



FEED THE KIDS
Monson residents honored
 Page 3



COMMUNITY
50s Sock Hop rocked Amvets
 Page 7



SPORTS
Young Panthers lose to Ware
 Page 9

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MONSON

ZBA approves apartment variance

By Harrison Giza
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MONSON – The Zoning Board of Appeals approved the creation of an in-law apartment at their March 28 meeting.

Resident Antonio Diaz asked the board to grant a variance allowing him to construct an accessory apartment in the garage of his property.

ZBA member Teresa Sobanska-Hynkiw presented the application to the board.

"The applicant seeks a special permit to construct an accessory apartment in the existing garage located at 127 Stafford Rd map 101 and parcel 006 A," Sobanska-Hynkiw said. "There are no proposed changes to the exterior or the footprint of the existing structure. The property is zoned rural residential."

Diaz was then invited to speak in front of the board regarding his pending case.

"I am just looking for an accessory apartment for my father in-law," Diaz said. "He has Alzheimer's and dementia, so all the bedrooms in the main part of the house are on the top floor, so it is a fall hazard for him for the stairs and he is having a difficult getting into the shower. So we are going to put in a rolling shower for him long term. Pretty much that is it."

The board did not ask any questions of Diaz.

"So this is basically what we usually call an in-law apartment," ZBA member Ron Fussell said.

David Sanborn advocated for Diaz's request.

"I am glad to hear that it is a relative," Sanborn said. "Because the bylaw assumes that it really is going to be a relative and if it were n'o a relative, it would be a multi-family situation. Like if you were trying to rent it to a third party unrelated. It would be a multi-family and then you would have to have 10 acres, so, it is really nice that you are taking care of your father in-law."

Diaz said the apartment was necessary to assist with his father-in-law's care.

"Somebody got to do it, right?"

ZBA | page 3

EDUCATION

School Committee sets goals for District Improvement Plan

By Marcelo Gusmão
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PALMER – The School Committee met on Wednesday, April 10, to receive student reports and updates to the Strategic Plan.

Superintendent Matthew Francis made a presentation on entry findings to outline a path for the Strategic Plan.

"Over the summer we're going to start working on our district core values," Francis said. "The plan is to come up with a list of roughly 10 that then we would send out to key stakeholders – teachers, paraprofessionals, all the faculty and staff,



Turley photo Harrison Giza

school committee, and then the community as a whole – our goal in the fall is to identify five that we can call out District Core Values."

Francis said that once the District Core Values have been identified, the district would come up with a vision and a District Mission, which would lead into creating an instructional strategy. This would all lead to creating a comprehensive district strategic plan to be approved by the School Committee in, at Francis's estimation, three to four years.

"I think it's important that we pause, before we even start to work on the instructional strategy," Francis said. "I think it's crucial for us

as a district to define our core values – and we're looking at five to six core values – create the District Mission and Vision, and that will then drive our instructional strategy."

The committee members were supportive of this outline. Committee member Erica Nadeau agreed with the instructional strategy as an opportunity to take stock, asking about how the strategy might change with updates to the District Improvement Plan.

"I think this is excellent because as a first-year School Committee member, I didn't know what

PALMER | page 5

Solar eclipse of the Heart



Submitted photo

Old Mill Pond students came together to form a giant heart for their Total Eclipse of the Heart.

Old Mill Pond Students Commemorate Solar Eclipse By Making One Giant Heart

By Harrison Giza
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PALMER - Old Mill Pond School is a place for students to learn, grow and make memories with classmates. It should be no

surprise to anyone that the school put their entire heart and soul into their Solar Eclipse event.

Old Mill Pond Principal Holly-Beth Riopel was ecstatic to share the news.

"We had an amazing activity in which we lined all our stu-

dents and staff up in the shape of a heart," Riopel said. "This was our Total Eclipse of the Heart for the Solar Eclipse day."

There are four types of solar eclipses: Total, partial, hybrid, and annular. The type of eclipse

OMP ECLIPSE | page 4

MONSON

Board rescinds vote to fund basketball trip

By Marcelo Gusmão
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MONSON – At the April 9 Select Board meeting, the Board rescinded its vote to pay transportation fees for an imminent basketball trip.

Erin Grassetti appeared before the Select Board to talk about Jeffrey Lord's request for \$1400 at a previous Select Board meeting, for a bus ride for between five and seven students.

"I just want to go back to June 13, 2023 when, under community business, Ed Myers stood in for Lord, and it was 10 students at that time for \$1500," Grassetti said. "One parent paid the bill, and Mr. Lord would like to have been reimbursed."

Grassetti quoted Select Board members John Morrell and Pat Oney as saying that this could not be funded all the time, and to make sure that this did not happen again in the future.

"Once again, it happened," Grassetti said. "As a parent of four children and a stay-at-home mom, summer comes, vacations come; I set aside money for my kids to participate in any kind of camp or any extracurricular activity that they would like to be involved in, because I feel that's my responsibility. I don't feel it's the taxpayers' responsibility."

Jeffrey Lord approached the Board to say there was some misinformation relating to the trip.

"As a correction, a parent is paying for the entire cost of the session at a place called the court in Enfield and it's \$200 per student," Lord said, and later clarified that he was the parent in question, adding, "I don't have enough money to also pay for the bus."

"What we've asked for the town to help us with is for transportation of seven families that otherwise would have to all take off from work because parents don't get off when school has a break," Lord said.

Lord noted that the town had agreed to pay for the bus transportation, but not the camp. He noted that to do so would have set the precedent, and that the Select Board had made it clear it did not intend for this precedent to be ongoing.

"I heard very clearly that the Board did not want to set another precedent for the future," Lord said. "But based on the vote, which was done in good faith that no inaccu-

MONSON | page 6

MONSON

Town Council addresses ARPA funds

By Marcelo Gusmão
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PALMER – At last week's Town Council meeting, the council discussed the allocation of ARPA funds and how the money might be distributed towards town departments.

Palmer Street Sinkhole

The council acknowledged the work done to fix the sinkhole on Palmer Street. Town Manager Brad Brothers said that 600 feet of road was paved over and is now usable.

"I just want to thank everyone who was involved in that project," Brothers said. "To turn that project around as fast as they did is really unbelievable. I know a lot of favors

were called in from our contractors, and there were a lot of 24-hour shifts, I think for three days in a row and then we got to Easter.

"Everyone stepped up, and it just shows community values and what Palmer's all about," Brothers said.

The sinkhole originally happened on March 28, caused by a collapsed 15-inch stormwater drain about 40 feet uphill from the sinkhole's location.

"Everything has been cleaned up," Brothers said. "The trains were actually rolling on April 2, so within five days we had trains rolling through there again."

The downside, Brothers said, would be that there will probably be some big bills associated with the repairs. He advised that the town hold off on appropriating any ARPA funds until the bills have come in.

"I met with Representative Todd Smola on Friday, he did not

feel like we were going to have any state funding available to us," Brothers warned.

Brothers was hesitant to speculate about a dollar amount, but said that ARPA might be the best place to allocate funds to pay for these repairs.

Comments on ARPA funds

During Public Comments, resident Steven Kosmider approached the council to ask about the plans for the ARPA funds. Kosmider advocated that portions of the funds be allocated to the villages.

"Spread it around, is what I'm saying," Kosmider said. "The villages are not getting their share of the tax dollar, not even close."

Kosmider asked about the plans for a pickleball court, which the council said was part of an ongoing discussion. However, Councilor Karl Williams explained why space for recreational activities is a

COUNCIL | page 6

COMMUNITY

Purple Heart program gets ready to celebrate decorated veterans

By Harrison Giza
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PALMER - The Palmer Business Partnership, Light Up Palmer, is getting ready to roll out their Purple Heart Program.

Director of Veterans Services Tina Brohman loves being able to help Palmer's veterans community as well as aid The Palmer Business Partnership any way she can.

"I just started the job in January of 2023," Brohman said. "It is important for Palmer and its residence. So many of them have said to me that 'it is important to remember' and that 'so many people forget' and that can break your heart."

Brohman cares deeply about Palmer's cause for boosting veteran morale.

"The sacrifice to even go," Brohman said. "And then there is the sacrifice where you've given your body and even pieces of your body to, you know, the service and for your country. But also of course the ultimate sacrifice is giving your life. These groups of individuals who earn the Purple Heart have made a huge sacrifice for their country. Being injured in the line of duty and, you know, sometimes you just hear some crazy stories about how things happen. It could be saving others or it could be while doing something completely different."

LIGHT UP | page 6



SPORTS

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SOFTBALL

Mustangs can't solve South Hadley ace

By Tim Peterson
Sports Correspondent

SOUTH HADLEY—Whenever Ella Schaeffer is standing in the middle of the pitcher's circle, the South Hadley varsity softball team has a very good chance of winning a game.

The hard throwing junior righthander came very close to hurling a perfect game, as the Lady Tigers defeated Valley Wheel League rival Monson, 9-0, in the home opener, last Monday afternoon (April 8).



Emma Bannon fields a grounder to second.

"I've coached a lot of very good pitchers during my coaching career, but Ella is probably the best. She's always in control out there," said South Hadley varsity softball coach Junior Perez, who was previously the junior varsity softball coach at Chicopee High School for 15 years.

"If we're able to score a couple of early runs, it's like having a seven or eight run lead."

In the Lady Tigers first meeting of the regular season against the Lady Mustangs, Schaeffer allowed two infield hits and didn't issue any walks.

"The South Hadley pitcher throws the ball very hard. She'll probably be the best pitcher we're going to face this season," said Monson head coach Jill Carneglia. "We just couldn't get our bats on the ball against her in today's game."

Schaeffer also had 18 strikeouts in the Lady Tigers home opener, which raised her career total to 496.

"I can't wait until I reach 500 career strikeouts," Schaeffer said. "My next goal is to break the school strikeout record." That record is currently held by Courtney Kapinos, who finished her varsity softball career with 531 K's.

The state strikeout record is 1,002, which is held by Emma Mendoker, who played softball at Amherst Regional.

Schaeffer opposed Monson junior righthander Molly Szado for the fifth time in a varsity softball game.

Szado and her teammates swept the season series two years ago.

Szado struck out 19 batters in the first meeting of the 2022 regular season, which was a 7-2 victory.

The Lady Mustangs posted a 1-0 shutout win in the second meeting.

Schaeffer and her teammates swept the season series a year ago. The final score of both games was 3-0. Schaeffer also had 19 strikeouts in the two games.



Molly Szado sends a pitch away.

"Molly and I have played basketball together for the South Hadley DARE Organization," Schaeffer said. "She's a very good pitcher and it has been a lot of fun facing her."

Both teams had a 1-0 record entering their first meeting of the

2024 regular season.

The Lady Tigers put a lot of pressure on Szado during the first two innings, but they failed to score.

Senior shortstop Jenna Bo-

MONSON | page 10

BASEBALL



Sebastian Mayberry sends a pitch to the plate.

Young Panthers fall to Ware



Brendan Hess watches the bouncing grounder into his glove.

Turley photos by David Henry
www.sweetdogphotos.com

LACROSSE

Rams double up on Mustangs



Brody St. Martin observes the offensive area looking to make a pass.



Samuel Lauzier looks to make a pass on the run.



Oswaldo Nieves sends a pass up the field.



Landon Couture sprints for the opposing goal.

SOUTH HADLEY - Using neighbor South Hadley High School's turf field, Granby boys lacrosse hosted Monson last Monday night. The Mustangs, which

co-op with Pathfinder, fell on the road 12-6 to the Rams. The Rams were led by Riley Goodhind with four goals and three assists. Kamydyn Lopez and Connor McDonnell

had three goals and two assists each. Monson is 1-1 this season while the Rams are out to a 2-1 mark.

BASEBALL

Monson baseball starts 0-2

MONSON - Last week, Monson finally got its regular season underway following a few rainouts. The Mustangs suffered a 16-5 loss against Pioneer Valley Regional followed by a 1-0 loss against South Hadley. The Mustangs hope to rebound against Granby on April 18 at 4 p.m. That will be followed by a big matchup with Ware at Dunkin Donuts Park in Hartford on Friday, April 19 at 6:30 p.m.

LACROSSE

Warriors suffer overtime loss at Agawam

By Tim Peterson
Sports Correspondent

AGAWAM—The Agawam boys' varsity lacrosse team hasn't had very much success against Tantasqua Regional during the past decade. That all changed in the only meeting of the regular season between the two squads.

After battling back from a three-goal deficit to tie the score late in the fourth period, Agawam junior Riley Jorgensen netted the game-winning goal with 1:54 remaining in overtime. It gave his team a thrilling 8-7 victory over the Warriors at Harmon A Smith Field,

TANTASQUA | page 10



Matt Santos fires a pitch away.

PALMER - Last Wednesday night, the Palmer High School baseball team, which nearly did not have enough players to start the season, suffered a 13-2 loss against rival Ware. The Indians scored six runs in the third inning to take a lead and Palmer came back with a pair. But the Indians were able to run away with the game from there. Palmer is out to an 0-3 start while Ware is 2-1 to start the year.



Grayson Griswold makes a throw to first.