Rebecca Holcombe: Thinking Globally, Acting Locally

The road to becoming a Vermont gubernatorial candidate began a long time ago for Norwich resident Rebecca Holcombe whose childhood in Afghanistan, Pakistan, the Fiji Islands, and Sudan had a direct impact not only on how she has perceived the world but how she has navigated through it. Even though her family “had the bad fortune of arriving in countries just

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Linda Cook and her firefighter helper, Ella Sweet

LINDA COOK is the Norwich Women’s Club 2020 Citizen of the Year. The “Stewards of Norwich” are Ray and Anna Royce, Cheryl Lindberg, and Allison Colburn. Please come celebrate them at this year’s Women’s Club Gala on Saturday, March 21 at 6 pm.

It’s hard to believe there’s anyone who knows Norwich as well as Linda Cook. It’s not just that she was born and raised here and has been – other than college – a lifelong resident. It’s

Continued on page 14

Farm-to-Table Food Movement
Good for Local Growers

Frank Orlowski

There is something special about the taste of a freshly picked piece of produce from the garden, or beef on the grill from a locally raised, grass fed cow. Not only the taste, but also the satisfaction one receives from eating locally produced food products is palpable. Growing up in farm country, having foods, particularly produce, go directly from the garden to the dinner table seemed natural to me. If some fruit or vegetable did not come from our gardens, surely a neighbor’s farmstand carried it. Sure, all of our foods weren’t local, and the grocery store

Continued on page 24

Blue Sparrow Kitchen staff Gracie Rollins, Hannah McMinn, and owner Amber Boland
Spring 2020

- Monday, March 2, 10-11am
  Coffee and Conversation, Norwich Inn
- Thursday, March 5
  Spring Gala Online Auction Opens
- Saturday, March 21, 6-9:30pm
  Spring Gala, Tracy Hall
- Wednesday, April 1
  Scholarship Applications due
- Monday, April 6, 10-11am
  Coffee and Conversation, Norwich Inn
- Friday, May 1, Application deadline for Community Projects Grants
- May 1-3, Spring Nearly New Sale
- Monday, May 4, 10-11am,
  Coffee and Conversation, Norwich Inn

For more information, visit norwichwomensclub.org

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Dartmouth Students Tackle Climate Change

Every year, Dartmouth College offers a two-term capstone class called the Senior Design Challenge, that combines interdisciplinary education with human-centered design to solve challenges identified by partner organizations in the Upper Valley. This year, a trio of students is working with the Upper Valley Adaptation Workgroup (UVAW) to find grassroots solutions addressing the problem of climate change on an individual level. The team hopes to build a technical solution that will have a real impact on the local community and, in some form or another, similarly engaged communities around the world.

Seniors Abby Drach, Gabby Hunter, and Jade Bravo wanted to do something about climate change. Jade is an environmental studies major; Abby and Gabby, who are majoring in psychology and cultural anthropology respectively, are passionate about sustainability and interested in finding creative, bottom-to-top solutions to the problems people face daily. Despite their disparate majors, the human-centered approach the class inspires drew them together, and their interests fit with the challenge proposed by UVAW, a group of individuals and organizations that meets under the Vital Communities umbrella and seeks to build climate-resilient communities in the Upper Valley. The challenge, as given to the students, was to answer the question: “what else can I [as an individual in the Upper Valley] do to combat climate change, and where do I start?”

The challenge, “to catalyze community-wide activity to mitigate and adapt to climate change” as stated in UVAW’s proposal, inspired the trio, and they set about interviewing residents of the local community, with support from Earth Sciences Professor Erich Osterberg and Vital Communities Climate Projects Coordinator Ana Mejia. Starting from various climate-conscious sources including UVAW’s Climate Change Leadership Academy and a Building A Local Economy meeting, the team interviewed twenty-eight residents of Norwich, Hanover, and Lebanon. The questions were fairly broad, says Abby: in terms of pro-environment actions, they asked people “what behaviors they do daily, what they wish they were doing, and what’s preventing them from doing that,” among other topics.

The students’ results may not sound surprising, but they are certainly informative and highly useful. Analyzing the results of their interviews, they distilled their findings into four insights: first, that people often rely on community-based actions and resource-sharing mechanisms for change; second, that the decisions people make are based on individual motivations and priorities; third, that though money can be a barrier, people with resources intentionally invest in and explore tools ranging from electric vehicles to solar panels and weatherization; and fourth and perhaps most importantly, that individuals want to be more resilient than they are, but they often lack sufficient information and can be overwhelmed by the information that is available. That may sound confusing, but in short, it means that people want to find more ways to address climate change locally, and they do when they have the opportunity and support, but they may not know what to do.

This is where their work will continue in the second term of their project, which Abby is excited to begin. Their task, she says, will be to build “a decision-making tool to help people choose and undertake the actions that make most sense for them.” Though this is a project focused on the Upper Valley and different populations may require different solutions, the team is hopeful this is a project that can ultimately be applied to numerous communities in Vermont and beyond. They are grateful to the friendly and helpful community members they interviewed – “you definitely can’t find that everywhere,” Abby notes enthusiastically – and expect that, with slight modifications, this sort of activity could be applied in communities elsewhere and the results could have broad and meaningful impacts on our world.

Still, Abby knows there are challenges. In analyzing their data, the team developed personae to broadly define their target audience: a retired person with free time and a desire, perhaps partially realized, to get involved in her community; a young professional doing what he can with limited impact and time; parents with young children who are conscious of the climate crisis but lacking the discretionary income to be able to do much more than make it through the day; and of course the environmental experts who understand the issues but may not always know the best solutions for the wider community. “We may need to choose one persona to focus on, or we may need different solutions for each of them,” Abby says, but they still hope to find effective solutions for as many people as they can, and use the community, or other people, as bases of knowledge or resources for building those solutions. As someone with a keen passion for sustainability (she is particularly interested in clothing sustainability) Abby hopes her experience will be applicable to her future endeavors; in any case, her work in collaboration with the Upper Valley community has already made steps towards meaningful change.
To read an issue full of stories like the ones celebrated here, anyone would assume that we live in a pretty special place, and that the world is full of rainbows and unicorns (or whatever happy-place image comes to mind). And that’s the point!

Why not see the world through “Norwich colored glasses” (see “Life at 531 Feet” on page 19)? In fact, the Norwich Times does, indeed, want to shine the light on what is good and working and everyday in our community. While I don’t consider it ‘journalism,’ I like to think that the stories we share serve as a nice counter-balance to all that is wrong with mainstream media today.

To broaden the scope a bit, I had the privilege to interview Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist and Norwich resident, James Bandler, about how real journalism can and does work (see page 22). I came away believing even more strongly in how powerful “thinking globally and acting locally” can be as an MO that could serve humanity and our planet well. By engaging in media that delivers content by those dedicated to truth, justice, and moral force, and by taking the time to learn about the good stuff happening close to home, we can all feel a bit more hopeful and at peace.

From Norwich’s Citizen of the Year, Linda Cook, to our very own gubernatorial candidate, Rebecca Holcombe, to the local farmers that surround us, thinking globally with an open mind, and then just doing one’s very best at home to make life better for all seems to work just fine for us.

Happy Spring!

~ Jen

“Governor’s Farm”, w/ Antique Cape & Large Dairy Barn, River Frontage

4 parcels totaling 67 acres, with 1474’ RIVER FRONTAGE. Meadows, door yard, gardens, forest, flowers, mature hardwoods, Christmas tree grove, stream, hiking trails, sugar grove and post-and-beam sugar house frame. Half hour easy drive from the heart of the Upper Valley, CLOSE TO MAJOR SKI AREAS. Other purchase options available. HOUSE has great potential for further restoration and expansion. Use for grazing animals, as vacation home, small farm, B&B (w/4 br each having a dedicated bathroom), recreational, or any combination thereof.$699,000

“Good Hope Hill Farm” Horse Training Facility, Thetford, VT

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Addressing the Mental Health Crisis Through Community Collaborations

By Nancy Parker

With a national mental health crisis on the rise, drawing attention to mental health issues in early childhood is a key part of addressing the issue. Dartmouth Hitchcock’s mental health initiative is collaborating with local organizations such as The Family Place in Norwich to address community mental health by creating and strengthening programs to support families with young children.

Two programs implemented by the D-H initiatives are Project LAUNCH and P2P. Both projects are working in collaboration with Grafton, Sullivan, and Windsor counties to support families across the community. With a recent grant from Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), Dartmouth Hitchcock Medical Center was able to collaborate with local family resource centers on further programming to spread information and education about mental health within the Upper Valley. By collaborating with family resource centers like The Family Place which are available to any family in the community who needs a little extra support, they are further helping to provide a safe place to target early childhood mental health issues.

“The reality is that we are here for any family with a young child, and families from all walks of life take part in what we have to offer,” said Nancy Bloomfield, Executive Director of The Family Place. The programs they offer range from parent education and support, to home visits, information and referrals, play groups, and an on-site high school. They also have a family assistance fund to help with the practical needs of families in tough economic situations. “Our lens is always thinking about the wellbeing of the child and helping parents have the support they need to be the parents they want to be,” said Bloomfield.

Project LAUNCH (Linking Actions for Unmet Needs in Children’s Health), which targets children ages zero to eight, will help The Family Place have a larger presence in local primary care offices, with on-site staff members who can inform families about the resources available to support them in the early years of their children’s lives. Project LAUNCH will also provide information and education in local businesses such as Hotherm, King Arthur Flour, and Dartmouth to give parents and caregivers access to resources through their place of employment.

Project P2P (Partners to Protect), also funded by the SAMHSA grant, is targeted towards supporting children ages zero to eighteen who live in Sullivan and Grafton Counties, and are dealing with the effects of parental substance abuse. One of the project’s goals is to prevent the removal of children from their homes. The programming offered includes evidence-based practices such as community trauma training, a group for parents in recovery from substance abuse, and child-parent psychotherapy to heal relationships during parent recovery from substance abuse. It also involves collaboration with child welfare district offices, family courts, family resource centers, primary care offices, and other behavioral health and social service organizations in the community.

“Both projects have a major target of improving coordination of services across different sectors that all serve and try to improve the care and wellbeing of kids and families,” said Kay Jankowski, PhD., Director of the Dartmouth Trauma Interventions Research Center, and primary project investigator for Project LAUNCH, and co-investigator for Project P2P.

Katie McDonnell, MSW, who is the Public Awareness Coordinator for both projects, pointed to the community effort involved in addressing this issue. “We are building infrastructure within our community. The hope is that through the grant, we will really help weave more knowledge about these evidence-based practices, and knowledge about what the family resource centers do in terms of support…”

By targeting at-risk families and families affected by trauma, the projects hope is that through engagement and coordination with local community resources, there will be greater access to mental health care and support for families in the Upper Valley.
Mission Accomplished: 2019 Norwich Bird Quest

From transient winter visitors like Bohemian Waxwings and Pine Grosbeaks to splashy spring migrants like Bay-breasted and Canada warblers, Norwich hosted a steady stream of avian treasures in 2019. And, birders rose to the occasion in both tracking and celebrating them during VCE’s 2019 Norwich Bird Quest.

The idea behind the Quest was always more about outreach and discovery than quantifying Norwich’s birdlife. While birders love a challenge, our ultimate objective was to engage with others in exploring Norwich’s avian diversity, get outdoors, have some fun, share the thrill of discovery, and learn a lot in the process. We succeeded – and then some – on all fronts.

The goal for the 2019 Quest was to identify 175 bird species within town borders. Upper Valley birders handily eclipsed that goal, with an impressive final tally of 177!

The year started, as it always does, with the Hanover-Norwich Christmas Bird Count on New Year’s Day. This annual citizen science census, one of 23 across Vermont and nearly 2,500 worldwide, takes place within a three-week period centered around Christmas Day. After this one-day blitz, our yearlong tally grew slowly, reaching 42 species by the end of February. But spring migration brought a meteoric rise: 66 species by March 31, 110 by April 31, and a remarkable 164 by May 31! Especially dazzling was the warbler parade in mid-May, when >20 species provided a visual and acoustic display beyond compare. Many slack-jawed birders thrilled to the sight of >15 Cape May Warblers in a small grove of blossoming cherry and crab apple trees at Kendall Station, etching memories that will endure for years.

Between June 1 and August 31, a mere five species were added to the master Quest list, leaving us at 169. All five newcomers were noteworthy birds, including Black-billed Cuckoo, Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, Great Egret, Common Nighthawk, and Blue-winged warbler.

Fall migration is another big draw for birders – numbers of migrants tend to swell in comparison to those of spring, as returning adults are augmented by the summer crop of youngsters. Species #175 was a good one, as Norwich resident Spencer Hardy observed three Red Crossbills fly over his Tucker Hill Road home on October 20. The final two months of 2019 yielded another two species, a Horned Lark and a Ring-necked Pheasant, to bring our final tally to 177.

With a new year on tap, we’re at it again, and the 2020 Norwich Bird Quest is now officially underway. We set modestly ambitious goals for ourselves: 180 species (including at least three that weren’t found in 2019), 1,500 eBird checklists, and 20 eBirders contributing those lists (with at least three under the age of 21). Join the fun, set your own personal goals, and get out there with your binoculars! And, don’t forget to report your findings to Vermont eBird.
Here is an interview with Larry Wiggins, Department Head of the Department of Public Works. He is answering questions about the trials and tribulations of winter maintenance:

1. **What are the preparations for winter maintenance?**
   To list only the basic preparations:
   - Purchase salt, winter sand and liquid deicer by bid
   - Have each driver review his route to identify any obstacles, posts, walls, trees, etc., which may be hit by the plow or wing plow.
   - Make repairs to the sanders, plows, wings (plow shoes, blades, tire chains, body, plow lights, etc.)
   - Calibrate, test sanders for salt and sand output settings
   - Prepare the sidewalk tractor for use as well as the tractor attachments
   - Review plow routes, salt and sand application rates

2. **How many tons of salt and sand are ordered each season?**
   For the current year 1500 tons of salt and 8000 tons of sand.

3. **What is the origin of the salt and sand?**
   I believe our supplier imports the salt from Chile.

4. **What is a typical workday like for a plow truck operator when there is a storm of many hours duration?**
   A typical day might be:
   - Called in at 4am to plow/treat roads prior to school buses and commuter traffic travelling the roads.
   - Plow until the storm ends (maybe hours or maybe days) with small breaks. We try to limit the crew to a maximum of 16-18 hours without a significant break for rest/sleep.
   - After the snowstorm ends, treat all roads and sidewalks with salt, sand and liquid deicer as applicable. (Typically 5-6 hours with the entire crew).

5. **What is it like to actually drive a plow truck – getting the job done without hitting obstacles (mailboxes) and maintaining appropriate speed when encountering other vehicles?**
   Driving a truck with plow and wing requires constant attention. The driver has to learn where the end of the wing plow travels by reference of certain items. The driver has to cease road plow/treatment duties to perform sidewalk maintenance.
   - Called in at 4am to plow/treat roads prior to school buses and commuter traffic travelling the roads.
   - Plow until the storm ends (maybe hours or maybe days) with small breaks. We try to limit the crew to a maximum of 16-18 hours without a significant break for rest/sleep.
   - After the snowstorm ends, treat all roads and sidewalks with salt, sand and liquid deicer as applicable. (Typically 5-6 hours with the entire crew).

6. **What special maintenance procedures are done when an ice storm is anticipated?**
   With freezing rain or ice, the gravel roads repeatedly freeze over, or ice over, so frequent retreatment is required until the storm ends. With long duration ice storms, this becomes very fatiguing.

7. **How does the newly installed internet service at DPW affect coordination of the plowing and gathering information about weather conditions?**
   Prior to the DPW internet, weather updates were by radio only (cell phones don’t work at the PWG). This made planning winter maintenance very difficult. Now (internet installed March 2019), decisions can be made on an hourly basis.

8. **How is a culvert blocked by ice opened up by “steaming?”**
   The DPW has a steamer on a trailer which produces hot water, i.e. “steam.” The hot water is routed through a long steel rod which is pushed through the culvert (as the hot water will allow). Usually after a hole is made in the ice for the total length of the culvert, friction of the water will enlarge the hole to totally free the culvert of ice. Steaming a culvert can take from 15 minutes to several hours depending on conditions.

9. **What are the challenges of keeping the sidewalks clear?**
   Sidewalks are maintained by a sidewalk tractor which is a unique, expensive piece of equipment. It plows and has the ability to treat sidewalks and navigate tight areas. With only one sidewalk tractor, winter maintenance becomes an issue when the tractor is down for repairs. If the sidewalk tractor is out of service, the Norwich DPW is forced to use walk behind snowblowers and hand applied salt. This adds considerable manhours to the crew’s duties. This is exacerbated by the fact the DPW does not have a dedicated sidewalk tractor operator, so a plow route driver has to cease road plow/treatment duties to perform sidewalk maintenance.

   With climate change, the DPW’s winter maintenance duties have changed. With snowstorms, the crew plows until the roads are cleared, treats the roads, and, in general, can go home for some significant rest. Warmer winters have seen the increase of rain, freezing rain, hail, and ice which requires constant attention, particularly on gravel roads, since the applied sand is washed off, or covered over, in a few hours producing poor road conditions again. This has increased the number of hours the crew works and adds to driver fatigue. There are limited total hours plow drivers can operate without risk, and it is a delicate balance when deciding between plow-driver hours or treating roads for the travelling public. This issue causes the department considerable concern. The DPW is dedicated to providing the best road conditions possible but safety of the drivers (and indirectly, others as well) has to be factored into operations when road conditions require constant attention. Climate change also seems to be changing budgets. In addition to budgeting for increased overtime, it appears the budget will need to increase for winter sand in Norwich.
The Essential Guide to Rebecca Holcombe

What is one person, place or thing you love about living in Norwich?
I love living near our neighbors, and that feeling of having good neighbors with all that means. When our kids were young, they were like another set of grandparents. We can just show up at their house, or them at our house, for a last minute, casual shared dinner of leftovers or cup of tea. We help them with sugar, and they keep us grounded. My kids love the candy in the cupboard, and I like the comfort of old, gold relationships.

What did/do you want to be when you grew/grow up?
Just about everything at one point or another, except a politician.

Which bedtime story you read to your kids is your favorite and why?
Good Night, Gorilla and Ten Minutes Till Bedtime by Peggy Rathmann. Both perfectly capture the yearning and absurdity of bedtime.

If you had your own talk show, who would be your first three guests?
Today? Eleanor Roosevelt, Claudette Colvin, and Ruha Benjamin.

What is your favorite quote?
Changes by the week. This week it’s by Wendell Berry: “All we can do to prepare rightly for tomorrow is to do the right thing today.”

If you could be invisible for one day, where would you be?
I wouldn’t be invisible. I think it’s past time for us to be more direct and transparent about the challenges we face, and what it will take to work together to overcome them. This is a time for courage, not invisibility.

Wine, beer, martini, green tea or Lou’s milkshake?
Blues Sparrow hot chocolate. I love buying Vermont products!

What is your biggest fear or phobia?
I was once served a bowl of snakes in broth in China. That was pretty much where my adventurous spirit hit a wall.

What is your most energizing dream/vision for your future?
I want to be able to look my children and their friends in the eye and know I did everything I could to make this a state and nation where we work together with our neighbors and give everyone a fair chance. I want them to know that when we live in ways that protect the environment and institutions for the future, we are all better off.

Print or digital?
For pleasure, there is nothing like print.

What do you love most about living in Vermont?
The people and the place.

If you had to give away 50% of your assets today, where/how would you distribute them?
Higher education and loan forgiveness for young people who want to stay and live in Vermont.

What advice would you give to the next generation?
Your voice matters. Show up. And then show up again.

as political trouble was beginning,” Holcombe learned quickly from her mother that, in comparison with many global native inhabitants, she had a privileged upbringing. “In my own family, particularly on my mother’s side, access to public schooling gave her many opportunities,” said Holcombe. “She was always acutely aware that she was lucky and that those who weren’t, should have a chance.”

Opportunity. Education. Equality. Those are the words that encompassed Holcombe’s core values as a child and then as a teenager when she arrived in the United States. And those are the philosophies that are still ingrained in her as an adult, spouse, parent and politician.

Prior to that, Holcombe lived in Afghanistan from 4th to 7th grade, attending a government subsidized public school, until the Soviet invasion in 1979 forced her family out of the country. From there, they traveled to Pakistan where Holcombe attended the International School of Islamabad until anti-American unrest scared away nearly all the English-speaking students and teachers. Because Holcombe’s family stayed, however, she was home schooled.

“The power of living abroad is you have to look at yourself from the outside,” said Holcombe. “When you’re in one of those international schools, you’re going to school with children from so many different countries. That challenges you to think about things you take for granted. You realize quickly how important language facility is to doing well. It’s an incredibly privileged way to grow up.”

From the Mideast, Holcombe returned to the United States to attend the Boston preparatory Milton Academy. During vacations, she regularly joined her parents overseas including Fiji and Sudan. And, while at Milton, she spent a year in Spain, resulting in her speaking fluent Spanish to this day.

Holcombe went on to earn her bachelor’s degree from Brown University, an MBA from Simmons School of Management, and her Doctorate in Educational Leadership, Policy and Practice from Harvard’s Graduate School of Education. She completed coursework for her principal certification at Lyndon State College.

She and her husband, James Bandler, a Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist, moved to Norwich 11 years ago. “Living in Vermont is a values issue,” said Holcombe. “One of the things on this side of the river is a sense of community. We all celebrate
the walkable downtown area while maintaining the land around us. And, frankly, the high-speed internet allowed James to telecommute to New York City where he was based as a journalist. So, it’s a nice mix of nearby family, community ties, and the internet.”

Holcombe spent the next several years as a teacher, principal and Vermont secretary of education, continuing to focus her life’s work on creating equal opportunities for every child and every individual in the state of Vermont.

As secretary, she worked to address the inequalities between those with wealth and those without in Vermont communities, keeping in mind what she had witnessed as a child growing up in an international community. “Public schools are where we achieve equality,” said Holcombe. “It’s where we bring each other together and become a civil society. It’s the means for making sure every child has a chance.”

As Governor, Holcombe said she wants to take advantage of her life experience “to push the democratic project of making sure the state is working to create opportunities so people can go out and live well. I’m going to win by showing everyday working Vermonters that it’s not enough to talk,” said Holcombe. “I think Vermonters want a governor who's going to roll up their sleeves and engage.”

Whether focusing on health care, affordable housing or education, Holcombe emphasized that people can’t live if these issues are not addressed. “People are struggling to pay their bills,” she said. “They need good jobs that pay them living wages. We need to make sure people that work hard are able to cover their bills and pay for their rent and not worry about health care.”

The first job of governor, she continued, is to improve the lives of the people. “That means putting our resources where they make it better and where they make our communities stronger so that people can live well and prosper and be happy in our Vermont communities,” Holcombe said.

Holcombe is deeply committed to her own community of Norwich where she has raised her two children, Daniel and Johanna, both of whom attended local public schools. “I’m so proud of them. It’s tough for young people growing up right now. Many whom I’ve met are full of hope and ideals, but they’re not sitting on the sidelines. I appreciate their hard work and their realism and clarity. It’s incredibly inspiring, and I see it in my own kids. They give me hope.”

It is exactly that aspiration, Holcombe indicated, that propelled her into public service, understanding her own privileged inheritance and wanting to pass that on “to make sure everyone has the chance to learn, and to grow up healthy and strong.”

“Young people have the opportunity to get a good education, they will always take with them the ability to make good things happen even in the face of challenge.”

Diverse communities, such as those found in public schools, are brought together by how to build an institution that prepares children for the future, Holcombe noted. And schools are the most democratic institution because “we come together to figure out how to work together,” she added. It is these institutions that reflect individual core values that, according to Holcombe, “will keep you on a straight course in a world that can get confusing fast.”

Holcombe and David Zuckerman are running in the Democratic primary for Governor of Vermont on August 11, 2020.
At 22 Church Street in Norwich, the Marion Cross School is an organic place to learn. The essence of its mission is “to be able to challenge children to work towards being good global citizens and for children to enjoy learning and be a valuable member of their community,” said Shawn Gonyaw, a first-year principal at the elementary school.

In earlier years, Gonyaw and his wife moved to southern Texas to teach at Camp Lejeune but returned to the Newton School in South Stratford, VT. After that, “I was a teacher for 15 years at the Westshire School in Fairlee and we were hiring for a principal,” he said. When candidates didn’t make the cut, and he was on the hiring committee, he asked to be considered for the position. “Now I wouldn’t go back because I love this job,” he said.

Gonyaw was in a master’s program when a principal’s job opened at the Barnet School. After ten years there, he was intrigued by Marion Cross. He met with former principal Mr. Bill, who Gonyaw noted “was well known and appreciated in the community” to see if it was a good fit. “I think they did a nice job of having a pretty extensive search and making the person coming in aware of what the school was like, what the community was like,” said Gonyaw.

The community gets involved at Marion Cross in a variety of ways, Gonyaw explained. Fourth graders put on a play Counting On Grace this year, and families were invited to an instrumental band concert. “The PTO does a really great job of sponsoring activities that bring the community together in different ways,” said Gonyaw. Parents also got involved to include more educational assistance in classrooms as well as the current budget.

An addition of 31 students over the summer created a short window to hire more teachers. “Kids get a significant challenge at the Marion Cross School,” said Gonyaw. “Teachers are great about challenging kids to be deeper thinkers.” Gonyaw pointed out that there are more robust social studies and science classes at Marion Cross than at other schools.

The school has many traditions, such as “Rep.” Each week students share what they’re proud of, whether it be music or a play.

Finding substitute teachers can be a challenge. Gonyaw related. If the coming year’s budget passes, four teachers will be added to the school to fulfill vacancies due to retiring staff. “I’ve been fortunate in all the years that I’ve been a principal to work with school boards and communities that really value education,” stated Gonyaw.

Students with special needs can qualify for an Individualized Education Plan. A student’s “ability to learn is impacted by his or her disability,” Gonyaw explained. “I’ve always been interested in kids who learn differently than other people.” A pilot program will begin next year at Marion Cross. A traditional “pull-out” model uses resources outside the school. The “push in” model involves a special educator to come to class to assist with a curriculum. The “co-teaching” model pairs a special...
educator with a teacher to create various entry levels for kids. Three classrooms will pilot the co-teaching method next year, allowing as much peer-learning as possible and removing stigmas that kids may experience by leaving the classroom to learn elsewhere.

French instruction begins in Pre-K and goes through 6th grade. Fifth and sixth grade students have four 45-minute classes per week; more than other Vermont schools where Gonyaw has worked. "I like the premise behind the foreign language program here, that it's not teaching kids a language but it's teaching kids about language and language acquisition" and that they are able to transfer the skill to learn other languages.

The Town Forest hosts the outdoor program. Kindergartners are involved in Forest Fridays where most of the day is spent outside. Kids can also learn about syrup in the sugarhouse behind the school.

Gym teacher Newton partnered with Lindsey Putnam, the Outdoor Educator, to do a snowshoeing unit. "I see a lot of great balance between the emphasis being on movement and working with kids on activities that promote lifelong movement," explained Gonyaw who would like to see outdoor programs flourish and "continue to provide services to kids who struggle a little bit and start to fall behind."

Gonyaw has also taught Restorative Justice Institutes during the summer at the Lake Morey Inn. The aim is to work out issues with a third party rather than isolating individuals with consequence as the result. "It's changing how we think of discipline in schools," he said, adding that "it brings people together to solve problems. I see mistakes as opportunities to teach kids how to learn from their mistakes. If we're doing our job correctly, we're producing students who are citizens who can think broadly about many issues." Gonyaw has experience solving problems this way, from playground disputes to the harassment of transgender students.

Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports is another interest of Gonyaw. "It really has the understanding that you get what you give," he said. The focus is on what kids do well and not what they do poorly. "I'm really interested in questioning how teachers build curriculum and ask kids questions and get them thinking and spark their interest," said Gonyaw.

As for the future of Marion Cross, Gonyaw said, "I think to continue doing great work with kids around the social studies piece, the science piece. This school has a great environmental ed program. I'd love to see that grow. Another goal of mine is to continue to recognize all the great things that are here at the Marion Cross School and continue to support the elements of our program that do really great things for kids."

Aside from quilting, Shawn raises chickens, cows, goats, and a rabbit on his farm where he's also a beekeeper, but his real passion, he said, is working with children. For information, call (802) 649-1703 or visit www.marioncross.org.
Lifting a Schoolhouse is Easy with Help from Friends

Courtney Dobyns

The Root District Schoolhouse Board of Directors (official name Root District Game Club) is pleased to announce that the foundation of the Root Schoolhouse has been replaced, thanks to Webster & Donovan Excavating, to our other generous contractors and to all our magnanimous donors. Over the summer of 2019 the historic schoolhouse was jacked up from its crumbling foundation, the site was excavated, concrete was poured, and the schoolhouse was placed back down on a new solid base. The finishing touches were wrapped up in the fall.

Now that we have completed the drainage and foundation project (phase 1), there are a few essential projects required by the state to comply with the occupancy permit before we can use the building (phase 2). We are presently raising funds for an ADA access ramp, an accessible parking space, a complete electrical system, and fire safety protection. We plan to complete these projects by summer 2020, at which point we will be able to enjoy the building on a seasonal basis.

Future enhancements such as painting, window restoration, driveway/parking improvements, ADA access bathroom, composting toilet installation, and a direct vent propane heater for the cooler spring and fall season events will come under a third phase and will depend on continued help from friends and community.

In cooperation with the Preservation Trust of Vermont, the schoolhouse has just been invited to submit an application to the 1772 Foundation for a matching grant to restore the windows. If you would like to make a tax-deductible donation, see our donation information and a list of donors, as well as many more photos on our website www.rootschoolhouse.org.

Beyond its historic preservation, the goal of the board is to open the schoolhouse as a community space hosting educational and cultural events such as readings, musical gatherings, and maybe even collaborative events with neighboring farms for children and families. There are limitless possibilities within the collective imagination. The enthusiasm expressed by volunteers and townspeople makes the future look bright for this wonderful gem.

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that over the course of her life she’s devoted herself to serving the town and helping its people meet whatever challenges face them.

She started young. Her first fire call came when she was 10, when she rode along with her father, Fire Chief Leonard Cook (who in turn had learned the ropes from his father). She wasn’t allowed out of the car, but it made an impression, and eventually Linda joined the fire department, becoming a firefighter (and Fire Captain) and an EMT. She also serves currently as the town Fire Warden.

She’s directly served the town in other ways, as a lister and as a years-long member of the selectboard, including a stint as chair. In her capacity there she was a tireless voice for people who struggled to express themselves and worried about rising costs and taxes; she was never less than plain-spoken about her convictions, which were rooted in her belief that, as she puts it, “Whether you’re here for a day, a year, or a lifetime, I want people to be able to stay here if they choose to.”

Linda may also be one of the most visible volunteers in town. She works the Nearly New Sale every year, helps organize the Five Churches Rummage Sale, and stepped up to run Norwich Old Home Day after Rose Swift, who started it, retired. She’s active in the Grange, helps Police Chief Jen Frank with the babysitting class she runs for young teens, and works with the Boy Scouts who do the haunted house every year at Halloween.

But it’s her less visible work that may be most impressive. Linda essentially coordinates an informal network of volunteers who help older people stay in their homes or, if the time has come to leave, to move out. She’ll stop by an elderly neighbor’s home every day to put the newspaper on the porch. She takes others to appointments. She drove one to Maine to move in with family. When one elder in town passed away, she found a scrap metal company to remove appliances, helped pack up his personal items, found a home for his wood stove, and helped the family with the removal and disposal of everything else in the house. She did all this, as her nominators write, “simply because she could and wanted to help.”

For her tireless and generous sleeves-rolled-up spirit in helping Norwich and its residents, the committee is delighted that Linda Cook is the 2020 Citizen of the Year.

RAY AND ANNA ROYCE have been stalwarts in Norwich ever since Ray ran for and became town treasurer almost a quarter century ago. She has worked tirelessly on behalf of financially rigorous town and school governance – here and, as an active member (and past president) of the New England States Government Finance Officers Association, across the region.

This is often invisible, thankless work. Last fall, however, Cheryl’s painstaking work became highly visible after she noticed a pair of questionable transfers from the town’s account to a supposed vendor. The money had been transferred by a new town finance director without selectboard approval and in contradiction of Cheryl’s explicit instructions. Cheryl brought the issue to the
attention of the selectboard chair and then the finance committee – and that is how the town discovered it had been bilked of almost $250,000. She played an active role in helping dissect what had happened, and in helping the town retrieve its money. For that, and for being a true steward of Norwich finances, she deserves the community’s enthusiastic thanks.

ALLISON COLBURN is leaving the Child Care Center in Norwich after 38 years, the past 22 of them as executive director. Hundreds of Norwich children got a safe, caring, stimulating, mind-stretching start in life, grounded in open-hearted decency, thanks to Allison’s tireless hard work. And their parents, it’s safe to say, got wise, to-the-point – but never judgmental – advice on how to understand their kids and to be better parents.

Under Allison’s leadership, the Center has become a lodestar in the regional child-care world, meeting the highest professional standards, becoming a state-funded preschool site, expanding when the town needed it to take on after-school care for older kids, and remaining dedicated through it all to meeting the needs of families from all national backgrounds, socioeconomic strata, and belief systems.

In nominating Allison, a group of parents wrote, “Allison is, on any given day, a teacher, a boss, a plumber, a grant-writer, a housepainter, a Tuck Internship sponsor, a staff advisor, a Dartmouth work/study host, a water-quality control expert, a weather forecaster, a budget guru, a sub scheduler, an interviewer, an outreach coordinator, a special needs team member, an early childhood advocate at the Vermont Statehouse and on local and state commissions, a regulations-reader, a late-night board meeting attendee, an early-morning IEP meeting attendee, a snack fixer, a tear-wiper, a parent coach, a phone answerer, and a band-aid procurer.” Her influence on the children both of Norwich and the region is incalculable. We thank her for being a steward of our children.

Allison Colburn

The Citizen of the Year Committee: Cheryl Herrmann, chair; Lisa Christie; Amy Miller Eberhardt; Rob Gurwitt; Stephanie McCaull; Don McCabe; Sue Pitiger
In its history, the town of Norwich has been divided over many issues. Early on, there was a controversy over where to build the first meetinghouse. Much later, there was ongoing debate about whether Norwich should allow the sale of alcohol. And, for several years, there was a tough back-and-forth dispute about where to locate the I-91 interchange. But when the bombs fell on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, Norwich united as never before in an impressive, community-wide effort to help the country win World War II.

Soon after war was declared, a meeting was held at Tracy Hall, and Donald Bartlett of Elm Street, before he left to serve in the US Navy, was appointed director of civilian defense for the town. A first aid teacher, air raid warden, and medical officer for Norwich were nominated and approved, and a Civil Defense office was set up in the basement of Tracy Hall.

At the meeting, an appeal went out for 60 volunteers to monitor the lookout tower atop Rowell Hill, the highest accessible hill in town, near the end of Meetinghouse Road. Soon other watchtowers were set up on Willey Hill and Gile Mountain. At the time, England was on the verge of collapse and many believed if England fell, the Germans would invade Canada, and the next step would be an attack on Vermont. The observers took the job seriously. Two people stood watch for three or four hours at a time.

Betsy Bankart Sylvester was a teenager when the war began and trained with her sister as plane spotters. “We learned to identify the silhouettes of our fighters and bombers as well as British, German, and Japanese planes,” she said. “We believed a sneak air attack was a real possibility.” Mike Choukas, who was 14 at the time and living in Hanover, also served as a spotter. “I was paired with Norwich resident, Ramon Guthrie, a well-known professor of French at Dartmouth,” he wrote. “Three times a week for four-hour shifts, Professor Guthrie and Mike would scan the skies and ‘defend our country against all invaders.’”

Dr. Barrett, who taught a first aid course, also became the chairman of the local draft board that registered men between the ages of 20 and 45 for selective service. Eighty-seven men signed up at one of the first registrations in 1942. By May, many of Norwich’s young men were on their way to the war. “Ralph Powell, Francis Sargent, and James Huntley,” reported a local newspaper, “went to Rutland Monday morning where they reported to the Army induction headquarters…. Mr. Sargent was rejected. Mr. Powell and Mr. Huntley were sent to Fort Devens, Mass.”

To protect Vermont against a possible enemy attack, civilian volunteers formed a Home Guard in each community. The Home Guard in Norwich learned to march, had their own uniforms, and were outfitted in packs and helmets from the WWI era.
Each member of the Guard was issued a 12-gauge Winchester Model 24 double-barrel shotgun at the cost of twelve dollars apiece. But there is no record of these ever being fired at the enemy.

Starting in 1942, surgical dressings were produced at a record pace in the Red Cross workroom in Tracy Hall. In February 1943, eighty-six Norwich women made, inspected, and packed 18,000 bandages. “When it was discovered that the month’s total was within 85 pieces of being 18,000, some of the Grange women worked overtime to meet that figure which makes February’s production more than double that of January.”

Sadly, the war became all too real less than a year after it began. Frank LaPorte, who delivered ice to folks in Norwich, and his wife Sophie lived on Hopson Road. They had four sons who served, three in the Navy and one in the Army. In September 1942, the LaPorte’s received a telegram from the War Department reporting that their son, Leo, who had graduated from Hanover High School and joined the Navy in 1937, was missing in action.

A few days later another telegram arrived from the Secretary of the Navy Frank Knox. “After a full review of all available information,” it began, “I am reluctantly forced to the conclusion that your son, Leo Francis LaPorte, Storekeeper First Class, is deceased having been reported ‘missing in action’ on August 9, 1942, being a member of the crew of the USS Vincennes when that vessel was sunk as a result of enemy action during the Battle of Savo Island.”

Just a few months later, another son, Frank, was killed when his ship, the USS Pensacola, was engaged in a sea battle near Guadalcanal. The ship was hit by several torpedoes, caught fire, and limped to safety, but not before 125 men, including Frank LaPorte, were killed. In March 1945 the oldest LaPorte son was “wounded in action in Germany” while serving in the Army. The youngest brother, Allen, was with the Navy in the Pacific at this time.

A close look at the war memorial outside of Tracy Hall shows the names of 178 men and women from Norwich who served in World War II. Eight of those listed were killed serving their country.

At the end of 1943, a newsletter with the heading “Life on the Norwich Homefront” went out to every Norwich resident serving in the armed forces. “Norwich is seeming empty these days,” it began. “We’re not forgetting any of you, we’re wishing all of you the best of luck – especially when the going’s tough…Meanwhile, everyone has got together to write this letter to bring you the whole town’s heartiest greetings & … its latest news.”

The newsletter explained in detail how the citizens of Norwich were doing their part to win the war. First, people dug deep into their pockets to support a war bond sale. The Third War Loan Drive in 1943 “to pay for the cost of victory” was an amazing success. “Mrs. MacAulay and 17 assistants set out to raise $5,753 and got $15,156!”

Throughout the war years, food and gasoline were strictly rationed. But the people of Norwich were able to manage. According to the newsletter, “Forethought & some scrabbling have kept everyone in Norwich from being stuck, meat rationing has brought new demand for chickens, egg prices have been up, pigs have grown despite poor grain, cows still give milk, shelves are filled with more home canning than ever before… Supplies of coal coming into Sargent’s have been short, wood – if you can get it! – is up to $16 a cord.”

Because gasoline was in short supply, non-essential or “pleasure driving” was strictly prohibited. Cars going to Hanover were filled with riders, and, when the weather was decent, people rode bicycles. “Bill Ballard, swaddled like a mummy, rides one to Hanover daily rain or shine, snow or ice, gets all steamed up

Continued on page 20
standing on the pedals to make it go on the flat, & on sleety days has fallen off 4
times going down Lewiston Mt."

The newsletter closed with words from Mrs. Marion Cross, principal of the
town school. She wished “all her 39 former pupils now in service everything
they need to see the big job through.” She also hoped “they all have as many
happy memories of school days as she, & says the same old bell turns over
summoning 110 children from play, & in spite of the new furnace windows still
rattle, pupils & teachers shiver.”

During 1944, Norwich continued to contribute mightily to the war effort. In
the Christmas newsletter that year it was noted that at least 82 men and women
were in uniform scattered around the globe. With a population of just over
1,400, it’s not hard to imagine how each person in the armed forces was sorely
missed. Some of those serving had been away from home for three years.

But the war was winding down on the home front. The 1944 newsletter didn’t
mention blackouts or bandages being made by the Red Cross. The focus was more
on local events. “Beavers from Beaver Meadow have flooded a couple of acres on
Tigertown Road… Tommy Kendall…got a 6-pointer with his first shot.”

In May 1944, the plane-spotting towers were closed. The volunteers received
a letter from Army Colonel Towle a few weeks later. “You have done a splendid
job,” he began. “I hope and believe that you will turn your patriotic efforts into
other forms of work which will help to support the attack and bring the day of
victory nearer.”

When the war ended 75 years ago this coming August, the church bells in
Norwich rang loudly, and there was probably a celebration at the town pool that
had opened the previous summer. The 1946 edition of the Norwich town
newsletter was full of news of young veterans stepping into their postwar life.
“Edson Keith is working for Trumbull-Nelson. Gordon Edward is at his Mother’s
home… getting adjusted to cities. Capt. Clinton Gardner… is on terminal leave
and will return to his studies at Dartmouth in March.” But it took several more
years for all of those serving overseas to wend their way back to Norwich. Jim
Huntley, a veteran himself, thought of those still far from home when he wrote
the newsletter, closing, “You can watch the seasons come and go in Norwich…
But whatever the season, the cheery light of bridge lamps in houses along Main,
Elm Church, Mechanic, Hazen, Cliff and McKenna Streets, or the warmth of
farmhouses in all our little hamlets, and the hospitality of friends all through our
town – these, you can be sure, will not change ere you’re home again to stay...
Sincerely, as ever, Jim Huntley.”

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#3 W. Lebanon: July 13-16
#4 Norwich: August 3-6
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FOR MORE INFORMATION & REGISTRATION
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Have you ever noticed that Norwich and our larger community can follow you around the world?

Over the President’s Day school vacation, I had some adventures on the ski slopes. First, after a fall from an ill-advised attempt to ride a rail in a terrain park (a doctor friend of mine said he had “never seen anything like” the resulting bruise on my backside), I took some poor guy’s skis from Suicide Six. His resembled mine, yada yada yada, I arrived at Bolton Valley to discover that the skis I thought were mine were not. I went inside to rent a pair and the young woman helping me looked at my paperwork and said, “Oh, I’m from Thetford.”

Upper Valley in the house.
I knew I was in good hands.

At the double chair lift, I shuffled onto the red stripe with my six-year-old. The chair came, I grabbed him, boosted him up on the seat, and prepared for him to talk my ear off for the next ten minutes. (Sample line of questioning…if you find the connective tissue, please let me know: “Why do they have numbers on the chairs? Why is chair “1” lucky? Is chair “2” also lucky? Why is that person wearing a Cleveland Browns jersey? Why don’t they have safety bars in Montana? Would you be scared on a chair with no bar? Did it hurt when you fell? Why can’t you bounce in the chair? What did you bring for lunch? Do you like red peppers? Am I a good skier? Why shouldn’t I ski with my jacket unzipped? Can I have some gum?”)

Before I could get the bar down, my little man slid off the chair like an egg coming out of a nonstick pan, crash-landing ten feet from where he started. As the attendant rushed to help him, and as the tears began to flow, I heard a voice, calm as an August sunset, asking, “Mark, do you want me to ride up with him?” Naturally, 90 minutes from home, on a mountain with five chairlifts spanning three peaks more than a mile apart, dotted with thousands of skiers, the next person in line for the lift was none other than my son’s soccer coach. She popped onto the red stripe, snagged my kiddo, and rode up, learning all about the “sick jumps” he had found. 05055 saving the day, right on cue.

Norwich is no slouch on the (inter)national stage. Whoa... is that my high school classmate’s sister running for Congress, governor, and leading the emoluments case? Wait, the guy I used to play Nerf football with is now part of a book about Norwich Olympians? Hold on, is that my childhood neighbor at the head of the State Department? Seriously, is that a Norwich woman wearing a gold medal? Rick’s brother is running a national presidential campaign? Why does it seem normal that a Norwich face pops up in the middle of a movie about plant-based eating among professional athletes?

The relationships we build in this community propel us on extraordinary journeys. I moved to Burgundy, France and within six months, my high school French teacher and her husband (Norwich residents) were in my dining room sampling a goat-cheese tart recipe that my wife won a prize for a week later. A Norwich friendship got me a private peek inside the Oval Office. A different Norwich connection—our Congressman—got my family a tour of the Capitol. A Norwich relationship got me primo tickets to many Phish concerts. Norwich helped me get more than one job. Norwich people took me on an unscheduled, unscripted, and uninhibited tour of a college I am proud to call my alma mater. Norwich helped me get more than one job. Norwich people took me on an unscheduled, unscripted, and uninhibited tour of a college I am proud to call my alma mater. Norwich sends me letters from Asia... and delivers me dried shredded squid to my mailbox. A Norwich resident inspired my wife to come to Dartmouth from Washington, DC. His daughter and son-in-law later introduced us.

On a recent trip to Boston, one product of that introduction, my slippery-pants youngest son, spotted the iconic Citgo sign outside of Fenway Park. Like any good Norwich boy he exclaimed, “Look guys! A giant Dan & Whit’s sign!”

I am certain Norwich will launch both our boys into epic explorations of the world around them. For now, though, it feels good to have them here at home, surrounded by the extraordinary safety, kindness, and goodness of our town and the people who inhabit it so beautifully.
This is a story about new life given a safe haven thanks to a Good Samaritan from Norwich. Here in Norwich, cabin-fever season is in full swing. Soon, that will give way to mud season and then, sometime in early May, spring will finally bloom here. With it will come bright-green grass, yellow daffodils, and tulips in every imaginable color.

As always, it will be infused with the grace and promise of new life. And that reminds us of our friend Gracie. A stray cat, she was found early last May right in the heart of Norwich, just off Carpenter Street. She is beautiful and silly – a gorgeous marmalade cat who was barely a year old when a good Samaritan brought her to the Upper Valley Humane Society (UVHS).

Upon arrival at the shelter, our medical team examined Gracie. She was quite frightened. Being very under-socialized, she was fearful of people and the new environment. She was also pregnant.

A few days after her arrival, our volunteer coordinator matched her with a foster home. Thanks to the love of our team and the family who took her in, Gracie soon became comfortable in a home environment.

She was safe and just two short weeks later, in the peace of that home, Gracie gave birth to four kittens: Bandit, Blaze, Pumpkin, and Polly. Gracie and her kittens stayed in the foster home until the kittens were weaned a few months later. At that point, she and her kittens returned to UVHS where they all were spayed or neutered by our veterinarian. A few days later, all went up for adoption and, of course the kittens quickly found new homes.

Though Gracie had become comfortable in her foster home, she was sweet but still rather shy around people. Shy cats are often overlooked in a shelter – especially during kitten season!

But it didn’t take long. Within two days of being available for adoption, the thoughtful animal care team at UVHS matched her with a household that already had another cat. Our team knew that the other cat would help Gracie build her confidence so that she could continue improving her socialization.

Thanks to a kind-hearted resident of Norwich, Gracie and all four of her kittens are now living in new loving homes. Spring will soon arrive and with it will come kitten season...
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“Bandler. James Bandler.”
Using Journalism As a Moral Force

Publisher’s Note: James Bandler’s wife, Rebecca Holcombe, is running for governor of the State of Vermont. She is featured on the cover of this issue. Why did I choose to run separate articles about this “power couple?” Because both deserve the spotlight as individuals and I wanted the brush strokes of each story to paint the bigger picture of what makes them such a special force in our community and beyond. It’s like those images on canvas that are hung separately but side-by-side, each one revealing half the scene but somehow creating a more interesting view than if combined into a single print.

On an unexpectedly snowy Thursday morning, James Bandler arrived, somewhat flustered, to meet me for our interview in downtown White River Junction. He admitted that he was nervous and that he gets nervous when he’s going to be interviewed. I was shocked and relieved… and admitted that I was nervous (in a one-ups-man kinda way) because surely this small-town publisher had more reason to be intimidated interviewing a Pulitzer-prize winning, real journalist!

What makes James Bandler fascinating, in my opinion, is not purely the work he does to make a living. James Bandler is real and honest and humble and feels called to remain true to all of those character traits in his roles as father, husband, and community member. However, what resonates deeply with me is his profound conviction to be of service to the field of journalism and its moral responsibility to citizens around the world.

A cold water swimming enthusiast, James describes himself as a “normally fearful person who has to push (himself) hard to be brave.”

“I approach every story as I do a cold water swim – with a mix of trepidation and excitement. There’s real anxiety because I’m stepping out of my comfort zone into a situation that can be uncomfortable and sometimes hostile. I knock on lot of strangers’ doors and deal with angry lawyers and hostile PR teams who will go to incredible lengths to discredit our work. But there’s also the thrill of discovery and the honor of meeting remarkable whistleblowers and concerned citizens who have the courage to defy powerful institutions, companies and governments by telling the truth to a stranger who knocked on the door.”

As a senior writer for ProPublica, James literally has his finger on the global pulse of what is fair, just and true. As stated on the “About Us” page on its website, www.propublica.org: ProPublica is an independent, nonprofit newsroom that shines a light on abuses of power and betrayals of public trust – and we stick with those investigations, helping expose fraud and law-breaking at Fortune 500 companies. He was a co-author of “The Perfect Payday,” a 2006 investigation that exposed the widespread practice of backdating stock options by business executives. The series, produced by a team of reporters, led to the paper’s first Pulitzer Prize for Public Service.

In 1999, James was hired as a correspondent by Boston Globe and moved to Cambridge. Rebecca followed soon after, received her MBA at Simmons College and, by 2002, had had both of their kids, Johanna and Daniel. By then, James was a busness writer for the Wall Street Journal, where he worked in the Boston bureau, one of the paper’s most aggressive centers of investigative reporting.

At the Wall Street Journal, Bandler wrote hard-hitting corporate investigations, helping expose fraud and law-breaking at Fortune 500 companies. He was a co-author of “The Perfect Payday,” a 2006 investigation that exposed the widespread practice of backdating stock options by business executives. The series, produced by a team of reporters, led to the paper’s first Pulitzer Prize for Public service.

“We were smitten by Vermont and small-town life. I grew up in NYC but had done summer farm work and was really happy to be working in Vermont at a small-town newspaper,” said James. My first editor, Dirk Van Susteren, loved storytelling and let me stretch my wings. He put up with my tendency to report and report and put off writing for as long as possible.

Another editor Dave Moats later won a Pulitzer Prize. There were so many outstanding editors and reporters there.” Fast-forward to when James was working for the Wall Street Journal where six of his colleagues were former Rutland Herald-Times Argus journalists.

“It [Rutland Herald] was family-owned by the Mitchell family and a fiercely independent newspaper. It really was Vermont journalism at its best… an inspiring place.”

“I was a Sunday feature writer about Vermont life… mostly stories about eccentrics, obsessive people, passionate people with unusual hobbies or jobs… off the beaten track sort of people,” said James. “Like Sy Osmer who was a “knacker” in Taftsville, VT who picked up dead cows from farms; I also wrote about this guy whose love was picking up hub caps from the side of the road… and then there was the stand-up comedian Rabbi…”

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“When Rupert Murdoch was trying to buy the Wall Street Journal, I was publicly protesting the transaction. It was a searing event for me because Murdoch represents all that is horrible about journalism today,” said James. “I stayed for six months until I couldn’t stand it any longer and then left and was hired by Fortune magazine. Before I took the job, I asked them if they would be willing to let me work in Vermont if, after three years, I proved myself and did a good job. They said yes.”

“Finally, after 10 years of trying to make our way back to Vermont, we moved to Norwich in 2011 where I was able to work remotely for Fortune and Rebecca resumed her career in the field of education eventually becoming the Secretary of Education for the State.”

When Fortune’s parent company, Time Inc., was in the process of being sold, James proactively left and became a financial researcher for 3 years for a family office. “After the 2016 election of the current President, and seeing how
Mike and I have been swimming together since 2014 in the winter. He’s a member of the UVAC UV Rays masters team with me and we swim as soon as the ice melts on the river and at Post Pond. There is a big contingent of summer swimmers but it gets smaller by the day as temps drop until it is just me and Mike in late October.

Our swims get progressively shorter as the water gets colder. By the time it is just above freezing we’re only swimming for six minutes or so max. Cold water forces you to be in the moment, to relax and stay calm and to realize how marvelous and resilient the human body is. Laws of physics apply and eventually everyone will perish in cold water, but the power of the mind is incredible. Our few rules are get out when you start to feel really good, because you’re on the verge of hypothermia, and don’t complain. As soon as negativity enters the picture you’re toast, or ice!

James Bandler with his dear friend and neighbor Chad Finer. Chad and his wife Susan are honorary grandparents for James and Rebecca’s kids.

James says. “We are there to document, reveal, shine a light. We shouldn’t think of ourselves as the elite leading the country because I think that is also full of danger and we shouldn’t be comfortable thinking we know anything until we go out into the field and report.

“I just try to keep the lines of dialog open… like people I fervently disagree with, I try to really understand the way they view things… I try to watch Fox News… and listened to Rush Limbaugh my whole life because I want to know what other people think. So, Norwich in particular, we are in a very liberal bubble.”

“I learned so much about Norwich when our daughter, Johanna, wrote an article about affordable housing… some of the opponents of it were very thoughtful in their responses. It was much more of a complicated issue than she first realized.”

To bring the interview back full circle, I asked James how he balances the global perspective he gains from his job with that of small-town life in Norwich.

“For me, it’s a therapeutic break to get away from Washington [DC] or Seattle or wherever. However, we must realize that we are being swept by these forces, too, like the gig economy, epidemics, viruses, all these things… we are not an island at all.”

“On the flip side, it’s nice to be able to look out and see a beautiful view and live in a beautiful place and have neighbors who you recognize at the store and you can sit and chat… there are some lovely things about small town [living]. Dan Fraser has taught both my children about the responsibility of holding a job and being punctual… And when people find my wallet, they know to leave it at Dan and Whit’s for me…”

When asked what he would be called if Rebecca becomes governor, James replied “… hopefully ‘not late for dinner,’” James laughed. “I have to get my cooking better. Rebecca is very polite about the assorted dog’s breakfasts I put in front of her… so my role will be very supportive at that point. The thing I like about Vermont is that there are no perks… you know, no governor’s mansion… that’s a good thing because I wouldn’t want to leave Norwich.”
The Norwich Times was a weekly stop, but having regular access to local foods was common.

In recent decades, we have experienced a revival in the interest among consumers of obtaining foods directly, or indirectly, from local farmers. For a variety of reasons, including product freshness, nutritional value, supporting local farms and businesses, or knowing how and where one’s food is produced, many consumers are active in finding their food products from local sources.

In the Upper Valley, consumers are privileged with numerous choices for locally grown produce and locally raised meats. Whether direct from the farm, from one of the many farmers markets, stores that sell local foods such as the Co-op Food Stores, or area restaurants that serve local products, area “foodies” have many options for foods right here in the Upper Valley.

Chuck Wooster operates Sunrise Farm in Hartford. During the busy growing and harvesting season from May until October, Wooster says his farm focuses on its CSA (community supported agriculture) customers, who come directly to the farm to pick their CSA shares of the produce. “We’re lucky enough to sell everything right from the farm,” says Wooster.

During the remainder of the year, the farm also provides produce such as lettuce, chard, kale and spinach to some local restaurants, and to the Upper Valley Food Co-op in White River Junction.

With the strong interest in locally grown, nutritious foods, the Upper Valley is a great place for farmers to get food directly to the customer’s dinner table. “From a farmer’s perspective, we have a lot of people here caring about food, who don’t have extra time to plant a garden,” Wooster says.

The trend of restaurants using more and more locally grown and raised food products “has been a major change over the last twenty years,” says Wooster. That trend prompted Sunrise Farm to move forward with winter growing of produce. “Winter growing is driven by restaurants,” he adds.

Mark Robie, of the Upper Valley’s Robie Farm, markets local meat products to a variety of stores and restaurants. Having the chance to buy local food products, “gives the consumer a say in how your food is produced,” he says. Robie often takes calls and has discussions about the meat and other products, such as cheese, sporting the Robie Farm name. Discussions often center on the health of the animals and the manner in which they’re raised. “These conversations offer consumers a connection with the farmer themselves,” he adds.

Bill Stinson has a history of raising and selling vegetables for 40 years in New England. He notes that the current farm-to-table movement “hasn’t been around all that long.” Stinson says the late 1970s saw farmers begin expanding their marketing by selling from farmstands and farmers markets. This trend proved advantageous for farmers and consumers. “It connected people with better food, though the movement was slow to grow, to get momentum,” says Stinson.

Eventually, this farm-to-table food experience took hold. “The buy local food movement has really picked up speed in the last twenty years,” says Robie.

Stinson says that in the early 2000s, chefs and restaurants really picked up interest in using locally grown produce in their creations. Area restaurants such as Ariana’s, the Latham House Tavern, and Molly’s all feature Robie Farm meat...
products, says Robie. Other area restaurants well publicize the fact that they utilize local farm products in their dishes.

The Blue Sparrow Kitchen of Norwich uses a great deal of local produce in the dishes they create, says owner Amber Boland. In fact, Blue Sparrow’s menu indicates which dishes feature local produce and the farms where that produce originates. “We hear a lot of thanks from folks (for using local produce),” says Boland. “It means a ton to me.” Some of the local produce Boland uses in her recipes comes from Edgewater Farm of Plainfield and Sweetland Farm of Norwich. With so much local produce available, Boland says the Upper Valley is blessed for those seeking local food products. “We live in this amazing area with all these farms,” she says.

Often during the growing season, Boland says she will customize her dishes to feature the local produce plentiful at that time. Lots of chard coming during the growing season? Then you’re likely to see it featured on the menu at the Blue Sparrow Kitchen.

Another area farm producing locally grown and raised food products is Norwich’s Sweetland Farm. Owner Norah Lake says her farm specializes in selling through CSA shares, and at farmers markets. “We’re just on the cusp of getting into the restaurant market,” she adds. With her farm growing over 100 different varieties of produce, the chances of filling the needs of consumers and restaurants is greatly enhanced. For the consumer, Lake says buying local foods “is a feel-good purchase” which results in supporting local producers and the Upper Valley economy. In return, the farm offers consumers important information about the food they eat.” A big part of what we do is education,” Lake says.

Sweetland’s produce does end up in the foods created by nearby Blue Sparrow Kitchen, but for a farmer to make buying arrangements with numerous restaurants or stores, it takes a commitment of time, energy, and resources. In arranging a better, more efficient way to match up the local farmer with the stores and restaurants, enter the Upper Valley’s champion of buying local, Vital Communities.

Last fall, Beth Roy, Vital Communities’ food & farm program manager, says her organization arranged a first ever event designed to match up local farmers with area restaurants, food stores, and grocery distributors. This event, resulting from a grant offered by Vermont’s Agency of Agriculture, allowed
FARM-TO-TABLE – continued from page 1

local farmers and food producers (such as honey and maple syrup producers) to meet with commercial buyers of their meat, produce, and products. The event resulted “in really positive reactions,” says Roy. “It made it easier for (farmers) to meet these businesses.”

Vital Communities efforts to increase education and realization of the local farm-to-table movement extend well beyond bringing farmers and businesses together. Roy says her organization works closely with area schools to enhance young people’s knowledge and appreciation of nutritious, locally produced foods. Some of these efforts include having schools’ breakfast and lunch programs buy and use foods from local farms and encourage outdoor classrooms where students learn about growing and preparing produce and care for on-site gardens.

Roy says she also works closely with the area farmers markets to enhance the experience for both consumers and the vendors. In this effort, Vital Communities established the Upper Valley Farmers Market Collaborative, working with numerous farm market managers, including those from Lebanon and Norwich, to help grow these markets. Roy notes that both the Norwich and Lebanon markets are particularly successful in bringing together consumers with local farmers and producers.

Some of the ideas coming out of this effort include the Power of Produce Clubs which allows “kids to connect with the farmers market,” says Roy. This program encourages kids to visit the various farmers and vendors at the market, garner information and, in return, receive market dollars to spend at the market on healthy offerings.

Other ways they help the viability of the markets includes assisting vendors in designing customer friendly booths, and encouraging the use of SNAP benefits at the markets, allowing lower income folks the ability to buy fresh, local produce.

Making locally grown food accessible to lower income people should be a key goal, says long-time farmer Bill Stinson. “Some think it’s only for wealthier folks…it doesn’t reach a large enough volume of people,” Stinson says. Sweetland Farm’s Norah Lake points to programs now in effect that assist lower income consumers to buy subsidized CSAs from farmers and organizations such as Willing Hands which get local produce in the hands of more people, particularly those in need.

Norwich farmer Lake further endorses the work of Vital Communities in promoting local food production and the farm-to-table movement. “Vital Communities is pretty amazing to work with,” says Lake. “Their promotion of local food in the Upper Valley has been key.”

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Mascoma Bank Offers Opportunity Through Internships

By any measure, not all internship programs are alike. Whereas some interns may act as glorified errand men and women for certain companies, other companies and organizations take these programs seriously, offering the young people taking part tremendous opportunities to learn, develop, and take part in meaningful work. Such is the case with Mascoma Bank’s summer internship program for college students.

Tom Hoyt, Mascoma Bank’s public relations and social media coordinator, explains that 2020 marks the fifth year of the internship program. Each year of the program, four or five college students, usually juniors or sophomores, are selected for the 10-12 week summer program. Each intern serves in a different department of the bank; departments utilizing interns include marketing, human resources, commercial credit, and wealth management, says Hoyt.

Each intern within each department is “given great responsibility,” says Hoyt. “From day one they are really involved in their departments.” Working full time, these interns (who are paid, by the way), often work with a different banking professional on different days of the week. In addition, the interns often have the opportunity to interact with the bank’s top management. That doesn’t mean they don’t take part in the fun, casual tasks as well. Tom Hoyt mentions interns may also flip burgers or scoop ice cream at the bank’s summer barbecues.

Many past interns were Upper Valley residents returning from college for the summer, but being a local resident is not a prerequisite, says Hoyt. Though some interns are studying subjects such as finance and marketing, the bank certainly considers those studying other disciplines for the internship program. Taking part in Mascoma Bank’s internship program is a great stepping-stone for the future; Tom Hoyt says that Mascoma Bank now employs four of the past interns.

To discover more about Mascoma Bank’s internship program, Hoyt invites those interested to visit the Current Job Openings page on Mascoma's website.

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