



# Can athletic fields be a bridge to new schools?

By JOHN HOWELL

How does the city resolve the apparent pending shortfall of funds to complete construction of new Toll Gate and Pilgrim High Schools?

City Council President Steve McAllister, who completes his tenure on the council this month, was asked that question during a recent interview about his eight years on the council.

He came up with a proposal that has yet to be publicly debated, and it's not clear it could be implemented: city-owned athletic fields.

McAllister set the scene.

In 2022 voters approved a \$350-million bond to build the new schools. At the time, McAllister questioned the need for two schools and whether \$350 million was sufficient to

## Outgoing council president envisions city ownership

do the job. He personally favored a new high school or schools. Putting the question to the voters required council approval. He backed letting the voters decide.

Then the financial backlash of the pandemic hit – inflation. Supply chains frayed, costs soared, and even before the bond reached the ballot there



McAllister stepping down but staying close. Page 3

were those who said \$350 million wouldn't be enough.

McAllister has been the sponsor of all three school bond issues – funding to revitalize elementary and middle schools – to come before the council. He believes the city's schools are critical to the city's future. Without good schools, the city won't attract or retain young families to invest in the community.

But likewise there's a limit to what the city can afford.

McAllister, whose wife, Vanessa, is an elementary school teacher and is personally friends with many school administrators, feels conflicted.

"I've told them a hundred times this is the number [\$350 million]."

So, should the city go ahead with construction knowing it will run out of funds before the projects are completed?

■ FIELDS- PAGE 10

# Big dividends in shopping small

## 'What's better than owning your own job?'

By JOHN HOWELL

There was nothing small about Shop Small Business Saturday at the Crowne Plaza in Warwick.

Following on the heels of Black Friday one might have suspected shoppers would be tapped out. But no, that wasn't the case as bargain hunters turned their attention to the unique and in most cases, the handcrafted.

The event conceived eight years ago by Sue Babin, special projects coordinator at the Rhode Island Developmental Disabilities Council, has taken off. In fact, many shoppers, and perhaps even some of the vendors, have no idea of the council's role.

The Crowne Plaza was transformed into a kasbah.

Nine rooms, including the grand ballroom and the space around it, were filled with 166 vendors. Of those 26 were people with disabilities. You would never know it, which is just how Babin intended it to be. She didn't want disabilities to stand out, nor did she want shoppers to take pity on the vendors. She looked for them to occupy an even playing field with other small businesses, such as that of Richard Boudreau of Warwick.

Boudreau, now retired, is a welder who melds his skills with his artistic talent. He has an eye for repurposing everyday items, such as spoons, pots and pans, tools, old sewing machines, wheels, bicycle chains and door handles, and the list goes on into new items such as sculptures of people and animals. Some of his creations are gigantic, like his giraffe, and stand sentinel in his yard.



Alton Stuckey loves his own business of painting scenery and portraits. With him is Iraida Williams, who became his foster mother when he was a teen. He now lives independently.

Then there is Alton Stuckey, who suffers from intellectual disabilities and mild cerebral palsy. You wouldn't know it from speaking to him behind a display of vivid landscapes he painted from his imagination or the scores of smaller dog and cat portraits covering his table.

"It keeps me happy," Stuckey says of his art. He knows his limitations. He doesn't spend more than four hours at

a time working on a project; otherwise it doesn't work for him.

Accompanying Stuckey was Iraida Williams of Johnston, who became Stuckey's foster mother when he was a teenager. Stuckey, now in his 50s and living in North Providence, is close friends with Williams and her family.

■ BUSINESS- PAGE 24

# Picozzi's light show shines on for charity

By JOHN HOWELL

It's up, it's shining brightly and donations are coming in to the Tomorrow Fund.

As he has done for years now – making the show more intricate each year – Mayor Frank Picozzi's digital family Christmas light show went live last weekend. Usually Picozzi stages out a preview on Thanksgiving night for neighbors and friends, but that was canceled because of rain.

With the display set to music, Picozzi transforms his house and property at 75 Gristmill Road in the Hoxsie section of the city into a stage for dancing lights. He starts work on the display in the summer and fall, which was difficult this year as in addition to his job as mayor he was running for reelection. He found time on days off and the weekends to fit it all in. He estimated this year's show



runs an hour and ten minutes.

So far attendance has been a slow, which doesn't surprise Picozzi. It picks up closer to Christmas. The show runs Sunday through Thursday from 5:30 to 9 p.m. and on Friday and Saturday from 5:30 to 10 p.m. It closes on New Year's Eve. It's free.

The display can be viewed from limited parking in front of the Picozzi house and by "listening to the lights" on 97.1 FM. Many families gather outside to watch as well as to drop off letters to Santa – there's a box out front – as well as to make donations to the Tomorrow Fund.

Last year, Picozzi estimates the display plus the "yuling" run by his wife, Kim, raised \$30,000 for the Tomorrow Fund. The fund provides daily financial and emotional support to children with cancer and their families, from the time of diagnosis throughout the entire course of treatment

■ LIGHTS- PAGE 10

# School Committee chairman confronts City Council critic

## Says financial distortion 'has led to unnecessary fear and concern'

By ADAM ZANGARI

In their Monday meeting, the Warwick City Council heard a presentation from School Committee Chairman Shaun Galligan giving the council an update on the happenings within the Warwick school system.

The presentation included some introductory controversy, with a letter written by resident Rob Cote circulating before the meeting encouraging members of the public to object to how the meeting was being held. The meeting did not include a public-comment section.

In his speech, Galligan gave multiple updates to the council on topics ranging from the financial situation of Warwick Public Schools to the performance of their students.

Galligan said Ward 5 Councilman Ed Ladouceur had misrepresented the schools' financial situation to the media while talking about a financial balance sheet presented at November's School Committee meeting.

"One particular elected official has chosen to misrepresent this preliminary document, focusing on a single line-item expenditure and taking it out of context," Galligan said. "This has led to unnecessary fear and concern among

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### PATS WIN BEACON BOWL

The Pilgrim football team cruised past Toll Gate 34-8 to extend its Thanksgiving win streak. See story on page 19.

### NOTABLE Quote

"[I] want to show people that people with disabilities are just as good as anybody else."

– Sue Babin, special projects coordinator at the Rhode Island Developmental Disabilities Council, on the 26 people with disabilities among the 166 vendors at last weekend's Shop Small Business Saturday at the Crowne Plaza.



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Deb Morais took on the task of promoting the Shop Small event held Saturday with 168 participating vendors.

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**Business**  
 (Continued from page 1)

Stuckey's success as the owner and operator of a small business is a prime example of how Babin's efforts to assist the Center for Women & Enterprise have evolved into an event that attracted more than 3,000 people on Saturday. The center came to Babin seeking advice on how to market products and services produced by women. Babin took on the challenge, learning along the way that while women looking to start business may have good ideas, they needed business training. She started with classes offered by the Small Business Administration that were later modified and since 2017 have expanded to eight classes.

What motivates Babin?  
 "[I] want to show people that people with disabilities are just as good as anybody else."

But then, how best to market those products?

Babin turned to American Express Small Business Saturday for some help. American Express came through with promotional materials including stickers, banners, posters, signs and even rugs bearing the mes-

sage "shop small." She also enlisted the help of fellow members of the Rhode Island Developmental Disabilities Council and friends. The federally funded council is an advocacy and support group for people with disabilities.

Babin arranged the booking and setup at the Crowne Plaza, realizing that to make it all work would require pulling together vendors and promoting the heck out of the event. She left the promotion part up to Deb Morais, CEO of Communication Works Inc. Vendors paid \$75 for a table. Additional funding came from two major sponsors. And, Babin added, the council couldn't do its work without support from the state Department of Labor and Training.

"We're not in this to make money," said Babin.

Overall, she said, attendance this year was down from last year. Nonetheless, she is happy watching people carry one or two or even more bags of items purchased.

"The vendors did well," she said, reporting that some did more than \$3,000 in sales.

"It's just so cool to see people happy. It makes you feel really good," she said.

As for small businesses, she added, "What's better than owning your own job?"



Caroline Bhaha and Tanya Wright staff the table of Adult and Teen Challenge of Southern New England, a Christian residential drug and alcohol addiction recovery program. The wares they sold were made by those in the program.



Lt. Gov. Sabina Matos gets the details of the Shop Small Business Saturday event held at the Crowne Plaza and organized by Sue Babin, at right.



Jackie Bernard listens as Richard Boudreau describes how he finds new life in items, such as pots and pans, for his works of art. (Beacon Media photos)