A year after it was signed into law, the new Massachusetts Paid Family and Medical Leave (PFML) program is moving into the implementation phase, with several upcoming requirements and deadlines.

Beginning in January 2021, workers in Massachusetts will be eligible to take up to 26 weeks off from their jobs for personal medical conditions or designated family circumstances. During that leave, they will continue to receive a portion of their usual pay and will have guaranteed job security and a continuation of their existing healthcare benefits.

“This creates an important new employee benefit that hasn’t been available for most workers,” said Rick Caneschi, a member relations representative with the Employers Association of the NorthEast (EANE).

“Workplace benefits are an important part of balancing work, family and medical needs,” he continued. “A benefit such as PFML can help employees meet their personal and family healthcare needs, while also fulfilling work responsibilities.”

Fewer rooms but bigger impact on community with prominent setting at base of Spring Street

After four years of planning, preparation and construction, the new Williams Inn near the corner of Spring and Latham streets in Williamstown is readying for an Aug. 15 opening.

The new Williams Inn replaces its predecessor of the same name at 1090 Main St., by Williamstown’s village green, which will be closed at the end of July. Both are owned by Williams College.

While it will serve the same basic role, the 2.0 version of the Williams Inn is expected to significantly enhance the guest experience, better serve the college and community’s needs, and add a new focal point of activity in the town’s central business district, according to college officials.

New Williams Inn on track for mid-August debut

The new Williams Inn at the base of Spring Street awaits a shift of operations from its predecessor of the same name, which is slated to close by the end of July.

Can you say PFML?

Employers get more time to become conversant with new workplace benefit

By John Townes

A year after it was signed into law, the new Massachusetts Paid Family and Medical Leave (PFML) program is moving into the implementation phase, with several upcoming requirements and deadlines.

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The Studio’ brings new element to Porches Inn

BY JOHN TOWNES

A new venue with modern design and state-of-the-art technology for meetings, weddings, private parties, and music recording is opening this summer in North Adams. The finishing touches for the facility, known simply as The Studio, are being completed as an addition to the campus of The Porches Inn at 231 River St. It is slated to be open in late July or August.

“We designed and built it to be as forward-thinking as possible,” said Sarah Eustis, CEO of Main Street Hospitality Group (MSHG), which manages The Porches Inn under contract with its owner, Jack Wadsworth.

The new structure includes 1,110 square feet of open space with glass walls on three sides, laminated timbers of Arctic spruce and slats of cedar with a high copper roof. It has an estimated capacity of 80 people.

The Studio is equipped with presentation and recording technology that includes a ProTools recording system, and a Yamaha CX7 Piano. It also features a Constellation Audio Active system, which enables the acoustics of the space to be adjusted and tuned for specific sound qualities. Meyer Sound of Berkley, Calif., designed and installed the setup.

Another highlight is an ultra-high-definition LED screen that is 12 feet wide by 6 feet, 7 inches tall with a 1.2mm pixel pitch.

“The size and screening quality of it are a real asset both for The Porches and for the region,” said Eustis. “It’s something that has not been available until now and adds another dimension to presentations and screenings.”

She noted that one of the first bookings for The Studio is a week-long conference of the MIT Media Lab. “That’s a very cutting-edge region,” said Eustis. “It’s something that has been very cut-edge and for which we are excited.”

Apart from its high-tech features, The Studio is also designed to serve a more traditional role as a rehearsal, recording and production studio.

“We’re marketing it to musicians as a fully equipped studio they can rent to rehearse, record and produce music,” said Eustis. “We’re also marketing it to musicians as a fully equipped studio they can rent to rehearse, record and produce music.”

Eustis said The Studio has been in the planning and development stage for about two years, to update and build upon the inn’s role and presence in an increasingly competitive market.

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Eustis said The Studio has been in the planning and development stage for about two years, to update and build upon the inn’s role and presence in an increasingly competitive market.

“The Porches has had a unique and important role as a key element in the first chapter of development in the region,” said Eustis. “It’s something that has not been available until now and adds another dimension to presentations and screenings.”

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“The Porches Inn at 231 River St. is slated to open this summer at the Porches Inn in North Adams. The uniquely designed structure, highlighted by a rounded copper roof, stands in contrast to the adjacent row of Victorian-era houses that were renovated and connected to form the upstate inn in 2001.

To design and develop The Porches Inn, he worked closely with Nancy Fitzpatrick, owner of The Red Lion Inn in Stockbridge, which today is the base of Main Street Hospitality Group, a hotel management company founded in 2013.

Eustis noted that The Studio will offer an additional venue and resources to grow The Porches’ existing business as a host of conferences, weddings and other events.

“We will also be working with community groups to make the space available for local uses.”

To create the new facility, an adjacent site at the western end of the inn was acquired, and existing structures were razed. The building was designed by Bensonwood, an architecture and design firm based in Walpole, N.H. It includes a geothermal heating and cooling system coupled with solar production and efficient materials to create a net-zero energy building.

The construction of The Studio is the first step in a two-phase process, Eustis noted. “The first step was completion of the building itself,” she said. “The second phase
Interpret to see ownership change in coming months

BY JOHN TOWNE

The parent company of Interpret, one of the most prominent manufacturing firms in the Berkshires, is slated to be sold to Toppan Printing Co., Ltd., a division of the Toppan Group, headquartered in Tokyo.

The sale agreement was announced on June 25. It is slated to become final by the end of the year.

Interprint GmbH is headquartered in Amsberg, Germany, and was established in 1969 by Wrede Industrieholding GmbH & Co, which originated in 1880 to consolidate the industrial activities of the Wrede family of entrepreneurs.

Interprint’s North American operations are based in a 167,000-square-foot office and manufacturing plant on Route 41 on the western edge of Pittsfield. It currently employs 175 people, with an additional 15 positions expected to be created this year.

While the new owner’s long-range plans are not yet known, significant changes are expected in the local operation in the near term while the sale is being finalized, according to Peter Stasiowski, director of communications in Pittsfield.

“His deal is still in the process of being completed, and we don’t have any information about Toppan’s ultimate plans,” Stasiowski said. “But indications are that it will continue to be full speed ahead here.”

He added that, over the past year, Interpret has invested over $12 million in an expansion that includes the upcoming installation of a newly purchased $10 million press.

“Is it possible that we’ll see even more investment here in the future?”

No one has called to tell us to stop pouring cement,” he commented. “Our decision to choose Toppan as a partner is a signal to all employees and customers worldwide that Interpret will continue to be a trusted partner now and in the future,” said Michael Sindram, managing director of Wrede Industrieholding.

For Toppan, the purchase of Interpret is part of a larger strategy to expand its global reach and customers worldwide that Interpret will continue to be a trusted partner now and in the future,” said Michael Sindram, managing director of Wrede Industrieholding.

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 Archive facility being built for Schumacher Center Library

BY JOHN TOWNEE

The Schumacher Center for a New Economics, based in South Egremont, is undertaking a construction project to support its mission of fostering decentralized economies and a sustainable society.

In early April, the organization began construction at the existing Schumacher Center Library to create an area with controlled lighting and humidity for the necessary level of protection to preserve the center’s research archives.

“This has been a long-dreamed-of project,” said Susan Witt, executive director of the Schumacher Center. Witt explained that the library’s 16,000-volume collection has many materials—including letters, books and other documents—that require archival protection.

“We knew we would need to eventually create a climate-controlled space for the archives,” said Witt. “It’s something we’ve wanted to do for years but were busy with other priorities and activities. We’re finally moving forward on the archive space at the insistence of our librarian.”

Witt said they began actively planning to build the archive section of the library over the past year.

“At a board meeting in 2018, we discussed it and one of the members said ‘Let’s just do this,’ and came up with an initial donation to get it started,” said Witt.

The Schumacher Center for a New Economics was established in 1980 to preserve and build upon the work of the German-born British economist E.F. Schumacher, who was an influential figure in the modern movement for integrated thinking about economic, environmental and cultural issues.

In 1955 Schumacher traveled to Burma as an economic consultant. While there, he developed the principles of what he called “Buddhist economics,” based on the belief that good work was essential for proper human development. He also contended that production from local resources for local needs was the most rational form of economic life.

In 1973 his collected essays were published in a book, Small Is Beautiful: Economics As If People Mattered. Schumacher’s ideas subsequently became popular during the 1970s for his critique of Western economies and his proposals for human-scale, decentralized, and more humane and sustainable economics, technologies and values.

Schumacher’s principles have continued to be a foundation for increasingly popular contemporary movements and trends, including the principles of environmentally sustainable “green” development and construction, renewable energy, support for local food systems, and community-oriented businesses and local economies.

He also helped to lay the groundwork for strategies such as community land trusts, affordable housing, local currencies and social entrepreneurship.

Ideas and outreach

The Schumacher Center was founded and led by Robert Swann, who was a community organizer and proponent of Schumacher’s ideas. He led the organization until his death in 2003.

A statement of goals on its website (centerforneweconomics.org) is to “envision the elements of a just and sustainable global economy,” apply these to projects in Berkshire County, and develop educational programs to share the results and encourage them to be adopted in other regions and internationally.

Among its local projects serving as models for these principles, the center established the Berkshire Community Land Trust.

Its outreach activities include programs such as the annual E. F. Schumacher Lectures, which feature speakers prominent in these issues.

The Schumacher Center Library is another core element of its outreach and educational activities. It serves as a repository for the center’s collections of materials that explore the theory and practice of building ecologically and socially responsible economies. These include books of theory and practical support material. It also has special collections including books and other material from Schumacher’s personal library.

“It’s important in that it shows how wide

his interests were in terms of subjects, and how his thinking developed,” said Witt. “He also took prodigious notes in the books, and so they have his own observations and comments in them.”

Due to its unique or out-of-print book and archival collections, it is a non-lending research library. It is open for research visits by appointment.

The library catalog is accessible online via the LibraryWorld database program, and books can be searched by title, author, specific collection, and keywords. Links and a database are on the organization’s website.

Preparations for project

The Schumacher Center acquired the building, which is on its property on Jug End Mountain, in 1989.

The building had originally been a stained glass studio. Over the years, the 2,000-square-foot, high-ceilinged main floor has been remodeled, updated and converted for offices, a library, meeting space, technical communications area, and other uses.

The building, which is on an incline, also has a lower level of about 1,600 square feet. This is the area that will house the archive center. The goal is to complete it by autumn.

According to Witt, the building had always been envisioned as eventually becoming a fully built-out two-story structure.

During previous construction projects, preparations were made for this by erecting support walls under the cantilevers, grading and adding drainage around the perimeter, and upgrading the septic and electric systems to handle the projected requirements. Andreas Electric had upgraded power service to the building in anticipation of the increased use.

A budget for the current renovations is $250,000. Friends of the Schumacher Center have contributed $155,000 in donations, plus amounts that range from $25 to $50,000. There are pending applications for grant funding for the balance.

The project is employing all local contractors. Steve Seddon of S&S Home Improvements is the general contractor and will do the framing and finished work.

Over the winter, architect John Fulop updated the building’s original drawings to meet current building standards and incorporate energy efficiency.

On April 8, work began when Joe Wilkin-son Excavation took down part of the north wall and drove the backhoe and bulldozer inside to remove the old cement floor. They laid drainage pipes, positioned frames for new support pilings, and spread a base of stone. Cavanagh Plumbing installed the waterline and Rough cast in the fixtures.

A series of photos marking progress on the archive project can be seen at https://centerforneweconomics.org/library-renovation/.

“One of the best things about this has been the spirit of cooperation and the enthusiasm among the contractors and board and volunteers,” noted Witt. “Everyone has pitched in and made an extra commitment to enable it to be done on an affordable basis. It’s one of the great aspects of the community engagement the Schumacher Center promotes.”

Set on a bucolic hillside in South Egremont, the library at the Schumacher Center for a New Economics houses a 10,000-volume collection related to the organization’s mission of fostering decentralized economies and a sustainable society. A $250,000 renovation project is underway to transform the building’s 1,800-square-foot lower level into a climate-controlled facility to preserve and protect items in the collection.

The line drawn with a trowel in the earth is a metaphor. It also has special collections including books and other material from Schumacher’s personal library.

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The Pittsfield Cooperative Bank has announced that 14 area students have received awards from the bank’s Centennial Scholarship Fund. Created in 1989 in celebration of the Co- op’s 100th year, the Scholarship Fund has provided over $300,000 in aid to local students seeking to further their education. This year’s recipients include: Paul Suasti and Brenda Depson, Taconic High School; Adam Chaffotte and Shikaila Goode, Colonel High School; Thomas Burris, Dayton Kozlowski, Victoria Partridge, Paul Alexander, Nano Pier and Joseph Wronicki, Wahconah Regional High School; Nicholas Dil- lon, Monument Mountain Regional High School; Brian Dillon, Mount Everett Regional School; Wyatt Nazor, Lee High School; and Myah House, Lenox Memorial High. “Supporting our com- munity is a hallmark of what we do, and these scholarships are an investment in our community’s future,” said Jay Anderson, president and CEO of the Pittsfield Cooperative Bank. “We are proud to support students achieve their dreams and we look forward to welcoming them back home to live and work in the Berkshires.”

As of June 26, pairs of friendly faces are tak- ing to the streets of downtown Pittsfield to be an approachable source of directions, information, and assistance for residents, visitors, business owners and the general public during the busiest time in the Berkshires, as part of the Downtown Pittsfield Ambassador Program. A partnership between Downtown Pittsfield Inc. (DPI) and the Pittsfield Police Department, the program addresses increased visitor presence during the summer and helps to relieve the demand on police presence downtown. It is based on similar models implemented in other cities around the country. A partnership between Downtown Pittsfield Inc. (DPI) and the Pittsfield Police Department, the program addresses increased visitor presence during the summer and helps to relieve the de- mand on police presence downtown. It is based on similar models implemented in other cities around the country. Acting as walking concierges, the ambassadors are a welcoming, information- sharing resource helping visitors and residents find parking, offering directions and wayfinding, and providing information on dining, shopping, and cultural activities. The ambassadors are trained and certified by the Pittsfield Police Department in CPR, AED, First Aid, and public safety protocol. The ambassadors observe street activity and, when needed, call for assistance via police radios, which they are equipped with. Downtown ambassadors walk in pairs along the downtown loop, donning distinctive uniforms identifying them as official representatives of Pittsfield, and greet everyone they currently employed or primarily interested in entering the workforce upon graduating from BCC. It is a three-year, part-time program, of- fering hybrid courses on Wednesday evenings or Saturday mornings and requiring students to attend classes at the SCC. Students in the Business Careers cohort will study accounting, computer applications, economics and oral and written communica- tions, along with selected business courses in financial literacy, marketing, management and entrepreneurship. Graduates will have mastered the fundamentals of business, allowing them to advance at their current place of employment as well as qualify for new positions within the community. The program graduates can also find employment in manufacturing operations, accounting, finance, customer service, sales, government, insurance, banking, marketing, human resource management and other career areas.

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The Massachusetts Berkshire Workforce Board (BWFB) held its annual meeting on June 13, at which it highlighted accomplishments including its college and career readiness programming, training initiatives, employer outreach and engagement, rapid response services, and those impacted by company closings, and more collaborative efforts in meeting the demand for highly skilled workers.

State Sen. Adam Hinds, who was recognized as the 2019 Workforce Catalyst for his continued support for meeting the demand for highly skilled workers.

Lisa Mendel, the 2019 Educator of the Year, is WE DO’s Workforce Catalyst for the Berkshires.

The volunteer work for the food bank was one of the many ways New England University (WNEU) students are making a difference in their communities – harnessing their skills, expertise and time to help ensure all individuals thrive.

When it comes to who chooses the best selection of diamond engagement rings, wedding and anniversary bands that answer is WE DO! Even when it comes to who chooses the best diamond value the answer again is WE DO! Everything Real Estate is WE DO! Every single one of our diamonds is backed by a guarantee certifying its carat weight and grade according to GIA standards. We’re sure you’ll agree WE DO offer the best selection, quality and value for your money.

The Berkshires Medical Center is a recipient of the Healthgrades 2019 Patient Safety Excellence Award. This is the third straight year BHC has been recognized for this honor, which places it among the top 5 percent of all short-term acute-care hospitals reporting patient safety data as evaluated by Healthgrades, which uses online resource for information about physicians and hospitals. “Berkshire Health Systems continuously exceeds our customers’ expectations of providing our community with the highest and safest quality care,” said David Phelps, president and CEO of Berkshire Health Systems.

Berkshire Bank Foundation, invested over $4 million to support local nonprofit organizations through its volunteer support, the bank, along with the Berkshire Bank foundation, and communities.

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Good Properties

Brewing

Bright Ideas of the Year – Brian Cruey (Village and Jennifer Trainer Thompson (Hancock Shaker Festivaling); Under 40 Change-Maker – Jesse Cook-Dubin Roots Ris;
Berkshire Community Coalition Mahaiwe Performing Arts Center, and Non- The celebrate the Berkshires event on Sept. 26 at best managed IT services providers,” said Dave His is an honor to be recognized among the world’s and technology success provider, has been named
Heirloom Fire
tography), Steve Sears (Berkshire Photo Booth, Tricia McCormack Photogra;
Advancing the Berkshire Economy, Newcomer out, Entrepreneur/Visionary of the Year, Growing/ VidMob
Steven Valenti Clothing

The finalists have been announced for the 2019 Berkshires Trendsetter Awards, which will be presented by Berkshire at the ninth annual Cel-

The MBA Program at MCLA Courses include a blend of classroom experience and practical, hands-on fieldwork. In addition, the Master of Business Administration program puts students in contact with alumni, diverse business programming, and provides a high return on investment. Students will gain an all-encompassing business perspective and networking system to advance in their career.

Berkshire Family and Individual Resources Inc. (BIFAR) has purchased the Bottle and Can Redemption Center at 1000 Massachusetts Ave, in North Adams from Enviros Morelli & Associates. “BIFAR has a great relationship with Mr. Morelli,” said Rich Weissfuss, BIFAR’s CEO. “We have been working together for several years managing the customer service portion of the business, and when the Redemption Center became available for sale, he approached BIFAR. We are grateful for this opportunity to continue to provide employment for individuals with disabilities while also playing an important role in north Berkshire.” According to Theresa Gelasins, senior vice president of day services. “The employees acquire customer services skills with the support of BIFAR’s employment program staff, assisting the general public redeeming cans and bottles, as well as playing a positive role in our community with respect to the environment by reducing waste and promoting reuse of containers. Our Redemption Center also serves as a great stepping stone for people with disabilities acquiring work skills moving on to competitive employ-

The Southwestern Vermont Health Care (SVHC) Foundation’s Summer Gala on June 8 raised $250,000 of which nearly $220,000 will support advancements in breast imaging for early detection of breast cancer. “SVHC makes extraordinary investments to ensure the best patient care,” said Leslie Kerfe, SVHC’s vice president for corporate development. “It is so gratifying to feel that same level of support echoed among our valued community partners through participation in the Putnam Challenge and enthusiastic sponsor-

Kimball Farms CLCC has received this improved rating from Fitch, and are proud of our staff and leadership who have established a consistent track record of excellence in everything they do,” said Bill Jones, president of Berkshire Healthcare Systems. “This reinforces Berkshire Healthcare’s commitment to providing a broad range of quality senior living care options in our community.

The detailed rating report can be found at www. fitchratings.com. “We are thrilled that Kimball Farms CLCC has received this improved rating from Fitch, and are proud of our staff and leadership who have established a consistent track record of excellence in everything they do,” said Bill Jones, president of Berkshire Healthcare Systems. “This reinforces Berkshire Healthcare’s commitment to providing a broad range of quality senior living care options in our community.

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Here’s the scoop on what’s happening with restoration of passenger rail service from the Berkshires to NYC

BY KAREN CHRISTENSEN

The Train Campaign began in 2011 with the simple idea that a beautiful rural region could attract 21st century commerce by being seamlessly connected to an important global hub. Since then, western Massachusetts has become a hotbed of rail activism, with so many projects being discussed that a lot of people are now confused.

Our volunteers and supporters seek to agree that one of the most important regional environmental challenges of our time is to find better ways to connect rural and urban areas. That conviction is central to the mission of the Train Campaign: to foster a robust network of rail transportation options in Berkshire County and surrounding areas including western Connecticut and Columbia County in New York. Our catchphrase is "REGIONAL INFRASTRUCTURE FOR A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE.”

While we strongly support the major East-West Passenger Rail Study and other Boston-focused initiatives, I’m writing today to provide clarity about the restoration of the Housatonic Line, more commonly known as the Berkshire Line, which provided passenger service until 1971.

Restoration of the Berkshire Line will result in an active, year-round service with six to eight trains per day in each direction from Grand Central Terminal in New York City, with stops in at least six towns, and terminating in Pittsfield. The Berkshire County towns identified as key station locations are Great Barrington and Lee, and there will be a station in Canaan, Conn., and/or Sheffield.

The line will also provide train service for those seeking to travel up and down Berkshire County – from Pittsfield to Lee to Great Barrington. You’ll have read in last month’s BERKSHIRE TRADE & COMMERCE about another initiative, the Berkshire Flyer. I’d like to explain the difference between the two projects and put to bed the idea that they are in competition. The Berkshire Flyer and the Housatonic (Housatonic) Line are very different concepts that will serve different places and different users, and have different passenger capacity.

It is quite possible that they both have a place in a comprehensive, efficient rail system.

Until 1971, the Berkshire Line carried passengers from Grand Central Terminal in New York City, through Danbury, Conn., and up through western Connecticut along the Housatonic River. (You can see what this was like. We’ve posted a clip from the documentary “The Last Train to Pittsfield” at traincampaign.org.) The tracks remain in place and have continued to serve as a freight line by the privately held Housatonic Railroad Company (HRRC).

Our goal is to see passenger service restored on the Berkshire Line, and there have been extensive efforts made to ensure that this happens. There have indeed been ups and downs, but here’s some history and an overview of the massive upgrade now underway on the Massachusetts portion of the line.

In 2010, the HRRC commissioned a study of the demand for passenger rail service and determined that restoring passenger rail service to Berkshire County would provide two million single-fare passengers with a fast, convenient and comfortable connection to Connecticut and New York.

In 2014, legislators on Beacon Hill passed a transportation bond bill that included money for the project in Massachusetts, first by purchasing the 37 miles of track in the state from HRRC for $13 million and also making a commitment to upgrading the line, with some (but by no means all) of that future expenditure contingent on Connecticut’s involvement in upgrading the line in that state.

The purchase documents were clear about the commitment to moving people.

The acquisition of the subject Railroad Assets is one step in what MassDOT anticipates will be a multi-year, multi-state process that ultimately will lead to the establishment of a new railroad passenger service route in the Berkshires.

After Gov. Deval Patrick stepped down in early 2015, MassDOT downgraded the plan, saying that such a project would not continue the effort because Connecticut wasn’t interested – and, in fact, facing major financial problems.

Steps forward

In a surprising reversal, however, upgrade work on the line did begin in July 2018, and a $30 million infrastructure project is currently underway right here in Berkshire County. The train and tie work is scheduled for completion in 2020, and further work on the line is planned for 2020 to 2024. It is, of course, passenger service that will justify this major taxpayer investment.

This positive step forward has also been supported by recent developments in Connecticut. In this May,1st New England State Gov. Ned Lamont released a draft transportation bill that includes the extension of Metro-North service past Danbury to New Milford, and Danbury Mayor Mark Boughton recently announced that the city is making plans for a restored rail line to Southeast on the Maybrook Line for faster commuting to New York City. Both these pieces of railroad line are sections of the Berkshire Line. To paraphrase the late astronaut Neil Armstrong, "One small step for New Milford, and one giant leap towards extending passenger rail to the Berkshires."

Restoration of passenger service on the Berkshire Line is a completely different project from the Berkshire Flyer, a seasonal weekend service between Pittsfield and New York City run by Amtrak via Albany. That initiative is modeled after the CapeFLYER, which brings summer weekend train service from Boston to Cape Cod.

What confuses many is that the Berkshire Flyer route via Albany is not the route state Sen. Adam Hinds and New York City consultant Eddie Sporn originally proposed. In fact, that route, a new rail link from the Berkshires to Pittsfield, seems to be completely off the table because of costs and engineering challenges. Sen. Hinds has, however, expressed hope that there might be a stop added in West Stockbridge, bringing the train perhaps from Albany to Pittsfield, although MassDOT’s 2018 report referred only to a possible station in Chatham, N.Y.

That question of an additional stop remains to be resolved, as does the question of passenger service extending beyond weekends should the pilot program prove successful.

Critical of the Berkshire Flyer should remember that it is a relatively low-cost way to expand rail options since it requires only an operating subsidy in addition to marketing and management costs.

Who benefits?

Within a discussion of the various proposals for restoring passenger rail service, the important question is: Who benefits? Calculating the myriad benefits of passenger rail is something we’re working on at the Train Campaign. We think about this, talk about it, and encourage its inclusion in state-funded studies because departments of transportation are focused only on moving people from one point to another. Calculating benefits just isn’t their focus.

We, on the other hand, consider it essential to calculate returns in terms of the environment, public health, economic vitality, and employment and educational opportunities – and tax revenue, too.

Perhaps the biggest difference between the Berkshire Flyer and Berkshire Line is the people they will serve. The Berkshire Flyer is for weekend tourists, and specifically for people who do not already come here. The Berkshire Line, on the other hand, is quite different. While its market is currently under way right here in Berkshire County, the track and tie work is scheduled for completion in 2020, and further work on the line is planned for 2020 to 2024. It is, of course, passenger service that will justify this major taxpayer investment.

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Expanding the Berkshire Flyer beyond weekend service would at least address one of the criticisms of the plan: that it is too limited and rigid in its schedule to meet the needs of those wishing to use it. The weekend Berkshire Flyer service is not, however, as inflexible as people think.

Because there is already daily passenger service from Pittsfield to New York on the Amtrak route, Berkshire Flyer riders in either direction wishing to depart or return on their own schedule would only have to purchase separate tickets for the regular daily service. (Unlike the Berkshire Flyer, that daily Amtrak service requires changing trains in Albany.) Once the Berkshire Flyer starts in 2020, it will be perfectly feasible to take the Flyer one direction and another train the other.

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Berkshire Trade & Commerce

Commentary

The Train Campaign

by Sarah Greenman

(roughly $340,000 for 20 round trips per year, each carrying up to about 50 passengers at Amtrak ticket prices). Restoring service on the Berkshire Line—including all engineering and safety upgrades, new stations and operating costs—will cost much more, with both capital and operating costs ($200 to $250 million in capital costs, and planned break-even on ticket sales at prices comparable to Metro-North). Indeed, Massachusetts is already doing a substantial part of the work required on its 37 miles of track, but there remains much to be done.

The return on investment, however, will be much greater with the Berkshire Line, serving as many as two million single-fare riders each year, and invigorating small cities like Danbury as well as the towns of northwest Connecticut and Berkshire County. It will also give all these towns the possibility of connecting in Pittsfield to Boston on new East-West passenger rail, a project spearheaded by state Sen. Eric Lesser.

We were delighted to see that the Berkshire Line is the top line item in a priority table included in the draft Berkshire County 2020 Regional Transportation Plan (RTP), a long-range (25-year) comprehensive document that provides the basis for future transportation investment and planning in the region.

We can all agree that restored and drastically improved passenger rail service to New York and to Boston will be a catalyst for sustainable economic development. It will give city dwellers access to our wonderful towns and cultural venues, to beautiful countryside and outdoor recreation, and it will offer country dwellers much easier access to employment and educational opportunities.

We are looking forward to the day when we can say to business associates in Europe or Asia, “Just go to Grand Central and buy a ticket for Great Barrington.” We are also hoping to see the service become so successful that we’ll have a modern version of the 1940s Berkshire Express: Train No. 144, which offered a limited-stop service every afternoon except Sundays, with a parlor car and a “broiler buffet.”

Please jump aboard the Train Campaign. Find out how at www.traincampaign.org.

EDITOR’S NOTE: Karen Christensen is founder of The Train Campaign (www.traincampaign.org), which advocates for a return of passenger rail service between New York City and the Berkshires.

The organization provides educational materials, meets with legislators and local government officials, and provides extensive maps, links, background documents and podcasts (www.traincampaign.org). The Train Campaign recently joined with Trains in the Valley and Citizens for a Palmer Rail Stop to form the Western Mass Rail Coalition (www.westernmassrail.org). Christensen owns and runs Berkshire Publishing Group, and is the author of a series of popular environmental books including The Armchair Environmentalist (Hachette 2008) that have been translated into French, German, Swedish, Japanese, Korean and Thai. She was also senior academic editor of the Encyclopedia of Community (Sage).
The Berkshire Innovation Network (BIC) has announced the appointment of Ben Soone as executive director. A native of the Berkshire County native and a 20-year veteran of Monument Mountain Regional High School in Great Barrington, Soone returned to the area in 2011 to raise a family after spending time working in law and digital media in New York City for several years. He comes to the BIC after serving as general counsel and senior project manager for Thomas Krems’ proposed Extreme Model Railroad and Contemporary Architecture Museum North in Amadus. Soone succeeds Scott Longley, who will remain a member of the BIC team, leveraging his manufacturing and supply chain expertise to further enhance BIC member services and development opportunities. Construction of the BIC, which will include training facilities, biotech wet space, clean rooms, offices and event space for small to medium-sized companies in the Berkshires, began in September 2018. The $14 million project is expected to be completed later this year.

Dr. Jerry Stoepker, a family medicine physician, has relocated from New York City to join the primary care team at CHMP for Family Practice. Stoepker has a special interest in LGBTQ health, and says he is looking forward to caring for individuals and families. Most recently Stoepker was a teaching attending physician at the Center for Family and Community Medicine at Columbia University Medical Center. He also worked as a private practitioner at Westside Family Medicine in New York City. Other past positions include assistant attending at the New York Presbyterian Hospital/Columbia University Medical Center, and chief medical officer at Watikere Hospital in Auckland, New Zealand, following completion of his family medicine residency.

Shaun McHugh has been appointed principal architect for the town of Great Barrington. A Pittsfield native and certified residential appraisal with 25 years experience, McHugh has previously worked as the commercial assessor for the City of Pittsfield and later as a senior commercial reviewer for Tyler Technologies. He has been owner and president of Berkshire Appraisal, McHugh Appraisals and Berkshire Asset Management. McHugh has completed coursework with the Massachusetts Board of Assessors and has been a取胜plan of municipal, state and federal agencies, the Institute of Real Estate Management and the Certified Commercial Investment Management Institute.

Berkeley Hills Bancorp Inc. (NYSE: BHLB), the financial holding company for Berkshire Bank, has announced the appointment of three new members to the board of directors. Baye Aduo-Wilson joins the board’s Audit Committee and the Corporate Responsibility and Culture Committee. He brings 20 years of experience in law and business development, with a focus on community development. Rho Brouillard joins the Compliance and Regulatory Committee and the Risk Management and Capital Committee. He has more than 30 years of experience in the financial services industry, holding key roles at multiple financial services institutions. Walfrido Hughes III joins the board’s Compensation Committee and the Risk Management and Capital Committee. He has over 30 years of business experience in strategy development and execution, technology services and cyber security. Aduo-Wilson, Brouillard and Hughes were also appointed to the board of directors of Berkshire Bank. In addition to these appointments, the following changes have been made to the membership of various board committees: Richard St. Germain has been elected to the Compliance and Regulatory Committee to the Audit Committee. David Blevins has moved from the Compliance and Regulatory Committee to the Corporate Governance/Nomination Committee. Larry Norton Mofield has moved from the Risk Management and Capital Committee to the Corporate Governance/Nomination Committee.

Salisbury Bank has announced the promotion of two employees. Michael Carnevale has been promoted to vice president, mortgage advisor. Carnevale started with the bank in 2013 as an intern in the Commercial Credit Department. He became a mortgage advisor trainee and has been a full-time mortgage advisor since January 2019. Ryan Diamond has been promoted to assistant vice president and commercial credit manager. Diamond has been with the bank for nine years, and has served as commercial credit manager for the past two prior to that, he worked a teller. Commercial credit advisor and team leader in the Commercial Credit Department.

At its June 10 annual meeting, the MassHire Berkshire Workforce Board elected the following slate of officers for FY2020: Eva Sheridan, Main Street Hospitality, president; Stephanie Kinzle, Mass.gov/MAJobs, vice president; Albert Inagami III, Berkshire Health Care Systems, vice president; Doug McNally, Freshthowth Associates, Youth Council Chair; Matthew M. Cann Technical School, treasurer; Chelsea Tyer, Nernah Paper, secretary; Bradford Dedrick, Berkshire Workforce Board, board member, Crescent Crematory, at-large. Newly appointed to the board were Jerry Burke from Hillcrest Educational Centers, Rebecca McHugh, Unistress/Peticia, and Sarah Alfonso from Canyon Ranch.

The Pittsfield Cooperative Bank has announced the promotion of Heather Archibald. who will now serve the 130-year old financial institution as assistant treasurer. An employee of the Pittsfield Cooperative Bank since 1995, Archibald most recently held the position of senior accountant. Also promoted is Steve Rogers, who will serve as assistant vice president and branch manager. In his new role, Rogers will be responsible for managing the bank’s Dalton Avenue branch. Prior to this, he served as customer service representa-
Tiny house builder finds bigger space to build in

BY JOHN TOWNES

Having secured a new facility, B&B Micro Manufacturing is currently in the process of relocating from North Adams to Adams, where the business was founded by three natives of that town — Jason Kopermaik, Chris St. Cyr and Mitch Brestes.

B&B designs and manufactures transportable “tiny houses” and also constructs modular and “stick-built” tiny and small homes on foundations. It was started in 2015 as a very small venture based in a garage in Adams, and later moved into a larger space in the Windsor Mill in North Adams (October 2017 TBC).

As the business continued to grow, the partners searched for other spaces to expand and/or relocate. In 2018 their proposal to purchase a city-owned property on Ashland Street was accepted by the North Adams City Council. But B&B never completed the deal.

Earlier this year they closed on the purchase of a 3.6-acre site at 201 Howland Ave. (Route 8) in Adams, just south of the North Adams High School, that includes the former offices and warehouse of Brown Packaging, for $818,000.

(After being purchased by Pacific Packaging Products, the Adams headquarters of Brown Packaging have been phased out, and the property was put on the market.)

B&B is making the transition in stages, according to Kopermaik.

“For now, we’re operating out of both locations,” he said. “What those in the mill in North Adams continue at least through April, and we’re still working out of there.

Meanwhile, we’re adapting the facility in Adams and are moving our operations into that. We’ll steadily transition to Adams as our main site and use the North Adams mill primarily for storage while we are still leasing that.”

The move expands their space from about 13,000 square feet in North Adams to 24,000 square feet in the Adams building, which was constructed in 1989. It includes 4,000 square feet of office space plus 20,000 square feet of open warehouse space that is suitable for B&B’s construction activities.

Kopermaik said B&B is marketing some office space in the building that they are not using for lease to other businesses as tenants. B&B has projected an overall investment of at least $978,500 in the new facility and related improvements. In June, B&B was one of 12 companies in Massachusetts approved for participation in the latest round of the state’s Economic Development Incentive Program (EDIP), which provides corporate tax credits and other support as incentives for job creation.

B&B also received a seven-year Special Tax Assessment with a value of approximately $999,000 from the town of Adams. This would include relief from local property taxes, starting at 100 percent and phase down over the seven-year period.

These are based on B&B fulfilling its investment promises and creating at least 16 new full-time jobs (for a total employment of 34) within seven years.

Currently the company has 26 employees and is hiring several more to increase that to the low thirties, according to Kopermaik.

“The potential total relief in corporate and local property taxes is $200,000,” he said.

“But that will be dependent on our meeting the agreed-upon targets for investment and jobs.”

B&B’s original business was creating transportable RVIA-certified tiny houses on wheels, which continues to be their main source of business and revenues.

In addition, it has been expanding to build tiny houses and small structures on foundations, which includes stick-built, on-site construction and/or modular manufactured housing.

“We design and build custom houses too, but our sweet spot is manufacturing multiple units with the same design to benefit from economies of scale,” said Kopermaik.

They also build non-residential structures that serve as offices or small businesses. One recent project was a small structure near the Williams Inn that is used as a seasonal ice cream store by Lickety Split.

While their fort is constructing functional, Koperniak said they are equally happy to be building the local job base.

“We’re excited to contribute to employ-

ment growth here in a nice, steady manner,” he said.

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news & notes from the region

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CONTACT: STEPHEN J. DADAK • 413-458-3837
By John Townes

While creating art is often considered a solitary pursuit, artists also appreciate and need social contact and practical support – both to show and sell their work, and to stimulate their own development and inspiration. Since its beginnings as a single art show in 2014, the Guild of Berkshire Artists has been supporting those connections through a variety of activities, including public art shows, workshops, seminars, critique sessions, group artmaking sessions, and other programs and events.

Its mission is also to enhance the region’s quality of life by providing the public with exposure to the creative talent of the region. “The Guild of Berkshire Artists provides artists with opportunities to work and learn and share their skills,” said Karen Carmean, president and board member. “We also educate the public about art and the vibrant creative community that exists in the Berkshires.”

While the Guild is active throughout the year, it is currently in the midst of its business season, with a full calendar of summer activities, including daily plein air (outdoor) painting and photography sessions, meet-the-artist events and others.

Among the highlights is its Lenox Fine Arts Show, now running through July 29, which features the works of numerous participating Berkshire County artists in a variety of media available for viewing and sale in the Welles Gallery at the Lenox Library. It is free and open to the public from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Saturday and 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. Sunday.

The show will have two phases, with different works in each. The first began on July 1. A reception for the second phase will be held July 20 from 3 to 5 p.m.

In addition, the Guild is holding another event, the West Stockbridge Old Town Hall Show, from July 22 through Sept. 1.

A visit to its website (www.berkshireartists.org) illustrates the Guild’s high level of activity. It also has a central Facebook page which lists upcoming shows throughout the region, a video of selected activities, and other Facebook pages, including Berkshire Call for Art, which lists upcoming shows throughout the region. They also have an Instagram page and a regular newsletter.

The Guild’s busy schedule is all the more impressive in light of the fact that it is a grassroots, all-volunteer, nonprofit organization with a limited budget.

The Guild supports its activities through memberships, commissions, admissions, fees for certain services, and contributions and in-kind support from the public.

Karen Carmean, president of the Guild of Berkshire Artists, joins her husband and fellow Guild member Doane Perry at the entrance to the Welles Gallery in the Lenox Library, which is hosting the organization’s annual art show and sale. The exhibit is part of the Guild’s busy year-round schedule of events and activities.

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low as possible, “We try to do things simply and efficiently,” she said. “We don’t have a central office or any paid staff. Fortunately, we have active and committed members and supporters, and free tools available, which enables us to get a lot of things done.”

Camaraderie, Visibility
The Guild of Berkshire Artists originated in 2014 through the efforts of Helen Febbo, an artist who lives in Richmond. Febbo is a painter who has worked in various media, including watercolor landscapes and large acrylic abstracts (helenfebbo.com).

“I’ve been an artist for many years and enjoy the camaraderie of being part of a group,” said Febbo. “I thought something that would bring artists together would be a good idea here.”

She also believed that it was important to give greater visibility to the region’s artists in the larger community.

“There was not enough awareness of how many artists live here, and the level of talent that exists in the Berkshires,” she said. “Too often people think that you have to go far afield outside of the Berkshires to find quality art. I decided that an open public art show was one way to stir up interest in these goals.”

The next step was finding a space. “I suggested the idea to the minister of the Richmond Congregational Church, and she loved the idea,” said Febbo. The show was scheduled for September of that year in the church’s sewing room.

She contacted friends and sent out an open call for artists.

“I put up posters all over the place inviting artists to participate in the show, and it got a surprising number of responses,” she said.

Then we put up posters inviting the public to attend, not knowing how many people would show up. The show turned out to be very successful, and several hundred people came to the reception. There was a lot of enthusiasm around it.”

Out of that, a core group of artists emerged to foster further collaborative activities.

“Because of the number of entries and people who came, we realized that there was a lot of interest in forming a group to meet and support other artists and have fun together,” Febbo said.

They held an organizing meeting the following December, and established a board.

The guild’s first president was Howard Greenhalgh. He was succeeded by Carmean, who is a painter.

In 2017, the Guild obtained status as a nonprofit 501c3 organization from the IRS. The organization was originally named the Richmond-West Stockbridge Artists Guild Inc. because that was where it was originally centered. That was changed to the Guild of Berkshire Artists in 2018.

“We serve artists throughout Berkshire County, and also have members in adjacent sections of New York, Connecticut and Vermont,” said Carmean. “Most of our activities take place in central and south Berkshire County but we also have members in the northern Berkshires and hope to do more there.”

Membership
The Guild currently has approximately 160 members. Annual fees are $52 (or $26 for those under 30).

Membership is primarily oriented to active amateur or professional fine artists. Applicants are requested to submit three images of their work for review with their applications.

It is open to artists in all media, including painting, digital art, mixed media, sculpture and those working in pottery and other fine crafts.

Members are eligible to participate in all Guild activities, including member-only benefits such as showing in art shows, attending organizational meetings, group art-making and critique sessions, potlucks, workshops and presentations.

They are also listed in the Guild’s directory, with the option of an online page for a portfolio of their work.

However, Carmean emphasized that overall the Guild is designed to be inclusive.

Many of its activities and programs are open to the public, often for free. Nonmembers are also able to participate in member-oriented activities for free on a trial basis.

“We accept contributions and support from the public,” she said. “But we encourage non-artists who want to become members to instead support their favorite local museum.”

One option we recommend is to become a member of the North American Reciprocal Museum (NARM) Association.

That program (narmassociation.org), she explained, offers a special category of membership at participating museums and cultural organizations. It provides free admission and/or discounts at all NARM sites, which includes several major institutions in the Berkshires.

“That’s a great deal, because you can visit a variety of museums and cultural activities for the equivalent price of one or two visits at regular admissions,” she said.

The activities of the Guild of Berkshire Artists include a mix of regularly scheduled programs and one-time events. It also partners with other organizations and local businesses, and they participate in events such as the First Friday Artwalk in Pittsfield and the Stockbridge Art Walk on the second Thursday of the month from June through October.

From June to September, the Guild sponsors a daily Creating Art Outdoors program in which artists are invited to paint, sketch or photograph at rotating locations such as Hancock Shaker Village, the Great Barrington Riverwalk, and Berkshire Botanical Garden, among others. These include morning work sessions followed by lunch and discussions.

In the autumn the Guild will hold two intense sessions with a live model, in conjunction with the IS183 Art School.

It holds art shows at various venues, including local businesses and organizations, such as TKG Real Estate in Stockbridge, and the Berkshire Humane Society in Pittsfield.

Another program is a regular Meet the Artist series, in which a featured artist presents and discusses their work.

The guild also sponsors a series of group Art Studio Tours, in which participating artists open their studios to the public. This year they will take place July 13, Aug. 10, Sept. 14, and Oct. 12.

More information and updated lists of activities are listed on its website and Facebook page.

Febbo, who is still active in the organization, said her initial idea to hold an art show has succeeded beyond her expectations.

“It has grown tremendously and is a very diverse group of artists of different levels of experience and accomplishment,” she said. “Karen Carmean deserves a lot of credit for being such a great administrator. It certainly has achieved the original goal of connecting artists and having fun while supporting art in the Berkshires.”

The Courtyard at The Red Lion Inn is one of the Berkshires’ true summer pleasures. Whether you’re a guest, or live around the corner, the flower-filled, casual dining spot offers you a taste of the region’s favorite season. The menu features al fresco dining with traditional Red Lion favorites, as well as seasonal specialties.

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MARKETPLACE

LONGTIME LENOX BUSINESS ‘PERFECT FIT’ FOR NEW OWNER

BY JOHN TOWNES

Loeb’s Foodtown, a longtime staple of the Lenox business community, has changed hands, but its role as a traditional independent food market will continue.

On May 29, Bernie and Isabel Fallon purchased Loeb’s from Earl and Lesley Albert, who had operated the store since 1968.

Located at 42 Main St. in the town center, the store was founded in 1959 by Leo Loeb. Bernie Fallon said there will be changes for the business over time, but its familiar identity will be retained, including its name.

“We purchased Loeb’s because this is exactly the kind of business my wife and I want to run,” he said. “We’re very passionate about it, and we appreciate its connection to the local community. It’s not people who want to turn it into a restaurant or something other than what it is.

It also is a perfect fit for his own background and interests, he added.

“I’m like a kid in a candy store here,” Fallon said. “This perfectly matches my experience and what I love to do, including the business side and the interactions with people you have in a store like this. I get up very early, come here and work very hard, but I’m not worn out at the end of the day.

That’s when you know you’re doing what you should be doing.”

A native and current resident of West Stockbridge, Fallon and his family previously operated the West Stockbridge Public Market. That store was founded by his grandfather and great uncle as Fallon’s Market in 1930.

That business later left the family but was then purchased and operated by Fal- lon’s mother Anna Ambrose and step-father Michael Skorput from 1978 to 2003. Fal- lon took over the West Stockbridge Public Market in 2003 and operated it until 2010, when he sold the business (although he still owns the building).

“I was 15 when they bought that business, and I worked there and stayed,” Fallon recalled. “That store was a microcosm of Loeb’s, so it was good preparation for this.”

He added that Skorput and Ambrose had a strong influence on him, inspiring him both professionally and personally. Skorput taught him much about business – including the craft of butchering, a role Fallon will continue at Loeb’s.

“My mother is an amazing woman with a passion for kindness,” he said, noting that she now works part time at Loeb’s.

After selling the West Stockbridge Public Market, Fallon moved out of the area for several years and worked for Coors Brewing and for Chobani yogurt in Arizona and in New York City. He returned to the Berkshires in 2016 and worked at Guido’s Specialty Market.

“Guido’s was a great place to work,” he said. “But I had a need to do something on my own. I saw a listing for Loeb’s. It was a unique opportunity that’s not easy to find, so we bought it.”

Isabel Fallon is from Arizona, where the couple met. She worked for a pharma- ceutical company there. After moving to the Berkshires she worked at TJ Maxx and Marshall’s. She now works full time at Loeb’s. “Isabel is wholeheartedly into this,” said Fallon.

In purchasing Loeb’s Foodtown, the Fal- lon family also purchased the building, which has a main floor with 3,800 square feet of retail space, plus a basement. The real estate trans- action was for $500,000. The overall cost of the business sale was undisclosed.

Fallon said they obtained financing for the business purchase from Adams Com- munity Bank, which has a branch office in Lenox. “They were extremely supportive and made this whole process a great experi- ence,” he said.

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“Retail strategies

Loeb’s Foodtown (413-637-0270) has a traditional layout with shelves of brand name foods, coolers for produce and other products, and other staples. It has a popular butcher counter, and a deli and prepared-meal section. The store also sells beer, wine and liquor.

It is open from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. Monday through Saturday, and 7 a.m. to 6 p.m. on Sunday.

When discussing the business, it is clear that Fallon is very detail oriented and en- trepreneurial. In addition to the instinctive qualities of operating a fast-paced business, he pays close attention to comprehensive business planning and specific retail strate- gies and efficiencies.

“We love doing this, but we also know that in order to succeed and support us, it has to be a profitable business,” he said.

For example, he said, it is possible to significantly increase the selection of items within the existing space and layout of the store. “Everything that’s in the store will stay, but it can occupy half the space,” he said.

He explained that one of his plans is to reduce the number of individual packages of a given item on the shelves by storing more in the store’s lower level.

“So, instead of having 10 cans of the same variety of soup in the shelf, there will only be a few, with the rest available in storage to bring up to replenish as needed,” he said. “That will create space to display more items.”

He said they have ideas for additional merchandise to carry, including natural organic foods and other health-oriented and specialty items. One of the first changes the Fallons have made is adding a section of bulk foods, including nuts, trail mix and chocolate-covered snacks.

However, Fallon emphasized that changes and additions will be based on customer demand, including ongoing tracking of what types of items are selling, market trends and individual requests.

“Customers will determine what’s in the store,” he said. “We’re here to provide what people want and need.”

He said that they will also place more emphasis on their prepared food offerings.

“However, I won’t touch the deli,” he said.

“That part of the business is golden. The num- ber of call-in orders we get is amazing. And people know the names and ingredients of all the sandwiches and have their favorites.”

Fallon said that over time they will make physical changes, such as new shelves, flooring and other elements. “That will be gradual and based on what we can afford to invest as we go along,” he said.

The store has about 15 employees, most of whom have stayed on with the transition. Among them is Earl Albert, who has been working part time, including manning the butcher’s department.

“He’s been very helpful in the transition,” noted Fallon. “The relationship they had with the community has been an important reason for the store’s longevity and loyal customer base.

Fallon said the store’s core market consists of people who live within a few miles of the store.

Lenox is a seasonal town that is busiest in summer and autumn, and considerably quieter at other times of the year.

Fallon noted that many of the seasonal residents seem to consider Loeb’s Foodtown as one of the qualities that attract people to Lenox and the Berkshires.

“One long-time musician in the Boston Symphony Orchestra (whose summer home in Tanglewood) said Loeb’s was one of the things he missed most about Lenox when he wasn’t here,” said Fallon.

Fallon said he is prepared for the seasonal fluctuations in his business plan.

“We haven’t experienced a full summer season ourselves yet,” he said. “But I do know that on the first day of Tanglewood our business almost doubled.”

“We purchased Loeb’s because this is exactly the kind of business my wife and I want to run.”

Isabel and Bernie Fallon have taken a prominent position in the central Lenox business community with their recent purchase of Loeb’s Foodtown at 42 Main St.
New career choice leads to We All Need Bodywork

BY BRAD JOHNSON

A new therapeutic massage business in Adams – operating under the name We All Need Bodywork – is doing its part to help local residents meet those needs in a comfortable and convenient setting.

“It’s important that people feel safe about their process,” said Jessica Wilson, a licensed massage therapist (LMT) who opened her studio in downtown Adams this April. “My goal here is to give people a chance to be comfortable in getting the treatment they need.”

A native of North Adams, Wilson took up her new career in massage therapy only recently, after returning to the region following a long absence.

“I lived in Colorado for 16 years, and came back here five years ago,” she explained. While juggling the responsibilities of her growing family (five children now aged from 2 to 18), she has also been establishing herself as a singer/songwriter, performing at local venues under the stage name “Jess Renee.”

Since returning, Wilson has also taken on various positions, most recently as an activities coordinator at a regional resort area – work that she described as enjoyable but less financially rewarding than it could be. Her search for other alternatives led Wilson to consider a career in massage therapy.

“I’ve always had an interest in this,” she said, adding that her sister “nudged me into going to school for it.”

Wilson enrolled in the LMT program offered at Mildred Eily in Pittsfield, and graduated with her certification in May 2018. “After that I began working with individual clients and doing chair massage events,” she said.

While the chair massage events generally were conducted in group settings or as part of other public events, the work with individual clients involved her going to their own homes. “This, she said, was both limiting for her and sometimes uncomfortable for clients.

“After working that way for a few months, I felt ready for the next step of having my own studio,” Wilson noted. In January she learned of a storefront space at 30 Park St. in downtown Adams that was available. “It used to be a barber shop and it was close to her own residence in Adams,” she said.

Wilson worked out a lease agreement with the building’s owner, took occupancy on April 1, and over the next few weeks got the space ready to open as We All Need Bodywork. “It was a labor of love to get this place up and running so quickly,” she said.

The demand for Wilson’s services has steadily increased with the building’s owner, taking occupancy on April 1, and over the next few weeks got the space ready to open as We All Need Bodywork. “It was a labor of love to get this place up and running so quickly,” she said.

Wilson’s new studio, We All Need Bodywork, at 30 Park St. in downtown Adams features a front room (above) which is set up for longer therapeutic massage sessions that are scheduled by appointment. She also offers in-studio or on-site chair massage parties, as well as corporate chair massage service.

Since opening in mid-April, Wilson has been steadily building a regular clientele. “People have been coming back for repeat business, and new people are calling and trying it every week,” she said.

The demand for Wilson’s services has also required some adjustment on her part. “I’m getting used to what it means to have people in and out all day,” she said. “Physically it’s very demanding.”

In these first weeks and months, she said, she has also been “learning the ins and outs” of running a business. “I’m trying not to take on more than I can handle as I figure out what the need is for this market,” she said.

She noted that We All Need Bodywork has a multiple therapist license, which means she has the option in the future of bringing on an additional massage therapist if demand warrants.

But, for now, Wilson said the process of establishing herself and her own business is very satisfying. “I love the fact that people walk into this space and it’s my own,” she said.

She added that the business dovetails nicely with her other career as a musician. “I just turned 40 and I’m doing both of the things I love,” she said. “I’m passionate about my music, and now I have this studio that allows me to treat people and help them along in their journey.”

We All Need Bodywork is divided into two sections. A larger front room serves as a reception area. It is also set up for chair massage, which Wilson offers on a walk-in basis during open studio hours, from 11:30 a.m. to 2 p.m. on Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday. The rate for a 15- to 20-minute chair massage is $15.

A smaller back room is set up as a more private and tranquil space for more complete massage therapy and related treatments on a scheduled basis. The hours available for scheduling a massage are from 4 to 9 p.m. Monday through Friday, 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. on Saturday and 2 to 6 p.m. on Sunday.

Studio massage is available in 30-, 60- and 90-minute sessions at $40, $65 and $80 respectively. Among the massage techniques offered are Swedish, deep tissue, sports, stretching, trigger point, hot stone and others.

Wilson still offers on-site massage for clients who request that service. Rates are $85 for 60 minutes and $110 for 90 minutes. She also offers in-studio or on-site chair massage parties, as well as corporate chair massage service.

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PFML benefits continued from page 1

In the meantime, Caneschi emphasized, it is important for employers and workers to be aware of and prepare for the PFML and its requirements.

Gov. Charlie Baker signed the PFML into law in June 2018. Since then, the program has been in the preparation stages. The state has established a Department of Family and Medical Leave to oversee and administer it.

The program and benefits are funded by mandated premiums paid into a state PFML trust fund by employers, employees and the self-employed. Contributions will be remitted for each calendar quarter.

Payments will start being made in advance of 2021 to build up the PFML trust fund before benefits will be paid out.

Three-month delay

The regulations were finalized on July 1. Originally, that had already been the deadline for employers to start withholding pay from covered employees for initial first quarter payments into the PFML trust fund.

However, in June, Gov. Baker signed a three-month extension for payments from covered employees for initial first quarterly filings and these contributions will be used to cover individuals’ wages. Complete quarterly filings and these contributions must be submitted by Jan. 31, 2020 through MassTaxConnect.

Caneschi noted that the PFML law extends leave benefits beyond those already provided under the federal Family and Medical Leave Act, which enables employees to take up to 12 weeks of unpaid, job-protected leave in a 12-month period.

“The federal Family and Medical Leave Act provides workers job protection when they have to take a leave. We’ve said, ‘But it does not provide any pay during that time.’ The new Massachusetts program provides employees with job protection and a portion of their regular pay during a leave.”

Up to 20 weeks of paid medical leave may be taken if an individual is unable to work due to a serious medical condition.

Up to 12 weeks of paid family leave can be used to care for a family member with a serious health condition. It can also be used to bond with a child during the first 12 months after its birth or following adoption or foster care placement.

Time off can also be taken to manage family affairs when a member is on active duty in the armed forces.

Certain employees may be eligible for up to 26 weeks of combined paid family and medical leave.

Weekly benefit amounts are calculated as a percentage of a person’s earnings. The maximum weekly benefit is $850 per week.

The state has a calculator on its website where workers can find the specific benefits they can expect,” noted Caneschi.

In addition to full-time leave, another option is “intermittent leave” in which employees continue to work but can take shorter periods off during their eligibility period.

This could be applied to people who have medical conditions that allow them to work but periodically disable them for briefer periods, or which require time off for medical treatment.

Confusion about contributions

Among the aspects of PFML that have prompted the most questions are the exact responsibilities and contributions of employers and employees.

Contributions are paid by employers and/or by withholding from the pay of covered employees and eligible contract workers.

Total contributions into the trust fund are 0.75 percent of employee’s qualifying earnings, which includes 0.62 percent for medical leave and 0.13 percent for family leave.

(Originally the rate was 0.68 percent, but with the extension it was raised to 0.75 percent to make up for the lost quarter of advanced revenue coming into the trust fund.)

In general, employers with 25 or more employees are responsible for paying 60 percent of the 0.62 percent medical leave contributions. Employees and eligible 1099ers cover the remaining 40 percent through withholding deductions.

Employers are not required to cover any of the 0.13 percent for family leave, which is funded entirely by employee withholdings.

Also, employers with fewer than 25 employees are not required to cover the 60 percent of the medical leave portion of contributions.

That aspect has caused confusion, according to Caneschi.

Some people have misunderstood that, thinking that the employer’s responsibility for 60 percent is passed on to the employees in these smaller companies. This was thought to mean that workers at smaller employers would have to pay more into the trust fund than those at larger employers.

“But that is not true,” Caneschi emphasized. “Employee contributions to PFML are the same, regardless of the size of their employer.”

He explained that neither the small employer nor their employees fund the 60 percent of the medical portion. Rather, it is funded through the overall contributions in the fund.

While coverage of all employees is mandatory, there are options for how employers pay their share of coverage for employees.

For example, employers can decide on their own to cover all (or a larger portion) of their employees’ contributions, rather than withholding it from their paychecks.

“They might do that as an additional employee benefit,” said Caneschi.

Employers can also decide to opt out of the state PFML program with an approved private plan, which must provide benefits that are equal to or more generous than those provided under state PFML. If they choose to do that, they must apply for an exemption for Q1 2019 by Dec. 20.

Caneschi noted that employers should check with the Department of Family and Medical Leave website for the most up-to-date information.

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Central Berkshire Habitat moves forward with ‘workforce housing’ development

BY JOHN TOWNES

Central Berkshire Habitat for Humanity has broken ground on the Gordon-Deming Infrastructure Project and Home Development in Pittsfield, a project that sets several precedents for the organization’s larger mission of providing home ownership opportunities to people who otherwise could not afford to purchase housing.

The development, at the corner of Deming and Gordon streets, will include six condominium units in a village-style complex on a parcel of about one acre just north of the Hoosac River near Elm Street.

The property, which for many years was owned by Berkshire Gas, was donated in 2009 to Central Berkshire Habitat for the housing project.

The condominium units will be sold at affordable prices and financing. Eligibility of buyers will be based on income, credit and related factors.

“This is what is sometimes referred to as workforce housing,” said Carolyn Valli, CEO of Central Berkshire Habitat, a nonprofit organization that said that many working families are caught in a squeeze between their incomes and high rents, home prices and finance constraints.

“Many hard-working people have responsible jobs and a steady income but cannot afford a down payment on a mortgage,” she said. “Some people are paying as much as 30 percent or more of their income in rent, so they are struggling to cover their overall living costs. Available market-rate homes are either too expensive for them to buy or are substandard or not suited for a family.”

Central Berkshire Habitat (413-442-3181) or berkshirehabitat.org) is currently accepting home-ownership applications for the Gordon-Deming homes.

Gordon-Deming is one of Central Berkshire Habitat’s most ambitious projects to date. It follows Habitat’s basic model for home construction and sales, but with several variations and precedents.

“It’s unusual for us to be building a multi-family village with six homes together,” Valli said.

Construction on Gordon-Deming was started in early June, with site preparation and the installation of basic infrastructure including roads and a water system. This phase is supported by a $425,000 grant from the state MassWorks Program.

Following that, in August, the foundations will be poured for the units.

The buildings will be erected starting in September. Of those, four units in two duplexes will initially be erected during a Home Builders’ Blitz in which local building professionals will work together to bring intensive collaboration from Sept. 7-14.

So far, several businesses have committed to participate, including Allegra Companie Companies, Pariseau Heating & Cooling, RAM Electric, Tatro Flooring, White Engineering and L.P. Adams Co.

Valli said Central Berkshire Habitat is still seeking and recruiting other building and services professionals to participate in the Home Builders’ Blitz. (Interested professionals are asked to contact Valli for information.)

The other units will subsequently be built by participants in two Habitat programs.

One of them will be built by members of a Habitat paid workforce training program, called Build and Repair Corp. Participants in the program learn skills for jobs in the building and repair trades through hands-on experience on construction and repair projects, and instruction by licensed contractors and teachers from Taconic High School and McCann Technical School. They receive certificates in education credits.

The other unit will be constructed by participants in Women Build, a program that encourages women in construction trades to volunteer at Habitat.

Other Habitat volunteers will also work on the homes.

Valli said the exact timetable for the project will depend on the rate of progress. Overall, she said, the goal is to have the first units ready for occupancy by December, with overall completion and occupancy of all units within a year.

Family orientation

With its two-story, 1,400-square-foot units with four bedrooms, Gordon-Deming is specifically designed for families. Habitat workers to provide housing for people in diverse situations,” Valli said. “This particular project is oriented to families, so that will be one criterion for eligibility.”

Bidders will include those with incomes that fall within the basic range of eligibility for affordable housing established by the U.S. Dept. of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). This is basically 50 to 70 percent of local median incomes based on family size. An example would be a family of four with an income of $45,000, according to Valli.

Valli said the projected appraised market values in Gordon-Deming is about $180,000.

“The actual selling price will be adjusted down to about $150,000, so buyers will not be paying 100 percent of its value,” she said. In addition, special financing for the homes is provided with affordable down-payments and terms.

Usually Habitat has handled the sale and financing of homes itself directly. That is being handled differently with the Gordon-Deming development, which will incorporate bank financing.

“Greylock Federal Credit Union has part- nered with us and created special financing packages for at least four of the units,” said Valli. “These will be 30-year fixed-rate mort- gages at 2-percent interest.” She added that they hope to line up similar bank financing for the other two units.

Valli said that the homes are also designed to be net-zero energy structures through insul- ation materials and other energy-saving features. They will meet the criteria for that standard set by the U.S. Dept. of Energy.

“For many people, the cost of utilities and rate hikes is a major financial burden,” she said. “Houses built to the net-zero standard will use very little energy, which will significantly reduce that expense.”

Central Berkshire Habitat will also create a homeowner’s association, in which residents will oversee management of the development once the units are sold.

Valli noted that the units will include a small exterior patio and yard. The landscap- ing and maintenance of the commons will be determined by the homeowner’s association.

Worldwide mission

Founded in 1992, Central Berkshire Habiti for Humanity is an independent affiliate of Habitat for Humanity International, a global nonprofit interfaith housing organization working in nearly 2,000 communities across the United States and in 70 countries around the world.

Its mission is to encourage individuals and families to gain strength, stability, and self-reliance and control over their housing. Central Berkshire Habitat is dedicated to eliminating substandard housing and prov- iding affordable options. Most directly, it constructs new homes or rehabilitates old, sell- ing ones, which it sells to eligible buyers at affordable prices and financing terms.

It also provides training to help families gain skills and access to resources related to home ownership, and other aspects of financial management and self-sufficiency. Purchasers are also expected to contribute “sweat equity” by assisting in the construc- tion of their homes.

Habitat also operates ReStore, a retail ven- ture that sells new and used home improve- ment materials and appliances at affordable prices. ReStore operates from a facility at 399 Hubbard Ave. in Pittsfield.

Habitat relies on community participation to support these services, including volun- teer labor in the construction of homes by individuals.

Habitat also works with professional part- ners in the construction and home building trades, and with several committees.

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This year’s program will run September 25 - November 20, 2019. Sessions will take place on Wednes- day afternoons at a rotating location throughout the Berkshires. E2E is open to all ages.

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Rick Newton, President
providing labor and services through vol-
tunteer participation, in-kind contributions
or reduced prices.
It also receives support through local, state
and other grants and programs, as well as
individual and corporate sponsorships and
collections.

Long road for project
The Gordon-Deming development has
required a particularly long planning and
preparation process since Berkshire Gas
owned the parcel 10 years ago.
Issues that have had to be dealt with
include its location near the river, and the
need to accommodate and remediate wetlands
concerns.
Valli noted that they had originally planned
to preserve a round, brick former gas facility
on the property as one element of the village.
Gas had previously rented it out for other
purposes.

However, after studying the property, we
decided that the building had too many
issues, and demolition was necessary," said
Valli. The site has been a vacant lot for
several years.
Habitat developed the alternative ap-
proaches to facilitate the Gordon-Deming
project including the Home Builders’ Blitz,
to construct the basic units in a short period
time.
Habitat also developed a new approach
to prepare for the construction. Two special
work sessions were held in 2018, in which
volunteers built panels of the units.
This took place in spaces provided for free.
These included a vacant space now occupied
by Planet Fitness that was made available by
Mike Panek of Phoenix Realty, which owns
the shopping center it is located in. John
Pariseau also donated use of another space.

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collections.
New Williams Inn
continued from page 1

“Our hope is that the new Williams Inn serves as a welcoming spot for locals and visitors alike to gather and enjoy the historic atmosphere,” said Fred Puddester, vice president for finance and administration at Williams College.

The project is also intended to be an economic stimulus for Williamstown.

“We see it as a key piece of the economic development puzzle to enhance the viability of Williamstown as a place to live and visit,” said Matt Sheehy, associate vice president for finance at Williams College. “Among other impacts, it will create an anchor on Spring Street that will stimulate activity at other businesses.”

The new inn will be managed for the college by the Waterford Hotel Group, which has also been operating the current Williams Inn. The company has managed more than 90 hotels nationwide, including large corporate and chain hotels, and smaller independent inns.

Kevin Hurley of the Waterford Group has been named general manager of the new Williams Inn. Hurley has 15 years of experience in the hospitality industry, including management roles at various establishments.

Located at the base of Spring Street, the new inn will be a 58,000-square-foot structure built of stone and wood, with a design intended to be reminiscent of a contemporary New England farmhouse.

The inn will feature 64 guest rooms, a fitness center, a full-service restaurant and bar, and a 50,000-square-foot event space that includes a 2,800-square-foot ballroom and an additional 400-square-foot space directly adjacent to the ballroom.

The ballroom can accommodate up to 300 people for a seated function, or 150 people seated with a dance floor. In addition, the space can be divided into three sections for smaller events.

“We see the inn as a hub for culture, the college and the town,” said Hurley. “For example, its meeting spaces are more extensive than is typical for an inn of this size.”

The inn’s restaurant, called The Barn, will be open for lunch, buffet and dinner to guests of the inn and当地人. It will serve breakfast, lunch and dinner to guests of the inn and locals.

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Long history of hospitality

The original Williams Inn was built and operated by L.G. Treadway n 1912. By the 1950s the Treadway family had established 14 Treadway Inns in the Northeast and Florida. In 1964, the Williams Inn was sold to its employees, and then to a small hotel chain in 1971.

The present inn on Main Street was built in 1974 on property owned by Williams College. In 1979, the Williams Inn was acquired by Carl Faulkner and his wife, Marilyn.

“We owned the ground below the Williams Inn and leased it to the Faulkner’s, who owned the building and business,” explained Puddester. “When the Faulkners decided to retire in 2012, we bought the structure and the business.”

The college hired a consultant to evaluate the inn. In 2014 the college announced plans to build a new facility rather than upgrade the existing inn. “The consultant determined that the existing building had become outdated and was no longer adequate for a modern inn,” said Puddester.

“We decided to replace it with a new structure. We also decided to relocate it, to support the revitalization initiatives on Spring Street.”

Four years of planning and construction, along with a number of other projects, had to be resolved about its scale, location and environmental impact. These included existing issues related to the site, as well as the effects of the project itself.

“It involved extensive negotiations and agreements between the college, the town and the local business community and residents.”

The six-acre site is at the base of Spring Street at the intersection with Latham Street. It was previously a mix of undeveloped land and various outbuildings for storage and maintenance. There was also a former VFW hall, which has been demolished.

There is also a public parking lot there that was recently reconfigured for the new Williams Inn project, along with a number of other projects in recent years that have already changed that section of Spring Street. These have included the construction of a commercial building on the former site of a service station at the corner about a decade ago, which houses Tanglewood City Coffee and other businesses and offices.

Another more recent change was the construction in 2018 of a new building for the Williams Bookstore and other tenants. That project came at the expense of a small park-like vacant lot at the corner of Spring and Walden streets.

Along with these projects, there has also been a high volume of construction work on new facilities on nearby sections of the Williams campus as well as infrastructure and roadwork along Latham and Water streets that has complicated traffic in that section of town over the past few years.

Before it could proceed, the Williams Inn project required about a year to obtain a zoning change for the property to expand the commercial village business district designation to the site. This involved negotiations with the planning board and approval by voters at a town meeting.

“Complex project”

The preparation and construction of the Williams Inn project was very complex, due to the physical characteristics of the site and other factors.

There were concerns and some controversies that had to be resolved about its scale, location and environmental impact. These included existing issues related to the site, as well as the effects of the project itself.

“It involved extensive negotiations and agreements between the college, the town and the local business community and residents.”

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“We hope that the new Williams Inn will become a destination itself, to encourage people to stay longer and enjoy the other attractions of the northern Berkshires.”

“We hope that the new Williams Inn will become a destination itself, to encourage people to stay longer and enjoy the other attractions of the northern Berkshires.”
There were also a number of complex environmental and infrastructure issues that had to be resolved. The inn is near Denison Park. There are also wetlands, Christmas Brook, and other environmentally sensitive areas in the vicinity requiring protection. The site also contained contamination from the former service station and other activities in the area.

The college has undertaken a number of major infrastructure improvements and environmental remediation projects both to address existing issues there and to mitigate the impact of the inn. “The groundwater had dispersed petroleum and lead into the soil over the years,” said Rita Coppola-Wallace, executive director of design and construction at Williams College. “So we did an entire site remediation.”

There were also issues of drainage and runoff, and protection of wetlands and brooks. From its head at Main Street, Spring Street follows a slight but distinct decline. A long-standing problem has been the impact of water flowing down during storms and other periods of heavy runoff. Occasional flooding has been a perpetual problem.

To correct that in conjunction with the inn project, the college has constructed a comprehensive new infrastructure of culverts and other facilities to collect water and control drainage. “For example, when there were major storms, the basements of homes and other structures on Latham Street would flood,” said Coppola-Wallace. “We replaced a narrow pipe and installed a 5-by-12-foot culvert on Latham Street to carry runoff into the Green River. Homeowners there have told us that their basements have remained dry during storms as a result.”

Another impact that had to be addressed was the requirement to ensure that adequate parking would be available, both for guests of the inn and the general public. The existing parking has been reconfigured and a section specifically for the inn was created. Overall, 17 new spaces have been created, for a total of 238 spaces.

Of those, 137 are earmarked for public use and 101 have been allocated for the inn for parking by guests and other designated users. The allocation to the inn includes 71 spaces that are under its control, but which the inn’s management can shift to public accessibility during periods when its needs are less. In addition, the Williams Inn is being physically integrated into the streetscape of Spring Street and other connections to the surrounding community. “For example, we’re building a pedestrian walkway over the brook to The Barn,” said Coppola-Wallace.

She noted that the greenspace will be available for public events and outdoor performances. “For example, Images Cinema is planning to show outdoor movies there,” she said.

The college and the inn also will partner with the organizers of events like the annual Holiday Walk and July 4 parade. There also be amenities such as benches and tables around the intersection to encourage people to stroll and linger. “The base of Spring Street will still be open to traffic, but the idea is to make that area more pedestrian oriented,” Coppola-Wallace said. “As a safety measure, we’re installing cobblestone in a section of the street to slow traffic at the intersection.”

In addition, the completed project will include at least two trails: one to the east towards the college’s athletic fields, and another toward the Clark Art Museum. These will feature raised paths through wetlands. One change to the site that was already made was the installation of a small transportable tiny house on the property near the corner of Spring and Walden streets, which is used as a seasonal ice cream stand by Lickety Split. “That’s been amazingly popular this season, and is already a major draw,” said Coppola-Wallace.

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