



SUZANNE KREITER/GLOBE STAFF

## CHOOSING THE POLICE LIFE

The allure of law enforcement has dimmed with the killing of George Floyd. In a class of recruits, some still hear the calling; others cannot resolve their doubts.

By Dugan Arnett  
GLOBE STAFF

FITCHBURG — The speeches had been delivered, the awards handed out, and the badges pinned, and now, the state's newest police officers rose from their seats at the front of the auditorium.

Their uniforms, never before worn, were crisp and deep blue. Their black boots shined. They stood ramrod straight, like they'd been trained, as they recited in unison the officer's oath: "I will never betray my integrity, my character, or the public trust . . ."

For Fitchburg State University's Police Academy class of 2021, September's graduation ceremony represented the culmination of a years-long journey.

They'd arrived on campus four years earlier, fresh-faced and idealistic, applicants who'd chosen a more rigorous and academically demanding path into law enforcement. Though largely white and largely male, they came from a variety of backgrounds — and from a generation more socially conscious than those before. In entrance essays, some spoke of racial equity or justice for the powerless. And while their reasons for entering policing varied, their underlying motivation seemed the same: They wanted to do the job the right way.

Back then, however, there'd been 93 of them.

Fitchburg State University Police Academy graduates smiled as they watched younger cadets stand in formation.

Retirement among officers rose by **45%** in 2020 from the previous year.

# CHOOSING THE POLICE LIFE

►POLICE  
*Continued from Page A1*

Today, there were 15.  
In the year and a half since the nation’s streets boiled with the largest demonstrations in a generation, the full scope of America’s reckoning with race and law enforcement is still coming into focus. Task forces have been assembled, training re-imagined. Police budgets poked and prodded.

Amid the still-settling dust, however, this much is clear: The desire to become a police officer has diminished as the profession finds itself mired, more than ever, in a cultural tug of war.

Across the country, police departments are struggling both to recruit new officers and keep the ones they have. Early retirements and resignations have shot up. In some cases, departments desperate for officers are handing guns and badges to those who would’ve previously been passed over.

And now, that reckoning has found its way to this bucolic, central Massachusetts campus and a policing program some experts have said could serve as a model for policing’s future.

Exactly how many of the program’s departures can be traced to the murder of George Floyd and its aftermath is unclear; student resignation letters can be vague, and some level of natural attrition has always existed. But the deep national conversation about systemic racism and abuses within law enforcement, students and program leaders say, has had a marked effect on the program and its enrollment.

Some students have pushed through, the killing and its aftermath having affirmed even more the job’s importance. Many others have walked away, citing, in some cases, their inability to reconcile their desire to do the job with what they’d seen on an 8-minute, 40-second cellphone video that chronicled Floyd’s death at the hands of a Minneapolis officer.

In an America still reeling from this once-in-a-generation movement, it has become the young officer’s dilemma.

Stay, and serve at a time of unprecedented change and public scrutiny?  
Or abandon it altogether?

\* \* \*

Randy Jaquez was just 7 or 8 years old when the men in suits showed up at his door.

His parents kept the reason for the visit vague; only later would Jaquez learn that a cousin had been killed in a gang dispute and that the men who arrived at his family’s New York City apartment were detectives assigned to the case.

At the time, all he knew was that something bad had happened and these were the people who’d come to fix it.

“I saw them as protectors,” Jaquez says.

As he grew up in Washington Heights, a Dominican enclave in New York City that was still battling the remnants of the crack epidemic of the 1980s and ’90s, the blue-and-white of an NYPD squad car was a familiar sight. He took comfort in their presence, even as he grew to understand their limitations. Today, Jaquez says, the killings of at least two of his relatives remain unsolved.

Maybe it was naive, he admits now, but part of him always believed he could do better.

After his family moved to Worcester, he watched his older brother pursue a career in law enforcement. And when he learned of a new policing program at Fitchburg State that allowed students to get a criminal justice degree as well as academy training, he jumped at the opportunity.

He outlined his motivation in a freshman essay: “Losing family members and having no one pay for it was the [turning] point in my life. ... I vowed to myself that when I was strong enough to protect myself I would also protect those who [couldn’t] defend themselves.”

This was about more than a job, he explained. It was a duty, a fire that had been quietly burning for years.

“And it is a fire,” he wrote, “that cannot be put out.”

\* \* \*

Short and thick-necked, with blue eyes and blond hair cut high and tight, Cody Soderlund grew up in Middleborough, a working-class suburb of 25,000 residents that was one of the few Massachusetts towns to vote for Trump in the last two presidential elections. His father ran a plumbing business in town. His mother taught at the local middle school. From the front porch, an American flag fluttered.

“Very pro-America,” Soderlund says. “‘The Land of the Free’ and all that stuff.”

The consummate overachiever, Soderlund filled his high school workload with AP courses, started at cornerback for the town’s state-champion football team, and still found time to raise enough hell that his mother, Karin, would later credit her younger son for every strand of gray that had crept into her hair.

As a senior in high school, Soderlund, long fascinated with law enforcement, signed on for a semester-long internship at the local police department. Much of the work involved the kind of mundane tasks typical of student apprenticeships — answering phones, making runs to the courthouse.

But one day, when shadowing an officer out on patrol, he found himself suddenly thrust into a situation like something out of the “NCIS” shows he’d grown up watching: As officers attempted to serve a warrant, a man shot at them before barricading himself inside a home.



PHOTOS BY SUZANNE KREITER/GLOBE STAFF

‘I had this perception that it was easy, or an A to B step: I join policing, and I immediately become a good person and help people. It’s more complex than that.’

RANDY JAQUEZ

Soderlund watched that day as the officer he was with plucked a rifle from his cruiser and took off toward the scene. Adrenaline coursed through him as a flood of cruisers arrived, one after the other, from every agency and jurisdiction imaginable.

Policing, he came to believe that day, was a brotherhood.

“You don’t even need to know the person,” he says, “and you know they have your back.”

The standoff would last eight hours and end badly, with the barricaded man shooting himself. But Soderlund knew before it was over:

He never wanted to do anything else.

\* \* \*

It was rare for Lisa Lane McCarty to get to know students well before they were seniors. As director of the policing program at Fitchburg State, she was responsible for overseeing more than 200 students, as well as the school’s 17-week summer police academy. If a freshman landed on her radar, it probably meant they were in trouble.

But from the time they arrived at Fitchburg State, Soderlund and Jaquez stuck out.

Soderlund was the studious freshman professors approached her to gush about: “You got a good one there.” Jaquez was the always-smiling kid who’d wandered into her office one day early in his first year and never stopped visiting, dropping by regularly to ask about her day or chat about his work at a local homeless shelter.

Both were early standouts in the program, the kind of kids she’d hoped to attract when she’d agreed in 2017 to head an experimental policing program.

Back then, the school’s criminal justice department was looking for a way to professionalize policing. Nurses, doctors, and teachers were all schooled before being sent into their respective fields. Why not the men and women being dispatched, armed, to police the country’s cities and towns?

The program, one of the few of its kind in the country, became a melding of old-school training and new-school ideas. Students would spend four years earning a bachelor’s degree in criminal justice and, afterward, be put through a state-sponsored, 17-week, full-time police academy carried out by the university. Through it all, they’d be soaking up a curriculum infused with lessons on implicit bias, sociology, and the psychology of criminal behavior.

In short, the school hoped to foster a new breed of officer: one capable of carrying out the job’s grim realities — and a critical thinker skilled in communication and trained to deescalate, where possible, fraught situations.

On campus, policing students were required to wear matching uniforms — blue polo shirt, beige cargo pants, black belt and boots — and address teachers and faculty by their titles. Class attendance was tracked meticulously, and students were subject to regular uniform inspections. Something as minor as forgetting to carry a pen required a student to file a report with Lane McCarty, explaining the infraction and how they planned to ensure it wouldn’t happen again.

To the typical undergrad craving college’s newfound freedoms, it would have sounded like a nightmare.

To Jaquez and Soderlund, it felt like a road map to their future.

From the start, the two fell seamlessly in step.

No stranger to screaming coaches, Soderlund embraced the regimented lifestyle. He came from an extended family of military men and took a certain pleasure in well-defined rules.

Jaquez, too, quickly found purpose in the program. He walked proudly through campus in his police uniform, dutifully polished his black police boots once a week. Even the more arbitrary rules at which some of his peers bristled — no jewelry or facial hair — he welcomed; in his first three years in the program, he would receive just a single infraction, for forgetting to wear a belt.

In a program that trended white and male, much like policing’s general demographics, Jaquez represented one of a handful of students of color. And though there were moments he could be reminded of that status — one of his earliest college memories was arriving at his freshman dorm to find that the policing student down the hall had affixed a large Trump flag to his dorm room wall — he loved his policing peers. They quickly became the bulk of his social circle.

“We were always together,” Jaquez says. “We became a little family, spending every day and night together, helping each other with homework.”

Many of the policing students lived together, worked out together, looked out for one another; standing in formation before their monthly meetings, they’d quietly alert one another to a sloppily tucked-in shirt or earrings not removed, offenses that could earn pointed reprimands from drill sergeants.

Warned constantly that a single slip-up — an underage drinking citation, an egregious speeding ticket — could jeopardize their chances of one day becoming officers, they often refrained from the typical indulgences of college life, fearing the repercussions.

The rigidity of the program wasn’t for everyone, certainly, and each semester saw a few students drop off, unable or unwilling to handle the exacting standards; it wasn’t uncommon for a class to shrink by half by the start of its fourth year.

But by May of 2020, as their junior years drew to a close, Jaquez and Soderlund had not only survived, but emerged as two of the class’s most promising.

Jaquez was a dean’s list student who served in campus government and was part of the Black Student Union and Latin-American club. Soderlund managed an honor’s college course load while playing multiple sports — he was a member of the university’s cross country and track teams — and working weekends at the local AutoZone.

After three years as the program’s director, Lane McCarty had learned to tell, with uncanny accuracy, which students would make it and which wouldn’t. And though their styles differed — Soderlund would excel at vehicle stops and quick decisions, Lane McCarty felt; Jaquez at calming tense situations — she had no doubt that both would one day make excellent officers.

“I knew those two were going to be fine,” she says. “I absolutely had no question.”

The two students headed into summer break that May with the bulk of the work behind them. The following fall, they would return for their final year of school, and from there, begin the academy that served as the final stepping stone into policing’s ranks.

Their summer vacation was just a couple weeks old when the earliest reports began to emerge out of Minnesota.

Something about a Minneapolis cop, a Black man, and a cellphone video.

\* \* \*

There was a time, not all that long ago, when the idea of an officer shortage in the state of Massachusetts would’ve been laughable.

The job provided security, a pension, and good, if not great, pay. The position came with power, commanded respect. In Massachusetts, competition for jobs could be so stiff that aspiring officers sometimes had to leave the state in order to find police work.

But today’s realities have changed things.

Even as numbers declined in the past few years, the last year has brought a new intensity. In a national survey of nearly 200 departments taken earlier this year, the Police Executive Research Forum found that most departments were working below their normal staffing levels, while retirement among officers shot up an astonishing 45 percent from the previous year.

The effects in Massachusetts have been no less stark. In 2013, 16,813 people applied to take the state’s civil service police exam, required by many departments to get hired. This year, 10,345 took the exam, and only 6,294 received a passing score, continuing a sharp downward trend in exam results.

Policing has seen periods of diminished interest before, says PERF executive director Chuck Wexler. There are ebbs and flows.

But what’s happening now, he adds, is different.

“It feels like the very legitimacy of policing as a profession is being questioned by prospective candidates,” he says.

Some departments have begun the process of leaving the state’s civil service system, seeking added flexibility in hiring. Others have resorted to taking out classified ads in local newspapers or posting their openings on job-search websites, steps unheard of in years prior.

Some desperate chiefs, meanwhile, have begun lowering their hiring standards.

“I’m not saying we’re going to hire criminals,” says longtime Falmouth Police Chief Edward Dunne, who is currently down 10 of his department’s 60-some officers. “But some of the things that would [previously] disqualify an individual, you might have to say, ‘You know what? I may have to overlook that, because it’s a body.’ ”

\* \* \*

Jaquez watched the shaky cellphone footage online, waiting, as the minutes passed, for the white officer to lift his knee from the Black man’s neck.

One minutes, two minutes, three minutes ...

“I watched all nine minutes of it,” Jaquez recalls. “And you can [see] the life literally leave his eyes.”

In the weeks that followed, he began to think more seriously about the world of policing, and how he fit into it.

Despite his passion for the work, he’d occasionally wondered whether his nature ran counter to the culture of the job. In class, he’d sometimes be the only student to voice an opinion critical of law enforcement. Prior to the death of

Floyd, he'd noticed, many of his classmates had been quick to defend officers in incidents where force was justified. But in cases where an officer seemed to him to be clearly at fault, those same students often stayed silent.

"It's hard, being a Black male and going into this demographic," he says. "The boys have, like, buzz cuts, and they're white with blue eyes, and they have a very militaristic look to them."

It didn't help, meanwhile, that COVID had shuttered in-person classes, leaving him siloed from his classmates that summer, his interactions with the outside world relegated to an increasingly incendiary stream of social media that left little room for nuance.

Defend the police, and you were a traitor to the Black community. Speak out against even egregious examples of police misconduct, and risk being labeled antipolice.

"It felt like I was in the middle of a war," he says, "and I was getting pulled to both sides."

His entire motivation for a policing career had been to help. Now, as his senior year approached, he found himself wondering whether that was even possible in policing — at least the way he wanted to.

"I had this perception that it was easy, or an A to B step: I join policing, and I immediately become a good person and help people," he says. "It's more complex than that."

"Sometimes we're put in a position where we help people, but we hurt them at the same time. Sometimes there's nothing to do but arrest somebody or take a certain action."

He'd always loved the idea of policing, and he understood the necessity of keeping a community safe.

But the more he thought about it, the more he wondered: Did *he* want to be the one doing it?

In his bedroom, he opened his computer and pulled up the letter that, for weeks, he'd been avoiding sending — the one that attempted to explain the reality that had slowly set in, after three months of fighting it:

That he no longer wanted to be a police officer.

\* \* \*

The first thing Soderlund noticed when classes resumed last fall were the stares.

As students returned from a 2020 summer rife with protests, college campuses quickly became hotbeds for demonstrations on race and police brutality — and Fitchburg State was no exception.

"All eyes were on you," Soderlund says.

Throughout that first semester back, campus events were held to address police brutality and larger issues of racism, and policing students — easily identifiable in their matching uniforms — became occasional targets. In one instance, a policing student reported that when she'd identified herself as an aspiring officer during a classroom introduction, a classmate responded, "I'm not sitting next to a murderer."

Even in class assignments, Soderlund says, he sometimes felt he had to disguise his policing ties; in certain classes, he says, he tailored his papers to what he thought the professor wanted to hear, masking some of his more conservative, pro-police beliefs. He feared that sharing his true perspective — in the moment — might hurt his grade.

In the months following the Floyd killing, meanwhile, a growing number of his classmates departed. Every week, it seemed, Lane McCarty's inbox had another resignation letter from a student explaining that they were no longer interested in a career in policing.

"Coming to terms with my decision was devastating, to say the least," wrote one promising female student, just four months before the academy was to begin. "But I know it is the right one for me."

Others were more direct: Floyd's killing, and its aftermath, had eroded their faith in the profession.

An honors student with a 3.98 grade-point average, Soderlund had options. His older brother had majored in forensic chemistry and physics before going to work for the Connecticut Medical Examiner's office. The Air Force, too, had once been a possibility.

Even Soderlund's mother had begun to ask: Are you sure this is what you want to do?

Like most who'd watched the Floyd video, Soderlund had been disturbed by what he'd seen,



and considered what the officer did to be out of line. But the idea that he and his classmates — college students who'd never yet worn a badge — were being judged on the actions of an officer 1,400 miles away felt wrong.

Since arriving at Fitchburg State, he'd devoted himself to becoming the kind of officer who did things the right way. He and his peers had been schooled in sociology and psychology, listened as their instructors ingrained, over and over, that policing was about much more than muscle-flexing and exerting power.

Walking away seemed counterintuitive to everything he'd worked to become.

"The whole purpose is making a difference," he says. "And leaving would just be making the situation worse."

And so he made his decision.

He kept his head down through the final months of the school year, even as the resignations mounted.

He sweat his way through last summer's 17-week academy, running stadium stairs in the mornings before *yes-sir* and *no-ma'am*-ing his way through hours of classroom work in the afternoons.

And on a Friday morning earlier this fall, he sat alongside his remaining classmates inside a packed auditorium, as the ceremony's keynote speaker delivered the message they'd long waited to hear:

"You are now all members of the Thin Blue Line."

\* \* \*

The cruiser rolls down Main Street, past the town hall and the local bank branches and the high-steeped churches. The radio bleats from time to time with chatter from dispatch.

From behind the wheel, Soderlund looks out over the streets of his hometown.

It's been two months now since he started his job with the Middleborough Police Department,

a dream gig he'd been so eager to begin that he'd declined an offer to push his start date back a week; just three days after his academy graduation, he stood in his first roll call.

"There's no way I could've waited a week," he explains.

As a rookie in the 46-officer department, he's still getting his bearings. The older officers razz him, which he takes as a good sign. Not long ago, he made his first arrest during an OUI stop. It felt good, knowing he could handle himself.

Still, he is entering a policing world far different from the one he'd signed up for four years earlier. As his mother puts it, her son had decided on a career in policing "way before all of the negative police press came around."

Even his new boss acknowledges the reality of the altered landscape. Asked recently whether he would've made the choice to go into policing today, given the current climate, Middleborough Police Chief Joseph Perkins falls momentarily silent.

"It depends," he says, finally. "It takes a special person to do this job."

Soderlund, for his part, seems to harbor few concerns over how he will fit into this new world. His college experience prepared him for what's next, he says, exposed him to people and ideas he might not have otherwise considered. If anything, he says, the current scrutiny on police will make him a better, more exacting officer.

And does he now have any doubts about his choice?

"I feel like it was a calling to me," he says. "It's not something I was forced into, like I can't do anything else [so I'll] try this. It's something I was drawn to — I was called to — for a reason."

"And I feel like if I had to do it all again, I'd do it the same way."

\* \* \*

The alarm goes off early inside the Worcester apartment.

In his cramped bedroom, Randy Jaquez rises and prepares for the day. He showers and feeds his two cats before pulling on his blue uniform: medical scrubs, sneakers comfortable enough to get him through an eight-hour shift on his feet.

It's been more than a year since he let go of his policing dream, Floyd's killing — and the emotions it evoked in him — too much to overcome. When she'd gotten the news, Lane McCarty had done her best to let him know how important he was to the program. *You're who we want out there*, she implored. *You're who we need*.

But by then, his mind had been made up.

"It's a little hard to think about," he says one afternoon. "This was a part of my life I thought I had figured out."

"This was something that I genuinely, in all my heart, thought I was going to do."

At 22, he's not yet sure how to fill the void. He has considered law school or teaching. One of his favorite college instructors worked for the Department of Children and Families. Maybe he could try that.

Earlier this year, on something of a whim, he took a job as a dental assistant, making \$15-an hour as he finishes his final year of school.

He's been surprised how much he's enjoyed the job, he says one night, as his mother tends to dinner in the nearby kitchen. There's something to be said, he explained, about the tangible nature of the help he offers; a patient arrives with a broken tooth and leaves an hour later with a smile.

And yet, there are some remnants of his old life he can't quite shake. He still finds himself making his bed each morning, tucking in his shirttail just so.

In his bedroom closet, his police uniform still hangs.

\* \* \*

On a weekday afternoon last month, a few dozen students filed quietly into a meeting room in the basement of the Fitchburg State student union.

Eighteen or 19 years old, mostly male and mostly white, they wore nervous expressions and matching blue polo shirts bearing their names: *Kelly. Cooper. Connelley*.

Just a year or two earlier, buoyed by the program's rising profile and a growing enrollment that pushed class sizes into the 80s or 90s, Lane McCarty had allowed herself to imagine this freshman class topping 100 students — so many that she'd have to turn some away.

But as she looked out across the room now, she saw only 45.

On the faces of the young students gathered, she recognized the nerves and eagerness of previous classes. But with that came a certain wariness: Among the students gathered was a young man who wrote in his entrance essay that he was so dedicated to policing he'd ended longtime friendships over this passion. Nearby, sat another student who'd waffled amid the civic unrest about a career in law enforcement before ultimately deciding that she and her classmates "would be the change that these protesters were calling for."

Scanning the students, Lane McCarty felt a tinge of sadness and couldn't help but wonder: Who would make it? Who wouldn't? And what did that mean for policing's future?

Some of it is out of her control. Another video-taped injustice, for example, could shape this class's future.

But for now, she took a deep breath and launched into her remarks.

"Welcome."

Dugan Arnett can be reached at [dugan.arnett@globe.com](mailto:dugan.arnett@globe.com).



Lisa Lane McCarty (left), director of the Fitchburg State University Police Academy, joked with students on the last day of class.

# LOCAL NEWS

UPDATES AT [FACEBOOK.COM / SENTINELANDENTERPRISE](https://www.facebook.com/sentinelandenterprise) AND [TWITTER.COM / SENTANDENT](https://twitter.com/sentandent)

[sentinelandenterprise.com](https://www.sentinelandenterprise.com)

## FITCHBURG STATE

# Main Street Theater Block gets a boost

## University gets \$475,000 to help with renovation

### Submitted Article

**FITCHBURG »** The restoration and rehabilitation of the historic Main Street

Theater Block received significant support last week with a \$475,000 grant from MassDevelopment's Underutilized Properties Program, according to an announcement from the university.

Fitchburg State University purchased the theater block in 2016 and the funds, awarded to the

Fitchburg State University Supporting Organization, will help reactivate several long-vacant storefronts, according to the university. The theater block, located at 689-701 Main St., is considered an anchor property in downtown Fitchburg. The university's renovations to the block to date include a game design studio and interdisciplinary idealab for local entrepreneurs. The game design studio houses the semester-long capstone experience for students enrolled in the program, the first such major in a public university in Massachusetts, according to the university.

"This grant brings us a step closer to revitalizing a key asset in downtown Fitchburg," said Richard S. Lapidus, Fitchburg State University President. "The grant will help us reactivate several long-vacant storefronts, according to the university. The theater block, located at 689-701 Main St., is considered an anchor property in downtown Fitchburg. The university's renovations to the block to date include a game design studio and interdisciplinary idealab for local entrepreneurs. The game design studio houses the semester-long capstone experience for students enrolled in the program, the first such major in a public university in Massachusetts, according to the university."

ter-long capstone experience for students enrolled in the program, the first such major in a public university in Massachusetts, according to the university.

"This grant brings us a step closer to revitalizing a key asset in downtown Fitchburg," said Richard S. Lapidus, Fitchburg State University President. "The grant will help us reactivate several long-vacant storefronts, according to the university. The theater block, located at 689-701 Main St., is considered an anchor property in downtown Fitchburg. The university's renovations to the block to date include a game design studio and interdisciplinary idealab for local entrepreneurs. The game design studio houses the semester-long capstone experience for students enrolled in the program, the first such major in a public university in Massachusetts, according to the university."

**THEATER » 6A**



RENDERING COURTESY OF FSU

An artist rendering of the Theater Block in downtown Fitchburg shows what it will look like once it has been renovated.

## Theater

FROM PAGE 3A

Fitchburg and continues our commitment to supporting the city's evolution as an arts and culture hub

for the region," Fitchburg State President Richard S. Lapidus said. "These projects will enhance the quality of life for the public at large and provide valuable opportunities for the university community."

The funding will help re-

activate storefront spaces ranging in size from 500- to 2,200-square-feet to accommodate restaurants/cafes, retail shops, art galleries and studios.

The \$7.5 million awarded statewide in the first round of Underutilized

Properties Program funding will pay for capital improvements and predevelopment work to increase occupancy in challenging properties, creating new opportunities for housing, retail and further economic development.

# Sentinel & Enterprise

Wednesday, November 10, 2021

\$2.00 FACEBOOK.COM/SENTINELANDENTERPRISE TWITTER.COM/SENTANDENT

[sentinelandenterprise.com](http://sentinelandenterprise.com)

## FITCHBURG



DANIELLE RAY / SENTINEL & ENTERPRISE

Fitchburg Mayor Stephen DiNatale shows Massachusetts Cultural Council Executive Director Michael Bobbitt a rendering of the future Fitchburg State University theaterLAB project on Monday.

# CULTURAL COUNCIL CHIEF GETS A TOUR

By Danielle Ray

[dray@sentinelandenterprise.com](mailto:dray@sentinelandenterprise.com)

**FITCHBURG** » City and state officials and interested parties gave Massachusetts Cultural Council Executive Director Mi-

chael Bobbitt an arts and culture walking tour on Monday morning, highlighting various spots in the city that promote and support the arts and creative endeavors.

Bobbitt said he was invited

to the city by state Sen. John Cronin. Mayor Stephen DiNatale, state Rep. Michael Kushmerek, city Executive Director of Community Development and Planning Tom Skwierawski and more joined in the event,

which kicked off at City Hall.

"We are branding the city as an arts and culture center," DiNatale said to Bobbitt and the large group while proudly showing off a rendering in his

**TOUR » 8A**

# Tour

FROM PAGE 1A

office of the future Fitchburg State University theaterLAB project and photos hanging in a hallway of the \$23 million city hall renovation project.

The tour continued to the Fitchburg Art Museum, where Director Nick Capasso and Director of Development Rebecca Wright gave Bobbitt a tour.

"We are arguably the leading cultural institution in the area," Capasso said of the renowned museum. "Collectively, we are working to position Fitchburg as the regional arts and culture center, and as the state Cultural Council executive director, Michael needs to see what's on the ground."

The next two stops were at the former BF Brown school, which is to become the Fitchburg Arts Community, a complex of affordable housing and studio space for local artists,



DANIELLE RAY PHOTOS / SENTINEL & ENTERPRISE

City and state officials and interested parties gathered at Fitchburg City Hall on Monday to give Massachusetts Cultural Council Executive Director Michael Bobbitt an arts and culture walking tour of the city.

and the theater block, a long-vacant section of Main Street that Fitchburg State University purchased

in 2016, which is slated for a multiphase, multimillion project that will feature an interdisciplinary learning space to benefit both students and community members.

Skwierawski said the city plans on investing \$60,000 for the shared artist space and is "looking at strategic investments in the arts as well." When the group paused on the steps of City Hall at the beginning of the tour for photos, Kushmerek said, "how do we tell these organizations to make the big investment in the arts?"

Bobbitt, a playwright, director and choreographer who has dedicated his professional career to arts leadership, was appointed executive director in February. When asked what he thought of Fitchburg's arts and culture scene and the ideas for the future, he said he was "blown away."

"I am absolutely gobsmacked to see the investment in the city and thoughts beyond, such as affordable housing for art-



NOT PROVIDED / SENTINEL & ENTERPRISE

Fitchburg Art Museum Director Nick Capasso, left, and Director of Development Rebecca Wright, right, give Massachusetts Cultural Council Executive Director Michael Bobbitt a tour of the museum during his visit to the city on Monday.



Massachusetts Cultural Council Executive Director Michael Bobbitt gets an arts and culture walking tour of Fitchburg on Monday morning, including the theater block, a long-vacant section of Main Street that Fitchburg State University purchased in 2016 that is slated for a multiphase, multimillion project that will feature an interdisciplinary learning space to benefit both students and community members.

ists," Bobbitt said. "A lot of cities don't do that."

Bobbitt enthusiastically supports the city's efforts and pointed out that there are a lot of studies out

there that prove that "arts will bring money into the city."

When asked if he would be interested in being a part of a group of mayors,

DiNatale said "absolutely."

"I am amazed by the mayor and the collective thought," Bobbitt said. "It's a nice group, everyone working together."

# LOCAL NEWS

UPDATES AT [FACEBOOK.COM / SENTINELANDENTERPRISE](https://www.facebook.com/sentinelandenterprise) AND [TWITTER.COM / SENTANDENT](https://twitter.com/sentandent)

[sentinelandenterprise.com](https://www.sentinelandenterprise.com)

## AMERICAN MOOT COURT ASSOCIATION

# FSU hosting moot court tourney this weekend

### Submitted Article

**FITCHBURG »** The constitutionality of vaccine requirements will be under review when Fitchburg State University hosts the American Moot Court Association's Eastern Regional Tournament on Friday and Saturday, according to a press release from the university.

The competition, in which students are

judged on their oral and written arguments on opposing sides of legal principles, will be conducted online. The teams with the highest scores at the regional tournament will move onto the national finals in January.

Fitchburg State has a long and distinguished history with the tournament, sending students to nationals each year

**FSU » 8A**

## FSU

FROM PAGE 3A

since the campus program's inception in 2000. Earlier this year, the American Moot Court Association ranked Fitchburg State in its top 20 programs nationwide. Four Fitchburg State students will be competing in the regional tournament this month.

"This year's competition is shaping up to be the strongest one yet," said Fitchburg State professor Paul Weizer of the Economics, History and Political Science Department, who founded and coaches the university's moot court team. "With 22 different universities competing from across the country, I am looking forward to seeing how our students match up with some of the best in the United States."

"We have all been working tirelessly since the end of September to make the best possible impression on the courts, and all of us believe we have a chance to get to the highest levels of this competition," said team member Anthony Marcella of Boxboro, a senior political science major. "Whether it be studying in passing time, using flash cards to refer to precedents and cases, or practicing oral arguments both outside and inside the classroom, I'm confident in myself and my peers' abilities. I couldn't be any more honored to represent Fitchburg State at the upcoming tournament."

"Preparing for this moot court competition has been unlike anything I have ever done before," said Maylynn Velazquez of Leominster, a senior majoring in political science. "Hours of arguing, practicing and reading with our classmates and amazing mentors has gotten us far and has prepared us to compete against fellow distinguished moot court teams. Representing the Fitchburg State University Moot Court team is something that I am very proud of, as we are continually ranked among the Top 20 programs within the nation. Working so closely with such a great group of individuals who strive to succeed within this association and beyond is something I am honored to be a part of."

Benjamin Hill of Troy, N.H., a senior majoring in political science and history, said the teams are well-prepared for the tournament, having been composing their arguments since the beginning of the semester. "We constantly practice our arguments individually, as pairs, and as a class," he said. "We are constantly asking tough questions and I think this makes us competitive."

Hill, competing for the

**'We have all been working tirelessly since the end of September to make the best possible impression on the courts, and all of us believe we have a chance to get to the highest levels of this competition. ... I'm confident in myself and my peers' abilities. I couldn't be any more honored to represent Fitchburg State at the upcoming tournament.'**

— team member  
Anthony Marcella

second year, said the program continues to challenge him. "I'm honored to represent a respected program such as Fitchburg State and I look forward to knocking down some giants," he said.

This year's hypothetical case will have students arguing whether a presidential vaccine requirement violates the U.S. Constitution. Teams of students will argue either side of a case in which a man refuses a federal vaccine mandate on the grounds it would violate his personal right to make life-shaping decisions and to preserve the privacy and integrity of his body, and that the mandate itself violates due process rights.

More than 200 Fitchburg State students have competed in the tournament since the local program was founded. Many graduates of the program return to campus each year for the regional tournament on the Fitchburg State campus. Their ranks include police officers, lawyers and court clerks, though the skills developed through moot court are applicable far beyond the legal profession.

The American Moot Court Association is the largest intercollegiate moot court organization in the U.S. The AMCA establishes the rules of competition and supervises regional and national tournaments that are open to all college and university students. Last year, 500 teams registered to compete in 15 qualifying tournaments to attempt to win a bid to the Championship Tournament that was held virtually for the first time in the history of the AMCA.

# LOCAL NEWS

UPDATES AT [FACEBOOK.COM / SENTINELANDENTERPRISE](https://www.facebook.com/sentinelandenterprise) AND [TWITTER.COM / SENTANDENT](https://twitter.com/sentandent)[sentinelandenterprise.com](https://www.sentinelandenterprise.com)

## FITCHBURG STATE

# Moot court teams bound for nationals

### Submitted Article

Members of Fitchburg State University's Moot Court team are headed for nationals in January after a strong showing at the Eastern Regional Tournament, according to a press release from the university.

The American Moot Court Association hosts 15 regional qualifying tournaments across the U.S., where the top 20% of finishers advance to the na-

tional championship. There were 54 teams from 25 colleges and universities at the regional tournament held Nov. 19 and Nov. 20.

Fitchburg State team members Maylynn Velazquez of Leominster, a senior majoring in political science, and Benjamin Hill of Troy, N.H., a senior majoring in political science and history, will advance to the national tour-

**NATIONALS » 8A**

## Nationals

FROM PAGE 3A

nament. Students Miranda Gustin of Leicester and Anthony Marcella of Boxboro also performed well, defeating teams from Georgia Southern, Western Connecticut, Framingham State and Liberty University, scoring high enough to earn their own berths to nationals.

"The competition was a tough one, the teams were competitive, and many were schools that were seen as more prestigious than Fitchburg State," Velazquez said. "Regardless, my partner and I persevered, landing ourselves a spot to nationals and winning every single one of our ballots on day one of regionals. We are prepared and ready to go to nationals and that is exactly what we presented at the regional competition. I am beyond excited as we prepare for the competition, we have more knowledge than ever before and I am ready to showcase that on a national stage."

"I knew the competition would be tough, but I felt as though on the first day we were unparalleled in terms of knowledge and argument structure," said Hill, recalling a sweep of opponents on the first day of the competition and a strong start to the second day, as well. "The team that beat us ended up winning (the regional tournament), so we were right there with the best."

Professor Paul Weizer, who



COURTESY FSU

Fitchburg State University's moot court teams are bound for the national tournament following a strong showing in the recent regional competition. From left, Benjamin Hill, Maylynn Velazquez, Miranda Gustin and Anthony Marcella.

founded and coaches the university's moot court program, noted that Fitchburg State was the only institution in Massachusetts to qualify a team for the national tournament.

"These students came a very long way this semester and performed extraordinarily well against some of the top schools

in the nation," Weizer said. "Our students stood toe to toe with them. I am very proud of what they have accomplished."

This year's hypothetical case has students arguing whether a presidential vaccine requirement violates the U.S. Constitution. In the competition, teams of students argue either side of a

case in which a man refuses a federal vaccine mandate on the grounds it would violate his personal right to make life-shaping decisions and to preserve the privacy and integrity of his body, and that the mandate itself violates due process rights.

The national tournament will be conducted virtually in late

January.

Fitchburg State has a long and distinguished history with the tournament, sending students to nationals each year since the campus program's inception in 2000. Earlier this year, the American Moot Court Association ranked Fitchburg State in its top 20 programs nationwide.

# LOCAL NEWS

UPDATES AT [FACEBOOK.COM / SENTINELANDENTERPRISE](https://facebook.com/sentinelandenterprise) AND [TWITTER.COM / SENTANDENT](https://twitter.com/sentandent)[sentinelandenterprise.com](https://sentinelandenterprise.com)

MULTILINGUAL WARM WISHES

## HOLIDAY SIGNS



DANIELLE RAY / SENTINEL &amp; ENTERPRISE

On Fitchburg's Main Street there is a line-up of signs wishing happy holidays and Merry Christmas, Happy Kwanza and Hanukkah in several different languages. The display is co-sponsored by The Arc of Opportunity in North Central Massachusetts and Fitchburg State University.

# LOCAL NEWS

UPDATES AT [FACEBOOK.COM / SENTINELANDENTERPRISE](https://www.facebook.com/sentinelandenterprise) AND [TWITTER.COM / SENTANDENT](https://twitter.com/sentandent)

[sentinelandenterprise.com](https://www.sentinelandenterprise.com)

## EDUCATION

# New admissions director joins FSU

### Submitted Article

**FITCHBURG** » Fitchburg State University President Richard Lapidus announces the appointment of Anthony “Tony” Trodella as the institution’s new director of admissions, effective Monday, according to a press release from the university.

Trodella brings more than 20 years of experience in higher education and enrollment to the post at Fitchburg State, most recently at St. Anselm College and Plymouth State University in New

**FSU » 4A**

## FSU

**FROM PAGE 3A**

Hampshire. His professional experience also includes service in Massachusetts. Trodella was hired after a national search for the post, where his responsibilities will include recruitment for undergraduate and transfer student populations, according to the university.

“Tony’s diverse experiences and demonstrated passion for working with students will strengthen Fitchburg State’s outreach and recruitment efforts as we continue our mission of supporting students in the pursuit of their academic and career goals,” Lapidus said. “Tony will lead a talented and committed group of admissions counselors who will show students from Massachusetts and beyond how Fitchburg State can serve and support them.”

“I am truly honored to be

given the opportunity to join the Fitchburg State community in this role,” Trodella said. “The university’s commitment to pro-



**Trodella**

viding access to high quality education and experiences was evident with everyone I met during the search process. I’m very excited to be working with a great group of admission professionals to share the opportunities Fitchburg State has to offer to the future Falcons and their families.”

Fitchburg State is accepting students now for fall 2022. The university, which does not require standardized test scores for admission to most programs, has waived all application fees for the coming academic year. To learn more, schedule an in-person visit or take a virtual tour of the campus, go to [fitchburg-state.edu/visit](https://fitchburg-state.edu/visit).

# LOCAL NEWS

UPDATES AT [FACEBOOK.COM / SENTINELANDENTERPRISE](https://www.facebook.com/sentinelandenterprise) AND [TWITTER.COM / SENTANDENT](https://twitter.com/sentandent)[sentinelandenterprise.com](https://www.sentinelandenterprise.com)

## FITCHBURG STATE UNIVERSITY



COURTESY OF FSU

The film, 'If Only I Were That Warrior,' will be a topic of discussion as Fitchburg State's Center for Italian Culture examines Colonialism in Europe.

## Center for Italian Culture examines Colonialism effects

### Submitted Article

**FITCHBURG** » Starting this month, the Center for Italian Culture at Fitchburg State University will look at the legacy of Italian colonialism, centered on the invasion of Ethiopia in the 1930s and its resonance across generations and continents, according to an announcement from the university.

In October 1935, Italian Army soldiers invaded Ethiopia. The war was fought until February 1937, and is remembered in Ethiopia as the Italian Invasion, and in Italy as the Ethiopian War. The Center for Ital-

ian Culture invites the community to explore the complex legacy of this time period with a series of programs that will explore history and culture from a variety of perspectives.

At the heart of this exploration will be the acclaimed novel "The Shadow King" by Ethiopian-American author Maaza Mengiste, which explores the Italian occupation and its aftermath. Faculty members will lead discussion groups centered on the novel, culminating in February with a keynote address by Mengiste in February. Other presentations will look at the history of Fascism in It-

**EFFECTS » 6A**

## Effects

**FROM PAGE 3A**

aly and its repercussions across generations and continents.

The programs begin with a film screening and discussion of "If Only I Were That Warrior" at 3:30 p.m. Tuesday, Nov. 9, in Ellis White Lecture Hall. The documentary looks at the recent construction of a monument dedicated to Fascist general Rodolfo Graziani, and addresses the unpunished war crimes he and others committed in the name of Italian leader Benito Mussolini's imperial ambitions. The stories of three characters, filmed in present-day Ethiopia, Italy and the United States, take the audience on a journey through the memories and the tangible remains of the Italian occupation of Ethi-

opia — a journey that crosses generations and continents to today, as this often-overlooked legacy still ties the fates of two nations and their people.

Following the screening, at 5 p.m., there will be a virtual question and answer session with director/producer Valerio Ciriaci and cinematographer/producer Isaak Liptzin, who will discuss the making of the film and the questions it raises about the malleable nature of history.

Associate Professor Kevin McCarthy from the university's Communications Media Department will introduce the screening and moderate the question and answer session with the filmmakers.

The series will continue in 2022, culminating in a keynote address at 3:30 p.m. on Feb. 15, when Mengiste will come to campus to discuss her novel, "The Shadow King."

# LOCAL NEWS

UPDATES AT [FACEBOOK.COM / SENTINELANDENTERPRISE](https://www.facebook.com/sentinelandenterprise) AND [TWITTER.COM / SENTANDENT](https://twitter.com/SENTANDENT)

[sentinelandenterprise.com](https://www.sentinelandenterprise.com)

## FITCHBURG STATE UNIVERSITY



COURTESY OF FITCHBURG STATE UNIVERSITY

Leominster Credit Union recently presented \$5,000 to support scholarships at Fitchburg State University, with students and administrators gathered for the presentation. From left, are Fitchburg State students Emily Vargas of Lawrence, Kurtis Reace of Brockton, LCU Senior Vice President for Community Engagement and Marketing Kelli Rooney, LCU President and CEO Barbara Mahoney, Fitchburg State President Richard S. Lapidus, Fitchburg State students Eliana West of Killingly, Conn., Rachel Howard of Franklin, Fitchburg State Vice President for Institutional Advancement Jeffrey Wolfman, and student Sadie MacNeill of Woburn.

# Leominster Credit Union donates to scholarships

## Gives \$5,000 to boost students' education

**FITCHBURG** » Leominster Credit Union President and CEO Barbara Mahoney recently presented Fitchburg State University President Richard Lapidus with a \$5,000 gift to support student scholarships, according to an announcement from the university.

"We are grateful to our corporate partners at LCU for investing in the success of our students," Lapidus said. "At Fitchburg State we pride ourselves on keeping high-quality educational experiences within financial reach for students, and scholarship support lets us

create opportunities for an even larger number of students."

"We are dedicated to enriching the lives of the individuals within the communities in which we live and work, and we are thrilled to be able to contribute to the scholarship program at

Fitchburg State," Mahoney said.

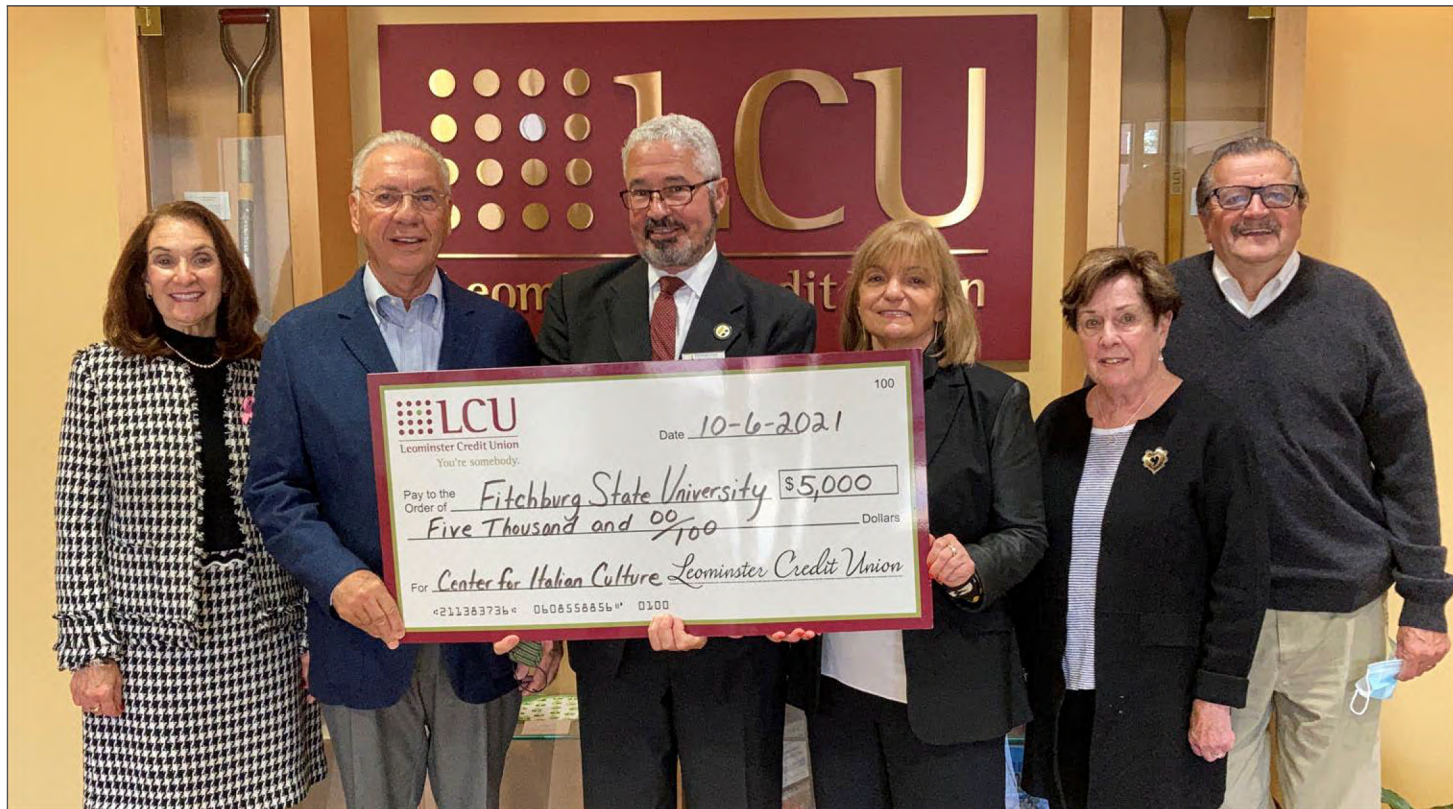
More than 60% of Fitchburg State's students qualify for need-based financial aid, many of whom are the first members of their families to attend college. For more information on how to support Fitchburg State's students, visit [support.fitchburgstate.edu/givingback](https://support.fitchburgstate.edu/givingback).

# LOCAL NEWS

UPDATES AT FACEBOOK.COM / SENTINELANDENTERPRISE AND TWITTER.COM / SENTANDENT

sentinelandenterprise.com

## FSU'S CENTER FOR ITALIAN CULTURE



COURTESY OF FSU

Leominster Credit Union recently became a gold sponsor of the upcoming 20th anniversary celebration of the Center for Italian Culture at Fitchburg State University. Shown with the donation are, from left, LCU President and Chief Executive Officer Barbara Mahoney; CIC Vice President Hank Lesciotti; Fitchburg State University Vice President for Institutional Advancement Jeffrey Wolfman; CIC President Anna Clementi; and CIC members Irene Greco and Giulio Greco.

# Leominster Credit Union chips in for anniversary gala

### Submitted Article

**FITCHBURG »** The Center for Italian Culture at Fitchburg State University, which has supported educational and artistic programming and created

opportunities for dozens of students to study abroad, will formally celebrate its 20th anniversary with a gala next June at the Fitchburg Art Museum, according to an announcement from the university.

In addition to honoring the work and legacy of the CIC, the gala will generate funds to further its mission to support students. Leominster Credit Union recently donated \$5,000 to the effort, making the credit union

a gold sponsor of the event.

"The CIC has been a jewel on the Fitchburg State campus since its founding more than 20 years ago," Fitchburg State University President Richard Lapi-

**GALA » 4A**

## Gala

FROM PAGE 3A

dus said. "This generous gift from Leominster Credit Union will directly help students and faculty in their appreciation of Italian language, culture and history."

"Leominster Credit Union was started back in 1954 by a group of individuals from the Italian community," said LCU President and CEO Barbara Mahoney. "This opportunity to contribute to the Center For Italian Culture, to benefit students, reminds us of our roots and the intent of those founding

members, people helping people. Assisting these students to engage in international and cultural experiences, and receive hands-on learning through exposure to the arts, historical landmarks, cultural cuisine and the native language, further develops their broader education."

The CIC was established

in 1999 with one of the largest gifts in university history by Amelia Gallucci-Cirio, class of '38. The formal celebration of its 20th anniversary was delayed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

To learn more about the Center for Italian Culture and its offerings, visit [fitchburgstate.edu/cic](http://fitchburgstate.edu/cic).