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## WSESD: ‘No further comment likely’ after lengthy sexual abuse investigation

### Community members — and survivors — slam district’s terse statement drawing years-long investigation to a close with no conclusions or public information; previous members say board is gagged by a legal system that ‘isn’t designed to protect victims’



Windham Southeast School District Board Chair Kelly Young, having just read a statement from the board announcing that the board would likely not ever comment about the sexual abuse investigation, responds to a survivor who was participating remotely in the Jan. 23 meeting.

By Virginia Ray  
*The Commons*

BRATTLEBORO—More than two years after the Windham Southeast School District hired an attorney to investigate allegations of sexual abuse in the district, the investigation has apparently come to an abrupt ending, creating disappointment, sadness, frustration, and anger in the community.

At the WSESD board’s Jan. 23 meeting, Chair Kelly Young read a brief statement:

“This Board engaged Aimee Goddard, Esq. to conduct a privileged and confidential investigation. Attorney Goddard analyzed allegations of sexual assault, sexual abuse, sexual harassment, and retaliation. Attorney Goddard has made confidential factual findings,” the statement started.

The board, it said, “has relied on Attorney Goddard’s findings and other information to

improve District policies and practices, and to take other action necessary to protect students, employees, and other members of the educational community.”

“While we anticipate that this statement may be a disappointment to some, we do not expect to make any further comment on the investigation,” the statement concluded. “Thank you to those of you who participated in the investigation.”

Attorney Martha Carol, attending the meeting via Zoom, said it was “an injustice to survivors to not release further information.”

“The community needs accountability to heal, and I think this leaves people feeling alone,” said Carol, an associate attorney with the Justice Law Collaborative, which represents five individuals who have alleged sexual abuse or harassment by school district employees.

“So this is a disappointing

outcome, and I think it’s allowing secrecy and injustice to continue,” she said.

*The Commons* has reported the sexual harassment of a former student, identified in these pages as “Jane Doe,” that resulted in former Brattleboro Union High School Principal Steve Perrin’s firing. [Editor’s note: The newspaper does not identify victims of sexual or domestic violence in print. Doe’s identity has been confirmed by Reporter Virginia Ray.]

Perrin is currently suing the board, and his case is in the discovery stage.

Since the investigation started, several people, including Brattleboro High School alum and survivor Mindy Haskins Rogers, who unveiled the decades-long history and culture of sexual abuse in the district in her August 2021 essay in *The Commons*, have asked for information at meetings.

Those requests included ■ SEE WSESD ENDS PROBE, A4

## Vt. Abenaki talk about controversy over legitimacy

### At a community discussion in Westminster West, members of state-recognized bands discuss the Canadian tribes’ assertions that Vermont bands are not ‘the true Abenaki’

By Robert F. Smith  
*The Commons*

WESTMINSTER WEST—Several members and allies of the Southern Vermont Elnu Abenaki held a packed informational meeting on Jan. 21 in response to controversies regarding their tribal integrity and to answer questions about this from the public.

The meeting, hosted at the Westminster West Congregational Church, was organized by the Living Earth Action Group (LEAG), a citizen’s group based in Westminster West which focuses on promoting sustainability and spirituality.

The LEAG website said the meeting “is about the controversy created by the Canadian Abenaki in Québec (Odanak and Wolinak groups) that have made waves by coming down to Vermont and declaring that only they (the Canadians) are the true Abenaki.”

At the meeting, Vermont Abenaki representatives addressed the recent Canadian Abenaki concerns, which go back

about 20 years, in the light of modern political and economic issues and longtime tribal relations with federal governments.

They also provided background on the 500 years of European contact and pre-contact history of the tribe and tribal culture.

Well over 60 people attended the meeting, despite freezing cold, single-digit temperatures. The meeting was recorded by both FACT-TV out of Bellows Falls and Brattleboro Community TV, and will be available on those stations.

Elnu tribe member Rich Holschuh, co-director of the Atowi Project and a contributor to the Abenaki Alliance, Elnu Tribal Chief Roger Longtoe Sheehan, Chief of the Nulhegan Band of the Coosuk Abenaki Don Stevens, tribal member Jim Taylor, and several other members and allies led or contributed to the program.

### A sensitive debate on the issues

The reasons for the meeting are both sensitive and controversial.

In 2022, the University of Vermont hosted representatives from members of the Abenaki First Nation in Québec, giving them a platform to question the tribal status of Vermont’s Abenaki. Vermont Public’s *Brave*

*Little State* podcast also aired a series addressing the issue.

Specifically, the Québec-based Odanak First Nation and the Wolinak First Nation — both bands with members having gone through the process of providing adequate tribal evidence to be federally recognized by the Canadian government — claim the Vermont tribes have not proven their genealogical links to their shared Abenaki ancestry.

■ SEE VERMONT ABENAKI, A2



An Abenaki song closed the Jan. 21 meeting in Westminster West, with, in front, Elnu Tribe members Jim Taylor, left, Roger Longtoe Sheehan with drum, and Nulhegan Band Chief Don Stevens.

## Library finds growing challenges in accommodating urgent human needs

### New resources from HCRS bring specialized support to library, other town departments in Brattleboro

By Joyce Marcel  
*The Commons*

BRATTLEBORO— Librarians are known for their compassion, but it may be wearing them down.

Brooks Memorial Library has always been a welcoming place for the community. But the population of those experiencing

homelessness, drug dependency, and mental health problems has increased in Brattleboro, bringing with it new challenges for patrons and a library that is mission-driven to serve them.

Now the library is receiving some help from Health Care and Rehabilitative Services (HCRS) for a few hours, two days a week. Library Director

Starr LaTronica calls the help “thrilling” and “magic.” But she still needs more.

“We’re bringing people together here, and being supportive and being welcoming and being kind to them,” LaTronica said. “But we just see so many people who need help that we aren’t trained and prepared to give them.”

What kinds of things are the librarians encountering? Some of the experiences are dire. Homeless people who lock themselves in the bathrooms at night rather than be turned out into the cold. People with mental health issues who scream or threaten other library patrons. People who throw things. People

■ SEE LIBRARY AND HCRS, A7

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*The Commons* presents a broad range of essays, memoirs, and other subjective material in Voices, our editorial and commentary section. We want the paper to provide an unpredictable variety of food for thought from all points on the political spectrum.

We especially invite responses to material that appears in the paper.

We do not publish unsigned or anonymous letters, and we only very rarely withhold names for other pieces. When space is an issue, our priority is to run contributions that have not yet appeared in other publications.

Please check with the editor before writing essays or other original submissions of substance. Email: voices@commonsnews.org.

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**Vermont Abenaki**

FROM SECTION FRONT

Both the U.S. and Canada have extensive processes that require genealogical, historical, and anthropological research and evidence to establish federal tribal status.

It has been the federally recognized Canadian Abenaki bands' position for some years now that, due to the lack of a proven genealogical connection, the four Vermont Abenaki tribes are self-identified and are claiming a tribal Abenaki cultural heritage without a solid basis.

The Canadian tribes say they were excluded from the process that the state of Vermont used to grant the four Vermont-based Abenaki bands tribal status. They contend that the process failed to recognize the Odanak and Wólinaq First Nation status, which grants them the position to have a say in who can be a member of the tribe. Therefore, they claim, the Vermont tribal recognition was inappropriate.

The Vermont Abenaki take issue with several of these points, including whether the Odanak and Wólinaq can claim the status and authority to say for other bands who is and who is not Abenaki.

The Vermont tribal leaders addressed many of these issues during the discussion — at first, in response to previously submitted questions, and then in an audience discussion.

**'European settlers changed all the rules'**

First, the tribal leaders said they needed to lay out the story of the Abenaki in the Northeast — not just over the last 20 or 50 years of controversy, but going back hundreds of years, prior to first contact with Europeans.

They noted that granting federal tribal recognition in both the U.S. and Canada is a process created not by Indigenous people, but by the national governments established in the past few hundred years by the European invaders.

And referring to the Indian Act of 1876, which laid the groundwork for the Native recognition system, they asserted that the process was designed as much to create division and infighting among the tribes as it was to provide a smooth process for Native people to gain tribal recognition.

According to the University of British Columbia's Indigenous Foundation's website ([indigenousfoundations.arts.ubc.ca](http://indigenousfoundations.arts.ubc.ca)), "The Indian Act is a part of a long history of assimilation policies that intended to terminate the cultural, social, economic, and political distinctiveness of Aboriginal peoples by absorbing them into mainstream Canadian life and values."

"The government decides what the rules are," Holschuh said, and the other leaders contended that the rules were "arbitrary," a construct that the powers-that-be want to protect.

"It's not in a state's interest to have federally recognized tribes," Holschuh added.

Denying First Nation people tribal recognition avoids a lot of problems for the established governments, they said. With federal tribal recognition comes the issue of returning stolen land, or financial reparations in lieu of that, among many other issues.

Recognition also brings into play the legal ramifications of hundreds, if not thousands, of treaties that both the U.S. and Canadian governments made with First Nation tribes, many of which were broken.

Federally recognized tribes can be self-governing, which creates issues with the state or province they are located in. That autonomy has allowed Native people to establish their own laws and regulations, including approving casinos on their lands, which for many tribes, including the Abenaki in Québec, has proven very lucrative.

The state recognition for the Vermont Abenaki bands, the tribal leaders said, has come with very limited benefits.

Tribe members receive no federal or state payments or salaries, and they are not a self-governing entity within the state. Benefits do include not having to pay for hunting and fishing licenses. New laws make tribal-owned properties tax free.

"We don't have the money and the backing that the Odanak have," said Sheehan. "If they want to crush us, they have the money to get the lawyers."

He also claimed that Canadian tribes are trying to turn Vermont citizens against the Vermont tribes.

**Who decides who is native?**

As far as the Odanak and Wólinaq claims that they are the sole arbiters of who are "real" Abenaki and who are not, Holschuh said that goes contrary to traditional Abenaki culture.

"This is a unilateral issue brought by one group of people," Holschuh said, referring to the Odanak and Wólinaq bands. "This is not black and white. It's not a binary. We're all related — that's where I start."

The tribal leaders took turns explaining Abenaki history in the region.

Tribe members once occupied an area that today includes Québec, parts of New York, Vermont, New Hampshire, parts of Maine, and parts of Massachusetts. They were connected and shared language with tribes all through New England and into the Canadian Maritimes as part of the Wabanaki Confederacy.

They noted that all those state and national borders and boundaries are a modern construct, unknown to the Abenaki of generations past, who lived mainly in family groups that hunted, farmed, and fished on ancestral

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**Motel program occupants to see return of deposit money**

Attorney General's Office recoups \$300,000 in withheld security deposits for more than 300 occupants

MONTPELIER—Attorney General Charity Clark has resolved an investigation into security deposit withholdings at five motels — including the Quality Inn in Brattleboro — housing Vermonters through the state's Transitional Housing Program (known informally the "motel program").

The settlement provides \$300,000 in restitution for qualified former occupants of the program who stayed in motels owned by Anil Sachdev or by companies he controls, along with advance requirements that he give proper notice should deposit monies be held and confirming of billing and expenses for repairs deducted from such funds.

"Vermonters who are temporarily displaced and living without permanent shelter deserve the same consideration as any other consumer: to be treated fairly and receive adequate notice when decisions are made about their money," Clark said in a Jan. 24 news release.

"Every penny matters for families experiencing economic distress," she added. "That is why we are taking this action to put this money back in Vermonters' pockets."

The Attorney General's Office determined that 429 deposits were originally made by the Agency of Human Services to motels owned or controlled by Sachdev.

These funds were on behalf of occupants or former occupants participating in the

Transitional Housing Program. At the time of move out, some occupants received notices stating that they "may have" caused damage and requiring a waiver to contest any disputed amount. These notices were deemed unfair or deceptive by the Attorney General.

Other former occupants had deposits withheld in full or in part based on records deemed problematic — for example, records that could not expressly verify whether a particular occupant caused the alleged damages, that were submitted without adequate supporting photographic evidence, or that showed inconsistencies or "appeared duplicative of other similar damages forms," the news release said.

As a result of the settlement, former occupants who received deficient notice are entitled to receive up to the full amount of the \$3,300 security deposit; all other qualified occupants will receive \$500. (The amount to be paid will not exceed \$3,300 for those who received a partial payment at time of exit from the program.)

In addition, due to the settlement, the motel owners/operators are required to provide the state with billing and invoices of more than \$500,000 to verify that deposit money withheld is actually used for repair and maintenance to improve conditions for Vermonters who still reside at the premises.

In the future, if deposit monies are issued by the state on

behalf of Vermont beneficiaries, the owners/operators will be required to provide clear and accurate disclosures to consumers, the AGO said. Failure to do so would forfeit the right to withhold any portion of a deposit.

The Transitional Housing Program was set up in an emergency response to the pandemic in early 2020. It was created quickly, "to leverage federal dollars and place Vermonters experiencing homelessness into emergency housing in hotels on short notice, using these security deposits," said Department for Children and Families Commissioner Chris Winters.

The other motels that are subjects of the settlement include Comfort Inn (Rutland), EconoLodge (Montpelier), Hilltop Inn (Berlin), and Pine Tree Lodge (Rutland).

A third-party administrator paid for by the owners/operators of the motels will establish a website: [vtmoteldeposit.com](http://vtmoteldeposit.com). The administrator will begin sending claims forms to qualified former occupants within "a couple of weeks," the news release said.

Unclaimed deposits will be transferred to the State Treasurer and may be claimed in a former occupant's name any time after the claims period closes.

Former occupants with questions may contact the Attorney General's Consumer Assistance Program at 800-649-2424.

lands in a region generally divided according to the rivers in a watershed.

With the coming of European traders, explorers, and eventually invaders — particularly the French and English — came the borders and the separation of traditional Abenaki lands into two often-warring countries and subdivided into several colonies and, eventually, provinces and states. With those changes, Native issues became political issues, they said.

The majority of Abenaki sided with the French. Many converted to Catholicism, and two major refuges were established by them in Québec. The Odanak reserve originated around 1700 at the mouth of the St. Francis River. The Wólinaq Reserve in central Québec became the other major Abenaki refuge.

A strong Jesuit presence in both reserves has aided the Québec Abenaki in getting federal recognition due to a long written history of births, deaths, baptisms, and other records, the participants said.

**Two different tribal narratives**

The crux of the dispute lies where the Abenaki historical narrative diverges.

The Québec Abenaki say that by around 1800, tribal bands in New England had, for the most part, all moved to the Québec reserves, and the two tribes have a long written record that satisfies

those claims under Federal law.

The Abenaki in the U.S., on the other hand, disagree with this narrative in one major way. They say that they are descended from several small family bands of Abenaki that remained south of the Canadian border in the heart of Abenaki lands in northern New England and kept their ancestry hidden for a variety of reasons.

With Abenaki bands living in ancestral lands throughout Québec and the Northeast for hundreds, if not thousands, of years, "is it possible that all Abenaki moved to just one place" by 1800? Holschuh asked.

His answer? "No."

And the Elnu are not the only band outside of Odanak and Wólinaq claiming Abenaki heritage.

In addition to the Elnu Abenaki Tribe, other state-recognized tribes are the Abenaki Nation of Missisquoi, the Nulhegan Band of the Coosuk Abenaki Nation, and the Ko'asek Traditional Band of the Koas Abenaki Nation, all in Vermont.

The fifth Vermont band that has been unsuccessful through the state recognition process is the Ko'asek Traditional Band of the Sovereign Abenaki Nation ([koasekabenakination.com](http://koasekabenakination.com)).

The program began with an Abenaki greeting song, followed by a reading of a portion of Andlea Brett's essay, in the *Our Better Nature* anthology, on her personal journey growing up as an Abenaki woman in Vermont, in a family where her father tried to hide his Native heritage.

Brett's story, while subjective and personal, is the basic narrative repeated over and over among Vermont and New Hampshire Abenaki band members — personal stories that lack the documentation necessary to establish federal tribal status.

But that is not a major concern for the New England bands, only one of which has even tried to apply for federal status. Abenaki bands traditionally were kin-based and autonomous, making decisions by group consensus, the participants said — no one central tribal council or chief spoke for all the bands.

The Abenaki lacked a central government or governing body, and the bands in Vermont say they don't believe that the Odanak and Wólinaq Tribes in Québec can claim that position today.

"A committee determines their membership," explained Holschuh, citing rules that require connection to documented members of the tribe. The Québec tribes can reject people for membership who do not meet

their criteria.

The Vermont Abenaki say they have no issue with the Canadian tribes having and applying tribal membership criteria. "That's their autonomy," Holschuh said.

They do have an issue with the idea that the Odanak and Wólinaq therefore have the position and status to decide who can be a member of any other Abenaki tribe.

In particular, they question why the Odanak and Wólinaq feel they can speak for those tribes that did not relocate to the two Québec reserves and whose experience over the past 200 years has been quite different.

For their part, the Odanak and Wólinaq say they are highly suspicious of the claims of Native ancestry in bands outside of their two tribes.

They assert that the New England bands are self-identified Abenaki — non-Indigenous people appropriating Abenaki culture that they have learned only because it was preserved on the Canadian reserves by people with documented Native lineage.

Chief Roger Longtoe Sheehan told the group that this sort of intertribal conflict is common, saying it is happening with tribes in Oklahoma, New Jersey, and North and South Carolina.

While there are close to 1,000 Native tribes in the United States, only 574 are federally recognized, and very few of those are in the East. One speaker pointed out that there is hardly a better-known New England tribe than the Wampanoag of Massachusetts, famed for the story every schoolchild learns about how they greeted the Pilgrims and taught them to survive in the early 1600s.

Yet it wasn't until 400 years later, for reasons very similar to the experience of the New England Abenaki, that the tribe began to see some state recognition. Most of the current Wampanoag bands are still considered self-identifying.

Federally recognized tribes "are afraid of recognizing more tribes," Sheehan asserted. "It's a money issue. People have agendas, and a lot of agendas have to do with power and money."

Who gets and controls reparations, federal money, and casinos are among the main disputes between federally recognized tribes and members who are considered as self-identifying.

Among those who identify as Abenaki, the New England bands feel that the "who is a real Abenaki and who is not" debate is one sided and political.

"Politics is about power and control. We don't want this to be this way," said Holschuh. "We just want to be left the hell alone," Sheehan concluded.

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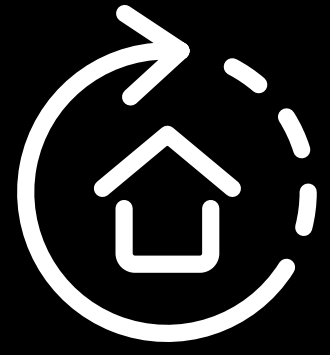
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that I don't know are still known to me through other community connections as well," Reynolds said. "I also want to trust them."

She implored the current board to "please share any data that you can to help give folks some closure and to give survivors the respect they deserve. I think it's the least we could do for them."

"I won't claim to know everything that has transpired in the time since I left the board, but I can absolutely tell the current board members that they do not want to find themselves in the position that I am in right now," Reynolds said.

Board members, she said, find themselves "fully aware of the quasi-judicial proceedings in which [they] are participants, while also feeling a deep sorrow and wondering if we did what we set out to do when we first read Mindy's piece and prioritized survivors over protecting our own interests."

"Did we do that?" Reynolds asked.

Former board member David Schoales, who served as chair when the investigation started, said he was "surprised" by the board's decision to "keep the sex abuse investigation private," calling it "the worst possible outcome."

"This was always going to be a hard decision for the school because board members are constantly aware of potential liabilities, but the board wholeheartedly endorsed a commitment to an independent investigation and releasing the findings," Schoales said.

Even with two lawsuits already on the books, he said that "the stated intention of the school board from the beginning was to be transparent."

"The child psychologist/consultant we hired had experience in abuse investigations, and he was clear that the best legal strategy for the school would be transparency," Schoales said.

"We knew we would be sued, and because a former administrator had publicly stated that the [administration] knew about the abuses, we knew the school would lose those suits," he added.

"The best thing we could do was to uncover the scope of the problem and publicly share any information that could be verified," Schoales said. "Up until the time I retired from the board, that was the plan."

He described the release of the statement as "the worst possible outcome."

"Coming clean is the moral choice, and would create a lot of good will," Schoales said. "Instead, the board seems to be modeling the church — covering up past sins and letting the perpetrators continue to interact with children."

As a result, he said, "Students will see the adults who are supposed to be protecting them covering up crimes. Courts will see no evidence that the school has accepted responsibility for letting the abuses persist. Instead, the board will be committed to fighting back against the just claims of the survivors. The attorneys will avoid going to court and will work out a settlement, so none of the criminal abusers will ever be named."

And that, Schoales said, is a scenario where "everyone loses but the abusers and the attorneys."

"It is also discouraging that the 188 people who signed the petition saying the school had committed 'institution betrayal' did not see fit to follow up and make sure that betrayal was reversed," he said. "That fell to Mindy Haskins Rogers and Sherri Keefe. Their disappointment must be deeply bitter."

"I want survivors to be heard," Haskins Rogers said. "This was never supposed to be about me. I'm still in awe of the power and courage of the people who came forward to share their stories."

Haskins Rogers vowed to "keep fighting to change this culture," she said. "This is the WSESD's failure, not ours."

## Kindergarten sign-ups begin in Brattleboro

BRATTLEBORO — The three elementary schools have begun kindergarten registration for children who turn age 5 before Sept. 1, 2024. Information and links to all forms are at [wsesu.org](http://wsesu.org); click the Enrollment tab.

Families who would like to request paper copies can contact Kerri Beebe at 802-579-1013 or [kbeebe@wsesdvt.org](mailto:kbeebe@wsesdvt.org). For children who attend private early education programs that partner with the school district, their packets can be found at their program.

Registration paperwork should be returned by Friday, Feb. 16, to: WSESU Central Office, Attention: Kerri Beebe, 53 Green St., Brattleboro, VT 05301. Families who reside in outlying town schools in WSESU/D should call their school directly to register: Dummerston, 802-254-2733; Putney, 802-387-5521; Guilford, 802-254-2271; and Vernon, 802-254-5373.

## 'Souper Wednesdays' in Westminster

WESTMINSTER — The First Congregational Church of Westminster, 3470 U.S. Route 5, will once again host "Souper Wednesdays" every Wednesday, from noon to 2 p.m., through April 24.

There will be at least two choices of soups and warm bread served. Take-outs will be available; call 802-518-0321 to reserve a meal. Donations are appreciated, but not required. This is a time for everyone and anyone to come and visit and have a warm meal.

## Guilford Country Store celebrates anniversary

GUILFORD — The Board of Directors of Friends of Algiers Inc. extends its hearty congratulations to Ali West, Wayne Warwick, and the whole crew at the Guilford Country Store and Café on the one-year anniversary of the store's reopening under their management and "with their re-visioning of what a community store can be," the board writes.

With this in mind, reflecting their community spirit, the board joins West and Warwick in inviting the whole community to come to the store on Thursday, Feb. 1, to celebrate the occasion.

Birth-day-party coffee and cupcakes will be offered, and "the store's great food will be available," the board writes.

## Windham County Genealogy Interest Group meets Feb. 3

BRATTLEBORO — On Saturday, Feb. 3, from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m., the Windham County Genealogy Interest Group will meet online to present two topics: "Using Artificial Intelligence in Genealogy" and "Using the David Rumsey Map Collection for Genealogy." Register at [bit.ly/WCGIFEB2024](http://bit.ly/WCGIFEB2024) to receive a Zoom link before the meeting. Questions may be submitted at registration.

Jerry Carbone of Whetstone Brook Genealogy will discuss the David Rumsey Map Collection at Stanford University, which began in 1966 and contains more than 200,000 maps, 128,000 of which are online. The collection focuses on rare maps from the 1500s through the present. The collection's scope is worldwide, but is very strong on various maps of the United States.

The collection includes atlases, globes, wall maps, school geographies, pocket maps, books of exploration, maritime charts, and a variety of cartographic materials including pocket, wall, children's, and manuscript maps.

Maps of importance for genealogical use are property,

insurance, railroad, military, and topographic maps. The presentation will focus on how to find the maps and use the various tools that are part of the collection.

Wayne Blanchard, co-founder of Windham County Genealogy Interest Group and genealogy volunteer at Rockingham Free Public Library, will give his insights into artificial intelligence and its current and future use in genealogy.

Companies such as Ancestry and MyHeritage are beginning to incorporate AI in their websites to support users in their family research. Blanchard has been experimenting with some of these tools and he will share what he has learned.

The Windham County Genealogy Interest Group is supported by Brooks Memorial Library in Brattleboro and Rockingham Free Public Library in Bellows Falls. Contact Carbone or Blanchard at [windhamcountygig@gmail.com](mailto:windhamcountygig@gmail.com).

## 'Remembering the Ancestors,' a celebration of Black History at Brooks Library

BRATTLEBORO — Local poet, story weaver, and artist Djeli (formerly William Forchion) will present "Remembering the Ancestors," Monday, Feb. 5, at 7 p.m. in the main reading room of Brooks Memorial Library, 224 Main St.

The presentation, sponsored by the Friends of Brooks Memorial Library, will be a conversation about our shared history, and it will intentionally step into the future. It will include recent unpublished writings as well as readings from his published poems and essays.

Describing himself as a story weaver who helps transform overwhelm to overjoy, Djeli uses oral and written traditions, including poetry, to create an atmosphere of curiosity and dialogue around even difficult topics. He helps others "breathe life into their own stories as part of a healing process by speaking from the heart."

Books that Djeli has written will be available for sale and signing. The free program is accessible to people in wheelchairs.

For more information, visit [brookslibraryvt.org](http://brookslibraryvt.org) or call 802-254-5290.

## Bone Builders classes resume Feb. 6

WEST BRATTLEBORO — The Bone Builders class at the All Souls Unitarian Universalist Church, 29 South St., will resume on Tuesday, Feb. 6. The class runs 12:30 to 1:30 p.m. on Tuesdays and Thursdays.

Bone Builders is modeled after the Growing Stronger Program created at Tufts University Friedman School of Nutrition Science and Policy. The interactive strength-based exercise program benefits all genders and has been proven to help build strength, maintain bone density, improve balance, coordination, and mobility, reduce the risk of falling, and help maintain independence in performing activities of daily life.

Anyone aged 55 and over is welcome to attend. The class is free, and weights are provided. Participants who wish to participate in the exercises using weights must have a release from their doctor.

Attendees should contact Bev Miller at [bevermont@gmail.com](mailto:bevermont@gmail.com) to register and to get a medical consent form in advance of the first class.

## Get ready for 2024 solar eclipse with help from RFPL

BELLOWS FALLS — The Rockingham Free Public Library will host Southern Vermont Astronomy Group (SoVerA) member Claudio Véliz on Thursday, Feb. 8, at 7 p.m. for a presentation about the total solar eclipse that will happen on April 8, which program organizers describe as an opportunity to

experience a rare — even once-in-a-lifetime — natural event.

In this graphic-rich presentation, Véliz will cover how to prepare for the eclipse, where to be, and what to do if it is cloudy. He will distribute safe, solar-filtered glasses to in-person attendees, complete with instructions for how to use them when this solar event occurs.

This program is free, and accessible to those with disabilities. In case of cancellation due to weather, the program will be rescheduled to Thursday, Feb. 15.

For more information, email [reference@rockinghamlibrary.org](mailto:reference@rockinghamlibrary.org), call 802-463-4270, or visit [rockinghamlibrary.org](http://rockinghamlibrary.org).

## Grace Cottage's Cabin Fever Online Auction begins Feb. 14

TOWNSHEND — Grace Cottage's Cabin Fever Online

Auction is "a perfect way to bring fun and joy to your winter," say organizers, who describe items to be auctioned as "practical, delectable, delightful, and inspirational."

Bidding takes place Feb. 14–28.

Each year, the auction includes vacations, Vermont foods, local gift certificates, handcrafted items, jewelry, art, and other donations from area businesses and individuals.

All proceeds support patient care at Grace Cottage Family Health & Hospital. Visit the auction website, [32auctions.com/GraceCottage2024](http://32auctions.com/GraceCottage2024), to register, view the selection, and plan bidding beginning Valentine's Day.

For more information, visit [gracecottage.org/auaction](http://gracecottage.org/auaction) or e-mail [info@gracecottage.org](mailto:info@gracecottage.org).

## Four landmarks to receive state funding for preservation

MONTPELIER — Four Windham County historic sites are among the 19 municipalities and nonprofit organizations in six counties which will collectively receive \$319,090 to help with the restoration and rehabilitation of landmarks and important historic buildings and structures.

These grants will help to leverage more than \$1.5 million in additional efforts, according to the Vermont Division for Historic Preservation (VDHP) and the Vermont Advisory Council on Historic Preservation.

"The projects funded in 2024 involve some of Vermont's most iconic historic buildings and structures," State Historic Preservation Officer Laura V. Trieschmann said in a news release.

"These places matter because they reflect our history and serve as the centerpieces of our communities. Preserving historic sites starts at the local level and we applaud this year's grant recipients for their commitment," she added.

The Windham County projects, as listed on the VDHP website:

- **Halifax Historical Society**, \$7,500. Originally built as a chapel by local resident Sanford Plumb, this building has served as a church, Grange, schoolhouse, general municipal building, and fire station. Today, it is owned by the Halifax Historical Society and used to house and display local historical items, to host local programs, and to provide educational programming in partnership with the local school.

A matching grant will support the Historical Society's work to replace the building's 30-year-old asphalt shingle roof.

- **Rockingham Meeting House**, \$11,800. Owned by the town since its construction in 1787, the Rockingham Meeting House is a National Historic Landmark. The building is open daily between Memorial Day and Oct. 31. It hosts weddings, memorial services, concerts, and other public events. As part of an ambitious

multi-year restoration project, state grant support will be used to complete roof repairs for this iconic building.

- **West Townshend Stone Arch Bridge**, \$20,000. The bridge was built in 1910 by self-taught dry stone mason James Otis Follett. After 113 years, it continues to carry traffic across Tannery Brook, but it needs major restoration.

State grant funding will match support from a National Park Service Save America's Treasures grant and town funding. The Historical Society plans to continue increasing the bridge's visibility.

- **Westminster Institute**, \$5,500. The Westminster East Parish was created by the General Assembly in 1787. This unusual quasi-municipal entity established the Westminster Institute and in 1923–24 constructed this Colonial Revival-style building with an auditorium, meeting spaces, and a public library (now the Butterfield Public Library).

Today, the building continues to be an important community asset, hosting public meetings and gatherings, classes, and theatrical events. A modest matching grant supports repair of the building's slate roof.

### About the grants

The VDHP administers the Historic Preservation Grants, a state-funded program awarding one-to-one matching grants up to \$20,000 for the rehabilitation of civic and community resources that are a vital part of Vermont's historic downtowns, villages, and rural communities.

To qualify, the resource must be at least 50 years old and listed in or eligible for the National Register of Historic Places.

Since the creation of the program in 1986, it has distributed \$6.7 million to more than 650 projects.

For more information, visit [accd.vermont.gov/historic-preservation](http://accd.vermont.gov/historic-preservation).

### GOT AN OPINION?

(Of course you do! You're from Windham County!)



Got something on your mind? Send contributions to our Letters from Readers section (500 words or fewer strongly recommended) to [voices@commonsnews.org](mailto:voices@commonsnews.org); the deadline is Friday to be considered for next week's paper. When space is an issue, we give priority to words that have not yet appeared elsewhere.

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To apply for this position, please go to the State of Vermont Dept. of Human Resources website at [www.humanresources.vermont.gov](http://www.humanresources.vermont.gov).

For further information about the position please contact William Pendlebury, Field Services Manager, [William.Pendlebury@vermont.gov](mailto:William.Pendlebury@vermont.gov)  
Application deadline date: 2/6/24



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### If I Must Die

"If I Must die, you must live to tell my story, to sell my things, to buy a piece of cloth and some strings, (make it white with a long tail) so that a child, somewhere in Gaza while looking heaven in the eye awaiting his dad who left in a blaze—and bid no farewell not even to his flesh not even to himself—sees the kite, my kite you made, flying up above, and thinks for a moment an angel is there bringing back love. If I must die let it bring hope, let it be a story."

Refaat Alareer, Poet Laureate of Gaza.  
Murdered by the ZioNazis  
in a targeted bombing,  
December 2023



### BRATTLEBORO GREAT BOOKS GROUP

For information, email Michael Landis [emagicmtman@gmail.com](mailto:emagicmtman@gmail.com)

**Next Meeting: Monday, February 5th**  
7 to 9 p.m. in the Mezzanine History Room, Brooks Memorial Library, discussing The Makioka Sisters by Junichiro Tanizaki.

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# MILESTONES

Births, deaths, and news of people from Windham County

## College news

• **Jaja Caron** of Bellows Falls, **Leah Madore** of Williamsville, and **Kylie Reed** of Jacksonville were all named to the fall 2023 Dean's List at Russell Sage College in Troy, New York.

• **Ruby Powers** of Dummerston was named to the Dean's List for the fall 2023 semester at James Madison University in Harrisonburg, Virginia.

• **Ansley Henderson** of Brookline, **Maxwell Hooke** of Grafton, and **Griffin Waryas** of Bellows Falls were all named to the fall 2023 Dean's List at the University of Rhode Island.

## Obituaries

• **Eloise Grace Bartley, 91**, of Concord, N.H. Died peacefully, surrounded by her loving family, on Jan. 18, 2024. Eloise was born in Cabot, Vermont in July 1932, the oldest daughter of Raymond and Jessie Batchelder. Originally living in northern Vermont, she spent most of her childhood in the Springfield, Vermont, area. After suffering the loss of her father while she was in high school, Eloise's mother had the strength and determination to keep the family together, raising her six children alone. Eloise graduated from Springfield High School in 1950 and then met her future husband Richard, also from Springfield. They married in 1951 while he was a Marine stationed in Cherry Point, North Carolina. Richard's military service and work moved them to many locations throughout New England, New York, and Pennsylvania. Their family grew with the births of Jerry and Donna in their early years of marriage before returning to Vermont in 1966. They settled in Dummerston and completed their family with the birth of daughter Brenda. Throughout the years, Eloise worked at Green Mountain Orchard, The Book Press, American Optical, Henry's Market, and Floyd's Butcher Shop. She ended her working career at J.J. Nissen Bakery Outlet, from which she retired in the early 1990s. After spending more than 40 years in Dummerston, Eloise moved to the Concord area to be near her daughter following the 2010 death of her husband. She most recently lived at Presidential Oaks Assisted Living in Concord, a place she loved and where she made many friends before her passing. Eloise was a loving and devoted daughter, sister, wife, mother, grandmother, great-grandmother, great-great-grandmother and a friend to all. There were no strangers to her, only friends she had yet to meet. Family was always very important to her and her involvement in the Witham Family Reunion (which has continued for more than 120 years) was a high point of every year. Eloise is survived by siblings Paul Batchelder (Betty) and Sheila Johnson (Bill); sisters-in-law Lois Batchelder and Brenda Mae Batchelder; children Jerry Bartley (Anne) of Albuquerque, New Mexico, Donna Simonds and fiancé Mark Tassinari of Pembroke, Massachusetts and Brenda Hodges (Eric) of Rio Rancho, New Mexico; grandchildren Heather Anaya (Alex), David Bartley (Jennifer), Justin Simonds (Ashley), Krista Carrington (Russ), and Zachary Hodges; great-grandchildren Gary, Michael, Trevor, Cameron, Denlyn, Jace, Landon, Logan, Ashlyn, and Jordan; great-great-grandchildren Scarlett and Taylin; and many nieces, nephews, and cousins. In addition to her husband, she was predeceased by her parents, stepfather Linford Bowen, and brothers Raymond, Wallace and Robert Batchelder. MEMORIAL INFORMATION: Donations to Presidential Oaks, 200 Pleasant St., Concord, NH 03301.

• **Philip Curtis "Phil" Blum, 64**, of Sarasota, Florida, formerly of Guilford. Died unexpectedly Jan. 15, 2024 at Sarasota Memorial Hospital following an extended period of declining health. Phil was born in Brattleboro on June 20, 1959, the son of the late Robert J. Blum and Arlene (Yeaw) Blum. He attended Academy School and Guilford Elementary School, and graduated from Brattleboro Union High School with the Class of 1977. Phil earned his certification as a Vermont Emergency Medical Technician (EMT) and was an active volunteer with Rescue Inc. for several years, a calling he really enjoyed. After graduation, he joined the workforce in the printing trade, working for a local Brattleboro printing business. Not wanting to live with clipped wings, Phil decided to break out on his own and move to Florida at age 24, with not much more than a few clothes and a sleeping bag in his car. Settling in Orlando, he immediately was hired by a growing printing firm, which he was employed by for several years. Phil's career in later years was in the IT industry with positions in Florida, Ohio, Texas, and New Jersey. It was in Florida that Phil met the love of his life, another New Englander from Williamstown, Massachusetts, Carrie Gest Markgraf, whom he married in Miami in May 1989. In 1992, Phil and Carrie welcomed their only son, Justin Philip Blum, who predeceased them on Feb. 12, 2019. Less than a year later, on Jan. 2, 2020, Phil lost his wife to cancer. Phil's life was not without challenges and hardships, but even so, he remained a genuine, funny, caring and generous person. He loved music, especially attending concerts, and had attended so many he lost count. He was a huge fan of baseball and an avid New

York Yankees fan, and football, where the Miami Dolphins were his team of choice. Survivors include his mother of Guilford; two brothers; Craig Blum of Guilford and Cameron Blum of Brattleboro; as well as his sister, and brother-in-law, Sheila and Rick Pollica of Guilford; three nephews, Eric and Kyle Pollica, and Trevor Blum; and two great nephews, Connor and Rian Pollica. MEMORIAL INFORMATION: A graveside committal service will be conducted later in the springtime in Baker Cemetery in Guilford where he will be laid to rest with his wife and son. Donations to the Windham County Humane Society, P.O. Box 397, Brattleboro, VT 05302; or to Nate's Honor Animal Rescue, 4951 Lorraine Rd, Bradenton, FL 34211. To offer condolences, visit [atamaniuk.com](https://atamaniuk.com).

• **Constance E. "Connie" Carlson, 102**, a resident of Brattleboro for 57 years. Died peacefully on Jan. 18, 2024 at Our Lady of Providence Residential Care Community in Winoski. Connie was born in Burlington on November 8, 1921, the daughter of Frederick and Ethel (Fountain) Savard. She attended public schools in Milton and graduated from Milton High School, later earning her teacher's degree from Johnson Normal School. Connie's first assignment as a teacher was in a one-room schoolhouse in St. Albans. Later, she taught in Springfield, Vermont and, for many years, taught in Winchester, Massachusetts. She then moved to Brattleboro, where she taught at the former Estevyville School and then at Green Street School, until she retired. A devout Catholic, Connie was a longtime communicant of St. Michael's Roman Catholic Church. She was also a member of the American Legion Post 5 Auxiliary, maintaining her membership since 1963. Of her leisure time activities, she enjoyed bowling, taking walks, and was an avid reader. On February 15, 1964 at St. Mary's Parish in St. Albans, she was married to Ernest C. Carlson, who predeceased her on March 15, 2016. Survivors include her sister, Beverly "Bev" Collins and her husband Lawrence of Fairfield; a special niece, Kara Collins Gomez and family of Tallahassee, Florida; a special nephew, Jamie Savard and family of Wilmington, North Carolina; and several other nieces and nephews and their families. Additionally, she leaves several wonderful neighbors and close friends. Connie was predeceased by five brothers and one sister. MEMORIAL INFORMATION: A Mass of Christian Burial will be celebrated at St. Michael's Catholic Church later in the springtime at a date and time to be announced. Committal rites and burial will be in Saint Michael's Parish Cemetery. Donations to Saint Michael's Catholic Church or to Bridgid's Kitchen, 47 Walnut St., Brattleboro, VT 05301. To offer condolences, visit [atamaniuk.com](https://atamaniuk.com).

• **Pauline Robinson "Polly" Casanova, 85**, of Newfane. Died on Jan. 14, 2024 at Dartmouth-Hitchcock Medical Center in Lebanon, New Hampshire, surrounded by love after a struggle with kidney disease. Polly was born in West Wardsboro on Feb. 20, 1938, the daughter of Travis and Nora (Boyd) Robinson. In 1942, the family moved to Newfane where Polly grew up and attended elementary school. She graduated from Leland & Gray Seminary in Townshend. After high school, Polly worked at Grant's department store in Brattleboro and later became the office manager. She married Carl Sargent in 1958, they were together for 14 years and had four children. Polly was active in Girl Scout leadership as the girls were growing up and she served the community with babysitting, sewing for others, and was active in the Newfane Grange. In 1967, she started working at the First National Bank in Jamaica for many years, and was also active in the NewBrook Fire Department Auxiliary. In 1973, she met the love of her life, "Patsy" Casanova, and they married on June 7, 1978. They later purchased a "mom & pop" store, The County Seat Market, which served the West River Valley for years known by all as "Patsy & Polly's." Polly also worked for a few years doing in-home healthcare. In 1998, the couple started foster care, which Polly continued in her retirement. She worked for NFI & Families First, fostering many children and also doing respite care. Polly loved adventures, especially camping at Maidstone and Grout Pond with her siblings and her family, later at the old County Seat Market site in Newfane with her son Ron & family members. In addition she enjoyed her trips to Arizona to be with her best friend Gwen. Polly was the rock of the family, always there in times of trouble or triumph. She was everything to everybody; Gram, Ma, Sister, and Aunt all rolled up into one incredible package. Spending time with family and friends was first and foremost among her loves. As the nexus of Newfane, her door was always open to all. She welcomed everyone to her round table for laughter, conversation, and good food. Polly knew how to laugh and to love, and was never afraid to act like a youngster. For Polly, tag sales were half passionate pursuit and half social event. She always managed to find that one perfect thing others were looking for. She would purposely buy broken things just so she could take them apart, her keen and curious mind would not let her rest until she understood the inner workings of her purchase. She could rehab the most broken things, people included, with flair. In today's world of opportunity for women, she would have been a great engineer.

Polly was predeceased by her parents, her husband Patsy, her daughter Alanah Vanleeuwen, foster son David Hardy, and her siblings, Betty Druke (Bernie), Irene Brooks (Alfred), James Robinson (Ida), Sally Herring (Rod), and sister-in-law Patricia Sargent. She is survived by her siblings Mary Laitres (Leo) of Brattleboro and Louise McGourty (Jack) of Barnstead, New Hampshire; children Cindy Rose (Jack) and Linda Brookes of Newfane, Ronald Sargent and daughter in-law Lori of Brattleboro; nephew Billy Brooks whom she has mothered since 2012; and her grandchildren Jessica Emerson (Eric) and Joshua Brookes (Jessica) of Newfane, who lived with her the majority of their school years; Tavis Rose of Townshend, Ashley Rose of Newfane, Travis Sargent (Amber) of Brattleboro, Amanda Pacheco (Josh) of Dummerston, Brianah Hall (Jason) of Springfield, and Cody Hall of Newfane; great-grandchildren Matt and Abigail Emerson, Scarlett Rose, Hayden Vanleeuwen, Jacob Smart, Annabelle and Tucker Brookes, Savannah Squires, Alice and Emilia Pacheco, Chloe Hall, Jeffery Parker, and Oaklynn Sargent; and many dear nieces and nephews. Polly had two dear friends who checked in on her daily, Bob Holden and Bob Litchfield. MEMORIAL INFORMATION: A celebration of life will be held at Newfane Congregational Church on Feb. 11 at 1 p.m. Donations to Grace Cottage Hospital (P.O. Box 216 Townshend, Vermont 05353) or NewBrook Fire & Rescue (P.O. Box 77 Newfane, VT 05345).

• **Robert Wayne "Bobby" Damon, 38**, of Townshend. Died suddenly on Dec. 20, 2023. Born on Aug. 5, 1985 in Springfield, Vermont to Lori and the late Tom Leary, Bobby worked for Soundview Paper Company in Putney for almost a decade. He was always known as a "social butterfly," chatting with everyone while sharing laughs and smiles. Most of all Bobby was a father to his three children – the youngest, Braydn, the oldest, Makayla, and the middle-child, Skylah, who predeceased him. He was a fiancé to his long-term partner and mother of his children, RoseAnn Goetz, with whom he spent the last 19 years. Bobby grew up with three siblings, his older brother, Joseph Ainsworth, and his younger siblings, Jessica Leary, and Richard Leary. Bobby was also valued greatly as a "son-in-law" to RoseAnn's parents, Evelyn and the late John Goetz. Bobby was also a nephew to many aunts and uncles. He was a friend to all, and willingly would stop to help anyone in need. He had a way of brightening a room with his sunshine personality, making sure no one was left in the dark. He had many interests: playing cribbage, yachtee, and video games, watching movies, going on a nature walk, exploring, traveling, listening to music, writing poetry and songs, and drawing. He was a jack of all trades. MEMORIAL INFORMATION: A celebration of his life will be held on Wednesday, Feb. 7, from 1 to 4 p.m., at 689 VT-30, Newfane.

• **Veglia Caccivio Derosia, 87**, of Brattleboro. Died peacefully at home, surrounded by her family, on Jan. 24, 2024. She was born on Sept. 6, 1936 in Plainfield, Vermont, the second of three daughters of the late Iglio and Pauline (Wright) Caccivio. Veglia was a graduate of St. Michael's High School in Brattleboro, where she was known as "the girl with the golden personality." She also attended Northeastern College in Boston, where she earned her license as a lab technician. In May 1958, Veglia married Bernard James "Bernie" Derosia of Brattleboro, who predeceased her in September 2014. During their life together, they were active and supportive parents in the school activities of their children, grandchildren, and great grandchildren. After Bernie's passing, Veglia continued to be an avid fan at all her grandchildren and great grandchildren's school events, including all sports, music and award events. She especially enjoyed the weekend trips all over New England to support her grandchildren in their AAU and college sporting activities. As her children became older, Veglia began a 33-year career employed by Price Chopper/Market 32, where she fully retired from in August 2023. Each day, she brought positivity, dependability and a strong work ethic. Veglia lived life believing that family comes first in kindness, happiness, love and strife, together and forever. She was a parishioner of St. Michael's Catholic Church, and in her earlier life was in the church choir, often singing at midnight Mass on Christmas Eve that used to be broadcast on local radio stations. In addition to her parents and husband, Veglia was predeceased by her daughter, Angela Marie in 1989, her son-in-law, Stephen Lynch in 2021, and her older sister, Colleen Murphy in 2023. She is survived by her six children and their spouses, Lisa, Wayne, Karen Lynch, Scott (Janet), Joseph (Sheena), and Jimmy (Kelly) who will always remember her as a humble, graceful, supportive Mom who loved her family unconditionally; her 15 grandchildren and their spouses, Michelle (Ricky), Jason (Jenn), Amy (Brian), Becky (Marshall), Taylor, Lilly, Alex, Zach, Maddy, Morgan, Kyle, Grady, Hailey, Lucy and Lydia; and her 12 great-grandchildren who will forever miss their selfless, strong, joyful, caring, and irreplaceable Grammy. In addition, she is survived by her younger

sister and her husband, Karen and Henry LaRose; two brothers-in-law, Sylvester Murphy and Fred Derosia; as well as many nieces and nephews. Extended family considered her an adopted Grammy, including Alex Fellows and Grammy's furry friends, Brody and Koda. In the end, Veglia continued to communicate her love and thankfulness to her family, when it was her family that was blessed to have had her love, guidance and generosity throughout their lives. MEMORIAL INFORMATION: A remembrance of her life will be held at American Legion Post 5 on Saturday, Feb. 3, starting at 1 p.m. The family will hold a private memorial service in the spring. Donations to Vermont Special Olympics, 16 Gregory Drive, Suite 2, So. Burlington, VT 05403; St. Bridgid's Kitchen, 47 Walnut St., Brattleboro, VT 05301; or St. Michael's School, 48 Walnut St., Brattleboro, VT 05301. To offer condolences, visit [atamaniuk.com](https://atamaniuk.com).

• **Jacqueline Gens, 73**, of Shelburne Falls, Massachusetts. Died on Jan. 2, 2024, in Northampton, Massachusetts, after a courageous battle with cancer. She was predeceased by her mother, Olga Pakidoff Gens Shreiner, and father, Alexander Pierre Gens. She is survived by brothers Mike, of Boston, and Will, in Great Neck, New York; nieces Dr. Alexandra Gens, Athena Maitri Gens and Lydia Karunya Gens; nephew Kyle Devin Gens, Esq.; and myriad close friendships she developed over an adventurous and creative life. Born on January 20, 1950, in Woodland Hills, California, as a teen, Jacqueline moved with her family to New York City as teen and, later, to Bernardston, Massachusetts. She graduated from Pioneer Valley Regional High School in 1968, working full time at Mohawk Plastics while still a student. A brief marriage to artist Steven Curtis ended in an amicable divorce. She attended Greenfield Community College and transferred to Smith College for a B.A. in classics and anthropology as an Ada Comstock Scholar, Class of 1981. In 1983, she pursued a graduate degree in Buddhist studies at the Naropa Institute (now Naropa University) in Boulder, Colorado; in 2005, an MFA in creative writing (Poetry) from New England College; and in 2007, an MAT in information technology from Marlboro College. Beneath her calm demeanor, she worked hard, often operating behind the scenes. Courageous, witty, irreverent, keenly delighted with conversation, she threw herself into life wholeheartedly: poetry, Tibetan Buddhism, cooking, friendships. Starting in her 20s, she lived for several years at Total Loss Farm in Guilford, which remained a touchstone for the rest of her life. At Naropa, she met prominent poets and worked with many of them, including Allen Ginsberg, whom she had idolized ever since seeing him on television when she was a teenager. She moved to New York to become Ginsberg's personal assistant, office manager, and photo archivist. Ginsberg appreciated her, saying that she saved him from *klesha*, a Sanskrit term for poison, affliction, and negative mental patterns. Jacqueline maintained a role in Ginsberg's legacy to the end. Among her many accomplishments, she co-founded and co-directed with Chard deNiord a poetry workshop in Patzcuaro, Mexico, in 1998-99, and then the MFA program in poetry at New England College from 2001 to 2012. The program included some of the very best poetry faculty in the country. Jacqueline's wisdom, keen intelligence, and business savvy were instrumental in growing it from just 10 students into an international graduate program with an enrollment of fifty-two. A poet herself, she published several chapbooks and founded the website *poetrymind*. Jacqueline's influence as a wise woman, dear friend to myriad MFA students, and longtime student herself of the Tibetan Buddhist master of Dzogchen leaves a deep emptiness in the hearts of her friends, an emptiness that fills immediately with memories of her kindness, humor, wisdom, and love. *The Stuff of Dreams*, a 1977 documentary about a community production of Shakespeare's *The Tempest* performed by the Monteverdi Players at Sweet Pond in Guilford, commemorates her essential role as stage manager. She was an active member of the Buddhist community at Tsegalgar East in Conway, Massachusetts, where she co-founded the Khandroling Paper Cooperative. She was a respected scholar of Tibetan Buddhism, published in numerous journals and online, and had two radio monthly programs on WVEW. She also published chapbooks of her own poems. In retirement, she continued to write poems, run poetry writing groups online and in person, cooked as a personal chef, maintained the *poetrymind* blog, and defended tenants' rights at her housing community. She remained clear-headed and vividly herself until her last hours. MEMORIAL INFORMATION: Donations to Shang Shung Publications or to Shang Shung Institute School of Tibetan Medicine-America by sending a check to School of Tibetan Medicine, P.O. Box 479, Conway, MA 01341

• **Merrill Ernest Spiller Jr., 93**, of Vernon. Died Jan. 14, 2024, with his family by his side, at Vernon Green Nursing Home. Merrill was born in the home of his parents, Merrill and Grace (Carter) Spiller, in Leominster, Massachusetts, on Feb. 22, 1930, the oldest of four children. Growing up in there, he was a Boy Scout, played clarinet, and worked at the local grocery store after school. He attended Worcester Polytechnic Institute, where he was a member of Sigma Phi Epsilon and was in the radio club. He graduated in 1951 with a B.S. in electrical engineering. While at WPI, Merrill met Betty Joan Anderson on a blind date; they were married on May 15, 1954. Merrill had been inducted into the Army and, soon after the wedding, he was sent to Japan. While stationed there, he worked as an assistant radio engineer. When he returned, Merrill and Betty settled in North Easton, Massachusetts; his first job was with the Foxboro Company. In 1968, he obtained a master's degree in engineering management from Northeastern University. He later worked in management positions in the manufacturing departments of Sylvania, Polaroid, Data Terminal Systems, and Aviv Corporation. Merrill was very connected to his community, a connection that he strengthened through service. As an active member of Holy Trinity Lutheran Church in North Easton, he held several offices within the church over the years. Merrill became a Mason in 1960 and was a faithful lifelong member of his Lodge. He was also a long-time member of the board of trustees of Brockton Hospital, serving as chair from 1984 to 1986. He maintained his ties to WPI as an alumnus, serving as treasurer for Tech Old Timers (now WPI Voyagers) and helping to plan several class reunions. In 2011, he received the Herbert F. Taylor Alumni Award for Distinguished Service to WPI. Merrill was an avid ham radio operator and loved all things tech, as well as any kind of vehicle, from sports cars to model rockets. Both Merrill and Betty shared with their children (and eventually, their grandchildren) their love of the outdoors — camping, hiking, and boating. A true engineer, Merrill prepared for all family excursions with detailed itineraries, thorough checklists, expert packing techniques, and strict time management skills. In 1978, Merrill and Betty bought a motor home and took their kids on a six-week cross-country trip; this marked the first of many long treks they made over the next four decades. Together, Merrill and Betty drove to and camped in 49 states. (For their 50th anniversary, they flew to Hawaii to "complete the set.") In 2017, Merrill and Betty moved to Vernon. They continued to enjoy traveling and spending time with family and stayed active through their ninth decade. Merrill is survived by his wife; son, Douglas (Yong Hee) Spiller; and daughter, Cheryl (Stephen) Redmond; as well as granddaughters Laura (Adam) Sobel, Kimberly Spiller (Marc Weiss), and Genevieve Redmond. He is predeceased by his brother, Richard Spiller; and his sisters, Marilyn Baker and Bernita Spiller. MEMORIAL INFORMATION: A memorial service at the Guilford Community Church on March 9 at 1 p.m. To offer condolences, visit [atamaniuk.com](https://atamaniuk.com).

• **Keith Scott Griswold, 59**, died on Jan. 12, 2024 at Cheshire Medical Center in Keene, New Hampshire after a brief illness. He was born on June 10, 1964 to Allan and Doris (Squires) Griswold. Keith enjoyed snowmobiling, hunting, gardening, and riding his motorcyle. Besides his loving partner, Jennifer Razez, he leaves behind his father, Allan Griswold (Julie) of Guilford; brothers Mark (Karla) and Brian Griswold, all of Guilford;

niece Andrea Crowningshield (Geoff) of Vernon; nephew Heath Parsons (Erikka) of Swansey New Hampshire; and four great-nieces as well as several cousins. He was predeceased by his mother and a brother, Damon. MEMORIAL INFORMATION: Services will be private.

• **Stanley A. "Stan" Mack, 76**, of Grafton. Died comfortably at his home under hospice care on Dec. 27, 2023. Stanley was born in Bridgeport, Connecticut on Sept. 1, 1947 to Otto and Mildred (Isaacs) Mack. He grew up in Trumbull, Connecticut, and became a volunteer firefighter for the town at age 15. Stan graduated from Trumbull High School in the Class of 1965 and then earned his associate's degree from the Connecticut School of Electronics. He was the loving husband of Patricia (Lobo) Mack. The two married in Trumbull on Feb. 10, 1973 and moved to Grafton in September 1979. Stan soon became the Fire Chief for 20 years and was honored by having the Fire Station named in his honor for initiating and being the driving force behind getting the new fire station designed and built, and replacing the older fire vehicles with newer equipment. He was also an EMT for more than 40 years and devoted his life to helping and protecting others. He also served on the Grafton Selectboard and was Emergency Management Director for many years. He began working for the Windham Foundation in 1980 as an electrician and shepherd. Along with Doug Wright, they tended the 100-plus flock and helped with many lambings (Stan was known as "The Electrical Shepherd.") He soon became their Director of Maintenance and remained with the Windham Foundation for almost 30 years. Stan is survived and will be missed by Pat, his loving wife and best friend of more than 50 years; his exuberant dog, Josephine; his sister, Marilyn Gilvear of Charlestown, New Hampshire; his sisters-in-law Carolyn Lobo and her husband Vince Burrelli of Newtown, Connecticut, and Lorraine Curley and her husband Bob of Dublin, Ohio. MEMORIAL INFORMATION: A memorial service and celebration of Stan's life will take place on Saturday, May 4, at 11 a.m., at the Community Church of Grafton, with a celebration to follow. Donations to the Stan Mack Memorial Fund, in care of the Grafton Firemen's Association, P.O. Box 191, Grafton, VT 05146, for the continued maintenance of the fire station. To send condolences, visit [csnh.com](https://csnh.com).

• **Faith Christine White, 51**, of Brattleboro. Died unexpectedly on Jan. 19, 2024 at her home, following a lengthy period of declining health. Faith was born in Brattleboro on May 29, 1972, the daughter of the late Walter and Emily (Miller) White. A premature infant, at birth her weight was a mere one pound, four ounces. She was known as a miracle baby, so tiny her father could hold her in the palm of his hand. She was raised and educated in Brattleboro where she attended public schools, graduating from Brattleboro Union High School with the Class of 1990. Faith worked most of her career as a healthcare giver, performing private duty for the elderly in their homes. She also had worked at the former Linden Lodge Nursing Home and at the Holton Home on Western Avenue. She later earned her certification as a Vermont State Emergency Medical Technician (EMT), an achievement she was very proud of. For several years, she was an active volunteer with Rescue, Inc. During her youth and teen years, Faith was involved with the day-to-day operation of her parent's ministry, Faith Ministries Mission and Shelter, located at her parent's home on Frost Place. Although small in physical stature, Faith was known to be feisty and full of life. Faced with health issues most of her adult life, she was always optimistic and positive, seeing the shiny side of a rusty nail. Faith enjoyed the outdoors, swimming, sunbathing, and she loved the beach, especially trips to Hampton Beach, New Hampshire with her family. She was also an avid reader. Survivors include her son, Trevor Leclair of Lunenburg, Massachusetts; one brother, Walter White of Brattleboro; an uncle, George Miller of Walpole, New Hampshire; close friend and companion, Todd Leclair of Brattleboro; her stepmother, Linda White of Bennington; and many cousins. Additionally, she leaves her beloved Puggie, "Emmy." MEMORIAL INFORMATION: A graveside committal service will be conducted later in the springtime in West Brattleboro Cemetery. To offer condolences, visit [atamaniuk.com](https://atamaniuk.com).

• **Shirley May Clark Squires, 94**, of Guilford, a resident of Thompson House nursing home for the past year. Died Jan. 24, 2024 at Brattleboro Memorial Hospital. She was born at home in Guilford on November 9, 1929, the daughter of Earl and Clara (Goodnow) Clark. She lived her entire life in Guilford, attending a one-room school for eight years. Shirley continued on to Brattleboro High School, graduating in 1947. In the early 1940s, Shirley worked at Woolworths and Holstein Association. She married Webster Squires on May 21, 1950 at the Meeting House Church in Guilford Center. They built a house in 1953, just down the road. They raised six children there. Over the years, Shirley was a 4-H Leader, a Red Cross Volunteer, and served 20 years as treasurer for the Guilford Historical Society. She was also a crossword puzzle "addict." In 1969, she became the cook at Guilford School. She retired in 1996, but later became assistant manager in the Brattleboro Memorial Hospital cafeteria, retiring in 2007. Shirley loved gardening and watching the wild critters in her back yard and enjoyed get-togethers with her family. One of her great memories was flying to Amsterdam for the Tulip Festival. She is survived by six children, Rebecca West (Ed) of Guilford, David Squires (Betty) of Windham, Bonnie Newton (Gary) of Vernon, Andrew Squires (Brenda) of Maine, Todd Squires (Kathy) of Guilford, and Kenneth Squires of Biddeford, Maine; a sister, Arlene Gilbert (Bob); a brother, Richard Clark (Kathy); a sister-in-law, Cindy Clark; 12 grandchildren, 26 great grandchildren, two great-great grandchildren, and many nieces, nephews and cousins. Shirley was predeceased by her husband of 49 years on April 26, 2000; her brothers, Arnold and Edward; her sister, Virginia; and a daughter-in-law, Tina. MEMORIAL INFORMATION: A celebration of life will be held at American Legion Post 5 on Saturday, Feb. 10, from 1 to 4 p.m. Graveside committal services in Guilford Center Cemetery, where she will be laid to rest beside her husband, will take place in the springtime when the cemetery reopens. Donations to the Guilford Volunteer Fire Dept., 108 Guilford Center Road, Guilford, VT 05301, or Rescue, Inc., P.O. Box 593, Brattleboro, VT 05302. To offer condolences, visit [atamaniuk.com](https://atamaniuk.com).

• **Faith Christine White, 51**, of Brattleboro. Died unexpectedly on Jan. 19, 2024 at her home, following a lengthy period of declining health. Faith was born in Brattleboro on May 29, 1972, the daughter of the late Walter and Emily (Miller) White. A premature infant, at birth her weight was a mere one pound, four ounces. She was known as a miracle baby, so tiny her father could hold her in the palm of his hand. She was raised and educated in Brattleboro where she attended public schools, graduating from Brattleboro Union High School with the Class of 1990. Faith worked most of her career as a healthcare giver, performing private duty for the elderly in their homes. She also had worked at the former Linden Lodge Nursing Home and at the Holton Home on Western Avenue. She later earned her certification as a Vermont State Emergency Medical Technician (EMT), an achievement she was very proud of. For several years, she was an active volunteer with Rescue, Inc. During her youth and teen years, Faith was involved with the day-to-day operation of her parent's ministry, Faith Ministries Mission and Shelter, located at her parent's home on Frost Place. Although small in physical stature, Faith was known to be feisty and full of life. Faced with health issues most of her adult life, she was always optimistic and positive, seeing the shiny side of a rusty nail. Faith enjoyed the outdoors, swimming, sunbathing, and she loved the beach, especially trips to Hampton Beach, New Hampshire with her family. She was also an avid reader. Survivors include her son, Trevor Leclair of Lunenburg, Massachusetts; one brother, Walter White of Brattleboro; an uncle, George Miller of Walpole, New Hampshire; close friend and companion, Todd Leclair of Brattleboro; her stepmother, Linda White of Bennington; and many cousins. Additionally, she leaves her beloved Puggie, "Emmy." MEMORIAL INFORMATION: A graveside committal service will be conducted later in the springtime in West Brattleboro Cemetery. To offer condolences, visit [atamaniuk.com](https://atamaniuk.com).

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## Services

A celebration of life for **Paul J. Van Winkle** will be held in the back room of Peter Havens Restaurant in Brattleboro on Feb. 8, at 4 p.m. All who were close to Paul are welcome to attend. In lieu of flowers, bring your favorite martini glass and your best "Paul V." story to share in remembrance. Mr. Van Winkle, 63, of Putney, died on Dec. 21, 2023.

Nature equals change, and it flows continuously and onwards.

—PAUL VAN WINKLE

Milestones are published as community news at no cost to families, thanks to financial support of our members and advertisers. Send them to [news@commonsnews.org](mailto:news@commonsnews.org). Though we ask that content for this column be sent by Friday at 5 p.m., we will do our best to include late obituaries. Please alert the newsroom at 802-246-6397 for post-deadline urgent submissions. We will always do our best to accommodate contributors in their time of grief.

## Library and HCRS

FROM SECTION FRONT

who bring barking dogs into the main reading room.

Sometimes, help from the police is necessary.

“We’ve had people who refuse to leave at the end of the day,” LaTronica said. “We call the police and ask them to come. Then we tell the people that they can’t come back unless they have a discussion with us and understand and agree to these parameters. But we’ve had people at nine o’clock that just don’t want to leave. And we’ve had other situations where people have just reached a breaking point and destroyed library property. Or when the staff feels endangered.”

These kinds of things are unacceptable, she said.

“All those compassionate people that went into library work did not sign up for that,” she continued. “We’ve lost at least one staff member who felt that her health was just being endangered by working here. She felt not safe.”

The town now has what LaTronica describes as two “very nice” security guards who patrol the transportation center and also make themselves available to the library.

“We have a security guard that comes to help us close up — to make sure that everybody’s out,” LaTronica said. “They’re a nice presence of strength, without being oppressive.”

One of them recently held his wedding at the library; LaTronica was one of the witnesses.

The police also have an embedded HCRS worker; he has been able to help with unusual situations at the library. One day recently, for example, a man showed up at the library wearing a hospital gown, paper trousers, and a jacket.

“He managed to get in the library and sit down in one of our chairs with wheels on it,” LaTronica said. “Then he scooted over to the circulation desk and said, ‘Can I use the phone?’”

She noted that the library does offer a courtesy phone “for folks that don’t have phones — and there are a lot of people who don’t.”

After the call, he pleaded with staff to give him a ride home. “He was pretty frail and pretty infirm,” LaTronica said.

The library called the police’s HCRS worker.

“While we were waiting, he asked if we had something to eat,” LaTronica said. “So I went upstairs and got him a granola bar from the staff room. And one of the board members had donated a big beach towel that she had got from somewhere, and I put that around his shoulders because he was cold.”

When the HCRS worker arrived, it turned out that the two men knew each other. So the man got his ride home.

### Extra help is a must

The HCRS person at the library is Care Coordinator Mary Lachenal.

“I have helped people make primary care appointments,” said Lachenal, who previously worked at Groundworks Collaborative. “I’ve helped them sign up for Medicaid. I’ve helped people with food stamps applications there. And sometimes I just sit there and talk with them.”

“Mary is great in that she has a background with a lot of these folks,” LaTronica said. “We have a limited experience. She has a much deeper relationship with them from her work at Groundworks. So that’s been really, really helpful.”

In some circumstances, she has been present “when people get worked up,” she continued.

Lachenal, LaTronica said, “has the training to intervene, to have a discussion, to calm somebody down, to get to the root of the problem: ‘OK, what’s needed here? What is the issue right now?’ Because sometimes, somebody will fly off the handle. And that’s really not the root of the problem.”

For example, someone might be talking into their cell phone.

“We will ask someone not to talk on the cell phone while they’re at the library,” LaTronica said. “And sometimes people take offense, take umbrage at that. And they really come back strong verbally with us. But Mary is there to intervene and say, ‘You know, what’s going on is not just that they can’t talk on the cell phone here.’ It’s like that was the final straw for them.”

Rather, “they’re feeling that they have no respect anywhere. They have no power anywhere. They have no place anywhere. And now they come to the library, and we’re telling him, ‘You can’t talk on your cell phone,’” she continued.

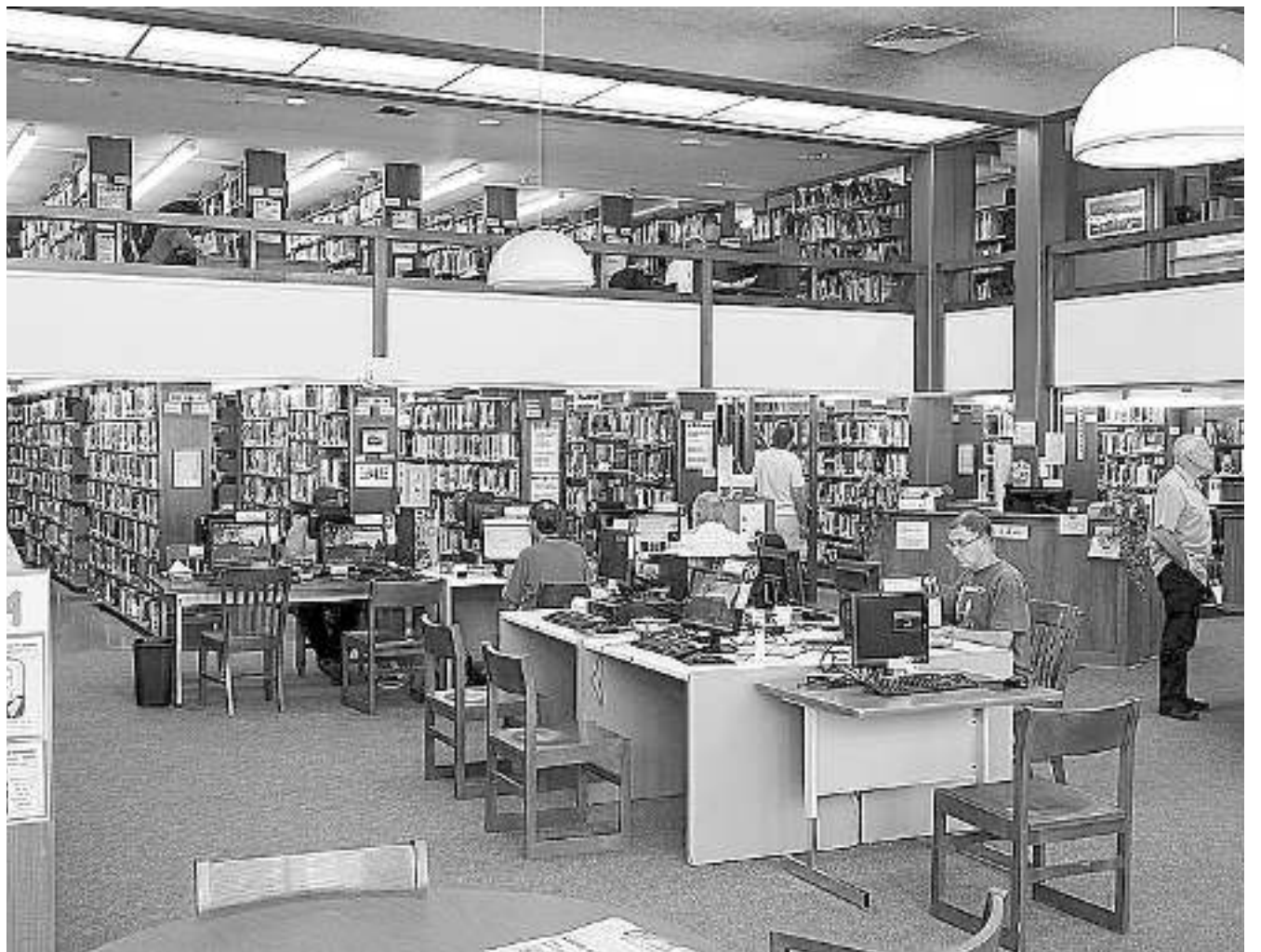
“Mary is very good at defusing a situation and then taking that next step: *OK, what do we need to do? How do we need to make this better?* That’s been fantastic for us.”

Lachenal is not a social worker; she is trained in “trauma informed care.”

“It’s a way of approaching situations where each situation is unique to the individual,” she said. “There could have been trauma. Behavior could be stemming from trauma. We don’t know anybody’s life story. But that doesn’t make them any less of a person.”

A problem could be something as simple, but as time consuming, as needing help to access a crucial service.

“We need to sort of sit with that person, to see where that person would have the most efficient connection to get the resources they need,” LaTronica said. If the person is looking for work, for example, staff asks, “Do you



RANDOLPH T. HOLHUT COMMONS FILE PHOTO

Public computer terminals at Brooks Memorial Library have long been an important resource for those without internet service.

need the Department of Labor?”

“We need to know where to send that person,” she said. “So we needed somebody who has their finger on the pulse of all those places. We also needed somebody who can recognize when somebody’s in trouble and to refer them to places where they might need to go for emotional support.”

Literacy might be a problem; some people are reluctant to admit they have trouble with reading.

“They don’t want to say, ‘Yeah, I can’t read that,’” LaTronica said. “They say, ‘I’ll tell you what to type in and you type.’ But that takes an enormous amount of our time. We’re honored to do that work, but it takes a lot of time. And it means that we can’t do something else.”

HCRS is charged with providing community health care in Brattleboro, Springfield, and Hartford.

“We have developmental services programs, we have adult mental health services, we have community rehabilitation treatment programming, and we have care coordinators,” said HCRS Care Coordination Team Leader Lindsey Mack.

“Most of the work we’re doing is to support individuals in their respective communities who might be having barriers due to the challenges of their mental health experience,” she said. “Or if they’re a person with a disability, we help with trying to help navigate the barriers that they may be facing.”

Crisis assistance is another service provided by HCRS.

“Our primary focus is just supporting people with developmental disability and mental health struggles,” Mack said. “As care coordinators, our objective is to help connect people to or to resolve what we call ‘social determinants’ or ‘health barriers.’”

“Being homeless can be very challenging for folks,” she said.

“Even the most healthy of us, if you find yourself homeless, you might find that you’re also now suffering from depression or anxiety because it’s a very stressful situation to be in,” Mack said.

Not having health insurance can also create barriers.

“Having the ability to access treatment is another difficult situation,” Mack said. “Our objective is to try to help people that may be facing those types of challenges in their lives, to move around or through those challenges, and to get them connected to resources that can help them sustain wellness in their lives.”

Having HCRS on the scene can help the library in many ways, Mack said.

“Depending on how many staff they have on, the library might not have time to help every one that comes in with a need for, like, an application to be filled out,” Mack said. “Or maybe its somebody that’s looking for resources for recovery from substance use disorders. Or maybe somebody who’s looking for mental health resources as well. The whole gamut. We’re just really there to help support the librarians in those situations.”

The clientele dependent on the library may arouse fear and suspicion in some community members.

“There’s a lot of fear,” Mack said. “And I’m not saying from the librarians. Amongst the community, there’s a misunderstanding sometimes around ‘How do I talk to someone when they seem to be kind of escalating.’ And sometimes it’s just going over and saying, ‘Hey, how are you doing? How’s your day going?’”

“But if you don’t have the

training to understand, it can be intimidating for a lot of folks. So we’re there just to really help out in challenging situations that they come up, and help get those folks to the right places to help them manage whatever it is that they’re needing.”

This is not a situation limited to Brattleboro, Mack said.

“What I’ve been seeing from libraries, not just in Brattleboro, is that this seems to be a place where people go to find resources,” Mack said. “As well as go to read and do research and things like that.”

HCRS personnel are “available in other situations, and in other buildings, anywhere in the community where those services are needed,” Mack said. “We’re not exclusive to the library.”

### Books, compassion, and connection

LaTronica said librarians come from a place of compassion, a place of “How can we help?”

“It’s sort of innate in the people that go into this profession,” she said. “Certainly, if they go into public librarianship, in this day and age. And at least, if they are on this staff.”

When the library recently did a new strategic plan, it listed its values: Kindness was at the top.

“That is really what we bring to everybody that comes in here,” LaTronica said. “That is of absolute premium importance.”

A recent report by the U.S. Surgeon General called loneliness a national — and deadly — epidemic.

“This is one way that the library can really contribute to this community,” LaTronica said. “We can help mitigate some of that loneliness.”

Even the weakest connections are important, LaTronica said.

“People come in and ask [librarian] Ellen Martyn for a good book, and they trust her to give them a good answer,” she said. “They rely on that. And you have to have those kinds of interactions to stay healthy mentally.”

LaTronica described a regular patron who is often confused. “She knows that if she comes here, we will help her figure out where she really needs to go to get her prescription filled,” she said. “Where else would she go to find that?”

Brooks Memorial Library is “open to everybody, all ages,” LaTronica continued. “Really, the library is uniquely situated to keep a community knit together.”

The library is an especially welcoming place for teenagers.

“They talk about the key to adolescents’ growing up safe and not engaging in risky and destructive behavior is peer support,” LaTronica said. “So when we have these teen groups, people come together and engage in substance-free activities and feel supported here.”

Teen patrons, she said, “see themselves reflected in the literature. They know that there are special activities. They know that they belong here. And where else can teens go that there is no membership fee or admission fee to participate in something like that?”

Studies show that the mental health and well-being of children, even of preschoolers, depends on social and emotional development as much or even more than intellectual development. The library has taken upon itself to provide it.

“We have preschool story times where they learn to interact with other kids,” LaTronica said. “Parents can come together at those same events and share experiences and find mutual support. And again, it’s all free and open to everybody.”

She described the story times as “great.”

“You really get a cross section,” LaTronica said. “You get people who wouldn’t encounter each other otherwise.”

In a way, the library has taken on the role of providing the community with connections.

“We’re connecting [members of] the community to one another, to services, to a world of literature, and to events,” LaTronica said. “What’s been lost so much, even pre-pandemic, are connections.”

She cites Robert D. Putnam’s 2000 book, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*.

“He saw all this coming, all this social isolation, and the devastating effects that it’s having. It’s just unraveling those connections that kept us all strong and kept us all in this together.”

While the librarians are busy being kind, empathetic, and helpful, there is a long list of what LaTronica calls “library stuff” they are not doing instead.

“We’re not reading book reviews,” she said. “We’re not ordering books. We’re not assessing the collection. Sometimes we can barely check the books in. And we can’t plan programs and do all the other wonderful things that the library can do.”

Programs are very important, LaTronica said.

“What is going to save us is people coming together and not sitting at home on their own, attached to a computer screen,” LaTronica said. “The great thing is that, in this community, we have so many people that want to contribute. They have skills and talents and interests that they’d love to share. And we just don’t have time to do them all.”

This is why LaTronica is putting into her budget for the next fiscal year a full-time program coordinator position.

“[Town Manager] John Potter got a grant for 1.75 municipal social worker positions that would be shared by all municipal departments,” LaTronica said. “So the Gibson-Aiken Center can call if they have an issue, or whatever.”

In developing a draft budget, which voters at Annual Representative Town Meeting will consider in March, Potter then boosted the hours those positions to an even two full-time positions.

“Which is fantastic,” LaTronica said. “We would really appreciate that kind of coverage. And we would like a full-time program and outreach person.”

At least once a day, LaTronica said, she receives requests or offers for programs but she has not got the time to develop them.

“They take a lot of work, for lack of a better word,” she said. “To schedule, promote, and host the program and everything, and I just don’t have time. So I’m missing all these opportunities because I’m scrambling constantly.”

When LaTronica took over the library’s management in 2016, “the board recognized this, and we were hoping to get a contract person to do it. But that doesn’t really work. An outside contractor works on their own and is not supervised or a regular part of the library. What we really need is a person who is part of the library.”

That position could be the key to bringing the community together, LaTronica said.

“Programs are what bring people together,” she said. “And that’s what’s important, I think, in this community, and in all communities.”

People meet people in the community that they wouldn’t have otherwise known, she said, and they form connections.

“And what’s more important than that?” LaTronica said. “I can’t think of anything right now.”



RANDOLPH T. HOLHUT COMMONS FILE PHOTO

Brooks Memorial Library Director Starr LaTronica.

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# College-age students to return to Potash Hill

*Contemplative Semester plans a program of contemplative space, mindfulness, and academic Buddhist study for young people searching for meaning and calm in a world of climate change, smart phones, and a global pandemic*

By Annie Landenberger  
The Commons

MARLBORO—The former Marlboro College campus, which remains the home of the Marlboro Music Festival in July and August, will soon have students again.

Potash Hill ([potashhill.org](http://potashhill.org)), the nonprofit that purchased the campus of the former Marlboro College in 2021, is diligently worked to see that its grounds and buildings continue to be used by various groups for events, workshops, classes, retreats, and creative programming, according to Potash Hill Managing Director Brian Mooney.

Mooney said that, in early December, Potash Hill signed an agreement with Contemplative Semester (CS), a new academic program created by a group of eight professional practitioners.

One of them is the part-time coordinator of CS, Shea Riester, a native of Brooklyn, New York. He is a licensed clinical social worker/therapist specializing in Somatic Experiencing and Emotionally Focused therapies.

In a parallel vein, the 33-year-old Riester works as a youth social worker, a conflict resolution coach, and a restorative circle leader. Having done his professional training at New York University, he is still Brooklyn-based but is familiar with northern New England from time he spent at Morning Sun Mindfulness Center, a Buddhist community in nearby Alstead, New Hampshire.

## 'Young people are really struggling'

"Contemplative Semester comes out of a lot of direct requests from young people saying they're wanting something more, wanting more support, wanting to go deeper into these practices," Riester said.

The idea for this semester of mindfulness study and practice — which is exclusively for those ages 18 to 25 — is the yield of Riester's professional experiences and those of his co-founders.

Explaining the program's rationale, he said that "young people are really struggling. I don't

know if you've seen any of the articles about young people's mental health, but it's kind of at an all-time low in terms of rising rates of depression and anxiety and suicidal thoughts."

Riester attributes that to fall-out from the pandemic — in part. "It's also [the fact that] we're going on a decade or more of young people having smart phones as the norm," he said. "Then add climate change to the mix."

Moreover, given the tendency of social media to generate feelings of social disconnection, isolation, and ill ease, Riester said that "it's a really hard time to be a young person."

He and some other CS organizers "know this firsthand because a lot of us are [also] staff members on Inward Bound Mindfulness Education retreats for teenagers," he said.

On these twice-yearly retreats, Riester said he and other staff have seen that "in the last few years, there are more and more mental health struggles; more teens in crisis."

Young people say that they are not ready for a three-month silent retreat, he said, but they "love contemplative space and feel the need to go deeper into mindfulness, but also be connected and in relationship with young people and with adult mentors who've been on this path a lot longer."

Such input and articulated need led Riester and colleagues "to create this program which has been a dream for over a decade."

Some mental health professionals, says Riester, have coined the term "the age of insecurity." Working with young people, he adds "that's so palpable — the feeling of insecurity and disease [sic] that young people have [about their futures]."

## Structured around 'the Noble Eightfold Path'

Described on [contemplativesemester.org](http://contemplativesemester.org), the September to December course on Potash Hill promises "a journey deep into mindfulness meditation, beloved community, and earth connection. [...] Together we'll co-create the beloved community we want to see in the

world. Through small groups, relational practices, cooperative living and plenty of time to play, you'll be invited to know and be known by your peers on a profound level, building an intimate community and lifelong friendships."

Rooted in Buddhist precepts and practices, CS draws from Buddhist wisdom incorporating daily meditation, four week-long silent retreats, mindfulness and compassion practices, experiential inquiry, small group dialogue, journaling exercises, and lectures on a range of topics focused, in turn, on connections with nature, on ethical leadership, on collaboration and cooperation, on communication and creative expression.

"The 14-week curriculum is structured around the Noble Eightfold Path that countless human beings have traveled to transform anxiety and suffering into happiness, peace, and freedom," one sees on the website.

All of this, it's said, is "applied to what it means to be a young person alive today [...] Get the space and time to discern what's yours to do in the world, and leave ready to step into a powerful life of love and leadership."

The tag line on that page reassures: "And yes ... there will be

dance parties!"

## A Marlboro connection

When asked how the organizers found Potash Hill, Riester explains that the founders of Contemplative Semester are in different ways connected to William Edelglass, who lives adjacent to Potash Hill and was on the faculty at Marlboro College.

CS faculty member Jessica Morey, in particular, has known Edelglass for many years, so when they were searching for program facility, Riester recalls that he urged them to "check out Potash Hill."

Potash Hill welcomed the idea and, Riester adds, "has been generous and kind about how to accommodate us so we can make this work at the price point we can do it at."

A Buddhist teacher, Edelglass is affiliated with both Emerson College and Smith College and is director of studies at the Barre (Mass.) Center for Buddhist Studies, which functions as a partner organization for Contemplative Semester.

Edelglass will be visiting faculty for the Potash Hill program, as will be well-known mindfulness/meditation teachers Sharon Salzberg and Joseph Goldstein.

# Organizers hope to draw attention to Ukraine war

Speech from Lithuanian diplomat, a campaign to fund first aid kits, and a walk to raise awareness will mark the second anniversary of Russia's invasion

By Fran Lynggaard Hansen  
The Commons

BRATTLEBORO—Kerry Secrest and her brother, Christian Stromberg, agree that the war in Ukraine matters to the world.

"In 1906, my Lithuanian great-grandparents arrived in the U.S., fleeing the Russians as well," explains Secrest, of Brattleboro, who serves as honorary consul of Lithuania to Vermont.

"Growing up, we only knew Lithuania as an occupied country, and living two years there under Soviet occupation, I saw firsthand the awful consequences," adds Secrest, who calls the fall of the Soviet Union from 1988 to 1991 "a joyous time."

"I truly believe that if Russia is not stopped in Ukraine, it will have global implications for democracy around the world," Secrest says, noting that the war will hit the two-year mark this February.

"Ukraine is fighting for all of us for world democracy," she adds. "Russian President Vladimir Putin is pushing forward because no one is paying attention."

Secrest and Stromberg, the Windham World Affairs Council, and Ralph Meima, also of Brattleboro, will host several events throughout the month to bring the public's attention back to the war.

## Lithuania consul general to speak

At the first event on

Wednesday, Feb. 7, from 5 to 6 p.m., Consul General of Lithuania Vaclovas Salkauskas will speak about "Reflections at the Two-Year Mark of Russia's Invasion of Ukraine."

The event, free to attend with no tickets or registration, will take place at Saxtons River Distillery, at 155 Chickering Dr., where Stromberg is founder and head distiller.

Salkauskas is the highest ranking diplomat based in the Consulate General of the Republic of Lithuania in New York, which represents Lithuania and serves the country's citizens in Connecticut, Delaware, Georgia, Florida, Massachusetts, Maine, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, and Vermont.

Lissa Weinmann, board member and treasurer of the WWAC, is helping to cosponsor this part of the event.

"We try, as an organization, to give the public perspectives on important global events on a regular basis," Weinmann says. "We felt it was appropriate to work with local people to bring the war in Ukraine to the forefront again. It's certainly been disturbingly forgotten as we face other conflicts in the world."

Weinmann notes that WWAC is not a political organization, but the organization does "bring people together to discuss and engage in civil dialogue, even though people's views on these matters are complicated."

"It's exciting to hear from

"I'm excited about the way we are organizing ourselves," Riester said. "It's fully collaborative; we're shaping the semester that way."

To organize their work, "we use sociocracy, a system of governance that a lot of cooperatives and cohousing groups use; we're going to use that system during the Contemplative Semester, too. Students will have a seat at the table."

The aim, Riester adds, is that all 40 participants — 10 faculty, 30 students — will be part of a community, with all voices heard and valued.

## Potential for academic credit

CS is conceived to encompass "well-embodied education, deep mindfulness, and meditation, but it'll also involve academic-style learning."

As far as Riester knows — with the exception of a couple of college study abroad programs and the curriculum at Naropa University in Boulder, Colorado, Contemplative Semester is unique.

"We're the only program offering in-depth work for this length of time" that has potential to earn academic credit, which it will as long as a credit-earning

arrangement in the works with Hampshire College comes through, he said.

"We'll know soon," says Riester. "We had to submit syllabi to Hampshire" for accreditation review.

"Earning college credit is essential for many young people, he adds: "We're hoping that [being able to offer it] will make this semester more accessible to young people" from a range of backgrounds.

Mooney said that Contemplative Semester "will be working primarily in the Serkin Center for Performing Arts, and the 2,500-square-foot dance studio in particular. They'll have two dorms and a few cottages. The Campus Center will be a social hub and a cafeteria."

In effect, "they will have a mini-campus on the north side of Potash Hill," he said. "We're thrilled that we will again have college-age students on Potash Hill."

The cost of the semester is \$13,400 for tuition, room, and board. Contemplative Semester has already received grants to allow the program to offer scholarships for students in need.

For program, faculty, and application information, visit [contemplativesemester.org](http://contemplativesemester.org).

organizes Vermonters March in Solidarity with Ukraine on the Second Anniversary of Russian Invasion.

"I strongly identify with Ukraine's cause," says Meima, who lived in Europe for over 20 years.

"The stability of Europe is at stake. If Russia demonstrates that they can invade, occupy, and conquer a country, why can't they do it to Georgia? Or Moldova?" he adds.

"I think what Russia has done is to challenge the entire order of Europe," he says. "If we don't oppose Russian interference in Ukraine, that opens us up to many other conflicts around the globe."

Walkers will gather at the parking lot next to the Dummerston Covered Bridge on Route 30 at 8 a.m. From there, they will walk along the West River Trail until they reach the Marina Restaurant.

From there, they will walk along Route 5 south to the parking lot of the Brattleboro Food Co-op. Organizers think the 7.6-mile walk will take about three hours and anticipate the group will arrive at the Co-op around 11 a.m.

While the terrain is "flat and easy," the event's promotional materials note that "crusty snow 6 to 12 inches deep is likely in late February. Cross-country skis, snowshoes or micro spikes can be used until Route 5 is reached."

Though donations for the purchase of medical kits will be warmly accepted, Meima stresses that the walk isn't a political event.

"We're not protesting," he says. "We're not stating a position. We're just trying to draw people's attention to the cause and the need."

Meima thinks it's important for people to acknowledge their good fortune.

"We're very lucky in Vermont to live in such a peaceful, stable corner of the world, surrounded by like-minded states, with friends like Canada across the border," he says.

"There are so many other places in the world where there are ethnic conflicts and wars," Meima continues. "Ukraine is very much in that position."

For more information about the Feb. 7 event, visit [windhamworldaffairsCouncil.org](http://windhamworldaffairsCouncil.org).

Information about the Vermonters March in Solidarity with Ukraine event on Feb. 24 can be found at [bit.ly/750-Ukraine-walk](http://bit.ly/750-Ukraine-walk).

Those wishing to learn more about the first aid kit fundraising or to donate directly can visit [bit.ly/750-IFAKs](http://bit.ly/750-IFAKs).

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Johnny Gandelsman

MARCO GIANNAVOLA, COURTESY OF JOHNNY GANDELSMAN

# A violin virtuoso's musical take on the big issues

*Johnny Gandelsman will perform an anthology of music written in 2020, after he 'invited a wide array of American or U.S.-based composers to reflect on the current state of society in a personal and intimate way'*

**W**HEN Johnny Gandelsman performs at Next Stage Arts on Wednesday, Feb. 7, the Grammy award-winning violin virtuoso, composer, producer, and former member of the Silkroad Ensemble will perform works that respond to the turbulent and disconnected time of the early pandemic and the murder of George Floyd.

In his anthology, "This Is America: Part II," Gandelsman tackles big issues like Covid lockdowns, the push for racial justice in the aftermath of Floyd's death while in police custody, climate change, and divisive issues like the slogan, "Make America Great Again" in his anthology.

The performance is part of Gandelsman's year-long residency at Dartmouth College's Hopkins Center for the Arts ("the Hop"), which is co-presenting the program with Next Stage.

As described by its publicity materials, "This Is America: Part II" includes compelling new works as it "celebrates America's rich cultural tapestry through the eyes of contemporary composers."

Gandelsman "brings a wealth of



**VICTORIA CHERTOK** covers arts and entertainment in Vermont for The Commons. She is a classically trained harpist and received a B.A. in music at Bucknell University.

cultural influences to the stage," says Keith Marks, executive director of Next Stage Arts. "His ability to seamlessly blend genres is a testament to his artistry."

Over the course of his residency, he is performing the anthology and expanding the project with three new Hop-commissioned pieces. The winter concert features "Breathe," a composition by Kojiro Umezaki, commissioned by the Hop.

One of the pieces, "O," by Clarice Assad, directly responds to Floyd's murder. Program notes explain more:

"O, the symbol for Oxygen. As we withdrew from the social arena, we watched in horror [as] a newly discovered virus take down thousands of people from acute respiratory failure

■ SEE GANDELSMAN, B4

## Vermont Theatre Co. celebrates 40 years

BRATTLEBORO—Vermont Theatre Company (VTC) is proud to announce its 2024 season, its 40th year of providing the Brattleboro area with quality theater made by and for the community.

This year, say VTC organizers, they return to some of the troupe's lasting traditions while starting new ones.

- The season begins with their first-ever 24-Hour Play Festival. Four writers, four directors, and a cast of actors will have only 24 hours to write, rehearse, and perform four original short plays. It's a theatrical high-wire act that will celebrate the creativity of the Brattleboro area's theatermakers. Location: Evening Star Grange in Dummerston. Date: TBA

- In June, VTC will present its 33rd Shakespeare in the Park production, *The Tragedy of Julius Caesar*. Shakespeare's play tells the story of Roman senators as they face existential questions about democracy, loyalty,

■ SEE VTC 40TH, B4

## Gallery exhibits work of 18 artists: paintings, prints, ceramics, and sculpture

BRATTLEBORO—Mitchell-Giddings Fine Arts, 181-183 Main St., celebrates the new year with a large group exhibit, "18 Artists—44 Days," opening with an artist reception Saturday, Feb. 3, from 5 to 7 p.m.

The exhibition continues through March 17 and features a diverse selection of paintings, prints, ceramics and sculpture by Mucuy Bolles, Eric Boyer, David Brewster, Fran Bull, Bruce Campbell, Liz Chalfin, Willa Cox, Gay Malin, Emily Mason, Chuck Olson, Susan Osgood, Erika Radich, Donald Saaf, Deidre Scherer, Helen Schmidt, Cameron Schmitz, Jim Urbaska, and Dan Welden.

As described in a news release, ceramic artist Bolles's inscribed stoneware vessels speak to the artist's Mayan heritage. Printmaker Chalfin has created collaged prints as an intuitive response to the devastating rains of last summer.

As characters in Saaf's large, quilt-like painting, *Cherryfield*, stroll through their rural village, Malin's bronze figure, titled *What's Going On?* nervously peers ahead into 2024. *Neighborhood of Worries*, suggests Brewster's attempts to

■ SEE 18 ARTISTS, B4



"Hot Topic" by Emily Mason.

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# arts & community CALENDAR

THURSDAY	THURSDAY CONT.	FRIDAY	SATURDAY CONT.	MONDAY	TUESDAY CONT.	
<h1>1</h1>	<p><b>of their annual Photography Show with local photographer Nicki Steel:</b> Show highlights VT's countryside and way of life. From charming farms to woodland scenes and pieces featuring local wildlife in its natural habitat, this show is a visual journey through the unique character of VT's rural landscapes. It highlights VT's spirit of community with canvas prints and cards featuring the state's working landscapes and the natural wonders that surround it.</p> <p>► <b>10 a.m.-6 p.m. every day. Steel also has cards/enlargements from her Hearts in Nature series in honor of Valentine's Day. Note: cards, boxed sets, mini-mats, cards, matted and canvas prints available at prices honoring her commitment to making art available for every budget.</b></p> <p>► <b>Through Thursday, February 29.</b></p> <p>► <b>Show is free of charge.</b></p> <p>► <b>Bartleby's Books, 17 W. Main St. Information: 802-464-5425; myvermontbookstore.com.</b></p> <p><b>Ideas and education</b></p> <p><b>Artist Talk: Fawn Krieger and David B. Smith (Online only):</b> Curator Wendy Vogel leads conversation w/ multimedia artists Fawn Krieger and David B. Smith whose practices involve layering, colliding, collapsing physical materials/visual forms to reimagine ceramics and textiles. The artists will discuss their exploration of themes: association, attachment, relation, embodiment, perception. Their work raises questions about how our society views creative labor and generates new ideas for organizing/understanding the world.</p> <p>► <b>7 p.m. Krieger and Smith discuss their interest in relation, attachment, embodiment. This event is presented in connection with Fawn Krieger and David B. Smith: "Home Bodies".</b></p> <p>► <b>Free.</b></p> <p>► <b>Zoom. Information: Register to watch via Zoom: brattleboromuseum.org/2023/10/31/artist-talk-fawn-krieger-and-david-b-smith/.</b></p>	<h1>2</h1>	<p><b>Music</b></p> <p><b>BRATTLEBORO First Fridays at the Latchis Pub with The Woodpeckers:</b> The Woodpeckers play the high-spirited, danceable, good humored, joyful jazz of the 1920s. Ron Kelly tenor saxophone, Walter Slowinski clarinet, Mark Anagnostopulos rhythm guitar, Ty Gibbons bass. All sing.</p> <p>► <b>7:30 - 10 p.m.</b></p> <p>► <b>Free admission.</b></p> <p>► <b>Latchis Pub &amp; Latchis Underground, 6 Flat St. More info: orchardstreetpottery@gmail.com 802-380-1369.</b></p> <p><b>BRATTLEBORO An Evening with Hazelnuts:</b> Comfy classics guitar/keyboard duo.</p> <p>► <b>7 - 9 p.m.</b></p> <p>► <b>Free.</b></p> <p>► <b>River Garden Marketplace, 157 Main St. Information: rivergardenmarketplace.com.</b></p>	<h1>5</h1>	<p><b>Community building</b></p> <p><b>BRATTLEBORO Remembering the Ancestors: Celebration of Black History at Brooks Memorial Library:</b> Presented by local poet, story weaver, artist Djeli (formerly William Forchion) who offers a dynamic conversation about our shared history and intentionally stepping into the future and will include recent unpublished writings as well as readings from Djeli's previously published poems and essays.</p> <p>► <b>7 p.m. in Main Reading Room. Books will be available for sale and signing. Wheelchair accessible.</b></p> <p>► <b>Free.</b></p> <p>► <b>Brooks Memorial Library, 224 Main St. Information: 802-254-5290; brookslibraryvt.org.</b></p>	<h1>TUESDAY</h1>
<h1>Well-being</h1>		<h1>3</h1>	<h1>SATURDAY</h1>	<h1>6</h1>	<h1>TUESDAY</h1>	
<p><b>Guilford New Weekly Beginner Tai Chi Class:</b> A great opportunity for total beginners or those wanting to build on previous experience with fall prevention practice. Tai chi is an exercise system combining disciplined, graceful movements w/ invigorating sense of the body, mind, surrounding space. These slow movements contain great power. We try to coordinate hand/foot movements, breathing naturally, moving with slow continuous flow to improve strength, balance and posture.</p> <p>► <b>11:30 a.m.-12:15 p.m. All are welcome to come and try the class on Thursdays.</b></p> <p>► <b>No charge. Donations are welcome.</b></p> <p>► <b>Broad Brook Community Center, 3940 Guilford Center Rd. Information: No registration required. For more information, contact Guilford Cares: guilfordcaresvt@gmail.com, 802-579-1350.</b></p>		<p><b>Performing arts</b></p> <p><b>PUTNEY Sandglass Theatre and Doppelscope present Winter Sunshine's "The Amazing Story Machine":</b> The Grimm family unveils their new story which runs on steam and dreams and promises to revolutionize how stories are told and people connect. When their fabulous contraption malfunctions, they invent a new way of storytelling on the spot, using puppets and audience help. The Grimms explore favorite fairy tales including "The Hare and the Hedgehog," "Hansel and Gretel," "The Brave Little Tailor". Performed by Stoph Scheer, Shoshana Bass, and Mackenzie Doss. WHERE</p> <p>► <b>2 shows: 11 a.m. and 2 p.m. Each show is 45 minutes long. Co-produced by Sandglass Theater and Doppelscope.</b></p> <p>► <b>Sandglass Theater, 17 Kimball Hill. Information: 802-387-4051; sandglasstheater.org.</b></p>	<h1>Visual arts and shows</h1>	<p><b>Instruction</b></p> <p><b>BELLEWS FALLS Tech Time - hosted by Rockingham Free Library:</b> Join us in the Youth Programming room for one of our upcoming tech sessions this Winter to learn more about different applications and digital library resources. Today's program is "Love your Library's resources - Libby and Biblio+." Drop-in sessions are first come, first served. Providing your own personal devices is highly encouraged, however library laptops will be available for class use.</p> <p>► <b>2 p.m. "A different tech class will be held in the Youth Programming Room each Tuesday in February. Note: February is National Library Lovers' Month! Come love your library more by learning how to access eBooks, films, and television for free through our online library resources."</b></p> <p>► <b>Free.</b></p> <p>► <b>Rockingham Free Public Library, 65 Westminster St. Information: More info: Email reference@rockinghamlibrary.org, call 802-463-4270, go to rockinghamlibrary.org, stop by the library.</b></p>	<h1>7</h1>	
<p><b>Community building</b></p> <p><b>GUILFORD Celebrate the One-Year Anniversary of the Guilford Country Store:</b> The Board of Directors of Friends of Algiers Inc. extends its hearty congratulations to Ali, Wayne and the whole crew at the Guilford Country Store and Cafe for re-opening under their management and with their amazing re-visioning of what a community store can be. Reflecting their community spirit, the Board joins Ali and Wayne inviting our whole community to celebrate with us.</p> <p>► <b>6 a.m.-6 p.m. Celebrate at the Guilford Country Store all day long. Birthday-party coffee and cupcakes will be offered and, as always, the Store's great food will be available.</b></p> <p>► <b>Guilford Country Store, 475 Coolidge Hwy. (Rte. 5). Information: 802-490-2233.</b></p>		<p><b>Instruction</b></p> <p><b>WILLIAMSVILLE Rock River Players host Improvisation Training:</b> This open-to-the-public workshop is led by Burlington-based musician and actor Karlie Kauffeld. A Leland and Gray UHS and University of VT graduate, Kauffeld co-founded and directed Leland and Gray's Summer Performing Arts</p>	<h1>Visual arts and shows</h1>	<p><b>Visual arts and shows</b></p> <p><b>BRATTLEBORO Mitchell Giddings Fine Arts: 18 Artists - 44 Days - plus Opening and Artist Reception (In-Person/Online):</b> Exhibit features new and selected works by Mucy Bolles, Eric Boyer, David Brewster, Fran Bull, Bruce Campbell, Liz Chalfin, Willa Cox, Gay Malin, Emily Mason, Chuck Olson, Susan Osgood, Erika Radich, Donald Saaf, Deidre Scherer, Helen Schmidt, Cameron Schmitz, James Urbaska, and Dan Welden.</p> <p>► <b>2/3, 5-7 p.m.: Opening and Artist Reception.</b></p> <p>► <b>Through Sunday, March 17.</b></p> <p>► <b>Free.</b></p> <p>► <b>Mitchell-Giddings Fine Arts, 183 Main St. View exhibit online: https://mitchellgiddingsfinearts.com/18-artists-44-days/802-251-8290; mitchellgiddingsfinearts.com.</b></p>	<h1>WEDNESDAY</h1>	
<p><b>Visual arts and shows</b></p> <p><b>WILMINGTON Bartleby's Books celebrates 20th Anniversary</b></p>		<p><b>Visual arts and shows</b></p> <p><b>WILMINGTON Bartleby's Books celebrates 20th Anniversary</b></p>	<h1>Visual arts and shows</h1>	<p><b>Visual arts and shows</b></p> <p><b>WILMINGTON Bartleby's Books celebrates 20th Anniversary</b></p>	<h1>WEDNESDAY</h1>	

**Be Sure To Check Our Full Program Schedule @ brattleborotv.org**

**Jan. 29-Feb. 4 LOCAL PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS**

CHANNEL 1078 CHANNEL 1079

PLEASE NOTE NEW CHANNEL NUMBERS!

Here We Are - Brian D. Cohen, Artist: Mon 8p, Tues 3:15p, Wed 9p, Thurs 1:15p, Fri 7a, Sat 12:15p, Sun 5:15p	Brattleboro Selectboard Mtg. 1/30/24: Tues 6:15p (LIVE), Thurs 1p, Fri 6p, Sat 8:30a, Sun 12p
The World Fusion Show - Ep# 170 - Brian Shankar Adler: Mon 7:30a, Tues 8p, Wed 9a, Thurs 12:30p, Fri 5:30p, Sat 8p, Sun 6:30a	River Valleys Unified School District Board Mtg. 1/29/24: Wed 6p, Thurs 8:30a, Fri 12p
Brattleboro Reformer Presents Windham County's Got Talent 1/25/24: Thurs 9:15p, Fri 10a, Sat 2p, Sun 6p	Brattleboro Charter Revision Commission Mtg. 1/18/24: Tues 3p, Wed 6a, Thurs 6p
Couch Potatoe Productions - 78th Guilford Fair - Morning Events: Mon 10a, Tues 12:30p, Wed 3:30p, Thurs 9a, Fri 9:30p, Sat 10:30a, Sun 8p	Windham Elementary School School Board Mtg. 1/18/24: Tues 6:55a, Wed 8:30p, Thurs 3:30p
Deliberate Drift - 4: Untitled For Now: Mon 11:35a, Tues 1:45p, Wed 4:45p, Thurs 10:15a, Fri 7:35a, Sat 8:30p, Sun 9:15p	Guilford Selectboard Mtg. 1/22/24: Fri 9:15a, Sat 12p
Stained Glass Windows of St. Michaels - Week 10: St. Raphael: Mon 8:35p, Tues 6a, Wed 12:30p, Thurs 1:55p, Fri 6:25a, Sat 8:45p, Sun 9:30a	Jamaica Selectboard Mtg. 1/22/24: Wed 3:45p, Thurs 8:30p
Couch Potatoe Productions - Orchard Aid - Slow Pony: Tues 3:50p, Wed 11a, Thurs 2:30p, Sat 9:15p, Sun 10a	Vernon Selectboard Mtg. 1/23/24: Mon 5p, Tues 8a, Fri 8:30p, Sat 11a
Around Town With Maria - Jonas Fricke's Friends Remember Him 12/12/23: Mon 12:30p, Tues 9a, Wed 9:50p, Fri 5a, Sat 5p, Sun 9:30p	Townshend Selectboard Mtg. 1/23/24: Tues 4:25p, Wed 7:25a, Fri 9:30p
Brattleboro Area Chamber of Commerce - Annual Members Meeting 1/16/24: Mon 6a, Tues 10:25a, Wed 1p, Fri 4:30p, Sat 6:25p, Sun 4p	Windham Southeast School Board District Mtg. 1/23/24: Mon 12p, Wed 8:30a, Sun 6p
Energy Week with George Harvey & Tom Finnell: Mon 9a, Tues 5p, Thurs 11a, Sat 7p	Windham Central Supervisory Union Board and Exec. Comm. Mtg. 1/24/24: Mon 3:15p, Thurs 6a, Sun 9:15p
Vermontitude - Weekly Episode: Tue 11:30a & 6:30p, Wed 6a, Thu 1p, Sat 12p, Sun 5p	Newfane Selectboard Mtg. 1/16/24: Thurs 7:30p
News Block: WISA News: Mon-Fri 12p & 6p Reformer News Break: Mon-Fri 12:05p & 6:05p BUHS-TV News: Mon-Fri 12:15p & 6:35p	Marlboro Elementary School Board Budget Mtg. 1/11/24: Thurs 5p, Sat 6p
St. Michael's Episcopal Church - Weekly Service: Wed 2p, Sat 7:30a, Sun 11a	Brattleboro Housing Partnerships Board Mtg. 1/8/24: Tues 9p, Thurs 4:35p, Sat 8a, Sun 4:30
Trinity Lutheran Church - Weekly Service: Wed 10a, Thurs 7a, Sun 3p	West River Education District Board Mtg. 1/18/24: Tues 7:30p, Thurs 9:30p, Fri 2:30p
Guilford Community Church - Weekly Service: Wed 6:30a, Fri 8p, Sun 8a St. Michael's Catholic Church Mass: Sat 4p (LIVE), Tue 6:45a & 2p, Thurs 8p	Town Matters - Weekly Episode: Mon 6p, Wed 4:45p, Thurs 11a, Fri 11:30a, Sat 5p
St. Michael's Catholic Church Mass: Sat 4p (LIVE), Tue 6:45a & 2p, Thurs 8p	The David Pakman Show: Mon 8a, Tue 9a, Wed 5p, Fri 10:30a, Sun 5p

**Note: Schedule subject to change.**

View full schedule and watch online at **brattleborotv.org**

BCTV's Program Highlights are sponsored by **The Commons**. BCTV's municipal meeting coverage helps **Commons** reporters stay in touch. Read about it in the Town & Village section at [www.commonnews.org](http://www.commonnews.org).

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Scan here to visit [vtjazz.org](http://vtjazz.org)

To submit your event: [calendar@commonsnews.org](mailto:calendar@commonsnews.org)

Deadline: 5 p.m. Friday

## Sandglass Theater presents Winter Sunshine Series in February, with puppet shows for the whole family

PUTNEY—Sandglass Theater presents its annual Winter Sunshine Series this February. All are invited to come celebrate the magic and warmth of puppetry for young audiences with four sensational puppet companies from Massachusetts, Maine, Connecticut, and Vermont. Dedicated to serving children

and families through the art of puppetry, Sandglass will host a different live performance every Saturday at 11 a.m. and 2 p.m. throughout the month.

To join in the magic, 8- to 14-year-olds can attend Sandglass's own Puppet Camp taught by Jana Zeller during Windham County's winter break,

Feb. 19–24, from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. each day. This year's campers will create a version of *The Three Little Pigs*. Days will be filled with building marionettes, constructing set pieces and props, and rehearsing this old folktale.

The week will culminate in a show for family and friends on the final day. Participants are

encouraged to bring lunch and snacks. The camp will take place in Sandglass Theater's own space, 17 Kimball Hill, in downtown Putney.

Winter Sunshine's featured artists of 2024 perform at 11 a.m. and 2 p.m. every Saturday and include the following shows:

- Feb. 3 — *The Amazing Story Machine*, a co-production between Sandglass Theater and Doppelskope created by Ora Fruchter and Stoph Scheer. The Grimm family is on the verge of unveiling their amazing new Story Machine, which runs on steam and dreams and promises to revolutionize how stories are told and how people connect.

- Feb. 24 — *Isidor's Cheek* by Sandglass Theater. So begins the song, which begins the story, which begins the adventure: One day, something drives Isidor from his little gray existence. His cheek runs away, and Isidor must search around the world to find it again: a world of color and beauty, as well as loneliness and even danger. Inspired by a German children's book, this show was created by Ines Zeller Bass and will be performed for the first time by Jana Zeller, in whose hands the piece will have another life. Length of show: 45 minutes. Recommended audience: ages 4 and up.

- Feb. 10 — *The Legend of Banana Kid* by the Frogtown Mountain Puppeteers. Little Chucky heads to the Wild West to outwit outlaws in this cowboy adventure. With a fistful of bananas, Chucky rides into town on his trusty goat for a showdown with Big Bad Bart and his gang of bandits. *The Legend of the Banana Kid* features 20 handcrafted glove, mouth, and rod puppets, and a slew of flying and twirling styrofoam bananas. Length of show: about 45 minutes. Recommended audience: ages 4 and up.

- Feb. 17 — *Sleeping Beauty* by Tanglewood Marionettes. A classic tale that appeals to children of all ages, *Sleeping Beauty* begins in King Felix's great hall with the celebration of Princess Aurora's birth. The party goes awry when the wicked witch arrives and curses Princess Aurora. Will the curse come true? Will someone with a true heart appear? The audience will know when they see Tanglewood Marionettes' presentation of this best-loved tale.

In this retelling, a painted storybook opens to reveal each

## ATP hosts open auditions for Ten Minute Play Festival

BRATTLEBORO—The Actors Theatre Playhouse in West Chesterfield, New Hampshire, announces auditions for its first production of the 2024 season, the Ten Minute Play Festival, which runs for 10 performances Thursday, Friday, and Saturday evenings, June 6–24, with a matinee on Sunday, June 9.

Auditions will be held in the Brooks Memorial Library's Community Room on Monday, Feb. 5, from 6:30 to 8:30 p.m. and Saturday, Feb. 10, from 2 to 5 p.m.

Those interested in auditioning should contact Jim Bombicino at [jbombicino@comcast.net](mailto:jbombicino@comcast.net) or call/text 802-274-0503 to schedule an

appointment for auditions on either of those days or to make arrangements for a different time. In addition to casting for the 10 Minute Plays, actors may be considered for roles and production positions they seek to fill later in the season.

Those who would prefer a general audition and individual interview using their own prepared material can make arrangements to meet with directing and production staff by contacting Artistic Director Sam Pilo at [actorstheatre5@gmail.com](mailto:actorstheatre5@gmail.com).

Since the inception of ATP's Ten Minute Play Festival, organizers say they "are proud to have created many acting and directing

opportunities for seasoned actors and newcomers alike. Actor participation and enthusiasm are key to the success of the program, and we strive to cast actors of various experiences, ages, and types."

This year's Festival winners were selected from national submissions of more than 300 10 minute plays. Those making the final cut have gone through vigorous screening by ATP's team of readers and directors, and they look forward to bringing eight of them to production. Copies are available as PDF files for perusal.

At the audition, actors will be asked to read from sections of interest in the 10 minute plays or others. Those seeking roles may audition for as many as they like, and they may be cast in more than one play. They may be called back for a second appearance, particularly for considering a main stage or workshop production later in the season.

Rehearsals for the 10-minute plays will likely begin with a read through in March and rehearsals in May, with the most intensely scheduled rehearsal time being the three weeks prior to the opening. The directors this year are Wendy Almeida, Jim Bombicino, Rob Grey, Bob Kramsky, Sherman Morrison, Brenda Seitz, and Lin Snider. They will schedule rehearsals for their respective plays. Tech week for all is June 1–5.

For more information about the Actors Theatre, visit [atplayhouse.org](http://atplayhouse.org).

## Jazz Center launches semester of classes

BRATTLEBORO—The Vermont Jazz Center will offer learning opportunities open to the public for this winter and spring. Most sessions are 10 weeks long and begin the week of Feb. 11.

In-person courses include Youth Jazz Ensemble, Anna Patton's Soubrette Choir, Latin Jazz Ensemble, two levels of Claire Arenius's Blue Note Ensemble, two levels of Jazz Guitar Ensemble with Draa Hobbs, and a Samba Percussion Ensemble led by Julian Gerstin and Ron Kelley. Brian Shankar Adler will teach the Art of Rhythm online.

Interested music learners may join a combo or chorus and get involved with performing while being guided by one of the VJC's professional faculty members. For those who have never improvised, that's no problem. There are opportunities for all, including

classical musicians intrigued by jazz's structure and improvisational opportunities.

The classes will culminate with an afternoon of performances on Sunday, May 5, at 2 p.m., at the Jazz Center's performance space at Cotton Mill Hill.

Sessions are 10 weeks long, except the Youth Jazz Ensemble, which meets for 8 sessions; the Soubrette Jazz Choir, which meets for 12 sessions; and the Samba Percussion Ensemble, which is ongoing.

For class registration and work exchange questions, email [elsavjc@gmail.com](mailto:elsavjc@gmail.com). For questions regarding the Soubrette Choir, which begins on Feb. 6, contact Patton at [annameryl@gmail.com](mailto:annameryl@gmail.com). For information on private lessons or specifics about curriculum, contact Eugene Uman at [eugene@vtjazz.org](mailto:eugene@vtjazz.org).

## Tie up those loose threads with Darn It All! at RFPL

BELLOWS FALLS—Rockingham Free Public Library (RFPL) organizers ask, "Do you have a shirt missing a button, a favorite wool sock with a hole in it, or a tote bag with a loose handle? Don't we all?" They suggest there's no need for one to get rid of these items — or repair them all by their lonesome — when they can fix their things, or learn to do so, in the company of friends and neighbors.

Beginning on Saturday, February 3, the public is invited to bring projects and learn new skills at Darn It All!, a monthly mending bee at the RFPL, 65 Westminster Street in Bellows Falls. Darn It All! is from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. each first Saturday of the month.

Admission is free and open to all, regardless of residency in Rockingham; attendees age 16 and younger must be accompanied by a responsible adult. The library is ADA-compliant with appropriate ramps, restrooms, and an elevator.

Veteran menders who have

piles of books about the art of darning as well as those who have never threaded a sewing needle in their life, people of all skills — or none — are encouraged to attend.

Darn It All! is not only for those repairing their clothes and accessories; it's also for those who are knitting, sewing, or doing other fiber arts.

What Darn It All! isn't is a tailor shop. While skill-sharing and helping one another are features of these sessions, Darn It All! is strictly do-it-yourself, and each participant alone is responsible for their repairs. Likewise, there may be sewing tools to share, but it's best for folks to bring their own.

Darn It All! organizers and Bellows Falls residents, Lydia Daum and Wendy M. Levy, created this mending bee to provide a dedicated time to repair clothing and accessories to extend their use, to learn and share mending skills, and to do this in the company of new friends and old.

For more information, email Daum and Levy at [darnital@fastmail.com](mailto:darnital@fastmail.com).

## Nominations sought for Southern Vermont Emerging Leaders awards

BRATTLEBORO—The communities of Windham and Bennington counties are full of extraordinary individuals who are working to make a difference. The public is invited to help honor and celebrate the next generation of leaders (ages 21 to 40) by submitting a nomination for this year's Southern Vermont Emerging Leaders awards.

Nominations are due Friday, March 15, and can be submitted using a brief online form at [bit.ly/750-leaders](http://bit.ly/750-leaders).

Each year since 2018, the Southern Vermont Young Professionals (a program of Brattleboro Development Credit Corporation) and the Shires

Young Professionals have sought to highlight and honor young adults in their roles as leaders and change-makers in the southern Vermont economy and community through the Emerging Leaders awards.

More than 100 local leaders have been given an Emerging Leaders award since the beginning of the program, and 35 of those have subsequently been recognized statewide through *Vermont Business Magazine's* Rising Stars awards as well.

For more information, email Rachel Shields Ebersole at [rsebersole@brattleborodevelopment.com](mailto:rsebersole@brattleborodevelopment.com).

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FEBRUARY 2-8

**ARGYLLE** PG-13  
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SATURDAY 2:15 / 6:45 / 9:15  
SUNDAY 2:15 & 6:45  
MON.-THUR. 4:15 & 6:45

**AMERICAN FICTION** R  
FRIDAY 4:15 / 6:50 / 9:15  
SATURDAY 2 / 6:50 / 9:15  
SUNDAY 2 & 6:50  
MON.-THUR. 4:15 & 6:50

**ZONE OF INTEREST** PG-13  
FRI. & SAT. 4:15 / 6:45 / 9:15  
SUN.-THUR. 4:15 & 6:45

**THE BOY AND THE HERON** PG-13  
FRI. & SAT. 4:15 & 7:15  
SUNDAY 1:45  
MON.-THUR. 4:15

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## Something Sweet for Valentine's Day

Special section for advertisers in the February 7th issue of

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Hannah Morris

KELLY FLETCHER

## Vermont artist discusses her work at BMAC

BRATTLEBORO—The Brattleboro Museum & Art Center (BMAC) invites the public to join artist Hannah Morris, in person, on Thursday, Feb. 8, at 7 p.m. for a discussion of her work, which is on view in the exhibit “Moveable Objects” through April 30.

Enlarged images of several of Morris’s collage paintings are featured on the museum’s facade, visible to all who pass by, and the paintings themselves are on view inside the building. Morris’s work depicts lively scenes of community life: people hanging out in a

park or shopping at an outdoor market, for example. The inhabitants of the paintings are slightly abstract and off-kilter, but also humane and relatable.

“By capturing a moment of action and interaction in a kind of frozen, surreal choreography, I am exploring what it means to be interconnected in this fragile, impermanent human existence,” Morris says.

In her BMAC talk, Morris will reflect on that theme, as well as on her artmaking methods. She uses material pulled from lifestyle, craft, humor, and news magazines

from the 1940s to the 1970s to create an initial collage, and treats paint as an editing tool, working on top of the collage to distill the scene down to a focal point.

At the beginning of the process, Morris “looks for colors, gestures, and contexts that strike me,” she says. She then takes the source material and turns the outdated gender, race, and class norms of the era on their heads. “Who was left out reveals as much about American cultural history as who is included,” she notes. She curates, rearranges, and re-contextualizes the magazine scraps into new, inclusive narratives.

Morris was born and raised in rural Vermont. She studied art, writing, and documentary studies at Bates College in Maine and earned a master’s degree in Philosophy in Illustration (Visual Arts) from Stellenbosch University in South Africa. She now lives and works in Barre, Vermont.

Admission to the talk is free. Registering in advance is optional, and walk-ins are welcome. To register, visit [brattleboromuseum.org](http://brattleboromuseum.org) or call 802-257-0124, ext. 101.

nonalcoholic (NA) ticket is available, and every stop will have a nonalcoholic option for those who prefer it.

Participants can get their map stamped at each stop and, at the end of the night, turn in their completed maps at Harmony Collective to be entered into a drawing for a \$100 gift card to any of the participating shops or vendors. The winner will be announced Monday, Feb. 12, at noon.

Each year, the Luv Crawl offers a handmade, commemorative tasting glass for purchase in advance and on the night of the event. This year, the glasses are crafted by Fire Arts Studio (hand blown glass) and ZPOTS (ceramics).

Tickets may be purchased online, with a discount available until Thursday, Feb. 1. Tickets are also on sale on the night of the event at both of the starting points: River Garden Marketplace and the Latchis Hotel Lobby.

For more information and tickets, contact [brattleboro.com](http://brattleboro.com) or 802-257-4886.



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**NECCA**

## Gandelsman

FROM SECTION FRONT

every day. Some succumbed from complications of the disease, others for lack of respirators. Preventive measures required the whole of humanity to wear masks, to protect each other from an infection that could spread through the air.

“Soon after, another tragedy. This time, oxygen would take center stage and be violently obstructed, by force, from entering the lungs in George Floyd’s body, whose last words, ‘I can’t breathe,’ echoed through the four corners of the world, causing pain, anger, outrage. The air was thick with doubt and fear.”

Gandelsman was born in Moscow, by way of Israel, and moved to the U.S. in 1995. His father, Yuri, is a violist; his mother, Janna, is a pianist; and his sister, Natasha, is a violinist.

As a founding member of Brooklyn Rider and a former member of the Silkroad Ensemble, Gandelsman has worked with such luminaries as Béla Fleck, Martin Hayes, Kayhan Kalhor, Yo-Yo Ma, and Mark Morris.

As a concert soloist he has premiered dozens of new works and has released albums by The Knights, the Silkroad Ensemble, Brooklyn Rider, and others on his label, In a Circle Records, which he started in 2008.

In 2016, Gandelsman won a Grammy award for “best world music album” for co-producing the album by the Silkroad Ensemble, *Sing Me Home*.

Gandelsman, 45, spoke by phone from his home in New Paltz, New York recently and told *The Commons* how “This Is America: Part II” came about. We talked about where he studied violin and what he hopes the audience will take away from his upcoming performance.

**VICTORIA CHERTOK:** What was your vision for the anthology, and how did it come about?

**JOHNNY GANDELSMAN:** Every piece was commissioned by me from the composers. Each of the composers wrote that piece specifically for me for this project.

It came together in 2020 at the start of the pandemic. My family and I moved to New Hampshire for what we thought was going to be a few weeks, and we ended up staying for six months.

We were just observing what was happening in the world. I thought that it would be interesting to commission people to write new works and just reflect on that period of time.

I commissioned over 20 works for violin by American composers and composers who live in America, and this anthology is the result.

I’m an artist in residence at Dartmouth this year, and the Hop at Dartmouth is a great presenter. I’ve been there many times with different groups, and I’m very grateful to them.

This is the first time presenting the whole project, which is about four hours of music by one presenter across a season. It’s unusual and very cool!

[Dartmouth has] also commissioned three new works since the original anthology was created.

So three new works will be premiered specifically during this season, and that is very special.

**V.C.:** So every piece in this program is for solo violin.

**J.G.:** Yes, every piece is written for solo violin and some pieces have electronics that come with them.

**V.C.:** What do you hope the audience will take away with from the concert?

**J.G.:** This music was created during a specific period of time four years ago — a very volatile time, for many reasons. And revisiting these pieces, I’m remembering what it felt like to experience 2020 in isolation and how scared we were about what was happening — the Covid pandemic — and for the world, as a very volatile election was going on.

I’m hoping the audience will come in with open minds and open ears to hear something that ends up being memorable to them.

**V.C.:** When did you start playing the violin? Did you play any other instruments?

**J.G.:** I started playing when I was 5 years old. I never really questioned it for a long time. For this project I had to figure out how to play the guitar, but I don’t really play other instruments.

**V.C.:** What type of violin do you play?

**J.G.:** My violin was made by Samuel Zygmuntowicz in 2008 in Brooklyn, one of the premier instrument makers in the world. I’ve been playing it since it was made.

**V.C.:** Where did you study violin, and who were some of your teachers?

**J.G.:** I studied at the Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia, where I studied with Jascha Brodsky, Arnold Steinhardt, and Peter Oundjian.

**V.C.:** Lastly, how did the concert in Putney come about?

**J.G.:** I know Keith [Marks], as we have played there with Brooklyn Rider a few years ago. Every visit that I do at Dartmouth includes a concert somewhere in the community, and this time it’s at Next Stage and I’m really excited about it.

When we were there with Brooklyn Rider, it was a great crowd. I’m excited to see people at a live show. I think it will be really fun.

Johnny Gandelsman, Grammy award-winning violinist, performs “This Is America: Part II” at 7 p.m. on Wednesday, Feb. 7 at Next Stage Arts, 15 Kimball Hill, Putney.

Tickets ([nextstagearts.org](http://nextstagearts.org)) are \$20 (\$12, youth and student); \$10, current Dartmouth College students) for the live performance and \$10 to access a livestream.

Next Stage will provide a beer, wine, and cocktail cash bar.

For more information, call 802-387-0102 or visit [nextstagearts.org](http://nextstagearts.org).



COURTESY PHOTO

Palaver Strings returns to the Brattleboro Music Center on Feb. 2.

## Palaver Strings’ Beehive Chamber Series presents ‘Nightingale in a Tree’ at BMC on Feb. 2

BRATTLEBORO—Palaver Strings’ Beehive Chamber Series presents “Nightingale in a Tree,” Friday, Feb. 2, at 7 p.m. at the Brattleboro Music Center (BMC).

Palaver Strings welcomes Fredy Clue, a nyckelharpa player, composer, and multi-instrumentalist from Sweden. Clue

says their music takes inspiration from the forests, oceans, birds, and animals alike.

Joined by Maine’s Jamie Oshima, a guitarist, Palaver Strings will premiere Clue’s new arrangements for nyckelharpa and strings. It will pair Clue’s music with Philip Glass’s String Quartet No. 4, written

in memory of avant-garde artist Brian Buczak. “This three-movement work combines undulating arpeggios, soaring melodies, and rich harmonies to create a deep-rooted, whole-body experience,” say organizers.

Other performers will be Maya French and Katie

Knudsvig, violins; Elizabeth Moore, viola; and Timothy Paek, cello.

Tickets are \$20 in advance and \$25 at the door. They may be purchased through [bmcvt.org](http://bmcvt.org), by calling 802-257-4523, or by emailing [info@bmcvt.org](mailto:info@bmcvt.org).

## VTC 40th

FROM SECTION FRONT

and the consequences of political ambition.

*Julius Caesar* does not present the downfall of a single man but of a republic. It is a story that is perhaps more relevant now than it has ever been since Shakespeare wrote it. This production will be directed by Jessica Gelter and produced by Dawn Grobe. Location: Living Memorial Park

in Brattleboro. Dates: Thursday through Sunday, June 20–23.

• Once upon a time, VTC presented shows specifically produced for child audiences, though it has been many years since this program was active. VTC will close out its season by reviving its theatre-for-kids program with *Cyrano*, a three-actor show that tells the classic tale of Cyrano

de Bergerac, France’s greatest swordsman and poet.

*Cyrano* has longed to tell the beautiful Roxanne how much he loves her, but there is one thing in his way: his abnormally long nose. When Roxanne is enchanted by the handsome but dim-witted Christian, *Cyrano* takes on the task of teaching the fool how to woo her.

*Cyrano* will premiere at Retreat Farm before touring local schools in the fall. This production will be directed by James Gelter and produced by Jesse Tidd. Dates: Friday through Sunday, Aug. 9–11.

For more information about VTC and their upcoming shows, visit [vermonththeatrecompany.org](http://vermonththeatrecompany.org).

## 18 artists

FROM SECTION FRONT

“synthesize a 200-year-old tradition of American Scene Painting into a new breaking point of abstraction in order to make sense of an increasingly bizarre and incongruous synthetic landscape.”

The aptly titled carborundum monograph, *Hot Topic*, heralds Mason’s growing critical recognition as one of the art world’s premiere colorists, according to

Jackson Arn of *The New Yorker*, who says Mason is “an American genius, turning color into its own form of storytelling.”

Mitchell-Giddings Fine Arts is committed to presenting innovative, contemporary works that stimulate and challenge both the seasoned collector and aesthetic explorer, as well as hosting and promoting events aimed to

connect the community with its local and regional artists.

The gallery is open Thursday through Saturday, 11 a.m. to 5 p.m., and Sunday, noon to 5 p.m. For more information, contact 802-251-8290 or [info@mitchellgiddingsfinearts.com](mailto:info@mitchellgiddingsfinearts.com) or visit [mitchellgiddingsfinearts.com](http://mitchellgiddingsfinearts.com).

VIEWPOINT

# Vape cloud

As the Legislature is considering a ban on flavors in both cigarettes and e-cigarettes in Vermont, a prevention educator describes how some of these substances are created to hook users from a young age — for life

Brattleboro

**I**GATHER scientific information about nicotine products for the Vermont Department of Health's Tobacco Control Program. I also share the latest research about vapes with elementary and middle school students in Vernon, Putney, Dummerston, Guilford, and Brattleboro.

My responsibilities have expanded. I now offer cessation counseling with children as young as 11 — because that is the age at which vaping is starting in our towns here in southeast Windham County.

The first time I talked to elementary school students about vaping, I asked them what they thought it meant to be addicted to nicotine.

"The vape tastes so good, you don't want to stop," one student replied in what would be a common response to this question.

Laughing, another student said, "My mom says she is a chocoholic."

"It's like that Cheetos ad," said a third, presumably referring to a TV spot where a guy looks at the camera and confesses his extreme addiction to the snack food.

These impressions on young minds are borne out by statistics.

■ SEE VAPE CLOUD, C2

**ROLF PARKER-HOUGHTON** is program coordinator with Building a Positive Community, which offers programs that serve youth and families, including substance-use prevention, though he has written this piece as a concerned private citizen and not in his official capacity.

Parker-Houghton helps health care professionals get the information they need to help people sign up for smoking cessation classes. He also works with people who are addicted to nicotine to help find the help they need. He also works with interns and volunteers to document how corporations market, distribute, and sell nicotine products to young people.

He notes that he will be working on Wednesdays, starting at 5 p.m., at Brooks Memorial Library in Brattleboro, "tracking down information about sales targeted at children in Vermont." Interns and volunteers are welcome to join in this work.

"Information that we gather can be used to close down internet sellers who sell without age verification and try to ship products to Vermont," he continues. "It's good work, and I hope some readers might be able to join me."

For more information, contact Parker-Houghton at [phrr.newengland@consultant.com](mailto:phrr.newengland@consultant.com).

VIEWPOINT

## Planting the seeds to fine-tune our democracy

*The task of influencing the voting public to value facts and logic is, at times, disheartening. Yet, it is too critical to abandon.*

Brattleboro

**T**HE WORDS OF Ben Franklin at the signing of our Constitution in 1787 — "A republic, if you can keep it," his response to the question, "What have we got, a republic or a monarchy?" — have never held more meaning.

Keeping our democracy in good working order is always a work in progress. For that reason, I have often wondered why some people disregard facts and logical reasoning when making critical decisions such as how to vote in a federal election.

I have done so myself at times — perhaps when the stakes did not seem as high as they are today. It may be tempting to attribute this to stubbornness or a lack of

**JIM FREEDMAN** is a leadership consultant whose latest book, published in 2020, is *Becoming a Leader: Identity, Influence, and the Power of Reflection*.

information, but the reality is far more complex.

Every individual's reasoning is informed by a collection of experiences, beliefs, and emotions. It is tempting to dismiss the perspectives of those with whom we disagree.

Doing so would undermine the very principles of the democratic society we aspire to be. That includes the freedom to hold and express diverse opinions — even those

■ SEE DEMOCRACY, C3

LEGISLATIVE UPDATE



MICHELLE BOS-LUN COURTESY PHOTO

OnPoint NYC has reversed 636 overdoses.

## The time has come for overdose prevention centers

Our state needs to take new steps to support survival and recovery for individuals who struggle with substance use disorder. The House has approved a bill to establish two OPCs in Vermont as a pilot project.

Westminster

**O**N DEC. 29, I LEFT MY HOUSE AT 4:45 A.M. AND HEADED TO HARLEM WITH TWO LEGISLATIVE COLLEAGUES, REP. TRISTAN ROBERTS (D-HALIFAX) AND SEN. TANYA VYHOVSKY (P/D-CHITTENDEN-CENTRAL DISTRICT) FOR A VISIT TO THE ONPOINT NYC, THE ONLY OVERDOSE PREVENTION CENTER IN THE U.S., WITH TWO LOCATIONS IN NEW YORK CITY (THOUGH MULTIPLE OTHER LOCATIONS ARE ABOUT TO OPEN IN OTHER STATES).

Dr. Ashwin Vasan, commissioner of the New York City Department of Health & Mental Hygiene, has said about the work of

**MICHELLE BOS-LUN** is a second-term member of the Vermont House of Representatives, co-representing the Windham-3 district, which includes her hometown of Westminster as well as Rockingham and Brookline.

OnPoint: "The facts are clear — overdose prevention centers save lives. Overdose prevention centers are an evidence-based approach to harm reduction we must authorize, invest in, and expand to combat our overdose epidemic."

I did not know what I would find at OnPoint, but I wanted to learn more. I knew that a vote to establish two programs in Vermont was pending in the Legislature and that I needed more information.

VERMONT HAS A VERY HIGH PER-CAPITA RATE OF DEATH DUE TO OPIOID OVERDOSES — A RATE THAT HAS QUADRUPLED IN THE 10 YEARS THAT HAS PASSED SINCE OUR THEN-GOVERNOR DEDICATED HIS ENTIRE STATE OF THE STATE SPEECH TO THE OPIOID CRISIS.

For much of 2023, after the Legislature adjourned, I did social services work with

■ SEE OPCs, C2



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## ■ Vape cloud

The following text is included in a bill (S.18) passed by the state Senate and under consideration by the House:

• *Youth tobacco use is growing due to e-cigarettes. Seven percent of Vermont high school students smoke, but if e-cigarette use is included, 28 percent of Vermont youths use some form of tobacco product. More than one in four Vermont high school students now uses e-cigarettes. Use more than doubled among this age group, from 12 percent to 26 percent, between 2017 and 2019. [This is the language in the bill, but I have to note that many popular brands of vapes have no tobacco in them of any kind, and TFN, or tobacco-free nicotine, is very popular among vapers, who are proud to not be tobacco users. They know you are wrong if you insist that they are using tobacco.]*

• *More students report frequent use of e-cigarettes, which indicates possible nicotine addiction. According to the 2019 Vermont Youth Risk Behavior Survey, 31 percent of Vermont high school e-cigarette users used e-cigarettes daily, up from 15 percent in 2017.*

• *Flavored products are fueling the epidemic. Ninety-seven percent of youth e-cigarette users nationally reported in 2019 that they had used a flavored tobacco product in the last month, and 70 percent cited flavors as the reason for their use. E-cigarette and e-liquid manufacturers have marketed their products in youth-friendly flavors, such as gummy bear, birthday cake, candy cane menthol, and bubble gum.*

• *Mint- and menthol-flavored e-cigarettes are increasing in popularity among youths. Over the past few years, mint and menthol went from being some of the least popular to being some of the most popular e-cigarette flavors among high school students. Evidence indicates that if any e-cigarette flavors remain on the market, youths will shift from one flavor to another. For example, after Juul restricted the availability of fruit, candy, and other e-cigarette flavors in retail stores in November 2018, use of mint and menthol e-cigarettes by high school users increased sharply, from 42.3 percent reportedly using mint and menthol e-cigarettes in 2017 to 63.9 percent using them in 2019.*

This bill “proposes to ban the retail sale of flavored cigarettes, e-cigarettes, and e-liquids. It would expand the applicability of provisions relating to the seizure and destruction of contraband tobacco products to include contraband e-cigarettes, e-liquids, and tobacco paraphernalia.”

It “would also direct the Office of the Attorney General to report on the extent to which Vermont may legally restrict advertising and regulate labels for e-cigarettes and other vaping-related products.”

STUDENTS UNDERSTAND that nicotine addiction can cause a person to have highly unpleasant withdrawal symptoms. High school students have

reported that they have seen friends suffering from anxiety while trying to stop. Those who had parents or grandparents who tried to quit have described how these family members got irritable with them — and anxious.

“It wasn’t pretty,” one student said.

Nicotine addiction is a harm all by itself — independent of the other harms (and there are many) that come from cigarettes and vapes.

But in another way, addiction is about the flavors. Many of the chemicals that cigarette and vaping companies commonly use — menthol, acetates, and pyrazines — don’t just taste good, they are known by scientists to alter neurons in the brain so that the nicotine addiction is potentially much stronger.

As a result, for some people quitting can become that much harder and emotionally painful.

According to the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, menthol’s sweet and cool flavor is on the list of the most popular flavors with kids. More than half (57.9%) of students currently using e-cigarettes reported using flavors with “ice” or “iced” in the name.

According to the research of Duke University researcher Dr. Sven Eric Jørdt, menthol enhances nicotine addiction in more than one way.

“Menthol reduces the irritation sensed when inhaling smoke (or nicotine in a vape aerosol) and can increase the amount of nicotine a person takes into their system and metabolizes.”

Putting it a different way, nicotine causes a harsh feeling in the throat, and menthol blocks that harsh feeling. Menthol and some other synthetic cooling agents allow new users to suck the nicotine cloud deeper into their lungs without coughing.

The deeper down a user — frequently, a child — sucks a vape cloud of nicotine without coughing, the more easily and strongly addicted they can potentially become.

But aside from allowing the deep inhale, there is another way menthol and flavorings can help hook kids before they even know it.

“Menthol and chemical flavors that contain acetates can increase the number of receptors in the brain that bind to nicotine,” said Dr. Brandon Henderson, Neuroscience and Developmental Biology Research Cluster coordinator at the John C. Edwards School of Medicine at Marshall University, in an email.

“They contribute to making quit attempts more difficult,” said Henderson, who identified four acetates that create nicotine receptors in people who ingest these additives.

THE YOUNG PEOPLE I work with don’t know that tobacco companies have a long and well-documented history of adding chemicals to work with

FROM SECTION FRONT

nicotine.

Hillel R. Alpert and his then-colleagues at the Harvard School of Public Health analyzed millions of tobacco company documents, and discovered that the tobacco company Phillip Morris — now renamed Altria — found a special group of chemicals called pyrazines.

According to Dr. Henderson, pyrazines connect strongly to specific parts of neurons in the brain that are related to nicotine addiction, and it is not fully understood how they might be promoting addiction. But according to Alpert, the company chemists referred to their mix of additives, including three pyrazines, as “Super Juice.”

In this 2015 paper, Alpert called for additives and ingredients that “promote addiction by acting synergistically with nicotine” to be regulated by the FDA.

A DECADE LATER, it appears little to nothing has been done to keep addiction enhancers out of nicotine products.

The FDA has, on paper, banned all flavors in disposable vape products, and the agency has not given market approval to menthol versions of products by the R.J. Reynolds Tobacco Company (which makes Camel cigarettes and Vuse vapes) or Altria (which makes Marlboro cigarettes and sells NJOY menthol vapes).

But those menthol products remain on the shelves of convenience stores and available online, and they will for years, because companies routinely appeal FDA decisions. Litigation can take many years, and the agency has lost cases when pro-industry and anti-regulatory, conservative judges have weighed in.

The makers of Marlboros spent \$2.75 billion in 2023 on NJOY, so that company seems pretty confident that they are going to continue selling those menthol pods for a long time.

Meanwhile, the FDA is not requiring vape manufacturers to disclose the chemicals they use on the packages that come into Vermont.

So my University of Vermont college interns, volunteers, and members of the non-profit organization Parents Against Vaping E-Cigarettes ([parentsgainstvaping.org](http://parentsgainstvaping.org)) purchased vapes so we could find out what might be in them — and so I could give that information to my students and the public.

FOR TESTING, we chose some of the most popular brands among young people: Vuse and Elf Bar.

Even though Vuse GO vapes are not supposed to be available for sale in the U.S., we included this brand because it comes in many “Ice” flavors, like “Banana Ice.” Also, it took my volunteers only eight minutes to find and purchase this product online, where it was available without age verification, from at least one company authorized by Reynolds to sell its products.

We also purchased menthol-flavored devices like Vuse and NJOY and Vuse Solo menthol at stores in Montpelier and in other cities in other states.

Finally, we purchased “Tobacco” flavored NJOY out of curiosity to see what chemical flavorings were actually used.

I gave the devices to the Vermont Department of Health, which shipped them for testing to the laboratory of Dr. Robert Strongin, a former industrial and medicinal chemist, at Portland State University, where among his research interests is the study of electronic cigarettes.

In the Vuse Go products, we were looking for these flavorings and also artificial cooling agents.

Of course, we were not surprised to find menthol in the NJOY and Vuse Solo menthol products, both of which also included an acetate that Dr. Henderson’s lab has documented as potentially increasing the power of nicotine.

In fact, all the devices we sent to Dr. Strongin’s lab that were tested included one or more potentially addiction-enhancing chemicals ([pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/36328460](https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/36328460)), whether acetate flavors of some kind, or menthol, or pyrazines.

Pyrazines were the least common in the devices tested so far, but the “tobacco-flavored” vapes have not been tested yet. Other researchers have found pyrazines in other brands marketed as tobacco, so we will have to see what we find in the NJOY tobacco at some point in the future.

Whether the concentrations of these chemicals were high enough to potentially achieve this effect is a question that

## ■ OPCs

individuals who lacked permanent housing. Through my work and other community experiences, I know many Vermonters who struggle with substance use.

As a legislator, I have heard from concerned family members that the state needs to do more. I believe our state needs to take new steps to support survival and recovery for individuals — including many individuals I have worked with — who struggle with substance use disorder.

Adequate resources have not been available to help people like one man I had many conversations with this summer — someone who wanted to testify about supporting individuals with opioid use disorders when the Legislature resumed. He died before we returned to Montpelier.

Vermont needs to do better for our residents who struggle with these challenges.

CURRENTLY, VERMONT HAS ONLY TWO FACILITIES WHERE INPATIENT SUBSTANCE USE DISORDER TREATMENT IS AVAILABLE. IT USUALLY REQUIRES A LONG WAIT TO GET ADMITTED, AND RESIDENTIAL PROGRAMS RARELY RUN FOR LONGER THAN TWO WEEKS, AFTER WHICH PEOPLE ARE RETURNED TO THE STREETS OR TO THE HOMES THEY LIVED IN BEFORE TREATMENT — WHICH OFTEN ARE PLACES WHERE ACTIVE SUBSTANCE USE IS ONGOING.

“Existing treatment options are insufficient — particularly if we do not keep our friends and neighbors alive long enough to access treatment when they are ready. We urgently need to pursue additional, commonsense strategies that can save lives today,” Falko Schilling, advocacy director for the ACLU, shared in a recent letter to legislators.

What is an overdose prevention center? The site I visited was a multipurpose center with a multitude of services in the same complex.

The facility had a drop-in center, which provided three meals per day, a place to bathe and get mail, psychiatric services, basic medical care, and referrals, holistic health care (acupuncture and massage), materials to test drugs, and sterile syringes and supplies.

A relatively small portion of the building was devoted to one room where individuals could use substances in a supervised setting (and, if needed, they could receive treatment if an overdose were to occur).

Many of the staff at the site are former clients at the facility. It is a place for individuals who have struggled with substances to get support to stabilize their lives and to give them time to recover and help others.

OnPoint opened its OPC

merits deeper study. For now, people need to know about this potential risk, especially given tobacco companies’ past record of intentionally — and secretly — making their tobacco products more addictive.

As for which coolants are being used in the Vuse Go “Icy Flavors,” Dr. Strongin’s lab identified only one so far, and that is a synthetic compound known as Wilkinson Sword 23, or WS23 for short. This chemical was in every one of the Vuse Go products and also in the Elf Bar.

That remains a mystery. None of the six common synthetic substances known from other researchers to be used in vapes was identified by Dr. Strongin’s lab.

Scientific publications by researchers in other labs have already documented addiction-enhancing chemicals in many vape products, but some of these papers don’t list the brands and the chemicals that are used, instead anonymizing them with terms like “Brand A.”

Neither the FDA nor the industry is sharing this information. I’ve started collecting it into what will eventually be a large table to match devices with the chemicals that make them potentially more addictive, so I can eventually share that information with my students and with the public.

For now, I merely warn students that many flavorings are actually chemicals that can potentially harm their brain, and can potentially make the painful feeling of addiction stronger.

These results come from a single sample for each type of device we tested, so we cannot be sure that they accurately represent what is in all similar devices from each brand. But



MICHELLE BOS-LUN/COURTESY PHOTO  
**Individuals can use substances in a supervised setting (and, if needed, they can receive treatment if an overdose were to occur).**

in 2021 and in its first year of operation reversed 636 overdoses. In only 23 of these instances was it necessary to involve EMS or transport to the hospital.

In New York, each overdose transport costs the state over \$30,000 between transport, emergency department services, and other charges. The 636 individuals whose lives were saved at OnPoint also saved New York close to \$2 million in transport and ED costs.

Vermont’s costs would be different, but OPCs will lighten the load of our EMS responders. The funds to support these centers will come from opioid settlement funds, not taxpayer dollars. The drug companies that contributed to creating this problem will help fund one path to survival and recovery.

SEEING PEOPLE USING DRUGS UNDER SUPERVISION FELT UNCOMFORTABLE FOR ME, BUT I WAS GRATEFUL TO KNOW THAT IT MEANT THAT THEY WERE NOT USING DRUGS ALONE, ON THE STREETS OR ELSEWHERE, AND THAT THEY COULD GET HELP IN A MYRIAD OF WAYS.

Painted on the wall of the room used for overdose prevention, was a message: “This site saves lives.”

It does. Every day.

I believe that it is time for Vermont to follow our neighbor to the north: Canada opened North America’s first overdose prevention center in Vancouver nearly 10 years ago; now, 39 of them are spread across that country.

Globally, more than 200 overdose prevention centers have opened in 14 countries since the first site in 1986 in Switzerland.

since pyrazines, acetates, and menthol increase the potential for addiction, I found their consistent presence in our tiny sample disturbing.

We plan, of course, to continue to test vapes from Vermont and continue to publish which brands are selling vapes with chemicals that potentially enhance how addictive they are.

I KNOW THAT the students I talk to are going to hear a lot of false information about nicotine, flavors, and harms after I leave the classroom.

Tobacco and vaping companies pay for some of the research that is published on flavors, though some journals refuse to print their “science.”

According to an article in *Preventive Medicine* by Charlotta Pisinger and her colleagues, “Almost all papers with no conflict of interest found that e-cigarettes had a potentially harmful effect on health, while <8% of studies performed by the tobacco industry reported potential harm.” That’s an astonishingly strong impact of the conflict of influence.

I show one slide from this article to children, which makes a picture of this fact about the science that they can trust versus supposed science that they cannot.

And I ask them if they understand what the graph means, and most of them do.

“They are lying,” one student said.

SOME PEOPLE talk about how legislation that is designed to fight this epidemic of youth nicotine addiction infringes on the freedom for adults to purchase flavored vapes.

But arguments about freedom leave out how the

FROM SECTION FRONT

The international data is clear: OPCs save lives and lead people to recovery.

WE NEED TO DEVELOP OPTIONS TO HELP INDIVIDUALS WHO LIVE WITH SUBSTANCE USE DISORDER TO HAVE THEIR LIVES SAVED IN VERMONT, TOO.

Criminalization of mind-altering substances has not worked. Prohibition didn’t work in the 1930s. The War on Drugs hasn’t worked, and we’ve been trying it since the 1980s.

The criminalization of drugs and drug users fills our incarcerative facilities, causes long delays in our court systems, and rarely gives people the support or opportunities that enable them to recover.

We need to help and support people — not arrest them for substance use struggles.

Overdose prevention centers help people survive, connect with resources, and build skills that support their transition from active substance use disorder to recovery.

At OnPoint, we met an individual who had received harm reduction services there in the ’90s. He got sober and has now worked as a staff member for over 20 years.

Many stories like his were shared with us as we toured the facility and met staff and clients.

A BILL — H.72 — TO EXPLORE THIS MODEL IN VERMONT PASSED THE HOUSE ON JAN. 10 WITH STRONG SUPPORT. IF PASSED, IT WILL DESIGNATE TWO PILOT PROJECTS IN THE STATE.

The bill has moved on to the Senate for consideration.

It’s time to try a new, globally proven route to save and transform lives here in Vermont.

companies, by selling nicotine products that use these flavors and other additives, get people painfully addicted to products they later want to stop using — but can’t.

Corporations that mix the nicotine in cigarettes and vapes with these flavors offer painful chemical dependency, not freedom.

The FDA has attempted to ban flavors, including menthol, from vape products, and the agency says it is going to ban them from menthol cigarettes, but because of appeals and lawsuits, that hasn’t come to pass — and maybe it never will.

That leaves state regulation. In Vermont, we made sending vapes in the mail illegal, because that is one way companies like Juul were getting their products to children.

In Vermont, the Attorney General’s Office has collected large settlements from multiple online sellers that were selling vape products and sending them here.

That illegal behavior is still practiced by some bad apples, but the Vermont AGO has the power to tackle only that part of the problem because our legislators made such shipping illegal.

As a citizen of Vermont, I believe we need to give our AGO the power to go after any corporation that mixes menthol and other flavors with nicotine. That also goes for the synthetic coolants that allow people to suck the nicotine, along with other toxins, deeper into their lungs.

Then our AGO’s office can continue to do the excellent work it has already achieved by stopping many internet sales to children.

We can make a mad world somewhat better, and we should try to do so.

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LETTERS FROM READERS

'A mendable stitch to bolster our common fragile social fabric of a shared community'

Abenaki and non-Abenaki at the Living Earth Action Group-sponsored gathering in Westminster West Jan. 21 exemplified "community" in the broadest of terms.

groups is but a prominent, resilient fruit of the ordained goals of a distant few. Yet, there was a latent, more powerful fruit that might bloom.

These recent discussions demonstrated to me that healing for these common wounds comes truly from mutual respect for all segments of community at the local level — from the literal and metaphorical "grassroots" who defy division's destructive lava flow and bring hope for a renewed community where all continue to respect the place we dwell and all people around us.

At this gathering, Abenaki and non-Abenaki together completed here a mendable stitch to bolster our common fragile social fabric of a shared community now.

David Mulholland Westminster West

Brattleboro becoming a site for an overdose prevention center (OPC).

This touches close to my heart, because for many years, I lived in fear of receiving a phone call that my brother had died from an overdose.

That is not an experience I would wish on anyone. However, it has fundamentally shaped the way I now understand people who struggle with addiction.

The world can be a hard and unforgiving place, and we all find our own ways to cope. Addiction does not discriminate, nor is it a moral failing. Rather, it is a symptom of a larger issue of the systemic oppression we collectively face.

We should come together as a community to support one another in all of the ways we can,

especially in effort to prioritize harm reduction.

I fully agree that "[n]o one should die from a preventable overdose. Overdose prevention centers save lives. They are a much-needed response to the unprecedented numbers of Americans dying from an overdose. OPCs reduce overdose death and connect people to ongoing care (drugpolicy.org)."

An OPC would be a welcome addition to our community in an effort to make it safer for everyone, and to do everything we can to prevent someone, like myself, from losing their loved one to a preventable overdose.

Hannah Sorila Brattleboro

Crossing a fine line

RE: "Letter values fear of antisemitism 'above Palestinian lives that have been taken by Israel's genocide'" [Letters, Jan. 24]:

It's mighty presumptuous to tell the members of the Brattleboro Area Jewish Community they are demonstrating "white fragility" when expressing their fears in the current political environment.

I believe equating the slogans of "Black Lives Matter" and "From the River to the Sea" and the movements behind them is a false equivalency.

BLM is positive, life-affirming, and inclusive. FTRTTS is negative, hateful, and exclusive.

Israel's attacks on Hamas in Gaza are horrific, overreaching,

clumsy, vengeful, and probably illegal, but they are not genocidal in origin or, I believe, intent. Hamas and its supporters' attacks on Israel and Jews are expressly exactly that.

Palestinians and Israelites (the latter many returned from voluntary emigration after being driven out of Europe and elsewhere as well as involuntary exile by Arabs earlier in the last century) are indigenous people of the eastern Mediterranean region who have been pitted against each other by imperialist nations of the East and West. They may have more in common than not.

To be anti-Zionist and not be antisemitic is to walk a fine line. Too often too many cross it.

Jean Anne Kiewel Brattleboro

OPC would let loved ones get help without stigma

As a social worker who lives in Brattleboro, I fully support our town becoming a site for an overdose prevention center (OPC).

For nearly 10 years, I have worked as a health educator and then as a social worker with teenagers grappling with the devastating effects of addiction and recovery on their parents, aunts, uncles, siblings, beloved community members, friends, and chosen family.

A through-line message that I have heard over and over from these youth: If it were up to me, I would create a treatment center here in my community.

I would make sure that it would be a comfortable place without any judgment so that people struggling with addiction wouldn't fear getting the help they need.

Internationally, safe injection sites have reduced the risk of overdose (bit.ly/750-opc), death, and the spread of infectious diseases. They have increased public safety and decreased public drug injection or nuisance.

Sites link people to medical care, expedite social services that help them quit using, and aim to reduce the stigma associated with drug use that often prevents people from seeking help.

Liem Berman Brattleboro

OPC would help us support one another by saving lives

As an employee who works in downtown Brattleboro, and as a sibling who has watched their brother struggle through addiction and recovery, I am hopeful about the conversations beginning around

Democracy

FROM SECTION FRONT

with which we are at the greatest odds.

Engaging with voters who dismiss facts and logic in the lead-up to an election is a daunting task, yet it is one that holds significant implications for the future of our republic. This challenge doesn't just call for extraordinary patience, compassion, and communication skills; it must also be grounded in realistic expectations.

It is perplexing to me when individuals support candidates who embody the opposite of the respect and understanding that we would expect and demand from our own children.

How do you engage productively with those whose political allegiance lies with public figures who try to rewrite history and reality — who dispute who won the last election or question whether space lasers cause forest fires?

THE CHALLENGE HERE is not to validate disrespect but to engage in a dialogue that can rise above personal affinities and focus on substantive issues such as economic security, affordable health care, and defensible borders.

Recent history has shown that the politics of "attack and defend" leads only to more division, polarization, and disunity.

Cultivating critical thinking in an era of "alternative facts" is an arduous task, according to scholars starting as far back as Socrates. It is a problem for the ages.

We know from experience that questions like "What makes you believe that?" are often met with resistance, but these questions remain vital. They may sow the seeds of doubt that can sprout critical

self-reflection. The challenge is to plant these seeds without malice and nurture them with patience and persistence.

ENCOURAGING THE exploration of reliable information resources is a responsibility we all share. While it may seem overwhelming, the effort to introduce credible sources and debunk misinformation is an incremental battle, where every mind opened, even slightly, is a victory.

The task of influencing the voting public to value facts and logic is, at times, disheartening. Yet, it is too critical to abandon.

Therefore, in the interest of forging realistic expectations, I believe our immediate focus needs to shift from trying to change the minds of the immovable extremes. I am no longer interested in knowing the size of any candidate's "base."

Rather, we must engage with the persuadable middle — the 30% or so whose votes are not yet predetermined. It is in this middle ground where dialogue, evidence, and empathy may yet take hold and make a difference.

It is unsettling to consider the stakes of the upcoming election and the influence of the undecided minority. But it is this very gravity that motivates the need for continued and sustained effort.

For the sake of our democratic institutions, we all must strive to engage as many voters as possible, fostering a more-informed public and, ultimately, a stronger, more-representative republican democracy.

We are and always will be trying to become a "more perfect union." That is surely a goal worth pursuing.

THE COMMONS CROSSWORD

JOON PAHK

"Falling Leaves"

Across

- 1. Paper bundle
6. Handle roughly
10. Rapids craft
15. Picket line crosser
19. "Revelations" choreographer Alvin
20. 100 percent up front?
21. Holder of the skies
22. Concern
23. Donation to the needy
25. Boxer
27. Single number?
28. Lincoln or Ford
29. Disgraced VP Agnew
30. Hawkeye
31. More righteous
33. Something to study for
34. "Tiny tots with their eyes all ..."
35. Iconic London cathedral
38. 2006 Kevin Smith sequel
41. Surrounded by
43. Read through
44. Letter opener?
45. Close associate
47. "Nick of Time" singer Bonnie
48. Body of water in Exodus
50. Actress Ward
51. Novel
52. Story progression
53. Glasses, informally
55. First line of a wedding rhyme
58. Stir-fry vessels
60. Is \_\_\_ (likely will)
62. LBJ biographer Robert
63. "Such a shame"
67. Brazilian president
68. Basketball coach
69. Small denomination
71. Metallic fabric
72. Tablet peripherals
74. Part of 5-Down
76. Bills
77. Turns down
78. 1971 British film about Tchaikovsky
81. Retained
83. \_\_\_ Moines
84. Einstein's I
87. Mined materials
88. Mild British oath
90. Top-notch
92. Like a straight line?
94. Scent
95. Dee of Twisted Sister
96. One opposed
97. Break in a trip
101. Emotional affinity
102. Start a point
104. Painter Magritte
105. Bible book with chapters
107. Main artery
108. \_\_\_ den Linden (Berlin boulevard)
109. Jekyll's counterpart
110. Shaggy Himalayan cattle
114. Tricky puzzles
116. German soccer powerhouse
118. "Adam \_\_\_" (George Eliot novel)
119. Unsettling
120. Friend, in France
121. Jazz singer Carmen
122. "Beware the \_\_\_ of March"
123. So far
124. Once around the sun
125. Havens

Crossword grid with numbers 1-125 indicating starting points for across and down clues.

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Down

- 1. Anatomical pouches
2. Cheery greeting
3. Israeli carrier
4. Balloonist
5. "Just a heads up," for short
6. Ski slope bumps
7. Slightly
8. Like some errors
9. Happening, as a party
10. Megan Thee Stallion, for one
11. In jeopardy
12. Acts romantically playful
13. Lipton subsidiary
14. Dir. opposite NNW
15. Academic
16. Selina Kyle's alter ego
17. Regional
18. Swiss capital
24. \_\_\_ leaf
26. \_\_\_ leaf
29. Two-channel
32. Boots from office
34. Garlicy condiment
35. Falls awkwardly
36. Remove from a notebook
37. Irritable
39. Sudeikis title role
40. Women's Olympic sport since 1998
42. Drops on the lawn?
44. Skillful
46. "Pirates of the Caribbean: Dead \_\_\_ Chest"
48. It settles a debt
49. "Better Call Saul" network
50. One who runs out of habit?
54. Gentle touch
56. Comfort
57. \_\_\_ leaf
59. Shaker contents
61. Greek T's
64. Tied the knot
65. Indicator of current
66. Final course, often
70. Baking soda
73. Waffle House rival
75. Such a shame
76. Back of a single
79. Delete
80. \_\_\_ leaf
82. Nightly news hour
84. Journalist Tarbell
85. Bleeped out
86. "Drink" for the critics
89. Basic meaningful linguistic unit
91. Mouths
93. Soils
95. Peabody Essex Museum city
98. Cantankerous
99. "The Dick Van Dyke Show" family name
100. Short tennis match
101. Comedian Gilda
103. Ryder rental
106. Aleppo's country
107. "A League of Their Own" writer/creator/star Jacobson
108. Applications
111. Nonchalant
112. Unit of food energy, in brief
113. \_\_\_ Stadium, former home of the Mets
115. \_\_\_ leaf
116. \_\_\_ leaf
117. Thurman of "Suspicion"

Last issue's solution

"Jab Stand"

Grid for the crossword solution "Jab Stand" with letters filled in.

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COLUMN | Sports Roundup

# Bears bite Bulldogs, 52-51, after last-minute rally

Brattleboro boys' basketball coach Winston Sailsman Jr. has said all season that his team has often had two problems in games — committing too many turnovers and not finishing strong in the final minutes.

After a come-from-behind 52-51 win over the Burr & Burton Bulldogs on Jan. 26 at the BUHS gym, the Bears took care of both problems. They took better care of the ball, Sailsman said, cutting the number of turnovers in half against the Bulldogs with just 13 compared to the 28 turnovers that were committed in the Bears' 77-37 loss at Hartford on Jan. 23.

As for finishing strong, the Bears went on a 7-1 run in the final two minutes to clinch the win after Brattleboro trailed by as many as 15 points in the second half.

"We've had our hearts broken too many times in close games," Sailsman said. "This was a big step forward for us."

For the first three quarters, it didn't look like the Bears had a comeback in them. They trailed 13-8 after the first quarter, 26-16 at the half, and 39-28 heading into the final quarter.

But the Bulldogs let the Bears hang around just a little bit too long. They saw their lead slowly get chipped away bit by bit thanks to aggressive defense and some timely baskets by the Bears quintet of guards John Satterfield and Oscar Korson, and forwards Karson Elliott, Jackson Emery, and Johnathan Haskins.

The final flourish came with 7.6 seconds remaining, when Elliott calmly sank a three-point shot right in front of the Bears' bench to win the game. It was the last of nine three-point baskets on the night for Brattleboro — five for Korson (who finished with a game-high 15 points), three for Elliott, and one for Satterfield.

Elliott and Haskins finished with nine points each, Emery had eight points, and Satterfield scored seven in a balanced Bears attack. Forward Will Amedeen led the Bulldogs with 14 points, but only four of them came in the second half. Noah Rourke and Zakariah Chani each added



**RANDOLPH T. HOLHUT,** deputy editor of this newspaper, has written this column since 2010 and has covered sports in Windham County since the 1980s. Readers can send him sports information at [news@commonsnews.org](mailto:news@commonsnews.org).

11 points.

Brattleboro finished the week with a 5-9 record, while Burr & Burton fell to 6-7. The Bears will host Mount Anthony on Feb. 2 to kick off the first of the final five games of the regular season.

## Girls' basketball

• How good is Bellows Falls this season? They have outscored opponents by 20 points or more in six of their first eight wins of the season, including a 56-29 victory over Sharon Academy on Jan. 22 at Holland Gymnasium.

But the mark of a really good team is the ability to win on the road against a tough opponent, and the Terriers passed that test with an intense and hard-fought 36-29 victory over Brattleboro on Jan. 25 in the BUHS gym.

BF jumped out to a 7-2 lead in the first four minutes of the game, but a pair of three-pointers by Bears guard Reese Croutworst shifted the momentum and the Terriers ended the first quarter with a 14-12 lead.

The second quarter was equally close as both teams contested every shot, every rebound, every possession with tenacity. BF had a 19-17 lead at the half, and turned up the defensive intensity another notch. Brattleboro got lots of good looks at the basket, but their shots were not falling and the BF defense prevented the Bears from any second-chance shots.

BF coach James Pecsok said the key to the defensive effort was hustle and communication. "We hustled, we talked, we worked hard, and we got after it," he said. "It wasn't just a couple of people. It was really everybody that played that made that impact defensively."

A three-pointer by Kate



Brattleboro guard Karson Elliott (2) gestures toward his team's bench as his teammates celebrate his game-winning three-point shot with 7.6 seconds left in regulation to seal a come-from-behind 52-51 win over Burr & Burton on Jan. 26 at the BUHS gym.

RANDOLPH T. HOLHUT/THE COMMONS

Pattison got the BF lead down to 23-22, but an 8-0 run by BF keyed by freshman guard Abby Nystrom closed out the third quarter and gave the Terriers a 31-22 lead.

The Bears again rallied as Mallory Newton and Croutworst scored to pull within four, 33-29, with 2:33 left in the game. Brattleboro got no closer as the Bears could not get a basket the rest of the way.

"We just couldn't put it in the bucket," said Brattleboro coach Karen Henry. "Those are shots we'd make in any other game. That was the difference."

Nystrom and forward Laura Kamel led BF with 10 points each. Croutworst had four three-pointers and finished with a game-high 14 points. Pattison added seven points, and Newton and Montana Frehsee each scored four points.

In BF's victory over Sharon, Kamel finished with 16 points and 10 rebounds and Nystrom also scored 16. With the two wins, the Terriers improved to 9-2.

• Brattleboro bounced back from the loss to BF with a 41-38 road win over Fair Haven on Jan. 27. Abby Henry led the Bears with 12 points, while Pattison added nine and Newton chipped in seven. The 6-6 Bears will travel to Bennington to face Mount Anthony on Feb. 1.

• Leland & Gray withstood a fourth-quarter comeback by the Poultney Blue Devils and hung on for a 37-31 road win on Jan. 23. Maggie Parker led the Rebels with 18 points, and Mary Sanderson added nine points. With a 36-22 road win over Rivendell on Jan. 25, the Rebels improved to 6-8.

• Twin Valley kept things close in the first half but was overwhelmed in the second half by Poultney in a 44-13 loss in Whitingham on Jan. 25. Poultney led 18-7 at halftime and held the 0-10 Wildcats to just six points in the second half.

## Boys' basketball

• Bellows Falls ended their five-game losing streak as the Terriers rallied to beat Windsor, 75-64, at Holland Gymnasium on Jan. 23. Colby Dearborn scored 15 of his team-high 19 points during the fourth-quarter comeback. Forward Jaxon Clark also scored 19 points.

Against Fair Haven on Jan. 27, the visiting Terriers lost, 75-63, as Phil Bean scored 33 points and pulled down 14 rebounds to lead the Slaters. Clark led 6-8 BF with 20 points, followed by 15 from Cole Moore, and 13 from Colby Dearborn.

• Leland & Gray put up a good fight, but Twin Valley held the Rebels to just three points in the final quarter as the Wildcats rolled to a 65-46 victory on Jan. 23 in Townshend.

Twin Valley guard Brayden Brown led all scorers with 21 points, while Noah Dornburgh added 18 points. Cody Hescok was the 2-11 Rebels' top scorer with 18 points, and Chip Winkler had 10 points.

• With a 54-51 road win over Springfield on Jan. 27, Twin Valley improved to 9-5.

## Ice hockey

• Forwards Avery Hiner and Lily Carignan provided the scoring punch as the Brattleboro girls won their first game of the season on Jan. 27 defeated winless Harwood/Northfield, 7-2.

Bears starting goalie Nellie Sterling was not in the lineup due to injury, so ninth-grader Dakota VonFeldt and junior Lakota Offenburger split the goaltending duties to get the win over the 0-13 Highlanders.

The victory over Harwood came after a 7-1 loss to Burr & Burton in Manchester on Jan. 24. But that six-goal margin of defeat was the closest game the Bears had played all season and perhaps was a harbinger of the win on Harwood's ice.

Sterling made 27 saves in the loss to Burr & Burton, and Gretchen Stromberg got the Bears' only goal against Burr & Burton in the second period, with eighth-grader Alex Day picking up the assist. The Bears are now 1-12 on the season.

• The Brattleboro boys improved to 5-5-2 with a 9-3 victory over Monadnock on Jan. 24.

## Snow golf fundraiser returns to Scott Farm on Feb. 25

• On Sunday, Feb. 25, from noon to 3 p.m., The Landmark Trust USA (LTUSA) invites the public to its second annual "Snow Golf: Chip, Drive, & Putt for Preservation" event, which will once again be held at Scott Farm in Dummerston. An official part of Brattleboro's Winter Carnival, tickets are \$35, and advance registration is suggested.

LTUSA is a nonprofit historic preservation organization that has beautifully restored Naulakha, the 1892 Dummerston home of author Rudyard Kipling, and four other southern Vermont properties, which it owns and operates as overnight vacation rentals. According to the U.S. Golf Association, Kipling invented snow golf at Naulakha following his introduction to the game by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle of Sherlock Holmes fame.

New this year, the course will

be designed in partnership with the Brattleboro Country Club and feature six skills challenges — including Chipping Skee-ball, Tic-Tac-Toe, and Blindfolded Pick-A-Club — as well as one hole and a bonus "closest to the pin" shot. Players may register individually or as a team of four, and prizes will be awarded for best overall score, best score on each challenge, best dressed, and more.

All tickets include a free exclusive hard or sweet cider drink from the Scott Farm pop-up bar. Additional snacks and drinks will be provided as well. For more information and registration, visit [landmarktrustusa.org/snow-golf](http://landmarktrustusa.org/snow-golf). All proceeds from the event support LTUSA's historic preservation work.

## Senior bowling roundup

• Week 3 of the winter/spring season of the Brattleboro Senior Bowling League at Brattleboro Bowl on Jan. 18 saw High Rollers (16-4) have a 5-0 week to move into first place while Good Times (13-7) had a 0-5 week to slip back into second place. Stepping Stones II and Four Seasons (both 11-9) are tied for third, followed by Stayin' Alive (10-10), Hairiers (9-11), Four Pins (6-14), and Slow Movers (4-16).

Vicki Butynski had the women's high handicap game (262) with games of 234 and 220. Corriveau had a 614 series with games of 237, 193, and 184. John Walker had a 593 series with a pair of 205 games and a 183 game, Duane Schillemat had a 552 series with games of 197 and 191, Gary Montgomery had a 547 series with a 208 game, Peter Deyo had a 546 series with a 201 game, and Jerry Dunham had a 186 game.

Butynski had the women's high scratch series (503) and game (194). She also had a 174 game. Other notable games included Nancy Dalzell (178) and Carol Gloski (176).

Brattleboro defenders Reese Croutworst (1) and Kate Pattison, left, close in on Bellows Falls guard Abby Nystrom (3) during the first half of their Jan. 25 game at the BUHS gym.



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