

# Inside Worcester

A Journal of Observation & Opinion

January, 2013



**'Dog  
Days'  
at  
Jeremiah's  
Inn**

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‘When the Gross National Product becomes scratch tickets and video rentals you know you’re in trouble.’

**Jim Magay, Magay & Barron Eye Center  
Lincoln St. Area Business Association**

## A bad bet?

Slots parlor,  
exam school  
draw rebukes

By Rod Lee  
The City Council’s  
decision to study  
taking long-  
dormant Wyman-  
Gordon property in  
the Canal District  
by eminent do-  
main—possibly for  
a slots parlor—and  
The Research Bu-  
reau’s push for an  
exam school in  
Worcester are both  
getting a cold re-  
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ception from rank and file leaders in the city's business and educational ranks.

You would think that the idea of an exam school in the mold of the long-gone Classical High would enjoy an instant warm embrace.

Far from it.

John Monfredo, a former award-winning principal, and Jack Foley, VP for Government, Community Affairs & Campus Services at Clark University, both found fault with the Bureau's answer of "yes, for many reasons" at the close of its recent report "Academically Selective High Schools: Should Worcester Public Schools Have One?"

Mr. Monfredo and Mr. Foley are both veteran members of the Worcester School Committee.

Roberta Schaefer and the Bureau cited such factors as the WPS having an obligation to "develop the capacities of gifted students no less than less talented ones" as the basis for its recommendation.

An exam school, the Bureau contends, would help promote economic development and prosperity at the local level, induce professional and executive families to move here and create the opportunity for the exam school to be situated at or to establish a strong relationship with an area college.

But Mr. Monfredo cites a paper by Harvard economist Roland Fryer who after studying exam schools from 2002 to 2009 stated that "not only did the exam-school education have little impact on a marginal student's SAT score, there was little evidence that it improved the chances of college enrollment or college graduation."

"Personally," Mr. Monfredo believes the focus should be on all  
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## Beth Proko on the W-G property



'I understand the city wanting to have a say in economic development but (taking the Wyman-Gordon property by eminent domain) is crazy. It will sit for years longer. Private development is the way to go. I think we should stay out of it.'

(Mrs. Proko chairs Worcester Citizens for Business)

(PHOTO/JAMES H. FINNEGAN)

## John Monfredo and Jack Foley on an exam school:

'...is an exam school necessary? Are we meeting the needs of our best and brightest students in Worcester? There is no evidence that students who attend an exam school fare any better academically than equally gifted students who do not. A paper by Harvard economist Roland Fryer, who studied exam schools from 2002-2009 state that not only did the exam school education have little impact on a marginal student's SAT score, there was little evidence that it improved the chances of college enrollment or college graduation...' JOHN MONFREDO

'...I'm greatly opposed to the idea of an exam school. The Research Bureau's premise of (it being a boon to) economic development is faulty. If we improve academic standing and academic rigor at all our high schools that would have a greater economic impact...' JACK FOLEY

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## **ODD FELLOWS HOME OF MA**

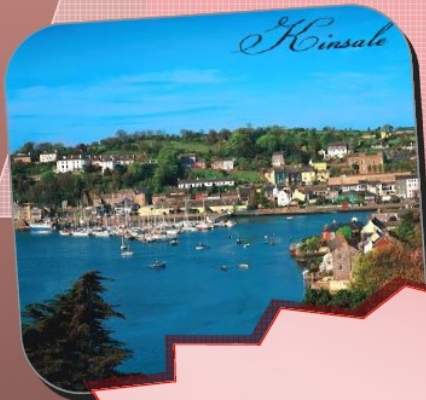


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## A safer Lincoln St.

LINCOLN ST.—Though still in its formative, getting-our-feet-wet stages, the Lincoln St. Area Business Association (LBA) is already hoping to have a larger impact in 2013 than last year, **Jim Magay** of Magay & Barron Eye Center tells Inside Worcester. “We are working on bringing new people into our group. We’re about to do some planning for 2013 and we’re trying to hook up and do more things with the city,” Mr. Magay said. “Our mission is to make the street more habitable and safe to get to. (District 2 City Councilor) **Phil Palmieri** has been helpful in getting crosswalks painted and signage put up to inform pedestrians of these “ (traverse points, which will hopefully avert deaths like ones that have already occurred). Mr. Magay said the Association is also concentrating some of its focus on such vital areas and assets as Lincoln Square, Green Hill Park, Tuckerman Hall, the Aud and WPI. “We’re doing a lot of work in committee, which seems to work best,” he said.

## ‘Fit’ as a fiddle

WEBSTER SQUARE—Six months have gone by since Planet Fitness of Worcester opened at 68 Stafford St. in the Webster Square Plaza and the results so far are “healthy,” says the company’s **Jonathan Epstein**. Residents of Auburn, Worcester, Grafton and West Boylston are among those who have joined a rapidly growing clientele. Businesses are embracing the club too. “(We) have developed more than forty corporate partnerships with many of the larger local employers in the city including Fallon Healthcare, St. Gobain, UMass Medical and the Worcester Public Schools,” Mr. Epstein said. The club has been written up in the press and was home to one of the

Worcester Extreme Loser fitness competition. During the competition fourteen local firefighters were given free club memberships. They exercised regularly at the club in hopes of winning.” Mr. Epstein notes that the 20,000-square-foot facility has lots going for it. It has ample parking. It is open twenty-four hours a day. It boasts more than one hundred pieces of cardio equipment, three lines of strength training, a thirty-minute express circuit, a twelve-minute abs area, private men’s and women’s locker rooms, a tanning salon, a massage are and free group fitness training with a personal trainer.

Planet Fitness followed up its smash Worcester opening with the  
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## OUR TOWN:



THE NEIGHBORHOODS

By ROD LEE



Planet Fitness’ trademark purple is abundant as patrons, including Pablo Torres of Worcester, left, work out to blaring rock music at the company’s new facility on Stafford St. in the Webster Square Plaza.

(PHOTOS/ROD LEE)

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unveiling of a second area location at White City Plaza in Shrewsbury.

## Mask on, mask off

CANAL DISTRICT—Carnaval de Canal Co-chairs **Allison Alaimo** and **Amanda Riik** of Veterans Inc. are beating the drums for this year's fast-approaching version of the event, which is scheduled for "Fat Tuesday" (February 12th) exclusively in the Water St./Millbury St./Green St. neighborhood.

Beads, contests, promotions, giveaways, specials and more including the chance to win a VIP trip for "Magic Hat Mardi Gras" in Burlington, Vermont are part of the celebration.

For venues and more info go to [www.thecanaldistrict.com](http://www.thecanaldistrict.com).

## A Bear of a talk

WEBSTER SQUARE—A virtual standing room only crowd of members and guests of the Webster Square Business Association turned out for Polar Beverages VP/Treasurer Christopher J. Crowley's update on the company at a luncheon meeting of the WSBA at JOPA's Webster House on January 9th.

With slides and background on the fourth-generation family-owned enterprise's growth since the formative days when "Boss" Crowley ran things, Mr. Crowley said Polar is stronger than ever and especially proud of its "35 share" of the beverage industry in the New England



Polar Beverages VP/Treasurer Chris Crowley offered a history of the company and its products before a large audience of members and guests at the Webster Square Business Association's January 9th meeting at JOPA's Webster House Restaurant.

area.

His remarks drew more than a few laughs, as for instance when in reference to Polar's beginnings as a wholesale and retail liquor business, "we were the reason Prohibition happened!" Or, in reference to the "eighteen in the next generation" of Crowleys who stand to get involved in the operation, "if it wasn't for nepotism, none of us would have a job!"

While Polar has a bottling facility in Atlanta, the great news for Worcester, he said, is that "this little plant in Worcester rocks. It does three times

the business of the Atlanta plant. Guys on the line in Worcester are singing and having a good time."

As further evidence of Polar's strength, "we have everyone chasing us in the seltzer category," Mr. Crowley said.

## Bikers' paradise

CHANDLER ST.—Paul Collyer's championing of a stretch of roadway that until recently was nothing to brag about continues with an email he sent that said "for those who only speed down Chandler from Main to Park or who pop in once a year (for his New Orleans blues and jazz festival, maybe)...we have cool bike racks on Chandler from Main to Park and one in Main South."

On another bright note for the Chandler St.-area business sector, Kozara—an Asian tapas restaurant—recently opened next door to Baba Sushi.

## O'Brien time

NORTH WORCESTER—With the addition of UniBank for Savings which recently established a Worcester office, the North Worcester Business Association (NWBA) now boasts 137 paid members according to Treasurer Neil Brosnan of Easy Sweep Vacuum & Pet Goodies.

This Wednesday City Manager O'Brien will offer his annual "State of the City" address at The Manor. WBDC President Craig Blais is on the docket for March, at Tweed's Pub.



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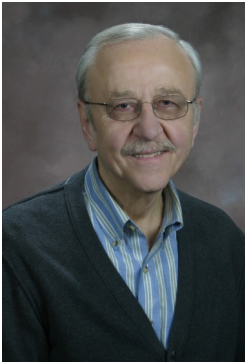
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## CHRIS LIAZOS/A CULINARY LIFE



### **Foodies’ paradise** Best Chefs, Mechanics Hall a perfect parlay

On Sunday, January 27th Mechanics Hall will host the sixth annual Worcester’s Best Chef (WBC) competition, showcasing the culinary talents to be found in Central Massachusetts while also providing some much-needed scholarship money for culinary students at Worcester Technical High School.

Don’t miss it for some of the best food and drink, from 4:00 to 8:00 p.m.

More than twenty chefs from different restaurants and food establishments will prepare their signature dishes.

You’ll taste the shrimp and think it’s the best.

Then you’ll proceed to the beef ribs at the next table and you’ll be sure they are even better!

After sampling the appetizers, entrees, wine and beer you won’t be able to make up your mind and you’ll have to go back and taste again. It’s tough work, but someone has to do it!

You want to cast your vote for the best chef and you take it seriously. Everyone around you is having a great time. The glorious foods, the aromas, the presentations, the wine, the laughter, the noise, the music and beautiful Mechanics Hall make this a foodies’ paradise.

Our pictured national heroes and Worcester notables surrounding the Hall are jealous...no food or drink for them!

Professional judging will be held from 11:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m., before the doors open to the public.

Chef Barry Sexton of Philadelphia, Chef Alina Eisenhauer of Sweet, Chef Danny Morgan of Pepper’s Catering, Barbara Houle of the T&G’s Table Hoppin’, Chef Tim Quinn (2011 champ), Chef Chris Rovezzi (2012 champ), myself (former owner of the Webster House Restaurant) and Christina Andrianopoulos of Dining Out Metro will be the judges.

Students from the Culinary Dept. of Worcester Technical High School will assist the chefs in the preparation of their entries. They will also serve the judges

during the judging process, giving a brief description of the entry submitted, without the chef’s name.

The three top finishers will participate in a cook-off. They will be given a box of mystery ingredients and will compete for thirty minutes, preparing their best dish with the ingredients provided. This segment will be seen live on large TV screens for the benefit of all to see what’s happening. Judges will decide the winner of the competition.

Go to [www.worcesterbestchef.com](http://www.worcesterbestchef.com) for tickets.

We’ll see you at Mechanics Hall on the 27th!



Chris Rovezzi celebrates his victory in the 2012 Worcester Best Chef competition at Mechanics Hall.

PHOTO/COURTESY OF SCOTT ERB

## **The Competitors for 2013**

Chef Wilson Wang, BABA Sushi, Worcester

Chef Brian Treitman, BT’s Smokehouse, Sturbridge

Chef Al Maykel, EVO, Worcester

Chef Christopher Rovezzi, Rovezzi’s Ristorante, Sturbridge

Chef Christopher O’Hara, Flying Rhino Cafe, Worcester

Chef Aleksander Gjonca, Nuovo Restaurant, Worcester

Chef Rafael Guzman Cruz, Two Chefs Restaurant & Pastry Shop, Spencer

Chef Christiana Ernst-Ercoli, Ristorante Via Alto 27, Clinton

Chef Bill Bourbeau, Boynton Restaurant, Worcester

**ALSO:** Chef Joe Cancelmo, Worcester; Chef representing Kozara, Worcester; Chef Enton Mehilaj, Livia’s Dish, Worcester;

Chef Dean Della Ventura, Scales Restaurant, Millbury; Chef

Ethan Cramer, Zorba’s Taverna, Worcester; Chef representing 7

Nana, Worcester; Chef Stacy Murphy, Brew City, Worcester

Chef Dan Sullivan, Sonoma Restaurant, Princeton; Chef Jovaney

Henrique, Viva Bene Ristorante, Worcester; Chef representing

Cheng Du, Westboro; Chef Jay Powell, Twisted Fork, Cherry;

Chef Eric Swenson, Sturbridge Host Hotel, Sturbridge.



# Showtime!...happenings, randomly chosen

## 13 Home Sweet Home

Fans of Abby's House will love this "Wearing Smooth the Path" presentation by founder Annette Rafferty—based on Ms. Rafferty's new book chronicling a decade of building a community within the home's walls. A commemoration of Abby Kelly Foster's birthday will also be celebrated. At the Worcester Public Library, 3 Salem Sq., 3:00-4:00 p.m.

## 16 Mike at The Manor

Times Square has the ball drop, NASCAR has Daytona and the North Worcester Business Association has the city manager, for his annual "State of the City" remarks. At The Manor, 42 West Boylston St., West Boylston, 11:45 a.m.-1:15 p.m.

## 19 Swords up! You go, girl!

Helmets, axes and shields are an absolute must for "Viking Invasion." At the Higgins Armory, 100 Barber Ave., 10:00 a.m.-4:00 p.m.

Accomplished local business women will be recognized during Women in Action Inc.'s annual awards ceremony. At Worcester Public Library, 3 Salem St., 12:00-4:00 p.m.

## 21 Cool, man!

The family that plays together stays together. "Family Day/Everything 60s" will feature art-making activities, performances, a special gallery scavenger hunt and more! At Worcester Art Museum, 55 Salisbury St., 11:00 a.m.-2:30 p.m.

## 25-27 Ready, set, ignition

That new ride, those "Big Boys toys" might be just a morning or afternoon's outing away, as the 2013 Massachusetts International Auto Show sets up shop. At the DCU Center, 50 Foster St., 4:00-8:00 p.m. Fri., 10:00 a.m.-7:00 p.m. Sat., and 11:00 a.m.-5:00 p.m. Sun.

## 29 Second helpings?

"Worcester's Best Chef" means palette-pleasing tastes for attendees. At Mechanics Hall, 321 Main St., 5:00-8:00 p.m.

## 31 Flower Power

"Flora in Winter 2013" featuring eye-popping splashes of color is a surefire way to beat the cold-weather doldrums. This four-day fundraiser (through Feb. 3rd) benefits the Worcester Art Museum. At Worcester Art Museum, 55 Salisbury St.





FLASH POINTS  
**Hot diggity**  
 The Dogfather  
 pays it forward  
 at Jeremiah's Inn

Santa wasn't the only good guy making the rounds on Christmas Eve.

Mark Gallant, left, aka "The Dogfather," brought his truck to Jeremiah's Inn where he offered complimentary food to residents of the home. He may have thrown in a few stories since he is also a self-described "raconteur, bon vivant and ne'er-do-well."

Mr. Gallant's visit was arranged by District 1 City Councilor Tony Economou, who had met him on the north side of the city while campaigning for election.

The Dogfather has been operating his business for about three years. Previously he was a service advisor for a Ford dealership.

"That's the guy you unload on when your car in for service," he said. "It was not the favorite one of the many jobs I've done, so when a friend suggested I start a diner or food truck because I make awesome chili, the rest was history. I left a good-paying, albeit high-stress job for this venture. I'm born and raised in Worcester and proud of it, so even though the rules for food trucks in Worcester can be daunting, I was determined to make it work in the city."

Talk about gumption... "we've got a man in his 50's making a career change to selling hot dogs and starting the business in January in New England."

Among those who took advantage of Mr. Gallant's visit were Jon Tetreault and his son Aiden Notargiacomo, 8 (at left).



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students in the district, not a few hundred.”

He would much prefer that Worcester “move in the direction of” an International Baccalaureate program if it can come up with the resources to do so.”

Research, he said, has shown that “IB” is “a step above the AP programs” that already exist in the Worcester Public Schools and that have been expanded with assistance from the Mass. Math-Science Initiative.

### **A boost from MMSI**

This boost has produced impressive results by exposing students—especially underserved ones—to more rigorous, college-level AP courses in forty-five high schools across the Commonwealth.

Data shows that since 2008 MMSI has more than doubled the number of students enrolled in AP math, science and English while also more than doubling the number of students achieving passing scores in those subjects’ exams.

By this year, the program is expected to engage over 8,500 high school students annually, greatly increasing their likelihood of college enrollment and completion.

“If we considered an IB program and had the resources (to implement it) it could be part of most of the high schools in Worcester, thus avoiding students going to a school that does not exist yet,” Mr. Monfredo said. “On the other hand consideration could be given to reflecting on an exam school as part of a high school and have those students who meet the criteria move into a grade 7-12 program as we have for the Goddard Scholars program in the Worcester Public Schools.

“In the Goddard Scholars program students (who measure up) move from Sullivan Middle School to South High. The program has a rigorous curriculum in place. As you



can see we do have pockets across the city for our best and brightest students. In addition, many Worcester students over the years have attended the Massachusetts Math-Science Academy at WPI.”

While “more discussion needs to take place on this topic” before a decision is made for or against creation of an exam school, an IB program’s appeal is indisputable, Mr. Monfredo said. It starts in the third year for high school students, who must devote their full junior and senior years to it. It requires English and another language, math, science, social science and an art plus a course on theory of knowledge, a 4,000-word essay, an oral presentation and community service in order for students to earn an IB diploma.

“A current high school can house the program. The drawbacks would be the cost and significant ongoing required staff training.”

With exam schools, Mr. Monfredo said, “money would be a challenge as well as the allegations of elitism.” Also, “many principals do feel that exam schools may be taking away their best students, thus jeopardizing the school’s academic rankings.”

Maureen Binienda, principal at

South High, concurs with the sentiments expressed by Mr. Monfredo.

“I am not a supporter of the idea (of an exam school),” she said. “First, I am not sure if the old Classical had an exam to get in. I think the present high schools offer the high level of classes that an exam school would offer.

“I heard that the exam school would offer IB classes which we do not offer at this time. I think the exam school would strip the high schools of their high-level students.

“One of the strengths of a public high school is the diversity of the students both ethnically and academically. I wonder how the exam school will select students from all racial groups and income levels.

“Also, the present high schools have been on a shoe-string budget for the past few years. How will a new exam school be financed?

“I read that the idea would was to bring students who had left the WPS back to the system. I question if that would happen.”

Mr. Foley pointed out that a pending report from an ad hoc committee of the School Committee will shed light on the issue. Meanwhile, however, the “selectivity” factor associated with establishment of an exam school troubles him. And, he said, “funding is a huge issue.”

An exam school of the sort The Research Bureau proposes “will cause a great divide in the school system,” he said. “Look at Boston where there is forging of signatures to get in!”

### **Eminent domain?**

Worcester business leaders including Jack Woods of Woods Insurance find little to

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cheer about in the possibility of the city taking Wyman-Gordon land on Madison St. by eminent domain with a slots parlor as the only prospective use of the property put forth so far.

"I'm kind of an old-fashioned guy," Mr. Woods said. "I don't think a casino adds value. If someone else comes up with a Plan B that's better, I'm for that."

Jim Magay of Magay & Barron Eye Center and the Lincoln St. Area Business Association agrees.

"Building a state's economy on gambling," which is "socially not redeemable," is a mistake, Mr. Magay said.

"I can't say I have any better proposal but a 'tax on the stupid'" makes no sense as enlightened public policy, in his view.

Elizabeth A. "Beth" Proko of Worcester Citizens for Business (WCB), said the Wyman-Gordon parcel's future should be left in the hands of private developers.

"If it needs special consideration," though, she said, "it should be opened to the public for their say, if there are zoning and permitting issues to address.

"You have to give private development a chance to work.

"I see it sitting a long time still" if the city gets involved, she said.

In regard to Wyman-Gordon's seeming reluctance, or inability, to move the property, or even to respond to governmental prods on the status of the acreage, Mrs. Proko says, "are (city leaders) asking Wyman-Gordon the right questions?"

At a luncheon meeting of the Webster Square Business Association at JOPA's

**'I'm kind of an old-fashioned guy. I don't think a casino adds value. If someone else comes up with a Plan B that's better, I'm for that.'**

**Jack Woods  
Woods Insurance**

Webster House Restaurant on January 9th, Phil Niddrie, business-retention manager for the city, said he believes the city should have purchased the site years ago.

Now, given the current economic climate, Wyman-Gordon is probably asking too much for an acquisition of the land to be a feasible course for Worcester to pursue, he noted.

Canal District businessmen John Giangregorio and Allen Fletcher have not totally rejected the notion of a slots parlor on the property, which is within the bounds of their neighborhood. Mr. Fletcher, however, has indicated it would take a lot of convincing for him to back the idea.

Not to be ignored in the deliberations over direction is a master plan developed by the Worcester Business Development Corporation (WBDC) in collaboration with the city's Office of Economic Development that calls for creation of an eighteen-hour mixed-use downtown "Theatre District" that would abut the Madison St. site.

A slots parlor/boutique hotel would appear to be a use that fits comfortably as a companion to such a district.

## NWBA

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City Business Retention Manager Phil Niddrie is pictured accompanying State Rep. John Binienda, Mayor Petty, District 5 Councilor William J. Eddy and others on a Mayor's Walk through Webster Sq. this past fall. (PHOTO/ROD LEE)

# COMING IN FEBRUARY

The RTA on a 'roll':  
An exclusive inside look at a  
bus company that is  
revitalized and moving ahead!



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