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MASS LIVE

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SWIMMING FOR THEIR SURVIVAL

A UMass Amherst study explored how various catch-and-release handling techniques affect the physiological health of striped bass, whose numbers are declining. Page A6

TODAY'S MUST-READS

TECHNOLOGY

Rent a robot for \$18 an hour?

The new robot warehouse worker from Tutor Intelligence, a Watertown startup, won't work for minimum wage.

But pay it \$18 an hour, and it will uncomplainingly pick up boxes and plunk them onto wooden pallets — three shifts a day, with no breaks.

Tutor, founded by two MIT alums, is announcing last week that it has raised \$34 million in venture capital funding.

Full story on Page B1

AI SAFETY

AI company safety efforts are ranked

Are artificial intelligence companies keeping humanity safe from AI's potential harms? Don't bet on it, a new report card says.

As AI plays an increasingly larger role in the way humans interact with technology, the potential harms are becoming more clear — people using AI-powered chatbots for counseling and then dying by suicide, or using AI for cyberattacks.

Full story on Page B2

TEL AVIV, ISRAEL

Netanyahu says second phase of ceasefire is close

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said Sunday that Israel and Hamas are "very shortly expected to move into the second phase of the ceasefire," after Hamas returns the remains of the last hostage held in Gaza.

Netanyahu spoke during a news conference and stressed that the second phase, which addresses the disarming of Hamas and the withdrawal of Israeli troops, could begin as soon as the end of the month.

Full Story on Page A6

WEATHER

Very cold with sunshine.

High: 27°; Low: 0°

EXPANDED WEATHER, B4

3,000
Cars per Year
+
#1 Auto Body Shop

Rick's
AUTO BODY

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IMMIGRATION

Narrowing the legal path to citizenship

One step from becoming a U.S. citizen, some find it eludes their grasp

By JAZMINE ULLOA AND ORLANDO MAYORQUÍN

The New York Times

Raouf Vafaei followed all the rules.

He obtained his green card, passed his civics test and his naturalization interview, and underwent multiple background checks.

After eight years in the United States, Vafaei, an Iranian-born mental health worker who emigrated from Austria, was just days away from becoming an American

citizen when he learned in a four-sentence email that his naturalization ceremony scheduled for Friday had been canceled.

"I was so excited," Vafaei, 41, said in a recent interview, referring to the honor of officially calling himself an American. His mother had even bought a new dress for the occasion. "This is one wish that many people have all over the world."

SEE CITIZENSHIP, PAGE A3



The U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) welcomed 299 new US citizens during a naturalization ceremony at American International College on Dec. 19, 2019. (HOANG LEON' NGUYEN / THE REPUBLICAN, FILE)

HADLEY

Angels, sheep and goats, oh my!



Participants walk to the front of the First Congregational Church of Hadley during the annual outdoor Christmas pageant featuring live animals on Sunday. (DAVE ROBACK PHOTO)

Organizers of an annual living nativity in Hadley have learned to embrace imperfection. Local farm animals are the biggest wild card.



Ella Glover, age 9 of Hadley is a participant in the First Congregational Church of Hadley's annual outdoor Christmas pageant featuring live animals on Sunday.

(DAVE ROBACK PHOTO)

By STAASI HEROPOULOS

Special to The Republican

While Bethlehem in the Holy Land saw weather in the 70s over the weekend, members of the First Congregational Church in Hadley broke through snow and ice for its reenactment of the birth of Christ.

The church staged its Christmas pageant with actors and live animals on its front steps Sunday, drawing a crowd of some 75 people.

A narrator told the story while a donkey brayed and lambs bleated. A neighbor walking her dog stopped and watched.

Mary was "great with child" at the time, according to the biblical account, and with no room at the inn, she gave birth to Jesus in a manger.

Children from the congregation played all the roles, including Mary and Joseph, who traveled to Bethlehem so they could be counted for the census ordered by Roman emperor Caesar Augustus.

The pageant replaced the church's morning service, moving outdoors to proclaim the faith to everyone who walked and drove through the intersection of Massachusetts Route 9 and Middle Street.

"I think it's important for us to share and be on the front steps of the church," said Diana West, chairperson of the church's Board of Christian Education.

SEE PAGEANT, PAGE A2

BAY STATE BRIEFING

Titans of industry meet to save Mass.

Sen. Paul Feeney got stuck on mute to kick off meeting

By JOHN L. MICEK

jnmicek@masslive.com

They were titans of industry, policy and labor. And they'd gathered at the State House to each offer their sweeping visions of a Massachusetts that's a champion of innovation, a leader among states and a technological powerhouse.

But first, they had to figure out how to get state Sen. Paul Feeney off mute on the remote link. He'd rung in from his home in the shadow of Gillette Stadium and had some thoughts to share.

After a couple of initial attempts failed, Lt. Gov. Kim Driscoll, channeling the true spirit of Yankee ingenuity, found a workaround.

She called Feeney, D-Bristol/Norfolk, on his cellphone, and got him on speaker, loud enough for the assembled luminaries to hear him offer his wisdom.

So, baby steps.

Gov. Maura Healey established the council through an October executive order. She charged it with advising her on ways to "drive economic growth and strengthen the state's business climate."

The panel of about two dozen people met for the first time on a chilly morning, convening as the state does battle with the Republican Trump administration, and as policymakers try to tame skyrocketing housing prices, the second-highest cost of living in the nation and a host of other economic challenges.

Gov. Maura Healey established the council through an October executive order. She charged it with advising her

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