**Vision and Tenacity Award for Opera North**

Ruth Sylvester

It was just one more challenge that the January night of the awards ceremony threatened a dismaying snowy drive. But—as the award bears witness—overcoming challenges is a specialty of Opera North, the Upper Valley's esteemed homegrown opera company. Three intrepid representatives of the company set forth for Concord, NH, to receive the New Hampshire Theatre Alliance's Matty Gregg Award for Vision and Tenacity. Continued on page 24

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**Crucial Catch: A Ticket to Superbowl LIII**

Lars Blackmore

“The four words we use to describe this experience to our friends are Shock, Awe, Gratitude, and Joy.” Kristin Brown and her husband, Stuart Close, have had ample opportunity to recount their once-in-a-lifetime adventure as unexpected VIP attendees at this year’s Superbowl game in Atlanta. Sitting in their living room in Norwich thinking back on their trip yet again, they both keep breaking into huge smiles. “We were just pinching ourselves that whole weekend and couldn’t believe that it was actually happening. So far outside our normal life.”

No mere ballgame, the Superbowl has been described as “a celebration of our shared American condition,” and, “a

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**A Quarter Century of Vital Communities**

Jennifer MacMillen

Neutral convener. That is the term beloved and longtime executive director of Vital Communities, Len Cadwallader, used when describing the role this transformative organization has filled for the past 25 years. That's right, Vital Communities is celebrating its 25th anniversary and is clearly just ramping up!

Time and time again, it seems that an innocent spark goes airborne and lands on just the right combustible and — Wowie! — it spreads and spreads organically because it is just that powerful! Vital Communities’ origin story tells a similar tale.

While she “can’t say enough about all

Continued on page 14

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An usher looks on as an aerialist dazzles patrons high above center stage.
NORWICH WOMEN’S CLUB NEWS

Spring Calendar 2019

- Monday, March 4th, 10-11am
  Coffee and Conversation
  Norwich Inn
- Saturday, March 16th, 6-10pm
  Spring Gala
- Monday, April 1st, 10-11am
  Coffee and Conversation
  Norwich Inn
- Wednesday, May 1st
  Community Projects Grant Application Deadline
- Friday, May 3 – Sunday, May 5
  Nearly New Sale
  Tracy Hall
- Monday, May 6th, 10-11am
  Coffee and Conversation
  Norwich Inn
- June TBA
  Annual Meeting and Luncheon

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Unexplained Shoulder or Neck Pain?

The Cause May Be Hiding in Plain Sight

If you've ever experienced shoulder or neck pain that seemed to have no clear explanation, you may have thought it was just part of getting older. While our bodies do require increasing care as we age, it's not true that chronic pain is inevitable. If we can adjust our perspective to see the body more clearly, it's possible to sort out unexplained chronic pain. It's also possible to feel better — even much better.

If you've ever had an X-ray or MRI come back normal, and you then received no substantive explanation for your pain, chances are good that a muscular problem is present. But muscular problems can be hard to analyze if we don't assume a global view of the body. In the same way we might step back to gain perspective on a painting, we must also step back to see a clear picture of the body.

If we take a broad view of a painful shoulder, for example, we often see a common pattern: rounded shoulders. Rounded shoulders are caused by the muscles of internal rotation overwhelming the muscles of external rotation. Over time, this can be a recipe for shoulder pain because the "arm-raising-muscle," the deltoid, is severely overworked when stuck in this position. Try it. Internally rotate your arms so that backs of your hands face front. Then try to raise your arms. Not easy, right! While the arm-raising deltoid is what often becomes painful in this example, the root of the problem lies elsewhere: in the overly tight muscles of internal rotation causing rounded shoulders. These muscles must be lengthened before the arm can be raised without shoulder pain.

We can apply this thinking equally to neck pain. In fact, rounded shoulders will often lead to neck pain because such rounding can force the head forward. (A severe forward head posture is represented by my Rembrandt drawing!) With the head stuck in this position, the posterior neck muscles are forced to hold up the weight of the head, something they're not designed to do. The result can be significant neck pain.

In this case we cannot just treat the painful muscles of the neck and hope for the best. Rather we must consider the cause of the forward head posture: excessive tightness in the front of the body. Tightness in the front neck, the chest, the abdominal muscles, the hip flexors (deep in the abdomen), and the quadriceps can collapse the body forward so that gravity becomes a pernicious force.

In both of these examples, the explanation for pain can be found in muscular imbalance. Over the years I have found this to be true a very high percentage of the time. While direct treatment of painful areas can be helpful, treating such areas exclusively is often only partially effective. We must also seek to understand the root patterns of imbalance. We must see the body as a whole.
Good things come to good people...

This phrase just seems so dead-on when reading this issue. Of course, that’s not to say that the rest of us aren’t good people (because I truly believe that everyone is), but sometimes there are some standouts who deserve some of those extra good things.

Take Stuart and Kristin (Brown) Close. Without going into the long version, Kristin and I bumped into each other while in labor with our daughters. Born just a day apart, our girls – Maisie and Greta – have been soul sisters ever since. I can honestly say that the Close family is one of those families who seem to live a really ‘right life.’ What does that mean? It means that they care for others, do for others, carve out wonderful time for family and friends, work hard, sacrifice for their kids without spoiling them... These may be my definitions, but I am sure many would agree. Who knows how the Universe works, but... “You’re Going to the Superbowl!” is not an exclamation many people hear. Because of Kristin’s giving heart and follow-through, they won one of those once-in-a-lifetime experiences. Read about it on the cover and feel happy in your heart for them!

I also happen to know Maria Laskaris, current development director for Opera North and whose husband is its founder. Like Kristin, Maria is one of those women who just lives a ‘right life’ under the radar but keeps popping up in top leadership roles wherever she goes. Why? Because she is excellent in all she does and leads by quiet example that is neither threatening nor judgmental nor rife with expectation. She just goes about doing her absolute best while quietly cheering others on. Life rewards such stellar beings. Read about Opera North and its recent award for Tenacity and Vision. Sounds like Maria!

As always, I could go on and on, but the printed page (please love the printed page) has space limits. Demo, Jill, Chief Robinson, my colleague Frank, Linda, Mark, Betty, Anne and Clay... even dear old Alden Partridge... read about them all and see how good things come to good people. And, PLEASE thank our local businesses and civic organizations that put in time and money to make the Norwich Times the community connector it has been for over 21 years!

Happy Spring!

~ Jen
Charles Brown Brook Comes On Stream

Lynnwood Andrews and Mary Sellmann

All of those 758 truckloads lumbering onto Beaver Meadow Road this past summer transported material collected behind the Norwich Reservoir Dam in order to restore the Charles Brown Brook to a more natural state. With the dam removed and the streambed rebuilt, 43 miles of stream now flow freely. Eastern brook trout, and other aquatic species such as minnows, frogs, mayflies, and stoneflies are expected to thrive with cooler water in the stream and obstructions gone.

The history of the dam began in the 1920s when the Norwich Water Supply Co. bought 800 acres along the Charles Brown Brook to create a public water system. The first dam was built in 1922, but was replaced in 1928 after it was heavily damaged in the Flood of 1927. The new, larger and stronger dam served Norwich well until the 1960s when water use began to exceed the reservoir’s capacity, and the Army Corps of Engineers found that it was in need of major repairs. The dam and 850 acres of watershed land were purchased by the Norwich Fire Department in 1970, but in 1973 the dam was further damaged by a flood, and it was no longer used to contain the reservoir. In 1981 the Fire Department had found an alternate source of water, a large aquifer accessible from land off Route 5. Hurricane Irene damaged the dam further as well as the adjacent Norwich Pool, a beloved community swimming pond, rendering it unusable.

By 2016, Vermont officials had identified the stream as a priority river restoration project. In 2018, the Connecticut River Conservancy removed the dam with help from several organizations including the Vermont Department of Environmental Conservation, the New Hampshire Charitable Foundation, Vermont Fish and Wildlife, US Fish and Wildlife, Trout Unlimited, American Rivers, Patagonia, and the Norwich Conservation Commission. Restoration work will continue through the spring of 2019. Native plants will be installed streamside and a kiosk near the Bill Ballard Trail will have information about the dam.

The future physical adjustment of the stream will be studied by two graduate students in geomorphology from Dartmouth, Jordan Fields and Rebecca Rossi. The students are examining how long it will take the stream to return to a natural state by comparing it to sections of the stream above and below the dam site. Comparisons to upstream areas are more valuable than downstream because the dam removal will continue to affect the downstream section for some time to come.

Natural processes and flood events will alter physical characteristics of the stream such as its shape, width and the rock and sediment lining the streambed. The students hypothesize that flood events will make a stronger impact on the stream’s adjustment than natural processes. They use traditional survey mapping tools to measure the shape of the stream. A Terrestrial Laser Scanner maps water surface patterns to give them water flow data. Even the rocks and sediment on the streambed are monitored with tracking devices to record what kinds of rock and sediment move and where it goes.

Not all of the material that collected behind the dam was taken away, and the students have already documented its movement downstream and the ensuing alterations to the stream. Because it is so bare and wide, the area where the reservoir used to be is especially prone to adjust significantly in response to different kinds of flood events – spring snowmelt, summer thunderstorms, or long, heavy soaking rains. All of this information will be important to understanding stream rehabilitation and management in the face of increasing extreme weather events.
Adapt, Be Stong, Have Faith, and Live

Editor’s Note: What makes a person a real hero is when they are the hero yet they sing the praises of others. Frank Orlowski is that kind of hero. I honestly could not get the Quechee, Lebanon and Norwich Times out to each community without his help. Not only does he persevere with kindness and patience while selling advertising space to our local businesses, he pitches in and writes many of the articles (often with little notice). And, when the paper is delivered to my office, Frank arrives in his pickup and slowly but surely loads the boxes of extras onto the truck to deliver them around town. Frank soars with a different kind of cape, and for that I am deeply grateful.

I wrote this post for my friends on an ataxia site, as they deal with the same condition I do. However, I think the message is universal, so I wish to share it with you here. We all know of others who deal heroically with tragedy or great challenges, and I know many of you fall under the definition of hero. Let’s remember all those regular people faced with extraordinary circumstances, that fall into that hero category, through their actions and efforts. They inspire all of us.

Not All Heroes Wear Capes

Any of you wear something occasionally to honor someone else? Every once in awhile, I wear my father’s tooled leather belt, though he died some 30 years ago. Well, a few days back, I gave blood, and they gave me a shirt as a gift for doing so. When I opened it and saw the message, “Not All Heroes Wear Capes,” I did not think about blood donors. Giving blood is a good thing to do, but not heroic. What I immediately thought of was all of you, dealing with ataxia, either as a sufferer, or a caregiver.

Heroes are merely ordinary people put in extraordinary, difficult situations, who find some way to deal with, if not overcome those circumstances. Heroes do not always triumph, but they do strive to make the best of a bad situation. And heroes do their best to uplift those around them.

An act of heroism can be as simple as getting out of bed, getting dressed, and facing the day. It can be deciding to take part in an activity, despite the fact that others may look at you strangely because you cannot walk, talk, or move right. It can be as simple as saying “I’m going to live, and work, and play as best I can, in spite of my condition.” And it can be smiling and laughing, as your heart breaks, because you are taking care of someone you love, who has lost the ability to do so much.

These definitions of heroism apply to all of you. So whenever I wear this shirt, know it’s in honor of heroes such as yourself.

Growing to Appreciate

I always loved swimming in huge bodies of water; Lakes Michigan or Huron, the Atlantic, or the Gulf here in FL. Would run down the beach into the water, dive, and swim out as far as I wanted. I never thought twice about it, and took it for granted. Now, it’s slowly maneuvering my rolling walker through the sand, carefully parking it, getting down on my knees, crawling on all fours to the water, and sitting where the waves lap up over my legs to my waist. As much fun as before? Maybe not, but surprisingly more satisfying. The effort it takes now is rewarded by the therapeutic value to mind, soul, and body of once again feeling the comfort of the water and waves covering part of my body. The moral of this? Never take for granted the pleasure resulting from things you love to do, and more importantly, never allow circumstances to deny you the joy of still doing those things, in one manner or another. Adapt, be strong, have faith, and live.

A Few Good Messages

Today is a day set aside for those that live with rare disorders and conditions. (I almost wrote “suffer from” in that sentence, but I honestly do not think I suffer; more correctly, I live with). Though each disorder is rare, when you put them all together, there are a large number of people dealing with rare medical conditions. Some have answers and treatments; others – such as the ataxia I have – have no remedies. I will share this piece I did on ataxia a while back, to let you know about this particular disorder.

If you are not familiar with ataxia, you are not alone; I wasn’t either until a couple years back. It is a rare neurological condition that affects one’s mobility and balance. Like many other neurological problems, not much is known about it, and there are no cures or effective treatments, though exercise and movement helps. It affects people of all ages; my issues started in my mid 50s. I’ve gone from a slight limp and change in my gait, to needing a rolling walker to get around. It also affects other physical attributes, such as hand dexterity, eyesight, swallowing, and causes tightness, or spasticity. Falling down is a common problem. However, much as coach Jim Valvano said in his famous ESPN speech about his cancer 25 years ago (watch it on you tube if you’ve never seen it – inspiring), it cannot touch my mind, my heart, or my soul; and after all, those parts are what really matter. So if you encounter someone with ataxia, there are a few good messages to give them: “I’ve heard about ataxia – it sucks,” or “You’ve got a lot of guts fighting that,” or even “I’d like to give you a hug,” (of course, always ask first before giving the hug!). Anyhow, thanks for listening, and above all, please don’t feel bad for me; we all deal with burdens in life, and often those burdens lead to great understandings, and traits, such as strength, perseverance, adaptability, and courage, we never knew we had. For more about ataxia, check out Ataxia.org.
Who is the most “famous” person you know or know of in Norwich?
Robin Williams and Walter Mathew

What fictional place would you like to visit? Which “real” place would you like to visit?
Fictional: A place where people have no worries and enjoy life. Real place: Hawaii swimming with dolphins

What skill would you like to master?
The computer

What would be your first question after waking up from a 100-year sleep?
Where can I get a pepperoni pizza?

What is your ideal way to spend a weekend in Norwich?
Visiting and relaxing with friends

What is the best way to start the day?
Sitting on the deck watching for Bald Eagles

To which organization or person/group do you donate your time or other resources regularly?
Assisting seniors with projects

What weird food combinations do you enjoy?
Horseradish sandwiches

What’s the last book you read? Did you like it, love it, or were you just happy to be done with it?
All mysteries... I enjoy all of them

What was cool when you were younger, but not now?
Winter camping

What is your favorite movie from childhood?
I was always playing outside.

What is your motto in life?
Get it done

Does your life have a “Theme Song”? If so, what is it?
“Bare Necessities” (from The Jungle Book)

If someone gave you $1,000 right now, what would you spend it on?
I would give the money to a friend who needs help now.

If you could save or protect one animal, plant or part of our earth, which would it be?
Protect our environment

If you could only eat at one local restaurant for the rest of your life, which one would it be?
Molly’s

What did you want to be when you grew up?
I was not sure... teacher, chef or fire fighter

If you could be invisible for one day, where would you be?
Speeding in my mustang up and down the highway.

If you could have one super human power, what would it be?
To travel anywhere in the blink of an eye

If you could have dinner with any famous person (alive or dead) who would it be?
Al Foley

In general, do you follow or break the rules?
In general, I follow the rules

What’s your biggest fear/phobia?
My biggest fear/phobia is someone finding out what my biggest fear/phobia is!

What’s your most energizing dream/vision of your future?
Living in Norwich for the rest of my life.
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I was probably never in the running for Dad of the Year anyway. With that truth acknowledged, I can tell you that I recently pulled a few stunts with my kids that, in another town, may have prompted some calls to “the authorities.” Happily, Norwichians didn’t blink, and my shenanigans felt as permissible as they were exhilarating.

For starters, I am a devoted advocate of leaving your children in the car when you stop to get a coffee at Blue Sparrow, buy some stamps at the post office, vote at Tracy Hall, or pop into Dan & Whit’s for some beef jerky. Just leaving them there lets you see if a) they can manage not to fight for a few minutes and b) if you can manage to be a calm adult even though your kids are not under your direct supervision. Naturally, this is an activity I only encourage inside the 05055... I would hesitate to leave them in the car in the warzones that we call “Thetford,” “Sharon,” and “Hartland.” No sane person would leave children unattended for 90 seconds in the savage wastelands of New Hampshire. Norwick, as we know, is different, so we can take some chances that our friends in Lyme would never dare contemplate.

Recently, though, my kids + car + dad experiments have been expanding a bit. I confess that I routinely tear up when I hear Bruce Springsteen’s “My Hometown.” Those who know the song understand the temptation to put their kids on their laps and let them steer the car down the strictly-enforced 25 mph public ways. One weekend day in February, I gave my oldest a shot. While I won’t detail our route (you’ll have to track me down, Chief!), I made sure we were where there was essentially zero traffic. He was mesmerized, and kept trying to brush my supporting hands out of the way. I didn’t begrudge him his grab for independence; it’s an unforgettable moment of childhood. He loved turning the blinkers on, and, like a cautious politician, kept the vehicle in a nice center-of-the-road position, neither offending nor injuring anyone in our path.

Only a lunatic would afford the same experience to his five year old the next day. As anyone who has ever had a five year old knows, however, every judge in the land would immediately grant a “not guilty by reason of insanity” to any case involving the parent of a five year old, so away we went. (He had started advocating for his turn in Dartmouthland, but was reminded that the Granite State’s law enforcement community is perhaps a bit more intense than here in Huntleyville.) He was a little more insistent about maneuvering the actual wheel, and I had to stop once or twice to make sure he understood who was really in control. I waved gleefully to a passing car, dog walkers, and joggers. They seemed, in true Norwick fashion, nonplussed.

Two days later, we returned home from a day of outdoor recreation. The boys were gassed and stumbled into the house. By the time I remembered that I had an errand to run, everyone had shed their snowpants, hats, mittens, coats, and boots. My wife was out, so I felt there was no choice: they had to get back in the car and come with me.

They answered not with howls of protest but more of a “That’s a non-starter for us, Dad” type of attitude. “I’m reading, he’s playing, we do NOT want to come with you.” In the age of no landlines, I told them not to put anything in their mouths, extracted a guarantee of no fighting, and forbade leaving the house, except in an emergency, when they should run to the neighbor’s house. They barely noticed my departure.

On my way out, I ran into some of those neighbors and told them I had left my kids alone. They laughed, and said something along the lines of, “My parents left us at that age... sometimes overnight!” We laughed, and I ran my errand. True, anxiety may have been nibbling at my conscience like a curious fish picks at a worm on a hook. True, said anxiety may have caused a momentary case of leadfootitis. True, I may have caught air off the infamous speed tables on Hopson. Overall, though, I went about my business.

When I returned home 21 minutes later, I heard the voices of two little boys engaged in conversation. While banal, the sound contained a lot of hidden data for me: Today, I would not be getting a divorce; getting arrested; forced to wear the scarlet letters of “Child Abandoner.” A famous Norwick journalist would not be writing about my egregious lack of judgment. For at least another day, “What type of a father does he think he is?” would not dominate the list serv.

Instantaneously, I internalized all those different realities, and the sound of my two children talking sounded a lot like what I imagine Mozart heard the first time someone played a piano in his presence.

The world was full of marvels.

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In the summer it’s difficult to stroll by the Norwich Green without being stopped by an out-of-state car whose passengers are seeking directions. Generally, the first question asked deals with a local bakery: “Where is King Arthur Flour?”

The response is easy and straightforward. “Take a right at the light. It’s less than a mile away.”

Inevitably, the second most popular question will be, “Where is Norwich University?” This query requires a more detailed response.

“Norwich University is in Northfield, Vermont.”

“But this is Norwich. It must be here.”

“Well, no... it burned down in 1866 and the school then moved to Northfield.”

“Well, that doesn’t make sense. Why didn’t they just re-build the University here?” And the discussion continues until the passengers become so frustrated with the curbside historian, that they zoom off to King Arthur Flour to find solace in a baguette or a cranberry scone.

In actual fact, the cornerstone of the predecessor of Norwich University, the American Literary, Scientific, and Military Academy, was laid on August 6, 1819, on the Norwich Green. Alden Partridge, a Norwich native, founded the academy after being superintendent of West Point for several years. The new school attracted over 100 students by 1820 and 200 scholars by 1825.

Partridge turned the traditional syllabus of the day on its head and promoted an educational program he called the “American System of Education.” He expanded the classical curriculum to include modern languages, surveying, navigation, history, and agriculture and offered the first classes in civil engineering in the United States.

Nicknamed, “Old Pewt,” because his signature looked like the word pewter rather than the name Partridge, Alden was widely known among his staff as an “accomplished pedestrian,” whose favorite past times were “hard reading and climbing mountains.” So along with revolutionizing the academics at his academy he developed a program of “physical education” and led his cadets to the dusty roads and tall mountain trails of Vermont and New Hampshire.

“Our great president,” wrote an 1837 graduate of Norwich University, “believed that legs were made to be used skillfully, and he learned this art. Walking, therefore was a past time with him and horses were of little account. . . Now and then to give our brains a rest, excursions were planned for the benefit of our legs. Sometimes summits of distant hills were scaled, a feat that could be accomplished in a day. At other times more extended tramps were entered upon whose execution required several days...prior to these undertakings I had prided myself on my fleetness of foot, but my effort to keep in sight of Captain Partridge, took this conceit out of me.”

Partridge, who on his own could walk 50 miles a day for three days in a row, easily breezed by his students during many a trek. One student recalled being overtaken by the Captain. “With his scabbard sword under his arm and a plume in hand, he passed me as a steam car would go by a canal boat.”

Partridge felt the hikes should be much more than a physical education class in the countryside. “There is no equal portion of time, during the whole year,” he wrote in the 1827 school catalog, “in which members of the Institution derive more advantage and are more improved that while on these excursions.” They were called “pedestrian excursions” but for the cadets, these hikes were far more daunting than a stroll through the woods on a Saturday afternoon. Partridge believed that on these hikes, “…youth became accustomed to endure fatigue and privation.” In addition, to the tough exercise, the cadets learned how to measure the heights of mountains and mapped and surveyed the ground they covered.

Typical of a day hike was one conducted in the summer of 1823 when several of the students, with Partridge in the lead, left Norwich at daybreak, walked to the summit of Ascutney Mountain and returned to Norwich about 9:00 in the evening of the same day. The whole distance was 46 miles and included a climb up a mountain 3,000 feet in elevation.

In September of 1823, Partridge led 27 cadets to Manchester, Vermont, where they climbed Mount Equinox and measured its elevation at the governor’s request. One cadet described the ascent as “very steep indeed so much so that we had to hold onto trees, or whatever came in our way to prevent our falling backward...” On the return march, they hiked to Rurland and crossed the Green Mountains. On the final day, they set out from Woodstock, Vermont, at 6:00 a.m. passed through Quechee and White River Junction and arrived at the Norwich barracks at 11:00 a.m. They were on the road five and a half days and marched one hundred fifty-nine miles. One cadet wrote in his journal, “All (except the Captain) were much fatigued.”

It’s important to remember that during the longer hikes Partridge rarely found housing for the students in taverns or inns. The young men slept on the ground under the stars and in the rain. When the cadets reached the base of a mountain there were no trails or guides and no summit lodges at the finish. Hikers had to bushwack to the peaks. As for hiking gear, there were no down sleeping bags, no featherlight nylon rain jackets, and no REI freeze-dried beef stroganoff and noodle dinners. Uniforms were made of wool, a cadet ate what he carried in a knapsack, and boots were painful.

From the 1820s until the 1850s, soldiers wore ankle-high boots with no “left” or “right” foot. Instead, the boots shaped themselves to the wearer’s feet over time. Needless to say, this footwear was uncomfortable and created some serious blisters.
A favorite hike for Partridge was the trek from Norwich to the top of Mt. Washington. He made this journey at least four times and on several occasions with a band of cadets at his heels. One of these mountain top "excursions" began on September 30, 1824, when Partridge and a detachment of fifty cadets left Norwich for the White Mountains.

The "historian" for the party was Gideon Welles who later graduated from Norwich University and, during the Civil War, became Abraham Lincoln's Secretary of the Navy.

"Crossing the Connecticut River at Norwich," Welles began, "we entered Hanover... celebrated for containing one of the more ancient and respected literary institutions in our country, Dartmouth College. We marched through the village without halting." By noon the cadets reached Orford and by evening they pulled into Haverhill where they spent the night after a 28-mile hike. "On our left, across the river, rose the green hills of Vermont," wrote Welles after the first day. "Their verdant sides (were) sprinkled with villages, captivated the eye, while the rugged cliffs of the Mooseshillock range hung frowning on our right." Near sunset two days later, they finished the day's hike with a seven-mile ascent to the base of Mt. Washington. "Our pathway was impeded by rocks, stumps, fallen trees, bogs... and frequently by streams of water across which had fallen some neighboring tree that served as a bridge." They finally reached two hunting sheds where they spent the night. "Fatigued with this day's exertions, particularly that of the last seven miles, each one sought his blanket and throwing himself upon the ground slept soundly 'till morning."

The next morning they began their ascent of Mt. Washington. After a steep climb above the treeline, they paused "...to take a view of the country, extending to the west, and the immense pile of mountains that seemed thrown in wild confusion around us." As they approached the summit they were met by snow from a recent storm. "Ice was formed in many places, which added difficulty and even danger to our ascent. But by perseverance... we placed our feet on the highest summit east of the Mississippi."

After a brief stay on the peak, the cadets headed home. Two days later they arrived in Norwich. The entire march of 160 miles was completed in six days. Much of the journey according to Welles "was over a rough and mountainous district, that has justly obtained the appellation of the 'Switzerland of America.'"

The final words from Welles' "history" surely echoed the sentiments of all those cadets who through the years did their best to keep up with Old Pewt. "We trust, however, that they were days not unprofitably spent, ...that we shall hereafter remember them as an interesting era in our youthful annals, to which our minds will revert with sentiments of the purest satisfaction."

Each fall a group of Norwich University cadets marches 45 miles from Norwich to Northfield to carry on the hiking tradition started by Alden Partridge — the Captain would certainly be proud of them all. Stop into Norwich Historical Society this summer and see the exhibit on Norwich University.
of the amazing people” who carried and continue to carry the torch to this day, it was Norwich resident, Betty Porter, who took the first spark of an idea presented in the Valley News and fanned the flame that was to become Vital Communities.

“If an Upper Valley group were to try this sort of exercise, it could help define those elements that Upper Valley residents collectively value, and provide a useful gauge for monitoring changes in the quality of life.”

The Editorial was referring to a group in Seattle, WA called Sustainable Seattle Civic Panel “…that formed to work for the long-term cultural, economic and environ-

mental health of Seattle…to measure those factors most crucial to the city’s livability.”

At the time, Betty was a board member of the League of Women Voters and posed the question to fellow members: “Why don’t we become Upper Valley group and create a unifying model to bring all of the good work being done separately, together?”

Many brown bag lunch meetings later, she and fellow Norwich resident and League member, Anne Silberfarb, realized that if this concept were to happen in separate silos, so to speak. There needed to be a unifying body.

“Thankfully, Anne and I served on the boards of many organizations headed up by true visionaries,” said Betty. “People like Delia Clark (a place-based educator and community facilitator), Lilla McLane-Bradley (Upper Valley Land Trust, Upper Valley Community Foundation and the Dresden School District) – the first interstate district in the country), Walter Paine (who was instrumental in forming the United Way of the Upper Valley, and the Montshire Museum of Science). These were true community leaders who were thinking regionally and big picture.”

“So, we assembled what Anne coined as the Dream Team, and ‘Upper Valley 2001 and Beyond’ was created,” reflected Betty. A serendipitous situation enabled them to secure the funding and they were off to the races!

The newly-formed organization’s first order of business was to educate local community members from throughout the Upper Valley about the organization’s role as a non-threatening driver of change at the support of many more community leaders.

“Several of us were aware of the chronic issues plaguing the Upper Valley – housing, transportation, local agriculture – and we were serving on boards doing great work,” said Betty. “The problem was that the work being done happened in separate silos, so to speak. There needed to be a unifying body.”

VITAL COMMUNITIES – continued from page 1

1993: League of Women Voters of the Upper Valley launches “Upper Valley: 2001 & Beyond”

1994: Began developing Community Profiles

1995: Valley Vital Signs Forum; developed 50 indicators to represent what residents said they value in the region

1996: First Valley Quest booklet printed

1997: Initiative renamed “Vital Communities of the Upper Valley” with three programs: Community Profiles, Valley Vital Signs, and Valley Quest

2000: Shortened name to “Vital Communities”

2001: Published 2,500 copies of Valley Quest: 99 Treasure Hunts in the Upper Valley; added three new projects: Local Agriculture, Upper Valley Housing Coalition, and the Upper Valley Transportation Management Association (UVTMA)

2002: First Flavors of the Valley local food expo held

2004: Received Community Organization of the Year award from Hanover Conservation Council

2006: Valley Quest rec’d Marie Pirie Environmental Program of the Year award from New England Education Alliance

2008: UVTMA’s “Mobility Checklist: Guidelines for Efficiency and Livable Growth” received Project of the Year recognition from New Hampshire Planners’ Association

2009: Launched Local First Alliance, accepted management of Leadership Upper Valley from Lebanon Area Chamber of Commerce, and established Municipal Leaders Group and Corporate Council

2010: Launched Energy initiative; Upper Valley Housing Coalition separated as independent organization; won Hanover Area Chamber of Commerce’s Small Business Innovator of the Year Award

2014: Upper Valley Farm to School Network and Community Discussion Lists (listservs) merged into Vital Communities; launched first round of Solarize Upper Valley

2015: Sustainable Energy Resource Group (SERG) merged into Vital Communities

2017: New Adaptation and Workforce Housing initiatives launched

2019: 25th anniversary and new logo

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hyper-local level. Community leader and group facilitator, Delia Clark, was instrumental in leading workshops for those communities receptive to hosting day-and-a-half-long events to dig deep into what were the issues... and possible solutions... that showed up uniquely for that community.

“Delia’s charisma and ability to articulate, in as close to an elevator pitch as possible, exactly what we were trying to accomplish really lent credibility to our work. People could understand that we weren’t coming into their town to tell them what to do. We were there as ‘neutral conveners,’ as Len [Cadwallader] used to say, to help them shape their own destinies,” explained Betty.

Len Cadwallader became the Executive Director of what evolved into Vital Communities in 2000 and served as its leader for eleven years. "Len was the perfect person for the job,” said Betty, “and remains one of the most influential people in my life.” Len’s ability to listen, facilitate and then lead without ego allowed the original Vital Communities’ mission to carry on as a unifying grassroots, rather than top-down, organization.

Today, Executive Director, Tom Roberts, has just the right stuff, and the right people in place, to help lead Vital Communities and the Upper Valley region it serves – into the next quarter century.

In the Spring 2015 newsletter in which Tom was introduced to Vital Communities members, he wrote: "I have been spending my time getting to know the excellent staff and Board as well as focusing more deeply on Vital Communities’ projects and role in the community. I am enjoying the opportunity to listen and learn, and I look forward to expanding the circle of conversation and focus as we move into the spring.”

And move into spring, he and Vital Communities certainly have. Vital Communities continues to grow and bloom with new programs and initiatives being introduced as local and regional needs arise.

“I would say the most important factor in the success of Vital Communities is the amazing people who have served and continue to serve the organization. I remember being so energized and being on such a high after our meetings... that doesn’t happen very often at board meetings,” Betty said with a smile. “Everyone was always excited to contribute with no agenda or personal outcome in the mix. Being a part of Vital Communities has been the most rewarding thing I have ever done in my life.”
Demo Sofronas Named Norwich Citizen of the Year

Jill Kearney Niles and Doug Robinson Named Stewards of Norwich

If you live in Norwich, you’ve encountered Demo Sofronas. You might not know it — but face it, the man and his works are everywhere. Maybe you’ve watched him crossing kids to Marion Cross in the morning. Or stopped to ponder the new monument honoring Norwich residents who served in the armed forces post-Vietnam, which he helped create. Or you read his “About Norwich” blog on DailyUV, which knits townspeople together. Or you’ve seen him at the Norwich Fair, sat on one of the benches he helped put together behind the library, or come across some other Norwich Lions Club service project he’s been involved in. Or you encountered him when he was postmaster here. Or you’ve used the library, on whose board he sits. Or, until a month ago or so, you watched the Selectboard on CATV — though you wouldn’t have seen Demo, because he was the guy behind the camera.

Here’s the other thing about Demo: If you do have occasion to work with him, you can count on two things — he’ll always be upbeat, friendly, and constructive; and he doesn’t wait to be asked to roll up his sleeves. If there’s a building project, he’s got hammer in hand. If things need setting straight or organizing, he plunges in. If a conversation is getting testy — on a nonprofit board, planning some volunteer event, in a town gathering — he cheerfully reminds everyone that we’re all just trying to do the best we can, and that everything will turn out okay. Plain and simple, Norwich would not work as well as it does without him.

All of this may be why, when the Norwich Citizen of the Year Committee asked townspeople for nominations this year, the “Demo!” emails came flooding in. And it is also why the committee is tickled pink to be able to announce that Demo Sofronas is the 2019 Norwich Citizen of the Year. When you see Demo around town, please congratulate him. The committee is equally pleased to say that we’re also honoring two town employees, Recreation Director Jill Kearney Niles and Police Chief Doug Robinson, whose longstanding contributions to the quality of life in town are so overwhelming that naming them Stewards of Norwich can’t even begin to describe their impact. Both are stepping down this spring, and we’ll miss them tremendously.
Jill has been running town recreation programs for 26 years. It’s tempting to say that all you have to do is look at any recreation brochure to see her impact: a range of programs and resources for kids and adults that towns twice this size would envy. But her impact has actually been far greater: She’s not only made it possible for townspeople and their kids to exercise, learn a sport, and learn the life skills that sports can teach, she’s also set a tone of generosity and good will.

“Jill treats all families as special and makes exceptions and dispensations that restore humanity to the business of raising children,” one former member of the town Rec Council says. “She nurtures relationships with Norwich families in ways that make us want to volunteer to coach and assist. She follows through providing support all along the way, including having a presence at many recreation events and games. The children all know Jill and feel safe under her leadership because of her friendly presence at their games. She knows so many of them by name, saying hello to them and inquiring about them long after they have graduated from Norwich recreation sports.”

By comparison, Doug is a short-timer, having worked for the Norwich Police Department for a mere 17 years — the first three as sergeant, then 14 years as chief. There’s a lot we could say about how Norwich has benefited from the shift he led to a community-centered model of policing, and about the ways in which he encouraged the town’s police officers to serve Norwich as resources as well as law enforcers. But Doug will probably be remembered most for his sheer humanity and compassion.

Reminiscing after he announced his retirement, he said this: “Way back, when I was a school resource officer, a young lady comes up at high-school graduation, gives me a big hug, and says she wouldn’t have made it without me. And I remembered all the times I had to deal with her truancy and getting her to go to school, and now she was going off to the Navy. It’s moments like that you go, ‘Wow, I really did make a difference!’ You don’t realize, when you just go and stop a car for speeding, that you might just have saved that person’s life.”

“Doug looked out for a lot of people,” says Marion Cross School Principal Bill Hammond. “But he had a soft spot for the kids here. One of his most reliable and memorable contributions was during Bike-to-School Day. He showed up early at Huntley Meadows, chatted with kids and adults, and then led the parade to Marion Cross School in his cruiser. He set the pace. He made sure the traffic was controlled while the kids biked down Main Street. He came with a smile and left us in good, safe shape. I can’t tell you about all of our interactions, but I can tell you that his goal was always about finding a solution that was in the best interest of the child.”

So please! Make sure you come to the Norwich Women’s Club Gala on Saturday, March 16 from 6 to 10pm, as the town comes together to honor and celebrate Demo Sofronas, Jill Kearney Niles, and Doug Robinson.

The Norwich Citizen of the Year Committee
Cheryl Herrmann (chair), Lisa Christie, Dan DeMars, Amy Miller Eberhardt, Rob Gurwitt, Don McCabe, Stephanie McCaull
5th Grade Students Present the Problems of Plastic Pollution

The Marion Cross School 5th graders and their teacher, Jonathan Fenton, attended the Norwich Select Board meeting on February 13, 2019. Their purpose was to ask the Selectboard to accept these proposals:

A.) Acceptance of Mike Peabody’s offer to take Norwich’s plastic not accepted for recycling at our transfer station. Town-financed weekly collection at the transfer station and transport of this plastic to the ARCC in Barre.

B.) Make an arrangement with Hannaford Supermarket (or another supermarket that participates in the W.R.A.P program with the Trex Co.) similar to that made by the town of Thetford. Collect all plastic-film products at the transfer station and at the same collection sites used to collect plastic items for the ARCC.

C.) A Ban on all point-of-sale, checkout or carryout plastic bags provided by a retailer or other business within the town of Norwich, regardless of labeling or thickness. We think it’s a mistake to get mired in a debate over the term ‘single-use’ and therefore recommend that it be avoided. And because our goal is to encourage the use of sturdy shopping bags made from eco-friendly, natural materials designed for longterm use, we don’t favor making exemptions for plastic bags of a certain thickness that have handles and meet a specified standard for reuse.

D.) If a retailer or other business provides a bag, it should be paper or made of natural, eco-friendly, biodegradable paper bags.

E.) To encourage reusable bags provided by the customer, a retailer or business should charge a fee for providing paper bags.

F.) No bioplastic bags, even if labeled ‘fully compostable,’ should be substituted for paper bags — at least not until they are proven to be truly compostable along with food scraps in a home composter or by the town of Norwich.

G.) We defer to the Selectboard to determine an appropriate schedule of fines to be imposed for noncompliance.

The 5th grade students visited and or corresponded with the following businesses in order to achieve their goals:

- Dan & Whit’s, Carpenter & Main, Norwich Inn, Fogg’s Ace Hardware, King Arthur Flour, Huntley Meadow, and Norwich Meadows.
- Norwich Post Office, Zuzu’s, Montshire Museum, Mascoma Bank, and Ledyard bank.

There is a popular and growing movement to ban or heavily tax single-use plastic bags across the United States and globally. These bags eventually make their way to landfills and into our oceans, adding to the 8 million metric tons of plastic entering the ocean every year. This impacts every scale of marine ecosystems, from bottom feeders and microorganisms to whales.

These two paragraphs were taken from Principal Bill Hammond’s latest Cross Words newsletter. It pretty much sums it up for me. This is what he wrote:

On Wednesday night, fifth graders spoke at the Norwich Selectboard Meeting. During their hour-and-a-half presentation, they talked about the worldwide effects of plastic use, the steps they took to get information about plastic use from local and regional institutions, the present practices of these institutions, the grant they received to help mitigate the impact of plastic, and the recommendations they have for recycling more types of plastic and banning the use of some plastic in Norwich.

What did they teach me? They reminded me that if there’s a problem – and something doesn’t feel right – work to understand it and fix it. The best way forward is to push for improvement. A lot of little improvements make one big improvement.

To read more about Norwich stories, visit www.eepurl.com/djXgqv.
Editor’s Note: I received a press release about sending Valentine’s Day cards to senior citizens. It caught my eye so I looked into it further. It turns out that Brian Dempsey of Bennington, VT started a website called VermontGoodStuff.com on which many postings about people paying it forward are listed. From the VermontGoodStuff.com site:

**Valentine Day Cards for Seniors 2019.**

Our first project as a group was a great success and we thank all of those who took the time to fill out Valentine’s Day cards for Seniors in Vermont. Thirteen group members volunteered to take the time and write a kind note inside each card, not just signing it and putting it in the envelope. 520 cards were distributed to Seniors in various locations throughout Vermont by our members who embrace the idea of kindness and Paying it Forward.

**Paying it Forward:**

1st You need to appreciate the small things in life.
2nd Join the group so you can post and follow along all the giving.
3rd Request some VTPIF cards (free!) at the link below.
4th I will send them out to you as soon as I can.

Then when you receive the cards just do some random act of kindness, a good deed or just something nice for someone and give them one of your cards (which are numbered). Some people take photos of what they are doing, others post just a text version of the random act they did. The real fun part comes when someone who (And it won’t happen all the time) received a card “pays it forward” and posts their good deed, You will know if it was from you that this ripple effect took place because of the numbered cards (An idea from Dustin Metzler above). That’s it! Enjoy the good news, the good things happening all around you that you rarely hear about!

For more information about this project and other Vermont Pay It Forward projects, go to www.vermontgoodstuff.com.
A question I am often asked is “what’s the best way to learn more about wine?”

The answer is the same as the old joke about how to get to Carnegie Hall - practice! Now I realize that may not sound like much of an answer, but let me explain what I mean.

All too often, somebody new to wine will taste one that particularly appeals, and from that small sample draw broad conclusions about the world of wine. It may seem less risky to buy that same wine over and over, rather than trying something else, but can you imagine if we did that with food? I love a perfect grilled cheese sandwich, but can’t imagine having one at every meal. Every region and varietal produces an enormous range of styles, so although it is tempting to make generalizations, they are frequently based on just a few examples.

The best way to learn is to start by forgetting what you think you already know! The world of wine is continually changing, so what you may remember from 5, 10, or 50 years ago may not apply today. Have a sip of something you’ve never heard of, try a few examples of the same grape from different parts of the world, or explore wines one region at a time. The broader your sampling is, the greater the chance you’ll discover something new to enjoy. Host a gathering with friends where each person brings a current favorite to share. Ask questions, think about what qualities appeal most to you, and think in terms of style rather than a particular grape. Whatever you do, remember, if you want to get better at it you just need to practice! ■
Welcome to the inaugural report from the Norwich Selectboard. We will be using this space to update residents on past, present and upcoming events or topics we believe may be of interest. We may also use this forum to provide updates on employees. For this initial article, we will focus on one issue that has been identified as warranting further explanation and update you on upcoming issues.

FEMA Issues, Financial Status and the Budget

Hurricane Irene may not be remembered by many but we are still awaiting FEMA reimbursement of +/- $65,000 for one project related to that event. However, Irene damage fails in comparison to the damage the town infrastructure (and people) experienced during the July 1, 2017 storm.

The town experienced approximately $3.5 million in damage to our roads and other infrastructure. Because repair work needed to begin and contractor bills paid, the town used funds already in the bank and sought voter approval in March 2018 to borrow up to the $4 million dollar estimated repair costs. A $4 million line of credit (LOC) was approved by the board in June of 2018. The LOC was needed so that daily operational costs could be met especially in light of the fact that FEMA reimbursement money still had not arrived. To date, we have no idea when the money may be granted or the amount of the reimbursement.

In addition to the July 1 storm damage, cost overruns related to the Public Safety Building and Town Garage were also realized. While one can debate the “whys” of the overruns (and we continue to do so), the bills still need to be paid.

Due to the circumstances listed above, the town’s “rainy day” fund balance, officially known as the Undesignated Fund, was reduced to approximately $400,000, or 10% of the budget. This level is below what is considered to be necessary to fund 30 days of daily operational costs. Ideally, the fund balance should be at 14-16%.

Facing these realities as well as the increasing tax burden on residents, the board deliberated line item reductions and reductions in specific designated fund appropriations. The conclusion was a reduction in the municipal budget of 5.12%. While we await our FEMA reimbursement, work is under way by the board, our Town Manager, and the Finance Committee on re-structuring our designated funds, updating financial policies, and finding ways to mitigate future financial “storms”.

Upcoming Issues of Interest

- The Planning Commission has begun work on drafting a new Town Plan. Multiple public meetings will be held prior to presenting the plan to the board. Once a plan is received by the board, a minimum of two additional hearings must be held.
- In November 2017, with voter approval, the Affordable Housing Designated Fund was re-established. Work has begun by members of the Affordable Housing subcommittee of the Planning Commission, the Town Manager, Director of Planning and Zoning and two Selectboard members on determining how this fund will be managed. After review by the board and dependent on potential changes, a policy on use of the fund could be adopted in the early spring.
- The board is slogging through the work of reviewing all town policies. Some of these policies have not been reviewed or updated in years. This is slow and tedious work but extremely necessary.
- Call for candidates for open positions on board committees/commissions or representatives to regional bodies. We will be working on getting information out to townspeople on what positions are open and exactly what a candidate needs to do to apply.
- The Transfer station has begun collecting returnable bottles and cans. The proceeds will be used to fund the Norwich Police Cadet program and the Citizens Assistance program.
- EV charging station at Huntley Meadow to be constructed in spring 2019.

The Selectboard realizes that this has been a tumultuous year in terms of finances, staff turnover, and an unrelenting winter. We welcome any and all comments. In an effort to keep track of communication and to be sure that each board member is aware of communication of concern or interest, we ask that emails be directed to Selectboard@norwich.vt.us.
The combination of Thanksgiving-like feasting, Fourth of July-like Americanism, and Christmas-like commercialism into a spectacle that draws the largest audience for any event in modern national life.” Even those who aren’t into football will make an exception and join friends to watch the big game in February. But for many die-hard fans, seeing the Superbowl in person is most definitely a bucket list item.

Which was part of the reason why Kristin found herself casually browsing for tickets shortly after the Patriots had punched their ticket to this year’s game. Not surprisingly, the prices were crazy, but then she happened to come across a raffle by the American Cancer Society (ACS). A contribution to their decade long “Crucial Catch” cancer awareness and prevention campaign in collaboration with the NFL entered you in a raffle for an over-the-top VIP package to Superbowl LIII. Feeling that her money would be better spent on a good cause than on expensive tickets anyway, she donated and promptly put it out of her mind. Then, less than week before kickoff in Atlanta, she received a call from the organizers. She half expected that they were just looking to hit her up for an additional donation. “What are you doing for the Superbowl?” the guy casually asked. “Oh, we’re going to hang out with our friends as we always do,” answered Kristin. “Well,” he said, “How would you like to actually go to the Superbowl this year?”

“And that,” says Kristin, “was when we lost it.”

What followed was an abundance of experiences and thrills. “It was so much fun,” says Kristin, “but so opposite anything we’d otherwise ever do.” They had primarily been excited about the chance to watch the game up close, but they ended up with so much more. “I had no idea we were going to concerts,” says Stuart with a shrug. Not only concerts, but opportunities to hang out with the halftime show band, Maroon 5, and various celebrities, being escorted around to parties and VIP events, getting sidelines passes to watch the Patriots warm up, and then third row seats at the game itself (“right by the end zone where the Patriots got their touchdown,” notes Kristin gleefully). Then there were the post game parties and the NFL awards show. “We barely touched the tip of the iceberg,” says Stuart, “even though it felt like we barely slept or ate anything.”

Kristin and Stuart were seated next to singer/actress Vanessa Hudgens (top), and enjoyed meeting halftime band Maroon 5 (bottom right) during the celebrity festivities.
for four days.”

Just listening to the rundown is exhausting, but in spite of the VIP treatment, much of what they now recall as highlights from their trip were random fan encounters, like their chance to cheer on the Patriots players as the team was getting on their busses outside a hotel on the day of the game.

They loved the atmosphere permeating Atlanta. “We walked everywhere, and there was just so much excitement, so many friendly people, including the 10,000 volunteers who helped you out wherever you went.” Like Roald Dahl’s Charlie in the Chocolate Factory, they found it all awe inspiring: “The stadium itself: Oh, my god. We stayed in that stadium until midnight, when the security guards kindly told us it was time to go home,” recounts Kristin.

Approaching their big adventure with such a sense of genuine excitement and wonderment was richly rewarded; in fact, their easy going nature and appreciation for everything going on around them left even their jaded big city hosts and organizers in awe of this unassuming New England couple that came to the big show and just took it all in.

“Super Bowl LIII was not merely bad. It was a boring, lame, non-suspenseful, never-ending, drool-puddle exercise in all that can suck about professional football and the surrounding hoopla.” So read just one of many scathing reviews of this year’s big event. But perhaps it’s little more than armchair quarterbacking by unappreciative curmudgeons, because Stuart and Kristin completely disagree. “There was nothing dull about it at all,” they insist. They thought the game was riveting and the halftime show amazing.

“There will be nothing in our life ever like that again,” notes Kristin almost wistfully. “We hadn’t really been away since our kids were born. That made it all the more special.” And, to top it all off, the Patriots won. For a couple of die-hard New Englanders, it really doesn’t get much better than that.

They’re left with incredible memories and a closet full of merchandise. Definitely lifelong supporters of the ACS, and still in touch with the team from Fanthropic, the company that facilitates the collaboration between the NFL and the ACS. Next year, they’ll be back to watching the game with friends in the Upper Valley. “But,” says Kristin, “we’ll be reliving our trip to Atlanta, doing it all over again in our minds.”

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“I think of it as New Hampshire’s equivalent of the Tony awards,” says Opera North’s Director of Development (and former Norwich resident), Maria Laskaris. ON was being honored for its collaboration with the National Park Service (NPS) which resulted in last summer’s “Singers and Swingers,” a surprising blend of opera music and circus performance at the NPS site, Blow-Me-Down Farm. The property, with its beautiful views of water and mountains, has historic links to the nearby Augustus Saint-Gaudens National Historic Site.

Told of the proposed blend of different arts, some people thought “Circus and opera, weird” and stayed home. Open-minded folks thought “Circus and opera, weird—let’s go find out what they’re up to.” This adventurous crowd was richly rewarded. The unique blend of circus arts and opera music bent audience brains in a pleasing way, opening people to connections they had not felt before. “You think, come on—circus and opera!?” says Jim Adler, now in Quechee after years in Norwich. Jim has been attending ON shows with his wife, Brooke, for over 20 years. “Then you have the excitement of seeing people pull off a major risk” as they display newly combined art forms.

It was the partnership with the National Park Service that tipped the scales for ON to win the Tenacity award, says Maria. The NPS has been on the lookout for an arts organization that would work with them to create a national park for the arts, and ON is poised to be that partner. While the prospect of working with a government body might give pause, ON sees a wide-open field of possibilities. They’re prepared to accept NPS restrictions such as not changing the exterior of the site’s historic buildings.

“We’re experimenting with different things,” says Maria. “Some things will go better in a traditional environment [like Lebanon Opera House], “but we’re trying new venues, and looking for new audiences.” Like many arts groups, ON presenters see their audience aging, and work to engage new fans. Exposing circus aficionados to opera music fits their bill precisely.

Norwich’s Arline Rotman says, with her characteristic vigor, “We look forward to [ON] every year. We’re opera fans and we go to all the HD operas [at the Hop], but especially in these days of HD, live opera is an incomparable experience. In recent years they’ve upped the ante in costuming, drama, staging.” She and her husband went to Blow-Me-Down Farm last summer. “They blew us away,” she says, with just a slight humorous accent on the blew. “We’re excited to see what they’ll do with it.”

ON has definitely embraced the vision thing. “We were dazzled when we first heard about the venture at Blow-Me-Down Farm,” says Jim Adler. “The singers and swingers idea seemed unlikely.” But the wonderful views, the fabulous property put the couple in a hopeful mood, and what they saw, Jim says, “was truly innovative. The intimate staging was thrilling, and somehow operatic music went well with circus acts. They really pulled it off wonderfully well. If they’re able to fulfill their dreams for Blow-Me-Down Farm it will be an outstanding place.” It looks as though Opera North has the tenacity to realize their vision.

Next summer, July 12-14, will see five shows of “Hoedown at Blow-Me-Down,” with circus performers and American music by Aaron Copland, George Gershwin, and Richard Rodgers.
YOUTH SUMMER CAMP OPPORTUNITIES

Children’s Art Studio
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Calling all birders and nature enthusiasts: Norwich Year of the Bird is underway! Spearheaded by the Vermont Center for Ecostudies (VCE), this informal (but serious) challenge beckons all birders – experts and novices, professionals and amateurs, from near and far—to explore the avian diversity of Norwich, get outdoors, learn about birds, share the thrill of discovery, and have a little fun along the way.

Here's the challenge: can we document 175 species within the town's borders during 2019? The answer is an unequivocal yes, but it will require a concerted effort by many, attainable only through an abundance of good luck and diligent reporting practices. As of this writing (February 4), the tally stands at a respectable 40 species, highlighted by winter nomads from Canada like Bohemian Waxwings and Pine Grosbeaks.

Why Norwich? Well, why not? Many birders frequent the town (and a few live here), regularly scouring its forests, thickets, fields, wetlands, and waterways. And, lying along the Connecticut River, Norwich attracts a multitude of migratory species, many of which are simply passing through and stopping to rest or refuel during their spring and fall migrations. Who knew that Vermont’s first-ever record of Marbled Godwit, a spectacular long-distance migrant shorebird, would come from Norwich? Or that Tundra Swans, Glossy Ibis, White-eyed Vireos, and even a Golden-crowned Sparrow have been found in town? What other avian surprises await discovery??

Because keeping careful track of yearlong sightings throughout Norwich will be critical to know where we stand, we’ll use Vermont eBird, a real-time, online checklist program that has revolutionized how the birding community reports and accesses information about birds. To be clear, the data amassed by eBird aren’t just for fun. They contribute hugely to science and conservation.

How exactly do birders contribute their sightings to Norwich 2019 Year of the Bird? It couldn’t be easier. Just visit www.vtecostudies.org/blog/2019-norwich-year-of-the-bird/ to get all the details, see photos, follow links, and sign up for Vermont eBird.

VCE will offer a hands-on eBird workshop or two during the months ahead, so don’t fear if this checklist tool doesn’t immediately make sense to you. To make it even more fun, we’ll feature a different “target species” each month and encourage everyone to find it. We’ll also offer periodic outings to various birding “hotspots” in Norwich, and/or excursions to see especially exciting birds that have been found.

Grab your binoculars and field guide, and start keeping track of what you see in town. Every bird counts!
Mascoma Bank Benefits Our Arts Community

There is no question that the arts play an important role in the Upper Valley. From the sold-out performances at Northern Stage and the Lebanon Opera House, to the small art showings at local libraries, Upper Valley residents show their support for the arts by attending, and giving financial support. Still, ticket sales and individual donations are not enough to keep all our arts organizations going. Help is needed in the form of business and institutional giving.

Enter Mascoma Bank. For years, Mascoma has supported many arts organizations in a myriad of different ways.

Tom Hoyt is the public relations coordinator at Mascoma Bank, and is a member of the Bank's donation committee, which decides how to spend their funds designated for philanthropy. Over the years, Hoyt has seen firsthand the commitment of the organizations, and individuals involved in the local arts scene. “It’s been a great eye-opener to me to see the level of talent here,” Hoyt says.

Though several arts organizations benefit from Mascoma Bank’s commitment to the arts, Hoyt points to two Lebanon arts institutions as prime examples. The first is the highly regarded AVA Gallery. “The Bank was very involved in their building renovation,” says Hoyt. Their involvement did not stop with that renovation project from several years back. Still involved in many ways, Mascoma is currently a major sponsor of the high school arts exhibition held at the AVA, which highlights the work of high school students from around the region.

Another example of an arts organization assisted by Mascoma Bank is the Upper Valley Music Center (UVMC) of Lebanon. The Bank assisted with their move to a new location in Lebanon, and helps financially with their various performances.

In Norwich, Hoyt says Mascoma Bank has underwritten the regular speaker series held at the Norwich Public Library. This series showcases speakers on a variety of topics, including the arts. Hoyt adds that recently, Mascoma sponsored the Hamiltunes event, which features music from the Broadway show. This event, hosted by the Norwich Library, and others, was held at the Norwich Congregational Church.

Though monetary donations are important to these organizations, Tom Hoyt says Mascoma Bank helps in other ways, too. Among these are help with the business and administrative side of the arts operations, and by sending bank volunteers to assist with needed jobs. Mascoma Bank has a program that encourages employees to spend time volunteering while on the job.

Local arts organizations interested in receiving help from Mascoma Bank no longer need to visit Mascoma’s offices, says Tom Hoyt. “They can go to our website,” he says. “The entire giving platform is online.”

- Frank Orlowski

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