

## Burlington thriving as boom town

Site of Building 19½ is latest development

By John Laidler  
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

New stores and homes will soon rise on the site of the former Building 19½ on Route 3A in Burlington, continuing the recent surge of activity to the town's already bustling economy.

Workers began demolishing the four vacant buildings on the approximately 7-acre property on March 13 to make way for the mixed-use development.

Duffy Properties has received town approvals to create 48,000 square feet of retail space and 29 residential units on the site, according to Steven P. Duffy, a principal of the Waltham-based firm.

Town Manager John Petrin said the project will bring to the down-



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The former Building 19½ site, which has been vacant since late 2014, will include 29 residential units and two retail buildings.

town some of the economic development Burlington has enjoyed in its retail and office districts.

"We actually about the property," he said, noting that Town Hall, the Fire Department headquarters, and the Burlington Town Common are all close. "We look forward to this project really taking that eyesore away."

Petrin said the development also will provide new restaurants and stores that are easily accessible to those who work in the area. "We don't really have much to walk to here," he said.

Waltham-based Duffy is a family-owned business that developed, owns, and manages about 500 apartment buildings in the area.

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PHOTOS BY JOSH REYNOLDS FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

# FINDING THE LIGHT

New approach lets kids with special needs play the games they love

By Brion O'Connor  
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

**W**hen Maureen and Tim Sweeney watch their son Patrick practicing his slap shot, the pride is evident in their faces. Patrick's ear-to-ear smile, and his black Boston Bruins jersey, reveal a boundless enthusiasm for the game.

"Patrick loves it," said Tim Sweeney. "Being on the ice is the highlight of his week. I really think this is going to become a regular activity for him. I can already see the progress."

Patrick, 9, is a big fan of hockey and basketball, in part because of "the pace of the games," his father said.

But Patrick has challenges. He's autistic, and requires one-on-one instruction. That's precisely what Joe Dellanno provides at Smart Light Sports in Woburn.

Dellanno, an architect from Arlington, said his program employs "visual imprinting" backed by "consistent positive reinforcement."

"Joe is very animated, and Patrick responds well to that," said Maureen Sweeney. "He just naturally knows what to do to get through to Patrick. He finds a way to get him to laugh, and not get stuck on one thing."

At a recent session, Dellanno had Patrick skating with the help of an assistant, following a pattern of the im-

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Patrick Sweeney, 9, of Wakefield, who has autism, is helped on the ice by Joe Dellanno, president of Smart Light Sports, in a session that mixes hockey, light therapy, and visual imprinting. At far left, Patrick gets ready with his mother, Maureen.



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# Helping them find the light

**AUTISM**

*Continued from Page 1*

age of Cookie Monster of “Sesame Street” fame.

“The advantage is having discovered a language that helps us communicate with a simple light pattern,” said Dellanno. “We’ve experienced a unique way of tapping into Patrick’s world and gaining his trust.”

“One size does not fit all. Once you find the communication code, then you can start the learning process.”

Dellanno’s Smart Light technology incorporates overhead patterns projected onto the synthetic ice at his facility at Athletic Evolution. It gives players a tangible image — something they can actually see — to follow. He has created more than 800 images or “patterns” to enhance certain skills or replicate game situations.

“Our theory was if kids can retain complex video game information, then projecting a video game-like image under their feet would give them a similar experience while learning the game they love to play,” Dellanno said. “By communicating in today’s tech-savvy language, we gain and maintain their interest throughout the entire training session.”

Dellanno was introduced to the Sweeneys, who live in Wakefield, through CoachUp, a nationwide coaching network based in Boston. The Sweeneys’ daughter Caleigh, 12, had worked with a CoachUp instructor for soccer, and they inquired about help for Patrick. CoachUp recommended Dellanno.

“If you think about the whole concept of one-on-one coaching, it’s designed to accentuate individual strengths and shore up weaknesses, so that they’re not debilitating,” said CoachUp CEO John Kelley. “If you extend that to someone who has special needs, that’s even more meaningful.”

“I don’t want to denigrate camps and clinics, because camps and clinics are great for some people,” Kelley said. “But



JOSH REYNOLDS FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

“We’ve experienced a unique way of tapping into Patrick’s world and gaining his trust,” Joe Dellanno said.

fundamentally, if you’re doing something with 10 or 15 or 20 other athletes, you’re just not going to get the specialized instruction.”

Wakefield firefighter Jonathan O’Brien said his son Liam, 8, who has been diagnosed with attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder and dyslexia, is “obsessed with hockey.”

Though Liam participates in a youth hockey program, Smart Light Sports provides an extra edge.

“For Liam, the idea of a multisensory approach is what I think provides him the most benefit,” said O’Brien. “[It’s] not just having a coach explain to him what the drill will entail, then expecting him to be able to carry out those instructions.”

“The addition of the visual cues provided by the projection system is a huge benefit to kids like Liam. The coaches can’t explain the drill 10 times over, but the projection system provides constant, on-ice direction, which they can easily follow.”

The inspiration for Smart Light Sports came in 2001, not at a hockey rink but on a baseball diamond, Dellanno said.

“I found myself in charge of 15 young T-ballers with two balls and one bat,” said Dellan-

no, 53. “I needed an idea to keep the players from rushing to the ball and colliding. I tried using verbal instruction and showing them how to react to the ball, but they still didn’t get it.”

“So I decided to give them a visual cue on the field. I drew 15 staggered circles on a parched, dusty old infield and explained to my players that they could keep one or two feet in the circle, but they couldn’t leave their baseball property circle. It worked.”

Encouraged, Dellanno pursued the concept, relying on his background in architecture.

“In the spring of 2010, I decided to fill a 9-by-13 lasagna dish with water and freeze it,” he said. “I was trying to replicate a hockey rink. I then projected images onto the ice. I knew I had found a one-to-one communication system that could bridge the communication gap between players and coaches. We then tested the idea to scale on basketball courts, indoor turf fields, and several hockey rinks.”

A breakthrough came three years later while Dellanno was continuing to develop his technology at another synthetic ice facility. In 2013, special needs students with the LABBB Edu-

cational Collaborative (Lexington, Arlington, Burlington, Bedford, and Belmont) were hired to clean the surface. According to the LABBB, the collaborative “helps students with special needs reach their full potential through high-quality programs that integrate academic, social, recreational, and vocational services and enable participation in the least restrictive environment.”

However, cleaning the synthetic ice surface proved to be a challenge, Dellanno said.

“The students were aimlessly pushing brooms and shovels trying to clean white shavings from the white synthetic floor,” he said. “I asked the occupational therapists if they would like me to project routes, or circles, on the surface to help the students with guidance and direction. Like my T-ballers in 2001, it worked.”

Dellanno said the day the LABBB students followed the animated projected circle without any verbal cues was a “Eureka!” moment not only for him, but therapists as well.

“LABBB and I spent the next year studying and researching how visual imprinting could help people with autism,” he said. “At the end of our research, our students cleaned the floor in 14 minutes.”

Today, Dellanno applies his Smart Light technology to numerous sports, including hockey, field hockey, soccer, baseball, and lacrosse.

“The learning curve has been reduced significantly,” Dellanno said. “We substitute numbers and letters with images for players who have dyslexia, and colored patterns help players with autism.”

Families like the Sweeneys and the O’Briens have seen the results.

“What makes this all come together is the fact that Joe genuinely cares,” O’Brien said. “He is truly invested in the kids, and wants to see them succeed. It’s a rare thing these days.”

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**The Boston Globe**

**BLOTTER TALES**

BY EMILY SWEENEY | GLOBE STAFF

*Every day, police officers respond to reports of all sorts of events and non-events, most of which never make the news. Here is a sampling of lesser-known — but no less noteworthy — incidents from police log books (a.k.a. blotters) in our suburbs.*

**CRAVE, CRAVE, CRAVE THAT CIGARETTE**

At 7:27 a.m. Feb. 9, Burlington police got a 911 call from someone at the Lahey Hospital and Medical Center on Mall Road. The caller said he was at the hospital and in need of a cigarette, but he acknowledged the situation was hardly that of an emergency. Police spoke to the staff at Lahey and made them aware of the situation.

**UNWANTED DELIVERIES**

Mailboxes are made for the safe delivery of the US mail to people’s doorsteps, but occasionally strange items turn up in them that no self-respecting letter carrier would deposit. Case in point: Just after 5:30 p.m. March 8, Bridgewater police got a call from a resident who said someone had left a dead mouse with a note in his mailbox. The incident was documented, but police had no further details when we checked recently. Only 20 minutes or so later that same day, someone walked into the Walpole police station to report finding a very small but potentially troublesome object in the mailbox — a lone pill. Again, a report was taken.

**X-RATED RECYCLING**

At 2:50 p.m. March 9, a caller told Bridgewater that someone “dropped a large amount of adult magazines” into the recycling bin at an intermediate school on South Street. Police sent to the scene soon confirmed that it was true: a large number of adult mags dating back to the 1980s had been tossed into the recycling dumpster located outside the school. The company responsible for managing the dumpster was notified and emptied it later that day.

**THY NEIGHBOR’S GOODS**

When it comes to alleged thievery, as with many types of prohibited activities they deal with daily, police encounter incidents that can

range from the silly to the heartbreaking. What, for example, was the guy who stole a Porsche service sign from an Audi dealership on Cambridge Street in Burlington at 3:26 a.m. Feb. 4 thinking? It’s not exactly the season to decorate your dorm room, and the suspect apparently caught on security cameras didn’t fit the student demographic in another important respect. He was, according to the dealership’s general manager, driving a black Audi A4 sedan.

On Feb. 8, police in Watertown encountered what we imagine is a far more typical incident: Security at the Target store there told officers that a woman tried to walk out with a basket full of merchandise that she hadn’t paid for. According to police, the woman was found with goods worth \$722.27, including clothing, a handbag, a pedometer, and six Fitbits, those wearable activity trackers for the exercise crowd. The 31-year-old East Boston woman said the latter were intended “for her sister’s birthday.” She was arrested and charged with larceny over \$250 and shoplifting over \$100.

Then on Feb. 15, a still darker incident confronted officers in that town, when a woman reported the theft of a stroller specifically designed to accommodate her child’s special needs. She had brought the child down to her car, then left her apartment complex on Watertown Street to drive to the nearby Perkins School for the Blind. When she got back, the stroller had vanished. Police are investigating the theft of the item, which was valued at \$900.

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