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Meet A Superlative Senior:
Ripton’s Erik Eriksen

Erik Eriksen, nearing the completion of his eighth decade, provides important services to the community of Ripton. But that is nothing new. Eriksen has been a member of the Ripton Fire Department since the 1980s, and he served as fire chief for two decades — from April 2002 to February 2021.

We caught up with Eriksen last week while he was sitting by Otter Creek in Middlebury thinking about fly fishing. He said that when he stepped down as chief, he didn’t want any special titles, he didn’t want to become assistant chief, he just wanted to hand the leadership position off to the new chief, Chris Pike.

“For the first four months after I stopped being chief I didn’t go to meetings,” Eriksen said. “I wanted Chris to do things the way he wanted to do them.”

But being done as chief, didn’t mean being done as a firefighter. Eriksen still responds to calls when the fire department is toned out during daylight hours. He went on a fire call just last month.

“I don’t drive the truck, but I’m happy to hold a sign and direct traffic” while other firefighters are dousing flames or cleaning up a fuel spill, he said.

He isn’t expected to respond to late night fire calls because he has to turn his aids off around bedtime; without those he couldn’t hear the tone. But he clearly enjoys taking part in the department.

“It makes me happy,” he said.

Eriksen also contributes to the community as the town fire warden. And he is a town lister, a position that maintains the grand list. His term as lister lasts until 2025, at which point he would be free to run for the position again.

— John S. McCright

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Senior Profile: Porter Volunteers Fred and Mary Anne Hoff

By AMELIA SEEPERSAUD
MIDDLEBURY — Married couple Fred and Mary Anne Hoff of Bristol retired in the early 2000s — Mary Anne, now 84, from a career as a special education teacher and Fred, 81, as a mechanical designer. They spent the first 20 years of their retirement traveling around the U.S., soaking in the next phase of their lives together.

Today they spend about four hours each week volunteering at Porter Medical Center.

“We had been thinking about volunteering when our travels were done,” Fred said. “We were familiar with Porter Hospital having been a patient there. I remembered how nice the people were. That is a strong draw to be a part of. So Porter was where we wanted to be.”

During their time at Porter, the pair have served as wayfinders and greeters. A wayfinder is the person who escorts patients to their destinations, and a greeter is the person who welcomes people as they enter and helps them if needed.

Both Fred and Mary Anne enjoy the human connection that comes with these jobs.

“As a wayfinder I escort people to their destination,” Mary Anne said. “It is especially nice talking to new grandparents on the way to the birthing center. I prefer greeting people. As a greeter I get to talk to people, give directions to the different areas in the hospital. We also provide maps if verbal instructions are lacking. As it turns out, I like talking to people. I hope I can bring a smile when one may be needed.”

“I am a wayfinder when Mary Anne is greeting,” Fred continues. “I like to strike up a conversation on the way to Cardiology, Med-Surg and Surgery. Mostly it’s about anything I can think of. I hope it relaxes some if needed. I also greet people when they enter. ‘Can I help you’ has become imprinted on my brain.’”

Beyond wayfinding and greeting, Fred explains, “some of my other responsibilities are picking up the mail, cleaning the wheelchairs after they are used, delivering flowers.”

The couple finds fulfillment in helping others through their volunteer work at Porter.

Outside of volunteering, they find fulfillment in other ways. Fred enjoys woodworking and Mary Anne tends to her garden. The pair spends the rest of their time exploring Vermont and enjoying their family.
EVERYONE KNOWS THAT they need to stay active as they get older — active physically, mentally and socially. But those of us at a certain age also know that taking part in some sports we loved as a younger person can become a little too taxing as the years mount. Many seniors have found that pickleball, one of the fastest-growing sports in the world, gives them a good aerobic workout without as much stress and strain on joints and muscles. Plus, keeping score is not overly complicated but it does keep the brain sharp. In place like the Middlebury Recreation Park, shown here, people of all ages can enjoy the social aspects of the game, as well as the physical aspects.

Independent photos/Steve James

Pickleball for all!
A court sport is sweeping the nation, and it isn’t tennis or basketball. According to the Sports & Fitness Industry Association, 4.8 million people played pickleball in 2021, marking a nearly 15% growth in the total number of players from the year prior.

In Addison County, players of all ages are joining in, but older folks age 55 and above have been particularly attracted to the sporty. As the popularity of pickleball grows, now is a great time to explore the basics of this game that’s become a go-to pastime for so many people.

**What is pickleball?**
USA Pickleball notes that pickleball combines many elements of tennis, badminton and ping-pong. That game is played with a paddle and a plastic ball with holes and can be played both indoors and outdoors on a badminton-sized court with a slightly modified tennis net.

Much like tennis, pickleball can be played in a singles (one-on-one) or doubles (two-on-two) format.

**How long has pickleball been played?**
Despite a recent and meteoric spike in popularity, pickleball has been around since 1965. The brainchild of three fathers from Bainbridge Island, Wash., (which is just a brief ferry ride away from Seattle), the game was invented as a means of entertaining bored children. It has since evolved from those roots and become a wildly popular game across both the United States and Canada, and the game has even begun to spread into Europe and Asia.

**How is pickleball played?**
An extensive list of the rules of pickleball can be found at tinyurl.com/PickleRules. A game is typically played to 11 points, and a team must win by two. Tournament games may be played to 15 or 21, and a team must win by two.

**Does pickleball have referees?**
Recreational games of pickleball can rely on the honor system much like pick-up games of other sports do. However, USA Pickleball notes that referees and line judges are important components of tournament play. More information about becoming a pickleball referee can be found online at tinyurl.com/PickleRef.

**Why should I play pickleball?**
Players enjoy the game of pickleball for a multitude of reasons, including the thrill of competition, the chance to socialize and the opportunity to exercise outside of a gym or home fitness center. But many play the game because they find it fun.

Pickleball has experienced a notable spike in popularity in recent years. More information about the game and how to get involved is available at usapickleball.org.

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**Pickleball basics for all ages**

Pickleball’s Two-Bounce Rule
1. When the ball is served, the receiving team must let it bounce before returning, and then the serving team must let it bounce before returning, thus two bounces.
2. After the ball has bounced once in each team’s court, both teams may either volley the ball (hit the ball before it bounces) or play it off a bounce.
3. The two-bounce rule eliminates the serve and volley advantage and extends rallies.

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JUDY AUSTIN SUCCESSFULLY hits a backhand during a recent pickleball game at the Middlebury Rec Park. The Middlebury Recreation Department manages two dedicated courts located at Middlebury Recreation Park (77 Mary Hogan Drive) and three indoor courts at the Middlebury Rec. Facility (154 Creek Road).

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Age Strong Vermont

(Continued from Page 4)

the Vermont Department of Health:
- 60% of older adults report experiencing age discrimination in the workplace.
- 45% of all Vermont employers do not offer retirement benefits.
- 70% of older adults will need long-term care as they age, yet almost half (46%) of older Vermonters do not know how they will pay for long-term care.
- 38% of Vermonters with Alzheimer’s Disease or Related Dementia have five or more chronic diseases.

The Age Strong Vermont plan serves as a roadmap for mitigating these barriers and prepare for the state’s demographic changes.

The creators of Age Strong Vermont believe that an age-friendly state supports and advances the following eight pillars of aging strong:

1. Self-determination
   Older Vermonters should be able to direct their own lives as they age, and be granted dignity, respect and autonomy when it comes to decisions affecting their lives.

2. Safety and protection
   Older Vermonters should be able to maintain their civil and legal rights to be protected. All individuals should feel safe and protected:
   - Within their living communities
   - Against abuse, neglect and exploitation
   - At all stages of life, even if their capacity is diminished

3. Financial Security
   All older Vermonters regardless of age and ability should have the opportunity to:
   - Receive an adequate income
   - Work and maintain employment if they choose
   - Retire without fear of poverty and isolation

4. Optimal Health and Wellness
   Through the end of their lives, older Vermonters should have the opportunity to receive:
   - Optimal physical, dental, mental, emotional and spiritual health
   - Affordable and accessible options for health, counseling, exercise and nutrition
   - Access to coordinated, competent, and high-quality care

5. Social Connection and Engagement
   Older Vermonters should be free from isolation and loneliness with the opportunities to participate in affordable and accessible social connection within their communities through:
   - Work and volunteering
   - Continued education
   - Arts and culture
   - Broadband access and other technology

6. Housing, Transportation and Community Design
   Communities should be designed to support and maintain the health, safety and independence of older Vermonters through:
   - Affordable, accessible housing
   - Transportation and community support systems
   - Flexible and affordable transportation programs

7. Family Caregiver Support
   Family caregivers play an essential role in supporting older Vermonters throughout the aging process. All family caregivers should have affordable access to:
   - Education and trainings
   - Counseling
   - Respite

8. Coordinated and Efficient System of Services
   A Coordinated and Efficient System of Services is key to ensuring that the needs of Vermonters are met. Vermonters can feel empowered and better to age well in their homes and community if we work to:
   - Improve efficient delivery of service
   - Close gaps in unmet needs
   - Increase accessibility of resources

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How does Age Strong VT apply to me?
Age Strong Vermont is a plan that benefits all of us. Regardless of your current age or ability, consider what type of aging process you envision for yourself or for your loved ones. Does your community have the resources in place for you to live and age how you imagined?

From current older Vermonters and their family members to our neighbors, caregivers and younger generations, every one of us is getting older. Age Strong VT serves to build a stronger future for our community, where all Vermonters have equitable opportunities to thrive throughout all stages of life—at any age or ability.

Here are some examples of age-friendly initiatives:
- Age Friendly Housing: In response to Vermont’s changing demographics Vermont’s Age-Friendly Housing plan outlines a future of affordable, convenient zoning and infrastructure that promotes socialization, local businesses and overall wellness.
- Continuing Education: The University of Vermont is embracing the Age-Friendly University (AFU) global movement to organize and support educational opportunities for Vermonters of all generations.
- Age Friendly Health Systems: Vermont hospitals have been moving towards care for older patients that is patient-centered and recognizes the importance of

(See Health, Page 9)
prioritizing the prevention and treatment of dementia, Grace Cottage Hospital leads Vermont in this area and received its “Age-Friendly” certification from the Institute for Healthcare Improvement for their committed care excellence to older adults in 2021.

**HOW TO GET INVOLVED**

With the guidance and oversight of the Department of Disabilities, Aging and Independent Living and the Department of Health, this plan is being drafted and will outline critical actions needed from all corners of our community. To be successful in creating an Age Strong Vermont we will need involvement from large and small businesses, foundations, healthcare leaders, policymakers, community organizers — and most importantly — you.

**WHAT YOU CAN DO**

Share with us what matters to you in aging strong in Vermont. What would you like to see more of? Or a new initiative or project? We would like your input. Type up your answers to those questions and email them to agestrongvt@vermont.gov.

Contact agestrongvt@vermont.gov to join a brief monthly update and to be invited to upcoming meetings and public comment periods on the plan.

Join in to make Vermont a state in which we can all thrive!

**Health**

*(Continued from Page 8)*

Enjoying the competition

IT’S FUN TO play pickleball with a partner. Here, Bill Kingston of Middlebury watches as partner Virginia Silvey returns a ball to their opponents, Merle Schloff and Judy Austin in a friendly game at the Middlebury Recreation Park late last month. Independent photo/Steve James
Fight isolation: form a club or other social organization

The COVID-19 pandemic taught the world many lessons, not the least of which was how easy it can be to take socializing for granted. Lockdown was a big part of life during the early days of the pandemic, as people were forced to stay home from work and school and remain largely isolated, even from their own friends and family members.

The sense of isolation that many people developed during those early days of the pandemic likely didn’t come as a surprise to medical researchers, particularly those who have studied the effects of isolation on aging populations. The National Institute on Aging indicates that social isolation and loneliness are linked to depression as well as a host of other negative health outcomes, including high blood pressure, heart disease, obesity, and cognitive decline.

Social clubs can be a great way for adults over 50 to avoid isolation and loneliness. Such clubs can provide opportunities to connect with individuals who share similar interests, laying the foundation for new friendships that can be hard to develop in midlife.

Perhaps the best thing about social clubs is that anyone can start one. These tips can help individuals over 50 start social clubs that appeal to locals who are on the lookout for fun ways to meet new people.

- Think of a hobby unique to your location. One of the best ways to attract other locals is to find a hobby that caters to residents in your area. For example, coastal residents may want to start a local fishing club, while city dwellers may draw more interest starting a club focused on local museums or restaurants.
- Take all comers. Individuals over 50 may aspire to meet people in situations similar to their own, but they should still allow anyone interested in their club to join. Adults in the early stages of midlife (i.e., their thirties and forties) are often too busy with their personal and professional lives to make much time for social clubs, so it’s likely that those interested will be 50 or older. But accepting all who are interested can increase the chances of starting a diverse and engaging group.
- Spread the word. Meetup (meetup.com) has been facilitating connections for two decades, making it a great place to start a group for people with shared interests. In addition to utilizing a service like Meetup, founders can spread the word through their social media apps and create fliers to post on public boards at local community centers and libraries.
- Find a public place to get together. It’s best to avoid hosting club events and meetings at a private residence, including your own. Instead, prior to starting the club, look around for meeting places, which can include local churches, libraries or community centers. Ask about reserving spaces for meetings and look for places that are accessible for all people, including those with mobility issues.

Starting a social club can be a great way for individuals over 50 to meet new people and explore new or existing passions.

One of the best ways to attract other locals is to find a hobby that caters to residents in your area.

Independent photo/Steve James

Ready for action

BILL KINGSTON, WHO coached high school tennis for nearly five decades, serves the ball to start a pickleball game as teammate Virginia Silvey awaits the return volley. Pickleball has a two-bounce rule that gets the ball moving after a serve but encourages participants to keep it in play.

Independent photo/Steve James
Vt. Elder Law protects those over 60 years

Vermont Legal Aid’s Elder Law Project focuses on the legal needs and problems of Vermonters over the age of 60. Through our Senior Citizens Law Project (SCLP) and Medicare Advocacy Project (MAP), the project provides a full range of legal services that includes advice, assistance with documents such as powers of attorney and advance directives, advocacy and full representation.

SCLP represents seniors on legal issues like public housing, health care, government benefits and guardianship. They advocate on behalf of seniors, including testifying before the legislature, regarding policy matters that impact their safety, dignity and rights.

MAP represents Medicare beneficiaries who also receive Medicaid in Medicare appeals concerning home health services, durable medical equipment, nursing care, and prescription drug coverage. MAP has helped improve the lives of thousands of seniors in Vermont by prosecuting successful lawsuits that hold Medicare accountable to follow the rules when making decisions about care and services.

Vermont Legal Aid has developed online materials on a variety of legal topics that affect seniors. Access them at vtlawhelp.org.

Dedicated courts

THE COURTS AT the Middlebury Rec Park between Mary Hogan Elementary School and the county courthouse for years hosted only tennis matches, but now people like Bill Kingston, left, and Virginia Silvey are among the growing number of people who play pickleball there.

Independent photo/Steve James

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