

CHAMBER EXCHANGE

 THE NEWSPAPER

Summer 2022

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CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

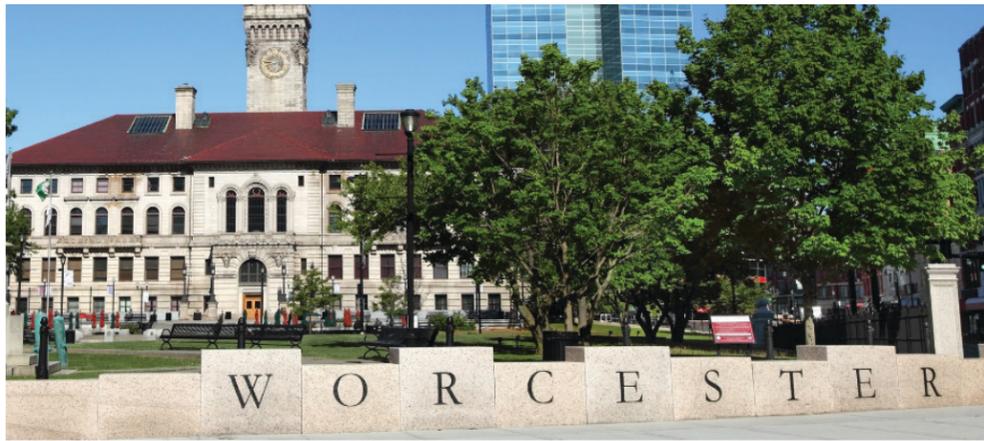
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Above: Photo of Worcester Common.

Is Worcester Ready for Another Hike in our Property Taxes with the Community Preservation Act?

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

Earlier this year, a coalition of city residents requested that the City Council approve an order that will allow Worcester voters to determine if the city should adopt the Community Preservation Act (CPA) by a binding question on the November 8th ballot. At that hearing, the city council approved the order 7 votes to 3 allowing the question on the ballot. While there have been attempts in the past to get the CPA on the ballot here in the city, this November will be the first time Worcester residents will be able to decide whether or not to implement it in the second biggest city in New England.

Worcester voters will be voting on whether to adopt a 1.5% surcharge with exemptions for the first \$100,000 of residential and commercial properties and for low-income households and some seniors who qualify for a low-income exemption. It is argued by proponents that the city could raise approximately \$3.6 million annually for historic preservation, outdoor recreation, open space, and community housing.

If the CPA is passed it allows Worcester to join the state's Community Preservation Trust Fund. Currently, there are 189 municipalities in the Commonwealth, or approximately 54 percent of all communities that have adopted the CPA. Moreover, of the 26 Gateway cities in Massachusetts, only 13 have adopted the CPA to date. Seven of these communities have opted for a surcharge of 1%, five have a 1.5% surcharge and only one city has a surcharge of 3%. Further, while only half of the State's Gateway Cities have adopted the CPA, just three of Worcester's neighbors have implemented it here in Central Massachusetts: Grafton, Shrewsbury, and West Boylston.

While initiatives that CPA collected funds would be applied to sound good in theory, what does it mean to the average taxpayer here in the city of Worcester?

As proposed, Worcester property owners will add a 1.5% surcharge to their assessed tax levy.

There would be an exemption for the first \$100,000 of residential and commercial property and for low-income households and low and moderate-income

HOUSING, PG 10

WORCESTER WELCOMES HER EXCELLENCY MAHAMA

Ambassador from Ghana Visits Worcester Chamber and Massachusetts Officials

by DAVID SULLIVAN, DIRECTOR OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT & BUSINESS RECRUITMENT

WORCESTER - On July 15, the Worcester Regional Chamber of Commerce welcomed the Ambassador of Ghana to the United States, Hajia Alima Mahama, to Worcester while she was on a visit to Massachusetts.

During the Friday afternoon event, Worcester Regional Chamber of Commerce President & CEO Tim Murray and Massachusetts Lieutenant Governor Karyn Polito welcomed the Ambassador. They were joined by state legislators and regional business leaders in a conference room on the top floor of the

Mercantile Center tower at 100 Front Street, overlooking downtown Worcester. In addition to her embassy staff, Ambassador Mahama was joined by members of the Worcester Ghanaian-American community many of whom helped bring the Ambassador to Worcester.

Worcester and Ghana have a strong connection with a vibrant community of immigrants that are part of the Ghanaian diaspora. In fact, Worcester has the highest concentration of Ghanaian immigrants in the United States. Thousands of Ghanaians live in Worcester, and they represent the largest ethnic



Right: Her Excellency with Worcester Chamber President & CEO Tim Murray and WRCC Board Chair, Christine Cassidy.

group of Worcester's foreign-born residents.

In attendance at the event were several dignitaries and business leaders. State legislators in attendance included State Senators Michael Moore and Anne Gobi and State Representatives Daniel Donahue, David LeBoeuf, and Mary Keefe. Acting Worcester

GHANA US AMBASSADOR, PG 14



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NEW FACES AT THE CHAMBER

Chamber welcomes Cait Lubelczyk as new VP of Marketing and Communications and promotes David Sullivan to Director of Economic Development and Business Recruitment

by WORCESTER REGIONAL CHAMBER OF COMMERCE



Above: David Sullivan



Above: Cait Lubelczyk

The Worcester Regional Chamber of Commerce announced the appointment of Caitlin Lubelczyk as vice president of marketing and communications. Previously, Lubelczyk was Director of Marketing and Enrollment at Notre Dame Academy in Worcester and before that worked for Tenet Health New England and Saint Vincent Hospital as its Regional Marketing manager.

“We are thrilled to have Cait join our team. Cait brings both private and non-profit sector experience to the Chamber which will be of great assistance to our communication and marketing efforts on behalf of our members, said Tim Murray, President, and CEO of the Worcester Regional Chamber of Commerce. “Moreover, her collaborative approach and deep knowledge of Worcester and Central Massachusetts will be invaluable in taking the Chamber’s communication efforts to the next level.”

Lubelczyk, a Worcester native, holds an undergraduate degree from the University of New Hampshire, and an MBA with a marketing concentration from Fitchburg State University. She will be responsible for building relationships with regional organizations and businesses and will also manage media relations across all platforms. “I couldn’t be more excited to work with Tim, Karen, and the team at the Chamber of Commerce, and to be a part of the continued growth of our great city,” said Lubelczyk.

Lubelczyk was a 2016 Worcester Business Journal 40 under 40 award recipient. She is a member of the Young Professional Women’s Association of Worcester (YPWA), and also serves on the board of trustees for the Emerald Club of Worcester. She resides in Worcester with her husband Tom, and their daughter Olivia.

The Chamber also announced the promotion of David Sullivan to Director of Economic Development & Business Recruitment. Sullivan has been with the Chamber for over three years, starting as a work-study intern and working up to a full-time associate position last year. Sullivan currently coordinates the StartUp Worcester program, writes and implements grant programming, promotes Worcester’s value to national developers, facilitates commercial real estate introductions, and helps manage the Worcester Regional Food Hub’s Union Station construction project. He advocates on public policy at all levels of government and conducts a variety of other responsibilities that have contributed to the Worcester area’s economic development momentum and the Chamber’s central role in it. Sullivan received both his BA in Political Science and his Master’s in Public Administration from Clark University.

Women’s Leadership Conference Celebrates 13th Year

by CAIT LUBELCZYK, VICE PRESIDENT OF MARKETING & COMMUNICATIONS

The 13th Annual Worcester Women’s Leadership conference took place on Thursday June 16th at the DCU Center in Worcester. In addition to the morning and afternoon keynote speakers, the conference offered eight workshops with topics ranging from financial planning to unconscious bias. The Chamber welcomed over 600 women to Central MA’s largest professional womens conference, which is also one of the biggest fundraisers for the Chamber, with support this year from Hanover Insurance Group, UMass Memorial Health, and forty other sponsors.

The morning started off with a welcome from committee chair Kimberly Salmon, Assistant Vice President Community Relations at The Hanover Insurance Group. Kim chaired the WWLC for six years and at this event turned over the reins to Maria Fernandes-Dominique, Director of Public Affairs at Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts. The first keynote speaker of the day was Claire Wasserman. Wasserman is the founder of Ladies Get Paid, an ‘educational platform, global community, and book that champions the professional advancement of women.’ Claire has been all over the country teaching thousands of women how to advocate for themselves in the workplace and negotiate raises. She has been featured on Good Morning America and hired by dozens of big-name companies, everyone from NASA to Converse. Claire was charismatic and inspirational, and the perfect way to kick off the conference. The afternoon keynote speaker had equally impressive accolades. Luvvie Ajayi Jones, a three-time New York Times Bestselling author, has spoken at events for Google, Microsoft, Facebook, Nike, and Bank of America, to name a few. She has been featured in Forbes, The New York Times, and the Wall Street Journal. As her website states “Luvvie pulls from the well of truth to ensure that attendees have a transformative experience...” and that they did. For 45 minutes guests were captivated by Luvvie’s words and wit. One attendee stated “the topics were very relevant to today’s audience. I can’t say enough good things, but I want to call out that the speakers were not only motivational, but solution orientated. They provided specific actions and tools that we could apply to day-to-day life.”

Each attendee walked away with a copy of Luvvie’s bestseller Professional Troublemaker: The Fear-Fighter Manual. The day ended with Worcester Technical High School student Stacia Zogbie receiving the \$1,000 Susan Mailman Aspiring Young Women Leaders Scholarship.

Finally, Kim Salmon passed the baton to Maria Fernandes-Dominique, Director of Public Affairs at Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts, as she



Above: Attendees pose with Keynote speaker Claire Wasserman.

Below Left: Kim Salmon, Chair of the WWLC addresses the crowd of over 600 women.

Below Right: Afternoon Keynote Luvvie Ajayi Jones. All photos by Matt Wright



stepped into the role as the new chair of the Worcester Women’s Leadership Conference. Thank you to all of our sponsors including our presenting sponsors The Hanover Insurance Group and UMass Memorial Health.

The committee has already begun work on the 2023 conference which is sure to be another exciting event. Workshop proposals are now being accepted and sponsorships are available. The keynote speaker has also already been announced as Carla A. Harris. Harris began her career as an investment banker at Morgan Stanley and is now the Managing Director in Global Capital Markets for the firm. She has been named by Fortune magazine among the 50 most powerful black executives in corporate America, Essence magazine named her among the 50 Women Who Are Shaping The World, and Harvard’s Black Men’s forum named her woman of the year in 2004, and she’s going to be right here in Worcester!

Save the Date:

Worcester Women’s Leadership Conference

Thursday, May 4, 2023

7:30am-4:00pm

DCU Center

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KAREN PELLETIER

*Vice President of Membership
Development and Finance*
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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 Caitlin Lubelczyk at clubelczyk@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

Young Professionals Night Out at X-Golf Worcester

Tuesday, August 30, 2022

5:00pm-7:00pm

Sponsor: Assumption University

The Breakfast Club at the AC Marriott Worcester

Thursday, September 8, 2022

7:00am-9:00am

Sponsor: Berkshire Bank

Construction & Real Estate Roundtable at Chamber Office

Development Tax Credit

Thursday, September 15, 2022

12:00pm-1:00pm

Sponsor: Bowditch & Dewey, Dorfman Capital

StartUp Worcester Reception at WorLab

Tuesday, September 20, 2022

4:00pm-6:00pm

RSVP by Sept. 1

Sponsor: Berkshire Bank

MEGA Business After Hours w/ Corridor 9/495 at Cyprian Keyes Golf Club

Wednesday, September 21, 2022

5:00pm-7:30pm

Sponsor: Rockland Trust

Diverse Professional Roundtable Recognition and Networking Event at The Hanover Insurance Group

Thursday, September 22, 2022

4:30pm-7:00pm

Sponsor: Blue Cross Blue Shield of MA

HR Round Table- Zoom

Wednesday, September 28, 2022

10:00am-11:00am

Sponsor: Aetna and Bowditch & Dewey

2022 Game Changers Business Conference & Expo "The Future of Retail" at Mechanics Hall

Friday, October 21, 2022

7:30AM - 1:30PM

Sponsors: People's United Bank, DCU, Saint Vincent Hospital, Bowditch & Dewey, UniBank, The Hanover Insurance Group, and VHB

WORCESTER CHAMBER EXCITED TO WELCOME NEW AFFILIATE Clinton Area Chamber of Commerce



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

This past April the Worcester Regional Chamber of Commerce (WRCC) announced a new partnership with the Latin American Business Organization (LABO) making LABO the sixth partner affiliate of the WRCC. With its affiliation, all LABO members will have full access to WRCC benefits and programs. This new partner's 3-year affiliation was made possible by Fallon Health and UniBank. The announcement was formally announced at the LABO Business Expo at the DCU Center in April. A story in the last edition of the Chamber Exchange in June also features this new partnership.

The announcement was formally announced at the LABO Business Expo at the DCU Center in April. A story in the last edition of the Chamber Exchange in June also features this new partnership.

“For several years the WRCC and leadership from Discover Clinton and the Town of Clinton had been exploring the idea of re-establishing a Chamber to assist local businesses and companies in Clinton”

Following quickly on the heels of the WRCC/LABO partner affiliation, the WRCC announced its seventh partner affiliation with Discover Clinton to re-establish the Clinton Area Chamber of Commerce. This announcement was launched on May 25th in the reception room at the new Clinton Bar and Grill on High Street. For several years the WRCC and leadership from Discover Clinton and the Town of Clinton had been exploring the idea of re-establishing a Chamber to assist local businesses and companies in Clinton. Clinton is a town with a population of approximately 15,500 and spans over 7.3 square miles. It has a rich history and unique identity.

Geographically, Clinton is an important location for a business to explore. It is situated just outside of Worcester right next to the Wachusett Reservoir and it is close to the cities of Leominster and Fitchburg. The town also has access to MetroWest through the Route 2 corridor making it an ideal location for many businesses. The town's manufacturing history, road and rail access, and idyllic downtown provide options for companies looking to grow in the 01510-zip code.

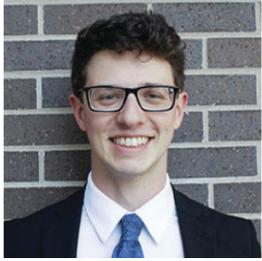
The WRCC staff is working closely with the new Clinton Area Chamber of Commerce in setting up new programs and events for the remainder of the year and have already conducted two membership information sessions at the Clinton Historical Society and Bryley systems. In several months the Chamber has grown to nearly 20 members with new applications in the pipeline. As interest in the Central Mass region grows, we firmly believe that this new partner affiliate agreement between the WRCC and Clinton Area Chamber of Commerce can add to the economic momentum taking place in the region.



Above: WRCC staff with Clinton Chamber of Commerce board members

Chamber Continues to Fight for Housing Development Incentive Program

by DAVID SULLIVAN, DIRECTOR OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT & BUSINESS RECRUITMENT



BOSTON - In the waning hours of July 31, the Massachusetts legislature failed to act on passing a massive \$4.57 billion economic development bill before the late-night close of the legislative session. The bill had included a variety of benefits for the Worcester area, but arguably the biggest victory for Worcester would have been a landmark increase in funding for the Housing Development Incentive Program, or HDIP.

HDIP is a program that allows Gateway Cities to incentivize housing production by providing relief on the new taxes generated by a property that has been improved as a result of development. Municipalities can negotiate the terms of a Tax Increment Exemption, or TIE, with a developer to determine the terms under which the developer receives tax relief. Once approved by a city council, the TIE deal allows a developer to pursue tax credits from the state's Department of Housing and Community Development.

HDIP is considered a win-win by its supporters in Gateway Cities around the state, as it generates millions in new tax revenue for post-industrial communities that have historically seen little investment in market-rate housing. Worcester is one such community, and would benefit greatly from the expansion of HDIP.

However, the legislative vehicle for expanding the program, the economic development bill, was not taken up by leadership in the House and Senate late in the night before the 2021-2022 legislative session ended. Now, the bill will sit in conference committee, one of the final stages of development before going to a floor vote in both houses. Now that the session is over, the bill can be altered significantly by legislators before advancing. Legislative leadership was most concerned about revisiting the bill due to billions in tax breaks included in it, which would have been redundant with another measure introducing billions in tax breaks for the Commonwealth.

Governor Baker disagreed that the economic development bill needed to be put on hold due to the redundancy that legislative leadership cited, calling both plans "eminently affordable."

In Worcester, there are 1,000 units of housing in HDIP projects that are permitted and underway, with over \$300 million in investment in these developments. The developments are estimated by the city to yield over \$18 million in new taxes for Worcester over the next several years. Some of these developments have been awaiting tax credit allocations from the DHCD for years, but HDIP currently has a \$10 million-per-year cap on tax credit allocations. This cap has proved inadequate to fund the demand for HDIP from the Commonwealth's Gateway Cities.

Thanks to the hard-fought advocacy efforts of Gateway Cities, including the Worcester Regional Chamber of Commerce and its allies, the economic development bill contained a one-time infusion of \$57 million to clear the backlog of tax credit allocations and increases the program's cap to \$30 million going forward. MassINC, a statewide policy think-tank, coordinated many of the advocacy efforts and Senator Eric Lesser of Longmeadow, co-chair of the Joint Committee on Economic Development and Emerging Technologies, championed the effort.

The economic development bill was originally introduced by Governor Charlie Baker and Lieutenant Governor Karyn Polito as the final major spending bill of their administration. The original proposal featured \$3.5 billion in investments for the Commonwealth, mostly centered around benefiting local economic development efforts in downtowns and industrial areas. Coined FORWARD, the proposal was billed as "Massachusetts's path forward as the Commonwealth transitions into a post-pandemic world." The HDIP expansion was a significant part of FORWARD.

Leaders from Gateway Cities, including the Worcester Regional Chamber of Commerce, the Worcester Business Development Corporation, and the City of

Worcester all testified at a committee hearing in May in favor of the provisions in the Baker-Polito administration's bill - including the HDIP expansion. As the bill passed through several different committees, it was altered significantly according to the opinions of influential legislators and their committees. While it was a turbulent process that was expedited to meet the legislative session deadline on July 31, the HDIP expansion survived to the end thanks to consistent and coordinated advocacy efforts from around the state.

The Chamber had been working with MassINC and its coalition of Gateway Cities for almost a year to find a way to expand HDIP in the legislature, and will continue to work directly with these partners and with legislators to find a solution to HDIP.

In Worcester, major projects accessing HDIP tax credits need relief now more than ever. Developments such as Madison Properties's 350-unit development across from Polar Park and Alta on the Row, the 371-unit housing development on the site of the former Mount Carmel Church, are accessing HDIP tax credits and will bring millions to the city's tax rolls once completed. However, rising costs in materials, labor, and inflation in general have added more and more to the developments' bottom lines.

For anyone looking to get involved, the Chamber encourages readers to reach out to Massachusetts Speaker of the House Ron Mariano and Senate President Karen Spilka to let them know of Worcester's support for expanding HDIP.

"In Worcester, there are 1,000 units of housing in HDIP projects that are permitted and underway, with over \$300 million in investment in these developments"

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INCLUSIONARY ZONING: HOW WORCESTER CAN CREATIVELY ENCOURAGE AFFORDABLE HOUSING DEVELOPMENT

by DAVID SULLIVAN, DIRECTOR OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT & BUSINESS RECRUITMENT

WORCESTER - Right now, Worcester is experiencing a period of rapid growth. Lately, it seems like a new major housing development is being announced or completed every few weeks. With momentum at an all-time high, Worcester may soon adopt a policy to ensure that there is a component of affordability provided by each new multifamily development.

This policy, commonly called inclusionary zoning, is something that the Worcester Regional Chamber of Commerce is working hard to ensure is implemented in a way that does not halt the economic development momentum the city has been experiencing.

The housing crisis in America has hit Worcester hard. The city grew by 25,000 residents in the last decade, while only 10,000 units of housing were built. As a result, Worcester has become one of the hottest residential real estate markets in the country as supply becomes shorter than demand. Developers have been making strides to meet this challenge, with a massive number of housing units coming online.

By the Chamber's analysis, there are more than 3,900 units of housing in major developments in the pipeline in Worcester, with just a little over 500 being affordable housing. While the city is in need of new market-rate housing, it also desperately needs affordable housing that is reserved for lower-income residents, workers, and families.

Rising rents and housing costs have begun to price out many working-class and middle-class families who have lived and worked in Worcester for years. Discussions about affordable housing have long been taking place in the city, without much systemic change. Now, it seems a tangible solution may be presenting itself: inclusionary zoning.

Inclusionary zoning is essentially a requirement of a certain amount of affordable housing that must be included in every new multifamily development in a municipality. It is set by zoning ordinance, and 141 communities in Massachusetts have some form of inclusionary zoning.

While for years Worcester struggled to attract large developers' attention, the city's recent momentum finally means it can become more selective and intentional with how it pursues its housing strategy. "We believe it's the right time for such a policy," says Peter Dunn, Chief Development Officer for the City of Worcester.

In 2019, the Chamber put out a study titled "Worcester for Everyone". The study analyzed a potential shortfall in housing units and called for a substantial increase in housing production for all types - including market-rate and affordable. Worcester's business community is sustained by talent, and workers need a wide array of places to live if Worcester wishes to maintain the diversity of the community.

As such, the Chamber has been active in promoting affordable housing options to developers. The Chamber played a significant role in attracting developers who have added to the city's affordable housing stock, such as Trinity Financial with the 118 mixed-income units at Courthouse Lofts and Boston Capital with the incoming 83 units of affordable housing at Table Talk Lofts on Kelley Square.

However, the Chamber also understands that for a developer to build affordable, they must have a certain level of expertise and capacity for applying to housing subsidies, managing tenant or buyer applications, and handling other legal matters related to income reserved housing. Given these constraints, as well as the existing economic conditions developers face with skyrocketing costs, the Chamber is supportive of inclusionary zoning only as long as the city provides flexibility and benefits for developers in the new ordinance.

The City of Worcester's Executive Office of Economic Development recently put forth an initial proposal to the City Council's Economic Development Committee with a set of components that they recommend. The proposal stated that the ordinance should take effect on any multifamily development creating 12 or more new units, that the developer would have a choice between ensuring 15% of their habitable square footage is reserved for residents earning 80% of the Area Median Income (AMI) or 10% for 60% of AMI, that it would apply to both rentals and condos, that the affordability restriction would last thirty years, and that there would be an option for a payment-in-lieu-of construction.

The proposal also included suggestions for applying certain incentives to developments that build more affordable housing than required, and some common language found in inclusionary zoning ordinances for ensuring the design and quality of the affordable units is not different than the market-rate units. There would also be a provision for ensuring local residents are first in line to purchase these units.

The Chamber spoke at the Economic Development Committee meeting in July when inclusionary zoning was introduced and has been in communication with city councilors about moving the ordinance forward in a way that creatively incentivizes affordable housing without placing an undue burden on developers.

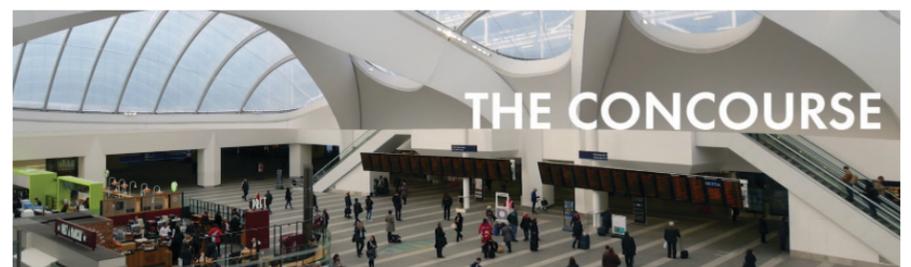
During the meeting, committee chair Sean Rose noted that all the councilors "were in support" of inclusionary zoning and that the discussion would need to focus on the components of the ordinance.

The Chamber noted during the meeting that the most important components would be the ones that give developers options - the choice between developing units for 60% of AMI or 80% of AMI, and the option for a payment-in-lieu-of construction. The payment-in-lieu option is one that is common in communities with inclusionary zoning, allowing the developer to elect to pay a nominal fee to the city's new Affordable Housing Trust Fund rather than construct the units.

Payment-in-lieu will not only be a crucial tool for developers - especially local small developers - who may not have the necessary expertise in affordable housing. It will also provide a steady revenue stream for the trust fund to support other affordable housing developments.

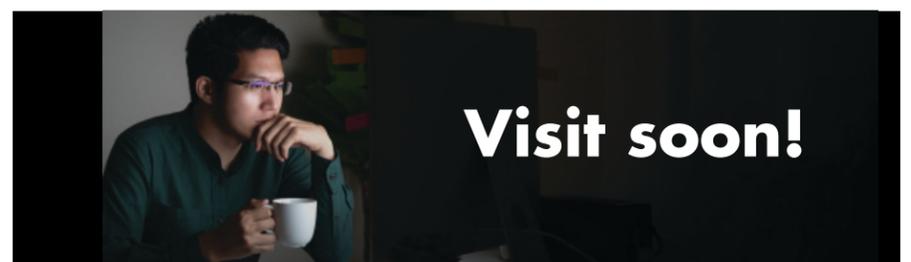
During the Economic Development Committee meeting, Councilor Rose noted that this was just the beginning of the process, and that actual language would need to be drafted, sent back to the committee for approval, and then the ordinance would go to the planning board and city council for final approval. The Chamber noted that the developer community must continue to be a part of this discussion.

It is anticipated that the ordinance could take effect at the start of 2023, with any previously permitted developments at that point not needing to comply. The Chamber will continue to facilitate conversations on an effective and flexible inclusionary zoning ordinance throughout this process.



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COMPOST, GROW, EAT, REPEAT...

by CONOR MILLER, FOUNDER, BLACK EARTH COMPOST

This summer my four-year-old son came to understand what his Papa does for work. He now knows the difference between trash, recycling, and composting. He is taking the fruit sticker off the banana peel and tossing it into the green bin. Puts the green bin in his kid's electric car and drives it to the curb to set it out on the weekly collection day. In spring he helped hold the wooden boards of our raised bed kit made by Black Earth Compost, helped shovel the compost/soil mix into the bed, and planted the tomatoes, strawberries, cucumbers, squash, and more. Now she is in harvest mode, plucking cucumbers and tomatoes on almost a daily basis. Compost, Grow, Eat, repeat...

What he doesn't know is that composting is at the nexus of three crises: all MA landfills will be closed by 2030 and we currently send our waste on trains to Ohio, Virginia, and beyond, which will get extremely expensive, and compost is the heaviest element of the waste stream to divert. The US has a topsoil crisis on our farms that only compost can alleviate. And compost is an ideal means to pull CO₂ out of the air by growing strong plants, and storing the carbon long-term in the soil. These are three current crises that every household feels now, and will feel more the slower we are to address them.

Black Earth Compost was founded twelve years ago to collect wasted food scraps from resi-

dents, schools, and restaurants, convert them into super nutrient-rich compost (most compost is merely leaves and grass clippings), and help enable people to grow their own food. The pandemic has shown us that people are really wanting to lean into this cycle: Compost, Grow, Eat, repeat. Some want to reduce their waste (compostable waste makes up 40% of household trash), others want to have raised beds and produce their own food, and both are more sustainable means of moving forward.

Because of this demand to have food scraps collected, Black Earth has begun expanding into the Worcester area this year. We currently have 137 subscribers in Worcester at \$114.99 per 6-month term for weekly collections or \$89.99 per 6-month term for every other week's collections. When we get to 750 subscribers we will lower the prices by 30%. Then when we double to 1500, we can lower prices by another 30%. This incentivizes residents to work together to grow large and efficient compost collection services. Black Earth has reached these lower tiers with dozens of towns across Eastern MA including Newton, Brookline, Lexington, Belmont, Arlington, and Natick. On the North Shore, everywhere from Swampscott up the coast to Newburyport is reduced pricing.

It's not just residents that can compost. The largest producers of food waste are schools and com-

mercial generators. In Worcester, Clark University and Worcester State are among the commercial customers that Black Earth picks up from. This fall the MA DEP is requiring all entities that produce 1000 lbs or more of organic waste to compost it, which affects most medium-sized restaurants and large schools.

Above, left: Black Earth Compost Founders



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The Blackstone River Commons: How you can help continue a 50-year legacy of stewardship this summer

by **STEPHANIE COVINO**, PROGRAM MANAGER, RESEARCH SCIENTIST, GEORGE PERKINS MARSH INSTITUTE AT CLARK UNIVERSITY

Those who remember the water quality of the Blackstone River 50 years ago will recall the signature smell of the foamy, multi-colored water, filled with sewage, industrial contamination, and tons of trash. The Blackstone had been our dumping grounds for over a hundred years without stewardship or regulations to protect it. Today, we've made massive progress and it seems impossible to have such unacceptable conditions, but there are new challenges facing our watershed - and a new group ready to face the challenge.

10,000 TONS OF TRASH: ZAP THE BLACKSTONE

A group of river advocates led by the then-director of the Blackstone River Watershed Association David Rosser started organizing a comprehensive plan for cleaning up the Blackstone River in 1971. Rosser built a diverse coalition throughout the community and fortified it with political backing as well as support from the Providence Journal, Army Corp of Engineers, and others to launch a massive promotional campaign that recruited thousands of volunteers.

"Operation ZAP" was the largest hands-on environmental activation of citizens in the U.S. with 10,000 volunteers showing up on September 9, 1972, removing 10,000 tons of trash and debris - from cars and appliances to municipal trash and shopping carts. Scuba divers, bulldozers, school children, and local residents worked to clean up the river as well as create new parks along its shore to protect the floodplain. One highly-organized day helped create new stewards and watchdogs to oversee river conditions and help educate the masses on the importance of water and our connection to it.

THE NEXT GENERATION OF STEWARDSHIP FACES NEW CHALLENGES

While some challenges remain the same as in 1972, such as trash and sewer contamination (now through combined sewer overflows and issues at wastewater treatment plants), new challenges have arisen - including increased flooding from climate change, prolonged and more severe droughts (the entire watershed is currently in a drought), aquatic invasive plants, and the need to expand equitable recreational access. However, the path forward is the same as our original ZAPsters had: collaboration, evaluation of the issues, a clear plan, and an unwavering commitment to the task. Luckily, we have a plan and we have a group ready to tackle it.

Today, there are over 100 organizations working together to improve the health of the Blackstone River and its 475-square-mile watershed. However, programs in this urban watershed have historically been underfunded with minimal coordination between them. In 2020, the Narragansett Bay Estuary Program recognized these challenges and decided to make a difference. Over two years, hundreds of stakeholders participated in the program, met with stakeholders, and listened to concerns to identify the top 20 areas of opportunity to improve watershed health, river access, and climate resilience. This study experiment was published as the Blackstone River Watershed Needs Assessment Report. This initiative established the Blackstone Watershed Collaborative, an umbrella organization hosted by Clark University, which brings together diverse partners to build capacity and implement the priority actions identified.

BLACKSTONE COMMONS 2022: A 60-MILE JOURNEY TO RAISE AWARENESS

To raise public awareness about the ongoing needs and opportunities to improve stewardship of the Blackstone as a "commons" available for current and future generations, the Collaborative is working with the Rhode Island School of Design, Friends of the Blackstone, Save the Bay, and other organizations to launch an expedition paddling the entire the Blackstone River. A core team of adventurous advocates will paddle 60 miles from Worcester, MA to Providence, RI from August 11-14, meeting with legislators, wastewater treatment plant operators, government agencies, and community groups to discuss the most pressing issues facing the Blackstone and how we can work together to address them.

The expedition will include several public events, including a kick-off on August

11 from Worcester's own Blackstone Heritage Corridor Visitor Center, a free family-friendly RiverFest on August 12 at River Bend Farm in Uxbridge, MA, and a final public paddle and celebration hosted by Narragansett Brewery in Providence on August 14. To learn more about these events, check out blackstonecollaborative.org/commons.



TAKE PART IN ZAP 50TH THIS SUMMER

On August 27, 2022, we're organizing ZAP50: over 200 clean-ups and "green ups" throughout the Blackstone River Valley, from Worcester to Pawtucket, RI. Organizers hope to match the energy and momentum of the original Project ZAP in its 50th-anniversary revival. Volunteers are still needed and we're inviting families, individuals, community groups, businesses, schools, and others to organize a cleanup of a littered area or "green up" improvements such as invasive species removal, rain garden installations, or tree plantings. Worcester Green Corps is excited to be leading efforts for the Worcester portion of the river clean up this year. Sign up to volunteer at worcestergreencorps.org/events. Then join the public celebration of all our volunteers' efforts on September 10 at Old Slater Mill in Pawtucket, RI, with arts, music, food, and more.

To learn more about the Blackstone Watershed Collaborative, check out www.blackstonecollaborative.org

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COMMUNITY PRESERVATION ACT, CONTINUED

seniors. For businesses, this would be an average surcharge on the already 8th highest commercial tax rate in Commonwealth of \$604.58 per year.

To put this into perspective, I go back to last year's tax classification vote: there was a heated debate over an increase in the yearly property tax payments from both the residential and commercial taxpayers. After testimony from both sides stating that these increases would have a negative impact on the affordability to live and work in Worcester, a final tax line was voted on. In the end, with the new property assessments, the increase for the average residential taxpayer was \$105 per year and the average commercial tax increase was \$143 per year. We are now talking about adding another \$44.45 per year for the average residential taxpayer and \$604.58 per year for the average commercial taxpayer if the CPA is passed.

Inflation rates continue to climb, rents in Worcester are at an all-time high, the cost of building supplies is making projects unaffordable, and filling up a car or work truck is affecting residents and small businesses alike. Moreover, we continue to hear the same common denominator across all sectors of the economy: work shortages and supply chain issues. Adding these costs together with new proposed property tax increases is not the right policy for Worcester at this time, especially when there is an influx of federal money sitting in city and state treasuries.

Currently, we have a historic amount of dollars available to both residents and businesses through the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) on both the city and state levels. Through the act, the city of Worcester received \$149 million to address many of the same initiatives that the CPA is proposing to address. There is \$15,000,000 already allocated for the Affordable Housing Trust Fund.

Couple those funds with the Inclusionary Zoning proposal that the Chamber is advocating for, this creates a continuous stream of funding going forward and will accomplish many of the things the CPA hopes to do. There is also \$10,525,000 for park capital improvements earmarked under the city's ARPA fund allocations, \$12,966,624 in Technology upgrade dollars, and \$10,313,615 that is available to allocate as needed.

Moreover, in 2021 Congress sent over \$5.3 billion in ARPA funds to the Commonwealth of Massachusetts to invest in our economic recovery, jobs, and sustainability. Last December Governor Baker signed a \$4 billion American Rescue Plan Act and surplus tax revenue spending bill. The bill deploys \$2.55 billion in ARPA money and \$1.45 billion in fiscal 2021 surplus state tax revenue while preserving a little more than \$2.3 billion in federal ARPA funds for future use. ARPA money must be committed by the end of 2024 and spent by the end of 2026. The bill will allocate \$624 million in housing across the Commonwealth, will put \$414

"Adding these costs together with new proposed property tax increases is not the right policy for Worcester at this time, especially when there is an influx of federal money sitting in city and state treasuries."

million into infrastructure upgrades, \$389 million into education, \$267 million into economic development, and \$500 million into workforce initiatives.

There is also \$25 million to plant trees on public, private, and nonprofit lands to sequester and store carbon, manage stormwater, and reduce urban flooding, while insulating homes thereby creating lower energy demand and reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

Furthermore, \$15 million has been allocated to conserve forests, wetlands, farms, and other natural resources and improve state parks; including grants to nonprofits to create new outdoor recreational opportunities, especially in urban areas, and to benefit those disproportionately impacted by COVID-19. There is also \$14 million for agricultural needs including improving soil health and increasing carbon sequestration and resilience on farms.

While the Chamber supports the goals of affordable housing, more green space, and the preservation of historic buildings, 2022 is not the right time to add more taxes to homeowners and businesses. We continue to talk about workforce shortage as a common factor across all industries; is taking money out of the pockets of those who want to hire the right message?

A property tax increase is a disincentive to those we look to for employment, sponsorships, and support for many worthy causes in the City. We continue to see businesses leave the city to neighboring communities because of our dual tax rate, now we are going to add surcharges for projects and initiatives that can be addressed by the federal dollars that are earmarked for the same initiatives the CPA seeks to focus on if passed.

The Worcester Regional Chamber of Commerce is not opposed to the goals of the CPA, however, we believe that with the inflow of dollars that the city and state are both currently sitting on, increases in property taxes for our hard-working residents and businesses is not a responsible policy at this time.



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City of Worcester Announces Grant Programs Funded by Federal ARPA Dollars

IMPORTANT FOR SMALL BUSINESSES & NONPROFITS

CITY OF WORCESTER ANNOUNCES GRANT PROGRAMS FUNDED BY FEDERAL ARPA DOLLARS

Important for Small Businesses and Nonprofits!

INFORMATION PROVIDED BY THE CITY OF WORCESTER

In 2021, the City of Worcester received \$146.6 million from the federal government as part of the massive national stimulus package known as the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA). The city has been planning for over a year on how best to allocate these funds, and has only spent \$13 million so far. This week, the City announced an initial series of grant programs totaling \$16.75 million that will be available for all Worcester-based applicants. Applications are available online.

IMPORTANT REQUIREMENT: Due to regulations on federal grant awards, all applicants must have a Unique Entity Identifier (UEI) given to them by the federal government. To receive your UEI, go to SAM.gov and begin the process of registering the legally recognized entity you are associated with which would receive funding. Because it is a public service, this process is completely free. The Chamber will be releasing a guide on our website in the coming weeks on how to complete SAM.gov registration from start to finish. Please note this process can take up to 1-3 weeks and plan accordingly.

COMMUNITY PROJECTS & PROGRAMS

A program for nonprofits to assist with their operational and capital needs to address the pandemic's negative effects on social issues like food security, child-care, and more. Please refer to the program's RFP to see if your nonprofit is eligible.
Program total funding: \$10,000,000
Application funding range: Up to \$250,000 for operations, up to \$1,000,000 for capital improvement projects.
Due: 9/30

SMALL BUSINESS SAFETY NET

Grants for small businesses in specific industries negatively impacted by the pandemic. Please refer to the program's RFP to see if your business is eligible.
Program total funding: \$2,500,000
Application funding range: Expected \$5,000 - \$11,500
Due: 10/14

OWNER-OCCUPIED HOUSING REHABILITATION

A program to provide grants to owner-occupied properties to assist in addressing building or sanitary code violations.
Program total funding: \$2,500,000
Application funding range: Up to \$30,000 per eligible unit

LEAD PAINT ABATEMENT

A program for property owners for the abatement of lead paint hazards in residential properties built prior to 1978.
Program total funding: \$1,500,000
Application funding range: Up to \$15,000 per eligible unit

FLOOD INSURANCE

Grants to assist owner-occupied properties in commonly flooded areas to help with insurance premiums.
Program total funding: \$250,000
Application funding range: Up to 50% of annual flood insurance premium cost to assist owner-occupied properties located in flood zones.

The Chamber highly encourages all interested parties to read the detailed program guidelines and eligibility that are found on <https://www.worcesterma.gov/arpa>.

The City will host two workshops for Community Projects and Programs on August 18 at 6pm and August 22 at 6pm in City Hall's Levi Lincoln Chamber as well as virtually, with live Spanish translation. There will be additional workshops announced specifically for the Small Business Safety Net Program.

For more information, please contact ARPA@worcesterma.gov.

Photo of Trapp Falls by Jerry Callaghan

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Opening of Guild of St. Agnes's newest location expected before Christmas

by PATRICK SARGENT, CORRESPONDENT

Redevelopment of the former Colonial Bowling Center at 248 Mill St. is currently underway as the Guild of St. Agnes turns the candlepin bowling alleys into preschool rooms ahead of the opening of the new, Guild of St. Agnes University Collaborative child care center.

The site was originally scheduled to open in September, but following an inspection by the City of Worcester, the Guild was informed the site was located on a flood plain and, in order to continue construction, they would have to raise the floor by a foot.

The Guild's new child care center, now set to open late this fall, will enroll around 155 children between the ages of 2 to 5 years old, including seven infants, 18 toddlers and 130 preschoolers.

According to the Guild's new executive director Sharon McDonald, the center will meet a city-wide need for more quality and affordable child care options and education.

"About half of the center's 155 seats will be reserved for low-income families eligible for subsidized child care," McDonald said. "There are wait lists for infants and toddlers, and parents often cannot find the child care they need."

This mission of the center is to support the Worcester community in several ways. The Guild will provide early childhood education and care services to the surrounding Worcester community by caring for children ages birth to 5 years old while also serving as a learning lab for university students.

The Guild is partnering with Worcester State University to provide the school's education majors a place for onsite teaching and learning through practicums and internships. Interns will work in the program, classes will be held in a conference room on site, and the center is being built with observation hallways and classrooms for practice teaching. These observation rooms will allow students to watch the classrooms without disrupting its daily function.

"This is the most exciting thing we have done in 10 years, and it is coming at such a critical time," said Worcester State University Education Professor Carol Donnelly, who is leading the university's academic program in the new center. "Our hope is that the center is a lighthouse for diversity in terms of the children served and in terms of the teachers served and graduated by the partnership."

The Guild's former executive director Edward Madaus said they are aiming for a late fall or early December opening. Madaus retired on June 30 but is still very much a part of the progress taking place at the Mill Street location.

"Since 1913, the Guild has been committed to creating high-quality child care centers for all children, regardless of their economic background," Madaus said. "This new partnership allows us to ensure teachers have an excellent education while providing the best care and education for the children and families we serve."

The \$6 million renovation in the 17,600-square-foot building will add seven preschool classrooms and three infant/toddler rooms, all with their own bathrooms, a kitchen, and a laundry room. The building's original maple wood floors are being preserved in the main atrium and part of the open-truss ceiling.

A pair of evening classes in Worcester State's early childhood education degree program will be held at the center to serve teachers working at the Guild and other child care programs throughout the area.

"We are thrilled to partner with the Guild of St. Agnes to advance the quality of early childhood education for our students," Worcester State University President Barry M. Maloney said. "With the Guild's longstanding commitment to caring for and educating our city's youngest children and Worcester State's historic distinction in educating teachers, this new facility will be a model statewide for early childhood educational excellence."

The Colonial Bowling Center closed in May 2020 at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic after 60 years in business. The Guild of St. Agnes purchased the property in Dec. 2021 for \$1 million.

The Guild of St. Agnes has centers in Worcester, Charlton, Devens, Fitchburg, Gardner and Webster serving 1,600 children, including seven child care centers, 11 school-age programs, two administrative buildings and 130 contracted Family Child Care providers.



Above: Executive Director Sharon MacDonald and Director of Facilities Peter Allard share blueprints with Amy Kershaw, the Acting Commissioner of Early Education & Care.



Above: The inside of the former Colonial Bowling Alley.



Above: Rendering of the new Guild of St. Agnes childcare center on Mill Street.



Above: An empty construction vehicle sits outside of the entrance of the former Colonial Bowling Alley.

GHANA US AMBASSADOR, CONTINUED

“Thank you for all the beautiful things you say about Ghanaians in Worcester, we are so proud.”

City Manager Eric Batista, Worcester County Sheriff Lewis Evangelidis, and City Councilor Khrystian King were all present as well. Business leaders from the Chamber’s board of directors, including board chair and Fallon Health Vice President Christine Cassidy, Quinsigamond Community College President Luis Pedraja, WPI Assistant Vice President Kola Akindele, UniBank CEO Michael Welch, Fidelity Bank Senior Vice President Eric Torkornoo, and The Guru Tax and Financial Services CEO Satya Mitra were in attendance for the discussion as well.

The Lieutenant Governor welcomed the Ambassador, saying, “I hope that you are feeling the love today because we feel the love of over 50,000 Ghanaians in Central Massachusetts every day!” She made sure to note the Commonwealth’s economic growth in life sciences, high tech, and infrastructure, and the need to fill those growing sectors with talent.

Ambassador Mahama showed the attendees a video produced by her government that highlighted Ghana’s growth as an economic powerhouse in West Africa. Ghana’s GDP is \$72 billion, and the economy grew at a rapid pace of 7% between 2017 and 2019. Because of the African Continental Free Trade Area, a multinational economic cooperation treaty that allows free trade between every country in Africa, Ghana is effectively an international gateway for trade to the entire continent. Ghana’s strongest industries are manufacturing, mining, agriculture, food processing, and lumber.

“Thank you for all the beautiful things you say about Ghanaians in Worcester, we are so proud,” said Ambassador Mahama in response to the Lieutenant Governor. She said that there were partnerships to be explored between New England’s second-largest city and Ghana. “We are looking for business collaboration in manufacturing and other sectors,” said the Ambassador.

Sheriff Evangelidis, who is also the chair of the board for the Massachusetts Port Authority, which operates Logan International Airport and Worcester Regional Airport, pointed out that he is having conversations about potential direct flights to Ghana. “At Massport, we look at ourselves as the economic engine of the region,” said Sheriff Evangelidis. “I’m excited to continue a conversation that will hopefully lead to some very fruitful developments.” In response, Ambassador Mahama noted the daily flights from DC and New York City to Ghana, and how they are always filled, mostly with Ghanaian-Americans coming back and forth between their home countries.

Tim Murray concluded the event with a promise of a follow-up. “Continuing this conversation, we will include MassDevelopment, the Commonwealth’s Office of International Trade and Investment, and other leaders to pursue some mutually beneficial opportunities,” he said. Ambassador Mahama responded, saying, “There are many things that Ghana and Worcester can do together.”



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Above: Her Excellency addresses guests as Lieutenant Governor Karyn Polito, and President & CEO of the Worcester Regional Chamber of Commerce Tim Murray look on.

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The Pros and Kids of Baseball

WOOSOX PLAYERS AND COACHES RUN A BASEBALL CLINIC FOR LOCAL KIDS OF ALL AGES

by KEVIN SALEEBA, CORRESPONDENT

WORCESTER - Woo Sox outfielder Ryan Fitzgerald stood in the left field corner at Polar Park on a bright July morning last month. He was surrounded by a group of kids between the ages of 10 and 14 all of which wore baseball gloves. This was during a recent youth baseball clinic sponsored by the team.

After the kids practiced catching pop-flies, Fitzgerald performed some baseball magic tricks as the clinic wound down. He smiled and asked the kids if they were going to come out to the ball park later that day to watch his team play. One precocious boy said, “no, I’m going to see the Worcester Bravehearts play.” The Bravehearts are a summer collegiate baseball team and Worcester Chamber member based in the same city.

Fitzgerald then asked, “why don’t you want to see us play?”

The boy said, “because they are on NESN.”

A puzzled Fitzgerald then asked, “but we are on NESN, too!”

The boy retorted back sarcastically, “yeah, NESN-plus!”

Fitzgerald could not help but laugh. “I like this kid. I mean he’s going places. He’s smart and it sounds like something I would say as a kid.”

Young fans of all ages had the chance to participate in multiple baseball drills on the field at Polar Park conducted by WooSox players and coaches during the clinic. Fitzgerald was joined by outfielder Devlin Granberg and catcher Deivy Grullón, while manager Chad Tracy, hitting coach Rich Gedman, pitching coach Paul Abbott, bench coach Jose Flores, and assistant hitting coach Michael Montville split up the nearly 50 kids into four different stations. Pop flies were practiced in left field, groundballs were done in left center, a hitting station was set up in right center, and a pitching and catching station was organized in right field under the scoreboard.

Brandon Shaw, 7, of Sutton demonstrated what he learned. “So, this elbow,” he said pointing to his left elbow. “This goes like this,” as he pointed his elbow to an imaginary batter. “And then your foot goes like this,” he said pointing his toes toward that same imaginary batter. “And then you step and throw to your target,” he said concluding his tutorial by simulating the throwing motion. “Your elbow and foot should always be facing your target.” He then said, “I want to be a pitcher. This was fun. We threw the ball back to the coaches and they taught me some things.”

His mom, Anita Shaw, said the clinic was “awesome. It’s so well-done. It’s perfect.”

William Rodgers and his 6-year-old son Andrew, came from Seattle to attend the clinic. “He’s a big baseball fan. A big Red Sox fan living in Seattle,” William said. “They did such a great job with this clinic. It’s really cool ... You have the players and the coaches out there with the kids. I can tell him a million things, but with the players and coaches out there, it makes it that much more fun and impactful. I can’t say enough. They did a really nice job.”

Andrew said, “I liked batting and taking pop-flies, because it was really fun. I like the Red Sox and the Oakland A’s because the A’s start with the letter A of my name and I like their mascot. I like the Red Sox because they are in Boston and Boston is my favorite place I want to live. Playing with Red Sox players was great because we get to have fun with them.”

The players also enjoyed the clinic. Granberg said he remembers similar fan/player interaction as a kid. “I grew up in Colorado and I remember walking around Coors Field. I don’t think they did anything quite like this at Coors Field, but I remember we have pictures with Todd Helton, and a bunch of those Rockies legends. It definitely meant a lot to me as a kid and definitely growing up and trying to see yourself where those guys were. Plus, it’s just such a beautiful day today for these kids to be around this beautiful ballpark. The whole experience has been good. The kids are great. They are very enthusiastic, which is awesome. You can tell they have raw passion for the game and for life. Even when they miss a fly ball, they pick it up and they’re smiling. It’s definitely cool to see the joy they have for the game. Some of them are quite clever. You’ll say something and they’ll come right back at you like Fitzzy was saying, but that makes it fun. That makes it awesome.”

Dr. Charles Steinberg, the team’s President, said this is the first time the WooSox has been able to run such clinics. “This is a big day for us because this is something the Paw Sox have done for years, but the COVID restrictions didn’t allow us to do it last year,” he said. “So, finally today, we can foster fan/player interaction with the most eager young children who have dreams of playing baseball. What we hope to accomplish today is to advance those dreams.

Steinberg said the goal is to help the kids learn some important life lessons. “It actually doesn’t matter if the child grows up to play major league baseball,” he said. “What does matter is that they learn the lessons of baseball: teamwork, sportsmanship, how to win, how to lose, and how to relate to the people who are inside that uniform when they’re playing. You’re not going to look at Ryan Fitzgerald the same way. Once a player becomes a person to the fan, the bond in-



Left: WooSox outfielder Ryan Fitzgerald gives kids tips at a recent baseball clinic.



Right: Catcher Deivy Grullón take a photo with a young fan. Photos by Kevin Paul Saleeba

tensifies. And when that player is soon starring at Fenway Park, the nine-year-old has this great connection to them. ‘He taught me how to play baseball. He taught me hitting.’ And when you have somebody like Rich Gedman, who was born in Worcester, who went to elementary school within eyesight of the ballpark, well then maybe this child says, ‘well maybe I can do it to.’”

Steinberg also said he was please to see many girls participating in the clinic. “It’s great and inspiring to see what percentage of these kids are girls. There’s going to be a woman who plays major league baseball and maybe she’s playing here today.”

After the clinic, the kids received player posters and the players signed autographs and took selfies. The club has held two more similar clinics on July 23rd and August 6th, since this first one on July 9th. The last two clinics will be on Saturday, August 20th and September 3rd. Registration for future clinic dates will open closer to each event date. If you have any questions, contact info@polarpark.com or call (508) 500-1000. Each clinic starts promptly at 10 a.m. Fans up to the age of fifteen can register. Fans are encouraged to bring a glove and cleats cannot be worn on the field. Water is provided.

Both the professionals and the kids all enjoyed the experience. “They’re not just here to learn the specifics of baseball,” Fitzgerald said. “They are here more to have fun and maybe experience what it’s like to be one of us pro guys ... I remember when I was a kid and saw pro guys like this. Now seeing the kids, guys like Deivy, Devlin and myself, we enjoy being around the kids. It’s energizing.”



Above: Rich Gedman tosses at batting practice Photo by Kevin Paul Saleeba



Above: Bench Coach Jose Flores helps with groundballs. Photo by Kevin Paul Saleeba

SPORTS STREET PLUS

By TIM MURRAY

Sports fans of different generations can recall great athletes that have played different pro sports or two positions offensively and defensively depending on the particular sport. The legendary Bo Jackson played professional football and baseball simultaneously. Michael Jordan left basketball for a period to play pro-baseball. Deion Sanders occasionally played both offense and defensive in the NFL as did The “Refrigerator” Perry for the Chicago Bears.

Locally Mike Vrabel, Troy Brown, Wes Welker, Vince Wilford, and Rob Gronkowski occasionally played both sides of the ball for the Patriots. Also, Holy Cross College football player Gordie Lockbaum finished third in the Heisman Trophy balloting for his two-way exploits on the gridiron in 1987.

However, currently sports fans are witnessing in Los Angeles, Angel’s baseball player Shohei Ohtani, who hails from Japan; something not seen since Baby Ruth.

Ohtani currently pitches, plays outfield, and is a designated hitter for the Angels on any given night. As of the deadline for this publication of this edition his career batting average is .263 and has a pitching record of 9-5 with an earned run average of 2.80 and 134 strike outs on a struggling Angels team.

Visions of the Future: LOCAL ENTREPRENEUR AND STARTUP WORCESTER GRADUATE CONNECTS LOCAL INTERNS WITH EMPLOYERS

by KEVIN SALEEBA, CORRESPONDENT

WESTBOROUGH - After five years of teaching college students, Amy Mosher Berry grappled with a major problem. Numerous juniors and seniors each year are bewildered and mystified about how to gain meaningful real-world experience after graduation.

"Many students had no clue what they wanted to do and worried that their lack of tangible work skills and experience will set them back," said Berry, a former adjunct professor in entrepreneurial studies at both Clark University and Worcester State University. "Others were unsure if they even wanted to pursue a career in their chosen field. Most students were just focused on completing their degree and hoping it would all work out in the end. But ultimately, they freak out during their last two semesters or after graduation when they realize time was no longer on their side."

Berry, the founder and CEO of Visions Internships and a 2019 StartUp Worcester cohort, wanted to help and had an idea for a possible solution. While still teaching a class at Worcester State, she had an epiphany.

"I remember a student in the back of my Urban Studies class. His name was John," she said. "He was like, 'Miss, I know you are always telling me to get experience, but who do I talk to?' I was like, okay, you know what? It was a Tuesday, and I told him on Thursday to come back with a couple different kinds of internships or work experience that you would like to actually get this summer and I'm going to go around and call someone in my network or Google something live, in front of you in class, and I'm going to show you how to just line stuff up. He was like, 'No way!'"

In that Thursday class, Berry searched different career paths for John. She discussed market research and talked about different trends in the job market with the class. She found a possible fit for John at a state water treatment plant. "No one really questions where their water comes from until you don't have it," she said. "(John) said that sounded good. So, I called the state water agency in front of 30 or 40 students that day just to make it happen. I said, 'I got a really motivated young person here and I'm literally calling from the classroom at Worcester State. Who could you connect me to for a conversation with John?' He got an interview the next week and the following week he had

an internship. That was the start."

After discovering her new calling in life and armed with her new idea of helping college students, Berry applied for the StartUp Worcester program sponsored by the Worcester Regional Chamber of Commerce. Once accepted in to the program, she decided to quit teaching and to pursue her new business plan called AMBassadors Community Development, LLC, at the time. The name has since been changed to Visions Internships.

The goal of the company is to help bridge the gap between employers and prospective interns. Instead of just throwing these young people to the wolves of the real world with no direction, Visions Internships helps link these two groups together. The interns get the quality experience they need, while the employer gets a productive employee.

"Visions Internships helps purpose-driven young people get meaningful real-world experience serving social impact organizations in need of project support," she said. "We believe we can co-create a world that works by empowering motivated young people to tackle the greatest social and environmental challenges of our time. We are deeply committed to leaving this world better and brighter than we found it."

"I could not stand the thought of one more college graduate returning to their high school barista or babysitter job - now saddled with debilitating debt - just because they failed to put a plan in place," she said. "I also felt strongly that I needed a better response when people in my professional network would constantly inquire about how to 'get good interns.' It was a bold move to leave my two jobs, but StartUp Worcester gave me just enough structure to have the confidence to go for it."

Although Berry looked to create a harmonious balance between employer and intern, establishing Visions Internships came at a difficult crossroad in her life. Six weeks after becoming a StartUp participant, she went through a tough divorce, she lost another job to COVID, and was forced to raise her two-year-old daughter alone. On top of that, this sudden change in her personal life and what she perceived to be a faulty business model threatened to derail her new venture, which was quickly put on the back-burner.

"I was in a position where I had just made a real difficult move leaving my two teaching positions," she



Left: Amy Mosher Berry

said candidly. "I was navigating a difficult divorce with a two-year-old ... I found myself in the midst of a personal crisis ... I couldn't even think straight. I was in such emotional turmoil, trying to keep my kid alive

by myself. It was nuts.

"When I was furloughed due to COVID, I soon realized the universe was telling me to return to building my startup. It was indeed a blessing in disguise," she said. "StartUp Worcester is one of those programs I feel eternally grateful and blessed I was able to jump into it ... If I didn't have StartUp Worcester as an excuse to keep going, I would not have done this. Little did I know that I would be divorcing, but it was perfect at the time and then I had to humble myself and admit I didn't have the best business model ... StartUp Worcester was a program that gave me mentorship and a community around me to help me to noodle through my idea and it was very useful. A program like StartUp Worcester can keep you in the game mentally working with other people."

Berry now looks to continue to build up Visions Internships. The company's core values stand on four principles; the wellbeing of people over profit; giving people the opportunity to fulfill their potential; resilience in the concept of "failing forward," in other words, bouncing back when things don't go your way; and finally, simple kindness.

"We care for our interns and honor their lived experiences, views, and desires," she said. "These young people are not dumb. They know they need some real-world experience. The default for them is to just keep focusing on the exam and their GPA and hope it all works out. We'll help them work it out."

For more information about Visions Internships, visit their website at www.visionsinternships.com or email Berry.amy@visionsinternships.com or 508-835-8007.

For more information about StartUp Worcester visit worcesterchamber.org/startup-worcester



Worcester Regional Chamber of Commerce Announces the Leadership Worcester Class of 2023

RISING PROFESSIONALS CHOSEN FOR CIVIC LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

by WORCESTER CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

The Worcester Regional Chamber of Commerce announces the selection of 28 talented professionals who will make-up the class of 2023. Members of the Leadership Worcester Class of 2023 are:

- Katherine (Katie) Acker- Health Equity Program Manager, Fallon Health
- Marwa Alnaal- Director of Government Affairs, Ascentria Care Alliance
- Christina Bazelmans- Associate Principal, Lamoureaux Pagano Associates Architects
- Margie Breault- Program Manager, EforAll
- Staisha Chavis- Operations Manager, City of Worcester-Executive office of Economic Development
- John Daniels- Director of Investments, The Menkiti Group
- Jennifer Delaney- Community Health Manager, UMass Memorial Health
- Lora Dumas- Lead Process Improvement Consultant, UMass Chan Medical School
- Katie Ferreira- Director of Communications & Development, Guild of St. Agnes of Worcester, Inc.
- Stacey Forrest- Chief Operating Officer, Thrive Support & Advocacy
- Anastasia Garcia- Commercial Lines IT Business Analyst, Hanover Insurance Group
- Maricelis Gonzalez- Executive Director, El Buen Samaritano Food Program, Inc.
- Amaris Gonzalez- Director of College Placement and Transition, Nativity School of Worcester
- Kendra Hacker- Lead Admissions Marketing Specialist, UMass Chan Medical School
- Holly Hodgkins- District Representative, Office of Congressman McGovern
- Kayanna James- Workforce development specialist, U.S. Department of Labor
- Billie Kenyon- COO/Sales Operation & Customer Success, Ladybugz Interactive Agency
- Peter Munene- Program Coordinator, CMHA
- Wanjiru Nganga- Assistant Administrator, Operations, Century Homecare, LLC
- Jay Prosser- Chief Nursing Officer, Saint Vincent Hospital
- Victor Rivera- Senior Manager, Strategic Priorities, YMCA of the USA
- Gabriel Rodriguez- Outreach Director, Legendary Legacies
- Eric Roldan- Director of Outpatient Services, Open Sky Community Services
- Loreta Sulejman- Market Manager, Webster Five Cents Savings Bank
- Janelle Tanenbaum- Associate Attorney, Seder & Chandler LLP
- Marina Theberge- Financial Services Professional, Dream Big Wealth Strategies LLC
- Joel Wallen- Associate Executive Director, Pernet Family Health Service
- Jibrael Younis- Operations Manager, MassHire Central Career Center

The selection committee sought motivated individuals who aspire to take an active leadership role in Worcester and who want to learn how they can tap in to make the best/biggest impact on the city and surrounding communities. The selected applicants were notified this July.

The Leadership Worcester Class of 2023 represents a variety of industry sector and cultural backgrounds and are all in different phases of their careers.

The 2023 class will get underway on September 15, 2022, with an overnight retreat, offering participants an opportunity to get to know one another, determine

LEADERSHIP, CONTINUED

individual leadership strengths, become grounded in the city's landscape, and begin conversations about Worcester's potential in the coming decades.

Monthly sessions will explore topics that are critical to Worcester. The daylong sessions will take place between 8:30 a.m. and 4:15 p.m. on one Thursday a month from October through May and culminate in a graduation in June 2023. Session topics include Urban Environment and Sustainability; Education and Youth Development; Economic Development; Public Health; Community Safety; Government; Arts, Culture and Quality of Life; and Food and Housing Security.

“Now more than ever, we need leaders - those who understand the needs of our community and will step up to facilitate change and inclusivity,” said Timothy P. Murray, President and CEO, Worcester Regional Chamber of Commerce. “For nine years Leadership Worcester has been cultivating just such individuals. Graduates of the program have gone on to do incredible things in our community and beyond. I know that this new class will do the same to help our great city continue to grow in the fields of science, education, healthcare, technology, and more.”

“As a past Leadership Worcester graduate, several years ago, I have since then overlapped with many LW classmates that are now involved in the community and it is incredibly heartening for me to see so many recent grads of Leadership Worcester getting involved with local organizations. It is a fabulous program, and it helps the Worcester area advance as a great place to live and do business! Leadership Worcester grads really make a difference.” - Deb Cary, Community Advocacy and Outreach Manager, Mass Audubon, Central Region

The cost to participate in the program is \$3,200. Scholarship assistance from employers and a number of Worcester foundations including: George F. and Sybil H. Fuller Foundation, George I. Alden Trust, Stoddard Charitable Trust, Hoche-Scofield Foundation, the Fletcher Foundation, and new this year, the Leadership Worcester Alumni Fund which is made up from alumni donations.

Applications for the next class will be available online in February 2023. For more information, visit www.leadershipworcester.com.



HEY WORCESTER RESIDENTS!

LOOKING FOR YOUR NEXT CAREER MOVE?









The Worcester Jobs Fund (WJF) is always recruiting for no-cost, short-term job trainings which prepare participants for high-wage positions in high demand! Examples of upcoming trainings include Commercial Driver's License (CDL Classes A & B), Environmental Remediation, and Building Pathways Pre-Apprenticeship.

WJF also provides scholarships for eligible Worcester residents to take other career training classes through Worcester Public Schools' Night Life Continuing Education program.

For more info, please contact Anh at (774) 418-1234 or DaoA@masshirecentral.com

The Worcester Chamber is proud to partner with Worcester Jobs Fund, Worcester Night Life, & the MassHire Central Region Workforce Board.



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SPORTS STREET, CONTINUED

WooSports Roundup

by KEVIN SALEEBA, CHAMBER CORRESPONDENT

WORCESTER - The hockey world and the Worcester Railers are mourning the loss of their longtime hockey voice this offseason. Eric Lindquist, the voice of professional hockey in town for more than a decade, died unexpectedly back in May at the age of 43.

Following the news of his death, the Railers announced that they “are heartbroken by the sudden passing of Eric Lindquist. His legacy will be carried on through the memory of his larger-than-life personality that left smiles on the faces of everyone he knew. Our thoughts and prayers are with his family and friends.”

Prior to working for the Railers, Lindquist spent nearly eight years with the Worcester Sharks before moving to San Jose with the team in 2015, where he spent one season calling games and handling public relations.

Upon hearing the news of Lindquist’s death, the San Jose Barracuda team posted on the team’s Twitter page that their hockey “family is shocked and saddened at the sudden passing of organizational play-by-play voice Eric Lindquist. Eric served as the voice of the Sharks AHL affiliate for nine seasons; eight with Worcester (2007-2015) and the Barracuda’s inaugural season in 2015-16.”

After he returned to Worcester from San Jose, he joined the Worcester Railers as the vice president of marketing and communications in 2016. He continued to work as a play-by-play broadcaster and called his 1,000th pro hockey game on Feb. 27, 2018. He left the organization in 2021 but continued to work for team owner Cliff Rucker in various other capacities.

He began his career in Los Angeles where he worked as an



Above: Eric Lindquist

assistant production coordinator and casting director for various TBS and FOX-related reality shows. His broadcasting career began with the Lowell Lock Monsters as the color commentator for the baseball team from 2004 to 2006. After that, he became the play-by-play broadcaster for the Long Beach Ice Dogs, a former ECHL team, in California before joining the Worcester Sharks as the director of public relations and broadcasting.

On June 15th, Spectrum News’ Kevin Shea emceed an event honoring Lindquist at Off the Rails Music Venue in Worcester where he said, “everyone is here because he touched us all in a beautiful way and he made everyone feel that you were his best friend ... we were all blessed to have the time we had with him.”

RAILERS HIRE NEW HEAD COACH

WORCESTER - Michael Myers, chief operating officer of the Railers, announced on June 29th that the club has named Westborough, MA native Jordan Lavalley-Smotherman as their new head coach and general manager.

“We are very excited to name Jordan as our new Head Coach and General Manager,” Myers said. “This past season, he was a major asset to our organization, providing veteran leadership and leading our club in scoring. He has proven throughout his career that he is a winner having captured multiple league championships, including an AHL Calder Cup. With 16 years of professional experience as a player, captain, and player assistant coach, we feel very confident that he will be able to help us take the next step forward on and off the ice.”

Lavalley-Smotherman, 36, joins the Railers behind the bench following a 16-year professional playing career where he captured an AHL Calder Cup in 2008 with the Chicago Wolves, a CHL Memorial Cup with the Québec Remparts in 2006, and an EIHL Cup with the Belfast Giants in 2019.

Lavalley-Smotherman was drafted in the 2005 NHL Entry Draft by the Atlanta Thrashers in the 4th round (#116 overall). He made his NHL debut with the Thrashers on March 31, 2008, and scored his first NHL goal on April 1, 2008. He went on to play parts of two seasons with Atlanta (2007-09) while also playing parts of five seasons in the AHL with the Chicago Wolves, Syracuse Crunch, Providence Bruins, and Springfield Thunderbirds where he garnered 165 points (79G, 86A) in 374 career games.

Lavalley-Smotherman was named an ECHL First Team All-Star during the 2017-18 season as a member of the Manchester Monarchs totaling 72 points (34G, 38A) in 69 games. Over his 16-year professional playing career, he played parts of nine seasons overseas from 2011-21.

During his time as a player, Lavalley-Smotherman gained experience in coaching serving as a volunteer assistant with the Manchester Monarchs during the 2017-18 season guiding them to game seven in the Eastern Conference Final. He also served as a player assistant with the Belfast Giants during the 2019-20 campaign.

“It was a privilege to play my last season of professional hockey in Worcester and experience the fans in full force,” Lavalley-Smotherman said. “I’m extremely excited to begin my coaching career in a loyal and passionate city like Worcester. I am very grateful for the opportunity to continue to push the Railers in the right direction.”

RAILERS WIN RECENT AWARDS

WORCESTER - The Worcester Railers Hockey Club, an ECHL affiliate of the New York Islanders, announced today that the league has named the Railers a co-recipient of the 2021-22 ECHL Community Service Team of the Year Award. This is the fourth straight year the Railers have received the award, but it is the team’s first time sharing the title with the Rapid City Rush. Additionally, Railers Manager of Communications, Broadcasting, and Hockey Operations, Cam McGuire, was named the 2021-22 ECHL Broadcaster of the Year. Winners were announced on Wed., June 29th at the ECHL Hockey Summer Meetings in Las Vegas.

RAILERS OPENING WEEKEND ANNOUNCED

WORCESTER - The Railers 2022-23 opening weekend at the DCU Center will be Saturday, October 22nd and October 23rd at the DCU Center vs. the Adirondack Thunder. Season ticket memberships for the 2022-23 season and group packages are on sale now by calling the Railers front office at 508-365-1750 or by visiting RailersHC.com.

MASSACHUSETTS PIRATES CLINCH PLAYOFF BERTH

WORCESTER - After defeating the Bay Area Panthers 4-2 on July 14th, the Massachusetts Pirates clinched their 10th win of the season and a home playoff game. It is the third time in four years the team has achieved this feat. This is an impressive accomplishment because the team has only been in existence for the last four years.

After the game, defensive lineman Ivan McLennan said they owed it to their fans to clinch this home-playoff game. “Talking with our owner and GM and our whole roster, we know it means a lot to our fans,” he said. “Last year they won a championship, so it was our duty this year to come out and get this team a home playoff game.”

BRAVEHEART’S NORIEGA CONTINUES TO SHINE AT THE PLATE

WORCESTER - Although the Worcester Bravehearts have struggled to stay over .500 this season and they’re near the bottom of the Future Collegiate Baseball League’s standings, their young first baseman, Gavin Noriega, has impressed with the bat so far this summer. The Marist College junior is ranked second in the league with a .360 batting average. The 5-9, 175 pound, Noriega has a whopping 50 hits, including 13 doubles, in 38 games as of July 18.



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The Latin American Business Organization (LABO), is Proud to Announce the Opening of its New Office

by ELIZABETH CRUZ

The Latin American Business Organization (LABO), is proud to announce the opening of its new office on 33 Highland Street in Worcester as a go-to-resource center for LABO members and the community. We are also excited to recognize the newly appointed members of the Board of Directors which include: Albie Alvarez-Cote, Owner of Che Empanadas; Aramis Jordan, President & CEO of Franvice, LLC.; Karyn Sanchez, Lead Attorney at Mass Tax Corp; Sylvia Ruiz, Central Mass Conference for Women; Rosa-Maria Salas, Director of Community Loan Funds; Jacob Vazquez, Philanthropy office at Greater Worcester Community Foundation; Jackson Restrepo, Founding Partner of Restrepo Properties LLC; Carla Delacruz Davila, Co-Founder and President of Wellstorm Inc.; Lindiana Semidei, Program Officer, Arts & Culture.

As LABO continues to integrate new changes into the organization, we are extremely honored to look back at some of our recent accomplishments that have benefitted members of our community. In April we partnered with the Worcester Regional Chamber of Commerce as an affiliate partner organization which is a win-win for both organizations and members.

On June 11th LABO, DYME Institute, and Centro Inc. hosted a graduation ceremony for students who completed the Venture Start Up and Growth program. Thirty-nine students graduated and of those 39, 35 have launched their business and four have received college credits from Quinsigamond Community College. These students get access to LABO and WRCC membership for a year in a way to support and empower them through their journey as entrepreneurs.

We would also like to highlight the growth and success of the LABO News Show. This show is intended to provide resources and information and highlight business owners in the community. LABO's News Show is filled with highly-skilled and professional hosts that work within the community. We welcome you to tune in on the LABO Facebook page every Friday at 5 pm. LABO continues to partner with local organizations to provide educational workshops and classes in Spanish to benefit our Latino community. We are extremely proud of the work we have accomplished in the last seven months and excited for what is to come. For more information about LABO please visit www.LABOus.org or call Elizabeth Cruz, president at (508) 769-3532.

Chamber of Central Mass South Unveils New Websites!

by CENTRAL MASS SOUTH CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

The Chamber of Central Mass South has just unveiled new, improved websites for both the Chamber and The Sturbridge Townships. CMS Chamber Members will be able access vital resources, advertise their upcoming events, post Hot Deals, register for Chamber events, post Member 2 Member discounts, pay invoices, even create Job Postings to recruit new employees! The Chamber is grateful to Karl Storz Endoskope for sponsoring the development and launch of these new websites. We invite you to visit the new Chamber website (www.cmschamber.org) and The Sturbridge Townships tourism website (www.sturbridgetownships.com) anytime to see the results!

Upcoming Affiliate Chamber Events

Sat., August 20 | 12:00pm-4:00pm

Clinton Chamber of Commerce Clinton Sidewalk Fest
High Street, Clinton, MA 01510
Open to Public

Sat., August 27 | 9:00am-3:00pm

Wachusett Area Chamber of Commerce Holden Days 2022
Holden's Main Street, Holden, MA 01520
wachusettareachamber.org

Mon., September 12 | 12:00pm-6:00pm

Auburn Chamber of Commerce
Annual School-Business Partnership Golf Tournament Blackstone National Golf Club
auburnchamberma.org

Thurs., September 15 | 5:30pm-7:00pm

Blackstone Valley Chamber of Commerce Networking at Night
Town House Tavern
1 Grafton Common, Grafton, MA 01519
blackstonevalley.org

Tues., September 20 | 5:30pm-7:30pm

Wachusett Area Chamber of Commerce Business After Hours
The Mill 185 Restaurant & Lounge
185 West Boylston Street, West Boylston, MA 01583
wachusettareachamber.org



The Clinton Area Chamber of Commerce presents

SUMMER SIDEWALK FEST

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food FOR thought



FOOD HUB Mint Kitchen & Bar Grand Opening; Food Hub Donates Milk in Worcester and Fitchburg

by DAVID SULLIVAN, DIRECTOR OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND BUSINESS RECRUITMENT

WORCESTER - Lately, things have been busy at the Worcester Regional Food Hub in 2022. Two of the biggest recent developments for the Food Hub have been the grand opening of a restaurant run by a former shared kitchen member and the start of a milk donation partnership with the Boys & Girls Club of Worcester and Fitchburg Public Schools.

MINT: A NEW DINING AND NIGHTLIFE EXPERIENCE IN MAIN SOUTH

Mint is a Vietnamese restaurant that just opened this spring on Maywood Street near Clark University. The restaurant is owned and operated by Trang Le, a graduate of the Food Hub's Launching Diverse Food Entrepreneur Program in 2019.

Trang came to the United States when she was eight years old, fleeing the Vietnam War with her family on a fishing boat. Her family found themselves in several different refugee camps around the Pacific before being resettled through a charity with other family members already in Worcester. Since then, Trang has raised a daughter and two sons in Worcester who helps her with the family business. Her husband Van, who has experience in the restaurant industry, cooks and helps manage the restaurant.

Trang has always been active in her community, volunteering at a parent organization at Nativity School, the Southeast Asian Coalition, Worcester Community Fridges, and other organizations. In 2019, Trang was inspired to apply for the Food Hub's diverse entrepreneur program. "I was always drawn to food," she said, noting its central importance in her culture and her willingness to try new things. Trang came out of the program with all of the necessary permits and licenses and an understanding of how to run a food business. She started a catering business, and when the time was right, bought the former Blarney Stone bar on Maywood Street to pursue her dream of opening a restaurant.

The old bar was completely renovated and had a kitchen and a small performance stage added. Trang says that while she loves operating the restaurant, she wants customers to know that they are a bar as well. "It's a modern, trendy Vietnamese bar that provides live entertainment and traditional North Vietnamese cuisine with a modern flair," said Trang when asked to describe Mint. "We get a good mix of Vietnamese and non-Vietnamese customers, and we definitely attract younger people."

Trang says that after the grand opening of the restaurant this past spring, her family is now focused on expanding their operating hours and bringing live music to Main South in the fall.

Mint is open Sunday-Tuesday from 4-11 pm, closed Wednesday, and open Thursday-Saturday 4 pm-midnight. More information is available on mintworchester.com.

DONATIONS TO BOYS & GIRLS CLUB AND FITCHBURG PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Recently, the Food Hub received a grant from the Massachusetts Dairy Promotion Board to continue a milk donation program it ran last year with the Boys & Girls Club of Worcester. This year, the grant also allows the Food Hub to donate milk to Fitchburg Public Schools.

Last year, the Food Hub delivered 2,500 jugs of milk of all sizes and types to the Boys & Girls Club. The milk is taken directly from local farms that typically work with the Food Hub. This year, the grant will pay for up to \$1,000 worth of milk - split evenly between the two organizations - every week for 19 weeks. The Food Hub delivers the milk directly to the Boys & Girls Club food pantry while working with the nonprofit Growing Places to deliver to families at Fitchburg Public Schools when the school year returns in September.

"The Food Hub's mission to create a sustainable and robust local food system is only possible if we continue to build our relationships with great organizations in the entire Central Massachusetts region," said Food Hub Director Shon Rainford.

The program will serve hundreds of families with youth at the Boys & Girls Club and Fitchburg Public Schools, two touchpoints for low-income and working-class families experiencing food insecurity. "We are so very grateful for our partnership with the Food Hub for making this opportunity possible," said Liz Hamilton, Executive Director of the Boys & Girls Club. Luisa Fernandez of Fitchburg Public Schools offered much of the same excitement, saying "Fitchburg Public Schools offers a heartfelt thanks to the Worcester Regional Food Hub and hopes to continue collaborating in the future."

Milk is a great way to encourage healthy eating habits in young people, as it increases the intake of vitamins and nutrients and is a substitute for sugary beverages. Last year, a vast majority of families who accessed the Boys & Girls Club pantry said in a survey that they would strongly consider more local food options like the milk they were provided.

FOOD REVIEWS Tatnuck Square Stays Cool

by SARAH CONNELL SANDERS, CORRESPONDENT

Back in the early aughts, the Tatnuck Square parking lot was the place to be seen. Sometimes we would scrounge together a few bucks and order a soda at Friendly's, but more often than not, we just gathered outside on the pavement in little huddles to gossip, flirt, fight, and conspire.

The parking lot remains a monument to my teenage years, but around it, the Tatnuck Square-*ea* has grown up. Friendly's is long gone, replaced by an Irish pub called Scruffy Murphy's where you can get a properly poured pint of Guinness and Fish n' Chips on Fridays. New small businesses are emerging all over the neighborhood.

Today's high schoolers have far more options to occupy their sweltering summer nights than we ever did. Take, for example, Mrs. Mariconi's Ice Cream on Pleasant Street. The farm-to-spoon operation relies on happy Jersey Cows and their famously sweet milk. Small batches of ice cream are flavored with careful ratios of fruit, citrus oil, cinnamon, chocolate chunks, marshmallows, morsels of cake, and other fresh ingredients. Owner Julia Mariconi trained professionally as a pastry chef in New York before completing the Food Science and Safety Program in Dairy at Penn State University in 2019 and then launching her ice cream brand in Central Massachusetts in 2020. Popular flavors include cherry vanilla, amarena pistachio chip, peanut butter chocolate chunk, and a variety of frozen Italian lemonades. The retail shop does not sell scoops; they offer pints and half-pints to go. In other words, if you want to stroll down the block to the Friendly's parking lot with your purchase and reminisce about the old days—giddyup. That's precisely why I keep an emergency spoon in my car at all times.

On the same stretch of Pleasant Street, is Tatnuck Square Nutrition where you'll find a roster of energizing teas designed to brighten up your social media feed. I suppose it's fitting that I've discovered this local gem at a time in my life when I am experiencing unquenchable thirst. As a nursing mom, the fountain root beers from Friendly's just won't cut it anymore. Luckily, Tatnuck Square Nutrition's refreshing beverages are here to help. The orange mango pineapple looks like a liquified sunset, and the "swamp water" looks like—well, you get the idea. Because I have my hands full with a tiny milk vampire, I'm partial to anything that will replenish serious calories through a straw. Tatnuck Square Nutrition's frozen shakes boast more than 20 grams of protein along with a variety of important vitamins and minerals. Times may have changed, but I still know how to stay cool in Tatnuck Square.

What are your favorite small businesses in Tatnuck Square? Find me on Instagram at @sarah_connell and let me know.



Above: One of Mrs. Moroconi's famous pints.



Above: TSN's Orange, Mango, Pineapple Mega Tea.

10 Things to Do in Central Massachusetts this Fall

Below: Foliage at Wachusett Mountain

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



Throughout this cherished season, crisp air and autumn charm are at their finest in New England. Check out these 10 ways to enjoy fall in Central Mass.

1. LEAF PEEPING

Our favorite destinations to enjoy this classic New England pastime are at Broad Meadow Brook, Bancroft Tower, Wachusett Reservoir, and Wachusett Mountain.

2. APPLE PICKING & CIDER DONUTS

Brookfield Orchards is a must-visit for the quintessential experience of wagon rides, apple picking and freshly made seasonal pies, dumplings, fudge, and cider donuts. For the farm fanatics, also check out Bolton Orchards, Breezlands Orchards, and Cook's Farm Orchard.

3. FAMILY FUN AT FALL FESTIVALS

On Sept. 1 from 11 a.m.-2 p.m., check out the Out to Lunch Festival & Farmers' Market on the Worcester Common Oval. An annual October favorite, the Harvest Festival in Sturbridge brings live music, crafts and an infamous scarecrow contest to Sturbridge. Discover more fun at events such as BBQ Fest, Kids Fest, and Apple Fest at Wachusett Mountain throughout the season.

4. LAUGH AT A COMEDY SHOW

Fans of live comedy won't want to miss the big names coming to the city this fall, so book your tickets ASAP! "King of Queens" star Kevin James is at Hanover Theatre Nov. 11 to Nov. 12. For Dec. 3 you'll have the tough decision of choosing between Chelsea Handler's Vaccinated and Horny Tour at Hanover Theatre or Sebastian Maniscalco's Nobody Does This Tour at DCU Center.

5. SIP ON THE SEASON

In addition to trying the Pioneer Pumpkin wine at Hardwick Vineyard, you'll certainly find a bevy of seasonal beers to sip on at local breweries. Don't miss Greater Good Imperial Brewing Company's Imperial Beer Fest on Sept. 17. Special Oktoberfest events can be found at Wormtown Brewery, Bay State Brewing Co., Rapsallion Brewery, and Wachusett Mountain.

6. FIND MORE FALL FLAVORS

Restaurants that refresh their menus with meals that spotlight seasonal ingredients should top your list this fall. Worcester has so many to offer, though Lock 50 and Deadhorse Hill tend to top our list. Sweets specialists such as Bean Counter Bakery Café and Glazy Susan will also delight you with fall flavored favorites.

7. SPECIAL EVENTS AT SOUTHWICK'S ZOO

The season brings three fun events to our region's zoo. Starting Sept. 1, Festival of Illumination, Once Upon a Time debuts and is sure to wow no matter your age, with a vibrant evening full of spectacle. Harvest Fest is on Oct. 23, and Zoo Boo is Oct. 29 to Oct. 31.

8. EXPERIENCE A DISNEY SHOW LIVE

Bring the on-screen magic to life for your kids. The DCU Center hosts Disney on Ice's "Frozen" and "Encanto" from Thursday, Oct. 27 to Sunday, Oct. 30. Discover Disney's "Aladdin" at Hanover Theatre, Nov. 3 to Nov. 6, where you're sure to get swept up in the beauty and magic of this brand-new performance directed and choreographed by Tony Award-winning talent.

9. PHANTOMS BY FIRELIGHT

Running for 13 nights only, beginning Oct. 7 through Oct. 31, this evening event (4:30-9 p.m.) at Old Sturbridge Village is sure to sell out. If you missed it last year, expect costumed kids, entertaining performances scattered throughout the living history museum, live music, spooky stories by a bonfire and more.

10. ENCHANTED FOREST & GNOMEVEMBER

You'll find the Enchanted Forest at The Ramble, a new addition to New England Botanic Garden at Tower Hill's property. We recommend attending a Fairies Aglow event on Friday evenings to see this special exhibit in its most magical light. An annual tradition, Gnomevember, runs through November, at which you'll have the chance to spot many of the hundreds of gnomes scattered across the property—fun for both kids and adults ready for a spectacular day in nature during this whimsical month.

Whether it's a foliage-filled exploration or live entertainment with the crew, I'm confident you'll enjoy these Central Mass. experiences this fall season. ♥

Discover Central MA, 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.



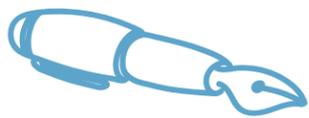
Above: Harvest Festival in Sturbridge, MA, photo by Erb/Dufault Photography.

Below: Enchanted Forest fairy house, courtesy of New England Botanic Garden at Tower Hill, photo by Sally J. Smith.



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4 STEPS TO PREVENT BURNOUT OF LEADERSHIP AND STAFF

by **QUINTEN PETRALLO**, LEAD, INC.

The World Health Organization identifies burnout as an “occupational phenomenon,” a syndrome resulting from chronic workplace stress that has not been successfully addressed or managed. Even this definition of burnout places blame on individuals - rather than placing blame on employers or workplace environments - for not “successfully managing” toxic stress.

While certain positions and industries feel this pressure and overwhelm more strongly than others, burnout is not a personal failure, a sign of weakness, or the result of generational differences. In contrast, burnout is the most detrimental issue affecting companies in 2022, with its mental and emotional consequences only being exacerbated by the COVID-19 Pandemic. In fact, a Deloitte survey^[1] found that 77 percent of workers say that they have experienced burnout at some point. Another study found that millennials and other young workers feel the impacts of burnout more easily than previous generations have, but this may be a result of collective trauma (i.e. the COVID-19 Pandemic) lowering employees’ tolerance levels for stress.

WHY IS BURNOUT A PROBLEM?

Burnt-out employees tend to produce both a lower quantity and quality of deliverables, causing work to pile up and eventually be too much to effectively handle. This is especially dangerous for those in critical jobs that require detail, such as healthcare or finance. When company leaders ignore the burnout of their staff, it can harm their physical and mental health, as well as their feelings of inclusion and belonging at work. Additionally, burnout can lead employees to suffer from excessive stress, fatigue, insomnia, sadness, anger or irritability, high blood pressure, and heart disease, to name a few.

HOW DO WE FIGHT BURNOUT?

In order to prevent and overcome burnout, companies need conscious, vulnerable, and authentic leaders. For leaders and managers, it’s imperative to recognize when an employee is experiencing burnout and commit yourself to provide support and compassion. Conscious leaders are self-aware, resilient, empathetic, intentional in their actions, committed to improvement, and dedicated to creating a safe and healthy working environment for everyone. Whether your employees have remained at work, continue to work remotely, or are transitioning back to the office, there are many ways you can help alleviate burnout and support your employees without being too invasive or stepping on HR’s shoes.

STEP 1: FOSTER EMPATHETIC LEADERSHIP

In order to lead with empathy, you must put aside your own biases and preferences to see things from the other person’s perspective. An empathetic leader understands the needs of others and is aware - and responsive to - their feelings. When leaders connect with their teams on a human level, they are more likely to identify risks to wellbeing and early symptoms of burnout. Empathy better enables company leaders to build productive teams and improve relationships with co-workers, clients, and customers.

When directly approaching someone, explain your concerns about the person’s feelings of overwhelm without focusing on their external behavior (i.e. lack of motivation to complete work.) As LEAD’s instructors often teach, “People want to know that you care before they care what you know.” Ask staff calmly and compassionately if they feel unmotivated or overwhelmed. Listen intently, and let them know you’re here to help and listen. If workplace burnout is the problem, work with the employee to identify the root of their overwhelm, prioritize competing tasks, and collaboratively determine a solution. Solutions could include time off, assistance on a project, or even moving them to a new team or department.

STEP 2: PROMOTE A HEALTHY WORK-LIFE BALANCE

Leaders can mitigate burnout by encouraging a healthy work-life balance. Try implementing more flexible schedules and encourage employees to take breaks if they feel like the task at hand is too overwhelming. Remind your employees that they need to prioritize their physical and mental health. In return, employees will feel trusted, appreciated, and like they are a partner in contributing to the business’s and team’s overall success.

Encourage and model taking time off, as well. Taking time off is key to avoiding burnout and rejuvenating one’s energy. Despite this, many employees may not be inclined to ask for time off for fear of their job security. If employees haven’t taken time off in a while, encourage them to take a day or a few days to decompress. This will allow employees to rest and recharge.

And remember, if leaders are not taking time off themselves, employees will feel like they shouldn’t either. Leaders should explicitly model vulnerability by sharing when their mental health is in decline and what they’re going to do about it to get back on track. If leaders don’t take advantage of well-being benefits or their Employee Assistance Program, their team may not feel empowered to do so, either. Set a good example by taking “breather” breaks or pauses during the day and try sharing strategies that you’ve found helpful to employees who may be struggling or are looking for advice.

STEP 3: PROMOTE COLLABORATION

The connection between co-workers is critical to building a productive, psychologically-safe, and healthy workplace. Encouraging team members to collaborate on projects will also help separate the workload and take the stress off individual employees.

STEP 4: AND FINALLY, SET AN EXAMPLE OF GOOD MENTAL HEALTH

To prevent burnout you have to start at the top. Leaders play a critical role in shaping organizational culture and well-being, so it’s vital that they too are supported to maintain engagement and productivity. Burnout is intrinsically linked to company culture, and to prevent it, leaders must create a space where employees feel inspired, motivated, energized, and supported on a personal level.

In summary, if you see someone struggling, reach out. If you think you spot the signs of burnout in an individual, meet with them privately or ask Human Resources for support. Leaders and managers are more powerful and influential than they know.

About the Author: LEAD empowers employees with no-fluff mental health and diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) training, coaching, and consulting to proactively prevent burnout, maximize productivity, and foster psychological safety in the workplace. Learn more at www.LEADnow.org or email info@LEADnow.org for a free consultation.

Why Work with a staffing Company?

by **BRIAN PALAIA**, SPHERION STAFFING & RECRUITING, WORCESTER COUNTY

Has your business struggled to hire reliable employees? Are you having trouble staffing your business in response to recent shifts in economic demand? Does the phrase “peak season” cause more than a bit of anxiety?

If the answer to any of these questions is “yes,” consider working with a staffing agency. Staffing agencies like Spherion find businesses the qualified employees you need, when you need them. We specialize in hiring and onboarding seasonal, temporary, and permanent employees in an efficient manner. Our goal is to take the burden of sourcing and interviewing candidates off of business owners so you can focus on running your business.

According to the American Staffing Association, more than 16 million people work in temporary positions in the US. Temp workers make up about 9% of the US workforce. Staffing companies manage a majority of these employees on behalf of their clients by:

- Advertising open positions
- Reviewing credentials
- Scheduling interviews
- Extending employment offers
- Guiding new hires through paperwork
- And in some cases, assisting with onboarding and on-site training.

One of the most common reasons businesses contract with staffing agencies is to save on various costs. We save you the time of finding and hiring candidates. We can staff your open positions within days. You can remain focused on your short- and long-term goals. Staffing agencies also handle payroll, benefits administration, unemployment claims, onboarding paperwork, and payroll taxes.

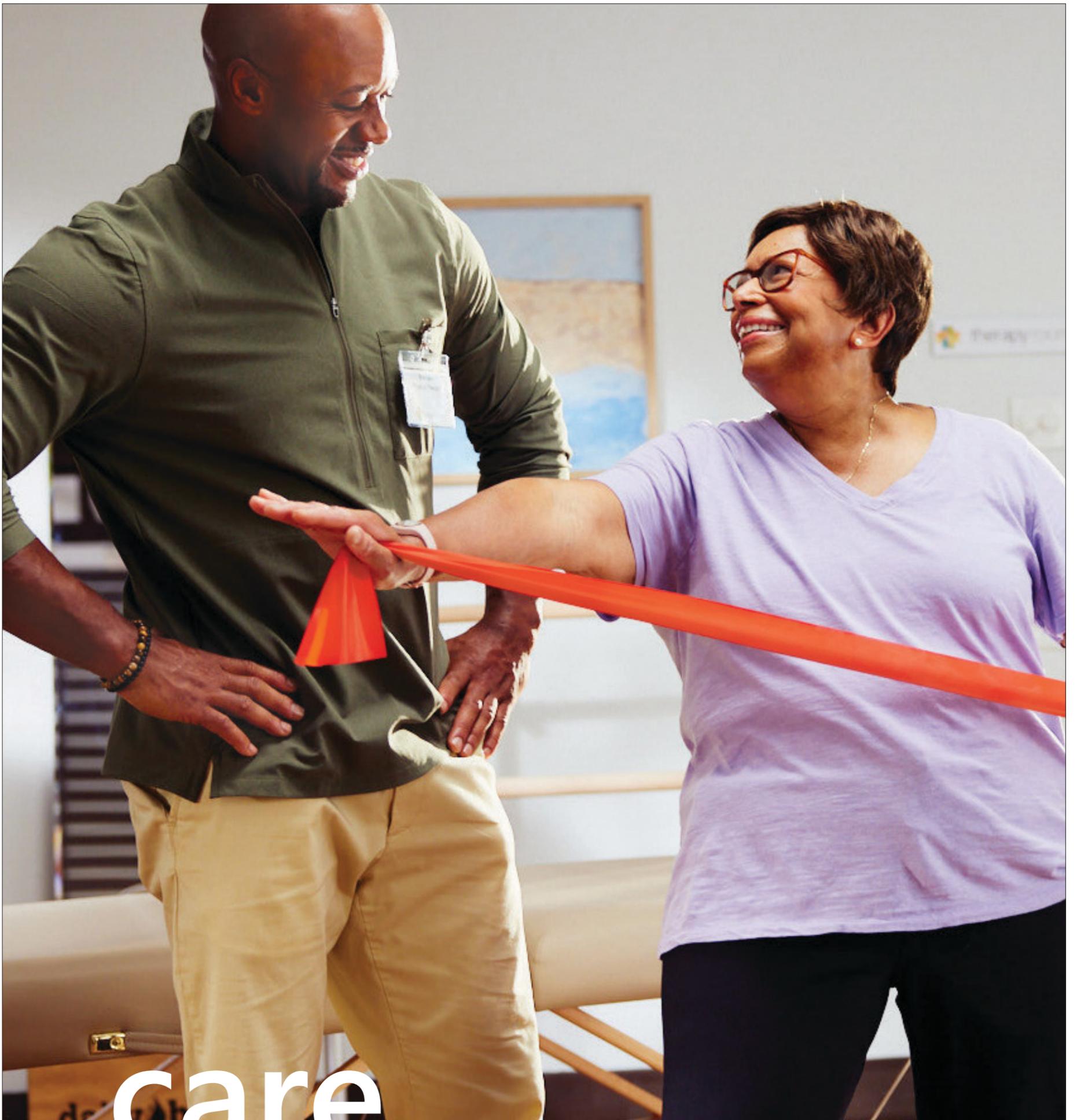
Hiring through a staffing agency saves money, too. Many staffing agencies step in to provide PTO, health insurance, and other benefits so you can continue to attract high-caliber workers without shouldering those costs. Working with a staffing agency usually costs less than having a full-time HR employee handling your hiring needs. A staffing agency can also support your existing HR department if your hiring needs are greater than what they can handle, but not large enough to justify another full-time HR specialist.

Secondly, staffing agencies help businesses fulfill peak season labor needs. Help with adding seasonal employees to ensure you can serve customers on time and to their satisfaction is the No. 1 reason businesses work with temp agencies. We help companies respond to increased demand faster because it’s what we do all day! We’re efficient and effective at hiring and retaining labor for the duration of your business’s needs.

Another reason to work with a staffing agency is to enhance your labor flexibility. Hiring through an agency relieves the work burden on existing permanent employees during busy seasons. Temporary employees can fill in for someone who’s on extended leave. Furthermore, a temp worker offers your business the option to trial an employee first. If you find a great fit, you can then extend a more permanent offer.

Finally, one of the most overlooked benefits of working with a staffing agency is to reach more candidates. People search for jobs in different ways. A staffing company advertises roles in several ways in your local market to ensure we’re reaching the widest possible audience who may be interested in your open positions. We are excellent at finding exceptional employees in unexpected places.

Especially given the last two years, we all know how unpredictable the labor market can be. These are all situations your business is likely to face one at a time or simultaneously. Staffing companies like Spherion help businesses bridge the gaps in your staffing needs so you can progress faster toward your goals. If you’re still unsure if a staffing company’s services are a fit for your employment needs, give us a call! We love showing businesses how we can become a valued partner. Let’s get to work!



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It's what we believe in.

Care is more than health care—it's care for your struggles, challenges, and triumphs. That's the kind of care we believe in.

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