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The Commons

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YOUR AWARD-WINNING, INDEPENDENT, NONPROFIT SOURCE OF NEWS AND VIEWS



The Whetstone Brook courses through Brattleboro on Monday after the region was pummeled with rain, some areas in Windham County up to 2 inches.

December rain, flooding hearken back to recent weather catastrophe

Rivers rise and roads close as up to 5 inches of rain falls on Windham County; Londonderry avoids repeat of devastating summer flooding

By Virginia Ray
The Commons

Rain hit hard and early on Dec. 18 in Windham County for a soggy start to the week before the Christmas holiday, at a time when things had barely been cleaned up from the big July flood in some towns.

The National Weather Service reported county rainfall between 2.44 inches (in Rockingham), and 5 inches (in Guilford). Had the rain come in the form of snow, the accumulation would

have totaled between 2 and 4 feet.

“I know this is the last thing Vermonters want to see right now, especially during the holiday season,” said Gov. Phil Scott, who spoke briefly post-storm on Dec. 19.

“So let me say, although there will be damage to infrastructure, homes and businesses, we do not expect this to be the same scale as July,” he continued. “That being said, some of the same places that were impacted in July are currently experiencing flooding once again so for

them, this is July, and it’s a real gut punch.”

The East Coast from Florida to Maine saw heavy precipitation and gusty winds with what the National Weather Service deemed “excessive rainfall” moving from the mid-Atlantic states into New England, lake-effect snow downwind of the Great Lakes, and upslope snow over parts of the Northern/Central Appalachians.

Here, by 7:10 a.m. on Dec. 18, East Dover reportedly had seen 2.31 inches of rain, according to the NWS office in

Albany, New York. West Dover received 2.25 inches. The lowest at that hour of the morning were Bellows Falls and Rockingham, with just over 1 inch of rain.

By 12:45 p.m., East Dover was ringing in with 2.54 inches and West Dover with 2.42 inches, while Bellows Falls had risen to about 1.5 inches of rainfall.

The Guilford/Halifax area, however, took the lead, with a reported 5 inches of rain by 10:30 a.m.

The weather service also

■ SEE RAIN AND FLOODING, A2

State legislators have plenty to do in 2024

County lawmakers will return to Montpelier to address a housing shortage, a drug crisis, climate change, and other issues that top the legislative agenda

By Joyce Marcel
The Commons

BRATTLEBORO—When the Vermont Legislature reconvenes on Jan. 3, state lawmakers, having already served the first year of their two-year terms, will hit the ground running.

A lot of legislation from the last session is still waiting to be dealt with.

According to Sen. Nader Hashim, D-Windham, “Last session, the House introduced 523 bills and the Senate introduced 157 bills. The cutoff date for new bills was Dec. 1, so we will know how many new bills will be introduced this upcoming session once we reconvene.”

From new judges to mushrooms, from health care to paid family leave, from housing to fighting climate change, Windham County’s legislative delegation is set to play a big part in the Legislature this coming year.

The Commons asked area legislators about their priorities for the coming session.

No paper next week

BRATTLEBORO—As usual, *The Commons* will not publish an edition for the last week of the year.

The next issue of the newspaper will appear Wednesday, Jan. 3, 2024. Deadline for news and advertising is Friday, Dec. 29.

All of us at Vermont Independent Media wish our readers warm holiday greetings, a safe end of the year, and best wishes for strength, prosperity, and resilience in the months to come.

Climate change: top priority

House Majority Whip Rep. Emily Long, D-Newfane, says leadership’s first priority is further fortifying Vermont against climate change.

■ SEE LEGISLATORS, A4

Staffing crunch temporarily closes Windham school

Windham Elementary will close for remainder of the school year after months of tumult over the school’s ultimate fate

By Peter D’Auria
VtDigger

WINDHAM—School board members have decided to temporarily shutter Windham Elementary School after administrators struggled to fill staffing positions at the tiny school.

The three-person Windham School Board voted on Dec. 14 to close the 15-student school and send kids to Townshend Elementary, roughly 10 miles away. Students will continue to attend Windham Elementary through this week and will begin positions at the tiny school.

■ SEE SCHOOL CLOSURES, A3

Bringing holiday cheer to Nicaragua

Local man starts fund to help his neighbors in a small farming village have a Christmas dinner

By Fran Lynggaard Hansen
The Commons

PUTNEY—Brattleboro native Ian Diamondstone has done a lot of traveling through his work buying certified organic specialty spices in Central America, but he’s found a second home.

“You know how it is,” he says, smiling. “You travel to a country where you [...] feel at home, you

want to spend more time there, and over time you find yourself returning. Along the way, you make friends and then it feels even more like home.”

About six years ago, in Chichigalpa, a village of 73 subsistence farmers in Nicaragua, Diamondstone put down some roots — literally. He bought land and used local labor to build a house where he can stay during his frequent visits there.

Diamondstone has also had an additional project going over the last nine years or so: He donates to his neighbors so they can afford the ingredients for their special Christmas meal.

“This is an area that is deeply and devoutly Catholic,” he says. “When Christmastime comes,

each family hopes to have a Christmas dinner, as it is the most important holiday to celebrate.”

Like families in Vermont, Diamondstone points out, these families “hope to have a ham or a turkey with vegetables, potatoes, corn, or tortillas to celebrate the holiday.”

“In Nicaragua, the meal costs \$10 to feed a family of about five people, but most don’t have the money for the meal,” he adds. For these farmers, “\$10 is a huge sum.”

Subsistence farming

In Chichigalpa, “everybody there is poor, but everybody there is very real and exceptionally kind,” he says.

“I got there and I thought, ‘How amazing there is still a place where people are living off the land. They don’t pass judgment — ‘we’re all poor, and we’re all in this together.’”

He points out that “families here don’t make much money, and in some cases, a parent has gone out of the community or even the country, to earn money.”

“For example, Donja Christina is a local woman who tends her daughters’ and sons-in-laws’ cows. She looks after them and earns a tiny bit of money here and there if something gets sold,” Diamondstone says.

After the war in Nicaragua ended in 1990, the government gave families between 20 and 30

■ SEE CHRISTMAS MEAL, A6



From left, Ian Diamondstone’s neighbor Francesca, Maritza’s granddaughter, Diamondstone, Maritza, and Rigoberto in front of the gate to his home in Nicaragua.

COURTESY PHOTO

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For 11 projects in county, \$4.6 million from the feds

Grants will fund home repair program, renovations to former Rockingham hospital building, and other work

By Virginia Ray
The Commons

The Windham & Windsor Housing Trust (WWHT) and Greater Rockingham Area Services (GRAS) are two of 11 applicants in Windham County to receive Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) and Recovery Housing Program (RHP) federal funding awards through the Vermont Community Development Program.

Governor Phil Scott and the Department of Housing and Community Development announced the recipients of a total of \$4,591,000 on Dec. 14.

In Brattleboro, WWHT is the sub-grantee that will receive a \$440,000 CDBG supplemental award to administer the Green Mountain Home Repair Loan Fund to provide affordable home repair financing and housing counseling services to eligible homeowners in Windham and Windsor counties.

WWHT Executive Director Elizabeth Bridgewater says the program includes providing low-cost loans and/or grants to income eligible homeowners to make repairs and/or undertake rehab projects to “improve the health and safety of their homes.” Examples include installing new roofs or new heating systems, replacing outdated electrical wiring, and addressing mold.

“The Green Mountain Home Repair Program is a wonderful resource for homeowners in southeastern Vermont to improve the quality of their homes,” Bridgewater says. “The low interest rates, small grants, and support from our team of home repair specialists help homeowners navigate the sometimes complicated process of developing a project, hiring a contractor, and getting the job done.”

Hospital building renovations

A \$250,000 award, funneled through the town of Rockingham, is to help sub-grantee Greater Rockingham Area Services replace its oil heating system with

a biomass wood chip system and make associated renovations to the building, the former Rockingham Memorial Hospital, at 1 Hospital Court.

GRAS Administrator Marty Gallagher has been working to raise the needed \$1.9 million for the project for several years.

“I don’t think it’s unusual when raising this much money that it takes this long,” she says. “I think that’s the norm. You have to be persistent. And every grant gets us one step closer.”

The total project to upgrade energy systems at the former hospital includes replacing two boilers, 33 and 58 years old, respectively, with one new energy-efficient biomass boiler, a boiler backup system, and a silo to store the wood chips used as fuel.

The plan will also reduce carbon dioxide emissions by an estimated 507%.

Tenants collectively employ about 85 people and serve about 150 clients daily. Along with the Rockingham Health Center, GRAS tenants include Springfield Hospital’s Windham Center for Psychiatric Care, North Star Health, HCRS (Health Care and Rehabilitation Services), Front Line Foundations of North America, the Rockingham Dental Center, and Greater Rock Fitness.

Falls Area Community TV (FACT), the region’s local access cable studio, also operates from the facility.

To date, Gallagher has also received a \$817,980 grant from the Northern Border Regional Commission (NBRC), a federal/state partnership for economic and community development within the most distressed counties of Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, and New York; a \$72,000 grant from the Vermont Capital Investment Program; \$50,000 in Efficiency Vermont incentives; and \$100,000 from the Bellows Falls Village ARPA fund. She has also successfully raised \$100,000 from community donations.

She has also applied for two additional grants, about which she should hear in 2024.



A postcard of the Rockingham Memorial Hospital in the 1950s. The building’s renovation got a big boost with a \$250,000 Community Development Block Grant for the project.

“If I get those two grants, we’ll be fully funded,” Gallagher says.

Enhancing communities

The Community Development Block Grant program continues to enhance communities throughout the state,” said Scott. “With these grants, we are making child care more available, making public spaces more accessible, and adding affordable housing to cities and towns across Vermont.”

Scott thanked the state’s congressional delegation — Sens. Peter Welch and Bernie Sanders and Rep. Becca Balint — “for their continued work to keep these federal dollars coming to Vermont.”

In a joint statement, the three lawmakers wrote that the CDBG program “helps create stronger and more resilient communities here in Vermont and around the country.”

“This federal investment will jump start meaningful improvements in towns and cities across the state,” they said. “CDBG funds provide the resources our communities need to make critical projects a reality. We look forward to seeing Vermonters benefit from this important work.”



MIKE FAHER, VTDIGGER AND THE COMMONS FILE PHOTO

Windham Elementary School will be closed for the rest of the school year.

School closes

FROM SECTION FRONT

at Townshend in the new year.

“This is a short-term emergency measure,” said Windham Central Supervisory Union Superintendent Bob Thibault at the board meeting. “It’s temporary, and it is the intent of the board to re-operate next school year. This is not a permanent decision.”

The vote was 2-1, with Abigail Pelton, the chair of the three-person Windham board, the sole vote against closing the school.

The immediate reason for the closure was simple: The school is struggling to find staff. Windham Elementary usually employs three people: a teaching principal, a teacher, and an administrative assistant.

Jenna Cramer, the teaching principal, was placed on administrative leave in mid-October, just weeks after beginning in the role.

Parents alleged that Cramer had played a music video that included drinking, smoking, and violence during class, and the board fired her in November.

Cramer is appealing that decision, according to the superintendent, and a school board hearing, as provided under state law, took place on Dec. 14.

The other teacher is on a provisional teaching license and is supposed to be supervised by a licensed principal.

Jen McKusick, director of curriculum and instruction for the Windham Central Supervisory

Union, has been filling that role on an interim basis, Thibault told the school board.

A search for a replacement for Cramer has come up short, however. At a Dec. 5 school board meeting, Thibault reported that after interviewing two candidates, a hiring committee “was unanimous in not having a candidate to recommend to the board at this time.”

Wrangling over cost, quality of education

Outside of staffing challenges, Windham has been wrangling over the fate of the school for years.

Some parents and community members believe the school should be permanently closed. The institution is too small to effectively educate kids, and maintaining it is expensive for residents, they argue.

Proponents of the school, meanwhile, say that keeping Windham Elementary running is key to a healthy community and that the tiny school offers students a unique and intimate educational experience.

A group of parents is suing the town of Windham and the state over the school, saying that its students are not receiving an appropriate education and should receive state tuition money to attend schools elsewhere. That case is ongoing.

On Dec. 14, Daniel Roth, a Windham School Board member, said that the decision to close the school temporarily could prevent the state Agency of Education from taking even more drastic action — such as closing the school permanently or forcing it into another district.

“We as a community, we as Windham, may lose the power that we have to direct our own district,” Roth said.

Lindsey Hedges, a spokesperson for the Agency of Education, told VTDigger in an email that closing a school due to staffing challenges is “indeed a unique occurrence.”

Hedges did not answer questions about the agency’s stance on Windham Elementary, but she pointed to Vermont statute laying out the options if a school is failing to meet standards.

According to that statute, the agency is empowered to combine districts, close schools, or “assume administrative control” over a school.

Thibault, the superintendent, said that state officials have been paying close attention to events in Windham.

In communications with the district, those officials “reminded us of their statutory power,” he said. “That’s probably the best way to put that.”

Additional Commons reporting by Jeff Potter.

PUBLIC NOTICES

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PUBLIC HEARING NOTICE DUMMERSTON DEVELOPMENT REVIEW BOARD

The Dummerston Development Review Board will hold a public hearing on Tuesday, January 16, 2024, beginning at 6:00 pm, at the Dummerston Town Offices, 1523 Middle Road, Dummerston Center and via Zoom video teleconference, for the purpose of reviewing the following applications:

- A review of application #3749; Whitman Wheeler, for Right of Way for access through parcel #279.1, under Sections 602 of the Dummerston Zoning Bylaw, 620 East West Rd., Dummerston, VT, a Residential District. The hearing will be preceded by a site visit on Saturday January 13, 2024, beginning at or about 10:00 am.

- A review of application #3750; Adam Hubbard, ABF Freight, for Conditional Use, Right of Way, and Sign, under Sections 602, 665 & 720 of the Dummerston Zoning Bylaw, at parcel #828, 830 US Rt. 5, Dummerston, VT, a Rural Commercial District. The hearing will be preceded by a site visit on Saturday January 13, 2024, beginning at or about 10:30 am.

The hearings and site visit are open to the public. Participation in these proceedings is a prerequisite to the right to take any subsequent appeal. Persons wishing to appear and be heard may do so in person, by a representative or by video teleconference, or through written comment. A copy of the applications is available for public review at the Dummerston Town Office during normal business hours or by email to: zoning@dummerston.org. To receive the Zoom video teleconference link email to: zoning@dummerston.org, or call: 802-275-5739 .

Dated: December 20, 2023
Roger Vincent Jasaitis
Dummerston Zoning Administrator

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PROBATE DIVISION
Case No. 23-PR-05873

December 12, 2023

NOTICE OF HEARING AND ORDER FOR PUBLICATION Estate of: Elwood Tenney

This is to notify you to appear at court in connection with the above-named case for the following:

A Testate Estate Commencement Hearing will be held on:

Petition to Open an Estate and Appoint Fiduciary

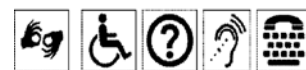
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| January 11, 2024 | 1:30 PM | 30 Minutes |

IF YOU DESIRE TO BE HEARD ON THE ABOVE MATTER, YOU MUST PARTICIPATE IN THE HEARING.

Objections to the allowance of the will must be filed in writing not less than seven days prior to the hearing. In the event that no timely objections are filed, the will may be allowed if it meets the criteria set out in V.S.A. 14 section 107(b)(1) or (2).

This hearing will be held by WebEx only. For instructions for participating by WebEx and for the WebEx login information, please contact the Court.

Any individual with a disability requiring assistance accessing the services, programs, and/or activities at the Courthouse should contact the Clerk’s office at the above address for further assistance.



It is hereby ORDERED that the notice of hearing as set forth in this Order be published in a newspaper of general circulation in Windham County, Vermont.

Publication Date: December 20, 2023

Notice of Windham County Annual Meeting **TO ALL RESIDENTS OF WINDHAM COUNTY**

Pursuant to 24 V.S.A.133 Notice is hereby given that the Annual Windham County Meeting of the voters presenting the proposed budget for the county for the ensuing year will be held on:

Wednesday, January 24, 2024, at 4:00 PM at the Windham County Sheriff’s Office 185 Old Ferry Rd Brattleboro, VT 05304.

If interested in attending this meeting via Zoom, please contact the Windham County Clerk at Countyclerk@windhamcountytvt.gov. Please provide your full name and the town in which you reside. The Zoom information, along with a copy of the proposed budget, will be emailed to you approximately 3 business days prior to the meeting date. Note: If you prefer to attend the meeting via phone, instead of via the web (Zoom), a dial-in number will be provided to you.

The following is a summary of the expenditures being proposed for the fiscal year Beginning February 1, 2024.

| | |
|---|----------------|
| County Clerk’s Office, Windham County Courthouse | \$553,338.64 |
| Personnel | \$256,821.64 |
| Professional Services | \$37,100.00 |
| Contract Services | \$1,050.00 |
| Building & Grounds | \$203,000.00 |
| Operational Expenses | \$21,570.00 |
| Insurance | \$31,797.00 |
| Donations | \$2,000.00 |
| Windham Probate Court | |
| Building Expenses | \$0.00 |
| Contract Services | \$0.00 |
| Operational Expenses | \$0.00 |
| Windham County Sheriff’s Department | \$499,500.18 |
| Personnel | \$274,086.39 |
| Professional Services | \$78,365.00 |
| Contract Services | \$11,680.79 |
| Building Expenses | \$30,525.00 |
| Operational Expenses | \$46,000.00 |
| Insurance | \$58,243.00 |
| County Capital Reserve Fund | \$0.00 |
| TOTAL COUNTY EXPENDITURES | \$1,052,838.82 |
| REVENUE | |
| Windham Superior Court Small Claims and Notary Fees | \$24,000.00 |
| TOTAL COUNTY REVENUES | \$24,000.00 |
| County Capital Construction Fund | \$ |
| TOTAL TO BE ASSESSED TO THE TOWNS OF WINDHAM COUNTY | \$1,028,838.82 |

The tax rate is based on last year’s Grand List as this year’s list is not published until the end of December, January. Estimated Tax rate FY 24/25 0.01096. Actual tax rate should be known by the Annual County Meeting in January 2024. Copies of the complete proposed budget are available to the public during the county court’s hours of Monday through Friday 8:00AM to 4:30PM at the county (Superior) Court on Route 30, Newfane, Vermont.

Carolyn Partridge, Assistant Judge

Lamont Barnett, Assistant Judge

BUHS senior named delegate to U.S. Senate Youth Program

Eva Gould, one of two from Vermont, wins a \$10,000 scholarship and will meet with U.S. leaders during a week in D.C.

By Virginia Ray
The Commons

BRATTLEBORO—The Vermont Principals' Association has announced that Brattleboro Union High School senior Eva Gould is one of two students in the state named a 2024 United States Senate Youth Program (USSYP) delegate.

Annually, two students from each state are selected for a \$10,000 cash scholarship and an all-expenses-paid, week-long trip to Washington D.C. This year's selected student delegates to represent Vermont are Gould and Chris Alfano, a senior at Burr & Burton Academy in Manchester.

A Vermont Principals' Association press release calls both students "very impressive Vermont high school students." "They submitted incredible application packets, have lots of evidence of great school and community leadership, and had very impressive interviews with the VPA USSYP committee that makes the final selections," says the release.

The United States Senate Youth Program, established in 1962 by Senate resolution, is a unique educational experience for outstanding high school students interested in pursuing careers in public service.

Its 62nd annual Washington Week is scheduled to be held in person in Washington, D.C. March 2-9, 2024.

The two student leaders from each state, the District of Columbia, and the Department of Defense Education Activity (which operates a school system for children of U.S. military families around the world) will spend the week experiencing their national government in action. Students must be actively serving in high-level elected or appointed leadership positions to qualify to apply.

Student delegates will hear major policy addresses by senators, cabinet members, officials from

the departments of State and Defense, and directors of other federal agencies, as well as usually participate in meetings with the President and a justice of the U.S. Supreme Court.

All transportation, hotel, and meal expenses will be provided by The Hearst Foundations.

In addition, each delegate will also be awarded a \$10,000 college scholarship for undergraduate studies with encouragement to pursue coursework in history and political science.

Gould appreciates every opportunity

"I love being involved in my school," Gould says. "I truly want the best for Brattleboro and its schools. I feel the impact you have on your community is so important, and I hold that close to me."

Gould plays two varsity sports in addition to filling her academic schedule and working as much as she can throughout the year.

She is a member of Student Council and the National Honor Society. She played a major role on the recent committee to rename the school mascot and has been a student representative to the BUHS School Board.

Gould says her biggest accomplishment to date is founding the PeaceJam chapter at the high school.

The international organization was developed by Nobel Peace Prize laureates as a vehicle to teach peacemaking to young people. The BUHS chapter members are among the 1.3 million youth in 40 countries participating in the program.

"Last year, our bike drive was monumental," she says. "It was so wonderful to even the playing field by bringing transportation to people who need it while positively impacting the Earth."

The organization, she says, "has brought a great community to our school and connected us town-wide. The engagement is something you don't see everywhere."

"We had Jody Williams, Nobel Peace Prize laureate, speak a couple years ago and [we] now host monthly speakers for the school," Gould says. "PeaceJam has a whole curriculum focused on Nobel Peace Prize laureates and international leaders that we work through while also planning our Billion Acts of Peace sub-projects."

The latter is PeaceJam's goal of documenting one billion individual actions and programs "to change the world." According to the project's website, more than 110 million acts of peace in 171 countries have been recorded.

Gould's family owns and operates Lilac Ridge Farm in West Brattleboro, which she says "has been a big inspiration."

"I have a big family that I love so much [...]. I love how passionate my family is about caring for animals, producing healthy food, conserving the land, and recently making the most delicious creamies," Gould says.

"Growing up on Lilac Ridge is something I wouldn't change for the world," she adds.

The senior says placing in the top six Vermont students in the U.S. Senate Youth program is "an absolute honor," especially given the "intensive selection process."

"The final six then go through an interview in front of seven VPA members, from which the final two are chosen," Gould says.

"I was the last interview of the day in Montpelier. With some bad car luck, I ended up having to spend the day up north waiting for AAA to come," she adds. "When I found out, I was so thrilled and I couldn't quite process the news."

She recalls that when she learned the news, she "was eating pizza with my Dad so it was a fun moment to share together."

"The opportunity this presents is so great, and I could not be happier. To meet and be able to chat with our country's leaders is amazing," Gould says.

"I can't wait to see in-depth how our country is run from within the Capitol," she adds. "I also am so excited to meet the other outstanding students from across the nation. It will be so interesting to learn everyone's roots, interests, and accomplishments."

She predicts that it will be "a great group."

"I am most excited for the judicial branch as I have a strong interest in law and justice. I also am fascinated by history, politics, culture, and business," says Gould, who recently applied "to a bunch of universities" and hopes to major in business and/or political science.

"I am very excited to be part of and encourage women in leadership," she says.



Eva Gould

COURTESY PHOTO

HOLIDAY SPECIALS!

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'Dry January' encourages 'substance over substances' in 2024

BRATTLEBORO—Windham County Prevention Partnership (WCPP) is encouraging the community to go substance-free in January 2024.

"Substances can be anything we use out of habit to comfort ourselves in times of stress, uncertainty, loneliness, or boredom," said organizers in a press

release. "Examples include alcohol, cannabis, sugar, technology or caffeine."

They invite others to join them on "a powerful and transforming journey in the new year, prioritizing substance over substances for the full month of January," which will "reap great health advantages."

WCPP called Dry January "a fantastic way to reclaim your mental and physical well-being, boost your energy and attention, discover new interests and activities, and create healthy habits for long-term wellness."

While WCPP says they recognize "that giving up alcohol, caffeine, cannabis, technology or

sweets can seem intimidating" and that "starting out can be difficult, and breaking free from previous patterns is no easy task," they say that doing so "gets simpler with time, and the benefits are tremendous."

By participating in this campaign, "you will become a part of a caring community that

understands your challenges, offers encouragement, and celebrates every step along the road," WCPP said.

The Windham County Prevention Partnership is a collaboration between Building a Positive Community, Deerfield Valley Community Partnership, and West River Valley Thrives,

working together "to support a comprehensive effort to promote wellness and prevent the use/misuse of substances, primarily by youth and young adults, in Windham County."

For additional information or to sign up for Dry January, visit wcpp.link/sos.

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COLUMN | Creative Conversations



Erin Bell, left, teaches Woodshop Essentials at HatchSpace.

COURTESY OF HATCHSPACE

'Anyone can enter this space and feel like they're a woodworker'

HatchSpace's mission: to make woodworking accessible to all, breaking barriers and cultivating a diverse community of makers

Brattleboro

MANY WILL REMEMBER the space as the former Brattleboro School of Dance. Along the three flights of stairs at 22 High St. is the familiar dark gray, worn a bit more, but with cool signage — made from wood, of course — pointing to HatchSpace.

Consisting of five shop spaces in 8,000 square feet, the non-profit states its mission is "to celebrate and advance the learning, practice, and cultural varieties of woodworking. We provide anyone with access to the tools and training necessary to build the things they love."

"All are welcome here," it's said on the HatchSpace website,



Breeze Verdant.

ANNIE LANDEMBERGER is an arts writer and columnist for The Commons. She remains involved with the Rock River Players, the community theater that she founded and directed for years. She also is one half of the musical duo Bard Owl, with partner T. Breeze Verdant.

and "financial assistance is always available to anyone experiencing hardship. Historically marginalized people including women and members of the [Black, Indigenous, and people of color] and [gender nonconforming] communities are welcome here."

HatchSpace offers a range of classes on various schedules, from bowl turning and wood finishing to kerf bending and workshop essentials. Private

instruction is also available.

Members (at \$49 monthly) have access to the third-floor power and hand tools and the second-floor digital fabrication space, which offers a full-scale CNC (computer numerical control) router, as well as laser cutting and advanced milling equipment.

I had a chance recently to talk with HatchSpace's executive

■ SEE HATCHSPACE, B3



COURTESY OF HATCHSPACE

HatchSpace's Lars Hasselblad Torres, executive director, and Jesse Pompei, education coordinator, with some of what Hasselblad Torres calls the nonprofit's "beautiful wood inventory."

COLUMN | Deeper Dive

A sci-fi/horror/comedy classic returns to the big screen



Gizmo, one of the lead characters in the horror comedy classic "Gremlins," which will be screened at Epsilon Spires in Brattleboro on Dec. 22.

Epsilon Spires celebrates the season with the 1984 darkly funny Christmas film. And ugly sweaters.

Brattleboro

THIS YEAR, Epsilon Spires presents a Christmas event worthy of its reputation. Pop culture, satire, and unusual music fill the bill on Friday, Dec. 22, when the downtown arts organization will screen the comedy-horror hit, Gremlins.

Guests are encouraged to wear their best — or worst — ugly holiday sweater to win gift certificates to local businesses and other prizes. Mulled cider,

WENDY M. LEVY, a former reporter and columnist for this newspaper, contributed this piece on behalf of Epsilon Spires. The Commons' Deeper Dive column gives artists, arts organizations, and other nonprofits elbow room to write in first person and/or be unabashedly opinionated, passionate, and analytical about their own creative work and events.

eggnog, and other seasonal treats will be served.

Before the movie begins, Synthesizer Santa, a.k.a. Jolly Olde Synth Nick, will play unorthodox versions of Christmas

carols and holiday music.

Synth Santa, an entertainment industry veteran, decided to revamp his act with the latest technology in sonic possibilities.

■ SEE 'GREMLINS', B2

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arts & community CALENDAR

| THURSDAY | THURSDAY CONT. | SATURDAY | SUNDAY CONT. | WEDNESDAY CONT. | TUESDAY |
|----------|---|----------|--|-----------------|---|
| 21 | <p>Community Center: Talk with fellow seniors about what's on your mind. Feel like talking especially around this holiday? Participants say they feel uplifted and lighter after chatting with folks who are in the same age range. Laugh, listen, share experiences, ideas. Deb Albright - retired nurse and professional facilitator - helps the group follow simple guidelines, but participants determine what comes up for discussion. Deb brings beverages and cookies too!</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ 1-2 p.m. on the 1st and 3rd Thursday of each month. ▶ Free. ▶ Broad Brook Community Center, 3940 Guilford Center Rd. Information: More information or to request a ride, contact Guilford Cares: 802-579-1350, guilfordcaresvt@gmail.com.. | 23 | <p>Well-being</p> <p>BRATTLEBORO The Brattleboro Zen Center In-Person Meditation: This group chants briefly and then sits in silence for a half hour. All are welcome to join this peaceful action, either in-person or from wherever they might be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ 1 p.m.-1:35 p.m. on Saturdays. ▶ Free. ▶ Wells Fountain, south side Windham County District Courthouse, Jct. Putney Rd. & Main St. (Rte 30). | 2 | <p>Instruction</p> <p>BELLOWS FALLS Rockingham Free Public Library hosts Tech Time Tuesday Classes: January 2: New Year, New Device: Did you get a new device for the holidays and need some help? Drop into the library to get the New Year started with your innovative technology. January 9: Google Suite - Digital Tools for Connection and Collaboration: Improve these skills using Google's online tools such as Calendar, Chat, Docs, Drive, Gmail, Meet. If you don't have existing Google account, we'll help set one up for you. (More classes below!)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ 2 p.m. Tuesday classes in January in Downstairs Programming Room continue: Jan. 16: Drop-In Tech Help: Quick tech help option. Registration not required - walk in and spend 5-15 min. with librarian to ask your tech questions. Jan. 23: Social Media Etiquette/Tips: As social media channels evolved to become a primary ways people communicate in the modern world, learn how social media etiquette revolves around online guidelines to allow you to connect/promote. Jan. 30: Drop-In Tech Help: Quick tech help option. No registration needed. Just walk in and spend 5-15 min. with a librarian to ask your tech questions. Learn more about different applications and digital library resources. Drop-in sessions are first come, first served. Providing your own personal devices encouraged, though library laptops are available for class use. ▶ Through Tuesday, January 30, 2024. ▶ Free. ▶ Rockingham Free Public Library, 65 Westminster St. Information: 802-463-4270; rockinghamlibrary.org. |
| 22 | <p>Kids and families</p> <p>BRATTLEBORO Bonnyvale Environmental Education Center: Little Explorers - Nature Playgroup for Children ages 3-5 and their Caregivers: Enjoy a morning of nature play and exploration with BEEC's Naturalist Educator Kristina Weeks and her 3-year-old child.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ 10-11:30 a.m. ▶ Free. ▶ Bonnyvale Environmental Education Center, 1221 Bonnyvale Rd. Information: 802-257-5785; beec.org. <p>Community meals</p> <p>PUTNEY Putney Monthly Free Produce Distribution: The Vermont Foodbank and the Putney Foodshelf co-sponsor a monthly food drop of free produce and some non-perishables usually on the 4th Thursday of every month. Due to the Holiday season, December Free Produce Distribution will be Wednesday, 12/22. All are welcome.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ 9 a.m. - 9:45 a.m. This is a drive-up service. Bags provided. ▶ Free. ▶ Putney Foodshelf, 10 Christian Sq. Information: 802-387-8551. | 24 | <p>Community building</p> <p>W. BRATTLEBORO All Souls Church Hybrid Worship Service (In-Person/Zoom): After breakfast there will be a service of seasonal stories ranging from picture story books to possibly the Christmas Chapter from Wind in the Willows. All Souls musicians are also being asked to give us a chance to sing or listen to appropriate music. Plus, Dan Kasnitz and Maisie Crowther are also participating in the planning - we hope to have an interesting variety.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ 9 a.m.: Community Breakfast. 10 a.m.: Worship Service. ▶ Donations welcome. ▶ All Souls Unitarian Universalist Church, 29 South St. Information: 802-254-9377; ascvt.org. <p>Dance</p> <p>BRATTLEBORO Brattleboro Conscious Dance: Move your body, dance to great tunes, meet our sweet dance community. Conscious dances are a beautiful way to: tone and regulate your nervous system, explore/process events and emotions, explore experience of freedom, reconnect with your inner child, practice vulnerability, engage the sacred, experience community, honor yourself, release all that no longer serves.</p> | 30 | <p>Performing arts</p> <p>BRATTLEBORO The Baker Street Readers celebrate New Year's by performing "An Evening with Jeeves & Wooster": Bertie Wooster and his trusty valet Jeeves are creations of P.G. Woodhouse who wrote 35 short stories and 11 novels about the pair. Wooster is a young, wealthy man who never worked a day in his life while Jeeves is his "gentleman's gentleman," always on hand to press his trousers or brew his tea. Moneyed classes of England rely on these men to solve the most thorny of social difficulties, like ending an ill-informed engagement or covering up a scandal.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ 6:15 p.m. doors open, 7 p.m.: show. Featuring two of their adventures: "Jeeves Takes Charge" and "Bertie Changes His Mind," w/ James Gelter as Bertie Wooster and Tony Grobe as Jeeves, plus special guests Jessica Gelter, Bruce Holloway, Kaya Blouin. Hors d'oeuvres served before show and during intermission. ▶ Through Sunday, December 31. ▶ Tickets: \$15. ▶ Hooker-Dunham Theater, 139 Main St. Information: To reserve a seat, email bakertreereaders@gmail.com. More information: facebook.com/bakertreereaders. |
| 27 | | | | 31 | |



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■ 'Gremlins'

FROM SECTION FRONT

He replaced outdated concepts like reindeer and jingle bells with mono- and poly-phonic synthesizers, vocoders, electronic drum machines, and sequencers.

After Synth Santa finishes his set, the ugly holiday sweater contest and film will begin.

Gremlins, released in 1984 to critical acclaim and commercial success, was directed by Chris Columbus (director of *Home Alone*), with Steven Spielberg as executive producer.

Darkly funny and often scary, *Gremlins* drags out numerous holiday- and B-movie tropes to poke fun at them.

What's a holiday film without a family drama? *Gremlins* has that. An inventor dad who can't seem to succeed, whose child has to pick up the slack. A cute family dog whose life is threatened by a mean, old, lonely woman. A love interest with a secret.

BUT *Gremlins* is also a science-fiction horror film, so add to the mix a character in search of something who travels to an unusual and mysterious location to find it. Another character has a horrifying childhood story that explains why she doesn't like Christmas.

And, the B-movie common denominator: a supernatural being that seems cute, friendly, or alluring at first, but then, due to human folly, transforms into an intractable menace.

Because this film is also a dark Christmas comedy, the menacing creatures don't just go about their usual business of maiming and killing everyone and everything they see. They also pause their destruction long enough to don their Santa

apparel and screech Yuletide tunes to terrified neighbors.

The satire doesn't end there. With a nod to the knowledge that Christmas has also become a secular holiday centered around neverending materialism, this film's plot device is a present that magically reproduces itself. The gift that keeps on giving!

But, *Gremlins*, like many old B-movies, has a lesson: Be careful what you wish for.

Gremlins is rated PG and is not suitable for young children. Doors open at 7:30 p.m., and the contest and musical performance begins at 8 p.m. Tickets are on a sliding scale (minimum \$5).

Epsilon Spires is located at 190 Main St. in Brattleboro. For more information, or to purchase tickets in advance, visit epsilonspires.org.

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'We were spared'

Southern Vermonters deem Monday's flooding 'not as bad as we've seen' — yet still not good

By Kevin O'Connor
VtDigger

LONDONDERRY— Beverly Jelley woke Monday to fears of yet another surge of storm-water. Twenty-four hours later, the 81-year-old local business owner gave thanks for something else: a torrent of community support.

The three-decade operator of Jelley's convenience store on Route 100 — having rebuilt from top to bottom twice, after 2011's Tropical Storm Irene and last summer's record rains — watched Tuesday as dozens of family members and friends put back nearly \$300,000 of equipment they had pulled out the morning and afternoon before.

"Everybody just appeared, and we started packing," Jelley recalled of this week's effort to save a business that reopened Oct. 30, after five feet of July flood-water, nine dumpsters of debris and nearly four months of repair.

The store owner was one of many southern Vermonters who breathed a sigh of relief Tuesday after freak winter-solstice-week rain closed roads and schools.

"It was not as bad as we've seen," Jamaica Town Clerk Sara Wiswall said of damage in that nearby town. "When you do it over and over again, you get used to it."

At the height of Monday's storm, first responders from Rescue Inc. used a boat to evacuate three out-of-state skiers from a Jamaica rental property near the

Ball Mountain Brook.

As the water receded Tuesday, the town highway crew worked with graders and gravel to repair the impassable Dalewood, Goodaleville and Pikes Falls roads.

"Pikes Falls is closed where we just replaced the culvert," Wiswall told one caller to her office.

Hanging up, the Jamaica clerk shrugged.

"We're still fixing things from July, and we're still paying for Irene," she said. "Trust me, we really are."

Nearby towns such as Andover, Chester, Ludlow, Plymouth and Weston — all hard hit this summer — reported few major problems this week. But that didn't stop the owners of Ludlow's

not-yet-open Blue Duck Deli from emptying their basement along the banks of the Black River.

"It was a nail-biter watching the radar, watching the river," said Craig Kovalsky, who wound up in the New York Times after last summer's storm. "We were nervous, but we still had some room."

Back in Londonderry, Jelley said she was grateful the sandbags around her store held, given that she drained her finances after the July flood.

"It may take us a day or two to get our product back where it belongs, but I feel so blessed," the octogenarian said. "We got a bit of water in a couple of spots, but we were spared."



KEVIN O'CONNOR/VTDIGGER
Londonderry residents on Tuesday put back nearly \$300,000 of inventory and equipment they had pulled out of Jelley's convenience store on Route 100 the day before.

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VIEWPOINT

‘Why don’t they just get a job?’

Some general answers to some common questions about giving money to people on the streets of Brattleboro

I WAS HAPPY to hear the issue of so-called “panhandling” discussed at a recent Selectboard hearing, where board member Daniel Quipp made a key point: You don’t have to choose between giving money to someone holding a cardboard sign and donating to a nonprofit organization. You can give a little or a lot to either or both.

Nonprofit organizations do their best to provide long-term solutions to chronic issues of lack of shelter, hunger, transportation, clothing, medical care, etc., whereas when you give cash (or a gift card) to someone on the street, you’re helping address a more immediate need.

Over the last few months, I’ve talked to well over a dozen of my neighbors who live on the street by day and wherever they can by night. I’ve learned enough to give at least general answers to some common questions about why or why not give them money.

First, let me assure you that those immediate needs do not usually involve getting a dose of some drug. (I admit that, if you count sugar and caffeine, the percentage goes up.)

• *Why don’t they just get a job?* My biggest surprise when I started getting to know my friends was how many don’t have any kind of picture identification — and may not have, or remember, their Social Security number.

How could they not have an ID? Well, maybe they never

DAVID BLISTEIN, a scriptwriter for documentary films and an author, publishes a Substack newsletter, Fields of Vision (davidblistein.substack.com), where he is writing “Street Cred,” a series of essays that profile the lives and circumstances of his unhoused neighbors in downtown Brattleboro. (Note that he’s changed the names he uses here.) Some of these stories were featured in the Voices section on Sept. 20. “This is a big topic, and I welcome comments, corrections, and criticism,” he says.

had a driver’s license, let alone a passport. More likely, they lost it as they moved from place to place, or someone stole their wallet or bag and threw it away after taking out any cash. Or they got evicted and the landlord threw everything into the dumpster. It may have even been confiscated by the police after a misdemeanor arrest.

And they never had the means (or understood how) to retrieve or replace it.

Meanwhile, you cannot get work without an ID unless someone is willing to pay you under the table. The logistics of getting an ID are very complex; they are different in different states and usually require jumping through enough hoops to get you a job teaching at NECCA.

Also, if they do have an ID and can get a job, that job is

■ SEE PANHANDLING, D3

VIEWPOINT



Tahseen Aliahmad (left), Kinnan Abdalhamid (middle), and Hisham Awartani (right) — are shown wearing keffiyehs. The three Palestinian American men were shot in Burlington on Nov. 25.

Wear the keffiyeh with pride. Wear it with knowledge.

‘These simple cotton scarves represent not only our struggle for freedom, they are also a powerful representation of Palestinian heritage and culture, which Israel continues to try to erase’

AS A Palestinian American, some of my earliest memories involve the black-and-white Palestinian scarves called keffiyehs.

My sister and I were photographed in them as babies. They covered our strollers in rallies and protests before we could even say the word “Palestine.” We tied them around our hips and shoulders as we played the make-believe belly dancers or Arabian princesses that we later came to recognize as exoticified, Hollywood versions of our culture.

As I got older and traveled to places

SAMIA ABBASS is a Palestinian American who lives in Brattleboro. She invites you to find out more about Palestinian food and culture, including the keffiyeh, at a tabling event at the Brattleboro Food Co-op later in December, on a date to be determined.

like Northern Ireland, Ecuador, and Nepal, I saw keffiyehs held up as global symbols of liberation and solidarity with oppressed people. They appeared in struggles for freedom around world, from the Indigenous people of South America to urban Black Lives Matter protesters in the United States

— all connected ideologically to the Palestinian resistance movement.

THE TRADITIONAL square black-and-white cotton scarf is a powerful icon rooted in Palestinians’ connection to our land. The scarves are embroidered

■ SEE KEFFIYEH, D2

MEMOIR

‘I SURELY RUINED CHRISTMAS’

What started as the worst feeling ever became my favorite holiday memory

I LOVE THE HOLIDAYS and always have. My mother and I typically took the lead to deck the halls, create artistic presents for others, and most notably, decorate the Christmas tree together.

Don’t get me wrong in thinking that my dad and two older brothers weren’t in the holiday spirit; my mom and I had our little special traditions together.

Our house was a home-based daycare, and parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, friends, and everyone in between were always coming and going, with upwards of a dozen children a day. It was a full-on zoo — and we loved it.

My mom decided to create a contest, where the person to most accurately guess how many

OWEN B. MCLAUGHLIN has lived in Vermont for 17 years. He is a preschool teacher, an avid cyclist and camper, and he loves to whittle wooden spoons to give at Christmas.

■ SEE RUINED CHRISTMAS?, D3



PHOTOILLUSTRATION BY JASON MUNSPLASH



The pleasant energy of a quiet country neighborhood and a sense of serenity from a tucked away deck that overlooks terraces filled with mature shrubbery and the woods beyond. The first floor features a light filled kitchen/dining with a brick fireplace (propane insert), and sliders to a very private deck. A large living room, a sitting room/den and a half bath. Upstairs a spacious primary bedroom with ensuite 3/4 bath. There are two other good sized bedrooms and a full bath off the center hall. At the back of the house, a two story flex space offers so many possibilities! The first floor has a small kitchen and sliders to the deck. A spiral staircase takes you up to a light filled aerie with treetop views. There is a full bathroom and a closet. The finished lower level offers a separate game/playroom, laundry area, a cedar closet, and a utility room. There is a separate craft/workshop space that walks out to a patio with views to the lower lawn. 1.58 acres; front and side yard with garden/play space, a fenced in dog area; back yard is terraced down to a lower lawn with a garden/storage shed. 2 car garage with a smaller third bay for garden/snow equipment. The driveway is paved. 3 miles from downtown Brattleboro.. Golf course close by.

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