

The Charlotte News

March 21, 2024



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A change in our print days

The newspaper was delivered late last week. Because of problems with the company that was printing The Charlotte News, the newspaper staff and board decided to change printers this week.

Because of the new printer's schedule, this will mean that your newspaper will be delivered on Fridays now, instead of Thursdays.

We hope this isn't an inconvenience for you. We are optimistic that the quality of the printing will improve so much that it will be worth the change in printing days.

Please be aware that the email newsletter will still be sent on Thursdays. Also, all stories in the print copy will be available on The Charlotte News' website at charlottenews.org on Thursday mornings.

On the website, you can subscribe to the newsletter for free, so if you would like you can get your news before Friday,

CVSD revises budget with \$4M less in expenditures

Scooter MacMillan
Editor

The Champlain Valley School District board's meeting began on Tuesday, March 12, with Meghan Metzler of Charlotte being chosen unanimously as its next chair.

After the board took care of this and the other necessary requirements of reorganization after an election, it got down to the hard work — approving a new budget to send to voters in the district's five towns to replace the proposed budget that was defeated on Town Meeting Day. This was a special meeting called specifically for that purpose.

The district was one of almost a third of the state's school districts that defeated their proposed

SEE **BUDGET** PAGE 6

Birdwatching as a way of life

Scooter MacMillan
Editor

In the firmament of Charlotte Senior Center programing, there are lots of stars, but over the years one of its all-stars has been Hank Kaestner.

He has been leading free birding walks for more than 10 years. These often fill up, so make your reservations early.

He recently gave a presentation on vanilla that was packed and that has lots of people clamoring for a repeat. He says he will give it again. He will also give a presentation on cinnamon sometime in the future at a time to be announced and not to be missed.

On March 13, I was lucky enough to get one of the 20 spots on a Kaestner-led birding expedition. It did not disappoint. Although birds figured prominently into his conversation on the excursion, it ended up being about much more than birds.

After a lifetime of birding, it is an understatement to say he knows a lot about our feathered friends. But he also knows a lot about spices and lacrosse. Oh, and by the way, he

knows six or seven languages.

The first stop on that Wednesday's birding trip was the Charlotte Town Beach.

Kaestner starts the birding by calling attention to the talk that Trish O'Kane gave at the Shelburne library, after the newspaper's deadline but before it was printed this Wednesday, about how birding can change the world. She was also scheduled to give a reading from her book "Birding to Change the World: A Memoir." He figures, since all of the group are birders, they ought to find out how they can change the world.

He allowed that all his life people have called him a bird brain, and whatever the malcontents may have meant, actually that's a good thing.

First stop - town beach

Before the group has even left the Charlotte Senior Center parking lot, Kaestner was already identifying birds, pointing out a robin flitting and singing in the trees.

Bird migration for the spring season is already here, he told the group at the town beach.

"A lot of birds are returning to your backyard — redbirds,



Photo by Scooter MacMillan

Hank Kaestner is ranked No. 9 in the world for his birding life list, having seen 8,083 different species of birds. His brother, Peter Kaestner, is ranked No. 1 and is the first person to have reached 10,000 birds.

blackbirds, grackles, bluebirds," Kaestner said. "All sorts of things are here."

He set up what he called his "oh-my-god" telescope because usually when people look through it the first time and see the birds, their involuntary response is: "Oh,

my god."

The first bird or birds identified on this expedition were Canada geese.

"All birds are different. You just have to know what to look

SEE **BIRDWATCHING** PAGE 2

CVU wins record-breaking 10th state girls' hoops title

Scooter MacMillan
Editor

After a hard fall that drew an audible gasp from the crowd when Merrill Jacobs' head hit the floor of Patrick Gymnasium with a loud thump, CVU's senior guard got to her feet and calmly sank the resulting free throws, putting the Redhawks up 38-33.

With 26 seconds left, the outcome appeared determined.

Although St. Johnsbury's Hayden Wilkins attempted a 3-point jumper that missed, it's doubtful it would have mattered if it had hit with just 9 seconds remaining. And when CVU's Grace Thompson grabbed the defensive rebound, it was a done deal.

The only thing that mattered then was containing the impending excitement of



Photo by Scooter MacMillan

Senior Nina Zimakas and coach Ute Otley revel in the thrill of the state championship.

repeating as Division 1 girls state champs as the final eight seconds ticked off the clock.

When at long last the horn

sounded, the excitement exploded and the celebration began.

The Champlain Valley Union girls team had achieved

back-to-back titles by beating the Hilltoppers for the state basketball title for the second year in a row. Last year's victory had been by a more comfortable 14 points at 43-29, but this victory exemplified the perseverance and resilience coach Ute Otley's applauded in this year's team.

Clutching her plaque, Jacobs said she was feeling no pain, but admitted it might catch up with her later. For now, she was subsumed with the joy of achieving the amazing.

"My goal for basketball was to be on this team and to win a championship, so it was really amazing to be able to experience that twice," Jacobs said. "And I would like for my last game to be a win."

SEE **CVU WIN** PAGE 3



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BIRDWATCHING

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

for. The goldeneye has a golden eye. With the buffleheads it’s the white patch on top,” Kaestner said.

You can even identify a bird by its song with your phone.

Kaestner touts the wonders of eBird, a website managed by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology: “You can take a picture of birds. The camera knows where you are because of global positioning. It’s got a picture; it sends it to the computer at Cornell University where eBird is headquartered.”

Your picture of a bird goes into the database. It confirms the bird in the photo, with the date, the time and the location within 50 feet of where you are and documents it for your bird life list, he said.

Through his telescope Kaestner can even see the golden eye of the goldeneye duck.

I can’t. Apparently, I’m the other kind of bird brain.

There’s breeding loons on Lake Champlain, but they don’t actually breed there. The loons like shallower water, so it’s lucky that there are shallow lakes all over Vermont, perfect for a loon love fest.

Lorraine Johnson, who was serving as bird scribe for this trip and keeping the list of the birds we’d seen, said there were 18 birds on the list at Charlotte Town Beach before the group caravaned over to Shelburne Beach. By the end of the day, the list had over 20 different species of birds on it.

“Doing COVID, that was my winter entertainment, sitting in my kitchen and looking out at all my bird feeders,” Johnson said. “It’s a phenomenal thing to do. It’s just so wonderful.”

Kaestner goes out the day before or morning of a birding expedition to scope out potential birding spots and see where the feathered action is. Sometimes, he will announce a destination only to change it because of bird activity. You don’t know where you’re going with Hank Kaestner until the birding starts.

When we arrived at Shelburne Beach, there are a group of crows that are upset. It takes a few moments to find the source of their consternation. A red-tailed hawk. The flock of crows are darting in and pecking at the much larger predator. Their heroism bolstered by their numbers.

The spark bird

Kaestner has been birding since he was 10 years old.

“Serious birdwatchers have what they call their spark bird. That’s the bird that they saw that gets them interested in bird watching. I’ve never met a bird watcher that didn’t have a spark bird,” Kaestner said.

His spark bird was a vermilion flycatcher. He was visiting his grandparents in Mexico City when he was 10 years old. Until then he’d been interested in and collecting butterflies, when a brilliant colored bird flew up to the picnic bench where he was sitting.

“As a budding naturalist, I wonder what the name of that bird is,” Kaestner said.

He didn’t have a way to find out then, but the next day he was in a bookstore. There was a bird book with a photo of the bird he had seen the day before on the cover. He bought the book and identified the bird as a vermilion flycatcher, common in the western and southwestern United States, but not so much in Kaestner’s hometown of Baltimore.

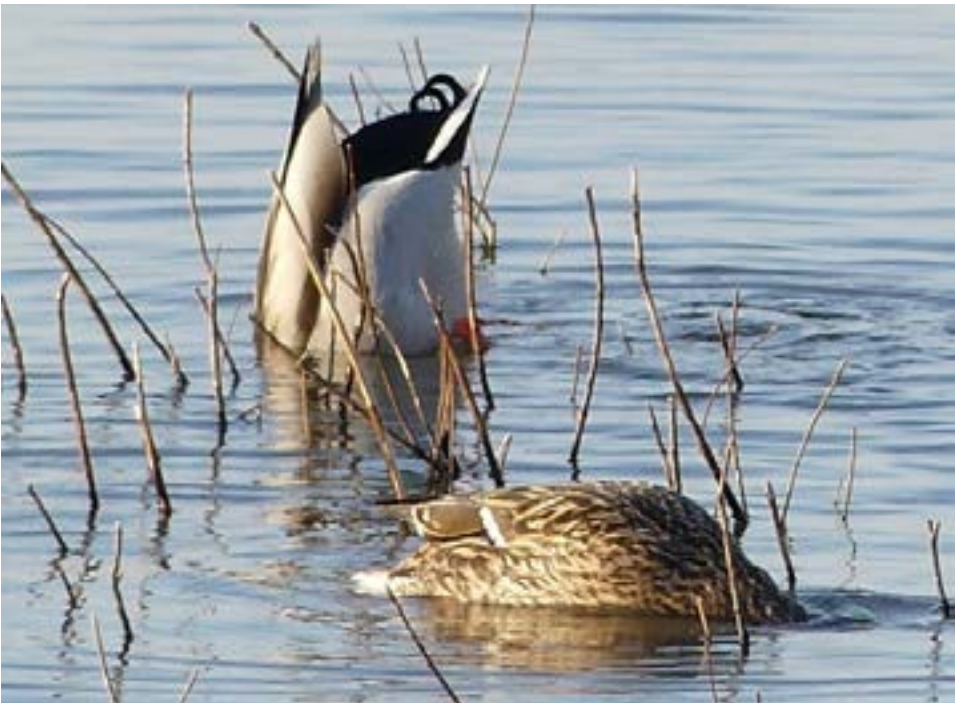


Photo by Hank Kaestner

Here a pair of mallards are dabbling. There are two different kinds of ducks — dabbling, who feed by turning upside down, and diving, who like deep water and feed by diving and chasing their prey underwater.

“Fewer than 60 people have ever seen 8,000; fewer than 20 have surpassed 9,000.”

— Source: The New York Times article about Peter Kaestner’s achievement

He was hooked. Kaestner is the oldest of five brothers, and he got them all interested in birding, eventually even his brother Peter who was 2 years old at that time of Hank’s birding epiphany.

When organizing family events, their father would say, “I’ve got five boys. The oldest is interested in bird watching; let’s go bird watching.”

As the years passed, brother Peter Kaestner caught the bird bug big time. So big, that like Hank, he travels the world trying to add to his bird list.

In fact, Peter was written about this month in The New York Times and on the cover of The Baltimore Sun because he is the first person in history to have gotten to 10,000 species on his bird list.

There’s a photo in The New York Times article of Peter Kaestner in the Philippines on Feb. 9, after snapping a photograph of his record-breaking 10,000 bird — an orange-tufted spiderhunter.

According to The Times, 10,000 had once been thought unachievable. Consider that there are only an estimated 11,000 species of birds in the world. And, only 750 in the United States and Canada.

“Fewer than 60 people have ever seen 8,000; fewer than 20 have surpassed 9,000,” according to The New York Times.

‘Coach K’

As his brother got closer to his goal, Hank Kaestner has acquired a new nickname. Coach K. This is a double entendre that is more than doubly appropriate.

Hank Kaestner knew the more famous Coach K, Mike Krzyzewski, who acquired that nickname during his 42-year tenure coaching the Duke Blue Devils and becoming the winningest men’s coach in Division 1 basketball history.

Krzyzewski was the captain of the Army basketball team when Hank Kaestner was a lacrosse coach at West Point in the late 1960s.

After his younger brother detailed in an essay for the American Birding Association how he planned to top the 10,000-bird goal, Hank Kaestner started “coaching” Peter.

Shortly after his brother got off a flight from Taiwan, Hank told him that he had revealed his birding strategy to his nearest competitor on the bird life list. He said Peter needed to get on another plane and fly back out the next day to some place where the odds were good of seeing enough birds to get past the 10,000 birds benchmark.

The next day Peter Kaestner got on a plane bound for the Philippines where he took the title and broke the 10,000 bird mark.

Hank Kaestner said he doesn’t have any jealousy about his brother’s achievement, just the same pride a college professor would have for a student who came up with a discovery that won a Nobel Prize.

Combining work and birding

Both brothers chose professions that were beneficial to their bird watching pursuits.

Hank traveled the world, buying spice for McCormick, going to 140 countries and planning his travel itinerary so it supplemented his bird watching

“If you’re flying all the way around the world to Sumatra, where we got our cinnamon, you can go a lot of different ways,” Hank Kaestner said.

He’s gone to Madagascar by way of Brazil to get in some birdwatching along the way.

“My brother was in the State Department.



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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The editor makes final decisions on the stories that are published in The Charlotte News. While we are funded by advertising revenue and donor contributions, our news judgments are made in accordance with our mission and are independent of all sources of financial support.

Code of Ethics

The Charlotte News has adopted the Society of Professional Journalists Code of Ethics as the touchstone to guide newsroom practices. The Society of Professional Journalists Code of Ethics is built on four principles:

- Seek truth and report it.
- Minimize harm.
- Act independently.
- Be accountable and transparent.

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Letters, Opinions and Obituaries

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Send submissions, questions, photos, etcetera to scooter@thecharlottenews.org

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CVU WIN

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Mission achieved for the senior. “We’re a very resilient team,” Jacobs said. “We may not be up right now, but we’ll sneak back up at the end.” A very good description of this game, in which the Redhawks didn’t have a lead until late in the game. With 1:17 left on the clock in the third quarter, Elise Berger hit a driving layup to give her team a 27-25 lead, which is where the score stood when the fourth quarter began. And in the final quarter, the contest was thrilling with three lead changes. St. Johnsbury managed to pull even at 29-29 with just under five minutes left when Anna Ebert hit one of two free throws and then pull ahead when the Hilltoppers’ Cassidy Kittredge hit a layup to put her team ahead one last time with 3:20 left. Twelve seconds later Grace Thompson hit a 2-pointer in the paint to put CVU back up 32-31. She hit again almost a minute and half later to put her team up 34-31. Still, St. Johnsbury didn’t fold. Adrianna Hever connected on an outside jump shot to pull back within a point at 34-33 with 1:44 left. But that was all the scoring for the Hilltoppers. Berger characterized the contest as an awesome way for her team to put all its hard work together. She admitted that she and her teammates may been nervous early in the game, but they took a collective breath and realized: “All right, we’ve got this. We know what we’re doing. We’re getting good shots.” Settling down and “just finding that rhythm” was the big change in the game, Berger said. The Redhawks were taking good shots from inside, but many clanged off the rim. Early in the game the Hilltoppers were dependent on shooting threes, a

“My goal for basketball was to be on this team and to win a championship, so it was really amazing to be able to experience that twice.”

— Merrill Jacobs

discouraging amount of which fell in. But CVU stuck with its defensive prowess and working the ball inside to take good shots. This is the way to do it when your shots aren’t falling in, to stick with your game plan and continue taking good shots, Berger said, eventually, “you’ll find the touch; you’ll find the momentum; one goes in and then it starts rolling.” Champlain Valley took the state record for girls’ state titles with this win, the school’s 10th. In her 13th season as head coach, Otley’s teams have accounted for seven of those record-setting title wins. The coach asserted that winning titles never gets old: “Every one is special and fun in its own way.” This team was special in watching how they became confident and learned how to trust each other, she said. The learning curve was big for Otley’s team this year



Photo by Al Frey

Merrill Jacobs drives down the court in CVU’s state title win over St. Johnsbury on March 6 at Patrick Gymnasium.

because five seniors graduated from last year’s team. Berger was the only player who had started before this year. “Everybody else had to pick up a new role and be ready to go,” Otley said. In the pandemonium of jubilation, the coach took a few moments to contemplate the future and the prospects for next year’s version of the Redhawks repeating. It may be an even bigger challenge with six players graduating. When asked if the team would be ready again next year, she said, “You never know. We’ll see.” But, she said it with a smile that seemed to say she already was seeing something in the players who’ll return. A member of the audience speculated

that it’s a good chance that both of these teams might be back again, not only next year, but for some years to come. Both Otley and St. Johnsbury’s coach Jade Huntington run strong programs. As Otley said, “We’ll see.”

BIRDWATCHING

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 2

When it was time to choose where he wanted to be, he would be Papua New Guinea or all these crazy places where there were birds,” Hank Kaestner said. “He always got his first choice.” These two brothers will be joined by another brother for birdwatching in the Philippines next week. The country has around 250 species of birds that are only found there. Hank has the chance to add 75 birds to his list. “There’s no place in the world where I have the chance for 75 lifers,” Hank Kaestner said. The birding caravan’s trip to Shelburne Town Beach also provided some avian excitement with the sighting of a greater scaup. Over the years, the bird list for the Charlotte Senior Center trips is just shy of 200 different species of birds. Hank Kaestner said he was going to have to check his records, but he was pretty sure they hadn’t seen a greater scaup on these trips before.

Dabbling vs. diving

Loons and grebes are different from ducks and geese, he explained. There are two different kinds of ducks. The dabbling

ducks included mallards, black and pintail ducks who prefer shallow water where they feed by turning upside down. Diving ducks like deep water and generally remain in the middle of the lake, so a good telescope like the one Hank Kaestner carries is particularly helpful for watching them. They feed by diving and chasing their prey underwater. Scaups, goldeneyes, mergansers and buffleheads are examples of diving ducks. Kaestner plans to hold another birding walk in early June in the Charlotte Park and Wildlife Refuge. It will be about a two and half mile walk in hopes of seeing birds that like the open country there like bobolinks and indigo buntings. Stay tuned to the senior center calendar for details. The final stop of the birding expedition was at Shelburne Bay, where there were a bunch of Canadian geese, which we had been seeing all morning. Although it wouldn’t add to anyone’s bird life list, there was a bit of excitement here in seeing a mink who obliged the group by swimming up to a small rock promontory jutting into the lake, where we were standing. The sleek, black semiaquatic showoff scurried across the point and into the water on the other side. It seemed like a good way to punctuate the outing.

Correction

A story about voter sentiment on Town Meeting Day in the March 7 edition erroneously quoted resident Evan Langfeldt. He was referring to a road commissioner, not a “rogue” town manager.

NEXT PUBLICATION DATES

APRIL 4

Copy Deadline: March 29
Ad Deadline: March 29

APRIL 18

Copy Deadline: April 12
Ad Deadline: April 12

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Letters to the Editor

Lectio Divina Series at Charlotte Congregational Church

To the Editor:
In Latin, lectio divina means Divine Reading.
Wherever you are on your spiritual journey, Charlotte Congregational Church invites you to join us in the process of lectio divina. It is a meditative technique of repeating a passage from the Bible or other contemplative writings. This process is a form of learning to listen within, to find comfort with a bit of silence, to pray or meditate, to contemplate, and to consider taking a renewed action in your life.
Terri Severance, teacher, soul coach and member of Charlotte Congregational Church, will lead this contemplative and meditative form of listening and prayer. We will meet at Charlotte Congregational Church on Wednesdays, 5:30-6:15 p.m., April 10-May 15 (no meeting on April 17) for the five weeks of the Easter season and end just before Pentecost, the time of spiritual renewal.
There is no cost. To sign up, please email Terri Severance at terri@terrispirit.com.
Kevin Goldenbogen
Charlotte
(Kevin Goldenbogen is senior pastor of Charlotte Congregational Church.)

Remain alert to what Trump says and the threat he poses

To the Editor:
In a New Yorker essay on March 14, Susan Glasser wrote, “It’s easiest to understand the threat that Trump poses to American democracy most clearly when you see it for yourself.” She advised readers, “Watch his speeches. Share them widely. Don’t look away.”
A week earlier I had set myself the task of doing that very thing. I sat through an entire Trump speech, and then, stunned by his last line, wrote a letter to The New York Times that was published on March 18.
Trump assured his fans, that when elected, “I will not give one penny to any school that has a vaccine mandate or mask mandate.”
Hello, diphtheria, tetanus, polio, pertussis, measles, mumps, hepatitis, rubella and more.
This Trump promise brings his threat very close to home. Surely, any worries over whether teachers choose to focus on phonics or address critical race theory will vanish when these diseases, which vaccinations prevent, invade our schools.
Glasser is right: Unpleasant as the task is, we must pay close attention to what Trump says so we remain alert to the threat he poses to us and our children.
Susan Ohanian
Charlotte

Report from the Legislature

Working on bills, bills, bills

Chea Waters Evans
Representative

With crossover behind us, the calendar is stacked on the House floor with all the bills we voted out of our committees last week; now they need to make it out of the House and into the Senate.
Last week we voted out S18, which was the ban on flavored tobacco. I’m glad this is out of my hands because it cost me a lot of sleep. I did vote no on it, which I realize isn’t popular with everyone, but not only did I hear from a lot of people who weren’t supportive of a yes vote, but I had some problems with it myself.
Ironically, someone testifying in my committee just this morning said the goal is to create the laws for liquor, tobacco and cannabis in a way that they’re all considered equal. On that level, it makes zero sense for me that we would legalize cannabis in order to regulate it, but then ban flavored tobacco, thereby making it unregulated and arguably less safe. We also have, within the Department of Health, a health equity office that does a lot of things, among which is evaluate legislation to make sure the laws we make are equitable to all Vermonters. Despite the fact that both racial and socio-economic inequities were concerns for this bill, those concerns were largely ignored. I’d really like us to actually walk the walk when it comes to things like this. It shouldn’t be an afterthought.
We’re voting this week on the Transportation Bill, on H289 which accelerates the Renewable Energy Standard program to the year 2030, as well as my two favorite bills (because I did an enormous amount of work on them): H875, which is a state government and municipal government ethics bill, and H626, which establishes an animal welfare program. I’m really excited both of those were voted with great support out of my committee. Obviously, I’m voting for my own bills, and I’m also voting yes on the T Bill and the RES bill. I know there are concerns about net metering restrictions in the energy bill, but I’ve communicated my concerns to our senators. I’m hopeful that

they’ll address those issues as they consider the bill.
I’ve heard from a ton of people who are supportive of H709, which bans a certain kind of pesticide called neonicotinoids, which are chemicals used mainly on corn to rid crops of certain pesky creatures. The problem is that they also kill non-pesky creatures, like bees and butterflies, and we need them; there’s also evidence that they have long-term negative health impacts on humans. These chemicals have been banned in Quebec and the EU, and so far, the impact on farmers hasn’t been significant. It was important to me that there was no economic hit to farmers. My understanding is that crop yield will not suffer, and there are safer alternatives to that particular chemical.
Finally, I want everyone to know I’m really taking to heart and keeping in mind everyone’s concerns about property taxes and spending. Although we can’t go back in time, we can definitely use our mistakes as an opportunity to do better as we move forward. I see where we’re wasting money, and often those situations arise when, in our haste to fix a problem, we don’t consider the long-term effects of our decisions. I’m hopeful that a measured, careful approach to reconfiguring the way we fund schools (still equitably!) will keep our taxes low and set up our kids to fly high.
I know I’ve mentioned multiple times how uncomfortable the chairs are on the House floor. I got a seat cushion this year, and as I sit in that chair (eight hours today on the floor), I’m thinking occasionally about how I wish I were more comfortable, but mostly what I’m thinking about is making sure that I’m doing my very best to represent all of you. The best way for me to do that is to hear from you.
I’ve received calls and texts on Monday mornings, Friday nights, Sunday afternoons, you name it, and I’m always grateful to receive them. If you don’t tell me what you care about and how you want me to vote, I’m not going to know.
My email is cevans@leg.state.vt.us and my phone is 917-887-8231.

State News

Kids pitch bear’s head tooth as Vermont’s state mushroom

Holly Sullivan

Community News Service

Feeling cooped up after incessant Zoom meetings during the COVID pandemic, Rep. Michelle Bos-Lun, D-Westminster, started going on woodland walks with her dog. The more time she spent outside, the more she noticed an evolving cast of characters on her route: mushrooms.

“There would be all these different amazing mushrooms emerging, and the change was really quick and really dramatic,” Bos-Lun said in an interview. “There were so many different colors and styles: some of them edible, some of them poisonous and literally some that had gold sparkles on them.”

Bos-Lun regularly visits public schools to teach students about the legislative system. In the past, she simulated the process by having kids vote for a Vermont state ice cream.

“I remember thinking when it was done, ‘You know what? I wish that I could actually generate some ideas with the kids and let them see the next part of the process,’” Bos-Lun said. “And so, the first thing that came to mind, because I happen to love mushrooms, is: ‘Do we have a state mushroom?’ And I actually didn’t know. When I looked it up and realized that we didn’t, that five other states do, that four other states have them pending, I was like, ‘That’s it.’”

H.664, introduced by Bos-Lun in the House agriculture committee and sponsored by a dozen other lawmakers, nominates *Hericium americanum* as Vermont’s state mushroom. The spindly *Hericium americanum* was handpicked by the state’s toughest critics: kids.

Students from two schools Bos-Lun is familiar with, Windham Elementary School and Compass Middle School, were tasked with selecting the perfect mushroom. After much debate, they landed on *Hericium americanum*, commonly called bear’s head tooth.

“We think the bear’s head tooth mushroom should be the state mushroom because it can be used as medicine, it can be found locally, it is in the mushroom family *Hericium americanum* which means ‘hedgehog of the Americas,’” Charlie Pelton, Windham Elementary student, told committee members March 12. His brother, George, sat beside him, controlling a set of presentation slides.

Nicholas Duprey, a seventh grade student at Compass Middle School, further explained the medicinal qualities of the fungus during his testimony.

“Bear’s head tooth is known as a ‘brain food.’ It is also very nutritious,” he said at the same meeting. “Bear’s head tooth are effective against memory loss, depression, anxiety, dementia, neurological disorders and cancer. As stated above, it also has wound-healing properties. Usually, they are taken as a tincture, which are like eye drops, or a powder.”

Duprey assured committee members bear’s head tooth have no poisonous doppelgängers. Even if a Vermonter foraged the wrong fungus, they wouldn’t be in danger.



Photo by Meg Madden

The bear’s head tooth mushroom.

“Although this mushroom looks similar to some others, none in this group are toxic if you mistake them with each other,” he said.

One of Duprey’s classmates, Zinth Mae Holder, said the mushroom’s white, spiny appearance makes it a wonderful candidate for another reason.

The mushroom “represents the icicles and waterfalls we have here,” they said, explaining that its spiky hanging clusters mimic Vermont’s winter landscape.

The kids picked an excellent nominee — so say mushroom experts.

Meg Madden, a Vermont-based photographer and myco-educator who runs a popular mushroom-focused Instagram, thinks bear’s head tooth is a great representative for the state. She explained the “native Vermonter” is always the showstopper on hikes she guides.

“When I find it and show people, their minds are blown,” she told Community News Service. “They can’t believe that, first of all, it’s a mushroom because it breaks the preconceived notion of what a mushroom looks like — it doesn’t have a cap, it doesn’t have a stem, it doesn’t have gills. ... It looks kind of like a pom-pom having a crazy hair day.”

Madden said the mushroom is not only a beautiful fungus to look at, but also one that can be cultivated, cooked and sold locally. She said there’s great economic potential to create and sell local products with the state’s mushroom. And she can confirm its deliciousness.

“My favorite thing to do with it is to make bear’s head tooth crab cakes,” she said. “It’s so much like crab meat, texture-wise and flavor-wise. I think if you served them to someone and they didn’t know it was mushrooms, then they wouldn’t even know.”

Lydia Joy Dutton, a fifth grader from Windham Elementary, is also excited about growing a state mushroom. Feeling shy in front of committee members, Dutton had Bos-Lun read parts of her testimony for her. In her presentation, Dutton wrote that a state mushroom would be a fun horticultural opportunity for her family.

“My family have farmed in Vermont since the late 1700s,” the student wrote. “We have farm stands in Manchester, Newfane and Brattleboro. We sometimes sell mushrooms. I hope we sell bear’s head tooth one day.”

(The Community News Service is a program in which University of Vermont students work with professional editors to provide content for local news outlets at no cost.)



Photo courtesy Michelle Bos-Lun

Students from Windham Elementary School and Compass Middle School point to the bear’s head tooth on the day of their decision.

BUDGET

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

budgets. It was the first time voters in the CVSD had defeated a budget since consolidation created the Champlain Valley School District.

Charlotte had a record turnout for Town Meeting Day with 1,434 residents voting on the local ballot and 1,359 on the presidential primary, said town clerk Mary Mead.

According to this year’s town report, Charlotte had just over 3,300 registered voters in March 2023. With just over 3,900 residents, according to the 2020 census, it appears the town has an engaged electorate with almost 85 percent of its residents registered to vote, and almost 44 percent of those voting this time on local issues.

It is impossible to know how many of the town’s voters voted for or against the budget the school board had initially submitted because school ballots are all taken to the district to be tallied. There the ballots are mixed together, so that individual town votes won’t be revealed.

The presentation of the CVSD administration’s proposals for a revised budget began with Superintendent Rene Sanchez saying the staff had worked to come up with new budget proposals for the board consideration that would lower the tax rate

with the least impact on students.

Gary Marckres, the district’s chief operation officer, applauded his coworkers’ help in getting these budget proposals ready in such a short time, since the vote rejecting the initial budget had just been the week before.

Sanchez said the goal was to have the board approve a new budget proposal ready to go to voters on April 16.

One of the options Marckres presented will result in the district removing 41 full-time equivalent positions from the rejected 2024 budget. The positions that would be cut under this plan would be seven district and central office positions, 19 paraprofessional positions, 16 teaching positions and “\$380,000 in non-personnel spending.”

Non-personnel spending is for things like supplies, IT hardware and software, and equipment.

It was noted at the meeting that the 16 teaching positions eliminated by this option would not necessarily be 16 classroom teachers. It could be a mixture of roles that would add up to that number. These would be positions that were acquired with Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) funds. This is federal money given to schools to help stimulate COVID recovery. Marckres said all ESSER funding has ended.

Another budget option he offered for the board to consider would have kept all the

reductions called for in the previous budget proposal, but would have also called for \$500,000 more in cuts to be found in the school system’s budget and another \$500,000 to bring down the budget by applying that amount from the district’s fund balance.

The first option suggested at the meeting, without the more stringent cuts, was eventually approved by the school board with a 7-4 vote with one abstention. This is the budget the school system will send to voters. If approved by voters, it will mean a budget with a bit over \$101.8 million in expenditures for fiscal year 2024-25.

The budget voters defeated called for expenditures of just over \$105.8 million, so the new budget is a \$4 million decrease in proposed spending.

The expenditures in the 2023-24 budget were \$96 million.

This new proposed budget calls for a Charlotte tax rate of \$1.27. If approved, it would mean property valued at \$500,000 will get a school tax bill of about \$6,350 this year. This is a property tax increase of 17 percent over the fiscal year 2023-24 budget’s tax rate of \$1.09.

The failed budget called for Charlotte’s tax rate to go up to \$1.40. This would have meant a 28-percent increase in school taxes, and for property valued at \$500,000 to get a bill of about \$7,000.

Sanchez confirmed that, if the board had chosen the additional \$500,000 in budget cuts

called for by the more severe budget cutting option, which the board didn’t approve to send to voters, much of that money would have had to come from cutting more full-time equivalent positions. He said, although educators would work to provide services to children at the same level as now, they likely would not be able to.

Under this new proposed budget, spending at Charlotte Central School was reduced from the initial budget by \$144,000. Cuts to Champlain Valley Union High’s initially proposed budget were \$612,000. The district and operations budget was cut by \$776,000, Hinesburg Community School by \$226,000, Williston Central School by \$413,000 and Shelburne Community School by \$317,000.

These reductions were equity based, based on the “weighted pupils” at each of the districts’ schools, Marckres said. “Weighted pupils” is a student funding model based on the number of students at a school, with extra dollars allocated per student that needs services like special education, English-as-a-second language instruction or help catching up to grade level.

“The commissioner of taxes in Vermont estimated that the education spending growth in Vermont statewide would average around 12 percent,” Marckres said. The proposed budget the board approved makes this around 2 percent.

“I’m saying that we’re pretty far below the statewide estimated increase,” he said.

Sappy birthday



Photos by Robert Nickelsberg

Although it won’t be the Vermont Maple Sugar Makers’ Association official Spring Maple Open House Weekend until this Saturday and Sunday, March 23-24, with this early spring, they were already sugar making at Pat LeClaire’s PatAlin’s Sugarworks on Lime Kiln Road this past weekend. One of their neighbors celebrated her birthday there with doughnuts, fresh maple syrup and four of her friends. For info about sugaring destinations this weekend, visit vermontmaple.org/mohw.



Hi! Neighbor

Alpeter taking an old company and trying to make it new

Phyl Newbeck
Contributor

For a man with a history of working for start-up companies, taking a job at a firm that's been in existence since 1892 might seem odd but for Curt Alpeter, there are a lot of parallels between his new job as CEO at Grafton Village Cheese and his previous work for IDX, MyWebGrocer and Runamok Maple.

"I refer to it as a 130-year-old startup," Alpeter said. "It has a long history but it's a company that's had a variety of different lives. It's a very Vermont brand with a lot of great components."

Alpeter said a common theme of his career has been either starting, building or fixing companies. Although Grafton Village Cheese is an older company, he believes skills from his previous positions are applicable and that he is bringing a start-up mentality to the business.

Grafton Village Cheese is part of the Windham Foundation. The foundation began in 1963 when a New York businessman saw changes in his summer community of Grafton. He realized that manufacturers were leaving small rural communities which often led to an economic downturn in those places. He created an endowment to bolster Grafton and help other rural communities survive.

Grafton Village Cheese was created as a co-op so local farmers would have a consistent source and price for their milk.

"It was very mission-driven," Alpeter said.

As the business struggled, the Grafton Inn also suffered since there wasn't much reason for people to visit the town. The Windham Foundation responded by buying the inn and the company. The foundation also established the Grafton Trails and Outdoor Center. Grafton Village Cheese is a for-profit company, but all their profits go back to the Windham Foundation.

The company has three primary categories of cheese: aged cheddars, infused cheddars and a newer line of cave-aged cheeses. They are best known for the aged and infused cheddars, but the newer cave-aged products have been receiving awards, and Alpeter said they are a big part of the company's future.

Grafton Village Cheese is sold in approximately 30 states. Its two-year aged cheddar is their flagship product, though Alpeter favors Shepsog (an Algonquin word for sheep), which is cave-aged cheddar made with both sheep and cow milk.

After he moved to Vermont, Alpeter began working at IDX, which was a small privately-owned company.

He considered leaving to go out on his own but instead, joined MyWebGrocer which was also in its infancy.

After nine years, he again thought about



Photo by Lynn Alpeter

Curt Alpeter likes working for a mission-driven organization that creates an iconic Vermont product.

leaving to start his own business but instead, took a job at Runamok Maple where he spent seven years. Grafton Village Cheese may seem like a very different venture from Alpeter's previous positions, but he doesn't see it that way.

"All these incredible companies were doing things that I thought was a better path than doing something on my own," Alpeter said. "They allowed me to learn about the start-up world."

One issue he had with IDX and MyWebGrocer is that although they were Vermont companies, they didn't do much business in Vermont and didn't have a visible product. That's what drew him to Runamok Maple which, during his tenure, grew to be a \$10 million business. The owner was also the CEO and Alpeter yearned to run a company on his own, an opportunity he found at Grafton.

Surprisingly, Alpeter isn't the only Charlotte resident involved in Grafton Village Cheese. Two members of the board of directors, Jeff Smith and chair William Bruett, are also Charlotters.

Alpeter has done his share of volunteer work including stints on the boards of the Charlotte Land Trust and Green Mountain Audubon.

The Audubon connection taught him about the rare gold wing warbler, which lives on his property. He became part of the Champlain Valley Bird Initiative so he could manage his land to protect the warbler's habitat. A portion of his property has been conserved by the Vermont Land Trust.

Alpeter considers himself lucky to have been involved with so many Vermont companies. "I've worked for two bigger software companies and two food-driven organizations," he said.

In Grafton Village Cheese he believes he has found the best combination of attributes and a mission-driven organization that creates an iconic Vermont product.

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Education

A message from Charlotte Central School principal

Naomi Strada
(Summarized by Tom Scatchard)

Throughout the week, I have spent a significant time listening to the caregivers and community members of the Champlain Valley School District. The common thread is a commitment to children.

I've heard honest debates about the impact of the tax burden on residents. I've heard fear that a proposed reduction will have significant impacts on the programming for our youth. I've heard firsthand from families who are "surprised" by the layers of responsibility educators and public schools have in caring for and teaching learners.

Public education is complex. People have differing needs and expectations of schools. Channels for sharing ideas are muddy and at times void of curiosity and compassion to understand the multifaceted role schools play.

How can we unite those differing values to nurture, to educate and to prepare the caretakers of our future? Take time to listen to those outside of your close circle. If you don't have students in the school, reach out to a neighbor who does. Consider volunteering and feel the impact you can have on the wellbeing of this community.

When we've invited community members to volunteer, I've heard there is a misconception that you will be filling in for a position that is not funded. In reality, our volunteers:

- Provide one-on-one connections with a student.
- Spend time reading with small groups.
- Help lend a hand in the cafeteria or on the playground sometimes to cover someone who is sick or at a training but more importantly, to make sure every student is seen during these busy times.
- Bake cookies with a student to share the sweetness of their work.

It is with the deepest of gratitude, I thank those of you in the community who have reached out to share your passion, your time and your commitment to these inspiring youth.

I applaud the exceptional educators of CCS who show up each day, staying focused on creating a safe and accepting learning space for all children.

Jen Roth

Fourth graders share poem and fun

When Charlotte Central School fourth graders led a whole-school morning meeting on a recent Wednesday, they shared a poem collectively written called "Where I Am From at CCS." Some excerpts include:

- We are from the school quote, "Take care of yourself; take care of each other; and take care of this place."
- We are from the trees that give us shade.
- We are pizza for lunch on Thursdays and donuts for snack on Friday.

The fourth graders wrapped up the meeting by leading a game of animal master where staff and students from kindergarten-eighth grade played a game like rock, paper, scissors where the animal master would be a moose, snake, lion and shark. They led a fun morning meeting.

School choice deadline is April 1

Children entering kindergarten-eighth grades living in Charlotte, Hinesburg, Shelburne, St. George and Williston may exercise school choice. The goal is to both allow options for families while making balanced class sizes for a positive learning environment for all students. Processes for intra-district choice of school will be guided by the needs of students, space availability and existing resources. Given this, the Champlain Valley School District will work to meet as many families' needs as possible.

Guidelines and application forms can be

found at cvsdvt.org or by calling the district office.

Family Math Night

On Wednesday, April 3, the Charlotte Central School PTO will hold a family math night. It is free to all ages and will be held in the Multi-Purpose Room from 6-7:30 p.m. There will be many games, raffles and prizes, all focused on math fun.

If you would like to attend, RSVP to ccspto@cvsdvt.org. Please include your child's name and number of children attending.

Girls on the Run registration open

Girls on the Run inspires individuals of all abilities to discover, build and grow their self-confidence. They experience a sense of belonging and connection as a team. Volunteer coaches facilitate lessons that blend physical activity with life-skill development, including managing emotions, fostering friendships and expressing empathy.

At the end of the season, the team completes a community-impact project and a 5K, which provides a sense of accomplishment and sets a confident mindset into motion.

Charlotte Central School registration is limited to 15 participants, so register now. For more information, reach out to the school's Girls on the Run coach, Kevin Fleming, at kev5354@yahoo.com.

Sports

CVU alpine teams finish another remarkable season

Scooter MacMillan
Editor

This has been another remarkable year for the Champlain Valley Union alpine ski team.

For the second year in a row, the Redhawks had 12 skiers qualified to represent the state of Vermont in the Eastern High School championships — six men and six women. The competition involves teams from the states in the eastern United States.

With a total of 24 skiers on the state team, that means that half of the team were from CVU. This is the same number that CVU sent to the Easterns last year as part of the state team.

Vermont won the Eastern High School Championship on March 9 at Attitash Mountain in Bartlett, N.H. The event was supposed to be a two-day competition with giant slalom on Saturday and the slalom on Sunday, March 10, but a snowstorm blew in Saturday night forcing the cancelation of Sunday's contest.

The Vermont men won Saturday's giant slalom with Jake Strobeck taking second. The Vermont women took second. The results of Saturday's skiing became the results for the Eastern High School championships with no results from the canceled Sunday slalom to contribute to the final result.

CVU also did quite well at the Vermont state championship on Monday and Tuesday, March 4-5, at Burke.

Kate Kogut took home third place in the giant slalom on Monday, the first day of state competition.

On Tuesday, Ella Lisle took first place in her final high school slalom competition. Rachel Bialowoz also ended up on the podium with a third-place finish, closely followed by Kate Kogut in fourth and Carly Strobeck in eighth.

With four women in the top 10 in the slalom, the Redhawks scored enough points to take the women's state title.

The CVU men had four finishers in the top 10 in the giant slalom, with Jake Strobeck taking first place, followed by George Francisco in fourth, Ray Hagios in sixth and Sebastian Bronk in eighth.

But, a bit of bad luck struck the Redhawks men's skiers in the slalom. With three of the team placing in the top five — Ray Hagios taking first, Jake Strobeck in fourth and George Francisco in fifth — there was a technical mistake made by officials.

Each team is only allowed to ski six competitors. The places of the top four finishers for each team are added together to arrive at the teams' scores. Since since two of CVU's men's skiers didn't finish and

CVU SKIING

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 8

one was disqualified, the team didn't have a fourth skier whose finishing place could be added to the other three skiers' places.

Officials figured the resulting score incorrectly, so initially Rutland was awarded the men's title on Tuesday. Eventually, the mistake was discovered and officials realized that actually the CVU alpine team was supposed to be the winner.

The Vermont Principal's Association made the decision for CVU and Rutland to stand as boys co-champions.

In the end, the CVU alpine team officially won both the women's and the combined overall title (the combination of the men's and women's scores), although it actually won all three — the men's, women's and combined state titles.

"At the end of the day, CVU alpine did 'win' both the men's and women's State Championship Alpine titles and the combined overall title," said coach Steve Francisco. "CVU Alpine continues to be the team to beat."



Courtesy photo

The Champlain Valley Union's men's and women's alpine teams are, from top left, Lars Cartwright (coach), Carly Strobeck, Elizabeth Norstrand, Ella Lisle, George Francisco, Kate Kogut, Rachel Bialowoz, Marley Cartwright, Lilly Caputo, Addie Bartley, Natalie Paquette (coach). Bottom from left, Ray Hagios, Jacobs Sternberg, Sebastian Bronk, Alden Endres, Kai Schulz, Sawyer Lake, Jake Strobeck and Steve Francisco (coach).

Outdoors

Lewis Creek Association fights Japanese knotweed in watershed

Kate Kelly
Contributor

Non-native invasive plant species have long threatened the health of ecosystems, wildlife habitat and populations of native plants in the Lewis Creek watershed. Management can be difficult because they are easily spread via seeds, roots, fragments, animals and humans.

Japanese knotweed is a particularly tough plant to remove. It was introduced from East Asia in the late 1800s. It was planted as an ornamental and for erosion control, but ironically, it can actually increase streambank erosion.

Japanese knotweed spreads primarily by its roots or rhizomes, which can break off during a flood then resprout and form a new colony downstream. The Lewis Creek Association hopes to engage community members and undertake a long-term project controlling knotweed without herbicides in our watershed and is looking for help.

A prior grant to Lewis Creek Association documented the presence of knotweed

populations in the Lewis Creek watershed, but distribution is patchy. It has not yet spread prevalently across streambanks, unlike in many other Vermont watersheds where it covers nearly every square foot available.

The Lewis Creek Association is excited to demonstrate a non-chemical removal method to the public at a site in North Ferrisburgh, where technicians will be present weekly to lead removal efforts and display these methods to the public. Everyone is invited to help.

The Lewis Creek Association is partnering with Mike Bald of Got Weeds? to guide this work and demonstrate effective methods for knotweed removal without herbicides. You can also get involved in a project that uses community science to help us understand the distribution of knotweed in the watershed using iNaturalist.

The Lewis Creek Association would love to have your involvement in one or both portions of the project. If you're interested in learning more, sign up at bit.ly/lca-knotweed or reach out to lewisecreekorg@gmail.com or 802-488-5203.



Photo by Kate Kelly

Japanese knotweed on the bank of Lewis Creek in Starksboro.



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Our Local Feast

Maple cornbread celebrates the spring sugaring season

Dorothy Grover-Read
Contributor

The sap run has been better than expected with our strange on-again, off-again spring and early warm weather. But maple syrup is here at last, and it is as tasty as ever. This Saturday and Sunday, March 23 and 24, we'll celebrate the Spring Maple Open House Weekend and there will be lots of sweetness to sample.

Check local events listings for pancake breakfasts, sugar bush and sugarhouse tours, samples, sales and sugar on snow, although this year it might be shaved ice. Head over to vermontmaple.org for a map of participating sugar makers in our area, and stock up.

Our precious syrup is not just for pouring on pancakes. We use maple in our cooking and baking all year. This week, after getting my supply of dark amber from my friend Greg's sugarhouse, I decided to sample the new batch with a family favorite — maple cornbread. This uses another local product, organic heirloom cornmeal grown right here in town at Nitty Gritty Grain Co. Why use anything else when our local product is so delicious? High Meadow Yellow is easily found in our local markets and co-ops.

Talk to a southern cook about cornbread, and a Yankee like me may well end up in a verbal disagreement over two aspects: the addition of flour and that of sugar. The southern cook will probably tell you that neither the former nor the latter has any business in true cornbread. Northerners use both with no apology!

I have always found this interesting because in general, New Englanders do not like their foods nearly as sweet as dishes from the South. Our desserts use less sugar, our baked goods, puddings, etc., are never as sweet as some of the treats dished up in the South. And yet, with cornbread, I'm told it is almost a felony to add a bit of the sweet.

Whether South or North, corn was an important staple grain for our early settlers, every settlement had a grist mill; in the North, wheat did not grow well, so we used primarily corn, rye and buckwheat, all of which suited our climate. Corn still grows beautifully here, especially our delightful sweet corn.

My aunt's cornbread is quick and easy, and can be made with endless variations. At high summer, add some fresh peppers from the garden, maybe some scallions. In just a few weeks, snip some chives to toss in.

Use King Arthur (a Vermont company) white whole wheat flour for a 100% whole grain bread with a lovely texture, which is how I usually make it, but you can also use all-purpose, which is what my aunt used.

In addition to using whole grains, my other variation on her recipe is the fresh corn, usually left over from supper the night before. Local corn you've tucked in the freezer last September is perfect, but you can substitute any frozen or canned corn.

My mom added the maple extract because often when you bake with maple, the flavor gets lost in the process, and we do want to taste it. Although we've used maple three ways, the flavor is not overpowering, just a

nice background note, and the corn flavor still shines through.

I sprinkled just a bit of Vermont cheddar on top to add a nice browned cheese note, no one around here objects to this, and thus we've added another local food to our feast.

The recipe is quick and easy. One bowl, one pan and you are a half-hour away from a local, seasonal treat. Serve it on the side, grab it for a snack, or drizzle with a bit more maple syrup and call it breakfast.

Aunt Jeanette's Yankee maple cornbread

Preheat oven to 425 degrees, or 400 convection, preferred to even browning. You can also use an air fryer with this recipe. Tuck an overhanging sling of parchment paper into a greased pan and grease the paper as well. This will help in remove the bread in one piece for easy cutting.

In a large bowl, combine:

- 1 cup milk, dairy or plant (I used oat)
- 1/3 cup dark amber maple syrup
- 1 tsp. maple extract
- 2 local eggs, lightly beaten
- 1 tablespoon maple sugar or white sugar
- 1/2 stick butter or vegan butter, melted and cooled just slightly

Mix together and add:

- 1 cup High Meadow Yellow cornmeal or other medium cornmeal
- 1 cup King Arthur white whole wheat flour or all-purpose flour
- 1 tablespoon non-aluminum baking powder
- Scant teaspoon sea salt
- 1 cup corn kernels, patted dry



Photo by Dorothy Grover-Read
A slice of cornbread — drizzle with some dark amber maple syrup, and life is good.

Mix only until combined, then add to prepared pan. Top with some grated Vermont cheddar if desired and pop in the oven.

Set the timer for 20 minutes convection, 25 for standard oven, and check with a toothpick. It will probably need five to six more minutes, and if the cheese starts to get too browned, cover with foil.

Once baked, let cool for a few minutes, then lift out of the pan with your little sling. Let cool until your impatience gets the best of you, then cut into 16 pieces. If you are having this for breakfast, a little drizzle of more syrup is highly recommended.

Food Shelf News

Charlotte Food Shelf mourns the death of Louise McCarren

Maj Eisinger
Contributor

The Charlotte Food Shelf is deeply saddened by the death of our friend and colleague, Louise McCarren. In equal measure, we are grateful to have known and worked alongside her.

Louise was a successful businesswoman, a lawyer by training, who worked in civic service in and outside of Vermont,

including spearheading the New England Energy Project, which helped low-income people dealing with rising cost of utilities.

She retired to do volunteer work with a vigor, graciousness and humility that amazed us all. She would arrive at the food shelf, always saying "whatever you need, whatever you need," with a big smile and big energy to match. Whether it was purchasing a cow for our meat distribution, hauling in a load of fresh fruits to fill the

holiday baskets or delivering food to shut-ins, Louise was always generous with her time and gifts. She frequently recognized a need and did what was needed, without requests or fanfare, in a way that was thoughtful, personalized and discreet.

Louise loved tennis, ice hockey, volunteerism and her community. She loved flower gardens, cultivating more than 150 varieties of peonies that would be celebrated with a "Peony Walk" party. In the Spring, the Food Shelf will plant a peony in honor of Louise, our passionate, generous, delightful friend, for she was truly a beautiful force of nature. It was our privilege to know her, and we celebrate her memory.

Louise and Ed's son, Willy Amidon, has invited friends and colleagues to a

service for Louise and Ed at the Charlotte Congregational Church on Saturday, April 6 at 11 a.m. A Celebration of Life at the Old Lantern will follow.

We are so grateful to all our community for its support. We thank Diane Cote for her donation in memory of Shirley Marshall, Julie and Eliot Feibush for their donation in memory of Vera Louise McCarren, Gregory Chioffi and Kim Haley for their gift in memory of Bill Posey, and Nik Blasius for his donation of time and groceries. We appreciate the generosity of Remo and Donna Pizzagalli, Virginia Foster, Our Lady of Mount Carmel Church, the Vermont Foodbank, Jeffrey W. and Jolinda D. Smith and The Windham

SEE **FOOD SHELF** PAGE 12



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Gardening

Easter lilies are not the only popular Easter flower

Deborah J. Benoit
University of Vermont Extension

It’s no surprise that the Easter lily (*Lilium longiflorum*) is the most popular floral gift for Easter giving, but did you know that, contrary to its name, it isn’t a spring-blooming flower?

When grown outdoors, they bloom during the summer. Commercial growers go through a carefully timed process to coax them to bloom at the proper time each spring.

Easter lilies are commonly sold as a plant, but their white, trumpet-shaped flowers often take center stage in cut flower arrangements. They symbolize rebirth, new beginnings and hope.

After the holiday, potted Easter lilies can be planted in your garden after all danger of frost has passed. Be sure to introduce them to the outdoors over the course of several days by bringing them out for a while each day, gradually increasing the number of hours.

Easter lilies are hardy in U.S. Department of Agriculture hardiness zones 5-11, possibly Zone 4, if protected from winter temperatures by sufficient snow cover and a generous layer of mulch. Choose a sunny location with soil



Photo by Ashlee Marie/Pexels
The ever-popular Easter lily, sold as a potted plant or cut flowers, symbolizes rebirth, new beginnings and hope.

that drains well. The leaves will eventually yellow and die back in the fall.

As beautiful as they are, be aware that every part of an Easter lily can cause stomach upset in dogs if eaten but is highly poisonous to cats. That includes the yellow pollen that is easily shed. If you have pets, be sure to keep Easter lilies well out of their reach.

In addition, the pollen can permanently stain fabric. An easy way to prevent the spread of pollen is to simply remove the

anthers (the yellow part of the flower that produces pollen).

Of course, Easter lilies aren’t the only flower popular for Easter gift giving.

Daffodils (*Narcissus*) are one of the first flowers to emerge as winter ends and are true harbingers of spring. They appear in cut flower bouquets and as potted plants at florists around this time of year. Their bright yellow, trumpet-shaped blooms represent rebirth and are a popular gift for Easter.

Daffodils are hardy in hardiness zones 3-8. While bulbs are traditionally planted in the fall, potted daffodils can be transferred to the garden after flowers have faded. Simply deadhead the flowers and allow the greenery to continue to grow until it dies off naturally. Remove from the pot and plant in the garden once temperatures have warmed and the ground is workable.

Like daffodils, tulips (*Tulipa*) are a classic spring-blooming flower. They’re available in a rainbow of colors and can be found at florists as cut flowers or potted plants. The egg-shaped flowers can represent rebirth and love.

Tulips are hardy in hardiness zones 3-7.

Potted tulips can be transplanted in the garden in the same manner as daffodils. Like daffodils, they’re toxic to dogs and cats if eaten.

You may already be familiar with other holiday cacti — Thanksgiving cactus (*Schlumbergera truncata*) and Christmas Cactus (*Schlumbergera bridgesii*) — but have you heard of the Easter cactus (*Rhipsalidopsis gaertneri*)? Its flowers come in shades of red, orange and pink. It’s easy to care for and generally considered pet friendly.

Like other holiday cacti, Easter cactus is actually a succulent. Treat it to bright, indirect sunlight and water when the soil feels dry. It’s hardy only to hardiness zones 10-12, so while it can spend warmer months outside (avoid hot, direct sunlight), be sure to bring it back indoors before there’s danger of frost.

Whether you receive Easter flowers as a bouquet, a potted plant or a mixed-bulb planting, they’re a wonderful way to celebrate and a sure sign of spring.

(Deborah J. Benoit is a University of Vermont Extension master gardener from North Adams, Mass., who is part of the Bennington County Chapter.)

Calendar

ParentIN talk

Thursday, March 21, 7 p.m.

Annie Maheux, University of North Carolina assistant professor of psychology and neuroscience, will talk about her research on the impacts of technology use on young people with a focus on mental health, gender and sexuality. Register for the online link at <https://tinyurl.com/zh8pd358> to get an invitation and Google meet link. This workshop sponsored by the Champlain Valley School District may be recorded for future community learning and sharing. You are welcome to join anonymously or turn off your video during the workshop.

‘Terrestrials: life on the ground’

Friday, March 22, 7-8 p.m.

Come to the marble court at the Fleming Museum of Art at the University of Vermont for a performance featuring three original works by professor Paul Besaw in collaboration with an amazing team of musicians and dancers. Make a free reservation at <https://tinyurl.com/4f9ypwk2>.

‘Cabin Fever Follies’

Friday & Saturday, March 22-23, 7:30 p.m.

The Valley Players will present the 36th annual “Cabin Fever Follies” on Friday and Saturday, March 22-23, at 7:30 p.m. at the Valley Players Theater, 4254 Main Street in Waitsfield. Singing, fiddling, banjo playing, improv comedy, clowning, poetry, storytelling and magic are some of the acts to be presented. There will be limited table seating (tables of 10) for pre-show dining (doors open at 6:30 p.m.) and individual seating on risers. The event is BYOB and the audience is asked to “pack-in and pack-out.” For tickets and information go to valleyplayers.com or call 802-583-1674.

‘Just Getting By’

Friday & Saturday, March 22-23, 7 p.m.

“Just Getting By,” a new documentary film by Bess O’Brien about Vermonters struggling with food and housing insecurity will tour Vermont from March 22-April 12 and will play at Burlington’s Main Street Landing at 60 Lake Street at 7 p.m., March 22-23. Tickets are \$15 and can be purchased at the door. Vermont has the second highest rate of homeless people in the United States, right after California. One third of Vermonters struggle to put food on the table. “Just Getting By” focuses on these issues. There will be a Q&A after each screening with the director and folks from the movie. For more information or discount tickets go to kingdomcounty.org or email bobrien@pshift.com.

Maple Run 5K

Saturday, March 23, 9:30-11:30 a.m.

Rock Point School in Burlington is hosting its annual maple-themed 5K race on March 23. The course will run through Rock Point and

on the Burlington Bike Path. Sign-ins begin at 9:30 a.m., and the race will kick off at 10 a.m. After the run, enjoy pancakes with Rock Point syrup and tour their sugarhouse. This year, all proceeds from the race will go to Friends of the Winooski River to help restore and protect the Winooski River. For more information and to register, visit <https://tinyurl.com/bjfh6wj7>.

‘Never Spoken Again’ video

Saturday, March 24, 2-3 p.m.

Catch a special screening of video artworks accompanying the exhibition “Never Spoken Again,” featuring artists Laura Huertas Millan, Carlos Motta, and Francois Boucher at the Fleming Museum of Art at the University of Vermont. This will be followed by a public tour of the “Never Spoken Again” exhibition and a tour of artworks and objects from the Fleming Museum’s Founding Collections with Kristan M. Hanson, curator of collections and exhibitions, and Margaret Tamulonis, manager of collections and exhibitions. “Never Spoken Again” will be shown again on March 31 at 2 p.m.

Artist talk

Wednesday, March 27, 8 p.m.

On Wednesday, March 27, visiting artist Mildred Beltré will give an artist talk at the Red Mill at the Vermont Studio Center. Beltré, is a Brooklyn-based artist, mother and educator working in print, drawing and participatory politically engaged practice to explore facets of social change. Beltré is the co-founder of the Brooklyn Hi-Art! Machine, an ongoing socially engaged collaborative art project in Crown Heights, Brooklyn, that addresses gentrification and community building through art-making.

Climate, photography Q&A

Thursday, March 28, 7 p.m.

On Thursday, March 28, at 7 p.m., full-time meteorologist and part-time photographer Conor Lahiff will hold a Q&A at Jericho’s Deborah Rawson Memorial Library on trends in weather and the challenges of photographing the night sky. The Jericho Energy Task Force is presenting this open-ended forum. Discussion points will include identifying the town’s vulnerabilities, climate mitigation and the chances of having clear skies for the eclipse. Lahiff has worked at the National Weather Service in Burlington for over two decades. His photographs have been displayed at a variety of local venues. Light refreshments will be served but this will be a waste-free event so bring your own mugs and bowls.

Solar eclipse celebration

Tuesday-Saturday, April 2-6

To celebrate the upcoming total solar eclipse, the Fleming Museum at the University of Vermont is celebrating with “Look to the Sky!” Museum staff pulled artworks and objects

from it collection related to space, the heavens and all things out of this world.

Solar eclipse at Shelburne Museum

Monday, April 8, 11 a.m.

Shelburne Museum is holding viewing of the total solar eclipse on April 8. The museum grounds will be open along with the Weathervane Café, the Carousel, Round Barn and, depending on the weather conditions, some of the museum buildings. Tickets are \$25 for adults, \$23 for members, \$15 for children 3-17 and students with ID. Children under 3 are free. More info at store.shelburnemuseum.org/Events.aspx.

Secrets of Mount Philo

Saturday, April 27

Judy Chaves will lead a history-focused, guided hike up Mt. Philo on Saturday, April 27. Learn the mountain’s fascinating history and discover where evidence of that history hides in plain sight. Early spring is a great time for this — the park is closed officially (no cars) and the leaves are still off the trees (views). Plus, this year marks the park’s 100th anniversary; what better way to celebrate? Number of participants is limited to 20, so send an email to chaves@gmavt.net soon to reserve your spot. You will then get more info.

Job Fest

Thursday, May 2

The Middlebury Spring Job Fest will be held on Thursday, May 2, at Middlebury Parks & Rec on Creek Road. This unconventional job fair should feel a bit more like a farmer’s market. Vermont Department of Labor says both jobseekers and employers have preferred outdoor venues and felt as though conversations were easier. The event will be moved into the gym in the event of inclement weather. For more information, contact the Department of Labor office at 802-388-4921. Registration is required at <https://tinyurl.com/ycjzvsth>. You will be provided additional information and reminder notifications as the event approaches.

Woodlands protection retreat

Friday-Sunday, May 17-19

Maintaining and connecting habitat is important for the movement of wildlife across the landscape. Vermont Coverts: Woodlands for Wildlife will hold their 2024 cooperator training May 17-19 in Waterbury. This weekend retreat will share information on improving habitat for wildlife, maintaining connected landscapes and improving forest health. The two-and-a half-day session features presentations by state and local experts in wildlife and forest management and alumni from past sessions. Visit vtcoverts.org to download an application or call 802-877-2777.

FOOD SHELF

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 10

Foundation, and Shelburne Community School seventh graders Charlotte Flanagan, Grace Cowles and Lucy LeFrancois for their project on sustainable solutions to hunger in Vermont which sponsored a food drive that provided food and hygiene products to the food shelf.

The number of families the food shelf is assisting has risen, a part of the third of Vermonters who struggle to put food on the table. “Just Getting By,” a documentary by Bess O’Brien, explores the issue of hunger in our state. The film will be touring Vermont March 22-April 12. More information regarding the film and viewing locations and times can be found at kingdomcounty.org.

The Charlotte Food Shelf is striving to meet increased demand and, in April, will increase the number of days on which food is distributed, adding a Saturday distribution as noted below.

Food is provided at 403 Church Hill Road, behind the Charlotte Congregational Church on the second and fourth Wednesday, 4-6 p.m., and, beginning in April, additional distributions on the second and fourth Saturday, 9-11 a.m., each month. For emergency food, or if you cannot come to the Food Shelf due to COVID symptoms, call 802- 425-3252.

Note that the food shelf has limited utility, rent, medical, dental, school supplies and other emergency assistance available to Charlotte and North Ferrisburgh residents. If you, or someone you know, is facing hardship, help is available. Simply call 802-425-3252 or fill out a request form. Request forms are available during food shelf open hours or on our website at charlotteuicc.org/copy-of-charlotte-food-shelf-1.

Monetary donations are appreciated, tax deductible and can be addressed to: Charlotte Food Shelf, Inc., P.O. Box 83, Charlotte VT 05445. An easy, new way to donate is through the Paypal button on the website address above.

The following donations of nonperishables are always helpful: crackers, canned soups, spaghetti sauce, breakfast cereals, granola bars, toilet paper and paper towels.

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Library News

Take action for every ecosystem, every creature in Ecochallenge

Margaret Woodruff
Director

Earth Month Ecochallenge, running from April 1-30, is a program focused on environmental and social engagement. During this month, you're invited to select actions that resonate with your values, committing to them for 30 days to foster and reinforce positive habits.

Each action you complete earns points and generates real-world impact. Your efforts, combined with those of your team, contribute to a significant collective difference.

Join the team sponsored by library director Margaret Woodruff at <https://bit.ly/48Vx4Qj>.

'Beaverland' Book talk

Tuesday, March 26, 5:30 p.m.

Allaire Diamond, Vermont Land Trust ecologist, leads a discussion of "Beaverland: How One Weird Rodent Made America." Discover how the "Beaverland" story has played out in Vermont and learn more about the book. This is one in a series of book talks in advance of a presentation by Leila Philip next month at Shelburne Town Hall. Copies of the book available at the circulation desk.

Water quality in Charlotte

Thursday, March 28, 7 p.m.

What are some of the causes of poor water quality, and what can you do to help? Join Lewis Creek Association and the Charlotte Conservation Commission for a presentation and discussion about water quality in Charlotte and how it affects Lake Champlain's health. Learn about a new resource available from the association to help you assess your property for stormwater problems and direct you to resources to design and implement improvements. Email at lewiscreekorg@gmail.com if you'd like to attend via Zoom instead of in person.

Writer's Studio

Tuesday, April 9, 6:30 p.m.

Looking for a welcoming spot to share your writing? Join 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 meetup that rotates among our three neighboring libraries. Check with your local library to sign up.

Dog communication

Thursday, April 11, 6 p.m.

This popular, long-running dog communication and safety lecture is a multimedia extravaganza where the audience gets to test their "dog reading" skills. Rescheduled from March 11. Dog trainer Deb Helfrich demystifies dog communication, reveals some common dog-human misunderstandings and explores how we can all live safely and happily together. Registration appreciated but not required at <https://tinyurl.com/bddpn6yn>.

'Beaverland' author talk

Thursday, April 18, 7 p.m.

Celebrate the release of "Beaverland: How One Weird Rodent Made America" in paperback. In the rich naturalist tradition of "H Is for Hawk" and "The Soul of an Octopus," "Beaverland" tells the tumultuous,



Photo by Susanna Kahn

Kids join knitting night at the library.

eye-opening story of how beavers and the beaver fur trade shaped America's history, culture and environment.

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. We'll be exploring the sensory table, sorting, playing with blocks, play dough. These 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. There will be 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 & March 2)

Poetry and meditation are offered freely and in person to the Charlotte community. Come 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.

Better Together book club

Wednesday, March 27, 7 p.m.

Join this group that discusses books related to parenthood and read "Never Enough: When Achievement Culture Becomes Toxic and What We Can Do About It" by Jennifer Breheny Wallace. The definitive book on the rise of "toxic achievement culture" overtaking our kids' and parents' lives, and a new framework for fighting back. Copies will be available at the circulation desk.

Mystery book group

Monday, April 15, 10 a.m.

As the Luftwaffe makes its last, desperate assaults on the battered city in 1944, Londoners take to the underground shelters amidst the black out in "Blackout." Detective-Sergeant Troy starts with the clue of a neatly dismembered corpse leading him into a world of stateless refugees, military intelligence, and corruption all the way to the top of Allied High Command. Copies available at the circulation desk.

Men's book group

Wednesday, April 17, 7:30 p.m.

"Demon Copperhead," set in the mountains of southern Appalachia, is the story of a boy born to a teenaged single mother in a single-wide trailer, with no assets beyond his dead father's good looks and copper-colored hair, a caustic wit and a fierce talent for survival. In a plot that never pauses for breath, relayed in his own unsparing voice, he braves the modern perils of foster care, child labor, derelict schools, athletic success, addiction, disastrous loves and crushing losses. Through all of it, he reckons with his own invisibility in a popular culture where even the superheroes have abandoned rural people in favor of cities. Copies available at



Photo by Margaret Woodruff

Liza Woodruff shares her art at Story Time.

the circulation desk. Join the discussion at the library or on Zoom at <https://tinyurl.com/bde3bktn>.

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, March 20 & April 3, 1 p.m.

Join library director Margaret Woodruff to discuss short stories old and new on the first and third Wednesdays of each month. Via Zoom at <https://tinyurl.com/9c398wyy>.

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 on the first Thursday of the month. The next meeting is April 4 at 6 p.m. online and in person. Contact the library or visit the library website at charlottepubliclibrary.org for more information.

Senior Center News

All kinds of activities for helping you find your balance

Lori York
Director

According to the CDC, falls are the leading cause of injury for seniors 65 and older. Improving strength, balance and fitness is important so that adults can stay active and reduce their chances of falling.

At the Charlotte Senior Center, there are a variety of exercise activities that can help reduce risks of falling, including Bone Builders, pilates, yoga and tai chi. There are also opportunities to be physically active outdoors. This month you can be inspired to be physically active by Charlotte resident Carrie Fenn's experience hiking the long trail, or you can enjoy the beauty of nature by joining the gentle, walking-hiking group.

Community services

AARP free tax preparation Wednesday, March 27, 1-4 p.m.

Tax-aide volunteers will prepare tax returns, provide tax assistance based on your provided information or documents and maintain confidentiality while reviewing and preparing it. 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 1-4 p.m. Registration required.

Weekly Age Well Grab & Go meals

Pick up on Thursdays, 10-11 a.m. Registration required by Monday for Thursday meal. \$5 suggested donation but not required. To register, call 802-425-6345 or email meals@charlotteseniorcentervt.org.

Navigating Veteran Administration benefits

Bob Stock, veterans outreach specialist with the South Burlington Vet Center, will assist veterans and their families with VA benefits and related issues. No registration necessary. Drop-in anytime between 10 a.m.-2 p.m.

Presentations & events

March artist exhibit

The series "Farm and Field" by Margaret McSwain is based on capturing the beauty of Charlotte landscapes, farming spaces and locally grown food. As an oil painter, Margaret has been drawn to pastoral scenes and the subtle differences in light and seasonal changes on the land

Hiking the Long Trail Thursday, March 28, 1 p.m.

Can you imagine hiking 280 miles in 19 days? Have you ever been curious about hiking the Long Trail and what's involved? Join Charlotte resident Carrie Fenn as she talks about her adventure in 2023 hiking the entire Long Trail solo. She will discuss how she prepared for the hike, the planning involved and how it all went. Free. Registration appreciated.

Board & card games

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

Backgammon is a tactical table game with



Photo by Lori York

Bone Builders is a no-impact, weight-training program designed to prevent and even reverse the negative effects of osteoporosis in older adults. The class is offered on Tuesday and Friday mornings at the senior center.

a 5,000-year history. The group welcomes players at all levels. Email jonathanhart1@gmail.com with questions. Cost: \$3.

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

This 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

Brain games Fridays, 2-4 p.m.

There are many ways adults can stimulate their brains to increase mental health, improve memory skills and contribute to overall well-being. Research finds that positive interaction with others and engagement in stimulating group activities sharpens cognition and increases memory ability. Join to play various games, share laughter and enjoy one another's company. Some games are available, but also feel free to bring your own.

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

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

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

Samba is a new version of canasta that has quickly become very popular due to its variety of melds, which keeps the game interesting. If you are curious to learn how to play samba, call Sandy Armell at 802-425-3248.

Exercise activities

Bone builders Tuesdays, 10:30 a.m.-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. Free. No registration required, but there is paperwork to complete.

Gentle yoga Mondays, 11:00 a.m.-noon

A gentle yoga class that focuses on breath-led movement, building bone strength and improving mobility, balance and flexibility. Suggestions are given for adapting the practice. Please bring a blanket or pillow to sit on. Suitable for all levels. Cost: \$10 a class. No registration required.

Pilates fitness Tuesdays & Thursdays, 8:30-9:30 a.m.

This pilates class is for folks 55+ and is designed to be challenging yet safe. It includes upper-body strength work with hand weights and mat exercises. The group will work core muscles to improve balance, strength and posture. Cost: \$8 a class. No registration required.

T'ai chi practice Thursdays, 11 a.m.-noon

T'ai chi is an exercise program for mind and body training to help improve balance, flexibility, stability and overall health. This is not a class with instruction, but rather a practice for students familiar with the form. Cost: Free. No registration required.

Gentle hiking group Thursday, March 28, 9 a.m.

Enjoy the beauty of nature. Come walk at a gentle pace with other seniors. The group will meet each month for a congenial non-strenuous walk. Location to be determined based on conditions of the local walks. Meet at 9 a.m. in the parking lot at Charlotte Senior Center. Call Penny Burman at 916-753-7279 with questions. Registration required. Free.

Yoga strength-building practice Wednesdays, 11 a.m.-noon

Join Heidi Kvasnak for an integrative practice that builds strength and stability

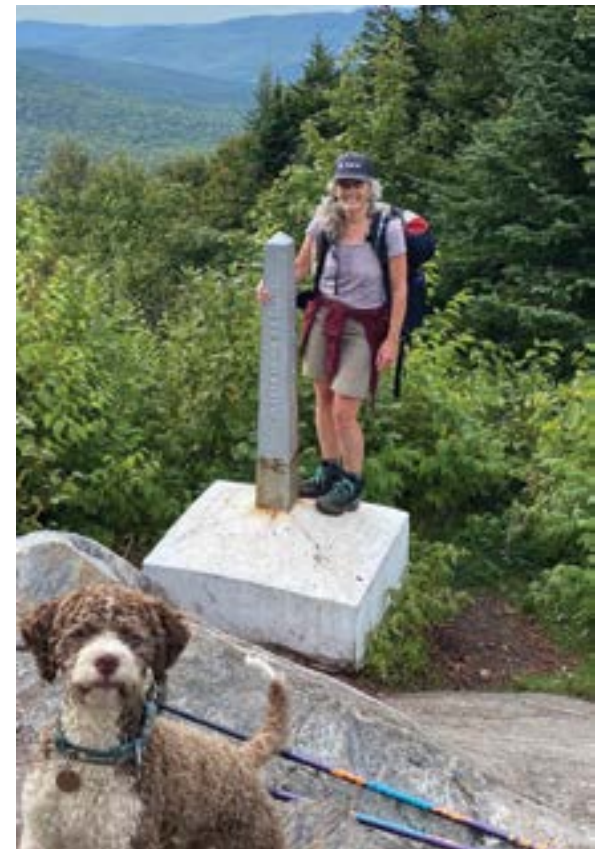


Photo by Peter Fenn

Carrie Fenn at the start of her trip at the Northern Terminus on the Canadian border. She will give a presentation about Hiking the Long Trail at the senior center on Thursday, March 28, at 1 p.m.

while maintaining a sense of ease and spaciousness in both body and mind. The group will practice longer-held postures that strengthen muscles, bones and core, as well as breath-led flowing movement, including sun salutations. Prerequisite: Must be able to easily get down to and up from the floor with or without props. Cost: \$10/class. No registration required.

Meals

Menus are posted on the website at charlotteseniorcentervt.org.

Monday lunches

Served weekly 11:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m., or until the food runs out. Suggested lunch donation \$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.org.

Write Ingredients

The official dish of Texas coming to the senior center near you

Susan Ohanian
Contributor

The 1893 Columbian Exposition in Chicago, also known as the Chicago World’s Fair, included the San Antonio Chili Stand, giving many Americans their first taste of chili. It became the official dish of Texas in 1977.

When I was traveling to 26 states, taking notes on specific classrooms for a report that became a book, I was amazed and delighted by all the chili in Cincinnati. It was featured here, there and everywhere. And here, there and everywhere, it was delicious.

Then I went to San Antonio and discovered that chili ingredients can be very regional. I was astonished by chili mole.

Don’t feel bad that you’ve missed the inaugural Cincinnati Chili Week, organized “to celebrate the city’s food staple,” held Feb. 24-25. On March 25, chili is on the menu at the Charlotte Senior Center.

On March 25, 1945, Sylvester made his first appearance in a televised cartoon, produced by Warner Brothers Merrie Melodies. Sylvester’s trademark expression was “Suffering succotash!”

Since succotash isn’t on upcoming Monday Munch menus, I will refrain from giving the website where one can watch (and hear) Sylvester saying this for 10 hours.

For me, the important connection with Merrie Melodies was the classical music. As a kid, I watched the Saturday afternoon double features and then sat through the cartoons again just to listen to the music. See Mental Floss for samples of the great music those cartoons featured at mentalfloss.com/article/66672/15-pieces-classical-music-showed-looney-tunes.

Look for another American staple, mac and cheese, on April 1. I haven’t asked the cooks for their recipe, but we can rest



Image by Robyn Wright from Pixabay

assured that they won’t use Van Leeuwen’s recipe for mac and cheese ice cream, which dumps two packages of the Kraft orange powder into a bowl of heavy cream, milk, sugar, corn syrup and egg yolks, freezes the result and scoops it into cones.

“Cooking: A Dictionary for Those Who Have to Cook, Love to Cook or Refuse to Cook” by Henry Beard and Roy McKie notes that for those who think the revolution in food tastes has made this classic dish seem humble, the answer is to rename it: maccheroni con formaggio velveeta di Amerigo Vespucci.

On April 1, while adults enjoy their mac and cheese, children can go to the Little Free Library for Kids and look for “On Market Street,” a prize-winning book by Arnold and Anita Lobel, published April 1, 1981. Starting with apples, books, clocks and doughnuts, this book offers delightful shopping from A to Z. Thanks to a generous donation from the board of directors at the Charlotte Senior Center, children can find many great titles in this book spot outside the Grange at 2858 Spear Street.

On April 27, the National Cornbread Festival will be held in South Pittsburg,

Tenn. It features Cornbread Alley, where in past years you could eat sweet potato and bacon cornbread balls, rattlesnake candy cornbread, deep-fried banana cornbread puffs and lots more.

A cornbread traditionalist, this doesn’t impel me to rush to buy a ticket to Tennessee.

Rick Bragg, whose “The Best Cook in the World: Tales from My Momma’s Table,” is a wonderful read, notes that his momma had a number of strong opinions about cornbread. Her Depression-era recipe included both yellow and white cornmeal, water, some butter or lard and one tablespoon of mayonnaise.

She said, “If you do not own a cast-iron skillet, shame on you; go get one.”

Margaret Renkl shared this injunction in the New York Times: “If you are making cornbread in anything other than a cast-iron skillet, stop right now.”

Bragg’s momma’s strongest injunction: “Don’t never, ever put sugar in cornbread. It will ruin it, and you will have to throw it out.”

My mother had the same view, and her



Image by Hermes Rivera from Unsplash

strongest criticism of her mother was, “She puts sugar in her cornbread.”

Ever going for variety, The New York Times has 1,565 entries for cornbread, starting with coconut cornbread, followed by cornbread madeleines with jalapeno, apple pecan cornbread, pumpkin maple cornbread and so on. Their cornbread cake recipe directs readers to put a dollop of maple ice cream on top.

King Arthur Baking has a quarter of a cup sugar in their cornbread recipe (kingarthurbaking.com/recipes/cornbread-recipe).

In “Best Food Writing 2014,” Irvin Lin wrote an April Fool’s Day recipe, “How to Boil Water.” His recipe is “gluten-free, grain-free, paleo-friendly, meatless Monday friendly, cane sugar-free, soy-free, peanut and nut tree-free, egg-free, dairy and casein-free, vegan, vegetarian, local and organic.”

His recipe begins, “Find the perfectly sized pot. ... Locate the sink.”

Lin notes, “I totally LOVE it when I get comments telling me how the recipe doesn’t work ... especially when the reader who tried it substituted different ingredients.”



Early blooming

Photo by Lee Krohn

Early season light looks beautiful on these early season red maple blossoms.

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