

# The Brandon • Pittsford • Proctor • West Rutland • Lake Dunmore • Leicester • Whiting • Sudbury • Goshen REPORTER

A community supported newspaper

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Wednesday, February 21, 2024

\$1



## LOST TO VERMONT

Genealogist Michael Dwyer shares the history of the Vallée/Valley and Soulière/Soulia families.

PG. 2



## A LOSS FOR THE COMMUNITY

Proctor teacher and Selectboard Chair Benjamin Curtis passed away unexpectedly on Friday.

PG. 6

## ENERGY SOURCES

The Brandon Energy Committee shares endorsements from supporters of the proposed solar array.

PG. 13



## HONOR WELL DESERVED

Joan Rowe of Rowe Realty wins the President's Award from the Brandon Area Chamber of Commerce for her service to the Chamber and community.

PG. 19



## HAPPY BIRTHDAY

Harold Adams of Brandon celebrates his 98th birthday! Happy birthday, Harold!

PG. 32

## Brandon elections

### Selectboard Q&A Schoolboard update Constituent questions

Learn about the candidates for Brandon Selectboard through our Candidate Questionnaire and our coverage of the Chamber's Candidate Forum on February 15. We sent a set of questions to all the candidates and have printed their responses inside this issue. We also provide detailed coverage of the responses given at the forum. Coverage begins on page 12.



**MARGE & SCOTT** Munger literally helped build Brandon. From the 1970s through the 1980s, they built homes all over town, ultimately concentrating on the Mt. Pleasant neighborhood just up the hill from downtown.

## Looking back with Scott & Marge Munger of Brandon

BY STEVEN JUPITER

BRANDON—The views from the Mt. Pleasant neighborhood in Brandon are spectacular. Just up the hill from downtown, the summit looks out over the Champlain Valley to the west

and the Green Mountains to the east. It's no surprise, then, that local builders were eager to turn the site into a neighborhood of trim single-family homes. Scott and Marge Munger were among  
*(See The Mungers, Page 9)*

## Neshobe School educates at Naylor & Breen

BY GEORGE FJELD

BRANDON—Last Friday, students from Neshobe Elementary School got a hard look at the construction industry through a mentorship program coordinated by Dean of Students Shauna Lee. The group toured the offices and shops of Naylor and Breen before heading out to a real job site. The excitement and interest was palpable as the students asked questions of industry professionals. They met with project managers and estimators and learned the basics of those jobs and asked some good questions: "How complicated is your job?" and "Do you have fun at work?"

Neshobe's 5th- and 6th-grade  
*(See Neshobe, Naylor & Breen, Page 3)*



## I hear the train a-comin'

A RECENT SNOWFALL made these tracks along the Pittsford/Proctor border stand out. Back in the day, marble from the Vermont Marble Company would've traveled along this line...  
*Photo by Dale Christie*





# Names lost in Vermont, Part 18: Valley and Soulia

BY MICHAEL F. DWYER

Whether in spelling or speech, losing an accent often becomes part of assimilating to a new culture. In previous installments of “Lost Names,” we have seen that some French-Canadian immigrants may not have been aware of how written versions of their names were garbled or misspelled. In the case of Alfred Vallée/Valley (1882–1954), grandfather of George Valley of Pittsford, he deliberately chose an anglicized version of his surname to appear “less ethnic.” Born in Dixville, Québec, about 20 miles north of Island Pond, Vermont, to impoverished migrant farm laborers, Alfred crossed the border at least half a dozen times with his parents before settling in Montréal for a job with the Canadian-Pacific Railway. He married at the age of 21 to Catherine Blais and likely would have stayed in Canada until bootlegging caught up with him and cost a job. On May 15, 1913, Alfred Vallée, wife Catherine, eight-and-a-half months pregnant, and their five children immigrated to Newport, Vermont. (Two of their children died in infancy.)

After a dismal failure eking out a living as a farmer in Jay, Vermont, Alfred moved to South Burlington, where

he began working for the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company. When he made his primary declaration for U.S. citizenship in 1925, he signed his name as Alfred Vallée, but in his naturalization oath, several years later, he wrote his name as Alfred Valley. That is by no means the end of this family’s story shedding accent marks. Alfred and Catherine’s thirteenth child, Rita, born in 1927, chose to become a nun at the Fanny Allen Hospital in Colchester. The hospital had been founded in 1894 by a religious order from Montréal, the Religious Hospitaliers of St. Joseph, better known as the Sisters of Fanny Allen, after Ethan Allen’s daughter, Frances Allen (1784–1819) who converted to Catholicism and joined their convent. Before the Catholic Church made sweeping changes as part of Vatican II, the sisters were semi-cloistered, hardly ever leaving the hospital and convent grounds, and as a sign of their worldly renunciation, their wimples extended to the top of their eyes. Unlike many other orders of nuns who chose new names in religious life, these Sisters did not change their family names.

When Rita Valley applied for admission, Mother Superior Albina Roy said in French, “That is no way to spell your

MARRIAGE—GROOM			
Name of Groom	George J. Vallie		
Name of Bride	Germaine Lucille Lavallie		
Residence of Groom	Lime Kiln Rd. So. Burlington Vt.		
Date of Marriage	October 10th 1938		
Color	White	Age in Years	25
No. of Marriage	1st	Widowed	Divorced
Occupation	Mining Lime Kiln		
Place of Birth	Newport Vermont		
Father's Name	Fred Vallie		
Birthplace	Richmond Canada		

VERMONT STATE MARRIAGE card file for George's parents.

I arrived at the port of <u>Richford</u> , of which I am now a subject, in the State of <u>Vermont</u> , on or about the <u>13</u> day of <u>April</u> , anno Domini 19 <u>13</u> ; I am not an anarchist; I am not a polygamist nor a believer in the practice of polygamy; and it is my intention in good faith to become a citizen of the United States of America and to permanently reside therein: SO HELP ME GOD.
<u>Alfred Vallie</u> (Original signature of declarant)

ALFRED VALLÉE SIGNATURE on his initial naturalization record.

name.” Back came the -éé surname ending instead of -ey! Consequently, Sister Vallée, who eventually became the administrator of the hospital, alone of her Vermont siblings, reverted to the French spelling of her name.

Thirty years ago, as part of my wider search to document George’s family, I consulted the vital record card files then housed in Montpelier. Combining through the alphabetized records, first with the Vallée spelling and then Valley, I was vexed by not being able to find the marriage of George’s parents, George Valley and Ger-

maine Lavallée, married in Winooski, on 10 October 1938. Did the priest not send his local marriage certificate to the state? Not until after the death of George’s mother in 2001 did this mystery reach a solution. We found a small Metropolitan Life Insurance burial policy for under the name of Germaine Vallie! Since American typewriters did not possess the key for an “accent aigu” [é], it was transcribed as the letter i—enough to thwart my alphabetical search. Thus, the Vermont state copy for the record for marriage of George’s parents recorded the name Vallie.

Another example of an accent-mark problem surfaced with the gravestone in Pittsford’s St. Alphonsus Cemetery of “Francis Soulière.” A second-generation American, Francis and his family went most of the time by the name Soulia, a phonetic version of their French name Soulière/Sullière, with an “accent grave” [è] over the first e. Born in Pittsford but baptized at “the French Church in Rutland” [Immaculate Heart of Mary], Frank “Pete” Soulia had to use the church record as documentation of his birth in the absence of a town certificate. Upon his death, the gravestone carver did not know what to do with the accent grave [è], so he rendered it as an apostrophe! His descendants today in greater Pittsford include Soulias and two branches of the Eugair family.

Not far from the “Soulière” stone is the obelisk to Francis’s father, Joseph Soulia, born in Peru, New York. His obituary in The Rutland Herald cites his distinction as Pittsford’s last surviving soldier of the “War of Rebellion.” He served and reenlisted in Company B, 7th Vermont Infantry for a term of four years, one month, and 25 days. Joseph died in Burlington, on 11 June 1926, at the DeGoesbriand Hospital, run by the Sisters of Fanny Allen. The informant on his death certificate did not know the name of

(See Names lost, Page 10)



SISTER VALLEE IN her habit, 1959.

Photos provided by the author



OLD HABITS: SISTER Vallee and George Valley, 2002, on the 50th anniversary of her final profession as a nun.



# Neshobe, Naylor & Breen

(Continued from Page 1)

teachers selected a group of students for this mentorship program. They meet weekly as a group to focus on team building and developing leadership skills. They have met with their mentors, Tanner Romano, part-owner of Naylor and Breen, and Josh Letourneau, project manager at N&B, a total of 5 times since the fall. Romano and Letourneau volunteer their time at the elementary school they both attended and hope to demonstrate how interesting and diverse the construction industry is. These students have bonded and call themselves “The Naylor and Breen team.” At their lunch-time meetings, they discuss what it means to be a leader and how to work at team building. They toured Neshobe with their mentors and identified a few areas they thought could be improved, mainly in how the adults running the school could be better organized. One area they felt had a big need was in the storage of the physical-education supplies. They

*Mentor Josh Letourneau admitted that he wished he had a school field trip like this one while he was at Neshobe. Tanner Romano hopes that a few of these students will see the trades as a great place to work and earn a good living right here in our community.*

Levins, project manager for the Brandon Free Public Library Renovation Project. Parker Dillon asked “What’s the hardest part of your job?” Levins revealed that it can be hard to step back and take a deep breath when facing crucial deadlines and important decisions. “I realize that it’s self-induced stress and if I slow down, things get done better, they get done right.” She related that she is a list person and that lists help her to prioritize the things that need to get done. “I don’t always finish my list, but I know that what I’ve done were the most important things to be completed that day.”

In Tanner Romano’s office, which he shares with Rob Naylor and spends

the majority of his time in, the students noticed a sign about leadership. “The sign of a good leader is not how many followers you have but how many leaders you create.” It made an obvious impression on the group.

Estimator Miles Krans showed the students plans and reviewed how he turned the plans into a budget for the project. He pulled out a large blueprint of a project for affordable housing in Randolph. He went through the process of calculating the amount of concrete needed for the project and the way to estimate its cost. “I like when I’m done with estimating that I have checked every detail of the project and its costs.” “The most fun is when we sign a contract to do the work that I’ve budgeted”

They talked with Tom who meets with potential customers in the preconstruction phase of a project and Leo, another project manager, who admitted that communication was the hardest and most complicated part of his job. “But being able to work with everybody is the most fun,” he

said.

Moving across the parking lot, the students met with the folks at Hawk Hill Cabinetry and Custom Woodwork. Tim showed the students how he took (See Neshobe, Naylor & Breen, Page 10)



**MILES KRANS EXPLAINS** his position as Naylor & Breen’s Senior Estimator to the students. Krans is responsible for estimating the costs of the firm’s projects, a job that entails determining how much material will be required for each phase.



**FIFTH- AND SIXTH-GRADE** students from Neshobe toured the ongoing renovation of the Brandon Free Public Library as part of their field trip to Naylor & Breen, which is supervising the work.

Photos by George Fjeld

collaborated and came up with a napkin sketch and some measurements for a cabinet which could meet that need.

On a not-your-average field trip to Naylor and Breen’s offices on Route 7, they met with Kim

## Spotlight On Business MJB EXCAVATING



Michael Bertrand

I am the owner-operator of MJB Excavating. I have been in business for 24 years and love working outdoors.

I do hauling of gravel, stone and other products for your outdoor needs. I also do digging of drainage ditches, driveways, site-clearing and landscaping.

I do my best to put things where you want them. My rates are reasonable, I aim to keep the customer happy and I love meeting and talking with new people.

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music and fun!**




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Pub open Thurs–Mon for dinner 5:00–9:00 p.m.

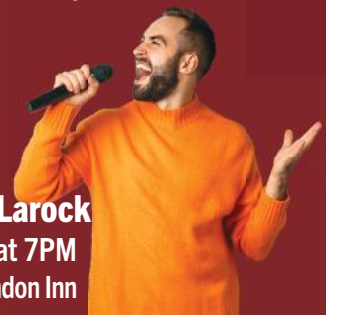
**West Coast Swing** Thursdays and Sundays  
**Learn Tango** every Monday night!

**80s dance** March 9th

**Open Mic** Fridays coming soon

Follow Neshobe Cafe & Pub 

**Karaoke with host Brenden Larock**  
This Saturday, Feb. 24th starting at 7PM  
at The Neshobe Cafe & Pub at the Brandon Inn





BRANDON REPORTER

## Guest Editorial

# Why I'm running for OV '25 Class President

BY BRENDAN AIDAN M'CLOUGHLIN

I write to address a dire concern of mine and announce something that I hope gives others something to think about. In a year when the two top contending candidates for President of the United States have a combined age of more than a hundred and fifty years, and they face little opposition outside of themselves, I implore you to put your money where your mouth is: run for office or vote. In order to be true to my word, I announce my own candidacy for President of the Otter Valley Class of 2025.

Regardless of which candidate you may lean toward or think is the "lesser of two evils," the polls speak, and they tell us that these top two candidates are highly unpopular, and many want more options. Yet in spite of this, year after year voters fall into line like sheep, voting along what feels comfortable out of fear of "wasting their vote." A vote is only wasted when it is not cast (something some tens of millions of voters do each year). Your vote is your speech, and not voting or voting out of fear of it not truly counting is ridiculous. Voting for someone who may not win isn't a waste, it's showing how you feel, and it may take time, but showing your support for a candidate or cause now can go a long way in the long run.

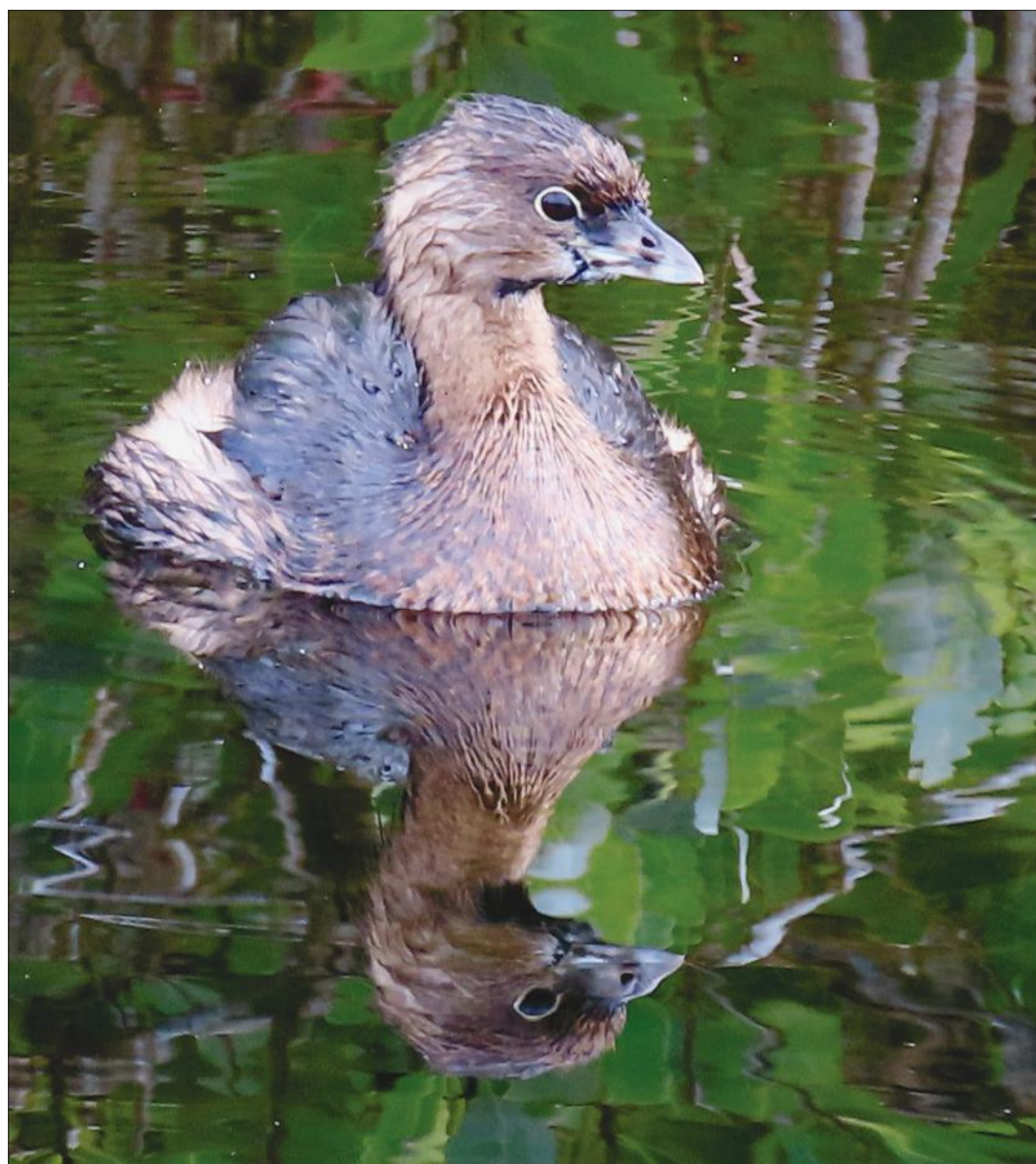
As stated earlier, I myself am running for an additional term for President of the Otter Valley Class of 2025. I run not out of a desperation for power, but out of a sense of moral obligation. I see a country that is deeply discontent with its leaders yet does

nothing to change it. I admit that voting for a third party or someone other than an incumbent has nearly always meant voting for a losing candidate. Except when it doesn't: in 1992, business mogul Ross Perot ran for president as an independent candidate, and although he wound up falling short, he took with him nearly 20% of the vote, sending a sure message to both President Bush, Sr. and then Governor Bill Clinton that the people had spoken, and they were not completely content with the status quo. In 1980, Ted Kennedy challenged President Jimmy Carter in the Democratic Primary, and while he ended up short, he showed that a sizable portion of the party did not back Carter's reelection.

Don't get me wrong, elections are largely about winning so that people may be allowed to affect the change that they seek. However, they are also about expressing oneself by sending a message and speaking up about one's vision of what our country should be.

I'm no fool—I know that the odds are largely in favor of a geriatric rematch in 2024, but they only are until they aren't. A single vote may only be as powerful as the flap of a butterfly's wing, but that can cause a tsunami across the globe. While not immediate, change will come. Only once people start to realize the true power of their vote and actually get up and chase after the idealistic America that they so desperately want, will true change come.

I run not for myself solely because I want to win, but because I (See *Class President*, Page 8)



### Like water off a duck's back

A PIED-BILLED GREBE posed for this photo op in Florida.

Photo by Sue Wetmore

## Community Forums

# Bobcat tests positive for highly pathogenic Avian Influenza

MONTPELIER—A bobcat and two red-tailed hawks found dead in Cornwall, Vermont, have tested positive for highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) virus infection, according to preliminary lab results shared with the Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department on February 15,

2024.

The department is now awaiting the results of a confirmatory second test, which may take several weeks to receive

HPAI has been circulating in Vermont since 2022 and has been reported in wild birds including hawks and eagles as well

as domestic fowl. The bobcat that tested positive this month is the first detection of HPAI virus in a mammal from Vermont. HPAI is uncommon in mammals, however, there have been HPAI detections in mammals in many other states including Con- (See *Bobcat test positive*, Page 8)

# GoFundMe announced to help Forest Dale's Amy Richards Fredericks

Ms. Fredericks lost her home in Forest Dale to a fire recently. Anyone who would like to help her through this difficult period can contribute to the Go-

FundMe account that has been set up in her name. The URL is <https://www.gofundme.com/f/amy-richard-fredricks-house-burned-down>. Or simply visit

[gofundme.com](https://www.gofundme.com) and search for "Amy Richard Fredericks." As of Tuesday morning, the account had \$620 out of its \$2000 goal.

## The REPORTER

Brandon • Pittsford • Proctor • West Rutland • Lake Dunmore • Leicester • Whiting • Sudbury • Goshen

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# Letters to the Editor

## Please vote to support the Brandon Free Public Library's mission to serve

With voting preparation now getting under way in the Brandon area, and some contentious budgetary discussions occurring, I want to clarify some things about the Brandon Free Public Library's appropriation request

on the town ballots. Every year, Brandon, Leicester, Sudbury, and Goshen vote to approve a town appropriation to support the library's operating budget. Every year it has passed, with no increase in the funding re-

quest for the last 5 or 6 years. To be clear about some details this year:

- This appropriation is unrelated to the building renovation project. The vote is for the library operating budget only, which encompasses things like staffing, insurance, books/DVDs, and utilities. It keeps the doors open and the lights on. None of this

money goes toward the renovation (which has been entirely privately funded thus far).

- The requested amounts from each town have not increased for over five years, despite significant inflation during that time. We make do with what we have, fill in gaps as needed, or make cutbacks.

- The library appropriation has

nothing to do with town budgets, electric vehicles, bond issues, or anything else that has been discussed recently on public forums; it is completely separate and is strictly to support library operations. (See *Conflict of interest*, Page 6)

- Town appropriations collectively provide about 45% of (See *Support BFPL*, Page 6)

## Correct information about proposed new taxes is essential to deciding how to vote

I have been reading with interest the letters on Front Porch Forum and in the Brandon Reporter about the Selectboard's proposed budget and would like to add my voice to the conversation. Although I am member of the Brandon Selectboard, the following comments are my own views and are not intended to represent the views of the Selectboard. I have no quarrel with folks who ques-

tion the budget. I do, however, have significant concerns about the amount of misinformation, and disinformation, that I am reading in many of the posts advocating for a "No" vote on the budget. It is that misinformation I would like to address.

There appears to be significant confusion about a line item in the police department budget (See *Correct information*, Page 7)

## Proposed budget measures are reckless spending

Brandon taxpayers are being asked to approve a 13.45% town budget increase with a 9.7% increase in taxes, as well as being asked to approve a bond for \$500,000 for a town solar array on leased land. Brandon taxpayers will also see a rise in school taxes of approx. \$262 per \$100,000 of assessed homesite value, with a proposed spend-

ing increase for the OVUUSD of 12.7%, a projected Brandon tax increase of 18.3% for a projected enrollment of 1128 students or \$24,155.87 per student. In addition, the Brandon Fire District that manages our public water system is looking at purchasing land and putting in a new water reservoir and piping to connect that system to the ex-

isting water supply, which may range from \$5 mil to \$15 million in the future.

The Town of Brandon Selectboard has done a lot of spending in the last year or so (See *Conflict of interest*, Page 7)

to include \$1.16 million ARPA funds, almost \$400,000 in 1% (See *Proposed budget*, Page 7)

## Atherton's Selectboard candidacy is a conflict of interest

I fail to comprehend how Dave Atherton's candidacy for the Brandon Selectboard is not a direct conflict of interest with his position as Town Manager of our neighboring town, Pittsford.

The Selectboard is privy to confidential information regarding town employees, contract ne-

gotiations, financial matters, etc. Vital information that should not be available to other, possibly competing towns.

A reading of the Town of Brandon Policy of Conflicts of Interest makes that perfectly clear. Dave Atherton, as a (See *Conflict of interest*, Page 8)

## Ethier and Fjeld Nelson are best for Brandon

After speaking to the candidates and examining their experience and values, I want to give my support to Ralph Ethier and Heather Fjeld Nelson for the 1-year Selectboard positions and to Doug Bailey for the 3-year term.

I was impressed that all three of these candidates speak about learning the facts, listening, and

being open to changing their minds about issues. A willingness to be open-minded, separate fact from fiction and think critically are fundamental to serving the whole of our community when they set policy and budget. Heather, Ralph, and Doug have been a constant presence at meetings and will bring not only experience and knowledge of the

issues/challenges, but also humility, civility, and a mindset of public service that isn't tangled up in ego or driven by anger.

I hope everyone joins me in voting for these three to represent the interests of our whole community.

Lisa Peluso  
Brandon

## Fjeld Nelson and Ethier would help build a better Brandon

There are two seats open on the Brandon Select Board for one-year terms. Ralph Ethier and Heather Fjeld Nelson are the two candidates that have the ability and desire to work together towards a bet-

ter Brandon. Their answers at last week's candidate forum showed that they do not have any personal agendas that they would be pushing forward. Both are local business (See *Nelson and Ethier*, Page 7)

## Letters to the editor

**Letters Policy:** The Reporter will only print letters to the editor that are signed with the author's full name, address and a phone number so the author may be reached for verification or questions. Only name and town will be printed.

Letters will only be accepted from residents of the eight towns we cover (Brandon, Pittsford, Proctor, West Rutland, Goshen, Sudbury, Leicester and Whiting) or letters that pertain to issues or people in our coverage area. We will also consider letters from former residents if the subject matter is pertinent.

The editor reserves the right to approve or reject any letter to the editor. Any letter considered slanderous or libelous will not be printed. Letters written locally endorsing candidates for office will be accepted without charge.

Send your Letters to the Editor by Fridays before 5 p.m.  
Brandon Reporter, 58 Maple St., Middlebury, VT 05753.  
Or email to news@brandonreporter.com

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# Obituaries

## Gloria Joann Jodoin, 94, Brandon

Gloria Joann Jodoin, a wonderful mother of five, grandmother of six, great-grandmother of seven, wife, sister, aunt, and friend, peacefully went home to be with our Lord and Savior on Monday, February 19, 2024, at the age of 94. As a single mother, Gloria provided a beautiful and inviting home for her family. She always put her family's needs above her own and prayed for them daily. Gloria loved reading the Bible and her daily devotions, and spending time with her family. Gloria loved her children's spouses as if they were her own, and her heart expanded even more with the arrival of her grandchildren and great-grandchildren.



**GLORIA JOANN JODOIN**

Gloria was born in Newark, NJ on November 27, 1929, to William and Lillian (Mayer) Dester. She was a longtime resident of Brandon and worked for over 20 years at the Brandon Training School as a nurse's aide. After she retired from the

Brandon Training School, she worked for the State of Vermont in the unemployment department for several more years.

Gloria was predeceased by her parents, two sisters (Doris and Barbara), her brother (Billy), her

daughters, Gail and Paula, her son Bill, and her granddaughter, Tracey. Gloria is survived by her husband, Bob Fisher, her sister, Lois (Jack), her sons Richard (Jan) and Robert (Angela), five grandchildren, seven great-grandchildren, and her nephews and nieces.

Her final days were spent surrounded by her loving family, who cherished every laugh, smile, and special moment. All who came to know Gloria were blessed by her presence, and we imagine she is now rejoicing in Heaven with her Lord and Savior and loved ones who went before her.

A celebration of Gloria's life will be held in the spring. In lieu of flowers, kindly offer a donation to the Brandon Senior Center, P.O. Box 237, Brandon, VT 05733.

Arrangements by Miller & Ketcham Funeral Home in Brandon.

## Proctor Selectboard member Benjamin Curtis passes away unexpectedly

BY STEVEN JUPITER

PROCTOR—Proctor teacher and Selectboard member Benjamin J. Curtis, 46, died unexpectedly after the car he was driving went off the road in Proctor last Friday afternoon, February 17. Though Curtis was pronounced dead at the scene of the crash, the cause of death has not been determined, with speculation that a medical episode may have caused him to veer off the roadway. No other vehicle was involved in the crash.

A native of Proctor, Curtis was a 1995 valedictorian graduate of Proctor High School (PHS), where he worked as a social studies teacher at the time of his death. After PHS, Curtis attended Elmira College in New York on scholarship and later received a teaching degree from Champlain Col-



**BENJAMIN J. CURTIS**

lege in Burlington.

After several years of service on the Proctor Selectboard, Curtis was appointed Chair in 2023 to replace Judy Frazier, who had taken on the position of Proctor town manager.

**A mass will be held for Curtis at St. Peter Church in Rutland at 11 a.m. on Tuesday, February 27.**

## Aline Genevieve Elnicki, 94, Florence

Aline Genevieve Elnicki, age 94, passed away on Monday, February 19, 2024, at Wintergreen Residential Care Home in Brandon.

Aline was born in Proctor on January 6, 1930. She was the daughter of Ferdinand and Marie (LaVictorie) Pomainville. She grew up in the Florence-Pittsford area, where she received her early education and graduated from Pittsford High School, class of 1948. On July 9, 1949, she married Charles Elnicki in Brandon. They made their home in Florence, where they raised their family. Aline had worked as an aide at the Brandon Train-

ing School for many years. She later was employed at the Vermont Police Academy as a cook for several years. She retired in 1986. Aline enjoyed camping, arts and crafts, painting in both oil and watercolors. She was an accomplished piano and accordion player. She loved to cook, sew, knit, and crochet, but most of all, her family was her life.

Surviving is her son, Michael Elnicki and his wife, Colleen of Pittsford, and a daughter, Donna Whitman and her husband, Gary, of Ripton. Also surviving are grandchildren Jill (Mike) Merrill and Richard (Nicole) Elnicki, great-grandchildren Zoe and



**ALINE GENEVIEVE ELNICKI**

Eli Merrill, two sisters, Theresa Drew and Lorette Walleth. Several nieces, nephews, & cousins

also survive her. She was predeceased by her husband, Charles Elnicki, two brothers, Roland and Francis Pomainville, and a sister, Mary Jane Burgess.

The memorial service "In Celebration of Her Life" will take place on Saturday, February 24, 2024, at 12 noon at the Miller & Ketcham Funeral Home in Brandon.

Rev. Maurice Moreau, pastor of Our Lady of Good Help (St. Mary's Catholic Church) will officiate. Friends may pay their respects to the family on Saturday, from 11 a.m. until service time at 12 noon.

Following the ceremony, the

family will receive friends at Brandon American Legion Post #55, for a time of remembrance.

A private graveside committal service and burial will take place at a later date in the family lot in Evergreen Cemetery in Pittsford.

Memorial gifts in lieu of flowers may be made, in her memory to St. Mary's Catholic Church, 38 Carver Street, Brandon, VT 05733.

The family wishes to express their special thanks to the staff at Wintergreen and to Bayada, for their wonderful care.

Visit our website

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Jim & Liz McRae

## Support BFPL

(Continued from Page 5)  
the overall library income; the rest comes from your generous donations to our Annual Appeal (thank you!), other citizen donations, apartment rents, and grants that we write.

- If the library appropriation is not passed, library operations will be significantly reduced, including eliminating open days, reduction in services, greatly reduced staffing, elimination of programs, and other cuts. In 2023, we had 55,000 visits, 2783 people attended programming,

and 23,508 materials circulated.

We can't do what we do without your support of our appropriation request.

In sum, voter-approved appropriations are critical to having a vibrant and successful library serving the greater Brandon community. This includes free internet access, technology support, copying and faxing, a library of "things" (like snowshoes, games, DVD player, projector, among others) to check out, interlibrary loan service, and of course books, magazines,

audio CDs, and DVDs. You can read more about all of the services we provide on page 47 of this year's town report and as always please reach out to me with any questions or concerns.

**Please vote "Yes" on your town's appropriation so the Brandon Free Public Library can continue to serve all of us.**

*Warmly,  
Molly Kennedy, Director  
Brandon Free Public Library*

# Correct information

(Continued from Page 5)

for two new cruisers. During the budget discussions and at subsequent Select Board meetings, the Board and the budget committee addressed whether one or both of the new cruisers should be electric vehicles, and there was support from a majority of Selectboard members to encourage any new cruisers to be electric. However, and this is an important distinction, the budget itself does NOT specify or require that the vehicles be electric. Rather, there is an amount in the budget set aside to purchase two new cruisers. See Town Report 2022-

23, Page 13. When and how that money is to be spent remains to be determined. There can be no real dispute that the police department will need to replace aging vehicles, which is what the line item is for. What TYPE of vehicle is not what we are voting on.

Unfortunately, at least one poster has blamed the aforementioned cruisers for the “significant increase in your tax bills” contained in the proposed budget. That is patently false. The line item for the new cruisers is \$48,000; a fraction of the overall town budget with minimal ef-

fect on the bottom line. Rather, the marked increase in taxes that would result from the proposed budget is due almost entirely to the Selectboard’s decision to include a line item of \$300,000 in Highways to pay for road paving and asphalt.

In the past, road paving was paid for through a separate appropriation. This method allowed for a leaner budget, but created an illusion of low taxes, since the appropriation would still be paid for through taxes. It was this tactic that Board Chair Tracy Wyman described as “smoke and mirrors.” Adding it to this year’s budget, instead of using the appropriation route, while more transparent, led to the perceived increase in prop-

erty taxes. If that line item were stripped from the budget and returned to appropriations, the resulting budget would increase taxes by less than 5%, which is a modest amount in a time of inflation.

Which brings me to my next point: appropriations. At the most recent Selectboard meeting, and in later FPF posts, reference was made to appropriations “raising” taxes by 6% if they all pass. Brandon residents need only look to the current Town Report to see that all of the non-profit entities seeking voter support through appropriations have asked for the same amounts every year for at least the last three years, if not longer, and those appropriations have always passed.

Town Report 2022-23, page 34. Consequently, a “yes” vote on the requested appropriations in this year’s ballot will not affect your property taxes at all; it will simply maintain the status quo. To be sure, you could choose to vote “no” on all the appropriations in the hopes their failure would potentially reduce your taxes, but by doing so you would also deprive Brandon citizens of important and necessary services that for the most part benefit the neediest of our neighbors.

Thank you for your time and attention.

*Cecil Reniche-Smith  
Brandon*

# Proposed budget

(Continued from Page 5)

local option tax funds including \$255,000 on a highway truck that wasn’t budgeted for under the previous Town Manager’s oversight, creating a deputy town manager position, spending for a plan for the \$500,000 solar array on land we don’t own, and spending the \$3 million dollar town budget. Within the town budget, we spend approx. \$113,000 for a full-time town clerk and part-time assistant salaries but have the office open and access to public records only available 80% of the time or 208 days for a cost of approx. \$543 per day for gross wages alone.

The Brandon Selectboard’s recent decisions have sparked much controversy in town. There is a buzz of concern about the disconnect between the decisions and the public’s sentiment about the direction the town should go. Micromanaging and canceling a 2-yr-old trained canine officer that we are lucky to have that can smell drugs, follow scents to search for citizens, and often allows police to get search warrants much easier when needed, in a community that has always struggled with drug issues was a serious misstep.

Police equipment such as vehicles that are as much as 10 years old on the road, without a solid plan to purchase one per

year to OWN, not lease, because of the high cost of fitup of a police vehicle for lettering, laptop, lights, backseat restraints, while forcing electric vehicles on a 3-year lease that are not police certified with heavy-duty frames, transmissions, and batteries is just plain silly. With seven officers and a chief, the simple solution is to purchase one vehicle per year to rotate the fleet and none are over 7-8 years old and we retain them for years after fitting them up for police use, while paying zero interest.

Electric vehicles are not delivering the mileage ranges, are seeing increases in insurance, require expensive infrastructures for charging at the police station as well as officer’s homes when they are on call, will require an upgrade of generators, and will most likely have zero value when the batteries expire, not to mention the damage to the environment to produce these electric vehicle batteries. These pose new issues that Brandon can’t afford to learn and certainly not with public safety.

The solar array is proposed to be on leased land and involves an agreement with a public utility company that has increased site fees for the “net metering” programs regularly, relies on sunlight that we get little of compared to other parts of the country, relies on government

rebates that we all pay for, and assumes a 40-year equipment life. There is barely any equipment I can think of other than a tractor that could last 40 years and it would need work over those years. The notion of paying the same as the electric bill to buy equipment to HOPE it delivers free electricity down the road is a notion that the solar business USES to SELL product. If we had just mailed the \$500,000 to the electric company, we could pretend we had \$500,000 of free electricity, but it wouldn’t be true and it would surely eliminate the maintenance costs, the site fees, the disposal costs at the end of the useful life. In short, the decisions of our local elected Selectboard and town clerk have been irresponsible and not mindful of their main purpose of providing access to town records, and providing sewer, highway maintenance and police services.

Our schools, built for many more students than we currently have, are buying new temporary classrooms, while our proficiency scores are very low in math and science. 3rd, 7th and 9th grades are testing at 26%, 18% and 11% proficiency respectively. 5th, 8th and 11th grades are testing at 34%, 19% and 29% proficient in science. Both scores are lower than the statewide average.

Put simply, we have elected

officials who are spending away as if we are a city with unlimited resources. If you are concerned about the cost of living, the answer is to VOTE and VOTE NO

and to replace elected officials and move forward with new more responsible decisions!

*Sharon Stearns  
Brandon*

# Nelson and Ethier

(Continued from Page 5)

owners as well as longtime residents of Brandon and only want to have Brandon move forward.

They both have Selectboard

experience, as they have been appointed to complete vacant board seats and now want to continue to serve the citizens of Brandon.

PLEASE consider using your

two votes on these two QUALIFIED CANDIDATES

*Doug Bailey  
Brandon*

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# Bobcat tests positive

*(Continued from Page 4)*  
necitic, Maine, and New York

Although mammals infected with HPAI are always of interest to wildlife officials, the risk to people from HPAI viruses remains low according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

“Our recommendations to Vermonters are the same as they’ve been since HPAI was first detected in our state—mainly, to avoid

direct contact with wild birds,” said David Sausville, Wildlife Management Program Manager with the Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department. “Observe wild birds only from a distance and practice good hygiene around domestic fowl. Practice good biosecurity by keeping domestic fowl and other pets away from areas where wild birds gather, like bird feeding stations or duck ponds.

Officials will continue to monitor bird and other wildlife deaths that show signs consistent with possible HPAI infection. More information on best practices around wild birds are available on the Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department’s website. More information for domestic fowl owners is available from the Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food, and Markets.

# Conflict of interest

*(Continued from Page 5)*

Pittsford, has a direct financial interest and possible impact, due to that employment, in the decision processes made by Brandon’s leadership, whether it is grant applications, employment candidates, and a myriad of other decisions made by the Selectboard, along with the amicable interactions between the Board members, and town management. In the past, from the many times I witnessed him at meetings as Brandon’s Town Manager, I would not consider Dave Atherton a team player in his interac-

tions with the Selectboard. Disrespectful verging on contemptuous at times, and I don’t see that conduct as beneficial to Brandon.

The town policy on conflict of interest is available at: [https://www.townofbrandon.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/brandontownscanner@gmail.com\\_201909\[...\]pdf](https://www.townofbrandon.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/brandontownscanner@gmail.com_201909[...]pdf)

At the Candidates Forum last Thursday, when I posed the question of conflict to Dave Atherton, he answered that he had confirmation from the powers that be at the State level, that they did not consider it to be a conflict. In

fact, Mr. Atherton stated, he could be Town Manager of both Brandon and Pittsford and it wouldn’t be a conflict of interest. How ludicrous and frightening! He also said he would recuse himself from votes that would be a conflict. The fact remains he would still have vital information to our town that he could use to his advantage as the Town Manager and employee of Pittsford.

There are other qualified candidates to select from to better serve Brandon’s interests.

*Brent L. Buehler  
Brandon*

# Class President

*(Continued from Page 4)*  
want to face challenges to my ideas and work from that in order to form a more perfect Otter Valley Union. I may only be 16, but I am observant of the world around me and see people who seem to enjoy complaining more than actually searching for solutions. I may not be able to vote or run for an official elected office, but I’ll do everything in my power until then to make sure my voice is heard. I don’t offer myself as the solution, but as an idealist who wants to help find the solutions. It’s my utmost hope that others answer

this dire call to arms and do something in the name of my generation’s future and everyone to succeed me.

With my campaign at Otter Valley, I hope that the message gets across that young people are observant, too, and that we have a voice. It may take time to truly be heard, but I am completely confident in our ability as a society to come together and be the change that we seek.

*Brendan Aidan McLoughlin is a junior at Otter Valley Union High School.*



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# The Mungers

(Continued from Page 1)

those who developed the area, building many of the homes in the enclave. And they still live in the house they built up there 39 years ago. They recently sat with The Reporter at their home to reflect on their lives in Brandon.

Scott turns 96 this year and has lived most of his life in Brandon. Born here in 1928, he grew up on lower Carver Street, the sixth of twelve children, of whom five (including Scott) are still alive. His father worked for the Vermont Marble Company and his mother kept house. She passed away when Scott was 13 and the youngest child only 2.

When he was a kid during the Depression, he used to walk along the railroad tracks collecting bits of coal he'd sell to buy movie tickets. And despite living relatively close to downtown Brandon, his address on Carver Street was deemed outside the Brandon school zone and he attended elementary school at the Forest Dale School (now part of the Neshobe Elementary School campus).

"I didn't like school," Scott said. "I was shy, but I managed to get on the Honor Roll when I could do my own thing." Yet even at that young age, Scott's ambition was to join the Marines.

"When I was a kid, I said, 'If I ever get old enough, I'm gonna be a Marine,'" Scott recalled.

So, he enlisted in the Marines in 1945, at age 17.

The Second World War had ended, but the U.S. still had Marines stationed in China. Scott was sent there to serve. His unit returned to San Francisco in 1948. While Scott and a buddy went off to enjoy a few days the city, the rest of their unit signed up to be reservists and ultimately ended up being sent to Korea, where many of them met their fate. Scott's escapade in 'Frisco likely saved his life.

Back in Brandon, Scott wanted to be a trucker but was just shy of the minimum age of 21. So, he would sneak rides with licensed truckers who worked for Dutton Trucking Company, learning the ropes by hauling apples and other produce from Shoreham down to New York City.

After a year at Dutton, he moved to Goddard Trucking, which was based in the Castleton/Fair Haven area. He spent 6 years there, trucking produce, marble, and milk all up and down the east coast, as far south as Washington, D.C.

While he enjoyed the work,

there was at least one person in his life who did not: Marge.

They first met around 1960, when Marge's cousin married Scott's brother. Scott had come to help his brother finish putting up sheetrock in his brother's camp on Fern Lake. Marge was not impressed.

"I didn't care for him at all," she laughed. "I didn't like him."

That all changed after a card game in 1961, when Scott was called in to be a fourth player.

They've been married 59 years now.

Marge grew up in Rutland but had always been fond of Brandon. She spent a lot of time here as a child and her family has roots in the area: both Swington Road and Delorm Road in Leicester are named after branches of her family.

"I fell in love with Brandon when I was young," Marge recalled. "I'd think, 'I hope someday I can live here.'"

Marge and Scott married in 1965 and settled in Brandon. One of the conditions of the marriage, however, was that Scott give up his long-distance trucking.

"I told him I wasn't going to marry someone who was gone all the time," Marge said.

So, Scott got a job hauling wood chips every day from East Middlebury to the International Paper mill in Ticonderoga, New York. After 7 or 8 years on that route, Scott began work with Eddie Wheeler, a builder who taught Scott the profession that would change the direction of his and Marge's life: building houses.

"I was a quick study," Scott said.

Scott and Marge built themselves a house on Town Farm Road, where they lived for 10 years. Then in the early 1970s, they built themselves one in Forrestbrook, where they stayed for a few years.

"For a while we kept moving because people kept buying the houses we built for ourselves," Marge said. "I was working as a secretary for Connecticut Mutual Life Insurance in Rutland, but we needed the money, so we kept selling the houses we finished even though we were living in them."

Eventually they bought some land from Bill Peck on Mt. Pleasant and began building homes up there, including the one they still live in.

"We've been up here for 45 years," Marge said. Ultimately, they built 10 houses in the neighborhood that was known as "Snob Knob" back in the day.

"A lot of out-of-staters bought the houses up here," Marge said. "The neighborhood had a reputation because of that. But

niscing about coming into town on Saturday night to "trade" (shop).

"There's a lot more traffic,"

dared pay with a \$20," laughed Marge. "And when she did make change, she'd give it to you quickly and hope you



**SCOTT AND MARGE Munger (middle and far right) on their wedding day in 1965. Scott had been a long-distance trucker before he and Marge got serious. She put a stop to that. "I told him I wasn't going to marry someone who was gone all the time," Marge said.**

we're just common folk. It took about 10 years before families with kids started moving in and replacing the retirees."

"And we've never had a complaint," said Scott in reference to the quality houses he built.

Though it's been a while since they've built any houses, they keep up with the local market, which continues to astonish them. Houses on Mt. Pleasant have sold for more than \$500K in recent years.

"We borrowed \$15K to build our first house in 1973 and sold it for \$32K," said Marge. "The most we ever got for one of our houses was \$82K for a house on Mt. Pleasant in the 1980s."

And Scott recalls being able to rent a house for \$25/month when he worked for Dutton, making 50¢ per hour.

So much has changed in Brandon over the course of the Mungers' lifetimes.

"It used to be a quiet little village," Marge recalled, remi-

said Scott. "It used to be one car for every house. Now you see two or three cars in a driveway."

Neither one is crazy about the new traffic lights or the smaller size of Central Park after Segment 6. And Marge misses the lush tree canopy on Park Street, which has diminished as the majestic maples that were planted in the 1800s have died off.

The Mungers recalled local characters such as Edgar Paul, who would chastise people on Center Street if they parked badly, and Shirley Farr, whose family built what is now the Lilac Inn on Park Street. Miss Farr was so particular about her street that she would send workers to repair and paint any houses she found wanting.

There was Desi Louras, who ran a candy and magazine shop on Center Street and would warn people that the store "wasn't a library" if they lingered too long over a comic book.

"She'd chew you out if you

wouldn't count it."

Sid Rosen could get you anything you needed—"He'd find it for you," said Scott—and was landlord to many.

"He didn't keep his properties in the best condition," said Marge. "But he provided housing for a lot of lower-income people."

Those folks have gone, but their memory remains alive in conversation with those, like the Mungers, who remember Brandon in those years.

"It's part of life," said Marge. "You've gotta expect change."

In the meantime, even after all these decades, Scott and Marge still live among the houses they built that became homes for so many Brandon families. And they're still dazzled by the sunsets at the house they built on Sunset Drive.

"We still marvel at the beauty," said Marge.





**NESHOBE STUDENTS STAND** inside the Brandon Library renovation site. Back row, left to right: Lani Heitman, Project manager Kim Levins, Superintendent Jason Wisell, Aubrey Mohan, Nick Savela. Front row, left to right: Lucas Lacy, Parker Dillon, Carter Frasier, Jacob Krans.

## Neshobe, Naylor & Breen

*(Continued from Page 3)*

the napkin sketch of a cabinet that they came up with and used CAD software to turn it into a plan for a bookshelf unit to store PE equipment in Neshobe School. The group then went into the shop and helped load sheets of plywood into the CNC machine to cut out the parts for the cabinet. The huge machine then expertly and exactly did the cutting in only a few minutes. The parts will be delivered to Neshobe School next week to be assembled on site by the students and their mentors.

Back on the bus, the students journeyed to downtown Brandon, where they met again with Kim Levins and project superintendent Jason Wisell. They had an in-depth tour of the Brandon Library project, where they witnessed electricians and plumbers as well as carpenters hard at work all over the building. Although the project has had some holdups, it is presently on schedule to finish in early June. Students saw the work of masons who restored old and collapsing brick-

work. They saw the installed steel rods that support the second and third floors by hanging from the roof rafters. They got a look at the elevator shaft from the basement and the third floor and they were impressed. They watched the fire alarm system being installed.

At the end of the tour, they loaded back onto the bus for the short trip back to Neshobe. Shauna Lee said the students are volunteering one day of their vacation next week to meet at

school to assemble the cabinet they designed and helped build.

Mentor Josh Letourneau admitted that he wished he had a school field trip like this one while he was at Neshobe. Tanner Romano hopes that a few of these students will see the trades as a great place to work and earn a good living right here in our community. Gauging the students' enthusiasm, he probably will see some of them in the future.



**THE STUDENTS LEARN** how a CNC machine works at Naylor & Breen's cabinet shop.



**SOULIÈRE GRAVE.** THE carver used an apostrophe instead of an "accent grave" in the French name.

## Names lost

*(Continued from Page 2)*

Joseph's parents—a knowledge gap now rectified.

Joseph's parents, André Soulière (1802–1884) and Julie Brousseau (1808–1889), married at St. Hyacinthe, Québec, on 26 September 1826. They had six children born in Canada and five more born in Clinton County, New York after 1838, making "Andrew Soulia," paterfamilias of the many Soulia families on both sides of Lake Champlain. Their second son, Christopher Soulia (1828–1917) also served in the Civil

War. Christopher's son Abram Soulia (1854–1929) moved to Rutland. Among his many living descendants whom I know: Harley A. Soulia of North Chittenden and Helen (Soulia) McKinlay, Pittsford's Town Clerk.

How often I have heard the question, "Does spelling count?" The Valley or Soulia Americanized names would not take us directly to their 17th century Québec ancestors from France, Jean Vallée dit Laval-lée, and Nicolas Sullière dit Tranchemontagne.



**JOSEPH SOULIA'S STONE** in Pittsford's Evergreen cemetery.



## Nature is an artist

VICKI NOLETTE SENT us this charming photo that was taken by her grandson, Rory McDonald, age 8, at Lake Dunmore. The setting sun is lighting up the ice in an eye-catching display.



## Recreational cannabis flourishes, lawmakers ponder the future of medical dispensaries

BY SHAUN ROBINSON/  
VTDIGGER

James Pepper, chair of Vermont's Cannabis Control Board, offered a blunt assessment of the state's medical cannabis program to a panel of lawmakers earlier this month.

The program "is just in a rapid decline," Pepper told members of the House Government Operations Committee. "The economies of scale are just getting tougher and tougher for these standalone medical dispensaries every time more patients drop off."

There is little question why: Officials have known for years that there would be a downturn in medical users after retail cannabis sales came online in 2022. In fact, the state has seen faster-than-expected growth on the recreational side since then, Pepper said, which has also contributed to the decline in the state's medical program.

This shift has regulators concerned. Pepper said that as more people exit the medical program and start buying from a retailer, they could lose access to medical expertise and, effectively, end up self-medicating.

And since Vermont law allows medical dispensaries to sell higher-potency products than retail stores can, some medicinal users may end up turning to the illicit market as their tolerance for cannabis increases.

Meanwhile, medical dispensary operators said they have a loyal — if declining — contingent of patients who want continued access to the program's benefits, including specialized products, tax-free sales and the option to get their cannabis delivered.

"We feel an obligation to provide that service that our patients depend on," said Russ Todia, chief operating officer of Ceres Collaborative, in an interview. Ceres operates both a recreational store and two medical dispensaries.

"But," he added, "you can't look at the (statewide) program right now and say that it's a healthy program. It certainly needs help from the state to keep it viable."

Members of the government operations committee have been weighing a slate of proposed changes to the state's cannabis (See Cannabis in VT, Page 19)

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# Special election coverage

## Brandon Selectboard candidates give answers to Reporter questionnaire

The Reporter sent the same list of 7 questions to all official candidates for Brandon Selectboard (in alphabetical order): David Atherton, Doug Bailey, Ralph Ethier, Ray Marcoux, Heather Nelson, Aida Nielsen, and David Snow.

Here we present the questions and the candidates' responses, presented alphabetically by last name.

### WHAT IS YOUR BACKGROUND AND EXPERIENCE?

**David Atherton:** I am currently the Town Manager in Pittsford, VT. I was on the Brandon Selectboard from 2012 to 2015 and then became the Town Manager in Brandon until February of 2023.

**Doug Bailey:** I have been a resident in Brandon for the last 40 years. I am retired after working 35 years in the banking field as a loan officer and a regional manager. In Brandon I was a board member of the Brandon Chamber and served as president for 3 years. I was on the Otter Valley School Board and also the Brandon Selectboard for 6 years.

**Ralph Ethier:** I come from a family of 11 children. I'm married and we have 2 grown daughters and 1 grandson. I went to Seminary Hill School and then to Otter Valley, where I graduated in 1982. I live on Pearl Street. I also work on Pearl Street in a business I started back in 1998. I've coached and sponsored several rec league teams over the years. I've also coached at Neshobe and Otter Valley. I've been a member of the Planning Commission, Development Review Board, Se-

lectboard, and am currently an alternate on the Development Review Board.

**Ray Marcoux:** I've lived in Brandon since 1993, raised children here, am a small-business owner, and I'm concerned about out-of-control spending and tax increases.

**Heather Nelson:** I am a native Vermonter, born and raised right here in Brandon. I moved away to attend college and earn my Master's and Bachelor's degrees at UVM. After working in St. Albans, VT and Washington state, my husband and I chose to return to Brandon to purchase a home and start our family. We now have three school-aged children. I worked in public schools for about 6 years before starting my own business. As a speech-language pathologist, I support communication-skill development with children in Rutland and Addison Counties. I've had the privilege to work with hundreds of families in our community, which allowed me to meet an incredible cross-section of Vermonters.

**Aida Nielsen:** I was born in Lithuania. Came to USA in 1994. I got my Associate's degree in nursing with honors in 2005. We moved to Brandon from Westhampton, NY in 2010. Since then, I am working as RN at HPHRC in Middlebury. We raised our 2 sons in Brandon.

**David Snow:** I am a lifelong resident of Brandon (46 years). I, along with my wife, own 3 businesses. I am on the Prudential Board in Brandon, this being my second year. I have a very good understanding of budgets, projections, planning, and being able to listen to all opinions and feel I am able to

decide what is best for everyone in Brandon.

### WHY HAVE YOU CHOSEN TO RUN FOR SELECTBOARD THIS CYCLE?

**David Atherton:** I decided to run for a 1-year Selectboard seat after many Brandon residents asked me to get involved again. I am concerned about the amount of spending that has happened during the past 11 months by the Selectboard and current administration. I think it's time to get back to being fiscally responsible instead of asking for a sizable budget increase that will continue the spending.

**Doug Bailey:** I am on the Budget Committee and feel that my financial experience and board history could be important at this time.

**Ralph Ethier:** I believe my business experience, management skills, and background in Brandon would be a good fit on the board. I like being involved with decision making. I can have an opinion and be able to listen to and respect other opinions and sometimes change my mind.

**Ray Marcoux:** I'm local and Brandon needs to stop the big spending so people can afford to live here.

**Heather Nelson:** I was appointed to the Selectboard in spring 2023. I have learned so much during the past 9 months! Sitting on the Selectboard provides me an incredible opportunity to give back to our town. I love living here and I want to make sure our town is affordable and that it continues to be a great place to live. I am fair, honest, and I ask for more information when I need it. As a 38-year-old female professional with a family at home, I offer a unique perspective that wasn't previously represented on the board.

**Aida Nielsen:** I chose to run for Selectboard because I do not like how my tax money is spent. I do not support an idea that the Town of Brandon should run other businesses, such as solar production, besides making sure that taxpayers' money is spent to run the town in the most efficient way.

**David Snow:** I have chosen to run for the 3-year seat to try and get the voice of every member of Brandon heard and do what's right for everyone. I feel a lot of citizens for one rea-

son or another can't make it to meetings, aren't vocal because they feel they don't get heard, but I will say that in conversation one on one with many citizens from all walks of life, they want things to be done differently and I hope to be able to help with that. One seat is only 20% of the vote, so it takes a group that has the same visions to help the entire community.

### WHAT DO YOU THINK IS POSITIVE ABOUT BRANDON AND HOW IT'S BEEN MANAGED?

**David Atherton:** Honestly, I don't think we are being managed or represented well right now. Attendance at Selectboard meetings has significantly increased and there are more folks running for board seats this year than in the last 10 years. This should be a sign to the Selectboard and administration that Brandon residents are concerned.

**Doug Bailey:** Brandon is a thriving small town with many activities for people to become involved in. Our new town manager has a style that is positive and he communicates well with groups and individuals alike.

**Ralph Ethier:** Brandon has recently completed several large projects. The wastewater plant is being done right now. The 1% options tax is probably one of the best decisions.

**Ray Marcoux:** Brandon used to have stores for local people's needs, water/sewer, and everything was cheaper.

**Heather Nelson:** Brandon is a wonderful community and I love living here. Brandon has improved its infrastructure over the past several years, with more changes coming soon (for example, the Union Street sidewalk project is coming up). It's amazing to have a robust recreation department, especially since I have children. The recreation department is a major draw for families from surrounding towns as well—it's a great way to bring potential customers to Brandon! The new project tracker provided by the town manager approximately bi-monthly (which can be requested at any point in between) has improved transparency and protects us from inadvertently overextending ourselves financially.

**Aida Nielsen:** The Town of Brandon did a good job paving

roads, upgrading downtown. The town still does a good job maintaining safe roads during winter.

**David Snow:** Brandon is different than when I grew up, that's for sure. Brandon used to be a town you didn't have to leave at all. There was work, clothing stores, car dealerships, appliance stores, department store outlets, you name it. Brandon's infrastructure has come a long way for sure; it looks nice in town. I feel there are areas that need improving from a management standpoint and I'll leave it at that.

### WHAT ASPECTS OF BRANDON NEED MORE ATTENTION THAN THEY'VE RECEIVED?

**David Atherton:** My only answer to this is the mess on Newton Road. It's been eight months since it was damaged by flooding and it's still in disarray.

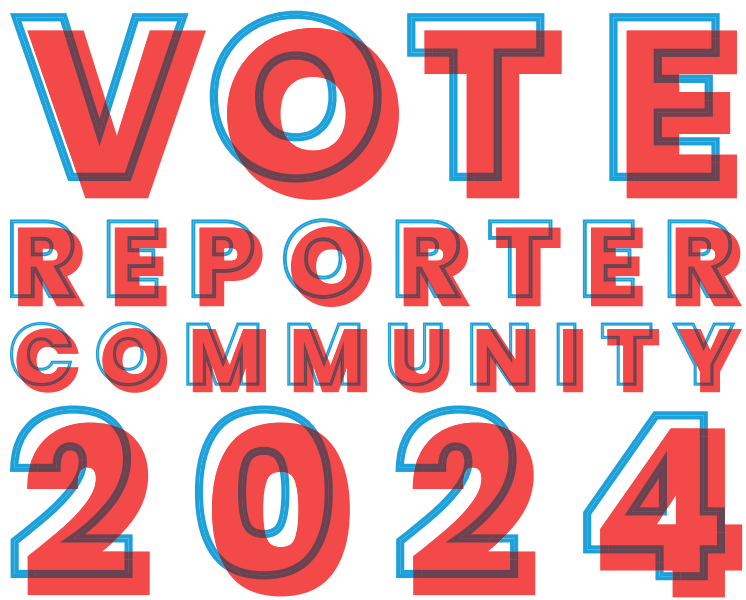
**Doug Bailey:** Marketing the many positive aspects of our small town. There is always room to improve, yet there's the fear that we want to maintain our town's personality and not become another Woodstock.

**Ralph Ethier:** I think the aspect of Brandon that needs more attention is to keep it affordable for everyone. We talk about how nice Brandon looks, wanting 24-hour police coverage, all of the rec programs we have, and then we complain about how expensive it is to live here. There needs to be a balance.

**Ray Marcoux:** The Selectboard needs to curb spending and pet projects, and plan ahead with emergencies down the road, such as broken water mains, equipment, trucks, etc.

**Heather Nelson:** Since completion of the Segment 6 construction, our town has had a lot of changes. For example, we now have beautiful gardens to enjoy—and take care of! We now have to manage the care of these new things, and there has turned out to be a learning curve to this. It would also be prudent to stay ahead of paving—I have learned that it costs less overall to maintain roads so that they don't require larger construction projects to get them in order. Making a plan to handle this proactively is important as we move forward.

**Aida Nielsen:** The Town of Brandon needs to pay more at-





tention to recreation. Exploring the possibility of more nature walking and biking trails, promote outdoor activities.

**David Snow:** I feel the budgets and how the spending increases needs attention. We don't have an open checkbook. Many citizens simply can't afford increases. I understand money has to be spent, that's a given. However, planning for larger expenses needs a lot of attention rather than just approve large items and increase taxes. Our 1% options tax could be used sparingly and when we have a surplus, we could invest that in short-term CDs, money market accounts, etc., to help that money grow before we just spend it.

#### PLEASE IDENTIFY A RECENT ISSUE THAT THE SELECTBOARD HANDLED WELL.

**David Atherton:** I am having a difficult time finding anything that I see as a positive outcome that has benefitted the town.

**Doug Bailey:** The Selectboard and the town manager have allocated funds for all pending projects requiring money. This is very important for the future soundness of Brandon.

**Ralph Ethier:** I believe the issue of the police dog was handled well in that 3 board members listened to the public input and changed their votes.

**Ray Marcoux:** There are none. They mishandled the canine deal, town leased out property for solar panels, and now the town wants to lease another property for town solar, nobody budgeted for a new town truck but it was ordered, sidewalks need repair but they want a huge solar project, and the budget increase is crazy and there is no need for it. They need to close the checkbook and stop the spending.

**Heather Nelson:** During my tenure on the Selectboard, we allocated the remainder of the ARPA funds. At one point during the year, a road construction project on Arnold District Road cost more than expected. Initially, the Selectboard was split, with some members wanting to use ARPA funds for the entirety of the construction costs and some not wanting to use any ARPA funds for the construction costs. I proposed that we pay the expected road construction costs from our regular funds and the excess (unexpected portion) from the ARPA funds. In my view, this was a reasonable compromise.

**Aida Nielsen:** The Selectboard does a good job maintaining the town.

**David Snow:** The K-9 officer is a young animal, has more training needed, but the fact that the program after spending what has been spent was going to be dissolved potentially, I am happy to see we didn't just throw it away after the investment and the decision was made to continue it. That being said, after this year, if the costs of training are going to continue at a high rate, perhaps it needs to be revisited.

#### PLEASE IDENTIFY A RECENT ISSUE THAT YOU THINK THE SELECTBOARD HANDLED POORLY AND EXPLAIN HOW YOU WOULD HAVE HANDLED IT DIFFERENTLY.

**David Atherton:** I think that certain people on the Selectboard have personal agendas and it's clouding their decisions in looking out for the best interest of the town. I don't think the push by some Selectboard members for electric police cruisers and the urgency to build a solar array is what we need to be focusing on while we have outstanding infrastructure projects that seem to have been all but forgotten. The Union Street project and the Wheeler Road bridge and North Street bridge scoping studies should be first priority while a planning process begins for reducing fossil fuel consumption.

**Doug Bailey:** First, I would like to thank each member of the Selectboard. They work diligently for all of us. The one area of improvement could be better communication with each other and the public at meetings. An unanswered or poorly answered question is a lost opportunity to get people to understand items as they come up.

**Ralph Ethier:** The recent issue the Selectboard handled poorly was the police dog. I believe an issue that is important should not have been decided on so quickly. There should have been time for public input.

**Ray Marcoux:** The Selectboard should have gone back and got the right figures for the canine program before they voted it down, could have put solar panels on their own property, they should fix the sidewalks, solar is an eyesore, is expensive, will have expenses to get rid of the panels down the road, and they should have cut back the budget.

**Heather Nelson:** In the past, we found matching money for grants from different place as we needed it. Over the course of the past several months, we have adopted a practice of earmarking matching funds at the time that we accept the grant.

This practice, in combination with a project tracker developed by Town Manager Seth Hopkins, will help us to plan ahead financially.

**Aida Nielsen:** Solar project recommendation, canine program cancellation, and recommendation to buy 2 electric cars for the police department were not handled well. I would research affordability, usefulness, and reliability for each project.

**David Snow:** I was at a Selectboard meeting when the topic of the new town truck was brought up. The truck was ordered and the truck cost was not factored into the budget. Rather than finance a large purchase, the Selectboard decided to use 1% option tax to just pay for that truck. At the time, it was also decided to pay another equipment loan off to which half of the 1% money we had was depleted. I would have chosen a different route and financed the truck, invested \$400,000, and made enough money on investment to offset the interest cost of the loan. Again a business decision not to deplete cash.

#### WHAT ARE THE MOST PRESSING ISSUES FACING BRANDON IN THE NEXT FIVE YEARS AND HOW WOULD YOU ADDRESS THEM?

**David Atherton:** Building a five-year plan is a great idea, if everyone follows it. I think the first step is to stop this sudden urgency to spend money. When I was on the Selectboard from 2012 to 2015, we actually had a "matrix" that was used as a to-do list, which eventually morphed into the "project tracker." I don't know how or if the current Selectboard or town managers use anything like this anymore.

**Doug Bailey:** Two pressing issues that I see are (1) attracting meaningful small business and (2) protecting our town from the types of storms that seem to come from a changing climate. To attract new business, we need to find ways to get outside shoppers into Brandon. For protection to property loss due to storms, we need to maintain a strong public safety department that is ready when needed.

**Ralph Ethier:** Some of the issues facing Brandon in the next 5 years are cost of living, housing, jobs, and climate change. To address some of these, we keep our budget affordable, work on zoning to make it easier to build or convert large houses into multifamily homes.

**Ray Marcoux:** Taxes, taxes, and spending. Taxpayers can't

# Brandon Energy Committee

We encourage a 'Yes' vote for solar



The following quotes reflect the gist of comments offered by more than a dozen people in town who were asked if they would encourage Brandon residents to vote yes on the solar-bond vote.

Tanner Romano - "This project is worth supporting and I encourage Brandon voters to approve it."

Judy Pulsifer - "I will always be a Brandonite at heart and I encourage you to approve this bond."

Ken Mohan - "I have no problem encouraging Brandon residents to vote for this bond."

George Fjeld - "Adopting solar is the best way to reduce our dependence on fossil fuels and it has saved me money at my house. I support this bond."

Sheila Gearwar - "Yes, I support this bond and encourage others to vote yes."

Bill Dick - "The Rescue Squad investment in solar in 2016 has paid for itself and saves us money every month. I support this bond vote."

Mitch Pearl - "I definitely support this bond vote and hope others do as well"

Sarah Pattis - "Yes, I think this project will be good for Brandon and hope we pass this bond vote."

Jim Leary - "I feel this project will be good for Brandon and encourage others to vote for it."

Judy Bunde - "This project will benefit our taxpayers and I hope our voters approve it"

Andy Jackson - "I support Brandon voters in backing this solar project."

Devon Fuller - "I was in favor of the Green Lantern solar project that the town has been benefiting from for years and it is smart for the town to develop their own."

Stephanie Jerome - "This solar project is a sound investment in Brandon's future. I am happy to add my name to a list of people encouraging Brandon voters to support the solar bond vote."

Louis Pattis - "I think this project is great for Brandon, just like my solar is great for us at home."

afford the plans that some have. The town needs to plan ahead for equipment, police cars, town trucks, graders, building repairs, before they happen and have a reserve for emergencies. They need to prioritize a replacement plan for police cruisers because they can't be run until the wheels fall off of them. Same with highway trucks. We don't need a solar array.

**Heather Nelson:** One of the most important issues facing Brandon is keeping the cost of housing (owning and renting) in check. I want people to be able to afford to stay in our town, and for them to afford to purchase homes if they'd like to. It will be important to support affordable housing as part of this. Improving our capital plan for replacement of equipment will be important as we

move forward as well. We are currently piloting a new electronic government management software to help us collect the data we need to develop this formal plan.

**Aida Nielsen:** To find the fine line between making sure the town is safe and affordable. We should consider a permanent tax-increase cap.

**David Snow:** Brandon still has infrastructure work that needs to be completed outside the village: sidewalks, salt shed, town garage, police vehicles, potential solar project, etc. These are all expensive issues and the simple answer has been to raise taxes. My thought is to plan the issues out, plan the spending—it can't all happen at once—so it's going to be a struggle that needs much attention.



# Candidate for Brandon SB draws attention for Facebook posts

After last week's Candidate Forum, The Reporter was approached by a Brandon resident who showed us printouts of posts and memes from the Facebook account of Ray Marcoux, who is currently running for Brandon Selectboard. Many of the posts were clearly jokes and not to be taken seriously or literally. However, some of them were more difficult to shrug off.

We did not discover these posts ourselves. We had not visited any candidate's social media. But once we were made aware of this material, most of which has since been deleted, we had to make a decision whether to ignore this information or make it public. We have decided to make it public and would like to explain our reasons.

First, we acknowledge that

Mr. Marcoux, like everyone else, is entitled to his opinions and his beliefs. He is also entitled to express those opinions publicly. No one is suggesting that he has done or said anything that he did not have a right to do or say.

But the voters of Brandon also have a right to know who is making decisions and setting policy on their behalf. The material culled from Mr. Marcoux's Facebook profile does provide information that some voters will find useful in evaluating Mr. Marcoux's candidacy. This is why we have decided not to keep what was given to us from the community. The examples we're printing here convey a sense of the larger group they were drawn from. We apologize for any discomfort or offense they may cause. We thought it was

important for the community to evaluate the material for itself.

We understand that some of our neighbors may object to the publication of this material on the grounds that it was meant humorously or only to be seen by Mr. Marcoux's friends. Some may argue that what matters is how a member behaves on the Board, regardless of personal beliefs. And there is truth to that. But once we were made aware of this material, we felt obligated to allow all voters to decide for themselves whether to give it any weight in their votes.

We did reach out twice to Mr. Marcoux, via an email address that we had used to communicate with him before, to let him know that we had received this material and that we planned to publish it this week. We offered him an opportunity to submit a

statement if he so wished. We have not heard back. The offer still stands.

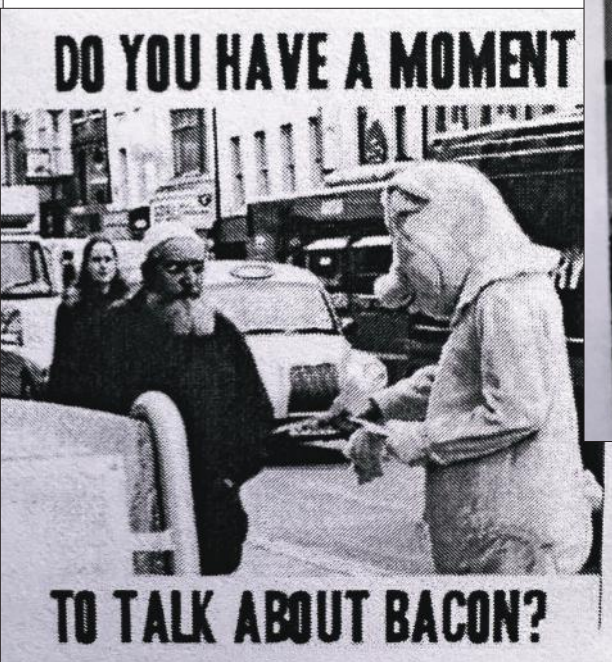
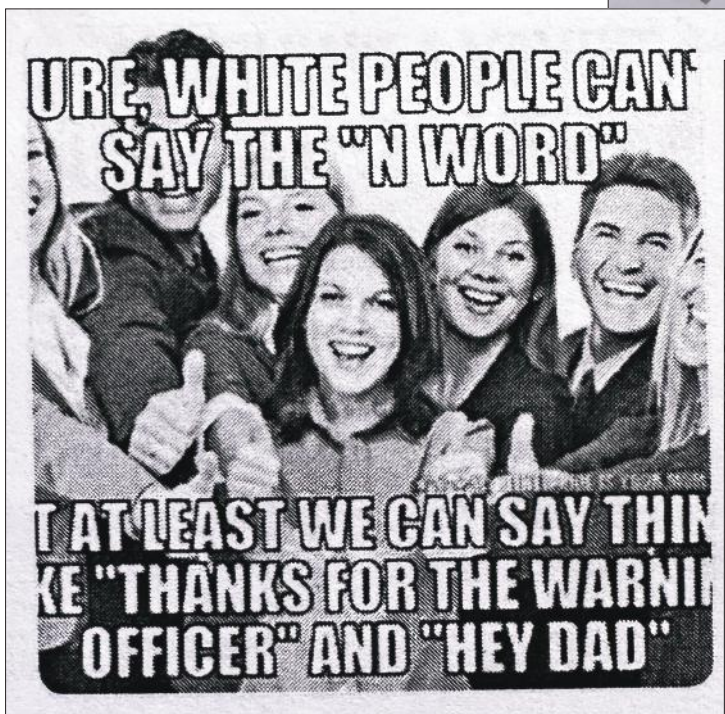
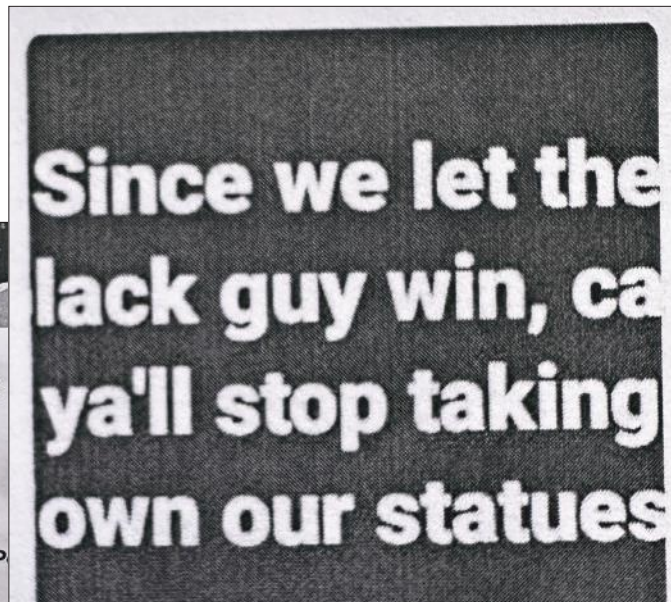
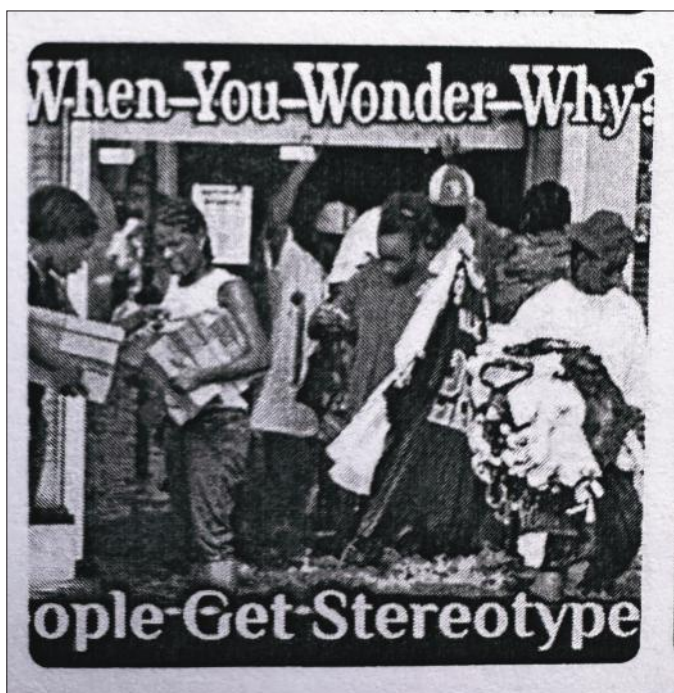
After receiving the printouts, we did visit the public social media profiles of the other candidates, just to be clear that Mr. Marcoux is not being singled out. If we're going to publish this, we need to be sure we've applied the same scrutiny to the other candidates as well. We did not find any other material comparable to what was culled from Mr. Marcoux's Facebook.

Brandon is a small community. It was not an easy decision to put a spotlight on a neighbor like this. Even though the

material was publicly available when it was discovered, it can certainly feel invasive to have what was perhaps intended only for friends suddenly called into question in a public forum. But Mr. Marcoux is seeking a public position and with that comes some degree of public scrutiny.

As we explained above, we did not discover this material ourselves. It was presented to us, along with a dilemma about how to handle it. Not everyone will agree with our decision to publish it. But it was known by some that we were in possession of it and, ultimately, we did not want to be in a position where our readers felt that we had ignored or withheld information that they would've deemed useful in how they cast their votes.

*But Mr. Marcoux is seeking a public position and with that comes some degree of public scrutiny.*



ALL IMAGES TAKEN from Mr. Marcoux's Facebook page and sent to The Reporter by a community member.



# Critics say Phil Scott's budget proposal, which would force cuts to prosecutors, undermines public safety agenda

BY SHAUN ROBINSON  
/VTDIGGER

Gov. Phil Scott's 2025 budget proposal would force the Vermont Department of State's Attorneys and Sheriffs to cut as many as nine prosecutor positions, department leaders said this week. It's a move that Democratic lawmakers, and the department itself, said could hinder the state's efforts to bolster accountability in the criminal justice system.

The possibility of layoffs — or of reductions in attorneys through attrition — also drew criticism from the leader of the state employees' union. Steve Howard said he sees a disconnect between the possible impacts of Scott's proposed budget and the governor's calls for lawmakers to tackle pressing public safety challenges.

Among those challenges, officials have said, is the state's persistent backlog of thousands of unresolved court cases, which has left some alleged offenders — and victims — waiting months or even years for a trial.

"It is troubling to have the governor give a speech saying he's concerned about crime, and then propose a budget that doesn't invest in what the system needs in order to get justice for victims and to keep communities safe," said Howard, the executive director of the Vermont State Employees' Association, in an interview.

Department leaders testified to lawmakers that they need those nine positions — and

then some — to bring down the number of cases that county prosecutors are handling. At current staffing, many deputy state's attorneys are juggling more than 300 cases at a time, officials said, suggesting a more reasonable number would be below 275.

Scott has made public safety a major focus of his policy proposals to lawmakers this year and is pushing for legislation that would roll back bail reform measures and increase penalties for some offenses, among other changes. Some of these measures are the subject of bills being considered in committees in the House and Senate.

But at the governor's weekly press conference Wednesday — which he focused on public safety — Scott said he does not think the state can afford to fit those prosecutor positions into a budget that should include less spending than in previous years.

The administration "did the best we could under the conditions of the money we have. We have to live within our means," Scott told reporters. "We can have conversations about add-

ing those positions, adding to the cost of government. But it has to come out of some pocket. It's got to come out of somewhere else."

The governor said he was open to hearing lawmakers' ideas about where such money could come from. Speaking in an interview Thursday, House Speaker Jill Krowinski, D-Burlington, said the nine positions were critical.

*"It's crushing," Noonan said. "When you don't have money to pay people, the expectation is that you will do a reduction in force of your staff — which of course for us would just be very, very difficult to do."*

—Annie Noonan  
Sheriff's Department  
Labor Relations and  
Operations Director

"It's a tough budget year, yes," Krowinski said. "But this is something that (House leaders) are prioritizing, because we know that it can make a difference."

Scott's administration asked the state's attorneys and sheriff's department to hold its 2025 budget increase to 5% over current

spending levels — higher than many other organs of state government, said Jaye Pershing Johnson, Scott's general counsel.

But even with that increase, the department said it needs to find about \$945,000 in cost savings heading into the 2025 fiscal year in order to meet the governor's targets.

That works out to nine prose-

cutor positions, Annie Noonan, the department's labor relations and operations director, told House lawmakers earlier this week. She said the department already operates on a slim budget and that there is no other area where it could make substantial cuts.

"It's crushing," Noonan said. "When you don't have money to pay people, the expectation is that you will do a reduction in force of your staff — which of course for us would just be very, very difficult to do."

The department currently has one vacant deputy state's attorney position, Noonan said. Overall, she noted, the department employs about 60 deputy prosecutors statewide in addition to the elected state's attorneys in each county.

In fact, Tim Lueders-Dumont, the department's legislative and assistant appellate attorney, said it needs at least 10 additional deputy prosecutors to make meaningful improvements in how quickly many cases are resolved. The department also asked for 10 new victim advocate positions, and 10 new administrative support positions, which did not make the governor's proposal either, officials said.

Scott's budget also falls short of meeting all of the needs the Vermont Judiciary has identified for 2025, lawmakers said this week. The Judiciary requested 15 new positions intended to aid the courts in their work, including 10 judicial assistants, four information tech-

nology analysts and a database administrator, none of which are included in the governor's proposal.

The governor does support funding two new superior court judge positions, as the judicial branch has asked for, officials said.

Moreover, Vermont Defender General Matt Valerio told lawmakers this week that the governor's budget proposal falls about \$2 million short of what his department — which provides defense attorneys to people who do not otherwise have a lawyer — needs just to continue operating at the status quo.

In an interview Thursday, Rep. Martin LaLonde, a South Burlington Democrat who chairs the House Judiciary Committee, acknowledged that finding the money to support all of these requests — as well as the many other issues facing the state this year — will be a challenge.

But he said that prosecutorial and judicial leaders have been adamant that they need resources in order to make progress on dealing with existing cases before the state makes policy changes that increase consequences for offenders.

"I know that the governor said, 'Yeah, I'm being hard on crime — the alternative is being soft on crime,'" LaLonde said, referring to Scott's press conference. "I think our approach is that we're being sensible on crime and in our approach to this issue."

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## Empty seats on RNESU School Board have no takers

BY STEVEN JUPITER

BRANDON—While the race for Brandon Select-board heats up with the greatest number of contenders in years, the ballot for RNESU board seats remains wide open. Seven seats on the Otter Valley and Barstow boards had yet to receive any candidate interest by the January 29 submission cutoff.

There are currently seven OVUSD seats on the March ballot:

Brandon (1 year remaining

of a 3-year term)

Brandon

Goshen

Leicester (2 years remaining of a 3-year term)

Pittsford

Whiting

At-Large

Natalie Steen of Brandon, Fernanda Canales of Goshen, and Jeremy Gildrien of Leicester are running to retain their seats. Mr. Gildrien will be running as a write-in candidate.

A 3-year seat from Pittsford

is being vacated by Brooklyn Markowski. A 3-year seat from Whiting is being vacated by Rebecca Watters. A 3-year at-large seat is being vacated by Greg Bernhardt. And a 3-year Brandon seat with one year remaining is being vacated by recent OV graduate Pajua Gamba.

None of these seats is being contested on the ballot.

It's too late for candidates to submit their names for the ballot—interested parties will have to campaign as write-ins.



# Special election coverage continued

## Candidates for Brandon Selectboard focus on spending at public forum

BY STEVEN JUPITER

BRANDON—At a well-attended public forum organized by the Brandon Area Chamber of Commerce at Brandon Town Hall on Thursday, February 15, six of the seven candidates for Brandon Selectboard introduced themselves (or re-introduced, in some cases) to the public and answered questions from the audience.

The candidates are (in alphabetical order) David Atherton, Doug Bailey, Ralph Ethier, Ray Marcoux, Heather Nelson, Aida Nielsen, and David Snow. Mr. Bailey and Mr. Snow are running for the 3-year seat being vacated by Board Chair Tracy Wyman. The remaining candidates are running for the two one-year seats currently held by Ms. Nelson and Cecil Reniche-Smith, who is not seeking re-election after one year on the Board.

Mr. Atherton, Mr. Bailey, Mr. Ethier, and Ms. Nelson all enter the race with Selectboard experience under their belts. Mr. Marcoux, Ms. Nielsen, and Mr. Snow would be newcomers to the Board. Mr. Atherton also served as Brandon town manager from 2015 to 2023.

Aida Nielsen was not able to participate in the forum because of work commitments.

The overarching theme of the evening, mentioned by all candi-

or summarized. The full video of the event is available on the Chamber's website. Please also see "Candidate Questionnaire" in this issue of The Reporter for further information about the candidates and their positions.

The first opportunity for the candidates to speak was a request from Mr. Carr for brief opening statements. Mr. Atherton arrived several minutes after the beginning of the forum and was not present for this round of statements.

Mr. Marcoux began by saying he was not happy with the town's spending.

"There's no saving, no planning," he said. "We have to raise everyone's taxes because we didn't plan."

Mr. Ethier stated that he wanted to "help the town be all we can be."

Ms. Nelson said she "was ready to give back to the town."

Mr. Bailey recounted his employment history in banking and his six years on the Selectboard.

Mr. Snow shared his employment with the state highway department and said, "I have a lot to offer on the budget side of things."

Mr. Atherton stated that he was concerned about the budget and stated that "there's a lot of unrest in town" because of spending and tax increases.

In the following sections, an asterisk (\*) after a response indicates that that reply requires clarification, which will be found in the "Clarification" section at the end of this article.

### AUDIENCE QUESTIONS WHAT DO YOU CONSIDER 1 OR 2 KEY VALUES AND HOW DO YOU DEMONSTRATE THEM IN HOW YOU LIVE YOUR LIFE? —LISA PELUSO

Mr. Marcoux said that he was honest and straightforward with everybody. "You have to have standards."

Mr. Ethier said that he was honest, dependable, and hard working.

Ms. Nelson stated that she was thoughtful of others, was able to rethink her positions, and willing to keep learning.

Mr. Bailey said that he was "transparent" and that "people should feel like they can communicate with me. I deal in factual information."

Mr. Snow offered honesty, integrity, and dependability. "You have to listen to everyone to come

up with a solution for the whole town."

Mr. Atherton said that he did not believe in procrastination and that he gets things done.

### HOW WOULD YOU ADDRESS THE HOUSING CRISIS IN BRANDON? —JANIE YOUNG

Mr. Ethier said he would make it easier to build multi-unit buildings on town water and sewer and would make it easier to derive income from one's own home.

Mr. Atherton noted that the housing crisis is a statewide problem. He wasn't sure that the Selectboard was in a position to address the issue until the state legislature reforms statutes like Act 250. "There's no local solution until the state allows us to have one."

Ms. Nelson stated that she'd like to see a relaxation of housing codes to accommodate families of various sizes. "It's heartbreaking to see families work hard without stable housing."

Mr. Bailey agreed that the issue is difficult to address because of state laws but acknowledged that there are private citizens in Brandon already working on building affordable housing.

Mr. Snow noted that "Brandon as a whole is not affordable." But the issue is difficult to tackle at the local level. "There's no dead-set solution in Brandon."

Mr. Marcoux also agreed that until the state changes its laws, the issue is beyond the town to resolve. "We have to have safe housing," he added.

### HOW WOULD YOU ADDRESS BRANDON'S INFRASTRUCTURE? —TRACY WYMAN

Mr. Atherton stated that he had a lot of experience with infrastructure because of his time as Brandon town manager. "I know what it takes." He expressed dissatisfaction with the current town management's handling of Newton Road, which flooded last summer and is still not paved.\*

Ms. Nelson said that she would like to be proactive with maintenance rather than reactive with repair. She also suggested that the town know exactly where funds for grant matches will come from. "We shouldn't be surprised by things."

Mr. Bailey recommended using the 1% local option tax to pay for infrastructure projects, including paving. He noted that the 1% funds could be used to offset some of the

\$300K allocated for paving in the proposed town budget.

Mr. Snow, who runs an excavation company, noted that construction costs now are "ridiculous." He also deemed the town's handling of Newton Road a "failure" that should've been addressed in 2 or 3 months. He suggested better coordination between the town highway department and the water department so that installation or repair of water lines doesn't destroy new paving.\*

Mr. Marcoux felt that the town had been relying too much on the 1% fund without enough planning. He also found the use of granite curbing instead of concrete in downtown an example of wasteful spending. Similarly, he criticized the installation of brick pavers that cannot be easily plowed.

Mr. Ethier suggested a 5-to-10-year plan for infrastructure and keeping better tabs on the longevity of various infrastructure around town to aid in planning for repair and replacement.

What is the role of a Selectboard member? —Jan Coolidge

Ms. Nelson said the role is to "make thoughtful decisions for the town while allowing the departments to do their jobs. Offering guidance and looking at the big picture."

Mr. Bailey stated that the Selectboard members "do not run the town." Rather, their role is to set policy and prepare the budget.

Mr. Snow saw the role of the Selectboard in tandem with the town manager: the town manager runs the town and the Selectboard "keeps the town manager in check." "The board has to do what's best for the entire community."

Mr. Marcoux saw the purpose of the Board as primarily financial: "to keep the reins on spending and to stay within the budget."

Mr. Ethier also saw the role of the Board as setting policy and preparing the budget. He also added that the Board must be "open minded" and willing to change its mind through public input.

Mr. Atherton stated that the Board "looks out for the best interest of the town as a whole. The Board is there to assist, not micro-manage. The Board shouldn't be playing a daily role."

### HOW DO YOU KEEP YOUR PERSONAL INTERESTS TO YOURSELF? —CLAIRE ASTONE

Mr. Bailey said, "I have very few personal interests. I am frugal.

I've never asked for a pet project."

Mr. Snow stated that "you have to do what's best for everybody in town. Get back to self-sufficiency."

Mr. Marcoux said, "I've got no pet projects. You have to hear what voters have to say."

Mr. Ethier stated that he has "no hidden agenda." He added, "My personal interest is potato chips."

Mr. Atherton asserted that "there should be no special interests on the Board. It should represent the town as a whole."

Ms. Nelson said that she was willing "to have a conversation with anyone who wants to talk" and that she was just one person on a Board of five members. "Everyone's opinion is equally valid."

### DO YOU SUPPORT THE PROPOSED TOWN-OWNED SOLAR ARRAY? —SHIRAZ DAYA

Mr. Marcoux saw the array as "a bad idea. Bad business."

Mr. Ethier had not made his mind up and said that he'd asked the Energy Committee for hard data on other towns' results with their own arrays.

Mr. Atherton said that he was not "anti-solar," but the current proposed array is "not a priority." "Not the time to ask for \$500K. Other priorities first."

Ms. Nelson believed the best path is to "follow the town energy plan while being fiscally responsible."

Mr. Bailey noted that Brandon residents had asked the town to find other sources of revenue and that the array might well be such a source. "No one is forcing voters to say yes. Look at the issue yourself."

Mr. Snow was not sure that a solar field was the only way forward, given the huge expense. He suggested placing solar panels on town buildings or exploring hydroelectric power.

### WHAT UNIQUE PERSPECTIVE DO YOU BRING TO PEOPLE WITH LOW AND FIXED INCOMES? —VICKI DISORDA

Mr. Ethier said that he would "keep the budget in mind for all income levels."

Mr. Atherton would watch the budget, help with energy costs, and keep budget and tax increases small.

Ms. Nelson said she would manage the budget responsibly and meet the needs of as many



dates at one point or another, was spending. This year's anticipated budget increases, both municipal and educational, have Brandon citizens on edge. Moreover, the town ballot in March will include an article asking voters to approve a \$500,000 bond for a town-owned solar array. Additionally, the Brandon Fire District, which is a separate municipality from the town with its own budget, is exploring a multimillion-dollar water-tank replacement project that will likely require a significant debt burden borne by the District's customers.

The forum was moderated by Chamber of Commerce Executive Director Bernie Carr, standing in for Town Moderator Bill Moore, who was unavailable.

The six candidates sat at a long table onstage and passed a microphone up and down the line as they responded to questions posed by attendees.

Because of space constraints, attendees' questions and candidates' answers may be abridged



town residents as possible. She would also focus on compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act.

**Mr. Bailey** believed that the budget and revenue are vital. He would distinguish between what the town wants and what it needs.

**Mr. Snow** said that he would try to lure businesses to Brandon that could pay more than low-income wages.

**Mr. Marcoux** said that local people would soon be taxed out of their homes and that the state would be filled with out-of-staters if spending weren't controlled.

#### WHAT IS YOUR MOTIVATION FOR RUNNING? --JANET MONDLAK

**Mr. Atherton** noted that the 13% increase in the town budget was "unnerving" to him and that the condition of Newton Road had gotten him "fired up."

**Ms. Nelson** said that she wanted to keep Brandon a place that her kids would want to live in as adults. She also noted that it was important that the Board include women and younger people.

**Mr. Bailey** said that he didn't feel that the current Board had successfully communicated with the public or one another and that his communication skills could help resolve the problem.

**Mr. Snow** acknowledged that he was "new" to town politics but felt that one shouldn't complain unless one is willing to help change things. "Now is the time to step in."

**Mr. Marcoux** said that "the time has come to try to change things. Put an end to the open checkbook."

**Mr. Ethier** stated that he enjoyed the decision-making process.

#### WHAT IS YOUR POSITION ON ELECTRIC POLICE CRUISERS?

--JIM EMERSON

**Ms. Nelson** would consult with the police chief, look at costs, and try to adhere to the town plan.

**Mr. Bailey** noted that "there's a lot of misinformation out there." He suggested buying one EV and one gas-powered cruiser and tracking their performance over the next few years.

**Mr. Snow** stated that Vermont has a lot of EVs and that they have to recharge often compared to gas vehicles. But he would gather more facts before making a decision.

**Mr. Marcoux** "would never own an EV. Police should get what they need, not what the Selectboard says."

**Mr. Ethier** noted that there are currently no EVs certified to be police cruisers.\*

**Mr. Atherton** asserted that the Brandon Police Department's cur-



SIX OF THE seven candidates for Brandon Selectboard onstage at Brandon Town Hall for the Candidate Forum on Thursday, February 15. L to R: Ray Marcoux, Ralph Ethier, David Atherton, Heather Nelson, Doug Bailey, and David Snow. Not present: Aida Nielsen.

Photo by Steven Jupiter

rent cruisers are not "as bad as people say." But he also felt that it might not be the right time to make an investment in EVs.

Do you support the \$92K appropriation to the Brandon Free Public Library? --Faith Daya

**Mr. Bailey** said he "highly" supports it. "It's a resource we have to have."

**Mr. Snow** was undecided. He recognized the importance of the library in town but also felt that the appropriation could be lower, given declining use of the library facilities. He suggested perhaps charging users a fee.\*

**Mr. Marcoux** stated that he was opposed and did not feel that it was appropriate for the library to use tax money for its current renovation.\*

**Mr. Ethier** supported the library's appropriation request.

**Mr. Atherton** stated that the library was "very important" and that he "would hate to see it not pass."

**Ms. Nelson** "wholeheartedly" supported the library and noted that the facility has changed with the times and is a safe space for many people in the community.

How do you propose to keep taxes down? --Sharon Stearns

**Mr. Snow** stated that the town office should be open 5 days per week and that he wasn't sure the deputy town manager's salary was necessary.\*

**Mr. Marcoux** said the town should "close the checkbook" and criticized the creation of the deputy town manager position, suggesting that the position be eliminated.\*

**Mr. Ethier** said that everything would be up for re-examination if

the budget failed and that frugality was important.

**Mr. Atherton** stated that the Selectboard has no authority over the town clerk or the hours she sets. He also stated that he didn't understand the deputy town manager position and that he'd never had an assistant as town manager.\*

**Ms. Nelson** said that the Selectboard had been responsible in how it had allocated the ARPA funds. "We were efficient with what we have."

**Mr. Bailey** said that he didn't see anything wrong with the deputy town manager position.

#### DIRECTED QUESTIONS [TO MR. ATHERTON SPECIFICALLY] IS THERE A CONFLICT OF INTEREST BETWEEN YOUR POSITION AS TOWN MANAGER OF PITTSFORD AND A SEAT ON THE BRANDON SELECTBOARD?

--BRENT BUEHLER

**Mr. Atherton** stated that he did not believe that a conflict existed between his current position as town manager in Pittsford and a seat on the Brandon Selectboard. He also said he would recuse himself if any apparent conflict arose and that he had consulted with the VT Secretary of State's office and been told that the situation was acceptable, noting that someone is legally able to be town manager in two different towns simultaneously.

#### FINAL STATEMENTS

**Mr. Marcoux** would curb spending and save money.

**Mr. Ethier** stated that Brandon

is his town, he has good management skills, and he will try as hard as he can.

**Mr. Atherton** said it "breaks [his] heart to see where we were in 2012" compared to the last 11 months. "We need to get back to basics."

**Ms. Nelson** said she hoped she'd get another opportunity to sit on the board. "I've learned so much. It's been a fantastic experience. Everyone has an important voice. I love Brandon."

**Mr. Bailey** said that he enjoyed his 6 years on the Selectboard in the past and that he believes the town is in good financial shape now with a "healthy" reserve.

**Mr. Snow** said he had "a lot to offer" and that the Selectboard needs to base its decisions on what the community wants and needs.

#### CLARIFICATIONS

Question #3: **Both Mr. Atherton and Mr. Snow** reference the unpaved condition of Newton Road. Brandon Town Manager Seth Hopkins reached out to The Reporter to clarify that the road remains unpaved because contractors were unavailable before the end of asphalt season, given the heavy damage sustained by roads in other communities during the summer floods. Mr. Hopkins said both the Brandon Highway Dept. and FEMA agreed that the paving could wait until asphalt production begins again in the spring.

Question #9: **Mr. Ethier** stated that there were no commercially available EVs that are certified for police work. Some models can be upgraded to police standards and the 2024 Chevrolet Blazer EV Po-

lice Pursuit Vehicle is specifically designed for police.

Question #10: **Mr. Snow** suggested that there had been a decline in library use, but the Brandon Library states that it has seen an uptick in users, surpassing pre-COVID levels in 2023.

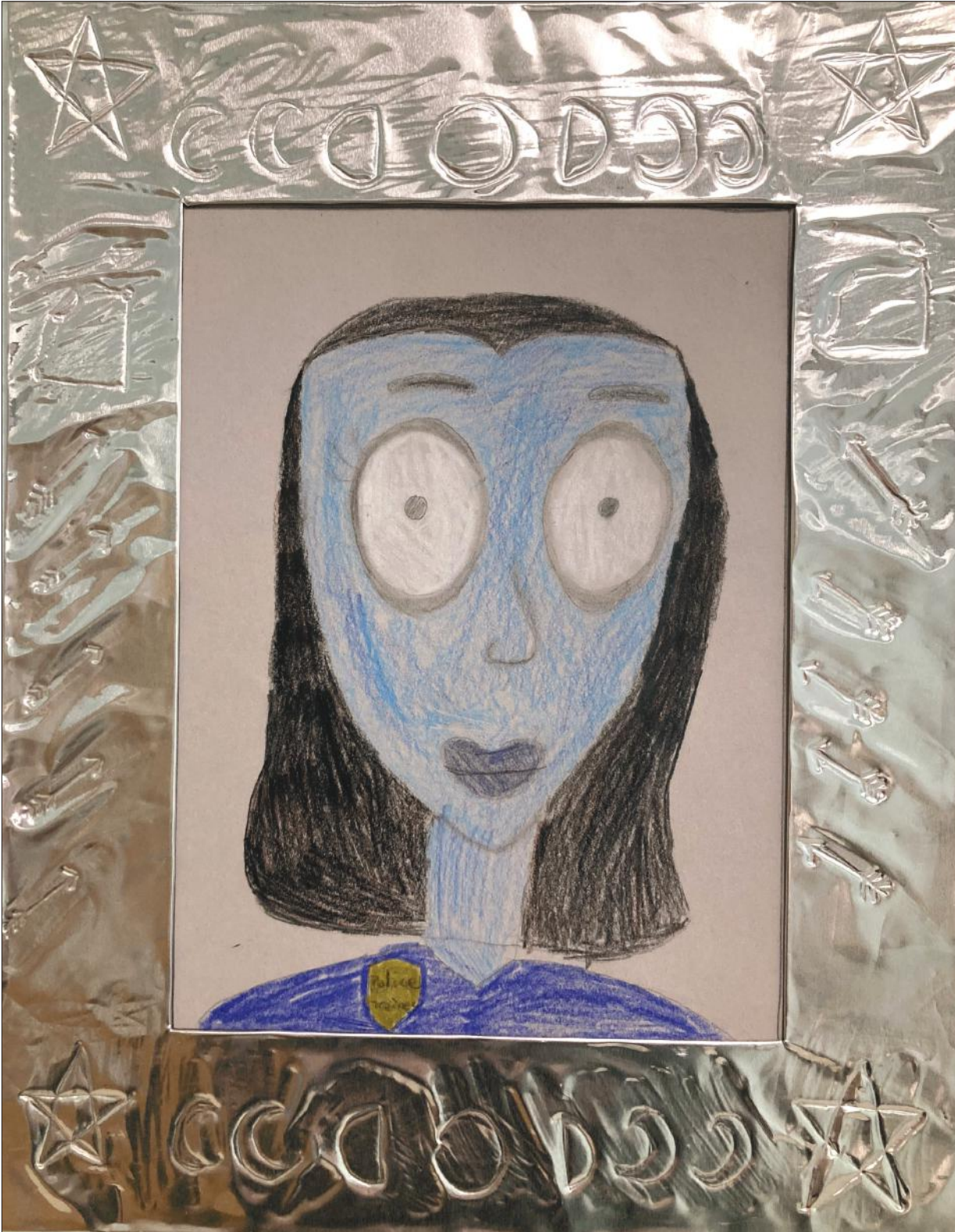
**Mr. Marcoux** suggested that the \$92K appropriation requested by the library would be used for the library's current renovation. The \$92K is strictly for operating expenses. The renovation has been funded through grants and private donations.

Question #11: **Mr. Marcoux and Mr. Snow** both questioned the deputy town manager's position, based in part on the cost of the deputy's salary. However, Bill Moore, the deputy town manager, is receiving only \$7,000 more for the additional work of the position than he was already receiving for his work as Rec Director and Economic Development Officer. Combined with Mr. Hopkins current salary of \$75,000, the total for the two positions (\$75,000 + \$7,000) is still less than the salary Mr. Atherton was earning (\$95,250 + \$3,000 gas allowance) when he left the position in 2023.

**Mr. Atherton** claimed that he had never had an assistant while town manager. In Pittsford, where Mr. Atherton is currently town manager, there is a position titled "Assistant to the Town Manager." Mr. Atherton notes, however, that this position is entirely administrative with no supervisory responsibility, unlike the deputy town manager position in Brandon.



# OUR CREATIVE KIDS



ARTISTS: Izzy Guevin

GRADE: 7

SCHOOL: Otter Valley  
Middle School

MEDIUM: mixed media and  
embossed tin

TEACHER: Dasha Kalisz



# Cannabis in VT

## MAPLE<sup>the</sup> COW<sup>TM</sup> by Matt Aucoin

(Continued from Page 11) policies in recent weeks, many of which are proposals from the control board. The panel appears to have an interest in advancing at least some of those measures aimed at bolstering the medical program.

Proposals in the latest version of H.612 include allowing recreational stores — of which there are about 75 statewide, compared to just five medical dispensaries — to serve medical patients under certain conditions, as well as lowering the fees that the state charges to dispensary operators. The bill would also reduce the frequency with which many patients have to renew their medical marijuana cards and add a new health condition to the list of those that qualify someone for medical-grade products.

Still, Pepper said in an interview Friday that the bill as written likely won't spur a large influx of medicinal patients that medical dispensary operators need. Barring any significant policy changes, he has said, some medical dispensaries may soon be closing their doors.

"This year is the year for us to decide in the General Assembly what path the medical program

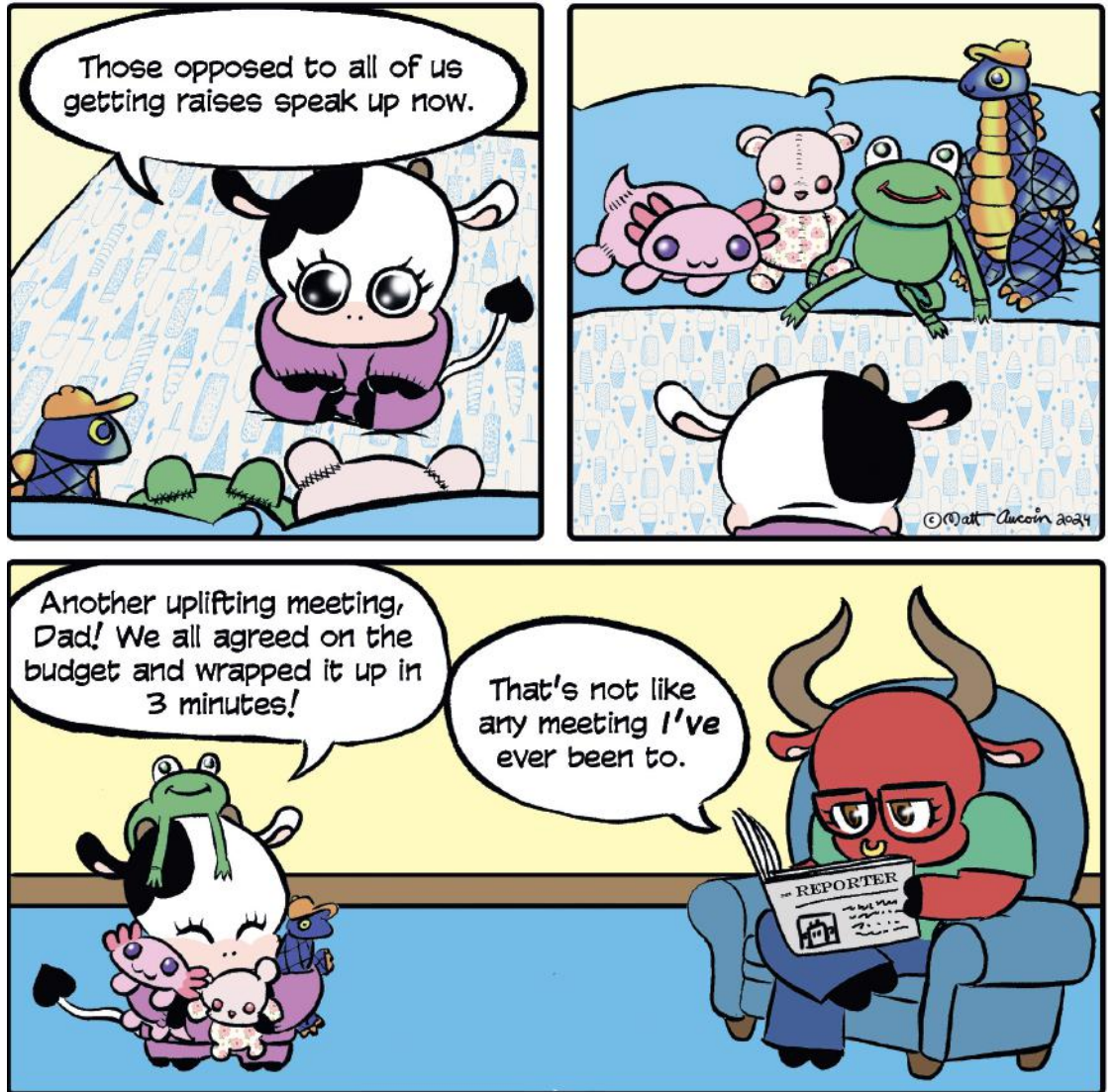
is going to take," said Rep. Mike McCarthy, D-St. Albans, the panel's chair, at a hearing earlier this month. "If we make the choice to not change anything, it's very likely that the medical program will be very, very small."

As of this month, there were about 2,800 people enrolled in the state's medical cannabis program, according to data from the control board, a figure that has fallen sharply since a 2017 peak of more than 5,000 patients.

At the same time, taxable revenue from the first year of retail cannabis sales came in above what state officials were expecting, Pepper said. From October 2022 to the end of 2023, sales brought in just shy of \$120 million in such revenue, he said.

Leaders in Gov. Phil Scott's administration told reporters last month that, as a result, they dipped into the state's pot of cannabis tax revenue to avoid proposing certain cuts in the governor's 2025 fiscal year budget.

It's not clear yet which proposals, if any, will make it over the finish line in the Legislature this year. But the House panel (See Cannabis in VT, Page 23)



### No speech needed!

BRANDON AREA CHAMBER of Commerce President Pat Wood (left) presents the Chamber's President's Award to Joan Rowe (right) at the Chamber's annual dinner, held this year at the Lilac Inn. Ms. Rowe, who founded Rowe Real Estate with her late husband, Fred, has been involved with the Chamber for decades, even stepping into the role of president "as long as she didn't have to give any speeches." Ms. Wood praised Ms. Rowe's ability to bring people together. For her part, Ms. Wood is leaving the Chamber presidency after 6 years.



# Calendar of events

## February Mondays

### Brandon Rec offers Aikido classes

Come to Brandon Town Hall for Youth classes at 5 p.m., and adult classes at 6 p.m. Beginners and spectators welcome. Visit [www.aikidovermont.org](http://www.aikidovermont.org) for more information, including fees.

## Tuesdays

### Maclure Library Story Time Playgroup

Looking for a fun, educational playgroup for your 2–5 year old? Look no further! From 10 a.m. – 12 p.m. join Miss Allie, a certified teacher, for a weekly FREE literacy-based playgroup. Light snacks will be provided, along with stories, crafts, songs, games, and more. To register, please email [allie.griffiths@rcpcc.org](mailto:allie.griffiths@rcpcc.org) with your child's name, age, and contact information for your family.



### Pins & Needles Craft Club at the Brandon Free Public Library

Drop in from 5:30–7:00 p.m., and bring your projects to work on.

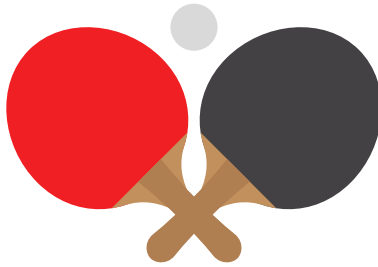
## Wednesdays

### Ping Pong

The Green Mountain Table Tennis Club would like to announce the beginning of its new season!

The club has begun playing on Wednesday evenings starting at 7 p.m. It will meet nearly every Wednesday year-round in the gym at the Rutland Area Christian School in Rutland, located at the corner of Melrose Ave. and Lincoln Ave. in Rutland, a block from the intersection of Route 7 and Melrose Ave. (110 Lincoln Ave., Rutland, VT 05701).

Being a part of this unique and exciting club offers a variety of activities, including regular practice, a challenge board, clinics for beginner and advanced play, singles and doubles, inter-club events with other table tennis



Not everyone can get up and down off of the floor easily, making traditional yoga classes difficult. If you have physical limitation or a health issue this might be the ideal class for you. With the help of a chair most people can practice yoga and reap the benefits of increased circulation, balance, flexibility, mobility, strength and more.

We spend a fair amount of the time exercising in a seated position in the chairs but if possible, we also do exercises standing, using the chairs for support. The exercises can be adjusted for individual needs and we move at a comfortable pace. I think you will soon notice a difference once you start. Looking forward to seeing you in class!

Lina (Parvati) has 20 plus years of experience teaching and a lifelong personal practice.

To stay tuned if there are any cancellations, follow on Facebook and get on our email list. \$15/class

## Thursdays

### Ukulele Group

Free at the Chaffee Art Center from 12–1 p.m., for adults & 12+. This is not a class but a group enjoying playing the ukulele together. Must pre-register. There are a limited amount of in-house instruments to reserve.

Attendees will be led through specific sheet music by musician Steven Wilson. All levels are welcome.

### Open Mic at Red Clover in Brandon

Join us starting at 6 p.m. for a rousing good time!

## Fridays

### Chaffee Art Center All About the Arts Free Class for kids 3–5

From 11am–Noon...FREE! Students will have fun creating and doing activities with art, music, literature, and more!

One free book per student will be given weekly (while supplies last) thanks to our partners at Rutland Free Library. Adult must accompany children under age 4. Must pre-register by Wednesday each week.

Instructor: Lori Sullivan; Minimum 3.

### Maclure Library Knitting Circle

Come join us weekly to share projects from noon – 2:00 p.m.

### Corn Hole at the Godnick Adult Center

By request, we will have drop-in cornhole in the Rec Hall on Fridays from 2–4 p.m.

## Homeward Bound announces 2024 low-cost rabies clinics schedule

The clinics are open to both dogs and cats and are offered at 9:00 to 10:00 a.m. on the following Saturdays:

February 24

March 16

April 20

The clinics take place at the shelter, which is located at 236 Boardman Street in Middlebury. Pre-registration is highly recommended and can be completed through the shelter's website, [homewardbound-animals.org](http://homewardbound-animals.org). The cost is \$20.

All animals must be 12 weeks of age or older to receive the rabies vaccine. In order to receive a 3-year rabies vaccine, pet owners must provide proof of prior vaccination. No physical exams will be performed. This is a drive-

through style vaccine clinic. All dogs are required to be on leash and cats in carriers for this event.

Rabies is a deadly viral disease of the brain that infects mammals. In Vermont, rabies is most commonly found in wild animals, however the state requires that dogs and cats be vaccinated by a veterinarian. The owner of a dog must provide evidence of current rabies vaccination status to obtain the required municipal license by April 1 of each year.



### Friends Zone

The Friends Zone will be initially open 3 hours per week at the Brandon United Methodist Church on Tuesdays from 12-3 p.m. at 1 Franklin Street, Brandon. Socialize with old friends, make new ones. Sip some soup while you sip a drink. Be puzzled for a bit, sorting out a puzzle, or hold an Ace in the hole until the right moment to play it. If so inclined, you can bring to the table a struggle of your own to work on or your thoughts on developing the Friends Zone or improving our lives.

The door is open. Our minds are open. Our hearts are open.

All are welcome in.

For more information contact pastors Reverend John Hardman-Zimmerman ([hzm@hotmail.com](mailto:hzm@hotmail.com)) or (802) 282-7532 or Vicki Disorda ([vqueenoftheearth@gmail.com](mailto:vqueenoftheearth@gmail.com)) or (802) 345-4125).



clubs, and even tournaments.

If you are interested in table tennis as a recreational or athletic activity, we're interested in you! There is a modest membership fee of only \$30, although you can come twice free as our guest. Bring your sneakers and paddle (or use ours) and have some fun playing a great game of "Pong!"

For further information about the Green Mountain Table Tennis Club, visit our club's website at [www.gmttc.com](http://www.gmttc.com).

### Yoga Prana Shakti Zoom & Studio Chair Yoga, Gentle, Wednesdays

From 10:30–11:30 a.m. at 155 Woodstock Avenue in Rutland, Lina Cloffe Hanson (Parvati) offers an Earth Conscious, Spiritual, Gentle Physical Yoga Practice. We meet on Mondays via zoom. Contact for Zoom link. (There is also a Monday Zoom only class)

## Brandon Rec Winter Carnival

Wait- it's winter in Brandon. It's even winter vacation for RNESU schools. Doesn't that mean it's time for Winter Carnival?

It used to be, but this winter, the snow has been hard to find, so Brandon Rec is moving Carnival to the Town Hall!

Friday Feb 23 Brandon Idol Country  
Sat Feb 24 4H Talent Show





**The Brandon United Methodist Community**  
Where the Secular Meets the Sacred

**Bone Builders**  
Monday & Thursday 4-5 PM  
Tuesday & Friday 9-10 AM  
Strength for healthy aging.  
Bone Builders is an exercise program designed to prevent (and even reverse) the negative effects of osteoporosis. Strength training just twice a week dramatically reduces the risk of fractures. Gain bone density, become stronger and improve balance. These health gains significantly reduce the incidence of falling.

**Friends Zone**  
Tuesdays from 12-3  
Socialize with old friends, make new ones. Be puzzled for a bit, sorting out a puzzle, or hold an Ace in the hole until the right moment to play it. If so inclined, you can bring to the table a struggle of your own to work on or your thoughts on developing the Friends Zone or improving our lives.

**Christian Based Book Studies**  
Tuesdays 10:30

**Brandon Forestdale Lions Club Diaper Drive**  
Donations accepted during Food Shelf Hours

**SANDY'S SOUP BOWL AT NOON**  
FREE COMMUNITY MEAL PROVIDED BY THE COMMUNITY  
ENJOY A HOMEMADE BOWL OF SOUP WITH WARM BREAD  
THURSDAYS 12 - 1:30

**Food Shelf**  
Sunday 12:30-2  
Tuesday 12-3

**Sunday Worship Service**  
11:15  
All Welcome  
1 Franklin Street

## Saturday 24th

Neshobe Cafe, Brandon  
Karaoke starting at 7:00 p.m.

## Saturday 24th Sunday 25th

Middlebury Winter Carnival Ice Show

Middlebury Figure Skating Club in collaboration with Middlebury College Skating Club present Blast from the Past, a choreographed figure skating and ice dance show performed by local youth!

Come on out to Kenyon Arena at Middlebury College on Saturday, at 7 p.m., or Sunday, at 2 p.m., for Blast from the Past, a thrilling ice show choreographed by instructors and performed by local youth, college students, and special guests! With music and costumes reminiscent of the 60s, this show is family-friendly and fun for all ages! Skaters have been practicing since October and are so excited to share their talent with you. Tickets available online and at the door!

\$6 per ticket, children under 2 free.

Snacks available for purchase.

Visit [www.middlebury.edu/college/box-office](http://www.middlebury.edu/college/box-office) or find us on Facebook! <https://www.facebook.com/MiddFigureSkatingClub>

## Sunday 25th

NXT Gallery: Aldila: Paintings by Nancy Calicchio:

Opening Reception

Artist Statement: "Al di La" is the Italian expression for "the beyond," meaning vaguely "over there." When it is spelled as one word, "Aldila," the meaning is "heaven." In these paintings I seek to express the beyond, the vast expansiveness of the realm above us. The sky we experience is Southern Vermont with our landscape of rolling hills and meadows is uniquely ours, vast, yet somehow intimate, closer to us,

making the beyond we imagine close to our reality. It allows us to dream without losing our balance.

With my focus on the beyond, I wanted to anchor this dynamic, elusive world of sky to the solid earth below. The excitement in painting a large sky, which suggests the ephemeral, with a recognizable landscape, is to find the color and value balance in order to paint on canvas the harmony that exists in nature. Achieving it is a delightful and

delicate dance of brush and palette.

Clouds play a strong role in the concept of beyond. In all their manifestations, cumulus, stratus, cirrus and nimbus, clouds draw attention to the vast realm of the beyond and powerfully affect our moods. At play in the small paintings is the color gray, achieved by mixing complementary colors: blue/orange, yellow/ violet, red/green. The selection of complementary colors for clouds can be key to achieving the harmonious balance between beyond and below.

About the artist: A graduate of Brown University (B.A.) and Dartmouth College (M.A.L.S.), Nancy Calicchio moved to Vermont in 1963. She enjoyed a long career as an independent school educator. Upon retirement she devoted her time to painting the Vermont she loves. Nancy has painted extensively in Southern Vermont on the Taconic Mountains in the west to the Connecticut River in the east. Her paintings combine her love of the natural world with the traditional, yet current, uses of the land in farms, pastures, fields and orchards. The greatest influence on her work has come from artist Diane Rath with whom she studied from 2007 to 2011 at the Putney Village Arts in Putney, Vermont.

Reception from 4:00-6:00 p.m. at Next Stage Arts Project. The Next Stage Gallery is open during events, and by appointment with the artist or by contacting Next Stage at [info@nextstagearts.org](mailto:info@nextstagearts.org) or (802) 451-0053.

## Tuesday 27th

Virtual—Farm & Wilderness Conservation Speaker Series: Vermont Loons

Joins us for an informative Zoom presentation all about loon conservation in Vermont!

For the first presentation in our speaker series, Farm & Wilderness Conservation is excited to welcome Biologist and Loon Expert Eric Hanson from The Vermont Center for Ecostudies. A beloved species by many and a frequent sight at local water bodies, common loons are easily recognizable by their distinct plumage and eerie calls. Thanks to conservation efforts, common loons continue to experience population increases despite the many threats that impact their survival. Some of these threats include lead fishing gear, loss of suitable nesting habitat, and injuries from boats. In this presentation, Eric will discuss the Vermont Loon Conservation Project as well as the status of loons on local water bodies such as Woodward Reservoir and Lake Ninevah. There will be time for questions at the end of the presentation. We hope you will join us!

From 7:00-8:00 p.m. To receive Zoom link, register at <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/fwc-speaker-series-vermont-loons-with-biologist-eric-hanson-tickets-779831927287?aff=aff0evvnt>

Or email [conservation@farmandwilderness.org](mailto:conservation@farmandwilderness.org) for help. For help over the telephone, call 802-422-3761.

Play with whomever shows up each time or just practice your cornhole skills!

## Saturdays

Bingo at the Brandon Senior Center

First Saturday of each month from 1 p.m. to 3 p.m. Bring lunch, and the Center will provide beverages, desserts, and a good time. A great way to pass a Saturday afternoon. Please direct any questions to Kathy Mathis at 247-3121.

Storytime at the Brandon Free Public Library

Join us every Saturday at 10:30 a.m. for picture book storytime. All ages welcome.

## Sundays

Brandon Town Hall Painting with Crystal  
Crystal Ketcham leads an all ages painting event!

Yes, you CAN paint! More info, contact Crystal at [ceast-man88@gmail.com](mailto:ceast-man88@gmail.com)

"The study of art is the most important study a garden designer can pursue."

## Friday 23rd

Off Center for the Dramatic Arts—G.L.A.M.:  
Gay, Loud & Music!

A night of sex positive musical comedy with Jenna Emerson & Owen Leavey, plus special musical guest Nico Suave. Parody song sing-a-longs, improvised music, and lots of sequins are all to be expected in this magical night of educational and fun musical comedy. Sponsored by PCC.

From 8:00-9:30 p.m. at Off Center for the Dramatic Arts, 1127 North Avenue, suite 27, Burlington.

\$10.00-\$15.00

## Chaffee Art Center Teen Bigfoot Painting

A part of WINTERFEST 2024, Friday 23rd, from 1:30-4 p.m.

FREE thanks to Come Alive Outside via funding from Region 2 VTPLO funds.

Ages: 12-18

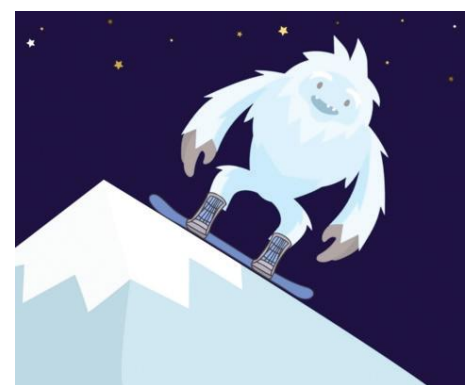
Painting: From Come Alive Outside WINTERFEST images

Instructor: Heather Wilson

Min 5; Max 15

MUST PRE-REGISTER

Teens...join us for this FREE & Fun time at 1:30 p.m. for snacks before the class starts at 2 p.m. Then paint Bigfoot as part of Rutland's WINTERFEST 2024! Attendees follow along with an instructor and leave with a finished acrylic painting.





# Sports

## Devil's Bowl Speedway Gears Up for 58th Season with 21 Events in 2024

WEST HAVEN—New England's fastest dirt track is back for another year of jam-packed racing action this May. The 2024 season will be the historic half-mile's 58th, the 13th under the supervision of Mike & Alayne Bruno and this season's schedule is a blend of returning classics,

new ideas and new renditions of the Bruno era events fans have come to love.

It all kicks off on May 4th, with a 32 lap, \$3,200-to-win Sunoco Sportsman Modified feature in memory of Matt Bilodeau. The first month of the season also includes the popular kids' poster

contest, the first appearance by the Sprint Cars of New England, the much-anticipated return of Devil's Bowl 358 modified racing, and the fourth Devil's Bowl edition of the Northeast Crate Nationals 100 paying \$5,000 to win on Memorial Day Weekend.

June and July feature the return of the "little track" for a Granite State Mini Sprints, topless night, the third \$10,000 to win "Slate Valley 50" Short Track Super Series race in Devil's Bowl history, the much-anticipated return of the 38-lap Vince Quenneville Memorial, the Mohawk Valley Vintage Dirt Modifieds and more!

The second annual "Prelude

to the 200" on the first weekend of August, a 67-lap, \$5,000 Sunoco Sportsman Modified race that will lock its winner into the Vermont 200 in September. August also features the Charlie LaDuc Memorial and the "Summer Break" week off on August 10th.

September brings the \$10,000 to win Vermont 200 on Labor Day weekend in the twilight of the 2024 season, which is scheduled to close just two weeks later, on September 14th with Championship Night.

With over 10 divisions of racing stopping by Devil's Bowl in 2024, the 58th season is set to be one of the biggest ever. Special events like spectator races, the

backpack giveaway autograph night and more dot the 2024 schedule, and more details will be released in the coming weeks.

Devil's Bowl Speedway is located on Route 22A in West Haven, Vt., four miles north of U.S. Route 4, Exit 2, and just 20 minutes from Rutland, Vt. For more information, visit [www.DevilsBowlSpeedwayVT.com](http://www.DevilsBowlSpeedwayVT.com) or call (802) 265-3112. Devil's Bowl Speedway is on Facebook at [facebook.com/DevilsBowlSpeedway](https://facebook.com/DevilsBowlSpeedway), and on Instagram, Twitter, and Snapchat at @DevilsBowlSpeed; follow the action using the #DevilsBowl hashtag.

## Restaurant guide



**From Provence to You**  
*De la Provence à Vous*

Wednesday – Saturday: 11:30 a.m. – 9 p.m.  
Sunday: 10 a.m. – 9 p.m.

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## With a flurry of legislation, VT lawmakers try to bring down health care costs

BY PETER D'AURIA/  
VT DIGGER

For years, Vermont lawmakers have aimed a barrage of legislation at a seemingly intractable and impossibly complex problem: Health care costs are increasingly unaffordable for residents.

Vermonters and their insurers spend \$12,756 per person on direct health care annually — making Vermont the sixth-highest spending state in the U.S., according to 2020 data from the health policy think tank KFF. And between 1991 and 2020, Vermont's annual health care spending per capita grew faster than any other state, KFF reported.

Separately, rising insurance premiums have outpaced wage growth and strained residents' wallets, advocates say. Last year, when insurers requested double-digit rate increases, many members of the public responded with alarm.

"The requested rate hikes are unaffordable and unconscionable," wrote Pownal resident Wendy Lefel to the Green Mountain Care Board last year. "Vermonters already cannot afford the monthly health insurance premiums."

Ambitious health care reform efforts in the state have either foundered — see the infamous 2014 demise of Vermont's single-payer model — or have yet to noticeably slow rising costs, like the state's current efforts to implement an "all-payer" model.

Now, this session, lawmakers are pursuing a raft of less comprehensive reforms, ones they hope will nevertheless make a dent in Vermonters' bills.

"It's ongoing," said Rep. Brian Cina, P/D-Burlington, who serves on the House health care committee and is a member of the recently formed Universal Healthcare Caucus. "Every year that I've been in the Legislature, we've looked at the affordability issue," said Cina, who was first elected in 2016.

### MEDICAID ELIGIBILITY

The most ambitious piece of legislation — H. 721 and its Senate counterpart, S. 240 — would dramatically expand eligibility for Medicaid in the state.

Speaking broadly, Vermont adults 19 to 64 are currently eligible for Medicaid if their income is below 133% of the federal poverty limit, meaning a four-person household must have a monthly income of \$3,450 or less to qualify in the current year.

Generally, pregnant Vermonters with incomes of 208% of the federal poverty limit are eligible, and youth under 19 are eligible for Dr. Dynasaur — the state's public health insurance program for children — if their household income is up to 312% of the federal poverty limit.

As currently written, the bill would significantly expand those limits, allowing pregnant Vermont-

ers and all Vermonters up to the age of 26 to qualify for Medicaid with income up to 312% of the poverty limit.

Meanwhile, eligibility for adults 26 to 64 would gradually increase to 312% of the federal poverty limit by 2030 — meaning a four-person household with a monthly income of \$7,925 would qualify.

The bill would also increase reimbursement rates to providers in the fields of primary care, mental health, substance use disorder, and long-term care, among other reforms.

"I think the bottom line is, we are trying to make health insurance and health care more affordable for Vermonters," said Rep. Lori Houghton, D-Essex Junction, the chair of the House health care committee and the bill's primary sponsor.

### PRESCRIPTION DRUGS

Other bills focus on drug prices. S.98 would allow the Green Mountain Care Board to review prescription drug costs to determine whether they create "affordability challenges" for Vermonters and give the board the power to cap the price of certain drugs with high or fast-growing costs.

"We are hearing in the news all the time about countries that pay far, far less than we do (for drugs)," said Sen. Kesha Ram Hinsdale, D-Chittenden Southeast, the primary sponsor of the bill. "And I (See *Healthcare legislation*, Page 27)



# Can you guess the street?

BY LAURA PETERSON

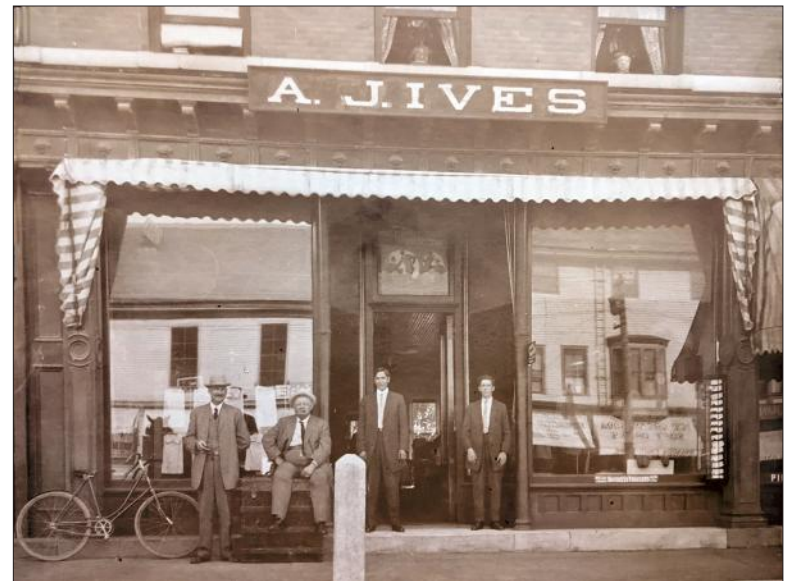
Last week's photo was of the storefront between Brandon House of Pizza and Across the Street. I love the image on the transom above the shop door and the dapper fellows looking sporty. Speaking of dapper fellows looking sporty...we could use that descriptor for the image I captured for the Present Day scenario: Jack Fillioe, John Peterson, Bruce Jensen, Ken MacFarland, and Dick Kirby.



**THE STOREFRONT BETWEEN Brandon House of Pizza and Across the Street, now, and circa 1900.**



Do you know what part of Brandon this is?



## Cannabis in VT

(Continued from Page 19)

on Friday did rule out a proposed change that made headlines last month — to eliminate the potency limits on all cannabis products from state law. The measure drew support from cannabis retailers but opposition from some medical leaders, including the Vermont Medical Society.

H.612 now proposes allowing recreational cannabis stores to apply for what would be a new “medical endorsement” to their state operating license, which would permit them to sell medical-grade products to medical program patients, and to do so tax-free.

The license would also allow recreational stores to deliver products to medical patients, a service that has long offered both convenience and confidentiality, said Lee Stowell, owner of the Brandon medical dispensary Grassroots Vermont. Stowell’s delivery driver will, and does, travel across the state to bring people their products,

she said.

“As long as we can, we will,” she said. “It’s a big deal — you know, if you’re a cancer patient and you’re nowhere near a dispensary, you can be delivered to.”

Pepper said the control board has heard from at least 10 retail stores that would be interested in serving medical patients, too. He noted that the board would draw up new regulations to make sure retailers were protecting confidential medical information.

The idea, he said, is that having more retailers in the medical program would make it more convenient — and appealing — for people to access medical products.

Retail employees, often known as budtenders, would also need new resources to be able to educate patients about their options, Pepper said. In a report published last month, the control board asked lawmakers to fund the purchase of software, called Cannify.us, that

patients could use to find which products might be a good fit.

Lawmakers did not include that funding in the latest draft of H.612.

The bill does propose to reduce the operating fees the state charges medical dispensaries, including reducing an application fee from \$2,500 to \$1,000, and cutting an annual renewal fee from \$25,000 down to \$5,000.

Pepper said he hopes this change helps dispensaries’ bottom line, and it would bring the fees in line with those charged to recreational stores. He pointed to Ceres Collaborative, where Todia has said he wants to keep a separate medical operation going as long as possible.

“They shouldn’t have to pay, you know, two and a half times what an adult-use retailer pays, just to serve an ever-dwindling number of patients,” Pepper said.

## REAL ESTATE



### IN-TOWN BUSINESS

Great business opportunity coupled with a residential unit in the center of downtown Brandon! The ground floor is currently an operating restaurant - Li's Chinese - with an impressive kitchen. The sale includes all restaurant equipment. Upstairs is a 3,540 SF living space. Beautiful hardwood floors, ornate ceiling and trim, and the glass storefront overlooks the Central Park & gazebo. Updated infrastructure: plumbing, windows, furnace & heating system, hot water, A/C and new wiring. Brandon is bustling with galleries, shops, pubs, restaurants, and a grand list of events! \$495,000



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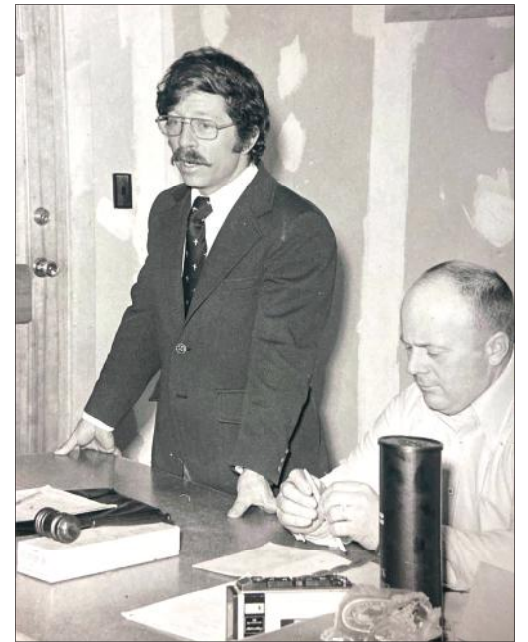


# Mim's Photos

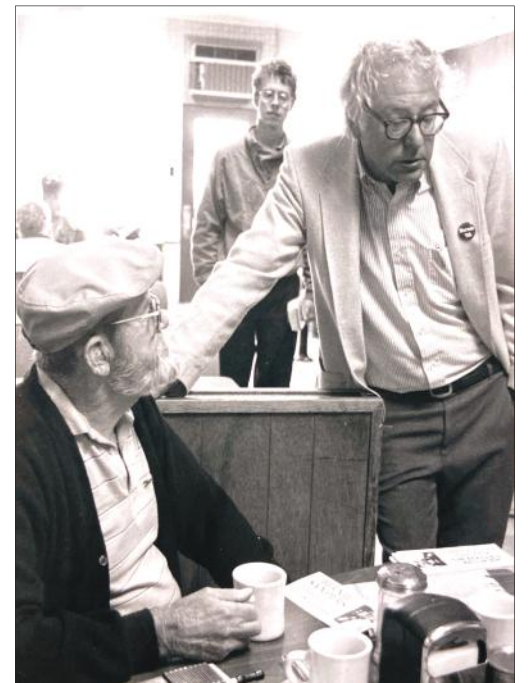
Can you identify any of the people in these vintage photos from Mim Welton's Dateline Brandon newspaper archives? Let us know!



## Recognized



Tom Whittaker was able to identify attorney John Liccardi standing, and Rhodes Wyman seated. He wasn't sure about the location, but due to the unfinished wall thinks it could be the Neshobe School during construction?



Tom also recognized Bernie Sanders talking with (he thinks) Denny Lowell with Peter Fjeld in the background. Likely at the "bitchin' kitchen."

**E-mail**  
[kate@brandonreporter.com](mailto:kate@brandonreporter.com)  
if you can identify someone in these photos.

Or call us at 247-8080



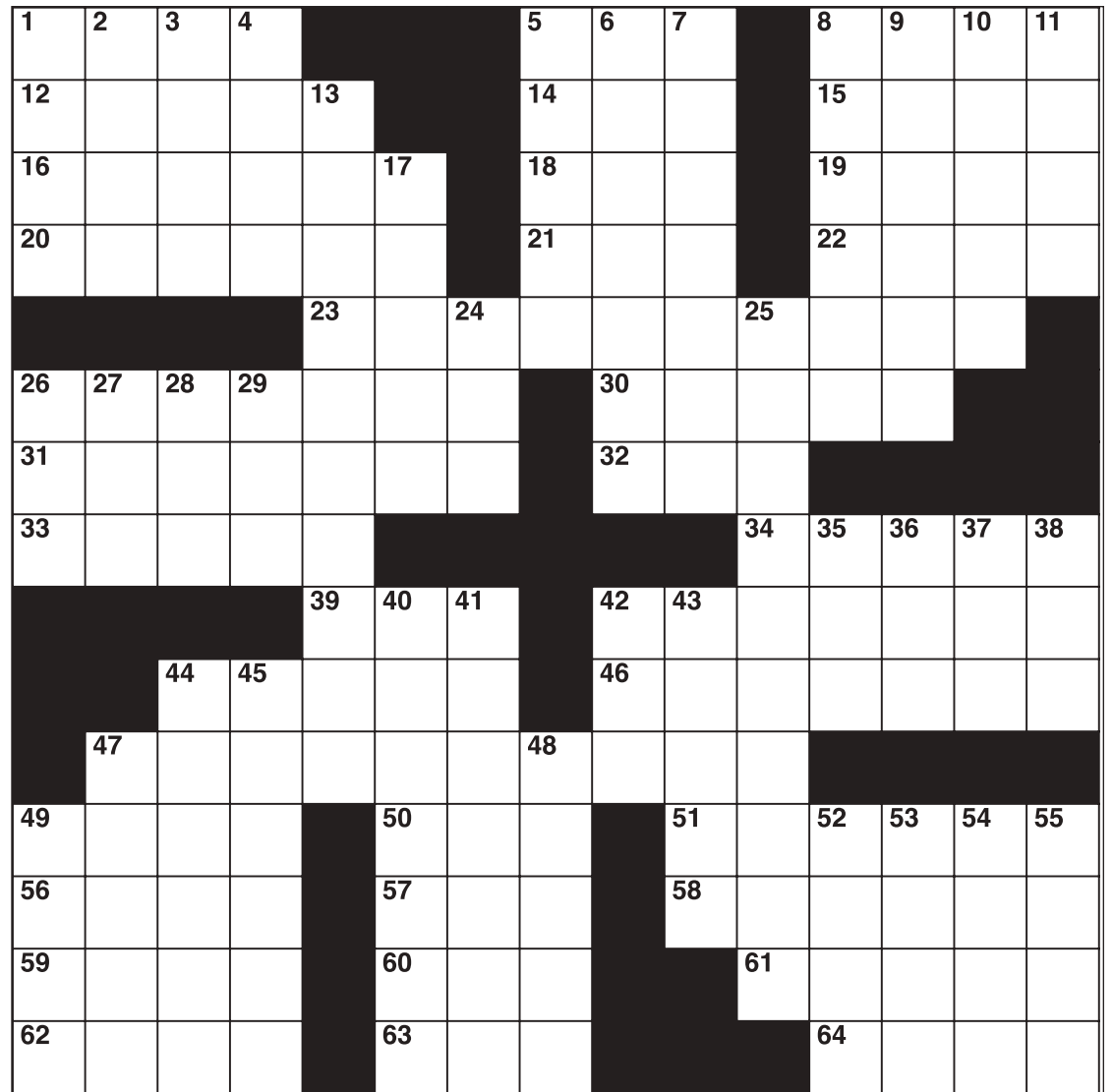
# Crossword

## CLUES ACROSS

1. Home of Iowa State University
5. \_\_\_-fi (slang)
8. Mottled green and yellow fruit
12. Capable of thinking and expressing oneself clearly
14. Sports broadcaster Eagle
15. Midday
16. Kinsmen
18. Cable network
19. Simpleton
20. Brunch beverage
21. Fed
22. European capital
23. Native inhabitants
26. Mechanical device
30. Rare geese native to Hawaii
31. Bedroom furnishing
32. The products of human creativity
33. Mass transit option
34. Made a mistake
39. Sacred sound symbol
42. Large N. American reindeer
44. Dull and flat
46. Partner to huffing
47. Written works
49. Monetary unit of Serbia
50. Midway between east and southeast
51. Peninsula of southwestern Asia
56. Widely used multiuser OS
57. Aggressive dog
58. Varnished
59. Hindu queen
60. Time units, abbr.
61. Farm animals
62. Capital of Latvia
63. Where golfers begin
64. Takes to civil court

## CLUES DOWN

1. One who graduated
2. An inspired holy person
3. Electronic counter-countermeasures
4. A place to store things
5. Indian instrument
6. Spanish saloon
7. Whole number
8. Not fastened
9. Gives a boost
10. Lounges about
11. Interested in
13. Remove salt
17. Type of sword
24. Naturally occurring solid material
25. Gets involved without being invited
26. Feline
27. Bobby \_\_\_, NHL champ
28. "Kill Bill" actress Thurman
29. Hawaiian dish
35. Moroccan coastal region
36. Baseball statistic
37. Long period of time
38. Moved earth
40. Central Netherlands city
41. Take stock of
42. Central processing unit
43. Distinctive qualities one generates
44. Getting stuck
45. Loss of bodily movements
47. Veranda
48. Abrupt
49. What cats do
52. Expresses pleasure
53. Type of cheese
54. Professional STEM organization
55. Automatic data processing systems

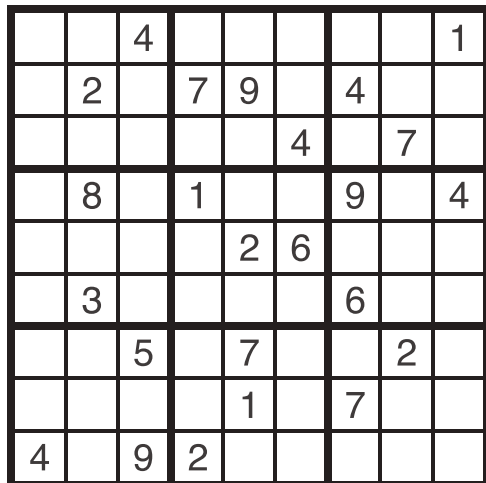


# Sudoku

Here's how a sudoku puzzle works:

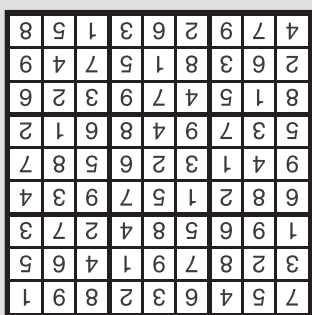
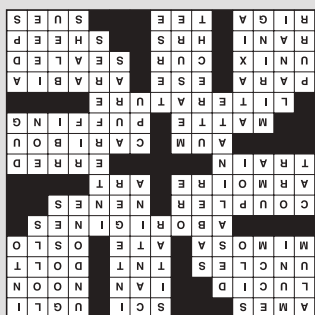
Sudoku puzzles are formatted as a 9x9 grid, broken down into nine 3x3 boxes.

To solve a sudoku every row, every column and every box must contain the numbers 1 through 9. Each number must appear only once in each row, column and box. Figure out where to fill in the missing numbers by using the numeric clues already provided in the boxes. The more numbers that are filled in, the easier it gets to solve.



Level: Intermediate

## PUZZLE SOLUTIONS



## Help Keep the Animals Warm with the RCHS Winter Warmth Fundraiser

Nothing feels more welcoming than entering a warm house after being out in the cold. Imagine how a stray animal feels when they settle into the shelter at the Rutland County Humane Society (RCHS) after being cold, lost, and hungry — sometimes for days or weeks. You can help provide that warmth by participating in the RCHS Winter Warmth Fundraiser. To learn more about how you can help the animals and win cash prizes please visit our website at [www.rchsvt.org](http://www.rchsvt.org) or call RCHS at 802.483.6700.

### I COULD BE THE NEW FRIEND YOU'VE BEEN LOOKING FOR!

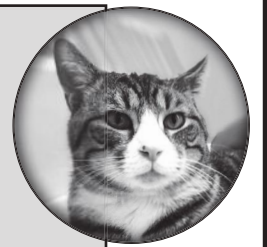


#### MEET MADDY-JACK - 2 YEAR-OLD. SPAYED FEMALE. BEAGLE MIX. BLACK/TAN/BRINDLE.

Are you looking for a small to medium sized dog to participate in your active lifestyle? Maddy-Jack was a stray dog brought to us in January. She is a sweet, well-tempered dog with a playful attitude. Maddy-Jack loves walks, hikes, and playing with a tennis ball. She does well with other dogs in the shelter, but may not be good with cats. We think older children may play well with Maddy-Jack, but think small children may be too overwhelming for her. If you think Maddy-Jack may fit well in your home, please stop by to visit her!

#### MEET CHASE - 2 YEAR-OLD. NEUTERED MALE. DOMESTIC SHORT HAIR. TABBY.

This sweet boy will Chase your heart! Forward and friendly, he'll be the first in the room to greet you. Chase came to us on January 12th from a busy shelter in Virginia. Therefore, we have no known history on how he will do with dogs and children. He is currently adjusting in the community cat room and doing great! Chase is adjusting to the Vermont weather, and is looking for permanent residency! If this confident gentleman sounds like the right fit for you, please stop by and visit with him! The Adoption Center is open Tuesday through Saturday 11am to 4pm.



## RUTLAND COUNTY HUMANE SOCIETY

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OUR ADOPTION CENTER IS OPEN  
TUESDAY-SATURDAY FROM  
11AM-4PM.  
NO APPOINTMENT NEEDED.



# OFF THE SHELF



NEW BOOKS AND NEWS



## Non-fiction

### Great Scoops: Recipes from a Neighborhood Ice Cream Shop by Marlene Haley and Amelia Ryan

80 easy custard-style and vegan ice creams and delectable desserts. From hibiscus & passion fruit and bourbon black cherry to triple chocolate and caramel popcorn, this cookbook also includes recipes for signature sauces, toppings, and baked goods (say hello to chocolate chip cookies and meringue kisses). Best of all, the ice creams are nut free, sesame free, and some even gluten free. For those who are new to ice-cream making, the book includes a chapter covering everything there is to know about making both dairy and vegan ice creams and frozen desserts at home.

### Secret History of Bigfoot: Field Notes on a North American Monster by John O'Connor

Journalist and skeptic John O'Connor is fascinated by Sasquatch. Curious to learn more, he embarks on a quest through the North American wilds in search of Bigfoot, its myth, and meaning. Alongside an eccentric cast of characters, he explores the zany and secretive world of "cryptozoology," tracking Bigfoot through ancient folklore to Harry and the Hendersons, while examining the forces behind our ever-widening belief in the supernatural. As O'Connor treks through the shrouded forests of the Pacific

Northwest, listens to firsthand accounts, and attends Bigfoot conventions, he's left wondering what happens when the lines between myth and reality blur?

### Train Go Sorry: Inside a Deaf World by Leah Hager Cohen

A journalistic memoir, since Leah Hager Cohen grew up on the campus of the Lexington School for the Deaf in Queens, New York, where her father was its superintendent. As a hearing person raised among the deaf, Cohen appreciates the intimate textures of that silent world and the gulf separating it from our own.

### The Thefts of The Mona Lisa: the Complete Story of the World's Most Famous Artwork by Noah Charney

This book tells the complete story of the famous painting, including the so-called "affaire des statuettes," in which Pablo Picasso and Guillaume Apollinaire were arrested under suspicion of involvement in the theft of the Mona Lisa, and seeks to resolve the question as to whether the Nazis stole the Mona Lisa during the Second World War.

### The Bishop and the Butterfly: Murder, Politics, and the End of the Jazz Age by Michael Wolraich

Vivian Gordon went out before midnight in a velvet dress and mink coat. Her body turned up the next morning in a desolate Bronx park, a dirty

## DID YOU KNOW?

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clothesline wrapped around her neck. At her stylish Manhattan apartment, detectives discovered notebooks full of names—businessmen, socialites, gangsters. And something else—a letter from an anti-corruption commission established by Governor Franklin Delano Roosevelt. Led by the imperious Judge Samuel Seabury, the commission had uncovered a police conspiracy to frame women as prostitutes. Had Vivian Gordon been executed to bury her secrets? As FDR pressed the police to solve her murder, Judge Seabury pursued the trail of corruption to the top of Gotham's powerful political machine—the infamous Tammany Hall.

### Smoke and Ashes: Opium's Hidden Histories by Amitav Ghosh

Smand Ashes is at once a travelogue, a memoir, and an essay in history, drawing on decades of archival research. In it, Ghosh traces the transformative effect the opium trade had on Britain, India, and China, as well as the world at large. The trade was engineered by the British Empire, which exported Indian opium to sell to China to redress their great trade imbalance, and its revenues were essential to the empire's financial survival.

# Brandon Police Report

## February 12

- Received a complaint regarding possible animal neglect. The complaint was turned over to the Town of Brandon Animal Control Officer for investigation.

- Received a complaint regarding sexually explicit photographs that were sent by an individual. Investigation is ongoing.

- Conducted a background check on a Stafford Technical Center student scheduled to do a ride-a-long with an officer.

- Responded to the Jiffy Mart on McConnell Road for a vehicle fire. No one was injured.

- Vehicle stop on Grove Street for failure to maintain travel lane and for obstructed plates. Two tickets issued and a warning given for flashing on-coming traffic with headlights.

- Vehicle stop on Franklin Street for suspicion that the driver had a criminally suspended driver's license. The driver did have a suspended license and the vehicle's registration had been expired since 2021. Citation issued to appear before the Rutland County Superior Court for arraignment on 5/13/2024 at 10:00 a.m.

- Vehicle stop on Forest Dale Road for failure to display license plate. Warning issued.

## February 13

- Served a temporary stalking order on Forest Dale Road.

- Conducted traffic enforcement on Grove Street. No violations were observed.

- Vehicle stop on Grove Street for a speeding violation. Warning issued.

- Assisted the Pittsford Police with a vehicle pursuit on Route 7 and Franklin Street. Officers lost sight of the vehicle and the pursuit was terminated in the area of Syndicate Road.

- Conducted quarterly Sex Offender Registry Checks throughout Brandon. All individuals on the registry were in compliance.

- Vehicle stop on Forest Dale Road for a stop sign violation. Warning issued.

## February 14

- Vehicle stop on Franklin Street for a defective headlight. Driver was given one week to repair it.

- Vehicle stop on Grove Street for failure to maintain lane. Warning issued.

- Vehicle stop on Union Street for blocking intersection. Warning issued.

- Vehicle stop on Wood Lane for failure to maintain lane. Warning issued.

## February 15

- Vehicle stop on Franklin Street for wrong lane. Warning issued.

- Vehicle stop on Park Street at High Street for failure to stop at a flashing red light. Warning issued.

- Assisted troopers from New Haven secure the scene of an assault on Route 7 in Leicester in which two individuals were reportedly injured.

- Responded to a residence on North Street for a report of vandalism to a street sign and a possible incident involving the unauthorized use of a vehicle parked on the property.

- Vehicle stop on Old Basin Road for speeding. Warning issued.

- Conducted a patrol by Neshobe School on Forest Dale Road.

- Received a complaint on Forest Dale Road regarding an ongoing landlord-tenant dispute.

- Contacted about a threatening comment a child made at the Neshobe Elementary School.

- Vehicle stop on Forest Dale Road for a stop sign violation. Warning issued.

- Conducted a welfare check on a child near McConnell Road.

- Vehicle stop on Franklin Street for defective plate lights. Warning issued.

## February 16

- Responded to a mental health incident on Nickerson Road. The individual was left in the care of his mother.

- Attended a community meeting at the Brandon Motor Lodge to discuss organizing volunteers to help with outreach services for individuals in need in the Town of Brandon.

- Conducted VIN verification.

- Responded to Center Street for a report of a minor two-car crash with no injuries.

- Vehicle stop on Center Street for a cell phone violation. Warning issued.

- Vehicle stop on Franklin Street for failure to maintain lane. Warning issued. (See Police report, Page 27)

## SPREAD THE WORD!

Have an event to add to our calendar?

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# Healthcare legislation

(Continued from Page 22)

think just having a process to look at each prescription, to look at its affordability, its comparators, and give Vermonters more information and hopefully some relief, is a really valuable step forward.”

Another bill, H.233, would create a licensing system for pharmacy benefit managers, third-party entities that negotiate drug coverage plans with drug companies, insurance providers and pharmacies. It would also impose stricter regulations on how they could operate in the state.

Pharmacy benefit managers have come under increasing scrutiny nationally, amid criticism that they operate opaquely and drive up drug

prices for consumers.

“Nationally and in our state, we have had many conversations over the years about how the costs of health care are increasing,” Rep. Mari Cordes, D-Lincoln, said in an interview Wednesday. “And one of the drivers, the biggest drivers, if not the biggest driver, of those health care costs increases are pharmaceuticals.”

Another bill, S.164, would require private health insurers and Medicaid to cover the cost of obesity treatment. The proposal comes amid the booming popularity of new weight-loss drugs and the promise of their effectiveness in reducing the prevalence of chronic diseases linked to obesity.

Lawmakers are also considering a “provider burden” bill, H.766, aimed at cutting some of the bureaucratic requirements of health care by streamlining interactions between providers and insurers. The bill takes particular aim at a practice called prior authorization, in which insurers must sign off on certain procedures or drugs before they can be administered to a patient.

That legislation intends to allow providers to help patients more quickly and easily. While not explicitly aimed at cost, the bill aims to free up providers and improve access to health-care — something that “goes hand in hand” with affordability, Houghton, the chair of the House health care committee, said.

“As providers spend more and more time on administrative duties, they have less time for patients,” Houghton said.

## PRICE TAGS

But those proposals will carry their own costs, which may be a hard sell at a time of vanishing pandemic aid and ballooning property taxes. And even as Vermont law-

makers target the bureaucracy of health care, industry critics have argued that some of that complexity actually exists in order to make care more affordable.

Insurance companies have pushed back on H.766, the “provider burden” bill, saying that an insurer’s ability to sign off on treatments actually saves consumers money by cutting down on unnecessary procedures.

Sara Teachout, an in-house lobbyist for Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Vermont, told the House health care committee that the bill,

if passed, would actually end up costing its members more — over \$100 million, she said. (Lawmakers expressed skepticism about that figure.)

“There always needs to be a balance between the costs for patients and the increase in the price of care, and your goals for trying to decrease administrative burden,” Teachout told lawmakers in a testy committee hearing Wednesday. “We believe this goes too far in the other direction.”

Pharmacy benefit managers, meanwhile, argued that their ability to negotiate with drug companies and pharmacies actually helps keep drug costs lower.

“PBMs exist to do one thing, which is drive down the cost of prescription drugs,” Sam Hallemeier, the senior state director with the Pharmaceutical Care Management Association, the national organization for pharmacy benefit managers, told lawmakers Wednesday. “PBMs exist to deliver savings.”

And requiring Medicaid to cover obesity treatment could ultimately end up costing the state as much as \$75 million annually in drug costs within a few years, according to a preliminary estimate from the Department of Vermont Health Access.

“These are very popular medications, and they do carry significant costs,” Alex McCracken, a spokesperson for the department, told lawmakers last month.

There is no price tag for H.721, the sweeping Medicaid expansion bill, yet.

“The Department is actively working to put together cost estimates for the sections of H.721 which would have a budget impact,” McCracken said in an email. But he noted that Gov. Phil Scott’s proposed budget did not include the costs that the bill would create.

Jason Maulucci, a spokesperson for the governor, said that the administration “(supports) the policy goal” of the Medicaid expansion.

“However, in a year with very limited budgetary capacity, we would need to better understand which programs the bill’s sponsors would plan to cut in order to pay for it,” Maulucci said.

# Police report

(Continued from Page 26)

Street for failure to maintain travel lane. Warning issued.

- Attempted to stop a driver who had fled from a traffic stop conducted by the Pittsford Police and had entered into Brandon. Officers terminated the pursuit when sight of the car was lost in the area of Grove Street.

- Vehicle stop for driving at speeds up to 90 mph while passing multiple vehicles unsafely on Grove Street. The investigating officer observed signs of impairment, and the driver was arrested and charged with a DUI, Grossly Negligent Operation, and Excessive Speed. Citation issued to appear before the Rutland County Superior Court for arraignment on 2/26/2024 at 12:30 p.m.

- Received a request for a welfare check on an individual possibly in the area of Brandon. The case was transferred to an outside police agency as the individual was determined not to be in Brandon.

## February 17

- Vehicle stop on Champlain Street entering Conant Square for stop sign violation. Warning issued.

- Received a report of a loose dog on Church Street. The animal control officer was notified.

- Vehicle stop on Franklin Street at Nickerson Road for a stop sign violation. Warning issued.

- Vehicle stop on Franklin Street at Nickerson Road for misuse of number plates and obstructed windshield. Warning issued.

- While conducting traffic enforcement at Franklin Street

and McConnell Road, observed a vehicle traveling at excessive speed. The driver was stopped and issued a citation to appear before the Rutland County Superior Court for arraignment on 5/20/2024 at 10:00 a.m.

- Assisted the Brandon Fire Department with a structure fire on Birch Hill Road. No people or animals were injured.

- Investigated a retail theft at a business on Franklin Street.

- Vehicle stop on Union Street for not having a visible registration. Warning issued.

- Vehicle stop on Franklin Street for defective equipment. Warning issued.

## February 18

- Received a complaint of a theft at a residence on Grove Street.

- Assisted a motorist on Marble Street whose vehicle’s bumper fell off on Marble Street near Wheeler Road.

- Conducted a welfare check on a semi driver parked at Jiffy Mart. He was found to be all right.

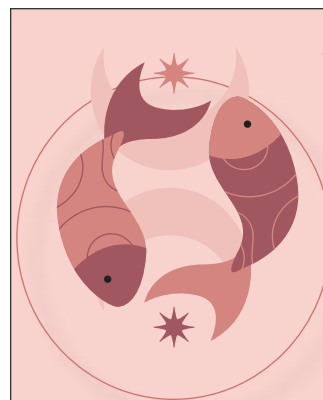
- Vehicle stop on Route 7 for driving with an obstructed license plate. Warning issued.

- Vehicle stop on Grove Street for tailgating. Warning issued.

- Conducted traffic enforcement at the intersection of Franklin Street and Park Street.

- Vehicle stop for a Traffic Control Signal violation (red light) at the intersection of Franklin Street and Park Street. Warning issued.

- Opened an investigation into a counterfeit bill used at a local store.



## WEEKLY HOROSCOPE

come to you and try to vent, Cancer. Exhibit some patience and help this person work through his or her issues.

### LEO July 23-Aug. 23

A great opportunity is coming down the pike, Leo. You will have to get your timing correct to maximize its impact on your life. Organize all of the elements you can control.

### VIRGO Aug. 24-Sept. 22

Advice from a loved one prompts you to reevaluate your plans for the coming weeks, Virgo. Step away from the situation to see how things might work.

### LIBRA Sept. 23-Oct. 23

It is important to take the reins this week, Libra, particularly if you want to get noticed by those in positions of power. You need to be your own best advocate.

### SCORPIO Oct. 24-Nov. 22

Sometimes the hardest thing to do in a situation is to stay silent when you don’t agree with things, Scorpio. Keep in mind that others may not be ready to hear your advice.

### SAGITTARIUS Nov. 23-Dec. 21

Take ownership of any mistakes you have made and learn from them this week, Sagittarius. That is the only way

you can grow as a person and make a difference in others’ lives.

### CAPRICORN Dec. 22-Jan. 20

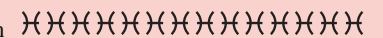
Capricorn, are you ready to accept the consequences of your actions? If you go out on your own path when others are warning against it, you will need to confront the consequences on your own.

### AQUARIUS Jan. 21-Feb. 18

Aquarius, you may be ready to make a big move in your life, but others may not be there with you just yet. You need to find the timing that works for as many as possible.

### PISCES Feb. 19-March 20

Pisces, it may not be possible to put blinders on for every situation. However, sometimes it is advisable to look the other way in the name of keeping the peace.



## FAMOUS BIRTHDAYS

- Feb. 23 George Frideric Handel, composer (d)
- Feb. 24 Winslow Homer, artist (d)
- Feb. 25 George Harrison, Beatle (d)
- Feb. 26 Christopher Marlowe, playwright (d)
- Feb. 27 Dexter Gordon, saxophonist (d)
- Feb. 28 Brian Jones, Rolling Stone (d)
- Feb. 29 Gioachino Rossini, composer (d)



# We need to hold state government accountable

*As policymakers, we need to know how well this system is working. Are Vermonters getting the results they expect and deserve?*

*This commentary is by Rep. Jessica Brumsted of Shelburne. She is vice chair of the Human Services Committee and co-chaired the Summer Government Accountability Committee. The committee's final report was delivered to the Legislature on Dec. 13, 2023, and is posted at [legislature.vermont.gov](http://legislature.vermont.gov).*

Every year, the Legislature convenes for five months at the Statehouse in Montpelier. Our committees take detailed testimony, debate and revise bills, and bring them to the floor for a vote.

During any given session, perhaps 100 bills win final House and Senate passage and are signed into law by the governor. These range from tiny technical corrections — updating an errant phrase in Vermont statute — to the “Big Bill,” which appropriates more than \$8 billion in state spending for the coming fiscal year.

Once a bill becomes law, in many ways, the Legislature passes the baton to the executive branch. Across dozens of state agencies and partner organizations, the statutes are enacted, the rules and regulations are written, the policies and programs are developed, and the dollars are spent.

As policymakers, we need to know how well this system is working. Are Vermonters getting the results they expect and deserve? How do we hold the Legislature and our state government accountable while giving our hard-working state employees the tools and resources they need?

The Legislature has many oversight tools. First, all new administrative rules, which lay out exactly how a program or policy is going to work, are developed by a public process and reviewed by a joint House-Senate committee before implementation. Second, we request and review many studies, reports and updates. And finally, public testimony — asking hard questions and getting honest answers — is the heart of our daily committee work.

But it's an imperfect system, and one the Legislature continually seeks to improve.

Act 53, signed into law in June 2023, established a Joint Committee on Government Accountability. In December, our final report offered a series of common-sense recommendations that will allow legislators

and the public to keep closer track of what happens after a law is passed. The House and Senate are working together to enact those recommendations in 2024. The bill (H.702) would establish a more systematic approach to government accountability, reducing the Legislature's reliance on institutional knowledge, individual legislators and individual committees.

Several of the report recommendations focus on process. We need to set up checklists and timelines to ensure all key legislative reports and deadlines are met, and are easily accessible to the Legislature and the public. We need to ensure that committee members (and staff) formally review past legislation, legislative reports and relevant data before enacting new legislation. We need a more systematic way to review the previous year's budget data — across multiple committees — and historical budget data, too. Have the funds been spent as intended? And if not, why not?

We're also interested in requiring a “performance note” for all legislation that's a priority or costs more than a threshold

dollar amount. This document would include a clear statement of legislative intent, overall goals and anticipated change; data that needs to be collected to measure results; and an estimate of anticipated savings, return on investment or quantifiable benefit resulting from adoption of the legislation.

On top of this, we would like to provide training for all members of the General Assembly on the importance of government accountability, how to use data to inform decisions and measure outcomes, and how to embed this work into all legislation. We also hope to establish a dedicated Joint Government Oversight and Accountability Committee. Among other duties, the committee would investigate cases of significant oversight failure — like juvenile justice or the EB-5 scandal — and make recommendations about how the state could avoid such serious problems in the future.

By way of example: In 2023, the Legislature passed Act 76, a landmark bill that invests significant additional funding into Vermont's long-struggling childcare system. The act takes effect in stages, with the first investments in July and September 2023, more funds rolling out to providers this month, and expanded financial assistance for families in April and October 2024.

The new law tasks Building Bright Futures, the state's early

childhood public-private partnership and official legislative and administrative early childhood adviser, with tracking outcomes of Act 76. In just the first few months, 202 new childcare slots opened across four programs alone — a sample size of what's happening across the state. And in the five programs surveyed, all five are increasing compensation for early childhood educators.

In the months and years to come, Building Bright Futures will continue to track hard, quantifiable data — the result of accountability measures that were built into Act 76 and will be used to inform future childcare policy in the Legislature.

While this kind of data-gathering and check-back is hardly new to the Legislature, we're interested in making sure it's embedded into all of our work — every day, every committee and in every important bill. We need to systematically review past legislation and ensure it's working the way Vermonters need it to work. We need to use that information to generate new ideas. And we need to infuse oversight and accountability into our citizen's Legislature, so we can say with assurance that the laws we pass in the Statehouse are being rolled out effectively by the executive branch, that your tax dollars are being spent wisely and that your state government is working — for you.

*We're also interested in requiring a “performance note” for all legislation that's a priority or costs more than a threshold dollar amount.*

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## Stepping out of time

DALE CHRISTIE'S OBSERVANT eye caught this old truck in Center Rutland. We're not sure what it's hauling? Does anybody out there know what it is?

Like all things vintage?

# Mim's Photos

are on page 24!

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### Brandon United Methodist Church

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1 Franklin Street, Brandon

### Our Lady of Good Help (St. Mary's) Catholic Church

Saturday 4 p.m., & Sunday 11 a.m.  
38 Carver Street, Brandon

### Brandon Baptist Church

Sunday 11 a.m.  
13 Champlain Street, Brandon

### One Church Brandon

Sunday 9 & 10:30 a.m.  
97 Frog Hollow Road, Brandon, VT

### St. Alphonsus Catholic Church

Sunday 9 a.m.  
2918 US 7, Pittsford

### Living Water Assembly of God

Sunday 11 a.m. via Facebook Live  
76 North Street, Brandon

### Forest Dale Christian Fellowship

Sunday 10:30 a.m.  
1895 Forest Dale Rd, Brandon

### Furnace Brook Wesleyan Church

Sunday 9 a.m.  
3325 US Route 7, Pittsford

### Pittsford Congregational Church

Sunday 10:15 a.m.  
121 Village Green, Pittsford

### Church of Wildwood

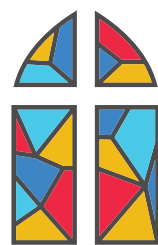
Sunday 11 a.m.  
347 Holden Road, Chittenden

### Union Church of Proctor

Sunday 10 a.m.  
5 Church Street, Proctor

### St. Dominic Catholic Church

Sunday 9 a.m. Feb, Apr, Aug  
45 South Street, Proctor



# CHURCH Directory

### St. Paul Lutheran Church

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5 Gibbs Street, Proctor

### St. Bridget/St. Dominic/St. Stanislaus Kostka

Sunday 9:00 a.m.  
Sunday Masses rotate monthly between the West Rutland/Proctor Parishes. 2023 February - St. Dominic; March - St. Stanislaus-Kostka; - April - St. Dominic; May - St. Bridget; June - St. Stanislaus; July - St. Bridget; August-St. Dominic

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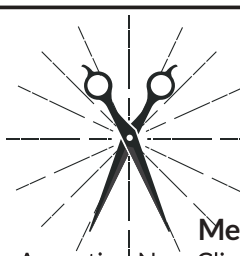
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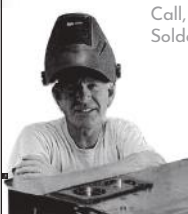


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### OTTER VALLEY UNIFIED UNION SCHOOL DISTRICT REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL

The Rutland Northeast Supervisory Union (RNESU) seeks proposals for 5 construction projects below.

Interested parties may call Pam Reed at 802-247-5757 to schedule a site visit.

**Project Timeline:**

RFP Issue Date	February 16, 2024
Deadline for site visit	February 26, 2024
Deadline for questions	February 26, 2024
Proposal Due:	March 1, 2024 at 12:00 pm

HVAC Improvements and upgrades projects 1-4. Work to begin as soon school closes, approximately June 17<sup>th</sup> with completion date anticipated September 30, 2024 optional extension to December 1, 2024

Davis Bacon Prevailing wages apply,

Dept. of Labor, Wage & Hour Division, Davis Bacon Link:

<https://www.dol.gov/agencies/whd/government-contracts/construction/rulemaking-davis-bacon>

1. OV North: budget \$300,000, construction may begin now
2. Lothrop Elementary School: budget \$40,000, construction to begin at close of school
3. Otter Creek Academy @ Leicester: budget \$54,000, construction to begin at the close of school
4. Otter Creek Academy @Whiting: budget \$54,000, construction to begin at the close of school

**AND**

5. Otter Valley Union Middle High School: Fields Lighting project, budget \$250,000, this project is not subject to Davis Bacon prevailing wages, construction to begin at the close of school to be completed by August 20, 2024.

More information and bid details are available online at: <https://www.mesu.org/page/public-bids>

**SUBMIT YOUR BIRTH, ANNIVERSARY,  
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# PUBLIC NOTICE

## FORM OF TOWN OF PITTSFORD, VERMONT ANNUAL TOWN MEETING AUSTRALIAN BALLOTING OFFICIAL WARNING MARCH 5, 2024

The legal voters of the Town of Pittsford, Vermont, are hereby notified and warned to meet at the Pittsford Municipal Offices located at 426 Plains Road in the Town of Pittsford on Tuesday, March 5, 2024, between the hours of seven o'clock (7:00) in the forenoon (a.m.), at which time the polls will open, and seven o'clock (7:00) in the afternoon (p.m.), at which time the polls will close, to vote by Australian ballot upon the following Article of business:

**ARTICLE 24**

Shall the voters authorize the removal, replacement, and installation of a new watermain along the easterly side of the VT Route 7 Bridge #108 over Furnace Brook and the issuance of general obligation bonds of the Town in an amount not to exceed Four Hundred Thousand, and 00/100 Dollars (\$400,000.00), subject to reduction by grants in aid and other state and federal funds then available to the Town, to pay the capital costs and related other costs of the project?

The legal voters of the Town of Pittsford are further notified that voter qualification, registration, and absentee voting relative to said special meeting shall be as provided in Chapters 43, 51 and 55 of Title 17, Vermont Statutes Annotated. The legal voters of the Town of Pittsford are further notified that an informational meeting for the purpose of explaining the Project and the financing thereof will be held on Monday, March 4, 2024, at Lothrop School Gymnasium in the Town of Pittsford following the

conclusion of Town Meeting (floor voting) which begins at six-thirty o'clock in the afternoon (6:30 P.M.).

Adopted and approved at a meeting of the Selectboard of the Town of Pittsford duly called, noticed, and held January 24 2024.

**TOWN OF PITTSFORD SELECTBOARD**

Alicia Malay, Chair

*Alicia Malay*

David Mills, Vice Chair

*David Mills*

Thomas Hooker

*Thomas Hooker*

Mark Winslow

*Mark Winslow*

W. Joseph Gagnon

*W. Joseph Gagnon*

Received for record and recorded in the records of the Town of Pittsford on January 24, 2024.

Helen McKinlay, Town Clerk

*Helen McKinlay*



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See page 25

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## Happy 98th birthday, Harold!

HAROLD ADAMS CELEBRATED his 98th birthday on February 11th with family and friends. From the looks of it, it was a happy celebration indeed!



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