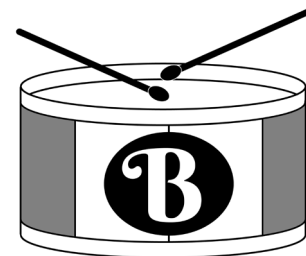


Becket Beat

Keeping neighbors connected Vol. 5, No. 4, May 2026



This Summer, Eat Local — and Eat Well

By Adele Levine (photos by Art Alpert)

Ready for a spring outing in Becket? Hop in your car or put on your hiking boots and experience the changes our six local eateries have in mind for the coming summer. Start in the south with the Sherwood Shoppe and wind your way north to Papa Bob's, the Becket Country Store, the Dream Away Lodge, the Route 8 Pub, and the far north's Neon Newt. Changes are on the way for all six.

Mike and Glenda Hamling are continuing to do what they do best as owners of the Sherwood Shoppe for fourteen years. In addition to beloved favorites, daughter Rebecca, is introducing new baked goods and pies. Their expanded raised-bed garden on the hillside behind the restaurant means more fresh produce on your plate this summer. Teas and natural remedies made from homegrown herbs will also be available in the shop. Customers are welcome to wander up to the garden — you may pass their free-range hens on the way. As Mike puts it, "This is a place where customers can slow down, relax, eat all-homemade food, and take a break from a hectic pace of life."



There's new energy at Papa Bob's, with co-owners John Baldasaro and Don Ellershaw taking over from Bob and Tami Scott. The same staff will continue to provide great food and service, with menu favorites continuing alongside new specials like pot roast and cheesesteak. They will be featuring open mic nights, comedy nights, and karaoke on a regular basis. The backyard will soon open for relaxed outdoor dining and live Sunday afternoon music. John and Don also plan to host local benefits. "We want to make everyone feel at home and also give back to the community," says John.

The Becket Country Store is ready to surprise you this summer with gourmet and rectangular camp-style pizzas, a wider deli selection, and a partnership with Mel's Kitchen offering grab-and-go lunches and dinners, including mac and cheese and spaghetti and meatballs. Last summer's popular frozen non-dairy scooped desserts will be back too. The biggest change comes later: major expansion plans to include a gas station, EV charging station, and a small grocery store, all recently approved by the Becket Planning Board. "The positive response from the community for these plans has been overwhelming" said owner Ryan Eley.



Something special is happening in the kitchen at the Dream Away Lodge. Chef Caroline Fidanza has arrived, bringing a successful farm-to-table career forged in some of New York City's most intriguing restaurants, followed by eight years as a culinary consultant. "Dream Away Lodge really excites me. I've received great support from management, and the Becket community has welcomed me with such warmth," Caroline says. Her menus will be built around seasonal produce from local farms and locally sourced beef and chicken.

Come celebrate at the Route 8 Pub. The weekend of May 15 marks three years in business for co-owners Mo Vandesteene and Trisha Hayes, with a full weekend of celebrations planned: food specials by chef Rodger Ginthwain and live music from local favorites the Rounders Revival, Razz Time, and Colby Robb. Trish and Rodger will soon launch a new summer menu. The popular Sunday music series at 5 p.m. and Wednesday community sing-alongs will keep the good times rolling. Also, "The Route 8 Pub was voted Berkshire County's Best Pub for 2026 by the Berkshire Eagle," Trisha said proudly.



continued on page 2



Memorial Day weekend, the Neon Newt bakery once again opens its doors, showcasing owner Olivia Pattison’s locally famous breads, cookies, and sweet rolls — all made with 100% locally sourced grains. Soft-serve ice cream returns with one creative flavor each day, like last year’s favorite: sweet corn with caramel sauce. The bakery and restaurant are open Thursday through Sunday for breakfast and lunch, with Friday burger nights and Monday evening dinners rounding out the week. “Adding to our success is our exceptional manager Liz as well as the famous Simon Guthrie and his sister Lily after she returns from college for the summer,” said Olivia.

Softball “Under the Lights” Coming Fridays and Saturdays in May and June

By Marcia Parnell

The Dalton/Hinsdale Little League and Lee Wildcat Sports League for Softball and Little League are coming to Becket to play softball under the lights! The games will run Friday and Saturday evenings from May 5th through June at 6:30pm at the lighted field at the Becket Town Hall Pavilion.

Dalton/Hinsdale Little League games are on Friday, May 9th and May 23rd, and Saturday, June 6th. Lee’s schedule was not available at press time but we hope to provide it in our June edition.

With a shortage of fields and night game capacity in their respective towns, Lee and Dalton/Hinsdale league organizers and Becket Parks and Rec folks connected and agreed playing here at Becket’s lighted field was a not-to-be-missed opportunity. Becket doesn’t have enough kids to form their own league, so any local athletes typically join one of these leagues.

Whether you’re a baseball lover who has longed for a nearby night game under the stars, or just someone looking for something fun to do outdoors, don’t miss your chance to get out there and cheer on these young athletes.

The Becket Country Store – next door to the ball field – will be extending its summer hours to 8pm on Fridays and Saturdays and owner Ryan Eley promises some special deals on various refreshments.

Batter up!

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Annual Town Meeting (ATM) and Town Election

by Marcia Parnell

The ATM is scheduled for Saturday, May 9th at 2pm at the Becket Washington School.

The Town will hold a public forum to share details about the Warrant and answer any questions in advance of the ATM on Thursday, April 30th at 6pm in the Community Room at Town Hall. When it is available, the Warrant will be posted on the Town web site.

The Town Election is scheduled the following Saturday, May 16th from 10am to 7pm at the Becket Town Hall. The following candidates are on the ballot; none are opposed although there is a single write-in slot for Planning Board.

- Jeff Piemont: Select Board, 3-year term
- Robin C. Mathiesen: Town Clerk, 3-year term
- Ethan Klepetar: Moderator, 3-year term
- Ellen Manley: Finance Committee, 3-year term
- Natasha Loeffler: Planning Board, 5-year term
- Robert T. Ronzio: Board of Health, 3-year term

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April 7 Snow Storm. Photo by Art Alpert

Mary Kay McCloskey Retires from Becket Washington School

By Cathy Terwedow

After 26 years with the Central Berkshire Regional School District, Mary Kay McCloskey, the principal of Becket Washington Elementary School (BWS), will retire in June. Her successor will be announced in late April.

When interviewed by the Becket Beat about her tenure and what comes next, she mostly talked about kids and the community. "This is a profession you hold in your heart. At BWS we get to know every student as an individual. We know what motivates each child and what frustrates them. When they graduate, we keep a piece of them with us, and I believe they take a piece of us with them."

Ms. McCloskey went further when asked about her biggest challenges. "You take the kids' problems home with you. We're always asking ourselves, 'Are we doing enough for them? How can we do what is best for each child, socially, academically, and emotionally?' It's hard trying to be everything for every student."

"BWS is special. It's a beautiful school. We have such a strong staff, very dedicated district management, and a wonderfully supportive community. Teachers want so much for their kids. We're like a small, private school. Parents see that and they love our school for it."

Ms. McCloskey began her career in the publishing world of New York City, working with the likes of Stephen King, Kurt Vonnegut, and John Irving. Yet, when she and her husband began their family, she realized her true passion was children. Upon moving to the Berkshires, she served as an elementary teacher at BWS for 16 years before becoming principal in 2017.

Renee Adams, mother of three adult children who attended BWS, recalls McCloskey as being very attentive, a principal who did way more than just teaching. "She did whatever it took, helping the PTO, pushing spaghetti dinners, you name it. When our daughter struggled, she helped us get to the bottom of her learning problems, building a foundation for learning that still serves her today. Now a college graduate with a degree in Chemical Engineering, our daughter still uses the strategies she learned at BWS."

Looking back on her career, Ms. McCloskey gazed out the window and said, "It's been such a privilege to watch these children grow up. Seeing them progress through middle and high school and watching their successes; it's just wonderful to feel you had a part in it."



Becket Washington School. Photo by Art Alpert

They continued, "Mrs. Bilodeau is absolutely wonderful. She kept us in line, literally, every single morning, somehow managing to do it with just the right mix of strictness and care. As adults looking back now, we can say she helped keep us on track in more ways than one."



Mary Kay McCloskey reflects on her years at Becket Washington Elementary School. Photo by Art Alpert

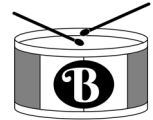
Addendum: As this article went to press, we discovered there will be two other meaningful retirements from BWS this year: 3rd-grade teacher Patty Robie, and administrative assistant Ronda Bilodeau, serving 26 and nine years respectively.

Colin and Skylar Rosier, graduates of BWS and now honor students at Berkshire Community College, remember both women fondly saying, "We remember Mrs. Robie as a teacher who was firm, but kind, in the classroom. Her sense of humor made learning memorable, and even her strict moments came from a place of wanting us to do our best. As she retires, we're grateful for the lasting impact she had on us and for the many smiles she brought along the way."

Community Calendar May 2026

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

see page 6
for more >>



BECKET ARTS CENTER

Thursdays: Yoga with Rima Sala / 9:30-10:30am / \$15 per class (discount for members)

Friday, May 1, 8: 5-Week Beginner Watercolor Painting / 1:30-3:00pm / \$40 (materials included; discount for members)

Saturday, May 2: "Spirited Material" Juried Exhibit Opening Reception / 2-4pm / Free

Saturdays, May 16, 23, 30: Becket Moving Freestyle with Delsie Dunn / 10:30am-12pm / \$15 (discount for members)

Saturday, May 16: "We Are River People" World Fish Migration Day exhibit (through June 7) / Free

Wednesday, May 20: W.I.P. Wednesday - sharing of works in progress featuring "Soldier of Love" By Rick Reiss / 7-8:30pm / Free

Saturday, May 23: Herbal Workshop with Kim Geisler: Botanical Protection / 11am-1pm / \$50 (discount for members)

Saturday, May 30: "Form, Fact, and Fragment" Juried Exhibit Opening Reception / 2-4pm / Free

Sunday, May 31: Windsor Jazz Workshop / 1pm / Free

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

BECKET ATHENAEUM

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

Wednesdays: One-on-One Tech Support / 2:30-4:30pm / By appointment: bwlibrary.org/techhelp/ / Free

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

Tuesday, May 5: Book Club: *Educated* by Tara Westover / 1:30pm / Free

Monday, May 11: Cookbook Club: *What Goes with What* by Julie Turshen / 6-7:30pm / Free

Thursday, May 21: Game Night / 6-8pm / Free

Tuesday, May 26: Movie Night for Adults / 6:30-9:30pm, movie starts at 7pm / Free

Thursday, May 28: Close at 6:30pm

Saturday, May 30: Inspired by Nature writing workshop with Lara Tupper / 4-5:30pm / Free / Registration required: bwlibrary.org/nature

Tuesday, June 2: Book Club: *There Are Rivers in the Sky* by Elif Shafak / 1:30pm / Free

Wednesday, June 3: Be Proud, Be You: All Ages Art Making with the Becket Arts Center / drop in between 3 & 5pm / Free



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Community Calendar May 2026

see page 5
 << for more



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

TOWN GOVERNMENT

- Tuesday, May 5:** Zoning Board of Appeals / 6pm
- Wednesday, May 6:** Board of Health / 5pm
- Wednesday, May 6, 20:** Select Board / 6pm
- Wednesday, May 7:** Planning Board / 5pm
- Monday, May 11:** Board of Assessors / 10:30am
- Tuesday, May 12:** Historical Commission / 3pm
- Tuesday, May 12:** Finance Committee / 3pm
- Tuesday, May 19:** Municipal Buildings Advisory Committee / 9am
- Tuesday, May 19:** Energy Committee / 5pm
- Wednesday, May 20:** Bylaw Review Comm / 3pm
- Tuesday, May 26:** Conservation Commission / 6pm

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

COMMUNITY EVENTS

- Mondays:** Osteo Yoga for Seniors / Washington Town Hall / 11am / Free
- Tuesdays:** Yoga for Seniors w/ Rima Sala / Washington Town Hall / 9am / Free
- Tuesdays:** Chair Yoga / Becket Town Hall / 10:30am / Free
- Wednesdays:** Yoga / Becket Town Hall / 9am / \$3
- Thursdays:** Chair Yoga / Becket Town Hall / 10:45am / Free
- Tuesdays & Thursdays:** Becket Senior Group / Becket Town Hall / 11am-2pm / Lunch and Bingo / Becket Town Hall / Lunch \$3
- Saturdays, May 2, 16:** Food Pantry / Becket Federated Church / 9-11am
- Saturday, May 9:** Mother's Day Flower Sale / First Congregational Church / 9am-3pm
- Friday, May 29:** Senior Fitness Class / Becket Town Hall Community Room / 9-10am / Free

DON'T FORGET
 Saturday, May 9 @ 2:00pm
 Annual Town Meeting
 Saturday, May 16 (10am-7pm)
 Annual Town Election

Live and local music events:

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



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Nurturing the Local Loon Population

By Susan Neule

To the uninitiated birder, one hawk species can look like another. The same with ducks. And even eagles can be mixed up with turkey vultures to the casual observer of the skies. But no one gets confused about the Common Loon, with its black head, red eyes, and its artistically patterned black and white body. Its unique yodeling-like call makes it even more recognizable. No other water bird vocalization is as melodious as the loon's.



Encountering this stunning bird in person usually involves a trip to remote Canadian, Maine, New Hampshire or Vermont bodies of water. Lakes there with undeveloped shorelines and an abundance of small islands and water courses large enough for the long runways loons need to accelerate into flight, are ideal loon breeding grounds. But loons can now also be found in Massachusetts. Up until 1975, loons had been absent from Massachusetts lakes and ponds for 100 years, but since then their numbers have steadily increased. Fifty-six breeding pairs were counted across the state in 2024. And two of these stunners are summering in Becket!

Loons breed and raise their young on freshwater, fish-abundant lakes which have undeveloped shorelines or islands for nesting. In fall, they travel to warmer salt water coasts and estuaries. The Massachusetts and Cape Cod shorelines are the winter homes for an abundance of loons. The newly hatched loons will stay at the shore for up to three years before heading to inland lakes to breed, often returning to where they were born.

The need for lakes not ringed by houses and without power boats on the water, limits loons' breeding location choices in the densely populated state of Massachusetts. In Becket, a pair of loons have been seen for the past two years on the Palmer Brook reservoir, a 125-acre lake surrounded by undeveloped land. Mass Audubon, the new owner of Palmer Brook, is thrilled to have two loons summering on its lake and is expected to make trails to lookout points to enable visitors to catch a glimpse of these creatures.

Finding nesting areas away from human development for the month-long gestation period, however, is only one part of the challenge for loons. Fox, bobcats, raccoons, snapping turtles and eagles are fierce predators. Several conservation groups have been installing nesting rafts with protective covers after a loon pair has three unsuccessful years of bringing chicks to maturity. The adult loons can evade most predators but not the chicks. Mercury and lead poisoning are also damaging the population numbers as are fluctuating water levels caused by global warming impacts on rain patterns. But despite these challenges, loons have returned to Becket and efforts are underway to ensure they breed successfully.

FY26 Becket CDBG Housing Rehabilitation Program

The Housing Rehabilitation Program is a program designed to help low to moderate income homeowners make essential repairs to their home. This financial assistance is made in the form of a 0% interest, deferred, forgivable loan for essential repairs on your home. If you are interested in the program, please scan the QR code below or contact the Grant Administrator at HousingRehab@berkshireplanning.org.



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Three Community Preservation Act (CPA) Items for Voter Approval at the ATM

By Marcia Parnell

Becket's Community Preservation Committee (CPC) will tee up three CPA proposals for voter approval at the ATM on Saturday, May 9th.

Readers may recall that the Beat ran a December 2025 story by CPC Chair Mary Canty seeking proposals from individuals or groups for CPA-eligible projects that would improve Town infrastructure and overall quality of life for Becket residents. Three submissions were received and all were all deemed CPA-eligible.

- Feasibility Study for a Dog Park (\$22,000): The study would provide potential locations, requirements and costs associated for a dog park somewhere in Becket. The group of local residents met with other Berkshire County towns to understand the process they followed for their existing dog parks. The hope is to build an accessible community gathering place for both dogs and their owners.
- Partial funding for a new roof at the Becket Athenaeum (\$30,000; portion of total cost): The original slate roof needs replacement. After staff and board research, a lower cost, environmentally friendly roofing material resembling original slate is recommended. The material has been used on other historical buildings in the state. The Athenaeum has some funding from the Towns of Becket and Washington as well as self-raised funds. CPA funding would fill the gap needed to complete the project.
- Reallocation of cupola funds (\$28,613); Although the funds were approved in the FY 2024 budget for cupola installation at Town Hall, it was learned that additional engineering costs would nearly double the cost of the project. As a result, voters denied the additional funding in the FY 2025 budget. The current proposal is to use the already allocated \$28,613 to install the cupola at the North Becket Village Park.

Canty explains that there is considerable funding still available and encourages residents to consider projects for the future. She acknowledges that the proposal process can seem daunting to many, but because it is funded by a 1.5% surcharge on real property tax and distributed by the Massachusetts Community Preservation Trust Fund it is dictated by State law. The Committee offers guidance and help through the process. Go to <https://www.townofbecket.org/community-preservation-committee> to learn more.

AI-Caramba! How AI is Used in Schools

By Lola Mancari and Jack Walton, *WRHS Student Interns*

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is computer science technology capable of performing complex tasks which previously required human intelligence, rendering it a very powerful tool that is growing rapidly. Because of its expanding popularity and usefulness, teachers and students alike use AI for their assignments. This can be both beneficial and harmful because when used in the wrong way AI is no longer a device that is helpful but rather one that may undercut the learning process.

Many teachers use AI to help with a variety of tasks from creating assignments to grading them, and everything in between. AI can enable teachers to provide quick feedback; however, if the information cannot be verified, it may cause more problems for teachers than it solves. Meagan Shannon, Spanish teacher at Wahconah Regional High School, pointed out that it needs to be recognized as a tool which can fail: "I use AI to give feedback to students, however AI is not always correct, so I have to read everything before I share it with the students." Rob Difazio, another teacher at WRHS, recognizes that AI has a lot of power: "I don't like AI but I have to learn to use it as it will stick around for a while."

Students use AI as a mechanism to help them better understand their assignments, but even students see the potential harm caused if AI is used to complete their coursework rather than using it simply as a resource. "We use AI to gain ideas for assignments, and we think it is a good tool if used correctly, meaning not having AI write it for you," according to WRHS students Brianna Lucey and Elliana O'Leary. AI can be used in ways that help students, such as facilitating research, but can also be detrimental to their learning because, if they use AI to complete the work for them, they will not master the material or the skill sets they are there to learn.

When used properly, AI is a truly powerful asset that can be used to support students and teachers. It has great educational potential, but if misused as a "short cut", it is hard to say whether AI will benefit students or be their downfall.

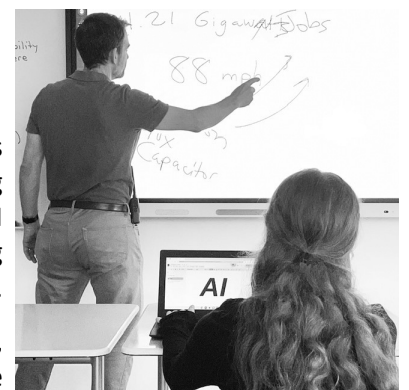


Photo by Jack Walton

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Contributing Writers

Adele Levine

Lola Mancari

Susan Neule

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Find the Becket Beat at:
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BECKET WASHINGTON COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP (BWCP) NEWS

Mother's Day Flower Sale - Saturday, May 9, 9am-3pm

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Proceeds to benefit the Historical Restoration efforts the First Congregational Church of Becket.

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Becket Arts Center Blooms with Art, Movement, and Community This May

The Becket Arts Center's May 2026 calendar offers a lively mix of recurring classes, workshops, and special events that highlight both creative practice and community engagement. Weekly Thursday morning yoga with Rima Sala provides an accessible wellness option, while movement and expression continue later in the month with Becket Moving Freestyle sessions on Saturdays (starting May 16), encouraging creative exploration through dance.

The month is also rich with exhibitions and community gatherings. Early May features the opening reception of the juried exhibit "Spirited Material," followed by the launch of "We Are River People" in conjunction with World Fish Migration Day, on view through early June. Additional highlights include a W.I.P. Wednesday showcasing new work by Rick Reiss, a hands-on herbal workshop on botanical protection, and a juried exhibit reception, "Form, Fact, and Fragment," at the end of the month. For the latest updates and details, visit becketartscenter.org/events

**BECKET
ARTS
CENTER**

Get Inspired by Nature at the Becket Athenaeum

Thanks to everyone who participated in the poetry activities at the library in April – be on the lookout for a display of participants' poems – there are some fun ones! In addition, we hope to see Becket voters at the Annual Town Meeting on May 9 @ 2pm where we humbly ask for your support in approving the library's funding requests, including the funds that will support a much needed roof replacement project.

On Saturday, May 30 @ 4pm, local author Lara Tupper will offer Inspired by Nature, a writing workshop that will take participants on an exploration of the naturalist themes in the poems of Ross Gay, Mary Oliver, and others and then participants will write their own responses. No writing experience necessary, just a willingness to be curious on the page. Registration required: bwlibrary.org/nature

