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Chronology 2023

A Year In Review

(January from Page 1A)
 into an alleged teen drinking party factoring into the equation.

Four months after announcing that Addison Northwest School District 6th-graders would attend middle school at Vergennes Union High School, ANWSD officials determined the change would take place in the fall of 2024, as opposed to the fall of 2023. Among the reasons for the delay: teachers and staff needed more time to prepare for the new educational model, already in place in the Addison Central School District (ACSD).

Rep. Peter Conlon, D-Cornwall, resigned from the ACSD board in January to focus on statewide educational policy; he was the newly appointed chair of the House Education Committee. The school board appointed Ellen Whelan-Wuest to replace Conlon until the March elections, at which time she would be free to run for the final year remaining on Conlon's original three-year term.

Conlon wasn't the only Addison County lawmaker to get tapped for a leadership post for the 2023-2024 biennium. Rep. Diane Lanpher, D-Vergennes, was named chair of the House Appropriations Committee; Rep. Amy Sheldon, D-Middlebury, was picked to helm the newly created House Environment & Energy Committee; Sen. Ruth Hardy, D-Middlebury, was picked to lead Senate Government Operations; and Sen. Chris Bray, D-Bristol, was granted another term as steward of the Senate Natural Resources & Energy Committee.

January brought news of four building scenarios for upgrading Middlebury's Ilsley Library, ranging in price from \$5.5 million to \$23 million, according to very early estimates. Options included renovating the 100-year-old library building, renovating it while complementing it with an annex somewhere nearby, renovating and expanding the structure on site, or building a new structure. Library officials organized numerous public comment sessions to get feedback.

The recently expanded Ethan Allen Express passenger rail service, which began rolling through Addison County the previous August, proved it was catching on with riders, including those catching the train at the Middlebury and Vergennes/Ferrisburgh stops. Toni Clithero, the VTrans Amtrak Grants Program manager, told the *Independent* that Amtrak had projected ridership on the Burlington-Rutland extension would add 2,000-2,500 riders per month to the Ethan Allen. Comparing ridership to pre-pandemic numbers during the federal fiscal year of 2019, the extension added more than 5,000 riders in July, 3,000 in August, 3,424 in September, 3,785 in October and 3,930 in November.

In Vergennes, Mayor Matt Chabot announced he wouldn't seek re-election to a second term. "Politics isn't really my bag, and change and transition management is," Chabot told the *Independent*. "Everyone knows it was never my intention to be mayor for life. It was just to assist (City Manager)



January 10

HEATHER BALLARD PROUDLY holds up the newest addition to her family — Jaxson Thomas McCormick, the first baby born at Porter Hospital in 2023. Little Jaxson arrived on Jan. 3 at 7:51 a.m. weighing six pounds, 12 oz., to parents Heather Ballard and Nate McCormick of Middlebury and siblings Sophia and MyKayla. Welcome to the world, Jaxson!

Independent file photo/Steve James

Ron (Redmond) and the council to get things stabilized after 2020."

The ACSD board declined to warn a petitioned referendum seeking feedback on two separate options to amend the ACSD charter in a way that would allow a bigger public role in closing local schools. But the panel did agree to hold its own vote in February on whether host towns — or the combined electorate of the seven member ACSD communities — should be given the right to vote (and potentially veto) any future proposals to close any district school due to declining enrollment or other reasons that might make a school unsustainable.

Faced with mounting neighborhood complaints about late-night partying at off-campus Middlebury College student housing, the Middlebury selectboard strengthened the town's noise ordinance. Noise complaints can now trigger a police response after 11 p.m. and before 7 a.m. on Fridays, Saturdays and "special holidays (such as, New Year's Eve and July 4), which is two hours earlier than the previous noise ordinance trigger of 1 a.m. through 7 a.m. on those days.

The Turning Point Center of Addison County secured a \$1 million federal earmark through U.S. Sen. Patrick Leahy; the nonprofit was seeking the money to transform the former St. Mary's Catholic School at 86 Shannon St. in Middlebury into a multi-use "Addison County Hope & Recovery Community Center." The Turning Point Center is one of 12 peer recovery centers in Vermont that offer support for individuals and their families seeking recovery from substance use disorder and other addictions. The organization



February 9

A FEW OF THE 38 firefighters who responded to the Old College Farm Road fire on Saturday morning emerge from the smoke as they move gingerly on the icy scene. The thermometer read almost 20 degrees below zero.

Independent file photo/John S. McCright

and its recovery programming are currently wedged into 3,300 square feet at 54A Creek Road.

Just when it appeared the COVID-19 pandemic might end a more than 50-year tradition of legislative breakfasts in Addison County, the Addison County Farm Bureau and Bridport Grange announced plans to resurrect the sessions — albeit in a more limited fashion — two breakfasts per month, instead of one a week,

through the legislative session.

From Bristol came other signs of a return to normalcy following the pandemic. Officials confirmed a return of the annual "Pocock Rocks" festival on Main Street, and resurrection of the Bristol Farmers Market on the town green.

February

The Patricia Hannaford Career Center community celebrated the hiring of a top administrator in February. Nicole MacTavish — a U.S. Army education program quality analyst working in Kwajalein Atoll, one of the Marshall Islands — accepted the job and would begin her duties on July 1. She was hired to succeed interim Career Center Superintendent Timothy P. Williams, who had been hired in August 2022 after a previous effort to replace former Superintendent Dana Peterson proved unsuccessful.

The town of Middlebury in February earned a "Neighborhood Development Area" designation from the state of Vermont for a large swath of property in its core village area. It's an important classification that should serve as a catalyst for the construction of more local affordable housing, while giving the community priority consideration for state grants.

In Montpelier, lawmakers were (See February, Page 9A)



January 26

THE EXPANDED ETHAN Allen Express rail service is drawing a growing number of passengers, including at its Middlebury stop, shown here.

Independent file photos/Steve James

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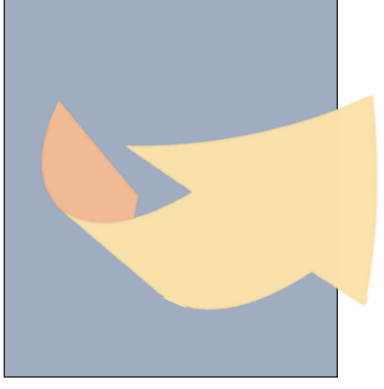
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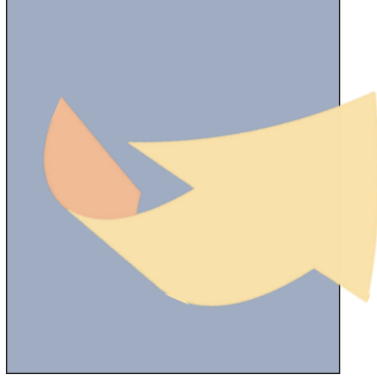
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Chronology 2023

A Year In Review

(February from Page 8A)
busy working on a number of bills — including legislation aimed at guaranteeing paid family leave. Leading that effort was state Rep. Robin Scheu, D-Middlebury, who saw the bill as a way to assist Vermonters needing to take care of an infant, sick family member or those fleeing domestic violence.

Another bill proved to be far more controversial. Members of the Addison County business community turned up the heat on Bill S.5, also known as the Affordable Heat Act. The bill was aimed at bending the curve on climate change in Vermont through major investments in weatherization and the transition to green heating systems in homes and businesses. As originally crafted, S.5 called for, among other things, establishing a Clean Heat Standard that would've required importers of fossil heating fuels into Vermont to reduce pollution over time. Fossil fuel importers would have been asked to help subsidize cleaner heat options — primarily for low- and middle-income Vermonters — such as weatherization and heat pumps. That provision drew particular criticism from area heating fuel companies. In response, the authors of S.5 agreed to make then bill a two-year study.

The Addison Central School District board agreed to change the ACSD charter in a manner that will make the future shuttering of a district school more arduous. Article 14 of the ACSD charter had given the ACSD board exclusive rights to close a district school, if such a measure were approved by at least 10 of the panel's 13 members — aka, a supermajority vote. But the board in February added an extra wrinkle to the charter stating that the closure process will also require a majority vote of the combined electorate of Bridport, Cornwall, Middlebury, Ripton, Salisbury, Shoreham and Weybridge before any school building can be closed.

Maple Broadband connected its first Addison County customers to high-speed, fiber optic internet services. The lucky, initial customers were located in Cornwall, Middlebury and Salisbury. Plans called for installation of 100 more miles of fiber optic lines during 2023 to bring service to more of Cornwall and Salisbury, along with portions of Orwell, Shoreham, Whiting and Leicester.

Sugarmaking got off to an early start in February, thanks to freezing temperatures at night followed by 40-plus-degree days that prompted the sap to flow.

February was a month during which the upcoming Town Meeting Day municipal and school board races came into focus. Some particularly interesting ones: Four candidates emerged for three spots on the Vergennes City Council,



February 2

VICTORIOUS MIDDLEBURY COLLEGE Log Rolling Club member Audrey Welsh keeps her balance on a colorful timber floating in the shallow end of the college Natatorium Sunday afternoon as a competitor from the University of Vermont gets dunked.

Independent file photo/Steve James



March 9

RYAN MCNULTY, ASSISTANT general manager of the Middlebury Snowbowl, spent part of Wednesday morning clearing the upper deck of the base lodge after this week's storm. About 24-plus inches fell at the Snowbowl, as well as in mountain towns throughout Addison County.

Independent file photo/Angelo Lynn

while two people stepped up for one available seat on the Addison Northwest School District board. Nine candidates announced for four available spots on the Addison Central School District board.

It was a month that saw Joanne Corbett announce she'd step down as executive director of Elderly

Services Inc. after a 33-year run. Elderly Services is a much-revered nonprofit that delivers comprehensive counseling, educational programming, entertainment and daycare to around 80 elders at its own spacious Harry & Jeanette Weinberg Center at 112 Exchange St. in Middlebury.

Valentine's Day featured the launch of "Gather" at 48 Merchants Row, a 1,400-square-foot space in which folks are invited to congregate, enjoy food, chat with neighbors, do laundry, and benefit from entertaining and therapeutic programming — all for free. It's a project of the Cornwall-based Bread Loaf Mountain Zen Community, which signed a 2.5-year lease for what was once home to the Bourdon Insurance Agency. Gather would become a particularly important spot for the community's houseless population.

Middlebury College marked the centennial of its annual Winter Carnival, a three-day event filled with skiing competitions, snow sculptures, a grand ball, music and parties. The tradition was established in 1923 and has changed in scope and popularity through the years.

March

March is synonymous with "Town Meeting Day" in Vermont, and Addison County residents dutifully fielded a variety of fiscal year 2024 municipal/school budgets, special purchases, elections and referenda in their respective towns.

County taxpayers passed all their school and town budgets, mostly



March 9

JAIME McCALLUM TURNS away from the action of the Weybridge town meeting Monday evening in the Weybridge Elementary gym to share a moment with his daughter Tessa, who pauses her own note-taking to connect with her dad.

Independent file photo/Megan James

by substantial margins.

Voters in the Middlebury area decided a nine-person race for four spots on the Addison Central School District board. Those making the cut were incumbent Ellen Whelan-Wuest of Cornwall (just appointed in January); Tricia Allen and Jason Chance, both of Middlebury; and incumbent Suzanne Buck of Bridport.

Sadly, there were no takers for four vacant seats on the Mount Abraham Unified School District board, seats representing Bristol (2), Monkton (1) and New Haven (1).

In Vergennes, residents picked a new mayor, Chris Bearor (who ran unopposed), and decided a four-person race for three spots on the city council. Two incumbents, Sue Rakowski and Ian Huizenga, and newbie Cheryl Brinkman were elected, while Don Perley finished out of the running.

In Middlebury, residents re-elected incumbent selectboard members Dan Brown and Brian Carpenter to new three-year terms, and incumbent Isabel Gogarty to a two-year term.

Incumbents also breezed to new terms in Bristol; John "Pecker" Heffernan and Michelle Perlee ran unopposed for the selectboard.

In addition to endorsing their FY'24 municipal budget, Middlebury voters backed proposals to invest in a new, \$3.5 million municipal water holding tank; to change the town charter in a manner allowing future town treasurers to be appointed, instead of elected; and agreed to a purchase the former Maverick service station at 82 Court St. for \$295,000, a property the town needs for a future realignment of the Court Street/Monroe Street/Charles Avenue intersection.

Middlebury Union High School landed a new principal in March — though the person hired needed little introduction to the community. Caitlin Steele was awarded the gig after having taken the job for a test drive following the sudden resignation of Justin Campbell in January. Steele has been with the ACSD since 2016, when she was hired as director of teaching & learning. She was promoted to assistant superintendent of teaching & learning in July 2021. Steele was the top choice from among three finalists for the job.

Ripton also confirmed a new principal: Bridport School teacher Megan Cheresnick, who agreed to helm Ripton Elementary beginning July 1.

While Middlebury and Ripton both snagged new school leaders, the town of Bristol learned it'd be in the market for a new elementary school principal. John Bratko announced he'd take an immediate leave of absence for the remainder of the academic year and sever ties with the school after that. Bratko had just begun his tenure as Bristol Elementary's principal in July of 2022, and was the fourth administrator to lead the school since 2018.

Jason Ouellette got the word

(See March, Page 10A)

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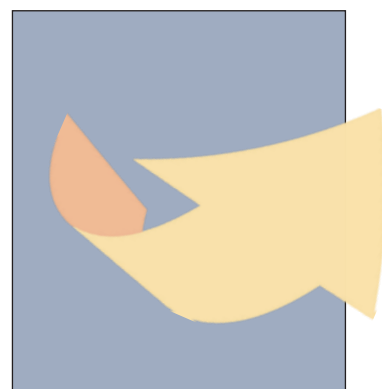
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Chronology 2023

A Year In Review

(March from Page 9A)
“interim” removed from his Vergennes police chief title. The city council formally OK’d his promotion to top cop, a position from which George Merkel had retired last fall.

But Vergennes officials also learned, very tragically, that the city would need a new fire chief. After 45 years with the city fire department — the most recent 14 as chief — Jim Breur succumbed to a long battle with cancer.

Middlebury police agreed to take on dispatching services for the Addison County Sheriff’s Department, an agreement that some local law enforcement officials hoped would lead to a common dispatching system for all the area’s emergency responders.

In Bristol, the selectboard was taking stock in the village’s aging water distribution system — some of it 117 years old and in need of replacement. The board estimated around half the water lines needed to be swapped out, a massive undertaking that will come at a significant cost to users.

Lincoln school leaders drafted a \$4.6 million spending plan to cover FY’24 public education expenses for the town’s new, PreK-12 independent school district. Local voters would get a chance to decide the spending plan in April.

Monkton residents began discussing the possible purchase of a 445-acre parcel that would be designated a “town forest.” The Monkton Town Forest Committee, established back in 2019, vowed to research the potential purchase, involving property at the southern end of Monkton, near the Bristol town line.

A handful of Addison County organizations — including Addison County Relocalization Network (ACORN) — continued their efforts to develop a community-based commercial kitchen and tortilla factory to serve as a space for residents to grow their food-related businesses, whip up value-added products or gather with one another over a meal. Joining the effort was the Addison Allies Network, a nonprofit organization dedicated to supporting the county’s migrant community.

Nikki Campbell and Hannah Roque, wife and stepdaughter, respectively, of former *Addison Independent* photographer Trent Campbell, teamed up to author a booklet called “Stroke Stories.” It’s a handy, 20-page publication that offers links to important healthcare resources for stroke survivors and their families, as well as poignant stories from patients and caregivers who continue to navigate the road to recovery. The two women committed to authoring the booklet to share what they’d learned following a series of three strokes that Trent had suffered, the first



March 2

PARENTS WATCH AS a group of first- and fourth-grade kids try to slide en masse down the sledding hill behind the Middlebury Rec Center on Sunday afternoon. Ample snow combined with a spirit of adventure resulted in great fun.

Independent file photo/John S. McCright

one back in 2018. Officials at Middlebury’s Town Hall Theater got some great news. The performing arts hub on Merchants Row was awarded a \$500,000 grant to help pay for a 7,000-square-foot addition and public plaza. The grant came through the Vermont Agency of Commerce and Community Development’s Community Recovery and Revitalization Program, and it would help defray an approximately \$7.5 million THT building project.

April

A tragic discovery marked the beginning of April in Addison County, when the body of 17-year-old Rebecca Ball was recovered on April 4 in a wooded area on the west side of Otter Creek, north of Belden Falls, in Weybridge. The discovery ended a massive search that began when the Middlebury teen was reported missing on March 29 and that brought together Middlebury and Vermont State police forces, other agencies and a large group of citizen volunteers. Authorities believed Ball’s death was an accident, as the teen, who had shown a history of “walking off” when she was upset or angry, spent multiple nights outdoors in below-freezing temperatures without sustenance or warm clothing and likely succumbed after one or two days in the elements.



April 6

SOPHIE JOHNSON, OUTREACH Coordinator for the Addison County River Watch Collaborative, points to a part of the Barnes Brook. The collaborative has launched a campaign focused on addressing pollution in the Middlebury watershed and increasing community awareness of the stream.

Independent file photo/Marin Howell

The Middlebury Chapel made the front page in April, after Middlebury College alum and former Vermont Gov. Jim Douglas of Middlebury filed a 79-page lawsuit challenging college officials’ 2021 decision to change the name of the historic structure, formerly known as Mead Memorial Chapel. Douglas argued that the name change broke an agreement between the institution and former Gov. John Abner Mead, the college alum who funded construction of the building and asked that it be

named in honor of his ancestors. College officials in September of 2021 announced the institution would remove Mead from the building’s name, citing Mead’s role in the state’s eugenics movement as prompting the decision.

In other college-related news in April, Middlebury College senior and Middlebury Fire Department volunteer firefighter Emily Jones ran her way to a world record in front of around 120 friends, fellow firefighters and other supporters. (See April, Page 11A)



April 27

NIGERIAN ART AMBASSADOR Ibiyinka Alao shares with Ripton Elementary School students the stories behind his colorful paintings. The artist was visiting Addison County for a nine-day residency and spoke at seven area schools as part of ongoing collaborations with Middlebury College biology professor Greg Pask.

Photo by Greg Pask

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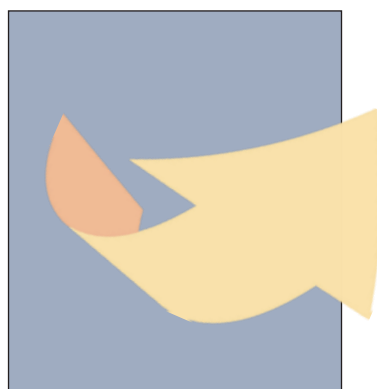
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Chronology 2023

A Year In Review

(April from Page 10A)
To accomplish the feat, Jones ran a mile around Middlebury College's Dargone Track while wearing 60 pounds of firefighting turnout gear and breathing through a respirator, all in eight minutes and 25 seconds. Jones's time crushed the former Guinness Book of World Record of 11:00 for a female runner.

In Cornwall, members of the Mary Baker Allen chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) were busy breathing new life into the formerly dormant Samson Memorial House, a 108-year-old building in the center of town. The building, owned by the local DAR chapter, had seen less and less use over the years as the group's membership dwindled to a point where it no longer had enough people for monthly meetings and special events. However, more recent efforts to recruit new members and transfer members from healthier DAR chapters had proven successful, and in April the local group was preparing to once again welcome community members to the historic structure, particularly during an open house the following month.

The search for a new superintendent to lead the Addison Central School District seemed to progress in April, when district officials identified and began interviewing two finalists for the position: Suzanne Gruending, director of policy implementation for the Essex-Westford School District; and Barbara Anne Komons-Montroll, top administrator of the Windham Southwest Supervisory Union in Vermont.

However, the ACSD board ultimately decided to pause its search for a new superintendent and begin looking for an interim district leader instead. The decision came after Komons-Montroll withdrew her application following the first round of interviews. She did not elaborate on the reason for withdrawal, though ACSD stakeholders had raised concerns about a recent U.S. Department of Justice investigation into the response of the Twin Valley School District (part of the supervisory union the administrator leads) to complaints of student-on-student harassment based on race and sex. Komons-Montroll's departure left Gruending as the lone candidate for the job, and ACSD board members ultimately decided not to offer her the position.

Lincoln residents packed Burnham Hall on April 12 to discuss and vote on the Lincoln School District's first spending plan. Though it wasn't the district's first annual meeting, the gathering was still a momentous occasion: Lincoln voters elected by voice vote three members, including one new member, to serve on the school board, and they adopted by a \$4.6 million spending plan for the school district's first year of operation, which would begin July 1.

Elsewhere in the 5-town area, the Mount Abraham Unified School board in April heard concerns



May 25

PATRICIA HANNAFORD CAREER Center students head into the woods in Wright Park where they felled more than 100 trees that are being cleared for a multi-use trail that will link the Belden Falls trailhead with an important shrubland in the Middlebury park.

Independent file photo/Steve James



June 1

JOE DEGRAY CUTS his last head of hair — belonging to Armond Brisson, one of his oldest customers — after a barbering career that began 65 years ago. "Joe's Barber Shop" in Middlebury, owned by Shelley Bryant, will continue to bear Joe's name.

Independent file photo/Steve James

from around a dozen community members after a student of color at Bristol Elementary School was twice called a racial slur. Residents called on school officials to take immediate and extensive action in addressing racism throughout

the district and ensuring all students feel safe and supported, such as by incorporating an anti-racism course into the district's curriculum and hiring (within the next five years) more teachers and staff who are Black, Indigenous or

people of color.

School-related news continued to fill the front page in April, after the county's three unified school districts teamed up on a county-wide bus contract. Officials were hopeful the "strength in numbers" approach would reap a better deal for student transportation than continuing to broker individual deals, however the districts' request for busing contract proposals yielded just one bid — from Betcha Transit/Student Transportation of America, which has served as the transportation provider for each of the districts for decades. While their first effort did not yield many bids, district officials remained optimistic that their collaboration could prove to be fruitful in the years to come.

In Vergennes, city council members in April took steps toward creating a citizen panel to work with the city's police department. The council on April 11 began the process of forming the committee by agreeing to start recruiting up to nine members for the panel, as well as by reviewing and tweaking a revised committee charge written by City Manager Ron Redmond. Council members eyed the Community Engagement Committee as a potential bridge between the department's officers and the citizens they serve. Potential duties of the committee outlined in the draft committee charge included holding regular meetings to "review and provide feedback" on "regularly provided reports" on the "number and types of citizen complaints and compliments received," the types and volume of calls for service, and the department budget.

May

The Middlebury selectboard in May unanimously voted to hire Karin Mott, a longtime manager at the Middlebury Natural Foods Co-op, to succeed Ann Webster as Middlebury's town clerk. Mott will continue to fill the job until next March, when she'll have the choice to run for the final two years on the term.

Officials in other parts of the county were also busy filling open positions. The committee tasked with searching for Bristol Elementary School's next top administrator selected Brandon resident Boynton to serve in the post. The committee also bolstered the school's leadership team by tapping Bill Huggett, then acting principal at BES, and Anne McKinney, a literacy coach at the elementary school, to serve as co-assistant principals.

In Vergennes, councilors unanimously confirmed interim Vergennes Volunteer Fire Department Chief David DiBiase as the permanent head

(See May, Page 12A)



May 4

OK, THE WARMER weather can return, the annual May Day celebration has taken place at the Waterworks Property in Bristol. The Beltane celebration, sponsored by Vermont Family Forests, took place a day early this year, on Sunday, April 30. The three dozen or so people who attended first enjoyed some rousing music from a first-class quartet of musicians before carrying in a May pole, dancing around it and enjoying a good time.

Photo by Jonathan Blake

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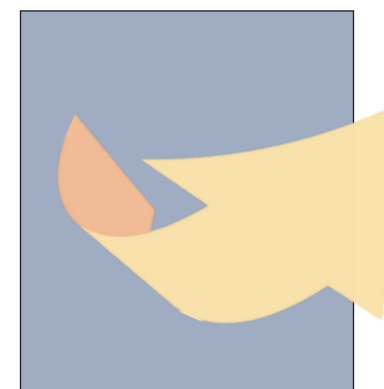
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Chronology 2023

A Year In Review

(May from Page 11A)
of the department. DiBiase had been serving as interim head of the department since March, when longtime Chief Jim Breur succumbed to cancer. Breur had named DiBiase the department's first deputy chief in 2022.

Plans for a new regional transfer station hit the front page in May. The Addison County Solid Waste Management District purchased land in New Haven to host the facility, which is slated to open sometime in the next year and sit on roughly 5.4 acres at 65 Campground Road, close to Route 7. Once complete, the transfer station will offer a place for community members to bring their residential trash, recyclables and, eventually, household hazardous waste.

Also in May, people started talking about former Middlebury Union High School Principal Justin Campbell's January resignation after a Chittenden County newspaper published a story speculating on his reasons for doing so. As former MUHS coaches Jill and Pat Dunn traded accusations with the Addison Central School District over Campbell's investigation of a drinking party at the Duns' home, the *Addison Independent* wrapped up a months-long investigation into the case. The Duns alleged that Campbell had fabricated evidence of the underage drinking party that led to the firing of the two MUHS coaches — Jill as girls' tennis coach and Pat as assistant boys' basketball coach.

Campbell had cited interviews with three MUHS students who he said had told him about drinking at the party. The Duns hired a private investigator who recorded brief interviews with the three students in which they denied having talked with Campbell about the party. Campbell's resignation, effective immediately in January, came just hours after the Duns were informed by an ACSD lawyer that an investigation substantiated their claims that Campbell made up the interviews.

Multiple attempts to reach Justin Campbell were fruitless.

The Duns told the *Independent* that the alleged drinking party was a pretext for their firing, but that school officials did not renew their contracts because they complained about their boss — the activities director. After acknowledging the fabricated evidence, the school district investigated the case again, and determined that the Duns' contracts were not renewed for reasons beyond the testimony of the three students, but they declined to give details because it is a personnel matter.

Jill Dunn's attempt to get federal regulators to investigate her claim that she had been unfairly treated because of her gender did not go anywhere.

Meanwhile, in Bristol, Steven Heffernan and other co-owners of GHR Metal Recycling were working to coordinate a proper military burial for Allan Moch, a Vietnam War era veteran whose remains were discovered in the



June 22
IN ANTICIPATION OF a speech by an anti-trans activist at Vergennes Union High School on Tuesday evening, several hundred people met up outside the school to make posters in support of transexual people and then marched to the city green for the city's first Pride rally. Independent file photo/Steve James

trunk of an abandoned car in the business's Pittsford scrapyard. Heffernan had spent nearly a year trying to ensure Moch was given a serviceman's burial and hadn't had any luck when the *Independent* spoke with him in May. Challenges of the effort included getting in touch with Moch's family, whose permission would be needed for a funeral home to claim Moch's remains.

In May, Middlebury resident Ken Scupp completed the United Way of Addison County's "Race for the Rest of Us." While the philanthropic "race" only consisted of 0.5 kilometer, it marked the end of an arduous, medical marathon for Scupp. Seven months prior to the race, Scupp had received a heart transplant, an operation that's allowed him to live an active life after several months during which his survival was in grave doubt.

The congregation of Shoreham's St. Genevieve Church was also celebrating in May, after parishioners won a major round in an ongoing fight to keep the 146-year-old place of worship open. The Dicastery for the Clergy of the Holy See, based at The Vatican, reversed a 2020 decision by Bishop of Burlington Christopher J. Coyne to close St. Genevieve's, a decision Coyne made in part based on the ongoing decline in the number of St. Genevieve parishioners and the need for substantial renovations to the building. Parishioners Randall and Kathleen Brisson in the spring of 2022 appealed Coyne's decision, and a year later, the Vatican's Dicastery ruled in the Brissons' favor.

Efforts to create more affordable housing in Addison County continued throughout the region in May. The Patricia Hannaford Career Center hosted an open house on May 26, showcasing the first tiny home, also referred to as a "right-sized" home, built by students in collaboration with

a group called HomesFirstVT. In the 5-town area, Monkton officials were looking to develop a new housing committee that would identify options for creating more affordable housing in town. Over in Lincoln, the planning commission was exploring potential adjustments to zoning regulations that would create more housing opportunities in the town's four village districts as part of the panel's work with a \$9,000 Bylaw Modernization Grant it received from the Vermont Department of Housing & Community Development.

And with the end of the school year quickly approaching, human services providers in Addison County were anticipating a decline in free meal options for school-age children whose access to meals declines once school is let out for the summer. Changes in demographics, recent bumps in household income, low staffing and other factors were expected to reduce the number of places hungry kids could get free meals over the summer.

June

In June, Addison County farmers were still assessing the damage caused by a mid-May frost, which devastated apple, grape and other fruit crops throughout the state. Shelburne Vineyard, which owns and operates Lincoln Peak Vineyard in New Haven, lost an estimated 50% of its overall crop in the freeze and some grape varieties at the vineyard's New Haven location experienced upwards of a 95% reduction. Later in the month, Gov. Phil Scott asked that the U.S. Department of Agriculture to issue a disaster designation for the state of Vermont in response to the frost. The declaration would increase

the availability of financial aid for growers throughout the state.

June marked the beginning of a new chapter for Joe's Barber Shop in Middlebury, after founder and longtime barber Joe DeGray hung up his barber's shears at the age of 90. DeGray's retirement marked the end of a 65-year career filled with cutting generations of Addison County residents' hair, as well as the hair of famous poet Robert Frost, actor Burgess Meredith and other celebrities.

Others in Addison County also announced they'd step down from their respective positions. Mary Manley said she'd depart from Middlebury's Henry Sheldon Museum after 25 years serving as an administrator at the organization.

Barnaby Feder in June prepared to step down after 11 years leading Middlebury's Champlain Valley Unitarian Universalist Society, though he planned to return to the place of worship as a congregant. And in Vergennes, longtime Vergennes Union High School math teacher Nancy Ambrose bid farewell to the high school after a 43-year career.

But June wasn't all goodbyes. Some in the county decided they'd stick around for awhile longer. Such was the case in the Addison Central School District, where district officials unanimously endorsed Tim Williams to serve as the ACSD's interim superintendent for the 2023-2024 school year. Williams, a former educator from Pennsylvania, had spent the past year as interim superintendent of the Patricia Hannaford Career Center.

In Bristol, an orphaned, black bear cub was rescued in June after a group of local minors shot and killed the bear's mother on Memorial Day. Vermont Game Warden Dale Whitlock caught the cub and took it to the Kilham Bear Center in Lyme, N.H. The young bear had been on its own for a little under a week when it was caught, not straying far from where its mother was killed.

The 5-town area made the front page again in June when state officials visited a new crop of affordable housing units taking shape in Bristol. The Firehouse Apartments development would provide 20 mixed-income units, with the first tenants set to move in this September. Addison County Community Trust and Evernorth, a non-profit organization committed to providing affordable housing throughout Vermont, New Hampshire and Maine, collaborated on the housing project.

Hundreds of community members gathered outside Vergennes Union High School on June 20, when Walt Heyer, an advocate against gender-affirming healthcare for youth, spoke via video during an event hosted at the high school. Over five dozen community members listened to Heyer's presentation inside the auditorium, while hundreds of other community members gathered outside of the school to make signs and parade to the



June 15
DURING FRIDAY'S COMMENCEMENT ceremony at Vergennes Union High School, seniors, from left, Flynn Bolduc, Scott Botala, Eli Brace and Kyra Bradford look expectantly to the moment when they will get their diplomas. Independent file photo/John S. McCright

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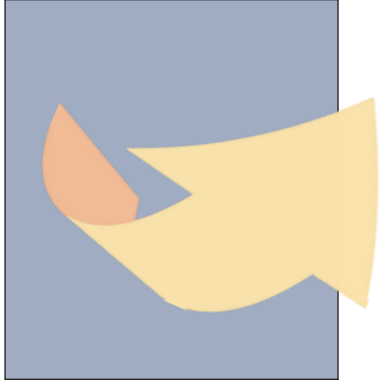
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Chronology 2023

A Year In Review

(June from Page 12A)
City Green for a Pride event that celebrated their queer and trans neighbors.

Pride festivities continued on June 25, when Middlebury hosted its second annual Pride festival on the Middlebury Town Green. The event featured a parade and a Drag Queen Story Hour and coincided with the 40th anniversary of the state of Vermont's first Pride march.

As the month came to a close, Town Hall Theater officials announced ambitious plans for the years ahead. Those plans called for an expansion of the historic building at 68 South Pleasant St., a \$7.5 million project expected to boost THT facilities and transform it into a regional performing arts center. Around 80 people gathered to hear more about the expansion plans during a June 28 informational meeting, which featured a variety of images showing how the 7,000-square-foot, three-story addition would look once completed.

July

July opened with a bang, but thankfully no one was injured. Middlebury and state police cordoned off a portion of Seymour, Elm and Maple streets in Middlebury on July 1 as they negotiated with a man who had fired a rifle from the window of his Seymour Street apartment. The standoff ended around 8 p.m., when Vermont State Police shot teargas into Paul Allard's apartment, then busted in, took away Allard's .3-06 rifle, and took him into custody without further incident. Police said it appeared that Allard was having an emotional crisis of some sort.

The regular rhythm of the year was restored as the fabulous Fourth of July parade in Bristol (preceded by the annual outhouse races), followed by a wonderful week of plain air music in Middlebury at the Festival on the Green.

After more than six months of mounting tension with the selectboard and the resignation of four other town officials, Goshen Town Clerk Rosemary McKinnon resigned her position after 15 years on the job. Her move followed the departure of two selectboard members, the road foreman and the town treasurer, most of whom cited the current three-member selectboard as the reason. Assistant Town Clerk Marci Hayes, whose job was tied to McKinnon's, left that position at the same time McKinnon left hers.

Vermont State Police's Addison County force got a new leader; Lt. Tom Mozzer, 48, succeeded Lt. Cory Lozier, who was named commander of the state police's Williston barracks. Mozzer has a quarter century of experience in law enforcement.

Former longtime state Rep. and Middlebury Selectperson Betty Nuovo died on Tuesday, July 4, at the age of 91. Nuovo, who gave a lot of herself to her community,



July 13
DESPITE CHALLENGING WEATHER at the start of the week, the 44th annual Festival on the Green kicked off with great live music and some other fun performances in Middlebury. Dancer Brendaliz Cepeda whips up the crowd, her bandmates and her red skirt on Tuesday evening under the tent on the town green as the Puerto Rican band Bombajazeando played soulful jazz.

Independent file photo/Steve James



August 10
4-H MEMBERS SKIP over puddles outside the show ring on a soggy opening day of the Addison County Fair and Field Days on Tuesday. The rain overnight and then later in the day didn't affect the judging, but forced postponement of several other events including the Demolition Derby, which was rescheduled for Wednesday.

Independent file photo/Steve James

was recalled as a dutiful, kind and meticulous lawmaker who proved a tireless advocate for marginalized Vermonters. A lawyer by trade and a humanitarian at heart, Nuovo's keen eyes were often enlisted to scan legislation for any ambiguities, potential loopholes or just plain mistakes, and she was particularly outspoken in her support for same-sex unions, equal rights for women, the environment, and for services to lift up those in need.

Farm stands are a familiar roadside attraction in Addison County. The simple set-up offers consumers a convenient way to purchase locally grown produce and other products directly from area growers whenever they spot an

open stand. But what if that well-known model could also be used to connect community members with the work of local artists? That's the idea behind the new Plank Road Art Stand and Gifts, run by Bristol resident and artist Brenda Myrick. The art stand operates out of a converted pony trailer parked in front of Myrick's Plank Road home. The roadside treasure trove is filled with paintings, hand-blown glass and gifts created in Addison County. Passersby can poke into the art stand and purchase pieces by leaving a check or cash in a cash box or making a payment through Venmo.

Middlebury Police Chief Tom Hanley in July confirmed he'll retire from the force later

this year after more than three transformational decades of service to the department and the community. His contributions included establishing a bias-free policing policy with respect to Addison County's migrant worker population, helping create the PD's first policies and procedures manual to create a new culture within the department, installing a "community policing" system, boosting hiring standards, spearheading efforts to build a new Middlebury PD headquarters, and overseeing the transition to better technology and equipment. Middlebury police also have access to a mobile command unit and has its own K-9 team — two things the department didn't have pre-1991.

Addison County was spared the brutal flooding that hit central Vermont in early July, but the rains started to fall at mid-month and Middlebury Fire Chief David Shaw was seeing during the week of July 17 water levels in county rivers rising to record levels. Deep brown waters in Otter Creek rushed over waterfalls and spilled into farm fields and recreation areas. The recently completed \$2 million project aimed at safeguarding East Middlebury from an at-times unbridled Middlebury River appeared to pay off, as the village was spared widespread damage. People were worried, however, that all the standing water would lead to worse mosquito infestations than usual. They didn't know what would be coming just a few weeks later.

After several years of increasingly more pointed discussion of renovations to Ilsley Library, officials at the Middlebury library late in July revealed images created by three architectural teams showing what an expanded and renovated Ilsley could look like. The teams were competing to win the final contract for the big job.



July 27
AFTER DRENCHING RAIN during the second week of July, and just before last week's deluge, Addison County residents endured high winds, hail and a tornado warning on July 13 that left their marks on the landscape. Workers cut up and removed a large willow tree that toppled onto a Buttolph Drive home in Middlebury as a result of the high winds.

Independent file photo/Steve James

August

It was already a tough year for Vermont farmers as August started. They were dealing with a May frost that devastated apple, berry and fruit crops, and heavy rains in July eroded fields, hurt soil fertility and stressed crops during prime growing season. Then the rains really came. And it wasn't just the farmers that were hurting.

A summer's worth of rain fell on parts of Addison County on Aug. 3 and 4. There was so much water that just didn't have a place to go. In Middlebury, water pooled so high on Seymour Street under the railroad overpass that even boats couldn't get through. Route 116/Case Street was washed out by water evacuating Dow Pond and it took a segment of town water line with it — some residents were under a boil water notice for six weeks. Municipal wastewater pumps that were submerged by flooding would

(See August, Page 14A)

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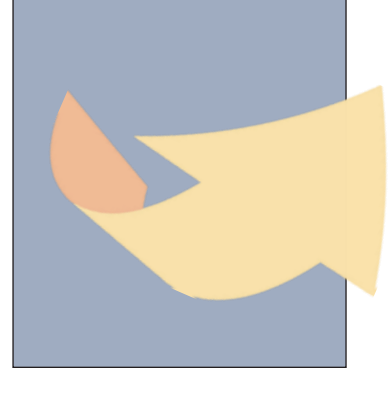
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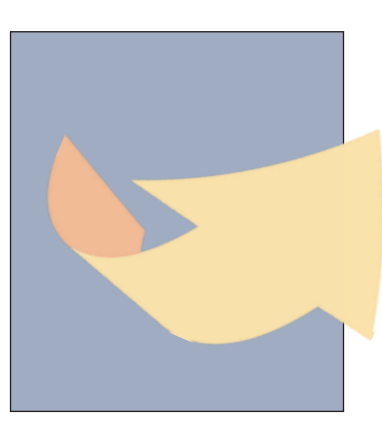
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Chronology 2023

A Year In Review

(August from Page 13A)
 cost \$500,000 to repair, a town official estimated. Water in the police station prompted officers to evacuate.

Not just Middlebury, but also Ripton, Lincoln and Salisbury saw major damage to roads and culverts, sinkholes appeared, and landslides stuck in several places. Lower Notch Road in Bristol was closed. Flowing water decimated the Lincoln Library driveway. There were power outages in many places, and folks trapped by the water had to be rescued.

Despite the rains, Addison County Fair and Field Days still came off as planned. Cows were shown, cars were crashed into each other, children laughed, pigs raced, and almost everyone ate at least a little bit of junk food.

Amy and James Muir both have jobs, yet for the past six years, they've been unsuccessful in finding permanent housing while living with their two children in a transitional apartment provided by John Graham Shelter in Vergennes. Then their fortunes changed when Habitat for Humanity approved their application for a house being built in the Vergennes neighborhood Booth Woods. In August they told us how much this meant to them.

About a month before students were scheduled to return to Middlebury College campus for the start of the 2023-2024 school year, college officials offered some of them a big incentive to stay away. At the beginning of the month, the college sent emails to rising juniors and seniors offering a \$10,000 stipend to the first 30 students who opted to take a voluntary leave of absence for the fall and winter. The reason for the incentive: the college was over-enrolled after some accepted students put off starting school during the COVID-19 pandemic, and now Middlebury didn't have room to house them all.

Porter Medical Center officials in August said they are seeking state approval of a fiscal year 2024 budget that projects \$140 million in expenses, reflecting a \$23 million increase compared to the current year. They attributed the increase to the cost of hiring visiting nurses and inflation in general.

After Town Hall Theater thanked Steve and Beth Dow for their years feeding Middlebury at The Diner, a demolition crew knocked down the three-room former diner on Merchants Row in a matter of hours. Town Hall Theater, which has owned the structure since 2018, cleared the site in order to expand the theater to make way for more rehearsal and storage space that will enable THT to become a regional performance hub.

Later in the month, the THT announced that Middlebury College had donated \$1 million



August 24

MIDDLEBURY FIRE CHIEF David Shaw poses with one of the town's two Technical Rescue Team boats, which have seen extensive use this summer and were originally purchased with grant funding, as has been related equipment.

Independent file photo/Steve James

to its \$7.8 million drive to raise funds for the new theater and arts hub.

The newest Vergennes City Council member was appointed in early August. Emily Rossier, an educator who also has experience working in city government, replaced Zoe Kaslow, who stepped away from the board to pursue a graduate degree out of state. Rossier, 45, will serve until Town Meeting Day in March.

The Guilbeau family of Austin, Texas, was among those seeking to lay down new roots in Addison County but they couldn't find a conventional home to buy. So they bought the Chipman Inn in Ripton instead and now are running a hotel business in the 195-year-old structure they also call home.

Middlebury Union Middle School's first-ever dean of climate and culture resigned from her job after only one year. Esther Charlestin, who is Black, cited two alleged, racially-charged incidents — and what she called an “underwhelming” response to those incidents from Addison Central School District — as reasons for her departure.

The ninth annual Middlebury New Filmmakers Festival (MNFF9) hosted a record number of movie makers during its Aug. 23-27 run. This year's crop of 82 visiting filmmakers hailed from as far away as Indonesia and as near as here in Vermont — home to Mount Abraham Union High School grad Sierra Urich, whose documentary “Joonam” was one



September 21

ACORN'S TOUR DE FARMS, one of Vermont's oldest cycling farm tours, returned to Shoreham and Orwell for its 15th year of celebrating local food. At the Golden Russet Farm Will Stevens shows off garlic drying in the rafters.

Photo by Lee Krohn Photography

of the most highly anticipated offerings at MNFF9. Downtown Middlebury, on a small scale, played its annual, late-summer role of “Hollywood East” for an eclectic collection of newly minted filmmakers, established stars and movie fans. An amazing 118 films — a mixture of features and shorts — were screened at six Middlebury venues

Shortly after the film fest we reported that MNFF9 broke all previous records for attendance and receipts. Organizers sold 237 festival passes, up 12% from the 212 passes sold for MNFF5 (the biggest festival before the pandemic). Plus another 250-plus passes were given to visiting directors, festival honorees and volunteers, which in turn boosted traffic at all the film venues. Festival pass revenue was up 49% from 2019, in part due to a bump in the price of the pass. This year's pass receipts were up 110% compared to 2021, held with rigorous pandemic restrictions. Attendance — measured by people in seats, with of course some people seeing more than one film during the five-day event — was 4,150, which was up roughly 37% from last year, when 3,050 seats were filled during MNFF8.

Ripton's Baxter Harrington had some impressive results as he represented the United States at the 2023 World Junior Skyrunning Championships in Italy. A rising senior at Middlebury Union High School, Harrington, 17, competed among 226 athletes from 31 countries in races that stretched

over rugged mountains. Harrington finished 19th in the Vertical Kilometer (3K with 1,000 meters of vertical climb) and 25th in the Skyrace (10K with 1,300 meters of vertical climb). Oh my!

September

Our Salute to Rescue Workers in September showed how giving service to the community can be a family affair. In Sprague Huntington's family of four in Starksboro, there's a 75% chance you'll come across an Emergency Medical Technician. Huntington herself is a member of the Starksboro and Bristol rescue squads. Her sons, Graham, 21, and Leo, 19, are also both EMTs. Like Sprague and her sons, Cornwall's Frankovic family of three is also entrenched in the Vermont volunteer first responder scene. In fact, the family is 100% first responders. Aven Frankovic and her father, Tommy, both serve on the fire department. Her mom, Megan, is an EMT with Cornwall First Response. In fact, Megan's grandfather was a driver for Orwell First Response back in the day.

Speaking of first response, word came in that the Bristol Rescue Squad was coming off a busy month. In August, the agency responded to around 100 calls, the highest monthly total in its history. And this reflects a larger trend

(See September, Page 15A)



September 14

PUPS OF ALL ages and sizes had a blast this past Sunday, Sept. 10, at “Woofstock,” a major fundraiser for Homeward Bound, Addison County's Humane Society. A total of 72 dogs and 168 humans participated in the event, which included the ever-popular pool party for pooches at the Middlebury town pool.

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October 19

THE CENTER OF Middlebury became a parking lot on Sunday as 3,000 auto enthusiasts came to view scores of vintage vehicles on display at the Better Middlebury Partnership and the Addison County Chamber of Commerce's second annual Middlebury Car Show & Fall Festival. 90-year-old Bill Mraz of Middlebury gives his dog Edi a ride in his 1933 Dodge Coupe that boasts only 80,000 miles on its odometer (less than 1,000 miles a year).

Independent file photo/Steve James

(September from Page 14A) within the organization, which has seen its annual call volume increase in recent years.

In the absence of federal relief, the United Way of Addison County established an "Addison County Responds: Flood Relief Fund" to support Addison County residents who've experienced home and/or property damage from this summer's rainfall and need financial assistance. This fund allowed individual households to apply for up to \$1,500, though a steering committee has the discretion to make larger grants.

Not enough people know that famed abolitionist, orator, journalist and founder of the U.S. Civil Rights movement Frederick Douglass brought his anti-slavery message to Middlebury during the summer of 1843. It was the first stop in the New England Anti-Slavery Society's "100 Conventions" tour, a multi-state odyssey aimed at sowing abolitionist leanings within communities deemed receptive to such a message. Douglass returned to Middlebury in September, if only in spirit, when dignitaries unveiled a plaque in Court Square commemorating Douglass's Middlebury visit of 180 years ago.

The plaque unveiling coincided with Middlebury College's "Clifford/Twilight Symposium," which commemorated the 200th anniversary of Alexander Twilight's



October 5

KINDERGARTNER ELIZABETH HECK clearly loves smashing a paper plate of whipped cream in the face of Bristol Elementary School Principal Aaron Boynton in front of a whole school assembly this past Thursday. She was one of 15 students who got to pie the principal and two assistants as a reward for gaining the most points for good behavior and other positive things at the school.

Independent file photo/Steve James

graduation from Middlebury College in 1823. Twilight is credited with being the first person of color to graduate from an American college.



October 12

A WOMAN KICKS back on a bench in Bristol village on Monday afternoon and soaks up the beautiful fall foliage.

Independent file photo/Steve James

Five years and several setbacks after first launching their plans for a major expansion and renovation of Vergennes Residential Care, a home for seniors just off the city green, Charlotte residents Dan and Rebecca Hassan finally lined up the financing for what is now a \$25 million project. The couple announced in September that they will start transforming the existing 18-bed senior housing facility, a 200-year-old property at 34 North St., into an interconnected 53-room, four-building care home capable of accommodating up to 82 seniors with modest means. It will also triple the business's employee count from 18 to an estimated 48.

Tom Thompson, who has been leading Porter Medical Center for around three years, said he would step away from his role as president and chief operating officer of the Middlebury health care hub as of Sept. 18. He will focus his time and energy on a pressing family health matter. UVM Health Network's Bob Ortmyer stepped in on an interim basis.

The departure of another local leader, Middlebury Police Chief Tom Hanley, had been long expected. This month the Middlebury selectboard unanimously selected Sgt. Jason Covey to be the new police chief. Covey joined the MPD 23 years ago as a patrolman and officially began his new duties on Sept. 18.

Around that same time the town of Salisbury officially welcomed a new interim town clerk — longtime resident Allen Hathaway, who succeeded Sue Scott. Recently retired from Autumn Harp, Hathaway agreed to run for a term

of his own when the town clerk's job comes on the ballot next March.

Tragedy struck at mid-month when news circulated that a pre-teen youth had shot and killed a Waltham woman during a fight. The juvenile watching a scuffle involving two women in a Waltham home on the evening of Sept. 15, picked up a gun that was apparently dropped by one of the women and shot her multiple times, Vermont State Police report. Michelle Kilbreth, 48, was killed by gunshots to her torso. Addison County State's Attorney Eva Vekos has not yet charged the youth with a crime.

Middlebury Regional Emergency Medical Services said it wants to eliminate its annual Town Meeting Day funding requests in the 10 communities it serves. MREMS, as the county's largest ambulance service is known, would replace that funding with multi-year contracts that will, in the short term, reflect some sizable per-capita rate increases. This would allow the nonprofit to recruit and retain rescue personnel as well as more promptly replace ambulances and equipment when they become outdated. It won't be clear how towns will respond to the change until selectboards prepare their budgets for the coming year.

The inventive minds of Addison County in September got another place in the community in which to unleash their creativity. The Makerspace at Middlebury College reopened in its new home within the Johnson Memorial Building, and members of both the college and broader town community are

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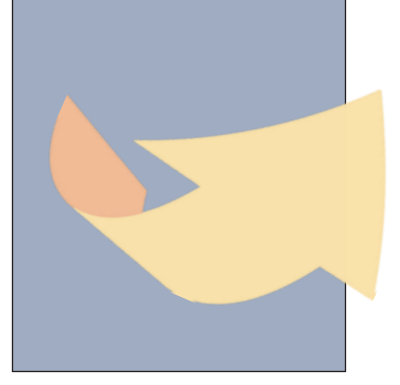
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(September from Page 15A) invited to use the space and the tools it offers to pursue projects they're passionate about.

Like most things, the future of agriculture in Vermont lies in the hands of younger generations. Today, many of those young Vermonters are leaving the state and pursuing careers outside of farming. With this in mind, the Champlain Valley Farmer Coalition is exploring ways to get more local youth engaged in various aspects of agriculture. The coalition is increasing its workforce development initiatives and recently launched the Lake Champlain Sustainable Agriculture Education Program, which will pair high school students in Addison County with a local farm for a two-month internship.

The shuffle continued on the Vergennes City Council. For the second time in two months the Vergennes City Council got a new face in September and planned for another new member in the near future. Former Vergennes City Councilor Mark Koenig returned to that body after other council members picked him from among four applicants to replace the recently resigned Ian Huizenga. At the same meeting councilors learned they would have to backfill another vacancy when the board's newest member, Emily Rossier, said she was stepping down. Rossier's resignation marked the council's third since June, when Zoe Kaslow resigned to attend graduate school out of state. In August, the council appointed Rossier, the only candidate to step forward, to replace Kaslow.

October

It wasn't our imagination. Information released by local and state mosquito experts showed the bloodsucking pests were in fact much worse than usual in 2023 after all the warm-weather rain and flooding. For example, the Lemon Fair Insect Control District reported the number of mosquitoes it had caught by early September in its eight traps was on track to reach 105,000. The previous high count for a year came in 2021: That number was 64,827 of the bugs.

There was happier news on two housing fronts, not usually a source of comforting information. In Vergennes a planning commission proposal to change the city plan to ease zoning restrictions in the district that runs along Main Street in the city's northeast quadrant received a warm reception at a city council meeting. The simple change proposed would allow considerably more housing units on one particular parcel once zoning laws could be altered to reflect the change. A developer announced he was prepared to build 130 units of workforce housing when that change became law. Later in the year, the council agreed to ease zoning even further to allow a couple more properties to be developed into residential units



November 2

RETIRING MIDDLEBURY POLICE Chief Tom Hanley was joined by members of his force on stage at Town Hall Theater this past Thursday, Oct. 26, for an open house recognizing his more than 32 years of service to the community. Shown, from left, are Sgt. Casey Covey, Officer Kevin Emilio, Hanley, new Chief Jason Covey, Sgt. Vegar Boe, and Sgt. Nathan Hayes.

Independent file photo/Steve James



November 2

AROUND A DOZEN luminescent jellyfish take to the streets of Bristol on Tuesday night to dazzle trick-or-treaters and community members with a colorful performance. The group, which calls itself the Bristol Jellies, was made up of Bristol residents and a couple from Starksboro.

Photo courtesy of Karen Swanson

to help relieve the city's housing crunch.

Middlebury was also in line for more housing: The 208-year-old, 9-bedroom Means Mansion at 51 Seminary St. found new owners ready to redevelop the once-opulent, but now decaying, home into two high-end condos. The owners also plan to add more units in new barn-style buildings that will replicate the former outbuildings that once dotted the property's 3.08 acres.

Meanwhile, a lack of housing for the less fortunate combined with a related crime and vandalism spree tested downtown Middlebury throughout the summer. Those issues came to a head in October, when new steps arrived to try to solve the difficult problems. Some members of a homeless community living near the west end of Cross Street Bridge were alleged to have smashed business and car windows and doors, entered vehicles and stolen cash and items, trespassed, threatened and harassed residents

and visitors, and committed other offenses. Some business owners complained and sought more effective law enforcement, and many citizens and agencies organized to do their best to help those in need. A task force was formed to help resolve the issues.

It was a sad day on Oct. 5. Former Middlebury College professor, author and Middlebury selectboard member Victor Nuovo passed away. The highly respected member of the Middlebury community had lost his wife of 70 years, Betty Nuovo, 90, an equally respected member of the community, on July 13.

Bristol and its Stoney Hill business park got a shot in the arm in October. Williston's AllEarth Renewables, which makes solar trackers and other green energy components, announced it would be moving to the West Street site when construction on a 25,000-square-foot building was completed, probably in early 2024. Around 20 employees will come

along, according to owner David Blittersdorf.

While the Stoney Hill business park nears completion on Bristol's Firehouse Drive, community members are celebrating the opening of a new affordable housing development across the street. An official grand opening of the Firehouse Apartments was held in October. The new housing development is the result of a partnership between the town of Bristol, private developers and housing nonprofits Addison Housing Works and Evernorth. Partners have financed the project with \$8,649,000 from a mix of private and public funding sources, including the American Rescue Plan Act, the Vermont Housing & Conservation Board and the Vermont Community Development Program. The Firehouse Apartments complex consists of 20 mixed-income units just east of the town's fire station — specifically, two duplexes and a block of town homes with one- and two-bedroom units.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency announced in October a new major disaster declaration related to the severe storms and flooding that struck Addison County from Aug. 3-5. In that round of flooding, which followed others in July, Middlebury received more than six inches of rain, and the adjacent towns of Ripton and East Middlebury more than three inches. The declaration finally made FEMA Public Assistance funds available to local municipalities to pay for flood damage repairs.

Porter Medical Center struck a new three-year labor agreement with its nurses, a deal that provides raises of 10% in year one, 5.5% in year two and 4.5% in year three.

Vermonters are accustomed to witnessing spectacular fall foliage. Each year, trees bathed in vibrant shades of red, orange and yellow become a familiar backdrop to autumnal scenes throughout the state. This fall, however, the Vermont landscape has looked slightly less colorful. While there is still some beautiful foliage, many leaves are dawned muted, brownish hues or have yet to change color at all. Some blamed this year's lackluster fall foliage display on the wet weather we had this summer.

A spate of teacher illnesses and a persistent lack of substitute educators prompted Mary Hogan Elementary School in October to ask the Addison Central School District central office and the community at large to help solve its workforce dilemma. Mary Hogan Principal Jen Kravitz said the majority of students were thriving due to the care and dedication of the adults around them, but several classrooms were struggling with significant social, emotional and behavioral needs.

It was the kind of story you hate to hear about: A southbound Amtrak train struck a car at a Route 7 railroad crossing in Ferrisburgh on Oct. 10. Fortunately, troopers reported that no one was seriously

(See October, Page 17A)



November 23

ON SUNDAY THE Addison Volunteer Fire Department held its sixth all-you-can-eat pancake breakfast for 2023 in the fire station at Addison Four Corners. Shown here, senior firefighter Buster Grant flips some blueberry pancakes.

Independent file photo/Steve James

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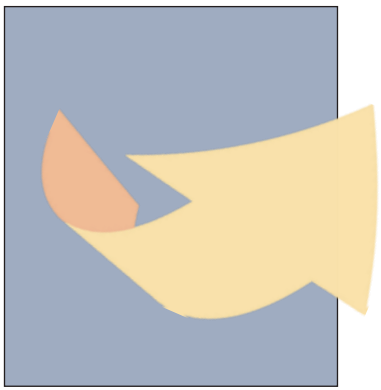
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(October from Page 16A)
injured during the accident, which closed Route 7 for about 45 minutes.

That same week, we heard about a tragedy that sadly claimed the life of a former Addison County resident. Honoree Fleming, a former Middlebury resident who raised her family here before moving to Castleton to teach at the state college there, was killed while walking on a rail trail in the Rutland County town. Authorities are still looking for her killer.

With affordable and workplace housing a critical need for Addison County and Vermont as a whole, some advocates are working on a plan to expand housing in town centers in a way they say is "gentle." An Oct. 20, presentation by state officials and architects in Vergennes and a following tour through city neighborhoods offered one possible path forward, both in the city and statewide — the "Homes For All" project. It would take a "gentle infill" approach to building more housing in existing neighborhoods.

The same edition had stories about how John Graham Housing & Services was seeing demand for its services go up, while the Charter House Coalition was putting limits on the length of stays of people who weren't actively improving their houseless situations.

November

"Teen charged in fatal shooting" is not a headline we ever want to write, but there it was in our Nov. 2 edition. Earlier that week a 14-year-old Burlington

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December 14

THEATRE GROUP LTD will perform "Night Fires," a winter solstice dream play directed by Marianne Lust, at Middlebury's Town Hall Theater this Friday through Sunday. Shown in a Tuesday rehearsal Ellie Sachs-Wilkinson going full-on hummingbird.

Independent file photo/Steve James

youth shot and killed, apparently inadvertently, a Shelburne youth while they were both in a car parked outside a Bristol home. The youth pled not guilty to second-degree murder, manslaughter and aggravated assault, and the case began its journey through the court system.

In better news, the *Independent* published details on two major childcare projects that will add about 100 new slots in the Middlebury area. On Weybridge Street an expansion of the Otter Creek Child Center will boost its service capacity by 77 to 139 youngsters, and by January the shire town's Congregational Church plans to open its Red Clover Child Center and serve two dozen children.

Bristol's Hannah Zeno went on TV's "Wheel of Fortune" in early November. When Zeno spoke to us she couldn't reveal how well she did. Spoiler Alert: She romped.

Middlebury College went into the public phase of a \$600 million fundraising campaign, which it labeled "For Every Future." College officials said the money would be used to enrich students' experiences at the college and prepare them for their futures, including by increasing financial aid, internships and "experiential learning."

The Vergennes City Council rescheduled a bond vote for new fire trucks and scaled back its amount. Instead of voting on Dec. 5 on a \$2.35 million for two new trucks, residents were set to vote on Dec. 19 on a \$1.75 million bond on one new and one used truck.

Middlebury edged closer to a major Ilsley Library renovation bond. Library leaders told the town selectboard they had settled on a two-story makeover of the building with a possible vote in May. The full price tag could approach \$15 million, they said, but library officials said they hope grants and government funding will lower the cost to taxpayers.

Chris Sabick joined the Lake Champlain Maritime Museum as an intern in 2023. In November, Sabick was appointed as the LCMM's executive director after

a widespread search eventually looked inside.

Fire made sad news in Monkton: A pre-dawn blaze at Queen Bee's Snack Bar destroyed the popular local eatery and left the owners' scrambling to recover.

Meanwhile, the Bristol Fire Department announced plans to help it and other local agencies better respond to such incidents. The department will build an onsite training structure consisting of four 40-foot-long Conex containers (think shipping containers), with the fourth resting on top of the other three. Firefighters can thus gain invaluable hands-on experience, department leaders said.

The new Lincoln School District hired its first superintendent: Amy Cole, who has extensive experience in Vermont and elsewhere, but comes to the Green Mountain town directly from Hawaii, where she was an educator at a private school.

Teams that win three straight championships are said to have accomplished a three-peat. What is it when a team wins six straight? A sixpack? Call it what you will, but the Middlebury College field hockey team made it six straight NCAA Division III championships (and six consecutive NESCAC titles) in November.

The *Independent* has been tracking local deer harvests for more than 20 years. In 2005, the Department of Fish and Wildlife banned shooting bucks with fewer than two antler points; after a rules change that limitation still applies in most areas. This rifle season hunters weighed more bucks in Addison County — 676 — than in any year since then. The previous record was 647. That's a lot of venison.

After a secretive search that produced three finalists, two of whom remain anonymous, late in the month the Addison Central School District board hired Wendy Baker to be the new ACSD superintendent. Currently a grant writer and business owner, she has experience leading schools in Vermont, New Hampshire and New York. Baker is set to begin her new job in July.



December 7

WILLIAM WERNER FASTENS a tree onto a customer's car at Werner Tree Farm last week. The Middlebury tree farm lost a substantial portion of its crop due to heavy rains this summer, though other county tree farms were less affected by the extreme weather.

Independent file photo/Steve James

December

Yes, Virginia, and Vermont, there is a Santa Claus, and he is truly magical. So magical that the Jolly Old Elf appeared simultaneously in Vergennes and Middlebury on Dec. 2 to kick off annual holiday season events in both communities.

Meanwhile Christmas tree farms were mostly doing well despite 2023's difficult climate challenges, notably a late frost and then summer flooding. Some farms were dealing with damaged crops, but prices were stable, and there appeared to be enough inventory for all who celebrate the holiday.

Some in local communities were questioning whether youths accused of serious crimes should be welcomed in towns' schools. Administrators said yes, they should, and plans were in place to support the students and ensure the safety of all. It also turned out state law was not only on the schools' side, but also required schools to educate the youths in question.

The Middlebury Snowbowl created plenty of buzz among area skiers with significant improvements, most notably lighted trails to allow night skiing for the first time. Enthusiasts were quick to take advantage of the new amenities.

School boards around the county were hard at work crafting budgets under new sets of funding laws that included complex new pupil weighting systems and different levels of cap increases, all while state officials warned that spending statewide and low town property assessments could spike residential taxes up by an average of around 18%. Early indications were that local rates wouldn't rise by that much, but administrators and board members were working hard on spending plans.

Vergennes voters on Dec. 19 by a count of 90-64 backed a bond of up to \$1.75 million to buy two fire trucks, one a used latter truck and the other a heavy rescue unit that could double as a pumper unit, which officials said might be bought new or used. City officials estimated the bond at most could add a little more than a penny to the tax rate, but that estimate assumed all the towns the city department serves as a first responder chipped in as they have historically.

And as of the vote date the Vergennes City Council and the Ferrisburgh selectboard were still struggling to agree on what the town should pay the city to be the first responder for West Ferrisburgh and some of the rest of the southern half of the town. On Dec. 19 the Ferrisburgh selectboard agreed to a city council proposal to enter into mediation to help bridge a gap of more than \$44,000.

At the council's first meeting in December it also welcomed its newest member after a summer and fall of a series of resignations due to family, educational and work reasons. The council appointed military veteran, current Army National Guard instructor, and experienced aviation technician John Montgomery, 55, to fill the latest vacancy. Montgomery is currently working for Tri-Valley Transit as well as the National Guard.



December 14

TOWN HALL THEATER Executive Director Lisa Mitchell and Middlebury College President Laurie Patton mark the symbolic start to the next phase of the Middlebury arts institution's growth, as they take part in a THT addition groundbreaking on Tuesday.

Independent file photo/Steve James

In Middlebury, one selectboard veteran, Lindsey Fuentes-George, said she would not run again in March after two terms on the board, saying she wanted to make way for new blood on the panel. But another board veteran, Farhad Khan, said he would seek re-election.

The long-running Legislative Breakfast series got a new coordinator: Beth Morse, daughter of recently deceased longtime host Jim Morse, agreed to take the reins of the Monday morning winter gatherings that bring the county's state representatives together over coffee and pancakes.

On Dec. 15 and 16 more than two inches of rain hit the county — and more than three inches came down in some locations elsewhere in Vermont — causing flooding in some areas. Mercifully the damage was not as bad as in the summer floods, but many schools, including in Addison County, either closed on Dec. 17 or opened late, and officials also closed many roads around the state.

Another incident of racism at a county school — a Bristol Elementary School student used the N-Word in speaking to another — caused soul-searching among school officials and led to many residents meeting with the MAUSD board to seek more robust anti-racist educational efforts within the district. The board listened carefully.

In a neighboring school district, a new superintendent was ready to take charge: The Lincoln School District hired Amy Cole, 57, to take over the district reins as of Jan. 1. Cole comes to Lincoln from Hawaii, but has extensive leadership experience in New England, including 18 years in Vermont school systems.

Who was that Brit with spiky hair and leather pants spotted first in Vergennes thrift shops and in eatery 3Squares, and then at the Middlebury Snowbowl? Many were convinced it was veteran rocker Rod Stewart and his wife. Another publication reported it was, with the singer allegedly seeking a New England White Christmas. That report even reached at least one English tabloid. But alas, no, it wasn't Stewart, who was on tour in Europe.

As far as not Rod, we wish we'd never seen your face. You made a first-class fool out of us. (OK, we kid — we don't feel the same about you as you sang about Maggie May, and hope you enjoyed your visit.)

About a year ago a group of county residents, following a template created first in Michigan, established 100+ Women Who Care Addison County. Their plan called for members to donate \$100 every three months and then to meet quarterly and decide collectively

to which registered nonprofit the money should go. How did it work? The new organization, with support from a foundation, contributed \$97,200 to a dozen nonprofits. Well done.

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