

# Economy brings good and bad news

**T**here was no magic in 2013, but some developments occurred that will definitely change the dynamics of our cities and towns in the future.

First and foremost, is the advent of casino gambling. This legislation was passed two years ago and allows for a casino in Western Massachusetts, making implications for traditional tourism, traffic, and the city of Springfield. The proposal by MGM Resorts International was the only one approved by residents, as is required by the state Gaming Commission.

The second major change is a piece of legislation which allows marijuana to be grown and distributed for medicinal purposes, as already approved by many other states.

Franklin County has had three proposals filed with the state Department of Public Health with locations in Greenfield, Montague and Deerfield.

Perhaps the biggest change in the way we do business today is the remarkable rise in the use of social media. Technology has become effective yet intrusive. Users sit at meetings, social events and family outings with eyes glued to their smart phones and their tablets. We are in an age of information overload and being constantly bombarded by instant messaging.

Urgent has a whole new definition! My hope is that human contact and consideration will not be lost by Gen Xers and millennials who succumb to cyberspace communication devices. This is a new era, and it's here to stay so we adapt and perhaps change our routines and communication strategies.

There are some changes in Franklin County including the sale of two major employers, Yankee Candle Co. and Lightlife Foods.

Yankee was purchased by Jarden Corp., a consumer products firm that owns more than 100 brands and ConAgra sold Lightlife to Brynwood Partners VI L.P., a private equity firm. Spokes-

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people from both companies say we should not expect major changes in employment or general operations.

Both companies are excellent

corporate members of the community, give generously to local causes, and encourage employees to volunteer be involved in community activities.

A big plus for manufacturing were the efforts of Steve Capshaw, president of VSS in Greenfield, who raised nearly \$220,000 from other manufacturers, \$250,000 from the state, and nearly another \$250,000 in a large training grant, all of which led to a substantial numbers of new CNC machines for Franklin County Technical School. Not only will students be trained for the workforce of today, but 30 adults a year are eligible for CNC training to equip them to fill the need for many manufacturers' employment needs.

Several expansions have taken place, including Bayer Material Science in Whately, the food processing center at the Franklin County Community Development Corp. and a new Greenfield High School to open this fall.

Good news from Turners Falls, the Gill-Montague bridge was re-opened to two-way traffic in November after being one-way (in) for nearly four years. This definitely impacted businesses in the village.

Some challenges are ahead in 2014.

The 230-acre campus of Northfield-Mount Hermon School is still for sale in Northfield, the First National Bank building (1929) on Bank Row in Greenfield needs an owner and a purpose, and there's a large plot of land in South Deerfield,

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# Good news, bad news

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formerly the site of Oxford Pickles vacant and available. This is really good news-bad news because there are relatively few available sites for new or expanding companies in the three large industrial parks or available inventory of buildings.

The good news is that many of our small businesses are doing well in the global economy, although retailing becomes more challenging in the age of e-tail and the convenience of shopping on one's home computer or apps on mobile devices.

On a positive note, a hotel has been announced for the top three floors of Wilson's department store and \$60-plus million courthouse renovations and new construction will begin.

On the tourism scene, we look forward to the arrival of trains from New York City to Greenfield and parts north in late 2014 or early 2015, and at least two scheduled stops a day, perhaps more. This should increase tourism traffic from the metropolitan New York area and offer a convenient option for people in the Pioneer Valley to get to the Big Apple or somewhere in between. Hikers, bikers, canoeists, kayakers and the students and parents of our several independent schools will find this a great boon to vacation plans.

If one prefers "lesser traveled" exploration, the Franklin Regional Council of Governments launched a new scenic byway program with attractive signage, maps and markers along seven back roads in Western Massachusetts.

Our best wishes to all our residents and visitors for a wonderful new year.

Ann L. Hamilton is president of the Franklin County Chamber of Commerce; to learn more about the chamber and its work, go online to [franklincc.org](http://franklincc.org)