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Northern Berkshire Community Coalition

Coalition news

An update from



December 2024, Volume XXXIX, Number 6

The Opportunities and Challenges Facing Our Local Economy

November's forum tackled the topic of our local economies and workforce. Dr. Ben Lamb, Vice President of Economic Development at 1Berkshire, and Bryana Malloy, Manager of Industry Relations & Berkshire Market Maker at MassHire, served as the forum moderators. In their introduction to the topic they offered a broad overview of the Berkshires economic factors. Our economy is comprised of six main clusters: advanced manufacturing & Digital enterprise, creative economy & culture, food & agriculture, hospitality & tourism, health & wellness, and outdoor recreation. Annually, Berkshire County generates eight billion dollars in gross domestic product.

The biggest challenges facing our economy are a workforce, housing, transportation and broadband access. These issues are considered "cross cutting", meaning they are true across all fields of work and regions, and each is complicated by a multitude of factors such as affordable child care and access to mental health and substance use services.

While the region has six main fields of economic activity, the forum panels focused on two of the largest fields, health and social services, and education. Health and social services, the fastest growing industry and largest employment industry in our region, was the focus of the first panel and consisted of Laurie Lamarre, Vice

President of North Adams Regional Hospital(NARH) and Diana Knaebe, President and CEO of the Brien Center. Panel moderator, Bryana Malloy, guided the conversation.

Berkshire Health Systems(BHS) is the Berkshires' largest employer with 4,300 employees. Ms. Lamarre stated that they are proud to be focused on patients and partnerships that provide the tools to improve the lives of those patients and their employees. The most exciting recent developments for BHS have been the opening of NARH, which provided over 65 jobs and brought healthcare closer to home. Ms. Knaebe stated that the Brien Center was focused on recruitment and retention, growing the workforce from within. Other exciting changes were an electronic records system to relieve not only the administrative burden, but also to make it easier on patients to minimize the trauma of retelling their stories over and over. Also, advancements in digital therapies for adolescents.

Both Lamarre and Knaebe praised the value of the collaboration with educational institutions like McCann Technical High School, Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts(MCLA), and Berkshire Community College(BCC) on a "pathway program" to make sure students are getting the support they need to succeed and growing both of their workforces from within the community.

The challenges each organization faces were also similar. More jobs available than people to fill them, a lack of transportation and housing. A lack of clinicians, counselors, and EMS. Both are working hard to do what they can to support their staff with continuing education and growth within the organizations and are constantly reviewing their salaries and benefit packages to stay fair and competitive. Despite the challenges both Lamarre and Knaebe had opportunities to highlight in the industry. Knaebe spoke of the new Have Hope Recovery Center in North Adams. There is a lot of need and opportunities for licensed clinicians. Lamarre restated the need for more housing and the opportunities that it offers for developers. Finally, the panel urged the forum attendees to rethink what working in "healthcare" looks like. The job field within the industry is incredibly diverse and offers employment opportunities to almost everyone, regardless of education background.

The second and final panel, featured representatives from the education field and included Dr. Tim Callahan, Assistant Superintendent of the North Adams Public Schools(NAPS), Gina Puc, Special Assistant to the President, Director of Community Relations, and Secretary to the Board of Trustees at Williams College, and Dr. James Birge, President of MCLA. Dr. Lamb led the discussion as moderator.

(Continued on Page 2)



Northern Berkshire Community Coalition
Community Empowerment • Prevention & Wellness

Our Mission

"Empowering the Northern Berkshire region to enhance the quality of life through our efforts at connecting, convening, and supporting all facets of the community."

In pursuit of this mission, we place particular emphasis on the following:

- Strengthening neighborhoods and community life
- Preventing alcohol/substance abuse and supporting recovery
- Promoting health and wellness
- Helping families to be strong and resilient
- Supporting positive youth development
- Building bridges between residents and service agencies

Coalition Supporters

Public Sources

- MA Dept. of Children & Families/EOHHS
- MA Cultural Council
- MA Department of Public Health
- MA Department of Public Health, Bureau of Substance Addiction Services

Local Support

- Contributions from our many individual supporters

The Coalition is a member agency of the Northern Berkshire United Way 
and the Williamstown Community Chest.



To submit announcements to the Coalition E-zine:

The Coalition E-zine is a weekly e-blast, published every Thursday, with news and announcements from Northern Berkshire agencies and organizations. Submissions must be received by 9:00 am Tuesday morning to be considered for inclusion in that week's issue. All submissions are subject to editing and should be 50 words or less. All events related to Northern Berkshire community public health will be considered for publication. Banner ads are available. For more information, please call 413-663-7588, or to submit an announcement, please email phzine@nbccoalition.org.

(Continued from Cover)

The opening question was the same as it was for the first panel. What's new that you are most excited about within your organization?

Dr. Birge answered first, stating that he was most excited about MCLA's plans to offer a Masters program and degree in Social Work. Currently, they are working on securing the resources to support this program. He also mentioned the new hockey program was bringing new families to visit the area, offering a little boost to the local economy.

Ms. Puc was most excited about the imminent plans for construction on the new Williams College Museum of Art(WCMA) that will not only employ local contractors during the three year construction process, but once completed will be a treasured asset with free admission to the community.

Dr. Callahan chimed in last to say that the upcoming Greylock School building project and education pathway partnerships, like the Dury Early College program, were what he was most excited about.

Next the panel tackled their biggest challenges. Dr. Callahan lamented two major challenges. First, there are more jobs than people, a common challenge echoed by the group. This staffing shortage included substitute teachers, creating situations where administrators like himself are having to step in to teach classes like math or science, at the expense of their administrative responsibilities. Secondly, funding is a deeply felt strain. Callahan stated that the costs related to special education were astronomical and had increased 100% in the last year. Ms. Puc stepped in next with a list of challenges, saying that filling dining services & skilled trades positions; housing &

transportation issues; trying to remain competitive without taking away from student resources; and battling the perception that college educations are not as valuable or worth the cost as they used to be were all issues that Williams is currently facing. Dr. Birge echoed most of these sentiments.

The discussion was concluded on an up note with opportunities that the panelist saw in their industry. Ms. Puc stated adversity is its own opportunity, challenging Williams to be creative and transformative. They have a generous endowment to ensure accessible pathways for talented students that are highly motivated. Dr. Birge pointed out that a college education at MCLA is currently free to eligible students, those whose families make less than \$75k/annually, and is free to all commuters and transfers from BCC and UMASS. Lastly, Mr. Callahan shared simply that the students were the bright spot he sees in our collective future. He shared the recent experience of listening to a 6th grade class discuss their ideas for alternative energy through critical thinking and leaving the experience feeling confident about the future. He is also excited about the upcoming Portrait of a Graduate grant programming. On that final uplifting note, the forum concluded.

Please join us for the next forum on December 13, 2025 from 10:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. at the First Congregational Church of Williamstown, located at 906 Main Street, Williamstown. The topic will be the Status of Parents in North Berkshire: Parental Mental Health.

Family Holiday Budget Tips

It's that time of year already, you know the one where people are going crazy, trying to fit in their holiday shopping and stay on a budget. Every year I know I say, "oh next year I'm going to start shopping earlier so I'm not so stressed". If you're like me and everyone else I know, it usually doesn't work out that way. How can we teach our children and ourselves that more isn't always better? I'm going to give you some ideas on how to stay on a budget for the holidays AND keep you and your children happy.

Here are some helpful tips;

- Each pay week, set aside a certain amount either in a savings account or in a jar in your house and be faithful to it.
- Another way to try and save a little money is to collect loose change and put it in a jar, it can really add up.
- Have a family meeting, and talk with your kids about your budget and why it is important for you to stick to it. (Age-appropriate of course)
- During the year, volunteer with your children at your local food pantries, or churches so they get the opportunity to see people that aren't as fortunate as they are, it will change their outlook on other people and they can self-reflect on that.
- Homemade gifts are the best! And it will strengthen your bond with your children. You can make ornaments, jams, holiday cards, mason jar cocoa or you can use a clear frosting sleeve and put the ingredients in instead.
- In the Spring, help your children go through their toys and ask them to donate "gently" used toys for the holidays. (It's a win, win, you're helping out children and cleaning out the clutter).
- For your children's gifts instead of presents, maybe talk about a family vacation, and as a gift give them "accessories", that will give them a hint.



Holiday Tips with Young Children

- Simplify your priorities
- It's OK to not please everyone. Manage relatives expectations.
- Make homemade gifts instead of buying gifts, or pick names from a hat to only buy for the person you choose.
- Talk to your kids before going somewhere that can get overwhelming for you & them. Have a code word to let each other know when you've had enough without hurting anyone's feelings.
- Clarify your expectations of them before you go.
- Be prepared with whatever will keep your little one from having any meltdowns.
- Encourage gratitude with your children.
- Don't force them to hug relatives they aren't comfortable around; it's OK. Try high-fives or a fist bump instead.
- Try to keep their naps & schedules as close as possible.
- Laugh! Have a sense of humor with whatever comes your way and enjoy your time with your family & friends.



Northern Berkshire Community Coalition Board of Directors Fiscal Year 2025

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1Berkshire

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THE NEIGHBORLIES 2024

November at the Coalition means our favorite annual event, the Neighborlies! This evening of community recognition that celebrates our friends and neighbors for their kindness, selflessness, and volunteerism with Neighborly awards is a perfect way to honor a month that is all about gratitude.

MCLA once again played gracious host to our event in their beautiful Church Street Center space. The night kicked off with refreshments and lots of hugs as the Williams College Ephlats greeted attendees with their incredible a capella music as community members began to filter into the space. State Representative John Barrett III and North Adams Mayor Jennifer Macksey were kind enough to join us to congratulate the awardees and pose for photos with everyone.

MCLA's Chief of Staff, Josh Mendel offered a warm welcome to the crowd before passing the mic over to Coalition E.D. Amber Besaw. Amber reflected on the importance of seeing and celebrating the good deeds and experiences, big and small, especially in these tumultuous times. She also took a moment to acknowledge that the day was also World Day of Remembrance.

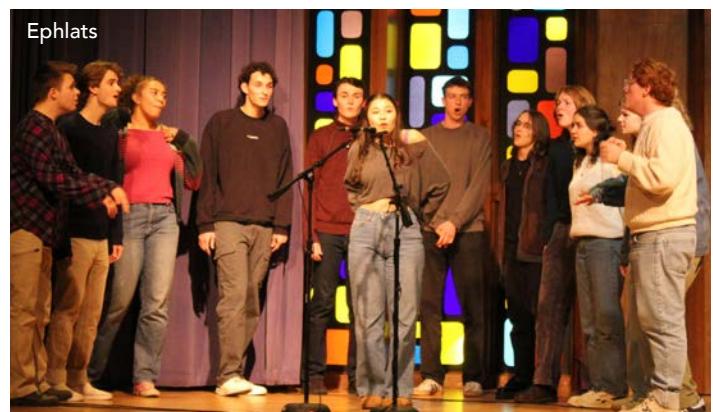
This year we honored over 120 individuals for their selfless acts in the categories of Family Support, Businesses & Groups Pulling Together, Neighborly Acts, Youth Taking the Lead and Community Health & Wellness. Ben Lamb, nbCC Board President, presented the first category of awards for Businesses & Groups Pulling Together. Among the eighteen awardees were long standing community club, the North Adams



Fraternal Order of the Elks, who were nominated for continuously donating generously to the Drury High School Band and the North Adams Public Schools music program through the DHS band. This year they donated \$6,000 that was used to purchase new instruments for the band and music programs. Alongside the Elks were newcomers, North Adams Community Housing Organization (NACHO), nominated for taking on the issue of affordable community housing in a meaningful, data informed, and tactical way rarely seen before.

In the Community Health & Wellness category, seventeen groups or individuals were recognized for deeds as simple as donating bikes to the Bike Collective and coaching youth soccer and basketball, and as complex as supporting others in their struggles with sobriety and homelessness.

There were a total of twelve local youth celebrated for their volunteer efforts in the community. River Bourassa-Pitroff and Willoughby Lamb were the





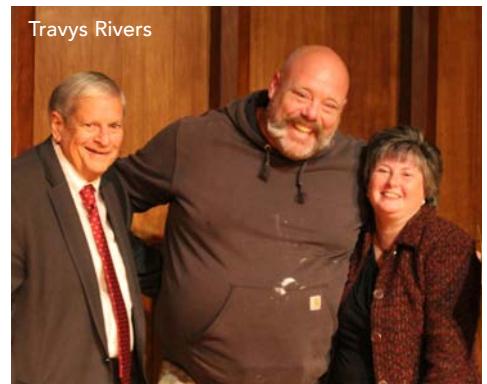
youngest honorees of the night. River received her Neighborly “For being Heart & Soil Collective’s youngest volunteer- at 3 years old- helping deliver fresh veggies (and smiles!) to seniors in Adams” and Willoughby received her award “For joining the Otto’s Farm Stand team and for spreading joy by caring for and sharing her beautiful flower bouquets.”

Neighborly Acts drew the largest number of awardees this year with over sixty individuals being celebrated. The largest group of the evening , consisting of twenty-two folks, was recognized for their “tireless efforts on supporting the Greylock Elementary School Building Project.” While Family Support drew the smallest group, but some of the sweetest submissions like, “She is my grandma. She is the best person ever!”

This year’s Steve Green Neighbor of Year recipient, Mary Jirkovsky, was unable to join us, but was celebrated as “a dedicated educator, volunteer, and neighbor who consistently lends her time and talents to support others. She has served on the UNO Steering Committee for several years and has spent countless hours helping to host community events and programs, including her afterschool program for school-age youth. What truly sets Mary apart is not only the time she invests but also her remarkable character. She takes the time to get to know her neighbors personally and always greets them with warmth and kindness whenever they cross paths. She meets everyone with positive energy, and she embodies what the Neighborlies are about—being a true supporter of her neighbors and an engaged member of the community.”

We had such a great evening and look forward to doing it all again next year, on Wednesday, November 19, 2025. Until then we encourage you to submit your favorite local do-gooder for a 2025 Neighborly!

To submit online: https://bit.ly/the_nbcc_neighborlies



MLK Jr. Day of Service Committee Seeks Nominations for the 2025 Peacemaker Award

The MLK Jr. Day of Service Committee is also seeking nominations for the 2025 Peacemaker Award to be presented at the 2025 MLK Jr. Day of Service on Monday, January 20, 2025.

The Peacemaker Award is given annually to an individual or group in Northern Berkshire. The award, which originated as part of the annual Martin Luther King, Jr. Day of Service, is made to persons who have contributed substantially to peace in our region. In general, the Peacemaker Award recognizes persons who have a history of working with people and/or neighborhoods and communities to provide for greater tolerance, understanding, and caring. While the award may be made to a person or group well known in the region, those making nominations are particularly urged to consider those who have worked hard and have made contributions without much recognition.

Past Peacemakers include Kenna Waterman, Don Quinn Kelley, Mark Rondeau, Mark Lincourt, Pastor Dave Anderson, Al & Cindi McLain, PopCares, Inc., Dick Alcombright, Bilal Ansari, Kerri Nicoll, Mary Lou Accetta and Mary Francis Curns..

The MLK Jr. Day of Service Committee is also seeking new members interested in helping to plan the January 2025 event. To join the committee, please call the Coalition at (413) 663-7588. To nominate a Peacemaker, pick up a form at the Northern Berkshire Community Coalition office at 61 Main Street, Suite 218, North Adams or nominate online at <https://bit.ly/peacemaker2025>

The submissions will be reviewed by the committee and the recipient will be announced in January 2025, prior to the event. Please join us at the MLK Jr. Day of Service on Monday, January 20, 2025!

Nominations must be received by December 20, 2024.

Peacemaker Award Recipients from Previous Years



Rev. Mary Frances Curns, recipient of the 2024 Peacemaker Award



Mary Lou Accetta, recipient of the 2023 Peacemaker Award



James Bush, recipient of the 2020 Peacemaker Award

We're Hiring! Open Positions at nbCC

Apply via mail to Amber Besaw at 61 Main Street, Suite 218, North Adams, MA 01247 or email jobs@nbccoalition.org. Please include a cover letter, resume, and contact information for 3 references. For more details about our open positions please visit our website at bit.ly/WorkAtNBCC for more information about these positions.

Family Resource Center Clinician: Rate: \$29-30/hr, PLUS a \$5,000 sign-on bonus after completion of 1 year

The Family Resource Center (FRC) Clinician will provide Comprehensive Mental Health Assessments, including the Family Strengths and Needs Assessment (FSNA) assessment; short term treatment; and Care Planning to Youth and Families of the FRC.

Health & Wellness Coordinator: Salary: \$44-47k/annually, PLUS a \$1,000 sign on bonus

The Health & Wellness Coordinator will oversee and lead the implementation of community health work to support integration of environmental, policy and systems changes to advance active living, healthy eating and sustainable systematic change in Northern Berkshire. The Health & Wellness Coordinator will also oversee the planning, implementation, and evaluation of health and wellness programming through nbCC.

Coalition Events

First Fridays North Adams: LumiNAMA

Friday, Dec. 6, 5:00-9:00 PM, Downtown, North Adams

Join in the First Friday Fun! Kick-off the weekend by supporting the downtown businesses this holiday season. As a special treat, check out the illuminated window displays for the holiday season! We encourage everyone to dress-up your attire with light and sparkles.

Family Ornament Making

Saturday, Dec. 7, 10:00 AM - 12:00 PM, Artsy Avenue, 151 Eagle Street, North Adams

Registration required. Space is limited. Room for 16 participants. One ornament per child. Contact us at 413-663-7588 or nkennedy@nbccoalition.org

nbCC Monthly Forum: Status of Parents in North Berkshire: Parental Mental Health

Friday, December 13, 10:00AM-12:00PM, at First Congregational Church, 906 Main Street, Williamstown

All are welcome! Parents and caregivers face many challenges that affect them as individuals and in their role as parents/caregivers. Please join us for a community conversation about parental mental health.

This community conversation will begin with a round of introductions and announcements before diving into the topic. Families are welcome. Light refreshments & snacks provided. FREE & open to the public. More info: 413-663-7588

Learn Through Play: Bakery

Saturday, Dec. 14, 10:00 - 11:00 AM, UNO Community Center, 157 River Street, North Adams

In collaboration with Child Care of the Berkshires. Activities and circle time with sensory activities. Best for ages 0-5 years. No registration required, but we appreciate RSVPs. Contact us at 413-663-7588 or nkennedy@nbccoalition.org

Annual Adams Scavenger Hunt

Saturday, Dec. 21, 11:00AM - 1:00 PM, Adams Visitors Center, 3 Hoosac Street, Adams

Swing by the Adams Visitors Center to pick up your stamp book, then explore downtown Adams looking for polar bears to collect stamps and win a prize!

11:00AM - 11:30AM: Registration

11:30AM - 12:45PM: Business locations open for passports to be stamped

12:45AM: All participants head back to the Visitor's Center to collect prizes.

The Visitor's Center will also be open for crafts from 9:00-12:00 for any families who do not want to do the scavenger hunt.

Questions? 413-663-7588 or gglasier@nbccoalition.org

Family Skate Day

Tuesday Dec. 31, 11:00 -1:00 PM, North Adams Ice Rink, 1267 South Church Street

Join the nbCC during the holiday break for FREE skating, skate rentals and snacks! No registration needed. For more info: 413-663-7588

nbCC Youth Empowerment Program

Mondays, 5:00-6:30 PM, 61 Main Street, #218, North Adams

Free and open to youth, 6-8th grade, who live in or attend school in North Berkshire. A weekly group to talk about school, emotions, navigating teen years, making friends and more. Snacks provided; transportation available. Register: call 413-663-7588

Youth Leadership Program

Tuesdays, 5:00 - 7:00PM, 61 Main Street, Rm. 213, North Adams

Free and open to youth ages 14-19 who live in or attend school in North Berkshire. Young people are changing the world and you can too. Make a positive change in yourself and the world around you. Develop leadership skills, discuss what drives you, meet other young leaders and plan projects in your community. Snacks provided; transportation available. Register: call 413-663-7588

nbCC Bike Collective Open Hours

WINTER HOURS: 1st Wednesday, 4:00-6:00 PM, The Armory, 206 Ashland St., North Adams

Bring your own bike or work on a bike at the bike collective. You'll have the opportunity to learn from other community members on basic bike fixes, or team up with more experienced bike mechanics to rebuild a bike. Tools and stands are provided. All NB residents are welcome! For more info, call us at 413-663-7588.

Teen Writing Workshop

Wednesdays, 5:00 - 7:00 PM, held at nbCC, 61 Main St., Suite 218, North Adams

Free and open to youth ages 13-19 who live in or attend school in North Berkshire. Aspiring writers and poets! Join this incredibly supportive group and get 1-on-1 help with your writing and performance style. Opportunities to perform and be published. Snacks and supplies provided; transportation available. Register: 413-663-7588

FRC Parenting Together Group

Wednesdays, 5:30 -7:30 PM, nbCC, 61 Main St., Suite 218, North Adams

A peer-driven/peer-supported group in a judgement-free, confidential space. Snacks provided. Children welcome.

Youth Health Collaborative

Thursdays, 5:00pm - 7:00pm, 61 Main Street, Rm. 213, North Adams.

(14-19 Yrs. Old) This program is intended to engage young people in supporting the health of their peers in the region. The aim of this program is to benefit the community by directly engaging young people in the act of bettering their environments. This is the only program with a limit on attendance, as there are only ten spots available! Participants will receive a stipend for completing this program. **Please call or email to apply:** 413-663-7588 or bmccarthy@nbccoalition.org

Grandparents Raising Grandchildren Coffee Time

1st & 3rd Fridays, 10:00 AM - 12:00 PM. UNO Center, 157 River Street, North Adams

This is a group for grandparents who are actively parenting their grandchildren giving them a safe and confidential space to share similar experiences with other grandparents. Coffee and snacks provided.

IT'S FARMERS MARKET INDOOR SEASON!

North Adams | 1st Sat. of the month 9AM-1PM

DOUBLES SNAP UP TO \$30/WEEK & HAS 2 HIP VENDORS, ACCEPTS WIC & SENIOR COUPONS

Williamstown | 3rd Sat. of the month 9AM-1PM

DOUBLES SNAP UP TO \$30/WEEK ACCEPTS WIC & SENIOR COUPONS

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Northern Berkshire Community Coalition
Community Empowerment • Prevention & Wellness

MORE INFO:

413-663-7588 OR

INFO@NBCCOALITION.ORG

COMMUNITY FORUM

12/13

10AM-12PM

STATUS OF PARENTS IN NORTH BERKSHIRE: PARENTAL MENTAL HEALTH

ALL ARE WELCOME!

Parents and caregivers face many challenges that affect them as individuals and in their role as parents/caregivers. Please join us for a community conversation about parental mental health.

This community conversation will begin with a round of introductions and announcements before diving into the topic.

Families are welcome.

Light refreshments & snacks provided.

1st Congregational Church Williamstown, 906 Main St

online at www.nbccoalition.org

Find this newsletter

61 Main Street, Suite 218, North Adams, MA 01247
Northern Berkshire Community Coalition

