



## NOAH KAHAN PLAYS FOR VT CHILDREN

Stafford kid turned Grammy-nominated superstar, played his viral hit “Stick Season” for patients at UVM Children’s Hospital.

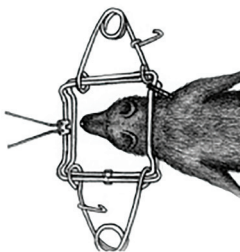
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## OVER 600 SNOWSPORT PROS DESCENDED ON KILLINGTON

Hundreds of snowsports professionals gather at Killington for the PSIA-AASI ProJam, Dec. 11-15.

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## NEW HUNTING AND TRAPPING RULES SPARK CONTROVERSY

The Fish & Wildlife Board voted unanimously to approve new rules for trapping and hunting — which are intended to make the activities safer for wildlife, pets and people — but there are many objections from hunter/trapper, animal advocates, property owners and legislators.

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## Christmas tree farms grapple with a tight supply

By Babette Stolk/VTDigger

Although the supply of locally grown trees is tight this year, industry observers, including Jim Horst, the executive director of the New Hampshire-Vermont Christmas Tree Association, have an assuring message: “Most people that want to buy a Christmas tree are gonna be able to get one in Vermont,” he said.

But it might require persistence. The current state of Vermont’s industry fits into a national trend of a tightening supply of Christmas trees. As trees take roughly a decade after they’re planted to grow large enough to sell, the industry goes through long cycles of supply and demand, with a tightening supply since 2016, according to the National Christmas Tree Association.

“The Christmas tree industry, like most industries, goes through oversupply and undersupply, just like the housing market, or any market,” Jill Sidebottom, a

Trees → 9



By Jason Mikula

## Santa and Mrs. Claus delighted hundreds at Giorgetti

Ida Parini, 5, from Weybridge and Esme Mikula, 6, from Killington, were among the 350 participants that skated with Santa and Mrs. Claus Saturday, Dec. 16, at Giorgetti Arena in Rutland.

## Ludlow businessman arrested in NYC for alleged fraudulent construction contracts scheme

By Katy Savage

A Ludlow businessman was arrested Thursday, Dec. 14 in New York City on federal charges for unlawfully securing commercial construction contracts.

Troy Caruso, 56, owner of multiple businesses in Ludlow and the CEO of a New York City-based construction firm, McAlpine Contracting, faces one count of conspiracy to commit honest services wire fraud and one count of honest services wire fraud, each carrying a potential maximum prison sentence of 20 years.

Caruso bought a second home in Ludlow about 13 years ago and quickly began acquiring businesses around 2021. First, he purchased the former Okemo Valley Golf Club for \$2.71 million and renamed it Fox Run. He then bought a slew of restaurants, including Calcutta’s, LaTavolta, Off the Rails, Sam’s Steakhouse and Mr. Darcy’s. He also owns the

former Tater Hill Golf Club in Chester. Caruso said in previous interviews he planned to demolish Sam’s Steakhouse and Mr. Darcy’s after both were damaged in July flooding.

The charges allege Caruso’s involvement in a 2 ½-year kickback scheme ... resulting in millions in fraudulent gains.

The charges allege Caruso was involved in a kickback scheme with business partner John Nolan, a senior executive at McAlpine Contracting.

The U.S. Department of Justice alleges the duo bribed a senior project manager at a Fortune 500 commercial real estate firm between February 2021 and September 2023. Caruso and Nolan paid \$15,000 to an intermediary to connect them with the real estate firm employee around March 2021. Caruso’s company then reportedly secured a \$3.55 million construction contract for a health services business after manipulating the bidding process. Caruso and

Fed fraud → 5

## Flood waters rise again

Staff report

Heavy rain and melting snow inundated much of Vermont on Monday, Dec. 18, leading to swift-water rescues, evacuations, road closures and early school dismissals. Rivers continued to rise Monday until about midnight, state officials urged Vermonters to exercise caution and remain vigilant.

Many areas throughout the state received 2 to 2.5 inches, according to Jessica Neiles, a meteorologist with the National Weather Service in Vermont. (Locally, preliminary flooding → 9

## Snowbowl debuts night skiing

By Angelo Lynn

The Middlebury College Snowbowl debuted night skiing, Friday, Dec. 15.

The idea of adding night skiing at the Snowbowl has been in the works for the past several years and was given the go-ahead a few years ago to coincide with the new Sheehan lift — a quad serving the former Sheehan double.

The new lights for night skiing illuminate three of the runs off the new Sheehan quad as well as the beginner Discovery Zone. The Snowbowl also plans to offer more après ski activities on Wednesday, Thursday and Friday nights, when skiing will be extended from 4-9 p.m.

“The idea was to increase skier and rider visits without having to increase the size of our parking lot, or lodge, or other facilities that are

Night skiing → 6



TOWN OF  
**KILLINGTON**  
VERMONT

**PLANNING COMMISSION  
PUBLIC HEARING NOTICE**

**PROPOSED AMENDMENTS TO THE TOWN OF KILLINGTON  
ZONING BYLAWS and KILLINGTON ZONING MAP**

The Killington Planning Commission will hold a public hearing on amendments to the Town of Killington Zoning Bylaws and the Town of Killington Zoning Maps on **Wednesday, January 3, 2024, at 7:00 p.m.** at the Public Safety Building, 800 Killington Road, Killington, Vermont. The hearing will also be held remotely via Zoom. The link to join remotely is <https://join.zoom.us/j/86571219632> or by call in +1649809902,86571219632.

This public notice is given pursuant to 24 V.S.A. Section 4444. The principal purpose of the proposed zoning bylaw amendments is to provide standards for permitting and regulating cannabis establishments within the Town of Killington. These amendments will affect every geographical area of Killington. The Town of Killington Zoning Map has been amended to provide 2 Commercial Districts – one of which is labeled the Killington Basin Commercial District and one of which is labeled the Route 4 Commercial District.

- The section headings affected by the proposed zoning bylaw amendments are:
- SECTION 13B – DEFINITIONS
  - SECTION 302 – CONDITIONAL USE - CANNABIS ESTABLISHMENTS

The full text of the proposed Town of Killington Zoning Bylaw Amendments may be found at the Town Clerk's office, 2705 River Road, Killington and on the Planning Commission page of the Town's website [KillingtonVT.com](http://KillingtonVT.com).

Dated at Killington, Vermont this 11th Day of December 2023.  
Lisa Davis Lewis, Town Planner, Town of Killington, Vermont



TOWN OF  
**KILLINGTON**  
VERMONT

**Reminder to all Short-Term Rental owners:  
Registration is past due!**

The Short-Term Rental of a dwelling unit within the Town of Killington requires a STR Registration License, which is issued by completing an application online (<http://KillingtonVT.com>) and paying the permit fee based on # of bedrooms in each unit.

**STR Registrations run from Nov 1 - Oct. 31  
and need to be renewed each year by Nov. 15.**

The grace period for renewing will end Jan. 15, 2024.

If you are still short-term renting and you fail to renew your registration by Jan. 15, 2024, you will be sent a certified letter informing you that you are in violation of the Town's STR Zoning Regulations. You will then have 7 days to register, or you will be subject to fines of \$200/day.

- A Short-Term Rental is defined as a furnished house, condominium, or other dwelling unit or self-contained dwelling unit rented to the tourist, traveling, or visiting public for a period of fewer than 30 consecutive days and for more than 14 days per calendar year.
- Dwelling Unit Capacity for a Short-Term Rental is two occupants per approved bedroom plus two additional occupants. For example, a 3-bedroom dwelling can be rented to eight guests (3 bedrooms = 6 occupants plus 2 additional occupants = 8). The occupancy of condos is determined by VT Act 258.
- An inspection report with occupancy approved from the State Division of Fire Safety is required for STRs with an occupancy of greater than 8 guests. The Rutland Fire Safety office can be reached at 802-279-0946 to answer questions you may have and to set up an appointment.
- The designated operator (the owner may be the designated operator) must be available by phone at all times that the Short-Term Rental is in use.
- Parking by STR guests must be off-street. On-street parking is not permitted.
- STRs with an occupancy of 16 or fewer guests are allowed in all zoning districts.
- Failure to secure an STR Registration or advertising a Short-Term Rental for more than the approved maximum number of occupants (guests) are violations of the Zoning Bylaws and will be enforced.

For more information, visit: [bit.ly/KillingtonSTR](http://bit.ly/KillingtonSTR)

# Vermont Adaptive Ski and Sports honors the 2023 volunteers of the year

The most outstanding Vermont Adaptive Ski and Sports volunteers in 2023 were Glen Torres, Andy Holt, Jay Schulz, and Ben Hamilton.

Named 2023 Volunteers of the Year, these four recipients embody the traits and legacy of Jim Hutchinson, a Vermont Adaptive volunteer who left a tradition of empowering people of all abilities through sports and recreation as well as a commitment toward supporting the organization.

Torres, of Waterbury, has been a Vermont Adaptive volunteer for the past 30 years and is incredibly dedicated and active in his volunteer efforts. This past winter season at Sugarbush Resort he taught 44 individual lessons, totaling up to 29.5 total days of instruction. He is not just present in the winter months — he is a committed year-round volunteer. He can always be found volunteering at many of Vermont Adaptive's annual events such as the VT50, VT 100, Charity Challenge, and Allen Clark Hill Climb.

On top of his attendance and assistance at these major events, Torres continued to find time to volunteer for summer programming. This past summer he volunteered at every single open-enrollment paddle programming day, every single CORE

Connections programming day, and many school group bike path rides. Unsurprisingly, Torres is the instructor who taught the most lessons in the winter 23/24 season at Sugarbush and the summer 2023 season in central Vermont. He has dedicated a truly incredible amount of hours to central programming in the past year in addition to his obvious commitment to Vermont Adaptive over the past 30 years.

Schulz has been a stellar, year-round volunteer since 2021. He's willing to learn any sport to be of service to Vermont Adaptive — he even learned to ski so he could volunteer in the winter. He is a favorite among athletes and his fellow volunteers and is only a phone call away when help is needed. In addition to his time volunteering at Bolton Valley and in Burlington in the summer, Schulz also plays an active role in Sunday ski team at Sugarbush both in helping with SOVT athlete transportation as well as instructing on snow. Vermont Adaptive is very sad to be losing him this year as he is moving to Reno, Nevada, for work, but Schulz has left a lasting impression with everyone he has worked with and will always be welcome to come back and visit his Vermont Adaptive family.

Adaptive volunteers → 23

# West Rutland receives community development block grant

West Rutland was one of 11 towns that received a community development block grant.

West Rutland got a \$500,000 CDBG supplemental award for NeighborWorks of Western Vermont to continue operating the revolving loan fund to provide affordable home repair financing and housing counseling services to eligible homeowners in Rutland, Addison, and Bennington Counties.

The funding efforts will support two mixed-income housing developments; continued funding for the five home-ownership centers throughout Vermont to support affordable home repair financing and housing counseling services for low- and moderate income homeowners; provide funding to renovate a historic farmhouse into

childcare and community space, including two units of affordable housing; provide funding to support a regional healthcare facility's heating plant; planning for ADA improvements to a historic theater; and an enhancement of RHP funding.

"The community development block grant program continues to enhance communities throughout the state," said Gov. Phil Scott. "With these grants, we are making childcare more available, making public spaces more accessible, and adding affordable housing to cities and towns across Vermont. We thank our congressional delegation for their continued work to keep these federal dollars coming to Vermont."

"The CDBG program is a valuable resource that plays an important role in projects throughout

Vermont," said Department of Housing and Community Development Commissioner Farrell. "By leveraging these federal dollars, communities can advance vital affordable housing projects and create more opportunities for residents."

Senator Bernie Sanders, Senator Peter Welch, and Representative Becca Balint said in a joint statement:

"The Community Development Block Grant program helps create stronger and more resilient communities here in Vermont and around the country. This federal investment will jumpstart meaningful improvements in towns and cities across the state. CDBG funds provide the resources our communities need to make critical projects a reality. We look forward to seeing Vermonters benefit

Block grants → 23

# Strafford's Noah Kahan plays for patients at UVM Children's Hospital

Kahan, fresh off a Grammy nomination, played his viral hit "Stick Season" for young patients and their families, on Friday, Dec. 15

By Shaun Robinson/VTDigger

Noah Kahan has performed on some of music's biggest stages this year, from Lollapalooza to Red Rocks Amphitheatre to Saturday Night Live — all since he performed a free concert at the FIS Alpine World Cup ski race at Killington last Thanksgiving.

But on Friday, Dec. 15, the Strafford-born singer opted for a different kind of venue, a more local one: a sunny hallway in the children's hospital wing of the University of Vermont Medical Center in Burlington.

"It means the world to be in Vermont," said Kahan, whose moody, folk-pop songs about life in small-town New England have earned him international fame and, last month, a Grammy nomination. The 26-year-old now lives just outside of Boston.

Kahan played the title track from his latest album, "Stick Season," for about 20 patients and their families as well as dozens more doctors, nurses and other hospital staff. The UVM Children's Hospital mascot, a bipedal, break-dancing moose named Monty, had a front-row seat — little wonder, it seemed, as Kahan said Monty was "my biggest fan."

The performance was clad in branding from the coffee chain Dunkin', which helped organize the event,

"What Noah Kahan stands for is something we should be talking about. Remove the stigma. Have the discussion. And provide the resources," First said introducing Kahan.

including a hat on Kahan's head and logos on the holiday-themed set flanking him as he played. Dunkin's mascot — a large, white coffee cup named Cuppy — stood among the crowd, too.

Kahan and Dunkin' together donated \$2,000 worth of toys to UVM Medical Center that will go to young patients and their families, hospital officials said Friday.

Speaking just before Kahan stepped out to play, Lewis First, the hospital's chief of pediatrics, praised the singer's openness in talking about his struggles with his mental health — across his lyrics and performances, and through a nonprofit organization.

"What Noah Kahan stands for," First told the crowd, "is something we should be talking about. Remove the stigma. Have the discussion. And provide the resources."



By Shaun Robinson/VTDigger  
*Noah Kahan, a Strafford-born singer-songwriter, plays for young patients, their families and hospital staff members at the UVM Medical Center on Friday.*

Kahan drew laughs during his performance for the handful of lyrics that he said he had changed to make the

track more "friendly." The song, which went viral on the app TikTok last year, recounts the sadness of feeling left behind after a relationship ends.

The line "I'll drink alcohol 'til my friends come home for Christmas" became "I'll drink applesauce 'til my

Kahan drew laughs during his performance for the handful of lyrics that he said he had changed to make the track more "friendly" ... "somethin' even smoking weed does not replace" became "somethin' even climbing trees does not replace."

friends come home for Christmas," while "somethin' even smoking weed does not replace" became "somethin' even climbing trees does not replace." After Kahan played "Stick Season," he posed for photos and autographed

merchandise for many of the children's hospital's patients and staff members in attendance. He gave the young patients vinyl copies of the album "Stick Season," drawing tongue-in-cheek grumbles from some parents that the kids would not even know how to play them.

One of the first people from the crowd to chat with Kahan was Victoria Reed of Alburgh, who has come to UVM Medical Center for surgeries since she was born. Speaking a few minutes later, she called meeting the singer — whom she's been a fan of for years — "insane."

Reed, who is a sophomore at Saint

Michael's College, gave Kahan a hug and then handed him a present — honey, from the beehives that her family keeps on their land.

"My mom thought it would be good for his voice," she said with a laugh.

## Rutland city addresses contamination: drinking water concerns, plan for former factory

Staff report

Rutland city's water is slightly contaminated.

Mayor Mike Doenges told the Board of Aldermen Dec. 18 that haloacetic acid was found at 60.5 parts per billion in the water, which is just above the federal limit of 60 parts per billion.

Doenges said there were no immediate health risks to the public. The contaminant has been reported to put people at an elevated risk of cancer if a person consumes the contaminated water over a long period of time.

Doenges said the contaminant has appeared in the city's drinking water before. The city will identify the cause and then put a plan together to remediate it over the next three months. Residents will receive a notice about the issue on their next bills.

The Rutland City Board of Aldermen also approved a let-Contamination → 5

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By Glenn Heitsmith

Rotarians Tom Rice, president, and Melanie Gulde, who runs the Divided Sky Recovery Retreat in Ludlow, with County Sheriff Ryan Palmer.

## Sheriff spotlights department expansion at rotary homecoming

By Glenn Heitsmith

Sheriff Ryan Palmer recently joined Rotarians at DJ's Restaurant in Ludlow. No arrests were made. No speeding tickets were issued. And the meal was typical at DJ's: hot and filling.

The Dec. 5 luncheon marked a sentimental homecoming for the former Ludlow cop who launched his successful bid for county sheriff at a Rotary meeting in 2022.

Palmer, who took office in February, detailed a busy first year filing campaign promises to "change law enforcement in Vermont." Accountability holds top billing. Officers in the field now all wear body cameras, Palmer said. And releasing video footage of arrests or encounters is common practice.

Observers noted an increased presence of county law

Sheriff Palmer → 17

# Hartland planners report survey results

By Curt Peterson

The Hartland Planning Commission displayed results from its 2023 vision survey of residents and non-resident property owners. Mill Moore, who had organized the results, projected a very professional presentation that revealed many interesting and unexpected results.

The town has about 3,400 residents, according to the latest census, including adults and children. Oversimplified, the 608 respondents to the survey represent a tad less than 18% of the total population, which is a very respectable response rate, and includes non-resident property owners who took

part in the survey. All the percentages in the presentation referred to the 608 respondents. However, not all respondents answered all questions in the survey. Many questions had responses totaling just above 500.

Commissioners said, while the data is accurate, the survey organization and conclusions are still in "draft" form. Chair Rebecca Gordon said there will be a public introduction of the final commission-approved results when complete.

Hartland results were segmented into four groupings: Rural (60%), Three Corners (12%), Four Corners (16%) and North Hartland (12%) residents. Other categorizations were by length of residency and age of respondent.

Age groupings include Over 65 (44%), 40-64 (46%), 20-39 (10%).

Moore said there are four "stress points" or areas of non-consensus

among the groupings:

1. Desire for more services versus resistance to increased taxes.
2. Villagers' opinions versus rural residents' opinions.
3. Long-term residents (30 years or more) versus newer-comers.
4. Four-Corners residents versus everyone else.

Landowners represent 93% of the tally, non-resident landowners 2%, and renters 5%.

Asked what should be the most important long-term vision, 61% want Hartland to remain a "quiet, rural town"; 59% desire affordability for young families. Improve-

ment of roads, lower taxes, investment in education, high speed internet for all, and preventing "mega-mansion" development are suggested.

Single- and multi-family houses are preferable, respondents said.

Suggestions for affordable housing include tiny houses and cluster housing, condos, "a few" apartment buildings, mobile homes and senior housing.

Respondents think villages and adjacent areas, and highways best for multi-family housing, and for commercial development, although 36% would prefer no commercial expansion in town. Industrial development got 55% thumbs down anywhere.

Equal numbers (41%) said "no" and

Flood mitigation ranks high on the list of survey participants' priorities.

Equal numbers (41%) said "no" and "yes" to establishing zoning regulation in town.

providing solar installation grants or rebates, and education about available programs. Transportation is a well-recognized challenge

"yes" to establishing zoning regulation in town.

Cell towers and wind towers got moderate support (46% and 31%). But there is pretty strong favorability for supporting expansion of ambulance services, health services, fire services and police services (49% to 54%).

Environmental issues, i.e. invasive species identification, stream and river buffer zones, wildlife conservation, critical habitat identification, and wetland identification, all received strong to medium prioritization.

Not surprisingly, flood mitigation ranks high on the list of survey participants' priorities.

Biking and walking trails are prioritized among recreational opportunities. One respondent suggested an "award scheme" whereby environmental activists might be recognized for their personal investment.

Weatherization and encouragement of renewables to produce electricity are favored ways to achieve energy and emissions goals. Suggestions include

providing solar installation grants or rebates, and education about available programs. Transportation is a well-recognized challenge

for Hartlanders. The survey inspired suggestions of "better parking in Three Corners," more bus stops and service, charging stations for electric vehicles and more multi-family housing.

This is just a skeletal look at the very comprehensive survey result presentation.

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# Over 600 snowsports professionals gather at Killington for the PSIA-AASI ProJam

By Brooke Geery, Killington Resort

In mid-December, Killington Resort welcomed hundreds of snowsports instructors from across the Eastern Region for the PSIA-AASI ProJam and Master's Academy. This event, which has been running since 1986, is the largest gathering of snowsports professionals in the country.

"A lot of our members look at this week as a way to get geared up and ready to go. When their resort opens for Christmas week, they're dialed in, have the latest information and are able to deliver a great experience to guests," said Kathy Brennan, CEO of the PSIA-AASI for the Eastern Region.

The Eastern Region ranges from Maine to North Carolina and as far west as Western New York, with some 10,000 members, ranging in age from 15 to 92. Some people come from as far away as Alaska, Arizona, and Alabama, and Canada for the event.

This year's ProJam, Dec. 11-15, was attended by 576 members, 63 Eastern education staff and 14 members of the

PSIA-AASI National Team—653 in total.

"Most, if not all, of the participants pay for this event out of their own pocket, and many use their vacation time to be able to participate," Brennan says. "I think it is wonderful how many people are so committed to get better at Snowsports in order to deliver the best possible experience to their students."

Killington has hosted the event many times, including exclusively since 2016.

"The reason that our members and staff love coming to Killington is because of the terrain that you have available," Brennan said. "It allows our instructors to ski/ride on pitch and in snow conditions that will help to elevate their performance. Around the region there are very few places that have guaranteed early snow, terrain and the hotel and conference facilities we need. That's what really makes Killington a stand-out when we're choosing a venue for our event."



By Zach Godwin/Killington Resort

PSIA → 8 Professional Ski Instructors of America enjoyed Killington.



By Vincent T. Vuoto, courtesy VTD

The Fox Run Golf Course in Ludlow was one of the properties owned by Troy Caruso, along with five restaurants.

## ← Fed fraud: from page 1

Nolan paid the real estate firm employee \$35,500 in bribes and \$33,000 in kickbacks.

Most transactions, according to the DOJ, were conducted in cash at various locations around New York City.

Both Caruso and Nolan appeared in the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of New York on Thursday, Dec. 14. Caruso was represented by high-profile criminal defense attorneys Marc Agnifilo and Teny Geragos. Agnifilo, known for his work with notable figures like Martin Shkreli.

Caruso was released on a \$10 million bond, while Nolan was released on a \$1 million bond, according to court records.

Attempts to reach Caruso and Nolan and their attorneys weren't successful.

Caruso grew up on Long Island, New York and started working at a demolition company out of high school. He started his own construction business in the mid 1990s. Caruso planned to invest far more in the Ludlow community, including luxury senior housing units and a hotel.

"Fox Run has plans for two subsequent phases of expansions to develop the 120 unimproved acres on the property," Caruso told the New England Real Estate Journal in 2021. "An upscale senior living complex, with a preliminary budget of \$25 million, will be constructed in Phase II, while Phase III will include the construction of a \$15 million hotel."

The investigation, led by Task Force Officers from the Public Corruption Unit of the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Southern District of New York, received assistance from the FBI.

Caruso was released on a \$10 million bond, while Nolan was released on a \$1 million bond, according to court records.

## ← Contamination: from page 3

ter of intent for the former factory building at 10 Cleveland Avenue.

The letter asks the property owner to hold the property for 60 days while the city conducts environmental assessments to put together a corrective action plan.

City officials are hoping the property could become part of a future TIF district — a longterm plan to take care of blighted properties in the city. The TIF district could be put to voters within the next 12-18 months.

"It's very important that you vote for this tonight so we can get access to the property and finish the information process that we need so we can put a TIF bond together," Alderman Bill Gillam told his colleagues.

"This gets us into the door. We need to go through the steps to get there so we can

present to the taxpayers an actual plan to correct the blighted properties in this community."

The property, a former factory, has long been vacant and often has squatters, despite it being deemed unsafe to occupy. The property owner also owes the city \$126,516 in back property taxes

"I know the neighbors are very, very excited to see this move forward," Gillam said. "It's been sitting there way too long doing nothing."

The city will likely enroll in the state's Brownfields Reuse and Environmental Liability Limitation Program (BRELLA), which would eliminate the city's liability for cleanup.

"This is something that we've been working on through the TIF process for a significant amount of time," Doenges said.

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By Steve James, Addison Independent

About 1,000 people attended the Middlebury College Snowbowl kick-off party Friday, Dec. 15, to debut night skiing. Night skiing operations are now offered Wednesday-Friday, 4-9 p.m.

## ← Night skiing: from page 1

already full on busy days,” said Mike Hussey, operations manager of the Snowbowl. “But this is also an idea that we hope will rejuvenate the ski culture in town; to recreate that ski town persona that Middlebury was in the 1960s and 1970s when the town had state champion ski teams at the high school and a ski club that was one of the strongest in the state.”

When Middlebury Union High School stopped letting Tiger ski team members out of classes early for ski training, that program waned and other sports like ice hockey and Nordic skiing gained favor.

But today, with a very strong Nordic program at the high school and with a strong Alpine ski club at the Snow Bowl for younger skiers, the time seems ripe for a resurgence.

“Today we have a strong younger ski club program, but once those skiers get to high school age and there is no team sport there, they go to hockey or something else,” Hussey said. “So, we’re hoping this will help revive the ski program in area schools... And that will, in turn, encourage more families to get involved in the sport and all we have to offer at the Snowbowl.”

The process to rejuvenate a ski team at Middlebury Union High School (MUHS) is to form a club team for two years and if there is adequate interest, it would gain varsity

status in the third year. A club team has been formed this year at MUHS under the direction of John Nucedor.

### Night skiing

Hussey also said night skiing should attract a whole new subset of skiers who weren’t previously able to take off from work or school to be on the mountain mid-week. “We anticipate that night skiing will be an amazing asset for the community,” Hussey said. He noted that while only a handful of Vermont ski areas offer night skiing, almost 80% of the ski areas in New York and other southern New England states offer night skiing — a feature that makes up the bulk of their business.

Hussey said the Snowbowl would be looking at other industry leaders who are doing night skiing well. Of the half-dozen ski areas in Vermont offering night skiing, Hussey cited Bolton Valley as a leader that has “a great bar, food and beverage scene, as well as successful night-skiing programs that attract a lot of skiers.

“There are a lot of ski areas we can learn from,” Hussey said, adding that he expects “a sizable uptick in revenue from being opening these three nights.”

Those potential gains are not without challenges, he admits.

While only a handful of Vermont ski areas offer night skiing, almost 80% of the ski areas in New York and other southern New England states offer night skiing — a feature that makes up the bulk of their business.

“Creating the right atmosphere, food offerings and après ski scene is something we have to build on, so that’s also a big challenge and very exciting.”

Hussey said the crew that will cater the Snowbowl’s food is the same group that is running the Tavern on the T, the restaurant at the Middlebury College golf course, which is part of the college’s staff — a change from the outside contractors of the past few years. The pub located on the second floor of the lodge will continue to be called the Lake Pleiad Pub, which is a rolling kiosk bar and flexible, as they mull over ways to make the après ski scene more attractive.

If projections hit their targets, the Snowbowl expects to draw a couple hundred people each night.

“We’ve gotten a pretty good response on our season and night passes so far,” Hussey said, “so community interest seems to be there.”

The Discovery Center, the beginner’s area, served by the Magic Carpet, will also be lit at night for skiing on Wednesday, Thursday and Friday from 4-9 p.m., the same as the Sheehan Lift.

The three trails that will be lit for skiing off the Sheehan lift are Kelton (under the lift line), Cameron (race training trail) and Lang. Hussey said that lights on the slopes have to be off by 9 p.m., and lights in the parking area go off by 9:30 p.m., according to the area’s state permit, which was respectful of light pollution at night.

The lights are LED Dark Sky compliant, Hussey added, noting that the lights will be mounted on telephone poles along each of the trails.

# New details in state's lawsuit against Meta allege concerted effort to target Vermont teens, avoid public scrutiny

By Shaun Robinson/VTDigger

New details released Thursday, Dec. 14, in the Vermont Attorney General's lawsuit against Meta describe how the tech giant studied teenagers in Vermont as part of efforts to make its social media platform Instagram more addictive — and how top company leaders allegedly ignored repeated warnings that the popular app is harmful to young people.

The details come in a recently unsealed version of the lawsuit, which Attorney General Charity Clark's office filed in Chittenden County Superior civil court in October. The suit alleges that Meta violated Vermont's Consumer Protection Act by engaging in unfair and deceptive trade practices — namely, by lying to the public about the safety of Instagram despite knowing its adverse impacts on young people.

Instagram has detrimental impacts on young users' mental health, the 114-page lawsuit asserts, and that usage correlates with social media addiction,

sleep deprivation, poor self-image, feelings of loneliness and even the desire to self-harm.

Clark coordinated with more than 40 other attorneys general across the country who also sued Meta in state and federal court. Vermont is one of just a handful of states bringing its case before a local judge; Clark said Thursday that this is because she feels the state's consumer protection law is particularly strong.

A Vermont superior court judge granted a motion by the Attorney General's office to unseal the complaint, in its entirety, earlier this month.

The unredacted complaint cites internal Meta documents to suggest that the company made specific efforts to increase the time that Vermont teenagers spend on the platform.

Meta research showed that "at times," Vermont had the highest percentage of teenagers using

Instagram, per capita, of any U.S. state — about 80%, according to the Attorney General's Office.

At the same time, a 2017 Meta analysis found that the amount of time Vermont teens spent on Instagram each day was —

Meta researchers found... 28% of users witnessed bullying on Instagram, 25% witnessed discrimination, 16% viewed nudity they "did not want to see" and 7% saw images of self-harm.

at that time — lower than in several other states. Looking at that data, the suit alleges, Meta researchers concluded that the company needed to build new features to keep teens engaged with the platform.

"In other words: Meta concluded that it needed to refine Instagram such that teens like

those in Vermont, specifically, would spend more of their time on Instagram each day," the attorney general's complaint states.

Between July 2020 and June 2021, more than 41,500 Vermont teenagers used Instagram monthly, and nearly 30,000 used it daily, according to the complaint.

Clark was determined to make the full complaint public so that Vermonters could get the most complete picture possible of Meta's practices, she said in an interview Thursday.

"This is just incredibly important to me personally," she said. "I'm not just an attorney general. I'm a mom. I'm an aunt."

Meta did not respond to a request for comment Thursday about the unredacted complaint. The company previously wrote in a statement responding to Vermont and other states' litigation that it shares "the attorneys general's commitment to providing

teens with safe, positive experiences online," but was "disappointed" in their approach.

## 'Bad Experiences and Encounters'

Newly unsealed portions of the complaint allege that there were repeated instances in which Meta researchers raised internal concerns about Instagram's detrimental impacts on young people — especially girls. But senior leaders, up to the highest levels of the company, took no action in response, the complaint alleges. In some cases, it states, those leaders instead seemed far more concerned with protecting the company's image.

Some of these concerns were based on specific Instagram features that the company knew, from its own internal research, made the platform more addictive and more harmful, Clark said. The lawsuit cites a feature that teases new content below what a user is already seeing, called "infinite scroll," and another that plays

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## ← State vs Meta:

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videos as soon as they appear in a user's feed, called "autoplay," as two examples of this.

Researchers ran concerns as high up the chain as Meta CEO Mark Zuckerberg, arguing that the company needed to invest more resources into initiatives to make the platform safer and less addictive to teens, the lawsuit states, but Zuckerberg and others failed to act accordingly.

The unredacted complaint also includes more details that back up the state's allegations that Meta deliberately deceived the public about how frequently teenage users were accessing harmful content.

Clark's office cites data from a mid-2021 survey that Meta conducted of some 240,000 Instagram users, called a "Bad Experiences and Encounters Framework survey," which measured users' exposure to a wide array of harmful experiences and content.

Meta researchers found that, over the seven days prior to taking the survey, 28% of users witnessed bullying on Instagram, 25% witnessed discrimination, 16% viewed nudity they "did not want to see" and 7% saw images of self-harm, according to the complaint. Among all age groups on the platform, teenagers reported having the highest rates of these "bad experiences," according to the lawsuit.

But around the same time that data was collected — and in the years that have followed — Meta has publicly reported data showing far lower rates of interactions with that kind of content, which the company simultaneously states it does not want young people to see.

For instance, while the survey found that 19% of 13- to 15-year olds were exposed "to adult nudity and sexual activity" on the platform, the company stated in one of its 2021 quarterly reports that only between 0.02% and 0.03% of users that age were exposed to such content, according to the lawsuit.

### 'Internal culture of secrecy'

In another case, the suit describes an Instagram feature implemented in 2018 that tells users how much time they have been spending on the app — the "time spent" tool. Two years after the feature rolled out, the complaint alleges, Meta employees were raising concerns that the metrics the tool was showing to users were "materially incorrect."

"It's not just that Apple / Google have better data. Ours is wrong. Far worse. We're sharing bad metrics externally," Instagram's director of engineering allegedly stated at the time, according to the complaint. "The reason this is relevant is we vouch for these numbers. Any day they're out there is a legal liability."

By mid-2020, an internal team at Meta recommended that the "time spent" tool be removed from the app, the lawsuit alleges, but company leadership pushed back, arguing that the tool was important because it created a public perception that Instagram was taking steps to curb addictive use of its platform.

"The regulatory and brand risk from removing our only addiction-related features outweighs ... the wins around user trust in the data," one Meta employee said, according to the lawsuit.

Vermont's lawsuit also alleges that Meta leaders deliberately hid research that showed how Instagram was harming young users from their own employees. That concern was heightened in August 2021 after company officials learned that the Wall Street Journal obtained leaked company research on the negative impacts that Instagram has on teenage girls, the lawsuit states. The Journal reported on its findings that fall.

After learning about the leaked slides, the suit alleges, Meta's communications department began "sanitizing" some of its research findings in internal company communications. One manager instructed a research colleague to "make sure that any of our shareable deliverables or insights docs that you own on the mental well-being space are locked down," according to the lawsuit.

Multiple researchers raised concerns internally about the practice, the suit states, with one writing in late 2021 that "this is a huge moral hazard, in my opinion." Another Meta employee allegedly responded by saying, "(a)greed!"

"Meta's internal culture of secrecy regarding Meta's harms to Young People was and is designed to keep consumers — including Young Users and their parents and guardians — in the dark about the harms Instagram causes to Young People," the suit states.

The Attorney General's Office said Meta has until Jan. 19 to file a response to its complaint.



By Glenn Russell/VTDigger

Attorney General Charity Clark speaking during a press conference at the Statehouse.



By Zach Godwin/Killington Resort

A group of PSIA members and trainers smile and wave from the slopes of Killington last week.

## ← PSIA:

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Over the five-day event, there are clinics and opportunities for alpine skiing, snowboarding and telemarking, as well as programs specific to teaching children and adaptive athletes. There are also opportunities to participate in assessments to demonstrate skillfulness and earn certifications.

"It's great to host an event of this magnitude at Killington," said Dave Beckwith, Killington's director of golf and snowsports. "There's a lot of history and legacy tied to it, and it's an unparalleled opportunity for pros to gather, learn from each other, and progress snowsports instruction as a whole."

While they're here, the snowsports pros mainly spend their time on snow, learning from one of the 200 professional teachers that have achieved the highest level of education from the PSIA-AASI and earned a spot on their education staff through a tryout process. Some of the groups have a skiing or riding focus and some have a teaching focus. Others are preparing to take an assessment in the future. Although you do not need to be certified to participate in ProJam, most participants have already achieved level I, II or III certification.

In addition to the on-snow events, participants have the opportunity to attend educational presentations on topics such as biomechanics or yoga. The PSIA-AASI also holds its annual membership meeting, an awards ceremony for dedicated snow-

sports professionals and a fundraiser for its education foundation. The whole event is a big community gathering and many of the participants look forward to seeing each other year after year.

"Some people have been coming for nearly 30 years," Brennan says. "It's their snowsports family. They might see these people only once a year, but they see them

"There's a lot of history and legacy tied to it, and it's an unparalleled opportunity for pros to gather, learn from each other, and progress snowsports instruction as a whole," said Beckwith.

every year. There's a real sense of community you can feel, it's very cool."

After the week of training, the pros head back home ready to teach and excited for the season to come.

Brennan encourages anyone considering trying to ski or snowboard to take advantage of the knowledge available. "Taking a lesson from an instructor is going to improve your experience at the mountain," she said. "Whether they're certified member of the PSIA-AASI or not, all instructors are really passionate about what they do and ready to help you improve your skills. We are already looking forward to returning to Killington next year for this great event and continuing to improve our own teaching skills."



← **Flooding:**  
from page 1

inary reports from Quechee were the highest at 2.9 inches.)

The heavy rainfall was exacerbated by a number of factors, Neiles said: high temperatures, an abundance of fresh snow and frozen ground that could not absorb runoff. “Rainfall on top of snowpack is usually not a good thing,” she said.

At a press conference late Monday afternoon, Gov. Phil Scott said that while the state was prepared, the extent of the flooding was unexpected.

“But it hit me by surprise,” he said. “I knew there was going to be an increased, elevated amount of rain today — and the snow melt we knew was going to be a problem — but we didn’t expect this elevation to the amount of water that we’re seeing right now.”

“As we continue the recovery from this summer’s flooding, I know this is the last thing Vermonters want to see right now — and especially during the holiday season,” Scott continued.

“Many of the places that were impacted in July are currently experiencing flooding once again,” he said. “So for them... it’s a real gut punch.”

Killington, which suffered severe damages in the July flooding, particularly in the area of East Mountain Road, fared ok this time, Town Manager Michael Ramsey reported.

“The town had a few road closures due to the flooding, but overall, our infrastructure held up well,” he said. “Crews were diligent about keeping culverts clear of debris, and the most



By Jerry LeBlond  
*Aspirations for a white Christmas evaporated early this week when coastal storm rainfall and melting snowpack swelled the White River in Rochester flooding the fields surrounding Chantreafield Farm off River Brook Drive.*

serious problems we experienced were muddy roads, minor flooding in low areas, and manageable erosion.”

Elsewhere folks were not as lucky. As of 5 p.m., at least three rescue operations, according to Public Safety Commissioner Jennifer Morrison. In Moretown, the Elementary School flooded and some residents were told to evacuate.

Agency of Education spokesperson Ted Fisher said many schools and supervisory unions called for early dismissals

Monday— the majority were located in Washington, Orange and Windsor counties. Mountain Views School district, serving the towns of Barnard, Bridgewater, Killington, Plymouth, Pomfret, Reading and Woodstock, closed at noon.

Secretary of Transportation Joe Flynn reported that 15 state roads were fully closed and 34 were partially closed. He said the Agency of Transportation had heard from 10 municipalities experiencing problems with local roads but had not received formal requests for assistance.

Amtrak and Cape Air in Rutland suspended operations to and from Vermont, Flynn said.

*VT Digger contributed to this reporting.*



By Jerry LeBlond  
*Melting snowpack swelled the White River in Rochester flooding the fields surrounding North Hollow Farm and closing Route 100 north to Hancock.*

← **Trees:**  
from page 1

spokesperson for the National Christmas Tree Association, said.

Given the long growing period of trees, the effects of financial crises that happened years ago can still be visible in the industry.

“The start of the issues that we’re experiencing now started all the way back with the recession in 2008, and at that time there was an oversupply, and the economy wasn’t good, and a lot of tree growers were having a hard time selling their trees. And because of that many weren’t planting as many (trees) as they normally do,” Sidebottom said.

However, the limited supply is not only due to financial ebbs and flows but also a potential increase in demand for the real thing. According to a survey by the Real Christmas Tree Board, a program sponsored by the U.S. Dept. of Agriculture to promote the use of real trees, 20% of respondents this year were planning to buy a real tree for the first time.

According to Horst and some tree farm owners, there is also growing interest among families in the cut-your-own tree experience in Vermont.

“It’s just the trend of, and I think it started especially during Covid, that people like to get outside and do things,” said Jack Manix, owner of Walker Farm’s Elysian Hills in Dummerston. “You go outside and we have hot cider and popcorn and cookies and all kinds of stuff like that, and it’s like a little event”

While Manix expects to be open until Christmas Eve, others, such as Isham Family Farm in Williston and White Trees in Jericho, have already closed for the season. That’s not unusual for this time in December, said White Trees’ owner Bob White.

“Everybody wants to cut their own trees — that’s typical. It’s a struggle to find a place to go this time of year. You could find a hundred farms — we all sell out pretty much, that I know of,” he said.

During the interview, White had to pause to send numerous customers away. When asked where to, he said: “There’s nowhere else to send.”

White said that he needs to be judicious about how much he cuts to keep sales consistent from year to year. “If we cut all in one year, it will take four or five years before we open again,” he said.

While the supply may be more plentiful again in the near term, the future of the local industry remains precarious for other reasons. White’s farm, for example, is on a floodplain.

“If (a flood) happens in the spring or fall that doesn’t bother me at all,” he said. But when Tropical Storm Irene hit in late August 2011, “we lost half the farm and it took eight or 10 years to recover from that,” White said.

Apart from a changing climate, the long cycles in the Christmas tree industry pose a real problem for Vermont’s aging population, as new farmers can only begin selling trees after

four to five years. “Assuming you’re planting on an annual basis, you got ever-increasing expenses and no income coming in,” Horst explained. “Over the last several years there have been people to some extent leaving the industry, primarily because of age, and no one to take over.”

On top of that, the land available is limited, making it difficult to get into the

industry, and also to expand to keep up with demand. “I’d love to plant a lot more trees (but) there’s no land available because I can’t bet against housing projects. Housing projects win every time,” White said. “We only grow X amount of trees, and the demand has grown. ... So we do the best we can but we aren’t going to make it to Christmas anymore.”



By Glenn Russell/VT Digger  
*Mike Isham wraps a freshly cut Christmas tree at the Isham Family Farm in Williston on Tuesday — the last day he was open for the season.*



Courtesy of Vermont Fish and Wildlife

A trapper sets a trap for beaver during Vermont's winter beaver trapping season, which runs Oct. 28, 2023 – March 31, 2024.

## USDA grant to VTSU will expand educational opportunities and improve workforce development

Earlier this month, \$635,465 in federal grant funding was awarded to Vermont State University (VTSU) to expand educational opportunities and workforce development in rural communities. The grant is authorized through the USDA's Distance Learning & Telemedicine (DLT) grant program, which provides rural communities with key resources to access advanced telecommunications technology and promote more opportunities in rural America.

"This grant from the USDA will be a game-changer in expanding access to learning opportunities for students of all types in Vermont's rural communities. Importantly, it will enable Vermont State University to enhance telepresence classroom technology, helping Vermont learners take advantage of VTSU's offerings and jumpstart their education," said Senator Peter Welch (D-Vermont). "I applaud the USDA for their continued commitment to investing in the education of rural students and developing our workforce here in Vermont."

"Accessibility in rural higher education is absolutely critical to the success of our students, especially those juggling work demands and other obligations as they work towards their degrees. Vermont State University is proud to be a model for hybrid education which allows learners of all ages and backgrounds greater flexibility and options that meet both their learning styles and family circumstances... Very importantly, we are better positioned to support the state's workforce needs in high-demand areas like nursing and connect with our high school dual-enrollment, early college students," said Dr. David Bergh, president of VTSU.

VTSU will use this grant to benefit nearly 6,000 students by enhancing telecommunications equipment for new learning sites and investing in new state-of-the-art software to assist teacher-student engagement, the university stated.

## Dept. of Forests, Parks and Recreation is accepting applications for the recreational trails program

Want to build or improve a recreational trail in your Vermont community? The Vermont Dept. of Forests, Parks, and Recreation (FPR) invites municipalities, non-profits, and other governmental entities to apply for funding through the Recreational Trails Program. In 2024, FPR will award approximately \$500,000, funded through the Federal Highways Administration, to build and maintain trails across the state.

Over the past 15 years, the Recreational Trails Program, or RTP, has provided almost \$8.5 million in competitive grants to Vermont communities for the development and maintenance of public trails, for both motorized and non-motorized recreation.

"One of the benefits of the RTP grant program is that it supports so many ways for people to get outside," said FPR Outdoor Recreation Program Manager Claire Polfus. "Whether you mountain bike, walk, bird-watch, snowmobile, ski, or do any other activity outside on trails, this grant can help create new trails to explore, rehabilitate existing trails so they are more resilient to extreme weather events and high use, and maintain well-loved trails so that your favorite places to get outside can remain open and accessible."

Pre-applications for the RTP grants are open through Dec. 30. Email: ANR.FPRRecreationGrants@vermont.gov.

## Despite objections, Fish & Wildlife Board moves ahead with new rules for hunting and trapping

By Emma Cotton/VTDigger

On Thursday evening, Dec. 14, members of the Fish & Wildlife Board voted unanimously to approve new rules for trapping and hunting. Recent laws required the board to create the rules, which were intended to make the activities safer for wildlife, pets and people.

Earlier on Thursday, a group of lawmakers on the Legislative Committee on Administrative Rules (LCAR), which is charged with approving state regulations, voted to formally object to four subsections of the new rules, contending that they didn't meet all of the obligations of two recently passed laws. Lawmakers had already approved the remainder of the rules at a meeting last month.

The objections, which the body will submit to the Secretary of State's office to be certified, leave a stain on the rules that could make the Department of Fish & Wildlife vulnerable to lawsuits. And a local wildlife advocacy group has already said it plans to challenge the rules in court.

In Vermont, the Fish & Wildlife Board, made up of citizens appointed by the governor, creates and approves rules for hunting and trapping, while the Fish & Wildlife Department implements and enforces those rules.

The movement to instate stricter regulations on trapping animals and hunting coyotes with dogs has been hugely controversial among wildlife advocates and hunters.

Wildlife advocates have long criticized the Fish & Wildlife Board and its process, calling it uncooperative and resistant to lawmakers who want to tighten hunting and trapping regulations.

Meanwhile, hunters have expressed concern that lawmakers and wildlife advocates are angling to ban the activities altogether.

"Just jumping back to where these bills started, these were bans — 'there

A key legislative committee contended that some of the changes don't comply with state law, leaving the Department of Fish & Wildlife vulnerable to lawsuits.

will be no hunting coyote with dogs.' 'There will be no more trapping,'" Chris Bradley, Vermont Federation of Sportsmen's Clubs, told VTDigger.

Act 159, which passed in 2022, required the department to make trapping practices more humane by updating the allowed types of traps, techniques that can be used, locations where traps can be set and ways trapped animals can be killed.

Lawmakers took issue with the final trapping rules for three reasons. In the first instance, lawmakers objected to the addition of the word "hunt" to the definition of trapping, arguing that it could give the activity new protection in the Vermont Constitution, which

protects hunting.

In the second instance, lawmakers objected to the board's definition of a "public trail," near which trapping is restricted. They argued that it should be expanded to "all trails where persons may reasonably be expected to recreate."

While the rule prohibits traps from being set near trails and public areas, it exempts traps set under water and under ice. In the third instance, lawmakers objected to the exemption, arguing that traps under water could still cause danger to people and pets.

Currently, the act of hunting coyotes with dogs is not regulated in Vermont. Among several requirements, Act 165, which passed in 2022, mandated new regulations that would require hunters to have more control of dogs that pursue coyotes.

The law called for rules that require hunters to reduce the risk that dogs would "enter onto land that is posted against hunting, enter onto land where pursuit of coyote with dogs is not authorized, harass or harm people or domestic animals, and cause other unintentional damages to people or property."

It also created a moratorium on hunting coyotes with dogs until rules are created.

Lawmakers say the new rules don't guarantee that hunters would have

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## Delegation announces \$1 million in grants to improve, expand rail service

The Vermont Congressional Delegation, Senator Bernie Sanders (I-Vermont), Senator Peter Welch (D-Vermont), and Representative Becca Balint (D-Vermont), announced Dec. 11 that the Vermont Agency of Transportation (VTrans) will receive a combined \$1 million to develop long-range plans to improve existing passenger rail services and expand services in Vermont from the Department of Transportation (DOT). This funding will be used to identify and plan for projects that will compete for Federal Railroad Administration grants under the Corridor Identification Program.

“This investment in the continued development of Vermont’s rail service will help connect our communities to new opportunity through improved and expanded service and strengthen our economy by making tourism and

business travel easier between Vermont, neighboring states, and Quebec, the state’s largest trading partner. We look forward to implementing these investments and will continue our push to improve Amtrak services across the state, between states, and between Vermont and Canada, and streamline the preclearance process,” stated the Vermont Delegation.

Provided through the FY22 Corridor Identification and Development program, the grants will help develop and enhance domestic and international Amtrak travel to Vermont. The Vermonter Corridor Project will assess project needs to improve existing Amtrak Vermonter service between major east coast travel hubs including improving reliability, and extending service to Montreal, Quebec, Canada. The Green Mountain Corridor project will include planning and

assessing project needs for establishing passenger rail to communities in southwestern Vermont through the Ethan Allen Express.

In September, the Vermont Congressional Delegation called on Amtrak to work with the delegation to expand rail service in Vermont, which included a request to improve preclearance operations and construct new preclearance facilities between Vermont and Quebec.

Congress authorized Amtrak to expand preclearance operations to allow rail activities in Canada in 2016 through the Promoting Travel, Commerce, and National Security Act. Logistical and operational obstacles have hindered the full implementation of preclearance activities between the United States and Canada, and a preclearance facility in Montreal Central Station has not been finished to-date.

## Legislative preview presentations further inform business priorities

In advance of the 2024 legislative session, the Vermont Chamber of Commerce reintroduced its annual Legislative Preview Presentation series to provide guidance on the business priorities for the session and provide information on legislative activities and advocacy opportunities. This series creates opportunities for business leaders to engage with the Vermont Chamber advocacy team to discuss policy concerns around Vermont and inform the business agenda.

Middle-income housing was at the forefront of each event, specifically, the need to modernize Act 250, reduce cost and time barriers for private developers, invest in local infrastructure, and create incentives for the adaptive reuse of vacant buildings. Workforce recruitment and retention also remained a foundational concern that is intertwined with all other top priorities. Businesses statewide understand that to create a stronger Vermont economy, we must leverage strategies to meet the need to increase Vermont’s population to 802,000 by 2035.

Affordability was an ongoing concern collectively shared by the Vermont business community. Weighing new tax proposals against existing tax and cost burdens would create a Vermont business climate that allows time for the cost burden of recent years to be implemented and absorbed. Simultaneous-

ly, the business climate is being impacted by the uptick in public and employee safety concerns and retail theft. The repercussions of the negative press that this generates for Vermont further impact our visitor economy.

Local chambers of commerce and business associations hosted the Vermont Chamber’s advocacy team in Addison, Bennington, Chittenden, Lamoille, and Rutland County. Each event featured a presentation on policy opportunities and pressures expected in the upcoming session and a robust discussion.

“We are grateful for the continued partnerships with local business organizations and opportunities to bring together regional business communities for robust policy discussions,” said Megan Sullivan, vice president of government affairs for the Vermont Chamber. “Following these events, it’s clear that there are common themes that are impacting businesses across Vermont regardless of differences in geography, industry, or size.”

The Legislative Preview Presentations facilitated connections with hundreds of business leaders across the state of Vermont throughout November and December 2023. Business leaders in attendance gained in-depth insights into the legislative landscape and strengthened their advocacy skills to effectively influence policies that drive business growth.



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## GUEST EDITORIAL

## Sticker shock!

Understanding the Dec. 1 property tax letter

By Kathleen James

*Editor's note: Rep. Kathleen James, D-Manchester, serves as assistant majority leader in the Vermont House.*

On the last day of November, the annual "Dec. 1 Letter" was published by the Vermont Department of Taxes.

This year's letter landed with a bang, as Tax Commissioner Craig Bolio predicted that Vermonters might see an average 18.5% increase in their property tax bills.

Fueled by an accompanying press release from Gov. Phil Scott, the news caught fire on social media. And why wouldn't it? Many Vermonters are struggling to stay afloat, and very few can afford that kind of tax hike.

While the letter created scary headlines, it's important for Vermonters to understand what the Dec. 1 letter is — and what it isn't.

Required by law, the annual memo provides a very preliminary take on property tax rates for the coming year. It's based on early budget estimates submitted by school districts across Vermont.

The memo also takes projected revenues into account, and it assumes that the legislature will do nothing — take no action whatsoever — to bring down the rates.

To be blunt, the Dec. 1 letter can also be a political exercise, a chance for the administration to land a few punches and try to shape the public debate. It's a memo that delivers some useful stats while kicking off a months-long policy conversation. But it's not much more than that.

So how and when are property tax rates set?

It's a complicated process, but the first and most important factor is school budgets. These are controlled at the local level, and it's up to Vermont voters — to all of us — to consider, debate and approve these budgets every March.

From district to district, this process is just getting underway. In my community, for example, the Taconic and Green board just held its first public budget discussion. Faced with rising costs — many of which are beyond their control — they're considering cutting classroom teachers and instructional staff to hold the budget increase under 10%. That's lower than many districts: Statewide, the Dec. 1 letter says school spending is estimated to go up by about 12%.

Why is school spending up?

Several reasons, including a 16% increase in the cost of health care benefits for employees; inflation that's increased the cost of everything, from fuel to equipment; and the cost of debt service and construction as communities are forced to replace, renovate and maintain Vermont's aging school buildings. The updated "pupil weights" are also kicking in — a necessary, long-overdue and equitable update to the way we account for the cost of educating different kinds of students, including rural, low-income and English language learners.

Another key factor: Federal Covid relief funds are ending. Many schools used these one-time dollars to add new staff and services that kids needed during the pandemic and still desperately need today. Schools deliver much more than

While the letter created scary headlines, it's important for Vermonters to understand what the Dec. 1 letter is — and what it isn't.

Sticker shock → 14



The First Step by Pat Byrnes, PoliticalCartoons

## LETTERS

## The reality about hunting and trapping

Dear Editor,

A recent commentary by an anti-hunting activist took their standard track in denying the value of the sporting community to wildlife stewardship in Vermont. It is intriguing that this handful of activists has the hubris to claim that they speak for the general public. They don't. They speak for themselves. If they spoke for the general public, it wouldn't be the same dozen people writing all the commentaries we have been subjected to for the last eight years.

As of 2020, Vermont ranked 14th in the nation for hunting participation. About 10% of Vermonters purchase a hunting license annually. They all have friends, neighbors and family who support them in their lifestyle. Those license purchases provide millions in direct revenue from that small portion of the population, which helps secure our federal funding for wildlife. This funding is generated by excise taxes on the equipment hunters buy to hunt with, and these funds can only be drawn down when license revenues

are used for legitimate fish and wildlife stewardship work. Without these license sales, Vermont stands to lose millions of dollars in funding that secures the health and stewardship of our wildlife.

I expect the numbers

About 10% of Vermonters purchase a hunting license annually.

above dramatically undercut the Vermonters who participate in hunting. That is because we have a large share of the population which has either lifetime licenses or permanent licenses and I don't believe either are counted in the above stat. So our ranking is likely considerably above 14th when you consider how much of our population is participating but not buying the regular licenses. Of course, they still contribute to the federal monies.

Why do those opposed to hunting and trapping ignore this reality? The answer is simple really. They don't actually care about wildlife, they just care about removing human influence from

wildlife. They dislike the fact that we hunt and utilize wild game and they are perfectly willing to throw the baby out with the bathwater.

How do they propose to pay for wildlife management in the absence of this small community that does so

much for our state? We all know too well the tax burden that comes with living in Vermont. Would we like to see

higher taxes, or should we simply do away with the Fish and Wildlife department that these activists constantly malign as incompetent and biased?

They claim Vermont is undergoing a cultural shift that leaves hunting and trapping in the past and when we point out that these activities are a crucial part of the fabric of our state from both a cultural and biological perspective, we are gaslighted and told that "Vermont's culture is evolving," and the hunting community is somehow a relic of a bygone era and has no place in the modern world, but license sales recently reached a 30-year high. Animal rights activists misuse phrases like "Species Hunting, trapping → 16

## School safety has eroded

Dear Editor,

As concerned parents, my husband and I have recently removed a child from a local school for his safety as the bullying, harassment and constant safety issues have risen and are not being dealt with. Schools are supposed to be safe places for our children to gain an education.

As parents we put our trust in the schools to provide this. When constant emails come home about lock downs, fights, and other issues what are we to do? Send our children to an unsafe place where they are put at risk?

I'm sorry, but I refuse to do so.

It's time for the parents to step up and be heard. As well as the children who feel that they can't get their education safely.

There are people who care ready and willing to listen. Anyone who would like to be heard please email tdddad@yahoo.com. We are working with state representatives to make sure this happens.

Trinkett Tanner,  
Whiting

## CAPITOL QUOTES

Sandra Day O'Connor, the first woman to serve as a U.S. Supreme Court justice, died Dec. 1 at age 93. A funeral was held for her on Dec. 19.

**“She lived and breathed the notion that every citizen has a duty to understand how our democracy and how our government works and has to be part of the process, has to contribute to it. She believed that from the earliest part of her career, and she lived that principle throughout her life,”**

Jay O'Connor, her son, said.

**“Announcing her nomination earlier that summer, President Reagan described her as — and I quote — ‘a person of all seasons.’ And it was a person for all seasons that we saw at this hearing and the Americans and the world would see through her extraordinary service as a justice, and I might add as a citizen: Gracious and wise, civil and principled. Sandra Day O'Connor, the daughter of the American West, was a pioneer in her own right, breaking down the barriers of legal and political worlds and the nation’s consciousness,”**

President Joe Biden said.

**“The nation was well served by the steady hand and intellect of a justice who never lost sight of how the law affected ordinary people,”**

Justice Sonia Sotomayor said.

**“The minute I was confirmed and on the court, states across the country started putting more women ... on their Supreme Court. And it made a difference in the acceptance of young women as lawyers. It opened doors for them,”**

Sandra Day O'Connor said during her tenure.

## COMMENTARY

# More nursing seats are coming to Vermont State University

By Sarah Billings-Berg, VTSU dean of nursing and health sciences

Ready for some good news about nursing in Vermont? I bet you are. I know, reports haven't always focused on the good news. As recently as last year, news reports focused on nurses retiring, how we don't have personnel or facilities to educate new nurses, the high cost of education and how all these factors plus burnout resulted in a shortage of nurses in Vermont and across the country. This leads to the use of expensive traveling nurses to provide essential staffing in our hospitals and community care settings. In short, the news focused on the problems with developing and maintaining our nursing workforce in Vermont.

Here's the new picture: Vermonters listened to those reports and took action. Our lawmakers, governor, employers and education leaders—at the state and national levels—went to work on breaking down barriers to educating more nurses and invested in new initiatives and creative solutions to make it easier.

As a result, I get to share some really good news about what Vermont has been able to accomplish—the net result is that we will be able to enroll more than 50% more nursing students in Vermont State University

(VTSU) nursing programs within the next three years. When this expansion is fully realized, we'll have nearly 1,000 nursing students in our programs at a given time, paving the way for future caregivers who are desperately needed here.

How does that happen?

First, more than \$6 million in Congressionally directed spending funds secured by Senator Patrick Leahy is going to build more VTSU nursing classroom spaces. Funds will be used to create more facilities to educate students for practice in clinical settings, such as improved labs in our existing Lyndon campus settings and brand-new classrooms in Williston and Johnson. These spaces feature new technology, like a virtual reality immersion room for students to learn clinical judgement in a virtual hospital room, and equipment and software to run full interactive simulations.

At our Castleton campus, we were able to create a full telepresence classroom, which will particularly help our practical nursing and associate degree nursing programs who learn with multiple classrooms connected to one instructor. We owe a special thanks to

Nurshing at VTSU → 14

## It's time to change how and why we name things after people

By Lucie Lehmann

*Editor's Note: Lucie Lehmann of South Burlington is a former state director for now-retired U.S. Sen. Barbara A. Mikulski of Maryland. She is a member of the board of the Green Mountain Audubon Society.*

Just in time for the gift giving season comes word of yet another honor bestowed on retired senator Patrick Leahy: The Leahy Institute for Rural Partnerships at the University of Vermont.

I admire Sen. Leahy. His contributions to Vermont are legion, beginning with all the federal aid that he steered here and that has more than a little to do with why Vermont is tattooed with his name.

But enough is enough. If we are going to honor individuals by naming things after them, we need to be more inclusive and include people who don't already have dozens of things named after them, including an airport and a science center.

I'm certain that Leahy never asked for any of his honors, but I do wonder whether he considered refusing them. My old boss, retired Sen. Barbara A. Mikulski, D-Md., as revered in Maryland as Leahy is here, said no to every single proposal we received — and there were a lot. She didn't want to be honored for doing her job when millions of others went unrecognized in theirs.

We can debate whether or not public servants should be honored on monuments that taxpayers pay for. What isn't debatable is that we need more diversity in our honorees.

Just 6% of statues in the U.S. represent real women, according to University of Washington-La Crosse Art Professor Sierra Rooney. Monument Lab, a public art and history nonprofit, reports that in 2021 less than 1% of statues, plaques and parks in the U.S. were named for people of color. Martin Luther King Jr. may have over 1,000 streets named after him, but he is the exception that exposes just how dismally thin the ranks are.

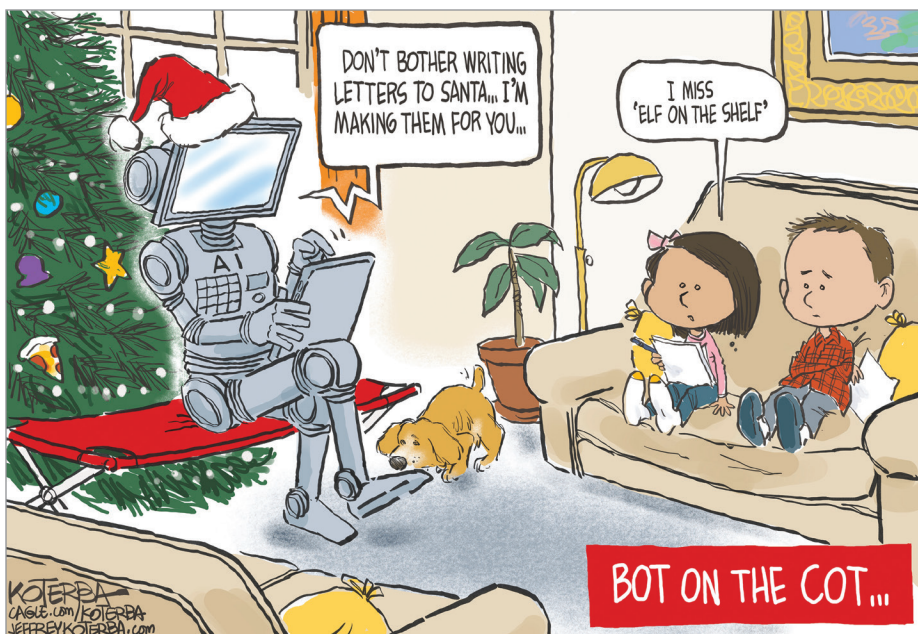
The announcement of Leahy's new honor contrasts with the American Ornithological Society's recent decision to “change all English bird names currently named after people within its geographic jurisdiction.” It did this both to redress exclusionary, misogynistic and racist naming practices and to intentionally make birding and conservation more inclusive,

Names → 17

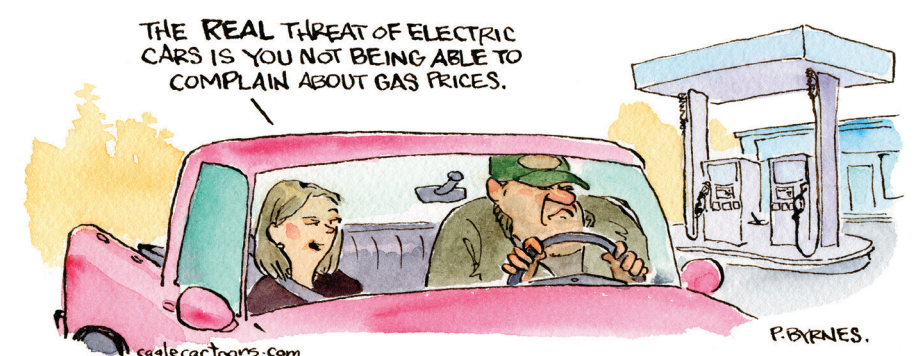
CARTOONS



KING CLAUS by Angel Boligan, El Universal, Mexico City



Not the Elf of the Shelf by Jeff Koterba, patreon.com



The Real Reason by Pat Byrnes, PoliticalCartoons

← Sticker shock:

from page 12

academics these days. Increasingly, they're expected to provide a wide range of mental health, social and emotional supports that help our kids in complex times.

District to district, school boards are facing these tough facts. They'll be working hard to build responsible budgets that meet the very real needs of our students, families and schools while balancing that cost against Vermonters' ability to pay. Now's a good time for voters who care about schools, and care about taxes, to get involved.

So what happens after Town Meeting Day, when school boards and voters have all had their say? That's when the legislature takes action.

Every spring, we crunch the numbers and set property tax rates in the annual "yield" bill. We're obligated to raise enough money to cover the sum total of Vermont's voter-approved budgets, plus other Education Fund expenses like school meals, transportation and special education.

Property taxes ... only contribute about 67%.

Important fact: The tax rate we pass in April rarely matches the rate predicted in the Dec. 1 letter. That's because we have a lot of legislative policy levers to pull, like using reserves or other revenues to bring down the property tax rates. (While property taxes are an important revenue source for the Education Fund, they only contribute about 67%. Schools are also supported by our state sales and use tax, rooms and meals tax, vehicle purchase tax and lottery revenues.)

Vermont has a long tradition of local control. We trust our school boards to deliver budgets that balance competing needs, and we trust voters to decide on these budgets. As the 2024 legislative session unfolds, we'll be taking a similar approach in the Statehouse. Our goal is to follow a path that supports taxpayers while also supporting schools ... the heart and soul of our communities.

← Nursing at VTSU:

from page 13

Senator Leahy and our entire delegation for working to bring more resources for nursing to Vermont.

We also thank the Vermont legislature and Governor Scott—first for providing funding in the amount of \$800,000 that made acquisition of new simulation equipment possible at VTSU. Items such as additional low-, medium- and high-fidelity human patient simulators, lab equipment, beds, headwalls, IV pumps, code carts, defibrillators and furniture allow our students the state-of-the-art learning experience they deserve. Lawmakers previously created forgivable loan programs to support nursing students who choose to work in Vermont.

Support from state leaders and the agency of human services will also allow us to enroll more students in master's-level programs to become nurse educators, who are essential for educating more nurses. The state also allotted more than \$3 million to create scholarships, administered through VSAC, for nursing faculty candidates. Thanks to all our elected officials who listened to their community and helped us overcome obstacles to creating a pipeline for the nursing workforce because it's paying off and it's exactly the way we'll begin to turn the tide on our workforce shortage.

Partnerships with employers have also eased the path to becoming a nurse. Local hospitals and other employers have provided funding and employee flexibility for programs that create opportunities for students to work and learn at the same time. For example, a program run through a partnership between VTSU, Community College of Vermont (CCV) and University of Vermont Health Network's Central Vermont Medical Center (CVMC) allows a student to work full-time to retain full-time salary

and benefits while studying to become a Licensed Practical Nurse. Their pre-requisite courses are completed at CCV in year one. Students are then able to apply for admission at VTSU's Practical Nursing program and begin that coursework in year two. Academically-eligible students then have the option to advance through the Direct Progression for their Associate's Degree in Nursing to become a Registered Nurse. These programs allow the students to study to advance their careers with a RN—all while working full-time with a flexible working schedule and supportive environment through their employer at CVMC. Students are able to complete some of the coursework and clinicals onsite at CVMC, which reduces the barriers for access to transportation. Apprenticeship opportunities abound at other hospitals and facilities in every corner of the state. Truly good news for both students and their employers.

Want even more good news? You got it. These hundreds of new students are entering a program with proven success. I'm filled with so much pride to share that our nursing students at all levels passed their National Council Licensure Examinations (NCLEX®) at a significantly higher rate than the national average. The exams assess critical thinking and clinical judgement skills students learned in nursing school, so it's a testament to our VTSU programs that nearly all of our graduates passed on the first attempt—whether they were testing at the practical nursing or RN level. I am so proud of our students and faculty and so eager to welcome even more of them to our campus community.

Thank you, Vermont for contributing to our advancements, our success, our increasingly good news. Our students look forward to taking care of you when you most need it.

**WORDPLAY**

ENTERTAINING WORD SEARCH

Find the words hidden vertically, horizontally, diagonally and backwards

I P T R I Y R C M B P A R T Y T S O H T  
 G E A T V V G T S I L T S E U G G N Y L  
 S N F V S A E N Y E M B I L G C I S U M Y  
 C T M L P I D M I Y I O A O M R M A G Y E  
 L E G H D R L O E T E I S C U P U F H E  
 O R R D V R E Y H R S P P F B H M P T I  
 P T A E O T N C A G I O E I O N G I P U  
 S A Y F D O T S E L M Y H M R N V A D A  
 E I S S R N F C M P P C E D I N O A V I  
 H N I L S A E V R S T H L N I O U G E O  
 S V O E U R B T R I T I N E R A R Y S A  
 I B B F B P E M R M L A O O P V C E C H  
 D T O Y M E I G D A L G V N A Y N T S S  
 G E T A E F V S R P B E E C R I I T G P  
 N L G P Y A O E U A R U F L R V Y N V S  
 I A I M V H A A R N H N L T I F D S G D  
 F V F H E N R I I A E C C T V D R I L M  
 A L T N V U S G F B G M I C A A B B L M  
 H H V L U U H O P B M E G Y L H V M C S  
 C M C I M T E H U G S R S R A O B V L A

ACTIVITIES  
 ARRIVAL  
 BARTENDER  
 BEVERAGES  
 CHAFING DISHES

CHARGERS  
 ENTERTAIN  
 FOOD  
 GIFT  
 GUEST LIST

HOME  
 HOSTING  
 INVITE  
 ITINERARY  
 MENU

MUSIC  
 OVERNIGHT  
 PARTY  
 PLANNING  
 PLAYLIST

RECEPTION  
 RSVP  
 VALET

**CROSSWORD PUZZLE**

Solutions → 25

**CLUES ACROSS**

- 1. Droops
- 5. Subatomic particle
- 10. Not in danger
- 14. Nursemaid
- 15. Black band worn in mourning
- 16. Long song in opera
- 17. Edible seed of a Philippine tree
- 18. Chicago political family
- 19. Pursues pleasure from one place to another
- 20. Appetizer
- 22. Hill (Celtic)
- 23. Simple shoe
- 24. Songs to one you love
- 27. Secret activities
- 30. Upset
- 31. Popular hot drink
- 32. Body art (slang)
- 35. Fired
- 37. Blood relation
- 38. Identical
- 39. Porticos
- 40. Partner to cheese
- 41. Type of sword
- 42. Enough (archaic)
- 43. Surface layer of ground
- 44. Cotton fabric woven like satin
- 45. Choose for a post
- 46. Father
- 47. Tell on
- 48. Indian title of respect
- 49. Fonts
- 52. Fencing sword
- 55. Mock
- 56. Vaccine developer

- 60. Atmosphere surrounding a person or place
- 61. Marten with a short tail
- 63. Chinese temple
- 64. Invests in little enterprises
- 65. Popular cut of meat
- 66. Charity
- 67. Iron-containing compound
- 68. River in Northern Europe
- 69. One point east of southeast

**CLUES DOWN**

- 1. Exhausts
- 2. Genus of fish related to gars
- 3. Impudent behavior
- 4. Adherents to Islam
- 5. They come after A
- 6. Spoke
- 7. Room to receive guests
- 8. About opera
- 9. End-blown flute
- 10. Heroic tales
- 11. Member of a Semitic people
- 12. Dog's name
- 13. Opposite of west
- 21. Political divisions in ancient Greece
- 23. Ocean
- 25. Cool!
- 26. Young woman about to enter society
- 27. One from central Caucasus

1	2	3	4		5	6	7	8	9		10	11	12	13
14					15						16			
17					18						19			
20				21		22				23				
			24		25				26					
27	28	29		30				31			32	33	34	
35			36				37				38			
39						40				41				
42					43				44					
45				46				47			48			
			49					50			51			
52	53	54				55				56		57	58	59
60					61				62		63			
64					65						66			
67					68						69			

- 28. Indian city
- 29. A way to serve ice cream
- 32. Emaciation
- 33. Escort aircraft carrier
- 34. Italian city
- 36. Mythical settler of Kansas
- 37. Unhappy
- 38. High schoolers' test
- 40. Measured in pace
- 41. Satisfies
- 43. Gullible person
- 44. Enclosed space
- 46. Substance used to color something
- 47. Shirt type
- 49. Discover by investigation
- 50. \_\_\_-Castell, makers of pens
- 51. Semitic Sun god
- 52. Grads wear one
- 53. French river
- 54. Part of a cap
- 57. Digestive fluid
- 58. Metrical foot
- 59. Body part
- 61. Very fast airplane
- 62. Supplement with difficulty

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**SUDOKU** Solutions → 21

**How to Play**

Each block is divided by its own matrix of nine cells. The rule for solving Sudoku puzzles are very simple. Each row, column and block, must contain one of the numbers from "1" to "9". No number may appear more than once in any row, column, or block. When you've filled the entire grid the puzzle is solved.

	7					8		
1				9				
9	8	6		3	7			
5	9					1	6	
					4			
	6	8			2			
				4		7		9
				8		6		
8	3			1		2		4

Level: Intermediate

*Guess Who?*

I am an actress born in New York on December 12, 1970. I began my career as a child model and eventually segued into acting. I've been in films with Robert DeNiro, David Bowie, Tom Cruise, and Jennifer Aniston. Much of my work has garnered critical acclaim.

*Answer: Jennifer Connelly*

← **Hunting, trapping:**  
from page 12

of Greatest Conservation Need” (SGCN) as a rallying cry, but they don’t explain that many of our SCGN are abundant. Whitetail deer and snowshoe hare for instance are both classified as such. Their lack of understanding shines through when they make statements such as the assertion that the SGCN list “doesn’t even include” threatened and endangered species. It unequivocally does.

These activists criticize our citizen Fish and Wildlife Board that is informed by biologists from the Department for not being credentialed biologists themselves (which several of them are at any given time), then in the same breath complain that wildlife management isn’t a democratic process. I submit that wildlife management MUST NOT be a democratic process, but rather MUST be guided by science and best practices; of which hunting and trapping have long played a critical role.

These hunting oppo-

nents casually describe the Department as disregarding science because they are not catered to, and like any petulant child they lash out incessantly in hopes of getting their way. If you tell a lie often enough, people will start to believe it, correct? This seems to be the driving theory behind their approach. To violently lash out at everybody who doesn’t simply acquiesce to their ideology.

Sure, we see a never-ending stream of letters to the editor from people who carry a strong hatred of hunters, trappers, and in some cases, Vermont’s rural culture in general. If you look back through them you will find it is a handful of activists who write constantly and have nothing new to say. It is time for those of us who understand how intimately these activities are woven into the fabric of our home to start writing as well.

Their activism takes a prejudiced tone we don’t

tolerate anywhere else in society, and I question why we have tolerated it this long when directed at the hunting and wildlife management communities.

Our fish and wildlife professionals should be freed to focus on the biological needs of our wildlife and determine how to create the best outcomes for our wildlife. Instead, they are constantly subjected to bombardment from these activists that runs the gamut from derision to threats and their time is wasted responding instead of doing the important biological work that the hunting community funds, work that benefits all species. While our biologists deal with this, leadership at the Department has taken a conciliatory posture that has only exacerbated the problem, and if it continues, Vermonters and our wildlife will be the ultimate losers.

*Mike Covey, executive director of the Vermont Traditions Coalition*

← **New rules:**  
from page 10

adequate control over their dogs. While hunters will now be required to put electric collars and GPS devices on their dogs and maintain control over the animals, lawmakers were still concerned that the dogs could be too far from their owners to prevent them from running through posted properties and causing damage.

On Thursday morning, lawmakers argued that the moratorium should not be lifted when the rules take effect, which will happen on Jan. 1, because the new regulation falls short of the law’s requirements.

The Fish & Wildlife Board responded to all of LCAR’s objections in a letter arguing that the rules do meet legislative intent.

At Thursday night’s Fish & Wildlife Board meeting, Chris Herrick, commissioner of the Fish & Wildlife Department, said the department is “looking at our legal options with respect to the moratorium,” implying that he would try to lift it despite LCAR’s objection.

“It’s not as cut and dry as some people want to think it is,” he said.

When a state body can’t agree with LCAR on the final details of a rule, the legislative committee can attach a formal objection. The state body can choose to pass the rule despite that objection, as the board voted to do on Thursday evening.

Hunters will now be required to put electric collars and GPS devices on their dogs.

Then, if a relevant person or group objects to the rule and sues, the burden of proof shifts to the state body — in this case, the Vermont Fish & Wildlife Department — which must then defend itself and prove that it has acted within its legal authority while approving the rule. If it is not successful, a

court could reverse the regulation.

In this case, the entity bringing a lawsuit could be a wildlife advocacy group, according to Patrick Parenteau, professor of law emeritus at

the Vermont Law and Graduate School, who has litigated cases involving wildlife law.

“There is a way for either an individual or an organization representing individuals to challenge these rules,” he said. “There’s hoops that you have to jump through. You have to prove injury, you have to prove a violation of law, et cetera, but there is a way to do it.”

If, for example, a dog is injured or killed in a wildlife trap, a person or group could bring a lawsuit.

If the body submitted a response to LCAR arguing against the objections, the court will weigh that response, and if it’s reasonable, it could help the state’s case. The board’s letter to LCAR outlines such arguments.

Brenna Galdenzi, president of the advocacy group Protect Our Wildlife Vermont, has said the group plans to challenge the rule.



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← **Names:**  
from page 13

especially to a younger generation of birders.

The ornithological society announced that henceforth it will focus on renaming birds to better describe their characteristics, so as to make identification easier. Most people can picture what a Ruby-Throated Hummingbird might look like, whereas a Wilson's Warbler doesn't describe its attributes at all.

By removing all eponymous bird names, rather than selectively deciding which were deemed culturally appropriate for this era, the ornithological society crafted a wise solution that I wish the National Audubon Society had adopted when it decided earlier this year to retain its name.

That it did so after a review sparked by scholar scientist Dr. Drew Lanham and others unearthed not just Audubon's history as a slave owner, but his execrable conservation practices, boggles the mind. Rather than focusing on what it does — champion and protect birds — the organization made it about Audubon's name and brand.

The decision prompted the resignation of three of its national board members and a growing grassroots movement to rename local affiliated chapters, including in Vermont (though official state chapters must keep the name), that I predict will eventually force the national organization to reverse its position.

We don't need to recall only egregious wrongs and obvious historical anachronisms in naming to reconsider how, when, and even if they are appropriate. Many

descriptive names can't be improved upon, like Otter Creek or the Green Mountains. But when we do honor groups or individuals, let's do so thoughtfully and inclusively, rather than elevating one slice of society and ignoring the rest of it.

What if educational institutions developed criteria about when to name buildings and involved their populace, including their faculty, staff, and students, in that process? It could be transformative and might move away from honoring mostly wealthy donors.

And what if towns and cities had nominating commissions that actively solicited and reviewed submissions when there was a naming opportunity? The democratization of the process could provide not just teachable moments, but it could reenergize participation at a local level and engender community pride.

Inviting all voices to have a say would surely yield deserving individuals or groups who otherwise would never be considered, from longtime dedicated community volunteers to trailblazing women and people of color whose contributions have historically been marginalized. I'm not trying to be the Grinch that steals anyone's Christmas, but if we continue to name streets and monuments and buildings after individuals, then we have to care enough not just to insist that honorees represent the diversity of America today, but to become the driving force to make it so.

← **Sheriff Palmer:**  
from page 4

enforcement activity, such as patrols and roadside law enforcement. Greater visibility runs consistent with department re-branding that extends to the expanding fleet of Chevy Tahoe SUVs, sporting new black paint jobs. A redesigned and enlarged uniform insignia highlights Constitution House in Windsor, recognized as the birthplace of the state of Vermont in 1790.

Palmer highlighted community involvement, school visits and other interactions with young people. This "problem solving" ranges from unsafe driving (drivers are being pulled over for traveling more than 100 mph) to assisting families with loved ones who are dealing with substance use disorders. Ludlow's new Divided Sky Residential Recovery Retreat is an "important part of helping people get help," he added.

Palmer said he spent "a ton of money" on officer training. Staff also must meet four times a year with a psychologist, a new requirement that also reduces the stigma of mental health issues.

In his first year on the job, Palmer has doubled the size of the sheriff's department from 10 officers to more than 23 sworn and contractual employees. The department's first canine officer in 20 years will soon join the force after completing training.

"Opiates and violent crimes are concerning trends," he said. The solution could require a regional approach that combines local police departments. Meanwhile, the sheriff's office is working hard to "make a difference." Palmer identified the recent seizure of 19 stolen guns. He also related the story of a suspect who escaped apprehension after ramming a law enforcement vehicle.

"We hunted him for three days. It wasn't like we weren't going to find him — he crashed into my new car." He's now in custody and "three more guns were taken off the streets," the sheriff proudly exclaimed.

Headquartered in Woodstock, the Windsor County Sheriff's Dept. provides direct law enforcement to Barnard, Cavendish, Hartland, Plymouth, Pomfret, Reading, Rochester and Sharon. Founded in 1781, ten years before Vermont had even become a state, the sheriff's department provides a number of other services, including paperwork on behalf of Civil, Small Claims, Probate, Family Courts and individuals.

Ludlow Rotary serves the towns of Cavendish, Ludlow, Mount Holly and Plymouth. The club meets weekly on Tuesdays for lunch at DJ's Restaurant.

In his first year on the job, Palmer has doubled the size of the sheriff's department from 10 officers to more than 23.



## Stay Healthy This Winter

*"This is viral season so having great hand hygiene is key. We want to encourage everyone to stay healthy by washing their hands for at least 20 seconds with soap and water and avoid touching their face at all costs. We also encourage community members to get vaccinated for influenza and COVID. People 60 or older should consult with their provider for the RSV vaccine."*

Nkiruka A. Emeagwali, MS, MD, PhD  
Pulmonary & Critical Care Medicine



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**WEDNESDAY**  
12/20

### Cribbage for Adults

3-5 p.m. Weekly. Hartland Public Library, 153 Route 5, Hartland. Free. Join a group gathering of adult cribbage players at the library's meeting room. hartlandlibraryvt.org or 802-436-2473

### Bone Builders

3:30-4:30 p.m. Chaffee Art Center, 16 South Main St., Rutland. Join us for a Bone Builders event at the Chaffee Art Center in Rutland. Improve your bone health and strength with this informative session. chaffeeartcenter.org

### Zentangle Workshop

4-5:30 p.m. Norman Williams Public Library, 10 The Green, Woodstock. Zentangle is a method of drawing that is easy to learn and relaxing. Drawing a combination of dots, lines, and curves called "tangles" on small pieces of paper called "tiles" is unplanned and free-flowing so you can focus on each stroke. Starter kits will be available (for a \$5 suggested fee). normanwilliams.org

### 24th Annual Homeless Prevention Center

#### Candlelight Vigil

5 p.m. Depot Park, 15 Evelyn St, Rutland. This outdoor event raises awareness about homelessness in Vermont and showcases community efforts to reduce it. Candles and hot beverages will be provided. hpcvt.org.

### Figure Drawing with Live Model

5-7 p.m. Chaffee Art Center, 16 South Main St., Rutland. Bring your own supplies. Minimum students: 4. Sign up for 4 weeks at \$60 or \$20 per class. Enjoy a creative session of figure drawing with a live model. chaffeeartcenter.org

### Amahl & the Night Visitors Opera Perf

5:30 p.m. Salisbury Congregational Church, 853 Maple St., Salisbury. \$10. A heartwarming and poignant production featuring talented performers. Tickets available at barnopera.com/amahl-and-the-night-visitors. barnopera.com/amahl-and-the-night-visitors

### Rutland Young Professionals Annual Give Back MIX

6-8 p.m. Roots, 55 Washington St., Rutland. \$10 donation or a pair of children's snowpants. United Way will be sharing information on their programs and how your donations can make a difference. In a recent survey, United Way found that snow pants are in high demand for local youth. To support them, we encourage you to bring a pair of children's snowpants or make a \$10 donation at the door. rutlandyoungprofessionals.org

## VINS: RIDING WITH RESEARCHERS

SATURDAY 8 AM-4 PM



**THURSDAY**  
12/21

### Riding with Researchers

8 a.m.-4p.m. VINS Nature Center, 149 Natures Way, Quechee. General Public \$125; VINS Members \$112. Ride along with the VINS Research team in the field this winter! Join the VINS Research team for a day-long outing in Addison County, Vermont, in search of wintering raptors. Learn about raptor ecology, behavior, and field identification, and get a firsthand glimpse at the equipment and process used to trap and band hawks. Dress in layers, bring your own snacks and beverages, and be prepared for the weather. Binoculars are recommended. Transportation will be provided. Registration is required. vinsweb.org

### Storytime!

10-11 a.m. Weekly. Fox Room, Rutland Free Library, 10 Court St., Rutland. Free. Promoting early literacy and socialization skills for ages 2-5. No registration required. rutlandfree.org or 802-773-1860

### Toddler Story Time

10:30-11:30 a.m. Weekly. Norman Williams Public Library, 10 The Green, Woodstock. Free. Join us to read a few books on a theme of the week. Enjoy stories, socializing, and often a project tied into the theme. For young children ages 20 months - 3 1/2 years. Duration: 30-60 minutes. normanwilliams.org or 802-457-2295

### Ukulele Group

Noon-1 p.m. Weekly. Chaffee Art Center, 16 So. Main St., Rutland. Free. Musician Steven Wilson leads the group through specific sheet music. All levels welcome. Must pre-register. chaffeeartcenter.square.site or 802-775-0356

### Play Bridge!

2 p.m. Weekly. Norman Williams Public Library, 10 The Green, Woodstock. Free. Beginners are welcome to observe. normanwilliams.org or 802-457-2295

### Knitters Meet-up - Thursdays on the Mezzanine

2-4 p.m. Thursdays. Norman Williams Public Library, 10 The Green, Woodstock. Free. Attention knitters! Join us for a knitting meet-up. All skill levels are welcome. Bring your projects, questions, and patterns. normanwilliams.org

### S.T.E.A.M.

3:30-4:30 p.m. Weekly. Hartland Public Library, 153 Route 5, Hartland. Free. Join us for S.T.E.A.M. and craft activities, something different every week! hartlandlibraryvt.org/calendar/ or 802-436-2473

**FRIDAY**  
12/22

### Artery at Chaffee Art Center

10 a.m.-Noon. Weekly. Chaffee Art Center, 16 So. Main St., Rutland. \$10-\$20. Adult group for connection and inspiration. Painting in all mediums welcome. Participants will work on their own pieces. When possible, a 30-minute focus on technique will be held. Must pre-register. chaffeeartcenter.org or 802-775-0356

### Story Time at the Library

10:30-11:30 am. 2998 River Rd, Killington. Free event for children to enjoy storytelling at the library. sherburnelibrary.org

### Bone Builders

3:30-4:30 p.m. Chaffee Art Center, 16 South Main St., Rutland. Join us for a Bone Builders event at the Chaffee Art Center in Rutland. Improve your bone health and strength with this informative session. chaffeeartcenter.org

### Blue Cat Music Series

6-9 p.m. Fridays through December. Blue Cat Bistro, 575 Main St., Castleton. No cover. Live performances. 802-468-2791

**SATURDAY**  
12/23

### The Vermont Farmers' Market

10 a.m.-2 p.m. Howe Center, Suite 92, 1 Scale Ave. (off Strongs Avenue), Rutland. Free. The Vermont Farmers' Market has moved indoors for the winter. One of the largest and most diverse farmers' markets in Vermont, it was the first to operate 52 weeks out of the year. Find seasonal harvest, winter veggies, handcrafted gifts and more. vtfarmersmarket.org

### Storytime!

10-10:45 a.m. Saturdays. Hartland Public Library, 123 Main St. Free. Themed reading, crafts, experiments, and games for preschool and early elementary aged kids. hartlandlibraryvt.org or 802-436-2473

### Make & Take Saturday Kids Class

10:30-11:30 a.m. (Saturdays) Chaffee Art Center, 16 So. Main St., Rutland. Ages: 6-12. Weekly fun activity featuring arts and crafts. \$15. Min 5 students. Must pre-register. Info: chaffeeartcenter.org

### Rutland Railway Museum & Model Club

11 a.m.-3 p.m. 79 Depot Lane, Center Rutland. Free. Maintained by the Rutland Railway Association, Inc., the historic depot is now a museum that houses an operating HO scale model railroad setup and displays hundreds of rare or antique model trains, photographs, signs and memorabilia saved from an earlier time, including the former Rutland Railroad Caboose #45. rutlandrailway.org

### Drop 'n' Paint

Noon-2 p.m. Chaffee Art Center, 16 So. Main St., Rutland. \$25. All ages. All materials will be set up and ready for you with a choice of 3 images you can paint. Includes use of: canvas, paint, brushes, easel, smock. Youth must be accompanied by an adult. Must pre-register. Info and registration: chaffeeartcenter.org

### Catholic Mass at Our Lady of the Mountains

4:30 p.m. Saturdays. The "Little White Church," 4173 US-4, Killington. Call the church office to confirm mass times, 802-457-2322. (Christmas Eve Mass will be celebrated at 7 p.m. on Sunday, Dec. 24.)

**SUNDAY**  
12/24

### Killington White Church Sunday Service

9 a.m. Sundays. 2326 US-4, Killington White Church. Free event. Join us for our Sunday service. killingtonucc.org Festival of Nine Lessons 9:30 a.m. Brownsville Community Church, 66 Brownsville-Hartland Rd, Brownsville. A special Christmas service featuring an abundance of poinsettias. Info: Email: bcchurchvt@gmail.com. bccvt.org/ Christmas

### Christmas Eve Services at Grace Church

10 a.m. and 8 p.m. at 8 Court St., Rutland. Family-friendly service with music, choir, and children's Christmas pageant. Candlelight evening Service at 8:30 p.m. preceded by a musical prelude at 8 p.m. Enjoy the beauty and comfort of lighting candles and singing "Silent Night" at this festive event. gracechurchvt.org

### West Rutland United Church Celebrates Christmas

10 a.m. 60 Chapel St, West Rutland. Join the Christmas Eve service. ucc.org/church/united-church-of-west-rutland/

### Brownsville Community Church Christmas Service

4:30 p.m. Brownsville Community Church, 66 Brownsville-Hartland Road, Brownsville. Please join us for our Christmas Eve service as we celebrate the birth of our Savior! brownsvilleumc-vt.org

### Mission Farm Christmas Eve Service

4 p.m. Mission Farm VT, 316 Mission Farm Road, Killington. Join us for a family-friendly Christmas Eve Service filled with prayer, music, and communion. missionfarmvt.org

### Christ the King Christmas Eve Service

4 p.m. Christ the King, 66 So. Main St, Rutland. rwcatholic.org

**Killington White Church Christmas Eve Service**

4:30 p.m. at White Church, 2326 US-4, Killington. Join us for a special Christmas Eve service. [killingtonucc.org](http://killingtonucc.org).

**Christmas Even Candlelight Worship at Brick Church**

7 p.m. The Brick Church, 298 Middle Road, North Clarendon. Celebrate the coming of our Lord Jesus with a beautiful candlelight worship service. Join us for an evening of reflection and joy. [brickchurchvt.com](http://brickchurchvt.com)

**Christ the King Christmas Eve Service**

7 p.m. (Carol concert begins at 6:30 p.m.) Christ the King, 66 So. Main St, Rutland. [rwcatholic.org](http://rwcatholic.org)

**MONDAY**  
**12/25**  
**Merry Christmas!**

**Christ the King Christmas Service**

7:30 a.m. Christ the King, 66 So. Main St, Rutland. [rwcatholic.org](http://rwcatholic.org)

**Christ the King Christmas Service**

9:30 a.m. Christ the King, 66 So. Main St, Rutland. [rwcatholic.org](http://rwcatholic.org)

**Christmas Service**

11 a.m. St. Patrick, 218 N Main St Wallingford. [rwcatholic.org](http://rwcatholic.org)

**TUESDAY**  
**12/26**



# How Charles Dickens rescued Scrooge from himself

By Julia Purdy

After the Gospel, Charles Dickens' "A Christmas Carol" is probably the best known story of Christmas in the English language.

Since 1900, the entertainment industry alone has produced at least 50 versions for film and TV. We enjoy "Carol" like a box of Christmas candy, a cornucopia of special effects, as Dickens intended. He offers us this rich visual feast as a vehicle for the message closest to his heart.

Until Dickens came along, Christmastide was primarily a liturgical observance, not a popular holiday in the modern sense. Yet in Christmas, Dickens saw his chance to press for a new morality that begins with individual conscience, a spiritual redemption and rebirth on a personal level, available even – and especially – to misers like Scrooge.

In the 1840s he wrote a set of short novels known as the "Christmas Books," beginning with "A Christmas Carol" in 1843. He composed "Carol" in six weeks and it sold 6,000 copies immediately.

From 1850 to 1867, he published an annual Christmas issue for his own popular family magazine, *All the Year 'Round*. By the time of his death in 1870, Dickens had left his stamp on the Christmas season – the "Victorian Christmas" we know today.

Certainly the symbol of the sacrificial child resonated with the dark bitterness of Dickens' own childhood. His modest but careful upbringing ended when his father was sent to Marshallsea debtors' prison, and the boy had to leave school at age 12 to join the army of child laborers in a factory that made stove blacking and shoe polish.

He later was able to resume his education and sharpened both his pen and his wit as a streetwise newspaper reporter. The result was the kind of mind that could record without blinking the good, the bad and the desperate, yet with a compassion and an overriding faith in the essential goodness of ordinary people.

Certainly, Dickens never turned a blind eye to injustice. Film renditions of "Carol," however, rarely emphasize Dickens' condemnation of public policies and traditional attitudes that fostered a climate of callousness toward the working poor.

In 1776, Adam Smith's "The Wealth of Nations" laid the foundations of laissez-faire capitalism, which is not so much a policy as the almost total absence of one. This theory holds that the law of supply and demand (today's "market forces") is tantamount to a law of nature, above and beyond human influence. Thus government regulations or protections are viewed as not only unnecessary and futile, but undesirable. The demands of "the economy" trump everyday human needs, rights and priorities.

This new thinking explained away the shortcomings and failures of society's "losers" as their own fault; the causes of poverty were put down to "idleness" or overpopulation, or both. The New Poor Law in 1834 (which Scrooge cites as a reason not to donate to a charity drive) assigned debtors to do backbreaking labor in

prison-like workhouses, segregated by gender. The fabric of normal family life disintegrated.

When the "portly gentlemen" come to collect donations on Christmas Eve, Scrooge grumbles that he already donates to the workhouses and debtors' prisons, and if poor people "would rather die than go there, they had better do it and reduce the surplus population,"

adding that it's "not my business" to know the fate of the poor. The perennial gripe of England's new man of business is Scrooge's own gripe.

Against the "dismal science" of profit-and-loss, Dickens contrasts his own vision of life and hope in the form of Scrooge's jolly nephew, the benevolent employer Fezziwig and Tiny Tim's penniless but loving family. He proffers models of conscience and true charity in the persons of the portly gentlemen.

Scrooge is indeed a soul cut off from the main stream of humanity. But he is not evil. He is a product of the commercial mindset that surrounds him. He still is capable of remembering, observing, learning and repenting. He is forced to revisit his innocent youth full of moments both lonely and joyous. He is reminded how he lost out on a happy marriage and family when it became apparent that his money-hunger was replacing his devotion to his fiancée, who did not share his ambitions.

Dickens carries this profound message of personal service across

without once intoning Scripture. But when Scrooge, after his ordeal, finds himself in the giddy, sublime state of an innocent baby, we are given to understand that Scrooge's redemption will lie in regaining his soul—that portion of everyone, whatever his, her or their station in life, that makes common cause with the whole human race.



Submitted

*Charles Dickens' "A Christmas Carol" provides a glimpse into the understanding that Scrooge's redemption will lie in regaining his soul. The story is probably the best known story of Christmas in the English language.*

# Rockin' the Region with Mihali

Alexander Graham Bell once said, "When one door closes, another door opens." That quote rings true for Mihali Savoulidis, whose band Twiddle just ended 18 years of touring with their three-night Friendsgiving celebration at The Capitol Theatre in Port Chester, New York, last month Nov. 24-26.

Mihali is now turning his attention to his solo career, which he's been doing alongside touring with Twiddle. He's kicking it off with two nights of "Mihalidaze" at the Pickle Barrel Nightclub in Killington, Dec. 28-29. Night

1 features a rare "Gubbulidis" set with Twiddle bassist Zdenek Gubb and Mihali. That's a looping show where they do a lot of Twiddle songs, but in a different style. Night 2 welcomes back Mihali for a jam-filled evening of Mihali and friends, including Gubb on bass, Adrian Tramontano (Twiddle) on drums, Scott Hannay on keys with special guests G. Love and Brandon "Taz" Niederauer. That show will be a little bit of everything: covers, Mihali's originals and possibly a super jam.

After Killington, he'll jump to The Met in Rhode Island on Dec. 30, but is back in Vermont the next night, Dec. 31, for an early, family-friendly, New Year's Eve show at the Middlebury Town Hall Theater 7 p.m.

His 2024 starts with the Winter Sessions, a four-week Wednesday residency at the Pickle Barrel, starting Jan. 3. Each show will be different, with friends and special guests. He'll be announcing those details soon.

In February he goes on tour with The Movement.

Adrian Tramontano on drums and Scott Hannay on keys are part of Mihali's band. Mihali said, "I've been listening to Adrian since I've been 14. It's been a real blast to play with him for these past however many years, on a regular basis, so I'm looking forward to continuing that. Scott is a fabulous piano player, guitar player. We go way back with him, he's toured with Twiddle. For the past two years, he's been my guitar tech with Twiddle. We've been



Rockin' the Region  
By Dave Hoffenberg



By Dave Decrescente

Mihali Savoulidis

Rockin' →29

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**Dec. 19    7 pm** Longest Night Service: Join us in the Chapel for a time of inspiration and encouragement.

**Dec. 24    10 am** Family Christmas Service with Festival Brass, Choir and Nativity

**8:30 pm** Candlelight Christmas Eve Service with Musical Prelude at 8pm

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# [MUSIC Scene]

By DJ Dave Hoffenberg  
Have a music scene coming up? Email [djdavehoff@gmail.com](mailto:djdavehoff@gmail.com)

**WED**  
12/20

**CHITTENDEN**

6 p.m. Mountain Top Tavern – George Nostrand

**KILLINGTON**

6 p.m. Rivershed – Live Music

**LONDONDERRY**

5 p.m. Magic Mountain Black Line Tavern – Sammy B

7 p.m. New American Grill – Nick Bredice

**LUDLOW**

6 p.m. Off the Rails – Learn to Line Dance

**POULTNEY**

7 p.m. The Poultney Pub – Open Mic with Danny Lang

**QUECHEE**

6 p.m. Public House Pub – Kim Wilcox

**SOUTH POMFRET**

6:30 p.m. Artistree – Acoustic Music Jam with Kerry Rosenthal

**THURS**  
12/21

**BARNARD**

5:30 Fable Farm - Winter Solstice Show with Bow Thayer & Krishna Guthrie

**BRANDON**

5:30 p.m. Red Clover Ale Company – Open Mic hosted by Emily Nelson

**BRIDGEWATER**

**CORNERS**  
5 p.m. Long Trail Brewery – Sammy B

**KILLINGTON**

5 p.m. Moguls Sports Pub – Duane Carleton

6 p.m. Liquid Art – Open Mic hosted by Grateful Gary

6 p.m. Mountain Green – Nick Bredice

6 p.m. Rivershed – Chris P

6 p.m. The Foundry – Liz Reedy

8 p.m. Jax Food & Games – Jenny & Friends

**LONDONDERRY**

7 p.m. New American Grill – Open Mic Night hosted by DJ Jazzy Joel & Catnip John

**LUDLOW**

6:30 p.m. The Killarney – Irish Sessions with Gypsy Reel

**POULTNEY**

6 p.m. The Poultney Pub – Vinyl Night with Ken

**RUTLAND**

6:30 p.m. Angler Pub – Open Mic hosted by John Lafave

8 p.m. Center Street Alley – Karaoke 101 hosted by Tenacious T

**FRI**

12/22

**CASTLETON**

6 p.m. Blue Cat Bistro – Silas Hamilton

**KILLINGTON**

1 p.m. Bear Mountain Base Lodge – Nick Bredice

4 p.m. The Foundry – Jamie & s Junk Show

6 p.m. Rivershed – Live Music

6 p.m. Still on the Mountain – Nick Bredice

7 p.m. The Foundry – Aaron Audet

8 p.m. Pickle Barrel Nightclub – Hometown Radio

9 p.m. Jax Food & Games – Jamie & s Junk Show

9 p.m. Moguls Sports Pub – Last Chair Band

**LUDLOW**

7 p.m. The Killarney – Sammy B

**POULTNEY**

6 p.m. The Poultney Pub – George Nostrand

**QUECHEE**

5:30 p.m. Public House Pub – Frogs

**SAT**  
12/23

**BRIDGEWATER**

8 p.m. Woolen Mill Comedy Club – Comedy Night with Vicki Ferentinos

**KILLINGTON**

5 p.m. Pickle Barrel Nightclub – Jamie & s Junk Show

6 p.m. Moguls Sports Pub – Duane Carleton

6 p.m. Rivershed – Live Music

6 p.m. Still on the Mountain – Liz Reedy

6 p.m. The Foundry – Jenny Porter

8 p.m. Pickle Barrel Nightclub – Hometown Radio

9 p.m. Jax Food & Games – Jamie & s Junk Show

**LUDLOW**

9 a.m. Okemo's Sunburst Six Bubble - Lift Party with DJ Dave

7 p.m. The Killarney – Eric King

**QUECHEE**

5:30 p.m. Public House Pub – Arthur James

**RUTLAND**

9 p.m. Center Street Alley – Karaoke 101 hosted by Tenacious T

**STOCKBRIDGE**

7:30 p.m. Wild Fern – Rick Redington & Tuff Luv

**SUN**  
12/24

**KILLINGTON**

12 p.m. Rivershed – Brunch with Live Music

5 p.m. The Foundry – Jazz Night with the Summit Pond Quartet

9 p.m. Jax Food & Games – Jenny Porter

**MON**  
12/25

**KILLINGTON**

5 p.m. The Foundry – Christmas Music with Kent Baker

**TUES**  
12/26

**CHITTENDEN**

6 p.m. Mountain Top Tavern – Ryan Fuller

**KILLINGTON**

2 p.m. Pico Mountain & s Last Run Lounge – Duane Carleton

2 p.m. Snowshed & s Long Trail Pub – Nick Bredice

6 p.m. Rivershed – 2Dave & s Tuesday Ugly Sweater Party Bingo

9 p.m. Jax Food & Games – Taco Tuesday with Rick Webb

**LONDONDERRY**

6:30 p.m. New American Grill – Trivia hosted by Zach Yakaitis

**LUDLOW**

2:30 p.m. Okemo & s Sitting Bull Lounge – Sammy B

6 p.m. The Killarney – Trivia with Rick Davis

**POULTNEY**

7 p.m. The Poultney Pub – Bluegrass Jam

**QUECHEE**

5 p.m. The Public House – Jim Yeager

**RUTLAND**

8:30 p.m. Center Street Alley – Acoustic Open Mic hosted by Josh LaFave

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Courtesy Downtown Rutland Partnership

### Sightings of Santa, Mrs. Claus and even Buddy the Elf occurred around Rutland all month long

*Santa and friends made a few appearances earlier this month in downtown Rutland drawing a warm reception as his presence spread joy to all who caught a glimpse of him and his pals.*



By Pat Wise

*Santa and Mrs. Claus showed off their skating skills as children stare in fascination at Giorgetti Arena last Saturday.*

*Buddy the Elf peers over the roof of Green Mountain Power Energy Innovation Center at 66 Merchants Row, downtown Rutland.*

## Ludlow Recreation and Community Center extends hours and events

The Ludlow Recreation committee and dept. has extended its hours. The new hours will be weekdays 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. The recreation department is planning to add dedicated volunteers for weekend hours as well, once all the required documentation is finalized.

The Ludlow Rec Center is located between the Black River Good Neighbor Services/Okeemo Valley TV building and Ludlow Elementary School (LES) and The Expeditionary School at Black River (ESBR) school buildings. The center had become the hub for goods and resources for the community following the major flooding back in July. Many products were stored in the space due to the size and accessibility. Now, the town has finally been able to remove the last of these items as well as expanded the hours for the center's availability.

Current programs include adult leagues for pick up volleyball, basketball, indoor soccer, and pickleball. The elementary school youth basketball teams also practice and host their home games in the community center's gymnasium. Many meetings and community events are also hosted on the premises. Both LES and ESBR utilize the space intermittently for resources as well. Furthermore, the center also has its own fitness center which is open to all for membership and for rent. The 800-square-foot room is available for day to day or monthly use.

Lastly, The Ludlow Recreation committee meets the second Tuesday of every month at 5 p.m. in the community center's conference room (or sometimes the cafeteria on the left side). These meetings are open to the public and everyone is invited to share their thoughts, volunteer their time, help with fundraising, or inquire for more updates.

For more information, visit: [Ludlowtparksandrec.com](http://Ludlowtparksandrec.com).

## Drop off toys at Benson's Chevrolet

There is no greater joy than a child receiving a Christmas gift on Christmas Day! Drop off unwrapped items to us at Benson's Chevrolet, Inc., 25 Pond St. in Ludlow.



collected are given to those in need during the holidays. We sincerely appreciate your contribution. We are open Monday to Friday 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. and Saturdays 8 a.m. to noon.

If you have any questions, please contact Kim Lampert at 802-228-4000. We hope that you can help make a child smile this Christmas Day by donating a toy to a good cause.

They will be collecting toys for children in need in our area until Dec. 22. Donated items can be children's clothing, toys, books, bikes, games, and craft projects to name just a few. The toys



Courtesy Downtown Rutland Partnership

## Santa shakes hands with Rutland Mayor

Earlier this month Santa visited downtown Rutland for the tree lighting celebration. Mayor Mike Doenges sought him out to say "thanks" and share a jolly handshake and smile.

### ← Adaptive volunteers: from page 2

Holt, of Burlington, has been a dedicated volunteer for many years. He has served as a favorite instructor to athletes and as a mentor to other volunteers. He always shows an interest in increasing his knowledge base and sharing that knowledge with others. He participates in skiing, biking, climbing, paddling and also enjoys working with the Veterans Ventures program. He's even been known to stop by the Sailing Center to help work on the bikes when Vermont Adaptive is at a loss as to what needs to be done. Holt's commitment to Vermont Adaptive is palpable and the organization is lucky to have him.

Ben Hamilton, of North Chittenden, has been with Vermont Adaptive for two years and in that time has stood out while helping with numerous lessons and special events. Whether on the snow, bike paths or water, his steady presence and dedication is obvious to everyone participating and the public.

A skier by nature, Hamilton has been known to help on the occasional snowboard lesson, too, if needed. He also brings great perspective from his EMT training and work, education in the field of medicine, love of the outdoors and local knowledge of Vermont. His future plans include going to medical school so he can continue to learn and help others in his community upon graduation.

To volunteer at Vermont Adaptive, candidates must participate in off-snow and on-snow training for winter programs each year or for summer training in the spring.

For more information, visit: [vermontadaptive.org/get-involved](http://vermontadaptive.org/get-involved).

### ← Block grants: from page 2

from this important work" This round of CDBG and RHP funds were awarded to West Rutland and these other 10 projects:

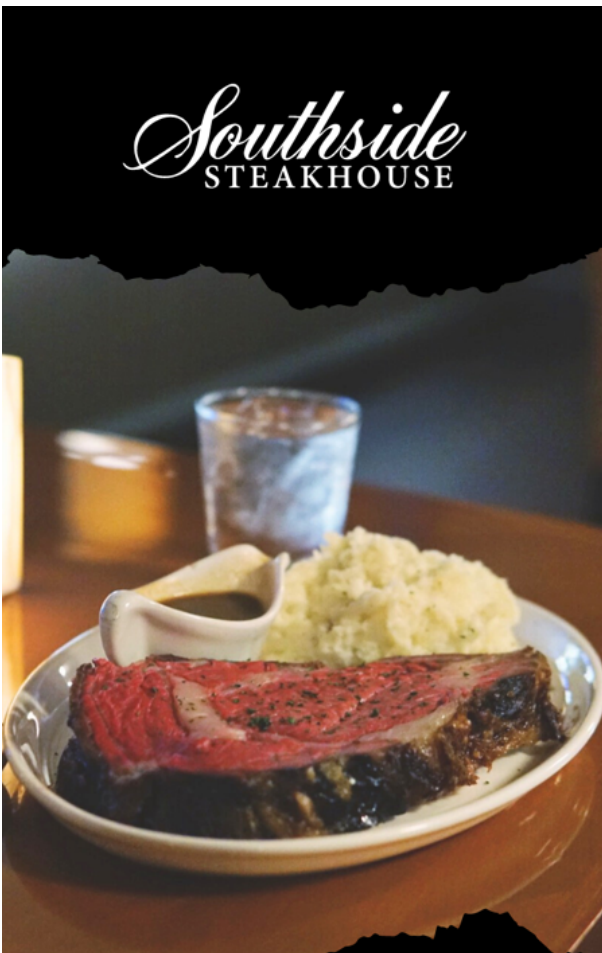
1. Town of Brattleboro — \$440,000 CDBG supplemental award for Windham Windsor Housing Trust to administer The Green Mountain Home Repair Loan Fund to provide affordable home repair financing and housing counseling services to eligible homeowners in Windham, and Windsor Counties.
2. Town of Essex — \$300,000 RHP supplemental award to support the Vermont Foundation of recovery Essex Recovery Housing project for individuals, and individuals with families, in recovery from substance use disorders.
3. Town of Lyndon — \$400,000 CDBG supplemental award for Rural Edge to continue operating the revolving loan fund to provide affordable home repair financing and housing counseling services

to eligible homeowners in Essex, Caledonia, and Orleans Counties.

4. City of Montpelier — \$360,000 CDBG supplemental award for Downstreet Housing & Community Development to continue operating the revolving loan fund to provide affordable home repair financing and housing counseling services to eligible homeowners in Washington, Orange, and Lamoille Counties.
5. Town of Pittsford — \$450,000 CDBG award to support renovations to a former farmhouse to include childcare space for 26 children, community meeting room, and two affordable apartments.
6. Town of Randolph — \$54,000 CDBG award to develop architectural plans to make the historic Playhouse Theater ADA compliant.
7. Town of Rockingham — \$250,000 CDBG award to support the Greater Rocking-

ham Area Services to replace their oil heating system with a biomass wood chip system and make associated renovations to the building.

8. Town of Shelburne — \$700,000 CDBG award to support the redevelopment of a former motel into a new mixed-income and mixed-tenancy neighborhood with 68 units of affordable rental housing and 26 shared equity homeownership units.
9. City of St. Albans — \$540,000 CDBG supplemental award for Champlain Housing Trust to continue operating the revolving loan fund to provide affordable home repair financing and housing counseling services to eligible homeowners in Franklin, Chittenden, and Grand Isle counties.
10. Town of Windsor — \$500,000 CDBG award to support the construction of a new building with 25 mixed income rental apartments.



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Courtesy of VINS

VINS Forest of Lights transforms the forest into an enchanted realm. New additions this year include a twinkling Snowflake Tunnel, the Blue & White Icicle Tower and the Fairy Lighting Hideaway.

## VINS Forest of Lights is going strong

Don't miss this opportunity to experience the forest like never before.

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After your walk through, cozy up by the campfire and enjoy hot chocolate and snacks that are available for purchase. The Forest of Lights will be open on specific evenings from 5-7 p.m.

Adult \$12; Youth \$7; Children 3 & Under Free. (With taxes & fees: Adult: \$14.58; Youth \$9.25; Children 3 & Under: Free)

### Schedule:

- Wednesday, Dec. 20, 2023
- Thursday, Dec. 21, 2023
- Friday, Dec. 22, 2023
- Saturday, Dec. 23, 2023
- Tuesday, Dec. 26, 2023
- Wednesday, Dec. 27, 2023
- Thursday, Dec. 28, 2023
- Friday, Dec. 29, 2023
- Saturday, Dec. 30, 2023
- Sunday, Dec. 31, 2023
- Monday, Jan. 1, 2024
- Tuesday, Jan. 2, 2024
- Wednesday, Jan. 3, 2024

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### Solutions

#### Crossword

S	A	G	S		B	O	S	O	N		S	A	F	E			
A	M	A	H		C	R	A	P	E		A	R	I	A			
P	I	L	I		D	A	L	E	Y		G	A	D	S			
S	A	L	A	D		T	O	R			S	A	B	O	T		
					S	E	R	E	N	A	D	E	S				
O	P	S			M	A	D			T	E	A			T	A	T
S	A	C	K	E	D			S	I	B			S	A	M	E	
S	T	O	A	S			M	A	C			S	A	B	E	R	
E	N	O	W			S	O	D			S	A	T	E	E	N	
T	A	P			D	A	D			R	A	T		S	R	I	
					T	Y	P	E	F	A	C	E	S				
S	A	B	R	E			R	A	G			S	A	B	I	N	
A	U	R	A			S	A	B	L	E			M	I	A	O	
S	B	I	C			S	T	E	A	K			A	L	M	S	
H	E	M	E			T	O	R	N	E			S	E	B	E	

#### Sudoku

4	7	3	6	2	1	8	9	5
1	5	2	4	9	8	3	7	6
9	8	6	5	3	7	4	2	1
5	9	4	8	7	3	1	6	2
2	1	7	9	6	4	5	3	8
3	6	8	1	5	2	9	4	7
6	2	1	3	4	5	7	8	9
7	4	5	2	8	9	6	1	3
8	3	9	7	1	6	2	5	4

From page 15

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# “Amahl and the Night Visitors” returns to Salisbury

By Julia Purdy

Sometimes inspiration strikes in a flash and a story almost writes itself. That seems to be the case with composer and librettist Gian Carlo Menotti’s “Amahl and the Night Visitors,” commissioned by NBC and premiering in 1951 with the NBC Opera Theatre in the debut of the “Hallmark Hall of Fame,” the longest-running prime-time series in the history of television, according to wikipedia.

“Amahl” has garnered a devoted following since its early years, especially since its first telecast in color in 1953. In those early days of television, my parents were strict about what we could and could not watch. But we made a point of watching, as a family, “Amahl and the Night Visitors,” through its changes of orchestra and performers. We knew the plot, the songs, the characters, by heart and we looked forward to each new performance’s variations in staging and interpretation. But the Barn Arts production is from being an “old chestnut.”

Now “Amahl and the Night Visitors” is back, thanks to Glenn Andres at the Salisbury UCC Church, who originally pitched the opera to Barn Opera four years ago, Collier told me. What Artistic Director Josh Collier aims to do is refresh the message of “Amahl” within the watching experience. The staging, costuming and visual details follow traditional forms, with an inspiring, interactive conclusion that Collier hopes will leave a lasting impression.

The story of three kings, magi or wise men, bearing gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh for the newborn Messiah and guided by a star, is a staple of the Christmas season, told in the Gospel of Matthew and retold in carols and in art as “The Adoration of the Magi.” As magi, they represent the yielding of pagan traditions to the Christian God; as kings, they represent rulers and inequality of power; as individuals, they represent the three dominant races: Caucasian, African

and Asian.

In an interview, Gian Carlo Menotti recalled the personal inspiration that sparked this magnificent and moving opera:

“This is an opera for children because it tries to recapture my own childhood. You see, when I was a child I lived in Italy, and in Italy we have no Santa Claus. ... Our gifts were brought to us by the Three Kings, instead.”

And, just as children still do, “...it didn’t matter how hard my little brother and I tried to keep awake at night to catch a glimpse of the Three Royal Visitors, we would always fall asleep just before they arrived. But I do remember hearing them. I remember the weird cadence of their song in the dark distance; I remember the brittle sound of the camels’ hooves crushing the frozen snow; and I remember the mysterious tinkling of their silver bridles.”

The three kings are Melchior, Kaspar, and Balthasar. “My favorite king was King Melchior, because he was the oldest and had a long white beard. My brother’s favorite was King Kaspar. He insisted that this king was a little crazy and quite deaf. ... To these Three Kings I mainly owe the happy Christmas seasons of my childhood and I should have remained very grateful to them. Instead, I came to America and soon forgot all about them, for here at Christmas time one sees so many Santa Clauses scattered all over town. Then there is the big Christmas tree in Rockefeller Plaza, the elaborate toy windows on Fifth Avenue, the one-hundred-voice choir in Grand Central Station, the innumerable Christmas carols on radio and television—and all these things made me forget the three dear old Kings of my old childhood.

“But in 1951 I found myself in serious difficulty. I had been commissioned by the National Broadcasting Company to write

an opera for television, with Christmas as deadline, and I simply didn’t have one idea in my head.”

Wandering through the Metropolitan Museum one day, he paused at a scene, “The Adoration of the Magi” painted three centuries before, and “suddenly I heard again, coming from the distant blue hills, the weird song of the Three Kings. I then realized they had come back to me and had brought me a gift.”

That gift became the lyric opera, “Amahl and the Night Visitors.”

If any creative work can be said to equal in power, message and presentation Charles Dickens’ “A Christmas Carol,” or Handel’s oratorio “Messiah,” it would be this little opera.

When the company created the first production in 2019, it was the first time it had been done locally in years, performed by the in-house artistic family

of Barn Opera. “It was wildly successful, people loved it!” Collier said. The annual tradition grew from that first energizing success.

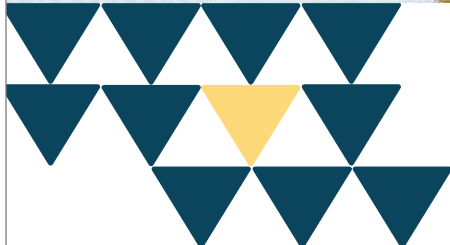
Collier said the opera is “a meditation on generosity and compassion. This opera is the secular sermon that we need right now in understanding that we can bridge the gap between ourselves and people that don’t look like us, act like us, live like us, or love like us, we can make the connection between the story that is told and the miracle of that compassion.”

In addition to the annual two performances (5:30 & 7:30 p.m.) at Salisbury Congregational Church on Dec. 21, Williston Congregational Church will be welcoming “Amahl” into its sanctuary for one day of performances as well, Dec. 22, 5:30 and 7:30 p.m. Information and tickets are available now at: [barnopera.com/amahl-and-the-night-visitors](http://barnopera.com/amahl-and-the-night-visitors).



Helen Lyons (Mother), Cailin Marcel Manson, Nicholas Tocci, Joshua Collier (Three Kings), Ambrose Cusick (Amahl) perform in a rendition of “Amahl and the Night Visitors.”

Courtesy of Barn Opera



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	<b>7:00 pm</b>	<b>Christ the King</b>
		<i>(Carol concert begins at 6:30 pm)</i>
<b>Christmas Day</b>	<b>7:30 am</b>	<b>Christ the King</b>
	<b>9:30 am</b>	<b>Christ the King</b>
	<b>11:00 am</b>	<b>St. Patrick</b>



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## The White River Valley Players to perform 'Tales From the Forest: A Community of Trees Tells Its Stories'

Saturday, Dec. 23 at 5 p.m.—ROCHESTER—For this year's annual winter production, "The Night Before the Night Before Christmas," The White River Valley Players invite you to the Rochester School Auditorium on 222 S Main St, Rochester. Show time is 5-6:30 p.m. preceded by cider and homemade cookies starting at 4:15.

The theme for this year's show is "Tales From the Forest: A Community of Trees Tells Its Stories." Original stories are woven into a journey through the forest, with music from the woods and beyond performed by friends and neighbors from the Valley and a bit further. This will include singers in grades 4-6 from the Rochester and Stockbridge Schools, as well as The Three Sues, Greg Ryan, Heather Masterton Lemmons, Fred Lemmons, Christine Meagher, and others.

The stories and songs take place in the familiar woods of the White River Valley, where certain trees are given personalities as well as the ability to tell their own stories. A bit magical, a bit informational, and delightfully entertaining, Tales From the Forest will be a family favorite in this holiday season. We invite you to come for a relaxing evening, complete with refreshments and seasonal singing for all. This is a free community event, with donations to benefit the Rochester Federated Church Food Shelf, serving the needs of valley residents.



By Jerry Leblond

For this year's annual winter production, "The Night Before the Night Before Christmas," The White River Valley Players will perform at Rochester School Auditorium. The theme for this year's show is "Tales From the Forest: A Community of Trees Tells Its Stories."

## Roots restaurant and United Way to help kids for a great cause at the annual Give Back mixer at Roots

Wednesday, Dec. 20, at 6-p.m.—RUTLAND—Roots restaurant on 55 Washington St., Rutland, is hosting their annual Give Back mixer on Wednesday. The event aims to support United Way and their programming. United Way will share information on its programming and explain how donations can help.

A recent survey conducted by United Way discovered that snow pants are in high demand among schools. As part of the

holiday spirit, Roots suggests a donation of children's snow pants or a monetary donation of \$10 at the door. These contributions will directly benefit local youth. The event will take place at Roots restaurant located at 55 Washington St., Rutland. Attendees are encouraged to bring either a monetary donation for United Way or a donation of children's snow pants. By joining this event, individuals can help make a difference in the lives of young students in need.

← **Rockin':**  
from page 20

hip-to-hip for a minute.”

Mihali is really looking forward to night two of "Mihalidaze." He said, "Garrett (G. Love) is the man. He's like my big brother, I definitely look up to him a lot, he's always got the best advice. What a guy and what a player. That man can freestyle over anything, it's so dope. I don't have enough good things to say about Garrett."

They have a song together, "Strongest of our Kind" off Mihali's first solo record, "Breathe and Let Go." Mihali added, "Taz can literally play any song on the face of the planet. He's the greatest guitar player I've ever heard. I

haven't met anyone with that much raw talent before. I've known him since he was 12 (20 now) when he started playing with Twiddle and he's played with us almost every year since that. Every single time I play with him, he's so much better than the last time I played with him. It's fun watching him do his thing, and he's got an amazing voice too so I'm looking forward to the music he'll be putting out in the next few years. It's going to be amazing. I was stoked that they wanted to come up and play. It's going to be pretty fun."

Mihali has been working on some new material and will be releasing it throughout the next year. He said, "I plan on touring as much as I can and getting this music out to the world."

He has two solo albums out now, the aforementioned "Breathe and Let Go" produced by Eric Krasno and his latest album "Efection" produced by Nathan Feinstein.

Mihali said, "He's an incredible reggae producer out of California. I have some singles and features I did in the past year that have been put out more recently."

Mihali did "Light it Up" with Collie Buddz on his album "Cali Roots Riddim" which has been nominated for a Grammy. He added, "It's funny I wrote a song about weed and there you go."

Mihali has written about 90% of Twiddle's songs.

When talking about Red Rocks (which is on my bucket list) Mihali said, "It's incredible. It's the best place I've played in the country. It's special, there's no doubt about it. It's pretty sacred to all musicians who've played there. I'm very fortunate, I've got to play it five or six times and I'm

looking forward to going back."

Mihali was born in New York, moved to New Jersey when he was 3 years old and attended Castleton in 2004, where Twiddle was born.

He's visited Vermont almost every summer growing up. He said, "I feel I always knew I was going to end up here."

He started on guitar and sang in the church choir when he was younger. He said, "Guitar was always my secret passion. I started playing seriously when I was 12 and then slowly on my own got good, basically playing Dave Matthews

songs and stuff like that. My mom recognized I was at least pretty good at it and I liked it so she invested in some lessons and pushed me to focus on that. I wasn't a very studious person so she invested in my music, supported it, encouraged it. You know, it worked out."

Mihali has written about 90% of Twiddle's songs. He dedicates time to writing music. He said, "It takes so much focus. I consider myself the middleman. I don't really know what I'm going to be writing

about. For the most part I write some chords and the words just sort of come to me. A lot of times I don't know what the song's about until the first verse is over and I have a hook. It's interesting, it all sort of comes when it happens. If it's not coming, I don't try and force it. I'll take a break and come back to it. I just let it flow, as they say."

Mihali, who has three kids ages 8, 5 and 2, is looking forward to his New Year's Eve show. He said, "It's a lovely show in my hometown, I can bring my kids, it's over by 10 and it's right down the street. I don't have to go far."

Mihali feels the stage is sacred for him and said, "It's like church. The hour I'm up there is the only time I can completely turn off, just be really in the moment. Not have to think about bills or kids or anything, really be there in a sharing situation

because you're sharing the energy with the crowd. I love writing songs and recording them, that process has been fun and I've been getting way more into it the past few years

but it will never replace what it's like to play one of your songs and have someone sing along or be in it, in the moment."

For more information, visit mihalimusic.com. He's on Facebook under Mihali and Spotify, Soundcloud, Instagram and YouTube under Mihali Music.

When talking about Red Rocks...Mihali said, "It's incredible. It's the best place I've played in the country. It's special, there's no doubt about it. It's pretty sacred to all musicians who've played there. I'm very fortunate, I've got to play it five or six times and I'm looking forward to going back."

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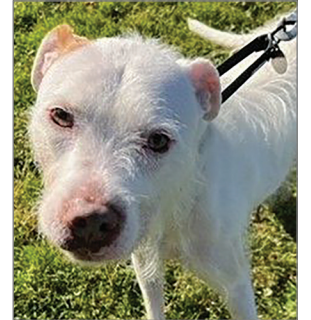
Chowder—2-year-old. Neutered male. Domestic shorthair.



Genesis—7-year-old. Neutered male. Pitbull mix.



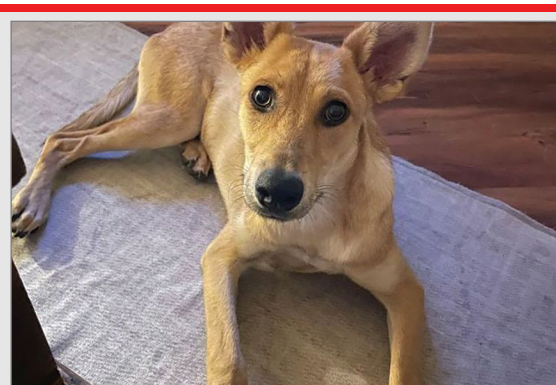
Nelly—3-year-old. Spayed female. Domestic shorthair.



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# Cosmic Catalogue



## **Aries** March 21 - April 20

No matter how hard you've worked to gain the professional status you have, does it fill your heart with joy? Do you derive a sense of meaning and purpose from it? Maybe once upon a time it did. It's OK to realize that what once got you up each day may not do so in the same way. Changing your mind and your perspective on life may be necessary this week. Ask yourself some hard but necessary questions.

## **Leo** July 21 - August 20

You're not one who likes to let people down. That being said though, the work will always be there tomorrow, next week or even next year. Do you know what won't be there tomorrow? The chance to experience the joy and happiness that this time of year offers for many. Be sure to change your perspective and your plans and live this week to the fullest. Joy, happiness, laughter and a little romance are on offer – grasp them with both hands.

## **Sagittarius** November 21 - December 20

You may begin to see 2023 out in a very reflective phase. With Mercury retrograde returning to your sign, you may need to revisit old problems or issues before you can really put them behind you. While this may be frustrating to have to go over old territory, you'll be stronger for it. By the time 2024 rolls around, you'll have a better understanding of what you'll put up with and what you won't. Choose you first.

## **Taurus** April 21 - May 20

You may desire a new path in life. It could be a religious or spiritual pathway. Maybe you just want to travel to places that didn't excite you previously. Whatever has been arousing your curiosity, the question now begs – can you afford to do what your heart feels called to do? It may not be about money as such. It could also be, what might this new desire cost in terms of your relationship? Those are harder questions to answer.

## **Virgo** August 21 - September 20

If things aren't working out the way you wanted or expected, it isn't always up to you to fix things. There are times where letting the cookies crumble where they may, can be the best thing to do. Easier said than done though. What you can do to give you piece of mind is to just shift your perspective on things. Family, friends and other people are going to do what they are going to do. Just opt to change how you think about it.

## **Capricorn** December 21 - January 20

Your plans and progress may take on a one step forward, two steps back approach this week. On the one hand, the Sun lights up your sign, a symbol of celebration for you. While on the other, Mercury will retrograde back into your reflective and isolated private zone. How do you wish to be positioned this time next year? The choices you make now or the problems you choose to face or ignore may be what determines that.

## **Gemini** May 21 - June 20

The chance to address your fears and phobias is rarely pleasant. When you can walk the path you'd rather not traverse, you do get the chance to know yourself better. The questions you've been pondering of late are those of partnership. Are you happy in your current relationship? If you're not in one, then why not? What holds you back? Lift the lid on the box you've been avoiding opening, if you want to find the twin every Gemini is promised.

## **Libra** September 21 - October 20

When you've worked so hard to change up some habits, this time of year can really put pressure on you. Other people's expectations coupled with your tendency to want to make others happy can really undo all that you've achieved thus far. If you don't want that to happen, it's up to you to communicate that clearly. If those around you don't get it, then that is on them, not you. You don't have to falter unless you want to.

## **Aquarius** January 21 - February 20

This week brings the chance to really reflect on yourself, the past and what you want for the future. It's imperative you don't ignore this. Whether you like it or not, your life is undergoing profound and significant changes. Conscious awareness of this will make it a lot easier – so don't go into 2024 ignorant to your own blind spots. Speak with a trusted friend, they may provide the insight you can't or unable to see. Heed any advice they offer.

## **Cancer** June 21 - July 20

Mercury retrograde in your partnership zone can really put you on edge. You can be sensitive at the best of times, but when crossed-wires and confusion with someone special happens, you tend to internalize things. Sometimes the best remedy isn't to replay scenarios in your mind. Rather, just get back to work. Stay busy. Put your mind on an important task and you'll be surprised by how your perspective shifts. A solution may arrive when you least expect it.

## **Scorpio** October 21 - November 20

With Venus in your sign, you may be the life of the party at the moment. As other people want a piece of you, you may need to decide if you can afford that. This may include financially as well as energetically. Mars, your patron planet, is slowly becoming visible again. You may need to remind others, as well as yourself, what your goals are and what is most important to you. Don't let miscommunication or crossed-wires put you off track.

## **Pisces** February 21 - March 20

While for many, this is a time to slow down and celebrate with family, you may still have your career or overall life direction on your mind. If you've got to the point where you realize you can't do in 2024 what you did in 2023, then a reassessment is required. No need to take action straight away, but it may dawn on you that new perspectives are emerging as a result of your new personal priorities.

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Cassandra has studied astrology for about 20 years. She is an international teacher of astrology who has been published all over the globe.

## The mind plays tricks

Too often, the mistake of regurgitating information is the benchmark by which intelligence is determined. The teacher tells you what you need to learn. You sit a test and repeat the information given and you either pass or fail. It appears we've arrived at a point on the timeline where this method of learning no longer appears to work — if it ever really did.

The intelligence of the heart doesn't seem to get much of a look in anymore. It's the kind of intelligence that despite what the logical brain may tell you, something within your heart, within your moral com-

pass just tells you something's off.



**Cosmic Catalogue**  
By Cassandra Tyndall

You may hear a bit about Mercury Cazimi this week, an event that occurs when a planet joins the heart and fire of the Sun and becomes purified. If the Sun is the beating heart of the Cosmos, the central and organizational force of which all life depends, then why do we, as humans, value the brain so much?

An opportunity arrives this week where if your mind has strayed too far from your heart, you can realign them. The mind can play tricks on you, but a choice led by the heart is rarely wrong.

## The magic of the reindeer

Magical Reindeer,  
They dance,  
They prance,  
They land on your rooftop,  
With the softest of sounds.  
Then they leave in an instant,  
As fast as they had come.  
On Dasher,  
On Dancer,  
On Prancer,  
On Vixen,  
On Comet,  
On Cupid,  
On Donner,  
On Blitzen,  
And lead the way Rudolph,  
With your bright shiny nose.  
And year after year that's how it goes,



**Poetry Is Power**  
By Bree Sarandrea

Atop the rooftop with a click and a clack,  
Saint Nick arrives,  
And is gone in a flash.  
He is here one second,  
Gone the next.  
As those magical reindeer guide the way,  
Pulling the great load of Santa's sleigh.  
As those reindeer fly around the earth,  
The world awakes with joy all around,  
For all the kindness Santa's team spreads,  
From town to town.  
And that is the kindness  
that Christmas gives,  
The magic of Christmas,  
The magic of the reindeer.



## Let's repair our world together—"tikkun olam!"

Extending a helping hand to a neighbor is a longstanding Vermont tradition in an environment with harsh winters, snow and rain storms with increasing potency. That is how our forebears survived.

Sharing kindness and passing on blessings is a great way to live our lives. Christian charity is a concept I learned in my Methodist Sunday school and James was often quoted about the importance of doing good work in the world because faith without deeds is useless. "I will show you my faith through my good works" (James 2:18). That was the basis of my theology until.... I first heard the words Jesus would have known—"Tikkun olam, repairing the world" for the betterment of society, an ancient Hebrew concept from the Talmud 2,000 years ago. This expression has been revived at various times and signifies that "repairing the world will bring about the Kingdom of Heaven." (Brandeis.edu, "The World is Broken So Humans Must Repair It: The History and



**Mountain Meditation**  
By Marguerite Jill Dye

Evolution of Tikkun Olam").

Living a life filled with lovingkindness is a similar Buddhist concept, while Christian charity helps lift others up. I was impressed by how *tikkun olam* teaches ethics and "philanthropy" as a way of life.

A dear friend on weekends in Killington leads a program in a Boston area school that demonstrates the importance of *tikkun olam*. Students study and select five organizations that help mend the world in various ways. A representative from each one presents their program in the auditorium, then students vote for their two favorites. They raise funds through myriad activities and the children and their families contribute, as well. Then they donate their substantial contributions to the chosen groups in a ceremony.

This instills a desire to help and the power of philanthropy. These youth continue the tradition of contributing to help heal the world through their life work and generosity.

Mountain Meditation → 37

## How trees prepare for winter

Of all life's synergies, I appreciate most the one between my propensity for domestic procrastination and my love of moving through the outdoors — countless adventures are born of it. During a late November weekend, when faced with a day spent winterizing our home, my husband and I instead packed up our children and headed for Mount Moosilauke. Ascending the Gorge Brook Trail, we moved quickly, our son pouncing on every puddle, delighting in the power of his 60 pounds to break through the creme brulee-layer of ice.

With this thin ice and a dusting of snow, the lower elevations had been warned of winter's approach. The higher elevations, we soon discovered, were being blasted by its arrival — every surface, be it branch, rock, or summit signpost — was coated in a substance equal parts snow and ice. The wind, roaring and sustained, stung our noses and cheeks, the only bits of skin exposed.

Despite this harbinger of winter storms to come, it appeared the trees were simply standing around. But looks can be deceiving. While I may have been procrastinating on winter preparations, the trees were busily, if subtly, bracing themselves for the snow, ice, wind, and frigid temperatures. They've been doing so for months, for millennia.

In handling heavy snow and ice loads — infamous for breaking branches and bending trunks — our northern tree species vary in strategy. The high-surface-area leaves that increase a deciduous tree's photosynthetic capacity in the warmer months become load liabilities in the winter, offering ample parking for heavy snow and ice — and surfaces for catching the wind. For this and other reasons, these species drop their leaves in autumn. These hardwoods rely on branch architecture and strength to support the snow and ice that settle on them. Species such as maples, birches, and ash trees, all long-term residents of the northern forests, drop their leaves quickly in the fall. On the other hand, oaks and beches — relative newcomers with tropical origins — often, and at their own expense, sport crinkly brown leaves well into winter.

Employing a different tactic, coniferous species, including spruce and fir, hold on to their low-surface-area needles year-round.

Their flexible branches bend with the weight of snow, like Christmas tree boughs adorned with too-heavy ornaments. But as the branches droop, the snow slides off, and the branches spring defiantly back to shape. Ice proves harder to shrug off and can cause branches to break, bark to tear, and trunks to bend.

That flexibility serves coniferous trees well with regard to winter winds, too.

Flexing with the wind dissipates the wind's kinetic energy, thereby reducing force on individual branches and the tree as a whole.

This streamlining proves more difficult for deciduous trees with stiff branches, even after they have dropped their large leaves.

Frosted and asymmetrical, the crowns of the exclusively coniferous trees near the summit called to mind white sails whipped taut, betraying the wind's direction. But unlike sails adjusted to capture the wind's energy, these crowns are aerodynamic, shaped by the prevailing wind to evade as much of its energy as possible.

To cope with freezing temperatures, coniferous and deciduous trees alike are triggered by longer nights and cooler temperatures to progress to a state of dormancy and maximum cold tolerance by mid-winter. Insulation by dead cells, which constitute 99% of a mature tree's woody volume, and a number of seasonal cellular changes, help to prevent live cells from freezing. According to researchers at Purdue University's department of forestry and natural resources, these cellular changes include a transition to more pliable cell membranes that can withstand the sharp edges of ice crystals that form when the water between cells freezes. Within each cell, starch is converted to sugars, which will serve as antifreeze, lowering the cell's freezing point. Then, as water leaves the cell through its more pliable membrane and as the content of the cell thickens and cools, viscosity increases, preventing crystallization, which can shred cell membranes.

Eight miles and four hours after beginning our hike, my family returned to our car and then our home, which was exactly as we'd left it: unprepared for winter. Eventually, we did weatherstrip the windows where the wind whistled through, shoring up our house's membrane. But our late attention to winter's arrival put us in the company of the procrastinating oak, shamed by the proactive ash.

Rebecca Perkins Hanissian is the editorial and outreach coordinator at the Center for Northern Woodlands Education. Illustration by Adelaide Murphy Tyrol. The Outside Story is assigned and edited by Northern Woodlands magazine and sponsored by the Wellborn Ecology Fund of the New Hampshire Charitable Foundation: [nhcf.org](http://nhcf.org).



**The Outside Story**  
By Rebecca Perkins Hanissian





# The candy man can

Frank Loesser was thrown out of high school and college — both times for the same reason: he failed almost every subject. Oddly, the one class he excelled in was English, which would prove prophetic as his career trajectory unfolded.

Given this track record of failing, Loesser had to be resourceful, especially after his father's death when he was still a teenager. Other than his ability to write, the only other talent he had was a prowess on the piano. Coupled with his ambition, Loesser would eventually use his precise skillset to reach the upper echelons of the entertainment world.

Fans of the theater will undoubtedly know Loesser's name since he wrote the music and lyrics to many great Broadway shows like "Guys and Dolls" and "How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying." He also wrote songs for over 60 Hollywood films, additionally winning a Tony, a Grammy, and a Pulitzer Prize for Drama.

But Loesser's crowning achievement was his Academy Award, having won the golden statue in 1950 for the song, "Baby, It's Cold Outside."

"Baby, It's Cold Outside" (now a holiday standard) was a huge hit when it was featured in the film "Neptune's Daughter" starring Ricardo Montalban and Red Skelton. In subsequent years, it fell out of fashion, but over the last two decades, the song has reemerged as a holiday favorite.

Loesser wrote "Baby, It's Cold Outside" as a duet for he and his wife to sing at their housewarming party. The performance was a hit with their social circle, so friends continuously asked them to sing it at their parties. Eventually, the couple got asked to perform the song at several elite Hollywood parties, which is how an executive from MGM eventually bought the rights.

Loesser's wife was infuriated with him when she discovered that he had sold their song, but after its release, immense popularity, and emotional Oscar win, she decided that the song was meant to be shared with the world.

Many years ago, I received a professional karaoke machine as a gift. I have few inhibitions about singing, so I put the device to good use during parties and on weekends when I had nothing better to do.

Unfortunately, I had few friends who would join in. On occasion, a friend or two might try something after a few drinks, but those results were precarious at best.

However, I had one friend who was an exceptional singer, and whenever she came to visit, I was insistent that she and I perform together.

Sarah was a buxom redhead whose voice was as large as her personality. She and I worked together for several years and in that time became close friends. When I found out that Sarah could sing, we were off to the races.

The two of us often sang popular duets. We'd belt out "Stumblin' In" by Suzi Quatro and Chris Norman or "Stop Draggin' My Heart Around" by Stevie Nicks and Tom Petty, but our all-time favorite was "Baby, It's Cold Outside."

When the holiday season arrived, we'd pull out the backing track, pour ourselves a martini (in the spirit of Dean Martin), and belt it out. The call-and-response format of the song not only made it challenging to sing, but also a hell of a lot of fun to perform. I have numerous Christmas memories in my life, but singing "Baby, It's Cold Outside" with Sarah is one of my favorites.

Eventually, Sarah moved away and our duets came to an end. But every time I hear "Baby, It's Cold Outside" I think of her and the fun we had in my basement during the holidays.

Another great holiday memory I have was watching "Willy Wonka & the Chocolate Factory" starring Gene Wilder, which always seemed to get airplay during the Christmas season. The characters, storyline, and bevy of catchy songs make it one of the true Hollywood classics when it comes to children's musicals.

In 2005, Tim Burton remade the classic film with Johnny Depp in the title role of Willy Wonka. Reviews were mixed but I was adamant that Depp's portrayal was totally off base, and in my mind, one of the lowest performances of his career.

And now Timothée Chalamet is giving it a shot with the chocolatier's origin story. "Wonka" imagines Willy Wonka's life before he becomes famous and what it took for him to break through. It's light-hearted, whimsical, and full of catchy, upbeat performances.

I ended up liking this film more than I thought I would. It's still no match to the original 1971 film, but at least it embodied a Wonka that author Roald Dahl would have been proud of.

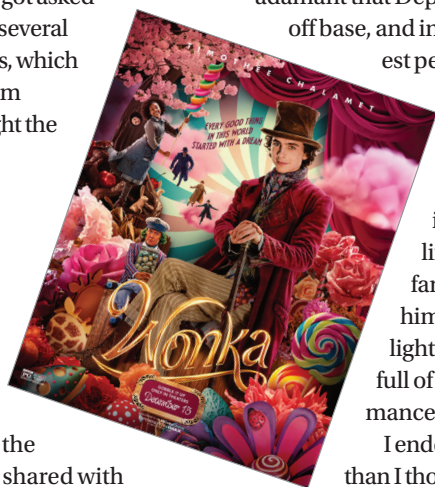
Be sure to check this one out over the holidays. It's the kind of film that the whole family can enjoy together.

A scrumptious "B" for "Wonka," now playing in theaters everywhere.

*Got a question or comment for Dom? You can email him at [moviediary@att.net](mailto:moviediary@att.net).*



The Movie Diary  
By Dom Cioffi



# Family traditions: trees, grumblings and all

Getting the lights all untangled and the ornaments hung one by one never bothered me. We usually had family gatherings where everyone would take part so you could always hide in the bathroom if it got too intense. My grandmothers (both the Methodist and the Jewish one) would each spend meticulous hours opening the paperclips and unwrapping the ornaments from the paper towels. Later, there would be fancy already opened clips and organized storage boxes, but in the '80s, we had Avon boxes.

That was the fun part. Running around in our holiday party dresses, all hopped up on orange soda. Wearing our stupid tights, drooping down and bunched up at the ankles, because our grandmas were over and that's what is appropriate for young ladies. It was a different time then. My one grandpa would sit on the big white couch, his lap looking just like Santa's while my other grandpa was off looking over some

building plans my dad always had laid out in his office. Always working, that one.

Then there was my dad. Rocking his silly red plaid vest like he was going to be the lead in some romantic Christmas production (they didn't have Hallmark movies yet). Don't worry, he would be obsessed with those when they came out. But back then, he had to be his own Christmas movie. Literally. I remember the camcorder

being bigger than his head and we weren't allowed to run down the stairs in the morning until he had the thing all set up. I don't think we ever watched a single one of those movies, but he did like filming them.

But you cannot just remember the fun stuff. You have to remember those moments where an 8-year-old little girl is trying to help her father carry a 10-foot pine tree into the house while my mom and younger sister told us how to do it.

Living the dream → 35



Living the Dream  
By Merisa Sherman

# Practice Part 3: Adventure is rarely comfortable

I was ready to wander solo. On a trip I was afraid to take.

With my (tiny) book "Fear" at the printer, I set out to practice the methodosophy (what I call philosophy plus methods) I had shared in the book. It was anecdotal research for a book I'd just written.

## Sandra Science

I planned to car camp as no itinerary is needed when carrying your room on your back. It's a great way for an old lady to wander alone.

The trip's agenda was to practice not listening to the fear gremlin. Each time this invisible gremlin whispered in my ear that I could or should not do something, I would stop—and do that thing. Every single time. Period.

And for fun, I set another goal to swim in every loch and sea loch I encountered. Every. Single. One.

I knew from experience that not listening to the fear gremlin takes effort. So, weeks before my trip, I embraced the word "effort" as something to lean into, rather than retreat from.

I set the voiceover on my iPhone to a British accent, rented a manual car, and saw myself enjoying driving on the left side of the road for the first time. I was "leaning toward" the things with the potential to

scare me before encountering them.

When I arrived, I switched to an automatic shift after a harrowing clutch burn-out of my rental car. As I was being shuttled back to the airport, I patted myself on the back for effort. I had driven a manual shift car on the left side of the road. It was a short-lived victory and uncomfortable. But I did it.

Later that day, I approached my first roundabout and instead of allowing the fear gremlin to turn my guts to liquid, I embraced the experience and relaxed my mind, breath, and shoulders. Then slid into the busy labyrinth with ease and a smile.

Gliding smoothly around the lanes, I listened to my familiar GPS gal and exited the roundabout with more confidence and an even bigger smile. I was practicing not listening to fear. One moment at a time.

Before the trip, I connected with a few women via social media who offered to share their local adventures with me. It was a great way to meet new friends and have a local guide. These adventures included driving on twisty, single-track roads full of blind curves, taken at high speed. I was terrified.

As narrow as a bike path, I questioned Funologist → 35



The Funologist  
By Sandra Dee Owens

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← **Funologist:**  
from page 33

the sanity and safety of this well-established, mind-blowing driving behavior. With a giggle, my new friends raced around curves without slowing. “You just have to be ready to ditch your car to the side a bit.”

The fear gremlin said I couldn’t drive on a single-track road. So I asked my new friend, Holly Spice, to trade seats, and drove her car slowly, honking loudly at every curve. I didn’t drive it like a local—but I drove it. Practice, practice, practice.

I spent a night in a coed hostel in northern Scotland. The shared bunk room was filled with soggy, Highland hikers and their equally soggy gear. The room smelled ghastly. It was uncomfortable to use a bathroom stall with men on either side. But adventure is rarely comfortable. A lovely Scotswoman named Charlotte, who’d been traveling the world solo, told me she was heading to the standing stones on the northern tip of Lewis Isle. “The standing stones are older than Stonehenge,” she said. I was intrigued and headed to the Lewis ferry the next morning.

I stayed in a hostel on Lewis Isle that was not coed. It smelled much better. Sick of driving in my car, I found a bicycle rental shop in the village and told the shop owner I wanted to ride out to the standing stones. He showed me a map with a remote, interior road that cut across the peat bogs.

As I studied the map, the fear gremlin began in earnest. “You cannot ride a bicycle across this desolate, boggy landscape, on a narrow path shared with Highland cattle, no homes, fierce wind, and cold, driving rain.”

Then ride back again. So I did what the fear gremlin said I could not. And it was uncomfortable at times. But I knew discomfort was just a stone wall I needed to climb over if I wanted to reach the magic on the other side. And I found a lot of magic that day. And every day. In the wind, the rain, the Highland cattle, the otherworldly scent of peat bogs, and the standing stones. In the lochs, sea lochs, white sand beaches and alpine ponds, new friends and shared adventures.

These magnificent experiences are mine to keep now. If I had listened to the fear gremlin, I would have robbed myself of these treasured experiences.

So every day I continue to practice. I practice not listening to the fear gremlin.

Because just like a baby learning to walk, you get good at what you practice.

For more information, visit: [sandradeeowens.com](http://sandradeeowens.com).



By Sandra Dee Owens

Visions of wanderings through Oslo’s enigmatic landscape.

← **Living the Dream:**  
from page 33

I’m not sure why this was a thing. Maybe it’s because my dad was Jewish and his dad never taught him the proper way to do it. But our way, my dad’s and my way, was to not ever move anything out of the way and litter as many pine needles throughout the home, making as much noise and as big a mess as possible.

We would swear. Both of us. The entire time. I loved it. Because we were miserable and I was never old enough to actually help. I would end up falling with the tree on top of me while he yelled “pick it up” as we tried to maneuver around the glass coffee table. Because why would we ever move that?

Then righting the damn thing into that stupid little tree holder. I seriously don’t understand how four screws and tiny legs are supposed to hold anything up, but for the most part it worked. After we trimmed the bottom off. And then the top off. And then made some other adjustments to the uncooperative branches at the bottom. And top. And maybe the bottom again.

But not too many, because Mom watched us like a hawk. It was too left, now it’s leaning too right. Maybe we could spin it around just a little bit. No, she meant counterclockwise. She always sounded so sweet telling us what to do, holding her Christmas coffee mug like a talisman to ward off her grumbling elves. While Dad and I, sweating profusely, would tighten and retighten those stupid screws until our forearms failed us.

Since my dad died, I do the tree by myself. I feel that it’s important to maintain this family tradition and swear the entire time. My mom does try to help, she puts her coffee mug down, but the last thing I want is for a tree to fall on my 75-year-old mother and knock her into the glass coffee table. Because we still don’t move it. That would be breaking family tradition and just plain sacrilegious.

But seriously, why is there not a company that goes around setting up people’s Christmas trees in those little stands? I know why. Because it sucks so badly that no one even wants to get paid to do it. But you know what? My most vibrant memories of Christmas are of cursing with my dad

while putting up the tree. We might not have known how to do it properly, but we figured it out. Together. And I will continue to grumble and swear while I put up my mom’s tree every year. Because that’s our family tradition.

Merisa Sherman is a long time Killington resident, KMS coach and local Realtor. She can be reached at [female-skibum@gmail.com](mailto:female-skibum@gmail.com).

My most vibrant memories of Christmas are of cursing with my dad while putting up the tree. We might not have known how to do it properly, but we figured it out. Together.



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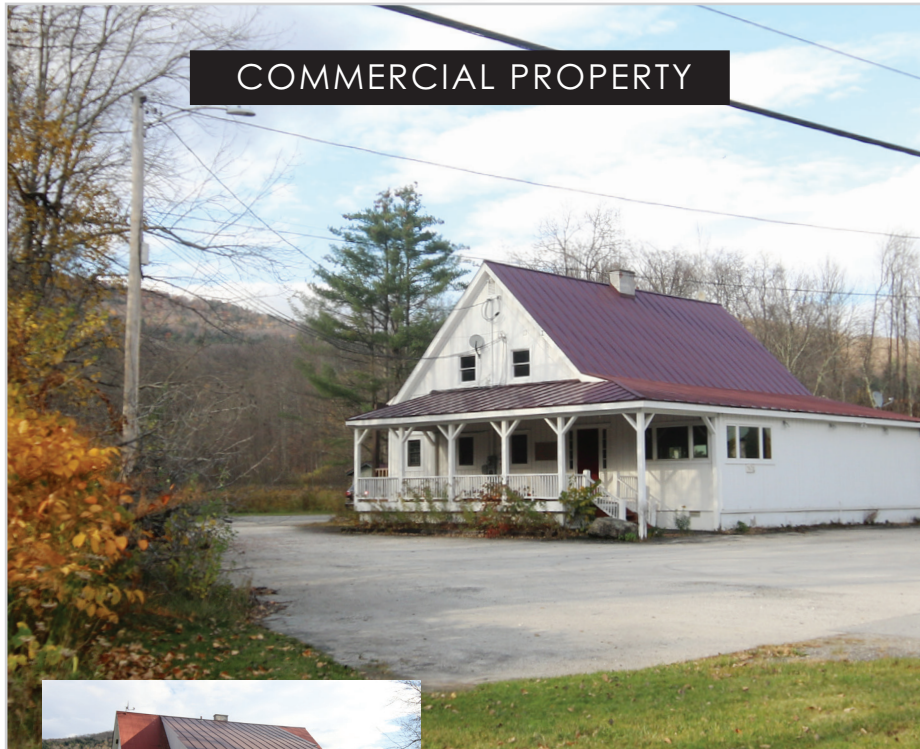
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## ← Mountain Meditation:

from page 32

Regardless of our individual riches, we can assist a global effort to mend our world by sharing our resources and the gifts we possess, also locally. Perhaps baking and cooking are your abilities—a warming zone is open in Rutland (6:30 a.m. - 2:30 p.m. Monday through Thursday) where breakfast and lunch are served to the needy in the United Methodist Church 60 Strongs Ave., Rutland. The Community Cupboard in Killington's Little White Church (2326 US-4) is available for neighbors in need. There are many ways to help.

Now we have exciting opportunities to assist refugee families through the Refugee Resettlement Program. Vermont needs more people, and refugees are willing to resettle here, rebuild their lives and contribute through hard work. Their rich cultures enhance and broaden our understanding and global perspectives. (To



help as a family friend, tutor in English, with transportation, administration, special events, temporary housing etc., contact Volunteer@uscrvt.org. For more info visit: refugees.org).

*Tikkun olam* improves our world and strives to restore its harmonious nature. It is an opportunity for each one to reach one through our own Divine spark, by sharing our unique gifts and passions. Whether entrepreneur, artist, teacher, environmentalist, caregiver, developer, or retiree, our every small deed helps tip the world towards its healing restoration.

We must remember that "silence is consent." Within our power as vehicles for good, we can ease human

suffering and rebuild the world through our small acts of kindness and compassion. The ultimate goal is the everlasting perfection of our beloved world.

This holiday season is the perfect time to remember that *we are one*. What we do unto others we also do unto ourselves, so every positive act uplifts all of us, too. The Golden Rule, treating others as we wish to be treated, and the holy acts of *tikkun olam* are our opportunity to glue the world together, all together, for a brighter future for everyone.

May blessings of peace, harmony and joy be yours this holiday season.

*Marguerite Jill Dye is a writer and artist who lives in both Vermont and Florida.*

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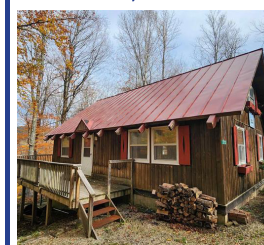
3 BR/1.5 BA, 2-Level condo, 1168 sq. ft.



- Electric heat, 2 decks
- Seller offering some financing
- Furnished & equipped \$519,000

### TANGLEWOOD DR - "Snow Haven"

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- 1.5 acres, electric heat
- 1st floor with a BR & BA
- Open living concept
- Level driveway \$579K

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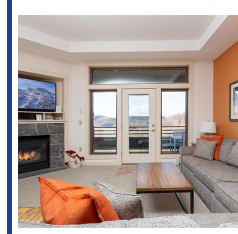
Upper level 2BR+LOFT, 2BA, 1,342 Sq.Ft.



- Great rental history
- Woodburning fireplace
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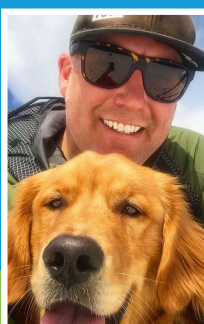
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