

### **Summer 2021**

A QUARTERLY PUBLICATION OF THE WORCESTER REGIONAL CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

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Above: JetBlue COO and College of the Holy Cross alumna Joanna Geraghty announces the airline's decision to resume service at ORH. Photo by Dominique Goyette-Connerty.

or the first time since October of 2020, commercial flights are returning to the Worcester Regional Airport. JetBlue Airways announced May 26 they would be the first major carrier to resume service at ORH after the coronavirus pandemic ravaged the commercial airline industry.

Joined by elected leaders, city hall decision-makers, and Massachusetts Port Authority (Massport) executives in the Worcester Regional Airport terminal, JetBlue COO and College of the Holy Cross alumna Joanna Geraghty said that nonstop service would resume August 19 with daily flights to JFK Airport in New York City.

On October 21, JetBlue will increase NYC flights to twice daily, and will add back nonstop flights to Fort Lauderdale, Florida.

JetBlue was the first commercial airliner to begin nonstop service out of Worcester Regional Airport after Massport acquired the facility in 2010 - they had been flying nonstop routes since 2013. Ms. Geraghty affirmed that despite the pandemic's challenges, JetBlue "remains as committed to Worcester today as we were on day one."

At JFK, JetBlue's hub, passengers bound from Worcester will be able to directly connect to any one of more than 70 domestic and international destina-

### COMMERCIAL **FLIGHTS RETURNING TO WORCESTER REGIONAL AIRPORT JetBlue Resuming Service This Month**

by DOMINIQUE GOYETTE-CONNERTY, DIRECTOR OF COMMUNICATIONS

and DAVID SULLIVAN, ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT & BUSINESS RECRUITMENT ASSOCIATE

> tions. Fort Lauderdale will have connections available to destinations in the South as well as the Caribbean and parts of Latin America.

> JetBlue's flights were the most popular at Worcester Regional Airport, offering service to New York City as well as Ft. Lauderdale and Orlando in Florida. The hope is that American and Delta, which also had to suspend service in Worcester due to financial constraints, will follow the trail that JetBlue is blazing.

> Those in attendance at the May 26 press conference included Lt. Gov. Karyn Polito, Massport CEO Lisa Weiland, Congressman Jim McGovern, Massport Board Chairman

> > COMMERCIAL FLIGHTS, PG 10

### Worcester Green Corps Working Toward a Greener, More Sustainable Future for the Heart of the Commonwealth

by MIRANDA HOTHAM, WORCESTER GREEN CORPS COORDINATOR

here is no denying that Worcester has been growing and evolving over the past five-plus years, both visually and economically. It is expected that the city will continue with this momentum, which in turn will attract more business and residents to the area. As Worcester grows, it is important to do so in a way that incorporates the current residents and businesses, as well as the prospective newcomers. Furthermore, these new developments are a chance for Worcester to commit to sustainability and green pathways for growth. By incorporating feedback from residents and businesses while focusing development efforts on environmentalism and sustainability, there is an opportunity to embrace these changes in a positive and effective way in order to remodel the city and provide an example for what the future of urban growth and development in New England could look like.







B-ORGANIC

The purpose of the Worcester Green Corps (WGC) is to ensure that as Worcester grows, we include current residents and local businesses in our conversations

WORCESTER GREEN CORPS, PG 14

Above: A Worcester Green Corps team at one of their cleanup sites this summer. Photo by Ravana Petrone.



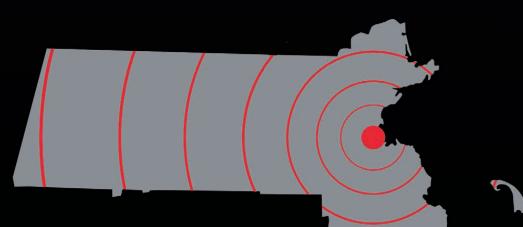


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Each quarter, 20,000 copies are mailed to 6,000 members and business professionals and roughly 13,000 City of Worcester registered voters. The remainder are distributed among area businesses.

If you're interested in being a point of distribution, or would like to know more about placing an advertisement in the Chamber Exchange, please contact Kristen Luna at kluna@worcesterchamber.org. To contact the editorial staff, please email Dominique Goyette-Connerty at DGoyetteConnerty@worcesterchamber.org

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

### Worcester Regional Chamber CALENDAR of EVENTS

### August

#### AUGUST 24 • 5:00PM - 7:00PM • FREE PLAY BAR ARCADE

Young Professionals Night Out Sponsor: UniBank

#### AUGUST 26 • 2:30PM - 3:30PM • CHAMBER OFFICE

Seminar Series: Time Management During COVID Sponsor: TD Bank

### September

#### SEPTEMBER 7 • 12:00PM - 1:00PM • CHAMBER OFFICE

Construction & Real Estate Roundtable with Maugel Architects *Sponsor:* Bowditch & Dewey

#### SEPTEMBER 9 • 7:00AM - 9:00AM • POLAR PARK

The Breakfast Club

*Presenting Sponsors:* Berkshire Bank, Harvard Pilgrim Health Care *Friend Sponsors:* AIS, The Willows at Worcester

#### SEPTEMBER 14 • 8:00AM - 9:00AM • HYBRID/CHAMBER OFFICE

Seminar Series: Prepare to Win Now! What Your Business Must do Right Now to Win Big This Year - ft. Mike Savage *Sponsor:* TD Bank

#### SEPTEMBER 15 • 10:00AM - 11:00AM • VIRTUAL ON ZOOM

### A SUMMER IN REVIEW: WORCESTER GREEN CORPS A SUCCESSFUL COLLABORATION



### Partnership Program Already Making a Tangible Difference in the City

#### by TIMOTHY P. MURRAY, PRESIDENT & CEO

n July 6, 2021 the Worcester Green Corps (WGC) was officially launched with a kickoff celebration to formally establish its formation at the city's iconic Elm Park. That was day one. The WGC is a public/private partnership between the Worcester Regional Chamber of Commerce (Chamber), the City of Worcester, and the United Way of Central Massachusetts (United Way) to create a sustainable year-round effort to clean and beautify the city.

The WGC partnership includes collaborations with organizations like the Worcester Community Action Council (WCAC), MassHire Central Workforce Board (MassHire), and the Regional Environmental Council (REC). In partnering with WCAC through their YouthWorks Summer Jobs Program, the WGC deployed nearly 20 young people who worked throughout the city during the months of July and August on several cleanups and beautification projects. This effort was supported financially in part by Fallon Health, National Grid, and the Worcester Business Development Corporation (WBDC).

Additionally, each Friday during the six-week program, these young people heard presentations and took tours of businesses and public facilities, such as the city's water filtration plant, for example. This gave the youth participating in the program the opportunity to learn about education and career pathways in the environmental and green job sectors — which are growing at a rapid rate.

The summer initiative by these WGC crews covered approximately 30 miles, 137 streets, and several parks, resulting in the collection of more than 4,000 pounds of trash and debris. Our WGC Coordinator Miranda Hotham is now working on engaging partner organizations, various stakeholders, and community groups across the city to organize volunteer and sponsored cleanups for the rest of the year as a means of complementing the WGC summer initiative. The Chamber's board of directors committed to hiring and paying the WGC Coordinator position on a fulltime basis in order to facilitate this year-round effort. Having Miranda wholly dedicated to developing these partnerships and identifying the needed resources to fill existing gaps is a critical part of the operation.

However, beyond the cleanup and beautification efforts which are a major thrust of the WGC initiative, the WGC Coordinator will also work to develop programming and educational materials to assist our member businesses in ways they can engage in environmental best practices that save these businesses money and contribute to combating climate change.

During my time as Mayor, Worcester was one of the first communities in Massachusetts to establish a Climate Action Plan and a Greenhouse Gas Emissions inventory focusing on steps a municipality could take to reduce greenhouse gas emissions overtime. Similarly, as Lt. Gov. working with Gov. Patrick and the legislature, we passed legislation like the Green Community Act and Global Warming Solutions Act which incentivized the development and use of renewable green energy such as solar and wind. Likewise, the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative facilitated new investments in energy efficiency and renewable energy programs for Massachusetts residents and businesses. Through these experiences, it was important for government to help lead, facilitate, and model environmental best practices wherever possible. However, to dramatically reduce the factors contributing to climate change and its adverse impact, we must engage our businesses whenever possible to inform them of new technologies and practices that can assist them in reducing their carbon footprint in a cost-effective manner. This is particularly important for our small businesses that power our regional and national economy. This business outreach will include actively promoting our members currently working in the Green Jobs and renewable energy space to fellow members. We are looking forward to meeting this challenge as we seek to protect our environment and strengthen our local economy. If you're looking to help us achieve this mission of making Worcester a cleaner, greener, more sustainable, and more beautiful place to live, work, visit, and do business, I recommend reaching out to WGC Coordinator Miranda Hotham to find out specific ways in which you can get involved in the Worcester Green Corps' efforts right now. 💙

HR Roundtable: Strategic Thinking & Decision Making Presenting Sponsors: Worcester State University, Aetna Supporting Sponsor: Bowditch & Dewey

#### SEPTEMBER 16 • 4:30PM - 6:30PM • THE HANOVER INSURANCE GROUP

Diverse Professional Roundtable: Annual Networking, Awards, & Recognition Event *Sponsors:* BC/BS of MA, The Hanover Insurance Group

#### SEPTEMBER 23 • 5:00PM - 7:30PM • AC HOTEL WORCESTER - PAVILION

MEGA Business After Hours w/ Corridor 9/495 Chamber *Sponsor:* Rockland Trust Bank

#### SEPTEMBER 30 • 2:30PM - 3:30PM • HYBRID/CHAMBER OFFICE

Seminar Series: The Best Way to Stop Global Warming? You Decide in This Climate Simulator *Sponsor:* TD Bank

### October

#### OCTOBER 28 • 8:00AM - 4:00PM • DCU CENTER

Worcester Women's Leadership Conference *Presenting Sponsors:* The Hanover Insurance Group, UMass Memorial Health

### RECAPPING LEGISLATIVE UPDATES AT THE LOCAL AND FEDERAL LEVELS

What You Need to Know About the Infrastructure Deal, Amtrak's Expansion, Brownfields Tax Credits, and Film Tax Credits

by ALEX GUARDIOLA, VICE PRESIDENT OF GOVERNMENT AFFAIRS



n June, Gov. Baker announced Massachusetts' COVID-19 numbers had dwindled down to a point where the state could proceed to Stage 4 of his reopening plan and begin to navigate the "new normal." Our community was celebrating the lowest infection and hospitalization rates since the onset of the coronavirus pandemic. Paycheck Protection Plan (PPP) dollars were being disbursed, the Restaurant

Revitalization Plan was in full swing, and our businesses' doors were reopening. It was now time to start tackling some of the bills that had to be placed on the back burner because of the pandemic.

President Biden made the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) a priority and the legislature approved the measure in order to help states and municipalities streamline their recovery. Gov. Baker promised to move those dollars forward to help Massachusetts' cities and towns, and so far, all of these measures have shown promise and have gotten the Commonwealth back on track.

So, what about President Biden's other major priority: a trillion-dollar infrastructure bill?

#### **FEDERAL LEVEL**

#### A BIPARTISAN, \$1 TRILLION INFRASTRUCTURE DEAL

At the end of July, the U.S. Senate voted to take up the bipartisan bill that would make far-reaching investments into the nation's public infrastructure. The 67 to

32 vote, which included 17 Republicans, was the first major example in over four years of Democrats and Republicans crossing the aisle for the collective betterment of the country. Decaying roads and bridges must be a priority for both parties and, thus far, there has been good work to get this bill done.

The measure represents a crucial piece of President Biden's economic agenda, and the agreement which gave rise to it was a major breakthrough in his quest for a bipartisan compromise. However, what was also notable were the concessions Biden had to make in order to strike the deal, including less funding for clean energy projects, lead pipe replacement, transit, and other measures aimed at helping historically underserved communities.

Cities and towns like Worcester desperately need upgrades to arteries, bridges, waterways, and public transit. One thing which became apparent to the entire nation during the pandemic was the need for broadband to be included in this major bill. As students and parents learned and worked remotely, access to quality, reliable broadband was an issue. States across the U.S. quickly realized how far behind we are in this area compared to other countries. Politicians and decision-makers began to have conversations around making broadband a designated utility, much like electricity and natural gas. This bill has been hailed as "the most significant long-term investment in our infrastructure and competitiveness in nearly a century" by President Biden.

To deem it a true bipartisan bill, concessions had to be made by both sides. Neither side got everything they wanted, but as the president said, "That's what the notoriously bad Los Angeles traffic, a city which held the number-one spot for the past 30 years.

#### LOCAL LEVEL

#### **BROWNFIELDS TAX CREDIT**

In our continued effort to stimulate economic development and environmental justice, the Worcester Regional Chamber of Commerce, along with other development partners, advocated for reform of the Brownfields Tax Credit program.

In order for developers to continue to come into the city and region, many things must occur. One of those major things is remediation of contaminated land here in Central Massachusetts. Historically, the region has been a heavy manufacturing region since the Industrial Revolution. The science available then probably wasn't what it is now, and there was a lack of understanding about how contamination of land would result in contamination of our waterways that serve as our drinking water. Now, as the region's economy has changed, remediation of contaminated land is a governmental requirement which mandates developers to test soil, and if contamination is found, it must be removed before a project can begin. For Central Massachusetts, this means a hefty portion of the land here needs to be remediated before construction can begin.

In our combined efforts and with the help of the Baker-Polito Administration, significant changes have been made to the scope of review on appeal, denial explanation, asbestos eligibility, appeals timeline, and hiring of a dedicated environmental engineer along with three additional audit staffers.

Lastly, one of the major changes is the review of these new guidelines. The Department of Revenue, which is charged with approval or denial of Brownfields

Tax Credits, will solicit stakeholder feedback on the regulation two years from the date of final promulgation, thereby allowing the tweaking of these regulations as needed.

#### FILM TAX CREDIT

As part of the budget deal reached, state House and Senate negotiators reached a compromise to permanently extend the tax credit to film producers, following months of simmering debate about the program.

The film tax credit, which was created in 2006, was otherwise set to expire at the end of 2022. The program offers a 25% tax credit on production expenses and a sales tax exemption to any TV and movie production that spends at least 50% of its budget

or 50% of its shooting days in Massachusetts. Any project that spends more than \$50,000 in the state also qualifies for a 25% payroll tax credit. The budget deal would increase the threshold to require that 75% of a production's budget or filming days be spent in Massachusetts.

A number of movies have been filmed here in Worcester in recent years. What isn't always talked about is how much of an economic driver the film tax credit is in the city and region. It lures companies to film a movie or show here, meaning more folks are staying in hotels, eating at restaurants, and spending dollars locally on other services that these crews require. This is a win for the state and our continued economic development.

"Cities and towns like Worcester desperately need upgrades to arteries, bridges, waterways, and public transit."

it means to compromise and forge consensus — the heart of democracy." Plenty of work still lies ahead to finalize this bill and, in the spirit of democracy, compromising will have to be at the center of all conversations.

#### AMTRAK'S NORTHEAST CORRIDOR EXPANSION

For us here in the Northeast, one of the most significant elements of the infrastructure bill is the \$66 billion carved out for intercity rail — the largest investment in passenger rail since the creation of Amtrak by Congress in 1970 to preserve a basic level of passenger rail service. The deal includes \$22 billion in "grants" for Amtrak; another \$24 billion specifically for the Northeast Corridor; and another \$20 billion for intercity service, safety grants, and grade crossing improvements.

The Northeast upgrade is set to be completed by 2035, cutting travel times and boosting capacity on the nation's busiest route: Boston to Washington. Advocates argue the plan can help take more private cars off clogged American roads and eliminate some airplane trips while reducing greenhouse gas emissions which contribute to climate change.

Here in Massachusetts, time and again, legislators have discussed the need to expand rail service, seeing as prior to the pandemic, the 45-mile radius outside of Boston was deemed to be the worst traffic congestion in the country. Of course, the pandemic halted most traffic across the nation, but as commutes start to rebound now, Boston has still been ranked the second-worst trafficked city in the country — edged out only by New York-Newark. Both cities ranked worse than





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### Madison Properties Breaks Ground on First Residential Development Near Polar Park

*by* **DAVID SULLIVAN**, ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT & BUSINESS RECRUITMENT ASSOCIATE

ext time you go to Polar Park or visit the Canal District, take a good look around.

While the ballpark currently stands alone, in just a few years' time, it will be the lynchpin of a multi-million-dollar campus of modern apartment buildings, offices, laboratories, and hotels.

At a ceremonial groundbreaking on July 21, Denis Dowdle, president of Boston-based real estate firm Madison Properties, announced the first development in the Polar Park campus (other than the ballpark itself) would be going up starting next year.

"We're breaking ground, and we're going vertical," said Mr. Dowdle, referring to the six-story, 228-unit housing development planned for across the street from Polar Park's front entrance.

Mr. Dowdle was joined by elected leaders such as Lt. Gov. Karyn Polito, as well as Worcester Red Sox executives, Worcester City Manager Edward M. Augustus, Jr., and Worcester Mayor Joseph M. Petty. The groundbreaking signified an important milestone in finalizing the plans for Polar Park.

During the groundbreaking ceremony, which was held at Polar Park's concourse, each speaker praised the coordination it took to pull together a baseball park

and a mixed-use campus in order to transform a series of overgrown parking lots and dirt piles into a district of the city with a new lease on life.

Before Polar Park was a concept, Madison Properties already had plans to build new properties at Madison Street (no relation) in the Canal District. Once the news



*Above:* "SOMA," the residential building, will be right across the street from Polar Park. Photo by Dominique Goyette-Connerty

broke that the Pawtucket Red Sox were coming to Worcester — a move orchestrated by Worcester Regional Chamber of Commerce President and CEO Tim Murray along with City Manager Augustus and other local leaders — Mr. Dowdle began to coordinate with them on planning a mixed-use campus to complement the ballpark.

Madison Properties already had experience with Worcester, having built the Walmart shopping plaza off Route 146 years ago. But once returning to Worcester and seeing firsthand the transformation the city's downtown area had undergone in the past few years, Mr. Dowdle's interest and enthusiasm for investing in the Heart of the Commonwealth was reignited.

"Nothing attracted the team and us more to Worcester than the Canal District," said Mr. Dowdle in a previous interview for *Chamber Exchange: The Newspaper*, praising the neighborhood's cultural vibrancy.

In 2019, Madison Properties purchased parcels of land on Madison Street which belonged to aerospace manufacturer Wyman-Gordon. Now, plans are in place to construct two residential buildings; two hotels; and a six-story, 200,000 square foot laboratory and office building. A 340-space municipal parking garage is currently being built by the city in the same space. Madison Properties is also building a six-story office building immediately behind left field at Polar Park.

The plan as of earlier this year was to begin construction on the first residential building, called "SOMA" for "south Madison Street," sometime in 2022. In 2023, construction on the left field office building and the second residential building are

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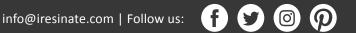
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expected to begin, and in late 2024, the two hotels and the lab building will break ground.

SOMA is planned to have a mix of one- and two-bedroom apartments, with a smattering of three-bedroom apartments to test the market for family-sized units in the city. Mr. Dowdle noted that his firm hopes WooSox players sign season-long leases with the space, and that they are targeting young professionals as tenants. Amenities at the living space will include outdoor fire pits, a pet washing station, and common areas for meetings.

The first residential building is estimated to be an investment of \$89 million.

Lt. Gov. Polito and Undersecretary Ashley Stolba of the Massachusetts Executive Office of Housing and Economic Development both expressed their excitement for the Madison Properties developments, especially as it pertains to building more housing. "We need 200,000 units of housing of all kinds all across our Commonwealth," said the Lieutenant Governor. "I can't underscore enough how important it is for other communities to look at Worcester and understand their housing needs," she added.

The Worcester Chamber conducted a 2019 housing study which confirmed this gap and proposed further investment in housing developments as key. With close to 1,000 new housing units being constructed between proposed projects such as the Madison Properties developments, Boston Capital's Table Talk Lofts, Wood Partner's Alta Seven Hills, and Churchill James' The Cove, Worcester has made great strides to close the housing gap with both affordable and market-rate apartments.  $\heartsuit$ 



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### COUNTRY BANK AWARDS TOTAL OF 20 CHAMBER MEMBERSHIP SCHOLARSHIPS Helps Small Businesses During Pandemic Dy RAYANA PETRONE, LASELL UNIVERSITY INTERN

 he year 2020 brought hardships for us all. But one group of people particularly impacted has been small business owners.

With many businesses having to cut costs in order to ensure their survival of the COVID-19 pandemic, some had no choice but to drop their Chamber memberships. The Worcester Regional Chamber of Commerce and Country Bank — both passionate about the success of the business community and small businesses specifically — decided to step in.

The two partnered to create the Country Bank Small Business Chamber Member Scholarship, through which Country Bank funded one year of Chamber membership costs for 20 small businesses. The scholarship was announced on the Chamber's radio show, the Daily Radio Blast, on February 4, 2021. Businesses which had previously been members of the Chamber were eligible to apply for the scholarship online and recipients were announced on a rolling basis.

As part of the scholarship award, recipients were offered the opportunity to join Country Bank's Vice President of Community Relations, Jodie Gerulaitis, as a guest on the radio show hosted by Hank Stolz. The radio segments were an opportunity for these scholarship recipients to promote their business and discuss why they wanted to (re)join the Chamber. "Joining them during their radio interview and understanding the impact this will make for their business and the community is incredible," said Ms. Gerulaitis. "As a long-time member of the Chamber, Country Bank's staff has had the opportunity to benefit from the valuable programs and events that the Chamber offers; we feel this membership offers a vital connection to growing and supporting businesses within the city," she said on the inspiration behind the program.

As 2021 progresses, things are looking up for the scholarship recipients. Many are eager to utilize their Chamber membership as we all attempt to navigate a new normal. One recipient, Jenna Knight of Never Defeated Coaching, said, "I have so many big ideas and I can't wait to really implement them." She added that Chamber events have inspired her to think outside of her business' current concept as she moves forward with her ADHD coaching business.

Other recipients, like Jennifer Hernandez, CEO and director of strategic marketing of GEM Marketing Solutions, are planning on using their funded membership to expand their teams. Ms. Hernandez expressed nothing but gratitude for her Country Bank scholarship, saying, "What a blessing that was to kind of give our small business an opportunity to grow with a wonderful and valuable membership to the [Chamber of] Commerce."

Another Country Bank scholarship recipient seeing success is Alan James Co., a custom leather goods shop located inside the Worcester Public Market. Owner Bill Laudon also shared his experience operating a small business on the Chamber's Daily Radio Blast, noting that his craft has faced challenges as people have gravitated more toward mass-produced items. But with no other leather shop around, moving to the Worcester Public Market was a "no brainer" for him. And since the opening of Polar Park, he's seen an increase specifically in custom orders. He said, "I care about each project and it will not pass my doors if it's not perfect."

The Chamber is incredibly thankful to Country

Bank for their partnership on this scholarship program. Spanning a service area of 35 cities and towns in Central Massachusetts, approximately 85% of the Chamber's 2,000 members are small businesses with ten employees or fewer. In essence, the Worcester Chamber is the ultimate voice for the Worcester region's small business community, and Country Bank's scholarship program has helped the nonprofit business advocacy organization continue to aid small businesses on the road to pandemic recovery.

#### SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENTS:

- Alan James Co.
- Armsby Abbey
- ArtsWorcester
- B-Organic
- Che! Empanada
- GEM Marketing Solutions
- · Jennifer Lee's Bakery
- Let's Empower, Advocate, and Do, Inc. (LEAD)
- Never Defeated Coaching
- Nuestra

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- Nuovo Restaurant
- Preservation Worcester, Inc.
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- Worcester Hibernian Cultural Center
- Why Me & Sherry's House

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We've been proudly supporting our communities since 1850, and now we've taken that support to Polar Park. As one of the 21 Founding Partners, it has been an exciting inaugural season to cheer for. In carrying on our commitment to Worcester, we'll be actively working with the WooSox, local businesses, and the greater community to continue fostering your home team spirit. See you out there!



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### Chamber's 2021 Game Changers Conference & Expo Centers Around Planning for an Equitable Future

by DOMINIQUE GOYETTE-CONNERTY, DIRECTOR OF COMMUNICATIONS

ust as COVID-19 infections and hospitalizations started to taper off and vaccination rates rapidly rose, the Worcester Regional Chamber of Commerce held their 2021 Game Changers Conference & Expo virtually this spring.

What was once a half-day, in-person conference pre-pandemic instead took place over Zoom in June for the second year in a row as a four-day mini-series. Its sixth year under the Game Changers brand, the Chamber's annual business conference typically brings together members of the Central Massachusetts business community to learn about local innovations and business opportunities, hear keynote speakers, and network with other professionals.

This year's conference theme, "Planning for an Equitable Future: Economy, Justice, and Education," was organized in response to the racial reckoning and calls for change taking place across our country over the last year-plus, reignited by the death of George Floyd and several other Black Americans. This 2021 theme built on the 2020 conference theme, "Not Business as Usual," which explored how the region's business community could work toward fostering a more diverse workforce and providing opportunities for diverse groups of people.

Similarly, discussions amongst keynote speakers, panelists, awardees, and participants in 2021 were centered around diversity and inclusion in the workforce, but they were also designed to extend the conversation beyond the office walls to examine efforts toward equity in other facets of everyday life: in the city, schools, health care systems, and more.

The four-day conference opened with recognition of five Game Changer Award recipients. In his remarks, Worcester Chamber President and CEO Timothy P. Murray said the award winners were "engineering change, creating community, and helping propel Worcester forward, especially as we emerge from some of the most challenging times we've ever witnessed."

The awardees were as follows: Dr. Mattie Castiel, the City of Worcester's Commissioner of Health and Human Services, for her commitment to providing equitable access to COVID-19 testing and vaccines as well as other resources; biopharmaceutical company AbbVie for their company's leadership in DE&I efforts and their new internship/scholarship program for Worcester Public School students; Fred Taylor, new president of the Worcester branch of the NAACP, for his leadership in diverse hiring and advocacy for underserved communities; both Worcester State University (WSU) and Quinsigamond Community College for their collaboration on the 100 Males to College program; and Tocci Building Corporation for their hiring of a diverse workforce on the Courthouse Lofts construction project.

Described as "catalysts for change" by the Chamber, several of the 2021 Game Changer Award recipients expressed gratitude for the recognition as a Game Changer. "I always wonder what the impact of my work has been. The fact that this award is called the 'Game Changer' means that someone has noticed — and for this, I am grateful and honored," said Dr. Castiel upon accepting her award. "I thank you for giving me the ability to appreciate that I have made some positive changes in our community, and I will let that be the force that continues to push me forward to positive change for all who live and work in Worcester."

Following the awards ceremony, President and CEO of Massachusetts League of Community Health Centers, Michael Curry, addressed attendees for Education, Fred Taylor of the NAACP's Worcester branch, and Stephanie Williams of the City of Worcester; it was moderated by Stacey Luster of WSU. Participants discussed diverse and equitable initiatives already in place in the city's health care systems, schools, and workforce; as well as the need for new or additional initiatives as the community continues to strive for equitable access.

The second, "The Role of Employers in an Equitable Recovery," included Katie Crockett of Lamoureux Pagano & Associates Architects, Angela Dixon of Berkshire Bank, Celia Richa of the Greater Boston Chamber, and Derrick Kiser of Fresh Start 508. Moderator Bonnie Walker of Worcester Academy asked panelists to share how they have worked towards diversity, equity, and inclusion in their companies and organizations.

More news coverage of both panels and the entire conference can be found on the Worcester Chamber's website.

The conference concluded with a closing keynote address from Judge Serge Georges, Jr. of the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court, who wrapped up by discussing the importance of simply giving someone a chance in life.

"The zoomed-out, 3,000-foot view of diversity and inclusion can, in many ways, [...] distill down [...] to just giving people a chance. We can only go so far before we need somebody to say 'yes' to us," said Justice Georges. According to him, everyone has been given a chance to further themselves, whether they recognize it or not, and giving that gift back to someone else is the least we can do.

Justice Georges discussed the role in which business owners and community leaders have in giving someone a chance. "You have so much power in your life to change lives. You can make a dent in this world by believing in someone, particularly those of us that don't look like you," said Justice Georges.

Presented by AllWays Health Partners, the 2021 Game Changers Business Conference and Expo was also sponsored at the corporate level by Bowditch & Dewey, Tocci Building Corporation, and UniBank. The Game Changer Awards were sponsored by Digital Federal Credit Union (DCU), keynotes were sponsored by Saint Vincent Hospital and The Hanover Insurance Group, and panel discussions were sponsored by Health New England and Clark University Graduate Studies. The next Game Changers will be held in October of 2022.



with an opening keynote about the history of racial inequities in the U.S. The presentation, "Quantum Leap: The Unmasking of Anti-Black Racism in America," took a deep dive into the long-standing racial inequalities and injustices across the country which have historically impacted the Black community and continue to do so today.

Throughout the speech, Mr. Curry continually asked participants to "take a Quantum Leap with [him]" and work to connect the dots of these inequalities and injustices by looking closely at a collection of historical facts.

Part of his presentation focused on what data show about how the COVID-19 pandemic has disproportionately impacted communities of color in the U.S. Citing the higher rates of death and infection among Black and brown communities, Mr. Curry said, "This disease was not born equitably across neighborhoods, across zip codes. It ravaged many of our immigrant, Black, and brown communities."

He added that the coronavirus crisis only exacerbated and underscored existing societal issues, saying, "If this pandemic made us realize anything, it's that we're all interconnected."

Days two and three of the four-day conference were dedicated to panel discussions followed by Q&A sessions. The first, "Worcester's Equity Agenda," consisted of Dr. Castiel, Ryan Flynn of the Massachusetts Business Alliance

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#### COMMERCIAL FLIGHTS, CONTINUED

and Worcester County Sheriff Lew Evangelidis, Massport Aviation Director Ed Freni, Worcester Mayor Joseph M. Petty, and City of Worcester Chief Development Officer Peter Dunn.

During her remarks, Lt. Gov. Polito made a call to action for American Airlines and Delta Airlines, which have yet to return service to Worcester. "I am so thrilled that you [JetBlue] are leading the way and we hope that the example you've set with the announcement you made today will be followed by others," she said.

Representatives for both American and Delta have said previously they will wait and see when it comes to following JetBlue's lead in resuming service, but the demand and market for commercial flights here in the region is already well-defined.

In the fall of 2020, the Worcester Regional Chamber of Commerce conducted a survey of 1,300 residents in the area to gauge demand for particular flights at Worcester Regional Airport. Most notably, more than 93% of these respondents indicated they would be "likely" or "very likely" to fly from Worcester if the flight destination they wanted was available.

The demographics for the area are strongly in favor of a competitive regional airport. Worcester Regional Airport served 165,000 passengers annually before the pandemic, showing that even with limited options for commercial flights, there is still a very promising level of demand present. In the 1980's, as many as 340,000 passengers traveled through Worcester, indicating that there is still room to grow.

Additionally, according to Massport, more than a million people live closer than or equidistant to Worcester Regional Airport when compared to any other surrounding airport. This demographic flew more than 3 million times in 2019, a number that — when coupled with the 93% rate of demand found in the Chamber's survey — indicates Worcester has the potential to truly be a competitive option with other regional airports and perhaps even with Logan Airport, as it runs out of physical capacity and traffic congestion leading into Boston becomes worse.

Not only is there a strong case to be made for demographics and demand, but the economic development prospects of Worcester are resilient and stronger than ever, garnering national attention. Earlier this year, Bloomberg highlighted Worcester as a top-10 city in the country to strongly recover from the pandemic as vaccination rates rise.

The recent construction of Polar Park — along with over \$437.5 million in new construction happening in the Canal District alone — is testament to Worcester's economy roaring back to life.

Vaccination rates have also been a primary factor for airlines to determine geographic areas that are primed for air travel. Massachusetts has fully vaccinated 4.2 million of its almost 7 million residents, the second highest percentage of a state's population in the country.

*Below:* Massport and JetBlue executives joined state and local leaders on May 26 to announce the return of commercial service to ORH. Photo by Dominique Goyette-Connerty.



For its part, the Worcester Chamber is doing all it can to promote the Worcester Regional Airport at every turn. The Chamber was instrumental in introducing commercial airlines like JetBlue to the tremendous potential that Worcester holds, and continues to try and recruit airlines such as Breeze Airways — a promising, new, low-fare airline which offers service to mid-sized cities.

Massport has done the same, and since 2010 has invested more than \$140 million into improvements for Worcester Regional Airport. Massport, which also operates Logan, is continuing to invest in Worcester by undertaking a main runway redevelopment and a \$2 million rehabilitation of taxiway B. Massport also spent \$32 million on a CAT-III landing assistance system in 2018 which helps pilots land in inclement weather. Massport has made it clear that they promote Worcester in every conversation they have with airlines, and they've used the Chamber's survey data in these conversations.

Celebrating their 75th anniversary this year, Worcester Regional Airport is an asset to the city and to the region, creating 587 local jobs, disbursing \$29 million in payroll, and generating \$96 million in economic impact since 2010.

Congressman McGovern perhaps said it best when describing the importance of a regional airport: "Great cities and great regions thrive on great airports. They connect us to other parts of the country, they connect us to the world, and they unlock unlimited potential for our entire region."  $\checkmark$ 

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### WORCESTER JOBS FUND PROVIDES COMMUNITY OPPORTUNITY

by KAREN PELLETIER, EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT

or years before the COVID-19 health crisis, most business members of the Worcester Regional Chamber of Commerce shared the same top concern: their workforce.

In response, the Chamber has made workforce development a key function of our services. For the past seven years, we have helped to build recruitment relationships between employers and area colleges and universities; worked one-on-one with employers to start or grow their internship programs; partnered with Worcester Public Schools on career and technical trainings like the Innovation Pathways Program and Worcester Night Life; and have worked closely with other community trainers, employers, and community agencies as a liaison to the business community.

One program seeing an amazing return on investment and offering life-changing career training for participants and much needed talent for employers is the Worcester Jobs Fund. The Chamber has served on the Jobs Fund oversight committee since its creation by Worcester City Manager Edward M. Augustus, Jr. in 2016. Currently chaired by the Chamber and Worcester Interfaith, the committee is comprised of representatives from MassHire Central Region Workforce Board, Worcester Community Labor Coalition, MassHire Central Career Centers, and Worcester Public Schools.

The Jobs Fund's goal is to ensure that development projects and job expansion efforts in Worcester bring a direct benefit to Worcester residents in the form of jobs, free job training, and related services by preparing and connecting Worcester residents with living-wage employment.

Over the past six years, the Jobs Fund has been

funded by the City of Worcester and additional sources including SNAP Employment and Training, Outreach Partner, Department of Transportation, Commonwealth Corporation Learn to Earn Grant, and Workforce Competitive Trust Fund, among others.

For our trainings, we recruit local residents for anticipated job opportunities — especially talented individuals with previous obstacles to employment including veterans, single parents, people of color, people with a past felony conviction, women, people with disabilities, and low-income residents.

The Worcester Jobs Fund training programs are free for selected participants. Through community outreach, the residents interested in these pathways are connected with local service providers for assistance with continued education, skill development, housing, food assistance, or health assistance before beginning the program. Applicants who are not accepted into the program are connected with local services or alternative employment opportunities as applicable.

We are currently recruiting for the following trainings:

The Worcester Building Pathways Pre-Apprenticeship Program allows exploration of trades of such as electrical, painting, roofing, carpentry, and more, to help prepare participants who are underrepresented in the building trades for placement into a union apprenticeship program. After completing the Building Pathways program, Shaina, who was previously working in a per diem position, is now earning \$18.86 an hour as a first-year carpentry apprentice working for Tight Line Construction. She is doing metal framing and drywall work for project sites like Polar Park and a high school in Lincoln, Rhode Island.

The Jobs Fund has a five-week Commercial Driver's License (CDL) Class B training which can earn graduates starting wages of \$19 an hour, and a five-month CDL Class A training which leads to positions earning \$24 an hour or more. Our graduates work at the Department of Public Works (DPW), Polar Beverages, Worcester Regional Transit Authority (WRTA), Coca-Cola, and more — like Jared, who works for ABC Supply Co., Inc. making \$20 an hour.

Partnerships with other organizations are a critical way the Jobs Fund leverages funds to maximize trainings available locally. A partnership with the Worcester Public Schools' Night Life program supports two evening adult education programs. The first is a 21-week clinical medical assistant program that includes externship placement with UMass Memorial Health. The second is a 900-hour diesel technician training that thoroughly prepares individuals for entry level positions in the industry.

If you would like more information about any of these training programs, reach out to Theodora Appiah at 508-373-7641 or AppiahT@masshirecentral.com.

This program supports the economic activities of the Chamber and our community by creating opportunity (especially for underserved communities), keeping jobs local, and supporting our businesses through access to a skilled workforce. The Chamber is proud of this program and our many collaborations. We believe that it can serve as a workforce development model for other communities and as a framework for collaborative solutions to complex problems.  $\checkmark$ 



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### Worcester Night Life Returning to In-Person Programming

by KAREN PELLETIER, EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT and RUTH SEWARD, COORDINATOR OF NIGHT LIFE ADULT EDUCATION AT WORCESTER PUBLIC SCHOOLS

fter being in an all-remote format due to the coronavirus pandemic, the Night Life Continuing Education Division at Worcester Public Schools (WPS) will be back in person this year at Worcester Vocational Technical High School starting the week of September 13. The Worcester Regional Chamber of Commerce helped to advocate for the initial return of the Worcester Night Life program, which had not been running for many years, in order to activate Worcester Technical High School after traditional school day hours and make low-cost training and continuing education options available to local residents.

Worcester Public Schools has affordable continuing education classes for adults through this Night Life program. These classes are for members of the surrounding community to have access to state-of-the-art technical high school classrooms and equipment. They offer career and vocational training such as plumbing, electrical, welding, and medical coding; as well as personal interest classes such as cooking, quilting, yoga, and language.

The catalog of courses is online now for classes starting in September. If you are looking to change careers, there are programs and trainings for Commercial Drivers Licenses (CDL), diesel technicians, clinical medical assistants, and more. There are some scholarships available for qualified adults for career-vocational trainings in certain fields where there is a local workforce demand for people with that skill. If you are interested in a scholarship, reach out to Ruth Seward, Night Life Coordinator, at 508-751-7612.

Personal enrichment courses include flower arranging, yoga, golf, quilting, financial planning, home improvements, and more. There truly is something for everyone and of every interest! Most instructors are members of the immediate community who are looking to share their knowledge in a fun and casual atmosphere.

In addition to the many in-person options, there are more than 800 online courses available which you can take from the comfort of your home including accounting, nutrition, starting a business, and much more. Many of these courses are open enrollment and available to take now or throughout the summer; these can either be taken at your own pace or with an online instructor.

The Worcester Night Life program is a great resource for members of our community to pursue their personal and career passions. In addition to enrolling in classes, you can submit an application to teach a course on the website as well and get paid for sharing your passion and expertise.

Check out the complete listing of classes in the fall 2021 course catalog at worcesternightlife.org. Registration is now open, and more classes will continue to be added as summer comes to a close. So, what are you waiting for? Advance your career, learn a new skill, or simply indulge a hobby of yours by signing up today!

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### THE "POLAR PARK EFFECT" IS A POSITIVE ONE FOR CANAL DISTRICT BARS AND RESTAURANTS by David Sullivan, economic development & Business recruitment associate

olar Park is still in the nascent stages of being a part of the fabric of the Canal District community, but for local bar owners, its presence is overwhelmingly positive for their businesses.

While parking has been the major debate within the community since the inaugural season began, patience is proving to be key. More private lots are offering affordable flat rates of up to \$20 per car de"The thing I tell most people is, it's not done yet," Mr. Patton continued, citing several incoming housing and retail developments that will complement the ballpark, including Madison Properties' campus of apartment buildings, hotels, and an office and lab building. "This is private money, people spending their money to invest in the city. This increases our tax rolls, brings retail, brings apartments – it's win, Mr. Patton also has a municipal lot next to his bar, one which costs \$10 on game days. He says his parking usually does not fill up all the way even during games and noted that street parking was just a couple of dollars at most if you can get a spot. For those concerned about parking, Mr. Patton advised they should be patient to see what the municipal garage and more private lots will do for capacity.

pending on proximity to the ballpark, and the City of Worcester recently dumped its Canal District parking meters in favor of single kiosks. The city has also added remote parking payment service with the app Passport, making parking a quicker and easier process.

These measures are currently not enough to comfortably accommodate the type of record-breaking crowds that Polar Park is getting, such as when Chris Sale did a rehab start at Polar Park in late July. The city is building a 340-space municipal parking garage across from Polar Park which should take a significant burden off the parking areas used by Canal District businesses.

Bar owners Patrick Patton of Patsie Dugan's and George Yantsides of Rock Bar – both members of the Canal District Alliance – agree that despite initial parking issues, Polar Park is a boon for not only their businesses, but the city at large.

"It's had a positive effect not just on my business, but on the Canal District and the city," said Mr. Patton, a lifelong Worcester resident who has owned Patsie Dugan's on Millbury Street for 10 years. win, win for Worcester."

Mr. Patton also noted Polar Park's capacity to hold events outside of the baseball season, such as college football games, comedy nights, and proms. "It's more than a ballpark - a lot more - and that's something I think a lot of people don't see."

George Yantsides, owner of Rock Bar on Water Street, also noted what he sees as the ballyard's overwhelmingly positive effect on his business. Mr. Yantsides, also a lifelong Worcester resident, started his business in February of 2019. "The pandemic took its toll on us...it was decimating," he said, adding that Polar Park has offered his business a path to recovery.

Parking was something both owners were candid about discussing. Rock Bar is adjacent to a small, municipal parking lot which costs \$15 during Polar Park games and events. "It's deterred a few of our customers – I've gotten messages from some people on [Facebook] Messenger who say they won't pay \$15 just to come here," Mr. Yantsides said, further explaining that parking is not a huge detriment, but is still an issue that will be solved over time. Mr. Patton said he "tips his hat" to city leaders who not only brought the Red Sox to Worcester, but who are addressing parking issues by building the new garage, setting up new residential parking signs, and creating stricter parking enforcement.

Both Mr. Patton and Mr. Yantsides said the best thing about Polar Park has been the number of new customers they're seeing that they'd never seen before. "We see so many new faces coming in; we're the only live music venue in this neighborhood and we get the foot traffic of people following the music. It's really nice to see people coming in," said Mr. Yantsides.

Growing pains are part of any major development in an emerging city. As the Worcester Red Sox' new home quickly continues to build on the mantra of "more than a ballpark," with several surrounding developments bringing vitality and walkability to the Canal District, Worcester businesses will continue to reap the benefits of the incredible achievement that is Polar Park. ♥

#### WORCESTER GREEN CORPS, CONTINUED

about development and sustainability. Before the summer cleanups and programming officially began, the five district managers drove throughout the city and prioritized the regions which needed the most attention and TLC. Specifically, they evaluated areas that had been recognized as priority areas by residents, businesses, and city councilors. As the program continued throughout the summer, the WGC has continued taking feedback from residents as to which neighborhoods they would like to see cleaned promptly. The district managers then broke the neighborhoods up into "sites," which focused on certain streets for the day with the youth workers. The sites were then ranked, and a schedule for the six-week program was made. Over the course of the summer, the schedule was flexible, changing regularly as the needs changed as well.

The WGC teams — which consist of nearly 20 high-school-aged students through Worcester Community Action Council's YouthWorks Summer Jobs Program worked four days a week to beautify the city. They tackled projects in both residential and commercial areas, cleaning litter off the streets and providing much-needed maintenance to some neglected public spaces. The team covered more than 30 miles of streets in 18 neighborhoods, picking up more than 4,000 pounds of litter. In addition to the litter cleanups, they added fresh flowers to planters in the Main South area, helped maintain overgrowth on sidewalks and parks, and provided power-washing and other cleanup services to Chamber member businesses.

The positive feedback from the community has been beneficial to the program in a number of ways. It has been encouraging to the youth workers who receive positive comments and enthusiasm from residents while they are working in the field. People will often shout and honk as they drive by our clean teams – easily identified by their bright green shirts – or cheer them on from windows of their homes. Residents have even stopped by work sites to provide snacks and cold drinks to the youth workers as well – something which is always much appreciated, especially as they work on the hot and humid days of July and August.



Above: Worcester Green Corps helps beautify city's Main South neighborhood by planting new flowers in existing planters. Photo by Rayana Petrone.

Additionally, there has been a significant interest in the program from community members and businesses. The list of volunteers is growing, and organizations have been working to schedule neighborhood cleanup days as well as provide resources to help the program grow. As the WGC updates its progress on social media (follow us on Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram to stay up to date), the comments from Worcester residents have been unanimous: the work from Worcester Green Corps' summer youth program is creating visible change in our neighborhoods and reinstilling a sense of pride in the Worcester community.

It's empowering to see so much positive community feedback, but this is only the beginning. When people thank him on the street, Kisero Rosario, one of the youth workers, says, "I feel grateful, but they themselves need to do more." Moving forward, it will be essential that members of the community work together to keep the streets clean. One of the biggest obstacles to maintaining these efforts is illegal dumping throughout the city. In fact, while out on cleanup days this summer, WGC team members have witnessed people throwing trash out their car windows or

### Weekly Dairy Donation Program Begins at Worcester Boys & Girls Club

### THIS AND OTHER WORCESTER REGIONAL FOOD HUB UPDATES

*by* **DAVID SULLIVAN**, ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT & BUSINESS RECUITMENT ASSOCIATE

he Worcester Regional Food Hub (WRFH) has just started a program to donate low- and non-fat milk to the Boys & Girls Club of Worcester. The donations will run every week for 20 weeks into December and is funded through a grant from the Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources' Dairy Promotion Board.

On Thursday, July 29, WRFH Director Shon Rainford and Sales Operations Manager Sarah Bonner dropped off 73 half gallons and 50 whole gallons of regular and chocolate milk from Mapleline Farm. The farm, located in Hadley, already provides food for the Food Hub's wholesale activities to local restaurants, hospitals, colleges, and other institutions in the region.

This is not the first partnership between the Food Hub - which is in a fiscal sponsorship agreement with the Worcester Regional Chamber of Commerce - and the Boys & Girls Club. During the height of the pandemic, the Food Hub donated hundreds of grocery boxes packed with locally sourced food to community organizations around the city, including the Boys & Girls Club.



*Above:* Food Hub staff delivers milk to Worcester Boys & Girls Club as part of new grant. Photo by Rayana Petrone

"We love partnering with the Food Hub

because they believe in mutual aid," said Boys & Girls Club Executive Director Liz Hamilton. "Sometimes our families have to make really tough choices about what they can spend at the grocery store, so making sure they have dairy products that are very healthy for their families is a huge difference."

Hamilton noted that the children at the clubhouse had asked for chocolate milk, and the Food Hub delivered on that promise as well. Strawberry milk will be available in future donations. While seemingly trivial, the different flavors help encourage consumption of milk in youth from food insecure, low-income households where caloric and vitamin intake is lower than the average food secure household.

The Boys & Girls Club of Worcester serves about 8,000 youth aged 8 - 18 and their families. Many of these youth are at-risk and live in disadvantaged, low-income households in neighborhoods with systemic difficulties in accessing affordable, healthy food. The Boys & Girls Club is a significant community partner in the fight against food insecurity and operates a pantry for its member families. Through the pantry, families are eligible for free food, such as the milk from the Food Hub.

Mr. Rainford believes that community partnerships, like the one with the Boys & Girls Club, are essential in ensuring Worcester residents from all backgrounds have access to healthy food in affordable ways. "The Food Hub has worked with area organizations for the past several years with the goal of bringing healthy, affordable, local food to those that need it most," he said, also noting partnerships with the Regional Environmental Council, Growing Places in Fitchburg, Woo Fridges, and others.

"Milk is such an important food for growing minds and bodies, and we

simply dropping litter on the ground rather than carrying it to the nearest receptacle.

Though the WGC has been working hard to beautify Worcester's neighborhoods, it is ultimately the responsibility of those who work and live here to maintain the cleanliness of these areas. "Hopefully this work inspires the community to put effort into the beautification of Worcester," said Ian Njihia, one of the district managers. We all have a role to play in keeping this city clean, green, and beautiful. Let's work together to make it happen.

Though the first annual summer element of this collaborative initiative has come to a close, you can still expect to hear about WGC operations in the fall. There are currently several community cleanup events being planned, as well as some other beautification and greenery projects. The volunteer roster continues to grow, allowing WGC operations to continue on a regular basis. Furthermore, the WGC hopes to assist businesses and residents in efforts to develop the city in a sustainable way. As Worcester expands economically, it is important to recognize these changes as a chance to remodel the way that we conduct business, ensuring that community members and environmentalism are included in conversations about growth.

I encourage anyone – company or nonprofit, business or individual – who wants to get involved in this effort to get in contact with me about ways you can help Worcester Green Corps make a difference. I can be reached by email at mhotham@worcesterchamber.org or by phone at 508.753.2924 ext. 233. I look forward to connecting on how we can work together to make a greener and more sustainable future for Worcester, this city we all love. ♥

are proud to work with Mapleline Farm out of Hadley to bring this fresh milk from their herd of Jersey cows to the Boys and Girls Club," Mr. Rainford added.

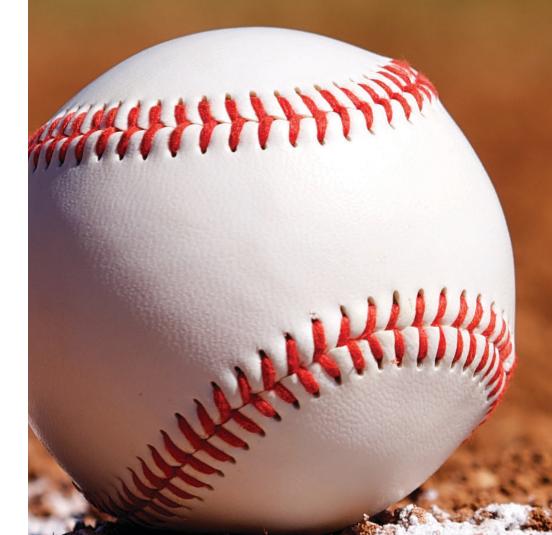
It is a busy year for the WRFH, which is planning on moving to Union Station in mid-2022 after a build-out of a lower space in the intermodal transportation hub. The Worcester Chamber has been working for the last year to raise the capital funds and policymaker support necessary, collaborating with the City of Worcester, Congressman Jim McGovern, and state legislators. The new facility will allow for six sub-kitchens for the shared commercial kitchen, a multipurpose event space for pop-up markets and other events, a lofted office space for WRFH staff, and room for shipping and cold storage.

The Union Station space may also contain a retail kiosk selling food from startup businesses that work in the Food Hub kitchen, as well as food directly from local farms.

Worcester Chamber and Food Hub staff recently presented the \$3 million concept to the Worcester Redevelopment Authority, which expressed support for the Food Hub's vision.

Building on its community partnerships, the Food Hub is running courses in Worcester State University's entrepreneurship program at its shared commercial kitchen at Greendale People's Church. Courses will begin in October and be open to Worcester State students as well as the community at large. The collaborative effort will seek to further incubate startup food businesses in Worcester. ♥

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### StartUp Worcester Announces 2021-2022 Cohort CHAMBER PRESS RELEASE 12 COMPANIES SELECTED FOR SEVENTH YEAR OF THIS COLLABORATIVE PROGRAM

he Worcester Regional Chamber of Commerce, The Venture Forum, and WorcLab are thrilled to announce the 12 companies which have been selected to participate in the 2021-2022 cohort of StartUp Worcester.

A joint initiative of these three organizations, StartUp Worcester is designed to help launch new businesses as well as to provide support and physical workspace for the region's entrepreneurs. The initiative helps to incubate new businesses and retain graduates of the area's colleges and universities. StartUp Worcester encourages these budding entrepreneurs to grow their business here — where they have access to everything they need to succeed.

This year's StartUp Worcester winners are:

- A Sneakerhead's Paradise a concierge dashboard that allows customers to search and purchase sneakers during and following sold-out retail releases all on one website
- **Barn Owl Technologies** chemical-free agriculture; provides alternative pest control solutions for farmers
- Cat in the Box LLC designer and manufacturer of whimsical cardboard box playhouses for cats
- **Munq LLC** a creative agency helping clients shape their brand identity

- **Penny Wise PPE Protection** sterile mask storage; provides health care workers with a sanitary and safe paper bag alternative to store their face masks
- **Reach** a social media company aiming to change the social media landscape by encouraging the users of the platform to engage with their environment
- **Routi** an all-in-one, cloud-based communication software that provides government agencies with a single place to communicate with partner agencies and the public in the same process
- Spicy Water Distillery a micro-distillery focused on crafting spirits for adult consumption
- Sympal, Inc. the "new braces;" an orthodontic clear aligner system
- **TaqHawk, Inc.** a community-based resale marketplace for buying & selling used items in communities
- Urban Spice World LLC curator of ready-to-cook meal kits for busy families; making cooking easy and bringing families together
- X Therapeutics, Inc. a biotech company developing novel antivirals

"The Chamber and our program partners are so excited to see such innovative and creative start-up business concepts in this next cohort" said the Worcester Chamber's Economic Development & Business Recruitment Associate David Sullivan, who supervises the StartUp Worcester program. "The start-up ecosystem in Central Massachusetts is a strong one, and the StartUp Worcester program will continue to help grow, develop, and cultivate that successful climate."

The 12 companies selected receive full-year memberships to all three organizations (Worcester Chamber, Venture Forum, and WorcLab) effective September 1, 2021, through August 31, 2022. Participants also have access to mentors from SCORE, a service of the Small Business Administration (SBA), through which they can receive entrepreneurial support, guidance, and mentorship. Each StartUp Worcester membership awarded is valued at more than \$14,000. This yearlong program is generously sponsored by Berkshire Bank, the Better Business Bureau (BBB) of Central Mass., and Pineapple Girl Productions.

Orientation for the new cohort begins September 1 at WorcLab, located at 44 Portland St. on the 4th floor. At this time, the winning companies will be introduced to the equipment and software available to them in the co-working incubator space. An introductory reception will be held on September 21 from 4 - 6 pm also at WorcLab. Additional information about each winning company will be available at this free event which is open to the public. Visit the Chamber's website to register. ♥

I'm proud of what we've accomplished in 9 months, that we haven't done in 19 years.

- Edward,



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### CHAMBER ANNOUNCES LEADERSHIP WORCESTER CLASS OF 2022 CHAMBER PRESS RELEASE

he Worcester Regional Chamber of Commerce is pleased to announce the 28 professionals who have been selected to participate in the 2021-2022 Leadership Worcester class.

**VORCESTER** 

Now in its seventh year, Leadership Worcester has graduated more than 150 professionals in the Greater Worcester area from various sectors including government, business, education, nonprofits, and the arts. These alumni are committed and connected to Worcester through residence or their place of work.

Through a nine-month experiential learning program from September to May, Leadership Worcester participants learn about their community from a variety of angles and engage with local leaders to learn about the region's challenges and opportunities. Each monthly session takes participants behind the scenes of Worcester's diverse anchor institutions and hidden gems, allowing them to see the city through a new lens. Participants then graduate in June and join a robust network of Leadership Worcester alumni.

Members of the Leadership Worcester Class of 2022 are:

- Amy Sciannameo Senior Underwriter Hanover International, The Hanover Insurance Group
- Andrew McShane Program Manager, Downtown Worcester Business Improvement District
- Ariana Dello Stritto Marketing Coordinator and Financial Literacy Assistant, Bay State Savings Bank
- Brittany Wong CEO, Studio Jade
- David Conner Director of Community Engagement, Worcester Historical Museum
- **David Sullivan** Economic Development and Business Recruitment Associate, Worcester Regional Chamber of Commerce

- David Zeutas-Broer Major Gifts Officer, Eco-Tarium
- Domenica Perrone Project Manager, Department of Health and Human Services; City of Worcester
- Elizabeth Deliberto Vice President, Nativity School of Worcester
- Heather Forchilli Branch Manager, Central One FCU
- Johan Romero Luna Area Manager, Workers Credit Union
- Jonida Duque Director, Open Sky Community Services
- Juli True-Dooley Director of Grants and Marketing, Edward M. Kennedy Community Health Center
- Katherine Aguilar Owner and Founder, K Sense Co. LLC
- Keyshawn O'Connell Director of Athletics & Healthy Habits, Boys & Girls Club of Worcester
- **Kimberly McCullen** Employment & Employee Relations Specialist, College of the Holy Cross
- **Kwame Ofori** Director of Information Technology, RCAP Solutions, Inc.
- Larnese Cook Director of Operations, Central Massachusetts Agency on Aging, Inc.
- Lisa Malo Creative Group Manager, Bose
- Lovo D. Koliego-Narmah Executive Director, Community Health Awareness Network (CHAN)
- Margarita Navarro Executive Assistant & Event Coordinator, KARL STORZ
- **Paula Fitzpatrick** Dean, D'Amour College of Liberal Arts & Sciences, Assumption University
- Ryan Petrone Owner/CEO, Energy Athletics LLC
- Sam Sui Utilization Management Clinical Pharmacist, Fallon Health

- Samantha Sendrowski Technology Innovation Manager, Bowditch & Dewey, LLP
- Sherri Lee Gentile Project Manager, UMass Memorial Health
- Steven Schimmel Executive Director, Jewish Federation of Central MA
- Vittoria (Tori) Buerschaper Interim Executive Director, Community Harvest Project

The class was carefully selected by committee and includes a diverse group of 19 women and nine men from Central Massachusetts. The selection committee sought motivated individuals aspiring to take active leadership roles in Worcester and have the potential to create meaningful change.

The class will get underway on September 16 with an overnight retreat at the AC Hotel by Marriott in Worcester, offering participants an opportunity to get to know one another, determine individual leadership strengths, learn more about participants' experiences, and to understand more about the Worcester community and our emerging leadership.

Monthly sessions will explore topics that are critical to Central Mass, such as urban environment and sustainability; economic development; health, public safety; government; arts, culture and quality of life; and food insecurity. The daylong sessions will take place the second Thursday of each month from October through May; the program will conclude with a graduation ceremony in June of 2022.

Applications for the next Leadership Worcester class will be made available online in February of 2022. More information can be found online at leadershipworcester.com. ♥



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### MEET ELIZABETH WAMBUI Fontaine Brothers' New Director of Diversity, Inclusion, and Community Impact

By DOMINIQUE GOYETTE-CONNERTY, DIRECTOR OF COMMUNICATIONS

n each edition, editorial staff of *Chamber Exchange: The Newspaper* look to include one question-and-answer-style interview with a Chamber member who's really making a change in the community. This month, I sat down with Elizabeth (Liz) Wambui, the new director of diversity, inclusion, and community impact for Fontaine Bros. – a local, decades-old construction management and general contracting company. Below are excerpts from the interview with Ms. Wambui regarding her career change and new role at Fontaine Bros., the importance of her work in this field, and her community involvement and passion for Worcester – the city she calls home.

#### You're now about a month in to this new position at Fontaine Bros. What does this role as Director of Diversity, Inclusion, and Community Impact entail? What are your day-to-day tasks and what are the long-term goals?

It has been a busy and amazing first month at Fontaine. It's been wonderful getting to know my colleagues and connecting with other people who are in similar roles at other companies. One of my major responsibilities is the compliance reporting to the cities of Springfield and Worcester. As you may know, many cities and towns have established workforce goals to ensure individuals working on publicly funded projects are reflective of the community. In Worcester, the workforce goals include city residents, people of color, womxn and business enterprises owned by people of color and womxn.

I've taken time over the last month to meet with different stakeholders including compliance officers in Springfield and Worcester, union representatives, and other individuals in the industry involved in similar work – learning from them and building a plan for how we will achieve and hopefully exceed these goals. I will work closely with our subcontractors and serve as a resource throughout the duration of our projects.

The long-term goal at Fontaine is to provide opportunities for members of underrepresented communities and actively engage them in the city's economic development. This is about making sure that all members of our community thrive and benefit from all the investments we're seeing across the city. This will be part of our DNA at Fontaine - to create and sustain great careers for the next generation of tradespeople in Springfield, Worcester, and in all areas we are engaged in.

#### Why did Fontaine feel it was important to create this new position and how does it feel to be the first person to serve in this role?

The fact that Fontaine created this position illustrates how serious and committed the entire company is to equity, community, and making sure no one is left behind. Having one person whose time and efforts are wholly focused on working with contractors, unions, trade schools, and other community partners is crucial to not only achieving these workforce goals, but also helping provide opportunities to individuals who have been historically left out of this industry. It's about making sure that anyone who is interested in a career in construction has a great lifelong career. Trades are an excellent way to make a great living and those opportunities should be afforded to anyone who is interested in this industry. I am so honored and so thrilled to be the first person to serve in this role. I'm incredibly humbled that Fontaine has entrusted me with this responsibility, and I will give it my all.

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many other partners at Nativity Worcester for giving me the opportunity to serve as the Director of Advancement. It's hard to quantify how much I learned and grew during my five years there.

Yes, this is quite the career change, but I learned many things during all my years in fundraising that will help me in my new role. From relationship building, storytelling, and working in partnership with different stakeholders to achieve a common goal – this is the essence of what we are trying to do at Fontaine. We all need to work together to move our communities forward. This is what drew me to this role: the opportunity to develop partnerships that are going to be critical in shaping a workforce that is representative of our richly diverse community.

I know you're a Holy Cross graduate, a Leadership Worcester graduate, and you serve on a number of boards and committees — so your Worcester

You previously worked at Nativity School of Worcester as their Director of Advancement. This is quite the career change, no? What made you want to take the leap into a new field?

I owe a lot to the students, families, graduates, faculty, staff, Trustees, Trustee Associates, and



"This is about making sure that all members of our community thrive and benefit from all the investments we're seeing across the city." ties are definitely strong! What drives you to be so involved like this beyond the office walls?

Worcester is my home. I want to do whatever I can to contribute to the growth and development of our community. As you know, we have an incredibly vibrant nonprofit sector in Worcester, and I've been so lucky to have been offered opportunities to serve in different capacities in some incredible non-profit organizations.

I currently serve as a Board Member at the Bancroft School, Shine Initiative, Women in Development of Central Massachusetts, Worcester Historical Museum, and YWCA. I am also a Mechanics Hall Modern Mechanics Guild Member, Worcester Art Museum Corporator, and have served as a Greater Worcester Community Foundation Early Childhood Committee member and scholarship community reviewer. It's great to see the city thrive and I would like to play a part in making sure that as many people as possible are part of that journey.

# Leading in Uncharted Territory

AFFILIATE CORNER

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REGIONAL CHAMBER PARTNERS

*by* **JEANNIE HEBERT**, PRESIDENT & CEO, BLACKSTONE VALLEY CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

t a recent meeting with Chamber colleagues, we discussed how we were addressing the needs of our members during the re-opening period after COVID. There was no one solution any of us found in common. The only aspect we could agree upon was that there had to be a complete reorganization. Over the past year, we all had to leave our comfort zone and become very well-schooled in the cliché of "ever changing world."

The terrain of the area is distinctly different. Look around — downtown business zones have been reworked. It is survival of the fittest, or the most creative, or the most flexible. If the business did not meet any of that criteria, chances are it is no longer in existence.

And the same goes for Chambers of Commerce. Those that were stuck in the same old, same old, looking for easy answers and quick fixes, declined and closed their doors. We needed new tools in the toolbox to equip us to go above and beyond the usual and customary. We had to develop a guidebook for learning to lead in areas we were not yet prepared for.

Adaptation is everything, and just about everything is challenging. Adaptive challenges require learning to negotiate the gaps in actions taken to reach productive solutions. In some ways, it is exciting to start fresh — to come up with new ideas and plans to meet the needs of businesses we would never have even thought we would have to address. It takes a lot of work and a lot of time. Listening, really listening, to what the business owners or managers are experiencing is a big first step. To find out what tools are available to help you help your clients means exposing yourself to as much information as possible to discover how you can develop a plan to achieve the goal. Reaching out to partners for advice, guidance, and expertise enables you to offer real opportunities for long-term solutions businesses can live and grow with.

Taking advantage of seminars, webinars, and listening sessions with organizations which offer funding, grants, lending, counseling, and a myriad of tools you can pass along or institute for your members in need is essential to successfully creating a pipeline of assistance. This is adaptive learning. It leads us to find new, innovative ways to develop answers to unique challenges.

Be there as a resource. It is great to take all this in, but if you aren't accessible, it is all for naught. What appears logical to you may not be so much so for the business owner, manager, or entrepreneur. Offer to walk them through the process, help them understand processes, timelines, deadlines, applications and reports. Don't just forward information — personally make introductions, assist in filling out forms and applications, offer letters of support. Do research to find suitable presenters for educational seminars, roundtables dedicated to specific industries, and peer groups that foster



### TAKE A PEEK INSIDE THE VAULT

WEBSTER-DUDLEY-OXFORD CHAMBER'S NEWEST MEMBER IS A PREMIER RECREATIONAL CANNABIS DISPENSARY

by TAYLOR MAILLOUX, MANAGER OF THE VAULT

he recreational use of marijuana has been legal in Massachusetts for a few years now. We understand that not everyone is an active marijuana user, of course. We also realize that some people in Massachusetts may still feel uneasy about the sale of marijuana products in their towns and communities.

The Vault wants to help dispel any reservations that you or any community members might have.

We run a professional, prospering business, and our dispensary is strictly an adults-only establishment. Our mission is to provide all cannabis consumers — from those new to the product, to more experienced customers — extensive product offerings and best-in-class service.

When you shop at The Vault, you'll simply enjoy a smooth, unparalleled experience.

#### WHAT IS THE VAULT?

The Vault is an adult-use recreational cannabis dispensary. We are located in Webster, MA, and we'll be opening up another location in Worcester, MA, in early fall of 2021. If you haven't visited us yet, here's what you can expect.

At The Vault, we specialize in:

- **Superior Customer Service** Walk-ins are always welcome at The Vault, though we do offer online ordering and same day pickup, as well. However you choose to shop, and whatever products you're looking for, we can accommodate your needs. We even monitor local prices to ensure you're getting the best price around.
- **Expert Knowledge** Since recreational marijuana sales were legalized, there are a lot of new consumers out there. If you're worried about being overwhelmed when you enter The Vault, don't be. We have a staff of experts here ready to answer any questions you may have. Book a "newbie," "regular user," or "expert" appointment with our team for a custom-tailored dispensary experience.
- **Expansive Offerings** The days of purchasing whatever's available are over. Those new to The Vault can be intimidated by our extensive product menu, and understandably so. From fresh flower to pre-rolls, edibles, concentrates, tinctures, topicals, and more, there are a lot of incredible cannabis products to choose from. Rest assured we'll help you find the right product for your particular needs.

#### **ENJOYING OUR PRODUCTS RESPONSIBLY**

Marijuana and other cannabis products are finally legal and available to the public, as so many of us have long felt they should be. As is the case with any controlled

sharing ideas and proven best practices.

Leadership for uncharted territory creates trust that your clients can rely on you in a crisis or to just answer a question, and that you'll always act in their best interests. The result is success in building a process for the community to thrive even when the outside environment is evolving. Remember the key leadership principle for uncharted territory is to start with conviction, stay calm, stay connected, and stay the course.

Here are just some of the partners we work with at the Blackstone Valley Chamber of Commerce (BVCC): Mass Growth Capital Corporation, Mass Office of Business Development, MassDevelopment, Central MA Regional Planning Commission, Small Business Administration, and MassMEP (MA Manufacturing Extension Partnership). BVCC also hosts several programs including the Executive Roundtable; Women's Success Network; Food, Beverage, and Hospitality Network; Valley Business Network; and HR Roundtable. More info on these programs is available on the BVCC website, www.blackstonevalley.org. ♥ substance, it is important to enjoy these products responsibly. That's the product user's responsibility, but it's one we're passionate about helping users with.

Those curious can check out our website (www.thevaultma.com) for regular articles on all sorts of cannabis-related topics, including those touching on local laws and regulations. There, you can also find our FAQ page which answers some of the most common questions we hear and offers important tips for staying compliant with current recreational marijuana regulations.

For instance:

- The legal age for consuming marijuana products in Massachusetts is 21.
- Consumers may keep up to one ounce on their person, and up to 10 ounces in their homes.
- Laws require any amount of marijuana over one ounce be locked up at home, though we recommend locking up any amount to keep children and pets safe.
- Open containers of any marijuana are prohibited in vehicles.
- · Marijuana products may not be used in public or on federal land.

Shop online, come visit us in person, or book an appointment with an expert on our team. We're excited to hear from you, so we want to make things as easy as possible. At The Vault, we value our place in the community. Don't hesitate to reach out with any additional questions you may have, and we look forward to serving you for many years to come. •

### Pandemic-Born Decanted Wine Truck in High Demand

### FOOD HUB MEMBERS BRING CUSTOMIZABLE PARTIES DIRECTLY TO CUSTOMERS

by DOMINIQUE GOYETTE-CONNERTY, DIRECTOR OF COMMUNICATIONS



t's always wine o'clock somewhere for Melissa Costa and Julia Walderzak.

The two moms and longtime friends teamed up at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic to start a new venture together: Decanted Wine Truck.

The business, housed in a completely renovated vintage camper they've named "Winona," travels on wheels all throughout Massachusetts to bring carefully-crafted boozy events directly to customers.

"It's a one-stop shop. We literally bring a wine bar to your house. We set up everything. It's gorgeous. We can do the catering

as well [...] And you don't have to lift a finger," said Ms. Walderzak.

As a self-described wine connoisseur, the concept for the wine truck business was one Ms. Walderzak says she's had in the back of her brain for some time. But when the coronavirus crisis wiped out dozens of accounts for the kids' fitness business she owns, she started seriously considering exploring it as a real possibility.

She approached her friend Melissa — a hairdresser of more than 15 years who also found her day job being significantly impacted by the nature of the pandemic — with the idea, and the two decided to partner.

Equipped with the seemingly crazy idea, according to them, the duo started searching for campers to make the vision come to life sometime around April of 2020. After almost a year of making renovations to the camper, getting the proper licensing and certifications in order, finding a wine distributor, conducting wine tastings, and designing the types of event packages they wanted to offer, they were ready to take Winona online.

"So it took a full year to get everything kind of operational," Ms. Costa said. "And then we started booking in April [of 2021] and it's been insane ever since."

Now, the creatively-titled Chief Wine Officers find themselves traveling all across the Bay State any day of the week to help customers celebrate their special occasions. From 40th birthday parties and 60th wedding anniversaries, to mom's nights out, microweddings, and corporate events, Decanted Wine Truck can personalize any special event and make it one to remember.

For those who aren't wine drinkers, it's no problem. Though labeled a 'wine truck,' Decanted also offers beer and craft cocktails so that there's something for everyone at these events.

*Below:* Decanted Wine Truck's traveling camper, "Winona," decked out and decorated for a Mother's Day event. Submitted photo. *Left:* Chief Wine Officers Melissa Costa (left) and Julia Walderzak (right) started the Decanted Wine Truck business during the pandemic. Submitted photo



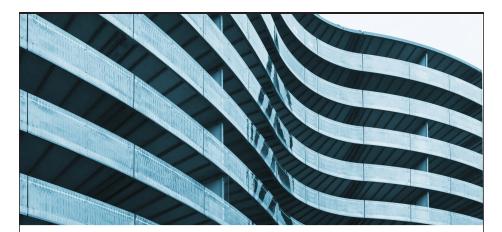
away anytime soon. Born in a time when small crowds and social distancing were necessary safety measures, the private and outdoor setting Decanted Wine Truck provides was a major selling point. Melissa and Julia anticipate the demand for something like that is here to stay.

"People don't feel as comfortable being in huge, large groups with people they don't know. I think there's something to be said about really keeping your friends close," said Ms. Walderzak.

"I don't think that's going to change," Ms. Costa added. "I think people's mindsets have changed [as far as] what they're comfortable with now just knowing what could happen."

At the end of the day, pandemic or no pandemic, both see what Decanted has to offer as being unique. "We're providing an experience. So it's not just: we roll up, open a table, and pour wine," said Ms. Walderzak. "We're bringing this beautiful, unique experience to your house. And people love having a unique option."

In addition to bringing a second camper online next season, Melissa and Julia have other concrete plans for expanding Decanted. They'll be hiring extra hands to help and are currently working on getting licensed to operate in Rhode Island as well. In the future, they envision possibly operating several campers in multiple New England states and having a manager at each location.  $\checkmark$ 



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And of course, what would a wine party be without the cheese (and crackers, and grapes, and veggies, and charcuterie boards)? Backed by the commercial kitchen space of the Worcester Regional Food Hub, the pair is able to do a lot of their own food prep and cooking in order to offer a catering menu.

As members of the Food Hub, they say the organization has "been a great resource" for them — from the 24/7 accessibility which allows them to get their wine dropped off there and prep for events on their own time, to Director Shon Rainford's help walking them through the required ServSafe courses. What's more, they're able to make connections with other local food entrepreneurs also utilizing the Food Hub, a network that comes in handy when Decanted wants to outsource select catering jobs. "There are a lot of different connections [in the Food Hub] which we've said we need to explore more...a lot of different businesses making cool food and they're local," Ms. Costa said.

Staffing the business on their own, the two ladies are doing an average of three to five events a week while juggling their other respective jobs, kids, and families. During a mid-July interview, they said Decanted was pretty much booked solid through August, and they were already starting to fill up for September through November, as well as starting to take bookings for 2022. "We're at the point now where we've had to turn so many people away because it's just the two of us and Winona, which is why we recently purchased another truck which is going to be renovated for next season," Ms. Walderzak said.

And the popularity of the business isn't something either of them see going

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### **NEW WEBSITE AIMS TO TELL GOOD NEWS STORIES ONLY**

### **Central Mass Town Square on a Mission to Spread Positivity at Hyperlocal Level**

by DOMINIQUE GOYETTE-CONNERTY, DIRECTOR OF COMMUNICATIONS

ood news only. That's what Central Mass Town Square, a hyperlocal news website, is setting out to cover.

Created in response to the palpable divisiveness, partisanship, and negativity that occupies much of the news cycle today, Central Mass Town Square (CMTS) is aiming to highlight just the opposite.

"We're in a place in the country right now where, whenever you turn on the news or whenever you look at what's going on, there's just a lot of division," said CMTS Founder Doug Rubin. "People have kind of lined up in different camps, you know. 'Are you an MSNBC viewer? Are you a Fox viewer?'"

Recognizing this, he saw an opportunity to create a platform which would steer people away from bickering and arguments, and direct them toward healthy conversations celebrating the good. "There are so many people doing amazing things everyday all around us, and we just felt there was an opportunity to build a website that focused on that," Mr. Rubin said.

Located at centralmasstownsquare.com, the site is subscription-based. At \$5 a month, subscribers get access to all the good news stories CMTS reporters write, as well as the rest of the website's offerings including an opinion section and a "lighthouses" page, where one human interest story or profile is featured weekly.

Mr. Rubin says it's important to point out that Central Mass Town Square doesn't see themselves as a competitor of or a replacement for the traditional news media. "They have a critical role in this. They hold people accountable and provide valuable information," he said. Rather, they see themselves as a supplement to existing news coverage. "It's one of the reasons we don't really cover hard news on our site [...] I think what we're trying to do is provide an alternate site where people can go to talk about some of the good things that are going on and find out what people are doing," Mr. Rubin added.

Prior to launching the site this spring, CMTS hired three local reporters. Asked about the importance of her role and the CMTS mission, reporter Genevieve DiNatale said, "Generally speaking, journalists are not credited with restoring faith in humanity, but this position has certainly given me the opportunity to do so. I think a lot of people turn off the news because it's too negative and doesn't accurately represent the world we live in. I think it's important to write about the unsung heroes from the community who are making a difference selflessly and those who have overcome adversity on their way to success."

The team is covering just the Central Massachusetts region to start - primarily Worcester County, and perhaps other cities and towns just beyond that, depending on the story. With this focused coverage area, they're looking to keep the site community-centric and people-centric. "Part of the appeal of the site," Mr. Rubin said, "is we're talking about people that you may know, or have heard of, or are close to."

The Town Square concept is one that has significant financial backing already: They've raised \$250,000 in seed money and have the support of a private equity firm. According to Mr. Rubin, that firm has said if the CMTS team can prove the platform is viable and that people want this type of content, then they're willing to grow it beyond Central Mass to other regions, other states, and even across the country.

"So Central Mass is our first foray into this. I really think it's a perfect place to test the concept," Mr. Rubin said. "I just think in Central Mass in particular, there's a diversity of opinion and diversity of demographics [...] and there's a lot going on here that doesn't get talked about. Boston gets covered extensively by the Boston media, but there are so many good things happening out here that don't get covered on a regular basis, and we thought this would be a perfect kind of proving ground for our concept."

Ms. DiNatale, a Central Mass native herself, agreed the area was an appropriate one to use as a jumping-off location. "Central Massachusetts is a hidden gem with a lot of interesting people and stories that have largely been left untold, so there's always a good story to uncover," she said.

Got a good news story that needs telling? You can share your positive pitch with the CMTS team by emailing info@centralmasstownsquare.com. 🛡









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nticipation is building for the return of professional hockey at the DCU Center after a year hiatus because of COVID-19. The home opener for the Worcester Railers Hockey Club is scheduled for Saturday, October 23 at 7:00 pm. The Railers will face off against one of their New England rivals: the Maine Mariners. As of the press deadline for this edition of "Sports Street," Railers General Manager and Head Coach David Cunniff had already engaged in a flurry of signings with a number of Massachusetts connections. Liam Coughlin, a forward and South Boston native who played at the University of Vermont, will be coming to Worcester, as well Grant Jozefek, a forward from Northeastern University. Also, forward Nolan Vesey from North Reading, who's the son of former NHL player Jim Vesey and brother of current NHL player Jimmy Vesey, will be playing in the Heart of the Commonwealth. Vesey is a graduate of the University of Maine. Additionally, forwards Drew Callin and Ross Olsson will be rejoining this year's Railers squad. However, there will be the departure of Railers' fan favorite and part-time on-ice pugilist Yanick Turcotte. He was recently signed by the Hershey Bears of the American Hockey League. Many on Sports Street and fans of the Railers Hockey Club hope that Turcotte can make the most of this promotion. He is a ferocious competitor.

While July was a wacky month weather wise, which resulted in the postponement of

a few Worcester Red Sox games, there was some good news for the team. Major League Baseball announced that the minor league season would be extended. This means the WooSox, and the rest of their counterparts in Triple-A baseball, will be playing an additional 10 games in September. You'll recall that as a result of COVID-19, the start of the MiLB season was delayed for nearly one month resulting in a shortened season. Despite the July weather challenges, it was picture-

### **SPORTS STREET** Railers Set to Return to Ice, WooSox Inaugural Season Extended, All Eyes on Holy Cross Football, and Cousy Statue Unveiled

by TIMOTHY P. MURRAY, PRESIDENT & CEO



Above: New statue outside of DCU Center honoring legendary basketball player Bob Cousy is unveiled. Photo by Dominique Goyette-Connerty.

perfect on the last day of the month when the Worcester Red Sox took on the Buffalo Bisons in front of a record capacity of 9,508 fans at Polar Park - a sellout crowd for Boston Red Sox ace pitcher Chris Sale to make a rehab start in front of. Sale was on a rehabilitation assignment, on the road to recovery from Tommy John surgery on his elbow. His performance was excellent and certainly made for a memorable day in the team's inaugural season.

Fall high school and collegiate sports will be returning to a normal schedule after a difficult year which resulted in many teams having to face delayed and shortened seasons because of the pandemic. A team to watch will be the Division I Football Championship Subdivision (FCS) Holy Cross Crusader squad, which will be looking to capture their third Patriot League Championship. Led by dynamic head coach Bob Chesney, Holy Cross plays an 11-game schedule that includes a homecoming game at Polar Park. The ubiquitous and energetic Chesney, who lives with his family in Worcester, has become Holy Cross' ambassador to the Worcester community and has excited many Holy Cross alum and area "subway alumni" with his enthusiasm and winning ways. Chesney did much of the same at Assumption University in building that Division II football program.

While the year has featured many highlights for "Sports Street" fans, one of the special moments in the city's sports history was un-

doubtedly the unveiling of the striking statue of basketball legend and Worcester resident, Bob Cousy. The statue has an eye-catching presence on the plaza in front of the entrance to the DCU Center. Mr. Basketball's remarks at the unveiling were poignant on many levels, but his expressed love for his adopted city of Worcester and how special the city became for his wife and two daughters over the years was especially moving. A tip of the hat to Bob Cousy!

### B-ORGANIC WORKING TO ELIMINATE PLASTIC, FOOD WASTE Sustainable, Reusable, Biodegradable Bags Handmade in Worcester

ike many households across the nation, Cathy DiPilato found hers throwing away plastic bags of produce which had gone rotten. After losing her job in 2018 while hosting international students at the same time, Ms. DiPilato found herself struggling to make ends meet.

More often, Ms. DiPilato realized she was constantly saying to her students, "I'm buying all this food for you and you're turning around

and wasting it [...] I can't do that anymore." Growing frustrated with seeing so much food wasted,



by RAYANA PETRONE, LASELL UNIVERSITY INTERN

the bags. "That part I had patented because it took me six months [to figure out]," said Ms. DiPilato.

In total shock at the effectiveness of the bags, Ms. DiPilato realized her product would be able to help others who also struggle with food waste. It was then that the idea to open the small business B-Organic was born.

With newfound confidence in her creation, Ms. DiPilato was able to start selling B-Organ-

> ic products at farmers markets in the area. "It was going great, people were really catching on." She was put in contact with a professor at the College of the Holy Cross who collaborated with her on a sustainability experiment where 85 subjects were given bags and were told to report back their findings. She began to receive a lot of feedback on her products, which led her to make alterations that allowed for even more growth. "I was going from selling five bags a week to selling

pay my bills and making enough money to try to put some money in a savings account, and all of a sudden, I started living off of my savings account."

As was the case for many small businesses during the pandemic, the future of B-Organic was unknown. However, Ms. DiPilato pivoted her business' concept, determined to make it survive this tough time. "You can't let this pandemic kill your business. You worked way too hard to get to this point," Ms. DiPilato said she kept reminding herself.

It was at this time she reached out to a sales-

she began to explore other options in order to preserve produce.

After much trial and error of creating bags of various materials, such as flour sacks and other forms of cotton, Ms. DiPilato discovered that organic cotton helped preserve produce the best. Once she finalized the material, it was time to tackle the design aspect so the students could differentiate the bags inside the

fridge. Each bag has produce items painted on them, indicating what's inside. She credits her students for teaching her how to paint, saying, "They really showed me a lot."

In order to maintain the eco-friendliness of the bags, Ms. DiPilato created a formula out of rotten fruits and veggies for the inks used on them. Now, after many attempts, she believes she's perfected a formula so that the designs won't wash out of

Above: B-Organic's reusable, biodegradable bags work to eliminate plastic and food waste. Submitted photo.

30 bags a week at the farmers market and that was a really big deal," said Ms. DiPilato.

But just as things were looking up and her products were making headway at trade shows and retail locations, the coronavirus pandemic hit. At first, Ms. DiPilato referred to owning and operating her small business entirely from home during the times of COVID-19 as a, "major crisis." She said, "I was making enough money [pre-pandemic] to person in hopes of bringing B-Organic to the wholesale market. She also contacted all those who were supposed to be in attendance at a trade show she was going to which was cancelled due to COVID.

Thanks to her hard work and determination, Ms. DiPilato ended up seeing an "overwhelming" amount of growth during the pandemic. "Before, it was just me, but now because I was making all of these phone calls and I had help from the salesman, all of a sudden, I have like a million orders," she said with a smile.

Another saving grace for B-Organic: Cathy received a Country Bank Small Business Chamber Member Scholarship, providing her with one free year of membership benefits and services to the Worcester Regional Chamber of Commerce. Ms. DiPilato expressed gratitude for being a recipient, saying, "It really has helped a lot because I got so much feedback, especially from being on radio. [...] I am so excited about it because now I feel like I am part of the business community again."



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