

CANTERBURY

# Ayahuasca retreat may move on

Pastor says it may leave town over planning board issues beyond hallucinogenic tea

By **TODD BOOKMAN**  
NHPR

The life Derek Januszewski led before ayahuasca, and the life he leads after, bear little resemblance. His former self struggled with obsessive-compulsive disorder, childhood trauma and drug addiction. Then, in May 2017, he took ayahuasca for the first time.

“And for the first time in ten years, I had 45 days of absolutely zero cravings, absolutely no pull to use,” he said. “The world opened up for me.”

His new world continues to revolve around ayahuasca, a tea brewed from a combination of plants native to South America that its ad-

herents say has healing properties. Januszewski, 46, with tattooed arms and a trimmed beard, is the pastor of Pachamama Sanctuary, a religious organization he founded off of a wooded road in Canterbury that serves ayahuasca to its guests several times each month. Since opening in 2019, Januszewski says he has welcomed close to 2,000 people to the three-bedroom house he rents for a weekend of psychedelic exploration.

Ayahuasca has been used by indigenous tribes in the Amazon for hundreds of years to purportedly heal physical and mental distress. Americans with the money and interest to do so have traveled to places like Peru and Costa Rica for the experience. In 2006, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in a unanimous decision that the government



Courtesy of Pachamama Sanctuary

SEE **CANTERBURY CHURCH A2** Participants in a recent retreat at Pachamama Sanctuary in Canterbury.



**DAVID BROOKS**  
Granite Geek



# Circuit rider for clean energy

Non-profit position is working with towns to find ways to save money on energy expenses

By **DAVID BROOKS**  
Monitor staff

In the current list of New Hampshire job openings, the coolest title has to be Energy Circuit Rider.

If you're as old as me your first thought was “Hi-yo, Silver, away!” but the job does not involve riding horses. At least, it doesn't have to involve riding horses, since the current Energy Circuit Rider's job is equine-free, although I suppose it could.

What it does involve is the sort of slow and steady personal interaction that is needed to make social change, including changing our economy so it doesn't make the planet unlivable. All the laws and regulations and green

SEE **CIRCUIT RIDER A3**

MASSACHUSETTS

# Statue honors enslaved woman who won freedom

Woman found lawyer after hearing the Constitution read

By **MARK PRATT**  
Associated Press

The story of an enslaved woman who went to court to win her freedom more than 80 years before the Emancipation Proclamation had been pushed to the fringes of history.

A group of civic leaders, activists and historians hope that ended Sunday in the quiet Massachusetts town of Sheffield with the unveiling of a bronze statue of the woman who chose the name Elizabeth Freeman when she shed the chains of slavery 241 years ago to the day.

Her story, while remarkable, remains relatively obscure.

State Rep. William “Smitty” Pig-natelli grew up not far from Sheffield

SEE **STATUE A2**

## SENIOR SHUTTLE: Concord area transit adds Monday bus service specifically for shopping after its previous days of operations were filled by medical appointments



Shopper Danielle LeBlanc chats with Tim Cate after they both did their shopping at the Fort Eddy Road Market Basket in Concord on Monday morning.

# OUT ON THE TOWN

By **MICHAELA TOWFIGHI**  
Monitor staff

When Danielle LeBlanc got in a minor car accident, her steering wheel airbag blew. To replace it, it meant she'd also have to replace her seatbelt and horn. The price of all of this, was far too expensive for her 14-year-old red Nissan. The solution, sell her car and hop on a Concord Area Transit bus.

On Monday, LeBlanc rode the new senior shopping bus to get groceries at Market Basket. She is one of many seniors in the Concord area utilizing the bus as a free mode of transportation, with door-to-door services.

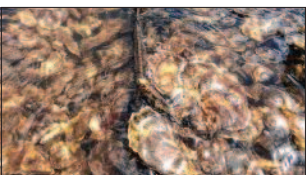
“I'm giving up my car, which is life altering,” she said. “I've never lived anywhere where I've had this kind of



Senior shoppers board the CAT senior transit bus at Market Basket on Fort Eddy Road on Monday morning.

SEE **SHUTTLE A2**

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Research funding received for protection and restoration of New Hampshire's coast.

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# Complicated balancing act between religious interests and drug control

CANTERBURY CHURCH FROM A1

could not stop a New Mexico church from using the substance as a sacrament. At the same time, ayahuasca’s active ingredient, dimethyl-tryptamine, or DMT, remains a controlled substance under federal law, and thus illegal to consume.

In this legal gray area, new ayahuasca retreat centers have emerged across the country. What used to be limited to those who could travel to South America, or had connections to an underground network of practitioners in the U.S., is now available in small towns and major cities. The pandemic further fueled a growth in domestic ayahuasca options, according to advocates, with international travel limited and a growing number of trained *curanderos*, or shamans, overseeing ceremonies.

**‘Like a spiritual psych ward’**

At Pachamama in Canterbury, each retreat consists of two evenings of ayahuasca, during which an invited practitioner will run the ceremony, often accompanied by music and a campfire. “Sitting with the medicine” often results in intense mystical visions, and can include visions of your own death, according to participants. (There is also a lot of vomiting or diarrhea.)

“It is like a spiritual psych ward,” said Januszewski. “In a way, it is beautiful. You have people over here crying. You have people over here purging. You have people rolling around in the grass trying to get towards the earth. It is where we can lose our mind and find our soul.”

Afterwards, those who participated in the ceremony will gather for “integration,” a group dialogue aimed at sifting through the visions and thoughts that arise during the psychedelic trip, and translate those messages into tools for one’s daily life.

Pachamama Sanctuary declined

to let an NHPR reporter observe a ceremony. But it isn’t hard to find detailed online reviews of this or other ayahuasca facilities. Reddit’s messaging boards are full of posts about various sanctuaries in the U.S. and abroad, while the site Retreat.Guru, where Pachamama currently enjoys a 4.92 rating out of 5, also allows users to leave reviews.

“A trip to the Amazon was totally out of the question, because I’m poor,” Em Quiles, a non-profit executive from Worcester, Mass, told NHPR. She said she first learned about Pachamama through a friend, and decided that after years of anxiety and depression, with limited relief from medicine and therapy, to try ayahuasca in Canterbury.

“Before going into the ceremony I was a little apprehensive,” she said. “I’m a Latina, this is a white run organization, I’m going to the middle of the woods. I don’t know what I’m doing.”

But Quiles praised Januszewski and other volunteers who supported the 20 or so other people who attended the weekend retreat earlier this year. She said that the shaman — at Pachamama, there is a roster of those who oversee the ceremony — provided comfort, as well: “I felt that Pachamama did a really good job at honoring the medicine, and respecting its sacredness and treating it with the sacredness that it deserves, that it commands.”

**Ayahuasca still far from approved as medicine**

While often described by its practitioners as a medicine, formal clinical study of the drug’s potential to treat conditions, including depression, anxiety, substance misuse disorder and PTSD, remain in a “very early stage,” according to Fred Barrett, associate director for the Center of Psychedelic and Consciousness Research at Johns Hopkins University.

“We don’t know yet if these drugs and therapeutic approaches can really be approved as medicines yet,” he said. Ayahuasca, he said, can have unintended interactions with other drugs or foods in your body. Plus, some people have negative or “difficult” hallucinations that could cause psychological issues.

However, Barrett said the few formal studies on ayahuasca’s potential to heal people that have been done in controlled settings show promise.

“With that small amount of information, the effect sizes so far seem enormous, which is generating all the interest in these approaches,” he said.

Even with the potential healing properties, Barrett warned that taking ayahuasca in an uncontrolled setting, versus under the guidance of a clinician, does carry risks.

“How do you know that a particular retreat, a particular shaman, is legitimate?” he said.

The rapid growth of ayahuasca in the United States is leading to a rise of practitioners, some of whom Januszewski said may be attracted to a “gold rush” of demand.

Colorado attorney Martha Hartney, an estate planner who also works in the field of religious use of ayahuasca, agreed.

“There is money to be made, there is power to be had,” she said.

Hartney, who is a member of the Psychedelic Bar Association, said before attending an ayahuasca facility, she would go beyond reading online reviews or Reddit posts. Instead, she says word of mouth, the experiences of previous guests, and research into the practitioner who will lead the ceremony is the best way to ensure a safe experience.

There are no shortage of options for those interested in experiencing ayahuasca. In her community of Boulder, Colo., she estimates there are 15-20 “circles” on any given weekend.

“You can hear people talking

about it over polite dinner conversation right now,” she said.

**Drug’s legal landscape still murky**

And yet, ayahuasca churches continue to exist in a legal gray area. The U.S. Supreme Court ruling in 2006 sided with a facility that uses ayahuasca during its ceremonies, but the opinion is not directly applicable to every other church.

“It is not that it is legal entirely in a clear way where the laws against it have been repealed,” said Omar Figueroa, an attorney based in California. “These are Schedule 1 controlled substances.”

Federal and state prosecutors could still take action against facilities, including Pachamama, for serving ayahuasca, according to Figueroa. The legal test would come down to whether the facility is operating in a safe manner, and that there is no risk of diversion, he said.

In 2020, the New Hampshire Supreme Court heard arguments in a case involving a Colebrook man who was found guilty of possessing psilocybin (or “magic”) mushrooms. The defendant, Jeremy Mack, argued the mushrooms were part of his religious practice as a member of the Oklevueha Native American Church, and were therefore protected under the state constitution, which states people have a “natural and unalienable right to worship God according to the dictates of his own conscience.”

In a 22-page opinion, the justices vacated the conviction, and sent the case back to a lower court to determine if the government could prove it had a compelling public interest in taking legal action against Mack, or if prosecutors were substantially burdening his religious expression. Ultimately, this newly established “balancing test” was never conducted because prosecutors dropped the charges.

Local law enforcement have responded to Pachamama Sanctuary, according to police logs, but Januszewski says there has been no legal action taken. He claims the federal Drug Enforcement Agency is also monitoring his facility, though the DEA didn’t respond to a request for comment.

But while federal and state officials don’t appear eager to stop Pachamama Sanctuary, the local planning board in Canterbury is raising concerns. The town has issued cease and desist orders after Januszewski failed to provide proper documentation over issues regarding the property’s smoke alarm and septic systems, emergency signage, parking plans and snow removal options in case of an emergency.

Just before voting to deny Pachamama a review of its site plan in May based on incomplete documentation, meeting minutes show the Canterbury Planning Board told Januszewski that “the Board was not trying to make Pachamama do something unrealistic, but their measures needed to be appropriate for the nature of the operation.” In June, the town filed a lawsuit against the landowner and Januszewski.

“That’s a sore spot,” Januszewski says. “That’s part of the reason we are leaving.”

Later this year, he says he plans on relocating the sanctuary to another town in New Hampshire, though he declined to say where. He launched a Go Fund Me page to help pay for the new space, but so far has only raised about \$11,400 of his \$77,777 goal.

Januszewski said he remains committed to serving what he calls his church’s sacrament to those who are ready for the experience. But he cautions only those who feel “called” to do so should take the trip.

“Just be patient, he said. “Don’t go and drink it because it is a cool fad. You are going to have a hard time.”

## Statue marks woman’s quest for freedom

STATUE FROM A1

in the Berkshires of western Massachusetts yet didn’t hear her story until about 20 years ago. He found that many of his colleagues in the Statehouse were also largely in the dark about the significance of her case, which set the legal precedent that essentially ended slavery in Massachusetts.

“She’s clearly a hidden figure in American history, and I really believe Black history is American history,” said Pignatelli, a Democrat. “But unfortunately, Black history is what we haven’t been told and taught.”

The enslaved woman, known as Bett, could not read or write, but she listened.

And what she heard did not make sense.

While she toiled in bondage in the household of Col. John Ashley, he and other prominent citizens of Sheffield met to discuss their grievances about British tyranny. In 1773, they wrote in what are known as the Sheffield Resolves that “Mankind in a state of nature are equal, free, and independent of each other.”

Those words were echoed in Article 1 of the Massachusetts Constitution in 1780, which begins “All men are born free and equal, and have certain natural, essential, and unalienable rights.”

It is believed that Bett, after hearing a public reading of the constitution, walked roughly 5 miles from the Ashley household to the home of attorney Theodore Sedgwick, one of the citizens who drafted the Sheffield Resolves, and asked him to represent her in her legal quest for freedom, said Paul O’Brien, president of the Sheffield Historical Society.

Sedgwick and another attorney, Tapping Reeve, took the case.

Women had limited legal rights in Massachusetts courts



GILLIAN JONES / The Berkshire Eagle

**A monument of civil rights pioneer Elizabeth Freeman is unveiled in Sheffield, Mass.**

at the time, so a male slave in the Ashley household named Brom was added to the case.

The jury agreed with the attorneys, freeing Bett and Brom on Aug. 21, 1781.

Former Massachusetts Gov. Deval Patrick, and his wife, Diane, are residents of the Berkshires and have been instrumental in fundraising and organizational efforts. They led Sunday’s ceremony.

“What I love about the story is that this remarkable woman, enslaved, sometimes brutalized, unable to read, listened carefully to the conversation around the table as the men she was serving discussed the concepts of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness as ‘inalienable rights,’” Patrick, the state’s first Black governor, said in an email. “I love that this powerless woman could imagine these powerful ideas as her own, and could persuade others to test that question. And I love that the Massachusetts courts had the integrity of purpose to take her question seriously.”

Pignatelli was inspired to raise a statue of Freeman last year when he attended the unveiling of a statue of Susan B. Anthony in Adams, the Berkshire County community where the suffragist was born.

He brought together stakeholders and raised about \$280,000, enough money for the roughly 8-foot statue, as well as

a scholarship fund in Freeman’s honor for area high school students.

Gwendolyn VanSant, the CEO of BRIDGE, an area non-profit that fosters racial understanding and equity, is overseeing the scholarships.

She called Freeman an icon and a trailblazer. “For me as an African American woman, it’s amazing to be walking in her footsteps,” she said.

After the court case, Ashley asked Freeman to return to his household as a paid servant, but she refused and instead went to work for Sedgwick, where she helped raise his children and was known by the affectionate name, Mumbet.

She was a healer, a nurse and a midwife, who bought her own property in nearby Stockbridge, VanSant said.

The Sedgwicks had such a deep respect for Mumbet that when she died in 1829 at about the age of 85 she was buried with them, the only non-family member in the family plot. Much of what historians know about her was written by one of Theodore Sedgwick’s daughters, the novelist Catharine Maria Sedgwick, O’Brien said.

The statue, cast by renowned sculptor Brian Hanlon, was placed on the property of the First Congregational Church in Sheffield, not far from the Sedgwick home.

“We don’t know if Elizabeth Freeman went to the church, but we know Ashley did, and it was common for enslavers to bring enslaved people to look after their children at church,” said O’Brien.

Although some 200 people were expected to attend Sunday’s unveiling, the culmination of three days of celebrations, organizers have been unable to find any of Freeman’s descendants.

VanSant hopes a permanent memorial will spur interest into Freeman’s story. “Maybe her descendants will find us,” she said.

## Shuttle service for shopping begins

SHUTTLE FROM A1

service. It’s phenomenal.”

**Concord Senior Transit**

Think Uber, for people over the age of 60, free of cost. That is the premise of the Concord Area Transit’s senior bus services. Monday through Friday, the green Concord Area Transit buses will pick seniors up at home, taking them to their destination of choice – whether that be medical appointments or the grocery store – and drop them off again.

Taking riders to their scheduled medical appointments take priority over other requests, said Cindy Yanski, the mobility manager for Concord Area Transit. Yet, when more requests for medical appointments meant canceling requests for shopping trips, a new dedicated bus to shopping was introduced on Mondays.

“We were finding that we had more and more of those situations where we had to reschedule shopping trips for folks, but we know that shopping is still important,” she said. “We needed that nutrition in their homes so folks are comfortable. And it was unnerving as well. You had your day all planned to go shopping and you can’t now because there’s no space.”

Now, Eric Ham drives a Concord Area Transit bus on Mondays dedicated to grocery shopping trips. He’ll pick people up from their home, take them to any grocery store within the 03301 area code, and circle back to drop them back at home.

The schedule, kept on a black clipboard by the driver’s seat, has the timing down to the minute.

“They called me and said we will be here at 8:56,” said LeBlanc. By 10:45 a.m., the bus had returned to the store to take her home.

*“I’m giving up my car which is life altering. I’ve never lived anywhere where I’ve had this kind of service. It’s phenomenal.”*

DANIELLE LEBLANC, a senior Concord resident

Services are free of charge. And for those who have never taken the bus before, the transit system has a Travel Trainer, who can walk them through how to use their services for first-time riders.

For those looking for any transit help, they can call Yanski. Her role as Mobility Manager, is to play “nurse navigator,” she said. She helps connect people across Concord to transportation services, whether it be navigating the bus or a carpool group.

To request a ride, seniors call the Concord Area Transit office with their preferred timing and destination. They then receive confirmation later of the route and their pick up time.

### Riding the bus

At 10:45 a.m. on Monday morning, Ham pulled the bus to the front of Market Basket on Fort Eddy Road. Outside, LeBlanc waited with her two grocery bags, alongside other riders.

Tim Cate regularly rides the bus. He started riding a year and a half ago – at first two times a week. One to do laundry, the other to grocery shop. Then his landlord installed laundry in his building, so now he is strictly shopping on bus trips.

He helps the other shoppers load their grocery bags onto the bus. Two bags for LeBlanc, a few more for Sue Ayer.

When the bus stops to pick

up Karen Rayner, who is in a wheelchair, Cate is quick to help buckle her in.

The 10-seat bus is wheelchair accessible, as are all of Concord Area Transits’ busses. Ham picked up Rayner from the Storrs Street Market Basket, in between dropping off other riders home.

With gas prices higher, the bus is a way for people to leave their car at home and get a free ride, said Yanski.

For some, like Marilyn Belanger, leaving their car at home is not even an option. She doesn’t have a license. When her husband passed away six months ago, she was without a way to get around.

Now she shops once a week using the senior shopping bus.

“Once in awhile being old has its benefits,” she joked.

Ham follows a route to drop the four customers – Ayer first, Cate last, picking up and dropping off Rayner in between.

This was LeBlanc’s first Monday shopping trip. But she’ll be back on next week, she said, with her grocery list and bags.

The biggest adjustment, is learning to shop for a whole week at a time, she said.

And for the two hour shopping trip there are old and new faces. Cate sees some regulars, he said, like a man who was housed in the Best Western in Concord, and would take the bus to grocery shop and do laundry at the Concord Coalition to End Homelessness’s Resource Center.

For others, it is a chance to chat to someone new on the ride home.

“Have a good week. It was nice to meet you. By next week I won’t remember your name, but it was still nice to meet you,” she joked turning to LeBlanc as she gets off at her house.

*Seniors looking to request a ride may schedule a pick-up by calling 603-225-1989.*

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