

Editorial

## Flu season nothing to sneeze at

Due to an early peak, this year's flu season has been characterized by health officials as severe and widespread, and our email box has been inundated with announcements from the medical community with information about this year's flu strain and instructions on how to care for yourself and family members. We've summarized these announcements to help keep our readers informed and, hopefully, protected.

The best defense against the flu is a flu shot. It's not too late. The Centers for Disease Control recommends that everyone six months of age and older receive the flu shot that will provide protection against this year's virulent strain, which, according to Dr. Sarah Haessler of the Infectious Disease Division at Baystate Medical Center, can remain in the area through April.

Busting through the biggest myth about flu – the vaccine does not cause the flu; still, it does take about two weeks for it to become fully effective, so there is a chance that if you are exposed, you may still suffer symptoms.

Other protections against infection include frequent hand washing with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand rub. Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth, and avoid close contact with people who are sick.

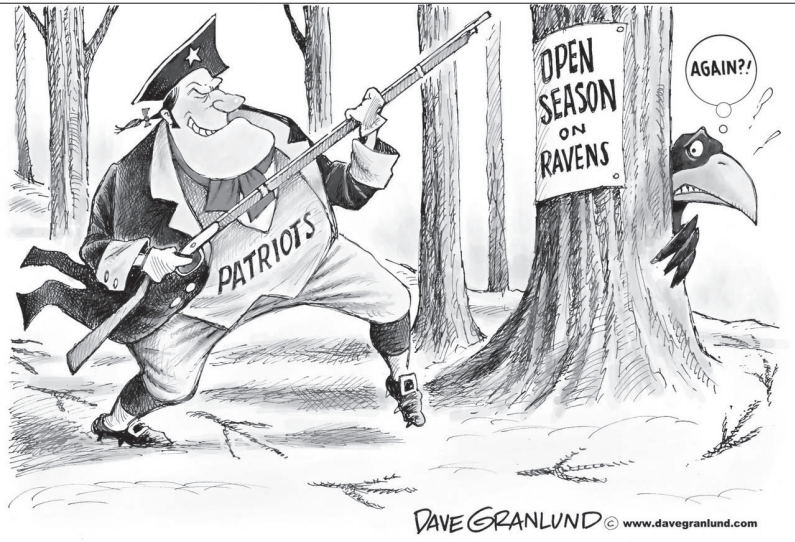
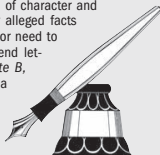
The flu is a virus, so antibiotics cannot treat it. Still, there are steps you can take to treat symptoms that include high fever lasting three to five days, severe body aches, headache, fatigue, sore throat, cough, runny or stuffy nose, and vomiting and/or diarrhea, particularly in small children. First – rest – stay at home, and stay in bed. This will help you to recover more quickly and avoiding work or school will keep the flu virus from spreading to others; drink plenty of fluids, water or juice, to avoid dehydration; take non-aspirin pain relievers to reduce fever and pain.

Seek medical attention immediately if more severe symptoms develop, including "fast breathing, trouble breathing or bluish skin color; pain or pressure in the chest or abdomen; confusion or sudden dizziness; not drinking enough fluids, not being able to eat, or severe or persistent vomiting; flu-like symptoms that improve but then return with fever and worse cough; not waking up, being so irritable that the child does not want to be held or not interacting (children); fever with a rash (children); no tears when crying or significantly fewer wet diapers than normal (children)."

More information is available at [redcross.org](http://redcross.org) and [www.mass.gov/flu](http://www.mass.gov/flu) or by calling the Massachusetts Department of Public Health's Immunization Program at 617-983-6800.

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### Letters to the Editor

#### Thank you from Holyoke Merry-Go-Round

To the Editor,

The Holyoke Merry-Go-Round would like to thank all of our riders who donated a pair of mittens, gloves or a new hat for our "Warming Tree" this past holiday season. Thanks to your generosity, many deserving residents of the area will have something to help keep them warm this winter season.

Marianne Holden,  
Operations Manager  
Holyoke Merry-Go-Round

#### Community Field restoration deserves recognition

To the Editor,

Praises go out to those of whom are responsible for not only salvaging but also breathing life back into Community Field in Holyoke.

This refurbished park is instrumental in bettering the lives of area residents by giving them an area of play that both young and not so young can enjoy. I hope this park revitalization may serve as a model for other communities as to what can be done with parcels of land that have been neglected or shunned aside and forgotten.

The refrigerated skating path is a work of art along with other innovative apparatuses.

Now it is up to local residents to conjure up creative new games that can be

played on the grounds. What about badminton and wiffle ball for starters as soon as the dandelions are in bloom come summer? How about adding "Kubb" (a Swedish lawn game) to the roster?

As for now, winter is a time for sledding and skating and skijoring...yes skijoring! Skijoring, simply put, is taking your typical household pet dog wearing a harness and pulling his or her master on cross-country skis.

Whatever vibrant activity suits your style and those you intend on sharing it with; there is now a place you can go to set yourself free!

As one blogger put it, "A field of dreams!"

Bill Paul,  
Chicopee

#### More info on needle exchange

To the Editor,

At the meeting on Aug. 14, 2012, Kevin Cranston from DPH presented a report indicating there were 301 individuals living with AIDS in Holyoke as of Dec. 31, 2011 and that 39 percent or 117 self-reported that injection drug use was the exposure mode.

Then, in November, Tim Purington, director of the needle exchange program for Tapestry and former city councilor stated on television channel 22, that there were 200 individuals registered with the needle exchange program. By December, at a recent Board of Health meeting, he reported 300 individuals registered with this program.

These numbers appear to support the assertion by those that say this program is drawing drug users who inject drugs TO our community from other communities.

So far, the statistics indicate those concerns have merit. Most arrested for drug offenses are from outside of Holyoke, too. Why should we provide needles?

We are paying for this service with our tax dollars. This is a way for Tapestry to increase revenue by \$150,000. So far they have reduced the number of individuals

in the Northampton needle exchange program by 30.

Are they shifting the program from Northampton to Holyoke?

Apparently the 15 Main Street location has not had many customers, so paid staff are now driving to neighborhoods in a Winnebago to hand out needles. By Tim Purington's report, they handed out 6,000 needles in a three-month period and collected about 7,000 (other than diabetic needles).

This program is counter-productive to our recently approved urban renewal plan. Bringing more drug-addicted people to our community does not serve to improve our public health.

Drug addicts are linked to increased levels of crime. As Tim Purington indicated they will steal from family, friends and strangers as their only focus is on obtaining the drug.

We need to take steps to ensure the safety of those who live in Holyoke and to encourage new, productive people to move here to "grow Holyoke."

Linda Vacon,  
Ward 5 City Councilor

### A Quote

OF NOTE

*"This parade will not be about the walk I take, it will be about the footsteps in which I travel."*

- Brian Q. Corridan, in the article, "Parade committee honors Grand Marshal."



The Holyoke Sun is published every Friday by Turley Publications, Inc., 24 Water St., Palmer, Mass. 01069. Telephone (413) 283-8393, Fax (413) 289-1977.

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