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COMMUNITY



New Economic Development in Worcester

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by DAVID SULLIVAN, DIRECTOR OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT & BUSINESS RECRUITMENT

WORCESTER - Despite some concerns around the country of an impending economic malaise, development momentum remains strong in Worcester at the beginning of 2023. With several keystone projects already underway, a flurry of other multifamily, life sciences, and industrial developments were announced in the past couple of months, proposing to revitalize unused lots and vacant buildings across the city to create new housing and jobs for all income levels.

In the City of Worcester, an estimated total of 5,000 units of housing in multifamily projects are either proposed, in pre-development stages, or are currently under construction—collectively estimated to cost more than \$778 million. Of those units, 615 are income-restricted affordable housing, being constructed at a cost of approximately \$360 million. Over 2,000 of the total units in the pipeline are permitted or currently under construction.

Overall, there is \$2.6 billion in new construction taking place in New England's second-largest city.

These housing units seek to address a wide variety of needs—public housing, income-restricted senior living, housing for young professionals and recent college graduates, and more. Ultimately however, the

construction of new housing units of all types will help the city address an upward price pressure which has steadily increased housing costs over the past few years.

For a city with a population growth that has outpaced its housing production, the supply of housing is shorter than the demand for it. The city grew by 25,000 residents between 2010 and 2020, while only 10,000 units of housing were created, according to U.S. Census Bureau data.

The new construction will bring vacant or unimproved properties onto the city's tax rolls to help fund public services. Nearly all the new housing projects involve either converting underutilized buildings or empty parcels.

A fast-growing city not only needs housing, however, but new jobs as well. Several developments, particularly life sciences developments and some industrial developments, aim to bring these new jobs to the city.

1,000 Units of Housing Around Polar Park

While new housing developments are proposed or underway in every part of the city, Polar Park and the Canal District are at the epicenter of much of the new development.

Nearly 1,000 units of housing are going up just in

the properties surrounding Polar Park, the city's new Triple-A baseball stadium for the Worcester Red Sox which had more than half a million visitors in 2022.

Three major housing developments are taking place here. Madison Properties' 228-unit building, dubbed SOMA for "South of Madison", is currently under construction and is expected to be completed in the coming months. Madison Properties plans to build a second, 125-unit building behind it, along with a new hotel, lab building, and an office building overlooking left field inside Polar Park.

Nearby, Table Talk Pies' former bakery in Kelley Square was demolished last year to make way for what was announced in January as a 473-unit complex of three buildings.

Boston Capital Development acquired the site in 2022 and is currently constructing the first phase, a 7-story, 83-unit building entirely reserved for households earning 60% or less of the area median income. Construction is expected to be complete by 2024.

A second phase of the project will renovate the Table Talk Pie Store building on Green Street into retail space and 15 units of housing. The third phase

New Developments, pg 10





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Each quarter, 20,000 copies are mailed to 6,000 members and business professionals and roughly 13,000 City of Worcester registered voters. The remainder are distributed among area businesses. If you're interested in being a point of distribution, or would like to know more about placing an advertisement in the Chamber Exchange, please contact Kristen Luna at kluna@worcesterchamber. org. To contact the editorial staff, please email Caitlin Lubelczyk at clubelczyk@worcesterchamber.org.

Unless otherwise noted, the editorial content herein is the opinion of the Worcester Regional Chamber of Commerce and does not reflect the opinion of any specific member, business, or partner of the Chamber.

Worcester Regional Chamber CALENDAR of EVENTS

The Breakfast Club | AC Marriott

Thursday, March 2, 2023 7:00am-9:00am

Presenting Sponsor: Fidelity Bank **Supporting Sponsor:** UniCare

Construction & Real Estate Roundtable: Brownfields with MassDEP and EPA | Chamber Offices

Wednesday, March 15, 2023 11:00am-12:00pm Chamber Offices

Presenting Sponsor: Bowditch Attorneys
Supporting Sponsor: Building Evolution Corp.

Seminar Series: Basic Tax Procedure For Financial Professionals with Mike Duffy of Fletcher Tilton | Chamber Offices

Thursday, March 16, 2023 9:00am-10:30am

Business After Hours | 107 Tap

Thursday, March 23, 2023 5:00pm-7:00pm

Leadership Worcester Info Session | LIVE on Zoom

Tuesday, April 4, 2023 12:00pm-1:00pm

Presenting Sponsors: Commonwealth
Consulting Group and Countrybank

Diverse Young Professionals Night Out | Nuestra

Wednesday, April 5, 2023 5:00pm-7:00pm

Sponsor: UMass Chan Medical School **Sponsor:** Hanover Insurance Group

Seminar Series: Diversity Certification through the Massachusetts Supplier Diversity Office | Chamber Offices

Wednesday, April 12, 2023 9:00am-10:00am

Financial Services Roundtable: The Future of Community Banking with Marco Bernasconi | LIVE on Zoom

Wednesday, April 26, 2023 10:00am-11:00am

 $\hbox{*All events are subject to time and location change, for the post accurate list of events visit} \\ worcester chamber. or g.$

VOLUNTEER INCOME TAX ASSISTANCE (VITA) PROGRAM ASSISTS INDIVIDUALS AND FAMILIES WITH TAX FILING PREPARATION



by TIMOTHY P. MURRAY PRESIDENT AND CEO

or working Americans and residents of the Commonwealth the beginning of the new year is not just about new starts and resolutions but also the beginning of the preparation process for the filing of tax returns on earnings from the year previous

with the state and federal government. Towards that end, the Worcester Regional Chamber of Commerce is proud to partner with the United Way of Central Massachusetts and other stakeholders as a supporter of the Worcester Free Tax Service Coalition (Coalition). The principal members of the Coalition, along with the United Way, include the Main South Community Development Corporation, The Community Builders of Plumley Village, Worcester Community Action Council and Worcester State University.

The Coalition helps staff, together with trained community volunteers from the Internal Revenue Service's (IRS) Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) program, to assist individuals and families with tax filing preparation. In particular, the VITA program volunteers seek to make sure that eligible filers are aware of the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC). In many instances this tax preparation assistance is free of charge. The EITC is a refundable tax credit that returns cash back to eligible working families that make \$60,000 or less. As stated in the Coalition's literature "the program helps working families jumpstart their savings, reduce debt, and invest in the community."

At the recent Coalition kickoff event, Tim Garvin the President and CEO of the United Way said, "last year the Coalition prepared over 2,200 federal and state tax returns for low- and moderate-income families in Central Massachusetts free of charge and that more than \$2.6 million was returned to those families." There are numerous stories of how these earned refunds have assisted families and interjected dollars back into the Central Mass economy. Worcester Mayor Joseph M. Petty added, "if one were to add up the 20 years that the Coalition has been doing this work, it totals \$43 million dollars back to individuals and families benefiting Worcester and area businesses."

The VITA volunteers are IRS trained and certified and are taught to prepare basic tax returns. They come from many of our local banks, financial institutions, and local colleges. Tania Medina, an Assistant Vice President, and Mortgage Specialist at Unibank has led a team of her Unibank colleagues for the past 6 years. She called it "an extremely rewarding experience that really helps individual and families" in her remarks at the kickoff.

The EITC is one of the few programs that has enjoyed fairly broad bipartisan support in the United States Congress since its inception as part of the Tax Reform Act of 1986. Since such time EITC eligibility has been expanded and continued and numerous states such as Massachusetts have added their own version of the EITC to reward working individuals and families at low and moderate income levels.

The Coalition is now offering in person and virtual tax preparation. People can go to Unitedwaycm.org/our-work/strategic-initiatives to learn more and make an appointment. VITA locations include the Main South CDC, The Community Builders at Plumley Village, Worcester Community Action Council, and Worcester State University. The Chamber has asked all of our members businesses and organizations to help share this information so eligible employees or self-employed individuals can take advantage of this tax credit.



Chamber staff accepts Best of Business Award for 2023

The Worcester Regional Chamber of Commerce was honored to receive the Worcester Business Journal's Best of Business (BOB) Award for Best Chamber in Central Massachusetts on January 26 at the Beechwood Hotel in Worcester.



LOOKING AHEAD TO **POLICIES OF 2023**



by ALEX GUARDIOLA, VICE PRESIDENT OF GOVERNMENT AFFAIRS AND PUBLIC POLICY

s we look ahead to quarter two and the rest of the year, there are some new laws that go into effect and pending bills that could potentially affect our business community. While I may sound repetitive at times regarding the City of Worcester's dual tax rate, it is necessary to continually remind

folks of the negative implications of having the seventh highest commercial and industrial tax rate in the Commonwealth. While the commercial property tax rate, in its own right, makes it difficult to do business here in the City, the other added costs such as surcharges and legal requirements that are continually added will make it even more problematic for businesses in the city.

Community Preservation Act

Last November, the residents of Worcester voted to implement the Community Preservation Act (CPA) by a narrow margin. The CPA levies a 1.5% surcharge on property taxes to acquire, create, and preserve open space, recreational spaces, and low-and moderate-income housing, as well as the acquisition, rehabilitation, and preservation of historical assets. While the Chamber was and continues to be supportive of historical preservation, affordable housing, and green spaces, we argued that it was not the right time to implement this act with all of the other available funds in both the city and state treasuries.

This initiative will disproportionately impact our business community as the average commercial CPA surcharge will be over \$600 per year compared to \$44 per year for the average homeowner. Businesses and residents will begin to see this charge on July 1 of this year.

Fair Share Amendment

Another initiative that was on last year's state ballot that received enough support to pass was the Fair Share Amendment or commonly known as the "Millionaire's tax". The approved initiative will add a new 4% surtax on incomes over \$1 million, with the revenue generated by that tax dedicated to education and transportation. The tax would be paid only on the amount of income above the first \$1 million, and that threshold would be adjusted annually to reflect any increases in cost of living. This surcharge has been in place since January 1, 2023.

Clean energy and Climate Plan

Former Governor Baker signed new climate legislation in March of 2021 to help reduce greenhouse gas emissions and to work towards Net Zero emissions in 2050. Part of the bill goes into effect in 2023. The legislation will authorize the Department of Energy Resources (DOER) to establish an energy code for newly constructed buildings that municipalities may adopt. This new code would need to be approved by a municipality and would implement certain restrictions on water use and what appliances are installed in newly constructed buildings.

Minimum Wage and Sunday Premium Pay

Beginning January 1, 2023, the minimum wage in the Commonwealth has been increased to \$15.00 an hour and the service rate to \$6.75. The increase is applied to all employees except for agricultural workers, members of religious orders, workers being trained in certain educational, nonprofit, or religious organizations, and outside salespeople. This is the last increase from the 2018 "Grand Bargain" that was negotiated in order to remove the ballot question that would have raised the minimum wage from \$10.00 per hour to \$15.00 per hour in one year. The deal was struck in order to give employers the ability to properly plan each year.

In that negotiation the retail premium pay or "time and one-half" on Sundays was to drop one tenth of a percent each year until 2023 when it will be even money to work on Sundays.

While the timeline for wage increase has ended, it is important to note that there are groups already lobbying legislators to increase the minimum wage to \$20.00 per hour. In the coming months we will most likely see advocates begin a campaign to either put a question on the ballot or get state Senators and Representatives to support legislation to again increase the minimum wage. I will continue to monitor and keep everyone up to date as plans emerge.

Inclusionary Zoning

The Worcester Regional Chamber of Commerce has been in favor of adding more housing on all levels from the onset. In 2019 the Chamber paid for an in-depth, independent housing study that was rolled out at our October Game Changers half day business expo. At that event, developers from all over the state and New England came to see what type of housing they could build here. The biggest take away from that event was that Worcester needed housing of all types. The study showed that we need not only luxury and market rate housing, but workforce and affordable as well.

Since that time, the city has seen an influx of developers wanting to build housing of all types including affordable. Trinity financial redeveloped the old Worcester Courthouse at One Main Street into different levels of affordable housing. 332 Main Street redeveloped about 60% of all its units into affordable; and Boston Capital at the old Table Talk Pie location at Kelley Square will be adding additional affordable housing just to name a few.

Now, the City of Worcester is introducing Inclusionary Zoning to help address the need for continued development of affordable housing which the Chamber has publicly supported. Inclusionary zoning is a requirement of a certain amount of affordable housing that must be included in every new multifamily development in a municipality. It is set by zoning ordinance, and 141 communities in Massachusetts have some form of inclusionary zoning.

The City of Worcester's Executive Office of Economic Development recently put forth an initial proposal to the City Council's Economic Development Committeewith a set of components that they recommend. The proposal stated that the ordinance should take effect on any multifamily development creating 12 or more new units, that the developer would have a choice between ensuring 15% of their habitable square footage is reserved for residents earning 80% of the Area Median Income (AMI) or 10% for 60% of AMI, that it would apply to both rentals and condos, that the affordability restriction would last thirty years, and that there would be an option for a paymentin-lieu-of construction which the Chamber is in support of.

This proposal was presented at the January 31 E.D. subcommittee meeting. At that meeting there were about two hours of public testimony. The majority of that testimony was from activists advocating for 60% AMI or lower. While the Chamber is in support of Inclusionary Zoning, requiring developers to use a 60% AMI will have them question the financial viability of the project and may chill development of the much-needed housing stock.

It is important to understand that developers have no requirement to come to Worcester. They have to make the numbers work for them, their lenders, and investors. If those numbers do not work because of over-arching requirements, they will move on to a different town or city that is also growing in population and needs housing with less restrictions. We all want to produce more affordable housing, we just have to be responsible about the way we are doing it. Having a heated debate with a stalemate at City Council will produce no Inclusionary Zoning housing versus some.

Other issues to watch for

This will be Governor Maura Healey's first budget proposal. All signs indicate that her budget will be out on March 1. There are some real funding needs here in Worcester and the region and the budget will be an important part of it.

Legalized sports betting has been implemented in Massachusetts as of January 31 of this year. Projections of tax revenues are high. Will that mean that with the combination of Cannabis and Sports Betting income tax will come down?

And lastly the Work and Family Mobility Act. The law, also known as the driver's license legislation, will allow Massachusetts residents who cannot provide proof of lawful presence in the country to get a driver's license or permit after meeting the other requirements. Earlier this year, the House and Senate both voted to override the Governor's veto of the driver's license bill, and the legislation then became Question 4 on the November ballot. Voters approved the question with a 53.7 percent majority. Will this help fill the gap of workforce while adding insured vehicles to the road? The law will go into effect on July 1, 2023.

More to come as bills are filed and budgets are recommended in the coming months.



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Fun and Games

— for a Successful — Startup Worcester Alum

by KEVIN SALEEBA,

CHAMBER CORRESPONDENT

NEW YORK - Peter Levin has built a successful business on fun and nonsense. He has gone from local startup entrepreneur to national party-game stardom in just a few years of graduating from his StartUp Worcester cohort in 2017.

Levin, a Startup Worcester alum, is the co-creator of Incohearent, a popular adult party board game. The goal of the game is for players to make sense of gibberish words and phrases from different categories ranging from risqué adult topics to general pop culture knowledge.

For instance, a player will hold up a card with the seemingly ridiculous lines like, dome hutch chin firm hey shun. Take a moment to figure it out ... If you guessed

"too much information", then you understand the basics to the game and why it's become popular at parties.

"The wildest thing when we first started, we thought games were silly," Levin said. His first business venture came about seven years ago as a StartUp Worcester cohort with his company Slydde, a company launched in February 2016 in the Worcester Canal District. The goal of that company, which was eventually acquired by the New York City-based Hooch Inc., operated as a digital wallet for customers of local bars and drinking establishments who wanted to avoid waiting in lines and did not want to carry a credit card or collect paper receipts.

After graduating from the StartUp Worcester program in 2017 and completing his time with Slydde, Levin and his partner Javier Quinonez wanted their new business venture to be "fun." When the idea of creating their own board game happened, they had doubts about their future.

"There's no business here, right?" he said. "I mean, we grew up playing games, but the switch never turned on in my brain that there's actually an entire industry behind something that I've become to love my entire life."

The game has since grown into "family-friendly" versions of the game, as well as some strictly "naughty" editions. Levin said many people have even incorporated the game into their drinking parties. Levin recently launched digital versions of his game as well as a TikTok game show called One Stop Trivia.

"The game is supposed to be fun and that's what we're about," he said. "People have remixed it in many different ways. The game comes with 500 of these cards that span all these different categories and it is fun to play with friends and family."

Levin has also done celebrity partnerships that has increased the exposure of his game. "We've had collaborations with big celebrities like Demi Levato. She released her recent album through Incohearent where all of her fans had to decode the songs of her new album."

As a member of the StartUp Worcester cohort, Levin said he is grateful for the



business opportunities the program provided him early in his career. StartUp Worcester is a program that encourages and nurtures new businesses in the Worcester area.

As a successful alum, Levin offered some sage advice to the cohorts of 2023. "The age-old wisdom is that time is the most valuable currency," he said. "In practice, that means that you should treat time like the most valuable resource, which means in the world of startups, launch ASAP."

Levin, who does consider his early venture with Slydde to be an unsuccessful one, said startups should not be afraid of releasing an imperfect product. In fact, they should immediately get their ideas out into the world. "Slydde is in the graveyard now," he said with a sad face. "It may be in the graveyard, but it's always here," he said as he pounded his fist to his heart, "and in here," pointing to his head. "My advice to the new cohorts is to put something that you're embarrassed about out into the world. This was our failure with Slydde. If we spend months trying to ship a perfect version of the product and then find out that people didn't want the product, then we wasted time. So, if you cherish time, do yourself a favor and just ship the product ... all you need to do is find one person that loves what you're doing and then go from there.

"We had these like grandiose visions of what a startup should be because of popular media or headlines in articles, but the much more productive way to run an experiment, which is what a startup is," he continued ... "is to put out the bare minimum and then learn from what a single customer tells you. It's that simple."

"What is a startup? It's a research experiment essentially. You have some hypothesis about the world and that you want to prove to be true or false. That same philosophy applies to writing. It applies to a piece of media. It applies to a physical product. It applies to a digital product. It's all the same.

"Get out there and learn from what the world tells you!"

To learn more about Hunch Studios and all Levin's new games, TV, and social media programming, visit him and his business at www.hunchstudios.com.

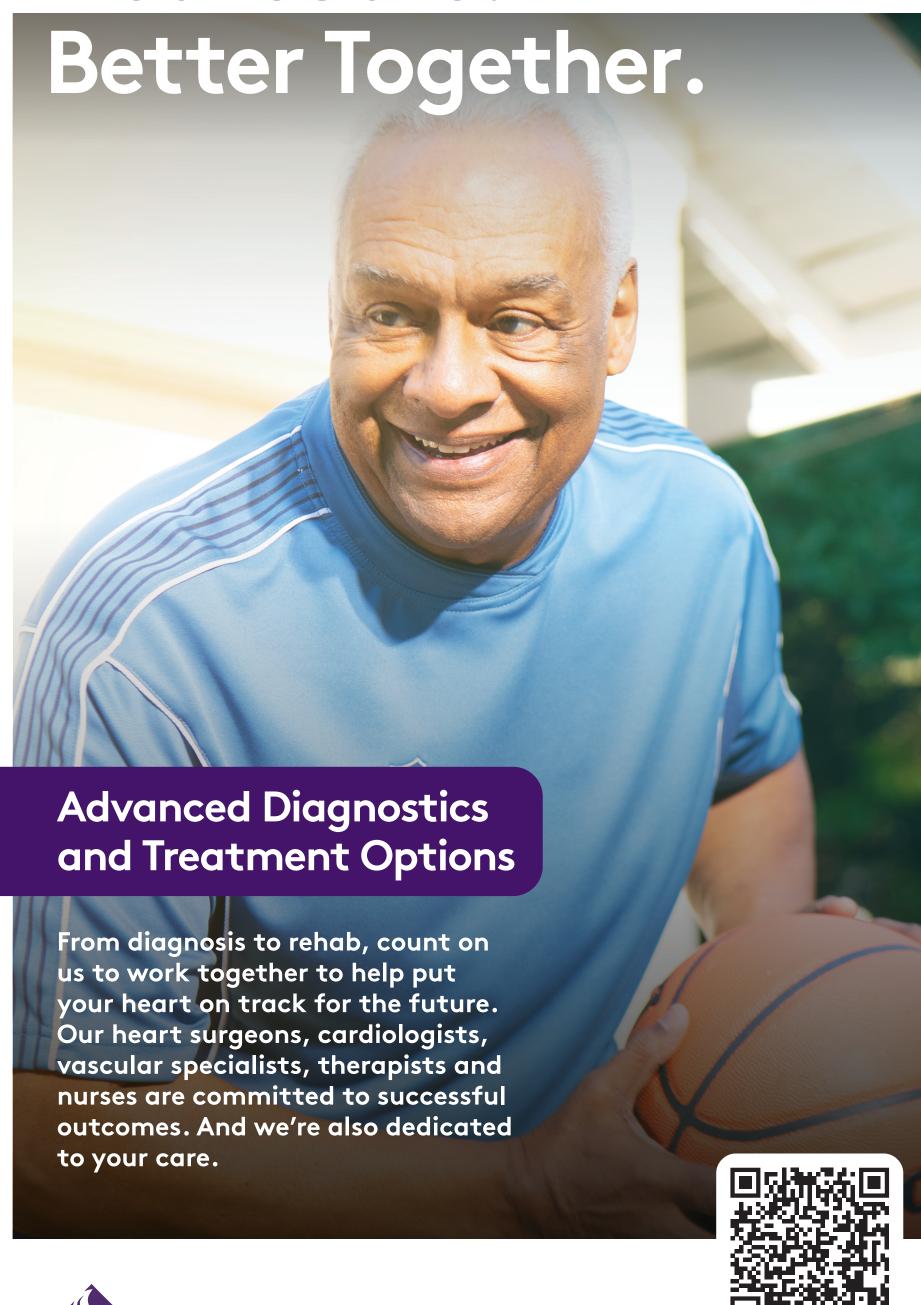




Ricky Williams Pays Visit to Worcester Cannabis Dispensary, Major Bloom

On January 22nd, Ricky Williams, who received the Heisman Trophy in 1998 as a senior at The University of Texas, becoming only the second Longhorn to receive the honor, paid a visit to the Worcester Cannabis Dispensary, Major Bloom. Williams met with fans, signed autographs, and posed for pictures as part of his promotional tour. After being suspended multiple times for cannabis use during his time in the NFL, Williams became a cannabis advocate, promoting the effective usage of cannabis products over pharmaceuticals. In 2021 he launched his own brand of cannabis called Highsman.

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Reducing Single-Use Plastics In The New Year

by MIRANDA HOTHAM, WORCESTER GREEN CORPS COORDINATOR



t's undisputed that the COVID-19 pandemic has changed the world around us in so many ways. While most people think about a new life with mask mandates, vaccines, and working from home, many environmentalists fear that the pandemic put a major hampering on sustainability practices, especially the attempts to reduce reliance on single-use plastics. If you set a resolution in 2020 to eliminate single-use plastics of any kind, you may have abruptly abandoned your new practice when panic and confusion began swirling with

information of the virus. You weren't alone, and many did not have a choice in the matter.

At the government level, numerous states and cities across the US reversed bans on plastic bags and straws, forcing consumers to abandon their eco-friendly practice in hopes that this would slow the spread of the virus. Here in Worcester, we saw a temporary ban on our reusable bags, leaving shoppers no other choice but to use the plastic and paper options in the grocery store. Coffee shops no longer allowed people to bring their reusable cups, and some places even reversed their ban on plastic straws and Styrofoam containers.

Additionally, the production of single-use plastics rose as a result of the pandemic. Originally, there was concern that the virus was able to be transmitted on almost anything, which led to a lot of confusion about what was safe to re-use and how to safely disinfect items. As a result of this misconception, many consumers and business operators turned to disposable products to ensure there was limited contamination. The pandemic also resulted in the increased use of disposable personal protective equipment (PPE) such as masks, gloves, and face shields. Lockdowns and social distancing also led to a spike in online shopping, which generated even more waste per household from all the packaging. The increase in demand for single-use plastics combined with the reduction in restrictive legislation, along with the spread of misinformation, exasperated an already out of control trash problem.

Nearly three years later, we now know much more about the virus and are better situated to commit to sustainable practices. While legislation is slowly enacted again, it is important that consumers also reduce the overall demand for single-use plastics. By decreasing consumption of these goods it is predicted that there will be a significant slowdown in production of new plastic items.

It seems like an overwhelming issue and individuals often feel that there is little they can do themselves to relieve the problems we're facing. But the truth of the matter is that consumers drive demand, and through a change in demand, consumers can help eliminate the reliance on single-use plastics.

To start, just consider one area of your life where you can reduce or eliminate single-use plastics. Maybe it's how you buy and store groceries, use personal hygiene products, order takeout and to-go drinks, or even your cleaning practices. There are now plenty of options available locally and online that allow you to switch to a sustainable model, it's just a matter of choosing where to start!

Still need some inspiration? Here are some ways that you can reduce your single-use plastics:

BUYING AND STORING GROCERIES

Go one step further than the reusable grocery bag, and consider bringing a reusable produce bag. If the option is available, buy wholesale to reduce the amount of packaging used. For storing food, eliminate saran wrap and plastic bags by opting for reusable storage options. You'd be surprised how many things exist now for food storage solutions!

PERSONAL HYGIENE PRODUCTS

Lots of products are now refillable, like shampoo, conditioner, body soap, hand soap, toothpaste, and floss! Shop at our local refillery or check online for sustainable products.

CLEANING PRODUCTS

Many cleaning companies have taken significant strides to reduce the amount of waste generated from their products. Consumers are now able to buy simple tablets or solutions, add these to a bottle they already own, and simply fill with water. You now have a completely refilled cleaning product!

Furthermore, the City of Worcester is committed to improving how we handle waste as a community. Here are the most important things to know if you participate in the city's curbside recycling program:

- **USE BINS**, **NOT BAGS**. Recycled materials should be placed in bins, boxes, or paper bags. Plastic bags will not be accepted and will be left on the curb.
- NO PLASTIC BAGS. Plastic bags are not recyclable in our curbside program. They contaminate the waste stream and can be problematic at the Materials Recovery Facility. To recycle your plastic bags, bring them to your local grocery store.
- MAKE SURE ITEMS ARE CLEAN AND DRY. There should be no food residue on anything in your recycle bin. Make sure to rinse all containers so that there is no contamination.
- PUT YOUR WASTE ON THE CURB IN THE MORNING, NOT THE NIGHT

Green Green

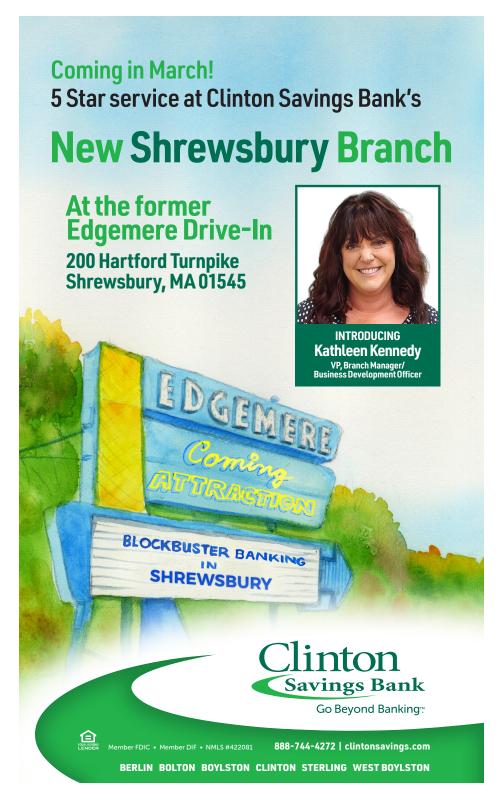
BEFORE. Many Worcester residents put their household waste on the curb the night before the truck comes to their neighborhood. This practice is not only against the programs guidelines, but can also lead to a major increase in litter in your neighborhood. When left overnight, bins are more likely to spill over or have animals comb through them. It's best practice to put your materials on your curb first thing in the morning.

• SIGN UP FOR CITIZEN ALERTS TO STAY UP TO DATE ON TRASH PICKUP DELAYS. Visit the city's website to register for the alert system so you will always know if your pickup day is delayed (or not) by a holiday.

The pandemic may have stalled some world's efforts to eliminate a reliance on single-use plastics, but three years later, we are now in a position to get right back on track. Make 2023 the year you make your household model more sustainable.



The softball team from Holy Cross did a cleanup this winter and picked up 127 pounds of litter.





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New Development, cont.

is a recently announced partnership with national developer Quarterra, which will construct 375 units in an 8-story building with 395,000 square feet.

A new public street, Spruce Street, will run the length of the development and link Polar Park's front entrance with the Canal District, with retail space lining the street.

Meanwhile, The Cove is under construction behind Polar Park's center field. This 171-unit building started construction in late 2022 and will have a candlepin bowling alley and flatbread pizza restaurant on the first floor. Some of the units will have balconies looking into the park, and outdoor amenity spaces on the top floors will be available for residents and visitors.

Life Sciences and Industrial Development Booms

While the city needs housing of all types, it also needs jobs of all types to accommodate new residents. In particular, Worcester is well-positioned to build on strong markets for life sciences and industrial real estate. Several developments are striving to meet that demand.

The City of Worcester has approximately 1.4 million square feet of life sciences space between research and development labs and biomanufacturing production space. However, the vacancy rate is currently close to 0%. And as Cambridge and Boston become increasingly crowded, life sciences companies have looked westward for new space. The sector is growing quickly in Massachusetts, with over 20,000 new jobs created in life sciences since 2020.

According to a report by the Massachusetts Biotechnology Council, Worcester is a "Platinum" rated community in terms of readiness for accepting life sciences companies, and Worcester County is home to 20% of all biomanufacturing jobs in Massachusetts. Biomanufacturing is unique from research, and is generally regarded as a more accessible industry for those without advanced college degrees.

Development in life sciences is starting to ramp up in 2023, with UMass Chan Medical School hoping to complete a \$325 million, 9-story research building on their campus, and Chinese biomanufacturer WuXi Biologics looking to finish construction on a \$300 million facility. WPI also announced plans with O'Connell Development in late 2022 to construct an all-glass exterior lab building by 2025.

Industrial development is also rapidly picking up, particularly in warehousing and distribution. Worcester's proximity to other metro areas and connectivity by rail, road, and air has made it an ideal location for logistics.

In 2023, Amazon is completing three distribution facilities in and around Worcester, including a facility on the grounds of the former Greendale Mall, which will create over 100 jobs. Amazon also recently completed a "last-mile" distribution center at the Worcester Regional Airport. In Charlton, a 2.8 million square-foot warehouse is nearing completion, which is expected to create a minimum of 1,000 full-time jobs for the region.

Criterion Group, an industrial developer, also brought plans forward in early February for a 150,000 square-foot warehousing facility built where Greendale's Showcase Cinemas used to stand. This building will have space for 34 loading docks and will likely employ anywhere between 50 and 100 people.

And the Worcester Business Development Corporation in late 2022 announced they were going to start developing 51 acres of former industrial properties near Saint Gobain's campus to convert them into new sites for advanced manufacturing and life sciences companies that could bring hundreds of new jobs to the area.

As 2023 gets underway, Worcester's momentum appears to not be going anywhere.

right: Aerial view of new development on the former site of the Table Talk Pie's bakery









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BY CAIT LUBELCZYK VP OF MARKETING AND COMMUNICATIONS, WORCESTER REGIONAL CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

orcester native Eric Butler founded Broadway in Worcester in March 2022 and in just 10 months he has brought three of Broadway's biggest names to Worcester.

Broadway in Worcester kicked off in March with An Evening with Tony Award

Winner Laura Benanti which featured songs from Laura's career (My Fair Lady, She Loves Me, and more) along with humorous anecdotes and experiences that she has encountered on and off the stage and screen. Laura, and celebrated music director and accompanist Grammy Award winner Billy Stritch, provided a sold-out Worcester audience with an unforgettable night.

An Evening with Chita Rivera, in September, was a fireside chat style show where Chita sang her hits from West Side Story, Bye Bye Birdie, Chicago, and Kiss of the Spiderwoman, while breaking between to have a conversation with Seth Rudetsky, her pianist, recalling stories about Jerry (Jerome Robbins), Bob Fosse, and Gwen Verdon.

Finally, this past January Broadway in Worcester welcomed Kelli O'Hara. O'Hara has seven Tony Award nominations and a Tony Award win for her portrayal of Anna Leonowens in *The King and I*. She has been hailed by The New York Times as "Broadway musical's undisputed queen." Her other notable Broadway credits include: Kiss Me, Kate, The Bridges of Madison County, Nice Work If You Can Get It, South Pacific, The Pajama Game, and The Light in the Piazza — performances all of which earned her Tony nominations.

What is unique about *Broadway in Worcester* is that Eric lines up his concerts with a free master class experience that involves workshops and a Q&A session for high school and college students in the region, along with their arts educators.

This experience is the equivalent of an NBA player coming to a local high school and doing drills with student athletes. These performers are at the top of

their game, and to have the legendary Chita Rivera give performance tips to a high school student looking to pursue a career in the performing arts is a once in a lifetime opportunity and an absolute gift to the community.

I sat down with Eric after his whirlwind year at Root & Press in Worcester (one of his favorite spots) to talk about Broadway in Worcester and what's coming down the pike.

Eric, three big shows in ten months and this is a part-time gig for you, how did you do it?

It's been a crazy ten months..

Laura, Chita, Kelli....aside from being the best of the best, what made you choose them specifically?

They were all performers I personally love; I thought Laura would kick things off in a big fun energetic way, Broadway's equivalent of a rock star; I thought she would bring a lot of energy and excitement to the launch.

The only way to top Laura was to go with a true Broadway legend, so we had Chita Rivera, a Tony Award winner, Kennedy Center honoree, and a Presidential Medal of Freedom recipient. There's really no way to top that, so for our third star I chose a personal favorite, Kelli O'Hara.

[In 2015, Eric brought Kelli O'Hara to Saint John's High School to headline the grand opening of Founders Hall and the Robert R. Jay Performing Arts Center.]

Broadway in Worcester presents Worcester area students with oncein-a-lifetime experiences to meet and learn from Broadway performers. Except we've been fortunate enough to attend three times so far! The opportunity for our students and educators to attend free master classes has been incredible! We have all been in awe of these talented performers and anxiously await the announcement of the next Broadway celebrity to visit Worcester!!

> -Nicole Lian, Director of Theater, **Notre Dame Academy**

Since its inception, Broadway in Worcester has offered free workshops to students in Worcester County, why was the education component important to you?

In some respect, I've spent my career in education. I worked at Saint John's High School, then worked in the edTech sector at edX, and now I'm at City Year; the importance of education and arts in education has always been important to me and so I always knew I wanted to couple our performances with educational opportunities for the students in our community. For the last three performances with Benanti, Rivera, and O'Hara we have officially partnered with Worcester Public Schools and the Hanover Theatre Conservatory, but we open the opportunity to all local high schools, colleges, and universities. Each of our programs have seen participants from over 30 schools in Central MA. With this past workshop being in early January, we even had several Worcester area students who were home on break from college in attendance. We spread the word through local media, social media (Instagram and Facebook), and email. Typically, we have been averaging 150 students and teachers for every

session. These performers are big names on stage and screen; these students are essentially being taught by the Lebron James of Broadway.

Aimee Kewley, the Arts Department Head at Burncoat High School said, "The educational opportunities that Broadway in Worcester has been able to give my

> students have been exceptional. The opportunity to listen to the stories of Broadway greats, have one on one workshops, and ask questions enriches their arts education beyond just a classroom setting."

> Both Ms. Kewley and Mrs. Lian's students participated in all three workshops.

> I would be remiss if I didn't acknowledge the people and organizations that help to make this series possible. While the Broadway concert series is designed to be sustainable through event ticket sales, the free educational programming for Worcester area students is supported entirely by local philanthropy. The Hanover Theatre and Conservatory is graciously serving as Broadway in Worcester's 501(c)(3) fiscal sponsor and past supporters of our educational programs include The George F. and Sybil H. Fuller Foundation, The Fletcher Foundation, Barr Foundation, Worcester Cultural Coalition/JMAC 2022 Accessibility Initiative, and UniBank.

What are your plans for Broadway in Worcester for the upcoming year?

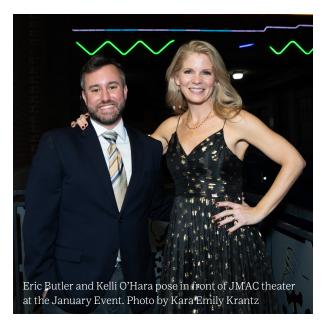
We'll definitely have another Tony award winner coming to Worcester this calendar year. We had three performers in our first 10 months, we hope to have at least 2 A-list stars coming in this year. My dream list: Lin Manuel Miranda and Leslie Odom Jr. doing a show together...Harry Connick Jr. would be great too...Christian Borle would be fun... Audra MacDonald...Aaron Tveit... As the Xaverian Brothers say "In harmony, small things grow", I'll adopt that philosophy and let things grow organically as the community demands it.

A very important question... how did our guests like Worcester?

They were charmed by Worcester and the Worcester audiences.

Each one of them referenced the warmth of the community and were truly touched by the resounding appreciation for the arts. Chita received three standing ovations! That makes the experience more meaningful for them, it doesn't feel like just another gig. Because the setting is so intimate, they are really able to connect with the audiences each night, and vice versa.





Not only do we welcome these stars to Worcester, but we also find a way to involve our community... it creates a holistic experience. For all three shows we have partnered with local businesses like Glazy Susan, Suzette's Creperie, and Queen's Cups to create signature items that co-brand the event, Glazy Susan created "All That Razz" for Chita Rivera; she enjoyed the donut so much on her first day in Worcester that she asked me to pick her up some more to bring back to her daughter in Connecticut. They also created an ice cream sundae donut in honor of Laura Benanti's role in *She Loves Me* where she sang the song "Vanilla Ice Cream", and Kelli brought home "Kiss Me, Cake" cupcakes to her children from The Queen's Cups. These performers have tens and thousands of followers on social media and when they share their photos with their treats from Worcester with their following it brings attention to our city and recognition to these creative business owners.

If people are interested in your next show, where should they go, and what should they expect?

You can learn more about *Broadway in Worcester* on our website broadwayinworcester.com or by following us on Facebook and Instagram.

As for what to expect, each show offers the option of regular tickets or a VIP package. The VIP packages includes a VIP Meet & Greet with Photo Op and preferred seating, *Broadway in Worcester* swag, local items from sponsors (e.g. Table Talk Pies, Greater Good Pulp Daddy, 90+ Wines), etc. If you've been to the BrickBox theater at the JMAC, you know that there's not a bad seat in the house.

Any hints about who'll be coming to Worcester next?

(Eric smiles) We'll be announcing this Spring.



Chita Rivera speaks to students at September master class as Eric Butler looks on. Photo by Kara Emily Krantz

In Case You !! MISSED IT

Buck O'Neil Display at Worcester Public Library

Fittingly, on the first day of Black History Month, The Worcester Public Library unveiled their newest exhibit, a tribute to the life and career of legendary baseball player and coach, John Jordan "Buck" O'Neil.

The exhibit, on loan from the Negro Leagues Baseball Museum, was brought to Worcester through the help of many community partners including the United Way and the WooSox.

The exhibit will be on display on the main floor of the library through April.





Friend Coach Big

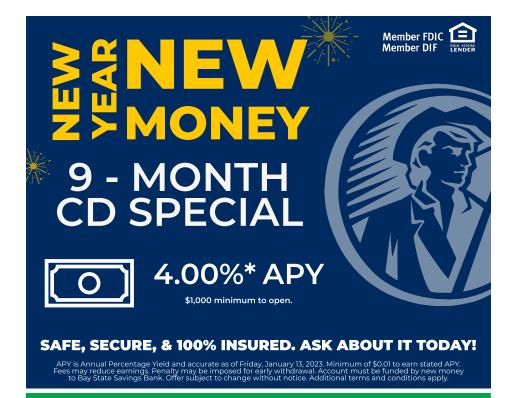
There are 60 boys waiting for their Big.

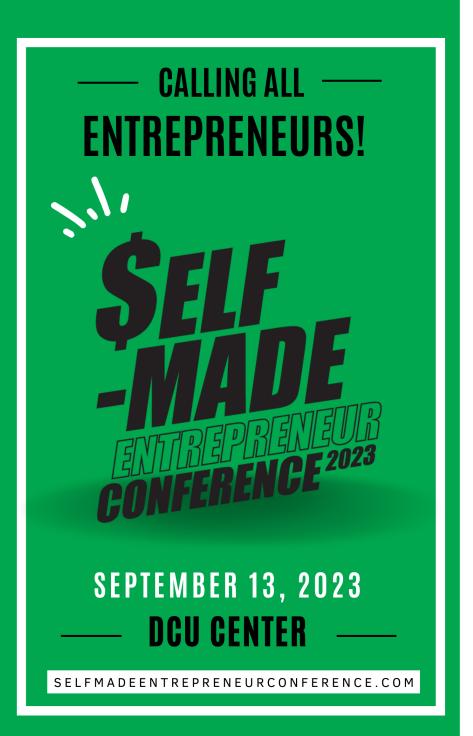
Our goal is to match those 60 boys by April 1st!

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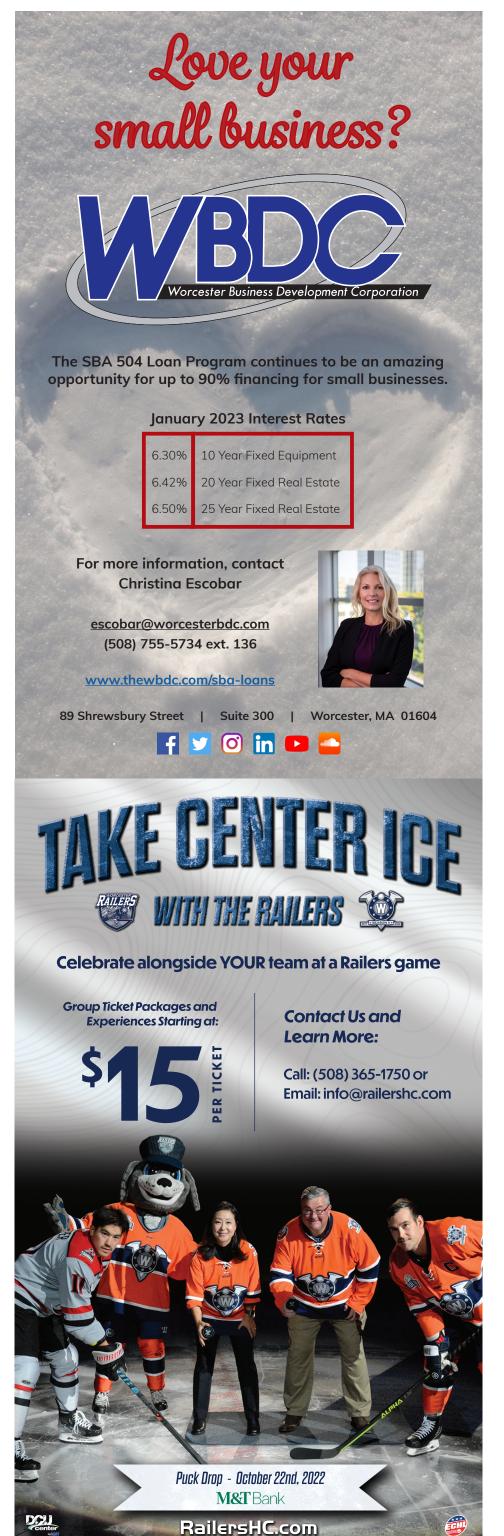
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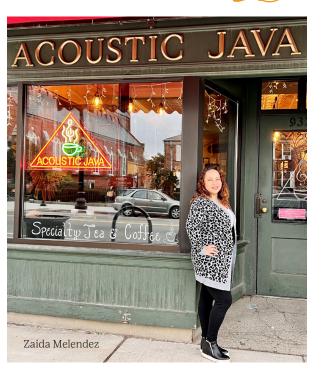




Chamber Exchange: The Newspaper • Winter 2023

FOOD HUB **UPDATE**

Salvadorian **American Bakery Belen Moves Into Former Acoustic Java Location**



by DAVID SULLIVAN DIRECTOR OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT & **BUSINESS RECRUITMENT**

WORCESTER - Acoustic Java, a longtime coffee shop in Main South next to Clark University, is moving out. However, the flow of coffee and pastries is not stopping, thanks to Belen, a Salvadorian-American bakery. They began operations out of 932 Main Street this month.

In a statement posted online, Acoustic Java said they were "delighted to announce" that ownership would transfer to Belen. "The block isn't losing it's café, it's gaining a beautiful new panaderia," they said. The local coffee roaster plans to focus on its rapidly growing wholesale operations and the tasting room at Brussels Street, which remains open.

Meanwhile, Belen will continue serving Acoustic-made coffee, and plans to offer some jobs to those who previously worked there.

Belen is owned by Zaida Melendez, a longtime Worcester resident who moved here from El Salvador with her family when she was young.

Melendez was a graduate of the Worcester Regional Food Hub's 2022 program, Launching Diverse Food Entrepreneurs, which assisted 24 local entrepreneurs in creating a food business. Participants like Melendez entered the Food Hub's program with little more than a concept, and left with a business plan, a menu, a business permit, all necessary safety certifications, a micro-grant, and free membership to the Worcester Regional Chamber of Commerce.

Melendez was always a baker. "I had always been baking from home, I was always baking my kid's birthday cakes and baking for my nieces and nephews," she said. In El Salvador, a Central American country roughly the size of Massachusetts, pastries and cakes are a cultural staple food at every time of the day. However, she noticed a lack of that homemade culture here in Worcester. "There's no real Salvadorian bakery here, everything you get is from the store," she explained.

While Melendez is a baking enthusiast, the hobby alone is not what drove her to start a business. She worked as a respiratory therapist at UMass Memorial Health in the height of the pandemic, and the toll that it took on her was too much. "I would almost use baking as my stress relief, it was just something I enjoyed doing," she said.

A friend referred her to the Food Hub's program. "And then I got brave," she said. "I switched my schedule around at the hospital, and then I was like, 'you know what, maybe I can do this."

The inspiration for the name Belen is personal for Melendez - it is her middle name. Belen is the Spanish name for Bethlehem, which itself is a translation for "House of Bread". Her family would always call her by her middle name growing up. "I had no idea that I would actually turn it into a business," said Melendez. "But I kept a promise to myself that if I ever started a bakery, that would be the name."

Like she is herself, Melendez describes Belen as a blend of American and Salvadorian culture. "I was raised here but am still Salvadorian," she said. "Belen is an American bakery specializing in traditional Salvadorian treats that you normally wouldn't find here. I love that combination."

Belen offers American pastries like cupcakes, but also Salvadorian tres leches cakes, cheese bread, and other treats.

Before beginning operations at 932 Main Street, Melendez was operating a pop-up stand a half-mile down the street at 446 Main Street, the glass tower. There, in the heart of downtown, the Food Hub Marketplace offers entrepreneurs like Melendez solid ground to do business on before they jump into owning their own restaurant.

Now, Melendez is making her own leap, hoping to capitalize on a population of students from Clark University, while also planning to be a second home for Salvadorian families in the community.



SPORTS STREET ROUND UP

by KEVIN SALEEBA CORRESPONDENT

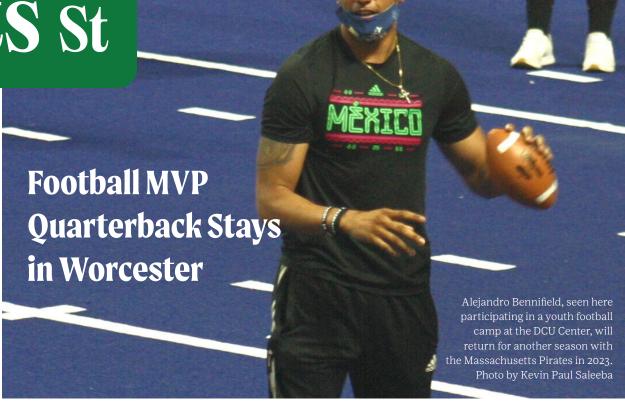
WORCESTER - The Massachusetts Pirates' have resigned their star quarterback for the upcoming 2023 Indoor Football League season. Alejandro Bennifield, the Most Valuable Player for the Pirates in the 2021 IFL Championship game, will be making his return for his fourth season with the club.

This helps the Pirates keep stability under center for the upcoming season because Bennifield, a 6-feet-2, 210-pound lefty, holds eight playoff records and three all-time marks for the organization.

This season will also be a bounce-back campaign for Bennifield after missing six games in 2022 due to injury. Despite not playing the full season, he still ranked in six of the IFL's top ten statistical categories for quarterbacks, which included several standout games. He was the league's Offensive Player of the Week after his week five game against the Bismarck. In the 54-43 win against the Bucks at the Bismarck Event Center, he passed for 19 of 29 for 262 yards with six touchdowns.

In ten games last season, which included a quarterfinal round playoff game against Quad City, Bennifield completed 65.3 percent of his passes which was sixth best in the league and a Pirates single season record. He connected on 128 of 196 attempts for 1,328 yards with 28 touchdowns with only five interceptions. Bennifield averaged 138.2 yards per game and had an efficiency rating of 166.6. He also carried the ball 68 times for 243 yards, scored 13 touchdowns, averaged 3.6 yards per carry and 24.3 yards per game.

In his Pirates career, Bennifield is the team's



all-time record holder for rushing touchdowns with 27 and rushing yards with 478 for a quarterback. His eight Massachusetts playoff records includes 66 passing attempts, 35 completions and seven passing touchdowns.

Bennifield first played for the Pirates in 2019 in four games, including one start. Prior to joining Massachusetts, he played in the Your Call Football League in Jacksonville, Florida in 2018. One year earlier, he was invited to rookie minicamp with the New Orleans Saints of the National Football League and later with the Memphis Express in the Alliance of American Football.

Bennifield first rose to prominence as an IFL quarterback during the 2021 season. He came off the bench in a week one contest as starter Sean Brackett was injured. Bennifield helped guide the team to a win over Louisville. He remained the starter and led the team to its first ever championship defeating the Arizona

Rattlers in Phoenix in a 37-34 overtime victory. In that game, Bennifield was 10 of 23 passing for 83 yards and a touchdown against two interceptions. He also ran ten times for 56 yards and scored two touchdowns and was named the MVP of the United Bowl. The team finished with 13 wins and just four losses, the team's best single season record. He also established the single season mark for rushing touchdowns in a game with four against the Green Bay Blizzard and four two-point conversion passes in a victory over the Arizona Rattlers on Phoenix Field at the DCU Center during that championship run. His 16 rushing touchdowns that year were also a seasonal best.

Bennifield started his football career at the University of Tennessee-Chattanooga where he played four seasons, was a team captain as a senior and earned All-Southern Conference Second Team honors as a junior.

The IFL will kick-off their 2023 schedule on Friday, March 17. The Pirates first game will be Sunday, March 26.

Former Pirates Drafted in the XFL

WORCESTER - Seven former Massachusetts Pirates players will compete for XFL team roster spots this month. The league is slated to start play on February 18th.

Four ex-Pirates were selected in the XFL Supplemental Draft, including defensive lineman Da'Sean Downey and defensive back Debione Renfro, who played with the Massachusetts Pirates last season. Offensive linemen Jordan McCray and Jarod Thomas, who played on the Pirates Championship team in 2021, were also drafted.

Downey was chosen with the seventh pick in the eighth round (60th overall) by the San Antonio Brahmas. He played the past two seasons with the Pirates appearing in 18 games making 43 tackles, including 14.5 tackles for a loss with nine sacks. He also broke up four passes while forcing two fumbles and recovering one. The 6-feet-4, 225-pound Downey played for the University of Massachusetts and scored his only Pirates touchdown on a 15-yard fumble recovery in a 48-30 win over the Green Bay Blizzard.

He was also a member of the Pirates Championship team in 2021, setting three team records. That season he became the first Pirate to recover two fumbles in a game. That occurred in a 68-44 victory over the Arizona Rattlers. In the postseason, he set a record for most tackles for a loss in a playoff game with three in the Pirates 43-22 victory over the Frisco Fighters enabling Massachusetts to advance to the United Bowl. In the championship game, Downey established Massachusetts' All-Time postseason

mark of 4.5 tackles for a loss as he posted another 1.5 TFL in the Pirates' 37-34 overtime win over Arizona.

Renfro was taken with the sixth pick in the 12th round (79th overall) by the Arlington Renegades. The 6-feet-2, 195-pound defensive back from Pearland, Texas played in four regular season games last season for Massachusetts making 12.5 tackles with two for a loss. He also intercepted a pass, broke up two others and recovered a fumble. He played in the Pirates post season game against Quad City making four tackles, recovered a fumble and broke up a pass.

Renfro, who played at Texas A&M, played pro ball with the Montreal Alouettes of the Canadian Football League, and spent the 2021 CFL season on the practice squad with the Edmonton Football Team. Prior to joining the Pirates last season, he also was

signed as an undrafted free agent with the Seattle Seahawks of the National Football League in 2020 after three seasons at Texas A&M.

Center Jordan McCray was chosen with the seventh pick in the eighth round (60th overall) by the San Antonio Brahmas. The 6-feet-2, 336-pound anchor of the Pirates offensive line was a First Team All-IFL Offensive selection for Massachusetts in 2021. As a result, he was selected last season in the USFL Draft by the Birmingham Stallions with pick number 161. He played his college ball at Central Florida.

Finally, Jared Thomas, a 6-feet-3, 300-pound offensive lineman from Northwestern, was also a starter on the Pirates 2021 title team. He was chosen with the fourth pick in the third round (20th overall)



by the Seattle Sea Dragons. Last Season, the New Orleans Breakers of the USFL took Thomas with the 163rd overall pick in that league's draft. Thomas was a Second Team All-IFL selection and a member of the IFL's All-Rookie team in 2021.

Other notable Massachusetts Pirates alumni include offensive lineman Larry Williams and running back/wide receiver Deddrick Thomas who have been assigned to XFL teams. Williams will report to the Las Vegas Vipers while Thomas will join the Orlando Guardians. Both were graduates of NFL Alumni Academy. Offensive lineman Barry Wesley, who recently signed with the Pirates will be going to

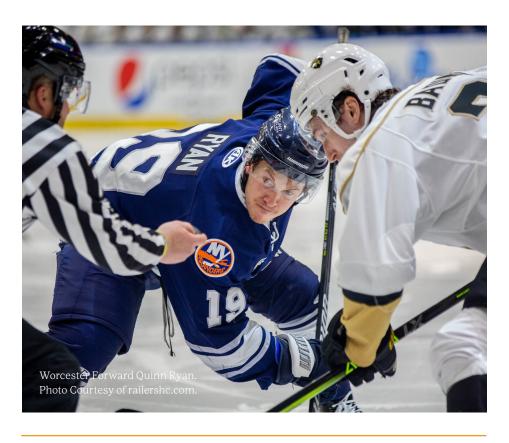
camp with the Seattle Sea Dragons.

Derrick Thomas ended his 2022 Pirates season rushing five times for 16 yards and scored two touchdowns in Massachusetts' playoff game against Quad City. He also had two receptions for 37 yards. In 12 regular season games, Thomas carried the ball 60 times for 330 yards with six touchdowns. He averaged 5.5 yards per carry and 27.5 yards per game. Thomas also had 16 receptions for 148 yards and two scores. He returned nine kickoffs for 167 yards averaging 18.6 yards per return.

Williams was a starter on the offensive line that was fourth in the Indoor Football League in passing

with 146.4 yards per game and fourth with 53 passing touchdowns. Williams was a consistent presence, starting 12 games for the Oklahoma State Cowboys in 2018. He was signed as an undrafted free agent by the Green Bay Packers where he took part in their 2019 training camp.

Wesley, a 6-feet-7, 324-pound lineman, signed with the Pirates for the upcoming season, but will join the team in Seattle. He was a four-year starter at Colorado State University. He twice received All-Mountain West post-season honors and was invited to minicamps with the New York Giants and Los Angeles Chargers of the National Football League this season.



New and Improved Polar Park in the Spring

WORCESTER, MA — The Worcester Red Sox announced several new improvements to Polar Park will be introduced on opening day this spring. The highlights for fans include new "seating, heating, and eating" options.

"We want Opening Day to be like Christmas morning," said Larry Lucchino, Chairman and Principal Owner of the WooSox. "We seek to unwrap these new gifts and show our fans that we continue to listen to their ideas and add innovations to this beautiful ballpark."

The WooSox debuted the Berm in mid-season in 2021, opened Summit Street in 2022, and will be

adding the Fan Deck on Plymouth Street next season. Lucchino said the ballpark "continue(s) to grow and evolve."

Along with the Fan Deck, other improvements include a new family-friendly entertainment area with three cornhole games, a stage for live music, and new menu items. Four canopies will provide shelter from rain, shade from sun, and warmth on cool evenings. The area, just beyond the Simply Orthodontics Berm, includes 36 tables and 175 seats in left-center field. The area will be accessible to anyone in the ballpark.

The following is a complete detailed list of all the new improvements and amenities fans can look forward to at the ballpark.

- 1 New Seating: Fan Deck The new expansion of Polar Park on Plymouth Street, featuring more seats, canopies, and fun fan activities, such as cornhole, live music, and new menu items just beyond the Berm in left field.c. This temporary amenity improves the Plymouth Street experience until the time comes to establish the Left-Field Building.
- New Heating Adding warmth on the concourse for spring games in April and May. Enhancing Group Venues with new, warm cabanas on the Hanover Deck, FLEXcon Landing, Shaw's Home Bullpen Terrace, the new JetBlue Hanger at the Triple Decker Garden, and at our new Fan Deck.
- 3 New Eating The WooSox will introduce authentic Lobster Rolls, thick, hot New England Clam Chowder, tacos, with a special offer on "Taco & Tequila Tuesdays," by Tequila Herradura.
- 4 There will be new ticket booths at Gates B and C. Fans also can pick up Will Call tickets or purchase tickets at any of the ballpark's four gates (A, B, C, and D).
- 5 There are new drink rails at Craft Corner and on Summit Street. Fans can set their food and beverages down while enjoying the ballgame with both areas open to all fans and are available on a first-come, first-served basis.
- 6 The WooSox now has five Blue Woo Shuttles, three more from last season. These all-electric shuttles provide free transportation to and from Polar Park from several city lots and parking areas throughout downtown. The addition of three shuttles will help ensure regular and frequent pickups.
- 7 A new swing set has been added for children on the 8th Hill behind the videoboard.
- New televisions were added in the main restrooms to help ensure that fans do not miss a pitch.

Historic Start

WORCESTER - The Worcester Railers opened the season winning nine straight games for the first time in ECHL history. The previous longest win streak to start a season was eight games by the 2001 Trenton Titans and 1994 Dayton Bombers. The previous best start in franchise history was 2-0, achieved twice, most recently during the 2019-20 season.

As of January 26, the team was in fourth place in the ECHL standings with 43 points and a 20-17-3 overall record. Forward Bobby Butler leads the team with 14 goals, as well as adding 12 assists through 34 games. However, forward Quinn Ryan proves to be a huge offensive standout for the Railers. He leads the team in scoring with 31 points (11 goals, 20 assists) in 38 games. The Railers signed Ryan, 26, to a contract prior to the season after spending most of the 2021-22 season with the Utah Grizzlies, recording 24 points (12 goals, 12 assists) in 57 games. Ryan also played two games with the Indy Fuel last season, adding one goal.

Prior to joining the ECHL, Ryan spent five seasons (2016-21) playing for the Liberty University Flames of the American Collegiate Hockey Association. At Liberty, Ryan totaled 235 points (88 goals, 147 assists) in 147 games. In his final season with the Flames in 2020-21, Ryan led the team in scoring with 18 points (9 goals, 9 assists) in 13 games while helping to lead Liberty to the 2021 ACHA semifinals.



Artist rendering of the new Fan Deck in leftfield at Polar Park. Courtesy photo from the WooSox.

- 9 Chicken tenders and French fries can now be ordered from your seat.
- 10 The club will introduce a ballpark-wide Peanut Allergy-Friendly Week from May 14-21, when the ballpark will be deep cleaned before the homestand May 16-21. No peanuts or peanut products will be served at Polar Park during this time. For the second straight year, the Simply Orthodontics Berm will be peanut allergy-friendly all season long.





THE FUTURE OF WORK

Making Business More Human

By LYNN WHITNEY TURNER CORE XP BUSINESS SOLUTIONS

"The Blackstone Valley Chamber (BVCC) in partnership with the East Hampton Chamber recently held a "Future of Work" virtual workshop facilitated by Lynn Whitney Turner. Lynn also facilitates the BVCC's HR Roundtable, born out of the HR needs during COVID, but very relevant today. This article encapsulates much pertinent information useful to prepare for business now." Jeannie Hebert, President, and CEO, BVCC

As we begin to move past or possibly with the disruption of the past few years, there is a lot on the minds of leaders. According to a recent CEO survey, "today's businesses are constantly revisiting, rethinking, and reshaping many of the key levers that define their organization, such as talent, workplace, and technology models, as well as growth expectations."

The past few years have tested our limits in every way. Individuals and organizations have been pushed to look at new ways of doing business and getting work done. Some have found success. Others have struggled. As a result, a re-evaluation of the current situation has been taking place both for individuals and organizations. Some hard decisions are being made about how to move forward in this ever-evolving landscape. While some would like to go back to what was, the future is now.

Change has been happening for a long time. The only difference now is the pace of that change. With the advancement of technology, the rate of change has sped up exponentially. We are living in a world

of VUCA, an acronym that came out of the military at the end of the Cold War that stands for: Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity, and Ambiguity.

- Volatility refers to the speed, magnitude, turbulence, and dynamics of change.
- Uncertainty relates to being in unfamiliar territory with unpredictable outcomes.
- Complexity refers to the multiple interdependencies amidst the global interconnectivity, and
- Ambiguity ties to multiple perspectives and interpretations of various scenarios.

While this VUCA World may feel overwhelming, causing stress and panic due to the various challenges we are faced with, the best way to manage VUCA is with VUCA. The flip side to dealing with Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity, and Ambiguity is with Vision, Understanding, Clarity and Agility. This flip side of VUCA must be built into your organization. For those that take the time to pause and build their core of VUCA, it can be a time of opportunity. For those that do not engage through a regular strategic planning process with Clarity and Understanding about the Core of who you are (Mission and Purpose), what you stand for (Values) and where you are going (Vision) along with how you will get there (your strategy), a lot of time, resources, and energy could be wasted, missing out on various opportunities.

Future of Work Pg 20

Affiliates Calendar

BLACKSTONE VALLEY CHAMBER

BVCC, Hub, and Foundation Open House BVCC Chamber Offices

Wednesday, March 8, 2023 | 5:00pm-7:00pm

CLINTON AREA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

Seminar Series: Digital Marketing 101 Operations Center At Clinton Savings Bank Thursday, March 9, 2023 | 9:00am-10:00am

BLACKSTONE VALLEY CHAMBER

BVCC Home & Community ExpoNorthbridge High School Field House

AUBURN CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

Saturday, March 25, 2023 | 10:00am-2:00pm

Business Expo

Auburn Lodge of Elks Tuesday, March 28, 2023 | 3:00pm-6:00pm

CLINTON AREA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

Business After Hours

Clintons Bar & Grille

Tuesday, April 4, 2023 | 5:00pm-7:00pm

Presenting Sponsor: Clinton Savings Bank

Supporting Sponsor: DiMeco's Nursery & Landscape

CLINTON AREA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

Seminar Series: SBA 504 Loan Program with WBDC

Museum of Russian Icons Thursday, April 27, 2023 | 9:00am-10:00am



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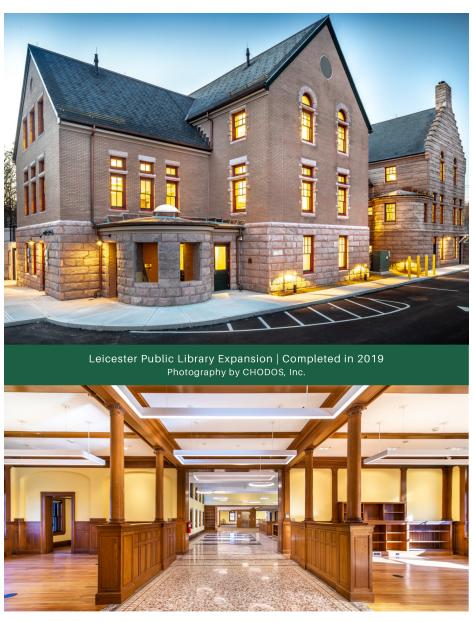


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Future of Work Cont.

According to TAB (The Alternative Board), "operating without a strategic plan is like sitting in the passenger seat of your own business. You see it accelerate into overdrive and pass one milestone after another. Eventually, however, you helplessly watch as it swerves aimlessly, or worse, crashes and burns. Strategic planning puts you behind the steering wheel. It serves as a roadmap that defines the direction a company must travel, and that helps leaders prepare for potential roadblocks. Companies and markets without this foundation and foresight are far more likely to get lost, stuck or wrecked."

Part of the strategy will require talent and thinking about the future of work. This starts with Clarity around WHO you want to attract and retain for talent.

• What skills are needed now and into the future?

Jennifer Adams, Director of Marketing & BD

Email: jennifer@dasullivan.com

• And will they fit in with our culture?

In today's VUCA world, the talent required for, not only today, but into the future will need to possess the following characteristics: Integrity, Curiosity, Empathy/Compassion, Creativity, Collaboration and be a Constant Learner.

Gone are the days where we learned a skill, performed it in our job and then retired. Because change is happening faster than ever, constant learning needs to be woven into our organizational culture to remain relevant. Our future demands engaged and empowered people aligned to constantly learning new skills. Collaboration will be paramount to the future and this does not solely mean collaboration between humans. Equally important will be the collaboration between humans and technology. Technology will be used to augment HOW work gets done. Younger generations that have grown up with technology will expect nothing less. WHERE and WHEN work gets done also needs to be thought out. Flexibility and Agility are part of the future.

Leaders need to be attuned to these various aspects to remain relevant. For rester's 2023 Predictions Report is advising leaders to "steer a steady course and avoid reactive moves in response to the headline of the moment." While many HR policies and procedures are seemingly borrowed and adapted from decades of best practices, that well of knowledge could be a bit less valuable today and into the future. Moving forward, tap into your current talent by gauging employee sentiment. It will provide valuable insights to help them operate at their best. Despite all the shifts taking place, the one thing that leaders must remember lies at the Core of every business and that is you are dealing with Humans and their basic foundational needs. At the heart of the Future of Work, for Leaders to remain competitive is through Emotional Intelligence and Making Business More Human.

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by RICH LODIGIANI NEW ENGLAND BUSINESS SALES

or every business owner, the time will come when they need to move on. This may be for financial, health and or personal reasons. It may also simply be time to retire.

When this time comes, it is important to speak with a professional who specializes in the transfer of businesses from one set of owners to the next.

For most owners, this will be a one-time event with no prior experience to rely on. It can be exciting, emotional, and sometimes perplexing all at once.

Where do you start?

The first step is to contact one of the many firms who are available to assist owners with the sale of a business. These companies are referred to as "Merger and Acquisitions Advisers", "Business Sale Advisers" and sometimes simply as "Business Brokers". Regardless of the name, they are all in the business of assisting sellers with the transfer of their business to a new owner. For their services, they are paid a fee. While this service may appear like that of a realtor, there are many more complexities in the sale of a business.

The business owner should try and meet with a few advisers first to make sure there is a good fit. They will be working with the adviser for an extended period, so they need to make sure they are comfortable with their style. It is also important they fully understand their process and compensation formula.

Once the owner has chosen an adviser, the first step is for the adviser to prepare a valuation of the business. This valuation is based on an analysis of the business's historical operating results, the value of the business assets, and the demand for the business's product or services within their specific industry. Some advisers charge an initial fee for this valuation and others will incorporate it's cost into the total fee they charge for the completed sale of the business. Once the adviser has determined the value of your business, they will guide you through how the sale process works.

What are the key elements of value in a small business?

The most important determining factor is the amount of cash flow your business generates. Buyers are paying a price that is a multiple of your annual profits. The multiple is determined by many factors. Some of the most important are:

- The value of your equipment and fixtures.
- The diversity of your customer base.
- The amount of management and or key employees that will stay with the company after the sale.
- The proprietary nature of your product or service. This is what separates your business from your competition.

How long will it take to sell your business?

The entire sale process can take anywhere from six to twelve months to complete. The complexity of your business, whether there is real estate to be sold and or any necessary license transfers will all affect the time involved.

How are the advisers paid?

Some firms work on an hourly basis. With these, you will be billed monthly (like that of your accountant or lawyer). Others work on a straight commission basis (like a realtor). They would be compensated only upon the successful sale of your business.

How will your business sale be accomplished?

While the process can differ from one adviser to another, a qualified professional should prepare a comprehensive summary package to highlight your business's strengths and operating history. Your business should then be exposed to qualified interested parties who have executed a non-disclosure agreement. Interested parties are then narrowed down to the group that the adviser believes has the best chance to complete a purchase on a timely basis. These buyers will meet with you and tour your facilities at a discreet time of your choosing. The adviser will work to find a buyer who will treat your business and employees the way you have.

An experienced adviser will then coordinate with both buyer and seller's accountant and lawyer (along with lenders counsel) to create an asset purchase agreement that is acceptable to all parties involved. Once the agreements are in place, the parties will move to a successful closing.

New England Business Sales has been assisting owners to sell their businesses for over thirty years. Our team at New England Business Sales will guide you through every step of the sale process in a confidential and professional manner. We will only present you with qualified buyers who are actively seeking to acquire businesses in your industry and price point. By coordinating with your legal and accounting advisers during the intricate structure negotiations, we will minimize tax consequences while enhancing the net proceeds to you from the sale. Our goal is to transfer your business to new owners for the best possible price and terms. Contact us anytime for further information! http://newenglandbusinesssales.com/



COLD-WEATHER BIRTHDAYS

by MONIQUE MESSIER EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, DISCOVER CENTRAL MASSACHUSETTS

hen it comes to hosting a wintertime birthday soiree, colder weather can mean getting creative. Central Massachusetts has options for every party-goer, from the adventure seeker to the hop sipper.

X-GOLF WORCESTER ▶

Central Massachusetts is a hub for action-packed venues for competitive crews. X-Golf Worcester, the sports spot for new and experienced golfers, has nine simulators, a bevy of beverages, bites, televisions and tournaments—making



for a uniquely year-round destination. On their state of the art simulators, you can play any one of over 100 world renowned courses, and consider golf leagues, lessons and club fittings if your adventure leaves you wanting more.



■ APEX ENTERTAINMENT

APEX Entertainment sits at the nucleus of food, attractions and events, offering 100,000 square feet of serotonin. APEX features party packages based on group, age and interest, with boundless activity options. Think: luxury bowling, arcade games,





AUBURN CHAMBER BUSINESS COMMUNITY EXPO

When: Tuesday, March 28, 2023 from 3-6pm Where: Auburn Lodge of Elks #2118 754 Southbridge St

Auburn, MA

** Limited space available **

The Auburn Chamber Business Community Expo is a great opportunity to meet customers, prospects, and other Chamber members in a fun and casual environment. The Showcase is free and open to the public to encourage maximum community participation.

Reserve your booth today!

Chamber Members — \$100 Early Bird | \$125 After March 1

Non-Members — \$200 Early Bird | \$250 After March 1

Register at auburnchamberma.org

a multi-level go-kart track, bumper cars, laser tag, glow-in-the-dark mini golf and sports simulators. The team offers a variety of catering options, too, planned alongside their on-site event managers. Party requests are to be submitted at least seven days prior to the date of inquiry and are subject to availability. Connect with a coordinator at 508-251-8666 ext. 3 to book.

ECOTARIUM

The EcoTarium serves as New England's leading museum of science and nature, dedicated to inspiring a passion for both with every visitor who passes through. With hands-on activities (like make-your-own stomp rocket) and an entire museum to explore, birthday parties here are a



true combination of excitement and education. The venue also boasts a playground, train ride and planetarium, adding movement and joy to the many lessons being learned. Head here for all the info you need on birthday packages for the little ones, or to host a family-friendly event.

CORNERSTONE RANCH

Celebrations at Cornerstone Ranch happen through every season, with a gorgeous new pavilion heated by a wood stove to warm any wintertime attendee. Kiddos and adults can peruse the Ranch grounds on their big day with horseback riding in the ring and leisurely horse-drawn wagon rides. Date availability, pricing and customizable options can be found on their site here.

LIVE ACTION ESCAPE ROOM

Live Action Escapes brings an immersive environment to Worcester, one for solving puzzles and challenges with customizable experiences for two to 25 players per hour. Become part of a story, find hidden clues, solve puzzles and crack the code to escape the room. Here, you'll get a variety of escape room settings, all with their own theme and storyline.



■ BRUSH IT OFF PAINT & SIP

BAF

Located inside a rustic mill in Sturbridge, Brush It Off Paint & Sip Bar encourages attendees to "bring out your inner Picasso." Foster your kiddo's creativity with a private room rental and several package options, from Splatter Room Parties to Mega Glitter Paint Parties. For the adults in the crowd, Brush It Off specializes in

private and/or traveling parties. Think: bridal showers, baby showers, fundraisers, retirements and the like. Call 774-241-3444 or click here for all the colorful details you need to start planning.

BARS & BREWERIES

For the 21+ folks, explore local hops and cocktails to get a taste of the Central Massachusetts scene. Breweries like Wormtowm Brewery and Redemption Rock Brewing Co. feature creations by hardworking brewmasters along Shrewsbury Street, while Canal District Wines offers an intimate atmosphere for one-of-a-kind birthday soirees, with a bottle shop and tasting room of 60+ wines, flights and food pairings for up to 35 people.

WEEKEND GETAWAYS ►

To experience the quintessential charm of New England during your birthday weekend, visit the Publick House Historic Inn. This Sturbridge landmark is a historical ode to the area and a wonderful spot for winter dining and overnight stays.



For the ski bunnies in the crowd,

Beechwood Hotel offers a warm welcome after a day on the slopes at Ski Ward. With 52 sleekly decorated guest rooms and 21 elegantly appointed suites, the exceptional service, amenities and accommodations make this AAA Four-Diamond boutique hotel a coveted destination for a winter escape. Think: plush robes, fine wine, a good book and your very own fireplace.

WACHUSETT MOUNTAIN & SKI WARD

Celebrate your day at a summit elevation of 2,006 feet with 26 trails. While the longest trail at Wachusett Mountain, known as Balance Rock, is a mile and a half, there is a wide variety of terrain for skiers of all abilities. The 38,000-square-foot lodge, cited for excellence in architectural design, offers a warm, comfortable atmosphere with exposed beam construction, a huge fireplace and sun decks surrounding the building.

Minutes from Worcester and less than an hour from Boston, Ski Ward is open year-round offering skiing, snowboarding and tubing. Ski Ward is also host to the Slopeside Bar & Grill—serving lunch, dinner, beer, wine and ice cream, both indoors and outdoors on a patio with fantastic views. The mountain offers nine trails, four lifts and eight tubing lanes for any snowy-day celebratory needs.

Whether you're enjoying indoor entertainment or braving a chilly-weather adventure, celebrations are always in order in Central Massachusetts.



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