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Goldfinches will soon lose color,
but their songs are still bright

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Cambridge seeks proposals
for STEAM funding

CAMBRIDGE DAY

THE WEEK OF SEPTEMBER 10 – SEPTEMBER 17, 2026 FREE

MIT professor dies in Memorial Drive bike crash

By NATHAN METCALF

An MIT professor died last Wednesday from injuries sustained in an Aug. 21 bicycle crash at Massachusetts Avenue and Memorial Drive, an intersection where bicycle advocates had warned of safety problems and mounted a campaign for improvements just weeks before the crash.

Thomas Rose, 37, was struck in a collision with a motor vehicle around 6 a.m. on Aug. 21, according to the Middlesex District Attorney's Office. Rose was taken to Massachusetts General Hospital and died Sept. 2. The driver remained at the scene.

Authorities have released few details about how the crash occurred, including what direction Rose was traveling or how the collision happened. The crash remains under investigation by the district attorney's office and Massachusetts State Police.

Rose, an archaeometallurgy expert who studied ancient metal production, joined MIT in January and was in the process of establishing a new laboratory and welcoming his first graduate students.

Last Friday afternoon, members of the MIT community, local cyclists and other mourners gathered at Killian Court, a block east of the Mass. Ave. and Memorial Drive intersection, to hold a silent vigil in honor of Rose. Around 60 people attended, with many tearing up as they filtered forward to place



Gretchen Ertl

MIT Professor Thomas Rose

tealight candles before a makeshift memorial of bicycle helmets and flower bouquets.

State Rep. Mike Connolly said at the vigil that he had received new information about the crash.

"It's my understanding that a truck was involved, and some of the reports that I've heard would suggest that the driver would appear to be at fault," Connolly said. "I certainly am calling for accountability for the driver of the truck."

Connolly said he had spoken multiple times last week with the Middlesex District Attorney's office and had also spoken with State Police, the Department of Conservation and Recreation (who manages Memorial Drive) and Cambridge officials.

The vigil was organized by Alexa Gomberg, a member of MIT's Graduate Student Council whose friend, fellow MIT graduate student Minh-Thi Nguyen, was killed by a truck while biking to campus in 2024.

See **BIKE CRASH**, page 3

Massachusetts scientists raise funding concerns with Clark



Alex Degterev

Scientists gathered in Arlington on Tuesday to discuss the loss of federal funding on local research projects and jobs.

By ALEX DEGTEREV

Massachusetts scientists came together Tuesday evening at the Robbins Memorial Town Hall in Arlington to discuss their concerns about the Trump administration's disruption of scientific research with U.S. House Minority Whip Katherine Clark, who recently won the Democratic primary to retain her seat as representative for the Massachusetts' 5th Congressional District.

Cuts to federal health organizations are "tough" for scientists, but are "not usually a tangible thing for humans" said Union of Concerned Scientists (USC) Organizing Manager Nick Savelli in an interview with Cambridge Day. Savelli, the town hall's lead organizer,

explained that the evening's goal was "to connect what the impact of [funding freezes] are, so that when [Clark] is defending these budget line items in Congress, she's defending [local scientists]."

Clark's district includes much of Cambridge, including Harvard University. The UCS, headquartered near the corner of Brattle Square and Mount Auburn Street, is a science advocacy organization that supports a network of more than 26,000 scientists and other technical experts across the country.

Funding loss feels personal

Yarrow Axford, who helped organize the town hall, moved to Massachusetts in 2025 to pursue a new path in her career as a science

communicator. She previously taught as an adjunct professor at Northwestern University, where she spent a decade as a climate scientist and educator.

She did not leave Northwestern because of the current administration's attacks on university-based science, which included a temporary freeze of nearly \$790 million in research funding at Northwestern, but she relayed her colleagues' experiences.

"Everything that the federal government has done for so many decades to support scientific research in the U.S. and create the most vibrant scientific ecosystem in the world is being undermined right now," said Axford.

See **FUNDING**, page 2

Cambridge launches first civic assembly to weigh ShotSpotter



Wikimedia's Beyond My Ken

By NATHAN METCALF

Cambridge will ask 40 randomly selected residents to weigh the future of ShotSpotter and other surveillance technology this fall, launching the city's first civic assembly and one of the first ever municipal efforts of its kind in New England.

Beginning this week, the city will mail invitations to 15,000 randomly selected Cambridge households, more than a quarter of the roughly 57,000 households city officials say are in Cambridge. One person from

each invited household can volunteer for the assembly, which will meet for four seven-hour Saturday sessions from October through December.

"This is a really exciting moment for new and innovative approaches to community engagement in Cambridge," said Jackson Price, Cambridge's Director of Community Engagement. "We really want to hear from a diverse range of voices on this issue, and it's a great opportunity for community members to play a role in shaping the future of approaches to public safety and the use of surveil-

lance technologies in Cambridge."

The assembly follows a tumultuous few months for ShotSpotter in Cambridge. After more than a decade of use the City Council voted in May to discontinue the gunfire-detection system after concerns were raised about its privacy implications, but the debate reignited after 32-year-old Cambridge resident and Department of Public Works employee Xavier Bautista was fatally shot near Sennott Park on July 4.

See **CIVIC ASSEMBLY**, page 3

BUSINESS PAGE 5
Spindler Confections makes
Harvard Square a little sweeter

FOOD PAGE 9
The dishes at Liars in Somerville's
Teale Square are unusual and playful

BOOKS PAGE 11
Broadway brewery Lamplighter now has
a pop-up book fair

LOCAL

Porter Square developer sues over housing rule

By NATHAN METCALF

The developer seeking to replace the Walgreens near Porter Square with a six-story, 71-unit apartment building is suing Cambridge, arguing the city is unconstitutionally withholding a building permit until it agrees to permanently set aside 20% of the development as affordable housing.

Old North Development, led by developers Adam Siegel and Brendan Seaver, filed the lawsuit through its affiliate OND 1740 Investors LLC on Aug. 27 in Middlesex Superior Court, becoming the second developer since December to challenge Cambridge's inclusionary housing requirement.

The proposed 61,300-square-foot mixed-use building would replace the Walgreens and the storefronts that housed longtime Cambridge businesses Simon's Coffee Shop and Keezer's Classic Clothing.

At the center of the lawsuit is Cambridge's Inclusionary Housing Ordinance, which was adopted in 1998 and amended in 2017 to



Marc Levy

Adam Siegel, a principal at Old North Development, at a meeting with Cambridge residents in 2025.

require developments with 10 or more units to make 20% of their residential floor area permanently affordable to income-eligible households. For the 1740 Mass. Ave. project, that would mean 14 of its 71 apartments.

OND argues the city cannot impose the requirement because the proposed building already complies with Cambridge's zoning rules "as of right." "The Project is fully as-of-right and does not require any zoning relief, special permit, variance, or other discretionary approval from the City," the lawsuit says.

The developer argues afford-

able housing requirements can be imposed in exchange for additional development rights, but says no such exchange is taking place here. "OND is receiving no additional development rights or other benefit from the City in exchange for the required dedication of 20% of its residential floor area to affordable housing," the lawsuit says.

Cambridge developer and zoning attorney Patrick Barrett made a similar argument when his company, Columbia St. LLC, sued Cambridge in Land Court in December. Columbia St. LLC is challenging the same 20%

requirement, arguing Cambridge cannot condition a building permit on permanently setting aside part of an otherwise zoning-compliant development for affordable housing.

That case remains pending, and the Massachusetts Attorney General's Office has joined Cambridge in defending the requirement, citing the potential implications for inclusionary housing rules in communities across the state.

Cambridge has told OND it will not issue the permit until it signs and records a permanent affordable housing covenant restricting rents and tenant eligibility for the 14 units, according to the lawsuit. OND argues conditioning the permit on that agreement amounts to an unconstitutional taking of private property without compensation under the U.S. and Massachusetts constitutions.

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



Funding

From Page 1

In late 2025, Northwestern came to an agreement with the government to restore much of its funding. But the pause in funding had a cost and for Axford, it felt personal.

Axford has Lyme disease, and she said that when the Trump administration froze Northwestern funds, she learned that "promising" Lyme research at the university was temporarily halted by the freeze.

The research program was led by late Northwestern bacteriologist Brandon Jutras, and had made several recent breakthroughs, before the federal funding freeze disrupted operations.

"It was just so painful to learn that [the funding had been halted]," said Axford. "Here in Massachusetts, we need more information about how to deal with tick-borne illnesses, and here's this fabulous research that is put on hold because of destructive nonsense."

While temporary freezes or confusion about grant funding do not affect all research programs equally, Axford said that "trust in the federal governments and the ability to plan around that trust" may never bounce back.

She also pointed out that universities typically choose how many students to admit to their programs based on how much federal funding they receive, but now many institutions were at a loss over how much funding they could realistically count on.

Last year, for example, the Harvard Crimson reported that Harvard University's Biostatistics graduate program had to cut its admitted class in half, and the

Population Health Sciences program planned to make 25% fewer offers in the following admissions cycle. Statistician Sebastian Haneuse attributed these cuts to confusion with federal grant funding, according to the Crimson.

The brain drain

Panelists offered a human perspective of the difficulties scientists face in the United States, and all pointed to the "brain drain" from American universities and research institutions.

Panelist and MIT Ph.D. student Kristen Ammons, who has conducted research funded by NASA, told Clark that the career path she had expected to follow had all but disappeared.

She pointed to the more than 10,000 federally-employed Ph.D. scientists removed from their posts by the current administration and explained that "those who would be providing me with reference letters" were now her "competitors" in the job market.

This loss of a guaranteed career for Ph.D. scientists was echoed by panelists and Boston University professors Lucy Hutyra and Jack Dennerlein, who both spoke of students and early-career researchers leaving their programs or reconsidering their careers in the sciences.

Dennerlein told the story of Manny, a Ph.D. student who received money from the federal government to study language recovery of stroke patients. Under the current administration, the grant was abruptly canceled, and the research halted.

"At this stage, we don't know what to expect, and so therefore we can't plan appropriately," said Dennerlein.

Money problems

It's not just scientific discovery that suffers, scientists said.

Panelist David Nelson, whose company Aerodyne Research makes scientific instruments, said he built his Billerica-based company with "consistent" federal funding.

Beyond direct research funding, his company relies on instrument sales to survive, which have fallen as scientists have seen their own budgets be cut or frozen. Nelson also won a federal grant to study the chemical pollutants excreted by chemical holding tanks, but since the election more than a year ago, he hasn't gotten "a single penny."

For a small company like his, prolonged disruption could mean bleeding jobs, and eventually losing "60 high-tech jobs" if the company is forced to shutter its operations.

Several panelists stressed the idea that damage done now cannot be easily reversed by restoring funding. Nelson said his company took decades to develop, "and that could be destroyed in the next years or several months."

Clark saw the loss as particularly significant in Massachusetts, which she said was the best in the nation at creating drugs and bringing them to the market. "But if we take people out, we have nothing," said Clark of the local industry.

A political fight

Questions from the audience shifted the focus to the people waiting on current scientific research, as well as who has the authority to propel it.

Tom Hopcroft, who ran in the 2nd Middlesex district race in the state house before dropping out in August, asked Clark about

what Congress could do to remedy pauses on rare-disease trials and research. His son has a rare liver disease. In response, Clark said the work to treat rare diseases had to be done "in conjunction" between scientists and the government.

"The benefits that we can glean from this extend far beyond any one particular disease," said Clark.

Another audience member, Laura Senier, a Sociology and Health Sciences professor at Northeastern University, focused her questions on the proposed Office of Management and Budget (OMB) changes which critics say would give the body more power to pause and terminate scientific grants. She also asked what the Democrat minority in both the House and Senate could do to fight for science.

Calling the proposal "concerning," Clark blamed Republicans, saying that while some GOP party members were some of the greatest supporters of government funding for the sciences, they "don't talk about it anymore."

She said the solution was helping the Democrats win back the House. "When we win, we hold the gavels, we have subpoena power and we can halt this, and that is exactly what we are going to do."

Hopcroft told Cambridge Day after the panel that he was astounded by the Trump administration's approach to the sciences, saying that, "every time something is delayed, there are people for whom it is a life or death thing."

"Why would you fight science, and progress," said Hopcroft. "You're human too, your family may have rare diseases and chronic conditions, so you would think that everyone would care about that."

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A mourner places a tealight candle at a makeshift memorial for Rose during a silent vigil held at Killian Court on Friday. Photo by Nathan Metcalf.

Bike crash

From Page 1

Gomberg said she and Nguyen met in middle school before attending the same high school and enrolling into MIT together. Gomberg said the experience of losing her friend taught her that a fatal crash can deeply affect people regardless of whether they knew the victim.

At the vigil, Gomberg said she “wasn’t surprised at all to see people publicly mourning [Rose],” and that it would be “weird” if the preventable death of a young human didn’t evoke feelings.

A top crash site

The intersection had already been the target of Cambridge Bike Safety advocacy. The volunteer group put up banners there in July highlighting what it says is widespread disregard of a red right-turn arrow and calling on residents to support broader safety improvements along Memorial Drive. The group has advocated for changes along the state-controlled roadway since 2019.

Chris Cassa, a Cambridge Bike Safety volunteer and MIT lecturer, said the placement of the traffic signals can confuse drivers. The signal telling drivers not to turn right is positioned off to the side, while green lights for traffic continuing straight are directly in front of them.

In a video uploaded by the YouTube channel Petru Sofio in 2023, 55 of 102 drivers who encountered the red right-turn arrow proceeded through it anyway. The observation was not an official traffic study and compliance could vary at other times.

Advocates are calling for both signal changes and physical alterations to the intersection. Cassa said a “protected intersection,” which uses curbs or other barriers to tighten the turning radius, could force drivers turning from Massachusetts Avenue onto Memorial Drive to slow down before crossing the paths of bicyclists and pedestrians.

“If you can just kind of put

some obstruction there, it makes people turn at a little bit more responsible speed,” Cassa said. Slower turns, he said, also give bicyclists and pedestrians more time to recognize that a vehicle is turning and react.

MassDOT identified the intersection as one of the state’s top 200 crash clusters based on crashes from 2020 through 2022. The agency also identified the area as a top 5% bicycle crash cluster based on data from 2012 through 2021, with 61 reported bicycle crashes.

Rose is at least the fifth pedestrian or bicyclist killed in a crash along Memorial Drive since 2014. Pedestrians Mark C. Keiser, Molly Doub and Juzhen Feng were killed in crashes in 2014, 2017 and 2020, respectively, while bicyclist John H. Corcoran was killed near the BU Boathouse in 2024.

Communication concerns

The crash has also exposed confusion over how information about serious incidents on state-controlled roads moves between state and Cambridge officials.

Cambridge Police and Fire responded to the crash alongside State Police, according to the district attorney’s office. But because Memorial Drive is under state jurisdiction, State Police took responsibility for the investigation.

Cambridge Police communications director Jennie Lopez said the department is “not necessarily provided with additional information or updates” once State Police takes over a case. City spokesperson Jeremy Warnick similarly said Cambridge may not learn the subsequent medical status of someone injured in a crash when a state agency is leading the investigation.

Massachusetts State Police, which is investigating the crash with the Middlesex District Attorney’s Office, has released little information about what happened. When asked for more information about the crash and how agencies communicated about it, State Police directed Cambridge Day to the district attorney’s office, which

responded by sending a link to the press release.

Without timely follow-up from state authorities, bike safety advocates grew concerned about a communication breakdown between the state and the city. Although the city was involved in the emergency response, it remains unclear what information Cambridge received afterward or when city officials learned Rose had died.

Cassa said the lack of information after a serious crash is troubling because officials need to understand what happened before deciding whether safety interventions are necessary.

“That should trigger some sort of communication and some sort of thought about what interventions might work,” Cassa said.

Civic assembly

From Page 1

Bautista’s body was not discovered until roughly an hour after the shooting, when a pedestrian called 911, raising questions about whether ShotSpotter could have alerted police sooner and prompting criticism from residents who felt communities most affected by gun violence had not been adequately heard before the system was eliminated.

On Aug. 3, the council voted 6-3 to temporarily restore ShotSpotter while directing the city manager to convene a civic assembly to consider whether the technology should ultimately be continued, modified or discontinued.

Exactly how long ShotSpotter will remain active is not yet clear. The policy order calls for the city manager to report back within 90 days, but also says ShotSpotter should “remain in operation through the completion of the resident assembly process.” That process will extend beyond the 90-day period, with the final assembly session scheduled for Dec. 5.

City Councilor Marc McGovern said that ultimately it’s City Manager Yi-An Huang’s decision whether ShotSpotter will be deactivated exactly 90 days after the policy order went into effect or after the civic assembly process concludes, but that “it’s not a problem” because the difference will only be a matter of months.

An “advisory group” of community members and people with experience designing civic assemblies will help shape what

information and testimony participants receive, Price said. Who will serve on the group and how its members will be chosen have not yet been determined.

“We’re still working through those details,” Warnick said. “A lot of this is still being developed as we go along.”

Officials said the assembly will hear perspectives from law enforcement and privacy advocates, as well as testimony from Cambridge residents with first-hand experience of the issues.

“This is not a process intended to influence,” Warnick said

Forming an assembly

Selecting the 40 residents will involve a multi-step lottery. After residents respond to the 15,000 invitations, the city will create 1,000 possible 40-person panels, each designed to meet representation requirements based on demographics and residents’ experiences. One of those 1,000 panels will then be randomly selected as the assembly.

“The value of the randomization is bringing folks from different backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives who might not otherwise participate in a public meeting or a public process,” Price said.

The city will consider factors including age, gender identity and neighborhood, Price said.

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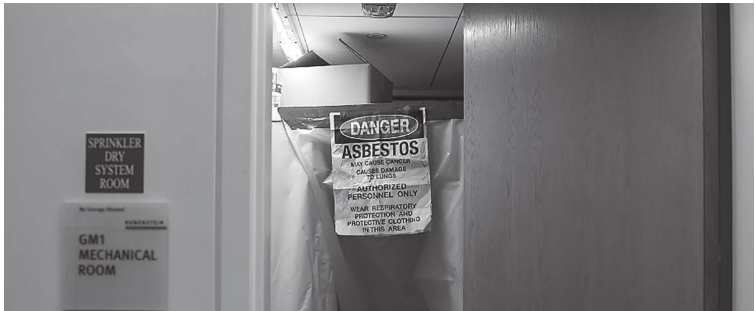


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EDUCATION

This Week at Harvard

Cambridge Day brings its readers the biggest stories on campus, fresh from the pages of The Harvard Crimson. Read more at thecrimson.com.



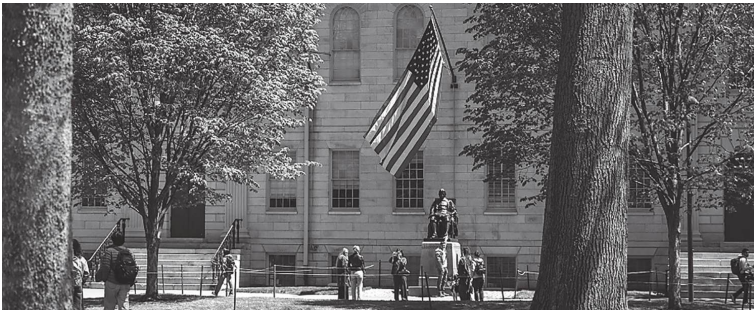
Uy B. Pham

Contractors removed asbestos-containing materials from this mechanical room at the Rubenstein Building.

Former Kennedy School employees allege years of contractor favoritism, construction problems

After an April asbestos finding set off an internal dispute, former Harvard Kennedy School employees described years of alleged bid favoritism, construction problems, and management concerns under HKS operations chief Arthi Kasetty, including claims that she shared competing bid information with a favored contractor.

— Uy B. Pham and Alexa M. Schmitt



Mae T. Weir

University Hall in Harvard Yard.

Majority of Harvard Faculty of Arts and Sciences oppose \$10M viewpoint diversity push

More than half of respondents to The Crimson’s annual faculty survey opposed Harvard’s efforts to solicit donations for a viewpoint diversity initiative — rejecting a push to raise hundreds of millions of dollars through \$10 million endowed professorships meant to broaden ideological representation.

Nearly 47 percent of faculty respondents also disagreed that Harvard has a troubling lack of ideological diversity among its faculty, while roughly 31 percent agreed. The split didn’t change much from last year, when 45 percent disagreed and 34 percent agreed — putting most respondents at odds with critics, including Trump administration officials, who have charged that Harvard’s faculty is too ideologically narrow.

— Abigail S. Gerstein and Amann S. Mahajan



Pavan V. Thakkar

Morgan Gate outside Widener Library.

Harvard overhauls screening requirements for university-engaged foreign entities

Harvard quietly rewrote its screening requirements for international collaborations last month, sharply expanding when schools must check foreign researchers, visitors, students, and institutions against government watchlists.

The revised guidance, dated to August 26, is the first rewrite of Harvard’s general restricted party screening guidance in nearly a decade and comes as the federal government ratchets up its scrutiny of Harvard’s foreign ties.

The new guidance overhauls longstanding university-wide Export Controls guidance designed to govern how Harvard affiliates interact with foreign entities and ensure compliance with federal sanctions and export-control laws.

— Alma T. Barak, Theresa F. Bartelme, Hugo C. Chiasson and Elise A. Spenner

STEAM Initiative seeks math proposals



Maya Taylor Photography

Tutoring Plus’ Global Village Project, where students practiced proportions, ratios, area, perimeter and scale by designing an equitable village, was funded by a prior STEAM Initiative grant.

By JULIA CARPI

The city of Cambridge will divide \$70,000 in funding to selected nonprofit math enrichment programs over the course of the next year.

Each selected organization can receive up to \$25,000 in its first funding year, with the potential to receive an extended grant for an additional year.

The funding opportunity comes through the Cambridge STEAM Initiative, under the Department of Human Services, which partners with local organizations to support equal opportunities in STEAM fields (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Math). The initiative also works in collaboration with Cambridge Public Schools and Cambridge Public Library.

The call for proposals, which are due Friday, is directed at out-of-school time programs in Cambridge that provide math enrichment to students from early childhood to Grade 12. The grant is particularly aimed at “serving young people historically excluded from STEAM opportunities,” the request for proposals says.

Sharlene Yang, director of the Cambridge STEAM Initiative, spoke to the barriers that Black and Hispanic students, students from lower-income families, and English Language Learners face in math programming.

“Fewer role models, unequal access to advanced coursework, and programs that don’t reflect students’ lived experiences and cultural backgrounds all contribute to the sense that math is simply ‘not for them,’” Yang said.

Recent data from standardized state tests, reveal a persistent racial and socioeconomic achievement gap in Cambridge — one that includes, but is not limited to, math outcome data.

In last year’s data from the Department of Elementary and Middle School Education, 25% of Black students, 26% of low-income students, 38% of

Hispanic or Latino students, and 18% of English Learners in Grades 3-8 were meeting or exceeding grade-level expectations in math. That’s compared to 74% of white students meeting or exceeding expectations in the same year.

For the same age group, the gap between White and Black students has widened in recent years, growing by 15% between 2019 and 2025.

Yang added that out-of-school time STEAM experiences make math more accessible by demonstrating to young people how math can “show up in the music they love, the food they cook, or the community they live in.”

Jordan Harvey, the Executive Director of Tutoring Plus, a free after-school tutoring program, echoed the importance of programming targeted at high-need students.

“Most of our programming happens in schools where maybe academic performance is lower than other schools,” Harvey said. “Having free high-quality tutoring ends up being really impactful for families who can’t access that otherwise.”

This is the second round of funding for organizations through the Cambridge STEAM Initiative. Three Cambridge-based math organizations — Cambridge Math Circle, Tutoring Plus and The Young People’s Project — were awarded \$60,000

collectively each year for the past two years. Each of those organizations prioritizes Black students and high-need students.

Organizations selected for funding will be announced at the end of September. Their usage will depend on the needs of each program, said Yang. Some might use it to “offset the costs of hiring” or “invest in materials or professional development” while others might “be piloting a math enrichment experience for the very first time,” she said.

In the previous funding cycle, for example, The Young People’s Project piloted an after-school program at Peabody School and Fletcher Maynard Academy, while Cambridge Math Circle offered free instructional slots to students from marginalized communities.

Tutoring Plus used previous funding almost explicitly on “staff time” to cover free sessions as well as “curriculum development,” Harvey said.

Yang said that this year she is “especially excited” about organizations that are not strictly centered around math, but “are interested in making math more intentional and central to what they already do.”

“We want to meet organizations where they are and grow together,” Yang said, referencing general afterschool programs, music programs and community gardens as examples.



Lauren Badeau

As part of a Tutoring Plus project, students learned about spatial reasoning and geometry while making real-life connections to tessellations in the natural world.

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

MIT student’s algorithm wins award

By NATHAN METCALF

An MIT doctoral student won a \$10,000 award in August for developing a new approach to recommendation algorithms that has already been adopted by Tencent WeChat, where it helps determine what content is shown to more than a billion users.

Lei Huang, 30, a final-year doctoral student at MIT’s Sloan School of Management, won Texas A&M University’s Mays Business School AI Dissertation Proposal Competition for his ongoing research, “Designing Self-Sustaining Markets: An Application to Content Platforms,” which seeks to solve a fundamental problem facing content platforms: Giving every user exactly what they most want to see in the moment does not create the healthiest content ecosystem over the long run.

The research, conducted jointly with Huang’s adviser, MIT Sloan professor Juanjuan Zhang, proposes an algorithm that sometimes sacrifices a user’s top choice to steer attention toward creators whose continued presence makes a platform more valuable, potentially giving someone their second-favorite recommendation if the additional views help keep a valuable creator producing.

“The consumption of any single consumer not only affects that consumer, but also affects all other consumers by affecting future supply,” Huang said, describing an economic phenomenon known as a “consumption externality” that affects markets ranging from social media to ride-sharing and e-commerce.

Huang uses an example from his dissertation to explain the phenomenon: Imagine a university offering two courses, coding and branding. Of 60 students, 31 prefer branding and 29 prefer coding, but each course needs 30 students to remain available. A traditional recommendation system would direct everyone to their preferred course, causing coding to disappear. The algorithm would instead recommend coding to a student with only a slight preference for branding, sacrificing a little immediate satisfaction to keep coding available for students who strongly prefer it now and in the future.

The same principle applies to content platforms. A creator who receives little attention may stop producing, shrinking the content available to everyone.

“This is well-documented in the literature,” Huang said. “The real contribution of our project is not to document that externality, it’s to operationalize it and design solutions at massive scale.”

Deciding which creators deserve additional attention requires the algorithm to weigh two factors: “creator sensitivity,” or how responsive a creator is to additional views, and “creator



Courtesy of Lei Huang

contribution,” or how much the content ecosystem would lose if that creator disappeared.

Popularity matters, but so does whether other creators offer similar content. “Even if the creator is popular, if there are many close substitutes on that platform, it doesn’t really hurt the consumers too much if that creator leaves,” Huang said.

Calculating that contribution becomes enormously complicated across tens of millions of creators and billions of users. To address that problem, the researchers developed PIXSET, which converts information about users’ preferences and creators’ content into visual representations that can be analyzed using machine learning.

In one analysis involving roughly 29,000 creators, calculating creator contribution individually took about seven and a half hours. PIXSET cut that to about 30 seconds, a 99.9% reduction.

Huang began working on the project with his adviser in early 2022. Later that year, the pair met researchers from WeChat at an MIT conference, who invited them to present their research to the company. WeChat is a Chinese “super app” with more than a billion users that combines features Americans might associate with several separate apps, including social media, messaging and PayPal-like digital payments.

When Huang presented the research to WeChat’s content team, “They said, ‘This is exactly the problem that we are working on,’” he recalled. Now, the algorithm is used on WeChat’s content platform, where users can publish “images, videos, articles, whatever,” Huang said.

Huang subsequently spent two years, from late 2023 through late 2025, as a machine-learning research intern at Tencent, working with company teams to adapt, test and deploy the system. In a two-week field experiment involving more than 25,000 creators, the algorithm performed 46% better than WeChat’s existing approach on the company’s “net user benefit” metric, a tool

which weighs the immediate cost of less-preferred recommendations against the future benefit of keeping valuable creators producing. Huang’s algorithm also increased the likelihood that creators would continue producing content by 2.6%.

“I just observed the metrics over the experiment window and observed that, wow, the graphs become better, better, better, better,” Huang said. “In the end, statistically significantly better than the other algorithms. I knew that they were going to adopt it.”

Huang called seeing his research adopted across WeChat one of his proudest moments. Asked to describe the feeling, he turned the comparison back on his interviewer.

“Suppose your article is featured by all the big media,” Huang said. “You’d be so proud.”

Huang, who grew up in China’s Hunan province, came to Cambridge after earning his undergraduate and master’s degrees at Tsinghua University in Beijing.

Now in his final year at MIT, Huang believes the approach could eventually extend beyond content platforms to markets such as Amazon and Uber, where sellers and drivers also respond to how demand is distributed. Asked whether the technology could form the basis of a startup, Huang said he and his collaborators had previously considered the possibility but did not pursue it, though he still sees potential for a company that helps platforms design more efficient algorithms.

Huang said he has not yet received the \$10,000 prize but expects to put it toward his research, including computing costs associated with training and running machine-learning models.

For now, he is seeking professorships across North America Europe and Asia, including in the Boston area. Whether he remains in Cambridge after completing his doctorate will largely depend on where he finds a job, but regardless Huang said his years at MIT have transformed him.

“It totally changed the way I view the world,” Huang said. “There are super intelligent people all around me. I just love it.”

But what continues to excite Huang most about the research is the underlying idea that inspired the project four years ago: One person’s seemingly individual decision can ripple through a marketplace, changing what gets produced and, ultimately, what remains available to everyone else.

“From the individual consumer’s perspective, our single decision affects other producers’ supply incentive in the future, and therefore affects every other consumer,” Huang said. “I think this chain is just amazing, so elegant.”

Spindler Confections to open booth inside Leavitt & Peirce



Norris Duncan

Inside Leavitt & Peirce's Harvard Square emporium.

By MADISON LUCCHESI

North Cambridge’s Spindler Confections will expand into Harvard Square, opening a satellite location inside Leavitt and Peirce Sept. 14. Spindler, which is in its 10th year of business, was approached by Paul MacDonald, who owns Leavitt & Peirce and was looking to fill a space left when New York-based Fruition Chocolate closed up shop this summer. Leavitt & Peirce Manager Norris Duncan said Fruition had issues with the distance between its businesses and with staffing.

Spindler founder Jeremy Spindler said he’s long wanted a second location, and thinks the two stores “are going to complement each other really well,” said Spindler. “We both specialize in selling affordable luxuries.”

Duncan agreed, saying gourmet chocolates are a good addition, especially as Leavitt & Peirce continues to diversify its goods beyond tobacco.

Spindler’s will offer its entire handmade chocolate selection, including its most popular items: assorted bon bons and chocolate covered caramels. In addition, Spindler said “We are hoping to bring a couple new products that might only be sold at [the satellite] location that are geared a little bit more toward tourists,” such as lobster-shaped chocolates.

While its two locations will be less than two miles apart, Spindler expects “a completely different customer base. Our North Cambridge location [is] very much a neighborhood shop [with] lots and lots of regulars,” he said, whereas Harvard Square attracts mostly tourists.

Leavitt & Peirce expects new customers will come in specifically for Spindler’s, Duncan said.



Courtesy of Spindler Confections

Jeremy Spindler, owner of Spindler Confections in North Cambridge, piping dark chocolate nonpareils.

Leavitt & Peirce opened in 1883 and it is full of Harvard sports memorabilia and other historic decor. Spindler plans to create a smaller version of his store’s “Museum of Chocolate and Confectionery.”

The “Mini Museum of Chocolate and Confectionery,” which may not be added until the spring, will feature a collection of vintage candy boxes, advertisements, and molds from the mid-nineteenth to mid-twentieth centuries when Cambridge was a candy making hub, he said.

At its peak in 1946, the city was home to 66 candy factories, and Main Street was known as Confectioner’s Row, according to History Cambridge. The only remaining factory is a Cambridge Brands facility that makes Junior Mints, Sugar Daddies and Charleston Chews.

Overall, Spindler sees the satellite location as a “test run” for a second brick-and-mortar and hopes the partnership with Leavitt and Peirce is permanent.



Michael F. Fitzgerald

The Chocolate by Fruition sign outside Leavitt & Peirce will be replaced by one for Spindler Confections.

EVENTS SEPT 10 TO SEPT 24

Monday, Sept. 21, 5:30 to 8:30 p.m.
Somerville Public Library West Branch,
40 College Ave., near Davis Square

Until Help Arrives with Somerville Emergency Management

As part of Somerville's Year of the Neighbor initiative, neighbors are invited to learn response tactics for everyday emergencies with Somerville Emergency Management. Sign up to learn how to stop life-threatening bleeding, how to safely position an injured person and more.

Thursday, Sept. 17, 8:00 p.m.
Crystal Ballroom, 55 Davis Square,
Somerville

Otis Shanty

\$25. The Somerville-based band Otis Shanty blends the experimental noise-folk tendencies of Yo La Tengo, the jangly pop hooks of Real Estate, and the lush atmospheric textures of Cocteau Twins. This show marks the release of their third album "Shadow Of Doubt."

Saturday, Sept. 19, 11 a.m. to 3 p.m.
Danehy Park, 99 Sherman St., in
Neighborhood 9

Danehy Park Family Day

Enjoy a fun-filled day of children's amusement rides, arts and crafts, music and aerialist and acrobatic performances, plus food and music by DJ Special K.

Wednesday, Sept. 23, 7 p.m.
Mount Auburn Cemetery, 580
Mt Auburn St.

Cemetery Cinema: "The Straight Story" & "Wings of Desire"

\$40. The Coolidge Corner hosts a graveside double feature of David Lynch's "The Straight Story" and Wim Wenders's "Wings of Desire." Screenings of these films will begin at dusk. Parking will be available at the cemetery, and light concessions will be sold. Chairs, blankets, and snacks are encouraged, but no alcohol, please.

Sunday, Sept. 20, 10 a.m. to 3 p.m.
The Rockwell, 255 Elm St., Davis
Square.

Clown Workshop

\$200 to \$300 and 18-plus. This "Clown Intensive" with Gemma Soldati, a performing and teaching artist, will use everything from physical games and improvisation to explore imagination, pleasure, and audience engagement. All skill levels are welcome.

Saturday, Sept. 19, Noon
Aeronaut Brewing, 14 Tyler St., near Union Square, Somerville
Lamplighter CX, 110 N. First St., North Point
Portico Brewing, 101 South St., Boynton Yards, Ward 2

Oktoberfest

Enjoy a fun-filled day of children's amusement rides, arts and crafts, music and aerialist and acrobatic performances, plus food and music by DJ Special K.

Thursday, Sept. 17, 6:00 to 8:00 p.m.
Somerville Museum, 1 Westwood Rd. in
Spring Hill

Common Ground: Photography, Place and Community Opening Reception

Free but register. This exhibition brings together 15 photographers who call Somerville home, presenting work that ranges from documentary to conceptual and reflects on the city's evolving identity.

Tuesday, Sept. 15, 6:00-8:30 p.m.
East Somerville, Check in at 81 Broadway or
165 Broadway, East Somerville

Foodie Crawl

\$15-45. Enjoy tastings and live entertainment supporting East Somerville Main Streets. Food from Rinón Mexicano, Los Paisanos, Machete and more will be available.

Monday, Sept. 14, 5:45 to 8 p.m.
Cambridge Main Library, 449 Broadway, Mid-
Cambridge

Documentary Film Screening: "Recovery City"

Free but register. In honor of Recovery Month, "Recovery City" tells the story of four women in Worcester, Mass. whose lives share a common thread: addiction.

Thursday, Sept. 17, 6 to 7:15 p.m.
Harvard Art Museums, 32 Quincy St.,
near Harvard Square

Exhibition Opening Program for "On Location: Drawing the Outdoors"

Free but register. A celebration of the opening of "On Location: Drawing the Outdoors," featuring 140 artworks inspired by nature, including drawings by J. M. W. Turner, John Constable, Gustave Courbet, Edouard Manet, Berthe Morisot, Paul Cézanne and Vincent van Gogh. Exhibition curators will lead a talk about drawing outside the studio.

Saturday, Sept. 12, Noon to 5 p.m.
Pacific Park, 82 Pacific St., Central
Square.

Pan in the Park Panorama Showcase

Free but register. Enjoy an afternoon filled with steel pan music, Caribbean cuisine, local craft vendors and family-friendly fun. The showcase features performances by steel bands from across Greater Boston and New England, including the Cambridge Youth Steel Orchestra, Tempo International Steel Orchestra and others.

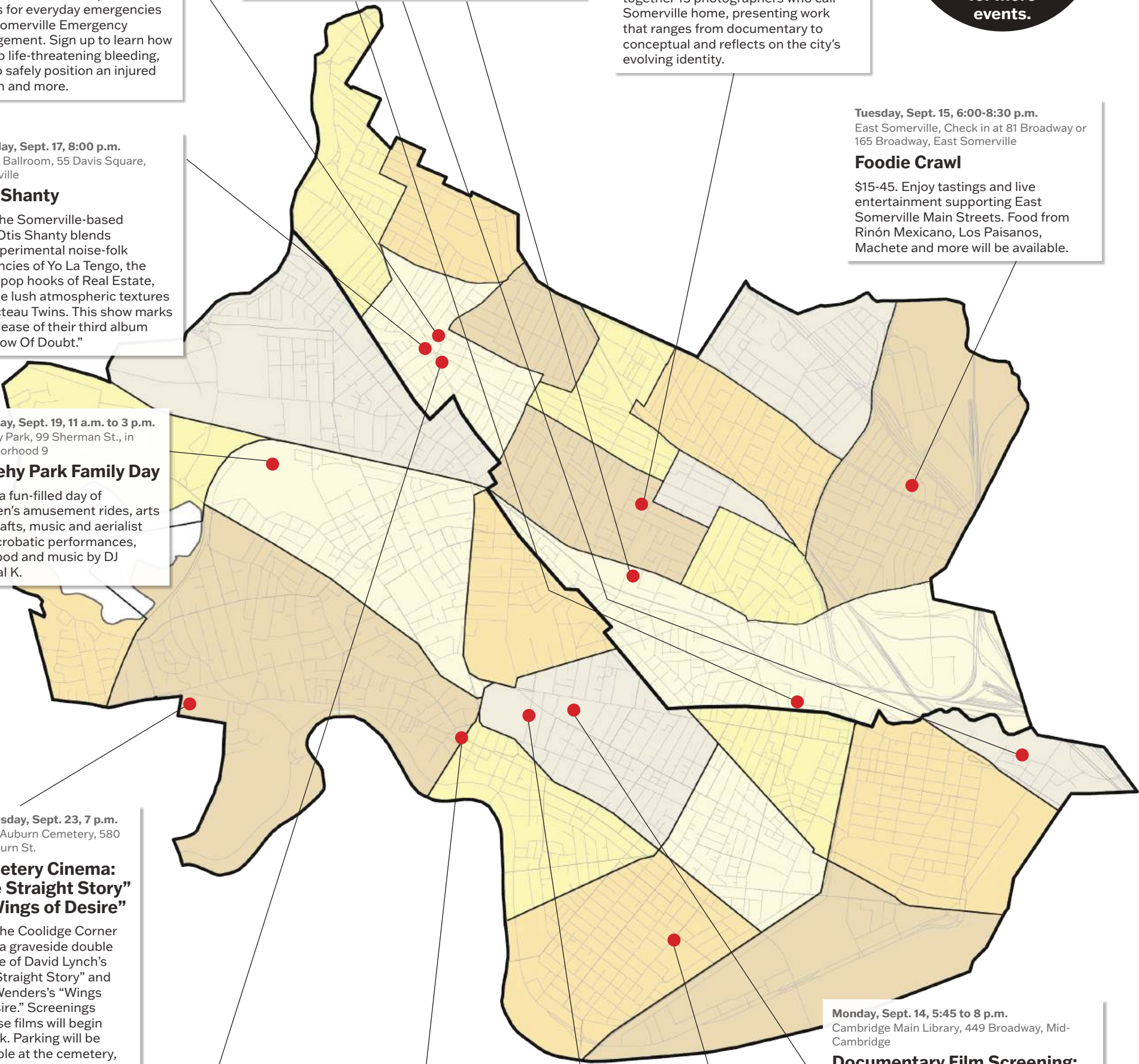
Wednesday, Sept. 16, 7:30 p.m.
The Comedy Studio, 5 John F.
Kennedy St., Harvard Square.

Black Girl Magic

Free. Tooky Kavanagh, Bethany Van Delft, Amma Marfo, Dorothy Whitfield, Pamala Zabala and DJ Rayvino headline this celebration of Black comedians, which will also offer food, drinks, and an after party with DJ Rayvino.



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WILD THINGS

Go for goldfinches



Tom Murray

In summer, a male goldfinch sports a black cap and wings, August 17, 2025.

By JEANINE FARLEY

In 1906, ornithologist William Brewster wrote in *The Birds of the Cambridge Region of Massachusetts*, “Goldfinches used to breed nearly everywhere in and near Cambridge; in shade trees along our city streets; in orchards throughout the farming country; most abundantly of all in the maple woods and willow thickets which once covered so large a portion of the Fresh Pond Swamps.”

These sparrow-sized birds (*Spinus tristis*) are a hardy species, with about 44 million birds currently living in North America, a number that has likely increased since Brewster’s time. Also called “yellow birds,” goldfinches have dark wings but their colors change throughout the year. In spring, male goldfinches partially molt into breeding plumage, becoming bright yellow with a black cap by summertime. Females sport an olive yellow bib in spring. By early fall, both the males and females molt completely, replacing all of their feathers. Both become mostly olive brown, but the male still has a bit of yellow around the face and shoulders.

Bradford Torrey (1885) painted this picture of the goldfinch: “Our American goldfinch is the loveliest of birds. With his elegant song, and his more beautiful soul, he ought to be one of the best beloved.” Naturalist John Burroughs expanded on the birds’ song: “All the goldfinches of a neighborhood collect together and hold a sort of musical festival...The males sing, and the

females chirp and call.” The male’s musical song is made up of twittering notes and trills, often delivered during its undulating flight. He makes a distinctive four-note call that some people think sounds like po-ta-to chip. Females com-



Tom Murray

A male goldfinch in winter plumage, January 15, 2023.

municate mostly with short calls. While most songbirds nest and raise youngsters in the spring when there is a great bounty of caterpillars to feed the offspring, goldfinches are almost entirely seed eaters and feed their young regurgitated, partially digested seeds. Because of this distinctive behavior, goldfinches have also pushed back their entire schedule and do not nest in the spring like most other songbirds. They nest later, waiting until their favorite plants (thistles and milkweeds) have gone to seed. These plants provide both fluffy fibers to build strong nests and seeds to feed offspring. Because of their love of thistle seeds, goldfinches are

sometimes called thistle birds.

Their entire breeding season is also synchronized with the seed crop as goldfinches pair up by early summer. When it’s time to nest, July at the earliest, the female spends about six days weaving a



A.J. Kleber

A goldfinch in Cambridge Highlands, July 16, 2025.

and lining it with plant down. Nests are usually near good feeding areas containing thistle and sunflower seeds. The finished nest is so durable it can remain in a tree for a couple of years and is woven so tightly that it holds water. (Although nests are built beneath a canopy of leaves, so they do not get wet.)

The female lays about five jelly-bean sized eggs anytime from July to September and incubates the eggs for up to two weeks. She spends most of her time on the nest, while the male brings her food, regurgitating seeds into her mouth. Ornithologist Alexander F. Skutch watched one male feeding his incubating mate: “He approached the nest with nothing visible in his bill but with his throat or crop well stocked with food, stood upon the rim, and regurgitated to her while she fluttered her partially spread wings like a hungry nestling.”

After the eggs hatch, the male does double duty—feeding both the female and the newly hatched chicks. As the chicks grow, both parents feed them regurgitated seeds. In two weeks, the hatchlings leave the nest, but they are not yet independent. The male continues to feed them for another three weeks.

In winter, the goldfinch population shuffles southward. Some birds, especially youngsters, migrate south, joining large flocks of migrants as they pass overhead. Other birds stay put and overwinter right here in Massachusetts, especially if food is plentiful. Still

others, mostly from Canada, fly south to or through our region to overwinter. Goldfinches prefer to overwinter where the average January low is greater than 0°F. Overwintering birds survive on seeds from thistles and asters, sunflowers and grasses found in weedy fields, roadsides and gar-



Jeanine Farley

A female goldfinch eats sunflower seeds in a Somerville community garden.

dens. They also eat from winter birdfeeders (favorite birdfeeder seeds are sunflower and nyjer).

Indeed, if you have sunflowers, you have probably spotted goldfinches eating the seeds. These birds have conical beaks perfectly suited for cracking open seeds.



Tom Murray

A goldfinch in winter plumage, November 21, 2021.

It’s something that Brewster also noticed: “Young birds, with their parents, continue to visit our garden in late August and early September, when the seeds of the sunflower are ripe.”

So, look out your window or around your neighborhood. It is prime sunflower — and goldfinch — season.



Jeanine Farley

A goldfinch eats thistle seeds in Somerville’s Baxter Park.

FILM

LOCAL FOCUS



Bud Cort and Ruth Gordon as the titular couple in "Harold and Maude."

Cult classics are in session

By OSCAR GOFF

The **Harvard Film Archive** is officially back in full swing following a long summer off, and with it comes another round of fascinating retrospectives and repertory series you're unlikely to see anywhere else. On Friday, the HFA kicks off another tribute to a cinematic hero in a series titled **"João César Monteiro, Poet-Provocateur."** Though often overlooked in discussions of world filmmakers, Monteiro was an essential figure in Portuguese cinema, mixing subversive political commentary with a unique and idiosyncratic aesthetic sensibility. The series begins Friday with Monteiro's breakthrough, **"Silvestre"** (1981), an arch feminist fable in which a young damsel (Maria de Medeiros, in her film debut) disguises herself as a male knight errant to search for her missing father. Then, on Monday, the series jumps to **"Snow White"** (2000), Monteiro's radical interpretation of the fairy tale, told via dialogue over an almost entirely black screen. The series will continue through October, with more works from this unsung visionary.

On Friday, the **Brattle Theatre** partners with Mass Mini Con and Spoke Art for a special screening of Mamoru Oshii's anime classic **"Ghost in the Shell"** (1995). A technological nightmare set in the not-too-distant future of 2029, "Ghost" is a touchstone not just of animation, but of science fiction writ large (the Wachowskis famously pitched "The Matrix" by showing "Ghost in the Shell" to producer Joel Silver and telling him, "We want to do this in real life"). To celebrate this cyberpunk triumph, illustrator **Rory Kurtz** will be on hand to unveil a brand new print inspired by the film, which will be available for sale in the lobby prior to showtime. (Note: at press time this event is sold out, but additional tickets may be available at standby).

On Saturday, the HFA welcomes back students with their annual all-night movie marathon. This year, in honor of the class of 2027, the theme of the program is **Marathon '77**, bringing together seven features which will celebrate their semicentennials next year. The typically eclectic selection begins with **"Citizens Band"** (1977), an oft-overlooked early comedy by the late, great Jonathan Demme, followed by Robert M. Young's socially conscious character study **"iAlambrista!"** (1977). The tone then shifts radically with Steven Spielberg's **"Close Encounters of the Third Kind"** (1977), representing the blockbuster spectacle which would come

to define the late '70s. From there we move onto a pair of top-shelf thrillers with William Friedkin's **"Sorcerer"** (1977), here presented in its rarely screened "road-show cut" (featuring an extended overture set to Tangerine Dream's iconic score), and the classic grindhouse revenge flick **"Rolling Thunder"** (1977), an essential influence on the films of Quentin Tarantino. The marathon will send you out on a suitably delirious note with **"Pumping Iron"** (1977), the bodybuilding documentary which put Arnold Schwarzenegger on the map, and David Lynch's iconic midnight-movie nightmare **"Eraserhead"** (1977). That these selections only scratch the surface of the year's offerings speaks to what a watershed year 1977 truly was.

On Tuesday, the **Somerville Theatre** launches a new weekly repertory series sure to bring some old favorites back to the big screen. The title, **Cult Cinema Tuesdays**, speaks for itself. Each week for (at least) the next two months, the Somerville will screen a seminal midnight movie classic at the much more bedtime-friendly hour of 7:30pm. The series begins, appropriately enough, with one of the most beloved cult classics of the 1970s: Hal Ashby's **"Harold and Maude"** (1973). The late Bud Cort plays Harold, a sullen young misfit who delights in tormenting his mother with elaborately staged mock-suicides. His life is turned upside-down when he meets Ruth Gordon's Maude, a free-spirited octogenarian who teaches him to find joy in life. It's a perfect romantic comedy for people who hate romantic comedies, effortlessly blending life-affirming spirit with a pitch-black countercultural sense of humor. A forebear of filmmakers from Tim Burton to Wes Anderson, "Harold and Maude" remains a perfectly offbeat date movie more than half a century later.

On Thursday, moviegoers have their choice between two amazing local film festivals. At the Somerville, the Taiwan Film Festival Boston continues with a screening of Julian Chou's sweeping family drama **"Blind Love"** (2025), followed by a Q&A with the filmmakers (moderated by Cambridge Day's own film editor Tom Meek). Meanwhile, at the Brattle, the good folks from **Grrl Haus Cinema** return with a brand new program of experimental shorts from women, trans, gender-queer, and non-binary filmmakers from around the world. There is vital cinematic work being produced far outside the reach of the multiplex; thankfully, we live in a place with programmers and festivals bringing the good stuff to the surface.

REVIEWS

"Filipiñana"

In "Filipiñana," the audacious feature debut from filmmaker Rafael Manuel, rotting mangoes dot the otherwise immaculately manicured greens of a private golf course outside of Manila. It's a handy encapsulation of the film, which slowly reveals the sickly underbelly of the verdant resort. Seventeen-year-old Isabel (Jorybell Agoto) is a "tee-girl," whose job is to crouch inches from the swinging golf clubs in the driving range and place fresh balls on the tees. (She's frequently framed between the legs of her wealthy, male clients, as if to drive home her subservience.) Through Isabel's eyes, we get to know some of the other figures at the club: the charismatic owner and his disaffected ex-beauty queen wife; a lecherous businessman coaxing his college-educated niece to return from New York and rejoin Manila's high society; a nanny searching the grounds for a missing girl. All are filtered through Isabel's wry, observant gaze, as her simple task of returning a misplaced driver to the club's owner becomes a surreal odyssey through increasingly pronounced class divisions.

Superficially, "Filipiñana" might be classified as "slow cinema." Manuel tells his story patiently through long, unbroken takes, frequently silent but for the droning of cicadas and the chittering of sprinklers. Manuel and cinematographer Xenia Patricia shoot the proceedings in eye-popping, saturated color, allowing viewers to practically feel the sweltering heat and smell the fresh-cut grass. The dialogue is spare and deliberate, with long



Courtesy of Kino Lorber Team

A still from "Filipiñana."

pauses between terse lines. If you were only half-paying attention, you might find the film relaxing.

But for all its gentle rhythms, "Filipiñana" harbors a biting satirical humor that rivals "Triangle of Sadness" (2022). In one early standout sequence, the workers at the club go about their morning chores with the lockstep syncopation of an MGM musical, cleaning up for the oblivious elite. Later, a horrifying discovery on the club's grounds is dismissed with an even more horrifying callousness, as if it were just another unsightly branch to be pruned and discarded. At the center of it all is Agoto, who plays Isabel with a beguiling deadpan that masks a deep sadness. Though we don't learn the extent of Isabel's connection to the club until the film's final moments, she serves as the perfect window to this deceptively alien world. With "Filipiñana," Manuel establishes himself as a unique voice in world cinema, and it will be thrilling to see where he goes next.

— OSCAR GOFF



Playing at the Brattle Theatre through Wednesday, Sept. 16

"Onslaught"

Adam Wingard, who cut his teeth in mumblegore ("V/H/S," "You're Next"), stumbled with the "Blair Witch" reboot (2016) and then showed some big-budget filmmaking pizzazz with the monster beatdown "Godzilla vs. Kong" (2021), returns to his lo-fi gut-and-gore roots with this derivative grindhouse mashup.

The framing is murky: a Germanic evil genius (Dan Stevens, donning an uneven aging makeup job) is living in the New Mexico desert, where he dutifully performs toe-kissing subservience to his Marlene Dietrich-esque wife (Rebecca Hall, who appeared in Wingard's 'Zilla flicks). He also runs a secret military lab where he experiments on soldiers thought to have died in battle to create a platoon of super warriors. These über-grunts have no moral compass — they execute with extreme prejudice (the concept is clearly stolen from Walter Hill's 1987 militia thriller starring Nick Nolte) — thanks in part to being imbued with night vision (their eyes glow like wolves) and an ability to flex their muscles so densely that bullets have diminished impact: organic Kevlar, I guess.

The what and why for their creation and murderous mission are never adequately explained. There's some oblique nod to Nazi experimentation and Operation Paperclip, but it's all an air kiss so the three beefy commandos can saddle up and eradicate the late-night denizens at a local truck stop. They commandeer a semi and go to their next bloodbath target, a crummy trailer park. The three hop out



Courtesy of A24

Adria Arjona in "Onslaught."

of their truck looking like Jason, Michael Myers and Leatherface in ICE gear, and hey, they also deliver misery, pain and death. But the mad doctor's ointment has a fly: Celeste (a generic Adria Arjona from "Andor"), a single mom suffering PTSD from combat deployments who happens to possess a crowd-quieting cache of firearms. It's basically Ripley versus Jason multiplied by three.

Not much of "Onslaught" holds together, and few of the characters endear. Hall is riveting, but she's not onscreen much. The film is best appreciated for Oren Soffer's trippy, slick camerawork and brooding soundtrack — best heard in Dolby surround sound and a cool but total cop from one of John Carpenter's classics. With a lithe running time of 90 minutes, you'd think "Onslaught" would fly by, but once the three speechless lads lace up and get at it, it begins to slog and feel repetitive and pointless. To pay homage does not put one on par.

— TOM MEEK



Playing at Kendall Square Cinema and AMC Assembly Row 12

■ 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

WHAT WE'RE HAVING

Unique, whole food and masterful mixology at Liars



Photos: Tom Meek

A pungent swordfish steak is mellowed by a slow cook.

By TOM MEEK

Spoke Wine Bar in Davis Square, with its ever-changing unique small plates, cozy atmosphere, and friendly, knowledgeable service, has long been a personal favorite. Now the team behind Spoke has gone bigger and grander, opening Liars in the Teele Square storefront that was formerly the vegetarian fine nosh spot, True Bistro.

If you're expecting Spoke's cozy intimacy, Liars will surprise you: The new space is chic and open, with a sheen of IKEA minimalism. There's a bar with cafe tables on one side, and on the other, a more formal dining area with a tasting counter overlooking the open kitchen. And throughout, there's a sense of spaciousness. The menu's tight and peppered with unusual offerings: fiddlehead chips, elk lettuce wraps, beef tongue with peppers and cheese, and cold somen (Asian buckwheat noodles that come with either a light tomato-y or more classic sesame and cashew broth). Soups include a lamb and zucchini stew and a cauliflower and almond soup with shrimp.

The centerpiece of the menu appears to be the tuna meatballs, lean balls of seasoned tuna in a rich pomodoro sauce. It's a neat trick – you get the savory meatiness without the heaviness, and the sauce packs a tangy bite. The meatballs are a guilt-free warm-up, and shareable, like many of the plates. They're also exactly what they say they are: no garnish or starchy side, just whole foods cooked with delicate care and cleanly plated. If you want a side dish, you can order long-grain rice with the option of added crab-fat butter. The sizzling chicken sausage and okra is simple yet savory, a cast-iron skillet of flash-fried, de-cased sausage with stout okra segments. The Jonah crab arrived as two pristine claws

with a creamy garlic aioli (getting the meat out wasn't hard, but some effort was required for the reward.) My favorite was the slow-roasted swordfish, a juicy, peppery steak whose slow cooking smoothes out the natural pungency that turns some people off (not me). It comes with three accents: delicately sliced, caramelized onions; chimichurri sauce; and a habanero vinaigrette that really knocked the dish out of the park for me, adding a piquant, puckering pow.

The drink list boasts playful theme-related names like “Come Clean” and “Poetic License,” and reads like a mad scientist’s chemistry equation. This is where the knowledgeable bartenders and servers can help you decide what

to order. It's a fun back-and-forth. The drinks include beguiling elements like roasted barley shochu, prickly ash, Serbian orange wine, Vago Elote, paw paw, and nitro pandan jasmine coffee. The end result is a colorful work of art in a thin-stemmed glass, maybe not what you expected but a happy surprise. I had something with Banhez destilado de mango (a Mexican liquor) and Sihhenge pineapple rum that was smooth, effervescent, and multi-tiered in its flavor complexity. As with the food menu, I wanted to try almost everything I read because it was so unusual. There's also a flight of curated spirits that come in one- or two-ounce servings — neat or with ice, and, if you desire, cut



A chicken sausage and okra sizzling on a cast-iron skillet at Liars.



Liars, in Somerville's Teele Square, is just up the street from its sibling restaurant, Spoke Wine Bar.

with wineberry syrup. In addition to the somen and elk, the wild mushrooms with soft scrambled eggs (two things I deeply appreciate) also beckon me back. The griddle-pressed corn muffin with blueberry ice cream is a nice way to close out your evening. From top to bottom, nearly everything on the menu stokes your curiosity and will have you planning future visits before you even close out your tab.

Liars
1153 Broadway, Teele Square,
Somerville
restaurantliars.com
\$\$\$ (out of \$\$\$\$)

What favorite dish or dine out spot should we cover? Email Tom Meek at tmeek@cambridgeday.com. Our reader recipe for next month is spring soups and you can also email your recipe pitches to Tom.

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BOOKS

Local creatives win book awards



Courtesy of Zachary Clemente and Harvard University

Zachary Clemente (left) of Bulgilhan Press and Jill Lepore (right) of Harvard University.

By **NATHAN METCALF**

A Cambridge historian and a one-person Somerville comics publisher are among the winners of this year’s Massachusetts Book Awards, the Commonwealth’s annual honors recognizing outstanding books by Massachusetts authors, artists, poets and publishers.

Jill Lepore, a Harvard University historian and Cambridge resident, won the nonfiction prize for “We the People: A History of the U.S. Constitution,” while Zachary Clemente’s Somerville-based Bulgilhan Press received the Notable Contribution to Publishing Prize for “Slices of Life: A Comic Montage,” by Chinese artist Qu.

The Massachusetts Book Awards have been presented annually since 2000 by the Massachusetts Center for the Book, a nonprofit and the state’s official affiliate of the Library of Congress’ Center for the Book. The awards recognize works across categories including fiction, nonfiction, poetry and children’s and young adult literature.

“I’m kind of a lifelong Massachusetts person, so it felt delightful,” said Lepore, a Worcester County native and Harvard professor for more than two decades, of receiving the award.

At the center of “We the People” is what Lepore calls the “philosophy of amendment,” the idea that the ability to modify the U.S. Constitution is foundational to American constitutionalism.

Lepore, 60, noted the Constitution has not been “meaningfully amended” since she was a little girl, when the 26th Amendment, passed in 1971, lowered the voting age from 21 to 18.

“A constitution that can no longer be amended is one whose legitimacy is really weakened,” Lepore said. “I wanted to call attention to this as a source of our constitutional frailty.”

Ratified in 1780, Lepore said the Massachusetts Constitution is the oldest written constitution still in use in the world. Massachusetts residents had rejected an earlier proposed constitution that lacked what Lepore described as a “proper” amendment provision, a struggle she said helped establish the philosophy of amendment that would later influence the U.S. Constitution.

Bringing the “mundanity of life” alive

For Clemente, the recognition honors not his own writing, but the painstaking behind-the-scenes

work of bringing someone else’s art to readers’ eyes. The Notable Contribution to Publishing Prize is awarded to Massachusetts-based presses and considers the quality of a book’s production, design and printing.

Bulgilhan Press’ “Slices of Life” is a collection of short, wordless comics by Qu, a Chinese artist now living in South Korea. Typically just two or three pages long, the comics capture ordinary experiences such as waking up from a long nap, playing with a pet or spending a day with a friend.

Clemente described the book as a celebration of the “sublime mundanity of life.”

The project began as Qu’s master of fine arts thesis at the Maryland Institute College of Art in Baltimore, where Clemente first encountered her work in 2019. Qu had printed just three copies and was showing them to publishers at the Small Press Expo in Maryland.

Years later, after the book had been published in China, Clemente unexpectedly encountered it again in a catalog sent to him by a foreign-rights agent.

“I was like, ‘Oh my God! I recognize this immediately. I would love to learn more about this,’” Clemente said.

He eventually worked directly with Qu to help craft the first edition ever published in the United States, giving her individual comics more room on the page and allowing Qu to update some of her earlier work.

Besides bringing on the occasional graphic designer, Bulgilhan is essentially a one-person operation Clemente runs as a side project out of his Teele Square home when not working his day job in IT. Clemente spent years writing about comics and helping run the Massachusetts Independent Comics Expo (MICE) before realizing that what he enjoyed most was not writing comics himself, but the work surrounding their creation, including editing, financing, printing, distribution and promotion.

“There’s all these beautiful books out there that I feel like really could use a little bit of extra oomph, a little bit of extra support,” Clemente said. “I also have pretty good taste, and thought it’d be fun to apply that, like, ‘Here are the books I think are amazing, we’ll see if other people agree.’”

Lepore and Clemente will join the other 2026 Massachusetts Book Award recipients at the State House on Oct. 28 for an in-person ceremony celebrating this year’s winners and honorees.

“Dot Kids” invited to meet author

By **MADISON LUCCHESI**

From 2014 to 2016, babies born at Mount Auburn Hospital in Cambridge were given a copy of the book “The Dot.” Now, its author Peter H. Reynolds is inviting those kids to meet him.

The “Dot Kids,” as he calls them, are invited to bring their books and meet Reynolds at the Museum of Fine Arts on Sept. 12 for International Dot Day.

“To see them at an age where they [can] not only read, but understand the meaning of the book [is] truly special,” said Reynolds, who has met a few “Dot Kids” at his Dedham bookstore, The Blue Bunny.

Reynolds, who lived in Cambridge at the beginning of his publishing career, first found out about the program when thousands of copies from his bookstore were ordered for the hospital.

Gifting newborns a copy of “The Dot” began in 2014 when one baby was given a gift to mark the 100th birthday of a woman who was born at Mount Auburn in 1914. After that, the hospital was inspired to give something to all babies born at its Bain Birthing Center.

In “The Dot,” published in 2003, a child discovers her creativity after a teacher tells her to “make a mark and see where it takes you.” Each copy the hospital gave included a bookplate with the baby’s name and birthdate.

“The Dot” program at the hospital was discontinued in 2016 when the supply of donated copies ran out. The hospital could not locate a record of who made the donations. Today, babies born in the hospital’s Special Care Nursery are still gifted books that are donated during an annual book drive, according to a spokesperson from the hospital.

Full circle

Years later, “Dot Kids” began visiting The Blue Bunny and showing Reynolds their inscribed copies of his book. “To see this ‘Dot baby’ all grown up, grown into a reader, standing, beaming in front of me was such a joy,” Reynolds said in an interview with Cambridge Day.

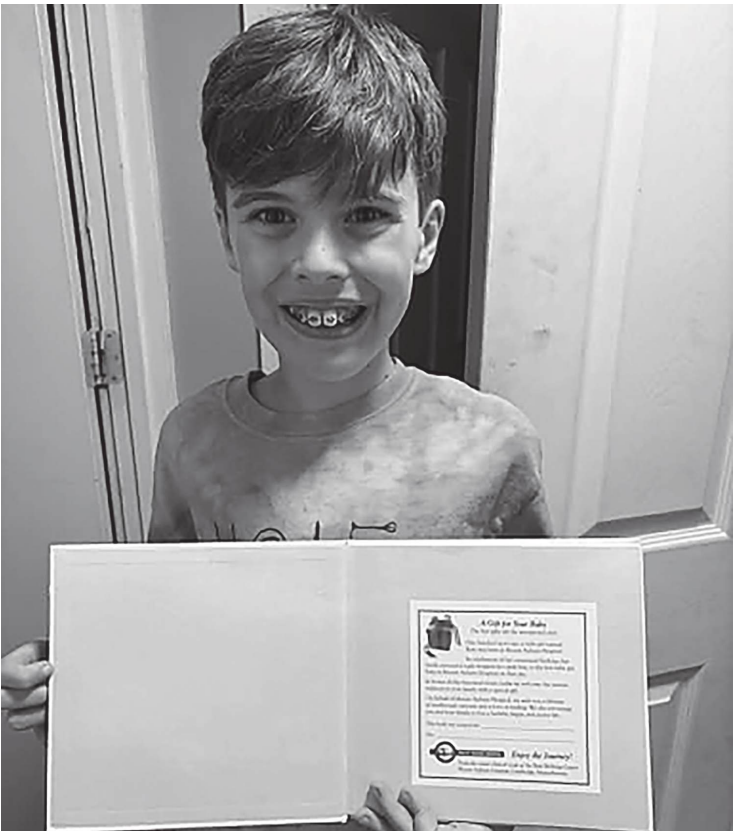
When Cantabrigian Diana Rastegayeva gave birth to a “Dot Kid” in 2016, her daughter received a copy of “The Dot,” which was “a sweet surprise,” she said. “All [three of] my kids have loved the book. I think it has an amazing message, and all my kids are very creative and so I’ve reminded them of the book at times where they get frustrated with the quality of their work.”

Now that “Dot Kids” are 10 to 12 years old, Reynolds wants to know where the book and its lesson took them, he said. “We are connected even if we haven’t met in person. And we always will be because our dots were connected from the very first day [they]



Photos: Courtesy of FableVision Studios

A newborn in Mount Auburn hospital swaddled in front of a copy of “The Dot.”



A child holds the copy of “The Dot” by Peter H. Reynolds, which was gifted to him on the day he was born at Mount Auburn Hospital in Cambridge.



Award-winning children’s book author and illustrator Peter H. Reynolds.

were born.”

On Sept. 12, the Museum of Fine Arts will be free to enter for International Dot Day, a celebration of creativity. The day will include a story walk to read book pages throughout the museum,

art making opportunities, a book reading and signing with Reynolds, and a musical performance by the School of Honk, a brass band based in Cambridge and Somerville that dresses in polka dots.

BOOKS

Cape Cod environmental crime drama has local flavor, minimal thrills

By AMY ROEDER

“The Scallop Plot” by former Boston Globe health columnist Judy Foreman seems like an ideal choice for a Cape Cod guest house bookshelf, a thriller to flip through idly on a rainy day. It’s full of immersive descriptions of Provincetown and vicinity, with plenty of local landmarks and restaurants namechecked. And it leaves the reader feeling a little bit smarter about wind power and scallop harvesting. However, a more attentive read quickly proves problematic.

The book’s fundamental problem is that the scallop plot is revealed in great detail early on. We learn that Swedish entrepreneur Olaf Svensson — who is creepily obsessed with young real-life climate activist Greta Thunberg — is taking his failed wind farm operation to Provincetown, along with a sinister plan to circumvent complications from the area’s local scallop fishing industry.

It’s all in the name of saving the planet, he and his fellow Swedes, hot newlywed marine biologists Astrid and Leif, tell themselves. If dozens of people die scallop-related deaths along the way, it’s just collateral damage in the fight. C’est la vie.

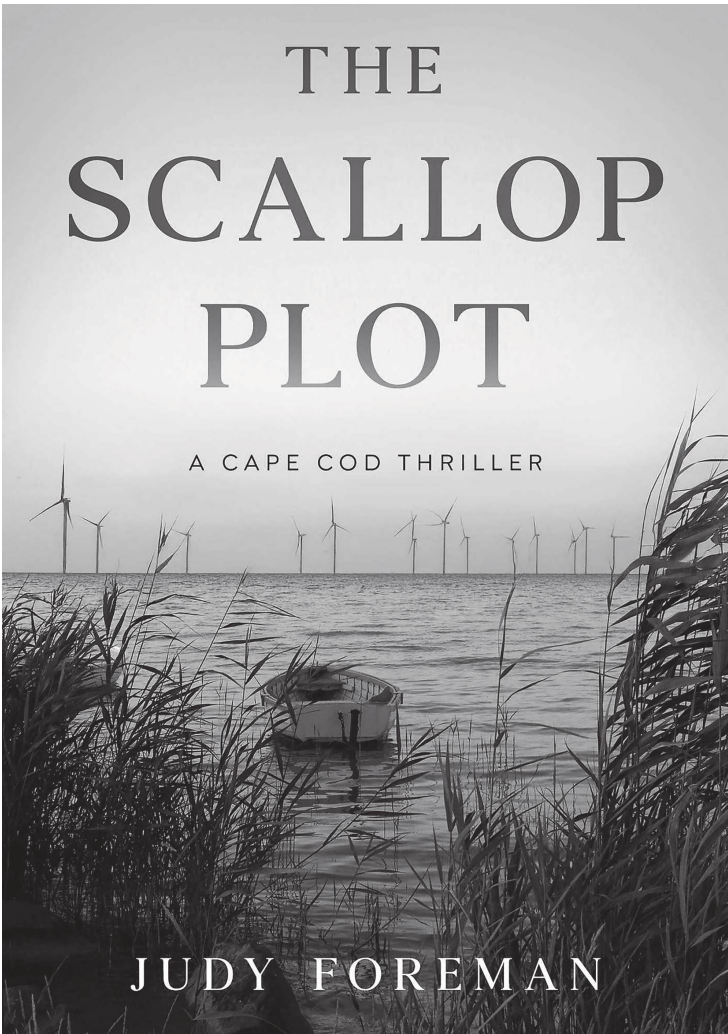
The book’s thrills, such as they are, get going when scrappy reporter Samantha Fuller’s spidey sense starts tingling. She teams up with scrappy scallop fisherwoman Isabella Ferreira to collect evidence for a story. Said evidence is gathered at a pace that is probably pretty realistic, but it is glacial for a thriller. Two years literally go by.

While Samantha is the most well-written and fully realized character, her central role makes the drama hinge more on getting the story than on saving lives. Too much information is conveyed secondhand, diluting any sense of tension.

Foreman makes other odd choices, like spending more time on Isabella’s daughter’s traffic accident — meaningless to the overall story — than on the deaths caused by the scallop plot. And much of the book proves repetitive, as Samantha tracks down facts about the plot that the reader already knows. These same facts are also repeated during the climactic trial and in Samantha’s triumphally reported news story, which is published here in full.

Also published in full is Samantha’s story: “Broken Turbine Blade Falls Into the Ocean.” This appears following a page in which we hear Samantha learn that a broken blade has fallen into the ocean and, two paragraphs later, inform someone else.

Much of the dialogue is eyeroll-inducing. Flat expository



The cover for “The Scallop Plot.”

statements abound. “Astrid, I recognize you, even though your hair is different. It is you,” was a personal favorite.

On the plus side, the book seems deeply reported and raises compelling questions about environmental ethics. Underneath the silliness, it explores a very real dilemma: How do we balance the need for clean energy with the costs its technology may create for other parts of the environment or to people’s livelihoods — and who gets to decide what costs are acceptable?

Samantha and other characters admit that they haven’t thought about these issues much beyond “Wind power = good.” The book is at its most interesting as she gets into the nuances, tapping her sources about the potential risks from offshore windfarms and sifting out misconceptions promoted by right-wing groups under the guise of environmental advocacy. For example, a scientist

she interviews states that there is no causal link between low-frequency noise from wind turbines and harm to human health, and that climate change and cats pose more of a risk to bird populations than wind farms.

According to a recent study, bivalve shellfish fisheries are expected to be the most impacted by offshore wind development. Foreman’s characters land on the idea that fishermen can play an important role in the responsible development of wind power, and that they deserve compensation to offset losses to their livelihoods.

In the real world, mechanisms do exist to address direct economic impacts from offshore wind projects in Massachusetts, which are proceeding despite opposition from the federal government.

Foreman succeeds when she’s laying out the facts. Her fiction, unfortunately, fails to deliver.

Book fair pops up at Lamplighter

BY VIVIAN HIR

This summer, Lamplighter Brewing Co. in Cambridge launched a monthly Brewery Book Fair with Book Ends, an independent bookstore in Winchester.

It began in July as the brainchild of Book Ends co-owner Lauren Tiedemann, a Cambridge resident and member of the brewery’s membership club. She was inspired to host a book fair at Lamplighter because of the “more social atmosphere” that breweries offer compared to the “traditional bookstore browsing experience,” which tends to be quiet.

“I feel like breweries are becoming a really wonderful third space,” Tiedemann said. “It’s a great place to hang out, to buy a drink, to eat some food.”

Each month, Tiedemann selects books that focus on seasonal themes and local authors. In addition, she plans to invite local authors to attend book fairs so they can talk to attendees about their work and sign books.

On a Sunday in late August, around 100 attendees browsed a varied selection of books at Lamplighter’s Broadway back taproom. Everything from recent bestselling novels to local books about the greater Boston area were laid out on tables, in addition to bookish gifts and games.

Cambridge-based author Brian Hoefling was the writer on tap that day. An author of four books about cocktails and spirits, Hoefling chatted with attendees about his latest book, “Dryads: Spirits of the Trees,” a book about spirits distilled from tree taps around the world. In conversations suited for the space, Hoefling shared drink recipes and taste profiles from his book “Cocktail Seminars” and debunked drinking myths from another, “Distilled Knowledge.”



Vivian Hir

Attendees browse books at the Lamplighter Brewery book fair in August.

Here for the vibes

At the event, people drank craft beer while perusing the diverse array of books. Some chatted with friends about books they read, while others sat down on the couches and read a book.

“I’m here for the vibes,” attendee Audrey Iocca said. She learned about the event through the Lamplighter’s Instagram account and brought her friend to the event.

Nicole Reddig also came to the event for its laidback setting. She ended up purchasing four titles — two children’s books for a baby shower gift, and two books that her friends recommended. “It’s nice to have a pop-up afternoon,” Reddig said.

In addition to the book fairs, Lamplighter also has monthly book club meetings in collaboration with the Cambridge Public Library on the first Wednesday of each month.

“We know Cambridge is a literary city,” Lamplighter Events Manager RileyMcLaughlin wrote in an email to Cambridge Day.

McLaughlin considers the pop-up book fair to be a “perfect fit for our taproom” because of the fair’s focus on Cambridge-based authors and community.

Lamplighter plans to continue partnering with Book Ends to host pop-up book fairs every month, with the next on October 25.

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Cambridge Body Art Regulations Revisions

The Commissioner of Public Health for the City of Cambridge has revised the “Cambridge Public Health Department Body Art Regulations” under the authority of M.G.L c.111 s.31. Revisions include reordering the sections for clarity and readability; clarifying the source of legal authority; adding definitions for clarity; clarifying required licenses; changes to exemptions and prohibited activities; updates to body art practitioners requirements and disinfectant and sterilization procedures; changes to protocols for the preparation and care of the procedure site; changes to informed consent and release forms; new requirements

for single-use items and body art establishment documentation; changes to establishment requirements and professional standards; changes to practitioner license requirements and apprenticeship programs; and changes to the enforcement of body art regulation.

For a copy of the proposed revisions, contact the Cambridge Public Health Department at 781-870-0687, or pschult@cambridgepublichealth.org, or visit the department’s website at www.cambridgepublichealth.org. Detailed information about the revisions to the regulation can be found in the Tattoo and Body Art section in the drop-down bar “I want to...” found on the top of the website.

Public comments will be open for 21 (twenty-one) days after the first publishing of this notice, closing on 9/25/26. Comments can be sent to Paul Schult and Bhumika Kamthey at pschult@cambridgepublichealth.org and bkamthey@cambridgepublichealth.org.

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