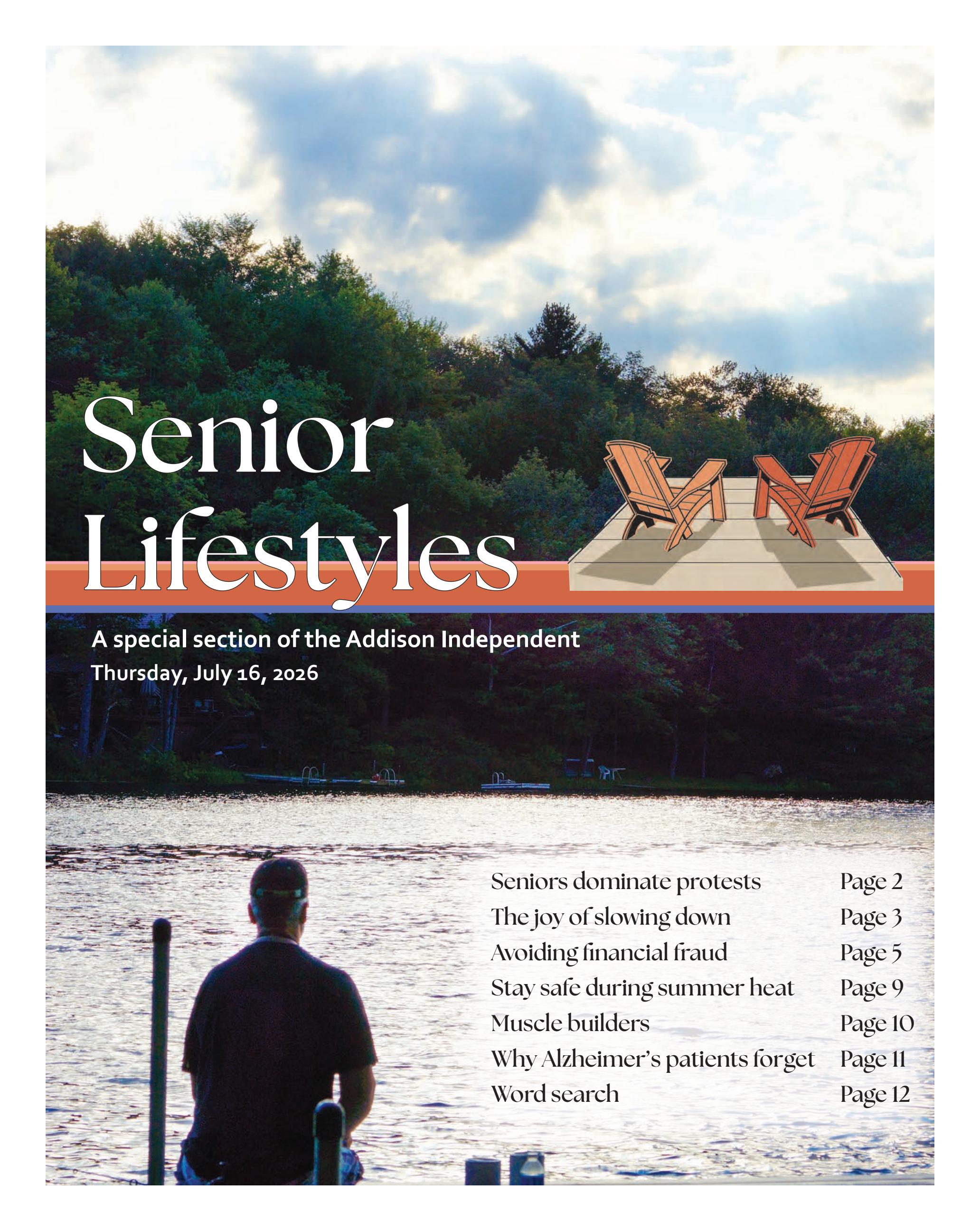




Senior Lifestyles

A special section of the Addison Independent
Thursday, July 16, 2026

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“Where are the young people?” Seniors at helm of anti-Trump protests

By SOPHIA KESHMIRI

MIDDLEBURY — Sitting on the floor of a company associated with Immigration and Customs Enforcement surveillance, demonstrating in the name of democracy, was not what Revell Allen had imagined for how she would spend a day in her golden years.

Nevertheless, before walking through the doors of the White Cap business park building in Williston this past Feb. 9, she had decided the only way she’d leave her spot on the ground was if she was arrested.

The 76-year-old Middlebury resident was just one of 11 people — seven of them seniors — to be arrested that day. The demographics of that winter protest are a reflection of those of the broader anti-Trump movement, that has been defined on some level by the number of participants who can recall the carnage, loss and division of the Vietnam War-era.

Long before Allen, and her walker, were removed from the building, she was one of a group to form Indivisible Middlebury, a branch of the grassroots organization that has been at the forefront of nationwide protests against President Donald Trump and his administration.

When asked what made her want to help get the local chapter started at the end of 2024, just after Trump won re-election, Allen said, “Just ... total despair.”

“At Trump’s re-election that our country would, you know, elect a convicted felon who had tried to, who had incited an insurrection ... we knew it was only going to go from bad to worse as soon as he got in office, and we just felt we had to try to organize to do anything we could to counteract, even though there’s not a lot we can do.”

Allen’s list of concerns with the Trump Administration is not short.

What is worrying her?

“Everything,” she said.

Unsurprisingly, considering her hardcore approach to defying Trump’s ICE efforts in February, the current

president’s immigration agenda is especially concerning.

“Picking up people who are innocent, people who are citizens, or who have not committed any crimes, and throwing them in detention centers of all ages, pregnant women, little children, babies, separating families, putting them in detention centers where they are existing in inhumane conditions.”

While Allen can recall the days when the phrase “Make love, not war” sprang up, she feels her religious anti-Trump protesting was her first serious foray into the activity.

“When I was in college, I did some Vietnam War protesting and stuff, but you know, I felt like I didn’t

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MIDDLEBURY SEPTUAGENARIAN REVELL Allen, in wheelchair, joins with other demonstrators to block the doors during a protest at ICE’s National Criminal Analysis and Targeting Center in Williston this past February. Many in her generation have found a strong voice for protest since President Trump was re-elected.

Photo by Glenn Russell/VTDigger



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The joy of slowing down

John Freidin recounts some busy years

By ELOISE CHRISTY

Sitting in his rocking chair, John Freidin is surrounded by the evidence of a long, fulfilling life spent collecting stories. There are paintings on the walls, books stacked on various shelves, and artwork of his own, created in recent years. Outside his kitchen window, birds come to rest on a feeder. A bright Baltimore oriole comes to perch, then orange flashing as it flits away.

It is the perfect place to stay and grow old in Vermont.

Freidin, 85, lives in Middlebury, past farmlands and grassy meadows, with a dramatic backdrop of the Green Mountains out his front door. He lives with his long-term partner, Kathryn Thompson, and their dog, Otis.

With his two sons, Abe and Luke, living in New York and Vermont, Freidin has the pleasure of enjoying time with his family frequently.

Although Freidin is now known as a local in Middlebury, he spent a good deal of his life experiencing many other places. Freidin was born in Mount Kisco, N.Y., in 1941, where he attended a one-room schoolhouse in the “commuting community.” Being Jewish in a place that

had mainly an Episcopalian population was not easy, he recalled.

“Even though I made dear friends, it was clear that we didn’t measure up,” Freidin said.

Despite the divide within the community, he was able to enjoy the place he lived, being someone who loves the countryside.

“It was rural,” he remembered. “We lived adjacent to the woods and I would get lost in them as a kid.”

After high school, Freidin lived in New York City for four years, where he earned a Columbia University degree in American history. He later earned his master’s in American Studies at Yale University. Freidin loved the city and considered himself a New Yorker, but the country life had always been beckoning him.

In 1968, Freidin moved to Vermont and started teaching at Middlebury College as a professor of American history.

“I stayed here for four years, by which time I realized that being a professor was not for me,” he said. “Then, I went on a bike ride.”

A BIKING BUSINESS

In 1972, Freidin went biking with some

(See Freidin, Page 8)

“My sons, they give me hope. They’re going to make the difference. But I am very empathetic to the challenges that most of them face.”

— John Freidin

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Protest

(Continued from Page 2)
really — I wasn't that up on the news and everything that was going on," she recalled.

"I just knew I was against war, but I didn't really know the whole history of everything in Vietnam, and I was sort of following along at that point, so this is much more stepping out and taking the lead, which is not my usual mode of operation."

Just over a year after dipping her toes in the protest pool, Allen found herself at the forefront of an anti-ICE protest that made state headlines.

"We didn't have anybody who was really actively resisting arrest when they came to arrest us. We pretty much went with them, and you know, I, for example, have braces that I wear for neuropathy when my foot's not in a cast, so I had a walker with everything, and you know,



SALISBURY'S HEIDI WILLIS, shown at last year's town meeting, considers herself much more active in protests as a 77-year-old than she was as a college student in the Kent State era.

Independent file photo/Steve James

the state police were really ... I was sitting on the floor, and they did not want to, you know, they were concerned about doing something that would hurt me or injure me, whatever. So, you know, it was, it was pretty amicable and low key."

The incident was amicable between police and protesters, and VT Digger reporting notes that nobody was forcibly removed in the incident.

Allen was comfortable being arrested for more than one reason.

"Partly my trust in the group that's organizing the whole thing, partly that ... my whole life I've lived in white privilege, and I feel like at this point it's time," she said.

Allen noted that the charges against her and other protesters from that demonstration were dropped.

"I'm not risking losing a job or anything. I'm retired, and (at) this point in my life I can afford to take greater risks, and it's time for me to step up. Other people have been stepping up for ages and ages."

'SIGNS OF FASCISM'

Like Allen, ICE activity is top of mind for another local senior who regularly participates in area anti-Trump protests, such as the weekly "Signs of Fascism" demonstration that has rolled out each week for roughly seven months in downtown Middlebury.

The 72-year-old woman requested anonymity "for my protection from Trump supporters," she said.

When asked how it made her feel that she was concerned enough for her safety to request anonymity she said, "It frustrates me."

"And just makes me sad that it's come to that."

While Allen said she feels the response she's been shown while protesting to be primarily positive, her anonymous compatriot has had a different experience during the "Signs of Fascism" demonstrations. She's seen significant negativity.

"They roll down their windows and we're standing there, and sometimes the traffic stops, and they'll just scream at us like, 'You're stupid,' you know, and 'effing this and effing that,'" she recalled.

"Kind of hurtful, but I don't react at all, which is really hard sometimes. I want to kind of scream back, 'Don't you see what they're doing to our country?'"

Though she was not one of the people to be arrested at the Williston business park, she has attended in the past to protest the operation, from outside the building.

"Before they started doing the intense protests, I was standing outside with a bunch of other people just outside, and there weren't any police present then, and we stayed outside the area, just on the road," she said.

"I didn't get involved with that, but several people with Indivisible did, so I was proud of them."

Just like Allen, this woman's participation in anti-Trump and anti-ICE protests is new territory, and not a role she previously considered she might find herself filling in her eighth decade of life.

"They're just so, so very scary times, and I felt I needed to get out there," she said. "And I thought that maybe possibly

(See Anti-Trump, Page 7)

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Fraud

(Continued from Page 5)

choosing one while in good health and full cognitive capacity. Although it's possible to revoke power of attorney at any time, once you are deemed to "lack capacity," you are unable to do so.

One important prevention against financial fraud for older adults, Duprey said, is making an informed decision about rights granted to power of attorney. In Vermont, there are optional specific authorities, like the ability to change beneficiaries that can be granted to a power of attorney. Duprey said these rights increase the risk of exploitation and recommends not granting them.

When choosing a power of attorney, Duprey said to consider two factors:

1. Who you can trust to manage your assets always in *your* best interest, not considering their own.
2. Who is good at managing money and staying organized. A trustworthy but unorganized person can still cause problems.

If financial fraud by a power of attorney is ever suspected, Duprey recommends immediately revoking their rights and calling the Attorney General's Office, law enforcement or Adult Protective Services if applicable.

Know your rights: Vt. laws protect against financial fraud

Under Title 33, Chapter 069 of Vermont statute, "vulnerable adults" are protected from abuse, neglect and exploitation, including financially. Vulnerable adults,

according to the Vermont Judiciary, are those over 18 who:

- Live in a care facility or psychiatric hospital/psychiatric unit
- Received assistance with personal care services for over a month/are eligible for Long-Term Medicaid waiver services
- Have a physical, mental, or developmental disability that impairs ability to independently take care of oneself, or
- Are unable to protect themselves from abuse, neglect or exploitation.

Consequences for financially exploiting a vulnerable adult depend on the amount of assets involved. Over \$500 can result in up to 10 years in prison and a \$10,000 fine. Perpetrators are also placed on the Adult Abuse Registry. In FY25, 60 Vermonters were placed on the registry, compared to 44 in 2024 and 38 in 2023, according to the Department of Disabilities, Aging, and Independent Living Adult Protective Services Annual Report. 149 vulnerable adult exploitation cases were investigated by the state in 2025, with 30 resulting in a recommendation of substantiation, meaning there was sufficient evidence of exploitation.

On May 20, Gov. Phil Scott signed H.385 (Act 106) that protects vulnerable adults and victims of domestic abuse or human trafficking from long-lasting impacts of coerced debt. Coerced debt is incurred in someone else's name without their consent or knowledge because of abuse or exploitation, and manipulation

WHO TO CALL

Scams:

- Vermont Attorney General's Consumer Assistance Program: 800-649-2424
- Financial Abuse Specialist Team Vermont (FAST): 802-765-2004
- Numbers for specific types of scams on CAP's website: ago.vermont.gov/cap/recover-scams
- Your financial institution(s) and law enforcement

Financial Exploitation/Abuse:

- Vermont Attorney General's office: 802-828-3171
- FAST: 802-765-2004
- Your financial institution(s) and law enforcement
- For suspected abuse, call Adult Protective Services at 800-564-1612

You can report a scam at ago.vermont.gov/cap/scam-prevention-through-awareness-and-education. Find information about applying for a Relief from Abuse for a vulnerable adult at www.vtcourts.gov/family/relief-abuse-neglect-or-exploitation-vulnerable-adult.

is used to prevent action from the victim. The bill also makes it possible for financial institutions to step in in cases of suspected financial fraud for vulnerable adults.

A NEW LAW

Rep. Jubilee McGill, D-Bridport, said she was originally interested in Act 106 because of coerced debt's impact on youth, whose parents or guardians can incur debt in their name without knowledge or consent. Although Act 106 doesn't apply to them, McGill said she decided to co-sponsor this bill because of all the protections it provides, especially allowing banks to act on suspicious transactions. McGill said bankers often notice unusual transactions but have never had a mechanism to do anything about it.

"I think we'll see a lot of vulnerable adults who are going to be getting that person stepping in, helping them resolve the situation and not falling prey to the kind of scams out there that can really change a person's life," McGill said. "Especially for older Vermonters who are on fixed incomes, we see folks losing their entire life savings."

Instead of having to bring personal lawsuits for coerced debt, victims will now be able to tell their creditor their debt is coerced, and the creditor will immediately stop collection. An investigation will follow and if the state determines the debt is coerced, it will be transferred to the perpetrator, and the victim will be relieved.

"The old way of doing things was a lot of work and even when folks were able to see the process through, they were really not likely to ever see any true resolution in their life," McGill said, adding that she believes this new method will make it easier to seek

retribution for coerced debt. The bill will take effect in July 2028.

Scam prevention and education

Anyone can become a victim of scams, said Ilir Hasa, lead financial coach at Champlain Valley Office of Economic Opportunity, which is why the organization offers a free class called "Avoiding Scams and Financial Fraud."

The class is a one-hour Zoom session held quarterly but will be available on demand starting this fall on their website at cvoeo.org, Hasa said. It covers scam warning signs, methods scammers use, most common scams and the importance of taking time to verify before responding. Hasa said the class helps people make more informed decisions about their finances and encourages them to reflect before acting.

CVOEO also offers one-on-one financial coaching for people older than 18, and the organization has an office in Middlebury with financial coaches. If someone thinks they have been a victim of a scam, Hasa said to first call their financial institutions to report it and stop money from going to the scammer.

Below are numbers to call if financial fraud happens or you have questions. For loved ones scammed by romance or friend impersonators, it can be difficult to help them out of it. According to clinical psychologist Anca Ivu in a Bitdefender article, unmet social needs make it difficult for people to cut off impersonators. Ivu recommended a less judgmental approach when talking to someone you believe is in a romance scam. Instead of accusing them of being scammed, try to help them come to the realization by asking questions about the person's background and history.

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Anti-Trump

(Continued from Page 4)

we could, with our signs, make people driving by think about what and who they are supporting and trying to change it. I just feel it's really important."

Another Indivisible Middlebury regular also didn't get the itch to start protesting, and didn't envision it as a hallmark of her late 70s, until Trump's most recent term.

While Heidi Willis of Salisbury loosely participated in the Kent State protests while a student at the University of Vermont, she doesn't consider herself to have been nearly as engaged in protesting as she is today.

"I was concerned about it, but just not as active. Definitely concerned. I did other things in terms of civil rights things, but just not a lot of demonstrating."

More recently, she began participating in some environmental activism in the past 20 years.

"So it's not totally new, but on the other hand, I'm not strident, and I totally missed out on a lot of the civil rights stuff, because I was kind of clueless when I was younger."

In March 2025, shortly after Trump took office, she felt called to join the effort.

"It was probably semi out of desperation, like if you sat at home, you'd be crazy," Willis said.

She also had connections to those putting Indivisible Middlebury together.

"I had friends that were organizing it, and ... Trump hit the ground running in terms of his destruction and ... I was

frantic to try to find something that I could feel like I could push back a little bit," she said.

"So much of what has happened (has) just been so haphazard, no forethought, a completely different set of values around, you know, not oriented towards the rule of law, the Constitution, or the common good, but oriented towards imposing a very narrow set of beliefs and greed."

Now, Willis does facilitation for the team's outreach and visibility group. The 77-year-old's role is largely organizational, she noted.

"So just kind of keeping an eye out on the broad things, so that individual people can do their individual little jobs, and it's been really amazing, actually," Willis said.

"There's been some lemonade in this last year, as well as some pretty sour lemons."

YOUNG PEOPLE?

"Where are the young people?" Willis wondered.

"Do they realize what is happening to the country, and what their life is going to be like if they don't get active, and kind of, kind of prioritize this. Yes, you know, raising children, I know you've got soccer games and all this kind of thing, but this is kind of like, second civil war, and when the time came, people back there said this is important, I'm going to have to change my life, put aside some things, and give time to it."

The three women said they've all observed the same demographic trend throughout their anti-Trump protesting — those doing the day-to-day work tend to be seniors, and though the average age decreases during big events, there's

a lack of representation from younger generations.

Each had a slightly different take on why.

Allen theorized that it could be that seniors have more time on their hands, and added that the presence of Middlebury College students at a No Kings protest "was really wonderful."

"We made a good connection there. Unfortunately, for the No Kings Three, they were on break, so we are hoping to reestablish that connection with the Middlebury students when they're back in session, so that we can do more things with them."

The woman who requested anonymity said the lack of young people is a topic that local protesters have discussed.

"I guess we have more time. I know families, it's hard, but just to come out for an hour once a week. I really, I really wish more would see the need to do it. I, and I don't know how to get them involved. We've discussed it over and over, and with Indivisible, we encourage people to come, and sometimes there're younger people that will come, but then we don't see them participate a lot."

She said the youngest participant in the Signs of Fascism protest is roughly 60 years old.

"I don't know if they're fearful of it all or whether they just don't see how serious it is, because it's their lives. I mean, we're going to be gone. If this keeps like this, it's going to affect them a lot more than us."

She feels it's urgent to get younger people involved.

"The more that join us, the more that

we might turn people around, you know, there's more talk at home, family dinners," she said. "I just feel like it might help persuade some that are on the fence to come over to our side."

Willis said the reasons behind the lack of young people "can be a long philosophical conversation." Like the other two women, she noted the time element, and added that might compound with simultaneously "struggling with a lousy economy."

"Philosophically speaking, we've lived in a time that was relatively peaceful and stable since World War II, and that was put in place by the United Nations, and some important peace arrangements, and so forth, that were made, and the alliances that Trump has destroyed that were built up over that time, and so I think younger people have assumed that's the way it's always been," she said.

"And it's not."

"I think our generation, my parents' — my parents served in the armed forces during World War II, and I have friends that lost family in the Holocaust, and all that ... that's getting to be distant history, but we have the closest connection, probably to that, and the most perspective in terms of looking at what's happening, and understanding what's going on."

For these septuagenarians, standing up against the Trump Administration and its actions isn't something that can be left to one person, or even a few people.

"We all need to be doing this," Willis said.

"Democracy is not a spectator sport. It is a participatory form of government, and you use it or you lose it."



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Freidin

(Continued from Page 3)

of his fellow Middlebury faculty members and got the idea that adults and families may like to bicycle in Vermont if they knew where to ride, had somebody come along to help them with mechanical problems, and had a nice inn to stay at.

“So I started a business called Vermont Bicycle Touring, known now as VBT,” he said. “It was the first adult bicycling vacation business in the country. I led trips for 14 years and then sold the business.”

The first bicycle trip Freidin ever led was in 1962 for American Youth Hostels. The only trips outside Vermont were in Sri Lanka, the Indian Ocean island nation he had visited many times and fell in love with.

Reminiscing on these times, Freidin recalled his favorite bike route to ride when he led these tours in Vermont.

“There was one seven-mile piece of riding,” he said. “It was way up in Franklin County on the Canadian border in the town of Montgomery. It involved a gradual climb ... then you get to the top of this hill and you just go swooping downhill, and you end by going through a covered bridge. I love that ride. It was glorious.”

His favorite route wasn’t simply about the ride, it was about the difficulty. When giving tours, Freidin would tell people about the “tire suckers” that slowed them as they were about to climb the hill, but it would eventually pay off with a beautiful winding descent.

Biking was such a big part of his life for

so many years, but as he got older, things changed. One of the things he regrets most is not continuing to bike to this day.

“One of the biggest mistakes of my life was about four years ago, when I stopped exercising,” Freidin said. “I got weak, and then it wasn’t fun to bicycle anymore.”

Although he does not bike anymore, he has other things that occupy his time these days. With experience in the state government, having served in the Vermont House from 1990 to 1998, Freidin now aids the local government.

“I’ve always wanted to do something that was gratifying and good for other people as well as myself,” he said. “I was not afraid of change, I was always hopeful about it. I am working on writing up some ideas for Amanda Janoo that she might use in her campaign to become the Democratic nominee for Vermont governor.”

STIMULATED MIND, BUSY BODY

Along with working and keeping his fingers in politics, Freidin was on the committee responsible for renovation of the Ilsley library building. In these last few years, he also wrote an unpublished book of his memories for his sons, titled “Lucky Man.” These things keep his mind stimulated and his body busy.

With all those memories written out from his life, there also comes the remembrance of history and how much his life and environment have changed since the 1940s. One specific time comes to mind, 1976, the

(See *Slowing down*, Page 9)



JOHN FREIDIN, 85, sits in his Middlebury home surrounded by memories of a life full of teaching, traveling and building Vermont Bike Touring while reflecting on what it means to grow older.

Independent photo/Eloise Christy



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Slowing down

(Continued from Page 8)

U.S. Bicentennial. This was a time when the Vietnam War was over, Jimmy Carter was on his way to the presidency, people were starting to think about recycling as well as conserving energy, Freidin recalled.

"When the 200th happened, I was involved with the VBT," he said. "I had been asked to design a way to carry bicycles on the train that ran through Vermont. I was so busy running my own business, I don't remember much. But it was a very different time. A time of hope and idealism."

Another remembrance of these times from years prior was the embroidered handkerchief Freidin used to dab at his nose every now and then during a recent interview.

As the country celebrates its 250th anniversary, times have changed and the world feels different from the one Freidin knew during the Bicentennial. Back then there was no social media or the internet. We had a lot more in common because of our national and limited sources of information. Now we are living in a time where hope has faded, idealism is parodied, and our democracy is under threat, Freidin believes.

"It's very hard for people to make a living," he said. "And we have a president who has no respect for our Constitution, our customs of democracy, and who has just demeaned these."

Despite the future of our country looking bleak in Freidin's eyes, the hope he sees lies in the younger generations. "Well, it's got to be the young people," he said. "My sons, they give me hope. They're going to make the difference. But I am very empathetic to the challenges that most of them face."

A lot of things have changed over the years for the worse, but there are also good things that have happened. Living in Vermont for over 50 years, Freidin has been privy to the benefits this state has for the health and well-being of its people.

"Vermont values are better than any other place I know in the U.S.," he said. "One of the nice things about living up here is that people tend to be more trustworthy of one another. More ... confident."

When asked what it was like to grow old in Vermont, Freidin laughed.

"Well, I haven't tried it anywhere else!" he said. "One of the things that is really special about Vermont is the scale. It

makes things easier. When you need help, it's easier to know where to look or how to find it. It's comforting to know people who have known you for a long time. It's generally a friendly and gentle state."

ROUTINES

Since Freidin has now been retired for some time, his days look very different from what they used to. The hustle and bustle of legislative, teaching and small business life that were constantly present for so many years have now been replaced with a more calming pastime.

"I tend to stay up late and sleep late," he explained. "I wake up and read some, then get up and have breakfast. I usually have stuff to do on my computer. Now it's something that's sort of political. I was writing my book before. I read. Maybe mow the lawn."

One of his favorite books, which he had read recently, is "Robinson Crusoe" by Daniel Defoe.

A perk that Freidin found from a retired life is the joy of not having to be in a rush all the time. He doesn't have much to be guilty about, he explained. "Oh, I should have done that, or I was in such a rush I couldn't stop and talk to somebody when I ran into them on the street, or I thought I knew the answers when I should have known and I didn't," he said. "That's the biggest difference. I love not having to feel strained to get something done."

Now that he has more time to think, feel and talk, there are things that are important to remember when you're going through life, according to Freidin. One of them is companionship.

"Nothing will make more difference in your life than meeting and living with someone you love and get along with and talk with," he said. "Nothing else will help you when times are grim. Nothing else will be better to celebrate."

As Freidin stood looking at old photos of his sons and the copy of "Lucky Man" he had written for them, his second message after 85 years of living was simple.

"One of the most important things and our greatest responsibility is our children," he said. "There is nothing more important than that."

Living in a home that surrounds him with art, memories, and love, Freidin has achieved the aspects he believed to be most important in life.

Stay safe during summer heat

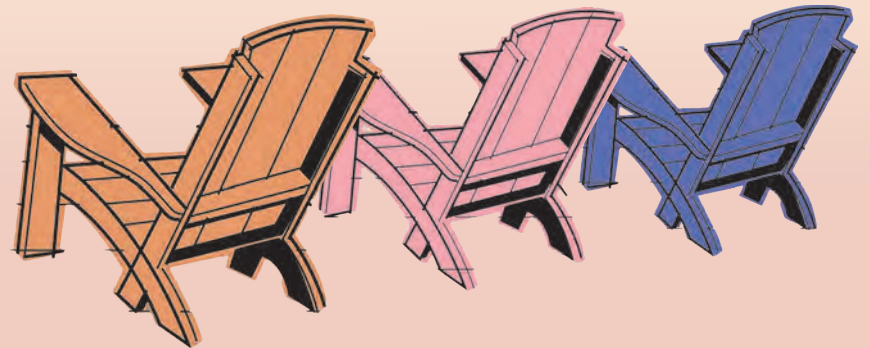
Hot weather can be especially dangerous for older adults and people with chronic health conditions.

AgeWell, a nonprofit organization and the designated Area Agency on Aging for Addison, Chittenden, Franklin and Grand Isle counties, offers a few simple precautions that older Vermonters can follow to help them stay healthy and safe this summer.

Remember to:

- Drink plenty of water, even if you don't feel thirsty.
- Spend time in air-conditioned buildings or cooling sites.
- Avoid strenuous outdoor activities during the hottest part of the day.
- Wear lightweight, light-colored clothing and seek shade whenever possible.
- Most importantly, check in on older friends, family members, and neighbors during periods of extreme heat.

Need a place to cool off? Find cooling sites and heat-relief resources by heading online to the website tinyurl.com/CoolOff2026.



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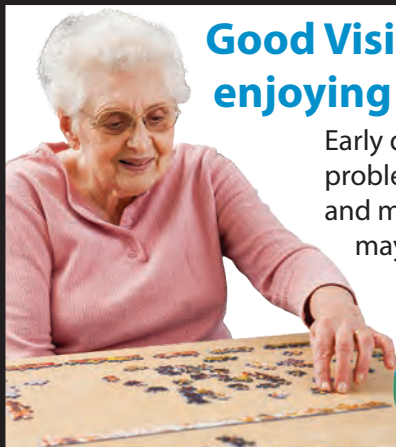
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Muscle builders

Some seniors don't want to spend too much time in the rocking chair — they get up and rock their bodies with exercise. Pictured at the Bone Builders class at the Residence at Otter Creek last week are, clockwise from bottom left, Karen Hill, Annette Lynch and Suzanne DePree.

Shown in the inset is 70-year-old Jeff Schumann of Salisbury wrapping up the 10K running section of a Vermont Sun Triathlon at Branbury State Park in Salisbury on June 28. A regular competitor, he won his age group that day, and was 11th overall.

Photos by Steve James and Pat Hendrick Photography



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Why Alzheimer's patients forget family and friends

Research suggests new treatment approach could preserve your cherished memories

CHARLOTTESVILLE, Va. — One of the most devastating moments for family members of a patient with Alzheimer's is when their loved one forgets who they are. New University of Virginia School of Medicine research may explain why that happens and could lead to a way to prevent it.

UVA's Harald Sontheimer, PhD, and graduate student Lata Chaunsali and their colleagues found that the failure to recognize family, friends and caregivers is caused by the breakdown of protective "nets" that surround neurons in the brain. Preventing the loss of these nets in lab mice protected the mice from losing their memories of previous social interactions.

The results offer an exciting target for the development of new treatments to benefit Alzheimer's patients, the researchers say.

"Finding a structural change that explains a specific memory loss in

Alzheimer's is very exciting," said Sontheimer, chair of UVA's Department of Neuroscience and member of the UVA Brain Institute. "It is a completely new target, and we already have suitable drug candidates in hand."

Alzheimer's affects 55 million people around the world, and that number is expected to grow by 35% in the next five years alone. In response, UVA has established the Harrison Family Translational Research Center in Alzheimer's and Neurodegenerative Diseases as part of its Paul and Diane Manning Institute of Biotechnology. The institute aims to accelerate the development of new treatments and cures for some of the world's most challenging diseases, including Alzheimer's.

Sontheimer's new work sheds important light on the development of the disease. He and his team previously revealed the importance of what are called "perineuronal nets" in the

brain. These net-like structures surround nerve cells called neurons and perform a critical barrier

function that lets neurons communicate correctly. These communications allow the neurons to form and store new memories.

Based on those results, Sontheimer and his collaborators suspected that disruptions of the nets could be a critical turning point in Alzheimer's. Their latest work bears that out: The scientists found that lab mice that had faulty nets lost their ability to remember other mice — their "social memory" — even as they could still form new memories of objects in their environment. This mirrors what is seen in people with Alzheimer's, where social memory often fails before object memory.

Sontheimer and his team then used "MMP inhibitors" — a class of drugs already being investigated for their potential to treat cancer and arthritis — to see if they could prevent the loss of the perineuronal nets. It worked. The approach staved off the degradation of the nets and preserved the mice's social memory.

"In Alzheimer's disease, people have trouble remembering their family and friends due to the loss of a memory known as social memory. We found that the net-like coating known as perineuronal nets protects these social memories. In our research with mice, when we kept these brain structures safe early in life, the mice suffering from this disease were better at remembering their social interactions," Chaunsali said. "Our research will help us

get closer to finding a new, non-traditional way to treat or better yet prevent Alzheimer's disease, something that is much needed today."

The changes the scientists saw in the mice's brains align with those seen in human patients with Alzheimer's, suggesting that the targeting the nets in people could provide similar benefits. Developing a treatment based on the findings will require additional research, but Sontheimer and Chaunsali are hopeful about what the future could hold.

"Although we have drugs that can delay the loss of perineuronal nets, and thereby delay memory loss in disease, more research needs to be done regarding safety and effectiveness of our approach before this can be considered in humans," Sontheimer said. "One of the most interesting aspect of our research is the fact that the loss of perineuronal nets observed in our studies occurred completely independent of amyloid and plaque pathology, adding to the suspicion that those protein aggregates may not be causal of disease."

The researchers have published their findings in the journal "Alzheimer's & Dementia: The Journal of the Alzheimer's Association." The article is open access, meaning it is free to read. See a link to the article with this story on addisonindependent.com.



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Find the words hidden vertically, horizontally, diagonally, and backwards.

WORDS

- BALANCE
- BATHROOM
- CAREGIVERS
- COGNITIVE
- ELDER ABUSE
- EMERGENCY
- FALL PREVENTION
- FIRES
- GRAB BARS
- HEARING AIDS
- HOME SAFETY
- HYPOTHERMIA
- LIGHTING
- MEDICATION
- MOBILITY AIDS
- NON-SLIP
- PERSONAL ALARM
- PREPAREDNESS
- SAFE DRIVING
- SCAMS
- SECURITY SYSTEM
- STAIRLIFT
- VISION



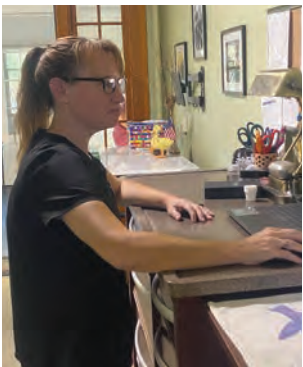
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