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STATE

Lawmakers to Healey: Remember western Mass.

As gov.-elect prepares to take office, local pols want focus on transportation, affordable housing, health care, roads

By NINO MTCHEDLISHVILI
For the Gazette

BOSTON — Western Massachusetts lawmakers say Gov.-elect Maura Healey needs to remember the needs of region as she charts a course for her new administration.

“We are 20% of the population living in 80% of the landmass,” said Rep. Susannah Whipp, I-Athol. “We might have similar problems, but solutions that are often developed in Boston do not apply well to rural areas, including western Mass.”

Healey scored a historic victory in the Nov. 8 election, becoming the first elected female governor in Massachusetts and the nation’s first openly lesbian governor.

The Massachusetts attorney general, who had already won statewide office twice and held a significant advantage in fundraising and steadily led in polls throughout the campaign, easily defeated former state Rep. Geoff Diehl, who was backed by for-

SEE TRANSPORTATION A4

SIDNEY F. SMITH TOY FUND

Honoring late colleague’s Christmas spirit

Joe’s Cafe makes Toy Fund donation in honor of longtime server and continues tradition of annual ornament fundraiser

By EMILY THURLOW
Staff Writer

NORTHAMPTON — The generosity of the patrons of Joe’s Cafe during the COVID-19 pandemic touched the staff of the Northampton restaurant, so much so that it inspired a little altruism of their own.

The crew at the eatery, also known as Joe’s Pizza and Spaghetti House, collectively donated \$100 to

SEE BELOVED FORMER SERVER A4

WEATHER SATURDAY

Mostly sunny and breezy, high 51

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\$1.50

NORTHAMPTON

A music empire goes dark



STAFF PHOTO/CAROL LOLLIS

Nerissa Nields, whose band The Nields has played dozens of times at the Iron Horse in Northampton, says the shuttering of the club feels to her like “a major part of what made Northampton so special is gone.”

Musicians, club owners wonder what’s happened to Iron Horse Entertainment Group

By STEVE PFARRER
Staff Writer

NORTHAMPTON — When she looks back at how her band first found its footing, Nerissa Nields sees one club in particular at the center of that story: the Iron Horse Music Hall.



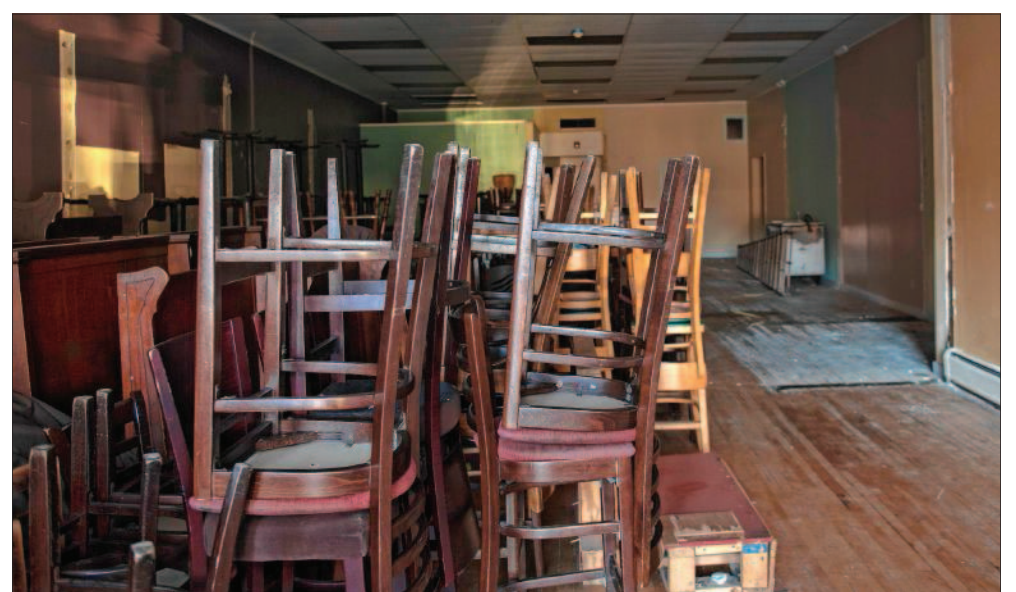
ERIC SUHER
Iron Horse Entertainment Group president

From the time The Nields, the Valley folk-rock band, formed in the early 1990s, the Iron Horse became the group’s adopted home, a place “where magic would happen,” said Nields — and a venue she went to countless times simply as a music fan to see a huge range of artists.

The Nields played dozens of gigs at the Horse over the years, from the early 1990s into early 2020, before the pandemic shut everything down for a year and a half. But the group had been scheduled to perform there again in the fall of 2021, and then this year after that initial show was postponed.

But in late summer, they got a call from their manager, Patty Romanoff. “She said, ‘Everyone’s left the Iron Horse — the club has gone dark,’” Nields said.

The band scrambled to find a new place to play and in October landed at the Drake, the downtown Amherst venue that opened



STAFF PHOTO/CAROL LOLLIS

In this view through a window, chairs can be seen piled up in the Iron Horse Music Hall, which has been closed since March 2020.

this spring.

It was good gig, Nields says, but the apparent demise of the Iron Horse was still on her mind: “That was devastating to hear. The Iron Horse has been a part of my life for so long.”

More than a year after most venues reopened for live music following the worst of the pandemic, the Iron Horse remains shuttered, never having actually reopened since

closing in March 2020 — though for months, beginning last fall, coming shows were listed there, only to be canceled or postponed, or in some cases moved to another venue.

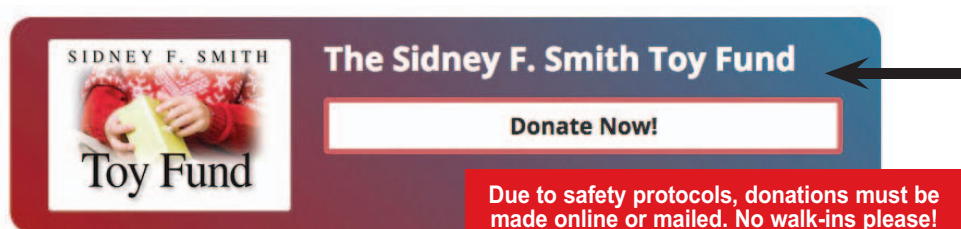
Meanwhile, two other Northampton clubs that are part of the Iron Horse Entertainment Group (IHEG), the Calvin Theatre and Pearl Street Nightclub, have also gone quiet;

SEE OTHER MUSIC VENUES A7

SIDNEY F. SMITH

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