

Summer 2025 Edition

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# *North Central Massachusetts* Chamber Report

**Building Businesses. Building Communities.**

## A LEGACY OF INNOVATION: Celebrating Manufacturing In North Central Massachusetts



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# Chamber Report

a publication of

The 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.

**About this Issue:** Manufacturing has been the backbone of North Central Massachusetts for over a century, and today it's experiencing an extraordinary renaissance. In this edition's feature article, "A Legacy of Innovation," we celebrate how our region's manufacturers are honoring their heritage while embracing cutting-edge technology and innovation.

You'll discover how companies like L.S. Starrett, SMC Ltd., and Catania Oils are bridging generational knowledge with modern automation, AI, and advanced manufacturing processes. These stories showcase why our region bucks national trends—growing manufacturing jobs by 3% while the state declined 2%, and maintaining 15% manufacturing employment compared to just 9.7% nationally.

With 430+ manufacturers calling our region home and contributing one-third of all regional wages, manufacturing remains our economic powerhouse. The newly formed Manufacturing Council represents the latest evolution of our Chamber's longstanding commitment to advocating for, supporting, and growing this vital sector through tours, workforce development, policy advocacy, and networking opportunities.

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# CHAMBER updates: Your Chamber in Action

As your dynamic partner in North Central Massachusetts, we continue to drive initiatives that strengthen our business community and foster regional growth. Our impact spans from direct business support to innovative community development, and we are pleased to share these updates with you that are not covered elsewhere in the newsletter. For Tourism news, see page 18. Government Affairs updates are on page 8.

## STRATEGIC PLANNING:

A forward-looking Chamber delivers greater value to your business. That's why the Chamber and affiliate boards gathered in May for a comprehensive strategic planning retreat to evaluate our current initiatives and chart our course for the next three years. This collaborative process focused specifically on how we can better support businesses through enhanced programs, stronger advocacy, and targeted economic development that creates tangible opportunities. Your priorities are driving this process—from workforce development and business resources to governmental affairs and regional marketing. The resulting strategic plan, to be released by September, will ensure we can deliver maximum impact while advancing our shared vision of a thriving North Central Massachusetts. We welcome your input on how the Chamber can best support your goals in the coming years; please share your thoughts at [rnascimento@northcentralmass.com](mailto:rnascimento@northcentralmass.com).

## SMALL BUSINESS LENDING:

Access to capital fuels business growth throughout our region, which is why the Chamber's economic development arm, North Central Massachusetts Development Corporation (NCMDC), continues its vital small business lending work. Since the beginning of the year, the NCMDC has approved and closed 8 loans totaling \$330,327.71. These included three SBA loans, four RRF loans, and one EDA loan, supporting entrepreneurs and small businesses that traditional lenders often cannot accommodate. These investments in local enterprises create new jobs, revitalize properties, and strengthen our shared economy—ultimately benefiting every Chamber member through increased economic activity. Beyond



Chamber board members and staff collaborate during the strategic planning retreat at Oak Hill Country Club, mapping our organization's future direction and member- focused priorities for the next three years.

the direct capital, these loans have leveraged an additional \$139,554 from private sources and banking partners, multiplying the impact of every dollar invested. With a current portfolio of 90 loans totaling over \$3.1 million, the NCMDC continues to strengthen our regional business ecosystem, creating opportunities for members through enhanced customer bases and more robust supply chains.

## BUSINESS ASSISTANCE:

Behind every successful business is a network of support. Through April, our economic development team provided 964 hours of hands-on technical assistance to local entrepreneurs and small businesses—helping them navigate challenges and build sustainable operations. This support extends to startups and established businesses alike, with services including business plan development, financial projections, marketing strategies, and operational improvements. We also connect businesses with specialized resources through NewVue Communities, SBDC, and SCORE, creating a comprehensive support network that strengthens our entire regional economy.

## REGIONAL BUSINESS INVESTMENT FUND:

Strategic investment in our communities supports business growth throughout the region. The NCMDC's Regional Business Investment Fund has provided \$526,000 through three loans since its launch that are helping to revitalize key properties in our service area. We currently have two promising projects in our pipeline that will support downtown revitalization efforts and create new housing units in our region. These strategic investments align with both municipal and state priorities for community revitalization.

## SUPPLIER DIVERSITY:

The Chamber and NCMDC recently sponsored a successful supplier and procurement fair at Fitchburg State University on May 29. This event connected local businesses with procurement opportunities and provided guidance on state certification. The initiative, which followed our earlier workshop with the state's Supplier Diversity Office, demonstrates our

*Continued on page 5*



*Continued from page 4*

ongoing commitment to expanding business opportunities and fostering economic inclusion throughout our region. Participating businesses gained valuable insights into government contracting processes and certification benefits.

### TRANSPORTATION INITIATIVE:

Workforce transportation challenges directly impact members throughout our region—affecting employee recruitment, retention, and reliability. To address this concern, the Chamber is partnering with CHNA9 to explore establishing a transportation management association (TMA) that would coordinate solutions tailored to local needs. This collaborative approach would bring together employers, developers, and property managers to create sustainable transportation options with an initial focus on improving workforce access to jobs. While still in the early planning stages, we've already submitted a funding application to MassDOT to leverage private sector investments from founding members. For businesses struggling with workforce transportation issues, this initiative represents a potential pathway to expanded hiring pools and improved employee stability through coordinated, cost-effective transit solutions.

### CHAMBER GIFT CARDS:

The Chamber's Gift Local program continues through Yiftee's Mastercard-based e-gift card system with 44 participating merchants. From January 1, 2025 through April 30, 2025, we have sold 39 eGift Cards totaling \$1,355 in value, with 26 cards redeemed for a total of \$989.72 at local businesses. The program remains an important shop local initiative, primarily used for holiday gifts and business recognition awards. Yiftee is rolling out a new Tap-to-Pay functionality for mobile wallets that will provide an easier checkout experience for customers and streamline the transaction process for participating merchants.

### SOLAR INITIATIVE:

Sustainability initiatives that deliver tangible economic benefits exemplify our practical approach to supporting regional business needs. Since August 2014, our solar initiative has generated nearly 15 million kWh in Net Metering Credits for participating manufacturers, translating to over \$3.2 million in collective energy savings. This innovative program demonstrates how collaborative Chamber initiatives can substantially reduce operating costs for member businesses while supporting environmental sustainability goals. As energy costs continue to rise, this program's success highlights our commitment to developing creative solutions that strengthen our members' bottom lines while positioning our region as forward-thinking.

### WORKNORTHCENTRAL.COM:

Finding qualified employees remains a top challenge for many businesses—which is why our WorkNorthCentral.com jobs board continues to serve as an important tool. As of April 2025, the platform featured 403 active positions, connecting local talent with employment opportunities across North Central Massachusetts. With over 13,290 jobs posted since launch, this resource has become a great resource for members of all sizes and sectors. Remember that Chamber members can post unlimited job openings at no cost—providing another marketing channel for your job opportunities while supporting regional workforce retention. Submit your listings today!

### TECHNOLOGY UPGRADES:

The Chamber is implementing several technology improvements to directly enhance how members and visitors connect with the Chamber and our region. These include upgrading our conference room video display to provide a more engaging experience during member meetings and workshops, and replacing two outdated computers to ensure efficient operations. We've also installed a new interactive digital kiosk at the Johnny Appleseed Visitor Center

to help showcase our members and communities to visitors. These strategic investments reflect our commitment to maximizing member visibility while streamlining access to Chamber services.

### EV CHARGING STATIONS:

We're exploring the installation of two electric vehicle charging stations at our building in Fitchburg to benefit our members and visitors. We've applied for a Unitil grant to offset costs, with Chamber member DMH Electric of Sterling offering to sponsor a portion of the remaining expenses. In parallel, MassDOT is planning to install EV charging stations at the Johnny Appleseed Visitor Center, further expanding charging infrastructure along the Route 2 corridor. These initiatives would support the growing number of electric vehicle drivers in our region.

### CHAMBER BUILDING IMPROVEMENTS:

Our ongoing investments in the Chamber building reflect our commitment to providing members with a professional, welcoming environment for the numerous meetings, networking events, workshops and business gatherings we host throughout the year. We recently refreshed the landscaping, creating a positive first impression for clients and visitors, while also replacing the third and final HVAC unit to ensure reliable comfort year-round. We've also established a new cultural partnership with the Fitchburg Art Museum, which now provides select local artwork for display in our staff office area, showcasing regional talent. These thoughtful improvements to your Chamber home enhance the overall experience when you visit, while demonstrating sound stewardship of membership investments—maintaining both the functionality and professional atmosphere you expect from the Chamber as the center of business activity in North Central Massachusetts.

*We value your input on how the Chamber can better support your organizations! Share your thoughts at [rnascimento@northcentralmass.com](mailto:rnascimento@northcentralmass.com). ♦*



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# COMMUNITY Leadership Institute:

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The Community Leadership Institute (CLI) is now recruiting its next class of emerging leaders ready to expand their regional knowledge, professional networks, and leadership capabilities.

Since 1988, more than 300 professionals have graduated from this prestigious program, with many now serving in key leadership positions throughout North Central Massachusetts. Each monthly session immerses participants in different aspects of our region—from economic development and education to healthcare and

government—providing exclusive behind-the-scenes access and connections that would take years to develop independently.

For businesses and professionals alike, CLI delivers exceptional value—investing in high-potential talent while providing unparalleled access to regional decision-makers. Participants gain broader perspectives, stronger connections, and enhanced leadership capabilities that advance both careers and organizations while developing a deeper understanding of the opportunities and challenges



*Applications are due by August 15, 2025.*

facing North Central Massachusetts.

The 2026 class begins in October 2025, with monthly full-day sessions through June 2026. Applications are due by August 15, 2025.

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## CALENDAR OF UPCOMING EVENTS

### Connect. Network. Learn.

**Visit Our Calendar & Register Today: Scan the QR code or visit [northcentralmass.com](http://northcentralmass.com) to browse and register for upcoming programs.**

From exclusive signature events to focused educational seminars, the Chamber hosts diverse opportunities to expand your network and strengthen your business. Stay ahead of regional developments and industry trends through our year-round programming.

*Questions? Contact Valerie Bruno: 978.353.7600 ext. 235 | [vbruno@northcentralmass.com](mailto:vbruno@northcentralmass.com)*



# GOVERNMENT AFFAIRS UPDATE

## ADVOCACY IN ACTION

Advocacy continues to remain at the forefront of the North Central Massachusetts Chamber of Commerce's efforts to advance the region and support our member businesses.

### FEDERAL AFFAIRS

#### Trade Policy:

President Donald Trump continues to utilize increased tariffs as part of his foreign policy, with frequent announcements, retractions, and pauses affecting various industries and countries. The Chamber actively monitors these rapidly evolving developments through our congressional delegation and partners with the U.S. Chamber of Commerce to advocate for member interests in trade policy discussions. We have engaged with member businesses to assess tariff impacts and continue ensuring local business concerns reach federal policymakers.

#### Tax Policy Updates:

In May, the U.S. House of Representatives passed the "One Big Beautiful Bill Act" (H.R. 1), which now moves to the U.S. Senate for consideration. The legislation extends and expands many provisions from the 2017 Tax Cuts and Jobs Act, including making the 37% top individual tax rate permanent, increasing standard deductions through 2028, and enhancing the Section 199A qualified business income deduction from 20% to 23%. Key business provisions include extending 100% bonus depreciation through 2029, making permanent the

Section 163(j) interest deduction improvements, and restoring immediate deductibility of domestic research and development costs under Section 174 for tax years 2025-2029. The bill also raises the state and local tax (SALT) deduction cap to \$40,000, introduces new \$1,000 credits for children, and includes various business-friendly provisions such as increased depreciation limits and expanded opportunity zones. The Chamber has joined a nationwide coalition led by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce advocating for key business tax provisions in this legislation. This coordinated effort aims to provide businesses with long-term certainty, encourage continued investment, and support sustained economic growth.

### STATE AFFAIRS

#### State Budget:

The Chamber continues to closely monitor and engage the region's legislative delegation throughout the state budget process to protect business interests and identify opportunities for our regional economy. On May 22, the Massachusetts Senate passed its \$61.4 billion FY2026 budget, increasing state spending more than 6% over the current fiscal year.

Like the House version, the Senate budget rejected



Building Business, Building Communities! Our Legislative Briefing in March brought together members of the North Central Massachusetts Legislative Delegation to discuss the Chamber's impact and One North Central initiatives. We presented FY26 priorities focused on small business, manufacturing, tourism, and workforce development, while emphasizing fiscal restraint amid economic uncertainties. We appreciate our delegation's continued support in driving growth and opportunity across the region.

Governor Healey's proposed tax increases and maintains the state's \$8.1 billion stabilization fund without drawing from it. Key differences between versions include education funding levels, transportation investments, and policy provisions such as prescription drug price controls and liquor license reforms. A Conference Committee will now negotiate the final budget, with the Chamber advocating for provisions that support economic growth in the region.

#### Housing:

In April, the Healey-Driscoll Administration established the state's first-ever Office of Fair Housing to support fair housing initiatives and collaborate with other agencies to advance fair housing

policies and programs.

On May 14, the Administration's Devens Housing Working Group unanimously approved their final report outlining strategies for increased housing production in Devens to help meet the estimated 6,300 new homes needed in the region by 2035. The report examines zoning bylaw modifications to allow and promote housing development in the Devens Innovation and Technology Center, including adaptive reuse of historic buildings at Vicksburg Square.

The Chamber successfully partnered with the North Central Massachusetts Association of REALTORS® for our 8th annual Real Estate Summit Ed Augustus, Secretary of the Office of Housing and Livable Communities,





Chamber Board Chair, Barbara Mahoney of All One Credit Union, and Chamber Staff, were on hand in April as Governor Maura Healey announced \$18 million dollars in Housing Development Incentive Program (HDIP) awards to six Gateway Cities across the state, including \$1.5 million for two projects in downtown Fitchburg. The Governor also toured multiple buildings and units under development in the downtown area.



The Chamber attended Governor Healey's press conference in Leominster unveiling the Energy Affordability, Independence and Innovation Act. With Massachusetts facing the highest energy rates in the nation, this proposal aims to save customers \$10 billion over 10 years. The Chamber remains committed to advocating for North Central Massachusetts businesses on this critical economic issue.

briefed attendees on the Commonwealth's first comprehensive housing plan and ongoing measures to achieve the ambitious target of creating at least 220,000 new housing units statewide by 2035. This summit provided valuable insights for our members on state housing policies and their potential impact on local development opportunities.

### Energy:

For years, the Chamber has advocated for meaningful solutions to reduce energy costs

and increase competitiveness, as our region continues to face the highest energy rates in Massachusetts. Governor Healey announced the Energy Affordability, Independence & Innovation Act in May at a press conference in Leominster attended by Chamber staff. Key reforms include: eliminating and reducing certain charges on utility bills, creating more accountability for utilities, preventing unnecessary costs from being passed to customers, and reducing barriers to new nuclear technologies; changes that are estimated

to save customers in the state approximately \$10 billion over 10 years.

The Chamber has also been engaged on the state's Advance Clean Cars II (ACC II) rule. This rule originally required that 35% of new vehicle sales be electric or hybrid starting with 2026 models. In response to concerns raised by the Chamber and other business groups about market readiness and charging infrastructure, the state announced that it will provide manufacturers with a two-year grace period for 2026 and 2027 model years. Manufacturers must still make traditional vehicles available to dealers and report on their efforts to promote electric vehicles and expand charging networks. The state will also provide additional funding for public fleet electric vehicles and charging infrastructure.

### Workers Compensation:

In mid-May, the Massachusetts Commissioner of Insurance Issued a decision rejecting a proposed 7.1 % increase in the cost of workers' compensation insurance in Massachusetts for the period beginning July 1, 2025. According to the Healey-Driscoll Administration this is expected to save Massachusetts businesses nearly \$80 million.

### State Elections:

The 2026 Massachusetts gubernatorial race continues developing with Governor Maura Healey announcing her reelection bid in February, followed by two former Baker administration officials

launching Republican campaigns: Mike Kennealy, former Housing and Economic Development Secretary, and Brian Shortsleeve, former MBTA chief administrator.

## LOCAL AFFAIRS

### Sterling Zoning:

Following resident and stakeholder input, Sterling's town planner and Planning Board developed updated zoning to enhance economic development, aligned with One North Central priorities. The Chamber submitted testimony supporting three key changes to streamline permitting and double potential commercial space through updated performance zone regulations. Town residents voted in favor of the changes at their Annual Town Meeting in May.

## STAY INFORMED AND ENGAGED

The Chamber's advocacy work on federal, state, and local levels directly impacts your business environment. We continuously represent member interests in policy discussions to foster economic growth and reduce regulatory burdens. We encourage you to stay engaged with these important issues and share your feedback on how government policies affect your business.

*For more information about any of these government affairs updates or to discuss specific policy concerns, please contact Travis Condon, Director of Public Affairs at 978.353.7600 or via email at tcondon@northcentralmass.com. ◇*

# Chamber Foundation Demonstrates Powerful Community Investment in Local Scholars

## *Congratulations to the 2025 Scholarship Recipients*

The North Central Massachusetts Chamber Foundation recently showcased the region's exceptional commitment to education by awarding \$58,000 in scholarships to 29 outstanding students from throughout the region. This significant 26% increase from last year's funding was celebrated at the annual Scholar's Breakfast held May 9th at Great Wolf Lodge in Fitchburg.

Award-winning speaker Maria Milagros delivered an inspiring keynote address to the gathered families, educators, and business leaders who came together to honor these impressive young achievers.

"The North Central region continues to demonstrate extraordinary generosity and commitment to supporting its future leaders," remarked Roy M. Nascimento, Chamber president and CEO. "Every dollar invested in these students strengthens our region's future workforce and leadership pipeline."

Among the recipients were 27 college-bound seniors selected for their academic excellence, community involvement, and work ethic, along with two non-traditional students pursuing continued education and career advancement—reflecting the Chamber's commitment

to diverse educational pathways.

This milestone year brings the Chamber Foundation's lifetime scholarship impact to over one million dollars benefiting more than 700 students throughout North Central Massachusetts.

The Chamber extends heartfelt gratitude to all members who made these scholarships possible—whether through sponsoring a full scholarship, endowing a scholarship, or providing voluntary contributions with their annual dues payments. Each contribution, regardless of size, plays a vital role in supporting our region's promising students.

Special appreciation goes to our Scholar's Breakfast sponsors: **Rollstone Bank & Trust, Great Wolf Lodge, Steel-Fab Inc., Fitchburg State University, All One Credit Union,** and **FATV**, whose leadership continues to inspire broader community support.

Together, we're not just funding education—we're fueling our region's future prosperity.

*Members interested in establishing a scholarship for next year or contributing towards the Chamber Foundation can contact Roy Nascimento, president & CEO at ext. 225 or via email [rnascimento@northcentralmass.com](mailto:rnascimento@northcentralmass.com). ♦*



**Anna Manchester**  
Leominster Center for Technical Education  
Awarded: HealthAlliance Hospital Guild Scholarship  
College: Merrimack College  
Major: Health Sciences



**Brianna Patel**  
Leominster High School  
Awarded: M. Ruth Lee Scholarship  
College: UMass Amherst  
Major: Public Health



**Aidan Cleaves**  
Oakmont Regional High School  
Awarded: Edward C.J. Healy Scholarship  
College: Wesleyan University  
Major: Mathematics



**Megan Richard**  
St. Bernard's Central Catholic High School  
Awarded: Roderick W. & Donna M. Lewin Scholarship  
College: Emmanuel College  
Major: Biology with Pre-Med



**Melissa LaBlanc**  
MyTurn  
Awarded: Non-Traditional Scholarship  
College: Mount Wachusett Community College  
Major: Nursing





**Noah Lee**

Leominster High School  
Awarded: Vision Payroll Scholarship  
College: UMass Amherst  
Major: Biology/Pre-Med



**Lily Mom-Uch**

Montachusett Regional Vocational  
Technical School  
Awarded: UMass Memorial  
HealthAlliance Scholarship  
College: UMass Amherst  
Major: Nursing



**Jack Greene**

Wachusett Regional High School  
Awarded: Young Professionals  
Scholarship  
College: UMass Dartmouth  
Major: Spanish & Psychology



**Elizabeth McNabb**

North Middlesex Regional High  
School  
Awarded: Elizabeth & Anthony  
DiGeronimo Family Scholarship  
College: Fitchburg State University  
Major: English/Professional &  
Creative Writing



**Alexander Fey**

Fitchburg High School  
Awarded: Workers Credit Union  
Scholarship  
College: Worcester Polytechnic  
Institute  
Major: Robotics Engineering



**Ethan Frisch**

Clinton High School  
Awarded: IC Credit Union Scholarship  
College: Worcester Polytechnic  
Institute  
Major: Mechanical Engineering



**Annika Sallila**

Oakmont Regional High School  
Awarded: David L. McKeegan  
Scholarship  
College: Bentley University  
Major: Corporate Finance &  
Accounting



**Madison Oxnard**

Nashoba Regional High School  
Awarded: Ronald Ansin Scholarship  
College: Northeastern University  
Major: Environmental & Sustainability  
Sciences



**Jordan D'Amelio**

Wachusett Regional High School  
Awarded: Enterprise Bank & Trust  
Scholarship  
College: Undecided  
Major: Undecided



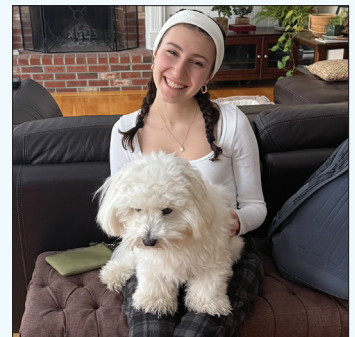
**Jahdalynn Manigat**

Montachusett Regional Vocational  
Technical School  
Awarded: All One Credit Union  
Scholarship  
College: Fitchburg State University  
Major: Health & Natural Sciences



**Makayla Amoako**

Montachusett Regional Vocational  
Technical School  
Awarded: Benjamin Asher  
Scholarship  
College: UMass Amherst  
Major: Political Science



**Maya Ivanov**

The Bromfield School  
Awarded: Rollstone Bank & Trust  
Scholarship  
College: Harvard University  
Major: Math & Economics





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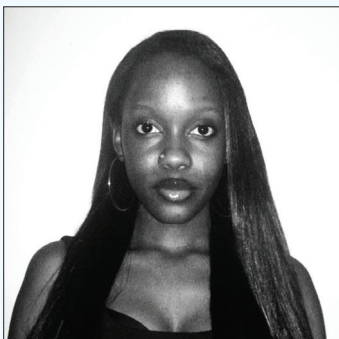
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**Bethsheba Pamela Kayaga**  
Fitchburg High School  
Awarded: Patricia S. Alario  
Scholarship  
College: Mount Wachusett  
Community College  
Major: Nursing



**Klara Tatarev**  
The Bromfield School  
Awarded: North Central  
Massachusetts Chamber Foundation  
College: UMASS Amherst  
Major: Biochemistry and Molecular  
Biology



**Kate Spengler**  
North Middlesex Regional High  
School  
Awarded: North Central  
Massachusetts Chamber Foundation  
College: Virginia Tech  
Major: Biology



**Annabella Farley**  
Groton-Dunstable Regional High  
School  
Awarded: Young Professionals  
Scholarship  
College: University of Pennsylvania  
Major: Art History



**Lauren Gosson**  
Leominster High School  
Awarded: Barbara Silva Scholarship  
College: Fashion Institute of  
Technology  
Major: Fashion Merchandising



**Clair Norton**  
St. Bernard's Central Catholic High  
School  
Awarded: UMass Memorial Health  
Alliance Scholarship  
College: St. Anselm College  
Major: Nursing



**Sruthi Kasaraneni**  
North Middlesex Regional High  
School  
Awarded: George R. Wallace, Jr. and  
Alice G. Wallace Scholarship  
College: Case Western Reserve  
University  
Major: Biochemistry / pre-med



**Abigail Buchhols**  
Groton-Dunstable Regional High  
School  
Awarded: Elizabeth & Anthony  
DiGeronimo Family Scholarship  
College: Mount Wachusett  
Community College  
Major: Veterinary Technology



**Margaret Leighton**  
Leominster High School  
Awarded: Salny Family Scholarship  
College: Harvard University  
Major: Human Regenerative and  
Developmental Biology



**Julia Parenteau**  
Clinton High School  
Awarded: North Central  
Massachusetts Chamber Foundation  
College: Quinnipiac University  
Major: Sonography



**Gabrielle Roberto**  
North Middlesex Regional High  
School  
Awarded: North Central  
Massachusetts Chamber Foundation  
College: Gordon College  
Major: Human Biology



**Jameson Brinker**  
Montachusett Regional Vocational  
Technical School - Continuing  
Education  
Awarded: Non-Traditional Scholarship  
Major: Electrician





# A LEGACY OF INNOVATION

## *Celebrating Manufacturing in North Central Massachusetts*

**N**orth Central Massachusetts has a proud manufacturing heritage that can be sorted into two broad categories: “legacy” manufacturers of consumer goods like furniture, car parts, and food products, and “high-tech” firms specializing in innovation-driven products like pharmaceuticals, electronic components, and machinery parts.

“Regardless of the category, manufacturing in North Central Massachusetts is experiencing a renaissance,” said Roy M. Nascimento, president and CEO, North

Central Massachusetts Chamber of Commerce. “By creating jobs, driving economic growth and demonstrating how the industry continues to evolve and innovate, our manufacturers are continuing to honor the legacy that made our region known as one of the most robust manufacturing hubs of the 20th century.”

While many of our region’s manufacturing leaders remain dedicated to the principles and values of those who came before them, the way these companies make the products their

customers have come to know and trust for generations has evolved from hardscrabble workshops to clean rooms and high-tech labs.

Founded in 1880 by Laroy S. Starrett, the **L.S. Starrett Company** in Athol is one of the region’s oldest companies. As a manufacturer of more than 5,000 variations of precision tools, gages, measuring instruments and saw blades for industrial, professional and consumer markets around the world, the walls within the L.S. Starrett Company speak volumes of an old mill facility that is modernizing and

evolving operations while continuing to honor the roots of what made the company a global leader in toolmaking.

Matthew L. Wells, director of operations and continuous improvement at the L.S. Starrett Company, said it is not uncommon for multiple generations of the same family to work at the company. “There are times when we have up to three generations of the same family with us, some with more than 50 years of service,” he said. “This is a really important aspect of our culture because with those years of service comes a level





of dedication, knowledge and deep history within the company and for our products.”

For Wells, and many other manufacturers in the region, that dedication, knowledge and history is gone when retirements occur. In fact, Wells said that in the three years since he began working at L.S. Starrett, the company has gone from 70% of its workforce having 15 plus years of tenure to almost 50% of its workforce having just five years or less experience on the job. “It’s admirable to have people work with you for their entire careers and be part of your family, but when they leave it’s a big challenge for us as we have relied on an individual’s knowledge to supplement our manufacturing process.”

To bridge the gap between legacy workers and the manufacturing process, L.S. Starrett has looked to local technical and vocational schools, as well as the Massachusetts Manufacturing Extension Partnership (MassMEP), which works to

**“They are surprised with the massive focus on our automated engineered solutions and with the huge technical demand for engineers and workers to support the maintenance of the machines.”**

provide small and medium-sized manufacturers with resources to help companies be successful.

“People are our number one asset and we have a lot of room for opportunity,” added Wells. “Through MassMEP, we established an operator training program to educate employees on how to read a Starrett blueprint and identify quality characteristics of our parts. We also partner with Monty Tech and Franklin County Technical School to offer more advanced technical programs that enable the student to work full-time during the day and attend school in the evening.”

And L.S. Starrett isn’t

the only manufacturer in the region looking at today’s youth as the key to future success. **SMC, Ltd.**, a manufacturer of critical medical devices serving the Pharma, Diagnostic and Surgical markets located in Devens, is also collaborating with local technical schools and universities to build its employee pipeline.

Brian Payson, executive vice president at SMC, said the company has partnerships with Worcester Polytechnic Institute and UMass Lowell to offer co-op programs. And through a collaboration of parents, teachers, principals and superintendents at schools across the region,

the company created an internship program designed for students to explore careers at SMC.

As a global company, SMC has nine manufacturing locations around the world with 2,000 employees, of which 440 employees work in Devens. As SMC continues to grow, it is maintaining strong roots in Devens with a 250,000 square foot expansion. “We love being in Devens,” added Payson. “We made the decision early on to automate our processes as much as we can so we can concentrate on high volume products to absorb the cost of automation.”

But for Payson, the real impact of today’s industry comes when he is touring guests at the Devens facility.

“We’ve hosted tours for superintendents in central Massachusetts and welcome other groups to our facility, and it always makes me smile when they realize this isn’t their grandfather’s manufacturing,” said

*Continued on page 16*





*Continued from page 15*

Payson. “They are surprised with the massive focus on our automated engineered solutions and with the huge technical demand for engineers and workers to support the maintenance of the machines. It’s just fantastic to show them what we are doing!”

For some companies, leaders need to only look within their own family to continue their legacy. **Catania Oils**, which is celebrating its 125th year, is a leading provider of organic oils, including vegetable oils, olive oils and blended oils, for the foodservice and retail markets. A fourth-generation employee, Joseph Basile

grew up sweeping floors and doing small tasks as a child when his grandfather led the company. Now more than 30 years later, Basile is at the helm as President.

“I grew up in the business from a young age and through my teenage years spending a lot of time with my grandfather at the plant on weekends,” recalled Basile. “As I got older, I would spend more time at the factory and did a lot of the jobs which look different today because the technology has grown leaps and bounds.”

In addition to SMC, L.S. Starrett is also focusing heavily on automation, especially in areas with difficult processes or tasks for lower skill sets to give employees with a higher level

of skill more skin in the game on the shop floor.

“We want to give our employees more responsibility and ownership on machine fault recovery and putting in basic Lean principles on the floor,” said Wells. “We’re also working with robotics automation and leveraging AI (artificial intelligence) to detect quality issues in our inspection process.”

Jon-Michael Raymond, chief revenue officer at L.S. Starrett, said AI is also coming into play to identify marketing trends. “We can use AI to help with the sales process to identify new leads and track trends so we can have a targeted approach to the industry,” he said. “By investing in technology and using AI for data analytics,

our sales [representatives] can see current trends, view hundreds of distributors, and explore thousands of products at their fingertips, which is very valuable.”

At Catania Oils, AI is something Basile and the team are watching closely. “We are in the process of making investments in AI from a resource and time perspective,” said Basile. “A lot of things today are run by computers and automation has really exploded internally in running the business.”

Whether our manufacturers are creating jobs, driving economic growth or exploring AI and automation, one thing that has stood the test of time for generations is the collaboration among other

## *Ready to Connect with North Central Massachusetts Manufacturers?*

Join the Chamber’s Manufacturing Council of North Central Massachusetts and tap into our region’s 400+ manufacturers. Members network with peers, tour innovative facilities, attend quarterly meetings featuring experts in the industry, gain direct access to policy leaders, and collectively advocate on key industry issues.

*To learn more, call Roy Nascimento at 978.353.7600, ext. 225 or visit [www.NorthCentralMass.com](http://www.NorthCentralMass.com).*





manufacturers in the region.

“Together, we can make the overall region stronger by sharing best practices on megatrends and market conditions,” said Payson. “Market [intelligence] is critical to gauge where we are and where we need to go regardless of our industry so I always want to hear from other manufacturers about how they are dealing with using technology and navigating the geo-political environment especially from folks in our own backyard.”

Basile agrees. “Being involved with the [North Central Massachusetts Chamber of Commerce], networking and coming together to understand common pain points versus being a single voice trying to get attention is a powerful thing,” he said. “By working together and compiling resources, we can draw labor to us, we can automate to do more with less, and we can have a stronger culture tied together in a network with the right people.”

For Nascimento and the Chamber team, working with 400 manufacturers that call the region home means taking the Chamber’s commitment to advocating and supporting the industry one step further. In 2024, the Chamber announced the Manufacturing Council of North Central Massachusetts to support the industry and regional economy.

“The Chamber has always been a strong champion of local manufacturing, advocating and supporting the industry in multiple ways,” said Nascimento. “I believe that our strong advocacy and support of the manufacturing industry is one of the things that helps set our Chamber apart. From hosting manufacturing tours to publishing a Manufacturing Directory and supporting workforce efforts for the industry, the Council is a natural extension of our work and reflects our commitment to supporting and growing this important sector of our economy.” ◇

## MANUFACTURING IN NORTH CENTRAL MASSACHUSETTS

- **COUNTER TREND GROWTH:** The region experienced 3% growth in manufacturing jobs from 2014-2019 while Massachusetts overall saw a 2% decline;
- **MANUFACTURING POWERHOUSE:** 15% of the region’s employment is in manufacturing vs. 9.7% nationally – home to 430+ manufacturers;
- **ECONOMIC ENGINE:** Double the state’s manufacturing employment concentration—one-third of all regional wages from manufacturing jobs;
- **PREMIUM WAGES:** \$77,945 average manufacturing wage (2019), 42% above regional average;
- **MANUFACTURING HERITAGE:** Leominster’s plastics innovation and generations of precision manufacturing across 26+ communities;
- **MULTIPLIER EFFECT:** Each manufacturing job supports 2-3 additional regional jobs;
- **TAX BASE:** High-value industrial properties contribute significantly to municipal revenues;
- **ADVANCED MANUFACTURING:** Identified as #1 target industry for regional growth;
- **FUTURE PIPELINE:** Multiple expansions underway including Veranova, SMC, Watson-Marlow and Solvus Global.

Source: One North Central (2021)



# TOURISM

## Update

### Visit North Central Massachusetts

Here is a recap of efforts over the Spring from the Chamber's destination marketing arm, Visit North Central Massachusetts (VNCM).

#### Website

For FY25 year-to-date, our tourism affiliate site, [VisitNorthCentral.com](https://VisitNorthCentral.com), shows strong growth with a 26.5% increase in users and 17.09% increase in pageviews compared to last year, currently averaging approximately 17,715 pageviews per month.

#### Tourism Advertising

We successfully promoted the region through strategic print and digital campaigns targeting key markets. Our winter and spring initiatives reached audiences through AAA Northeast, Boston Spirit, Cumulus, Hearst WCVB, LocalIQ, and MassLive, positioning North Central Massachusetts as a premier travel destination. We also participated in Boston Spirit's LGBT Executive Networking Night in May, showcasing our attractions and the region's welcoming atmosphere to business leaders. These



Visit North Central Massachusetts highlighted local attractions and businesses at the recent Boston Spirit LGBT Executive Networking Night. In this photo, from left to right: Vicky Tippawong, Market & Communications Manager of the North Central Massachusetts Chamber of Commerce; Jack Brown, Marketing Director of Hampshire County; Laurie Hepworth, Site Manager of the Plymouth Waterfront Visitor Center; Paula Fisher, Deputy Director of See Plymouth; and Julie Arrison-Bishop, Director of Marketing at Visit Massachusetts.

coordinated marketing efforts drive visitor awareness and support our regional hospitality and tourism businesses.

#### MA250 Campaign

We're leveraging the Massachusetts 250th Anniversary with our "North Central Mass is

Revolutionary" marketing campaign, supported by a MA 250th grant. This initiative highlights our region's innovative spirit across Tourism, Culture, Agriculture, Manufacturing, and Business sectors. Strategic media partnerships with Boston Business Journal, Worcester Business

Journal, Worcester Magazine, Mass Live, and Local IQ deliver broad visibility through print, digital, and social media channels. The campaign features specialized content and curated itineraries on [visitnorthcentral.com](https://visitnorthcentral.com), plus a new digital kiosk at the Johnny Appleseed Visitor



Center connecting visitors with member businesses and attractions.

### Sports Tourism

Visit North Central has partnered with Playeasy, a leading digital platform connecting youth and amateur sports event organizers with regional venues, to strengthen our position in this growing market. This technology-driven approach streamlines venue discovery and bookings while creating economic opportunities for member businesses including hotels, restaurants, and attractions. The platform's automated lead generation delivers event opportunities directly to member venues. Recent meetings with sports-related sector members are developing targeted strategies to attract more sports tourism to North Central Massachusetts.

### Digital Engagement

Our Visit North Central Massachusetts Facebook and Instagram accounts have built a community of 48,512 followers who actively engage with content about regional attractions, events, and businesses. This growing digital audience translates directly into economic benefits for members through increased website traffic, business inquiries, and travel decisions.

Our email newsletter reaches 3,582 contacts

with impressive engagement: a 47% average open rate and 6% click-through rate—significantly above industry standards. Together, these digital channels convert online interest into real visits and spending at member establishments.

### Shoulder Season Campaign

Our Super Region Grant partnership with Discover Central MA and MetroWest Boston Visitors Bureau concluded successfully in April. The campaign featured press familiarization trips to Wachusett Mountain, Great Wolf Lodge, and local museums, attracting travel writers and influencers who positioned our region as a vibrant year-round destination. Results exceeded engagement goals and delivered substantial tourism growth throughout Central Massachusetts.

### Recognition at the State Level

At the Governor's Conference on Travel & Tourism in Springfield, Diane Burnette, former Manager of the Johnny Appleseed Visitor Center, received the prestigious Larry D. Meehan Lifetime Achievement Award from Governor Maura Healey for nearly 30 years of service to North Central Massachusetts tourism. This honor elevated our region's profile among state tourism leaders.

### Johnny Appleseed Visitor Center

The Johnny Appleseed Visitor Center welcomed 20,300 visitors during the January–March 2025 quarter. Strategic improvements include reconfiguring the front entrance for a new interactive touch kiosk, installing a Freedom's Way National Heritage Area display, enhancing the Johnny Appleseed replica house with MassDOT-donated gravel, new Polar vending machines, refurbished flagpoles, and upcoming EV charging stations from MassHighway. These enhancements position the Visitor Center as an attractive gateway driving economic impact throughout our region by connecting visitors with member establishments.

### Regional Performance Analysis

North Central Massachusetts shows solid visitor engagement through the first quarter of CY2025, with visitors averaging 2.6 days per stay and 76.9% staying overnight—an improvement from 74.0% in 2024, indicating growing quality tourism benefiting local businesses. The region attracts a loyal visitor base with 73.1% repeat visitors. Massachusetts represented our top origin market at 13.9%, followed by Connecticut (10.3%) and New York (8.5%).

However, the lodging sector experienced challenges in April, continuing early 2025 patterns. Hotel performance declined across key metrics: occupancy dropped 5.2% to 72.2%, average daily rates fell 6.8% to \$195.15, and revenue per available room decreased 11.7% to \$140.88, resulting in an 11.7% decline in total hotel revenue to \$5.7 million. Conversely, short-term rentals demonstrated strong performance with occupancy rising 13.4% to 49.9% and revenue increasing 45.5% to \$279,200. This contrasting performance reflects evolving traveler preferences and presents both challenges and opportunities as we approach the critical summer tourism season.

### Looking Ahead

We're building on this momentum to drive greater economic impact for member businesses and communities. Every visitor we attract means increased revenue for local hotels, restaurants, shops, and attractions while supporting jobs and strengthening our regional economy. As we develop new strategies to position North Central Massachusetts as a premier destination, we remain focused on creating measurable benefits that help our members thrive and communities prosper. ◇

# MONTACHUSETT VETERANS OUTREACH CENTER, INC.

## Show Your Support: Sponsor Veteran Housing in North Central Mass!



MVOC acquired the vacant Streeter and Poland School buildings in Winchendon, MA and is repurposing them into low-income apartments for veterans- *and we need your help!* Within this housing project, 44 new apartments will be created. Veterans in these apartments will have access to long-term, supportive housing designed to age with them, and access to all other MVOC supports.

We have secured funding from private and state sources and are now looking to YOU to help us reach the finish line!

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## SPONSORSHIP OPPORTUNITIES



Scan this QR code or visit [veterans-outreach.org/expansion](https://veterans-outreach.org/expansion) to:

- Sponsor an area of the building in your name, the name of a fallen veteran, or the name of your business/organization
- Buy a memorial or supporter brick for the veteran's courtyard

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*Donating an amount listed on the site will automatically designate that area to you/your business. MVOC's Executive Director will call to discuss details!*

*Stephanie Marchetti, EdD*

**Executive Director**

978-630-7435

[smarchetti@veterans-outreach.org](mailto:smarchetti@veterans-outreach.org)





# NEW NORTH CENTRAL MASSACHUSETTS CHAMBER MEMBERS

## AnnieMac Home Mortgage

Brianna Kelley  
28 Central Street  
Leominster, MA 01453  
FINANCE & INSURANCE  
MORTGAGE COMPANY

## CirculAIR Mini Splits

Tyler Gushlaw  
249 Winchendon Road  
Ashburnham, MA 01430  
BUSINESS & PROFESSIONAL  
SERVICES  
PLUMBING/PIPING/HEATING/AIR  
CONDITIONING

## Edge Benefit Partners

Doug Goodhile  
1174 Main Street, Suite 200  
Holden, MA 01564  
FINANCE & INSURANCE  
BENEFIT PLANS

## Elysium MedSpa & Aesthetics LLC

Esther Steinkraus  
244 Walton Street  
Fitchburg, MA 01420  
HEALTH CARE & MEDICAL

## Fitchburg Rotary East

Robert Cambell  
PO Box 2252  
Fitchburg, MA 01420  
FAMILY, COMMUNITY &  
NON-PROFIT

## Heywood Hospital

Rozanna Penney  
242 Green Street  
Gardner, MA 01440  
HEALTH CARE & MEDICAL  
HOSPITAL

## LS Starrett

Kip M. Patterson  
121 Crescent Street  
Athol, MA 01331  
MANUFACTURING  
TOOLS, DIES & MOLDS

## Massachusetts Youth Soccer Association

Michael Bruno  
512 Old Union Turnpike  
Lancaster, MA 01523  
SPORTS & RECREATION

## Northeast Site Development

Joseph Levine  
PO Box 2264  
Acton, MA 01720  
REAL ESTATE & CONSTRUCTION  
DEVELOPMENT

## Oasis Senior Advisors NW-Boston

Patricia Jacotin  
94 Spring Street  
Lexington, MA 02421  
BUSINESS & PROFESSIONAL  
SERVICES  
CONSULTANT

## On Duty Chimney, Masonry & Stove

Bryan LeBlanc  
493 Lancaster Street, Suite 201  
Leominster, MA 01453  
HOME & GARDEN

## Ramey Music

Maria Ramey  
24 Massachusetts Avenue  
Lunenburg, MA 01462  
PERSONAL SERVICE & CARE  
HUMAN SERVICES

## Senior Helpers of Fitchburg

Ekow Ambaah  
881 South Street, Unit 2  
Fitchburg, MA 01420  
HEALTH CARE & MEDICAL  
HOME HEALTH CARE

## TaraVista Behavioral Health

Sheila Crowley  
85 Patton Road  
Devens, MA 01434  
HEALTH CARE & MEDICAL  
MENTAL HEALTH

## The Green Dog Holistic Grooming

Briana Mancuso  
217 State Road East, Suite 4  
Westminster, MA 01473  
PET SERVICES  
GROOMERS

## Veranova

Michael Riley  
25 Patton Rd.  
Devens, MA 01434  
MANUFACTURING  
PHARMACEUTICAL

## Wellfleet Enterprises, Inc.

Stephen Webster  
8 Pond View Terrace  
West Wareham, MA 02576  
BUSINESS & PROFESSIONAL  
SERVICES  
CONSULTANT

## Whitney Companies, LLC

Jim Whitney  
98 Adams Street, Suite 114  
Leominster, MA 01453  
REAL ESTATE & CONSTRUCTION  
DEVELOPMENT

## CHAMBER EVENTS & PROGRAMS

Browse and register for upcoming events at [northcentralmass.com](http://northcentralmass.com).

FEBRUARY — MAY

# CHAMBER NEWS

## Chamber Promotes Travis Condon to Director of Public Affairs

The North Central Massachusetts Chamber has promoted Travis Condon to Director of Public Affairs, recognizing his significant contributions since joining the Chamber staff in 2020.

In this expanded role, Condon will continue leading the Chamber's advocacy and public policy initiatives while contributing to economic development efforts that strengthen the visibility of regional businesses on Beacon Hill.

"Travis has consistently demonstrated his

commitment to our organization's mission," said Roy M. Nascimento, President & CEO. "His contributions have helped strengthen the Chamber's work throughout North Central Massachusetts."

A Leominster native and former WPKZ Radio host, Condon serves on the North Star Family Services board and holds a communications degree from Bridgewater State University.

Please join us in congratulating Travis on his well-deserved promotion. ♦

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# Out & About



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



We're grateful to Dr. Donna Hodge, President of **Fitchburg State University**, for graciously opening her residence to host our February **Business After Hours**. Her warm hospitality provided the perfect backdrop for an evening of connection, conversation, and community. It was a wonderful opportunity for local professionals to network, share ideas, and build meaningful relationships.



Our February Business Benefit Series: PR, Communications & Marketing brought together local professionals for an engaging session of learning and connection. Special thanks to guest speakers Lauren Howe of **empHowered PR** and Tamar Russell Brown of **Sitka Creations** for sharing their expertise and offering practical insights that left attendees inspired and ready to enhance their brand and communications strategy.



In April, the Chamber held a **Meet & Greet at Bitcoin Ben's Crypto Club Massachusetts** in the City of Leominster. Attendees had the opportunity to learn more about the business, its mission, and its connection to the local community and regional economy. Special thanks to Ed and the team at Bitcoin Ben's for their warm hospitality and for shedding light on the growing world of cryptocurrency.



The Chamber's March **Women's Leadership Connection** luncheon brought together an incredible group of inspiring and influential women from across North Central Massachusetts. Thank you to our guest speaker, Stephanie Munoz, Founder, Creative Director, Fashion Designer & Educator of Mpoze Fashion. Stephanie shared her powerful journey of building her business and launching Suited for Fashion, a nonprofit dedicated to empowering underrepresented youth in the local arts community. Her story and insights on leadership, creativity, and giving back left a lasting impression on all who attended.



Congratulations to Chamber member **Victor's on Main**, located at 423 Main Street in Fitchburg, on their recent opening!

Victor on Main has quickly become a popular lunchtime destination and a go-to spot for fine dining in the evening. The restaurant offers a fresh menu with a unique fusion of Latin American and American flavors.



The March **Good Morning North Central** breakfast brought together community and business leaders for an inspiring morning. Marc Dohan, Executive Director of **NewVue Communities**, shared exciting updates on the Fitchburg Arts Community housing project, and Navjeet Bal, President & CEO of **MassDevelopment**, highlighted new funding opportunities and economic growth initiatives across Massachusetts. Special thanks to our sponsor, **Montachusett Regional Vocational Technical School**, and emcee Lea Ann Scales for making the event a success.





The March session of the North Central Massachusetts Chamber's **Community Leadership Institute** focused on the thriving Arts & Culture landscape and its impact in the region. Participants began with an inspiring visit to the **Fitchburg Art Museum**, followed by an exclusive behind-the-scenes tour of the innovative BF Brown Artist Housing project, which transforms historic architecture into creative living spaces. After enjoying lunch at the historic **Fay Club**, the group spent the afternoon at the world-class **Groton Hill Music Center**. There, members discovered how this premier venue enriches our region through its educational programs and performance spaces designed for exceptional acoustic experiences.

The March session highlighted the role the arts and creative economy play in fostering cultural vibrancy and economic growth throughout North Central Massachusetts.



We were proud to attend the **2025 Governor's Tourism Conference**, where **Diane Burnette** was honored with the prestigious Larry D. Meehan Lifetime Achievement Award by Governor Maura Healey, recognizing her nearly 30 years of dedication to growing tourism in North Central Massachusetts as manager of the Johnny Appleseed Visitors Center.

The conference brought together Visit North Central Massachusetts, Chamber teams, state officials, and tourism leaders from across the state to strengthen this vital economic sector and explore opportunities tied to the MA250 Initiative. Regional representation was strong, including Destination Groton, Fitchburg's Economic Development Director Mary Jo Bohart, and speakers Al Rose (Red Apple Farm) and Erica Bosse (Gardner Farmers Market), who highlighted agriculture's key role in tourism.



The March **Chamber Leadership Council** meeting featured insightful discussions with special guest Stephen P. McAllister, Vice President of the Eastern Region for the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, who shared key priorities like tax and regulatory reform. Jim Whitney presented an exciting plan to transform the former Leominster landfill into a horse racing and entertainment complex, while Chamber President Roy Nascimto provided important updates. The Council continues to play a crucial role in guiding North Central Massachusetts' economic future. Thank you to all who contributed!



In March, we hosted our **2nd Annual Small Business Showcase & Entrepreneur Awards Reception**. It was a fantastic evening dedicated to honoring the remarkable achievements of entrepreneurs and small business owners who partnered with our Development Corporation to start or grow their businesses. The event welcomed a diverse group, including start-ups, established small businesses, resource providers, lenders, professional service providers, and anyone considering launching a business, creating a vibrant space for connection, learning, and celebration.



Congratulations to Chamber member **Comeketo Catering & Bar Services** on their Grand Opening of their new commercial kitchen at Rollstone Congregational Church at 199 Main Street in Fitchburg. Comeketo Catering provides exceptional catering and mobile bar services, perfect for your next event. Let them elevate your special occasion with their top-notch offerings!



Our March Young Professionals of **North Central Massachusetts Fashion Show Fundraiser: Empowerment Through Style** was an inspiring evening that showcased confidence, community, and purpose. From the excitement of pre-show preparations to the glamour of the runway and candid moments, attendees came together in style to support the Young Professionals Scholarship Fund. Thanks to your incredible generosity, we not only met our \$2,000 goal but surpassed it by \$1,400, making a powerful impact on the future of our young professionals.





The Chamber was proud to attend the announcement of **Feel Your BrEaST**, a new program launched by Lauren Howe of **Empowered PR**, a breast cancer survivor, in partnership with Fitchburg-based **First Class Hair Design** and local non-profit **Pawsitively 4 Pink**. This compassionate initiative offers up to five complimentary hair washes and blowouts, plus free hair loss consultations, to support women during breast cancer treatment and recovery. The program also raises awareness through **First Class Hair Design's** outreach to clients. Backed by **Pawsitively 4 Pink's** emotional support dogs and financial aid, **Feel Your BrEaST** is making a meaningful difference for underserved women facing breast cancer across Massachusetts.



In April our **Community Leadership Institute** spent the day at Beacon Hill, gaining firsthand insight into state government and leadership in action.

We're grateful to Senator John J. Cronin and State Representatives Natalie Higgins, Meg Kilcoyne, Mike Kushmerek, Margaret Scarsdale, Dan Sena, and Jon Zlotnik for welcoming our class into the State House, sharing the history of the legislature, and leading engaging discussions on policy and public service.



The **Annual Economic Forecast Breakfast** in April was a great success, providing attendees from across the region with valuable insights into the economic outlook for North Central Massachusetts. Thank you to our speakers Rachael Aiken, Vice President of Senior Investment Officer at Cape Cod Five, Curtis Dubay, Economic Policy Division at the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and Joseph Silva, President at **Fidelity Bank**. The Economic Forecast Breakfast was presented in partnership with Greater Gardner Chamber of Commerce, Fidelity Bank MA, Nashoba Valley Chamber of Commerce & North Quabbin Chamber.



Chamber Manager of Membership Recruitment & Engagement, Patrick O'Hara, visited **Kimball Farm** in Lancaster on its opening day to tour the facility, meet with management, and experience the many offerings that make Kimball Farm a beloved local destination.



The Chamber held a successful **Meet & Greet** at **Sitka Creations** in Shirley. Thank you to Sitka Creations for hosting and providing a fantastic opportunity to learn more about their business and its strong connection to the local community and region.



Luck was tested and winners emerged at the **Young Professionals of North Central Casino Night** in April, where fun, networking, and friendly competition filled the evening. Congratulations to our top three winners and thank you to everyone who joined us for this lively event. Special thanks to **Bitcoin Ben's Crypto Club Massachusetts** for hosting, **Main Street Gift & Cafe** for the fantastic food, and **Creative Event Services, Inc.** for making the night a success!



Our **April Business After Hours** event at **Rollstone Bank & Trust** was a success! It was an evening filled with fantastic networking opportunities, along with delicious food and drinks. A special thank you to Rollstone Bank for hosting such a memorable event!





The Chamber hosted a productive **Manufacturing Council Meeting** in April at **Catania Oils** in Ayer, where members received valuable insights on tariffs and supply chain challenges from industry experts Kathie Mahoney of MassMEP and Joseph Basile of Catania Oils. The meeting included a facility tour, highlighting the company's innovative operations. The Manufacturing Council of North Central Massachusetts is dedicated to providing knowledge, resources, and support to strengthen the regional manufacturing sector. Local manufacturers interested in connecting with peers and addressing industry challenges are encouraged to join the Council's quarterly meetings.



The Chamber attended the grand opening of **Montachusett Regional Vocational Technical School** brand new MVP Academy on April 30. This new workforce training center will give over 120 students access to hands-on training in Carpentry, Electrical, with plans to add Plumbing. As part of their continuing education and adult training, they are also planning to launch adult clean energy programs this fall.



Building Tomorrow's Leaders! On May 1, the **Community Leadership Institute Class of 2025** explored manufacturing excellence and economic development. The day featured **AIS** showcasing innovative furniture manufacturing and community impact, an economic development panel with leaders from the **City of Fitchburg**, **City of Leominster**, **North Central Massachusetts Development Corporation**, and **North Central Massachusetts Chamber of Commerce**, plus **Burkart Flutes** demonstrating precision craftsmanship. Visionary leadership uniting innovation and collaboration!



Building Tomorrow's Leaders! The CLI Class of 2025 explored "Responsible Leadership" on April 24 with Dr. Michael Greenwood of **Fitchburg State University**, Dr. Charles Cavagnaro at **UMass Memorial HealthAlliance-Clinton Hospital** discussing healthcare ethics, and Sheriff Lew Evangelidis showcasing transformative rehabilitation programs at **Worcester County House of Corrections**. Another milestone in our leaders' journey!



Congratulations to Chamber member **AnnieMac Home Mortgage**, located at 28 Central Street in Leominster, on their grand opening!

AnnieMac Home Mortgage provides personalized service and a diverse range of loan options, including Conventional, Jumbo, FHA, VA, USDA, and Renovation loans. Their expert team is committed to guiding clients through the home financing process with care and professionalism.



Congratulations to Chamber Member **Mera's Cakes Inc.** on the grand opening of their new location at 150 Main Street in Fitchburg! As a proud member of the Chamber, we are excited to support and witness your continued growth and success. Mera and her whole family have worked for over 4 years to get this point. Amazing team effort!

We invite the community to visit Mera's Cake, where they can enjoy an exceptional selection of pastries and beverages, including cookies, brownies, flan, Dubai chocolate, fruit cups, coffee, tea, juices and more.



Congratulations to Chamber members **Clear Path for Veterans New England** and **MassDevelopment** on the opening of their newly renovated Fort Devens Veteran Housing. The two organizations teamed up with Soldier On for this incredible project which included major renovations of ten three-bedroom units, developed specifically for veterans and their families in Devens.





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- Learn conflict resolution skills you can use in your daily life and work
- Examples: - Active Listening Skills
- Exploration of personal conflict styles, biases, and what you bring to the table
  - How to use neutral and open-ended questions to help people hear each other
  - How to help people get through impasse and work toward resolution
  - Learn how conflict can be positive for relationships
  - Learn first-hand the challenges facing community members
  - Have the opportunity to help others heal their relationships

*Tuition rebate program and scholarship program available to those willing and able to volunteer for our organization on a regular basis for at least one year upon successful completion of mediation course.*

To learn more & download the registration form go to:

<https://mediationncm.org/education-and-training>

please contact our Executive Director, Lisa Wood at [info@mediationncm.org](mailto:info@mediationncm.org) with questions or to send your registration form

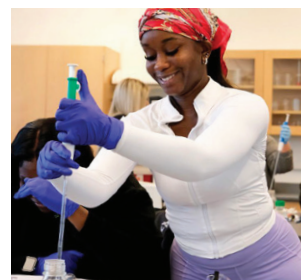




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