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North Central MASSACHUSETTS

CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

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For Editorial & Advertising

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About the Cover:

The cover design was selected to highlight One North Central: A Roadmap for Regional Prosperity. This action plan was developed after an intensive eighteen-month process to inspire the region's public and private sectors to work together in building an economically sound and prosperous region capable of benefiting from future growth and development. Learn more about the plan on page 14.

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Need health insurance for your small business? The North Central Massachusetts Chamber of Commerce remains committed to helping our members to access the best health insurance plans available and to make sure that your health insurance needs are met. As always, we are just a phone call or email or visit to our office away from being able to help you decide what health insurance plan best meets your needs. Contact the Chamber at 978.353.7600 ext. 227 for information on available plans and to receive a quote.

RACHEL LOPEZ TO CHAIR THE CHAMBER'S BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Rachel Lopez, president of Resource Management, Inc. (RMI) has been elected Chair of the North Central Massachusetts Chamber of Commerce Board of Directors for 2021-2022. The announcement was made at the chamber's Annual Meeting on June 10, 2021.

Headquartered in Fitchburg, RMI was established in 1995 as a PEO and full-service HR out servicing firm. Its



Rachel Lopez.

experts offer a wide range of HR services including payroll processing and taxes, compliance guidance and paperwork, workers' comp insurance and safety

“I am excited to continue David Duval's efforts and make sure the Chamber remains a strong resource for the local business community.” — Rachel Lopez

management, HR and personnel administration, and benefits administration. Since its founding, RMI has grown into one of the largest Hispanic-owned businesses in the nation. It operates today in thirty-nine states and has over 6,000 employees.

Lopez grew up in the family owned business, starting out as its first employee when she was just 15. She started in payroll and went on to work in every department within the company and eventually managed the sales and product development department before being promoted to President of the company in 2017.

She succeeds David A. Duval, president and founder of Protective Services, Inc. who now moves to the position of Immediate Past Chair of the Board of Directors.

“It is an honor and privilege to have been

elected Chair of this dynamic and respected organization that plays such an important role in North Central Massachusetts,” expressed Ms. Lopez, “I am excited to continue David Duval's efforts and make sure the Chamber remains a strong resource for the local business community.”

In the same election, Christopher McCarthy, president & COO of Fidelity Bank in Leominster was elected Vice-Chair and director Cheryl Molebash, general manager of Dixie Consumer Products in Leominster was elected to the position of Treasurer. Board members elected for a new three-year term were Allie Catlin, co-owner of Smith's Country Cheese in Winchendon; Rodrigo Souza, owner of Comeketo Brazilian Steakhouse in Leominster; and John Zarrella president of Research Results, Inc. in Fitchburg. ♦

North Central MASSACHUSETTS CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

NEWLY ELECTED BOARD MEMBERS
THREE-YEAR TERMS

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Owner
Smith's Country Cheese

Rodrigo Souza
Owner
Comeketo Brazilian Steakhouse

John Zarrella
President/Founder
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CHAMBER JOINS NEW STATEWIDE SKILLS COALITION

The Chamber has joined with other business groups from across the state in the new Massachusetts Business Coalition on Skills (MBCS). This new statewide coalition is advocating for policies that develop the skills of our current and future workforce.

The Coalition formed because there are two sides to the skills gap and both can drag job and economic growth. A 2019 survey by the Massachusetts Business Alliance for Education (MBAE) found that 73% of employers find it “somewhat difficult” or “very difficult” to find people with the right skills to fill open



Students on a tour of a local manufacturer organized by North Central Massachusetts Chamber of Commerce.

positions. For workers, new skills are the springboard to job opportunities and growth: a 2016 Pew

Research Center survey found that 87% of working adults believe developing new skills throughout

their work life will be “essential” or “important” to career success.

The Coalition has developed recommendations aimed to leverage the state’s entire workforce, not just graduates with 4-year degrees, by creating a statewide standard of essential skills, expanding access to career and vocational technical education (CVTE), and incentivizing employers to provide ongoing skills training to employees. Visit NorthCentralMass.com for more information or contact Travis Condon at 978.353.7600 ext. 224. ◇

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GOVERNMENT AFFAIRS UPDATE

As of this writing, President Biden is working to garner support for two major plans, a \$2.3T infrastructure bill dubbed the American Jobs Plan announced in March and a \$1.8T American Families Plan. The American Families Plan, if approved, would include: a national paid family and medical leave benefit similar to Massachusetts that would include a 12 year ramp up period; over \$200B for two years of pre-K for every student; \$109B for two years of community college, and grants to expand access for high-demand programs. The infrastructure plan would include: \$479B for transportation infrastructure improvements to roads, bridges, public transit, Amtrak, electric vehicle production, and airports. The plan aims to spur job creation through projects designed to improve drinking water, update the electric grid, expand broadband access, and modernize buildings. It would also provide incentives for companies that manufacture products within the country, and calls for higher wages, with the President pitching a \$15 minimum wage. Biden's plans call for increasing the income tax rate for the top 1 percent of earners from 37 percent to 39.6 percent, along with higher tax rates on capital gains and dividends on individuals earning more than \$1M, and eliminating other



Governor Baker authorizes \$7B in borrowing in an effort to stabilize the state's trust fund. (Photo taken by State House News Service.)

“The state is set to receive billions from the federal government in recovery funds and the Chamber has joined...in advocating that these funds be put into the UI Trust fund...”

corporate tax provisions.

At the state level, Governor Baker set an end date of June 15, 2021 for the Commonwealth's State of Emergency. The Baker-Polito administration and state legislature each continue to work on a solution for the unemployment solvency issue facing the state and impacting small businesses across the Commonwealth. On April 1, Governor Baker authorized \$7B in borrowing in an effort to stabilize the state's trust fund. This law also limited the average rate hike to 18.5 percent; however,

businesses are still seeing dramatic increases, even ones who kept full staff throughout the pandemic. The state is set to receive billions from the federal government in recovery funds and the Chamber has joined with other business groups and most of the members of our legislative delegation in advocating that those funds be put into the UI trust fund to ease the burden on the business community. In other advocacy efforts, the Chamber was also part of a joint letter sent out in March to Energy Secretary Theoharides

on the Clean Energy and Climate Plan for 2030 and the need for a measured approach using available resources and we testified at a transportation hearing in support of Phase II of the Twin Cities Rail Trail project in the region.

While the State House continues to operate largely remotely, the state budget is operating on a normal timeline as opposed to the current fiscal year. The Governor released his \$45.6B proposed budget in January. The House released their \$47.716B proposed budget on April 14, while the Senate released their \$47.6B proposed budget on May 11. Once the Senate debate wraps up, the budgets will head to conference committee where the two branches work out their differences on the budget. The Chamber has been working closely with members of the region's delegation and several coalitions throughout the budget process to advocate for economic development priorities, support for the workforce development pipeline, and increases to funding that will aid in economic recovery for North Central Massachusetts and help the industries hit hardest by the pandemic.

If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact Travis Condon, the Chamber's public affairs manager, at 978.353.7600, ext. 224; or via email at tcondon@northcentralmass.com. ♦

CHAMBER WELCOMES GOULET & MORENO TO ITS PROFESSIONAL STAFF

The Chamber is pleased to announce that Lauren Goulet has returned to its professional staff in the position of Operations Manager. The Chamber is also pleased to welcome Desiree Moreno to its professional staff in the position of Business Development Manager.

Ms. Goulet had previously served for over ten years as the Office Manager for the Chamber before leaving in 2020 for a new professional opportunity. In her new expanded role, Ms. Goulet will be responsible for day to day operations of the Chamber and its affiliate organizations, including oversight of the Chamber building, database management, grant administration,



Lauren Goulet.



Desiree Moreno.

“ She has roots in the community, growing up locally and currently residing in Fitchburg.”

and providing support around governance and event planning.

Ms. Moreno will be responsible for leading the Chamber’s member recruitment and retention efforts. She joins the

Chamber from Monster.com where she worked as a Business Development Representative. She has roots in the community, growing up locally and currently residing in Fitchburg. Her family

owns and operates a local small business which is also a Chamber member and successful client of the Chamber’s economic development arm, the North Central Massachusetts Development Corporation. In addition to her experience at Monster.com, she has also worked at her family’s business part-time. She holds a Bachelor’s Degree in Business Management from Salem State University and volunteers her time coaching softball.

Members can contact Desiree Moreno at 978.353.7600 ext. 239 or via email at dmoreno@northcentralmass.com and Lauren Goulet at 978.353.7600 ext. 222 or via email at lgoulet@northcentralmass.com. ♦

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CHAMBER UPDATES

NEW LOANS:

The Chamber's economic Development arm – the North Central Massachusetts Development Corporation (NCMDC) - has approved fourteen micro-loans since October for a total of \$670,250. The loans were made to a mix of start-up and existing small businesses that were unable to secure financing from traditional sources. The businesses included a gift shop, a landscaper, a dentist and several new restaurants in the region. The loans helped create five new jobs and saved fifty-nine jobs.



Tacos Tequilas.

PPP LOANS:

In addition to our traditional micro-loans, our economic development team also provided PPP loans in May when the SBA closed the PPP portal for new applications from banks. As a certified community financial institution, the NCMDC was still able to process PPP requests. Thanks to referrals from local banks and other members, we were able to provide over 60 PPP loans to local small businesses, totaling over \$800,000. The average PPP loan was just \$13,454.57.

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE:

During the last quarter, our team provided over



350 hours of direct technical assistance to small businesses. Most of that was delivered via phone and ZOOM and focused on providing clients with information on the SBA Cares Act payments as well as continued updates on resources available, including PPP, EIDL, ADVANCE, grants and Restaurant Revitalization Fund through the SBA.

MINI-GRANTS:

The Chamber, in partnership with New Vue Communities, is exploring developing a new mini-grant program to help vulnerable small businesses in the region. The objective of these grants is to bridge gaps and disparities by aiding businesses in underserved populations who may have missed out on other COVID-19 relief opportunities. The grant program is funded through a Regional Recovery Grant that we received to support recovery efforts.

ANNUAL SCHOLARSHIPS:

This year, due to the pandemic, we will not be holding our popular annual scholarship breakfast, but instead will be honoring our scholarship recipients with a small ceremony in June at the Chamber. We

will be inviting the 26 scholarship recipients and our scholarship presenters to present the awards. Thank you to all the members who help support the scholarship program!

SOLAR:

From its inception in August 2014 through April 2021 the Chamber's solar energy program has produced 9,618,666 kWh of Net Metering Credits to the manufacturers participating in the program. Total value of these credits is \$2,069,337 and the collective savings to participants totals \$1,758,936.

JOBS BOARD:

Since its launch in early 2020, there have been nearly 5,000 job opportunities posted on the WorkNorthCentral.com online jobs board. Postings have been growing over time and we are currently averaging between 1,300-1,500 active jobs listed on the site each month. The jobs board is now the 4th most visited page on our website, and the jobs button on the Chamber website is clicked on more than any other item on the homepage. As a reminder, there is NO-COST for members to post jobs and there is no limit on the number that can be posted. Members at

the Business Growth level and above also receive premium job postings, which are highlighted, promoted at the top of the jobs board and published on the Google Jobs Network. Feel free to post the jobs yourself or email your jobs to Sabbra Reyes at sreyes@northcentralmass.com and we will post it for you.

JOBS FAIR:

In a related effort, plans are underway for a large multi-day regional jobs fair in the Fall. The jobs fair was one of the recommendations highlighted in the new regional economic development plan. The Chamber is partnering with Mount Wachusett Community College, Fitchburg State University, the Workforce Investment Board and the North Central Massachusetts Career Center on the event. We plan to heavily market the event to job seekers in an effort to help local employers with the challenges they are seeing around recruiting workers. For more information or to reserve a booth, please contact Kat Deal, Programs & Events Manager, at kdeal@northcentralmass.com.

COVID-19 IMPACT SURVEY:

The results of our third COVID-19 Business Impact Survey are available online at www.NorthCentralMass.com. Thank you to all the members that completed the survey which provided critical information on the

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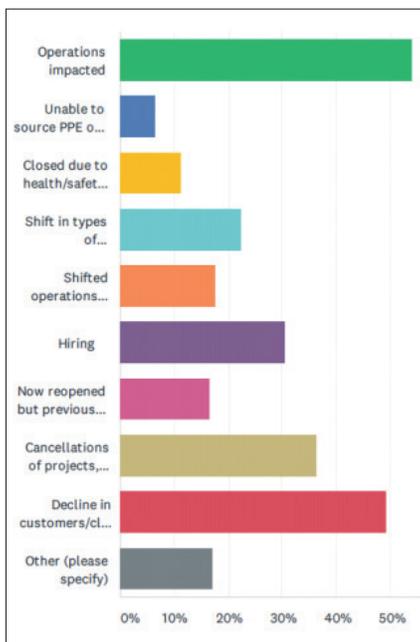
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COVID-19 Impact Survey. Graph answers the question: "If you are fully or partially open, how has your business been impacted by the Covid-19 outbreak?"

continuing impact of the pandemic on local businesses. The survey was conducted online between April 1, 2021 and April 30, 2021 in both English and Spanish.

MEMBER DISCOUNTS:

We have recently revamped our member discounts page on the website. We are hoping to increase the use of the member to member discount

program among members. If you would like to offer a member discount, please contact Lauren Goulet, Operations Manager, at lgoulet@northcentralmass.com.

MARKETING AWARDS:

The Chamber was selected for two national awards recently for our digital marketing efforts. The Chamber received a Gold Hermes Creative Award from the Association of Marketing and Communication Professionals and a 2021 Award of Distinction from the Academy of



Gold Hermes Award.

Interactive & Visual Arts Communicator Awards competition. ◇

FEATURED MEMBER PROFILE

HEYWOOD HOSPITAL



Heywood Hospital worker talks to patient on telehealth call.

Heywood Hospital is a non-profit community-owned hospital licensed for 134 beds, located in Gardner. The medical staff includes 200 active, courtesy, and consulting physicians in primary care and a multitude of specialties. Heywood Hospital is a member of Heywood Healthcare, an independent community-owned health system which includes Heywood Hospital, Athol Hospital, the Quabbin Retreat and Heywood Medical Group.

“What makes the hospital unique is its commitment to ensuring the health of the community in and outside its walls,” said Winfield Brown, President and Chief Executive Officer of Heywood Healthcare. In some ways, Heywood Hospital is a traditional hospital providing emergency, surgical and inpatient care, however our approach to health goes beyond doctor’s appointments, tests and procedures. “We focus on the social determinants of health and how we set up our communities to be healthier. For example, we look at the needs of our youth, identify challenges and barriers, and strategize in partnership with the schools, law enforcement and local organizations to develop programs and

services to strengthen the network of resources,” Brown said.

Dawn Casavant, vice president of external affairs and philanthropy, said Heywood’s approach is to provide access to supports in natural settings, meeting people where they learn, live and play, at school or community settings, for example.

“What makes us unique is the level of community engagement and the willingness of partner organizations, donors, legislators and providers coming together to address prevalent community health issues such as,” childhood trauma, food insecurity or access to behavioral health services and other community-based supports, she said. The hospital and its Board are committed to addressing needs specific to North Central Massachusetts, such as access to needed behavioral health and addiction treatment services. Heywood Hospital operates an inpatient psychiatric unit and a geriatric psychiatric unit, as well as a partial hospitalization program, day treatment and outpatient counseling services, in addition to robust telebehavioral health programming.

The hospital is dealing with the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, treating patients and

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“What makes us unique is the level of community engagement and the willingness of partner organizations, donors, legislators and providers coming together...”

— Dawn Casavant

providing free testing. In November 2020, the hospital tested 6,600 individuals, and has currently tested over 78,000. On average the hospital has been testing 200 people a day seven days a week by appointment only.

The pandemic has also led to an increase in the need for behavioral health and addiction services, they said. It’s also created a need to remind the community to maintain regular preventative care such as mammograms, colonoscopies, immunizations and well-child visits.

Looking toward the future, the hospital will continue to expand its primary and specialty care into the community but will also be making improvements on campus.

The hospital is in the midst of two major projects – one that will make the hospital more energy efficient and another that will improve its surgical space. The project calls for

six new operating rooms, which will provide state-of-the-art equipment and the space to accommodate growth in areas such as orthopedics, general surgery, gastroenterology, plastics, geriatrics and weight loss surgery.

Brown said the hospital takes great prides in its focus on quality and safety.

Heywood Hospital was named to Newsweek’s 2020 and 2021 list of Best Maternity Care Hospitals.

Heywood also recently received an ‘A’ in the fall 2020 and spring 2021 Leapfrog Hospital Safety Grade rating, a distinction recognizing its achievements protecting patients from harm and providing safer health care.

“This should reassure the community that we provide exceptional care close to home,” Brown said.

Heywood Hospital is located at 242 Green St. in Gardner. It can be reached at 978.632.3420 and www.heywood.org. ♦

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For more information on sponsorship opportunities, please contact Kat Deal, Programs & Events Manager at 978.353.7600 ext. 235.



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CHAMBER WELCOMES BEMIS AS NEWEST REGIONAL LEADER

The Chamber is pleased to announce the addition of Bemis Associates Inc. as its newest Regional Leader level member.

Bemis Associates, Inc. is a manufacturer of thermoplastic adhesives, coatings, tapes and specialty film products for bonding. Headquartered in Shirley, MA, the company is one of the world's leading bonding innovation experts and has partnered with global brands from a diverse set of industries including performance sportswear, technical outerwear, intimate apparel, footwear, consumer electronics, and industrial applications.



Team at Bemis Associates Inc.

Bemis is one of an elite group of prominent businesses and organizations to hold the prestigious position of Regional Leader level member. Regional Leaders make a vital commitment to the economic development of the region

through their enhanced investment in the Chamber. They also serve as key advisors and maintain a close relationship to the organization. Their support helps shape the future of North Central Massachusetts by providing resources and the benefits

of their advice and wisdom.

Michael Johansen, President of Bemis Associates, Inc., explained, "The North Central Massachusetts Chamber is an outstanding organization with a clear record of advancing economic opportunity in the region. We like their work supporting businesses of all sizes in North Central Massachusetts. And, in particular, the Chamber's recognition of the key role manufacturing plays in our local economy is very appealing. Bemis is pleased to partner with them and help further their mission." ◇



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COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP INSTITUTE

NOW ACCEPTING APPLICATIONS FOR THE CLASS OF 2022



Community Leadership Institute.

The Community Leadership Institute is now accepting applications for the 2021-2022 program year. The Community Leadership Institute began in 1988, known then as Leadership North Central. Over the last 25 years, more than 275 participants have graduated

from the Institute and become leaders in their communities, with over 100 in the last five years. Participants for the Institute are sponsored by their business and are seen as leaders or potential leaders within that company. The best leaders know that training

their successors to be competent, knowledgeable and well-connected community leaders is crucial for the North Central Massachusetts community's economic vitality. The Community Leadership Institute was developed to support the access to region's many

organizations, industries and business leaders as part of the succession plan not only for individual businesses but for the community at large in this 21st century technology and knowledge-driven economy.

Deadline to apply for the 2021-2022 Community Leadership Institute is August 27, 2021.

Please contact Kat Deal with questions regarding the Community Leadership Institute at 978.353.7600 ext. 235 or by email kdeal@northcentralmass.com. ♦

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ONE NORTH CENTRAL: A Roadmap for Regional Prosperity

NEW REGIONAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PLAN
SETS A PATH FORWARD FOR GROWTH,
OPPORTUNITIES IN NORTH CENTRAL MASSACHUSETTS

In the 1990s, the North Central Massachusetts Chamber of Commerce led a major community and business-based planning effort that resulted in a bold strategy to advance the economy of the region into the future. The regional plan, which led to the implementation of several economic development programs across the region, resulted in great success.

Following implementation of the plan, the region continues to benefit from a strong economic impact of tourist dollars and manufacturing jobs, while also supporting existing businesses with lending programs, and new start-ups with financial and business assistance.

In the past 25 years since the previous plan was

developed, North Central Massachusetts has certainly changed! Our region now offers opportunities where one can open a small business in an old mill, build furniture in a state-of-the-art manufacturing facility, learn to design a video game in a tech lab, or even visit a farm or orchard for fresh produce. We've seen the region's 26 cities and towns and the former Fort Devens experience their own economic challenges and opportunities. But these communities have also come out of these scenarios stronger than before due to the combined strength of our region where the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.

In early 2020, the Chamber and its affiliate

“A central tenant of this plan is **growing our region from within.**”

— Roy M. Nascimento

organizations hired RKG Associates, a national economic development consulting firm, to help us develop a new Regional Economic Development Plan and learn how the region should position itself over the next ten to fifteen years. With the collaboration of regional business and community leaders, dignitaries, the boards of directors at the Chamber, the North Central Massachusetts Development Corporation and Visit North Central

Massachusetts, three steps were identified as the region looks toward success through the year 2035: defining goals, assessing and defining market opportunities, and identifying recommendations and actions to advance economic development. By utilizing data and stakeholder input, the new Regional Economic Development Plan revealed several strengths and

Continued on page 15



SWOT

Summary Diagram

Strengths

- Lower real estate pricing & cost of living.
- Availability of land.
- Variety of community types.
- Accessibility & centralized location.
- Established economic development & tourism coalitions.

Opportunities

- Devens as a regional center of economic development.
- Downtowns as attractive mixed-use nodes.
- Legacy industries pivoting to, or adding, higher tech uses.
- Retain retirees with housing & amenities.
- Locate jobs & homes near transit stations.

Weaknesses

- Automobile access is essential.
- Age of the building stock.
- Relative lack of housing diversity.
- A common regional voice.

Threats

- COVID-19.
- Macroeconomics & politics.
- Aging population & workforce.
- A common regional voice.

S.W.O.T summary diagram; Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats.

Continued from page 14

opportunities for which the region can compete for businesses, employees and residents. It also identified weaknesses and threats for the region to acknowledge and respond to effectively in the months and years ahead.

“A central tenant of this plan is growing our region from within,” said Roy M. Nascimento, President & CEO, North Central Massachusetts Chamber of Commerce. “The goals and recommendations included in the plan are structured to help the region come together and provide opportunities for each city and town across our region to succeed.”

The plan analyzed the demographic, economic and real estate markets, as well as target industries, and identified five themes. These themes include leveraging the region’s industry and business growth opportunities, enhancing regional equity through talent and workforce development and infrastructure for economic potential,

Continued on page 16

TOP 50

Skills in Worcester County, MA, 2020

EMSI

1	Accounting	26	Selling Techniques
2	Project Management	27	Marketing Strategies
3	Strategic Management	28	SQL (Programming Language)
4	Sales Management	29	New Business Development
5	Microsoft Access	30	Quality Management
6	Event Planning	31	Adobe Photoshop
7	Business Process Improvement	32	Restaurant Operation
8	Customer Satisfaction	33	Inventory Control
9	Customer Relationship Management	34	Fundraising
10	Billing	35	Multitasking
11	Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation (CPR)	36	Project Planning
12	Purchasing	37	Java (Programming Language)
13	Budgeting	38	Packaging and Labeling
14	Merchandising	39	HyperText Markup Language (HTML)
15	Auditing	40	Public Relations
16	Operations Development	41	Curriculum Development
17	Business Development	42	Financial Statements
18	Accounts Payable	43	Forecasting
19	Account Management	44	Lean Manufacturing
20	New Product Development	45	Business Analysis
21	Office Management	46	C (Programming Language)
22	Inventory Management	47	Software Engineering
23	Data Warehousing	48	Continuous Improvement Process
24	Accounts Receivable	49	Technical Support
25	Nursing	50	Warehousing

Table listing the top 50 job skills in Worcester County, Massachusetts, in 2020.

Tourism-Friendly JOBS & WAGES, 2019

EMSI

SECTOR	2019 JOBS	2019 AVERAGE ANNUAL WAGE
RETAIL		
Grocery Stores	2,457	\$23,813
Department Stores	1,254	\$23,509
Health & Personal Care Stores	675	\$40,999
General Merchandise Stores	653	\$25,078
FOOD & BEVERAGES		
Restaurants	6,327	\$20,918
Bars & Taprooms	156	\$15,133
ACCOMMODATION		
Hotels & Motels	464	\$31,176
RV Parks & Campgrounds	22	\$38,406
ARTS, CULTURE & ENTERTAINMENT		
Fitness & Recreational Sports Centers	290	\$19,095
Gold Courses & Country Clubs	273	\$26,523
Skiing Facilities	139	\$12,142
Independent Artists, Writers, & Performers	87	\$32,063
Performing Arts Companies	71	\$23,748
Museums, Historical Sites, & Similar Institutions	68	\$32,326
Amusement Parks & Arcades	44	\$10,675
Bowling Centers	36	\$25,805

Health Care & Social Assistance JOBS & WAGES, 2019

EMSI

SECTOR	2019 JOBS	2019 AVERAGE ANNUAL WAGE
Total Health Care & Social Assistance	17,368	\$51,845
General Hospitals	5,784	\$72,885
Individual & Family Services	3,202	\$26,952
Nursing Care Facilities	1,677	\$40,930
Outpatient Care Centers	872	\$59,249
Physicians' Offices	772	\$91,024
Home Health Care Services	737	\$38,938
Child Day Care Services	704	\$28,334
Dentists' Offices	702	\$57,301
Residential Disability/Mental Health Facilities	589	\$40,467
Assisted Living/Continuing Care Facilities	544	\$27,594
All Others	1,786	---

Table 19 (left) depicts the most tourism-friendly jobs and wages of 2019.

Table 20 (right) depicts the top health care / social assistance jobs and wages of 2019.

advancing innovation and entrepreneurship, and improving the delivery of economic development efforts, programs, and funding.

North Central Massachusetts was compared to five other regions both within Massachusetts and other states, including Greenville County in South Carolina and the Lehigh Valley Region in Pennsylvania. The five comparison regions are comprised of those inside Massachusetts that are seen as peers or have a composition the region may want to strive for. The two regions outside Massachusetts (Greenville and Lehigh Valley) were chosen because of their robust manufacturing and transportation/logistics sectors and both are experiencing significant job growth compared to national averages.

“By utilizing a benchmarking exercise, we

were able to understand the strengths and opportunities North Central Massachusetts has compared to other regions,” added Nascimento. “This also gives us a portrait of how the region may look to improve its competitive position over time.”

When the team began working on the plan, the economy of Massachusetts and the United States was experiencing a long period of economic growth with very low unemployment rates and positive growth emanating toward North Central Massachusetts from the Greater Boston region. Those positive growth trends were quickly diminished in March 2020 with the rapid spread of COVID-19 and the ensuing shutdown of the national economy.

“The pandemic has shifted the context of economic development across the entire ecosystem,” added

“We know by building the skills of today’s workforce to accommodate tomorrow’s technology we can remain a competitive and attractive region for employers and employees alike.”

— Barbara Mahoney

Nascimento. “While it is difficult to predict the short- and long-term systemic impacts and changes presented by the pandemic, the goals developed for the plan were structured to address current and near-term needs through the economic recovery, as well as looking past the recovery to a future where the region prioritizes strategic yet organic growth that is cultivated from within.”

One of the more pressing challenges for the region’s employers is attracting and retaining younger workers who are interested in the region’s most concentrated areas of employment in health care, advanced manufacturing, and government and public services industries. While these sectors represent strong and stable industries,

Continued on page 17

Continued from page 16

job opportunities in health care and manufacturing offer a wide array of pay grades that require both highly-skilled and entry level workers. Additionally, the region’s industrial sector has experienced an increase in higher-paying, higher-tech firms within the chemical manufacturing, electronic product manufacturing, research & development, and computer systems design, among others.

“Looking ahead, we need to focus on strengthening and growing the advanced manufacturing, logistics,

distribution and health care industries, with an emphasis on continuing to develop the skills of our younger workers,” said Barbara Mahoney, President & CEO of Leominster Credit Union who also serves as Chair of the North Central Massachusetts Workforce Investment Board and as a member of the Chamber’s Economic Development Taskforce that helped develop the plan “We know by building the skills of today’s workforce to accommodate tomorrow’s technology we can remain a competitive and attractive region for employers and employees alike.”

As for the region’s

demographics, post-retirement residents make up an increasing share of the region’s population, with a modest increase expected in the next ten years. “With an aging population, the region is likely to experience an increase in health care utilization,” said Winfield Brown, President & CEO of Heywood Hospital and another member of the Economic Development Taskforce “The need for additional healthcare and social services is likely to thrive and will serve as one of the key industry sectors for growth over the next ten years.”

The region’s large geography means that while

some communities function within the economy of larger anchor cities like Boston or Worcester, others rely more heavily upon North Central Massachusetts markets like Fitchburg and Leominster. What’s interesting is that more workers who live in the northern and western parts of the region tend to commute to other North Central Massachusetts communities and not out of the region.

“As the region begins to heal from the pandemic, we believe our opportunities for tourism in North Central Massachusetts will serve the region well as

Continued on page 19

Figure 23: Median 1-Family Sale Price

Source: Warren Group, 2019

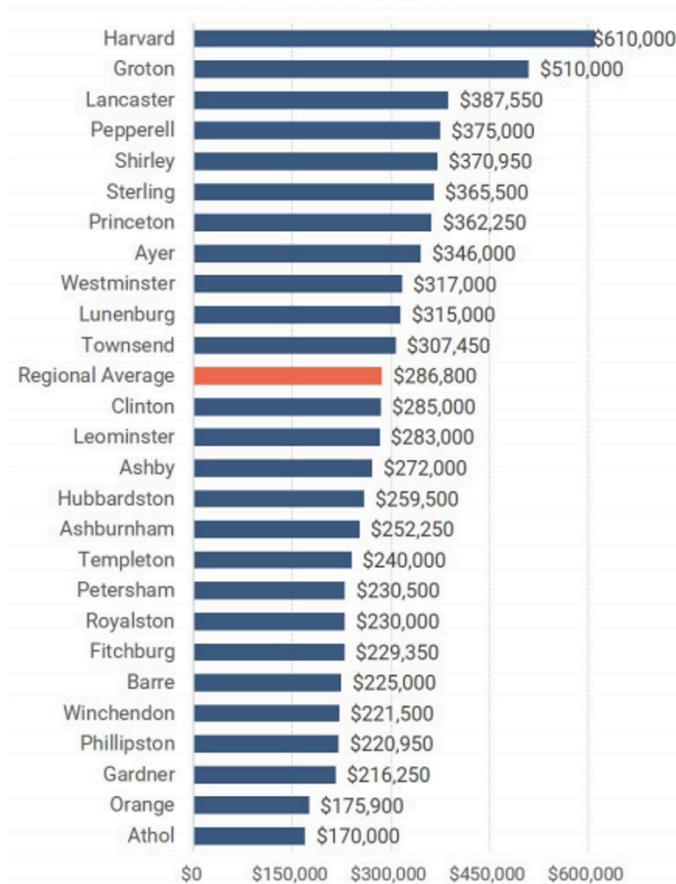


Table 5: 5-Year Growth %

1-Family Home Median Sale Price

Fitchburg	58%
Athol	48%
Winchendon	44%
Orange	41%
Clinton	39%
Gardner	39%
Lancaster	38%
Leominster	37%
Townsend	36%
Templeton	35%
Barre	32%
Westminster	30%
Ashby	30%
Princeton	29%
Lunenburg	29%
Regional Average	26%
Hubbardston	26%
Pepperell	25%
Groton	24%
Sterling	22%
Royalston	21%
Ayer	17%
Ashburnham	13%
Phillipston	13%
Shirley	12%
Harvard	12%
Petersham	7%

Bar graph of 5-year growth percentages of 1-family home median sales prices for the towns of North Central Massachusetts.



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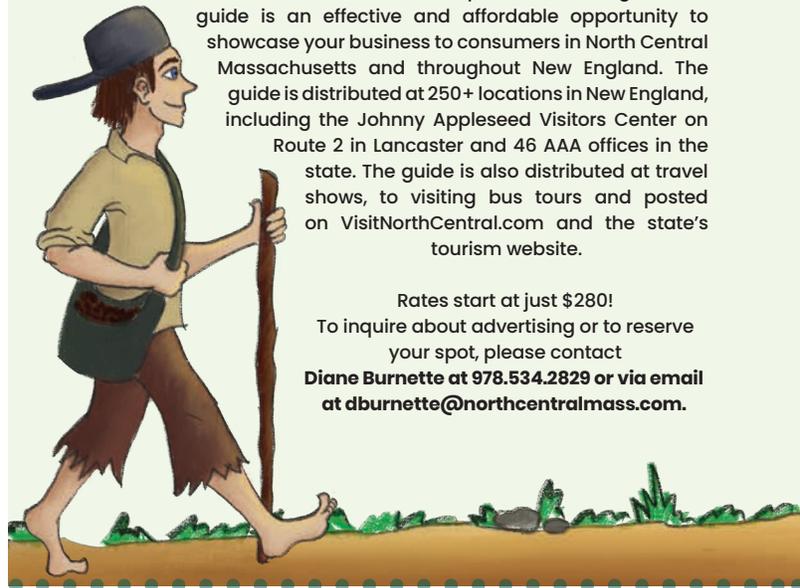
www.northcentralmass.com/news/online-programs/

ON DEMAND ACCESS

Explore the North Central Massachusetts Chamber's on-demand online program library and access training sessions, workshops and seminars that will help your business succeed. Access the library at www.NorthCentralMass.com.

Advertise in the 2021 Fall/Winter Guide to North Central Massachusetts

Plans are underway to publish the 2021 Fall/Winter edition of the Guide to North Central Massachusetts. This well-known magazine is published by the Chamber's tourism arm – Visit North Central Massachusetts – to promote the region. The guide is an effective and affordable opportunity to showcase your business to consumers in North Central Massachusetts and throughout New England. The guide is distributed at 250+ locations in New England, including the Johnny Appleseed Visitors Center on Route 2 in Lancaster and 46 AAA offices in the state. The guide is also distributed at travel shows, to visiting bus tours and posted on VisitNorthCentral.com and the state's tourism website.



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Continued from page 17

individuals and families may find easily drivable amenities, food and farm attractions, and arts and culture venues here in the region as an appealing and affordable option rather than traveling by air or to destinations in the U.S. and around the world,” said Henry Tessman, General Manager of Great Wolf Lodge and a member of the Taskforce. “Given the effects of the pandemic on the restaurant and retail industry in the near term, there is uncertainty around the demand for future skilled workers; however, this could also present an opportunity to support growth in local businesses if skilled workers are looking at the region as a place to open their own business and hire locally.”

Perhaps the region’s greatest single advantage in economic development is its ability to serve as a “pressure valve” for Greater Boston’s overheated real estate market. From a cost perspective, real estate in the region is far less expensive than other Massachusetts regions and, in some cases, also more cost-effective than comparable regions outside of Massachusetts. Lease rates, rents, and housing purchase prices are generally lower in North Central Massachusetts than in the other three Massachusetts regions, with residential rents as much as \$1,000 less per month. While the cost of living in the region is less expensive, average earnings for jobs in North Central Massachusetts are in line with those jobs in the

Greenville and Lehigh Valley regions, but \$30,000 - \$40,000 less than MetroWest and Route 128.

“The current, demanding real estate market in North Central Massachusetts is a true testament of the draw this region is for individuals and families who want the convenient access to amenities with a more affordable cost of living,” said Matthew Fournier, Owner of Elite Construction & Design and a member of the Taskforce “What used to be a weekend destination for apple picking or leaf peeping is now a place where we call previous visitors our neighbors.”

While the Regional Economic Development Plan shows the strengths, opportunities, threats and weaknesses of NCM, it does not portray what we who live and work in North Central Massachusetts have known all along: that our home here is where the heart is.

To view the Regional Economic Development Plan in its entirety, visit northcentralmass.com/onenorthcentral. ♦

“...*this* could also present an opportunity to **support growth in local businesses** if skilled workers are looking at the region as a place to open their own business and hire locally.”

— Henry Tessman



Aerial view of Fitchburg State University in Fitchburg, MA.



City of Leominster, MA.

TOURISM update

VISIT NORTH CENTRAL MASSACHUSETTS UPDATE



Hikers enjoy Pine Hill trail at Wachusett Mountain.

With the lifting of travel restrictions and COVID-19 rates improving, Visit North Central Massachusetts (VNCM) has resumed its destination marketing efforts to help attract more visitors to our region's businesses and attractions. We launched a campaign in the Spring called "Discover Your Next Adventure" to target

the weekend and day trip markets. We have been executing this campaign through multiple channels including print, digital, and social media. We secured print advertising in AAA Magazine, Yankee Magazine, Boston Spirit Magazine and Bay State Parent. We also utilized branded content campaigns promoting the region to day trippers through AAA Northeast and

Our staff at the center is looking forward to a busier season going into Summer as more and more people resume traveling."

several other media publications. Our efforts align with the pent-up demand as consumers, who have been unable to travel since the lockdown in mid-March of 2020, are looking for new and unique outdoor experiences. The pandemic solidified a new interest in outdoor activities that sets up our region in a position for increased success. We have

seen strong demand for hiking, camping, canoeing, kayaking and other activities. We also continue to invest in social media and curating new relevant local content highlighting activities and businesses in our region. We produced five new "Taste of North Central" videos promoting our local businesses and attractions. The videos that have been published so far have garnered over 20,000 views. Our Facebook page saw 248,900 impressions since the launch of the spring campaign, which represents a 390% increase over the same period the previous year. Our www.visitnorthcentral.com website also has seen strong traffic with a 16% increase in

Continued on page 21

Go to www.visitnorthcentral.com to keep up-to-date!

WorkNorthCentral Jobs Board

Find your next job in North Central Massachusetts!

The Chamber is proud to offer members the opportunity to post an unlimited number of job openings at no cost. Premium job postings are available for members starting at the Business Growth Level of membership and above.

Start posting your jobs at
WorkNorthCentral.com!



Continued from page 20

visitors over the same period last year.

As of April 1, 2021, our new Spring/Summer 2021 edition of the Guide to North Central Massachusetts hit the stands. The visitor guide is our primary publication promoting the communities of North Central Massachusetts and includes information on our local communities, a calendar of events, stories about the region and much

more. We have invested in expanding the distribution this year. The guide will be available through AAA offices throughout New England and hundreds of new locations including hotels, visitor centers, attractions and airports, including Logan and Worcester. We are also distributing it in Canada, an important market for our region.

In other news, the Johnny Appleseed Visitor Center in

Lancaster has started to see an uptick in visitation since the Spring. Our staff at the center is looking forward to a busier season going into Summer as more and more people resume traveling. We also recently applied for a matching capital grant from the state to make some renovations and improve the experience for our 165,000 annual visitors. Our vision is to not only be the

best visitor center in the state, but to also transform the center into a destination that provides an engaging experience and encourages visitors to learn more about the region's communities, local attractions and businesses.

As we move in to the Summer, we will continue our efforts to attract consumers that will be critical to the recovery of our local businesses and economy. ♦

QUICK hits



APRIL CONNECT NORTH CENTRAL GROUP MEETING

The Connect North Central group met in April to discuss possible networking opportunities.

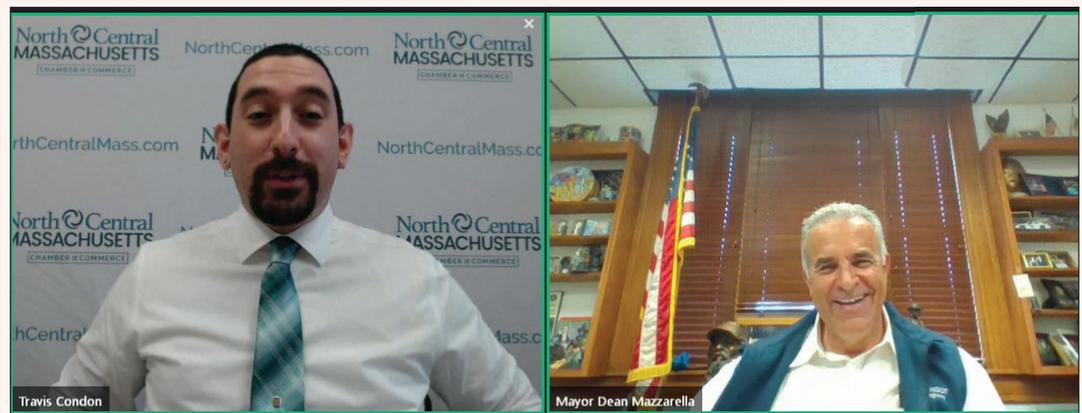


GOOD MORNING NCM WITH STATE REPS

State Representative Mike Kushmerek, Meghan Kilcoyne and Dena Sena were interviewed by Lauren Howe of empHoweredPR during a Good Morning North Central Massachusetts program in March. Attendees were able to hear a COVID update and a look into the future of their respective districts.

APRIL CHAMBER "LIVE CHAT" WITH MAYOR DEAN MAZZARELLA

Mayor Dean Mazzarella of the City of Leominster gave an update on the Mall at Whitney Field, the donation from pro-skater Tony Hawk for the Frankie Fortuna Skatepark and more during a Chamber "Live Chat" program emceed by Travis Condon in April.

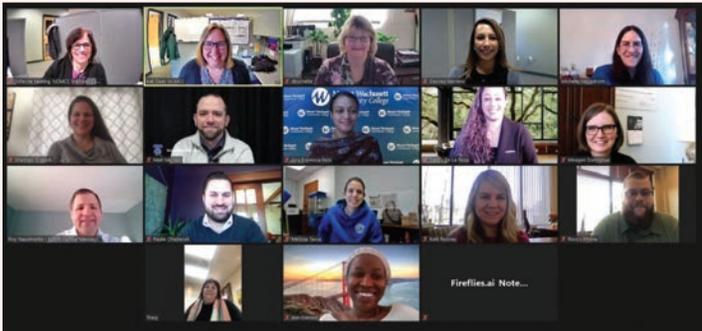


QUICK HITS CONTINUED...



APRIL CHAMBER "LIVE CHAT" WITH JESSICA STRUNKIN

Travis Condon was joined by Jessica Strunkin, Executive Vice President of Mass Development, on a Chamber "Live Chat" in April. They discussed new business and the biomedical expansion in Devens, MA.



CHAMBER'S AMBASSADORS CONTINUE TO MEET

The Chamber's Ambassadors Committee continues to meet in an effort to support members and the community. Pictured here are Ambassadors meeting via video conference in March.



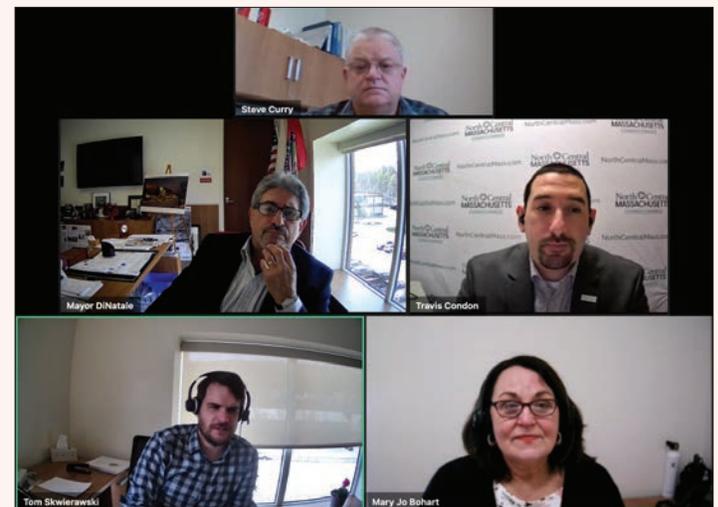
COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP INSTITUTE MARCH MEET-UP

Community Leadership Institute Class of 2021 met in March with state officials to talk about their impact on the communities we live and work in.



HOWE, FELDBURG AND CHELBECEK ON HOW TO BRAND YOURSELF PROFESSIONALLY

Lauren Howe from empHowered PR, and Sherry Feldburg from Leadership Journey, joined Paul Chelbeczek from Workers Credit Union to talk about branding yourself professionally to excel at your career during a Young Professionals of North Central Massachusetts Event.



APRIL CHAMBER "LIVE CHAT" WITH MAYOR STEPHEN DINATALE

Mayor Stephen DiNatale of the City of Fitchburg was joined by Tom Skwierawski, Executive Director of Community Development and Planning, Mary Jo Bohart, Director of Economic Development, and Stephen Curry Board of Health Director during a Chamber "Live Chat" program, that was hosted by Travis Condon in April.

QUICK HITS CONTINUED ON PAGE 24

QUICK HITS CONTINUED...

MA SECRETARY OF HOUSING AND DEVELOPMENT VISITS FITCHBURG, GARDNER, AND LEOMINSTER

Mike Kennealy, Massachusetts Secretary of Housing and Economic Development; Ashley Stolba, Undersecretary of Community Development; and Dan Rivera, President and CEO of MassDevelopment toured the cities of Fitchburg and Leominster and visiting local small businesses. This visit highlighted the Urban Agenda Initiative and its impact in supporting small businesses.



RIBBON CUTTING FOR MAIN STREET GIFT & CAFE

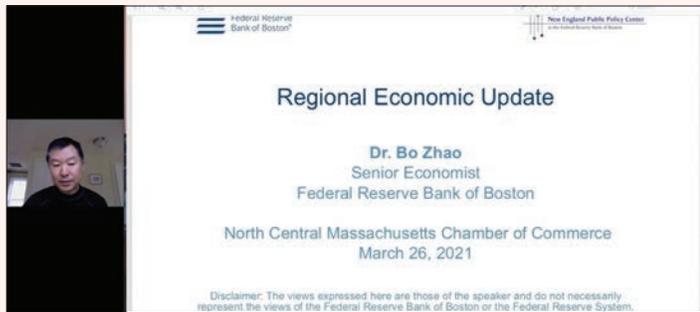
The Chamber and the City of Leominster recently celebrated the grand opening of Main Street Gift & Cafe - a new gift and coffee shop. Congratulations to Main Street Gift & Cafe crew!



RIBBON CUTTING FOR THE BARN DOOR

The Chamber recently celebrated the grand opening of The Barn Door - a New England farm style store that meets the delights of Tuscany in Pepperell. Congratulations to The Barn Door crew!

QUICK HITS CONTINUED...



ECONOMIC FORECAST FROM MARCH

Community and business leaders looked to the future during the Economic Forecast Event in March. The program’s featured speakers were Dr. Bo Zhao, Senior Economist at the Federal Reserve Bank of Boston and Simon Anderson, a nationally recognized futurist and author. Dr. Zhao went in depth about the current economic status of the region and predictions for the future. Simon Anderson presented on the emerging opportunities that could transform tomorrow.

RIBBON CUTTING FOR LEOMINSTER TV'S NEW TELEVISION STUDIO

The Chamber and the City of Leominster recently celebrated the grand opening of Leominster TV’s new television studio. Congratulations to Leominster TV crew!



LOAN FROM NCMDC TO BLACK HYDRA TATTOO

The North Central Massachusetts Development Corporation recently provided a loan to Black Hydra Tattoo in Fitchburg, MA. Pictured (L-R) are Sandie Cataldo, Economic Development Manager, NCMDC; Matt Gallagher, Emily Shortsleeves, and Brad Touchette, Owners of Black Hydra Tattoo; and Brendan Hannen, Micro-Loan Manager, NCMDC.

OCCUPATION AND SKILLS ANALYSIS

Key Takeaways

- There is demand for the skills most critical to Advanced Manufacturing from other industries, namely Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services. Coupled with the fact these skills are also currently deployed in other industries means that Advanced Manufacturing is likely going to be competing with other industries for qualified workers as the industry grows.
- Attracting employees to North Central Massachusetts from other parts of the state could also be challenging as competing industries such as Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services are highly concentrated in other regions like the Boston core and the Route 128 belt.
- Today, supply/demand for most skills is balanced but to support the future growth of this industry sector, additional skilled workers are likely needed.
- Since the market for this skills set is competitive, efforts to build these skills within the NCM region should be pursued.

Skill Assessment for Top Ten Skills in Advanced Manufacturing

Skill	Supply/Demand Balance in Workforce	Competition for Skill Across Industries
New Product Development	Balanced	High
Corrective and Preventive Action	Balanced	High
Auditing	Balanced	High
Automation	Balanced	High
Continuous Improvement Process	Balanced	Moderate
Agile Software Development	Balanced	High
Good Manufacturing Practices	Balanced	High
Manufacturing Processes	Balanced	Moderate
Project Management	Oversupply	High
Pharmaceuticals	Balanced	High

NCM Economic Development Strategy

APRIL NCM REVIEW OF THE REGIONAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PLAN

Nearly thirty municipal officials from North Central Massachusetts communities participated in a meeting to review the draft Regional Economic Development Plan in April. The Chamber has led this important initiative to develop a multi-faceted and actionable blueprint to guide the region’s collective economic development efforts over the next 10 to 15 years, providing for sustainable growth.

LOAN FROM NCMDC TO HAILEY'S ANTIQUES

The North Central Massachusetts Development Corporation recently provided a loan to Hailey’s Antiques and Publishing in Athol, MA. Pictured (L-R) are Marcia Gagliardi, Owner; and Sandie Cataldo, Economic Development Manager.



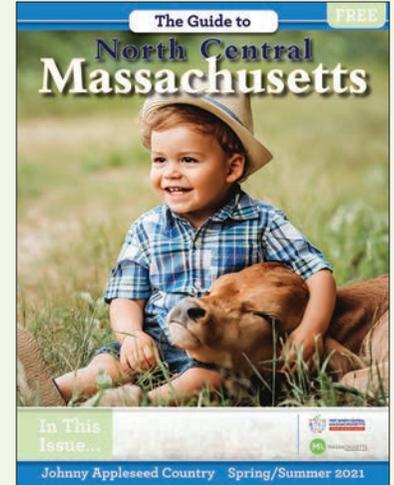
North Central Massachusetts Chamber is Nationally Accredited

Did you know that the North Central Massachusetts Chamber of Commerce is a nationally accredited chamber of commerce? Only 205 of the 7,000+ chambers in the country are accredited. This is part of our dedication and commitment to meeting standards that demonstrate a higher level of performance, expertise and impact for the benefit of our members and communities. ◇



The Guide to North Central Massachusetts: 2021 Spring/Summer Issue

Visit North Central Massachusetts is excited to announce that the 2021 Spring/Summer Issue of the Guide to North Central Massachusetts is available now. You will be able to find a copy of the guide throughout Southern New England at 250+ different locations and 46 AAA offices. It can also be found at the Johnny Appleseed Visitors' Center on Route 2 in Lancaster. The Guide to North Central Massachusetts is published to assist in promoting tourism and travel in the North Central Massachusetts region. The guide is printed twice a year and has seasonal stories and a calendar of events that encompasses some of the great events happening in North Central Massachusetts. ◇



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North Central MASSACHUSETTS
CHAMBER OF COMMERCE



Guests enjoy 7 Chamber event at Great Wolf Lodge.

LOOKING FORWARD TO THE FUTURE

The North Central Massachusetts Chamber of Commerce is excited to announce that, due to the lifting of COVID-19 restrictions, we are planning to resume face to face programs and events this Summer and Fall. We are looking forward to reconnecting and seeing members again! **Please check our calendar of events on www.northcentralmass.com and our social media platforms for updates.** ♦



Need financial help?

Contact the North Central Massachusetts Development Corporation for our new COVID-19 Loan Fund

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