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Men find a place to be vulnerable



Carlos Aquino, standing on right, 30, of Lawrence, welcomes guests to the Brothers In Arms third annual potluck in Lawrence. REBA SALDANHA PHOTOS

Brothers in arms

By Reba Saldanha
 » Correspondent

LAWRENCE — On an unremarkable night in 2022, Michael Bastien was speaking with a family member when he had his eureka moment. “My cousin called me to talk about what he was going through in life and I was thinking about what I was going through. I thought ‘If we are going through this, imagine how many other people are going through this same exact thing.’ We have to bring this (conversation) to Lawrence,” said Bastien, CEO and cofounder of Brothers In Arms (BIA), a weekly men’s support group he runs in Lawrence’s historic mill district. One of 13 recipients of a 2023 Commonwealth Restorative Community Justice grant from the state, the group aims to combat traditional male gender roles of power, toughness and aggression that have a negative impact on men by promoting healthy masculinity through mindfulness and self-reflection. “I didn’t grow up speaking about emotions. It wasn’t until I started the group that I started speaking openly about my emotions,” Bastien said. “To me, Brothers in Arms



CEO and cofounder Michael Bastien, 28, of Lawrence, speaks during the Brothers In Arms third annual potluck.

embodies the idea of brothers connecting, holding each other up, and supporting one another,” he said. Running a media company at the time, Bastien and his cousin created a video inviting men to their support group that went viral on social media. In April 2022, shortly after the video went out, Bastien partnered with his former Lawrence High School teacher Quin Gonell to lead the first

“To me, Brothers in Arms embodies the idea of brothers connecting, holding each other up, and supporting one another.”

— Michael Bastien, support group cofounder

circle. Word spread about the free and open to the public meetings. Today, the weekly circle

hosts an average of 12 men and is run by Bastien and hosts an average of 12 men and is run by Bastien and

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State weighs sliding scale for vet tax breaks

By Christian M. Wade
 » Statehouse Reporter

BOSTON — Massachusetts boasts some of the most generous benefits for disabled veterans and their families, including state and local tax breaks, yearly annuity payments, tuition assistance and hiring preference. Those benefits are set to be expanded even further under a bill signed into law in August by

Gov. Maura Healey, which also allows local governments to double property tax exemptions for qualifying disabled veterans without legislative approval. A key provision of the bill required the state’s Executive Office of Veterans Services to study the costs of shifting to a sliding scale system to provide those property tax breaks, with the number of veterans with service connected disability seeking

those benefits expected to rise in coming years. The state agency wrapped up its review with a new report, issued this week, estimating that moving to a sliding scale for property tax breaks would cost the state about \$26.6 million. That’s a savings of about \$105,000 over the current system. Most cities and towns offer property tax breaks ranging from \$400 to \$1,500 for qualifying

veterans who are at least 10% disabled. The state reimburses local governments for a percentage of those tax breaks. In fiscal year 2024, the state spent nearly \$27 million on reimbursements for property tax breaks. Local governments also offer property tax exemptions to unmarried widows of military veterans, as well as eligible

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Patriots don’t hesitate, fire Mayo

77 minutes after season finale team let go of coach

By Hector Longo
 » Staff Writer

FOXBOROUGH — The New England Patriots chose to wait all of 77 minutes to inform Jerod Mayo of the decision that he was done as the head coach.

Word broke just an hour after Mayo’s post-game press conference ended that the team was moving on after one error-filled season.

There was no interest in what happened on the field for New England’s 23-16, season-ending win over the Buffalo Bills. We took in Mayo’s postgame presser for his “tone.”

In a word, it should be characterized as, angry, a man who had been told to start boxing up his stuff in the office.

“For me, the day was fine,” said Mayo. And barely an hour later it was official. Mayo was short with the media, reiterating multiple times how every time he steps on the field he does it to win.

That stubbornness may have been the final straw for ownership. “After the game today, I informed Jerod Mayo

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Plaistow to take over ALS service from Exeter Hospital

By Jamie L. Costa
 » jcosta@eagletribune.com

PLAISTOW — The Plaistow Fire Department was given the green light last month to launch its own regional paramedic intercept program for towns immediately affected by Exeter Hospital’s plans to end advanced life support services in March.

During the Dec. 30 Board of Selectmen meeting, Fire Chief Chris Knutsen and Executive Councilor Janet Stevens proposed a pilot program that would be entirely funded in its first year by a \$2 million grant from the hospital, at no cost to the town.

The grant, in addition to a \$20,000 donation from the William H. Donner Foundation, will enable the town’s Fire Department to launch the program, draw up municipal contracts with impacted towns, hire EMS personnel, purchase additional life-saving equipment and staff two specialized, fully-staffed SUV’s 24/7, which will be donated by the hospital.

“We have an opportunity to help our

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