

The Rambler

Worcester, Massachusetts
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'Tis better...

The very idea of "Giving Tuesday" as a follow-up to Black Friday, Shop Small Saturday and Cyber Monday is bound to appeal to someone as instinctively community-minded as United Way of Central Massachusetts' irrepressible President/CEO Tim Garvin. So it was that Mr. Garvin had only just arrived at BirchTree Bread Company on Green St. the morning of November 28th when he looked at his cell phone and began ticking off the donations the agency had already received, toward a one-day goal of \$10,000. "\$100 from Michael in West Boylston, \$20 from Brendan in West Haven, Connecticut who is a Holy Cross grad and a friend of mine, \$100 from Marissa in Sudbury, \$200 from Kerri in Worcester which will benefit our Women's Initiative, \$100 from a contributor in Eden Prairie, Minnesota," Mr. Garvin gushed. Last year, Mr. Garvin said, United Way of CM delivered three hundred sixty pounds of food through letter carriers, got 1954 women out of abusive relationships and sent nine hundred kids to camp. He describes the competition for dollars among local nonprofits on Giving Tuesday and at other times as "friendly. The city of Worcester is the epicenter of collaboration," he said. "I have lived in seven countries around the world but never in a place like Worcester;" with its generous heart.

From the left: Mr. Garvin, Brian Whitney, Arny Spielberg, Avra Hoffman of BirchTree Bread, Heather Mangione, Katharine Cooney and Louise O'Neill. Several United Way of CM staffers wore "Live United" shirts. PHOTO/ROD LEE

THE COVER STORY

An education warrior

By ROD LEE

There is to Brian A. O'Connell a buoyancy that permeates his entire being. It is a defining characteristic, as are the bald look, the eyebrows now flecked with white, the large hands and the disarming smile.

When I rendezvoused with Mr. O'Connell at the Subway restaurant in Webster Square on a Sunday morning in mid-November, he was wearing a Holy Cross cap and a Harvard sweatshirt—testament to the schools at which he earned an A.B. in English, French and History and a Doctor of Law (J.D.) degree, in the late Sixties and early Seventies.

He was reading a copy of *The New Yorker*, a favorite publication of his—and mine.

By agreement we had decided to meet and discuss Mr. O'Connell's life in education, his work on the Worcester School Committee and his impressive performance in the recent municipal election.

In winning re-election to a seat he has held continuously since January, 1984 ("thirty-three years, eleven months!" by his count), he emerged as the highest vote getter with 9,084 votes. Followed in order by Jack Foley (8,616), John Monfredo (8,489), Molly McCullough (8,092), Dante Comparetto (7,894) and Dianna Biancheria (7,807).

Mr. Comparetto is the lone newcomer to the board and should be a good addition, in Mr. O'Connell's opinion. "I know him a little through his work with the citywide parent advisory council," he said. "He has demonstrated an interest in education, lives almost in the shadow of the Elm Park School and was very involved in the No. on 2 campaign."

UNLIKE Mr. O'Connell, Mr.

Comparetto spent a considerable sum in dislodging Donna Colorio. Mr. O'Connell spent virtually nothing, as has become the norm for him. "One day," I told Mr. O'Connell, "Mr. Comparetto

may be in the same position," in which his record and name recognition are enough to carry him to victory.

"I narrowly won, my first time," Mr. O'Connell interjected. "I lost by one vote. I requested a recount and won by thirty-three votes!"

"Retail campaigning" is not as important as before," he said. His approach now is to "be visible, year-round." He shows up at awards ceremonies, at meetings of civic groups, at Little League programs, at veterans activities. "By being at events I learn a lot," he said. "It's a way of staying in touch with people. When I can attend people react well to it." No one can argue with the results. And, he said, "I like the dollars-to-votes ratio!"

"I WAS surrounded by education, growing up," Mr. O'Connell, an only child, said. "My dad was an administrator at Worcester Academy. He was in charge of the dorms. My mom was a teacher and principal in the Leicester school system. We lived in a dorm. I started at Union Hill School. Vernon Hill Park was a natural draw. I was active in St. John's. I belonged to Boy Scout Troop 79, sponsored by Wyman-Gordon. I enjoyed school. I worked hard but there was never any pressure. There was always a sense of people paying attention to what you were doing. So public school was a part of my childhood, as well as private school. I lived in a dorm until I graduated from law school."



Mr. O'Connell, photographed the morning of November 19th at the Subway restaurant on Stafford St. in Worcester.

Starting out, Mr. O'Connell practiced law in Boston and Worcester and still does some legal work in the area of trust administration. A desire to "get more involved in community service" is what compelled him to run for the School Committee. "I thought I could help with the dialogue," he said. Today's Worcester School Committee is "less divisive than its predecessor," he said. "There is mutual respect" even amid "differences of opinion."

He sees Maureen Binienda, who he supported as interim and then as permanent superintendent, as an improvement on Melinda Boone. Ms. Binienda is more involved at a grassroots level. "What you see is what you get, she is very dedicated to the students," he said.

School safety "on the whole, I think it's better," he said. "I wanted (Rob) Pezzella (school safety director) to report to Belinda Boone, not the assistant superintendent." That is now happening.

AS BUSINESS manager for the Haverhill Public Schools, as a member of the Board of Trustees of Anna Maria College, as a past president and a life member of the Massachusetts Association of School Committees, as secretary for the Board of Trustees at Worcester Academy and as vice chair of the Worcester School Committee, Mr. O'Connell is immersed in education on many levels. Of his long tenure with the Worcester School Committee, he says "it's never become mechanical or dull. I thoroughly enjoy the School Committee."

Inevitable comparisons between Haverhill and Worcester are understandable, he said. The Haverhill system "is smaller, 5000 students to Worcester's 26,000. Haverhill is an older manufacturing city, like Worcester, but "in Boston's orbit." There are efforts in Haverhill, as in Worcester, to revitalize the downtown. Haverhill's population is similar to Worcester's with "a heavy influx of ethnic people who struggle economically. Haverhill faces "some of the same challenges. Haverhill is a terrific

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TRAGEDY—AND TRIUMPH

'I bet I can quit'

The Opioid Crisis" as it has become known (the capital letters at the front of each word signifying the scope of the epidemic's impact on society) is what compelled a friend we'll call "Ron" to ask, recently, for a chance to share "a personal story" of his own battle with addiction.

Albeit a dependence of a different sort.

All that readers of *The Rambler* need to know of Ron's identity is that he owns and operates a successful business in the Blackstone Valley; and that he is a member of Gamblers Anonymous.

Ron reached out, he said, because "I feel bad for anyone suffering from addiction. I know on a personal level that it can turn good people into bad people."

Ron has not been alone in his journey to recovery. A brother, a daughter, his wife, his sponsor and others have walked the path with him.



He is grateful for their support, and happy to have come out okay after almost losing everything.

HIS "habit" began years ago, when

business took him into Connecticut on a regular basis. He started making side trips to the casino. These became more and more frequent, and of a longer duration. Sometimes he would not return home until late at night.

When he was playing the one-armed bandits nothing else mattered. "I got so bad that 'eight years or so ago my family had an intervention and sent me to a GA meeting,'" Ron said. "It turned my life around. I want others to know there is help out there."

The intervention came just in time, in his case. He started attending GA meetings that are held nearby—in Millbury, Worcester and Westborough. He embraced the organization and its message of "I bet I can quit."

Like AA, Gamblers Anonymous is a fellowship of men and women who share their experiences and who strive to raise hope with each other in an effort to "solve a common problem." GA grew out of a chance meeting of two men in January of 1957. Like AA, it involves twelve steps to recovery.

Ron equates his rehabilitation with the one his father underwent in AA; he learned from his

dad how difficult it is to build resistance to the temptation.

"IT'S BEEN quite the trip but it's all good at the end," Ron's wife, "Sylvia," said, by telephone. "It's a tremendous program. I wish there were more like it. It's helped my husband immensely. He was going down the wrong road. He had just bought a new business," she said, which now was in jeopardy. "Years before," when Ron went to the casino, "he always brought me with him." This was no longer happening. "My daughter figured it out, based on points he was winning that could be used toward shopping," Sylvia said.

"He wasn't hiding it but I didn't realize how bad it was. He was running away from the business because he couldn't handle the pressure. My daughter and I were running the business. He started getting advances because he was out of cash. I found tax returns. I went to his brother and said we need to sit down with him. His brother handed him twenty questions to answer. He had hit rock bottom. He was always a gambler, even as a teenager—cards. When Foxwoods and Mohegan Sun opened his parents went there. He just felt like he was the king, getting rooms for people. His hands were clammy just thinking about going there. It just fills your brain. He'd come home with a gallon of milk and twenty dollars worth of scratch tickets.

Sylvia spoke of Ron's turnaround, saying, "eight years in GA, the best group of people. At first, three nights a week, church too, now at least once a week and with family and enjoying life, vacations, we bought a beach house last year.

"Business is phenomenal, great leaps. The pressure of life was drowning him. He would run away. Now he speaks at meetings, goes to anniversaries.

"Ron is living it."

Ron concurs. "I have taken Gamblers Anonymous into every aspect of my life," he said.

"THE FIRST guy who shook my hand when I came through the door" of a GA meeting was "JerryB," Ron said. JerryB became his sponsor. JerryB is celebrating more than forty years away from gambling. "I don't think Atlantic City was built and the lottery had just started but it was neither of those that interested me," JerryB said, by telephone. "It was horses and sports betting. There were a lot of racetracks back then, including 'Suffering Downs.' I had to go out of my way to gamble, at the track, or to find a bookie.

"My story is different. I was married with three kids. I was drinking too but I wasn't an alcoholic. I couldn't see any of that because of the sickness. The roof was caving in. I

took off for a week. My wife threw me out. I owed thousands, like two dollars on a horse is going to make a difference. I was living with my mother and father. I was watching TV one night, Channel 5 out of Boston, and lo and behold they showed a live meeting from LA. I was glued to that TV. I could identify with everything that they were saying. Twenty questions, if you answer seven you are addicted to gambling. I answered seventeen. I told my wife. I didn't make the call for months. I was living in Marlborough at the time. I connected with a guy from Lynn. 'That's far to come for a meeting,' I told him (if it had been a tip from Yonkers...) my wife got a nephew to babysit and off we went.

"I met my sponsor. When he shook my hand, electricity went through my body. There were thirty-two people there, two newcomers. We were both Jerry. So they called us JerryA and JerryB. I never knew what happened to JerryA. On my twenty-fifth anniversary I learned he had committed suicide.

"I worked the program. There were only eight meetings in New England when I came in. It was not easy but I did it."

RON, JerryB says, "has done very well. He came in, he was a wreck. He woke up and now he has a great life. Stinking thinking, rotten set of values, it's easy to stop, hard to stay stopped. Ron is one of the lucky ones; and he's giving back."

They both are.

—Mr. O'Connell

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city, reminds me of Worcester."

That Mr. O'Connell is possibly the most ardent and active voice on education policy on the School Committee is reflected in commentary he writes for Patrick Sargent's "This Week in Worcester." In one of many postings for This Week he offered an analysis of school discipline, for instance (ultimately, he concluded, the school learning environment "is safe" despite variations in "internal logging" and what constitutes an infraction).

He is not shy in asserting that when it comes to "the quality and state of our school buildings, South High, Burncoat High, Doherty and Worcester East Middle" are lacking. Or that Worcester's MCAS scores are "not attractive" because of struggles students are having with math and science. Or that the state "is not meeting its constitutionally mandated" obligations in funding the Foundation budget for the schools.

Mr. O'Connell has earned the right to speak out. He exercises it forcefully but judiciously.

"I call them as I see them," he said.



Figs & Pigs Owner Candy Murphy with employees Erika Anderson, left, and Emily Trotta, right..

THE CUISINE SCENE

Downtown dreamin'

There is only one way to know how hard it is to open a restaurant in a city already flush with them. After nearly two years in place in the southwest corner of the DCU Center in downtown Worcester, Candace “Candy” Murphy can tell anyone who asks that it is not easy.

In fact, Figs & Pigs, a kitchen and pantry, which opened its doors at the corner of Foster and Commercial streets in December

of 2015, would not have materialized at all, Ms. Murphy said, without the help of the city’s economic-development office (specifically Mike Traynor, Paul Morano Jr. and Peter Dunn) and the Worcester Business Development Corp. (WBDC); and with encouragement from Sandy Dunn who is the arena’s general manager.

A former executive in the corporate world and the former chef de cuisine-GM at Adrian’s & Company in Truro, Ms. Murphy has used experimentation in her own kitchen at home to create a menu at Figs & Pigs that is based on cooking “from the ground up.” The intent of her self-described “simplistic seasonal approach” is to demonstrate “the healing effect of food on the mind and soul.”

She refers to Figs & Pigs, which serves breakfast and lunch, provides catering and operates as a vendor during events at the DCU Center—including Railers’ games—as “an incubator.” Her ambition is still to open a full-service sit-down restaurant of her own. Preferably close to her current location in the heart of an area of the city that is percolating with redevelopment as new apartments, condominiums and hotels come on line. With Figs & Pigs, she is pushing in that direction. As she put it during a conversation on November 20th at a table with pleasant just-above-street-level window views of Mass. College of Pharmacy and other pedestrians walking about, Figs & Pigs is a step toward a loftier goal.

White-haired but youthfully vibrant, Ms. Murphy said her quest to establish herself as a restaurateur began with a visit to a real estate agent to see what restaurants already operating were for sale.

“I looked at six or seven, not just in the city,” she said. In the midst of what she calls “an interesting process,” she reached out to Mr. Traynor and his staff. “They were very helpful,” she said. “They led me to the T&G building (the previous home of the region’s daily newspaper, on Franklin St.). Regrettably, a buildout of first-floor space there “got too expensive. It’s kind of ironic. We worked together for a year and a half and then agreed to walk away from each other. It was very painful. I had spent money on an architect.

“When that happened the city turned me on to this space.”

The WBDC got involved as well. “The WBDC mentioned the Commercial Market in Cambridge and told me ‘this is what we envisioned.’”

Fortuitously for her too, the DCU Center was “looking for candidates” to set up a dining component (as an adjunct, in part, to the Worcester Wares gift shop). Ms. Murphy was selected from three finalists, she said, for the right to proceed.

“It’s gone well,” she said. “Everything I make is from scratch, in small batches.”

Initially at Figs & Pigs, she tried attracting a dinner crowd. “It wasn’t conducive to dinner, so I flipped it. I do breakfast and lunch, with coffee from a company in Northampton.”



Tony Alatisé and Faiaashade Adewuyi dine at Figs & Pigs.

When there is hockey or other activities occurring in the building, she takes advantage of access to the arena side that is otherwise curtained off. “I’m like any other vendor on the concourse,” she said.

The arrangement has worked nicely from the DCU Center’s standpoint, Ms. Dunn noted, saying “we are thrilled with the incubator concept” and Ms. Murphy’s operational technique. “She is certainly ready to graduate and I look forward to dining at her new space in

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DOWN ON THE FARM

Malt forward

Travel due northwest from Worcester on Rt. 122, through country that becomes increasingly rustic mile by mile and within about forty-five minutes you will reach the town of Barre and Stone Cow Brewery.

Barre was founded in 1774 and is named for a member of the British Parliament who opposed the taxation of America. Just shy of forty-five square miles in size, the town is positioned almost exactly in the center of the state. During the Industrial Revolution, Barre became known for its production of farming equipment and palm leaf hats.

For quite some time now too, Barre's claim to fame has stemmed at least in part from raw milk that is produced at the 1000-acre Carter & Stevens Farm on West St.; "Keepin' It Real Since 1938," as the property's owners like to say.

The farm is home to a farm store (presently closed for the winter), "Tilly the Mini Horse," a barbecue pit and Stone Cow Brewery. A large solid-stone bovine stands guard next to the driveway leading onto the premises from Rt. 122/32.

Stone Cow Brewery is "a passion project born of a love for craft beer," as is noted on the company's website.

Carter & Stevens Farm boasts a significant tie to the past. Joseph Plummer, a Civil War brigadier general, was born on the farm in 1816. A graduate of West Point, he marched troops into the second battle of the Civil War, at Wilson's Creek, Missouri, on August 10th, 1861. He was severely wounded there. Brig. Gen. Plummer is buried at Arlington National Cemetery.

A FIRST VISIT on the first Saturday in November to Stone Cow Brewery, which is situated in a barnlike structure, generated lasting favorable impressions. Customers queued up early on for samples

of farm-brewed beer, available for purchase in "flights" or pints. Choices included such exotically named favorites as "Endless Summer Sour" which is brewed with locally grown watermelon and basil, "Chinook Single Hop IPA" (new, a classic variety from the Pacific Northwest that leaves a scent of juicy peach and citrus fruits on the nose) and "Delmar's Dunkelweizen" (a dark German wheat beer in which fruity yeast esters mingle with a nutty, toasted malt profile—"think banana bread, roasted nuts and subdued notes of chocolate and toffee").

Joe Cutroni Jr. and a friend who had accompanied him on the ride ordered pints of "Cows Out Milk Stout," the Brewery's signature milk stout. The stout is described in a handout as "black in the glass and topped with an inviting tan head" and featuring "aromas of coffee liqueur and dark fruits followed by flavors of milk and bittersweet chocolate as well as roasty notes of espresso."

Cows Out Milk Stout "clocks in at a smooth 5.8% ABV (alcohol by volume) and can be tried "on Nitro for an extra silky mouthfeel!"

A CONCRETE FLOOR, thick wood beams, handsome knotty-pine paneling and accented heavy picnic tables that quickly filled up in anticipation of the afternoon's entertainment: The Green Sisters, a mostly all-woman band (guitar, bass and two violins) from Hubbardston. Children drove around on tiny tractors.

Responding to his companion's comment "this is great" in reference to the family-friendly atmosphere, Mr. Cutroni, who has made several trips to Stone Cow Brewery, said "find your niche and stick with it. If you pick the hops for them you get the beer for a

Stone Cow Brewery in Barre: Home to scenic views from the patio, farm-brewed beer and dance-inspiring music from groups like The Green Sisters.



dollar."

The music is as much of a draw as the beer—and sandwiches made on the spot in a kitchen to one side of the room.

The Green Sisters, young and spirited, did not disappoint. "They remind me of the High Woods String Band," Mr. Cutroni said, of the band's country hoedown-like offerings, which

prompted one straw-hatted, cowgirl-booted patron to break into a dance at the sound of "Red River Valley." An upbeat version of Elvis's "Don't Be Cruel" brought the remark from one of the musicians when the song was done "that was Melanie Green, everybody. She's the oldest and wisest."

Attire worn by those in attendance seemed to fit the setting. One man with a long beard was dressed in brown dungarees and a "South Barre Rod & Gun Club" gray hooded sweatshirt. A woman was clad in a "David Cray" hooded sweatshirt. Flannel shirts were prominent.

Sitting at a table, taking all of this in, Mr. Cutroni said "they had a barn dance here a month or so ago. That must have been a good time."



Kristine A. Binette on the patio at CareOne at Millbury. Below, an aerial view of the property.



HEALTH & WELLNESS

A Next Step Home

The urge that brought Kristine A. Binette back to CareOne at Millbury as senior administrator after a brief time away is the same one that prompted her to readily agree to talk about the facility's "Next Step Home" program, on a recent Wednesday afternoon.

"I have one o'clock available," Ms. Binette said in response to a morning telephone call. There was in her voice a noticeable eagerness to accept the chance to tout the merits of Next Step Home. So the sooner the better. There was no need to wait.

Ms. Binette's enthusiasm for what Next Step Home can do for those who avail themselves of its many components is shared by all of those involved.

In discussing the program in her office just off the lobby at CareOne at Millbury, in a handsome and beautifully landscaped building situated at the end of a driveway accessed from Millbury Ave., she offered a visitor a promotional sheet containing the essentials about Next Step Home. On this sheet Next Step Home is described as "a specialized patient education and home preparation program" created by clinical experts that ensures a seamless and safe transition from a rehabilitation setting to the home and community."

The team that administers Next Step Home is the reason the program has been

include a case manager in Kerri Oppedisano, a director of rehabilitation in Kelly Carroll, a dietician and so on, all working in close collaboration. Together they provide skilled physical, occupational and speech therapy seven days a week, medication management, safety assessment, home simulation training in a Next Step Home suite, a pre-discharge home visit (if ordered by a physician), medication and health-safety education, coordinated discharge planning and post-discharge follow-up.

Simulation and stimulation are key ingredients. Next Step Home "simulates what the patient would encounter at home," Ms. Binette said. Meanwhile electrical stimulation, or "E-stem," which is utilized by various means, is so highly effective that "athletes even use it."

With forty-seven beds on the "rehab floor," Next Step Home accommodates hundreds of patients a year, most of whom are on the premises only for five to twelve days.

"We have a good home-to-return rate, also long-term care if the patient isn't able to go home," Ms. Binette said. "The facets of Next Step Home are unique to CareOne, from simulation to med management to self-care and sometimes we train the caregiver."

AS A TRAINED occupational therapist herself, Ms. Binette's zeal for Next Step Home is understandable. "Rehab is close to my heart," she said.

"Sue" and "Don" are two patients who were helped by the program, she

such a success, Ms. Binette said. This team consists of physical, occupational and speech therapists, primary-care nurses, nutritionists and social workers. In CareOne at Millbury's case these participants

said, in citing examples of Next Step Home's impressive track record.

"Sue experienced falls and then a stroke and didn't think she would be able to go back home. Now she is in assisted living and appears in a commercial for us.

"Don is a neat story. He also had a stroke. When he came here no one thought he would make it. Now he's home and living a normal life."

That no stone is left unturned by Next Step Home is apparent, Ms. Binette said, in that "we do outcome studies and when a person leaves we want to close that loop so we make an appointment with their PCP. We also send information to the VNA and we follow up with phone calls. A patient can be readmitted if they are not doing well."

MS. BINETTE speaks fondly of both CareOne as a company and the Millbury complex.

"I worked here for five years," she said. "I missed the building. The owners called and asked me to come back, which I did, at the end of July."

The company is based in Fort Lee, New Jersey, is family-owned and operates fifteen skilled-nursing centers in Massachusetts.

"We are trying to make this one of the premier sites in the CareOne system," she said.

"To that end, a major renovation of the interior, a project that will take about ten months to complete, is underway. This will follow a makeover of the exterior of the building. The building was constructed in 1996. CareOne has owned it since 2004.

One current patient, Shirley LeBlanc, of Berlin, probably speaks for many in praising Next Step Home.

"Excellent," Ms. LeBlanc said of the help she receives. I had a choice after the hospital. This is where I insisted on going."



SHOWTIME

Rethinking the mean season

December may bring about an understandable urge to escape to Florida via a JetBlue flight out of Worcester Regional Airport and many area residents will avail themselves of that opportunity. For those who are staying put, however, there are plenty of options close to home that can help take the bite out of a cold-weather month. One of these, “Winter Reimagined,” which runs through January 7th at the Tower Hill Botanic Garden on French Drive in Boylston, is getting its share of plaudits. Deservedly so. Picture



glittering lights displayed throughout acres of formal gardens, handmade and nature-inspired ornaments, a wishing tree forest, an up-cycled igloo and two towering conservatories brimming with subtropical plants and seasonal music. Tower Hill is open Wednesday-Sunday from 11:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. and Tuesday-Thursday from 4:00 to 9:00 p.m. but pre-purchased

timed tickets are required for the evening visits.

Nowhere are the holidays celebrated with more enthusiasm, locally, than at the **Hanover Theatre for the Performing Arts** on Southbridge St. in Worcester. A jam-packed lineup of shows at The Hanover includes an appearance on December 18th of the Boston Pops with Conductor Keith Lockhart; attendees will be treated to the Pops’ signature “Sleigh Ride”—and a sing-a-long!

The countdown to the **Worcester Bravehearts’** 2018 season opener, on May 30th against the Nashua Silver Knights, has already begun with the signing of five players to the roster including Matt Stansky of Douglas and Jack Gardner of Holden. They will reunite as battery mates after starring for a St. John’s High School team that won the 2017 Super 8 championship.



Also aboard are Kendall Pomeroy, a six-foot-four right-hander who went 5-0 for UMass Lowell in his first two seasons, Danny Barlok who returns to the Bravehearts after a summer with the Keene Swampbats of the NECBL (he had a 2.40 ERA and three saves for the Bravehearts in 2015) and infielder Mariano Ricciardi (Danny Barlok and Matt Stansky are pictured, left and right, at the recent Heart Stove Reception at St. John’s).

In this day and age of women saying “Me Too” to being victimized by sexual abuse, Cirque du Soleil’s “Crystal” speaks of confidence, liberation and empowerment as the headline character for ice shows featuring the speed and fluidity of gravity-defying acrobats at the **DCU Center** on Foster St. in Worcester, December 7-10.

Booklovers’ Gourmet on East Main St. is a hot spot for artists, authors, poets and musicians, one of whom, Woodstock’s Tim Oliver, who explores the realm of ink, sharpies and markers, will be present for a reception from 2:00 to 4:00 p.m. on December 16th.

Mary M. Brodeur (below) sang the National Anthem and a sympathy card was given to the family of Commander Michael C. Masley Jr. of Oxford High School’s NJROTC Unit (Mr. Masley died November 7th) at a veterans’ brunch at the Oxford Senior Center on November 9th.



Photos/
Robert J. Shedd



—Figs & Pigs

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the future.”

Ms. Dunn said the DCU Center continues to “review all options moving forward. We have a mutual ninety-day notice with Candy. If she locates a new space or we locate a new tenant or individual to incubate.”

The incubator concept “was conceived over five years ago during initial planning for renovations to the DCU Center,” Ms. Dunn said. “The space was originally designed as a concession stand located in-board on the concourse. The goal was to activate this corner of the DCU Center and integrate [it] with the neighborhood during non-event times as well as when we have events—while still achieving the operational needs of the DCU Center by ensuring we continued to have food and beverage options for patrons of the venue when there is an event. The originally designed concession stand was moved outboard on the concourse to achieve this.

“At the time, the downtown footprint was in need of additional eateries including more menu variety. Having restaurants or retail ‘take a chance’ on downtown was very challenging. By creating the incubator concept, our hope was to mitigate risk for a potential entrepreneur to build their brand downtown. Once they were established, they would be more likely to decide to lease a downtown property to continue and expand their operation. I believe this is Candy’s current goal. In fact, Candy came to us with more experience than we anticipated. She is ready to graduate ahead of the time period we originally projected for an operator.

“Five years later, the downtown dining scene has changed dramatically. The need to incentivize someone to open shop in downtown is no longer required. Restaurants are popping up everywhere with exciting new menu variety. Our goals to keep this corner activated during non-event times and continue to service the food and beverage requirements of the DCU Center during events are both still very important. Whether this is through an incubator concept, in-house operation or a third-party option is still under review.

“In the meantime, we are happy to have Candy continue to thrive.”

If anything is certain based on Figs & Pigs’ success as an incubator project, it is that both Ms. Murphy and the space she occupies at the DCU Center are going to be part of the food scene in Worcester for the foreseeable future.

“I have good conversations going with several landlords down here,” Ms. Murphy said. “My preference is stay downtown. I believe in it.”

MY BACK PAGES/Rod Lee



On 'Day Hollow'

He is the baby of the family, the youngest of four boys, an adventurer by inclination who spent much of his childhood roaming what wilds existed—Tarzan-like—back in Endicott, New York with his beloved four-legged friend Patches, but a scholar of the highest rank too. A graduate of what is now Binghamton University. A resident of Elmira. A devotee of Walt Whitman, a wordsmith, a free spirit and a thinker who muses in unconventional ways. Today, at the age of fifty-three, he has published his first book. Actually Volume One of a two-part tome entitled *Day Hollow* (named for a road that runs between West Corners and Owego), written under the coyly imagined alias “Holdall Are Warned, Esq.” (a play on Randall Howard Lee). As the “big brother” who could not be more proud, I immediately purchased a hard copy from Amazon. A little over two hundred pages into its more than three times that many, I am mesmerized. There are those who will dismiss the book as too high-brow. Or nonsensical. It is in fact described tongue-in-cheek on the back cover by “Helena A. Droll, well-known cultural and literary critic,” as “a pointless legend. A myth without content or context...a waste of time.” I think otherwise. Grasping what my feeble mind can of its meandering path, which is filled with interestingly conceived characters (Lord Basilthrob, Father Baxter, Cruikshank, Cadmium and the narrator’s ever-present cohort Porrigore) and places (The Cave of Unimaginable Horror; Derrydale), uniquely spun words (Fogvamper, Chuzwhacker, etc.) and inspired phrasing (“Careful! Watch where you step! The bones of ghosts racket and spin, bouncing close by us now”), I

understand Day Hollow to be a philosophical rumination on traveling through time; on life and death. On the not-so-smooth carpet ride we all take from the beginning to the end..

An excerpt from *Day Hollow* “Hollow Words”

“So our journey continues in companionship—a simple bond, but it is enough. Now, however, we must expand our repertoire, learn new dance steps, memorize new jokes—we must consider other magics, other elixirs, stranger powers, new incantations. Where to begin? Think upon the greatest, most overlooked of arcane arcana, namely, words, my friend. Words have gotten us this far and words, above all else, words shall pull us forward. Yes, we must look to words. To begin with, we must find words with which to cast ourselves hence, words to lighten the very bones and blood of our bodies, yes, words to open our pores to the airiest air, words which will cause us to float up, up off of the ground, yes, floating about, we will use our shirts as sails and our arms as rudders to ride the breeze forward across the fields in a north-south-easterly direction thereby leaving behind in one brilliant moment this simple yet ineffective plodding. Ah, I find myself guilty of a remarkable inspiration due to the brightness of the sun and the clearness of the sky! Who would not dream of floating and jouncing about upon such wonderfully clear air? And yet, I tell you, such sudden longings, here especially, need not go unfulfilled. We need only to find words which will match our vision. We need magical lightening words, words of rare buoyancy, words lighter than the smallest downy feathers found upon a feather, balloon words, cumulus words, words that can be amassed like cotton and then inhaled deep down into our very souls where they will expand and lighten us from within until we float up above the countryside to be carried on our way like tiny bits of Milkweed fluff riding the fine invisible air. An ethereal semantics is what we need. A lightening logos. Do not worry—I already have an idea. In such ungrave matters of anti-gravity, we must turn to one being in particular for

guidance. The word that serves as his name is

Cruikshank.

Cruikshank, I say, the codger of

codgers. Old

Cruikshank, the

philander of

pedantry.

Cruikedy,

cruikedy,

Cruikshank,

the

histrionic

hermit of

hermeneu-

tics. Yes,

crooked,

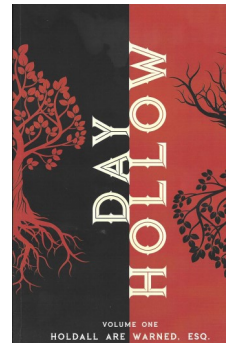
crusty,

cruiky

Cruikshank.

With true serendipity, we find

ourselves even now upon the barely trodden path which leads us to his hut; we will hasten on to see if he is at home (although one cannot actually conceive of him being anywhere else). I warn you now, and hopefully far enough in advance, that Cruikshank’s hatred of the entire human race, himself included, as well as every other race for that matter, is complete, profound and unstinting. He finds no value whatsoever in the existence of people; he cares nothing for human desires or concerns. Who can say how long he has sat within his little dried mud hut cursing loudly any and all who make the mistake of coming within earshot of his invective? Dark under these briars! Here, pass to the left, the way is a little clearer. You are perfectly right to wonder what we might hope to gain from such a seemingly hopeless visitation as this one. Words. Only words and nothing more...”



Randall Howard “Randy” Lee; and the cover of *Day Hollow*.

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