

The Charlotte News

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Your nonprofit community news source since 1958

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Three heart-warming surprises and request

Bill Regan
Contributor

When we first moved to Charlotte, one of the many heart-warming surprises we encountered was a community newspaper in our mailbox every two weeks. We relied on the paper to learn about the people, places and issues that defined our new home. The Charlotte News continues to help us connect with Charlotte and to understand the challenges facing the town.

To provide this essential civic service year after year, the newspaper relies in large part on charitable gifts from Charlotters like you and me.

In a second heart-warming surprise, seven friends of The Charlotte News have issued a generous \$10,000 challenge grant. With that challenge, plus our NewsMatch grant, all gifts will be triple matched — for a limited time only. For every \$1 you give, the newspaper receives \$3.

It's quick and easy to make your tax-deductible gift on our website at charlottenewsvt.org/donate or by sending your check to: P.O. Box 251, Charlotte VT 05445, using the envelope included with this newspaper.

I think of The Charlotte News as a kind of glue that helps hold us together. Charlotters differ in background, how they live their lives and the views they hold. But we are all members of this community and we all do better when we come together in the spirit of respectful civic discourse and community-building that the paper provides.

I may not agree with every story or the focus of every column, but I don't do that with any of the news I consume (and, to be clear, board members like me have no role in the paper's editorial decisions).

The Charlotte News provides a forum for different perspectives and interests rather than being the perfect echo-chamber for each reader and does so with built-in safeguards against the kind of incivility that can creep into social media.

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Photo by Scooter MacMillan

Tuesday was the first full day of “real” work on installing culverts for the Spear Street repair, Connor Poulin said. Poulin, owner of the company doing the work, said he hoped to be finished by mid-March, but would definitely be finished before the April deadline.

Brett Yates
Contributor

The Charlotte Selectboard announced that repairs on Spear Street, impassable since July's flooding, would begin on Dec. 3.

“We have the contractors all ready to go,” chair Jim Faulkner said the night before.

Following an executive session, the board approved a pair of easement agreements between the town and private landowners to facilitate the work. The job will make use of time-

limited funding from the Federal Highway Emergency Relief Program.

“And now we have to push to get this finished by April 6,” Faulkner added. “If we do that, it won't cost the town a penny.”

Two new 10-foot culverts will replace the single culvert that Mud Hollow Brook washed away amid the remnants of Hurricane Beryl.

Possible skating-rink delay

A faulty electrical box may push back the start of the ice-skating season in Charlotte. The public rink at Charlotte

Central School will not open until repairs have taken place.

Citing safety and liability concerns, the selectboard approved the precautionary closure and a request for bids from electricians. The electrical box serves the pump that moves water into the rink.

Volunteer Bill Fraser-Harris had planned to begin flooding the rink this upcoming weekend. He called the system “operational,” but he recounted observing sparks upon turning on the

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New principal at Charlotte Central School

Tyler Cohen
Contributor

The new year is set to begin with an administrative restructuring at Charlotte Central School, with Assistant Principal Tim O'Leary transitioning into the lead principal role. Beth Slater, currently the school's student services director and a special educator, will become a special services director and assistant principal, while Jen Roth, the school's current lead principal,

moves to Shelburne Community School to serve as pre-K-4 principal.

“The opportunity to serve as principal at Charlotte Central School is both exciting and deeply meaningful,” said O'Leary, who joined the administrative team at Charlotte Central School this year and has worked in the Champlain Valley School District for eight years. “Stepping into this role inspires me to lead and collaborate within an already high-functioning team that benefits from the

strengths and leadership of many.”

During his time in the district, O'Leary has supported digital learning, curriculum development and instructional coaching, and he played a key role in establishing the Virtual Learning Academy, where he served as the middle-level principal during the 2020-21 school year, a pivotal part of the Champlain Valley School District's response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Before his work in the CVSD, O'Leary was a high school teacher and special

educator.

An educator of more than two decades, Beth Slater has been at Charlotte Central School for eight years, most recently in a split role as an eighth grade special educator and as the director of student services. Prior to working in the Champlain Valley School District, Slater worked in Grand Isle for 14 years, and she holds a master's degree in special education from the College of Saint Joseph and

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SPEAR STREET

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power and noted that “the pump relay made some very disconcerting noises.” The selectboard reviewed an email from a local electrician, Steve Spadaccini, who had looked at the system earlier this year. He recommended a multi-step process for bringing it up to code, which would cost \$5,000 by his estimation.

“What is in place is a mess,” Spadaccini wrote. The request for bids will close on Dec. 16, the date of the next selectboard meeting. With any luck, a speedy completion will prevent Charlotters from missing out on many good skating days. “It’s usually too warm in December,” Faulkner said. “And January comes around — by then, we may have it all set.”

Town planner needs

Town planner Larry Lewack retired at the beginning of December, and Charlotte officials are still figuring out how to go about replacing him. They haven’t yet advertised the position or interviewed any candidates. Instead, they have considered alternative models for professional planning services. Last month, a form of regionalization —

reminiscent of the contracts under which large municipalities often provide police and fire services for small ones — struck the selectboard as the best option. With a “shared services agreement,” the town of Shelburne’s planning & zoning office would have overseen the writing of Charlotte’s town plan, alongside related work, for a fee. “We had an agreement a week ago with Shelburne, and they backed out at the last minute,” selectboard member Kelly Devine said. “Which is unfortunate, because I thought it was a really great solution.”

Now, the Chittenden County Regional Planning Commission appears likely to fill in on a temporary basis. As one of its dues-paying member municipalities, Charlotte already receives roughly 35 hours per year of technical assistance, according to Faulkner. For an additional fee, the commission could add “about eight to 16 hours a week” of remote planning work through the end of June, though Faulkner hoped that the stopgap solution wouldn’t have to last that long. “I think we should get out there and start to advertise right off the bat for a town planner,” he said. “I mean, like, almost tomorrow.” But Devine pushed back, voicing

concerns related to upcoming negotiations between the town and its new municipal employee union. “When you bring on a full-time employee, and it’s a union position, you don’t have a lot of flexibility,” she said. “You have to fire for cause, so we better be really sure on what we’re doing before we’re adding people into those positions.” Devine floated the possibility of turning the job into a “gig work” role, whereby the town would contract retired planners for services as needed. “My initial thought was to try to head in that direction before advertising the position,” she said. “I don’t see, based on the workload and production that was coming out of the planning office, the necessary need for a full-time town planner.”

Charlie Pughe, the chair of Charlotte’s volunteer planning commission, expressed a willingness to work temporarily with the Chittenden County Regional Planning Commission, but he advocated for prompt action on a permanent solution. “This has been on the table for four or five months now that we’ve known this is happening, and we haven’t done anything yet. And here we are now, and Larry’s gone,” Pughe said. “So, we need to get this done.”

PRINCIPAL

Continued from page 1

has completed advanced graduate studies through Saint Michael’s College. “Since my start at CCS, I see a legacy of community partnerships, innovative educators and our collective love and appreciation in service to the Charlotte youth,” says outgoing Lead Principal Jen Roth. “Tim and Beth will be a dynamic

team, each leading with their own plethora of skills centered on relationships and the belief that each member of the community has something to enhance our school.” CVSD Interim Superintendent Adam Bunting announced this transition to staff, faculty, families and caregivers this week, sharing that this restructuring moves the district in a direction that maximizes each leader’s varied experiences and talents, demonstrating the flexibility and creativity

that the school district seeks to achieve in the coming years. “These changes align the strengths of our administrative team in preparation for the second semester,” Bunting says. “We made these decisions with collaboration, thought and intention as we reflected on how we best support our teachers to inspire our learners.” (Tyler Cohen is Champlain Valley School District communications manager.)

DONATION

Continued from page 1

This nonprofit newspaper comes without charge, but it is not free. It takes money — about \$6,000 per issue — and many people

working behind the scenes to provide this service. This is where the third heart-warming surprise comes in. After our move, I quickly became aware of all the good that happens in Charlotte only because volunteers and donors large and small embody an “if not me, then who?” approach to their community. The Charlotte News helps residents learn about all the good that volunteers are doing around town and promotes opportunities for Charlotters to join in. Like so many things in Charlotte that rely on the generosity of our residents, we

simply could not publish the paper without your support. In asking for your gift, we want to express our gratitude to the 265 folks who have already donated this year. And special thanks to the seven friends of the newspaper who pulled together to create this challenge. Show them you appreciate their generosity by making your gift today. Thanks for your support in this season of giving. (Bill Regan is chair of the board of directors of The Charlotte News.)



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

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

Code of Ethics
The Charlotte News has adopted the Society of Professional Journalists Code of Ethics as the touchstone to guide newsroom practices. The Society of Professional Journalists Code of Ethics is built on four principles:
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• Minimize harm.
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• Be accountable and transparent.

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

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Merrymac Farm Sanctuary keeps its barn door open

Brett Yates
Contributor

Charlotte’s Merrymac Farm Sanctuary is a safe haven for goats, horses, rabbits, cows, ducks, chickens, turkeys, sheep, pigs, donkeys and people.

Sick, injured, neglected, or otherwise in need of care, the animals come from all over Vermont and sometimes farther. They find what founder Era MacDonald calls a “forever home” on her 15-acre property.

“Everyone dumps their bunnies. Everyone dumps their goats. The Humane Society is calling us now,” she said.

MacDonald fields requests every day. A few nights ago, she heard from “a couple in Vermont that are getting divorced, and they can’t keep their pig.” In the spring, she typically receives 30 to 50 unsalable birds from feed stores.

The people are almost as numerous as the animals. With a staff of just five part-timers, Merrymac Farm Sanctuary has cultivated a community of nearly a hundred regular volunteers by MacDonald’s count. Animal lovers visit every morning.

“We didn’t really realize the impact on humans that we would have,” MacDonald said. “They’re choosing here over anywhere they could be.”

The sanctuary aims to promote “awareness and compassion.” In the afternoon, a bus unloads a group of 9- to 12-year-olds from Charlotte and Shelburne schools.

“We’re able to do some of the educational components that other sanctuaries maybe can’t do because they’re in pretty remote areas,” MacDonald explained. “We do a toddler reading program. We have a high school internship program and a college internship program.”

Assistant director Mari Lowder started as a volunteer herself. As a former human resources manager, she has a professional background “in people,” not in animals, but as she sees it, human and animal welfare can go hand in hand.

“I love how welcoming we can make people, how people can find their niche working with animals,” Lowder said. “I think



having a relationship with an animal speaks for itself. We don’t have to take a really sort of strict vegan stance. We don’t have to shut people out.”

Some of the sanctuary’s animals show up as a result of interventions by animal control officers and concerned citizens, bearing tragic tales of abuse and hunger. A few continue to struggle to survive. Tizmas, a former racehorse, arrived in October with what MacDonald termed “grade-two starvation.”

“We grade starvation one through nine. Nine’s like a normal horse,” she said. “He kind of wants to bite everyone right now. His stomach’s probably really not feeling good because he’s been on a lot of drugs. He has an infection in his coffin bone which actually could kill him.”

Overall, however, the atmosphere at Merrymac Farm Sanctuary is bustling and cheerful. Roaming goats nuzzle visitors happily.

“Not all the animals really have this cruel, sad story,” Lowder said. “Sometimes it’s just a circumstance.”

In Vermont, one common circumstance is old age. Last year, the farm received “three



Photos by Brett Yates

When Era MacDonald started Merrymac Farm Sanctuary about eight years ago, she didn’t realize how much impact the farm would have on people. Now, there are about 100 regular volunteers.

mini-donkeys” from a retired woman “who couldn’t care for them anymore,” Lowder recounted.

MacDonald, who lives on site, has owned the farm with her husband for about eight years. She has “always been involved in rescue work,” but her sanctuary earned 501(c)(3) nonprofit status only last year in March.

“I’m way more of a grassroots person. I like to actually get dirty and do barn chores,” MacDonald said. “It’s hard to stop and research and write grants.”

Merrymac sits less than five miles from Shelburne Farms, an educational nonprofit with more than \$10 million in annual revenue. MacDonald expects her own \$200,000 budget, derived principally from “individual donations,” to rise to \$300,000 next year.

“I think the scary part is it costs a lot of money to run this place,” she said.

Most of the budget pays for feed, hay and veterinary care. As the director, MacDonald works for free.

“There’s a million nonprofits in Vermont,” she said. “We kind of run on gas fumes compared to most places, but I think we’re making a lot of things happen.”

MacDonald invites newcomers to see the farm for themselves at Merrymac’s Winter Wonderland event this Friday and Saturday, Dec. 13 and 14. Visitors will enjoy hot chocolate and holiday lights.

“Some sanctuaries are very closed off to humans because they’re just like, ‘This is for the animals,’” MacDonald said. “And it is hard when you have the community aspect. You open yourself up to having a lot more going on.”

For her, the challenges — including grant writing — are worthwhile.

“We’re on a good path,” MacDonald said. “We really believe that all animals belong here, and all people belong here.”



The sanctuary’s newest rescue, Babette (of the Scottish Highland breed), is one of just two cows at Merrymac Farm. Director Era MacDonald says she can’t fit any more on her small property.



After arriving a year and a half ago as a “sick, little, day-old chick,” Emory has become Merrymac’s largest turkey at 60 pounds, according to assistant director Mari Lowder.

Double your impact — all gifts are matched

John Quinney
Contributor

I’m writing to ask for your support for The Charlotte News.

There are lots of reasons to make a gift to your hometown newspaper.

First, you value our coverage. Each time you open your copy of The Charlotte News, or visit our website, you learn something new — about our town and the people who live here.

In the past few issues, we’ve run stories about the return of the tractor parade, new developments at Nordic Farms, celebrating the town administrator’s first year, the Ferry Road speed limit controversy and innovative funding for solar at the town garage. We also publish news from the food shelf, the library and senior center and list upcoming town meetings, recent real estate transactions and our popular calendar of events. If you like what you read, I invite you to join me in making a gift to The Charlotte News.

Second, The Charlotte News is a true community newspaper, created by us and for us. It’s the people that make it special. In the course of a year, our employees, freelancers and board members work with 140 volunteers, 70 advertisers and funding provided by hundreds of donors to publish and distribute 25 issues of The Charlotte News.

Third, and this is something to celebrate, your gift now goes twice as far. For the

fifth year in a row, The Charlotte News has received a grant from NewsMatch, a national program that supports nonprofit community journalism.

For every gift we receive, up to \$1,000, NewsMatch will double it. So, when you give \$100, we receive \$200; give \$50 and we receive \$100, and so on.

Even better, consider making a monthly gift. For every monthly gift we receive — say \$10 or \$20 — NewsMatch multiplies the gift by twelve!

It’s quick and easy to make your gift on our secure website or, if you prefer, you may send your check to us at P.O. Box 251, Charlotte VT 05445.

We distribute the newspaper without charge, but it is not free. It costs about \$6,000 to publish each issue of the newspaper and to keep the website humming along.

Your gift, in any amount, helps us cover this cost and helps fuel growth in our news coverage and stories about our neighbors. This is the kind of reporting that you’ve told us you want the newspaper and website to provide. We’re ready to make that happen — but we need to hear from you today.

Thank you in advance for your support.

For those who have already given, thank you. And to all our readers, best wishes for a happy holiday season in the company of family and friends.

(John Quinney is a board member and chair of the fundraising committee.)

Fresh snow



Photo by Lee Krohn

This still life view of Shelburne Museum is evidence that we had a beautiful, unmarred snow for a couple of days.

Food Shelf News

Winter brings busy times to the Charlotte Food Shelf

Katherine Arthaud
Contributor

Things were busy at the food shelf the Saturday morning before Thanksgiving. By noon, things had calmed down considerably. Shoppers had picked up most of the 26 pre-ordered Thanksgiving baskets, and thanks to early sign-up for staggered pick-up times, things went relatively smoothly this year.

In the food shelf pantry, a few individuals were doing some Thanksgiving shopping, carefully filling grocery bags with boxed juice, milk, rolls and coffee, along with some honey and large-sized squash donated by generous local farmers, while three volunteers stocked shelves, took inventory and answered shoppers' questions.

Lindsay Landrigan, who has been volunteering at the Food Shelf since spring, explained that each Charlotte Central School grade was assigned a different food item to bring in to add to the food shelf Thanksgiving baskets. Lindsay said she has really enjoyed meeting other volunteers in her time at the food shelf, as well as families who shop there. She has two kids at Charlotte Central School and explained to them about how the items they were bringing into their classrooms would be added to baskets for families who don't have enough this holiday.

"One son definitely wanted to keep the brownies, but was OK saying goodbye to the canned corn," she said.

Avery Siket and Ceci Scriber, two Champlain Valley Union High students helping in the food pantry on Saturday, explained that they are part of CVU's Volunteer Outreach Club, which connects students to volunteer opportunities in the community. Avery, a sophomore, said she has enjoyed her work on the Thanksgiving food drive. Her next gig will be as an elf at the Polar Express. Many, many CVU students helped both Thursday and Saturday with the Thanksgiving food drive, and we heartily thank them one and all.

While shoppers shopped in the pantry downstairs, a handful of food shelf volunteers were gathered upstairs. Sherri Browdy, who has been volunteering at the food shelf for nine months, learned about the opportunity through the Charlotte Congregational Church, where she is a member. It is important to her, as a relative newcomer to the area, to volunteer where she lives, to help "the actual people in my community; especially now, it is important to have meaningful impact right in front of you."

Maria Blanchette, who has been with the food shelf for four years, found out about the work through a Front Porch Forum post asking for volunteers. During her time volunteering, a family once told her that it's very difficult to be in need in such an affluent community

"We are trying to make that easier," director Peggy Sharpe said.

Volunteer Lorraine Koffman said when she started volunteering, she was "blown away by the generosity in our community." She said it is gratifying to see how shoppers "are so grateful, respectful and happy we are here."

Besides the many volunteers who showed up for the Thanksgiving food drive, we would like to extend great thanks to the Charlotte-Shelburne-Hinesburg Rotary for

donating turkeys for 25 families; and to Ebeth Scatchard, Christa Duthie-Fox, Mary Mead and Moe Harvey, who also donated turkeys. We also would like to thank Holly Rochefort, who coordinated yummy community baked goods; Steve Schubart of Grass Cattle Company who donated eggs; and Peter Demick, who provided delicious fresh honey for the baskets.

And thank you to the teachers and classes of Charlotte Central School students, who provided nonperishable goods for the Thanksgiving baskets and created beautiful cards to make things extra special.

We add a general heartfelt thank you to those who donated squash and who brought in a generous myriad of miscellaneous food donations. Though we don't know your names, you are on our gratitude list. Thanks, also, for donations from Gerald Werle, Rice Lumber, Peter and Diane Rosenfeld, Kathleen Nolan, E. Kiley, Margaret Berlin, Robert and Kathryn Mesaros, Susan and Hans Ohanian, Charlotte Congregational Church, Nancy Wood, Vermont Community Foundation and SCHIP.

It is heartwarming indeed how many people pitched in to help make Thanksgiving so abundant this year. So much generosity from people of all ages. We can't thank you all enough.

Denise and Bob Danyow, Deborah Preston, Richard Mintzer and Dmitriy Akselrod (and Nathaneal, for his pumpkin-carving winnings) are all also on our gratitude list for their donations this month. Thank you, thank you.

The food shelf announced its fundraising campaign last month and mailed an informational flyer last week to the community. Please join our team and make a donation to the food shelf to help continue the commitment to providing food and assistance to our neighbors in need.

Moving forward, please note our holiday hours: Wednesday, Dec. 11, 4-6 p.m. and Saturday, Dec. 14, 9-11 a.m. Holiday distribution will be Saturday, Dec. 21, 9:30 a.m.-noon.

Food is provided at 403 Church Hill Road, in the basement of the Charlotte Congregational Church on the second and fourth Wednesdays (4-6 p.m.) and Saturdays (9-11 a.m.) of each month. For all other inquiries, call 802-425-2402.

Charlotte Food Shelf and Assistance also provides limited utility, rent, medical, dental, school supply and other emergency assistance to residents of Charlotte and North Ferrisburgh. If you or someone you know is facing unexpected hardship, help is available. Call 802-425-2402 or fill out a request form. Request forms are available during food shelf open hours or on our website charlotteucc.org/charlotte-food-shelf.

During these colder months, monetary donations are much appreciated to help our families with heat and other utility bills. Tax-deductible donations can be addressed to: Charlotte Food Shelf Inc., PO Box 83, Charlotte VT 05445.

An easy way to donate is through the PayPal button on the website address listed above or via the QR code provided here.



Courtesy photo

From left, Cece Scriber, Lindsay Landrigan and Avery Siket enjoying volunteering at Charlotte Food Shelf as a way of connecting with the community.



Commentary

Kudos for helping feed community college students

Ivy Enoch
Contributor

Earning a college degree is challenging, especially for Vermont students who balance school, jobs and family while working to put food on the table. Fortunately, a new policy change now makes it easier for Vermont’s community college students to access 3SquaresVT, the state’s name for the federal Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), to help with grocery expenses so they can focus on success in school.

As of Oct. 1, Vermont’s Department for Children and Families adopted a policy that eliminated a prohibitive work activity requirement for community college students seeking to gain eligibility for 3SquaresVT.

This policy change recognizes that mandating work requirements is simply not effective at incentivizing work, because 80 percent of Community College of Vermont students are already employed while pursuing their degree. The student work requirement does nothing other than create arduous and burdensome paperwork requirements, posing a legitimate barrier to 3SquaresVT for students simply trying to meet their basic needs while learning.

This policy aligns Vermont with other states like Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, Washington and Connecticut, which have



Adobe Stock image

taken similar steps to support community college students by increasing access to programs like SNAP that help with basic living expenses. By removing the student work requirement, Vermont is supporting the food security of our community college

students.

So, what does this mean for Community College of Vermont students? If you’re enrolled in a two-year associate degree or certificate program (excluding liberal studies students) you no longer have to meet the “student work requirement” to qualify for 3SquaresVT. Benefits are provided on an EBT card, which works just like a debit card and can be used at grocery stores and farmers markets in Vermont, across the country and even online. A family of three who meets income requirements could receive up to \$768 every month for groceries.

National studies show that students attending two-year colleges are more likely to face challenges when it comes to getting enough food for themselves and their families. In fact, nearly one in four students at community colleges struggle to afford groceries — this is an unacceptable reality.

At the Community College of Vermont, a 2023 student survey found that 47 percent of respondents were concerned about running out of food. This underscores the systemic issue of students at risk of hunger.

Community College of Vermont has dedicated great attention and resources to the issue of food and basic needs security among students. The institution has created robust student resource centers at every campus holding in-person classes where students can access staple foods, a hot meal and support from a trained peer mentor in navigating program applications like 3SquaresVT. We see this as a best practice, one worth investing in.

We commend Community College of Vermont for its commitment to students’ well-being and for being a vocal supporter of this shift in 3SquaresVT policy.

This policy is a win for students, families and Vermont’s economy. By ensuring students have access to the support they need to stay healthy and nourished, they are better positioned to succeed in school and their future careers. No one should ever have to choose between food or books for class. It’s a victory for all of us who believe in the power of education to transform lives.

We commend Vermont’s Department for Children and Families for adopting this common-sense policy. By making it easier for community college students to access 3SquaresVT, they are not only addressing the immediate needs of students but also contributing to the long-term success of the state’s workforce and economy.

To all Community College of Vermont students: we encourage you to see if you qualify for 3SquaresVT. You may be leaving behind grocery money that you rightfully deserve. If you want or need some support through the application process, call 2-1-1 and ask for 3SquaresVT assistance, text VFBSNAP to “85511” or visit vermontfoodhelp.com to learn more.

Thank you, Vermont Department for Children and Families, for this important step forward. With this change, Vermont is leading the way in supporting community college students, ensuring they have the resources they need to succeed both in the classroom and in life.

(Ivy Enoch, of Richmond, is the SNAP policy & training lead at Hunger Free Vermont.)

Commentary

YIMBYs growing support for reasonable building projects

Larry Lewack
Contributor

Wait, what? The acronym stands for “Yes In My Backyard.” YIMBYs are organized, vocal supporters of positive development in their communities, such as affordable diverse housing and commercial projects to meet local needs. New groups that publicly stand up and be counted to support urgently needed housing development are organizing all over the country, from Massachusetts to California. They have come together to prove to local elected officials that there is an important local constituency that actively supports fair consideration of projects that can meet urgent community needs and to voice support for those projects in local permitting decisions.

YIMBY groups operate in stark contrast to NIMBYs, which is an acronym for “Not In My Backyard.” That term describes folks who aggressively oppose specific projects that embody values they might otherwise support, such as housing that’s affordable to working families or establishing a new home for a community health clinic. These folks are often the loudest voices in the room when decisions about new projects are made. They can (and often do) overpower projects by circulating petitions, packing public hearings or filing spurious appeals that delay construction for months or years, sometimes resulting in property owners just giving up altogether on permitted projects. This dynamic defeats worthy projects that have

demonstrated their compliance with all local standards, earned their permits and financing, and would satisfy important community needs.

Charlotte has long been a place where NIMBYs often get their way. Many otherwise reasonable building projects (for example, just adding two single-family homes on a large farm) have been defeated here by naysayers whose primary motivation seems to be that they cannot abide seeing a new home going up within the line of sight from their kitchen window, even if that house is 100 yards away and allowed under zoning rules.

This makes one wonder: Where are the voices on the other side? Where do you go if you care about our regional housing crisis and want to see this community do more to encourage and build housing that’s accessible to families who don’t happen to have at least \$686,000 (the average cost of a Charlotte home these days) stuffed under their mattress or an income of at least \$240,000 a year to afford that kind of mortgage?

Once upon a time, Charlotte had an active affordable housing committee that advocated to create our affordable housing trust fund (that still exists). That committee has long since disbanded. Today, there is no group in town that speaks up for expanding housing options other than large market-rate, single-unit dwellings. In fact, it’s been over a decade since any new affordable housing units have been built in Charlotte.

The truth is: Charlotte has changed and is changing. The large dairy farms that dominated the rural landscape for generations with a few widely scattered farmhouses are gone forever. Farms and farming are still important, but the town is now home to nearly 4,000 souls. Sixty-seven percent of all residents in the workforce commute elsewhere to earn their living. The median age of Charlotte residents is 50 years — the oldest in Chittenden County. Ninety-four percent of all new homes built since 2000 are located in the rural part of town, eating up our landscape in 2-acre and 5-acre bites. Our long-held vision of our two historic villages as vibrant community centers have been defeated by zoning rules that discourage (or preclude) building homes that can meet the needs of working young families, elders and others who simply can’t afford current housing costs here.

As our community evolves, let’s plan thoughtfully and accordingly. This includes modifying zoning bylaws to allow infill housing and businesses in the village centers, the heart and soul of the town, instead of encouraging development out in our rural open spaces. We can’t stop people from moving in or out of Charlotte. But when that does happen, let’s do it right. Multi-family homes in the village centers does NOT mean we would allow six-story modern apartment buildings or new suburban-style homes in neat rows. Instead, we could enable increased

“gentle density” of smaller duplexes, triplexes and apartments that would fit with the architectural style of historic Charlotte homes and can accommodate a socio-economically diverse array of residents.

That’s where YIMBYs come in. We need caring community members to step up and organize to counteract the corrosive negativity of vocal NIMBYs. YIMBYs understand Charlotte needs to allow and encourage diverse housing to be built with options for young working families, elders, farm workers and others priced out of the current market. They want to encourage and allow new housing where our Town Plan says it belongs (in our villages), keeping our rural spaces open. Charlotte YIMBYs would support housing development that is diverse and affordable, like carefully planned and attractive multi-family housing in our historic villages, instead of more “McMansions” that have relentlessly gobbled up our farmlands and forests.

Charlotte is growing. Let’s do so in a way that protects the beauty of our rural landscapes with positivity and an eye towards the future. Say yes to YIMBYs!

Curious to learn more? Check out this example of other New England YIMBYs <https://tinyurl.com/2k2nmy7w>.

(Larry Lewack retired Dec. 1 as Charlotte Town Planner.)

Commentary

Not rare as you think for parent to deny their child’s abuse

Teresa Huizar
Contributor

The recently released Netflix series on the Menendez brothers reignited debate over whether a parent would overlook their child’s abuse at the hands of their spouse.

The sad truth is that these sorts of cases are far from unique or even uncommon.

A parent faced with the abusive conduct of a partner, family member or friend must confront the unthinkable -- harm to their child and the worst possible betrayal committed by someone they perhaps considered to be their life partner, better half or best friend. Parents should know that initial feelings of confusion, or even shocked disbelief, are not unusual.

But parents should also know that the decisions made in the immediate aftermath of such a revelation will have a lifelong impact. Rates of depression, PTSD, substance abuse and suicide are all significantly higher for victims of child sexual assault. A child’s trauma is only compounded if a trusted adult denies or minimizes the abuse.

To protect their child, parents don’t need to immediately believe every word they say. But they need to report the abuse, separate their child from the offender, and suspend their own disbelief through the course of an investigation.

Often, those actions give parents the time they need to process the reality of what



Image by WOKANDAPIX from Pixabay

happened. But there are other pitfalls that may hinder a parent from supporting a child. It’s important for every parent and child advocate to be aware of these barriers and work to overcome them.

If the offender is the primary breadwinner in the family, the non-offending parent may panic over housing and financial stability. This is especially true in circumstances where the parent lacks a solid support system. Can

they rely on friends or family? Or are they dependent on their child’s abuser?

Often, concerns about public image arise. A non-offending parent may worry at the prospect of losing their social and professional circles.

Experiencing child sexual abuse is a devastating trauma. And while a parent experiences their own form of psychological trauma upon learning their child was abused,

the obligation to protect their child must always come first. The good news is that help is available for families navigating this excruciating time.

Experts working at Children’s Advocacy Centers nationwide play a pivotal role in ensuring that abused children and their caregivers receive the support they need. Professionals at these centers provide therapy, medical care and liaising with police — but also advice, like how to get the offender removed from the home and how to tell family, friends or teachers about what happened.

According to the CDC, an estimated one in four girls and one in 20 boys experience child sexual abuse. Its prevalence is believed to be higher because children often wait years to report abuse. About 30 percent of victims have been sexually abused by a family member, while roughly 90 percent know their abuser in some way. Parents everywhere should take note, listen and learn.

A child’s disclosure of abuse is shocking, disturbing and life-changing. But supporting your child from the start is always the right thing to do.

(Teresa Huizar is CEO of Washington, D.C.-based National Children’s Alliance the nation’s network of nearly 1,000 Children’s Advocacy Centers, providing justice and healing through services to child victims of abuse and their families.)

Education

Artificial intelligence and humanity can work in tandem

Margo Bartsch
Contributor

Do you know the difference between 650 characters versus 650 characters with spaces in writing an essay?

Artificial Intelligence (AI) didn't.

Recently, a college essay prompt asked to write an essay in 650 characters (approximately 125 words). This was an odd requirement since essays typically require characters with spaces, accounting for each space between words.

To verify whether the requirement was with or without spaces, I did a Google search of the college's name and its essay requirement. The first response was an AI summary: "the college's supplemental essays have a character limit of 650 characters per response." This corroborated the college's application.

However, this AI response was inconsistent with my experience of essays requiring 650 characters with spaces (approximately 105 words). This prompt seemed to be an anomaly; it would allow writing nearly 20 percent more words, providing more detailed structure.

Putting critical thinking to the test, I copied 650 characters into the application box. Lo and behold, it cut off 20 percent of the essay.

This example shows the importance of mastering problem-solving skills to

protect against the rising tide of AI. Last year, the National Association of Colleges and Employers surveyed 255 employers identifying three top "competencies" for today's job candidates — communication, teamwork and critical thinking.

First, honing communication skills includes working with many personality types and professional expertise. Although AI can write computer code, check grammar and solve math equations, AI cannot go out to lunch with clients to explain a value-added service or form trust as a valuable partner.

This November, The Wall Street Journal published the story, "How Students Can AI-Proof Their Careers: Artificial intelligence is going to eliminate a lot of jobs in the future. It's possible to reduce the risk that it will be yours."

The article explains AI will replace some jobs, while others will be created because of AI. It highlights Goldman Sachs research predicting the share of U.S. employment in specific industries that are exposed to AI — administrative 46 percent, legal 44 percent, architecture and engineering 37 percent and physical and social science 36 percent.

For example, a new Hollywood movie studio, Promise, will primarily use generative AI to make storyboards, conceptualize scenes and create production software. Last year, the Screen Actors Guild went on strike in fear of this very type of AI reach. Yet, AI is

happening anyway.

Job interviews probe how candidates use their communication skills in challenging situations. Examples to share include listening to internal discourse, proposing solutions and motivating others.

Second, teamwork can be fostered by avoiding being pegged as a one-dimensional thinker. Instead, choose a variety of academic and professional exposures to expand qualifications and responsibilities.

For example, AI is transforming into the fields of accounting and computer science. Having both technical skills and social-science capabilities, like sociology and English, can expand a person's outlook and knowledge.

To push yourself out of your comfort zone, consider joining activities and clubs that stretch your social interactions and team dynamic experiences. For example, there are Women in Business clubs at Champlain Valley Union High and many colleges. The George Washington University club's mission is to "bring together students from all majors, career interests and aspirations to achieve personal and professional success ... seeking to provide opportunities for mentorship, networking, leadership and community engagement."

The third point emphasizing critical thinking is not to criticize other's point of view. Merriam-Webster defines critical

thinking as "the act of thinking critically in order to solve problems, evaluate information and discern biases." Taking a step back to listen, think and respond can be more productive than a knee-jerk reaction, as shown with the questionable essay prompt requirement.

Tomas Chamorro-Premuzic, Manpower Group chief information officer and Columbia University professor of business psychology, explains the value of emotional intelligence (EQ) in having a range of skills and knowledge to solve problems. "AI has probably won the IQ battle, but the EQ battle is up for grabs."

Critical thinking includes carrying out complicated projects with many moving pieces and personality types. John Behrens, director of technology and digital studies at University of Notre Dame, explains that although machines do specific tasks, we still "need big-picture humans to put it all together."

AI is not a replacement for human thought. Instead, people must step up to develop their social skills to avoid being outpaced by AI seeping into our everyday decision-making.

Humanity and AI can go hand-in-hand.

(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.)

happy
Holidays

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Education

Legos and newscasts at Vermont’s No. 1 middle school

Naomi Strada
Summarized by Tom Scatchard

The week of Dec. 2, the Charlotte Central School First Lego League team participated in the Champlain Valley School District Challenge Cup at Shelburne Community School. The mission was to have fun, inspire collaboration, practice skills and foster relationships within the district. The friendly competition also served to prepare teams for regionals, states and (maybe one day) nationals.

Charlotte Central School students are now producing a weekly newscast. It can be found by going to the schools website at <https://tinyurl.com/bdenu2cc>. Don’t forget to watch the bloopers at the end of the clip. Thank you, Steve Flint, for encouraging these future reporters.

The morning of Dec. 6 the students

were treated to a comedic skit performed by eighth graders on the importance of effective handwashing at our December All-School Assembly. The skit was in the style of a sports competition with broadcast commentary. Clips from the assembly can be seen by going to the Charlotte Central School website (cvsvdt.org/Domain/8).

Seeking Costco sleds for winter

For the last few winters, the school has started out the sledding season with about 20 sleds for for students to use during recess on the back hill. As you can imagine, with hundreds of students using these sleds weekly, they need annual replacements.

If you are interested in contributing to the closet of sleds, the school would welcome very specific donations that can



Courtesy photo

The Charlotte Central School First Lego League team participates in the Champlain Valley School District Challenge Cup at Shelburne Community School on Dec. 2.

be found at Costco. These foam-based sleds with a polished plastic base have held up longer than any other sled purchased in the last eight years. They cost between \$15-18 each. It was reported they are on sale now. Thank you in advance to anyone able to help.

Celebrate the Arts Night

Join students from across the Champlain Valley School District for an evening of entertainment and celebration, showcasing

performing and visual arts from the district’s six schools on Jan. 9, 5-8 p.m. After a six-year break, this annual tradition returns to Champlain Valley Union High, transforming the school into a gallery of learning, innovation and inspiration. The 13th-annual Celebrate the Arts Night brings together art, music, theater, media arts, foods, business, design and technology in a one-night-only exhibition of student creativity.

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Hi! Neighbor

Fraser-Harris — Charlotte’s unofficial fun guy

Phyl Newbeck
Contributor

Being the Fun Guy of Charlotte keeps Bill Fraser-Harris busy throughout the year. Summers are spent at Charlotte Town Beach, but during the winter he concentrates his efforts at Charlotte Central School, maintaining the town skating rink.

A former high school hockey player, Fraser-Harris started working on the rink when he was a member of the recreation commission.

“I’ve been doing it for 15 years or so with a motley assortment of other night owls,” he said.

At 100 x 200 feet, the rink is one of the largest outdoor surfaces in Vermont and is almost the size of an NHL rink. It’s big enough that when college kids come home during winter break, they can shoot a puck around on one side while people free skate on the other side.

Making the rink requires spraying thin layers of water when the ground begins to freeze. The cost of a liner and the logistics involved in laying one down means the team of ice makers has to wait until the temperature is in the teens to spray water on the ground surface. Last year, the ground never really froze.

“We’re hoping for a better year than last year,” Fraser-Harris said. “We keep saying

that every year and it doesn’t happen.” The ice rink is only one of Fraser-Harris’s many volunteer efforts. Roughly 15 years ago, he helped bring the Mozart Festival to Charlotte and other venues in Chittenden County. When the festival went bankrupt, Fraser-Harris was loathe to see its venue at the Charlotte Town Beach go to waste, so he recruited a quartet of Vermont Symphony Orchestra players to take the festival’s place.

For the last seven or eight years, Music at the Beach has been a self-supporting, pass-the-hat event with some behind-the-scenes benefactors.

“It’s been extremely successful,” Fraser-Harris said. “We have a beautiful venue that is almost mystical.”

Another event that Fraser-Harris spearheads is the annual Town Party. Initially, the party was an opportunity for residents to learn more about the various municipal committees. When the cost of renting a tent ended that event, Fraser-Harris and Mary Provencher of the Mystic Party Band decided to build on it and create a real summer party with ice cream and music.

The event is billed as a farm-to-table potluck, and last year, roughly 300 people attended.

“It’s a social feeding frenzy,” Fraser-Harris said. “It comes at a time when people have been cooped up and they’re a little starved for community. In Charlotte, we pack everything

into the three months of summer.” Fraser-Harris grew up in Ottawa and studied oceanography and geography in Wales. Although he hasn’t worked in those fields, he has done a lot of traveling on land and sea and believes his educational background gives him a great appreciation for the planet and what we have to do to save it. Working for People’s Express, Fraser-Harris was based in Newark and employed in a number of different capacities. As a flight attendant on one of the airline’s \$19 flights to Burlington, after landing, he stepped on the stairway, smelled the air and saw Mt. Mansfield capped with snow. He decided to request a transfer to Vermont.

After People’s Express was purchased by Continental and then United, Fraser-Harris decided to switch careers. He started a restaurant at Bolton Valley. When that ski area went bankrupt in 1994, he opened Bridge Street Café in Richmond.

He sold the restaurant in 2000 when he married Eva, an anesthesiologist from Charlotte. He moved into her house and took care of her aging parents, who have since passed away.

Those deaths gave Fraser-Harris more time to volunteer, and he has begun working at the senior center for the Men’s Breakfasts and other social events like the farewell party for Dean Bloch. Additionally, he is a house captain and usher at the Flynn.



Photo by Eva Fraser-Harris

Bill Fraser-Harris is known as the fun guy of Charlotte.

During COVID, Fraser-Harris and his wife bought an Airstream. As a first responder, Eva had been vaccinated so she was able to go out and do the shopping, but otherwise, the couple was in their own COVID bubble. They drove for two and a half months, covering over 10,000 miles and meeting a whole community of travelers.

Fraser-Harris stepped down from the recreation commission a year and a half ago, but enjoys volunteering in other ways.

“I got out of the administrative side,” he said, “and just took on doing the fun things. I’ve been called the Fun Guy of Charlotte and I’m happy to own that. Volunteerism is a wonderful distraction from the world.”

In the Outdoors

Reflections upon loving and leaving North Pomfret

Elizabeth Bassett
Contributor

For as long as I can remember, North Pomfret has been my special place.

As a child I learned to ski in snow over my head and to drink sap out of huge metal buckets that sometimes froze to my lips. I drove my cousins’ go-carts on the hilly dirt road and, to their delight, this “city” cousin found more ways to fall off a horse than to ride one. I stacked bales on the wagon and later in the haymow, where we choked on dust in the filtered light. I bit into as many apples as I fancied in the ancient apple orchard, my face dripping with sweet juice. The family farm was my heaven on earth.

While growing up in the 1930s, my father often visited his aunt’s farm. When Woodstock’s Gilbert’s Hill, one of the first ski tows in the country, celebrated its 50th anniversary in 1984, Dad “raced” in the old timer’s relay wearing bib No. 1. In 1934, he was hauled up Gilbert’s Hill by the Model-T-powered rope tows and descended on what he called his hickory sticks.

When my mother first visited the farm with Dad in 1947, the road was so deeply rutted with spring mud that they parked the car and walked the final half mile in the middle of the night.

My father’s brother, Uncle Milt, had no intention of milking a herd after graduating from college. Yet he was summoned by their maiden aunt to Pomfret to do just that. Milt milked 30 cows, one named after me, and



Courtesy photos

Galaxy Hill, from which the stars are nearly as perfect as they were in 1770, is the homestead and farm established in 1773 by Hannah Putnam and John Winchester. It was sold to a famed astronomer in the 20th century after Elizabeth’s great-grandmother married and moved to Connecticut, as did her siblings. The homestead remains in the Candaday family.

lived in an always-cold farmhouse with a wood furnace and spring water plunking into the upstairs cistern. He and my aunt raised three kids, all educated in one-room

schoolhouses. In suburban Connecticut, I walked to the solid brick elementary school that my mother attended. In third grade, I had Mom’s teacher.

In 1770, Hannah Putnam, daughter of Revolutionary War General Israel Putnam, married John Dana Winchester and moved from Pomfret to Pomfret, Connecticut to Vermont. They bought 1,500 acres of hills and vales and spent three years clearing the land so they could raise enough food to survive. They settled on the hilltop, Galaxy Hill. Cold air drained into the valley, giving them a longer growing season. Hannah and her husband are buried in one of Pomfret’s three cemeteries, where American flags are more likely to mark graves of the Revolution and Civil War than the wars of the 20th and 21st centuries.

In 1960, milk carriers no longer emptied those old milk cans and required dirt-poor farmers to buy \$1,000 bulk tanks, a bridge too far for many. Uncle Milt sold his cows. He also sold the abandoned hired man’s house

to my parents. This Civil War-era home has been in my life ever since, filled with more than 60 years of accumulated memories and possessions of parents and children.

Family and friends gathered in this house with little heat and no creature comforts. While John and I raised our family in Charlotte, Pomfret remained special, kids swimming in the pond and exploring fields and woods. For decades, my parents brought our Christmas tree to Charlotte, one of many that my roommate and I planted during college.

Wanting to keep the house and land in the family, our parents gifted it to my brother and me over the years. For more than two decades, our parents were our tenants. The long-term hope was to keep the property in our family 250 years after Hannah and John Winchester bought the land. Just days before my mother left this life, she learned that her granddaughter and my niece, Hannah Bassett, would move to Vermont for a job. She and her husband will eventually live in our family home.

I am delighted, at least my head is, that a new generation of Bassetts will live on the old sod. Unfortunately, my heart has not yet warmed to that message.

I have a few weeks to leave this place that I have loved my entire life. I am walking and walking and walking the beautiful hills of Pomfret, visiting Bunker Hill Burying Ground, a 5-mile round trip from our house via the Old Kings Highway, to visit Dad and tell him Mom will join him there soon. I delight each evening in building a fire, just as Dad taught me, in the Vermont Castings stove.

Mom walked almost daily until her November death at 99. She embraced these hills every day. I meet her friends on our road, in cars, on tractors, snowmobiles or foot. They tell me that their favorite visits with Mom were on this dirt road. Shortly after Mom left us, her neighbors organized a walk to celebrate her. A dozen of them, ranging from their 30s to 80s, began at our house and walked and talked their way along Mom’s favorite route.

I could not be more fortunate; we are keeping this special place in the family for yet another generation. But, I am struggling. Losing loved ones is hard. To lose my mother and this house inside of a month is a lot. In just a few short weeks North Pomfret will no longer be mine.

And my heart is breaking.



The Bassett family’s hired man’s house, always loved, was eventually renovated into a heated, livable home.

Shelburne

Shelburne Museum announces Native American art center design

Leslie Wright
Contributor

Shelburne Museum announced the architectural team and design for The Perry Center for Native American Art, a building and integrated landscape collaboratively designed to create a national resource for the exhibition, study and care of an important collection representing Indigenous art from across the continent.

“The design of the Perry Center for Native American Art and the many steps that led us to this moment are the result of a collaborative approach focused on communication and relationship building with Tribal Nations to create a national resource for the study and care of Indigenous art,” said Thomas Denenberg, John Wilmerding Director and CEO of Shelburne Museum.

Annum Architects of Boston and Two Row Architect of Six Nations of the Grand River First Nation were chosen to design the Perry Center, joining together noted firms with depth of experience in both major museum and Indigenous projects. Landscape design is by Reed Hilderbrand of Cambridge, Mass., a practice with extensive experience designing landscapes that seamlessly integrate with architecture.

The Perry Center for Native American Art is planned to be an 11,200 square-foot, highly sustainable structure with design consideration based on input from tribal partners. The \$12.5 million Perry Center will serve as a welcoming space for tribal members and scholars to study and engage with the collection and will reimagine the museum experience for all visitors. Plans call for construction to begin in spring of 2025.

“Searching for the appropriate design response for the building and landscape has been a deliberate and deeply collaborative exploration between Shelburne Museum, Two Row, Reed Hilderbrand and Annum,” said Annum Principal Steven Gerrard. “Embedded in the design are careful listening, research and creative iteration of ideas, all reflective of how the museum has operated since its



Courtesy illustration

A rendering depicts designers’ vision of the eventual Shelburne Museum Perry Center for Native American Art.

founding.”

Integral to the project is collaboration with over 50 Indigenous partners, who advised on cultural protocols and design considerations and care and conservation of the collection. In addition, insight and guidance about the building and landscape design were taken from listening sessions — a series of talking circles — led by Indigenous-owned Two Row Architect that included leadership and culture bearers of the local Abenaki, the traditional stewards of the site, along with Tribal Nations represented in the museum’s collection.

“The Talking Circles guided us in considering this project in different ways. The building needed to honor the host nation, the Abenaki. The internal space, where the items from many Tribal Nations will be housed, will need to accommodate unique moments with items in the collection and allow for those items to be to be looked at and taken care of in

unique ways,” said Matthew Hickey, from the Mohawk Nation, and a partner at Two Row.

The Perry Center will be the 40th

building on the museum’s 45-acre campus and will house a significant collection that includes items gathered by Anthony and Teresa Perry and recently gifted to the museum. When combined with the Indigenous art already stewarded by the museum, the collection represents more than 500 items from 389 Tribal Nations across the continent.

“The Perry Center will enhance the museum’s mission as an educational resource for the local community, will amplify Shelburne Museum’s role as partners rather than arbiters and will empower the Indigenous peoples represented in the collection by reconceiving the role of a museum facility in presenting material culture,” said D. Scott Wise chairman of the Shelburne Museum Board of Trustees.

The project has received early public and private grant funding support, including from the National Endowment for the Humanities, the state of Vermont, Henry Luce Foundation, Lilly Endowment Inc., Terra Foundation for American Art, Institute of Museum and Library Services, National Endowment for the Arts and The Decorative Arts Trust.

(Leslie Wright is the Shelburne Museum’s director of communications and marketing.)



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Gardening

Consider five things before giving live indoor plants

Debra Heleba
University of Vermont Extension

Live houseplants can make meaningful gifts during the holidays or any time of year for birthdays, housewarming and other special occasions. Not only do houseplants improve air quality in the home but a growing body of research shows that the care of houseplants is associated with greater mental health and well-being.

With more than 10,000 species of houseplants available, you may wonder which plants are best for gift giving. Selecting holiday favorites like poinsettia, holiday cacti and cyclamen are good choices. But there are so many colorful houseplant choices that will last well beyond the holidays.

Here are some tips that may help you choose festive and fun plants for your gift giving during the holidays and any time of year.

Select easy-to-grow plants with a flair. The recipient of your houseplant gift may be an experienced green thumb or a beginner. You can play it safe and choose an indoor plant that is easy care, yet interesting and colorful.

Consider those that tolerate several light conditions from a sunny, south-facing window to a dimly lit room and thrive under a range of humidity levels. Examples include the African violet (Streptocarpus sect. Saintpaulia), Peperomia and Echeveria.

Choose pet-friendly houseplants. Many plants are toxic to cats and dogs, so if the

gift recipient has pets, be sure to select a houseplant that won't cause any harm if ingested. The ASPCA has comprehensive lists of toxic and nontoxic plants for cats, dogs and horses. See go.uvm.edu/toxic-non-toxic-plants. Some festive, pet-friendly indoor plants in addition to the above include Bromeliads, Hoya and the nerve plant (Fittonia verschaffeltii).

Select unusual plants. Here's where the fun comes in. You can spice up your houseplant gift-giving by selecting varieties with unusual growing habits, colorful foliage or brilliant blooms.

Many of the plant ideas mentioned above come in varieties with variegated or unusual leaves, or with a variety of bloom colors. Other examples that fit all three criteria include the unique living stones (Lithops naureniae) the fun, pancake-shaped leaves of the Pilea peperomioides and the vibrant, non-toxic foliage of the Calathea.

Consider a cutting from your own collection. Some of my favorite houseplants were propagated and gifted by friends and family. Whether it is Aunt Dorothy's classic red geranium or Judy's coffee plant, my most treasured indoor plants came from someone else's special collection. Most houseplants are easy to propagate at home, which makes for a low-cost and meaningful gift.

Finally, be mindful of live plant transport during the winter months. Since most houseplants originated in tropical locations, they don't tolerate cold temperatures. If



Photos by Deb Heleba

Above: Houseplants come in many shapes and sizes, making them versatile gifts for the plant lover.

Top Right: A classic houseplant, the African violet, is non-toxic to pets, easy care, and has delicate pink or purple flowers.

Right: Echeveria are easy-to-grow, non-toxic succulents that come in a variety of colors.



you are gifting plants during the winter, be sure to limit the time they are exposed to the cold, including their time in the car and outdoors. A quick trip from the garden center to a warm car to home is fine, but prolonged temperatures below 40 degrees Fahrenheit can damage tropical plants, so bundle up that gift.

If gifting a live plant is not possible or

preferred, a great alternative is a gift card from a local nursery or garden center. Allowing the recipient to choose their own plant is a wonderful way to give the gift of plants.

(Debra Heleba is the University of Vermont Extension community horticulture program director.)

Our Local Feast

Crocus sativus or saffron: World’s most expensive spice

Deborah J. Benoit
University of Vermont Extension

Did you know that the world’s most expensive spice comes from a type of crocus? It’s true. Saffron is derived from *Crocus sativus*, commonly known as the “saffron crocus.”

While blooming crocuses are as common in spring as boldly colored leaves are in autumn, the saffron crocus blooms in the fall.

Saffron corms (bulbs) are planted in late summer. Grasslike foliage emerges September to October, followed by lavender-colored buds that open to reveal a trio of bright red stigmas in late October and early November. It’s the stigmas that, once harvested, become the saffron found on our kitchen spice racks.

What makes saffron such an expensive product in comparison to other spices? It’s the labor involved in harvesting those three little, red stigmas. Each saffron flower must be individually handpicked, and the three stigmas carefully removed by hand. Once harvested, the stigmas are dried, becoming the saffron used in dishes such as yellow rice and bouillabaisse.

Saffron appeals to three of our five senses by offering a strong fragrance, its signature yellow color and a distinctive flavor to numerous cuisines around the world. In addition to its culinary uses, saffron has been used historically as a dye and for medicinal purposes.

It takes approximately 150 to 170 saffron flowers to produce one gram of spice. That’s about 4,000 saffron flowers to produce a single ounce.

Iran is by far the world’s largest grower of saffron. It is also grown in Afghanistan, Spain and other countries with hot, dry climates. Saffron has been grown in parts of Pennsylvania for over 200 years, mostly for personal use. Research is underway into expanding commercial opportunities for growing saffron in the United States.

The saffron crocus is hardy to United States Department of Agriculture

Hardiness Zone 6 but readily survives in Zone 5 and even Zone 4, according to research conducted at the University of Vermont. No insulation is required. In fact, researchers discourage the practice of covering plants with mulch because it may attract rodents.

If you’re thinking about trying to grow saffron at home, corms are generally available to order in late summer and are shipped at the proper time for planting. Saffron corms should be plump and firm. Discard any that are shriveled or soft or that display signs of disease.

Select a location in full sun with well-draining soil. Standing water or excessive moisture can rot the corms. In the fall, plant corms about 3 inches deep, cover with soil and water in. The plants will continue to grow all winter, going dormant in June.

Lining the planting area with hardware cloth and placing it over the corms can help deter squirrels, chipmunks, mice, voles or rabbits that will dig up saffron corms.

When in bloom, harvest saffron on a dry, sunny day, early to midmorning. Remove each flower by hand, then carefully remove each stigma. Place the stigmas separately on a paper-lined tray to dry.

Like other herbs and spices, saffron should be stored in an airtight container out of direct sunlight and away from heat to preserve its flavor.

Over time, the corms in your saffron bed will multiply. After several years, dig them up and separate the daughter corms from the mother and replant to prevent overcrowding.

Growing your own saffron can be a satisfying and money-saving endeavor. To learn more about saffron, check out the University of Vermont North American Center for Saffron Research and Development at uvm.edu/~saffron.

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



Photos by Deborah J. Benoit

Saffron is derived from *Crocus sativus*, a fall-blooming plant commonly known as the “saffron crocus.”



Saffron is the world’s most expensive spice, as each *Crocus sativus* blossom must be individually picked and its three stigmas carefully removed by hand and laid out to dry.



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Gardening

Caring for amaryllis during the holidays and beyond



Photo by Herbert Aust/Pixabay

Amaryllis is a popular holiday plant, as it requires minimum care and produces beautiful colorful blooms from a single bulb.

Andrea Knepper
University of Vermont Extension

Amaryllis bulbs and blooms make popular and appreciated holiday gifts. Gifted in full bloom to brighten the winter months or lovingly tended to bloom after the new year, amaryllis add vibrant color and joy to the dreary season.

Amaryllis are commonly available during the winter holidays because they bloom so willingly. They are easy to care for and, with careful attention, can produce flowers for 20 years or more. Some growers even report blooms from the same bulb for over 50 years.

Your amaryllis may come in full bloom, as a bare-root bulb or a waxed bulb. Whichever type you have, each is easy to care for.

Bare-root bulbs should be planted in a pot about an inch wider than the bulb and twice as deep. Amaryllis prefer good drainage and nutrient-rich potting soil.

Fill the pot about halfway with potting soil and place the bulb on top. Once enough soil is placed under the bulb, fill in around it firmly with potting soil leaving the top of the bulb exposed. The top should be above the soil level to where it begins to round.

For the first watering, water thoroughly, allowing the soil to drain completely. After that, water when the top soil feels dry and just enough to moisten the soil. Place the amaryllis in a warm, sunny spot. Typically, your amaryllis will bloom in five to eight weeks. Refer to the plant tag for specific care instructions.

A waxed amaryllis bulb is a unique gift that requires almost no effort to produce a beautiful flower. Simply place the waxed bulb in a sunny spot, and you will enjoy the showy blooms in a few weeks.

If you want to keep your waxed bulb, gently remove the wax coating after the flowers fade. Be careful not to detach roots



Photo by Mypod/Pixabay

Bare-root bulbs should be planted in nutrient-rich potting soil in a pot about an inch wider than the bulb and twice as deep.

or foliage. Check the bulb closely for soft spots, which may indicate disease or rot. If the bulb appears healthy, plant and care for the bulb and foliage as you would a bare-root bulb.

After the amaryllis blooms have passed their prime, cut back the blossom stalk but leave the long, spiky foliage leaves. The leaves will help the bulb gather nutrients in preparation for blooming next year. The foliage itself is an attractive plant that will thrive all summer.

To force blooms in winter, the amaryllis needs to go through a dormant period. At the end of September, stop watering the plant and place it in a cool, dark place, between 50 and 55 degrees Fahrenheit. Once the foliage browns, cut it back to the top of the bulb with sharp, clean garden shears.

Keep the bulb in darkness at this lower temperature for eight to 10 weeks. After that time, replant it as described above and place it in a warm, sunny spot. Before long, you will enjoy another season of beautiful amaryllis blooms.

(Andrea Knepper is a University of Vermont Extension master gardener from Bolton.)

Gardening

Garden inside this winter

Deborah J. Benoit
University of Vermont Extension

Cold weather has arrived, and you’ve put your garden to bed for the season. That doesn’t mean you can’t garden. Just shift your focus from outdoors to in.

Adding foliage plants to your home can help satisfy your need to be surrounded by green. Easy-to-grow choices that are also tolerant of the low-light conditions common in winter include pothos (*Epipremnum aureum*), philodendron (*Philodendron hederaceum*) and Chinese evergreen (*Aglaonema commutatum*).

Aloe (*Aloe vera*), a succulent, will do well near a window with bright, indirect light. Begonias (*Semperflorens*) are available in a variety of leaf shapes, textures, patterns and colors, including green, silver and deep red.

With any houseplant you select, check its light requirements. Keep it away from heat sources and cold drafts, and be careful not to overwater. Soggy soil can lead to root rot and other problems.

If you’re more interested in flowers than greenery, consider African violets (*Saintpaulia*), cape primrose (*Streptocarpus*) or moth orchids (*Orchidaceae*) for long-lasting blooms to brighten winter days.

Water as needed, and feed with a fertilizer recommended for flowering houseplants according to package directions. Remove faded blossoms.

Flowering plants are likely to require more light than those grown for their foliage. Be sure to check the needs of specific plants. Required light levels and tolerance for direct sunlight will vary. Consider adding a supplemental light source if you don’t have a suitable window that provides sufficient sunlight.

Indoor gardening during the winter months isn’t limited to houseplants. With a little extra work, you can include edibles in your indoor gardening plans.

What could be more visually satisfying than a row of potted herbs basking in the faux sunshine on a grow-lighted shelf?

Herbs such as chives (*Allium schoenoprasum*), basil (*Ocimum basilicum*) and thyme (*Thymus vulgaris*) can be grown in pots on a bright

window sill. Plants may be available at a local greenhouse or can be started from seed. Keep plants away from cold drafts and contact with window glass, which can damage leaves and slow growth.

If a plant needs full sun outdoors, it will require plenty of light indoors. Leggy growth can indicate insufficient light. A window with full sun and a southern exposure will work best for many plants, but a grow light may make your plant happier and more productive.

A home-grown salad in January harvested from a container of lettuce (*Lactuca sativa*), spinach (*Spinacia oleracea*) or other greens can be immensely satisfying. You’ll need a good light source, potting mix, water and, of course, seeds. For more detailed information on growing salad greens, see go.uvm.edu/indoor-greens.

Growing vegetables like tomatoes (*Solanum lycopersicum*) or peppers (*Capsicum*) can provide an extra challenge and personal satisfaction. Varieties such as Tiny Tim and Micro Tom have a compact form and grow well in pots. In general, choose smaller-fruited tomatoes for best results.

Use a quality potting soil. Provide plenty of room for good air circulation. Temperatures should be warm (around 70 degrees Fahrenheit). Water consistently and fertilize according to package directions. Stake as needed. Once flowers appear, a gentle shake of the stem can aid pollination in the absence of pollinators.

Growing potted vegetables indoors will require supplemental light in order to produce fruit. For information on selecting and using grow lights, see go.uvm.edu/grow-lights.

If you have pets, check whether plants in your indoor garden are pet friendly. Keep any that may be toxic out of reach or select alternatives.

No matter what plants or methods you choose, moving your garden indoors can keep your inner gardener content until spring arrives.

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



Photos by Deborah J. Benoit

Planting an indoor herb garden is an easy and economical way to enjoy fresh herbs for cooking or garnishes throughout the year, even when the ground is frozen outside.



The beautiful, long-lasting blooms of the cape primrose will help brighten winter days.



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Calendar

Send your events two weeks in advance to news@thecharlottenews.org.

Valley Players’ karaoke parties
Thursday, Dec. 12, 3:30-5 p.m. & 7-10 p.m.

The Valley Players will hold two karaoke parties on Thursday, Dec. 12, at their theater, in Waitsfield. From 3:30-5 p.m., kids take over the stage to sing solos, duos or group numbers. Parents are encouraged to stay and enjoy the afternoon with their children. From 7-10 p.m., adults take the spotlight. Those 13 years and older can attend the afternoon or evening event. Don’t want to sing? No problem, come to enjoy the music. A \$10 suggested donation for the evening event can be made at the door. You do not need to attend the entire time and no reservations are needed. BYOB and snacks from 7-10 p.m. Questions? Email valleyplayers@madriver.com.

Holiday movie night
Friday, Dec. 13, 6:30 p.m.

Friends of the Union Meeting Hall can’t say what movie will play for holiday movie night at 6:30 p.m., Dec. 13, at the Ferrisburgh Town Hall, so questions about what will be shown should be emailed to unionmeetinghall@gmail.com. The movie, whatever it is, is free, and traditional concessions will be for sale.



Courtesy photo
Anne Austin’s watercolor The Old Crown Point Bridge is part of the Furchgott Sourdiffe Gallery’s December and January exhibit.

Burlington winter market
Fridays-Saturdays, Dec. 13-22

The BTV Winter Market (burlingtoncityarts.org/event/btv-winter-market-1) is in full swing. This European-style outdoor market runs until Sunday, Dec. 22, in Burlington’s City Hall Park. The market is open Fridays 2-6 p.m.; Saturdays 12-6 p.m.; and Sundays 12-4 p.m. and features a rotating group of 20 local artists, makers and food vendors, fire tables, games and a DJ on Fridays, 4-6 p.m.

Santa visiting fire & rescue
Sunday, Dec. 15, 4:30 p.m.

Santa’s coming to Charlotte Volunteer Fire and Rescue. Enjoy cocoa and a candy cane while you write your letter to Santa. Santa is expected to arrive around 5 p.m. to turn the switch on fire and rescue’s seasonal light display. Kids of all ages are welcome.

Historical Society open house
Sunday, Dec. 15, 2-5 p.m.

The Charlotte Historical Society will hold its 47th annual holiday open house at the museum. There will be refreshments inside and a festive fire ring on the front lawn.

Rokeby open house & holiday sale
Saturday, Dec. 21, 10 a.m.-4 p.m.

Enjoy free admission
The Rokeby Museum exhibit, “Seeking Freedom: The Underground Railroad and the Legacy of an Abolitionist Family” will have free admission on Dec. 21 and there will also be shopping for wreaths, swags, books, yarn,

candles and more.

Vocal ensemble concerts
Saturday & Sunday, Dec. 21 & 22

Ring in the season with Solaris Vocal Ensemble as they present, A Joyful Sound, featuring guest artists Northern Bronze Handbell Ensemble. A Joyful Sound will be performed 7:30 p.m., Saturday, Dec. 21, at the Waterbury Congregational Church, 8 North Main St., and at 4 p.m., Sunday, Dec. 22, at College Street Congregational Church in Burlington. The concerts will feature holiday selections for voices and instruments. Buy tickets at <https://tinyurl.com/3e8wtx8e>.

‘Highlight’ New Year’s Eve
Tuesday, Dec. 31

Burlington City Arts is holding the seventh “Highlight” New Year’s Eve celebration from midday Dec. 31 until past midnight. Tickets for “Highlight” go on sale at noon, Friday, Nov. 1, at <https://tinyurl.com/46v6nw9c> and cost \$15 throughout November, before going up to \$18 in December. Kids 5 and under do not need a ticket. “Highlight” will feature programming with community-powered, multidimensional experiences throughout the downtown and waterfront areas of Burlington.

Celebrate the Arts Night
Thursday, Jan. 9, 5-8 p.m.

After a six-year hiatus, the Champlain Valley School District is bringing back the longstanding winter tradition of Celebrate The Arts Night at Champlain Valley Union High. Join students from across the school district for an evening of entertainment and celebration, showcasing performing and visual arts from the district’s six schools. The 13th Celebrate the Arts Night brings together art, music, theater, media arts, foods, business, design and technology in a one-night-only exhibition of student creativity.

Charlotte Congregational Church Services

Lighting the Advent Wreath
Sundays, Dec. 1-22, 10 a.m.
Each Sunday the church will light candles of hope, peace, joy and love.

All of the following Charlotte Congregational Church services will be livestreamed.

Messiah Sing
Sunday, Dec. 1, 4-5:15 p.m.
Four of Vermont’s preeminent vocal soloists along with a professional chamber ensemble, including the Skylark quartet, will lead the audience in bringing Handel’s timeless masterpiece to life. This family-friendly event is open to all and will be livestreamed. Childcare and scores will be available. Donations encouraged (suggest: \$5 children, \$20 for adults and \$50 family maximum).

Taizé service of hope, peace, joy and love, Wednesday, Dec. 11, 5:30 p.m.
A simple candlelit service in the sanctuary with singing of Taizé chants, holding silence, praying and listening to scripture.

Christmas Pageant
Sunday, Dec. 15, 10 a.m.
A creative and imaginative enactment of the Christmas story.

Christmas Eve
Tuesday, Dec. 24, 4 p.m.
Outdoor family carol sing for all will be held rain or snow in the courtyard around the Christmas tree with Christmas bells for the children.

5 p.m. Indoor service of lessons and carols with children’s choir and Christmas bells for the children.

7 p.m. Indoor service of lessons and carols
(A special offering taken at 4, 5 and 7 p.m. services will be used to support the church’s partners near and far.)

First Sunday After Christmas
Sunday, Dec. 29, 10 a.m.
Rev. Hadley Bunting will lead worship.
For more information call 802-425-3176.

Community Roundup



Consider applying for open official town positions

The following boards have seats with terms ending this Saturday, Dec. 14:

- Development review board (two seats; terms expiring on Dec. 14, 2026 & 2027)
- Development review board alternate (two seats; terms expiring on Dec. 14, 2025)

The following positions have terms ending on Jan. 1, 2025:

- Green-up Day co-coordinators (two seats; terms expire Jan. 1, 2026).

The following board seats, and positions, are currently vacant:

- Energy Committee (two seats; terms that ended on April 30, 2024)
- Trails Committee (one seat; term ending on April 30, 2025)
- Canine Control Officer (one seat; term ending on April 30, 2025)
- Emergency Management Coordinator (one seat; term ending on April 30,

2025)

- Planning Commission (one seat; term ending on April 30, 2026)

If you are interested in serving the town in any of these capacities, send a short letter explaining your interest and relevant background information to Nate Bareham, Town Administrator at townadmin@townofcharlotte.com.

Interested applicants will be interviewed, and possibly appointed, by the Charlotte Selectboard on Dec. 16. The deadline to submit was Dec. 11, so those received after will be considered on a rolling basis.



\$180,000 specialty crop block grant funding available in 2025

The Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food & Markets announces the opening of the fiscal year 2025 funding cycle for the specialty crop block grant program, which aims to strengthen Vermont's specialty crop industries and producer associations.

Specialty crops are defined as fruits, vegetables, tree nuts, horticulture crops (including honey, hops, maple syrup and mushrooms), and nursery crops (including Christmas trees and floriculture).

Approximately \$180,000 is available in

grant funds. Grant requests must range from \$15,000 to \$45,000. Interested applicants should apply by Jan. 8, 2025 at 11:59 p.m.

Grant funds will enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops by:

- Leveraging efforts to market and promote specialty crops,
- Assisting producers with research and development,
- Expanding availability and access to specialty crops, or
- Addressing local, regional, and national challenges for producers. Any entity may apply, but projects must benefit more than one specialty crop business, individual, or organization.

To apply, download the request for applications at <https://tinyurl.com/4f5bzdwu> and follow the pre-application process at agriculturegrants.vermont.gov.

The Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food & Markets will conduct an information session webinar for all prospective applicants on Dec. 4 at 2-3 p.m. Register for the information session webinar at bit.ly/2025scbgpwebinar.

Find volunteer opportunities with the United Way

Give the gift of time this holiday season – volunteer. Access the United Way's Volunteer Connection website at unitedwaynwvt.galaxydigital.com to connect with agencies and learn about volunteer opportunities. Here are some opportunities:



• **Turning Point of Chittenden County** is looking for volunteers to help celebrate recovery, resilience and hope by serving a Christmas dinner and helping to spread holiday cheer. Volunteers are also needed for other upcoming events. For information and to volunteer see turningpointcentervt.org/volunteer-application.

• **SCORE** mentors advise individuals and small businesses attain their goals by providing free business advice and education to aspiring entrepreneurs and existing business owners. Help clients solve problems, manage employees and projects, make their businesses more efficient, and develop long-term business plans. An ideal opportunity for those with marketing, finance, accounting, management, and technology skills. Contact 802-764-5899 or email recruiting0284@scorevolunteer.org.

• **National Alliance on Mental Health** (NAMI) Vermont invites volunteers, age 18 to 35, in recovery from a mental health condition, to make a difference for Vermont youth as an Ending the Silence presenter. Work in a team to educate middle and high school students, their parents and school staff about the warning signs of mental health conditions and where to turn for help. Presentations are about 50 minutes long and include one young adult sharing a recovery experience. Register for NAMI Vermont's next training session at namivt.org/form-2.

• **Vermont Kin as Parents** is looking for volunteers to help tell the compelling personal stories of kinship caregivers and children who have been raised in kin care. Volunteers should be good listeners with the ability to write up stories for Vermont Kin as Parents' newsletter and to share with legislators and journalists. Contact Jeana Lavalley at 802-391-8849 or email jeana@vermontkinasparents.org.



CHARLOTTE TOWN MEETINGS AND AGENDAS

Visit charlottetvt.org for more information

Recreation Commission Meeting
Monday, December 9, 5:30 p.m.

Development Review Board
Wednesday, December 11, 7 p.m.

Regular Selectboard Meeting
Monday, December 16, 6:30 p.m.

Conservation Commission Meeting
Tuesday, December 17, 7 p.m.

Development Review Board
Wednesday, December 18, 7 p.m.

Planning Commission Meeting
Thursday, December 19, 7 p.m.

Christmas Eve Holiday
Tuesday, December 24
Town Hall Closes at 12:00pm

Christmas Day
Wednesday, December 25
Town Hall Closed

New Years Eve
Tuesday, December 31
Town Hall Closes at 12:00pm

Library News

Lots of gift, gardening and cooking ideas at the library

Margaret Woodruff
Director

The library's annual mitten tree goes up this week, welcoming donations of cold-weather accessories to adorn it. These donations will go to our neighbors in need at the start of the New Year.

Check out our best picks for the readers on your gift list. Library displays have gift ideas in time for your holiday shopping.

In January, join master gardener Karen Tuininga for a five-week course based on "The Vegetable Gardener's Guide to Permaculture." Register at <https://tinyurl.com/mskyzpxe>. Copies are available at the library circulation desk.

For the cooking book club during January, featuring Yotam Ottolenghi, select a recipe from his newest cookbook, "Comfort." Make and bring your dish to share.

The library will also offer sessions on keeping your favorite houseplants hale and hearty during the winter.

Programs for kids

If you're looking for some fun vacation activity, come to the library for some fairy golf. Library patrons can get everything they need over the winter holiday to create a mini-miniature golf course, complete with obstacles. Once the work of art is completed, it will be added to the fairy golf course around the library.

Preschool story time Tuesdays, 10 a.m.

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

Preschool free play 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. Explore the sensory table, sorting, playing with blocks, playdoh — these are a few of the open-ended projects planned for Wednesday morning play-based learning at the Charlotte Library.

Wildcard Wednesdays Wednesdays, 2-3:30 p.m.

Who knows what Wednesday will

bring? Science sessions? Crafts and games? Sign up and show up on Wednesdays to join in the fun activities for kids fifth grade and up. For registration information, contact the library at info@charlottepubliclibrary.org. The rest of the December schedule is winter art on Dec. 18.

Babytime Thursdays, 9:30 a.m.

You're invited to an unstructured hour for parents, caregivers and babies to play, explore books and chat in the young children's area. Ages birth to 18 months.

Let's Lego Saturdays, 10 a.m.-1:30 p.m.

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

Programs for adults

Stillwater meditation Saturdays, 9 a.m.

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.

Book swap & recommendations Wednesday, Dec. 11, 7 p.m.

You're invited to the Better Together Book Swap. Join this open group that discusses books related to parenthood. Bring a list of favorite reads and, if you'd like, wrap up a book to swap. Light refreshments served.

Men's book group: Wednesday, Dec. 11, 7:30 p.m.

"Differ We Must," from journalist and historian Steve Inskeep, is a compelling and nuanced exploration of the political acumen of Abraham Lincoln via 16 encounters before and during his presidency, bringing to light not only the strategy of a great politician who inherited a country divided, but lessons for our own disorderly present. This is a hybrid program. Join in person or on Zoom at <https://tinyurl.com/4dsa85xk>.

Copies available at the circulation desk.

Mystery book group Monday, Dec. 16, 10 a.m.

In "The White Priory Murders," Marcia Tait is a Hollywood star who has come to England to make a historical film. She is found beaten to death in the Queen's Mirror Pavilion, the 17th-century trysting place of King Charles II and his mistresses. The problem is particularly puzzling because the pavilion is surrounded by new-fallen snow, with only one set of footprints leading to it and none leading away. The suspects include a man who thought he was marrying her — and her husband, whose marriage was unknown to all. Sir Henry Merrivale joins the investigation, but is too late to stop the second murder. Copies available at the library circulation desk.

Short story selections Wednesday, Dec. 18, 1 p.m.

Join library director Margaret Woodruff to share and discuss short stories old and new on the third Wednesday of each month. Story selections are sent out by email the Friday before the meeting date. Please contact margaret@charlottepubliclibrary.org if you'd like to join the group.

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, library director 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.

Join in 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.

Please note: The library will close at noon on Tuesday, Dec. 24, and be closed Wednesday, Dec. 25. The library will be open Dec. 26-30 (except Sunday, Dec. 29). We will close again at noon on Tuesday, Dec. 31, and be closed Wednesday, Jan. 1.

Library contact information:

Margaret Woodruff, director
Cheryl Sloan, youth services librarian
Susanna Kahn, tech librarian
Phone: 802-425-3864
Email: info@charlottepubliclibrary.org
For the latest information about programs, books and activity kits, sign up for the newsletter at <https://tinyurl.com/n5usd25r>.

The Charlotte Library Board of Trustees meets the first Thursday of each month at 6 p.m., unless otherwise rescheduled following the Opening Meeting Law. The next scheduled board meeting is Thursday, Jan. 2 at 6 p.m. Contact the library or visit the library website (charlottepubliclibrary.org) for more information.



Write Ingredients

Charlotte Senior Center always on sunnyside of street

Susan Ohanian
Contributor

Wikipedia notes that “brunch” was coined in England in the late nineteenth century. New York Times restaurant critic William Grimes was more specific, writing that Guy Beringer coined the term in 1895. He noted that Beringer wrote, “Brunch is cheerful, sociable and inciting.”

Grimes offers brief descriptions about this linguistic and culinary hybrid so popular in New York City: “Breakfast that begins with a cocktail. Or a lunch that’s organized around a stack of buckwheat pancakes. It’s neither fish nor fowl nor good red herring, although all three can wind up on the same plate.”

The piece, “At Brunch, The More Bizarre the Better,” with tales of the ups and downs about what Grimes terms “New Yorkers’ favorite weekend meal,” is a good read and offered as a gift article to readers of The Charlotte News here “At Brunch, The More Bizarre the Better” (<https://tinyurl.com/ypw2tu6d>).

This is one of 12,318 articles in The Times about brunch. There, you’ll find recipes for all manner of items they describe as edible, from pickle biscuits to peanut butter banana bread with chocolate chips, to zucchini-peach salad with lime dressing. And many, many more.

According to Wikipedia, the universally accepted time for partaking of brunch is 11 a.m.-2 p.m.

Not surprisingly, the inimitable Judge John Hodgman disagrees.

To get to his brunch proclamation, you must push yourself not to linger over Hodgman’s thoughts on proper pringle consumption, the dos and don’ts of eating mayonnaise, the ethics of naming a child after a pet dog and the dos and don’ts of preventing a spouse from growing a plant (that occasionally smells like a rotting corpse), not to mention his advice on the probity of getting help on Wordle.

Here is Judge John Hodgman on the proper time to partake of brunch (The New York Times, July 21, 2022): “Brunch defies time ... unless it’s on asparagus, even Hollandaise sauce, eaten alone out of the fridge at midnight, is brunch.”

Writing in The New Yorker, Anthony Bourdain, Culinary Institute of America graduate, celebrity chef at numerous prestige restaurants and television host of “A Cook’s Tour” and other culinary adventure shows, declared, “You can dress brunch up with all the focaccia smoked salmon and caviar in the world, but it’s still breakfast.”

The Grimes piece balances a restaurant owner complaining of customer requests, including that the staff butter his toast, with a chef reflecting on why people love brunch because it “reminds you of childhood, when someone was cooking for you.”

This brings us back to Guy Berringer’s 1889 vision of brunch: “Brunch is cheerful, sociable and inciting. It is talk-compelling. It puts you in a good temper, it makes you satisfied with yourself and your fellow beings, it sweeps away the worries and cobwebs of the week.”

“Cheerful, sociable and inciting” is a great



Adobe stock photo

way to characterize meals at the Charlotte Senior Center. And to end the year the volunteer cooks and dishwashers there invite you to sweep away your worries and cobwebs with good food and good conversation at Monday Munch. The promised meal has no mimosas but no pickle, peanut butter or zucchini weirdness either.

Of critical importance: Someone else is doing the cooking and the cleaning up. All you need to do is eat, be sociable and enjoy yourself.

Sounds like a song lyric: No matter what the weather, the kitchen at the Charlotte Senior Center is definitely on the sunny side of the street. In that vein, here is Louis Armstrong crooning the popular tune (<https://tinyurl.com/3trv9ef6>).

On Dec. 16 you can bring sunshine into your life with the Charlotte Senior Center meal billed as Holiday Brunch 11:30 a.m.-12:30

p.m., sausage, egg, cheese and hashbrown casserole, fruit salad, cinnamon rolls and hot cocoa.

Everyone is welcome. No reservations needed. A \$5 contribution is appreciated but not required.

This is the last Monday Munch at the Charlotte Senior Center until 2025. But note this special event on Wednesday, Dec. 18, 4:30-6:30 p.m. — gingerbread house-building party. It’s free, but registration is required.

This event, hosted by the Champlain Valley Union High School Senior Community Service Club, invites seniors to get creative while enjoying the holiday spirit. All the materials will be provided.

Come share some laughs, delicious treats and good company, as people celebrate the season together. Space is limited. To register, call 802-425-6445.

Senior Center News

Great time, wonderful place for connecting with others

Lori York
Director

As 2024 comes to a close, it's the perfect time to focus on building meaningful connections, especially as many are feeling the effects of isolation and loneliness. The Charlotte Senior Center offers a variety of opportunities to help bridge that gap, creating a welcoming and supportive space for individuals to connect.

Whether you're looking to make new friends through the new Gen-hub group or find a moment of peace during the busy holiday season with a winter solstice meditation, there are plenty of ways to come together and recharge.

Community

Magical World of Birds exhibit Dec. 9-Jan. 31

The Magical World of Birds center with photography by Barbara Motyka will be the next art exhibit at the senior center.

Gen-hub Friday, Dec. 13, 1 p.m.

Gen-hub is a new group of social gatherings for seniors interested in building friendships and making new connections in a cozy environment. Join for light refreshments and lots of conversations and mingling. If there is interest, the group will plan for gatherings monthly. Registration required at 802-425-6345, so there is enough refreshments. Free.

Gingerbread house-building party Wednesday, Dec. 18, 4:30-6:30 p.m.

Join the Champlain Valley Union High School Senior Community Service Club for a festive gingerbread house-building party, Dec. 18, 4:30 p.m.-6:30 p.m. Seniors are invited to get creative, share some laughs and enjoy delicious treats while celebrating the holiday season. Free, but registration required at 802-425-6345.

Charlotte Death Cafe Wednesday, Dec. 18, 2-3:30 p.m.

Come together in human fellowship to celebrate life by voicing concerns, share questions, ideas and stories around death and dying at the monthly Death Cafe. These are not always easy conversations, but when we share, heart to heart, we build community and experience a joy that enhances our lives. Questions to ppolly62@ymail.com. Free. Registration required at 802-425-6345.

Red Cross Blood Drive Thursday, Dec. 19, 1:30-6:30 p.m.

Please consider donating blood. 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.

Winter solstice meditation Friday, Dec. 20, 5-6 p.m.

Join Charlie Nardozzi and Heidi Kvasnak in celebration of the winter solstice for a candlelight meditation on Dec. 20, 5-6 p.m. Beginning with seated,

gentle movements, followed by soft chanting, a longer sitting meditation and a closing chant. No experience necessary. Suggested donation: \$5-\$20. Registration recommended at 802-425-6345.

Shape-note singing Sunday, Dec. 22, 12:30-2:30 p.m.

Traditional a capella, four-part harmony sung for the joy of singing, not as a practice for performance. Search "sacred harp" on YouTube for examples, then come and sing with us. Introduction to shape notes and scales is recommended and offered 30 minutes before each fourth Sunday singing. The first hour will be sacred harp singing and the second hour will be singing from an alternate shape-note book. Books will be provided. For questions or to schedule your introduction to shape-notes and scales, contact Kerry Cullinan at kclynxvt@gmail.com. Free. No registration required.

Looking ahead 2025

Chair yoga sit, stretch & smile Tuesdays, Jan. 14-Feb. 18, 1:30-2:30 p.m.

Join Lynn Alpeter, former co-owner of Yoga Roots, teaches a gentle and accessible chair yoga designed to help you connect with your breath, move your body and lift your mood. Whether you're new to yoga or looking for a more supportive practice, this class is perfect for anyone seeking to increase flexibility, balance and relaxation. Using a chair for support, we'll explore mindful movement and simple stretches that can be easily adapted for all levels. Leave feeling uplifted, energized and centered. Cost: \$60 for the 6-week series. Registration and payment required by January 10. To register, call 802-425-6345.

Meditation Thursdays, Jan. 9, 16, 23, 30, Feb. 6 & Wednesday, Feb. 12, 5-6 p.m.

The New Year provides an opportunity to focus our attention on those habits that will help us thrive. Meditation is one of those practices that can help reduce pain, anxiety and stress, while making our life more joyful and peaceful. Come join Charlie Nardozzi for this six-week series on meditation exploring how to meditate and use it in our daily living. You can join the class live, via Zoom or just get the recording afterward. The final class will be held on Wednesday due to the blood drive scheduled for Thursday. Contact Charlie for more information at cnardozzi124@gmail.com. Cost: \$60 for the six-week session. Registration and payment required by Jan. 7. Register at 802-425-6345.

Exercise

Bone Builders Tuesdays, 10:30 a.m.-11:30 a.m., Wednesdays, 1:30 p.m.-2:30 p.m. & Fridays, 11 a.m.-noon

RSVP Bone Builders, a program of United Way of Northwest Vermont, is a no-impact, weight-training program designed to prevent and even reverse the negative effects of osteoporosis in older adults. Bone Builders consists of a



Photo by Lori York

The Monday lunch volunteers enjoy getting into the holiday festivities at the senior center.

warm-up, balance exercises, arm and leg exercises and a cool down with stretching. Free. No registration required, but there is paperwork to complete for the RSVP Bone Builders program.

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

Join Phyllis Bartling in this pilates class, geared to folks 55+. This class is challenging and includes upper-body strength work with hand weights and mat exercises while working on core muscles to improve balance, strength and posture. \$10 a class. No registration required.

Tai chi Thursdays, 9:45-10:45 a.m.

The Yang international short form is the most popular form of tai chi practice. It consists of slow continuous soft circular movements which are coordinated with breathing. Regular practice helps to improve balance, mind-body connection, mental awareness, flexibility, stability, coordination and overall health. When practiced in the company of others, it is both uplifting and energizing. Taught by a certified instructor who has studied with the founder of the Tai Chi for Arthritis Association. Email questions to belizahammer@hotmail.com. \$10 a class. No registration required. No class on Nov. 21 and 28.

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

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

Programs

Brain games Fridays, 2-4 p.m.

There are many ways adults can stimulate their brains to increase mental

health, improve memory skills and contribute to overall well-being. Research finds that positive interaction with others and engagement in stimulating group activities sharpens cognition and increases memory ability. Come play various games, share laughter and enjoy one another's company. Some games are available, but also feel free to bring your own games. Free. No registration required.

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

New or experienced in the Shanghai style of mahjong, you are welcome to join this informal get-together. For questions email Nan Mason: anne.mason@uvm.edu. Free. No registration required.

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.

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. 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
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802-425-6345
charlotteseniorcentervt.org

Follow the senior center on Facebook or Instagram at charlotteseniorcentervt.

Merry Christmas
and a
Happy New Year!

from all of us at
The Charlotte News



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