

Local Leaders in Action: Navigating the COVID-19 Crisis in Worcester

By Dominique Goyette-Connerty, Correspondent

It goes without saying that the coronavirus pandemic has effectively turned the world upside down. The first confirmed case of COVID-19 was reported in Massachusetts on February 1 and on March 11, the World Health Organization declared the virus a global pandemic. And it wasn't long until the virus began to spread like wildfire across the Commonwealth, wreaking havoc on our way of life -- Worcester was not immune. Unprecedented by nature, it was no surprise many didn't know how to respond when met with this public health emergency right in their own backyards. Cue: our local leaders. Despite the shock, these are the people who sprang into action to help fight the virus in the community, doing their own part to keep Worcester and Central Mass. residents safe and healthy.

CITY SAFETY

The first case of COVID-19 in the city of Worcester was announced March 14. But even in the weeks prior,

knowing they bear the responsibility of looking out for about 187,000 residents and 2,000 city employees, the city administration wasted no time in reacting. From the outset, the city knew if they could keep the hospitals from being overwhelmed, it would be their biggest gamechanger. By transforming Worcester schools and churches into four homeless shelters, having the Beaumont Nursing Center act as an acute care facility for COVID-positive seniors, and opening the first-in-the-state field hospital at the DCU Center, they were able to avoid that. "At the height of this [surge]," City Manager Edward M. Augustus Jr. said, "we had about 200 people in those different locations who, otherwise, would have been in the hospital. And if we had taken up 200 hospital beds -- all the staff and PPE it would've taken to take care of those people -- we really would have been up against it." Often focused on vulnerable communities in Worcester, Commissioner of



Worcester City Manager Edward M. Augustus, Jr. gives his daily update.

Health and Human Services Dr. Mattie Castiel and her team were looking at how to support these groups of people through the crisis. Between conducting three rounds of COVID-19 testing for 237 homeless people, providing them with support services while in the shelters, and working to find them housing; conducting outreach and delivering almost 1,500 meals to seniors; and helping veterans apply for benefits and access mental

health resources; the entire Department of Health and Human Services was determined to ensure no one was being left behind. "In my role, I want to make sure I'm the person helping those who truly, a lot of times, can't help themselves. So those marginalized communities that sometimes nobody's paying attention to -- [we're] making sure that we do pay attention and offer the best care

SEE LEADERS, PAGE 4

Trolley Yard on Former Site of WRTA Maintenance Facility Now a Bustling Center of Commerce

By Aviva Lutrell, Correspondent

When Alice Lombardi was looking to open a second Bean Counter Bakery location, she wanted to create a destination that would draw in customers from not only Worcester, but throughout the region. She found the perfect location on Worcester's Grove Street near the intersection with Gold Star Boulevard -- a bustling area that has undergone an immense transformation over the past few years. The neighborhood, once home to manufacturing sites and the Worcester Regional Transit Authority's bus maintenance facility, garage and vehicle storage yard, is now a hotspot for redevelopment, with a slew of new businesses opening there in recent years. The mixed-use Trolley Yard plaza brought businesses like Orangetheory Fitness, Rockland Trust, Hot Table, and Starbucks Coffee to the former WRTA site between Grove Street and Park Avenue beginning early last year. The property is now fully-leased and a second phase of development is underway. "I call it the 'gold key' of Worcester," Lombardi said. "It's close to great neighborhoods, it has easy highway access, you have access to downtown, you have access to the suburbs and the schools." Within the coming months, Lombardi plans to open a flagship Bean Counter Bakery on the former

Gervais Car Wash site at 270 Grove St. In addition to the 5,000-square-foot bakery, the new building will also be home to The Eyebrow Place and a bankHometown branch. The Highland Street Bean Counter location will remain open, as well as Cafe Noir in Shrewsbury, which Lombardi also owns. She said the new location will provide enough room for the company's 10 full-time pastry chefs to keep up with the growing demand for custom and large-scale orders, and will feature a private cake consultation room, a new catering menu, small cafe menu, and about 25 seats. "The real purpose of this new location was to provide the best customer experience," Lombardi said. "There's 31 parking spaces, much more elbow room and the convenience of customers being able to hop in the bakery and come out and their car is parked right there. 'A tight, deeply rooted neighborhood' Elsewhere in the area, other business owners found similar potential. Paul Wengender, owner and founder of Greater Good Imperial Brewing Co., had his eye on the neighborhood for more than a year before opening



Alice Lombardi at her Trolley Yard location.

the brewery and taproom on Millbrook Street in early 2018. "Price, parking, ceiling, expandability was all there," he said. "It doesn't hurt that Gold Star is the most highly trafficked road in Worcester, and Burncoat is a tight, deeply rooted neighborhood that has welcomed us with open arms -- and we've reciprocated." In late 2018, Leominster-based Lisciotti Development bought the former Worcester headquarters of the Girl Scouts on Gold Star Boulevard. The structure was demolished and a new retail building, which is currently for lease, was built in its place. Other businesses, including Wachusett Liquors and

SEE TROLLEY YARD, PAGE 14

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

WORCESTER REGIONAL CHAMBER CALENDAR OF EVENTS

MAY

Tuesday, May 19

WEBINAR: Tax Impacts of COVID-19 Stimulus Bill, 10 am

Thursday, May 21

Healthcare Roundtable, 7:45am

Tuesday, May 26

**WEBINAR: Managing Your Business' Cash Flow During
a Crisis - Excel Tools and Strategies, 10 am**

Wednesday, May 27

**WEBINAR: Resuming Operations: Legal Considerations
and Best Practices, 10 am**

JUNE

Wednesday, June 3

WEBINAR: Mental Health & COVID-19, 10 am

Wednesday, June 3

WEBINAR: Recalls, Refusals, Future of Employment, 2 pm

Thursday, June 11

The Breakfast Club - VIRTUAL, 9 am

Tuesday, June 16

**SEMINAR: Phishing and Other Social Engineering Attacks
& How to Prevent Being a Victim, 8:30 am (online)**

Thursday, June 18

Business After Hours with Affiliates, 5 pm

Monday, June 22

William J Short Golf Tournament, Charter Oak - tentative

NOTE: Chamber events are subject to change. With the current pandemic, staff are adding events on a regular basis based on member needs and requests. As businesses begin to reopen, we expect to add additional webinars pertaining to the "new normal." Visit WorcesterChamber.org for the most up-to-date programming.

Infrastructure - On The Track Toward Economic Recovery

By Timothy P. Murray, President and CEO
Worcester Regional Chamber of Commerce

That we live in uncertain and unprecedented times is a fact that does not need to be impressed on anyone. Over the past six weeks, it's been forced upon all of us.

That there's nothing we can do about it is not a mindset into which any of us should fall. Amid the uncertainty caused by the COVID-19 crisis, we need to rethink fundamental assumptions about the way we operate and, if we do, we can grow stronger in the face of adversity.

Now is the time for the federal government to continue to help act with the sweep and authority that only the federal government can. We, as a country, have met historic challenges and undertaken massive projects before. Now is the time for us to take a page from our parents' and grandparents' playbooks and move forward in bold fashion. Now is the time to confront our own generational responsibility.

The country needs a sweeping infrastructure program to help revive our economy. Not only that, but even before this time of crisis and alarm, the country had an open, obvious need for an infrastructure program to support what had been a healthy economy.

When I served as Lt. Governor in Governor Deval Patrick's administration, we faced an economic and budgetary crisis during the fallout from the Great Recession that began in 2008, the year after we took office. The current crisis is wreaking even greater havoc on our economy.

With cooperation from the federal government, Massachusetts was able to emerge from the Great Recession more quickly and in better shape than nearly any other state. How? Through preparation, good government, and smart investments in our regional economies across the Commonwealth. By partnering with the federal government, we made significant down payments on infrastructure projects that continue to pay dividends today.

The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA), which became law in 2009 under President Obama's signature, unleashed \$831 billion in economic stimulus over 10 years. The law enabled Massachusetts to pay for \$7.5 billion in project awards. Our current needs have revealed themselves to be far more severe, but the model should remain. We need dramatic federal investment that will further leverage a commitment of state dollars.

Congress should also re-institute the time-honored practice of earmarking. Far from the strawman "wasteful spending" criticized by some politicians and pundits, earmarks allow local direction of taxpayer dollars. Mayors, city and town managers, working with residents and organizations like our local chambers of commerce, know

where this money can be used most effectively to strengthen a town, city, or regional economy.

Fortunately for Massachusetts, we have well-positioned members of Congress, like our delegation dean and House Ways and Means Chairman Richard Neal and my own Congress-

man, House Rules Committee Chairman Jim McGovern, who can help pull these levers.

And there are pent-up levers to pull. As much of the country has been converted to a "work-from-home" economy, has there ever been a more salient reminder of the importance of universal broadband in today's world? We need to continue to aggressively build out that

infrastructure.

As our economy undergoes the first shockwaves of the COVID-19 body blow, who would argue against expediting and following through on South Coast Rail, for which Governor Baker broke ground last July? Why would we not "prime the pump" for an economic recovery by moving ahead with West Station and East-West Rail that would connect Boston with Worcester with Springfield with Pittsfield, finally knitting together the framework for commuters across the state? Our fishing and other maritime industries also have long infrastructure needs neglected by the federal government. These industries play a huge role in our supply chain and culinary sectors, and it benefits us all to make strategic investments to correct these inequities.

Additionally, by having the Environmental Protection Agency return federal reimbursements from the current 10% to municipalities to 90% for the cost of modernizing our water and sewer infrastructure, we can prevent environmental and health catastrophes like the one that occurred in Flint, Michigan from happening in other places and put Americans across the country to work.

All of these are projects that would reap long-term economic and social benefits. But they are also urgently needed in the short term, to resuscitate a reeling economy and to mend a supply chain that has been, temporarily, broken.

None of us has encountered an economic challenge that moved this swiftly and dramatically. To counter it, we need to move swiftly and dramatically. We must be strategic about where we direct the funds that will put us back on course.

This is not a Red State-Blue State moment. It's an American moment, summoning us to rise to the challenge. As we always have, we will answer the call.



Tim Murray

FROM LEADERS, PAGE 1

possible to them," Dr. Castiel said.

Aside from all the work being done behind the scenes to ensure city safety – which has much of the city hall staff working twelve-hour days, seven days a week – city leaders took the initiative to do even more work in the public eye.

By implementing daily press briefings led by the city manager, mayor, and Medical Director Dr. Michael Hirsh, the goal was to share the latest information regarding coronavirus in the city with the Worcester community.

"People are starved for accurate information; they're starved for non-political information. They just want the facts," said Mr. Augustus. "They want to know the truth, as best we can tell the truth. And they want to know what they need to do to keep them and their families healthy."

Mayor Joseph M. Petty echoed this sentiment: "I think by having a strategy of being transparent and putting the facts out everyday [...] instead of dividing the community, we brought the community together."

HEROIC HEALTH CARE

Up against serious challenges including a nationwide shortage of PPE supplies and models which projected surges of more COVID-19 patients than existing hospital beds, local health care providers have demonstrated nothing short of heroism.

Before becoming President and CEO of UMass Memorial Health Care, Dr. Eric Dickson recalls a relevant saying from his younger years in the Army:

"You can't wish that you had practiced your aiming more before a firefight. You have the skills you have when you get into it, and they'll either get you through or they won't. Wishing you had spent more time on the rifle range won't matter."

In other words: preparation is key. According to Dr. Dickson, it was UMass Memorial's last seven years of intense workforce development in process improvement and problem solving which paid off most in equipping the system to deal with a public health emergency of such magnitude. These skills enabled them to construct a drive-through testing site in one day and put up a homeless shelter at the DCU Center in six hours.

Moreover, Dr. Dickson points to UMass's institution-wide commitment to innovation as what allowed them to be the first-in-the-state doing convalescent plasma treatments, and to contribute ten percent of cases for the trial of remdesivir – a drug believed to have a beneficial effect in COVID-19 patients.

In addition to preparation, Saint Vincent Hospital CEO Carolyn Jackson says being nimble and making decisions at the right time – even if those decisions are unpopular – is another essential piece of dealing with this crisis. The safety of staff and patients at the forefront of every decision, Saint Vincent made the move to limit visitor access earlier than some hospitals, which Ms. Jackson said was "initially unpopular," and met with "pushback" from some. But, with circumstances "changing daily," Ms. Jackson explained, "you have to make rapid

decisions, and sometimes the decision that was right yesterday needs to be changed tomorrow because the situation changes."

For both Ms. Jackson and Dr. Dickson, leadership at this time isn't just about making the tough decisions. Mainly, it's about leading by example and being present, which is why you can often find both CEOs in their respective hospitals' COVID care units. "Every day that I'm at the hospital, I'm making rounds on the patient care floors, [...] connecting with staff, thanking them for the great work they're doing, and making sure they have everything they need," said Ms. Jackson.

Calling it "probably one of the best things I did," Dr. Dickson says committing to working every Sunday in the COVID unit was personally important to him because, "I wasn't asking people [my staff] to do something I wasn't willing to do myself."

SCHOOL'S OUT

First and foremost, "we had to orchestrate a very effective and organized closing of all the schools," said Maureen Binienda, superintendent of Worcester Public Schools (WPS). "Then it was immediately [about shifting] to: What can we do to provide education for our students while we're in this shutdown? Right away, we didn't want there to be a gap in learning."

In order to sustain this 'remote learning' format now that schools are closed for the rest of the academic year, the district will need to overcome what Ms. Binienda sees as one of their greatest challenges: lack of connectivity.

After a survey of their 17,000 unique

families revealed 2,500 didn't have reliable internet access and 6,000 didn't have a device at their home besides a cell phone, the district is working toward a two-to-one ratio – meaning for every two students in a home, there's one device. To accomplish this, they're sending out thousands of Chromebooks from mid-May to June, and teachers are also printing and assembling thousands of packets so those who opt for the 'non-tech' option can still continue to learn.

But access to learning isn't the only hurdle they're facing. Noting this is true of some suburban areas too, "in urban education," Ms. Binienda explained, "all the resources families need exist in schools. Whereas in suburbia, all the resources already exist in their homes." Due to this, food distribution – among other resources – has been made possible by the collaboration of school staff and volunteers, so students know where their next meal is coming from.

Distance learning models took over in the higher education landscape too, as the coronavirus caused campus closures. But as Worcester State University (WSU) President Barry Maloney says, it hasn't slowed the students' hunger for success or the faculty's motivation. "We mobilized in those first few weeks like I've never seen, and it was all done with our students' best interests in mind," he said, adding, "Our students are just as resilient as they've always been. Our faculty have doubled down their commitment to their work."

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE



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With many middle-class, first-generation students, Mr. Maloney recognizes even at their price point, college expenses are still a “big lift” for many families – which is why the institution has established an emergency fund to help raise funds for those students in need at this time.

And with a vast majority of those students coming from Central Mass., Mr. Maloney sees supporting the community as part of WSU’s mission. The university has MOUs with Saint Vincent and Fallon Health to house their frontline responders, and, like WPS, they’ve donated any PPE materials they had to local health care facilities. “These are our students’ homes,” he said, “So when we’re helping our community, we’re helping our students, we’re helping retention.”

Now, both Mr. Maloney and Ms. Binienda are focused on what’s in store for the 2020 - 2021 school year. If they’ll be able to reopen in the fall, how will they do so in the safest manner? And what will that look like? No matter what the future holds, they both agree learning must continue, and judging by the collaboration and engagement they’ve already seen from their “incredible” faculty and staff, they’ll be able to handle anything.

BARRICADES TO BUSINESS

Primarily a public health crisis, there’s no denying the coronavirus pandemic carries a significant economic crisis on its back as well.

With extended closures and shut-downs tailspinning the economy, unemployment has reached record highs. At the time of writing, more than 33 million Americans had filed claims since the start of the outbreak, and those significant job losses have brought the U.S. unemployment rate to 14.7 percent – the highest since the Great Depression.

Recognizing all businesses would need help even before March 24, when Gov. Baker ordered all non-essential businesses to close in Mass., the Worcester Regional Chamber of Commerce pivoted immediately, extending their services to all local businesses – not just Chamber members.

Of the decision to offer this availability, President and CEO of the Chamber Timothy P. Murray said, “In moments of crisis, you have to do things differently and step up, and us doing this was about our greater mission economic development wise [...] We’re going to fight for every job and business we can during this crisis.”

One of these key services has been hosting Zoom meetings with Congressmen Jim McGovern and Richard Neal. Worcester Chamber Board Chair and a Managing Partner at Bowditch and Dewey, Robert D. Cox Jr., said, “We have a responsibility of making sure our members have a connection to government leaders and that they can hear from them directly.” Putting businesses in direct contact with their elected officials has allowed them to get answers to their specific questions from the leaders governing and making decisions on their behalf.

Mr. Cox adds another role of the Chamber at this time has been one of advising. “We acknowledge there are difficult decisions to be made by many employers, especially in the retail industry,” he said, “so we offered a program to advise on employment loss and discussed how to carry out [those] actions as fairly as possible.”

Beyond hosting these conversations and topical webinars, the Chamber has been in regular contact with the Baker-Polito administration, advocating for the Central Mass. business community, and has had discussions with the state’s Reopening Advisory Board.

And like many other leaders during this ever-changing situation, they’ve made a concerted effort toward frequent communication, including daily ‘special edition’ email blasts, social media posts, and radio talks.

WORCESTER WORKING TOGETHER: LEADERS’ COLLABORATION & COMMONALITIES

“I’ve said this a couple times in other interviews now,” Dr. Dickson admitted, “but it’s absolutely amazing what you can accomplish when everyone’s focused on the same goal.”

That same goal? Beating the virus and keeping this community safe. “That’s really the biggest common thread,” Ms. Jackson said, when asked about the commonalities between her and other leaders as of late. “We all have our different styles, but we all want to maintain everyone’s

health, well-being, and safety to the greatest extent possible.”

Similarly, “I think everybody has just put ego, title, whatever else on the back burner,” Mr. Augustus said. “It’s just been: ‘let me roll up my sleeves and do whatever it takes to get it done.’”

Unencumbered by that lack of individual preoccupation, all these leaders – regardless of the industry or position they’re in – have their eyes on the same prize: moving Worcester forward.

And if any city is equipped to deal with hardship, it’s Worcester. “Worcester is a very enterprising community,” said Mr. Cox. Pointing to the Chamber’s nearly 150 years, and Bowditch & Dewey’s 106 years in existence, he said, “There have been ups and downs, good times and tough times, I’m sure. But if we can keep in mind we’re in it for the long haul, [...] we’re going to come out on the other side of this much stronger and an even better business community.”

Dr. Dickson agreed, “We’re going to be challenged to get the renaissance of Worcester going again, and it’s going to take everyone working together the way we’re doing right now [...] but we’ve got to get that momentum back because this city was poised to do something special and we don’t want to stall that.”

At the end of the day, “it all comes down to helping Worcester be successful,” as Mr. Maloney put it. “Worcester has been on a great trajectory of late and we want to keep that going, despite this blip on the screen.”

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Tripp Leads Hanover's Opus Investment, Spearheads Worcester Redevelopment with CitySquare Project

By Dominique Goyette-Connerty, Correspondent

A walk through downtown Worcester today reveals a vibrant and lively environment that's nothing like the area was a decade ago.

550 employees come and go from the Unum Insurance building. Patients from Central Massachusetts and beyond arrive for treatment at Saint Vincent Hospital's Cancer and Wellness Center. Patrons filter in and out of the many businesses within the Mercantile Center and the surrounding shops. Hundreds of residents call the Front Street apartments "home." Visitors check in at the AC Hotel by Marriott, commuters file into the underground Worcester Common Garage, and everywhere, pedestrians dot the streets.

A longtime top insurance and investment executive at The Hanover Insurance Group (THG), Ann Tripp wears many hats. But her role there as president of Opus Investment Management, Inc. is what makes her partly responsible for this momentous transformation and revitalization of the downtown area.

The \$585 million, multi-phased redevelopment project known as CitySquare is the largest single public-private development project in Massachusetts history outside of Boston.

Below are excerpts from an interview conducted with Ms. Tripp in early May, chronicling her time with The Hanover,

industry experience, work with the CitySquare project, and involvement in the community.

In 2006, you were appointed president of Opus Investment. What was your and The Hanover's collective vision when you took over this investment arm?

Opus acts as the investment manager for The Hanover's assets, as well as about \$3.5 billion of assets for third-party clients. Under a different name, Opus has actually been around since 1993. When I was named president of Opus, we were looking to continue to grow the third-party assets under management by the team. We knew there were great benefits for the business in terms of attracting and developing our talent in addition to providing a larger base to spread expenses. Therefore, it enables Opus to have better, more state-of-the-art technology and other capabilities.

Not only the head of Opus, you also serve as EVP, Chief Investment Officer, and treasurer of THG, where you're responsible for investing \$11 billion. You're a member of The Hanover's Partner Group – a group of the company's



Ann Tripp, president of Opus Investment Management, Inc.

most senior leaders, and you serve on different boards and sub-committees of local non-profits. What drives you to be this involved in your career and community?

The markets and the business are always changing and growing. I find it extremely challenging and rewarding. I also work with a team of talented, skilled professionals, allowing us to drive strong results which is very motivating.

At The Hanover, one of our core values is a shared commitment to making a difference in the community. We're in the business of helping people, so it [community involvement] is really like a natural extension of my career. I started off volunteering to be on the board and treasurer of the United Way and quickly realized the value I could bring to a community organization, especially on the investment and financial side. This positive impact on others really helped drive me to get more involved and take on other opportunities within the community...[including with] the Health Foundation of Central Mass., Fallon Health, the YWCA, and

the Greater Worcester Community Foundation. I'm also a very active volunteer with a non-profit called City to Saddle which my husband's on the board for. We're very passionate about this non-profit because we own a farm and work with under served youth through that organization.

It's worth mentioning you hold these lead roles in a male-dominated industry. According to McKinsey, only 18 percent of top insurance executives are women. In any way, do you feel this 'fuels your fire' to be successful?

First and foremost, I believe you have to do what interests and motivates you. I'm competitive by nature and have always wanted to do my best at whatever I'm doing. That has been the driving force most of my career.

I will say though, as my career has developed, I've recognized the tremendous value of a diverse workforce and I've wanted to have an impact on the next generation by helping others build their careers. I've taken the opportunity to serve as a mentor for a number of early-in-career and mid-career individuals across our organization -- many of whom are women and minorities. I've tried to not only mentor, but for some, take on more of a sponsorship role or help them find sponsors throughout

SEE TRIPP, PAGE 9

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The COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted every industry. We are focused on one thing right now – helping our clients and businesses in our community strategically plan to emerge stronger. In our three decades of experience, we’ve helped companies survive and thrive after the recessions of 1990, 9-11, and 2008, and we are here to help your company move forward today.

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Member 3Media Web Gains Traction with Clients and Recognition from Peers

By Lysa Miller, President and Co-Founder, 3 Media Web

A business that started as a friendship on Twitter has turned into a success story about a thriving digital agency, most recently recognized as one of the “Top Ten Web Development Companies in Massachusetts” by The Boston Business Journal.

When Marc Avila, founder of Chamber member 3 Media Web joined forces with Lysa Miller, Founder of Ladybugz Interactive Agency, the two dreamed of creating a full-service digital agency to serve the needs of mid-sized businesses. From their experience, they both knew that these companies were priced out of larger agencies, and had needs small agencies didn’t have the expertise or resources to provide.

Those dreams soon became a reality as the two landed ideal clients together, such as global manufacturers and distributors, B2B companies, and nonprofits, not just locally but across the US and Canada. Some of these accounts include MicroGroup, American Superconductor, CORD, Acacia Communications, Hardinge Inc., Visit North Central and SALMON Health and Retirement.

The company built its reputation on solid and proven methods for working with these clients and promising to keep projects on time and on budget with their “Proven 5-Step Process.”

3 Media Web specializes in Word-Press web design and development, and touts itself as your company’s

“trusted web partner.” The agency specializes in all things digital including expanding reach with results-based digital marketing.

3 Media Web has been honored with several prestigious design awards for successful projects. It has also been recognized as a top agency on Clutch.co, Upcity, and Agency Spotter. Other recent wins for the company include Best of Small Business Awards (Small Business Expo), Best Places to Work (Business Intelligence Group) and the Entrepreneur 360 Award (Entrepreneur.com).

What differentiates 3 Media Web both as an agency and as a business? It’s the combination of skills between Marc Avila and Lysa Miller, that comes together to make their agency stand out.

Marc has a highly-technical background and leads the agency as its CEO. He runs all things operational with the help of a third partner Sara Spector-Brown, who joined the agency two years ago as its operations director, a decision that proved to be a successful one. Together they run a tight ship and focus on the company’s operations and physical growth.

Marc is the leader on all things quality assurance. He makes sure everything that 3 Media Web puts out meets the highest quality standards, especially from a technical standpoint.

3 Media Web was the first agency to host a technical event for agencies called, “Agency Automation, 2018.”



Creatives from 3 Media Web show off their personalities for a staff photo.

Event attendees included agency owners from around the world and helped put 3 Media Web in the spotlight as a thought leader for agencies and automation and innovation.

The company’s co-founder Lysa Miller brings a polar opposite set of skills to the table. She focuses on the company’s outside relationships and growth. She has been crucial in helping scale the business by expanding essential partners and building referral networks. A self-proclaimed relationship builder, Lysa uses the power of PR, events, and thought leadership to establish the company as a cutting edge contender in the agency world.

This is one of the unique strategies that has helped the agency gain exposure and traction that puts it on the top list of Boston agencies.

Lysa herself, advocates for all things women, and with the support of her two partners, has brought her cause into the business by hosting events for women, such as the Sales Empowerment Summit for Women. Lysa is the founder of the MetroWest Women’s

Network, an online and local networking group just shy of 4,000 women. Most recently she was featured on the cover of the Boston Business Journal’s 2020 Annual Book of Lists.

Being located in the town of Hudson goes along with the agency’s unique style. 3 Media Web likes to do things differently so instead of locating their office in an urban center like Boston or Worcester, the partners chose Hudson, Mass. because of its hip vibe and current renaissance.

“We were trying to be cool and different,” says Miller. “We wanted to be a part of the town’s growth and expansion and geographically, it made the most sense.”

In 2018, Avila and his family relocated to Grand Rapids, Michigan (yes, a virtual CEO). This was a great opportunity for 3 Media Web to expand its footprint and with expertise in manufacturing, has proven to be a smart move for the agency.

Currently, 3 Media Web employs 22 people in Central Mass. and five others scattered around the East Coast.

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Chamber Strong

By Jeannie Hebert, President and CEO, Blackstone Valley Chamber of Commerce

The past couple of months have been surreal, walking deserted streets, wearing face masks and gloves as if we were portraying characters in an episode of the “Twilight Zone.” Our lives, both personal and professional, have been disrupted to the point of distraction with no clear end in sight. “Virtual” is now reality.

We are navigating uncharted waters, forced to make difficult choices based upon ever-transforming guidelines and deadlines. Leaders are making life changing decisions that keep them up at night. Thousands are out of work. Business owners are unsure if they can survive much longer and questioning, What will be the ‘new normal’?

The one entity that is always there for businesses to rely upon in times of need is the Chamber of Commerce.

A Chamber is a unique thing. Many people think we are funded by cities and towns and taxes. Not true. Many people think we are a marketing agency. Not true (although we do provide marketing services). Many people think we are community event planners. Not in our job descriptions, although we do believe our community is enriched by having regular

activities to enjoy.

We consider ourselves customer service professionals, existing to serve our members, school districts, individual members, non-profit partners, and the residents and visitors of our communities.

More than 6,500 Chambers across the U.S. Chambers are a dependable local lifeline for small businesses fighting to keep their doors open through COVID-19. Nationwide we have set up small business hotlines; held thousands of chamber-led webinars on topics such as how to work in quarantine and navigating the CARES Act and SBA loans. We offer free counseling and advisement, answer questions about applications, unemployment assistance and stimulus checks, create guides to access businesses and restaurants that are trying desperately to serve the public during these unprecedented times.

Over one million small businesses have been approved for a loan through the Paycheck Protection Program which can be forgiven if the organization meets certain criteria.

While Chambers are front and center serving their communities through this

crisis and assisting our local businesses, we have been left out of receiving these funds. Other nonprofits are eligible, but Chambers are registered with the IRS as 501(c)(6) groups – and ironically, we are deemed ineligible.

This puts Chambers in a precarious position. While providing critical support to our communities in the fight against COVID-19, we face the business-threatening financial impact of our own loss revenue from members unable to pay dues along with canceled events. This has essentially left us without funding and no relief. Layoffs at chambers are happening across the country. It could very well be that when a business is in need and reaches out to their local Chamber for help, some will not be there to answer the call.

We must ensure that this does not happen. Chambers across the United States are imploring the administration and congressional leaders to include chambers and other 501(c)(6) organizations in the next COVID-19 aid package making us eligible for federal stimulus dollars.

#ChamberStrong is a grassroots campaign to support this effort and

sustain the organizations throwing a lifeline to the business community. We face the same uncertainty that many of our member businesses do.

Chambers of Commerce are catalysts, conveners, and champions for our members and the communities we proudly serve. We want to continue our work for decades to come and that is why we need everyone to rally around us and #ChamberStrong.

How can you #ChamberStrong?

- Join, sponsor, or donate to your local Chamber of Commerce (every little bit helps)!
- Write or create a video testimonial about why you are a proud Chamber member. Tag your local Chamber and use #ChamberStrong.
- Encourage local businesses and organizations to join their Chamber.
- Become a social media champion for your local Chamber – like them, comment on their posts, share their content, and leave a review!
- Share this articles on your Social Media profiles using the hashtag #ChamberStrong.

Together, we will all get through this uncertain time!

Staying Connected During Isolation

by Auburn Chamber of Commerce’s Marketing Committee

As we adjust to social distancing to stay safe during this pandemic, businesses are learning new ways to conduct meetings and stay connected with customers.

Zoom | This virtual meeting space allows businesses to conduct professional meetings in a controlled environment. The free version allows a host to set up an account with limitations on time and number of attendees. More advanced plans begin at \$14.99 a month, an affordable price point for most businesses. Hosts schedule the meeting, a URL, passcode, and call-in number is generated and the host can now invite attendees through email and calendar invitations.

During the meeting, the host can control the audio (with a mute button) and video and even determine when to let attendees in from the waiting room. The host can control who can speak which

attendees can share their screen. Questions may be asked via chatroom, and if you are in webinar mode, via Q&A.

If you need to change the original meeting settings, don’t panic; Zoom allows the host to change most settings once a meeting has started. Meetings can also be recorded and shared.

Zoom has been in the news regarding privacy issues so we suggest you update the platform regularly, use passcodes, don’t publish the URL publicly, and use the waiting room so you know who is entering the platform.

Loom | Loom is a video messaging platform that is so simple to download and operate you might try to make it more complicated than it is. Users can make short videos on the fly from their phone and send them as a text or email. On the desktop version, videos can be managed and emailed.

According to one user, “Loom was my answer to the question of ‘How do I reach out to my customers and business partners with a personal touch?’ My company is a 106-year-old, family-owned, automotive services business. Connecting to our community and customers has always been done person to person and with a handshake. Since this can’t happen currently, video is going to have to do, and Loom will be in my tool.”

Phone | Last but not least, you can phone a local business or fellow Chamber member with a friendly call. You might even brighten their day. If you are among the 80% of Americans who own a smartphone and are yearning to see – as well as hear – other people again, you most likely have easy (and for the most part, free) access to FaceTime, Duo, or Skype which is still one of the most popular video call platforms.

FROM TRIPP, PAGE 7

the company. I recognize the value of diverse perspectives, as does The Hanover, and was very excited and gratified when I was chosen to be one of two executive co-sponsors of the company’s inclusion and diversity efforts ... [which help create] a more natural pathway for people of diverse backgrounds to move up the career ladder.

And finally, something is wrong when women only fill 18 percent of these executive roles when they make up 51 percent of the population and graduate college and graduate school at a much higher rate than men. That needs to change. The good news is, companies, including The Hanover, have begun to address the issue. I’m optimistic real progress can, and will, be made.

Opus Investment’s involvement with the CitySquare redevelopment project has transformed downtown Worcester. How do you see this project as contributing to the frequently-dubbed ‘renaissance’ taking place in the Heart of the Commonwealth?

We were brought into the project in 2009 and closed on it in 2010, so it’s almost been ten full years we’ve been working on this. We had lots of discussions with city leadership at the time around the critical nature of the project and the previously failed development. It was clear the project needed a partner like The Hanover which would bring money, commitment, and focus. The idea was the successful development of CitySquare would really support economic development efforts in the downtown area and beyond, like in the

neighborhoods, helping to create the positive momentum we needed in the city. It’s exciting to see CitySquare, along with the development of The Hanover Theatre, be a driving force in rejuvenating the local economy while also driving that critical momentum. Worcester is a wonderful city and I’m proud of my work and The Hanover’s commitment to help it reach its full potential.

Aside from The Hanover’s roots being here, of course, what’s so attractive about investing in this Worcester-based project? What are the motivating factors behind keeping the money at the home base?

We took on this project for many reasons but the two biggest were: we wanted to do what we could to help make the city of Worcester thrive, and

we were also committed to continuing to strengthen our company. Our home office is here, our employees work here, many live here, so we care a great deal about this community. The more attractive the city is, the better able we are to attract and retain employees, benefiting both our company and our city.

About ten years ago, we were hiring talent fresh out of college through our Future Leaders Program. We did expect an attrition rate, but it turned out to be quite high because everyone wanted to go live in Boston. Now, we still hire a lot of early-in-career individuals, but we no longer see the high turnover anymore because the city is alive and young people want to live here. So it really has made a difference for The Hanover as well as the city.

Chamber Supporting a Changed World

By Alex Guardiola, Director of Government Affairs and Public Policy

As the voice of the Worcester regional business community, the Worcester Regional Chamber of Commerce has had to field some of the toughest questions from some of the most vulnerable small businesses in the area.

Prior to COVID-19, my daily conversations were centered around economic development, expansion of rail, and transportation bills. We continued to discuss the Worcester renaissance, the WooSox's Polar Park, traffic congestion reports, and the Main Street revitalization project. Downtown office space was at a premium and the median price of homes had climbed to record highs.

EVERYTHING CHANGED

On March 23, 2020, Governor Charlie Baker, and his administration, issued an emergency order requiring all businesses and organization that do not provide "COVID-19 Essential Services" to close their physical workplaces and facilities to workers, customers, and the public.

Restaurants, bars and other hospitality-based businesses were forced to unexpectedly close their doors to patrons for the unforeseeable future. A list of businesses and other organizations that have been designated as providing essential services and workers related to COVID-19 was issued. They continued to operate brick and mortar facilities, albeit some on a much reduced basis, during this time; but that list was very short and most businesses have been left closed or operating from home.

Thousands of companies in the Commonwealth abruptly shut down and forced the lay-off of nearly one million employees since the start

of the coronavirus crisis pandemic.

Nationally, approximately 34 million workers have filed for unemployment in the weeks since the shutdown.

Since that time, citizens have looked for guidance from our key leaders and decision makers. Locally, The City of Worcester holds a daily 5 pm press conference. Our health care professionals provide daily update us on the number of positive COVID-19 cases and the number of deaths. Governor Baker holds regular meetings via phone conference with different groups throughout the state.

CHAMBER RESPONSE

Here at the Chamber, we opened all of our member services to the broader business community, member or not. Historically, it has been our community obligation to help all businesses navigate uncharted waters. Since offering our services to non-dues paying businesses, we have directed hundreds of businesses, large and small, for-profit and non-profit, and from all industries to every available grant, loans and service that we can find. This was most evident when the U.S. House of Representatives and Senate passed the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act stimulus bill.

CARES ACT

On March 27, 2020, the president signed into law the CARES Act. Passage in both chambers resulted from intense negotiations among Congressional leaders and White House officials, led by U.S. Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin.

The nearly \$2 trillion relief package is the boldest action to date in response

to the COVID-19 pandemic and is the single largest relief bill in U.S. history. The CARES Act included: direct financial assistance to Americans; aid to small businesses and employees; efforts to stabilize the economy and keep people employed; and additional support for health care professionals, patients, and hospitals.

As anticipated, a record number of applications were received over a two-week period. The Small Business Administration (SBA) said in a statement that "the SBA has processed more than 14 years' worth of loans in less than 14 days."

Because of the high demand, the legislature had to again approve funding for a second round of the Paycheck Protection Program to meet the needs of the country's small businesses. In just the second round alone, the SBA approved more than 2.2 million new loans.

In Massachusetts, in excess of \$2.1 billion in loans were approved during the second go-round. In the Worcester area, large and community banks as well as credit unions went above and beyond to meet the demand, working tirelessly to ensure that our local businesses got the same opportunities received by others in the first round. Although the SBA's portal was not prepared for the unprecedented bandwidth required to process the number of loan requests, our community lenders here continued to make sure their customers received the highest degree of service possible.

LOOKING FORWARD: EMBRACING THE NEW NORMAL

As we begin to incrementally reopen



Alex Guardiola

businesses, safety must be paramount and precautionary protocols must be implemented to protect our employees and customers. Governor Baker's 4-stage approach to reopening the state's economy in a COVID-19 world will provide a road map and we urge all to follow it.

Federally, conversations are already taking place regarding the "HEROES" Act. In a video conference meeting with Congressman Richard Neal, he stated that the next stimulus bill will be focused on infrastructure. Rebuilding of much needed roads, bridges, and railways will help spark our economy.

Internet broadband must also be part of this infrastructure package. Now more than ever, we rely on online communication platforms. Giving a \$1,200 check is helpful, but earning a steady paycheck will instill a sense of normalcy and financial security in the minds of American workers.

Continuing to be "Worcester Together" is vital and embracing the "new normal" must become part of our everyday lives.

Contact Alex at 508.753.2924 or aguardiola@worcesterchamber.org.

Chamber's Public Policy and Advocacy Efforts Support Businesses and Promote Economic Development

By Sharyn Williams, VP of Marketing, Communications, Programs, and Events

The Chamber assists member businesses with all sorts of requests including zoning, parking, utility company issues, permits, and more.

A Development Stalled

In the case of the Trolley Yard and surrounding business district, the Chamber's director of public policy and government affairs, Alex Guardiola, assisted members with several requests.

The first challenge the Chamber tackled was to help Galaxy Development, owner of the Trolley Yard, who was having an issue with getting a utility to tie in their service. The slow-to-respond utility was delaying tenants from moving into their storefronts and keeping them from opening resulting in lost sales for the businesses and the developer. With intervention by Alex, electricity soon made its way to the retailers.

New Location for a Worcester Favorite

When Alice Lombardi, owner of the Bean Counter selected the location of the long-shuttered Gervais Car Wash, vacant for nearly two decades, new life was on the horizon for the abandoned property. Investing in the teardown of the existing structure and the construction of the new bakery, she realized the importance of a

recognizable address. The Chamber assisted her with obtaining a Grove Street address to ensure that patrons would easily find the new location.

Financial Institution Banks on the Future

When bankHometown wanted a Worcester location, the property adjacent to the bakery was



Construction is underway for the new bankHometown location on Grove Street in Worcester.

an ideal spot with one exception. According to city codes, space at the new microbank – designed for quick in and out via a drive-through – was too narrow for vehicles. In reality, there was plenty of room. Alex attended both the planning board and zoning board hearings to advocate for a waiver. Because of his intervention, this important project is moving forward.

Retail Designation Assists Brewer

Designated as a "tap room" – because the location did not serve food – Greater Good Imperial Brewing needed assistance when COVID-19 hit. With only those establishments designated as essential open to the public, the Chamber stepped in to help them become classified as a liquor store. Now considered an essential business, they are other breweries are open as a retailer.

Connecting Grove Street to Downtown

The Trolley Yard development and neighboring businesses have reinvigorated the district and created a vibrant corridor leading to Main Street, the heart of the city. Connecting our neighborhoods to our downtown is an important path for the continued revitalization of the city. The Chamber is proud to have assisted these member businesses

and many others like them over the years.

If you're a member of the Chamber and your business needs assistance, please contact Alex Guardiola at aguardiola@worcesterchamber.org or 508.753.2924.

See related story about the Trolley Yard and surround area on page 1.



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Student Lily Gandolfo of North High School and her teacher, Courtney Brousseau, are this year's recipients of the Dr. Lee Gurel Award. Worcester Public School alumni Dr. Lee Gurel established the award in 2006 in honor of his eighth grade English teacher. Each year, the student honoree is chosen by lottery from the pool of WPS students with the highest AP English exam scores. Thanks to Dr. Gurel's generosity, both recipients received \$500.

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WORCESTER REGIONAL FOOD HUB Offers Curbside Pickup of Locally-Sourced Food

By Dominique Goyette-Connerty, Correspondent

Amid the COVID-19 pandemic, the grocery store is the last place many people want to be. And with some food in short supply, shoppers are looking for alternatives. Luckily, the Worcester Regional Food Hub has the socially-distant solution to food shopping -- but the service is doing much more than just allowing customers to avoid the crowds.

Each Wednesday, the Food Hub offers curbside pickup of "local food boxes" filled with different products from local farmers and food producers.

A proud partner of the Worcester Regional Chamber of Commerce, and with start-up support from the Health Foundation of Central Mass., the Food Hub's mission is to increase local food access and consumption while also supporting local food entrepreneurs. This new food to-go service accomplishes just that.

Food Hub Director, Shon Rainford, says the idea began in mid-March, when he was meeting with his team about the newly-opened Worcester Public Market. They noticed the crowd at the market was starting to dwindle and the surrounding colleges

ter, and cider from Bolton Orchards in Bolton, just to name a few. There are also add-on options to the boxes for an additional price if a customer is looking for something extra, such as maple syrup from Pure BS Maple Shack in Auburn.

The Food Hub continues to diversify what's offered in the boxes, changing the items each week both for the sake of variety and availability. Mr. Rainford says they're looking at adding seafood to their offerings in order to help fishermen who have been impacted by restaurant closures. As the season changes, he also expects they'll be able to offer more produce with the boxes, such as locally-grown tomatoes and strawberries.

With more farms in Worcester County than any other county in Massachusetts, the to-go service is not only good for the health of consumers, but it's also helping to keep the industry financially afloat and avoid food waste. Mr. Rainford explained many of the food sources are getting much less business during the pandemic, "so when I buy 200 orders of cheese, or 200 bags of granola or kettle corn,



ABOVE: Locally sourced food found in one of the Food Hub's weekly offerings. RIGHT: Ready for pickup by area residents who pre-ordered.



were just beginning to close due to coronavirus concerns.

Mr. Rainford and the Food Hub team knew it wasn't going to be long until their typical buyers -- colleges, markets, and restaurants -- would be affected by the nationwide shutdown. He said, "We wanted to continue our work supporting local farmers and food producers and thought selling directly to our community was a promising way. We could not have been more right!"

In their first week of offering the pickup service, they sold 25 orders. By the end of April, they were receiving 110 orders a week, and anticipated reaching 200 orders by May. "A lot of our customers are repeat buyers, so I think that's a good indication of the quality of food we have," Mr. Rainford said.

The to-go food boxes feature different locally-made items including eggs and bacon from Lilac Hedge Farm in Holden, focaccia bread from Crust Artisan Bakeshop in Worces-

ter, and cider from Bolton Orchards in Bolton, just to name a few. There are also add-on options to the boxes for an additional price if a customer is looking for something extra, such as maple syrup from Pure BS Maple Shack in Auburn.

Since the program has received good feedback and "seen enough demand," Mr. Rainford "absolutely" expects it's something they'll continue, even after the coronavirus outbreak dies down.

But for now, he's just happy to see the project already so successful, achieving exactly what the Food Hub set out to do, even in the most challenging times: "We're helping to support local farmers and we're getting [local food] to the people in Worcester who need it most."

The pickup service is offered every Wednesday; prices vary according to what's included but have ranged from \$59 - \$77. Orders must be placed in advance at www.worcesterfoodhub.org/foodtogo.

CLASS IS CANCELED: Worcester Area College Seniors Speak Out About Graduating into a Time of Uncertainty

By David Sullivan, Economic Development Fellow, Worcester Regional Chamber of Commerce

As COVID-19 proliferated across the globe, colleges and universities have effectively canceled the second half of the senior year for the class of 2020. While these decisions are in the best interest of the public health, for seniors, the repercussions of this pandemic go far beyond missing their final sports season, final club event, or even the graduation ceremony. The post-graduation job market is now a pit of uncertainty that graduates fear they won't be able to escape for some time.

With all this in mind, I interviewed several graduating seniors to understand how the pandemic is affecting them as they enter a critical period in their both their lives and careers. These are their stories, and I will let them do the talking:

Stephen Lenane, Worcester State University

Stephen Lenane, a Worcester State senior planning on attending law school, is concerned that his planned career path has been inextricably altered. "In the short term, I am really worried about it," Stephen said, "It seems like a lot of jobs right now are reducing their staff." For him, it is essential for employers to understand the complications associated with graduating in 2020. "I hope they choose to have some understanding and leniency for us."

Liang Dzindolet, Worcester State University

For Liang Dzindolet, a nursing major at Worcester State University, the pandemic has generated uncertainty. Her Nursing Honors Society induction ceremony was canceled, as well as her nursing senior practicum, where she would get the hours of experience needed to learn the ropes of health-care. Liang expressed that she felt depressed, overwhelmed, and easily irritated by all that has happened, and hopes that employers take steps to

do as best as they can to hire the class of 2020. "Hospitals should hire more people through the nurse residency program," she proposed, saying that they usually only hire about 20-30 per seasonal cohort.

Michael McMahon, Becker College

Michael McMahon was on his way to finish his senior baseball season with Becker College's team in Florida over spring break when the news of campus closures hit. He worries that entering the workforce is going to be a struggle for graduates, explaining that "finding a job and career is hard enough... now adding the obstacles of most places not having the ability to hire new employees... it makes it

there is still hope for her and the class that she led into graduation. "Unfortunately, we live in a world where tragedies strike. Fortunately, we have taken these tragedies and have witnessed the goodness and perseverance that often follows closely behind."

Christopher Tillotson, WPI

Christopher Tillotson, a senior at WPI, said he is "hopeful right now" despite the circumstances. Christopher secured a job in the defense industry with Lockheed Martin before the pandemic recession hit. He offered an approach of cautious optimism saying, "There is no way around the fact that this will be a

the last," she said. While sad about missing her friends, Gianna is optimistic too. She will be attending graduate school to prepare for a career in school counseling.

Kevin Bimonte, WPI

Kevin Bimonte, a senior at WPI and the treasurer of the Worcester Student Government Association, feels lost without the closure to his college career, saying being unable to experience the final chapter of his journey at WPI was "just surreal." He also suggested that companies canceling internship opportunities was not the answer to addressing complications from the pandemic. "Businesses that can transition to a remote style of internships or jobs should try to do so not only for the sake of graduates, but for those who rely on that opportunity."

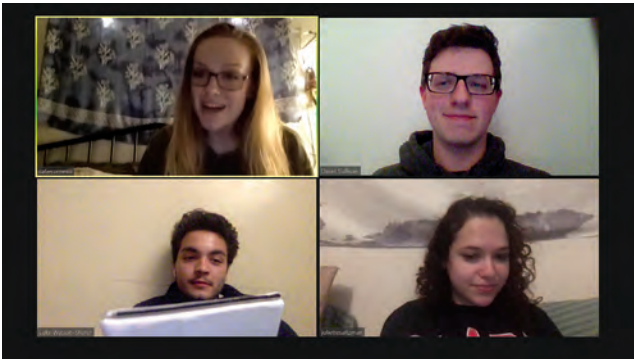
Nicole Duquette, Assumption College

Nicole Duquette, a senior at Assumption College and Webster resident, explained the emotional toll on 2020 graduates. "I don't think all adults realize the genuine emotional toll this has taken on us," she said. While she believes she is lucky to have the support of the Assumption community, she also thinks that the pandemic has forced seniors into a scramble to find job security after graduating. "For years to come, if they see 'Graduation Year: 2020' on an application, I hope they will give it a second look considering our extraordinary circumstances."

Jack Hebb, Clark University

For Jack Hebb, a senior at Clark University and co-president of the Model United Nations team, the pandemic has "thrown [his] life into chaos". Jack, a political science major, is worried about the effects of COVID-19 on his ability to attain a career job after

SEE CLASS, PAGE 19



The story's author (upper right) conducts virtual interviews.

that much more difficult." Michael, however, is keeping his chin up like many 2020 graduates. "It just depends on how hard we are willing to work, and what we are willing to go through to get where we want to be."

Annie Melanson, Anna Maria College

Annie Melanson, the president of Anna Maria College's senior class and captain of the field hockey team, expressed sadness over her campus closing down. "The day we received the email announcing that we would not be returning to campus, I do not think I was alone in feeling heartbroken," she said. However for Annie,

character-building experience for 2020 grads," and adding, "I think our class will be stronger for it, but in the meantime, we need to dig deep and capitalize on any opportunity we can find."

Gianna Caprioli, Worcester State University

For Gianna Caprioli, a Worcester native and Worcester State University senior, a lack of closure to her college career has left her heavily disappointed. Some of Gianna's best friends were those who shared memories with her at Worcester State. "I didn't know the last few times seeing and hanging out with my friends would be

Animal Adoptions at the EcoTarium

By Rebecca Landry, Marketing and Communications Intern, Fitchburg State University

Providing an opportunity to support and learn more about often overlooked or stereotyped species which call the EcoTarium home, one of the museum's latest initiatives allows participants to engage with animals which aren't at the top of the cute, cuddly list.

Sergeant Pepper the North American porcupine, Pidge the rock pigeon, Gir the corn snake, Stormy the striped skunk, Bowie the Virginia opossum, and Slydell and Daisy the North American river otters are the focus of the Animal Adoption Program. To be clear, and fitting given today's climate of social distancing, this is a completely virtual adoption program. None of the animals will leave the EcoTarium.

Launched in September 2019, funds received from the program act as donations to help "financially support [the animals'] everyday care and enrichment," said Kerry Castorano, EcoTarium vice president of institutional

advancement. Adoption funds are put directly to the purchase of food, toys, and treats as well as providing care for the animal including veterinary visits.

In response to museum guests' requests for birthday and holiday gift options, including professional photos and biographies of the animals, the EcoTarium developed the program in September of last year.

Each animal has their own unique personality, and Castorano said the EcoTarium staff gets to know the animals well as their caretakers during educational activities and marketing and museum promotion campaigns.

Sergeant Pepper, the resident porcupine, "has been with the museum since 2002, loves sweet potatoes, and enjoys walking around the lower plaza to check in on the chickens who live near him," Castorano said.

Adoption packages range from \$25 to \$125. In addition, there is a monthly donation option for the river otters, Daisy and Slydell, inclusive of a pri-



Sgt. Pepper, N. American Porcupine

vate, behind-the-scenes tour of their space. Individuals may adopt multiple animals or the same animal more than once. Automatic annual renewal is available to ensure continued support throughout an animal's lifetime.

All adopters receive a package with information about the animal, an adoption certificate, and a photo.

More advanced package options come with notes from the animal's lead keeper, a painting created by the animal, a stuffed animal toy version, and a meet-and-greet session with the adopted animal.

Meet and greet sessions occur annually and give adopters the chance to see their animal up close, ask questions, and learn more directly from the handlers. Adopters may bring up to five guests to the session.

The first meet and greet took place in November 2019 and was "a big hit," said Castorano who believes their pigeon enjoyed the attention received when flying around the display in front of his adopters.

The next meet and greet is scheduled for November 24, 2020.

Adoption packages can be purchased online and can be sent as a unique gift. Packages priced at \$25 are sent via email whereas all other packages are mailed to the recipient or can be picked up at the EcoTarium.

Fallon Health is here... for you, your business and our community.

This unprecedented health crisis presents challenges for all of us, personally and professionally. And it's important that we support one another during this time—within our communities of friends, families, neighborhoods and businesses. We need to work together to manage the spread and tragic effects of the coronavirus (COVID-19).

Helping businesses and their employees

Fallon is working with businesses and employees that are negatively impacted by the crisis. In addition to providing open enrollment information virtually, we'll also have staff available for outbound calls to prospects and members. We're working directly with businesses that are shut down or having employees quarantined or hospitalized.

Helping in the community

Our mission of making our communities healthy always guides us at Fallon. It's become more important in light of how deeply the coronavirus crisis is affecting people all over.

To help, we're providing support to the "Worcester Together" fund, which addresses immediate basic needs and long-term local relief efforts. And we're offering mini-grants to organizations that support food insecurity response efforts as well as senior isolation and support services.

Here for you

Our staff remains dedicated to the health and well-being of our members and the communities we serve. Their ongoing contributions ensure that Fallon is and will remain fully operational and continue to serve your needs—and the needs of all those we work with and for.



TROLLEY YARD, FROM PAGE 1

O'Reilly Auto Parts, opened along Grove Street in the past year, but the new arrivals haven't been limited to just retail.

Fallon Health made the decision to relocate its Worcester Summit ElderCare facility from East Mountain Street to Grove Street two years ago. Constructed on a former manufacturing site, the new 15,500-square-foot building opened last fall and offers health care and support services to individuals 55 and older who qualify for nursing home care but wish to remain living independently.

Kristine Bostek, vice president of Summit ElderCare, said the site was identified for its central location, easy highway access and available parking. She said some of Fallon's employees take public transportation, so the WRTA bus stop in front of the main entrance was an added benefit.

More change on the horizon

Meanwhile, the neighborhood's long-time business owners have watched the area grow around them.

Alan Lavine, vice president of sales at Percy's TV & Appliance on Glennie Street, has seen the area explode with new businesses and population over the past few years. Percy's — a nearly 95-year-old business — moved from downtown Worcester to the neighborhood in the 1980s.

"It's going to be changing a lot more in the next two to three years. There's a ton going up," he said. "I'd say in two to three years, you won't recognize Gold Star Boulevard. There's been a lot of turnover — some people that owned buildings decided to sell to other peo-

ple or redevelop them into more of a modern area."

Lavine sees so much potential in the neighborhood that he purchased the retail building at 31-35 Park Ave. that includes New England Roast Beef earlier this year. Within the next year or so, he plans to make aesthetic improvements to the structure. Lavine said there are no plans for New England Roast Beef to leave, but believes the renovations might attract new businesses.

"The goal is to really make it look nice, make it pleasing to the eye, comfortable for tenants, good parking, safe, all that type of stuff," he said.

A few blocks away, the Worcester Center for Crafts is also reinvesting in the area. Located on Sagamore Street since the 1950s, the center features studios, classes, artists in residence and a gallery store. Executive Director Elaine McKenna-Yeaw said after she was hired a year ago, she noticed many passersby didn't realize the building was an arts center given its nondescript exterior. Now,

the organization is in the process of writing grants and raising money for a "renomakover" that will include a new front lawn sculpture, outdoor seating, improved lighting and fresh paint.

"We're so grateful there's so much construction and renovation all around us," she said. "What we want to do is give a whole new face to our building and we're very excited to pursue this in terms of what we want to communicate to the community — you're welcome to come inside, there's art inside, there's activity inside."

The effect of COVID-19

Despite the outbreak of COVID-19, which has shuttered businesses across the city, many in the area are remaining optimistic about the neighborhood's future.

Lombardi said she will likely open the new Bean Counter location in May, offering takeout, delivery and curbside pickup. If that happens, she said she may close her Highland Street location temporarily. Greater Good

can no longer serve beer or food in its taproom, but has been offering to-go can sales six days a week.

Lavine, who added new interactive displays and live cooking demonstrations at Percy's in recent years, has put that on hold because of the virus. As an essential business, the store remains open but is only allowing four customers in at a time and offering local, same-day delivery.

"Hopefully when this is over we'll start that up again," Lavine said. "We find that people want interaction, they want to use the products before they buy them, they want to see them in action."

At the Center for Crafts, staff made the difficult decision to cancel the first spring workshop session. In the meantime, they've hosted weekly live stream craft sessions, shared creative ideas and posted fun, at-home challenges on social media.

"We're still running a lot of fantastic workshops and classes, but right now we're on hold," McKenna-Yeaw said.

See related story on page 10.



Early spring 2020 view of the Trolley Yard looking towards downtown Worcester.

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Location: Sheraton Hotel & Conference Center, Framingham MA or Webinar*

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Eight Weeks, a World of Difference

By Sharyn Williams, VP of Marketing, Communications, Programs, and Events, Worcester Regional Chamber of Commerce

On March 24, as the coronavirus began to rev up in Massachusetts, Governor Baker issued a stay at home order. Now, nearly two months later, we live in a different world. One where social distancing has become part of our vocabulary and face coverings are now an accessory – and, along with shut down businesses, both are mandatory. Individually and collectively, we are living with a new normal. With the shutdown of commerce, the business community is experiencing unprecedented economy suffering and uncertainty. Here's how the Chamber has been helping.

CHAMBER STEPS UP TO SUPPORT ALL BUSINESSES

The Chamber immediately became proactive with regard to outreach to the business community and transitioning our work to offer emergency communications and online programming. And, we are still offering programs. We quickly transitioned our events to an online platform offering webinars and virtual meetups to keep businesses connected and learning. After ensuring the safety of our staff by enabling them to work remotely, one of the first actions the Chamber took was to work with members, all experts in their fields, to develop webinars to assist businesses with remote working. The first of those offerings included two sessions featuring detailed information about doing just that – getting up and running remotely. From equipment needed, to software options, to program settings and best practices, these sessions helped dozens of members and non-members

to get back to business quickly. Our second topic focused on the Federal Cares Act and accessing forgivable loans, understanding unemployment options, and compliance for these businesses already in peril. Since then, the Chamber has held 8 more webinars for a total of 10 completed and an additional 6 scheduled with more in development. Sponsored by Fallon Health, the new series includes topics such as: Protocols for Cleaning Office and Commercial Space During COVID-19, Cash Flow for Businesses During a Crisis, Practical and Legal Challenges of Reopening a Business, and Selling During the Coronavirus, among other relevant topics. From the beginning of this crisis, the Chamber has issued regular email correspondence, first on a daily basis, later three times a week, to communicate important announcements. These curated, daily emails contain detailed information about emergency loans and grants, their eligibility requirements and links to applications, emergency legislation, free webinars, opportunities to hear from legislative officials, and much more. All information has been archived on the Chamber's website and is accessible on the homepage. Our dedicated staff called every single Worcester Chamber member to check in on them, find out if they needed anything, listened to their experiences, and offered assistance. Those who could not be reached, received personal emails with offers to help and provide guidance on available financial assistance at all three levels of government: municipal, state, and federal. We also answered dozens of calls, fielded questions about specific hardships and unique circumstances,

and provided customized information. And we did the same for the dozens of businesses who reached out by email with similar questions about where to get help. We advocated and helped to shape local, state, and national policy related to the COVID-19 response. We met regularly with elected officials giving them real-time scenarios as they continued to frame new bills and orders. All these services and more have been provided to our Chamber members, and in fact, to all businesses...even non-members. We did this because we are all in this together and the economic well-being of our economy needs the entire business community to thrive. And we are responsible to the business community, we work for them. Don't take it from us, check out the article below about what members are saying about how we have helped them.

WE ANSWER TO OUR MEMBERS

The vast majority of the Chamber's funding comes from our members. We are an independent member-driven organization funded by our members through annual membership dues, program sponsorship and event fees, and advertising in our newspaper, e-news, and website. That's why we don't answer to anyone but you, the business community. We are not eligible for any stimulus money or loans. And, it's why we need your support. With so much of the business community in jeopardy, we need everyone to be a member of the Chamber so that we can continue to work on your behalf – to help businesses through the COVID-19 pandemic. But, we do so much more.

Our regular services are many and varied and includes advocating for business-friendly legislation and policies, supporting economic development including actively recruiting businesses to the region, education and programming to help our members grow their businesses and expand their professional development, and connecting businesses to encourage partnerships and increase opportunity.

WHAT'S NEXT

We are preparing now for businesses to reopen and for commerce to resume. The Chamber will continue to provide up-to-date information about the phases of the plan, what segments can open and when, best practices, and guidelines for how to reopen safely. So, if you're not already a member, we ask you to please join us. Become involved in the network, you'll make new connections, get the inside scoop, and the Chamber will support you and your business in many ways. Membership is just \$395 a year and supports our mission to help you. Monthly payment plans are available. Now more than ever, we know that there is strength in numbers and that we are all in this together.

GET INVOLVED

Join online at WorcesterChamber.org or contact our member sales associate: **Kristen Luna at 508.753.2924 or KLuna@worcesterchamber.org**
FIRST TIME MEMBERS
Now through June 30, you'll get 14 months for the price of 12 and an enhanced listing on our website, a value of \$200, that will help you get found with keywords, graphics, and more.

READ WHAT CHAMBER MEMBERS ARE SAYING



Gary Riello
Anytime Fitness

Chamber member Anytime Fitness follows the rules. The facility shut down on March 24 after the governor's announcement – an especially hard blow for owner Gary Riello. Because he has no employees, he is not eligible for PPP loans. Chamber staffers Kristen Luna and Alex Guardiola who have both reached out with offers to assist in whatever way they could. They shared with him various options and information about what's available to a business like Anytime Fitness – and to Gary personally. In the fitness industry, social distancing will be a challenge. Worried about a "free for all" when facilities are allowed to reopen, Gary looks to the Chamber to help him understand what the regulations will look like and hopes that people will realize that he continues to follow the rules and provide a clean, safe space for the fitness-minded.



Charles T. O. King IV
Charles D. B. King II
FASTSIGNS of Worcester

The Worcester Regional Chamber of Commerce has proven a great resource and network for FASTSIGNS. Its programs have introduced us to business opportunities and provided valuable community insight and a wealth of benefits. The Chamber has also been exceptionally responsive during the coronavirus pandemic, providing regular updates that relate to business operations in the Worcester market. We have benefited from being able to provide 'social distancing' and 're-opening' signage to businesses in the greater Worcester area. The team's collective efforts to serve its members, as presented by Kristen, have been outstanding. We are glad and proud to be members of the Chamber. It is a membership that continues to provide value to our business goals.



Patrick Patton
Patsie Dugan's

"Without the Chamber, I wouldn't know that grants from the city even existed." That's what Patrick Patton stated when asked why he's a Chamber member. With very little experience navigating his way around government websites and loan applications, Pat has relied heavily on the Chamber's regular COVID-19 communications. "Information in those emails has been a lot more pertinent to me than anything officials have sent out." Now, a recipient of a federal PPP loan and having just heard from Mayor Petty himself that Patsie Dugan's received a grant from the City of Worcester, he is grateful to the Chamber, "my membership dues were a great investment." Pat is busy preparing for the reopening of his pub and anticipating the Chamber to help provide information about guidelines and requirements.

Socially Responsible Investing Becoming Increasingly Important

By Kathleen Glowacki, Sr. Financial Analyst, Investment Management, Bartholomew & Company, Inc.

“Every dollar you spend, or don’t spend, is a vote you cast for the world you want.”
– L.N. Smith

That truth certainly holds, but here at Bartholomew & Company, we may edit that slightly to also include “where you invest your dollars”.

Investors desire to have their money grow – that is the fundamental point of investing, of course! However, there has been a flourishing desire to balance asset growth with belief principles. Over time, there have been more (and increasingly better) ways to accommodate values and incorporate them into investment decisions. Value-based investing is a multi-faceted investment philosophy that allows investors to align their personal beliefs, or simply their general desire to help make the world a better place, with their investment dollars.

There are two main terms in value-based investing that are sometimes used interchangeably but are in fact quite different: SRI (socially-responsible investing) and ESG (environmental, social, and governance investing). SRI investing was the traditional way to approach this attitude of investing through “negative screening” or more simply: full exclusion of certain investments. A very common example of this is portfolios that exclude investments in companies that gain a significant amount of revenue through sales of alcohol, tobacco, and firearms. SRI investing can align with any number of value principles an individual or organization may have – all you need to focus on is removing certain investments, industries, and companies from the portfolio. In turn, you are now investing more dollars in companies that align to the standards of your defined principles.

ESG investing is quite a bit more layered than simply excluding certain investments. The E, S, and G are three siloed buckets that have a number of factors within them:

1. Environmental factors such as issues of climate change and natural resources;
2. Social factors including labor conditions, human rights, and community outreach; and
3. Governance factors such as Board of Director composition, management quality, and corporate structure.

From there, these and many more categories can be delineated down to even more granular metrics to measure companies to determine if they are suitable for investment. This strategy attempts to balance traditional financial metrics with a holistic ESG overlay.

You may be asking yourself, “Well, wouldn’t ESG and SRI approaches lead us to basically the same place?” Not necessarily. For example, an SRI mandate of excluding carbon-emitting companies would always fully exclude companies that have a negative environmental impact. Let us then say that this fictional carbon-emitting company has a diverse Board of Directors, an excellent track-record of community engagement, and just

instituted a “green” project specifically introduced to have a more sustainable emissions process. Maintaining the exclusionary process of SRI would leave out this company regardless of these other more positive factors. An ESG-focus, on the other hand, might find the company to have enough positive factors to consider it as a potential investment. From there, if the ESG managers do become shareholders, they can use proxy voting to push for implementation of more change to align that company with other key ESG metrics. In this example, the ESG shareholders might push for the organization to fund more “green” projects, for instance.

ESG encapsulates a holistically responsible view of investments while SRI takes a hard stance for particular values that matter to the investor. Both philosophies can be justified and used to help investors guide their dollars to securities that are right for them.*

At Bartholomew & Company, we work with each client individually to ensure we understand your unique

and multi-faceted investment goals. If those goals include some form of value-based investing, our team is here and happy to help. If you would like more general information, please visit the United Nations Principles of Responsible Investing webpage <https://www.unpri.org/> or call our office at 508-753-8807.

Securities and advisory services offered through Commonwealth Financial Network®, Member FINRA/SIPC, a Registered Investment Adviser.

**Investing in the stock market involves gains and losses and may not be suitable for all investors. The investment’s socially responsible focus may limit the investment options available to the investment and may result in returns lower than those from investments not subject to such investment considerations.*



Kathleen Glowacki, Bartholomew & Company

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WORCESTER BRAVEHEARTS

Pen Pal Program Fosters Connection Between Seniors and Students

By Jennifer Ingham, correspondent

By sharing stories within the pages of written journals, local students and seniors are finding joy and building friendship as participants of the Worcester Bravehearts Pen Pal Program, which offers benefits of community enrichment and the removal of generational barriers through the development of positive relationships.

The Worcester Bravehearts are part of The Futures Collegiate Baseball League, which is made up of seven teams from various parts of New England who play 28 home and 28 away games each. During the 42 weeks in the year outside of their regularly scheduled baseball season, the Bravehearts support multiple child-focused efforts including a K-6 literacy program called "Ticket to Read," run in collaboration with the local Worcester Railers hockey club.

Giving back to the local community is one of their core organizational values.

"On the surface, we're a baseball team and our product is entertainment," says Worcester Bravehearts General Manager Dave Peterson. "However, the programs we support have nothing to do with baseball. They were born out of the desire for our team to remain engaged in the community beyond the 10 weeks of baseball games played."

In 2016, Bravehearts leadership

started exploring the idea of pairing Worcester Public School students from grades 6-8 with local seniors, asking them to write each other letters on a monthly basis in a journal. They started the Pen Pal Program on a small scale with the hope of growing their reach over time.

Each program participant receives a brand-new journal, with suggested conversational topics provided by Bravehearts staff. Entry ideas are general and open-ended, to encourage creative thinking and an authentic sharing of unique life experiences.

Topics that participants can consider include subjects such as, "describe the first time you attended a sporting event" or "talk about your role model and the ways they've influenced you." No matter their age, "pals" eagerly look forward to their monthly journal delivery, discovering new things about each other with each page they read.

A collective partnership effort in collaboration with local businesses helps to offset expenses. Worcester Regional Chamber members Fallon Health and Cornerstone Bank are partners in this work, helping to fund supplies and make connections with senior facility directors.

With the rise of new technology, using a pen and paper to communicate has become a secondary practice



After weeks of writing, pen pals meet up at a Worcester Bravehearts game in 2019 to watch the team play and enjoy good 'ol American ballpark fare - hot dogs and soda.

to email, texting, video chat and the like. Many students are navigating new ways of writing and reading letters.

When students are matched, teachers are ready to help them if they have trouble deciphering cursive or understanding generational terminology. The intent is to support literacy, grammar, and spelling skills, along with fostering human connection inside and outside the classroom.

"We don't limit students or seniors or have any kind of word count for journal entries, but encourage participants to write content that will spark a genuine conversation," says Peterson. "We're aiming to teach the art of communication and how that keeps us connected. Think about the last time you received a card in the mail? Didn't that make you feel special?"

Typically, 80 students and seniors become "pals" in the program each year. Letters are exchanged for four to six months, with the program culminating at the end of the school year with a chaperoned outing to a Worcester Bravehearts game. Students and seniors are guests at a game at Hanover Insurance Park at Fitton Field where they finally get to meet their "pal" in-person and share in a catered meal

of hot dogs and ballpark snacks.

With schools closed due to the COVID-19 pandemic and social distancing recommendations in place, the program is temporarily on hold. However, Peterson hopes that the Worcester Bravehearts season opener will be held sometime this summer and that the annual Pen Pal outing can move forward, as is tradition. If that is not possible, program organizers are exploring the option for a Zoom chat with matches, so they are able to virtually meet and reflect on their journal conversations throughout the previous months.

Over the past four years, nearly 400 seniors and students have corresponded, with some seniors writing to multiple young people each school term. Peterson hopes that in coming years, the program will continue to grow, despite some of the potential operational challenges, given our rapidly changing environment.

"We're making connections and that remains our primary objective with the Pen Pal Program," says Peterson. "We will continue to develop our programs in the community with that philosophy in mind."



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The program emphasizes:

- adaptability and flexibility with change
- excitement for new opportunities
- motivation, initiative, and decisiveness
- organizational skills, an ability to plan and facilitate
- acceptance and respect for multiple and diverse perspectives and backgrounds

Applicants should have:

- a proven record of leadership capacity
- an eagerness to have a personal impact
- a passion and commitment to making Worcester a leading, livable city
- a commitment to remain involved in the area

LEADERSHIPWORCESTER.COM

101 Years of Girl Power: Girl Scouts' Camp Bonnie Brae

By Dominique Goyette-Connerty, Correspondent

While many are enjoying the coveted cookie season, the Girl Scouts of Central and Western Massachusetts (GSCWM) have something even sweeter to celebrate: more than 100 years of empowering young girls at one of their camps.

Located in Otis, Mass., Camp Bonnie Brae is the nation's longest, continuously operating Girl Scout camp.

With a century of operation under its belt, there's certainly no shortage of history at the camp. It was the first in the country to offer a counselor training program, and the first to develop a waterfront "buddy procedure," ensuring kids' water safety.

One of the most notable moments, however, may have been when first lady Eleanor Roosevelt visited in 1941 to attend the Western Hemisphere Conference. There, she joined 136 Girl Scouts and Girl Guides from 24 states and sixteen countries to promote international friendship amid World War II.



First lady Eleanor Roosevelt visited the camp in 1941.

Initially envisioned in 1919 as an opportunity for girls to get away from the big city of Springfield and enjoy the outdoors, Bonnie Brae has since evolved into a summer mainstay where girls from all across Massachusetts – like Brownie Scout Lily Tatro, 8, of Housatonic – return year after year for fun. "I like when we have the campfires," she says.

Offering a range of activities like archery, arts and crafts, and cooking; and developing a number of skill sets including night safety, leadership, and general outdoor skills, "Camp is at the heart of Girl Scouts," says Katie Chappell, program manager for GSCWM.

"Camp is where we work to make a lasting impression on young women. It's where they get to try new things – things they don't get to experience at home or in their troops," she added.

Despite Bonnie Brae's Western Mass. location, GSCWM CEO Pattie Hallberg says more than half of the organization's girls come from Worcester County, and residential camp is really about exposing them to new opportunities, people, and environments.

Camp Bonnie Brae "is a great way for girls to get away without going too far. It's far enough to provide a new experience, yet close enough to home to provide comfort for families," Ms. Hallberg said. "So it's really not about geography -- it's about opportunity."

Prior to her time as an administrator with the Girl Scouts organization and her five years as a camp counselor, Ms. Chappell was a Girl Scout herself who camped at Bonnie Brae for more than a decade.

Growing up in Chicopee in what she describes as "not a great neighborhood," Ms. Chappell never played outside and her troop didn't really go anywhere off school property. She recalls hiking through mud and picking blueberries during her first year at camp, but not enjoying her experience because she "didn't like getting dirty."

But after returning ten more summers and getting out of her comfort zone, Ms. Chappell's now certain she "wouldn't be the strong, confident person [she] is today without camp."

And while all camps are working toward this common Girl Scouts mission of building "girls of courage, confidence, and character, who make the world a better place," Bonnie Brae is particularly important "because it's been a home for girls for more than one-hundred years," Ms. Chappell says.

Girl Scout Addison Witkes, 14, has camped at Bonnie Brae for five years and says she always looks forward to it. "I've made some really good friends I've been able to connect with there and outside of camp too, so it's a really special place to me," she added.

Not only does camp offer new opportunities and grows friendships, it's also a Girl Scouts staple in raising the next generation of leaders, environmentalists, and STEM enthusiasts



For decades, water sports on the lake has been a staple of the activities enjoyed by campers.



While canoes have given way to streamlined kayaks, the experience still provides scouters with plenty of fresh air and exercise.

like Ms. Witkes, a member of the Girl Leadership Board, who says she's "definitely interested in science and the medical field" as potential future career paths.

Open to any girl from second through twelfth grade, regardless of whether they're a Girl Scout or not, camp sessions last for one to two weeks and revolve around themes such as backpacking and hiking, and "Rock the Boat," which includes water activities like kayaking – one of Ms. Tatro's favorites, and sailing – one of Ms. Witkes' favorites.

While the landscape and programs of the camp have changed over the years, evolving with the girls' interests and needs, "the core values have really remained the same," Ms. Chappell

says, citing the efforts to help girls overcome their fears while exploring nature and the outdoors.

In their second century of operation, Ms. Chappell expects their programming to continue to adapt based on what girls want to see and do. Whatever those new offerings and activities are, Camp Bonnie Brae plans to be there for another 100-plus years or so, upholding what the Girl Scouts organization set out to do in the early 1900's.

And plenty of campers from Central Mass. have hiked the trails, swum in the lake, and sat up into the night recounting the day's adventures with newfound friends.

"Girls will always need a safe place" to be themselves and explore, Ms. Chappell says, and "we provide that."

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POLAR PARK IS RISING:

Dreams and Imagination Coming to Life in Kelley Square

By Charles Steinberg, President, Worcester Red Sox

You can picture a speedy future Boston Red Sox star horizontally stealing second base like Dave Roberts, then becoming vertical as he dusts off his WooSox jersey and pants. He will be credited with “the first steal” in the history of Polar Park.

But perhaps his “steal” should have an asterisk.

“The first steel” in the history of Polar Park went from horizontal to vertical, safely, on Monday, March 16, 2020 – the visual proof that Polar Park is rising.

As you navigate the new Kelley Square Peanut at this Cracker-Jack ballpark, drive along Madison Street and see the future of Worcester transforming before your eyes (which you should keep on the road, of course).

Let your mind imagine this magnet drawing hundreds of thousands of people to our city, to our Canal District, and to the businesses and establishments from Shrewsbury Street to Green Island Boulevard.

Imagine more than 6,000 parking spaces for 10,000 fans—all within a short walk through a finally-connected downtown. From Main Street to city hall to the Worcester Common to the DCU Center to Shrewsbury Street to Union Station to the Canal District to the Theater District, Worcester’s last piece of the jigsaw puzzle let’s us all enjoy one livable, walkable downtown neighborhood in the ‘Heart of the Commonwealth.’

Imagine the local culinary delights that declare, “You could only be in Worcester.”

Imagine the heart-shaped clock and smiley-face foul poles that declare, “You could only be in Worcester.”

Imagine the dioramas along the concourses that depict Worcester history, its baseball history, and the Triple-A history of the Boston Red Sox. Families will want to come early, savor the sights, and connect the generations.

Those families will also see the tribute to the 10,000 postcards and the members of the “21 Club,” all of whom helped “Woo the Sox” to this land of kindness, compassion, and vitality.

And even before the first pitch is thrown, maybe we will have a visit from Jim Rice when we erect the left field foul pole, and from Dwight Evans when its right field counterpart rises.

Yes, we have so much to look forward to as, together, we transform our



This rendering of the ballpark gives viewers a birds-eye-view as to how Polar Park is situated in relationship to Worcester’s downtown, Route 290, and Kelley Square.

[field of] dreams into reality.

It’s happening now.

It’s happening here.

And not only have each of you contributed to making it happen, each of you stands to benefit as fans flock to our “field of dreams” and visit our restaurants, hotels, and shops.

Let us remember: each year, more fans attend Major League Baseball and Minor League Baseball games than the NFL, NBA, and NHL combined. To the comical cynics who chirp, “Yeah, but you play more games!” we say, “Exactly!” Fans come every day. The rhythm of baseball is the rhythm of business. It’s the steadiness, the dailiness, the reliability of the attendance that helps the surrounding businesses. A Super Bowl is fine, but what about the other 50 weeks of the year?

Dream of a Polar Park that celebrates the April to September season, and that has imaginative year-round uses to pour thousands of people into our businesses September to April.

Polar Park is rising, right between our Coney Island Hot Dogs, our Table Talk Pies, and our Kelley Square Peanut. Have a box of Cracker Jack. We’ll provide the prize.



View of the park from Union Station looking southwest toward the field.

FROM CLASS, PAGE 12

graduation. “I did have some opportunities lined up but have since been informed that the firms I was consulting at have begun a hiring freeze and canceled internship programs,” he explained. “I hope that employers are willing to look beyond potential empty spots in people’s resume when this pandemic passes.” Jack hopes that once this is all over, he can intern on a scholarship as an assistant data journalist at The Economist.

Jorgo Gushi, Quinsigamond Community College

Jorgo Gushi, president of the Quinsigamond Community College stu-

dent body, believes that in the face of this pandemic, “hiring needs are still crucial and open positions still need to be filled.” Jorgo was confused and sad at the initial thought of abruptly ending his senior year’s activities, but knew it was the right decision in the end to protect everyone. He still feels a sense of stress and insecurity, but is hopeful that these feelings will eventually go away as life returns to normal. “Although we might not be able to experience the last moments of our senior year,” he said, “2020 will be remembered as the brave class that sacrificed its senior year for the good of those they cared for.”

Rebecca Landry, Fitchburg State

Rebecca Landry, a graduating senior at Fitchburg State University, feels “stressed because everything has changed very suddenly,” she explained. For the spring semester in 2020, she has worked a full-time internship with the Chamber as a communications intern. “I am sad that we cannot finish the semester as planned,” she says, “but I’m glad that I have the opportunity to continue working and learning remotely.”

While learning about these graduates’ lives and passions, it became clear to me that while things are par-

ticularly difficult for their career plans right now, the unique effects of graduating into a pandemic won’t last forever. 2020 graduates are hopeful, and I wasn’t expecting to find so many seniors who, even if they didn’t have a job or internship lined up, were looking to the future with optimism. This pandemic is sure to change daily American life for some time, but our local colleges and universities have prepared them to adapt to the circumstances. Hopefully, employers will see their value and accommodate them not only now, but in the future as we collectively rebuild our nation from this crisis in due time.

MEET STARTUP WORCESTER: RYDRO FARMING: 2019-20

By Dominique Goyette-Connerty, correspondent



Nolan Ryan, Founder, Rydro Farming (Photo courtesy: Jeff Baker, Visions by Baker)

Founder: **Nolan Ryan**
Company: **Rydro Farming**
Age: **23**
Hometown: **Holden**
Favorite Worcester Bite: **Pho Dakao**
Favorite Down Time Location: **Hiking Bovenzi Conservation Area**

“Toe-mae-toe” or “toe-mah-toe?” However you say it, Startup Worcester alum Nolan Ryan wants to bring you a higher quality, better tasting one any time of year.

Founder of Rydro Farming – a small, hydroponic tomato farm – the Central Mass. native and Bryant University graduate (’19) is committed to providing fresh, local produce to the region, regardless of the season.

This agricultural route wasn’t always in his plans. An international business major with a concentration in finance and a minor in French, Mr. Ryan was no farmer. In fact, he had never even heard of hydro farming until a college project his freshman year tasked him with “creating a business model that would generate cash flow and also have an impact on local citizens” – but this project was enough to plant the seed.

After a phone call to a Worcester Regional Chamber staff member, months of research, and consultation of other resources, Mr. Ryan renovated an old barn in Holden and began growing in June of 2018.

For fourteen months, the newly minted farmer grew tomatoes, focusing on how the plants react and adapt to different environmental conditions. He toyed with different lighting environments, using LED lights and adjusting carbon dioxide and nutrient levels, to understand how the plant develops.

The goal of fostering this highly-controlled environment is to create optimal, ideal conditions which produce the freshest and best-tasting tomatoes. “Instead of modifying the plant to fit the environment, I’m modifying the environment to fit the plant,” Mr. Ryan explained – which is also why he never uses pesticides or insecticides.

Rydro Farming started with tomatoes because “people are familiar with tomatoes,” Mr. Ryan says, and, in New England, they “can’t find a quality tomato year-round.”

In general, produce growers located far from clientele face the issue of shelf life. Whereas heirloom tomatoes specifically are highly perishable, growers face even more of a challenge. They have to pick the tomatoes before they’re ripe in order to get them to customers, resulting in a product with less flavor, fewer nutrients, and not as good of taste. Some restaurants in this area even cut out tomato-based dishes – like a caprese salad – from their menus during winter months due to this issue.

Rydro Farming solves this problem; not only are the tomatoes grown locally, they also taste better and are better for you.

Emphasizing the business’s priority of providing local, healthy food, Mr.



Rydro Farming growing facility in Holden can grow all year.

Ryan is gravitating toward a contract grow model, which would allow Rydro Farming to focus on highly-perishable specialties, rather than mass produce crops like a greenhouse. This would essentially work as a subscription service where restaurants, meal prep services, and catering companies could specify the number of pounds of each product they want and the frequency of delivery desired. Mr. Ryan would use this order information to grow food based on individual customer needs.

Currently, he’s in the process of designing a 20,000 square foot cultivation space for heirloom tomatoes, but says he’ll expand to growing other crops eventually.

And as his business (and tomatoes) continue to grow, he’s not forgetting where his roots are.

“I had to ask myself [whether I wanted to stay in the Worcester area] when I got out of college. I initially wanted to be in a bigger city like New York or Boston, but personally felt I could have more impact in Worcester. I’ve seen all the progress, energy, and enthusiasm in the city and wanted to be part of the new wave helping with redevelopment,” he said.

“If I have even a small part to play in that, then that’s motivating. I love to be part of something,” said.

WORCESTER SPORTS STREET: Changing Times, Hard Times, Lessons Learned

By Tim Murray, Chamber President and CEO



In 1970, Bobby Orr flies into history and into our hearts after scoring the winning goal in overtime. Although we are craving sports right now, many memorable moments can sustain us as we wait for the next great shot.

High Schools Merging

It was undoubtedly difficult for Central Mass sports fans who appreciate many of the local high school athletic rivalries and traditions to hear the news that Holy Name and St. Peter Marian high schools will be merging into one school. The new high school will be named St. Paul’s beginning in the 2020-2021 academic year and will be located at the current Holy Name facility on Granite Street in Worcester.

While it won’t be easy for all, we hope that this merger will present an opportunity to rebrand and attract new students and families while the administration, and athletic department, does its best to honor long-standing traditions and rivalries. Best of luck to the new St. Paul’s High School. Go Knights!

Hockey Season Shortened, Baseball Delayed

The COVID-19 pandemic has claimed the remainder of the Worcester Railers hockey season and is now claiming all or parts of the local spring sports season. The Worcester Bravehearts, part of the Futures Collegiate Baseball League, have pushed back the opening of their season until further notice and the future Worcester Red Sox Triple A baseball team have put their season on indefinite suspension. Let’s hope we can experience the boys of summer in some fashion in 2020.

High School Athletes Get Life Lesson on Disappointment

Our hearts go out to the many high school athletes, in particular the seniors, who were not able to com-

pete in this spring’s athletic season for their high school teams. These young men and women were cheated out of some special moments because of this pandemic. May the lessons they have learned through athletics – especially resiliency and perseverance – guide them through this disappointing situation, and life, knowing there will be better days ahead.

It’s All a Matter of Perspective

Bobby Orr was once asked how he became so skillful at skating with the puck on the ice. He said growing up in Parry Sound, Canada, when they would play pick up hockey games, each team would often have ten guys on the ice instead of the usual five per team. Accordingly, when he played against other teams in regulation games with only five opponents on the ice at once, he said the ice seemed wide open.

I share this story because I thought of it when I saw that Boston College’s record-breaking halfback, A.J. Dillon was drafted by the Green Bay Packers. Dillon broke the college’s rushing records despite other teams stacking eight of their eleven defenders in the box knowing that the BC offense was run dependent. Now coupled with Packer’s quarterback Aaron Rogers, I think Dillon will be considered one of the steals of this year’s draft and will go on to become an elite NFL running back.

These are not fun times for sports participants or enthusiasts, but as The Great Santini might say, “Hang tough sports fans, game day is on the horizon!”

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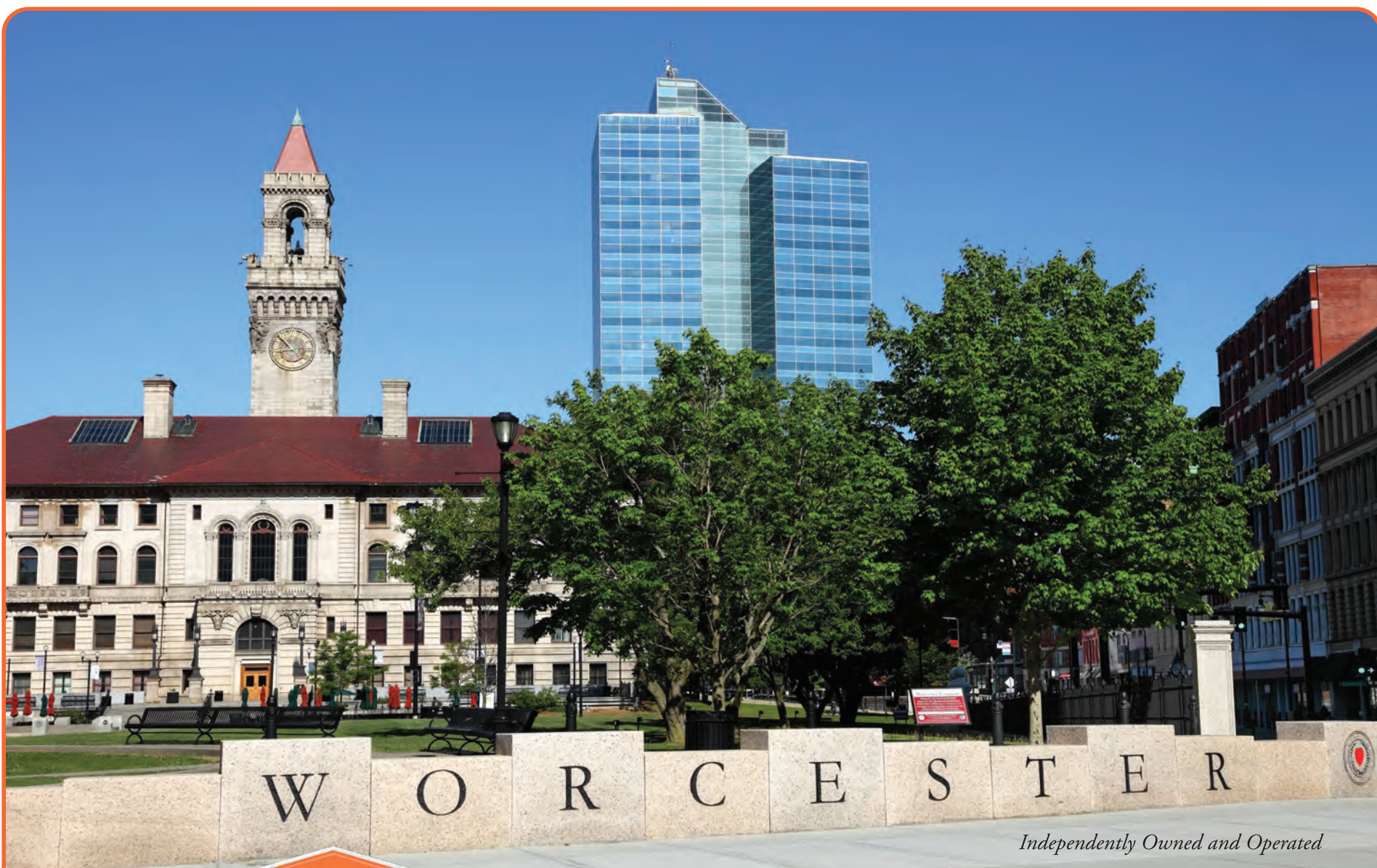
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Get Inspired by Sbrogna's Artistic Promotions

By Rebecca Landry, Communications & Marketing Intern

Following a moment of inspiration, Linda Sbrogna launched the eponymous Sbrogna's Artistic Promotions to help others see the beauty of the world, which she celebrates every day, through art.

During her time as an administrative assistant for the Department of Medicine at UMass Medical School, Sbrogna, a member of the Auburn Chamber of Commerce, was asked to create an art gallery that would bring peace, beauty, and color to the fifth floor of the teaching hospital. The gallery was comprised of UMass staff artwork and was displayed for patients, staff, and visitors to enjoy.

When the gallery was near completion, a patient entered and expressed his appreciation to Sbrogna.

"Whoever put this gallery together, I want to thank them for taking a few minutes of my pain away," she anecdotally remembered the patient saying.

This interaction, combined with a previous love for art, encouraged Sbrogna to open her own business. Sbrogna's Artistic Promotions is designed to support artists and inspire others through these works.

Currently, she represents two artists, Ron Rosenstock and Mark Doyle, and one musician, Mauro DePasquale.

Rosenstock is a photographer, photo tour leader, and retired photography teacher. His work can be viewed at the Auburn Public Library or through programs scheduled by Sbrogna.

Rosenstock says that Sbrogna has

been successful in promoting his teaching and they both strive to inspire as many people as possible. "When I exhibit, I don't exhibit with the hope of selling my photographs, I exhibit with the hope of inspiring people," said Rosenstock.

His program Photography as a Spiritual Experience is an exercise in being present to the moment, with a slide show of his work and the work of other artists set to quiet music. The program was shown at the Worcester Senior Center last Spring, and Sbrogna feels delighted to continue working with the senior center in the future.

"We have been presenting in many senior facilities and the joy and smiles in the rooms are priceless. We are bringing the beauty of the world to the people," said Sbrogna.

Doyle, a professional photographer with a range of photo lab services at AutumnColor Digital Imaging in Worcester, says that Sbrogna promotes his work by sharing it with the people she meets. She also creates email campaigns and makes phone calls to spread the word.

His work is displayed in revolving exhibits at the Worcester Regional Airport and on a panorama in the Bank of America building on Park Avenue in Worcester. This panorama is a long term exhibit that features Doyle's photos printed onto wallpaper. Doyle is presently focusing on architecture and real estate photography.

Sbrogna also promotes the music of

jazz artist DePasquale, featuring it on her website. DePasquale plays with award-winning jazz trio Jazzed Up, who were voted Best Jazz Act in the 2019 Worcester Music Awards.

The trio performs at various local venues, including Bull Mansion and Medusa Brewing Company, and at WCCA TV's Central Mass Jazz Festival.

Excited to continue making a difference in the community, Sbrogna joined the Chamber in 2013. She was looking for the opportunity to connect with other business owners, support them, and learn from them.

Chamber membership has helped Sbrogna feel connected to the Worcester community and build long lasting relationships with other members, while

also promoting artists. "Linda goes to nearly every Chamber meeting in Worcester County," said Doyle, expressing that the Chamber's events also provide the opportunity for Sbrogna to share his work with other members.

She has been a part of the Women's Information Network, which recently re-branded to the Power of Women. In that vein, Sbrogna says she has enjoyed the "opportunity to meet other women in business and learn from them."

Sbrogna has also attended other Chamber events centered around networking opportunities, including Business After Hours, and plans to continue attending Chamber events as they open up doors to her business and the local art community.



Photography, this one by Rosenstock, is part of the portfolio.

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Meet Leadership Worcester: Emrah Ercan Cakir '19

By: Emrah E. Cakir, Correspondent

I am an “alien” — a Turkish man in Worcester.

Born close to the Russian border in the northeast region of Turkey, my family moved around a lot. At the age of 11 years old, we finally settled in Fethiye, a beautiful Mediterranean turquoise coast town where my mother still resides today.

I earned my Bachelor's Degree in Computer Science from Ege University in Izmir, Turkey, and immediately following graduation, I immigrated to the U.S. to attend the MBA program at New York Institute of Technology. While there, I met my wife Jin, an immigrant from Taiwan, who was also enrolled in the program.

After obtaining my degree, I took several Information Technology (IT) positions on both coasts all the while, building my foundation of professional experiences.

Between mid-2008 and the end of 2010, my wife and I lived in Worcester for the first time when I worked as a consultant at Fallon Health. Even though I left the area for another project, I knew that some day, I wanted to return.

We got the opportunity just a few years later, when in 2013, I returned to Worcester and to Fallon Health where I am now an employee.

Today, I am a senior leader overseeing the Information Management and Analytics department. The work we do inside the walls of the office is important, but to me, the work we do

outside, in the community, is equally significant.

Fallon has given me numerous opportunities over the years to volunteer in the city and beyond. I've been a part of efforts to address hunger by helping to build food pantries in our public schools and community-based organizations. I have also participated in the United Way's annual 'Day of Caring' events and have led or co-led Fallon Health's dragon boat team since its inaugural event in 2017.

In 2018, a colleague shared an article with me that piqued my interest. It was about Leadership Worcester. The timing could not have been better as I was looking to expand my network and presence in the community. Being accepted as part of the class of 2019 was a great honor.

Over the nine-month period during which Leadership Worcester takes place, my peers and I learned important information about a wide range of topics. Leaders from the community share information about important aspects of the region including education, public safety, government, economic development, arts and culture, healthcare, and urban sustainability.

As an immigrant, healthcare and education are closest to my heart—they are evolving parts of our community and the contributions that I could make in these areas could yield greater returns.

Through the program, I learned a lot about the inner workings of a giant

and complex organism, our city. It quickly became clear to me just how important and difficult it is to balance the many needs of our community. Every aspect is interconnected and limited resources must be shared and managed. To see first-hand how the members of our community support all these pillars— through events, donations, volunteering, and more — was eye-opening.

Leadership Worcester equipped me with invaluable friendships, relationships, tools, and the awareness that I needed to engage and motivate others around me to share their time, talents, and treasures. By working together, we can contribute to the greater good of Worcester. I owe so much to the experience and will not take it for granted.

It has been nearly a year since my cohort graduated, and in that time, I was named one of the Worcester Businesses Journal's 40 Under Forty leaders. An honor that I humbly accepted with gratitude.

The Leadership Worcester experience has also helped me establish relationships with several local non-profit organizations for which I have done pro-bono consulting and have served on boards. These include the Pakachoag Music School of Worcester and the EcoTarium's 200th anniversary celebration committee. I am also excited and honored to share that during the museum's annual meeting in May, I am being nominated to their board of



Leadership Worcester Alum
Emrah E. Cakir, Fallon Health

trustees.

As I approach my 7th anniversary at Fallon Health, I am realizing that I have now spent almost 10 years in and around Worcester – making it the city that I have lived in the most. Worcester is the city that I call home and where I am proud to raise my family. My wife and our young sons are my inspiration and drive to continue this path of leadership and community engagement.

Leadership Worcester has been an important component in my leadership development and has positioned me best for my next leadership opportunity.

And, for that, I am forever grateful and prepared.

Leadership Worcester applications are being accepted through May 29 at leadershipworchester.com



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- | Called every member to check in and offered assistance.
- | Transitioned events to an online platform adding 20+ webinars and virtual meetups to keep businesses connected and learning.

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