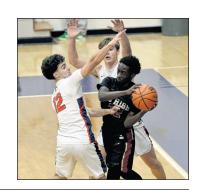


Lopez and Elkin lead Raiders past BC High



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Men find a place to be vulnerable



REBA SAI DANHA PHOTOS

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

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

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

66To 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 hosts an average of 12 men free and open to the public meetings.

Today, the weekly circle

and is run by Bastien and

See **BROTHERS**, Page A2

State weighs sliding scale for vet tax breaks

By Christian M. Wade

» Statehouse Reporter

boasts some of the most generous benefits for disabled veterannuity payments, tuition assistance and hiring preference.

Gov. Maura Healey, which also those benefits expected to rise in veterans who are at least 10% allows local governments to dou- coming years. ble property tax exemptions for without legislative approval.

sliding scale system to provide the current system. Those benefits are set to be those property tax breaks, with

BOSTON — Massachusetts qualifying disabled veterans its review with a new report, age of those tax breaks. In fiscal issued this week, estimating that year 2024, the state spent nearly A key provision of the bill moving to a sliding scale for prop-\$27 million on reimbursements ans and their families, including required the state's Executive erty tax breaks would cost the for property tax breaks. state and local tax breaks, yearly Office of Veterans Services to state about \$26.6 million. That's study the costs of shifting to a a savings of about \$105,000 over

 $expanded \ even \ further \ under \ a \quad the \ number \ of \ veterans \ with \ ser-property \ tax \ breaks \ ranging \ from$ bill signed into law in August by vice connected disability seeking \$400 to \$1,500 for qualifying

disabled. The state reimburses The state agency wrapped up local governments for a percent-

Local governments also offer property tax exemptions to unmarried widows of mili-Most cities and towns offer tary veterans, as well as eligible

See **BENEFITS**, Page A2

Patriots don't hesitate, fire Mayo

77 minutes after season finale team let go of coach

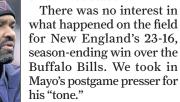
By Hector Longo

» Staff Write

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 postgame press conference ended that the team

was moving on after one error-filled season.



Jerod Mayo

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.

 $\hbox{``After the game today, I informed Jerod Mayo}\\$

See **MAYO**, Page A2

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

See **ALS**, Page A2

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Easy ways to improve safety in the bathroom

Ask Joan

Joan Hatem-Roy



Q. As my mother's mobility gets more limited, I'm concerned about her bathing and the risk of getting hurt. What can I do to improve the

safety of her bathroom? As we age, our balance, strength, and flexibility can diminish, which increases the risk of accidents in the bathroom. Bathing, while a necessary and relaxing part of daily life,

can become hazardous for older

adults. However, with some sim-

ple adjustments and precautions,

it's possible to greatly reduce the risk of slips, falls, and injuries. Here are some tips for ensuring bath safety for older adults.

Install Grab Bars and Handrails. The most effective way to prevent falls in the bathroom is to add grab bars near the bathtub, shower, and toilet. These sturdy bars provide support when getting in and out of the tub or standing up from a seated position. Ensure that they are securely mounted to the wall and placed at an accessible height.

Use Non-Slip Mats. Wet surfaces can be dangerously slippery. Placing non-slip mats or adhesive strips on the bottom of the tub or shower can provide better traction. Additionally, using a

non-slip rug outside the tub can help prevent slipping when stepping out of the shower.

Consider a Walk-In Bathtub or **Shower.** For those with limited mobility, a walk-in bathtub or shower can be a safe alternative to a traditional tub. These options often feature lower thresholds and easy-to-access doors, reducing the risk of tripping or losing balance when stepping in or out.

Improve Bathroom Lighting. Proper lighting is essential for preventing accidents. Ensure that the bathroom is well-lit, particularly in the areas around the tub or shower. Motion-sensor lights can also be useful for those who may forget to turn on the light or need a little extra illumination at night.

Use a Shower Chair or Bench. For long periods difficult, a shower chair or bench provides a safe place to sit while bathing. This reduces the chance of dizziness or loss of balance during a shower.

Adjust Water Temperature. Older adults are more vulnerable to burns, as skin can become thinner and less sensitive with age. Install an anti-scald device on the faucet or shower to regulate water resources? Our experienced staff temperature, ensuring it doesn't get too hot.

Keep Essentials Within Reach. Avoid the need for stretching or bending by keeping soap, shampoo, and other essentials within easy reach while bathing. Consider installing a shower caddy or shelving unit at a comfortable

height to reduce the risk of losing older adults who find standing for balance while reaching for items.

By making these simple adjustments, older adults can maintain their independence and reduce the risk of accidents in the bathroom. Prioritizing safety measures in the bathroom is an essential part of ensuring overall well-being as we age.

Are you caring for an older adult or need help finding healthy aging is available to help. Visit us online at www.agespan.org. You can also call 800-892-0890 or email info@ agespan.org.

Joan Hatem-Roy is the chief executive officer of AgeSpan, which serves Andover, Groveland, Haverhill, Lawrence, Methuen and North Andover.

» ALS

Continued from Page A1

but for the other commu- having the program." nities that aren't able to get

need." oche's sentiments, and for the services Plaistow prounanimously voted to vides at the rate that Exeter accept Knutsen and Stevens' Hospital set, which was \$80

rently provides criti-sen hopes to work with fire cal, life-saving resources chiefs from the neighboring in which Exeter Hospital communities to create equal deploys paramedics in spe-contracts that will evenly cialized "intercept" vehicles distribute the estimated with medical equipment to \$1.7 million annual operatneighboring communities ing cost. where advanced medical care is required to protect human decide they don't want to pay life. The hospital originally for the services, the departplanned to end the program ment will discontinue the in September.

vices will be formally dis-possibility as there are many continued, Knutsen said the stakeholders invested in the grant money will be in hand program's success. and the program will be ready to roll out. When the selectmen and surrounding intercept program launches, towns appear to be in favor it will be based in both Plai- of the program, the proposal stow and Brentwood where was not without opposition each site will be staffed with from residents who argued two highly trained para- that, once again, the Fire medics for dispatch 24/7 to Department and the town assist surrounding downs in were making decisions withemergencies.

Between now and then, Knutsen plans to draft up opportunity to vote on this. contracts with the towns Last year, you forced upon that were dependent on the us a new ambulance service ALS program, which include, and now we're apparently but are not limited to, Exeter, the experts in ambulance Brentwood, Kingston, East services in Southern New Kingston, Fremont, Hamp- Hampshire," said Ryan LaBton Falls, North Hampton, racque during public com-Newfields and Stratham. ment. "I'm not saying there

Lottery

MASSACHUSETTS

Daily Lottery

Jan. 2

Evening number 1269

Jan. 4

Evening number0798

Mass Cash

Jan. 5.....6-14-16-19-21

Jan. 4.....6-11-14-17-24

NEW HAMPSHIRE

Tri-State Numbers

Jan. 5

Day 641 and 8749

Evening899 and 3806

Jan. 4

Day404 and 3779

Evening948 and 1885

Tri-State Megabucks Plus

Jan. 4.....10-14-22-30-34

Mega Ball: 4

Mega Ball: 1

Gimme 5

Jan. 2.....12-15-21-26-36

MASS.-N.H.

Megabucks Doubler

Jan. 4.....4-5-28-3-37-40

Jan. 1.....6-16-20-31-36-40

Mega Millions

Jan. 3.....20-42-46-59-69

Mega Ball: 19

Dec. 31......13-22-27-29-35

Mega Ball: 1

Lucky For Life

Jan. 4...... 3-9-27-29-33

Lucky Ball: 6

Jan. 3.....14-15-20-23-28

Lucky Ball: 12

Powerball

Jan. 4......26-32-43-54-56

Powerball: 24

Jan. 3.....

.....1-19-21-24-27

..... 1-9-19-24-31

Midday number...

Midday number...

have staffed medics, nor do

they operate 24/7. "Budgeting is already done and the odds of these towns neighbors and the surround- trying to find any additional ing communities and it's not money would be next to going to cost the town any impossible," Knutsen said. money through our budget," "We are hoping to make said Selectman Jay DeRoche. this decision process easy "It's not just a benefit for us, for them to want to continue

The towns, which have paramedics that they might already budgeted for this year's services, will be Selectmen echoed DeR- expected to continue to pay per call if the patient is trans-The ALS program cur- ported to a hospital. Knut-

If at any point the town's program indefinitely. Knut-By March 20, when ser- sen said this is an unlikely

Though town officials,

out public input. "Voters don't have the Most of these towns do not isn't a need, but the Town of Plaistow doesn't need to be involved in this. If these towns need it so greatly, why aren't the representatives of

these towns here tonight?" He asked what town will step up if selectmen vote against approving the program and implied that other towns, specifically Exeter, don't want a program like this.

Unlike surrounding communities, Plaistow's Fire Department has separated the EMS program from the Fire Department, which makes it easier to make independent hires and keep it mostly staffed. Other towns are looking for dual qualifications in one person, which Knutsen said is really hard to find nowadays. The result is rural departments are often understaffed.

"I applaud Chief Knutsen for developing this sustainable plan and I thank the Board of Selectmen for considering it tonight. This is a huge step in the right direction in providing this critical safety net," councilor Stevens said.

» Brothers

Continued from Page A1

participant-turned-facilitator Edward Cedeno, who are not licensed therapists but have received training in restorative justice practices and circle facilitation from Suffolk University and the ManKind Project.

Each meeting starts with a check-in, followed by conversations based on a series of related prompts such as "Reflect on your early memories of your father. How did his presence or absence shape your understanding of what it means to be a man?"

Then "What actionable steps can you take today to bring more healing and relief from the pain of trauma caused by your relationship with your father?" Each session concludes with attendees stating a key takeaway they have from the night and the BIA call and response chant of "when I say 'Brothers', you say 'In Arms'."

In their current space, shared with Family Services of the Merrimack Valley, the group recently held its third annual potluck. Guests were asked to sit in a circle and participate in the opening check-in by sharing their names, a situation or feeling that is present for them to today, and one thing for which they are grateful this

Many noted achievements at work and happenings with their family and most were grateful for being part of the circle. The crowd acknowledged each person's check-in with finger

The intentionally dimly lit room is a welcoming environment with warm tones and exposed brick, creating a comfortable space for deep self-reflection that can bring some members to tears. "A lot of guys are dealing with stuff and they have no one to talk to. I've opened up to people and they call you the b-word, they make fun of you and it's tough. You've got to know who gives you a place to be vulnerable," said Angel Garcia, a 38-year-old from Lawrence.

A set of written guidelines request that men come ready to heal with an open mind, are respectful and use "I statements" to speak from personal experience. There is no obligation to share. Lawrence resident Carlos Aguino, a 30-year-old father of three, underscored the importance of confidentiality and respect within the circle.



REBA SALDANHA

The Brothers In Arms third annual potluck closes with a chant in the center of

"A band of brothers is only a band when it can keep things among itself. You cannot open up unless you are respected," he said. So strong is this bond that the non-profit's newly formed Board of Directors is made up of current circle participants.

The communal conversations set Brothers In Arms apart from common forms of self-reflection like religion and psychotherapy. Twenty- year-old Jordy Deleon said he appreciated hearing the experiences of older men in the group.

"I felt like my relationship with my mom was drifting apart. The men around the circle gave me basically a hug, but with words. When I get older I'll be very mindful, very prepared too," said the Lawrence resident who used to run the two miles to and from the meetings because he didn't have a

Deleon is in training to lead youth circles aimed at ages 14 -26 with Luis Reyes, 19, of North Andover. "I know what it's like to be a kid in high school having dark thoughts and if I had had somebody to help me out, I would nave been extremely grateful. I hope when I become a youth leader I'm able expansion and by making donations to help those kids find their own ways and have a more positive outlook on life," Reyes said.

A skilled networker, Bastien, 28, of Lawrence, will continue past collaborations in the new year with area nonprofits such as a Juneteenth celebration with Greater Lawrence Fellowship of the Arts and the Harvest of Healing Retreat that brought together members of BIA and the Jeanne Geiger Crisis Center for victims of

domestic abuse for a day-long retreat in Rockport.

One female program participant wrote in a testimonial that "the retreat was the first time I have been surrounded by men while feeling completely at ease. Their vulnerability and honesty matched that which I experience in the Creative Express Group (at the Jeanne Geiger Crisis Center), to which I am so grateful. I left feeling energized, clear-headed, and motivated to participate in community healing in a way that I had not felt before.'

Bastien recently quit his media business and took a pay cut to run Brothers In Arms, whose funding comes mostly from grants, as the full-time CEO.

"I was doing things but it wasn't fulfilling in my heart. This work is fulfilling," he said. Bastien said he hopes to add a licensed therapist to the team and to move into a dedicated space in the coming year. The community can support this impactful work by connecting the group with resources and funders who can lend their support to programs and their through their website https://biacircle.com.

Adonis Peña, a childhood friend of Bastien's, has been part of the circle for 21 consecutive weeks. "I can't always stay for the whole time," said the 28-year-old with three children under seven, "but I will come here every week as long as I know I am helping others and I am also helping myself. I hope the group spreads all over the world."

» Benefits

Continued from Page A1

parents.

erans receiving service-conto the report.

to more mental health asso- among veterans." ciated diagnoses, driving up Massachusetts has an esti- of alternative therapies, such said.

likely impact exemption report noted. Like many other states, amounts and overall costs Massachusetts is expected to if a sliding scale model was ing, Empowering and Recog- the Massachusetts Statehouse

nected disability awards in gested that switching to a Disabled Veteran Annuity sites. Email him at cwade@ coming years, as well as an sliding scale would mean and the annual annuity for cnbinews.com. increase in the severity of the a "simpler and systematic veterans with a 100% serdisability ratings, according method" to determine bene- vice-connected disability, fits, provide additional finan-surviving spouses, or Gold Meanwhile, greater aware- cial benefits to veterans and Star Parents from \$2,000 ness of mental health dispromote "a more equitable to \$2,500, according to the orders and recent policy methodology given the ris- Healey administration. changes "have contributed ing mental health diagnoses

both the number and level of mated 234,000 veterans, as psilocybin, in treating vetservice-connected disability about 57,000 of which have erans suffering from mental ratings," the report's authors a service-connected disabil- health disorders. ity, according to the report.

"As a result, the overall Between 2017 and 2023, the in the Nov. 5 elections to legalgrowth seen in service-con- number of veterans report- ize psilocybin, also known nected disability awards ing a service-connected dis- as 'magic mushrooms', and across Massachusetts would ability increased by 8%, the other psychedelic substances

The HERO Act, or Honorsee a rise in the number of vet- implemented," they wrote. nizing Our Service Members for North of Boston Media The report's authors sug- and Veterans, increases the Group's newspapers and web-

> It also called for a panel to study the potential benefits

Voters rejected a proposal

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» Mayo

Continued from Page A1

head coach of the New England other teams started request- season as the head man on the Patriots in 2025. For me, pering to interview him, I feared sideline since 2011. From 1981sonally, this was one of the I would lose him and commit- 2010, that had only happened hardest decisions I have ever ted to making him our next 12 times. made," said Patriots Chair- head coach. Winning our seaman and CEO Robert Kraft in son-opener on the road at Cin- the hiring process up under a prepared statement after the cinnationly strengthened our NFL rules, prescribed by the

in 2008 and throughout his conducted himself in our with good season.

our coaching staff, his lead-tim of a growing trend in the ership was even more evi- NFL. Mayo becomes the 13th dent as I saw how the players NFL coach to be fired during that he will not be returning as responded to him. When or immediately after his first

community. When he joined He becomes the latest vic-

The Patriots must now open convictions. Unfortunately, the "Rooney Rule," which was "I have known Jerod for 17 trajectory of our team's perfor-created to provide access to years. He earned my respect mances throughout the season minority candidates for top and admiration as a rookie did not ascend as I had hoped." managerial positions in the Mayo would not talk about league. The team was allowed career for his play on the the future at his press confer- to circumvent that rule when field, his leadership in the ence, choosing only to speak replacing Bill Belichick a year locker room and the way he about the game, obviously, ago with Mayo because of a clause in his contract.

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........6-12-28-35-66 Powerball: 26