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LITTLETON REGIONAL HEALTHCARE: 115 YEARS

A Special Supplement To
The Caledonian-Record
Highlighting Milestones
For Some Of The
Many Successful Local
Businesses Of Vermont's
Northeast Kingdom And
The New Hampshire
North Country

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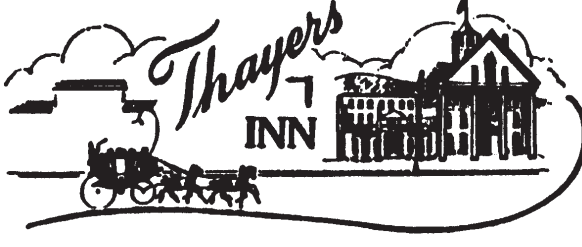
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185 YEARS

Caledonian-Record Delivers On Commitment To Community News

BY DANA GRAY
Staff Writer

ST. JOHNSBURY — The “e” in eEdition meant something entirely different 155 years ago to Caledonian-Record readers than it does now.

The “E” now is for Electronic and the eEdition is where digitally-minded readers go to see their daily newspapers via the Internet, representing an increasing number of subscribers online. Back on day one of the Caledonian, Aug. 8, 1937, the “E” meant Equestrian, as in news delivery by horseback.

The newspaper’s origin story includes information about the challenge horse riders had selling copies in the early days due to the prominence of the North Star publication and people’s belief that the Caledonian wouldn’t last because they’d seen other newspapers come and go quickly.

“Prospective subscribers expected that the Caledonian would go the way of all other St. Johnsbury papers before it, and little was their response when horsemen went out into the countryside with the first editions of the new St. Johnsbury weekly,” notes a 150-anniversary publication about St. Johnsbury printed in 1937.

Thanks to the efforts of those early newspaper deliverers on horseback, the Caledonian gained a following and found its place in local communities.

Nearly 185 years later, the Caledonian-Record maintains its mission of delivering relevant news while adapting to changes in readership habits and the way people want to access their news.

Delivery by horseback has long since passed, and even the long tradition of newspaper boys and girls on foot or on bicycle is no more. Caledonian-Record delivery people are adults driving between deliveries. They now canvas approximately 1,600 square miles in the middle of the night, six days a week.

The evolution of news delivery has been impacted significantly by the Internet. An increasing number of readers (more than half of all subscribers) are getting their Caledonian in a digital space. But whether it’s the feel of a newspaper between the fingers or it’s the ease of logging onto the Caledonian-Record from any data device to view it on a screen, the newspaper’s commitment to relevant, impartial community news extends across all platforms.



Herbert Smith, the first of four generations of Smiths to publish *The Caledonian-Record*.



Gordon Smith, the second generation of four Smiths to publish *The Caledonian-Record*.



Todd, left, and his father, Mark Smith, have helped extend Smith family control of *The Caledonian-Record* for 100 years. Mark was the third generation of Smith publishers, and now Todd serves as publisher. (Photo by Paul Hayes)

“The delivery methods are always changing but our core function is not,” said fourth-generation publisher Todd Smith.

“The value of newspapers is that they provide independent, trusted professionals to show up, bear witness and dispassionately report the news of the day,” said Smith. “Newspapers are watchdogs, mirrors for their community and provide a critical first draft of history.”

Smith says when communities lose their paper, as has happened in over 2,000 towns nationwide since 2004, there are a number of negative consequences.

The School of Media and Journalism at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, which diligently tracks the nation’s rapid loss of newspapers, says taxes, crime and public corruption all rise in communities that lose their papers. Civic participation, property values and quality of life plummet.

Too often, the local paper is replaced by social media profit off anger, division and conspiracy. They are untethered from the responsibility to provide facts.

“It’s not overstated to say a democracy can’t exist without trusted sources of information with a canon of professional ethics to verify the information they publish,” Smith said. “Social media took audience and money from newspapers but most damaging is that they replaced the truth with wildly profitable, conspiracy-laden echo chambers. The angrier, more divided and disillusioned people are, the more money these platforms make.”

Fortunately, Smith says, the Caledonian-Record continues to enjoy the trust and support of the community it serves.

The paper reaches a daily audience of over 25,000 local people across its multitude of platforms. That includes printed newspapers, the news website, native apps, social media pages and newsletters. That audience remains an important marketing tool for over 2,000 local businesses and service providers.

Deemed an “essential service,” the Caledonian-Record continued operations throughout the pandemic lockdown, meeting every deadline and never missing a publishing day - a streak that began on Aug. 8, 1837.

This year the number of digital subscribers surpassed home-delivery print customers - a hopeful development for the future of the last family-owned paper in Vermont.

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180 YEARS

St. Johnsbury Academy Educates World, Community For Generations

BY PAUL HAYES
Staff Writer

St. Johnsbury Academy opened its doors in 1842, two years before the telegraph was invented and over a century before the interstate highway system reached rural northeastern Vermont.

It began as a local school founded by the Fairbanks family to provide “intellectual, moral and religious training for their own children and the children of the community.”

Much has changed since then. Leaps in communication allowed St. Johnsbury Academy to expand its reach. Developments in infrastructure allowed people worldwide to reach the Northeast Kingdom. And today, 180 years later, the Academy is a renowned international boarding school.

Over the past 40 years, the Academy has increased its boarding student population by over 700 percent and founded a sister school in Jeju Province, South Korea.

Despite continuing COVID challenges, SJA opened the 2021-2022 academic year with 186 boarding students from 13 states (Arkansas, California, Georgia, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Rhode

Island, Texas, Vermont, and Virginia) and 22 countries (Saudi Arabia, Azerbaijan, Bermuda, Brazil, Chile,



and the Green Dorm) and most recently new turf and lights were installed at Fairbanks Field.

MOVING FORWARD

Following in the footsteps of longtime headmasters Bernier Mayo and Tom Lovett, Dr. Howell looks to lead the Academy towards future growth in a post-pandemic world.

It poses unique challenges.

Writing in the Winter 2022 Hill-topper Alumni Magazine, Howell noted that “shifting global dynamics will impact even our powerful international boarding program” and that “the most pressing need is also the most basic: we need to attend to the health and well-being of our whole community.”

As pandemic restrictions are lifted, she wrote, she looked forward to meeting alumni in person, thanking them for their support and contributions, and talking to them about “what we are doing and hoping to do to foster wellness in our community.”

“This includes ... using our resources and imagination to build what we need to be the right school for our brilliantly diverse, brave students.”

For more information on St. Johnsbury Academy visit StJAcademy.org.

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“The benefit of having international students at the Academy — particularly their diverse cultural backgrounds and their courage in coming to us from far away — is really incalculable,” Headmaster Dr. Sharon Howell wrote last year. “Having students from so many different countries is extraordinary in the boarding school world, and a tribute to the team’s creativity and vision.”

STILL ROOTED

In spite of those changes, St. Johnsbury Academy remains firmly rooted in the NEK.

Most students come from St. J and surrounding towns (80% of enrollment) and the school is critical to the local economy.

A 2012 economic impact assessment found that St. Johnsbury Academy employed one out of every 20 workers in St. Johnsbury, paid \$1 out of every \$20 earned in town, and generated more than \$12 million in export earnings for the local economy.

It determined that the Academy’s multiplier effect created an additional 135 jobs and an additional \$4.9 million of income in Caledonia County.

In addition, the economic impact assessment found that SJA contributed more than \$700,000 annually to the community through volunteer efforts, facilities use, monetary contributions and more.

As former St. Johnsbury Select

Board Chair Jeff Moore said in 2017, “I think St. Johnsbury Academy is part of the nucleus of this entire town. St. Johnsbury would not be what it is today without St. Johnsbury Academy.”

GROWTH AND PROGRESS

St. Johnsbury Academy was founded by brothers Erastus, Thaddeus and Joseph Fairbanks, whose family business, Fairbanks Scales, was once the largest employers in Vermont.

Unlike most New England boarding schools it has been coeducational (open to boys and girls) since its founding.

In 1873 it reincorporated to widen educational opportunities to include technical training in addition to college preparation.

“With this change, the founders created a school that was unique among New England academies, greatly changing the character of the school, and enabling it to serve the educational needs of St. Johnsbury and the surrounding communities,” according to the school’s website.

The Academy’s growth and progress can be measured in many ways.

Academically, St. Johnsbury offers more than 220 courses, including 31 advanced placement courses, 40 courses in the fine and performing arts, college-level engineering, five languages, and an award-winning technical education department.

Athletically, St. Johnsbury Academy has accumulated 84 team state championships, including the 2021 boys outdoor track and boys cross country Division I crowns, and countless individual titles.

Facility-wise, new buildings have

been added over the years (such as the Morse Center for the Arts, the Mayo Center, Christensen dorm,

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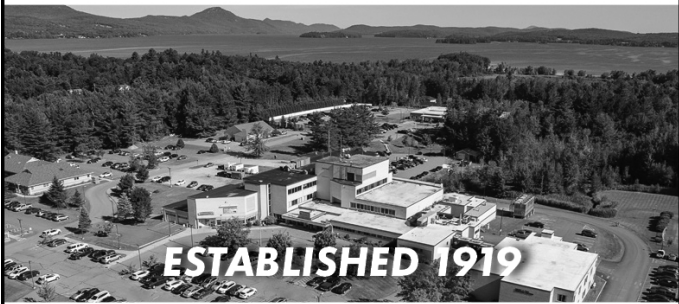
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155 YEARS

Lyndon Institute Charts Future With A Nod To The Past

BY ANDREW MCGREGOR
Staff Writer

Lyndon Institute is celebrating its 155th anniversary this year as the independent school transitions out of the pandemic and with new leadership.

Originally founded as Lyndon Literary and Biblical Institution with the signing of its charter in 1867, the school has evolved over the years to serve as home of the Lyndon Commercial College, the Vermont School of Agriculture, and to offer both secondary and post-secondary programs, the latter of which would eventually be incorporated into Lyndon State College when it was founded in 1951.

The school’s first term was advertised for \$3.25 and about 50 pupils attended. In 2023 LI will also mark the centennial of when it adopted Lyndon Institute as its name.

The school has benefited from strong local support and significant contributions from notable benefactors like TN Vail, who was president of AT&T in the late 1800s and early 1900s, as well as Elmer Darling, a Burke native who operated the Fifth Avenue



Hotel in New York City.

LI’s latest evolution comes in the form of its emergence from the pandemic, and a transition in leadership from current Head of School Twila Perry, who will be retiring at the end of the school year, to incoming Head of School Dr. Brian Bloomfield.



Incoming Head of School, Dr. Brian Bloomfield, center, shares a moment with senior Aiden Hale, left, and junior Julia Taylor in the Monahan Academic Commons on the LI campus. (Courtesy Photo)



Natalie Webster, cuts butter for brownies in the school cafeteria during her Baking 101 class, during J-Term at LI. (Photo by Javin Leonard)

“All companies must evolve over time to keep pace with the changes in the world. Lyndon Institute continues to adapt,” said Perry. “The most significant change has been the incorporation of dual-enrollment classes for college credit. This is evident in our Career & Technical Education (CTE) programs as well in our college prep classes. It is important for our students to be able to leave high school prepared both for college and for a career.”

Bloomfield noted that school’s board has strategic plan and priorities that he is looking forward to supporting and helping accomplish. He has been making trips to LI from the Boston area, where he works in a private high school and lives with his wife and two young sons, to familiarize himself with the staff, students and region.

The school’s motto, Per Aspera Ad Astra, through hard work you reach the stars, doesn’t just serve

as inspiration for the students but as mantra for the faculty and staff. “Per Aspera Ad Astra is visible throughout the institution,” said Perry. “Whether it is faculty pulling together to make spirit week or winter carnival happen during the pandemic or the administrative team finding ways to make school happen. It is the idea that if we all work together we can and will achieve our goals.”

The pandemic has delivered challenges to be sure, said Perry, noting COVID fundamentally changed the way the school was able to interact with students and the LI experience.

“Many of our younger students have not experienced the LI traditions in a meaningful way,” said Perry. “So we have to be more explicit about our expectations.” Perry said some of the changes, like giving students more freedom, which was to meet spacing requirements in the pandemic,

school.

Bloomfield said he is excited to join LI this summer and hopes to spend some time integrating with the school, traditions, culture and community. Bloomfield said he was attracted to LI because of its core values, the civic engagement of the community and for the opportunity to raise their children out of the commercial focus and pace of urban life.

“I’m excited to work with people that no matter what experience – everyone believes our best days are ahead of us,” said Bloomfield.

That was a sentiment echoed by Perry. “I am excited about where LI is at this time. We have weathered the financial challenges as well as the pandemic and are looking forward to a bright future.”

LI is an independent and comprehensive high school for grades 9 – 12, offering a 150-course curriculum specializing in core and honors academics, fine and performing arts, and technical and career programs. LI has a boarding program in addition to its day student offerings.

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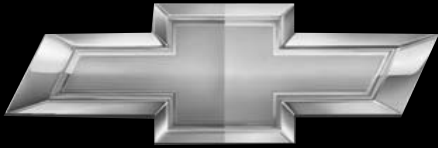
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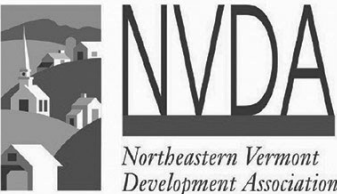
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140 YEARS

George M. Stevens & Son Insurance Serves Neighbors Across Generations

BY ROBERT BLECHL
Staff Writer

One of the oldest businesses in the North Country is George M. Stevens and Son Co., an insurance agency that has provided personal and business services since 1882 and this year celebrates 140 years.

The agency offers automobile, home, commercial, RV, motorcycle, snowmobile, watercraft, group, life, and health insurance, and also employee benefits.

The main office is in Lancaster and the other offices in Colebrook, Littleton, and Lisbon.

Chris Knapp, a company owner and senior partner who has been with the agency for a little more than 15 years, talked about George M. Stevens' growth through the years and about its guiding mission that has remained the same.

"We've just done some hiring and about have 17 staff in total," he said.

Licensed in three states — New Hampshire, Vermont, and Maine — George M. has had a steady increase in clients through the years.

"We've grown a lot, and then there were acquisitions," said Knapp. "In the last 10 years, we've acquired the Klebe insurance agen-

cy in Colebrook, and Lisa Klebe came on board and worked here. She just retired at the end of last year."

The most recent George M. Stevens acquisition was in September 2020, when the company bought Burns Insurance Agency, owned by Scott Burns, who retired.

"Through acquisitions, we've significantly grown just there alone, plus there are our own efforts," said Knapp.

What has made George M. Stevens and Son Co. successful for nearly a century and a half?

"I think it's our dedication to the communities we serve and the relationships we've formed," said Knapp. "The businesses and the folks that we've insured have been grandparents, parents, and kids all the way through. We're not an out-there-pounding-the-pavement type of sales. We rely on referrals on large part and that requires the relationships."

Serving generations of North Country residents, many from the same family, and focusing on what their specific needs are has been a recipe for success.

"We know our clients, we know the area and the market," said Knapp, who works out of the Lit-



George M. Stevens and Son Co. insurance agency, whose office headquarters is pictured above in Lancaster, with an office below in Littleton, celebrates 140 years in the North Country. (Contributed photos)



tleton office. "Knowing that and having those relationships makes it so we can very accurately serve our customers."

What does he love about his work?

"I love the fact that I get to do what I do in my very own hometown with people I've known a

can. As new things come up, like cyber insurance, those are opportunities to bring value to our clients and grow organically."

According to a history of the agency, George M. Stevens and his son, George E. Stevens, purchased the Kent Agency, which dated to 1859.

"I love the fact that I get to do what I do in my very own hometown with people I've known a long time..."

long time," said Knapp. "We provide a very necessary service to our clients and it's a rewarding career."

Other senior partners and owners in the agency are Jeff Gilman, who has been with George M. Stevens and Son Co. for about 40 years, and Keith Young, who has been with the agency for 16 years.

Future growth of the agency will be done as it has in the past.

"We are always looking to grow, but we want to grow sustainably and wisely and not necessarily by leaps and bounds," said Knapp. "We are always looking at possibilities of acquisitions. We are looking to build on the existing foundation and just add where we

The firm expanded through with acquisitions of agencies that included the Langley Agency in Groveton, Kelley-Baker in Littleton, Woolson and Clough in Lisbon, Geo. Noyes in Bethlehem, and Collins Insurance in Colebrook.

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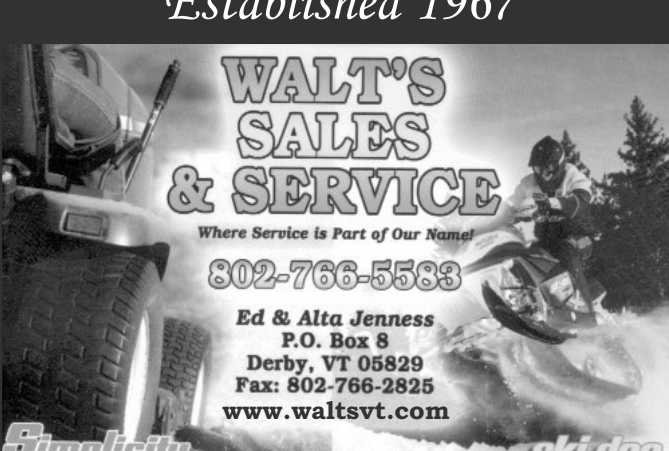
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115 YEARS

Littleton Regional Healthcare Heals & Supports Community For Well Over A Century

BY ROBERT BLECHL
Staff Writer

Littleton Regional Healthcare celebrates 115 years in the community.

In that century-plus, the hospital has faced a number of health care challenges, most recently the COVID-19 pandemic that for a time resulted in hospitalizations that pushed capacity to the max, mass vaccination clinics that staff quickly set up after receiving last-minute notice by the state, and workforce changes.

As LRH celebrates a milestone birthday, its medical director, who has been with LRH for three decades, reflected on the hospital's growth and how it's remained true to its original mission while adapting to meet 21st century needs.

"There's no question the organization is growing," said Ed Duffy. "However, that is a relative thing because of COVID. We actively managed during COVID and decreased the number of employees we had for a while, but they're coming back."

The COVID blip hasn't halted what has been a long and steady trajectory of growth for LRH, which provides a wide variety of inpatient and outpatient services as well as private practices at its St. Johnsbury Road campus.

Currently, LRH, which is the largest employer in the region, has a total of 526 employees, about the same number pre-pandemic.

Of those, 412 are full-time and 114 part-time.

Currently, the hospital pays \$54.5 million in salaries.

"We pump a lot of money back into the community," said Duffy. "There's that old saying that there's a multiplier. For every dollar we spend, it's \$2.30 that goes to the community."

In 2021, there were nearly 61,000 outpatient visits and about 10,000 emergency department visits, just a few hundred below the high-water point before COVID, he said.

Today, LRH operates an urgent care clinic launched several years ago as well as a large primary care operation.

Among the specialties are pediatrics, cardiology, neurology, spinal care, orthopedics, general surgery, urology, and OBGYN.

There is also audiology as well as ENT, or otolaryngology (care of the ear, nose, and throat).

"That is a lot for a critical access hospital," said Duffy.

On-campus practices saw just under 70,000 patient visits in 2021.

LRH campus tenants leasing space and operating independently of the hospital include White Mountain Family Health, North Country Internal Medicine, and Shippee Eye Care.

In recent years, LRH has strengthened its partnership with Dartmouth-Hitchcock Medical Center in Lebanon.

"In 2019, we wired our ICU to be connected to Dartmouth critical care, which is basically their ICU," said Duffy. "It's been terrific and really allows us to keep a lot of patients close to home because of the technical abilities that they add to our capabilities."

When a patient needs an infectious disease doctor, for example, he or she has access to one, and also to someone like a pulmonary critical care doctor who does just that 24/7, he said.

With the consultants, the care ratchets up and a Littleton area patient at LRH is basically getting the same care that he or she would be getting in the Dartmouth ICU, with the exception of some machines, said Duffy.



Danie Underbakke, general surgeon at LRH, with his surgical staff. This year, LRH celebrates 115 years in the community. (Contributed photos)



The first generation of nurses, in 1918, at Littleton Regional Healthcare.

Some machines, though, such as renal support, are en route to LRH.

"If you need dialysis in the ICU, we are very close to getting that, and you won't have to travel to Dartmouth for it," he said.

Patients in need of a ventilator also don't need to go to Dartmouth any longer, as LRH has an intermediate capability that other hospitals around it don't have, said Duffy.

And for parents, LRH in northwestern New Hampshire has the only birthing suite in the immediate area, and statistically averages nearly one baby born per day, he said.

On March 7, LRH opened up an urgent care clinic in Lincoln in partnership with ClearChoiceMD.

LRH's urgent care clinic at the Littleton campus was a superstar during COVID and was able to manage the day-to-day rapid test-

ing and vaccinations, said Duffy.

Currently, the hospital is undergoing a conversion to new electronic patient health records that is a universal record that can instantly be pulled up at office practices, inpatient units, emergency departments, or urgent care clinics.

"It's the same medical record," said Duffy. "We'll have one patient portal. It's going to be integrated into DH's system. It's not the same exact system they have, but we chose it because it plays well with it and they can read our records and we can read their records. We're pretty excited about that."

The new electronic records can meet the goals of wellness and prevention by allowing physicians to keep track of patients with chronic conditions and allow them to intervene when necessary or when asked, he said.

LRH was also recently awarded a \$500,000 federal grant for a year and a half to build a mobile integrated health program.

Once built, the program will allow paramedics to go into the homes of patients recently discharged as well as the homes of people with chronic conditions to check on them more often.

"That will help with community health in general," said Duffy.

LRH's goal since the early 20th century has always been high-quality health care and providing board-certified physicians in emergency medicine, hospitalist services, and excellent nursing staff, he said.

"The important thing is to continue to serve the community with the healthcare they deserve, which is just as good as anybody in Boston or Concord or Manchester or, for that matter, Lebanon," said Duffy "That's our goal."

Beyond the physicians and nursing staff are many others ded-

icated to the mission.

The LRH Auxiliary, which has been active since the beginning, provides some \$30,000 annually to support a number of programs, services, and scholarships.

The hospital's volunteers, another mainstay who number more than 200, include greeters, people who visit and comfort patients, and those who provide alternative therapies such as art and dog therapy.

While LRH's mission has stayed the same, adaptations were needed for a new century.

The hospital began in 1907 as a small 15-bed facility along Cottage Street.

Today, with an ever-growing focus on wellness, healthy living and preventative measures, the 252-acre hospital campus along St. Johnsbury Road includes the maternity ward as well as an operating room, pharmacy, laboratory, and emergency and other departments.

A 63,000-square-foot medical office building was added in 2010.

"Dr. Beattie started this 115 years ago as a physician and he needed a place to take care of patients that was not in his office," said Duffy. "As technology has changed, as capabilities have changed, the hospital has kept up. We've always gotten the technology that we needed here. The whole community knows that when we felt like we were falling behind, we moved to this campus in 2001 to meet the challenge of the growth and what it means to be a hospital provider for the community. We've updated everything. Our partnerships with other organizations, particularly Dartmouth-Hitchcock, is now part of the response to the technology and the changes in healthcare that the people of this area clearly deserve."

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85 YEARS

Wells River Chevrolet Speeds Toward A Century As A Local Automotive Leader

BY TODD WELLINGTON
Staff Writer

Wells River Chevrolet has been around for a long, long time.

The dealership first opened in 1937.

Franklin Delano Roosevelt was president.

It was the year that Walt Disney premiered the movie “Snow White and the Seven Dwarves.”

Benny Goodman, Count Basie and Bing Crosby were on top of the music charts and boxer Joe Louis defeated James J. Braddock in Chicago with an eighth-round knockout to win the World Heavyweight Championship.

The dealership is now located at 10 Railroad St. in downtown Wells River, Vermont.

But it started in another location when it opened 85 years ago. “It was around the corner under



the railroad bridge,” said majority owner Jeff Moore, who purchased his stake in the business in 2019 from former Ford Motor Co. executive Allan Gilmour. Gilmour’s nephew, John Gilmour, remains a part owner of the dealership and serves as sales manager.

The current Wells River Chevrolet building, which includes a sales office, parts shop, auto restoration department and a substantial row of car repair and maintenance bays, was built in the 1950’s. It was later re-named H.O. Taylor Chevrolet until the name



At left: Wells River Chevy in the 1950’s and the shop today (above).

was changed to Wells River Chevrolet by Allan Gilmour in 2007.

Moore, who owns two other Northeast Kingdom businesses, Quest Transportation and Pellets Now, grew up in the Northeast Kingdom and said he became interested in the car business after helping Allan Gilmour manage

the dealership in 2014.

“I really liked the business,” said Moore. “I enjoy the customers; I enjoy the people. My other companies are not local retail-type businesses with a presence in the local community. Here I see members of the community every day. They’re customers, they’re friends

and I enjoy that a lot.”

Wells River Chevrolet is also preparing itself for the future including electric vehicles (EV).

“We have just recently become EV certified with Chevrolet so we will soon have charging stations installed and hopefully within the next few months we’ll have our first electric vehicles on the lot to sell.”

In addition to buying used cars, selling new and cars and trucks and providing top level vehicle reconditioning, maintenance and repair work, Wells River Chevrolet is also deeply involved in the local community.

From music and the arts to youth sports and other community events and activities.

“We support local,” said Moore. “That’s what we’ve always done and that’s what we’ll continue to do.”

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55 YEARS

Parkway Realty Guides Generations Of Residents To Their Homes

BY ADRIANNA WEBSTER
News Contributor

ST. JOHNSBURY — Parkway Realty marks a 55-year milestone this year, and agents there reflected on the past while looking forward to the future, contemplating the present struggles with supply and demand.

With its office at 75 Mt. Pleasant St., Parkway has eight employees, with seven of them serving as agents.

The business that has become Parkway began with Begin - Ernie Begin - a current broker and realtor at Begin Realty Associates. “It started when Ernie wanted something to do after Interstate 93 took his farm and split it in half. So he started real estate,” said Maurice Chaloux, current realtor and agent at Parkway.

Waterford Real Estate Agency began and Chaloux started there 50 years ago. The business was first located in Begin’s house. Next it moved to a property on Railroad Street where Enhance Hair Studio is now located. “Then

in 1988, we bought the building we are in now,” Chaloux said.

Last year, Chaloux and Patty Emery sold the business to Amy Bedor and Connie Sleath. Both Chaloux and Emery remain with the business as agents.

The real estate market is incredibly different now compared to previous years, said Chaloux and Sleath. “There was no MLS (Multiple Listing Services), there were no copy machines, there were no computers. There was carbon paper and typewriters,” Chaloux said.

Another big difference is the cost of a property. According to Chaloux, a property that costs \$250,000 now would have cost around \$20,000 in the early 70s.

The advance of technology and in particular the Internet has also made the property-buying experience much different from the past.

“Back then, people saw properties in the newspaper, they would call you up to make appointments to see the properties. A customer only knew the two or three properties put in the paper,” said Chaloux.



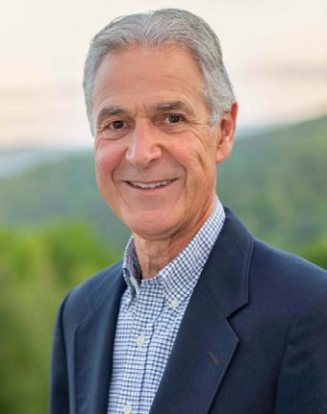
Amy Bedor



Connie Sleath



Patty Emery



Maurice Chaloux

While the cost of property has gone up significantly over time, buyers now have much more favorable interest rates. During the mid-1980s, interest rates ranged from 18-19 percent. “I bought a house in 1982 and the interest rate was 17 percent; now I look back and think, how in the world did I ever do that?” Chaloux said. “Now interest rates are at 2-3 percent.”

The struggle for all real estate businesses these days is in inventory. There is a lack of available homes.

“The real estate market now is like nothing I’ve worked with since I started doing it. It’s extremely aggressive, extremely undersupplied as well,” Sleath said.

The business sees people willing and able to easily sell, but these people have nowhere to go if they sell.

Said Bedor, “I’ve never seen, in my 25 years in realty ... deals fall apart for the reason of the seller having nowhere else to go due to lack of available homes ... We all have tons of buyers that we have no homes for.”

Market forces are in part driven by Vermont as a destination. “Vermont is one of the top states in the country that people are moving into. It’s really driving our market,” Sleath said.

The breadth of Parkway Realty’s listings is single family homes with a good variety of all listings including waterfront, multi-family dwellings, commercial, industrial, and land listings.

Parkway Realty serves all of the Northeast Kingdom and adjacent communities. The agents enjoy their work.

“I do what I do because there is so much diversity in the market. Not all of it is great, but most of it is,” Sleath said.

Added Bedor, “I love buying and selling houses ... I love St. Johnsbury, and it just kind of fits.”

As for the business beyond its 55th birthday, Chaloux, Sleath and Bedor say Parkway is growing and pursuing agents.

Sleath said, “I think that you’re going to hear a lot more about us. It’s happening already.”

See more information online at www.parkwayvt.com.

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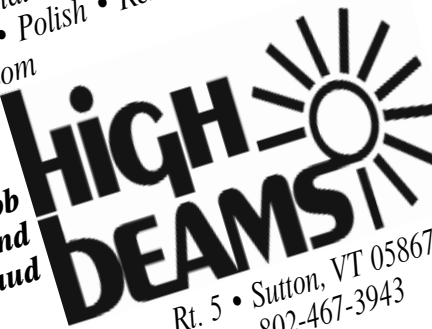
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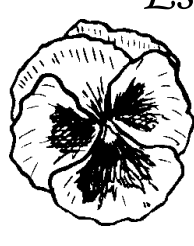
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50 YEARS

NVRH Provides World Class Community Health Care For Half-A-Century

BY DANA GRAY
Staff Writer

ST. JOHNSBURY — The region’s largest employer contributes to a healthy economy by making a healthy community its mission.

Northeastern Vermont Regional Hospital reached a 50-year milestone last month. It’s a time to reflect on the past, while acknowledging a present complicated by a pandemic and staff shortages and looking forward to a future that includes multi-million-dollar building improvements.

The hospital is the biggest employer around with a total of 703 people (full-time, part-time and per diem).

Though only a year old when it officially opened on Feb. 14, 1972, Shawn Tester, who’s been NVRH CEO since 2018, appreciates his hospital’s history.

Planning for NVRH began in the 1960s with the recognition that the town’s two hospitals - Brightlook and St. Johnsbury Hospital on Prospect Street - were aging. Community leaders and medical professionals “recognized a need for a new, centralized healthcare facility that would provide a modern environment for quality healthcare,” Tester noted.

“I think there were also pressures on the staff to provide, you know, a high level of care. There were also changes in how the health care system was regulated,” he said. “There were new regulations, and requirements for what a health care facility needed to be and how it needs to provide that care.”

Community fundraising efforts began in 1968. A goal of \$800,000 was set as a local contribution requirement to secure the federal funding and financing process. It was front-page news

on Jan. 14, 1969, and a time for community celebration when Orlando Costa stood on a stepladder and painted in the top of a fundraising thermometer marked with the \$800,000 goal. Vermont Gov. Deane C. Davis spoke at the celebratory event.

Upon its February 1972 opening, NVRH commenced a timeline of progress that continues. Highlights from the past, according to Tester include the following:

- Providing a home for the first high-tech CAT scanner in Vermont (in partnership with Vermont Radiologists) in 1977;
- Installing a ceiling-mounted microscope in the Operating Room to assist surgeons with eye, vascular and orthopedic surgeries in 1979;
- Opening a Day Surgery department in 1984;
- Launching a Community Connections program in 2002 to provide a safety net to people in need;
- Receiving a federal “Critical Access” Designation as a 25-bed facility in 2004;
- Providing space for the Norris Cotton Cancer Center in 2005 so patients can receive care close to home.

Currently the hospital is in the process of purchasing the lower level of the Medical Arts Building (they already own the upper level) for use by a pulmonology practice as well as the COVID Operation Center.

Tester also reflected on the people who have worked at the hospital over the years.

“We’ve just had so many dedicated fantastic physicians and health care professionals over the last 50 years,” he said.

Tester spoke well of his predecessor, Paul Bengtson, who led the hospital for over 30 years.

Presence Of A Pandemic
Tester had been on the job less



Above: An aerial view of Northeastern Vermont Regional Hospital featured in the Jan. 26, 1972 edition of The Caledonian-Record shows the hospital ahead of a Jan. 30, 1972 open house. The official opening happened on Feb. 14, 1972. Top: The NVRH Campus today.

than two years when the first pandemic in 100 years struck. He called the hospital’s response to the health care emergency quick and effective.

“We pulled out all the stops,” he said. “We responded quickly to a very dynamic situation. The resiliency I saw within our staff and our patients was just incredible, and I’m really proud of some of the things that we were able to accomplish.”

“We had a lot of firsts along the way, you know, we quickly set up our COVID Operation Center and then that evolved into a somewhat more permanent structure,” Tester said. “We were the first one to provide monoclonal antibody therapy treatment for those infected with COVID in the entire state and we know that kept people out of the hospital.”

Confronting Ongoing Challenges

Two of the challenges facing NVRH were exacerbated by COVID, Tester said. One is the increasing health care needs of an aging population in the area and the other is staffing.

“COVID was a wake-up call,” he said. “I was banging on the workforce issue for years before COVID, but COVID kind of made everybody go, ‘oh, yeah, we have a real problem here.’”

He said he’s encouraged by federal dollars dedicated to increasing the workforce.

“We’re seeing money flowing to the Vermont State College system to expand nursing education program ... we’ve got this work we’re doing with the NVU (Lyndon) campus right up the hill to add a sim lab so that they can



NVRH CEO Shawn Tester

grow the nursing program right here in our local backyard.”

Tester also said area high schools are providing an educational start toward nursing.

“We’ve been working with Lyndon Institute on their LNA (Licensed Nursing Assistant) program for students, as well as St. Johnsbury Academy, on their adult education programs for LNA, and an LNA certificate is a great pathway into a nursing career,” he said.

The cost of delivering health care is also a challenge, and inflation is hitting all aspects of the hospital, said Tester, from the cost of drugs, to wage rates, to supplies, to construction costs.

“It’s forcing us to really examine how we are delivering health care with a continued focus on frugality and making prudent financial decisions,” he said.

Forward-thinking

Plans for the “west wing” of the hospital have been in the works since 2016. They entail a significant renovation to the Emergency Department.

“This ED was originally built 50 years ago,” said Tester. “It has gone through some renovations in that time, but by and large, the footprint has not changed.”

The demands on ED services have only increased, he said, both in the acuity of the physical need

and with people experiencing mental health needs.

The pandemic shifted focus from the physical plant plan, but now that there’s more stability with the level and care of the virus, there’s renewed emphasis on the construction. Unfortunately, the cost of construction has jumped significantly since the project was first priced.

“It came in about 30 percent higher than our budget or ability to cover those costs,” said Tester. “So we’ve had to really think real hard about what that looks like and what we can reasonably affordably achieve ... It does still call for a much larger and significantly renovated end that will include four psychiatric care beds as part of that renovation.”

The goal is to break ground on the project next year.

Customer Appreciation

“I think we’re successful today because of the support of our community and in our patients, our friends, family and neighbors who get their care here,” he said.

Patients and their families who’ve relied on NVRH over the years appreciate the high quality of care, Tester said, as well as the “little things” like good food and an attentive staff.

“I think that’s what we’ve been able to deliver over the last 50-plus years, and we’re committed to continuing to deliver that feeling.”

He also said striking the proper balance in the services community members need is a strength at NVRH. “It’s not just the basics, but it’s having a neurologist, it’s having a really world class ortho program, it’s adding the services of pulmonology right here in the community so that people don’t have to travel to access those specialists.”

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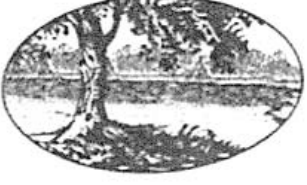
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Judy Abbott, whose parents William and Jean founded Abbott Rental a half-century ago, took the helm in the early 2000s. (Photo by Katherine Fiegenbaum)

50 YEARS

Abbott Rental Continues Festive Family Tradition

BY KATHERINE FIEGENBAUM
Staff Writer

It all began with the tents.

Half a century ago, William and Jean Abbott founded Abbott Rental at their home in Dalton, N.H. The couple owned the Old Grange Hall next door, which William used to store the antiques he sold at weekly summer auctions held in the yard under a large tent.

"People started calling and asking if they could use the tent for their weddings and things like that, which nobody really offered back then," recalls Judy Abbott, operator of Abbott Rental and Party Store since the early 2000s. "So my father bought a couple of tents and went from there. [...] I remember when I was in high school, driving this old big truck and helping [my father] put up the tents."

In 1986, William and Jean moved Abbott Rental to the corner of Union and Reddington Streets in Littleton, where Judy still operates a showroom and sells basic party supplies and propane to this day.

The family-owned business — Judy's three siblings also spent stints working for Abbott Rental — now employs six full-time year-round staff and adds another ten in the summer, running four delivery routes 100 miles in every direction to deliver and set up their signature white tents and everything that goes under them: dance floors, lighting, tables, chairs, plates, glasses and more.

In addition, Abbott Rental provides free rental planning advice, site evaluations, layout drawings and a 24-hour support line in case of emergency.

"Whether you are planning a wedding, family reunion, fundrais-

er, graduation, corporate events — large or small — Abbott Rental is equipped to assist you in planning your event," their website reads. "We understand the importance of clean and working equipment, timely deliveries and friendly, knowledgeable service from start to finish. Our goal is to make you look good!"

While some business was lost the past couple of years due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Judy Abbott says things have bounced back.

"We are incredibly busy, busier than I have ever been before," she said. "It's a crazy year for all rental businesses because people want to get married again!"

Abbott Rental works with other area bakeries, caterers and florists to make customers' visions for their special days come to life.

"Anything to do with weddings, we all have to work together," said Judy Abbott. "I really enjoy working with all the other local wedding vendors."

While tents have always been a focus, Judy attributes Abbott Rental's success to its adaptability: when they started fifty years ago, at least half of the business was small and large tool rentals. In 2017, the store stopped selling costumes and expanded the party rental side of things, remodeling into the showroom.

"I do have a lot of competition, but I guess I'm lucky enough to be where I am, in Littleton New Hampshire," she said.

More information can be found at abbotrental.com, by calling 603-444-6557 or by emailing info@abbotrental.com. The showroom and party store are open Monday through Friday from 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. and Saturdays from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m.

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40 YEARS

**Appalachian Supply Powers Local Plumbing,
Heating, Electric Industries For Four Decades**

BY KATHERINE FIEGENBAUM
Staff Writer

Mike DeKoeyer was just 25 when he went into business with his father Jack and his father’s longtime partner Inge Gray.

The trio founded Appalachian Supply in 1982 and have served the Northeast Kingdom and North Country with quality plumbing, heating and electrical supplies for the past forty years and counting.

“We just kept going,” Mike DeKoeyer said recently. “I don’t think we’ve ever had a bad year.”

Both father and son worked in wholesale plumbing and heating before co-founding their own operation, and DeKoeyer credits Appalachian Supply’s longtime success to the staff’s 100 plus years of combined experience in the industry.

“We knew what we were doing and could get people whatever they wanted,” DeKoeyer said. “My father used to say that ‘if we can’t get it, you don’t need it!’”

While DeKoeyer grew up in Barnet and graduated from St. Johnsbury Academy, the trio first ran their business from across the river in Littleton. Shortly after, they built a warehouse and car wash down on Meadow Street, both of which were operated by Appalachian Supply through



Jack DeKoeyer stands in the doorway of Appalachian Supply’s Littleton location in 2018. (Contributed photo)

In 1987, Mike DeKoeyer opened up a second location a bit closer to home: St. J’s Railroad Street, which “took off pretty good.” Their current location on Memorial Drive was built in 1989.

Though plumbing, heating and electric have always been Appalachian Supply’s bread and butter, the team originally diversified with TVs, boom boxes, VCR sales as well as movie rentals. Jack DeKoeyer branded the operation as “Home of the Bad Guys” — a moniker that lives on to this day — in contrast to St. J’s music shop at the

time (the “Home of the Good Guys”).

The team also sold appliances for about two decades before deciding to mainly focus on what they do best for both wholesale and retail customers.

After Jack DeKoeyer passed away in 2018, his son made the decision to shift the main operation to St. Johnsbury, selling the Littleton location and car wash. However, Appalachian Supply still serves a 50-mile radius from Littleton and St. Johnsbury, all the way up to the Canadian border and remains family-owned to this day.

While the bigger box stores are certainly competition, especially across the river in Littleton, Mike DeKoeyer notes that “lots of people like having more personalized service and our extensive knowledge base.”

Customers can find support with everything from outdoor drainage to indoor plumbing, wood boilers to pellet boilers, radiant heat and high-efficiency gas boilers to coal.

Appalachian Supply also still operates Jack’s Lazer Car Wash in St. Johnsbury and stocks Dominion & Grimm maple sugaring supplies.

More information can be found at appalachian-supplyinc.com or by calling 802-748-4513. Business hours are Monday through Friday from 7:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. and Saturdays from 8 a.m. to 12 p.m.

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40 YEARS

Family-Owned Top Cleaning & Restoration Keeps Region Clean, Healthy & Happy

BY ROSIE SMITH
Staff Writer

Top Cleaning & Restoration ULTD, formerly known as Top Carpet Cleaning (which began as a business in 1982), is celebrating 40 years of customer service in the Northeast Kingdom, and the North Country of New Hampshire. The new owners, Daren and Jenny North, purchased the business from Don and Sue Cheney on July 1, 2017. Since then, the couple has enhanced the services Top Carpet offers to their customer base.

Before the Norths took ownership, Top Cleaning specialized in carpet and upholstery cleaning, stone and grout cleaning, Oriental rug cleaning, and janitorial and commercial services.

When Daren and Jenny purchased the company, their first order of business was to change the name, but keeping with “TOP.” They re-branded, created a new logo; expanded the service area, and added other cleaning services.

In addition to the services rendered before the Norths took over, Top Cleaning & Restoration now offers wood floor cleaning, VCT strip/wax, air-dryer vent cleaning, and residential cleaning. These new services enhance the company’s ability to clean homes from top to bottom, and is especially beneficial for new homeowners, or those who are selling their homes.

Top Cleaning & Restoration also offers remediation and restoration services which include damage from water, fire and mold, as well as clean up of bio/crime scene sites. Top offers 24/7 emergency service. For anyone who may be experiencing a disaster, Top’s certified technicians will work directly with the customer or insurance company to restore the property to its pre-loss condition.

After five years of operation by the Norths, the business has nearly quadrupled in size, and continues to grow and expand. During the COVID Pandemic, Top Cleaning & Restoration continued to operate and provide cleaning services.

“It’s been huge the past year because of COVID,” said Jenny.

Top Cleaning & Restoration is family-oriented. Daren and Jenny have 10 children and believe that family is most important. Eight of the children have, at one point or another, worked for Top, and four are currently employed there. Daren and Jenny brought the core value of family into their business to make their employees and customers feel like one big “TOP” family.

Top Cleaning currently employs 17 individuals. The Norths pride themselves on hiring the very best and have teamed up with TheSeal.com, a third-party background check, to verify all their technicians. This element of the business provides



Daren and Jenny North purchased Top Carpet Cleaning on July 1, 2017. They rebranded and added services. The company, now known as Top Cleaning & Restoration, has since quadrupled in size.

customers with the security and confidence they need when the cleaning technicians come to their homes. All technicians are certified within their first 90 days.

Daren says, “I never want to lose my current crew. My goal is to provide the best working environment, compensation plan, and advancement program. I want this crew to one day become Management material.”

The business is known throughout the NEK and the North Country, by the bright green colors of the fleet of eight vehicles the Norths have purchased. When a customer calls, a question they often ask is: “is this the Green company?”

In 2019, Jenny was diagnosed with leukemia and was in and out of the hospital for almost a year. The couple had to deal with multiple issues, which included acquiring huge hospital bills, totaling nearly \$1 million. Jenny was on a monthly payment plan, until one day, when she was scheduled to make a payment, she discovered that the bill had been paid in full. The Leukemia & Lymphoma Society had stepped in to help and paid the remainder of her hospital bill. Jenny now keeps to her every three-month checkups and looks forward to the day she can say she is fully cured.

Recently, Daren, Jenny, and Top Cleaning & Restoration have partnered with Top Dawg SoftWash. “They offer excellent interior cleaning and are proud to say they can now offer that same quality of cleaning on the exterior of your home,” said Jenny.

“Top Dawg SoftWash is a safer and better alternative to pressure washing, providing exterior cleaning for house siding, roofs, gutters, fences, decks, driveways and windows,” she added.

Daren and Jenny also made a business

decision: because she is a cancer survivor, they decided to donate all exterior window-cleaning sales done by Top Dawg SoftWash to the Leukemia Foundation.

“Here at Top Dawg SoftWash, Daren and Jenny, welcome your help. All window cleaning proceeds will be donated to The Leukemia & Lymphoma Society and goes to help other Blood Cancer patients,” as stated on the website. The Norths feel the need and desire “‘to pay it forward’ and help others who are in need of a little extra help.” For those interested in a free estimate from Top Dawg, go to www.topdawgsoftwash.com.

To celebrate their 40th-anniversary milestone, Top Cleaning & Restoration will be hosting an Open House Celebration in July. The community will be invited to join in with live demos, education, refreshments and more.

“Today, Top Cleaning & Restoration is a thriving business with an awesome crew,” said Jenny.

Top Cleaning & Restoration, located on Memorial Drive in St. Johnsbury Center, currently services Vermont and New Hampshire, within approximately a 45-mile radius. Their business motto is: “Making your life CLEANER, HEALTHIER and HAPPIER.”

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40 YEARS

Shear Sensations Stays In Style
Owner Amy Bean Bought Local Business At 19

BY AMY ASH NIXON
Staff Writer

LYNDONVILLE — Amy Bean was so young when she bought Shear Sensations that she somehow didn’t even consider failing. She laughs about that today.
Bean bought the company after working there for approximately three months and a year in hairstyling.
It’s four decades since that time - and Bean, in an interview at the salon on the corner of Broad and Depot streets says that that much time has gone by feels surreal.
“How can 40 years possibly have gone by?” she asks with a disbelieving smile, taking a break between appointments.
Bean grew up in Hudson, N.H., and moved to the area when she was in high school. She is a November baby and began school at 4, so graduated at 17. She said her high school guidance counselor at Lyndon Institute pressed her to have a plan and get that plan in motion.
She did, signing up for beauty school in Burlington, and setting herself a goal to complete the program early, in just 10 months.
“I had just turned 18,” she said, and she was hired for her first job styling hair at Style Maker in St. Johnsbury. After a year, a friend encouraged her to apply to a new salon in Lyndonville, Shear Sensations, saying it was thriving, and Bean did.
Three months in, the owner told the employees she had to close the salon.
Bean was also working at the Town & Country Restaurant, and the owner, Ruth McNally, suggested to the young Bean, now 19, that she just buy the business. She told her she would back her - and she did.
Bean took stock of the salon’s equipment and made what she felt was a generous offer, \$4,500.
The owner said she had been looking for much more, like



Amy Bean, owner of Shear Sensations, is marking her 40th anniversary in business this year. (Photo by Amy Ash Nixon)

\$20,000, and Bean told her she didn’t have that kind of money.
Two days later, the salon owner told Bean that Shear Sensations was hers for \$4,500.
She sees herself as fortunate for having started off owning a business so young. Setting goals for herself and achieving them has always been important, said Bean.
Doing for others has been an important tenet since the day the late Ruth McNally helped Bean to start out, she said this week in an interview. McNally and Bean had set up a 3-year, \$75/month, zero-interest re-payment schedule and Bean paid her back \$150/month in a year-and-a-half.
Shear Sensations was in a house that once stood where the White Market on Main Street in Lyndonville’s parking lot is today. The house was ultimately razed, but Shear Sensations was there a few years. Next, Bean moved to another spot that owner Fred Bona had available, on Depot Street. It was renovated for the next home for the salon, and they moved in.
In 1989, an arson fire downtown burned her salon and other businesses, and they moved to a temporary spot for a year-and-a-half during the re-build.
She was offered the manager job at the salon at the new JC Penney in St. Johnsbury and considered it, but ultimately didn’t want to take the dream of the new salon or that opportunity away from her devoted

employees. She stressed that her business success is shared by every person who has ever worked for her, saying each of them has contributed, “and I love them all.”
For the past 24 years, Shear Sensations has been on the corner of Broad and Depot.
It is the largest and longest-lasting salon in Lyndonville.
That she’s been community-minded, and contributed to so many local benefits and organizations through the years - she counted 250+ for this report and thinks that’s conservative - has made a big difference for her business, stressed Bean.
If one of the girls’ clients has a house fire, the salon begins a fundraiser, that’s how things work. The salon helps out with H.O.P.E., which stands for Helping Other People Everyday. Bean and her husband and team of friends and employees have sponsored a free Thanksgiving dinner at the Darling Inn next door for a number of years.
“We all agree that our clients - and the community - is our #1 focus,” shared Bean. “I just want to be known as that person that you can come to if you need something or need help or need guidance.”
Bean has often spoken to students at her alma mater, LI, about the profession, and plans one day to likely teach hairdressing after she’s passed the salon along to its next entrepreneur. But that won’t be any time soon, she said. Her health is

35 YEARS

Sutton River Electric Keeps Local Homes, Businesses Wired

BY STEPHEN GARFIELD
Staff Writer

LYNDONVILLE — It’s hard to miss Sutton River Electrical’s truck. Colorful graphics depict a lightning bolt, a plug and all kinds of electrical things happening.
Electrical things have been happening at Sutton River Electrical for the past 35 years. The company still operates where it began, out of the Calendar Brook Road home of owner Alec Henderson.
“It was just me at the beginning operating out of my home. Now we have seven employees, and an office space downtown” at 1052 Broad St., Henderson said.
Sutton River Electrical is equipped for all manner of electrical work. “It’s always been a mix – residential, commercial,



industrial,” Henderson said of his customer base. “Right now we’re heavier into the commercial and industrial end. It comes and goes in cycles like that.”

Of Sutton River Electrical’s seven employees, five are in the field and two are in the company’s Broad St. office. “One electrician has 50 years experience, another

great, her family is doing well, and she just doesn’t see any reason to look to hang up those shears yet.
“There’s no reason for me at this point to consider that, I guess when our children start having kids that might change my story a little bit,” Bean said.
Looking back, her gratitude runs deep, “I’ve learned so much over the last four decades in business and I had so many people that helped guide me along the way.”
From Phyllis Perkins, her high school guidance counselor, “... who was very persuasive when it came down to making decisions as to what I was going to do after high school,” helping her to make the decision to attend O’Brien’s School of Cosmetology in Burlington, to a few talented stylists she named, Janie Ruggles and Sandy Fournier at the Style Maker who helped her begin her career. She also said the former headmaster of LI, the late Dwight Davis, was influential in her life, “Dwight Davis was a big support person for me in my early years of business as he connected me with a couple of other salon owners around the state who had years of experience to give me suggestions and guidance.”
“I truly never looked at this adventure as something that would ever fail. Maybe it was my age that made me so naive but it just never occurred to me,” that she wouldn’t make it, said Bean. “I have been very blessed that I have been able to do what I love - every single day of my life.”
She said, “Probably the most shocking setback that I couldn’t have ever projected was COVID.”
“To have to be forced to close my doors for 12 weeks was something that was beyond my control was frightening,” said Bean. “Like so many - my business was strong and we persevered and came back stronger.”
Bean said, “Shear Sensations has always tried to pay it forward and we have been a huge supporter in our community.”

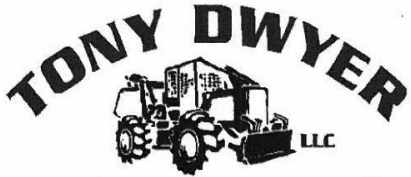
has 27 years – we’re a well-rounded company. We have a lot of experience. I’ve been doing it for 44 years myself.”
The electrical field is no different from most any other, in terms of technological upgrades. “We change out the knob and tube wiring - we get called for panel upgrades, short circuits, loose connections...” he noted.
In addition to its main truck – for which Henderson designed the snazzy graphics – Sutton River Electrical has a service van, bucket truck and five pickup trucks. “We’re set up for whatever we need, whatever job comes along,” Henderson said. “We’ve seen a lot of changes come and go. We have a wide variety of customers, and we’re always looking for ways to improve and do better.”

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35 YEARS

Hardwick's Rite Way Sports Still Has A Blast

Small Town Shop Is Largest Dealer In Vermont

BY STEPHEN GARFIELD
Sports Writer

HARDWICK — In its 35th year, Rite Way Sports has more than one claim to fame.
In addition to being what owner Larry Thibault calls "the largest firearms dealer in Vermont," another claim, he points out, is that "we're nowhere near the interstate – you have to want to come here."
Many people do. Rite Way store on Wolcott Ave. in Hardwick is "chock a block," Thibault says, with firearms and accessories. Asked if any one brand finds favor among customers, "they're all equally popular," he says. "We carry all name brands. You can't really single one out."
Sidearms, pistols and the like



are almost as big a seller as rifles and shotguns. "You have to have a lot of everything," Thibault said. "You need ammo, scopes for rifles, holsters for pistols, binoculars, targets..."

"The technological advances in firearms have changed so dramatically," he noted. "It's like a hammer, there used to be a carpenter's hammer and one other kind, now

there are 10 different kinds you can buy."
The store carries all manner of firearms and accessories, such as binoculars and other items. Owing in large part to hunting, rifles and

"I do this job because I love it..."

shotguns generally outsell pistols and sidearms, he added.
He's been at it as owner in the same location ever since the store's 1987 inception, and he wouldn't have it any other way.
"I do this job because I love it," he said. "Once I found out I really enjoyed it, it's been the same. I look forward to work."

30 YEARS

Rick's Gun Shop Takes Aim At Another Decade

BY ADRIANNA WEBSTER
News Contributor

What started as a storage dilemma for a Northeast Kingdom gun owner turned into a 30-year business with over 30,000 guns sold.
Back in 1992, Rick Gorham of East Burke had so many guns on hand and didn't know what to do with them. With his father's suggestion and wife's approval, he decided to start a firearm sales business and launched what has become the successful Rick's Gun Shop.
Merchandise available at the business isn't the only thing driving its success, Gorham said; locals from all over come to expect and rely on

Gorham. Customer service is a top priority, he said. "We've been open seven days a week for 30 years. That says quite a lot about how we take care of our customers."
The business is currently listed for sale, and Gorham's hope for the business is for somebody to buy it and not only to continue the business, but to also put archery products back in the shop, Gorham said. The last worker, approximately 7 years ago, had been stealing from the business as he made a sale. After Gorham found out and fired the worker, he realized he couldn't do archery sales & service by himself, so he got rid of archery as he got rid of the worker. "He was robbing us blind," he said.



Ruby and Rick Gorham stand behind the counter of Rick's Gun Shop in East Burke on Jan. 21, 2022. They've owned and operated the business for 30 years this year. (Photo by Dana Gray)

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25 YEARS

Flek’s Global Impact Is By Design

BY TODD WELLINGTON
Staff Writer

Flek, Inc is a small firm with an enormous toolbox.

“We are much more than designers,” said Flek co-owner and co-founder Keith Chamberlin. “We are writers, photographers, media and marketing strategists, project managers and branding specialists.”

Located at 370 Railroad Street, Suite 4, in St. Johnsbury, Flek has been helping businesses and organizations for the past 25 years compete in local, state, national and global markets by offering comprehensive and cost-effective solutions for advertising, branding, communications and marketing.

Flek was founded in 1997 and is now owned and operated by three partners including Florence Chamberlin, Keith Chamberlin, and Amy Hale. Together, they have more than 90 years of collective experience.

And they make their values clear on their website, flekvt.com.

“What do we value? Quality. Accuracy. Clarity. Good ideas.



Flek partners, from left, Florence Chamberlin, Keith Chamberlin, and Amy Hale.

Laughter. Above all, we value friendships we’ve cultivated with our customers and colleagues—and being partners in their success,” reads part of Flek’s corporate bio.

All three partners came to the area as students at Lyndon State College.

Keith Chamberlin handles

branding and strategy for the firm and has 40 years of experience in creative services as a photographer, graphic designer, copywriter and strategist for clients and has a strong interest in logos and branding.

Keith Chamberlin co-founded Flek with his wife, Florence Chamberlin, in 1997.

“Keith and I started our own business and I think our first client was the hospital,” said Florence Chamberlin. “And they’ve been our client ever since then...We’ve never solved design problems by throwing money at them. We’ve tried to do the best we can under the budget constraints that we’re faced within the Northeast Kingdom.”

Florence Chamberlin serves as the firm’s business manager and is an integral part of the Flek creative team as a copywriter, editor, photographer, strategic planner and account manager.

Amy Hale, works on web development and new media projects at Flek. She has been with Flek since 1999 and became a partner in 2006. She handles design and production, print buying and customer service.

The firm’s long list of clients includes Burke Mountain Resort, Catamount Arts, Karmê Chöling, Kingdom Taproom, Northern Vermont University, Northeastern Vermont Regional Hospital, Pete & Gerry’s, Quest Transportation, Rabbit Hill Inn and St. Johnsbury Academy.

20 YEARS



Three generations of Armstrong masons are, from left, Erik Armstrong, Roger Armstrong and Karl Armstrong. (Contributed photo)

Erik Armstrong Masonry: The Fourth Generation

BY ROSIE SMITH
Staff Writer

LYNDONVILLE — Erik Armstrong, proprietor of Erik Armstrong Masonry — which celebrates its 20th-anniversary milestone this year — represents the fourth generation of a local dynasty, Armstrong Masonry, which has been serving customers in the Northeast Kingdom (and the North Country of New Hampshire) since 1921.

Erik attended Lyndon Institute during high school and was a student in the culinary arts program at St. Johnsbury Academy. Anticipating culinary arts as his future profession, he attended the Culinary Institute of America following graduation.

He then decided that he wanted to go back to his family roots of working in the masonry trade.

“I enjoyed working with my family ... the camaraderie and satisfaction of working with them. I grew up working with family members — my dad, my brothers, my uncle and grandfather, as well as other cousins,” Erik said. “It wasn’t just a small business ... we grew up working together.”

Erik’s family roots began with his great-grandfather, Guy Armstrong. In 1921, Guy was living in Troy, Vt. When a local mason needed a ride to work, Guy offered to help since he owned a vehicle. Through this arrangement, Guy learned the trade of masonry. The concept of Armstrong Masonry was born.

Generations have since followed in Guy’s footsteps, including his son, Roger, who went into the masonry profession after serving in the armed forces. Roger started his masonry business while raising a family in Tampa, Fla. It was there that his oldest son, Karl was born. Roger eventually moved his family to the St. Johnsbury area where he continued the Armstrong masonry tradition (Guy’s business was in the Newport area and Roger didn’t want to compete with him).

Karl (the father of Erik) is the oldest of the four sons of Roger (Karl, Ken, Craig and Kevin). All of them continue to work in the masonry business, offering their own specialized aspects of the trade. Karl works in the St. Johnsbury area, as did one of his brothers; the other two chose to go west, setting up business in the Vermont towns of Williston and Underhill.

According to Karl, each family member has their own specialty in masonry – “we work together once and a while We all have the same blood, the same work ethic.”

Under the umbrella of Armstrong Masonry, each generation since Guy has crafted their chosen specialty, including Erik.

In 2002, Erik decided to start his own business – Erik Armstrong Masonry – a satellite of the family dynasty. Erik specializes in chimney services, which includes repair and cleaning, which is the majority of the work that he does. He has also worked on specialty jobs for customers. His website highlights his services: “chimney construction; Brick, stone and block; chimney inspection and repair; stainless steel chimney relining; and Residential.”

Erik has no employees – he’s on his own. Several times though, he has had the opportunity to work with other family members on projects that include chimney work.

Erik said, “This is not a competition with other family members in the business; it’s more of a complimentary thing ... My services might be slightly different than that of another family member.”

Erik’s siblings – Tim and Mark – are also members of the fourth generation of the Armstrong family (which also includes cousins Rick, Dana and Tyler) who have continued with the family trade. According to Erik’s mother, Barb, “all wives and sisters ... all worked in the trade.” Family members — which includes Erik’s sisters, Becky and Mary — at one time or another, have worked on a masonry project with Armstrong relatives.

Erik’s grandfather, Roger, the patriarch of the family now, still resides in St. Johnsbury and will be celebrating his 92nd birthday in April. According to son Karl, up until a few years ago, Roger was still helping out with projects, which included the building of Maplefields in St. Johnsbury and Littleton, N.H.

This is the work ethic that Erik has inherited. A work ethic that sees him celebrating 20 years of successful service in the NEK and the North Country. A work ethic that seems destined to be passed on to the next generation.

For more information about Erik’s business, go to erikarmstrongmasonry.com; email info@erikarmstrongmasonry.com, or call (802) 626-3757.

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20 YEARS

Sanderson’s Wooden Bowls Crafts Wonderful Family Success Story

BY AMY ASH NIXON
Staff Writer

EAST BURKE — Sam and Weeza Sanderson have been living close to the land all their lives through farming, logging, running a sawmill. A little more than 20 years ago, Sam saw someone turning wood in a shop along his travels and mused, “We can do that.”

“I went in and watched him,” said Sanderson of coming upon a furniture maker’s shop and watching a man turning the wood on a lathe that day.

Learning to turn wood takes a lot of trial and error, and the couple, who

have owned and operated Sanderson’s Wooden Bowls from their antique farmhouse just outside popular East Burke village, kept at it, going back to the lathe over and over.

Sam said when they first started tinkering around with turning, they bought a lathe and some “junk tools” at a yard sale, and then graduated to better tools. They also did a lot of research through books and online videos.

The early bowls weren’t much to look at, they said. At times, Sam adds, “We’d fool around and break stuff and get disgusted with it.”

They had begun the wood turning as an avocation, not an occupation.



Weeza & Sam Sanderson at their East Burke workshop. (Photo by Amy Ash Nixon)

Weeza is always game to try something new, said Sam, sitting at their kitchen table one morning, telling how Sanderson’s Wooden Bowls got its start. “We needed a hobby.”

Soon, the bowls, which started out pretty rough, began to look better and better.

They made some for personal use and for their family.

Then, one day, “Someone wanted to buy one. We said, ‘really?’” shared Sam with a hearty chuckle.

They decided to give selling wooden bowls a whirl.

They put up a few display shelves in their workshop, then expanded to their living room but people clearly felt uncomfortable shopping near

the couple’s television and couch, so they expanded the entry room into a full-fledged workshop, attached to the where the bowls are turned - often, customers want to see how they are made.

In the cellar of the couple’s home and wooden bowl enterprise, there are some 400 butternut, cherry, maple, yellow birch and more wooden bowls drying - for a full year - ready for being finished then added to people’s prized collections the country and world over.

They said their bowls have gone as gifts as far away as Guam, Nairobi, Germany, Bangkok, Switzerland and more.

“It’s turned into quite a thing!”

said Weeza.

The bowls are made from logs that are cut in half, then the couple traces the largest size circle they can on the flat surface, the edges of the log are trimmed off with a saw. They get to work anchoring the block of wood in place, and beginning to build the bowl to work on hollowing out the block, shaping the bowl on the lathe, wood chips flying, demonstrates Weeza.

Every bowl is signed and numbered, and the couple is getting close to 4,000 bowls since their journey began.

They also make children’s toys, spinning tops, rolling pins, bottle stoppers, vases, and even fan pulls.

One of the special features they love to work with, in addition to burls which have beautiful patterns, are maple trees that have been tapped and have both tap holes and striping that comes from the injured tree healing itself.

“I don’t know how we tripped over that,” Weeza adds of the cool maple tap patterns in the wood. They use several different kinds of maple.

Sanderson’s Wooden Bowls has been featured in news programs locally, in Boston and even in Germany, where their shop was featured in a travelogue magazine, which prompted several German visitors to

stop by.

For most of their bowls, they use local wood, native to the Northeast Kingdom, said Weeza, but sometimes people bring their own special pieces of wood to the shop.

One woman had a hefty burl from a tree that had been passed down three generations in her family; no one had ever done anything with it. She brought it to the Sandersons who turned the burl into gifts she was able to pick up to share the day before Christmas.

Another cute story, shared Sam, was when an old man in Williston was heartsick about his treasured cherry tree having to come down. His neighbor, a landscaper, brought a hunk of the special tree to the Sandersons and they made four heirloom bowls out of it.

The old man was not aware that his friend was doing this, and was overjoyed to have the treasures.

Sam shows off one of their hand-turned rolling pins, and says that though it’s not been proven yet, he’s pretty sure that rolling out baked goods with Vermont maple removes calories.

He said they were not long ago interviewed by a television reporter whose closing question was “What makes a good bowl?”

He had a one-word answer to that, “Us!”

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