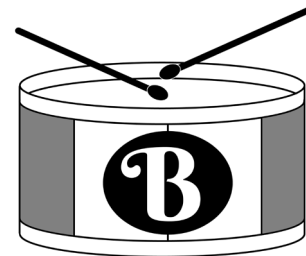


Becket Beat

Keeping neighbors connected Vol. 4, No. 11, December 2025 / January 2026



850-Acre Palmer Brook Property to be Sold to Mass Audubon

by Marcia Parnell



Photo courtesy of the Strassler family

The Strassler family of Great Barrington and Alford, long-time owners of the Palmer Brook property here in Becket, have signed an option-to-purchase agreement with Mass Audubon for \$5 million for the 850-acre tract, including a 125-acre lake. The undeveloped, pristine property lies between Plumb and Tyne Roads and has operated as the Berkshire Fishing Club since 1999. An appraisal commissioned by Mass Audubon valued the property at \$5.8 million.

Mass Audubon is pursuing permanent protection of the property with the intent to own and care for it as a Mass Audubon Sanctuary. It has thus far secured \$2.5 million in funding: \$1.25 million awarded by the Commonwealth of MA's Landscape Partnership Grant Program and a \$1.25 million commitment from the MA Department of Conservation and Recreation. In addition to the remaining \$2.5 million required for the purchase price, Mass Audubon is looking to raise another \$2.5 to \$3 million for an endowment fund to cover start-up costs and care and maintenance over time. The targeted close for the sale is February 2026.

Brothers David and Robert Strassler are the founders of



Photo courtesy of Eric McDonald

continued on page 7

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Letter from the Editors

As we wrap up the year, we want to express our gratitude to our community of readers for supporting us in so many ways, from cheering us on, suggesting story ideas, contributing articles, to donating to help sustain this all-volunteer effort. We also want to remind you that the Becket Beat will not publish a January issue. Instead, we will take our annual retreat to reflect, recharge, and brainstorm how to make the Beat even better in 2026 and beyond. Look for our next issue on February 1st. In the meantime, we wish everyone a healthy and happy holiday season!

To celebrate the season, we are pleased to share a little “food for thought” from one of our neighbors, David Mittler.

A Toast to Bread

by David Mittler

As we prepare for the holiday season, I'd like to propose a toast – to bread. This simple staple is both nutritious and delicious, and it holds a cherished place in winter celebrations across the globe. Bread connects us to family, to faith, and to history. Breaking bread is a universal symbol of togetherness, reminding us that learning about bread is also a way of learning about one another.

Matzoh, flat and quick to bake, sustained the Jewish people during their exodus from Egypt and still symbolizes resilience and freedom during Passover. In Christianity, the Communion wafer and the concept of “breaking bread,” of various sorts, carries deep spiritual meaning.

Naan, also flat and fast to cook, once nourished royalty and merchants along the Silk Road before becoming a beloved everyday bread. As it traveled, each culture shaped it with new flavors and uses.

Italian bread, long favored by workers and travelers, comes in many regional varieties—long, round, or flat—each reflecting local tradition. And the tortilla, with roots in ancient Maya culture, may be the world's most traveled bread, even accompanying astronauts in space.

So when you break bread this holiday season, take a moment to savor this unifying ritual that connects us all, past and present. Here's to bread!

Correction:

In our coverage of Shane Johnson's new business, “Made in the Shade,” we shared an incorrect email address. The correct address is shanejohnson32@yahoo.com

Great Ways to Give Back this Holiday Season

Winter Sock, Mitten & Hat Drive



Nov 1st till Jan 3rd

Mon through Fri, 8:30am till 4:30pm

Collection: Town Hall

557 Main Street, Becket, MA

Help make a difference by donating new socks, mittens, and hats for our neighbors in need. We welcome all sizes (Children's, Women's, Men's).

All donations will be given to the Becket Food Pantry.

For immediate needs, call Bill Mulholland at (413) 770-1897.



BECKET-WASHINGTON CHILDREN'S HOLIDAY CELEBRATION

DECEMBER 13, 2025
12:00-3:00PM

CHIMNEY CORNERS YMCA DINING HALL
591 HAMILTON RD, BECKET, MA



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Top-Notch Service with a Small-Town Vibe

by Cathy Terwedow

Perched atop the corner of Routes 8 and 20 in Becket is the “down-home” dispensary of Himalayan High. Down-home because they believe in the simplicity and authenticity of living in rural America, a place where you know your neighbors and you believe in small business. In short, a place like Becket.

Mike Goodenough, one of three owners of Himalayan High, described it this way, “We’re small-town people. We’re all about sustainability, connection with our customers and high-quality craft products. We’ll never make you stand in line in the cold or push you to buy products you’re not familiar with.”

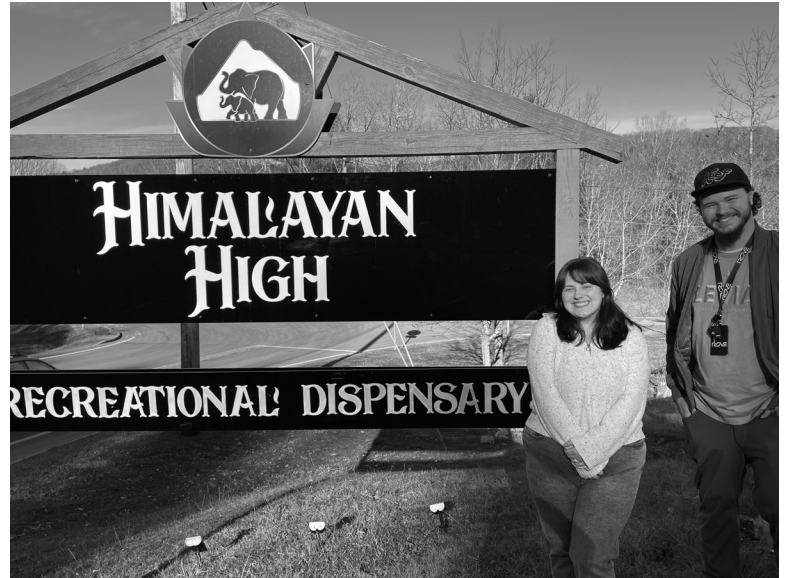
Budtender Kara Baldwin is easy going and approachable. Whether you’re new to cannabis or have been using it for years, she can help you find the products that will best serve your needs, whether they’re to quell aches and pains, to help you sleep better or to give you a buzz for your personal enjoyment.

“When Himalayan High was just an idea, we brainstormed everything we didn’t like about other dispensaries and we determined not to do that here,” said manager Kyle Gelinas. “We want to be your neighborhood dispensary. We focus on local growers and giving back. We’re even running a “Paws for Prerolls” promotion through December 15 to deliver pet food and blankets to Becket’s Animal Control program.”

Giving back includes giving to the Town itself. While many dispensaries have stepped away from their previously mandated commitment to support local communities, Himalayan High continues to give 3% of their revenue to Becket. “We agreed to share our proceeds with the Town in our original Community Host Agreement. We’re not walking away from that promise. When Becket flourishes, we flourish.”

“We’ve been in Becket for two and a half years and we have a heart for this town. Business is good in the summer, when lots of people pass through from New York and Connecticut on their way to Tanglewood and Saratoga Springs, but we love winter too. It gives us the time to really connect with our customers,” said Mike. “I plan to retire here.”

Himalayan High is open from 8:30 am to 8:00 pm, seven days a week. Visit www.himalayanhighllc.com to learn more.



Becket residents Kara Baldwin and Kyle Gelinas are ready to welcome you to Himalayan High. Photo by Cathy Terwedow

Community Collaboration Results in \$117K Grant to Improve Digital Access and Literacy for Becket and Washington Residents

by Marcia Parnell

With the installation of fiber optic high-speed internet service completed in Becket and Washington over three years ago, it seemed the work of the respective town broadband teams was done. But the availability of grant money to take it a step further by improving digital access and literacy represented too great an opportunity to pass up. Berkshire Regional Planning Commission (BRPC) Senior Planner for Economic Development, Wylie Goodman, Becket’s broadband committee chair, Bob Gross, and his Washington counterpart, Kent Lew, collaborated on a Digital Equity Plan and subsequent Implementation Program submission to the Massachusetts Broadband Institute at the Mass Tech Collaborative. The result was a \$117K grant award. Says Lew, “There were so many commonalities between the two towns that we decided it made sense to pool our resources, with Becket as the lead community.”

How did they define “Digital Access and Literacy” and where are the gaps that need to be addressed? BRPC surveyed some local organizations like the Becket Athenaeum, Councils on Aging and the Yoked Parish of Becket – all with firm roots in the community – and identified pockets of need. Explains Lew, “Now that we have high-speed internet, we want to make sure that the members of our community have the access, skills and knowledge to participate fully.”

Community Calendar Dec 2025 / Jan 2026

see page 6
for more >>



Full listing & details: www.BecketBeat.org/Community-Calendar

BECKET ARTS CENTER

Thursdays: Yoga with Rima Sala / 9:30-10:30am / \$15 per class (discount for members) (no class on Dec. 25 or Jan. 1)

Sundays: Sean McCusker Live Painting Demo / 1-2pm / Free (no demo on Dec. 28)

Thursday, December 4: Cornelia Hendricks (BAC founding member) Exhibit Opening / 5-7pm

Saturday, December 6: 'FRAGMENTS' a reading for WORLD AIDS DAY written and performed by Jim Petosa / 4-6pm / Free

Monday, December 8, 22: Drum with Rick Shrum / 5-6pm / \$15 (discount for members; ages 12-18 free)

Monday, December 8, 22: Maker Mondays / 6:30-8pm / Free

Saturday, December 13: Solstice Wreath Making / 10am-12pm / \$10 (Registration required)

Sunday, December 14: Family Hanukkah Celebration Latke-Making @ Mullen House / 2-4pm / Free (Registration required)

Sunday, December 14: Family Hanukkah Celebration / 4-7pm / Free (Registration required)

Thursday, December 18: The Winter Solstice In Story and Song / 7-8:15pm / \$20 (15 for members)

Saturday, December 20: Holiday Sing Along / 6-8pm / Free

Monday, January 12, 26: Maker Mondays / 6:30-8pm / Free

Friday, January 30: Douglas Ray Williams presents "Dr. Jörg's Symposium on Romantic Love and Sexual Fulfillment" / 7-9pm / Tickets TBD

Saturday, January 31: Douglas Ray Williams presents "WIGS" / 7-9pm / Tickets TBD

Up-to-date info at: becketartscenter.org/events

BECKET ATHENAEUM

Through December: Gift-making stations / during open hours / Free

Tuesdays: Baby & Toddler Playgroup / 10-11am / Free

Tuesday, December 2: Book Club: *The Man Who Loved China* by Simon Winchester / 1:30pm / Free

Saturdays: Storytime with Stay & Play / 10:30am-12:30pm / Free / Stay after Storytime for snacks and a chance for kids to play and caregivers to connect

Monday, December 8: Cookbook Club: Bring Your Own Recipe & Cookie Swap / 6-7:30pm / Free

Tuesday, December 9: Movie Night for Adults / 6:30-9:30pm, movie starts at 7pm / Free

Thursday, December 18: Game Night / 6-8pm / Free

Tuesday, January 6: Book Club: *Small Things Like These* by Claire Keegan / 1:30pm / Free

Monday, January 12: Cookbook Club: *Honey & Co.: The Cookbook* by Itamar Srulovich & Sarit Packer / 6-7:30pm / Free

Thursday, January 15: Game Night / 6-8pm / Free

Tuesday, January 27: Movie Night for Adults / 6:30-9:30pm, movie starts at 7pm / Free

Saturday, January date TBD: D&D One Shot Adventure / 12:30-4pm / Free / Ages 9+, registration required

Up-to-date info at: becketathenaeum.org/events

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Community Calendar Dec 2025 / Jan 2026

see page 5
 << for more



Full listing & details: www.BecketBeat.org/Community-Calendar

TOWN GOVERNMENT

Tuesday, December 2: Parks & Rec Comm / 9am
Tuesday, December 2: Finance Committee / 3pm
Wednesday, December 3: Board of Health / 5pm
Wednesday December 3, 17: Select Board / 6pm
Tuesday, December 9: Finance Committee / 3pm
Tuesday, December 9: Historical Commission / 3pm
Wednesday, December 10: Planning Board / 6pm
Tuesday, December 16: Energy Comm. / 5pm
Tuesday, December 16, 23: Conservation Comm / 6pm
Wednesday December 17: Cultural Council / 6:30pm
Wednesday, January 7: Board of Health / 5pm
Wednesday, January 7, 21: Select Board / 6pm
Tuesday, January 13: Finance Committee / 3pm
Tuesday, January 13: Historical Commission / 3pm
Tuesday, January 20: Energy Committee / 5pm
Wednesday, January 21: Bylaw Review Comm / 3pm
Tuesday, January 27: Municipal Buildings Advisory Committee / 9am
Tuesday, January 27: Conservation Commission / 6pm

Up-to-date info: www.townofbecket.org/calendar

Live and local music events:

www.route8pub.com
www.thedreamawaylodge.com/events
www.facebook.com/PapaBobsentertainmenthall


COMMUNITY EVENTS

Mondays: Chair Yoga for Seniors / Washington Town Hall / 11am / Free
Tuesdays: Yoga for Seniors w/ Rima Sala / Washington Town Hall / 9am / Free
Tuesdays & Thursdays: Becket Senior Group / Becket Town Hall / 10am-2pm / free Chair Yoga 10:30-11:00am followed by Lunch and Bingo / Becket Town Hall / Lunch \$3
Wednesdays: Yoga / Becket Town Hall / 9am / \$3
Monday, December 1: Deadline to register for Becket-Washington Children's Holiday Celebration
Saturdays, December 6, 20: Food Pantry / Becket Federated Church / 9-11am
Tuesday, December 9: Protecting Your Personal Information On-line / Becket Town Hall / 6:30pm / Free
Thursday, December 11: Protecting Your Personal Information On-line / Washington Town Hall / 2pm / Free
Saturday, December 13: Children's Holiday Party / Chimney Corners YMCA Dining Hall / 12-3pm / Registration required
Saturdays, January 3, 17: Food Pantry / Becket Federated Church / 9-11am

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the Palmer Brook Corporation and purchased the tract in 1966 to diversify their assets. The lake was created in early 1967. David's son Alan, who today oversees the care and management of the lake and land surrounding it for the extended family, explains that his dad and uncle initially wondered what they'd gotten themselves into, but once the dam was built, they were overwhelmed by the natural beauty surrounding them.

The Strassler brothers, their wives and their combined five kids used the property as a camp for many years. "It was about as close to roughing it as you can get, but we all loved it," says Alan. There was no electricity, no building, just a shed where the parents slept and tents for all the kids. They used an outdoor fireplace and set up an outdoor kitchen just inside the woods. Even when Alan and his siblings were involved in other summer activities, Alan's parents still came on the weekends and would bring all the provisions for a wonderful getaway. They enjoyed many idyllic evenings out on the lake watching the beavers and experiencing wonderful sunsets.

Over time, as the children grew up and the families spread across the country, the Strasslers visited the camp less and less. They began to consider ways to use the property more productively and keep a regular presence on site. That's when they came up with the idea of the Berkshire Fishing Camp. They built a modest but solid and attractive lodge, acquired some small fishing boats and kayaks, and in 1999 began selling memberships to Berkshire County residents looking for a peaceful, unspoiled spot to experience nature through activities like fishing, birdwatching, boating and hiking. Says Alan, "It's been really special for me to see people appreciate it as much as we did. We have one gentleman who's been a member for 22 years."

Yet even with the success of the Fishing Camp, over time the Strasslers increasingly felt it was time to shift the stewardship of Palmer Brook to another owner with the intention and capability to keep the property intact and maintained to the high standard they had set for themselves over the years. "My parents felt they'd spent some of the best years of their lives here. None of us wanted it developed," says Alan. But finding the right buyer was a challenge for a number of reasons. There aren't that many individuals or organizations that have the wherewithal. Many charitable organizations as well as the State are reluctant to acquire a building and take on the liability involved in owning a large earthen dam. "My dad and uncle always felt a great deal of responsibility for the dam. Although it's not required, we use an engineer to do all inspections and rather than every two years, we do them annually." He added they have routinely completed any recommended maintenance and improvements and always passed their dam inspections.

The agreement with Mass Audubon came about as a result of a chance conversation Alan had with someone he had worked with at the Nature Conservancy who mentioned that Mass Audubon was looking to acquire large parcels of land for preservation. That contact reached out to Mass Audubon who then reached out to Alan, discussions began, and the option-to-purchase sale agreement was eventually signed in August. Says Alan, "I think the family couldn't be happier to see it preserved and we are just thrilled that Mass Audubon is buying it."

Readers interested in helping Mass Audubon close the gap on its funding efforts to purchase Palmer Brook can go to: www.massaudubon.org/our-work/resilient-lands/land-conservation/news-project-updates/urgent-land-project-protecting-palmer-brook-in-becket.



Photos courtesy of the Strassler family

Expanded Berkshire Regional Transit Authority (BRTA) Services for Seniors in Becket

by Linda Shaw



BRTA has begun serving Berkshire County rural communities with a small bus. The service is available for individuals 60 years and over and has wheelchair access. Not just for medical transportation, the bus can also be used for other activities like grocery shopping, movies, concerts or visiting friends and family. It operates Monday through Saturday from 7 am to 6 pm within Berkshire County. Seniors must sign up with BRTA in order to use the service. After the initial sign-up, at least 24 hours notice is needed for travel. Pricing is \$7.50 for the first town stop and \$2.50 for each additional town stop. Prices are one way. If you need transportation for car repairs this bus may resolve your issues. If you are having a medical procedure, both you and your caregiver can ride, even if the caregiver is under 60 years old. BRTA hopes that enough rural seniors will participate to make the program viable for the long term. For more information and to sign up call BRTA at (413) 499-2782 or (800) 292-2782.

Digital Access and Literacy, continued from page 4

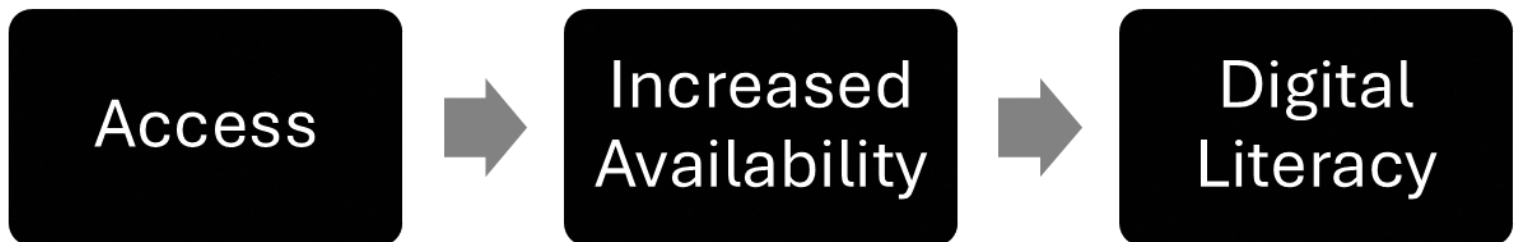
To that end, the team is targeting three areas. Not all of the details have been worked out for each, but the groundwork has been laid. The first is access, and that means fiber optic connection for a limited number of income-qualified residents who were unable to connect during the initial subsidized offering. According to Lew, Becket and Washington estimate that anywhere from 10-20% of occupied homes are without broadband service. He expects income guidelines and other details to be finalized for the January rollout, so stay tuned.

Next is increasing the availability of current-generation devices by upgrading library computers and making more laptops available for library lending at the Athenaeum. Purchasing individual laptops would be costly and have limited reach.

The third area is digital literacy, which is comprised of two elements. First, each month a trained instructor will conduct two identical sessions, one at Becket Town Hall and the other at Washington Town Hall, on key topics of interest to residents of all ages. The first sessions in November addressed on-line shopping (just in time for the holidays). December's is entitled "Protecting Your Personal Information On-line" and will be held Tuesday, December 9th at 6:30 pm at Becket Town Hall and Thursday, December 11th at 2 pm at Washington Town Hall. Second, a skilled technical intern will be available at the Becket Athenaeum for anyone requiring individualized assistance. Timing and details will be announced as they are finalized.

The collaboration includes the skills of BRPC's Wylie Goodman as the twice-monthly instructor through year-end when a trained AmeriCorps intern will take over. And ongoing program coordination will be managed by Kate Hubbell, the Athenaeum's program coordinator, who has taken on this separate, additional assignment. She will be conducting informal surveys, identifying monthly topics, organizing digital literacy activities and tracking community needs over time.

The program began in November and will run through October 2026. The Beat expects to provide updates as the initiative continues and will include instruction topics and details in the Community Calendar each month. For more information contact kate@bwlibrary.org.



Becket Community Preservation Committee (CPC) Looking for New Projects

by Mary Canty

The Community Preservation Act (CPA) in Massachusetts helps communities obtain funding to develop open space and recreational facilities, create affordable housing and preserve historic sites. It was enacted in September 2000 and has been adopted in 201 communities in Massachusetts. Becket has been an active member since 2008.

During that time, the Becket CPC has supported and completed many projects that have helped us improve our town – 2 affordable housing projects, the rebuilding of the Congregational Church belfry, which houses our Paul Revere bell, capital improvements to Seminary Hall and the Athenaeum, playground equipment at our Town parks and establishing Esau’s Heel Trail on Route 20 – to name just a few.

The funding for CPC is established through a 1.5% surcharge on real property tax and a distribution from the Mass Community Preservation Trust Fund to participating communities. All CPC Projects are presented annually at the Town Meeting and must be approved by Town residents to move forward.

During the 17 years the CPC has been active in Becket we have established a sizable balance. The current project on Brooker Hill Road addresses the erosion of a stone wall and pillars. The Town approved \$50K for this at the May 2025 Town Meeting.

We are looking for new projects that residents of the Town are interested in proposing and leading. Please bring us your ideas that meet the criteria for open space and recreation, historic preservation, or affordable housing.

The CPC meets regularly at Town Hall with the next meeting scheduled for January 21st at 6:30 pm. All are welcome. We would love to hear from you! Come in to chat about your potential projects with the Committee, we are happy to provide background and guidance. Readers may also direct any questions to CPC Chair Mary Canty at cpa@townofbecket.org. The application for future projects can be found at townofbecket.org. The deadline for 2026 Projects is February 28th.

Photos of Community Preservation Committee-Funded Projects *courtesy of the CPC*





Mark your Calendar for "Protecting Your Personal Information On-line"

Two Sessions:

Tuesday, December 9th at 6:30 pm at Becket Town Hall;

Thursday, December 11th at 2 pm at Washington Town Hall

Learn what you need to know to feel secure on-line and improve your digital literacy. Information sessions and workshops on various technology topics will be held each month through October 2026. Topics and dates will appear in the *Becket Beat* Community Calendar, *Washington Tracks* and on the Athenaeum website. For more information contact kate@bwlibrary.org.

BECKET WASHINGTON COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP (BWCP) NEWS

Yoked Parish Community Emergency Outreach Program (CEOP)

As the holidays approach, perhaps you'll consider a donation to the CEOP, which helps individuals with one-time emergencies such as fuel assistance (a tank of propane), car repair (a new tire), medical needs (eyeglasses, crutches, inhaler), a tank of gasoline to get to work. Demand is up and other funding sources are uncertain. Please make checks out to the Yoked Parish Becket Community Emergency Outreach Program, PO Box 306, Becket, MA 01223

Becket Arts Center - Celebrate the Season & Support the Arts

Celebrate the season with a vibrant lineup of inspiring events at the Becket Arts Center—from the Cornelia Hendriks memorial exhibit opening on December 4 and the FRAGMENTS reading honoring WORLD AIDS DAY on December 6, to festive family favorites like solstice wreath-making on December 13 and our warm Hanukkah celebration on December 14. Enjoy a magical winter solstice storytelling evening on December 18 and lift your voice at our Holiday Sing-Along on December 20. Plus, mark your calendar for two unforgettable performances by Douglas Ray Williams on January 30 & 31. Ongoing favorites continue as well, including Drum with Rick Shrum (Dec. 8 & 22), Thursday yoga, Sunday live painting with Sean McCusker (except Dec. 28), and Maker Mondays throughout December and January.

BECKET ARTS CENTER

As we close out the year, we invite you to support the arts in our community—your donation is critical to sustaining programs like these and keeps creativity thriving in Becket. Learn more at becketartscenter.org/events.

It's Giving Season at the Athenaeum!

Everyone loves a hand-made gift! Visit our gift-making stations throughout the month of December for fun projects to craft and give this holiday season. We provide all of the supplies at no cost to you. Stations will rotate throughout the month and will include options like hot cocoa mix in a jar, snowglobe nightlights, toys for pets, salt and sugar body scrubs, gift wrap/gift tags and more!

Help us continue to provide the robust services & materials that you and your neighbors value so highly! A healthy library consistently responds to the evolving needs of the community and in order to grow with our patrons – we need your support. The funds we receive from Becket and Washington only cover about half of our annual operating budget. There are multiple ways you can help: 1) Bid in our online Silent Auction through 6pm on 12/8: bwlibrary.org/auction and 2) Donate by check (mail to PO Box 9 Becket, MA 01223) or online: bwlibrary.org/donate. We are so grateful for our loyal group of donors and look forward to welcoming you into the fold!



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The Becket Beat is published monthly (combined Jan/Feb issue). Articles may not be reprinted without obtaining author permission from the Becket Beat.

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