

The Charlotte News

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Stay or go: Making plans for the apoc-eclipse



Steve Goldstein
Contributor

With the Great Total Eclipse fast approaching on April 8, most Vermonters have made a decision: Embrace this singular event, go whole hog and party like it's 1932. Or, rent the house, room, yard, or tool shed and get the heck out of the Path of Totality.

The Charlotte News did the person-in-the-street thing to discover how folks living literally on the 50-yard line of the Solar Super Bowl were planning to greet the sun — or not.

Katie Troutman — I work at Horsford Nursery and we usually don't take days off at this time of year. But the nursery provided eclipse glasses for all of us so we can look at the sky.

Tom Kenyon — I run Aurora Farm and the Nitty-Gritty Grain Company. I'll probably watch the eclipse from my home.

Linda Furiya — I'm going to stay at home and watch there. I want to see how my horse, Tree, reacts to the eclipse.

Katie Berdan — I work for The Nature Conservancy. I'm sure I will be watching with my friends.

Dr. Andrea Fossati — I'm taking the day off. My daughter is going to come up from Massachusetts, and we're going to celebrate, either in my backyard or at the town square.

Bud Lawrence — I've got six family members traveling here from Washington, D.C. On the day, we will probably go to Kingsland Bay State Park to watch the eclipse.

Jean Henry — My daughter lives on Mutton Hill and has a great view. A lot of open space. So, we'll probably go there and have a party.

Marcia Bristow — We are having a family-friend gathering, and we live out on Harbor Road. Our friends live on the lakeside, so we will sit on their front porch feeling very fortunate to have such a good venue.

Dulce — I'm originally from Brazil, but I've been living in New York for more than 20 years. My fiancé lives here in Charlotte, and I'll be watching with him.

(All interviews have been condensed and certified for accuracy. Conducted at the Old Brick Store and the Charlotte Library.)



Trina Bianchi — I'm going to watch from home because I want to see what happens with my horses and my dogs. I just got my official glasses here at the library.



Margaret Woodruff — The Charlotte Library will be just having a very casual get together on the Town Green for about 90 minutes and there will be activities for kids.



Dr. Alex Graham — I arranged to take the day off months ago. If it's a clear day, I'll head for the water, perhaps Thompson's Point, and get away from the crowds. I have a bunch of old X-rays that I can use in place of glasses to view the event.



Carol Conard — I was planning to visit my son in Seattle, but he persuaded me to come after the eclipse. So, I'm going to a friend's house. She's having some people over and she's got big fields so we'll sit on her porch and watch it.



Lewis Mudge — I don't have anything planned beyond taking my family to the library event at the town green. My brother is bringing 30 people up from Cambridge, Mass., and they are going to the viewing event at the Shelburne Museum.

Town beach eclipse influx worries selectboard

Scooter MacMillan
Editor

The Charlotte Selectboard is concerned about a large influx of people showing up to the town beach to view the solar eclipse, but isn't sure if there's anything they can do about it.

At the board's meeting on March 25, a discussion ran much longer than planned about what should, or even could, be done if large numbers show up to the town beach on April 8, which will not be officially open for the season yet.

Board member Lewis Mudge said that, at the risk of sounding cantankerous, he thought the town should charge for parking and look

Charlotte residents remain split over sidewalks

Busy Anderson
Community New Service

The shoulders of Ferry Road are patched with gravel and uneven pavement. Parked cars overtake sections on either side. For pedestrians, though, those obstructed shoulders are the only option for navigating Charlotte's West Village.

"You basically have to take your life into your hands and walk along the very narrow or nonexistent shoulder," said Larry Lewack, Charlotte's town planner.

Charlotte has debated the addition of sidewalks in its West Village for more than a decade. The quarter-mile between Greenbush Road and state Route 7 contains Charlotte Town Hall, a U.S. post office, the Charlotte Library, the Old Brick Store, the Charlotte Children's Center and the Charlotte Senior Center.

Now, the sidewalk topic is likely to resurface with two state and regional grants worth more than \$85,000 allocated last year for Charlotte infrastructure improvements. The funds for the town's Village Master Planning Project will determine land-use regulations and promote "smart growth" development, under the guidance of community input.

Some longtime residents suggest that sidewalks would make the trip to reach Ferry Road accommodations safer, more convenient and more environmentally friendly than driving.

On the other side, naysayers argue that sidewalks aren't necessary or worth the cost. Even with the rough conditions, they point out, plenty of people walk to and from community buildings anyway.

Some town residents see sidewalks as a sign of change in the town's character, said Jenny Cole, who grew up on Greenbush Road and served on the selectboard from 2002 to 2011.

"They see our town as a rural town, and they don't want to be moving towards something that would be more suburban or, you know, more like developed area," she said.

Cole, the Charlotte Public Library's interlibrary loan librarian, said she sees the need for sidewalks to improve safety. "I think there are lots of small towns that have put in sidewalks and they don't really change. I don't think they have to change the feel of the town."

Lorna Bates, who has lived in Charlotte with her husband for 35 years, visits the senior center twice a week to play bridge.

Bates sometimes walks from the senior center to the library.

"That's difficult to do when there's snow on the ground and there are puddles," she said. "It's unpleasant."

The senior center lists 600 people in its database who visit for meals, classes and presentations, and participation is increasing, according to Lane Morrison, the center's board chair. Morrison has lived in Charlotte since 1972 and said it would be easier and safer for visitors if walkways were in place. Children from the day care center stroll past the volunteer fire and rescue building to participate in senior center activities, which is one of his foremost concerns.

Back in 2012, a group of locals campaigned heavily for the construction of sidewalks in the West Village and reached success with a 141 to 124 vote in favor of the measure on the town meeting ballot that year. Later that same year, sidewalk opponents circulated a petition to reconsider the vote, leading to a reversal.

No progress on building sidewalks has been made since, though the town has studied and continued to discuss possible plans. Meanwhile, anti-sidewalk sentiment remains.

CVSD superintendent resigns, will stay through school year

Scooter MacMillan
Editor

On Tuesday, March 19, the Champlain Valley School District board voted to accept the resignation of its superintendent.

Rene Sanchez said he is leaving to pursue a new opportunity, but did not say what that opportunity was. Several phone calls to find out what is next for the superintendent were not returned.

The next day, the district sent a release saying Sanchez will continue as superintendent through the rest of the 2023-24 school year, and the board of directors plans to appoint an interim superintendent for the 2024-25 school year.

At the meeting, the board set June 14 as the last day of this school year.

Sanchez took over as superintendent in 2021, coming from a position as assistant superintendent of operations in South Bend, Ind. Before that he had been principal of César E. Chávez High School in Houston.

When he took the helm at the CVSD, Sanchez said one of his strengths as an

administrator was connecting with the community. He regarded Vermont as a good fit for his family because his wife is from Brattleboro and a University of Vermont graduate.

Sanchez took over after a national search to replace superintendent Elaine Pinckney, who had held the position for 15 years.

The school board has held at least three executive sessions for superintendent evaluations in recent months. The number of executive sessions may have increased this school year because the board has revamped its system for superintendent evaluations.

During his three years with the Champlain Valley School District, Sanchez implemented the district's first "data warehouse" that combines all students' data in one location so it is easier to identify their "academic and social-emotional needs and successes," the district's release said.

After voting to accept the superintendent's "negotiated settlement," a few of the school board members made statements thanking Sanchez for his service and applauding things that were achieved during his tenure.

"On behalf of the board I want to thank Superintendent Sanchez for his service to the district. We greatly appreciate that he'll be staying through the school year to finish the work he has led and to ensure a smooth transition," chair Meghan Metzler said.

She said the superintendent had led the district "through a very difficult time in public education."

Sanchez had the courage to step into "openhearted spaces" that can transform a district, former board chair Angela Arsenault said, "I'm sad to see him go and excited to see where he lands."

Lindsay Colf, the board member representing St. George, thanked Sanchez for his attention to Vermont's smallest town.

In the district's release, Sanchez said, "I will look back on my time as CVSD superintendent knowing that together we made significant progress creating systems in service to our students and our community."

Note that the vote on the revised proposed school budget is 7 a.m.-7 p.m. Tuesday, April 16.

ECLIPSE

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

for ways of limiting the numbers of people that show up there for eclipse viewing.

Robert Stein, who has a place at Thompson's Point, joined the meeting via Zoom to say that this will be his sixth solar eclipse and predicted that it would not be an unruly group of people. He urged the selectboard to embrace the event.

"It's a magical event. I hope you all will enjoy it," Stein said. "If you haven't seen a total eclipse, it's not like a partial eclipse."

The board discussed the viability of closing the parking lot there and how that could be accomplished, contemplating whether putting up chains, parking trucks or placing boulders at the entrances would be better to block access.

Brandon Tieso of the recreation commission said a problem with chains is that people have used bolt cutters to cut them in the past.

Road commissioner Junior Lewis said putting boulders at the entrances would require bringing an excavator to the town beach to move them into place and later

to remove them. If the town did decide to block off the parking lot, he thinks there will still be people parking on the side of the road.

Another big issue was people littering, and it was ultimately decided that shutting down the parking lot won't solve this problem if it occurs.

It seemed that basically a consensus was reached that a total eclipse of the sun is a once-in-a-lifetime event, and it is hard to know what is going to happen. If the crowd is as large as some have predicted, the town won't be able to do much about it in the way of police enforcement.

Town administrator Nate Bareham said he had talked with the Chittenden County Sheriff's Office and they don't have "the bandwidth" to cover Charlotte during the eclipse.

Shelburne has scheduled a number of activities around the eclipse and will probably not be able to spare an officer. It appears that even the Charlotte town constable will be occupied with his duties there as a member of the Shelburne Police Department.

Recreation director Nicole Conley said she didn't think the problem is things that might happen before or during the eclipse. She was worried about the aftermath and things like bonfires and groups hanging around to party.

Conley wanted to know how the event should be managed and how restrictions should be enforced. She was particularly concerned about who was going to clean up if there was a mess left.

Another concern is that there will just be one porta-potty at the town beach.

Mudge said he was worried about people camping at the town beach.

Having been at other total eclipses, such as Casper, Wyoming, in 2017, Stein said, "I can tell you the biggest problem is that, two minutes after totality, the roads are clogged. People do not stay and party after it's over."

"This is not a concert. It's not a sporting event. It's a group of people witnessing celestial things," he said.

Stein said he thought the concerns expressed were legitimate, but that the reality is: "This is going to happen. This is like the tide coming in."

He predicted that, after the eclipse, the traffic will be so slow that cars won't be able to leave faster than walking speed, but that it won't be a crowd of party people, just a lot of people willing to walk a long way with telescopes for a good viewing spot.

Chair Jim Faulkner wound up the discussion by saying he thought they should just let the situation be and that they just needed "to live with it the way it is" because, if they did shut down the parking lot, people will still park on the side of the road.

"There's no magic here," Faulkner said, arguing for not making the situation complicated. "We just need to be aware that we may need to do some clean up after."

The board members encouraged each other to show up early on Tuesday morning after to help with clean up. Stein even asked what time he should be there.

Board member Frank Tenney recommended leaving it up to Conley how she wants to handle the situation and whether she will charge for parking.

In a phone conversation after the meeting, Conley said she didn't plan to charge for parking, but she does plan to put up signs reminding people of rules such as no camping nor fires being permitted there.

Although the selectboard did not make a motion about handling the eclipse situation at the town beach, it did vote unanimously to approve the library's request to use the town green for a solar eclipse viewing party on April 8.

The library does not anticipate a lot of people coming to the town green for the eclipse.

"I really think a lot of people are going to Shelburne that day, because they have so much going on," said Cheryl Sloan, youth services librarian.



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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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SIDEWALKS

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Robert Mack voted against the sidewalk proposal in 2012 and still doubts that the level of need justifies the construction of sidewalks. His family has lived in Charlotte since 1919, and Mack served on the selectboard for 21 years.

“I don’t want change anywhere in Charlotte,” Mack said. “I like it just the way it is.”

Charlotte has “plenty of places” for walking and jogging other than Ferry Road, he argued. Mack and other sidewalk opponents also say the construction would only cater to a small number of residents who consistently walk along Ferry Road. Proponents, though, are confident that foot traffic would increase if safe options were available.

The 2012 sidewalk proposal would have cost \$77,000.

“I would rather use the money for other items,” said Barry Finette, a pediatrician, scientist and entrepreneur who has lived in Charlotte for 28 years.

Lewis Mudge, a Charlotte selectboard member, said the sidewalk proposal would require a surplus in town funds that is unlikely in the near future.

“The selectboard’s been elected to recognize that, yes, you need a healthy amount of debt to run your town, but you share a responsibility to do this responsibly,” he said.

The real issue, said residents on both sides of the sidewalks, is the speed of drivers on Ferry and Greenbush roads.

“People use those roads like they’re basically autobahns,” said Mudge, who lives on Greenbush Road with three young children and neighbors nearby with kids. “It’s certainly a major concern for us.”

Between 2021 and 2022, Vermont Agency of Transportation data showed an 18 percent increase in traffic from the Charlotte-Essex Ferry landing on Lake Champlain to Greenbush Road.

The town should “really start looking into more robust speed mitigation measures that’ll physically slow people down,” Mudge said.

Deirdre Holmes, an 18-year Charlotte resident, joined the Vermont Walking College in 2023. The educational program teaches its fellows to advocate for “safe, equitable, accessible and enjoyable places to walk and move” in their communities. For her project, Holmes used a walker to represent the experience of someone with restricted mobility and found navigating the shoulders and crossing the road extremely difficult.

Holmes stepped with the walker into the Ferry Road crosswalk, which connects the library and children’s center. “Cars just sped right by” without stopping, she said.

Holmes is a member of the Charlotte Energy Committee, which advocates carbon-free means of transportation to reduce Charlotte’s environmental impact. Able-bodied people relying on vehicles to travel walkable distances is “not the best pattern,” she said.

Lewack agreed, saying he has seen drivers run multiple errands and get back in their cars just to drive across Ferry Road.

“I mean, that’s just silly,” he said. Sidewalks would encourage them to park and walk, he reasoned.

Lewack said previous designs for poured concrete, curbed paths have bothered some residents. In 2015, the Chittenden County Regional Planning Commission proposed some alternatives: widening the shoulders on Ferry Road, making an informal gravel path or adding raised surfaces to enforce slow turns at intersections.

“Maybe we move away from the word ‘sidewalk,’” Holmes said, “if that particular word has connotations of a particular design and material, which people don’t feel like fits a small village.”

(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 by Deirdre Holmes

As a member of the Vermont Walking College, Deirdre Holmes did a project to determine how difficult it is to use a walker on Ferry Road. She found cars didn’t stop for her with the walker at the crosswalk between the library and the children’s center.

Room with a view



Photo by Carol Talley

A squirrel contemplates the world from what looks to be a cozy perspective.

jellycat

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Join in celebrating Earth Day all of month of April

Cathy Hunter
Contributor

Instead of just celebrating Earth Day, Charlotte is kicking off a celebration of Earth Month for the month of April.

A coalition of Charlotte organizations has been working to coordinate a variety of Earth Month activities from tree planting to storytelling. Attend one of the many free events listed below to get involved and make an impact alongside your friends, family and neighbors.

Several of these events rely on volunteers for their success, and organizers would love your help. To learn more and get the latest details, visit <https://bit.ly/3Ve7hzz>.

Free Earth Month events

- Eclipse Party at the Charlotte Library on Monday, April 8, from 2:15-4:15 p.m. Celebrate the total eclipse on the Charlotte Town Green. Special glasses will be available, cookies to decorate and craft activities to help mark this special day.

- Come to the library for some fun and festive stories to celebrate Earth Month on Tuesday & Friday, April 10&12, 10 a.m. For ages 2 years and over with parent or caregiver.

- Tree-planting and ribbon-cutting ceremony at the new town garage and along the Town Trail on State Park Road at 10 a.m., Saturday, April 13. Volunteer to help plant 48 bare-root trees. Bring your family and a shovel and gloves. Help plant, spread mulch and stake the trees into pre-dug holes.

A sign-up sheet for volunteers will be available at the library and through Front Porch Forum. People interested in volunteering can also email alexajlewis@gmail.com. The event at the new town garage will include a ribbon-cutting ceremony for the solar panels recently installed on the roof of the garage.

- Vernal Pool Walk and Birding for Kids sponsored by the Lewis Creek Association Saturday, April 13, 9-11 a.m. Signup at <https://bit.ly/vp-signup>. Space is limited.

- Repair Cafe: Saturday, April 13, 10-2 p.m. at the Charlotte Congregational Church. The Repair Cafe is a four-hour community party of talented local folks that volunteer their handy skills to repair your broken stuff. Bring your things to the Repair Cafe' and watch and learn as these handy folks do their magic.

If you'd like to be a fixer, there's always room for you at the café. Food is available for sale and donations to the food shelf are encouraged. For more info and to register: <https://tinyurl.com/VT-Repair-Cafe>.

Sponsored by Sustainable Charlotte, the Charlotte Congregational Church and the Charlotte Grange.

- The Charlotte Pollinator Pathway is a volunteer effort to build biodiverse habitats at key public buildings, along historic roads and in private gardens throughout our community sponsored by Sustainable Charlotte. For more info email Julie Parker-Dickerson at jgardensvt@gmail.com.

Bring your tools and get your hands dirty on Monday, April 15, 3-5 p.m. — clean up



Photo by Julie Dickerson Parker

Julie Parker-Dickerson and her team of volunteers works on one of the East Charlotte pollinator gardens.

at the Quinlan Covered Bridge; Wednesday, April 17, 3-5 p.m. — clean up at the Lewis Creek Gardens at the end of Lewis Creek Road; and Friday, April 19, 2-4 p.m. — clean up at the Mt. Philo and Spear Street Garden.

- “Beaverland” book talk with author Leila Philip on Thursday, April 18, 7 p.m., at Pierson Library in Shelburne. Celebrate the release of “Beaverland: How One Weird Rodent Made America” in paperback.

In the naturalist tradition of “H Is for Hawk” and “The Soul of an Octopus,” this book is the story of how beavers and the beaver fur trade shaped America’s history, culture and environment.

- Stories of earth activism at the Charlotte Library on Earth Day, Monday, April 22, 7 p.m. Since Earth Day’s founding in 1970, it has inspired generations of people to improve and protect the environment. They have done this through direct action, public campaigns and establishing environmental organizations. We wouldn’t have the Clean Air Act or other environmental legislation without these citizen efforts.

Join with others to hear and share stories of taking action to make a difference. Get inspired by hearing how Charlotte’s

EARTH DAY

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 4

conservation organizations got started. Participants will have a chance to share stories from their lives and dream with others about actions that can be taken in Charlotte and Vermont to protect our environment. Refreshments will be served.

- Earth Month celebration on Saturday, April 27, 10 a.m.-1 p.m., at the Charlotte Library. The coalition responsible for organizing Earth Month activities will hold an Earth Month Celebration with guest speakers, prizes, local food and more. Hear from Ethan Tapper, Chittenden County forester, and Alicia Daniel, Vermont master naturalist program founder; create soup from gleaned veggies; and learn how food waste reduction can be a tool to stop the climate crisis.

Bring your picnic lunch to enjoy along with Disco Soup and Backdoor Bread. Several town committees, commissions, nonprofits and other groups will be in attendance to share information about their environmental efforts. The Charlotte Energy Committee will be giving away energy-saving devices such as low-flow shower heads and outlet gaskets and make-your-own insect hotels.

Guided tours of the rain garden at the Charlotte Library will be available. The Lewis Creek Association will have copies of their landowner's guide, "Ahead of the Storm."

Earth Month activities thru the month

- Visit the seed library at the library. Include some tried-and-true heritage varieties in your vegetable garden this year. The Seed Library is offering small packets of seeds of beans, tomatoes, peas and more. Sign out your selections, follow the guidelines and library workers will help you learn how to save the seeds for yourself and to share with others.

The seed library is located in the Adult Reading Room. The 2024 seed catalog is available there in hard copy or at charlotteseedlibrary.org. Questions? Email seed@charlottepubliclibrary.org and coordinators Karen Tuininga and Linda Hamilton will be happy to help.

- The town-wide Ecochallenge, running through April 30, is a 30-day program focused on environmental and social engagement with the slogan: Take action for every ecosystem, every creature: your choices shape our world. 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 difference. Join the team at <https://bit.ly/48Vx4Qj>.

- Carpool, walk, bike or take the bus from Shelburne or Hinesburg.

- Visit the Solar Shed at Charlotte Central School, enjoy the garden and charge your device or e-bike from the free solar-powered outlet just inside the shed

- Visit the Charlotte Energy Committee's website at charlotteenergy.org for more information on ways to conserve energy

- There are resources and information at the library. Check out the display of books, tools and other items. From cookbooks to moisture meters, to a conservation corner, you'll find resources to keep your Earth Month going.

(The Earth Month coalition includes the Charlotte Public Library, Charlotte Energy Committee, Lewis Creek Association, Sustainable Charlotte, Charlotte Tree Tenders, Pollinator Pathways, Charlotte Grange, Charlotte Land Trust, Charlotte Park and Wildlife Refuge and Charlotte Conservation Commission.)



**The Town of Charlotte
TOWN MEETINGS
AND AGENDAS
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Planning Commission
Thursday, April 4, 7-9 p.m.

Regular Selectboard Meeting
Monday, April 8

**Charlotte Villages Virtual
Design Workshop**
Wednesday, April 10, 6-8 p.m.

Development Review Board
Wednesday, April 10, 7 p.m.

Help with energy-saving home improvements

Contributed

Dealing with a drafty home and high heating bills?

The Weatherization Repayment Assistance Program may be able to help you pay for energy-saving home improvements over time through a low-interest monthly charge on your utility bill, reducing or eliminating upfront costs.

Administered by the Vermont Housing Finance Agency, the state-funded program

assists both homeowners and renters.

Weatherization Repayment Assistance Program projects can include insulation and air sealing as well as heat pumps, water heaters and advanced wood heating systems. The program does not run credit checks to verify eligibility.

To learn more, visit vhfa.org/wrap or connect with Efficiency Vermont, Burlington Electric Department or Vermont Gas Systems to schedule a home energy audit.

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Stronger Together

A good reason for gardening: Gardening is good for us

Linda Hamilton
Charlotte Grange

Whether you are a “seasoned” (pun intended) gardener with many years of experience and an ample area where you grow lots of vegetables or a food gardener on a modest scale, you recognize the appeal of growing something you can eat. That appeal is hard to resist, even though growing food takes time and physical work.

Planting a garden is a commitment to staying present and attentive to its needs for weeks or months so it can thrive and produce something for you to harvest. As everyone who has tried knows, that can be a hard commitment to keep.

So why do we garden? Sometimes it’s for economic reasons. When we can invest our own time and energy to produce some of our food, we don’t have to lay out as much cash to buy food from other sources. Even a few tomato and bean plants can stretch a tight food budget, not to mention lettuce and other greens, potatoes or squash.

Many gardeners will say they love the experience of contact with soil, seeds and growing plants. It connects us with the

countless generations of humans whose survival from the beginning has depended on a direct relationship with plants (and the other animals which depend on plants). It’s uniquely satisfying to eat what you have helped produce, along with it being delicious and nutritious.

Nowadays, most of us in the U.S. do not need to feed ourselves through our own efforts. We have the option of paying other people to plant, tend, harvest, pack and transport fresh, preserved and processed food from wherever they are to wherever we are. Profit incentive created that system and keeps it going. Industrialized agriculture, food processing and associated agri-business is a huge complex, unsustainably based on minimum wage or below for most of the people doing the physical work and addictive profits for investors.

It is, however, convenient to just go to a store and buy what we want. Around here, we’ve grown accustomed to shelves generally being well stocked all the time, no matter the time of year. There is not much to remind us of the time and care and energy (both human and mechanical) it took to put that eggplant

on the shelf in Hannaford’s or those navel oranges in Price Chopper. We’re glad they’re there. And when our food budget allows, we buy them.

So given how available food is to buy, why does food gardening remain solidly popular, even here in the Northeast where the growing season is short? Research shows that people find having tangible experiences with soil, seeds and growing plants grounds and calms them as they engage with natural cycles and life forces. Even having a small part in the miracle of a seed becoming a plant which bears fruit and more seeds inspires wonder and gratitude. The physical movement and mental focus of garden work relieves stress. And certainly, opening one’s senses to observe and pay attention to details offers a welcome respite from dwelling on personal worries. People who garden, especially food garden, just feel better.

Not only that, but apparently we tend to live longer, healthier and happier. In January, Vermont Public featured a story named “Seven habits to live a healthier life, inspired by the world’s longest-lived communities.” What we eat, how we move, how much we sleep and how we manage stress and social connection really make a difference.

Many people who live in the world’s blue zones, places where people live longer like Sardinia and Okinawa, are gardeners. This means eating plenty of vegetables along with regular walking, bending, reaching, balancing, lifting and gardening’s restorative benefits of stress relief. The National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion includes gardening in their recommendations for reducing risk of many chronic diseases shortening life-expectancy in the U.S. today.

I guess it’s no wonder we keep gardening. If you are planning a vegetable garden this



year, remember that our library has a seed library program which offers free packets of local heritage varieties of beans, peas, tomatoes, salad greens, herbs and edible flowers, along with support for growing them and saving seeds for yourself and to share with others. See charlotteseedlibrary.org for the catalog and other details.

Another way to get ready for the growing season is to come to the Community Seed Swap sponsored by the seed library and the Charlotte Grange, 1-3 p.m., Sunday, April 7, at the Grange Hall (2858 Spear Street in East Charlotte Village). Details at charlottegrange.org. Come with or without seeds to share.

Happy gardening!

(Linda Hamilton is a member of Charlotte Grange and co-coordinator of the seed library at the Charlotte Library.)

Applications open for Farm Stand Together gift cards

Meaghin Kennedy
Farm Stand Together

Farm Stand Together is beginning its third season, with expanded farm partnerships and a reinforced pledge to work for food security across Vermont’s rural communities.

Farm Stand Together works with farms that are dedicated to growing nutrient-dense foods, valuing accessibility and employing practices that ensure soil, ecosystem and community health.

From the first year with six farmer partnerships, the program has grown to 12 partnerships this season, including Adam’s Berry Farm, Sweet Roots and Head over Fields.

The full list of farm stand partners is available on its website at farmstandtogethervt.org.

Also, this year the Essex, Jericho and Underhill Food Shelf, the Charlotte Food Shelf and the Shelburne Food Shelf have joined as “pilot food partners.” These food shelves will apply for a Farm Stand Together gift card at the farm stand of their choice,

enabling the food shelf directors to fill in the gaps on their shelves and provide even more choice to their customers who are facing food insecurity.

If you’re experiencing food insecurity and would like to apply to receive a gift card to one of the participating farm stands, the application period for applicants runs through April 30.

If you wish to join in fortifying Vermont’s vibrant agricultural heritage and the health of its residents, please apply or engage with the program via these links:

- Apply for a Food Stand Together gift card at apply.farmstandtogethervt.org/eaters
- Contribute to the mission of helping solve food insecurity at givebutter.com/farmstandtogether2024
- Inquire about the gift card program or get more information by emailing admin@farmstandtogethervt.org.

Your generosity helps ensure the prosperity and well-being of our rural community members and farmers, reinforcing a sustainable, healthy food system for everyone.

Hi! Neighbor

Douglas Webster practices and encourages creativity

Phyl Newbeck
Contributor

Douglas Webster doesn't want his musical pursuits to be confined to one genre.

The founder of the bagpipe group Drumduan and the Celtic Company has recently begun singing opera and hopes to combine that with his love of Celtic music and rock guitar.

When Webster was 11 years old, his parents suggested he learn a musical instrument, and he chose French horn. Later, he began taking bagpipe lessons. At 30, he joined the St. Andrews Society Pipe Band and played with them for roughly eight years.

Webster has traveled far with his bagpipe, performing at a wedding in New York City and another at the top of Sugarbush; he wore a tuxedo for the former and skis for the latter.

Feeling that a bagpipe band seemed somewhat militaristic, Webster opted for a different approach to music and began to choreograph dance with his then partner, Heather Morris, who was a Highland dance instructor.

In 2014, Webster and Morris founded the Celtic Company which played at events across the state and beyond. They were invited to tour Europe, but their day jobs interfered. Webster also plays in a band called Drumduan, named after the Scottish estate his father's family is from. They play a variety of Scottish and Cape Breton tunes.

In addition to bagpipes, Webster plays guitar and low D penny whistle, and he has recently begun singing opera.

"My goal," he said, "is to integrate opera, Celtic music and rock. I have no idea what it will sound like, but I can picture it in my mind."

Ideally, Webster would like to combine his musical pursuits with his philosophy of RAD – reduce, adapt and drawdown. His master's thesis at St. Michael's College was on corporate social responsibility involving greenhouse gases and toxic substance release and he has not wavered from his commitment to those goals. He has a background in aerospace engineering and was recruited by BF Goodrich Aerospace, now Collins Aerospace, to develop the F22 and F35 cockpits.

Webster is proud of being the founder and producer of the Champlain Maker Faire, an annual event celebrating invention, creativity, curiosity and hands-on learning which was last held in 2019 before being shuttered by COVID. He recalls parents approaching him and telling him that this was how education should be done. At the Champlain Maker Faire, Webster introduced drone races and started a drone club. He also started a Champ-bot contest to make robotic lake monsters and got his leg hair singed when he walked too close to one as the operator pushed a button to make flames come out.

Webster used his Champlain Maker



Photo by Douglas Webster

Douglas Webster's musical talents include the bagpipe.

Faire connections to take part in several local and national initiatives. He produced two television series on innovation and became the president of the National Association for Workforce Improvement.

"The goal was always more than the event," he said. "It was to build networks and bring people who didn't know each other together."

Webster's aim has always been to create new businesses, promote better economic development, particularly in clean energy, and to have an influence on reducing greenhouse gases. He would also like to see more teachers and students have what he describes as a "maker mindset" and pursue studies that will help bring about solutions to the climate crisis.

Professionally, Webster is entering his fourth decade with the Vermont Agency of Education, working primarily in career and technical education.

"When I came on board, I saw a system that had been developed in the 1960s and hadn't really changed," he said.

Webster said he was able to redesign career and technical education, both locally and nationally. One of those innovations was the implementation of industry-recognized credentials.

"It's important for students to get some recognition for the work they've done while they're in school," Webster said.

Education

Local schools show cooking mettle in Jr. Iron Chef Competition

Scooter MacMillan
Editor

Once again Champlain Valley Union High School has taken a team to the Jr. Iron Chef Competition and once again the Redhawks have come home with awards.

Teams from across Vermont have come to the Jr. Iron Chef Competition for 16 years. Forty teams came to the Champlain Valley Exposition in Essex Junction for the state's premiere cooking competition this March.

Eleanor Marsh, family and consumer science teacher, is retiring after this school year, her 16th at CVU. She has had teams competing in the Green Mountain State culinary contest since the beginning, except for one year when she didn't have a cooking club.

Each year, shortly after school starts in the fall, Marsh has started gathering her teams.

"We try to meet once a week and figure out what we're going to do for a recipe first, then we'll start meeting after school and practicing those recipes," Marsh said.

Once each team has decided on what it's going to cook, for over six months they work on the recipe, practicing on cooking their dishes and working on how they are going to improve on them.

Some years she's had to engage in the activity that can be so critical to coaches — recruiting. But some years it doesn't take much recruiting effort on Marsh's part because the previous year's team is pretty solid and the returning team members recruit others among their classmates who share their culinarian drive, who believe they can stand the heat and don't want to get out of the kitchen.

Lots of times, potential cooking team

members come to CVU with their gourmet thumbs already, having competed in the Jr. Iron Chef Competition in middle school.

Awards are given in both the afternoon and morning in both high and middle school age divisions in three categories — crowd-pleaser, lively local and mise en place.

The crowd-pleaser award is given to the team that is judged to have done the best job of incorporating "color, texture, and taste for a true crowd-pleaser," according to the Jr. Iron Chef Vermont guidelines.

The lively local award is given for a team judged to have done the best at highlighting Vermont foods. To be eligible for this award a recipe must include at least five local ingredients.

Mise en place is French for everything in place and "goes to the team that shows exemplary teamwork, order and professionalism."

Marsh said her teams haven't won the lively local award because they just haven't found a recipe that would include five local ingredients.

Over the years, her teams have won several mise en place and crowd-pleaser awards. She's proud of winning the mise en place awards, but she's particularly proud of the times when her teams have won crowd-pleaser awards.

"It's the one that talks most about the food. That's the one I personally like," Marsh said. "I mean, it says it's the crowd pleaser, right?"

Usually, the school year starts with more teammates than Marsh can take to the Jr. Iron Chef competition because the rules say she can only take two teams, and there can't be more than five cooks on each team, so it's a maximum of 10 cooks who can go.

Most years she has not had to make hard



Courtesy photo

Members of CVU's Chefhawks 1 team are, from left, Ben Fina, Julian Olin, Zev Barth, Aeden Curley and Magnus Nilsson. They are starting to plate their shiitake sushi to submit to the judges.

choices about who will compete. The teams just sort of coalesce around a group of students who are interested and committed enough to work on their dishes for several months.

Last year, Marsh took two boys teams to the competition. A team of seniors who graduated and a group of freshman, who won in the first year of competition with a rice bowl they developed. That team returned to the cooking club this year and went to the competition with a shiitake sushi dish they developed.

Although that boys team didn't win this year, a new girls team won for the crowd-

pleaser award for their pumpkin ravioli with brown butter sauce.

The Lake Champlain Waldorf School "Tofoo Fighters" won the AM Heat High School Mise en Place ("everything in its place") award, which goes to the team that shows exemplary teamwork, order and professionalism.

Lake Champlain Waldorf School had two high school teams in the competition and each came home with an award. That school's Tofoo Fighters team won the mise en place award for the morning heat and the Gnocchi Gnomes team won the lively local award in the afternoon round of competition.

Impressive student projects at Charlotte Central School

Naomi Strada
(Summarized by Tom Scatchard)

Charlotte Central School students have had a number of opportunities lately to research and explore their favorite topics.

Seventh and eighth grade students have created code to have bots the size of golf balls complete an obstacle course.

Third graders have written and presented persuasive essays about what students see as essential steps to create peace in the world.

The fifth graders who are the Charlotte Central School spelling champions attended the statewide championship and took along their own cheering section.

Middle schoolers are engaging in afterschool activities, such as theater or co-curricular sports.

Music news

Congratulations to Owen Scriver, Nathaneal Akselrod, Riak Chol, Liam Anderson and Odie Kallock, who will be representing Charlotte Central School at the District III Jazz Festival on Friday, April 5, at Browns River Middle School.

Also, note the following dates:

- Charlotte Central School Spring Concert featuring the fifth-eighth grade chorus and bands 6:30 p.m., Monday, May 20, in the Multi-Purpose Room at CCS.

- CVSD Jazz Festival (CCS Jazz Band members), Thursday, May 23, 7 p.m. at the CVU auditorium.

- Discover Jazz Festival (CCS Jazz Band members), Wednesday, June 5, 12:20-1 p.m. on the top block of Church Street in Burlington.

No school on eclipse day, April 8

Given the unpredictable nature of the eclipse's impact on our region, Champlain Valley School District schools will be closed on April 8.

CVSD purchased solar eclipse glasses for each student, which will be distributed the week before the eclipse.

For more information on Vermont's planning for the total solar eclipse go to vermont.gov/eclipse.

Summer camp information

This list of summer camps is provided as a convenience to families. Charlotte Central School does not endorse any particular camp but provides the list as informational only.

Champlain Valley Union High athletics — Families should start paying attention to the school athletics website regarding summer sports camp info, captains' practices (not mandatory) and info for fall sports especially.

With college applications up, so is need for applications to be top notch

Margo Bartsch
College Essay Coach

Will you see confetti, or will there be a somber screen?

For the class of 2028, most colleges had record-setting numbers of college applications. New York University received 85,000 applications, up 10.5 percent from last year. For the 20 years since creating College Essay Coach, I have seen the need for every element of the application to be top notch. There are five noticeable trends highlighting this increased importance to shine through.

First, community service is an increasingly important factor in standing apart from other applicants. Local volunteering includes COTS Walk, Penguin Plunge and Spectrum Sleep Out. Essays can share insight into experiences and values that are important to the applicant. This shows empathy while walking in someone else's shoes.

Over time, community service expectations have grown in supporting groups such as Black Lives Matter and the Global Climate Strike. Community engagement can be personalized to illustrate a deep commitment to a cause, including creating an event. Colleges encourage making a difference around us.

The second big trend is how colleges use structured writing to evaluate critical thinking and analysis. Even before 2004, the SAT and ACT had timed and scored written essays that measured analytical reasoning. Thematic writing is paramount in college, whether it be blue book exams, research papers or Power-Point presentations.

In 2015, the ACT revised its essay to include analyzing three perspectives of one prompt within 40 minutes. In 2016, the SAT revised its essay format, but discontinued it in June 2021.

Currently, the ACT essay is optional, but can be a good way to differentiate an applicant. It is scored across three criteria: developed ideas, structured arguments and language usage. Students learn how to take a stand with their writing and build confidence in communicating ideas. Achieving a top score on the ACT essay is an opportunity for the student to emphasize their ability as a persuasive writer with the admissions committee.

The third abrupt trend was the 2020 pandemic, which unleashed the test-optional movement. Since most high schools became virtual classrooms, the schools were not open to administer standardized tests. The AP exams were revised for online testing. The SAT subject tests, which were required for most highly selective schools, were eliminated. Nearly all colleges became test-optional for the 2020-21 admissions cycle.

The testing quandary continues today.

In March, The Wall Street Journal profiled Quinnipiac University, which is test-optional, test-recommended or test-required, depending on the applicant's intended major. Submitting scores can make-or-break for admissions for highly competitive majors such as engineering and business.

This March, The Washington Post explained that the number of students taking the SAT nationally has continued to rise each year since 2020. The College Board, which administers the SAT, reports that 1.9 million high school students in the class of 2023 took the exam, compared to 2.2 million for the class of 2019 (before the pandemic).

This year, Opportunity Insights, an educational research non-profit, analyzed how standardized test scores are a better predictor of college student achievement than GPA. The report compared performance gaps of admitted students who submitted scores to those who did not.

This upcoming 2024-25 application cycle, Dartmouth, Brown, Yale, University of Texas-Austin and University of Tennessee are requiring scores. They join MIT and Georgetown, who reverted to being test-required for the 2021-22 admissions cycle.

The fourth significant trend was last June's Supreme Court ruling, which effectively halted race-conscious admissions in higher education. Ending affirmative action highlighted the role of essays as a way for students to share their personal identity and social background. Colleges want to hear an applicant's story to build a diverse campus community with various perspectives.

The fifth trend foreshadows a widening disconnect between choosing a major and getting a job after college. This February, The Wall Street Journal reported that 52 percent of college graduates are in jobs that do not use their academic qualifications. For example, 47 percent of biology or biomedical science majors remain underemployed five years after graduating.

To circumvent this ominous trend, students should have a plan to optimize the college experience. Adding internships and work experiences can build academic interests into careers. Some students may consider applying to graduate school to gain credentials and form networking opportunities.

These past 20 years have shown the increasing importance of having a well-supplied tool chest to both get into and succeed in college.

(Margo Bartsch founded College Essay Coach, a full-service college admission business, and has been an adjunct professor in business at Champlain College and at Middlebury College.)

O'Brien at cvsummercamp@cvsdvt.org.

Horse & Theater Camp — Sentinel Farms, Starksboro. 9 a.m.-3 p.m., Monday-Thursday, June 24, July 8 and July 29. Ages 6-17.

Smugglers' Notch Vermonter camp programs — Ages 7-15. Register at smuggs.com/vtcamp.

Vermont Youth Orchestra Association summer symphony camp — Register at vyo.org/summersymphony.

Vermont Jazz Camp — Camp is July 22-26 at Elley-Long Music Center at Saint Michael's College. Call Tony Pietricola at 802-372-5363 or email at tonyvje@gmail.com with questions. More info at vtjazzcamp.com.

CHARLOTTE CENTRAL CONTINUED FROM PAGE 8

Any questions can be directed to the appropriate coach listed on the CVU website or athletic director.

CVU girls lacrosse summer camp — registration is open. 12:30-3:30 p.m., June 18-20, Tuesday-Thursday. Players entering fifth-ninth grades at CVU's A Field. Cost is \$125. This is a fundraiser for the girls lacrosse program. CVU coaches as well as current and graduated players will be leading the camp. Questions: tpierson@cvsdvt.org.

CVU summer camp — CVU summer camp registration is now live. Questions: Joey

Moon day morning



Photo by Woody Keppel

Rather than a bad moon rising, Charlotte was treated to a beautiful moon setting for a few days. Here the moon is setting behind Mt. Philo.



Photo by Cecelia Wu

Early Monday morning, Ferry Road appears to lead to the Adirondacks and the full moon beyond.



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Exhibit tells Black Vermonters' COVID vaccination experiences

Contributed

Clemmons Family Farm has an art exhibit, *Beneath Our Skin*, premiering at the South Burlington Public Library and The Root Social Justice Center in Brattleboro this month.

Beneath Our Skin: COVID-19 Vaccination Storytelling & Art Exhibit showcases the artistic reflections and stories of Black Vermonters and white health care providers of their experiences during the early roll-out of the COVID vaccine.

Clemmons Family Farm gathered stories and art from participants who were either fully vaccinated, partially vaccinated or not vaccinated at all against COVID.

The exhibit shares the spectrum of emotions experienced by Black Vermonters during the height of the global pandemic, ranging from fear and a deep-rooted mistrust in the medical system, to hope, joy and pride in Vermont's early leadership in combating the spread of the virus.

The exhibit also features the stories and artwork of three white healthcare providers who volunteered their time to administer the vaccine in communities throughout Vermont.

Most of the participants expressed themselves through narrative storytelling along with poetry, song or visual art. The *Beneath Our Skin* exhibit showcases participants' arts-integrated stories through audio, video and print.

Some of the artwork featured in this exhibit showcases nine members of the

Vermont African-American/African Diaspora Artists Network and includes poems by Djeli (formerly known as William Forchion), Rage Hezekiah and Yanna Marie Orcel; songs by Samirah Evans and Khonsu X; and artwork by Celine Davis, Travon Groves, Harlan Mack and William Mwanga.

The *Beneath Our Skin* exhibit was curated by Yanna Marie Orcel, Clemmons Family Farm's wellness arts adviser, a multidisciplinary artist. One of her original poems is included in the exhibit.

"This exhibit feels very personal, since it shares the fears, concerns and hopes associated with the COVID-19 vaccine roll-out for Black people, many of whom carry the intergenerational trauma of exploitation and neglect in United States medical and public health arenas. This perspective is often not brought to light outside of the Black community, which makes this exhibit an urgent representation of a historically underrepresented population," said Orcel.

The *Beneath Our Skin* exhibit will be open Sundays at Clemmons Family Farm May 19-June 16, and by appointment.

It can be seen at South Burlington Public Library's Community Gallery Space at 180 Market Street in South Burlington April 10-May 10.

In Brattleboro, the exhibit will premiere at 6:30-8:30 p.m., April 12, at The Root Social Justice Center at 28 Williams Street in Brattleboro and continue through May 15.

Shela Linton, executive director of The Root, said, "Partnering with



Photo by Nani Clemmons

Clemmons Family Farm agricultural meadows and forest in Charlotte.

Clemmons Family Farm is like kinship. We are grateful to have such extraordinary individuals and this organization here in Vermont."

"Other organizations have expressed interest in hosting the exhibit, and so we hope to do one or two more installations in Vermont before May," said Lydia

Clemmons, president of Clemmons Family Farm, a 501c3 nonprofit organization.

The *Beneath Our Skin* COVID-19 Vaccination Storytelling & Art exhibit is made possible with major funding from the Vermont Department of Health. To learn more, visit clemmonsfamilyfarminc.aviaryplatform.com.

Tree Stewardship Team seeks help planting almost 50 trees

Vince Crockenberg
Contributor

The Tree Stewardship Team, a group of volunteers working with Charlotte tree warden Mark Dillenbeck, are seeking additional volunteers to help plant 28 bare-root trees alongside the town trail on State Park Road, as well as 20 trees on the grounds of the new town garage on Route 7.

The plantings will take place on Saturday, April 13, starting at 10 a.m. and, with many hands, should take about two hours.

Lack of direct experience planting trees is no obstacle to volunteering. A video will be provided to all volunteers via email to show how to plant a bare-root tree, and the holes at the planting sites will be pre-dug.

Also, members of the Tree Stewardship Team will be available to help supervise the work, which will be to install and stake the trees and to spread mulch. All you need to bring, in addition to your love of trees, are gloves, a shovel and, if you have it, a large bucket for carrying wood chips. A wheelbarrow would also be helpful.

The event at the garage will include a ribbon-cutting ceremony to celebrate the installation of the new solar panels on the roof of the garage. Snacks and drinks will be available at both sites.

If you'd like to volunteer, send an email to either Robin Coleburn at robinis@gmavt.net or to deputy tree warden Alexa Lewis at alexajlewis@gmail.com to be added to the list. In your email you can also indicate a preference for planting at the garage site or the State Park Road site. A signup sheet for volunteers is also available at the library.

A coalition of Charlotte organizations, including the Charlotte Library, the Lewis Creek Association, the Charlotte Energy Committee, Sustainable Charlotte and the



Photo courtesy Vermont Urban & Community Forestry program

Charlotter VJ Comai, who is also Burlington's city arborist, stars in a video about planting bare-root trees that will be emailed to all tree-planting volunteers.

Tree Stewardship Team are coordinating a variety of Earth Month activities, from tree planting to storytelling, during the month of April, to celebrate and take action to protect the Earth. Details of these events

can be found on the library's website and the town's Facebook page.

(Vince Crockenberg is a member of Charlotte's Tree Stewardship Team.)

In The Outdoors

Celebrate nature at Bioblitz for four days in April

Elizabeth Bassett
Contributor

At the end of April, Burlington and several neighboring towns will host a four-day bioblitz.

You might ask, what is a bioblitz? An array of events celebrating nature and the outdoors. If you've ever wanted to taste Japanese knotweed ice cream, you are in luck.

Speakers, walks, exploring and documenting the natural world, storytelling and just plain fun are on the agenda.

Across four days, April 26-29, residents, students, teachers and scientists will fan out across the Greater Burlington Area to document diversity in our natural environment. Using the iNaturalist app, volunteers will record wild organisms in Burlington, Colchester, South Burlington and Winooski.

At Main Street Landing, speakers will discuss Vermont's amphibians on April 17 and community science on April 25.

Readers of this column may recall that I participate in a team that monitors a vernal pool in Charlotte. We are part of a long-term community science project overseen by the Vermont Center for Ecostudies. Now in year six, we are listening via audio recorder to frog courtship, monitoring water, ice and snow levels at our vernal pool, and later in the season, we'll be searching for wood frog and salamander eggs and their hoped-for offspring.

We even dream one day of finding fairy shrimp. Vermont Center for Ecostudies speakers will enumerate ways that community members can contribute valuable information and data about our ever-changing world and have a great adventure



doing it.

Guided walks will focus on spring ephemerals, or wildflowers, on April 27 and, on April 28, forest bathing.

Also on Sunday, April 28, the Intervale Center hosts a nature extravaganza for all ages. Participants can taste and learn about foraged food, including the aforementioned ice cream and perhaps some garlic mustard pesto, birdwatch and plant young ostrich (fiddlehead) ferns. Children can go pond dipping for aquatic insects or play at a kids' activity table.

Last but not least, storytelling. Nature Stories Open-Mic at Railyard Apothecary on April 27, 6-9 p.m. Advance registration required at citynaturecelebrationvt.org/storytelling.

Solar collecting turtles

Each March offers a few tantalizing warm days. On one of these, you might spot a painted turtle sunning on a rock or log. In order to be active, and that includes eating, turtles must raise their winter temperature of 43 degrees F to at least 63 degrees. They do this by basking in the sun. In addition to warmth, the sun provides Vitamin D, allowing turtles to metabolize calcium to grow and strengthen their shells. But in

March, the cold inevitably returns, making it a dangerous month for turtles.

Green Mountain Club outings

I know, I know, these gray days can be a little discouraging. But fresh air and exercise, as our mothers remind us, can boost even the darkest of moods. Better yet, consider an outing in good company.

While the original mission of the Green Mountain Club was to create and preserve the Long Trail, today volunteers lead trips in all seasons in all regions on foot, bikes and water. Here's a sampling of April events:

- Saturday, April 6 in Middlesex, a 6-mile, moderate walk on Bear Swamp Road Loop
- Saturday, April 13, Trail Around Middlebury, a moderate hike of 3-5 miles, 2-3 hours, route to be selected depending on conditions
- Friday, April 19, Means Woods, Middlebury. Easy paced, 2-mile walk with little elevation gain
- Sunday, April 28, bike outing on easy to moderate 25-mile ride in Panton and West Addison.

Dozens of outings cater to a range of abilities, modes and interests, including birding and wildflower walks. Check out the calendar at greenmountainclub.org/calendar-outings-events for contact information and

details. If you feel stuck in the house, don't blame the Green Mountain Club.

Maple for the birds

Vermont maple stands host more than 70 nesting species of birds, including scarlet tanagers and wood thrush. Vermont Audubon launched the Bird-Friendly Maple program a decade ago to encourage sugar makers to manage the forests with these birds in mind. Nearly 90 Vermont producers participate in the program described at vt.audubon.org/conservation/bird-friendly-maple-sugarmakers. To find participating producers, keep an eye out for a yellow badge featuring a scarlet tanager with a green maple leaf and the words: "Produced in Bird-Friendly Habitats."

"Certain management practices enhance this habitat for birds," said Steve Hagenbuch, a small-scale maple producer and biologist at Vermont Audubon, who dreamed up this program almost 20 years ago, "like maintaining a diversity of tree species, having at least a quarter of the forest be species other than sugar maple, leaving downed logs and standing snags, and maintaining leaf litter by preventing the spread of invasive earthworms."

However you choose, seize the energy of spring and get outdoors.

Calendar

Solar eclipse celebration

Thursday-Saturday, thru 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 its 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.

Virtual community design workshop

Wednesday, April 10, 6-8 p.m.

Join a virtual community design workshop on Wednesday, April 10, 6-8 p.m. The workshop is online only via Zoom at https://bit.ly/Charlotte_Villages_project. This is an opportunity to help shape plans

for Charlotte's East and West Villages.

This is the next in a series of opportunities for the project team to hear directly from residents their hopes, ideas and concerns about how the villages function and what could be better. This workshop is being held to help develop ideas for safe and attractive street designs, public spaces, parking areas, building types and locations, and alternatives for transportation. There will be breakout groups for those most interested in the East Village or West Village. (Please note: The content and process for this online workshop will be very similar to the March 16 event. So, if you participated at that event, rest assured that your input and ideas will be included in the planning process, going forward. Consider letting others have their say this time around.) The Zoom login link is available at <https://tinyurl.com/2r4r43zy>. If you would like to be notified of future events and opportunities related to this project, sign up for email notifications at the town website's "Get Involved" page at <https://tinyurl.com/m5vzc6u2>.

Local author reading

Saturday, April 13, 10:30 a.m.

Local author Robert Broder will read from his newest book "Reading Together: A

Heartwarming Story About Bonding with Your Child Through the Love of Reading" at Shelburne's Pierson Library on Saturday, April 13. The story time is free and books will be available to purchase from Flying Pig Books. This book is a nostalgic journey through childhood, when the joys of discovering new stories together create bonds that last a lifetime.

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 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/yjzvssth>. 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.

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On Books

Unheimlich and de gustibus non disputandum est

Katherine Arthaud
Contributor

It's a funny thing about books, how sometimes we love them and sometimes we don't. Sometimes I will love a book, but another person will not love it at all. I saw all this play out on my recent vacation, when I read a book I thought was spectacular, but when my daughter's friend Laura found herself bookless, I lent it to her. She began it, but in a day or two admitted it just wasn't doing it for her.

It made sense, in a way. The book is a little confusing. But the writing is gorgeous and the plot unusual and compelling, or so I thought. For me, any issues of confusion faded like footprints in sand in relation to the poetry, creativity and psychic truth of the novel.

In the end, Laura left my paperback copy of the novel on a small table in the living room. I saw it there on my way to the beach. Let's hope she found something more suitable at the airport.

Anyway, I'm not sure where I picked up "The Furrows" by Namwali Serpell, but I remember noticing that it was one of Obama's favorite books, as well as a finalist for the National Book Critics Circle Award, one of the New York Times' ten best books of the year and longlisted for the Joyce Carol Oates Prize. New York Magazine dubbed it "a triumph. 'Brilliantly inventive and enthralling,'" said Oprah Daily. One of the best books of the year, said The New Yorker, Time, The Washington Post, Los Angeles Times, The Guardian, Esquire and Ms. Magazine.

"I don't want to tell you what happened. I want to tell you how it felt," the book begins.

What happens, or what seems to happen, is 12-year-old Cassandra Williams goes to the beach with her brother, Wayne, age 7, who, while swimming, disappears. But what actually happened? Did he drown? Is he dead? Where did his body go? The reader, as well as a number of characters in the novel, imagines that he must be deceased, as many details point to that conclusion. Yet, as the novel progresses, it becomes less and less clear what really went down with

Wayne. Cassandra did her best to rescue him, but then lost consciousness herself. She remembers coming to on the beach and seeing him, in a heap, washed ashore on the sand. Then, there was this mysterious man (was he real?) standing over the boy's body. In short, no one really knows exactly what happened to Wayne. Cassandra feels guilty and responsible, and then her father leaves to start another family, and her mother, endlessly hopeful that her son is alive and growing up out there in the world somewhere, starts an organization whose mission is to find missing children.

Cassandra starts seeing her brother everywhere. Airplane aisles, stores, subway cars, sidewalks. But is it really him? Later in her life, she meets a man who is a stranger, yet who is also eerily familiar to her. His name? You guessed it: Wayne.

Which brings me to this concept I learned about decades ago: *unheimlich*. *Unheimlich* was first described by German psychiatrist Ernst Jentsch, who said that E.T.A Hoffmann's "The Sandman" was a prime example of the uncanny in literature. Sigmund Freud, in 1919, elaborated on this idea in an essay, "Das Unheimliche," in which he spoke of two concurrent meanings of the word: "Both courses lead to the same result: the uncanny is that class of the frightening which leads back to what is known of old and long familiar." *Unheimlich* can be used to describe something that is both known and at the same time unknown — familiar, and yet unfamiliar.

I believe this word popped up in my consciousness because there is something *unheimlich* (I may not be using the word correctly in a sentence, but oh well) for Cassandra about this adult Wayne — and I would argue that there is something *unheimlich* about the novel itself, which goes on to tell other iterations of the day Wayne disappeared, leading the reader to be not only unsure of what really happened to the kid but also how, where and why the disappearance took place. I'm thinking this is probably where Laura threw in the towel.

A rather practical person by nature, the uncertainty regarding the course of events and the dreaminess or unreliability of

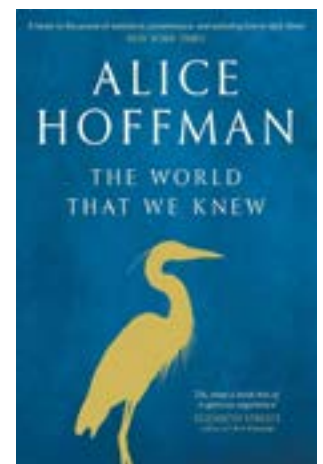
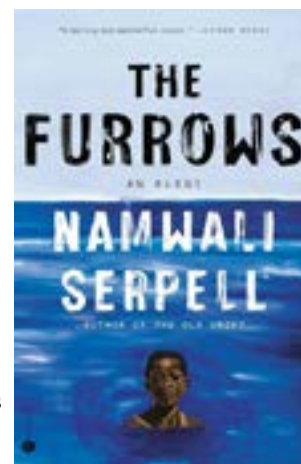
the narrator are likely what caused her to abandon ship and quietly leave the book behind. But not me. Though I was a bit thrown off by the alternate descriptions of the day and way young Wayne went missing and found myself more confused, pages later, by this weird explosion that happens in an airport and the sudden switch to a new narrator and a whole new lens and perspective. The writing is excellent, and the exploration of grief, guilt, longing, love, memory and the passage of time is profound.

Apparently, this novel was inspired by the death of the author's sister, who two decades ago died of a drug overdose. "What I took from that experience," Serpell said, "had to do with the grieving process — my refusal to accept her death psychologically and this sense of seeing her everywhere."

But getting back to books that some love and others don't. After finishing "The Furrows," I picked up a book that I confess I really didn't love. I stuck with it and forced myself to finish it, but it was like eating unsalted porridge or walking on the beach when the sand is super wet and deep (I did some of that, as well). It just didn't grab me, ever.

I was confused by the different characters and their complicated names, and though the book was decently written and based on a topic I would typically be all over, it was a slog. After finishing it, I left it, just as Laura left "The Furrows," coverless and somewhat the worse for wear, on a guest room bureau. It is entirely possible that someone has found it and is loving it as we speak. What is the saying, "De gustibus non disputandum est"? Translation: There's no disputing about taste.

Moving along, I am now reading Alice Hoffman's "The World That We Knew." It's just the right antidote for the aforementioned slog (which I will not name lest I prejudice you against what is probably a perfectly good book) and which kept me occupied and engaged on the long plane



trek home. There is a very special quality to Hoffman's work that I can't quite put my finger on, but the word "magical" is what comes to mind. Published in 2019, this novel has this quality, though its focus is not one where magic is typically found.

It takes place in Germany and France in the early 40s and highlights three main characters: (1) Lea, a young girl whose mother sends her away to save her from the Nazis; (2) Ettie, the quick-witted daughter of a rabbi from whom she secretly learns how to create a golem, which she does, in the "person" of (3) Ava, whose creation Lea's mother commissions with her last few pieces of jewelry in order to protect Lea in her flight to safety. "What's a golem?" you ask? You will have to read this book to find out (or you could just Google it), but I will tell you that this one, Ava, is a highly unusual golem, in that she has more human traits than your typical golem, and even falls in love, with a heron. See what I'm talking about? Magic. And yet also grounded in something very real: a world at war; the violent extermination of thousands of women, men and children, the separation of so many families. It is about some of the ones who fled, and some of the ones who helped.

One of the quotations in the front of the book strikes me as so poignant and illuminating, for this novel, and for our time. From Exodus 23:9: "The strangers in your midst shall be to you as the native-born, for you know the stranger's heart, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt."

Library News

Keep track of Earth Month actions on Earth Month bingo card

Margaret Woodruff
Director

There are all sorts of activities during April to celebrate Earth Month in Charlotte.

Swap seeds, plant trees, repair things, count frogs and promote pollinators among other things. Participants can use the Earth Month bingo card and calendar to keep track of events. Get your bingo card at <https://tinyurl.com/mr28u76s>.

During April, 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 at <https://bit.ly/48Vx4Qj>.

There will be an Earth Month celebration on April 27 and you can submit your bingo card then for Love Your Earth raffle prizes.

Eclipse viewing at the library Monday, April 8, 2:15-4:15 p.m.

Celebrate the total eclipse on the Charlotte Town Green. A limited number of viewing glasses will be available as well as hands-on activities.

Earth Month story times Tuesday & Friday, April 9 & 12, 10 a.m.

Join for some fun and festive stories to celebrate Earth Month.

Stories of earth activism Monday, April 22, 7 p.m.

Earth Day, since its founding in 1970, has inspired generations of people dedicated to improving and protecting the environment. Join with others to hear and share stories of taking action to make a difference. Get inspired by hearing how Charlotte's conservation organizations got started.

Earth Month celebration on town green Saturday, April 27, 10 a.m.-1 p.m.

10:30 a.m.: Chittenden County Forester Ethan Tapper

12 p.m.: Disco Soup Lunch: "Save our food, save our planet"

12:30 p.m.: Alicia Daniel, Vermont Master Naturalist Program
Ahead of the Storm rain garden tours
Earth Month team info tables

Special events

Writer's studio Tuesday, April 9, 6:30 p.m.

Looking for a welcoming spot to share your writing? Join us for the three-town Writer's Studio, a positive atmosphere to share feedback about writing projects big and small. Geoff Gevalt of the Vermont Young Writer's Project serves as the facilitator for this monthly meet-up that rotates among our three neighboring libraries. Check with the library to sign up.

Cooking book club Wednesday, April 10, 5:30 p.m.

What does "heritage cooking" mean to you? Beloved family dishes? A recipe from a favorite cuisine? Or something else entirely? However you interpret it, we'd love to have you join us for this session of the "Cooking Book Club." Bring a dish to share for this relaxed evening of conversation and cuisine. If you need help or inspiration, please stop by the library and we can help you. Please let us know if you'll be joining us: margaret@charlottepubliclibrary.org.

Dog communication program Thursday, April 11, 6 p.m.

This popular, long-running dog communication and safety lecture is a multi-media extravaganza of fun where the audience also gets to test their "dog reading" skills. This program is 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 eventbrite.com/e/dog-communication-tickets-803994367797.

Children's programs

Preschool story time Tuesdays & Fridays, 10 a.m.

Come to the Charlotte Library for



Courtesy photo

Hannah Miller, a Vermont State University professor, visited the Charlotte Library's knitting group. Miller's goal is to visit – and knit – in as many of Vermont's public libraries as she can during her sabbatical.

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.

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.

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

Due to scheduling conflicts, the April library board meeting will take place on Monday, April 8, at 6 p.m. Please contact the library or visit the library website at charlottepubliclibrary.org for more information.

Senior Center News

Charlotte is vibrant with resources helping people live well while aging

Lori York
Director

A vibrant community has the resources in place for adults to live well as they age. In Charlotte, we are fortunate to have the senior center as a community resource providing access to many support services such as Age Well meals, Alzheimer's support, veterans assistance, and Bone Builders through the United Way.

There are regular social services organizations presentations geared towards issues facing aging adults and activities that provide socialization and a community gathering place. This month check out the new watercolor workshop for beginners, a birding trip, the walking and gentle hiking group or consider taking a beginner Italian class.

Community services

Alzheimer's caregivers support group Wednesday, April 10, 4-5 p.m.

Are you caring for someone with Alzheimer's? Do you know someone who is? Please join the monthly Caregivers Support Group on the second Wednesday of each month from 4-5 p.m. The meetings provide a safe place for caregivers, family, and friends of persons with dementia to meet and develop a mutual support system. New date and time option to attend by Zoom or in-person. For additional information or to receive the Zoom meeting link, email Susan Cartwright at cartwright.susan1@gmail.com.

Navigating VA benefits

Tuesday, April 9, 10 a.m.-2 p.m.

Join Bob Stock, veterans outreach specialist with the South Burlington Vet Center. He will assist veterans and their families regarding available VA benefits and related issues. No registration necessary. Drop-in anytime on Tuesday, April 9, 10 a.m.-2 p.m.

Plant sale planning meeting

Friday, April 19, 1 p.m.

It is time to plan for the Friends of the Charlotte Senior Center's annual plant sale. If you are interested in attending this planning meeting or helping out with the plant sale, please sign up at the senior center. Questions? Email Polly at ppolly62@ymail.com.

Weekly Age Well Grab & Go meals

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

Red Cross Blood Drive

Thursday, April 25, 1-6 p.m.

Please consider donating blood at the Charlotte Senior Center. The Red Cross is experiencing the worst blood shortage in over a decade. Call 1-800-RED-CROSS or visit RedCrossBlood.org and enter: CHARLOTTE to schedule an appointment.

Programs & events

April artist exhibit

Found and Fiddled With

This month's exhibit, "Found and Fiddled

With" pretty much describes Jan Lawson's style, themes, palette and materials. Many of her pieces reflect her emotions, ranging from the whimsical light-heartedness of snagging a mermaid and parading chickens to the despair of an earthquake, hunger, and the horror of war. Jan enjoys experimenting with the juxtaposition of colors and shapes in abstracts and collage. Most of her frames and surfaces are found at yard sales and resale shops. She paints over what she finds and fiddles with the various frames. Some dents, dings, and scratches remain, lending patina and history.

Kirtan

Friday, April 12, 5-6:30 p.m.

Join Charlie Nardozi and Heidi Kvasnak for a spring kirtan on April 12. Kirtans are heart-centered practices where participants sing ancient yogic chants or songs that are simple and repetitive with the intention of creating a feeling of connection to yourself and others. Everyone is encouraged to join in and sing in unison or in call and response. If you prefer to listen, you'll still experience the peaceful benefits of coming together in community and taking in this beautiful ancient practice. Chant sheets will be available and there will be time between the chants for short, quiet meditation. Registration suggested. Suggested donation of \$5-\$15.

Italian for total beginners

Fridays, April 12-May 17, 10-11 a.m.

Are you interested in beginning your study of Italian? Join this group to explore the beauty of the Italian language and culture. For questions about whether this class is the correct level, email Nicole Librandi at nicolelibrandi2@gmail.com. Cost: \$60. Registration and payment required by Monday, April 8

Beginner watercolor workshop

Saturday, April 27, 10 a.m.-12 p.m.

If you've always wanted to try watercolor but were too intimidated, "The Sky's The Limit!" with Ginny Joyner is the class for you. Every landscape painting starts with a great sky. Learn the basics of water and washes while exploring ways to create clouds, gradations and depth. You will learn the properties of a variety of blue shades and experience the "zen" of watching paint dry. Each month you will add to your repertoire of subject matter and explore new techniques. Class limit 10 students. For more information about Ginny Joyner, please check out her website: ginnyjoyner.com. Registration required. Cost: \$35.00 plus \$6.00 supply fee which is paid to the instructor.

Outdoors

Birding expedition

Wednesday, April 17, 9 a.m. departure

There is a wide range of birding habitats in Chittenden County. Join avid bird watcher Hank Kaestner and learn to identify the various bird species and habitats right here in Vermont. Group size is limited to 20 participants. Free, but registration required.

Walking and gentle hiking group

Thursday, April 25, 9 a.m.

Enjoy the beauty of nature. Come walk at a gentle pace with other seniors. The group



Photo by Lori York

Volunteers of all ages enjoy helping out with our weekly Monday lunch at the senior center.



Photo by Lori York

Beloved board member, Beth Merritt is moving out of state. The Charlotte Senior Center board gathered for cake and to wish Beth well on her next adventure.

will meet each month for a congenial non-strenuous walk. Location to be determined based on conditions of the local walks. Meet at 9:00 a.m. in the parking lot of the Charlotte Senior Center. Questions? Call Penny Burman at 916-753-7279. Registration appreciated. Free.

Meals

Menus are posted on the website: CharlotteSeniorCenterVT.org.

Monday lunches

Served weekly. Lunch is served 11:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m., or until the food runs out. Suggested lunch donation \$5. No registration required.

Men's breakfast

Friday, April 12, 7:30 a.m.

On the second Friday of the month, the men gather for breakfast and conversation. The doors open at 7 a.m., and breakfast is at 7:30 a.m. The speaker this month is Robert Caldwell, who will discuss Vermont's 911 emergency response system (EMS). A member of Charlotte Fire and Rescue Services, he also currently serves as a dispatcher for the 911 system. He will also provide a refresher session on how to use the Senior Center's AED (automated

external defibrillator). Registration required. Suggested donation: \$6. If you are planning to attend the men's breakfast, please email Lane Morrison at lmorrison@gmavt.net before Tuesday, April 9.

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.

Write Ingredients

Celebrate the eclipse with Moon Pies and RC Colas

Susan Ohanian
Contributor

Monday, April 8, is definitely a day to celebrate the moon.

There's a new moon, and this one is particularly special. When the moon's path crosses the plane of the Earth's orbit around the sun while the Earth, moon and sun are aligned at new moon, a solar eclipse happens somewhere in the world.

On that day this year the "somewhere in the world" is Charlotte and the Charlotte Senior Center will be closed all day so that people can appreciate this extraordinary event.

In trying to think of food to commemorate the day, moonfish and moonshine didn't seem to work.

Then mooncakes came to mind. These traditional Chinese "cakes" made especially for the Autumn Moon Festival seem fitting for our special day. Along the Yangtze River, these round pastry shells are filled with lotus seed paste with whole pressed duck egg yolks.

Other fillings might be a paste made of dates or adzuki beans. All are imprinted with a special design on top, Chinese characters for "longevity" or "harmony."

It's quite a jump from these traditional mooncakes to Moon Pies, but even those of us who can resist the allure of this snack food made with graham crackers and marshmallow filling can appreciate its interesting history. Often associated with the American South, where, as if the sweet sticky filling weren't enough, Moon Pies were traditionally accompanied by an RC Cola.

In the 1950s, Big Bill Lister's "Gimme an RC Cola and a Moon Pie" became a hit: youtu.be/loamVbAOsPo.

In 1973, NRBQ came along with another hit with "An RC Cola and a Moon Pie": youtu.be/q5sUmGgMmhw.

Since New Year's Eve 2008, Mobile, Ala., has lowered a 12-foot-tall lighted mechanical Moon Pie to celebrate the coming new year. Before the drop, the world's largest Moon Pie is sliced and pieces served to the public.

These days, Moon Pies are still made by the creator, Chattanooga Bakery in

Chattanooga, Tenn. Their story is that they came up with the idea when a traveling salesman asked a Kentucky coal miner what kind of snack he'd like to eat to stave off hunger. The answer was something featuring graham crackers and marshmallows, incorporated in a cake "as big as the moon."

There you have it.

The company celebrated its centennial with a "My Favorite Moon Pie Memory" contest, with a grand prize of a 100-year supply of moon pies. They didn't specify just how many pies that amounts to, but Chattanooga Bakery bakes a million Moon Pies a day. Right now, they're offering the Solar Eclipse Survival Kit in a black box. Plus T-shirts and sweatshirts.

Moon Pies' five primary flavors are chocolate, vanilla, banana, strawberry and salted caramel. Coconut appears during Mardi Gras. Lemon and blueberry also appear seasonally throughout the year. In September 2017, with a nod to a pumpkin mania sweeping the country, the company released a pumpkin spice double-decker Moon Pie. It remains in the roster.

I admit to finding it disquieting that Moon Pie Inc. runs a website urging schools to run Moon Pie fund raisers, sending kids out into the community selling pies "fresh baked for your school." There's mention of a middle school that ordered moon pies for all their kids — to go along with their solar eclipse sunglasses. I'm happy to report that this school is not in Vermont.

Ron Dickson, who hoists the official Moon Pie flag on his sailboat, wrote "The Great American Moon Pie Handbook," which includes "folklore and stories of spiritual enlightenment." Dickson insists Moon Pies affect all aspects of life, including etiquette, courtship and childrearing. Among the practical uses he includes is marshmallow filling to patch a bicycle inner-tube leak.

Some might say: Better in your bicycle tube than in your belly.

In October 2016, at a World Moon Pie Eating Championship in Memphis, Matt "the Megatoad" Stonie downed 69 pies in eight minutes.

In nearby Bell Buckle, Tenn., with a



Photo courtesy Moon Pie Facebook page

listed population of 450, 10,000 people show up for the annual RC Cola and Moon Pie Festival. At 4 p.m. "the largest Moon Pie in the world" is sliced into pieces for the crowd to enjoy. If you're interested, this year's festival is on June 15. By then, you should be recovered from the deep-fried banana cornbread puffs at the National Cornbread Festival in South Pittsburg, Tenn., on April 27. (See "The Charlotte News," in the March 21 edition at <https://tinyurl.com/3xpjbre2>.)

Perhaps @MoonPie, an occasional Twitter presence, got the last word. When someone started arguing about the merits of the confection, @MoonPie replied: "Buddy it's saturday (sic) night and you're talking to a marshmallow sandwich on the internet."

Orson Welles made an interesting choice. According to Atlanta Magazine, in the first draft of the "Citizen Kane" screenplay, Charles Foster Kane's last words were "Moon Pie," not "Rosebud."

As someone who has never eaten a Moon Pie, I admit to being glad Welles decided on another draft.

Check out the Charlotte Library for plenty of children's books about the moon, including the 2017 Newbery title "The Girl Who Drank the Moon."

Finally, as a prelude to April 8, enjoy some moon songs without RC Cola or marshmallows:

- Richard Rodgers and Lorenz Hart's "Blue Moon" as performed by Ella Fitzgerald at youtu.be/IPyS4USQqSo.

- Or Bob Dylan's version at youtu.be/uNZNxcW80es.

- Or for another completely different rendition check out The Platters' version at youtu.be/3Pjx9RR4iSY.

- And finally, here's Audrey Hepburn with "Moon River" at youtu.be/zHxN2ZDp4vo.



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