

FRANKLIN COUNTY

Farmworkers’ lives unveiled

Oral history and photo project to tell stories of region’s agricultural workers

By **CHRIS LARABEE**
Staff Writer

To highlight the often-unseen perspectives and experiences of Franklin County’s agricultural workers, The LAVA Center is launching a new program, as well as an accompanying podcast, to document their stories.

Entitled “indivISIBLE: Celebrating Indispensable Agricultural Workers, Making

Their Stories and Presence Visible,” the project will use oral history and photos to tell the stories of the region’s farmworkers and their communities, while the “Documenting indivISIBLE” podcast will tell the story and methodology of the program from its conceptual state to The LAVA Center.

Alfonso Neal, who is co-directing the project, said indivISIBLE is sort of an extension to the social justice in

arts programming The LAVA Center pursued last year. His personal background as a first-generation American and previous work, including his current exhibit at the center, also contributed to the inspiration.

“In thinking about the bigger picture, what are the stories not being told?” Neal said, adding that Franklin County’s farm industry is huge, but the seasonal workers are often underrepre-

sented. “We don’t really see them as often as we think we would, given the size of our agriculture workforce.”

Neal is also the executive director of the Pioneer Valley Workers Center and an adjunct professor in Latinx studies and history at Holyoke Community College. Joining him as co-director is Lindy Whiton.

The goal, Neal said, is to

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STAFF PHOTO/CHRIS LARABEE
Lindy Whiton and Alfonso Neal are co-directing “indivISIBLE,” a photo and oral history project.

TURNERS FALLS

‘There’s more to the world’

With stops in Paris and Rome, 23 students take first school trip abroad in two decades

By **JULIAN MENDOZA**
Staff Writer

Twenty-three Turners Falls High School students are back on American soil after an overwhelmingly positive eight-day European excursion, marking the school’s first trip abroad in two decades.

The school’s Travel Club, assembled last school year specifically to prepare for a trip to Paris and Rome, spent March 10 to March 17 overseas. Megan Bendiksen, who leads the club and teaches French and Latin at Turners Falls High School, said spending four days in France and four days in Italy was meant to immerse students in other cultures and test their foreign language skills. The students — almost none of whom had ever traveled out of the country — took to the challenge in stride, Bendiksen said.

“I think overwhelmingly, they loved it,” said special education teacher Jessica Vachula-Curtis, who chaperoned the trip alongside Bendiksen.

Vachula-Curtis remembered “randomly chatting in the hallway” with Bendiksen in May 2021 when musings of a school trip abroad first arose. By then, the COVID-19 pandemic had limited people’s connection with the world for more than a year.

“It was just sort of out of this idea of getting restless and we were just like, ‘Do you think we could get a group of six to 10 kids to travel with us?’” Bendiksen said.

SEE TRAVEL C5

FRANKLIN COUNTY



STAFF PHOTO/PAUL FRANZ
Judith Northup-Bennett, of New Salem, and her Easter egg tree.

A slice of Slovakia

Local Polish-Americans find popular cultural getaway with Slovakia Heritage Tours

By **DOMENIC POLI**
Staff Writer

At least 8.8 million Americans reported Polish heritage to the U.S. Census Bureau in 2021. And members of this community who visit their ancestral homeland will find themselves in a nearly 125,000-square-foot nation separated from neighboring Slovakia by the majestic Carpathian Mountains.

This makes Slovakia Heritage Tours, established in 2010 by New Salem resident Judith Northup-Bennett, a popular service among Polish-Americans and others throughout Franklin County and the rest of

the United States.

“The culture is very similar,” said former longtime Deerfield resident Mary Lou Reid, whose four grandparents came from the Krakow, Poland, area. “Going to Slovakia felt like going back into my grandmother’s house, and Poland even more so.”

Reid is one of dozens of people Northup-Bennett has escorted to Slovakia, and over into Poland, in the past 12 years. Northup-Bennett’s maternal grandparents hailed from the landlocked central European country and grew up with an appreciation for the history and culture, visiting for the first time with her

mother in 1967 and returning many times to connect with her roots.

“I grew up with my grandmother in my house,” she said. “My mother and grandmother spoke [the dialect] Šariš, which is ... more like Polish.”

Northup-Bennett visited Slovakia for three weeks in 2008 to study the Slovak language at a university in Bratislava, the nation’s capital and largest city, and attend a relative’s wedding. She realized other Americans were likely equally anxious to retrace their heritage and she returned to the country in 2010 with her oldest son. This year’s trip will be the first since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. Slo-

vakia Heritage Tours are held in September.

“That’s worked out well,” Northup-Bennett said. “It’s around the festivals, the wine festivals and harvest festivals.”

She explained she and her clients typically fly into Vienna, Austria, and drive the roughly 50 miles into Slovakia. The federal republic of Czechoslovakia split into the independent countries of the Czech Republic and Slovakia at the end of 1992.

According to the Slovakia Heritage Tours’ website, the 2023 adven-

SEE SLOVAKIA C2

PICTURE THIS: View an expanded photo gallery of Judith Northup-Bennett and snapshots of her travels at [recorder.com](https://www.recorder.com).

Setting and respecting healthy boundaries is crucial

Setting boundaries is a life skill that involves setting limits and rules for how people treat us, who we want in our lives and how close we wish to be with others.

To really open our hearts to others, we need to be able to trust that we will be treated well, and that our boundaries will be respected. The need for boundaries applies to any kind of relationship — whether it be with a partner/spouse, friend, relative, coworker, neighbor or others.

Boundaries include both what we let in, and what we



AMY NEWSHORE
LET’S TALK RELATIONSHIPS

let out. They help to protect us from damaging situations such as mistreatment, abuse

and harassment. We also can set boundaries for our own behavior, so that we treat others well. If we value kind, respectful communication, we can set a boundary with ourselves not to yell and criticize, even when we are upset.

The quality of our relationships and lives profoundly depends on having intact, healthy boundaries. To know our boundaries and communicate them, we need:

- Self-awareness: “What am I wanting/needing right now?”
- Self-acceptance: “I ac-

cept my need to be alone right now, though you’d rather I be with you.”

- Assertiveness: “I’m taking a few minutes for myself right now so that I can calm down.”

Types of boundaries we need

Material: You may be fine with sharing your belongings or even your money at times. But what if you need to set a limit? Can you say “no” to a friend who wants to borrow a piece of clothing, or your car?

Do you have rules for your children about your personal items being off limits to play with? How much money is realistic for you to spend on a birthday?

Physical/Sexual: Your body belongs to you! You can prioritize your well-being by listening to your body’s needs. Can you decline an invitation to a family event when feeling unwell? Or ask your partner to be more gentle when massaging your neck? Can you speak up about your sexual desires? Can you tell your partner you would like non-

sexual touch and affection? When dating, can you communicate that you would like to take things slowly?

Mental: When we value ourselves, it is only natural to expect respect from others. Relatedly, can you, yourself, say respectfully, “I see it differently” to someone, without telling them they are wrong? When a friend gives you unwanted advice, can you ask them to just listen? When someone is dominating the conversation, can you express

SEE BOUNDARIES C3

FAITH CHURCH: GREENFIELD

Easter should be a time for the unexpected

No one saw crucifixion coming during Palm Sunday celebration

By **BRETT SHERWOOD**
Pastor, Faith Church

If you belong to a church in any capacity, you're already prepared for tomorrow. The most pastel of your Sunday finest are ironed and laid out and your children's baskets wait by the door, not to be forgotten in the mad dash to worship. Tomorrow is the church's Super Bowl, the main event, and not one of us doesn't see it coming.

Except, the whole point of Easter is no one saw it coming. No one waving palm fronds on Sunday expected a cross on Friday. No one weeping over a body expected an empty grave. And in the original April Fool's prank, all of the evil, sin and death of this world could never have expected the reversal of resurrection. As you hear the familiar gospel story in the comfort of your familiar pews, remember a time when absolutely no one was prepared for it at all.

Even in shrinking, post-COVID congregations, Christians still gather in big numbers for the expectation of Easter. And it is indeed a joy to witness people gather over what Christ has done, but perhaps the real joy is in the potential of our response. Jesus played a joke on death, smuggling away the victory evil surely thought it seized, and



Pastor Brett Sherwood of Faith Church on Silver Street in Greenfield.

the audacity and unpredictability of it should inspire the most familiar of reactions from us: laughter. We should laugh with relief, hope, joy — a joker/savior pulled one over on our mortal enemy — but instead, we've heard the

punchline so many years in a row the returns are diminishing. Christ's story loses its transformative power when we make it so routine. And so in our congregation, we seek to restore the unexpected mystery of Easter

through a less familiar tradition. Next week, when the pastels are in the laundry, the baskets left with half-melted chocolates, and you're all churching-out from the big day, maybe the unexpected will happen; you'll still find

yourself yearning for that joyful response of laughter. And on the Sunday after Easter, when the congregations shrink again, you'll find yourself at Faith Church for Holy Humor Sunday. It is our response to Easter, our laugh at

Christ's joke. We sing silly songs, play pranks on each other and generally act like joyful little children, because frankly, how else could we behave in the unexpected light of resurrection?

This is a service I look forward to every year, an opportunity for our church to show our community that in a world of Christians who are too easily offended and take themselves too seriously, there are still genuine Christ-followers with the humility to laugh because Jesus fooled us, too. It becomes an invitation to further joy and wonder in life, an acceptance that people of faith live with more questions than answers and more hope than certainty, and an opportunity to serve a world that God truly loves. Traditions like this are helping our church become a more welcoming and inclusive space and our congregation to be challenged by how far-reaching God's grace actually is.

I pray that the familiar old story catches you in unexpected ways tomorrow. I hope you see Christ's love like you never have before. But if you are still searching for that joy, I invite you on April 16 to enjoy a laugh with/at us for Holy Humor Sunday.

Faith Church, on Silver Street in Greenfield, hosts Growth Group discussion at 9 a.m. and sanctuary worship at 10 a.m. every Sunday as well as Addiction Recovery Tuesdays at 6 p.m. and Bible Study Wednesdays at 6 p.m.

A popular cultural getaway in Slovakia

SLOVAKIA FROM C1

ture from Sept. 8 to 17 includes nine nights in three- and four-star hotels and inns, admissions to festivals, historic sites, museums and cultural activities, and the 24/7 services of a native Slovak guide/interpreter and professional driver. Round-trip airfare, as well as medical and travel insurance and other costs, is not included.

That guide/interpreter is Northup-Bennett's Slovak counterpart, Peter Blazicek, the CEO and founder of Best Slovakia Tours. Northup-Bennett connected with Blazicek years ago in hopes of getting help making arrangements such as hotel and restaurant bookings. They conducted their first tour together in 2011.

"Judy contacted me. She found us on the internet while she was searching for Slovakian tour guides," Blazicek said in a phone interview from Budapest, Hungary, while in the middle of a 25-day tour around four countries. "We talked about an hour and everything was very good and we started then thinking about how to organize a tour."

"She really liked to talk to people and talk about Slovakia," he continued.

Northup-Bennett said the collaboration has gone so well that Blazicek takes over her company this year.

"I'm a consultant now," she said.

Satisfied customers

Reid, who recently moved to Florida after 49 years in Franklin County, said she went on one tour and is thinking about bringing her whole family "because it's really kind of a family-friendly tour."

"The tour was wonderful because it was small," she recalled. "I believe there were maybe 12 people and the two tour guides."

Reid said the group visited Northup-Bennett's uncle, who owned a restaurant. Reid said he closed the restaurant for his niece's guests and brought in food and musicians to play accordions.

"We danced the polka all night," she recounted. "Just like we used to in my grandmother's living room on Sundays. It was a great way to grow up."

Reid, who was awestruck by the beauty of the Carpathian Mountains on both sides, said she visited



A modern-day shepherd watching his flock on the hill behind Judith Northup-Bennett's house in Slovakia, where Northup-Bennett's grandmother used to take the cows to graze.

Poland and was sitting in a cafe in Limanowa when she saw a passing tour bus with her grandfather's surname on it. She also said Krakow felt "like a big hug."

South Deerfield resident Irene "Reenie" Clancy, who grew up in Sunderland with the surname Grybko, has twice toured with Northup-Bennett and raved about the intimacy of the trips.

"We went to very low-key places. We got to know each other," she said. "We became part of the communities. It was just such a personal experience, as opposed to a flamboyant or flashy ... experience. We learned how the people there enjoy and celebrate their lives."

Digging for her roots

Northup-Bennett, who worked in marketing and promotions in New Hampshire before becoming a Spanish teacher at Amherst-Pelham Regional High School in her late 40s, grew up hearing Slovak in her Stratford, Connecticut, home but was always encouraged to speak English.

"I was surrounded by Slovak, but no one spoke [the language] to me," she recalled. Part of the reason for this, she theorizes, is her father was not Slovak but rather the descendant of an old Rhode Island family.

Still, she has worked diligently to stay in touch with her Slovak roots. Her grandmother, Mary Zelensky, immi-

grated to the United States at 14 around 1900 and eventually met and married Josef Grich, a fellow immigrant who died of an enlarged heart at 30.

Northup-Bennett explained Slovaks have historically tended to move to Pennsylvania and Ohio to work in mines and steel mills.

Notable Slovak-Americans include Dave Grohl, founder of the rock band Foo Fighters and former drummer of Nirvana, actor Jon Voight and daughter Angelina Jolie, and singer Jon Bon Jovi.

More information about Slovakia Heritage Tours is available at: slovakiaheritage.com. More information about Best Slovakia Tours is available at: www.bestslovakiatours.com.

BOOKS

Moushabeck recollects 'Dream of Palestine'

By **STEVE PFARRER**
Staff Writer

Homeland: My Father Dreams of Palestine
By **Hannah Moushabeck**
Illustrated by **Reem Madooh; Chronicle Books**

Growing up mostly in Leverett, Hannah Moushabeck remembers hearing any number of bedtime stories from her father, Michel, alongside her two sisters. Sometimes these were imaginary tales — "a hero climbing a tower to rescue a magical princess" — but more often they were stories her father related about growing up in the Mideast and visiting his family's ancestral home in Palestine.



In "Homeland: My Father Dreams of Palestine," Moushabeck, today a marketing manager for Simon & Schuster, has written her first children's book, based on the family stories she heard, including the times her father visited his grandfather, or "Sido," in the Old City of Jerusalem.

"[O]ur homeland," she writes, is "a place we've never been."

As Moushabeck relates in an afterword, her extended family lived in West Jerusalem until May 15, 1948, the day Israel was declared an independent nation and the first Arab-Israeli War began.

Forced into exile, some of

her relatives, including her father, would return to Jerusalem for summer visits, but these ended when the 1967 Arab-Israeli War began.

But in the colorfully illustrated story, her father, as a boy, visits his grandparents' home in Jerusalem, where his "Teta" (grandmother) Maria urges him to eat more at breakfast, and his grandfather, Abu Michel, a community leader, takes him round the neighborhood, greeting everyone in turn.

Hannah's father recalls the smells and sights of the city — the muezzin's call to prayer; food in cafes, shops selling all manner of goods — and the unique work of a juice vendor, who bangs out rhythms on cups and saucers to get people's attention.

"We know the ending of this story is not a happy one," Moushabeck writes. "We know that we may never sit and watch the juice man by Jaffa Gate. But we whisper the hope of return as we turn out the light."

Kirkus Reviews calls the story a "beautiful tale of family, love for a lost homeland, and remembrance."

"Homeland" is in keeping with the literary tradition of the Moushabeck family: Michel Moushabeck is the founder of Interlink Publishing in Northampton, and Hannah Moushabeck and her sisters are all involved in the business.

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