



CAMBRIDGE DAY

THE WEEK OF JULY 23 – JULY 30, 2026

FREE

Grabbing a Bite with Imam Firmin, Jr.



Created by Sophia Day
An illustration of Imam Firmin, Jr.

By SUSANNE BECK

When I ask Imam Firmin, Jr. where to grab a bite, the recent graduate of Cambridge Rindge and Latin and co-captain of the basketball team doesn't hesitate. "El Jefe, in the square," he texts.

Firmin is already on site when I arrive at noontime in April, greeting me with a big, sheepish grin, sleepy eyes shaded by short dreadlocks, and offers a very polite handshake.

Our first attempt to meet at El Jefe weeks before had been less successful. My morning text reminder went unanswered, as did my follow-ups, until finally about 25 minutes after our meeting time, I got a reply. "I am so sorry for the late response. I thought it was the 4th. My coach was reminding me not to forget, and I still did - terrible first impression."

This second time is a charm, though. My normal confirmation text is preempted the day before with a cheery "Hey Ms. Beck. I just wanted to make sure we are still good for tomorrow?"

After our greeting, I steer him to the order line where, again, seemingly out of good manners, he tries to decline the chance to get something to eat. "You have to," I blurt out. Without even so much as a glance at a menu, he obliges: a steak and cheese quesadilla, water to drink.

See FIRMIN, page 9

On Broadway, bike lane debate continues



Chloe Taft

A biker rode over markings showing where new separated bike lanes will be on Broadway in mid-July, before lines were painted on permanently.

By CHLOE TAFT and REBECCA GOODMAN

The Broadway Safety Improvement Project, the most recent development in the city's plan to connect all of Cambridge by bike lanes, has extended the debate between bike advocates and critics.

The city plans to install separated, quick-build bike lanes — which keep cars and bicycles apart with street-level flex posts — along Broadway from Quincy Street bordering Harvard Yard to Portland Street near Inman Square. Adding the lanes will mean a 60% reduction of parking spots along Broadway, as well as potential changes to pedestrian infrastructure.

Michael Rogove, a Cambridge

resident and volunteer with Cambridge Bike Safety, said he is hopeful about the separated lanes on Broadway. "A successful bike lane project is a successful safety infrastructure project for everyone, and we would see a successful project will see slower speeds, calmer streets," Rogove said.

But another cyclist raised the question of whether the Broadway project is largely redundant with nearby streets that already have bike lanes, such as Cambridge Street. "It is very easy for a cyclist to travel 1-2 blocks to one of the other lanes that travel in the same direction," Cambridge resident David Bourque, who regularly bicycles in the city and has kids who bicycle to school, said via email. "I've been a long-time advocate for bike lanes and

making streets safer," he said. "I believe the cons [of the Broadway project] outweigh the pros."

In fact, Bourque plans to move to a different neighborhood in Cambridge to have a parking spot. "Multiple things have gone into that decision to move, but one of them in particular was that I just, I can't deal with the parking situation anymore," he said. "I'm



Tom Meek

A future bike lane in Section B of the Broadway Safety Improvement Project takes form.

lucky to have the resources to be able to [move]."

Broadway is a part of the city's larger Cycling Safety Ordinance (CSO), which City Council first passed in 2019, requiring Cambridge to build a 25-mile network of city-wide separated bike lanes in pursuit of eliminating all traffic-related fatalities and serious injuries. The CSO designates Broadway as one of four particularly complex streets for bike lane installation, dubbed the "Special4."

The city plans to execute the project in three parts. Construction on the eastern-most section, from Portland Street to Columbia Street, is complete. The middle section, from Columbia Street to Ellery Street, is in progress and the final section, which passes the high school and multiple public parks, is in the final design stage. The two-mile long project is expected to be finished this year. The city will oversee the installation with the help of a working group of 13 local residents and volunteers, which has been meeting semi-regularly throughout the project design.

Andreas Wolfe, the street design project manager for the Department of Transportation, said that the bike lane installations have the "most impact and benefit when we're able to make our most major and important streets safe," including streets like Broadway.

See BIKE LANE, page 4

Gathering for backgammon and other traditional board games

By RUTH TAM

Throughout the summer, local residents are gathering and they're bringing their family's board game traditions with them.

Pandemonium Books and Games in Central Square hosts tournaments for collectible card games. Cambridge Public Library also has a game night featuring a variety of games like Settlers of Catan and Wingspan.

But where are the traditional board games that used to happen naturally in public squares? You can still find chess enthusiasts of all ages, and sometimes even grandmasters, in Harvard



Ruth Tam

Hong Kong style mahjong draws enthusiasts and beginners to Aeronaut Brewing Company in Somerville.

Square. But beyond that scene, eral recurring neighborhood meetups that feature backgam-

mon, mahjong, and cribbage across Somerville and Cambridge.

Backgammon is for life

If there's one thing you need to understand about backgammon night at Mamaleh's, it's this: it's not for the community.

The Thursday night meetup outside the Jewish deli in Kendall Square "was purely selfish," admits organizer Alon Munzer. "The whole reason I did it is because I wanted to play backgammon. I wanted to hang out, have a drink, and play."

See BOARD GAMES, page 11

METRO

Cambridge, Somerville celebrate as Citizens de-ICEs

By ALEX DEGTEREV

The De-ICE Citizens Bank standouts scheduled for Saturday in Cambridge turned into a celebration, after the Providence-based bank announced it was no longer provide credit facilities to private prison companies Core Civic and The Geo Group.

Rafael Moure-Eraso, a Cambridge resident and professor emeritus at the University of Massachusetts Lowell, was at the Central Square standout celebrating and holding a "Citizens Retreats" sign.

"It was a very good strategy to illuminate that to do business you have to respect the humanity of people," said Moure-Eraso. "I guess they realized that if they want the community to see them as good citizens, then they have to do this."

One of the organizers told Cambridge Day that "When we stand together we have the power to make change in our community," said Philip Hillman, a member of Cambridge's St. Paul A.M.E. Church, via email. Hillman is also a leader in the Greater Boston Interfaith Organization's "Not with our Money, Citizens!" pledge campaign, which has collected over \$24 million in pledged withdrawals from the bank with the help of the De-ICE Citizens Bank Coalition.

Cambridge City Councillor Marc McGovern was the first local politician to publicly withdraw his campaign funds from the bank over its relationship with the two prison companies. He thanked the advocates who had driven the effort in an email, saying he was glad "Citizens listened to the people and made this decision."

Despite Citizens' shift, he said he will keep his campaign account at East Cambridge Savings Bank.

Citizens Bank on Friday confirmed it had ended the credit facilities, citing reductions in the companies' needs for capital. The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) has acquired several of their facilities, and the bank said shifting from owners to operators had reduced the companies' need for financing.

Buying detention facilities allows DHS to bypass local restrictions on immigration detention, a department spokesperson told the Los Angeles Times.

Partial victory

Some activists felt they had achieved only partial victory. Julie Craven, a Cambridge resident who helped start the De-ICE Citizens Bank Coalition, said the bank has not severed "all current and future banking relationships" with the two prison companies, a coalition goal. Asked what the coalition's plans were now, she said "stay tuned."

Citizens also said it was disappointed with "activists," claiming they had politicized a business relationship and forced the bank



Photos: Alex Degterev

Participants at the Porter Square De-ICE Citizens Bank standout celebrated the bank ending its credit facilities for private detention companies.

to illegally "debank" the companies. Using political or religious considerations to force banks to end client relationships was prohibited in an August 2025 executive order signed by President Donald J. Trump.

Citizens further noted in 2025 it had helped fund 140 nonprofits that provide services to immigrant communities, and provided \$2 billion in community development funding for affordable housing and economic support. "None of these virtues seem to matter to

Several politicians seeking state office have been involved in the protests also commented.

Evan MacKay, who is running to be state representative for the 25th Middlesex district, attended both the Central Square and Porter Square standouts and was mainly celebratory, praising what they called a "beautiful grassroots movement." MacKay added that "this is the type of people energy and movement energy that it is going to take to confront and abolish ICE."

Connolly had not yet removed campaign funds at Citizens. He said he would continue following the coalition's guidance on how to handle the account.

State Rep. Christine Barber, who attended a De-ICE standout in Medford in June, said in an email the decision was "welcome news." She praised organizers "who refused to let a major bank finance ICE detention."

She added that "one bank stepping back doesn't end this," referencing the recent Depart-



Candidate for state representative Evan MacKay (back row, center) was among those celebrating at the Central Square De-ICE Citizens Bank standout after the bank ended its credit facilities for two private detention companies.

activist groups," Citizens said.

Craven said the bank could not "play that narrative after months of protests and an increasing amount of divestment." She said the coalition and affiliated groups "never denied" the bank's good deeds, but those did not "cancel out the harm [they have done]."

One of the people at the Porter Square standout was a man named Jim, who declined to give his last name. He called the statement from the bank "weak" and said he did not understand why it had taken a stance against "activists." "[Citizens] want all the goodwill they can get, why even bring that up?"

They lambasted the Massachusetts Department of Correction's ongoing agreement with ICE, which authorized state correctional officers to perform federal immigration functions.

"Their statement sounds like nonsense," said state Rep. Mike Connolly, who joined the coalition last month in Cambridge to protest and pledged to remove his campaign funds from the bank. Attributing Friday's decision to the "collective pressure" brought on by organizers and local elected officials, he said, "I'm really impressed with and grateful for all of the Cambridge and Somerville residents [who participated]."

ment of Immigration and Customs Enforcement shooting of Johan Guerrero in Biddeford, Maine.

A CoreCivic spokesperson, Steve Owen, said the company was in the best financial shape it had ever been in, and that it would continue to provide "safe, high quality services" for its "government partners."

The Geo Group did not respond to a request for comment.

According to a report produced last month by the Human Rights Watch, 52 people have died in ICE custody since Trump took office last January, with 27 dying in privately-owned facilities.

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Cambridge Day is published by a nonpartisan, nonprofit media organization, Cambridge News Inc. Our mission is to provide our readers with impartial, informative reporting, and to be an outlet for civic engagement and discourse on public policy, politics, government and other matters of citywide concern.

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CAMPAIGN 2026

Mbah, Oates and Ruseau vie to replace Barber

By SYDNEY WISE

As state Representative Christine Barber competes in a five-way race for an open state Senate seat, three hopefuls seek to take her role representing the 34th Middlesex District.

The district covers parts of Somerville and Medford. Barber was elected to the seat in 2014.

Candidates hail from both cities in the district. Paul Ruseau lives in Medford and has served on the Medford School Committee since 2018. Chris Oates is a Somerville resident with a background in electoral reform, technology and geopolitical analysis. Will Mbah was elected to the Somerville City Council in 2017, where he has served as councilor at large since, barring the 2021 term, when he lost the mayoral election to then-mayor Katjana Ballantyne.

Cambridge Day spoke to the candidates about their campaigns and priorities if elected.

Mbah cites Council credentials

When asked why he's running, Mbah said he wants to bring his experience in city government, and also his experience of feeling limits to local power.

"Almost everything that we've been trying to do at the city level is all stuck at the State House," he said. He cited Somerville's efforts to give tenants first right to purchase their units when sold, implement transfer fees, and institute rent control: actions that all require state approval, which has not yet been granted.

As state rep, Mbah would want to reassess those limits to local power. "It's almost like we need to work on this rent stabilization, rent control, however you want to put it, and give communities the choice also to do what works for them," he said.

Mbah called housing affordability his "number one issue." He cited his experience in Somerville, including the creation of the city's Office of Housing Stability, which was established in 2018. But, there are limits to what he's been able to do in local office, he said.

Mbah said his priorities are shaped by both his lived and legislative experience. "My entire life story is shaped by the issues everybody's organizing around," Mbah said. "I grew up in Cameroon, you know, came to the United States believing in the promise of opportunity and democracy ... it's not always been an easy journey."

Healthcare is an example. When Mbah moved to Massachusetts 15 years ago, he fell outside of MassHealth's eligibility criteria and wasn't able to receive coverage. He was then penalized for not having health insurance, he said.

"I feel like it should be a human right. I think we can do this stuff. It's just the political will," he said.

He also cited immigration, transportation and education. He wants to advocate for expanded language and legal services and



Courtesy of Will Mbah

Will Mbah speaking at a campaign event earlier in 2026.

protections for immigrants, as well as see increased investment in the MBTA and in public schools. In schools, that includes increasing mental health resources and doing integrity checks on school buildings.

If elected, Mbah would step down from his role on the City Council. His message to voter: "I'm the best person that is ready on day one."

Oates on election reform

Oates, a first-time office-seeker, said he's running because "the issues I cared about, I didn't think were being addressed well enough. I didn't think Beacon Hill was moving with the urgency on a lot of issues," he said.

When Barber decided not to run for re-election, he saw an opportunity. "Given how uncompetitive these [elections] are, this is maybe the only time in my working life that this seat might be open," he said.

Oates said competitive elections can force legislative action. Without competition, "there isn't that pressure from the public to move," he said.

Though it will be his first time running for public office, Oates' professional background is in politics. He has worked in geopolitical risk analysis and consulting and from 2018-2020 worked on a ballot initiative led by Voter Choice Massachusetts to convert Massachusetts to ranked choice voting. The measure, which would have had voters rank candidates by order of preference in state elections, appeared on the ballot in 2020 but failed to pass, with 55 percent of votes cast against it.

He then founded Legislatra, a startup trying to increase transparency in government. Legislatra's services include tracking state bills and using AI to produce transcripts of public meetings.

He hopes that there is "appetite in the legislature" for ranked choice voting, he said. If elected, Oates says that he would stop consulting and hand over Legislatra operations to someone else.

Housing is "the single most important policy right now," Oates said. If he could pass any policy on his first day in office, he said he'd pick the "YIMBY Bill" currently in front of the legislature (House version Senate version). The leg-



Courtesy of Chris Oates

Chris Oates, at a campaign event.

islation, championed by the "Yes In My Back Yard" movement, includes several provisions aiming to increase housing production, including removing parking minimums for new residential construction near transit, removing minimum lot sizes and allowing some multifamily housing by right in residential areas: up to five units on sites connected to water and sewer and up to three units for those that aren't. A version of the bill in front of the Senate also includes provisions for building housing on sites owned by religious institutions. It is part of the economic development bill passed by the House.

Oates said that building market-rate homes should be made easier and more cost-effective, including by reforming permitting. Market-rate construction can generate revenue for affordable or social housing, he said.



Courtesy of Paul Ruseau

Paul Ruseau

Ruseau seeks aid reform

Like Mbah, Ruseau is running because he wants to leverage the state's power to tackle issues local governments don't have the power to address.

"A lot of the things that I want to do in the schools are just not allowed at the state level," Ruseau said. "I feel like a lot of the progress we've made will continue. But those things at the state level that are holding us back are not going to change on their own."

He also wants to bring more progressive politics to Beacon Hill.

"I think I'm the most left of all of the candidates in this race," Ruseau said, noting that he is a member of the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA), "and I'm not hiding that."

Ruseau endorsed Barber in her run for state Senate, though he "[looks] forward to working with

whoever is elected," he said.

Healthcare, housing, and education were among the issues Ruseau called his most important. He wants Medicare for all and envisions a transformational shift of the state's healthcare industry. "I don't think health care delivery should be for profit," he said, adding that Massachusetts' workforce in the insurance industry could be leveraged to build a new system.

On housing, he wants construction of new units and mixed income social housing: housing owned and operated without a profit by the government, a non-profit, or tenants.

If elected, he said the first action he would take would be creating a "whole new formula" for state education aid. State aid to public elementary and secondary schools is governed by Chapter 70 of the Massachusetts General Laws, which caps annual inflationary adjustments to the budget to at 4.5 percent. Ruseau wants to remove that cap.

Ruseau was elected to the Medford school committee in 2017. Outside of the committee, he works as a software engineer at Dana Farber. He would continue working at Dana Farber if elected, he said, which he said was a financial necessity. He said his job has flexible hours and autonomy, so he did not feel that continuing to work would conflict with serving in the legislature.

The primary election is scheduled for Sept. 1.

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CAMBRIDGE		
CONDOS	SINGLES	MULTIS
28.57%	36.11%	32.47%
SOMERVILLE		
CONDOS	SINGLES	MULTIS
28.24%	27.69%	23.17%

Source: MLS PIN statistics for "Market Pulse"

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Two Generations of Cambridge



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LOCAL

Bike lane

From Page 1

A "really important route"

On average, 350 to 450 people bike on Broadway daily, according to a 2025 report from the city that found the number of bikers in the city has gone up by 250 percent in the last 20 years. At the same time, fewer cyclists are likely to be involved in a crash, data Chris Cassa, a bicycle advocate with Cambridge Bike Safety, called “amazing.”

“It is important to at least acknowledge the success of this, and just be glad to see that when we’re making facilities safer, people are using them, and it’s making it easier for people to have those options that we hope they’ll have,” Cassa said.

Cassa said the Broadway project fills a gap needed to create a connected, bikeable city. “The ideal bike network should have north, south, east, west connections, and it should really focus on improving the safety of places where we know people already bike and are dangerous, and it should also get people where they need to go.”

Between 2022 and 2024, Broadway saw 24 collisions between cars and bikes, 10 of which led to injuries, and 14 crashes involving pedestrians. Speeding is also common. Over half of drivers consistently exceed the 25 mph speed limit, and 5% hit 37 mph or over while heading toward the high school, according to 2024 traffic data.

Rogove joined Cambridge Bike Safety after advocating for the city to continue the installation of lanes on Cambridge St., where he had stopped riding because of “how dangerous it felt.” Now, Rogove is most concerned with safety, especially in an area with a diverse group of riders.

“There have been some really bad crashes in the last couple years involving vulnerable road users, and it really highlights why it’s very important that the city follow through on its commitments here, and this is a really important route,” Rogove said. “It sort of just goes right through the heart of the city. There’s three public schools, a bunch of daycares, the public library.”

“The streets should be for everyone,” Rogove added.

Frustrations with the city

The area surrounding Broadway is a dense residential neighborhood — more so than Cambridge Street or many other previous projects. The proposed street plans would significantly reduce parking, leading to concerns from the many residents.

“[I am] concerned about the massive loss of parking,” said John Pitkin, a member of the Mid-Cambridge Parking Committee. He accused the city of not paying attention to the needs of drivers. “[N]obody in the city and, in fact, nobody in the press covers the interests of the 37,000 people in Cambridge who drive their cars.



Courtesy of the City of Cambridge

Aerial view of separated bike lanes at a Cambridge intersection.

[Driving] is a part of our transportation system.”

Pitkin is a known opponent of bike lanes who previously sued the city to stop their installation.

Debby Shapiro, who lives on Broadway, called the loss of parking “a disaster in the making.”

“Currently, there are over 200 new housing units with no dedicated parking either planned or in

and the competition for parking will become even more brutal. This is not a well-thought out plan.”

Cassa said Cambridge Bike Safety has proposed solutions to common complaints, such as turning metered parking into residential spots. Erich Trieschman, a resident in the Broadway area and member of the project work-

ried about his neighbors having to move. “[The city would] rather have people have to leave the city than require bicyclists to use another street if they’re uncomfortable on Broadway,” he said.

Diana Yousef, a Cambridge resident and now inactive member of the working group, and Lyon share concerns about accessibility. For some, including elderly and

process and a well-informed one. The lanes on Cambridge St., some residents say, were put in too quickly. This time, an interactive map let residents comment anonymously (with over 300 suggestions to date) and the project working group was formed.

“It felt like an actually decent balance between a couple people who genuinely want to remove bike lanes from the whole city and bike advocates,” Trieschman said about the working group.

According to Lyon, however, the group is “strictly a Band-Aid.”

“It’s not a Broadway safety improvement project, it’s a bicycle lane entitlement project,” Lyon, a fellow member of the working group, said.

Yousef agreed, citing a lack of transparency between the city and its residents.

Wolfe said that “we all at the city still want to hear from people about those concerns, and suggestions or feedback.”

But Yousef wrote, “The premise of the committee is flawed,



Tom Meek

Bike lanes being placed in front the main branch of the Cambridge Public Library on Broadway.

development within a two-block area along Broadway,” Shapiro said via email. “Add to that the elimination of 60% of existing spots on Broadway for bike lanes

ing group, also said bike advocates in the working group are aware of parking concerns.

David Lyon, who lives on a street off Broadway, is also wor-

disabled individuals, biking is not possible.

“Many who will face hardship due to the ever-increasing reductions in parking availability do not disagree that we want streets to be safe for all, but the way the City has gone about this in such a heavy handed, non-inclusive, data-blind and non-transparent manner is quite a disappointment,” Yousef said in an email.

Wolfe said that “In order to do these projects [removing parking] is a necessary part. It’s not necessarily that we’re just removing parking for parking’s sake, but we just have very limited space on the road.”

Taking feedback

Many residents feel that in prior projects, the city has struggled to find the balance between a speedy



Courtesy of The City of Cambridge

A cyclist travels on a dedicated bike lane in Cambridge.

because it is trying to invite ‘buy in’ after the policy has already been decided on. That isn’t buy in — that’s trying to confer the look of ‘buy in’ after the key decisions have already been made.”

Trieschman said he wished the city was more willing to listen to the group’s non-bike related proposals, including implementing other kinds of traffic control. Overall, though, he is “overwhelmingly happy” with the city’s work on bike safety. He hopes bikers from “8 to 80” will feel comfortable using the lanes on Broadway.



Tom Meek

A future bike lane in Section B of the Broadway Safety Improvement Project takes form.

■ Do you know of a business opening or closing in Cambridge or Somerville? Send news to business@cambridgeday.com.

BUSINESS

Somerville mayor backs theatre in Davis Square

By TOM MEEK

Somerville Mayor Jake Wilson is concerned about potential disruption to the Somerville Theatre as a result of its home, the Hobbs Building, being put up for sale and will work to make sure it continues its legacy.

“We are gearing up a planning process for Davis Square, and I can assure you that as we develop our vision for the square, the community will be loud and clear that Somerville Theatre needs to be a part of that future,” Wilson said in a statement emailed to Cambridge Day.

Wilson called the Theatre “a beloved institution in Somerville,” adding that “it’s not only a favorite place for catching a movie — I couldn’t possibly count how many films and shows I’ve seen there over the years — it’s a really unique anchor for the arts and the building is a historical treasure.”

The statement also noted the theatre has two potential protections from redevelopment:

- Its home, the Hobbs Building, is listed on the National Register of Historic Places, giving it access to federal and state historic preservation tax credits. These give owners incentives to carry out historically accurate restorations instead of new construction.
- The city said the building is also a Local Historic District, so alterations to it would require a certificate of appropriateness, a certificate of non-applicability or a certificate of hardship from the Somerville Historic Preservation Commission. An owner would have to prove extreme economic hardship or structural danger to make any significant changes to the exterior architectural design of the building.

The building, as well as the building that the Capitol Theater in Arlington occupies, is owned by the Fraiman family’s Chatham Light Realty trust. Melvin Fraiman, who died in 2022, bought the Hobbs Building in 1984. The Fraimans also operated both theaters until last year, when they transitioned ownership of those businesses to Ian Brownell, Ian Judge, Jamie Mattchen and John “Jay” O’Leary. The four have long been involved with the business as managers, and now operate as CSB (Capitol Somerville Ballroom) Theaters.

The CSB partners have expressed confidence that a sale would not disrupt their operations at least in the short-term because they have a multi-year lease. They issued a statement that said “While the uncertainty surrounding a sale is unnerving for everyone who treasures these places, and especially for those who rely on them for their livelihoods, we’re cautiously optimistic about the future.”

The Hobbs Building, 49-55

Davis Square in Somerville, and the Capitol Theater at 202-218 Massachusetts Avenue in Arlington, have been listed for \$12 million each.

Carl Christie, vice president of Hunneman Reality, the firm handling the sale, said it has “received multiple offers” both for individual assets and the portfolio (both theaters and an apartment complex on 36 College Avenue, also in Davis Square). Potential buyers have included investment groups and also some entertainment interests, though he would not confirm speculation, or perhaps wishful thinking, that bidders might include locals who became stars like Ben Affleck and Matt Damon or Mindy Kaling.

Christie said there is no set time for final offers.



Ruth Tam

The Hobbs Building, home to the Somerville Theatre, is for sale.

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EVENTS

Danehy Park, 99 Sherman St., in Neighborhood 9 just east of Fresh Pond.

Saturday, July 25, Noon to 6 p.m.

11th Annual Cambridge Jazz Festival

Free to \$20. Relax on the grass and enjoy world-class musicians, food and merchandise vendors and a children's area. Runs through Sunday.

Tuesday, Aug. 4, 6 p.m.

Ezra Rudel

Free. The trumpet player and composer from Cambridge plays music inspired by folk traditions.

Friday, July 24, 4 p.m.
Davis Square, Somerville.

Nice, a Fest

\$45 or \$120 for 3-day event. NICE, a fest is a celebration of the Boston and New England indie music scene presented by Get To The Gig Boston. More than 80+ indie artists across three venues and a massive outdoor record, art and vintage market, after parties, kickoff event and more through Sunday.

Thursday, July 23, 7 p.m.
Porter Square Books, 1815 Massachusetts Ave., Porter Square.

Elizabeth Preston and Perrin Roosevelt Ireland share a debut of books shaped by science of animals

Free but RSVP. Science journalist Preston's book, "The Creatures' Guide to Caring" is a journey through the evolution of caretaking on Earth, from animal parents to modern-day humans while environmentalist Roosevelt Ireland details the sex roles and relationships of animals in "Poking the Squid."



Scan here for more events.

Urban Park Roof Garden at Kendall Center, 325 Main St., Kendall Square.

Tuesday, July 28, 5 to 7 p.m.

Summer in the City

Free. The singer, songwriter, producer, and DJ's sound is an eclectic mix, heavily inspired by opera, psychedelic, indie/alternative and neo-soul. Brooklyn performs as part of Berklee's Summer in the City 2026 concert series.

Wednesday, Aug. 5, Noon

Lunchtime Concert: Ivy Boy

Free. Ivy Boy is the indie folk project of Boston-based singer-songwriter Perry Eaton. Its self-titled debut album was released in October.

Sunday, Aug. 2, 7:30 p.m.
The Burren, 247 Elm St., Davis Square.

Tiger Moan First Sunday Blues featuring Jondra Harmon

\$25. Tiger Moan is in the fourth year of their residency playing first Sundays every month at the Burren Backroom. Tiger Moan has entertained blues and swing dancers at events such as Sweet Molasses Blues, Blues Union, Yale Swing & Blues and MIT's Bread & Bones fusion dance. Vocalist Jondra Harmon's work centers the stories of Black and queer ancestors, shared through voice, memory and sound.

Monday, Aug. 3, 8 p.m.
The Sinclair, 52 Church St., Harvard Square.

Elliott in concert

\$25. Elliott is an American emo band from Louisville, Kentucky. They released three albums: the most recent, "Song in the Air" released in 2002.

Thursday, July 30, 5 to 9 p.m.
Harvard Art Museums, 32 Quincy St., near Harvard Square.

Harvard Art Museums at Night

Free. Gather with friends and mingle inside the Italian-inspired courtyard. DJ C-Zone sets the mood with smooth, curated sounds as you chat, snack, sip and catch up over bites and drinks available for purchase from local vendors.

Club Passim, 47 Palmer St., Harvard Square.

Monday, July 27, 8 p.m.

Eleni Mandell performs

\$30 to \$35. With over 10 solo albums, Mandell has carved out a singular lane blending folk, noir jazz, roots rock and literate pop music.

Saturday, Aug. 1, 7 p.m.

Billy Novick & Guy Van Duser perform

\$35. A musical duo for more than 40 years, Billy Novick and Guy Van Duser have performed in concerts, clubs and festivals all over North America and Europe. They have been frequent guests of the "Prairie Home Companion" show and NPR's "All Things Considered."

Monday, July 27, 7 p.m.
Harvard Book Store, 1256 Massachusetts Ave., Cambridge.

Meg Richardson reads from "Paradise Pawn"

Free. Translator and cartoonist Richardson's debut novel, "Paradise Pawn" is based on her own experiences working behind the counter of a pawn shop. This story follows teens working in a pawn shop in Cherry Beach, Florida, handling everything from Cartier jewelry to chainsaws to cars. Translator Hannah Kauders joins.

Friday, July 24, 8 p.m.
Massachusetts Institute of Technology's Kresge Auditorium, 48 Massachusetts Ave.

MIT Summer Philharmonic Orchestra: Celebrating Hope & Optimism

Free. Under the direction of Music Director and Conductor George Ogata, accomplished musicians from MIT perform two masterpieces: Prokofiev's Symphony No. 5 and Dvořák's Symphony No. 9, "From the New World."

Friday, July 31, 6:30 to 8:30 p.m.

Outdoor Movie: "It Happened One Night"

Free. A reporter trailing a runaway heiress for a big story joins her on a bus heading from Florida to New York and they end up stuck with each other when the bus leaves them behind.

Kendall/MIT Open Space at 292 Main St., Kendall Square.

Wednesday, July 29, 12:15 to 1 p.m.

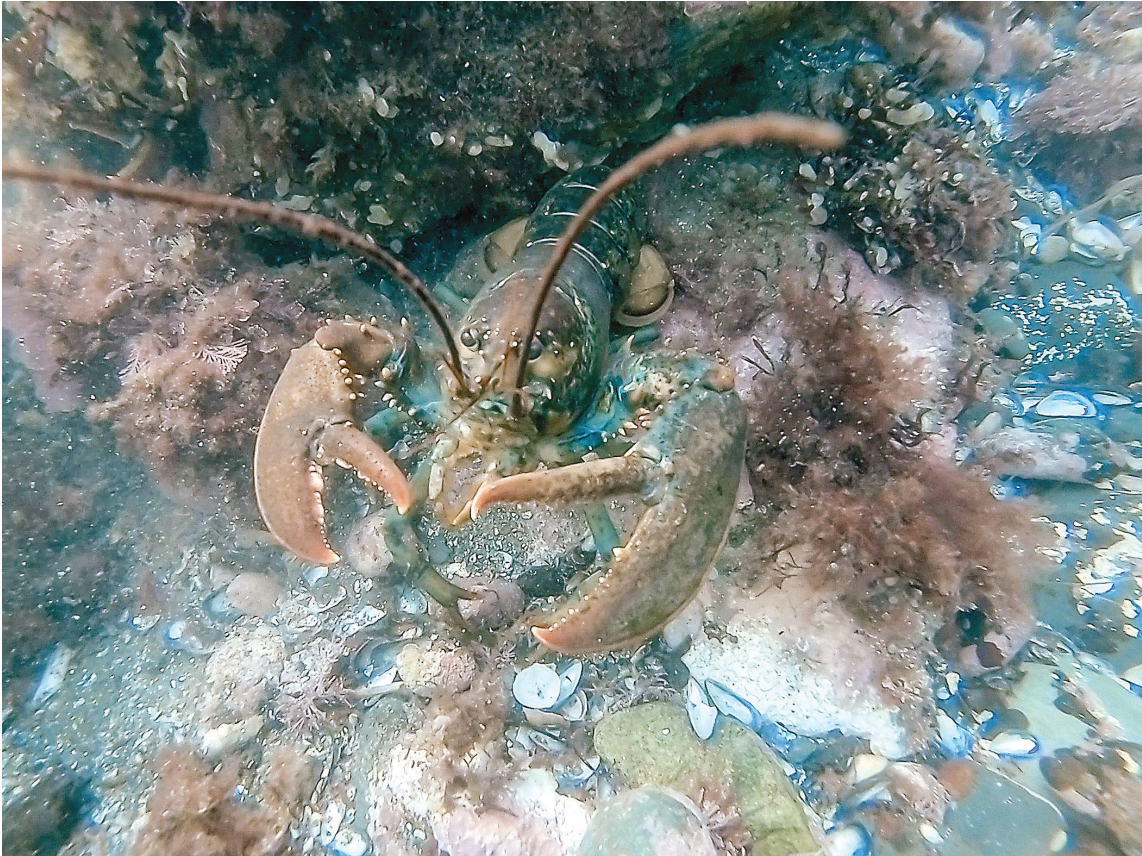
Middy Music: Angel Subero & Latin Logic

Free, but register. Venezuelan trombone virtuoso and bandleader Subero has shared the stage with Aretha Franklin, Slide Hampton, Jim McNeely, Claudio Roditi, Danilo Pérez and Chris Botti. With Latin Logic, he mixes old-school salsa, Latin jazz and Afro-Caribbean rhythms, drawing on the diverse backgrounds of its members.

■ Send your high-resolution images of urban wild things with location, date, photographer's name and other useful information for possible use online to photography@cambridgeday.com.

WILD THINGS

Lobsters are smart, except the ones you eat



A diver spotted this lobster in 13 feet of water near Nahant, September 2019.

By JEANINE FARLEY

There's a good reason lobsters and New England go hand-in-hand. Their presence in the Atlantic waters off our coast goes back millions of years, and the fact that they helped many early European settlers survive means these critters are an essential part of New England history.

These crustaceans make an appearance in 1623 in then-Governor William Bradford's Of Plymouth Plantation. Of the plight of some early settlers to the Plymouth colony, he wrote:

These passengers . . . were in a very low condition, many were ragged in aparell[sic], and some little better than half naked. . . . For food they were all alike. . . . The best dish they could present their friends with was a lobster . . . without anything else but a cup of fair spring water.

The shellfish were also large—nothing like our one-pound lobsters of today. According to Rev. Francis Higginson, who, after being persecuted in England for his Puritan views, settled at Naumkeag (now Salem, Massachusetts) in 1629:

We take plenty of . . . lobsters, that the least boy in the plantation may both catch and eat what he will of them. For my own part I was soon cloyed with them, they were so great, and fat, and luscious. I have seen some myself that have weighed 16 pound, but others have had great lobsters as have weighed 25 pound, as they assured me.

Their quantity was also impressive. In 1634, William Wood, in

New England's [sic] Prospect, described how Indigenous women would make long treks to the shore to gather a load of lobsters:

This is an everyday walk, be the weather cold or hot, the waters rough or calm, they must dive sometimes overhead for a lobster, which often shakes them by their hands with a churlish nip, and bids them adieu. The tide being spent, they trudge home two or three miles, with a hundred weight of lobsters at their backs.



Lobsters have five pairs of legs. If they lose a leg, they will regrow it.

The reason for their presence in our area is that lobsters prefer cold water, and therefore are most abundant in northern coastal waters. The largest lobster ever recorded was also around here: A fisherman off the coast of Nova Scotia captured a 44.4-pound, possibly 100-year-old lobster in 1977 and sold it to a restaurant owner in New York.

Today, lobster fishermen catch lobsters in traps. You have probably seen buoys marking traps if you have been on a boat in Boston Harbor or waters farther north. Lobster fishermen have long thought they were outwitting lobsters by building clever traps containing bait at the end of a long funnel-shaped tunnel, the idea being that lobsters can crawl into the trap, but they cannot get

back out. However, researchers at the University of New Hampshire put video cameras in lobster traps, only to discover that 94 percent of lobsters escaped back out the way they entered or through a small vent. Only six percent of entering lobsters were actually captured in the trap! (When you eat a lobster, you may be dining on a dolt who failed the exit exam.)

The 94 percent that do make it out can live for a long time. A one-pound adult lobster may be about five years old and have shed and regrown its shell, called molting, about two dozen times. Once they reach sexual maturity, however, lobsters molt less frequently. After an adult female molts, she mates and produces 5,000 to 100,000 eggs. Larger females produce more eggs. They carry the eggs underneath the tail for nine months or longer. When the eggs hatch, the female waves her tail in the cur-

rent to release the one-third inch larvae, which rise to the surface and eat plankton. Still, only about one in a thousand survives. The larvae grow and molt regularly. It isn't until their fourth molt that they metamorphose to look like what we know as bottom-dwelling lobster with claws.

Speaking of claws, did you know that half of lobsters are left-handed and half are right-handed? The larger of a lobster's two claws is called the crusher, a stout claw with slow muscle fibers that closes slowly to crush prey. The other is the cutter, which has sharp inner edges, fast muscle fibers, and closes rapidly to hold and tear

prey. A lobster with the crusher on the left side is considered to be left-handed and vice versa. Baby lobsters have two claws that are the same on each side, but as they grow, the claw they use the most develops into the crusher while the other becomes the cutter.

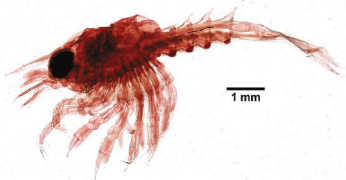
That bilateral theme continues



A lobster trap entrance is a funnel-shaped tunnel. Nearby is a bait bag, traditionally filled with herring.

with bladders—lobsters have one on each side of their head. Most of the chemicals that lobsters use to communicate are in their urine. They send out long pulses of urine three to six feet in front of them when they detect a potential mate or enemy. They have long, hairy antennae covered with nerve cells to detect these chemicals, known as pheromones, and other odors.

And despite seeming commonplace in New England, the number of lobsters in our waters today does not rival the numbers when the first Europeans arrived. In 1637, Thomas Morton wrote of New England: "Lobsters are there infinite in store in all the parts of the land." Today, no one would describe the lobster population as infinite. Warming oceans, overfishing, and diseases are challenges to today's lobster populations that may be more difficult to overcome than escaping from a trap.



Courtesy of H. Milne Edwards, Photo by Eric A. Lazo-Wasem
Preserved specimen of a young lobster, circa 1837.



Because the eggs resemble raspberries, an egg-carrying female lobster is said to be "in berry."



Lobster fishermen pulling up a lobster trap.

Tabor Chichakly

FILM

LOCAL FOCUS



A still from Robb Moss' documentary, "The Bend in the River."

Marquee moment for local docs

By OSCAR GOFF

Next Wednesday sees screenings from a pair of local documentary filmmakers, one in our backyard, the other a quick car (or bike, or 66 bus) ride away. At the **Somerville Museum**, filmmaker Anne Continelli debuts her new documentary short **"A Matter of Light"** (2026), about the artist collective at Somerville's legendary Vernon Street Studios and the challenges local artists face today. Meanwhile, down at the **Woods Hole Film Festival**, Cambridge native Robb Moss presents his new documentary feature **"The Bend in the River"** (2025), following a group of friends from their days as hippies rafting through the Grand Canyon in the 1970s to navigating the realities of time and aging. And if you can't make it to Woods Hole, Moss will appear closer to home on Thursday, moderating a Q&A with fellow Cantabrigian documentarian Ross McElwee across the river at the **Coolidge Corner Theatre** for a screening of the latter's new film, **"Remake"** (2026). Cambridge and Somerville remain a vital home for the arts, and it's always fascinating to see local filmmakers make good.

The **Brattle Theatre** will be closed this week as its seats get a much-needed refresh, but that doesn't mean you have to go without its ace repertory programming. On Friday, the Brattle team returns to **MIT Open Space** for another installment of its "Animated Animals" series of free outdoor screenings. This week's selection is **"Space Jam"** (1996), the ubiquitous '90s blockbuster in which Bugs Bunny and his fellow Looney Tunes join forces with basketball superstar Michael Jordan to stop a team of evil alien hoopsters. As odd (and undeniably commercialized) as its premise is, "Space Jam" remains a fiercely beloved totem of '90s-kid nostalgia, and a fascinating snapshot of Jordan and other real-life athletes at the height of their fame. And who can pass up an evening under the stars with some of the greatest cartoon characters of all time?

Of course, not all anthropomorphic animals are created equal. On Saturday, the **Somerville Theatre's** "Midnight Specials" series offers up a true rarity: a 70mm print of the notorious '80s bomb **"Howard the Duck"** (1986). Based on the cult classic comic book by maverick creator Steve Gerber (making this the very first Marvel movie!), "Howard" sounded like a surefire proposition on paper, produced by George Lucas and written by "American Graffiti" scribes Willard Huyck and Gloria Katz and released in the heady days of the '80s blockbuster. However, a film about a talking, cigar-chomping duck in love with Lea Thompson is a tough sell, and audiences stayed away in droves.

The result is one of the most profoundly strange Hollywood films of the 1980s — not "good" by any stretch, but so wrong in all the right ways that one simply can't look away. In any event, it's remained in the public consciousness long after many bigger hits of the day have faded away, so it seems like Howard has the last quack after all.

On Sunday, the great **Jeff Rapsis** returns to the Somerville for another installment of "Silents, Please!" providing live musical accompaniment to another gem of the silent age. This month's title is the rarely screened **"Chang: A Drama of the Wilderness"** (1927). Shot in the forests of northern Thailand (then known as Siam), "Chang" is a quasi-documentary following a family of farmers as they fight for survival against the elements. Though the intertitles are somewhat orientalized (to say nothing of the title itself) and some sequences are clearly staged, "Chang" contains rare and priceless footage of the people, customs, and wildlife of Thailand in the early part of the 20th century. Equally significant are directors Merian C. Cooper and Ernest B. Schoedsack, who, six years later, would return to the jungle for a much more famous adventure: 1933's "King Kong." (Note: "Chang: A Drama of the Wilderness" contains hunting scenes which, while undoubtedly a part of life in rural Thailand at the time, may be upsetting to some viewers. Those sensitive to violence against animals are advised to exercise discretion.)

Last week, the world said goodbye to actor Sam Neill, whose performances in Hollywood hits and arthouse favorites alike made him a favorite to generations of moviegoers. On Tuesday, as luck would have it, the **Kendall Square Cinema** screens perhaps Neill's most famous performance: that of paleontologist Alan Grant in Steven Spielberg's **"Jurassic Park"** (1993). With its groundbreaking special effects and all-timer of a John Williams score, "Jurassic Park" would have been a hit regardless of which humans starred opposite its dinos, yet Neill's performance goes a long way toward selling the majesty of the film's prehistoric beasts. With his rakish hat and bandana, Dr. Grant initially appears to be an Indiana Jones figure, the film's unflappable action hero. Yet, when he first lays eyes upon a living, breathing dinosaur, Neill portrays Grant as overcome with emotion — as, of course, a career paleontologist would be. The humanity Neill brings to the role is a huge part of why "Jurassic Park" works not only as spectacle, but as a satisfying emotional experience. Sam Neill may have left us, but his performances live on — and any excuse to see "Jurassic Park" on the big screen is worth acting on.

REVIEWS



Getty Images

From left: Jimmy Gonzales, Matt Damon and Himesh Patel in "The Odyssey."

Ancient antihero

Christopher Nolan's \$250 million retelling of Homer's classic sword-and-sandal epic is here. And it is also epic, with a nearly three-hour running time. The film delivers, if unevenly, but when the bow is strung and taut, "The Odyssey" flies with fury and purpose. Even though we know how the millennia-old story ends, there are still surprises and moments of wonder.

The central conflict in "The Odyssey" is not battle. It's a post-war saga centered on Odysseus's 20-year trek home after the conclusion of the 10-year Trojan War — you know, the one over Helen, the face that launched a thousand ships. Troy (in modern-day Turkey) was a strategic foothold and a gateway between the Aegean and Black seas — you could think of it as the Strait of Hormuz circa 1200 B.C.

In their shared narrative, Homer and Nolan aren't so concerned with the blood shed over land and prized hostages. "The Odyssey" is about the turmoil within its antihero as he struggles to fulfill his obligations to the gods, while trying to stay the agent of his own destiny. Odysseus bears the burden of his choices — the fate of his men, the downstream horrors of his military tactics and so on — while, his wife Penelope, some 400 miles away, fends off lecherous suitors as the fate of their son, Telemachus, hangs in the balance.

That's a lot to deal with without GPS to guide you, but there are the gods, and they see all. Odysseus, played with phlegmatic cool by a sculpted Matt Damon, is the keen strategist who engineered the Trojan Horse that led to the sacking of Troy and ended the war. He's also an assured reasoner who believes he can outthink the gods, or find loose strings in oracle-bound prophecies that leave room for different results. Hubris, a central theme in many Greek myths, seals many fates here.

The plot is launched when Odysseus shoots out the eye of Cyclops and boasts about it. (Cyclops had gruesomely snacked on several of Odysseus's detachment.) But it's not a good idea to brag and tag when the bully you put down is the son of Poseidon, and you want to cross his watery realm to get home. And so the ire of the god of the sea catalyzes Odysseus's long and circuitous trip.

"The Odyssey" is strongest when Odysseus is back on the shores of Ithaca and dressed as a beggar, gaining favor with his blind, loyal swineherd Eumaeus (an unrecognizable John Leguizamo) and plotting with his son (Spider-Man portrayer Tom Holland). They assess the mounting situation with his wife (a doe-eyed Anne Hathaway, and the loutish court of suitor bro-dom led by the manipulatively imperious Antinous (Robert Pattinson owning his character's smarminess). It's within the palace walls that the film registers the most intrigue and suspenseful tension.

Throughout the movie, there are flashbacks to the Trojan War that are, brutal and stunning, though sometimes confusing and garbled. Their details make Nolan's "Odyssey" more real and affecting than other retellings of the myth.

Nolan and frequent cameraman Hoyte van Hoytema ("Oppenheimer," "Dunkirk") shot the film entirely on IMAX cameras — a first.

Nolan was inspired by Emily Wilson's 2017 translation, which brings a greater female gaze to the patriarchal-leaning lore. And there are women at the forefront. Holed up in Ithaca, a resourceful Penelope uses both her charms and intellect to stave off the thuggish suitors — though the fear of male violence is noticeably etched on her brow. A compassionate Athena (Zendaya) lends counsel to the wandering Odysseus. The fiery vengeance of Clytemnestra (Lupita Nyong'o, who also plays her sister Helen) closes any argument about female passivity in this telling.

The cast is impressive, with diverse and intriguing choices. Take Benny Safdie as Agamemnon, seen almost entirely from the back of his head or in shrouded shadows; Jon Bernthal as Menelaus, Agamemnon's brother, Helen's husband, and military collaborator of Odysseus; or Elliot Page as the ill-fated Sinon. Charlize Theron plays Calypso, Odysseus's stranded island lover for seven drug-induced years. Zendaya and Pattinson, who paired together earlier this year for the locally shot, dark rom-com, "The Drama," get respectively lost in the flatness and bombast of their parts.

Samantha Morton is the film's secret sauce as Circe, the witch whose neat culinary skills and incantations turn much of Odysseus's crew into pigs: a rendering of who they are deep down inside, or that's how she frames it with a bit of #MeToo ire. The big surprise is Leguizamo, as the swineherd, who delivers a deep, slow simmer of a performance, imbuing passion, grit, and vulnerability into the part that's further informed by the character's blindness. It's a career-capping turn that should be remembered come awards season. The film ultimately hangs on Damon's shoulders as a war-weary warrior haunted by the ghosts of his men and driven to atone and honor their souls.

Nolan's quest to bring home the elusive essence of Homer's sea-swept verses, propelled by human flaw and relentless perseverance, is a passion project whose earnestness you can feel frame by frame. The film doesn't emerge from the gate on steady legs, but when it finds them, it can really run.



Playing at AMC Assembly Row 13 (IMAX), Apple Cinemas Cambridge, Kendall Square and the Somerville Theater (wide screen)

■ Do you know of a restaurant opening or closing in Cambridge or Somerville, or do you have other food news tips? Send them to business@cambridgeday.com.

FOOD

Firmin

From Page 1

It's his go-to, he says, that he enjoys more often than he should. The shop sits conveniently between school and the apartment he shares with his older sister, down Massachusetts Avenue. The 77 bus basically drops him at the taqueria's door.

I order a bowl, lettuce, extra tomato (vitamin C!), chicken, and large scoops of guacamole. My plate looks restrained next to his. It takes a few minutes of graduation talk before I understand something Firmin's coach had already warned me about. "I'm very, like, not really antisocial," he mutters, choosing his words carefully. "But I don't like to talk a lot if I don't have to."

By the time his tray is in front of him, though, he has detailed one of the few things that seems to break through what he calls "the craziest case of senioritis:" what to do after graduation?

He might go to Hampton University in Virginia next fall, he says. If he does, he would like to play basketball. It's D-1 after all. The Hampton coach has suggested a postgraduate year of prep school first — a year to grow into his body — but his father thinks he might be able to skip it by doing a summer program. Firmin has never been to Hampton. In fact, he has never been to Virginia. "It would be really, like, a new start," he says. "I could start my whole life over."

He is leaning toward that. He thinks. During our conversation, he often gets a faraway look, as if he is still thinking — hard. As a result, 20 minutes in, his quesadilla lies largely untouched while my bowl is more than halfway done.

Whichever route he takes, he hopes that basketball will be part of it. It seems to have always been a part of him. Among his earliest memories: his father plopping him down in front of Celtics games every chance he got. Dad made sure there was always a hoop of some kind nearby, too. Today, the younger Firmin swears he has no memory of ever not being a basketball player. "Even as a little kid, I was just already locked in."

"Basketball's my identity a little bit," he admits, as if that's a problem. "I don't really have a plan for college. I know I want to study finance. I just don't know what I want to be."

I assure him no one knows what they want to be. Even at my age (no disclosure), I am still figuring it out. He laughs in the way that suggests he has heard this kind of thing from grown-ups before and has mostly decided to wait and see.

What he is certain about is how much he will miss his hometown of Cambridge. His voice floods with emotion as he recounts his educational path — Morse for elementary, Putnam Avenue for middle school, and CRLS for high school. He talks about growing up in his grandmother's house. Relatives who seem to be everywhere in town. Cousins here, grand-

mother there, his sister down the street, and even his godfather, Geo Rodriguez, CRLS grad and member of the school's 2001 state championship team, who doubles as his coach on the court.

What, I ask, is he going to miss most about Cambridge? Firmin tips his head back and almost howls, never losing his smile. "Everything," he says, staring out again through the window onto Brattle Street. First off, Central Square. Although, he says, it has gone strangely quiet. "Nobody's in Central no more. It's crazy." His elementary school, which he walks past now with the feeling that he can't believe he was ever that small. The gym. And, of course, friends. When I point out that they will mostly be gone, too, he nods, adding, "but also the walking-around part." He pauses and takes a bite. "Everything."

One thing he might not miss is the inevitable confusion that resulted from sharing a first and last name with his father. Firmin Sr. was also a product of Cambridge and among other things, a well-recognized rapper before he moved out of town several years ago. Firmin Jr. makes it quite clear that rapping is not his thing. "He got all the rapping skill," he chuckles. "Or maybe my sister took it." Is he anything like his father? At first, he pushes the answer off to his mom or his sister. "Oh, wait," he says. "I can't save money," he confesses with a laugh. "He could save money. Really good. I can't." Firmin says it's part of the reason he is thinking about finance as a college major.

My lunch companion takes another bite of his meal. A quick sip of his water. (I have never seen a teen eat so slowly. My bowl is empty.)

The more he talks, the many other ways basketball shaped his short life. He played casually in middle school — during school, after school, and on weekends with his friendships defined by the peers he met on the court. This past season — Rindge lost in the second round of the playoffs — Firmin started at point guard, his position for as long as he can remember. He explains he is a lefty so his favorite place to shoot from is the left corner. "I think that's just wired into me a little bit." When he is working out ("I haven't done it since the season ended," he murmurs shamefully, hanging his head), he benches 225. His vertical? Maybe because he is only 5' 6" ("me too!" I blurt out) he has never measured his vertical. Honestly, I am still stuck on the thought of 225 pounds. I think I can lift 10.

I ask how he ranks, against his teammates, in competitiveness. "I'm the highest," he laughs. "I'll do anything to win. Without cheating — if that makes sense," he chuckles. There's that hangdog look again.

To read the rest of this feature, scan the QR code



WHAT WE'RE HAVING

Surf and turf dogs and scampi calzones at Alice & Monarch



Tom Meek

The dining room at Alice & Monarch in Kendall Square.

By TOM MEEK

We've long been fans of the sourdough pizza at Source in Harvard Square. The eatery is named for the cultured yeast, called "Mother," that is the source for their pies. Proprietor Daniel Roughan and executive chef Brian Kevorkian kept with that matriarchal theme when they opened Alice & Monarch in Kendall Square this May, its name a tribute to Roughan's great-grandmother.

Alice & Monarch is a different space and a different concept than Source, which I humbly describe as a cozy place for comfort food with friends. Alice is more cosmopolitan and corporate, which makes sense for its Kendall Square digs, just around the corner from Flat Top Johnny's and the MIT Open Space. Monarch is the venue's downstairs night club, a speakeasy-style lounge adorned with elegant Art-Deco accents and an enigmatic vibe that calls to mind the Overlook Hotel's bar lounge back in its 1920s heyday.

It's an impressive space that works on many levels — and that is clearly the aim. It's a dining destination, a get-business-done lunch spot, and a place to unwind and meet new friends late at night. Alice is open for lunch and dinner daily, and brunch on the weekends. Some of the pizzas and pastas are the same (margherita and cresti di gallo) as those at Source, but Alice leans into a more upscale menu, with squid ink linguini and shrimp scampi pie with capers and lemon. Happily, you can get that scampi delight for lunch in an addictive calzone: succulent shrimp, lemon zest, and stewed tomatoes with the pert zing of capers, all tucked into an airy, sourdough fold. It comes with a half-salad of your choice — tri-color greens with

goat cheese and honey vanilla vinaigrette; farro with kale, roasted beets, candied walnuts, and an apple cider vinaigrette; or wild greens with fennel and a citrus vinaigrette. All this for about \$20. The half-salad is substantial. I'm partial to the farro; tender roasted beets and candied walnuts always win me over.

I'd highly recommend the branzino, a simple, pan-roasted filet with crispy skin. The dish stays moist and flaky atop a white bean ragout with roe. The ragout is tomato-leaning, lite and subtle



Tom Meek

The speakeasy-style nightclub, Monarch, located underneath Alice.

— the caviar lends little pops of salty richness.

The salads appear on both the lunch and dinner menus, as well as the octopus, lightly battered tentacle nuggets (tempura-esque) with olives and brown butter potatoes. There's also one giant raviolo stuffed with a soft-cooked egg and cheese, lightly toasted with a hearty cream sauce. For either lunch or dinner, both make for nice starters.

When Alice first opened, it boasted a seafood sausage on its lunch menu. It was the reason I went to Alice several times, only to find it wasn't there — it had sold out or the seafood shipment hadn't come in. I'd never heard of a seafood sausage before Dear Annie introduced its Sea Dog — and while I was apprehensive, the rich, savory juiciness of the

shrimp, scallops, and whitefish combo was transformative. So when I saw it on the Alice slate, my brow arched in flavorful anticipation. But I never got to try it. After three or four misses, I was told the sea sausage was leaving the menu and being replaced by a surf and turf hotdog. Say what? I asked?

Sometimes it's best not to ask questions and just roll with it. The new menu item came on a toasted roll, a hand-packed wagyu-beef hotdog topped with delicately poached lobster meat and kisses of caviar. The combination of savory and succulent played well together and the varying textures offered individual tastes of the proteins.

Monarch has its own menu that leans toward decadent and sweet. Desserts include a baked Alaska, chocolate soufflé tart, and a strawberry tartare, as well as fanciful finger victuals for snacking; ceviche, foie gras, arancini, and, for the late night hungry, steak frites.

Given its locale between the tech-heavy Kendall hub and MIT, Alice & Monarch seems aptly positioned; t's right off the T and there are parking deals at the garage next door. The revamp of Main Street in Kendall Square has seen the arrival of Roy 34 and the build out of Eastern Edge, and now, at the southern end of Main, the merry matriarchy of Alice & Monarch has come to roost with good food and grand style.

Alice & Monarch
285 Main Street, Kendall Square
\$\$\$ (out of \$\$\$\$)
<https://aliceandmonarch.com/>

Have a favorite dish or dine out spot that we've not covered and you think we should? Email Tom at tmeek@cambridgeday.com.

BOOKS

Existential philosophy with Jell-O: A recipe for readers

We asked the staff at the MIT Press Bookstore for some recent book recommendations. Head over to 314 Main St. in Kendall Square, to continue the conversation.

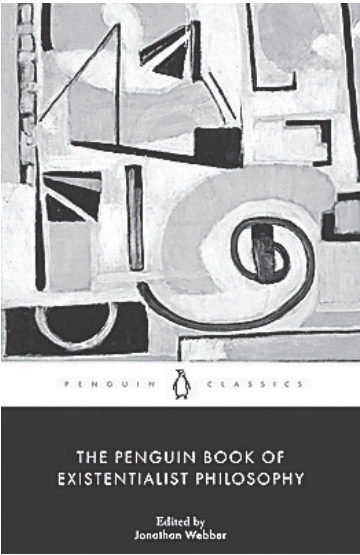
“The Penguin Book of Existential Philosophy,” edited by Jonathan Webber
Penguin Classics, 2026

Focusing on the work of Sartre, de Beauvoir and Fanon, this recent collection will either take you back to your undergraduate café days or catapult you into them. It is a solid collection and ready reference to an important philosophical movement, including Existentialist inspirations like Kierkegaard, Heidegger, and, of course, Nietzsche. This book will look great with a creased cover and dogeared pages on that café countertop.

— recommended by Rebecca

“Solid Wiggles: Recipes and Techniques for Phenomenal Jelly Shots and Cakes,” by Jena Derman and Jack Schramm
Ten Speed Press, 2026

After you’ve finished sinking into the espresso-dark depths of mid-century Continental philosophy, bring yourself back up with the hot summer party vibes of “Solid Wiggles,” a collection of nearly 50 fun, fresh gelatin recipes. Perfect



for entertaining, these colorful confections, swirled with spin art spirals and dots, are also perfect for enjoying as art even if you don’t intend to open a single Jell-O packet. If you are feeling creative, there’s a whole section about how to create these design effects yourself with basic kitchen and crafting tools. Wiggly bottoms up!

— recommended by Rebecca

“Soviet Scientific Institutes,” by Eric Lusito
FUEL Publishing, 2026

Photographer Eric Lusito trekked to over 20 scientific institutes across the former Soviet bloc, and the resultant small-format photo book is a record of ruin and of resilience, of beautiful murals



trumpeting the triumph of science rising above disused mechanical hulks, and a record of scientific work continuing through years of tremendous upheaval. Scientists and technicians continue working at some of these facilities, and Lusito includes their images and stories, along with brief historical descriptions of each facility.

— recommended by Rebecca

“This Census Taker,” by China Miéville.
Del Rey, 2017

A boy witnesses a murder. Or perhaps he doesn’t. And who, exactly, was killed?

China Miéville often builds his worlds through implication rather than cold accounting of specific histories, and he will frequently drop a tantalizing detail only to never elaborate on it, creating a

sense that the story of the protagonist is only one part of a larger cacophony of life rather than the center of the universe. Personally, I’m a fan, but I can’t blame anyone who finds that approach frustrating. So it’s a real treat to see this habit crystallized into “This Census Taker,” a tone poem on the anxiety of uncertainty. Every piece of information reads like a history lesson from a child who wasn’t alive to see what he describes, and only half-remembers what he’s been told. As an extra stylistic flourish, the narrator cannot decide whether to refer to himself in the first or third person.

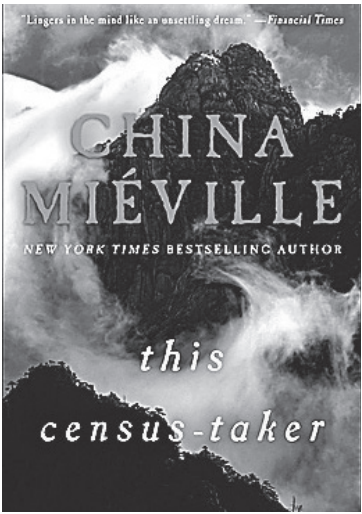
Not an easy read, but a fascinating curiosity for those already fond of Miéville’s antics.

— recommended by Rae

“Stubby: A Pencil’s Journey,” by Sydra Mallery and John Hare
Greenwillow Books, 2026

Is the pencil an object that spurs creativity? Yes, it is. The pencil creates as it is used and destroyed. But “Stubby: A Pencil’s Journey” is anything but a tale of destruction. It is a children’s book that celebrates this tool.

For the titular Stubby, life begins in the forest where a cedar tree grows big and straight, long before it will be turned into tiny planks to make pencils—and then to a life in a school doing math



problems, creating art, and taking tests. In this telling, the cedar tree gladly serves as a home for wildlife and provides sustenance for a mama bear and her cubs when its berries ripen. Then the loggers cut down the trees. You might think this would be a dark turn in our tale, but it is not. The story shifts into a beautiful lesson about how things are made and the journey from woodlands to city.

Stubby is now a pristine pencil who arrives at a store to be bought for school. And that’s where the creativity really takes off. By the second half of the book, our Stubby is, in fact, a stub of a pencil—with teeth marks and all—who reviews a life of passing through hands, drawing pictures, playing with students, and doing math.

— recommended by Carol

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THE COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS MASSACHUSETTS DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION – HIGHWAY DIVISION NOTICE OF A PUBLIC INFORMATIONAL MEETING

Project Description: Cambridge – Bridge Replacement, C-01-026, Memorial Drive over Brookline Street in Cambridge, MA

Project File No. 611987

A Public Informational Meeting will be held by MassDOT to discuss the proposed project in Cambridge, MA.

WHERE: Morse School, Auditorium 40
Granite Street Cambridge, MA 02139

WHEN: Thursday, August 6th, 2026 @ 6:30pm

PURPOSE: The purpose of this meeting is to provide the public with the opportunity to become fully acquainted with the proposed project. All views and comments made at the meeting will be reviewed and considered to the maximum extent possible.

PROPOSAL: The proposed project consists of removing the existing William Reid Overpass, which, though safe for all users, has reached the end of its useful lifespan and should be replaced, with either a reconstructed intersection of

Memorial Drive and Brookline Street and a new overpass or a reconstructed intersection in which Memorial Drive and Brookline Street would cross each other at-grade. The project also proposes replacing the bridge carrying Memorial Drive over the Grand Junction Railroad Line. Additional goals of this project include significant enhancements to bicycle and pedestrian connectivity at the intersection and consolidation of transportation assets to return space to accessible parkland if possible.

This location is accessible to people with disabilities. MassDOT provides reasonable accommodations and/or language assistance free of charge upon request (including but not limited to interpreters in American Sign Language and languages other than English, open or closed captioning for videos, assistive listening devices and alternate material formats, such as audio tapes, Braille and large print), as available. For accommodation or language assistance, please contact MassDOT’s Chief Diversity and Civil Rights Officer by phone (857-368-8580), fax (857-368-0602), TTD/TTY (857-368-0603) or by email (MassDOT.CivilRights@dot.state.ma.us). Requests should be made as soon as possible prior to the meeting, and for more difficult to arrange services including sign-language, CART or language translation or interpretation, requests should be made at least ten (10) business days before the meeting.

In the event of inclement weather a cancellation announcement will be posted on the internet at <https://www.mass.gov/orgs/highway-division/events>.

JONATHAN GULLIVER
HIGHWAY ADMINISTRATOR

CARRIE E. LAVALLEE
CHIEF ENGINEER

DEVELOPMENT AND MODERNIZATION SERVICES RFP INVITATION REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS DEVELOPMENT AND MODERNIZATION SERVICES

The Cambridge Housing Authority (CHA) Planning and Development Department is seeking the services of up to three qualified consultant(s) or consultant teams experienced in affordable housing development and modernization in Massachusetts. Tasks may include financial and feasibility analyses, proforma development, project management services, and due diligence preparation. The term of the contract will be for one year. At CHA’s sole discretion contracts may be renewable for additional terms up to four additional one year terms. The maximum total fee per contract year is \$200,000 per annum. A copy of the Request for Proposals (RFP) detailing the scope of work and selection criteria will be available from CHA beginning Thursday, July 23, 2026 at 12 Noon. The deadline for submitting proposals is 2:00 PM on Monday, August 10, 2026 by mail or hand delivery to 362 Green Street, 3rd Floor, Cambridge, MA 02139; Attn: Margaret Donnelly Moran. The RFP can be obtained by contacting Millie Santana, Executive Secretary via email at: msantana@cambridge-housing.org or via telephone at: (617) 499-7133.

**SENIOR LIVING
MANAGEMENT SERVICES
AT JFK**
Cambridge Housing Authority
Request For Proposal

The Cambridge Housing Authority (CHA), as Owner and Managing Agent

for its affiliate properties, is seeking competitive proposals from qualified consultants in providing property and facility management with enhanced services for senior living at our JFK Apartment building.

The successful firm must have significant experience in providing agencies of similar size to the Cambridge Housing Authority for property management with enhanced services for senior living.

The Request for Proposal for this project will be available on **Thursday, July 22, 2026, after 10am**. Bidders may obtain the RFP Electronically by contacting procurement@cambridge-housing.org.

Proposals will be received **ELECTRONICALLY by 02:00 PM on Thursday, August 6, 2026**. Vendors should e-mail their Qualifications Proposal to **Rocky Ludger, rludger@cambridge-housing.org** and **Cost Proposal SEPARATELY to Kristen Donnelly, kdonnelly@cambridge-housing.org**. In the body of each e-mail, vendors should clearly identify the Qualifications Proposal or Cost Proposal with the name of the firm. All proposals received will become the property of the Cambridge Housing Authority and will not be returned to the proposer. Any modification or withdrawal of proposals shall be made in writing and received by the CHA prior to the time and date the proposal is due.

Any questions or requests for further information must be submitted in writing to the attention of Andrew Kerivan, Director of Asset Management, at akerivan@cambridge-housing.org no later than **2:00pm on Wednesday, July 28, 2026**. No inquiry received after the stated deadline will be considered.

■ Send letters to forpublication@cambridgeday.com with the name, address, phone number and relevant affiliations of the writer or writers

CULTURE

Board games

From Page 1

Munzer launched Mamaleh's with his business partners 10 years ago, but his obsession with backgammon stretches much longer than that. His mother played with him in the womb, he said. He's been playing for so long he doesn't remember learning the rules.

Backgammon isn't complicated – you're trying to move all your checkers off the board and all you need to do is roll dice and count. But in this simplicity lies its appeal.

When Munzer moved to Boston for college 30 years ago, he would go to Harvard Square where for decades, people have gathered to play chess. Back then, there was also a bit of a backgammon scene, run by "a bunch of old Middle Eastern men who played very aggressively."

These men knew the game so well that whenever it was Munzer's turn to roll, they knew the best move as soon as the dice landed.

"Obvious move, obvious move," they'd say over his shoulder.

From these men, Munzer cultivated toughness, but also inspiration. Fast forward to 2018, when Munzer was two years in the deli business, he made t-shirts with "Official Mamaleh's Backgammon Club" printed on the back. Was there a club then? No, but there would be one day.

When diners reemerged from COVID lockdowns in 2022, Munzer began hosting backgammon nights at Mamaleh's location in Brookline. But because the restaurant sits on a hill, sometimes the dice would go tumbling off the board.

So, Mameleh's Cambridge location became the club's new home.

Now, during the summer months, you can catch players on Thursday evenings on the deli's patio in Kendall Square.

It's important to play outdoors, Munzer said. If he was inside, he'd be paying attention to the business, which again, is not the point of his weekly gatherings. Not everything he does needs to scale up. On Thursday nights, Munzer either wants to play or coach others. Like he said, his intentions are purely selfish.

In Somerville, a backgammon night has also cropped up at Aeronaut Brewing, where Ben Wheeler has hosted a meetup every six weeks or so.

Wheeler's stepsister first taught him how to play and he developed a love for the game at community tables in New York. Once in Cambridge for grad school, he couldn't find a backgammon gathering that fit his schedule, so he threw up a date on a Meetup page, not knowing if anyone he knew would come.

The first night at Aeronaut, in 2022, brought out 10 people. Since then, it's grown roughly threefold. And now, Wheeler is no longer a grad student but a Somerville city councillor. He entered office in 2026.

Hosting a backgammon night is not all that different from being a



Photos: Ruth Tam

Mameleh's owner Alon Munzer plays backgammon on the deli's patio in Kendall Square.

politician, said Wheeler, who also works in education technology.

"It's not that [politicians] are doing some brilliant thing; it's more that they're helping facilitate connections."

At Aeronaut, Wheeler said backgammon draws people whose families hail from countries like Turkey, Ukraine, Israel or Egypt, where the game is popular.

Regardless of familiarity, Wheeler thinks backgammon is for everyone because anything

so easy to teach," said Doug Perlin, a Cambridge backgammon player who joined the meetup at Mamaleh's for the first time this summer.

"People will probably not be playing Exploding Kittens for life," he said. "'People will be playing backgammon for life.'"

Hong Kong mahjong is 'family style'

You might hear a mahjong game before you see it. The edges



Callie Lau, left, is often the youngest person playing cribbage at Dragon Pizza's tournaments.

can happen throughout the game. Luck plays a prominent factor, so experienced players are not guaranteed a win, which is different from games like chess.

"It doesn't require you to crunch your brain at every turn. It lends itself to conversation, to eating and drinking. It rewards a third person looking over your shoulder saying 'Why'd you do that? Don't you want to go over there?'"

Because of Wheeler's position in the city, sometimes conversation will drift towards politics, but it doesn't happen as often as you might expect, he said.

He joked that he wants backgammon night to become his unofficial office hours as a sitting councillor, but that it won't happen anytime soon.

"I keep on inviting people in the politics world in Somerville, but none of them have ever come," he said.

Neither Munzer nor Wheeler charge for their backgammon events. Munzer has Mamaleh's Instagram and a Google group to communicate with players while Wheeler operates a Meetup page. It's designed to be simple and to reduce barriers for new players.

"I've come across few games that have [this] kind of longevity with kids and families that [is]

of tiles tapping together is the stuff of ASMR dreams – ideal for luring players out of the hellscape of social media and back into real life.

"I feel like my attention span with TikTok is, like, eight seconds. It's so nice to touch something," Anna Shay Wasden, who plays mahjong at Aeronaut Brewing Company on the first Wednesday of every month.

"I like to hear the click-click of tiles," she said, knocking a few together in her hands.

Somerville resident Nicole Yang (center) organizes Wednesday Tile Club at Aeronaut Brewing Company with Thomas Oide.

The group, called Wednesday Tile Club, is organized by Somerville residents Nicole Yang and Thomas Oide.

Yang, who moved here in 2017, first learned how to play mahjong when she visited China with her family at age 16.

She fell in love with the game, but back in the U.S., she couldn't find a community around it beyond her home in Connecticut. Mahjong requires four people to play, which can be a barrier if you don't have an existing group to join.

Yang first heard about Aeronaut's newly formed Tile Club through a friend last summer.

Although there were a few Riichi and American mahjong gatherings in the Boston area, there weren't any for Hong Kong mahjong, which Yang plays.

She and Oide, who are a couple, came to the club's second gathering. They became the events' lead organizers late last year. They pair beginners with more seasoned players to ensure new players learn the ropes.

"Optically, it's a very intimidating game, said Oide. "But as long as you have someone who knows what they're doing and knows how to teach the game, it's not as intimidating as you might think."

Mahjong tiles set up for a game at Aeronaut Brewing.

Part of the fun of Hong Kong mahjong is its cultural component.

Mahjong is a "family-based game," said Yang. Other games, you might learn from reading instructions, but mahjong has a lot of house rules. Superstitions, even, that can inflect game play with personal flair.

One player shared with Yang her family's rule of not washing your hands during a game because it washes away all the good luck.

Another player guards their tiles after they are dealt, to avoid catching bad luck from someone else. There's a lore attached to each family's mahjong style that can be fun to learn, said Yang. And after seating strangers together, she said she enjoys watching friendships form.

"We've seen people exchange numbers, return and sit with the same people they played with last time."

"I could probably play Mahjong online all day, but this is so different," said Felicity Inthisone, a Somerville resident who attends. "I've been really trying to stay away from my phone and connect with people in real life."

The meetups also give Inthisone an opportunity to connect with her Laotian family who lives in Texas.

"My entire family plays back home. My aunt has a set. They're showing their hands and I... really want to know what's happening."

To keep from killing your brothers, play cribbage

When Charlie Redd's grand-

parents built and furnished a lake house in the Adirondacks, they didn't include a TV.

So Redd, who now lives in Somerville, and his three brothers would play board games to pass the time – cribbage, especially. The card game tempered what might have been a more embattled childhood.

Dragon Pizza owner Charlie Redd at his restaurant in Davis Square.

"We're four boys. We could easily start playing and all of a sudden like, break out knives and kill each other," he said. "Ever play Life with your siblings? S**t can get real real quick. But cribbage ... who wins? Whatever. You talk some s**t and move past it."

As Redd grew up to become a chef and restaurateur, cribbage became the backdrop for many more of his relationships.

Redd would play with his wife, and then his children. Once, while on vacation in Vermont, his family happened upon a cribbage night at the Three Penny Taproom in Montpelier.

"It was incredible," said Redd, who knew he wanted to steal the idea. "There was literally a 70-year-old man with a beard to his knees playing a woman with tats up and down her arms. Everyone was having a great time."

When he opened Dragon Pizza in 2018, he hoped to introduce the concept of a cribbage night, but it wasn't until the restaurant expanded into the space next door that the idea took shape. The dim bar and games room became known as the "Dragon's Lair" and now sees everything from table shuffleboard to Warhammer and Dungeons and Dragons to, yes, cribbage.

Callie Lau, left, is often the youngest person playing cribbage at Dragon Pizza's tournaments.

Callie Lau, a 13-year-old who lives in Cambridge, began attending cribbage nights over a year ago with her mom. She said it's not super complicated. There's a little bit of luck, a little bit of strategy.

"Once you learn it, it kind of sticks with you," she said.

Although she plays online occasionally, just clicking against the computer is "not very interesting."

Playing with others at Dragon Pizza, "you have a purpose," she said. "You're playing someone else, and you're learning about them."

The cribbage game at Dragon Pizza includes prizes, among them a crown to wear.

At Dragon Pizza, cribbage players compete monthly for a crown and prizes that Redd contributes. It's all about building something cool, he said. And if you create community along the way? Well, that's great, too.

"In hard times, games really get you through," Redd said. "It's better than doomscrolling, sitting around drinking, and watching another TV series."

"Interacting with your brain, reminding yourself that you're smart, that you're a person ... games bring all of those things."

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