



HANK STOLZ,
"TALK OF THE
COMMONWEALTH"
MOVE TO
WCRN AM 830,
PAGE 5

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NEW ERA BREWING FOR WORMTOWN OUTSIDE CRAFT BREW "COMFORT ZONE"



ABOVE: Dave Fields, Wormtown Brewery Co. partner, at the company's Shrewsbury Street brewing facility. In the first six months of 2019, Wormtown launched two new beers while embarking on a two-part, locally-based marketing campaign. Photo by Emily Gowdey-Backus.

By Emily Gowdey-Backus, Director of Communications

Born and bred Worcester-ites, ensuring every can is infused with the "triple decker attitude," is essential to Wormtown Brewery's leadership.

At 49, Partner David M. Fields said: "I'm still 01604, that's where I grew up and that's our brewery today."

Yet 2019 marked a turning point for the Shrewsbury Street brewery. Two new brands were launched within six months of each other – one a limited batch lager, another an IPA addition to their year-round portfolio – and the team embarked on a marketing campaign.

Planned growth of the 9-year-old brewery is complimented by regional and national recognition.

Of those which submitted data, Wormtown ranked No. 112 top-producing craft brewery by the Brewer's Association, an industry data tracker, in 2018.

The volume produced is equal to demand and recognition. Wormtown received silver in the

2012 Pro Am Porter World Beer Cup followed by being named the Grand National Champion at the U.S. Beer Open in 2014.

Just last year, Wormtown was twice recognized on the international stage with bronze at the 2018 World Beer Cup as well as silver at the Great American Beer Fest.

"I'LL HAVE THE NEW ONES"

Don't Worry, paired with Wormtown-staple Be Hoppy, was released to the public on Feb. 1. Calling its flavor a "muted to dank papaya," Mr. Fields said the tropical IPA fits the profile of New England IPAs currently trending throughout the regional market.

From creating the brand in July 2018 to bottling the final product and setting the public release date, it took the brewery eight months to bring Don't Worry to the market.

Prior to the public launch, Don't Worry had been test-released to staff in November and at the Extreme IPA Festival in December.

The beer utilizes two hop varieties

new-to-Wormtown and is 5.6 percent alcohol by volume and a 55 on the IBU scale.

"A very hazy offering," he added, Don't Worry exists on the opposite end of the IPA spectrum from Be Hoppy's 6.5 percent ABV, but they balance each other as "natural siblings."

Adding to the personal, hyper-local focus which helps curate a passionate, albeit comical, branding strategy, Wormtown brought Mass Whole – the first beer in the company's lineup to consist of solely Massachusetts-grown ingredients – to market Jan. 1 in Worcester County followed by southeastern Massachusetts (Feb. 1) and Western Mass, New Hampshire, and Rhode Island in March and April.

"An internal project" aimed at crafting a lower-ABV, 12-ounce, six-pack lager – in fact, Mass Whole is 4.2 percent ABV – Mr. Fields said once released in the taproom, "it became a really good-selling beer ... much more than we had anticipated."

Currently a limited release, Mass Whole represents an evolving brand which has previously been released in multiple iterations – everything from a farmhouse, to a stout and a pale ale – since its founding in 2010.

The statewide moniker, he said, is "a badge of honor" worn by Massachusetts residents and lends well to the local nature of the beer.

SUCCEED, EXPAND, REPEAT

Such examples of brazen yet relatable branding, said Mr. Fields, coupled with a local commitment, has helped Wormtown standout among an increasingly-crowded statewide craft brewing scene.

In addition to the two 2019 releases, and within the past eight months, Wormtown released its first TV and billboard advertisements.

Both traditional advertising models, Mr. Fields said the decision seemed "very unnatural" for the Wormtown

SEE WORMTOWN, PAGE 19

AFFORDABLE HOUSING: CHALLENGING A STEREOTYPE

By Vaske Gjino, City of
Worcester Business and
Community Development
Associate

Affordable housing, a term used liberally in conversations about Worcester's booming resurgence in housing investment and development, has gained a stigma it does not deserve.

Mixed-income housing, the official term used by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, is defined as a development comprised of housing units with differing levels of affordability. Typically, those varying levels are affordable units below the area's median income, workforce units at or below 110 percent of the area's median income, and market-rate units.

According to HUD data for Fiscal Year 2019, the area's median income for a family of four in Worcester is \$97,700.

Several benefits of mixed income housing exist. One of the most predominant is that mixed-income housing introduces greater income diversity into local schools districts increasing the performance of students at all income levels.

Additionally, when mixed-income housing is scattered throughout the city, especially within commuting distance of the commercial sector, employee retention rates increase at local businesses.

Lastly, when neighborhoods are inclusive of varying income levels, crime rates drop as fellow residents look out for one another.

Mixed-income housing has been the general prescription in the revitalization of multi-family housing in Worcester and throughout the city's Central Business District.

Examples of mixed-income housing either recently-developed or currently-underway in the city's downtown include the Central Building (55 units), the former

SEE HOUSING, PAGE 7

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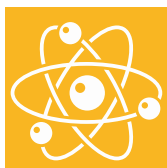
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POSITION OPENING

Development/ Communications Associate

The Worcester Educational Development Foundation is seeking a part-time Development/Communications Associate to support programs and initiatives in the Worcester Public Schools. Deadline for applications: August 31. For a full job description, visit **wedfwps.org**.



Welcome Back Teachers!

WEDF sends its warmest wishes to the teachers, administrators and support staff in the Worcester Public Schools. Thank you for nurturing our most important resource, our children. Visit us at wedfwps.org to see how we support the educational programs of the Worcester Public Schools.

Save the Date!

WEDF will once again honor outstanding individuals at the 9th Annual Distinguished Alumni & Friends of the Worcester Public Schools event on Wednesday, November 6th at 5:30 p.m., College of the Holy Cross.

The Worcester Educational Development Foundation is a private, non-profit organization established in 2005 for the sole purpose of supporting the Worcester Public Schools. To contribute or learn more about us, visit wedfwps.org.



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With publication dates in February, May, August, and November, Chamber Exchange The Newspaper is a quarterly publication written and produced by Worcester Regional Chamber of Commerce staff and members featuring content from affiliate members. Content is geared to business professionals, Chamber members, elected officials, and engaged citizens.

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

To contact the editorial staff, please email Emily Gowdey-Backus, director of communications, at egowdeybackus@worcesterchamber.org.

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

CHAMBER CALENDAR OF EVENTS

SEPTEMBER

- 5 The Breakfast Club @AC Marriott, presenting sponsor: Berkshire Bank, Commerce Bank, supporting sponsor: Worcester Regional Airport
- 10 Health Care Roundtable | Cost, Access, & Compliance @Chamber, sponsor: Assumption College Grad. Studies, MBA in Health Care
- 12 Info Session (4 pm, prior to after hours) @Cyprian Keyes
- 12 MEGA After hours with Corridor 9/495 @Cyprian Keyes, sponsor: UniBank
- 17 WIN @Mechanics Hall, sponsor: Saint Vincent Hospital
- 18 Financial Services Roundtable @Chamber sponsor: Bowditch & Dewey
- 19 Diverse Professionals Roundtable Networking Event, sponsor: BC/BS of Mass.
- 23 MFG Roundtable | IOT @Chamber, sponsor: Saint-Gobain and MassHIRE
- 24 Construction & Real Estate Roundtable, @Chamber, sponsor: Bowditch & Dewey, IBEW Local 96

OCTOBER

- 5-13 Trip to China | sponsor: Chamber
- 15 WIN @Mechanics Hall, sponsor: Saint Vincent Hospital
- 17 Business After Hours @ Wormtown Brewery, presenting sponsor: Harvard Pilgrim Health Care, supporting sponsor: Liberty Square Group
- 21 Business & Government Forum and Manufacturing Round Table w/ Consul General Menzenbach of Germany @Worc. Tech. H.S., sponsored by Saint-Gobain, MassHIRE, BC/BS of Mass., Ventry Assoc.
- 24 SEMINAR: Reducing Risk & Reaping Reward @ Chamber, sponsor: TD Bank
- 25 Game Changers Conference & Expo @Mechanics Hall, sponsor: Winn Companies
- 29 SEMINAR: Reach Customers Online with Google in partnership with City of Worcester and SCORE @Chamber

NOVEMBER

- 12 Health Care Roundtable | All of Us Research Study @Chamber, sponsor: Assumption College Grad. Studies, MBA Healthcare
- 12 Tri-Chamber Networking Event @American Heritage Museum with Marlboro and Metrowest chambers
- 13 SEMINAR: Cannabis Panel in partnership with Clark University, Location TBD
- 14 Diverse Professional Roundtable - Educational Event, sponsor: BC/BS of Mass.
- 19 WIN @Mechanics Hall, sponsor: Saint Vincent Hospital
- 20 Financial Services Roundtable @Chamber, sponsor: Bowditch & Dewey
- 21 Business After Hours @EcoTarium, sponsor: COUNTRY BANK
- TBD MFG Roundtable | Next Gen Talent @Chamber

MASSACHUSETTS NEEDS A NEW TRANSPORTATION FINANCE PLAN

PREVIOUSLY PUBLISHED IN THE WORCESTER TELEGRAM & GAZETTE ON JUNE 30, 2019

By Timothy P. Murray, Chamber president and CEO, and Richard A. Dimino, president and CEO of A Better City

Transportation remains a persistent problem. Relentless traffic jams combined with an under-performing public transit system continue to fuel widespread concerns about the future capacity of our network of roads and rail. Yet the Commonwealth currently lacks sufficient funds needed to modernize our transportation infrastructure.

Indeed, communities like Worcester are increasingly concerned about transportation revenue shortfalls that impact the Central Massachusetts transportation network. In mid-May, the MBTA announced that it needs approximately \$10 billion to repair or replace aging equipment, up from \$7.3 billion previously announced in 2015. A report published in February by A Better City and the University of Massachusetts Donahue Institute identified an additional \$8.4 billion-funding-gap over the next decade for maintenance of existing statewide transportation infrastructure including roads, highways, bridges, and tunnels. In response, statewide business leaders created the MA Business Coalition on Transportation to advance policy solutions and coordinate action plans with elected officials.

Despite the bleak outlook and recent news of derailments on both the MBTA red and green lines, there is reason to believe we can solve this problem.

Stakeholders across Massachusetts are discussing the urgent need to improve our transportation system while simultaneously planning for future targeted expansions. Publicly-collected data confirms what we know from shared personal experiences – vehicle traffic congestion is on the rise in Worcester County and the Route-I-90 Turnpike corridor. A strong economy combined with the exorbitant cost of housing in Eastern Massachusetts has resulted in longer commutes for workers who desire more affordable housing options located far from economic centers and/or accessible public transit options. Without strong statewide interventions, this trend is likely to get worse.

Decades of underinvestment are the primary cause for our congested transportation network. Transportation spending plans currently under consideration are encouraging, but largely address yesterday's infrastructure needs. In short, Massachusetts continues to fund a 20th century transportation system in 2019 while facing a series of revenue shortfalls that will not go away without key decisions around revenue.

State leaders can take three immediate steps to lay the groundwork for improved transportation infrastructure in every

corner of the state: (1) Identify and dedicate new, sustainable revenue streams to address unmet needs and fund modernization projects; (2) Prioritize transportation projects that provide improved access to employment centers and gateway cities; (3) Develop a 21st-century approach to transportation finances that ensures adequate resources for maintenance of existing infrastructure as well as future projects.

Central Massachusetts understands the benefits of new and planned transportation infrastructure. The \$90 million WRTA Maintenance and Operations Center on Quinsigamond Avenue, design work underway on Kelley Square, and plans to add a second train platform at Union Station are examples. Another opportunity is a possible direct connection between the Worcester Commuter Rail line and Kendall Square and North Station by way of a new terminal in Allston called West Station.

The Commonwealth has committed to rebuilding the nearby structurally-deficient I-90 viaduct in Allston, so it is logical and prudent for MassDOT to prioritize both infrastructure elements in terms of construction scheduling and funding. Guarantees for critical commuter connections that boost available east-west transit options to and from Worcester and MetroWest communities must be considered as part of a broader commitment to regional fairness and transportation equity.

Projects like the Union Station expansion and West Station connection to Boston and Cambridge can only move forward if the state implements a realistic and sustainable solution to the transportation financing crisis.

This longstanding financial situation is not only unfair to residents and businesses in Western and Central Massachusetts, as well as MetroWest communities, but it compromises the Commonwealth's ability to provide adequate transportation services. The lack of toll-equity inevitably impacts revenue streams, such as commuter rail fares, which have increased four times since 2007 including a spike this summer. To nobody's surprise, routine MBTA fare hikes resulted in more people driving to work, thereby adding to congestion and carbon emissions while reducing revenue.

Later this year, legislative leaders in the Massachusetts House and Senate are expected to debate financing concepts and rally around a comprehensive transportation finance plan. The time to act is clearly at hand. The scarcity of adequate transportation revenue has been firmly established.

Massachusetts' economy can't afford any delays. We must move forward this year to create the 21st Century transportation system that Massachusetts deserves.

WHAT'S A LITTLE DUST WHEN SUSTAINING WORCESTER BUSINESS?

**By Emily Gowdey-Backus,
Director of Communications**

General mayhem. That's how many local residents are perceiving certain Worcester neighborhoods which are either currently undergoing, or are slated to begin, major construction projects.

Tune out the cacophony and look past the immediate interruption. These transformations are helping to realize the; gulp, yes I'll say it; Worcester Renaissance.

A bright future for the city to which we're all committed exists, but it's on the horizon and we're journeying to that destination together. If we as a community are too inconvenienced by dust on our shoes or the time it takes to circle the block once more to find a parking spot, fewer of the commercial institutions on which we've come to rely, and which support Worcester's identity, will endure the in-between.

Collectively, we must support the existing momentum as Worcester enters the next stage of its evolution.

City Manager Ed Augustus said it best: "This is a story of a new Worcester. Gone are the doubts, replaced by confidence."

Entrepreneurs and business owners on Main Street and in the Canal District are among the hardest hit when it comes to decreased foot and vehicular traffic due to

construction-related interference. A first step in reversing this may be as simple as a hashtag – #ShopTheWoo.

CANAL DISTRICT

In just 63 acres, you can find ramen and BBQ, vintage home wares and new fashion, a forest of succulents and taxidermy – even three apple pies for one dollar.

A member of the founding 21 Club, the Chamber was one of many voices advocating for the relocation of the Red Sox Triple-A affiliate team to Worcester and helped determine the site of the future Polar Park in the Canal District. However, we must not let the neighborhood's new identity be drowned out by what's to come.

The Canal District has cultivated exceptional entrepreneurship and sparked similar commitment throughout the City of Worcester. This dedicated group of business owners shared a vision of what could be when many simply drove through Kelley Square on a wing and a prayer.

Building on their vision, they've launched a successful farmer's market, created one of the most Instagrammable shops west of Boston, and gave smaller-scale business owners a platform on which to thrive.

And their vision has caught on.



CONSTRUCTION IN THE CANAL DISTRICT BEGINS

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ABOVE: On July 31, the City of Worcester released a map of the Canal District designed to aid in continued visitation of the neighborhood and patronage of its businesses during the upcoming construction. Highlighted in yellow is the area in which Polar Park, home of the Triple-A Worcester Red Sox, and other development will occur while parking is marked in blue. Photo courtesy City of Worcester.

Bedlam Books opened in the Crompton building in November; Stillman Quality Meats opened their doors in December; June saw the launch of Russo's Italian Restaurant on Water Street marking an expansion of Ed Russo's, owner of Lock 50 owner, Canal District footprint; and a creperie is slated for the former Weintraub's deli.

Sparked by the district's popularity and building on its carbohydrate-rich history, Anthem Bagel opened in May.

Speaking of breakfast foods, there's no better, albeit wholesale, cuppa coffee than neighboring Good As Gold Coffee Systems.

Long-standing Canal District institutions – such as Bocado Tapas Wine Bar and Joseph's Lock and Safe Co. – are also buoyed by the renewed awareness.

MAIN STREET

We all mourned the loss of Elwood Adams Hardware, once the longest-operating hardware store in the nation, but the success of businesses such as Crust and North Main Street Provisions, Sweet Jane's Designer Consignment, and AlphaGraphics are evidence Main Street has true commercial potential once again.

Drawing attention to the Heart of the Commonwealth, much of the real estate left empty from the fallout of the Great Recession has been swiftly purchased by housing developers. Mixed-rate apartments at 332 Main St. went on the market earlier this summer.

One of the most anticipated projects is the new residence at the former Worcester Courthouse building financed by Trinity Financial out of Boston.

Bookended by housing, Main Street will soon be a cultural showcase of the City of Worcester.

At the intersection of Highland and Main streets, the former Worcester Courthouse building will welcome the public to view an exhibit detailing the life and achievements of famed Worcester cyclist Marshall Walter "Major" Taylor. Such award-winning institutions as

Armsby Abbey and Deadhorse Hill also call Main Street home. Their menus reflect an understanding of local and international cuisine emulated in only a handful of the world's culinary destinations.

What's old is once again new at Worcester Auditorium as the city awaits the official plans for the World War I memorial.

And the thoroughfare still has properties whose new uses have yet to be secured – namely, the Boys Club at the head of Lincoln Square.

Tying together the diversity of Main Street commerce is the Business Improvement District. Tasked with cultivating an 18-hour downtown and representing more than 130 business owners, the nonprofit was approved by the city in November, launched earlier this year, and recently employed an armada of placemaking ambassadors throughout downtown who help beautify the city.

#SHOPTHEWOO

While not all of these anchor businesses are Chamber members, the Chamber's pursuit here, and everyday, is to lift the business community as a whole and encourage residents of this city and beyond to continue to support local entrepreneurship.

Don't let the construction change the direction of your feet. Brave the congestion and detours – it might just lead to a new favorite Worcester destination.

Building off the rousing remarks delivered by Lt. Gov. Karyn Polito at the Polar Park groundbreaking July 11, this is a call to arms to sustain Worcester businesses through the journey. Their momentum has sparked the attention in which we revel today.

Take up your phones – and wallets! – and share your purchases and experiences with #ShopTheWoo. Use this hashtag as a badge of honor to show off your support of the city we all call home. Let's fill our social media feeds, bellies, homes, and offices with Worcester goods and experiences.

Business Stepping Stone?

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STOLZ TO HOST NEW MORNING SHOW ON WCRN AT 50K WATTS

By Emily Gowdey-Backus,
Director of Communications

Once a podcast, now a syndicated morning talk show, Talk of the Commonwealth will air live weekday mornings on AM 830 WCRN starting Tuesday, Sept. 3.

In an exclusive interview with the Worcester Regional Chamber of Commerce, Host Hank Stolz announced the move saying it allows for a broader reach – not just across Worcester but New England.

Most recently, the Talk of the Commonwealth aired on Unity Radio at 102.9 FM and was produced as a daily podcast by the team at Mr. Stolz's Radio Worcester. The show was also live streamed through Worcester Magazine's website.

Similar to the latest iteration aired on Unity Radio, the Talk of the Commonwealth on WCRN will focus on local news and events and feature interviews with leaders in government, businesspeople, community leaders, and residents.

The Worcester Regional Chamber of Commerce's weekly podcast, the Voice of Business, will remain a part of the show's programming.

Mr. Stolz, feels he is "uniquely suited" to host such a show because of his more than 25 years in the radio industry.

"That type of institutional knowledge armed with all of the new technology can really bring people" into the fold, he said.

Because of the talk show's focus on local current events, Mr. Stolz hopes listeners will call in to express



ABOVE: Hank Stolz, left, host of morning talk-radio show, Talk of the Commonwealth. His show will transition to WCRN on Sept. 3. Photo courtesy Radio Worcester.

their opinions and strengthen the conversation he cultivates over the airwaves.

The conversation is "going to be caller-driven," said Mr. Stolz, who has previously DJ'd music and hosted a local news talk show.

Talk of the Commonwealth can be heard from 6:00 a.m. to 10:00 a.m. every weekday morning. Starting Sept. 4, the Voice of Business will air in the final hour of Talk of the Commonwealth every Wednesday.

A graduate of the New School of Contemporary Radio in Albany, N.Y., Mr. Stolz previously worked for WCRN from 2008 to 2018 and WTAG from 1997 to 2007 among other stations.

A 50,000-watt channel, WCRN is heard from Maine to Rhode Island and Boston to Springfield, Mass.

TABLED TO AUGUST CITY COUNCIL MEETING, COMPREHENSIVE CLEAN CITY PROGRAM EXPLAINED

By Alex Guardiola, Director of
Government Affairs and Public
Policy

City of Worcester residents have been discussing the need for an updated recycling program – one that combats litter and continues efforts to reduce our carbon footprint – for years.

In January, just such a plan was proposed by City Manager Ed Augustus and the city's Department of Public Works Commissioner Paul Moosey.

As presented to the city council, the Comprehensive Clean City program was designed in response to numerous complaints concerning litter and illegal dumping in all corners of the city, wind picking up recyclables – and sometimes the green bins themselves – and carrying them across the block.

In the Comprehensive Clean City Program, the cost of bag rolls will increase by 50 cents each and include three clear recycling bags in the 10-pack and three in the five-pack. Yes, this is an addition of more plastic, however the recycling bags themselves will be recycled and repurposed once processed.

Included in the program is a four-person Clean Team exclusively tasked with enhancing the overall visual appeal of the city. It would add two additional full-time nuisance inspectors to combat illegal dumping and other beautification issues such as overgrowth and graffiti.

With implementation of the Comprehensive Clean City program, residents would be able to place textiles out for pick up alongside trash and recycling at no added cost. In addition, the Millbury Street recycling facility hours would be expanded on Wednesdays until 7 p.m. from April to November.

As for the Worcester business community, the program provides for and maintains new waste containers in business districts. On any given day, if you walk or drive the streets of city business districts, you will see litter all over the street as well as waste containers filled to the brim. This sight makes these districts look unattractive and unappealing.

Each fall, the Chamber advocates for the narrowing of the city's dual tax breakdown and this program is helpful for those businesses that pay more taxes but are mired down cleaning up their neighborhoods day in and day out. By showcasing the best of all our districts, the hope is to attract potential developers looking to become a fiber in the fabric of our city.

The proposal was first referred to the Department of Public Works subcommittee chaired by District Councilor George Russell along with District Councilors Candy Mero-Carlson and Matt Wally. Initially, this subcommittee held the item several times requesting

the city manager's team reconvene regarding additional suggestions brought up by city councilors. In particular, Councilor George J. Russell repeatedly questioned the use of clear plastic recycling bags to replace the green bins – inefficient receptacles which have been the source of continued ire for years.

On June 26, the DPW subcommittee voted 2-1 to move this item up to the full city council floor for a vote. Councilors Mero-Carlson and Wally voted in favor while Councilor Russell opposed.

Nearly one month later, the full city council met to discuss the program as it was approved in June with the addition of allowance for the purchase of a-la-carte recycling bags. Addressing the panel, Mr. Augustus emphasized the creation of six new jobs in the city and the visual and hygienic improvement to neighborhoods and business districts alike.

Councilor Russell moved to forward the proposal but eliminate the requirement of a clear plastic recycling bag – which was supported by councilors Konstantina B. Lukes and Khrystian E. King. Councilors Gary Rosen and Morris A. Bergman moved to hold the item while councilors Mero-Carlson, Wally, Toomey, Rivera and Mayor Joseph M. Petty indicated their support of the program.

When counting votes, Councilor King stated agreement with Councilor Russell's motion and indicated he would exercise his right to personally hold the matter if that motion fails. Seeing that Councilor King would hold this item, the mayor held it for the August meeting to continue discussions.

Will we ever see any version of the "Comprehensive Clean City Program?" In short, more than likely. It's evident the city council is in support of most of the program. There are a minority who feel a requirement to use clear recycling bags is not acceptable and feel it would lead to more plastic bags when other communities are moving to eliminate them altogether. These individuals fail to recognize comparing single-use plastics to these bags is not a fair comparison as these will be repurposed.

Our business districts, and neighborhoods alike, are in dire need of a clean city reform. The Chamber hopes that is evident to the city council and they pass this program sooner rather than later.

The City Manager is and has always been a champion of being a green city.

Worcester, by year's end, will have installed LED lights on all streetlight poles, complementing the 26-acre solar farm atop the former Greenwood Street Landfill – the largest municipal solar array in New England – and have, hopefully, adopted this program to cultivate a greener, cleaner city for us all.

LET'S GET SOCIAL

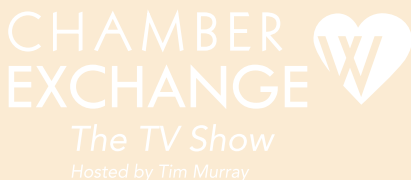


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TUNE IN FOR MORE



HIGH INTEREST IN WORCESTER REGIONAL FOOD HUB'S DIVERSE LEADERSHIP PROGRAM NECESSITATES INCREASE IN CAPACITY

By Shon Rainford, Worcester Regional Food Hub Director

There's no shortage of culinary creativity in the Heart of the Commonwealth – at least that's what the response to the Worcester Regional Food Hub's request for applications to its Launching Diverse Entrepreneurs in Worcester program indicates.

The Food Hub, in collaboration with the Worcester Regional Chamber of Commerce and The Health Foundation of Central Massachusetts, enrolled more than 20 participants in the first iteration of this food program in July.

An initiative aimed at increasing diverse representation among Worcester business owners, particularly those with a culinary focus, there was so much popularity in the program the number of open spots initially planned for by the Food Hub had to be increased.

More than 50 applications were received for the initial 20 positions, and the Food Hub enrolled 24 in the 16-week program.

Funded by the Massachusetts Office of Housing and Economic Development's Urban Agenda Grant, in addition to monies from The Health Foundation of Central Massachusetts, the program's goal is to jump start new food businesses in Worcester.

"This program is geared to introducing recipes handed down through generations to the main stream market and providing an opportunity for entrepreneurs to learn how to market their product efficiently and cost-effectively," said Alex Guardiola, director of government affairs and public policy, a Chamber staff member who helped secure the Urban Agenda Grant funds.

Selections were made by several community organization representatives, members of The Health Foundation of Central Massachusetts, the Food Hub, the City of Worcester, and the Chamber.

Run by Food Hub leadership, the program stretches from July through October with participants attending weekly sessions at Greendale People's Church, home of the Food Hub and commercial kitchen. These sessions will focus on culinary skills, food safety, business planning, sales, branding, accounting, and insurance information.

ServSafe manager and allergen awareness certifications, food permits, and liability insurance will also be rolled into the program.

In addition, guest speakers during the four-month curriculum will include Peter Dunn, assistant chief development officer from the City of Worcester; Ellen Nylen, food service

director at Webster Public Schools; Cheryl Miller, senior business advisor and training director from Clark University's Massachusetts Small Business Development Center; Michelle Miller, Central Mass. director of the Center for Women & Enterprise; Travis Duda, owner of Hunchback Graphics; Allen Fletcher, founder and president of the Worcester Public Market; Patricia DeChristopher, attorney and owner of DeChristopher Law Office; and Julia Moriconi, owner of Mrs. Moriconi's Ltd.; among others.

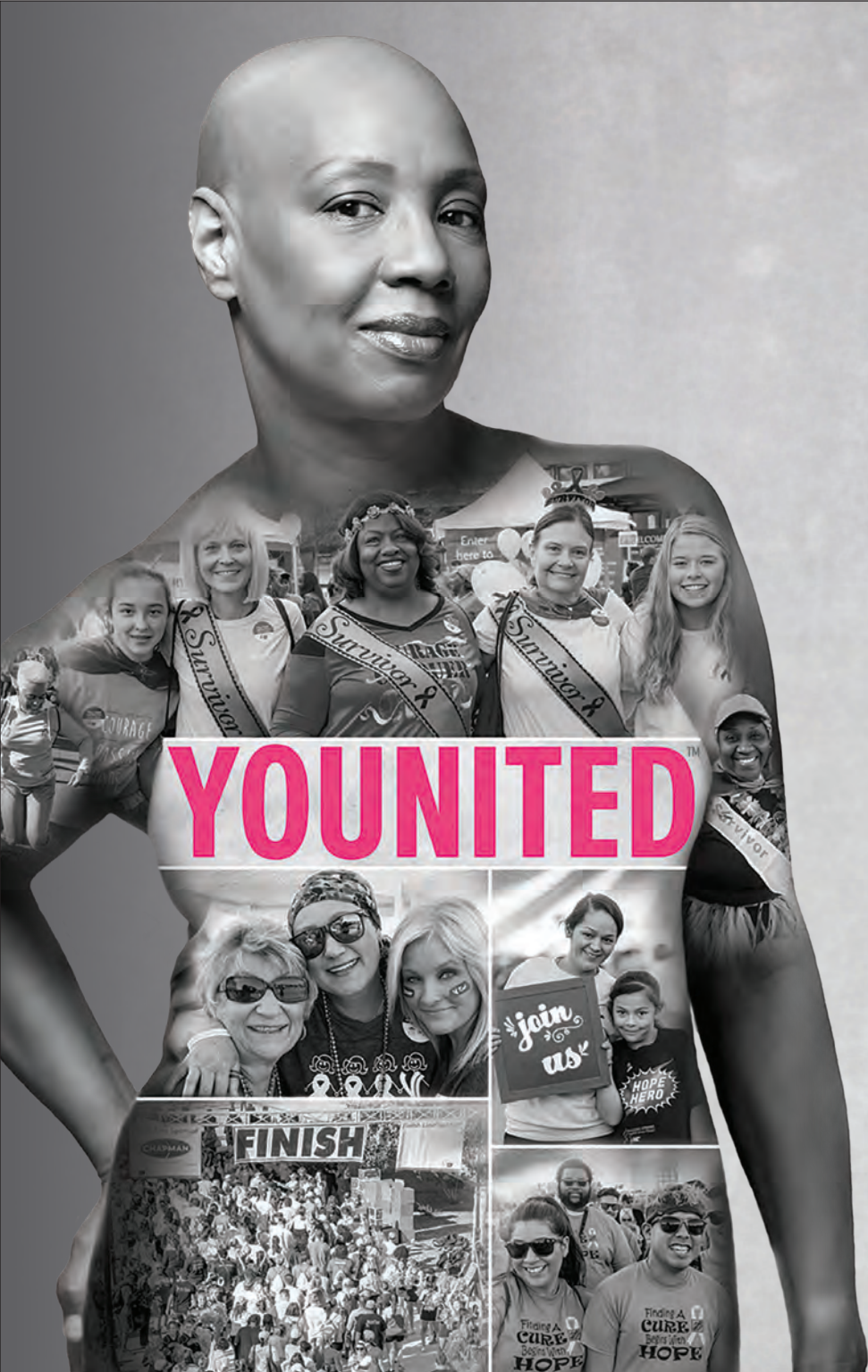
Participants in the program will receive free use of the Food Hub's community kitchen as well as promotion of their business.

Designed to bolster a robust regional food system, the Food Hub's mission is to increase local food access and consumption as well as recruit, retain, and incubate local food entrepreneurs, collectively building healthy, sustainable, and just communities. The Worcester



ABOVE: Knife skills, among other culinary know-how, are taught to participants in the Worcester Regional Food Hub's Launching Diverse Entrepreneurs in Worcester program. Additional sessions will focus on food safety, sales, accounting, and insurance among other topics. Photo by Emily Gowdey-Backus.

Regional Food Hub is a proud partner of the Chamber and generously supported by The Health Foundation of Central Massachusetts.



WHAT UNITES US, IGNITES US

Making Strides Against Breast Cancer of Worcester
Let's get together and celebrate!

Sunday, October 6, 2019
Registration begins at 8:30 a.m.
Walk begins at 10 a.m.

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WEC CELEBRATES 116TH ANNUAL SPEAKERS SERIES

**By Linda Salem Pervier,
Senior Director of Membership
Development and Finance**

Five professionals discussing a variety of subjects make up the schedule for the 116th annual Worcester Economic Club's speakers series.

Launching Oct. 15, the series includes the following events:

- Oct. 15: *Steven Hoffman; Chairman, Massachusetts Cannabis Control Commission*
- Dec. 3: *Peter S. Cohan; Professor, Author, Venture Capitalist, Consultant*
- March 17: *Bobby Jindal; Former Governor of Louisiana*
- April 14: *Daniel J. Ivascyn; Chief Investment Officer, PIMCO*
- June 3: *Brian Moynihan; Chairman and CEO, Bank of America*

A non-political, non-partisan, nonprofit group, previous WEC speakers include economists, public officials, foreign dignitaries, business leaders, educators,

journalists, and authors.

Two Worcester Economic Club membership options are available. Standard membership, one admission to all of the events, is \$350. Those who join prior to Sept. 15 will receive the discounted price of \$300. The Morgan membership rate is \$700, or \$600 before Sept. 15, and includes enhanced networking opportunities and five guest passes valid for the whole season.

Each WEC meeting takes place at the College of the Holy Cross' Hogan Center in Worcester.

Founded in 1903, the Worcester Economic Club is one of the oldest such organizations in the nation. An association of professionals in the Worcester County region, the club's objective is to provide a forum for the discussion of economic, civic, educational, and sociological subjects of interest to members. For more information about joining call 508.753.2924.



**THE WORCESTER
ECONOMIC CLUB**

GLOBAL THINKING. LOCAL NETWORKING.

HOUSING, FROM PAGE 1

Worcester Courthouse (117 units) building, and the Voke Lofts (84 units).

The majority of the units in these developments are categorized as income-restricted and costs range from 50 percent of the area's median income to 110 percent.

Since the end of the Great Recession, the Worcester MA-CT metro area has added 24,300 jobs representing a 9.2 percent increase in the decade from January 2009 to January 2019, according to Bureau of Labor Statistics data. In the City of Worcester alone, there has been an uptick of employment from 2010 to 2017 of 2.9 percent according to the U.S. Census. Within the city, the majority of employment gains have come in educational services, health care, and social assistance; arts, entertainment, and recreation; accommodation and food services; professional; scientific; and management; and administrative and waste management services.

Data from the past year shows a wide range of earnings for these growing industries. Median incomes for positions from an arts, entertainment, and recreation professional to management range from \$13,984 per year to \$72,708, according to U.S. Census Bureau data.

And, while the majority of the Worcester Regional Chamber of Commerce's members lie within the business and professional services and finance and insurance industries, there is an opportunity for further mixed-income housing development aimed at successfully matching the incomes of member employees and their industry sectors.

The top concern voiced to the Chamber by our members is the

challenge of recruiting and retaining a skilled workforce and part of the solution is to provide a diversity of housing at multiple income levels – a key recruitment driver for employers.

In line with the Baker-Polito administration's Housing Choice Initiative bill, the Chamber supports the governor's legislation which will create local opt-in functions in order to make zoning changes easier to apply through a majority vote.

In June, Sen. Brendan P. Creighton, D-Third Essex, spoke at a Business and Government forum at the Chamber on the topic of mixed-income housing and solutions being discussed at Beacon Hill.

Speaking to more than 40 Chamber members, Sen. Creighton urged those cities and towns already investing in transportation infrastructure to give more consideration to multi-family projects. Among the possible solutions discussed at the event were home-rule zoning laws and accessory, tiny or alternative, housing models.

In order to account for the city's current housing inventory while both understanding the needs of the local population as well as the workforce currently being recruited by area businesses, and building with those specifications in mind, the Chamber, with the support of the Economic Development Coordinating Council, has undertaken a three-phase regional housing study.

Initial reports from the first two phases of a joint housing study will be released at the Chamber's annual Game Changers conference on October 25. The third phase will occur in 2020.

DELTA THIRD AIRLINE ADDED TO ORH FLIGHT LIST SINCE 2010

**By Charlene Arsenault,
Correspondent, and
Dominique Goyette-
Connerty, Fitchburg State
University Intern**

Delta Air Lines is joining a growing list of commercial airlines operating in and out of Worcester Regional Airport.

As of Aug. 2, Delta hit the high skies out of Worcester with flights headed to its hub at the Detroit Wayne County Metropolitan Airport. Delta is the third major international airline to add service at ORH since the Massachusetts Port Authority, Massport, took over ownership and management nine years ago.

He added: "Massport has made significant investments in Worcester Regional Airport and attracting new service continues to be a priority. Those investments are paying dividends and we continue to see incredible support."

In fact, according to Massport, ORH has doubled its local economic impact from \$50 million to \$100 million since the purchase.

Calling Delta's decision to sign on to ORH a "logical fit," Andy Davis, the airport director at Worcester Regional Airport, said: "Massport's relationship with Delta is strong and [the airline] has made it clear they want to grow in the region."

As of August, daily flight destinations from the airport now total five cities and include JetBlue's service to New York City, Orlando, and Fort Lauderdale as well as American Airlines' service to Philadelphia.

Known colloquially by its three-letter code, ORH is a 1,000-acre, two-runway, category-three facility.

Purchased in 2010 by Massport, the organization has funneled \$100 million into the Worcester-based airport eyeing it as an essential element of Central Massachusetts' economic development scheme.

Competing with larger, international airports – everything from Logan International Airport in Boston to T.F. Green Airport in Warwick, R.I. among other New England facilities – ORH is still recovering from a dip in passenger volume. While a peak passenger count was hit in 1989 at 354,000, for calendar year 2018, ORH welcomed 145,000 to its terminal and Massport expects to exceed 200,000 this year.

"Since November 2013, when JetBlue began serving the airport, we've had consistent air service," said Mr. Davis.

In total, approximately 750,000 passengers have used the airport since 2010.

Residents, like Julia Moriconi, are part of the influx of ridership helping rebuild local awareness.

Prior to opening Mrs. Moriconi's Ltd; her start-up, dairy-based-



ABOVE: A flight takes off from Worcester Regional Airport, ORH. As of August 2019, three airlines are servicing the Worcester-based airport to five cities east of the Mississippi. Photo courtesy Massport.

dessert business through the Worcester Regional Food Hub; for multiple months Ms. Moriconi flew the American Airlines' ORH-to-Philadelphia flight every other week in order to attend classes at Penn State University.

Comparing ORH to other airports, Ms. Moriconi was impressed by the convenience.

"If my flight is at 10:15 am, I literally wake up at 9:15, get dressed, grab my bags, and I'm still waiting to board – it's that super convenient," she said. Whereas, with Logan, hurdles such as long travel times, traffic, tolls, expensive and distant parking, and lengthy lines proved to be challenging and frustrating for her.

ORH, on the other hand, is "peaceful. You can just park, come in, it's clean, and everyone's friendly," she added.

As a frequent flyer and Chicago-native, Ms. Moriconi looks forward to the added Delta service not just for going home, but also for utilizing their expansive international offerings.

"If we do any international travel, I would consider Delta and consider flying in and out of Worcester because it's just so easy," she said.

With 450 daily departures from 16 airlines to more than 140 non-stop destinations, Detroit Wayne County Metropolitan Airport is a primary connecting hub and will allow – business and leisure – customers to head to hundreds of locations throughout the United States, Canada, Mexico, and Asia.

"As part of their growth plan, Delta wants to provide travel options and, by adding service out of Worcester Regional Airport," said Mr. Davis, "they are affording customers in MetroWest and Central Massachusetts more choices in not just flights, but airports."

ANNUAL DRAGON BOAT FESTIVAL RETURNS SEPT. 21 AT REGATTA POINT

By Dominique Goyette-Connerty, Fitchburg State University Intern

The annual Worcester Dragon Boat Festival is back for its third year at DCR Regatta Point on Lake Quinsigamond.

On Saturday, Sept. 21 from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m., teams of 21, consisting of 20 paddlers and one drummer to keep everyone paddling on pace, will race against each other on a 200-meter course set in Lake Quinsigamond.

Hosted by the Telegram & Gazette and sponsored by Fallon Health; with supporting sponsors Discover Central Massachusetts, the Worcester Regional Chamber of Commerce, Atlas Distributing, Coghlin Companies, Greater Good Imperial Brewing Co., and the Worcester Railers; the 2019 Dragon Boat Festival is sure to be bigger and better than ever.

This family-friendly event not only includes the boat races, but also cultural performances, vendors, food, music and activities including a team drummer costume contest, music by WXLO, and more.

The annual Dragon Boat festival is an opportunity to celebrate the diverse cultures present in Worcester County and come together as a community.

President of the Telegram & Gazette, Paul Provost, said: "We are proud to have brought this

wonderful cultural experience to Worcester and Lake Quinsigamond. This is truly a community event that recognizes a long Asian tradition dating back 2,500 years."

With last year's event bringing more than 40 teams together, GateHouse New England events director, and coordinator of the Worcester Dragon Boat Festival, Suzanne DeGeorge expects this year's races will sell out. The number of teams is capped at 40 for the 2019 roster. Teams can register for \$975 and that cost will cover the boats, life jackets, team practices, and all paddle equipment.

Dragon boat racing is great for businesses looking for team-building exercises, as well as families, friends, and community groups interested in a good time and something fun to do on a Saturday.

Everyone 15 years and older is welcome to participate and there's no prior experience necessary.

Not a paddler? No worries. Spectators are more than welcome to come watch, cheer on their friends and family who are in the races, and enjoy the rest of the activities lining the shore. The festival is free and open to the public.

The Chamber has their team together. Do you have yours? To register your 21 racemates, visit worcesterdragonboats.com.



ABOVE: A team of rowers races down the Dragon Boat course on Lake Quinsigamond during the 2018 event. **BELOW:** Post-race, a 2018 Dragon Boat race team celebrates their accomplishment. Photos courtesy Worcester Telegram & Gazette.



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AFFILIATE CORNER: AUBURN CLEANS UP, BLACKSTONE VALLEY STRENGTHENS WORKFORCE, CMS CLAM BAKE DRAWS DOZENS

By Chamber Staff

By hosting biennial Clean Up days for more than 20 years, the Auburn Chamber of Commerce has remained true to the central ideas on which Earth Day was founded. The 2019 event took place May 4 in partnership with the Town of Auburn and multiple sponsors.

“Picking up trash not only makes the town look good, but it creates a sense of pride for the residents and businesses in the community,” said Tina Puzo, Clean Up committee chair.

This year’s volunteers rolled up their sleeves, grabbed some gloves and recycling bags, and scattered around the designated areas mapped out by the town to pick up litter and help beautify their community.

Picking up trash on the side of a busy road “is not the most glorious task, but it’s one that is needed,” said Ms. Puzo – especially because the events are only held every other year.

Auburn’s geography of multiple waterways, and parks makes the task seem insurmountable, said Ms. Puzo, but event data shows more and more volunteers commit to Clean Up day each year aiding in the effort.

“You could say it is the advertising of the event or the coordination and teamwork between the Auburn Chamber and the town, but when it comes down to it, it’s the many

volunteers and the pride they have for their town [which draws people in],” she added. “They want to walk the neighborhoods and look around without seeing trash on the sidewalk or in the parks where they play with their families.”

The Auburn Chamber encourages residents, local civic groups, and businesses to join in the initiative by beautifying their properties not only biannually, but instead whenever they see it is needed.

This year, the Auburn Chamber would like to thank its multiple Clean Up day sponsors, including bankHometown, Casella Waste Systems, Central MA Mosquito Control Project, Interstate All Battery Center, Masterman’s Safety and Industrial Supplies, Outback Steakhouse, R.H. White Construction Inc., Republic Services, Savers Bank, Starbucks, Southbridge Savings Bank, and Webster First Federal Credit Union.

“I am very thankful for our business sponsors and the many volunteers that join together on this day to show their Auburn pride. Without them this whole event would not be possible,” added Ms. Puzo.

The Clean Up day committee consists of Auburn Chamber members, volunteers, town officials, and local business partners.

By Chamber Staff

The Blackstone Valley Chamber of Commerce’s Advanced Manufacturing Trade class met with their mentors for the first time July 16 and 18 to learn more about their respective industries and potential career opportunities.

All professionals in their industries, each of the mentors are volunteers from the Blackstone Valley Education Hub advisory committee.

Enthused, one student, Wendell Perez, Jr., said of his mentor: “He’s really good at what he does. Hopefully, he’ll be able to motivate me” in my career going forward.

Another mentee, Joe Walz, added

of his mentor: “She reminds me of my mother. She’s not a quitter. Hopefully, I can be like that.”

Students and their mentors are encouraged to communicate at least weekly to see how progress is shaping up. Mentors are tasked with listening to their mentees, making career suggestions, and lending advice on how to be job-ready when the time comes.

The Advanced Manufacturing Trade program teaches machine tool skills, CNC machine control, and 3D printing, among others – all of which are needed at companies across the state and nation.



RIGHT: Members of the Central Mass South Chamber of Commerce enjoy the annual Clam Bake. **BELOW:** With lobster and corn, the Clam Bake is a not-to-be-missed CMS event. Photos courtesy CMS Chamber.



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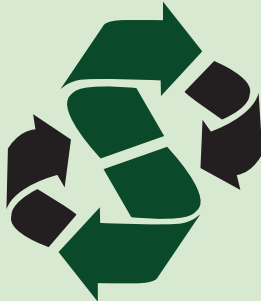
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FALLON HEALTH CARE: BABY BOOMERS DESERVE HELPFUL DOSE OF MEDICARE INFO

By Andre Gabryjelski, Fallon Health Director of Medicare Advantage

Every day is one step closer to retirement.

The average baby boomer is between 61 and 65, so their post-retirement future may be starting to come into focus. With the future in mind, it's important to remember to also plan for health care coverage.

Medicare can be confusing. That's why, as you approach age 65, it's important to proactively learn about Medicare coverage options and how the Medicare program works.

Although Medicare is complex, you have an ally right in your backyard – Fallon Health. With nearly 40 years of experience offering Medicare solutions to the communities we serve, we have learned a lot and want to share three things you need to know about enrolling in Medicare.

1. ENROLL ON TIME

It's important to enroll in Medicare when you first become eligible. Timely enrollment ensures you have coverage when you need it and helps you avoid financial penalties.

While some become eligible for Medicare due to a disability or illness, most people become eligible for Medicare at age 65. You may join Medicare during your Initial Enrollment Period – a seven-month timeframe which starts three months prior to the month of your 65TH birthday and ends three months after.

To start your enrollment, you will need to contact the Social Security Administration. Some people will be automatically enrolled in Medicare, but it's best to start the process on your own. This is true even if you plan to continue working for a while after you turn 65.

2. GET THE COVERAGE YOU NEED

Medicare consists of different parts – outlined below – and each provides different coverage. It's important to think about what kind of coverage you want now and what you may need in the future.

First, let's look at Medicare's basic coverage, Original Medicare. This coverage type includes parts A and B. Part A is hospital insurance which helps pay for things like hospital care, stays in a skilled nursing facility, hospice, and home health care. Part B is medical insurance which provides coverage for visits to your doctor, preventive screenings and flu shots, ambulance rides, lab tests, and X-rays.

You can enroll in one or both parts. With Original Medicare, you receive coverage directly from the Medicare program, and you can receive care from any provider who accepts Medicare and accepts you as a patient.

It's important to note that Original Medicare doesn't cover everything you may need like routine dental services, most prescription drugs, and vision screenings among others. This is why you have the option to enhance your Medicare coverage

with a Part C and/or Part D plan.

Let's start with the simplest enhancement option – Part D, Medicare Prescription Drug plans. These plans provide coverage for prescription medications only. This type of coverage can be added to Original Medicare or a Medicare Supplement plan.

Part C plans, also known as Medicare Advantage, cover all the benefits included in Medicare Parts A and B – and more. Many of these plans also offer prescription drug coverage. Additional covered benefits may include gym memberships, routine dental services, hearing aids, glasses, and more.

These plans offer similar coverage and cost-sharing as many traditional, commercial plans – like the coverage you may have now from your employer.

Finally, there are Medicare Supplement (Medigap) plans. These plans cover the same benefits as Medicare parts A and B, and they cover most out-of-pocket costs like deductibles, coinsurance, and copayments.

3. EDUCATION FOR EMPLOYEES

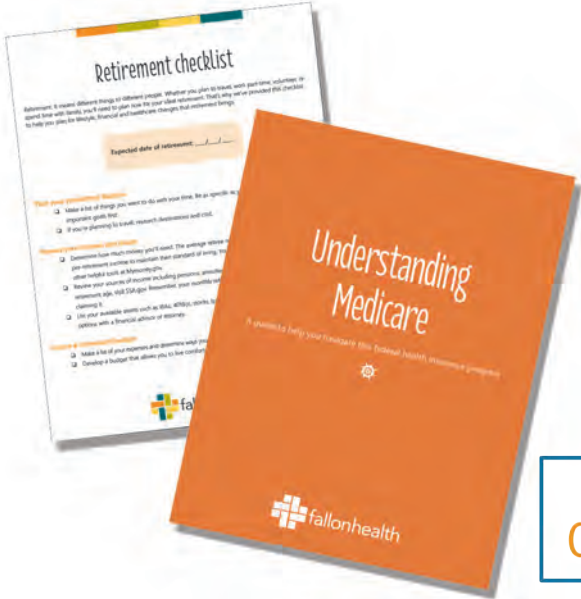
Employers are invested in their workforce. Retirement options and health care savings plans are some of the ways they help secure the financial future of their employees. Yet, it's important to understand that employers have a lot of "retirement planning" to do for themselves. According to Pew Research Center and the Social Security Administration, a wave of baby boomers is retiring – 10,000 every day – and with this amount of people leaving the workforce, local companies have a lot on their plate.

The good news for employers is that there are a lot of local resources, including Fallon Health, that can assist. Working directly with management teams to educate employees, we will take the burden off businesses – at no cost to the employer or employee – in order to help meet retirement goals.

The bottom line is that Medicare can be intimidating.

But, with the right help, you can have the confidence you need to move forward. Retirement should be an exciting time, and getting a dose of simplified Medicare information might be just what the doctor ordered.

Fallon Health provides free tools to help simplify Medicare.



WHAT IS OPEN ENROLLMENT?

Medicare's Open Enrollment, also known as the Annual Election Period, takes place from Oct. 15 to Dec. 7 every year. This is when enrollees can join a Medicare plan, switch to a new plan, drop a plan, or change type of coverage. This is also the time when health plans showcase their offerings and rates for the upcoming year. Fallon Health will be announcing some exciting changes to its Medicare Advantage offerings for 2020 during this time. In addition, we will be welcoming Reliant Medical Group to our Medicare Advantage network, which means – as a new Medicare enrollee – you will be able to see Reliant's dedicated team of providers and specialists right here in Worcester County starting in January.

TALK WITH AN EXPERT

According to a Kaiser Family Foundation survey, one of the top-recommended improvements to Medicare is to increase patients' access to in-person help when it comes to choosing plans.

As one of the first health maintenance organizations in the country to receive a special contract for Medicare recipients through the U.S. Health Care Financing Administration, Fallon Health has been offering Medicare solutions for nearly 40 years. Fallon Health's corporate offices are located in Worcester, the city where they first offered health care coverage.

CITY AIMS FOR COMPLETE CENSUS COUNT

By Dominique Goyette-Connerty, Fitchburg State University Intern

Everyone counts – at least that's the message of the Worcester 2020 Census Outreach campaign.

Since 1790, each decade the U.S. Census Bureau has conducted a mandated census to determine the number of people residing within the nation. With the next iteration occurring in 2020, Worcester is gearing up to comply with the federal mandate.

U.S. Census data is vital to the operations of a city like Worcester and is utilized in everything from determining electoral college votes to allocating federal funds.

To reach every resident, the city has implemented a Census Outreach Campaign spearheaded by City Clerk Susan M. Ledoux and Edgar Luna, business development manager in the city's Executive Office of Economic Development.

Noting the importance of a complete count for Worcester and the return on the community's well-being, Niko Vangjeli, assistant city clerk and an overseer of Worcester's 2020 Census implementation, said "Worcester could potentially lose millions in federal funding if we don't get a complete count."

The local campaign follows a multidisciplinary outreach plan aiming to identify, inform, and encourage individuals to participate regardless of their age, gender, race, primary language, or citizenship status.

Because Worcester is home to roughly 34,000 college students, multiple ethnic minorities, and recent immigrants, the city's plan includes dissemination of census information in several languages.

In March, Mayor Joseph M. Petty and City Manager Edward M. Augustus Jr. launched a Complete Count Committee – a subcommittee of the Census Outreach Campaign – in order to achieve this goal. Various community leaders representing a wide spectrum of socioeconomic segments and diverse populations sit on the council.

Timothy P. Murray, Worcester Regional Chamber of Commerce president and CEO, is a member. "Everybody has a role to play in raising awareness and ensuring we have a strategy that reaches all facets of the community," he said.

Emphasizing its importance, Mr. Murray added, "there are dollars attached to a census count that make a difference in quality of life, economic development, and job creation – everyone has a vested interest in that."

While census distribution will not begin until March 2020, the city's team will meanwhile attend local events – including the Worcester Caribbean American Carnival and Out to Lunch – to raise awareness.

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Pictured Left to Right: Craig Blais, WBDC; Rep. Kim Ferguson; Peter Lukes, Town of Holden; Tim Quinn, Quinn's Blue Plate; Kristin Sawash, UniBank



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ASYLUM POPATORIUM RIFS ON AGE-OLD, YEAST-LEAVENED "POPS"

By Emily Gowdey-Backus, Director of Communications

For Travis Duda, his first taste of popovers was a religious experience.

Four years ago, he recounted, the first popover he tasted was at Acadia National Park's Jordan Pond House.

"They bring it over in this basket and, I swear, angels flew out and there was a heavenly choir," he said.

This chance encounter in Maine led Mr. Duda to explore the boundaries of a carbohydrate that would come to change his life and impact the Worcester community.

Now, as co-owner of pop-up food company Asylum Popatorium, Mr. Duda said his and Co-Owner Zac Cave's mission is to "make delicious, soul-warming food that pushes the boundaries of flavor."

Using a "very traditional" base as a conduit, the popover, or "pop" as Mr. Duda calls it, the pair have done just that. Currently, while the menu is always rotating and updating, popular favorites include veggie pad Thai, balsamic and fig-glazed pulled pork, blueberry, sundried tomato and ricotta, and, of course, the classic plain warmed with a side of maple butter.

When it comes to flavor profiles, Mr. Duda is inspired by the diversity of the City of Worcester and aims to be as "eclectic as our world."

Uniqueness is at the heart of their goal as entrepreneurs. Not only was Mr. Duda smitten with his first bite of a pop, so too were his taste testers a few years later when he and Mr. Cave invited friends and family to try scones, cookies, and pops they had baked in preparation to open a coffee shop.

"No one talked about anything else but these damn popovers. We looked around and no one could find them [locally]," said Mr. Duda of the pair's decision.

While Mr. Duda's first taste of popover was four years ago, the company was founded in 2017, and that same year enrolled in the Worcester Regional Food Hub.

Launched in 2016 from the Worcester County Food Bank in Shrewsbury, the Food Hub's mission is similar to the Chamber's "recruit, retain, incubate," but focused on the local culinary scene. Shon Rainford, director, and his team strive to increase access to and consumption of locally-grown food as well as cultivate a strong, sustainable business community of food entrepreneurs.

By encouraging food-related entrepreneurs to root their businesses in Worcester, Mr. Rainford and the Chamber hope to fuel economic development and in so doing strengthen local agriculture and promote healthy eating habits in the Heart of the



ABOVE: Zac Cave (left) and Travis Duda (right) co-own Asylum Popatorium. Photo courtesy Mr. Duda.

Commonwealth.

While the Food Hub offers everything from ServSafe certification classes to social media workshops and branding aid, the most important aspect of their work is getting these decadent creations to the public.

A 1,000-square-foot commercial kitchen – complete with ranges, convection ovens, food processors, pots and pans, and dry storage space managed by the Food Hub – was the deciding factor behind Asylum Popatorium's membership, said Mr. Duda.

It was also the "roadmap of how to get legal" – in terms of food safety regulations – as well as local introductions which helped them proceed beyond the early stages of a startup.

Working with Mr. Rainford and the Food Hub has made "the barrier to entry into the area way easier."

Of Mr. Rainford, Mr. Duda said: "He's doing a lot of the leg work to make [members] feel confident they can get out there and [succeed]."

Today, Mr. Duda and Mr. Cave's immediate focus is on purchasing a food truck, which will allow them to bake popovers on-site, as well as exploring the wholesale end of pre-packaged food production and distribution.

"People are hungry for more" adventurous food, said Mr. Duda. He recommends anyone with even the slightest desire to explore a culinary career take the dive, but advised: "Be unique, whether it's a new take on ramen or a traditional frozen treat, there's room in Worcester for more unique flavors."

Worcester can only benefit from a stronger culinary industry, he said. "We represent a bunch of cultures but there's still so much more to explore and there are people in our community who can provide the best food, ... we just don't know them yet."

"It's hard," he said, of the investment necessary to launch a food business. But, "with something like the Food Hub in your corner, it makes [the process] much more manageable."

2019 PROVES BUSY FOR LOCAL SBA 504 LOANS



ABOVE: Left to right: Craig Blais, Worcester Business Development Corporation; Rep. Kim Ferguson, R-1ST Worcester; Peter Lukes, Town of Holden; Tim Quinn, Quinn’s Blue Plate; and Kristin Sawash, UniBank. Photo courtesy WBDC.

By Joyce A. Stewart, Worcester Business Development Corporation Executive Director of SBA and Finance

It was an eventful spring for the Worcester Business Development Corporation’s Small Business Administration 504 Loan department. Per WBDC President and CEO Craig L. Blais, local administration of the program now accounts for 40 loans totaling \$27 million.

Evidenced by two loans awarded in the first half of 2019, “our portfolio and success rate continue to grow,” he said.

A federally-funded initiative, the SBA 504 loan program provides small businesses with long-term, fixed-rate loans in partnership with banks local to each firm. This combination of local and federal funding supports the efforts of U.S.

small businesses. More than 67,000 small businesses nationwide have utilized SBA programs in the past year.

On May 9, N.H.-based Roedel Companies; in partnership with Berlin, Mass.-based developer Riverbridge North; celebrated the grand opening of the Homewood Suites by Hilton Boston-Marlborough in Berlin. The hotel’s opening marked the newest

extended-stay property to open in the region in more than a decade and the first in the Roedel portfolio.

In this case, the WBDC, together with CDC New England, funded 21 percent of the more-than-\$12-million loan alongside Eastern Bank’s 59 percent leaving the borrowers to cover 20 percent.

“The growing volume of business and recreational travelers to the Boston-Marlborough market, combined with limited lodging accommodations, provided a clear opportunity to introduce an upscale, suite-style product to the region,” said David Roedel, business development officer of Roedel Companies, in a statement.

The 105-room hotel targets

business travelers with a mix of studios and one-bedroom suites. Corporate demand generators – such as General Electric, IBM and Raytheon – are located in close proximity to the property. Additionally, New England Sports Center, Solomon Pond Mall, The International Golf Club, and Juniper Hill Golf Course are expected to sustain year-round business for the hotel.

It includes a 24-hour business center and a 750 square-foot conference room with an additional 300 square feet of breakout space. Rounding out the property are an outdoor, half-court basketball court, outdoor kitchen, indoor swimming pool, and a 24-hour fitness center.

A little more than one month later, Holden welcomed a new business, Quinn’s Blue Plate, on June 18.

Situated on the former site of the Blue Plate Lounge, the building was demolished to make room for the 100-seat pub-style restaurant owned and operated by Tim Quinn, owner of Quinn’s Irish Pub in Worcester.

“Expanding with a second location on Main Street in Holden is an ideal progression for our family-style, relaxed-pub atmosphere providing good food at reasonable prices using products that change with the seasons,” said Mr. Quinn of taking on the project.

Similar to the hotel, Mr. Quinn pursued the \$1.1 million project through an SBA 504 loan via the WBDC and UniBank.

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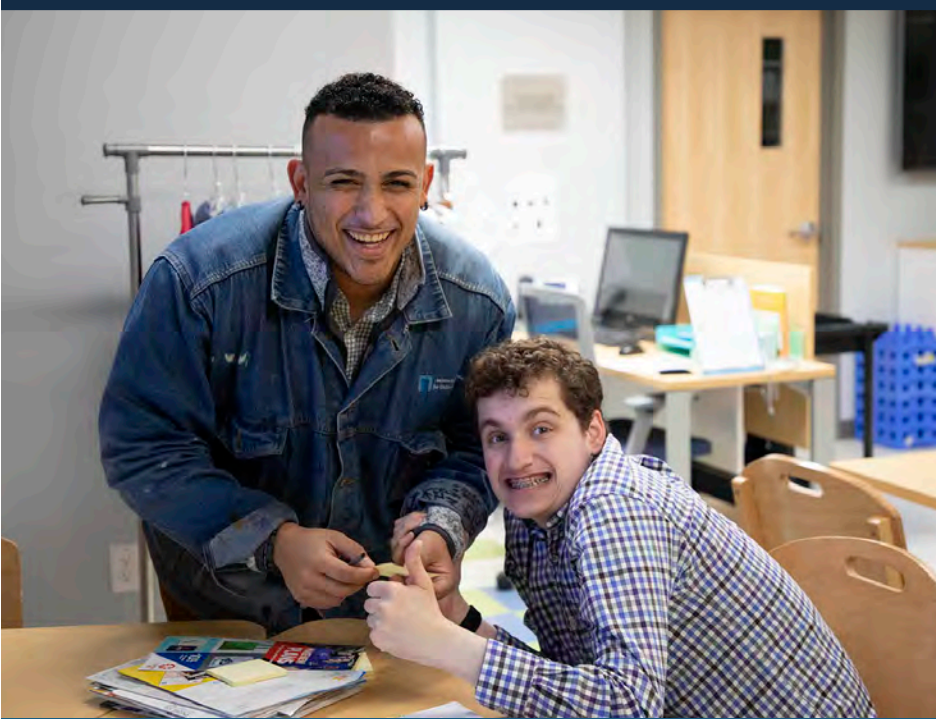
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GAME CHANGERS 2019: QUALITY OF LIFE, OPPORTUNITY, HOUSING

By Sharyn Williams; Vice President of Marketing, Communications, Programs, and Events

Now in its fourth year under the Game Changers brand, the Chamber's annual conference and expo brings together members of the Central Massachusetts business community to learn about local innovations and business opportunities, hear keynote speakers, and network with a group of regional industry professionals.

At this year's event, phases one and two of the Chamber's multi-

year housing study – as compiled by Smart Growth Economics, led by Mahesh Ramachandran – will be released. The third and final phase of the study will take place in 2020.

Spurred by the study, this important discussion of the region's housing will explore the implications for employers with regard to workforce and recruiting talent. Creating new housing at all levels – from luxury to workforce and student-focused to empty nesters – will foster opportunities for a variety of business sectors.

A SAMPLING OF WHAT THE STUDY IS REVEALING

With new businesses moving in to the region, additional sports teams such as the Worcester Red Sox, improved retail districts, and company expansions, the region is expanding rapidly and in so doing presenting additional opportunities in the housing sector.

The Worcester metro region is the second-fastest growing economy in the state.

SEE GAME CHANGERS PAGE 16



MORNING KEYNOTE
Mahesh Ramachandran, Ph.D.
Smart Growth Economics



AFTERNOON KEYNOTE
Chrystal Kornegay, Executive Director, MassHousing

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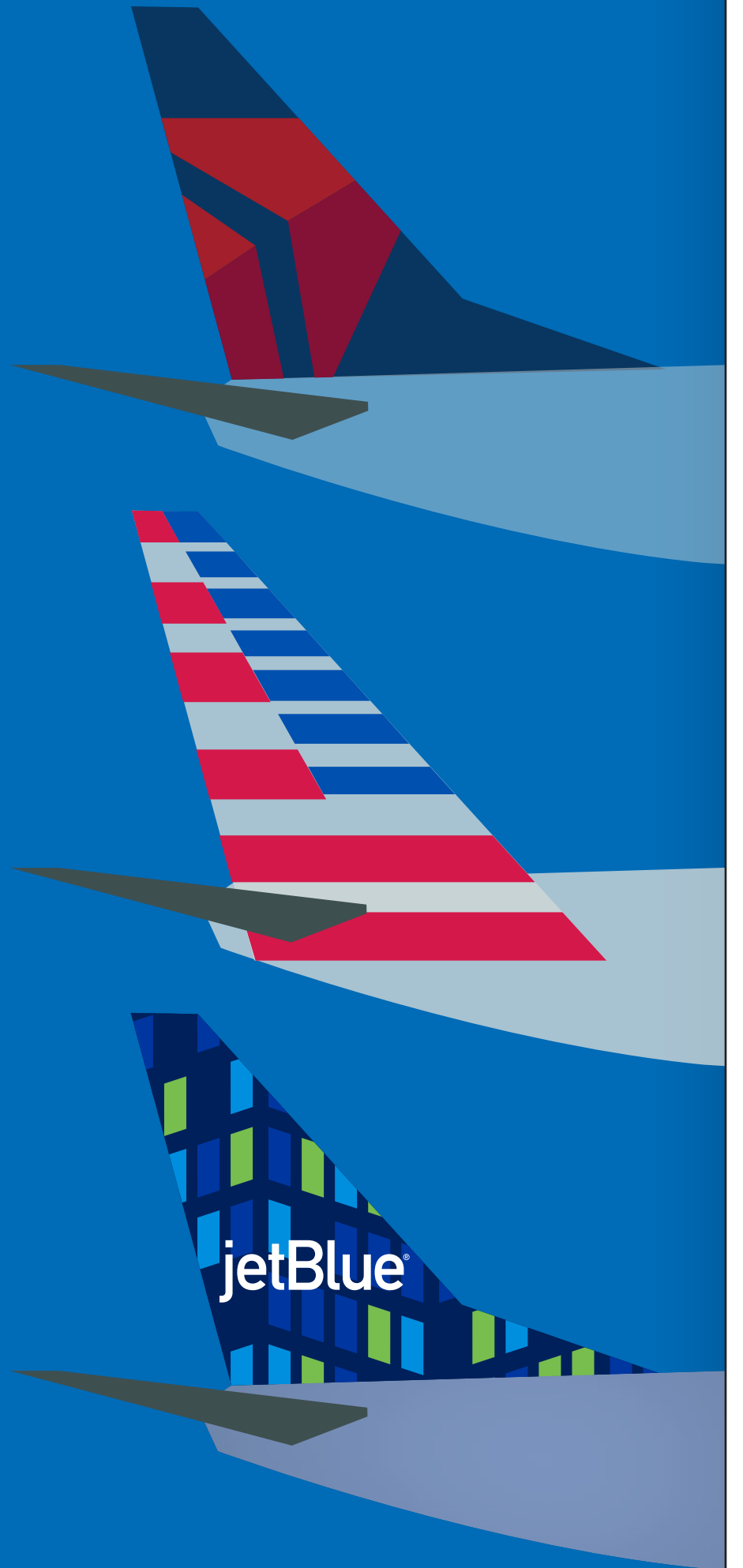


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UMASS MEMORIAL: ANCHORING A COMMUNITY-FOCUSED MISSION IN A 21ST-CENTURY HEALTH CARE LANDSCAPE, ECONOMY

**By Emily Gowdey-Backus,
Director of Communications**

Yes, investing in and maintaining quality health care will improve your overall well-being.

However, it's not the only factor impacting your overall health according to UMass Memorial.

Data from the Central Massachusetts-based health care organization shows the life expectancy of residents living in adjoining Worcester zip codes differ by 11 years.

"It's staggering," said Doug Brown, UMass Memorial Community Hospitals president. "Where you live ... is going to have a much bigger impact on the quality of your life" than any other factor.

For example, on one side of Lake Quinsigamond, residents' life expectancy is 84 years and across the shore it's as low as 73.

In fact, he estimates 20 percent of a person's lifelong well-being is determined by the quality of their health care whereas 60 percent is determined by local zip-code-by-zip-code social and economic factors, such as education level, employment, housing, and access to fresh food.

"The less you feel empowered about controlling your life – the more hassles you experience about housing and rent payments, for example – the greater the negative impact on your health," he said.

REFLECTING THE LOCAL ENVIRONMENT

Since 2005, explained Mr. Brown, industry trends have put an emphasis on the reformation of health care locally and nationwide. "We've all been challenged to focus more on community health," he said, and that has led UMass Memorial to pursue inclusion in a national network of what's called Anchor Mission Institutions.

Mr. Brown described those health care companies which, similar to UMass Memorial, have pursued a prescribed set of goals as a core group of "enlightened health care organizations" partnering to "organize and standardize" industry-wide involvement in the socio-economic development of their communities.

The term anchor, explained his colleague Cheryl Lapriore, UMass Memorial Health Care chief of staff, refers to the fact that these companies are founded, or "anchored, in a community – by their mission, size, and amount of employees – and are not ... likely to pick up and go somewhere else."

Given such community dedication, the four core tenants of Anchor Mission Institutions are investing, hiring, purchasing, and volunteering.

In November 2018, the UMass Memorial board of trustees'

investment committee approved the allocation of 1 percent of the nonprofit's endowment, or roughly \$4 million, to local investments in the realization of this effort.

The initial investments, which will be spent in roughly \$500,000 increments, are designed to act as "short-term capital" meant to "bridge" projects as they progress out of the startup phase, said Mr. Brown.

He added: "This is really about bringing chronic investment to areas that have suffered chronic underinvestment."

UMass Memorial plans to focus its resources on issues surrounding housing, food access and nutrition, and transportation. This work will take place in communities in which the health care company has an existing footprint – Worcester, Fitchburg, Leominster, Clinton, and Marlborough.

When it comes to the workforce reflecting community members already on the UMass Memorial payroll, Ms. Lapriore said: "This isn't a project that we are starting and ending. It has to become part of our organizational construct and not just with the leaders," but reflect diverse hiring practices all the way down through the hierarchy.

Not only does the company plan to increase hiring from within the community, but it also has similar plans for some of its purchasing. One of the most impactful ways large corporations can support the community in which they operate is to focus their purchasing locally, said Mr. Brown.

Over the long term, he hopes to emulate the results of a worker-owned model in Cleveland. There, community organizations came together to create a worker-run laundry company servicing the needs of Cleveland Clinic and several other hospitals in the area. The company processes 60,000 pounds of laundry every day and is owned by employees from local, distressed neighborhoods surrounding the hospitals. Half of these employees were formerly-

incarcerated and 85 percent are African American.

The model is "sustainable," said Mr. Brown, "because the hospitals commit to buying the laundry services from the business."

ADVANCING THE COMMITMENT

For UMass Memorial, said Mr. Brown, "it's a change in psychology."

While the company has focused "hundreds of thousands" of dollars in grant money annually to community-focused initiatives, he and Ms. Lapriore agree Anchor Mission Institution status brings their commitment to a new, higher level.

"What this is doing is taking all of the things we've learned about community benefits through grants," said Mr. Brown of the institution's previous community involvement, and "directing our efforts locally in a way that will get at social disadvantage and pervasive inequality" which is detrimental to personal health care and well-being.

Targeting "social disadvantage and pervasive inequality" is not solely the work of the health care community, said Mr. Brown.

Calling out Clark University and Hanover Insurance for their prior community-improvement leadership, Mr. Brown believes there is a ripe environment in Worcester for other like-minded organizations to "follow suit" and adopt the Anchor Mission Institution philosophy.

Community impact would be ten-fold, he said, if the idea caught on.

"We're going to make a meaningful impact, but [added involvement] would truly be a way to transform the community," he said.

As of early July, one yet-to-be-made-public Anchor Mission Institution project had been approved by the UMass Memorial board. Details will be made public in the fall. However, Mr. Brown said the project will focus on chronic homelessness in Worcester.

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ASSUMPTION'S LAND, RECEIVES REGIONAL NEWS AWARD

By Emily Gowdey-Backus, Director of Communications

At its 2019 award ceremony, the New England Newspaper and Press Association recognized Assumption College Associate Professor Mike Land as Journalism Educator of the Year.

After nearly a decade writing for Alabama-based newspapers and 19 more teaching the next generations at Assumption College, Mr. Land said it's important to "keep the faith" when it comes to the success of newsmakers and storytellers.

"I still see people fighting the good fight," he said.

When it comes to protecting independent journalism in today's culture of non-stop information onslaught and dwindling attention spans, Prof. Land is adamant but concerned.

Questioning the public's appetite for quality journalism, which often takes time to both produce and consume because it intricately weaves multiple perspectives and facts into one digestible story, he asked: "I wonder if people still perceive the importance of the evidence?"

He advises those interested in seeking out such well-balanced news to discern when their reaction to a story is founded in their own personal opinions and perspectives. If so, he advises those individuals counterbalance that information

with coverage inclusive of "the sides of the story that are going to quote the people who annoy [them] too."

Yes, it is a precarious time for journalism, but Mr. Land says many students are still finding jobs in the industry so long as they are committed to their craft and take advantage of opportunities.

"And," if all else fails, said Mr. Land, "journalism is a great springboard for a lot of [additional career choices]."

Mr. Land chose to dedicate his award to his father, Charles Land. In his acceptance speech, Mr. Land recounted the pride he holds for the man who made his way from paperboy to publisher.

"Over the years," said Mr. Land in his remarks, "Dad, in his words and in his deeds, instilled the conviction that suspending one's biases, questioning assumptions, considering sources, and seeking verification of facts weren't only part of being a good journalist ... but also of being a good person."

Mr. Land, who holds a University of Alabama bachelor's degree in journalism and a University of Missouri master's degree and doctorate in English with an emphasis in creative writing, was presented the award at Boston Globe headquarters on May 2.

GAME CHANGERS, FROM PAGE 13

With new businesses moving in to the region, additional sports teams such as the Worcester Red Sox, improved retail districts, and company expansions, the region is expanding rapidly and in so doing presenting additional opportunities in the housing sector.

Worcester's population is rising faster than comparable cities in Mass. and a housing shortage could slow our economic growth.

As residents are priced out of more costly markets in Boston and Metro West, Worcester is increasingly appealing to workers in communities to the east. Ironically, this influx is driving up housing costs in Worcester and creating a shortage. Employers are feeling the crunch as fewer workers are available to fill positions left by retiring baby boomers.

Conservatively, a \$1- to \$1.5-billion untapped housing market exists in Worcester.

Market conditions are creating opportunities for businesses in the housing sector and those that supply goods and services to them. As the region works to prevent an even greater housing shortage, a variety of housing options will be vital to meeting the needs of residents at all life stages.

KEYNOTE SPEAKERS TO OFFER EXPERTISE AND INSIGHTS ON THE FUTURE OF HOUSING IN THE REGION

The conference will kick off with a presentation by study author, Mr. Ramachandran as as the morning keynote. He will present the study's key findings and recommendations for the housing market.

Luncheon keynote Chrystal Kornegay, MassHousing executive director, will discuss the challenges to home ownership and efforts to eliminate such barriers when purchasing a home. MassHousing is an independent, quasi-public agency charged with providing financing for affordable housing. The agency raises capital by selling bonds then lending the proceeds to low- and moderate-income homebuyers and developers who build or preserve affordable and or mixed-income rental housing.

SIX WORKSHOPS WILL PROVIDE A GRANULAR LOOK AT THE TRENDS, NEEDS, AND BEST PRACTICES

Industry experts will present on topics detailed in the report with an opportunity for discussion with attendees. Workshop topics are: life-stage housing, workforce and affordable Housing, transit-oriented development, best practices and trends, home ownership, and employer incentives.

The conference will take place Fri., Oct. 25 from 7:30 am to 1:30 pm at Mechanics Hall. Workshops will be held in two, one-hour sessions with the first at 9:45 am and the second at 11:00 am.

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ORPHANED, SIBLING MOUNTAIN LIONS FIND HOME AT ECOTARIUM



ABOVE: Salton and Freyja lounge in their spacious habitat at Worcester's EcoTarium. Photo by Dominique Goyette-Connerty.

**By Dominique Goyette-Connerty,
Fitchburg State University Intern**

Things are getting wild at Worcester's EcoTarium.

In May, the museum of science and nature introduced the Wild Cat Station, an outdoor exhibit providing habitat-appropriate space to two mountain lions as well as native bird species.

Sibling kittens Salton, male, and Freyja, female, came as a package deal.

Funded by the Hanover Insurance Group Foundation, at 18,500 square feet, the Wild Cat Station is one of the largest mountain lion exhibits in the nation.

And the brother-sister bond these kittens share is certainly not out of place at the EcoTarium, an institution dedicated to creating spaces where families can connect and explore together. EcoTarium members Londyn, 8, and her brother King, 4, were viewing the mountain lions with their mom one June morning. "They're cute and cool!" said Londyn.

Visiting the kittens for the first time with her brother Liam, 5, and her dad, Giuliana, 6.5, agreed, "I think they're really cool!"

Now, eight years after the death of Kenda, the EcoTarium's polar bear, Wild Cat Station has transformed her former habitat into a space uniquely designed for the pair. Enclosed with 20-foot mesh fencing, the cats have plenty of room to scale a multi-tier rock wall.

According to Rachel Stoff, the EcoTarium's director of marketing and communications, "recent research has shown mountain lions to be crucial for the health of an ecosystem."

Their top-of-the-food-chain hunting behaviors, she said, play an important role in population control and general ecosystem balance.

"The scraps from their kills feed hundreds of animals within the habitat, provide nutrients to the ecosystem, and consequently boost biodiversity," explained Ms. Stoff.

Despite their significance to the ecosystem, there are many threats to mountain lions in the U.S. Among them are illegal hunting, habitat loss, wildfires, and rodenticide – the ingestion of rodent poison by an animal for which the poison was unintended.

In fact, while the eastern mountain lion was declared extinct in 1988, the western subspecies, that of Salton and Freyja, has not been classified as such.

Opened to the public May 11, Wild Cat Station provides a species-appropriate home for these two who were found orphaned in California.

"Unless these kittens are found by wildlife officials and rehabilitated, or placed in otherwise appropriate homes, they will likely not survive long without their mother to teach them necessary hunting and survival skills," said Ms. Stoff.

"This newly-designed, state-of-the-art feline care center offers the wildlife team and veterinary partners a tremendous capacity for animal husbandry [as well as] vital storage allowing the museum staff to adapt to continually-changing best practices for animal care, training, and enrichment," she added.

This exhibit was "envisioned as the EcoTarium's boldest outdoor experience," said Ms. Stoff. The completion of the Wild Cat Station marked the end of Phase II of the organization's three-phase Third Century Plan Campaign which kicked off in 2009 as a multi-year fundraising effort focused on enhancing experiences for museum visitors into the institution's third century of operation.

The Hanover Insurance Group Foundation's president, Paul Belsito, said the firm is a "natural supporter of the EcoTarium" as their organization also "increasingly leverages STEM disciplines and analytics."

Calling Wild Cat Station "a great fit," since two of Hanover's key focus areas are youth and education, he said: "We were especially drawn to this particular exhibit because of its unique educational value for local children and families."

The mountain lions will be trained for a variety of husbandry-related tasks, such as crating, stepping onto a scale, presenting body parts for medical examination, and more. Ms. Stoff noted that the EcoTarium uses force-free, positive-reinforcement training, meaning these kittens are rewarded for completing behaviors asked of them and are never punished or forced to participate.

Salton and Freyja can be seen year-round at the EcoTarium alongside ongoing temporary exhibits as well as a number of upcoming events such as EcoTarium21, an after-hours series for adults 21-plus on August 23 and again on Nov. 1.

In addition, the Chamber will hold its November Business After Hours at the EcoTarium on Nov. 21.

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LONDREGAN NAMED AUBURN CHAMBER PRESIDENT

By Dominique Goyette-Connerty, Fitchburg State University Intern

Steve Londregan, longtime owner of Chuck's Steak House and Margarita Grill in Auburn, recently found himself with more than just steak and Mexican cuisine on his plate. As of April, he's the president of the Auburn Chamber of Commerce.



ABOVE: Steve Londregan, Auburn Chamber of Commerce president. Photo by Emily Gowdey-Backus.

What's your history with the Auburn Chamber? I've been a member for more than 20 years and was asked to join the board three years ago. Soon after, Dr. Fran DeFalco, then-president, asked me to be his vice president.

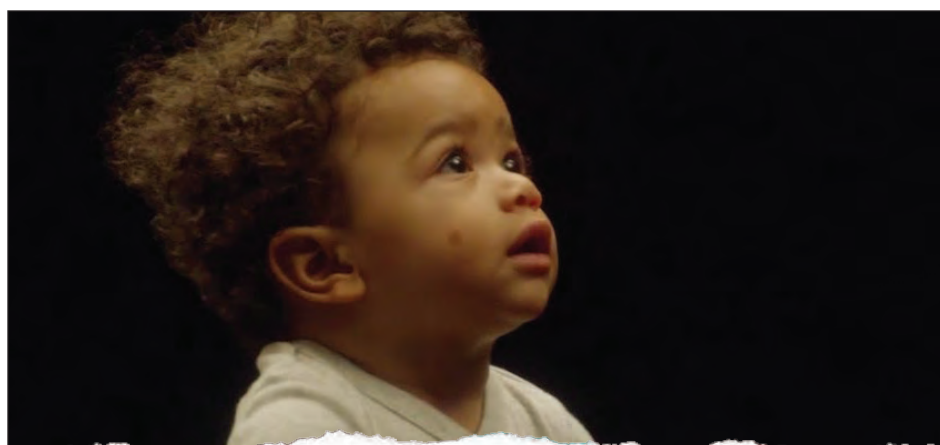
What interested you in the position? I accepted the vice presidency, and presidency, because it's a way I can give back to the town – which has been good to me, my family, and my business. This opportunity comes at a time when our children are grown ... so, I have the time to commit.

What are your goals and how do you want to move the Auburn Chamber's mission forward?

Over the next two years, our goal is to grow membership, event attendance, and build a strong bond with the Worcester Regional Chamber of Commerce. We can all learn from each other.

What are some events coming up in the Auburn Chamber's calendar? One of our biggest event of the year, our annual School and Business Partnership Golf Tournament is on Sept. 9 at Blackstone National Golf Club. Proceeds from this event support Auburn Chamber mini-grants for teachers and scholarships for graduating [high-school] seniors. We recently awarded \$13,500 in [such awards].

You also own Chuck's Steak House and Margarita Grill in Auburn. What's your history with the restaurant? My business partner and I both started at Chuck's shortly after it opened in 1978 while attending The College of the Holy Cross. In 1986, the owners made us an offer we couldn't refuse.



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WORMTOWN, FROM PAGE 1
team and a "step outside [their] comfort zone." However, at its core, the campaign harkens back to the essence of Wormtown's branding – quality beer with a Central Mass focus.

A partnership with Phantom Gourmet saw Wormtown beer with local food while one of the billboards suggests drivers "Honk If You're a Mass Whole."

Expanding reach, by "building momentum on the periphery" of the brewery's current market and expanding after only ensuring said success is sustainable, said Mr. Fields, has slowly but steadily increased awareness of Wormtown and its following.

Examples of the success of this strategy are the June announcement of the second Wormtown taproom, at Patriot Place, as well as partnering with the Worcester Red Sox as the team's official hometown brewery.

The Wormtown team also points to recent sales as evidence of the brewery's sustainability when it comes to flavor and branding. Once capped by a 10-barrel brewing system capable of producing 500 barrels of beer per year, today, their 30-barrel system produces 50,000 barrels per annum.

As of early July, the brewery was experiencing a 35.4 percent increase in sales year to date, per in-house data. "That's coming off of a year in which we were up 23 to 24 percent from the year prior," added Mr. Fields.

Wormtown is sold in more than 2,000 locations throughout the Commonwealth as well as Rhode Island, Connecticut and, as of this year, New Hampshire.

Not only is their hyper-local focus zeroed in on ingredients necessary to make beer and their consumer, Wormtown has a philanthropic hand in the local community as well.

Any donations given during free tours of the brewery are sent to the Worcester County Food Bank and Veterans Inc. The Worcester-based nonprofit veterans support also benefits from Wormtown's participation in the annual Black Ale Project which sees breweries

produce a beer to benefit similar groups across the country. Each year, one dollar from every Wormtown Black Ale Project pint is donated to Veterans Inc.

Together with Wachusett Brewery, Wormtown produced a beer and hosted events benefiting Ava Roy, daughter of the late Worcester firefighter Christopher L. Roy, raising more than \$50,000 through their combined efforts.

The walls of the brewery are even lent out to artists associated with Worcester Pop Up to showcase the city's commitment to the arts. Every two months, a new mural is painted in the taproom and the public is invited to watch the installation during a "Paint and Pint" night.

RECOGNIZING THE IMPACT OF CRAFT BEER

Of the local craft beer industry, Mr. Fields is glad to see the "energy, effort, quality, and passion" being funneled into a variety of new beverages, but more excited to know what that means for the City of Worcester and the state overall.

According to the Brewer's Association, in 2010, when Wormtown launched, it was one of 81 craft breweries in the state. Today, there are 185 in the Bay State with 39 more expected to launch before 2020.

The draw of the industry was measured in 2017 when more than \$1.83 million was generated in economic impact by craft brewers making Massachusetts the 14th-strongest such economy in the nation.

From the original four-person team to the 30 full-time and 10 part-time employees who make up the 2019 staff, Wormtown has grown into its own – a well-respected economic engine reflective of the ongoing development in the Heart of the Commonwealth.

"The popularity of craft beer," said Mr. Fields, "is helping the city realize its potential."

The Chamber's Oct. 17 Business After Hours will be held at Wormtown Brewery. Stop in to chat with Mr. Fields about his recollections of a changing Worcester and how craft beer has played a role.

RIGHT: A guest at Wormtown Brewing Co.'s taproom on Shrewsbury Street Brewery enjoys a Don't Worry, a 5.8 percent ABV IPA. **BELOW:** Mass Whole, the first Wormtown Beer to be composed of 100 percent Massachusetts-grown ingredients – a long-time goal of the brewery. Photos courtesy Wormtown.



MEET STARTUP WORCESTER: WOORIDE; 2017-18, 2018-19



NAME: Shahbaz Soofi
TITLE: President
COMPANY: WooRides
AGE: 27
HOMETOWN: Worcester
FAVORITE WORCESTER BITES: Fatima's Cafe, Bahn Thai
FAVORITE DOWN TIME LOCATION: Stop Cafe

LEFT: Shahbaz (left), Imrana, and Ali. Photo courtesy WooRides.

**By Emily Gowdey-Backus,
Director of Communications**

June 16 marked two years in business for WooRides – an on-demand pedicab service co-owned by brothers and their mother from across the City of Worcester.

Concerned about the increasing carbon footprint stemming from the current transportation crises gripping not just the Commonwealth but the nation and the world, WooRides markets itself as a multi-modal transportation service with the aim of “greening” the industry through providing people – and sustainable-powered options.

A worker-owned firm, Shahbaz Soofi, president and co-owner of WooRides, adopted the business model after participating in a Worcester Roots workshop. He said the idea allows for “a more egalitarian management of the business” as they decide to scale over time.

While WooRides employees won't be able to opt in as owners immediately at the time of their hire, Mr. Soofi said this model is “an appealing way to [scale]” adding that “it's [also] a way to level the playing field when it comes to profit sharing” among company leadership and employees.

A 2014 industrial engineering graduate of Worcester Polytechnic Institute, Mr. Soofi knew he wanted to be an entrepreneur from a young age – so long as his endeavor “could make an impact.”

As a student in downtown Worcester, Mr. Soofi said he watched while the amount of congestion on local roads increased and wanted to find a way to first, diminish that volume, and second, protect the climate from the negative impacts of today's majority fossil-fuel reliant vehicles.

“Worcester has always had transportation issues, but it's become more salient” in recent years, said Mr. Soofi. Wanting to join in the local conversation about congestion and sustainability in Worcester, he said it wasn't until he and his colleagues launched the pedicab fleet that he was granted “a seat at the table.”

Two years in, Mr. Soofi now hopes

to bring awareness to under-served demographics by designing WooRides services to target seniors and high-school-aged youth, among other groups, in need of transportation.

While gaining recognition and building a following in the Heart of the Commonwealth, last year Mr. Soofi and his colleagues decided to apply for Rockland Trust's Small Business, Big Dreams grant. This competition saw more than 400 applicant companies apply for a \$15,000 grand prize.

While WooRides was not the winner, they took second place. More importantly, they gained the coaching and advice of a financial mentor throughout the process whom they can now utilize in future conversations with venture capitalists.

“Applying to this was about ... [learning] how to get ourselves in front of potential investors at the Rockland Trust board,” said Mr. Soofi. While second place isn't top, he added: “We were happy because we learned through the process and were told where we could have been stronger.”

In March, during the height of the Rockland Trust grant competition, WooRides purchased a 10-person passenger van to compliment its pedicab fleet and has since penned a contract with a local early-childhood education center to provide transportation services to its students and their families.

To-date, WooRides has experienced a lot of “fanfare” throughout the City of Worcester, said Mr. Soofi because of the pedicabs' “novelty” and said the city has been “welcoming” to the startup company.

Hoping that nuance doesn't wear off, before the company's third year in business is complete, Mr. Soofi would like to secure additional transportation contracts – particularly with more early-education institutions – and increasing knowledge of the WooRides brand locally.

He said: “Using our vehicles as mobile advertising, we're excited to deepen that [following].”



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BROADER INDUSTRY REPRESENTATION IN LW CLASS OF 2020

By Sarah Shugrue, Greater Worcester Community Foundation Program Officer

From a competitive pool of 60 applicants, 28 individuals were selected as the Leadership Worcester's fifth cohort. Beginning in the fall, the Class of 2020 will embark on a nine-month learning journey which will take them behind the scenes of Worcester's anchor institutions, hidden community gems, and more.

In recent years, interest in Leadership Worcester has grown to include representation from many sectors of the community. Now, more than ever, building a cohort that is diverse in as many ways as possible is not only a cornerstone of the program, but an increasingly achievable goal.

Unique to this year's class make up is an especially high number of women, an increased number of people of color, and a growing presence within the cohort from higher education, health care, and banking institutions.

This year, the program also welcomes its first representative of a

faith-based organization. Four years ago, the Leadership Worcester program was re-established in 2015 through a partnership between the Greater Worcester Community Foundation and the Worcester Regional Chamber of Commerce. Designed with a community leadership focus, the program's responsive curriculum is developed annually with the aid of local leaders who provide insights on critical public policy issues impacting Central Massachusetts. Day-long sessions on education, government, economic development, arts and creativity, health, perceptions of safety, and urban sustainability allow participants to explore the City of Worcester's opportunities and challenges first-hand and connect with others who are equally committed to the city's advancement. The Class of 2020 will join 100-plus professionals who make up Leadership Worcester's alumni network of connected, prepared, and inspired leaders. A formal launch of the Leadersgip Worcester alumni network is set for October.

LEADERSHIP WORCESTER CLASS OF 2020

- Natalie Anumba
UMASS Medical School

Elena Arranz Alonso
Worcester State University

Danielle Beauregard
UNUM

Sean Brennan
Lamoureux Pagano

Ethan Brown
MassHire Central Workforce Development Board

Jennifer Carlson
Redemption Rock Brewery

Robert Caron
Becker College

Valerie Cohen
Temple Emanuel Sinai

Alicia Colizza
UMASS Memorial Healthcare

Elizabeth Condon
Pine Street Inn

Lisa Drexhage
Worcester Business Development Corp.

Patrick Flanigan
Consigli Construction

Cassie Gevry
College of The Holy Cross

Emily Gowdey-Backus
Worcester Regional Chamber of Commerce
- Ariel Lim
City of Worcester, Office of Economic Development

Amanda Misilo
Berkshire Bank

Julia Moriconi
Mrs. Moriconi's Ltd.

Craig Mortley
YWCA of Central Massachusetts

Charisse Murphy
YOU Inc.

Milka Njorge
Century Homecare LLC.

Alicia O'Connell
O'Connell & O'Connell, PC

Michelle Alexandra Santana
Community Activist

Erin Simpson
Fallon Health

Grace Sliwoski
Regional Environmental Council

Robert Totaro
Webster Five Cents Savings Bank

Alexandra Vazquez,
Fidelity Bank

Jennifer Vu
Family Health Center of Worcester

Jessika Zequirra
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WORCESTER SPORTS STREET: 25 YEARS OF GALAXY OF STARS, WACHUSETT HIGH SCHOOL WOWS, IT'S ALMOST HOCKEY SEASON

By Timothy P. Murray, Chamber President and CEO

GALAXY OF STARS

As debuted in the last edition of Chamber Exchange, we mentioned our new column – “Sports Street” was borrowed, in reverence, from the legendary Worcester Telegram & Gazette sportswriter Nick Manzello. Our Sports Street tries to capture the spirit of Nick’s long-time column which was almost exclusively focused on the Worcester-area sports scene – from youth sports to the professional leagues.

Nick was very involved in raising money for Friendly House on Grafton Hill – one of those truly special places for kids and families. Friendly House’s mission, “is to be an integrating force for the families and the neighborhood(s) it serves.” Founded in 1920, the Friendly House is the largest neighborhood based multiservice center, serving over 7,000 people per year.

Galaxy of Stars, an annual event started by Nick to benefit Friendly House, honors the achievements and contributions of various individuals involved in Worcester athletics. This group includes everyone from athletes such as Rich Gedman who went on to play for the Boston Red Sox to parks-league football legend Richie McMahon to various youth-league volunteers and coaches.

The story behind the Galaxy of Stars began more than a quarter-century ago, according to Nick and Mary Manzello’s daughter, Kathryn Beauregard: “Twenty-six years ago, my mom and dad attended a holiday event at the Friendly House. While they were there a young boy approached them and said he wanted to know if he could have the radio my parents had just won in a raffle drawing. He said he wanted to surprise his mom for Christmas but didn’t have any money. So, touched by this young boy’s generosity, my parents gave him the radio to take home to his mom.

“When they got home that night, they talked about the experience and how they recognized the need to support this underserved community. According to my dad, my mom turned to him and said you can do something, and you need to do something.

“Shortly after, my dad brought together a group of good friends who comprised the first Galaxy of Stars committee. He was joined by Ray Cozzolino, Roy Mumpton, Ted Budzina, Sr., Ted Budzina, Jr., Vic Stevens, Lou Sannella, Dan Sullivan, and George Ayik. Together, this team created an event that would both recognize local sports greats and raise much-needed funds to support the efforts of the Friendly House.

“While the event and Committee has changed over the years, both have always been comprised of some of the most generous people in the Worcester community, not least of all was Sonny Stultz whose presence and generosity added so

much to the event.” This year marks the 25th anniversary of the Galaxy of Stars and the event will be held on Thursday, Oct. 24 at 6:30 pm at The Manor in West Boylston. This year’s nominees to the Galaxy of Stars includes: John T. Andreoli, John F. Andreoli, Andrea Figeroa, Paddy Gallagher, Angela Padavano, Jim McMahon, Andy Sharry, Tony Murgo, Tijeane Pluverge, Bobby DiFlavio, and Mike Tamburro. And the student nominees are Josh Brunelle from Doherty Memorial High and Liz DiCecco from Holy Name Junior Senior High School.

MOUNTAINEER MANIA RUNNING WILD AND STATEWIDE

In our inaugural Sports Street column, we gave a big tip of the fedora to the boys’ basketball team from Worcester Technical High School. Many on Sports Street were surprised to learn this was the first time a boys’ team from Worcester won a state basketball championship. A recent conversation with Mike Cotter from Chamber-member business Mackintire Insurance raised a similar question about the most-recent time a Central Massachusetts school won three state championships in a year.

In October, the Wachusett sports phenomena began when the town’s girls soccer team won the Division 1 State Championship over Natick. These girls not only won, they defended their state champion status for a second year in a row.

This championship team consisted of Charlotte Gridley, Abby Head, Marissa Jacob, Vy Nguyen, Trish Pallotta, Katie Quinn, Taylor Rotti, Madison Starkey, Alexis Stone, Jenny Stone, Nichole Vernon, Riley Wasiuk, Maddie Wilde, Kahind Giwa, Taaye Giwa, Sydney McGhee, Alexis Roy, Amyah Santana, Emma Hickey, Olivia Berglund, Avery Bierfeldt, Maggie Kelley, Emily O’Brien, Brooke Panarello, Maria Piscione, Jillian Stone, Emma Croce, and Regina Pallotta.

In March, the Wachusett Regional High School boys’ hockey team capped their 18TH win of the season with a victory over Hopkinton High, securing the Division 1 state trophy. The team consisted of Nick Deoliveira, Tanner Willman, Dylan McCarthy, Sean Gardener, Jim Murphy, Zak Kapusta, Colin Moran, Grant Gardula, Pat Currie, Kevin Skagerlind, Ryan Murray, Peyton Marshall, Joey Jusseaume, Jackson King, Joey Naze, Donovan Alfama, Ryan Gardula, Cam Carlson, Alex Penning, Michael Iacaboni, Luke Jodice, Joe Murphy, Daniel Barbato, Jason Richard, Jack Felicio, and Alden Nicoloro.

The high school’s winning academic year was rounded out when the undefeated softball team took Methuen in the championship and finished 25-0. Team members were Emily Todorov, Madison Starkey, Erin Hancock, Courtney Lanpher, Reagan Lowe, Allison Peto,

Katelyn Mallotte, Abbygail Simes, Kayleigh Coffey, Kelsey Beaudry, Ashley Parechanian, Sarah Austin, Mia Cassella, Hannah White, Tory Piuze, Jordan Geloso, Riley Quirk, and Lily Johnson. Congratulations to all three teams for a banner year!

AROUND THE BASES

July 11 marked the historic return of Major League-affiliated baseball to the City of Worcester with the groundbreaking for the Triple-A Worcester Red Sox ballpark – Polar Park. With more than 1,000 people in attendance at the groundbreaking, this ballfield will be the centerpiece of a \$250-million public-private economic development project in the Canal District including the reconfiguration of Kelley Square. Polar Park is expected to be completed in April 2021 and the first season in which

the team will be based in the Heart of the Commonwealth. The Worcester Bravehearts, Worcester’s collegiate baseball team, following the Futures Collegiate Baseball League All-Star game, have made a strong push on the field to get the team into the playoffs. Best of luck as they look to extend the season for players and fans alike!

PUCK DROP

Like the turning of the leaves, before you know it fall will arrive and Worcester’s ECHL hockey team, the Worcester Railers will drop the puck to kick off their third season of professional hockey at the DCU Center on Sat., Oct. 12 at 7:05 pm against the Adirondack Thunder. To keep up with the weekly happenings of the Railers, follow Cam McGuire on Twitter at @cammcguire21 or go to RailersHC.com.

EVER WONDER...

Just what is a Chamber of Commerce?

The term “chamber of commerce” is one of the oldest and most well-recognized brands in the world, but there is significant misunderstanding about this 200-year old organization.

A chamber of commerce is an independent, self-funded organization of private businesses, led by a volunteer board, seeking to further their collective interests, while advancing their community, region, state, or nation.

Voluntarily formed by business owners, Chambers advocate on behalf of the entire community for economic prosperity and business interests with five primary goals:

- Building communities to which residents, visitors, and investors are attracted
- Promoting those communities
- Fostering economic prosperity by being pro-business

- Representing the unified voice of the employer community
- Reducing transactional friction through well-functioning networks

The Worcester Regional Chamber works toward these goals through our: Recruit, Retain, Incubate strategy. Businesses and other employers pay dues to belong and expect to receive the benefits of membership as long as they continue to invest in the organization.

WHAT CHAMBERS ARE NOT

Chambers work closely with government but are not part of them, nor do they function as the Better Business Bureau.

The Worcester Regional Chamber is not a member of the U.S. Chamber, nor do we subscribe to some of the policy positions and statements they issue.

If you’re a member who wants to learn more about your benefits, thinking about joining but unsure if it’s right for your business, or just want to learn more, join us for this free, informational session.

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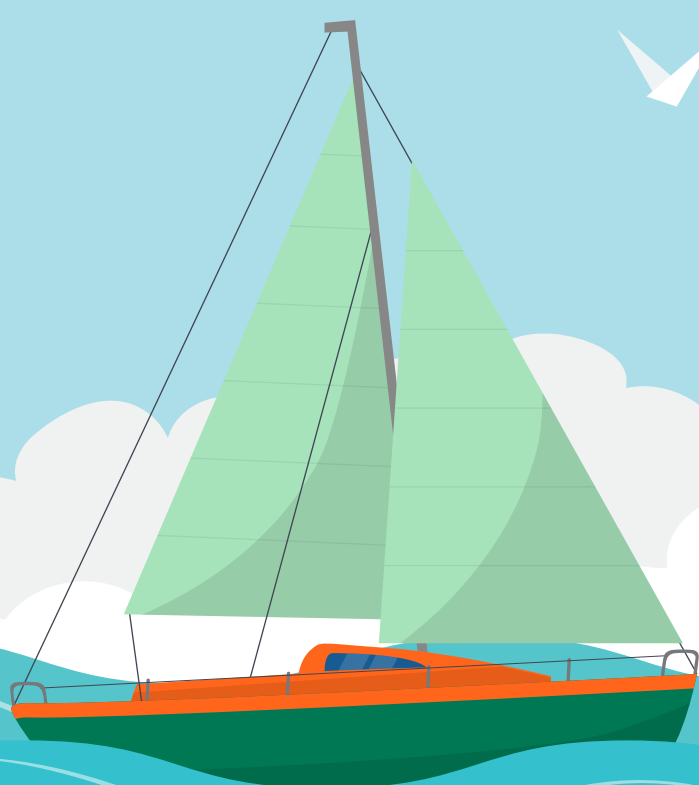
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