

A Youth Perspective: "The Dream Life of Bricks"

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Sprague Electric closed in 1986 when I was two years old. I had heard of the business as I was growing up and I was somewhat aware of its part in North Adams history. However, I never appreciated the magnitude of its role until Friday, June 21 when I attended a performance of "The Dream Life of Bricks," a MASS MoCA production directed by Martha Bowers. I knew very little about the performance beforehand. I knew that it was an abstract history of the MASS MoCA buildings and the dreams that were born inside these buildings. I also knew that Martha Bowers works in New York City as a site-specific choreographer and is the director of Dance Theater Etcetera. However, I had no idea what a dance performance about buildings would look like. When I arrived at MASS MoCA, my first surprise was to be directed outdoors, onto one of the museum's patios. An usher told me that the audience would be taken on an outside tour of MASS MoCA, and we would be taken through some unfinished buildings. As I looked through the program, I was again surprised to find that Martha had brought several local groups into her production, including the Greylock Theater project, Drury Drama Team, Jacob's Pillow dancers, Williams College Dance Company members, local musicians, singers, and former Sprague Electric workers. The show began with a welcoming note by Jonathan Secor, the Director of Performing Arts at MASS MoCA, followed by a welcome from Martha. Then two young members of the Greylock Theater project started the show with a skit of an interview with a brick. The show continued with "En Route," a walking tour that included more Greylock Theater skits, a Dance Theater Etcetera skit, and numerous visual components. The path through the buildings was lined with sleeping actors in windowsills, on equipment, and on the ground. Quotes and dreams from area residents were spelled out with stones and sticks. One quote was even illuminated underneath a bridge. The audience was then seated to listen to the mysterious Dream Life choir and band while dancers in nightgowns walked solemnly holding out pillows with bricks laid on top of them. Two dancers were elevated atop large gowns appearing as giant mill workers. Next, the audience was led by the sounds of the Dream Life Choir through an unfinished MASS MoCA building, where we walked through a hallway lined with women telling stories of the past, eyes closed as if they were speaking in their sleep. We were then seated in a large, dimly lit performance area, where we watched numerous dramatic dance routines. These were interspersed with Dance Theater Etcetera performances of "Kitchen Variations," a series of interpretations of a family's daily conversation at breakfast. The interpretations each progressed with the effects modern art had on the family's daily life. For example, in the last variation, the breakfast table was converted into a large abstract mass of chairs, coffee mugs, and kitchen supplies. Martha explained this in the program as "a metaphoric reflection on how events at this site seeped into both work-a-day and private lives." This section ended with a touching and humorous skit put on by the "Sprague Ladies" and the Dream Life Choir. The women each recited quotes of dreams from the past while lying atop beds of bricks. They then performed several impressive dance numbers. After their performance, the Sprague Ladies returned to their jobs as MASS MoCA ushers. The final portion of the performance was outdoors, in a large circle surrounded by festive lighting. The Drury Drama Team performed a skit called "Anything's Possible," adapted from an interview in Joe Manning's book, *Steeple: Sketches of North Adams*. The performance concluded with "Save the Last Dance for Me," which featured an elderly Sprague woman waltzing with every member of the cast, one-by-one. By interviewing local residents and researching the history of North Adams, Martha Bowers created a visual, musical, and dream-like depiction of the history of the MASS MoCA buildings. In the program, Martha states: "While this piece is based on the history of these buildings, it is a universal tale of people adapting to changing times and the reversals of fortune." By viewing this production, I was able to see the living history of North Adams, as well as uncover the dreams and aspirations of the thousands of people who walked through the buildings that MASS MoCA now inhabits. Since viewing the performance, I have started looking at MASS MoCA differently. I stare at the buildings with a little more wonder, fascination, and possibly a little more respect.

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North Adams City Council Hears From Berkshire Food Project

By Tammy Daniels

iBerkshires Staff

05:59AM / Friday, November 28, 2025

NORTH ADAMS, Mass. — More people are seeking food and warmth and social connectedness — and that's been reflected in the Berkshire Food Project's numbers.

The nonprofit's Executive Director Matthew Alcombright was asked to speak to the City Council on food insecurity by Councilor Andrew Fitch.

Alcombright came with hard numbers: There's been a 21 percent increase over last year in people availing themselves of the free lunch and a 52 percent jump in the last five or six weeks. Between September and October, it was 119 percent and Alcombright said at 361 new people have been coming in.

"The Berkshire food Project serves to provide a healthy, nutritious, homemade-from-scratch meal every single day of the week, Monday through Friday, 11:30 to 1, to the community at no cost, no questions asked," he said.

"To date, we have served 40,897 meals to this community, we have served 26,577 individuals this year, from January 2025, and the largest number is our increase in new faces. ... That number has seen an increase overall in the past five to six weeks of approximately 77 percent increase. So in total, this year, 361 new people have come to us for services."

For Thanksgiving eve, the project was doing double takeout meals was preparing almost 300 Thanksgiving dinners on top of what was served for its actual Thanksgiving dinner on Monday. It also provides meals to the Louison House, the Have Hope Recovery Center, the Roots Teen Center and UCP of Berkshire County, and has a delivery program of 50 meals three times of week with Northern Berkshire Transit.

Alcombright said the rise in numbers was indicative of homelessness, and the increasing need for safe spaces. Many of the guests coming into the dining don't eat, he said, they just want to be warm and put their heads down in a safe place to sleep.

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