NEW ERA BREWING FOR WORMTOWN OUTSIDE CRAFT BREW “COMFORT ZONE”

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 to demand and recognition.

In addition to the two 2019 releases, and within the past eight months of each other – one a limited batch lager, another releases, and within the past eight months of each other – one a limited batch lager, another one a limited batch lager, another 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 to 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

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 strategy, Wormtown brought

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
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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MASSACHUSETTS NEEDS A NEW TRANSPORTATION FINANCE PLAN

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

Transportation remains a persistent problem. Relentlessly, traffic jams combined with an under-performing public transit system continue to fuel widespread concerns about our future ability to operate 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 enhance 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 190–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 state 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.

Some 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 financing that ensures adequate revenue 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 Union Station.

The Commonwealth has committed to rebuiding 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 the MBTA and the State’s budgeting process can only fund projects 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 projects. The Union Station expansion and West Station completion are expected to ease traffic on Interstate 90. Cambridge can only move forward if the state implements a realistic and sustainable solution to the transportation financing conundrum.

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 2001 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 a new transportation financing concepts and rally around a comprehensive transportation finance plan. The time to act is clearly nearing. The scale 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 vision of Walker, 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 era of 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.

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 Weintraubs 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 Commonweal, 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 Trifyn 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 you 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.

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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 Commerce’s weekly podcast, the Commonwealth, which 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 the Commonwealth from 2008 to 2018 and WTAG from 1997 to 2007 among other stations.

A 50,000-watt channel, WCRN is a 50,000-watt channel, WCRN is heard from Maine to Rhode Island other stations.

TUNE IN FOR MORE

THE VOICE OF BUSINESS CHAMBER PODCAST

LET’S GET SOCIAL

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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 Murray.

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 business districts.

In the Comprehensive Clean City Program, the cost of bag rolls will increase by 50 cents each and include three clear plastic 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 these 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 and repurpose the city’s visual and hygienic improvement.

If approved by 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.
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 Ouda, 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 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.
Institute Park
125 Salisbury St., Worcester

Register or donate at MakingStridesWalk.org/WorcesterMA
For further info, contact:
Nina.Sabettini@cancer.org
774-314-7019
DELTA THIRD AIRLINE ADDED TO ORH FLIGHT LIST SINCE 2010

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

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.

HOUSING, FROM PAGE 1

Worcester Courthouse (117 units) building, and the Yok 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 24,380 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 occurred in educational services, health care, and social assistance; arts, entertainment, and recreation; accommodation and food services; health care, and social assistance; and waste management services. The Worcester economic club membership options are available. A 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.

WEC CELEBRATES 116TH ANNUAL SPEAKERS SERIES

By Linda Salem Perrier, 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. Volan; Professor, Author, Venture Capitalist, Consultant
- March 17: Bobby Jindal; Former Governor of Louisiana
- April 14: Daniel J. Iavsy; Chief Investment Officer, PMICO
- June 3: Brian Moynihan; Chairman and CEO, Bank of America

The Worcester Regional Chamber of Commerce aims at successfully matching the incomes of member employers 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 options, which is 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 Development and Finance Conference at the Worcester Regional Airport and emphasized the importance of infrastructure to give more economic opportunity. The Chamber supports ORH’s regional airport and the Community Development and Finance Initiative bill, the Chamber supports the administration’s Housing Choice Initiative bill.

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 employers and their industry sectors. The topic concern voiced to the Chamber by our members is the
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.
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 sense of pride for the residents and businesses in the community,” 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.

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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 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 per day – and this amounts 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.

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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.

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.

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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 the veggie pad Thai, balsamic and fig-glazed pulled pork, blueberry, sundried tomato and ricotta, and, of course, the classic warm 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 so in doing strengthen local agriculture and promote healthy eating habits in the Heart of the 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 and impact the Worcester community. It was Mr. Rainford who brought it up food company Asylum Popatorium. Photo courtesy Mr. Duda.

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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

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.

Evidence 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 Boston-Marlborough market, and recreational travelers to the region in more than a decade. Situated on the former site of the main Street in Holden is an ideal location for the hotel, Quinn’s Blue Plate Lounge, the building was demolished to make room for the 105-room hotel targets business travelers with a mix of studios and one-bedroom suites.

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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.

Fri., October 25, 2019
7:30 am to 1:30 pm
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www.GameChangersExpo.com

Breakout Sessions Topics
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• Transit-oriented Development
• Best Practices and Trends
• Home Ownership
• Employer Incentives
• Life Stage Housing

Join us as the Chamber releases the findings and recommendations from our year-long housing study and learn about opportunities for your business.

A SAMPLING OF WHAT THE STUDY IS REVEALING
With new businesses moving into 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

COST
Chamber Members $95
Non-Chamber Members $150
Table of 10 $900
Includes breakfast and lunch

MORE INFO
GameChangersEXPO.com
REGISTRATION
WorcesterChamber.org

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

AFTERNOON KEYNOTE
Chrystal Kornegay, Executive Director, MassHousing

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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 those efforts. The initial investments, which will be spent in roughly $500,000 increments, are designed to act as “short-term-capital” means "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 finishing. 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, 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 [addled 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.
assumption’s land, receives regional news award

by emily cowdrey-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 digestable story, he asked: “I wonder if people still perceive the importance of the evidence?” 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 Assumption Globe headquarters on May 2.

Game Changers, from page 13

With new businesses moving into 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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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, agreed, “I think they’re really cool!”

Now, eight years after the death of Kendra, 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 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 a 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.

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.

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WORMTOWN, FROM PAGE 1
We're a Mass Whole.

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

What are some events coming up in the Auburn Chamber’s calendar? One of our biggest events 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.

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 covered in a variety of new beer labels, 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 there were only 16 craft breweries in the state, today, there are 185 in the Bay State with 39 more expected to launch before 2020.

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: Wormtown’s first Wormtown Beer to be comprised of 100 percent Massachusetts-grown ingredients – a long-time goal of the brewery. Photos courtesy Wormtown.

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 beers, 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 there were only 16 craft breweries in the state, today, there are 185 in the Bay State with 39 more expected to launch before 2020.
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 Leadership Worcester alumni network is set for October.

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By Timothy P. Murray, Chamber President and CEO

**GALAXY OF STARS**

As debuted in the latest edition of Chamber Exchange, we mentioned our new column—“Sports Street!”—was borrowed, in reverence, from the legendary Worcester Telegram & Gazette sportswriter Nick Pallotta. 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 occasions. Friendly House’s mission, “is to be an integrating force for the families and the neighborhood[s] it serves.” Founded in 1897, 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 surprise gift for his mom for Christmas but didn’t have anything to play it with. Surprised 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 at length about 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 local for-profit and nonprofit leaders who comprised the first Galaxy of Stars committee. He was joined by Ray Cozzolino, Ted Budzina, Vic Gardula, Cam Carlson, Alex Giwa, Taaye Giwa, Sydney McGhee, Alexis Roy, Amyh Santana, Emma Hickey, So, Hunter, Zak Kapusta, Maggie Kelley, Emily O’Brien, Brooke Panarello, Maria Piscione, Jillian Stone, Emma Croce, and Regina Pallotta.

“In March, the Worcester 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, Jimmy O’Brien, Zak Kapusta, Colin Moran, Grant Gardula, Pat Currie, Kevin Skagりnder, Linton Murray, Peyton Marshall, Joey Houlihan, Jackson King, Austin Naze, Donovan Alfama, Lily Johnson, Aiden Nicoloro.

“With 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 we will celebrate on Thursday, Oct. 24 at 6:30 pm at The Manor in West Boylston. This year’s venues to the Galaxy of Stars includes: John T. Andreoli, John F. Andreoli, Andrea Fricano, Paddy Gallagher, Angela Padavano, Jim McMahon, Andy Shary, Tony Murgio, Tjane Pluveru, Bobby DiFlavio, and Mike Tambourino. And the student nominees are Josh Brunelle from Doherty Memorial High and Liz DiCiccio from Holy Name Junior Senior High School.

**MOUNTAINEER MANIA**

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 that 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 Mackenzie 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 really won it; they defended their state championship 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, Marissa Jacob, Vy Nguyen, Trish Pallotta, Katie Quinn, Taylor Rotti, Madison Star, Alexies Stone, Jenny Stone, Morgan Veor, Riley Waski, Maddie Wilde, Kahind Giwa, Taaye Giwa, Sydney McGhee, Alexis Roy, Amyh Santana, Emma Hickey, So, Hunter, Zak Kapusta, Maggie Kelley, Emily O’Brien, Brooke Panarello, Maria Piscione, Jillian Stone, Emma Croce, and Regina Pallotta.

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The high school’s winning academic year was rounded out when the undefeated softball team took Methuen in the championship and finished 2-0. Team members were Emily Todorov, Madison Starkey, Erin Hancock, Courtney Lanpher, Reagan Lowe, Allison Petos, Katelyn Mallotte, Abigail Simes, Kayleigh Cofey, Kelsey Beaudy, Ashley Parechanian, Sarah Austin, Mia Cassella, Hannah White, Tony Pizze, Jordan Geloso, Riley Quirk, and Lily Johnson.

Congratulations to all three teams for a banner year!

**AROUND THE BASES**

July sported 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. Business, 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 @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-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 attract, thrive, and promote;

• Recruit, Retain, Incubate businesses, led by a volunteer network, seeking to further the benefits of membership as long as they continue to invest in the organization.

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Chamber Exchange Newsletter • August 2019

WORCESTER SPORTS STREET: 25 YEARS OF GALAXY OF STARS, WACHUSETT HIGH SCHOOL WOVS, IT’S ALMOST HOCKEY SEASON