

*North Central Massachusetts*

# Chamber Report

Building Businesses. Building Communities.

## Advancing North Central Massachusetts into the Future

### Chamber launches new strategic plan



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**North Central MASSACHUSETTS**

CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

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# Thank You to Our Leadership Circle

The North Central Massachusetts Chamber of Commerce advances our region's economic vitality through the collective commitment of all our members. We extend special recognition to the businesses and institutions below whose enhanced investment enables us to expand our impact - from growing our lending programs and workforce initiatives to promoting our region as a destination for business and tourism. Thank you for your leadership in North Central Massachusetts.

## Regional Leaders



## Chamber Partners



# Chamber Report

a publication of  
The North Central Massachusetts Chamber of Commerce

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**About this Issue:** Strategic planning isn't just about setting goals - it's about charting an ambitious course that transforms our region's future. In this edition, we're proud to unveil the Chamber's new three-year strategic plan for 2026-2028, a roadmap built on member input and designed to address the real challenges facing our business community.

This plan features five strategic goals with measurable 2028 targets: strengthening the regional economy and improving the business climate; promoting the region as an ideal place to live, work, visit, and invest; partnering with educational and business communities to address workforce development needs; deepening regional understanding through advocacy and leadership development; and positioning the Chamber for long-term sustainability.

The plan introduces game-changing initiatives that demonstrate the Chamber's visionary leadership - from launching the region's first Tourism Destination Marketing District to forming a new Transportation Management Association, from recapitalizing our proven Regional Business Investment Fund to implementing a comprehensive workforce development strategy. These aren't aspirational ideas; they're strategic initiatives already in motion.

Thank you for reading. We hope this edition demonstrates our commitment to bold leadership and measurable impact!

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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 20. Government Affairs updates are on page 8.

## THE STRATEGY TABLE:

Collaboration breeds innovation, and we're creating new opportunities for members to tackle business challenges together. In partnership with the **Small Business Development Center (SBDC) at Clark University**, the Chamber and NCMDC launched **"The Strategy Table"**, a new monthly program where members and loan clients can address pressing business challenges, exchange ideas, and collaborate on growth strategies. This initiative is designed to foster problem-solving through collective expertise and provide a supportive peer network to help businesses overcome obstacles and accelerate growth. Following a successful introduction in September, the first full session began in November. This program exemplifies our commitment to creating spaces where regional businesses can learn from each other's experiences and build the collaborative relationships that drive sustainable growth. The Strategy Table



SMDC Clark Partnership on the Strategy Table.



New loan provided to The Vice in Westminster.

offers a powerful complement to our one-on-one business assistance, creating a community of practice where shared wisdom strengthens every participant's business acumen.

## 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. As of September 30, 2025, the NCMDC loan portfolio stands at **87 loans totaling \$3,274,410.59**, representing significant investment in local entrepreneurs who often can't secure traditional financing. For the fiscal year ending September 30th, we closed on a total of **20 loans totaling \$722,228**. These loans, ranging from \$1,000 to \$121,500, included twelve SBA loans, six RRF loans, and two EDA loans, creating or saving 73 jobs across our region while revitalizing properties

and strengthening our shared economy. Beyond the direct impact, these strategic investments leveraged an additional \$380,814 from private sources and banking partners, multiplying every dollar invested. Looking ahead, momentum continues building with a robust pipeline. As of October 23, 2025, we have a total of **\$1,491,313 in our pipeline**, including two loans totaling \$215,313 that have been approved but not yet closed; five loans totaling \$385,000 in loan requests being reviewed; and twelve loan requests totaling \$891,000 that are in the early stages and still awaiting review. 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 September 30, we've delivered 2,093 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 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.

**TOURISM DESTINATION MARKETING DISTRICT:**

Local control over tourism promotion is becoming a reality for our region. The Chamber has been working with hospitality industry members throughout the region to explore the potential **for tourism destination marketing districts (TDMD)**. This is a business-led initiative that gives our region greater control over tourism promotion, enhances regional efforts, and reduces reliance on state funding, allowing local businesses to directly invest in and shape marketing efforts that drive visitors to their establishments. In October, with the support of our member **Great Wolf Lodge**, the Chamber presented a petition to the **Fitchburg City Council** to formally establish a district for Fitchburg. It was **approved** and will commence in **January 2026**, marking a significant milestone in our region's tourism development strategy. We plan to explore expanding this model to other communities throughout the region. This collaborative approach to destination marketing positions North Central Massachusetts to compete more effectively for visitor spending while giving local hospitality businesses direct influence over promotional strategies that impact their bottom lines.

**SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM EXPANSION:**

Investing in tomorrow's workforce starts with supporting today's students. As part of our strategic plan, the Chamber has set an ambitious goal to significantly expand our **Chamber Foundation's scholarship program**—both our **traditional scholarships** and innovative **non-traditional scholarships** awarded each May. These scholarships make a real difference, helping students pursue higher education and career training while building the skilled workforce our region needs to thrive. As we enter this year's scholarship season, we've launched a comprehensive campaign to engage corporate sponsors who share our commitment to developing local talent. We're reaching out directly to member companies who are well-positioned to make this meaningful investment, sending personalized letters to prospective sponsors while promoting the opportunity across our social media channels and member communications. To support these outreach efforts, we've developed compelling new promotional materials that showcase the program's impact and make it easy for businesses to participate. Here's what makes this program special: **100% of every scholarship sponsorship goes directly to students** - not a single dollar is used for administrative costs. Every contribution makes a direct, tangible impact on a young person's educational journey and future career success. Our non-traditional scholarship committee deserves special recognition for their proactive approach, actively cultivating relationships with potential sponsors to support students pursuing alternative educational pathways, including vocational training, certificates, and career programs that lead directly to in-demand jobs in our region. By expanding our scholarship program, we're doing more than helping individual students achieve their dreams. We're investing in the future prosperity of North Central Massachusetts, demonstrating our business community's commitment to workforce development, and ensuring local young people have the resources they need to build successful careers right here at home.

**MANUFACTURING DIRECTORY:**

Manufacturing remains a cornerstone of our regional economy, and we're developing a comprehensive resource to showcase this vital sector. Throughout the Fall, our staff has been busy researching and compiling detailed information about manufacturers across the region for our upcoming **North Central Massachusetts Manufacturing Directory**. This will be the **most comprehensive and locally-focused compilation of manufacturing information in the region**, serving as an essential guide for businesses, economic development professionals, and organizations looking to connect with local manufacturers. After nearly four years since our last edition in 2022, we're bringing back this valuable resource in full color. The directory offers manufacturers, suppliers, and service providers to the manufacturing industry an excellent opportunity to promote their capabilities and connect with potential customers and partners. This reference guide will be used throughout the year, providing lasting value and targeted exposure to decision-makers in the manufacturing community. The directory underscores our region's manufacturing strength and helps businesses discover the depth of industrial capabilities available right here in North Central Massachusetts.

**JOBS BOARD:**

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 a vital tool for Chamber members. From January 1 to November 4, 2025, we've seen strong engagement with over **1,224 job opportunities posted** and more than **25,600 page views**, with **75% of those views from new visitors** to the site—demonstrating the platform's reach beyond our existing network. Chamber members can post unlimited job openings at no cost, providing another valuable marketing channel for your employment opportunities while supporting regional

*Continued on page 6*

*Continued from page 5*

workforce retention and growth. Submit your listings today!

**CHAMBER GIFT CARDS:**

Keeping dollars local helps drive economic growth, and our Gift Local program through Yiftee’s Mastercard-based e-gift card platform continues supporting shop local efforts with **45 participating merchants**. From January 1 through November 4, 2025, we sold **47 eGift Cards totaling \$1,735** in value, with **43 cards redeemed for \$1,752.62** at local businesses - demonstrating healthy circulation and use throughout our merchant network. As we enter the busy holiday season, where the majority of cards are traditionally sold as employee and client gifts, this program offers members an excellent opportunity to keep spending local while supporting our regional economy. The program remains popular for holiday gifts and business recognition awards, providing a practical solution for companies looking to celebrate achievements while strengthening the regional business ecosystem. Yiftee has introduced new Tap-to-Pay functionality for mobile wallets, improving the checkout experience for customers and streamlining transactions for merchants. As the holiday season approaches, 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.

**ACCOUNTING:**

Sound financial management underpins everything we do. Our auditors have completed the **FY25 audit** for the Chamber, Chamber Foundation, and Johnny Appleseed Trail Association **without incident**, reflecting our continued commitment to transparency and fiscal responsibility. The related tax returns for these organizations and Chambers Insurance were also filed on schedule. The **North Central**



Ashburnham Play & Gathering Park Ribbon Cutting & Celebration.

**Massachusetts Development Corporation’s fiscal year-end was September 30**, so we have engaged our auditors and begun that audit process. These clean audits demonstrate our stewardship of member investments and ensure we maintain the financial integrity that supports our mission of strengthening the regional business community.

**SOLAR INITIATIVE:**

Sustainability initiatives that deliver tangible economic benefits exemplify our practical approach to supporting regional business needs. Since the program’s inception, our solar initiative has generated over **\$4 million in Net Metering Credits for participating manufacturers**. 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 and environmentally responsible.



**RIBBON CUTTINGS:**

Celebrating member success stories strengthens our entire business community. The Fall has been a particularly busy period with **eleven ribbon cuttings and member celebrations** since September 1, showcasing the vitality and growth happening across North Central Massachusetts. These included **Orchard Hills Athletic Club, the Town of Ashburnham’s new Play and Gathering Park, GreenDrop, Pop by Posh, Edward Jones, Aspire**

**Living & Learning, Growing Places Waterford Street Regional Food Center, Welcome Home Furnishings & Decor, Coakley Family Dental’s 50th Anniversary celebration, Busy Bees Preschool Center’s 50th Anniversary, and Opportunities for Hope’s Neddy Latimer House.** Each of these celebrations represents investment in our region, job creation, and enhanced services for residents

and businesses alike. These milestone events also provide valuable networking opportunities where members connect, build relationships, and discover new collaboration possibilities. We’re proud to stand alongside our members as they reach these important milestones and look forward to celebrating many more success stories in the year ahead. If your business is planning an

expansion, relocation, or significant milestone, contact us to explore how a Chamber ribbon cutting can amplify your announcement and connect you with the broader business community.

*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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# GOVERNMENT AFFAIRS UPDATE

## ADVOCACY IN ACTION

The Chamber's advocacy work has been in high gear this fall, with efforts spanning local, state, and federal levels to advance policies that strengthen our region's economy and support our members. This busy period of engagement has been guided by our newly approved FY2026 Public Policy Agenda.

### OUR POLICY PRIORITIES

Adopted by the Board of Directors in September, our FY2026 Public Policy Agenda was developed by our member-driven Government Affairs Committee. The agenda maintains core priorities while making strategic adjustments to address emerging regional challenges and opportunities.

Our focus centers on promoting economic competitiveness, advocating for small business, asserting our role as the Commonwealth's manufacturing hub, and advancing education, transportation infrastructure, and real estate development.

Key priorities include implementing our One North Central regional economic development plan, fighting for regional equity in state investments, supporting our manufacturing sector, and addressing workforce challenges through support for expedited work visas, improved education

pathways. We're also focused on modernizing Route 2, enhancing commuter rail service, and supporting diverse housing and commercial real estate development.

New this year, we've added positions on artificial intelligence and support for financial literacy. We continue opposing increases to unemployment insurance taxes and other regulatory burdens that disproportionately impact small businesses.

### LOCAL ADVOCACY

Our local engagement intensified this fall. Public Affairs Director Travis Condon regularly attends city council meetings in Fitchburg and Leominster to monitor actions affecting members. With 27 communities in our region, we prioritize attendance at other municipal meetings as needed when member interests are at stake.

Chamber President Roy Nascimento testified at two Fitchburg City Council meetings this Fall supporting the creation of a tourism district that would bolster our growing tourism economy. Meanwhile, we've been advocating with the Mazarrella administration in Leominster to restore tourism funding after a \$15,000 cut this year. Following years of level funding eroded by inflation, this reduction threatens the

Johnny Appleseed Visitors Center and sets a dangerous precedent that could undermine our successful regional tourism partnership.

We also met with officials in Lancaster, Winchendon, Ashburnham, Gardner, and Leominster to discuss priorities and collaboration opportunities that strengthen our regional economy.

### STATE ADVOCACY

Our Beacon Hill efforts centered on several key initiatives. We were disappointed when the Healey administration vetoed regional economic development funding, and we advocated for restoring the modest funding. The decision by the Governor underscores the regional equity challenges we face. We're grateful to our legislative delegation for their steadfast support in fighting to restore these resources.

We testified supporting legislation for a Region D gaming license that would dedicate revenues to critical transportation infrastructure. This bill has tremendous potential to boost economic development and tourism throughout our region and the Commonwealth.

Working with a coalition of regional tourism groups, we have also been advocating to modernize

the Tourism Trust Fund. Legislation filed would direct 2.5% of the state's room occupancy excise revenue to the fund, which has remained flat for over ten years - effectively a significant cut due to inflation. We are pushing to index the fund to room tax collections, as other states do, ensuring revenue from the lodging industry is reinvested into tourism marketing. This modernization is essential for our region's competitive position.

### BUILDING CONNECTION

Beyond testimony and meetings, we organized several policy-focused events to connect members with elected officials and advance member interests. On September 18, we hosted our "State of the Tri-Cities" breakfast, bringing together members with the Mayors of Fitchburg, Leominster, and Gardner to discuss regional priorities and economic development initiatives affecting our three largest cities.

Our September 25 Legislative and Candidates Reception drew strong attendance from elected officials, municipal candidates, and members. On November 7, we hosted our Congressional Luncheon with our federal delegation to discuss national issues affecting business.

In October, we organized our annual Manufacturing Month bus tour, bringing legislative delegation members, education leaders, and economic development officials into our manufacturing facilities to showcase this vital sector and advocate for supportive policies.

Also in October, we formally joined the Massachusetts Opportunity Alliance alongside chambers and business associations statewide, participating in a briefing on two pro-economy ballot questions that would reduce state taxes.

## FEDERAL ENGAGEMENT

Chamber President Roy Nascimento connected with top chamber leaders nationwide at the CCC100 meeting this fall, joining discussions with U.S. Chamber of Commerce officials, policy experts, industry leaders, members of Congress, and pollsters on critical issues including artificial intelligence, the economy, childcare, tariffs, and legislative priorities.

## LOOKING AHEAD

The Chamber remains committed to advocating for policies that strengthen North Central Massachusetts’ economic

competitiveness, support our members, and ensure our region receives its fair share of investment and opportunity. ♦

*For information about the Chamber’s public policy work, contact Public Affairs Director Travis Condon at 978.353.7600, ext. 224, or [tcondon@northcentralmass.com](mailto:tcondon@northcentralmass.com).*



Legislative & Candidates Reception.



State of the Tri-Cities Breakfast.



Roy Nascimento testifies at Fitchburg City Council in October 2025.

# Out & About

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The **Johnny Appleseed Visitors' Center**, operated by Visit North Central Massachusetts, was recognized by the Boston Globe as one of the top rest areas in New England. This recognition highlights the region's hospitality and showcases North Central Massachusetts as a destination for visitors to explore.



The **Future Leaders of North Central Retreat** with **Leadership Dynamics** focused on personal and professional growth, inspiring the next generation of regional leaders.



The Chamber hosted **state economic development officials** for one-on-one meetings with members, providing guidance and resources to support local business growth.



The Chamber hosted a **career and hiring event** connecting job seekers, students, and employers, fostering meaningful connections and highlighting career pathways across the region.



Celebrating the opening of **GreenDrop's** first Massachusetts location, providing convenient donation options that support local programs and create sustainable impact in the community.



Members learned strategies for leveraging Massachusetts tax incentives to support business growth, compliance, and regional development during a special seminar.



The Chamber participated in a podcast with **Workers Credit Union**, discussing strategies for economic resilience, financial education, and supporting local businesses and members in the community.



The **SBDC** joined the Chamber podcast to discuss services supporting small business development, workforce strategies, and upcoming events to strengthen regional growth.



The Chamber attended the dedication of the **Neddy Latimer House**, a new shelter honoring a longtime community leader and supporting stability and opportunity for local families.

## CHAMBER EVENTS

If you would like to view more upcoming events visit [northcentralmass.com!](https://www.northcentralmass.com)



Chamber representatives met with **Sterling officials** to discuss economic development strategies and promoting the town as a prime location for business growth. Partnerships like these strengthen regional collaboration and opportunity.



We celebrated **Hey Good Look'n Salon and Spa's** participation in the Feel Your BrEaST program, offering free hair washes and guidance for breast cancer patients. This initiative highlights the positive impact of community projects led by Chamber members and alumni.



**Busy Bees Preschool Center** celebrated its 50th anniversary with a ribbon cutting and community fair, highlighting decades of service and impact in early childhood education.



The Chamber's economic development arm supported a loan for **Empowered Boutique + Spa**, helping create a collaborative wellness space for independent service providers.



Celebrating the grand opening of **Empower Boutique + Spa**, a collaborative space for wellness and community engagement. Visitors can enjoy the boutique, spa services, and workshops.



**Fidelity Bank** visited the Chamber as part of their community outreach, reinforcing their commitment to supporting members, local businesses, and regional initiatives.



The Chamber hosted our annual **Sponsors Reception** at **Wachusett Mountain** in the Fall to recognize the businesses and organization that support programs and strengthen local communities throughout the region.



The Chamber connected with **Community Health Connections**, a longtime member providing comprehensive healthcare services across the region. Their commitment to expanding access continues to make a meaningful difference.



The Chamber and **Leadership Dynamics, Inc.** partnered to create an Affinity Program for members, providing professional leadership development and training opportunities. Participants may also qualify for reimbursement through the Massachusetts Workforce Training Fund.



Chamber representatives attended the Executive Leadership Breakfast hosted by **Care Central VNA & Hospice**, recognizing the organization's ongoing commitment to quality care and community impact.



Business continues to soar at **Fitchburg Municipal Airport**. The airport hosts aviation businesses, offers 24-hour self-serve fueling, and serves as the base for Air Methods Life Flight Two. Expansion projects, including new hangars and aviation services, reflect the airport's ongoing growth and opportunities for the region.



The Chamber supports the **United Way Food Drive**, providing opportunities for the community to help local families in need and address food insecurity across the region.



We met with **Lancaster's** new **Town Administrator** to learn about exciting projects and explore ways to support community growth. The town's history and potential make it a strong partner in regional development.



Chamber representatives joined state leaders on a walking tour of Fitchburg, highlighting downtown revitalization efforts, public-private partnerships, and opportunities for continued investment.



Chamber member **Pop by Posh Party Designs** created a stunning balloon display for a Chamber event, showcasing creativity, generosity, and the vibrant spirit of the business community.



The Chamber participated in a **Small Business Information Session**, connecting with local business professionals to share resources and support small business success in the region.



The Chamber hosted the **Good Morning North Central: State of the Tri-Cities Breakfast**, introducing the Honors Initiative to recognize businesses making a lasting regional impact.



Our team met with **Fitchburg State University** leadership to explore collaborative initiatives and strengthen partnerships that drive innovation and economic growth in the region.



The Chamber hosted a lively **Business After Hours** at **Mountainside Bakery & Cafe**, bringing members together for networking, refreshments, and community celebration.



Chamber members celebrated **Aspire Living & Learning's** new office, expanding programs that empower neurodiverse adults and provide essential behavioral health support for children.



The Chamber celebrated the official ribbon cutting for **Pop by Posh Party Designs**, highlighting the owner's creativity and contribution to the downtown community.



The Chamber hosted the **Annual Legislative and Candidates Reception**, bringing together elected officials and business leaders to foster connections and productive discussions.



Celebrating the opening of **OHX Performance Center**, a specialized facility for strength, power, speed, mobility, and recovery. The center supports both athletes and the general public in reaching fitness goals.



The **Women Leadership Luncheon** brought together women from across North Central Massachusetts to celebrate leadership, resilience, and the power of supporting women in business and the community.



The Chamber celebrated the ribbon cutting for **Fitchburg Arts Community**, a project by **NewVue Communities** transforming historic buildings into artist-preferred housing. This project demonstrates the impact of vision and persistence on downtown revitalization.



Chamber staff joined hundreds of volunteers for the **United Way Day of Caring**, supporting projects such as trail improvements and emergency housing preparation. The event highlighted the strength of regional collaboration and volunteerism.



The Chamber participated in a roundtable with **Shriver Job Corps**, exploring registered apprenticeships and workforce development partnerships for regional employers.



The Chamber welcomed leadership from **Mutual Bancorp** to Fitchburg, discussing regional priorities, community engagement, and continued investment in North Central Massachusetts.



The **Fitchburg Art Museum** was recognized for its partnership in the Fitchburg Arts Community project, contributing to a connected arts campus and supporting arts and culture throughout the region.



Chamber representatives met with **Gardner's Director of Community Development & Planning** to discuss initiatives supporting economic growth and regional collaboration.



The Chamber joined **Coakley Family Dental's** 50th Anniversary celebration, honoring decades of service and commitment to families in North Central Massachusetts.

# *Future Leaders Ready to Shape* **NORTH CENTRAL MASSACHUSETTS** **Community Leadership Institute Class of 2026**

**T**wenty-six emerging leaders from across North Central Massachusetts are embarking on a journey that could shape the region’s future. The North Central Massachusetts Chamber recently announced the Class of 2026 for the Community Leadership Institute (CLI), bringing together professionals from diverse sectors for nine months of intensive leadership development.

From October through June, these participants will dive deep into the forces that drive our region, exploring everything from healthcare and manufacturing to the arts, legal system, and legislative process. Monthly sessions will cover media and crisis communications, non-profit governance, economic development, and more, giving participants a comprehensive view of the challenges and opportunities facing North Central Massachusetts.

“CLI continues to be our flagship leadership development program, preparing the next generation of regional leaders,” says Roy Nascimento, President & CEO of the North Central Massachusetts Chamber of Commerce. “This year’s class represents the diverse talent and potential within North Central Massachusetts.”

The program has a proven track record. Since its establishment in 1989, CLI has graduated more than



Community Leadership Institute Class of 2026.

300 community leaders over 37 years, with momentum building in recent years - over 100 alumni have completed the program in just the past five years alone.

Dr. Michael Greenwood, Chair of the Community Leadership Institute Program, is excited about this year’s cohort. “The caliber of this year’s class is exceptional,” he notes. “These emerging leaders

bring fresh perspectives and energy that will undoubtedly strengthen our region’s future economic and social fabric.

The Class of 2026 represents organizations throughout the region. Each participant is sponsored by their business organization, reflecting a community-wide investment in developing the leaders who will guide North Central

Massachusetts forward. Applications for the program are accepted annually during July and August.

*For more information on the Community Leadership Institute, visit [www.northcentralmass.com/overview/cli](http://www.northcentralmass.com/overview/cli) or contact Kat Deal at [kdeal@northcentralmass.com](mailto:kdeal@northcentralmass.com) or 978.353.7600 ext. 222. ♦*

## CLI CLASS OF 2026 PARTICIPANTS:

**Alicia Favreau,**  
Empower Collective

**Amanda Salmons,**  
Cleartech Group

**Andy Skoog,**  
Fitchburg Housing Authority

**Ben Shipp,**  
All One Credit Union

**Brittany Zorn,**  
Mount Wachusett Community College

**Caitlyn Falzone,**  
Fitchburg Art Museum

**Chayanis Hauswirth,**  
Workers Credit Union

**David Hinckley, Jr.,**  
DMH Electric, Inc.

**Eric Chouinard,**  
Edward Jones

**Erica Halloran,**  
MassHire North Central Career Center

**Joseph Flanagan,**  
Fitchburg State University

**Joseph Madden,**  
Bemis Associates

**Julie McNamara,**  
Workers Credit Union

**Katie Sullivan,**  
Guild of St. Agnes

**Laura Pearsall,**  
Rollstone Bank & Trust

**Lynsay Radzewicz,**  
Work Opportunities Inc

**Magnus Carlberg,**  
Wachusett Business Incubator

**Maria Quaglia,**  
Franklin Professional Associates

**Michelle Haggstrom,**  
Keller Williams North Central

**Stacie Dolan,**  
Work Opportunities, Inc.

**Susan Beddes,**  
Fitchburg State University

**Teresa Roberts,**  
North Central Massachusetts Chamber of Commerce

**Terrance McCormack,**  
IC Credit Union

**Towma Rastad,**  
Fidelity Bank

**Valerie Bruno,**  
North Central Massachusetts Chamber of Commerce

**Zach Rocheleau,**  
Rocheleau Tool and Die Co, Inc.

# NEW NORTH CENTRAL MASSACHUSETTS CHAMBER MEMBERS

AUGUST - OCTOBER

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Athol, MA 01331  
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Leominster, MA 01453  
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ENVIRONMENT  
ENERGY/SOLAR

**Devens Enterprise Commission**

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59 Merriam Avenue, Suite 504  
Leominster, MA 01453  
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HOME HEALTH CARE

**Morse Bros. LLC**

Harley Quigley  
25 Theodore Drive, Unit G  
Westminster, MA 01473  
BUSINESS AND  
PROFESSIONAL SERVICES  
PLUMBING/PIPING/HEATING  
AIR CONDITIONING

**P.A.L. NCM (Police Athletic League)**

Genaro Hall  
Police Athletic League  
North Central Mass  
Fitchburg, MA 01473  
SPORTS AND RECREATION

**Pathway Housing Solutions**

Daniela Ferraz  
286 Water Street , 01  
Leominster, MA 01453  
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**Paulino Auto Group**

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Fitchburg, MA 01420  
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**Revital Med Spa**

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**RouxFit and Nutrition Inc**

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# Chamber Unveils Bold 2026-2028 Strategic Plan: Building on Excellence, Reaching for New Heights

*After earning recognition as 2023 Chamber of the Year, North Central Massachusetts Chamber of Commerce sets ambitious targets to strengthen regional economy, member services and quality of life.*

The North Central Massachusetts Chamber of Commerce and its affiliates have adopted an ambitious three-year strategic plan that builds on recent successes while charting new territory in workforce development,

advocacy, and regional competitiveness. Approved in September 2025, the plan represents the Chamber’s continued commitment to strategic, measurable growth - building

on the momentum and achievements of previous strategic plans. “This plan isn’t just about what we’re going to do - it’s about the measurable impact we’re going to have on North

Central Massachusetts,” said Roy M. Nascimento, IOM, CCE, President & CEO.

**“We’ve proven we can deliver results. Now we’re raising the bar even higher.”**

## The Chamber's previous strategic plan produced remarkable results:



**\$482 million** in direct visitor spending. (308% increase over a decade)



**250%+ increase** in digital reach and member visibility through expanded social media and marketing platforms.



**Chamber of the Year Recognition** first for Massachusetts and New England.



**13,000+** member job postings through Work North Central Jobs Board.



**Millions in financing** provided through micro-loans and technical assistance to strengthen small businesses.



**\$58,000** in annual scholarships to local students.



# NEW STRATEGIC PLAN

## 2028 Goals & Targets

### Goal 2:

Promote  
the Region

*2028 Targets*

- \$520 million annual economic impact from tourism
- 130,000 visitors to Johnny Appleseed Visitors' Center
- 15% increase in digital marketing

### Goal 4:

Deepen Understanding  
& Advocacy

*2028 Targets*

- 25+ annual Community Leadership Institute graduates
- 20% increase in event participation
- Major advocacy victories on regional priorities

### Goal 1:

Strengthen the  
Regional Economy

*2028 Targets*

- \$1.3 million in new loans made annually
- \$2.5 million in private resources leveraged annually
- 150 jobs created or retained annually through lending/technical assistance
- 2,500 hours of technical assistance provided

### Goal 3:

Address Workforce  
Development

*2028 Targets*

- 16,000 cumulative job postings on Work North Central Jobs Board
- \$1 million Foundation corpus for education initiatives
- \$60,000 in annual scholarships

### Goal 5:

Position for Long-Term  
Sustainability

*2028 Targets*

- 86% member retention rate
- 125 new members
- \$1.3 million in non-dues revenue

*Continued on page 18*

# GAME CHANGING NEW INITIATIVES

## *Manufacturing Sector Strengthening* **EXPANDING SUPPORT:**

Connecting manufacturers with suppliers, partners, and opportunities through our new regional Manufacturing Directory, expanding our Manufacturing Council membership, and delivering targeted advocacy. Building stronger industrial connections and regional supply chains while showcasing our manufacturing capabilities to attract investment and talent throughout North Central Massachusetts.

## *Tourism Destination Marketing District* **FIRST IN THE REGION:**

Launching business-led tourism marketing districts that give local hospitality businesses direct control over supplemental promotion and investment. This groundbreaking model reduces reliance on unpredictable state funding while creating sustainable, locally-driven marketing that expands our tourism impact and strengthens the regional economy. Fitchburg approved, launches January 2026.

## **DATA-DRIVEN AND ACCOUNTABLE**

Tony Fields, Chair of the Chamber Board of Directors, emphasized the plan's measurable approach:

**“We’re not just setting aspirational goals, we’re committing to specific targets that will hold us accountable. This ensures we’re always focusing our energy where it will have the greatest impact.”**

## **BUILT ON CORE VALUES**

*Six core values guide all Chamber initiatives:*

**Integrity  
Excellence  
Focus  
Catalytic Leadership  
Inclusion  
Innovation**

“We’re committed to ensuring that the Chamber reflects the full diversity of North Central Massachusetts,” said Allie Catlin, Vice-Chair of the Board. “These values keep us grounded while we pursue ambitious goals.”

## *Transportation Management Association* **NEW CHAMBER AFFILIATE:**

Creating a member-led partnership to tackle our region's transportation challenges through practical, coordinated solutions. Member companies will collaborate on innovative programs addressing workforce commuting barriers, employee transportation needs, and regional mobility gaps, delivering the transportation solutions businesses need to attract and retain talent.

## *Regional Business Investment Fund* **PROVEN SUCCESS, EXPANDED IMPACT:**

Since 2023, the RBIF has strategically invested \$526,000 revitalizing key properties. Our strategic plan targets recapitalization of this economic development fund to expand support for priority projects across more communities throughout the region. Strong pipeline of projects awaiting funding to maximize regional economic impact.

# Comprehensive Advocacy Agenda

*The plan includes advocacy priorities across six critical areas:*

## Economic Competitiveness

- Regional equity
- Public infrastructure investment
- Regulatory reform and streamlined permitting

## Education

- Aligning K-12 curriculum with employer needs
- Vocational education expansion
- Financial literacy programs

## Small Business

- Healthcare cost management
- Micro-lending investments
- Reducing barriers to employment

## Manufacturing

- Removing industry stigma
- Inventory tax elimination
- Trade and tariff policy

## Transportation

- Route 2 modernization
- Commuter rail improvements
- Microtransit expansion

## Real Estate

- Expanded housing options
- Commercial and industrial investment

### *Expanded Engagement Initiatives*

#### **BROADENING OUR REACH:**

Proactively recruiting young professionals, Latino community members, and underrepresented populations through tailored programming and partnerships. Expanding beyond traditional Chamber engagement to create new pathways for participation, strengthening our regional talent pipeline and business community.

### *Workforce Development*

#### **STRATEGIC MULTI-PRONGED APPROACH:**

Addressing our region's biggest business challenge through expanded scholarships (traditional and non-traditional pathways), enhanced vocational partnerships, and targeted recruitment programs. Building tomorrow's workforce today through education, training, partnerships and employment initiatives while expanding practical tools like our popular Work North Central Jobs Board and our Career & Hiring Event.

As the Chamber embarks on this three-year journey, success will require continued partnership from the entire regional community.

“With this strategic plan as our roadmap, and with the continued support of our members and regional partners, North Central Massachusetts will continue to strengthen its position as the best region in the state to live, work, raise a family, or build a business,” Nascimento said.

**The complete strategic plan is available at [www.northcentralmass.com](http://www.northcentralmass.com) ◇**

# TOURISM

# Update

## Visit North Central Massachusetts

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

### Strategic Marketing Plan Implementation & State Grant Status

As we reported in the Fall edition, Visit North Central Massachusetts completed our comprehensive FY2026 marketing strategy and submitted our annual matching tourism grant request to the Massachusetts Office of Travel & Tourism (MOTT). We received notification of our grant award amount in late October; however, as of this printing – nearly five months into the fiscal year that began on July 1, 2025 – we have not yet received our contract or matching funding.

This delay in contracting and matching funding impacted our marketing efforts during the Fall season. We adapted by covering some advertising costs upfront while awaiting state matching funds and strategically deferring other planned campaigns. Fortunately, our Mass250 grant allowed us to maintain some momentum through active advertising campaigns



MA250 promotional advertising on the rail.

that helped bridge the gap created by the delay in our regular annual matching grant from the state's tourism trust fund. We remain committed to making up ground during the Winter months and positioning ourselves strongly for the Spring and Summer tourism seasons.

We appreciate the state's partnership and look forward to receiving our contract and funding so we can fully execute our marketing efforts that drive economic impact for our member businesses and communities.

### Website Performance

For the first four months of fiscal year 2026 (July 1 through October 31, 2025), VisitNorthCentral.com, our tourism affiliate site, attracted 18,683 users (down 68.1% compared to the same period in FY25) and generated 34,275 pageviews (down 63.6% year-over-year). Impressions totaled 1,012,127 (down 22.0% year-over-year). These significant declines directly reflect the impact of delayed state matching funding, which prevented us from launching our planned

digital advertising campaigns at the start of the fiscal year. As we receive funding and execute our winter and spring marketing initiatives, we expect to see digital engagement increase.

### Social Media Performance

For the first four months of fiscal year 2026 (July 1 through October 31, 2025), we maintained strong organic social media presence, building a community that actively engages with content about regional attractions, events, and member businesses. Our combined social media following across Facebook and Instagram now totals over 49,000 followers.

On Facebook, we achieved impressive results with post impressions of 885,441 (up 137% year-over-year) and a total reach of 45,173 followers (up 9.4% year-over-year). Post reactions increased 56.1% to 2,314, link clicks surged 69.4% to 2,060, and comments nearly doubled with a 93.1% increase to 195. On Instagram, post impressions reached 121,148 (up 85.4% year-over-year) with 3,821 followers (up 19.7% year-over-year). Post shares increased

24.2% to 221. These strong organic social media results demonstrate the effectiveness of our content strategy, even during a period when funding delays limited paid advertising campaigns.

### PlayEasy Performance

Through our partnership with PlayEasy, the platform connecting youth and amateur sports organizers with regional venues and hotels, we've seen continued engagement in November 2025. The VNCM profile received 981 views with 95 visitors, facility listings generated 1,586 views with 896 visitors, attraction pages received 77 views with 33 visitors, and event listings attracted 1,227 views with 625 visitors. This specialized sports tourism platform continues to create measurable connections between sporting events and our member hospitality businesses.

### Johnny Appleseed Visitor Center

The Johnny Appleseed Visitor Center welcomed 11,842 visitors in September and 14,575 visitors in October, bringing the calendar year 2025 total to 105,493 visitors through October 31. These impressive numbers reflect the center's role as a gateway to our region and a key touchpoint for introducing visitors to member businesses and regional attractions.

Throughout the fall,

we hosted our popular Showcase Events series at the Visitor Center—weekend celebrations featuring live music, henna tattoos, apple cider donuts, alpacas, handmade crafts, face painting, and much more. These family-friendly events, which took place on weekends throughout August, September, and October, were well-attended and showcased the rich culture and community spirit of North Central Massachusetts.

We thank the local cultural councils in North Central Massachusetts for helping to sponsor these events.

### Lodging Performance

According to the latest lodging reports from STR and AirDNA for July through September 2025, the North Central Massachusetts lodging market faced

## Why Tourism Matters to North Central Massachusetts

Tourism is far more than a single industry – it's a catalyst for community vitality. When you build a place where people want to visit, you've built a place where people want to live, work, and invest. Every visitor we attract becomes a potential business lead, future resident, or investor who experiences our region's unique assets and becomes an ambassador for North Central Massachusetts. This is why our strategic marketing efforts don't just drive immediate economic impact - they build long-term awareness and prosperity for our communities and members.

headwinds. For hotels in the region, occupancy was 71.9% (down 4.3% year-over-year), with an average daily rate (ADR) of \$164.20 (down 2.2%) and revenue per available room (RevPAR) of \$117.98 (down 6.4%). The hotel market generated \$14.7 million in revenue, down 6.4% from the prior year.

Short-term rentals in the North Central

Massachusetts region showed more positive momentum, with occupancy at 58.0% (down 4.8% year-over-year), but ADR of \$130.72 (up 9.4%) and RevPAR of \$75.85 (up 4.1%). Regional short-term rentals generated \$1.9 million in revenue, representing a 21.5% increase year-over-year.

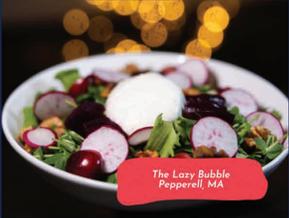
*Continued on page 23*

## A Foodie Revolution is cooking in North Central Massachusetts

North Central Massachusetts is Revolutionary!



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Pepparrell, MA





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Gardner Ale House  
Gardner, MA



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Groton, MA

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Visit North Central Massachusetts MA250th advertisement featured in Edible Boston.

## Chamber Installs EV Charging Stations Through Member Collaboration



The Chamber joined with members to celebrate the ribbon cutting for the EV Charging Stations installed recently.

The North Central Massachusetts Chamber celebrated a significant step toward regional sustainability in September with the installation of two electric vehicle charging stations at its South Street office in Fitchburg. The project

showcases the power of member collaboration and strengthens the region's infrastructure for the future.

Three Chamber members joined forces to make the project possible: **Unitil** provided a grant to fund the majority of the initiative,

**DMH Electric** performed the installation, and **Fuse Energy** negotiated the energy contract - all while sponsoring the charging stations.

"This project represents exactly what makes our region special - Chamber members stepping up to support one another and invest in our shared future," said Roy M. Nascimento, president and CEO. "By working together to install these EV charging stations near major travel routes, we're enhancing our commitment to sustainability while making North Central Massachusetts more accessible to electric vehicle drivers."

The charging stations are available 24/7, with two chargers accommodating up to four vehicles simultaneously. Payment options include app, contactless card, or QR code, with pricing varying based on charging speed and energy use.

### Why This Matters to You

This project showcases how Chamber membership delivers real value. When

members collaborate on infrastructure like this, the benefits ripple across the entire region - attracting EV-driving customers to local businesses, enhancing our competitive edge, and positioning North Central Massachusetts as a forward-thinking region for commerce and talent.

The strategic location near Route 2 makes our region more accessible, encouraging visitors to stop, charge, and support local businesses. As EV adoption grows, this infrastructure signals we're ready for the future.

"By working collaboratively, these types of initiatives become feasible for businesses and local governments," said Arianna MacNeill, municipal and community services executive for Unitil.

This is the Chamber in action - leveraging member expertise and resources to solve real challenges and create opportunities that strengthen our regional economy.

Whether advancing sustainability goals or connecting with partners for your next project, we're here to help you succeed. ◊



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*Continued from page 21*

These trends underscore the importance of our marketing efforts in maintaining visitor engagement and supporting local hospitality businesses during a challenging environment.

**Local Option Tax Collections**

Local option meals tax collections for July through September 2025 totaled \$723,100, up 46.2% year-over-year, while room tax collections reached \$799,500, up 13.7% year-over-year. These increases are most likely attributable to several communities adopting local option meals taxes and increasing their room tax rates in 2025, which significantly impact year-over-year comparisons. These tax revenues directly support local government services and we track them as indicators of visitor spending patterns and tourism’s economic impact on our communities.

**Visitor Profile**

Data from July through September 2025 provides valuable insights into who is visiting North Central Massachusetts. Domestic visitors stayed an average of 1.3 days, with 66.5% staying overnight and 44.5% being repeat visitors. Our top visitor origin states were Massachusetts (15.5%), Connecticut (11.3%), New York (9.7%), and Maine (9.4%). The Boston-Cambridge-Newton metro

area accounted for 8.1% of visitors, followed by New York-Newark-Jersey City (7.3%) and Providence-Warwick (6.8%).

International visitors from January through September 2025 stayed longer, averaging 2.2 days with 79.6% staying overnight. Canada led international markets at 81.2% overnight rate, followed by Brazil, Mexico, and the United Kingdom. These visitor profiles help us refine our marketing strategies to reach high-value audiences and better align with state tourism priorities.

**Looking Ahead**

Moving into 2026, we’re focused on executing the marketing plan we developed for FY2026, with particular emphasis on making up ground from the delayed state funding. Our MA250 campaigns continue to deliver results, showcasing the region’s revolutionary history, culinary scene, outdoor recreation, and innovative communities to audiences across New England.

Strategic media partnerships with AAA, Hearst, Boston Magazine, Yankee Magazine, Edible Boston, TripAdvisor, and PlayEasy will amplify our winter and spring campaigns. We’re building on our digital momentum with enhanced content for group travel, sports tourism, and seasonal attractions. ♦

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Our Executive Office Suites are available **furnished or unfurnished**, allowing you to personalize your space to fit your brand and workflow. Each office includes access to shared amenities and professional services that make day-to-day operations seamless. For those who don't require a physical office but want to maintain a professional image, our **Virtual Office options** offer a prestigious Main

Street business address, mail handling, and on-demand meeting space.

The Dickinson Business Center is strategically positioned just steps from the **newly constructed Fitchburg Boston Commuter Rail station**, making travel to and from the Boston area convenient for both you and your clients.

Tenants also enjoy **ample free parking**, ensuring easy access for visitors and staff alike. Our **all-inclusive rent model** covers utilities and high-speed internet, helping you manage costs with confidence and clarity. With **no long-term commitments** and **next-day move-in options**, you can scale your workspace as your business evolves—without the stress of lengthy leases or hidden fees.

Since its founding in **2004**, the Dickinson Business Center has supported a wide range of professionals and organizations, from small startups to well-established corporations. Over the years, it has earned a strong reputation



for its **commitment to accessibility, responsiveness, and personalized service.**

The Center's staff takes pride in maintaining a welcoming, professional environment that helps businesses thrive.

Beyond offices, the **Dickinson Building** itself is home to exciting initiatives like **"Creative Cities"** and **"Brazilian Kingdom,"** which add to the property's dynamic atmosphere. Together, these enterprises contribute to a vibrant, collaborative community that encourages creativity, innovation, and local engagement.

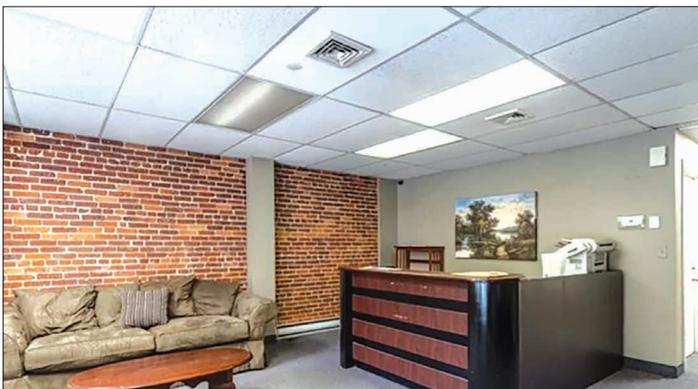
As one of the newest members of the North Central Massachusetts Chamber of Commerce, the Dickinson Business Center looks forward to strengthening connections within the region's business community. Together, we can



continue to build a stronger, more vibrant downtown Fitchburg—where businesses grow and ideas flourish.

If you're looking for the perfect workspace—one that's inspiring, convenient, and community-oriented—discover what's waiting for you at the Dickinson Business Center. Schedule a tour and see firsthand how this revitalized Main Street landmark blends historic charm with modern efficiency. ◇

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[www.chna9.org](http://www.chna9.org)



# FUTURE of MOBILITY

The Health Equity Partnership is partnering with the region to improve transportation and mobility.

Learn more: [www.chna9.org/mobility](http://www.chna9.org/mobility)

## Thanks to the North Central Massachusetts Chamber of Commerce!

For your partnership, for participating in our Future of Mobility work group and for hosting the region's new Transportation Management Association.

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# Chamber Brings Welcome Sign to Groton

The North Central Massachusetts Chamber has sponsored a new welcome sign at the common at the intersection of Route 119 and Nod Road in Groton, continuing its regional initiative to create positive first impressions for visitors

while boosting civic pride.

Similar welcome signs have already been installed in Fitchburg, Gardner, Hubbardston, Leominster, Lunenburg, Pepperell, Sterling, and Westminster. Each sign is customized with the community's seal and official colors. Additional

signs will be constructed for other North Central Massachusetts communities as funding becomes available.

The traditional New England-style sign, designed and produced by Add-A-Sign in Leominster, features a carving of Groton's town seal and is painted in the town's

official maroon color.

Town Manager Mark Haddad expressed gratitude for the initiative. "Groton has a rich history dating back to 1655, and we take great pride in our community's heritage and character," he said. ◇

**"This beautiful new welcome sign reflects our town's identity and ensures that everyone who enters Groton, whether visiting for the first time or returning home, knows they've arrived somewhere special."**

–Town Manager Mark Haddad



Pictured left to right: Gregory M. Sheldon, chair, Destination Groton Committee; State Representative Margaret R. Scarsdale; State Senator John Cronin; Jeff Gordon, president, Groton Business Association; Rebecca "Becky" Pine, vice chair, Groton Select Board; Roy M. Nascimento, president & CEO, North Central Massachusetts Chamber of Commerce; and State Representative Daniello A. Sena.

# Chamber Leads Regional Manufacturing Bus Tour to Showcase Industry

The North Central Massachusetts Chamber and its economic development arm, the North Central Massachusetts Development Corporation, led a successful manufacturing bus tour in October, bringing together education leaders, legislators, and community officials to experience firsthand the opportunities in our region's manufacturing sector.

Manufacturing remains one of the largest employers in North Central Massachusetts, with companies ranging from our world-class plastics industry cluster of more than 140 companies to pharmaceuticals, photonics, paper, and biomedical devices. The tour highlighted the critical role these businesses play in our regional economy while advocating for stronger career pathways and addressing workforce challenges.

Participants visited four leading manufacturers - Solvus Global in Leominster; YMC America in Devens; Veranova in Devens; and Micron Solutions in Fitchburg - gaining an insider's perspective on operations and growing job opportunities. The tour concluded at the new Montachusett Vocational Partnership (MVP) Academy

in Fitchburg, followed by a networking lunch where manufacturers connected with educators and community leaders.

"Manufacturing is vital to our regional economy, and these tours showcase the incredible opportunities this industry offers," said Roy Nascimento, president and CEO. "By bringing educators, legislators, and community leaders directly into local manufacturing facilities, we're bridging the gap between industry and education to build the talent pipeline our region needs."

The event was co-sponsored by the MassHire North Central Workforce Board and Mount Wachusett Community College, demonstrating the power of collaboration in strengthening pathways to careers that drive our economy.

This initiative is part of the Chamber's ongoing commitment to advancing our members' interests by connecting industry with education and workforce development partners, ensuring North Central Massachusetts remains competitive in attracting and developing the skilled talent manufacturers need to thrive. ♦



**"Manufacturing is vital to our regional economy."**

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