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The Charlotte News

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Nothing but blue skies

Photo by Lee Krohn

It looked like a UFO was landing on Mt. Philo on Sunday. After January only had two days that weren't gray and foggy, it was wonderful to finally have a close encounter of the blue kind.

Selectboard cancels March 2 in-person town meeting

All voting by Australian ballot again this year

Scooter MacMillan
Editor

Those who love Vermont's unique tradition of direct participatory democracy will be disappointed in Charlotte again this year, while those who support having the largest number of residents decide major issues like the town's budget should be happy.

On Monday, Jan. 29, the selectboard voted to cancel the town's scheduled in-person town meeting on March 2 at Charlotte Central School. This special selectboard meeting came after a motion to cancel this town meeting failed by a 2-2 tie vote of the selectboard at its regular meeting the Monday before, Jan. 22.

At the Jan. 22 meeting, board member Louise McCarren had left because of illness when the vote was taken, so there wasn't a fifth vote to break the tie.

On Jan. 29, chair Jim Faulkner made a motion to reconsider the previous week's motion about whether this year's voting should be in person or by Australian ballot. As they had the week before, Faulkner and Kelly Devine voted again to forego the in-person, voice-voting town meeting this year. McCarren joined them in voting to cancel the town meeting on March 2.

As supporters of the in-person March 2 meeting, Lewis Mudge and Frank Tenney voted against the motion.

So, all Charlotte voting this year will again be by Australian ballot, and this voting will take place along with most of Vermont on Town Meeting Day, Tuesday, March 5.

| | Registered voters | Town Meeting Floor attendees March | | April Hybrid Australian ballot (June in 2020) | | COVID Australian ballot for Town Meeting | |
|------|-------------------|------------------------------------|-------|---|--------|--|--------|
| 2022 | 3318 | | | | | 949 | 28.60% |
| 2021 | 3297 | | | | | 1222 | 37.06% |
| 2020 | 3341 | 129 | 3.86% | 522 | 15.62% | | |
| 2019 | 3258 | N/A | 0.00% | 164 | 5.03% | | |
| 2018 | 3102 | 128 | 4.13% | 227 | 7.32% | | |
| 2017 | 3226 | 173 | 5.36% | 475 | 14.72% | | |

Chart by Lynne Jaunich

Participation in Town Meeting Day and Australian ballot voting.

There hasn't been a traditional in-person town meeting in Charlotte since 2020. That town meeting came just before the pandemic shut down large gatherings. After the quarantine came, the state Legislature voted to temporarily grant towns the right to cancel in-person town meeting because of the threat of COVID transmission. This is presumably the last year that the town's selectboard can vote to suspend in-person town meetings, although that might be changed by the Legislature.

Mudge said his understanding is that, if Charlotte doesn't hold a traditional town meeting this year, it will have to next year. In fact, he said, that when the selectboard voted not to hold in-person town meeting last year, the members of the board made a commitment to the town to hold an in-person town meeting this year.

It was a controversial decision last year when the board voted to suspend in-person town meeting for 2023, with a very vocal group of people criticizing the selectboard about the decision.

This year, the audience at the selectboard meeting was largely in favor of canceling the 2024 town meeting. The most common reason given by those who spoke in favor of Australian ballot over voice voting was that more people vote by Australian ballot than show up for a town meeting.

Another frequent reason given was that many expect the turnout for the in-person town meeting to be small because Saturday, March 2, comes during the last weekend of the schools' winter break. It is widely expected that attendance will be low with many residents out of town for a winter vacation.

Faulkner said he supported using an Australian ballot exclusively to decide town issues because so many more people participate then.

"Something like 900 people participate when we use an Australian ballot," Faulkner said. "When the town has an in-person town meeting, 150, maybe 200 people on the best days, participate. That's a big difference."

Tenney pointed out that the town voted

for having an in-person town meeting by Australian ballot in 2020, just before COVID shut things down. So, Charlotte has never had a Saturday in-person town meeting the voters wanted then and approved via the voting method being touted as the most valid way for determining what residents want.

Having town meeting on the Saturday before the state's official Town Meeting Day on the first Tuesday in March was discussed for three years, Tenney said. "It's not something that was just talked about and we said, 'Hey, do you want to do it on a Saturday?'"

Chea Evans, Charlotte's representative, said, if the town wants to permanently switch to having all voting by Australian ballot, that decision would have to be made at an in-person town meeting.

Such a change has to be made by a town's current method of voting, which for the time being is town meeting in Charlotte, even though there hasn't been a town meeting since 2020.

Some people argue for town meeting because it gives residents a big hand in deciding things like a budget since the budget can be amended from the floor, Peter Joslin said. He told the selectboard he was a strong supporter of the Australian ballot because it gives so many more people the opportunity to vote, and residents have had ample opportunities to make suggestions about the budget at the many selectboard meetings when the budget has been discussed.

Rick Lunt said, because only around 5 percent of the residents participate in town meeting and are deciding the budget for the other 95 percent of residents, it is taxation without representation: "We had a war about this with the British."

Julia Russell newspaper's new board chair

John Quinney
The Charlotte News board

At a recent meeting of the board of directors of The Charlotte News, Julia Russell was voted in as board chair. She has been a member of the board since April 2023 where she leads the work of our digital committee.



This includes developing performance metrics, identifying security vulnerabilities and best practices, and planning for upcoming workshops with the Google News Initiative and the Institute for Nonprofit News where the focus will be on boosting digital revenues and reader engagement.

Russell worked at the University of Vermont for 27 years before retiring recently from her position as the associate chief information officer, where her responsibilities included overseeing the university's Enterprise Technology Services group of 80 full-time staff and 20 part-time student workers.

Her resume includes a wide range of skills and experience including strategic planning, management, business process design, software evaluation and qualitative research methods such as focus groups, hardware and software support.

Two very different hearings on town manager

Scooter MacMillan
Editor

What if a town held a hearing and nothing was heard?

This rhetorical question was close to reality Tuesday, Jan. 30, when the Charlotte Selectboard held a hearing where it attempted to restrict comments from audience members who support changing the municipal government from a town administrator to a town manager.

It was a totally different story at another official hearing six days later this Monday, Feb. 5, about the issue. The board apologized for its actions at the previous meeting. The discussion was open and included people speaking on both sides of the issue with no constraints on how long they talked or what they said.

The meeting on Jan. 30 began with selectboard chair Jim Faulkner saying that people could ask questions and, if the board didn't know the answers, supporters of the town-manager switch might be able to answer them.

But board member Kelly Devine interrupted to make a point of order, asserting that only elected officials should be allowed to speak because if others spoke it could be perceived as bias. She said, if questions came up that the selectboard couldn't answer, the board could do some research or check with the town attorney.

During the meeting, board members said they didn't know the answer to many of the questions asked, even though most of those questions had been answered by a study the town paid Lee Krohn, retired Shelburne town manager, to do this summer.

A couple of people close to town government said some members of the selectboard talked with the town attorney after this hearing, and he reportedly admonished them for the way the meeting was conducted.



Photo by Scooter MacMillan

A big crowd turned out in person and online for this Monday's hearing at town hall about whether Charlotte should adopt the town manager form of municipal government.

"I do not support the move to a town manager," said board member Lewis Mudge by phone after the meeting. He did not attend the meeting because of family responsibilities. "But, if we win this vote, and we stay with a town administrator, I don't want it to be because we didn't enable people to speak their minds."

At a previous meeting some months ago, the board took a straw poll about the switch and all of them said they opposed it, although Devine said after this first hearing that she had just voted against holding the vote, not against the switch.

After a question from Lisa Kiley about what authority a town manager would have, Devine said the board didn't know because the proposed change to a town manager came from a petition rather than from the selectboard.

"Every single town has its own version of this kind of language," Devine said.

Lane Morrison, one of those who developed the petition, said he would like to speak to correct what Devine had said.

Frank Tenney said the format of the meeting was to just hear questions. Faulkner and Devine responded that the meeting was not supposed to be a debate.

"What you just said was not correct, so it misleads the audience and the voters," Morrison said.

If passed, that charter would only amend state statute dictating the responsibilities of a town manager by allowing the town to keep its independent road commissioner who would answer to the selectboard and not the town manager in Charlotte.

Charlie Russell, chair of the development review board, said Morrison should be allowed to speak just like anyone else.

"The petitioners should be allowed to speak as much as anybody else," Russell said. "This is a hearing where everybody has a right to speak."

Finally, Faulkner allowed supporters of the switch to a town manager to speak, saying,

Survey results favor move to town manager

30% opposed; 26% undecided or need more information

Bill Regan
Contributor

The results are in. The Charlotte News survey finds that 44 percent of the people surveyed are in favor of a town manager model. Thirty percent want to stick with the current town administrator model, but equally important, 26 percent are undecided or need more information. The question will go to the voters on March 5.

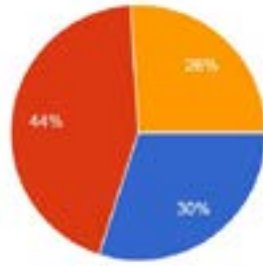
The 277 responses show how important this question is to Charlotte residents and give us high confidence in the survey results. We are grateful that so many people took the time to complete the survey. In addition, over 200 people went the extra mile to explain the reasons behind their choices — thank you!

We read all the comments, grouped like ones together and counted how many individual comments fell into each group. The six groups with the most comments are summarized below; the number of comments in the subsequent groups dropped off dramatically.

The largest group of comments by far centered around wanting the selectboard to spend more time on strategic decision making and less on routine administrative matters and what many respondents termed “minutia.”

Charlotters who said they were undecided or wanted to learn more provided the second-largest number of written comments. Many were unclear on the practical differences between the town administrator and town manager models, including any effect on the

Please tell us what model Charlotte should choose at Town Meeting in March.
277 responses



- Charlotte should keep the Town Administrator model.
- Charlotte should move to a Town Manager model.
- Undecided/need more information.

town’s budget.

The third biggest group of comments included the belief that a town manager would result in more efficient government. There was a lot of overlap between this group and the largest one expressing a desire for the selectboard to be more strategic. Many in this third group thought the selectboard would be a more efficient decision-making body if a town manager handled much of the day-to-day, lower-level decision making.

“If it ain’t broke, don’t fix it” summarizes the fourth largest number of comments. These respondents argued that the current system works well and that the argument for change has not been made convincingly.

The fifth group expressed concerns that a town manager would result in less government transparency and personal access to the selectboard. These residents also voiced concern that a town manager would have too much authority.

The sixth largest group argued that town

government is getting too complex for the town administrator and selectboard operating as they do now. “Complexity” was the key word that surfaced repeatedly in these comments, setting them apart from other write-ins about the need for greater government efficiency and better decision making.

The Charlotte News launched this survey to help inform residents and town officials in the run-up to Town Meeting Day. We hope that the pro and con camps will benefit from seeing how their messages are resonating with Charlotters and that, in advance of the vote on March 5, they will work to meet the clear interest in more information.

(Bill Regan is a member of The Charlotte News board of directors. This article captures the survey results as the paper received them, but offers no substantive conclusions about the merits of either town government model. Neither the newspaper nor the board have taken a position on the town manager-town administrator question.)

Letters to the Editor

Most Charlotters know town relies on volunteer rescue workers

To the Editor:

During COVID, I, like many others in our community, found myself wondering what I could do to help. After passing by Charlotte’s Volunteer Fire and Rescue Station many times, I attended their 2023 spring open house and found that they needed volunteers.

From living in a rural town growing up, I was aware of volunteer fire departments, but I didn’t know much about what Charlotte had to offer. I was surprised to learn that in addition to volunteer fire services, Charlotte employs a full-time medical duty crew who reside at the station 24/7 ready to respond to both fire and medical emergencies at a moment’s notice.

Last year, Charlotte Rescue responded to hundreds of our neighbors, perhaps even you, in need — falls and broken bodies, breathing problems, motor vehicle crashes, chest pain, cardiac events, mental health and many other medical emergencies. Communities without such resources experience delayed response times for critical issues. Ultimately, that could lead to more injuries and more deaths, leaving people vulnerable.

Our volunteer firefighters do the work that paid, professional — “career” — firefighters do. They are essential to our town, responding to numerous motor vehicle crashes, fires, alarms, citizen assists and marine emergencies. Yet, Charlotte, like many of these volunteer departments, especially across rural and suburban areas, faces a struggle.

Crucially, we face a shortage of people willing to do the job. Many of us are simply not aware of the need or how we can help. Some may feel that they can’t commit to being on-call or at the firehouse as they juggle careers and family. As such, the emergency services that we in Charlotte take for granted are in an increasingly dangerous situation.

Of the more than a million firefighters in the US, 65 percent of them are volunteers, according to the National Volunteer Fire Council. Of the more than 29,000 fire departments across the country, almost 19,000 of them are run completely by volunteers.

Despite the uphill battle, I think that people in Charlotte recognize the overall health and vitality of our community ultimately rests on our collective shoulders, as the potential

consequences of the loss of our volunteer fire department becomes increasingly clear.

I’ve always thought that everybody wanted to be a firefighter. We took it for granted.

I am optimistic, as are others in our volunteer fire service. There will always be emergencies, and a certain set of volunteers will always respond to the call to serve our community. Care to learn more? Contact me at r.caldwell@cvfrs.org.

Robert Caldwell
Charlotte

Selectboard set low standard at town manager hearing

To the Editor:

Despite my low expectations for the performance of the selectboard, last Tuesday evening’s meeting was a new low. A reasonable expectation for town selectboard members is that they read and be familiar with the basic state statutes and regulations that govern the management of selectboard meetings.

Title I, Chapter 005, Section 313 states:

SEE LETTERS PAGE 3

JULIA RUSSELL CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

She holds a doctorate in education from the University of Vermont, a masters of business administration from Boston University and a bachelors from Dartmouth. Over the years, she has volunteered with the Charlotte Library, the Vermont Refugee Resettlement Program, the Green Mountain Athletic Association, anti-poverty advocacy group Results and the Women in Science program at Dartmouth.

Julia moved to Charlotte in 1995 with her husband Charles and their three children, Amanda, Katharine and Michael. She enjoys running, gym, reading, cooking and knitting, and has recently added spinning and pickleball. She is also learning to weave on a floor loom and is optimistic about producing more from her garden. Whenever possible, the Russells travel to the New York City area and Syracuse to spend time with their kids and grandkids.

“As board chair, I’m looking forward to working with a strong and engaged board and, in conjunction with a talented and hardworking editor and staff, to building on recent accomplishments,” she writes. “I’m also looking forward to helping further strengthen the paper’s financial position and to diving into succession planning initiatives. Local news is vitally important to community health, and I feel fortunate to be involved.”

Following my resignation as publisher, we have not yet found someone to move into this role. Julia is working with board and staff to ensure that key responsibilities continue to be managed. If you’re reading this and are curious about what the publisher’s volunteer work involves, Julia would love to hear from you at julia@thecharlottenews.org.

On behalf of everyone connected with the newspaper, I want to express my thanks to Julia for stepping into a leadership position as board chair.



Mission Statement

- To engage and inform Charlotte and nearby communities by:
- Publishing rigorous, in-depth reporting on town affairs.
 - Providing a home for stories from our neighbors and friends.
 - Reporting on how other towns have addressed challenges similar to our own.

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- Minimize harm.
- Act independently.
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Send submissions, questions, photos, etcetera to scooter@thecharlottenews.org

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Here's the skinny on the Town Meeting Day ballot

Scooter MacMillan
 Editor

Let's start this story about voting this March like Jeopardy, giving the answer first.

Here's Common Connections for \$200 — and remember you need to phrase your answer in the form of a question — Mark Stewart Greenstein, Jason Michael Palmer, Dean Phillips, Cenk Uygur and Marianne Williamson.

Surely everyone clicked their buzzers simultaneously, rushing to say: "Who are Pres. Joe Biden's Democratic opponents on the Vermont primary presidential ballot?"

March 5 is Super Tuesday, when 14 other states and one unincorporated territory hold their primary elections. Technically, it's Super Tuesday in Vermont also, but here in the Green Mountain State, the day is more popularly known as Town Meeting Day.

This year, Super Tuesday isn't so super since it is pretty much a foregone conclusion that Biden will be the Democratic candidate and Donald Trump will beat Ryan L. Binkley, Chris Christie, Ron DeSantis, Nikki Haley and Vivek Ramaswamy on the Vermont ballot to be the Republican nominee.

After a recent decision by the selectboard to cancel a pre-Town Meeting Day town meeting on March 2 (the Saturday before traditional Town Meeting Day), where residents would have gathered in person to voice vote on some issues like the budget, all voting now will be by Australian ballot on the following Tuesday, March 5, this year.

But, voting on Town Meeting Day in Charlotte could have some of the mystery that might make the election more super here. The biggest voting cliffhanger will be whether residents favor changing the town's governing structure to a town manager or decide to stay with a town administrator.

This vote may be confusing because Article 6, the article that, if residents approve it, would create a town charter for Charlotte, says, "Shall the voters authorize the town to submit to the General Assembly of the state of Vermont a proposal to adopt a municipal charter which contains the following sections?"

Six sections follow — corporate existence, general provisions, town manager/road commissioner, separability, amendment and effective date. It goes on to say that the charter proposal is available for the public to see at the town clerk's office and can be requested by the public. The charter proposal can also be seen on the town's website at <http://tinyurl.com/26xu225v> and it will be posted at town hall on Town Meeting Day.

The charter proposal does not make things much clearer. There is nowhere in the proposal that specifically says that voting for the charter will be voting for the town to switch to a town manager, although it does outline the duties of a town manager and a road commissioner.

Charlie Russell, who is part of the group of residents that circulated the petition that required the town to put the charter proposal on the ballot, confirmed that voting for Article 6 is voting for changing to a town manager and admitted it could be confusing.

Two articles that could spur a bit of thrilling anticipation of voting results are articles 2 and 7. These will probably create a lot of interest because both of these concern the town budget.

Article 2 is the selectboard's budget. Voters are asked on this ballot item if they approve of a little more than \$3.25 million in town expenses, of which \$1.54 million is proposed to be raised by property taxes and more than \$1.71 million is proposed to be raised by non-tax revenue. Non-tax revenue is money a town collects from sources other than property tax, like money collected from building permit fees or for parking at the town beach.

The selectboard's approved budget would result in a tax rate of .1835 for fiscal year 2024-25 and the tax rate for this year is .1804, so it's essentially a flat rate from this fiscal year to next.

At the Jan. 29 selectboard meeting, when the budget that will be submitted to voters on Town Meeting Day was approved, chair Jim Faulkner lauded the process that had resulted in this rate, because when the board started the budget process, the town was looking at a tax-rate increase in double digits.

He was pleased that the construction of a new garage with solar panels had not driven the town's regular budget up. The proposed budget includes \$160,000 for bond payments on the garage and the solar panels, town clerk Mary Mead said.

"You've done a really good job. The increase is miniscule. And I honestly just can't look at this and see where you would be taking anything off or why you would," Mead said.

Article 7 asks if voters will authorize the town to get a bond or note for not more than \$365,000 for a new ambulance for Charlotte Volunteer Fire and Rescue. If approved the ambulance that would be financed for not more than 10 years.

Normally, the town and school officer ballots inspire some interest, but this year there is only one position with an announced opposition

candidate. Natalie Kanner has qualified to run against incumbent Louise McCarren for a two-year term on the selectboard. Other than that, the positions to be voted on are for unopposed incumbent candidates or positions that no one is running for.

There are auditor, cemetery commissioner and trustee of public funds positions open, but there are no candidates running. If you are looking to give back to your town, these could be good opportunities to try getting elected by running unopposed as a write-in candidate.

Matthew Bijur is running for the library trustee and Jessie Bradley for cemetery commissioner as first-term candidates.

Incumbents running for re-election include Frank Tenney for selectboard; Meghan

Metzler for one of Charlotte's positions on the Champlain Valley School District board; Mary Mead for town clerk, treasurer and delinquent tax collector; Hugh "Junior" Lewis for road commissioner; and Maurice "Mo" Harvey for one of the three positions as a trustee of public funds.

On the Champlain Valley School District ballot, voters in the district's five towns are asked to approve expenses of just over \$105,800,000 for the next school year and to issue grants or notes of \$395,000 to buy three school buses and of \$3.5 million for school building improvements — \$1.45 million at Charlotte Central School, \$50,000 at Champlain Valley Union High, \$1.9 million at Shelburne Community School, \$50,000 at Williston Central School and \$50,000 at Allen Brook School.

The school district vote got a bit confusing on Monday after Superintendent Rene Sanchez sent out this message:

"The Champlain Valley School District's board of directors approved the proposed 2024-25 budget to present to voters on Town Meeting Day ballots at the Jan. 23, 2024 school board meeting. The proposed budget is now a warned article on the ballot.

"However, the Vermont legislature is currently considering changes to Act 127, the new education funding law. Their review may require us to modify our proposed school district budget and possibly when we vote on the upcoming school year's ballot articles.

"We wanted to let all of our community members know that we are aware of this and will do our best to keep you informed as we learn more. We will reschedule community presentations about the proposed budget and will update associated materials when we have clarity."

Stay tuned.
The Final Jeopardy category is Absentee Voting.

The answer is 7 p.m., March 5.
The correct question is: "What is the deadline for turning in an absentee ballot?"

If you would like to vote by absentee ballot, you can pick up a ballot at town hall. You can vote when you go to pick it up or you can mail it in.



LETTERS

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 2

h) At an open meeting, the public shall be given a reasonable opportunity to express its opinion on matters considered by the public body during the meeting, as long as order is maintained. Public comment shall be subject to reasonable rules established by the chairperson.

This was a public informational meeting at which questions are raised and answers provided. Not permitting participants to comment resulted in a bizarre situation in which participants were limited in their ability to freely express their concerns.

In addition, there were a number of questions that the selectboard members could

not answer, despite the fact that many of those questions were included and answered by consultant Lee Krohn in a report to the selectboard. It appears that the members either had not read the report or did not remember its contents.

And finally, the statement that all towns in Vermont can individually decide what the duties of their town manager are is false. The town manager's duties are specifically described in Chapter 156, Section 516 of Vermont Statutes.

In summary:

1) Participants at a public informational meeting conducted by the selectboard were curtailed in their ability to make statements and ask questions.

2) The selectboard was unable to answer basic questions about the town manager

administrative duties, despite the fact that a consultant's report had covered these questions.

3) False statements were made about the duties of the town manager as described in the Vermont statutes.

Nancy Richardson
Charlotte

Charlotte Volunteer Fire and Rescue remembers Kip Mesirow

To the Editor:

It is with great sadness that Charlotte Volunteer Fire and Rescue notes the passing of our friend and fellow volunteer, Kip Mesirow.

A gifted craftsman, Kip showed his commitment to our community through his

many years as a fire department volunteer. His warm nature and calm demeanor were a welcome addition in our station and on the fire ground. As a volunteer Kip regularly ran the pumps on the engines and was always ready to provide traffic control, often from the back of his pickup where he carried his own set of signs and traffic cones.

We remember with great fondness his presence in our station and sorely miss his ready smile and, of course, that spectacular moustache!

John Snow
Charlotte

(Snow is the president of the Charlotte Volunteer Fire and Rescue Service board.)



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your little
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Valentine's Day!**



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Hi! Neighbor

Christopher Vatis: The Pied Piper of polar pickleball

Phyl Newbeck
Contributor

Some people run from the cold, but Christopher Vatis, chief organizer of the Polar Picklers, embraces it. Snow shovel in hand, he keeps his fellow pickleball players active throughout the winter.

In March of 2021, when Vermont was deep in quarantine, Vatis was happy to be able to spend time with his wife Emily and go walking and hiking, but he craved community. “Everyone was feeling some cabin fever,” he said.

Vatis had a background in tennis, squash and racquetball, but when a friend told him about pickleball, he was intrigued.

Vatis and his wife joined the beginners’ pickleball class at Charlotte Town Beach on Saturday mornings. It was still chilly, so in addition to masks, players were wearing

gloves.

“It felt very strange to be doing something we hadn’t done before with people we hadn’t met before,” he said, “but we took to it. We liked the people, the game and the license to be outside.”

Eventually Vatis and his wife were invited to join the regular Monday and Thursday evening pickleball groups.

“At that point it became like sugar,” Vatis said. “If one tablespoon is good, maybe two will be even better.”

He started asking people if they wanted to play on other nights and soon began developing an email list to notify other players if there was a change in the date or time.

When summer turned to fall, the town nets were taken down at the beach, but Vatis rigged up a system with portable nets, dowels and bungee cords to fasten to the stanchions. His daily emails to his pickleball comrades began to include jokes, puzzles, riddles and poetry which led to greater engagement. Players brought shovels to clear the snow and when there was significant snowfall, Vatis put his snowblower on a trailer and brought it to the beach. Sometimes there were two people shoveling but other times as many as 10 showed up.

Over the winter, the hardcore group that formed called themselves the Polar Picklers and had T-shirts and sweatshirts made with a polar bear and pickleball paddle.

“It became more of a social thing,” Vatis said. “On Saturdays we have après pickle with a little potluck, and sometimes people who didn’t play on that day come over to be with friends.”

Vatis grew up in the New York City area and followed his father, a Greek national, into the family shipping business. He was the seventh generation to enter the field, working

first in Manhattan and then Greece. When his mother became ill, he moved back to New York and got a job as an oil trader.

Subsequently, Vatis moved to Washington, D.C., with his first wife and worked in real estate. Although he had only lived in urban environments, he felt a connection to the outdoors and wilderness, so the couple moved to Vermont to find a better place to raise their children. Looking for a new way to make a living, Vatis enrolled in a one-year program at University of Vermont to get his master’s in teaching and his licensure.

Vatis describes himself as an atypical teacher because he is male and worked at the primary level, but he taught for 19 years. He recalls that he was sometimes chastised for going over children’s heads, but his philosophy was that kids were more capable than they were given credit for.

“One colleague described me as one part professor and one part game show host,” he said.

Vatis is thrilled that his pickleball companions enjoy both the game and his daily communication with them. “At one point I thought I could drop the emails because it became kind of burdensome to say something witty and clever that elicited engagement,” he said, “but people really seemed to like it.”

Three and a half years later, he has only skipped that email for a few days while on vacation. Vatis sends out his missives between 4:30 and 5:30 in the morning. He notes that the average age of the players is 70 with the oldest about to turn 81. He said most of them get up early and like to plan their day around game time. The group has grown so much that they are currently not accepting new members.

Cold weather has set in, but that hasn’t deterred the Polar Picklers. Vatis said snow




Photo by Emily Vatis

Christopher Vatis doesn’t let winter weather stop him from playing pickleball.

cover is an issue because age has diminished the agility of some of the players and they want to avoid injury, but cold is less of a problem.

“As the zeal for playing and the need for camaraderie grew, the threshold for when it was too cold dropped,” he said. “It’s now 10 degrees.”

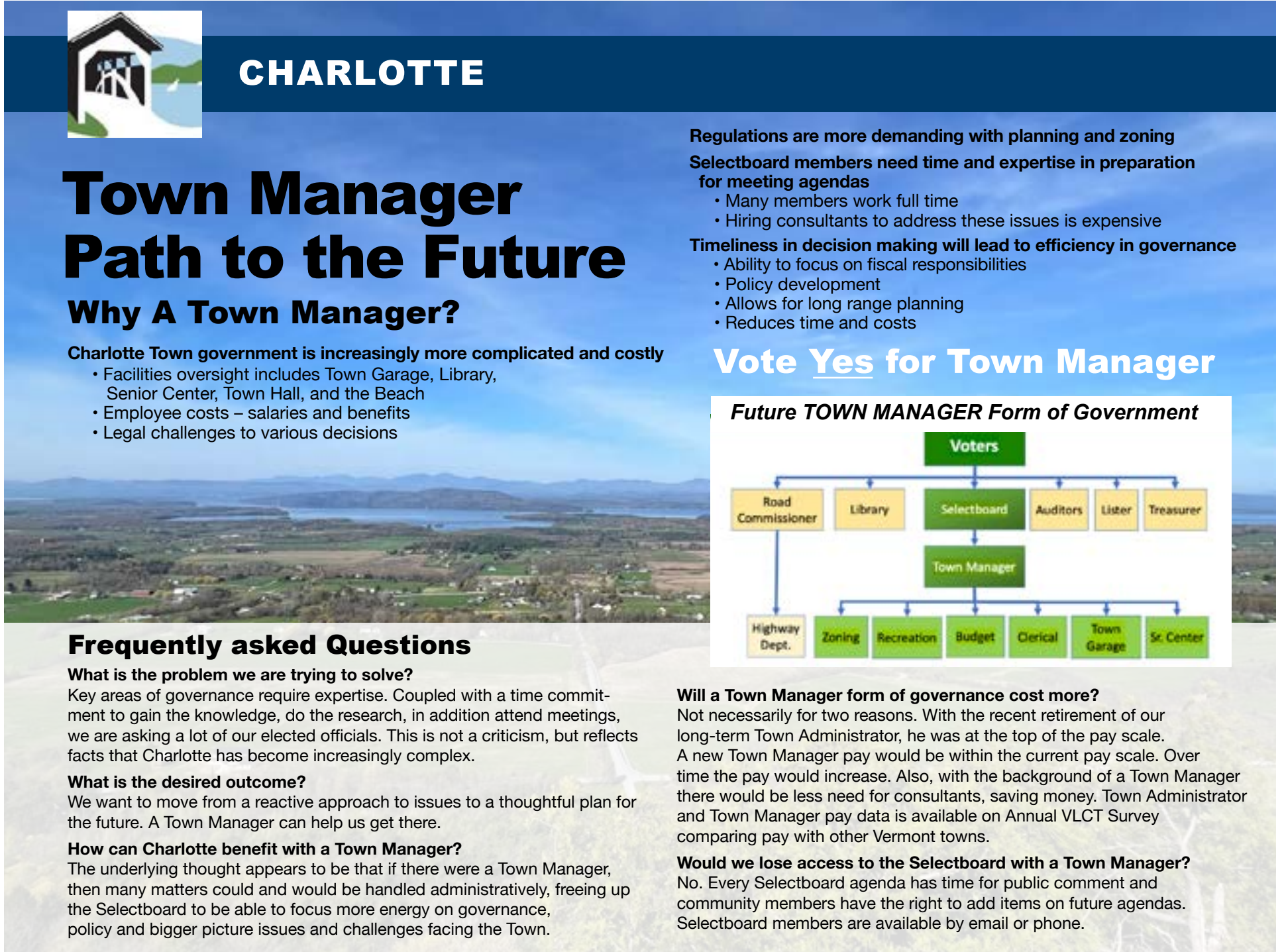



Town of Charlotte
MEETINGS
Visit charlottetv.org
for more information.

Selectboard Meeting
Monday, Feb. 12, 6:30-8:30 p.m.

Development Review Board
Wednesday, Feb. 14, 7 p.m.

Planning Commission Meeting
Thursday, Feb. 15, 7-9 p.m.





CHARLOTTE

Town Manager Path to the Future

Why A Town Manager?

Charlotte Town government is increasingly more complicated and costly

- Facilities oversight includes Town Garage, Library, Senior Center, Town Hall, and the Beach
- Employee costs – salaries and benefits
- Legal challenges to various decisions

Frequently asked Questions

What is the problem we are trying to solve?
Key areas of governance require expertise. Coupled with a time commitment to gain the knowledge, do the research, in addition attend meetings, we are asking a lot of our elected officials. This is not a criticism, but reflects facts that Charlotte has become increasingly complex.

What is the desired outcome?
We want to move from a reactive approach to issues to a thoughtful plan for the future. A Town Manager can help us get there.

How can Charlotte benefit with a Town Manager?
The underlying thought appears to be that if there were a Town Manager, then many matters could and would be handled administratively, freeing up the Selectboard to be able to focus more energy on governance, policy and bigger picture issues and challenges facing the Town.

Regulations are more demanding with planning and zoning

Selectboard members need time and expertise in preparation for meeting agendas


- Many members work full time
- Hiring consultants to address these issues is expensive

Timeliness in decision making will lead to efficiency in governance

- Ability to focus on fiscal responsibilities
- Policy development
- Allows for long range planning
- Reduces time and costs

Vote Yes for Town Manager

Future TOWN MANAGER Form of Government



```

graph TD
    Voters[Voters] --> Road[Road Commissioner]
    Voters --> Library[Library]
    Voters --> Selectboard[Selectboard]
    Voters --> Auditors[Auditors]
    Voters --> Lister[Lister]
    Voters --> Treasurer[Treasurer]
    Selectboard --> TM[Town Manager]
    TM --> Highway[Highway Dept.]
    TM --> Zoning[Zoning]
    TM --> Recreation[Recreation]
    TM --> Budget[Budget]
    TM --> Clerical[Clerical]
    TM --> Garage[Town Garage]
    TM --> Center[Sen. Center]
    
```

Will a Town Manager form of governance cost more?
Not necessarily for two reasons. With the recent retirement of our long-term Town Administrator, he was at the top of the pay scale. A new Town Manager pay would be within the current pay scale. Over time the pay would increase. Also, with the background of a Town Manager there would be less need for consultants, saving money. Town Administrator and Town Manager pay data is available on Annual VLCT Survey comparing pay with other Vermont towns.

Would we lose access to the Selectboard with a Town Manager?
No. Every Selectboard agenda has time for public comment and community members have the right to add items on future agendas. Selectboard members are available by email or phone.

*Paid for by community members leading the support for Town Manager:
Lane Morrison, Jim Hyde, Alexa Lewis, Peter Joslin, Patrice Machavern, Charles Russell*

HEARINGS

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

“Make it quick.”

“The statutes that exist for every town in the state of Vermont defines a town manager. End of story,” said Morrison.

To switch to a town manager, Charlotte did not need to have a charter. The voters could have just voted on the switch and state statute would have outlined the responsibilities and authority of the town manager, if the change was passed. But, the petitioners proposed a charter in order to keep the road commissioner, Russell said. “The language is identical to the state statute in terms of the duties of the town manager except for the paragraph in reference to the road commissioner.”

After Robert Mesaros asked a question about who would be a town manager’s boss, Russell walked over to give him an organizational chart that showed the selectboard would have authority over the town manager, but Devine said Russell should not do that.

She said that handing out the document violated laws against “electioneering” and that the hearing was supposed to be an unbiased forum.

“That is baloney! What I handed to Rob is a public document that came from your May 23 meeting that we presented at that meeting,” Russell said. “It’s a First Amendment right to hand something to somebody.”

Laws against electioneering pertain to voting and there wasn’t any voting taking place at this meeting, Russell said, “This is a hearing to hear people speak.”

The second hearing

The discussion at the second hearing on the town manager-town administrator issue began with Faulkner saying the board had gotten into some difficulties at the previous hearing.

“I’m hoping we’ve learned from that as well, but I do have to make an apology about how that was handled, and hopefully, we’ll learn from that going forward,” Faulkner said. “In our last informational meeting, not all members of the public were able to express themselves fully. This was a regrettable, inadvertent mistake.”

The town hall meeting room was full for this hearing. Between in-person and online attendance, at least 55 people participated in this meeting. Faulkner said the board would hold another hour-long discussion during its regular meeting this coming Monday, Feb. 12, at 6:30 p.m.

The upcoming discussion will not be an official hearing on the town manager issue because it’s too soon until Town Meeting Day for the board to warn the hearing properly, but it essentially will still be a hearing.

“I applaud you for your apology. It speaks very well of you,” Dennis Delaney said. He suggested holding a town-wide discussion on the issue two nights later on Feb. 14 and thought it would be a good time because it will be Valentine’s Day.

Delaney’s suggestion didn’t appear to get much traction.

Mudge was at this hearing, and he said he

didn’t support changing to a town manager because he was taught growing up: “If it ain’t broke, don’t fix it.”

Jerry Hawkins refuted Mudge’s idea of not fixing something. “If it ain’t broke, don’t fix it” is a bad idea because you will stagnate in your own pool.”

Ruth Uphold also took umbrage at the “don’t fix it” proverb. She mentioned the budget being voted down last year and in-person town meeting being canceled for the past two years as evidence that something is “broke.”

Mudge’s second reason for opposing the switch is because he is convinced, if the town moves to a town manger, the budget will increase because he thinks it’s inevitable the town will then end up hiring an assistant town manager.

“I guarantee you that in a year’s time the budget is going to go up,” Mudge said. An increase in the budget is a personal issue for him because he and Devine have been tasked with cutting 30 percent from town employee benefits.

“A town manager might be a little bit of an overkill. I don’t believe we need one at this time. I do believe that what we have is working. Our meetings in just a few months have gotten better and a little shorter.”

Tenney said. “Our current administrator has only been here on his own for a couple months. So, we’ve come along, and he’s come a long ways. He’s doing very well.”

Mudge said the board is unanimous in their support of new town administrator Nate Bareham. The consensus of board members seemed to be that the budget process this year has gone very well, particularly considering Bareham’s short time in his new position as town administrator.

Former selectboard member Matt Krasnow said a town manager can be expensive for a town, if the selectboard wants to replace them. It can be a very expensive and drawn-out process because it is a contracted position, while a town administrator is an at-will employee that is much easier and less expensive to terminate.

“Has anyone asked what the town employees want?” Krasnow also said. “Not asking that questions shows haste in the process.”

Around Town**Condolences**

The family of **Raymond “Kip” Mesirow** is

deeply saddened to announce his passing on the morning of Saturday, Jan. 27, after a long struggle with a neurological disease. Kip spent his last days at home, surrounded by family and friends.

Kip was born in Washington, D.C., on Aug. 4, 1941. He grew up in North Hollywood, Calif., and attended Cal Poly San Luis Obispo with majors in architecture and landscape architecture. He met his wife of 56 years, Mary, in 1968. Kip loved the work of Frank Lloyd Wright, and that influence can be seen in the many houses that Kip designed and built over the years.

His love of all things Japanese led him to learn Japanese joinery and go on to start a business importing Japanese woodworking tools; he also wrote and published two books on the subject. He loved his connection with the Takayama toolmakers in Japan, making many voyages throughout his career to exchange tools, techniques and other markers of the trade, as well as bringing some of those woodworkers to the States to teach their trade firsthand. A strong Japanese influence can be seen throughout much of his woodworking career, making his designs uniquely recognizable.

It was his involvement with the design and construction of Alice Waters’ restaurant Chez Panisse in Berkeley that started him on the path towards coppersmithing. He spent the last 40 years of his life doing architectural



Kip Mesirow

copper work and making uniquely beautiful copper lamps, as well as sharing his knowledge with anyone who expressed interest. His skill and passion lives on, not only in the things he made, but in the people he taught.

Kip was an avid volunteer at Charlotte Fire and Rescue for 12 years and loved the entire experience, going to fires and teaching ambulance driving. His commitment to the fire and rescue team was notorious as well as highly contagious. He loved and fostered the volunteer community and was rarely seen without his trademark T-shirt.

Above all, Kip was a loving husband, father and grandfather, and a valued friend. He will be remembered for his kindness and sense of humor, his loving nature and (of course) his fantastic mustache. His legacy survives in the immeasurable impact he has had on the lives of everyone around him, not least those closest to him. He will be dearly loved and missed for as long as he is remembered.

Kip is survived by his wife, Mary Mesirow; their children, Katharine Cohen and Wes Mesirow; son-in-law, Dave Cohen, and daughter-in-law, Jenny Mesirow; his grandchildren, Isabel and Silas Cohen and Brooklyn and Jackson Mesirow; and his brother, Brian Mesirow; as well as many, many friends.

Congratulations

Cole Boffa of Charlotte was named to the dean’s list at James Madison University for the fall semester where he is majoring in industrial design.

Sophia Kehr of Charlotte was named to Hartwick College’s fall dean’s List. Kehr is pursuing a major in psychology.

Hailey Palmer of Charlotte was named to the University of Delaware dean’s list for the fall semester.

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Our Local Feast

Deep winter is great time for Vermont onion soup

Dorothy Grover-Read
Contributor

In deep winter, one thing we still have plenty of at the farm stands and local markets is onions, and we're using them three ways here: caramelized, onion stock and French onion soup.

This vegetarian variation on French onion soup gets a twist with the additions of local apple cider, maple syrup and a luscious nutty cheese.

While you can always use a prepared vegetable stock and skip right to the onion soup, it's fun now and then to start the whole process from scratch, and the bonus is the delightful caramelized onions to slather on baguette slices or top veggies or proteins.

If making onion stock, it should be your starting point. Most of the work in all this is the slicing of the onions, which takes both

time and tears. If you remember to put your onions in the refrigerator beforehand to chill, you will have far less tears. Once the onions are sliced, the rest is a breeze.

A little apple cider added to the soup lends a bit of tart, and just a drizzle of maple syrup reinforces the sweetness of the onions, but this amount won't scream maple.

Classic French onion soup has a beautiful slice of toasted baguette or sourdough bread floating on the soup and covered with the cheese. A better technique is to toast the bread, rub it with a little garlic and then cut it into bite-sized cubes. Who wants to eat their soup with a knife?

Traditionally, a melty Swiss cheese tops this soup. I've subbed "Rupert," from Consider Bardwell Farm, a European Alpine style raw-milk cheese like Gruyère. It has a beautifully nutty flavor, smooth texture, and it's local, which is always best. Available at

the well-stocked cheese counters in the area, you can usually find it at Healthy Living in Burlington.

Vermont onion soup

- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- 1 tablespoon butter
- 4 large yellow onions, about 3 lbs., sliced pole to pole
- 2 tablespoons dark amber maple syrup
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 1/4 cup brandy or cognac, optional
- 1/2 cup apple cider
- 4 cups vegetable stock
- 4 cups onion or more vegetable stock
- 2 bay leaves
- 2 sprigs of thyme
- baguette
- clove of garlic
- 8 ounces Rupert or other Swiss-style cheese, shredded



Photo by Dorothy Grover-Read

Vermont Onion Soup has all the drama of the classic French version, but we're using ingredients sourced close to home. Maple syrup, apple cider and local cheese liven up the traditional.

SEE **OUR LOCAL FEAST** PAGE 8

Education

Third grade brings fun but no sun to Groundhog Day gathering

Naomi Strada
(Summarized by Tom Scatchard)

The third grade facilitated a school-wide morning meeting filled with joy on Groundhog Day. Students watched Punxsutawney Phil, and he didn't see his shadow, which supposedly means an early spring.

Third graders also led the school on a dance inspired by "Ice Age: Continental Drift" and the school took turns doing the "Sid" and the "Manny."

A group of fifth and sixth graders in the Taylor Swift Fan Club surprised the school with a Taylor Swift-themed flash mob dance to conclude the morning meeting. Much creativity, fun and laughter filled the Multi-Purpose Room to kick off Friday and wrap up the week.

New student teachers

A new round of student teachers have joined the school. They will be working in some first to sixth grade classrooms two days a week until May.

Kindergarten registration now open

Children who live in Charlotte and will be 5 years old by Sept. 1 are eligible to attend kindergarten at Charlotte Central School. Registration runs through Friday,



Courtesy photo

Sen. Bernie Sanders, center, and Champlain Valley Union High mentor coordinator Alison Duback (fourth from right) join a group of educators in Washington, D.C., at the National Mentoring Summit.

Feb. 23.

If your child has attended one of the Champlain Valley School District's preschool programs or registered in the past for publicly funded Act 166 universal prekindergarten in the district, email nstrada@cvsdvt.org or call 802-425-6600 to find out how to enroll.

If the child has done neither of these programs, please go to cvsd.org and follow the registration links to "kindergarten registration" and go to Step 1 on the registration webpage to start your child's registration.

Connecting Youth mentoring advocacy

Connecting Youth's mentor coordinators Alison Duback of Champlain Valley Union High and Kate Rooney of Charlotte Central School recently returned from attending the National Mentoring Summit, a gathering of the nation's brightest minds in mentoring in Washington, D.C. The summit is packed with learning opportunities, peer-collaboration and inspiration, all focused on one shared goal: expanding and sustaining the youth mentoring movement.

Alison Duback participated in the Summit's Capitol Hill Day where advocates spent the day meeting with legislators and their staff about the critical value of surrounding young people with supportive relationships. Their last meeting of the day was with Sen. Bernie Sanders.

"He asked about our programs and then asked if we need more mentors. We all said 'Yes.' So, he is having his communications person put an article in The Bernie Buzz about mentoring," Duback said.

To learn more about Connecting Youth's mentor program, check out the website at connectingyouth.cvsdvt.org.

Digital safety for youth

Detective Krystal Wrinn will facilitate a free virtual workshop on digital safety for youth and the whole family on Feb. 15 at 7 p.m.

Here's what to expect:

- Learn practical tips to empower parents and children about cyberbullying, inappropriate content and online predators.
- Foster respect and kindness in the family's digital interactions.
- Make the internet a more positive space for everyone.

Call 802-652-6800 to ask the Chittenden Unit for Special Investigations about "digital safety for youth" to get a meeting invitation and link.

Community connections

On Feb. 15 the PTO will sponsor a community connection series event where participants will hear all about the layers of mental health supports at Charlotte Central School. School representatives will answer questions and share the layers of work that goes into caring for students. Watch for more information about time and location in the coming newsletter on Front Porch Forum.

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Books with touch of creepy

Katherine Arthaud
Contributor

Mrs. Price brought treats to school like Russian fudge. “If we were good,” Justine the narrator explains, “she said, there’d be more treats, because good things happened to good people. And every boy and girl had sat up straight then, and nodded, and listened, and spoken when it was their turn to speak, not just because of the good things in the future, the treats, but because they wanted to please her. She was new to town ... and younger than our parents, and prettier than our mothers. ... She made us feel special just by the way she looked at us, as if we had something important to say and she couldn’t wait to hear it. Often, she’d rest a hand on our shoulder like an old friend, then lean in and listen. Laugh when we wanted her to laugh. ... If we came to school with a new haircut we really weren’t sure about, she’d put her hands on her hips and say, ‘Look out, David Bowie!’ or ‘Christie Brinkley, eat your heart out!’”

Sounds innocent enough, right? One of those rare gems of a teacher that kids love, look up to and want to please, who seems to genuinely appreciate and be interested in her students. What’s not to like? But hold on, because, in this story, things get pretty out of control and weird.

“Pet,” by Catherine Chidgey, is set in New Zealand in 1980 and 2014. In 1980, Justine is a 12-year-old enrolled in a Catholic primary school. In 2014, she is a grown-up mother of a daughter and caretaker to an elderly father, who we meet at the beginning of the novel being led to his recliner in an assisted living home, his skin pink, his face freshly shaved, freshly showered. The nurse who is helping him reminds Justine of someone, and she asks her father if the woman reminds him of anyone too. “I don’t know what you’re getting at,” he says, and goes back to his newspaper.

Later, we find out more about who Justine was remembering.

And thus, we are ushered into this odd, mysterious, unsettling and utterly enjoyable novel, which, second chapter in, takes us from the 21st century back to Justine as a child, lying on her stomach in the late afternoon, running her fingers through “the straw-dry grass.” Then comes a twinge in her temple, an odd feeling that her head is “high and hollow,” a taste of burnt sugar in her mouth.

The world suddenly seems distorted, her own hands strange to her, the garden strange also. Later, we learn she was having a seizure. And, as Ruth Franklin writes in *The New York Times Book Review*, “The unresolvable question of what Justine may do while experiencing a seizure — and what she does or does not remember

afterward — is fundamental to the novel’s web of uncertainty.”

It is a fascinating lead-in to a fascinating tale, which I suppose one would call a psychological (or intellectual) thriller, though I have to say I didn’t see the “thriller” theme coming for some time. It is there, though, woven quite subtly into what at first appears more of a coming-of-age story about a young girl with an iconic teacher, a sweet best friend, a nice dad and no mother. But when things start going missing from the classroom — including a pen that Justine loves because it was a gift from her mother, who died of cancer — a more sinister strain is introduced, and things go from relatively sunny to increasingly dark and twisted. Justine is the narrator of this increasingly haunted tale, and it is through her eyes, her apprehension, and her morality and decision making (as child and as adult) that we experience the story.

This is not Chidgey’s first novel. She’s written at least six before for adults and several for children. Her work has won several awards. Her first book, “In a Fishbone Church,” won Best First Book at the New Zealand book awards, as well as the Commonwealth Writers’ Prize (Asia-Pacific region). Her second novel, “Golden Deeds,” was a Best Book in the *LA Times Book Review*, as well as a Notable Book in the *New York Times Book Review*. And that’s just to name a few of the many honors this author has received. Chidgey was born in Auckland and grew up in the Hutt Valley. She has explained that the 13 years that elapsed between her third and fourth novels were due to infertility issues that prevented her from writing. Happily, she and her husband had a daughter in 2015.

I was recently in Florida for a brief visit with my daughter, and the day we were to fly back north, I realized I was close to finishing the book I had brought with me on the trip. Lucky for me, my father was a big reader and an avid collector of books, so I didn’t panic (I cannot imagine getting on an airplane without a book), pretty sure that one of his many crowded shelves would yield something to get me home. In his study, I found a slim paperback volume I figured would take up close to zero space in my backpack and add minimal pounds to my burden. It had a much-read, well-loved look; creased, torn and a little the worse for wear. Perfect. At some point, the cover must’ve come loose because someone had painstakingly repaired it with now slightly yellowed wide cellophane tape. “*Felicia’s Journey*,” by William Trevor.

I had heard of William Trevor and vaguely recalled having read something he’d written. I half remember my father speaking well of his work. He was quite

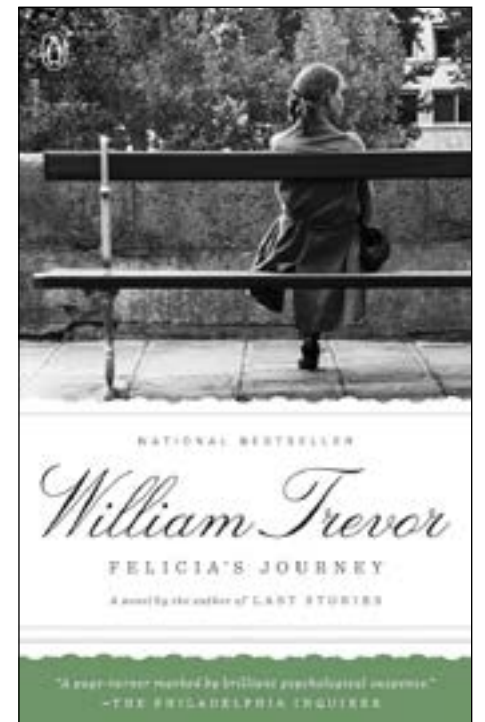


prolific: 13 novels, several short stories, a play and two non-fiction books — many of which have received awards, including the prestigious David Cohen Literature Prize in recognition of a lifetime’s literary achievement. Trevor was knighted in 2002 for his services to literature.

Born in 1928, in Mitchelstown, County Cork, Ireland, initially named William Trevor Cox, he died in 2016 at the age of 88. As a child, he moved a great deal around southern Ireland. His father was a bank manager frequently transferred from place to place. Trevor’s parents’ marriage was apparently not a happy one, which some critics believe explains “some of the more scaring confrontations and silences” among his characters (Peter Porter, *The Guardian*).

“*Felicia’s Journey*” (published in 1994) blew me away. I will treasure this battered, taped-up, kind-of-stolen copy forever. It begins, “She keeps being sick. A woman in the washroom says: ‘You’d be better off in the fresh air. Wouldn’t you go up on the deck?’ It’s cold on the deck and the wind hurt her ears. When she has been sick over the rail she feels better and goes downstairs again, to where she was sitting before she went to the washroom. The clothes she picked out for her journey are in two green carrier bags; the money is in her handbag.”

Where is this woman going? And why is she sick? Well, it turns out she is pregnant (not just seasick) and has left home, having left behind a note for her family, which consists of a father, a bunch of brothers and a grandmother (maybe even great-grandmother), who has managed to outlive just about every other female in the family. Like “Pet,” “*Felicia’s Journey*” begins rather straight-forwardly. Rather poignantly, rather sadly. A bit like Justine, in “Pet,” there is a loneliness about the young woman, Felicia, who we learn has



left the small Irish town she comes from to search in England for the father of her unborn child.

Initially, she makes a number of encounters with more-or-less well-meaning people (did I mention she doesn’t have much money?), determined to find this Johnny Lysaght person (did I mention she doesn’t have an address for the guy?). It is a difficult and worrisome situation, for sure, and Felicia is vulnerable and rather naive. And then, a bit like “Pet” (which this novel is not like in almost any other way), things get creepy, and then creepier, starting when Felicia crosses paths with a fat middle-aged man named Mr. Hilditch, who seems pleasant, innocent and helpful enough at first, but ... well, just read on.

The writing in this novel is exquisite. Beautiful. Skilled and subtle and poignant and descriptive and utterly unique, with an interesting, unusual, rather inspired ending. I found it riveting. “A thriller lifted to the level of high art,” says *Publisher’s Weekly*. It won the Whitbread Fiction Prize. And as with the novel, “Pet,” I didn’t see the creep factor coming.

So, don’t pass Go. Get these two books and read them. And while you are at it, check out “*A Guest in the House*,” a pop-off-the-page brilliant graphic horror novel by Emily Carroll about an uncomplicated, well-meaning, recently married woman who becomes haunted by the presence of her new husband’s ex-wife, Sheila. Yikes. And wow. Brilliant visuals in which somehow the two-dimensional page becomes multi-dimensional, in your face and unsettlingly immediate. Crazy good. Great juxtaposition of the commonplace with the nightmare/horror/paranormal. I want to say more about this but have run out of words and time.

Enjoy!

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OUR LOCAL FEAST

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 6

Heat a sauté pan over medium high and add the oil and butter. Once the butter is melted, add onions along with the maple syrup and season with salt and pepper. Toss well to coat the onions with the fats. Turn the heat down and cook over low heat for 45 minutes or so, until the onions just start to caramelize, but still retain texture.

Once the onions are where you want them, add the garlic until fragrant, about a half minute, then deglaze with the brandy and cider, scraping up any brown in the pan, and add the stock, bay leaves and thyme. Bring to a boil, reduce the heat and simmer for 20 minutes; you don't want the onions to get too soft. Taste for seasoning.

Meanwhile, toast slabs of the baguette. Cool and rub with the garlic clove. Cut the bread into bite-sized cubes.

Ladle the soup into oven-proof bowls, add a half teaspoon or so more brandy to each. This will cut the sweetness of

the onions. You can also add apple cider vinegar here if you wish to avoid alcohol.

Add a topping of the croutons. Sprinkle a liberal amount of grated cheese over each one and pop under the broiler until the cheese melts and starts to brown. Serve piping hot!

Serves six to 10 depending, on the size of the bowl and whether you are serving it as a starter or main course.

Caramelized onions and onion stock

Use a large stainless-steel skillet here, this is not the place for non-stick. As the onions slowly cook, a heavy brown glaze will form on the bottom of the pan which provides most of the flavor in the stock.

- 2 tablespoons butter
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 4 large, yellow onions, sliced pole to pole
- 1 large carrot, chopped
- 2 stalks celery, chopped
- End trimmings from the vegetables
- 1/3 cup white wine

- Half a bunch of flat leafed parsley, stems and all
- Bay leaf
- 8 cups of water

Heat a large skillet over medium high and add the butter and olive oil. Toss in the onions and immediately turn down the heat to low. Let them cook until soft and browned, up to an hour, stirring occasionally. This is about patience.

Remove half the onions to use as caramelized onions on toast or vegetables; this is the treat. To the rest in the pot add the carrot, celery and trimmings and continue cooking for about five minutes. Deglaze the pan with the wine, scrape up every bit, toss in the parsley and bay leaf, add water and bring to a boil. Turn down the heat and cook for another 20 minutes, then strain.

Use this stock in soups, stew, sauces and even as the liquid in cooking rice or other grains.



Photo by Dorothy Grover-Read

A tasty bonus: When making onion stock, a little stash of caramelized onions is your reward for any tears. A rich, flavorful onion stock provides the base for the Vermont onion soup and is just as rich as beef stock, which is usually used in classic French onion soup.

Environment

Town commits to conservation via conservation fund and land trust

Sharon Mount
Charlotte Conservation Commission

Vermont is well known for its incredible natural resources. Communities throughout the Green Mountain State have chosen to conserve special lands like forests, river corridors and wetlands.

In Charlotte, the Charlotte Conservation Fund and Charlotte Land Trust have been instrumental in conserving our town's natural resources.

A conservation fund is a dedicated fund set up by a town to conserve lands and waters. It represents a long-term public investment in land conservation. In 1974,

the town of Norwich established the first local conservation fund. Now, at least 62 towns have conservation funds — about 25 percent of all Vermont towns.

Local conservation funds offer towns many benefits, such as leveraging or tapping into matching funds, advancing town goals and providing flexibility to act on fast-moving projects. Beyond its direct dollar value, a conservation fund can leverage additional dollars from other funding sources. Often, competitive grant programs require a certain percent of matching funds from applicants.

Conservation funds can also help towns achieve community goals in many town

plans. When the chance to conserve an important parcel of land arises suddenly, local conservation funds can expedite conservation. A robust conservation fund signals townspeople's commitment to being a paying partner in a conservation project.

In 1996, Charlotte voters established the Charlotte Conservation Fund by Australian ballot to assist achieving maximum protection of valued town natural and agricultural resources as identified in the town plan. The vision was to combine with other public and private funds to protect not only agricultural soils, but also wildlife habitat and corridors, significant natural areas and scenic vistas.

Today, the Charlotte Conservation Fund is supported by taxpayer dollars. Early on, the fund was incorporated as a percentage of tax revenue, but it is now a budget item approved by the selectboard. The requested amount varies depending on ongoing projects and the current balance in the account. Given budgetary constraints, no funding has been requested in the past two consecutive years.

Applications to use the Charlotte Conservation Fund are made to the selectboard. To apply, contact the town offices. The applicant makes presentations to the conservation commission, the recreation committee, the trails committee and the Charlotte Land Trust. These groups submit comments on the application to the selectboard, which then reviews and acts on the application.

In 1986, the Charlotte Land Trust was formed as an outgrowth of an agricultural committee appointed to assist in developing a new town plan. By 1995, the Charlotte Land Trust became a non-

profit 501c(3) corporation. Since then, the Charlotte Land Trust has reached out to numerous "Friends of the Charlotte Land Trust" who support its work through donations.

Since 1995, the Charlotte Land Trust has acquired 15 conservation easements on local land, totaling approximately 627 acres. From the start, the focus has been to conserve farmland and make it affordable to farmers. Other goals are preserving land for wildlife habitat and corridors, public recreation and scenic or significant natural areas. To donate, please visit charlottelandtrust.org.

Charlotters' commitment to land conservation and environmentally responsible development is evident in the Charlotte Town Plan and Land-Use Regulations.

Charlotte is different from neighboring towns such as Ferrisburg and Hinesburg that do not have taxpayer-supported conservation funds. While Shelburne and Williston do have taxpayer-supported conservation funds, we are unique in having both the Charlotte Land Trust and the Charlotte Conservation Fund. The existence of a donor-supported local land trust and a municipal fund dedicated to conservation easement acquisition is testimony to the commitment of Charlotte residents to conservation.

There is a saying that if you believe in something, you should "put your money where your mouth is." The Charlotte Land Trust and the Charlotte Conservation Fund are proof that our community is committed to protecting and conserving the fields and forests that make our town a special home for the humans and wildlife that live here.

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Stronger Together

Master gardening program spreads good gardening ideas

Linda Hamilton
Charlotte Grange

When I started my professional career 45 years ago, it was in rural upstate New York as a cooperative extension agent in community resource development. Along with my fellow extension agents in agriculture, horticulture and home economics, we were tasked with bringing research-based information from the state's land grant college (Cornell University's College of Agriculture) to bear on practical problems of households, landowners, community enterprises and local government.

As educators and facilitators, we strengthened individuals' and communities' ability to successfully deal with real-life problems, from farm pests and diseases, making a family food budget stretch further, to teaching newly elected officials how to efficiently run a public meeting using Robert's Rules of Order.

It was, and as cooperative extension continues to be, all about empowering people with reliable information so they can solve their own problems and improve their lives and communities. My early first-hand experience of this approach has influenced all the work I've done since.

An interesting example of the cooperative extension approach and its benefits is the master gardener program. To complement the work of professional extension agents, members of the community from almost any background are offered several weeks of faculty-led, in-depth training, covering the fundamentals of sustainable home gardening, geared to that region and including: botany basics, soil health, herbaceous plants, vegetable garden planning and productivity, entomology basics, integrated pest management, plant diseases, tree fruit, tree care, pollinator plants, small fruit, integrated landscape design and volunteering.

Volunteering is the program's special sauce.

Participants who successfully complete the course are certified as an extension master gardener with a commitment to provide required number of hours (typically 50-100) over the next two years, volunteering in the community educating others on home horticulture topics.

This innovative, person-to-person way of extending scientific information from the university into the community benefits both the master gardener and the recipient. The recipient often finds help solving or improving a garden problem or situation. The master gardener has the satisfaction of passing along reliable information to fellow garden enthusiasts. The community benefits from more people successfully growing food and tending environmentally friendly landscapes, which can help knit communities together.

University of Vermont Extension began offering this program in 1991, and it has quickly grown strong. And they have repeated the model with a parallel master composter program in support of home composting.

To facilitate certified master gardener activity in the community, the University of Vermont Extension maintains a registry of qualifying community projects seeking volunteer expertise, where master gardeners are encouraged to volunteer as part of their community service. There are currently more than 90 educational gardening projects throughout the state with master gardeners or master composters partnered with schools, libraries, municipalities, museums, historical landmarks, farmers markets and nonprofit organizations to provide educational exhibits, information tables and demonstration gardens that teach about sound gardening and composting



Photo by Karen Tuininga

Bee balm, coreopsis and feverfew provide not only beauty in this multifaceted garden but also food for pollinators and medicinal herbs for the gardener.

practices. The range of projects is delightfully wide, and the results especially satisfying because of the person-to-person interactions.

In Charlotte we have two such community projects regularly benefiting from master gardener volunteers: a butterfly garden at Quinlan Covered Bridge on Lewis Creek, created with native plants and pollinator-attracting perennials suitable for our heavy clay soil to provide food for wildlife and demonstrate what neighbors could do in their gardens, and the Charlotte Library Educational Gardens, part of the library's Seed Library programs which encourage and support community members growing more of their own food using eco-friendly and sustainable methods, and supports biodiversity, soil health, pollinator-friendly flowering plants, herbs and other edibles.

Another important component of the program is the University of Vermont Extension helpline, staffed by master gardener and master composter volunteers. This is reachable by phone or email and serves many hundreds of Vermonters a year with home horticulture and integrated pest management information.

Yes, one can search the internet or library for information about gardening problems, and there is plenty available, but the significant advantage of the helpline is that it draws on information and science relevant specifically to Vermont conditions. It has the added benefit of direct one-on-one interaction between people, which is generally a richer and more satisfying form of education because it allows for questions and clarifications. That is something a computer screen or book cannot offer.

To explore becoming an extension master gardener or master composter yourself, see <http://tinyurl.com/nhkrwrbe>. To improve your own garden, consider learning through volunteering with one of the master gardener projects in town mentioned above. Email seeds@charlottepubliclibrary.org for more information.

Until April, the program doesn't have help by phone, but don't hesitate to contact a master gardener online when you have questions at <http://tinyurl.com/ms8rpuup>. They will be happy to help.

(Linda Hamilton is a member of Charlotte Grange whose slogan is: Honoring our agricultural roots and helping build a resilient future for all — charlottegrange.org.)



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In The Outdoors

Trying to put climate-changed weather in perspective

Elizabeth Bassett
Contributor

Sometime in early January, our solar credits ran out. Panels on our roof generally power all of our needs until about March. But as we all know, 2023 was cruel to our Brave Little State. With two devastating floods, a rainy summer, and grey months of November and December, it is no surprise that solar generation was crippled. This year has started no better with Burlington enduring its cloudiest January since 1951 and snow sports struggling to find enough of the white stuff.

Last February in this column, I wrote about cloudiness in the Champlain Valley: “When we bought our Charlotte home in the mid-’80s, then town clerk Hazel Prindle congratulated us on moving to the cloudiest place in the lower 48 states, the Champlain Valley.”

I noted that “The Farmers’ Almanac” affirms that Lake Champlain, the Atlantic Ocean and the Green Mountains are just a few of the factors that account for Vermont’s huge number of overcast days. Vermont, the Almanac claims “sees only 58 days of full sunshine each year whereas Seattle, legendary for its rain, experiences 71 sunny days.”

Per “The Farmers’ Almanac”: February averages the same number of sunny days as January but there’s more warmth and hope in that sunshine. The Almanac’s 2024 winter forecast for Vermont is: “Cold, snowy.” Some sunny days would be nice, too.

Speaking of sunshine, our adult children and young grandchildren all live in sun-drenched Colorado. We spend Christmas there, en famille, and then migrate to the mountains for January. This year has

delivered what we always hope for, a mix of sunshine and powdery snow. Who could ask for more, right?

Well, Colorado, along with much of the West, is basically desert. In recent years fire and drought have plagued the region.

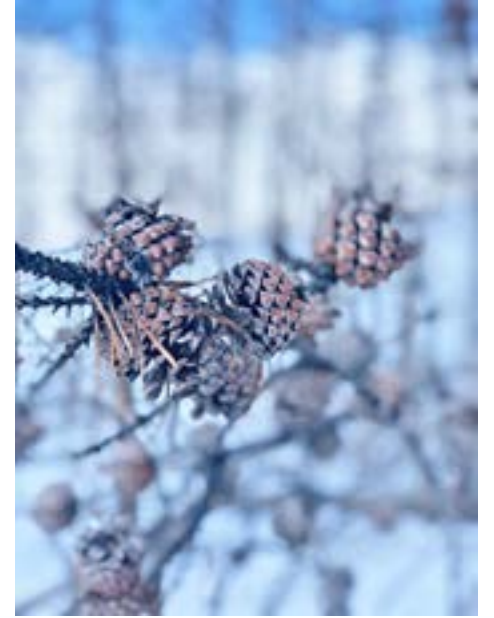
It was little more than two years ago that we were forced to evacuate from the Marshall Fire, not far from Boulder, that destroyed 1,000 homes in 12 hours.

There’s the Colorado River, on which 40 million souls and a good deal of the country’s produce depend. More than a century ago the river’s water was wildly over-allocated, distributing more water than the river carries in the best of times. These are not the best of times for the watershed. A quarter-century drought has lowered the water level of the river’s two main reservoirs, Lakes Powell and Mead.

Last year, 2023, offered some respite with massive snowfall across the West and several atmospheric rivers that dumped rain and snow on California. Lakes Powell and Mead have rebounded from their lowest levels. But the parched ground absorbed a disproportionate amount of last spring’s snowmelt, and to date, this winter’s snowpack in the West is below average.

I recently cross-country skied in Grand Lake, site of a horrific Colorado wildfire in 2020. In just two weeks, the East Troublesome Fire consumed 193,812 acres, making it the second-biggest fire in Colorado history. At one point the wind-driven inferno was consuming 6,000 acres per hour. Most of the mountainous terrain that burned was forested, but it included the town of Grand Lake. The blaze soared to over 9,000 feet and crossed the Continental Divide into Rocky Mountain National Park.

Now, ski trails wind through scorched



Photos by Elizabeth Bassett

Left: A ski trail winds through scorched groves of lodgepole pine skeletons in Grand Lake, Colo., site of a horrific Colorado wildfire in 2020.

Right: After massive wildfires, serotinous cones are glued shut with a strong resin.

groves of lodgepole pine skeletons. Drought-stressed trees are more vulnerable to pests. Pine beetles have decimated large stretches of western forest providing abundant fuel for wildfires.

Lodgepole pines have serotinous cones that have evolved in response to fire. The hard, thick cones are glued shut with a strong resin. Resinous cones can hang on the trees for years until fire melts the resin and mature seeds fall out. Like all seeds, they can be distributed by wind, animals and gravity. In the coming years young lodgepole pines will once again cover the landscape with the possibility of a 100-to-450 year lifespan. If

all goes well.

We all know that we can complain about the weather and do nothing about it. We can, however, make adaptations. Vermonters weatherize and update heating, and now even cooling, for their homes. Across the fire-ravaged landscape of the Marshall Fire, homes are rising, some being built with less flammable materials. In the fire-prone West, homeowners are clearing plants and brush from around foundations.

The cause of this weather mayhem is, of course, climate change. Mitigating it is the real job ahead.

Report from the Legislature

Frustrated by selectboard’s behavior in town manager debate

Chea Evans
Representative

Like many people in town, I felt frustrated and disappointed after watching last week’s informational meeting regarding the town administrator/town manager debate. I was frustrated at the selectboard’s lack of preparation to actually answer questions and disappointed at the way they attempted to silence public voices. I’m grateful for their apology at this week’s second meeting. Although I’m still a little disgruntled about what I perceive to be purposefully obtuse behavior, I’m glad we had so many people involved in the discussion.

Interestingly, I’m actually working on three bills in my committee right now that concern ethics and accountability. One deals specifically with municipal ethics and

would do two things: require municipal officers to take and adhere to a statewide, uniform code of ethics oath and require them to complete ethics training once they are elected. Another bill has a lot of components, but the relevant one here is establishing a process by which people can register complaints with the State Ethics Commission regarding their municipal officials, and those complaints could be tracked and investigated; it also establishes a process for resolving these issues.

Serving on a municipal board, committee or commission is essentially a volunteer position that is time-consuming, complicated and generally thankless. I appreciate our local government so much, and even in the challenging times, I don’t perceive anyone’s actions as malicious or ill-intentioned. Others might feel differently, though, which is why I think

it’s a terrific idea to have an impartial body to listen to these complaints, offer advice to people on how to proceed if they do think an ethical violation has occurred and offer a path to resolution. The State Ethics Commission would be charged with hearing these matters, offering advice and helping community members figure out if there’s an actual violation happening, or if they’re just mad or upset.

This helps in lots of ways, but most importantly: it gives a level of protection and a layer of clarity to municipal governing bodies, and it gives community members a way to express and resolve their concerns. It’s not intended to set up a gotcha system for municipal volunteers, nor is it meant to be a Fesitvus-style airing-of-grievances situation. It also provides whistleblower protection for folks who have complaints, in order to alleviate the fear of retaliation.

I really enjoy coming up with philosophical soundbites and then repeating them ad nauseam, which my children love dearly and so do my friends and family. I think this one applies to governing, educating, coaching, parenting and managing people in any capacity: Set clear expectations, specifically define what the consequences are should those expectations not be met and then consistently follow through with those consequences if need be.

In order to trust our government, from the most local offices to the president, we need to have confidence in the way in which it operates and the standards to which it holds itself and to which we can hold it. Conversely, if we want to keep talented, smart and passionate people invested in the management of our communities, they need to know that they can be safe to make choices on our behalf, and that if they do misstep, it’s not the end of the world, but an opportunity for all of us to learn and make better choices.



Rep. Chea Evans

I’m going to put this part at the end in the hopes that everyone stopped reading earlier: the property tax issue is at the top of my mind, believe me. To be perfectly honest, I don’t have a lot of information for you about how this is all going to pan out, but I’ll admit fully that earlier in the year when I told you that our property taxes weren’t going to go up that much, I unintentionally misled you. I was repeating information that I was given, and now after the fact, I’m realizing I should have said what I’m going to say now.

Our property taxes will rise, possibly significantly. (If you pay your property taxes based on your income, it will still only have an impact if your income changes.) Our school budget will also probably have to be re-done. I’m writing this on Tuesday afternoon and as of this morning, they were still working on drafting some legislation to remedy the issue, which, when it’s done, will move pretty quickly through the Statehouse. I will do my best to keep you all apprised of the situation in as timely a manner as I can.

Please be in touch any time; 917-887-8231 or cevens@leg.state.vt.us.

Sacred Hunter

Quench melancholy of time by staying alert to nature

Bradley Carleton
Contributor

Tonight, I am feeling reflective and somewhat consumed by introspection and melancholy. I am looking back on my life while Merle Haggard is singing to me: “Are the Good Times Really Over for Good?” on livestream on my laptop.

I think back on the time I spent with my father. It seems like the older I get, the more nostalgic I become. Memories flood back to me regularly and they warp my thinking that the “good times really are over for good.”

My friend Doug catches me doing this and calls me out with his wisdom informing me that this is called “euphoric recall.” He’s usually right about it. But Doug is also much younger than me, so I’m not sure he’ll be able to maintain that enlightened state when he’s my age.

My dear friend Hank Hagar called me last night, and we spiraled into a joyful vortex of reminiscence about days past at deer camp.

There was the time that Kennedy Snow slipped and fell on his back in front of the camp, and when we leaned over to see if he was alright, he proudly stated that he hadn’t spilled a drop of his beverage.

There was one night when I sat up in my bunk because I heard someone speaking in the middle of the night. I peered down to the dining area and there was the proprietor, Johnny McDonough, talking to a mouse that was sitting on his haunches listening to Johnny talk from his rickety red chair in front of the wood stove. The mouse knew that Johnny meant no harm to him as John told him “You know, you little #S%&^ someday this will all be yours.”

Memories of squirrel hunting in Pennsylvania where I spent my early adolescence haunt me. At the time it felt like unadulterated teenage angst. But once my father bought me that old Glenfield .22 and, having passed the Hunter Education course, that badge meant that the world was my oyster. Into the woods I would disappear trying to imitate a squirrel’s chipping and scolding vocalizations.

My father was a stalwart workaholic, which is probably why I was a carefree, lazy and undisciplined student. The only education I wanted was the one I got from my time outdoors. I was so difficult to reign in that when my family talked about moving to Switzerland, for my father’s business, I told them that, at the wise old age of 16 years, I would be moving to Vermont. I knew early on where my soul needed to be.

Failing in public school in a steel mill town that worshiped football and manufactured sophomores made from the Steel City’s iron ore and stood 6 feet 2 inches, weighed 250 pounds and were being scouted by NFL teams while still in high school, this was no place for me.

When I tried out for junior varsity, the hazing program was simple. I had to hold up this big cloth wrapped punching bag roughly



Courtesy photo

Tuck Cantrell, left, and Hank Hagar have walked from a neighboring deer camp in an evening snowstorm after the day’s hunting is done for some joy and laughter in the early 2000s. These are the good old days for Bradley Carleton.

6 feet high and weighing around 200 pounds while these genetically abnormal beasts came running at me.

The coach’s instructions were “try to stop them.” After being pummeled several times, I realized that I did not fit in. I wanted to live with my lungs fully functional.

I think my soul left me after the third time. I was left gasping for air on the ground. I was somewhere in the Great White North, tracking monster bucks. I began to daydream of moving north. I imagined hunting the big bucks that Field and Stream and Outdoor Life wrote about, where the legendary Benoit family lived and must be somewhere north of the 45th parallel.

I applied to Vermont Academy under the premise that a good portion of the curriculum would be performed outdoors. Finally, I found where I belonged. So much so, that I was able to convince my parents that we needed to move here. We moved to Stowe, and I learned to ski and hunt the big woods.

Again, here I wasn’t popular, because I was “just another flatlander coming in to change the place.” But what happened was that my father and I finally found our connection. We built a tree stand made of large pieces of lumber on the back side of Round Top.

On opening morning of rifle season, I fell asleep in the stand, 30 feet up in the trees. My father, who was sitting beside me, woke me and whispered, “There’s a buck! Take ‘em, Bradley!”

I replied. “You take him. He’s on your side.”

“Nope. Just crawl over me and shoot it.”

The old Winchester Model 94 30-30 rang out, echoing through the valley. This was my first deer.

I remember the long drag back to our house a mile away. I remember everything like it was yesterday. It was snowing and the air smelled fresh and clean as we dragged the fork horn past the neighbor’s barn. It was lit

up inside by a yellow glow where the cows were being fed. I could smell the manure, and instead of a flatlander’s reaction, I inhaled as if it were some life-affirming, earthly fragrance.

John Denver was singing “Back Home Again” on the radio in the barn. The cows seemed to be enjoying it. The feeling of accomplishment for the extraordinary effort that we had put into this adventure bonded us, and I finally understood my father as he must have been as a child in central Pennsylvania.

Years began to pass more rapidly, and I accumulated more and more memories. Some by myself. Some with friends.

With my father gone for several years

and witnessing friends pass on or make life choices that took us in different directions, the acknowledgment of the insensitive way in which time passes now that I am in my 60s seems like the present rarely measures up to the euphoric recall of my past.

For me, when I sit on a pickle bucket out on the ice, staring down a white cylindrical shaft, I grieve for the friends I’ve lost and the humor of past deer camp members. How can anything live up to the memories of my days already spent outdoors?

For me, the cruel beverage of melancholy for the time that has passed can only be quenched by one thing. Get back on the ice. Get back in the woods. Listen to a squirrel as he chips away on an acorn in the treetops, watch for the slightest movement on a distant hillside during the last few minutes of legal shooting time or notice the tiniest pulse of the rod tip bowing down to the hole in the ice, is all that I have now.

And now, knowing myself as I do, the meaning of any moment is in the practice of staying alert to all sounds, all movement, every wind direction, the smell of fresh acorns and butternuts, or the smell of fresh cut hay and the distant honking of geese. This is the meaning and purpose of my good fortune to still be walking on this planet.

One day, I, too, will become a memory, and I hope that when people hear the honking of geese, the smell of fresh manure or feel the cold North wind stinging their face on their boat ride to the duck blind, I will be there. It is where I belong. Now and then.

(Bradley Carleton is executive director of Sacred Hunter.org, a privately owned limited liability corporation that seeks to educate the public on the spiritual connection of man to nature through hunting, fishing and foraging.)



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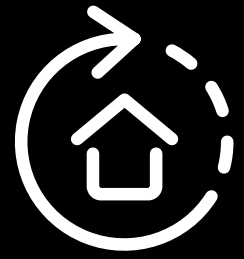
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Calendar of Events

Please send event listings to calendar@thecharlottenews.org at least three weeks in advance.

**Teachers' Night Out
Friday, Feb. 9, 4-5 p.m.**

Local educators are invited to the BCA Center galleries for Teachers' Night Out. Teachers and teachers in training, along with their family members, are invited to join for a social hour and a sneak peek of new exhibitions: "Here Now: Art" and "Migration and Margaret Jacobs: Kinship" in the fourth-floor art studio.

**'Bikes vs. Cars' documentary
Friday, Feb. 9, 7 p.m.**

On Feb. 9 at 7 p.m., the Jericho Energy Task Force will present the movie "Bikes vs. Cars" at the Deborah Rawson Memorial Library. "Bikes vs. Cars" is a documentary about the bike and what a tool for change it can be. It highlights the conflict in city planning between bikes and cars and a growing reliance on fossil fuels. Local Motion's executive director Christina Erickson will be on hand for a post-movie discussion. Light refreshments will be served but this is a waste-free event so please bring your own mugs and plates. For more information contact Larry Lamb at lblamb@hotmail.com.

**'The Last Suspicious Holdout' reading
Wednesday, Feb. 14, 8 p.m.**

On Wednesday, Feb. 14, at 8 p.m., writer Ladee Hubbard will give a reading at the Vermont Studio Center's Red Mill Building. Her latest work, "The Last Suspicious Holdout," is a collection of 13 stories chronicling the lives of a southern African American middle-class community, from 1992 through 2007. The next day, Feb. 15, at 10 a.m. Hubbard will give a talk on the craft of writing. Seating is limited, so please email writing@vermontstudiocenter.org to save a

spot.

**Cross-country skiing interview
Thursday, Feb. 15, 7 p.m.**

The Vermont Ski and Snowboard Museum will present "Part II: One-on-One with the Father of Cross-Country Skiing," John Caldwell will continue an interview via Zoom. Register at vtssm.org/new-events. Caldwell competed in the 1952 Winter Olympics and later became a cross-country ski coach. He ultimately became the authority on cross-country skiing and wrote a series of books on the sport. Caldwell is often referred to as the "Father of Cross-Country Skiing" and was inducted into both the U.S. and Vermont Ski and Snowboard halls of fame.

**Discover Engineering
Saturday, Feb. 17, 9:30 a.m.-3 p.m.**

Vermont 4-H and the University of Vermont College of Engineering and Mathematical Sciences are sponsoring Discover Engineering 9:30 a.m.-3 p.m. on Saturday, Feb. 17 on the campus. The annual free event is for fifth-10th grade students interested in engineering. It provides an opportunity for the youths to network with university engineering students, faculty and industry professionals and explore various engineering fields with hands-on, skill-building workshops.

**Vanish: Disappearing Icons
of a Rural America.**

Wednesday, Feb. 21, 6:30 pm
Burlington City Arts' Architecture + Design film series continues with "Vanish: Disappearing Icons of a Rural America" at the Contois Auditorium. The film is a chronicle of the visual preservation adventures of photographer, Jim Westphalen, who has traveled the country creating stunning imagery of America's disappearing rural structures. Westphalen, who also directed the film, will be on hand for a special introduction.



Courtesy photo

From left, Mary Scripps, Kimberly Rockwood and Halina Vercessi are appearing in 'IMMACULATE DECEPTION/and then there were NUN' at the Shelburne Town Hall March 14-17.

**Family Art Saturday
Saturday, Feb. 24, 11 a.m.-1 p.m.**

Drop into the BCA Center's 4th floor education studio for an art-making activity inspired by the work of "Here Now: Art and Migration" artist Lydia Nakashima Degarrod. You and your creative crew can explore printmaking and sculptural techniques, and create your own vibrant mobiles and wall hangings around themes of family and home.

**'IMMACULATE DECEPTION/
and then there were NUN'
Thursday-Sunday, March 14-16, 7 p.m., &
March 17, 2 p.m.**

Go With The Flo Productions presents a convent comedy murder mystery written and directed by Sean Moran at the Shelburne Town Hall. Tickets at theaterengine.com or at the door.

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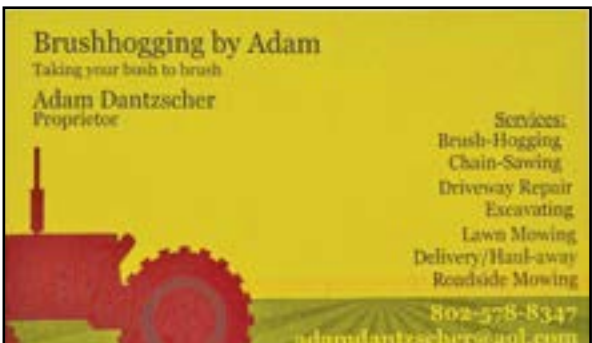


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Library News

Find out about candidates at Candidates Night on Tuesday

Margaret Woodruff
Director

The library and the Charlotte Grange are sponsoring Candidates Night at 6:30 p.m. on Tuesday, Feb. 13.

This is an opportunity to ask questions and share concerns with the candidates on this year's ballot. Learn more about each candidate, their priorities, reasons for running and points of views.

Questions for the candidates can be emailed to Tai Dinnan at charlottegrangevt@gmail.com or posed during the event.

If you'd rather participate online, you can join the discussion by Zoom at <http://tinyurl.com/64wwpaad>.

DIY Valentines

Feb. 10, 10 a.m.-1:30 p.m.

Show your friends and family some love. The library will have lots of supplies for card making in the Program Room.

Give your clothes some love

Monday, Feb. 19, 5:30 p.m.

Make your shirt with a missing button, ripped jeans or moth-holed sweater wearable again with some mending techniques. We'll have some mending supplies, expert advice from Colleen Brady and snacks. No experience necessary. Registration is appreciated, but not required: info@charlottepubliclibrary.org.

Legislation conversation

Monday, Feb. 19, 5:30 p.m.

Learn about new legislation and share your concerns and questions with our state representative, Chea Evans. Yes, you can darn your socks at the same time.

Writer's studio

Tuesday, Feb. 20, 6:30 p.m.

Looking for a welcoming spot to share your writing? Come to the Carpenter-Carse Library in Hinesburg for the second session of the three-town writer's studio, a positive atmosphere to share feedback about writing projects big and small. Geoff Gevalt of the Vermont Young Writer's Project serves as the facilitator for this monthly meet-up that rotates among the three neighboring libraries. Please email Margaret at margaret@charlottepubliclibrary.org if you'd like to attend.

Children's programs

Preschool story time

Tuesdays & Fridays, 10 a.m.

Come to the Charlotte Library for preschool stories, crafts and activities. No registration required. Age 2 and over.

Preschool play time

Wednesdays, 10 a.m.

Play in the preschool years enables children to explore and make sense of the world around them, as well as to use and develop their imagination and creativity. Exploring the sensory table, sorting, playing with blocks, play dough are a few of the open-ended projects planned for Wednesday morning play-based learning at the Charlotte Library.

Let's LEGO

Saturdays, 10 a.m.-1:30 p.m.

Drop-in for LEGO free play. We'll have loads of LEGO bricks out along with some books and prompts for inspiration. For ALL ages. Please note children under 10 must be accompanied by an adult.

Programs for adults

Stillwater meditation

Saturdays, 9 a.m. (except Feb. 24)

Poetry and meditation are offered freely and in person to the delightful community of Charlotte. You are invited for quiet reflection, contemplation and gentle meditation instruction. Respect for all beings and faiths is a foundational quality of our time together. Beginning and experienced meditators are welcome.

Loving your iPhone or iPad

Thursday, Feb. 15, 10-11:30 a.m.

Want to improve your relationship with your iPhone and/or iPad? Bring your questions and frustrations to a Q&A session with our tech librarian Susanna Kahn. She'll provide answers and offer some additional tips to help make your device a helpful and trusted tool.

Mystery Book Group:

Monday, Feb. 19, 10 a.m.

Join the group to discuss "While Justice Sleeps," a gripping, complexly plotted thriller set within the halls of the U.S. Supreme Court where a law clerk finds herself embroiled in a shocking mystery crafted by one of the most preeminent judges in America. Copies available at the circulation desk.

Better Together book club

Wednesday, Feb. 21, 7 p.m.

In Emily Giffin's "All We Ever Wanted," three very different people must choose between their family and their values. Copies available at the circulation desk. The e-book and audiobook are available on Libby.

Men's Book Group:

Wednesday, Feb. 21, 7:30 p.m.

In "One Summer: America, 1927," Bill Bryson, one of our greatest and most beloved nonfiction writers, transports readers on a journey back to one amazing season in American life. Join the discussion at the library or on Zoom at <http://tinyurl.com/bde3bktn>.



Photos by Susanna Kahn

Marcia Vogler talks about self-expression through artist books.



The cooking book club shares the joys of cooking.

Recurring programs

Book chat

Wednesdays, 3 p.m.

Meet each week to discuss new books, old books and books we might have missed. Each week, Margaret Woodruff selects a theme and highlights related titles from the library collection. No registration necessary.

Crochet & knit night

Wednesdays, 5-6:30 p.m.

Claudia Marshall is your host for a casual weekly session of crocheting and chatting, knitting and catching up. Bring your project or start a new one with yarn and needles available at the library, along with plenty of books to instruct and inspire. For teens and adults.

Short story selections

Wednesdays, Feb. 7 & 21, 1 p.m.

Join library director Margaret Woodruff to share and discuss short stories old and new via Zoom at <http://tinyurl.com/4bkn8ru8>. The group meets the first and third Wednesdays of each month.

Library contact information:

Margaret Woodruff, director
Cheryl Sloan, youth services librarian
Susanna Kahn, tech librarian
Phone: 802-425-3864
Email: info@charlottepubliclibrary.org
The Charlotte Library Board of Trustees meets regularly on the first Thursday of the month at 6 p.m. Contact the library or visit the library website at charlottepubliclibrary.org for more information.



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Senior Center News

Opportunities to stay young, healthy at senior center

Lori York
Director

The key to overcoming health issues associated with aging is remaining active and engaged while looking at preventative measures to limit any challenges. The senior center provides a variety of opportunities to remain engaged both physically and mentally, ranging from exercise classes and outdoor trips to games, artwork, languages and more.

The senior center also provides support for families and friends helping people through various stages of life. For example, the senior center hosts a monthly Alzheimer's Caregivers Support Group to help people caring for someone with memory loss. This month there will also be a screening of the Alzheimer's documentary, "Keys Bags Names Words", about facing dementia with hope and grace.

And while preventative measures are important to limit health challenges, it is also critical to plan so that family is not left wondering what decisions should be made. To help, this month there will be a discussion on how to plan your funeral as a gift to loved ones.

Community services

Alzheimer's Caregivers Support Group Thursday, Feb. 8, 5-6 p.m.

Are you caring for someone with Alzheimer's? Do you know someone who is? Please join the monthly Caregiver Support Group on the second Thursday of each month from 5-6 p.m. The meetings provide a safe place for caregivers, family and friends of persons with dementia to meet and develop a mutual support system. For additional information or to receive the Zoom meeting link, contact Susan Cartwright at cartwright.susan1@gmail.com.

AARP free tax preparation Wednesdays, March 6-27

Tax-aide volunteers will prepare tax returns, provide tax assistance and maintain confidentiality while reviewing and preparing your tax return. Register in person at the senior center or call 802-425-6345 to schedule an appointment to get your taxes done for free. These tax clinics are open to all ages. One-hour appointments available at the senior center between 1-4 p.m. Registration required. Free.

'Keys Bags Names Words' documentary Wednesday, Feb. 14, 1 p.m.

This documentary is about everyday people facing dementia with courage and grace as a patient, a caregiver or a professional helping patients and families cope and even thrive. The film is not a lament about loss, but an inspiring celebration of the human spirit. Free, but registration appreciated.

Planning your funeral Wednesday, Feb. 21, 1 p.m.

Join Michele Ready, a third-generation funeral director from Ready Funeral Home in Burlington. Ready will provide a comprehensive session on funeral prearrangements, prepayments and assisted planning. She will cover the benefits of preplanning, the various options available and how to make informed decisions that will help you and your loved ones during a difficult time. Light refreshments will be provided. Registration suggested. Free.

Age Well February Meal Wednesday, Feb. 28, noon

On the fourth Wednesday of the month, Age Well will provide a sit-down meal at the senior center. This month the meal will be cheese tortellini with beef, marinara sauce, green beans, dinner roll and an orange for dessert. Registration and \$5 lunch donation required by Thursday, Feb. 25. You will need to have a completed 2024 Age Well Registration form on file.

Weekly Age Well grab & go meals

Pick up on Thursdays, 10-11 a.m., at the

Charlotte Senior Center. Registration is required by Monday for the Thursday meal. \$5 suggested meal donation but not required. To register, call 802-425-6345 or email meals@charlotteseniorcentervt.org.

Bone Builders Tuesdays, 10:30-11:30 a.m. & Fridays, 11 a.m.-noon

RSVP Bone Builders, a program of United Way of Northwest Vermont, is a no-impact, weight-training program designed to prevent and even reverse the negative effects of osteoporosis in older adults. Bone Builders consists of a warm-up, balance exercises, arm and leg exercises, and a cool down with stretching. Cost: Free. No registration required, but there is paperwork to complete before your first class, so please plan to arrive a bit early.

Upcoming programs

February artist exhibit

The exhibit for February features unique watercolors, acrylics, oils, photographs and assemblages created by the artists who participate in the senior center's Friday arts group. This local group of artists will host a reception on Sunday, Feb. 11, from 1-3 p.m. All are welcome.

Winter spike hikes Wednesday, Feb. 21, 11a.m.-1 p.m.

It's time to get outside and enjoy some winter hikes. Weather permitting, the group will meet for an outing which will be approximately two hours with location to be determined on trails around Charlotte and neighboring towns. Bring your own spikes or snowshoes, depending on the weather, snacks and water. The group is also looking for some trip leaders. To register or indicate your interest in leading a winter hiking trip, contact Susan Hyde at susanfosterhyde@gmail.com. Registration required. Free.

Backgammon league Tuesdays, 6-8:30 p.m. & Saturdays, 2-4 p.m.

Backgammon is a tactical table game with a 5,000-year history. The league roster has 35 people signed up to play. The group welcomes players at all levels. If you have questions, please contact jonathanhart1@gmail.com. Cost: \$3

Duplicate bridge Mondays, 12:30-4 p.m.

The group plays an intermediate level of duplicate bridge using the basic American Contract Bridge League conventions. Names are drawn for partners, and friendly games ensue. Those unfamiliar with duplicate bridge are welcome and paired with an experienced player to help for a few weeks of open dialogue training. The group is always looking for new players who have basic bridge knowledge. Cost: \$3

Samba Tuesdays, noon, & Fridays, 12:30 p.m.

Samba is a variation of canasta. Players form five clean canastas, one dirty canasta (with a wild card), a canasta of wild cards, a canasta of sevens and at least one samba, which is a run of seven cards in a sequence of the same suit. If you are interested in joining this group, call Sandy Armell at 802-425-3248.

Shanghai mahjong Tuesdays, 12:45-3:45 p.m.

Whether new to or experienced in the Shanghai style of Mahjong, you are welcome to join this informal get-together. For questions email Nan Mason: anne.mason@uvm.edu.

Meals

Menus are posted on the website: charlotteseniorcentervt.org.

Monday lunches

Lunch is served 11:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m., or until the food runs out. Suggested lunch do-



Photo by Lori York

The Friday arts group will be exhibiting their work for the month of February at the senior center. This local group of artists will host a reception on Sunday, Feb. 11, from 1-3 p.m. All are welcome.



Photo by Lori York

The weekly fiber arts group meets on Thursday mornings at the senior center for conversation and inspiration.

nation \$5. No registration required.

Senior center info

The senior center offers programs for adults 50 and older from Charlotte and surrounding communities. Priority is given to seniors, but programs are open to adults of all ages. Programs include weekly lunches, daily exercise classes and many opportunities to connect through board and card games and art and language programming.

Interested in receiving a weekly reminder about what is happening? Sign up for the email newsletters at charlotteseniorcentervt.org. The "Week Ahead" email is sent out

on Friday mornings with activities, lunch menus, and special programs for the upcoming week.

Lori York, director,
lyork@charlotteseniorcentervt.org
212 Ferry Road, Charlotte
802-425-6345
charlotteseniorcentervt.org

Follow the senior center on Facebook or Instagram at charlotteseniorcentervt.

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Write Ingredients

Orange Jell-O mystery remains unanswered

Susan Ohanian
Contributor

Depending on who's making the lists, February has been variously designated as Canned Food Month, Great American Pie Month, Cherry Month, Grapefruit Month, Snack Food Month and Hot Breakfast Month.

And there's more. This year, Feb. 2-18 is Jell-O Week. Although the Jell-O company's invention originated in New York state, Utah officially declared national Jell-O Week in 2001. I don't quite know how Utah gets to designate national celebrations but the Beehive State, per capita, eats more Jell-O than any other state in the Union. When he was in his heyday, Utah even made Bill Cosby an honorary citizen.

And there's more. A senator from Utah often hosts a weekly Jell-O social for his Capitol Hill constituents. In 2002, when the state hosted the winter Olympics, a commemorative pin depicted a bowl of green Jell-O. I didn't quite believe this latter detail but found a pewter pin with the dish of very green Jell-O on sale at ebay for \$22.04. I was able to resist.

Somebody should check Utah license plates.

The jiggly dessert's major ingredients are sugar and gelatin. Not mentioned is that gelatin is a translucent, colorless, flavorless, food ingredient, commonly derived from collagen. Collagen is extracted from the skin, bones and connective tissues of animals such as domesticated cattle, chicken, pigs and fish.

Deep mystery: A package of orange Jell-O has a note: "Do not use with fresh or frozen pineapple, kiwi, gingerroot, papaya, figs or guava. Gelatin will not set." There is no such note on other Jell-O flavors.

Feb. 1, 1933, Skippy peanut butter went on sale for the first time. Developed in 1890 by a St. Louis physician as a high-protein food, by 1990, Americans were eating 800 million pounds of the sticky stuff each year. I don't know how one could check the Internet claim that this is enough spread to cover the floor of the Grand Canyon, but in any case, it's a lot of peanut butter.

And here's an apple story. On Feb. 19, 1878, Thomas Edison received a patent for the phonograph, which means "sound writer." The idea for this machine came to Edison while he was working on a telephone transmitter, hoping to improve on what Alexander Graham Bell had produced in



1876.

A friend bet him a barrel of apples that his phonograph idea would never work. Edison succeeded, and his invention created a sensation.

"I shouted 'Mary had a little lamb,'" he recalled, "and the machine reproduced it perfectly. I was never so taken aback in my life."

Everywhere that this machine was demonstrated people crowded in to hear it cough, bark and speak French. It remained one of Edison's favorite inventions, and he worked for more than 40 years to improve it. In 1927, at the age of 80, he developed a double-sided, 80 rpm, 1-inch record that would play for 40 minutes.

Whether or not Edison received that barrel of apples remains a mystery.

The National Park Service provides a link to the Thomas Edison National Historical Park, with lots of pictures of his journal notes on this device, as well as pictures of the device at <http://tinyurl.com/3u7vsu92>.

Suggestion: Celebrate National Don't Cry Over Spilled Milk Day on Sunday, Feb. 11, and then on Feb. 12, come to the Charlotte Senior Center where a delicious meal awaits you. Take note of how cleverly (and deliciously) the volunteer cooks represent the upcoming Valentine's Day.

Monday Munch

Monday, Feb. 12, 11:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m.

Italian wedding soup, three hearts salad (romaine hearts, artichoke hearts and hearts of palm), heart-shaped cookies.

The wonderfully named (and delicious) Italian wedding soup comes from minestra maritata, or married broths, referring to the blending of meats and broths. To make your week splendiferous, you can also sign up for the special Valentine's Day meal on Wednesday, Feb. 14, provided by the Residence at Shelburne Bay. Don't delay signing up. Space is limited.

Valentine's Day meal

Wednesday, Feb. 14, noon

Accompanying beverage: sparkling raspberry and pear punch. Starters: meat and cheese boards for each table. Entree: beef ravioli with brown butter and goat cheese. Side: classic Caprese salad with balsamic dressing. Dessert: assorted petit fours platter (raspberry thumbprint, petit fours, chocolate covered strawberries).

Monday Munch

Monday, Feb. 19, 11:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m.

American deli sandwiches, picnic potato salad with chips and good, old-fashioned birthday cake.

With the long string of gray days we've been having, we definitely need "You Are My Sunshine," copyrighted in 1940 and recorded by just about everybody: Gene Autry, Bing Crosby, Doris Day, Frankie Yankovic, Ray Charles, The Simpsons, the movie "O Brother, Where Art Thou" and many more. I remember my dad singing this as my bedtime song, although I always requested "Abdul Albulbul Amir," too, because it was long, and I loved the names.

"There are heroes in plenty, and well known to fame

In the ranks that were led by the Czar,
But the bravest of all was a man by the name

Of Ivan Potchjinski Skidar."

With the COVID lockdown and choir rehearsals canceled, British choirmaster Gareth Malone offered singers and music lovers a new opportunity and a safe way of singing in a group. As a choir, accompanied by the London Symphony Orchestra, they sang a wonderful "You Are My Sunshine." Here it is: <http://tinyurl.com/2ebn9cv9>.

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