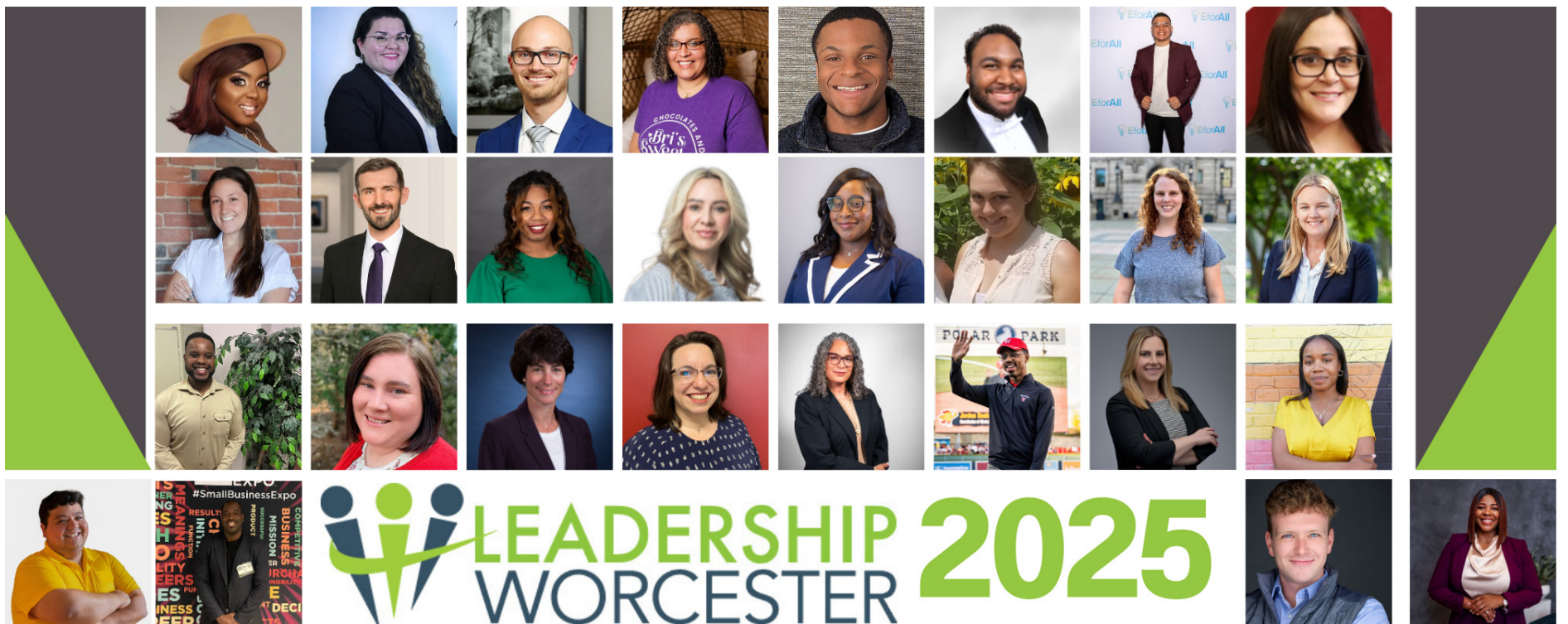




What's brewing at Greater Good? **6**

Chamber Announces Leadership Worcester Class of 2025

by WORCESTER REGIONAL CHAMBER OF COMMERCE



The Worcester Regional Chamber of Commerce recently announced the selection of 28 talented professionals who will make up the class of 2025. Members of the Leadership Worcester Class of 2025 are:

- Michell Addo, Advocates, Inc.
- Eliana Agudelo, City of Worcester
- Shepard Allen, Bartlett Wealth Management
- Briana Azier, Bri's Sweet Treats
- Giovanni Blue, Workplace Resource
- Christon Carney, Mechanics Hall
- Jose Castro, Entrepreneurship for All (EforAll)
- Tina Cicero, Leominster Credit Union
- Guillermo Creamer, Thrive Support & Advocacy
- Karlene Cudak, CASA Project Worcester County
- Brian Edmonds, Prince Lobel Tye LLP
- Patricia (Tita) Feraud-King, College of the Holy Cross
- Jennifer (Jenn) Grant, The Hanover Insurance Group
- Bwann Kellie Gwann, Worcester Polytechnic Institute
- Michelle Johnstone, City of Worcester
- Leah Maroney, City of Worcester
- Christine McCall Martello, Consigli Construction
- Dr. Sheri-Ann McLean -Williams, Mclean Coaching and Consulting, LLC.
- Casey Onuigbo, Worcester Police Department
- Jillian Phillips, Friendly House
- Ellen Piccioli, Worcester Polytechnic Institute
- Amie Richard, Pernet Family Health Service
- Sylvia Ruiz, Sevita Health
- Jordan Sealey-Ashford, Worcester Red Sox
- Stefanie Silva, Worcester Regional Chamber of Commerce
- Mikayla Tucker-Davis, MassHire Central Career Centers
- Brandon Wills, Cunningham & Associates
- Moses Laguerre Zenon, MA Department of Correction

The class was carefully selected by a committee that includes a diverse group of individuals committed to Leadership Worcester. The selection committee sought motivated individuals who aspire to take an active leadership role in the city and who want to work collaboratively across sectors on system changes. The selected applicants were notified this July.

The 2025 class will get underway on September 5, 2024 with an overnight retreat. The retreat will offer participants an opportunity to get to know one another, determine individual leadership strengths, learn more about participants' experiences, and to understand more about the Worcester community.

Monthly sessions will explore topics that are critical to the city. The daylong sessions will take place one Thursday a month from October through May and culminate in a graduation in June 2025. Session topics include: Urban Sustainability, Education, Economic Development, Public Health, Community Safety, Government, Arts & Culture, and Food Security.

"This Class of 2025 of Leadership Worcester is the tenth cohort of the program lead by the Chamber. The Chamber ran a similar program for many years but stopped in the 1990s," said Karen Pelletier, Executive Vice President of the





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Vote NO on Question 2

by **TIMOTHY P. MURRAY**, PRESIDENT & CEO,
WORCESTER REGIONAL CHAMBER OF COMMERCE



In fiscal year 2022 it is estimated that Massachusetts taxpayers of all types through their local, state and federal taxes contributed over \$20,197,461,902.05 to fund the Pre-K through 12 public education system across the Commonwealth. This investment of over \$20 billion annually into the public schools is about making sure that Massachusetts children graduate with an educational skill level that will allow them to work and compete in an

increasingly complex world economy. Accordingly, given the size and scale of this annual taxpayer investment it is reasonable to have a uniform statewide assessment to ensure that our children have these baseline skills rather than having 300 plus school districts, across Massachusetts each establishing their own separate assessment and high school graduation requirements. This is why the state established, in 1993, the MCAS exam as a statewide assessment tool and high school graduation requirement. High school sophomores must pass the MCAS in order to graduate from high school and make sure that they are proficient in English language arts, math, and science at a tenth-grade level. The good news is that in 2019, 88.4% of all students passed the exam on their first attempt. Retests, tutoring, support and processes that include cohort and portfolio appeals are available for those unable to pass the MCAS exam through a student's local school district and/or the state.

The establishment and implementation of high standards for students and teachers has resulted in Massachusetts being ranked number one in the nation in many student achievement measures. As the President and CEO of the Worcester Regional Chamber of Commerce, the single biggest issue we hear from our 2,100 member businesses and organizations on a daily basis is the need for a skilled workforce.

As the son, husband, and brother-in-law of public school educators, and as a former mayor and school committee chair in Worcester, I recognize the MCAS is not a perfect tool, and that improvements can be made to more fully

QUESTION 2, P4

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Assistant to the President & CEO

TAMARA BERRY

Worcester Green Corps Coordinator

AMELIA TIERI

Finance Assistant

RHONDA WHITE

With publication dates in February, May, August, and November, Chamber Exchange: The Newspaper is a quarterly publication written and produced by Worcester Regional Chamber of Commerce staff and members. Content is geared to business professionals, members, elected officials, and engaged citizens.

Each quarter, 20,000 copies are mailed to 6,000 members and business professionals and roughly 13,000 City of Worcester registered voters. The remainder are distributed among area businesses.

If you're interested in being a point of distribution, or would like to know more about placing an advertisement in the Chamber Exchange, please contact Kristen Luna at kluna@worcesterchamber.org. To contact the editorial staff, please email Caitlin Lubelczyk at clubelczyk@worcesterchamber.org.

Unless otherwise noted, the editorial content herein is the opinion of the Worcester Regional Chamber of Commerce and does not reflect the opinion of any specific member, business, or partner of the Chamber.

Worcester Regional Chamber CALENDAR of EVENTS

AUGUST

- Aug. 20** 12:00pm **Healthcare Roundtable: In Collaboration with MassHire - A Special Conversation on the Future of IT in Healthcare**
Chamber Offices
Sponsored by: Blue Cross, Blue Shield of MA, Saint Vincent Hospital
- Aug. 27** 5:00pm **Young Professionals Night Out**
X Golf Worcester
Sponsored by: Clark University

SEPTEMBER

- Sept. 5** 11:00am **Manufacturing Roundtable with Chris Ross of Waters Corp.**
Chamber Offices
Sponsored by: S&G and Industrial Transfer & Storage
- Sept. 12** 7:00am **The Breakfast Club**
Hogan Center | College of the Holy Cross
Presenting Sponsor: Berkshire Bank
- Sept. 17** 2:30pm **Human Resources Roundtable Leveraging Technology for HR Efficiency**
Live on Zoom
Sponsored by: Nichols College Graduate Studies

SEPTEMBER

- Sept. 17** 11:00am **Construction & Real Estate Roundtable: Specialized Energy Code**
Building Evolution Corp
Sponsored by: Building Evolution Corp & Republic Services
- Sept. 18** 4:00pm **Worcester Chamber Informational Session**
Cyprian Keyes Golf Club
- Sept. 18** 5:00pm **Business After Hours w/Corridor 9/495**
Cyprian Keyes Golf Club
Presenting Sponsor: Bay State Savings Bank
- Sept. 19** 5:00pm **Diverse Professionals Round Table**
Awards & Networking Event at The Hanover Insurance Group
Sponsors: Fidelity Bank and The Hanover Insurance Group
- Sept. 24** 11:00am **Nonprofit Round Table**
DEI Initiatives and Where They Can go Wrong
Chamber Offices
Presenting Sponsor: Bowditch & Dewey

OCTOBER

- Oct. 1** 12:00pm **Business & Government Forum**
MassBio CEO & President - Kendall Burlin O'Connell
Chamber Offices
Presenting Sponsors: Wellpoint and WuXi Biologics
Supporting Sponsors: Takeda & Ventry Associates
- Oct. 11** 8:00am **Game Changers Business Conference & Resource Fair | Workforce**
Mechanics Hall
Presenting Sponsor: M&T Bank

NOVEMBER

- Nov. 7** 4:00pm **Tri-Chamber Salute to the Troops "A Legacy of Loyalty and Service"**
American Heritage Museum
Sponsors: AIS
- Nov. 13** 9:00am **Seminar Series: Building A Strategic Business Plan Outline**
Chamber Offices
Presenting Sponsor: National Grid



all events subject to change- for the most up-to-date calendar visit worcesterchamber.org

Growing Up: The Benefits of Urban Density for Local Businesses

by **DARNELL DUNN**, DIRECTOR OF BUSINESS RECRUITMENT,
WORCESTER REGIONAL CHAMBER OF COMMERCE



A 2021 report by McKinsey & Company estimated that Massachusetts needs to produce an average of 57 new homes per municipality for a total of 20,000 homes throughout the Commonwealth per year this decade to match projected housing demand.

Rising interest rates, increased construction costs, and prolonged economic uncertainty coming out of the COVID-19 pandemic have combined to slow the pace of housing starts in Massachusetts to a crawl.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau's Building Permit Survey, through the first half of 2023, Massachusetts is on pace to create 12,400 housing units statewide, 30 percent below the same period last year.

Between proposed projects such as the Madison Properties developments, Boston Capital's Table Talk Lofts, Wood Partner's Alta Seven Hills, and Churchill James' The Cove, the City of Worcester has close to 1,500 new housing units on track to be delivered in 2024. A worthy effort but well below the approximate 3,450 units the city would need to create its proportional share of the Commonwealth's total.

To continue to close the housing gap in the Commonwealth's second-largest city, we need to find creative ways to identify sites that can maximize density, support walkability, and ultimately, improve housing affordability.

Many of our readers may be familiar with the West Side Artery concept plan; a study conducted by local Architect Steve Mita on behalf of The Worcester Regional Chamber of Commerce that was written by my colleague Michael Kane in the last issue of the Chamber Exchange.

Each of the four nodes along the artery referenced in the study contains several surface parking fields that offer compelling prospects for infill development for three key constituents: prospective residential real estate developers, local area business owners, and abutters.

“To continue to close the housing gap in the Commonwealth’s second-largest city, we need to find creative ways to identify sites that can maximize density, support walkability, and ultimately improve housing affordability”

Large undeveloped parcels in the urban core of the city allow developers to tie into existing water, sewer, and utility infrastructure which have the potential to limit the scope of the site work needed to prepare a given parcel for construction thereby compressing the time between when a shovel goes into the ground and that recent college grad, essential service worker, or young family gets to move into their new home.

All things being equal, compressing the time between property acquisition and cash flow generation, better positions a developer to compete for the capital needed to fund a given project.

At a time when risks of ground-up construction are elevated, commercial banks, private lenders, and other capital providers are more apt than ever to scrutinize the underlying factors that drive leasing.

Due to the sheer number of surface parking lots in the concept plan area, the ability in most cases, to support onsite parking and proximity

to amenities, node # 2 in the concept plan is well positioned to attract housing development.

The Morris Square node encompasses 28 parcels on approximately 9 acres of land. Surface parking lots account for nearly 60% of the land area making this an ideal location for infill development.

The area offers tremendous public transit connectivity, proximity to open greenspace, and walkability to Downtown's many amenities. These are all factors that drive residential leasing activity.

Creating more density in the City's urban core means more customers for local area businesses. Over time, this dynamic drives demand for commercial space as prospective companies look to establish a presence in a market where their customers live, work, and play.

Finally, the corresponding impact on property values is positive for abutting property owners.

Stay tuned for more updates as we begin to facilitate conversations around leveraging the opportunity this concept plan has helped uncover.

LEADERSHIP, CONTINUED

Worcester Regional Chamber of Commerce. “Since 2015, the program has been extremely competitive, with 66 applications this year for 28 spots. Leadership from various sectors and stakeholders curate each session, volunteering their time to help ensure an informed network of future leaders for the City.”

“Now more than ever, we need leaders - those who understand the needs of our community and will step up to facilitate change and inclusivity,” said Timothy P. Murray, President and CEO, Worcester Regional Chamber of Commerce. “For ten years Leadership Worcester has been cultivating just such individuals. Graduates of the program have gone on to do incredible things in our community and beyond. I know that this new class will do the same to help our great city continue to grow in the fields of science, education, healthcare, technology, and more.”

“As a past Leadership Worcester graduate, several years ago, I have since then overlapped with many LW classmates that are now involved in the community and it is incredibly heartening for me to see so many recent grads of

Leadership Worcester getting involved with local organizations. It is a fabulous program, and it helps the Worcester area advance as a great place to live and do business! Leadership Worcester grads really make a difference.” - Deb Cary, Community Advocacy and Outreach Manager, Mass Audubon, Central Region

The cost to participate in the program is \$3,200. Scholarship assistance from employers and a number of Worcester foundations including: Greater Worcester Community Foundation, George F. and Sybil H. Fuller Foundation, George I. Alden Trust, Stoddard Charitable Trust, Hoche-Scofield Foundation, the Fletcher Foundation, and the Leadership Worcester Alumni Fund which is made up from alumni donations.

Applications for the next class will be available online in February 2025. For more information, visit www.leadershipworcester.com.

QUESTION 2, CONTINUED

assess the educational attainment levels of students. However, in the absence of an improved alternative, it would be both foolhardy and irresponsible to eliminate the MCAS as a graduation requirement without an alternative. Unfortunately, this is being proposed in the upcoming Question 2 ballot initiative which seeks to eliminate the MCAS graduation requirement without an agreed upon statewide alternative.

First and foremost, this ballot question is a disservice to our students as we know positive educational outcomes are inextricably linked to their future

economic and financial success. Secondly, our educators are able to use the MCAS as a diagnostic tool in identifying students' academic strengths and weaknesses which makes efficient use of classroom time and instruction. Lastly, taxpayers of all stripes deserve to know that their annual \$20 billion investment into the Massachusetts public education system is providing a positive return in terms of producing a well-educated and skilled workforce needed to keep Massachusetts competitive. We urge Massachusetts voters to vote No on Question 2.



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IMPERIAL INSPIRATIONS: THE GREATER GOOD CHRONICLES

by **CAIT LUBELCZYK**, VICE PRESIDENT OF MARKETING AND COMMUNICATIONS, WORCESTER REGIONAL CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

Greater Good Imperial Brewing Company, located right here in Worcester is renowned for its focus on crafting high-quality imperial beers. Established in 2016, Greater Good has distinguished itself as America's first and only all-imperial brewing company, offering a diverse selection of robust, flavorful beers with higher alcohol content than traditional brews. This commitment to crafting imperial-strength beers has made Greater Good a standout in the New England craft beer scene.

The brewery offers a welcoming taproom where visitors can enjoy a variety of their unique creations. Their flagship beer, Pulp Daddy, is a New England-style IPA known for its juicy, hazy character and balanced hop profile. In addition to their core offerings, Greater Good regularly experiments with new flavors and limited-edition releases, ensuring there's always something new and exciting for visitors to try. The brewery also hosts events, live music, and food trucks, making it a popular destination for both locals and tourists.

Greater Good Imperial Brewing is dedicated to sustainability and community involvement, emphasizing environmentally friendly practices and local partnerships. They source ingredients locally whenever possible and focus on reducing their environmental impact through innovative brewing techniques. By prioritizing quality, community, and sustainability, Greater Good has become a beloved fixture in Worcester and a must-visit destination for beer enthusiasts across the region.

Paul Wengender, the founder of Greater is a passionate craft beer enthusiast, Wengender established the brewery in 2016 with the vision of creating America's first and only all-imperial brewing company. With a background in both brewing and life sciences, he has successfully combined his expertise to develop a brand that emphasizes innovation and quality. Under his leadership, Greater Good has become known for its exceptional imperial-strength beers, such as the popular Pulp Daddy IPA. Wengender's commitment to excellence and sustainability has positioned Greater Good as a prominent player in the New England craft beer scene, attracting both local patrons and beer aficionados from across the country. He took a step back from day-to-day operations for a few years, but now he is back and ready to



reconnect with the community that he chose 9 years ago.

Can you tell our readers a little bit about yourself and your background?

My career has always involved biology. I am a microbial geneticist by university training and got my first job in the 90s at Pfizer, started my own biotech in Worcester a decade later, and then a decade after that started a brewery in Worcester! I've built and grown lab-based teams that in some way or another utilized microorganisms (yeast etc.) in fermenters for either drug discovery products or beer!

What inspired you to start a brewery, and why did you choose Worcester as the location for your venture?

Well like many craft breweries I started home brewing with friends and biotech coworkers about 15 years ago. However, unlike any other craft breweries I was focused solely on imperials, beer that is 8% or higher in ABV (Alcohol by Volume). I love big beers. But the imperial products on the market in 2000s were too boozy and had an unpleasant burn, so that simple experience became my (and our) quest to solve... the Pain Point (as they say) that we set out to solve and construct recipes that delivered balanced drinkable and approachable beers at 8,10, even 12% ABV.

I love Worcester. I really do. It's been home for my businesses. There's always been this sense of forward transformational motion in Worcester over the last 20 years. It's emotional, it's hopeful, it's industrious. Business, culture, sports, all of it. I wanted my brewery to be a place that embraces its community and a place that the city identifies as its hometown brewery meeting place. What I think is really cool is that we've also brought a "destination brewery" here that travelers outside the city like to visit.

What challenges did you face in establishing an all-imperial brewing company, and how did you overcome them?

It takes considerable investment to get noticed for your "points of differentiation" in a market like craft beer where there is a great deal of uniformity. We have been more of a bootstrap-financed startup and growing venture so the path for getting Greater Good Imperials brand awareness has been incremental, probably slower than we expected, but especially in New England and certainly here at home in Worcester we've done well to differentiate the GG brand.

How do you approach the development of new beer flavors, and what influences your choice of ingredients?

We draw inspiration from our mug club members, our staff, our colleagues in the industry, and mash in ideas from everywhere. The GG team started saying "we will try to imperialize any style" even traditionally low ABV styles like sours, blondes, lagers and pilsners. It's R&D and it doesn't always work out! but we've actually become quite good at making any style at 8% or above a smooth, drinkable experience.

How do you see the craft beer industry evolving in the next few years, and what role do you envision your brewery playing in that future?

Well, craft beer market is like George Costanza after he jumped in a cold lake. There's shrinkage. Can I say that (-:). Haha. There are some breweries in distress out there. But strong breweries will remain if they have brand loyalty and a superior product. Right now, we feel like we are in a position of strength on those points. Plus, we have our taproom and it is an amazing place to meet colleagues, have an event, listen to music, play trivia with friends, bring the family or the dog, etc. so we remain very focused on offering the neighborhood a welcoming fun and relaxing day or night out with friends and family. We hope

"I wanted my brewery to be a place that embraces its community and a place that the city identifies as its hometown brewery meeting place. What I think is really cool is that we've also brought a "destination brewery" here that travelers outside the city like to visit."

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CATCHING UP WITH WORCESTER GREEN CORPS

by AMELIA TIERI, WORCESTER GREEN CORPS COORDINATOR, WORCESTER REGIONAL CHAMBER OF COMMERCE



The Worcester Green Corps is a program that seeks to bridge the gap between social, economic, and environmental concerns in the city of Worcester through placemaking, employment experience, and action.

As someone who has worked with Green Corps previously and who has since risen in the ranks, I am a testament to the effectiveness of this program's mission and goals. My every decision as the Green Corps Coordinator is informed by my previous experiences as a District Site Manager. I was welcomed back into the program by familiar faces, and a general bearing of how the program runs both in the field and behind the scenes. This knowledge has been pivotal in my success thus far and I am looking forward to applying these experiences and improving upon them to make each program better than the last.

As a proud employer of the Worcester Community Action Council (WCAC) YouthWorks Summer Session, Green Corps makes every effort to curate a program that is inclusive, fun, and impactful for all who participate. Our program builds practical training experiences, exposure to local careers, and new meaningful friendships all while getting outside and connecting with the city we call home!

This summer, our youth have been soaking up the sun and making Worcester a little cleaner and greener each day! Our crews have gotten their hands dirty and helped us to revitalize two of our pollinator garden beds at University Park as well as clean up various neighborhoods such as the Canal District, Main South, and Vernon Hill!

Just two weeks into our fourth summer of action, the Worcester Green Corps has collected 62 bags of trash, weighing 412.2 lbs. total, from Worcester's streets, parks, and neighborhoods. This year's cohort of YouthWorkers came into the program passionate, and eager to learn and take action against environmental issues that affect their own communities.

The last couple of weeks, our youth have participated in valuable career pathways sessions about habitat restoration and the waste industry. Each Friday, I am privileged to see how curiosity takes root and grows in the minds

Above: Worcester Green Corps Celebrates Kick off at University Park earlier this summer

Below: Worcester Green Corps at Casella Waste Systems on Hardscrabble Rd. in Auburn. Photo courtesy of Worcester Green Corps.



of these students. This group of students is engaged and enthusiastic about each topic that is presented, and each hand raised fills the whole room with a contagious sense of excitement about their bright futures.

Our program would not be possible without the continued support of United Way of Central Massachusetts. As one of our founding sponsors, the United Way of Central Massachusetts has helped our organization grow from an idea into a reality and, in turn, has given us the ability to impact the lives of thousands of Worcester residents. With the help of our sponsors and community members alike, we hope to continue to expand this program as well as its reach so that we can build a Worcester that is beautiful, clean, and sustainable for generations to come.

Amelia Tieri is the Coordinator for the Worcester Green Corps and a former Green Corps district manager.



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5 QUESTIONS with

Dr. Eric Dickson,



UMass Memorial Health CEO

Dr. Eric Dickson is President and CEO of UMass Memorial Health (UMMH), the largest nonprofit health care system in Central Massachusetts, employing over 17,500 caregivers and generating \$4.1 billion in annual revenue. The system includes four hospitals on eight campuses with more than 1,000 licensed beds; 70 office-based community practices; a behavioral health service; six urgent care centers; and an Accountable Care Organization (ACO).

1. How has the health care crisis in Massachusetts impacted access to essential services for low-income communities?

Even before the erosion of Steward Healthcare, Massachusetts has been facing an unprecedented healthcare crisis. Rising premiums, staffing shortages and capacity challenges, and financial pressures like inflation have significantly impacted patients' ability to access essential services. These impacts have been felt most acutely in low-income communities already facing barriers to care.

As health care costs rise, we see low-income and underserved patients delaying or skipping necessary care and having to choose between receiving care and paying for their homes or putting food on the table. Patients also struggle to access primary care services across the state, which makes it difficult for patients to receive the preventative health care services they need to stay out of the hospital.

As a safety-net institution, UMass Memorial Health's mission is to provide exceptional care to our patients and support the health care needs of all patients and the overall health and wellbeing of the communities we serve by investing in new programs.

In addition to improving and maintaining access to essential health care services throughout Central Massachusetts, we offer community-based services at no cost to patients through our Community Benefits programs. These programs include vaccination drives, mental health services, mobile medical and dental care, senior services, youth programs, social services partnerships, subsidized and charity care, and more.

2. What measures are being taken by local health systems to address post-acute bed and physician shortages in Central Massachusetts, particularly as Heywood Healthcare faces bankruptcy?

We are in the middle of a health care crisis in Massachusetts. At UMass Memorial Medical Center, our tertiary referral center, it's not uncommon for us to have close to 100 patients in our emergency department waiting for an inpatient bed. On some days, the backlog feels worse than it was at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Staffing in post-acute settings is one of the root causes. Thousands of positions remain unfilled across the care continuum in Massachusetts, forcing some health care providers to take beds offline that cannot be adequately or safely staffed. Chronic understaffing in settings such as skilled nursing facilities and rehabilitation centers, make it more difficult for us to discharge patients to the appropriate care setting and admit new patients.

At a macro level, one way to improve patient throughput is to initiate "care traffic control" - or better manage how patients are admitted to post-acute care facilities after they have received specialized inpatient care. During the pandemic, the Massachusetts Executive Office of Health and Human Services, in partnership with the Massachusetts Health & Hospital Association, tracked inpatient capacity at different health care facilities throughout the state. I'm a big proponent of resurrecting this model for post-acute care settings. Information about which facilities are full or have capacity could help us better understand where to transfer patients and help prioritize transfers from tertiary care centers that are often the most backlogged.

To help address the staffing crisis, we are focused on employee retention, caregiver satisfaction and recruitment at UMass Memorial. For example, our New Graduate Nurse Residency Program helps ensure that recent graduates are placed in the right position within our system, easing the transition from residency to practice and improving job satisfaction and performance. The Medical Center's first-year nurse retention rate is well above the national average in large part

because of this program. We also continue to invest in workforce development initiatives, like our registered apprenticeship program, that aim to expand our pipeline of talent and ensure that we're reaching candidates who may be interested in a career in health care.

We are also implementing innovative ways to provide care outside of the hospital by scaling our UMMH Hospital at Home program, which has benefited more than 2,000 patients. Designed to improve health equity and lower costs, the program is one of the largest hospital-at-home programs in the country, serving an average of 15-20 patients per day. Its success has led us to become the first health system in the country to accept post-Cesarean patients to Hospital at Home, increasing recovery and comfort options for postpartum patients after delivering via C-section. I believe this is a monumental step for improving equity and outcomes for postpartum patients, while also allowing our caregivers to address social determinants of health in real time.

3. How are rising health care costs affecting families in Central Massachusetts and what is UMass Memorial Health doing to improve affordability?

Residents across the state and in Central Massachusetts are struggling to afford health care. More than 41 percent of Massachusetts residents in a 2021 Center for Health Information and Analysis poll noted that they had trouble affording care in the 12 months previous.

UMass Memorial Health is a safety-net institution, with a mission and responsibility to serve patients from under-resourced communities. Roughly 70 percent of our patients are either publicly insured or uninsured, meaning that they are disproportionately impacted by rising health care and living costs. It is our job to ensure they have access to the compassionate, world-class care they need and deserve.

Last year, we dedicated \$340M to public health initiatives and programs that help improve the health of all residents. We will continue to offer these programs, which are integral to the health and wellbeing of the communities we serve, even though we are not reimbursed for them.

4. How has Steward's bankruptcy impacted the Massachusetts health care landscape and patients across the state?

Many of the Steward Health Care hospitals and facilities are also safety net institutions that play important roles in serving vulnerable members of our communities. With Steward's bankruptcy - and now with the pending closure of two of their hospitals - patients are confused and concerned about the future. Some patients are choosing to receive care at other facilities or delaying their care all together, which is challenging our already fragile ecosystem that is seeing sicker patients every day. To ensure patients can receive the services they need and deserve, healthcare organizations across the state have vowed to do their best to serve impacted communities and support continuity of care while Steward Health Care undergoes its exit from the state.

I also want to acknowledge the Steward caregivers working tirelessly to maintain access to essential health services during this disruptive time. I am continuously impressed by their dedication and passion for helping others, even when there are so many questions left unanswered. With the recent announcement of Nashoba Valley Medical Center's closure, we at UMass Memorial have pledged to offer job opportunities within our system to Nashoba's staff and providers.

As we anticipate moving beyond this crisis, patients and caregivers alike will need stability. Our industry can learn a lot from our coordinated response in the early days of COVID-19. Our healthcare system must come together to solve the ongoing capacity challenges, address social determinants of health, support continuity of care, and instill confidence as we move forward.

5. What is new at UMass Memorial Health?

There is a lot going on at UMass Memorial Health. We are developing a new inpatient, acute-care facility at the North Pavilion building on the UMass Memorial Medical Center University Campus. It will offer 72 private medical-surgical beds along with outpatient care offerings. By adding more staffed beds to the healthcare ecosystem, our hope is that we can improve access to the services we provide. The North Pavilion will fuse the best of in-person and virtual care, offering convenience, seamless integration, and a highly personalized patient experience, and will feature state of the art technology and equipment. We anticipate this facility being ready for patients in early 2025 and look forward to sharing more with the community soon.

We're also focused on ensuring our caregivers have the tools they need to be successful, and our organization has made incredible strides advancing our technological capabilities and efficiencies over the last several years. For example, our commitment to fully integrate Epic's Electronic Health Record (EHR) system at UMMH has paid off significantly. Just six years after our investment in Epic, we achieved Epic's Gold Stars Level 10 recognition for our exceptional use of the digital platform software - an honor that we have received two years in a row. We were the only health system in Massachusetts to receive the award in 2023 and one of only a handful of organizations across the nation to earn this distinction twice.



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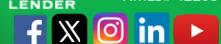
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VOTE NO on Question 5: Support our Local Hospitality Industry and Tipped Employees

by MICHAEL KANE, ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND PUBLIC POLICY ASSOCIATE, WORCESTER REGIONAL CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

For the November 2024 election, the Worcester Regional Chamber of Commerce will oppose Question 5 in support of our local small businesses, restaurants, and tipped employees.

Question 5 will eliminate the tipped minimum wage in Massachusetts and would gradually increase the wage of tipped employees until their wages meet the state minimum wage in the year 2029. Also, the ballot measure would allow restaurants to implement “tip pools” where non-tipped employees would share tips collected by servers.

If approved by voters, this ballot measure will fundamentally change the way our local restaurants and bars operate, which are still recovering from the negative economic conditions that the COVID-19 pandemic placed on the hospitality industry. As this industry already operates on thin margins and Worcester businesses have to pay the 7th Highest Commercial Tax Rate in the Commonwealth, it is crucial to defeat this ballot measure to support our local hospitality industry.

Businesses are not the only group that are concerned about this ballot measure, tipped employees in the hospitality industry are as well. A survey conducted in 2024, by the Massachusetts Restaurant Association conveyed that a staggering 86% of tipped employees in Massachusetts think the current system works for them, and 90% believe that if tipped wages are eliminated, employees will earn less.

Employees are concerned and have showcased their resentment toward the elimination of tipped wages in other states. For example, a ballot measure in Maine was successfully passed to eliminate the tipped minimum wage in 2016, however, restaurant workers successfully lobbied the State Legislature to lower their minimum wage just one year later. They were concerned that by eliminating the tipped wage, customers would tip less and reduce the number of tips employees would take home to support themselves and their families.

A Cornell University study backs up these concerns as the study found that states with higher tipped minimum wages see lower than average tip percentages in restaurants. California, where employers are required to pay the state’s minimum wage in addition to any tips employees receive, has the lowest tip average among all 50 states.

Further, the hospitality industry and employees in Washington, D.C. have started to see the adverse effects of eliminating the tipped minimum wage in 2022. Since the ballot measure was passed over 10% of tipped employees (3,200) have been laid off or left the industry due to lower take-home pay and business closures.

In Massachusetts, the current law already requires employers in the hospitality industry to provide tipped employees with a guaranteed minimum wage of \$15, making up the difference for tipped employees who did not earn a minimum wage with tips. However, the MRA survey conveyed that an overwhelming majority of tipped employees in Massachusetts say they earn over minimum wage, as 89% of respondents report earning \$20 or more per hour (89%), and 56% of respondents report earning more than \$30 or more per hour.

If Question 5 were to pass in Massachusetts, some of our favorite bars and restaurants would simply not survive. The Worcester Regional Chamber of Commerce urges voters to support their local restaurants and tipped employees by VOTING NO on Question 5 in the November election.

BEER , CONTINUED

to launch a second brewery in Worcester County.

What advice would you give to an entrepreneur just making their start?

Oh wow. That's a broad question. I honestly just believe that the best entrepreneurs I've known truly understand that it's not an individual sport. Most media and business press would lead you to believe that entrepreneurship is a singular term or name, and those names get to pontificate advice on Shark Tank. My reality is that it's 100% about the team you build. It's a team sport. I've been so fortunate to be a part of (and inspired by) some great entrepreneurial teams.

Greater Good Imperial Brewing is located at 55 Millbrook Street in Worcester. You can find them online at greatergoodimperials.com.



Above: The Canal District, Kelley Square, and Millbury Street are home to many bars, restaurants, and clubs in Worcester, photo courtesy of Discover Central MA

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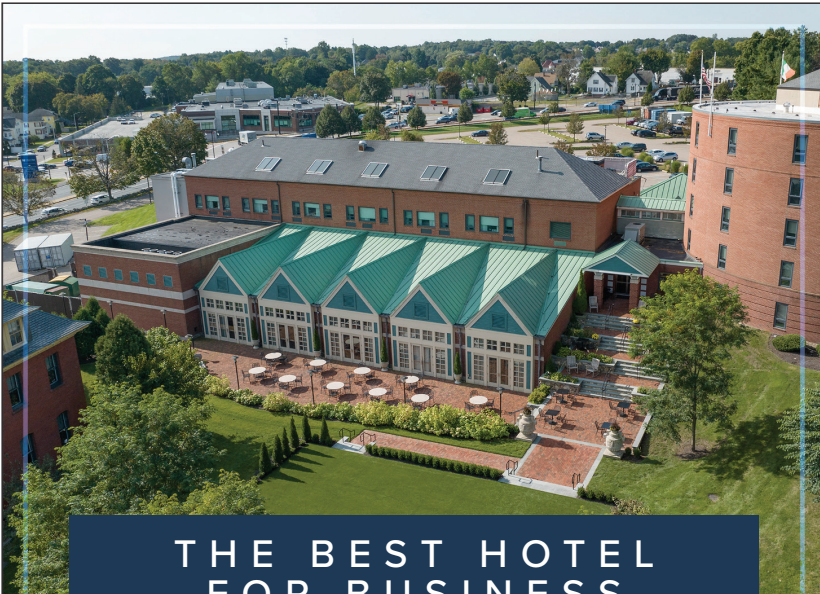
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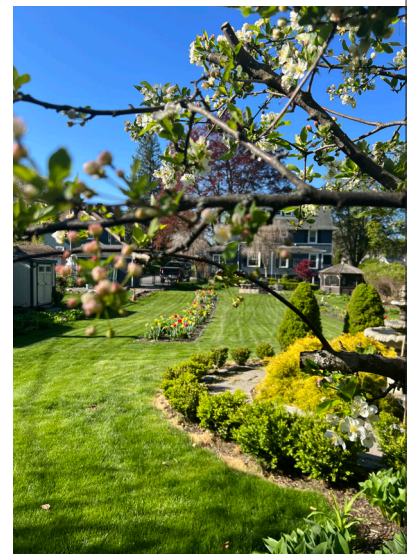
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Turning Lead into Gold: Two WooSox Hitters Shine in 2024

by KEVIN SALEEBA, CORRESPONDENT

The Boston Red Sox have had their share of first round draft busts through the years.

For every shining star like Carlton Fisk, Trot Nixon, Jacoby Elsbury, Jim Rice, and Roger Clemens, there are several highly touted first round disasters, like Craig Hansen (26th overall in 2004), Trey Ball (seventh overall in 2013), and Jay Groome (12th overall in 2016), who made little-to-no impact in the big leagues.

However, for every catastrophe, there are a few lower draft picks and undrafted free agents to work hard and make it to Boston with great success. Some most notable diamonds were former 2018 American League MVP Dustin Pedroia (64th overall in 2004), Red Sox Hall of Famer Dwight Evans (drafted in the fifth round of the June 1969 amateur draft), and Baseball Hall of Famer Wade Boggs (drafted in the seventh round of the 1976 MLB draft).

As current and recent Red Sox prospects like Roman Anthony, Marcelo Mayer, and Kyle Teel create most of the future MLB star buzz in Boston, the 2024 Worcester Red Sox have a couple of unheralded jewels on its roster, including Nick Sogard and Chase Meidroth. Whether they become the next Pedroia, Evans, or Boggs, that will be determined. However, they did improve their value within the organization this season with Sogard finally called up to the big club on July 31st.



NICK SOGARD, INFIELDER/OUTFIELDER

Not counting the designated hitter position, Nick Sogard has played six different fielding positions, including all four infield spots, as well as right and left field, for the WooSox. “I kind of play all over the place,” he said. “I try to make as many plays as I can where ever I’m at.”

Sogard, 26, has a combined field percentage of .971 for all six positions, while only making 11 errors in 152 tries. As good as his defense has been, his hitting is better. The switch-hitter is tied for seventh in the International League with 96 hits, including 17 doubles, 12 homeruns and 54 runs batted in (RBI). His out-

standing play all over the baseball diamond caught the attention of Boston Red Sox manager Alex Cora in July.

Cora was quoted by MassLive prior to the MLB All Star break saying Sogard is “playing great. He’s doing an outstanding job.” Cora also said Sogard is “playing good defense, putting good at bats from the left side and right side, just got to make sure people know it, right? That’s what I’m doing right now, and that’s a player when people are talking about you and you’re in Triple-A, you know you’re on the radar. It’s just a matter of time.”

The announcement of Sogard’s callup came at about 4 p.m. on July 31st when it was apparent that Sogard was not listed in the WooSox starting lineup against the Buffalo Bisons. Sogard, the former Tampa Bay Rays 2019 12th round draft pick, apparently was, in fact, on Cora’s radar. Sogard warrants such high praise from the Boston manager after the Red Sox acquired him in a low-key trade with the Rays in February of 2021. The deal included the Sox receiving Sogard and catcher Ronaldo Hernandez for Chris Mazza and Jeffrey Springs.

Flattered by Cora’s attention, Sogard does not want to think about things he cannot control. “Obviously, that’s cool to hear. It means a lot to hear him say that, but I just kind of got to keep playing, doing what I’m doing and we’ll see what happens.”

Sogard has already surpassed his homerun and RBI production from last year and he was close to career highs in hits and total bases before his promotion to Boston. He credits hard work in the offseason as the reason for his improvement. He focused on fixing his “bat path,” which is a proper swing path to help him get into the hitting zone quickly and stay in that zone as long as possible. The longer the bat cuts through the hitting zone the better chance he has of hitting the ball well at a high clip.



Above: Nick Sogard drew positive attention from Boston Manager Alex Cora this season and was finally called up to make his major league debut in August. Photo by Tayla Bolduc/WooSox.

“I worked a lot in the offseason on strength and bat speed and bat path as well,” he said. “So, probably those things helped. I’ve been working hard to get better in the outfield and at first base, a new position. So, I kind of been working on a lot ... They just introduced first base to me recently, so whatever they ask me to do, I’ll try. I want to be versatile.”

“I’m just trying to gain good weight, build arm strength, bat speed and stuff like that,” he said. “I got off to a pretty bad start. I’ve since been just trying to get neutral as quick as I could and just play as I know I can play. I just try to get a good pitch to hit and just hit it hard.”

Sogard made his major league debut on August first. He went ...?

Below: Chase Meidroth’s hitting has caught up to his fielding for the WooSox in 2024. Photo by Tayla Bolduc/WooSox.



CHASE MEIDROTH, INFIELDER

Prior to the 2024 season, **Chase Meidroth**, 24, was named the Boston Red Sox Minor League Player of the Year with only two errors at second base, shortstop, and third base combined for Double-A Portland. As good as he has been with the glove, his production at the plate was pedestrian at best where he hit .255 with 83 hits in 91 at bats for the Sea Dogs.

With the help of hitting coach **Doug Clark**, Meidroth, a fourth round righthanded draft pick by the Red Sox in 2022, was able to pinpoint where he could improve with the stick in the offseason.

“I think I was overswinging a little bit,” he said. “I was swinging too hard. I was almost trying to force things to happen instead of just letting the game just happen as it should. Dougie and I’ve been talking a lot, as far as, letting the game happen. Let it come to you. That constant reminder to just let the game happen. For me, hits are pitched, not hit. You hit mistakes. You hit balls

Easy Come, Easy Go: A Whirlwind of a Trade Deadline in Worcester

by KEVIN SALEEBA, CORRESPONDENT

**Note-All player stats updated as of the August 1st story deadline.*

The Major League trading deadline can be a stressful time for minor baseball players trying to do their job.

On July 30th, the clock struck 6 p.m. and the ability for clubs to make trades had expired. One day earlier, Pittsburgh Pirates general manager Ben Cherington called pitcher Quinn Priester on the phone to give him the news he was just dealt to the Boston Red Sox for Nick Yorke, the Red Sox 2020 first round draft pick (17th overall). Priester was told to report to Triple-A Worcester and that's how his "whirlwind" of a day began.

"Yeah, I talked to our GM, Ben Cherington, and then I was able to talk to (Red Sox chief baseball officer) Craig Breslow right after that and I started to get stuff underway," Priester told the media at Polar Park on July 30th. "It's literary been 24 hours almost. It's been crazy. You get a lot of texts from family and friends and old teammates now. All that stuff and trying to keep up with the whirlwind until it settles down in a couple days."

As Priester attempted to get settled in the WooSox clubhouse, both first baseman Niko Kavadas and right fielder Matthew Lugo were entered into the Worcester Red Sox starting lineup. It was about 45 minutes before the first pitch in a game against the Buffalo Bison that evening. A few minutes later, a new lineup was printed and the names of Kavadas and Lugo were missing. Eddy Alvarez was now in right field and Nathan Hickey was at first base.



Above: Nick Yorke was tearing up Triple-A pitching before the Red Sox traded him to Pittsburgh. Photo by Ashley Green/WooSox.

Speculation of another trade echoed around the clubhouse and in the press box. The rumor soon turned into reality. Kavadas and Lugo, along with Double-A right-handed pitcher Ryan Zeferjahn and Single-A right-handed pitcher Yeferson Vargas, were traded by the Red Sox for right-handed veteran pitcher Luis García from the Los Angeles Angels.

Prior to being dealt, Yorke and Kavadas discussed their mindset during this time of year.

"I don't pay a lot of attention to it," Yorke said a week before being traded to the Pittsburgh Pirates on July 29th. "I just come in day-by-day and do my job which is to put a bat on the ball. I want to hit the ball hard and make plays for my pitchers. That's all I'm going to try to do. Whether if it's here (in Worcester), there (in Boston), or where ever, it don't matter. It's kind of out of my control, so, I don't try to think about it or worry about it too much."

Kavadas, who finished with 17 homeruns and 20 double for the WooSox, had hoped his hard work would have paid off with a call to Boston. However, with Triston Casas entrenched at the first base position long term in Boston, Kavadas became expendable despite his high production this season. He tried not to worry about things he could not control. His main focus was to improve day-by-day.

"I don't really concern myself about what other people think I'm capable of doing," he said. "I know what I'm capable of doing and I think I can control my daily work. In doing so in the aggregate, they'll

TRADE , P19

Bravehearts' Stuart Dominating the FCBL this Summer

by KEVIN SALEEBA, CORRESPONDENT

**Note-All player stats updated as of the August 1st story deadline.*

Hudson native Brady Stuart has been a dominant pitching force for the Worcester Bravehearts this summer and the numbers show it.

Heading into the Futures Collegiate Baseball League (FCBL) all-star break, Stuart led the league in strikeouts (48) averaging nearly 12 punchouts per nine innings. He also has the lowest earned run average (.025) among starters with a minimum of 35 innings pitched while walking only 10 batters all season. As a result of his great pitching, he earned FCBL Pitcher of the Month honors for both May and June and his dominance on the mound garnered him a spot on the 2024 FCBL All Star team.

However, Stuart does not care about individual accomplishments. "At the end of the day you're not thinking about numbers," he said. "You're just trying to compete and trying to win the game. That's really it."

Bravehearts manager Alex Dion said Stuart's strong mound presence and mature attitude are keys to his success.

"I can talk about his presence on the mound, the way he carries himself," said Dion, who is in his fifth season as Bravehearts manager. "Brady has carried himself excellent through the course of the summer. He's a competitive kid. He throws a lot of strikes and I don't think there's any situation that we've put him in that's too big for him. So, yeah, he has a real mature way of going about his business. He's had a ton of success because of it."

Stuart's best performance of the summer was a near no-hitter against the Road Warriors on June 28. In that contest, he pitched into the ninth without giving up a hit. He forced Road Warriors shortstop Owen McHugh into a ground ball back to the mound for the first out. He then struck out pinch-hitter Tommy Goonan for out number two. Unfortunately, outfielder Nick Pappas ended the no-hit bid with a ground ball single on the first pitch he saw during the at bat. Stuart finished the complete game one hitter with 12 strikeouts and only two walks.

"He's just a competitor and has an unwillingness to give in to anybody," said Bravehearts pitching coach Greg Stagani. "He has a ton of fun playing the game ... As long as he's super competitive, he gets a ton of outs and commands the baseball when he wants to."

Stuart has a solid repertoire of pitches in his arsenal. He throws two main pitches with authority, a fastball that can reach 91 mile per hour and a vicious slider. He has also been working on a changeup with some success late in games



to give batters a different look, as well as a cutter that he admits is still a work in progress.

"It's usually just a two-pitch mix between fastballs and sliders," Stuart said. "I've been throwing a changeup more. So, I'll throw that too. I'm just trying to attack everybody with my stuff and not let them beat me. I also have great guys behind me that play great defense. I just try to let them help me and do what we need to do to win."

"Brady is a backdoor slider guy, mainly," said Stagani, who is in his third season as Bravehearts pitching coach. "He's worked really hard in bullpens on a cutter and a changeup. He's been pretty good in the game the last two outings with those pitches. It's something we're trying to get him comfortable with on guys on both sides of the plate. It's just something to try to keep in the back pocket until we need it."

Stagani said Stuart incorporated his new changeup in the recent one-hit game. "Going into that game is where he started to throw it," he said. "We're still

STUART , P22

HITTERS , CONTINUED

in the middle of the plate and I'm okay to take my walk if it doesn't end up in the zone."

Meidroth has kept his swing simple. He has a slight open stance with high hands. He starts with a quick leg lift and short stride to help himself swing quickly to the ball. This allows him to keep the barrel in the zone a long time. He has excellent pitch recognition, works the count well, and does not miss many pitches in the strike zone. His ability to make consistent contact has led to only 73 strikeouts in 397 plate appearances. He does not swing at bad pitches. He has 73 walks so far this season as compared to a total of 80 last season between Double-A Portland and Single-A Greenville combined.

This approach has paid off for Meidroth. Following the all-star break at the end of July, he was ranked sixth in the International League with 97 hits in 88 games, including 18 doubles, five homeruns, and 41 RBI while hitting mainly leadoff or second in the lineup. He has also maintained a solid .287 batting average with 10 stolen bases.

"I didn't exactly start out superhot. But it's a long season," Meidroth said, who began the season in a 5-for-30 slump. He would break out of that slump by mid-April where he hit safely in 13 of 15 games (April 16 to May 1), including a six-game hitting streak (April 25 to May 1) and a season long seven-game hitting streak (June 27 to July 3) prior to the all-star break. "Everyone is going to go through ups and downs. It's just part of it. I started off cold but then I got hot in the last few months. It's been a good little stretch."



His approach to hitting has led to 22 multi-hit games this season, including eight, three hit games. His best came batting leadoff in a June 30th game against the Scranton-Wilkes Barre Rail Riders when he went five-for-six with two RBI and scored two runs in a 15-5 WooSox victory.

"I haven't changed much in the last few years," he said. "It's more stick with what I'm doing well. Every day is a different approach and every day is a different plan. Every day is a different pitcher. I have a different plan for each pitcher. It just depends on the day and on how the body feels. There's a lot of variables that go into it and on how I draw up each day."

Meidroth looks to approach fielding like he does hitting. "In the field, it's pretty similar to hitting," he said. "You have to let the game come to you. I play up the middle (second base and shortstop), so I try to be as much of a vocal leader as I can. I'm always kind of talking to the outfielders, talking to the infielders, and constant talking to the pitchers, too. I think someone constantly talking out there keeps the game in a good flow."

Time will tell if Meidroth follows Sogard to Boston, but it will not be long until Cora notices another WooSox player. Who needs the first round?

Long Road to Recovery: Red Sox Triston Casas Opens up About his "Grueling Rehab" by KEVIN SALEEBA, CORRESPONDENT

**Note-All player stats updated as of the August 1st story deadline.*

It seemed like a harmless swing. On April 20th, Red Sox hitter, Triston Casas, stood ready in the lefthanded batter's box. He eyed the three-one pitch from Pirates righthander Mitch Keller.

Casas swung violently at the 94 mile per hour sinker and fouled it out of play. After making contact with the ball, the 6-foot-5, 244-pound first baseman winced on the follow through. As his left hand awkwardly came off the bat, he stumbled out of the box. Something was wrong. He walked pensively towards the dugout before returning to finish the at bat. He was replaced in the field the following inning. He was out of the game and would not be seen in a Red Sox uniform for more than three months.

Initially, the injury Casas suffered was thought to be torn cartilage in his rib cage. After further examination two days later, the prognosis was much worse. He fractured a left rib during that swing. He had a long and challenging recovery ahead.

"I couldn't sleep at night," Casas told the media at Polar Park more than three months after he originally sustained the injury. He was starting his rehab with the Worcester Red Sox on July 30th. "I couldn't breathe. It hurt to breathe. Yeah, that was pretty grueling."



Casas taking a swing during his first rehab game with the WooSox. Photo by Kevin Paul Saleeba.

Casas was told by the Red Sox medical staff that recovering from this injury was going to be arduous. The first problem he had to overcome was simply breathing.

"Originally, when I got hurt, I took about a quarter breath before (I felt) pain," he said. "One week in, I got to halfway (breathing) capacity. Three weeks in I could take three quarters (breath) before (feeling) pain. It took me a month to breathe regularly. Breathing hurt."

Breathing was not the only thing that was painful. Casas said doing simple things around the house caused him agony. "Getting out of bed hurt," he said. "Putting on my shoes. Putting on my shirt. Lifting my arms over my head. Bending down to pick something up. It really was a grueling process, for sure. Living was pretty unbearable for about a month."

Red Sox mental skills coordinator Rey Fuentes helped Casas stay positive throughout his rehabilitation. Fuentes incorporated mental exercises into Casas's rehab.

"Our mental skills coach, Coach Rey was constantly doing meetings with me (and other injured players like second baseman Vaughn Grissom and pitchers Lucas Giolito and Liam Hendricks). We had checkups a couple times a week. Making sure that we're staying in a good positive mindset," Casas said. "He really believes the way that you think about yourself physically can affect you. So, we were really trying to stay positive throughout it. It was visualization techniques, even just breathing exercises or mental clarity type of work. It was really something we put a lot of emphasis on and it's something I want to keep practicing because I feel like it was helping me to be present. I'm thankful for Rey and everything he's done for me through this process."

The best treatment for a broken rib is to do nothing. "For this kind of injury, the only thing that helps the recovery process is just rest," Casas said. "It's hard trying to find a balance to stay in shape. Doing baseball activities, but also giving it time to rest, because there is a mental grind to it as well. I want to feel like I'm getting better, but getting better is doing nothing so it was tough to balance. But, I'm happy how everything went."

Casas was finally able to get into the batting cage to take some swings about three weeks prior to returning to Worcester for his rehab stint.

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TRADE , CONTINUED

see what I'm capable of doing. We'll see. You never know."

With Yorke gone and Kavadas and Lugo heading out the door, Priester said he could not wait to wear a Red Sox uniform. "I got in at like two o'clock today. We flew in from Houston and when I got into the locker room they were really welcoming. The coaching staff has been great, so far. I'm definitely taking it slow this first day and (I'll) really get it going tomorrow and get back to work.

"I have a lot of emotions but (I'm) really excited," he said. "You know the organization speaks for itself. It's great. The history and the city and everything. There's a lot to be excited about. You know, to be able to wear Red Sox across my chest, is really special. It's something that is still setting in, you know, every single hour I'm here. And being part of the organization is really special."

WHAT THE WORCESTER RED SOX LOSE:**Nick Yorke, INF/OF**

Yorke was beginning to feel really comfortable at the plate in Triple-A. Two years ago, while playing for the Boston Red Sox A-ball minor league team, he was not feeling it. He was hitting a meager .232 average for the Greenville Drive, more than 100 points lower than his batting average from the previous year with the club. He also struck out 94 times in 80 games.

In A-ball, Yorke usually had an open stance with his hands by his chest. After his difficult 2022 season with the Drive, he decided to tinker with his batting mechanics in the fall of that year

while playing for the Scottsdale Scorpions in the Arizona Fall League.

"I was just trying to find an athletic position," said Yorke, who played this season for both Red Sox minor league affiliates, the Double-A Portland Sea Dogs and the Triple-A Worcester Red Sox. He was promoted to the WooSox in May 2024 from the Sea Dogs.

In an effort to find that "athletic position," he experimented with his hands higher up at the start of the swing with the bat pointed behind him. He then dropped his hands as the pitch was delivered into what hitters refer to as the "load position," a place where a hitter gathers momentum to their backside to prepare for an explosive swing.

"I did hit with my hands over my head a little bit," Yorke said. However, he still was not getting the results he was looking for. He went back to his lower hand setup with his hands located by his shoulders. This time, his hands were quieter with less movement. He added a slight leg lift for timing.

"Once I dropped the hands back down, I now put them in that (load position) spot that they drop into," Yorke said. "It's just a comfortable slot ... to try to just keep it calm and quiet. It helps to just be a little shorter and quicker to the ball."

This new position in the batter's box gave Yorke a solid feel for hitting. He has good bat speed through the strike zone. He also has a more fluid and compact swing which has led to better results. In 38 games with the WooSox, Yorke hit .310, with 45 hits, including eight doubles, six homeruns and 19 runs batted in (RBI). He also strikeouts less this season. He had a combined 68 strikeouts between Worcester and Portland in 83 games as compared to 122 strikeouts in 71 games at Portland last season.

"I would say my zone control is a little bit better this year," Yorke said. "I'm not chasing as much with two strikes. Just my pitch selection is better. I'm hitting pitches in the zone and making contact on them. I'm just not missing as many pitches in the zone. I'm putting the ball into play more."

**Niko Kavadas, first base**

With the Red Sox in desperate need for a power bat on the big club, there was no talk of WooSox first baseman Niko Kavadas as a possible option to fill that role. In split duty last season between Worcester and Double-A Portland, he combined for a respectable 22 homeruns. However, he batted a paltry .206 between both clubs and struck out 172 times in only 117 games.

Kavadas, 26, dedicated himself in the offseason to become a better hitter and it has paid off. In the first 80 games of 2024, the lefthanded power-hitter has 17 homeruns, he has raised his

batting average nearly 80 points (.281), and cut down on strikeouts (112).

"I used my offseason well," said Kavadas, who is having his best offensive season since being drafted by Boston in the eleventh round (316 overall) of the 2021 MLB Draft. In addition to hitting the ball out of the park, he has driven home 63 runs and raised his slugging percentage nearly 150 points (.573).

"I think that when you are in the middle of a season, it's easy to make day-to-day adjustments, but it's difficult making overarching adjustments because you don't really have that perspective of 30,000 feet," he said. "When you have the offseason, you can use that entire season of data, not just a day, a week, or a month. Being able to have that perspective and to be able to look back at it and say, 'wow, I really was overswinging. I really was trying to hit it 500 feet.'"

In the offseason, Kavadas analyzed a spray chart or diagram of the field that shows the location of each ball he put into play during an at-bat from the 2023 season. It helped give him valuable insight into his hitting tendencies and helped him understand his strengths and weaknesses in the batter's box. He realized he needed to "spin the ball" in the middle of the field more consistently.

"I've done a better job of staying through the middle of the field," he said. "I think if you look at my spray (chart) last year there was a lot of balls hooked down the right field line. There was a lot more swings and misses. I think that I'm doing a much better job staying through the middle of the field and making contact when the ball is in the (strike) zone.

"I think a lot of times I was just over swinging last year," he said. "I was trying to hit everything 500 feet. I think knowing that I'm strong enough and if I deliver, even my B-swing will be good enough to hit it out of any ballpark there is."

As a result of his offseason work, Kavadas has hit the ball high and center in the zone consistently this season. "I think doing that allows me to deliver the barrel with the correct path (through the zone). It helps me stay on time for the soft stuff down the right field line and hard stuff down the left field line and anything in between. I'm able to stay through center."

Kavadas's best game came against the Rochester Red Wings on July 12 where he had three hits, a homerun, and seven RBI. He has had 16 multi-hit games, including six, three-hit games and twice homered in a game three times. He also had a nine-game hitting streak from May 3 to May 12 where he batted .414, including four homeruns, two doubles, and eight RBI.

Kavadas varies his approach at the plate depending on the type of pitcher he faces. "I'm going to approach an east-west guy differently than a north-south guy and a lefthander is going to be different from a righthander."

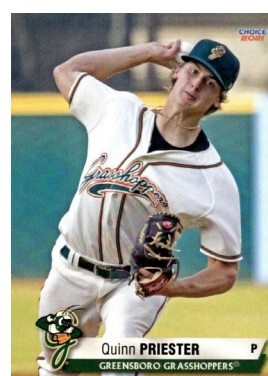
When a pitcher throws "east to west," it typically refers to the horizontal movement of their pitches. Instead of a straight trajectory, the ball moves sideways across the plate. For example, a slider or curveball might break from left to right for a right-handed pitcher or right to left for a left-handed pitcher. The pitcher looks to deceive and keep hitters off balance with that lateral movement.

In addition to his hitting, Kavadas has put a lot of work into improving his fielding at first base. He has a .988 fielding percentage with only five errors at first base, but he still thinks he has a lot of work to do with the glove. He was seen prior to games fielding ground balls under the supervision of WooSox bench coach Jose David Flores. "I've worked a lot with Flo," he said. "I worked on a lot of lateral stuff. There's a lot of receiving things at first base. I think I've done a really good job picking the ball. I still think I have some strides to make on lateral agility and range, but I think the conversion has been good ... I've received the ball really well, so far."

All that hard work made Kavadas a valuable trade chip.

**Matthew Lugo, outfield/infield**

Lugo, 23, hit .285 (77-for-270) with 20 doubles, four triples, and 16 homeruns in 78 games this season with Double-A Portland (43 games) and Triple-A Worcester (35 games). He made 55 starts in left field, five as the designated hitter, and one in center field. Selected by the Red Sox in the second round of the 2019 First-Year Player Draft, the right-handed hitter has batted .270 (432-for-1,599) in 424 career minor league games.

WHAT THE WORCESTER RED SOX GAIN:**Quinn Priester, right-handed pitcher**

The Red Sox acquired right-handed pitcher Quinn Priester from the Pirates in a one-for-one trade with the Red Sox for Nick Yorke. Priester, a 2019 first round pick (18th overall) for the Pirates, was optioned to Worcester where he hopes to get a fresh start after struggling in the majors this season.

"It's a new leaf," Priester told the media when he arrived at Polar Park on July 30th. He had subpar results pitching in 20 games (14 starts) with Pittsburgh the last two seasons. He had a 5-9 record with a high 6.46 earned run average (ERA). He gave up

STARTUP WORCESTER - Celebrating 10 Years of Helping Entrepreneurs in Worcester



by **MICHAEL KANE**, ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND PUBLIC POLICY ASSOCIATE, WORCESTER REGIONAL CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

Each September brings the start of a new cohort for StartUp Worcester; however, this year calls for a celebration. StartUp Worcester, the pre-accelerator program for Worcester's start-ups and entrepreneurs, run in partnership with the Worcester Regional Chamber of Commerce, the Venture Forum, and WorcLab, will celebrate its 10th year.

The program, formed in 2015, assists early-stage companies in Worcester. So far the program has assisted over 100 local entrepreneurs, providing them with the support and resources they need to scale their businesses in Central Massachusetts.

This year StartUp Worcester will be offering even more to its entrepreneurs, adding more networking sessions each month with StartUp Worcester Alumni, in addition to its 11 formal meetings/events which include 7 workshops, two networking events, and a Graduation/Showcase at the end of the program.

On the response of the program within the local entrepreneurial community, Tyler Ojala, the Community Manager at WorcLab and an organizer of the program said, "the local community has been overwhelmingly positive with StartUp Worcester. As we enter Year 10, we are excited to further refine our offerings to better tailor them to the specific needs of our entrepreneurs. Our goal is to continue fostering innovation and growth within Worcester's dynamic startup ecosystem."

Workshops that will be provided this year will focus on the initial phases of start-ups, with support in idea validation, market research, banking, branding, and selling, as well as how to build your network, fundraising, and pitching to professionals. The goal of these workshops and the program as a whole is for every entrepreneur to walk away with a solid business plan, a legally organized company, a network of mentors and potential investors, and a peer-reviewed pitch deck.

Zak Dutton, the Executive Director of the Venture Forum and an organizer of the program, said he was "excited to see the 10th-year kick-off!" Dutton said, "the program fills an important role in Worcester, it is one of the few



Left: David Echavarría '24 EzBusy presents at the StartUp Worcester Graduation Ceremony
Right: TJ Haigh '24 Trivflic presents at the StartUp Worcester Graduation Ceremony

programs that support and mentor early-stage entrepreneurs developing scalable ventures."

By fostering a community of startups, StartUp Worcester aims to strengthen the local economy and promote innovation and entrepreneurship in the region. To learn more about the program visit our web page on the Chamber's Website.

TRADE , CONTINUED

68 earned runs in 94.2 innings. "You know that, to some extent, everyone needs pitching and so the better I can be, the quicker I can get ready to be back (in the majors) helping in any way."

Priester throws a fastball in the mid-90s that has topped out at 97 miles per hour. He has a good snapping curveball clocked in the high 70s and low 80s. He also features a sinker, slider, and changeup. He has an easy delivery and throws at a three-fourths arm angle with excellent arm acceleration when releasing the ball to home plate.

"I'm definitely like a mix guy," he said. "I have a lot of pitches that are really, really, good. The more that I can mix and ... make that a power mix, the better I am. And I have the ability to throw other things when we need it."

Priester's favorite pitch is his curveball. He will attack hitters with it and that pitch has become his out pitch. He is able to get a lot of swings and misses with the curve.

"I just love it when you rip a really good curveball," he said. "You just know it as soon as it comes out of your hand. Same with the changeup, too, sometimes. As soon as it leaves your hand you know it's a good one. You know it's a swing and miss."

Priester has a lot of potential, despite his difficult season with the Pirates. In 2021, he was ranked by Baseball America as a top 100 prospect (58th overall). In addition to his 10 outings with Pittsburgh this season, he made seven starts for Triple-A Indianapolis, going 3-1 with a 3.21 ERA, 36 strikeouts and seven walks in 33.2 innings. He has had recent control trouble walking 40 batters with the Pirates, including hitting two batters in his final start with his old team.

But Priester said the WooSox are a clean slate. "It's exciting. I still think the skies the limit for me. To be able to get a fresh start in a new organization, especially with the reputation the Red Sox have, is super exciting and something that I looked forward to ever since I got that phone call (from Cherington). I'm really excited to continue to work and to continue to get better as a major league player.

"I just want to be able to help as soon as possible," he said. "You know to get back in the starting rotation here (in Worcester) and to work back into the Big Leagues and help the Red Sox win some games there (in Boston) ... That's what I plan to do."

HEADING TO BOSTON:

Luis Garcia, right-handed relief pitcher



The Red Sox newly acquired pitcher, Luis García, 37, has pitched in 45 games for the Angels this season. He had a record of 5-1 with four saves, a 3.71 ERA in 43.2 innings, 40 strikeouts, 14 walks, and four home runs allowed. The right-hander ranks in Major League Baseball's 86th percentile in ground ball rate (51.2 percent) and 85th in fastball velocity (96.3 MPH), as well as the 79th percentile in chase rate (31.2 percent) and 71st in barrel rate (6.4 percent). In his last 11 outings with the Angels (beginning June 21), he recorded a 0.71 ERA in 12.2 innings, a 0.71 WHIP, and a .159 opponent batting average, issuing zero walks in 10 of those 11 outings.

Born in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic, García was originally signed by the Los Angeles Dodgers in January 2004. He has appeared in 530 Major League games (four starts) with the Philadelphia Phillies (2013-18), Angels (2019, '24), Texas Rangers (2020), St. Louis Cardinals (2021), and San Diego Padres (2022-23). Since the start of the 2021 season, he has pitched in 204 games and recorded a 3.64 ERA in 197.2 innings with 15 home runs allowed. He made more than 60 appearances in both 2022 (64) and 2023 (61). In five career postseason games (2021-22), García has allowed only one run on four hits in 6.1 innings.



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Annual Golf Tournament

Monday, September 30, 2024
Shotgun at 11:00am
Pleasant Valley Country Club
95 Armsby Road, Sutton, MA

Blackstone Valley

Chamber of Commerce

blackstonevalley.org



Educational Breakfast with Congressman Auchincloss

Thursday, September 5, 2024
7:30am-9:15am
Galliford's Restaurant & Tavern
2 Southwick Street, Mendon, MA

Professional HR Roundtable

Tuesday, October 8, 2024
9:00am-10:30am
Zoom

Business After Hours- Apple Pie Social

Thursday, October 17, 2024
5:30pm-7:30pm
Willard House Clock Museum
11 Willard Street, North Grafton, MA

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CMS Chamber Golf Classic 2024

Thursday, September 26, 2024
8:30am-4:00pm
Heritage Country Club
85 Sampson Road, Charlton, MA

34th Annual Harvest Fair

Saturday, October 19, 2024
10:00am-5:00pm
Sunday, October 20, 2024
11:00am-4:00pm
Sturbridge Town Common

Clinton Area

Chamber of Commerce

clintonareachamber.org



Seminar Series- Show Me The Money: Loans, Grants & Profits

Tuesday, September 10, 2024
9:00am-10:00am
Icon Museum & Study Center
203 Union Street, Clinton, MA

Business After Hours

Tuesday, September 24, 2024
5:00pm-7:00pm
Sterling Street Brewery
175 Sterling Street, Clinton, MA

Third Annual Meeting & Business Awards

Wednesday, October 23, 2024
5:30pm
Sterling National Country Club
33 Albright Road, Sterling, MA

LABO

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Wachusett Area

Chamber of Commerce

wachusettareachamber.org



Business After Hours

Monday, September 23, 2024
5:30-7:30pm
The 228 In Sterling
228 Leominster Road, Sterling, MA

Webster Dudley Oxford Chamber of Commerce

wdochamberma.org



A Taste of the WDO

Thursday, November 14, 2024
5:30pm-8:30pm
J. Anthony's Italian Grill
206 Southbridge Road, North Oxford, MA

STUART , CONTINUED

actually working on it. It was something where we sat down in the dugout and said if we need it, throw it. Like, I'm comfortable with it. When he was in a big spot, credit to him, he had a ton of confidence throwing it."

Stagani said learning new pitches takes time, but Stuart is on the fast track to mastering all his pitches. He has worked hard to "hammer them out" in bullpen sessions and hopes to have them ready for when he gets back to school.

"I think he's there with the changeup now," said Stagani. "It's just getting him comfortable in games. When he's comfortable, he can pick his spots. The cutter is still a little work in progress, but it's close to getting there ... It's something new. It's a different type of fastball. Like anything with pitching, when you do something new it's going to take time. But for him he's got a pretty good feel. There is a couple guys here that throw it with different grips, so for him it's just finding a grip that's comfortable and then being confident to just let it rip."

Dion said Stuart's ability to throw consistent strikes with all his pitches has allowed him to go deep into games successfully. "It's his command, number one. He is certainly comfortable throwing a fastball or breaking ball in any count for strikes. I think that, along with his presence, like we've talked about, he has the maturity not to let a situation get too big for him. It's just his ability to focus on one pitch at a time, and letting his defenders work behind him. He's done an excellent job keeping his pitch count down because he throws so many strikes."

Stuart said you cannot be afraid to throw strikes. "Whether you have you're A stuff, B stuff, or C stuff, whatever you have, it's just about competing with what you have and just attacking guys. That's something I really wanted to work on because it lets you keep your pitch count down and to go further into games."

The 6-foot-2, 200-pound Stuart will head back to Endicott College in Beverly, Massachusetts to compete as a junior next spring. He has already had a lot of

success at school with a combine freshman-sophomore record of 10-2 with a 3.24 ERA with 90 strikeouts and just 36 walks.

"I'm just trying to compete," said Stuart. "Just overall attacking guys and not giving them any free bases ... It's always nice to strike guys out, but if it's a 1-2 count, I'm not always trying to strike this guy out. I'm more trying to get him out any way possible. Some guys swing big and that's how you're going to get him out, but some guys don't swing big and are scrappy and you're just trying to get them to mishit something. It kind of depends on who you are facing really."

Stuart's teammate, outfielder Owen Pincince, enjoys playing behind his ace pitcher. "It's nice. I don't get many baseballs hit my way and when I do, it's weak contact and a nice easy fly ball. He's awesome. He's electric on the mound. He has some stuff to him when he's on."

Stuart refuses to let complacency creep into his game. "It's been the same since I was four years old or whenever I started," he said. "You go up there on a mound throwing a baseball, but you have to continue to build on that ... I'm just using everything as a learning moment. When I give up a hit or I give up runs, whatever it is, or walk a guy, I know what I did wrong and I try to fix it either in the bullpen or the next time I pitch or even with the next batter ... I'm just trying to learn and be better the next time."

As a local kid from Hudson, Stuart has enjoyed playing for his hometown Bravehearts. "It's really cool to finally play here. It's cool when there's fans showing up to watch you. It's a pretty cool environment overall. Obviously, the guys here are good players otherwise they wouldn't be here. You don't know how you are going to fit in or what to expect really, but I just wanted to come in and to be myself, I guess. Just play the game I know how to play. That's really it."

I mean, it's cool but the season isn't over. Hopefully, we can keep it going."

A MISSION FOR UNITY OF COMPANIES & COMMUNITY IN AUBURN

Auburn Chamber of Commerce President Debra Seaman Leads with Service at Heart

by JACKIE FARON, AUBURN CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

As the last truck pulled out of the Chester P. Tuttle Post 279 on a bright, crisp December afternoon, Auburn Chamber of Commerce President Debra Seaman took a moment to reflect on the day. Just a few hours earlier, she and a team of Chamber leaders feverishly filled logoed gift bags with water and treats to hand out as a gesture of gratitude from the Auburn business community to the Wreaths Across America drivers and crew. With a trunk full of bags, Deb and former president Kerri Cunningham, followed the convoy to The Tuttle and worked side-by-side with Auburn Police Department officers and volunteers to distribute the gifts. The collaboration of Auburn's business, municipal and residential leaders in support of a great mission is at the heart of Seaman's initiative as Auburn Chamber president.

Evolution from the girl next door to the woman at the head of the table.

To understand how Deb landed in the President seat, we need to travel in the way-way back machine to the early 80's on Merriam Street - back to a time when the hair styles were high and finding your forever love in the boy next door wasn't just seen on the big screen. Seaman married her high school sweetheart in the late eighties, and with a close friend, founded Johnson & Seaman Engineering in 1995. At the time, joining the local Chamber meant business owners could use the logo on their websites and in marketing materials to help legitimize their company, a symbol that still holds true today. Deb hoped joining The Auburn Chamber of Commerce would help substantiate their new business, but she couldn't have imagined the impact the professional community would have on both their company and her own development.

For over a decade, Deb was a casual member, attending events and welcoming new members while managing her young family and their growing company. When her sister and fellow business owner tried to convince her to join a Chamber Referral Group, she almost said no. The idea of joining this group exposed her speaking anxieties, but at the same time, compelled her to overcome them.

Meeting after meeting, through her warmth and sincerity, strong professional relationships were forged, and their business, now Seaman Engineering Corporation, grew right along with Deb's confidence. It wasn't long before she heard the call for help from various committee members - School Business Partnership, Expo Committee, Tax Classification, Events Committee - way more was happening behind the scenes than she realized. Beyond supporting businesses commercially, the groups were serving the Auburn community, too, and that was a mission that spoke to her heart.

"We have a bigger mission here. When you give your time and talents to Chamber events and committees, you will meet an amazing community. In turn, the growth of your business will far exceed whatever you thought possible."

She wasn't sure she would stand out in a community full of strong leaders, but she knew she was willing to give her time and help serve the committees that supported the community she loved. As her Chamber involvement increased, so did her credibility, and in 2020, she was asked to become a board member. Despite joining amidst a pandemic, Deb got her bearings quickly and was eventually

nominated as Vice President in 2022, and accepted the role of President in 2023. In this newest role, she had to have faith in herself and call on the support of the connections made over twenty years as a member.

I want people in our community to talk about how great the Chamber is.

Seaman sees the next eleven months as an opportunity to encourage fellow members to get involved in Chamber and community events. With over 140 local and affiliate members, the potential to make an impact in town is enormous. Dozens of owners and managers already invest their time every month on the seven committees, but there is room for more participation.

Fellow Chamber leaders recognize and champion Deb's mission. "Deb sees how the community benefits from having dedicated businesses that give back. She understands the importance of giving businesses the opportunity to have their employees also be involved in the town they work in, which can help build work-life balances and get them to learn more about the community they work in," said Virginia K. Murphy, membership and affiliate services representative for the Worcester Regional Chamber of Commerce.

The Auburn Chamber board members bring nearly 200 years of combined experience in their related fields. With the full membership experience added in, there's an invaluable quantity of expertise to offer. And, Deb knows that with every member comes unique ideas and fresh perspective - something she not only welcomes, but encourages. She hopes to challenge fellow Auburn Chamber members to offer creative learning sessions to their fellow professionals, but also to make sessions available to kids in Auburn as a way to spark an interest in business. She envisions holding events where members with legal or fund accounting experience can help seniors with relief applications. And most of all, she aims to reach those members who are willing to help, but are not sure how, and to offer simple, low commitment ways to do so.

"I understand that The Chamber is business to business - to grow and help one another," says Seaman, "but, we can't stay as an island. We will drown. We need the community. And who is in the community but the elderly, who we have to take seriously with their depth of experience instead of reinventing the wheel, and the kids who need role models and teachers to mentor them - our next generation of business leaders.

Get involved - be active. If you want the best of what The Chamber can give you, you need to approach it with a helpful mindset. Don't worry about your own agenda, but instead, invest your time, grow the relationships. Because if you do, you're going to find a community that cares, that wants to help teach you and invest in helping you grow."

Debra has a clear vision - she wants to encourage an environment where the people of Auburn talk about how great The Chamber is. She plans to continue providing opportunities to serve, with the ultimate goal of fostering unity between the businesses, their leaders and employees, and the amazing members of the Auburn community. It is her firm belief that through service, you and your business will get back more than you ever imagined.

For more information on how you can get involved, visit www.auburnchamber-ma.org.

CASAS, CONTINUED

"He hit off the machine. Progressing well," Cora said at the time. "There's a good chance that he could go on a rehab assignment next week. So, I think that's where we're at right now. Let's see how the weekend goes, but he's feeling a lot better."

Casas said his other injured teammates aided his recovery. "The other thing that was helping me out was the other rehab guys including Vaughn throughout this process and Giolito and Hendricks. We were with each other throughout that process to try to stay positive. So, it was a big group effort."

Casas has come a long way since his painful breathing days. He is able to do most baseball activities, but he still has lingering pain swinging the bat. "Right now, swinging is the only thing that really bothers me," he said. It hurts making "contact with the ball, so once I gain more strength and hit more balls, it should go away. But taking ground balls, running, sliding, working out in the weight room, none of that bothers it, so the last last step is just hitting."

Casas went 0-3 with a walk during his first rehab game against the Bison later that night. He last played for Boston on April 20th. In 22 games for the Sox prior to the injury, he batted .244 with 6 homeruns and 10 runs batted in (RBI).

With Boston hovering around a possible playoff spot, Casas said watching

his teammates succeed in his absence motivated him to get back on the field. He wanted to help contribute to the team winning. "Seeing them every day has been my motivation," he said. "I come to the park. There's a lot of great energy in the clubhouse and it shows out there on the field. I'm hungry to get back out there to try to contribute to what they're doing at the major league level. It's been exciting. Everyone is playing really well. The pitching is holding up and the batting is coming through. So, hopefully I can come back and not miss a beat. That is to go with the flow and keep winning games."

Despite the difficulty of rehabbing an injury, a part of him is happy to be back in Worcester. Playing at Polar Park "now it feels like a lifetime ago," he said. "The stadium looks beautiful. I like what they've done behind the field. They've built a couple new buildings. The clubhouse is still better than Fenway's. Yeah, I'm really happy to be back. Everyone has welcomed me with open arms. Hopefully I can share information for anyone who wants it, but it's going to be a lot of fun to get into a game and come back. I'm excited to play in front of these fans as well."

By the time of publication of this story at the end of August, Casas should be back in Boston barring any setbacks.

"We'll see how it goes," he said. "I think I'm in a good position."

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AFTERNOON KEYNOTE

Tonja Mettlach

Executive Vice President, Massachusetts Business Roundtable

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