

#### **COVER STORY**

## Cheap shot?

#### Senior Center is much better than letter writer's criticism infers

By ROD LEE

The first reaction upon reading Pamela J. Capp's letter to the editor of the Telegram & Gazette in which she asserted that the Worcester Senior Center is "a disgrace to all of the taxpaying seniors of Worcester" was, "say what?" The second was, perhaps familiarity breeds contempt. Maybe Ms. Capp had firsthand evidence of the Center's inferiority when compared to similar facilities in

"Auburn, Barre, or even Leominster." Maybe a fresh look was in order, given that we hadn't been up on the hill since U.S. military and Worcester neighborhood hero Herb Adams was feted there a while back

First, however, a call to District 5 City Councilor Gary S. Rosen who is also president of the "Friends" group that as a separate nonprofit raises funds to supplement the dollars the Senior Center gets from the city.

"It's a great facility," Mr. Rosen said. "Great programs. And I'm a senior myself! It saves lives."

Backlash letters from several offended fans of the Senior Center echoed Mr. Rosen's sentiments. One of these was penned by Chester J. Babinski, who described the complex as a beauty and added "one must look behind the walls of the Center to appreciate the activity and programs offered." The Center, Mr. Babinski

said, has "a very capable director" in Amy Vogel Waters and "a super supporting staff." It also has, as Mr. Rosen pointed out as well, "wonderful neighbors—Worcester Academy and the Girls Club. Thanks to Worcester Academy, seniors are allowed to use the track at Gaskill Field for their walk programs."

When we caught up with Mr. Babinski while he was having lunch with his wife Anna at the Senior Center on September 18th and commended him for his ringing defense of the complex, he smiled and said, "my letter was written with sincerity and enthusiasm. We've been coming here ever since it opened, having lunch and walking the track."

Councilor Rosen said he has heard "very few negatives" about the Senior Center and surmised that Ms. Capp "was looking at the other two-thirds of the building that is not occupied...the old nurses' dorm. I would love to see senior apartments there."

He added, "(Ms. Capp) also talked about the neighborhood. We're working on that, doing as much as we can. There has been drug activity, crime, but I've heard of no one not going to the Center because of it and we don't have night events." Between the Senior Center, the Girls Club and "the pool" (on Vernon Hill), "there is so much good going on," he said.

For whatever reason, Ms. Capp is obviously unaware of the Senior Center's many strengths. Ms. Waters, the Center's unflashy, proficient director, who has been with Elder Affairs since the 1980s (she was assistant director of the Center when it opened in 2000), took Ms. Capp's swipe in stride. "I was happy, it generated four letters [of rebuttal]! " she said. "I think everyone agreed that person must not have come into the building. The outside, we try hard to keep it up. [The grounds] are old. We have community gardens and the seniors maintain all of it."

The Center is rich in programming, with top-notch staffers like Yung Phan who is coordinator of multi-cultural programs and senior services. Ms. Waters said that Ms. Phan's Thursday-morning ESL class involving Vietnamese, Cambodians and Chinese "is like a model for other groups to emulate" (it is preceded by "two sessions of Tai Chi"). She said of Ms. Phan, "I promoted her because she's the expert. Now Chinese, African-Americans, Albanians, Iraqi, Latino elder groups have formed."

Ms. Capp would have to have blinders on to not see all the Center has to offer: aerobics, yoga, "various evidence-based programs like 'A Matter of Balance' to deal with a fear of falling," a library ("it's run on the honor system, read it, put it back"), card playing, bingo ("people get their lucky seats early"), a computer lab, the Bobby M's diner operated by Quinsigamond Community College, a "pay-as-

you-go" federal lunch program, a health and wellness clinic "upstairs," and Ms. Waters' favorite—"weights that Velcro onto your wrist, we do it for osteoporosis and you get nutritional information to build bones. I do it."

With three to four hundred seniors using the Center daily, with partners like Centro Las Americas (whose Elizabeth Nguyen is planning for an October 17th pot-luck dinner), with "ten rent-paying organizations" in house, the Center is everything Ms. Capp says it is not.

"We have new people coming in every day, which is exciting," Ms. Waters told Inside Worcester. As for Ms. Capp's letter? "It was a nice little PR exercise," Ms. Waters said. Bad publicity countered by tons of good publicity. A good thing.



#### **OUR TOWN/ROD LEE**

# A blown save?

## Did our political elite let Mr. Binienda's seat slip from city's hands?

Two very different moods, as might be expected, when I dropped in on incumbent 16th Worcester District State Rep. **Daniel M. Donahue's** festive victory celebration at City Lights on Grafton St. the evening of



September 9th, and then Moses S. Dixon's far-moresubdued post-primary-vote gathering at Beatnik's on Park Ave—after he was vanquished in his attempt to be the Democratic nominee to

replace the late John J. Binienda in the 17th Worcester District. First, the 16th. Having been graciously invited by George Kerxhalli of the Grafton Hill Business Association to moderate a debate between Mr. Donahue and Joshua J. Perro at Broad Meadow Brook on September 3rd, I witnessed firsthand telling exchanges between the two candidates. This was especially true when they were allowed a chance to question each other directly, to end the evening's program before an overflow crowd. Here Mr. Perro pursued in earnest his oft-asserted campaign theme that Mr. Donahue is "100 percent aligned with the speaker of the House" to the detriment of the district. "The issues here and in Winthrop are radically different," Mr. Perro said. Mr. Donahue rebutted, firmly. "Every vote I take I listen to the needs of the district." he said. As for instance, he said, "a bill for Level 3 school s to avoid them falling to Level 4." Throughout, Mr. Perro tried to distinguish himself from Mr. Donahue by tying his foe to the speaker. Right up to his closing remarks, when he said "I am not trying to be negative. I'm

going after my opponent's voting record. Dan Donahue doesn't speak with an independent voice." To which Mr. Donahue responded that he sees his job as "listening and working with (my constituents)." That Mr. Donahue defeated Mr. Perro for the second time in less than a



year, by about two hundred votes (will there be Donahue-Perro III, like Ali-Frazier?), is proof that his hands-on approach is viewed as commendable by the people he represents—even if he doesn't buck the powers-that-be (and

even though he spent a lot less money than Mr. Perro). Now to that 17th Worcester District race, in which **Douglas A. Belanger** (see related item in box at right) joined State Rep. **Mary S. Keefe** (15th Worcester District) and State Sen.

Harriette L. Chandler (1st Worcester State Senate District) as a primary-night victor ("I was worried," Ms. Chandler told me, outside the Worcester Senior Center, on September 18th). In expressing his disappointment in the outcome, which left him third behind Mr. Belanger and Mr. Germain, Mr. Dixon lamented that city politicos did not get behind his grassroots, communityactivist candidacy. A number of elected officials, including Jack Foley of the School Committee, felt that Mr. Dixon was the best man for the job. There was a feeling too that Mr. Germain was not totally engaged in the campaign (when Mr. Germain showed up for a debate at the Elks Club without the three questions he was supposed to bring to ask his rivals, he told Councilor Gary Rosen "I'll wing it"). Did Congressman McGovern, Mayor Petty and the city's other elected heavyweights let

Mr. Dixon down and cost
Worcester Mr.
Binienda's seat with a now allLeicester final in the offing by not pressuring Mr.
Germain to take one for the team? Mr. Dixon believes the answer to that question is yes.

## Be a gentleman, Mr. Belanger

During both an interview at the RTA's new bus hub and a debate involving the four candidates for the late John J. Binienda's legislative seat, Leicester Selectman Douglas A. Belanger came off as a polished professional with a firm grasp of the issues facing the 17th Worcester District. In fact, when a representative of Worcester Magazine lacked the materials to hang a banner as presenting sponsor of the forum at the Elks Club, Mr. Belanager said, "I'm a Boy Scout. I come prepared. Tape...screws..." And he delivered. He also handled himself admirably in the debate itself, in fending off attacks from both fellow Democrat Moses S. Dixon and Republican Kathleen D. Campanale on his way to defeating Mr. Dixon and Michael J. Germain in the primary for the right to face Ms. Campanale on November 4th. In the flush of that victory, however, Mr. Belanger revealed an unbecoming side of himself when he told supporters at Hillcrest Country Club that "it would be an embarrassment to my friend John Binienda if we lost this thing to a damn Republican." It is fair to say that the late Mr. Binienda would never have uttered a statement so awash in smug superciliousness. A shame, given Mr. Belanger's otherwise impeccable qualifications. One can't help but think it was the bully in him, not the Boy Scout, coming out. Can he do better? Be more courteous in the run-up to November 4th? Let's hope so.



## The Find

### Old Odd Fellows Home yields time capsule

RANDOLPH RD.-Deb Packard of Preservation Worcester might not have exactly been clapping her hands in celebration, given the organization's unsuccessful fight to save the former Odd Fellows Home, but that does not diminish the significance of what was unearthed during demolition of the sprawling structure to make way for "a revolutionary Alzheimer's and dementia residential care facility for the elderly in Central Massachusetts" being developed by the owners of Dodge Park Rest Home.

Groundbreaking for "The Oasis at Dodge Park," as the new housing complex, directly opposite Dodge Park's own historic premises, will be called, is scheduled for the morning of October 15th with State Sen. Harriette Chandler, State Sen. Michael Moore, Dr. Catherine DeBeau who is chief of geriatrics at UMass Memorial, Dr. Gary Moak who is medical director of the Moak Center for Healthy Aging and District 2 City Councilor Philip P. Palmieri scheduled to speak. Hank Stolz of Charter TV3 and WCRN 630 AM will serve as MC.

In biting the dust, the former Odd Fellows Home surrendered a treasure. Lodged in the cornerstone on the northwest side of the building was a more than century-old

> time capsule. Its contents were well-preserved. "We told the contractor (Whipple) to be gentle when

they lifted it up," Micha Shalev, a co-owner of Dodge

Park Rest Home, said in describing the copper box that was discovered encased in granite.

Mr. Shalev had an inkling that something of the sort might be found. It had apparently been placed onsite during a dedication ceremony on October 8th, 1890.

"It took them an hour and a half to get it out," Mr. Shalev said. "It was really heavy, with filler paper on

"It was held in [the granite chamber] by two spikes, some shims and mortar," Jeff Catino, Dodge Park Rest Home's maintenance director, said.

The contents of the box were in remarkably good condition, when the top was removed to reveal them. Inside was a gold mine of artifacts: a "National Songs of America" book; a "City of Worcester 1886" by Sanford & Davis book; a "History of Worcester" book; a City of Worcester directory; a Holy Bible; a copy

of the "Proceedings of the Grand Encampment" (of Odd Fellows); a map and business guide of Worcester; newspapers (the Boston Herald, the Hudson Enterprise, the Boston Globe, the Worcester Daily Telegram, the Worcester Daily Spy, the Lowell Morning Times); a souvenir of "Ye Old South Meeting House;" Worcester Academy's annual catalogue from 1890; and a WPI brochure from the same year.

A quandary over what to do with the collection prompted Mr. Shalev to reach out first to the Worcester Art Museum and then to William Wallace at the Worcester Historical Museum.

Meanwhile, Mr. Shalev intends to honor the spirit of those Odd Fellows who placed the time capsule by doing the same, as The Oasis at Dodge Park is being built. "I'll include something about Obamacare," he said. "I'm serious. And we will put in a CD because one hundred years from now there won't be any."

How about an artist's rendering of "CitySquare:" the project that has defied the odds?







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### The Vapor Wars

WEST BOYLSTON ST.-Lest anyone be swayed by misconceptions swirling in the air like smoke, Worcester Vapor is not copping the city logo for commercial purposes. It is not a head shop either. What it is, says Societe Caponette (below), who is co-owner with her husband Mark



of the city's first such lounge, is the perfect destination for people looking for increasingly popular electronic cigarettes to "kick the habit" like she did. "I was a heavy smoker for thirty years. Nothing seemed to work,"

Ms. Caponette said. She is not alone. Christopher. "Chris" George, president of George & Co. on James St., also finally shed his dependence on regular smokes. "Four+ years without a cigarette and my little side e-cigarette business continues to grow," Mr. George told Inside Worcester. "The American Heart Association's announcement has helped sales but it is disappointing that towns and municipalities keep regulating (e-cigarettes) like the real thing." The AHA "policy statement" Mr. George refers to (which corresponds to one the American Cancer Society issued with no fanfare in May) is that while smoking cessation is still priority No. 1, electronic cigarettes may be "a reasonable option" as a last resort. Especially if counseling and nicotine patches have not worked. Worcester Vapor's relocation several months ago from Kelley Square to a storefront in the vicinity of Quinsigamond Community College that previously housed a yogurt business has been a good move, Ms. Caponette said, despite what she termed a "white-knuckled" response from some quarters stemming from "a lot of bad publicity" generated by "the tobacco companies." Part of her job, she said, is defending Worcester Vapor against attacks from detractors. "We don't sell (paraphernalia for drug use) or anything like that," she said. "I want nothing to do with that end of it. (Our product) is a nicotine-delivery mechanism. We sell everything from starter kits to materials for hobbyists who build from scratch." Customers like "Dave" who was a two-pack-a-day smoker are making the switch and loving it, she noted. As for the brouhaha that arose over businesses like Worcester Vapor using what looks like the city logo on the door or windows for their own commercial purposes, she said "It's the city logo but it's not if you alter it. Mr. Rushford [City Clerk David Rushford] called to say 'I just got a complaint about you guys' but (our logo) is Worcester Vapor and Worcester is the heart of the Commonwealth." That is her story and she's sticking to it.

# Nordgren Memorial Chapel Funeral Service

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## Floor show

Gracie Cha of the CVB.

## Chamber will rethink Expo that fell flat

FOSTER ST.—In exchanging a greeting in the lobby of the DCU Center at the outset of the 28th annual Central Massachusetts Business Expo on September 8th, the Worcester Regional Chamber of Commerce's membership guru **Danny Vinton**, a longtime friend, spoke of "the new dynamic" and "busy, exciting" growth spurt the Chamber is experiencing under President **Tim Murray's** leadership.

Mr. Vinton had every reason to be espousing enthusiasm. **Rob DeMartini**, president and CEO of New Balance, had just finished his keynote address to a packed room at The Breakfast Club meeting that kicked off the morning's activities. News had just broken too of the Chamber's new

"Startup Worcester" program, an initiative to entice students to take jobs right here in the city after they graduate from Worcester-area colleges (the Chamber's Director of Higher Education and Business Partnerships

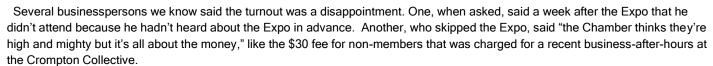
**Karen Pelletier** will elaborate on Startup Worcester at a luncheon meeting of the Webster Square Business Association at Zorba's Taverna on October 8th).

Mr. Murray has indeed brought fresh energy and vision to an organization that has its share of critics.

Unfortunately, the main portion of the proceedings on the Monday after Labor Day, in the exhibition hall, did the Chamber no favors.

"It was terrible," **Sharon K. Day,** owner/designer of Express Yourself!, an Oxford business that specializes in "innovative, creative, distinctive gifts and baskets," said, afterwards. Ms. Day was a first-time exhibitor. "I had nice conversations with people but it wasn't mobbed enough," she said. "It wasn't worth the time to be there. A Thursday probably would have been a better day. They didn't let you leave before 7:00 at night either. A don't think these kind of events are going to be around much longer. With so many networking op-

portunities out there they will phase out. They are another dinosaur, like newspapers, with so much focus on digital."

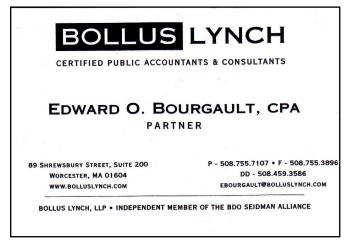


The Expo, however, is a free-admission event with your business card.

Chamber VP **Christina Andreoli** was accommodating, gracious and honest in answering a request from Inside Worcester for comment on the negative vibes we'd received about the Expo (she was covering for Mr. Murray, who was on vacation).

"You're not wrong," Ms. Andreoli said. "The WBDC (Worcester Business Development Corp.) had approached us in January, wanting us to partner with the Build Northeast Conference (at the DCU Center). The date was set in stone, right after Labor Day. The date wasn't ideal but we felt with Build Northeast and our other partners we were going to reach a much bigger audience than ever. On paper, it made sense. How could it not be. We had over 550 people at breakfast, less than half of them conference people, the rest regulars (at The Breakfast Club). But after breakfast the conference attendees headed to the third floor (instead of the show floor) and that was that.

"The bottom line is, we took a chance. Live and learn."



Ms. Andreoli acknowledged that the Expo has been through several incarnations including going from three days to two and then one and that now the Chamber needs to find out "what are people there for. We had nasty feedback but also good feedback," she said. "So we're asking, 'what do you want to get out of it?' Tim said to me 'go through the year and look at every event as they are today. Let's look at these across the board.' We'll look to modify some events, do away with some, add others. A lot of people are supportive of our overall mission."

That mission, Ms. Andreoli said, includes "Tim's big focus," which is "workforce development."

An Expo, and a Chamber, in transition.

## Walking the talk

### Canal'ers' map will be a hit

WATER ST.—As evidence that Worcester's "hippest, hottest and most hospitable retail and entertainment district" continues to push all the right buttons, there are the freshly minted 5000 copies of a walking map **Dave Maki** of worcesterweb.com is just now putting into circulation.

The map, out for the fourth time (**Allen Fletcher** published the first three versions) is nothing short of a piece de resistance, as only someone with Mr. Maki's technical skills could have pulled off. He hopes to replicate it on Shrewsbury St., in North Worcester, Webster Square and possibly on Grafton Hill.

The glossy two-sided map literally leaves no stone unturned, in serving as a means to find "music, food, drink, good times, art, antiques and more" in the Canal District. The locations of the thirty businesses that purchased spots for their logos on the map are also pinpointed on the magnified street and attractions guide on which their enterprises are depicted, covering an area that stretches from Un-



ion Station south to Crompton Park.

Better yet, as Mr. Maki points out, "scan the tag" at the bottom

of the map with your phone "for savings and promotions in the Canal District, at www.worcesterweb.com." Mr. Maki notes that "the technology is out there" for smart phones to be utilized to greater advantage in navigating the Canal District and accessing specials at venues like the Hotel Vernon (where **Bob Largess** offers \$1 drafts), The Banner Bar & Grille, Ziti's, Wings, The Broadway, Bocado, Widoff's Bakery and Weintraub's—for instance.

The map is the next best thing to a personal walking tour of the district that the Canal District's chief cheerleader, **John Giangregorio**, gave members of the Worcester Student Government Association (college students) in the aftermath of what **Karen Pelletier** of the Worcester Regional Chamber of Commerce described a "great" CanalFest, a summer farmers' market and summer wagon rides.

Mr. Maki's ambitious plans in pushing the Canal District are to link his own "Scan and Save" signage for "entertainment, shopping and dining" with the WRTA's signage at bus stops in the city.

The map "brings all of the folks" in the Canal District together "to support one another," Mr. Maki said. "You feel much more connected."

#### THE ECHO CHAMBER

#### Christine turns 50!

Lisa Blanchard Bruso Ambruson (on her friendship with Christine Whipple, whose 50th birthday party at Mezcal drew a crowd that included Jeannie Hebert, Cindy Skowyra, Davis and Donna Cox, Scott Erb and Donna Dufault and Alina Eisenhauer who provided



the cake): "We've been friends since we were twelve years old. We met in junior high at Blackstone-Millville. I moved to New York for twenty years but Christine and I stay connected. She was even in my wedding. The party was fantastic. She is a social butterfly. She has so many connections and for the first time they all came together which was neat to see." (Ms. Ambruson is a selfemployed benefits spe-

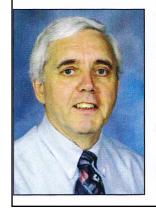
cialist with Colonial Supplement Insurance; Ms. plations at Quinsigamond

Whipple is director of philanthropic relations at Quinsigamond Community College. Donations for Christine's birthday benefitted her Pan Mass Challenge Fund).



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#### SHOWTIME!

## Circus act

"The Greatest Show on Earth" comes to town at the DCU Center October 9-13, with new wrinkles including a special interactive sensory tour for kids and a young clown in 23-year-old North Carolinan Andrew Hicks who has said in fulfilling a lifelong dream that these days "it's harder trying to get a job with the circus than getting into Harvard." One of three clowns with Ringling Bros., Hicks will be featured in the "superhero story line" he and his colleagues now employ, in which they save members of other circus acts, with "a lot of slapstick." October is the month of openers: The Worcester Sharks vs. the Providence Bruins at the DCU Center on 10/18, and Music Worcester's Opening Night at Mechanics Hall on 10/24. Speaking of openers, the "Reading Rally" kickoff to "Worcester: The City That Reads" is this Friday (10/3) at the Worcester Public Library. October brings both Clint Black and Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat to the **Hanover Theatre**. Already underway at the Worcester Art Museum, meanwhile, is the exhibition "Perfectly Strange:" depictions of the unusual. Don't forget Preservation Worcester's "Better Than Your Average Yard Sale" on Cedar St. (Noon-3:00, Oct. 5th).







#### THE BUSINESS CROWD

## Moosey, Turgeon are headliners at Webster Sq., No. Worcester

Everything anyone wanted to know about the intricacies of the sewer-line reconstruction work now underway in the Cambridge St. area of the city were spelled out in graphic detail-literally-by DPW Commissioner Paul J. Moosev at a meeting of the Webster Square Business Association at Livia's Dish on September 9th. Thirty-three businesspersons were briefed on the project, which will continue into early 2015. At The Manor the following week, Jeff Turgeon of the Central Mass. Workforce Investment Board spelled out for members and guests of the North Worcester Business Association the Board's region-wide effort to boost jobs, components of which include three one-stop career centers, job-seeker services and no-fee employer services.

#### A CULINARY LIFE/CHRIS LIAZOS

## Food, wine, to benefit Holy Trinity Nursing & Rehab



The eighth annual Food & Wine Fest benefitting Holy Trinity Nursing & Rehabilitation Center will be bigger and better than ever. This year's event will be held at St. George's Cathedral, 30 Anna St., on Thursday, October 9th from 5:30 to 8:30 p.m. More than twenty of Worcester County's best restaurants and three premier bakeries will be presenting their finest creations for patrons to sample. Great American foods, Mediterranean and classic French cuisine will be featured. I know you'll want to taste everything and you should. Just remember to save room for dessert. You'll be glad you did.

Guests will be invited to taste over fifty wines from France, Spain, Italy and California. We also have twenty brews from New England micro breweries. All of the evening's festivities will be enhanced by live music performed by Ed Hyder's Park Avenue Band.

Of course everyone's heard of Greek yogurt. Wait till you taste Sophia's. Sophia's Greek Pastry of Belmont will demonstrate how to make yogurt and will offer samplings of dips prepared with yogurt from 6:30 to 7:00 p.m. Jim Nicas, sommelier and co-owner of the Castle Restaurant, will give a seminar and tasting on the A, B, C's of wine beyond chardonnay and cabernet. Wine beginners and wine lovers don't miss it, from 7:30 p.m. till ???.

We want to thank the culinary students of Worcester Technical High School for assisting during our Fest.

Tickets may be purchased before the event for \$40 per person or \$75 for two by calling 508-425-7650 or by email at www.htnr.net. Tickets will also be available at the door that evening, \$50 per person. All proceeds benefit Holy Trinity Nursing & Rehabilitation, celebrating twenty years' service to the Worcester community. Plenty of free parking.

Beer and Wine vendors: O'Hara's Wines & Liquors; Horizon Beverage; Atlas Distributors; Quality Beverage; Monsieur Touton Wines; Carolina Wines; Atlantic Imports.

Food vendors: Castle Restaurant; Coral Seafood; Caravan Coffee; Creedon Catering; Crown Bakery; Culpepper's Bakery & Café; Dean Park Grill & Pizza; Ed Hyder's Mediterranean Market; Eller's Restaurant; George's Bakery; George's Coney Island; Kalamos Greek & Mediterranean Market; Ki Cocada; Livia's Dish; Meze Greek Tapas Bar & Grille; Mrs. Mack's Bakery; Park Grill & Spirits; Polar Beverages; Sophia's Greek Pastry; Sonoma of Princeton; The Auburn Town Pizza; The Twisted Fork; Zorba's Taverna.