

# The Rambler

A literary journal

Worcester  
& Central Massachusetts

September 2020

In the mail:

Jay Hunter, Hunter's Grill & Tap at the Grafton Inn (on the article "Up for the challenge," about restaurants fighting back from pandemic restrictions):

"Nice publication! Thanks for including Hunter's!"

Denis "Denny" LaForce of Manchaug (on "Trailblazers," an account of his exploits hiking The Long Trail, the Appalachian Trail, and bicycling the perimeter of the U.S.):

"I'm very pleased with what you wrote and how you wrote it. Thank you so much for taking the time for the interview and for thinking I had a story to tell. I'm pleased to have been able to have my adventures, but you are correct I'm not even close to being in the same company as those pioneers of hiking you mention.

"I'm about 1/3 through *Grandma Gatewood's Walk*, but she's into NJ as I read. At 1/3 of the book but past the halfway point on the trail, I've assumed there's more to the story that completing the AT, but without jumping ahead, I won't know until the last page. It's been a VERY interesting read and so much more than just a story of an old lady who hiked the AT. I hope you can let me keep the book a little longer. I usually read about a chapter a night before falling asleep. Unless you're passing by, we can exchange 'stuff' when I've finished the book."

Chris George, George & Co. (on "Go virtual or go home," about when and how students can return to school:

"I hope Worcester residents understand the almost impossible situation Maureen Binienda is in and support the committee's decision. Also, love your closing line from Tom Hanks!" (in "Unmasked and dangerous").



## Bravehearts fall in 3 to the Silver Knights

The Futures Collegiate Baseball League (FCBL) championship trophy seemed within easy reach sitting on a table near the entrance to Holman Stadium in Nashua, New Hampshire on August 20th. But despite an early 2-0 lead and a clutch single in the bottom of the eighth by third baseman EJ Exposito that broke a 2-2 tie for an eventual 3-2 win in Game 1, the Worcester Bravehearts were denied a third straight FCBL title. PAGE 6.

Photo/Joe Cutroni Jr.

# The warhorse



PHOTO/ROD LEE

"I'm ninety years old!" John "Cuckoo" DiRienzo's proud declaration of having hit the milestone number on August 16 drew shouts of congratulations and even Covid-19-era handshakes from a handful of people who gather each morning at the Dollar Tree in Whitinsville to buy the newspaper. Born at home in Milford in 1920, Mr. DiRienzo has lived with his family in Uxbridge for many years. His longevity can no doubt be attributed in part to hard physical labor in the oil and coal business and as a tree surgeon for the town. He defies age just as he defies threats to life and limb. When young he was known to ride atop the handlebars of a bicycle down the steep incline that is Hartford Ave. West; up until recently he was still climbing ladders—and not averse to extending one to get higher. Amid the camaraderie in a group of five or more that marks the fifteen-minute wait for the doors of the store to open at 8:00 o'clock, he will utter only a gruff acknowledgement of cordial greetings and then remain quiet until slow-footed "Pablo"—an object of irreverent ribbing—shows up. "Here comes creepin' Jesus," John will say, as laughter erupts.

The Feature Story

# Living, soberly

## Vanderburgh House pins hopes for success on independent owners

By ROD LEE

**T**here is no shortage of residences in Worcester and the surrounding area for men and women recovering from addiction, but none quite like the recently launched Vanderburgh House.

That “the Vanderburgh Communities” (structured and certified sober houses already operating, or about to be, for instance, in Worcester, Springfield, and Southbridge) is headed by an ambitious twenty-six year-old whiz kid named Hunter Foote is the first tipoff that something intriguing is *afoot*.

Mr. Foote, executive director of Vanderburgh House, hails from Wales, Massachusetts and is the son of “an entrepreneurial dad and dedicated mom who home-schooled me.” He started at Quinsigamond Community College in general studies, after which came UMass Amherst and finally Harvard for a Master’s in Business. He is now working toward his PhD at Salve Regina.

Vanderburgh House has come far in a short time. “We started slow and small,” Mr. Foote said on the afternoon of August 3 at a conference table in the company’s home office on Forest St. in Worcester, with colleagues Denise McGee, Mike Moreshead, Michelle Ngila and Kate Saad seated nearby. “Now we have seven houses.”

The idea in the minds of those at the forefront of the Vanderburgh experiment in 2015 was to create better-quality housing for men and women in recovery from addiction. Things moved fairly quickly from the point of inception. There was incorporation in 2016. Two homes opened shortly thereafter. In 2017, Vanderburgh House was awarded MASH (for Massachusetts Alliance for Sober Housing) certification. In 2018, the organization became the first “certified B corporation” (for for-profits in its field) in the city of Worcester. A relationship with Harvard, for employment and research, was initiated the same year; and Vanderburgh House’s first home in Springfield was opened.

Vanderburgh Communities, created in 2019, is the groundbreaking component that distinguishes Vanderburgh House from such other homes for recovering addicts as Channing, Linda Fey, Jeremiah’s and Rhodes. The concept is bold but risky too. In an approach similar in scope to the franchising opportunities that are available from Dunkin’, McDonald’s, Starbucks, Kentucky Fried Chicken and Honey Farms, independent owners are enlisted to operate each home.

“We are trying to build a collaboration of sober-house owners,” Mr. Foote said. “There are a number of skill sets involved” for a prospective franchisee, if you will, to be approved to take on a Vanderburgh house. Once cleared to proceed, “they would be granted a charter to operate a Vanderburgh House facility,” Mr. Foote said.

This does not mean a set of golden arches, a neon sign, a Col. Sanders sales pitch or a prominently displayed logo next to the door as an identifier. “We don’t need every Vanderburgh House facility to look and feel the same. An owner might want a Spanish-speaking facility, another a Christian home. Everyone has their vision of what a perfect home is.”

Mr. Foote and his team note that independent ownership is just one aspect that sets Vanderburgh House apart. Freedom to move about and certainly to venture out for employment is encouraged but there are rigidly enforced recovery-focused house rules, standards and expectations. A combination of curfews, peer support, drug and alcohol screenings, community involvement, mentorship, a clinical foundation and transitional support are utilized to help Vanderburgh House residents maintain sobriety.

“We expect our residents to have already gone through a program like Rhodes House (in Millbury),” Ms. McGee said.

“If someone wants to open a sober house, we’d have to do the research” on that individual,” Mr. Foote said. “They would pay a fee



Some members of Vanderburgh House’s A Team: Hunter Foote, Michelle Ngila, Kate Saad, Denise McGee and Mike Moreshead, pictured in the organization’s offices on Forest St. in Worcester.

PHOTO/ROD LEE



The Germain Estate in Worcester; sober living for women.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 3



The renovated Elm Home features large bedrooms with modern amenities and exquisite historical detail, off-street parking, a private yard and all that Worcester has to offer men in recovery..

## —Vanderburgh House

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 2

and we provide the training on all the different issues. I have a background in real estate so we can help them find a house.”

Securing the right owner for a Vanderburgh house is like dating, Mr. Foote said. “They have to like you, and vice versa. We have a good half-dozen people who are interested. They would one hundred percent own the business operation.”

With ownership comes the responsibility of maintaining strict guidelines. This falls principally to house-manager overseers like “Chuck,” who works full-time for a large Worcester manufacturing company. Chuck lives on-site at Elm Home.

All of Vanderburgh’s homes are owned through an affiliate. “It’s working out well,” Mr. Foote said. “The challenge is the perception of what a sober house is, the idea is so nebulous and municipalities are varied in their response.” Worcester residents are “generally receptive,” he said. This has cleared the way for the Kenwood and Elm homes for men and the soon-to-open co-ed Calderia Home “upstairs here” on Forest St., for instance, he said. Government with its insistence on sprinklers, lights and exit doors is where the pushback is usually encountered.

“This is something we are looking to vet,” he says, of any possibility of a potentially ruinous absentee-landlord situation. “We are the foundation they can rely on. Hopefully this will pave the way for more social-impact models like ours. There are so many examples in other endeavors.”

“The house manager is the glue,” Kate Saad, intake specialist for Vanderburgh House, said. “We trust their judgment.”

Rules are firmly enforced. Rent, starting at \$120 weekly, is expected to be paid.

“We are zero-tolerance,” Ms. McGee, who is operations manager for the company and a veteran of the recovery environment, said. This approach appeals and is the reason Vanderburgh House is seeing positive results. “Now people are asking for Vanderburgh House,” she said.

Mr. Moreshead, an attorney, came aboard six months ago after working in immigration defense, because, he said, “I wanted to make something grow.”

“We all love what we do,” Mr. Foote said. ■

## The Notebook

### No buy-in Bad seeds threaten gains of a city on the move

Worcester has only to look at its unsafe neighborhoods, its unruly streets and its houses that are fronts for all sorts of mischief to know that despite remarkable progress taking place in the city, ultimate success in terms of peace and immunity from harm has not yet been fully achieved.

Any medium to large-sized metropolis could say the same, of course. Still, how aggravating, how dispiriting, it must be, for Mr. Petty,

Mr. Augustus, Police Chief Sargent, councilors and the plethora of community-oriented citizens sprinkled throughout the populace to look on, aghast, at the gunfire and mayhem that has become so common in the Summer of 2020.

Those who do good, those names affixed to civic mindedness—Quinsigamond Village’s recently deceased “Queen Jane” (Petrella), United Way’s Tim Garvin, Grafton Hill’s Michael Testa, Main South’s William Breault, Preservation Worcester’s Deborah Packard, the Worcester Historical Museum’s William Wallace, to name a few (the list is long and impressive)—deserve a better return on their investment.

Instead, throughout July and August, shots ringing out, knives brandished, the Temple Emmanuel Sinai on Salisbury St. broken into, motorcycles speeding on Lincoln St. one of which was reportedly stolen and the driver, an Ezequiel Negron, found with a working firearm in his fanny pack.

A female gunshot victim on Valley View Lane; a female accosted on Cambridge St.

Lost in the flurry, such tidings of joy as a bicycle-safety course provided by the WPD.

It is hard to maintain a focus on the positive—a new mural of the WPD patch painted by Artists Melinda Boyle, Kate Gennelly and Brian Carroll—as one example.

The negative lingers: a hostile crowd confronting an officer trying to assist a female gunshot victim in the area of May and Mason streets, Superintendent of Schools Maureen Binienda subsequently commenting “once again our police officer comes through. Why in the world would someone interfere with an officer who is trying to help? God bless the officer for braving the crowd and assisting the woman. It’s not a job for the weak that’s for sure.” ■



## A clarification

“Please note, I was speaking to you expressing my personal questions” (re the Columbus statute at Union Station in Worcester). “I was not speaking to you as a WCCA TV representative. My opinion is not necessary that of WCCA TV or its members.”

—Mauro DePasquale, August 3, 2020

## The Notebook

# Josh, by gosh

A restaurant roadie follows circuitous path to Indian Ranch, Samuel Slater's

It is a fairly common occurrence for people in the food and beverage industry to move from job to job. Front-end managers. Chefs. Line cooks. Hostesses. Waitresses.

Attribute it to restlessness, disgruntlement, a desire for a better situation, the chance to take on a fresh challenge—what have you.

Meet Josh Suprenant, who, as the new director of hospitality for Indian Ranch and Samuel Slater's Restaurant on the shores of Webster Lake, may have finally found a permanent home at 200 Gore Road.

Mr. Suprenant's journey to his present position, which he assumed a year ago, has been even more interesting than most. He never could have predicted the course it would take.

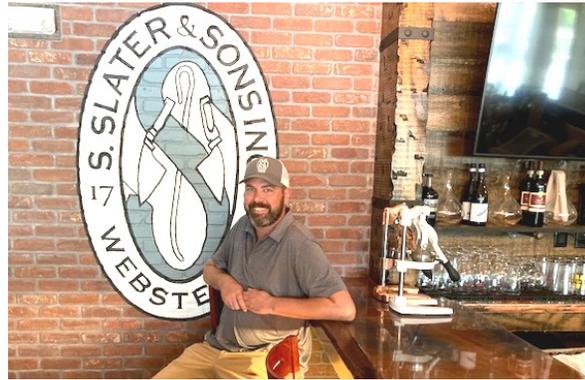
With no advance formal training in the culinary arts, he stepped into his profession at The Castle in Leicester not long after graduation from David Prouty High School; falling under the tutelage, there, of Jim Nicas.

Mr. Nicas "taught me a lot," Mr. Suprenant said in the dining room of Samuel Slater's on the humid and windy afternoon of August 4, as the storm Isaias bore down on the region. He still considers the Nicases "my second family."

One opportunity led to another. Today, Mr. Suprenant can point with pride to a varied resume that includes a significant stint at Lucca Restaurant & Bar in Boston's North End; a role as a member of a team that in partnership with Eastern Standard operated the Island Creek Oyster Bar in Kenmore Square; and the launch with a good friend, Devon Adams, of The Townsend in Quincy, which in 2015 was named "Best of Boston" on the South Shore for general excellence.

**HIS ACQUAINTANCE** with Dave Fields of Worcester's Wormtown Brewery led to the two of them being "linked together" by a writer for the *Boston Herald* on Wormtown's "Blizzard of 1978" beer and most recently to a run as assistant taproom manager for the craft-brew company.

Along the way on his career trajectory he



Josh Suprenant, one year into his position as director of hospitality for Indian Ranch and Samuel Slater's Restaurant; and prior to undertaking that role.

has picked up "experience you can't teach in a classroom," he says. Working "with some of the best restaurants" in the state and with Eastern Standard (a company that "redefined hospitality and craft cocktails") prepared him for the moment Indian Ranch's Suzette Raun would say "we could really use your help."

It also places Mr. Suprenant on the same payroll as his mom, who works in Indian Ranch's front office.

"It was not an easy decision to leave Wormtown but this is what I've worked toward for the last twenty years of my life," he said.

**ALTHOUGH** Indian Ranch's concert-season offerings and other events have been temporarily sidelined by Covid-19, Mr. Suprenant understands what he is taking on in tackling a multi-faceted operation that includes providing food and beverage for functions, paddle-boat cruises, entertainment gatherings, wine dinners and patrons of the restaurant.

Immediately he grasped that "your food and beverage has to match the setting. You need to set expectations. It was," at Samuel Slater's, before his arrival, "never a sustainable menu." People living in the immediate vicinity do not have a lot of disposable income and many reside only part-time on the lake. The approach, therefore, is "we have the ability to do both," he said: a high-end meal for customers who don't mind spending a hundred dollars or more for dinner with a bottle of wine, and customers who are looking for a less-expensive night out.

Like other venues, Indian Ranch has felt

the sting of the restrictions imposed by the virus. "We are doing what we can with Phase 3," Mr. Suprenant said. "I have one hundred twenty-five yards of beach" (to use for dockside dining). "With social distancing, it didn't really slow us down. We grabbed every picnic table we could. We reopened with close to thirty tables, with live music Thursday-Sunday, on the beach. It's worked out really well."

Having to tell forty-some employees in the spring "we're shutting down" was hard but "just about everyone is back and we have hired a number of new people. Outdoor dining has provided us with an avenue to survive."

Life is different for Josh Suprenant these days. Working with peers in the trade in Boston, "we went out all the time and immersed ourselves in food and wine."

In Webster, his focus is on helping Indian Ranch and Samuel Slater's present a welcoming atmosphere. "I'm chomping at the bit" for what a full-fledged restart, including a green light for Phase 4, will mean, he said.

At six-foot-seven and two hundred sixty pounds, Mr. Suprenant is a big man with an easygoing and engaging personality to match.

His road to Indian Ranch has taken him from Leicester to Boston, Quincy, Worcester and now Webster.

As an aside, he will counter the misconception that restaurant owners and managers are wealthy.

"I'm forty-one years old and I just bought my first truck!" he said. ■





Ms. Binienda at Worcester State University; below, some WPS students.

# An urban warrior, gutting it out

## Could chief critic Ms. Novick do Ms. Binienda's job?

P

recious few people would want Maureen Binienda's job as superintendent of schools in Worcester, Massachusetts. The headaches that go with the position are constant and monstrous in their complexity: the school busing contract, a tentative budget shortfall in the millions for the next fiscal year and the pandemic—for starters. And this is not even taking into account the sniping Ms. Binienda regularly receives from School Committee Member Tracy O'Connell



Novick.

Recently, *The Rambler* asked an acquaintance who is a longtime teacher in a K-6 school on the city's west side what she thought of the superintendent and Ms. Novick.

"I like Maureen," the teacher said. "Tracy is negative about everything. I would like to see if Tracy is up the task of being superintendent, if she got the chance."

During her first seven months on the School Committee, Ms. Novick has repeatedly called into question Ms. Binienda's ability to lead the district effectively. One of the most recent examples of this came with Ms. Novick's scathing appraisal of the superintendent as part of the School



Committee's end-of-the-cycle evaluations. Ms. Novick's assessment of the superintendent's performance was jarring in its severity, despite her assertion that "it is a professional evaluation. It is not a personal statement."

You could have fooled us, Ms. Novick.

It is not hard to picture Ms. Novick with a stern schoolmarm-like look on her face, ready to rap Ms. Binienda's knuckles for her supposed failings.

Management Operations, "unsatisfactory," Ms. Novick reported. Family and Community Engagement, "unsatisfactory." Professional Culture, "unsatisfactory." Instructional Leadership, "needs improvement." Summative determination: "unsatisfactory."

"The two overriding themes that arise again and again in this evaluation are the lack of capacity in administering the district in aspects from roles to ethics to leadership to professional learning; and the perpetuation of a district climate for staff and students that too frequently is silencing, fearful and discouraging, rather than collaborative, nurturing and supportive," Ms. Novick wrote.

In attaching an "unsatisfactory" rating across the board on Family and Community Engagement, Ms. Novick said "our families and the community continue largely to feel alienated from the school district, in marked contrast to the 'effective partnerships' envisioned in the statewide superintendent rubric."

Contrast Ms. Novick's judgment with that of Mayor Petty, who chairs the School Committee. "Proficient" is the word the mayor most often used. "Amid a worldwide pandemic I believe Superintendent Binienda has performed proficiently," he concluded. In many ways, the mayor said, Ms. Binienda is "at her best in a crisis, marshalling resources, utilizing staff and materials, and working hand-in-hand with the city administration and our nonprofit community."

In excerpts from his own evaluation of the superintendent that he provided to *The Rambler*, School Committee Member John Monfredo (he is one of her staunchest supporters) wrote "when Superintendent Binienda applied for the position about four years ago after having been an exemplary principal at South High, she referred to herself in an interview as an 'urban warrior'...an individual who will go above and beyond to educate and support our students. [Today] one can say that she has lived up to that title. In addition, she has continued to do all she can to make decisions that are the best interest of ALL students."

Mr. Monfredo gives Ms. Binienda high marks on Instructional Leadership. There have been more in-service opportunities for all staff members, he points out; improving technology to fight the effects of the pandemic; student engagement in meaningful activities in and outside of school; an expansion of the College and Career Opportunities at the high school level with such programs as an expanded AP Capstone; an expanded college application Celebrity Day, more students getting the Seal of Biliteracy on their diploma; and additional training for students on their PSAT and SAT testing.

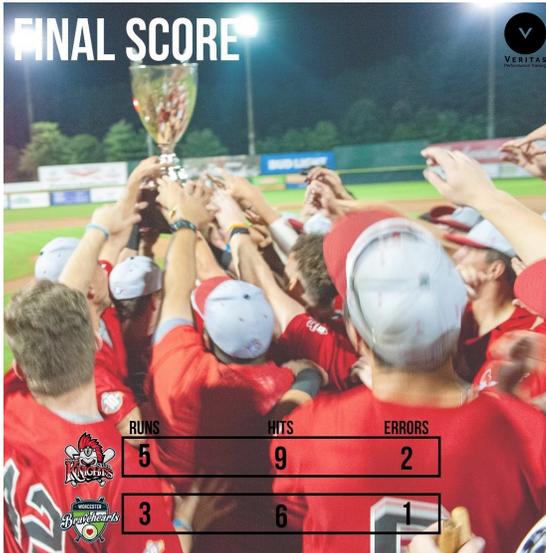
"Chronic absenteeism has been reduced, as well as suspension rates," Mr. Monfredo wrote.

Mr. Monfredo sees in the superintendent qualities Ms. Novick doesn't recognize. Ms. Binienda "is a leader who motivates others, is a good listener and a skillful communicator. Her qualities of commitment, passion, honesty and integrity make up her character. Many families within the city talk about her passion for education, her high energy, outstanding work ethic and her eagerness to do all that she can to make a difference in the lives of students."

Laura Clancey, new, like Ms. Novick, to the School Committee, says "overall Superintendent Binienda has made progress in providing a high-quality learning experience for students by providing an engaging educational experience through a rigorous curriculum while focusing on students' individual learning styles."

Every student "deserves a champion," Mr. Monfredo says. Worcester students have one in Maureen Binienda. ■

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# Solid gold for Silver Knights

## Nashua slugs its way past Bravehearts for FCBL title

**B**oo hiss Al St. Louis for the stirring rendition of the National Anthem he delivered before the first pitch of Game 2 of the best-of-three Futures Collegiate Baseball League championship series the evening of August 21, one of a record-setting hundreds he has performed at various venues around the country.

Boo hiss Mr. St. Louis in his star-spangled shirt and shoes for energizing the Silver Knights and their rabid fans—for creating the atmosphere that resulted in a 5-1 win for the lads of Amherst St., forcing a Game 3 twenty-four hours later, which Nashua won 5-3 for its fifth league title.

Boo hiss historic Holman Stadium, a major league-caliber ballpark that is just too beautiful for words especially lying in shimmering green splendor as viewed from seats just above Section 106 under a perfect nearly cloudless summer sky with a Wornstown Hoppy from the concession stand and an official program courtesy of Bravehearts GM Dave Peterson in hand.

Boo hiss the possible spell placed on the Bravehearts by Roy “Campy” Campanella, who is pictured on a mural outside the entrance to the bricked ballpark—a nod to the facility (which was constructed in 1937 and named for benefactor Charles Frank Holman) for having hosted the first integrated U.S. baseball team (the Nashua Dodgers) in 1946.

Boo hiss the young Silver Knights rooters assembled along a railing high above home plate as they hooted and hollered, “let’s go, Nick” (Silver Knights starting pitcher Nick Guarino), “hey, you got it,” “swing!,” “set him down,” “come on, Blue,” getting louder and louder and then erupting in ear-splitting applause and cheers when after giving up back-to-back leadoff singles he notched a K, a second



The Silver Knights, and Al St. Louis: an unbeatable combo.

K and a grounder back to the mound for the third out. They may not be as raucous as Mr. Peterson has said New Britain fans are, but they’re damn close enough.

Boo hiss the gods that conspired to cause normally reliable Angelo Baez to surrender five runs right off the bat, capped by Lucas Stalman’s three-run shot that cleared the leftfield wall (how does someone so small hit the ball so far?). The same Angelo Baez from Saint Thomas Aquinas who had finished the FCBL regular season with a 3-1 record and 1.28 ERA, who in two starts against Nashua had struck out nineteen in twelve innings pitched. Boo hiss that brief lapse on Angelo’s part, after which Angelo logged five straight goose eggs.

Boo hiss that the Worcester Bravehearts couldn’t play in their own Hanover Insurance Park at Fitton Field at Holy Cross this year and one can only hope that 2021 will bring better news.

Boo hiss Dylan Jones for the three-run blast to left off Jack Steele of UMass Amherst on Saturday that again put the Silver Knights in charge at the outset; Ben Rounds and Kyle Bouchard (the championship-series MVP) too for the single and sacrifice fly they contributed that cemented the outcome and enabled Nashua to add the 2020 trophy to ones it claimed in 2011, 2012, 2016 and 2017.

Boo hiss Arlette Lynch, a banker, a business acquaintance, a friend and a longtime Bravehearts supporter who, now residing in Amherst, New Hampshire, sheepishly admitted from a spot two rows above Joe Cutroni Jr. and myself, that her allegiance has switched over to the Silver Knights. But come to think of it, that’s not so unacceptable, both squads are Creedon-family owned, hence the battle for “the Creedon Cup.”

Was there anything not to boo hiss about? Yes. Nick Martin, who tagged Nick Guarino for a home run in the Bravehearts’ half of the third. And Matt Shaw (Maryland), series star for the Bravehearts with a .462 batting average, a home run, two runs batted in and two runs scored (thank you Anthony Mazzini for that info). Shaw’s leadoff homer in the bottom of the first in Game 3 gave Worcester life.

It was his fifth leadoff homer and his ninth overall in just fourteen games with the Bravehearts. He drove in another run with a fielder’s choice groundout in the second inning to close the score to 3-2.

There was as well the chance to reconnect with Bruce Caissie of Northbridge, who was at Holman Stadium to watch his nephew, lefty Shawn Babineau from Ashland, a Franklin Pierce player.

Finally there was appreciation for the Bravehearts, the Silver Knights and the FCBL. In remarks before Game 1, John Creedon Jr. reminded those in attendance that there was FCBL baseball this season when there might not have been. Mr. Creedon could not have been terribly disappointed with the way things turned out. Regardless of which team won, his family is a winner for, as Mr. Peterson puts it, giving the region “affordable family fun.”—R.L.■



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# SHOWTIME!

## Without a hitch

### Veterans Inc. Stand Down a success despite virus

It wouldn't have mattered to Paul Gleason or Randall Cutting or any of the other men and women who showed up for Veterans Inc.'s 15th annual Stand Down on the last Friday in August that the event was conducted with a military precision that would have impressed even a Douglas MacArthur, a George Patton or a Lewis "Chesty" Puller.

They only knew that Veterans Inc. again came through, as the organization has every year since the Stand Down's inception in 2006.

It wasn't easy. Covid-19 considerations made the logistics more difficult than usual, Sherry Leger Callahan, fresh on the job as communications and fundraising events manager for Veterans Inc., said, while monitoring activity among early arrivals on Grove St.

"We have a security checkpoint and testing and pre-registration was required, which is new," she said. The entire production was held outside, with vendors' tables lining both sides of the street, which had been closed off by the WPD. "We have spaced it out and we have a fabulous provider list so [homeless and in-need veterans and their families] are getting the services they need. There is even some virtual aspects to it; and lunch and dinner are to-go."

The goal, Vincent J. Perrone, Lt. Col., USAF (ret.), president and CEO of Veterans Inc., said, beforehand, was to get veterans "in front of as many job opportunities and other services that could normally take them months (to obtain)—all in one day."

Denis Leary, the agency's executive director, called it "an honor" to offer "this amazing day of service-delivery, but also to say thank you to all of our veterans in a meaningful and practical way."

"I like it," Paul Gleason of Worcester said as he left with a sea bag slung over his shoulder and a bag of food in his hand. "My buddy works here. I had thirty-two years in the Navy and the Army National Guard. I wanted to stay in but I had a heart attack in Iraq in '03."

"I always appreciate it," Randall Cutting of Worcester said, of the gesture on the part of Veterans Inc. Mr. Cutting served in the Army for three and a half years and then extended twice for a total of eighteen years.

The weather cooperated. "National Grid, one of our large corporate sponsors, called a few days ago when it looked like rain was coming and said 'we're not sure if we can make it,'" Ms. Leger Callahan said.

With a career fair, counseling and substance abuse referrals, employment and training services, health and wellness services, housing resources, legal services, clothing, food and refreshments and personal-care items—all of which were free—Veterans Inc. takes care of its own. ■



Above, Veteran Paul Gleason. Below, Veterans Inc. staffers Whitney Louvat, Amanda Clewes and Marisol Durango ready to hand out Woman & Families bags to attendees. 9PHOTOS/ROD LEE).



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Rambles & Rumbles/ROD LEE

## Beached at Hampton

He is older now by about eight years, paler too, weaker, thinner as the disease that gives no quarter continues to take its toll. “The Incident” is a distant memory for the most part, buried like the scraps of food that baby Noahlan tosses aside instead of eating and that are then put into a hole next to the Atlantic and covered with sand so that the ever-circling, ever-ravenous gulls won’t be able to get to them until the family has packed up its gear and left for the day.

“Mr. P” doesn’t mention the run-in with the Hampton Beach police but others do, from time to time, and it is a subject that stirs rounds of laughter and that even brings a smile to his face. He knows that his children and nieces and nephews and the girls’ boyfriends and Alexis’s husband Shawn will always be able to see the amusing side of The Incident despite the rumble of discontent in the stomach that it causes him.

Given his choice, he wouldn’t bother coming to this part of New Hampshire, along the coast, at all. He prefers lakes to the ocean, Winnepesaukee to Salsbury, just as, being a diehard, he favors the Red Sox over the Yankees (“scum,” he calls the hated team from the Bronx), the Ohio State Buckeyes over the Notre Dame Fighting Irish and Fantasy football and baseball-card collecting over playing golf.

He reluctantly agrees to a week at Hampton Beach every summer to satisfy the desire of his wife, Amanda, in her “But Coffee First” shirt, and the rest of an expanding brood. Most of them derive more pleasure than he does from afternoons frolicking in the salt water and evenings trekking the boardwalk—save in his case for the opportunity to buy a slice of pizza from the Sea Catch and fried dough from Blink’s.

**THEY**, like him, understand that there are two sides to Hampton Beach, the one that welcomes visitors with open arms and the other that says “stay away.” The contradiction was immediately apparent again upon arrival on August 9, when the property manager for 18C Riverview St. (“The Pearl Cottage,” a misnomer if ever there was one) raised objections to the idea that four cars—not three—were going to be parked on-site; this a reoccurrence of issues that festered during memorably enjoyable stays at Marty and Mary Ellen Pratte’s place on Johnson Ave. for a long stretch in the first and second decades of the 2000s and after that on Manchester St., in 2019—when Amanda announced that she was initiating a revival of a tradition.

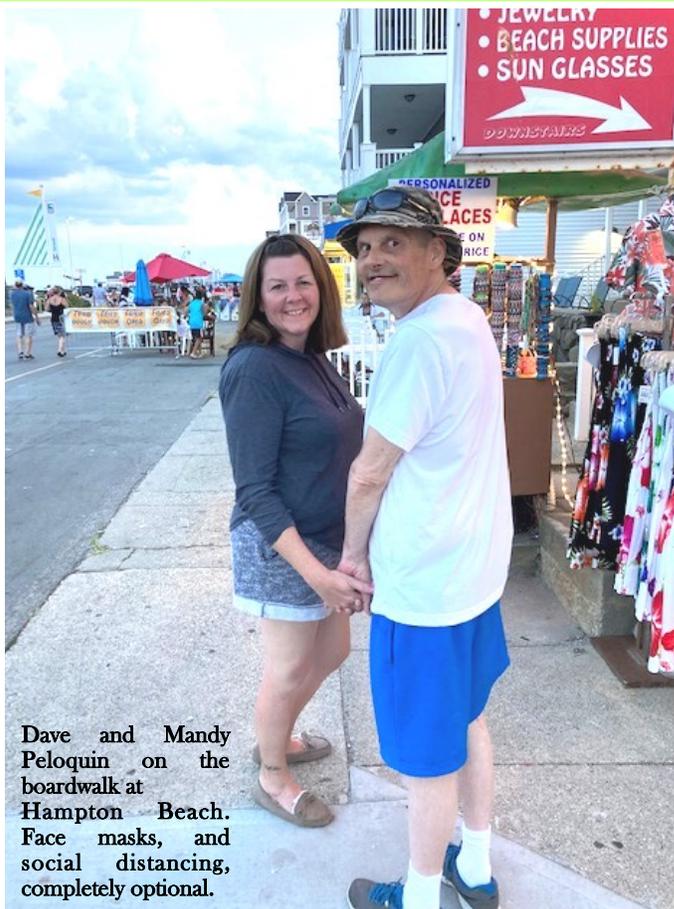
Space, zealously guarded, aggressively defended, is the perpetual fly in the ointment.

Unpacking had barely gotten started this time when Abagayle’s beau Chris was berated for briefly violating a neighboring homeowner’s perimeter (“we’ll egg the guy’s house before we go,” it was jokingly decided). That was on Sunday. On Monday, just after the beeping trash trucks rolled through, a man in a yellow jacket bearing the words “Parking Enforcement” and brandishing a clipboard was spotted out on the road. Within minutes, he had ticketed a motorcycle across the street (“can only imagine what *that’s* going to cost the offender,” someone chimed) and placed orange cones and signs (“Hampton Beach Resident Parking Only”) in front of several properties. On Tuesday, Chris (who had become an obvious target by then) was setting up the canopy within steps of a low tide when a woman already ensconced on a blanket next to him said “how much — beach do you need?” On Thursday night, the patriarch and matriarch, in puzzlement at the stipulation that the parking lot next to the beach would be closed at 8:00 p.m. instead of at midnight as it was in pre-Covid-19 days, asked a passing park ranger in a truck they had flagged down whether this applied “if we’re already parked and the restaurants and shops are still open.” “I can’t say for sure that you will be towed and fined twenty-five dollars but that is probably what is going to happen,” she said, sympathetically.

None of which compares to what Mr. P, Amanda and the then-young kids—Caitlin, Jordan and Mikey—were subjected to when stopped for a minor motor-vehicle infraction as they departed the beach in—when was it, 2012? Their belongings removed, the children made to get out of the car, an inspection conducted, a bucket of sand in their possession that they had carted off as a memento—a souvenir—discovered.irate at the harassment, Mr. P. telephoned Hampton police headquarters as soon as he got home to register a complaint.

“Sir, do you realize you just confessed to a felony (by having acknowledged inadvertently removing sand from the beach)” a sergeant told him.

“My advice to you is to never come back to Hampton Beach.”  
At Hampton Beach, the sand, like the space, is precious. ■



Dave and Mandy Pelouin on the boardwalk at Hampton Beach. Face masks, and social distancing, completely optional.

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