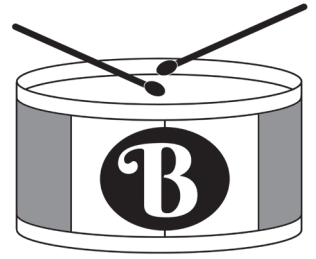


Becket Beat

Keeping neighbors connected Vol. 5, No. 8, September 2026



New Leadership at Becket Washington Elementary School

By Cathy Terwedow



BWS Principal April West; photo by Marcia Parnell

Becket Washington Elementary School (BWS) welcomed five new staff members over the summer: principal April West, administrative assistant Michelle Raymer, and teachers Faith Battistone (grade K-1), Stephen Mercier (grade 2-3), and Becket resident Lauren Dolan (grade 5).

A professional educator, West brings nearly 20 years of experience, enthusiasm, and innovative ideas to the job, and Raymer brings a decades-long commitment to BWS, having sent both her kids to the school. Battistone is new to the district, while Mercier and Dolan are district veterans from Craneville Elementary in Dalton. Mercier also served at Nessacus.

West knows the challenges of small schools. Having attended a four-room K-8th-grade school and a 150-student high school herself, she is very familiar with small class sizes and mixed-age classrooms. For West, it's critical that school be a stable and safe environment where relationships matter, teachers know kids deeply, and kids feel valued.

West received her bachelor's degree from Bennington College and a master's degree in cultural studies from Ohio State University. Realizing she wanted to pay it forward, West returned to school and earned a second master's degree in education.

Most recently, West worked at Berkshire Arts & Technology (BART) charter school, where she served seven years as a teacher and five as principal. "By bringing in new programs and improved discipline practices we kept more students in school, stabilized enrollment, improved the sense of belonging students felt, and significantly increased student and parent satisfaction with the school program." She is determined to do the same at BWS.

Faced with concerns over declining enrollment (Becket Beat, Vol 5, Issue 1), West came right to the point. "I have a very clear task at BWS – to do things that will increase enrollment. With just five classrooms, we need to rethink all aspects of students' learning experiences, from the educational blocks and enrichment opportunities to the social-emotional health and wellbeing of students and teachers."

Planned innovations include the introduction of "WIN" blocks, in which every student receives "What I Need" (e.g., acceleration, extra practice, interventions) without the stigma of being pulled out of class. There will also be new enrichment opportunities, such as a school garden and outdoor learning space and, potentially, book clubs, woodworking, a Lego® room, Snap Circuits®, robotics and fiber arts.

Knowing the strengths and weaknesses of small schools, West is already adjusting the BWS curriculum so that students learn

continued on page 2

together, without being in the same eight-person class cohort for their entire elementary experience.

West is also looking for new ways to strengthen the school/family connection, improve school communications, and build strong developmental partners in the community. Over the summer, she met with the Becket Arts Center, the Becket Athenaeum, Jacob's Pillow, and others, brainstorming new (and old) ways to increase the sense of community and bring new opportunities to Becket kids.

These partnerships are intended to help students explore their own interests, thereby increasing family and community pride in BWS. When students feel like they are heard and seen, they demonstrate better behavior and more attentiveness in class, thus improving student outcomes, explained West.

According to Central Berkshire Regional School District (CBRSD) Superintendent Mike Henault, "With West's arrival, we have the real opportunity to show families just how special BWS is. We'd love to welcome home-schooled children back to BWS and entice school-choice students in other towns to consider BWS, not only on its own merits but also as a "free pass" to Nessacus Middle School where kids from other schools often face a waiting list."

Henault is also creating an ad hoc committee to make recommendations to the school board about specialized programming, future grade configurations, and similar topics for BWS. The committee will be composed of Asst. Superintendent Aaron Robb (chair), West, and staff, parents, and one to two community stakeholders.

With Senator Paul Mark's support, CBRSD recently directed an additional \$250K in its Rural Aid funding to BWS. The funds will offset debt and curriculum purchases and support enrollment growth. Longer, mixed-grade science blocks and STEM-related partnerships (such as with the Wild and Scenic Westfield River Committee, Mass Audubon, Flying Cloud, and the Hitchcock Center), could become a specialty of BWS. Increased Rural Aid funds will also help fund gaps in the FY27 district budget.

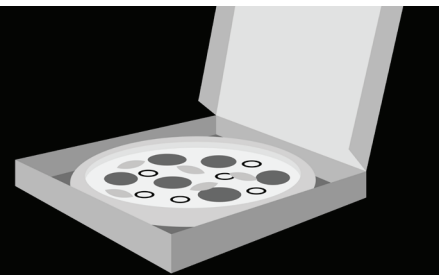
In closing, West said, "We have an amazing opportunity to build something special together. We're committed to the children of the central Berkshires, and we look forward to welcoming yours."



L to R: Colleen Trager, Lauren Dolan, April West, Faith Battistone, Stephen Mercier, Contance Janik, Michelle Raymer; photo by Art Alpert

Becket-Washington School Open House & Pizza Night Thursday, September 17, 2026 5:00-6:30pm

Welcome back to school! Families and community members are invited to the Becket-Washington School Open House to meet new Principal April West and the school staff. Pizza will be provided courtesy of the Becket-Washington PTO. For any questions, contact hello@bwspto.com.

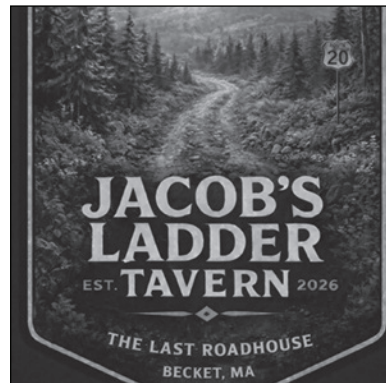


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Correction:

In the July issue of the Becket Beat, we incorrectly stated that The Jacob's Ladder Tavern was known at one point in time as "The Riggs". It was formerly known as "The Bonny Rigg" and went through a couple of iterations since the 1960s. Thank you to Ann Spadafora for bringing this to our attention.



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Third Annual Family Fun Festival and Parade

By Adele Levine

Love a parade? You're in luck. The third annual Family Fun Festival, co-sponsored by Becket Parks and Recreation and the Becket Arts Center, includes a parade this year on Saturday, September 26th (rain date September 27th) at 11am. The route runs from Route 8 and Carter Road up Main Street to Maple Street, ending at North Becket Village Park. Watch for 20 vintage cars, kids on decorated bikes, a vintage fire truck, police cruisers, and local groups, businesses and sponsors. Grab a sidewalk spot and cheer them on!

The festival continues from noon to 5 p.m. at the Park with a full afternoon of entertainment: a drum circle led by percussionist Rick Shrum, music from local favorites the Becket Praise Team, the Ladies Diane and Chris Merenda, plus other family-friendly programming. With an area for games for all ages, there will be something for everyone.

Bring your chairs and coolers, and picnic in the park for an afternoon with family, neighbors, and friends.

To sponsor, call Parks and Recreation at 413-329-7079. Donations are welcome. Please make checks payable to Becket Arts Center, noted "Family Fun Festival."

**3rd Annual
Family Fun Festival
& Parade
SAT, SEPT 26
11am-5pm**

North Becket Village Park
Parade, live music,
and more



Drum Circle from 2025 Family Fun Festival; photo by Art Alpert



Music from 2025 Family Fun Festival; photo by Art Alpert

Bringing New Life After Loss of Local Sugar Maple

By Marcia Parnell

A long-cherished and often-photographed sugar-maple tree which sat in front of the Becket Congregational Church finally had to come down. Efforts to keep it alive by pruning its dead branches failed, and the maple, located on Town property, was removed earlier this summer.

Determined to bring new life to the setting, Yoked Parish members are working to raise \$2,000 to purchase and install a new large sugar maple (they have already raised \$500). The new tree will be planted in the same area but further away from the road to ensure winter highway salt can't harm it.

According to Historical Commission and church member Rita Furlong, the land is part of the Town's original parade ground, where locals gathered and practiced in the days leading up to the Revolutionary War. And over the years, many young people – Sunday school kids and local camp counselors – couldn't resist the chance to climb the great maple. Says Furlong, "While it will be years before anyone can climb a new tree, we'd love to see it happen again in the future and you've got to start somewhere."

Readers who would like to contribute towards a new sugar maple are asked to send a check to the Congregational Church Tree Fund, PO Box 327, Becket, MA 01223. The hope is to have enough funds to plant a replacement sometime this fall.



Maple Tree being taken down; photo by Art Alpert



Painting of church and tree; photo by Art Alpert

Community Calendar September 2026

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

see page 6
for more >>



BECKET ARTS CENTER

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

Thursdays (except the 17th): Yoga with Rima Sala / 9:30-10:30am / \$15 per class (disc. for members)

Thursday, September 3, 10, 17: Improvisational Circle Singing with Nick Atlas / 6-8pm / \$10-\$20 suggested donation

Friday, September 4: Jeremy Yudkin presents: Understanding Beethoven's Ninth Symphony / 6-7:30pm / \$10 (disc. for members)

Saturday & Sunday, September 5 & 6: Open Studio DriveAbout / 11am-3pm / Drive around the hilltowns and meet artists at their studios

Saturday, September 5: Art Lounge Opening Reception "Gathered Ground: Ritual, Community, and Earth" / 2-4pm / Free

Friday, September 11, 18, 25 (and October 2, 9): Basic Watercolor Painting with Suzanne Gammon / 1-3pm / \$40 (disc. for members)

Tuesday, September 15: Author Talk with Bob Reiss / 6-7:30pm / \$10 (disc. for members)

Wednesday, September 16: Plein Air in Becket / 10am-1pm / \$10 (free for members) pre-registration required

Wednesday, September 16: W.I.P. Wednesday - Judith Kerman's *The Steamer Trunk* - sharing of works in progress / 7-8:30pm / Free

Saturday, September 26: Upstairs Gallery Opening Reception "Gathered Ground: Ritual, Community, and Earth" / 2-4pm / Free

Saturday, September 26: Family Fun Festival & Parade / North Becket Village Park / 11am-5pm / Free

SAVE THE DATE

Saturday, October 24: An Evening Conversation with Dar Williams / 5-6:30pm / \$50 (disc. for members)

BECKET ATHENAEUM

More info & to register: bwlibrary.org/events

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

Wednesdays: Mah Jongg Meetup / 2-4pm / Registration required

Wednesdays: One-on-One Tech Support / 2:30-4:30pm / By appt: 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, September 1: Book Club: *Hum* by Helen Phillips / 1:30pm / Free

Tuesday, September 1: A Night of Stargazing with local astronomer Rick Costello / 74 Andrews Rd, Becket / 8-9:30pm / Free / RSVP to receive weather-related rescheduling notices: bwlibrary.org/sky

Thursday, September 3: Rooted in Liberation: Elizabeth Freeman & the Natural World / 6-7pm / Free

Saturday, September 5 & Sunday, September 6: Book & Bake Sale Fundraiser / 10am-4pm /

Saturday, September 12: Esau's Heel Trail Tree ID Walk with Chelsey Simmons / 10-12pm / Free / Registration required: bwlibrary.org/treeid

Monday, September 14: Cookbook Club: *Every Grain of Rice* by Fuchsia Dunlop / 6-7:30pm / Free / Registration required

Thursday, September 17: Game Night + Mah Jongg / 6-8pm / Free / Registration required for Mah Jongg

Tuesday, September 22: Movie Night for Adults: Michael / 6:30-9:30pm, movie starts at 7pm / Free

Saturday, October 3: MANHATTAN SHORT Film Festival / 7-9:30pm / Free

Tuesday, October 6: Book Club: *When the Cranes Fly South* by Lisa Ridzén / 1:30pm / Free



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Community Calendar September 2026

see page 5
<< for more



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

TOWN GOVERNMENT

Tuesday, September 1: State Primary Voting / 7am-8pm
Tuesday, September 1: Parks & Rec Committee / 9am
Wednesday, September 2: Board of Health / 5pm
Wednesday, September 2, 16: Select Board / 6pm
Thursday, September 3, 22: Conservation Comm. / 6pm
Wednesday, September 9: Planning Board / 5pm
Tuesday, September 8: Historical Commission / 3pm
Tuesday, September 8: Finance Committee / 3pm
Tuesday, September 15: Municipal Buildings Advisory Committee / 9am
Tuesday, September 15: Energy Committee / 5pm
Wednesday, September 16: Bylaw Review Comm / 3pm
Saturday, September 19: Special Town Meeting / 2pm
 Up-to-date info: www.townofbecket.org/calendar

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COMMUNITY EVENTS

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Washington Town Hall / 11am / Free
Tuesdays: Yoga for Seniors w/ Rima Sala /
Washington Town Hall / 9am / Free
Tuesdays: Osteo/Chair Yoga for Seniors / Becket Town Hall / 10:30am / Free
Tuesdays & Thursdays: Becket Senior Group /
Becket Town Hall / 11am-2pm / Lunch and Bingo / \$3
Wednesdays: Yoga / Becket Town Hall / 9am / \$3
Thursdays: Osteo/Chair Yoga for Seniors / Becket Town Hall / 10:45am / Free
Saturdays, September 5, 19: Food Pantry /
Becket Federated Church / 9-11am
Saturday, September 5: Chicken BBQ / 12-2pm / First Congregational Church / \$20 / Reservations: 413-623-8300 or 413-623-6455
Thursday, September 17: Becket-Washington School Open House & Pizza Night / 5-6:30pm
Saturday, September 26: Family Fun Festival & Parade / North Becket Village Park / 11am-5pm / Free

Live and local music events:

www.route8pub.com

www.thedreamawaylodge.com/events

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2026 Chicken Barbecue

to benefit the Yoked Parish Community Outreach Emergency Fund

Eat In, Take Out (or picnic on the grounds)

Date: Saturday, September 5th (rain date: 9/6)

Time: 12-2pm

Location: First Congregational Church of Becket

Cost: \$20

Reservations: 413-623-8300 or 413-623-6455



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New Swap Shop Gives Becket's Castoffs a Second Life

By Adele Levine

Tucked into the far-left corner of the Becket Transfer Station sits a new little red building. As of August 1st, it's the Becket Swap Shop – and already one of the more talked-about additions to town.

The idea for the Swap Shop originated with Town Administrator Kathe Warden, funded by a MassDEP Recycling Program grant she first worked with while serving the Town of Hinsdale. The grants support community-driven initiatives that keep reusable household items in circulation instead of the waste stream.

After meeting with Warden, Becket residents Crispina French and Mary Canty volunteered to coordinate the project, rounding up a group of volunteers to staff it. The shop officially opened August 1st and now operates Tuesdays and Saturdays, 10am to 4pm.

The idea is simple: it is a place to drop off items no longer needed and pick up ones that are, keeping usable goods out of the landfill. But for French, it's about more than reuse — it's a way to bring neighbors together at a time when so much pulls people apart. "After all, everybody throws things away," she says, "and everyone enjoys finding a treasure. We all can agree on that."

The early numbers back that up. In just the first two weeks, the Swap Shop kept over 2,100 pounds of objects out of the landfill — a meaningful dent, since the Town of Becket pays by the pound to have trash hauled away. A new parking area near the shop lets visitors stop in without disrupting traffic at the transfer station.

Volunteers check in all donations, accepting clean, working items — though an antique lamp in need of rewiring was quickly rehomed anyway. What's accepted varies by volunteer discretion, storage space, and current selection. The transfer station charges for bulky items and electronics whether they're tossed in the dumpster or dropped at the Swap Shop, covering the cost if unclaimed donations eventually have to be discarded.

Smaller items fill the shelves inside and larger goods like furniture and outdoor sporting equipment sit outside, so anything that could be ruined by rain shouldn't be dropped off late in the day or ahead of wet weather. With storage limited, most unclaimed outside items are discarded by day's end.



Swap Shop; photo by Penny Leffert



Inside the Swap Shop shed; photo by Penny Leffert

Some things are off the table entirely: anything already barred from the transfer station, including mattresses, box springs, and hazardous waste, plus food items. Car seats and bike helmets are also turned away, since damage isn't always visible.

A bulletin board inside adds another layer to the exchange, letting residents post what they're hoping to find — or list bigger items, like a sofa too large to haul over, that they'd like to give away without bringing it in themselves.

The Swap Shop closes in bad weather, and how late into the season it stays open hasn't been decided. Organizers are considering seasonal donation days — a Christmas item exchange, or drop-off days for winter sports gear and spring gardening supplies. New signage, and possibly a site map, will also go up soon around the transfer station showing where to take items the Swap Shop can't accept.

For more information, or to volunteer for at least four hours a month, email BecketSwapShop@gmail.com.



A patron and volunteer show off a find from the Swap Shop; photo by Penny Leffert



Special Town Meeting September 19th: New and Revised Bylaws up for Vote

By Marcia Parnell

The Special Town Meeting (STM) on Saturday, September 19th at 2pm at the Becket-Washington School will bring four articles to the floor for Becket voter approval. In an effort to help voters learn more in advance of the STM later this month, this article summarizes what was available and shared with residents about the pending bylaws at the Town's August 20th public hearing meeting.

Those planning to attend the STM should know that there is a great deal of information to review and understand about these bylaws. Town officials and Committee members are planning brief presentations at the STM prior to voting to explain background, rationales and address any concerns. Meeting attendees will then have the opportunity to ask questions. Also note, registered voters must attend the meeting in order to cast their ballots. Information on the proposed new bylaws follows:

Short-Term Rental (STR) Bylaw defines and addresses requirements of STR properties in light of the fact that no state or other law exists to do so. Developed by the Bylaw Review Committee, the proposed STR bylaw defines STRs, owners, the number of STRs permitted in town and per owner, and details requirements for registering with the Town, STR operating rules and enforcement.

According to Committee Chair Chuck Garman, the bylaw aims to prevent the potential domination of local housing stock by commercial investors, keep more long-term housing inventory available for local residents, and maintain STR income opportunities for both full and part-time existing residents. Importantly, he explained, its operating rules also protect neighbors by setting contact, occupancy, parking and other rules.

Other municipalities in Berkshire County have established or are considering laws regarding STRs and the Berkshire Regional Planning Commission provides guidance and resources. Among towns with established laws, Garman estimates that Becket's proposed bylaw falls somewhere in the middle in terms of stringency.

There is also a request for an Appropriation from the General Stabilization Fund for Short-Term Rental Bylaw Administration. It seeks voter approval to transfer \$20,000 for costs associated with the implementation and administration of the STR bylaw. This appropriation would only be considered by voters if the STR bylaw passes.

Concerns about the provisions of the bylaw expressed at the public meeting relate to enforcement, funding and over-regulation.

Zoning Bylaw Articles for Battery Energy Storage System (BESS) and Solar, currently at 28 and 27 pages respectively, are nearly identical in language. Although the Town has an existing Solar Bylaw, which was revised in 2019, more recent state law and the expectation of new applications were the impetus for a revised solar and all-new BESS bylaw.

Signed into law in 2021 the state's "Act Creating a Next-Generation Roadmap for Massachusetts Climate Policy" sets interim emission reduction targets to achieve net zero emissions by 2050. And in 2024, an "Act Promoting a Clean Energy Grid, Advancing Equity, and Protecting Ratepayers" was enacted. This law established reforms to streamline the siting and permitting process for clean energy projects. As a result of these laws, towns cannot prohibit or unreasonably inhibit BESS or solar projects but can establish local laws to manage initiatives within their community.

According to Planning Board Vice Chair Al Blake, extensive consultation and research went into the preparation of the proposed bylaws. The state's Department of Energy Resources "Model Zone Bylaws: Allowing Use of Battery Energy Storage Systems and Solar Models" were the starting points for the Town's own bylaws.

The proposed bylaws were prepared by an Ad Hoc Committee in conjunction with the Planning Board over 10 months and took into consideration the protection of Town and resident interests while at the same time adhering to state requirements. The group gathered input from consultants, engineers, other relevant Town of Becket Committees, and the Berkshire Regional Planning Commission. A final review was then conducted by the Town's attorney. Among the Committee's top-most considerations, members noted, were the health and safety of residents and first responders, protection of the local environment and the elimination of any financial burden on the Town.

What happens if the bylaw doesn't pass? Blake explained that Becket will still be required to comply with state law without any added provisions specific to the Town.

Previously Voter-Approved Bylaw Requiring Revision by State Attorney General: Article 22 Outdoor Lighting Bylaw is back for voter approval due to a language change required by the State Attorney General. The version passed last year Section B. Applicability (2) read "If any neighbor is inconvenienced..." The revised version reads "If any person is inconvenienced..." A handout of the Article showing the marked-up changes will be available at the STM for voter review.

2026 Centennial Beer Garden



BFVD Centennial Beer Garden celebration; photo by Aaron Beatty



Becket Fire Department sign; photo by Aaron Beatty



Becket Volunteer Firefighter's Association

August 16 at 9:27 PM · 🌐

Our Centennial Beer Garden was one for the books, and we cannot thank our community enough for coming out and celebrating 100 years of service with us!

As a volunteer fire department, we are incredibly fortunate to serve a community that continues to show up and support us. Seeing so many familiar faces, friends, families, and new faces come together made this celebration truly special.

From all of us on the Becket Volunteer Fire Fighters Association, we thank you!



D-Rod band; photo courtesy of Derrick Rodgers



Mostly Blue band; photo by Jenn Beatty

DYC Drop-In Program | Grades 3–8

The DYC Drop-In Program provides a safe and welcoming place for young people in grades 3–8 to spend time after school, connect with trusted adults, receive mentorship and academic support, and explore new interests.

Drop-In Hours: Monday–Friday | 2:30–8:00pm

This fall, young people can expect:

STEM and maker activities • Arts and crafts • Gaming, air hockey, and spaces to hang out • Basketball and recreation • Tutoring and academic support • A refreshed kitchen with free healthy snacks

DYC Drop-In Program OPEN HOUSE Wednesday, September 2

Dalton Youth Center | 27 South Carson Ave., Dalton
Brief remarks at 5:30 p.m.
Free pizza generously provided by Spectrum.

BECKET WASHINGTON COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP (BWCP) NEWS

Create, Connect, and Be Inspired in September

September is packed with opportunities to create, connect, and be inspired at the Becket Arts Center. The month begins with Improvisational Circle Singing with Nick Atlas on September 3 and the Open Studio DriveAbout on September 5–6, inviting visitors to meet local artists and explore their work throughout the Hilltowns. Also on September 5, the Art Lounge hosts an opening reception for “Gathered Ground: Ritual, Community, and Earth.” A five-week Basic Watercolor Painting series with Suzanne Gammon begins September 11, followed by an Author Talk with Bob Reiss on September 15. On September 16, artists can head outdoors for Plein Air in Becket, and theater lovers can enjoy a Works in Progress Wednesday reading of “The Steamer Trunk.” The month closes with the “Gathered Ground” Upstairs Gallery opening reception on September 26. Yoga and Circle Singing also continue on select Thursdays throughout the month. Visit the Becket Arts Center calendar for details and registration.

Final Book & Bake Sale Weekend Plus a Natural World Spin on September at the Athenaeum

If you’re still in the market for late summer reads – and who isn’t always in the market for homemade baked goods – or planning ahead for gifts for the rest of the year, don’t miss the Athenaeum’s final Book & Bake Sale Fundraiser of 2026 on 9/5 and 9/6 from 10-4.

The month is also rich with programs that highlight the natural world and celebrate partnerships with other local organizations. In collaboration with Becket Dark Skies, the month kicks off with a Stargazing event on 9/1 led by local astronomer Rick Costello. On 9/3, we welcome Sunder Ashni of Mumbet’s Freedom Farm for Rooted in Liberation: Elizabeth Freeman and the Natural World. On 9/12, Chelsey Simmons of Berkshire Environmental Action Team leads a Tree ID walk at Esau’s Heel Trail. And of course you can always check out our recurring programs, pop in to browse or just relax, or catch up with us at Becket Fall Family Fun Festival on 9/26.

Who Needs Home Watch?

- Going South for the Winter?
- Taking a Vacation?
- Business Travel Keeping you Away?
- Can’t get to your Second Home as often as you’d like?
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- Is your Home Vacant Waiting to Sell?

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