

North Central Massachusetts

Chamber Report

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GETTING TO WORK

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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: Transportation barriers in North Central Massachusetts directly impact business growth and workforce access. In this edition, we spotlight the launch of the North Central Massachusetts Rides Transportation Management Association - an innovative, business - led solution that brings together employers, institutions, and municipalities to create practical transportation options no single organization could achieve alone. The cover photo, courtesy of TransAction Associates, shows a shuttle service near Boston and illustrates the type of transportation solutions the TMA will explore for our region.

This groundbreaking initiative emerged from extensive community engagement and directly supports our "One North Central" regional economic development plan. As your Chamber, we're proud to serve as the host organization for this innovative affiliate, demonstrating our commitment to addressing real barriers facing our business community.

Inside these pages, you'll also discover an exciting new affinity program with Leadership Dynamics, meet our new Board Chair Tony Fields, and celebrate volunteers recognized at our annual meeting. You'll also meet our Community Leadership Institute graduates and get the latest updates on government affairs, tourism and economic development.

Thank you for reading. We hope you find this edition both informative and inspiring!

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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.

MEMBER RECOGNITION INITIATIVE:

This fall, the Chamber is launching a new recognition program to honor Chamber members during our popular Good Morning North Central breakfast series who are celebrating major milestones or who have made significant contributions to economic growth and regional quality of life in North Central Massachusetts. Recognition categories include business milestone achievements (25, 50, 75, and 100+ year anniversaries), leadership transitions at major employers, substantial business development projects, individual achievements that bring positive regional recognition, and community enhancement initiatives.

Three to five honorees will be featured at select quarterly breakfast events, giving them professional recognition in front of influential business and community leaders while extending their spotlight across our 50,000+ social media followers and communication channels. Nominations are accepted year-round through our online form, and anyone can nominate—including self-nominations from Chamber members. This program celebrates the full spectrum of member achievements that make our region a thriving place to live, work, and grow. Learn more or submit nominations at northcentralmass.com/good-morning-north-central-recognition/.

SMALL BUSINESS LENDING:

Strong capital plus strong partnerships equals stronger communities—that's the formula driving the North Central Massachusetts Development Corporation (NCMDC), our Chamber's economic development arm, as it expands access to crucial small business funding. Since January, NCMDC has approved and closed **15 loans totaling \$530,228**,



The Clark family—Murry, Sara, Alexis, and Kody—recently purchased the longtime Fitchburg pizzeria with assistance from a \$122,500 NCMDC loan. Sara, a 15-year employee and manager since 2022, will continue serving the community alongside her family at the popular Ashby State Road location.

directly supporting local entrepreneurs who often can't secure traditional financing. These loans—ranging from \$1,000 to \$121,500—included ten SBA loans, four RRF loans, and one EDA loan, creating or saving **54 jobs** across our region while revitalizing properties and strengthening our shared economy. Beyond the direct impact, these strategic investments leveraged an additional **\$188,719** from private sources and banking partners, multiplying every dollar invested. Looking ahead, approximately \$1.4 million in loan requests currently sit in our pipeline, with three approved loans totaling \$150,000 expected to close soon. With a portfolio of 86 loans totaling over \$3.186 million, NCMDC continues strengthening our regional business ecosystem, creating opportunities for all Chamber members through expanded customer bases and more robust supply chains.

BUSINESS ASSISTANCE:

Strong businesses build strong communities, and our economic development team continues proving that targeted support makes all the difference. Through August, we've delivered **1,586 hours of hands-on technical assistance** this year to local entrepreneurs and small businesses—from ambitious startups to established operations ready to scale. Our comprehensive approach focuses on preparing businesses for financing success through our development corporation, providing both pre-loan guidance to strengthen applications and post-loan support to ensure sustainable growth. We also assist with marketing strategies and connecting businesses with the right resources at the right time. Beyond our

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direct support, we serve as connectors, linking businesses with specialized expertise through our partnerships with other resource partners. This collaborative network creates a ripple effect that strengthens our entire regional economy and benefits all Chamber members through increased local business activity and job creation.

REGIONAL BUSINESS INVESTMENT FUND:

Strategic investment in our communities continues supporting business growth throughout the region. The NCMDC's Regional Business Investment Fund has provided **\$526,000** through three loans since its launch in 2023, helping to revitalize key properties in our service area. While no additional loans have closed this quarter, momentum continues building behind the scenes. We've engaged with additional communities in the region to discuss RBIF opportunities and potential projects, expanding awareness of this resource for real estate development. Several promising developments remain active in our pipeline as they slowly work through the development process, with projects focused on downtown revitalization and creating new housing units that align with both municipal and state priorities for community growth. Due to strong demand and our robust project pipeline, we're nearing full deployment of our current RBIF capital and have submitted a grant application for additional funding to replenish this successful loan fund in order to continue meeting the growing need for strategic community investment.

INITIATE PROSPERITY PLATFORM UPDATE:

After careful evaluation, the Chamber has made the difficult decision to discontinue our Initiate Prosperity online learning platform. While this comprehensive resource offered 300+ business tools and guides in English and Spanish at no cost to members, usage remained consistently low despite our investment in the annual platform fee. Since launching

in October 2023, the platform generated only modest engagement that did not justify the ongoing expense. We remain committed to providing valuable member benefits and will continue exploring cost-effective resources that better align with our members' needs and usage patterns. Members seeking business development resources can still access support through our NCMDC team and other Chamber programs.

CHAMBER GIFT CARDS:

Keeping dollars local helps drive economic growth, and our Gift Local program through Yiftee's Mastercard-based e-gift card platform now features **44 participating merchants** ready to serve customers. From January 1, 2025 through August 15, 2025, we have sold 43 eGift Cards totaling \$1,560 in value, with 35 cards redeemed during the same period for a total of \$1,487.62 at local businesses. The program remains an important shop local initiative, primarily used for holiday gifts and business recognition awards. Yiftee has rolled 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. As we head into the busy holiday season, now is the perfect time for eligible members to join as redemption locations or for all members to consider these cards for holiday and client gifting—keeping spending power right here in our communities where it makes the biggest difference. Please contact Patrick O'Hara at 978.353.7600 ext. 239 or via email at pohara@northcentralmass.com to enroll to accept the cards.

COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP INSTITUTE:

Developing the next generation of regional leaders directly strengthens your business and community connections. Our signature Community Leadership Institute transforms promising professionals into community-minded leaders with broad regional knowledge and valuable networks, giving participants exclusive access to decision-makers across sectors while developing leadership skills that benefit their careers and

organizations. **Applications for the Class of 2026 closed August 15** with exceptionally strong interest, making this year's selection process very competitive. We're currently reviewing applications and anticipate welcoming between **20-25 emerging leaders** to this prestigious program. **Class selection announcements will be made in September**—stay tuned to see which rising stars will join our growing alumni network of regional influencers who are shaping the future of North Central Massachusetts.

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 over **15.5 million kWh** in Net Metering Credits for participating manufacturers, translating to over **\$3.3 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:

In today's competitive job market, connecting the right talent with the right opportunities has never been more critical—which is why our WorkNorthCentral.com jobs board continues to serve as an important tool. As of August 15, 2025, the platform features 275 active positions, connecting local talent with employment opportunities across North Central Massachusetts. Since January, over 850 local jobs have been posted, demonstrating strong use by regional employers. The platform's focused approach has generated strong user engagement, with an exceptionally low 0.48% bounce rate indicating visitors find relevant opportunities when they visit.

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BUSINESS LOANS

Reach out to Marcy for more information.



Marcy Lynn Silva, VP
Relationship Development Officer
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Continued from page 5

Chamber members can post unlimited job openings at no cost—providing another valuable marketing channel for your job opportunities while supporting regional workforce retention. Submit your listings today!

EV CHARGING STATIONS:

We're powering up for the future! This summer **we installed two electric vehicle charging stations** at our Fitchburg headquarters, providing a valuable amenity for members and visitors while supporting the region's transition to clean transportation. Special thanks to **Unitil** for their generous grant that helped offset installation costs, and to Chamber members **DMH Electric** of Sterling and **Fuse Energy** of Groton for stepping up as sponsors to cover remaining expenses. This member-supported initiative demonstrates the collaborative spirit that drives progress in our region—when businesses work together, everyone benefits. Whether you're attending a meeting, networking event, or just visiting our offices, you can now charge up while you connect with fellow Chamber members.

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. Following the installation of our new EV charging stations, **we've added three security cameras** on the Chamber grounds to ensure the safety of members, staff, and visitors who may use the charging stations after hours. These strategic improvements to your Chamber home enhance security and peace of mind while demonstrating responsible stewardship of membership investments. Every upgrade we make maintains both the functionality and professional atmosphere you expect from the Chamber as **the hub of business activity** in North Central Massachusetts, ensuring our facility continues serving as the welcoming, secure environment where regional business connections flourish.

GOLF TOUR OF NORTH CENTRAL:

The Chamber is launching a new Golf Tour of North Central Massachusetts event series running August through October to showcase our region's exceptional recreational assets and strengthen business connections across the area. This initiative highlights member golf courses in the region while providing valuable networking opportunities for business professionals of all backgrounds. This inclusive program welcomes everyone—from experienced golfers to those who have never taken a swing and want an introduction to the game. Each stop on the tour will feature course history presentations, professional instruction, and play at premier facilities including

Oak Hill Country Club (1921), Templewood Golf Course, Ellinwood Country Club, Mulligans Mini Golf, and Settlers Crossing Golf Course. For business owners and professionals, these events offer relaxed settings to build meaningful relationships outside traditional office environments while experiencing firsthand the quality-of-life amenities that help attract and retain visitors and talent to our region. Future plans include expanding the tour with additional courses while incorporating non-golf members through creative partnerships that highlight local restaurants, regional destinations, and other small businesses. The tour underscores our region's competitive advantages in recreation and tourism—key factors in business location decisions and economic development success. By participating, members gain new business connections, support local tourism enterprises, and help promote the recreational excellence that makes North Central Massachusetts an attractive destination for companies, employees, and visitors alike. Visit www.NorthCentralMass.com for tour schedules and sponsorship opportunities.

FUTURE LEADERS OF NORTH CENTRAL MASSACHUSETTS:

You asked, we answered! Based on valuable member feedback, we're excited to announce that our “Young Professionals of North Central Massachusetts” program is being rebranded as the “Future Leaders of North Central

Massachusetts.” This strategic change reflects our commitment to creating more inclusive programming that serves our membership better. The new format **removes all age restrictions**, welcoming professionals at any career stage from member companies who are ready to grow their leadership skills and expand their professional networks. Unlike our comprehensive Community Leadership Institute program, Future Leaders focuses on ongoing networking events, informal mentorship connections, and peer-to-peer professional development throughout the year. This program provides regular touchpoints for emerging professionals to connect, share experiences, and build relationships that support career growth within our regional business community. We envision this program will also serve as both a pathway for future Community Leadership Institute participants and potentially as a continuing connection point for CLI alumni, creating a robust leadership development ecosystem that spans career stages. Whether you're a recent graduate, changing careers, or taking on new leadership responsibilities, these accessible events offer flexible opportunities to engage with fellow professionals without a major commitment. Learn more about upcoming Emerging Leaders events and how to get involved on our website at www.NorthCentralMass.com or contact us directly.

We value your input on how the Chamber can better support your organizations! Share your thoughts at rnascimento@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.

Throughout the summer months, the Chamber has maintained an active presence in policy discussions that directly impact your business operations and growth opportunities. From engaging with federal tax reform to advocating for critical state funding and strengthening municipal partnerships, our advocacy efforts have focused on removing barriers and creating opportunities for North Central Massachusetts businesses and communities.

As we transition into fall, we're excited to offer several high-profile events that will connect you directly with decision-makers shaping the policies affecting your bottom line.

FEDERAL AFFAIRS

Tax Bill Analysis: At the end of July, the Chamber took an in-depth look at the "One Big Beautiful Bill Act" (H.R. 1) and provided a comprehensive summary and analysis for members of the North Central Massachusetts business community. When signed into law, the bill clocked in at 870 pages worth of provisions that significantly impact tax policy, business operations, and federal spending across multiple sectors.

Recognizing that this bill impacts businesses as well as employees in different ways, the Chamber provided

an objective, fact-based analysis. We focused on key tax provisions that impact the local business community like making the Section 199A qualified business income deduction of 20% permanent, SALT relief, and changes to 1099 reporting requirements. We also examined the enhanced business expensing and research and development expenditures, two issues that have dominated discussions with employers in recent years.

The analysis also looked at items affecting employers and employees including changes to individual income tax rates, no tax on tips and overtime provisions, changes to the estate tax, and family and medical leave credits. It was also important to recognize that the provision included a number of changes to areas and programs like Medicaid, SNAP, the energy sector and education. The analysis examined how these changes may impact specific industries in the region, employees as well as the overall workforce and items for employers to consider as provisions of the bill are implemented. The complete analysis is available online at www.northcentralmass.com under the Chamber News section.

Trade Policy: As we noted in our last newsletter,

the Trump Administration continues to utilize increased tariffs as an integral part of its foreign and economic policies, with announcements, retractions, and pauses affecting various industries and countries. The Chamber has continued to monitor these developments throughout the summer and remains in communication with our congressional delegation and partners with the U.S. Chamber of Commerce to advocate for member interests in trade policy discussions.

Congressional Luncheon: The Chamber is currently engaging with Congressman Jim McGovern and Congresswoman Lori Trahan's offices as we finalize our annual Congressional Luncheon. This popular event provides members with an opportunity to hear from the region's Congressional representation about what is being worked on in Washington D.C. as well as an opportunity to engage them on issues facing the region's business community. At the time of this writing, the event is tentatively scheduled for November 7, with more details to be released as they become available.

STATE AFFAIRS

State Budget: On July 4, Governor Maura Healey

signed the state's FY2026 budget which came in at \$60.9 billion following conference committee and \$130 million in vetoes from the Governor. While missing the July 1st deadline, this was the earliest a spending budget for the Commonwealth had been signed in 15 years. The Chamber was pleased to see that the final version of the plan did not include any major taxes or new fees.

Following its passage, the Chamber has engaged our state delegation regarding the Governor's veto of regional economic development funding. This funding directly supports services and resources that help local businesses start, grow, and expand—critical services that our members rely on to navigate challenges and seize opportunities in today's economy. On the tourism front, the Chamber successfully advocated for amendments regarding timing allocation and usage of tourism funds that will help build effective marketing campaigns for the region in the coming year. A strong tourism sector drives customer traffic to local businesses, supports hospitality and retail jobs, and generates vital economic activity throughout our communities. While these funds were approved, the Governor has delayed their release until Fall, citing



fiscal uncertainty and pending federal budget cuts. The Chamber is actively monitoring this situation to ensure our region receives these critical resources.

LOCAL AFFAIRS

Municipal Engagement: Throughout the summer, staff from the Chamber continued to communicate and meet with local officials in our communities. Recently, discussions have taken place with municipal staff in Ayer, Lancaster, Sterling, Winchendon, and our three cities: Fitchburg, Gardner and Leominster to discuss a range of items important to our members including zoning and permitting, economic development and housing. These ongoing dialogues strengthen the Chamber's role as a vital advocate and connector between businesses and local government. This direct engagement helps our members navigate local regulations more efficiently, access development

opportunities faster, and ensures their business concerns are heard at the municipal level where many critical decisions affecting day-to-day operations are made.

Legislative and Candidates Reception: Once again, the Chamber will convene members and officials for our annual Legislative and Candidates Reception. This year's event will feature a change of scenery when it occurs on Thursday September 25 from 5:00 pm to 7:00 pm at the Sterling National Country Club. This signature event puts our members in the room with our local officials, mayors, legislative delegation, congressional delegation and statewide constitutional officers as well as those running for office for a night of networking and conversation. Invitations are currently being prepared and sent out for officials and candidates.

Register today at www.northcentralmass.com.

Tourism Destination Marketing District: The Chamber has been working with hospitality industry members throughout the region to explore the potential for tourism destination marketing districts. We are now focused on establishing the first district in Fitchburg in 2026. This business-led initiative would give our region greater control over tourism promotion, enhance regional efforts and reduce reliance on state funding—allowing local businesses to directly invest

in and shape marketing efforts that drive visitors to their establishments. Once the Fitchburg district is operational, we plan to explore expanding this model to other communities throughout the region. ◊

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, ext. 224, or via email at tcondon@northcentralmass.com.



Chamber Partners with Leadership Dynamics for Exclusive Member Benefits

The North Central Massachusetts Chamber is excited to announce a new affinity partnership with **Leadership Dynamics, Inc.**, bringing exclusive professional development opportunities directly to our membership.

“This partnership addresses an important business need to develop strong leadership capabilities and improve workforce productivity for our region’s employers,” said Roy M. Nascimento, president and CEO of the North Central Massachusetts Chamber of Commerce. “In addition to offering substantial discounts, the program will empower members with the leadership tools and training they need to thrive in today’s competitive marketplace while also building stronger internal teams.”

Exclusive Member Benefits

Chamber members now have access to significant savings and professional development opportunities through this partnership:

20% Discount: Members receive an exclusive 20% discount on all Leadership Dynamics training programs, making professional development more accessible for businesses of all sizes.

Virtual Training Access: All programs utilize live, interactive virtual-based training with cutting-edge educational platforms, allowing teams to participate without travel costs or time away from the office.

Grant Funding Opportunities: Participants may qualify for tuition reimbursement through the Massachusetts Workforce Training Fund, offering up to \$3,000 per person with an annual company cap of \$15,000.

Flexible Program Options: Choose from public sessions, exclusive company training, or chamber-specific cohorts to best meet your organization’s needs.

Proven Leadership Development

With more than 30 years of experience, Leadership Dynamics specializes in helping companies develop leadership teams, improve employee productivity, and increase profitability. The company has worked with hundreds of organizations, from startups to Fortune 500 companies, understanding the critical role that effective leadership plays in business success.

Leadership Dynamics offers two flagship programs designed to address different organizational needs. Their **Workplace Productivity program** provides foundational training covering goal setting, time management, communication, and delegation skills. For more advanced development, the **Workplace Leadership and Coaching program** focuses on developing coaching skills and talent retention strategies.

“We are thrilled to partner with the North Central Massachusetts Chamber



of Commerce to bring our comprehensive leadership development programs to the local business community,” said Paul Brown, president of Leadership Dynamics. “This partnership allows us to extend our expertise to support the economic vitality of North Central Massachusetts.”

Who Can Benefit

This training is especially valuable for companies experiencing growth, expansion, or organizational changes. Whether you’re looking to grow sales, improve productivity, navigate management challenges, or enhance team performance, these programs provide practical tools and strategies.

All programs are delivered live with instructor feedback and mentorship coaching throughout

the program duration, ensuring participants receive personalized attention and support.

Getting Started

Chamber members can access these exclusive benefits by completing the registration process. Leadership Dynamics will work directly with the Chamber to verify membership and apply appropriate discounts. Members are encouraged to explore grant funding opportunities through the Massachusetts Workforce Training Fund to maximize their investment in professional development.

For more information about the program and benefits, visit leadershipdynamicsinc.com or northcentralmass.com/affinity-programs. ◇

Annual Meeting Recognition Roundup

The North Central Massachusetts Chamber of Commerce honored outstanding volunteers and celebrated years of dedicated service during our Annual Meeting on June 12, recognizing individuals whose contributions have strengthened our regional business community.



**Amanda Curtis
Named 2025
Ambassador of the Year**

Amanda Curtis,
Economic Development

Coordinator at the **City of Leominster**, was selected as the 2025 Ambassador of the Year by her fellow Chamber Ambassadors. This marks the second time Curtis has earned this prestigious recognition during her remarkable ten-year tenure as a Chamber Ambassador.

What makes her service particularly noteworthy is her unwavering dedication despite changing employers three times throughout her volunteer commitment, demonstrating exceptional loyalty to the Chamber and our regional business community.

“Amanda has been an exceptional Ambassador, known for her tireless energy, infectious sense of humor, and genuine care for our business community,” said Roy Nascimento, president and CEO of the Chamber.



**Brittany Knowles
Recognized for Connect
North Central Leadership**

Brittany Knowles, owner of **Bin There Dump That – Central Massachusetts**, was honored for her exceptional leadership as outgoing chairperson of the Connect North Central networking program. Under her guidance, the monthly networking program has continued to thrive as an essential resource for Chamber members.

“Brittany has led our Connect North Central program with incredible enthusiasm and energy,” said Nascimento. “She doesn't just show up—she shows up ready to connect, collaborate, and champion other businesses in our region.”

Knowles operates her veteran and woman-owned business alongside her husband

Anthony. Her Chamber involvement extends beyond Connect North Central—she also serves as a Chamber Ambassador and is a 2025 graduate of the Community Leadership Institute.

Retiring Board Members Celebrated

The Chamber also honored three board members for their years of service and valuable contributions to the organization's leadership.

Michael Johansen, President and CEO of **Bemis Associates**, completed his three-year board term.

Christopher McCarthy, former President of **Fidelity Bank** and former Chair of the Chamber's board, and **Nick Haritos**, President and CEO of **AIS, Inc.**, were also recognized for their board service and commitment to advancing the Chamber's mission.

These recognitions exemplify the volunteer spirit that drives our Chamber's success and impact throughout North Central Massachusetts. ♦

For information about volunteer opportunities, contact the Chamber at 978.353.7600.

STRATEGIC PLAN UPDATE: Measuring Our Progress

As we prepare to launch our new three-year strategic plan later this fall, we wanted to take a moment to share with our members how we performed against the measurable goals we set in our 2022-2025 Strategic Plan.

We have developed a comprehensive review document that demonstrates our commitment to accountability and strategic focus—core principles

that drive our success in delivering value to members and creating impact for North Central Massachusetts.

View our complete Strategic Plan Results report on our website to see our progress across five key goal areas, including significant achievements like exceeding our tourism impact goals and successfully launching major initiatives such as

the Regional Business Investment Fund and North Central Massachusetts Land Bank. The detailed results also show areas where we continue working toward ambitious targets, providing an honest assessment that informs our upcoming strategic framework.

Your input during the strategic planning process has been invaluable in shaping our future direction,

and we look forward to sharing our new plan with you soon.

Visit northcentralmass.com to check out how we did on our last strategic plan. ♦



Community Leadership Institute Celebrates Outstanding Class of 2025

The future of North Central Massachusetts is in capable hands, as evidenced by the remarkable achievements of the 24 graduates who completed the Chamber's Community Leadership Institute (CLI) program this year. These emerging leaders were recognized during the Chamber's Annual Meeting on June 12, marking the culmination of a transformative nine-month journey.

The CLI program represents far more than professional development—it's an investment in our region's future. "The Chamber developed CLI to inspire a new generation of community leaders to enthusiastically assume important roles in their communities while motivating participants from diverse backgrounds to be influential in our region's future," explained Roy M. Nascimento, president and CEO of the North Central Massachusetts Chamber.

A Comprehensive Leadership Journey

Running from October through June, the program includes an orientation and eight intensive, day-long sessions covering critical areas that shape our region. Participants dive deep into topics ranging from personal leadership and nonprofit governance to media communications, healthcare, law and justice, arts and culture, legislation, manufacturing, and economic development. This comprehensive curriculum ensures graduates understand



Graduates of the Community Leadership Institute Class of 2025 are pictured at their graduation (L-R): Front Row – Luisa Fernandez, Fitchburg Public Schools; Kristen Smith, sponsored by NXT Level Studios; Danielle Duval, All One Credit Union; Hannah Bovill, Bemis Associates; Eladia Romero, Office of Congressman Jim McGovern; Middle Row – Maureen Babcock, CLI Program Manager, North Central Chamber; Jacqui Girouard, AIS, Inc.; Stefanæe Bowen, Mount Wachusett Community College; Marian Colon, Enterprise Bank & Trust; Rosa Fernandez, sponsored by Health Equity Partnership of North Central MA; Calla Flannery, Workers' Credit Union; Meghan Maceiko, Community Foundation of North Central MA; Jake Simopoulos, Office of Senator John Cronin; Lynese Wiafe, Fitchburg State University; Ely Aguilera, Rollstone Bank and Trust; Back Row – Dr. Michael Greenwood, CLI Program Leader, Fitchburg State University; Brandon Robbins, Ginny's Helping Hand; Nate Glenny, Fitchburg Access Television; Brittany Knowles, Bin There Dump That; Catherine Comerford, Workers' Credit Union; Travis Condon, North Central Chamber; Emily Dewey, IC Credit Union; Sarah Tavitian, NewVue Communities; Deb Hinkle, Fitchburg Public Library; Lauren Howe, empHowered PR; Sabbra Reyes, Visit North Central Mass.

the complex interconnections that drive regional success.

Mike Greenwood, Ph.D., chair of the business and technology department at Fitchburg State University and CLI program chairperson, was particularly impressed with this year's cohort. "I am amazed with the dedication, creativity and motivation of our participants," said Dr. Greenwood. "Programs like CLI are important to our community and help ensure a continuity of leadership, engagement and service as our region's current leaders pass the baton to the next generation."

Making an Impact Beyond the Classroom

What truly sets CLI apart is its emphasis on community service and real-world application. This year's class demonstrated remarkable initiative, organizing food collections for local food pantries, collecting professional clothing for

Fitchburg State University students, and providing financial literacy sessions to students across the region. They also rallied around a classmate who started a nonprofit to benefit cancer patients, showcasing the collaborative spirit that defines the program.

The impact continues well beyond graduation. The Class of 2025 is currently proposing mental health legislation, creating a support group for mothers, and recently organized a murder mystery gala to benefit Ginny's Helping Hand in Leominster.

Building Lasting Connections

When asked about their favorite aspects of the program, participants consistently highlighted the relationships with fellow classmates as the most meaningful takeaway. These connections, forged through shared experiences and collaborative projects, create a network of engaged leaders

committed to our region's prosperity.

The CLI experience also provided participants with invaluable leadership lessons, insightful site visits, deeper community connections, and a more comprehensive understanding of the local region—all essential tools for effective leadership.

Continuing the Legacy

The Community Leadership Institute stands as a testament to the Chamber's commitment to developing homegrown talent and ensuring strong leadership continuity in North Central Massachusetts. With each graduating class, we're building a stronger foundation for our region's future, one leader at a time.

For more information about the Community Leadership Institute, visit northcentralmass.com/community-leadership-institute or contact Maureen Babcock at 978.353.7600, ext. 222. ◇

NEW NORTH CENTRAL MASSACHUSETTS CHAMBER MEMBERS

2A Talent Resource, LLC
Alyssa Berthet
Remote Offices
BUSINESS AND PROFESSIONAL SERVICES
HUMAN RESOURCES

Allied Flooring
Julee Montemagni
539 Lancaster Street
Leominster, MA 01453
HOME AND GARDEN

BC Tree Services
Brian Charette
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HOME AND GARDEN
LANDSCAPE

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Ellinwood Country Club
Tom Borden
1928 Pleasant Street
Athol, MA 01331
SPORTS AND RECREATION
GOLF

Golden Key Realty
Julie Cotter
P.O. Box 141
Westminster, MA 01473
REAL ESTATE & CONSTRUCTION
REALTORS

LeBlanc's Gun Shop
George LeBlanc
80 Butterick Avenue
Fitchburg, MA 01420
SHOPPING AND SPECIALTY RETAIL

Marcello's Restaurant
Tara Petricca
27 Airport Road
Fitchburg, MA 01420
RESTAURANTS, FOOD AND BEVERAGES
RESTAURANT

Mulligan's Miniature Golf
Bill McNamara
124 Leominster Road
Sterling, MA 01564
SPORTS AND RECREATION
GOLF

Nashoba Valley Life Sciences
Lesley Granberg
132 Biscayne Street
Leominster, MA 01453
EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL CONSULTANTS

Ox Industries
Jon Briere
600 West Elm Avenue
Hanover, MA 17331
MANUFACTURING

Pizza King
Stefan Bej
814 N. Main Street
Leominster, MA 01453
RESTAURANTS, FOOD AND BEVERAGES
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Templewood Golf Course
Rena Amidon
160 Brooks Road
Templeton, MA 01468
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The Great Exchange, Devens Eco-Efficiency Center
Dona Neely
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Getting to Work: North Central Businesses Unite to Tackle Transportation Challenges

A business-led solution to one of our region's greatest workforce challenges

After years of research, planning, and collaboration, North Central Massachusetts is taking a bold step forward in addressing one of our most persistent economic challenges: transportation barriers that limit workforce participation and business growth. The **North Central Massachusetts Rides Transportation Management Association (TMA)** represents an innovative, business-led approach to solving the transportation puzzle that has long hindered our region's economic potential.



The Business Case for Action

Transportation barriers don't just inconvenience workers—these are obstacles that directly impact bottom lines. When qualified employees do not have access to reliable transportation to commute to and from work, businesses face chronic staffing challenges, increased turnover costs, and limited access to talent pools. In our largely rural region, where many communities lack comprehensive public transit, these challenges are particularly acute.

The data tells a compelling story. According to the 2022 UMass Donahue Institute workforce study commissioned by the

Chamber, transportation emerged as one of the top barriers preventing full workforce participation in North Central Massachusetts. The study found that while public transportation exists in the region, it faces significant limitations: the commuter rail is designed primarily to bring workers from North Central Massachusetts into Boston rather than around the region, and while the **Montachusett Area Transit Authority (MART)** provides essential fixed-route bus services throughout the region, the challenge is often the "last mile" connectivity between transit stops and workplaces. The study noted that "getting from commuter rail through the 'last mile' to their workplace is a challenge

for workers in the area unless their employer happens to be along an existing route."

"Using public transportation for commuting outside of Leominster, Fitchburg, and Ayer is not a viable option for job seekers," the study noted, identifying this as a critical impediment to regional economic growth. The research specifically recommended developing a TMA for the North Central Massachusetts Region as a strategic solution to these transportation challenges.

Understanding Transportation Management Associations

TMA's are membership-based, public-private partnerships that bring

together employers, property owners, institutions, and municipalities to provide and promote transportation options for commuters. Think of them as regional cooperatives focused on solving practical business challenges through innovative transportation solutions.

TMA's complement—rather than compete with—existing public transit systems. While MART provides essential fixed-route bus services, the TMA will focus on more flexible, targeted solutions, such as shared shuttle services, and employer-specific transportation programs that can fill gaps in the existing transit network.

Bruno Fisher, administrator, MART, sees

the TMA as a valuable partner in expanding regional mobility options. "MART is excited to be working collaboratively with the North Central Massachusetts Rides TMA and the diverse group of stakeholders the association is building. Our fixed-route services provide the backbone of public transportation in the region, but we recognize businesses and workers have diverse transportation requiring flexible solutions to supplement the services provided by MART. The TMA's ability to provide targeted shuttle services and micro-transit options will complement our larger bus network perfectly by providing access to businesses outside the fixed route network and creating a more comprehensive transportation system that serves everyone better."

Neil Angus, director of the **Devens Enterprise Commission** and a founding TMA member, sees the initiative building on proven success. "The Devens Shuttle we launched in 2017 in partnership with MART proved municipal-employer partnerships for transportation solutions can work. The Fitchburg Line Working Group has also worked to greatly improve MBTA commuter rail services in our region. The TMA takes this collaborative model region-wide, connecting municipalities, residents and employment centers across North Central Massachusetts. What we learned—that businesses collaborating with local, regional, and state government can solve



challenges no single employer can tackle alone—is now scaling across North Central Massachusetts."

TMA's have proven successful across Massachusetts, in places like the Route 128 corridor, the Middlesex 3 area, and in Greater Boston and Cambridge. They typically offer tools to facilitate carpools and vanpool formation, an emergency ride home program that guarantees alternative transportation for employees who commute via a shared transportation, shuttle services to fill critical transportation gaps, and transit planning and promotion to maximize use of existing public transportation.

A Regional Response to Regional Challenges

The formation of our

TMA didn't happen overnight. It emerged from extensive community engagement led by the **Health Equity Partnership of North Central Massachusetts (CHNA9)** through their Anchor Collaborative initiative. This collaborative process involved healthcare providers, educational institutions, major employers, government offices, and transportation authorities across our region.

"Transportation has been consistently identified as a key contributor to health disparities in every Community Health Assessment process in our region since at least 2014," explains Chelsey Patris, executive director, CHNA9/ Health Equity Partnership of North Central Massachusetts. "Through the Anchor Collaborative, we brought together institutions that

employ thousands of people and serve even more residents to address this fundamental barrier to economic opportunity and health access. The TMA represents the practical, business-focused solution that emerged from this collaborative assessment."

The initiative also aligns with the Chamber's "One North Central" regional economic development plan, which identified transportation infrastructure as critical for regional growth, business attraction, and workforce development.

Chamber Leadership Driving Innovation

This initiative reflects the Chamber's commitment to addressing real barriers facing members and the broader business community.

Continued on page 16

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Throughout the collaborative development process, the Chamber maintained a seat at the table, working alongside members and regional stakeholders to explore the formation of this innovative solution. Building on this commitment to regional leadership, the Chamber has agreed to serve as the host organization for the TMA, providing administrative infrastructure while the TMA operates as an independent affiliate with its own board, budget, and governance structure.

“This TMA initiative represents exactly the kind of innovative, collaborative approach our region needs,” said Roy Nascimento, president and CEO, **North Central Massachusetts Chamber of Commerce**. “We understand transportation challenges limit our businesses' access to talent and our workers' access to opportunity. By hosting this TMA as an affiliate organization, the Chamber maintains its leadership role in exploring the development of practical solutions to shared challenges. This isn't just about transportation—it's about strengthening our economic competitiveness and creating positive conditions for business growth.”

The TMA's founding members represent a cross-section of our region's major employers and institutions, each bringing unique perspectives and employee populations to the collaborative effort.

“**T**MA's work because they create economies of scale and shared resources individual employers couldn't achieve alone...”

Technical Expertise Driving Results

The TMA benefits from professional management by **TransAction Associates**, a Massachusetts-based firm with over 33 years of experience in transportation program management and TMA operations. Michele Brooks, director of consulting, TransAction Associates, brings deep expertise to the North Central Massachusetts region.

“TMA's work because they create economies of scale and shared resources individual employers couldn't achieve alone,” Brooks explains. “In North Central Massachusetts, we're seeing exactly the kind of collaborative spirit that makes TMA's successful. The region's employers understand transportation challenges affect everyone, and they're willing to work together on solutions. Rural TMA's face unique challenges due to geography and lower population density, but they also have opportunities to be innovative and responsive to specific community needs.”

Practical Benefits for Businesses

For Chamber members, TMA participation offers

tangible benefits that directly impact business operations:

Cost Savings: Shared transportation resources reduce individual company investment in employee transportation while creating efficiencies to lower overall transportation-related costs.

Improved Recruitment and Retention: Enhanced transportation options expand the geographic area from which businesses can recruit talent, while employee satisfaction with commute options improves retention rates.

Reduced Absenteeism: Reliable transportation alternatives reduce weather-related and vehicle-related absences, improving operational consistency.

Environmental Benefits: Coordinated transportation initiatives help businesses meet sustainability goals and potentially qualify for environmental incentives.

Regional Economic Development

Improved transportation connectivity makes the entire region more attractive to new businesses and residents, creating a rising tide that lifts all regional enterprises.

Rozanna Penney, president and CEO, **Heywood**

Healthcare and a founding member of the TMA, sees the program as essential for both workforce recruitment and patient access. “Healthcare is one of our region's largest employment sectors, but we're also acutely aware of how transportation barriers affect our patients' ability to access care and our employees' ability to get to work reliably. With 1,700 employees, we understand transportation solutions benefit not just our workforce, but the entire community we serve.”

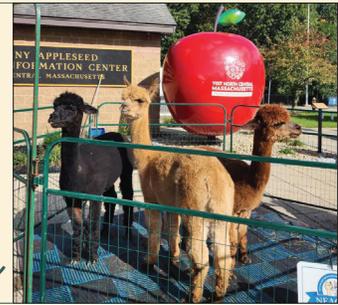
Business-Led Governance and Participation

The TMA operates on its own membership and fee-for-service model, separate from Chamber membership, designed to be accessible to businesses of all sizes while ensuring sustainable operations. Membership dues are structured based on organization's type and size, with different levels for employers, property owners, residential properties, and municipalities. This business-led investment model ensures all members have a voice in TMA governance—every member organization has the opportunity to designate a representative to serve on the TMA's board of directors, keeping control firmly in the hands of the business community.

Tricia Pistone, AVP of external affairs at **HealthAlliance-Clinton Hospital** and chair of the TMA's founding board, emphasizes the collaborative vision driving this initiative. “As healthcare providers, we see firsthand how

TOURISM

Update



Visit North Central Massachusetts

A recap of efforts over the Summer from the Chamber's destination marketing arm, Visit North Central Massachusetts (VNCM).

MA250 Grant Award

Visit North Central Massachusetts is proud to announce it has received a second Marketing Grant from the Massachusetts 250th Commission, continuing the successful theme "North Central Massachusetts is Revolutionary." This new funding supports four dynamic campaigns, each designed to showcase the region's strengths and attract visitors through August 2026.

Food - A "Foodie Revolution" is cooking in North Central Massachusetts, designed to invite visitors to "Taste What Makes Us Local" and discover "Your Tastebuds' New Favorite Destination." From wineries and orchards to farmers markets, farm-to-table dining, and specialty restaurants, the campaign highlights the region's breweries, farm stands, and culinary gems. A restaurant photo shoot will bring these flavors to life, with Edible

Boston/Worcester as the marketing partner.

Sports & Recreation

- A Sports Revolution is playing out in North Central Massachusetts. "From the Field to the Summit, Where Adventure Starts Here." Showcasing amateur and youth sports, semi-pro teams, alpine skiing, hiking, rock climbing, and outdoor recreation, the campaign captures the energy of the region's active lifestyle.

Marketing partners include Worcester Magazine and MBTA Commuter Rail.

History & Innovation

- "Two hundred and fifty years later, our cities and towns are still revolutionary." This campaign spotlights the historical and innovative spirit of communities like Pepperell, Groton, Rutland, Leominster, and Devens. NPR/WBUR will help share these stories statewide.

Central MA Super Region - "The Heart of New England Offers a Revolutionary Experience." This collaborative campaign within the MA250 initiative unites North Central Massachusetts with Discover Central Massachusetts and MetroWest Boston.

Together, these regions promote history, nature, vibrant communities, and welcoming spirit as defining traits of the Heart of Massachusetts. MassLive serves as the marketing partner for this multi-regional collaborative effort.

With this grant, North Central Massachusetts will continue to inspire visitors with authentic, diverse, and revolutionary experiences that drive economic impact for member businesses.

Digital Platform Partnerships

We've enhanced our technology-driven approach with two powerful digital platforms to promote sports venues and special events. Our established partnership with PlayEasy, a leading platform connecting youth and amateur sports organizers with regional venues, has expanded to include a new hotel booking feature that allows hotels to receive direct bookings through PlayEasy's site, creating measurable revenue streams for member establishments.

We've also partnered with Yodel, an AI-powered platform that

helps us maintain our event calendar by automatically collecting event information from local websites, social media, and calendars. This technology simplifies event discovery for residents and visitors while reducing the workload for local organizations. Together, these partnerships enhance visibility and drive engagement across sports, tourism, and community events in North Central Massachusetts.

Website Performance

As of FY26 year-to-date, VisitNorthCentral.com, our tourism affiliate site, has attracted 55,630 users and generated 108,763 pageviews. The site is currently averaging approximately 13,625 pageviews per month. Additionally, it has garnered 1,877,055 impressions, with an average click-through rate (CTR) of 0.7%. This digital engagement translates directly into economic benefits for members through increased business inquiries and travel decisions.

Social Media Performance

We maintained a robust presence on social media throughout the year, building a community that actively engages with content about regional attractions, events, and member businesses. From January 1, 2025, to date, our Visit North Central Massachusetts Facebook page achieved a total reach of 981,838, reflecting a 47.1% increase compared to the same period last year. Additionally, the page gained 3,126 new followers for a current total over 45,000, with 12,713 content interactions and 23,334 link clicks.

On Instagram, we saw impressive growth, with a reach of 54,672, which represents an 86.1% increase from the previous year. The Instagram page also gained 529 new followers, with 4,339 content interactions and 1,319 link clicks during the same period. This growing digital audience converts online interest into real visits and spending at member establishments.

Marketing Publications

Our Fall/Winter Guide to North Central Massachusetts hit the shelves this season, delivering compelling content that positions our region as an attractive place to live, work, and explore. The high-quality, full-color publication

reached readers through our established distribution network of 350 locations across New England via partnerships with AAA and CTM Media Group, with 40,000 copies in circulation. The guide also maintains strong digital presence across multiple channels—our website, social platforms, email campaigns, and through our partnership with the Massachusetts Office of Travel & Tourism (MOTT)—ensuring broad exposure for member businesses and regional attractions.

National Media Recognition

North Central Massachusetts was highlighted in recent media coverage this summer that continues to elevate our regional profile. The Boston Globe featured our very own Johnny Appleseed Visitors Center as one of the best Rest Stops in New England in its August 7 issue, filling us with great pride and positioning our region as a welcoming destination. Our center has received some great recognition over the years, earning coverage from outlets ranging from WCVB's Chronicle and the Telegram to local newspapers and even the BBC.

In a major achievement for our region's hospitality sector, **The Groton Inn** was selected by Newsweek as the #2 Best Historical Hotel in the United States for

2025, ranking just behind the prestigious Greenbrier resort. This outstanding national recognition—a direct result of our targeted PR efforts—showcases our region's exceptional historical hospitality offerings to a national audience. Additionally, USA Today featured 4 prominent member attractions in their recent survey of top fall destinations in the US: **Red Apple Farm** in Phillipston and **Hollis Hill Farm** in Fitchburg were nominated among the top 10 apple orchards in the US, **Wachusett Mountain's Applefest** was nominated as one of the top 10 fall festivals in the US, and **Davis Farmland** was nominated as one of the top 10 Corn Mazes. This national recognition drives visitor awareness and supports our regional hospitality and tourism businesses.

Strategic Marketing Plan & State Alignment

This summer we finalized our comprehensive FY2026 marketing strategy, introducing new messaging and enhanced

targeting to drive greater visitor engagement and economic impact for our region.

North Central Massachusetts' tourism strategy is shaped by its prime location in southern New England, within a 250-mile radius of major metropolitan areas. Our primary markets include Greater Boston, Central Massachusetts, and Southern New Hampshire—our core visitor base—while secondary markets span the Northeast, including Hartford-New Haven, New York, Portland-Auburn, Providence-New Bedford, and Burlington-Plattsburgh.

Through data-driven analysis, we target families seeking affordable recreation, affluent and active adults, cultural enthusiasts, sports tourists, and group travelers. This approach aligns directly with Massachusetts Office of Travel & Tourism (MOTT) priorities: celebrating the Massachusetts 250th, agritourism, arts and culture, group travel,

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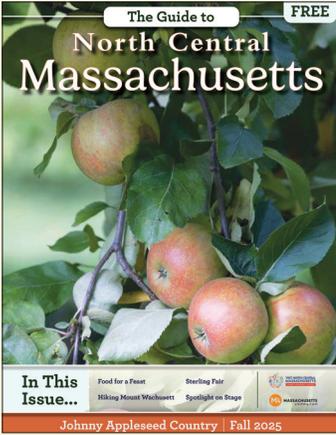
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The Fall/Winter 2025 Guide to North Central Massachusetts showcases our region as an attractive destination for living, working, and visiting.

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sports tourism, and international outreach.

We've also refreshed our messaging with a new tagline for our advertising—*North Central Massachusetts*

– *Your Closest Road to Authentic New England*—which now anchors all our campaigns. This includes promoting "Historical Firsts" such as Gardner's "Chair City" heritage, Leominster's Johnny Appleseed legacy and plastic manufacturing roots, Clinton's Icon Museum, and Fitchburg's early industrial innovations. Strategic media partnerships with AAA, Hearst, Boston Magazine, Yankee Magazine, Edible Boston, TripAdvisor, and PlayEasy extend our reach and deliver measurable economic impact for member businesses.

Looking Ahead

We're building on this

momentum to drive greater economic impact for member businesses and communities. The year ahead will see expanded digital platforms, including a new international landing page, enhanced event listings, and targeted content for group travel and sports tourism. Strategic media partnerships will amplify seasonal campaigns, while ongoing alignment with MOTT priorities ensures statewide support.

Recent STR reports indicate softening in the Massachusetts lodging market, presenting both challenges and opportunities for our region as we approach the fall tourism season. This reinforces

the importance of our strategic marketing initiatives and partnerships in maintaining visitor engagement and supporting local hospitality businesses.

Every visitor we attract means increased revenue for local hotels, restaurants, shops, and attractions while supporting jobs and strengthening our regional economy. By blending history, culture, recreation, and accessibility, North Central Massachusetts will continue to attract visitors year-round—delivering authentic New England experiences just an hour from Boston that help our members thrive and communities prosper. ◊

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



The Chamber held the 8th Annual **North Central Real Estate Summit** in partnership with the **North Central Massachusetts Association of Realtors**.

Attendees connected with professionals and gained insights into the current market and innovative regional marketing approaches. Thank you to speakers and our Summit Sponsors: **GFA Federal Credit Union, Great Wolf Lodge, Rollstone Bank & Trust, Bin There Dump That, and Ascension Appraisal.**



The Chamber celebrated its 41st **Annual Business Meeting** on June 12, with 300 attendees honoring a year of accomplishments and looking ahead to a bright future. Highlights included the Chamber's recognition awards, the commencement of the Class of 2025 Community Leadership Institute, and an inspiring keynote by Joe Kriesberg, CEO of MassINC. A special thank you to our sponsors and members for their continued support in keeping our business community thriving. Here's to many more years of building North Central Massachusetts together!



The Chamber held a **CLI Mixer**, bringing together enthusiastic professionals for a great event. Thank you to all who attended; your participation truly reinforces the power of collaboration and the shared vision we have for the future.



A productive visit to **L.S. Starrett** in Athol. Chamber President Roy Nascimento met with President & CEO Roger N. Amrol Jr. and Director of Human Capital Kip M. Paterson to discuss future plans and tour the facility.

For over 150 years, Starrett has been a leader in precision tools, contributing significantly to the regional economy and exemplifying manufacturing excellence.



The Chamber joined **Senator John J. Cronin, State Representative Mike Kushmerek, and State Representative Natalie Higgins** while the delegation hosted their colleagues in the Gateway Cities Caucus for a visit to the Twin Cities. Tour stops included a housing project at Iver Mills and the NewVue Communities Art Project. The event concluded with a discussion at **Fitchburg State University** focused on education with **Mount Wachusett Community College**, supportive housing with the South Middlesex Opportunity Council, and how the City has leveraged the state's Housing Development Incentive Program in collaboration with the **Fitchburg Redevelopment Authority**.

Celebrating Chamber member **Bitcoin Ben's Crypto Club Massachusetts** on their 1-Year Anniversary! The Leominster-based club has been building community and educating others about cryptocurrency for the past year.



The Chamber attended **Red Dog's Roofing Community Roofing & Trades Day**, a hands-on career fair designed for students, parents, and anyone curious about the opportunities in skilled trades. Attendees had the chance to ask career and resume questions, connect directly with professionals from Red Dog's Roofing departments like Sales, Marketing, HR, and Recruiting, and engage with major industry leaders. The event highlighted how careers in the trades are opening doors to leadership, personal freedom, and lasting success.



Congratulations to Chamber Member **Nutrishop Fitchburg** on their 1-Year Anniversary and the celebration of their new location at 228 Whalon Street in Fitchburg!

Nutrishop has been a valued member of the Fitchburg business community, providing high-quality nutritional supplements, wellness products, and expert customer support tailored to a range of health and fitness goals.



Chamber President & CEO Roy Nascimento had the pleasure of meeting recently with Jason Pigg, the new Scout Executive/CEO of the **Heart of New England Council, Scouting America!** Jason brings impressive leadership experience from his recent work with Scouts in the Chicago area. As a longtime Chamber member, the Heart of New England Council plays an important role in developing tomorrow's leaders right here in North Central Massachusetts. We're excited to welcome Jason to our region and continue supporting this vital youth development organization!



The Chamber met with the **TD Bank** leadership team recently! Thank you to Marshall Sugarman, Lisa Joyner, Paula Warchal, Derek Davoli, and Scott Gilmore for taking the time to discuss regional priorities and explore how we can work together on community development initiatives. The collaboration between TD Bank, our Chamber, and the North Central Massachusetts Development Corporation continues to strengthen our regional economic growth efforts.



The Chamber joined **Sunrise Senior Living of Leominster** as they celebrated the 100th birthday of one of their residents, Doris. Staff and residents from Sunrise and other community partners including Chamber member, **The Gables**, and Congressman Jim McGovern enjoyed an ice cream social while Doris regaled them with tales of growing up in a large family in Worcester.



Congratulations to Chamber Member **GAAMHA, Inc.** on opening their Community Based Enrichment Program at 40 Spruce Street in Leominster! This new location, GAAMHA's third CBES site, brings vital services closer to the individuals they support in the heart of Leominster. These day programs help individuals build life skills, foster connections, and engage in their local neighborhoods, promoting independence and inclusion for all.

The Chamber was proud to participate in the groundbreaking ceremony on June 18, 2025 for member **Veranova's** major facility expansion in Devens. This \$50+ million investment will add 9,000 square feet of advanced manufacturing space and create up to 70 new jobs, strengthening our region's position as a leader in pharmaceutical innovation.



Chamber President & CEO Roy Nascimento joined Congresswoman Lori Trahan, Veranova CEO Mike Riley, General Manager Luke Sauer - Jones and other local leaders to celebrate this significant milestone. The expansion will establish state-of-the-art capabilities for antibody-drug conjugates (ADCs) and other complex therapeutics that are critical to next-generation cancer treatments.

As a valued Chamber member, Veranova continues to demonstrate the kind of forward-thinking investment that drives economic growth and positions North Central Massachusetts at the forefront of the life sciences industry. We're excited to support their continued success and the good-paying jobs this expansion will bring to our region.



The **Future Leaders of North Central Massachusetts** Committee gathered to plan the agenda for the upcoming program year.



The May **Women's Leadership Connection** was held at **The 228 in Sterling**, focusing on mental health. We were honored to have Amy Jolly of **Applewild School** and Sheila Crowley of **TaraVista Behavioral Health Center** share valuable insights. It was inspiring to see so many empowering women come together to share their stories and support one another. A special thank you to Lauren Howe of **empPowered PR** for emceeding and to **Fidelity Bank** for their continued support as our Series Sponsor.

The airport's strategic location, diverse services, and connections to transportation infrastructure give it a competitive edge. With its newly extended 5,001 - foot runway and 56 corporate/private jets, Fitchburg Airport continues to be a vital economic engine for the region. The airport is also working to attract a new restaurant to serve its growing aviation community. As our regional economy expands, so does the importance of this transportation hub, and we look forward to working with Mr. Kettle and the Airport Commission to support their vision for continued growth.



The Chamber was proud to join **Great Wolf Lodge** for a ribbon cutting ceremony celebrating their upgraded Otter Cave Waterworks. Congratulations on this exciting enhancement! Special recognition to GM Alex Matthews, who led the ceremony, and Mayor Sam Squallia of the City of Fitchburg for her remarks. Thank you also to New England Patriots rookie Will Campbell for serving as special guest and participating in the charity water challenge benefiting the **Boys & Girls Club of Fitchburg, Leominster, & Gardner**. We're grateful to our member Great Wolf Lodge for continuing to invest in the community and enhancing the visitor experience in North Central Massachusetts. These investments strengthen our region's appeal as a premier destination.



We were pleased to welcome Peter Kettle, Manager of **Fitchburg Municipal Airport**, to the Chamber office for a productive meeting with President & CEO Roy Nascimento and Public Affairs Director Travis Condon. Our discussion focused on collaborating to support the airport's growth. Business activity at Fitchburg Airport is thriving, driven by competitive fuel prices, increased corporate air travel, and new businesses moving to North Central Massachusetts.



We joined Chamber member **North Star Family Services, Inc.** along with elected officials and community members as they celebrated their newly constructed Journey Home housing project in North Leominster with a ribbon cutting. Journey Home contains 15 units of affordable, supportive housing with the focus on keeping families together and housed and builds onto North Star's more than two decade mission of serving the region's homeless families. Families are expected to move in this August.



Congratulations to Chamber member **Senior Helpers** of Fitchburg located at 81 South Street, Unit 2 in Fitchburg on their recent opening. Senior Helpers Fitchburg is a leading provider of in - home senior care, offering personalized services tailored to each client's unique needs. Their comprehensive care ranges from daily companion support to specialized assistance for individuals living with Alzheimer's, Dementia, Parkinson's, and other chronic conditions



Thank you to everyone who joined us for the June **Connect North Central!** Attendees made meaningful new connections, traded business cards, and shared their 60 - second elevator pitches. It was a great way to kick off the day with energy and opportunity!



Members of our Chamber team visited the **Town of Winchendon** for a productive meeting focused on economic development and regional collaboration.

Together, we're exploring innovative ways to support business growth, attract investment, and create opportunities that benefit our entire region. The enthusiasm and vision shared by Winchendon's leadership team reinforces what we already know – when communities and the business community work hand-in-hand, great things happen!



Chamber President & CEO Roy Nascimento joined Boston Fed officials for a tour of Chamber member **Growing Places'** groundbreaking food processing center in Gardner's former Waterford Street School. This innovative facility processes locally grown food for area schools and hospitals, creating a sustainable ecosystem benefiting farmers, institutions, and communities. The center anchors the Local Food Works initiative, led by Chamber member **Health Equity Partnership of North Central Mass**, building a more equitable food system across our 27 communities through economic development, job creation, and resilient local supply chains."



At the first official **Ambassadors meeting** of our fiscal year, a special tradition was carried on, one that even the Chamber wasn't fully aware of! The passing of the pineapple from the outgoing Ambassador of the Year to the new honoree. A symbolic and celebrated transition of power: pineapple style. Michelle Hagstrom, last year's Ambassador of the Year, proudly passed the pineapple to Amanda Curtis



Congratulations to Chamber Member **Davis Farland** on the opening of their new Cowabunga Splash Park located at 145 Redstone Hill Road in Sterling! We're proud to see their continued focus on innovation and serving the community.



We had a great visit to Chamber member **The Great Exchange Devens!** Founder Dona Neely showed us how this innovative member creates value from what others consider waste. Businesses donate surplus supplies and furniture instead of paying disposal costs, while nonprofits, schools, and small businesses access quality items at deep discounts. Their impact: 60,000 pounds diverted from landfills yearly, helping 60+ Massachusetts communities save hundreds of thousands of dollars. Connect at gedevens.com!



The Chamber visited **Winchendon** and captured the stunning Robinson & Broadhurst Performing Arts Amphitheater at Winchendon Community Park. This unique outdoor venue, built into the natural landscape with cutting-edge sound and facilities, exemplifies how North Central Massachusetts is evolving as an arts and culture destination while attracting talent, tourism, and economic development. Kudos to Winchendon!

Tony Fields Takes the Helm as Chamber Board Chair

The North Central Massachusetts Chamber welcomed new leadership this summer when **Tony Fields**, president and CEO of **Claretech Group**, was elected Chair of the Board of Directors for the 2025-2026 program year. The announcement came during the Chamber's Annual Meeting on June 12, 2025.

Fields brings a wealth of experience to his leadership role, with over three decades in the technology industry. Growing up in a family immersed in computing—his father Tim Fields founded TAF Computer Services in the 1980s—Tony enlisted in the U.S. Air Force in 1992 as a Computer Operator, where he gained experience supporting Novell and Microsoft Networks. After his military service, he advanced through various IT roles before becoming an entrepreneur in 2004 with a Computer Troubleshooters franchise in Leominster.

In 2017, Fields founded Claretech Group with a clear

mission: "to support businesses with technology that will allow them to grow and prosper." Under his guidance, the Leominster-based IT solutions provider has grown from a home-based operation to a thriving ten-employee Managed Service Provider, demonstrating the kind of business growth the Chamber champions throughout the region.

Fields' entrepreneurial success hasn't gone unnoticed. A graduate of Park University and alumnus of both the Goldman Sachs 10KSB and SBA Emerging Leader programs, he was honored as the 2020 Massachusetts SBA Minority Owned Business of the Year. Beyond his professional achievements, Tony remains actively involved in community youth programs and serves as Chair of the Board of **LUK, Inc.**

"When I started my first business, the Chamber's support was invaluable to me," Fields reflected. "Now, as a more seasoned entrepreneur,



I have seen firsthand how the Chamber connects businesses and strengthens our communities. My goal is to continue that momentum—supporting local businesses, attracting visitors to our region, and maintaining the collaborative spirit that makes North Central Massachusetts special."

Roy Nascimento, president and CEO of the Chamber, expressed confidence in the new leadership. "Tony brings exactly what we need in a board chair—entrepreneurial insight, collaborative leadership, and genuine passion for our region. He understands both the challenges and opportunities facing our business community."

Fields succeeds Barbara Mahoney, president and CEO of **All-One Credit Union**, who transitions to the position

of Immediate Past Chair. The leadership team is rounded out by newly elected Vice Chair Allie Catlin, owner of **Smith's Country Cheese** in Winchendon, and Treasurer Melissa Glenny, president of **Franklin Professional Associates** in Leominster.

The board welcomed several new members, including Joseph Basile, Donna Hodge, and Alex Matthews, among others. These fresh perspectives join continuing board members who represent diverse sectors across the region.

Having served on the Chamber's board since 2021, including a term as Treasurer, Fields understands the organization's mission and impact. His vision for the Chamber focuses on building stronger business connections, enhancing regional economic development, and fostering the collaborative relationships that have long defined North Central Massachusetts' business community.

As the Chamber moves forward under Fields' leadership, members can expect continued focus on supporting local enterprises while working to attract new opportunities to the region. ♦



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