

SOUTHBRIDGE NEWS

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Town formally unveils new dispatch center



Photos Gus Steeves

Police Chief Shane Woodson cuts the ribbon to formally inaugurate Southbridge's combined dispatch center last Friday.

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CORRESPONDENT

SOUTHBRIDGE — Although it's been in operation since last year, and was in planning far longer, the town formally unveiled its new centralized dispatch last Friday.

"Historically, we've always had police officers on our dispatch and firefighters dispatching the fire department," Police Chief Shane Woodson recalled during the brief ceremony.

But changes in the law in 2008 made it "no longer practical for them to work the desk," and increasingly required professional dispatchers with certain kinds of training.

That started a very slow process of change. At first, the police started hiring

dispatchers on Mechanic Street with officers sometimes filling in and firefighters continuing to dispatch on Elm Street. For a while, Southbridge considered building a regional dispatch with several other communities in Oxford, but eventually opted out.

After that, it started the process of consolidating its decades-old police and fire dispatches, a project that turned out to be more complex than it initially appeared. Most notably, the police and fire stations are not "line of sight," so the chiefs and contractor Marc Cady needed to find a way to relay signals between the two. The solution turned out to be a microwave antenna atop 60 Charlton St., which required some

negotiating with the state and Housing Authority.

Cady noted the trickiest part of the project was moving the dispatch operation itself from one room to another and back again without disrupting it, especially under Covid guidelines. But he said they were "able to keep the project kind of on track."

To lead dispatcher Melissa Palmer, the biggest change is in the number of screens she has to keep track of.

"When I came here seven years ago, there were two screens" and various old furniture and other equipment, she said, noting they sought her input on what the new system needed.

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QCC at Southbridge making a positive impact

SOUTHBRIDGE — Quinsigamond Community College is making it easier for those in Southbridge and the surrounding communities to have access to high quality, affordable higher education opportunities, with its move to Southbridge High School. Beginning this fall, QCC at Southbridge will begin offering both in-person and online classes for the fall 2021 semester.

"The establishment of a QCC satellite campus in Southbridge High School has been incredibly successful and I look forward to our second year of collaboration. The partnership has provided our students with the opportunity to enroll in college courses while in high school. I look forward to once again working closely with QCC to provide the students of Southbridge High School with the opportunity to take college courses, while they are enrolled in high school," said Southbridge Receiver/Superintendent of Schools, Jeffrey Villar, Ph.D.

"This partnership has enabled QCC to become more accessible to the communities we serve both in and around the Southbridge area," said QCC President Luis G. Pedraja, Ph.D.

This fall, students in the region will have the opportunity to take standard 15-week courses, or chose accelerated courses offered in two seven-week sections: Fall 1 (Sept. 6 start date) and Fall II (November 1 start date). These accelerated courses enable students to complete two classes in the same time it would normally take them to

take one class during the standard fall semester. Currently the primarily classes being offered include general education courses required for most majors at QCC.

QCC moved from its Optical Drive location in the summer of 2020 so that high school students, family members and members of the Southbridge and area communities could take advantage of QCC's academic and workforce development offerings. In Spring 2021, QCC also began its Early College Program for Southbridge High School juniors and seniors.

"QCC offers affordable access to higher education and workforce training and development. Their admissions staff is eager to work with anyone wanting to improve their education and/or job opportunities," said Executive Director Chamber of Central Mass South, Alexandra McNitt.

"I look forward to expanding these opportunities and to the continued collaboration with the amazing QCC faculty as we plan for future programs that will provide our students and the community of Southbridge with new and exciting career opportunities," Dr. Villar added.

Enrollment for QCC's Fall semester is currently underway. To register for classes visit www.QCC.edu/admissions.

For more information about QCC, contact Josh Martin, Director of Institutional Communications at 508-854-7513 or jmartin@qcc.mass.edu.

Old Sturbridge Village Communications Department expands

STURBRIDGE — Earlier this summer, Old Sturbridge Village (OSV) added two new hires to their newly restructured Marketing department in an effort to centralize communications and content production

at the museum. Lex Piccione was hired as Lead Designer and Christine Freitas for a newly created position, Director of Communications and Content.

While a lot of organizations have been forced to down-

size over the past year, Old Sturbridge Village has continued to grow and expand on their programs and educational resources. This has given the Village the opportunity to bring in new talent and promote

already existing talent within the organization. The divisions of program and interpretation, museum education, collections, and research have also added staff to support the mission of the Village.

"We set out to expand the capacity of the existing Marketing department at OSV earlier this year in an effort to streamline and manage mes-

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Hitchcock Academy presents Seventh Annual Sip and Stars fundraiser

BRIMFIELD — For the seventh year in a row, Hitchcock Academy, with generous support from Country Bank and B.T.'s Smokehouse, presents summer's best opportunity to make a wish on a shooting star. For either of two nights, Wednesday, Aug. 11 or Thursday, Aug. 12 from 6 to 10 p.m., viewers can enjoy libations from Brimfield Winery and Rapsallion Brewery while watching the summer's best star show under the wide

open sky at the Brimfield Winery Field on Route 20 in Brimfield.

Each admission ticket includes a full pour of wine or beer and a laser guided tour of the night sky by Geoff and Kim McClean, who are the Lead Night Sky Rangers with The Last Green Valley. The McClean's will bring telescopes for up close viewing of the meteors as well as providing a Wi-Fi transceiver option allowing guests to use their cell phones to see the display in real time just as it appears through telescope lens. All Sip and Stars guests have to do is follow this exact link: <http://192.168.0.116:7094> to connect. No password required. Aug. 11 and 12 are peak gazing opportunities for the annual Perseid Meteor shower, which have been known to show 50 to 100 meteors per hour. In the



early hours before sunset crowds can enjoy music by James Paul on Wednesday or by Kitchen Jam on Thursday. Stargazers are invited to pack a picnic supper, or they have the option to splurge from B.T.'s Smokehouse food truck, which will be serving both nights. No outside

alcoholic beverages will be allowed. This is the second year the Hitchcock Academy summer benefit, which combines the local area's favorite beverages with a guided tour of the season's best natural

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