



**'TALENT
TURNPIKE'
WANTED
PAGE A15**

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WORCESTER REGIONAL CHAMBER OF COMMERCE NEWSPAPER • VOL. 2 ISSUE 3 - NOV. 2017

TRANSPORTATION

Special Report - Pages A8-11

TRANSPORTATION MODES EVOLVE



- WORCESTER REGIONAL AIRPORT AVERAGES 100 TAKEOFFS OR LANDINGS PER DAY, WHICH INCLUDES FOUR OPERATIONS BY JETBLUE SEVEN DAYS A WEEK.

PLANES

TRAINS

- MBTA COMMUTER RAIL PERFORMANCE ACROSS THE SYSTEM WAS 89.3 PERCENT IN 2016, UP FROM A 10-YEAR AVERAGE OF 86.9 PERCENT. THE SYSTEM HAD 540 CANCELLATIONS IN 2016, AND THE SYSTEM RUNS 3,000 TRAINS A WEEK.



- ZIPCAR RATES START AT \$7.50 AN HOUR AND \$69 PER DAY AT COLLEGES... NEW ALL ELECTRIC WRTA CITY BUSES ARE ALSO BEING PLANNED.

AUTO/ BUSES

BIKES

- OFO SERVICE IS AFFORDABLE FOR ALMOST ALL BUDGETS WITH CHARGES SET AT \$1 PER HOUR WITH A REDUCED RATE OF \$.50 PER HOUR FOR COLLEGE STUDENTS.



*Auto, planes, bikes, buses, trains
all playing renewed economic roles*

WORCESTER - When Zipcar, the world's leading car-sharing network, announced last June a new partnership with Worcester to bring its "wheels when you want them" membership service to area residents, businesses, visitors and students, it joined a modernized transportation expansion unfolding here to support the city's massive new downtown developments.

With recent major enhancements to JetBlue flights and Worcester Airport's infrastructure, expanded Worcester-to-Boston commuter rail and WRTA and private busing, and a fleet of city bicycles, the city sits in a prime position to support new apartment/hotel dwellers as well as commercial and retail businesses.

**SPECIAL REPORT
BEGINS ON PAGE A8**

Auburn's CI growth takes off like a rocket

AUBURN - Look out Worcester, Auburn is on the move with a tax rate strategy that is saving both businesses and residents big money.

Since 2007, new commercial/industrial growth has skyrocketed in Auburn after selectmen took their first vote to begin more evenly aligning the split tax rate. Auburn Town Manager Julie Jacobson says the town's Fiscal Year '06 commercial/industrial (CI) property tax rate was 1.62 percent. Today, that same rate sits more comfortably at 1.20

percent, a reduction from 2016 and almost the same rate as the past several years.

Moreover, Auburn's new revenue growth used to be heavily reliant upon residential properties falling in at 42.8 percent of total new growth back in 2003. Auburn's new growth for residential properties in 2007 was 45 percent and climbing. In 2017, the percentage of residential new growth dropped significantly to 35.5 percent, with much of that gap replaced by CI. The FY '17

commercial/industrial property tax rate is now \$24.15 per \$1,000 in valuation, a decrease of 35 cents per \$1,000 valuation from 2016.

Auburn has the second-highest business tax rate in Worcester County after the city of Worcester in 2016, which also uses a split tax rate. Worcester's FY '16 commercial/industrial tax rate was \$33.98 per \$1,000 valuation. All of this progress has resulted in Auburn increasing total new growth as applied to the levy limit, reaching

\$867,267 in FY '17. Better diversifying the town's economy is also one factor in determining overall municipal bond ratings used for lending, which in Auburn currently sits at the second highest tier AA-plus ranked by Standard & Poor's or an AA2 at Moody's.

"Factoring in a taxpayer-burdened middle school renovation project in FY '14 and agricultural land purchase in FY '15, Auburn selectmen have for the most part voted to either hold the line

SEE TAXES, PAGE A13

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PUBLIC POLICY

Neal warns of schism in worker skillsets, wages

WORCESTER - Schott Fiber Optics in Southbridge recently informed Congressman Richard Neal that it would hire 25 additional workers tomorrow if those applicants could actually meet the required minimum qualifications, underscoring a growing drought in advanced manufacturing skillsets in Central Mass. and beyond.

In a speech given during the Worcester Regional Chamber of Commerce's Business & Government Forum held Sept. 28 at the Massachusetts College of Pharmacy and Health Services, Neal notes that 18,000 precision manufacturing job postings go unanswered in New England as well as 1 million tech jobs nation-wide each year. "We need to be concerned in America about the worker participation rate right now," Neal says.

The post-war norm for participating workers who show up at jobs every day hovers around 75 percent or two-thirds of the country's population. Neal says those post-recession rates have fallen to about 63.9 percent. "That means there were 8-9 million people who left the economy amidst of a recession," he adds, "and we really don't know where they are. The number of people in parts of the country who are sitting home idle should concern all of us."

A number of that unknown worker population began accepting early Social Security benefits during this same time period as well. Neal cites demographic trends that are heading in the wrong direction, noting that people who choose early retirement are unlikely to go back to work after age 62. Economists claim the best America can do with job growth right now is 2.3 percent – basically the same average under both the Obama and last Bush Administrations. That equates to about 200,000 jobs created. However, Neal says that there are about 200,000 citizens who leave the workforce for retirement, causing very thin growth.



Congressman Richard Neal speaks to a packed lunch crowd at the Worcester Regional Chamber of Commerce's Business & Government Forum on Sept. 28 at the Mass. College of Pharmacy and Health Services.

"Part of the changes in the economy behoove the idea that you can move production anyway... and replicate it anywhere across the globe," Neal says. "We maintain, however, entrepreneurship and innovation. Nobody comes close. Part of that is technology and globalization, which certainly helps

suppress wages."

The Congressman says only 6.5 percent of the private sector workforce in America is organized, and 7 percent of public sector workers hold union

SEE NEAL, PAGE B5

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EDUCATION

Youth simulate city business opportunities, politics

WORCESTER - As Worcester continues to grow into a modern city, the focus on youth involvement has steadily increased.

The Worcester Regional Chamber of Commerce, along with the Central Massachusetts Workforce Investment Board, the United Way of Central Massachusetts, United Families for Change, Worcester Community Action Council and the city of Worcester's Youth Opportunities Office with support from community sponsors, have created an opportunity to expose Worcester's youth to the wide range of professional and educational offerings of the city.

Known as the Worcester Youth Leadership Institute (WYLI), which is sponsored by Reliant and GFI Partners, the goal is to develop and mentor Worcester's future leaders. The Institute introduces the participants to the business, government, education and non-profit sectors in a variety of ways; including talks, question and answer sessions with the leadership structures of these sectors and organizations, visits, tours and sessions at a number of venues to help expose and educate these young people to the multiple opportunities for future careers in their home city.

WYLI Coordinator Walter Jovel mentors this

group of 25 16-20 year olds through the program over the course of seven weeks. From learning about healthcare to history and culture, the WYLI participants are shown a wide variety of sectors and resources within the city. According Walter, the program is about making connections and giving the students a clear path to success.

"Many young people aspire to be actors, performers, singers, but they all want to do the Hollywood thing," says Walter, referring to the group's visit to the Hanover Theater. "For them to realize that there's stuff going on in their backyard really makes an impact and makes it more tangible for them."

As a summer program, run on Fridays, Walter is tasked with making WYLI contagious and fun for the students. "I try to make these connections early on for them, so that they're so busy, they're so focused, they're meeting so many people and doing so many activities that by the time the day is done, they are already looking forward to the next week," says Walter. "That's my favorite part."

For the students, there are several highlights of the program, one of which is a visit with the Chamber's Diverse Professionals Roundtable. "They start to realize that there are successful minorities in

Worcester who are willing to give back, and that they can somehow get there one day. That connection is instant," says Walter. In addition, this year's WYLI class was also very diverse. "Many people in the group are immigrants so we got to know each other and talk about our differences," says Tracey Frimpong, a sophomore at North High School and immigrant from Ghana.

Another favorite is the mock City Council meeting in which the students are given the chance to debate about topics and advocate for themselves in an authentic setting. This year, the mock debates focused on a city dog park and the use of recycling. "Everyone gets into it and afterwards they think, 'Wow, this is how it really happens? I can do this one day,'" says Walter.

As Worcester continues to gain momentum and propel into the 21st century, many careers, leadership opportunities, and city roles will start to become available. WYLI serves as a pipeline and facilitator for the city's youth to be introduced to the pieces that make the city work. "As an immigrant, I didn't know a lot about Worcester so I wanted to take this opportunity. It was a very good experience," says Tracey.

Mayor
Joseph Petty

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SPORTS BUSINESS

Railers open inaugural season

For business grand openings, this one could not have gone any better. Instantly electrified during the National Anthem by an artist's on ice rendering of US soldiers raising the American flag, the Worcester Railers' inaugural season opener Oct. 14 at the DCU Center captured the imagination and resilience of a capacity sell-out crowd.

Culminating a two-year crusade to bring professional hockey back to Worcester, the Railers not only won its inaugural game – a first in Worcester pro hockey history – but also satisfied the business end of sports with brisk ticket sales, packed food and drink concessions, new apparel worn by adoring fans in every section of the ice rink, and smiling faces everywhere. Fans were rewarded with fantastic hockey play with the game only decided late in the third period as well as a bevy of marketing contests for a new car, t-shirts, and more.

During the team's formative stages of organization with ECHL Commissioner Brian McKenna, Railers Owner Cliff Rucker held to his vision and promise of using the team as a catalyst for additional economic development. Over just the last year, Rucker and his team led by Railers President Mike Myers have opened a 100,000-square-foot dual hockey rink for team practice and public youth leagues including a pro shop and branded restaurant; invested in the Palladium rock club to boost downtown concerts; opened a new tavern across from the DCU; donated hundreds of thousands of dollars as a separate charitable foundation; and unveiled plans for a new restaurant and retail mix development on Main Street.

All these efforts are paying off with 1,580 season ticket sales already and counting, surpassing the Sharks' final season of sales. The team has also sold out on ice hockey board display advertising and beat out the entire league in corporate advertising and sponsorships. The icing on the cake came when the NHL's New York Islanders announced an affiliation with the team last spring.

In a recent interview with the Telegram & Gazette, Myers admits The Railers are a little different in their approach, deciding to focus a lot of time on off-ice community building. There are very few teams around the ECHL right now that can come close to what the Railers are currently investing around the city. "The real thing for me was the integration into the community," Myers recently told the T&G.

"If you believe in something, then you actually have the capacity to make others believe it. You can create your own reality."

- Cliff Rucker
Railers owner

Behind the vision sits Rucker, a humble hockey fan with laser-like focus. He founded NFS Leasing in 2005 and is currently its president, one of the largest independent equipment finance companies in the country. Prior to his tenure at NFS, Rucker was founder and CEO of NEXL, a national provider of IT services and outsourcing. Rucker oversaw the successful sale of Nexl to publicly traded NASDAQ Company MTM Technologies, in 2005. Rucker is also the principal owner of Porzia Properties, a national real estate investment firm, and Fulcrum FXT, a global asset management company. He has been featured on the cover of Computer Reseller News and served on various technology

industry councils including those for Sun Microsystems, EMC and Hewlett Packard. Mr. Rucker is a trustee at The Pingree School, The Brookwood School and on the advisory board for Citizens for Adequate Housing and Kids Kicking Cancer. He is a significant supporter of the Wellspring House, Beverly Bootstraps, EMARC, Haven from Hunger and many other not for profit organizations

As the Game Changers keynote speaker to introduce his team last year to the Worcester Regional Chamber business community, Rucker spoke almost prophetic words to describe his vision now coming true: "If you believe so strongly in something, then you actually have the capacity to make others believe it as well. You can create your own reality."

And given the Railers early success, that reality is growing every day. "The city is primed for explosive growth," Rucker says.

From left to right, Manchester Monarchs Defensemen David Kolomatsis, Worcester Regional Chamber President & CEO Timothy Murray, DCU General Manager Sandra Dunn, City Manager Edward Augustus, Lt. Gov. Karyn Polito, Susan Rucker, Railers Owner Cliff Rucker, Gov. Charlie Baker, Worcester Mayor Joe Petty, Rich Lundin, president of the Railers Booster Club, Railers President Mike Myers, ECHL Commissioner Brian McKenna and Railers Captain and Forward Ashton Rome. Below, Myers hugs Polito after opening ceremonies, and a sellout crowd waits for doors to open. Far below, fireworks erupt as Railers teammates are introduced on ice for the first time. Team mascot TRAX pays a visit to the owner's luxury box.



AROUND THE NEIGHBORHOODS - GET TO KNOW WORCESTER

Q&A WITH FASTSIGNS

Q: How long have you been a business owner in the city of Worcester?

A: We have been open just over 2 years (2 and a ¼ to be exact)

Q: Why did you decide to open a business in the city?

A: I investigated several possible locations to open my business. Worcester met all the criteria for business counts to support my FASTSIGNS center. It also has a strong showing in the industry types that our data show to be the most prevalent

sign buying industries (Construction, Education, Manufacturing, Healthcare, Retail). I also was impressed with the Chamber leadership and the role Tim Murray was playing in driving economic development in the city.

Q: What is it like being a business owner in your particular neighborhood/part of the city?

A: The Webster Square area has a strong and supportive business community. I'm a member of the Webster Square Business Association,

which connects area businesses, as well as supports and gives back to the Webster Square neighborhood where local business owners support and engage with each other.

Q: What are the benefits of being a business owner in Worcester?

A: Worcester provides a wealth of resources to help business owners at every stage. I joined the Chamber and began networking and meeting other business owners before my business opened its doors. I also took advantage of classes at the Center for Women and Enterprise and working with a business consultant at the Small Business Development Center (SBDC) at Clark University.



Denise Carr, Owner of FASTSIGNS of Worcester.

I often work with new business owners as customers and I share with them all the resources available to them in Worcester

Q: What has the redevelopment of the city done for you and your business?

A: Activities that support growth and development in the city have a great return on investment. As new business move to the city, it is good for all the businesses in the city.

Like what you see?

Most of the reporting, writing, editing and design of this publication was done by Tim Kane, veteran newspaper guy and PR professional.

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Outside Dining

The chief sponsor of Worcester's Outside Dining Ordinance allowing year round outside dining weather permitting.

Parking Lot Rules

Author of the changes to Parking lot ordinance cutting down red tape for small business. Allowing lots under 16 spaces to NOT go to through hearings and wait months.

Hire Local

A Leader who constantly is encouraging big developers and the City to use local suppliers and hire Local residents and companies.

Seminars for Businesses

George was the author of the Council item creating the City's Seminars on Starting a new business and bidding on City work.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

WBDC nurtures steady growth in SBA loans



Craig Blais, president & CEO of WBDC, and Joyce Stewart, executive director of the WBDC SBA and Finance.

WORCESTER - If an existing small business in a leased space wants to purchase property with a loan and also invest in major equipment upgrades, where could that borrower turn for help beyond conventional lending means?

One unique option is through the Worcester Business Development Corporation (WBDC) and its SBA 504 Loan Program aimed at expanding for-profit economic development projects.

The agency's SBA loan program works by having

the chosen local lending institution take 50 percent with first lien by way of the mortgage to secure the loan that can be used for any variety of developments, including property purchasing, new construction, machinery acquisition, and even some refinancing of existing debt. Then, the WBDC in partnership with the federal Small Business Administration (SBA) provides the secondary 40 percent of financing called debenture with a maximum loan size of \$5.5 million.

The borrower is only required to put 10 percent

equity down. As long as the borrower qualifies, the loan is for 10 or 20 years at fixed rate financing, which is currently averaging 4.59 percent. The borrower must have a tangible net worth of \$15 million or less, and is allowed to take out multiple SBA loans at the same time.

"It's 90 percent financing of which 40 percent is backed by the feds. It's a great deal for the bank, and a great deal for the borrower," says Craig L. Blais, president & CEO of the WBDC. "All your fees are rolled into that rate. When we present this, people don't believe us. They ask, 'What's the catch?'"

It is one of the Worcester region's best kept secrets given its growing popularity. Out of 261 CDCs in the country, adds Joyce A. Stewart, executive director of SBA and Finance at the WBDC, Massachusetts is ranked as a top leader in administering the 504 loan program. About 86 percent of the loans she facilitates go to existing businesses.


"We have a lot of good, sophisticated CDCs in our area," says Blais, adding that a CDC has to be part of the loan deal otherwise the SBA won't approve it. "There is an incredible amount of small businesses that qualify for this."

There is also a good mix of local banks that accept CDC-serviced SBA 504 loans, including several credit unions, Rollstone Bank, Fidelity Bank, Cornerstone Bank, UniBank, and Baystate Savings Bank among others. The WBDC's \$36-plus million loan portfolio includes a concrete company, restaurant, envelope printer, car wash, golf course, hotel, auto and trailer sales and service, distributor, and health and fitness center to name a few.

The WBDC's newest SBA loan project that closed in July involves Flying Rhino Café & Watering Hole

SEE WBDC, PAGE A12

Governor Charlie Baker to Headline Chamber Event



142nd Annual Meeting

FRI., DEC. 1

Noon - 2 pm

DCU Center Worcester, MA

WORCESTER REGIONAL

Chamber of Commerce

Keolis signals rail improvements for Heart To Hub

WORCESTER – When the Heart To Hub Express rolled into Worcester in May 2016, the long-awaited commuter rail service promised sleek, convenient and fast trains to and from Boston in under one hour between city platforms. After a series of well publicized commuter delays and breakdowns due to aging gear and infrastructure, however, as well as the possibility of adding additional stops, local Worcester leaders became more pro-active in pushing for better maintenance and upgrades to improve current levels of service.

“We have seen how the 20 round trips (per day to and from Worcester) have played a pivotal role in driving millions of dollars in economic development to Worcester. You talk to business owners large and small in and around Union Station, the Canal District, and Shrewsbury Street, and even realtors selling homes in our ring towns,” says Timothy P. Murray, Worcester Regional Chamber president & CEO, “and they talk about rail being a big factor in why this region is growing.”

In that spirit, the Worcester Regional Chamber of Commerce invited David Scorey, general manager of Keolis Commuter Services, which operates and maintains the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority’s (MBTA) commuter rail system, into its offices on Oct. 12 to address many concerns among gathered business leaders, and to learn more about customer service, locomotive fleet and track/station improvements already underway. Scorey openly acknowledges the need for improved on-time Express Train performance, but also notes a long and expensive list of improvement areas, including more than half of the MBTA’s locomotive fleet in need of repairs or overhaul.

With 16,000 weekday passengers and 18 stations strewn along 44 miles, the Framingham/Worcester line is the MBTA’s busiest in terms of actual train traffic and density of service. The T took over ownership of this line in 2012 and dispatch control in 2013, allowing it to better prioritize passenger trains over historically heavy freight-centric traffic. But that hasn’t stopped a bevy of problems from surfacing. Scorey says slips in all day and peak commuter time performance was seen as far back as last October that continued with climbs and falls in service through this past September, which saw one of the worst peak time performances in more than a year. Since Heart to Hub’s inception, Worcester trains have been operating at the lowest 80 percent level of peak performance as compared to the rest of the T’s network of 14 lines, which hover around 90 percent.

SEE RAIL, PAGE A11

Zippering into city

WORCESTER - Zipcar officially launched in Worcester on June 28, 2017 through a partnership with the city. Under that agreement, vehicles are available in on-street spots downtown and another eight are available at nearby colleges and universities for a total of 14 in the Worcester fleet.

The launch in Worcester builds on Zipcar’s success at several universities in the area, including Clark University, College of the Holy Cross, Worcester Polytechnic Institute and Worcester State University. With a number of students already using Zipcar, Chris Moulding, Zipcar’s regional community marketing manager, says his team was eager to expand their presence off-campus and into the downtown area to provide more residents and visitors with convenient access to wheels.

Mayor calls for more all-electric bus fleets

WORCESTER — Mayor Joseph M. Petty and 18 other mayors are calling on the state transportation officials to put into place a comprehensive plan that accelerates the deployment of electric buses in cities and towns.

In a letter sent to Stephanie Pollack, secretary and chief executive officer of the state Department of Transportation in September, the mayors and the Sierra Club urged the state to adopt binding targets for electric bus procurement into all regional transit fleets and commit to having 100 percent of new bus purchases as electric by 2030. They called electric buses a “critical tool” in the fight against climate change.

Petty, who was the lead signatory of the letter, said while some transit systems, including the Worcester Regional Transit Authority, have already introduced electric buses into their fleets, more needs to be done, and fast.

- Reprinted From T&G.

“We’re always looking to provide our members with more cars in more locations. We have a presence in nine countries, more than 500 cities and towns and more than 600 colleges and universities. In fact, we just recently launched in Costa Rica, which marks our first launch in Latin America,” says Moulding.

Zipcar’s mission is to enable simple and responsible urban living in cities across the globe, including right here in Worcester, according to Moulding. By encouraging people to share cars rather than own them, they’re reducing traffic, congestion, and carbon emissions, making cities better places to live. Studies show that each Zipcar eliminates the need for up to 13 personally owned cars on the road.

Zipcar rates in Worcester start as low as \$7.50 an hour and \$69 per day at colleges and universities, and \$9 per hour and \$74 per day downtown, which includes gas, maintenance, insurance and 180 miles of driving per day. Additionally, members pay a one-time application fee of \$25 and an annual membership fee of \$70.

As an urban service, Zipcar’s car-sharing members tend to be those who live in cities and want access to a vehicle without the hassles that come along with owning one, such as finding and paying for parking and keeping up with regular oil changes and tire rotations. With Zipcar, members have access to a vehicle when they want it and it’s out of sight when they don’t.

It’s as simple as “join, reserve and drive,” Moulding says, offering a quick day-in-the-life of a typical new member: Drivers become

Worcester C

WORCESTER - The Worcester Regional Chamber of Commerce, in partnership with bike share company, Ofo, has unveiled a new bike share program in Worcester. Worcester is among the first three cities to be part of the program’s expansion. The Worcester launch occurred on September 14.

Ofo is privately owned and the program is managed by the city.

The Chamber has led the discussion about a city-wide bike share program for more than a year, with input from various groups including the Worcester Regional Chamber of Commerce (WRTC), Central Massachusetts Council (CMRPC), Higher Education Council of Massachusetts (HECCMA), the city of Worcester, and the city manager’s office. Together, these groups conducted a feasibility study for Worcester and researched existing bike share programs. Much of the study was focused on infrastructure, safety, and cost.

Ofo, which launched in China in 2015, has been a group’s concerns and more. Now the world’s largest growing bike sharing platform with more than 10 million users daily in over 150 cities and 200 campuses, Ofo offers many benefits to the city.

Unlike many other community bike share programs, no commitment or sponsorship was required to launch the program. A significant hurdle. Additional benefits



Worcester City Manager Edward M. Augustus, Jr. (inset) takes a spin around City Common on one of the 400 new ofo Bike Share bicycles unveiled at this September launch ceremony.

TRANSPORTATION

City commuting's newest fleet



City's Worcester fleet features a variety of makes and models, including Hondas Civics, Ford Escapes, and Volkswagen and Golfs.

member by signing up online. Once approved, Zipcar sends a package in the mail, which is the key to the entire fleet of over 12,000 vehicles across the globe. Once a member, drivers can use Zipcar's mobile app or go online to make a reservation. At the beginning of a reservation, users simply tap their Zipcar on the windshield, and the doors unlock. The key is already in the car. Take the trip, and bring it back to its designated parking spot when done. And the rides aren't too shabby, either. Our Worcester fleet features a variety of makes and models, including Hondas Civics, Ford Escapes, and Volkswagen Golfs," says Moulding. "My personal favorite is a Honda Civic that we named 'Boopie' for really no reason other than it sounded funny. In Zipcar in our global fleet has a unique name. It's something fun and unique that

our members really enjoy." Zipcar is currently based in Boston. The company was founded in the year 2000 by two women in Cambridge who realized that personal car ownership in cities was highly inefficient. Moulding is a veteran when it comes to the automobile business. Before joining Zipcar four years ago, he spent 17 years working for the world largest auto auction company in several positions. Much of that time was spent overseeing auction marketing campaigns for the Northeast and Canada. "The ironic thing is that I now oversee Zipcar's marketing and community efforts in the same geographic area," Moulding adds. Current and prospective members can find out more about the service by visiting Zipcar.com.

Chamber leads effort to roll out Bike Share

Chamber of Commerce, who has announced that they will benefit from ofo's U.S. launch on Sept. 14 at City Hall. The program is not administered or managed by the Chamber. In establishing a city-wide bike share with stakeholders, the Worcester Regional Transit Authority, the Regional Planning Commission, and a consortium of Central Massachusetts planning office, the groups explored the program, researched a number of options, and spent time and energy on the project. The Chamber addressed all of the concerns of the city's largest and fastest growing, with more than 20 million active users around the world, and the program shares, no financial help in helping the group to launch the ofo bike share

program include the flexibility allowed by the dockless program that does not require docking stations or even a bike rack. Bicycles are located using a GPS finder on ofo's mobile app. Bikes are equipped with a smart lock on the rear wheel that is unlocked when a user scans the QR code on the bike, using her or his phone. When the cyclist is finished, the user parks the bike in a legal space and locks the bike ready for the next rider. The company re-balances bikes daily to ensure that they are available in high-use areas, maintained, and parked appropriately. The ofo service is affordable for almost all budgets with charges set at \$1 per hour with a reduced rate of \$.50 per hour for college students. The company's pricing was a key factor in their selection as it makes the bike share accessible to all types of riders: from low income people looking for an alternative way to work; to college students who want to get downtown; to commuters completing their trip with the "final mile" after using the WRTA, commuter rail, or other shared service. "The Chamber took the lead on this effort because of the many tangible benefits of a bike share program – from the economic to the position of the city as an innovation hub, to the health benefits, this program will help Worcester appeal to a broad range of businesses and residents alike," says Timothy P. Murray, president & CEO of the Worcester Regional Chamber of Commerce. "We worked with stakeholders to ensure that we looked at all of the aspects of the program, and could not be happier with the service, convenience,

and 'it factor' that ofo provides." Bike sharing is offered by many metropolitan areas and are gaining momentum in non-traditional biking cities across the U.S. and the globe. Benefits of bike sharing include: increased physical activity, fills in the gaps for areas not served by public transportation, and eliminates barriers created by riding schedules. Moreover, it creates a positive economic impact on property values through public perception of a greener and more accessible city, is a step toward social equality by providing an affordable and convenient transportation option for all residents, a zero emissions transportation option, and a full-time maintenance team to manage, inspect, and repair bikes. "We are excited that ofo chose to invest in Worcester," adds Worcester City Manager Edward M. Augustus, Jr. "As our City becomes increasingly bike-friendly, the rider data ofo will share with us can help inform our City's Master Plan and our bike/pedestrian plan. We think this can be a great program not just as alternative transportation, but a way to keep active and enjoy our city." From a tourism perspective, the bike share program will provide another way for visitors to experience the city. For a leisurely jaunt through the city to experience the foodie scene at Worcester's restaurants, visit historical landmarks, or enjoy the city's many green spaces, biking is an ideal mode of transportation.

TRANSPORTATION

Davis spreads wings at Worcester Airport

WORCESTER – More than 450,000 passengers have traversed Worcester Regional Airport since Andy Davis took over as airport director here, enjoying a bevy of major runway upgrades and flight expansions set to unfold in the very near future.

Davis assumed his latest position at Massachusetts Port Authority (Massport) in 2008 after a 26-year career with American Airlines. At American, he developed a wealth of aviation management experience both in operations and staff level positions, including positions at a wide variety of airports from as small as Eagle/Vail, CO to as large as Chicago's O'Hare Airport. He held management positions at 10 airports throughout the country including Boston, Providence, Hartford/Springfield, Stewart/Newburgh, and assisted American with start-up operations in an additional 12 cities.

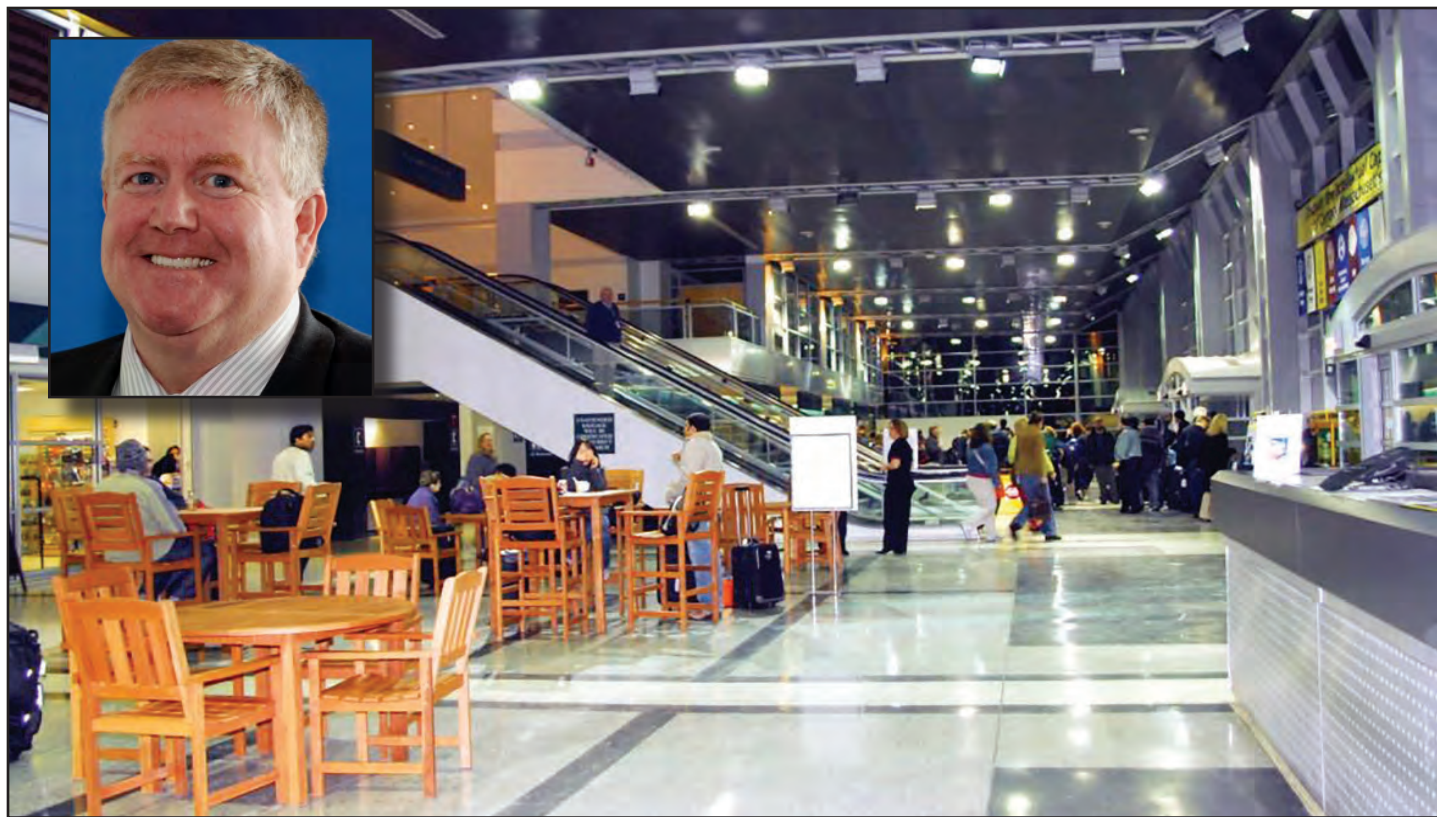
At Worcester Regional Airport, Davis is responsible for day-to-day operations as well as developing the airport to its full potential, including the promotion of both commercial and general aviation. Davis wants to build upon an existing modern passenger terminal suitable for both narrow body and regional jet aircraft, and several hundred acres of developable land has the airport well positioned for supporting aviation growth in the region.

The latest feather in his cap is JetBlue, which announced intentions last spring to fly out of Worcester Regional Airport to Kennedy Airport based in New York City. He believes this is a great opportunity in that JFK has more than 230 flights per day, which provides a unique opportunity for Worcester Airport to connect to New York and hopefully beyond as well. "With Kennedy being the gateway to the world with a significant amount of international flights, that's a one-stop opportunity to fly to and from Worcester," he adds.

JetBlue has not announced a start date for JFK flight service quite yet as it is awaiting several Massport-driven airport upgrades to be completed. Davis feels JetBlue's expansion is not only important for a local businessman to have access to the New York market and the world, but also their clients, customers and business partners accessing Worcester. "You want to have that network come in and do business in Worcester," Davis says.

To meet JetBlue's requirements and further expand airport infrastructure to accommodate more business here, Worcester Airport is closing in on completion of a long-awaited CAT III instrument landing system upgrade with back-up power generator technology projected to be finished this December. The new back-up generators activate within a half second of a power failure.

Massport's five-year, \$32 million project partially funded by federal grants initially came up in 2012 when Congressman Jim McGovern visited the airport with former federal Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood. Massport, which has operated Worcester Regional Airport since 2010, offered a proposal to invest in the CAT III upgrade to LaHood during that visit, if the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) was willing to take over the



Worcester Regional Airport Director Andy Davis (inset) is overseeing a \$32 million upgrade to the airport's CAT III instrument (pictured below) landing systems and runway lighting. The improvements pad an already redeveloped interior passenger terminal.

operation of that system. "Massport is in the business of running airports, not navigation aids, which does fall under the FAA," says Davis.

The upgrade is now largely complete with new approach lights at the ends of the runways and navigation transmitters that send beams down the runway to ensure airplanes are lined up not only horizontally but also vertically for low visibility approaches. Davis says both of these new systems have been turned over to the FAA to conduct final calibrations and adjustments with ongoing live flight checks to ensure accuracy over a two-to-three-month certification process that began earlier this fall. Davis says all the upgrades are still on schedule for a Dec. 7 commissioning.

Moreover, Massport is now finishing up final construction on the airfield itself and the physical upgrades it had committed to the FAA to accomplish, including adding a jug handle additional taxi-way to allow airplanes to get on and off the longest runway there. Davis says that normally airports offer parallel taxi-ways that run alongside the active runways. Terrain limitations and lack of demand for planes to parallel taxi, however, as opposed to back-taxiing on a runway to make a U-turn to takeoff or land, will now be possible. The jug handle offers airplanes the ability to continue to back taxi on a runway, but turn off or egress, if needed.

Davis believes the new Cat III system puts Worcester Airport on parity with other regional airports with low visibility issues. "It makes the airport more reliable not only for the airline but also its customers," says Davis. "This system will complement aviation in this region so customers now have an option, and now Worcester is one of them."

Based on the growing demand of airline travel, Davis estimates that more JetBlue-like expansions at Worcester Airport could become more realistic in the future. "The demand is increasing and what we are promoting to other airlines is to improve our network," Davis says. "They don't just have to fly out of Logan Airport if they live in Central



Mass. or even MetroWest. We will give airlines better selling options to their customers and be competitive with other airlines with more airline service and not just out of one airport."

Other recent developments at the airport include the 2015 addition of fixed-based operator Rectrix Aerodome Center, which offers a new 20,000-square-foot heated hanger and manages the airport's hanger and fueling services as well as de-icing and maintenance. Based planes at the airport now number 70 single engine private leisure aircraft, including seven corporate multi-engine jets owned by Rectrix.

Davis says the airport averages 100 takeoffs or landings per day, which

includes four operations per day by JetBlue seven days a week. Student flight training is also growing here with surrounding flight schools taking advantage of ideal conditions. All of this activity has laid the groundwork for a bright future atop one of Worcester's seven hills.

"What I envision this airport as is a reliever airport and to accommodate growing demand for aviation and air service, particularly on the commercial side," Davis says. "There are no new airports being built in New England. As air travel demand increases, Worcester is in a perfect position to accommodate general and commercial aviation."

TRANSPORTATION

RAIL, FROM PAGE A8

“What we saw in September is a really frustrating signaling problem near Grafton where a signaling system reverts to a fail safe,” Scorey says. “And that is an intermittent problem that occurs two to three times a week. It’s very hard to pin down. What we believe is happening is that a stray feed is getting into signaling system from the domestic grid. When the signaling system picks up this feed, it is designed to fail safe.” He adds that his staff is currently working to resolve that issue that causes an estimated three-minute delay each time it occurs.

Work continues to improve the Framingham/Worcester line. Over the last two years, the T has replaced 80,000 ties or about a mile per day to ensure proper rail alignment as well as lifting speed restrictions and opening the long-awaited Boston Landing Station. Those new ties have a life expectancy of only seven years. Also, replacement of switches and signaling systems was prioritized as was a forthcoming new platform addition at Union Station. “In the afternoon, if there’s a train in Union Station, another train can’t leave,” Scorey says. “The more trains that you operate and the closer together they are, if one train is delayed it’s more likely to have an impact farther down the track to other trains.” He adds that the ongoing work to actually improve the line also adds to delays between inbound and outbound trains. For example, train speeds have to be reduced from 50-60 mph to about 30 mph over the section of line that is undergoing tie replacement. A train takes quite a bit of time to slow down to 30 mph in that line replacement section and then speed back up again, adding an additional five minutes to the journey.

“What we do see on the Worcester line is a high proportion of trains narrowly missing their optimal time performance (OTP) threshold,” Scorey says, “so arriving within two to three minutes of



Worcester Regional Chamber of Commerce President & CEO Timothy P. Murray, right, invited David Scorey, general manager of Keolis Commuter Services, to his office Oct. 12 to publicly discuss performance issues along the Framingham-Worcester commuter rail line.

their planned arrival time. From an OTP perspective, that delay is considered a failure. The Worcester lines trails below the overall network.”

Currently, there is not much additional improvement work ongoing along the Framingham/Worcester line other than a new interlocking switch being installed near Boston Landing, Scorey adds. The main pieces of heavy maintenance and upgrades along the Worcester line are now complete, minus the planned new platform at Union Station now in final design stages.

Scorey admits that daily train scheduling, which he feels is “great” from a ridership and capacity perspective, still hits snags around mid-morning from Framingham east to Boston. This is mainly due to how the T spaces its trains along the network through use of signalization, which often revert to caution status if even one

train becomes delayed. Other causes of the delays, Scorey says, can be as simple as passengers not boarding trains quickly enough, causing a cumulative effect along 12 station stops. Over the past month, there have also been a tragic fatal incident near Natick and a few locomotive failures.

What the T plans to do about the signaling issue involves examining set line speeds. Now that the tie replacement work is complete, Keolis plans to slowly increase the speed of some trains over the next month now that track safety concerns have been alleviated, possibly shaving two to three minutes off the total commuter travel time for some trains.

Keolis has a plan to evolve its mid-term life expectancy fleet to 90 new or overhauled locomotives by December 2018.



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WBDC, FROM PAGE A7

located at 278 Shrewsbury St. in Worcester. Owner Paul Barber had been leasing the existing space for 18 years, says Stewart, but wanted to purchase the building outright to build upon the restaurant's mix of eclectic food, full bar and wine cellar.

With the average loan lasting approximately 10 years, the first three years are a critical time for the WBDC to work very closely with its loan clients to help protect the long-term viability of those investments. Only one loan has failed in the past 10 years of the WBDC's SBA loan program, though Stewart adds that it has done loan payment deferments in the past to help clients catch up. Borrowers are also subject to a substantial sliding scale pre-payment penalty during the loan's first 10 years because the SBA sells the debenture to investors and they then have to get a return, Blais adds. After 10 years, the pre-penalty ends and banks often will then refinance at a lower rate.

"We absolutely love going out to see the people because they are so hands-on and very grateful," says Stewart, who adds that the average turnaround time for the WBDC board of directors subcommittee-driven applicant review, credit analysis and loan approval is about seven days, not factoring in closing. "Going from that leap of leasing to owning is a big deal. We make it easy."

Unknown to many, the SBA is not subsidized by federal taxes but is funded based on fees they collect from its estimated \$100 billion loan portfolio across the country. Part of President Obama's 2009 American Recovery and Reinvestment Act specifically targeted the SBA, asking it to pay the fees to help stimulate the economy, which created a groundswell of renewed interest.

"The program is backed by the



Just some of the area businesses who have benefited from the WBDC's 504 SBA loan program.



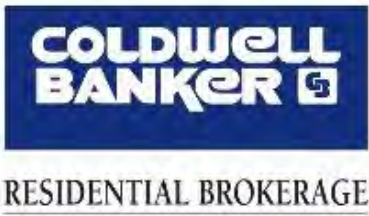
federal government, but it is self-perpetuating. The money all gets recycled," says Blais. "The interest is the federal government's. We take a piece of it. They pay us and they pay the servicing, but the big money goes back into the program. The SBA takes all the expenses to run the program out of it and then they relend it again."



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TAXES, FROM PAGE A1

or reduce the commercial/industrial tax deferential every year since I've been here," says Jacobson, who started in her position mid-way through FY '12. "They recognize that this isn't something you should or could do overnight. It should be a long, steady strategy so as to not overly burden the residential taxpayer."

Some of the most recent commercial growth Auburn is experiencing includes new franchise Bob's corporate headquarters; 30,000-square-foot Percy's Distribution Center; and a

90,000-square-foot Reliant Medical Center, retail spaces and restaurant now under construction in the former Macy's home store at the Auburn Mall opening next spring. There are also a few open parcels on the market right now for large-scale industrial-zoned developments at the 17-acre former Lowe's site by the Yankee Drummer, 457,000-square-foot Mid-State Packaging facility on Millbury Street, three other different parcels occupying almost 50-acres along Washington Street (Route 20), and a state-of-the-art

R.H. White's Construction headquarters and training center on Central Street with 300 employees based there. (See *completed projects list below*).

"We get a lot of expansions of existing facilities. When I first started here [in 2011]," Jacobson says, "there were a lot of vacant and unused lots along Route 12. Much of that space has filled up in the past six years."

With the Auburn's average medium residential home sales price at \$227,500 – less than many neighboring communities - Jacobson says Auburn's

commercial/industrial businesses are still paying more than their fair share in taxes and receiving less in town services than the average residential owner. "It's trying to find that sensitive balance to the needs of both residential and business communities," Jacobson says. "The commercial/industrial tax rate is critical to keeping the residential tax rate low. If you start losing major CI, that has a negative impact on your residential base. Trying to explain to residents how this works can be very difficult for elected officials."

RECENTLY COMPLETED AUBURN DEVELOPMENTS

The results of multi-tiered economic development efforts have begun to materialize in the growth of the Auburn commercial/industrial base as shown below: .

Completed Projects:

Mid-states Packaging, Inc.
28 Millbury Street

This international distribution company now occupies the entirety of a 456,920 square foot facility that has previously been vacant for several years.

Percy's Distribution Center
10-16 Millbury Street

Percy's purchased the property in December of 2015 and began rehabilitation efforts to operate its new distribution facility within a 30,000 s.f. industrial building.

Wendy's Restaurant
688 Southbridge Street

Wendy's restaurant received Site Plan approval from the Auburn Planning Board in September of 2015 to add an outdoor patio with picnic tables to enhance its seating area.

Pakachoag Acres Day Care

They purchased vacant distressed property that was in poor condition, demolished the existing structure and are replacing it with a new building designed specifically to meet the needs of a 21st century childcare provider.

R.H. White Construction

Auburn is home to the headquarters of R.H. White Construction. 300 employees are located in the company's Auburn headquarters.

Bells Lawn and Garden Center

The new commercial nursery stand for the sale of produce at property located at 282 Southbridge Street is complete. The project took place on an undeveloped parcel next door to Colonial Glass. The business includes the sale of flowers and other various garden or nursery-related products.

TD Bank Relocation

TD Bank received Site Plan Approval to relocate their Auburn facility to a new property. The construction approval includes leasing a pre-existing 3,500s.f. building with the addition of a drive-up ATM. This relocation fills a vacancy within the front-facing 3-tenant retail space that includes ReadyMed at 460 Southbridge St and has prime visibility on a main thoroughfare. The bank opened in September 2015.

Deer Run Estates

This development consists of a new 800-foot road servicing 9 single-family houses on a 38-acre parcel. The lots contained in this subdivision have a minimum lot size of 60,000 square feet with a minimum frontage of 180 feet. The homes in this development will range from 2,300 to 3,500 square feet. As part of the design, the developer has placed a conservation restriction on approximately 20 acres for the purpose of preservation of habitat for flora and fauna of special concern. Completed in April 2015.

Kitchen Makers
769 Washington Street

An applicant received approval from the Planning Board in March 2015 to open a kitchen furniture and appliance store within a previously vacant retail building. The existing building, formerly known as the King Phillip Motel, has high visibility on a state highway and was in deplorable condition. The applicant began construction in spring 2015 to upgrade the exterior façade of the building and continues to improve the property throughout the construction process. Construction was completed in the fall of 2016.

Spirit Central, Inc.
189 Washington Street

Spirit Central Inc. received a Special Permit from the ZBA in June 2015 to operate a dance/gymnastic studio within a 9,600 square foot vacant warehouse located in the Industrial Park zoning district. They received Site Plan Approval from the Planning Board in July 2015 for the site layout which includes striping of 58 parking spaces to accommodate 120 students to be relocated to this facility from out-of-town.

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SALES & MARKETING



Above, Chamber members pose questions to (top right photo) Danielle Cremmen, an associate in sales and marketing with Sandler Training/SaleFish, LLC, and Michael Flippin, the firm's chief training officer, (also pictured below).



Sales training highlights LinkedIn prowess, distinct selling system

WORCESTER - Two sales and marketing experts with Sandler Training/SaleFish, LLC schooled their peers on a bevy of social media and sales tools tips during the September Worcester Regional Chamber of Commerce Seminar Series.

Danielle Cremmen, an associate in sales and marketing with Sandler, lead her discussion on a forward thinking path that largely focused on how to improve and maximize LinkedIn.com profiles. As a first start, she advises “claiming your name” by using first and last names in profile URLs instead of company titles as well as uploading a professional business photo.

Beyond the basics, adding a helpful headline that provides more detail than your current job title such as a catchy slogan is often overlooked and a missed opportunity to offer a well written elevator pitch, including services provided. “In that 30 second commercial, you should use keywords in there,” says Cremmen. “You need to make the reader feel like you are talking to them. Build the curiosity so they look at your profile.”

Adding words, talents and experiences to LinkedIn.com is encouraged, but Cremmen advises taking profile management a step even further. Engage the person looking at your profile to come check out your website, download an ebook or white paper, or attend a class. Any call to action that requires them to do something in 30 seconds or less pays dividends down the road.

If you are using a resume on LinkedIn for sales or job opportunity lead generation, then Cremmen advises users to get away from the typical format using a first person “I” perspective and avoid publishing a resume that blanket lists all employers. “You don’t need to list every company you’ve worked for in the past,” says Cremmen. “We suggest the past two, and just list the company, your role and the time spent employed there.”

By pinning that information to the top of your profile, it avoids the need for scrolling to find the information and presents information in a convenient method for readers. Also, changing your white paper, open house or event often keeps the profile fresh and visitors coming back.

“Social selling is all new to us,” says Cremmen. “We’re all still figuring out what the best practices are. The best practices are to focus on the future instead of just uploading your entire resume and work portfolio. If somebody requires that, you can provide it.”

Cremmen says to approach LinkedIn as your personal brand showing who you’ve worked with in the past and who you are going to work with in the future. Users should make that profile separate from a company profile that normally offers tips, tricks and other useful advice. She believes it is essential for users to set aside time to do planning and research during the day to prospect and increase sales opportunities, and be very cognizant of what exactly you want to say when sending out a connection

request. “We need to add that bonding and customize that message because you think they are going to add value to your network,” says Cremmen.

Visit your profile regularly and delete anyone who does not add value to your network of hopefully 500 minimum first-time connections, then find somebody who would benefit within those connections from viewing your site. Ask for referrals at the end of every meeting or networking event. “Money does grow on referral trees,” says Cremmen.

LinkedIn also provides a good potential future sales opportunity with what Cremmen calls reaction notifications, such as for a connection’s birthday, new product launch, change of employment, work anniversary, or promotion. “These are all trigger events that we can all react to,” says Cremmen. “Comment on it, like it, message and be engaging with these so your name pops up and they are thinking of you.”

Also, consider joining and involving yourself in a LinkedIn group, Cremmen adds, as well as responding to incoming new connection messages with a simple, ‘how were you hoping we could potentially help each other?’ “You’ll never know if you don’t ask,” she says. “It’s a mutual relationship.”

She concludes by advising LinkedIn users to regularly check who is viewing your profile and don’t let them scoot away. “I now regularly message back those viewers, writing ‘thanks for checking out my profile. What did you like about it or didn’t like? Is there something I can help you with?’”

‘Sales process is a non-manipulative exchange of info among equals’

Michael Flippin, chief training officer with Sandler Training/SaleFish, LLC, continued the conversation on the direct sales side by asking audience members when does marketing end and sales begin?

“Marketing is one to many and the sales process begins when we have some type of interaction,” says Flippin. “What makes me a professional salesperson is closing business, and driving prospects through a systematic selling system. People don’t buy out of curiosity, they buy out of emotion. You need to have a system that is multipliable.”

Flippin went on to say that it is the salesperson’s job to close the deal. He advises salespeople to always be closing for the next step so having a written process in place helps guide success. “A sales process is a non-manipulative exchange of information among equals,” says Flippin. “We’re not an interruption.” Flippin suggests an alternative to constant prospecting is to find reasons why someone would want to talk to you, as it establishes a reason why they should qualify.

Flippin often highlights phrases to avoid when making cold calls, including “sorry to interrupt” or “hope I’m not catching you at a bad time”. Instead, he says if salespeople approach the conversation as an equal, then you are not immediately establishing yourself as a subordinate. “There’s a difference between assertiveness and aggressiveness,” Flippin adds. “You know if you’ve gone too far because it usually sounds like a dial tone.”

In addition to building a sales system is creating a specific playbook that captures best practices, Flippin says, for each stage in that master process. Also, salespeople must create a culture of practice by doing roleplaying with co-workers or family and friends so they can then replicate success.

Key objections from potential clients usually are the same six ones, Flippin adds, so creating planned responses to those is highly advisable to be more strategic about the selling process. “Don’t feel like you’re winging it all the time,” he says. “You must work on the business and not just in the business.”



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WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

‘Talent turnpike’ urged to fill manufacturing jobs

WORCESTER – Hosted by Kinefac Corporation, the Worcester Regional Chamber’s National Manufacturing Day celebrated on Oct. 6 yet again struck the chord of wide spread challenges in attracting younger workers while also trumpeting the many resources available for training.

“The need for the talent turnpike is great,” says Timothy Murray, president & CEO of the Worcester Regional Chamber, “because many existing manufacturers are aging out over the next 5-7 years.”

Representing about 10 percent of Massachusetts’ GDP or roughly \$40 billion annually supported by 250,000 workers, the multiplier effect extends out into all aspects of the state’s economy. “For every manufacturing job in this state, there are two-to-three other jobs created in the economic ecosystem,” according to John Killam, president & CEO of the Massachusetts Manufacturing Extension Partnership (MassMEP).

The current high demand in attracting skilled and qualified people for manufacturing jobs is unprecedented. Killam says many companies are not looking for applicants with degrees, but rather what he calls “work readiness” candidates. “On the technical side, there is a gap,” Killam adds. “High schools do a really good job getting kids prepared for college, but not every kid goes to college.”

What MassMEP and its partners are trying to do is create a pathway for high school graduates who want to go into manufacturing to come into the program to obtain basic skills such as job reliability, shop math, blueprint reading, and instrument and gauge measurements in a formal, credentialed program.

One avenue to bring together the various stakeholders involved in generating more skilled workers is through the Central Mass. Workforce Investment Board (CMWIB) led by Director Jeff Turgeon.



Central Mass Workforce Investment Board Director Jeff Turgeon makes a point during the discussion. To Jeff’s immediate left is Kinefac Corp. Owner and Director Leslie E. Greis.

Turgeon’s agency is a public/private partnership, serving needs of both employers and employees. The board collaboratively develops and implements strategies for job readiness and skills advancement, leveraging community resources that promote economic wellness within the region’s 38 cities and towns. Turgeon says the primary role of the CMWIB is to convene civic and business leadership, and utilize their insights to direct public funds aimed at building the skills of the workforce in our area. The CMWIB also oversees the region’s three One Stop Career Centers located in Worcester, Milford and Southbridge.

Whether it’s the employer side, colleges, educators, organized labor or community groups, Turgeon says his

agency’s job is to help them to develop a talent pool in order to grow, adding that the coming wave of retirements in manufacturing and what that means for the economy should concern everyone. He was struck during the Kinefac tour by its innovative internship program and how many entry level assemblers move on to more advanced roles by helping to further educate them.

CMWIB has invested more than \$2.5 billion of public resources into workforce training and pathway development, and has trained more than 300 hundred people. One of its top priorities right now is to work with key stakeholders to develop a regional blueprint for workforce development.

Quinsigamond Community College’s (QCC) George Duval says his

institution’s two-year technology prep program allows many students to move on to more advanced manufacturing and engineering-related degrees at area schools. “We have a good program that actually transfers all credits to WPI, UMass and some of the other four-year colleges,” he says.

Duval teaches in QCC’s electronics-technology division, helping train students to become first line technicians on production or manufacturing lines. And with the advent of QCC’s new QuEST Center that strengthens the educational pipeline for STEM and robotics careers, the college can offer high end manufacturing lab experiences and training as well as more basic computer science tracks in IT support and install networks.



Kinefac Engineer Mike Sweeney demonstrates a production method during the tour.

A model of hiring younger workers

WORCESTER - This company has a good employee problem, as they say.

More than half of Kinefac Corporation’s employees have been there for 20 years or more, while the company also provides abundant opportunities for younger workers to thrive. Kinefac Engineer Mike Sweeney recently graduated from WPI with a bachelor of science in mechanical engineering and was able to obtain his master’s while working at Kinefac. “He is now one of our internal experts in one of our metal forming processes that is proprietary technology,” Kinefac Owner & Director Leslie E. Greis says.

She adds that manufacturing extends far beyond the shop floor. Kinefac Sales Representative Chris Caitlin got his start as an assembler, but quickly became interested in other facets of the business and now sells the company’s parts and services while attending Quinsigamond Community College and serving in the Army Reserves.

Andrew Penneman also started as an assembler at

SEE KINEFAC, PAGE A16

KINEFAC, FROM PAGE A15

Kinefac, but wanted to put his accounting degree from Worcester State University to good use. He now serves as the company’s operations analyst and serves on many of the company’s internal committees.

Greis also cites one additional employee, Engineer David Willens, who literally knocked on her father’s door one day asking for a job. The company hired Willens part-time and helped him attend WPI where he did a thesis about Kinefac technology, which won a national award. He went on to earn his masters from WPI and is now pursuing his doctorate with Kinefac’s assistance.

“He now travels around the world,” Greis says, “working and interfacing with top technology companies around the world.”

Greis says that despite her company’s success with recruiting and retaining younger employees, Kinefac is currently hiring mechanical engineers, electrical controls engineers, robotics engineers, marketing assistant, international machinery sales, web marketing professional, and an office assistant.

Located on Goddard Memorial Drive in Worcester, Kinefac Corporation sells its precision metal forming technologies and machines in more than 25 different countries. Design, engineering, and manufacturing is all done in Worcester, while maintaining sales offices in Shanghai, India, and Mexico. The machines Kinefac produces are purchased by many different types of industries, including auto, aerospace, power generation, medical devices, railroad and appliance.



From left to right, Kinefac Corp. Engineer David Willens, Jean Allain, Kinefac Corp. vice president of North American Sales, Timothy Murray, president & CEO of the Worcester Regional Chamber of Commerce, and John Killam, MassMEP president & CEO, gather to discuss advanced precision metal manufacturing techniques during a tour on National Manufacturing Day on Oct. 6. This lathe machine produces giant screws used for military aircraft.

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Treasurer touts ed finance programs

Salutes honor members at Chamber Breakfast

WORCESTER - Deborah B. Goldberg, Massachusetts State Treasurer and Receiver General, might as well be from Worcester given her office's presence and genuine interest in the city, particularly on the vocational jobs education front.

She served as keynote speaker during the Worcester Regional Chamber of Commerce's quarterly Breakfast Club at Mechanics Hall in Worcester on Sept. 7. Responsible for the state's cash and debt management and unclaimed property, Goldberg prides herself on what she hails as "ground breaking" programs in Worcester and beyond.

One of Goldberg's long-term goals offers a seeded 529 college education savings plan here at no cost to the taxpayer that promotes financial literacy programs built specifically around any affected child and their family. That pilot program titled SeedMA was launched by Goldberg's office about a year ago in Worcester in public-private partnership with the Mass. Educational Financing Authority and Federal Reserve Bank of Boston.

Parents and guardians automatically receive a \$50 deposit when enrolling their children in the 529 college education savings account, which can be used to offset costs for books, tuition, fees, supplies and vocational training. Local partners include DCU for Kids, George Alden Trust, Stoddard Charitable Trust, Greater Worcester Community Foundation, Santander Bank, and Webster Five Bank. Those account funds can be transferred to other family members. The program is led by Goldberg's Community Engagement Manager Paul Kelley, a Worcester resident and Holy Cross



State Treasurer Deborah B. Goldberg speaks before a packed house at Mechanics Hall during the Worcester Regional Chamber of Commerce's quarterly Breakfast Club.

graduate, who works with more than 60 community leaders to spread the program's mission. His work has led to the program's expansion west in Central Mass. and the town of Monson in partnership with Monson Savings Bank.

"A highly-trained workforce needs to have these financial literacy skills. Just by opening a college savings account, a child is more likely to attain higher education or the vocational-technical education that they need to access a good paying job," says Goldberg. "If we can make that program happen here, we can make it happen state-wide."

Moreover, in collaboration with Northeastern's Dukakis Center, a recent job study titled "Meeting the Commonwealth's Workforce Needs" focused on future labor demands. Goldberg says her department's study found an explosion in the job pipeline over the next 10-20 years, with

many expected vacancies requiring a vocational high school diploma and associates' degree.

"We have a skills-based economy," says Goldberg, offering her concerns about a rapidly aging manufacturing workforce estimated at 20,000 vacancies in this region alone, and local employers' abilities to fill critical job openings as they occur.

Goldberg adds that SeedMA's early success has spread into other new programs, such as SoarMA, which targets seventh graders across the state and at Worcester East Middle School led by the state Legislature and non-profit partners. The two-year pilot program requires parents to invest \$100 upon application into a seeded college education savings account, which is then matched by the state at \$400. "Because 7th graders are much closer to high school and college, that's why SoarMA asks for more of a

"Our lottery system that has been the most successful in the country must adapt to capture new markets while protecting retailers."

- Deborah B. Goldberg, State Treasurer

commitment," says Goldberg.

Both of these college savings seed programs were born from a financial literacy task force Goldberg formed as a key component of her office's early vision to produce a working document in six months. Eighteen of the 22 programs identified by that task force have already been implemented.

For example, the state Division of Banks and the Treasurer's Office of Economic Empowerment partnered in 2015 to create the Financial Education Innovation Fund. Through a comprehensive application process, the Office awarded 37 high schools across the Commonwealth nearly \$140,000 in grant money to expand upon or establish Credit for Life fairs. Goldberg says these workshop fairs will help educate nearly 26,000 students across the Commonwealth in money and credit management by the end of 2017.

"What these fairs do is simulate a day in the life of a working person," says Goldberg, "simulating budgeting, saving for retirement, and other life decisions."

Many of these educational programs and unrestricted local aid for towns and cities are made possible through retail and possible future online digital lottery ticket sales in Massachusetts. Goldberg says her office that oversees that system is trying to maximize revenues, evidenced by lottery sales recently surpassing the \$1 billion in profit mark. Her office also recently formalized a lottery sales program with



Dr Luis Pedraja - 54th President of QCC.



Sam Pepper Jr. - President and CEO of UniBank.



Pamela Provo - Provo Wealth Management.



Matthew Groves - Total Wine and More.



Michael Robbins - Cornerstone.



Cliff Rucker - Worcester Railers.

BREAKFAST, FROM PAGE B1

the Worcester Railers and DCU Center as well.

“Our lottery system that has been the most successful in the country must adapt to capture new markets while protecting retailers,” says Goldberg.

Goldberg concluded her speech by noting her office’s Clean Water Trust \$336 million ongoing investment in the Upper Blackstone Water Abatement District, of which Worcester is one of its biggest members, and the drinking water in 52 Worcester schools, which were all recently tested for lead.

SALUTES

Cornerstone Bank combines two financial institutions

SOUTHBRIDGE/SPENCER - The 2017 Cornerstone Bank merger process is now complete, combining long financial staples of Central Massachusetts communities, SpencerBANK and Southbridge Savings Bank, which have served and supported their customers since 1871 and 1848, respectively.

With more than \$1 billion in assets and 200 employees, Cornerstone Bank offers an increased array of products and services and higher lending limits spread across 15 branches with 19 ATMs.

The senior leadership team of the newly merged bank reflects a complementary combination of experience and skill sets. K. Michael Robbins, former President & CEO of SpencerBANK prior to the merger,

will now serve as Cornerstone’s Chairman and CEO while Todd M. Tallman, outgoing President & CEO of Southbridge Savings Bank, will serve as President and Treasurer.

Fidelity Bank’s name to grace new Worcester Ice Center

WORCESTER - The Worcester Railers Hockey Club, proud ECHL affiliate of the New York Islanders, announced in August that Worcester Sports Center LLC has reached an agreement with Fidelity Bank for the naming rights to the new Worcester Railers HC \$18 million practice facility. The combination rink, recreation, and retail facility will be called Fidelity Bank Worcester Ice Center. The agreement between Fidelity Bank and the Worcester Ice Center will carry through 2027.

In addition to being the Worcester Railers HC practice facility, the state-of-the-art 110,000 square foot Fidelity Bank Worcester Ice Center will be home ice for Worcester State University, Becker College and top-tier high school programs such as Worcester Academy. It will also host the Junior Railers.

Provo Wealth Management celebrates 25th anniversary

SHREWSBURY - Celebrating 25 years in business, Provo Wealth Management Group based in Shrewsbury is poised for even greater success as the firm continues its mission to make all clients feel like the only client.

According to company President

and CEO Christopher Provo, the firm remains steadfast in its commitment to partnering with fewer clients for an enhanced focus: “This approach affords our team the energy and time needed to provide quality service and attention to even the smallest details. We seek to know our clients on a deep level. By only truly understanding can we put clients on the right path.

Quinsigamond Community College names new president

WORCESTER - Dr. Luis G. Pedraja has begun his tenure as president at Quinsigamond Community College. He is the sixth president in the college’s 54-year history.

Dr. Pedraja most recently served as Interim Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs for Oakland, California’s 35,000-student Peralta Community College District, where he led faculty, staff, and administrators to develop innovative programs and ensure student success. Previously he was Provost and Vice President of Academic Affairs at Antioch University Los Angeles, a non-profit institution serving adult students with bachelor degree completion and professional graduate programs.

Dr. Pedraja became the first in his family to attend college; later earning a Ph.D. from the University of Virginia.

Total Wine & More opens new retail business

SHREWSBURY - Total Wine & More, the nation’s largest independently-owned retailer of fine wine, spirit and beer, opened one of its newest and

fourth stores in Massachusetts on Route 9 in Shrewsbury this past February.

The new store offers more than 8,000 wines, 3,000 spirits, and 2,500 beers. Total Wine & More will feature the area’s most comprehensive and unique shopping experience for consumers looking for the best value and highest quality in wines, spirits and beers – as well as a level of expertise and service unique to Total Wine & More.

The company opened its first Massachusetts store in Natick in November 2015 and subsequently opened additional stores in Everett, Danvers and Shrewsbury.

UniBank announces new President & CEO

WHITINSVILLE - Timothy P. Wickstrom, chairman of UniBank’s Board of Directors, recently announced that Sam S. Pepper, Jr. has been named president & CEO of UniBank and the bank’s holding company, UFS Bancorp.

“Following a comprehensive search process that was conducted by a team of UniBank board members, corporators, and employees, we are confident that Sam Pepper has the knowledge and experience to uphold UniBank’s core values of Teamwork, Integrity, and Excellence, to further strengthen UniBank’s position as the premier bank serving the financial needs of individuals, businesses and communities throughout the Commonwealth,” says Wickstrom.

Pepper comes to UniBank with over 30 years of experience in senior-level banking positions



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HUMAN RESOURCES

Seminar educates members on lean management

WORCESTER - As markets continue to evolve, many industries have begun implementing new styles of management in order to best serve the modern consumer. On Tuesday, Sept. 26, the Worcester Regional Chamber of Commerce held another informative seminar focused on exploring these methods. This introduction into lean management methodologies, gave chamber members insight into more effective administrative techniques. Most prominent in software and technology companies, lean management has made a dramatic impact on the way companies plan ahead and meet project deadlines, although it can be applied to different situations. Achieving small, incremental goals within a certain process is the underlying principle of lean management. This model has been

steadily replacing traditional long-term goal models in other industries such as manufacturing and healthcare. “Maybe you’ve noticed your organizations have found that executing on a two-year plan rarely anymore yields the desired results,” says Marc Trudeau, scrum master and WPI grad. “The market is changing so fast and disruptive innovations occur so often that it’s hard to keep up.” Among the different sectors and industries represented by the panelists was the city of Worcester. In an effort to better retain city employees, Worcester officials met with UMass Memorial Medical Center about a year ago to better understand the hospital’s use of lean management techniques. Since then, about 200 city employees have been trained in the management system. “We know that city government is one of the oldest institutions in the world...but lean starts to shift the way we think in city government. Now it’s about continuous improvement and setting a culture that’s never been there,” says Eric Batista, chief of operations and project management for the Office of the Worcester City Manager. “There’s a lot of demand for our services to be streamlined and faster...I’m excited about it.” One element of successful lean management is instilling a sense of employee empowerment, resulting in quicker decision making and problem solving. “We have daily huddles. Every morning, every team connects for 15 minutes and talks about what went well and how we can do things differently,” says Diane Gardner, director of customer experience at Unum. “That’s how we recognize problems. In a lean environment, we’re coaching people to come that huddle and say, ‘I think there’s a problem.’” Team huddles are common practice among organizations using lean management. This allows managers and team leaders to help their employees understand problem solving techniques. “My primary goal is teaching people how to solve problems...As engaged as your front line managers are is as successful as lean will be in your organization,” says Gardner. Further supporting this application of lean, seminar moderator, Lora Dumas, process improvement specialist at UMass, shared the hospital’s journey of implementing the management system, which has since been used as the model for the Worcester city government. “It’s a lot about culture change. One of the ways we are doing this at UMass is through the use of idea boards. It provides a way for our employees to get there ideas out there,” says Dumas. “We recently celebrated the implementation of 40,000 employee ideas. It helps the employees feel good about what they do.” Although changing traditional processes and learning new management styles can develop a strong internal culture, it can also be applied to external customer service. “The key is for our clients to have visibility into those tasks,” says David Crouch, president of ten24 Digital Solutions. “Our task management system isn’t strictly internal...Our clients are brought into the process...They’re involved in setting those milestones.”

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The show also provides a forum for discussion of economic development, public policy and other topical issues that matter to Chamber members.

Charter TV 3

You can also watch Chamber Exchange the TV Show on YouTube at “Charter TV 3 Central Mass.”

INSIDE THE CHAMBER

Affiliate Chambers add advantage for area businesses

Serving as New England’s largest chamber of commerce, representing 2,300 members across 35 cities and towns, the Worcester Regional Chamber of Commerce holds the key to accessing the diverse and expanding business community of Central Massachusetts. This ever growing network brings together a variety of industries, sectors, and community leaders, resulting in a unique economic environment.

In an effort to further strengthen the potential of this community, the Worcester Chamber benefits and network have been made available to the members of five other area chambers. They include Blackstone Valley Chamber of Commerce, Auburn Chamber of Commerce, Central Mass South Chamber of Commerce, Wachusett Area Chamber of Commerce, and Webster Dudley Oxford Chamber of Commerce.

“Our missions are the same,” says Dennis Luukko, president of the Webster Dudley Oxford Chamber. “Although I enjoy being part of a small town, the affiliation allows us to be a part of a larger regional effort in supporting our local businesses.”

Perhaps the most effective resource provided by the Worcester Chamber is the wide variety of networking opportunities. From monthly Business After Hours events to the quarterly Breakfast Club, the Chamber provides an accessible path for making new connections.

“Being able to attend Worcester events and network with a larger



group is enticing for anyone, especially those new in business or new to the area,” says Auburn Chamber President Fran DeFalco. “The more relationships one builds the greater the chance of success. It’s not just a linear correlation either, it is exponential because one relationship could grow into several good opportunities as opposed to just adding a customer.”

As organizations directly serving smaller towns and areas, the affiliate chambers have created active and engaging business relationships within their communities. The partnership with the Worcester Chamber strengthens this influence. “We provide the small community

connections, and they get the larger regional resource in addition to that by partnering with Worcester,” says Jen Stanovich, executive director of the Wachusett Area Chamber. “The affiliation can only enhance what we offer. It’s a win-win.”

Along with strengthening the business network of Central Massachusetts, the affiliation also allows for the individual chambers to come together and discuss how to further benefit the region. “Within Tim Murray’s first week on the job, he reached out to all the affiliates in an effort to make our relationships closer and more collaborative,” says Alix McNitt, executive director of the Central Mass South Chamber. “We

meet about every other month and try to discuss things that are of mutual interest such as manufacturing and healthcare.”

As different industries and sectors continue to shape the Central Massachusetts economy, having access to a large network of people committed to the region is important to business owners. The Worcester Regional Chamber of Commerce creates a pipeline for important connections. Opening this pipeline up to the surrounding towns establishes stronger bonds, resulting in a robust business community. “It just made sense to team up with them,” says Stanovich.

SAVE THE DATE

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KEYNOTE SPEAKER

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NEAL, FROM PAGE A3

jobs. That has led to disagreement over whether private sector union members are willing to pay for public sector union benefits, particularly in the right-to-work battle states of Wisconsin, Pennsylvania, Iowa and Michigan. Neal believes this causes an unnecessary economic “schism”, with technology also playing a contributing role in the “downward depression of wages.”

“The American people, for the most part, have not had a pay raise in 10 years,” Neal says, admitting only modest growth in only the most recent US Census Report released in early September. “They [US Census researchers] do point to a healthier economy and family income has started to pick up.”

The problem Neal has with those statistics centers on the often unseen individual income challenges affecting the ongoing skillset drought. “A lot of children have started going back to living with parents to pay off college loans,” he says. “And that has kept those kids from getting up and re-locating. What has happened to the American economy has been really challenging and it is not a short term problem.”

TAX REFORM

Neal, who laid out the Democratic response to President Trump’s recent tax plan, says there isn’t an actual tax plan document yet, and he doesn’t expect to see one for months, as both Democrats and Republicans try to find common ground.

As ranking Democrat on the House Ways and Means Committee,

Neal believes the cuts won’t benefit the middle class. “There is nothing to wrap your arms around and there’s no legislation yet. The original architectural form that has yet to be released seems to indicate that there is going to be substantial relief for people at the top once again, and I think that the people who really need a boost economically is the middle class,” Neal says. “People at the top don’t need tax reform.”

In his response, Neal told President Trump that the final tax plan has to be revenue neutral, meaning the same amount of dollars move around the system. He adds that Democratic leaders want to see the distribution tables, and any new proposal needs to be built from the middle class up. He believes the Democratic position is not a “partisan position.” Neal says during the past two Democratic White House Administrations, top income earners at 39.6 percent did not get a tax break and it resulted in the greatest economic growth spurt in the history of the country under Clinton, and helped lead the country out of a bad recession with Obama.

“I’m not arguing here that we raise taxes on people,” Neal says. “We need to increase defense spending, but we also need to sustain Social Security and Medicare. Half the revenue at UMass Medical Center comes from Medicare and with the expansion of healthcare, another 15 percent comes from Medicaid, which now sustains long-term care in America.”

That said, Neal feels there is room for potential compromise on the 35 percent corporate tax rate, which is

not competitive internationally. “If you recall, President Obama proposed 28 percent [on the corporate tax rate], but Republicans went to 25 percent,” Neal says. “That meant business people across the country had to give up preferences, exclusions and deductions in the code that they had become used to. The effective rate for most corporations is 16-17 percent after they take advantage of what is in the code.”

The current OECD rate with international competitors is averaging 25 percent on the corporate side.

If President Trump’s plan to abolish the state and local tax deduction is realized, it would actually mean a tax increase, Neal adds. On Alternative Minimum Tax (AMT) that was first put in place in the 1960s because a

large percentage of wealthy families were found to be paying no taxes, Neal says he worked hard to convince both Vice President Joe Biden and President Obama to abolish it for the middle income earners. Today, 27 million Americans no longer pay AMT in the middle class. Neal adds that it’s OK to retain AMT for top wage earners who could still use exclusions, deductions and preferences to avoid tax burden.

The possible repeal of the estate tax is another area of concern for Neal. “It’s one of the few taxes that is not on work,” Neal says. “The estate tax is not a tax on Conrad Hilton. It’s a tax on Paris Hilton.”

The current White House tax reform proposal adds \$1.5 trillion dollars to the national debt, Neal says. “Tax cuts don’t pay for themselves,” Neal says.

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DEP needs more permitting power

On Tuesday, Oct. 10, I testified before the Mass. State Legislature's Joint Committee on Environment, Natural Resources and Agriculture on House Bill 2777, An Act to enable the Commonwealth's administration of the Massachusetts Pollutant Discharge Elimination System. The legislation, proposed by Gov. Baker, is part of the process to enable delegation from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) of the National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) and its associated permit authority.

NPDES are the permits issued to regulate the pollutant outflow from the Upper Blackstone Water Pollution Abatement District (UBWPAD). They are a vital component of the Clean Water Act seeking to keep out surface waterways – rivers, lakes, streams – free from pollutants and safe for recreational and other enjoyment.

No one is arguing against keeping our waters safe and clean; no one is advocating on behalf of pollution. However, I was there to advocate in favor of delegation of the permitting authority from the EPA to the DEP.



STUART
LOOSEMORE

The Worcester Regional Chamber of Commerce, along with other business associations and many municipalities, believe local control of these permits, at the state level, will lead to a more holistic and integrated approach. The current system of permitting, through the EPA, has led to over \$205 million in costs to Worcester rate payers to cover upgrades to the facility required by the EPA permits.

These costs are directly associated with improvements and upgrades to the facility systems in order to reduce pollutant output to meet levels set by the EPA. These costs, while initially borne by the city, are then passed through to the rate payers in the form of increased sewer rates. Since Fiscal Year 2004, when construction began to meet the requirements of a 2001 NPDES permit, sewer rates in the city of Worcester have increased from \$1.90 per hundred cubic feet of water to a rate of \$7.08 per hundred cubic feet, set for FY 2017. That is a staggering 273% increase over the course 13 years or an average of 21% per year. The great majority of these year-over-year increases has been attributed to costs associated with meeting the demands of NPDES permitting. Potentially looming on the not-too-distant horizon, construction is tentative slated for 2021, is an \$83 million upgrade to reduce phosphorous levels in the facility's discharge.

I believe it necessary to restate that no one is pro-pollution; everyone wants to see clean, safe and usable waterways. The difficulty arises when demands are made without any consideration for the ability of a community to pay for the associated costs.

As we continue to hear from members regarding the rising costs of healthcare, wages, insurance, electricity and water/sewer we recognize some of these issues require long-term strategies to find a cost-saving solution. However, House Bill 2777, and the overall effort of delegation could create relief in this area of cost concern. Savings realized by local businesses mean additional money that can be reinvested in the community, either through upgrades of their own, through adding staff or increasing salaries, or through support that businesses provide through.

- Stu is the chamber's General Counsel.

OPINION

PawSox conversation needs to happen

The Worcester Regional Chamber of Commerce fully supports the recent efforts of Mayor Joe Petty, City Manager Edward Augustus, and a majority of the City Council to explore the feasibility of bringing the Pawtucket Red Sox to Worcester for a variety of reasons.

First, as City Manager Augustus and Mayor Petty have both stated, these efforts are not simply about bringing professional baseball and a ballpark to Worcester. More importantly, this conversation will serve as a catalyst about the reuse of a substantial portion of the 22-plus acre Wyman Gordan site that has laid dormant for nearly three decades producing little in taxes or jobs.

Wisely, this area was included in the Worcester Redevelopment Authority's Urban Revitalization Plan, which was adopted by the Worcester City Council, and allows for the use of eminent domain to acquire these long standing vacant properties. The Chamber strongly supported the creation of the Urban Revitalization Plan as well.

This conversation with the PawSox is beneficial because it explores how a baseball park can be a driver for new private sector investment on the underutilized parcels of property around a new ballpark on most of the Wyman Gordon site and other underutilized properties in the area. In doing so, we can build on the momentum that has been growing in the Canal District over the past dozen years. Most recently this momentum has manifested itself with the newly completed \$18 million Fidelity Bank Worcester Ice Center, which features two new hockey rinks, and 40,000-square-feet of retail space, and new businesses openings like Lock 50, Queens Cup Bakery, and Kummerspeck Restaurant and butcher shop, just to name a few.

Secondly, this conversation and process is also about developing a plan that will knit together the Canal District, Vernon Hill, Green Island, Main South, and lower Chandler and Madison Street neighborhoods in a positive and strategic way. This would add density; include mixed use commercial, retail, and industrial uses that create jobs for the residents of these abutting neighborhoods; and expand the city's tax base. A similar planning process was utilized by the city in the early stages of the now



TIM MURRAY

substantially completed City Square project in downtown Worcester.

The Red Sox brand is known internationally, and having a Triple AAA baseball team in Worcester would undoubtedly have many benefits. These benefits include 70 home baseball games, a ballpark that could be used for concerts and other sporting events year round. Tens of thousands of new visitors from across New

England, and the country, would come to Worcester to watch baseball and the Red Sox's future stars. These fans would be visiting many of our local businesses during the spring and summer months. Additionally, the Pawtucket Red Sox Managing Partner, Larry Lucchino, and his team, led by the nationally recognized architect, Janet Marie Smith, have a proven track record of building or rehabilitating baseball parks, like Fenway Park. They have done so in a manner that compliments the urban landscape of the surrounding neighborhoods and have attracted significant, new private sector investment in the immediate area around the ballpark. Camden Yards in Baltimore and Fenway Park are two tangible examples of their work. Additionally, new Triple AAA baseball ballparks, designed appropriately, have helped facilitate private sector investment in cities like Durham, North Carolina, Indianapolis, Indiana, Nashville, Tennessee, and Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

The other positive is that the success of this conversation and process does not hinge solely on whether the PawSox choose to relocate to Worcester. As we witnessed with the City Square project, Gateway Park, and the South Worcester Industrial Park, as pad ready development sites are created, local and outside investors and companies come forward over time to build on these sites. If the PawSox stay in Rhode Island, a smaller multi-use ballpark could be utilized for the Bravehearts, local colleges, high schools, youth groups, and concerts as well. Additionally, a plan for a mixed use development on the current vacant and underutilized properties in the urban revitalization area property could go forward as well to the benefit of the surrounding neighborhoods.

- Tim Murray is the chamber's president & CEO.

Strap on your helmet...

Dog parks, mural festivals, handicap accessible playgrounds, solar farm... What's next on Worcester's list of totally awesome things? Bike share. On Sept. 14, a private bike share company, ofo, launched 200 bikes in Worcester. Over the next few weeks they will be introducing 200 more. This is doubly exciting as it's one more amenity that help Worcester compete with other young mid-sized cities, AND at no cost to its residents.

Cities all across the globe are implementing bike share programs in order to enhance the visitor and resident experience and add an alternative transportation mode for commuters. Bike share can provide that "final mile" to people using public transportation. Additionally, it can increase access to transportation for college students and low income residents.

Bike share can also go toward changing the perception of the city and quite literally, the mindset of its residents. Increased physical activity leads to a happier, healthier community. Oh and it can save the planet with decreased CO2 emissions.

Bike share models vary drastically and many require a financial commitment on behalf of a community to either fund or subsidize. Ofo is a private company investing in Worcester. We are the second city to launch in the company's expansion to United States (Seattle was the first). Being a \$2 billion company and the largest bike share company in the globe, allows for a very affordable cost to riders at \$1/hour.

Even among a reasonably young industry, ofo is a



KAREN
PELLETIER

new model of bike share. Their technology allows for a dockless system which is more flexible, affordable and convenient for riders. Our city will have some challenges as we increasingly become more bike-friendly. Ofo will help inform our city as they will be sharing the rider data with the Planning office as they work on updating our Master Plan and create a bike/ped plan.

There are some important steps that our community will have to make ...

1. Driver, rider (and how about some pedestrian?!) education. We need to inform everyone there will be more bikes on the road.
2. Plan for proper parking . These yellow bikes can be parked anywhere. The city and property owners will need to determine where they want bikes parked and inform residents and patrons
3. Access for non-English speakers or people without a smartphone. Currently the ofo US app is only in English and only works with a smartphone. As a community with a large immigrant population and residents who do not have access to a smart phone, we should be thinking of creative solutions and looking to see what other cities are doing to be more inclusive.

Bike share is a good thing. It's one more thing that we have as a city now to help activate our streets and position Worcester as a city where people want to live and work... And ride.

- Karen is the chamber's Director of Higher Education and Workforce Partnerships.

OPINION

DISCOVER CENTRAL MASS.

Beer tourism booming in Central Massachusetts

Discover Central Massachusetts, the region's travel and tourism agency, is finding great success in promoting the region for sporting events, corporate outings and breweries, among other things! In September, the Massachusetts Brewers Guild, in partnership with the agency, hosted its first beer festival on the Worcester Common. More than 1,300 people attended.

On Nov. 6, Discover Central Massachusetts will partner with the Massachusetts Restaurant Association and Wormtown Brewery to bring "Something's Brewing in Worcester" to The Hanover Theatre for Performing Arts. The event will showcase the region's growing restaurant scene, pairing dishes with local brews.

If you are unfamiliar with the Central Massachusetts Beer Trail, Discover Central Massachusetts' writer Sarah Connell takes you for the ride.

Central Massachusetts' remarkable brewing culture didn't unfold by accident. The region's sterling reputation among beer aficionados can be pinpointed to a single weekend five years ago. In late June of 2012, Mechanics Hall in Worcester welcomed the most esteemed brewers in the world including Shaun Hill of Hill Farmstead and Jean van Roy of Brasserie Cantillon for an event known simply as "The Festival." The Festival, spearheaded by Shelton Brothers and organized by Sherri Sadowski and Alec Lopez, also marked the first time Westvleteran 12 was legally available to sample in the United States. Trappist beer had grown to fame in the mid 2000's on account of beer nerd fascination with Westvleteran Brewery, a profitless, self-sustaining operation powered by Belgian monks.

On that weekend in 2012, beer lovers from all over the country flocked to Worcester for their chance to try the best beer on the planet and brush elbows with A-list brewers, gathered under one roof. As a result, Central Massachusetts earned its place in the beer history books and set a tone of excellence for a new generation of brewers, including the now legendary Nate Lanier of Treehouse Brewing Co.

Tree House Brewing Co.

Location: 120 Sturbridge Road, Charlton, MA

Hours: Wednesday 12-8 p.m. (cans only), Thursday and Friday 2-8 p.m. (cans only), Saturday 11 a.m.-7 p.m.

Flagship: Julius

Acute attention to craftsmanship and consistency have gained Tree House Brewery a dedicated cult following from all over the country. The brewery's new facility in Charlton marks a physical departure from Tree House's origins in a humble garage. Given Tree House's rapid growth, the brewery's quality and attention to detail remain unbelievably intact. Food trucks frequent the property including Say Cheese to keep you well fed while you brave the inevitable lines.



Wormtown Brewery

Location: 72 Shrewsbury Street, Worcester, MA

Hours: Opens at 12 p.m. Tues-Sun. Flagship: Be Hoppy

Wormtown Brewery was born in a small ice cream stand and has quickly grown into a 50,000-square-foot space on Shrewsbury Street. A "three-decker-attitude" and a mounting list of accolades render Wormtown a popular patio destination for patrons hoping to taste seasonal and underground offerings. Lines are rare and bar service is efficient. More than a dozen restaurants are located within walking distance.

Flying Dreams

Location: 455 B Park Avenue, Worcester, MA

Hours: Thursday 4-9 p.m., Friday 3-10 p.m., Saturday 12-10 p.m., Sunday 12-5 p.m.

Flagship: Pond Jumper

Flying Dreams may have inherited the original home of Wormtown Brewery, but they have built up a culture that is all their own. Their Mass style IPA, Pond Jumper, was brewed in honor of the first hole at Maple Hill Disc Golf Course where the players favor hazy juice bombs to refresh and invigorate.

Rapscallion Brewery

Location: 195 Arnold Road, Sturbridge, MA

Hours: Tuesday and Wednesday 3-9 p.m., Thursday and Friday 3-10 p.m., Saturday 12-10 p.m., Sunday 12-8 p.m.

Flagship: Honey

Rapscallion is located in a 1940s apple barn surrounded by a 150 acre orchard. The brewery is both dog and family friendly, regularly hosting festivals and offering an on site food truck. Members of the mug club enjoy 20 ounce pours. Their flagship brew is made with local wildflower honey.

Rapscallion Brewery is located on Hyland Orchard. The brewery offers disc golf and is dog-friendly!

Wachusett Brewing

Location: 175 State Road East, Westminster, MA

Hours: Opens at 12 p.m. Monday-Saturday

Flagship: Country Pale Ale

Wachusett Brewing was founded

Station last year, Wachusett Brewing instituted a shuttle to transport visitors to the brew yard with no hassle.

Homefield Brewing

Location: 3 Arnold Road, (Route 20) Sturbridge, MA

Hours: Wed., 2-8 p.m., Thurs.-Friday, 2-10 p.m., Saturday, 12-10 p.m., Sunday, 12-6 p.m.

Using world class ingredients all grown and processed by local farmers and artisans tells you everything about Homefield Brewing's owners Jon Cook and Suzanne LePage, who moonlights as a full-time adjunct professor at WPI. Many flavors of the northeast are brought into this popular workshop brewery and kitchen where the couple never brews the same beer twice, and offers only fresh, locally grown cheeses, soups and sandwich platters. Jazz, rock, and folk/bluegrass musicians and full bands perform live at Homefield every single Thurs-Sunday.

Visit: discovercentralma.org.

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SMALL BUSINESS FOCUS

Tech start-up opens doors for communication

WORCESTER – In the midst of a cultural and economic renaissance, Worcester was named one of the top 10 emerging start-up communities in the country by Progressive Policy Institute earlier this year. From transportation to tech, the entrepreneurial spirit in the city has disrupted and challenged traditional industry practices with innovative approaches. One example of this is OpenCity, an integrative live chat feature that allows businesses to directly communicate with their customers through text.

As a Worcester native, Nick Belsito attended Doherty High School and worked at his father’s business, Belsito’s Deli on Plantation Street. There, he developed his entrepreneurial drive and passion for customer service. After graduating high school in 2008, Belsito attended Bentley University where he ran the Italian Club. His involvement in the club led to strong connections in the restaurant and hospitality scene in the Boston area. “I’ve always had this affection for food,” says Belsito. “Food is the language to someone’s soul.”

Following his college career at Bentley, Belsito landed a financial leadership position at Raytheon. In his 5 year span at the company, Belsito lived Boston, LA, Germany, and



Nick Belsito.

Silicon Valley as well as travel to over 30 countries. “I like understanding different cultures and people and experiences...I visited a lot of restaurants and bars and always found a way to make myself feel at home,” says Belsito.

It’s this sense of belonging that helped sparked the idea for Belsito’s next venture. Offering customers a way of skipping lines at night clubs and restaurants, Belsito started BeeLine which operated out of California, New York City, and Boston. After three years, the team decided to shut down BeeLine, but much was learned.

“We noticed this real problem in the industry with communication... Customers didn’t know how to communicate with the restaurants and clubs appropriately,” says Belsito.

Further capitalizing on BeeLine’s original text feature, Belsito began to focus on the element of customer communication. “We came to realize, customers love feeling like a regular. They love having an ‘in’ somewhere,” says Belsito. After a year of research and writing business plans, OpenCity was born. Until now, the main avenues of communication for businesses are by email, phone call, or form submission.

According to Belsito, this results in a loss of leads. “Why lose a customer because you weren’t able to pick up the phone...or read email?”

In addition to effectively capturing more leads, OpenCity also serves as a tool for customer feedback. This allows for customers to give feedback directly to the business as opposed to writing a Yelp or social media review. “88% of customers trust online reviews as much as they trust their friends,” says Belsito. “Just a couple negative reviews can be a loss of \$60,000 for a business.”

Unaware of Worcester’s new booming start-up community, Belsito moved back to Worcester to be closer

to his team. After being introduced to the WPI Tech Advisory Network, he quickly realized the drive and innovation of the city. Working out of the Worcester Clean Tech Incubator with Joe Bush has also provided Belsito and his team an “atmosphere that cultivates learning, growth, and execution.” Now operating in Worcester and Boston, OpenCity offers customers a unique experience by giving them a direct line of communication to businesses like Lock50 and Civic Kitchen and Drink.

Although OpenCity is geared towards the hospitality industry, tests are in the works for integrating the feature into other industries and sectors. Any interested businesses can visit getopencity.com to apply to use the beta version of the software.

As customer service continues to play a large role, it’s important for businesses to be open to communication as often as possible. “When people go out, their experience doesn’t start from the minute they sit down to the minute they leave, it starts when they start thinking about going to your business,” says Belsito. “If you can build a customer relationship before they even come in, it’s going to improve their experience throughout.”

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