjoy a great meal and conversation during the Military Appreciation Breakfast at RiverMills Senior Center.

veterans and active service members.

"We have a lot of veterans that come into the senior center, so it's a way that we can say thank you to them," Conroy said.

Conroy explained the senior center provides resources for veterans including the Veteran's Voice Group, held the last Wednesday of every month at 1 p.m. and connecting people with the Department of Veterans Services.

Additionally, the Veterans Video History Project interviews veterans for video preservation in the Library of Congress and the National Archives.

She added the senior center is "always here" for the veterans.

"If they're a veteran and they're looking for veterans services, we can definitely try to get them the correct resources and get them to where they need to be if they have any questions," Conroy said. "The

Department of Veterans Services here in Chicopee is great. The staff there is fantastic if veterans need assistance with anything or just have questions in general about what their benefits are or if they need anything."

Conroy had this message for our veterans.

"Thank you for your service," Conroy said. "Again, we can just say thank you and thank you to the ones that we have lost. They made that ultimate sacrifice and we're here today because of that."

Slowik had this message for the community: remember and thank veterans.

"Don't forget our troops. They're still over there fighting for us every day," Slowik said. "Even if you have to say a little prayer for them every night. Just make sure you take care of them. Thank you to them."

Upcoming events at the Chicopee Public Library

CHICOPEE - The following events will occur at the Chicopee Public Library at 449 Front St.

Tuesday, June 6 at 3 p.m. Assistive Technology - If you, or someone you know has low vision or is blind, join us to learn technology skills that will help you navigate computers, tablets or phones better. Computers in the lab have Fusion (JAWS & Zoom Text) Software. This class is taught by Chicopee resident Robert Baran, M.Ed.

Wednesday, June 7, 14, 21, 28 at 6 p.m. Evening Yoga - Yoga classes with Carolyn Ruszala will be held on Wednesday evenings from 6-7pm. Class will be held outside behind the library if weather permits and in the Community Room if needed. Please have the following props available for class: yoga mat or a blanket and strap or scarf. For more information, email or call the Reference Desk at cpl@chicopeepubliclibrary.org and 594-1800 x3. This program is sponsored in part by the Friends of the Chicopee Public Library.

Thursday, June 8, 15, 22, 29 at 6-6:45 p.m. ASL Class - The Library is offering a beginning, four-week ASL Class for adults. The Class will be taught by SIGNING Basics from Springfield.

Registration is required.

Call the library at 413-594-1800x3 or email us at cpl@chicopeepubliclibrary.org to register or for more information.

Wednesday, June 13 at 6:30 p.m. Understanding Alzheimer's and Dementia - Join us at the Chicopee Public Library for a FREE presentation about the differences between Alzheimer's disease and dementia presented by the Alzheimer's Association. This talk will cover the early warning signs of dementia, risk factors, the importance of early detection, and local resources. All are welcome!

Tuesday, June 20 at 6:30 p.m. Poetry and the Spoken Word - Do you write poetry? Do you love the spoken word? The Chicopee Public Library is starting up a new program on the third Tuesday of every month, "Poetry and the Spoken Word" with local poet, Mary Jennings. Our next meeting is June 20. Sign-ups will begin at 6:30 p.m. and the program will begin at 7 p.m. Come join us to share your favorite poems, do a dramatic reading, share a favorite monologue or just listen.

Teens (16+) and adults are welcome. This program is supported by the Chicopee Cultural Council, a local agency, which is supported by the MA Cultural Council, a state agency.

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GUEST COLUMN



Sandhill crane



I received an email from an Oakham resident last week, who had “three very raucous sandhill cranes” fly past his house, heading northeast.

He said he went to a web site to verify their call and he included the link in his email. To hear sandhill cranes visit <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DYnH19MqkE0>.

The sandhill crane is a 45 inches tall heron-like bird. It is gray with a dark red patch on its forehead and a black bill. Some feathers on the back and wings are rusty-colored, possibly due to staining while preening from iron rich mud on its bill. They feed by picking or probing with the bill and eating weeds, agricultural grains and small animals.

A pair of sandhill cranes have nested in Hardwick for several years and successfully raised young. The cranes the Oakham resident heard flying over might be those.

The sandhill crane makes a mound like nest of arch plants, grasses and weeds placed on the ground or in shallow water. The female lays one to three olive eggs with dark marks. There call is a low pitched “karooooo, karooooo karooooo.” Courtship displays are often seen during migration and involve graceful jumps off the ground in a dance like manner.

Years ago, a Barre resident saw a pair doing their courtship antics while they were in a field in Barre. This was years before the nesting pair appeared in Hardwick, so I assume they were in route to their summer breeding grounds further north.

Sandhill cranes form huge flocks in winter and during migration. They are often seen in agricultural fields and roost at night in the center of shallow lakes or large shallow rivers.

Nesting bluebirds

An Oakham resident said she has nesting bluebirds again this year. She said usually the bluebirds and swallows squabble over the nest box, but she has not seen the swallows this year. She was wondering if anyone else has seen swallows.

I have seen them in my hayfield and I also saw some flying over Long Pond in Rutland.

Nesting ospreys

I received another email this week about the nesting pair of ospreys in Wilbraham. He said the pair were on or near the nest. If the eggs hatched, the young were too small to be seen. He will make a return trip later.

In a previous column he said for anyone wanting to go see this nest the best place to view the nest is from the Wilbraham Senior Center parking lot and park on the side of the lot facing the playing fields. There are stick nests on three light poles.

Hummingbirds

An Oakham couple reported lots of hummingbirds at their feeder. They keep busy filling the nectar feeders. People may make their own nectar by adding 1/4 cup white sugar to 1 cup water and bring to a boil. I make extra nectar, which I keep in the refrigerator. It will keep up to a week, but I am refilling every two to three days so it never gets past the one week mark.

People may report a bird sighting or bird related experience by calling me at 413-967-3505, leaving a message at extension 100, emailing mybackyard88@aol.com or edowner@turley.com or mailing to Barre Gazette, P.O. Box 448, Barre, MA 01005.

GUEST COLUMN



Lots of blue options for the spring border

I got so excited the other day.

I was walking around my backyard and came upon a flower I had never seen before. Where did it come from and what is it?

After a little bit of research, I found out that it is named Blue-eye Grass or *Sisyrinchium*. It is very diminutive, looking like a miniature purple-blue iris, with sword-like leaves and all.

Its size would make it perfect for a rock garden or alpine plant garden.

I promptly moved it out of the way of the weed whacker to join some other blue flowers that are in bloom in one of my gardens, taking their place in the front of the border. During late spring, blue flowers abound.

In fact, you could easily design a monochromatic scheme using just cool tones for a late spring symphony!

Here are some of my favorites: For the back of the border, try *Amsonia tabernaemontana*. This native plant is topped with clusters of pale blue flowers, each one opening to form a tiny star, hence its common name, blue star.

Growing to around three feet tall and not quite as wide, *Amsonia* almost qualifies for “specimen” status, although it is not as showy as other specimens like *Peony* or *Dictamnus*.

Only one plant is necessary per grouping in full sun or part shade. In my garden it self sows, but not so much to make itself a nuisance.

Sadly, the plant blooms for only a short while but makes a nice statement when it does. Make sure you choose your forever location wisely.

I need to move mine and with a crown two feet by two feet, it won't be easy.

Another plant best suited for the back row of the perennial garden is *Baptisia australis*, or false indigo.

Gray-green foliage is pretty in its own right, until you see the beautiful deep blue-purple pea-like flower spikes emerge in mid June. Easily four feet tall and three feet wide, *Baptisia* is a nice specimen perennial -

one plant is certainly enough per grouping.

The size of the plant you purchase may lead you to think otherwise, though, since transplants are usually puny and take a couple of seasons to establish.

Site false indigo in full sun or part shade in rich soil. Refrain from moving the plant once it reaches full size or its deep tap root may be compromised.

Blackish seed pods are hardly decorative on the plant, but do look nice in autumn decorations.

One of my favorite blue flowers is *Aquilegia vulgaris*. Although there are many cultivars of garden columbine, we grow the species variety at Old Sturbridge Village.

It can be found in white, pink, maroon, purple, blue and almost black. Ours tend to be mostly blue in a hue hard to describe - perhaps more royal blue than purple-blue.

If the color is hard to describe, the flower shape is even more difficult- maybe something along the lines of nodding bells with reflexed sepals?

Lobed leaves are another attractive feature of this plant, although vigilance against the dreaded leaf miner is a must in order to keep it looking good. Here too, full sun or part shade will grow decent two foot to two-and-a-half foot wispyish plants- a size perfect for the middle row of the border.

Mountain bluet, or perennial bachelor button, as it is sometimes called, is one of my most treasured perennials.

There is nothing rare about *Centaurea montana*, or even all that unique about it. I just plain like its oversized cornflowers and their lovely true blue shade.

At eighteen inches tall it is another plant best suited to the middle row of the garden. Plant in full sun or slight shade for best results. Cut back after it is done flowering for a chance at late season rebloom.

Jacob's ladder, *Polemonium caeruleum*, is another of my favorite blue perennials. Its pinnately compound leaves surely resemble a ladder, hence the Biblical reference, but it is best known for its pretty cup shaped, light blue flowers that hang from multi stems growing 18 inches to 2 feet tall and blooming in May in part shade locations.

Have fun playing with blue hues this spring. By high summer blue will be few and far between in the landscape.

Roberta McQuaid graduated from the Stockbridge School of Agriculture at the University of Massachusetts. For 31 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.

When kids move out to attend college...

When kids move back in after graduation...



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'Mild' winter costs Chicopee approximately \$1 million

City Hall repairs approved; police to receive new bulletproof vests

By Dalton Zbierski
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CHICOPEE – City Council unanimously approved an appropriation of \$390,929 for snow and ice removal following a winter without significant snowfall.

The city already budgeted \$100,000 for snow and ice removal, and the money approved on May 17 adds to the winter expenditures, which Ward 3 Councilor Delmarina López laid out.

"For the public, the total (snow and ice removal) expenditure is \$490,929, and then private plowers were \$83,480. Over-time was \$93,911 and salt was \$313,537," López said.

Mayor John Vieau praised the Department of Public Works for its effort this

winter. Even though it wasn't the most challenging winter on record, he's pleased with their performance during the cold season.

"We were very fortunate to have a pretty mild winter. I know that Chicopee takes a lot of pride from a DPW standpoint, and our residents expect our roads to be (cleared) during snow storms," Vieau said. "Our team did a fantastic job. I received a lot of good feedback this year on how we handled snow and ice throughout the city of Chicopee."

DPW Superintendent Liz Bautista agreed, saying "it was a mild winter so it was nice."

López said it was important to list the expenditures because of questions she was asked during and following the winter, especially regarding private plowers.

"I've gotten those questions like, 'Are there enough plows out there?' And yes, there's a lot of private plows. We engage with half of the money we're spending here on private plows," she said.

City Council also unanimously ap-

proved an appropriation of \$56,000 to the City Hall Maintenance Account for Special Services in hopes that it will cover the remaining month of Fiscal Year 2023, which ends June 30.

Director of Facilities Dave Rice is confident the money will get the city through June and spoke on what it will be used for.

"A lot of the expenses I have are inspections the buildings, the electric bills, the water bills, the gas bill, unexpected repair costs, stuff like that. The electric is the majority of what this money is going toward because we cover the electric for the City Hall building and the Public Safety Complex. It comes out of my budget," Rice said.

City Council President Frank Laflamme acknowledged problems with the air conditioning in the City Hall annex building. He said that there is a possibility that City Council could have to appropriate more money to the fund before the fiscal year ends.

"As everybody knows, the price of ev-

erything has doubled for parts. I know Dave right now is working on the annex building right now with the air conditioning, babysitting it right now until we get the parts and someone in to repair it," Laflamme said.

In another motion, \$5,000 was appropriated to the police department to fund the purchase of 22 new bulletproof vests. Several of Chicopee's C3 officers were on hand to display the old and new vests.

"They're expiring over the year so we're trying to get ahead of it, and we use the money to pay for them up front, and then we get state and federal grants to cover the costs. We apply for the grants and usually they cover them, but it's not a guarantee," Police Capt. Holly Cote said.

López said the city is happy to cover the funding, even if state money is not available.

"I'd like to thank you for using grants. I think that this is a small price to pay to make sure our officers don't get shot and killed in the streets. I'm happy to expend it even if we don't get grants," she said.

Chicopee Pride Fest 2023 to take place June 9

A celebration of identity, love and acceptance

CHICOPEE – The 2023 Chicopee Pride Fest will take place in Chicopee, rain or shine, on June 9 and June 10. On Friday, June 9 from 2:30-4:30 p.m., we will have the Pride Flag Raising, followed by an educational panel with a socially themed discussion at the Chicopee Public Library. The Pride Fest Celebration will take place

on Saturday, June 10 from 3-9 p.m. at Szot Park.

Our Pride Flag raising, the educational panel and our annual Pride celebration will provide the community with the opportunity to learn about the experiences of living as a member of the LGBTQ+ community, to learn about how to get involved in the civic actions in defense of the LGBTQ+ community and to celebrate Pride. During the Chicopee Pride Fest, guests will be able to browse various vendors, food trucks,

games, informational tables, and enjoy our programmed entertainment.

The first Chicopee Pride Fest originated three years ago by Johnny Miranda, under the sponsorship of the Chicopee Cultural Council and served as a beacon of hope. Each year brings new ideas, a renewed sense of acceptance and joy to the community. Currently the event is a collaborated effort incorporating a mesh of ideas, values and standards. The Chicopee Pride Fest planning Committee is an extension of

the Chicopee Cultural Council. Members of such committee have worked tirelessly this year to ensure a safe and memorable experience, under the valued leadership of Emarie Leatherwood during the 2023 planning process. The event is funded by the Chicopee Cultural Council and the Massachusetts Cultural Council, and sponsored the City of Chicopee, and organizations like Baby Safe Haven, the Chicopee Public Library and Chicopee Police Department among others.

EMPLOYEE OF THE YEAR

SARAH MAILHOTT

VP, Marketing



To honor Sarah's passion and commitment to achieving excellence, **PNCU will be closing at 3:00 PM on Wednesday, June 14, 2023** to celebrate.

The Polish National Credit Union





Congratulations!

PNCU awards 2023 Employee of the Year to Sarah Mailhott

CHICOPEE – The Polish National Credit Union will be closing early on Wednesday, June 14 to celebrate their employees. On Wednesday, June 14, all PNCU locations will be closing at 3 p.m., so employees may attend an Employee Appreciation Event at Glendale Ridge Vineyard in Southamptton. Sarah Mailhott, VP, Marketing will also receive honors, as she has been awarded 2023 Employee of the Year.

Sarah Mailhott, a graduate from the University of Hartford with a B.A. in Marketing and a minor in Psychology, joined the Polish National Credit Union in 2017 and under Mailhott's leadership; PNCU has continued to deliver on the credit union's marketing strategies and goals, while taking a firm stance on the thing she is most passionate about, giving

back to the community.

As Vice President of Marketing, Mailhott heads PNCU's Charitable Donations Committee and is the driving force behind many of PNCU's community initiatives. She identifies ways PNCU can support the community and is responsible for a significant Charitable Donations budget. Beyond her experience and knowledge, most importantly, she gives her time. Mailhott serves as Co-Chair for the Chicopee Department of Veterans Services Advisory Board; currently serves on the Board (and is past Chair) of the Chicopee Boys & Girls Club; and past Board Member of Dakin Humane Society. In addition, Mailhott has held many com-



Sarah Mailhott

mittee positions on the Greater Chicopee Chamber of Commerce and was appointed by the Mayor to serve on the Chicopee Comprehensive Steering Committee; the first-ever, citywide comprehensive plan.

Jim Kelly, President/ CEO said, "Mailhott is an accomplished individual and has even received a special recognition for her impressive leadership skills. In 2019, Mailhott was the Crash the GAC (Governmental Affairs Conference) recipient sponsored by the Credit Union National Association. She was the one individual selected from Massachusetts that CUNA recognized as an emerging credit union leader. In response to receiving this special recognition, Mail-

hott was invited to attend the GAC in Washington, D.C. She has also, just recently, received her GAIQ certification. We are very proud of all her accomplishments."

Founded in 1921, Polish National Credit Union provides a full range of financial services to individuals, families and businesses. The organization operates eight Western Mass branches plus a satellite office at Chicopee Comprehensive High School; PNCU Insurance Services, PNCU Financial Services; and a Commercial Loan Office located at 94 Main Street in Westfield, MA.

Deposits are federally insured by the National Credit Union Administration (NCUA) and by the Massachusetts Credit Union Share Insurance Corporation (MSIC). Polish National Credit Union's NMLS number is 439259.

Sen. Jake Oliveira delivers first speech in the state senate



COURTESY PHOTO

BOSTON- On Weds. May 24, state Sen. Jake Oliveira delivered his first speech to the Massachusetts State Senate, eliciting a standing ovation from the Senate President and his colleagues in the general court. In his speech, after thanking the Senate President and those on the Senate Ways and Means Committee, Oliveira thanked his peers for their hard work "assembling a budget that will serve Massachusetts as equitably, inclusively, and as far-reaching as possible."

Oliveira also took the opportunity to advocate for an increase in state spending for public libraries through an amendment he sponsored, Amendment #688. The amendment seeks to increase funding and provide an additional \$750,000 to increase state aid to regional public libraries. Oliveira said the funds would ensure that public libraries have the resources they need to protect themselves and their collections and services from the current culture war being waged against free thought and free speech across the country.

Oliveira cited data from the American Library Association and the Pew Center for Research, which tracked thousands of challenges and bans to books across the country because they were either written by or featured people of color and LGBTQ+ individuals. Oliveira described libraries and librarians as being "on the front line in the fight to protect diversity, inclusion, and accessibility."

Oliveira also spoke on the various public library services provided to residents across Massachusetts that would be protected by the increased spending and talked about the public libraries in his district and the many services they provide to residents. Such as English language courses, job training, and legal help. Oliveira also described how libraries address the disparity in high-speed broadband access for lower-income families and provide equity to those families.

"Public libraries are cultivators of equity and inclusion, they are the last true community centers that we have, and they are open to all." Said Oliveira, as he stressed how the funding increase would promote more resource sharing and provide access for the smaller libraries in Western Massachusetts that were particularly impacted by the pandemic. Oliveira finished his speech by calling public libraries the "Heart of America" and implored his colleagues in the Senate to protect equity, inclusion, accessibility, people of color, immigrants, and LGBTQ+ individuals by protecting public libraries. A roll call vote then approved Oliveira's amendment unanimously.

BIKE RODEO from page 1

officers make sure they interact with children and the community.

"We interact and make sure they're riding safe and make sure they know that we're good guys. That's the most important thing," Rivera said.

Rivera shared these safety tips.

"You got to make sure you're riding safe, you have a helmet on all the time. Make sure you look around all your surroundings, that's the main thing. Don't go into any busy roads. Try to stay residential," Rivera said.

Kristie Korash-Redmond heard about the event on the Chicopee Area Community Forum on Facebook and came with her son, Lukas. He had a good experience meeting the officers and enjoyed the obstacle course.

"I think this is really cool. It's just them showing kids how to be safe," Korash-Remond said. "All of this is super important whether they're walking or on their bike."

Korash-Remond appreciates the police department protecting everyone.

"I always thought the police were wonderful and always have had every-

body's safety first and foremost, and this is just another thing that proves they're definitely here to help us and the children," Korash-Remond said.

Charland loves working with all police departments for events as they promote healthy lifestyles, safety and positive law enforcement.

"We do tune-ups, we repair bikes, we also donate bikes while we're here. A lot of the families that come in didn't have any bikes at all so we donated bikes to them along with helmets. It's a great thing during summer. We love doing it," Charland said.

Odiorne emphasized safety and heightened awareness in his message to families, given the rise in distracted driving.

"Have the conversation with your kids. Be aware of your surroundings. Make sure your bike's in good, operable condition before you're going out to ride, and have the conversations about when you're crossing the street, get off your bike and walk it across to make sure you don't fall in the road," Odiorne said. "You need to be more aware of the cars around you and not just assume they see you."



L to R) Brooke, Lt. Ted Hitchcock, Aviah and her father, Sgt. Al Blankenship from the C-3 Willimansett Unit, pose for a group photo at the bike registration table during the Bike Rodeo event at Williams Park.

STAFF PHOTOS BY KRISTIN RIVERS



Lukas shows off his bike during the Bike Rodeo event at Williams Park. He had a lot of fun riding the obstacle course with other children and members of the Chicopee Police Department.



(L to R) MaKenna gets her bike helmet fitted by Officer David Rivera, commander of bikes for the Chicopee Police Department, during the Bike Rodeo event at Williams Park.

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Colts qualify for state tournament



PHOTOS BY DAVID HENRY WWW.SWEETDOGPHOTOS.COM

Edrien Roman sweeps in an gets a bump.

CHICOPEE – Last week, Chicopee Comprehensive boys volleyball learned it would be heading for the state tournament after finishing in the top 32 in the state. The Colts, who took on Belchertown in non-playoff action while awaiting the state tournament seeds, was not going to have to travel far for their first state tournament game. The Colts were scheduled to face Putnam Vocational on Wednesday night.



Amani Mkambavange goes for a spike.



Noah Johnson winds up for a big hit.



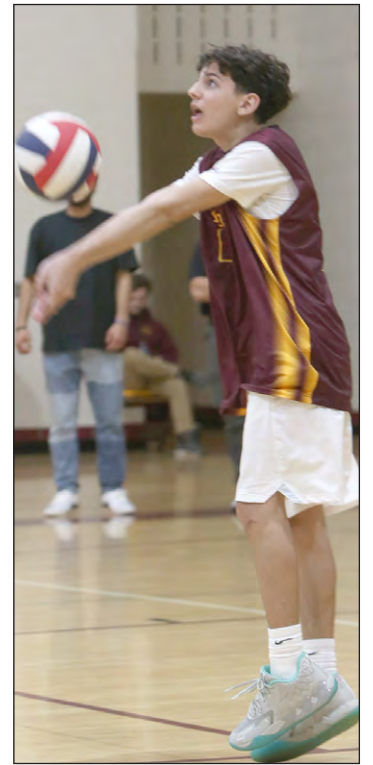
Chase Murphy looks to send the ball over the net.

Pacers wrap up season

CHICOPEE – Last week, Chicopee boys volleyball had a non-playoff matchup with Sci-Tech to close out their season. The Pacers had a tough time, going 1-17 on the year. They gave the Cybercats a great matchup, however, but fell in the fifth set for a 3-2 final.



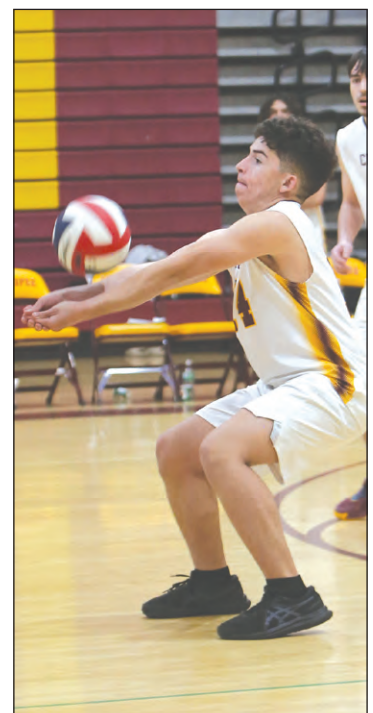
Jayden Rodriguez goes straight up with a set.



avid Gonzalez reacts to a serve with a bump.



PHOTOS BY DAVID HENRY WWW.SWEETDOGPHOTOS.COM
John Centeno sets the ball across the net.



Jeniel Nazario gets low for a bump.

Hall adds new lighting display

SPRINGFIELD – The Naismith Basketball Hall of Fame announced a recent addition to the museum’s iconic exterior, a state-of-the-art LED projection lighting display. The dome, one of the city’s most prominent structures, will be lit up every night and will display an array of festive colors and patterns for holidays and events throughout the year.

“We’ve completed a major renovation on the inside of the Hall, and adding this dynamic lighting package to the building’s exterior demonstrates our ongoing commitment to beautifying the property and enhancing

the riverfront area,” said John L. Doleva, President and CEO of the Naismith Basketball Hall of Fame. “We couldn’t be more pleased with the result and to be able to help light Springfield’s night sky.”

In an effort to honor those who have sacrificed everything in service to the nation, the dome and building will be lit red, white, and blue this Memorial Day Weekend, May 25-29.

This summer, the Naismith Basketball Hall of Fame will light the night to celebrate the winner of the NBA Finals, Independence Day, Enshrinement Weekend, and more.

Registration open for 2023 Bay State Games

WOBURN – Registration for the 41st annual Bay State Summer Games is now open. The 2023 Summer Games will include thirty sports with competitions from June 3 to July 29 at venues throughout eastern and central Massachusetts including Game On in Fitchburg, Boston Sports Institute in Wellesley, Union Point Sports Complex in Weymouth, and New England Sports Center in Marlborough. Bay State Games participants range in age from 5 to over age 75 and represent more than 300 Massachusetts communities as well as surrounding New

England States in some sports. From grassroots participants to accomplished amateur athletes, the Bay State Games provide opportunities for the athlete in all of us.

Eight high school showcase sports will take place for a variety of sports, including baseball, basketball, field hockey, ice hockey, lacrosse, soccer, softball, and volleyball. Athletes currently in grade 8-11 who live or go to school in Massachusetts are eligible to attend regional tryouts during the month of June. These tryouts will determine teams representing the various

regions of the Commonwealth that will compete against each other in July. Check each sport page for specific eligibility requirements.

The Summer Games include a wide variety of individual sports including swimming, track & field, figure skating, pickleball, wrestling, weightlifting, archery, judo, badminton, and more. These sports are open to a wide range of ages and skill levels from youth participants to masters-aged athletes. Adaptive sport divisions in archery,

See **BAY STATE GAMES** page 8

Hirschman dominates to win at Granite State Derby

LEE, N.H. – In the inaugural Granite State Derby at Lee USA Speedway, Matt Hirschman dominated early but came up short in the stretch. This time around, Hirschman would not be denied.

“Big Money Matt” took charge on the third lap and never looked back en route to his first NASCAR Whelen Modified Tour win of the year and his first at “New Hampshire’s Center of Speed.”

“We just finally closed one,” Hirschman said in victory lane. “These races are tough to win, and I think we should have had five or six of them in recent years.”

The Northampton, Penn., veteran started third and only needed a couple laps to get alongside polesitter and defending race winner Doug Coby. Once at the front, Hirschman checked out, maintaining a modest advantage over Coby, Sam Rameau and Jon McKennedy as the leaders plotted their tire strategy.

Patient and clean racing through the pack was paused on lap 69 when Max Zachem spun down the frontstretch, opening the pit strategy window. Hirschman led the entire field down pit road for tires, then beat Coby and McKennedy back to the track to lead the field back to green.

Coby stumbled on the restart with clutch problems, sliding back through the pack as McKennedy and Austin Beers settled into second and third. Beers snuck past the reigning series champion and into the runner-up spot, but Hirschman



SUBMITTED PHOTO

Matt Hirschman gets the win in the Granite State Derby.

was setting a steady pace at the front that the sophomore could not outmatch. The leaders prepared for one last pit stop, all the while managing their tires to go the distance if necessary.

McKennedy slipped back around Beers with 25 laps to go, carving time off Hirschman’s advantage as the leader dispatched slower traffic. But the caution McKennedy needed to erase that advantage never came.

Hirschman, ever disciplined at conserving equipment, crossed the line 1.120 seconds ahead of McKennedy to win his sixth career NWMT race and his first since the 2021 season opener.

“We deserve better than what the results have been, and a lot of that is on me,” Hirschman said. “I take the most responsibility for that. But today, we delivered.”

Beers held on for third place, with Rameau and Ron Silk rounding out the top five. Coby raced his way back to sixth at the finish.

Hirschman’s win is a small step toward repeating last year’s Whelen Granite State Short Track Cup championship for car owner Roy Hall’s Pee Dee Motorsports. Coby won the first leg of the triple-race program, the Duel at the Dog 200 at Monadnock Speedway.

In addition to the NASCAR Whel-

en Modified Tour, six more feature races kept fans on the edge of their seats with a mix of local and regional star power. Supermodified wunderkind Jeffrey Battle passed his uncle Eddie Witkum with the white flag in sight to claim victory in the 350 Supermodifieds. Tom Harwood prevailed in a three-way battle to win the 25-lap New England Dwarf Car Series showdown. The New England Pro 4 Modifieds staged their inaugural Dan Meservey, Sr. Memorial Race, with Brayden Meservey taking an emotional win for the family.

Massachusetts’ Ryan Kuhn topped Lee’s best Pro Stock racers, leading wire-to-wire in a commanding performance in the 80-lap Pro Stock open. Wade Gelinas turned in a similar performance with the NHSTRA Late Models. And setting the stage for the night’s main event, Kyle Valeri took his first-ever win with the NEMA Lites.

The next scheduled event for JDV Productions is the inaugural Winchester Open Modified 100 at Monadnock Speedway in Winchester, N.H., where the JDV Open Modifieds will make their debut at “Mad Dog” Saturday, June 3. More information on this special event will be released later this week.

For more information on JDV Productions, visit JDVProductions.com and follow on social media for the latest updates throughout the season, including updates from the track on race day with feature winner posts.

Blue Sox in need of host families

HOLYOKE – The Valley Blue Sox is still searching for a few host families for the 2023 season.

To be a host family, all you need is a private room for the player to stay in, food options, and access to a kitchen.

In return, 2023 volunteer host families will receive:

Free general admission to all Valley Blue Sox home and away games

Food vouchers for every home game

Transportation and ticket free to the

Boston Red Sox game on June 12

Free clinics for any household member ages 6-13

Special Host Family recognition event

40% discount on all merchandise

Season-long access to our live-game radio

Access to our fan bus to an away game to be determined

If you are interested in being a host family, please contact matt@dvalleybluesox.com for more information.

BAY STATE GAMES from page 7

swimming, and track & field are offered, as well. Bay State Games also organizes tournaments for pre-existing teams in girls lacrosse, rugby, and 6v6 field hockey.

The 2023 Summer Games will feature Game On in Fitchburg as the host venue for 8 sports. Bay State Games expects 1,500 athletes and their families to attend competitions at Game On during the second week of July. “We are excited to expand the roster of sports being held at Game On this year,” said Kevin Cummings, Executive Director of the Bay State Games. “This state-of-the-art facility allows us to enhance the athlete and spectator experience and provide a true Olympic-style multi-sport atmosphere for our participants.”

An additional feature in 2023 is that

in over a dozen sports, athletes who win a gold, silver, or bronze medal at the 2023 Bay State Games will qualify to participate in the 2024 State Games of America in San Diego, California. The State Games of America feature more than 8,000 athletes from over 30 different state games programs nationwide. To see the list of qualifying nations, please visit www.stategamesofamerica.com.

In addition to sports programming, Bay State Games offer college scholarships, a sportsmanship initiative, college internship opportunities, and a High School Ambassador program.

For more information on all sports in the 2023 Summer Games, links to online registration, and information on other programs, go to www.baystategames.org.

For questions, email info@baystategames.org or call 781-932-6555.

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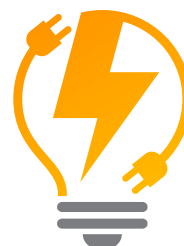
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MEMORIAL DAY from page 1

she is fortunate to live in a city that treats its service members with dignity and respect and never forgets the fallen.

"We're definitely military-proud and support our veterans. We have 4,500 veterans who live in Chicopee. Of course, we have Westover (Air Reserve Base) here as well so a lot of folks who do work here may not live here, but this is a military-friendly community, and everybody knows it," Arriaga said.

Arriaga reflected on the plaza, which features monuments honoring the lives of all Chicopee soldiers who lost their lives in various American conflicts, dating back to the Civil War. The most recent addition to the plaza is the War on Terror Monument, which was dedicated on May 19, 2018.

"It's great because you can come here and actually pay your respects," Arriaga said. "The War on Terror, the newest addition to it, they all speak volumes, but that one sits special with me given that I served and lost sisters and brothers in arms to that war. This is just a great reflection of how powerful (it is to) honor and respect our military veterans."

Only several years ago, consecutive Memorial Day ceremonies were limited in size due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Director of Veteran Services Stephanie Shaw is thrilled that the ceremony has returned to its normal capacity and continues to gain momentum each year.

"I love seeing it grow. I'm so



STAFF PHOTO BY DALTON ZBIERSKI

Veterans salute, standing next to a memorial at Veterans Memorial Plaza on May 29.

glad that the bands were available this year. We missed them last year," noting that students from each of Chicopee's high schools and middle schools performed on Memorial Day.

"I think adding the musical pieces just gives everyone a moment to breathe and reflect on all the words that have just been said. The musical pieces that we chose this year were really poignant and appropriate," she continued.

From senior citizens to local students, Shaw was proud to see multiple generations of Chicopee residents involved in Monday's ceremony. She complimented Chicopee High School's JROTC students, who were also present.

Shaw said her focus is already onto the next big event, and multiple

are around the corner, including Purple Heart Day and the ribbon-cutting ceremony for the Western Massachusetts Post 9/11 and Service Dog Memorial Park, she said.

Before turning the page on Memorial Day, Shaw looked back on what was a proud day for the city of Chicopee, as residents remembered.

"I think it's important that we keep doing this and that we say their names and that we honor them. The crowd today was beautiful," she said. "I love this (plaza) because I think it speaks to everyone on some level, and I think what's really nice is having this many people out here in this space with us lets me know and kind of restores my faith in humanity that there are people who understand what this day is about. It's not just picnics."

BELANGER from page 1

American Legion 452 since 2007.

Stephanie Shaw, director of Veteran Services, presided over the ceremony, welcoming guests including past recipients, City Council and School Committee members, veteran auxiliary organization members, city employees and more.

The Chicopee High School AFJROTC presented the colors, with Sidney Benoit singing the National Anthem.

Jacqueline Lynch, vice president of the Chicopee Historical Society, shared the story of Tracy, for which the award is named after. He received the Medal of Honor during the Civil War for two acts of bravery and worked at the Dwight Company and Ames Manufacturing Company after moving to Chicopee with his wife, Mary, in 1853.

"Remembering our warriors and honoring their heroic spirit of duty makes us a better community, with stronger ties to our country and to each other. It is in this spirit of doing we honor our award winner tonight," Lynch said.

Mayor John Vieau explained Belanger was nominated by three veteran associations and received numerous medals throughout his service. However, that's not why he was receiving the honor.

"It's his service to the City of Chicopee. That need to serve others is deep in his heart, and we are lucky enough to be exposed to such a big heart and hard work ethic," Vieau said.

Vieau highlighted Belanger's dedication to veterans through his leadership at the American Legion Post 452, opening doors to other veteran associations to hold their meetings, volunteering at the Soldiers Home in Holyoke and supporting fundraisers for Wreaths



STAFF PHOTO BY KRISTIN RIVERS

(L to R) Mayor John Vieau presents the 2023 Charles H. Tracy Award to SSG Brian Belanger, Army, during the 2023 Charles H. Tracy Veteran of the Year Ceremony in City Hall auditorium.

Across America, breast cancer research, the Salvation Army, Veterans Fund and more.

"Just about any time anyone needs something, he always comes running, eager to help and with a smile on his face," Vieau said.

Shaw said the ceremony is important to honor veterans, as they deserve it.

"I think it's really important to make sure we give credit where credit is due. I find so many of our veterans have that selfless service, they put their buddies before themselves, the mission before self, the whole mentality," Shaw said. "I think it's important that as a community we make them stop and just feel that appreciation."

Belanger was humbled by the honor.

"It's a long time coming. I've dedicated a lot of my time and efforts with the City of Chicopee and turn around to make sure our veterans are heard in Western Mass.,"

Belanger said.

Belanger added he always says, "It's not always about me, but our veterans," emphasizing the support the American Legion 452 Board of Directors has given him.

"So I cannot accept the award just myself, but with the American Legion 452," Belanger said.

Belanger asked the community "to remember a fallen veteran on Memorial Day."

"It is a day to remember somebody. An uncle, an aunt, a brother, a sister, a friend, someone you went to school with. Take a moment to remember that person and what they've given: the ultimate price," Belanger said.

Belanger encouraged anyone considering serving the military to do so.

"I feel that it's an honor to serve and a privilege. It's an opportunity to give back to the community," Belanger said.

JOB OPENING

STAFF WRITER

Turley Publications, based in Palmer, is seeking a storyteller who is curious about everything, and who understands how town government works to join our team of weekly reporters.

Experience in covering town government is a huge plus, and any experience in community journalism is as well. Staff writers cover all aspects of communities from features to municipal meetings to crimes and fires. Successful candidates must have people skills, plenty of curiosity and able to tell a story.

If you're a self-starter who enjoys community journalism and who can envision themselves connecting with our communities, we encourage you to apply for this position. Not a remote position.

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- Proficiency in Associated Press style
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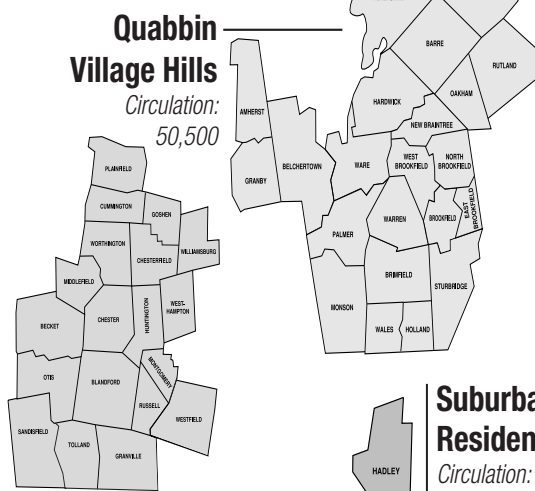
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You can't talk to your Ancestors

But you can 'talk' to your Descendants!

By Dave Robison
Professional genealogist,
Old Bones of New England, LLC

Growing up, my sister and I were always told that what we didn't know wouldn't hurt us. About our family, that is. Later in life, I realized that they were of the mindset that family history was something that didn't need to be shared with me, my older sister or anyone for that matter. I firmly believe that this was the initial motivation for my interest in genealogy and family history.

For the first seven years of my life, we lived in a duplex that my grandmother owned. She lived on one side with her two unmarried daughters, my mother's sisters, we lived on the other. I could occasionally hear a good story from Aunt Gert. My belief now is that she was somewhat surprised that I didn't know this, or I didn't know that, and she was happy to fill in some gaps.

My grandmother died in 1960 about five years after my grandfather. I barely remember him, and I really don't have any clear memories of her. I was simply too young. And by the way, while my mother was born in Springfield, my father was born in Alabama. He was put in the US Navy in January of 1942, a few weeks after Pearl Harbor. He never spoke of his father who divorced his mother, my "Grannie" who moved from Alabama to Massachusetts during World War II. Those events are family stories which I can save for another time.

Here's my point about talking to ancestors. In 1999, I was eager to get answers to about 20,000 questions! Since I knew my father was born in Evergreen, Alabama, I contacted the Evergreen Library and Historical Society. When I mentioned that I was interested in researching my father's family, the historian excitedly said, "Well, if you are interested in the family history of anyone from here in Evergreen, you will be best served by contacting Mrs. Sarah R. Coker. She's been researching the families of Evergreen for at least 30 years. You should write her a letter as she doesn't use a computer as she's about 80-years-old."

I was given her address with the advice to write large and clear as Mrs. Coker's vision was far less than ideal. Off goes the letter. In a couple of weeks, I received a reply. Much to my undying surprise, the "R" in the name "Sarah R Coker" stood for Robison. She was my great aunt, a sibling of the paternal grandfather I never knew.

In 2001, I was in a business that took

me all over the US. I managed to make it down to Evergreen a few months after my first contact with Aunt Sarah. She had mountains of family history: photos, letters, family charts...everything, all gathered without the aid of a computer! She allowed me to take whatever I wanted down to the local library to make copies. The biggest surprise was the fact that she had grade school pictures of me and of my sister. "Where did you get these, Aunt Sarah?" She replied, "Why your Daddy would send them to me every year!" I was thrilled to see that she cherished them, but I was irritated knowing that my father never mentioned that this woman existed! By the way, Aunt Sarah was one of eight siblings. Other than the fact that I knew my paternal grandfather existed, I knew nothing about his brothers and sisters.

Here's my lesson for everyone. I spent hours with a digital tape recorder asking Aunt Sarah a million questions. Getting her to talk was easy. She was one who, if you asked her what time it was, she'd teach you how to make a watch! I've got hours and hours of fascinating family history!

Aunt Sarah has been gone for over 20 years, but I've got her voice recorded and a treasure trove of her stories, my stories!

Since that time, I've learned how to go about setting up these interviews: the right questions to ask, the need to ask and then sit back and wait for the words to flow, and not wear out your welcome. Aside from Aunt Sarah, the longest session I've had was about 5 hours with a cousin here in Massachusetts who I "found" through a little bit of basic family research. And she had some very interesting family stories to tell. The only disappointment was the fact that although she grew up in Enfield, MA, she couldn't identify the people in the pictures I brought with me, which I hoped she could have identified.

In conclusion, ask questions such as "Where did you go on Thanksgiving when you were five or six-years-old? Who cooked and what was your favorite course? What did the kitchen smell like?" I can suggest about 150 or so questions that should elicit interesting responses.

The Worcester Public Library, 3 Salem St., Worcester is sponsoring my presentation on this topic. It is free and has been scheduled for July 1, 2023, at 4:15 pm. It will be a virtual event. Register through the "Calendar of Events" at www.mywpl.org and a Zoom link will be sent to your email. The summer calendar will be published soon. If you have any questions, you may contact Joy Hennig at jhennig@mywpl.org.

Random Acts of Kindness

Keystone Flowers Give-a-way

By Barb Turcotte

Flowers, flowers, flowers, smiles, smiles, smiles and then more of both! That's exactly what we got from everyone involved! With flowers galore, in mid-April we traveled to the Hampshire Mall and the Holyoke Mall to do Random Acts of Kindness. We gave many unsuspecting shoppers a beautiful flower for no other reason than to just improve their day!

We put smiles on approximately 700 faces of flower recipients, however, the good feelings and smiles that this produced went way beyond these people. Various florists that donated all these flowers for the residents at Keystone Commons in Ludlow to do this fun Random Acts of Kindness day were so happy and excited about this idea that they were extremely generous with their donations. The observers of us doing these gestures also had huge smiles on their faces and the residents giving out the flowers, well their faces glowed with permanent smiles as they greeted the shoppers and gave them a flower. What happiness this produced for everyone!

Some shoppers thought we were selling the flowers and then their faces lit up as we explained our reason for doing this, just to make their day a better one. Others tried to give us money as a donation, which of course we refused; we were doing this as our way of giving back to the community and doing Random Acts of Kindness.

One recipient shared it was her birthday, another receiving a yellow flower told us it was her grandmother's favorite color so we gave her two so she could pass one along to grandma and another even had tears in her eyes when handed the flower. We just never know what another is going through and for us; it was sheer joy to make their day a better one by giving them a gorgeous fresh flower.

Through the incredible contributions of the following florists, we were able to be successful in our vision of the day! Participants were: Floral Concepts by Tom in Agawam; in Chicopee was Golden Blossom Flowers and McClelland's Florist; Mark Henry Florist in Indian Orchard, Kinderhook Flowers in Hampden also helped along with Heavenly Inspirations and Randall's Farm Greenhouse, both in Ludlow; Wilbraham Florist in Wilbraham and Durocher Florist in West Springfield were also among the donors. Over 700 thank you's to you for your amazing generosity!

We wanted to make sure every recipient knew who the businesses were

that participated so made a small spread sheet listing each florist's name, address with their phone number and attached one to each flower! Now this certainly would have been a daunting task to take on myself so incorporated some wonderful friends of mine for their help with this project. Guess what?? More smiles! One of the florists had over ordered Easter Lilly's so offered them to me which in turn I offered to each friend who had helped me tag the 700 flowers! It was definitely a win-win, fun kind of day!

When I explained our desire of putting smiles on people's faces one florist shared with me that one of her own customers had done just that! She was a regular customer who weekly bought a bouquet of flowers for a relative and on a particular day asked for additional bouquets explaining her plan was to randomly give them out to people to brighten their day. How cool is that! Kindness really starts with each of us, so let the thoughtfulness start with each of you!

Beyond just being a beautiful addition to someone's surroundings and improving their mood, did you know that there are proven facts that flowers are beneficial to one's health? Here's just a few that I found interesting. They can reduce stress, help you focus, increase your energy, may help you physically heal, can aid in relaxation and also can increase creativity, innovation as well as productivity. Here's a great one too, they can improve your relationship and bolster your sex appeal! And one additional fact we can boast that we found to be true is that men love receiving flowers too!

So next time you want to improve your own or someone else's day, consider doing it with flowers and supporting one of the above mentioned florists as they supported us. You'll know you're at the right florist when you see a beautiful window cling-on designed by Turley Publications saying they are a 'Random Acts of Kindness Business.' Thank you to everyone who helped make this such a memorable day for so many! Kindness really does make a difference!

If you would like to tell me a story about a Random Act of Kindness please contact me at bdt514@aol.com or 413-788-7514. You don't need one, but if you'd like to have a predesigned flyer to include with your next gesture, let me know. It's a way to keep the memory alive long after the gesture is done. Who knows, you might see your story in this column, 'Just 'Cause' you witnessed, did or received something nice being done. See you next month with another Random Act of Kindness!

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