

CHAMBER EXCHANGE

 THE NEWSPAPER

Winter 2022

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CULTURE



Bobbitt calls for
investment and
support of arts and
culture industry **12**

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Above: “SOMA,” the residential building, will be right across the street from Polar Park and is expected to bring 228 apartments to the Canal District. Photo by Dominique Goyette-Connerty.

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

Despite the public health and economic challenges of the pandemic, Worcester continued to see a massive amount of investment in housing developments over the past year. Between major housing projects completed in the past 12 months and those currently under construction or in the pipeline, more than \$660 million of private investment is flowing into the city. These investments represent at least 2,300 rental housing units that either recently came online or are expected to be online in the next few years.

Worcester’s surge in population has created a red-hot market for housing. In fact, Worcester was ranked one of the hottest mid-size city housing markets in the country twice last year by Realtor.com, in March and then December. Redfin ranked Worcester as the third-most competitive housing market in June.

In recent years, Massachusetts at large has not produced enough housing of all types – apartments, condos, single-family homes – to accommodate its growing

population and economy. Worcester has been no exception.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, Worcester added 10,000 total units of housing in the past 10 years. But with 25,000 new residents added to the city in that same time frame, it’s no wonder that the housing vacancy rate dropped from 8.8% in 2010 to just 6% in 2020, driving up housing costs across the board.

A 2019 housing study published by the Chamber analyzed this shortfall in housing units and predicted an increase in the cost of living if production goals were not met. But after three years and a historic global pandemic, housing has proven to be more of a challenge than ever initially thought. With this shortage in housing, rental costs have increased by 11% from early 2021 and the median home price has increased by 12-16%, according to data from different home listing websites.

In addition, the study had used demographic modeling to predict that Worces-

WORCESTER TO ADD 2,300 NEW HOUSING UNITS

Several Major Housing Projects Responding to Widespread Demand

HOUSING, PG 10

Two Plasma Donation Centers Open Doors in Worcester

GRIFOLS AND TAKEDA ON LIFE-SAVING MISSIONS

by **DOMINIQUE GOYETTE-CONNERTY**, DIRECTOR OF COMMUNICATIONS

Two global companies in the health and biopharma spheres now have a local presence, too, after both opened locations in Worcester toward the end of 2021.

In November, Grifols opened their 300th Biomat USA plasma donation center in the country and their first in Massachusetts. The center is located inside the brand-new Veterans Affairs building on UMass Chan Medical School’s campus.

At the same time, Takeda Pharmaceuticals opened their 161st BioLife Plasma Services donation center on Worcester’s Stafford Street in the Webster Square Plaza. Though this was also their first Massachusetts location to open, the company is no stranger to the Bay State—Takeda’s U.S. headquarters are in Cambridge.

Once at full operation, the two centers expect to bring a combined total of just over 100 jobs to the city.

WHAT IS PLASMA?

There are few plasma centers in the northeast region—although Grifols and Takeda are working to change that—so, many people in this area are unfamiliar with plasma and what it is exactly.

Plasma is the fluid portion of the blood containing several proteins and antibodies critical to human health. It makes up about 55% of whole blood and is approximately 90% water.

Plasma has been in the news more recently because, at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, experts in the medical field were collecting convalescent plasma of those who’d already contracted and recovered from the virus so that they could turn it into plasma-derived therapies to treat COVID patients.

What many aren’t aware of, however, is that plasma donation centers and the use of plasma-derived therapies are nothing new. For decades, plasma

Below: Grifols’ ribbon cutting. Photo by Dominique Goyette-Connerty.



has been collected from donors and used to “make life-changing therapies for those who can’t make those pieces of plasma themselves,” said Tyson Brimberry, plasma center group manager at BioLife’s new Worcester location.

There are hundreds of diseases and chronic illnesses treated with plasma-derived medications. From hemophilia, to immune deficiencies, nerve disorders, and more, there are thousands of patients around the world who rely on plasma-based therapies.

PLASMA, PG 14



Where will 2022 take you?

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VENTURE FORUM REBRANDS, LAUNCHES NEW WEBSITE

Startup community doubles down on
commitment to helping entrepreneurs launch
and scale their business in Central MA

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

Venture Forum is excited to announce the launch of its new website, <https://www.theventureforum.org/>. The website is the product of a months-long development and rebranding process as the nonprofit positions itself as the gateway to entrepreneurship in Central Massachusetts. The website provides useful information for entrepreneurs looking for events, mentors, connections, and other opportunities to launch and grow their business in Central MA.

Through a partnership with the Worcester Regional Chamber of Commerce, Venture Forum is also now home to the Central Massachusetts Startup Community, or CMSC. This is an online community of entrepreneurs, businesspeople, startup support organizations, business assistance bureaus, and others interested in the Central Massachusetts entrepreneurial ecosystem. CMSC, powered by the platform Mighty Networks, provides members of the community with the chance to network, post, participate in discussions, join groups, and find events. To access CMSC, you can request to join at CentralMAStartupCommunity.com.

The creation of both the website and CMSC was funded by a grant from the Massachusetts Office of Business Development's Regional Pilot Program (RPP). The RPP was created last year to help Massachusetts regions recover from the pandemic. Partner organizations on the grant included Venture Forum and the Chamber of Commerce, as well as incubators WorcLab and IdeaLab.

"Venture Forum's new website has presented us with an opportunity to fulfill the organization's vision of becoming the gateway to entrepreneurship in Central Massachusetts," said Ron Fraser, vice president at Avidia Bank and chair of the Venture Forum's Board. "The site will help us provide easy online access to our programs, like the Five Minute Pitch and StartUp Worcester, as well as guides and resources for entrepreneurs and a brand new community-building platform with CMSC."

This new website and community present a unique opportunity for the Central Massachusetts entrepreneurial ecosystem going forward. The intent is to provide a central space for entrepreneurs to connect with each other, mentors, startup support organizations, and business service providers. CMSC also serves as the clearinghouse for the information and resources provided by the region's incubators, accelerators, university entrepreneurship programs, local governments, business assistance bureaus, and others key organizations in Central Massachusetts' entrepreneurial ecosystem. ♥



Congrats to all these Chamber members on
their upcoming grand openings, ribbon
cuttings, and milestones!

FEB. 11 @ 3:30pm

Carbonneau Bridal & Formalwear
60 Shrewsbury St., Worcester

FEB. 15 @ 11am

Fuel America
100 Grove St., Worcester
with Family Grounds

FEB. 24 @ 2:30pm

Elwood Adams
156 Main St., Worcester
with Ballybreen Ventures

MARCH 4 @ 11am

Samuel Slater Experience
31 Ray St., Webster
with Webster Dudley Oxford Chamber

All dates and times subject to change

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

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

February

FEBRUARY 17 • 5:00PM • ELECTRIC HAZE

Business After Hours

Sponsors: Complete Payroll Solutions, The Guru Tax & Financial Services, Trulieve

FEBRUARY 23 • 12:00PM • CHAMBER OFFICE

President's Council *with* Joe Boncore, CEO of MassBio

Sponsor: Marsh McLennan Agency

FEBRUARY 28

Leadership Worcester Applications Available

March

MARCH 1

Tickets go on sale: Worcester Women's Leadership Conference (June 16, 2022)

MARCH 2 • 11:00AM • CHAMBER OFFICE

Manufacturing Roundtable *with* Christine Nolan, Director of the Center for Advanced Manufacturing at MassTech Collaborative

Sponsors: AIS, FLEXcon, MassHire WB

MARCH 3 • 7:00AM • COLLEGE OF THE HOLY CROSS, HOGAN CENTER

The Breakfast Club

Presenting Sponsors: AllWays Health Partners, Fidelity Bank

Supporting Sponsor: MBI

MARCH 4 • 10:00AM - 11:00AM • LIVE ON ZOOM

Construction & Real Estate Roundtable *with* Chrystal Kornegay, Executive Director of the Massachusetts Housing Finance Agency

Sponsor: Bowditch & Dewey

MARCH 5 • 7:05PM • DCU CENTER

Chamber Appreciation Night at the Railers Game

MARCH 9 • 4:30PM - 8:00AM • LIVE ON ZOOM

Seminar Series | MindsetGo!: Communicating Change in the Workplace

Sponsor: TD Bank

MARCH 15 • 4:00PM • WORCLAB

StartUp Worcester Open House

Presenting Sponsor: Berkshire Bank

Supporting Sponsor: BBB of Central NE

Social Media Sponsor: Pineapple Girl Productions

MARCH 15 • 12:00PM • LIVE ON ZOOM

Healthcare Roundtable *with* Dr. Farah Khan

Sponsors: Blue Cross Blue Shield of MA and Saint Vincent Hospital

MARCH 24 • 5:00PM • VOLTURNO PIZZA

Business After Hours

Sponsor: Country Bank

CENTRAL MA ORGANIZATIONS RALLY TO SUPPORT AFGHAN EVACUEES

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



In November, the Worcester Regional Chamber of Commerce was honored to team up with the United Way of Central Massachusetts and Worcester Together to launch "Operation Welcome" in support of the Afghan evacuees who are arriving in Central Mass. The primary mission of Operation Welcome is to find housing for these Afghan evacuees and their families who supported the United States military in many ways while American troops were deployed in Afghanistan.

Countless members of the U.S. Armed Forces who served during the war in Afghanistan have spoken

about how important the assistance they received from Afghans was in keeping U.S. troops and personnel both safe and supplied.

One local veteran, U.S. Navy Captain James J. Sullivan, M.D. (now retired), said, "Many Afghans took enormous risk, for both themselves and their families, by aligning with the U.S. during our 20-year war. My Afghan interpreters made it possible for me to provide appropriate and necessary medical care for U.S. and Afghan military, as well as for innocent civilians including children. We cannot forget their efforts."

Afghans assisting U.S. troops and personnel played a variety of roles in supporting U.S. operations. This included interpreting for troops in the field, doing logistical and supply chain work for combat missions, and serving as employees at U.S. military facilities in Afghanistan.

Now, it's time for us to return the favor.

To help in connecting these Afghan evacuees with housing, the United Way and the Chamber hired former Worcester City Councilor and real estate professional, Tony Economou, to work with the community and residential property owners to develop a comprehensive inventory of apartments and homes for rent in the region.

In addition to assisting these families with housing, the Chamber is working with local employers to connect evacuees with stable jobs. Many of them possess the skills that the region's employers require and so desperately need right now. And of course, these families will need employment opportunities in order to truly make a living of their own here in the states.

The two agencies working at the forefront with evacuees to resettle these families are the Refugee and Immigrant Assistance Center (RIAC) and Ascentria Care Alliance. These two organizations have a long history of working with the U.S. government in assisting refugees, individuals with special immigration visas, or those permitted into the country under Humanitarian Parole status. Both RIAC and Ascentria work to transition new Americans to independence and stability as they build a new, permanent home in the U.S.

Recently, these community partners worked together to launch a new website designed to provide information on ways that individuals, businesses, and organizations can help support the evacuees and their families; the website is www.wtrefugee.org. For those interested in possibly renting out or providing housing to these Afghan evacuees, please feel free to email Tony Economou at tonyeconomou@msn.com or call him directly at (508) 868-2759.

Here at the Chamber, we are grateful to be part of this collaborative program, Operation Welcome, with so many dedicated community partners. Time and again, Worcester steps up to the plate and works together to solve problems in times of need. We are honored to be able to assist Afghan evacuees and their families who so generously supported our fellow Americans while they served in a hostile environment. Please visit www.wtrefugee.org to consider how you might assist this most worthwhile effort. ♥



THANK YOU!

Best Chamber of
Commerce in Central MA

For the **fourth year in a row**, WBJ readers voted us the Best Chamber of Commerce in Central MA in the publication's annual Best of Business Awards.

The Worcester Chamber is still the **only** Chamber to win this designation since the award category's inception in 2019.

BUSINESSES BEWARE:

New Worcester City Council Effects on Small Businesses

by ALEX GUARDIOLA, VICE PRESIDENT OF GOVERNMENT AFFAIRS AND PUBLIC POLICY



So, when I say, “businesses beware,” you might think I’m talking about national concerns on the evening news. Unfortunately, I’m not talking nationally. I’m talking locally, right here in the City of Worcester.

NEW CITY COUNCIL

At the time of writing, Worcester’s new city councilors have been in office for a month. During the campaign, several candidates emerged with new ideas and concepts. Looking at the issues which impact our city through a different lens certainly helps to bring new perspectives to the table, but these new ideas shouldn’t always come at the expense of our business community. Sadly, it seems we’re already running into that issue—and again, we’re only a month in.

Make no mistake: like any good corporate citizen, the Worcester Regional Chamber of Commerce encourages the voicing of opinions, open discussion, and healthy discourse. It’s what makes a democracy a democracy. However, those arguing the pros and cons of any particular issue should respect each other’s viewpoint and refrain from needless rancor.

As the largest chamber of commerce in New England and the primary advocate for the region’s business community, it is, of course, our job to act in the interests of businesses and organizations across Central Massachusetts, including in Worcester. Suffice it to say that when government and other key stakeholders are doing wrong by our business owners—who are, quite frankly, the backbone of our local economy and often intricately involved in the community—it is our responsibility to do something about it.

VACCINE PASSPORT

At the January 25 Worcester City Council meeting, I spoke on behalf of the Chamber in opposition to a petition that was filed by a Worcester resident asking the city to enact and enforce a vaccine mandate which would have required proof of vaccination in order to enter all restaurants, gyms, and entertainment venues in the city. Understandably, the petition garnered attention in the community, online, and in the news media. I was one of 285 people on the call since these meetings are being held virtually.

I argued that, during this time when our small businesses—specifically our restaurants, hospitality venues, and arts and cultural organizations—have been disproportionately impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, government should not be placing additional burdens on them. Frankly, mandating a vaccine passport in the City of Worcester would be detrimental to our business community.

We, at the Chamber, believe in science and data, and we defer to medical experts to make the right call when it comes to public health orders during this pandemic which we all want to see end. We continue to encourage everyone who is eligible to do so to get vaccinated and boosted against this virus.

What we don’t believe in or encourage, though, is making local business owners pay for others’ decisions to not get vaccinated. Considering all the other challenges businesses are currently dealing with—including supply chain and labor shortages, an onslaught of overhead bills like the unemployment insurance trust fund deficit, and increases to both the minimum wage and the Paid Family and Medical Leave funding—adding this vaccine mandate would have severely jeopardized the well-being of businesses and the local economy.

REFUELING STATIONS

Worcester’s City Council isn’t the only group of people who have decision-making power. There are numerous boards and committees in the City of Worcester which can also affect businesses. “How?” you might ask. Well, let’s consider the last few zoning board of appeals hearings that had two similar items on their agendas. Last December, an owner of a parcel of land on Park Avenue petitioned the zoning board for approval of a new gas station and car wash on land which had not been redeveloped in 20-plus years. In Worcester, regardless of where the site is or whether it’s zoned correctly, a petitioner for construction of a new gas station must apply for a special permit.

This owner did a careful traffic study, sought out the highest-grade materials so as not to disrupt the ecosystem, and poured thousands of dollars into an engineering survey that included adding greenery and beautification to a run-down parking lot. Regrettably, this zoning board was swayed by the outrage of and personal attacks by some individuals who appear to have their own agenda.

One month after that hearing, some of these same people again tried to convince the board to deny another petition. Due to their success the first time around with the December hearing, a developer who was trying to build a gas station on a South Quinsigamond Avenue parcel of land decided to pull their application. Put plainly: this very vocal group of individuals is discouraging economic development in the city.

Throughout history, we’ve seen scammers and swindlers come out of the woodwork when monetary opportunities present themselves. New currency will always bring out counterfeiters, deregulations on Wall Street will introduce pyramid schemes, and a federal and state influx of dollars have created (and will always continue to create) new groups of people trying to take advantage because of a shortage of oversight.

“Part of what makes Worcester [...] so attractive to employers, college students, families, and visitors is indeed the strength, diversity, and uniqueness of our business community”

With these recent denials of gas station petitions at the zoning board level and the associated momentum, the council was then petitioned to change the zoning ordinance altogether to never allow another gas station to be built in Worcester. Thankfully, that petition was denied—but just barely. The divided council voted 6-5 at the February 1 meeting to table this, effectively killing it.

Seeing as there’s already a special permitting process in place here in Worcester that these property owners must go through, that process can and should be respected. People’s private property rights need to be respected.

While the Chamber supports many policies that will transition us to a green energy future, the idea to drastically change the landscape of our refueling stations when only 4% of all vehicles currently on the road are electrified is not productive or realistic. Certainly, the transition to more electric vehicles is on our country’s horizon. Prominent companies nationwide like Ford and General Motors are currently spending billions of dollars building brand-new auto plants and retrofitting existing auto plants to facilitate the manufacturing of electric pickup trucks. Accordingly, rather than preventing the construction of all new gas stations in the city, the conversation should center around ensuring that new stations have conduits for electrical capabilities built into them and will be able to pivot to meet that demand when the time comes.

MOVING FORWARD, TOGETHER

The current City Council needs to understand the importance of small businesses and the private sector in having a strong local economy. They need to remember that businesses in our city get hit with challenges on several fronts. The City of Worcester already has the sixth-highest commercial/industrial tax rate out of the 351 municipalities in the Commonwealth. So, whether it’s this annual tax classification debate which consistently results in the business community paying much higher taxes than residents, or weekly petitions which come up on the council agenda, we maintain that Worcester need not be the residents versus the businesses. Let’s not forget that a significant part of what makes Worcester—New England’s second-largest city—so attractive to employers, college students, families, and visitors is indeed the strength, diversity, and uniqueness of our business community. In many instances, what’s best for these businesses is often what’s best for the entire city, be it directly or indirectly. ❤️

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Chamber’s 146th Annual Meeting Features Lt. Gov. Polito Keynote

by **DOMINIQUE GOYETTE-CONNERTY**,
DIRECTOR OF COMMUNICATIONS

Keeping with tradition, the Worcester Regional Chamber of Commerce held their Annual Meeting in December to acknowledge retiring board members, elect new officers and directors, provide an update on the organizational mission, and hear from a dignified keynote speaker.

At the 146th event, 600-plus professionals, leaders, and elected officials came together at the DCU Center for this end-of-year custom.

Just days after announcing she and Massachusetts Governor Charlie Baker would not be running for re-election, Lieutenant Governor Karyn Polito was in attendance to give a keynote address.

Lt. Gov. Polito spoke at length about the Commonwealth’s COVID-19 response, recalling, “There was no playbook. There was no toolkit.” She said the Baker-Polito Administration turned to the medical experts, ensuring Massachusetts’ response would be grounded in science and data, and be flexible enough to tweak when necessary.

Lt. Gov. Polito praised the state’s businesses—with special mention of those in Central Mass—for their roles in keeping Bay Staters safe. “We asked many employers to think about how they could pivot their workplace to make masks, gowns, and ventilators,” she said. Manufacturers like Chamber members FLEXcon Company and CogMedix were among those to step up.

Of the ongoing recovery process, the Lieutenant Governor said remote work models will allow employees to work from wherever they choose. “We have to make sure we’re doing all the right things to tether people to this Commonwealth,” she said. “And what I see here in Worcester is that formula. You get it. You know how to create a community that’s affordable, accessible, has quality of life, good schools, and a vibrant experience.”

The Central Mass native received a standing ovation before and after her speech. Throughout the day’s speaking program, many thanked her for her years of service to the region and Commonwealth.

In his report, Chamber President & CEO Timothy P. Murray provided updates on the “Recruit, Retain, and Incubate” agenda, speaking of the organization’s 2021 progress and outlining next steps for 2022. Some of 2021’s highlights included: the continuation of support for member businesses negatively impacted by the pandemic; the opening of Polar Park, an economic driver for the region and the new home to the Worcester Red Sox; and the establishment of Worcester Green Corps, a nonprofit organization aiming to clean and beautify Worcester on a year-round basis while incorporating lessons of environmental stewardship for local youth.

With Bowditch & Dewey’s **Bob Cox** completing his two-year term as Chairman of the Board of Directors, Fallon Health’s **Christine Cassidy** was elected to take over, effective January 1, 2022. Of her election, Ms. Cassidy said, “The Worcester Chamber is a vibrant organization, a powerful voice for its members, and a pivotal player in the successful economic development efforts happening across our region. I am honored by the opportunity to work more closely with Tim Murray and his outstanding team to support the Chamber’s mission at such an important time.”

Ms. Cassidy was previously serving as the Vice Chair. Mr. Cox will remain on the executive board as Ex Officio Chair. **Dr. Satya Mitra** of The Guru Tax & Financial Services, who was serving as Treasurer, will assume the role of Vice Chair. Fidelity Bank’s **Eric Torkornoo**, who served as Clerk, will become Treasurer. And Euro-American Worldwide Logistics’ **Eric Busenburg** was elected as Clerk.

The Chamber thanked retiring members for their service to the organization and the region’s business community at large. Those retiring were: **Raphael Bibiu**, Ace Medical Services; **Rob Crain**, formerly of the Worcester Red Sox; **Ivon Gois**, Gois Broadcasting; **Glenn Knowlton**, Saint-Gobain Abrasives, Inc.; **Paul Provost**, formerly of Worcester Telegram & Gazette; **Kimberly Rozak**, Mirick O’Connell; **Anthony Salvidio**, Fletcher Tilton PC Attorneys at Law; **Kate Sharry**, Arthur J. Gallagher & Co.; and **Nick Smith**, Rand-Whitney Container LLC.

Those elected to take their place were: **Ché Anderson**, UMass Chan Medical School; **Patrick Balivia**, Saint-Gobain Abrasives, Inc.; **Gareth Charter**, MassLive Media; **Charran Fisher**, Fisher Contracting Corp.; **Nadine James**, Unique Cafe; **Hamid Mohaghegh**, Family Grounds, Inc.; **Bruce Platzman**, AIS; and **Dan Rea**, Worcester Red Sox. All will serve four-year terms, with the exception of Mr. Balivia and Mr. Rea who are filling two unexpired terms for one and two years, respectively.

The 146th Annual Meeting was presented by sponsors Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts, UMass Memorial Health, UniBank, and Worcester Railers HC. More than 120 other sponsors also supported the meeting. The 147th Annual Meeting will be held Dec. 2, 2022. ♥



Above: Lt. Gov. Polito, a Central Mass native, delivers a keynote address at the Chamber’s 146th Annual Meeting. Photo by Matt Wright, Wright Photo Studios.

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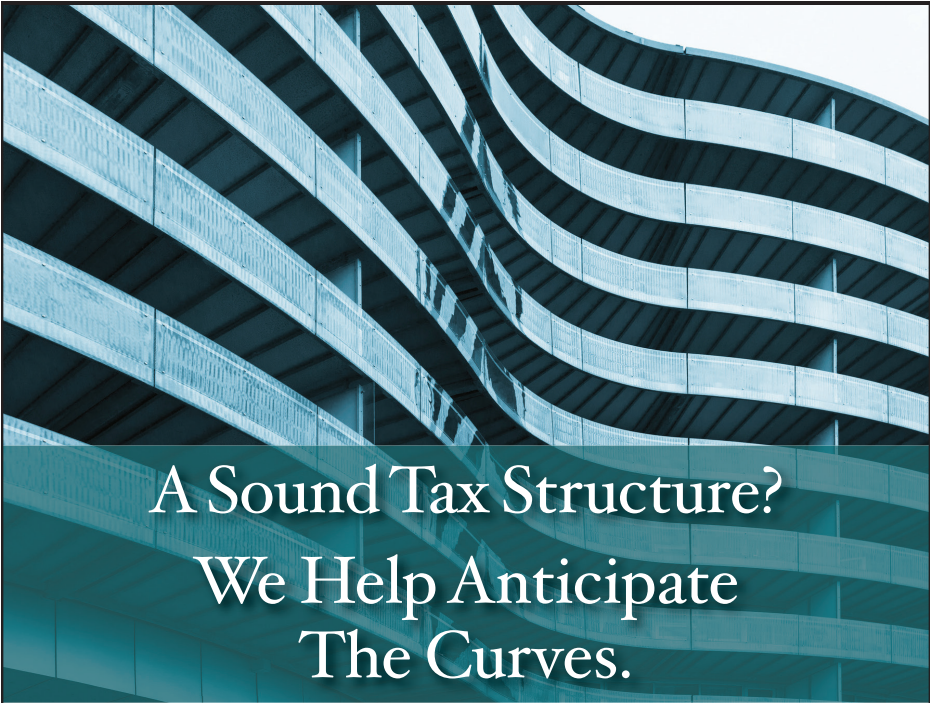
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Proposed Mass General Brigham Expansion Will Increase Care Costs

HEALTH POLICY COMMISSION VALIDATES WHAT WE SUSPECTED

A similar version of this op-ed previously ran in CommonWealth Magazine.

by **TIMOTHY P. MURRAY**, PRESIDENT & CEO; and **AMY ROSENTHAL**, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF HEALTH CARE FOR ALL

Mass General Brigham recently proposed a \$2 billion expansion that would create two new outpatient clinics in Westborough and Woburn and expand a clinic in Westwood. As organizations that represent businesses in the Worcester region and health care consumers across the state, we have serious concerns that this plan would increase health care costs for consumers and negatively impact health equity in Massachusetts.

A recently released Independent Cost Analysis commissioned as part of the Department of Public Health review process concluded the expansion would not drive up health care costs in the Commonwealth. The report largely focuses on current patients of the hospital system who will no longer have to travel into Boston to receive their care and will see reduced costs. This is certainly an important and positive development for these patients. However, this report is overly narrow and, therefore, presents a misleading picture and omits key considerations. Two additional and essential components must be taken into consideration when assessing the cost implications of this proposed expansion.

First, an analysis must look not only at the impact on outpatient care, which is considered in the report, but it must also look at whether the new ambulatory sites will shift referrals and inpatient hospitalizations toward higher-priced hospitals. If a higher-cost institution dominates the health care market across a range of health care services—outpatient care, inpatient care, imaging—costs will increase for everyone. This is what we believe will ultimately happen with the Mass

General Brigham expansion, given that the hospitals in that system are some of the most expensive in the state. Health care costs are already a major concern for businesses and families across the Worcester region and statewide, and this expansion would only further strain employer and family budgets.

As highlighted in a report released by Attorney General Maura Healey, Mass General Brigham’s own estimates show that it anticipates increasing its market share of inpatient hospitalizations due to new referrals from the new outpatient sites. They also estimate the revenue from these new referrals will far outweigh the lost revenue from shifting some care for their patients to lower-cost settings—ultimately resulting in an increase in their direct margins of \$385 million per year. It is the revenue associated with the change in market share of inpatient hospitalizations—not considered in the Independent Cost Analysis—that would likely increase overall health care system costs in Massachusetts.

Second, the Independent Cost Analysis report did not examine a key health care access and equity issue—how the proposed expansion will affect the financial stability of providers in the targeted areas who currently serve a disproportionate number of MassHealth and other publicly-insured patients. The proposed expansion sites are in predominantly white, higher-income communities with a disproportionate share of commercially-insured patients and surrounded by lower-income communities with a disproportionate share of publicly-insured patients.

The shifts in market share for outpatient services

projected in the Independent Cost Analysis are almost certain to result in some commercially-insured patients shifting away from local community providers who care for more publicly-insured patients. These providers often operate on thin margins, so even a small shift could remove a key revenue stream that enables them to serve patients who are insured by MassHealth or Medicare or patients who are uninsured. While we hope these local providers will continue to serve these patients even if their commercial volume is down, the financial instability could ultimately force them to close or scale back critical medical, behavioral health, and other services. If that were to happen, it would jeopardize access to care and services for the most vulnerable patients, while the most privileged migrate to Mass General Brigham facilities.

The concerns of the Attorney General were validated on January 25 when the state’s Health Policy Commission (HPC) weighed in on both Mass General Brigham’s proposed expansion and their inability to control costs on par with other Mass providers. The HPC said the proposed expansion would add to health care costs and negatively impact the UMass Memorial Health system and Saint Vincent Hospital.

We hope the Department of Public Health Council will carefully consider the full picture when deciding whether to approve the ambulatory expansions. We believe the health care cost, access, and equity concerns raised here should give serious pause to considering the approval of the proposed outpatient expansions. ♥



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RECYCLING DO'S AND DON'TS

Tips and Tricks to Improve Your Recycling Purity

by **MIRANDA HOTHAM**, WORCESTER GREEN CORPS COORDINATOR



Do you know what happens to your recycling once it leaves your curb? The answer might surprise you.

In the United States, only about 9% of plastic actually gets recycled, leaving an astonishing 91% to go to landfills, incinerators, or end up as litter in our oceans and streams. The reliance on single-use plastics around the globe is overwhelming our planet's natural environments. Scientists estimate

that by 2050, there will be more plastic than fish in the ocean when measured by weight. The problem isn't necessarily the fault of the recycling plant or your city, but rather, the consumer who fills the recycling bin.

The responsibility to recycle a product really begins with the producer, who starts the life cycle of the product and puts it into the economy. The producer then shifts responsibility to the consumer, who then relies on the municipality and recycling centers to take care of the issue at the end of the line. Because we as consumers are closer to the beginning of this cycle, we have an opportunity to improve how we handle waste and change the outcome of our recycling practices.

The recycling rate in the U.S. is very low, largely because we are just not very good at recycling. Many U.S. residents are "wishful recyclers," meaning they put something in their recycling bin hoping that it is recycled, or that they feel better about themselves and their environmental impact by putting items in the recycling instead of waste—even if that item is not truly recyclable. Wishful recyclers often don't want products to end up in the landfill, so they try to ease their guilt by recycling.

Though usually well-intentioned, this practice is problematic for the recycling plants, delaying the sorting process and clogging up machinery. Because contamination rates are so high, it costs more to collect and treat recycling than it would for trash alone. If we truly want to support this process, it's essential that households work to make the curbside recycling program more efficient and profitable for the next in line. That is: if we want to increase the rate at which curbside recycling products are actually being recycled, we must become better recyclers ourselves.

Here are some tips to improve your household's recycling purity:

NO PLASTIC BAGS

Plastic bags are not recyclable and are the most common contaminant in recycling bins. A conversation with Department and Public Works (DPW) Commissioner Jay Fink and Assistant Commissioner Robert Fiore confirmed that this is the biggest issue recycling plants face from Worcester's curbside collection program.

KEEP ITEMS LOOSE

Items must be placed in a recycling bin rather than being tied up in a plastic bag. Not only are the plastic bags contaminants in the recycling stream, but it makes it very difficult to sort the recyclables once at the plant.

COMBINED MATERIALS ARE TRASH

Combined materials are a combination of different products that cannot be manually separated. They are difficult to recycle because the paper, plastic, glass, or metal, cannot be isolated and processed, and therefore cannot turn a profit for the recycling plant. Paper envelopes with plastic padding glued inside, milk cartons with plastic spouts, and Pringles cans are all examples. There are some items consisting of combined materials that can be manually separated, though, like tissue boxes and glass jars with metal lids. Once you separate those materials, most are individually recyclable.

MAKE SURE IT'S CLEAN, EMPTY, AND DRY!

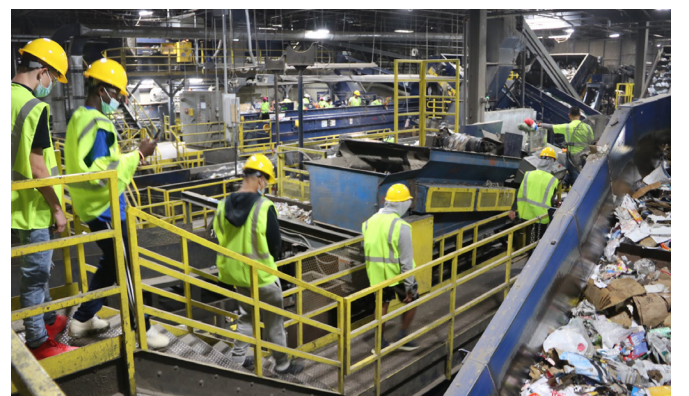
This is one of the most important steps in the recycling process and is commonly overlooked by recyclers. Make sure the item you're placing in the recycling bin is clean enough that it could be used again. I like to tell people that scrubbing

with soap and water until it shines isn't necessary, but that giving something a thorough rinse and leaving it on the drying rack will do the trick. Putting just one contaminated item in the recycling bin can contaminate not only your entire household recycling, but the whole truckload. One of the most common offenses that results in contamination is pizza boxes. Pizza boxes are typically covered in grease, making it impossible to clean for the recycling bin. It is therefore essential to remove the clean, recyclable lid, and trash the bottom part.

FLATTEN CANS AND BOXES

This significantly helps DPW's curbside program by reducing the amount of space that recycled materials take up. When I spoke with the DPW Commissioners, they highly encouraged this practice.

Right: Worcester Green Corps youth workers tour Casella Waste Systems' recycling center in Auburn during one of their summer 2021 educational sessions. Photo by Mason Rainford.



Worcester began curbside recycling in 1993 with our "pay-as-you-throw" program. Under this programming, Worcester residents pay for their household waste, but can recycle at no cost. This led to a much higher participation in recycling, because recycling was now free, accessible, and encouraged. As a result, many recyclable materials were successfully diverted from the waste stream. According to Mr. Fiore, we were much more efficient then because we were operating on a dual stream system. With dual stream, recyclers would separate their paper, plastic, glass, and metal products into separate containers for collection.

In 2010, the city switched to zero-sort recycling, meaning households put all their recyclables into one bin. After leaving the curb, the recyclables would be sorted and processed at the recycling center. While this is much easier for households, it's led to an increase in wishful recycling; Now that consumers don't have to consider which stream their product should go to, it makes it easier to just assume anything can go in the bin.

If you're truly concerned about the waste issue, the best thing you can do is reduce your overall waste volume. Recycling is a great way for manufacturers to help us reduce the amount of waste that ends up in landfills, as it can be turned into new products to enter the economy once again. However, producers are often averse to the high prices of recycled materials, and it's difficult for municipalities and recycling plants to turn a profit.

To best reduce your overall waste, you should avoid single-use items, reuse as much as possible, repurpose products, and try to compost. It's also important to not think of recycling as the end-all be-all solution to the waste issue. Once a product leaves your home, it is waste, and should always be thought of as such.

Another great way to increase your household's plastic recycling rate is to participate in the bottle deposit program. According to Mr. Fiore, there is up to \$70 million in unclaimed bottle deposits in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. While the Bottle Bill has been largely effective in its goal to encourage plastic recycling, it would be even better for households to increase their participation in this program. Not only does it ensure that your plastic will be processed, but it also reduces your curbside recycling volume and gives you back a little pocket change.

The good news is that for an urban area, Worcester is doing alright in terms of our recycling rates. Not great, but certainly not terrible either. Mr. Fiore thinks that for us to improve, education is essential. On Worcester's new recycling bins, there are easy-to-read icons that show what does and does not belong in the bin. Additionally, there is a QR Code on the new bins that brings users to a website, allowing them to search for specific materials and determine if they do in fact belong in the bin. More information can also be found on the RecycleSmartMA website.

The City of Worcester is planning on distributing 55,000 of these new bins which have lids to prevent litter from spilling into the streets. So far, all of the Wednesday pick-up locations should have received their new bins, and another 12,000 are ready to be delivered. Worcester's DPW hopes that by spreading this information and increasing awareness about how to best recycle, the city can improve the efficiency of our curbside program. ♥

Worcester Green Corps by the Numbers

since July of 2021:



195 streets

52.21 miles



172 volunteers



7,384.56 pounds



817 bags



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HOUSING, CONTINUED

ter’s population would increase to 195,000 in 2030 – a generous estimate at the time. Instead, Worcester surpassed all expectations, hitting 206,518 residents by 2020.

However, the city is starting to catch up. Worcester’s strong economic development prospects have brought major new multifamily developers to the city who are looking to help Worcester meet its needs for housing. For instance, Rich Mazzochi, Managing Director at Boston Capital Development, is leading the effort to construct 350 to 400 units of housing on a planned six-building campus on the site of Table Talk Pies’ former bakery at Kelley Square.

The first building in this development will cost over \$35 million and bring 83 units of workforce housing, according to Mr. Mazzochi. Workforce housing is in high demand for Worcester, as it provides subsidized affordable housing for households with low-to-moderate income in the range of 60-120% of the area median income. “New rental supply will provide affordable housing for families that are currently overburdened with housing costs or living in substandard housing,” said Mr. Mazzochi.

The fundamentals of Worcester’s economy have proven invaluable to incoming developers like Boston Capital. “Worcester has stable industries such as educational institutions and healthcare, combined with a good outlook for growth with industries such as biotech,” said Mr. Mazzochi. “The amount of public and private investment over the last several years and a very proactive city administration with economic development initiatives makes Worcester a very attractive area in which to invest.” Mr. Mazzochi also noted that the addition of Polar Park and the development momentum around it was an appealing attraction.

Other out-of-town developers like Madison Properties express similar sentiments. “The energy in the city renewed our interest in Worcester,” said Denis Dowdle, president of Madison Properties. The Boston-based developer had previously built Worcester Crossing, where Walmart is located.

Mr. Dowdle is overseeing the construction of two residential buildings across from Polar Park, the first of which, called SOMA, is under construction and is estimated to bring 228 apartments to the Canal District with an investment of \$89 million. The residential buildings will be accompanied by a hotel, a municipal parking garage, and a 200,000 square-foot office and lab building, as well as another office and lab building overlooking Polar Park’s left field.

Madison Properties’ investments were catalyzed in part by Worcester Chamber President and CEO Tim Murray, who showed Mr. Dowdle the developments at downtown’s CitySquare and the site of the new Polar Park in 2017.

These two projects, which will anchor the Canal District along with Polar Park, are being built from the ground up. Madison Properties is building its campus on vacant industrial land and Boston Capital is demolishing the former Table Talk Pies bakery. Another Canal District housing development involving new construction will be Churchill James’s The Cove, a seven-story, 173-unit building that will take the place of the former Lucky Dog Music Hall building right behind Polar Park’s centerfield.

Last year, there were challenges with construction costs due to supply chain issues as the price of steel and lumber increased dramatically. “The trends with materials pricing have definitely created challenges in putting together a feasible project,” said Mr. Mazzochi, whose firm plans to begin construction this year. Mr. Dowdle expressed optimism in planning for issues related to supply chains. “We have spent a lot of time proactively identifying potential supply chain issues before they become time sensitive problems,” he said, adding that no significant issues have occurred to-date for SOMA.

New construction is seen as a way to improve the quality of housing in the city. Substandard quality housing was identified by the Chamber’s housing study as a major issue in Worcester, which has one of the oldest housing stocks of any city in the country. Nearly half of the city’s housing stock was built before 1940, according to U.S. Census Bureau data.

Worcester’s historic buildings are also an opportunity, however. Worcester’s underused buildings are being repurposed into housing which retain the city’s historic character while bringing quality housing of all types. The Courthouse Lofts, for instance, was just completed by Boston-based Trinity Financial in 2021. It brought 118 units of housing, including 90 affordable housing units, to the old Worcester County Courthouse, which had sat vacant for a decade. Torrey Lofts is a repurposed old factory that is now home to 47 new units. Even the Elwood Adams Hardware Store – which recently closed after 235 years in business – was converted into housing units this past year.

Now, with well over \$600 million in recently completed and ongoing housing projects that represent about 2,300 new rental housing units in the city, developments in Worcester are accelerating at an unprecedented pace. This level of investment is a marked increase from the 10 years from 2011 to 2021, when just a combined 1,800 units of housing were added in major projects.

These new developments are bringing much needed housing to the city at a pivotal time to help rein in costs of living and continue to make Worcester an affordable and exciting place to live. ♥

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Night Life Continuing Education Collaborates with Community Partners to Resolve Bus Driver Shortage

by **MONICA SAGER**, CORRESPONDENT

Worcester Public Schools' (WPS) Night Life Continuing Education program is partnering with other community organizations to recruit, train, and employ bus drivers for the district, as the profession has been short on workers since the start of the coronavirus pandemic.

"It's so great all of the people we've been getting to apply because it's just so very needed," said Ruth Seward, Night Life director. "We still have a lot of spots to fill."

The national labor shortage has taken a toll on transit systems both nationally and locally within the City of Worcester. The gap between available jobs and people to fill them has led MassHire Central Career Center to act.

"It was kind of a no-brainer for us, saying 'let's figure out how to make this happen,'" said Jeff Turgeon, executive director of MassHire Central Career Center. According to him, MassHire is fully funding the training course for Commercial Driver's License (CDL) Permits.

MassHire Central Region Workforce Board houses the Worcester Jobs Fund (WJF), which is guided by a committee consisting of representatives from other workforce partners at the MassHire Central Career Centers, Worcester Community Labor Coalition, the Worcester Regional Chamber of Commerce, and Worcester Public Schools.

The Jobs Fund was created to pave way for viable long-term careers where there is an immediate need within the workforce. The program, which currently receives an annual City of Worcester tax levy appropriation of \$200,000, supports job training, recruitment, and other related services.

"The mission of that program is to facilitate getting Worcester residents into good-paying jobs," Mr. Turgeon said. "The Worcester Jobs Fund exists so that we see a great opportunity for people to move their life in a direction toward good-paying jobs with just a bit of training. The City's going to use the Jobs Fund to help them, and it's also going to help the schools that have a large demand [for bus drivers]."

The Jobs Fund has offered programs like Worcester Building Pathways pre-apprenticeship training, mobile EKG and phlebotomy technician training, and advanced manufacturing training. To participate in the WJF, individuals must be a resident of the City of Worcester, eligible for an income, and over the age of 18. Given the shortage of bus drivers, this CDL Permit program was a natural fit for WJF to offer.

Night Life, which allows lifelong learners the opportunity to develop more skills and knowledge both for employment purposes as well as enjoyment, also currently offers the chance for students to earn their CDL Permit. The course, which is offered at Worcester Technical High School, is held Tuesdays and Thursdays from 5:30 to 7:30 p.m.

"There's a huge need for this sort of employment," Seward said. "I've done a lot of community organizing [...] This is just another example of how people of Worcester just want to see things get done. We reduced all the barriers we could to get this program up and running."

The CDL Permit course was started by Seward's predecessor prior to the pandemic, but the pandemic's onset brought it to a halt.

"What she [the predecessor] couldn't predict and what we didn't know was that there would be such an extreme shortage of bus drivers," Ms. Seward said. "And in addition to that, Worcester Public Schools would be tasked to essentially create their own busing and transportation department and provide all of the busing rather than contract it out."

Night Life's program allows for what Ms. Seward calls a "streamlined process." Students receive their permit and then continue with the Worcester Public Schools transportation department. Kathy Everett, the assistant transportation coordinator at Worcester Public Schools, is the same trainer and instructor throughout both entities, according to Ms. Seward.

"This way it makes it very easy for the candidates," Ms. Seward said. "Worcester Public Schools needs to hire, I think, around 200 bus drivers."

The course is currently in its third cohort of students, with about 15 people in class. So far, around 30 people have completed the course and worked to

receive their Class A CDL Permit as well as both the passenger and air brakes endorsements. Night Life also provides the students 40 hours of instruction and the required 80 hours of road and field maneuvers.

MassHire helps with pre-screening to ensure that the candidates are Worcester residents and have a valid driver's license plus a high school degree or equivalent education. The Adult Education Center also supports those who would like their CDL Permit but need to receive a high school education first or take an English as a Second Language (ESL) course.

"They have been a very valuable background resource," Ms. Seward said of the Adult Education Center. "They have been very helpful as well."

Although applicants may apply for a CDL beginning at the age of 18, federal regulations state that a license holder must be 21 years old to drive a commercial motor vehicle in interstate commerce. Any CDL holders in Massachusetts under the age of 21 will be issued a restricted license.

"That shortage that exists was really limiting Worcester Public Schools' ability to operate," Mr. Turgeon said.

To Ms. Seward, though, the course is beneficial not only for the schools, but also for parents seeking employment.

"They pay well and the schedules at Worcester Public Schools are very good," Ms. Seward said. "You can really do [financially] well annually, but it's also the type of schedule that fits into a parent's schedule." She also added that candidates do not need to be computer literate or have knowledge in a specific field like some of the other permits that Night Life courses may entail. To gain a CDL Permit, potential candidates simply need to know how to drive and work well with kids.

According to Mr. Turgeon, the students who went through the initial cohorts are already working with the Worcester Public Schools—and the mission and courses have "caught on," in other cities across the Commonwealth. And, he doesn't see the program stopping at any point in the near future.

"As long as they have a need to fill these drivers, we would love to keep supporting them and the classes," Mr. Turgeon said. "I would say we will have at least one more cycle if not more than that." ♥





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Massachusetts’ Highest-Ranking Cultural Official Speaks at Chamber Event

by DOMINIQUE GOYETTE-CONNERTY, DIRECTOR OF COMMUNICATIONS

Rounding out the year on a high note, the Worcester Regional Chamber of Commerce’s final Breakfast Club event of 2021 welcomed just over 100 people—including the state’s highest-ranking cultural official—to a poinsettia-decorated Washburn Hall inside downtown Worcester’s historic Mechanics Hall.

The December edition of The Breakfast Club gave attendees the chance to network with other professionals, celebrate six member businesses and organizations for their milestones, and hear from a dignified keynote speaker, all while enjoying their morning coffee and breakfast.

Michael J. Bobbitt, new executive director of the Massachusetts Cultural Council, served as the event’s keynote speaker. Mr. Bobbitt assumed this leadership position February 1, 2021, when the coronavirus pandemic and associated restrictions still posed serious threats to the arts and culture sector.

From dedicating his entire professional career to arts leadership—operating in roles as a director, playwright, choreographer, and associate professor—Mr. Bobbitt understands and appreciates the important roles that arts, culture, and humanities play in the community and the economy. Amidst the pandemic, he said we “witnessed a cultural sector suffering, losing resources and revenue, but dedicated to getting arts and culture to residents of the Worcester region and beyond.”

But even in these last couple of difficult years, Worcester’s arts and culture scene has been a significant contributor to the local economy. According to Mr. Bobbitt, the industry was responsible for more

than \$125 million spent by cultural organizations and audiences, 4,000-plus jobs, \$10 million in state and local taxes, and millions in secondary spending (dinner before a show, drinks after a show, parking, public transportation, etc.)

Throughout his address, Mr. Bobbitt repeatedly called the audience to action, asking them to invest in and support the arts and culture industry. Leaving no room for doubt, he said, “We need to invest in the further development of the creative sector, because wherever creativity goes—and by extension, wherever talent goes—innovation and economic growth are sure to follow.”

Aside from its economic value and its function as entertainment, he said that art in all forms not only allows humanity to stay connected to the past, it enables society to imagine the future. “Art is inherently a social justice tool. It gives voice to the voiceless. What a responsibility artists have [...] What a gift artists are to the world.”

He continued, “The world’s problems—Worcester’s problems—can be solved through creativity. And Worcester has an embarrassment of riches of creatives,” speaking of the city’s abundance of artists and the like.

Presented by sponsor Bay State Savings Bank, along with supporting sponsor Western New England University School of Law, as well as coffee sponsors UniBank and UniCare, December’s Breakfast Club saluted six Chamber members for new leadership and key anniversaries.

Karl Storz Endoscopy celebrated their 75th anni-



versary, Bay State Savings Bank was honored for their 125 years in business, and Rollstone Bank & Trust recognized for a whopping 175 years in operation. Moreover, the Chamber was thrilled to salute three women who had all taken on new leadership positions at their member companies and organizations: Caitlyn Correia, new president of BlueHive Group and BlueHive Exhibits; Connie Askin, new CEO of Big Brothers Big Sisters of Central Mass and Metrowest—the first woman to ever hold the position at this nonprofit branch; and Rachel Lopez, new president and CEO of Resource Management, Inc. (RMI).

During the breakfast, Ché Anderson, assistant vice chancellor for city and community relations at UMass Chan Medical School, served as chief greeter. Mr. Anderson, who was elected to the Chamber’s board of directors just the week prior, pointed out that this first opportunity to emcee The Breakfast Club felt full-circle—years ago, his first involvement with the Chamber was by serving on The Breakfast Club planning committee. Moreover, Mr. Anderson formerly served as the City of Worcester’s Deputy Cultural Development Officer and currently serves on the Mass Cultural Council’s board, making him a natural fit for the event.

Held four times each year, The Breakfast Club typically draws about 200 professionals for a networking breakfast in which local member businesses and executives are recognized followed by a keynote speaking program. The next Breakfast Club will be held at College of the Holy Cross’ Hogan Campus Center on March 3. Visit worcesterchamber.org to register. ❤️

A photograph of a man with a beard and glasses, wearing a blue button-down shirt, smiling. A young girl with blonde hair is sitting on his shoulders, also smiling. The background is a soft-focus indoor setting.

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ARIANNA DRUMMY, NEW WORCESTER JOBS FUND DIRECTOR

by DOMINIQUE GOYETTE-CONNERTY, DIRECTOR OF COMMUNICATIONS

In each edition, *Chamber Exchange: The Newspaper* includes one question-and-answer-style interview with a Chamber member who's making a change in the community. This month, I sat down with Arianna Drummy, the new director of the Worcester Jobs Fund (WJF).

WJF was created to better connect Worcester residents with good jobs made available through development projects and job expansion activities. The effort prepares residents for employment in viable long-term career pathways where there is an immediate workforce need by providing free job training programs, job recruitment, and related services. WJF is administratively housed within the MassHire Central Region Workforce Board and guided by a committee of representatives from the MassHire Central Career Centers, Worcester Community Labor Coalition, the Worcester Regional Chamber of Commerce, and Worcester Public Schools.

Ms. Drummy took over in late-December of 2021, still in the midst of an ongoing coronavirus pandemic, and at a time when so many of the nation's employers—Worcester not immune—have been struggling to find employees and fill open positions. Below are excerpts from the interview with Ms. Drummy, edited for length and clarity.

Arianna, you just started this new position with Worcester Jobs Fund—welcome aboard! What prior experience do you have and what made you pursue and accept this position?

I went to college for youth development and studied nonprofit studies as well. After I graduated, I was on track to become a BCBA (Board Certified Behavior Analyst), but after that experience I figured out I wanted to work with young adults. I started working as a case manager out in the Berkshires with young adults who had learning differences like autism. And that was great work, but it was a for-profit company and I really wanted to get back to nonprofit work since that's what my background is in. So, I was looking for a new opportunity and Jeff Turgeon [Executive Director of MassHire Central Region Workforce Board], actually, told me about the Worcester Jobs Fund and explained the amazing work it does: the programs, the projects, and how it helps Worcester residents get these viable long-term careers. I thought that was such a unique workforce position and I wanted to take on a new challenge, get back to my roots, and help underrepresented populations get great jobs. It just felt like a natural next step and I've been really happy and excited to be here!

For readers unfamiliar, what are some of the training and certificate programs the WJF has historically offered?

We've had CDL (Commercial Driver's License) A and B programs. We're currently wrapping up our Building Pathways Pre-Apprenticeship program—that's for the trades. We're also wrapping up a Clinical Medical Assistant (CMA) cohort. We've had medical administrative assistant programs, school bus trainings, and right now we're recruiting for our upcoming Coding Dojo technology program which is very exciting—that will help students who want to learn coding software take that class and then be able to get a really good job in a lucrative career field.

Of course, you're still new to the job so I imagine you're still spending a lot of time trying to get acquainted, but when you're more settled, what will your day-to-day responsibilities look like?

It depends on where I'm at with the program. Right now, I'm doing a lot of outreach and recruitment. So the cycle is first: outreach and recruitment, then I'm helping walk those trainees through the application process. Then once they're in the program, I'm providing that case management to make sure they feel supported and can finish and commit to the program—because that's the goal. Then it doesn't end once they're done with the program. I'm going to be helping them with the job search, resumé writing, and job placement. And even after that, I'm going to be following up to make sure they're doing well and they've been placed in a job. So it's really a wrap-around approach, and I want to make sure they feel supported the whole time.

I can tell you're very passionate about the work you're doing. Is there a particular training or field you're looking to prioritize or expand? And what's your number one goal for WJF?

One of the trainings I'm extremely passionate about and definitely want to prioritize is the Building Pathways program—specifically looking to get more women into trade work. This is a huge challenge; women make up only about 3% of the construction population, so we definitely want to even the playing field and make sure that we diversify that workforce with people of color and women. Lots of work to be done there.

My number one goal is to have a high success rate in terms of placement. We want at least 85 - 90% of students who go through these trainings placed at a job

when they graduate—and not any job, but a job where they can grow and have a good, long-term career. With that, it's a responsibility [for me] to provide great case management to help them overcome any barriers they may have.



What programs are you actively recruiting for right now? And where can people go for more info?

We're currently recruiting for our upcoming Clinical Medical Assistant (CMA) program. That's a 16-week program which includes classroom instruction and an externship, then they take the national exam to become a CMA. We're also recruiting for a new Coding Dojo technology program; that's completely online and a 16-week program. Worcester residents receive a \$5,000 stipend. That will start mid-March. And we're recruiting for an Environmental Remediation program; this is a great program for someone who loves hands-on work and doesn't mind getting dirty. It involves asbestos removal, which is very important, especially in Worcester. There's a lot of need for this particular area. Worcester residents will receive \$200 a week in stipend. We'll have five cohorts, but that one starts in April. In the future, we'll be offering another CDL permit class and school bus driver training program.

To find out more, go to MassHireCentral.com. Under 'Training Resources,' there'll be a list of all the upcoming trainings. You can also email me, drummya@masshirecentral.com, or call me at 508.373.7641. ❤️

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PLASMA, CONTINUED

tics. According to Whitley Moguel, center manager at the new Grifols Worcester location, their company makes somewhere between 20 to 30 medications for more than 180 different diseases.

The challenge is that the medical community has yet to figure out how to synthetically manufacture these proteins and plasma. “Plasma can’t be made in a lab,” said Mr. Brimberry. “It has to come from human donors. If we don’t have those donations, these individuals can’t live their lives.”

“So that’s where we come in and that’s why we need donors,” said Ms. Moguel. “It can make a huge difference for someone. For our patients, it’s what makes them able to go out into the world—especially during a pandemic when they’re extremely high-risk. So we’re the very first step in being able to help someone live a normal life.”

PLASMA DONATION PROCESS

So what is the plasma donation process like? At centers like BioLife and Grifols, state-of-the-art technology is used to draw the whole blood from an eligible donor. The machine spins out just the fluid portion—the plasma—then returns the red blood cells to the donor through the same needle. This draw-and-replace process happens in cycles until the appropriate amount of plasma from that specific donor is collected.

Unlike a regular blood donation, since the red blood cells are returned to the body during a plasma donation, people are able to donate up to two times per week, as long as there’s at least one day of rest in between donations. With a regular blood donation, a donor must wait approximately 56 days. But with plasma donations, “since your body regenerates that plasma very quickly, you’re able to do so [donate twice per week] very safely,” Mr. Brimberry explained. And because plasma is roughly 90% water, “the more hydrated you are, the better the donation goes.”

But prior to donating, there’s a thorough safety process potential donors must go through to determine eligibility. “We do a lot of checks and balances to make sure the donor is healthy enough to donate their plasma, and that the plasma they donate is healthy as well for the patient,” Ms. Moguel said.

“The first visit is a little longer because we go through medical history and review medications the donor takes that could affect the plasma they’re giving. We do a non-invasive physical assessment to ensure there are no underlying medical concerns. And we check all the vitals, proteins, and make sure the hematastat is good,” she explained. “Again, that’s to make sure the donor is safe and the product is safe.”

That initial visit takes an estimated 2.5 hours. However, for repeat donors who’ve already been determined to be eligible, each visit is about an hour. BioLife centers require donors to make an appointment via their website or mobile app; Grifols centers offer appointments if you’d like, but otherwise accept walk-ins.

Since plasma donation is somewhat of a time-consuming process and because the need for donations is so dire, both companies compensate donors for each donation. They frequently run promotions offering bonus bucks to incentivize donors to return.

Recognizing “it can be scary to go out there and do something you’ve never done before, especially when it involves needles,” Mr. Brimberry said, “We really try to make the atmosphere very comfortable for people to come in and to keep coming back.”

LIFE-SAVING, MEANINGFUL WORK

What unites both BioLife and Grifols, both Ms. Moguel and Mr. Brimberry, and all those across the board who work at plasma donation centers, is their passion for saving lives. It’s pride for donors, passion for patients, and seeing the profound purpose in plasma.

Oftentimes, center employees get to meet patients receiving plasma-based treatments and hear their stories.

Mr. Brimberry, who’s been with BioLife for seven years, remembers one patient in particular whose story stood out to him. This man was in his early-30’s when they met, but he was always sick as a child. He went from doctor to doctor, to no avail. They didn’t think he would live past age 10. “He spent more of his childhood in a hospital than in a school,” Mr. Brimberry recalled. “For me, hearing that made a huge impact. I thought that must have been crazy.”

One day, this boy was finally referred to an immunologist who was able to diagnose him with a rare, chronic disease. “Now, he actually takes one of our medications. He lives a happy, normal, everyday life, and has two kids. You would never know [he had this disease,]” Mr. Brimberry said.

“Hearing that story and dozens of others has just solidified my belief in what we do even more. It’s not just a paycheck. I really do believe in what we do here.”

DONORS NEEDED

“There’s an evergreen need for plasma donations,” Mr. Brimberry said, noting the volume of plasma it takes to meet the supply commitment for patients. “For one year of medication, it can take anywhere from hundreds to thousands of donations to make the treatments for just one patient.”

“We’re grateful for our thousands of donors across the world, but there’s still a need,” said Ms. Moguel. “For all plasma companies, there’s been a shortage because of COVID. People are staying home. [...] But it’s huge because there are people still relying on it.”

“So even though our donations have slowed down, we can’t. We’re going to keep going. We’re still here and still need the donations,” she said. ♥

To learn more about plasma, the donation process, and how to become a donor, you can visit both companies’ websites: biolifeplasma.com and grifolsplasma.com. You can also call both Worcester centers directly. For BioLife Plasma Services, dial 508.713.0133. For Grifols, dial 508.793.2905.

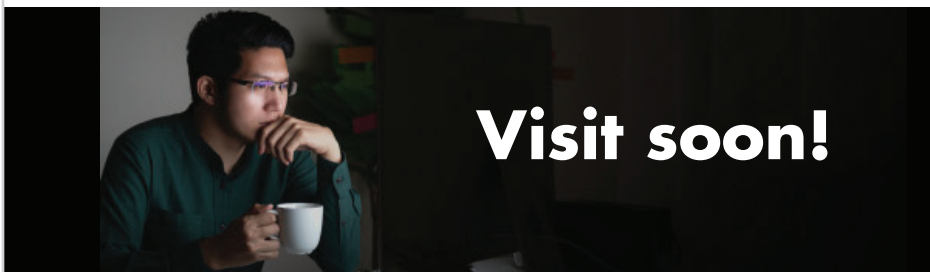
Below: BioLife Plasma Services’ ribbon cutting.
Photo by Dominique Goyette-Connerty.



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Chamber Revives ‘Worcester Goes to Washington’ Program

by DOMINIQUE GOYETTE-CONNERTY, DIRECTOR OF COMMUNICATIONS

After a 20-plus-year hiatus, the Worcester Regional Chamber of Commerce revived their biannual ‘Worcester Goes to Washington’ trip in November of 2021, putting Worcester’s business leaders in front of members of the federal delegation and other decision-making groups.

The day-long event brought nearly 60 Chamber members to the nation’s capital to hear from a lineup of politicians and key policymakers on the topics and issues pertinent to Central Massachusetts’ businesses, organizations, and economy. Throughout the day, attendees were able to listen to and engage with these leaders on subjects such as health care, education and workforce, transportation, and infrastructure.

Speakers included Senator Edward Markey, Congressman Jim McGovern (MA-02); Congressman Richard Neal (MA-01); Congresswoman Lori Trahan (MA-03); Congressman Tom Cole (OK-04); Chief of Staff to U.S. Secretary of Labor Marty Walsh and former congressional candidate, Dan Koh; Senior VP of Dutko Government Relations, Chris Andresen; AVP of Transportation Systems and Practices at the Association of American Railroads, Jeffrey Moller; and Director of Government & External Affairs for Amtrak, Christopher Zappi.

In true Washington, D.C. fashion, unpredictable circumstances almost threw a wrench into the Chamber’s action-packed day of programming. Scheduled months in advance for Nov. 4 when Congress was slated to be in session, trip organizers could not have foreseen that Pres. Biden’s landmark \$2.2 trillion Build Back Better Bill would be on the verge of a major vote in the same week.

In fact, negotiations were ramping up so much that many of the speakers were practically providing minute-by-minute updates of what was happening

in real time. “We’re all walking around with these big, black binders,” Rep. Trahan pointed out as she took the podium. “Not so much because we have scripted and prepared remarks for you, but because the negotiations on the Build Back Better Act have been changing sort of every second and we have to keep up with it.”

Things were unfolding so quickly that Northbridge native and Holy Cross graduate Alicia Molt-West, who works closely with the president in the White House Office of Legislative Affairs and was initially scheduled to participate in the speaking program, unfortunately had to call and cancel while already on her way over. Understandably, a last-minute change required her attention.

And so, just blocks away from the U.S. Capitol building in the Phoenix Park Hotel’s event space, Chamber members could actively feel the energy of D.C.

Rep. McGovern, who chairs the House Committee on Rules, got the day started by talking about how intricately involved his committee was in trying to get Build Back Better across the finish line. He stressed how important bipartisanship would be in getting the deal done, but acknowledged how challenging it was in this polarizing climate.

Sen. Markey spoke about what the bill would mean for Massachusetts’ infrastructure, broadband, clean energy, and green initiatives. Rep. Trahan explained why Paid Family Medical Leave (PFML), childcare, workforce, sewage, and housing all topped her priority list. Rep. Neal touched on transportation and infrastructure necessities, and taxes.

A native of Andover, MA, Dan Koh, honed in on the topic top-of-mind for many Chamber businesses: workforce and talent pipeline.

Right: In D.C., Sen. Markey speaks with Chamber members about issues impacting Central Mass. Photo by Dominique Goyette-Connerty.



The day’s speakers seemed thrilled to see dozens of Central Mass professionals engaged in so much so that they took time out of their work weeks to hear from their elected officials. On the flip side, attendees appeared eager for more and pleased that their legislators took time out of their busy days as well. Both parties welcomed the forum for open dialogue.

The trip ended with a cocktail reception featuring a presentation and Q&A session with Worcester Red Sox Owner and Chairman of the Board Larry Lucchino. Mr. Lucchino talked casually about the team’s inaugural season and what changes may be on the way for the 2022 season. He fielded questions about the minor league team’s move from Pawtucket to the Heart of the Commonwealth, how front office executives settled on the team’s official name and nickname with help from fans, his thoughts on the future of baseball, and Polar Park’s architecture.

Worcester Goes to Washington 2021 was made possible by lunch sponsor, AMR; speaker sponsor, Higher Education Consortium of Central Massachusetts (HECCMA); and reception sponsor, Fallon Health. ♥

The next Worcester Goes to Washington event is tentatively scheduled for November of 2023. Reach out to Chamber EVP Karen Pelletier for more info and sponsorship opportunities.



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StartUp Worcester Alum Sanrel Seeking to Revolutionize 3D Printing

Below: Michael Perrone working at WorcLab. Photo courtesy: Michael Perrone.

by DAVID SULLIVAN, ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT & BUSINESS RECRUITMENT ASSOCIATE

Changing the future of manufacturing is no easy task. But one StartUp Worcester alum, Michael Perrone of Sanrel, is developing the technology to revolutionize the industry.

"I founded Sanrel LLC to apply materials science to modern engineering problems that have a big impact on humanity's future," said Mr. Perrone. Sanrel is developing a game-changing process for 3D printing: utilizing semisolid metals instead of plastics to manufacture products. This is part of an emerging field of manufacturing processes known as "additive manufacturing."

Traditional manufacturing processes are subtractive by nature: cutting, sawing, and other methods that remove pieces until a product is made. With additive manufacturing, pieces are added until a product is made, thereby removing much of the waste involved with traditional manufacturing. Additive manufacturing relies on 3D printing at different scales, and Sanrel is developing a way to add components to products by essentially using a semisolid metal that hardens after being extruded from a nozzle. Mr. Perrone has also developed a software to guide the printer nozzle in following a blueprint.

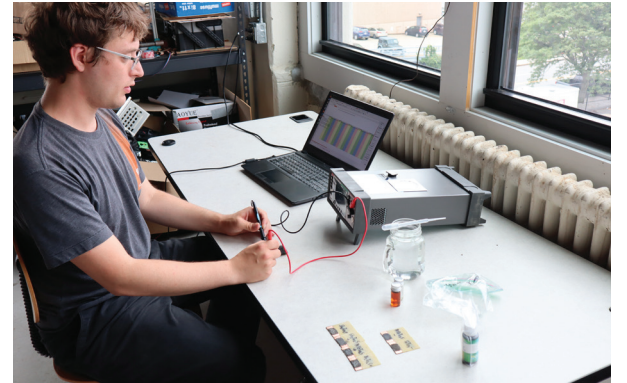
Mr. Perrone was a member of the 2020-2021 StartUp Worcester cohort and still uses WorcLab as his primary workspace. "Without StartUp Worcester, I simply wouldn't have found the lab space to make this work with my current budget," he noted. Mr. Perrone also said that connections to other

StartUp Worcester alumni in his field, like Jesse Silverberg of Multiscale Systems and Aaron Birt of Solvus Global, were essential in getting him the help he needs to continue developing his prototype.

Mr. Perrone is no stranger to the field of additive manufacturing. When he was younger, he built his own software and sold 3D printed objects at conventions when the process was more a novelty than a practical manufacturing solution. It was then Mr. Perrone became in touch with his entrepreneurial nature and found his passion. In fact, he's so passionate about his field that he's read at least three materials science articles a day since high school, sometimes taking a whole day perusing scientific findings.

After earning his degree in mathematics from WPI in 2017, Mr. Perrone worked with WPI's first makerspace, the CollabLab, to get hands-on engineering experience. He then went on to work for other startups like Voxel8, which was run by Harvard alums and Solvus Global. In 2020, he was selected to join StartUp Worcester and began working out of WorcLab, which has the 3D printing bed and software needed for his tech-enabled startup.

While Mr. Perrone remains the only employee at Sanrel as he develops his prototype metal 3D printer, he says this has given him a level of flexibility to respond to pandemic-related challenges. The steep increase in inflation has been his biggest challenge recently, as components for his experiments have become more expensive.



In terms of what's next for Sanrel, Mr. Perrone believes the sky is the limit. He's in the process of applying for Small Business Innovation Research (SBIR) grant funding, which would give him the necessary capital to complete the final design of his semisolid metal extruder. Once the 3D printer is fully functional—which he expects will happen soon—he can move into a kind of commercial printing done by more established firms in the field. "They have all demonstrated that simply printing things for people is quite lucrative at the moment," said Mr. Perrone. "Many people are not ready to own a 3D printer themselves yet but are still interested in having the capability available."

If things go well for Sanrel, Mr. Perrone is considering returning to school for his PhD. In a way that is just as impressive as anything else he's done, Mr. Perrone is interested in writing a physics thesis which would propose a new method of unifying gravity with the other forces of nature into one theory. ♥



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LEADING TOGETHER

What Leadership Worcester Taught Me

by **LOVO D. KOLIEGO MSN, RN**, FOUNDER & CEO, COMMUNITY HEALTH AWARENESS NETWORK (CHAN); LEADERSHIP WORCESTER '22



My Leadership Worcester experience so far has been overwhelmingly intriguing, and I am privileged and humbled for the esteemed opportunity to be part of the Leadership Worcester Class of 2022.

I love Worcester and being inducted into the Leadership Worcester class further fueled my passion for this city. This class has provided personal and professional growth around public health initiatives

and knowledge of different aspects of the city at the monthly educational sessions, highlighting the city's critical issues and challenges. Worcester is a beautiful city and a great place that I call home, but how did I get here?

As an immigrant from Liberia, my mindset has always been to live impactfully. However, as a young adult, actualizing my dreams seemed impossible. Nevertheless, I remained determined to make the most of the opportunities the United States had to offer. My initial plan was to complete the nursing degree I had started in Liberia. I later pursued a bachelor's degree in nursing and a master's degree in community and public health. Currently, I'm working toward a Family Nurse Practitioner degree at Chamberlain University while still working as a Registered Nurse at the University of Massachusetts.

In 2018, being aware and recognizing the population needs and health care challenges in my community, I founded Community Health Awareness Network (CHAN). CHAN is a nonprofit organization dedicated to improving health and healthcare access for low-income African immigrants through health education, outreach, and health promotion. Our goal is to empower community members, improve annual primary care visits, and encourage informed decision-making. While looking for ways to expand awareness and establish partnerships, I learned about the Worcester Regional Chamber of Commerce and its incredible opportunities and immediately signed CHAN on as a new member. In 2021, I applied to the Chamber's Leadership Worcester program. I'm thankful to Community Health Awareness Network (CHAN) and Leadership Worcester for their financial support provided.

Worcester, an all-inclusive city that embraces diversity, faces an equal number of challenges, making the Leadership Worcester program precisely valuable. The program brings professionals and leaders together to address problems from unique perspectives. Leadership Worcester is about changing the narratives and supporting emerging, innovative, and vibrant leaders with ideas to drive change and enhance the city's upward trajectory. It uses a solution-driven approach, presenting critical issues at every session where leaders are motivated and encouraged to build relationships and develop community partnerships to collaborate on finding a solution.

Since joining Leadership Worcester, I've created space for myself to learn and discover various perspectives and experiences of individuals who appreciate the opportunity to be part of this leadership training program. We're challenged and encouraged at every session to take advantage of the many platforms in the city and pursue opportunities that will put us at the decision-making table.

For example, Leadership Worcester has motivated and inspired me to apply for two open board positions, which I am excitedly anticipating favorable responses. I've also had the opportunity to engage and interact with local leaders from different backgrounds and create meaningful professional relationships. Moreover, the personal relationships established are priceless and some of my cohort colleagues have volunteered their expertise and time to support my organization, CHAN.

The Leadership Worcester experience is about having the heart for this great city and becoming the change you want to see, which means working together for a more significant outcome. The wealth of information, resources, and networking available has increased my confidence and productivity as a community leader. I can already see the impact it has had on me personally and professionally. I appreciate this opportunity and would love to encourage anyone passionate about community leadership and aspiring to be a leader to consider applying for the program, as the possibilities are endless. ♥

Applications for the 2022-2023 Leadership Worcester cohort will be available on leadershipworcester.com starting Feb. 28 and will be due May 30. For questions about the program or application process, contact Chamber EVP Karen Pelletier at kpelletier@worcesterchamber.org or 508.753.2924.



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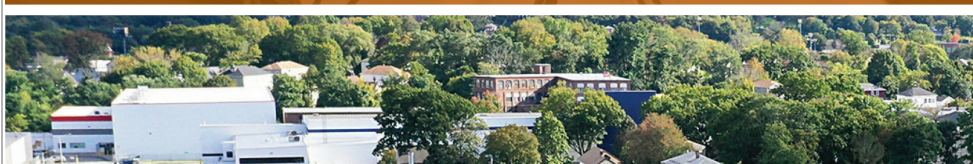


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Local Tax Guru & Philanthropist Dr. Satya Mitra: “EVERYBODY HAS A RESPONSIBILITY TO DELIVER”

By MONICA SAGER, CORRESPONDENT

Dr. Satya Mitra has worked hard to find the answer to what his purpose of being is.

Dr. Mitra turned to his guru, who serves as almost a priest within his community. Dr. Mitra said that gurus give life direction and guidance advice to people. The guru told him to share his success and help others around him.

On vacation, Dr. Mitra and his wife, Sheema, were mugged while in Brazil. Sheema was brutally beaten up. This sparked the start of a movement for Dr. Mitra. He didn’t want that to happen to others. “It was so that nobody goes through the same situation as my wife,” he said. “That kind of was the beginning.”

And that’s when it hit—the answer to his purpose. Helping those in need in his local and global communities. Dr. Mitra and his wife started a school of self-defense for women, educating with a free course that has already trained around 500 women and girls in Worcester.

“I always think that our life is not just for ourselves,” Dr. Mitra said. “We have a responsibility for someone else, maybe an individual, maybe your city or state or the whole world [...] Some people are doctors. Some people are engineers. But everybody has a responsibility to deliver.”

Dr. Mitra came to the United States in 1976 in hopes of pursuing a career in biomedical research in Louisville. Six years later, he moved to Worcester to work at a research institute. He went on to eventually serve as a tax consultant, financial planner, and investment advisor.

“The culture was so different from the south to the northeast,” Mitra said. “Many friends of mine wanted me to get involved with money-making ventures.”

Today, Dr. Mitra is the President and CEO of The Guru Tax & Financial Services, Inc. He’s a member of the Planning Board of the City of Worcester as well as a board member of many local organizations in the local community including the Worcester Regional Chamber of Commerce, Worcester State University Foundation, Tower Hill Botanical Garden, Worcester Rotary Club, and PACE Universal Foundation, CA.

Dr. Mitra and his wife started the Joy Guru Humanitarian Services, Inc., to honor the guru who told him he could use his success to help the rest of the community. “Joy” means “victorious” in Dr. Mitra’s native language, and of course, in English it also means “happiness.”

“We thought maybe we should start a formal

foundation to help more, not only the self-defense class,” he said. “We wanted to help blind people, homeless, poor students [...] We’re really blessed that we’re able to continue to help in different functions and activities and need.”

Beyond the self-defense classes, the foundation provides services for the blind, to combat poverty, help the homeless, empower women and girls, and promote good citizenship.

For Dr. Mitra, the eye exams and help that the foundation provides to the visually impaired mean the most. Growing up in India, his father became blind as an adult. While the medical cause of his blindness was treatable, there was not enough money to afford the help. Dr. Mitra’s father died without regaining his sight.

Today, Joy Guru initiatives provide audio journals to help inform and empower the visually impaired.

“There is a huge speaker in the senior center in Worcester so that the elderly can listen to the news while these volunteers read it,” Mitra said. “It’s just such a joy to see these people—who otherwise can’t do things like read—are able to know about what’s going on in the world.”

Dr. Mitra has supported surgeries for the elderly in Kenya and India who have been blind for years. “For one lady, after the surgeon was done, he asked me to come and the daughter to stand in front of the lady,” he recalled. “He took off the eye bandages, and she saw her daughter. The joy she had on that day—that moment still makes me cry.”

In May of last year, Joy Guru Humanitarian continued its work in India by donating \$50,000 to hospitals to help serve COVID-19 patients. The money went toward purchasing oxygen concentrators, humidifiers, PPE, and many other essential medical supplies.

“They were not quite prepared for it, and all of a sudden people didn’t have oxygen while people were gasping for air,” Dr. Mitra said, adding that he was able to help support a hospital in Kolkata, India. “When you see that you’re far from home and are still able to help people with that kind of support [...] our goal is to help our community—whether it is worldwide or in our City of Worcester.”

Dr. Mitra and the foundation combat poverty by providing food, clothing, medicine, and education to the poor and disadvantaged. They support the homeless population in the same way, hosting programs such as the 12 Days of Christmas, a feeding program to serve hundreds of meals with holiday spirit.



Above: Dr. Satya Mitra and his wife Sheema are philanthropists dedicated to helping those in need locally and internationally.

In addition to these services, the Mitra’s and the Joy Guru work to promote the idea of giving back to society and impacting communities in a positive way. He said he’d like to “restore hope” in everyone, ultimately providing and supporting initiatives in the area to help others. In September, for example, Joy Guru donated \$50,000 to welcome Afghan refugees to Worcester. The organization is also planning a Charity on Wheels, Coast-to-Coast program in the spring, which would include stops across the country to organizations like homeless centers and schools to contribute money and support where there are needs.

“If there’s one goal that I want to give to every entrepreneur is that the true essence of entrepreneurship is giving back to the community,” Dr. Mitra said. “If we are making all of the money today and enjoying our own lives with the earnings we have, I don’t think that is the truest success of entrepreneurship. True success is when you share your success with the community.” ♥

To give back to Joy Guru Humanitarian Services, a-tax deductible donation can be made at joyguru.org or sent to 446 Main Street, 16th Floor, Worcester, MA 01608.



GETTING MORE BY GIVING BACK

by **AUBURN CHAMBER DIGITAL MARKETING COMMITTEE**

Local chambers of commerce are largely volunteer organizations. The Auburn Chamber is no different. We rely on our membership to run every aspect of the Chamber—from the Board of Directors to volunteers on individual committees. Volunteering for these positions requires time and effort, but the benefits are plentiful.

Joining a committee or being elected to become a Board member benefits the Chamber, its members, and the local community. While the Chamber engages in advocacy for its members, much of what we do revolves around bettering our local community for businesses and residents. Helping to organize these events puts you face-to-face with other local businesspeople, community and government leaders, and your customers or clients.

For example, the Auburn Town Wide Clean Up brings together businesses, government, and residents for a rewarding workday that beautifies the town and its neighborhoods. Working side-by-side, groups move through town picking up litter and doing general clean-up. In doing so, you have a unique opportunity to make a significant contribution to the Town of Auburn while also showing your pride in the community.

The Auburn Chamber of Commerce has many committees and events that provide direct and visible contributions to the community. The School-Business Partnership Committee provides about \$15,000 annually in scholarships to graduating seniors. The Teacher Mini-Grant program enables classroom teachers to provide activities and projects for students that would not otherwise be funded. This funding is raised through the efforts of the Golf Committee which organizes the Annual Scholarship Golf Tournament.

The Membership, Programs, Health and Business Expo, and Digital Marketing Committees are less public-facing but work behind the scenes to ensure the Auburn Chamber maintains a strong member base and that its benefits and offerings are meeting those members' needs. The Board of Directors ensures that the Auburn Chamber is fulfilling its mission and that the organization adapts to an ever-changing environment.

In addition to the satisfaction of contributing to the community and the Chamber, volunteering in any of these roles provides valuable networking opportunities. While the Chamber offers regular networking events, working closely with a group over time creates a familiarity and comfort level one does not get from an evening networking mixer.

We're also eager to hear your ideas and suggestions; the more member involvement we receive, the more diverse our programs, and the more closely we can match our benefits to those that will positively impact our members. If there are events or programs you particularly enjoy, consider getting involved so we can continue to offer those events. If there are things you feel are missing from your membership, get involved to help bring those benefits to all members.

As with any membership organization, you will get out of it what you put in. Consider the many ways you and your business can get involved with your Auburn Chamber. If you have questions or would like to learn more, visit our website at auburnchamberma.org. ♥

Blackstone Valley Chamber's Home & Community Expo Lives on with 22nd Annual Event

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

After two postponements due to COVID-19 restrictions, one of the most anticipated events in the Blackstone Valley is finally scheduled to return Saturday, March 12th from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. at the Northbridge High School Field House, 427 Linwood Ave., Whitinsville.

Presented by sponsor UniBank, the annual Home & Community Expo is the largest and most well-attended event hosted by the Blackstone Valley Chamber of Commerce. Each year it hosts 100 exhibitors and more than 2,000 attendees from the community. The exposure and promotion for businesses is unmatched at an event of this stature. Exhibitors come from lifestyle, health and wellness, home improvement services, financial, technology, and education sectors, just to name a few. Interactive booths include demonstrations in workforce skills by the Blackstone Valley Education Hub, family-specific crafts and games, and live entertainment featuring the amazingly talented dancers of Murphy Academy of Irish Dance. It's a day of fun for the entire family!

This year, the fun begins with a St. Patrick's Day theme! Visit our Pot O' Gold sponsor booths and ask the secret question for a chance to win some great local prizes. Look for the leprechaun on the expo floor that day and snag a picture (and perhaps a special prize!) We're excited to finally present our premier event after a two-year hiatus. Not only are we looking forward to an in-person event with our friends and supporters, but also for the ability to showcase our local businesses, offering a special opportunity to local small and sole proprietorships, as well as nonprofits.

In addition to exhibitors, the day features 'Chowderfest'—a tasting competition among several local restaurants serving their best chowder, competing for 'Best Judged,' with local celebrity judges, and for 'People's Choice' awards, where you decide who is best, sponsored by Milford Federal Bank. Local restaurants will compete for bragging rights in the Valley. Come sample some delicious chowder and cast your vote!

This event is open to all. Admission is free with a non-perishable food item or a \$3 donation which will be made to "Peace of Bread" local food bank. Printable admission tickets are found online at www.blackstonevalley.org and available at many vendors and sponsors' places of business. For additional information, to become a vendor, or to enter your restaurant as a Chowderfest competitor, contact the Blackstone Valley Chamber of Commerce at 508.234.9090 X102 or email Liz O'Neil, programs and events coordinator, at lonelil@blackstonevalley.org. We hope to see you all there! ♥

CMS CHAMBER OFFERS FEBRUARY NETWORKING AT STURBRIDGE PORTERHOUSE

by **JACK STARKEY**, COMMUNICATIONS SPECIALIST,
CENTRAL MASS SOUTH CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

The Chamber of Central Mass South is very pleased to welcome back in-person networking at February's Fun at Five to be held on Tuesday, February 22 from 5 - 7 p.m. at Sturbridge Porterhouse.

Sturbridge Porterhouse offers classic world cuisine using contemporary techniques and fresh ingredients in a casual environment. Chef Ken, Chef Riley, and their staff are passionate about providing great food within an amazing atmosphere for their guests. The menu features mouthwatering steaks, chops, and much more. You'll also find an excellent selection of wines and an ever-changing cocktail menu that caters to fresh ingredients. They have 25 rotating beer taps and a full selection of canned craft beers. The restaurant also boasts an upstairs lounge area for a more intimate dining experience and can also be booked for private events!

Come enjoy some delicious hors d'oeuvres and cocktails while you mingle and make connections in a relaxed, casual setting at Fun at Five. You could even win some valuable prizes just for attending. Sturbridge Porterhouse is located at 407 Main St. (Route 20) in Sturbridge. Reach the restaurant by phone at 508.347.2700 and be sure to follow them on Facebook for updates and weekly specials!

Sturbridge Porterhouse is the brainchild of Chef Ken Yukimura, who also operates Sturbridge Seafood. Chef Ken grew up in Somers, CT; graduated from Johnson & Wales culinary school in Providence, RI; and has worked in kitchens across New England. Chef Ken is best known for his work as executive chef of Fusion Cafe in East Longmeadow, and Emperor of Hartford. Much of Chef Ken's culinary style has been influenced by Asian Fusion. Sturbridge Porterhouse is open Sunday - Thursday from noon to 8 p.m., Friday and Saturday from noon to 9 p.m., and closed on Wednesdays.

Guests can register for Fun at Five by emailing info@cmschamber.org or by calling 508.347.2761. The cost to attend is \$12 for Chamber members who pre-register, \$15 at the door, and \$20 for non-members. Visit the events calendar on cmschamber.org for more happenings from the Chamber of Central Mass South and our members. ♥

Hot Stuff: Local Entrepreneur Delivers Spice with Help of Food Hub

by KEVIN SALEEBA, CORRESPONDENT

Jared Brodeur has always liked spicy foods. “Growing up, my old man was always growing hot peppers and so I was always interested in hot sauces,” he said. As a result, Mr. Brodeur turned his passion for peppers into a company called Decimation Hot Sauce. The budding business offers a variety of gluten-free hot sauce flavors ranging from the milder poblano and roasted red peppers to the spicier zest of the habaneros and jalapeños. “I kind of got started on a whim with the whole thing,” he said. “My uncle brought a pound of fresh habaneros over for Thanksgiving a few years ago and they just sat there. No one touched them because what are you going to do with them?” Habaneros are small chili peppers and one of the hotter varieties of peppers available. “After they sat for a few days, I thought, well, I’ll just make a hot sauce with them.”

Mr. Brodeur, who has taken nutrition, food science, and food safety courses in an effort to become a dietician, said he’s always loved cooking and the idea of owning his own food business was appealing. He then began to experiment with ingredients to make his hot sauce.

“I love cooking. I have a restaurant background and a lot of the recipe was trial and error,” he said. “I tried new peppers from really hot to really mild, seeing how they mixed. Just playing around in the kitchen was really how it got going. At first, I added this and that, and the next thing you know, I had 30 different ingredients in there. I learned quickly that’s not the way to go about it.”

Mr. Brodeur, using his background in nutrition as a driving force, said the key to great hot sauce is the use of simple, quality ingredients directly from local farms. This adds to the quality of his sauces.

“I like to keep things very minimal, but keep the maximum flavor using the most minimal ingredients,” he said. “For me personally, things can get crazy using tons of ingredients. I pride myself on using minimal ingredients, with no preservatives, no chemicals, and no shelf-stabilizing agents. That’s what’s important [...] I always knew good hot sauce is less processed and didn’t have high fructose corn syrup, which is found in the commercial hot sauces.”

Once he nailed the recipe, “I was like wow, this is so good.”

Mr. Brodeur then began giving out his new creation to friends. “They were impressed by it,” he said. “So, I was like, okay, I’ll take the next jump and see if I can make it into a thing, you know?”

At first, he felt overwhelmed by the process of starting his own business. He needed to find commissary kitchen space in Worcester to start producing his hot sauce but had no idea where to begin. A simple Google search garnered Worcester Regional Food Hub as the first result. The Food Hub and its Director Shon Rainford proved to be the best thing for Mr. Brodeur’s fledgling business venture.

The Food Hub currently operates a food incubator business at the nearby Greendale People’s Church at 25 Francis St. A food incubator business provides time-shared access to a commercial kitchen to help local businesses and food entrepreneurs. The Food Hub provides startup and existing food entrepreneurs with hourly kitchen rentals, technical assistance, workshops, and support.

“The Food Hub has been such a great tool for me,” he said. “They were so friendly and willing to help the business grow [...] Shon is such a helpful and knowledgeable guy, such an amazing resource, and so willing to help at all times. I’m so thankful for my relationship with him. The Food Hub is such an amazing thing.”

Decimation Hot Sauce products can now be found inside the Worcester Public Market and Julio’s Liquors in Westborough. Mr. Brodeur also has an opportunity to expand into the wholesale market. He’s working to grow into local supermarkets and a pop-up deli business called Decimation Deli.

“It’s been cool making hot sauce and cooking food for people,” he said. “It’s really rewarding seeing people excited about it.” ♥



IN SEARCH OF COMFORT FOOD

by SARAH CONNELL SANDERS, CORRESPONDENT

Food is medicine. At an unprecedented moment of municipal economic growth and global health decline, there are plenty of days when all I want to do is hunker down with a cheesecake and watch what happens. Luckily, Worcester has a lot to offer in the comfort cuisine department. I believe it’s important to allow ourselves the small pleasures in life. Here are a few consistent local spots, perfect for hiding out to nosh amidst the drudgery of yet another pandemic winter.

Below: Sweets from Bean Counter Bakery are the perfect comfort food. Photo by Sarah Connell Sanders.

BEAN COUNTER BAKERY CAFE

270 Grove St., Worcester, MA 01605

Everyone has a Friday after-work routine.

Mine used to include a cold beer at the local watering hole with my colleagues, but ever since COVID, I’ve sought out more solitary alternatives. Now, my favorite end-of-the-week reward comes in pastry form. I have Bean Counter Bakery to thank for that.

I’ve been visiting Bean Counter since I was a little girl when I would accompany my mom on the weekends for “study dates.” Back then, she was cramming for college exams, and I was conquering coloring books. Mom always let me order a fancy gourmet hot chocolate and a treat. I favored the lemon tart.

Imagine my surprise when I noticed a new Bean Counter outpost opening up shop on Grove Street along my route to work. I took it as a sign. The dessert case was calling me.

Bean Counter’s mini cheesecakes are my favorite Friday indulgence. I am especially fond of the chocolate strawberry varietal, which sometimes only makes it halfway home.



ARMSBY ABBEY

144 Main St., Worcester, MA 01608

I worked as a server at Armsby Abbey from 2013-2018. During that time, dishes came and went from the menu nearly every day with one exception: the mac and cheese.

Armsby Abbey’s elite cheese offerings definitely contributed to their superior take on an American classic. During my tenure, the mac and cheese always had a Vermont cheddar base, but the remnants of tangy chevre, smoky blue, and unctuous brie might find their way into the mix after taking stock of whatever farmstead cheeses the cooks had in-house. Likewise, the recipe included an IPA which could rotate depending on the draft list.

On my last shift at the Abbey, as a closing gesture, the executive chef offered to make me anything I wanted from the kitchen. I thought about the bone marrow or a big bowl of handmade pappardelle. In the end, nothing felt more fitting than an order of mac and cheese with a side of jerk sauce, so spicy that it was practically hallucinatory.

These days, nine times out of ten, I visit Armsby Abbey with the express purpose of trying something new. But on the occasion I need a hug or a vacation, I find the next best thing is usually a bowl of Armsby mac and cheese.

CHASHU RAMEN & IZAKAYA

38 Franklin St., Worcester, MA 01608

Unlike my other suggestions, Chashu Ramen & Izakaya is a new addition to Worcester’s dining scene. Walk across the common, past the ice skaters and the twinkling lights of City Hall, and it won’t be long before you stumble upon nourishing bowls of ramen and sumptuous steamed pork buns. Little plates of charcoal grilled beef tenderloin and chicken thighs sizzle on sticks. Frigid winter evenings practically demand it.

The restaurant itself feels like an escape from reality. Murals envelop the walls paying homage to the anime flicks broadcasted on monitors across the bar. An open kitchen allows guests to peer into the hectic activity taking place on Chashu’s line. For an extra layer of warmth, ask your server to make a recommendation from Chashu’s extensive sake collection or order a cup of matcha for yourself. Both can be expertly paired with Kasutado egg custard streusel.

Don’t go to Chashu with a grab-and-go mentality. Everything is made to order and ticket times reflect the amount of effort put into each dish. When it comes to comfort food, your enjoyment should not be rushed. ♥



Above: Located in downtown Worcester, Chashu Ramen & Izakaya offers modern Asian cuisine. Photo by Sarah Connell Sanders.



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Curing Cabin Fever in Central MA

by **MONIQUE MESSIER**, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, DISCOVER CENTRAL MA



When the temperatures dip, it can be tempting to stay indoors and forgo adventures awaiting elsewhere. Central Mass, however, has several spots that specialize in unique experiences to cure any lingering cabin fever. Read on to discover wintertime activities just around the corner.

OUTDOOR ADVENTURES

If you can bear the cold, be sure to check out the local mountains. Whether you're an expert skier or a lodge-loving snow bunny, Wachusett Mountain and Ski Ward are two spots you'll want to explore.

WACHUSETT MOUNTAIN

Wachusett Mountain ski area boasts 27 trails over 125 acres with terrains for all skill levels. The lodge is nothing to scoff at, either. Cited for excellence in architectural design, this 38,000 square foot structure includes a fireplace, sun decks, and exposed beam construction for a cozy, comfortable feel.

SKI WARD

Ski Ward is another local gem located just minutes from Worcester. Ski Ward offers skiing, snowboarding, and tubing, with the Slopeside Bar & Grill serving up treats from lunch through dinner. Nine trails, four lifts and eight tubing lanes cover the mountain, as well as a rental shop and snow school for complete convenience.

INDOOR FUN

THE SCHOOL YAH

"Let's play yahd at School Yahd!" That's the motto at West Boylston's ultimate entertainment space for kiddos and kids at heart. This 20,000 square foot action center will bring you back to your days on the school yard, but with a completely amped up experience. A full-size whiffle ball field, pickle ball and badminton courts, basketball, dodgeball, and life-size Connect Four and Battleship games are just a few of the draws here. For gaming fuel, the full-service bar and kitchen have you covered whenever you need to re-up.

WORCESTER ART MUSEUM

Boasting 37,500 pieces across 51 centuries, Worcester Art Museum is

internationally known for its collection of European and American art. What's also enticing is that students, faculty, and staff from any of the universities in the Worcester area can visit the museum free of charge.

OLD STURBRIDGE VILLAGE

If your 2022 resolution is to learn a new skill, consider registering for a historic craft class at Old Sturbridge Village! From blacksmithing and bookbinding, to tin lanterns, furniture fundamentals and more, you'll leave these immersive experiences with your own masterpiece. Additionally, mark your calendars for Maple Days in March. This annual tradition brings aromas of wood smoke and maple syrup—there's no sweeter way to welcome spring.

FAR SHOT RECREATION

Worcester's Far Shot Recreation is an indoor adventure for the ages, offering archery, as well as knife and axe throwing parties with coaching and games. Whether you're on the hunt for an alternative date night or a competitive team building opportunity, the crew at Far Shot has you covered.

FREE PLAY BAR ARCADE

Wednesday through Sunday, you can power up with games and fuel up with food and beverages at Worcester's Free Play Bar Arcade, the epitome of a classic arcade without all the kids. What's more? One flat fee at the door gets you access to the 120-plus games they have to offer—no tokens or tickets needed. Play for as long as you want and beat your own high score. For parents eager to entertain, visit during the specially-designated Free Play Family Days.

LIVE ACTION ESCAPE ROOMS & ESCAPE THE PIKE

Escape the Pike and Live Action Escape Rooms are perfect for lovers of mystery. At either location, your curiosity and wit will be put to the test as you race against the clock to find a way out of whatever room you're in. Choose from a variety of storylines and scenarios to experience with family, friends, and workmates alike!

SMASHIT2

At Worcester County's only smash room, breaking stuff is no accident. SmashIt2 is the ideal indoor spot to blow off steam whilst curing cabin fever. ♥

Discover Central MA is the official Regional Tourism Council of Worcester and Central MA. Interested in becoming a member of Discover Central MA? Email Kristin Esper, Membership & Sales Manager at kesper@discovercentralma.org.

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5 EFFECTIVE WAYS TO MARKET YOUR BUSINESS IN 2022

by **JENNIFER HERNANDEZ**, CEO & STRATEGIC MARKETING DIRECTOR, GEM MARKETING SOLUTIONS



If you're looking to grow your business in 2022, whether it's an existing business or a new startup venture, marketing is key. You may not be an expert in marketing and promotions, but there are some quick and easy things you can do to hit the ground running. You don't have to try them all—and certainly don't try them all at once—but taking small steps can help with continuous growth and give you time to evaluate by trial and error. Here are some ways to get started:

1. IT'S TIME TO GO LIVE

Yep, we know it's scary, but you need to do it! Get out of that comfort zone and get ready to address your followers directly on camera. The good news: they're waiting to hear from you. They follow your page for a reason. They either like you, your products, your services, or a mixture of all the above. Give them what they want: to learn more about you and your business.

Once you get the hang of it and feel you could commit to it more regularly, we recommend going live at a certain time each week at the same time. This way your followers will already anticipate getting time with you online.

Still nervous? We know it sounds old school, but practice makes perfect. Stand in front of the mirror, make your children listen to you rehearse, etc.

2. JOIN FACEBOOK GROUPS

Some people love groups and others despise them. We think they're such a valuable resource to your personal and business brand when used correctly. You know what goes on inside of groups? Conversations. You know what those conversations are about? The things people need—like your services and products. Believe it or not, if you take the time to listen in these groups, you'll be surprised to hear how many people are looking for exactly what you deliver.

To be most effective, join groups that your target audience will be in. Is your target audience parents? Join mom groups. Is your target audience cooks? Join culinary groups. You get the idea. Try carving out a few hours each week to actively find these conversations...Talk about a free lead generation tool!

3. UPDATE YOUR GOOGLE MY BUSINESS PAGE

The primary way people search for services and products today is via search engine (looking at you, Google). Make it easier for prospective customers to pick you by optimizing your business profile. This means adding your logo as your profile picture; listing all your services/products; and including all necessary info like hours of operation, phone number, and web address. Remember to make it easy for them to contact you.

Most importantly, make sure to be actively asking for reviews from past and current customers. The number of reviews you have on your Google My Business profile is a big deciding factor when Google delivers search results. Reviews also give prospective customers the confirmation they need that you're the one they should do business with.

4. JOIN YOUR LOCAL CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

There is power within the circles you network. Meeting other like-minded professionals by joining your local chamber can make a huge impact on your business. Many of our clients join the Worcester Regional Chamber of Commerce. Their primary goal is to advocate for the region's business community. A significant part of what they do is promoting member businesses through various channels including radio and TV interviews, e-newsletters, social media posts, and this very newspaper you're currently reading! Additionally, all members are listed in their online member directory. And did we mention all the networking groups, events, and resources they offer?!

5. BUILD A REFERRAL NETWORK

One of the easiest ways to build your business is to connect with others who might send you referrals. The strategy is fairly simple: find other business owners who share the same target audience as you. Below are some examples:

- Real estate agents and interiors designers share the same audience: homeowners.
- Eyelash technicians and estheticians share the same audience: females into self-care and beauty.
- Mechanics and tire shops share the same audience: people who own cars that need repairs.

In these examples, each business offers a unique service but to the same audience. Building relationships with complementary businesses which can refer customers to you will not only increase your sales but will also save you time from actively having to search for new customers. This relationship drives them directly to you without any additional work on your end. ♥

8 Cybersecurity Trends to Prepare for in 2022

by **HELDER MACHADO, MBA, CISSP, LTC ARMY (RETIRED)**, CEO/CISO, MACHADO CONSULTING



In 2020, dramatic shifts in how businesses operated drove changes in network infrastructure for both large and small companies. As you've probably experienced, many of these changes took place without adequate analysis of security impacts because they needed to happen so quickly.

This shift continued into 2021 as your IT infrastructure had to accommodate a hybrid environment of working in the office and at home. This year, your focus should be on updating your overall IT policies, including data backup requirements, to address the 2022 cybersecurity trends we are already starting to see. Here are the cybersecurity trends you should prepare for this year:

1. DISINFORMATION CAMPAIGNS

If you're outside the cybersecurity realm, misinformation doesn't equate to cybercrime. According to EU Disinfo Lab, a European think tank, cyber criminals exploit the same distribution channels, use similar tools, and target the same victims. Just as cyber attacks can be conducted by paid professionals, disinformation campaigns often rely on those same people to distribute false data.

2. SUPPLY CHAINS DISRUPTED

Supply chain attacks look for the most vulnerable organization within a given supply chain. For example, healthcare systems must store all medical records in a government-defined format for the rapid exchange of digitized information. Whether it is a large urban hospital or a small private practice, any entity keeping patient information must have the ability to transfer digitized records, electronically.

3. MORE DATA BREACHES

According to a report published in October 2021, the number of data breaches from January through September was greater than the total number of breaches in 2020. The researchers expect data breaches to increase in number and size in 2022. Phishing and ransomware will continue to be the dominant threat vectors for data breaches.

4. MOBILE DEVICES TARGETED

The most recent 'Mobile Security Report 2021' from Checkpoint Software Technologies highlighted these insights on emerging mobile threats:

- Mobile devices have become another entry point into a company's network.
- Cyber criminals deploy new apps promising help or information on Covid as a means to place malware on a smartphone.
- Vulnerabilities exist in mobile devices that are not being addressed.

5. CLOUD ATTACKS INCREASE

Deploying cloud-based applications became a necessity as people continued to work remotely, but it didn't take long before cyber attacks on cloud services increased. The Capital One data breach of 2019 happened because of a misconfigured firewall. The hacker stole 106 million financial records and the breach cost Capital One about \$300 million.

6. PHISHING ATTACKS CONTINUE

Phishing is still a leading threat vector. In January 2021, there were almost 250,000 phishing attacks. This is an unprecedented number for only one month. Although many were contained, companies had to expend resources to thwart the attacks, burdening overworked IT staff. According to IBM, 33% of cyber attacks begin with phishing.

7. RANSOMWARE EXPANDS

The financial sector has long complained of the unregulated activities of cryptocurrencies such as Bitcoin. Due to its anonymity, cryptocurrency has become the payment mechanism of choice for cyber criminals. Most ransomware attacks require payment in Bitcoin. Without financial instruments such as Bitcoin, criminals would have difficulty shielding their funds from regulators.

8. NATION-STATE THREATS RISE

Microsoft's 2021 Digital Defense Report (MDDR) showed an increase in the number of nation-state activities over the last three years with a total of 20,500 nation-state notifications (NSN) being issued. An NSN notifies an organization or individual that a nation-state has targeted or compromised its infrastructure. For example, the People's Republic of China launched an attack on organizations with an on-premise installation of Microsoft's Exchange Server. They identified a vulnerability and exploited it to extract information on industry sectors such as infectious disease research, law firms, higher education, defense contractors, and think tanks.

HOW IS YOUR 2022 CYBERSECURITY READINESS?

If you're concerned about how any of the eight trends we're seeing may impact your business, you can learn more in our in-depth articles on this topic and other cybersecurity issues at: www.machadoconsulting.com/blog. ♥

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