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MASS LIVE

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PATS ROUT JETS, CLINCH AFC EAST

Drake Maye threw 5 touchdowns in a 42-10 victory over the New York Jets, Sunday. The win, coupled with a Buffalo Bills loss, gave the Pats their first division title since 2019. Page A7

TODAY'S MUST-READS

BAY STATE BRIEFING

Mass. leaders make their 2026 resolutions

In the spirit of optimism and goodwill that the turn of the calendar year brings with it, we asked some of the commonwealth's elected officials, pundits, political candidates and others for their resolutions and pearls of wisdom as we close out a challenging and eventful year and begin a new one.

Full Story on Page A2

EAST LONGMEADOW

Paramedical tattooing turns scars to art

When tattoo artist Ezequiel Lugo opened his studio in East Longmeadow, he wanted to make his mark on his clients — but he never imagined how life-changing his work would be.

“For a long time, I thought I was already changing lives doing tattoos, but this feels much more rewarding,” the owner of The Mean Bean Shop told The Republican.

Full Story on Page B1

PALM BEACH, FLA.

Ukraine, Russia ‘closer than ever’ to end of war

President Donald Trump on Sunday insisted Ukraine and Russia are “closer than ever before” to a peace deal as he hosted Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy at his Florida resort, but he acknowledged that negotiations could still break down and leave the war dragging on for years.

Full Story on Page A6

WEATHER

Periods of rain; plenty of cloud coverage.

High: 45°; Low: 20°

EXPANDED WEATHER, B4



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STATE

New crime lab will transform how all forensic evidence is processed

By Luis Fieldman

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State officials plan to start construction on a new, modern forensic laboratory in Marlborough in 2026.

The laboratory will bring together the current crime labs in Maynard

and Sudbury under one roof. Construction is expected to start in the early part of the year.

It could open as early as the first few months of 2028. The building will be designed with sustainable environmental designs on a current-

ly vacant property, officials said.

State Police Superintendent Col. Geoff Noble said the facility will strengthen forensic capabilities across the state.

“Our crime lab professionals play a vital role in investigations across Mas-

sachusetts,” Noble said. “This new cutting-edge crime lab will enhance our ability to uphold national standards of forensic excellence, support law enforcement statewide, and provide justice for victims and families.”

SEE LAB, PAGE A3

YEAR IN REVIEW

Readers’ favorite WMass stories of 2025

Sharing this year’s most compelling reports



Main: M. alleges that she and a high school teacher had engaged in sexual acts when she was a 16. (DOUGLAS HOOK / THE REPUBLICAN, FILE)

Top: LaMar Cook, former deputy director for the governor’s regional office in Springfield, is arraigned at Springfield District Court, Oct. 29. (DOUGLAS HOOK / THE REPUBLICAN, FILE)

By Noah Hoffenberg

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For some, 2025 was like an unsolicited second helping of holiday fruitcake.

Not everyone liked it. Certainly not the immigrants. Not the victims of sexual assault. Not the children upon whom the bombs fell.

Meanwhile, news in the Pioneer Valley marched on, sometimes in sync with the world and its struggles, and other times striking out on its own.

For this end-of-year news wrap-up, The Republican is sharing capsules of some readers’ favorite stories from 2025, based on online reader data. It is not meant to be a recap of “top” stories. Rather, these are some of the year’s stories that readers found most compelling.

2025’s most-read stories

■ ‘Governor’s WMass aide charged with drug trafficking after cocaine delivered to state building’: In late October, a story in The Republican detailed how a Western Massachusetts aide to Gov. Maura Healey allegedly had multiple pounds of the drug delivered to him at the state building on Dwight Street in Springfield and at his former employer, the Hotel UMass.

LaMar Cook, 45, the deputy director for the governor’s regional office in Springfield, was fired immediately and arraigned soon after.

His case is still playing out in court. The governor’s office hasn’t said much since the news broke, other than that the “criminal investigation is ongoing, and our administration will work with law enforcement to assist them in their work.”

SEE STORIES, PAGE A6



Gregory E. Jerome puts up a rental tent in Northampton in 1997. (BOB STERN / THE REPUBLICAN, FILE)

Putnam Vocational Technical Academy student Victoria Matheus cuts wood as she and fellow students work on the duck pond platform at Forest Park in Springfield, Dec. 19, 2024. (DON TREEGER / THE REPUBLICAN)



SPRINGFIELD

Set to use ‘a random lottery’

New system will replace rules giving weight to grades, attendance

By Jeanette DeForge

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In order to meet state guidelines, the School Committee has changed its selection policy for students who want to enroll at Roger L. Putnam Vocational Technical Academy or other career education programs, but teens will still have a chance to get a competitive

edge.

The School Committee voted 7-0 earlier this month to approve the policy to create a lottery system for eighth graders who want to enroll at Putnam for next year, replacing rules that give more weight to good grades, attendance and behavior.

SEE LOTTERY, PAGE A2