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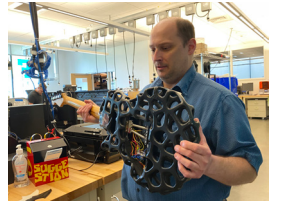
THE NEWSPAPER

Winter 2024

Vol. 7 • Issue 1

A QUARTERLY PUBLICATION  
OF THE WORCESTER REGIONAL  
CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

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## Expanding Early Education and Care: Not Just Childhood Development, But Economic Development

by KAREN PELLETIER, EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT, WORCESTER REGIONAL CHAMBER OF COMMERCE



Last month the Together for Kids Coalition convened early education providers, educators, policymakers, families, and employers for their first Solution Forum in order to further develop the first solution in Worcester's Early Childhood plan. The forum brought together these community stakeholders to discuss and contribute to a comprehensive, action-oriented, solution-based Early Education and Care (EEC) for Worcester.

I was invited to share the concerns of the region's business community as well as offer our commitment at the Chamber to work collaboratively to move this issue forward.

Certainly those at the center of the EEC crisis are our children and their families. When we back out level by level, we see the impact is shared among all of us.

Parents and caretakers need EEC so they can go to work. I'm sure we are all well aware of the desperate need for classroom teachers, but it's not only Early Education with a workforce crisis--the top concern of our region's employers, regardless of the size or sector, is workforce.

As a chamber, we have been actively working on a portfolio of education and workforce development efforts for the past decade. Four years ago, the Chamber joined forces with a number of other business organizations and employers to establish the Massachusetts Business Coalition for Early Childhood Education. Now comprised of 80 major employers and 20 business associations, the Coalition has been working to make world-class early childhood education and care accessible, affordable, and stable for Massachusetts workers.

In a survey we shared with our members as did others across the commonwealth in 2020, we learned that:

- 91% of employers reported "significant concern about childcare and school issues adversely impacting employee engagement and productivity."

*"As a chamber, we have been actively working on a portfolio of education and workforce development efforts for the past decade. Four years ago, the Chamber joined forces with a number of other business organizations and employers to establish the Massachusetts Business Coalition for Early Childhood Education."*

- 76% of parents reported the quality of work suffers due to childcare challenges\*\*, and
- 79% of parents are concerned they will not be able to work without formal childcare\*\*.

As a coalition, we have approached the issue from 3 focus areas:

- Budget and policy changes and advocacy
- Public-private partnerships, and
- Employer-based solutions

Through each of these, our message is that EEC is simultaneously:

- childhood development
- workforce development and
- economic development.

This is a shared priority, and as such all of us should be part of the solution. Building a quality early education and care system that is affordable and available is not only the right thing to do for our people but also for our economy. We need to address the labor issue in EEC not only for that sector but also for businesses and employers of all sizes.

But simply solving the workforce demand in EEC and getting things "back to normal" isn't enough. Normal or status quo was not working for all of our residents. It's not just about ensuring safe care for our 0-5-year-olds. We need to ensure that we are preparing our children for long-term success.

Our collective perspective is shifting as evidenced by the forum and by the "Gateway to Pre-K" press announcement by Governor Healey, where multiple members of her cabinet were present including the secretary of Education, Labor and Workforce Development, and Economic Development.

The Healey "Gateway to Pre-K" agenda\*\*\* includes four key components:

- **Delivering universal, high-quality preschool access for four-year-olds in all Gateway Cities by the end of 2026.** Every family of a 4-year-old in these 26 communities [including Worcester] will have the opportunity -- at a low or no cost -- to enroll their child in a high-quality preschool program that prepares them for kindergarten.

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EDUCATION , CONTINUED

- **Increasing Child Care Financial Assistance (CCFA) eligibility from 50 percent of the state median income (SMI) to 85 percent SMI** to help an additional 4,000 low-and moderate-income families afford care.
- **Continuing Commonwealth Cares for Children (C3) grants in FY25**, providing stable funding for programs to improve quality, pay facility costs, and hire more staff, thereby creating more classrooms where families can enroll their children in affordable child care.
- **Signing an executive order** to recognize the essential role child care plays in driving the state's economy and competitiveness forward and directing the Healey-Driscoll administration to take a whole-of-government approach to ensuring affordable, high-quality child care.

Having strong infrastructure for EEC is not just a moral issue, it's an economic issue, and a growing priority of the employer community, in addition to the city and state leaders.

We know that expanding access to EEC and building our city's infrastructure which prioritizes children's development and families in this way will simultaneously support workforce development and economic growth for Worcester residents and families.

We will see how the city and commonwealth are able to create system changes as budgets are passed and time goes on. In Worcester, we are fortunate to have leadership from our legislative delegation and the Together For Kids Coalition who have led us to where we are now—which is ready to make sure each family has access to affordable early education and care in our community.

*Note: This forum was the first of TFK Solution Forums, to be followed by additional gatherings focused on early childhood mental health, and high quality equitable primary and preventative health care throughout the early childhood years.*

- \*Massachusetts Business Coalition for Early Childhood Education fall 2020 employer survey
- \*\*Strategies for Children, Inc./Beacon Research statewide survey of 599 Massachusetts families with young children.
- \*\*\*Governor Healey Announces Universal, High-Quality Pre-K Access for Gateway Cities 1/16/24

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](mailto:kluna@worcesterchamber.org). To contact the editorial staff, please email Caitlin Lubelczyk at [clubelczyk@worcesterchamber.org](mailto: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

**Feb. 27** 11:00am **Construction & Real Estate Roundtable**  
Presented by the Menkiti Group  
at Chamber Office  
Presenting Sponsor: Bowditch  
Supporting Sponsor: Building Evolution Corp & Republic Services

**Feb. 28** 5:00pm **Business After Hours | Networking & Ticket to the Holy Cross Men's Basketball Game**  
at The College of the Holy Cross  
Presenting Sponsor: The Guru Tax & Financial Services & Complete Payroll

**Mar. 2** 7:00pm **Member Appreciation Night at the Worcester Railers**  
Free to Members  
DCU Center  
Sponsorships Available

**Mar. 7** 7:00am **The Breakfast Club**  
AC Marriott Worcester  
Presenting Sponsors: Fidelity Bank & Mass General Brigham Health Plan  
Supporting Sponsor: Wellpoint

**Mar. 8** 1:00pm **Non Profit Roundtable | Grant Readiness**  
at Chamber Office  
Presenting Sponsor: Bowditch

**Mar. 12** 9:00am **Seminar Series | Recruiting and Retaining Employees**  
with Tom Herald, MA Small Business Development Center  
at Chamber Office  
Presenting Sponsor: National Grid

**Mar. 12** 11:45am **President's Council**  
Presenting Sponsor: Marsh McLennan Agency

**Mar. 14** 12:00pm **Manufacturing Roundtable**  
at Chamber Office  
Supporting Sponsor: S&G Business Consultants & Certified Public Accountants, LLP

**Mar. 19** 8:15am **Business and Government Forum**  
at Chamber Office  
Presenting Sponsors: Wellpoint and WuXi Biologics  
Supporting Sponsors: Ventry Associates and Takeda

**Mar. 19** 11:30am **Power of Women (POW)**  
The White Room  
Presenting Sponsor: Country Bank  
Lunch Sponsor: S&G Business Consultants & Certified Public Accountants, LLP

**Mar. 21** 5:00pm **Business After Hours | Boys & Girls Club of Worcester hosted w/ LABO**  
Presenting Sponsors: Country Bank

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FOR THE MOST UP-TO-DATE INFO AND TO REGISTER FOR ALL EVENTS, VISIT OUR WEBSITE:  
[WORCESTERCHAMBER.ORG](http://WORCESTERCHAMBER.ORG)  
\*All dates subject to change\*

Dates subject to change.

**BUSINESS OWNERS DIALOGUE (BOD)** is a small group of non-competing business owners at the Chamber. BOD serves as a peer-to-peer advisory group, strategizing for how to face the challenges and opportunities that come their way. Find more info about this FREE Chamber member benefit on our website.

12/21/23

# 2023 Government Affairs and Public Policy Recap



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

As 2023 has closed out and we are on to 2024, we must reflect on some decisions made that have immediate impacts to the city as well as long-term effects. In 2023, we had some contentious items on the Worcester City Council floor, a chance to help our small businesses by lowering their tax burden while not adding more taxes to residents, some looming 9C cuts at the state level that took effect in the early weeks of this year and a municipal election with one of the best voter turnouts in the City's recent history. What happened and what is on the horizon?

## TAX CLASSIFICATION

Every fall the Worcester City Council debates on the tax levy and the burden that is placed on either the business community or the residents. It is no secret that over the past seven years the Worcester City council has continued to widen the tax gap between the business community and the residents by shifting more of the tax burden from the residential tax base to the commercial/industrial taxpayers. Those in favor of increasing the taxes on the commercial property owners argue that Worcester is booming, and companies are coming here to do business in that residents are having a difficult time staying in their homes. While there is merit to the fact that it is getting more costly to live in Worcester it is also true that it is getting very expensive to do business in Worcester.

Worcester businesses have and continue to be a big part of the fabric of this community. They employ our residents, giving them career ladders and opportunities to build equity in themselves and in their homes. They are constantly asked by our nonprofit community and local youth and adult sports leagues for sponsorships, donations, and financial support. During the pandemic, businesses, as they have historically done, stepped up and gave money to initiatives like the Worcester Together Fund, food pantries, and shelters to name a few.

This year, our City Council had an opportunity to lower the commercial tax rate, saving money that they could use to invest in workforce, energy upgrades and equipment while not increasing the residential taxes at all. Unfortunately, the City Council for the second year in a row voted for the lowest residential tax rate and again increased taxes on the businesses in the city.

Those who are affected the most are typically our small business owners with 10 employees or less who may be new Americans who have immigrated from their home country wanting to live their American dream. We hear on a regular basis the question of why there are so many empty storefronts downtown and in the neighborhood business districts and why we continually read that businesses continue to close for good or move to a neighboring town. The fact of the matter is when a business does its yearly budget or is looking to find a location, one of the first, if not the first things that a business owner looks at is the property taxes. Unfortunately, because of the continual vote to increase property taxes for businesses in Worcester, we have almost double the commercial taxes compared to the neighboring towns in central Massachusetts.

Surrounding towns are seeing that businesses are struggling in Worcester because of the tax rate and continue to work to attract them from Worcester. There are only two other communities in central Massachusetts that still have a dual tax rate: Auburn and Clinton. Last year Auburn again voted to narrow their tax gap in the hopes of capturing these businesses that cannot afford to be in Worcester. Clinton held the line not increasing the taxes for either businesses or residents in the hopes of revitalizing their commercial corridors.

One Worcester City Councilor in particular stated to a local radio station that the council is not even lobbied by the business community anymore and that the dual tax rate is no longer an issue. Well, I am here to set the facts straight. The Worcester Regional Chamber of Commerce advocates throughout the year for various items that can help strengthen the business community and continue to attract new businesses to the area while retaining those businesses that have been here for years. Through that advocacy, the tax issue is always discussed because it is the one vote that this council has that can have a direct impact on a business' bottom line. Along with the Chamber, many business owners reach out to city councilors either in person, by phone or in writing

to ask to help businesses by narrowing the tax gap rather than increasing it. For this councilor to say that it is not an issue any longer and that there is no advocacy for it is just plain incorrect and unfair to those businesses who spend the time calling or writing emails to them.

If there was ever a year to help the business community with the tax classification vote, 2023 was the year. They could have helped our businesses with their tax burden while not increasing the resident's taxes.

## MUNICIPAL ELECTION

The 2023 election had one of the highest turnouts in the City's history. Nearly 22% of registered voters cast a ballot. To put it in perspective, in 2021 there was only a 16% voter turnout and 17% in 2019. The reason for this great turnout was the number of new candidates vying to uproot an incumbent that had different political ideologies or claim a vacant seat.

Further, this was the first year that the Worcester School Committee implemented six district seats along with two at-large seats rather than having just six at-large seats. The idea is that creating districts would give better representation from across the city.

In the end, there was minimal change on the City Council. All the incumbents retained their seats. There are two new City Councilors in District 1 and District 4 as Sean Rose and Sarai Rivera left their seats. In District 1 Jenny Pacillo defeated David Peterson and in a closer race, Luis Ojeda defeated Katia Norford by 5 percentage points.

Joseph Petty retained his mayoral seat by defeating the other four challengers by winning 50% of the overall votes.

On the School Committee side, former superintendent Maureen Binienda and incumbent Sue Mailman won the two at large seats ousting incumbents Laura Clancy and Tracy O'Connell Novick.

There were only two contested districts seats. In District C, Diana Biancheria defeated incumbent Jermoh Kamara and is back on the School Committee after losing in 2021 after being on the School Committee for the previous 12 years. Kathi Roy narrowly defeated Nelly Medina to capture the District E seat.

While there was a big push for change from the progressive groups the voters of the city reaffirmed, they feel the city is on the right track and needs to continue to work towards making Worcester a place to live, work and play.

## STATE BUDGET

At the end of January, the Healey-Driscoll administration unveiled its Fiscal Year (FY) 2025 budget proposal. The budget, which is set for a little more than \$58 billion spending plan includes essential investments into transportation, education, and childcare. This budget is an increase from the FY 2024 budget of 3.7%. While this is a large and detailed budget, here are some of the high-level items that have been touted by the administration:

The FY 2025 budget proposal utilizes \$1.3 billion in new income surtax revenue to support investments across the education and transportation sectors. Notable spending areas include: \$311 million for early education and care, including \$150 million to support the full-year costs of the C3 Childcare Operational Grants program. \$250 million for a transfer to the Commonwealth Transportation Fund to fund additional operational support at the Department of Transportation and the MBTA. \$170 million to fully fund the Universal School Meals program. \$125 million to support capital investments at public higher education institutions. There is \$300 million for the Student Opportunity Act Investment Fund. \$265 million for the High-Quality Early Education and Care Trust Fund, and \$375 million in above-threshold capital gains.

For Worcester and central Massachusetts some of these high-level funding items will have some immediate and critical impacts. Transportation has and continues to be a top priority for the region. While there are some struggles with the MBTA, this funding may help get them back on track (no pun intended) and continue to add more Worcester-Framingham trains to and from Boston including getting the very popular Heart-to-Hub train back on the schedule.

Be mindful that this is just the first step in the budget process. Both the House and the Senate will present their budgets in the coming four months. At that time, we can really start to get a temperature check on where this budget will land.

Here's to 2024!





## JUNCTION SHOP *Lofts*

Originally a working mill building at the heart of Worcester's historic manufacturing district, this beautiful building has been exquisitely transformed into the luxurious Junction Shop Lofts. These stunning 1-4 bedroom loft apartments have been designed to capture the distinct architectural charm of this monumental property. Soaring ceilings, bright, oversized windows, and exposed brick and beams have been combined with sleek, modern finishes, and an assortment of convenient on-site amenities for the ultimate urban lifestyle.

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- On-Site Storage
- Package Room
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- \*In select units



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# StartUp Worcester Profile: Solecit Makes Sneakers Collecting More Accessible

by DAVID SULLIVAN, DIRECTOR OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT & BUSINESS RECRUITMENT

Nazr El-Scari is trying to make the world of sneaker reselling more accessible to everyone by creating an online reselling marketplace and concierge, Solecit. He has been reselling designer sneakers since he was 14 but has always thought it would benefit the so-called “sneakerhead” community to have more people involved.

“That’s something I’ve always wanted to fix,” said El-Scari about the exclusivity of the sneaker reselling community. “Especially for people who aren’t die-hard sneaker fans but still wanted to get some shoes that really fit them and spoke to their style and personality.”

That’s why he first started A Sneakerhead’s Paradise, which was rebranded to Solecit last year, when he was in high school. El-Scari then studied entrepreneurship at Lehigh University before moving to Boston to be closer to the city’s vibrant footwear scene, where major companies are headquartered.

During the pandemic, El-Scari saw an opportunity to capitalize on shifting trends and hobbies among consumers and stepped up his involvement with his project. “During the pandemic we saw a big boom in sneaker reselling,” said El-Scari. “With everyone at home, people were starting to pay a lot more attention to sneakers.” This resulted in highly expensive collector shoes flooding the market.

In 2021, El-Scari applied for StartUp Worcester to find a community of like-minded, energetic entrepreneurs looking to make a positive difference in people’s lives. “When I first moved here, one of the key things I learned in school about being an entrepreneur was finding a community to be a part of,” he said. “I didn’t know anybody [in Massachusetts] besides my roommates. And being an entrepreneur is an experience that a lot of people don’t fully understand.

As a result of being involved with the Worcester startup scene, El-Scari was invited to be a finalist pitch in the Five-Minute Pitch competition held by Venture Forum, a Worcester nonprofit that works with the Chamber of Commerce to host StartUp Worcester. El-Scari made connections through that event, and through StartUp Worcester, that helped introduce him to new networks and find new team members.

Solecit is now in the process of raising funds to expand the team and



Above: Nazr El-Scari presenting at the Venture Forum Five Minute Pitch in Worcester, 2023. Courtesy of Nazr El-Scari

finalize the platform. El-Scari is investing in a custom online platform built from scratch with an algorithm and machine learning program. The unique concept of Solecit is that it not only offers a marketplace for sneaker resale but also a tiered subscription plan for membership and a personalized concierge system that provides tips to shoppers about what clothing styles might work best for their shoes based on their taste. This feature is designed to help people who are new to collector sneakers to build a look for themselves that they are comfortable with.

“My advice to new shoppers is to come in being open to wanting to learn more about yourself,” said El-Scari of Solecit. “The platform is really aimed at helping people express more about themselves in a way that’s more affordable to them.”

You can visit [Solecit.co](https://solecit.co) to see the fully functional website today, and follow them on Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter under the name Solecit.

## SMALL BUSINESSES IN WORCESTER AND BEYOND: Navigating the Struggles Faced by Small Business Owners

by CAIT LUBELCZYK, VICE PRESIDENT OF MARKETING AND COMMUNICATIONS, WORCESTER REGIONAL CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

For those of us who were born here, raised here, or have relocated here, we know that Worcester is a city with a rich history and a diverse community. Amidst its historic streets and bustling neighborhoods, small businesses stand as pillars of economic resilience and local charm. However, these businesses are facing a host of challenges that threaten their survival and growth. Worcester’s struggles mirror those of many other cities coping with economic uncertainties, regulatory complexities, and shifting consumer landscapes. At the Worcester Regional Chamber of Commerce, more than 80% of our over 2,300 members are small business owners with 20 or fewer employees, and these issues are always top-of-mind for us as we work individually with business owners every day and advocate for the business community at large. What are some of the challenges small businesses encounter in Worcester and how are similar cities across the nation supporting their local economies?

### FIRST AND FOREMOST, THE PANDEMIC.

The recent global pandemic cast a harsh spotlight on the vulnerability of small businesses in Worcester. Lockdowns, supply chain disruptions, and shifting consumer behavior created a perfect storm, forcing many businesses to close their doors permanently. One of the lasting aftereffects of the pandemic has been the shift towards remote work, which has removed office populations from downtown areas in cities around the country, resulting in a negative impact on retail and small businesses that rely on pedestrian foot traffic. On top of this, business owners are now dealing with fluctuating demand, and increased operational costs.

The hospitality, retail, and entertainment sectors, heavily reliant on in-person interactions, were particularly hard hit, resulting in job losses and a diminished

economic landscape. Additionally, supply chain disruptions and increased costs added further pressure, making it challenging for businesses to maintain profitability.

### REGULATORY COMPLEXITIES:

Navigating the maze of regulations poses a formidable challenge for Worcester’s small businesses. From zoning laws to licensing requirements and complicated tax codes, the regulatory landscape is often overwhelming for businesses with limited resources. Small business owners find themselves spending significant time and resources on administrative tasks, diverting their attention from core operations.

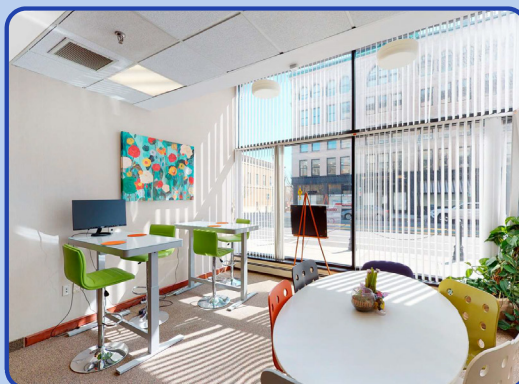
Streamlining and simplifying regulatory processes are crucial for fostering a more favorable environment for small businesses. Advocacy for regulatory reforms is gaining momentum, with business associations and chambers of commerce urging local governments to revisit and revise cumbersome regulations. The Worcester Regional Chamber of Commerce for example has continued to advocate for our businesses who continue to be hit with higher tax rates. Over the past seven years, the city council has continued to vote to widen the gap between residents and businesses shifting more of the tax burden onto the business community. Last year, for the first time ever, the council voted for the lowest residential tax rate possible. Our city now has the seventh-highest commercial tax rate in Massachusetts, making it increasingly challenging to do business in Worcester.

The dual tax rate – different rates for residential and commercial properties – was enacted in Worcester in 1984 and at that time, 35% of the tax base



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# 2023 Ribbon Cutting Recap

2023 was an exciting year for Chamber members as we welcomed new businesses to our community and also celebrated several relocations, renovations, and expansions.

We look forward to 2024 and are excited to celebrate more grand openings!

## **The Palace Elite Barber Shop**

1067 Main Street, Worcester, MA

## **365 Storage**

1 Brussels Street, Worcester, MA

## **Bri's Sweet Treats**

Worcester Public Market

160 Green Street, Worcester, MA

## **Paragus I.T.**

1 Mercantile Street, Worcester, MA

## **Sub Zero Nitrogen Ice Cream**

44 Front Street, Worcester, MA

## **Edward Kennedy Center**

605 Lincoln Street, Worcester, MA

## **107 Tap**

107 Water Street, Worcester, MA

## **Unique Café**

322 Cambridge Street, Worcester, MA

## **WooJuice**

22 Front Street, Suite 140, Worcester, MA

## **Chop Chop Convenience**

185 Madison Street, Worcester, MA

## **Hearts and Hands Therapy Services**

135 Gold Star Blvd. Suite 103, Worcester, MA

## **Clinton Dental**

1175 Main Street, Suite 8, Clinton, MA

## **Helfand's Deli**

143 Highland Street, Worcester, MA

## **Guild Of St. Agnes**

248 Mill Street, Worcester, MA 01602

## **Edenish**

Worcester Public Market

160 Green Street, Worcester, MA 01604

## **Early Steps Daycare/ Autism Allies**

18 Oxford Street, Worcester, MA

## **Euro-American Worldwide Logistics**

375 Airport Drive, Worcester, MA

## **Aponi Aesthetics**

99 Prescott Street, Worcester, MA

## **Petricore**

67 Millbrook Street, #208 Worcester, MA

## **Walmart Supercenter - Remodel unveiling**

25 Tobias Boland Way, Worcester, MA

## **Maker to Main**

162 Harding Street, Worcester, MA

## **Floor & Décor**

420 Boston Turnpike Road, Shrewsbury, MA

*Right: Early Steps Daycare  
Ribbon Cutting*



*Below Right: Aponi Aesthetics Ribbon Cutting  
Below: Edenish Ribbon Cutting*



*Right: Euro American  
Worldwide Logistics  
Ribbon Cutting*



*Below Right: Guild of St.  
Agnes Ribbon Cutting*

*Below: Walmart Super  
Center Ribbon Cutting*





## SMALL BUSINESS , CONTINUED

came from our commercial/industrial sectors. Now, 40 years later, only 20% of the tax revenue comes from the commercial/industrial sectors, meaning our businesses are leaving for neighboring communities with fairer tax rates. With fewer commercial properties on the tax rolls and taxes increasing each year, a smaller number of property owners pay more. Taxes often are passed onto tenants through rent, which means small businesses disproportionately bear the burden.

**SHIFTING CONSUMER DYNAMICS:**

The rise of online retail giants has transformed consumer behavior, challenging the traditional brick-and-mortar model. Worcester's small businesses are grappling with the need to adapt to the digital age, establish an online presence, and compete with e-commerce trends. For retail businesses rooted in the local community, this shift poses a threat to their business model.

Similarly, in cities across the nation, small businesses are confronted with the dilemma of embracing digital transformation or risk falling behind. E-commerce platforms offer convenience and a global reach, leaving local businesses with the challenge of finding their place in an increasingly digital marketplace. Many of our local retailers have adjusted by offering curbside pickup, online ordering, and partnering with businesses like Uber Eats or Grub Hub.

**COMMUNITY DYNAMICS:**

Community engagement and support are critical lifelines for small businesses. As we've read in recent articles, our business owners need our support. Worcester's residents can contribute significantly by choosing to support local enterprises, fostering a sense of community and shared responsibility. Initiatives such as "Shop Local" campaigns and community events have been popular, providing a much-needed boost to struggling businesses, but our small businesses need

more than that to keep afloat. This isn't just the responsibility of local residents and individuals, there are opportunities in our community for businesses to support other businesses as well. Worcester is experiencing significant growth, and we all play a very important role in the success of the city's economy. We need to look at it like we're "growing the pie" ...more housing equals more density and foot traffic, which leads to more spending power, which leads to more businesses, and more jobs.

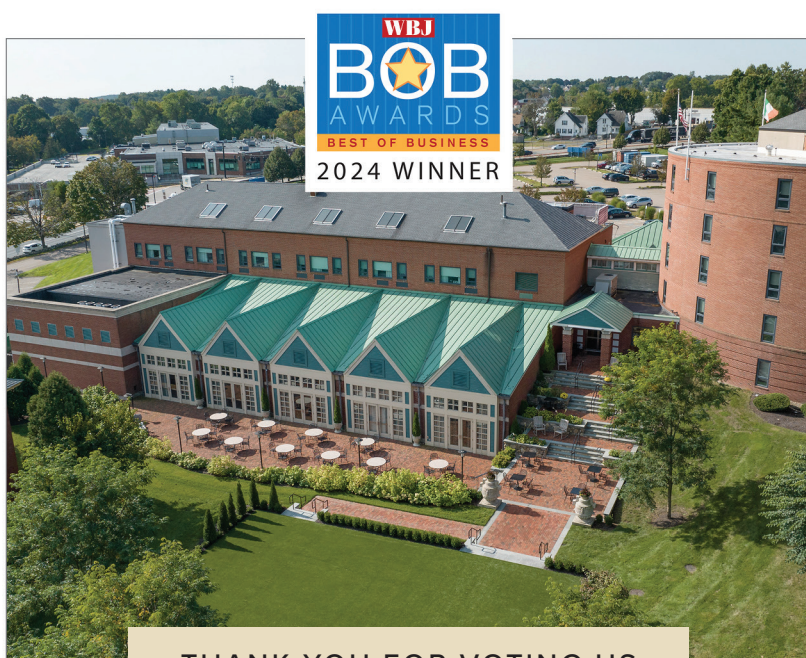
**COLLABORATION FOR SOLUTIONS:**

Addressing the challenges faced by small businesses requires collaborative efforts from all stakeholders. Local government, business associations, and anchor institutions can play a pivotal role in creating an environment conducive to small business growth. Mentorship programs, skill development initiatives, and increased access to resources are essential components of this collaborative approach.

The challenges faced by small businesses in Worcester are emblematic of the broader struggles experienced by similar enterprises in cities across the nation. Economic pressures, regulatory complexities, shifting consumer dynamics, finding staff, and the need for community engagement all converge to create a formidable landscape for small businesses.

As Worcester seeks to grow and revitalize its local economy, it serves as a microcosm of the challenges and opportunities faced by small businesses nationwide. Through collaborative efforts, innovative solutions, and a renewed commitment to supporting local businesses, cities like Worcester can pave the way for a brighter future where small businesses not only survive but thrive, contributing to the vibrancy and resilience of the communities they serve.

SMALL BUSINESS, P15



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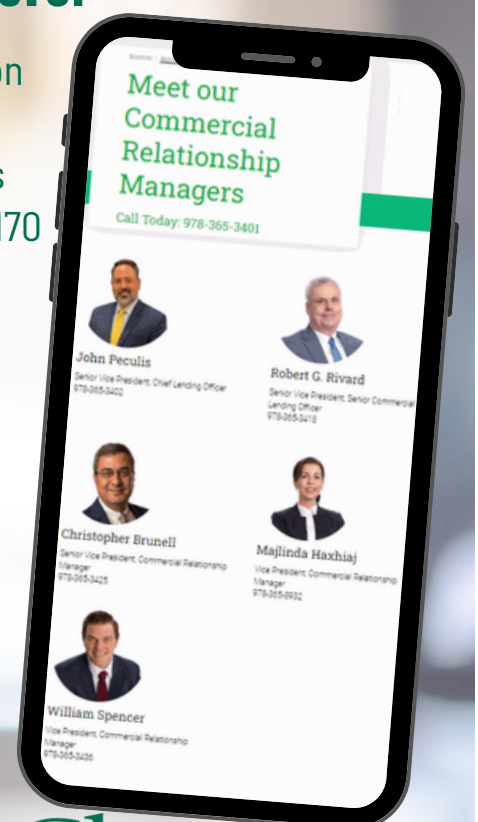
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# Strength in Numbers: Manufacturing Roundtable Equips Local Companies for Growth

by **ALLISON CHISOLM**, CHAMBER CORRESPONDENT

**W**hen manufacturers and vendors who serve them want to talk shop to improve operations, find talent, or learn about the latest technology and equipment developments, the Worcester Chamber has a place for them.

Every quarter, several dozen participants gather at the Manufacturing Roundtable for an hour at lunchtime, whether in the Chamber conference room or somewhere off site.

The high attendance numbers aren't surprising: Massachusetts is home to more than 6,000 manufacturing companies supplying nearly a quarter-million jobs, roughly 7 percent of the state's job market. According to MassMEP, the median wage in manufacturing is \$50,000 and the average compensation is \$103,000. Close to 100 Chamber members are in manufacturing-related industries.

Manufacturing is an economic driver that as a sector benefits from some care and attention. Participants in the Roundtable come away from the quarterly meetings with fresh ideas, new resources, and contacts with others who face similar challenges or offer specific solutions.

## WHAT'S ON OFFER AT MASSMEP?

Last February, Kathie Mahoney, the new president and CEO of MassMEP (Massachusetts Manufacturing Extension Partnership), took the group through the range of services her organization can provide for area manufacturers. Her team offers advice on workforce training and funding resources, develops plans to optimize operations, and finds opportunities for innovative growth. As one of many MEPs across the country, MassMEP also helps manufacturers access research from a national consortium of innovation institutes.

Her presentation included a case study for the '47 Brand (which makes Red Sox hats, among many other products), which had run into production delays as their portfolio rapidly expanded. Company-wide training extended beyond the manufacturing shop floor to change employees' mindset to focus on company goals. New employees now undergo a week of training, spend at least 30 minutes in each company department, have lunch with the owners and experience check-ins after 30, 60 and 90 days on the job.

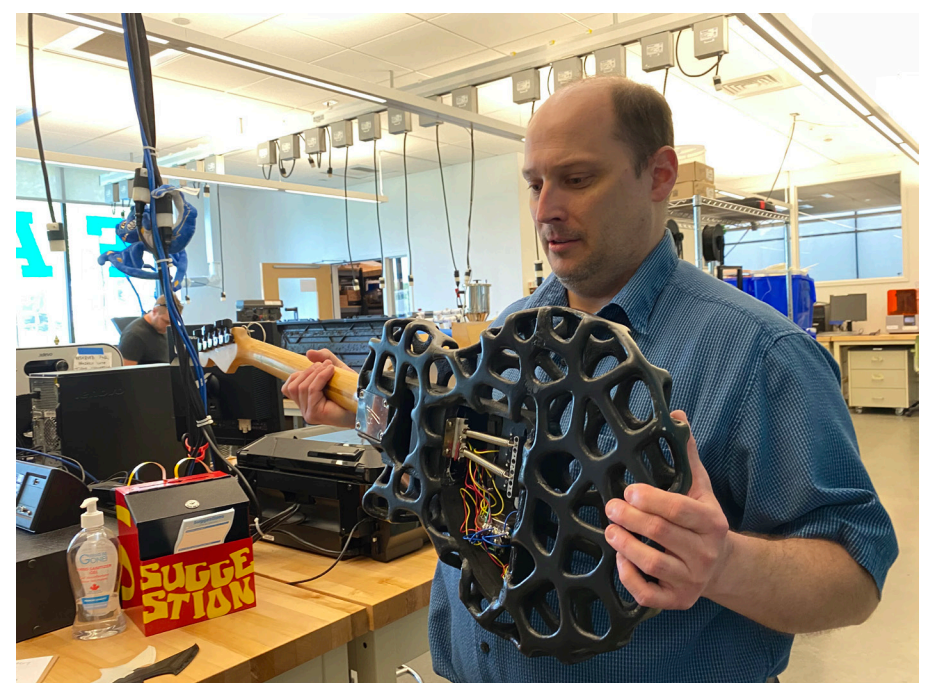
## FIELD TRIP TO QCC

Workforce training to bring new skills into the workplace and educate new employees on the range of skills needed in manufacturing has been a primary focus for many Roundtable members. The group took a field trip to Quinsigamond Community College in May to see firsthand the Quest Center on the main campus and learn about their continuing education services in advanced manufacturing.

**MANUFACTURING, P12**



Above: Prof. Jim Herffernan demonstrates a robotic hand at the QCC Quest Center. Photo credit: Allison Chisholm



Above: Another creation from the QCC Quest Center.



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MANUFACTURING , CONTINUED

QCC staff talked about associate degrees in electronics engineering technology, summer school for robotics, apprenticeship programs, and ongoing collaboration with local high schools, but visitors grew visibly excited to see robots at work, student apprentices learning Computer Numerical Control (CNC) programming, and larger machines available for training sessions with a company’s current employees.

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT ALWAYS A TOPIC

Finding and training talent in today’s workforce, a persistent challenge for most employers, was the topic for the August meeting. Speakers from the Blackstone Valley Hub for Workforce Development, MassMEP, QCC, and the MassHire North Central Workforce Board offered their perspectives on a variety of approaches. High school graduates facing the dilemma of going on to learn or to earn can do both with programs available in the region from the speakers’ organizations.

Under the headline of “pathways to production,” topics they discussed included identifying non-traditional sources for new hires, including veterans, citizens returning from incarceration, and people with interrupted work histories; creating a pipeline of future hires by establishing relationships with area technical schools and youth work organizations; utilizing temporary worker agencies; and addressing past stereotypes while introducing the idea of a future career path in manufacturing with younger students and their families.

THINKING ABOUT AUTOMATION

The year wrapped up with Todd Basque of Basque Engineering + Science addressing the “other side of automation” – the planning required before any system is designed, ordered, or installed. Teaming up with Ellen Ellsworth, Director of Innovative Growth Services at MassMEP, they cautioned that only systems currently operated by humans should qualify for automation.

Todd outlined steps that included reviewing the system as it exists, then optimizing it, creating a team that will “own” the automation process, sending them for training on the core systems involved in the automation and best practices for them, establishing an escalation plan among staff to minimize downtime, and securing refresher training from the system manufacturer or the integration company hired to install the new system.

The automation process may reveal unexpected employee interest, Todd said. Be open to cross-training, and look for people with a passion for this work. “People want to learn about robots,” he reminded the group.

The return on investment in automation may take time, Ellen noted, but the impact on staff will allow for more interesting and less repetitive types of work.

The presenting sponsors for the past year of the Roundtable were AIS and FLEXCon, with MassHire Central Manufacturing Consortium as supporting sponsor.

The Chamber wants to continue to address the needs of area manufacturers. If you have a topic you’d like to learn more about or you have a speaker suggestion, contact Alex Guardiola at [aguardiola@worcesterchamber.org](mailto:aguardiola@worcesterchamber.org).

*Allison Chisolm is a local marketing writer on business and manufacturing. She can be reached at [chisolm@choicewordsonline.com](mailto:chisolm@choicewordsonline.com)*

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Above: Robot arm moving dominoes



Above: Prof. Lee Duerden of QCC demonstrating advanced manufacturing products.  
Photo credit: Allison Chisolm



# QUESTIONS with

## Gauri Bhalakia,

### Owner, ARCpoint Labs Worcester

#### 1. What kind of services does ARCpoint Labs offer and how does it benefit our local business community?

ARCpoint Labs of Worcester is a full-service third-party administrator of drug & alcohol, occupational health, and wellness testing services. We offer comprehensive workplace screening solutions to businesses in safety sensitive industries including transportation, manufacturing, and construction, and are industry leaders in managing programs and providing compliance support for companies that fall under the purview of the Department of Transportation (DOT).

Services offered in this focus area include - DOT and non-DOT drug and alcohol testing and program management, random testing management, DOT and pre-employment physicals, respirator fit tests and medical evaluation, lead and heavy metal testing, background screening, driver qualification files (DQF) management and policy review. Being local, we can also provide 24x7 on-site drug and alcohol testing when needed in post-accident and reasonable suspicion situations. In addition, we offer DOT and non-DOT Reasonable Suspicion training and compliance support. We are local with a national reach. Working with companies located in the Worcester area - we can manage their programs and use testing sites within our network across Massachusetts.

For local pharmaceutical/medical device/bio-tech companies, we offer credentialing testing services such as TB tests and various types of titer tests required for their yearly medical credentialing requirements. If needed, we go on-site at the company for testing - making it easy and efficient for them.

We also have direct-to-consumer services. We help the community take control of their health by offering private pay diagnostic and wellness testing services. Our offering includes thousands of standard diagnostic tests along with an array of wellness tests like food sensitivity, micronutrient tests, gluten, and celiac sensitivity tests just to name a few. Our pricing is transparent, and the patient knows exactly what they are paying upfront. Our testing does not require a doctor's visit, making it very easy for those who would like to be well-informed and take control of their health. The results are accompanied by a report from our medical team explaining the test results. Price transparency means that the patient will not receive any surprise bills a few months down the road as often happens with health insurance.

#### 2. Since the legalization of Marijuana, how does ARCpoint educate companies so they can comply with the requirements in this challenging environment?

Massachusetts allows the purchase and use of recreational cannabis/marijuana by people over age 21.

Massachusetts is a "mandatory" state, which means any private employer wishing to conduct drug and/or alcohol testing of non-regulated employees within this state must do so according to the Constitution, statutes, regulations, and court decisions that apply (the rules). The Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court has made it clear that private employers in this state can require drug and/or alcohol tests if in balance with safety as a priority. Absent a clear safety issue testing is limited to cases where there is reasonable suspicion of drug or alcohol use or possible impairment. A policy should give employees advanced notice of the rules governing their behavior while employed by the company. Being able to show a written policy exists and that the employee acknowledged receiving a copy of it could be used to shift the balance in the employer's favor if its program is ever challenged. The policy must cover at a minimum: 1) Who and when (the reason) a company can test such as pre-employment, reasonable suspicion, and post-accident situations. 2) What drugs can the company test for in each situation? For example, companies may choose to test for marijuana in reasonable suspicion and post-accident situations, but not in pre-employment. 3) What action will the company take based on the results? The company must train the supervisor regarding the reasonable suspicion process (identification and response) for compliance, fairness, and effectiveness.

For companies that have employees regulated by the Federal Department of Transportation, such as commercial drivers (CDL), they must have separate policies for their DOT-regulated programs. These policies and procedures should be based on the DOT rules and regulations. Commercial drivers, and operators required to be part of the DOT Drug and Alcohol testing program will be disqualified from operating a CMV if they test positive for marijuana and must be



Above: Mayor Joseph Petty with ARCpoint staff.



Above: ARCpoint staff.

evaluated by a DOT-Qualified Substance Abuse Professional (SAP), follow all education and/or treatment recommendations, and comply with return-to-duty and follow-up testing requirements. Although recreational and medicinal marijuana use is allowed in the state of Massachusetts, the DOT drug and alcohol regulations follow federal law under which marijuana is considered a Schedule I drug and is therefore prohibited.

We at ARCpoint have extensive experience in helping local companies with their policies, test selection, testing, and supervisor and staff training. ARCpoint Labs offers regular webinars and newsletters so employers can get the most up-to-date information.

#### 3. What issue is causing concerns regarding marijuana testing and how does ARCpoint help in selecting the right test for cannabis detection.

This is an important topic that we at ARCpoint work with companies to ensure that they can consistently select the right test based on their workplace needs. Certain chemicals within the cannabis plant, namely metabolites of delta-9 THC, can be detected in the body for days, weeks, or months, depending on many factors such as the person, the potency of the cannabis consumed, the dose consumed, and the collection method. At ARCpoint, we select the method and test that aligns with your reason for detection - that gives you the best answer(s) for your question(s). We use saliva, urine, sweat patch and hair to detect cannabis.

- Saliva - Cannabis is detectable up to 24 hours. So, this is a good medium for reasonable suspicion for non-DOT companies. Saliva has an advantage over urine in that it can detect the parent THC compound and its first pass metabolite, hydroxy THC, which is also psychoactive and impairing. Not all devices are created equal, however.
- Urine - Can detect cannabis between 1-30 days. Used for DOT pre-employment, post-accident, return-to-duty, follow-up, and random selection process.
- Sweat - Can detect metabolites of D9 THC for up to 1-2 weeks, or possibly even longer.





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# Food Hub Profile: Stretch's Pickles Is a Family Affair

by DAVID SULLIVAN, DIRECTOR OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND BUSINESS RECRUITMENT

Not many expect Cheryl Gaudreau, a banker, to also be in the business of making pickles. Neither would they expect her husband, a foreman, or her son, an electrician. And yet, the Gaudreau family, along with their good family friend Jon Ano, makes the best craft pickles in Central Massachusetts.

Jon is the general manager at Vincent's Country Store in Westminster. Jon and Cheryl's son Erick Gaudreau helped the store's owner make pickles overnight to sell in the store. But in 2019, Erick approached his mother and asked to buy Stretch's Pickles from the owner, which was just a brand name and a few pieces of equipment. "I just chuckled thinking, 'what do I know about pickles?' I would eat them, but I knew nothing about how to make them," said Cheryl. But as it turns out, the team's eclectic professions have helped them build a strong local wholesale business.

Cheryl's connections with the banking world and her expertise in financing helped give the business a stable footing. Erick's retail and pickling experience has helped grow the brand in country stores around New England, and Cheryl's husband Todd has spread the word while on job sites all over the region. Meanwhile, Jon is the "pickle boss" in the kitchen and went to school to study business administration.

"We all bring our experience together to sell the product," said Cheryl. "It's sometimes hard to go into business with family and friends, but we feel very fortunate because there's always something one of us can bring to the table, and we can agree to disagree on certain things and work together."

After they bought Stretch's Pickles, the new owners found a home at the Worcester Regional Food Hub. For the past three years, they have been one of the most active members in the shared commercial kitchen at 25 Francis Street, working overnight to perfect their pickling craft. "We do everything in there - making the product, the bottling, the labeling," said Gaudreau of the Food Hub's kitchen. "[Food Hub Director] Shon has been a huge supporter of us."

Working in the Food Hub's kitchen has given Stretch's Pickles a reprieve from buying a large wholesale facility, and the Food Hub's relatively affordable rent rates don't hurt. The shared kitchen also allows the owners to interact with similar bottled wholesalers like Decimation Hot Sauce, who also are based out of the kitchen and sell wholesale to stores around the state. One product they've collaborated on is the Zesty Dill Stretch's Pickles, which Decimation served with their sandwiches at local pop-up events. "It took off like crazy," said Cheryl. "We're always looking to collaborate."



Stretch's Pickles are sold in country stores and markets consistent with their craft brand. They are available in stores like Idlywilde Farms, Bolton Orchards, Vincent's Country Store, Roots Natural Foods, and will soon be available in the new Fitchburg Public Market, a Food Hub retail location opening this year. Their products include not only pickles with a "brine like no other" and have a 14-month shelf life, but also a popular Bloody Mary Mix and pineapple chunks pickled in bourbon.

For all of their retail locations, check out [StretchsPickles.com](https://StretchsPickles.com), and follow them on Facebook and Instagram. You can also email them for more information at [info@stretchspickles.com](mailto:info@stretchspickles.com).

## SMALL BUSINESS , CONTINUED

So what are some action steps?

- For individuals: patronage, positive reviews, word of mouth, helping your favorite small businesses amplify their messages by sharing their content and creating your own. If you are not satisfied with a recent visit to an establishment, speak to the manager or owner and offer your feedback instead of posting a negative review on the business's page or social media groups. These reviews can cause significant harm to a small business. If there is a real problem speak to the people who can actually make an impact.
- Elected officials can:
  - Close the tax gap between businesses and residents. We need to be more competitive with the cities and towns that are moving towards single tax rates. If we don't act, we will continue to lose businesses to surrounding cities and towns where the cost of doing business is less.
  - Simplify permitting and inspection services and be upfront with costs and processes.
- Solidarity among Business owners: build your network and utilize resources that will help you stay informed. There are several resources through the Chamber, the City of Worcester, neighborhood business associations, and the Worcester Business Resource Alliance that can help you navigate everything from licensing to employer responsibilities to taxes on wages.

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# WooSox Sale Sparks Fond Memories

by KEVIN SALEEBA, CORRESPONDENT

**W**ORCESTER – Dr. Charles Steinberg’s office chair squeaked as he reached his left arm over his head. He was sporting an imaginary baseball mitt. “Tate Matheny’s catch on Chris Sale day, that’s my number one,” he said, as he mimicked catching a ball.

Steinberg was recalling his fondest on-the-field moment. The recent purchase of the Worcester Red Sox by Diamond Baseball Holdings (DBH) in December sparked the memory. It’s been several years since Steinberg helped move the Boston Red Sox Triple-A affiliate from Pawtucket to the “Heart of the Commonwealth” in 2020. Although DBH bought the majority shares of the Woo Sox, the team will retain local leaders Ralph Crowley, Larry Lucchino and Jim Skeffington Jr. in the ownership group and Steinberg is expected to stay in his position as the club’s president.

Steinberg’s heart, however, was on-the-field. “Tate Matheny went up and got it,” he said as a Cheshire Cat grin splashed across his face. The day was dubbed Chris Sale Day because Sale, the seven-time American League pitching all-star, was making a rehab start at Polar Park on July 31, 2021 during the team’s inaugural season. The ballpark was packed and there was a tremendous buzz for professional baseball in Worcester for the first time in nearly a century.

Sale pitched seven strong innings, striking out seven Buffalo Bison hitters on 81 pitches, but it was Matheny who outshined the 6-foot-6, 180-pound lanky hard throwing southpaw. Matheny, the son of former major league catcher and manager Mike Matheny, tracked down the screaming fly ball to left center off the bat of Bisons’ Kevin Smith. He leaped and grabbed the ball out of mid-air to rob Smith of a possible home run. Matheny then followed up the play in the bottom of the inning belting a two-run homer to put Worcester ahead for good, 3-1. Impressed, Sale rewarded the career minor leaguer by leaving \$500 in Matheny’s locker after the game.

“Tate Matheny makes that catch and that season marked the end of his playing career,” Steinberg said. “Wow, what a moment! He retired after that year ... And there were a lot of substories there. His father managed against us in the (2013) World Series and before that his father played against us (in the 2004 World Series) and here he is making this cool on-field moment for the Woo Sox. Wow, what a moment!”

Matheny’s catch and dramatic home run on Chris Sale Day helped revitalize baseball in Worcester. Other significant baseball achievements occurred in Worcester a lifetime ago, including the first ever perfect game thrown by Lee Richmond for the Worcester Ruby Legs in 1880. Also, Worcester native and former umpire John Gaffney, who was dubbed the “King of Umpires” by hall of famer Connie Mack, invented the iconic pentagon-shaped home plate. The Worcester Red Sox have since filled a professional baseball void in the city that has been vacant since 1925.

After Polar Park was built in 2020, it was later voted “Best Ballpark in Triple-A Baseball” by Ballpark Digest on May 11, 2023 in a vote of more than 87,000 fans. Despite this recent success with the team and the park, Larry Lucchino, 78, the chairman and former principal owner of the WooSox, said change is needed. “I believe it’s time to have a succession plan,” he said. “One that assures a commitment to baseball and a commitment to Worcester.”

Lucchino has spent 44 years in professional baseball. He was both the president of the Baltimore Orioles and San Diego Padres, while also playing a key role in the building of Oriole Park at Camden Yards and Petco Park in San Diego. As president and chief operating officer (CEO) of the Boston Red Sox, he helped with the renovations to modernize Fenway Park. He has since been inducted both the Red Sox and Padres Hall of Fames.

Lucchino said he is confident the WooSox are in good hands with DBH. “There is no organization more committed to Minor League Baseball than Diamond Baseball Holdings, and we welcome Pat Battle, Peter Freund, and this organization to our city.”

DBH was formed in 2021 to support, promote and enhance minor league baseball clubs affiliated with Major League Baseball through professional management, best practices, innovation and investment. Along with the WooSox,



Above: Photo Courtesy of the WooSox.

DBH also owns the Portland Sea Dogs and the Salem Red Sox. “There is no local business leader more invested in Worcester and in Polar Park than (Polar Beverages CEO) Ralph Crowley, and we are pleased that he is part of the ownership group,” Lucchino said. “Jim Skeffington’s late father and I set out to keep the Boston Red Sox’ Triple-A club in New England, and in good hands, and I trust that Pat and Peter will be excellent stewards.”

Sam Kennedy, President and CEO of the Boston Red Sox said he looks forward to continue their affiliation with the WooSox. “Larry, Ralph, and the rest of the Worcester Red Sox group and staff have been great partners to the Boston Red Sox,” he said. “It has been wonderful to watch what they’ve created in Worcester through their dedication to the organization and to Minor League Baseball. We are excited to deepen our connection to the exceptional team at DBH here in Worcester, in addition to their stewardship of our affiliates in Portland and in Salem.”

DBH executive chairman Pat Battle and CEO Peter Freund said they “are thrilled to add the WooSox to the DBH family, our third Red Sox affiliate and a transformational Triple-A franchise for both Minor League Baseball and the City of Worcester. We are beyond excited to partner with Ralph Crowley of Polar Beverages on the purchase of the club and very grateful to Larry Lucchino, Sam Kennedy, and the entire Red Sox organization for entrusting us with this incredible franchise.”

Success has come quickly since the team’s inaugural season in 2021. Minor League Baseball awarded the WooSox two major awards for community, Latino and Hispanic outreach. In their second and third seasons, the WooSox led all 120 Minor League Baseball clubs in sold tickets and they are the only club to have sold more than 500,000 tickets each of the past two years. Polar Park is also a year-round community gathering place, hosting high school and college football in the fall, high school and college baseball in the spring, and several community, family, and business events.

Steinberg expressed his appreciation to the city for the last three years of success. “My number one sentiment (for Worcester) is love and my number two sentiment is gratitude,” Steinberg said. “I have emersed myself in cities wherever we have been blessed to operate teams. I was born and raised in Baltimore and I knew my city inside and out. I knew nothing about San Diego and just plunged in ... I knew what tourists knew about Boston, but that was it and plunged into that city when we joined the Red Sox ... I plunged into Milwaukee when I worked with commissioner Bud Selig. I didn’t know much about Worcester and we plunged in.”

Steinberg first visited Worcester about 10 years ago and met several Worcester leaders, including Jake Sanders, the former chief of staff to the Worcester city manager, Eric D. Batista, the current chief of staff, and former assistant city manager Nicole Valentine, as well as members of the Worcester Regional Chamber of Commerce.

“There was a really warm vibe in the room when I came out here (to Worcester) representing the Red Sox ... and that really stayed with me,” Steinberg said. “That room really had a feel. I’ve spoken to a lot of places. I’ve spoken to a lot of groups; boy that room had a feel.”

With the possibility of the team remaining in Pawtucket, Steinberg said Valentine and other members of then ity manager Ed Augustus’s staff were very impactful in the decision to move the team to Worcester. “They were nice,” he said with that broad smile. “But I explained to them my hesitations for leaving Pawtucket ... and Nicole crossed her arms, tilted her head and said, ‘well, all I can tell you is that we are a community that works together. And it’s not just Worcester. It’s the 69 cities and towns of Central Massachusetts. I was the head of the Red Cross here for 15 years and we worked together. We cooperate. So, you’re getting more than Worcester. You’re getting an entire community.’ And then she got choked up and said, ‘I’m sorry! I just love my city...’ After that, I was like, this could happen.”

And it did.





# Great Ballpark! Great Moments!

by KEVIN SALEEBA, CORRESPONDENT

Before the cracks of bats could be heard within the cozy confines of Polar Park, nearly five years ago Worcester's Canal District was filled with empty lots.

"There was nothing there," said WooSox president Charles Steinberg.

However, Paw Sox owner Larry Lucchino and ballpark planner Janet Marie Smith saw something. They were the same two people instrumental in building Oriole Park at Camden Yards in Baltimore and Petco Park in San Diego, as well as the recent renovations to Fenway Park in Boston. They pictured a 10,000-seat baseball stadium surrounded by small parks, hotels, residences, restaurants and retail stores with professional baseball as its centerpiece.

"That visual thing happened to them," Steinberg said. "They see physical dreams in vivid color and detail."

Then on August 17, 2018, Lucchino announced that he was moving the Red Sox Triple-A affiliate from Pawtucket to Worcester, while popping cans of soda with the CEO of Polar Beverages, Ralph Crowley, who agreed on to the naming rights of the ballpark and part ownership with the team. Nearly a year later on July 11, 2019, local, state, and federal officials broke ground to build the new baseball park along Madison Street.

**Polar Park Firsts:** Worcester Red Sox players first took the field at Polar Park for a workout on April 1, 2021. Then on May 11, they played their first game against the Syracuse Mets, which featured six home runs, including the first homerun ever hit at Polar Park by WooSox outfielder Marcus Wilson with a solo home run in the bottom of the second. Sox reliever Marcus Walden earned the first win and Kyle Ort nailed down the first save for the 8-5 victory.

**The top five recent on-the-field WooSox moments since opening day 2021:**

*Right:* Durran celebrates his walk-off. Photo courtesy of Worcester Red Sox photographer Ashley Green.

**1 - June 20, 2021:** Jarren Durran hit the first extra-inning walk-off home run in Polar Park History on Father's Day with a 5-2 win over the Lehigh Valley Iron Pigs. At the time, Durran's game-winner capped off a game that saw the WooSox overcome two, one run deficits to eventually win the game in extra innings. The game highlighted a hot stretch of baseball that saw Worcester win 11-out-of-12 games. Durran also was the talk of the town that inaugural summer as the 24-year-old center fielder burst onto the Polar Park stage and became a draw to the ballpark. Durran belted 16 homeruns with 36 RBIs in 60 games with the WooSox that season. Less than a month later on July 17, Durran made his Major League debut with the Boston Red Sox



*Above:* Brayan Bello throws a pitch. Photo courtesy of Worcester Red Sox photographer Ashley Green.

**2 - May 19, 2022:** After pitching a seven-inning no-hitter in AA Portland, top Red Sox prospect Brayan Bello excited the Polar Park crowd of more than 7,200 with a 10-strikeout performance in his Worcester debut. Bello displayed impressive confidence on the mound, mixing his pitches with a fastball consistently hitting between 96 and 98 on the radar gun. Bello went on to post a 6-2 record in 11 games and striking out 81 batters in 58 innings. He made his Major League debut in Boston on July 6, 2022.

**3 - August 3, 2022:** On a rehab stint, Boston Red Sox right-hander Michael Wacha pitched 4-and-2/3 innings of no-hit ball. The start paved the way for the first no-hitter in WooSox history. Wacha combined with pitchers Andrew Politi and Chase Shugart over nine innings to no-hit the Durham Bulls at Polar Park, 12-0. It was the first no-hitter for a Red Sox Triple-A affiliate since Bronson Arroyo pitched a perfect game for the Paw Sox in 2003.

**4 - August 13, 2023:** Top prospect Willyer Abreu became the first WooSox player to belt three home runs in a game since Cole Sturgeon did it for the Paw Sox on Sept. 2, 2019 on the last pitch ever thrown at McCoy Stadium. Abreu finished with 22 homeruns and 65 runs-batted-in over 86 games for Worcester before being called up to Boston 11 days later.



**5 - September 12, 2023:** Woo Sox outfielder Narciso Crook helped set the Red Sox Triple-A team record for single season home runs (210) after the Dominican native hit a hanging slider in the bottom of the sixth over the left field wall. The previous record of 209 was set by the 1996 Paw Sox.

*Left:* Narciso Crook celebrates a home run. Photo courtesy of Worcester Red Sox photographer Ashley Green.

## THE BEST DAY OF HER LIFE

by KEVIN SALEEBA, CORRESPONDENT

**W**ORCESTER - Some memories are bigger than baseball.

Jack Verducci is the senior vice president of corporate partnerships and sales for the Worcester Red Sox. When asked about his favorite WooSox baseball on-the-field memory, he paused a moment.

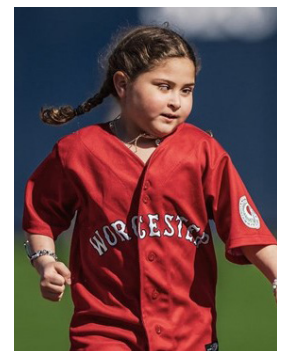
"On the field for me is not baseball related," he said thoughtfully. "I remember everything that's on the field that's not baseball."

In the summer of 2022, the Worcester Red Sox and UMass Memorial Health coordinated the Home Run for Life program. Each season, they highlight stories of brave children who are battling or have successfully overcome significant medical events in their lives.

But then eight-year-old Maddie Schmidt of Southampton stepped onto the Polar Park field. "This was a little bit different," Verducci said. Maddie suffered from diffuse intrinsic pontine glioma, known as DIPG, which is an aggressive, malignant brain tumor. "When someone runs Home Run for Life, it's somebody getting over cancer. Usually, at home plate, we have the whole care team, the doctors and the nurses, there to greet them at home plate as they round the bases. But this time there was no treating what Maddie had. This time the parents are there and all the players are there ... (Maddie) was going through the end of her life, but she was having a great day. She was able to run the bases on the field, both teams are out there cheering her on."

On that bright sunny summer day, Maddie experienced a professional photo shoot. She was given a WooSox jersey. "We took a bunch of pictures," Verducci said. "They interviewed Maddie and asked her 'what do you like? What's your favorite color?' For me it's the experience you create on the field for people and the players are just secondary ... What's special to me is the people who walk away with that core memory."

Prior to the game, she gave the lineup cards to the home plate umpire and she threw out the first pitch. The umpires even stopped the game for Maddie as both the home and visiting teams lined up along the first and third base lines.



*Above:* Maddie Schmidt running the bases at Polar Park in 2022. Photo courtesy of Worcester Red Sox photographer Ashley Green.



# My Leadership Worcester Experience

by **BILLIE KENYON**, CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER, LADYBUGZ INTERACTIVE AGENCY



I fell in love with Worcester as an undergraduate at Clark University and knew that I wanted to make this City my home and place where I would work while in Susan Smith's (Founder of Foothills Theatre), Audience Development class in 2009.

As part of that class, every week Susan brought in a different Community Leader to speak about their career journey, and experience, and offer a group of Master's students some advice as we began our careers. We heard from speakers like

Jim Moughan (DCU Center), Kate McEvoy (now with Synergy), and Linda Looft (who was at WPI). I remember listening to them talk about their experiences, and thinking I want that one day, I want to be someone who has a job I love, be involved in the community and can share my passion with others.

If you ask anyone who has participated in Leadership Worcester what one of the best things about the program is, I am sure the number one (or at least in the top three responses) will be the people you meet. I can confidently say that I added 25 people to my contact list that I can reach out to should I have any questions or need their assistance - plus I can call them friends. That is just the people in my cohort, and doesn't even count the tons of community organizers, City leaders, and other really smart people that I could say "I was a member of last year's Leadership Worcester class, and have a few questions do you have some time to chat?"

If I ever have the opportunity to run a class using the format I experienced in that Audience Development class, my entire roster would be filled with Leadership Worcester alumni.

In addition to the people - the experiences we were offered as part of Leadership Worcester were eye-opening, brain-expanding, and truly unique. This is my second favorite part of the program. Each month we went somewhere

different, learned from great speakers, and truly saw the future of Worcester.

Our first "true" Leadership Worcester day (we started with a two-day retreat), was focused on Public Health. This day we were told was often one of the most intense days of the program as we toured the Worcester County Jail and spent the day talking about the systemic issues facing the City with Dr. Matilde Castile the Commission of Health and Human Services for Worcester. Our morning kicked off with Sherri Gentile (Project Manager, UMass Memorial Health & UMass Chan Medical School) sharing the following statistic that has stayed with me since that morning:

- The average life expectancy of someone living in the Salisbury Street area is: 84 years
- The average life expectancy of someone living in the Kelley Square area is: 72.9 years

We were driven to explore, what systems are in place so that people living four miles apart have such different life expectancies.

While that day set the tone, this conversation came up each week. Not just how do we fix the problem, but to take a step back and find out why it exists in the first place. What can we do as leaders that will impact the city for years and generations to come?

Not every session was this intense though. On other days we spent the day outside when talking about Worcester's blue and green spaces, and in a different month spent the morning at JMAC listening to artists, and performers, talk about arts and culture. We looked at the budget for the Worcester Public Schools, and visited the Worcester Food Bank to talk about food security. Each month we were challenged, to think and learn.

My brain was exhausted at the end of every session but in the best way. I was learning from peers, from experts, and seeing parts of the City I didn't know about. It was incredible, and I wish I could do it every month still. This is

LEADERSHIP, P22



SAVE THE  
DATE



**CLASS OF 2025 INFO SESSION**

TUESDAY, APRIL 2, 2024 • 12-1PM ON ZOOM

Leadership Worcester is highly competitive. In this session, we'll review the selection criteria & answer your questions about the program.

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[www.worcesterchamber.org](http://www.worcesterchamber.org)





# BUSINESS after HOURS

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**Wednesday,  
February 28, 2024**

5:00pm Business After  
Hours  
7:00pm Men's  
Basketball Game



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of Connection

A fire side chat featuring:

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Project Management Office, Fallon Health and Kristin  
Asadourian, Founder and SEL Coach, Living Become



**Tuesday  
March 19, 2024**

11:30am-1:30pm



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# Upcoming Affiliate Chamber Events

**Auburn**  
auburnchamberma.org

**Auburn Chamber of Commerce**  
Save the Date  
Annual Golf Tournament  
Monday, September 24, 2024  
Pleasant Valley Country Club

**Blackstone Valley Chamber of Commerce**  
blackstonevalley.org

**Professional HR Roundtable**  
Tuesday, March 12, 2024  
Zoom

**Home & Community Expo**  
Northbridge High School  
Saturday, March 16, 2024  
10:00am-2:00pm

**Professional HR Roundtable**  
Tuesday, April 9, 2024  
Zoom

**Business After Hours**  
Whitinsville Golf Club  
Thursday, April 11, 2024  
5:30pm-7:30pm

**Annual Charity Golf Tournament**  
Monday, May 13, 2024  
Pleasant Valley Country Club

# AFFILIATE CORNER

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REGIONAL CHAMBER PARTNERS

WORKING TO ADVANCE

CENTRAL MASS

**Chamber of Central MA South**  
cmschamber.org

**Medium Night With Gary McKinstry**  
Thursday, February 29, 2024  
7:00pm-9:00pm  
Southbridge Hotel & Conference Center

**Clinton Area Chamber of Commerce**  
clintonareachamber.org

**Legislative Breakfast**  
Tuesday, March 12, 2024  
7:30am-9:00am  
Icon Museum & Study Center

**Business After Hours**  
Simple Man Saloon and Grill  
Tuesday, April 9, 2024  
5:00pm-7:00pm

**Seminar Series | Mastering Time: Thriving in a World of Endless Tasks**  
The Icon Museum & Study Center  
Tuesday, April 30, 2024  
9:00am

**Seminar Series | Marketing & Social Media**  
The Icon Museum & Study Center  
Wednesday, May 15, 2024  
9:00am

**Women's Networking Event**  
Chocksett Inn  
Wednesday, May 29, 2024  
12:00pm

**LABO**  
labous.org

**Latin American Business Expo**  
DCU Center  
Saturday, April 27, 2024  
12:00pm-4:00pm

**Wachusett Area Chamber of Commerce**  
wachusettareachamber.org

**Business After Hours**  
Thai House of Holden  
Tuesday, March 11, 2024  
5:30 - 7:30pm

**Chamber Chat**  
The Bagel Inn, Holden  
Thursday, March 14, 2024  
10:00 - 11:00 am

**Scholarship Scramble Golf Tournament**  
Sterling National Country Club, Sterling  
Monday, May 20, 2024  
8:00 am Shotgun Start

**Webster Dudley Oxford Chamber of Commerce**  
wdochamberma.org

## WHAT IS IN STORE FOR 2024?

by **DEB SEAMAN**, PRESIDENT OF THE AUBURN CHAMBER and **KERRI CUNNINGHAM**, VICE PRESIDENT OF THE AUBURN CHAMBER

Before we take a deep dive into 2024, we must, as the Auburn Chamber of Commerce, reflect on 2023. 2023 was a year of great WINS for the Chamber, starting with a strong commitment by Chamber President Debra Seaman to community involvement. This initiative has proven beneficial, as our social pages and website have gained many followers and a lot of traction. We see this momentum continue along its upward path into and beyond 2024, with many new programs and events to come.

Auburn was blessed to be chosen to host "Wreaths Across America." After the caravan exited the Mass Pike, the trucks paraded through the school districts, where the children came out with flags and signs to welcome and thank the drivers. This coordination was made possible by the hard work of the Auburn Police Department. The caravan then made its way to the American Legion Chester P. Tuttle Post for lunch and a ceremony honoring veterans across our great nation. This is where the Chamber members met the drivers and distributed snacks, water, and handshakes of thanks. Auburn was one of many stops on their journey to Arlington National Cemetery. If you would like to learn more about this organization and the great work they do for our fallen heroes, please visit [www.wreathsacrossamerica.org](http://www.wreathsacrossamerica.org).

We were able to narrow the gap between the commercial and residential tax rates to 1.09, with a commitment to gradually get to a single tax rate over the next few years, making Auburn a more friendly and competitive business community. What makes Auburn so attractive to incoming businesses is its accessibility to major highways and routes, the business-friendly initiatives created by the town administration, and the potential expansion of business

properties along the Route 12 and Route 20 corridors.

Always a great WIN for the Auburn Chamber is the annual School Business Partnership Golf Tournament. The amazing support from area businesses allowed us to offer a total of \$24,513 in scholarships and mini-grants to our students and teachers. This money is greatly appreciated by the teachers, who otherwise would not have funds to connect with their students.

Come and join in the golf tournament this September for this amazing cause solely for our students and teachers. We will be having this tournament at Pleasant Valley Country Club on September 30th. Don't hesitate to sign up, as this event is our most popular and very well-attended. If you would like to play, volunteer, or sponsor, please reach out to Virginia Murphy at [Vmurphy@worchesterchamber.org](mailto:Vmurphy@worchesterchamber.org) or watch for it on our social media pages.

Other events we are in the process of finalizing for 2024 are our Annual Meeting, Auburn Town Clean-Up, Business Showcase, Scholarship Breakfast, Auburn Business Stories, Concert at Pappas Park, Scarecrow Contest, Town Talk, and many more pop-ups in the works. We always end our year with the annual Auburn Chamber of Commerce Holiday Party, a great time to reflect and enjoy ourselves.

We hope you choose to join us at any of our events, and please follow our social pages.

<https://www.facebook.com/auburnchamberma>  
<https://www.auburnchamberma.org/>  
<https://www.linkedin.com/in/auburn-chamber-2a561b163/>



## QUESTIONS , CONTINUED

- **Hair – Hair testing offers the broadest detection window and can detect THC up to 90 days after use.** Many of our judicial customers use this medium for child custody and abuse cases.

At ARCpoint, we can design 4 panel urine test for non-DOT companies for pre-employment that does not measure THC, and have standard urine, saliva and hair test for random post-accident or reasonable suspicion. This allows them to have a fair policy and not penalize anyone for recreational use of marijuana, and address violation of the drug and alcohol policy at work.

**4. You opened an ARCpoint Lab in Southborough several years ago; what motivated you to expand into Worcester?**

I opened my first location in Southborough in 2016. In the first couple of years, we got to know the local business and their unique requirements. We were local and the businesses were able to pick up the phone and talk to us or we went on-site to understand their requirements. This was very different from the large national Third-Party Administrators that they were used to, which provided minimal support and were known for poor service. Our excellent local service helped us to grow fast. When we were planning to expand, we recognized that the Worcester area had many businesses that we could help. We were already working with many DOT and non-DOT companies in Worcester from our Southborough location. During that time, we learned that there was an unmet need and very few physical locations that the local companies could use for occupational health services. Besides, no one provided 24/7 onsite testing services if needed by a DOT company for post-accident in the area.

Another driver for opening a lab in Worcester is proximity to the local court as we offer hair drug testing and DNA testing for probate and family court.

Access to a good workforce pool was another driver for choosing a location in Worcester. Almost all our employees at both locations are residents of Worcester and graduates from local schools. They bring a positive attitude, drive to learn, and take a lot of pride in their work.

Our second lab is on Grove Street with easy access to major highways and

plenty of free parking. The Chamber meetings and forums provided a great opportunity to position our services to a broad range of local businesses. Worcester is a thriving city, with an engaging community, great talent & hard-working workforce; we are grateful to be part of this community.

**5. And finally, ARCpoint has been an active member of the Chamber of Commerce. What advice would you give to someone who is on the fence about joining a chamber?**

We joined the Worcester Chamber a year before we opened our doors in Worcester believing that WRCC would be critical in getting to know the local businesses. For us, four things stood out. The chamber's leadership team and staff members genuinely help foster connections, especially for small businesses. This helped in building connections and strengthening business relationships.

Second, the chamber has several networking opportunities including social hours, award ceremonies, and conferences to showcase your business offerings and network with other businesses. Many of these events are free or have a modest fee. The events are well organized and attended by the chamber leadership team & board members to facilitate engagement between the members.

The third reason is access and availability of resources. The chamber's team has broad experience ranging from government policymaking to industry-specific requirements. They can guide you to experts who can help with your business needs. An example is workforce development needs, where the Chamber can make introductions with MassHire Career Center. The chamber roundtable discussions are focused and address key industry issues while sharing best practices led by industry experts. Connect For Success groups provide a great forum to expand your network and build valuable relationships which are key to business success.

Finally, the chamber constantly hosts fun events in collaboration with other chambers and local businesses. These informal gatherings help in expanding your business network. The WRCC is one of the most recognized and active chambers in this region, if you are on the fence, my advice is to take a leap and try it out!


## DID YOU KNOW?


The WBDC was recently approved as an **Accredited Lender** in the SBA 504 Loan Program.

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Contact us if you would like to learn more!

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Director of SBA & Lending  
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# Have you considered membership?

Learn what it means, what's in it for you, and how to join.



## CHAMBER OF COMMERCE DEFINED

A chamber of commerce is an organization of businesses seeking to further their collective interests, while advancing their community, region, state or nation.

Business owners voluntarily form these local organizations to advocate, on behalf of the entire community, for economic prosperity and shared business interests.

Chambers have existed in the U.S. for more than 200 years and have five primary goals:

- Building communities to which residents, visitors, and investors are attracted
- Promoting those communities
- Fostering prosperity by being pro-business
- Representing the unified voice of the employer community
- Reducing transactional friction through well-functioning networks

Chambers are independent organizations led by private-sector employers, are self-funded, and are organized around boards of directors and committees of volunteers. Chambers are ardent proponents of the free-market system, resisting attempts to overly-burden private-sector enterprise and investment.

Local businesses are voluntary, paying members of a chamber run by a board of directors, a chief executive, and staff.

### WHAT WE'RE NOT

Chambers work closely with government but are **not part** of government, nor do we function as the Better Business Bureau.

## MEMBERSHIP WORKS!

The Worcester Regional Chamber of Commerce invites you to be a part of the largest chamber in New England representing 2,000-plus members from all industries and of all sizes across 35 cities and towns in Central Massachusetts.

Join our dynamic organization that works to assist individual businesses and the collective business community through our recruit, retain, and incubate strategy.

## Affiliate Chamber Partners



## TOP 10 REASONS TO JOIN

- 1 Chamber Advocacy** | We are a strong voice advocating on your behalf to reduce the negative impact of government regulations.
- 2 Business Assistance & Support** | We will facilitate introductions and provide you with access to services helpful to your business.
- 3 Economic Development** | The Chamber is the lead organization in the region's strategic effort to recruit and retain businesses and talent.
- 4 Business Promotion & Advertising** | You'll be listed on our website which has 6,000-plus monthly visitors with options for listing upgrades.
- 5 Education & Professional Development** | Low- or no-cost workshops and programs to help you manage and grow your business.
- 6 Networking & Connections** | Dozens of networking events provide opportunities to expand your contacts and generate new leads.
- 7 Industry Roundtables** | Unique discussions offer a forum for idea exchanges, challenges, and best practice sharing among your sector.
- 8 Leadership & Volunteer Opps** | Professional growth opportunities include ambassadorships, committees, and leadership programs.
- 9 Skilled Workforce Access** | Members receive access to the Chamber's Workforce Development Department, tapping into local colleges.
- 10 Programs to Help Your Business Succeed** | Free referral and mentorship groups to help you grow your business.

## For more information or to join, contact:

Kristen Luna | 508.753.2924, ext. 226 | [kluna@worcesterchamber.org](mailto:kluna@worcesterchamber.org)

Virginia Murphy | 508.753.2924, ext. 224 | [vmurphy@worcesterchamber.org](mailto:vmurphy@worcesterchamber.org)



It's quick, easy, and it'll be one of the best things you do for your business.

## BEST DAY , CONTINUED

A video of her plight was played on the video board.

"Then she comes out," Verducci said as the public address announcer calls, "Let's take a home run for life!"

When Maddie ran around those bases on the Polar Park field, she gave each player a high-five. "Every single player," said Verducci. "And when she gets to home plate, a lot of people were crying. This time the parents are there

and all the players are there embracing her. It was a really cool thing. She was seven-years old and she called it the best day of her life."

Maddie died about six months later on December 31, 2022, just two months after her eighth birthday.

She was bigger than baseball.

## LEADERSHIP , CONTINUED

why I tell everyone I know about the program and encourage them to apply. (If you are reading this and it sounds interesting - do it! Apply!)

At the end of the program, each of us was challenged to write our Six Word Memoir. If you aren't familiar with this challenge, story has it that Ernest Hemingway was once asked to write a story in only six words. He did, and it is very poignant. I encourage you to look it up. The day we were presenting our memoir I had it narrowed down to four that I had written, but when it was my turn to share I knew that the right one for me was: Left the Valley, for Seven Hills.

It has been a year since I graduated from this program, and daily I am reminded of the lessons I learned and am committed to seeing our City continue to grow and thrive.

*Billie Kenyon is the Chief Operating Officer at Ladybugz Interactive Agency. She, along with Founder & CEO Lysa Miller, and a team of experts create and elevate companies' websites and digital marketing with a focus on biotech, non-profits, education, and B2B businesses. In addition, she is the current President of the Board of Directors for the Worcester JCC, Worcester Business Journal 40 Under 40 Honoree 2022, and Leadership Worcester alumni class of 2023. Billie is married to fellow Clarkie Cory Kenyon, and they along with their five-year-old daughter Devyn live in Worcester.*

## workplace resource

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# Oscars to Orchids: Save the Date for These Events

by **MONIQUE MESSIER-JOSEPH**, PRESIDENT, DISCOVER CENTRAL MA



It's still winter, yet in Central Massachusetts we're fortunate to have special annual events that lure us into a springtime atmosphere early!

Here's just a taste of the events featured on our Events Calendar, the premier place to find things to do across the region.

## FILMED IN WORCESTER

### The Holdovers Receives 5 Academy Award Nominations

If you haven't yet seen *The Holdovers*, it features a pivotal scene filmed on the Worcester Common. The heartfelt comedy has been nominated for Best Picture, Paul Giamatti for Best Actor, Da'Vine Joy Randolph for Best Supporting Actress, Hemingson for Best Original Screenplay, and Kevin Tent (ACE) for Best Film Editing. On March 10th we'll be tuning into the 96th Oscars to see how *The Holdovers* fairs!

## NATURAL WONDERS

### Patterns in Bloom: An Orchid Exhibition at New England Botanic Garden at Tower Hill

The annual orchid exhibition, held February 10th through March 17th, is an opportunity to immerse yourself in a showcase of over 2,000 living orchids. The display of artful arrangements is a breathtaking, enchanting escape from winter inside the garden's two glass conservatories. This limited time treat

celebrating of one of the most diverse plant families on the planet is included in General Admission to NEBG.

### Flora in Winter 2024 at Worcester Art Museum

This annual event held on February 29th through March 3rd promises you'll see art in a new way: reimagined in floral arrangements throughout the museum galleries. Featuring the work of extremely talented florists, *Flora in Winter* is a museum-wide takeover, so general admission prices do not apply during this special event. As always, members receive free admission, however adult and seniors admission is \$30, while youth 17 and under is \$7.

### Maple Days at Old Sturbridge Village

Every year we look forward to these sweet, special days to honor a New England tradition. Friday - Sunday, February 23rd - March 17th you can experience the first signs of spring, the Old Sturbridge Village way. Visit the living history museum during "Maple Days" to see the working sugar camp demonstrate maple sugaring as it was done in early 19th-century New England. On Saturdays and Sundays bring your appetite, because the Ox & Yoke Café hosts a special Waffle Bar from 10:00 a.m. - 3:00 p.m.

### Friday Morning Bird Walks at Mass Audubon's Broad Meadow Brook

Starting March 29th enjoy a guided walk, sharpen your birding skills, and help track migrating and resident birds for Mass Audubon. Birders of all levels are welcome to this large urban wildlife sanctuary boasting 400 acres with well-marked trails through woods, fields, streams, and marsh. Visiting it free and there is ample parking in their lot at 414 Massasoit Rd in Worcester.

## HOME IMPROVEMENTS

### Worcester Spring Home Show at DCU

The DCU Center hosts the Worcester Spring Home Show from Friday, March 8 through Sunday, March 10, 2024. It's a one-stop-shop, with over 100 exhibitors, from general contractors to home decorators, handymen & more. Adult entry is \$10.00 and children 12 and under and free.

### Art On The Line at ArtsWorcester

Attend Art On The Line on April 13th from 5-7pm to brighten up your walls with original art. Each year there's a line of eager art-buyers seeking to get first dibs at the \$20-a piece art hanging from the gallery ceiling, so get there before the doors open to line up. This event is a fast-paced, fun way to start or expand an art collection.

## PERFORMING ARTS

### Tony Award Winner SANTINO FONTANA at Jean McDonough Arts Center

See Tony Award® winner Santino Fontana live in Worcester. Come celebrate a spontaneous, intimate and bespoke evening of his and your favorite songs- intermixed with hilarious showbiz tales about everything from James Earl Jones to Ryan Gosling. Tickets range from \$50-\$100.

### Worcester Chamber Music Society: The Little Mermaid at Mechanics Hall

The annual, free family concert is sure to delight an audience of all ages on Sunday, March 10th from 3:00-4:00pm. It promises to be a memorable multi-sensory experience and includes a "meet and greet" with the musicians on stage.

### Little Women: The Broadway Musical at The Hanover Theatre for the Performing Arts

Based on Louisa May Alcott's life, *Little Women: The Broadway Musical* follows the adventures of sisters, Jo, Meg, Beth and Amy March. Catch a performance at The Hanover Theatre on March 22nd, 23rd, or 24th.

Discover many more events at [DiscoverCentralMA.org/events](https://DiscoverCentralMA.org/events).

*Discover Central MA is the official Regional Tourism Council of Worcester and Central MA. Interested in becoming a member of Discover Central MA? Email Tim Power, Membership Success Coordinator at [tpower@discovercentralma.org](mailto:tpower@discovercentralma.org).*

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# REGISTRATION NOW OPEN!



Central Massachusetts' largest professional women's conference

**Thursday, May 2, 2024**

**7:15 a.m. – 4:30 p.m.**

DCU Center Arena and Convention Center  
Worcester, MA

- Two national keynote speakers
- Two breakout sessions | Eight workshops
- Continental breakfast and plated lunch
- Networking reception
- Conference app where you can plan your day and see who else is attending

## BECOME AN EXHIBITOR:

- Access to up to 800 women who live and/or work in Central MA
- New Women's Wellness Corner specifically designed for organizations to promote women's health.

\$250 Chamber Members  
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## SPONSORSHIP OPPORTUNITIES AVAILABLE:

- Strengthen your networking circle and business relationships.
- Attract new customers and clients.
- Reward your employees by offering the conference as a professional development opportunity.
- Brand your organization as one that supports women and equality.

Contact Karen Pelletier for sponsorship information:  
[kpelletier@worcesterchamber.org](mailto:kpelletier@worcesterchamber.org) • 508-753-2924 x229

## CONFERENCE SCHOLARSHIP

- We are proud to offer a free conference ticket to 10 young women enrolled in Worcester public schools and award one scholarship check. Applications can be found on the conference site through the QR code below.
- Professional Attendee Scholarships are available to receive a sponsor donated ticket. Please email [SSilva@worcesterchamber.org](mailto:SSilva@worcesterchamber.org) for more information.



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