

Spring 2022 Edition

chamber

north central massachusetts report

Building Businesses. Building Communities.

Building North Central for THE NEXT GENERATION



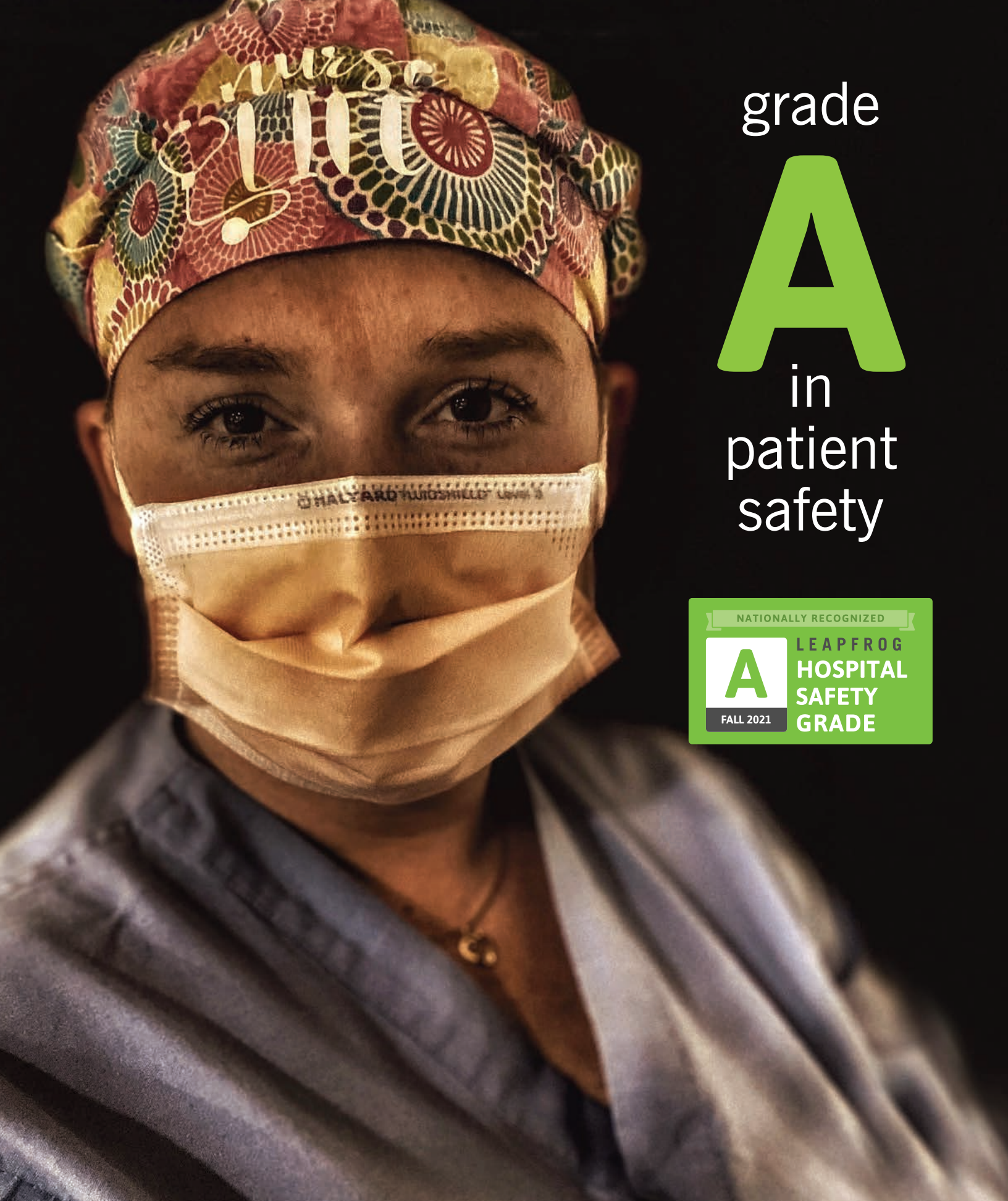
Government
Affairs Update
page 6

Chamber
Updates
page 10

North  Central
MASSACHUSETTS
CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

Feature Story
"Building North
Central..."
page 14

North Central
Calendar of
Events
page 27



grade

A

in
patient
safety

NATIONALLY RECOGNIZED

A

FALL 2021

LEAPFROG
HOSPITAL
SAFETY
GRADE

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chamber

north central massachusetts report

North Central MASSACHUSETTS

CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

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For Editorial & Advertising

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About the Cover:

In this edition of the Chamber Report we focus on the dynamic real estate market in North Central Massachusetts. The region's affordability and proximity to Greater Boston are competitive advantages that are helping to drive growth. We interviewed economic development leaders in the three largest communities to highlight their recent efforts and economic development priorities. The feature article starts on page 14.

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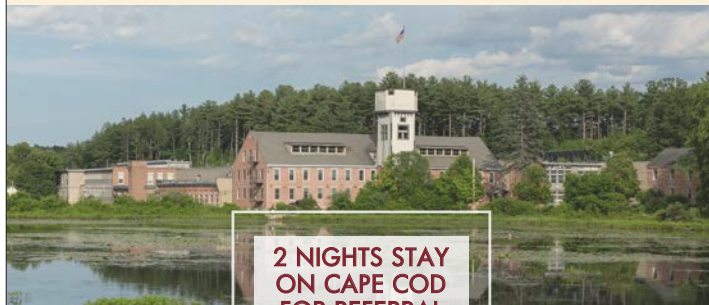
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TRACY GAGNON JOINS CHAMBER STAFF

The Chamber is pleased to announce the appointment of Tracy Gagnon as Manager of Membership Recruitment and Engagement. In this position, she will be responsible for managing marketing and outreach to prospective members while also providing superior service and support for current members.

Gagnon comes to the Chamber with years of experience serving in various roles in sales, hospitality and education. Most recently, she served as the COVID-19 Coordinator for the Town of Lancaster Board of Health. She also worked at the University of New Hampshire on its Keene and Durham campuses where she served in a variety of



Tracy Gagnon.

administrative roles. Earlier in her career, she served as Membership Director at the Dover New Hampshire Chamber of Commerce.

“As the child of entrepreneurs and an entrepreneur herself, Tracy has the unique ability to understand the needs of our members,” said Roy M. Nascimento, President & CEO of the North Central Massachusetts Chamber of Commerce. “Her energy, experience and passion for

the work of the Chamber and our affiliates made a positive impression during the selection process. She will play an important role in our efforts to engage business leaders in North Central Massachusetts.”

She holds a bachelor’s degree in Organizational Management from Daniel Webster College and a master’s degree in Educational Leadership/Counseling from Plymouth State University, where she

also obtained certification for K-12 School Counseling.

In addition to her work at the Chamber, she and her husband own and operate several rental properties that they manage. She is also active in the Wachusett Area Rotary Club and the West Boylston Board of Health.

Members can reach out to Tracy Gagnon at 978.353.7600 ext. 239 or via email at tgagnon@northcentralmass.com. ♦

“As the child of entrepreneurs and an entrepreneur herself, Tracy has the unique ability to understand the needs of our members.”

— Roy M. Nascimento



We want to hear about the great things happening with our members.

Have you hired any new employees? Have you expanded? Has your business celebrated a new milestone or received an award? Do you have a special event coming up? Have you supported a local community group?

Send us your announcements, news, events and press releases and we will post it in our members news section and share it on our social media. This is one of the many great perks that we offer members. The Chamber has a high-traffic website and strong social media presence. Our social media channels boast over 21,000 total followers and garners an average of 217,000 impressions monthly and over 2.4 million impressions annually. The Chamber’s multiple websites have become a go-to resource for local stakeholders, business professionals, elected officials, visitors and groups in our region, averaging 10,000 monthly pageviews.

If you want to increase your exposure, send all business news and events to rmurphy@northcentralmass.com.

Sponsorships Available

BE VISIBLE, participate in Chamber programs and watch your business grow.

The Chamber offers members the opportunity to showcase their products and services by sponsoring programs and events throughout the year. From the smallest to largest business, we provide multiple sponsorships and various programs to meet our member's marketing needs. Regardless of your budget, there is a sponsorship opportunity available for you at the North Central Massachusetts Chamber!

For more information on sponsorship opportunities, please contact Kat Deal, Events & Programs Manager at 978.353.7600 ext. 235 or via email at kdeal@northcentralmass.com.



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.

Available Summer 2022!

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Contact: Michelle Haggstrom
Phone: 978-660-9912
Email: mhaggstrom@kw.com
Website: mhaggstrom.kw.com

GOVERNMENT AFFAIRS UPDATE

After being closed to the public for more than 700 days, the Massachusetts State House reopened to the public in February. As local communities also rescind or revise their mask ordinances, the reopening of the State House certainly represents a major shift in the pandemic. While COVID-19 continues to remain present, communities across the Commonwealth are adapting and learning to conduct business in this new environment. As the Chamber continues our advocacy efforts, we look forward to the opportunity for staff and Chamber members to interact with legislators on important issues in the people's house.

Election season is also heating up, with contested races for all of the major constitutional offices, some of which will be decided in the state primary on September 6th. The Chamber once again looks forward to playing an informative role throughout the process, and we have launched a new election series as part of our Inside North Central Massachusetts Podcast focusing on candidates for these statewide seats. Episodes will continue to be posted in the coming weeks and will remain up through the election. The Chamber is also monitoring races in the House and Senate. 1st Middlesex District Representative Sheila Harrington was recently appointed to



Governor Charlie Baker announces new grant program to support small businesses. Photo credit: State House News Service.

“The Chamber is focused on securing support for a number of crucial areas that will help advance North Central Massachusetts including economic development, workforce development, education and tourism.”

be clerk-magistrate of Gardner District Court while 1st Worcester District Senator and former senate president, Harriette Chandler, announced she would not seek reelection leaving at least two open seats in North Central Massachusetts. We are working to engage candidates in regards to our members' priorities and our initiatives.

We are continuing to monitor the State's COVID-19 response. In February, Governor Baker

signed a \$101 million COVID-19 spending bill that included \$76 million in direct state spending aimed at boosting access to masks, vaccines and rapid tests, particularly for schools, congregate care facilities and homeless shelters, along with another \$25 million in available federal funds to be directed to the state's COVID emergency paid sick leave program. At the end of February, the Baker Administration also announced a new \$75 million dollar grant

program to support small businesses impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. The program comes as part of the \$4 billion ARPA spending plan signed into law in December. These funds will be administered by the Massachusetts Growth Capital Corporation through two different grant programs, the New Applicant Grant Program and the Inclusive Grant Program. Applications for the programs are open until April 4, 2022.

Following the announcement of Governor Baker's final proposed budget of \$45 billion, the Chamber met with the region's delegation virtually for our annual Legislative Briefing. The briefing provided an important opportunity to thank the delegation for their ongoing support of Chamber priorities, while advocating for a number of items in the upcoming budget and legislative session. The Chamber is focused on securing support for a number of crucial areas that will help advance North Central Massachusetts including economic development, workforce development, education and tourism.

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. ♦

Save the Date

ANNUAL MEETING & BUSINESS EXPO



Doug Griffiths.

Join other business and community leaders and attend the Chamber's 38th Annual Meeting which celebrates business people working together for the future of North Central Massachusetts. **The Chamber's Annual Meeting is scheduled for Thursday, June 9, 2022 at Great Wolf Lodge.** The program will include a luncheon, recognition awards and the commencement for the 2022 class of the Community Leadership Institute. Our keynote speaker is Doug Griffith, the popular community strategist and author of the best selling book, *13 Ways to Kill Your Community*. He has supported, guided and inspired hundreds of communities to create effective change.

New this year is the addition of a Business Expo to showcase local businesses! The table top expo will run before and after our regular program giving exhibitors the chance to reach hundreds of business and community leaders from throughout North Central Massachusetts.

The expo is a great opportunity to promote your business and make new connections. The number of exhibitor spaces are limited, so we encourage you to reserve your space today.

The Business Expo portion of the Annual Meeting will start at 10:45 a.m., the Annual Meeting and Luncheon will run from 11:45 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. and the expo will open back up and close at 2:00 p.m. A limited number of sponsor opportunities are also available. For more information or to register, please contact Kat Deal at 978.353.7600 ext. 235 or visit www.northcentralmass.com. ♦



HEALTH INSURANCE

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, 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.



North County Land Trust (NCLT) is excited to introduce a **NEW Business Partner Program** with a focus on healthy living, employee engagement, and charitable giving.

Join us as a Business Partner and help your organization make an impact on land conservation in your community.

BUSINESS PARTNER HIGHLIGHTS INCLUDE:

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REGION SELECTED FOR NATIONAL WORKFORCE PROGRAM

One of Seven Regions Selected to Increase Access to High-Quality Credentials for Adults of Color



AIS employees working at assembly station.

The North Central Massachusetts Chamber of Commerce is one of seven organizations selected by the Association of Chamber of Commerce Executives (ACCE) to participate in the ACCE's Equitable Credential Attainment Cohort program, an 18-month program to help strengthen chamber of commerce partnerships with community colleges and community organizations to increase the number of adult learners of color who earn an industry-relevant credential or degree. The ACCE Foundation (ACCEF) and American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) identified a virtual cohort of teams from seven cities or regions across the U.S., with each team comprised of a chamber, a community college partner and an organization that directly represents minority communities.

The Chamber will team up with Mount Wachusett Community College and

the Spanish American Center. Together, the team will identify and break down the barriers for adult learners of color to significantly increase the number of those completing high-quality, relevant short-term credentials and degrees in the region.

As one of six other regions across the U.S. selected for the program, the North Central Massachusetts team will attend monthly, virtual meetings to learn from national subject matter experts, obtain customized technical assistance, and engage in peer-to-peer learning activities to create a strategy for longer-term collaboration to build momentum after the grant period ends.

“This is a great opportunity for our region to contribute to the national dialogue related to upskilling and the resources that are being reallocated to fund short-term credentials.”

— Roy M. Nascimento

“This is a great opportunity for our region to contribute to the national dialogue related to upskilling and the resources that are being reallocated to fund short-term credentials,” said Roy M. Nascimento, President and CEO, North Central Massachusetts Chamber of Commerce. “By teaming up with Mount Wachusett Community College and the Spanish American Center, we will identify how best to support our region’s adult learners of color by utilizing the knowledge and best practices proven in other areas across the country to ensure success of the program to help us make an impact for those who live in North Central Massachusetts.”

“Mount Wachusett Community College has a strong and long-standing partnership with the North Central Massachusetts Chamber of Commerce as well as the Spanish American Center,” said Jim Vander Hooven, President, Mount Wachusett Community College. “We are fortunate to have such an engaged and forward-thinking Chamber in our region. We look forward to contributing to the success of the Equitable Credential Attainment cohort program and to ensuring the workforce and economic health of our region,” added Vander Hooven.

“The Spanish American Center is continuously assessing the needs of our community and adjusting the services we provide in order to best meet these needs, one of which is supporting the career aspirations for those we serve,” said Neddy Latimer, Executive Director, Spanish American Center. “By partnering with the North Central Massachusetts Chamber of Commerce and Mount Wachusett Community College, we will be able to enhance our commitment of advancing the community by ensuring that all those who seek an industry-relevant credential or degree will have the opportunity to do so.”

The other communities participating in the program include Aurora, Illinois; Chattanooga, Tennessee; Cleveland, Ohio; Des Moines, Iowa; Fargo, North Dakota; and Tallahassee, Florida. ♦

NEW NORTH CENTRAL MASSACHUSETTS CHAMBER MEMBERS

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12 Aitchison Street
Worcester, MA
SPICES

Anderson Power Products
13 Pratts Junction Road
Sterling, MA
WIRE & CABLE

Arend Carbone PC
625 Main Street, 4th Floor
Fitchburg, MA
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1006 Ashburnham Street
Fitchburg, MA
ELECTRICAL

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Lunenburg, MA
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21 Commercial Road
Leominster, MA
RESTAURANT

Cold Stone Creamery
80 Orchard Hill Park Drive
Leominster, MA
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Leominster, MA
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CONSULTANT

Marianos Pizza Italian Express
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Westwood, MA
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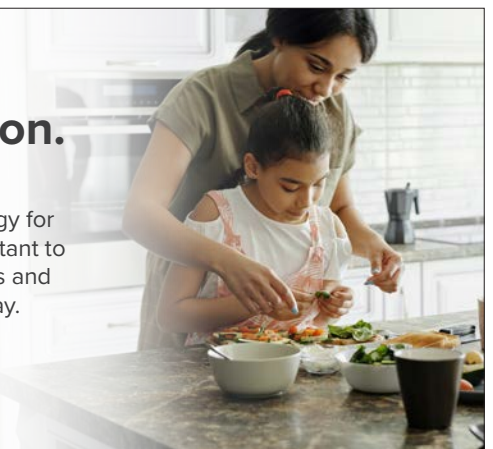
DECEMBER — FEBRUARY

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CHAMBER UPDATES



Advanced Manufacturing Programs at Mount Wachusett Community College.

WORKFORCE STUDY: In partnership with Fitchburg State University, the Chamber has commissioned the UMass Donahue Institute to conduct a study to assess and recommend ways to enhance the labor pool in the region. Specifically, we will be looking for strategies to recruit populations in the region that may not be currently participating fully in the labor market, including people with criminal backgrounds, the disabled, mature older populations, women, immigrants and veterans. The study is funded from a grant.



Fitchburg High School's Advanced Manufacturing Innovation Pathway Partnership.

EDUCATION COMPACT: The Chamber Foundation was awarded \$150,000 in funding through an earmark in the ARPA budget passed by the legislature recently. The funding will be used to help support the North Central Massachusetts Education Compact initiative. The compact, comprised of leaders in education, business and workforce development, was established in late 2019 to help facilitate partnerships around the shared goals of improving college and career pathways for students. Special thanks to Senator

Cronin and the other members of the delegation for their efforts to secure these funds for the region.

MINI-GRANTS: The Chamber's economic development arm, the North Central Massachusetts Development Corporation, was able to provide 14 grants totaling \$60,000 to local small businesses. This was a one-time grant initiative launched in partnership with New Vue Communities and funded through a grant from the Massachusetts Office of Business Development to support vulnerable small businesses impacted by COVID-19 with their recovery and growth. The grants ranged between \$500 – \$5,000 for professional services including accounting/bookkeeping support, marketing and social media support, website upgrades, legal services and signage.

JOBS BOARD: Over 1,000 jobs are currently listed on our WorkNorthCentral.com online jobs board and over 7,500 jobs have been posted since we launched the online resource. Several new optional features have been added since the introduction of the jobs board to improve the functionality, including a "Quick Apply" feature that allows employers to collect applications directly through the jobs board; an auto acceptance/rejection notification; and a follow-up survey to the employers to determine if they have filled the position. The jobs board continues to be one of the most visited sections of our website.

CHAMBER BUILDING: The Chamber has been investing in some much needed improvements to the Chamber's headquarters in Fitchburg. These include some repairs to the interior, repaving the entry road and implementing some technology upgrades in the conference room to allow for hybrid or virtual meetings. In the Fall, the Chamber also had some heating tape added to the roof to prevent ice dams and invested in



Repaired Driveway Entrance.

some landscaping to improve the appearance of the Chamber grounds from the road. The parking lot is scheduled to be resealed in the Spring.

GIFT LOCAL: We are currently exploring revamping our Gift Local gift card program to make it easier to redeem for both the merchants and the gift card recipients. We are looking for a new provider that will enable participating merchants to redeem the cards via the credit card network versus a separate platform or integrating it with a POS system.

AUDITS: The Chamber and its affiliates the Chamber Foundation, Visit North Central Massachusetts and the North Central Massachusetts Development Corporation each completed their fiscal years and underwent their annual independent audits. The audits were completed on time and with no findings reported.

HEALTH INSURANCE: Open Enrollment is upon us once again. Preparations are being made to provide participating members with new rates, benefit changes, plan discontinuations and their available options. Members interested in health insurance through the Chamber should contact our office for quotes.

ENERGY SAVINGS: From its inception in August 2014 through December 2021 the solar field on Pleasant St. has produced 10,215,626 kWh of Net Metering Credits to the manufacturers participating in the program. Total value of these credits is \$2,217,053 and the collective savings to participants totals \$1,884,495 as one

of the participants, the Chamber has received \$177,364 in energy savings.

DIGITAL MARKETING: Traffic in FY2021 averaged approximately 11,955 unique page views each month to our two main websites – NorthCentralMass.com and VisitNorthCentral.com – excluding our other websites. This represents a 4% increase over the prior year, and traffic for FY2022 is currently running 33% over the same time period in the prior year. Our social media platforms have also grown to boast over 21,000 total followers. In CY2021 our social media platforms garnered an average of over 217,000 impressions monthly and a total of over 2.4 million impressions for the year. That represents a 20% increase over the prior year.

NEW LOANS: The Chamber's economic development arm – the North Central Massachusetts



Development Corporation team members help client with recent loan closing.

Development Corporation - has closed twelve (12) micro-loans for a total of \$478,500 since October 1, 2021. The loans were made to a mix of existing and start-up businesses and ranged from \$7,500 to \$100,000. There are another two loans totaling \$236,000 that have been approved but have not yet closed.

ELECT NORTH CENTRAL COALITION: The Chamber has reconvened the Elect North Central Coalition to explore organizing debates and other initiatives to engage

candidates for statewide office. There are a number of important elections occurring this November, including for Governor; Lt. Governor; Attorney General; and State Auditor. The Elect North Central Coalition was formed in 2018 and is comprised of the major community institutions and media in North Central Massachusetts. The Coalition's mission is to make the democratic process accessible and assure that local and regional issues are examined and addressed by candidates running for statewide and federal offices.

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE: During the last quarter, our team provided over 330 hours of direct technical assistance to small businesses. We also provided businesses with assistance on accessing state grants available through the Massachusetts Growth Capital Corporation. ♦

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— Andrew, WCU Member
Owner, Groton Station House Restaurant



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Save the Date

ANNUAL SCHOLARS BREAKFAST



The Chamber's Annual Scholars Breakfast is scheduled for Friday, May 13, 2022 from 6:45 a.m. to 8:45 a.m. at Great Wolf Lodge in Fitchburg. The breakfast is a great opportunity for business and community leaders to come together to support educational opportunities for students in North Central Massachusetts. \$52,000 in scholarships will be awarded from the Chamber Foundation to graduating seniors in the region. This popular breakfast program is a celebration of student achievements and includes a strong turnout among students, parents, business and community leaders. Proceeds from the breakfast program will benefit the Chamber Foundation and help support Chamber scholarships in future years. The scholarship breakfast has been revamped this year to replace the Annual Golf Tournament as the primary fundraising event to support the scholarship program. We have introduced several new sponsorship levels and advertising opportunities for the breakfast. The cost is just \$35 for Chamber members/\$50 non-members and includes a breakfast buffet. Pre-registration is required. To register or for more information on sponsorship and advertising opportunities, please contact Kat Deal at 978.353.7600 ext. 235 or visit www.northcentralmass.com. ♦



HAVE YOU SEEN THE LATEST MANUFACTURING DIRECTORY?

Expansive Guide Highlights The Region's Vast Manufacturing Firms & Industrial Space



The Chamber and its development arm, the North Central Massachusetts Development Corporation (NCMDC), announce the publication of the 2022 edition of the Manufacturers Directory and Industrial Parks Guide for North Central Massachusetts. The publication is designed to promote and connect manufacturers with suppliers as well as serve as a resource for companies looking to relocate or expand throughout the region.

Working with multiple sources, the NCMDC confirmed

the operating status and primary product line of each company listed in the directory. In addition to the listing of local manufacturers, the publication also includes a listing of local suppliers and a guide to business and industrial parks in North Central Massachusetts.

The 2022 edition of the publication was supported by advertising and is being circulated to manufacturers throughout the region. For more information or to request a copy, please contact the Chamber at 978.353.7607. ◇

FEATURED MEMBER DISCOUNT



GOLDEN GIRL GRANOLA has a beyond delicious wholesale deal for chamber member food retailers! **Buy three granola snack pack cases (6 snack packs per case), get one FREE.** Offer valid from April 1 to June 30, 2022.

Golden Girl Granola is a woman-owned, family-run business based in Shirley that crafts the best-tasting artisan granola in New England. They bake and sell loose granola in 10-oz bags and 2-oz snack packs, along with chewy granola bars. They use only the highest quality natural ingredients in their products. Visit the Chamber's Member Discount page on www.NorthCentralmass.com for more information on this and other discounts available from your fellow chamber members.

Looking for a way to grow your customer base? Posting a member to member discount on our NorthCentralMass.com website is an effective way to increase your business while assisting your fellow chamber members. By adding a discount, you gain exposure to 700 eligible companies throughout our region. For more information, please contact the Chamber at 978.353.7600 ext. 222.

The Guide to North Central Massachusetts: 2022 Spring/Summer



VISIT NORTH CENTRAL MASSACHUSETTS

is excited to announce that the 2022 Spring/Summer Issue of the Guide to North Central Massachusetts will be available starting April 1st. 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. ◇

Building North Central for the Next Generation

Imagine a modern renaissance, built on our past with the vision of a sustainable, modern future. Guess what? It's happening right now in North Central Massachusetts. With more than 7,500 businesses based in the 27 communities that encompass North Central, we are building on the strong bones of our industrial past to redevelop buildings and create green living spaces, all while staying true to our traditional New England roots.

In 2020, a group of local business and community leaders, dignitaries and other key regional stakeholders got together to really understand what makes our region tick. The result is One North Central, a regional economic development plan to set a path forward for growth and opportunities.

One critical factor that bubbled to the surface early on was the North Central Massachusetts real estate market's affordability compared to Greater Boston. Our region is home to more than 52 million square feet of industrial, retail and flex space, which is an increase of 375,000 square feet since 2006. And, with industrial and office lease rates approximately \$15 per square foot, the region offers a relatively large share of competitively priced warehouse and



Downtown Leominster.

distribution space. In fact, North Central Massachusetts offers the highest potential for industrial space demand, more than double when compared to the other four Massachusetts regions identified in One North Central. In fact, we have a unique competitive edge over many other regions closer to Boston—the lower cost of both owner and renter housing. It's an advantage which could attract new talent to live in the region who could purchase homes typically out of reach in many other parts of the state.

The region's plethora of unique historic downtowns

and town centers with a variety of community types offer a wide spectrum of opportunities for businesses and families alike. Want to take a commuter rail to a walkable downtown or open a small business in an old mill? You can. Interested in building furniture in a state-of-the-art manufacturing facility, learning to design a video game in a tech lab or visit a farm or orchard for fresh produce? You can do that, too. For our region's largest communities, downtown areas are fast becoming destinations for arts and culture, restaurants and green space that attracts residents, employees,

and visitors to live, work, learn and enjoy.

"A major focus of our economic development is our Urban Renewal Plan focusing on the Mill Street and Downtown areas which are designed to create opportunity for private investment, stimulate economic growth, and improve and expand housing opportunities," said Trevor Beauregard, Director, Community Development and Planning, City of Gardner, and Executive Director, Gardner Redevelopment Authority. "In concert with state funding and grants, the availability of lending for private development in Gardner is also stimulating the city's targeted areas for development and growth."

Beauregard highlighted the Timpany Crossroads Project as a well-sighted, successful private investment located along the commercial corridor at the corner of Route 2A and Route 68, which offers businesses convenient access to major roadways and provides maximum high visibility. And in March 2021, Community HealthLink announced it purchased 13 acres of land next to Walmart on Timpany Boulevard to build a new 20,000-square-foot facility. The new building will be fully ADA-compliant, LEED certified,



Artist rendering of new development in Downtown Fitchburg.

Continued on page 15

W On the east, we have agricultural, greenfield development sites with the potential for tremendous commercial development. On the west side, we have a commercial recreation hub that started with Great Wolf Lodge and is now home to Game On, both of which provide family experiences for recreation."

— TOM SKWIERAWSKI

Continued from page 14

and offer primary and family medical, dental and behavioral health services, as well as urgent care.

"We have a two-pronged approach to economic development in Fitchburg," said Tom Skwierawski, Executive Director of Planning and Community Development, City of Fitchburg. "We are looking at the west and east sections of the city in very different ways. On the east, we have agricultural, greenfield development sites with the potential for tremendous commercial development. On the west side, we have a commercial recreation hub that started with Great Wolf Lodge and is now home to Game On, both of which provide family experiences for recreation."

A big challenge for Skwierawski is the current real estate market's low

inventory which is making it difficult to welcome new residents to the city. "While we want to create continuous activities for the weekend traveler, we also want to attract people who've been priced out of the greater Boston area. We want them to purchase a home and raise a family here, but that's hard to accomplish when there is little to no real estate inventory available."

The City of Fitchburg is also turning to its downtown area, which the city refers to as "InTown," into a destination arts and culture hub surrounded by residential units for those priced out of Boston, Worcester and the Merrimack Valley. "We have the Moran Square project which includes 44 residential units and commercial development opportunities, and several projects along Main Street designed to increase traffic to the downtown area," he said. "We're currently working on the

redevelopment of 655 Main Street which will create four rental units and become the future home of the Dario's on Main restaurant; 805 Main Street which will provide eight units; and the former Harper Furniture building renovation which will connect with the former Summer Street Firehouse providing 44 units and commercial space."

In addition to the city's InTown redevelopment, Fitchburg State University was awarded a \$475,000 grant from MassDevelopment in December 2021 for the Main Street Theater Block rehabilitation project, which will provide 500 to 2,200 square feet of additional space to accommodate restaurants, retail space, art galleries and studios. And, in keeping with the city's mission of creating an arts and culture hub, the Fitchburg Art Museum and NewVue Communities are working together to

Continued on page 16



EXISTING CONDITIONS

409 MAIN STREET - MAIN STREET SOCIAL
FITCHBURG, MASSACHUSETTS NOVEMBER 2014

A. T. LEONARD & ASSOCIATES
SHAPING LANDSCAPES FOR LIVING AND LEARNING



Proposed Fitchburg Art Community
in the former B.F. Brown School
in the Downtown.



Moran Square Redevelopment
Project in Fitchburg.



Artist Rendering of the Theater Block
Redevelopment in Fitchburg.

Continued from page 15

create the Fitchburg Arts Community, which will bring approximately 60 units of affordable rental artist residences and workspaces to three historical buildings adjacent to the Fitchburg Art Museum.

While downtown is a key area for growth, Skwierawski said industrial development like the Amazon warehouse on Intervale Road is equally important. The 97,000 square foot warehouse,

slated to open in August 2022, will provide up to 300 jobs in the region. “We are really excited about this development and are looking to expand an industrial park at the sand pit adjacent to the warehouse.”

Just as Gardner and Fitchburg are looking to enhance their downtown areas, the City of Leominster is busting at the seams with business growth in its downtown area, said Amanda Curtis, Economic Development Coordinator, City of Leominster. “We are making significant investments in the downtown area, from our Monoosnock Brook Gateway Project to our upcoming Façade Program for downtown buildings. We want to make our downtown accessible for walking and outdoor dining,” she said.

Planning for the Monoosnock Brook Stabilization Project began in 2019 and is funded by two Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness (MVP) Action Grants totaling over \$367,000. It’s an important project that will replace the current stone walls along the brook and the large culvert below the municipal parking lot off Mechanic Street. “The brook is a centerpiece of our downtown and provides a quiet respite for our residents and businesspeople during their lunch hour and lets families experience nature just a few steps from a bustling downtown area,” added Curtis. The project is expected to be completed in summer 2023.

Part of Gardner’s Urban Renewal Plan includes a pedestrian corridor with street markings and signage



Monoosnock Brook.

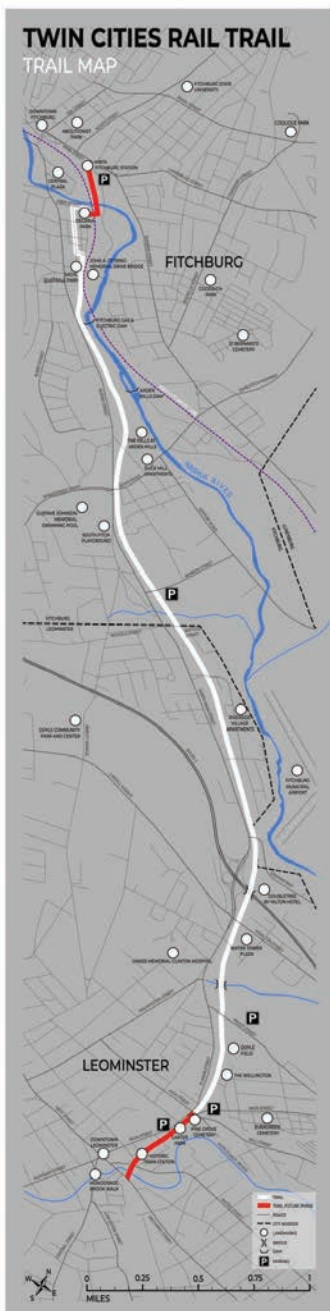
By bringing the rail trail directly to Mechanic Street, cyclists and walkers will be able to access all of what downtown Leominster has to offer while being active outdoors.” – AMANDA CURTIS

to make the public walkways more pedestrian and bicycle friendly. “We are working to expand the bike path from the [Mount Wachusett Community] college to downtown through a bicycle and walking network using shared streets and multiuse paths,” said Beauregard.

Speaking of bicycle friendly paths, the Twin Cities Rail Trail, which follows an abandoned rail corridor from downtown Fitchburg to Mechanic Street in downtown Leominster, is scheduled to be open to the public in 2023. The trail runs parallel to Route 12 and will be open for all non-motorized use. “By bringing the rail trail directly to Mechanic Street, cyclists and walkers will be able to access all of what downtown Leominster has to offer while being active outdoors,” added Curtis.

Just a few miles away is Devens, home to more than 100 businesses and

organizations providing more than 4,000 jobs all bolstered by approximately 2,100 acres of open space and recreation land. Formerly known as Fort Devens, the former U.S. Army base is now home to bustling businesses in technology and innovation, as well as New England Studios, producer of such television shows and movies as *Dexter*, *Defending Jacob* and *Castle Rock*. Growth and development abound in this community, with King Street Properties developing a 45-acre biomanufacturing campus consisting of five buildings with 700,000 total square footage. And last summer, SMC Ltd., a medical device contract manufacturer, announced plans to double its footprint with the addition of a 207,000 square foot manufacturing and warehouse facility,



Continued on page 17



Rendering for the Monoosnoc Brook project in Downtown Leominster.



The new bridge over Route 2 for the Twin Cities Rail Trail.

Continued from page 16

resulting in approximately 400 new jobs.

For all its successes, sometimes growth can present challenges, as Leominster's downtown growing pains can attest to. With just about every square foot of downtown commercial space filled, the Economic Development Office is working in collaboration with Mayor Dean Mazzarella and downtown business owners to both find additional space while maintaining that uniquely positive small town, customer experience. Curtis noted, "We have monthly downtown business group meetings with our business owners so we are made aware of their challenges and how we can work together to create solutions."

Curtis was quick to point out the Mall at Whitney Field is a hot topic of conversation in Leominster, with many rumors swirling about the future of the mall and surrounding area. "The mall is a work in progress and while there are many rumors about the future of the mall, including tearing it down, this is simply not the case," said Curtis. "The investors who own the mall

want to see this succeed, so in this case patience is asked by all in the community while we work to figure out the best path forward."

Collaboration is certainly key, not only with business owners, but also between other cities and towns in the region. "What we've realized over the years is that we cannot achieve our goals as a city without partnering with other cities in the region," said Curtis. "We want our businesses to thrive and if Leominster cannot accommodate the needs of a new business or a business that needs to grow its footprint, we will work with other communities to collaborate and help our business owners find the most appropriate location to achieve their goals."

Skwierawski and Beauregard also praised their respective city officials for collaborating with them on several of the economic development projects, both past and current.

"We are all rowing in the same direction and by having our Mayor, City Council, NewVue Communities, ReImagine North of Main, the Fitchburg Redevelopment Authority, and the North Central Massachusetts Chamber in our corner, it makes our work a lot easier.

But more importantly, a collaborative environment provides business owners with the confidence that we will work as a team to help them achieve their goals." Beauregard also said the Gardner City Council and its Mayor Mike Nicholson are all very supportive of all the city's initiatives, which makes it much easier to move projects forward seamlessly and

as quickly as possible.

It's truly an exciting time to see how our cities and towns are redeveloping areas by modernizing buildings from our past, creating sustainable housing and establishing recreation areas connecting cities together as we work toward building North Central Massachusetts for the next generation. ♦



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TOURISM^{update}

WINTER MARKETING CAMPAIGN



The Chamber's tourism arm, Visit North Central Massachusetts, focused its marketing efforts last quarter on promoting the region as a Winter destination, with a heavy emphasis on utilizing digital strategies. We invested in an assorted mix of strong content on VisitNorthCentral.com highlighting winter activities and businesses. This included developing

a new Winter landing page and blog articles such as "A Winter Getaway Might be Closer than you Think" and "Snow on the Mountain". We also conducted several sponsored content campaigns targeted to the drive market. During the Winter season we also invested in some paid social media; targeted and geofenced digital advertising; YouTube advertising; and some limited

print advertising. Our Facebook page garnered 221,443 impressions, reach of 78,845 and 8,004 engagements since the start of the Winter season. "Find Your..." was utilized as the overarching theme for our advertising campaigns during the season. The campaigns were centered around the wide range of activities, lodging, restaurants, breweries and

cultural attractions in North Central Massachusetts. Our winter activities were promoted as "Find Your Thrill" through geofenced digital ads on MassLive and LocalIQ affiliate websites and targeted YouTube advertising. The MassLive display ads garnered 251,401 impressions and 216 clicks thus far. The LocalIQ digital ads garnered 57,235 impressions and 72

Continued on page 19

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

Continued from page 18

clicks thus far. The targeted YouTube advertising campaign resulted in 98 clicks, 40,872 interactions and a 47.28% view rate. We also worked with MassLive and Telegram & Gazette to promote the region as a winter getaway destination through “Find Your Slice of Simplicity” branded content. The content focused on the unique lodging options, restaurants, museums and relaxing winter activities in the region. The MassLive content resulted in 39,701 impressions, click through rate of 0.61% and 244 clicks. The Telegram & Gazette content garnered 9,894 reads, a 20.06% click through rate, and 1,985 clicks. The sponsored social media post resulted

“The campaigns were centered around the wide range of activities, lodging, restaurants, breweries and cultural attractions in North Central Massachusetts.”

in 6,247 link clicks, over 400 reactions, and nearly 150 shares. For print media, we advertised in AAA magazine in Rhode Island, Connecticut and New York as well as Baystate Parent monthly issues through “Find Your Winter Wonderland”. These advertisements were targeted towards families with young kids centered around the family-friendly experience our region provides. We also partnered with the Massachusetts Office of Travel and Tourism,

the Massachusetts Ski Association and five other regional tourism councils on a collective winter campaign with Hearst media highlighting the state as a ski and winter destination. And, during the season we implemented some shop local marketing to promote supporting local businesses. Preliminary data from Arrivalist indicates a 14% increase in visitors traveling to the region over the same period the prior year, but down 27% over pre-pandemic 2019. Top

four origin markets were Boston; Rhode Island; Connecticut; and New York.

As we move in to the Spring, we will continue our past strategies of promoting the outdoor assets of our region as well highlighting local attractions and businesses. We will do so through pivoting to a more digital focused marketing mix with geofenced and targeted digital ads, connected-app streaming ads, targeted YouTube advertising, paid Pinterest ads, branded content, social media and print media. We are also planning to resume some sales development activities, including participating in some travel industry trade shows in the Spring to promote the region. ♦

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QUICK hits



LUK RIBBON CUTTING

The Chamber recently celebrated the grand opening of LUK's new Youth Resource Center. Congratulations to the LUK crew!



RIVER STYX BREWING RIBBON CUTTING

The Chamber recently celebrated the production expansion of River Styx Brewing in Fitchburg. Congratulations to the River Styx crew!



ZEN YOGA RIBBON CUTTING

The Chamber recently celebrated the grand opening of Zen Yoga's new studio in Westminster. Congratulations to the whole Zen Yoga crew!



FABRIC N' THINGS RIBBON CUTTING

The Chamber recently celebrated the grand opening of Fabric n' Things' new store in Fitchburg. Congratulations to the whole Fabric n' Things crew!



THE INFERNO HOT YOGA & PILATES RIBBON CUTTING:

The Chamber recently celebrated the grand opening of The Inferno Hot Yoga & Pilates' new studio in Fitchburg. Congratulations to The Inferno crew!

QUICK HITS CONTINUED...



MK DANCE RIBBON CUTTING

The Chamber recently celebrated the grand opening of MK Dance's new dance studio in Leominster. Congratulations to the whole MK Dance crew!



TOYS FOR TOTS DRIVE

The Chamber participated in this year's Toys for Tots Toy Drive partnering with Making Opportunity Count. Thank you to everyone who donated toys for this holiday season!



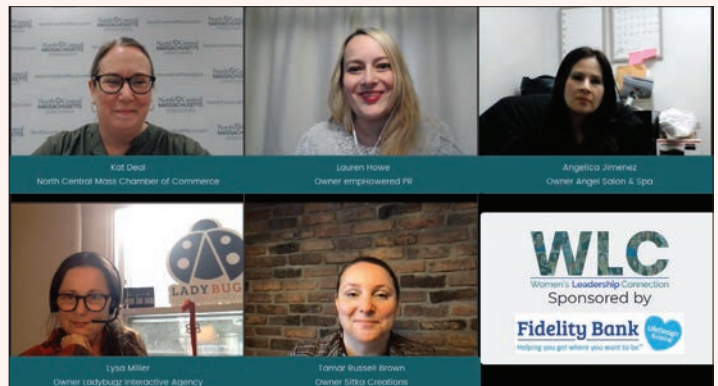
WINTER RECEPTION AT RUSSIAN ICONS MUSEUM

The Chamber would like to thank The Russian Icons Museum for hosting our Winter Reception – it was a fun evening of networking and great food!



YOUNG PROFESSIONALS HOLIDAY PARTY

The Young Professionals of North Central Massachusetts hosted their holiday party in December. Thank you to everyone who came and participated in the ugly sweater contest!



WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP CONNECTION

The Women's Leadership Connection was proud to host "Women Owned, Women Run" in January. The program featured a panel which discussed what it means to be a women owned and women run business, the glass ceilings they shattered, and those still yet to break!

QUICK HITS CONTINUED ON PAGE 22

QUICK HITS CONTINUED...



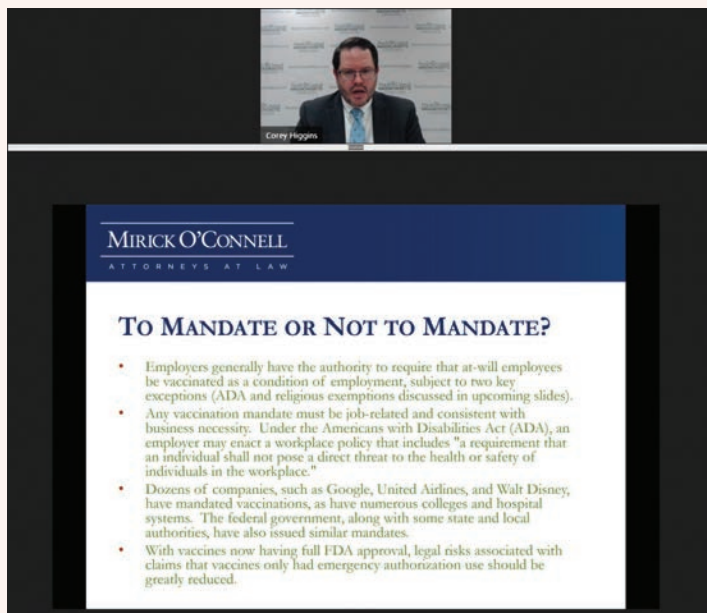
CLI CLASS & THE RUSSELL BROOKS FOUNDATION PROJECT

The Community Leadership Institute Class of 2022 rallied behind fellow classmate Austin Brooks of TD Bank in his startup of the Russell Brooks Foundation. The Russell Brooks Foundation's mission is to provide a wonderful holiday experience for families affected by cancer. The Russell Brooks Foundation was able to identify and sponsor five families and eight children who reside within our local communities.



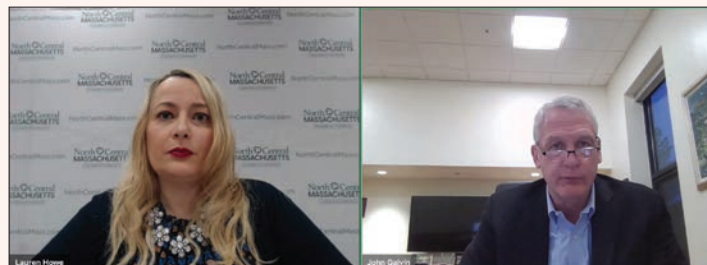
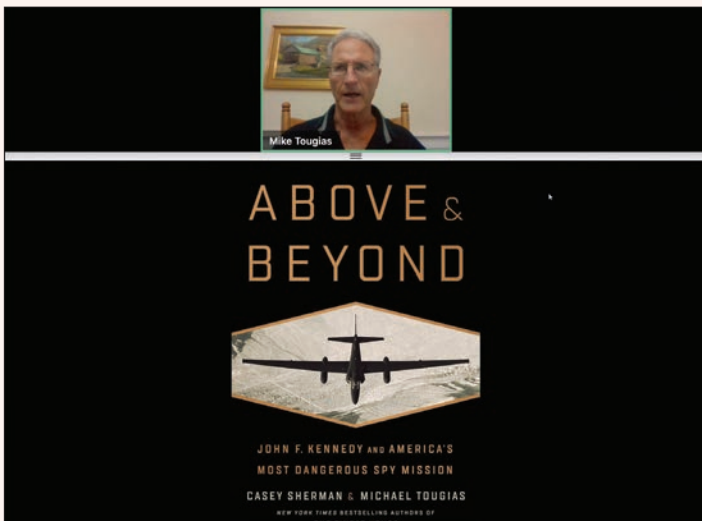
SPANISH AMERICAN CENTER VISIT

Members of the Chamber staff were given a warm welcome at The Spanish American Center, Inc. in Leominster. While touring the Center, they spoke with Neddy Latimer, Executive Director, and Mickey Guzman, Information & Referral Specialist, about the Center's COVID-19 response, current services, plans for future expansion, and their ongoing partnership with the Chamber.



JANUARY HUMAN RESOURCE COUNCIL

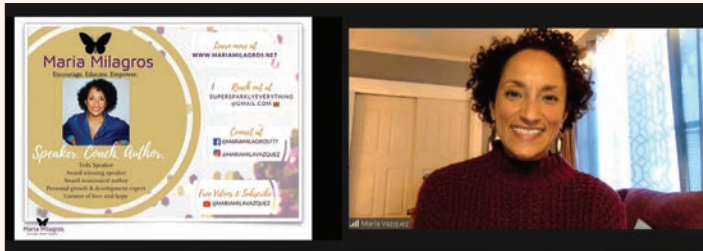
The Chamber hosted a great HR Council webinar in January on labor law changes with Attorney Corey Higgins, a Partner at Mirick O'Connell.



JANUARY GOOD MORNING NORTH CENTRAL

The Chamber held a virtual event for the January edition of the Chamber's Good Morning North Central Breakfast which featured John Galvin, President & CEO of AAA Northeast and Michael J. Tougas, New York Times Bestselling Author.

QUICK HITS CONTINUED...



"MARK, SET, GO" WITH MARIA MILAGROS PRESENTED BY YOUNG PROFESSIONALS

The Young Professionals of North Central Massachusetts presented "Mark! Set! Go!" with Maria Milagros. It was a very inspirational event! Thank you to Maria for motivating and getting the Young Professionals of North Central Massachusetts ready to take on 2022!!



FITCHBURG STATE UNIVERSITY'S DOWNTOWN REVITALIZATION EVENT

The Chamber joined city, state and federal officials in February for the presentation of \$3 million from the state's ARPA funding for the Fitchburg State University Theater Block project. Great to see the continued commitment to the economic revitalization of downtown Fitchburg. Pictured are Senator John J. Cronin, State Representative Mike Kushmerek, Congresswoman Lori Trahan, Stephen DiNatale - Mayor of Fitchburg, and Fitchburg State University President Richard Lapidus.



BOYS & GIRLS CLUB OF FITCHBURG & LEOMINSTER MEETING

Chamber President Roy Nascimento met with Elizabeth Coveney, the new Chief Executive Officer of Boys and Girls Club Fitchburg Leominster.



SMALL BUSINESS ROUNDTABLE – PLANNING FOR YOUR SMALL BUSINESS

Thank you to Dawn LaRochelle, Project Manager – COVID Business Recovery Central MA at Center for Women & Enterprise for emceeding "Business Planning for Your Small Business" presented by Small Business Roundtable.



FEBRUARY CLI MEETING

The February session of Community Leadership Institute focused on Healthcare and featured a presentation by Steve Roach, President and CEO of UMass Memorial HealthAlliance Clinton Hospital.



FITCHBURG STATE UNIVERSITY ENGINEERING TECHNOLOGY CAREER FAIR

Members of the Chamber team attended the Engineering Technology Career Fair at Fitchburg State University in February to promote the WorkNorthCentral Jobs Board.

QUICK HITS CONTINUED...



NCMDC PROVIDES LOAN TO PAWSITIVE IDENTITY K9 SERVICES

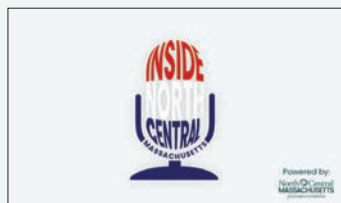
The North Central Massachusetts Development Corporation recently provided a loan to Pawsitive Identity K9 Services. Pictured (L-R) are Rebecca Beaton, Vice President of Lending, NCMDC; Tom and Nina Welch, Owners of Pawsitive Identity K9 Services (with dogs Kirby and Charlie); Sandie Cataldo, Economic Development Manager, NCMDC; and Steve Sugar, Vice President of Lending, NCMDC.



NCMDC PROVIDES LOAN TO THE BREAK BIKE SHOP

The North Central Massachusetts Development Corporation recently provided a loan to The Break Bike Shop. Pictured (L-R) are Steve Sugar, Vice President of Lending, NCMDC; Josh Merchant, Owner of the Break Bike Shop; and Sandie Cataldo, Economic Development Manager, NCMDC.

2022 ELECTION PODCAST SERIES



The Chamber has launched a podcast series focused on providing the region's businesses and residents the opportunity to hear directly from candidates running for state-wide offices in the upcoming 2022 election.

The Chamber's popular podcast program – Inside North Central Massachusetts – will feature a series of special interviews with the candidates running for Governor, Lt. Governor, Attorney General, and State Auditor. The Chamber has invited

all of the major candidates for these open statewide offices to participate in the podcast series.

This special election series is part of the Chamber's continuing efforts to promote civic engagement and advocate for regional equity. In addition to this podcast series, the Chamber is also a founding member of Elect North Central Massachusetts, a non-partisan coalition of media, education, and community leaders in North Central Massachusetts focused on engaging the candidates running for statewide and federal offices. Follow Inside North Central Massachusetts on Podbean, Spotify or Apple Podcasts. ♦



The Chamber's Ambassadors Committee.

AMBASSADORS COMMITTEE

Interested in connecting your business to the hundreds of member businesses and organizations in our region while supporting the Chamber's mission? The Chamber's Ambassadors Committee could be a good fit for you! Chamber Ambassadors are a volunteer committee

that meet monthly to serve fellow members by providing information, resources, member-to-member support, increasing awareness and promoting active participation in Chamber and affiliate programs and services. For more information, please contact the Chamber at 978.353.7600 ext. 244. ♦

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Full Calendar of Events on Page 27

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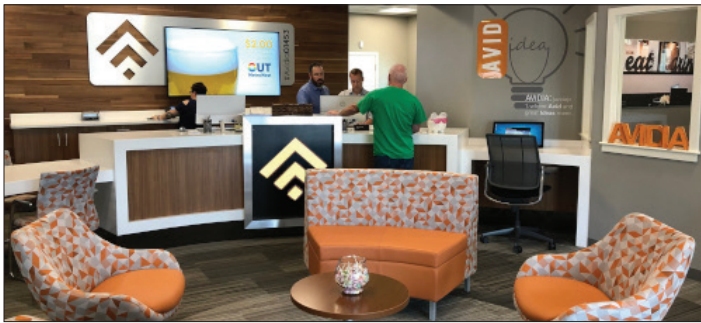
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FEATURED MEMBER PROFILE

AVIDIA BANK

Looks To A Fresh Direction With Recent Rebrand



New renovations at the Leominster branch.

Since the 2007 merger of Hudson Savings Bank and Westborough Bank (both founded in 1869), Avidia, deriving from the words “avid ideas,” overhauled everything from marketing to messaging, modifying products based on the feedback of their current customers to better serve their local community.

Avidia Bank is a \$2.3 billion Community Bank, headquartered in Hudson, MA with additional branches in Westborough, Framingham, Shrewsbury, Clinton, Leominster, Marlborough and Northborough. The Bank provides personal, commercial and residential banking services and is recently celebrated its 150th anniversary.

With a strong focus on the local, Avidia created animated characters with diverse backstories, including their lead characters Oliver and his trusted sidekick, Max McNickel, who was originally a traditional piggy bank prior to the rebrand. Each character has a unique background

and story, attracting small businesses and local entrepreneurs, as well as those looking to establish roots in the Metrowest area.

“We updated our Leominster location and went through our rebrand, and developed products that speak to our customers and showcasing who they are through ‘Honest to Goodness®,’” said Janel Maysonet SVP, Chief Marketing Officer.

“We are a community bank. What does that mean? It means we care about our community because we’re from here. We live here. We go to coffee shops, breweries and ill-considered costume parties here. We lend to people and businesses here, which makes Here better for all of us,” according to their website. “Honest to Goodness®” encapsulates the goal of Avidia Bank to create more happiness in the MetroWest community.

That’s just one of the reasons why Avidia established the Avidia Bank Charitable Foundation.

Through the Foundation, non-profit organizations are eligible to

request a grant, including, but are not limited to, those that place an emphasis on projects focusing on the disadvantaged and the underserved.

“We are so excited to announce that Avidia Bank just contributed a \$30,000 donation to the Boys & Girls Clubs of Metrowest as part of Be a Champion for a Child initiative, in partnership with Stephon Gilmore,” Maysonet said.

Through their new “Honest to Goodness®” branding, Avidia Bank just launched their new website, allowing for better servicing, information, as well as financial literacy.

“We also just finished renovating our headquarters, using it as a hub to attract talent and new employees, building an outside portion for community space both internally and externally,” Maysonet mentioned.

“We’re hoping to also launch our ‘Avidia Bank at Work’ program in 2022, allowing small businesses to have an added benefit for their employees to have financial wellness.”

Additionally, Avidia has announced to the community that all ATMs anywhere, customers will be refunded all transaction and surcharge fees, as well as early deposit for customers so that they are able to receive their paychecks earlier in the week.

Avidia has continued to flourish throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.

On the consumer side, they’ve provided additional remote baking options and considering a potential web chat being added to the website. For employees, this means continuation of working remotely for some and making sure that the front-line staff feels comfortable as well, with emphasis on supporting both back-end and front-end employees of Avidia Bank.

“We are always thinking of a mindful way to help customers and go the extra mile,” Maysonet said.

“[Avidia] relies on the North Central Massachusetts Chamber of Commerce to help us connect with the local community,” said Maysonet, “especially during the pandemic and keeping in touch with everyone, but also to participate in community projects too.” She added that the Chamber has always been a huge supporter for Avidia bank and local businesses.

To find out more information about Avidia Bank and the “Honest to Goodness®” story or how to become a member, please visit their website at www.avidiabank.com or by visiting a branch located near you. ♦



Lead character Oliver and his trusted sidekick, Max McNickel.

North Central Calendar **EVENTS**

April 8

Economic Forecast

Great Wolf Lodge
7:45 AM – 10:30 AM

April 12

Human Resource Council

*MassHire North Central
Workforce Board*
12:00 Noon – 1:30 PM

April 29

Connect North Central

Chamber Conference Room
8:00 AM – 9:00 AM

May 13

Annual Scholars Breakfast

Great Wolf Lodge
6:45 AM – 8:45 AM

*See page 12 for more
details on this event.*

May 18

North Central Real Estate Summit

Great Wolf Lodge
7:30 AM – 9:30 AM

May 18

Business After Hours: Can-Am

Can-Am Machinery
5:00 PM – 7:00 PM

May 27

Connect North Central

Chamber Conference Room
8:00 AM – 9:00 AM

June 9

38th Annual Business Meeting & Expo

Great Wolf Lodge
10:30 AM – 2:00 PM

*See page 7 for more
details on this event.*

June 15

Women's Leadership Connection

Great Wolf Lodge
11:45 AM – 1:30 PM

*A complete list of events with details can be found at
web.northcentralmass.com/events. Please contact
Kat Deal with any questions at 978.353.7600 ext. 235
or via email at kdeal@northcentralmass.com.*

Save the Date



Rachael Rollins.

WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP CONNECTION

meets on **June 15, 2022** for lunch featuring United States Attorney for the District of Massachusetts Rachael Rollins as the speaker. A Massachusetts native and attorney for over twenty years, Ms. Rollins served as Suffolk County District Attorney (DA) since 2019. She was the first woman to ever be elected DA in Suffolk County and the first woman of color to ever hold the position of DA in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. Rollins will be the first Black woman to serve as U.S. Attorney for Massachusetts.

Thank you to Fidelity Bank for their Sponsorship of the Women's Leadership Connection.

Contact Kat Deal at 978.353.7600 ext. 235 for more information. ♦

North Central MASSACHUSETTS

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