

40 Year Anniversary Edition

North Central Massachusetts Chamber Report

Building Businesses. Building Communities.



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CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

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Chamber Report

a publication of
The North Central Massachusetts Chamber of Commerce

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About the Cover: We are honored to celebrate the 40th anniversary of the North Central Massachusetts Chamber of Commerce commitment to build businesses and communities. This commemorative edition of the Chamber Report showcases our rich history of strong advocacy and bold leadership, and the cover highlights our past and showcases the dynamic work of the Chamber today. For our feature article, we wanted to gain insight from a few, longstanding members about what they see for our future, while also looking back on their experiences with the Chamber over the years. This edition also includes information on some special events we have planned to celebrate our 40th year as well as opportunities for members to engage with us over the next year, and so much more. We hope you enjoy this issue as much as we had putting it together. Thank you for your support of our Chamber.

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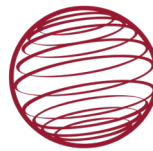
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North Central Massachusetts Chamber of Commerce

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We're celebrating 40 years of leadership and impact because of the continued support of our members and communities.

We hope you will engage in our celebration this year!

WAYS TO ENGAGE!

Attend an Event or Program



Scan the QR code or visit our website to check out our calendar of events. We have special events planned throughout 2024 in honor of our 40th Anniversary!

[web.northcentralmass.com/
events](http://web.northcentralmass.com/events)

Tell Us Your Story



Our history is your history – tell us about your company! Scan the QR code to complete a short questionnaire and to be spotlighted on our social media!

Learn About Our History



Scan the QR code to view our "History & Milestones" page to explore a full timeline of our history and learn more about the impact the Chamber has had over the years.

[northcentralmass.com/
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The North Central Massachusetts Chamber of Commerce wishes to acknowledge the following organizations who have been members since our founding in 1984.

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The Arc of Opportunity in North
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Leominster Credit Union
McCarty Associates, Inc.

BABCOCK, OGETO AND BERTHET-GARCIA JOIN CHAMBER STAFF

The Chamber is pleased to announce the following appointments to its professional staff.

Maureen Babcock is appointed Executive Assistant, bringing a wealth of skills and experience to the role, including more than a decade of experience in project management, registration, and program coordination. In this position, she will be responsible for managing the Chamber's database, providing administrative and operational support, and coordinating special projects. A resident of Devens, she has been very active in the community, including volunteering with Troop 1 of the Boy Scouts and Harvard Parks & Recreation as the Ski Club Coordinator. She also serves as the Chair of the Devens Educational Advisory Committee, which advises MassDevelopment on education-related matters for the Devens community. She holds a bachelor's degree in political science and business from Mount Saint Mary's College.



Duke Ogeto.

Duke Ogeto is appointed Marketing Coordinator and will assist with marketing and communications efforts, including graphic design, and website and social media management for the Chamber and its affiliate organizations. He holds a master's degree in digital marketing from Southern New Hampshire University, a bachelor's degree in graphic design from UMass Lowell, and an associate's degree in interactive media & design from Quinsigamond Community College. A resident of Leominster,



Maureen Babcock.

he previously served as marketing assistant for World Farmers, located in Lancaster, and as a marketing assistant and graphic designer for UMass Lowell.

Nicolas Berthet-Garcia is appointed Community Business Advisor. In this position, Berthet-Garcia will be responsible for leading outreach efforts to engage and support the Latinx community in North Central Massachusetts. This includes assisting Latinx small business owners and entrepreneurs with one-on-one technical assistance as well as connecting



Nicolas Berthet-Garcia.

them to resources in the local business community. He has deep roots in North Central Massachusetts, having grown up locally after his family immigrated from Uruguay. In 2015, Berthet-Garcia became the owner and operator of a cleaning company working with clients across Massachusetts. In 2021, he served as the regional lead on a citywide initiative to distribute public health information in collaboration with the city of Leominster. A resident of Fitchburg, he is bilingual in Spanish and English, and is a certified interpreter.

CHAMBER OF THE YEAR TROPHY TOUR



We are honored and humbled to have been named Chamber of the Year. We want to share this with the people who helped us achieve this historic milestone — **our members!**

We have been hitting the road for a Trophy Tour to recognize our members for their commitment and contributions to the region.

If you'd like to be part of the Trophy Tour, reach out and we'll deliver the trophy to your workplace for fun, creative photos to showcase your business.

Contact Maureen Babcock at 978.353.7600 ext. 222 or email at mbabcock@northcentralmass.com for more information.

NEW NORTH CENTRAL MASSACHUSETTS CHAMBER MEMBERS

SEPTEMBER — NOVEMBER

Alena Martiros Coaching

Alena Martiros
Lunenburg, MA 01462
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Groton, MA 01450
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Jillian Shaw
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Devens, MA 01434
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Lancaster, MA 01523
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Devens, MA 01434
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Keystone Educational Collaborative

Andy Birr
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Leominster, MA 01453
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Melissa Tzanoudakis
111 Main Street
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435 Lancaster Street
Suite 353
Leominster, MA 01453
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Potpourri Gift Shop

Kelly Kendall
139 Central Street
Leominster, MA 01453
SHOPPING AND SPECIALTY RETAIL

Social Light Business Club

Samuel Nieves
344 Main Street
Fitchburg, MA 01420
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633 W. Broadway
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**NOT A
MEMBER OF THE
CHAMBER?
CONSIDER JOINING!**



In the photo, left to right, are Travis Condon, public affairs manager, North Central Massachusetts Chamber of Commerce; Kim Ferguson, State Representative; Salvatore “Sam” Albert, Select Board; Stephanie Lahtinen, Town Administrator; and Roy Nascimento, president & CEO North Central Massachusetts Chamber of Commerce.



In the photo, left to right, are James Patacchiola, Chair, Sterling Economic Development Committee; Roy Nascimento, president & CEO, North Central Massachusetts Chamber; Bill Caldwell, Town Administrator; Stephen Wallace, Town Planner; Meg Kilcoyne, State Representative; Maureen Cranson, Select Board Chair; Kirsten Newman, Select Board; and Peter Durant, State Senator.

CHAMBER SPONSORS WELCOME SIGNS

As part of a regional effort to boost civic pride and create positive first impressions, the Chamber has sponsored new welcome signs in the Towns of Hubbardston, Sterling, and Westminister. Each sign is carved with the community’s seal and painted to match their official colors. Similar welcome signs have also been installed at key gateways in Fitchburg, Gardner, and Leominster. Additional signs will be constructed for other communities in North Central Massachusetts as funding becomes available.



In the photo, left to right, are Tracy Gagnon, manager of Membership Recruitment and Engagement, North Central Massachusetts Chamber; Nathan Boudreau, Town Administrator, Town of Hubbardston; Katie Young, Select Board Vice Chair, Town of Hubbardston; Jeff Williams, Select Board Chair, Town of Hubbardston; Peter Walker, Select Board Member, Town of Hubbardston; Whitney Friberg, Economic Development Committee Chair, Town of Hubbardston; State Representative Donald Berthiaume; and Roy Nascimento, president & CEO, North Central Massachusetts Chamber.

CHAMBER updates

INITIATE SMALL BUSINESS PLATFORM:

The Chamber has invested in a new online resource platform for members and NCMDC clients called “Initiate”. The platform can be accessed via the Chamber’s website and provides access to new tools, resources and bilingual supports to help small businesses grow in North Central Massachusetts. The Initiate resource portal covers topics such as money, marketing, management, and resiliency resources by using a variety of learning methods including videos, templates, and guides.

LAND BANK: The Chamber has established the North Central Massachusetts Land Bank, Inc. as a new affiliate organization. The Land Bank was recommended in the One North Central Regional economic development plan and is intended to be another economic development tool that helps spur more real estate economic development activity in the region. Research indicates the Land Bank approach has been successfully utilized to support economic development in other communities and regions. In addition to providing the region with a competitive edge, this initiative will act as a major selling point for investment by clearing what can often be a major hurdle in getting projects off the ground.

REGIONAL BUSINESS INVESTMENT FUND: In related news, the Chamber’s

economic development arm – the North Central Massachusetts Development Corporation (NCMDC) – recently launched a funding opportunity to provide low or no-cost loans to developers. The Regional Business Investment Fund (RBIF) is another initiative recommended in the One North Central plan to encourage more real estate development in the region. The funding can be used by developers for engineering, soft costs, site work, infrastructure and hard costs for specific developments in the 26 communities that make up the North Central region. The RBIF loan program differs from our traditional micro-loans and is intended to work in conjunction with other local, state and federal incentives and financing to encourage priority real estate development projects in the region. Documented support from the local municipality must be provided to be eligible.

EMERGENCY RECOVERY EFFORTS:

Following the historic flooding that impacted the region in September, the Chamber and its affiliate organizations stepped up to assist local businesses that were impacted and to help with recovery efforts. We reactivated our dedicated email hotline – help@northcentralmass.com – for businesses to contact us with requests for immediate assistance; we created an online resources page providing guidance and resources from local,

state and federal authorities; provided micro-grants to help impacted businesses; and established the North Central Emergency Relief Loan program to provide immediate funds for remediation efforts. The program provides up to \$10,000 with a 1% interest rate and all fees waived for eligible businesses and offers an expedited approval process with a quick closing. Loans are available up to six months interest only or deferred payments, then up to a 36-month repayment term with no pre-payment penalty.

jobs. The majority of the loans were through our traditional micro-loan program, however two of the loans were made through the new Regional Business Investment Fund to help support important real estate redevelopment projects in two communities in the region.

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE: In addition to the loans, our team also provided 2,706 hours of technical assistance and counseling to small businesses in the last year.



The NCMDC granted a \$32,000 loan to **Rise & Grind Café** and Smoothie Bar.

NEW LOANS: The NCMDC ended its fiscal year on September 30, 2023. During the last fiscal year, our team closed 27 loans for a total of \$1,371,000. Of note, 85% of these loans were granted to historically underserved communities of minority, women, immigrant, or low income owned businesses. The loans ranged from \$5,000 to \$216,000. Our loans helped to leverage another \$1,085,779 in bank financing and owner capital and resulted in the retention/creation of 96

MINI-GRANTS: The NCMDC continues to offer mini-grants between \$500 - \$5,000 to small businesses to assist with needed technical assistance. In FY2023, we provided ten mini-grants totaling \$35,288.93 to help with bookkeeping, marketing, signage and other professional services. The average mini-grant awarded was \$3,529. In addition to the technical assistance grants, the Chamber also provided another \$74,000 in Energy Relief Mini-Grants to small businesses. The energy relief grants were

CHAMBER updates



The Chamber was pleased to support Chamber member **Bisousweet Confections** recently with a \$1,000 small business grant.

generously funded through a contribution from National Grid. There are still grants available, so we encourage members to reach out to us to see if they are eligible. We are prioritizing chamber members for the grants.

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.

NORTH CENTRAL TALENT COMPACT: In September, the members of the Compact met again to continue to explore collaborative strategies to the

workforce challenges in the region. The North Central Talent Compact is a coalition convened by the Chamber and other major stakeholders to address the complex talent and workforce challenges facing the region. An outgrowth of the Compact meeting was an expanded Career and Hiring Event that was hosted at the Mount Wachusett Community College in October. The event was a tremendous success, with an estimated 450+ attendees, including college students, high school students and a diverse mix of job seekers from throughout the region.



The Regional Manufacturing Bus tour included a stop at **Rocheleau Tool & Die** in Fitchburg

MANUFACTURER BUS TOUR: As part of National Manufacturing Month, the Chamber, in partnership with the MassHire North Central Workforce Board and Mount Wachusett Community College, held a regional manufacturer bus tour in October. In alignment with our Talent Compact, this event provided education, civic and community leaders, and economic development officials with

an insider's look at how manufacturers operate, the growing job opportunities in manufacturing locally and the necessary skill sets for employment. The bus tour included stops at Rocheleau Tool & Die, in Fitchburg; SMC Ltd., located in Devens; and AIS, Inc., in Leominster. The bus tour also included a stop at the Leominster campus of Mount Wachusett Community College and the MassHire North Central Career Center where participants learned about education and workforce related resources and services available to employers and job seekers.

SOLAR: From its inception in August 2014 through October 2023, the solar field on Pleasant St. has produced 13,206,026 kWh of Net Metering Credits to the manufacturers participating in the program. Total value of these credits is \$3,154,043 and the collective savings to participants totals \$2,680,936. As one of the participants, the Chamber has received \$252,323 in energy savings to-date.

WEBSITE: The Chamber has been working to improve the Chamber's website – northcentralmass.com – to make it a more dynamic and valuable resource for our members and communities. We have redesigned the homepage and several interior pages. We also have consolidated our economic development website – choosenorthcentral.com – into the Chamber website to make it easier to manage and avoid duplication.

MEET & GREETs: The Chamber has been continuing to host our popular "Meet & Greet" series throughout the region. Our Meet & Greet are smaller, focused gatherings typically hosted by a member in one of our communities. They provide a great opportunity to engage with local businesses and get an update from the Chamber. Check our calendar of events for the next Meet & Greet or contact Tracy Gagnon on the Chamber team if you are interested in attending or hosting a future Meet & Greet at your business.

AMBASSADORS: The Chamber is currently accepting candidates for our Ambassadors Committee. Chamber Ambassadors are valued volunteers to the Chamber who serve as the face of the organization in the community. They assist the Chamber with communications to new and existing members, participate in ribbon cuttings and help connect members

Continued on page 13

WE'RE CELEBRATING

Because of Your Support!



The reason we're able to celebrate our 40th Anniversary is because of you – our members, partners and supporters. It's because of the businesses and organizations that realized by working together we can advance the communities of North Central Massachusetts and build towards greater prosperity for all.

We're celebrating all year long with commemorative events, special edition spotlights and so much more. We invite you to join us and toast to the last 40 years and the next 40 years that promise a bright future for businesses, our communities, and most importantly, the people who make North Central Massachusetts a great place to thrive.

VISIT OUR WEBSITE

FOR MORE CHAMBER NEWS:

WWW.NORTHCENTRALMASS.COM

FEBRUARY 7, 2024

Special 40th Anniversary Reception for Past Chairs and Directors (Invitation Only)

We will honor past, current and newly appointed Board Members with this special reception to celebrate the Chamber's history and many accomplishments.

JUNE 20, 2024

40th Annual Meeting & Business Expo

Celebrate 40 years and look towards the future with excitement, hope and a commitment to business and community growth.

APRIL 25, 2024

**40th Anniversary
Member Celebration**

This event celebrates the founding of the North Central Massachusetts Chamber of Commerce! We'll have networking, engagement, cocktails and hors d'oeuvres. It promises to be a night to remember!

TBD SUMMER/FALL, 2024

Sponsor Appreciation Reception (Invitation Only)

A special, invitation only event to express our gratitude to those sponsors who helped to generously underwrite our programs and events over the past year that have benefited our members and communities.

Visit our website at NorthCentralMass.com, follow us on our social media channels or contact the Chamber at 978.353.7600 for more information about these special events.

Limited sponsorship opportunities are available. Contact Kat Deal at kdeal@northcentralmass.com to inquire about sponsorships for these events as well as events we host throughout the year.



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CHAMBER EVENTS!



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CHAMBER updates

Continued from page 11

at various Chamber events. Contact Tracy Gagnon, the Chamber's Manager of Membership Recruitment & Engagement, to learn more.

LATINX OUTREACH:

The Chamber and NCMDC continue to prioritize efforts to engage more with Latinx business owners/entrepreneurs and connect them with financial resources, programs and business networks. Latinos are the largest minority group in the region and increasingly playing a larger role in our economy. The Chamber recently hired Nicolas Berthet-Garcia as our Community Business Advisor who is dedicated to assisting our Spanish speaking business owners with Technical Assistance and Lending Guidance. He will continue to foster our relationship with several partners serving the Latinx communities.

PODCAST: Over the Fall we hit a milestone of publishing our 100th podcast. We continue to trend upwards with



Chamber members Ashley Owens and Jamie Schwadel, co-owners of REArchitect, located in Ayer, were recently interviewed for the Inside North Central Podcast series.

our Inside North Central Massachusetts podcast, with listenership up 350% over the previous year. Special thanks to our Inside North Central podcast sponsor Franklin Professional Associates. Our podcasts are currently available on Apple Podcasts, Spotify, Podbean, Google, and Audible. Thank you to all the members who have participated in interviews and/or listened to the Podcast series.



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GOVERNMENT AFFAIRS UPDATE

FEDERAL AFFAIRS:

After weeks without a Speaker, House Republicans voted in Congressman Mike Johnson to be the new Speaker of the House at the end of October. Shortly after, the Chamber held its annual Congressional Luncheon with Congressman Jim McGovern and Congresswoman Lori Trahan. In addition to talking about the election of the new Speaker, the two addressed a number of topics including the potential shutdown, the housing and migrant crisis, inflation and the Chips Act. Thank you to Fitchburg State University for their continued sponsorship of this important program.

The Chamber continues to monitor a pair of bills, H.R. 2673 American Innovation and R&D Competitiveness Act of 2023 and its Senate counterpart, S.866 American Innovation and Jobs Act. This pair of bills aims to course correct a provision in the 2017 Tax Cuts and Jobs Act that set a sunset date of 2022 for a provision in the Tax Code that allowed firms to recognize all Research and Development (R&D) expenditures in the year that they were incurred. At the time of this writing, both members of our congressional delegation have signed on as sponsors of the House version, but Senators Markey and Warren have yet to sign onto the Senate Version.

Chamber staff also attended a number of New England Council events that have allowed us to connect



The Chamber's Annual Legislative & Candidates Reception in September connected business leaders with the region's elected officials.

with other members of the Massachusetts congressional delegation including Congressmen Auchincloss and Neal.

STATE AND LOCAL AFFAIRS:

In September, the Chamber gathered our state and local officials for our annual Legislative Reception sponsored by Mount Wachusett Community College. The event was well attended by the region's delegation. In addition to interacting with the state delegation, attendees also had the opportunity to interact with candidates running for office in the region's municipal elections.

In December, the legislature came to an agreement on a \$3.1 billion supplemental budget bill to close the books

on FY2023, which was held up over a disagreement on how to address funds needed for the state's shelter crisis. The bill ended up including \$250 million towards the state's emergency shelter system, funds to fulfill state employee raises that had already been ratified, and language to release critical tourism funding to the state's Regional Tourism Councils including Visit North Central Massachusetts.

The elections in November brought some change to the region's political leadership. State Representative Peter Durant won the special election to fill the Worcester and Hampshire seat previously held by Anne Gobi. In Fitchburg, Sam Squailia, councilor-at-large, was elected to serve as the next mayor. Shortly after the election, Squailia spoke to

the Chamber's Leadership Council about her transition plans and priorities for her new administration. Beth Walsh, who had previously served as councilor in Ward 6, will return to the Fitchburg city council as a councilor-at-large. In Gardner, Carolyn Kamuda will join the city council as councilor-at-large, while David Thibault-Muñoz will serve as councilor for Ward 1. In Leominster, Brandon Robbins was elected to the council as councilor-at-large and, following a recount, Bob Tocci was declared winner in the Ward 1 election. The Chamber has already begun efforts to engage these newly elected officials and inform them about our priorities and the Chamber's commitment to serving as a resource and an impactful economic partner.

As the Chamber's



Congratulations to new Mayor Sam Squallia of the City of Fitchburg, pictured here with members of the Chamber team and John DiNapoli, Chair of the Chamber's Government Affairs Committee. The Chamber looks forward to working with the new Mayor to advance the local and regional economy.



Congratulations to newly elected State Senator Peter Durant of the Worcester & Hampshire Senate District, pictured here with Chamber staff. We look forward to working alongside Senator Durant and the other members of our legislative delegation to continue to make North Central Massachusetts a destination for businesses, visitors, and families to live, play and work.



Governor Maura Healey and Lt. Governor joined state and local officials in Gardner in the Fall to kick off their Cutting Taxes, Saving You Money tour across the commonwealth.

Government Affairs Committee looks ahead to its Legislative Briefing in early 2024, they took time to review and revise the Chamber's public policy agenda, tweaking items to more clearly state our positions. This latest version, passed by the Chamber's Board at their most recent meeting, will serve as a

roadmap for our advocacy efforts in the upcoming year.

For questions or concerns regarding the Chamber's public policy efforts, 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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THANKFUL, GRATEFUL AND 40!

The year 2024 marks the North Central Massachusetts Chamber of Commerce 40th anniversary of providing engagement, leadership, and advocacy to advance our economy and quality of life here in North Central Massachusetts.

Since our founding in 1984, the Chamber has evolved into the region's leading economic development and business advocacy organization, while providing opportunities for our business, civic and community leaders to collaborate on making our region the best it can be.

Our members offer unique insights into their expertise and industries, employment opportunities to grow our communities and economy, and help to make our region a unique place for families and visitors to grow, work and play.

Looking back on our history, we are humbled that many businesses have continued their membership with us since the beginning. And we are proud to recognize them in our Chamber Report Honor Roll on page 7 in this publication.

From being the first Chamber in New England to be recognized by the Association of Chamber of Commerce Executive's as the 2023 Chamber of the Year, to granting more than \$24 million in loans and grants through our North Central Massachusetts Development Corporation to

help entrepreneurs make their dream come true or helping to attract nearly two million visitors to the region through our Visit North Central Massachusetts tourism arm, the North Central Massachusetts Chamber of Commerce is making investments, connections...and history.

But don't take my word for it!

I invite you to take a stroll down memory lane over the last four decades as you read this very special edition of the Chamber Report. For our special anniversary edition, we reached out to our first woman board chair, Anita Raboin, who shared her thoughts on how the Chamber helped her develop her business, Appleseed Personnel Services. Turns out, we were first neighbors, too! We also learned how our advocacy helped a business stay strong during the pandemic and how our connections can help our members succeed.

As we enter our 40th year, we want to thank you for your commitment and dedication toward helping us advance our region and look forward to celebrating our anniversary with you in the coming year.

Roy M. Nascimento, IOM, CCE
President & CEO

North Central Massachusetts Chamber of Commerce



1984:

MEMBER PROFILE

Anita Raboin, President,
Appleseed Personnel Services
(1984-1997); *First Woman*
Chair, board of directors, North
Central Massachusetts Chamber
of Commerce

Leominster, Massachusetts

In the fall of 1984 when Anita Raboin opened Appleseed Personnel Services on Main Street in Leominster above the former Werner's Sporting Goods store, the North Central Massachusetts Chamber of Commerce had just merged with the Fitchburg and Leominster Chambers and opened its doors across the street from her office. And, like many new business owners in the region, Raboin knew the chamber was a good place to start to network and grow her business. "I walked into the chamber and met David (McKeehan) because I wanted to better acquaint myself with the communities," she recalled. "And that was my beginning to being a connected business owner in the region." In

addition to providing Raboin with contacts, connections, and networking, it was also her go-to place to find people seeking work opportunities while also serving as a resource. "I was an educator by training, so owning a business was completely new to me," she said. "But the leadership and staff of the Chamber were encouraging, and they truly helped make my business successful." In fact, Raboin was appointed as the woman first chair of the Chamber's board of directors. What does Raboin see happening with the chamber in the next 40 years? "We have a large population that could be employable, and we need to work on improving the work ethic in our community," she

said. "Yes, I had a business, but I started my career as a clerk in the Personnel Department of a General Motors in Rochester, N.Y, which was not the professional path I had prepared for, but I was working. Sometimes you need to start at the bottom before getting to the top spots." Now retired, Appleseed Personnel Services is owned by Raboin's daughter, Maedon Coburn, and continues to thrive. "I am proud of my daughter in how she is growing the business, and that Appleseed Personnel Services is one of the first members of the Chamber. We do have the best Chamber and I wish them so much success in the years to come." To learn more about Appleseed Personnel Services, please visit www.appleseedpersonnel.com.

1984 - 1994



1984:

The North Central Massachusetts Chamber of Commerce was officially established through a merger of several local chambers and business groups in the region. Local attorney Elliott Zide served as the first Chair of the board of directors, and the Chamber maintained offices in both Fitchburg and Leominster.



1984:

Good Morning North Central, the Chamber's successful breakfast series, is launched, with speakers including governors, senators, prominent business and civic leaders, authors, and celebrities.



1986:

The North Central Massachusetts Development Corporation is founded as a formal economic development arm of the Chamber offering fixed asset financing programs for the region's small businesses.

1984 TIDBITS:

Apple's Macintosh computer goes on sale, priced at \$2,500

The Boston Celtics win the NBA Championship

Terms of Endearment wins five Oscars

The TV gameshow, Jeopardy! makes its debut



1994:

MEMBER PROFILE
Dr. B.J. Coakley, Owner,
Coakley Family Dental

Leominster, Massachusetts

As a second-generation family business owner, Dr. B.J. Coakley knows the value of the North Central Massachusetts Chamber of Commerce, as his father, Dr. William "Bill" Coakley, Jr., founded Coakley Family Dental back in 1975. With his father now retired, B.J. is a dentist carrying on the family business—and its membership with the Chamber. "Over the years, the Chamber has been an invaluable resource for all of our small business needs," said Coakley. "Our relationship has helped us update our human

resources information while also providing the opportunity to network and socialize with other small businesses." As Coakley Family Dental has grown over the past 30 years, the Chamber was with them the entire way. "We are blessed to be able to keep our business in the community we love, and while we have moved facilities twice and our team as grown exponentially, the Chamber was there for us with ribbon cuttings while also helping us remain compliant with updated state and federal laws," he

Continued on page 18

1994 - 2004

1996:

The Johnny Appleseed Trail Association is established as the Chamber's formal tourism affiliate, which does business as Visit North Central Massachusetts today. Over the years, the organization has grown the economic impact of tourism to more than \$195 million in direct spending from visitors.



1997:

As part of the Chamber's economic development plan launched in 1991, the Johnny Appleseed Visitors Center opens on Route 2 after ten years of lobbying to construct the center at the former site of the Howard Johnson's Restaurant. Today, the center welcomes approximately 165,000 visitors as they arrive to the region.

Continued from page 17

added. For Coakley, having an advocate who exclusively understands the challenges for small businesses is the biggest value. "As a small business, we need to seek out information and assistance to stay on the cutting edge in this ever-changing economy, but the Chamber removes the obstacles that keep small businesses updated and informed," he said. As for the future, Coakley hopes the Chamber maintains its strong roots and wings. "If the Chamber can maintain its strong roots

with the small business network, while giving wings to hopeful community members to advance and take the chance of partnering with the community, the Chamber will have unlimited longevity," he said. "We would not have made it this far without the Chamber and its strong network of members, and we congratulate them on 40 years of success." Coakley Family Dental's mission is to provide patient-centered dental care with friendly, compassionate service. Learn more by visiting www.drcoakley.com.

1994 TIDBITS:

The North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) goes into operation

Yahoo and Amazon were founded and made available to the public

Schindler's List wins Best Motion Picture

The popular sitcom, Friends, debuts



2004:

MEMBER PROFILE

Cindy Curley, President,
Orchard Hills Athletic Club

Lancaster, Massachusetts

1994 - 2004

1999:

The Chamber establishes the Executive Women's Network, today known as the Women's Leadership Connection, to foster success for local women in business.



2004:

The Chamber breaks ground on a new 6,000 square foot building on South Street in Fitchburg to serve as its headquarters and regional center to support the business community.

Established 50 years ago, Orchard Hills Athletic Club has grown into one of New England's largest, full-service health and wellness athletic clubs with programs and services for every age, interest, and ability. Under the leadership of Cindy Curley, the club has quickly become the leader in fitness, group exercise, summer camps, basketball, personal and private training, and senior programs, and has also maintained a membership with the North Central Massachusetts Chamber of Commerce for the past 20 years. "We've continued our membership because

the Chamber provides us with fantastic business resources and support," said Curley. "We've experienced more diversity in chamber member businesses over the years which is great for our region, and also benefited from programs that help support our business growth." During the uncertainty of the pandemic, Curley said the chamber was helpful with providing pertinent information that helped keep her updated. "During the pandemic, the Chamber was a valuable resource, especially regarding the COVID-19 assistance and employee mandatory benefit changes

that came along during that time." As Curley is an active member of the community serving on the board of directors for Clinton Savings Bank, she knows people are key to success, and she commended the Chamber staff for their work. Where does Curley see the chamber in the next 20 years? "I'd like to see them continue to evolve to meet the changing business, employee and community needs," she said. To learn more about Orchard Hills Athletic Club, please visit www.ohaclub.com.

2004 TIDBITS:

The Boston Red Sox win the World Series for the first time since 1918

The last Oldsmobile rolls off the assembly line

Massachusetts legalizes same-sex marriage

2004 - 2014

2010:

The Johnny Appleseed Trail Association receives official designation from the state as the Regional Tourism Council for North Central Massachusetts.

2012:

Fidelity Bank partners with the Chamber to launch the first Economic Forecast breakfast to highlight the economic outlook for the region



2012:

The North Central Massachusetts Development Corporation receives designation as the official Regional Economic Development Organization for North Central Massachusetts.



2014:

MEMBER PROFILE

Rick Walton,
President and Owner,
*Moon Hill Brewing Co. &
Gardner Ale House*

Gardner, Massachusetts

Founded in 2005, Moon Hill Brewing Company is a full menu brewpub with more than a dozen beers on tap at any time in addition to offering a full liquor selection of drinks and wine at the Gardner Ale House. An actively involved member in the community, the business has been a member of the North Central Massachusetts Chamber of Commerce since 2014 and Walton is grateful for the Chamber's support and collaboration. "The chamber gets our name out there," he said. "It's the best connection ever! They keep us informed,

current on news and events, and help get the word out about our offerings. We are on their website. We have a seat on the Visit North Central Massachusetts tourism board, and we are constantly involved in their messaging. They also assisted in helping us obtain a loan during the pandemic through their financial assistance program." While Walton believes the chamber's outreach is constant and varied, he said the chamber has an energy like no other. "They ask questions, are constantly growing and refining their business model. There is

so much good energy that comes out of this Chamber staff and Roy is the best!" he added. Where does he see the chamber in the next 20 years? "We need help finding employees and I hope they can find a way to help with employee search through their networking channels," Walton said. "Getting good employees is a challenge and it's not always clear which way to go to look for them." To learn more about Moon Hill Brewing Co. & Gardner Ale House, please visit moonhillbrewing.com.

2014 - 2023

2014:

Great Wolf Lodge opens after being attracted to the region by the Chamber and local and state officials who advocated for tax incentives for the project, resulting in more than 500 jobs for the region and millions of dollars in tax revenue for the City of Fitchburg and the state.

2015:

The North Central Development Corporation is approved as a micro-loan provider by the U.S. Small Business Administration.

2016:

The Chamber introduces its current logo, symbolizing its continued growth and transformation while being respectful of its history.

2023:

The Chamber is awarded the 2023 Chamber of the Year Award by the Association of Chamber of Commerce Executives to recognize the organization's strength and impact on key community priorities, including education, transportation, economic prosperity, and quality of life.



2023:

The Chamber is awarded a 5-star Accreditation because of its sound policies, effective organizational procedures, and positive impact on the community by the Accrediting Board of the United States Chamber of Commerce.

2014 TIDBITS:

The ALS Ice Bucket Challenge began as a global phenomenon that changed the fight against ALS forever

Hundreds of workers walked off the job at Market Basket in support of co-owner Arthur T. Demoulas

New England Revolution makes it to MLS championship game

Breaking Bad and Modern Family win the Emmy for best drama and comedy series

"Since our founding in 1984, the Chamber has evolved into the region's leading economic development and business advocacy organization, while providing opportunities for our business, civic and community leaders to collaborate on making our region the best it can be."

TOURISM

Visit North Central Massachusetts

Update

Economic & Visitor Data

New economic impact data for CY2022 was released by the state in the Fall and shows that direct visitor spending in North Central Massachusetts grew 39% to \$194.6 million, which represented one of the largest increases by percentage among the sixteen designated tourism regions in the state. The majority of the spending – \$185 million – was generated from domestic visitors, with the remainder from international visitors. Visitors to the region also generated \$12 million in state taxes and \$6.27 in local taxes. Room revenue in CY2022 was \$63.7 million, exceeding pre-pandemic numbers of \$53.7 million in CY2019 by 19%. CY2023 thru September 2023, occupancy was at 73.7%; room revenue was up 11%; rate was up 9.5%; and rooms sold up 3.9%!

North Central Massachusetts experienced an estimated 3.66 million

trips in FY23, an 11% increase over the previous year, and 1,959,389 unique visitors, up 54.4%. Average length of stay was 2.6 days, up 13.2%, and 64.8% stayed at least one night. Our top origin markets were Boston-Manchester (26.5%); Hartford-New Haven (12.11%); New York (8.43%); Providence-New Bedford (6.1%); Portland-Auburn (5.77%); Burlington/Plattsburgh (3.82%); Albany/Schenectady (3.21%); Philadelphia (2.24%); Springfield-Holyoke (1.66%); and Washington DC-Hagerstown (1.49%).

Advertising & Website

We continued to promote the region with a blend of print and digital advertising strategies across our targeted markets. To complement our paid advertising campaigns, we also launched a redesigned home page for visitnorthcentral.com in the Fall to keep the website fresh and inviting for visitors. We also continued with



The Chamber and Visit North Central Massachusetts hosted Kate Fox, the new Executive Director of the Mass Office of Travel & Tourism, in the Fall to showcase our dynamic region and discuss ways to collaborate to grow the economic impact of tourism. Thank you to Red Apple Farm, Wachusett Mountain, Great Wolf Lodge, and Groton Hill Music for their help in organizing the tour.



The Chamber helped co-sponsor the Groton Tourism Conference in October organized by Destination Groton. Chamber President Roy Nascimento was also a speaker and highlighted the work of Visit North Central Massachusetts and our successful partnerships with businesses and our communities. The program also included many of our partners, including the Mass Office of Travel & Tourism; Groton Business Association; Mass Office of Rural Affairs; Senator John J. Cronin; State Representative Margaret Scarsdale; Congresswoman Lori Trahan; Groton Hill Music; Nashoba Valley Chamber of Commerce; and numerous officials from the Town of Groton.



In October, Anne Howe, 86, a longtime resident of Fitchburg and local artist, joined her family, Fitchburg Mayor Stephen DiNatale, Leominster Mayor Dean Mazzarella and members of the Visit North Central Massachusetts and Chamber staff to donate a piece of her artwork to display at the Johnny Appleseed Visitor Center.

our ongoing efforts to develop a mix of strong content for the website highlighting activities and businesses. As a result of our combined advertising and website improvements, traffic to the site increased 81% in the Fall compared to the same timeframe the previous year.

Social Media

We also continued to be very active on social media with both organic and paid posts on Facebook and Instagram. From July through November 28, 2023, Visit North Central Massachusetts' Facebook page had an impressive organic reach of 589,864, attracting 8,416 new followers. The page also utilized paid promotion with an additional reach of 495,273 and 1,550,722

paid impressions. On Instagram, the page achieved an organic reach of 62,448 and gained 1,222 new followers during the same time frame.

Shoulder Season Campaign

In collaboration with two other Regional Tourism Councils, we have started to implement an off-season marketing campaign funded from a federal grant. We have advertising campaigns underway with Hearst Digital Story Studio, Yankee Magazine and several regional publications. We have also hired CM Communications, a Boston-based PR Agency that specializes in destination marketing, to assist us with generating more interest in the



The Chamber's Diane Burnette and Maureen Babcock helped to staff the Massachusetts booth during the Big "E" - Eastern States Exposition. More than 1.4 million visitors from throughout New England visited the fair. It was a great opportunity to promote businesses and attractions in North Central Massachusetts and distribute our very own "Guide to North Central Massachusetts."

region among the travel media and other travel influencers.

Visitor Center & Guide

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. We are currently working on the 2024 Spring/

Summer edition. Members interested in advertising should contact the Chamber to reserve an ad. We are continuing to see strong demand for the publication.

Thanks to funding from several local cultural councils, we were able to successfully introduce a new series of cultural performances/ demonstrations in the Fall at the Johnny Appleseed Visitor Center to highlight local culture and attractions in the region. We also invested in new displays and some new artwork.

Out & About



linkedin.com/company/north-central-massachusetts-chamber-of-commerce/



facebook.com/ncmchamber



twitter.com/ncmchamber



@ncm_chamber

See what Chamber members have been up to the last several months.



We kicked off the season with a sold-out Good Morning North Central business breakfast in September at the Colonial Hotel in Gardner. Thank you to Mayor Stephen DiNatale of City of Fitchburg, Mayor Michael Nicholson of Gardner and Mayor Dean Mazzarella of Leominster for addressing business leaders. Special thanks to our September premier sponsor **bankHometown** and to supporting sponsor **You Name It Creatives, LLC** for their support. Thank you also to Lauren Howe of empHowered PR for serving as emcee and Andrea Seward of Habakkuk Media Services for photographing the event.



We were thrilled to support Chamber member **Angel Salon & Spa** with a \$1,000 small business grant from National Grid US! Special thanks to **National Grid** for partnering with us to support the operations of small businesses in North Central Massachusetts



Thank you to longstanding Chamber member **Aaron Industries** for inviting Chamber President Roy Nascimento to tour their facility in Leominster. Aaron Industries is a leader in recycled plastic innovation and is one of the largest resin compounders in the Northeast. They supply materials to a wide range of customers within the plastics industry.

We provide trusted resources, a strong business network and a support system
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northcentralmass.com



In recognition of National Manufacturing Month in October, the Chamber partnered with the **MassHire North Central Workforce Board** and **Mount Wachusett Community College** to host a regional manufacturing bus tour. The tour provided education, civic and community leaders, and economic development officials an opportunity to learn more about—and the importance of—manufacturing in the region. Pictured here at **SMC Ltd.** in Devens.



Thank you to our partners at the **Mass Growth Capital Corp. (MGCC)** for inviting the Chamber and the North Central Massachusetts Development Corporation to their Community Grant Programs' Annual Meeting in October! Pictured (L-R) are Travis Condon, the Chamber's public affairs manager; Ari Velóz, chief community programs officer at MGCC; Roy Nascimento, Chamber president & CEO; Nicolas Berthet-Garcia, the Chamber's community business advisor; Lawrence Andrews, president & CEO of MGCC; and Sandie Cataldo, the Chamber senior economic development manager.



Congratulations to Chamber member **Yatco**, located at 400 Electric Avenue in Lunenburg on their 30th Anniversary! **YATCO**, is a family-owned and operated gas station, convenience store and commercial fuel distribution company that has been serving communities across New England with dedication and care. Here's to many more years of success and service!



Congratulations to Chamber member **RAAM Mobile Veterinary Care** located at 112 Main Street, #4 in Pepperell on their recent opening. RAAM Mobile Veterinary Care provides comprehensive veterinary services in Pepperell and all surrounding areas. RAAM's dedicated team offers a range of services, including surgery, exotic medicine, standard vaccinations, and physical therapy, both at their office and through their convenient mobile service. If you can't come to them, they'll bring their expertise to your doorstep!



Thank you to Chamber member **Salt + Sage** for hosting our Meet & Greet in October in the Town of Townsend. Our Meet & Greets provide a great opportunity to engage with local businesses and get an update from the Chamber. Thank you to the members in Townsend and Pepperell who were able to attend the meeting. Check out the Chamber website calendar for future meetings and events.



Chamber public affairs manager Travis Condon gets launched on his way to a third place victory in the 13th Annual Gardner Chair Luge. The Gardner Chair Luge is held in Downtown Gardner during the Oktoberfest "Party In The Street" at the **Gardner Ale House**.



Thank you to **AIS, Inc.** for generously hosting the October edition of the Chamber's Business After Hours series. It was an evening of valuable connections, delectable appetizers, and toasting to the Chamber's recent recognition as the 2023 National Chamber of the Year. Big shout out to Joeeci Gilchrest of You Name It Creatives, LLC, for winning the raffle of an office chair!



Thank you to the new members who were able to join us in October for our New Member Orientation. It was a great opportunity to highlight the work of the Chamber and build new connections. We hope it was informative and enjoyable for attendees. Here's to making new connections and strengthening our North Central Massachusetts economy!



The Chamber was thrilled to support **Applewood Controls** with a \$1,000 small business grant from **National Grid**!



A big shout-out to **United Way of North Central Massachusetts** for an amazing Day of Caring! Our dedicated staff and members volunteers rocked it, coming together to make a real difference in our communities. This annual event highlights the power of volunteerism and the impact we can achieve when we work together for a common goal. Thank you, United Way of North Central Massachusetts for making this happen!



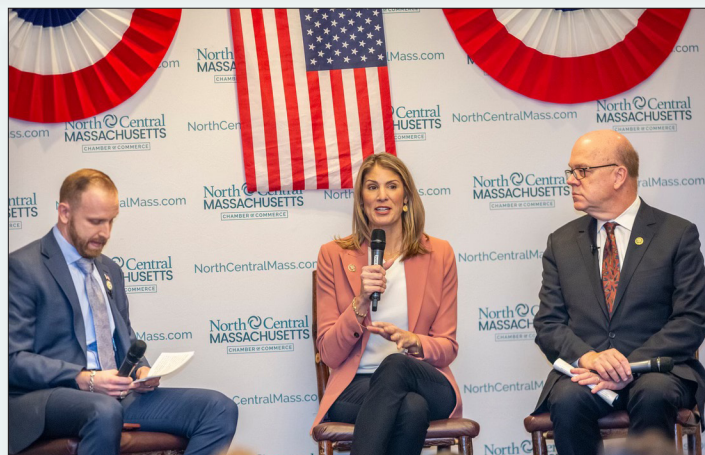
The North Central Massachusetts Development Corporation (NCMDC), the economic development arm of the Chamber, granted financing totaling \$45,000 to **Deershorn Farm & Taxidermy**. The loan was done in partnership with **TD Bank**. The funding supported the purchase of a new tractor and provided the farm with working capital.



The NCMDC recently granted a \$32,000 loan to **Rise & Grind Café and Smoothie Bar**. A matching loan of \$32,500 was provided by the **City of Fitchburg**, with **NewVue Communities** providing guidance on business projections.



Connect North Central kicked off the season in September with a great group of businesses looking to make a connection! Connect North Central meets on the last Friday of each month from 8:00 am to 9:00 am. This event is open to all industries for members and non-members. Check our calendar of events on the Chamber website for the next Connect North Central meeting.



Thank you to everyone who was able to join us for the North Central Massachusetts Chamber's 8th Annual Congressional Luncheon. Congressman Jim McGovern and Congresswoman Lori Trahan joined us to provide an update on issues impacting our region and local employers on Capitol Hill. We would like to extend our thanks to them for their participation, and acknowledge the support of our premier sponsor **Fitchburg State University** and supporting sponsor **Great Wolf Lodge**.



Chef Chris and Ann-Marie Finn welcomed Chamber members and Pepperell business owners to **The Lazy Bubble** with an assortment of breakfast foods for a Chamber Meet & Greet. Fourteen members and guests attended the informal get-together where we bring the Chamber to our members for informative updates and opportunities to learn more about local businesses in their community. Some exciting connections were made by our members thanks to the Finn's generosity and belief that businesses do better when owners work together in their community.



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Congratulations to Chamber member **Sage Home Collections** on the grand opening of **Salt + Sage** on Main located at 422 Main Street in Townsend! Salt + Sage on Main is a modern boutique with plants, crystals, gifts & more! Discover fresh, one-of-a-kind items. And don't miss their state-of-the-art Himalayan Salt Room for ultimate relaxation!



Thank you to all of the employers who participated in the **Work North Central Career & Hiring Event!** The event was a huge success. Hundreds of college students, high school students and a diverse mix of job seekers from throughout the region were able to connect with employers and resource providers about employment and career opportunities in North Central Massachusetts.



Congratulations to Chamber member **Pepperell Dental Associates** located at 75 Main Street in Pepperell on their recent opening. They specialize in providing dental care for children and adolescents in a warm, welcoming, child-friendly atmosphere.



The Chamber was thrilled to join Mayor Dean Mazzarella of the City of Leominster, MA and city officials for a ribbon cutting recently at the **Boys & Girls Club of Fitchburg, Leominster, & Gardner** celebrating their new sports courts at their Leominster clubhouse. Congratulations on this wonderful new resource for youth in our communities!



Congratulations to Chamber member **Potpourri Gift Shop** in Leominster on their recent opening. The shop provides various items including antiques, whimsical home decor, books & gifts and homemade signs!



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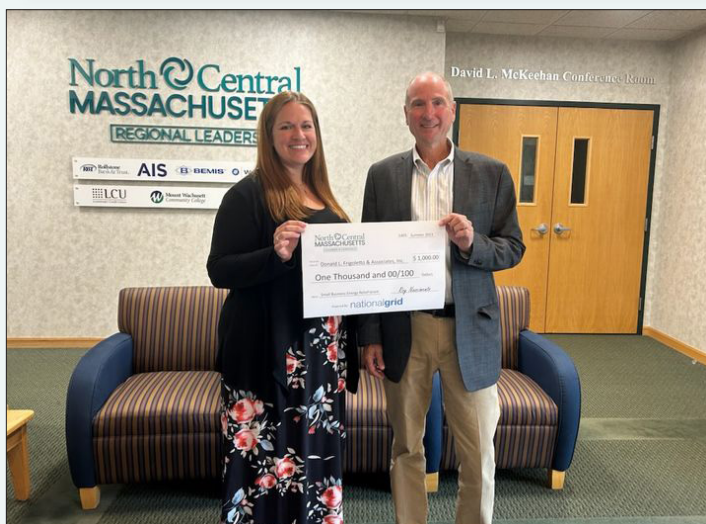
If all staff, families, and community partners work together, then every student will grow and achieve.



Congratulations to **Catlin Farmstead** for recently receiving a \$1,000 small business grant from the Chamber!



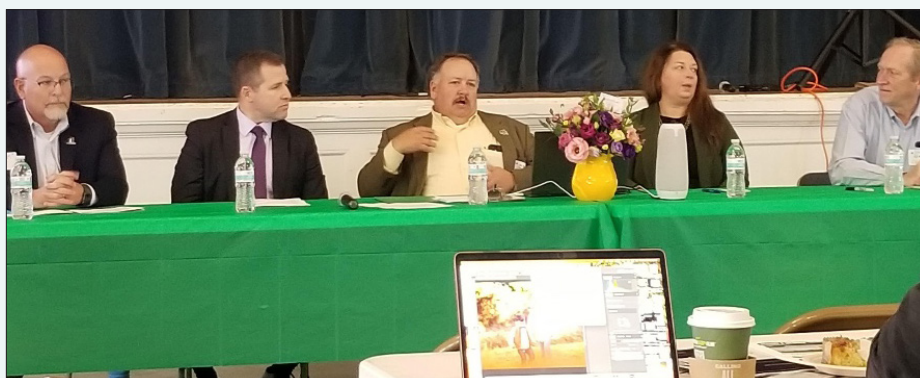
We had a great meeting of the Chamber's Leadership Council (CLC) in November featuring Sam Squailia, Mayor-Elect of the City of Fitchburg highlighting her transition plans and the priorities for her new administration. The meeting also included a presentation from Rod Motamedi of the UMass Donahue Institute on the North Central Massachusetts Land Bank study commissioned by the Chamber. Chamber president Roy Nascimento also provided an update on Chamber initiatives. Thank you to the business leaders who serve on the CLC. The Chamber's CLC plays an important role in helping to inform and guide policy and initiatives of the Chamber.



We were thrilled to support Chamber member **Frigoletto & Associates, Inc.** with a \$1,000 small business grant from National Grid!



The Chamber and Visit North Central Massachusetts joined with our friends at **Wachusett Mountain** and Visit Massachusetts last week at a media event to kick off the Snowbound Ski and Sports Expo in Boston. It was a great opportunity to highlight an important industry for our region and state.



Thank you to Chamber member **Growing Places** and Local Food Works for gathering stakeholders from around the region for their Building Bridges Event. In addition to providing an update on their efforts to strengthen the food system around North Central Massachusetts, the event featured a panel highlighting the region's food economy that included our President & CEO Roy Nascimento; **IC Credit Union** President & CEO Chris Hendry; **Community Foundation of North Central Massachusetts** President & CEO Steve Adams; and several local farmers.

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Congratulations to Chamber member **Journey Within Yoga and Wellness** located in Hubbardston on their recent opening. Danielle McDonald Bourbeau, RYT recently opened the studio which provides a variety of health and wellness services, such as yoga and meditation, tai chi, grief counseling, and massage therapy services.



Congratulations to the **Boys & Girls Club of Fitchburg, Leominster, & Gardner** on securing \$50,000 in the state budget for upgrades to their building! The Chamber was thrilled to join local leaders and the legislative delegation for the official presentation of the grant award.

Chamber president Roy Nascimento and Terry Young, the Chamber's manager of talent and education Initiatives toured Chamber member **Ecological Fibers, Inc.** in Lunenburg in November. They are pictured here outside their offices with Jeremy A. Quill, Chief Financial Officer. Ecological Fibers, Inc. is a global leader and innovator in the environmentally-sound manufacturing of cover materials for packaging, publishing and so much more. Chances are that if you own a book, the book's liner was most likely manufactured by them!



Chamber of the Year Celebration — After rescheduling in September so we could focus on helping our members and communities deal with the unprecedented flooding the region experienced, we were happy to finally host our Chamber of the Year Celebration on November 14! Thank you to all the members, partners and community leaders who were able to join us to celebrate. Each and every one of our members and partners contributed in some way towards our success and this tremendous national recognition, so we would like to once again express our immense gratitude and heartfelt thanks to everyone for the support and commitment. Special thanks to Chamber members the **228 in Sterling/Cordials Catering; Smiths Country Cheese; Polar Beverages; Red Apple Farm; Colonial Hotel; and Moon Hill Brewing** for contributing the wonderful refreshments for the celebration held at our office.



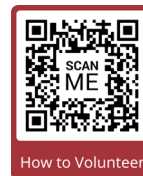
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Over 130 attendees joined us at the **Chocksett Inn** in Sterling for the Chamber's Annual Legislative and Candidates Reception in September. It was a fantastic evening of connecting with elected officials and candidates. The reception is one of the 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.

Go to northcentralmass.com or follow us on social media to keep up to date!



Chamber Events

Connect. Network. Learn.



Looking to expand your business network? Want to stay informed about what's happening in the region? Looking to stay up to date on business practices? The Chamber organizes a variety of programs and events throughout the year for our members, ranging from traditional networking events and educational seminars to issue forums and more exclusive and high-profile signature events.

Checkout our Calendar of Events by scanning the QR code or visiting our website at NorthCentralMass.com

Please contact Kat Deal, Manager of Programs & Events with any questions at 978.353.7600 ext. 235 or via email at kdeal@northcentralmass.com

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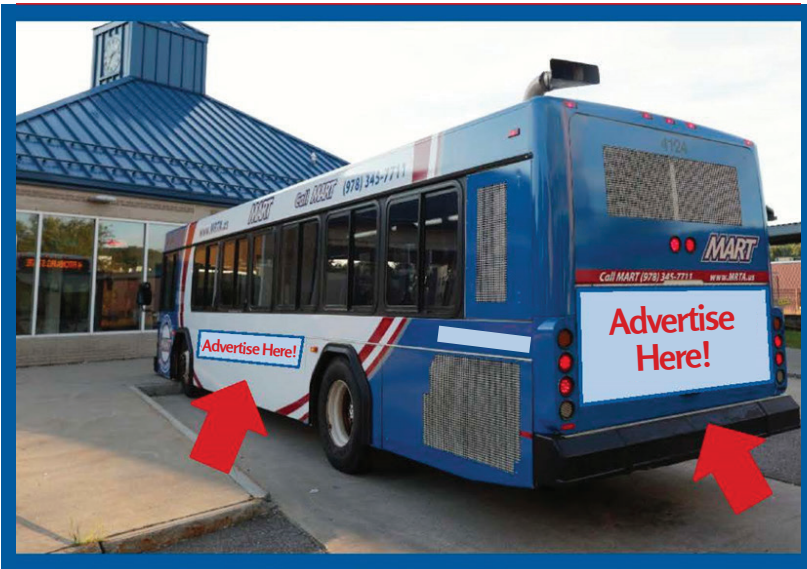
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