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February 13, 2026 ■ FREE

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Float winners announced

HOLYOKE – Last Friday morning, The St. Patrick’s Committee of Holyoke announced Holyoke High School seniors Marla Nieves and Joel Franco have been selected as the winners of the 2026 Grand Colleen

Float Design Contest, a beloved annual tradition that blends Irish heritage with local student creativity.

The announcement was made by Bill Quesnel and James Menard, Co-chairs

See FLOAT, page 6



Joel Franco and Marla Nieves are the winners of this year’s St. Patrick’s Day Parade float contest. Submitted photo



Holyoke Mayor Joshua A. Garcia signs the Municipal Finance Modernization Act (MFMA) into law surrounded by his constituents. Turley photo by Brendan Rooney

Garcia signs MFMA

By Brendan Rooney
Correspondent

HOLYOKE – On Monday, Feb. 9, Mayor Joshua A. Garcia officially signed the Municipal Finance Modernization Act (MFMA) from inside his office at the City Hall campus. Also on

hand to witness the signing of the Modernization Act, was several elected officials such as Ward 7 Councilor Meg Magrath-Smith, the Chair of the Ordinance Committee, City Councilor at-large, Patty Devine, who is also the Chair of the Finance Committee, Ward 3 Councilor

Anne Thalheimer, Ward 6 Councilor Juan Anderson-Burgos, City Councilor at-large Mimi Panitch, and interim city treasurer Rory Casey. The new law, which was recently passed by the City Council with an 11-2 vote, looks to tighten Holyoke’s

financial operations under a newly created Department of Finance, which has been a point of ire among the Commonwealth’s Division of Local Services (DLS) for the past 20 years. In addition the newly

See MFMA, page 10

Grand coronation this weekend

HOLYOKE – The St. Patrick’s Committee of Holyoke will celebrate the 70th annual Grand Colleen Coronation Ball and Awards Dinner, an evening dedicated to crowning the 2026 Grand Colleen and recognizing this year’s distinguished award recipients.

Finalists for the honor of Grand Colleen are: **Bridie**

Bowler, Jady Christy, Anna Evans, Paige Leahy, and Olivia Royland.

In addition, the evening will honor the 2026 recipients of the Committee’s annual awards:

• **Citizenship Award:** *Miracle League of Western Massachusetts.* Presented to an individual or organization that has made significant

contributions to Western Massachusetts communities or to the Parade.

• **Rohan Award:** *Tessa Murphy-Romboletti.* Awarded to a person who has made notable contributions to the success of the Parade and/or the Association.

• **George E. O’Connell Award:** *DJ. O’Connor.*

Presented to a Parade Committee member who has significantly supported the Parade’s fundraising efforts.

• **Daniel J. Gallivan Award:** *James Menard.* Awarded to a long-standing member of the Association who, while not a Holyoke resident, has made substantial contributions to the Parade and its mission.



It is the 70th anniversary of the Grand Colleen competition. Last year’s winners and former colleeens pose for a photo. File photo

Order of recusal filed against embattled at-large councilor

By Gregory A. Scibelli
gscibelli@turley.com

HOLYOKE – On Feb. 3, a couple of weeks after At-Large Councilor Israel Rivera agreed to a continuance without a finding deal to resolve his drunk driving case, another city councilor filed orders attempting prevent Rivera from voting on police matters.

Rivera was arrested in December for operating under the influence of alcohol. In the weeks that followed, released body-worn camera footage made available for the public showed Rivera making racial slurs and making negative comments about the Holyoke Police Department. He also threatened to cut their budget and said the police “don’t do (expletive).”

The controversial behavior drew the ire of

police unions in the city who not only wanted Rivera to recuse himself from any and all matters related to the police department, but to resign from the city council completely.

Upon the resolution of his court case, Rivera resigned as vice president of the council, and has been removed from the Public Safety Committee.

But Rivera also went on record and publicly stated he will not be resigning from the council.

Ward 5 Councilor Linda Vacon filed an order introduced last week stating Rivera “recuse himself on votes affecting the police department while on probation & ethics/conflicts of interest complaints are pending.”

She also filed an order

See ORDER, page 3

Original HPS receiver Dr. Zrike appointed new Secretary of Education for Commonwealth

By Gregory A. Scibelli
gscibelli@turley.com

HOLYOKE – In a bit of a full circle moment, as the city is preparing to name its first superintendent since re-taking local control of the Holyoke Public Schools, the original appointed state receivership has come back into the limelight.

On Wednesday morning, Gov. Maura Healey, who is currently running for her second term, named Dr. Steven Zrike as the new Secretary of Education for the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

Zrike guided the Holyoke Public Schools through the

formative years of receivership. He was the first receiver/superintendent in Holyoke and led the district unilaterally after the state took control due to underperforming test scores and graduation rates.

Zrike led the district through the implementation of a turnaround plan and worked to increase graduation rates, reconfigure the school district, and increase overall achievement.

Zrike served the district for five years before departing the district. He led the turnaround of 11 chronically underperforming schools, improved academic outcomes, increased the graduation rate, and reduced

chronic absenteeism. He also served as Superintendent of Schools in Wakefield, Massachusetts, Chief of Elementary Schools for the Pilsen-Little Village Network in the Chicago Public Schools and Principal of both the William Ohrenberger Elementary School and John Philbrick Elementary School in Boston. He began his career as a fifth-grade teacher in Massachusetts’ Andover Public School District.

He was most recently the superintendent of schools in



Dr. Steven Zrike

Salem. Now, he will be the foremost authority on education in Massachusetts with his new appointment.

According to a press release from the governor’s office, Current Secretary of Education Patrick Tutwiler will be stepping down from his position on Friday, Feb. 13 to assume the role of President and Chief Executive Officer of Walker Therapeutic & Educational Programs.

“Dr. Zrike has a proven track record of improving

learning for thousands of students across our state and the country. From his time as a fifth-grade teacher, to principal and onto Superintendent, he has changed lives and inspired those he works with. We congratulate him on this new role and can’t wait to work together to make sure every student has a high-quality education from early childhood through college and career,” said Healey. “I’m grateful for Secretary Tutwiler’s leadership as Secretary of Education and his lifetime of service to the students of Massachusetts. Together, we created nation-leading graduation standards, enrolled thou-

sands more students in early college, added thousands of child care seats, expanded early literacy tutoring and made historic increases to college financial aid. But what I’ll remember most about Secretary Tutwiler is his unfailing positivity and the absolute joy on the faces of students across the state any time he walks into the room. We wish him the very best in his next steps.”

“I am pleased to welcome Stephen as our next Secretary of Education. As a former Mayor of Salem, I know firsthand what a strong partner he is for our students,

See ZRIKE, page 6

Hibernians to lead Irish flag raising March 2



HOLYOKE – The Ancient Order of Hibernians James A. Curran Division 1 and the Ladies Order of Hibernians Division 2 of Hampden/Hampshire Counties will celebrate Irish American Heritage Month with an Irish flag raising ceremony at Holyoke City Hall on Monday, March 2, at 10 a.m. at Holyoke City Hall. The public is invited to attend.

Hibernian President Joseph O'Connor will preside as Master of Ceremonies. St Patrick's Parade President

Jim Wildman, Parade Grand Marshal Michael Moriarty, Ladies Order of Hibernians President Mary Kate O'Connor, President Sean Cahillane of the Irish Cultural Center of Western New England all plan to attend. Piper Matt O'Connor will play the pipes at the event and Sheila Moreau will sing the American and Irish Anthems.

Holyoke Mayor Joshua A. Garcia and City officials will also attend.

Some 31.5 million Americans claim Irish

Ancestry. The colors of the symbolic Irish Flag represent Green for Roman Catholics and Nationalism, Orange for the Protestant minority, and the White in between the two colors as hope for lasting peace between the two.

The U.S. Congress designated March as Irish American Heritage Month in 1991 to recognize the contributions Irish Americans have made to the country. The Ancient Order of Hibernians was founded in New York City in 1836 and in 1880 in Holyoke.

Irish Night 2026 set for Feb. 28

HOLYOKE – The Hibernians of Hampden/Hampshire Counties and Ladies Order invite the public to attend Irish Night in Holyoke 2026 on Feb. 28 at the Log Cabin 500 Easthampton Rd. Holyoke, Mass. Doors open at 5 p.m. and dinner is at 6:30 p.m.

The night will feature the Keohane and Kenneally Irish-American band and a corned beef and cabbage dinner with ribs. The price is \$50 per person and valet parking services will be available.

For reservations by Feb. 24 call Joe O'Connor at 413-627-7148, or Fran Hennessey at 413-785-5687 or online at eventbrite.com.

Additional entertainment by the Cassin School of Irish Dance and Piper Matt O'Connor. The night is in memory of Hibernian Daniel P. Curran and will benefit the Maurice A. Donahue Memorial Scholarship.

The Hibernians wish a Happy St. Patrick's Day to all.

Learn about little-known abolitionists

HOLYOKE – On Saturday, Feb. 28 at 11 a.m. at Holyoke Public Library, join us for an hour of inspiring stories of commitment, courage, and resistance. Speakers Tom Weiner and Dr. Amilcar Shabazz will share from their recent book, "In Defiance: 20 Abolitionists you were never taught in school," which uncovers stories of individuals who risked their lives in the struggle to end enslavement. The event is free and open to the public and will be held in the Community Room. After their talk, the authors will

be available for questions and book signing.

Authors Tom Weiner and Dr. Amilcar Shabazz will offer an engaging discussion of their recent book, In Defiance, which uncovers the stories of 20 individuals who risked their lives to fight enslavement and serves as a compelling call for justice and the preservation of history.

The talk focuses on the lives and words of a few of these individuals, highlighting their courage, activism, and unwavering commitment to freedom. Amid ongoing efforts to erase his-

tory, these stories serve as a powerful corrective—meant to challenge, inspire, and ignite action.

Tom Weiner is a Northampton-based writer, educator, and anti-racist activist, and Dr. Amilcar Shabazz is professor of History and Africana Studies at UMass/Amherst and former president of the National Council for Black Studies.

Sponsored by the Holyoke History Room.

Recommended for middle school through adult. Light refreshments will be served.

Providence Place holding Spring Concert Series

HOLYOKE – If you missed our 2025 Fall concert series, you do not want to miss out on our Spring 2026 concert series. We will be kicking off our first concert of the Spring series on Sunday, Mar. 1 at 2 p.m. in our Mother of Sorrows Chapel at Providence Place. Providence Place is located at 5 Gamelin Street in Holyoke, right behind the Holyoke Mall. The Mar. 1 concert will include a performance by the UMASS SIA Lambda Phi Chapter

who will be presenting a variety of vocal and instrumental selections that features music throughout history – from the classical era onward. This event is free and open to the public with ample parking available, no RSVP is necessary. For more information on the concert or if you are interested in learning more about our retirement community, please contact Katelyn Bacon at 413-534-9700 or email kbacon@providenceplace.org.

Play fun tabletop games

HOLYOKE – Join us at Wistariahurst Museum for a relaxed tabletop gaming event for players of all kinds. Bring your favorite games from home or jump into one of the tabletop games that we will have available for guests to enjoy. Whether you're into Magic: The Gathering, Dungeons & Dragons, classic board games, or something new, there's a set for you at our tables.

A staff member will be present to host a featured "game of the month." For February, guests can

learn about Villainous by Ravensburger. Select your favorite Disney villain and compete with others in a game of strategy, schemes, and mischief.

Entry to Tabletop Saturday is donation-based, starting at just \$1 per person. Every additional amount that guests donate supports the museum's programming. Registration is encouraged, but walk-ins are welcome. Come inside and roll the dice with us at Wistariahurst Museum on Feb. 21 from 12 to 4 p.m.

HMC to host cancer support group meeting

HOLYOKE – Holyoke Medical Center will host a Cancer Support Group for community members and/or caregivers dealing with cancer. The group will meet in the Fran Como Conference Room of Holyoke Medical Center, 575 Beech Street, Holyoke, from 4:30 to 6 p.m.

Dates the support group will meet include March 12, Apr. 9, May 14, July 9, Aug. 13, Sept. 10, Oct. 8, and Nov. 12.

Holyoke Medical Center will provide a safe

place for active and surviving cancer patients, families, and caregivers to share thoughts and feelings with others dealing with similar concerns and emotions.

"Support groups are a safe place to talk about emotions and difficult subjects. Our group members have developed a community through shared experiences," said James Haskins, MSW, LICSW, ACSW, HMC Oncology Social Worker.

The Holyoke Medical Center Cancer Support

Group offers a light meal, along with education, activities, as well as facilitation of discussion around a variety of topics.

Open feedback from support group members is encouraged, and a survey is provided at every group meeting to enhance future meetings.

Participants are asked to please register in advance to ensure enough food and materials are available for all. Please RSVP by calling (413) 534-2543, option 5.

Day Brook to hold concert

HOLYOKE – Day Brook Village Senior Living, a locally owned, not-for-profit Continuing Care Retirement Community located in Holyoke, MA will be hosting a concert featuring The Earls and The Pearls on Thursday, Feb. 26 at 2 p.m. in the Sheldon Dining Room. This performance is free and open to the public. An RSVP is required; kindly call 413-561-7958.

Public invited to annual St. Patrick's Breakfast hosted by Greater Holyoke Chamber for awardees

HOLYOKE – The Greater Holyoke Chamber invites the entire community to its highly anticipated annual St. Patrick's Breakfast, proudly presented by Witman Properties, PeoplesBank, HG&E, BankESB, and Greenfield Cooperative Bank. The event will take place on Wednesday, Mar. 18 at 7:30 a.m. at The Log Cabin. This traditional gathering offers an opportunity for residents,

business leaders, community leaders, and community members to reconnect, celebrate local achievements, and honor this year's distinguished award recipients.

The breakfast serves as a cornerstone event for the Greater Holyoke area, bringing together hundreds of individuals to celebrate the city's rich heritage and vibrant future. Building on a year filled with meaningful community engagement—

including a successful Food Drive, numerous new business ribbon cuttings, and a host of collaborative initiatives—the Chamber is proud to continue fostering connections that strengthen the fabric of Holyoke. This year, the Chamber aims to make the celebration the largest in recent memory, rallying the community to support business owners and civic leaders as awardees. All are welcome to join what promises

to be a truly inspiring and festive morning.

Award presentations will be complemented by a raffle featuring a variety of prizes. Businesses and individuals are encouraged to submit raffle prizes, further highlighting their commitment to the community, while attendees are invited to purchase raffle tickets in advance or at the breakfast to support the Chamber's efforts.

Businesses interested in maximizing their participation are invited to purchase tables, ensuring strong visibility for their teams and organizations. Register now at holyokechamber.com as a guest or as a sponsor, and secure your raffle tickets to be a part of this dynamic event.

As an added highlight, crowd favorites Last Night's Fun will return to perform, bringing atmosphere and

entertainment to the breakfast and setting the stage for a memorable celebration.

Attending the breakfast is an excellent way to show support for the Chamber's mission of fostering economic growth and goodwill. Whether you are a long-time resident or new to the area, this event provides the perfect setting to network, celebrate community leaders, and kick off the St. Patrick's season in style.

Donovan's Irish Pub 80 Jarvis Ave., Holyoke 413-543-0791 donovanspub.com

Sun. 12pm - 8pm; Mon.-Thurs. 11:30am-9:30pm; Fri. & Sat. 11:30am - 11pm

Saturday, Feb. 14th 6-9pm Frank Serafino	Saturday, Feb. 21st 6-9pm Jeff Blaney	Sunday, Feb. 22nd 2-5pm Jim McArdle & Jerry Murphy
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Are you having difficulty communicating with your partner, struggling with boundaries, and healthy relationships?

We invite you to join us Friday afternoons from 1-2:30 pm to explore these topics and more.

This group will be held in zoom, is educational, confidential, and free.

Please contact **Pat James 413-726-8661.**

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Special performance of Elizabeth Freeman story

HOLYOKE – Wistariahurst Museum is excited to announce an upcoming performance sharing the story of Elizabeth “MumBet” Freeman in celebration of Massachusetts’ 250th anniversary. This historical interpretation from Freeman’s perspective will highlight her experiences and contribution to Massachusetts history. This event will be held Sunday, Mar. 15 during Civic Learning Week.

Elizabeth “MumBet” Freeman was the first enslaved African American to file and win a freedom suit in Massachusetts. The Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court ruling, in Freeman’s favor, found slav-

ery to be inconsistent with the 1789 Massachusetts State Constitution. Her suit, *Brom and Bett v. Ashley* (1781), was cited in the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court appellate review of Quock Walker’s freedom suit. When the court upheld Walker’s freedom under the state’s constitution, the ruling was considered to have implicitly ended slavery in Massachusetts.

This performance is being brought to Wistariahurst by Hidden Women Stage Company. Hidden Women helps historical sites tell the accurate and complete stories of the past, ensuring all people’s narratives are represented and celebrated. Owner, and

Executive Artistic Director, Tammy Denease, is an accomplished Historian, Artist, and Storyteller passionate about amplifying the voices of those who have been overlooked by history.

Immerse yourself in the story of Elizabeth “MumBet” Freeman and learn how she made history. Join Tammy Denease of Hidden Women Stage Company on Sunday, Mar. 15 from 1 to 2 p.m. at Wistariahurst Museum. Tickets will be available on Wistariahurst’s Eventbrite page. Sliding scale admission is offered for this event, with tickets ranging from \$0 - \$15.

This program is funded in part by a grant from the Holyoke Local Cultural Council, a local agency

which is supported by the Mass Cultural Council, a state agency.



Elizabeth “MumBet” Freema

Pasta dinner being served at UCCH

HOLYOKE – Mangia, mangia! The United Congregational Church of Holyoke will be serving a pasta dinner with bread and salad at their February Community Meal on Friday, Feb. 13 at 5 p.m. A family movie follows at 6 p.m. All are welcome to attend.

The Community Meal is hosted on the second Friday evening of each month at the church at 300 Appleton Street. All Are Welcome to attend, and the meal is completely free of charge. The menu changes monthly; past meals have featured Thanksgiving din-

ner, meatball stroganoff, hot dogs, sandwiches and more. Parents must accompany their children.

The United Congregational Church of Holyoke is an Open and Affirming congregation of the United Church of Christ. We welcome all individuals, regardless of where they are on their journey. If you’d like to learn more about UCCH, please visit our website at www.uccholyoke.org, find us on Facebook or Instagram, or call our office at 413-532-1483 Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m..

Council president to hold talk March 12

HOLYOKE – Wistariahurst Museum is hosting a talk with Holyoke’s City Council President Tessa Murphy-Romboletti during Civic Learning week. Getting involved with your local city council is a way to engage with and be aware of what’s happening in your city. Residents from Holyoke and beyond can take away information about civic engagement from Murphy-Romboletti’s talk.

Tessa Murphy-Romboletti is entering her third term as an At-Large Holyoke City Councilor and is currently serving her second term as Council President and is the first woman in the city’s history to hold the title. For seven years, Murphy-Romboletti led EforAll/EparaTodos Pioneer Valley, helping hundreds of local entrepreneurs—particularly women, immigrants, and under-rep-

resented founders—start and grow their small businesses. Before that, she guided the SPARK Holyoke initiative through its transition to EforAll and previously worked for the City of Holyoke in both the Planning & Economic Development Department and the Mayor’s Office. Her dedication to community empowerment has been recognized repeatedly throughout her career.

Born and raised in Holyoke, Murphy-Romboletti is a proud graduate of the Holyoke Public Schools and earned her B.A. in history and sociology from the University of Delaware. She currently serves on the MassHire Holyoke Board of Directors and is an active member of the St. Patrick’s Parade Committee of Holyoke.

Holyoke’s City Council holds hearings, passes ordinances, financial orders,

and resolutions, as well as oversees city finances. Councilors also address resident concerns. City Council committees hold various duties including appointing municipal officers, approving municipal budgets, and approving laws. In her talk, Murphy-Romboletti will offer information on the functions of Holyoke’s City Council and how residents can get involved.

If Not You, Who? Getting Involved in Local Government will occur Thursday, March 12 from 6 to 7 p.m. at Wistariahurst Museum during Civic Learning Week. This annual, nonpartisan awareness week brings together students, educators, policymakers, and leaders in the public and private sectors to highlight and further energize the movement for civic education in states and communities across the nation.

HCC, NEPM co-hosting Feb. 18 free lunchtime talk on philanthropy

HOLYOKE – Holyoke attorney Gina Barry, a 1994 graduate of Holyoke Community College and an estate planning specialist, will present “Pro Tips for Savvy Philanthropy” during a complimentary lunch at the HCC MGM Culinary Arts Institute on Wednesday, Feb. 18.

The lunch, part of a series of “Inspired Giving” events hosted by Holyoke Community College, will run from noon to 1:30 p.m. at the HCC MGM Culinary Arts Institute, 164 Race St., Holyoke. The lunch is free and open to the public, but advanced registration is required as seats are limited.

The event is being co-hosted by New England Public Media, the local affiliate of National Public Radio, which saw its federal

funding eliminated last year. NEPM Executive Editor Elizabeth Román, a 2003 graduate of HCC, will speak about the impact of community journalism and her journey from HCC to her current role.

HCC President George Timmons will provide welcome remarks.

Barry, chair of the Estate Planning and Elder Law Department of Bacon Wilson, P.C., will break down what donors should know about the shifting tax landscape.

“Many people I talk to aren’t aware that recent changes to the tax code might affect their tax returns this year,” said John Sieracki, HCC leadership gift officer. “Combining forces with NEPM during these challenging financial times has

been a great way to get the message out to our supporters.”

Lunch will be prepared and served by students in HCC’s culinary arts program. Parking is available on site and along Race Street.

If the college is closed Feb. 18 due to inclement weather, the program will be moved online, and registrants will be emailed a Zoom link.

To register, please go to hcc.edu/inspired or contact John Sieracki, HCC leadership gift officer, at 413-687-0322 / jsieracki@hcc.edu.

Rummage Sale at St. Paul’s

HOLYOKE – St. Paul’s Episcopal Church, 485 Appleton Street, Holyoke will hold their Annual Rummage Sale on Saturday, March 14 from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. in the auditorium.

There will be bargains for everyone: Clothing, housewares, bedding, towels, books, toys, and holiday and craft supplies.

Free ample parking is located behind the Church and all are welcome.

For more information, please contact Trudy Monson 413-335-1145 or call the Church Office at 413-532-5060.

Ms. Massachusetts Senior contest orientation Feb. 20

HOLYOKE – The Ms. Massachusetts Senior America Pageant Club is looking for their next queen. The pageant is open to women 60 years of age or older that may be interested in becoming a contestant in the next pageant. The pag-

nant will be on Sunday, June 28 at Holyoke High School.

There will be a contestant orientation meeting on Friday, Feb. 20, 2026 at 1 p.m. in the wellness room, 2nd floor of the Holyoke Senior Center located at 291 Pine St.

ORDER, from page 1

requesting he be removed as vice president of the councilor, by Rivera has already done that on his own.

The police department

unions have requested a legal and ethical opinion from the city solicitor about Rivera’s ability to vote on any police-related matter. They have yet to issue any opinions.

Support Wheels of Hope Car Show fundraiser

HOLYOKE – The Wheels of Hope 3rd Annual Car Show Cancer Fundraiser would like to extend a heartfelt invitation to join them in supporting this important cause. As you may already know, cancer affects the lives of millions of people around the world, touching families and communities in a profound way.

The car show fundraiser will not only be a celebration of automotive culture but also an opportunity to raise funds for cancer research, treatment, and support programs. The event will bring

together car enthusiasts and community members and supporters of the cause for a day of fun, entertainment, and meaningful connections.

Individuals and businesses who share the passion for making a positive difference in the lives of those affected by cancer are urged to join. Support will help make this event a success and contribute to the work being done to fight this disease. (Please note that any donations are tax deductible under Wheels of Hope Corporation EIN: 33-4653136)

Your generous contribution will directly support cancer research, patient care, and support services. Become an official sponsor of the event and receive recognition and promotional benefits in return for your support. Donate goods or services that can be used for the event activities, raffles. Attend the event: June 27, 2026 High and Cabot St. Holyoke from 8 a.m. - 5 p.m.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact Carmen Rodriguez (413) 210-8896 or email at cnrodriguez1967@gmail.com.

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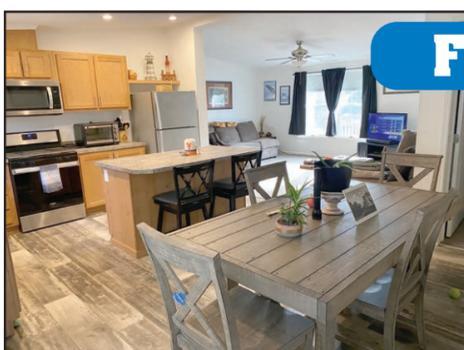
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2026 Cornelius J. Moriarty, Jr. Scholarship for Cadet Engineers

Pursuant to MGL Chapter 164, Sections 69B to 69F, applications for a cadet engineer scholarship will be received at the:

Office of the Manager
Holyoke Gas & Electric Department
99 Suffolk Street
Holyoke, MA 01040

Deadline: March 30, 2026

(Applications will only be considered if received on or before the deadline).

Application forms may be obtained from our website: www.hged.com or from high school guidance counselors. For further information, please contact the Office of the Manager, at (413) 536-9313.

Applicants for the scholarship must be:

- 1) Residents of the City of Holyoke.
- 2) Graduates of a duly accredited senior secondary school (year 2026 or before).
- 3) Not less than seventeen (17) years old on their last birthday, nor more than twenty-five (25) years old.
- 4) Accepted for admission to, or already enrolled in, an accredited community college, college, or university having a course of study leading to a degree of Bachelor of Science in Engineering.



Holyoke Gas & Electric
99 Suffolk Street
Holyoke, MA 01040
(413) 536-9300
www.hged.com

Guest Column



Why is my Social Security Retirement benefit so small?

Dear Rusty:

Can you help me understand?

I have paid into Social Security since I started working in 1978. I did have a lot of tax deductions, but I don't understand why I only receive \$350 a month from Social Security.

Signed: Befuddled Senior

Dear Befuddled Senior:

Your Social Security benefit is based upon your average monthly earnings for the 35 years over your lifetime that you earned the most while contributing to the Social Security program; however, your benefit isn't based on your contributions to SS. Your average lifetime earnings amount is called your Average Indexed Monthly Earnings, which are adjusted for inflation for years before you turn 60. Your earnings, your net earnings if self-employed, are provided to the SSA by the IRS.

Your AIME is subjected to a formula which calculates your "Primary Insurance Amount," which is the SS benefit you receive if you start benefits in the month you reach your full retirement age. Your personal Full Retirement Age depends on the year you were born which, if you were born in 1960 or later, is age 67. However, if you claim Social Security before reaching your FRA, you will get only a percentage of your PIA, reduced from what you would get if you claimed at your FRA.

For example, if you claimed at age 62, you would only get 70% of the amount you would have gotten had you waited until age 67, or if you claimed at age 63 you would get 75% of your age 67 benefit. The reduction is less as you get closer to your FRA; if you claimed at age 65, you'd get about 87% of your full retirement age amount.

You can see your lifetime Social Security earnings record at your personal "my Social Security" online account at www.ssa.gov/myaccount (you will need to first create that online account), or you can call Social Security at 1-800-772-1213 to request an "Earnings Statement" be sent to you. That statement will show your lifetime earnings by year, the 35 highest of which were used to calculate your PIA (your Social Security bene-

fit at your FRA). Generally, your Social Security FRA benefit will be about 40% or less of your average indexed monthly earnings.

So, to recap, your SS retirement benefit isn't based on your contributions to the program; it's based on your average monthly lifetime earnings. If you had less than 35 years contributing to the program, SS would still use 35 years in the benefit formula by using zero dollars in earnings for some number of years, which would result in a smaller AIME.

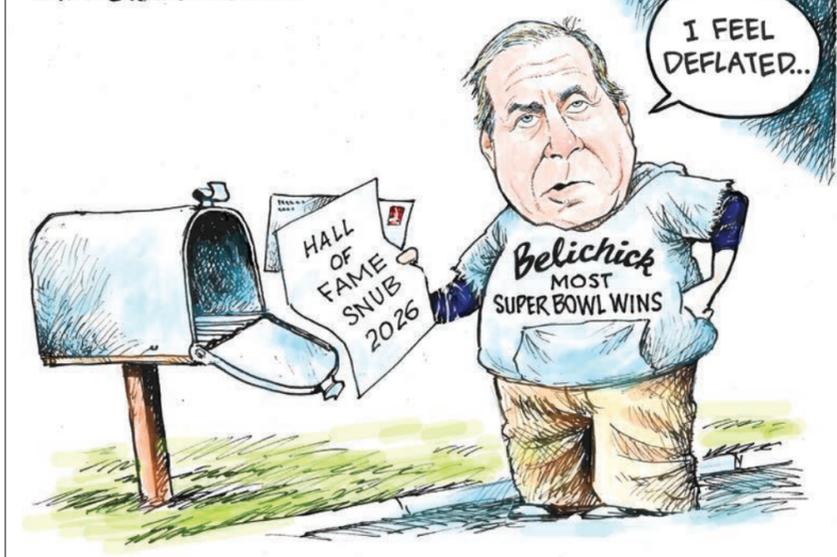
Thus, if you claimed before your full retirement age of 67, your SS benefit was reduced because you claimed early. And if you had less than 35 years of SS-covered employment, your AIME was less, resulting in a smaller PIA. And that is likely why your monthly Social Security retirement benefit is low.

One other thought to consider: if you are married and your spouse's monthly SS benefit is considerably more than yours (e.g., more than twice as much as yours), you may want to explore your options for spouse benefits.

I hope this explains how your SS benefit is calculated, but if you still question your monthly SS retirement amount, I suggest you first obtain your "Earnings Statement" to review the lifetime earnings SS has on file for you. If there are any discrepancies in your Social Security's earnings record, there are correction remedies available to you. If that is the case, please feel free to contact us again for more information.

The Association Mature Citizens Foundation and its staff are not affiliated with or endorsed by the Social Security Administration or any other governmental entity. This article is intended for information purposes and does not represent legal or financial guidance. It presents the opinions and interpretations of the Association Mature Citizens Foundation's staff, trained and accredited by the National Social Security Association. To submit a question, visit amacfoundation.org/programs/social-security-advisory or email us at ssadvisor@amacfoundation.org. Russell Gloor is a Social Security advisor for AMAC.

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Guest Column

Online seed houses offer endless choices

It's been a fun couple of weeks in the realm of gardening! While I haven't yet gotten my hands into the soil yet, I have been on the hunt for all kinds of seeds for the Old Sturbridge Village gardens: those for obscure medicinal plants, unique heirlooms, and rare native plants.

That process has led me to some interesting mail order companies that I'd like to share with you.

My mail order "go to" for herb seeds has always been Richter's (www.richters.com) but when I couldn't locate a few of the items on my list there, a simple internet search led me to Thyme Garden (www.thymegarden.com).

Their catalog boasts over 400 varieties of herb seeds and more. The text doubles as an herbal encyclopedia of sorts, providing the reader



by Roberta McQuaid

gave me something to think about: "Native plants co-evolved with native insects and wildlife; they are deeply dependent on one another. These plants provide food and shelter to insects, birds, and other small animals, which in turn support larger predators. Native plants are the fundamental stepping stones of a healthy ecosystem."

While many of us already enjoy growing native plants, the impact of doing so goes far beyond our ornamental gardens. Prairie Moon offers seeds, blended seed mixes, plants and more, and their catalog is free for the asking. You can also download a catalog and cultural guide. Growing native plants from seed often requires spe-

cialized knowledge and care. While many of us already enjoy growing native plants, the impact of doing so goes far beyond our ornamental gardens. Prairie Moon offers seeds, blended seed mixes, plants and more, and their catalog is free for the asking. You can also download a catalog and cultural guide.

Growing native plants from seed often requires spe-

See GARDEN, page 5

On Dec. 20, compilers at the Athol Christmas Bird Count recorded a total of 58 species including a Gadwall, a first time for this species during a Christmas count.

Male Gadwall have grayish-brown heads, sometimes showing cinnamon on the forehead and faint purplish iridescence on the crown. Females resemble female mallards, but they have a thinner, darker bill.

Gadwall nest in tall vegetation near water and show a preference for nesting on islands. Their choice of nesting location gives them some protection from predators. Female Gadwall produce an egg a day and lay a clutch of seven to 12 eggs. To meet their demand for protein during this stressful time, female Gadwall eat more invertebrates than males during this period in addition to using reserves of nutrients they've stored in their bodies during the winter.

Their winter habitat is fresh and brackish wetlands with abundant aquatic vegetation on which they primarily forage. Gadwall often snatch food from diving ducks as they surface. Gadwall number have increased in North America since the 1980s. This is part-



By Ellenor Downer



Male gadwall

ly because of conservation of their habitat, wetlands and adjacent uplands.

The oldest known Gadwall was a male, and at least 19 years, 6 months old. He was banded in Saskatchewan in 1962 and shot during hunting season in Louisiana in 1981.

Christmas Bird Count
The National Audubon Society Christmas Bird Counts take place within a 22-day period, there are many state count circles and volunteers must be avail-

able. Despite snowy weather, compiler Jon Skinner said of the Groton-Ayer count on Dec. 14, "I was surprised that we were able to scratch our way to 81 species in such snowy conditions. It has to be a testament to the relentless nature of both our team and the birds." Two new species were added 13 black vultures soaring over Lancaster and a killdeer at Devens. Some of the other highlights were evening

See BIRDS, page 6

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The Holyoke Sun welcomes election letters to the editor

The Holyoke Sun welcomes readers to participate in this year's election campaigns by writing letters to the editor for publication on these pages. Letters of up to 250 words from local residents endorsing candidates on the ballot or discussing campaign issues should be sent to The Holyoke Sun, care of Turley Publications, 24 Water St., Palmer, MA 01069, faxed to 413-289-1977 or emailed to thesun@turley.com. Please include a daytime telephone number for verification purposes (it will not be printed). Letters must be received by noon Monday to be considered for that Friday's

newspaper. No attack letters will be printed. No letters written by candidates supporting their own candidacy will be printed. If the volume of letters received is larger than the space available in the newspaper, or if the letters become repetitive, the newspaper reserves the right to print a representative sample. No endorsement letters will be printed in the last edition before the election.

For more information, call 413-283-8393.

Campaign news

As part of its election coverage, the newspa-

per plans to print stories about contested races for Congress, state Senate, state House, district attorney and Governor's Council during the weeks leading up to the election, as well as a question-and-answer voters guide. In order to ensure fairness to all candidates, no political press releases will be printed, nor will reporters cover political rallies or fundraisers.

Candidates who wish to further publicize their candidacy, beliefs and events may contact advertising, 413-283-8393 about paid advertising in The Holyoke Sun.

the HOLYOKE Sun

TEAM



EDITOR/SPORTS
Greg Scibelli
thesun@turley.com



ADVERTISING SALES
Wendy Delcamp
wdelcamp@turley.com

The Holyoke Sun is published every Friday by Turley Publications, Inc., 24 Water St., Palmer, Mass. 01069. Telephone (413) 283-8393, Fax (413) 289-1977.



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Unsigned or anonymous letters will NOT be published.

We reserve the right to edit or withhold any submissions. Libelous, unsubstantiated allegations, personal attacks or defamation of character are not allowed.

Deadline for submissions is Wednesday at noon.

Please email (preferred) letters to thesun@turley.com. Mailed letters can be sent to The Sun, 24 Water Street, Palmer, MA 01069.



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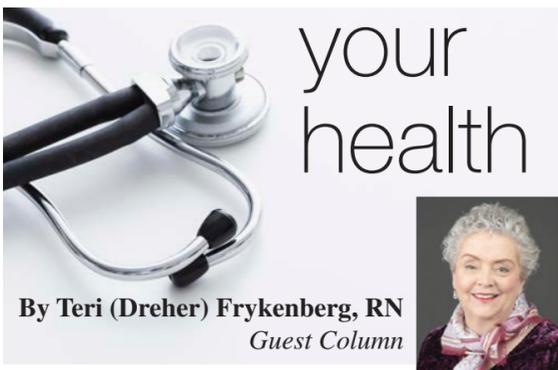
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Being an advocate in the emergency room



By Teri (Dreher) Frykenberg, RN
Guest Column

In the emergency room, the health-care system's shortcomings are laid bare. Not enough nursing staff, too little communication, confusing interactions.

I have seen that effective advocacy, whether from a family member, friend, or professional patient advocate, can have a positive impact on emergency room outcomes. Caregivers, who are usually familiar with their loved one's care and medical conditions, have the ability to act as advocates and perhaps make up for some of the shortcomings we find in ERs.

The tips I will outline aren't easy, and they sometimes run counter to the natural fear or even panic that accompanies a trip to the ER. But you will be doing your loved one and yourself a favor if you can remember them.

Evaluate whether going to the ER is necessary.

Patients present themselves at the emergency room with issues that could and should be handled by a primary care doctor or urgent care center. The result, of course, is an even more overburdened emergency room.

Go to the ER when there's:

- Chest pain or pressure (possible heart attack)
- Difficulty breathing (asthma attack, pulmonary embolism)
- Sudden numbness or weakness (stroke symptoms)
- Severe bleeding (uncontrolled, deep wounds)
- Head injuries with confusion/vomiting (possible concussion)
- Severe burn or fracture (bone protruding, major burns)

- Poisoning or overdose
- Seizure lasting more than 5 minutes

Bring a list of the patient's current medications and allergies.

Electronic health records (EHR) have done a lot to improve coordination of care, but the various systems sometimes don't "talk" to each other. Not only that, the medications and dosages listed in an EHR aren't always up to date.

Keep a list of current medications, including how many milligrams are prescribed and the frequency, printed out and kept in a "go bag" that you can grab on the way out the door. This can save precious moments in the ER.

Understand the triage process.

People who need immediate life-saving care, or who appear to be having heart attack or stroke, are considered Level 1 and Level 2 patients and will be seen almost immediately.

Your loved one will be evaluated and, if it's determined they're not in imminent danger, you likely will have to wait. If the wait feels

too long, calm and courteously ask at the desk how much longer it may be.

Be able to summarize the patient's conditions and what brought them to the ER.

The patient may be able to do this themselves, but I find they usually downplay certain things or even omit them. If your loved one has heart disease, diabetes, chronic kidney disease, allergies and previous surgeries, the clinicians need to know as soon as possible.

Have the patient's ID and insurance card with you.

One of the first people through the door (faster probably than any doctor) will be from admissions, and they will need information to register your loved one as a patient: photo ID and types of insurance.

Also, if you're not the spouse or the patient is your child over the age of 18, you will need their permission to receive medical information from the clinicians. The patient can give permission verbally, but having a signed HIPAA form or durable medical power of attorney is better.

Be familiar with the patient's preferences for care.

Some people don't want blood transfusions. Some don't want to be resuscitated if their heart stops beating or intubated if they stop breathing. The best way to provide this information is with a living will or advanced care directive. Bring copies with you.

Make sure your loved one is comfortable.

If they need more pillows or a heated blanket, ask for them. If it's OK for them to drink water (they may not if the docs feel there may be a surgery), get them some. Talk to your patient about what's going on, what's being said to you and what they can expect.

When you hear, "We're admitting you," understand what that means.

Is your patient being admitted for observation, which may have an impact on insurance coverage? Is an in-patient room available, or will they have to remain in the ER? What unit will they be admitted to, for example intensive care?

Listen carefully to the discharge instructions, ask questions and take them seriously.

The most common reason people return to the ER is not following discharge instructions. This may include what activities to avoid or new medications to take. The most important instruction is often "follow up with your primary care doctor within 72 hours." Don't brush them off.

It's easy to feel lost in the ER. The staff is there to help you, so speak up as an advocate and remember to say "thank you."

Teri (Dreher) Frykenberg, R.N., a registered nurse and board-certified patient advocate, is the founder of www.NurseAdvocateEntrepreneur.com, which trains medical professionals to become successful private patient advocates. A Monson, MA resident, she is the author of "How to Be a Healthcare Advocate for Yourself & Your Loved Ones" and her new book, "Advocating Well: Strategies for Finding Strength and Understanding in Health Care," available at Amazon.com. Contact her at Teri@NurseAdvocateEntrepreneur.com to set up a free phone consultation.

GARDEN, from page 4

cialized treatments such as chilling or nicking and soaking, so I'd definitely recommend brushing up. I found Toothwort (at last!) and Late Horse Gentian, both for the herb garden.

Sometimes the tricky part about searching out heirloom seeds in the issue of cultivars. For example, I need a black flowered Hollyhock known scientifically as *Alcea rosea nigra*, yet what I discover are cultivars called "Jet Black" or "Black Watchman." I want the original.

Here is where seed sales at Monticello (www.monticelloshop.org) come in handy. Thomas Jefferson was an avid gardener, and the display gardens around his estate highlight many of his favorite plants.

I was also able to secure seeds for unimproved versions of Rusty Foxglove

and Black Eyed Susan Vine. Because of this good fortune, you will see authentic 1830s gardens when you visit the Village.

There is no printed catalog to my knowledge, but the shop has its seed sales organized in a friendly manner online. Some seeds are even harvested on site.

Speaking of authenticity, it's also important that we utilize heirloom vegetable varieties within our gardens, so that you, the visitor, see the real deal, 1830s style. I've often ordered heirloom vegetable and flower seeds from Baker Creek Heirloom Seed Company (www.rareseeds.com) and this year is no exception.

Their big, beautiful Rare Seed and Whole Seed Catalogs are free for the asking and seed shipping is free, also. Search over 1,300 seeds.

If you can't find what you are looking for there,

hop on over to Victory Seeds (www.victoryseeds.com) and there will be more heirloom, open pollinated, non GMO varieties to choose from. I love the concept of Victory Gardens, and the company does a great job of explaining and promoting it.

Victory Seeds offers free shipping on all orders over \$30 and their website provides "quick links" to each main category for easy online shopping. They also encourage seed saving practices, which is neat.

This summer, look for China Rose Radish, Tall Telephone Peas, Boston Marrow Squash and Long Green Cucumber growing in our gardens and used in our households. These were all purchased from Victory Seeds.

If you are bored one afternoon, why not take a look at what these or any number of reputable seed

houses have to offer. You will no doubt expand your plant knowledge while you expand your garden!

Roberta McQuaid graduated from the Stockbridge School of Agriculture at the University of Massachusetts. For 34 years she has held the position of staff horticulturist at Old Sturbridge Village. She enjoys growing food as well as flowers. Have a question for her? Email it to pouimette@turley.com with "Gardening Question" in the subject line.

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| CLUES ACROSS | sesame plant | CLUES DOWN | 27. Records electric currents generated by the brain |
| 1. Breezed through | 38. Disallow | 1. Sign language | 28. Woman (French) |
| 5. Consumer protection agency | 41. Provide greater detail | 2. Fashionable | 29. Short route aircraft |
| 8. Criminal syndicate | 43. Inaccessible | 3. Borough in Helsinki | 34. Pitching statistic |
| 11. Moves back from | 45. Evoke emotions | 4. Inability to hear | 35. Pointed end of a pen |
| 13. Satisfaction | 47. Ancient kingdom near Dead Sea | 5. More quickly | 36. Popular sports league |
| 14. Feel concern or interest | 49. Celtic punk rockers | 6. An idea accepted as a demonstrable truth | 37. Body part |
| 15. Monetary units | 50. A fencing sword | 7. Shrewdly | 39. Inoffensive |
| 16. Congressman (abbr.) | 55. Actor Idris | 8. Rooney and Kate are two | 40. Yellowish cotton cloth |
| 17. Israeli city | 56. Affirmative (slang) | 9. Mediterranean port | 41. Feline |
| 18. Restaurants | 57. Afflicted in mind or body | 10. Benedictine monk | 42. Does not tell the truth |
| 20. 2,000 lbs. | 59. One point north of northeast | 12. Midway between south and southeast | 44. Seduced |
| 21. Grandmother | 60. Born of | 14. Town in Galilee | 45. Spiritual leader |
| 22. North, South and Central | 61. Social media hand gesture | 19. Satisfy | 46. Abba __, Israeli politician |
| 25. In an early way | 62. Hong Kong food stall __ pai dong | 23. Mice genus | 47. Repair |
| 30. Foes | | 24. Brass instrument | 48. Olive genus |
| 31. Social networking platform | | 25. Chest muscle (slang) | 51. Swiss river |
| 32. Early term for basketball player | | 26. Transmits genetic information from DNA | 52. Prejudice |
| 33. Another name for | | | 53. C. European river |
| | | | 54. Keep under control |
| | | | 58. Father |

CROSSWORD ANSWER on page 8

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frduyle@blessedsacramentholyoke.org
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Sunday: 10 a.m.
Sunday: 5 p.m. (Spanish)



Jim Wildman, James Menard, Marla Nieves, Joel Franco, Bill Quesnal and Giuseppe Duran.

FLOAT, from page 1

of the Float Committee, and Jim Wildman, 2026 Parade President, during a special presentation honoring the students' achievement. Marla and Joel were each awarded a \$100 donation, framed portraits of their winning design, and the once-in-a-lifetime honor of riding in the tow truck that pulls the iconic Grand Colleen Float in the 73rd Holyoke St. Patrick's Parade.

According to a press release from the committee, their striking design features a large, intricate Celtic cross, set against a dramatic backdrop of Irish castles, beautifully capturing the history, elegance, and spirit of Ireland. The float will serve as the grand stage for the 2026 Grand Colleen and her Court as they make their way through the streets of Holyoke.

"This contest is one of my favorite traditions because it showcases the incredible talent right here in our community," said Jim Wildman, 2026 Parade President. "Marla and Joel's design tells a story of Irish pride and timeless tradition, and it will be a stunning centerpiece for our parade."

More than 150 stu-



Submitted photos

HHS Art Teacher, Giuseppe Duran, Joel Franco, Marla Nieves and Lori McKenna, HHS Principal.

dent designs were submitted this year, representing every school in Holyoke, making the selection process both competitive and inspiring.

"The level of creativity we saw this year was outstanding," said Bill Quesnel, Float Committee Chair. "Marla and Joel created a design that is not only visually powerful but also deeply respectful of Irish heritage. We can't wait to see it come to life."

Students from the Holyoke High School Dean Tech Campus will once again assist in constructing the float,

providing hands-on experience and reinforcing the parade's long-standing commitment to education and community involvement. Also attending the presentation were Holyoke High School Principal Lori McKenna and the students' art teacher, Giuseppe Duran, who have been instrumental in encouraging artistic excellence and student participation.

The 73rd Holyoke St. Patrick's Parade steps off on Sunday, March 22, 2026, following the 49th Holyoke St. Patrick's Road Race on Saturday, March 21, 2026.

Holyoke Community College hosts Black History Month events

HOLYOKE – Holyoke Community College is celebrating Black History Month in February with a series of events highlighting this year's national theme: "A Century of Black History Commemorations."

Black History Month events at HCC will continue on Wednesday, Feb. 18, with a Harambee Celebration from 11 a.m. to 12:15 p.m. in the HCC Campus Center. Harambee is a Swahili word that means "pull together" or "unite." It's a celebratory event that honors the contributions and achievements of Black people. HCC's event will feature food, music, as well as an open mic session.

On Thursday, Feb. 19, HCC's ALANA, El Centro, and SAMP programs will host a free screening of the

2017 Academy-Award winning movie *Moonlight* beginning a 1:30 p.m. in Room 301 of the Kittredge Center for Business and Workforce Development. *Moonlight*, which won three Oscars including Best Picture, follows a young African American man as he grapples with his identity, sexuality, and burgeoning adulthood.

On Tuesday, Feb. 22, HCC's ALANA Men in Motion program is setting up an on-campus barbershop that will combine free professional haircuts for students with honest dialogue about being success in college and beyond as a man of color in today's society. "Cuts, Confidence, and Colleague" runs from 1-4 p.m. in Room 233 of the Frost Building. The haircuts are being pro-

vided by Jose Dones, owner of the ParlorFaded Company barbershop in Holyoke.

HCC will close out its Black History Month calendar on Wednesday, Feb. 25, from 11 a.m. to 12:15 p.m., with "Lift Our Voices," a presentation by Vanessa Ford, associate director of the Community Music School of Springfield, who will discuss defining oneself and owning your story.

In addition, HCC's Marieb Adult Learner Success Center will host Black History Month-themed book readings, accompanied by milk and cookies, in the Parent Learning Center (Frost 269) for student parents and their children, on Wednesday, Feb. 11, at 10 a.m., and Monday, Feb. 23, at 11 a.m.

ZRIKE, from page 1

teachers and parents, and I am confident his leadership will strengthen education across our state and build on the great work from the last three years under Secretary Tutwiler's leadership," said Lieutenant Governor Kim Driscoll. "It's been a pleasure to work with Secretary Tutwiler, and I am beyond grateful for his commitment to the students across Massachusetts. He will be missed, but I wish him the very best in his next steps, and I know he will continue to positively shape the futures of the students of Massachusetts for years to come."

Zrike was elated to take on the appointment made by the governor.

"I'm deeply grateful to Governor Healey and Lieutenant Governor Driscoll for the opportunity to serve as Secretary of Education," said Dr. Zrike. "I look forward to continuing to work alongside stu-

dents, parents and educators across the state to ensure every student has the support and opportunities they need to succeed. I will miss working with Salem's students, educators, and families; the lessons they have taught me over the past six years will be central to how I lead as Secretary."

Commissioner of the Massachusetts Department of Early Education and Care Amy Kershaw will serve as Interim Secretary until Dr. Zrike assumes his position in March.

Since 2020, Dr. Zrike has served as Superintendent of Schools for Salem Public Schools, where he led academic recovery efforts, strengthened educator support, expanded student-centered programming, and deepened partnerships with families and the broader community. He oversaw significant gains in MCAS achievement, expanded full-day pre-kindergarten, reduced chronic absenteeism to below

pre-pandemic levels, and strengthened dual language and early college programming.

Dr. Zrike holds a Bachelor of Arts degree in history from Dartmouth College and a master's degree and a doctorate in education from the Harvard University Graduate School of Education. He is Cuban-American and speaks Spanish. He lives in Andover with his wife, who is an elementary school special education teacher in the Andover Public Schools, and his children who attend public schools.

The Executive Office of Education oversees and coordinates the work of the Department of Early Education and Care, the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (K-12), the Department of Higher Education and the state's 29 public colleges and universities to align programs, policies and resources across the entire public education system.

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BIRDS, from page 4

grosbeak in both Harvard and Groton, red crossbills in Townsend, Lapland longspur at Fitchburg Airport and in Ayer, chestnut-collared longspur at Fitchburg Airport, American kestrel in Groton, two Baltimore orioles in Groton, eastern Phoebe in Shirley, redpoll in Lancaster and a long-eared owl in Devens. Species seen three days before or after the actual count date and noted as such were chipping sparrow, brown-headed cowbird, Peregrine falcon and sandhill crane.

Bluebird

I received an email on Jan. 26 from Jeffrey Landry. He had a visit from a bluebird on Friday, Jan. 23. He thought it was either the male parent or one of its offspring from a previous summer. He said, "For several years I have called him, 'Sunshine' and he arrived at my feeder on a bright beautiful winter's afternoon and this uncalled for visit was icing on my day's cake."

He offered to share this bluebird story. He said, "I was sitting on my meditation cushion yesterday watching my breath emerge from a deep silence and then gently return back into it. There was no counting, no manipulation, only watching, only flow. After some time had passed, I opened my eyes because I felt I was being closely watched."

"I have a bird feeder right outside of my window and sure enough a male bluebird or one of his offspring from a previous summer, was

perched and staring directly at me. Two summers ago I named the parent bluebird, 'Sunshine' and last May he returned to the same nesting box in my front yard.

Quizzically, Sunshine leaned slightly forward. He was amazingly close."

"It was beautiful, glorious to see his blue rust colored body outlined by a background of white snow still clinging to frozen lilacs and tall trees. The sight of this sent ripples of love, that became currents of joy, to course through me."

"I felt a smile stretch a mile wide across my whole being. It was like being visited by a long absent friend. Within minutes this made me get up and fill another feeder with dried mealworms because bluebirds aren't seed eaters like many of the other birds that seek nourishment here. Like my breath, the mealworms disappeared into a well of silence. A contented peaceful silence that then took flight."

Evening grosbeaks

A Cummington resident sent a photo of evening grosbeaks at her feeder. She said they are part of a flock that come to visit the feeders often.

People may report a bird sighting or bird related experience by emailing mybackyard88@aol.com or edowner@turley.com or mailing to Barre Gazette, P.O. Box 448, Barre, MA 01005. The Palmer office has a new phone system and I will be getting an extension where messages may be left. I will publish the number as soon as it is set up.

NOTICE

ERRORS: Each advertiser is requested to check their advertisement the first time it appears. This paper will not be responsible for more than one corrected insertion, nor will be liable for any error in an advertisement to a greater extent than the cost of the space occupied by the item in the advertisement.

SPO RTS



The defense gets set up for a play.

Turley photos by Gregory A. Scibelli

Lancers spoil Senior Night



Devin Velez brings in a rebound.

HOLYOKE – Last Thursday night, Holyoke High School boys basketball was defeated by Longmeadow 69-52. The Knights got off to a slow start and were not able to come back despite a stronger second half. Holyoke got 20 points from Jordan King. Michael Medina scored 11 for the Knights, who are now 4-11 on the season.



Julian Fasoli enters the paint.



Thomas Daisy heads into the arc.



Nayan Tabin gets around an opponent.



Jordan King is pressured near the sideline.

Holyoke falls to Agawam

AGAWAM – Last Tuesday evening, Agawam High School girls basketball had one of its best performances of the year in a 51-28 win over visiting Holyoke. Isabella Laprise led the Brownies with a 15-point night while Sophia Laprise had 13 points and Carly Calabrese chipped in 12 points. Holyoke's Kyra Lippman had nine points while Genesis Rivera turned in seven points. Agawam is 6-11 while Holyoke fell to 4-13.



Turley photos by David Henry www.sweetdogphotos.com
Kyra Lippman takes a shot on the run.



Isabella Lachat attempts a free throw.



Sujelyz Peralta shoots for Holyoke.



Michaela Guzman one-hands a pass inside the paint.



Genesis Rivera heads down the court to start an offensive play.

A new look coming for Western Mass. hockey tournament this year

By Tim Peterson
Sports Correspondent

WEST SPRINGFIELD – The 2026 Western Massachusetts high school hockey tournament is scheduled to take place from Feb. 16-19.

Six of the seven Berry Division teams will qualify for the Class A tournament.

The Berry Division teams, who are looking to qualify for the Class A tournament, are Westfield, East

Longmeadow, Greenfield, Minnechaug Regional, Longmeadow, Ludlow, and West Springfield.

The Westfield Bombers are the two-time defending Class A champions. They defeated the Greenfield Green Wave, 7-3, in last year's championship match.

All six of the teams in the Fay-Wright Division will be competing in this year's Class B tournament.

Those six teams are Easthampton, McCann Tech,

Amherst, Taconic, Agawam, and Chicopee High School.

Agawam defeated Taconic, 6-1, in last year's Class B championship match.

The top two teams in Class A & B will automatically advance into the semifinals.

Prior to playing the semifinal round, the top-seeded team in Class A will be facing the second-seeded team in Class B. The top-seeded team in

Class B will also play the second-seeded Class A team.

Those games will boost the team's state power rankings.

The other four teams in each of the classes will be playing in the quarterfinals on February 16.

The higher-seeded teams will be hosting the quarterfinal matches.

Any of the quarterfinal games played at the Olympia Ice Center in West Springfield will be held

during the daytime. The game times on rink 1 will be 11am and 1:30pm. The games on rink 2 will be at noontime and 2:30pm.

The losers of the quarterfinals will be playing non-playoff games against each other.

The Class A semifinals are scheduled to be played at Olympia on Feb.17. The start times for those two games will be 11am and 1:30pm.

The Class B semifinals are scheduled for Olympia

on Feb.18. The start times for those two games will also be 11am and 1:30pm.

Both Western Mass. finals will be played on rink 1 at Olympia on Feb.19.

The Class B finals will be held at 5:30 p.m. followed by the Class A final at 8 pm.

The tickets prices for the semifinals and finals are \$8. Tickets are available through GoFan Only.

There is not a different price for students or senior citizens.

Springfield Thunderbirds suffer loss to Toronto Marlies

TORONTO, ON – The Springfield Thunderbirds (16-24-4-2) fell by a final score of 5-1 to the Toronto Marlies (23-15-4-3) on Saturday inside Coca-Cola Coliseum in what proved to be one of the nastiest games of the season.

Simmering tensions boiled over from the opening drop of the puck on this night, a result of an altercation in the clubs' prior meeting on Jan. 23. In that contest, Marshall Rifai of the

Marlies fought Springfield's Simon Robertsson and threw multiple punches at a vulnerable Robertsson when he was lying prone on the ice. Robertsson has yet to play in a game since.

On this day, Steve Ott chose to start Kale Kessy for the opening puck drop, and Kessy immediately dropped the mitts with Rifai, which lit the fuse for three separate fights between the foes in the opening 15 seconds, resulting in 37 combined penalty min-

utes, plus a game misconduct to Toronto defenseman Blake Smith.

Once the dust from the altercations subsided, the Marlies quickly threw their own punches on the score-sheet, beginning with Vinni Lettieri snapping a shot past Vadim Zherenko on the blocker side just 1:12 into the contest, giving Toronto the 1-0 advantage on a 4-on-4 goal.

Springfield's power play had a tough go to begin the

night, failing to connect on a three-minute power play from the remnants of Smith's penalty time. Despite outshooting Toronto 15-5 in the period, the T-Birds' deficit grew as Logan Shaw and Michael Pezzetta each beat Zherenko just 1:22 apart, and with just over five minutes left in the first, it was 3-0, and Georgi Romanov was summoned to replace Zherenko in the net.

Romanov more than did his part as the game moved to the second, as Romanov

denied 14 Toronto offerings in the period and helped Springfield kill off a Marlie power play in the process.

After nearly 120 minutes without a goal, former Marlie Calle Rosen finally got Springfield on the scoresheet with just 10 seconds left in the period, as he sneaked down the left wing and slammed a shot through Artur Akhtyamov on Springfield's 26th shot of the night to make it a 3-1 game into intermission.

However, the T-Birds did not have any offensive juice left in the tank in the third, and Romanov finally relented a power-play goal to Luke Haymes past the midpoint of the third, which restored Toronto's three-goal advantage, 4-1. Romanov finished his terrific night in relief with 26 saves on 27 shots. Bo Groulx would add an empty-netter with the T-Birds skating 5-on-4 with the extra skater to round out the scoring.

Public Notices

City of Holyoke Notice of Public Hearing

The Ordinance Committee of the Holyoke City Council as well as the Holyoke Planning Board will hold separate public hearings to hear a zoning ordinance text change proposal to make the necessary changes to clarify parking on residential properties and create an enforcement structure. Planning Board public hearing will be held on **Tuesday, February 24th, 2026 at 5:30 p.m. via www.zoom.us** Meeting ID: 870 5374 1582 or by call in at 1-646-558-8656 with same meeting ID. Ordinance Committee public hearing will be held on Tuesday, February 24th at 6:30pm at Holyoke City Hall 536 Dwight St and can be accessed remotely via zoom. Meeting ID 829 8811 9233 Meeting Passcode 749060 or by call in at 1-646-558-8656 with same Meeting ID and Passcode. To provide comments to the Planning Board, please contact Brianna Tejada at tejadab@holyoke.org. To provide comments to the Ordinance Committee, please contact City Council Admin Asst Jeffery Anderson-Burgos at Anderson-BurgosJ@holyoke.org or by phone 413-322-5525.

Planning Board Chair
Lauren Nile,
Ordinance Chair
Meg Magrath-Smith
02/06, 02/13/2026

Notice of Community Outreach Meeting

Notice is hereby given that Rise Holdings, Inc. will hold a Virtual Community Outreach Meeting on **March 2, 2026 at 5:00 PM** to discuss its efforts to add a medical marijuana treatment center license to its existing medical and adult-use cultivation and product manufacturing facilities at 28 Appleton Street in Holyoke. This project will not result in any site changes.

Virtual meeting information is at the end of this notice. This Virtual Community Outreach Meeting will be held in accordance with the Massachusetts Cannabis Control Commission's Administrative Order Allowing Virtual Web-Based Community Outreach Meetings and the applicable requirements set forth in M.G.L. ch. 94G and 935 CMR 500.000 et seq. A copy of the meeting presentation will be made available at least 24 hours prior to the meeting by emailing p.silverman@vicentellp.com.

Interested members of the community will have the opportunity to ask questions and receive answers from company representatives about the proposed facility and operations. Questions can be submitted in advance by emailing p.silverman@vicentellp.com or asked during the meeting.

Register for Zoom Webinar: https://us02web.zoom.us/j/802wbnar/register?WN_MiY80Dwp

Tpyp13JgsmwFeQ#/registration
02/13/2026

City of Holyoke Notice of Public Hearing

The Ordinance Committee of the Holyoke City Council as well as the Holyoke Planning Board will hold separate public hearings to hear a zoning ordinance text change proposal to add a definition of "Data Centers" as a use, and to clarify that this use is not allowable in any zoning district in the city. Planning Board public hearing will be held on **Tuesday, February 24th, 2026 at 5:30 p.m. via www.zoom.us** Meeting ID: 870 5374 1582 or by call in at 1-646-558-8656 with same meeting ID. Ordinance Committee public hearing will be held on Tuesday, February 24th at 6:30pm at Holyoke City Hall 536 Dwight St and can be accessed remotely via zoom. Meeting ID 829 8811 9233 Meeting Passcode 749060 or by call in at 1-646-558-8656 with same Meeting ID and Passcode. To provide comments to the Planning Board, please contact Brianna Tejada at tejadab@holyoke.org. To provide comments to the Ordinance Committee, please contact City Council Admin Asst Jeffery Anderson-Burgos at Anderson-BurgosJ@holyoke.org or by phone 413-322-5525.

Planning Board Chair
Lauren Niles,
Ordinance Chair
Meg Magrath-Smith
02/06, 02/13/2026

THE COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION – HIGHWAY DIVISION NOTICE OF A DESIGN PUBLIC HEARING

Project Description:
Westfield – Intersection Improvements at Southampton Road (Route 10/202), Servistar Industrial Way, and Barnes Airport Drive.

Project File No. 612600
Design Public Hearing will be held to present the design for the proposed project in Westfield, MA.

WHERE: Westfield City Hall City Council Chambers Second Floor 59 Court Street Westfield, MA 01085

WHEN: Wednesday, February 25, 2026 @ 7:00pm

PURPOSE: The purpose of this hearing is to provide the public with the opportunity to become fully acquainted with the proposed project. All views and comments submitted in response to the hearing will be reviewed and considered to the maximum extent possible.

PROPOSAL: The proposed project consists of intersection improvements at Southampton Road (Route 10/202), Servistar

Industrial Way, and Barnes Airport Drive. The intersection is proposed to be reconstructed as a roundabout. Bicyclists and pedestrians will be accommodated with an 8-foot wide shared-use path around the outside of the roundabout in accordance with applicable design guides.

A secure right-of-way is necessary for this project. Acquisitions in fee and permanent or temporary easements may be required. The State is responsible for acquiring all needed rights in private or public lands. MassDOT's policy concerning land acquisitions will be presented in the hearing.

Project inquiries, written statements and other exhibits regarding the proposed undertaking may be submitted to Carrie E. Lavallee, P.E., Chief Engineer, via e-mail to MassDOTProjectManagement@dot.state.ma.us or via US Mail to Suite 7550, 10 Park Plaza, Boston, MA 02116. Attention: Project Management, **Project File No. 612600.** Statements and exhibits intended for inclusion in the public hearing transcript must be emailed or postmarked no later than ten (10) business days (14 calendar days) after the hearing is hosted on the MassDOT website listed below.

This hearing is accessible to people with disabilities. MassDOT provides reasonable accommodations and/or language assistance free of charge upon request (e.g. interpreters in American Sign Language and languages other than English, live captioning, videos, assistive listening devices and alternate material formats), as available. For accommodation or language assistance, please contact MassDOT's Chief Diversity and Civil Rights Officer by phone (857-368-8580), TTD/TTY at (857) 266-0603, fax (857) 368-0602 or by email (MassDOT.CivilRights@dot.state.ma.us). Requests should be made as soon as possible and prior to the hearing, and for more difficult to arrange services including sign-language, CART or language translation or interpretation, requests should be made at least ten business days before the hearing.

In case of inclement weather, a cancellation announcement will be posted on the internet at <https://www.mass.gov/orgs/highway-division/events>.

JONATHAN GULLIVER
HIGHWAY ADMINISTRATOR
CARRIE E. LALLALEE, P.E.
CHIEF ENGINEER
02/13, 02/20/2026

Commonwealth of Massachusetts
The Trial Court
Probate and Family Court
Hampden Probate and Family Court
50 State Street
Springfield, MA 01103
(413)748-7758
Docket No.

HD24P1714EA Estate of: Liefia P Laptas Date of Death: 03/06/2024 CITATION ON PETITION FOR FORMAL ADJUDICATION

To all interested persons:
A Petition for S/A - Formal Probate of Will with Appointment of Personal Representative has been filed by **Robert M Laptas of Springfield, MA** requesting that the Court enter a formal Decree and Order and for such other relief as requested in the Petition.

The Petitioner requests that **Robert M Laptas of Springfield, MA** be appointed as Personal Representative(s) of said estate to serve **Without Surety** on the bond in **unsupervised administration**.

IMPORTANT NOTICE
You have the right to obtain a copy of the Petition from the Petitioner or at the Court. You have a right to object to this proceeding. To do so, you or your attorney must file a written appearance and objection at this Court before: 10:00 a.m. on the return day of 03/09/2026. This is NOT a hearing date, but a deadline by which you must file a written appearance and objection if you object to this proceeding. If you fail to file a timely written appearance and objection followed by an affidavit of objections within thirty (30) days of the return day, action may be taken without further notice to you.

UNSUPERVISED ADMINISTRATION UNDER THE MASSACHUSETTS UNIFORM PROBATE

A Personal Representative appointed under the MUPC in an unsupervised administration is not required to file an inventory or annual accounts with the Court. Persons interested in the estate are entitled to notice regarding the administration directly from the Personal Representative and may petition the Court in any matter relating to the estate, including the distribution of assets and expenses of administration.

WITNESS, Hon. **Claudine T. Stoudemire**, First Justice of this Court.

Date: February 09, 2026
Rosemary A Saccomani,
Register of Probate
02/13/2026

Commonwealth of Massachusetts
The Trial Court
Probate and Family Court
Hampden Probate and Family Court
50 State Street
Springfield, MA 01103
(413)748-7758
Docket No.
HD25P1689EA
In the matter of:

Terry Lee Noes TRUST CITATION

To all interested persons:
A Petition has been filed by: **Michael L. Noes of Westfield, MA** requesting Confirm that the 999 North Street Extension Trust is valid and that a copy is sufficient. Confirm that Michael Lee Noes is the Successor Trustee and sole Beneficiary of said Trust and has the authority to direct the sale of the property. All as more fully set forth in said petition.

You have the right to obtain a copy of the Petition from the Petitioner or at the Court. You have a right to object to this proceeding. To do so, you or your attorney must file a written appearance and objection at this Court before 10:00 a.m. on 03/09/2026.

This is NOT a hearing date, but a deadline by which you must file a written appearance and objection if you object to this proceeding. If you fail to file a timely written appearance and objection followed by an Affidavit of Objections within thirty (30) days of the return date, action may be taken without further notice to you.

Witness, **Claudine T. Stoudemire**, First Justice of this Court.

Date: May 11, 2023
Rosemary A Saccomani,
Register of Probate
02/13/2025

Commonwealth of Massachusetts The Trial Court Probate and Family Court Hampden Division Docket No. HD26P0260EA

Estate of:
Anthony F. Piaggi
Date of Death: 12/23/2025
INFORMAL PROBATE
PUBLICATION NOTICE

To all persons interested in the above captioned estate, by Petition of Petitioner **Maxyne Schneider, SSJ of Holyoke, MA** a Will has been admitted to informal probate.

Maxyne Schneider, SSJ of Holyoke, MA has been informally appointed as the Personal Representative of the estate to serve **without surety** on the bond.

The estate is being administered under informal procedure by the Personal Representative under the Massachusetts Uniform Probate Code without supervision by the Court. Inventory and accounts are not required to be filed with the Court, but interested parties are entitled to notice regarding the administration from the Personal Representative and can petition the Court in any matter relating to the estate, including distribution of assets and expenses of administration. Interested parties are entitled to petition the Court to institute

formal proceedings and to obtain orders terminating or restricting the powers of Personal Representatives appointed under informal procedure. A copy of the Petition and Will, if any, can be obtained from the Petitioner.
02/13/2026

Commonwealth of Massachusetts
The Trial Court
Probate and Family Court
Hampden Probate and Family Court
50 State Street
Springfield, MA 01103
(413)748-7758
Docket No.
HD26P0271EA
Estate of:
Augustin S Santiago
Also known as:
Augustin Santiago
Date of Death: 06/11/2014
CITATION ON PETITION FOR FORMAL ADJUDICATION

To all interested persons:
A Petition for **Late and Limited Formal Testacy and/or Appointment** has been filed by **Ramonita Santiago of Holyoke, MA** requesting that the Court enter a formal Decree and Order and for such other relief as requested in the Petition.

IMPORTANT NOTICE
You have the right to obtain a copy of the Petition from the Petitioner or at the Court. You have a right to object to this proceeding. To do so, you or your attorney must file a written appearance and objection at this Court before: 10:00 a.m. on the return day of 03/09/2026. This is NOT a hearing date, but a deadline by which you must file a written appearance and objection if you object to this proceeding. If you fail to file a timely written appearance and objection followed by an affidavit of objections within thirty (30) days of the return day, action may be taken without further notice to you.

UNSUPERVISED ADMINISTRATION UNDER THE MASSACHUSETTS UNIFORM PROBATE

A Personal Representative appointed under the MUPC in an unsupervised administration is not required to file an inventory or annual accounts with the Court. Persons interested in the estate are entitled to notice regarding the administration directly from the Personal Representative and may petition the Court in any matter relating to the estate, including the distribution of assets and expenses of administration.

WITNESS, Hon. **Claudine T. Stoudemire**, First Justice of this Court.

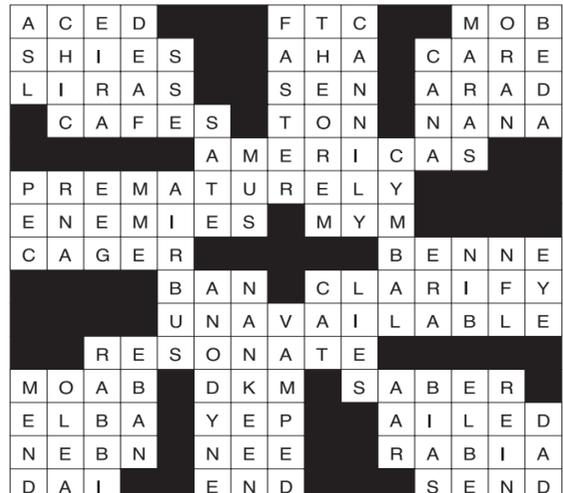
Date: February 11, 2026
Rosemary A Saccomani,
Register of Probate
02/13/2026

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- 2 Access archives and digital tear sheets by newspaper title.
- 3 Find a quick link to the state of Massachusetts' public notice web site to search all notices in Massachusetts newspapers.

Public notice deadlines are Friday at 3 p.m.

visit www.publicnotices.turley.com



The Holyoke Sun

OBITUARY POLICY

Turley Publications offers two types of obituaries.

One is a free, brief **Death Notice** listing the name of deceased, date of death and funeral date and place.

The other is a **Paid Obituary**, costing \$275, which allows families to publish extended death notice information of their own choice and may include a photograph. **Death Notices & Paid Obituaries** should be submitted through a funeral home to: obits@turley.com.

Exceptions will be made only when the family provides a death certificate and must be pre-paid.

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All real estate advertising in this newspaper is subject to the Federal Fair Housing Act of 1968, which makes it illegal to advertise any preference, limitation or discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, handicap, familial status (number of children and or pregnancy), national origin, ancestry, age, marital status, or any intention to make any such preference, limitation or discrimination.

This newspaper will not knowingly accept any advertising for real estate that is in violation of the law. Our readers are hereby informed that all dwellings advertising in this newspaper are available on an equal opportunity basis. To complain about discrimination call The Department of Housing and Urban Development "HUD" toll-free at 1-800-669-9777. For the N.E. area, call HUD at 617-565-5308. The toll free number for the hearing impaired is 1-800-927-9275.



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Becoming Initiative hosts She Decides Women Empowerment Brunch March 1

HOLYOKE – At a time when women are balancing rising economic pressure, caregiving responsibilities, and increasing burnout, The Becoming Initiative is bringing women together for something many say they rarely experience. A moment to pause, reconnect, and be supported.

On Sunday, March 1, The Becoming Initiative will host the She Decides Women's Empowerment Brunch at Wyckoff Country Club in Holyoke.

The event is expected to serve more than 200 women from across Western Massachusetts and will launch a yearlong

series of empowerment and personal development programming.

She Decides was created in response to what organizers describe as a growing need for spaces that support women beyond the workplace.

Many women are leading families, contributing to

the workforce, and holding communities together while quietly carrying emotional, financial, and personal burdens. The brunch creates a space where women can be seen, supported, and reminded of their value.

Funds raised will directly support workshops, community gatherings, and

leadership focused initiatives throughout the year.

Women attending the brunch will participate in guided conversation, storytelling, and moments of reflection designed to encourage personal growth and connection.

Organizers say the goal is not just inspiration, but

impact that extends long after the event ends. Tickets and sponsorship opportunities are now available.

For more information about the She Decides Women's Empowerment Brunch or partnership opportunities, visit: <https://www.thebecominginitiative.org/events>.

MFMA, from page 1

established department will be led by a Chief Administrative and Financial Officer (CAFO), a position in which the mayor revealed that is now open for recruitment across the Commonwealth, and will also include the consolidation of the city treasurer, collector positions taking shape, along with the appointment of a new comptroller, finance analyst, and auditor being brought on to develop a key shift to to strengthen accountability and oversight balance between the Executive and Legislative branches of our government," Garcia admitted.

While at the podium, Garcia opened by pivoting his focus to expressing a point of gratitude to declare this was the 'first step' toward achieving good governance, and helping restructure the financial integrity of the community.

"I'm proud to announce the Holyoke City Council has finally passed the municipal finance modernization act," the mayor said. "It's something I campaigned on when I ran for mayor and won. Four years later, here we are," Garcia said. "This landmark legislation not only represents a major step forward in how we handle the city's finances, but it also consolidates scattered responsibilities, strengthens internal

controls, reduces liabilities, and will improve efficiency, and ensure we make informed decisions that will continue to benefit our community and the voter-appointed shift that transpired this past election," Garcia added.

Once the mayor concluded his thoughts, Magrath-Smith took to the podium to discuss the importance of this law being passed, as she noted it's been a long time coming, while quelling the lingering concern brought forth by the DLS, which has lingered for more than 20 years, as mentioned prior.

"This past vote matters because it closes a loop that has been open for decades," Magrath-Smith said. "For more than 20 years, across four mayors, and multiple councils, the city of Holyoke has been told the same thing by DLS, financial structure fragmented, accountability was unclear and responsibility was shared in ways that made oversight nearly impossible." Magrath-Smith then noted that the recommendation among all parties remained the same, which was predicated on the conscience decision to "consolidate, modernize, and tighten internal controls, all elements that the Municipal Finance Modernization Act achieves," Magrath-Smith added. She also revealed that the new law will align budgeting, accounting, treasury, collections,

and procurement all under one coordinated team, led by Garcia. Magrath-Smith then noted that the value of each decision going forward will be integral in restoring the foundation and partnership between local government municipalities and the public's trust.

"This is about systems. Our residents expect us to run a fully functional government, to safeguard public dollars, and to plan responsibly for the future; that is our job. And in this vote, the council delivered, but let it be known our work is not finished, the council's next role is to advance the necessary charter changes, oversee a careful and transparent transition and continue our responsibility for strong legislation oversight, and other words this vote marks a turning point, and there is a lot of work to be done, and we are committed to doing it," Magrath-Smith said.

Casey offered a bit more insight into how this law came into focus.

"It's an amazing feeling to know this has been finally passed, and this is something the state has been recommending for close to 20 years, and it's attempted a number of times over that period, unsuccessfully," Casey noted. He then provided an ode of gratitude to the leadership of City Council President Tessa-Murphy Romboletti, whom Casey revealed was

the MFMA was first brought to the chamber floor during her first-ever council meeting, which got things in motion.

"It started with the removal of treasurer from being an elected position, and in terms of some of the issues we have encountered these past few years, we are happy to report we are making great strides recently," Casey said. "I want to reveal that the state appointed Clifton Larson Allen to come in and assist with making progress on our backlog of audits, and it's something that the mayor and I welcomed with open arms." He then confirmed that the 2023 audit has been completed, and provided an update that officials among his staff in the finance department expect to have the 2024 and 2025 audits wrapped up by the end of the current fiscal year. "In the grand scheme of things, this will get us back on track, which is the most important thing, so that whoever is the new treasurer and collector is not left with the same mess that I inherited, and the same mess that previous treasurers also inherited," Casey said. "This will all be done by leveraging technology, reorganizing staff positions, and utilizing additional support."

Casey also revealed that the next morning, after the vote, he and the finance team met to draft and imple-

ment new plans centered on the priority of cross-training staff and organizing staff to be ready for the new changes set to take place in the coming months. He also highlighted the shift in perception that is set to take place with the implementation of this new law.

"The public will start seeing a city government that is functioning in the 21st century, and the most visible thing they will be able to see is when free cash is certified later this fiscal year, which will be two years worth of free cash, which should be a very healthy amount of free cash for the mayor and council to appropriate as they see fit, and in accordance with the new financial policies that were codified, two years ago by the council," Casey said. "The most visible thing residents will see is they won't hear about this in the press any longer, and they will see everything being done like clockwork." Casey then added that it's necessary to stress the importance of ensuring that the current perception of Holyoke being a great place to live, work, and play remains intact, because with this new shift, the mayor's office can now dedicate more time to public projects.

"When they start seeing better parks to play in, seeing all the other things that the mayor will be able to focus on because he doesn't have

to wear three different hats," Casey said. "It's a main reason why we are going to have a CAFO in place to help oversee the finances of the city, and understanding were making strategic investments now to ensure this doesn't happen in the future, rather than it piling up, every five or so years in a different way."

Garcia then closed the meeting by citing "we hope with these changes that we can better protect our resources and maximize our revenue potential, so that we can invest in the things that are important to this community. We want to invest in our schools, our infrastructure, and public safety, but it's difficult to do that when we have all of these internal inefficiencies that create issues, and don't necessarily allow you to be adequate in response to community needs," the mayor said.

Beyond the immediate financial changes, Garcia revealed that city officials are also looking at other departments for potential reform, such as restructuring the Department of Public Works (DPW), and addressing zoning and permitting processes in an attempt of being 'business friendly' which falls under the umbrella of a comprehensive planning document that was driven largely by a reform of the city council, which he noted will be released to the public shortly.



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