



## Fantasy beasts

A Bristol artist's show features figures created from found natural materials. See Arts + Leisure.



## Trio of titles

Three county teams won state crowns, and a fourth came ever so close. See Sports, Pages 1B-5B.



## Graduation!

See stories from local high schools and photos of every local graduate in our special pull-out.

# ADDISON COUNTY INDEPENDENT

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## More meals for kids offered this summer

Free food provided at several sites

By MARIN HOWELL

ADDISON COUNTY — Local youth will have more opportunities to access free meals this summer, after several factors reduced the number of places kids could eat for free once school let out for summer vacation last year.

Summer meal programs help ensure school-age children maintain access to nourishing, consistent meals when school is not in session. Last summer, opportunities to access such programs were limited in Addison County and in other parts of the

state for a variety of reasons, including the federal government tightening free summer meals rules that during the pandemic had increased funding eligibility and allowed more school districts to expand their year-round meal programs.

Without those pandemic-era allowances fewer communities in the county were able to offer meals for local youth throughout the summer, such as in the Vergennes-area Addison Northwest School District, which did not offer a

(See Free meals, Page 12A)

## Council eyeing 3- or 4-cent city rate hike

By ANDY KIRKALDY

VERGENNES

— At their next-to-last meeting to discuss the city budget and tax rate for the upcoming 2024-2025 Fiscal Year (FY25), Vergennes City Councilors on Tuesday edged toward adopting a spending plan that would raise the city's current \$1.06 municipal tax rate by 3 or 4 cents.

Some councilors expressed a hope that the increase could go as low as 2 cents, but the consensus at

*"I'm praying global warming continues, because I cut the winter maintenance budget."*

— City Manager Ron Redmond

the end of the meeting hovered between 3.5 and 4 cents. The council must set the municipal tax rate and an FY25 budget by June 30 and will meet again on Tuesday, June 25, with decisions expected.

A 4-cent increase to the current rate of \$1.06 per \$100 of assessed property value would mean an additional \$40 of property taxes for every \$100,000 of assessed value, or \$120 more annually on a home

(See Vergennes, Page 12A)

## Slate Valley voters approve plan for FY'25 spending on the fifth try

ORWELL — Phew!

When the voters in the Slate Valley Unified Union School District considered a proposed spending plan for the upcoming school year on Tuesday, it was their fifth time in three and a half months doing so.

For the first time, they passed the budget.

The margin OK'ing the \$30,810,135 spending plan for

fiscal year 2025 was 930 yes to 794 no.

Superintendent Brooke Olsen-Farrell expressed her gratitude to the Slate Valley community, which includes the Addison County town of Orwell.

"I know this may not have been an easy decision for many, especially due to the funding challenges throughout the state," she said in

(See Slate Valley, Page 12A)



### Out from under

SECOND-GRADER COOPER BUTLER emerges from under a rainbow-colored parachute that he and other Mary Hogan Elementary School kids were playing with on the Middlebury rec fields during the school's annual Field Day before school let out for the summer. See more photos on Page 11A.

Independent photo/Steve James

## New book: CCV instills hope in higher ed

### Weybridge author's oral history tells 50-year saga

By CAROLINE JIAO

WEYBRIDGE — Many young people today are deterred from higher education by the rising cost of college, and they choose to stay out or drop out, observed an article published in January in *The New York Times*. And the college degree that might have raised young citizens onto an equal starting point is not achieved.

This report does not stand alone in the scene of people's dimming hopes. When a four-year college degree becomes burdened by ever-growing stakes, the question becomes, is there another path? One, perhaps, less traveled by?

Weybridge author Doug Wilhelm explores one of those paths in his recently published book, "Kind of a Miracle: The Unlikely Story of the Community College of Vermont." The



DOUG WILHELM

college's universal access and its carefully catered programs.

Wilhelm acknowledges the significance of historical and present-day social context for understanding the opportunities and hope the

book employs an oral history method to document the various struggles and successes of CCV throughout its first half century. It features not only founders, ex-presidents, faculty and staff, who all worked hard to will the institution into being but also many students who benefited from the college's universal access and its carefully catered programs.

Community College of Vermont brought to the community.

"To me this was a really interesting story, and an important one," he said.

"One of the biggest causes of the big division across America is there's a big gap in wealth, obviously, and an opportunity to earn a good living," he said. "A lot of people feel they've been left behind. There's a lot of anger about that. And it's understandable."

CCV was started in 1970. As an entry point into higher education, for many Vermonters it draws a picture of possibility.

"I think this is the story that matters," Wilhelm said. "Especially now, when we have so much division, and so many people in this county believed that there's no opportunity for them. They can never climb above their situation in life."

The statistics on the CCV website show that

(See Wilhelm, Page 10A)



## By the way

The Forest Service closed Forest Road 59 in Ripton for the rest of the summer while it makes an upgrade that ultimately should be a plus for the environment and for flood management. The road is being closed so that an older traditional culvert can be replaced with a new aquatic organism passage (AOP) culvert that will the Forest Service believes will

(See By the way, Page 12A)

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## Historic Monkton church reviving as a community hub

### Workshops, 4-H, other events return

By BARBARA BOSWORTH

MONKTON — A local cultural hub has come full circle over the past 157 years.

In its early decades, the East Monkton Church was not only a house of worship, but also the scene for standing-room-only concerts, festivals, plays, lectures, ice cream socials and oyster suppers.

After a period of decline and neglect, the church this year will again host a full season of events for a wide variety of interests and ages, in the sanctuary and out on its Church Road property.

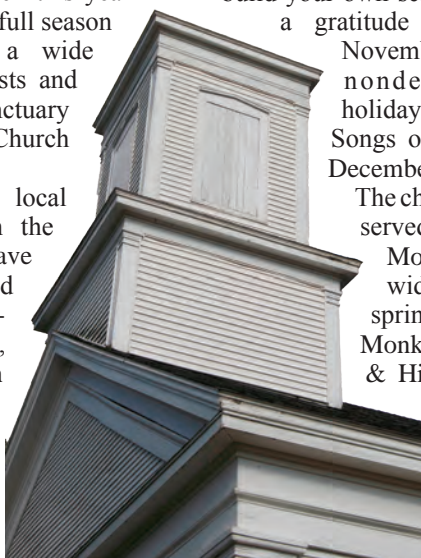
In July, two local 4-H clubs, with the animals they have been raising and their other year-long projects, will visit with the public on the church lawn. The Friends Methodist Church of Monkton Ridge will hold Sunday services

at the East Monkton Church. Pianist David Feurzeig will present a concert as part of his Play Every Town Project.

Karey Ann French of Silver Spring Farm will lead a flower arranging workshop in August. After school starts, a gathering will give young and old a chance to share memories of attending school in Monkton. Other fall events: a build-your-own-scarecrow session, a gratitude observance in November, and a nondenominational holiday event called Songs of the Season in December.

The church has already served as a stop on Monkton's town-wide yard sale this spring. Recently the Monkton Museum & Historical Society and the church explored local history during an East Monkton Cemetery

(See Monkton church, Page 13A)



EAST MONKTON CHURCH TOWER



PAT POLZELLA AND Candace Layn Polzella stand on the steps of the East Monkton Church, where they are leaders of the historical buildings' resurgence in the community.

Photos by Barbara Bosworth





IN THE SANCTUARY of the East Monkton Church, the rows of pews are divided down the middle by a low partition, that might originally have separated men's seating from women's seating.  
Photo by Barbara Bosworth

## Monkton church

(Continued from Page 1A)  
walk, followed by an informal gathering at the church.

Immediately after the Civil War, this white clapboarded building was designed in a simple Greek Revival style of the Tuscan order. East Monkton had been growing since the 1780s, along with the development of agriculture and mining for iron ore, kaolin clay and yellow ochre. But unlike the other hamlets of Monkton, this community did not have a church or any other public gathering place.

Residents raised funds for construction and bought a quarter-acre lot for \$1 on what is now Church Road. Carpenters set to work on the fieldstone foundation and timber frame in March 1866 for the 250-seat Methodist church. The first service, which included a double wedding, was held in February 1867.

In Vermont, public buildings such as town halls or opera houses in cities and large towns were venues for local cultural life in the late 19th century. But smaller communities without nearby opera houses were just as eager to enjoy the arts and entertainment, and to hear lectures on history, travel, and political and social issues. Religious buildings could provide places for these public events.

At the East Monkton Church, professional musicians instructed local children in vocal music performance. A series of lyceums "proved to be an excellent recreation and improvement for young and old," in winter 1877. The church was "filled to overflowing" for the music, debate, recitations and orations, the *Vergennes Vermonter* newspaper reported.

One pastor served the three Methodist churches in Monkton. Sabbath schools for children and adults were offered. In some ways, church functions differed from those of the present, as weddings and funerals were often held at home or in the minister's parsonage until well into the 20th century. The East Monkton Church was a site for evangelistic "revival of religion" meetings and services until 1910. These gatherings were common in Methodism at the time.

"The women of the church" had been taking an active role in church business. Then in 1918, a women's volunteer organization, the Loyal Workers' Society, officially formed and planned some modifications to the building, without changing its footprint. By adding a wall between the church entrance and the sanctuary, the Loyal Workers created a large vestibule, with a greatly expanded balcony above it. These first and second floor spaces could be used as cooking and dining areas.

Inexpensive oyster suppers had already been a popular fund-raising activity. With the additional space, suppers and other social events attracted the general public and helped finance church and parsonage repairs, renovations, and supplemental support for the pastor for at least 30 years. Other organizations held meetings and large suppers at the church, hosting as many as 100 people at a time, despite the lack of running water in the building, or even a well outside.

In the early 20th century, rural Vermonters had been migrating

to other states and to cities within Vermont. Because of the population drain, churches in small towns were having to close or merge.

By about 1960, the East Monkton Church was infrequently used, except for occasional funerals. Before the church's centennial, the old building had been "closed for several years, and was in a state of neglect," the *Burlington Free Press* reported.

### RESTORATION BEGINS

The community rallied to refurbish the building, hold summer services, and plan a well-attended centennial celebration. With the 1976 U.S. Bicentennial approaching, a small, informal group of volunteers made repairs on a regular basis and added electric lights. The church was one of the settings for Monkton's bicentennial observance.

For the past 25 years, Candace Layn Polzella has been the driving force for preserving the building and increasing its community use in creative ways. She was a University of Vermont dietitian, and is now retired.

For as long as she can remember, she says she has been interested in "the hearts of old buildings." As a child growing up in East Monkton, Layn Polzella loved Alfred Joyce Kilmer's 1914 poem "The House With Nobody In It." The poem speaks to the way she is inspired "to care for a building which has provided for others over the years."

She and her husband, Pat Polzella, a retired electrical engineer, had left Vermont after marrying in 1973, and worked in several parts of the country. They were drawn back to Monkton in 1999.

The church had become one of the old buildings "in need of care," she said. "I stirred the pot and got the Ridge (the Friends Methodist Church at Monkton Ridge) congregation to start holding summer services again."

The Polzellas hired Eliot Lothrop of Building Heritage LLC to perform a conditions assessment, and they initiated a series of preservation projects with advice and help from the Preservation Trust of Vermont.

The East Monkton Church Association, or EMCA, was incorporated in 2006 and was granted tax-exempt status the following year. Preservation work and a diverse selection of public events followed annually.

The Vermont District of the United Methodist Church's New England Conference still owned the church, so the EMCA bought the property for \$1 in 2020. The COVID-19 pandemic limited the events and fundraising that the group was able to hold for about three years. The pace picked up again after the National Park Service added the East Monkton Church to the National Register of Historic Places in March 2023.

With the advice of Devin Colman, state architectural historian at the Vermont Division for Historic Preservation, the property had been nominated to the Register under the category of Religious Buildings, Sites, and Structures of Vermont. It was eligible for this national recognition because of its social history as an important place for religious and secular activities, and because of its architecture.

Though "minor alterations consistent with more than 150 years of use" were made to

the interior, the building "has excellent historic integrity and is an important part of our cultural heritage," Colman commented. The East Monkton Church is "a great example of how a well-designed, solidly constructed, and consistently maintained building can serve its community for more than 150 years."

The EMCA plans to install an accessibility ramp at the entrance. This winter the Monkton selectboard awarded the nonprofit \$25,000 in American Rescue Plan Act funds to help finance the ramp.

For more information, visit the EMCA's website, [www.eastmonktonchurch.org](http://www.eastmonktonchurch.org).

*Note: Writer Barbara Bosworth became involved in the East Monkton Church's preservation while she was a graduate student in the University of Vermont Historic Preservation Program in 2016. She wrote the church's nomination to the National Register of Historic Places.*



THE EAST MONKTON Church has stood on this sandy knoll off Church Road since 1867. After a period of decline, local supporters are reviving the building as a spot for various community gatherings.  
Photo by Barbara Bosworth



THE CHURCH BALCONY was expanded to this size in 1920, to be used as a dining area for large oyster suppers and other fundraisers.  
Photo by Barbara Bosworth

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