



NEW START

Gasper looking ahead to 2021 season, Page C1

BALANCING ACT

Wilton's The Red Trouser Show takes clowning seriously, Page D1

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Dealership donates cars to PACT program at NCC

By GEORGE PELLETIER
Bureau Chief

NASHUA – The Honda PACT (Professional Automotive Career Training) program at Nashua Community College re-

cently received the donation of two cars from Peters Honda of Nashua.

NCC has teamed with Nashua High School to provide them with support for their program and provide a pathway for high school students to attend the college.

NCC Associate Professor and Honda PACT and automotive technology program coordinator Jason Felton said the program is geared towards students who might have talent for tinkering with cars or perhaps just the interest in learning how.

“The Honda program here at the college partners with local high schools to provide support for their students,” he said.

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Sunday Telegraph photo by GEORGE PELLETIER
The Infectious Groove owners Richie Thorn and Tina McCarthy opened their store last January but said business was good even through the pandemic. The record and CD store, which also stocks stereo equipment, is located at 76 NH Route 101-A in Amherst.

VINYL FRONTIER

*The Infectious Groove is a music lover's spin city*By GEORGE PELLETIER
Bureau Chief

AMHERST – Vinyl devotees rejoice. The Infectious Groove, 76 NH Route 101-A, stocks more than 6,000 new and used records and endless shelves of CDs, as well as turntables, receivers and speakers.

Owners Richie Thorn and Tina McCarthy opened the store a year ago, and quickly managed to find an audience of audiophiles during the pandemic.

“Last year was actually really good for us,” Thorn said. “What we’re finding is that a lot of families are digging out their old albums in their attics. With nothing to do at

home, it’s really been good for us.”

In addition to what’s on display and in racks, Thorn estimates that they have another 2,000 albums in the back storeroom.

“We haven’t even gotten to them yet,” he said. “Every single one of them, we go through and thoroughly clean. New stuff we just put out.”

When they first started, they had fewer racks and since then, they’ve expanded with another nine racks of vinyl bins. The Infectious Groove also buys back albums and CDs, though not as much as the latter.

“Compact discs are on the down swing,” Thorn said. “When people don’t have access to something, that’s when they want it more. And

that’s what’s happening with CDs right now. It’s the same thing that happened with albums back in the early 2000’s. You could go to a yard sale and people would sell you an entire box of records for \$10.”

Now, Thorn said, some of those same records are valued at \$30 - \$40.

“People will come in and some people will just give us their CDs because they don’t think they’re worth anything,” he said. “I tell people to hold onto them because it’s going to be the same thing. I think the person who is collecting whatever they’re collecting is going to stick to that format.”

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Business owners
keep eye on
SBDC fundingBy DEAN SHALHOUP
Senior Staff Writer

NASHUA – Just days after Great American Downtown executive director Paul Shea warned local small businessmen and women that one of their most valuable resources – the New Hampshire Small Business Development Center – could face drastic cuts in state funding, Gov. Chris Sununu issued a statement that stands to brighten the center’s economic picture.

Initially, the proposed biennial state budget for fiscal 2022-23 showed the SBDC receiving only \$50,000 in state funding for the first year, and nothing at all the second year.

Worse yet, according to state SBDC director Liz Gray, those drastic cuts could very well have jeopardized the federal funding the SBDC receives from the U.S. Small Business Administration, mainly because the SBA requires a 50% match.

The SBDC this year received about \$750,000 from the SBA, Gray said. The current state budget, which expires June 30, provided \$880,000 to the SBDC, she added.

But going forward,



Courtesy photo
Liz Gray is the state director for the New Hampshire Small Business Development Center.

the revised revenue estimates Sununu provided Thursday will likely create a sunnier economic forecast for the SBDC and several other agencies named in Sununu’s letter, or at least soften the economic blow for which many had been preparing.

The revised figures, Sununu said in Thursday’s notice, are based on updated figures just released by the Department of Administrative Services.

The updates show stronger than expected revenue estimates, which, when the proposed budget was first

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Ninety years ago next month, Nashuans mourned the sad ending to a once-majestic downtown opera house

The 1930s are often referred to as “Nashua’s Disaster Decade,” and is understood to refer to the three calamities that visited these parts between May 1930 and September 1938.

Unless, of course, you count the Great Depression, which would bring it to four calamities within the ‘30s. But it’s rarely recognized as part of Nashua’s Disaster Decade, perhaps because Nashuans, while certainly affected to some degree, seemed to weather, and emerge from, that economic disaster in comparatively decent shape.

Today’s topic, however,

is fire – the disaster that visited Nashua quite a few times during Nashua’s Disaster Decade but is the only fire included in that roughly 9-year span.

That, of course, would be the Crown Hill fire, also known as The Nashua Conflagration, a blaze of unimaginable size and scope that blackened and flattened much of the city’s Crown Hill neighborhood the afternoon of May 4, 1930.

I started thinking about that snippet of time in Nashua history when I came upon a small photo, taken by an unnamed Telegraph photographer and later reproduced as



DEAN SHALHOUP

SENIOR STAFF WRITER

a post card, depicting the near-total destruction of downtown Nashua’s historic, pre-Civil War brick edifice that housed, on the lower floor, a passenger rail station called Nashua City Station, and on the upper floors, a performance venue known

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From The Telegraph files
This photo, most likely taken from an upper-floor apartment window in the Whiting Block, shows the destruction the former Franklin Opera House suffered in one of two general alarm fires that heavily damaged two city landmarks on successive days some 90 years ago next month. The lower floor served as a railway stop called Nashua City Station.

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WEEKEND FORECAST



SATURDAY

32° | 16°



SUNDAY

34° | 16°

FEATURED INSIDE TODAY

Here’s some news that people in Hollis have been wondering about for years. It became town knowledge a few years ago that the “New Kids On The Block” boy band star, Jonathan Knight, was renovating the house at 84 Depot Road.

Details, Page B1.

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NCC

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“Students get full access to Honda training materials and they’re allowed to use that in the program while learning.”

The goal is offer guidance to students who might be interested in going to college, in this case Nashua Community College, to learn about a career in automotive repair.

“The whole program is called, ‘Guided Pathways,’” Felton said. “This gives them a head start and it’s something that we have had available, but we just started taking advantage of.”

Nashua High School North is the second school that NCC has partnered with. They also work with Dover High School. Nashua South students can go to Nashua North for their C.T.E. (Career in Technical Education) programs.

“The C.T.E. programs can incorporate automotive, building trades, electrical and culinary, to name a few,” Felton said.



Courtesy photo

High school students are encouraged to enroll in a PACT program, to learn the intricacies of automotive repair at colleges, such as Nashua Community College.

Honda doesn’t give the cars to the college, they’re loaned.

“If they reach the end of their usable life for us, I can contact them and they’ll try to get us more,” Felton said. “Right now, we have about 15 cars at the college that Honda has loaned to us. In the shop right now, we

have six or seven. And then outside, we have more to switch out.”

The student guidelines for the Honda PACT at NCC include that students must have a high school diploma or a GED, be motivated to step into a promising field, and have the ability to obtain a valid

driver’s license.

Felton said with the program with Nashua High North, they have loaned that school two cars. The cars that are loaned are running and fully drivable that have come out of other situations.

“I have a couple of cars here that were security cars

for Honda,” he said. “Once they reach the end of their life there, they send them to programs like ours.”

There are 20- 30 PACT programs throughout the country in various states.

The college program lasts two years and is a degree program.

“The students who enroll here take Honda classes in addition to general education courses like English, math, sciences and things like that,” Felton said. “And at the end of two years, they have an associate degree in Honda automotive technology.”

Felton said that another aspect of the PACT program is to help students identify that technical jobs can offer great jobs and competitive salaries.

“Pre-COVID, I went into the schools and promoted the program, but also promoted careers,” he stated. “Part of the Honda program is that it comes with an internship. So partway through the program, during the second semester, is that the students have to go and get a job at a dealer. It’s a paid internship but they have to do a

certain number of hours, which is 640 hours must be completed over their two years here.”

With the program itself at NCC, the freshmen class is 10 but Felton would like to see more students enrolled.

“I’d like to see more,” he said. “Our cap is 15 but I’d like to overfill the program.”

Felton said that this isn’t a COVID issue, but rather an inherent issue with these types of programs in general.

“Not a lot of people want to go into the trades anymore,” he said. “The money in the field is actually pretty good. And the schooling itself is two years, not four. And it’s cheaper.”

Changing students, and parents’ attitudes on trade jobs is important.

“For many years, people have promoted four-year schools,” Felton said. “So, the misconception is that the only way a person can earn good money is to go to a four-year school which is not correct. I’ve got students out there making great money working on cars.”

SBDC

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presented, “assumed that taxes collected by the Department of Revenue Administration would be 7% below” what was initially planned for.

But the new figures, according to Sununu, put estimated revenue at 17% above the original plan, a 24% swing that Sununu called “a tremendous improvement that speaks to the robust nature of this economic recovery.”

While the amount of funding Sununu said he will “encourage the House to reintroduce” when the representatives begin their phase of the budget process isn’t yet known, he indicated the SBDC will receive “state-match” funds that will meet the SBA’s 50% requirement.

In addition to the SBDC, the agencies Sununu said will benefit from the new revenue figures include ?

- The Department of Corrections, to help maintain transitional housing services
- The Department of IT, to fund existing shared services

positions

- The Department of Health and Human Services, to fund family resource centers
- The Department of Safety, to fund existing civilian positions

The SBDC, meanwhile, has been hailed among New Hampshire small businessmen and women with such phrases as “a godsend” and “our lifeline” in the weeks and months after the COVID-19 pandemic set in.

Founded in the mid-1980s as a program of the University of New Hampshire’s Peter T. Paul College of Business & Economics, the agency is currently operating on \$880,000 in state funding, the amount provided in the state’s current two-year budget, which expires June 30.

The agency also received roughly \$1.28 million in funding contained in the CARES Act, the federal program that provided emergency pandemic-related funds to a variety of businesses and entities statewide.

That funding, however, will come to an end this fall, just months after the state’s new biennial budget takes effect July 1.

For Gray, the state SBDC director, Sununu’s announcement

helped ease to some degree the widespread concern triggered by the initial budget proposal he unveiled in mid-February.

She said that while the SBDC receives funding from other sources, including UNH and a handful of other partners, it depends heavily on its state funding to sustain many of its programs and initiatives.

“Without state funds, I don’t see us able to make up (the difference) with our other funding sources,” she said. “We wouldn’t be able to continue the services we offer.”

Looking back over the past year, Gray said she is “so proud of the way our team responded” when the pandemic set in.

“We supported a lot of businesses during the pandemic,” she said. According to her records, the SBDC helped out some 7,178 businesses statewide in 2020.

Support comes in many forms, Gray said, citing its Resiliency Academy and its cybersecurity program and the e-courses as examples of initiatives the staff undertakes.

Add to those the “hundreds of webinars” the SBDC offers, thanks, Gray said, “to our small

but mighty team of 19.”

Among the scores of Nashua-based businesses to which the SBDC has provided assistance is owner Joyce Dales’s “Buzza-gogo,” a homeopathic products retailer who created a nasal swab cold remedy called “Cold Bee Gone.”

“If it weren’t for them, my company wouldn’t exist,” Dales said, referring to the SBDC. “The things they do for small businesses, it’s amazing.”

Dales said she’s been getting guidance from the SBDC for about 10 years, a relationship that went from her mentor “nurturing me by writing ideas on sticky-notes to selling my product at little, local country stores ... to the shelves of CVS,” the national pharmacy chain that now sells her “Cold Bee Gone” as an over-the-counter, or OTC, herbal cold remedy.

There’s a good chance, Dales said, that there wouldn’t be as many women-owned small businesses in operation today if not for the SBDC.

“I can’t tell you how many women-owned businesses wouldn’t exist if not for them,” she said.

Shea, the Great American

Downtown director who sent the letter cautioning local small businesses about SBDC’s potential funding crisis, said Thursday that he and city officials, along with the business owners themselves, are encouraged by Sununu’s statement that the agency and others are likely to benefit from the higher?(-) than?(-)expected state revenues.

“We’ll continue to watch it,” he said, adding that he encourages business owners to contact state legislators on behalf of the agency.

Historically, Shea said, SBDC has a “tried-and-true track record of helping New Hampshire businesses for more than 36 years.”

He said the agency’s value to local small businesses, especially those in the downtown area, has been on full display since the COVID-19 pandemic set in.

SBDC representatives “have been there with laser focus, helping business owners keep their doors open ... their futures hopeful, and their staff and customers safe,” Shea said.

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GROOVE

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Sometimes consumers will buy the album and the same CD of that artist, because they don’t want to wear out the album by playing it.

“The versatility of bringing a CD into a car is practically gone,” Thorn said. “Automakers now don’t even make CD players for cars. It’s all USB ports.”

Thorn and McCartney have no doubt in their minds that this is a welcome throwback for a lot of audio fanatics.

“We have people who walk through the door in

their ‘40s and ‘50s who say, ‘Wow, do I remember this,’” Thorn said. “It’s like they’re going back to their teenage years.”

For Thorn, as a teenager, he always fooled around with deejaying and vinyl.

“I listen to a lot of obscure stuff myself,” he said. “A lot of punk and a lot of alternative. And every once in a while, I’ll find a used copy of something that comes in here and I’ll be like, ‘Wow. I haven’t seen this in years.’ You can’t even get a particular album because the record companies haven’t re-pressed it.”

There are no record stores like The Infectious Groove in Nashua; collec-

tors have to travel around to other cities or even Boston to truly find what they’re looking for.

Thorn said people who bring their old albums into The Infectious Groove are also there to look around and shop a bit.

“We get people in here a lot who want to trade as opposed to sell,” he said.

“We’ll give more money for a trade than we will for a sale.”

Buyers can get their money on a gift certificate with a trade and spend that credit immediately or over a period of time.

The Infectious Groove also sells hard-to-find turntables, which fall into a lower mid-to-high level range.

“Since we opened, I wanted to be able to offer what a true audiophile wants to listen to,” Thorn said. “You find that people who listen to music don’t necessarily want the whole surround sound. They’re basically looking for two to four speakers and listen to their music in that setting.”

When he first started bringing used stereo equipment into the store, it was mostly older stereos, known as “silver-face stereos,” produced in Japan in the late ‘70s and early ‘80s.

“The Japanese stuff is still very solid,” Thorn said. “They last.”

The Infectious Groove has a contract with U-Turn

Audio in Woburn, Massachusetts. They make strictly turntables.

“We had a bunch in here for Christmas,” Thorn said. “We sold them all. We had twelve and sold right out of them and haven’t been able to get them in here since.”

U-Turn makes their turntables from scratch, and the plinth on the turntable is solid wood.

“They use very high-end needles,” Thorn said. “The turntables run from \$279 to \$600. They’re mid-range to high end.”

The Infectious Groove can special order records through one of their four distributors.

Additionally, The Infectious Groove has partnered

with local breweries over the past several months to spin and sell records at the breweries’ tastings.

“Last fall, we teamed up with a few breweries,” Thorn said. “We have a friend who owns Oak and Iron Brewery in Andover, Massachusetts. That was one of our better gigs that we did. It was an outside thing, where we sold vinyl from the store while I was deejaying. We sold a lot.”

The Infectious Groove has also done “gigs” with Able Ebenezer Brewing Company.

For more information, call The Infectious Groove at (603) 718-0109 or contact them at infectious.groove.nh@gmail.com.

SHALHOUP

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as the Franklin Opera House.

But the raging fire that all but destroyed the opera house wasn’t the only show in town on that disastrous weekend some 90 years ago next month: Less than 24 hours later, a second general alarm blaze “wiped out,” as the Telegraph reported, The Nashua Theater, a circa 1880 landmark on Elm Street that housed a sporting arena and playhouse.

Together the two fires caused \$130,000 in damage – roughly \$2.24 million today – and were still smoldering when acting fire Chief A. C. Melendy, police Chief Irving Goodwin, and fire commissioners Herbert Lintott, Charles Austin and Eugene Duncklee trotted over to City Hall for a hastily-convened confab with Mayor William Sullivan.

I don’t have the minutes of that meeting – it’s doubtful any were taken anyway – but I’d imagine the men toggled

between public damage control and sincere outrage among professionals whose jobs ?were to protect the people and property of Nashua.

“Prompt and Drastic Action Asked” read a headline on one of several smaller stories that appeared on page one of the Monday, April 20, 1931 Nashua Telegraph.

The page was topped by a huge headline in a bold, rarely seen font that stated, simply, “2 Landmarks Burn.”

The sub-headline, which read “Officials Probing Theory Fires at Opera House, Nashua Theater, (were) Set” lends credence to the lik?(e)lihood the City Hall meeting was emotionally charged.

A subsequent Nashua Telegraph story reported the men also “had a lengthy discussion (about) taking action on the numerous fires in the city, especially those of mysterious origin.”

Sullivan, the mayor, spoke with reporters after the meeting, and reading between the lines of the Telegraph story, he was understandably unhappy.

The commissioners

“will take action at once to investigate the last two fires and will hold hearings,” Sullivan told reporters.

Police will “cooperate to the fullest extent in an effort to get at the causes (of) the fires,” he continued, making sure everyone knew that “it is the intention of the commissioners to invoke the law to the fullest extent to prevent careless and wanton destruction of property by fire.”

No more burning rubbish or brush, Sullivan said.

All Nashuans were probably getting sick and tired of worrying about fires breaking out, getting out of hand and destroying property, not to mention the possibility of hurting or killing people.

Almost certainly still fresh in Nashuans’ minds was the Crown Hill conflagration, which preceded the opera house and theater blazes by just 11 months.

That’s the kind of thing that tends to lay on one’s mind for a? while – especially if your family’s house was among those reduced to a cellar hole

with pipes sticking out of it.

At least two other significant fires raised havoc between the Crown Hill blaze and the April blazes.

And don’t forget that less than two months into Nashua’s Disaster Decade occurred the general alarm fire that heavily damaged the entire Merchants Exchange building – and forced firefighters to do battle in temperatures around 20 degrees below zero, creating an ice-encrusted scene like something out of the show “Life Below Zero.”

Finding Telegraph stories or other information about the cause of the fires, or whether anyone was ever charged with setting one or the other, proved futile.

But a passage in a Telegraph editorial penned about two weeks after the fires served as something of a eulogy for the old opera house.

“For several years it was used principally as a store room for second-hand furniture ... it has become worn out and tumbledown,” the editor wrote.

“At one time the pride

of the northside (of the Nashua River) as an auditorium, the place had gone the way of all buildings. It had passed its usefulness, was out of date, begrimmed (whatever that means), besmirched ... nothing but a shell.

“The fire fiend gave it a last, sad kick.”

I’m kind of glad whoever wrote that editorial won’t be around to write my eulogy.

Dean Shalhoup’s column appears weekly in The Sunday Telegraph. He may be reached at 594-1256 or dshalhoup@nashuatelegraph.com.

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