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1765 Paxton Community News

PaxtonCommunityNews.com

June 19, 2024

Helping Hearts Foundation Donates AEDs to the Community

by Kristen Levine

The Josh Thibodeau Helping Hearts Foundation, founded by parents Deb and Ralph Thibodeau after the passing of their twelve-year-old son Josh due to a sudden cardiac arrest from a previously undiagnosed heart condition, has provided heart health awareness and education, hands-only CPR training, free heart screenings, and charitable donations of automated external defibrillators [AEDs] to the community.

"There's a lot of other people like us scattered out there, around the country, with stories like ours," Deb Thibodeau said.

Sudden cardiac arrest, or SCA, is a condition in which the heart suddenly ceases beating. While heart conditions and cardiac arrest are widely thought to be most commonplace in older people, children with previously undiagnosed conditions can also trigger SCA events. In 2011, while attending soccer camp, Josh collapsed on the field and was unable to be revived; the Thibodeaus would learn later on that he had an undiagnosed condition called hypertrophic cardiomyopathy, or HCM. HCM, as defined by the Mayo Clinic, is "a disease in which the heart muscle becomes thickened, also called hypertrophied. The thickened heart muscle can make it harder for the heart to pump blood"; one in every five hundred people carry this condition, though many go undiagnosed.

"We were consciously looking for an outlet," Thibodeau said when asked why she and her husband began the Foundation. "But it was also to educate other parents about sudden cardiac arrest in youth and the different heart conditions that may affect them. We became advocates for regular

CONTINUED PAGE 3



Annabelle and Adam Thibodeau with AEDs donated at Polar Park.

Photo Contributed

ECG (echocardiogram) screenings in children, and basically went from there and got into donating AEDs."

The Foundation, in its beginning phases, branched out into contacting similar organizations across the country, such as the Seattle-based Nick Of Time Foundation. Finding similar stories to Josh's, the Helping

Hearts Foundation also found how other families who had suffered such losses are working to educate the public and prevent SCA events.

"We had gone to a conference years ago and were able to attend one of [Nick of Time Foundation's] heart screenings," Thibodeau said. "And we thought it was really great. Screenings

are a thing we started doing as well."

"We have screened over a thousand kids in this time in various area high schools," she continued. "We've been to Wachusett District a few times and we've screened Worcester schools as well. [Helping Hearts is] fortunate enough that we can have one or two

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Paxton COA Art Gallery Best in Show Results

The winner for best in show was a tie between both beautiful paintings by Mr. Charles Belisle. His chosen paintings were German Hostel on the Lake and Cape Cod Sunrise. Every participant also received votes for their artwork as well. Participants are Ronald Thorn, Cheryl Rossier, Ann McDougle, Carol Morin and Anita Fenton.

The next exhibit at the Paxton COA Art Gallery will consist of photographic displays, and will begin mid June and run until early September. Exhibits are available for viewing from 10am to 1pm at the Senior Center, Monday through Friday.



Council of Aging Winner!

The Paxton Friends of the Council of Aging were hosted by Lynn Hartman at Hartman's Herb Farm in Barre, MA to a delicious luncheon and wreath making demonstration.

Lois Manning of Paxton was the winner of the beautiful herb wreath.



FOCOA Luncheon and Board Meeting Scheduled

The Paxton Friends of the Council of Aging were hosted by Lynn Hartman at Hartman's Herb Farm in Barre, MA. The Friends enjoyed a delicious luncheon and a wreath-making demonstration.

Lois Manning of Paxton was the winner of the beautiful herb wreath.

The Paxton Friends of the Council on Aging board members will not meet during July and August. Our September meeting will be held on Tuesday, September 10th at 9:30 a.m. at the Paxton Senior Center. Paxton seniors are invited to attend and bring their ideas to share.

Have a great summer!

June Events for Paxton Council On Aging

Paxton Senior Center, 17 West St., Paxton
Phone (508) 756-2833

MONDAYS:

Walking Group: 8:45am

Hearts And Hands Knitting Group: 10:30am

TUESDAYS & THURSDAYS:

Pitch: 12:30pm

FRIDAYS:

Mindful Movement Exercise Class: 11am

Piano Lessons beginning at 9:30am

Call to schedule, cost \$5.

JUNE 20TH: Ice Cream Social, 12:30pm. Sponsored by Mass Advantage, Music by Denis.

JUNE 27TH: Card Making with Carol, 10am. Cost \$5.

Letters to the Editor

Letters should be no more than 300 words, and must include the writer's name, address, phone number and signature. Only name, street name and town will be printed. Letters may be edited for length and clarity. On occasion, letters up to 500 words may be published as opinion pieces, at the editor's discretion. Send email to SterlingMeetinghouseNews@gmail.com or mail to: Sterling Meetinghouse News, 35 Redemption Rock Trail, Sterling, MA 01564.

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PAXTON WOMAN'S CLUB SCHOLARSHIP CEREMONY

The annual meeting of the Paxton Woman's Club was held at Hartman's Herb Farm in Barre this year. It featured the awarding of scholarships to two Wachusett Regional High School graduating seniors, Benjamin Domineck and Brady Westerlind. Benjamin is the son of Paxton residents Molly and Tony Domineck. He will be attending Worcester State University and is planning a career as a nurse practitioner. Brady is the son of Paxton residents, Lisa and Daniel Westerlind. He will be attending Stone Hill College and is planning a career in finance. The scholarships were awarded by Dr. John Paul Lock in memory of Gail Lock, his wife of 53 years. She was a devoted first and second grade teacher at Paxton Center School for over 25 years and was a member of the Paxton Woman's Club.

One photo is Benjamin Domineck, his mother Molly Domineck and Dr. John Paul Lock.

The second is a photo of parents, Lisa and Daniel Westerlind, Brady Westerlind and Dr. John Paul Lock.

photo credit Julie White

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Paxton Eighth Grader Leads Local Contribution to a Statewide Year of Service

by Ava DePasquale
 Each January, Project 351 sends student ambassadors from each of Massachusetts' 351 cities and towns to Boston for "Launch Day" to kick off a year of community service, statewide unity, and youth leadership. Project 351 was started in 2011 by Carolyn Casey and former Massachusetts Governor, Deval Patrick. What began as a one-day celebration of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. day and Gov. Deval's second inaugural has led to more than a decade of service by over 5,000 student ambassadors.

Annually, local educators from Massachusetts' cities and towns select one eighth-grade student to participate in Project 351. Paxton Center School selected Emilyanis Rodriguez as their student ambassador for 2024. Ambassadors are chosen based on Project 351's values: kindness, compassion, humility, and gratitude. Rodriguez was chosen by her teachers for demonstrating these traits.

In the fall of 2023 Rodriguez, who runs cross-country, took herself out of a race to help an injured runner. Her instinct to help her fellow runner was inspired by words she had heard from her coach many times, "As long as we help our community we'll always come out on top" repeated Rodriguez.

Rodriguez traveled to Boston with other student ambassadors this January to participate in Launch Day. While there, they heard from speakers including Gov. Maura Healey, Lt. Governor Kim Driscoll, and Sen. Ed Markey. Ambassadors learned about their upcoming year of service, in which they are supported by team leaders, supplied with "toolkits" and guided by mentors via Zoom meetings throughout the year.

On launch day Rodriguez participated in a food drive, with a Latina-led organization called La Colaborativa, which served over 27,000 people that day. March 27

kicked off Rodriguez's local spring service, during which she collaborated with Cradles to Crayons and the Paxton community to collect new and gently used clothing for youth in need across The Commonwealth.

Rodriguez assembled a small team of seventh and eighth graders to collect and sort a total of 33 bags of clothing. The collection box was housed at the Paxton Center School for the duration of the drive, which took place between March 27 and April 4.

The spring clothing drive is just one of several projects during the student ambassadors' year of service. In April, Project 351's regional ambassadors participated in an Earth Day community clean-up event at Wachusett Mountain. Each September, Project 351 dedicates a day of service in memory of 9/11.

For the student ambassadors Project 351 is a year of service, leadership training, mentorship, and statewide teamwork. For Paxton's student ambassador, it is just the beginning of what she hopes will be a lifelong calling. Rodriguez said she hopes to one day become a dental hygienist. "In the future, I want to move to Puerto Rico where my family is from, and help as many members of my community as possible," said Rodriguez, "even if it's just to provide a check-up for their teeth."

Each year of the project brings new student leaders and new issues requiring the service, humility and compassion of the student ambassadors. Next year, a new set of 351 students will be selected to carry out acts of service that transform communities across Massachusetts. For now, Rodriguez and her fellow ambassadors are hard at work making a difference in their communities. When asked what she hoped to accomplish before the year is up, Rodriguez said "I hope to touch as many hearts as I can, and to show people who might not have the same things that I do that someone cares about them."

"In the future, I want to move to Puerto Rico where my family is from, and help as many members of my community as possible."



Above: Emilyanis Rodriguez is our Paxton Ambassador for Project 351. Below: 8th Grader Emilyanis Rodriguez next to a Project 351 banner. Photos Contributed



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Garden Guru: Water Gardening

By Mark Packard



Water Gardening is becoming more and more popular now with people making their yards into their own paradise. If you think about some of the nicest places you have visited, I bet they all had some sort of water feature in the landscape. There is something that draws us to water. We pick a hotel or restaurant with water over one that doesn't have it. We pay more for waterfront property. We feel relaxed and calm on a lake or on the beach for some reason. That's why I have been building koi ponds and water features for over 20 years. Like my customers, I am drawn to water.

There are many reasons to have a water feature in your yard. You can use it to create a focal point. You can build an outdoor habitat for fish and frogs. You can use a water feature as an accent to enhance the look of a house or yard. You can even build a water feature to drown out noise from a street or neighbor. The best thing about water gardens is you never need to weed or water them!

There are many misconceptions about ponds so I figured I would clear some of them up. Many people think water gardens require a lot of maintenance. The truth is, a well-built pond will only take 10 hours of maintenance per year! If you have the proper equipment, the correct amount of plants, and the right amount of fish, your pond will stay balanced and won't need a lot of work at all. It is nothing like maintaining a swimming pool.

Another misconception is that ponds attract mosquitoes. The fact is, mosquitoes don't breed in moving water so as long as your pond is built correctly, you won't have any stagnant water for mosquitoes to breed. Additionally, most people have fish in their ponds so if mosquitoes do get in the water the fish would eat them instantly.

Some people think that ponds are not safe. Most ponds are only 2-3 ft deep and they are built with shelves on the sides. The gradual entry makes it safer than a pool. Ponds also create a learning experience where kids are encouraged to play in the pond catching frogs, watching and feeding the fish, or playing in the waterfall on a hot day. If you want the sound of a waterfall but don't want any maintenance, you can build a pondless waterfall. The pondless waterfall doesn't have any standing water and can be turned on and off.

If you are building your own pond, keep it close to the entertaining area and always face the waterfall towards the viewing area. Your pond should have shelves for water plants, a fish cave, and be at least 2ft deep so your fish can survive the winter.

Looking for inspiration? We are hosting our annual pond tour on June 22nd from 9-2. The bus will arrive to pick everyone up at 8:30 in Sterling and depart promptly at 9am. We will be visiting some of the area's nicest



ponds and gardens and ending at my house for lunch. Do you think your pond is worthy of being on the tour? Call us to let us know! You could win a \$200 gift card if you are voted "best pond". 978-422-0071 For more advice on backyard projects email Mark@sterlinggreenery.com Gardening questions? Please call 978-407-2568.

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Tax Talks

with Jennifer Lovett, IRS Enrolled Agent (EA)

(Owner/operator of Liberty Tax Service in Holden, Clinton, Framingham, Marlborough, Worcester, Spencer and Athol)

Hello there fellow taxpayers, here again to chat about an actual favorite topic: tax dodges! We've all heard about those crafty maneuvers people try to pull to lower their tax bills.

But...the taxman cometh, and this year it looks like some of those sneaky tactics might be getting the boot. So, grab your cup of coffee, settle in, and let's dish about some that may be on the chopping block.

The Offshore Shuffle: Ah, the allure of offshore accounts, the tropical breeze, the hidden assets, the not-so-hidden tax evasion. But hold onto your sun hats, folks, because tax authorities are cracking down on this beach party. Increased international cooperation means it's getting harder to hide those funds offshore without Uncle Sam catching wind of it.

Cryptocurrency: The wild west of the financial world. The IRS is absolutely tightening its grip on crypto transactions, leaving fewer dark alleys for tax evaders to hide in. Going so far as to creating specific job positions and hiring subject matter experts in order to focus on boat loads of money that has been invested in decentralized wallets.

Bogus Business Expenses: While that "business trip" to Hawaii might've been a blast, unless you can prove it was a legitimate business expense, the IRS isn't buying it. So, say goodbye to those extravagant write-offs and hello to a more realistic approach to deducting expenses. However, don't file your business alone, find an expert to really dig in to find every penny you can to write off, just not bogus ones. Your business structure also matters! Your business should never be "set it and forget it." Find a trusted partner to review your business structure on an ongoing basis to make sure you're taking advantage of every allowed write-off and tax benefits you're entitled to. Keep in mind, changing your entity could save tens of thousands of dollars every year.

The Trust Trap: Trusts can be a powerful tool for estate planning and asset protection. But when used to dodge taxes, they can also raise some serious red flags. So, if you're thinking of setting up a trust to shield your assets from the taxman, spend time meeting with an actual trust lawyer and an experienced preparer to make sure you're setting up your trust on the up and up.

Overstating Charitable Contributions: We all want to support our favorite causes, but inflating your charitable contributions to score a bigger deduction? Not cool, folks. The IRS is wise to this game, and they're not afraid to slap you with penalties if you're caught playing fast and loose with your donations.

The Phantom Farmer: Rolling fields, fresh air, and generous tax breaks. But before you start digging up your backyard and planting rows of carrots, remember this: the IRS isn't fooled by wannabe farmers looking to cash in on agricultural tax benefits. This is something that does come up in our lovely Wachusett area quite often, just because your town might be Right to Farm does not mean having two chickens let's you write off thousands but on the flip side it also may mean you may qualify depending on your activity even though you may not operate as a full-fledged dairy farm. Knowledge is power in this category.

This is a rundown of a few of the top 12 tax dodges that might be facing extinction this year. As I have written before, the ever-changing world of taxes is just that. My policy is that honesty is always the best policy when it comes to taxes. But you can always structure your finances honestly while saving money at the same time. And if you're ever in doubt, don't hesitate to reach out to your friendly neighborhood tax professional for guidance. Until next time, smile and file!



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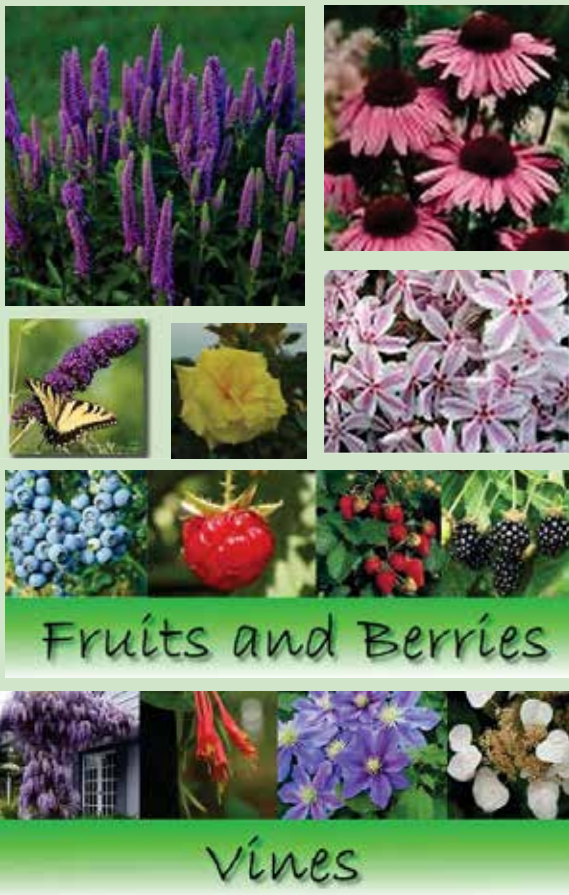


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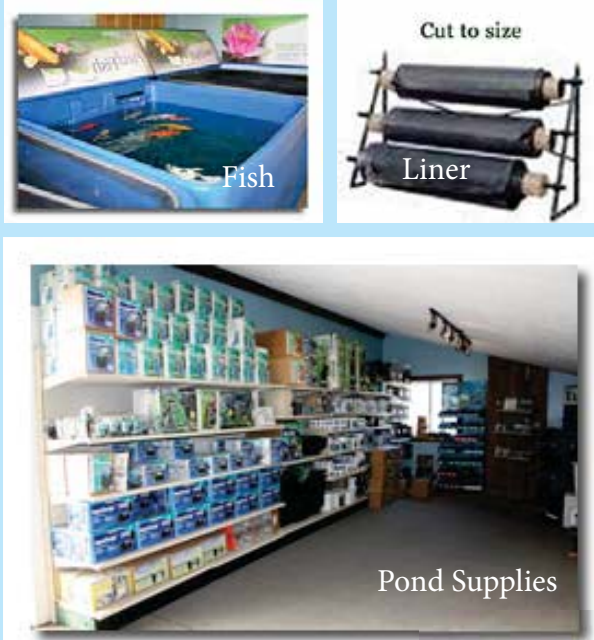
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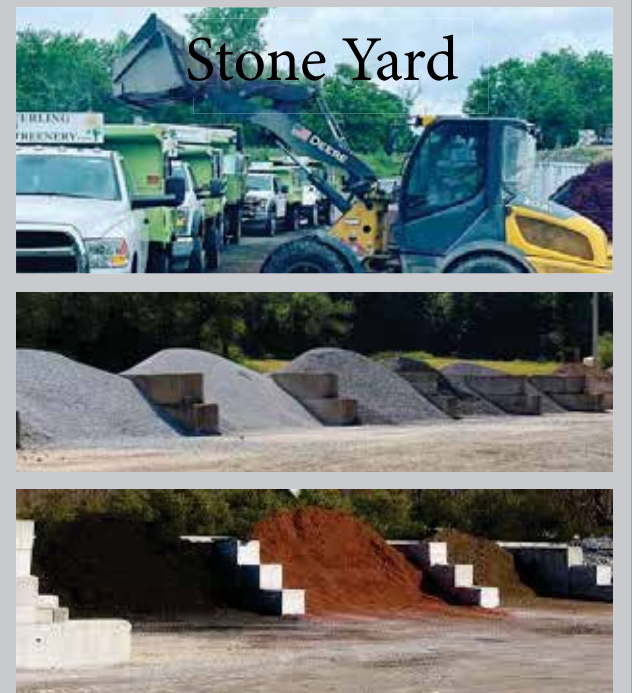


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Working with a Buyer's Agent

By Karen Packard

Buying a home is always an exciting and stressful situation especially in today's market. The low inventory and bidding wars are still driving home prices up and making it hard for some buyers to find a home within their price range. Having the right buyer's agent helping is extremely important to help guide you through the home buying process.

Here are a few ways that a real estate expert will make a big difference:

- **Experience** – an experienced agent knows what it takes to get you the home of your dreams. They will know the current market, be an expert in the towns you are looking in and help you navigate any hurdles that come up.
- **Education** – Your agent will help educate you on the market conditions, how to craft a competitive offer and help you understand the buying process
- **Negotiations** – Your agent will negotiate your offer as well as any repairs or credits needed after the home inspection. Make sure your agent has the experience needed and/or be a certified negotiation specialist to get you the best deal possible.
- **Contracts** – an expert agent will explain and guide you through the contracts and any disclosures you need to sign to make your offer.
- **Pricing** – An expert agent will know the comparable houses and help you submit an offer that helps you get the house without overpaying for the property.

Sold Single Family Homes Sold in Paxton in May 2024

- 274 Pleasant Street Sale Price \$415,000
- 2 Pierce Circle Sale Price \$560,000
- 443 Marshall Street Sale Price \$740,000
- 12 Mount View Dr. Sale Price \$750,000
- 23 Brigham Road Sale Price \$815,000

The real estate market is always changing and making sure you have the right agent is key. You want to meet with your agent before shopping to go over what the home buying process entails and make sure you like and trust the agent you are hiring. You need to know you can trust the advice they are giving you and rely on them for their experience, expertise, knowledge and resources. Hiring the right agent will give you the best chance to achieve your home buying goals.

If you are planning on buying a home this year, feel free to call or email me to set up a buyer consultation and see what it takes to hire an agent to represent you. My phone number is 978-407-2568 or email kpackardrealtor@gmail.com.



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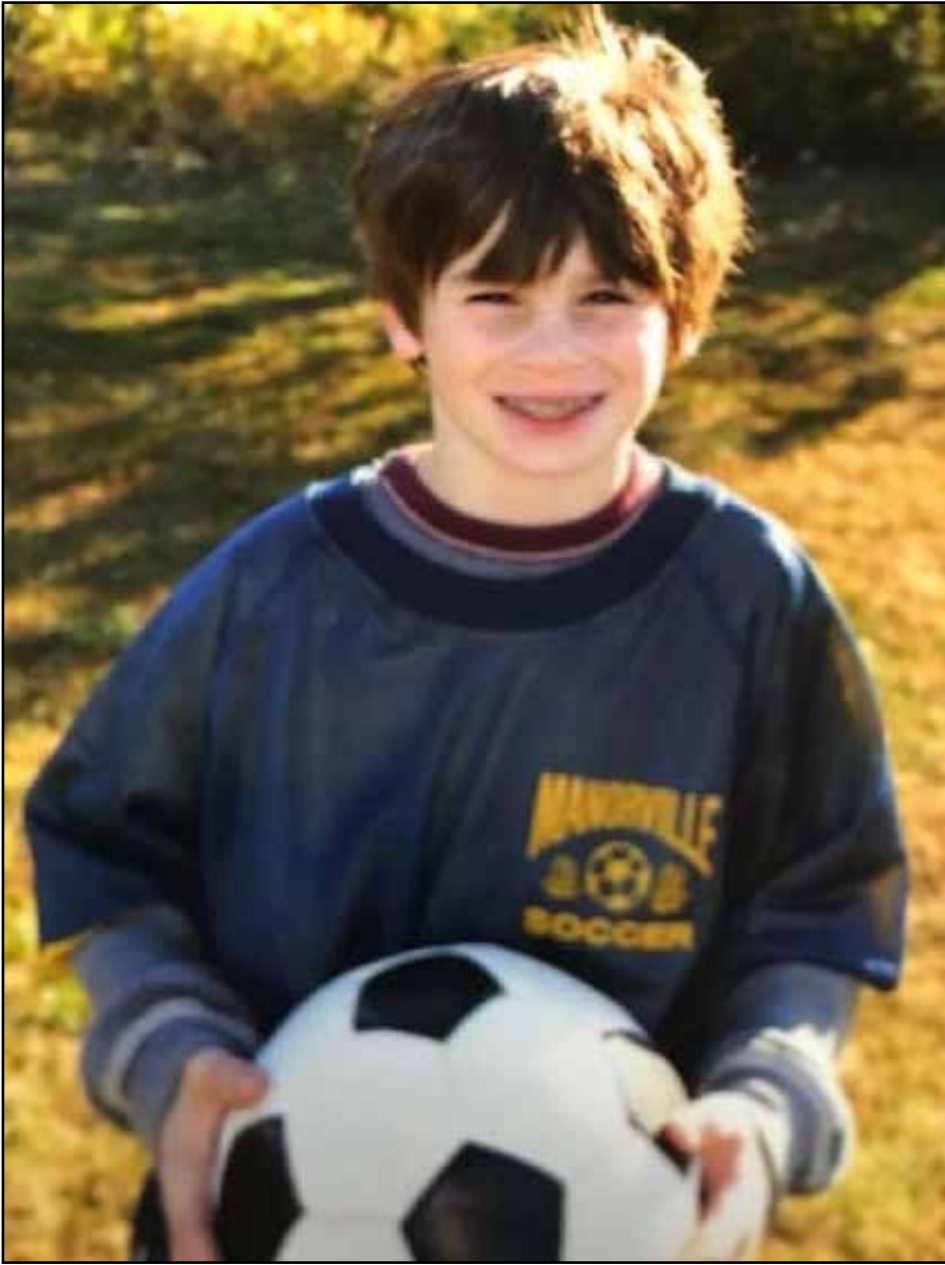


Photo of Josh Thibodeau

Photo Contributed

heart screenings a year. All of our volunteers take their own time to help us...Covid slowed [screenings] down a bit, understandably, but we're coming back now."

Screenings of family members post-SCA events are common, checking to see if other family members carry similar or other potential heart complications and defects.

"For obvious reasons, you want to make sure that there's not another child with [a condition] or a parent passing it down," Thibodeau said. "[The screening] with us found that Josh's younger brother Adam has another potentially fatal heart condition called Long QT Syndrome. That highlighted another reason why we found the importance of donating AEDs to families: we were faced with the question, 'should we get an AED?' And all of this was in the throes of losing Josh."

"After [the screening] with an ECG they were able to discover Adam had Long QT Syndrome, and of course everyone would assume that's what Josh passed away from, but it was a completely different condition. [Josh's] condition affects one out of every five hundred people, Adam's is one out of every two thousand. These heart conditions in youth, they're not so rare, as well as sudden cardiac arrest. It loops into why we do what we do: we don't want any family to have to go through what we've gone through."

After this diagnosis at age nine, Adam Thibodeau was able to receive medication and treatment that has kept his condition in check without issues, showing the life preserving long-term benefits provided by preventative screenings.

While the pandemic hampered the Foundation's ability for large-scale heart screening gatherings, Thibodeau noted that they are rebuilding momentum and introducing the Foundation's work to more families and organizations. The Foundation is funded by contributions by sponsors and community support and donations, as well as the Annual Josh Thibodeau Classic Soccer Tournament, a yearly soccer tournament that "highlights Josh's love for soccer and having fun," Thibodeau said. "We primarily have two avenues of fundraising, mostly the soccer tournament."

Thibodeau went on to say, "[Funding is raised] by people in our community that continue to support the soccer tournament every year, or area businesses who donate raffles or money to sponsor this event. If it wasn't for them we couldn't do this; we are so grateful after all this time because foundations lose volunteers or sponsors for all kinds of reasons. We have been very fortunate."

The efforts of fundraising have very tangible results for the community. To date, the Foundation has donated 108 AEDs to organizations, youth sporting teams, and families with children diagnosed with potentially-fatal heart conditions. These donations take financial pressure off recipients, as AED units on average cost \$1500 per unit, and insurances do not always cover the costs. On April 19, the Foundation presented five Worcester Little League teams with eleven AEDs at Polar Park, the home stadium for the Worcester Red Sox semi-professional baseball team.

We were able to use the venue; one of the people working there, PJ Barry,

used to be a friend of Josh's," Thibodeau said. "We had actually discovered that he has a heart condition at one of our screenings, and he has since had to have a heart ablation surgery...he's become a board member helping with our cause. We were very fortunate that we were able to go to the WooSox and present these AEDs to the Little Leagues."

Beyond heart screenings and AED donations, the Foundation also holds classes that teach hands-only CPR and response techniques to cardiac events.

"We teach hands-only CPR and how to use an AED," Thibodeau said. "They go hand in hand. We teach the importance of checking the scene, the importance of calling 911 right away, showing people correct hand placement [for CPR]. Children can do it; we teach a lot of kids, and they really get into it."

Hands-only CPR, which does not utilize mouth-to-mouth breaths, instead uses center of chest hand compressions; it is frequently taught to follow the beat of BeeGee's song "Staying Alive", which follows the compression beat of 100 to 120 beats per minute. Applying CPR and AED support to someone suffering a sudden cardiac arrest can help sustain life viability until emergency responders can reach them, a period of time that is vital to preserve chances of survival.

"The most important thing with an AED and sudden cardiac arrest is that with every minute lost that you can't revive the person, ten percent of their life viability is lost," Thibodeau said. "Say it took you three minutes to get the AED pads on a person; they've

already lost thirty percent, and they're at seventy percent viability that you can bring them back. That's a big message we have, as well as [AED maintenance] like making sure that the pads and batteries haven't expired, things like that."

The response to the Foundation's work has been positive, with Thibodeau noting, "It's always been positive, and it's a great way to share Josh with people. It all goes back to Josh. We love donating the AEDs, holding screenings, teaching CPR, raising heart health awareness. It's emotional; we're talking about this great, wonderful twelve year old kid, and he was here one day and the next he wasn't."

"We've had different people reach out to us because of Josh and Adam's story, [families] taking their child to the doctor and being diagnosed with heart conditions. That's Josh's legacy; this is how we can honor him. I find that it's emotional, but when people listen and understand, and follow up with 'thank you for sharing this story', it means the world."

"It takes a lot out of you," she continued. "You're reliving it all. The WooSox donation event was a great thing to do, but if Josh didn't die I wouldn't be doing this. [So] in those moments, hearing the positives from people we've helped makes sense why we're doing this."

To learn more about the Foundation's mission, contribute to the Josh Classic soccer tournament, and learn more about SCAs and heart health, visit <https://joshthibodeauhelpinghearts.com>.

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STEP 3

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Younger workers must balance financial priorities

Losing a spouse is one of the most painful experiences anyone can have. Unfortunately, widows and widowers have to deal with more than just the emotional trauma — they also must consider a range of financial issues. If you've recently been

widowed, what financial moves should you consider? For starters, don't rush into any major decisions. If you're still in the grieving process, you are unlikely to be in the best shape to make significant choices affecting your finances and your life. But once you feel ready to look at your situation objectively and make appropriate choices, consider the following steps:

- Review your finances. Look at your entire financial picture — your assets, investments, debts and income. If you and your spouse had communicated well about your finances, and you shared decisions, you hopefully won't encounter any big surprises. But if your spouse was the partner who mostly handled financial matters, you may need to get up to speed quickly on what you have and what you owe. And if your spouse had provided a large amount of your household income, you will also need to determine what changes you may need to make to your lifestyle.

- Address insurance issues. If you will receive a death benefit from your spouse's insurance policy, what will you do with the money? It may prove helpful in funding your own retirement or meeting other financial goals. But you'll also want to be clear about what other beneficiaries, such as your children, might receive. And while you're looking at insurance, you also might want to look at your own policies — do you need to change beneficiaries?

- Review your Social Security options. If you are at least 60 and you were married at least nine months, you may be entitled to Social Security survivor benefits. (If you remarry before age 60, you typically cannot receive survivor

benefits, but you can reinstate them if this subsequent marriage ends.) The amount of your survivor's benefits depends on your age and the age of your deceased spouse. You can't claim your deceased spouse's benefits along with your own retirement benefits, so if you qualify for survivor and retirement benefits, you'll receive the larger amount. Depending on your situation, you might come out ahead by delaying your retirement benefits, giving them the chance to grow, while you accept survivor benefits. For more details on receiving Social Security benefits, visit the Social Security Administration's website at www.ssa.gov.

- Review your estate plans. The death of a spouse can certainly affect your family's estate plans. So, it's a good idea to review these plans to see what changes, if any, need to be made. When conducting this review, you'll benefit from working with an estate-planning professional. Finally, keep in mind that you don't have to go it alone during this difficult time. If you're already working with a financial professional, they can help. If you aren't currently working with one, now might be the time to start. By looking at your finances and your family situation holistically, a financial professional can provide guidance that can help ease the stress you are naturally feeling.

Few events are as sad as losing a spouse. But when you feel ready, start taking the steps necessary to continue forward on your life's journey.

This article was written by Edward Jones for use by your local Edward Jones Financial Advisor.

Edward Jones, Member SIPC

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“Team Puppy Raisers” Needed to Work with Future NEADS Service Dogs

PRESS RELEASE

NEADS World Class Service Dogs, based in Princeton, Mass., is expanding the volunteer Puppy Raiser Program with the launch of Team Puppy Raisers. NEADS is actively recruiting volunteers in Eastern and Central Massachusetts who are interested in working as a team to collaboratively raise a dog. Applications are available online.

These Puppy Raisers share responsibility to raise a NEADS Service Dog in Training for 12 to 16 months, working on critical socialization and basic obedience. Together, they will work out a schedule to ensure the NEADS dog is cared for seven days a week. The dog is then moved into a prison facility to finish its Service Dog training or is chosen as a Breeder Dog.

NEADS World Class Service Dogs change lives every day but cannot do so without proper training. NEADS has ramped up its Puppy Raiser program to meet the ever-growing demand for Service Dogs. The expansion to a team structure option will allow even more volunteers to have the capability to take on this commitment. The Team Puppy Raiser program complements its Prison PUP Program, through which many NEADS dogs are trained.

Team Puppy Raiser candidates must be willing and able to:

Welcome a puppy over the age of 8 weeks old into the home.

Create a schedule with a teammate to ensure the NEADS dog is cared for and provided a safe, healthy, and loving environment seven days a week.

Follow the progress of the Service

Dog in Training with teammates.

Practice training and socialization exercises, as well as daily exercise, as directed by the NEADS Raiser Instructor.

Attend regular classes with a NEADS Raiser Instructor, both on and off campus.

“The need for Service Dogs continues to grow and having the proper training and a loving raiser is critical for our Service Dogs. While we realize the commitment that we ask our Team Puppy Raisers to make is a major one, the raising process is collaborative and the team option may suit those who are interested in dividing and conquering the raising process,” said Heather Romanoff, NEADS Manager of Raiser Operations. “Our volunteers have the once-in-a-lifetime experience (or hopefully more!) of preparing these amazing dogs for a career of helping others with disabilities, including those who are deaf or physically disabled, children who have autism, or veterans who have PTSD; or providing therapeutic assistance in a variety of professional settings.”

Heidi Kaufman, from Ashland, Mass., and her teammate, Ralph Hughes of Sharon, Mass., are now raising their second puppy as a team. This is Heidi's third NEADS dog, and her second time having a teammate. Hughes was a three-time Weekend Puppy Raiser before joining the Team Raiser Program.

“I loved my first experience raising a NEADS Service Dog and wanted to do it again, but due to an increase in



personal and work commitments, I was concerned about having the time to do so,” said Kaufman. “The new Team Raiser option is an amazing opportunity for me to have this incredible experience once again. It is life-changing not only for the clients who eventually match with the dog, but also for me.”

Those who best qualify to become Team Puppy Raisers range from young families to couples to retirees to individuals. Most importantly, the candidates need to be able to devote time, energy, and love to successfully socialize and work with a NEADS Service Dog in Training. Socializing consists of following NEADS outlined field trip levels to expose the dog to everyday life in public settings, including malls, restaurants, and grocery stores to familiarize with

various sounds, sights, and people.

Candidates are permitted to have other pets at home, with the approval of NEADS staff. NEADS dogs may also go to work with their Team Puppy Raisers, with the approval of their employers and NEADS.

An interested candidate begins the process by completing an application. If it's a good fit, a NEADS staff member will be in touch to schedule an orientation, which is followed by a home visit with NEADS staff prior to receiving the Service Dog in Training. NEADS provides a “Service Dog in Training” vest, as well as all food, veterinary care, and flea, tick, and heartworm medications for the duration of the dog's training, at no cost. Questions can be submitted via an online form on www.neads.org.

Ten Athletes Move Forward in Ninja Season after Local Gym Qualifier

By Samantha Aeschbacher

As Alan Seaback explained, and demonstrated, the course for the first Ninja Challenge of the season, competitors ranging from ages ten to 17 focused on his movements, tracking the new route they would soon have to race.

The Ultimate Ninja Athlete Association, or UNAA, is “the Global League of World OCR for Ninja Competitions,” according to their website. Seaback, the Sterling Gym Ninja Program Director, ran through the rules for the day’s qualifying event that took place March 2 and 3.

The UNAA rules dictate that a competitor has three fails before their run is complete, along with the number of obstacles, the scoring system and how participants are chosen to move forward in the season.

Emily Waters, a 14-year-old freshman at Essex North Shore Agricultural and Technical School, joined the world of Ninja competitions three years ago after initially watching her sister compete. Although the Ninja world didn’t captivate her sister, Waters was all in.

“I really like how you can be challenged and you’re doing something active that’s also fun, and there’s so many different varieties of things you can do while you’re in here,” she said.

The course for the qualifier included obstacles like Devil Steps, Warped Wall and the Salmon Ladder, staples that also appear on the television show “American Ninja Warrior.”

Waters’ mother, Karen, said their family had seen the show on TV but didn’t find out about local competitions until Emily began the classes.

“Emily was always into hanging from things and climbing up things, and when the gym opened back up after COVID, I thought it would be



Emily Waters (center) observes as the Ninja course is explained to competitors at the March 2 and 3 qualifying event. Photo Contributed

something she would really enjoy,” said Karen. “She started classes and loved it.”

From there, Emily brought the Ninja challenges home, with Karen stating that Emily was constantly working with her hands, trying to climb trees out in the woods, and any tricks she could make work.

“It was a really nice, natural fit,” Karen said.

Although Emily initially had some reservations about participating in the competitions, according to Karen, encouragement from the staff at the North Andover Gym and her coach coaxed Emily into the race.

“The confidence piece (is the most difficult) because it’s also really mental and a lot of times it can seem scary and hard, but if you actually

believe in yourself, you can do it,” Emily said.

Emily stated that one piece of advice she would give to someone interested in competing would be to make sure you’re practicing and focusing on good technique instead of speed.

“It’s just nice to see her doing something that makes her happy,” Karen said. “I like that she enjoys the mental and physical challenges, and the camaraderie of the team and the staff.”

Dylan Kasturi, a 16-year-old junior at Doherty High School, started Ninja classes at eight before taking a break. Coming back just a year ago though, Kasturi feels like he’s improving and enjoying the competitions. Following the course

walkthrough, he ran as the first competitor of the day.

“When Coach Alan said ‘you’re going first, Dylan, I was like oh crap,’” Kasturi said, laughing. “I did not wanna go first, but you know what, it felt good cause I did really good I think - it gave me more confidence.”

Kasturi’s goals for the weekend included focusing on not rushing through and making sure he didn’t fail on early obstacles.

“When I started back when I was a little kid, I would rush stuff because I would want to get a really fast time,” he explained. “I realized that just made me make more mistakes and ended up lowering my placement. It’s a mental shift to just take your time.”

Although Kasturi’s time didn’t move him forward to the next competition, he stated the Ninja community is fun and that he enjoys the physicality of it all, and that it provides a way to exercise mentally.

“Lifting weights... it’s black-and-white,” Kasturi explained. “It’s either you’re strong enough to do this or you’re not, either you have the right form or you don’t. But this, there’s a lot of room for improvisation. There’s not just one way to get through an obstacle.”

For others that may be interested in Ninja competitions, Kasturi said that practicing will allow you to get better on the obstacles, and that blisters are normal.

“Get practicing wherever you can and have fun,” he concluded.

Ten athletes from the Sterling Gym qualifier event achieved scores that will move them onto the next level of the UNAA season nine: Audrey Harrington (7U), Violet Summers (7U), Vivian Stitham (9U), Maggie D’Orsi (11U), Chance Almond (7U), Ethan Rouleau (7U), Benjamin Capone (11U), Alex Ascone (13U), Leo Patriss (13U), and Ryan Smith (13U).



Dylan Kasturi goes through the run as the first competitor of the weekend.

Photo Contributed

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Kicking Into Shape: New Soccer and Fitness Center Opens Locally

By Matt LaBarre

The new sign is up, and there's already a great deal of excitement about a new business serving the region: Soccer Asylum, located at 603 Pleasant Street in Paxton.

General Manager Matt Ganas explains how the Soccer Asylum came to Paxton. "Our owner, Rick Porter, along with a group of us who were instructors, were conducting soccer trainings and clinics throughout the area, renting space in schools and halls for the past couple of years. Rick happened to attend a birthday party here at this facility and was impressed with the space." Porter proceeded to negotiate a purchase of the club, and Soccer Asylum was created!

While soccer will certainly be the primary focus, other sports training will also be conducted at the facility. "We designed the new facility, turf, and equipment to include field hockey, lacrosse, football, and baseball instruction too," Ganas continues. "Our programs will involve youth and adult leagues, clinics, camps, and schools in all those sports, although soccer will be our primary focus."

The goal is to provide a facility for young people in the region which includes Paxton, Sterling, Princeton, Holden, Spencer, Leicester, Rutland, and Worcester to learn and play without having to travel an hour to

get those opportunities. According to Ganas, there are 6000 children in this region who play youth sports, and the facility is intended for that population.

The tennis courts have been replaced by all new turf and the entire facility has been renovated. Outdoor fields are also planned, but the renovations aren't limited to the beautiful new indoor sports area.

The gym and cardio areas have been renovated, and strength training, so important in all sports, will be available. "Adults can take classes, or just use the gym," Ganas says. Gym memberships will be available, and 20 to 30 classes per week are anticipated. Classes will be offered in small group settings with up to 4 individuals in each class, and the soccer package includes gym membership. "We're excited to announce that Choice Physical Therapy of Spencer is offering physical therapy services here as a satellite location," Ganas adds. "Our training will be provided by certified fitness instructors."

The indoor salt-water pool has been updated, and is now managed by Aquaspot. Youth swimming instruction will still be offered through the British Swim School.

Another addition to the facility is The Sky Deck, run by the Seven Saws Brewing Co. "We envision The Sky Deck will be a great place to watch



games on television, whether or not you are waiting for your children," Ganas suggests, "and you will be able to purchase Gatorade, sodas,

beer, and wine."

Drop by the Soccer Asylum to take a tour, or learn more by visiting the website: www.soccerasylum.com

Paxton Library Events - June & July 2024

ALL MONTH

Ready, Set, Grow: Seed of the Month Club - Last one of the season
June: Golden Zucchini Squash - One packet per person, available when you check out an item; no holds or reserving; while supplies last. Sponsored by the Friends of Richards Memorial Library (FRML).

Drop-in Crafts for Youth: Summer Reading-themed Stick Together Community Poster. Sponsored by the Friends of Richards Memorial Library (FRML).

EVENTS

Saturday - June 15

Paxton Days at Center Field and Bandstand

10am-2pm: Visit library table to learn about the 2024 Summer Reading Program.

10am-1pm - Photo Scavenger Hunt for Families. \$50 prize.

11am-1pm: Balloon Twisting with Dave the Balloon Guy

Sponsored by FRML

Wednesday - June 19

Closed for Juneteenth holiday

Thursday - June 20 through August 1, 2024

Read, Renew, Repeat Summer Reading Program

Sponsored by FRML

- Registration begins on June 20 (In-person only)
- Earn reading prizes
- Attend fun programs
- Help reach our community goal of 1,000 reading hours.

Thursday - June 20 through August 1, 2024

Adult Summer Reading Program (SRP)

Sponsored by FRML

Each day you check out books, you will receive an entry ticket. One adult reader will win a gift card each week.

Gift Card dates: 6/28, 7/3, 7/12, 7/19, 7/26, and 8/1

After the weekly winner is drawn, we will start over, so come in often! You may win only one time this summer.

BONUS Prize: All adults who participate in the SRP will be entered to win a KindlePaperWhite. (One winner will be announced on 8/2).

Tuesday - June 25 through Friday - July 5

Summer Riddle Scavenger Hunt

Solve the riddle by searching for clues in the J/Y room and earn a small prize! New indoor scavenger hunts every 2 weeks during Summer Reading.

Tuesday - June 25 - 6:30-7:30pm

Positivity Magic Show

Facilitator of Fascination, Jonas Cain, combines magic with music and storytelling to share the magic of positivity! All are welcome.

This program is supported in part by a grant from the Paxton Cultural Council, a local agency which is supported by the Mass Cultural Council, a state agency.

Thursday - June 13, July 11 from 2-3pm

Friends of Richards Memorial Library Meeting

Tentative dates based on Special Town Meeting & election results.

WEEKLY EVENTS

Wednesdays, 10:30-11:15am

Outdoor Story & Play Time

Join us for healthy outdoor play and learning in the library yard. We sing songs, go on scavenger hunts, tell stories, do art & experiments, and have fun.

(We move inside during inclement weather - check RML website for updates.)

• 6/19: No storytime. Library is closed.

• 6/26 and 7/3 -Summer Reading Program - Music and Movement Storytimes with Julie Stepanek

Thursdays, 3:30-4:30pm

Chess Time at the Library

Play, learn, and teach chess together. Other board games available. All ages and skill levels welcome.

REMINDER: The Finance Committee will be meeting at the Paxton Public Safety Building on June 5, 2024, at 5:30pm, to finalize their recommendations for FY25 budgets including the library's budget. The meeting is open to the public, and may also be viewed live at WPAX Paxton Public Access TV on YouTube.

The FY25 Library Budget slideshow may be viewed here: <https://rmlpaxton.org/news>





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