



BUSINESS RECOGNITION

A Special Supplement to
The Caledonian-Record and
Orleans County Record
highlighting the many successful
businesses of the Northeast Kingdom
and North Country



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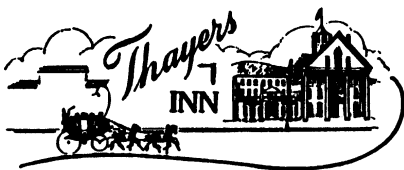
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The production line at Bag Balm, Vermont's Original. Putting the lids on the containers. (File Photo by Amy Ash Nixon)

Vermont's Original: Bag Balm Celebrates 120 Years

New Products,
Same Favorite
Old Salve

BY AMY ASH NIXON
Staff Writer

LYNDONVILLE — The Bag Balm brand of salve in the famous green tin is finding its way to more hands all the time, thanks to new owners who have increased brand awareness, placed the Vermont's Original product in chain stores and through Amazon's website, and are working with a major marketing agency to broaden that reach even farther.

Reid Greenberg, president of the company, still based in Lyndonville, within earshot of its manufacturing facility in the heart of the village, was hired on Aug. 1 of last year and brings to the firm his new commerce experience, ranging from a digital-first mindset to helping implement the 120-year-old business's "first-ever large scale marketing campaign."

The company still turns out its famous golden-toned salve in green tins, in different sizes including tiny ones sold in chain drug stores and at Walmart, and introduced in recent years a line of small items such as lip balm and soap that are widely available now, too.

Bag Balm, rebranded as Vermont's Original, was sold about five years ago to an investor group in Massachusetts.

"We just started working with one of the best marketing agencies in the world, VaynerMedia to help us 'punch above our weight' in terms of marketing and getting our grand brand out in front of a new wave of consumers who are seeking out products with fewer, simpler ingredients, that have a rich, authentic history and stand for something other than just big brands," said Greenberg in a recent interview.

Greenberg said, "We are expecting to launch a natural line of day-use moisturizing lotions (this spring) as well as a Bag Balm® sports tube that is great for cyclists, hikers and runners. Our goal is to innovate around the notion of 'share of skin' know that we want to build one of the best skin-care brands in North America!"

The old farmer's salve that has worked wonders on cow udders for more than a century in the past few years has been introduced to a much wider audience through its new owners. Still, the company intends to keep its local base of operation, the new owners vowed when they bought the company.

The new owners of Bag Balm - equity firms, Gemini Investors of Wellesley, Mass., and Timepiece Capital of Scottsdale, Arizona, along with a handful of individual investors - spent their first year of ownership devising a marketing and distribution strategy to trumpet the brand.

New machinery allows the production line to fill different size jars. They also consolidated much of the manufacturing process into a single facility with plans to expand.



The larger-than-life tin of Bag Balm on one of the company's original buildings in the heart of Lyndonville, now the new Do North Coworking space and soon to be the home to the new Mosaic Restaurant, as well. (File Photo by Amy Ash Nixon)

When Bag Balm came onto the market, there was fast interest by many investors.

A key change in recent years for Bag Balm is labeling to specify the product "for human use."

That has paved the way for the product to take its place on retail, grocery and drug store shelves. Traditional labeling specified the product for cow udders.

Bag Balm has been used by humans for many decades. Research shows uses ranging from eczema and psoriasis to radiation burns in a cancer treatment center.

Bag Balm History

The Norris family started the business in Lyndonville in 1899.

Customers love that the product is made by hand in Vermont, and has an artisanal appeal, from a small company, the new owners said when taking over the company.

The salve contains just four ingredients, according to the Bag Balm/Vermont's Original website: lanolin, which soothes and softens; 8-Hydroxyquinoline Sulfate, a preservative; paraffin wax to bind the ingredients together; and serif, to repair the skin.

On the website for the up-branded Bag Balm, it states, "Some say Vermont's Northeast Kingdom was born out of sheer stubbornness."

"It is gorgeous and mysterious, with a uniquely Vermont ability to endure just about anything, which is a handy thing, since until only about 13,500 years ago, most of it was encased under sheets of ice a solid mile thick," the company's website notes.

The website goes on, "With its far northeast climate, harsh winter weather led to the driest of skin conditions. As you might guess from such an environment, the treasure of the Northeast Kingdom isn't gold or silver, it's

an authentic skin-saving formula called Bag Balm."

From Farm To Fame

"In 1899, rumors flew around the Northeast Kingdom about a miraculous salve for chafed and cracked cow udders concocted by a pharmacist in Wells River," the Bag Balm site continues. "So one fateful morning in 1900, a Lyndonville farmer named John L. Norris saddled his best horse and rode 30 long miles to find out what the fuss was about."

The story goes, "The minute he tried it on the first cow, John Norris knew what he had to do. He scraped up every penny he could lay his rough hands on to buy the formula and all the rights to market it."

"Bag Balm officially set down roots after John hired a product designer to create the distinctive green tin with a cow's head and Vermont's indigenous red clover on the cover," the history continues. "The legend was born, and it was too big to stay in the barn."

The website goes on, "Old locals still talk about how Bag Balm saved everybody's hide in the winter of 1933, when the temperature fell to 50 below zero. In 1937, Admiral Richard Byrd took Bag Balm to the North Pole. During World War II, soldiers used it on their rifles to keep them in shape. After the Twin Towers in New York fell on 9-11, Vermont's Original quietly provided Bag Balm to be massaged into the scratched paws of search dogs, who relentlessly roamed over mountains of rubble looking for survivors."

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The Lebanon location of Mascoma Savings Bank in 1952. (Courtesy Photo)

Mascoma Savings Bank Marks 120 Years As A Mutually Owned Community Bank

BY ROBERT BLECHL
Staff Writer



Not all banks in northern New England that began as community banks remained so. Many closed.

Others changed their structure to bring in stockholders that resulted in a change of mission and often took the community out of community bank.

But not Mascoma Savings Bank, which this year celebrates 120 years as a mutually owned community bank that is still going strong and expanding to meet 21st-century needs, and doing so today in three states.

“We’ve grown over the last several years and have expanded into wealth management,” said Samantha Pause, MSB senior vice-president and chief marketing officer.

In other efforts, community remains at the forefront.

“Mascoma Community Development is a subsidiary where we work with new market tax credits, and we now have that division, which is something very few banks in northern New England are doing.”

That division allows the bank to focus on distressed communities and work toward development and job creation, she said.

MSB began business on April 8, 1899 in Lebanon, in the same building with the National Bank of Lebanon, and continued operating there until 1927, when the space became too small and it moved to a new location, retired MSB CEO Stephen Christy wrote in a historical narrative of the bank.

On the eve of the Great Depression, its assets were \$1.577 million.

“During the next 24 years, the bank witnessed the end of the stock market boom in 1929, weathered the Depression of the early ‘30s, and lived through the Second World War,” wrote Christy.

By 1952, assets increased to \$3.722 million, which jumped to \$10.754 million just over a decade later, in 1965, and to \$18.715 million in 1970.

In 1968, the bank converted to a computer system with its database located in Boston, said Christy.

In 1975, it built its first branch in West Lebanon.

By 1990, with more branches, its assets were \$245 million.

“By 1990, the economy was in recession,” wrote Christy. “New England experienced its worst economy since the Great Depression of the 1930s. Mascoma’s assets peaked at just over \$250 million and then began a four-year decline – the first time the bank’s assets had shrunk in consecutive years since the era of the Great Depression in the 1930s.”

The economy rebounded, though, and in 1996 it opened branches in Vermont, the first time with a physical presence in

the Green Mountain State.

Following the Great Recession of 2008, the bank saw growth of almost \$200 million in 2009 and 2010 as interest rates were at historic lows, said Christy.

Tropical Storm Irene, in 2011, resulted in more than \$26 million in loans to Vermont communities.

In 2011, MSB was named the best place to work in Vermont.

Today, still headquartered in Lebanon, it has two dozen branches, including in the North Country towns of Bethlehem, Littleton and Lancaster, and employs some 325 people.

“Over the last several years, we’ve really expanded our commercial lending area,” said Pause. “We probably have one of the strongest commercial lending teams in northern New England. We have pulled in some really well-established commercial lenders that have worked with Mascoma Bank and are well-versed in what they do.”

Technology has also been a priority.

“Over the last few years, we started to invest more in technology and really take a look at not only the products and services we are providing to our customers, but at becoming more efficient and agile and able to move quickly. We made the commitment that technology is something we will continue to expand.”

The bank also has a loan pro-

duction office in Burlington, and is looking to do more in the Burlington area, and also has a loan production office in Portland, Maine.

The loan production “is our first till in the water” and has much to do with community development, said Pause.

In keeping with its commitment to community, MSB has also become a certified B Corporation, changing its corporate structure with the state of New Hampshire.

“A lot of banks aren’t certified B Corps,” said Pause. “We are a mutual bank and don’t have any stockholders. Becoming a certified B Corp fits in well with the values of a mutual bank. It holds us accountable. We need to make sure we are thinking of the community, customers, employees, and the environment. This makes sure we are trying to be the best for the world and we have to prove it.”

“When someone is looking for a bank, that is the number one reason someone should be banking with us,” she said. “The bank is taking those four factors into consideration when we are making decisions. It’s profit with a purpose.”

The fact MSB is a mutual bank means it has no stockholders and can’t be sold, said Pause.

“That keeps the story going,” she said. “It’s the nice part about working here and we have that commitment from senior management.”



Frank Churchill, the first president of Mascoma Savings Bank. (Courtesy Photo)

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An aerial view of North Country Hospital in Newport City on its Prouty Drive campus.

A Century Of Community Health Care

North Country Hospital Founders Launched Plans For Local Health Care 100 years Ago

BY ROBIN SMITH
 Staff Writer

NEWPORT CITY — In May 1919, a dedicated group of citizens in Vermont’s North Country signed Articles of Association and registered the Newport Hospital Association with the state of Vermont.

One hundred years later, the community hospital organization they formed, now called North Country Health Care, operates North Country Hospital and other facilities. The health care system is preparing to enter its next 100 years of service to the community.

North Country Hospital is a private, nonprofit acute care community hospital serving 22 communities in Essex and Orleans counties, serving more than 27,000 residents.

The hospital is governed by a board of trustees, comprised of community members. The system includes the hospital, outpatient services, physician practices and Derby Green, a skilled nursing care facility.

The early hospital promoters raised funds for several years before breaking ground four years later on May, 1922 at the corner of Highland Avenue and Longview Street, according to a history from the hospital.

Two years later – on July 1, 1924 – the doors opened at the 24-bed Orleans County Memorial Hospital, with five full-time employees and a nursing school. The hospital operated for 49 years, serving not only the county but also many patients from nearby southern Quebec who traveled to Newport for their health care.

“When they set out to build a hospital, the founders wanted local health care,” says Brian Nall, the new CEO and president of the hospital system today.

There were other hospitals in the area during the time that the North Country system operated.

Broadview Hospital was open on Duchess Street between 1947 and 1967, before it became one of the homes of Northeast Kingdom Health Services and then was torn down, according to Vermont’s Northland Journal.

Cottage Hospital in Barton operated between 1932 and 1954, according to the Journal.

In the early 1970s, Orleans and Essex County citizens once again worked to raise funds for a new hospital – one that would have 80 beds, an OB/GYN department, pediatrics ward, intensive care/coronary unit, spacious quarters for radiology, laboratory, physical therapy, a hospital with a fully staffed twenty-four hour emergency service department, and a completely modern surgical suite.

The new North Country Hospital on a 30-acre site on Prouty Drive opened its doors on Jan. 5, 1974.

Since 1974, expansion and redevelopment of the original facility has included the imaging services, physical therapy, ancillary departments, library, business office, information systems, new



One hundred years ago, a committee of determined local residents decided to build a hospital. Several years later they opened the Orleans County Memorial Hospital on Highland Avenue. Another generation built the current facility on Prouty Drive which opened in 1974. (Courtesy Photo)

ambulatory surgery suites, new birthing rooms, a mobile MRI site and three new buildings for physician practices in a medical village adjacent to the hospital.

While continuing to replace old diagnostic equipment with new and to renovate and refit hospital space, hospital leaders planned for the future.

In September 2001 the hospital broke ground for the largest building project since the hospital was built.

No longer a high-inpatient, long-length of stay facility, the hospital needed space for a wide range of services not even thought of in the past.

Completed in 2003, the new 28,614-square-foot addition included a state-of-the-art surgical suite, new emergency department with indoor ambulance bays, outpatient services, and central sterilization and distribution department.

In 2004, the cafeteria was renovated and a complete remodeling was done of the Maternal Child Center on the second floor. In 2005 an expansion of diagnostic services into the old ER space was completed and a new suite for the urology practice was built in the Medical Arts Building.

Following a tremendous outpouring of community support, the 4,000-square-foot ground floor space became a dialysis center in 2006.

In 2010 a new medical office building was added to the medical village.

Built to deliver primary care using the Vermont Blueprint for Health patient medical home model, the 22,202-square-foot building now houses 14 physicians and associate clinicians, a lab, primary care coordinator, social worker,

dietitian, community health, and patient financial services.

These practices, as well as five others, were officially certified as Patient Centered Medical Homes in 2011.

The hospital remains independent but collaborates with other hospitals in the One-Care Vermont single-payer system for Medicaid patients.

Nall said North Country is continuing to assess whether One-Care should be expanded for all of its patients who rely on Medicare and private insurance. The hospital board will decide at the end of this year if North Country should go all in with One-Care Vermont or pull out.

Nall said hospitals like North Country provide much more service locally than the founders ever dreamed possible due to technology and the talented staff and doctors. The medical knowledge doubles every 18 months, Nall said, and that means that hospitals have to plan strategically each year, rather than every three to five years like in the past.

Wendy Franklin, NCH director of development and community relations, is working on plans for the centennial year. A committee of hospital and community members are beginning preparations for events each month to celebrate the centennial.

Medical Staff President Dr. Umair Malik said Nall would not have come to North Country Health Care and NCH in its 100th year until he recognized its ongoing successes.

“What really keeps this hospital going? It’s the community,” Malik said.

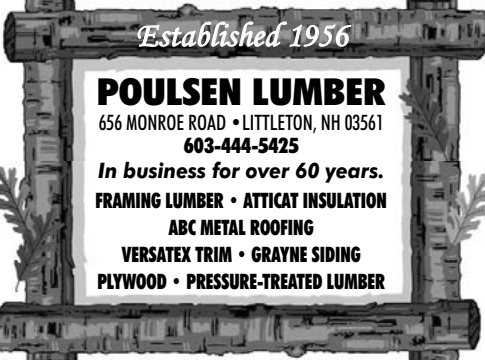
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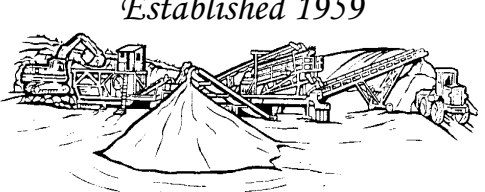
North Country Health Care has a new president and CEO, Brian Nall, to begin a second century of health care at North Country Hospital and its related services and facilities. (Photo by Robin Smith)

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Gauthier's Pharmacy in St. Johnsbury continues its independence into its 85th year. On the job Thursday, Jan. 17, 2019, are, from left, Angela Calkins, owner Carol Novick and Anne Leverette. (Photo by Dana Gray)

Gauthier's Pharmacy Maintaining Community Health For 85 Years

BY DANA GRAY
Staff Writer

ST. JOHNSBURY — One wouldn't need to walk too far from the Railroad Street location of Gauthier's Pharmacy to find another place to get a prescription filled, maybe only a hundred yards.

It would be a much longer journey, though, to find another pharmacy that is independent and small enough to specialize in customer service, from the first-name basis greetings and warm smiles from employees to the near non-existent waiting time.

In fact, the closest independent pharmacy Gauthier's owner Carol Novick and her staff could think of is in Rutland.

After 85 years in the business, Gauthier's (pronounced go-cheez) is the last of its kind in the region. "We're losing ground, Novick said. "It's not the big boys we're fighting; it's the insurance companies, the reimbursement rates. It's a daily challenge."

This is Novick's 30th year as a partial partner in the business; she assumed full ownership in 1992. She's been on the job long enough to be assisting the next generation of the customers she started with.

The business began under the ownership of Alphonse Gauthier Sr. His son, Alphonse, took it over, followed by Herbert Oliver.

When Novick took over, she continued the business as an "apothecary" drug store, meaning all products available, even on the counters that line either side of the retail space, are health-related.

Gauthier's employs six people: two pharmacists and four technicians. Together they maintain a friendly atmosphere — employee Angela Calkins was decorating for Valentine's Day last week — and provide as pleasant an experience as someone can have at a business people patron because they aren't feeling well.

Novick's co-pharmacist, J.P. Fournier, will be retiring in March. "He certainly deserves it," said Novick. "He's been working long and hard. He is a wonderful, wonderful pharmacist. He's just made it a lot easier."

One of Novick's employees has been with her since almost



Gauthier's Pharmacy on Railroad Street in St. Johnsbury has been operating for 85 years. (Photo by Dana Gray)

Novick's start as sole owner. Fatima Terzic began working at Gauthier's 25 years ago this year.

"We have tremendous support in the community," said Novick. "Once it hits the pocket books we understand. I have some very hardworking employees who do everything in their power to help me keep costs down."

Novick said people appreciate the personal service. She calls it their specialty at Gauthier's.

"We bubble-pack medication for a large number of patients who otherwise wouldn't be able to independently take their medication," said Novick. "It does help quite a few patients."

Gauthier's also works with Northeastern Vermont Regional Hospital and the Community Connections program to assist low income, uninsured people with their prescriptions.

"We work with Hospice," said Novick. "We have a fabulous hos-

pace program and it's really our pleasure to be able to help."

Despite the challenges in operating an independent pharmacy, Novick said the business brings her joy.

"Just the iteration with the patients, knowing that we are an established part of the community," said Novick. "A day doesn't go by that we don't get a compliment."

The economics of health care are not in Gauthier's favor.

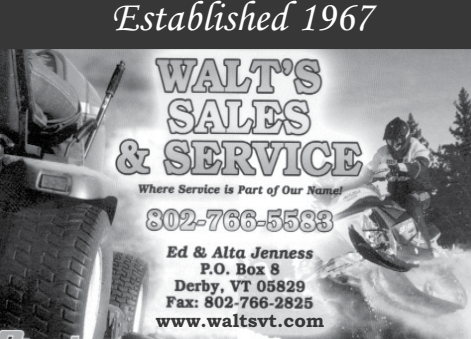
"Reimbursement rates are consistently going down," said Novick. "It's very hard for me to continue to run a business."

"For years I've said; things have skewed to such a ridiculous extent. I believe in competition and the capitalist way, but we don't seem to be leaning that way; we're down to one or two giants, management companies. They've inched their way into health care and they have become our bosses."



St. Johnsbury Town Manager Chad Whitehead picks up a prescription at Gauthier's Pharmacy on Railroad Street in St. Johnsbury on Thursday, Jan. 17, 2019, with assistance from Angela Calkins. (Photo by Dana Gray)

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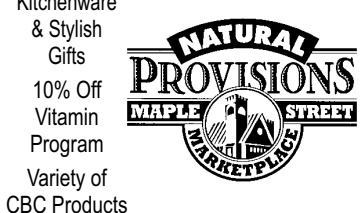
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Crosstown Motors general manager Tom Ritchotte holds the dealership's Fiat Chrysler Automobiles' 2018 Customer First Award for Excellence, which it received in recognition of quality customer service. Located in Littleton, Crosstown celebrates its 55th anniversary this year. (Photo by Paul Hayes)

Crosstown Motors Celebrates 55 Years

BY PAUL HAYES
Staff Writer

LITTLETON — Crosstown Motors continues to run on all cylinders.

Celebrating its 55th anniversary this year, Crosstown remains one of the region's most successful, most trustworthy and most reliable dealerships, offering Chrysler, Dodge, FIAT, Jeep and Ram lines of vehicles.

They are award winning — they have received Chrysler's Customer First Award for Excellence multiple times — and are one of the top Ram heavy duty truck dealers in the northeast (New York, New Jersey and all of New England).

The secret, said General Manager Tom Ritchotte, is service.

"I'm going to say it's the way we treat people, the way we treat our customers," said Ritchotte, noting that his staff of "around 26" full timers in the sales, finance and service departments are experienced, long-serving and dedicated. "They create repeat business. Our customers keep coming back. Probably 80 percent of our business is repeat business."

Crosstown's tradition of excellence dates back to 1964, when it was founded as a Chrysler-Plymouth dealership by auto mechanic Phil Cross and motel owner John Hall Sr.

Over the years the business grew. Crosstown began selling Dodge trucks around 1972 and AMC Jeep in 1977. They also briefly sold Subaru.

Originally located behind the Jax Jr. movie theater in downtown Littleton, the business moved to West Main Street (with a second site on Union Street) before relocating to its current location at 650 Meadow Street in 1984.

In 2004 the business was sold



Crosstown Motors in Littleton is one of the top Ram heavy duty truck dealers in the northeast region including New York and New Jersey. The dealership celebrates its 55th anniversary this year. (Photo by Paul Hayes)

to Abel Toll and the late Ronney Lyster, owners of the AutoSaver Group, which has 15 dealership locations in three states (Vermont, New Hampshire and New York) including Littleton Chevrolet and AutoSaver Imports in Littleton and Quality Mitsubishi, AutoSaver Outlet and AutoSaver Accessory Center in St. Johnsbury.

Crosstown helped set the standard for other AutoSaver Group dealerships.

"It was one of our first stores," said Toll. "We model our other stores to some degree after Crosstown, the way the store is operated."

Contributing to Crosstown's success has been the business's willingness to change with the times. Ritchotte, the general manager, has embraced the Internet as a sales tool.

"I would say that the business is changing quite a bit on the sales side, with the internet," Ritchotte said. "The best thing to do is to join it and don't fight it. If you fight it, you'll end up in last place."

Looking ahead Crosstown will continue to make changes and adjustments. This year they will offer a new line of Jeep pick-up trucks.

But they will continue to rely on what got them here, too: Their staff.

It's not just them selling and servicing cars either. It's their work ethic and commitment to the company, Ritchotte said.

For instance, during a recent Sunday snowstorm, when the dealership was closed, some employees still showed up, spending the day clearing a foot of snow off the lot, in preparation for the next day's business.

"There are two employees down there plowing the yard, they'll be there all day, they weren't asked to do that, they just know it has to be done," Ritchotte said. "I've always given the employees the ability to make decisions, and not have to ask what to do every step of the way, because we all know the end goal: Sell the car, service the car, make the customers happy."



Crosstown Motors in Littleton celebrates its 55th anniversary this year. (Photo by Paul Hayes)



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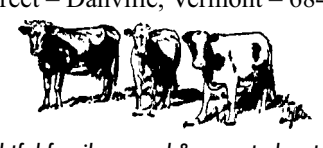
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The Weidmann plant located on Route 5 in St. Johnsbury. (Photo by Todd Wellington)

Weidmann Turns 50, Goes Green

BY TODD WELLINGTON
Staff Writer

Weidmann Electrical Technology Inc. in St. Johnsbury is celebrating its 50th birthday this year.

The company was founded on Oct. 1, 1969 by local residents Gordon Mills and Robert Fuehrer and was purchased by Weidmann in 1971. It was known for many years as EHV-Weidmann and the company is now working on plans for a birthday celebration this year.

Weidmann's local economic impact and charitable giving are well known. But in recent years the manufacturer of transformer insulation has also been quietly taking steps to help the environment.

"I don't know if a lot of people are aware of this but a hundred percent of the material that goes into our core products is 100 percent renewable - it's wood pulp," said Zach Hatch, Weidmann's vice president of manufacturing for the America's region.

"Of that, we recycle internally, about four million pounds of our own material and re-use it," said Hatch. "We've been working internally and with Efficiency Vermont over the last 10-15 years and we've been able to reduce our electric footprint here quite a bit. And also, we just made a transition from using oil for our boilers to compressed natural gas so we're burning a lot cleaner fuel now."

In addition to a greener footprint, business at Weidmann is good and the company, currently employing 290 people, is hiring.

"We have eight positions open," said Hatch. "We've been fortunate here, and I think across the Americas, to be really busy with the economy being in a fairly strong state and the electrical infrastructure is quite old so the utilities are faced with having to replace a lot of transformers."



Zach Hatch, Weidmann's vice president of manufacturing for the America's region (Photo by Todd Wellington)

Hatch started at Weidmann in 2004 in the St. Johnsbury plant finance department and worked his way up to vice president in 2015 when he replaced the retiring John Goodrich. The job puts him in charge of manufacturing at not only the St. Johnsbury plant but also Weidmann plants in Ohio, Mexico and Brazil.

Hatch says that in addition to traditional utility companies upgrading old power substations the emerging alternative energy markets such as wind power or solar power installations have also been good customers.

"You usually need to transfer that (alternative) power and when you transmit that power you need transformers," said Hatch.

The material the Weidmann plant makes is designed for large

scale transformers and the company also offers engineering and design services for clients across the globe.

"It's a very specialized kind of discipline," said Hatch.

In 2010, the Swiss corporation which owns Weidmann invested 40 million dollars to expand and equip the St. Johnsbury plant facility with new technology, allowing it to compete in the global market place. The upgrade of the St. Johnsbury facility in 2010 to include an 800-ton paperboard press moved the facility into the modern era.

In addition to transformer insulation, workers at the St. Johnsbury plant also provide diagnostic services to electric utilities by testing and evaluating the health of electrical transformers and their components.



ABOVE: Weidmann employees and public officials break ground in May 2011 for a building to house a new 800-ton press that was installed at Weidmann. RIGHT: Construction on the project is shown later that summer. (File Photo)



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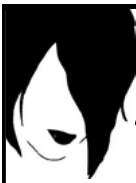
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The Village Gun Store in Whitefield celebrates its 45th anniversary this year. The business was bought by Josh and Nicole D'Agnese in 2014 and remains committed to offering superior customer service and competitive prices. (Photo by Paul Hayes)

Village Gun Store Celebrates 45 Years

Owners Josh And Nicole D'Agnese Mark Their First Five Years

BY PAUL HAYES
Staff Writer

WHITEFIELD — Five years after changing hands, the Village Gun Store remains a mom-and-pop success story.

Nicole and Josh D'Agnese are the mom and pop. Josh works the counter, Nicole handles the paperwork. They purchased the store in 2014 and remain committed to offering the same superior customer service and deep discounts that have drawn generations of gun buyers.

"We have crazy good prices, we're very personal here, and we're all about integrity," said Josh, a 13-year Army veteran who served three combat tours, two in Iraq and one in Afghanistan.

He emphasized his commitment to integrity.

"We don't do the whole used car salesman bit," he said. "We don't push them into buying certain firearms. We see what they need it for, we direct them that way, and we set them up for success," said D'Agnese, adding, "One of our core values [in the military] was selfless service."

A second generation gun dealer, D'Agnese has combined old and new ways of doing business. Over the past five years, he and his wife have maintained Village Gun's in-store inventory — improving displays, adding new products, maintaining robust selection — while also growing their on-line sales.

Village Gun has embraced internet commerce. The business sells firearms and accessories through its online store, which was launched two years ago, and via online auction sites. Those outlets have allowed Village Gun, which already drew customers from across the region, to expand its reach nationwide and internationally.

"You've gotta update and stay with current stuff," said D'Agnese. "I could survive without it, but it's a multiplier."

Still, the store's bread and butter remains the local customers, a diverse collection of people interested in purchasing firearms, ammunition and more: Hunters, target shooters, law enforcement, military, collectors, and those seeking personal protection.

He noted that a growing demographic for his business has been



The Village Gun Store is located on King Square in Whitefield, N.H. The store turns 45 this year. The business was bought by Josh and Nicole D'Agnese in 2014. (Photo by Paul Hayes)



Josh D'Agnese, owner of Village Gun Store in Whitefield, N.H. (Photo by Paul Hayes)

women.

"There are a lot of first time female buyers," he said. "Quite a few tell me they went to other places, and usually one of two things happened to them: Either they're quickly pressured into buying something they don't want, or sometimes [other sellers] don't want to deal with them because they're women."

D'Agnese frowns on that sort of dismissive behavior. His aim, he said, is to treat all of his customers fairly, equally and with respect.

"We're very personal, especially a first time buyer, it's a lot of pressure and they get intimidated, so we make sure we get to their level," he said.

In that way, the D'Agneses are carrying on the tradition of store founders Stan and Sandy Holz, who arrived from New York City and opened the Village Gun Store in 1974. Originally located next door, in the current R-Place Bagel Shop and Deli space, it moved to its current location at 4 King Square in 1984. The Holzes retired after 40 years in 2014.

Looking ahead, D'Agnese is optimistic that the Village Gun Store

will continue to thrive. It will remain a family owned business for the foreseeable future with he, his wife, settled into the area with their two daughters, ages 11 and 4, and son, age 7.

The store's business cards include the slogan "carrying on a proud patriotic tradition."

He hopes to keep making improvements and adding services — the store resumed its practice of issuing hunting, fishing, OHRV and snowmobile permits last summer — and will continue to ride out the ups and downs of the industry, with gun sales peaking when regulations and restrictions are under consideration.

Those second amendment issues will no doubt mean that political candidates will continue to make campaign stops at Village Gun, as they have for decades, but D'Agnese expressed no interest in using those visits to elevate his own public standing. He simply wants to do his job, help others, and live out his American dream in the North Country.

Said D'Agnese, "I'm just a solider."

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A rack of shotguns are on display inside the Village Gun Store in Whitefield. The store celebrates its 45th anniversary this year. (Photo by Paul Hayes)

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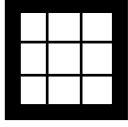
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Josh Fontaine grabs a fence post after Mark Goodridge runs it through the saw at Goodridge Lumber in Albany. (Photo by Robin Smith)

At 45 Years, Goodridge Lumber Continues NEK Traditions

Albany Sawmill
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Landowners,
Loggers And
Truckers Within
75-mile Radius

BY ROBIN SMITH
Staff Writer

ALBANY — Goodridge Lumber continues to be a driving force in the regional forestry, logging and trucking industries.

The family-owned and operated business with a sawmill on Bailey-Hazen Road is entering its 45th year.

Colleen Goodridge as president leads the operation, with sons Doug, Mark and Brian and nephew Josh Evans the core of the workforce. They are joined by full-time employees Gary Potter, Josh Fontaine and Jeremy Washer, who Colleen considers members of the extended family.

And Colleen Goodridge's sister Barb Ross, mother of Fontaine, works two days a week in the office to round out the staff.

Goodridge Lumber relies on the strengths, skills and talents of each person on the staff.

Orders are very strong in the retail and wholesale lumber business, Goodridge said in a recent interview at the office next to the sawmill.

The sawmill exclusively produces products from white cedar, a regionally grown softwood that resists decay and insect infestation. And because it's a native Northeast Kingdom wood, it replenishes itself naturally.

It's a lighter less dense wood as well, she said. An eight-foot cedar log weighs much less than an eight-foot pine log due to the air in its core.

And that means it's less expensive to truck and move.

Plus, Goodridge said it provides a better insulating value in log homes.

"It's a very beautiful wood inside and out."

Most of the cedar that comes to the sawmill is harvested and trucked from within a 75-mile radius, coming from 100 different landowners and trucking



Colleen Goodridge shows details of white cedar, a locally harvested wood which Goodridge Lumber uses exclusively for its products at its Albany sawmill. (Photo by Robin Smith)

companies in the region, making Goodridge Lumber a hub of the logging and forest industry in this region, Goodridge said.

Goodridge Lumber focused on providing logs for log homes as well as other products.

At the beginning of the Great Recession in 2008, the demand for new construction dropped off.

And even though demand did rebound, the cost of building a new rural home today is more than some want, after also paying



for the higher cost of permits, connecting to the electric grid and developing a septic system that will meet stringent state standards.

Also there are a lot of older homes on the market that come with septic and electric service in place, Goodridge said.

Today, people are buying older homes that are structurally sound and making them over, using cedar products to renovate inside and out. "And making them just like new," Goodridge said.

"That's very, very common. ... That was a major part of our retail sales."

The company discovered early on that they were providing a great product for new or renovated homes but not the construction or renovation know-how. Family members understood this first hand, because they all have log

homes and needed the assistance of experts in construction and maintenance.

Maintenance of a log home begins the day that the logs are delivered, Goodridge said.

So Goodridge Lumber partners with Perma-Chink to offer an annual seminar for prospective home builders and renovators using their products, Goodridge said.

The partnership is entering its 21st year. This year the seminar is June 1 and 2 at the company's Irasburg warehouse.

They attract people who travel hours to come here, scheduling their vacations so they can attend the seminar and also enjoy the NEK, she said.

The industry needs an influx of young people to take on the logging and trucking jobs and also mill jobs in other companies in the industry, Goodridge says.

She is an advisor to the North Country Career Center programs and has encouraged the Lake Region Union High School board to promote these careers.

She is active in the industry, serving as vice president of the Vermont Forest Products Association, past president of the Northeast Loggers Association and an appointed member of a board exploring the viability of the farm and forest industry.

Goodridge is hoping that the Legislature will not make it harder for landowners and farmers to harvest wood and maintain their lands, saying that's an important way to preserve the Vermont open landscape.

Forestry industries need to be "appreciated, valued and supported," she says.



Off-loading white cedar logs at Goodridge Lumber in Albany. The sawmill depends on regional logging and trucking operations. (Photo by Robin Smith)

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Brandon Boudreau and Bob Desrochers stand outside the office building of Fairbanks Mill in St. Johnsbury on Monday, Jan. 14, 2019. The business will celebrate its 40th anniversary this year. Desrochers began the business in 1979, and Boudreau bought it from him last fall. The brick building behind the men is a former Fairbanks Scales building that the Fairbanks Mill now utilizes. (Photo by Dana Gray)

Fairbanks Mill's Hydro Project Expertise Flowing Strong At 40

New Owner
 Leading the
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 That Specializes
 In Hydro-related
 Projects

BY DANA GRAY
 Staff Writer

ST. JOHNSBURY — Fairbanks Mill Inc. has had three locations in its 40-year existence — none of them far from the Sleepers River — and recently welcomed its second owner, but its name and reputation for quality work have endured, positioning the company with a long and diverse resumé of general contractor projects well for the future.

"We are a specialized millwright service in the hydroelectric market," said new owner Brandon Boudreau, with a "jack of all trades" skillset to address a variety of projects. The company employs five people.

Boudreau, of Bradford, was previously employed with Great River Hydro, but bought Fairbanks Mill last fall from the man who started the company, Robert Desrochers, in 1979.

Desrochers, of St. Johnsbury, continues to offer his services to the 40-year-old company and Boudreau is grateful.

"It's a wonderful feeling that he didn't take off for Florida," said Boudreau.

The men had worked together about eight years ago when Boudreau was employed by Fairbanks Mill, so he had an insider's knowledge about the company. The two had contact over the years since.

"When I got serious about selling he got serious about buying," said Desrochers. "I'm really excited about someone like Brandon taking over."

Desrochers started the company in 1979 at the old Fairbanks Scales saw mill site on the Sleepers River in North Danville. This location gave him the business name. His crews tackled projects related to water power, concrete, sitework, carpentry, and landscape construction. Growth occurred in the mid-1980s, and Desrochers moved to the Emerson Falls (Sleeper's River) business park. He had his highest number of employees at this time, as many as 25, and Fairbanks Mill handled some large projects throughout northern New England.

Desrochers said "a bit of a recession" in the 1990s caused him to scale back the business. In 1994, Fairbanks Mill moved to its current location on Factory Road, utilizing a large brick building originally built for use by Fairbanks Scales along the Sleeper's River. It was at this time, Desrochers said, that the business developed more of a focus on hydro project work.

"Our hydro service end of things was more in demand," he said.

The company's website boasts, "Quite simply, Fairbanks Mill,



In this photo from August 2016, a crew from Fairbanks Mill works to install a new turbine runner at the Green Mountain Power Hydro Station. (Courtesy Photo)

Inc.'s experience in the hydro power industry in New England is unmatched."

They've worked on dams, penstock systems, on-site powerhouses, turbines and generators. In October they built a fish passage at the Green Mountain Power Passumpsic Station to get fish downstream of the Passumpsic River dam. This month, a crew will go to Sebec, Maine for a generator installation at a hydroelectric site.

The company's history of non-water-related work is extensive and includes projects at important community institutions like Catamount Arts, Fairbanks Museum & Planetarium and St. Johnsbury Academy, where Fairbanks Mill workers helped build the fieldhouse.

Projects unrelated to water continue for the company, as well. The first job Boudreau considered when assuming owner-

ship was the filling of a large, underground space at the corner of Eastern Avenue and Main Street in St. Johnsbury.

Exactly when it was built is not known, but it hadn't been used for many years and its integrity was a major concern for the town.

Town Manager Chad Whitehead said last November, "It's eventually all gonna cave in. It's getting to a point where it's making us nervous."

Said Desrochers, "There's been a lot of people scared of it for a long time." He described inviting people into the space, who would only enter so far while keeping an eye on the decaying ceiling of flagstone and metal.

Whitehead made the decision to go with Fairbanks Mill without seeking other companies through a bid process because he said the specialty work required for the job was unique to Fairbanks' project expertise and experience.



Brandon Boudreau and Bob Desrochers are inside the office of Fairbanks Mill in St. Johnsbury on Monday, Jan. 14, 2019. The business will celebrate its 40th anniversary this year. Desrochers began the business in 1979, and Boudreau bought it from him last fall. (Photo by Dana Gray)

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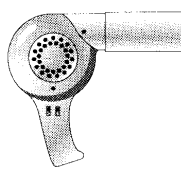
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Denny Fekay, founder of Topic of the Town restaurant in Littleton. He and his wife, Dot, sold the business to his daughter several years ago, but he still stays involved, doing cooking and baking. (Photo By Robert Blechl)

Topic Of The Town Celebrates 35 Years On Littleton's Main Street

BY ROBERT BLECHL
Staff Writer

A gathering place for meetings or for a meal with friends.
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In 2019, Topic of the Town, a family-run business, celebrates 35 years on Main Street and a recent addition of a family member into the fold, marking the fourth generation of hands on deck.

When Denny and Dot Fekay founded it in 1984, the goal was to run it and sell it after a decade. They ended up staying put and growing a business.

"I figured I'd move on after 10 years," he said. "It's incredible how fast that time went."

Topic is located at 25 Main St., in the Tilton Opera Block.

The Fekays bought the space from Emilio Porfido, who had run Emilio's Restaurant, the previous eatery that had been there.

After several years in operation, they bought the adjacent building after Penny's Clothing went out of business.

Topic of the Town has been home to the annual Fekay Family Feast, which offers free holiday meals to residents.

"We served 500 people at the last Christmas dinner," said Fekay. "We've been doing about that for the past five or six years."

Each Wednesday afternoon, Topic hosts a luncheon for the Littleton Rotary Club, which features guests speakers that have included New Hampshire Supreme Court justices and state and federal elected officials.

Presidential candidates have also visited, among them former New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie, in 2015.

Themes are also part of the restaurant, which has held an annual St. Patty's Day buffet and a Middle Eastern recipes night.



Topic of the Town celebrates 35 years in Littleton. (Photo By Robert Blechl)

"We have a buffet every Wednesday night," said Fekay.

A barbecue night is also held and Topic also offers catering and take-out food.

Denny taught the family how to cook and they keep Topic of the Town going.

About a decade ago, he sold the restaurant to his daughter, Ashlea Miller, who's been running it ever since.

"I cook and I bake and I back up now, but I'm not the main guy," said Fekay.

In the past five years, a new addition has come on board — Naveh Miller, Fekay's great-granddaughter, who buses

tables.

More than three decades on, he said he tried to estimate how many people have been served at Topic.

About five years ago, he estimates close to a million eggs have been broken for breakfast and other meals, a number that by now has probably surpassed the million mark.

Topic of the Town serves breakfast, lunch and dinner.

It is open from 6 a.m. to noon Sunday, 6 a.m. to 2 p.m. Monday, Tuesday and Thursday; and 6 a.m. to 8 p.m. Wednesday, Friday and Saturday.



Topic of the Town sits in the heart of downtown Littleton. (File Photo By Robert Blechl)

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Ruggco Construction, Inc. Celebrates 30 Years Of Working With Good People

BY ROSIE SMITH
Staff Writer

When Cynthia and Larry Ruggles were married in 1988, Larry decided to leave his job at EHV-Weidmann and try something new – the building business. What started out as L. Ruggles Building in Lyndonville, later became Ruggco Construction, Inc., now located in Barnet. The Ruggles have celebrated 30 years of marriage, along with 30 years of operating their successful business venture.

Larry always wanted to be an architect; it was his passion. When he was in high school at Lyndon Institute, his teacher, Norm Leggie inspired him to look toward that career path. Unfortunately, at that time it wasn't a possibility, so Larry decided the next best thing was to be a builder.

When he started building houses, he found it wasn't an easy thing to do. He hit the ground running, but did not have a lot of experience. Larry was fortunate to meet a lot of good people who would work for him – "they taught me a lot," he said.

"I had a passion for business as much as building," Larry said. "I was excited to be around big construction."

For big construction, Larry knew he needed to be bonded. It was an involved process – you have to be financially able, so the bonding company can be comfortable supporting you. Once your business is issued a bond, if you don't work out or can get the job done, the bonding company has to cover the bill.

Two of Larry's first big projects were done at the Calvin Coolidge Homestead in Plymouth, Vt. Upgrades were done to the Plymouth Cheese Factory, which was opened by Calvin's father, John Coolidge in 1890; and the historic porch at the meeting house was restored to its original condition. After these projects, Larry was inspired to do bigger and better things.

When the Caledonia County Fairgrounds Grandstand burned down, Ruggco was hired to rebuild the structure. This project didn't require a bond, but it did open up more bonding potential. Larry also

did a school project in Newfane, Vt., working there throughout an entire summer, meeting deadlines, etc. to get the job completed. This also expanded his bonding possibilities. When a business has a reputation for getting the job done, it becomes favorable to a bonding company, and adds security for the owner of the project, knowing that time, budgets, etc., will stay within the requirements of contract. After several projects he had the capacity to bond up to \$15 million, opening up many more opportunities.

Larry explained that if you failed to live up to bonding contract, it would be the last time. It's like the FDIC of the construction business; the customer needs to be protected. The worse thing is for a bonding company to have to pay off a project that isn't completed by your business (deadlines, budgets, etc., not met) because then the bonding company can come back at you and take all your assets. "It's one of the most risky businesses to be in," he explained.

Larry has multiple contractors for multiple projects. For 2018, eight projects were taking place at the same time, with two carrying over to 2019; one project was priced at over \$7 million.

Larry said he never really works much locally now – 99.9 percent of the businesses' work is outside Caledonia County. Ruggco has had lots of military work, federal government and GSA contracts, including a project with the Social Security office in Montpelier. Ruggco has also done projects on three border stations.

Some of his larger projects in Vermont include construction work for the makers of Heady Topper beer (The Alchemist) in Stowe; Lawson's Finest Liquids in Waitsfield, and Topnotch Resort in Stowe. Ruggco renovated Topnotch's restaurant, registration and dining areas, restrooms and lounge, at a cost of \$15 million, completing the project in 7 months.

Another big project took place just off Route 4 in Woodstock, Vt., building the high-end 506 On the River Inn for a family from Africa. The 60,000 square-foot building needed to look residential. It was designed in Nairobi, where everything was done in metric measurements. The project took Ruggco three years to build. The owners also have other resorts in Kenya, Zanzibar and Berlin. The owner and his partner established the first business which brought people to Africa on tours. The hotel was voted the #1 Best Hotel Resort in 2015 in Vermont by Condé Nast Traveler, whose readers rate the top hotels in New England. 506 On the River Inn was also rated #2 in the United States of all newly-constructed buildings. No other Vermont hotel was even considered.

Looking back over the years, Larry said, "There's been a lot of great projects; I feel fortunate to have done them."

He explains that 30 years later, things are a lot more complicated than they use to be. He said the construction business can be really stressful; "there are more money woes in projects; lots of cuts, cuts, cuts; the work is expected to go a lot faster, even though you can't miss anything."

Larry now controls all projects with a master program, ProContractor. The program is given all the information for a project — the blue print showing



Larry Ruggles controls all projects for his business, Ruggco Construction, with a master program, ProContractor. The program is given all the information for a project, then breaks it down so Larry can see all estimates, what kind and how much of materials needed, etc., down to the last detail. (Photo By Rosie Smith)

dimensions, materials to be used, costs, etc. ProContractor processes all that information and breaks it down so Larry can see all estimates, what kind and how much materials are needed, etc., down to the last detail. That information is then tied to the project. It also enables him to revisit the program over and over again, seeking information he needs as the project goes forward.

Larry tries to visit all worksites as often as he can. Plans for the future include installation of feed cameras on all jobs so he can watch the entire project being done, right from his Barnet workspace.

Larry would like to help other contractors make their contracts with their owners better. "If I ever slow down, I want to help contractors; make sure their project contracts with owners are solid." Still, Larry is not sure if he'll ever retire. Larry's wife Cynthia and he are "on our sixth, five-year plan" for retirement.

"Most people don't hear much about us," he said. Larry was working with a contractor in Georgia who told him, "If you want to be successful, don't ever play where you eat." Sometimes, interaction can be difficult, which is why he takes on projects that aren't close to home. "A niche market in what we do," he explained. He likes to keep doing business with the same people he has been working with over the years.

"I've got good sub-contractors; good people working for me; and 99 percent of my clients are good people," Larry concludes. "I've seen every part of Vermont; all the roads, met a lot of people in a lot of towns. I think back to all the people I've met. I couldn't have connected with as many people as I have in 30 years."



When Ruggco finished the renovations and work on Topnotch Resort in Stowe, the business gave Larry Ruggles the old signage, which now hangs as a memento in his workplace. (Photo By Rosie Smith)

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David Patoine in his office at Calendar Brook Cabinetry. (Courtesy Photo)

Calendar Brook Cabinetry Turns 40

Calendar Brook Cabinetry, the cabinet shop founded by Master Craftsman David Patoine, celebrates 40 years in business this year. From a high school kid with a knack for working wood to a successful business owner/employer and civic-minded community stalwart, Patoine has built Calendar Brook Cabinetry (CBC) on a reputation for excellence, integrity, and ingenuity.

Patoine's love of wood-crafting developed early, fueled by Lyndon Institute's building-trades program. While still in high school, he turned his family home's basement into a workshop for his newfound passion, later moving into the garage until there was no room for his parents' cars. In 1978, at age 19 and only 16 months after graduating from LI, he built a small workshop next to the Calendar Brook on the family's Sutton property and in 1979 Calendar Brook Cabinetry was born.

In 1985, having outgrown his Sutton space, Patoine bought a land lot on Route 5 at the St. Johnsbury/Lyndon line and built a much larger building, housing his apartment and new shop, and hiring his first employees to help meet the growing

demand for his custom-designed kitchens, hand-crafted furniture, and decorative millwork. The business continued to grow over the next 30 plus years, taking over all the living spaces in the building, requiring additions and the construction of a large storage shed. Maintaining strong relationships with customers, businesses, vendors, contractors, and employees – (including his LI shop teacher Bob Jackson for 14 years and Chad Sterling at 24 years!), has been a hallmark of the enterprise, as has been giving back to the community through charitable donations for nonprofits, fundraising drives, and youth organizations.

Patoine's four decades of being Calendar Brook Cabinetry has resulted in at least 873 custom kitchens built – the number continues to grow – for many homes all over New England, New York, and New Jersey, and even Florida. His craftsman's touch can also be seen in many other special custom projects like the Dr. John H. Elliott Memorial Library and other cabinetry in Lyndon Institute; the restoration of the windows and millwork at the St.

Johnsbury Athenaeum; the grand staircase of Brantview – the Fairbanks ancestral-home-turned-dormitory at St. Johnsbury Academy as well as cabinetry in Streeter Hall and the Grace Stuart Orcutt Library; the stained-glass window frames of the Cobleigh Library; cabinetry at NVRH and in the lobbies and offices of scores of banks and businesses throughout Vermont and beyond. CBC even refurbished two vintage diner cars from the railroad's golden era, transforming them from bare metal hulls to luxurious mahogany-paneled dining sanctuaries with elaborate molding and details.

These days Patoine, who just turned 60, still maintains his old-school ways: drawing plans out by hand on graph paper and mapping out his "cut lists" in spiral-bound notebooks. There's a bookcase in his office that holds every single one of those notebooks containing his hand-drawn measurements and plans for every project Calendar Brook Cabinetry has ever built.

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The mobile operating room built by Mobile Medical for Operation Smile in Mexico. (Photo by Amy Ash Nixon)



Mobile Medical International Corporation headquarters are located on Route 2 East in St. Johnsbury. (Courtesy Photo)

On The Rise Again: Mobile Medical International Corporation Shines At 25

New Business Model Ushers Specialty Firm Into New Era

BY TODD WELLINGTON
Staff Writer

Say Happy Birthday to Mobile Medical International Corporation. The Portland Street manufacturer of portable medical suites turns 25 years old this year and, according to CEO Jeff Paquet, business is good.

“It’s been a fantastic year,” said Paquet, who took over in June 2017 following a company reorganization. Since that time, the Mobile Medical payroll has grown from 15 to 22 employees and the company’s shift from a sales model to a leasing model has gone well. “We increased our leasing revenue by over 200 percent this last year,” said Paquet. “We had a very strong year, a very profitable year.” “We’ve been leasing these units for a long time when we were not able to sell them to people and really, it was a case of the market which kept telling us, ‘We would really rather lease them.’ Rather than trying to build and sell the units there was a much larger market to lease them and it’s a far more profitable business,” said Paquet. Mobile Medical currently has nine surgical or sterilization suites in its leasing fleet and they are all under contract, which has set the company up for further growth. “We are now in the process of building two new units for the fleet that will go into service in the summer and fall and those should probably be booked by the time they are ready to be operational,” said Paquet.

Driving the company’s growth are hospitals that are undergoing renovations. “There are thousands of hospital’s across the United States that are in some state of renovation all the time,” said Paquet. “Rather than facing their construction and trying to move people around from room-to-room as they do things, sometimes it’s much easier to move people into a new facility adjacent to the hospital, do the renovation and then move them back in when you’re done. We have units that are involved in renovations that are taking multiple years.” Five of the company’s units are being leased by customers in California, two are in the Washington, D.C., area, one is in West Virginia and another in Savannah, Georgia. “Essentially we have nine buildings and we maintain these throughout the United States and we move them around,” said Paquet. Mobile Medical was founded in 1994 by Walden resident Rick Cochran in his basement after he had left a job at an advanced medical equipment provider to go into business of himself. The company delivered the first Mobile Surgery Unit in 1996 to the U.S. Air Force and in 2011 Cochran was named the U.S. Small Business Administration’s

National SBA Person of the Year. Cochran relocated Mobile Medical to a 1,500-square-foot space in the Fairbanks Scales Building in St. Johnsbury where it remains today. In 1997, the company built a technologically advanced Mobile Breast Care Center to provide state-of-the-art care for the Indian Health Services Hospital in Tuba City, Arizona. Over the next two decades Cochran expanded the business into broader commercial, military, and emergency response applications worldwide. Cochran stepped down as CEO in 2016.

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Kingdom Trails staff pause for a picture. (Courtesy Photo)

Turning 25 At Kingdom Trails

Kingdom Trail Association began in 1994. The non profit association runs a year-round recreational trail network. The Kingdom Trail Association was established as a non profit association run by a Board of Directors in 1994 by visionary business leaders. The local community members saw the potential for non-motorized recreational trails as a viable resource for economic stimulation. The network exists on over 90 privately owned land parcels

and is one of the earliest examples of purpose built mountain bike trails. Today, the Association functions with five full-time, year-round staff and up to 28 seasonal employees in the summer funded by membership and donations. The Kingdom Trail network is well known as a world class mountain biking destination. With over 100 miles of trails that are accessible for all ability levels, beginner and advanced riders can find trails to ride. The soils of the

network lend themselves well to drainage creating sustainable trails and the beauty of the landscape completes the experience. The Kingdom Trail Welcome Center is in the village of East Burke which is known for it’s welcoming vibe and great dining and socializing options. The network is open year round and the trails are groomed for fatbiking, skate and classic skiing and snowshoeing in the winter time.



Fat biking on the Kingdom Trails (Photo by Herb Swanson, courtesy of Kingdom Trails)

Snowshoe Farm Alpacas In Peacham Marking 20th Anniversary

Couple Breeds Alpacas, Sells Yarn, Patterns, More

BY AMY ASH NIXON
Staff Writer

PEACHAM — Terry and Ron Miller, co-owners of Snowshoe Farm Alpacas, are celebrating their 20th year in business this year.

The couple have been breeding alpacas for two decades, and began because of Terry's interest in the fiber arts, she explained in a recent interview.

"I'm a hand spinner, and a knitter and a weaver, and we started looking at fiber animals, and chose alpacas because we like the characteristics of their fiber - they're extremely soft," said Terry.

She said, "I do everything but the spinning," saying she has the alpaca fiber sent to a spinner in New Hampshire and it comes back on big cones for her to use and to turn into skeins of yarn she dyes at her farm in Peacham, for sale through the farm's website, and by appointment at the farm.

Terry also runs a website design business, and Ron offers a few services including alpaca shearing as well as builds fences, so they don't keep regular hours at the alpaca farm.

When the couple began their farm, Terry said, "We decided to raise [alpacas] for breeding stock. We bought bloodlines from all over the country, and in different colors. We have a lot more light colors than we originally did."

"Alpacas come in a lot of colors," said Terry. "We started to breed for top quality alpacas and very high quality fiber; we've shown them over the years and won many awards for our animals and for their fiber. Once we had enough animals to be able to put together large amounts of fiber, we started sending it to the mill."

Terry said she also designs patterns to go with the yarn from their alpacas. She said some of the alpaca fiber is mixed with other fibers or made specifically for certain uses such as sock yarn.

In addition to selling yarn at their website, the farm also sells yarn at fiber festivals, including festivals in Vermont and New York state.

"Our farm is basically a sort of full-service farm, we sell animals, we have different price levels based on the quality of the animals," Terry said. "We are very fussy about which animals we breed."

The farm today has 38 alpacas, and has some years had up to 90 alpacas, said Terry, "We actually have quite a bit fewer than we had a few years ago."

Alpacas are adorable, but not always very friendly, said Terry.

"They like their space. They're that way with each other, too," she said. "When there is a threat, they'll band together. They are an extremely tight social group. They don't like being handled most of the time, even our friendlier ones."

The animals like to keep people just out of arm's reach, said Terry.

"You learn about their temperament by living with them all the time," said Terry. "They're always advertised as being hugable, and of course, that's how they look, but they're not. They're smart. They are a prey animal, so they are always on the alert. They are like sheep or goats or cows, they are herbivores."

Terry said the animals pick up on cues from how people act around them, "They're just like dogs or cats, if you're nervous, they're not going to come anywhere near you. You can really tell when someone is relaxed around the animal, they will start pulling on your coat, or if you're in a lawn chair, they'll come right up to you. They all have different personalities. The babies are



Ron Miller, co-owner of Snowshoe Farm Alpacas in Peacham. (Courtesy Photo)

a lot like their mothers, the really mellow ones have really mellow babies, it's heritable."

The couple run the alpaca farm together and also each have their own enterprises, so are too busy

to run a retail shop or for drop-ins, said Terry. She said she takes part every year in the Vermont Sheep and Wood Festival in Tunbridge and the New York Sheep and Wool Festival in Rhinebeck every year; she gives her knitting patterns for free to people who purchase yarn, and repeat customers, she said.

That they have operated the alpaca farm for a full 20 years now, Terry Miller said, "Probably that's kind of the way I do things. When I find something I like, I do stick with it. We enjoy this lifestyle, we like being farmers and will probably do it as long as we're able to do it. We like working for ourselves. We still enjoy it."

For more information, visit vermontalpacyarn.com.



A rug made from alpaca fiber on the website of Snowshoe Farm Alpacas farm in Peacham. (Courtesy Photo)



Part of the herd at Snowshoe Farm Alpacas in Peacham. (Courtesy Photo)

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On the job at Five Star Autobody are, from left, Jacob Mudge, George Mudge, Suzanne Mudge and Brandon Larrabee. (Courtesy Photo)

Five Star Autobody Celebrates 20 Years Serving The Community

Five Star Autobody is a family owned, independent collision repair facility founded by George Mudge on July 1, 1999. George has worked in the autobody industry since 1978.

After moving to Vermont in 1985, he was employed by Vinton Motors and later moved to Wayne Ford as an autobody technician and then shop manager. In 1999 he was given the opportunity to take over the autobody shop at the dealership and Five Star Autobody was formed. Suzanne, his wife, joined him in the business, along with their children Jacob and Deborah.

Suzanne's grandfather, Amedee Caron; her father, Pete; and Uncle Normand worked in autobody shops in the St. Johnsbury area in

the 1940s and 1950s. In 1956 they established Caron Auto Service on the Back Center Road, which was in operation until 1985.

Five Star Autobody has employed many great and talented technicians over the years and many of them became "family." At this time their son, Jacob, a fourth-generation autobody technician, and their nephew, Brandon Larrabee, complete the team. Coming into this 20th year in business, George and Suzanne are in the process of slowly grooming "the next generation" to be able to serve the collision and autobody needs of the local community and outlying areas for many years to come.

Five Star Autobody prides itself in customer service and quality

repairs. It is the business' mission to make sure that customers are educated and well advised throughout the claim and repair processes. Five Star Autobody has longstanding relationships with many insurance companies and appraisers, allowing it to assist customers in a timely and knowledgeable fashion.

The company believes that it works for the customer and with their insurance company. Customers have commented that they know "we care," and we do. Five Star Autobody also assists local services and businesses with their fleet work, so they can get their vehicles back on the road to do what they do best.

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Thaddeus Stevens School Turns 20, Reflects On Rich History

School Continues To Honor Legacy Of Thaddeus Stevens

BY AMY ASH NIXON
Staff Writer

LYNDON CENTER — History credits Danville-born and bred Thaddeus Stevens with being “a fierce advocate of equality for all who as a member of Congress in the Civil War era argued against the Fugitive Slave Act both in Congress and in the Court.”

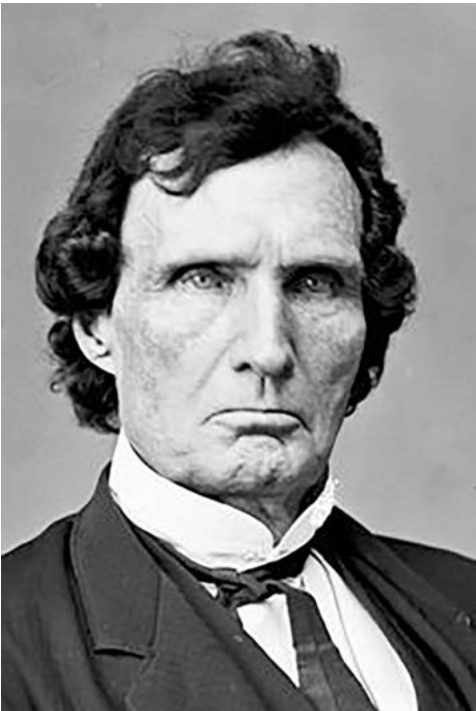
“During Reconstruction, Stevens advocated for the voting rights of freed slaves and equality for all; he was a primary author of the 14th Amendment, known today as the Civil Rights Amendment,” shares the website for the local school named for Stevens.

When Stevens, a long-time representative in Congress, died, he was the third man to lay in state at the Capitol Rotunda.

“His body was guarded by black honor guard soldiers,” said Julie Hansen, director of the Thaddeus Stevens School in Lyndon Center. “Twenty thousand people streamed by his casket during that time. He was then returned to Lancaster, Pa., where he had moved from Vermont as a young attorney and spent most of his life and was buried.

Said Hansen, “Thaddeus Stevens informs pretty much every decision that we make as a school, and in terms of our students, they are very aware of that.”

“We talk about his humble beginnings and also that he had what used to be called a deformity, so that your birth does not become your destiny,” said Hansen in an interview last week. “We weave African-American history and literature into everything that we teach, because that was his issue.”



Thaddeus Stevens, for whom the school in Lyndon Center is named. (File Photo)

Of the school’s namesake, Hansen said, “Our kids are very clear about what he represented.”

On slain civil rights leader Dr. Martin Luther King’s birthday, Jan. 21, the school also holds its annual candlelight vigil, as well, leading into Black History Month, said Hansen.

The school also works to ensure that Stevens has a diverse student population, stressed Hansen. **Stevens School Marking 20th Anniversary in 2019**

“The Mission of the school and the legacy of Thaddeus Stevens have guided the school’s growth and community involvement,” said Hansen.

“Thaddeus Stevens School began as a 7/8 school but slowly added lower grades as families requested them. Over those twenty years the school has produced valedictorians, presidential scholars, merit scholars, and award winning writers as well championship welders and culinary experts,” said Hansen. “The principles of academic excellence combined with honoring diversity have sustained the school.”

Hansen said, “As part of the commitment to diversity, the school has always accepted a percentage students who have found academic work challenging or who did not feel safe in school. The school have works hard to ensure that they maintain an intentional and cohesive community that values the contributions of each of our members, while never compromising the strengths and goals of each student.”

“The legacy of Thaddeus Stevens drives the embedded civic and character education,” Hansen said. “The socratic seminar-style classes create an environment in which students develop the literacy skills for discussing controversial issues both in history and in contemporary times.”

On the school’s website, it states, “Students flourish at Thaddeus Stevens School. Our teachers love their subjects and bring great passion and commitment to the classroom. We believe that children can learn every day. These are creative, curious, energetic years, and our rigorous curriculum inspires students to question and to pursue knowledge with fervor.”

A local family, Jen and Josh Castle of Walden shared their experience sending their children to Stevens, noting in a letter in part, “We were immediately drawn to the school’s intention to help young people understand what it means to participate in democracy, to foster a sense of purpose larger than one’s self, and seek to learn from the mistakes of past systems of racism, sexism, and classism, and to identity and understand how these ‘isms’ continue to cause harm.”

“The logistics - driving, tuition, and so on - were not always easy for us, but what our family got in return from Thaddeus Stevens School was truly priceless,” wrote the Castles.

The school shared a few student testimonials, as well, for this 20th anniversary report.

Ally Corrow, an alum, wrote, “Thaddeus Stevens School gave me the confidence and ability to strive in every aspect of life. I am a high honors student at the Academy because of my foundations



Stevens School teacher Tom Forster stands with students at the annual African-American Read-In held last year at the Thaddeus Stevens School in Lyndon Center. (File Photo by Amy Ash Nixon)

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The Thaddeus Stevens School occupies a building on the Lyndon Institute campus. (File Photo)

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A popular site on Route 2 in Concord — the Mooselook Restaurant will be celebrating 15 years of offering good food and a comfortable dining atmosphere. (Photo By Rosie Smith)



David Davis, at left, and Dan McChesney prepare to enjoy a meal at the Mooselook Restaurant in Concord. The men are two of the patrons that enjoy their meals on a regular basis at the establishment. (Photo By Rosie Smith)

Mooselook Serves Up Comfort Food And Hospitality For 15 Years

BY ROSIE SMITH
Staff Writer

The Mooselook Restaurant, located on Route 2 next to the Moose River in Concord, had a warm and cozy atmosphere on a recent 14-below-zero morning in the Northeast Kingdom of Vermont. That's one of the reasons it's a popular place to go for locals, business people, truckers, snowmobilers and tourists, as the restaurant looks toward celebrating its 15th year of operation under the ownership of Susan Ashby.

Born and raised in Concord, and a member of the Class of 1980 at Concord High School, Ashby was involved with the business when she was younger, working for her grandmother, Eunice Barnett, who owned the restaurant in the 1970s. Even back then, Ashby said the business was a friendly spot to come to, with good food served up and friendly service to its patrons.

After Ashby's grandmother sold the building it was a private home before becoming a restaurant again. When the restaurant came up for sale in 2005, Ashby was contacted and asked if she was interested. Susan purchased Mooselook from Charlie Aldrich and has been busy with it ever since.

Mooselook Restaurant is open seven days a week — winter hours are daily from 6 a.m. to 7 p.m., serving breakfast, lunch and dinner. In the summer, the restaurant extends its evening hours Friday and Saturday to 7:30 p.m. A senior menu is featured with reduced rates, catering to the older generation, and there is also a children's menu — plus take-out is an option. The menus for the various meals during the day boast a lot of favorites, including omelettes, pancakes, macaroni and cheese, haddock, scallops and clams, hot sandwiches, spaghetti with meat sauce, healthy salads, soups and more. According to its patrons, the portions are huge!

The walls of the business sport an eclectic mix of memorabilia and history, including an assortment of moose photos. There are also items for sale, including hand-made bird houses crafted by Steven Somers.

Ashby employs 12 people, mostly part-time. Her daughter, Christy, helps out with the cooking. One of her waitresses, Kathy Gray has worked at the business for 16 years. Ashby likes to hire students from the area, always trying to accommodate their schedules while school is in session.

Her customers include the "regulars," work crews, snowmobilers, truckers and tourists. When there's good snow, the restaurant is a convenient

stop for snowmobilers since the trail is right next to the business.

Sitting down to a meal on this particular frosty morning were regulars David Davis, of Waterford, and Dan McChesney, of St. Johnsbury; both men retired from their lifelong professions. They had nothing but praise for Mooselook.

"I come a couple of days of week," said Davis. "The service is fast and the food is excellent," he added. "Coming here gets you out of the house ... it's any easy destination."

"I really like the small community atmosphere," said McChesney.

Ashby begins her day at 4 a.m., making preparations for the busy day ahead. She is appreciative of all her repeat customers and really enjoys catering to the older generation.

"I just enjoy making people happy," she added. For more information, go online at mooselookrestaurant.com.

Susan Ashby, at left, owner and operator of the Mooselook Restaurant in Concord, takes a second to pose with one of her employees, Kathy Gray, who has been working at the restaurant for 16 years. (Photo By Rosie Smith)



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Countryside Kutts Celebrates 10 Years Of Partnership

Spray Tanning A Top Draw For Derby Salon

BY ROBIN SMITH
Staff Writer

DERBY — The demand for spray tanning as a regular beauty care treatment continues to be one of the strengths of Countryside Kutts, now entering its 10th year.

Spray tanning has done very well, said co-owner Tillie Smith who opened the shop in the Century 21 Farm and Forest Realty shopping plaza 10 years ago with her partners.

"Lots of people come in when they are going on a trip," Smith said.

Within 15 minutes, they leave with a tan that they can show off at the beach, without revealing that they've been living with a dark and cold winter in northern Vermont.

And it's becoming more popular over time, especially as people decide to forego natural tanning or tanning beds to avoid damaging their skin, she said.

"It's better for your skin." The spray-on tan lasts five to seven days, perfect for trips when you can replace it with a natural tan,

she said.

A spray tan also works perfectly for the girl who wants to have a nice glow for that party or wedding, summer or winter, when bare shoulders would go well with a tan.

There are five or six different shades, from the hint of color to a deep tan.

"Some brides just want a little," Smith says. And a customer can decide how little or complete the spray should be, from complete nude to select locations, says Smith who does it herself.

Users are encouraged not to shave their legs or wash their skin vigorously right away after the spray tan, she said.

Smith opened the shop with partners and continues to share the space with others.

Her team still includes Monique LaPlante, who does nails and hair, Ellen Valley, a hair stylist, and Karen Leach who does hair and nails at Countryside Kutts and in her own home salon.

Robin Ballinger has returned and does hair and electrolysis at Countryside Kutts and in her own home salon.

And Shelby Blake rounds out the partners involved.

Hair styles have evolved over the years. Popular today is something called Bayalage, creating high-

lights that offer a natural look.

Elle magazine online says "Bayalage is a French word meaning 'to sweep' or 'to paint.' It allows for a sun-kissed natural-looking hair colour, similar to what nature gives us as children."

Smith says it requires colors changing from dark to light, with some women seeking dark brown or black at the roots to red or other colors to the tips.

As for nails, the once popular applique style with each nail having a different design and color is not asked for so much now, except for by younger girls.

Women like Shellac, a fast-drying nail gel that lasts two weeks and doesn't chip, Smith said.

Smith said that she expects her industry will continue to be essential.

"People always need it. It's part of personal care," she said.

Plus, as she showed with her next regular customer, it's also a chance to laugh and share some gossip and stories with someone on a regular basis, a welcome respite from smart phones and the hustle-bustle of life.



Tillie Smith dries the hair of one of her regular customers at Countryside Kutts, Marie Vallieres of Stanstead, Quebec. Vallieres and Smith share laughs and stories during the appointment. (Photo by Robin Smith)

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