As the adage goes, people do business with people they know. Plus, the opportunities in a small community are really getting to know the people around you. The pages in this special “Profiles in Community” section will help introduce you to more of those people in the greater Addison County area so you can feel comfortable and confident with those who provide important goods and services in our area.

Community is at the core of what makes Vermont such an extraordinary place to live.

Knowing the name or some tidbit of information about your neighbor, shopkeeper, hairdresser, banker or car mechanic is what helps us stick together.

Volunteering and engaging in public conversations, knowing that your voice can actually make a difference, is what keeps us engaged.

Over the past two and a half years, as we’ve lived together through a global pandemic, the importance of community has become even more vital. We’ve seen how each individual and each business, institution or agency has a role to play that’s unique and important. And how, through all of our efforts, we create a vibrant community.

We invite you to spend some time with this special supplement and put names to some of the faces you see around town and remember faces that lately have been behind masks. Reflect on the importance of working together to make our towns and state a great (and safe) place to live and work.

For more than 30 years, the Addison County Independent has published this special section to help our readers know a little bit more about the people who play such a vital role in our communities. In this year’s section, we visited more than 125 area businesses to snap their photos, introduce their teams and tell their unique stories. While the details of each story vary, the common thread is the same — each story and each photo serves as a reminder to the hard-working employees and employers who make each business the success it is.

We hope you enjoy these pages and that you take the time to read about these businesses and individuals. You’ll find that our community is filled not only with products and services, but also with the smiles of those who greet us each day and the thanks we offer in return.

— The Editors
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THANK YOU

ADDISON COUNTY INDEPENDENT
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OUR MISSION is to report the day-to-day events of the county – capturing weekly life with words and photos – to serve as a mirror that reflects life as it’s being lived and to shine light on stories that need illuminating.

As we have for the past 76 years, we invite you to join us to learn about your community, about your neighbors, your schools, area businesses, local students, sports teams and other extracurricular activities, and to read the hundreds of feature stories that are told throughout the year. It’s a fascinating trip and one that keeps getting better and better.

In addition to our print products that we know and love so well, we’re also working every day to engage with the ever-expanding digital landscape. We’re proud that our website has won state and New England awards for its excellence! We put the same energy into making it a useful resource as we do our print editions. It’s exciting, fun and up-to-date – with breaking news featured first on addisonindependent.com and our weekly e-newsletters. Standard subscriptions include full digital access! Of course, we’re active on social media platforms too, follow us:

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- Fall Harvest
- Christmas and holidays
- School and business supplies
- And everything in between.

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Development Coordinator
Julie Basol works the city streets

By WILLIAM REED

VERGENNES — Take one pace into Vergennes City Hall and turn to the right. There, you’ll find Julie Basol, the marketing and development coordinator of the Vergennes Partnership, a non-profit organization that works with local Vergennes businesses to develop and improve their enterprises.

Founded in 1999 after Vergennes earned its status as an official Vermont State Designated Downtown, the mission of the Partnership is to enhance the economic activity and growth of Vergennes, all while maintaining the downtown’s charm and beauty. Over the past two decades it has done just that.

The partnership is run by a collection of volunteers who dedicate their time and effort toward their love for Vergennes. But Julie Basol is the sole employee who goes into the office most days, tirelessly devoting her efforts to the improvement and upkeep of Vergennes-area businesses.

Vergennes being one of 23 designated downtowns in the state of Vermont gives us certain opportunities for tax credits and nil-to-low-silicon and all that kind of stuff,” Basol said in an interview with the Independent. “What we do on a daily basis is to really support the city by promoting it and acting as ambassadors for whatever we can do to support our businesses.

Basol volunteered for the Vergennes Partnership for five years before taking the part-time position it has currently. As a volunteer she helped to grow and grow the downtown to what it is today. She has held the position of marketing director at University Mall in Burlington. She has a rich background in understanding what downtown retailers need and want because of her experience.

Basol and her husband, Mark, moved to Vermont to live in a location they could ski in after graduating from Iowa State University. Before moving to Vermont, Basol was not aware of how much Lake Champlain would become a part of her life. They arrived in North Ferrisburgh in 1987 and still reside there, but like many in the area they consider Vergennes to be their downtown.

“We wanted to find a place we could not only make a living but also love living in. We came here without jobs, a love for skiing, and a one-month-old baby.”

— Julie Basol

By turning the city into a welcoming environment and understanding what downtown Vergennes needs and wants because of her experience, Basol said the Partnership’s primary focus is the designated downtown. But because of the size of Vergennes as a population of almost 3,000 persons it’s an area of only approximately 2.5 square miles — and the close-knit community that lives within and near its borders, businesses outside of the downtown area collaborate with the Partnership as well.

“We’re really just a small yet in our attention to the ongoing businesses,” Basol said. “There’s a lot of action happening outside the city and outside the designated downtown as well. There’s a lot of owner-operated stores, restaurants and businesses. And they’re all just really, really good people to work with.”

Examples of businesses that Basol works with include the Lake Champlain Maritime Museum and the Basin Harbor Club, both out on the shores of Lake Champlain.

Basol also noted that the Partnership is “all-hands-on-deck” and works with any and all businesses that seek to do so. She noted that the promotion of various events and initiatives is something else the Partnership does on a daily basis.

“We work collaboratively. We helped to get the sewer bond passed by promoting that. We help promote the Vergennes Opera House, we work with the city council, we help to promote the Memorial Day parade. The Partnership also coordinates and runs the Annual Holiday Stroll in December. We’ve certainly contributed to the Partnership and the people that volunteer for it and support it, the opportunities for the city have been and will continue to be endless.

“I’m most proud of the fact that the downtown businesses are working together better than I recall they had been in the past.” Basol said. “We’ve gotten the businesses to do one another.

On the connection that Vergennes’ businesses have with one another currently, Basol attributed COVID as a driving force and milestone that brought each storefront together downtown.

The partnership’s slogan is “Building Commerce, Community and Culture.” Because of the Partnership’s connections with so many local businesses, the slogan has grown to mean, “Not only that, but there are 23 other designated downtowns throughout the state. Basol feels that she has 23 other communities to work and collaborate with to achieve similar goals in their towns.

Basol was excited to promote a two-day sidewalk sale happening this past weekend, in which the whole downtown engaged in promoting a sidewalk and street sale. Dozens of businesses participated, to promote their enterprises in a community format.

“It’s very rewarding to be working with so many strong independent entrepreneurs here. We’re continuing to seek out new businesses and continue to help support the existing ones in any way possible.”
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Nancy Foster who leads the team has been one of the top producers, number 1 in Addison County for years. She is a graduate of Middlebury Union High School, SVM and earned a Master's Degree in History. She is the mother to 3 daughters who are all married. Nancy's husband Robert is a dairy farmer and computer whiz who runs MOO DOO Products. Nancy enlists working with both Buyers and Sellers on all aspects of real estate.

Diana Berthiaume, has been assisting home buyers and sellers since 2006 and is well known in the selling and buying process. She is proud of her ability to make the process a stress free and enjoyable adventure.

John Snyder-White graduated from the University of Maine with a BA in History and Political Science. John grew up in Middlebury. An Addison County's sole Green Designated agent, John enjoys helping Buyers looking for energy efficient homes, and Sellers market the unique energy efficient homes.

Nancy, Robert, Todd, Paul, Joe, Roger & Matt Desabrais

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John, Brenda, Nancy, Diana, Heather, January

John, Brenda, Nancy, Diana, Heather, January

John, Brenda, Nancy, Diana, Heather, January

January Stearns offers dedication and compassion in assisting both Sellers and Buyers make their real estate goals a reality. January lives in Cornwall where her family has been for 9 generations. She is a back yard chicken fancier, an avid gardener, helps manage her husband's excavation business, and has a lovely greenhouse business which she runs with other family members.

Brenda Jaring who is the administrative assistant in the office is also the Weybridge Town Clerk. She was born and raised in Vergennes, and loves calling Addison County home. She also loves spending time with her three children and grandchildren.

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Heather Foster-Provencher, the newest member of our team, has been around the Real Estate industry the majority of her life, as she is the eldest daughter of Nancy Foster. For the last 20 plus years she has helped run Foster Brothers Farm Inc. and Vermont Natural Ag. Products Inc. (MOO® compost products). She is very excited to work with people and help them navigate and accomplish their Real Estate goals.
Recycled Reading of Vermont started with books, then it grew

By SAM LAPIN

“Supply your imagination” is a fitting tagline for the emporium that is Recycled Reading of Vermont Books and Instruments, where you can buy toys that range from the minted, body and spirit.

This month, the store, situated on the corner of Main and South streets in Bristol, is celebrating the 11th anniversary of its inception. To celebrate, founder and owner Melissa Hernandez will host a July 21 event outside her store at 1 Main St, complete with live music, discounted items and raffle giveaways.

Hernandez has transformed her emporium from what was originally a small snack booklet into a cornucopia for musical instruments, art supplies, kids’ products, board games, CDs and DVDs and much more.

The shop first opened at 25 Main St, the current location of the Hermit Thrust Fiber Co. yarn and knitting shop. In its original state, the concept for Recycled Reading was to be a nice used bookshop that also included a collection of DVDs and CDs. Having worked several years at a Barnes and Noble and discount bookstore in Salt Lake City, Hernandez realized she was well equipped to introduce another format.

She first used social media and community outreach to open a sense of her collection, and was pleasantly surprised by the response she received.

“Wow, that’d be great to carry. You think your customers would like that?”

Hernandez said. “And I thought, things called ‘Strumsticks,’

Wow, that'd be great to carry. You can stick it in your backpack and it's just so easy to play.”

The Strumstick is a three-stringed instrument designed especially for beginning guitar players. Because of the tuning and the way the keys are spaced, it is easier to learn than a six-stringed guitar.

Before coming to Vermont, Hernandez managed a folk music store and worked at another folk-like music store. She was able to use the connections she had made while working in music retail to secure the new space on top of her ever-growing instrument collection.

In 2014, Recycled Reading moved across the street to 20 Main St, a 1,300-square-foot space and began to sell guitars.

Again, Hernandez saw instant success, selling about 75 percent of her guitar collection in six weeks. She began growing her instrument selection to include mandolins, banjos, harmonicas and a plethora of other folk instruments.

“Everyone was really supportive,” she recalled. “I sold a couple of guitars the first day on my grand opening and I think people were really hungry to have something local.”

At the time, the store’s inventory included “Art Supplies.” Hernandez could not afford to buy a new category, having just purchased the new space on top of her ever-growing instrument collection. She was already consolidating adding an art section anyway, and this was the perfect reason for its launch.

“People kept asking so I started getting some art supplies, she said. “It was just going to be one little section, but it kept expanding as people kept asking for things.”

As this section and all of the others continued to expand, she again had to move.

GROWING AGAIN

In 2018, she crossed the street again, and moved down the block to 1 Main St, which is 1,800 square feet: more than her original store.

A lot of work had to be done in what was her biggest move yet, but Hernandez credits her friends from the Bristol Jaycees for their help moving all of her inventory, as well as a local painter, and her local landlord for helping her build the shelves that now hold her extensive book collection, as well as other jobs around the store.

“I knew what I would have done without him,” she said.

At this point, the store had a collection of locally and nationally sourced books, discount books, and we are happy to pay you top dollar for your clean late model cars

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“Everyone was really hungry to have something local.”

Hernandez continued. “It's packed in here; I don’t have room for many books.”

Hernandez credits her friends from the Bristol Jaycees for their help moving all of her inventory, as well as a local painter, and her local landlord for helping her build the shelves that now hold her extensive book collection, as well as other jobs around the store.

“I knew what I would have done without him,” she said.

At this point, the store had borrowed into something Hernandez had not originally intended. As customers, local and those just passing through, continued to request more and more things she didn’t have, the store continued to expand in every direction including a much larger kids’ section.

Hernandez credits her ability to find vendors of discounted products, especially books, in growing her business. She admits to having a knack for seeking potential vendors who can offer her discounted prices on the books she wanted.

Though she takes pride in finding these wholesale discounts from vendors, she also takes pride in the quality of her products and won’t sell anything she wouldn’t use or recommend.

“I curate everything and I don’t get discount books just because they’re cheap. If it’s packed in here; I don’t have room for bad books.”

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In her swim lessons, she "shares the passion" of simply telling them what to do, provides them with options, including what they might be ready for, and how much help they might need.

"I build from where they stop, and I ask, 'Do they still want to learn to swim?" Jacobs said.

"It concerns me that in a state like Vermont, where we have so many children, and Jacobs believes "causes of deaths among young children to swim," the Salisbury resident has discovered that teaching swimming, from age 25 into her early 30s. She has upheld said obligation for 47 years, ever since she first took a swim instructor course in her junior year at the University of Vermont. Jacobs grew up swimming recreationally, joined UVM's swim team during her junior year before graduating in 1976, and then competed on a masters team from age 25 into early 30s. She discovered a love for teaching, which she did at Lake Dunmore and sometimes at the Vermont Sun pool, was a natural outlet for her.

However, swimming is not just something that she does for fun. Jacobs places a high value on the essential, life-saving skill for people to have.

"I've always felt it has always been there. If you love swimming, I'll do whatever I can to help you recognize the opportunities and the outlets for that. If you hate swimming, I still want you to learn to swim," she said. "Because I need you to know you're going to come alive.

Coaching is one of the leading causes of Jacobs's love for teaching young children, and Jacobs believes kids are "ready to go" for something new as soon as they are equipped to handle it.

"I think they are always ready. If you love swimming, I'll do whatever I can to help you recognize the opportunities and the outlets for that. If you hate swimming, I still want you to learn to swim," she said. "Because I need you to know you're going to come alive.

Being able to see kids make progress is what motivates Jacobs most. "It's huge," she said.

"I get a front row seat when this happens," said Jacobs. "I get to watch kids accomplish something new. It's huge.

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Funeral director sees challenges and rewards of running a funeral home

By SHAYIQ SHAH

MIDDLEBURY — Sanderson Funeral Services is a trusted funeral home located in the town of Middlebury. It is notably the only funeral home in the area with an in-house crematorium.

The funeral home, known today as Sanderson-Ducharme Funeral Home, was founded sometime in the early 1900s by Buzz Waite and company. Ownership of the funeral home changed hands several times over the ensuing century until Walter Ducharme purchased the funeral service business in 2005.

Sanderson Funeral Services is a family owned and operated funeral home, one that according to Ducharme “built trust within the community.”

“Does a funeral home care for the trust of a community? To answer that question, one must first comprehend the ‘unique business’ that owning a funeral home is.

“Running a funeral service is not like operating your typical business,” Ducharme said. “The phone may ring any day of the week, which is in the middle of the afternoon or even in the morning and we have to be ready.” Ducharme commented on his readiness to always offer help and support to families who have lost a loved one.

However, what this support looks like is firmly consistent with the understanding that one cannot accomplish anything in this field without acknowledging the uncertainty that comes along with running such a business.

“We serve all nationalities, faiths and religious groups,” he said. “We serve all types of people and practices to honor their deceased and we attempt to honor these traditions to the best of our abilities here.”

With these customs being so unique, Ducharme prefers to meet with the families and understand their wishes and expectations and attempt to reconcile them with the DICF rules and regulations.

“We save people through a very trying time. Therefore, we try to individualize and customize our services as per the wishes of the family members to honor the departed’s memory,” he said.

Such a process has meant that Sanderson’s plan originated from a variety of funeral traditions from green burial and earth burial ceremonies and more. Along with honoring the traditions of funeral service itself, Ducharme and his Sanderson associates also work and work with the wishes of the departed or their family members about the location of the burial. “We have helped family members transport their departed to burial grounds where they wished to be buried for sentimental reasons whether that be somewhere in New England or even other places outside of the U.S.,” Ducharme said.

He recalled stories in which Sanderson helped a family fly their bereaved to their family member to be buried alongside their mother, to Fumaca where the deceased was interred in their familial burial grounds and even as far as Russia. “We have helped families with all the necessary paperwork and clearing the process through customs to ensure their and their departing’s wishes can be maintained,” Ducharme said. “It is a tedious process that can take long hours of research and paperwork.”

At times, the departed cannot be buried in their desired location soon after their passing – a common challenge for families of the armed services.

“We have aided in the funeral service of a few army generals who had wished to be buried in the Army’s burial grounds,” Ducharme remembers. “At times we have had to hold the deceased’s body for a period up to three months in our on-site refrigeration units. Even with this set of unique challenges, why does Ducharme pursue such a business?

He got involved in this business around 1995 on account of his father-in-law, who was a funeral director himself. Ducharme took an interest in the work, learned more and became a licensed funeral director in 2006.

“It takes a special person to be in this business. You are in this business because you love to help people,” Ducharme said.

This zest for helping people has been consistent throughout Ducharme’s life as he spent 32 years as part of an EMT in the Advanced Rescue Team in Caledonia.

Ducharme said he has to ensure that Sanderson goes “above and beyond” by having crafted a program for funeral services that families can opt for. Apart from just being the funeral director, Ducharme said he wears several different hats, filling a variety of roles at Sanderson. Sometimes that means being a celebrant of the funeral ceremony, other times he acts as a representative of the family when dealing with embassy or consulate officials for a foreign burial.

Not just Ducharme, but other Sanderson employees have diverse skills on account of their education backgrounds in fields such as cosmology, ethics, restorative art, physiology, human psychology and grief counseling.

“However, the thread that binds all these different pearls together is the motivation of providing comfort and peace to people in trying times,” Ducharme said.

“We who work here at the funeral home, often get asked about how we can do such a job that others probably can never think of doing,” Ducharme said. “Our answer is simple. We are in this profession because we want to help people in times of need and give them the closure they need.”

WALTER DUCHARME, the director of Sanderson-Ducharme Funeral Home, stands on the porch of the Middlebury business he purchased almost two decades ago. He said that, like most others in his business, he is in the funeral services business because he loves to help people.

PROFILES

He got involved in this business around 1995 on account of his father-in-law, who was a funeral director himself. Ducharme took an interest in the work, learned more and became a licensed funeral director in 2006.

“We have aided in the funeral service of a few army generals who had wished to be buried in the Army’s burial grounds,” Ducharme remembers. “At times we have had to hold the deceased’s body for a period up to three months in our on-site refrigeration units. Even with this set of unique challenges, why does Ducharme pursue such a business?

He got involved in this business around 1995 on account of his father-in-law, who was a funeral director himself. Ducharme took an interest in the work, learned more and became a licensed funeral director in 2006.

“It takes a special person to be in this business. You are in this business because you love to help people,” Ducharme said.

This zest for helping people has been consistent throughout Ducharme’s life as he spent 32 years as part of an EMT in the Advanced Rescue Team in Caledonia.

Ducharme said he has to ensure that Sanderson goes “above and beyond” by having crafted a program for funeral services that families can opt for. Apart from just being the funeral director, Ducharme said he wears several different hats, filling a variety of roles at Sanderson. Sometimes that means being a celebrant of the funeral ceremony, other times he acts as a representative of the family when dealing with embassy or consulate officials for a foreign burial.

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WAYBURY INN

Celebrating the Community of Addison County
With Special Thanks to the Communities of Middlebury and East Middlebury For Your support Through the Pandemic

The Waybury Inn has been a local landmark since 1810 and recently celebrated a meaningful transition in culinary leadership.

Tony, Donna and Christian

The Inn’s Chef for the past 40+ years, Donna Seibert is a daughter in the Greene family that owned the Inn in the 60’s. Her sister and brother-in-law owned the Inn in the 90’s. All lived, worked and played in East Middlebury. Though she will remain at the Inn, Donna is handing over the reigns of the kitchen to…

Our newly-minted Chef, Tony Petri, grew up in the house on the hill, just above the Inn. Tony’s arrival assures the Inn’s continuity as a locally-based and community-minded business. The Waybury will continue to use as many locally-sourced meats, produce, dairy and specialty foods as possible as we celebrate the great gifts of Addison County.

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