

Winter 2022 Edition

# chamber

*north central massachusetts report*

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## OPPORTUNITY KNOCKS IN NORTH CENTRAL: *HOW WILL YOU ANSWER?*



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**MASSACHUSETTS**  
CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

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# chamber

*north central massachusetts report*

## North @ Central MASSACHUSETTS

CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

The Chamber Report (USPS 773-650) is published quarterly by the North Central Mass. Chamber of Commerce, 860 South Street, Fitchburg, MA, for \$15 per year which is withheld from annual membership dues. Periodicals postage paid at Fitchburg, MA.

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### About the Cover:

For this edition of the Chamber Report we turn our attention to the labor challenges faced by local employers. The feature article starting on page 14 focuses on a study commissioned by the Chamber and conducted by the UMass Donohue Institute on the local labor market. We specifically asked them to assess and recommend solutions to the issues employers are facing finding qualified and skilled workers. We hope the study will be a useful resource to our members and a blueprint to help with our collective efforts to enhance the workforce and economy in the region. In this edition you will also find news and updates from the Chamber, highlights of our activities in the last quarter, a report on our tourism marketing efforts during the Fall, and so much more. We continue to be focused on growing our local economy and making sure the business climate in North Central Massachusetts is a strong one to help your business grow. Thank you for taking the time to see what your Chamber and our members and partners have been up to. We hope that you enjoy reading the Chamber Report!

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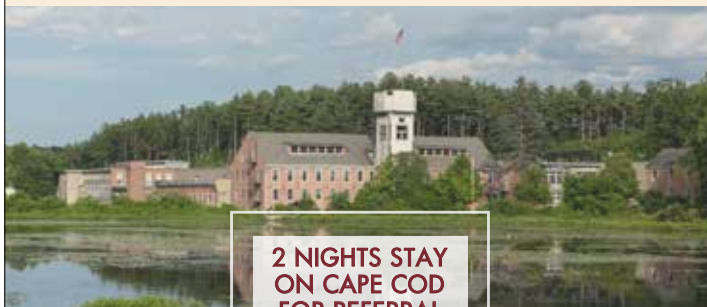
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# CHAMBER LEADS EFFORT TO REPLACE WELCOME SIGN AT IMPORTANT GATEWAY IN FITCHBURG

## Sign Provides Recognition of Civic Pride For Residents & Visitors Alike



Pictured left to right in the picture are Bernard J. Schultz, City Councilor representing Ward 1 in Fitchburg; Mayor Stephen DiNatale of the City of Fitchburg; Patricia Vacca Martin, a Fitchburg resident and member of the Sons and Daughters of Italy; Rebecca Hess, Legislative Aide to State Representative Michael Kushmerek of Fitchburg; State Senator John J. Cronin of the Worcester & Middlesex District; and Roy Nascimento, President & CEO of the North Central Massachusetts Chamber of Commerce.

The Chamber sponsored the construction of a new welcome sign for the City of Fitchburg on South Street, a key gateway to the community.

The new sign replaces a welcome sign originally constructed by the Sons and Daughters of Italy in 2003 in memory of the late Mary and Joe Ramondelli of Fitchburg that was partially destroyed by a car accident in recent years. Mr. Ramondelli, a retired Fitchburg police officer, and his wife were very active in the community.

Patricia Vacca Martin, a Fitchburg resident who

was involved with the design of the original sign, said it is nice to have the sign restored. “Mary and Joe were active members in our community and with the Sons and Daughters of Italy,” said Vacca Martin. “We are grateful the Chamber stepped up to help fund the restoration of the former sign so our community will always remember Mary and Joe and their commitments to making Fitchburg a better place for all of us.”

The new sign is part of a project to construct welcome signs at key gateways in communities in

**“As Fitchburg continues to implement our Urban Redevelopment Plan, the signs are truly a welcome addition to our city.”**

— Mayor Stephen L. DiNatale

the region in order to boost civic pride and serve as a positive first impression for visitors. The project was partially funded by a grant secured by the Chamber. In addition to Fitchburg, similar welcome signs are also being installed at key gateways in Gardner, Leominster and Westminster in the coming months. Each sign is carved with the community’s seal and painted to match their official colors. Additional signs will be constructed for other communities in North Central Massachusetts as funding becomes available.

“One of the goals of our regional economic redevelopment plan, One North Central, was to capitalize on our region’s

unique locations,” said Roy Nascimento, President and CEO, North Central Massachusetts Chamber of Commerce. “Each city brings a distinctive experience to the region and with this project, those entering Fitchburg will learn about the city while receiving a warm welcome as they arrive.”

“As Fitchburg continues to implement our Urban Redevelopment Plan, the signs are truly a welcome addition to our city,” said Mayor Stephen L. DiNatale. “We are grateful for the North Central Massachusetts Chamber of Commerce for providing these personalized signs to welcome visitors to our city and to also welcome our residents home.” ♦

### Energy is our passion.

We take pride in providing the energy for life that is so important to our families, friends and neighbors every day.







State Tourism Officials visited the Doubletree by Hilton during the Tour.



Keiko Orrall talks with Al Rose of Red Apple Farm and Rick Walton of Gardner Ale House during the tour.

## VISIT NORTH CENTRAL MASSACHUSETTS HOSTS STATE TOURISM LEADER

The Chamber's tourism affiliate, Visit North Central Massachusetts, recently hosted Keiko Orrall, the executive director of the Massachusetts Office of Travel and Tourism (MOTT) and Kevin Clang from her staff. This familiarization tour on October 18, 2022 was organized by Visit North Central Massachusetts to help increase Ms. Orrall's knowledge of North Central Massachusetts and showcase the many exciting attractions and offerings that our unique and vibrant region has to offer.

The tour included stops at Great Wolf Lodge in Fitchburg; Red Apple Farm in Phillipston; Game On in Fitchburg; Doubletree by

Hilton in Leominster; the Fitchburg Art Museum in Fitchburg; and Wachusett Brewing in Westminster. The tour also included meetings with several local tourism leaders.

"We were happy to organize this tour to show Keiko Orrall a few of the many great attractions and experiences that North Central Massachusetts has to offer visitors," said Roy Nascimento, president and CEO of the North Central Massachusetts Chamber of Commerce. "We look forward to continuing our work with the Massachusetts Office of Travel and Tourism to promote our region of the state as a great destination that is rich in history, culture and entrepreneurial

drive and that offers the authentic New England experience."

Visit North Central Massachusetts will periodically partner with members to organize FAM tours for media and other travel influencers to help promote the region and our attractions. The purpose of these familiarization (FAM) tours is to generate positive awareness among travel influencers and positive coverage in the media, which ultimately generates additional visitors and additional dollars to our region.

The Chamber and Visit North Central Massachusetts wish to thank all those members who had a part in organizing this tour. ♦



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# GOVERNMENT AFFAIRS UPDATE

**E**lection season was at the forefront of Chamber members' minds when they gathered to interact with over 70 local, state and federal officials and candidates that were running for office at the annual Legislative and Candidates Reception in late September sponsored by Mount Wachusett Community College at the Chocksett Inn. In October, members ventured to Great Wolf Lodge to hear from Congressman Jim McGovern and Congresswoman Lori Trahan on a number of national issues including inflation, the war in Ukraine, and the rising energy costs for businesses and residents during our annual Congressional Luncheon sponsored by Fitchburg State University. Special thanks to Mount Wachusett Community College and Fitchburg State University for sponsoring these two important events for the region.

Massachusetts voters let their voices be heard at the polls. At the federal level, Congressman Jim McGovern and Congresswoman Lori Trahan will continue to represent Chamber members down in Washington DC. On Beacon Hill, history was made with Attorney General Maura Healey becoming one of the nation's first openly Lesbian Governors, and with Salem Mayor Kim Driscoll taking over as Lt. Governor, they will lead the first all-female executive office in the country. Andrea Campbell became the first Black woman elected to statewide office as the next Attorney



Pictured left to right at the Congressional Luncheon : Roy Nascimento, Chamber President; Christopher McCarthy, Chamber Board Chair; Mayor Mike Nicholson of Gardner; Congresswoman Lori Trahan; Congressman Jim McGovern; Richard Lapidus, President of Fitchburg State University; State Representative Meghan Kilcoyne; and A.J. Tourigny of Fitchburg State University

General. The auditor's office will undoubtedly see change in the new year once Senator Diana DiZoglio begins her tenure. Representatives Berthiaume, Ferguson, Higgins, Kilcoyne, Kushmerek, Sena, Whipps and Zlotnik along with Senators Comerford, Cronin, Eldridge, and Gobi maintained their respective seats. At the time of printing, the race between Democrat Margaret Scarsdale and Republican Andrew Shepherd to serve as State Representative in the open seat in the 1st Middlesex District was too close to call, while Democrat Robyn Kennedy will represent the 1st Worcester District in the State Senate taking the place of Senator Harriette Chandler who decided to retire. The Chamber had met with elected and newly elected officials while on the campaign trail and look forward to partnering with them to advance North Central Massachusetts. We are also monitoring the implementation of changes

resulting from the four ballot questions and their impact on businesses in our region.

In addition to dealing with the shake ups on Beacon Hill, the Chamber's Government Affairs Committee saw a number of changes and additions in the past few months. Attorney Ken Gurge, who first joined the Committee in 2005 and served as chair since 2011, decided to step down in September. Due to transitions in responsibilities, Matt Bruun of Fitchburg State University, a member of the committee since 2014, and Scott Farrar of National Grid who has served since 2020, both departed over the summer. We want to thank all three of them for their tremendous dedication and service to the Government Affairs Committee over the years. Their expertise and contributions have been vital in shaping the public policy and advocacy efforts of the Chamber on a number of important issues for the business community. The Chamber

is also excited to welcome its newest committee members: Michelle Haggstrom of Keller Williams North Central; National Grid's Brandie Long; Tricia Pistone with UMass Memorial Health Alliance-Clinnton Hospital; and Fitchburg State University's AJ Tourigny.

At the start of the Fall, the committee also embarked on the process of updating the Chamber's public policy positions for FY23. This year, a real estate section was added focusing on housing as well as commercial and industrial real estate. The decision to include these areas came about as part of the One North Central plan which illustrated the need for more diverse housing options to support the regional workforce and the need to invest in more commercial real estate development to better compete against other regions looking to attract new investment.

While the Commonwealth began

*Continued on page 7*



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dispensing \$3 billion in excess tax revenue to residents under the 1980s voter law, Chapter 62F, Beacon Hill sent a \$3.8 billion-dollar economic development bill. The bill was a stripped-down version of House and Senate versions unveiled early in the summer. Major pieces nixed from the final version was the \$500 million in tax rebates to middle-income families and authorization of estate tax reforms, and permanent breaks for renters, seniors, caregivers and others. The State House News Service indicated broader, more permanent tax relief



Photo from the Annual Congressional Luncheon sponsored by Fitchburg State University. We would like to thank Congressman Jim McGovern and Congresswoman Lori Trahan for joining us.

could be revisited in the next session. According to Senate staff, the legislation included \$1.4 billion for the human services sector, \$540 million towards clean energy and climate resilience programs, along with \$409.5 million to support

affordable housing, and \$112 million for the MBTA.

With the colder weather arriving, the Chamber will continue to monitor rising energy costs and discussions on Beacon Hill and in Washington D.C. on how to best address

the situation. As we enter 2023, we will continue to foster relationships with our current elected officials, and we will work on building support for Chamber initiatives among the new administration, with a particular focus on workforce initiatives as we continue to outreach with the results of our recent workforce study. ◇

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**.

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## CHAMBER HOSTS MANUFACTURING BUS TOUR

Pictured are some of the education and community leaders that participated in the tour of Jabil Healthcare in Devens.

In recognition of National Manufacturing Month in October, the Chamber partnered with regional organizations to host a unique manufacturing bus tour as part of the Chamber's Education Compact Initiative. The initiative aimed to further partnerships between the region's K-12 schools, higher education institutions, and the region's employers to collectively work to advance the region's workforce.

The tour, which was held on October 19, provided education, civic and community leaders, economic development officials and the media, an opportunity to learn more about—and the importance of—manufacturing in the region as a way to promote careers in the industry. The MassHire North Central Massachusetts Workforce Investment Board and Mount Wachusett Community College co-sponsored the tour with the Chamber.

Participants visited several manufacturing companies where they obtained an insider's look at how select manufacturers operate, and also learned about the growing job opportunities in manufacturing and



Participants received a tour and demonstrations at Mount Wachusett Community College's Manufacturing Center in Devens.



Precision manufacturing was showcased at Burkart Flutes and Piccolos in Shirley.

the necessary skill-sets for employment.

Tour stops included Solvus Global, an advanced manufacturer located in Leominster that specializes in the areas of additive manufacturing, machine learning, and sustainable materials processing; Burkart Flutes and Piccolos, a company founded in 1982 that specializes in the precision manufacturing of high quality flutes and piccolos; Jabil, a worldwide contract manufacturer of

various medical devices and medical equipment; and Mount Wachusett Community College's Devens Manufacturing Center, which offers technical training in a number of different areas, including advanced manufacturing.

North Central Massachusetts boasts the largest concentration of manufacturing in the state, with one-third of all private wages in the region paid from manufacturing jobs. Companies range from the world-class plastics industry cluster of more than 140 companies to pharmaceuticals, photonics and paper as well as biomedical devices.

"The North Central Massachusetts Chamber of Commerce and the North Central Massachusetts Development Corporation remain committed to

supporting and growing this critical sector of the region's economy while also building successful partnerships between businesses and the region's schools which are critical to the collective, ongoing efforts of keeping manufacturing alive and well in the region," said Roy Nascimento, President and CEO, North Central Massachusetts Chamber of Commerce. "Manufacturers are some of the most well-paid, highly trained and in demand employees in the workforce, yet despite competitive wages and training, they are still challenged with recruiting the workers they need. We hope this tour provided our local educators, civic and community leaders, and the media, an opportunity to learn more about the jobs available in the region as the need for more young workers and a skills gap exists among the existing and transitioning workforce." ♦

For more information on the manufacturing bus tour or the North Central Massachusetts Education Compact Initiative, please contact **Terry Young, Manager of Talent and Education Initiatives at 978.353.7600.**



# NEW NORTH CENTRAL MASSACHUSETTS CHAMBER MEMBERS

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## Barrington's Autumn

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Lowell, MA 01852  
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## Flutter Yen Aesthetics, INC

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Wesminster, MA 01473  
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## Gardner Housing Authority

116 Church Street  
Gardner, MA 01440  
GOVERNMENT

## Green Meadows Farm

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Fitchburg, MA 01420  
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## Guild of St. Agnes of Worcester, Inc.

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Worcester, MA 01609  
CHILD CARE/PRE-SCHOOL

## Levanti Logging, LLC

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Winchendon, MA 01475  
WOOD

## New Dawn Arts Center

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Ashburnham, MA 01430  
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Boston, MA 02108  
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Ashburnham, MA 01430  
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SEPTEMBER-OCTOBER

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# CHAMBER UPDATES

## NEW STRATEGIC PLAN:

Stay tuned! The Chamber's new strategic plan will be released soon. This plan serves as a three-year roadmap for our efforts and builds upon the considerable momentum generated through our prior plan. The new plan capitalizes upon successes from the prior plan while also acknowledging a significant number of emerging opportunities and challenges currently facing our region. Once again it includes areas of focus, goals, quantifiable metrics and targets. It also aligns all of our functional affiliate organizations, resources and capabilities together and incorporates many of the recommendations of our One North Central Regional Economic Development Plan, as well as input from members and other stakeholders along with a review of our existing programs and initiatives.

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

Corporation – ended its fiscal year on September 30, 2022. During the last fiscal year, our team closed 31 micro-loans for a total of \$1,680,500. Of note, 74% of these loans were granted to historically underserved communities of minority, women or low income owned businesses. The loans ranged from \$7,500 to \$206,000. Our loans helped to leverage another \$2,286,138 in bank financing and owner capital and resulted in the retention/creation of 174 jobs.

## TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE:

In addition to the loans, our team also provided 1,162 hours of direct technical assistance and counseling to small businesses in the last year. We also provided an additional 10 micro-grants, for a total \$44,219.64, to support technical assistance needs of local small businesses. The average micro-grant awarded was \$4,422.

**AUDITS:** The annual independent audits for the Chamber, the Chamber Foundation and Visit North

Central Massachusetts were all completed in November with no findings reported. The audit is currently underway for the North Central Massachusetts Development Corporation and is expected to be completed by the end of the calendar year.

## REACCREDITATION:

The Chamber will begin the five-year reaccreditation process in 2023. Chamber accreditation is an extensive, self-review process that is expected to last six to eight months to complete. The process is overseen by the accrediting board of the United States Chamber of Commerce and chambers can only earn accreditation by meeting rigorous standards for leadership, staff development, chamber policy and procedures, programs – including governance, government affairs, technology, planning and finance. In Massachusetts, the North Central Massachusetts Chamber is one of only four chambers to have received accreditation, and is the only chamber in Central Massachusetts.

## SOLAR ENERGY PROGRAM:

From its inception in August 2014 through October 2022, the solar field on Pleasant St. has produced 11,876,866 kWh of Net Metering Credits to the manufacturers participating in the program. Total value of these credits is \$2,667,823.92 and the collective savings to participants totals \$2,267,650. As one of

the participants, the Chamber has also received \$213,426 in energy savings since inception.



A digital Ad campaign will be running through the holiday season promoting the Gift Local eGift Cards

## GIFT CARD NEWS:

As previously reported, we have revamped our gift card program to make it easier for merchants and gift card holders. The new cards can now be redeemed as a Mastercard transaction, significantly simplifying the process for everyone. We did a soft launch of the new and improved Gift Local eGift Card program in September and in November we launched a marketing campaign to promote the new gift card program. The campaign will run through the holiday season and includes paid digital ads with MassLive, Sentinel & Enterprise and LocalIQ. We are also running radio ads with WPKZ and we have implemented a social media campaign across our different social media

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channels highlighting our participating merchants. We encourage members to consider supporting this shop local initiative by either purchasing cards or by signing up as a participating merchant. Please visit [www.GiftLocal.net](http://www.GiftLocal.net) to learn more or contact Lauren Goulet, the Chamber's Operations Manager.

**STRONG ENTREPRENEURSHIP ECOSYSTEM:** This project, funded through a small grant from MassTech, builds off of the work of the One North Central Regional Economic Development Plan, which prioritizes



The Chamber's strong entrepreneurial ecosystem taskforce held hybrid meetings to continue efforts to strengthen the environment in the region for start-ups.

efforts to grow the region from within through small business support programs and initiatives. A small advisory committee of members has been working with our consultant, RKG Associates, to finalize a plan to strengthen the ecosystem for start-up and early stage companies in the region.

### DIGITAL MARKETING:

Traffic to our websites has averaged approximately 11,793 unique visitors and 23,743 page views each month for FY2023 YTD. We have also been averaging over 218,110 Google impressions each month. We continue to be very active on social media, populating our Facebook,

Instagram, LinkedIn, and Twitter platforms with our content. Our social media platforms have a combined 26,504 total followers. For FY2023 YTD, our Facebook channels had a reach of nearly 1 million and garnered an average of 217,000 impressions monthly and a total of over 3.3 million paid impressions. ♦



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### Contact Lynne Palazzi

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# FEATURED MEMBER PROFILE

## CHAMBER MEMBER IS BRINGING SCUBA DIVING BACK TO CENTRAL MASS



Descent Divers PADI Open Water Scuba Diver Certification Course.

For those in the know, the distinctive diagonal white stripe on a red background displayed on Main Street in Downtown Leominster is a pleasant surprise. They immediately recognize the diver down flag used to alert vessels that scuba divers and snorkelers are underwater. “A lot of customers see the diver down flag while driving by and stop in to check us out,” say first-time small business owners Matt and Pam DeMar, who opened Descent Divers, only the second dive shop in Worcester County, to have fun and grow the local underwater community.

The shop’s prime location at 6 Main Street boasts floor space for an array of scuba diving merchandise, from face masks to flippers. Even more convenient is the space upstairs that serves as a classroom for the wide range of courses offered at Descent Divers. Some of those courses, like Open Water Diving, cater to beginners. But the DeMars also offer an array of specialized certification courses, from Rescue Diving to Night Diving, for more experienced divers. And for those who want to dive year-round closer to

“It’s amazing what you can see underwater even out here.”

— MATT OF NEW ENGLAND’S WATERWAYS

home, the shop’s certification courses in Full Face Mask Diving and Dry Suit Diving are big hits. Since scuba divers equipped with a full-face mask and dry suit leave nothing exposed to the elements, they can continue diving in local lakes or along the South Shore well after the traditional end of diving season in November.

Whichever course customers choose, it’s helpful to know that Descent Divers is affiliated with internationally recognized PADI (Professional Association of Diving Instructors), which issues the scuba diving certifications. “Many of our courses are also ACE (American Council of Education) accredited,” adds Matt about the

accreditation, which means that some courses can count as transferable college credits in physical fitness or environmental science.

### ENRICHED AIR FOR LONGER DIVES

Matt is a certified scuba diving instructor who volunteered for years with Operation Blue Pride, a nonprofit based in Newton, MA, which offers free scuba training to veterans. So, he knows the ins and outs of diving and offers other essential services at Descent Divers, everything from repairing regulators to producing and selling enriched air nitrox (EANx). The enriched air tanks are essential to deep-water divers who run the risk of getting the bends, a potentially deadly nitrogen saturation in tissue that occurs when divers remain submerged for a long time. EANx increases the amount of oxygen in the tank up to 40% to minimize nitrogen intake. Luckily, the shop’s Main Street location also includes a basement that houses the compressor used to manufacture EANx. And the certification you need to purchase the enriched air? Descent Divers offers that non-dive training course right upstairs.

### SEAL PUPS, SCALLOPS AND LOBSTERS

“It’s amazing what you can see underwater even out here,” says Matt of New England’s waterways, which tend to be murkier than tropical destinations. Seeing seal pups play underwater is one of those amazing sights, while more adventurous souls

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can scuba dive for lobsters. Although picking up a lobster at your local grocer might be more convenient, Matt insists that “it’s more fun to dive for your own.” Rest assured, the shop offers essential gear for lobster diving, like squeeze-handle claw-proof bags and curved tickle sticks used to coax lobsters out of hiding.

## NETWORKING AND COMMUNITY OUTREACH

When it came to handling the logistics of opening a scuba diving shop, like booking pool time for underwater training, the couple say being members of the North Central Massachusetts Chamber of Commerce was invaluable. “The Chamber is good about helping businesses network with other businesses and institutions in the area,” explains



Photo (L-R) Shelby Coolidge, Matt DeMar (instructor), Noah Hill & Scott Raymond.

Pam. “Especially when we needed additional pool times, having those connections was very helpful.”

According to the owners of Descent Divers, their Chamber of Commerce membership is also great for community outreach since

it connects them with community organizers, like those who might plan beach cleanups. “People often forget to clean up what’s in the water,” Matt cautions. “We’re eager to participate in those beach cleanups since we can dive underwater and pick up discarded litter that washes into the waterways.”

Whether you’re a seasoned scuba diver or want to get certified, the dive shop owners encourage you to stop by for a chat. “But bring a friend,” warns Matt. “You’ll need a dive buddy.” ♦

## LEARN MORE

Stop by Descent Divers in person at 6 Main Street in Leominster, MA, or learn more about its extensive course offerings at [descentdivers.com](http://descentdivers.com).

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# OPPORTUNITY KNOCKS IN NORTH CENTRAL: HOW WILL YOU ANSWER?

**A**s employers in North Central Massachusetts continue to struggle to find skilled labor, the North Central Massachusetts Chamber of Commerce recently released *Worker Shortages and the North Central Massachusetts Region: Engaging Hidden and Future Workers to Grow the Local Economy*, a study that aimed to offer suggestions to balance the labor market now and into the future.

The study was prepared by the UMass Donahue Institute's Economic and Public Policy Research Group, a research provider of applied research to help clients make more informed decisions about strategic economic and public policy issues. Focusing on workforce growth barriers and solutions, including barriers related to geography, skills, structure and work/life balance, the study includes short-, mid- and long-term recommendations focused on growing the region's workforce.

"This project has very tangible recommendations

and sets North Central up as a thought leader in this space," said Dr. Mark Melnik, Director, Economic and Public Policy, UMass Donahue Institute. "The chamber is thoughtful about the characteristics of the region and the needs of the businesses. They are one of the first out of the gate in the state to acknowledge the workforce challenges their region is facing and have a strong desire to learn how to change those challenges into opportunities."

With the collaboration of regional business and education leaders and workforce development

**"The barriers and recommendations in the plan will require all different community stakeholders in North Central to work together to meet the region's workforce needs."**

**— ROY NASCIMENTO,  
PRESIDENT & CEO, NORTH  
CENTRAL MASSACHUSETTS  
CHAMBER OF COMMERCE**

experts, the study focused on two groups of workers who are not being fully utilized within the current workforce, but who have skills local employers need.

"Hidden workers" are potential workers in the labor market who are not being fully utilized, either because they are screened out of consideration for an open job or those who remain out of the workforce due to other barriers. Imagine workers with limited educational attainment or skill needs, workers with disabilities, veterans, people with criminal records, people

with family care needs, and so on, who may have an elevated level of unemployment or decreased labor force participation. For these kinds of workers, the research focuses on how best to remove labor market barriers to make it easier to work and help increase labor market engagement for underrepresented groups. "Future workers" are those workers who will be in the labor force in the future due to age, location, technology and other factors. The study recommendations zero in on how the region can better attract workers, as well as prepare today's young people for the economy of the future.

"Similar to many other areas of the Commonwealth, North Central is feeling the impacts of stagnant labor force engagement beyond the effects of the pandemic shutdowns," said Roy Nascimento, President and CEO, North Central Massachusetts Chamber of Commerce. "Our region is particularly susceptible to

*Continued on page 15*



## WHO THEY ARE: HIDDEN AND FUTURE WORKERS



*Continued from page 14*

labor force shrinkage due to our aging population and slower population growth, but also because groups of our hidden and future workers within the region have other needs which are not being met by the current labor market here. In fact, some workers are finding the job search to be just as difficult as it was before the pandemic began. The barriers and recommendations in the plan will require all different community stakeholders in North Central to work together to meet the regions' workforce needs."

While the study revealed many workers are willing and ready to work, barriers facing today's workers, including where they live, what skills they have and spoken (and unspoken) rules and regulations, can limit a person's ability to obtain a job.

From a lack of affordable housing adjacent to jobs and transportation from where affordable housing is available, to

current skills that no longer align with industries in the area and overly aggressive online applicant filters that may discriminate based on an applicant's past, the challenges facing today's workforce are unique to those of years past.

"We are definitely seeing transportation challenges," said Robin Therrien, Career Transitions Specialist, Shriver Job Corp., located in Devens, and who recently attended the Manufacturing Bus Tour hosted by the Chamber. "Not everyone is from the larger areas, like Fitchburg and Leominster, and we have students who live outside of these areas seeking opportunities, but there is no affordable housing and transportation to get them to these areas."

Jeffrey Roberge, Executive Director at MassHire North Central Workforce Board agrees. "Transportation is an issue, especially for those people who live in rural areas of the region," he said. "But the silver lining here is that several stakeholders in the region are constantly

looking at ways to get people to the jobs here and have a commitment to the workforce system to develop transportation services for the workforce."

Roberge pointed to the Montachusett Area Regional Transport (MART), which is looking at modified plans to support workforce development. "We are fortunate to have our local transit authority recognize workforce development as a priority, and I know they are looking at bus routes to better align with shift schedules."

To combat transportation issues, the study recommends employers implement ride share programs, which are similar to a carpool system among fellow employees, and encourage companies to coordinate a van system, which helps workers complete the last mile to and from public transportation locations to the company location. Roberge said this type of system has experienced much success in the Boston area.

But transportation

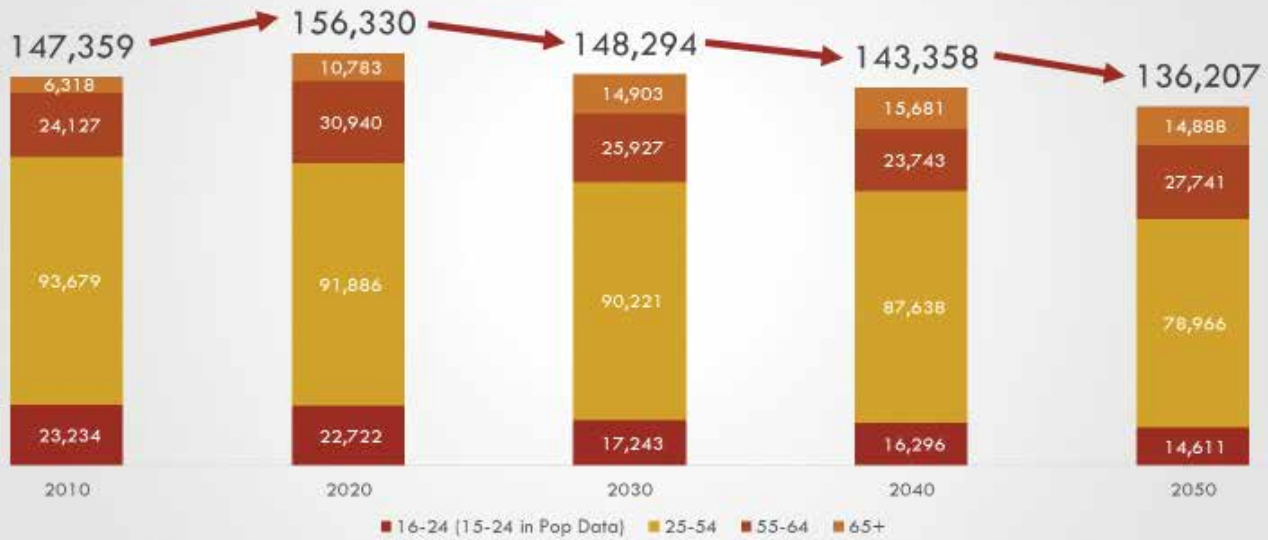
isn't the only challenge employers are facing when hiring workers. The study revealed the most diverse set of issues faced by both workers and employers relates to work/life balance, such as prioritizing shift times, benefits, and location over things such as industry, company or position in the company.

"The future is hybrid and preliminary data has shown there hasn't been reduced production of work when people are working from home," added Roberge. "While certain industries have more challenges with a hybrid work schedule, such as manufacturing and health care, I think employers really need to think about aligning schedules and shifts with what their industry can handle and provide remote or hybrid opportunities as much as possible. I don't think we will ever go back to the traditional workday of being in the office eight hours a day, five days a week."

The study recommends

*Continued on page 16*

## PROJECTED LABOR FORCE IN NORTH CENTRAL



UMassAmherst

Donahue Institute  
Economic and  
Public Policy ResearchSource: ACS PUMs 2010 and 2020 5YR, UMDI V2020 Population Projections  
Note: LFPR by year multiplied by projected population 2020-2050, LFPR for 2020 applied to 2020-2050 population, 2010 LFPR is applied only to 2010 population.*Continued from page 15*

multi-purpose solutions for North Central related to work-life balance, including a shorter work week, flexible working agreements, the expansion of benefits to include childcare, more permissive policies for time-off requests, incentives for career advancement and rewards for longevity, incentives for employees who have a healthy work/life balance, and coordination with other community stakeholders to increase the supply of childcare, among others.

The study also explored a variety of solutions to engage hidden and future workers into the labor force, such as through the creation of innovative training and credentialing programs, and fostering relationships with local community colleges, businesses and prisons.

“North Central’s workforce is aging and slowed population growth is projected to continue,”

said Nascimento. “In order to meet North Central’s workforce needs, employers, educational institutions and workforce development agencies must collaborate to identify overlapping strategies to help enhance the engagement of these groups in the labor force.”

Local institutions, such as Mount Wachusett Community College and

Fitchburg State University, currently collaborate with employers to coordinate programs geared toward community and employer needs. For example, in collaboration with employers, Mount Wachusett Community College began developing a new Veteran Worker’s Initiative that assists local veterans with the transition from

military skills to college/civilian skills. This program connects regional employers to students on campus, hosts panel discussions with organizations that educate employers on how to be responsive and sensitive to veteran needs and utilizes the college’s career services by connecting students with business partners in the area.

“We have so many great partners and we want the industry professionals in our area to be involved with educating the future workforce,” said Kijah Gordon, Director of Workforce Access and Education, Mount Wachusett Community College. “We are taking a step back from traditional programming and really looking at what our employers need to fill their open positions.”

At Shriver Job Corp., which serves those between the ages of 16 to 24, programs are offered to students who may not have

**“We have so many great partners and we want the industry professionals in our area to be involved with educating the future workforce.”**

— KIJAH GORDON,  
DIRECTOR OF WORKFORCE  
ACCESS & EDUCATION,  
MOUNT WACHUSETT  
COMMUNITY COLLEGE

*Continued on page 17*



*Continued from page 16*

had a good support system throughout their lives and who may not have life skills that make them attractive to employers. “Our students are not all at-risk youth,” said Denise Schultz, Work-based Learning Specialist, Shriver Job Corp. “The truth is we have good kids who might not have the best focus, but who are committed to learning a skill so they can be contributing members in their communities while also building a good life for their families. We want to work with local employers on filling their open positions and they just need to let us know what they need so we can help find the right fit.”

In an effort to facilitate the collaboration between employers and educational institutions, the Chamber recently hired a Talent and Education Initiatives Program Manager to support the development, retention and attraction of a qualified labor force. “By working with employers, regional partners and educational

institutions on developing strategies and programs to build and strengthen our current and future workforce, it was important for us to have a team member focused on these efforts to help strengthen the collaboration,” added Nascimento.

“Terry Young (the Chamber’s Talent and Education Initiatives Program Manager) is doing a great job recruiting for our program,” added Gordon. “The future for us is working with the high schools on how to make our programming more appealing to students.”

While collaboration will be key to growing the labor force in North Central, the study concludes that employers need to make working easier by overcoming the identified barriers.

“What stood out to me about the region was the level of collaboration between higher education and businesses combined with a strong Chamber of Commerce,” said Melnik.

“There is really good DNA in the region for collaboration and forward thinking, and the people who we spoke with (as we developed the study) realize that timing for this work is important as the issues at hand will only become bigger if they are not addressed.”

Nascimento agreed the region is unique because the collaboration among its businesses, educators and other key stakeholders is already strong. “The Chamber of Commerce is in a unique position to gain trust from businesses and locals with a goal of establishing connections necessary to better meet worker needs and ultimately bring additional people into the labor force,” said Nascimento. “It is our hope that by commissioning the North Central Workforce Study that all stakeholders will have a shared roadmap to overcome the challenges and set forth a bright future for employers and workers alike in the region.”

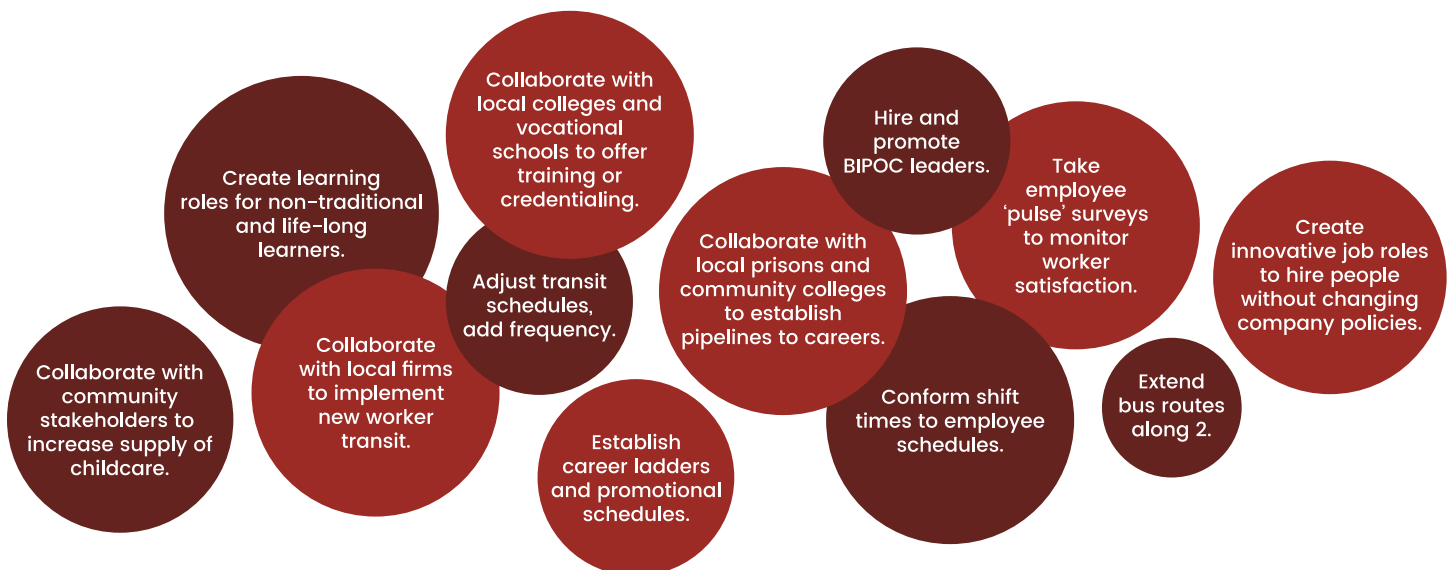
While the study

outlines challenges and opportunities to overcome them, many people are bullish on the region’s workforce development, including Roberge.

“We have a vibrant workforce development system, and the outlook is bright as we have solutions to combat our challenges,” said Roberge. “We are very lucky that our businesses, educators, career centers, social service agencies and many others are talking with each other toward a common goal of making North Central a place to live, work and raise a family. We know what we need to do, and we have a community of engaged and committed people to do it.” ♦

**To read *Worker Shortages and the North Central Massachusetts Region: Engaging Hidden and Future Workers to Grow the Local Economy*, visit [www.northcentralmass.com](http://www.northcentralmass.com).**

## MULTI PURPOSE SOLUTIONS FOR NORTH CENTRAL



# TOURISMupdate

## VISIT NORTH CENTRAL MASSACHUSETTS



Chamber President & CEO Roy Nascimento and Diane Burnette, Manager of the Johnny Appleseed Visitor Center, staffing the Massachusetts booth during the recent Big "E".

**T**he Chamber's destination marketing arm, Visit North Central Massachusetts (VNCM), finalized its FY23 annual marketing plan. Proposed marketing efforts included in the plan range from digital advertising campaigns, sponsored campaigns, public relations, social media, trade show participation and several collaborations with state and local partners. The primary focus of marketing efforts will continue to be on attracting the weekend and daytrip leisure traveler from within a 250-mile radius, including key origin markets like Boston, Southern Massachusetts,

New Hampshire, New York and Rhode Island. Other target markets for our efforts in FY23 include the youth/amateur sports market and corporate/associations. The plan was approved by the Board of Directors and submitted to the Mass Office of Travel and Tourism as part of our annual tourism grant submission. We hope to hear back on our final grant award in December.

Throughout the Fall season, we also worked on updating and refining the content on our travel website – [Visitnorthcentral.com](http://Visitnorthcentral.com). Visitors use the site as a guide and can easily find out about places to visit, where to stay,

culinary experiences and local services offered in the region. We updated listings and the event calendar. We also added new content to help promote the region, including some seasonal landing pages; a section highlighting communities in our region; and a new landing page to help promote the region as a destination for youth and amateur sports tournaments and events. In addition, we posted several stories highlighting activities and attractions, such as "Choices, Choices! How Do You Pick The Perfect Apple?" which promoted the region's orchards; "It's Festival Season" which highlighted the region's abundance of Fall festivals and events; and "Tunes & Taps" which promoted the region as a destination for craft beer lovers.

The Fall/Winter edition of the Guide to North Central Massachusetts was published in September. This popular publication is a glossy, full color magazine with pieces that aim to inform and inspire readers, and brand North Central

Massachusetts as a unique destination and a dynamic place to live, work and visit. Over 35,000 issues were distributed to over 300 high traffic locations throughout the region and state. A digital version was also posted on the website and shared via social media and email. We have seen strong demand for the publication this year and anticipate running out of the remaining supply of the Winter edition at the visitor center by early December. Costs for producing and printing the guide have increased, so we will need to carefully evaluate advertising interest to weigh if we can increase the number of issues for the next edition to meet the increasing demand we have been seeing. Members interested in advertising in the 2023 Spring/Summer edition are strongly encouraged to contact the Chamber as soon as possible.

We also invested in several paid campaigns executed through Facebook

*Continued on page 19*





Vicky Tippawong, Marketing Manager of the Chamber showcases local attractions and businesses at the recent Dream Destination Travel Show.

*Continued from page 18*

that were targeted to drive the market during the Fall season. The ads highlighted Fall activities in North Central Massachusetts, including apple picking, Fall foliage, festivals and other activities. The campaigns ran in September and October and resulted in a paid reach of 448,894 and 1,545,900 impressions. Organic reach during the same period was 398,967. The campaigns also resulted in 18,013 engagements and our Facebook following growing by over 2,000 followers. During the same period, our Instagram posts had a reach of 19,383 and saw 78 new followers.

Our other paid advertising efforts during the Fall included a Labor Day campaign with Media News Group to promote Fairs and the kick-off of the Fall season. The campaign included digital and print ads in their publications. The digital

ads resulted in 190,689 impressions and 156 clicks. We also complemented the campaign with radio advertisements. During the season, we also partnered with the Hampshire County Regional Tourism Council on an advertising campaign in the Boston Spirit and we secured an ad in the Dream Destinations Guide targeted towards the Western Massachusetts and Connecticut market. We also hosted a booth at the Dream Destinations Travel Show in Springfield and helped to staff the Massachusetts booth at the Big E in Springfield.

Lodging data was very strong for the Fall season. Hotel occupancy for YTD through September was 70.9%, a 20.7% increase over the previous year; ADR was \$173.76 which is a 41.5% increase; RevPar was \$123.18, a 70.9% increase over the previous year; total room revenue was up 70.9%; and rooms sold was up 20.7% for YTD.

## With Fall behind us, we have shifted gears to focus on promoting awareness and visitation to North Central Massachusetts during the Winter season.

AirDNA data also showed that demand for short term rentals (vacation rentals) in the region has increased 53.1% YTD through September and revenues have increased 62.6%. Although we saw strong lodging data and social media results, website traffic was down modestly about 6% during the season.

Our Johnny Appleseed Visitor Center also saw strong traffic during the Fall season. Sales

at the gift shop were at a record high, up 35% over the previous year and 10% over 2018 which was our previous record year. We also saw eighteen group tour buses stop at the center in the Fall, an increase over previous years.

With Fall behind us, we have shifted gears to focus on promoting awareness and visitation to North Central Massachusetts during the Winter season. ♦



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# QUICK hits

## BUSINESS AFTER HOURS AT OAK HILL COUNTRY CLUB

We had a great night full of networking, appetizers and drinks at our Business After Hours at Oak Hill Country Club. Thank you Oak Hill Country Club for hosting the event!



## RIBBON CUTTING FOR FLUTTER YEN AESTHETICS' GRAND OPENING

Congratulations to new Chamber member Flutter Yen Aesthetics on their Grand Opening at 217 State Road E Westminster, MA. Be sure to stop by and see them for all of your beauty aesthetic needs! Some of the services offered includes: Body Contouring, Facials, Eye Lash Extensions, Waxing and Teeth Whitening.



## NCMDC PROVIDES LOAN TO JC FERREIRA CONSTRUCTION, INC

The Chamber's economic development arm provided a \$112,500 loan to JC Ferreira Construction, Inc. toward the purchase of construction equipment. This loan helped retain four jobs in Leominster. Pictured left to right in picture are Steve Sugar, NCMDC, VP of Lending; Nico Mieres, JC Ferreira Construction; Paul A. Ferreira, President at JC Ferreira Construction; Sandie Cataldo, NCMDC, Senior Economic Development.



## RIBBON CUTTING FOR RFK COMMUNITY ALLIANCE'S GRAND OPENING OF NEW MIDDLE SCHOOL

Congratulations to Chamber member RFK Community Alliance on their Grand Opening of Doctor Franklin Perkins School's new middle school in Lancaster, in addition to a new art and music wing at the Janeway Education Center and the new Hope House residence.



## QUICK HITS CONTINUED...



### RIBBON CUTTING FOR MEM DANCE THEATRE "SHARING THE ARTS TOGETHER"

Congratulations to new Chamber member MEM Dance Theatre "Sharing the Arts Together". Owned by friends Mary and Matthew in Sterling, MA. MEM Dance Theatre offers a variety of classes and levels in ballet, pointe, modern, lyrical, contemporary, jazz, tap, hip hop, musical theater and dance competitions.

### RIBBON CUTTING FOR NGE SPORTS PERFORMANCE'S GRAND OPENING

Congratulations Chamber member NGE Sports Performance on their Grand Opening! They are located at 44 Old Princeton Rd, 5th Massachusetts Turnpike Entrance, Fitchburg, MA in the Emerson Falls complex. Stop by and learn about their customized training programs.



### RIBBON CUTTING FOR MELAO BY MUNCHIES' GRAND OPENING

Congratulations to our newest chamber member Melao by Munchies on their grand opening on 27 Airport Road in Fitchburg. Swing by to enjoy authentic Puerto Rican infused plates, and mention what your favorite item was.



### BUSINESS AFTER HOURS, HOSTED BY AIS

Thank you AIS (Affordable Interior Systems) for hosting a phenomenal Business After Hours and generously providing the beverages and appetizers as well as tours of their innovative facility!

### GOOD MORNING NORTH CENTRAL WITH DR. MARK MELNIK AND SENATOR JOHN CRONIN

We had a great kick-off to the new season of our Good Morning North Central breakfast series in September at Great Wolf Lodge which featured Dr. Mark Melnik, Director of Economic and Public Policy Research at the UMass Donahue Institute and Senator John Cronin. Thank you to BankHometown for sponsoring the September edition.



QUICK HITS CONTINUED ON PAGE 22

## QUICK HITS CONTINUED...



### NCMDC PROVIDES LOAN TO STERLING PERFORMING ARTS

The Chamber's economic development arm recently provided a \$100,000 loan to Sterling Performing Arts as new leadership takes over the popular studio following the retirement of Paula Meola, founder of the studio. This loan retained two full-time employees and 13 part-time employees. Pictured left to right in the photo are Matthew Kooyomjian, Co-Owner of MEM Dance Theatre; Mary Elizabeth Tinervin, Co-Owner of MEM Dance Theatre; and Norm Vigeant, Vice President of Lending at the North Central Massachusetts Development Corporation.



### NCMDC PROVIDES LOAN TO MAGIC TREASURES

The North Central Massachusetts Development Corporation (NCMDC), the economic development arm of the North Central Massachusetts Chamber, recently approved a \$10,000 loan to Magic Treasures, located at 914 Main Street in Fitchburg. Pictured left to right in the picture are Rebecca Beaton, Vice President of Lending at the Chamber; Keila Jardim, Owner of Magic Treasures; and Sandie Cataldo, Senior Economic Development Manager at the Chamber.



### NCMDC APPROVES FINANCING TOWARD PURCHASE OF BIRCHTREE BREAD COMPANY

The Chamber's economic development arm recently provided a \$125,000 loan as part of a funding package with TD Bank, for owners of Crust Bake Shop to purchase Birchtree Bread Company, located in Worcester. Pictured left to right in the photo are James Ciociolo of TD Bank; Sandie Cataldo, Senior Economic Development Manager at the Chamber; Anthony Pasquale of TD Bank; Nate Rossi, Owner of Crust and Birchtree Bread Company; Alexis Kelleher, Owner of Crust and Birchtree Bread Company; Norm Vigeant, Vice President of Lending at the North Central Massachusetts Development Corporation; and Cheryl Miller of the Small Business Development Center at Clark University.



### YOUNG PROFESSIONALS PLAY KICKBALL AT GAME ON FITCHBURG

The Young Professionals of North Central Massachusetts enjoyed a great evening of networking and Kickball at Game On Fitchburg. Thank you to our Special Guest Referee: Stephen DiNatale - Mayor of Fitchburg, our sponsor Enterprise Bank & Trust and to all who donated. All proceeds from this event will go towards the Young Professionals of North Central Massachusetts Scholarship!



## QUICK HITS CONTINUED...



### NCMDC PROVIDES LOAN TO DELICIOUS DIPS

The Chamber's economic development arm recently provided a \$30,000 loan to Delicious Dips to help establish the business. The new Fitchburg based bakery offers walk-in retail service featuring smoothies and custom orders of cakes and dipped fruits, among other items. Pictured left to right in the picture are Liz Murphy, City of Fitchburg, Office of Community Development; Maribel Cruz, Economic Development Manager at the Chamber; Sandie Cataldo, Senior Economic Development Manager at the Chamber; Paige McNamara, Owner of Delicious Dips; Mayor Steve DiNatale, City of Fitchburg; Rebecca Beaton, Vice President of Lending at the Chamber; and Ray Belanger, NewVue Communities.

### RIBBON CUTTING FOR COMMUNITY HEALTH CONNECTIONS' NEW LOCATION

Congratulations to Chamber member Community Health Connections on the recent opening of their new location at 165 Mill Street in Leominster. Community Health Connections is a nonprofit, federally qualified, community health center committed to eliminating barriers to care and building a healthier tomorrow. Their medical and behavioral health services are now open and phase 2 of construction at their Leominster facility will include optometry and dental services.



### 6 CHAMBERS OF COMMERCE GREAT B.A.S.H.

We had a great turn out at the 6 Chambers of Commerce Great B.A.S.H. of 2022! Over 300 businesses came together for a night of networking, amazing food and drinks! Thank you to Great Wolf Lodge for being an amazing host.

### WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP CONNECTION LUNCHEON AT OAK HILL COUNTRY CLUB

The Chamber held its quarterly Women's Leadership Connection luncheon at Oak Hill Country Club to a full room of amazing women from the North Central region. Thank you to our guest speaker Maria Milagros. Thank you to the Women's Leadership Connection series sponsor Fidelity Bank MA!



QUICK HITS CONTINUED ON PAGE 24



## QUICK HITS CONTINUED...



### YOUNG PROFESSIONALS MEET AT THE MAIN STREET GIFT & CAFÉ

In September, the Young Professionals of North Central Massachusetts enjoyed appetizers & drinks at the Main Street Gift & Café in Leominster! A huge thank you to the amazing staff and Mayor Dean Mazzarella for hosting us in your beautiful outdoor space.

### CHAMBER'S ANNUAL LEGISLATIVE AND CANDIDATES RECEPTION

More than 125 attendees including federal, state, and local elected officials and candidates attended the North Central Massachusetts Chamber's Annual Legislative and Candidates Reception on September 22, 2022 at the Chocksett Inn in Sterling. The reception is one of the Chamber's premier events of the fall season and provided business leaders an opportunity to engage with elected officials and candidates in a relaxed, social setting. A special thanks to our sponsor Mount Wachusett Community College for their support of the program.



### WORK NORTH CENTRAL HIRING EVENT

Thank you to everyone who participated in the Work North Central Hiring Event! It was a great success in promoting local jobs and careers in North Central Massachusetts. A special thank you to Fitchburg State University, the MassHire North Central Career Center, the MassHire North Central Workforce Board, and Mount Wachusett Community College for partnering with us on this important effort. Also, special thanks to the Montachusett Regional Transit Authority (MART) for providing a complimentary round-trip shuttle for participants and to Wachusett Mountain for hosting us.

### NEW CHAMBER MEMBER ORIENTATION AT THE BARN DOOR

Thank you to the new members that were able to join us for our Fall New Member Orientation and Reception! It was a great opportunity to learn more about the benefits of the Chamber and connect with other new members. A special thank you to The Barn Door in the Town of Pepperell for hosting us.





## Save the Date

**The quarterly meeting of the Women's Leadership Connection luncheon will meet on January 25, 2023.**

This meeting features guest speaker Elizabeth Coveney, Chief Executive Officer of Boys & Girls Club of Fitchburg & Leominster.

The Women's Leadership Connection, a luncheon event held four times per year focuses on business women empowering women in business. Core topics include professional development and career advancement as well as social and philanthropic events.

Thank you to the Women's Leadership Connection Sponsor Fidelity Bank. ♦




**Elizabeth Coveney**  
Chief Executive Officer  
Boys & Girls Club of Fitchburg & Leominster

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# North Central Calendar **EVENTS**

**Build Connections  
and Relationships  
at the Chamber!**

A complete list of events with details can be found on our event calendar on [northcentralmass.com](http://northcentralmass.com).

Please contact Kat Deal with any questions at 978.353.7600 ext. 235 or via email at [kdeal@northcentralmass.com](mailto:kdeal@northcentralmass.com).

## December 7

Winter Reception at The 228 in Sterling Sponsored by AIS

5:00 PM - 7:00 PM

## December 15

Young Professionals of North Central Massachusetts Holiday Party Sponsored by MOC, Inc

5:00 PM - 7:00 PM

## December 30

Connect North Central Sponsored by Aroma Joe's

8:00 AM - 9:00 AM

## January 12

Good Morning North Central Sponsored by Resource Management, Inc

6:45 AM - 8:30 AM

## January 18

Business After Hours at 110 Grill

5:00 PM - 7:00 PM

## January 25

Women's Leadership Connection featuring Elizabeth Coveney Sponsored by Fidelity Bank

11:45 AM - 1:30 PM

## January 27

Connect North Central Sponsored by Aroma Joe's

8:00 AM - 9:00 AM

## February 13

Small Business Roundtable Sponsored by Fidelity Bank

8:00 AM - 9:30 AM

## February 24

Connect North Central Sponsored by Aroma Joe's

8:00 AM - 9:30 AM



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