

10TH YEAR

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THE BUSINESS JOURNAL

of Greater Keene,
Brattleboro
& Peterborough



THE 2025 RADICALLY RURAL ISSUE!

COMPLETE GUIDE
TO SUMMIT EVENTS
STARTS ON PAGE 26

TAVERNIER CHOCOLATES:
WILDLY CREATIVE CONFECTIONS



COUNTRY STORES &
DESTINATION DOWNTOWN



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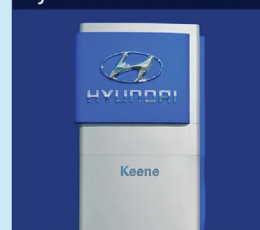
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(Postcard image courtesy the Historical Society of Cheshire County)

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Dar Tavernier-Singer and John Singer, owners of Tavernier Chocolates in Brattleboro. Read about their business of making artisan chocolates using foraged flavors, page 22.

(Clare Barboza photo)



(Courtesy photo)

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(Courtesy photo)

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PUBLISHER Keene Publishing Corporation

EDITOR Laurie Kaiser

**DIRECTOR OF
ADVERTISING
& MARKETING** Linc Murphy

CONTRIBUTORS Lillian Chase
Brady Flanigan
Bob Martin
Kara McGrath
Anna Merriman
Avery Miller
Cody Morrison
Patrick O'Grady
Julie Schoelzel
Lindsey Young

DESIGN Megan Schoettger, DesignIQ

ADVERTISING Pamela Wilder
Silver Direct

**DIRECTOR OF
ADVERTISING
OPERATIONS** Shelly Bergeron

**DIRECTOR OF
DIGITAL PRODUCT
OPERATIONS** Aaron Sickler

CIRCULATION Tom Moore

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CONTACT US Mail: PO Box 546,
Keene, NH 03431
Telephone: 603-352-1234
Fax: 603-352-9700
Web: [www.keenesentinel.com/
business_journal](http://www.keenesentinel.com/business_journal)
Editorial: editor@thebusinessjournal.net
Advertising: sales@thebusinessjournal.net

Editor's Note

When the town of Richmond, a rural community of about 1,200 along the Massachusetts border, was bustling in the 1800s with mills, tanneries, blacksmith shops, shoemakers and more residents than today, the town had a general store. In fact, Richmond supported a succession of stores throughout its history.

Now it has none.

The last general store, the Four Corners Store, closed about a decade ago. Residents who remember it have been missing the store ever since, because it was a community hub, they say.

I had the pleasure of covering Richmond town meeting for The Keene Sentinel in March. That's when I talked with Selectman Doug Bersaw about the town's efforts to bring back a village store and realized how acutely communities feel the loss of these businesses.

General stores were once a fixture of New England towns. Some still remain, but running a rural mom-and-pop store has become more difficult, as writer Patrick O'Grady demonstrates in his story about country stores.

Country stores resonate with those seeking a sense of community, and they capture the imagination of a generation accustomed to shopping on screens. As he was working on his story, Patrick discovered that a reporter from The Keene Sentinel was working on a similar piece. We altered our focus a bit to avert duplication.



LAURIE KAISER
EDITOR

Apologies go out to store owners Patrick reached out to who didn't make it into The Business Journal story and for any confusion the situation created.

This is the magazine's Radically Rural issue, centered on the annual summit that draws hundreds from across the country to Keene to discuss the challenges of rural living on topics ranging from perennial farming to planning for natural disasters. This year's summit will be held Oct. 7 through 9. You can read all about it in this issue.

As part of the Radically Rural coverage, we profile three rural communities and their efforts to remain vibrant: Newton, Kansas; Lewisburg, Tennessee; and Skowhegan, Maine.

Also in this issue of the magazine, you'll find a story on plans to keep local downtown centers alive in the era of the big-box store and on-line shopping.

The through-line seems to be this: Country stores and other local businesses, such as those often found along Main Streets, will survive only with strong community support. If we want these businesses to be there for us, we need to show up for them — something especially important for Keene residents to keep in mind as the city undertakes a major downtown infrastructure project.

The theme of this year's Radically Rural summit is "Rural Resonance." The stories in this issue illustrate exactly what this means.

The business columns printed in The Business Journal represent the opinions and views of the individual authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the editors or the advertisers. Likewise, the appearance of advertisements does not necessarily reflect an endorsement of the product or service by the editors. © Keene Publishing Corporation.

Talk of the Town

Business news from Greater Keene, Brattleboro & Peterborough • Compiled by Laurie Kaiser

■ C&S TO ACQUIRE SPARTANNASH

Keene-based C&S Wholesale Grocers announced this summer that it has agreed to acquire SpartanNash for about \$1.77 billion, expanding its national network of warehouses and retail stores.

SpartanNash is a Michigan-based grocery distributor, wholesaler and retailer, operating more than 190 grocery stores from Ohio and Kentucky west to the Dakotas and Nebraska. It also supplies U.S. military commissaries and e-commerce retailers.

The transaction is expected to be completed in late 2025, subject to customary closing conditions, including SpartanNash shareholder approval and applicable regulatory approvals, C&S said in a press release.

C&S said it has obtained financing commitment letters for the transaction. Wells Fargo has provided a debt financing commitment for the transaction.

In a statement in June, C&S said the acquisition is expected to better support independent retailers by offering complementary distribution centers, result in lower prices for grocery shoppers through a more efficient supply chain, and preserve accessible and affordable nutrition and pharmacy services in local communities.

■ LOCAL COMPANY A FINALIST IN GROW-NY

Shire's Naturals has been selected for the \$3 million Grow-NY food and agriculture business competition in November. The Peterborough company will join 19 other finalists Nov. 12 and 13 in Canandaigua, N.Y.

This year, 270 startups from 41 countries submitted applications, according to a Grow-NY press release.

Participating businesses are required to commit to growing jobs, partnerships or operations in a 22-county area including Central New York, the Finger Lakes region and Southern Tier of the state.

Seven winners will be awarded prize money. Top prize is \$1 million.

Shire's Naturals offers dairy-free foods made from whole-food, plant-based ingredients.

■ BUSINESSES GET LOAN-READY

Six food and farm businesses have participated in the Seedlings Loan Readiness

Program, and four have successfully applied for loans since the program was launched in December 2024, according to a press release from the Hannah Grimes Center for Entrepreneurship in Keene.

Concord-based Walden Mutual Bank launched the program with the Hannah Grimes Center and business consultant Chris Janke of Small Business Butter. The loan program focuses on those who would often be overlooked by traditional lending practices. In particular, the program helps underserved emerging food, agriculture and related businesses who are just starting to build their credit histories.

Sara Powell, program director for the Hannah Grimes Center, said the Seedlings Loan Readiness Program provides hands-on guidance, peer support and financial tools "to make confident, informed decisions."

The program not only assists with the necessary documentation and paperwork but also equips participants with the knowledge, confidence and peer support that sets them up for long-term success.

Pilot participants included a goat dairy farm and creamery, two diversified vegetable farms, a coffee roaster, a grower of microgreens, and the consumer packaged-goods startup GoodieKrunch based in Haverhill, Mass.

■ KEENE HIRES DOWNTOWN PROJECT OMBUDSMAN

The City of Keene has hired **George Downing** as ombudsman for the downtown infrastructure project. In this part-time role, Downing is expected to serve as an impartial liaison between the community and the construction team, including city departments and contractors.

Downing has more than two decades of experience in engineering design and construction management. He has also served on the Keene School Board for the past 10 years.

The ombudsman is expected to provide project updates through various channels, including in-person meetings, coordinate with project managers to relay community concerns, suggest effective solutions that minimize inconvenience to the public, prepare regular reports identifying community feedback and solutions, and present monthly

updates to the City Council's Municipal Services, Facilities and Infrastructure (MSFI) Committee.

■ COMMUNITY COLLEGES RAISE TUITION

Beginning this fall, tuition at River Valley and New Hampshire's other community colleges will increase.

The Community College System of New Hampshire (CCSNH) Board of Trustees voted in July to raise tuition for the upcoming academic year. In-state tuition for New Hampshire residents will be \$230 per credit, up from \$215.

The increase comes as New Hampshire's community colleges seek to reduce student costs in other areas, by offering free and low-cost textbooks and expanded Early College opportunities enabling high school students to take community college courses for credit. In addition, CCSNH says it will continue to grow its base of philanthropic support to increase scholarships and emergency aid.

The system's colleges include Great Bay Community College in Portsmouth; Lakes Region Community College in Laconia; Manchester Community College; Nashua Community College; NHTI – Concord's Community College; River Valley Community College in Claremont, Lebanon and Keene; and White Mountains Community College in Berlin, Littleton and North Conway.

■ NEW HAMPSHIRE BALL BEARINGS NAMES NEW PRESIDENT

Rich Bardellini became the new president of New Hampshire Ball Bearings Inc. in July. The Peterborough-based company announced the leadership transition as Dan Lemieux begins his planned retirement process.

Bardellini began his career with NHBB



Rich Bardellini

(Courtesy photo)

Continued to page 8

Talk of the Town

Business news from Greater Keene, Brattleboro & Peterborough • Compiled by Laurie Kaiser

Continued from page 7

in 1993 as an associate research and development engineer and has spent the last 10 years as executive vice president. He holds an MBA from Southern New Hampshire University and a bachelor of science degree in mechanical engineering technology from the University of New Hampshire.

Lemieux will remain with the company in an advisory role during the transition, the company said.

NHBB is a leading manufacturer of precision bearings and complex bearing assemblies for the global aerospace, defense, medical and high technology markets. The company is a subsidiary of MinebeaMitsumi Inc. and has manufacturing facilities in Peterborough, Laconia and Chatsworth, Calif.

■ MCH CEO TO RETIRE

Cyndee McGuire, CEO and president of Monadnock Community Hospital, has announced her decision to retire in 2026. McGuire has served as the hospital's leader since 2014.



Cyndee McGuire
(Kelly Fletcher photo)

The MCH Board of Trustees has formed a search committee and engaged WittKieffer, a nationally recognized executive search and leadership consulting firm, to conduct the search for the hospital's next president and CEO.

■ KURN HATTIN NAMES ASSISTANT DIRECTOR

Kurn Hattin Homes for Children in Westminster, Vt., has named Melissa Marston as the organization's new assistant executive director.



Melissa Marston
(Courtesy photo)

Marston will oversee all departments directly related to child and family support, including school, residential life, counseling, admissions, outreach and health services.

A former Peace Corps volunteer, Marston has held leadership roles with organizations such as Playworks, Community Planning and Advocacy Council, and the Fulbright Teacher Exchanges through IREX, a global development and education organization.

■ SWRPC HONORS JEN RISLEY

The Southwest Region Planning Commission (SWRPC) has named Jen Risley Monadnock Region Planner of the Year.

The new award celebrates volunteer and professional planners "who make exceptional, often unsung contributions to the region's vitality," according to SWRPC.

Risley was selected for her ongoing direction of The Local Crowd Monadnock, her founding leadership and marketing stewardship of the Monadnock Food Co-op in Keene, her creation and promotion of "shop local" campaigns such as Plaid Friday and Cider Monday and more.

■ LOCAL BANK CORPORATORS ANNOUNCED

Four local representatives have been appointed corporators for the New Hampshire Mutual Bancorp (NHMB).

They are Julianna Dodson, executive director of the Hannah Grimes Center for Entrepreneurship; Dr. Tae Kwon, dentist at Monadnock Perio and Implant Center; Mark Rebillard, owner of Deep Roots Massage and Bodywork; and Gail Somers, former owner of Yahso Jamaican Grille, who now runs an accounting consultancy and who recently founded the Keene Multicultural Center.

Corporators act as community representatives to ensure NHMB is on track in serving community needs.

■ COUNTRY STORE OWNER RECEIVES GRANT

Megan Hercher of the Sullivan Country Store was among 37 entrepreneurs statewide to receive grant money this year from the New Hampshire Community Loan Fund.

A total of \$100,000 was awarded in May as part of the Community-Driven Economic

Empowerment program, which helps small business owners to become financially resilient and self-sufficient.

Hercher owns and operates the store with her husband, Will Hercher.



Archway Farm shop
(Courtesy photo)

■ ARCHWAY EXPANDS FARM STORE

Archway Farm in Keene recently unveiled its newly renovated self-service farm stand.

The store carries not only meat from the farm's pasture-based livestock but also goods from other local farms, including eggs, vegetables, milk, maple syrup and more.

The store operates under a self-service model accepting cash, check and Venmo as payment methods.

In addition to the newly expanded retail space, Archway Farm's website offers online purchasing options for whole animals and monthly meat shares with pickup available in the farm store.

■ PRICE CHOPPER PARTNERS WITH DOORDASH

Market 32 and Price Chopper have partnered with DoorDash to bring customers on-demand grocery and meal delivery from all 129 stores in six states, including New Hampshire and Vermont.

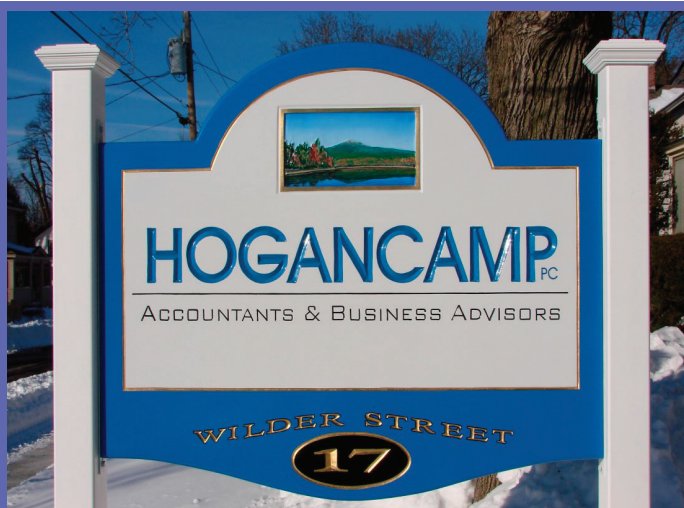
Customers can shop from a selection of more than 60,000 items — including fresh groceries, pantry staples, household essentials and prepared meals — to be delivered through the DoorDash app or website.

Continued to page 10

Just like the person behind the counter at your local country store, we know this community's backroads and hidden gems. Our residential team offers the kind of local knowledge you can't get from a search engine—the kind that helps you find not just a house, but a home.



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HISTORICAL SOCIETY HIRES EDUCATION DIRECTOR

The Historical Society of Cheshire County has named **Michelle Walker** as its new director of education.

Walker has 25 years of experience as a middle and secondary social studies teacher. In addition, she served as Rhode Island History Day coordinator and education manager at the Rhode Island Historical Society.

In her new role, Walker will oversee the development and implementation of educational programs for schools, families and adults at HSCC.

CHESHIRE MEDICAL NAMES CFO

Cheshire Medical Center, a member of Dartmouth Health, has named **Todd Roberts**, MBA, as its chief financial officer.



Todd Roberts

(Courtesy photo)

Prior to joining Cheshire's staff, Roberts most recently served as the vice president and chief financial officer of Alice Peck Day Memorial Hospital in Lebanon, a Dartmouth Health member. He worked at APD for more than a decade, holding prior roles of controller and director of financial services.

TIMKEN MANAGER NAMED EMERGING LEADER

The Manufacturing Institute has recognized **Marissa Rubino**, area manufacturing manager at the Timken Co.'s Keene plant, as a 2025 Women MAKE Awards Emerging Leader.

The awards annually recognize 130 women under age 30 in the manufacturing industry who exemplify leadership within their companies and communities. Rubino is among 30 honored nationally this year.

A graduate of Georgia Institute of Technology's mechanical engineering program, Rubino is responsible for all

manufacturing departments and leads a team of four supervisors and nearly 90 employees across three shifts.

RAYNOR DENTAL CHANGES NAME

Raynor Dental, with offices in Keene and Peterborough, has changed its name to Spoonwood Dental. The organization says that while the name has changed, everything else about the practice remains the same.

LOCAL FARMS GET CLIMATE RESILIENCE GRANTS

Six area farms have received 2025 Climate Resilience Grants from the New Hampshire Conservation Districts.

They include Caravan Farm in Acworth, Dog Days Farm in Fitzwilliam, Faber Family Sugarhouse in Hancock, Stonewall Farm in Keene and Picadilly Farm and Manning Hill Farm, both in Winchester.

More than \$337,000 in grants were awarded to 44 Granite State farms this year to build climate resilience through infrastructure, equipment and innovative practices.

CHRIS KEBALKA RETURNS TO SBW

Chris Kebalka has rejoined Savings Bank of Walpole as senior vice president, commercial loan officer.

Kebalka worked at SBW for nearly 13 years prior to joining Ledyard National Bank in New London as senior vice president-commercial lender in 2023, according to his LinkedIn profile.

In 2024, Kebalka was recognized as Granite State Development Corp.'s New Hampshire Top Banker.

CONNIE JOYCE NAMED REALTOR OF THE YEAR

The Monadnock Board of Realtors has named Connie Joyce Realtor of the Year.

Joyce works as a broker for RE/MAX Town & Country in Keene. According to her online biography, Joyce received the com-

pany's Lifetime Achievement Award in 2020 and is in the RE/MAX International Hall of Fame for outstanding sales.

She has been a member of the Monadnock Board of Realtors since 1982.



Connie Joyce

(Courtesy photo)

ANTIOCH TO REMAIN ON AVON STREET

Keene State College and Antioch University have mutually decided to abandon co-location plans on Keene State's campus, according to a news release issued by Keene State.

Antioch will instead remain on Avon Street and solidify its partnership with Monadnock Family Services, which bought the building from Antioch in June 2022. Antioch has been leasing back space in the building since the sale.

A graduate institution, Antioch University New England is one of six Antioch campuses and locations nationwide. Last fall, Antioch paused plans to construct a new campus building at the corner of Main and Winchester streets, where two vacant Keene State residence halls stood. Higher-than-anticipated construction costs led to the project pause.

Keene State announced it will move forward with its plan to welcome a new public charter school, Granite Valley Preparatory (GVP), to campus this fall.

ARTS ALIVE DIRECTOR JOINS IN-SIGHT

Jessica Iris has stepped down as executive director of Arts Alive after 11 years of service and joined the In-Sight Photography Project in Brattleboro as co-director.



Jessica Iris

(Scott Hussey photo)

In-Sight aims to create opportunities for youth to learn and use the photographic arts as a technical and expressive medium fostering personal development and cultural engagement, according to the organization's website.

Throughout her time with Arts Alive, Iris made significant contributions to the local arts community, including the Ewing Arts Awards, Radically Rural and Elevate the Arts Fest.

■ HUD ADMINISTRATOR NAMED

Michael R. Banks has been appointed New England regional administrator for the federal Department of Housing and Urban Development's Region 1.

In this role, Banks will support HUD Secretary Scott Turner in expanding access to affordable housing, promoting community revitalization and unlocking home ownership opportunities for Americans in rural, tribal and urban communities. HUD Region 1 includes Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island and Vermont.

Most recently, Banks oversaw field operations across HUD's Region 1 offices. Prior to his federal service, Banks was an assistant district attorney for Middlesex County and a member of the



Michael Banks
(Courtesy photo)

Massachusetts State Police and Gaming Enforcement Unit.



Back row, from left: Trevor A. Read, Vinh H. Le, Douglas A.I. Lischke. Front, from left: Grace A. Marrinan, Shea A. Bellino and Fatima Shaukat.

(Courtesy photo)

■ NEW PHYSICIANS IN TRAINING

Cheshire Medical Center's Family Medicine Residency program has welcomed its second cohort of residents, adding six more providers to its staff, the hospital announced in July.

The second class consists of Trevor A. Read, DO; Grace A. Marrinan, MD; Vinh H. Le, MD; Shea A. Bellino, MD; Douglas A.I.

Continued to page 12

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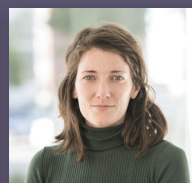
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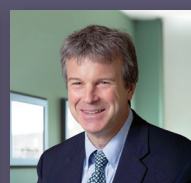
Elana Baron



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Bryce Wing

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Lischke, DO; Fatima Shaukat, MD. These residents join Cheshire's inaugural resident class — who started in July 2024 — bringing the program up to 12 residents.

Under the supervision of board-certified physicians, the new residents began seeing patients at the end of July as primary care providers in the Family and Community Care clinic on Maple Avenue in Keene. After completing their three-year residency, the residents will be able to work as family physicians without oversight.

■ RETREAT HIRES CLINICAL QUALITY VP

The Brattleboro Retreat has named **Lyndsy McIntyre**, MSN, RN, as vice president of clinical quality and patient safety. Reporting directly to Chief Medical Officer Dr. Karl



Lyndsy McIntyre
(Courtesy photo)

Jeffries, McIntyre will serve as a key member of the executive team, leading the organization's quality and safety initiatives, the Retreat said in press release.

McIntyre most recently served as chief nursing officer and vice president of operations at Valley Regional Hospital in Claremont.

■ PHILLIPS NAMED CCDOC SUPERINTENDENT

Nicholas Phillips is the new superintendent of the Cheshire County Department of Corrections (CCDOC). Phillips takes the reins from Doug Iosue, who retired in August.

Phillips holds a bachelor's degree in criminal justice and sociology from Keene State College. Since joining the department in 2018, just months after college graduation, he has served in a variety of roles, including corrections floor officer, shift commander, booking officer and work crew coordinator.

■ NH MEP RECEIVES FEDERAL FUNDING

The New Hampshire Manufacturing Extension Partnership (NH MEP) will receive \$924,376 from the National Institute of Standards and Technology to help the state's small and medium-sized manufacturers participate in the Manufacturing Extension Partnership Supply Chain Optimization and Intelligence Network (SCOIN), U.S. Sen. Jeanne Shaheen announced in June.

The CHIPS and Science Act created SCOIN to assist small and medium-sized manufacturers build resilient, local supply chains and strengthen manufacturing capabilities.

"Investing in American manufacturing is critical in order to grow our economy, advance American national security and out-build competitors, like China," Shaheen said in a statement. "New Hampshire is a small business state, and this funding will help ensure that Granite State manufacturers have the support they need to drive that progress."

■ PERRAS NAMED A CEO TO KNOW

Three leaders of Dartmouth Health member hospitals were named to Becker's Hospital Review's annual ranking of rural hospital and health system presidents and CEOs to know.

Joseph L. Perras, M.D., CEO and president of Cheshire Medical Center, is among them. Perras became Cheshire Medical's leader in 2023 after serving in the same role at Dartmouth Health member Mt. Ascutney Hospital and Health Center for six years. He is an internal medicine physician by training.

Others named in the ranking are Susan E. Mooney, M.D., CEO and president of Alice Peck Day Memorial Hospital, and Thomas A. Dee, FACHE, CEO and president of Southwestern Vermont Medical Center.



Dr. Joseph Perras
(File photo by Hannah Schroeder/The Keene Sentinel)

They are among 118 health-care leaders recognized for driving growth by expanding services, upgrading facilities and building skilled teams.

■ AHAVA JOINS DERMATOLOGY PRACTICE

Lisa D. Ahava, PA-C, has joined Integrated Dermatology of Chesterfield and is now seeing patients across New Hampshire, southern Vermont and Massachusetts. A certified physician assistant with more than 20 years of dermatology experience, Ahava collaborates with the practice's lead dermatologist, Jorge Crespo, M.D.

Ahava earned a master's degree in physician assistant studies and a master's degree in public health from The George Washington University in Washington, D.C. She completed her undergraduate studies at Wellesley College in Massachusetts.

Prior to joining Integrated Dermatology of Chesterfield, Ahava provided dermatology care for patients in Rhode Island and served as a sub-investigator in dermatologic clinical trials.

■ BRATTLEBORO BANK ANNOUNCES PROMOTIONS

Brattleboro Savings and Loan has promoted four employees at its main office.

Ella Young has been named loan servicing supervisor. Joining the bank nearly 12 years ago, Young has been working in the Loan Servicing Department for seven years.

Sam John has been promoted from teller to loan servicing associate.

Katerina "Kat" Pauloo has been



Ella Young
(Kelly Fletcher photo)



Sam John
(Courtesy photo)

Continued to page 14



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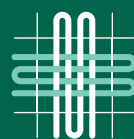
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Talk of the Town

Business news from Greater Keene, Brattleboro & Peterborough • Compiled by Laurie Kaiser

Continued from page 12

named teller supervisor, and Abby Myre has been named universal banker.

■ LANDMARK TRUST TO ADD VACATION RENTAL

The Landmark Trust USA (LTUSA) this summer kicked off rehabilitation of the former horse stable at Naulakha in Dummerston, the Vermont home of author Rudyard Kipling. The stable will be adaptively reused as an overnight vacation rental, LTUSA said in a press release.

The loft of the large stable will be converted into a studio bedroom unit with sleeping quarters and kitchen. The stable was constructed in 1896 for Kipling's horses, Nip and Tuck, and was initially restored, along with the larger Naulakha estate, by the nonprofit LTUSA in 1993.

The Naulakha estate — including the main house, carriage house and additional outbuildings — was the home of the author's family and staff in the 1890s, and it was here that the Nobel Prize winner penned "The Jungle Book" and other acclaimed stories. The main house and carriage house operate under LTUSA's preservation stewardship model and are made available to the public for overnight rental and small gatherings.



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■ BOARD SEEKS ENTERPRISING WOMEN

The Center for Women and Enterprise in New Hampshire is seeking volunteers to serve on its advisory board.

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Interested candidates should be familiar with New Hampshire and small business. For more information, write to info.NewHampshire@CWEonline.org.



Winchester National Bank

(Courtesy photo)

■ WINCHESTER PROPERTY PLACED ON STATE REGISTER

The Greek Revival-style Winchester National Bank, built in 1847 adjacent to the town common, has been placed on the State Register of Historic Places.

The bank's design set a standard later employed in the construction of the front entry to the nearby 1912 Winchester Memorial Church, according to information from the New Hampshire Division of Historical Resources.

In addition to its architectural importance, the bank has cultural significance. It had two women as directors in the early 1900s: Lucy Jennings and Jane Grace Alexander, the first female bank treasurer ever elected in New Hampshire.

■ MODESTMAN LEAVES KEENE

It's not Business As Usual in Keene for Modestman Brewing. The hazy pale ale and the brewery's other craft beers are now being produced exclusively in Maine.

Modestman Brewing consolidated operations in South Portland, Maine, this summer, abandoning its location in downtown Keene. The brewery served customers at 100 Main St. since 2019, The Keene Sentinel reported. It opened the Maine location in 2023.

In other restaurant news, **Smokehaus Barbecue** closed its Dublin location in August. The Amherst location remains open. Harold and Dave Mielke opened the restaurant on Route 101 in Dublin in 2023. Smokehaus was established in 2017.

And **The Smoking Trout** at 288 Main St. in Marlborough closed in August after more than three years in business, citing the rising cost of goods and services.

Do you have business news to share? Send it to editor@thebusinessjournal.net.



Businesses along Main Street in Keene are concerned about the effects of an upcoming infrastructure project.

(Helen Joy George photo)

Local communities work to keep Main Street vibrant

BY PATRICK O'GRADY

Downtown sectors of any city or town may differ in many respects, including demographics and geographic layout, but strategies for restoring or retaining their economic vitality have the same fundamental elements: ample parking, improved access and safety for

pedestrians and bicyclists, more greenery and venues for cultural offerings.

Studies show if those pieces are in place people are more likely to frequent downtown, and that in turn will spur business investment and job creation. Officials and business owners in Brattleboro, Keene and

Peterborough understand those economic principles and keep reworking their focus so their downtown centers remain a destination, not just a place to pass through.

Keene is about to undertake a large

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When Sam's Outdoor Outfitters closed its downtown Brattleboro location in 2024, the business left behind a big space for lease. Owner Brad Borofsky told MassLive at the time that the store suffered from a decline in retail due to crime, drug use and vagrancy in the business district. The Downtown Brattleboro Alliance has been working to reverse this. (Aaron Lipsky photo)



Pedestrians cross Main Street in downtown Peterborough.

(File photo by Hannah Schroeder/
The Keene Sentinel)

Continued from page 15

project on Main Street next year to repair its underground infrastructure, while in Peterborough one project has been completed on Main Street and more improvements are planned.

For 25 years, the Downtown Brattleboro Alliance has been working and reworking its mission to “nurture and support downtown Brattleboro through community and economic development,” said the Alliance’s Executive Director Kate Trzaskas.

The Alliance was born out of a concern among merchants about the high number of storefront vacancies in the downtown — a common thread in the U.S. as big box stores and malls on the outskirts of downtown began to appear. Brattleboro is one of 24 “Designated Downtowns” in Vermont as defined by the state Agency of Commerce and Community Development.

Trzaskas said the Alliance’s approach has included more cultural events and a more proactive approach to recruiting businesses.

“Right now our signature event is a First Fridays and Gallery Walk,” Trzaskas said. “We have a block party atmosphere with a beer garden, food trucks and a concert stage with live music. It really becomes a place where art and community collide. It is Brattleboro at its best,” Trzaskas said.

On the business side, Trzaskas said, in the past, the new business approach was left a little bit to chance, hoping someone with a dream or a contact would open. A new initiative undertaken by DBA and the local chamber of commerce called Brattleboro Thrives is no longer on the sidelines.

“We are looking at how we actively attempt to recruit new businesses downtown while also supporting the ones who are here,” Trzaskas said, ticking off a list of new businesses. “I think we are being more intentional about understanding what the community wants and needs and what entrepreneurs we have in the community, and then looking beyond that to the region and whether there are folks that maybe we could attract who are in a position of growth or expansion.”

Jen Karpin, owner of Morning Glorious Vintage, which sells a variety of styles of vintage clothing and accessories, has no regrets about opening a brick-and-mortar

shop on Elliot Street in May after years of selling online out of her home in Putney.

"It has been really great here," Karpin said. "I think Brattleboro is going through a bit of a renaissance, and I credit all that to Downtown Brattleboro Alliance and all the work they are doing."

Peterborough

The revitalization formula in Peterborough grew out of a downtown visioning project three years ago. Trisha Cheever, energy and community planner for the town, said the community focused on the Main Street side of town because, in the past, it has received less attention than the Grove Street side.

One completed project is the Riverwalk parking lot landscaping, which added local flora, a pollinator garden and trees.

"It has lifted the appearance of the Riverwalk area," Cheever said. "Having that visual appeal is more welcoming than what was there before."

Plans are also in the works to make the area around Roy's Market, with its diagonal crosswalk, more pedestrian friendly and easier to park. Such public efforts can become a catalyst for businesses.

"It is a kind of snowball effect," Cheever said. "Businesses see us investing in infrastructure that surrounds them, and it gets them excited and makes them more confident to invest in their business."

Keene

The plan to replace 100-year-old water and sewer infrastructure on Main Street in Keene led to a new streetscape plan, which has drawn some disagreements among business owners.

Tim Pipp, owner of Beeze Tees Screen Printing on Main Street, said he is leery about the impact of the work on businesses but hopes the final result will be worth it. "I'm excited for this project to be over and the infrastructure to be fixed and new," Pipp said. "I love our downtown, and tourists tell me it is beautiful. We want it to remain that way."

Keene City Manager Elizabeth Ferland stressed that Keene is undertaking an "infrastructure project" not downtown revitalization. "We are repairing all of the infrastructure underground, and when you do that, you need to decide what you will put back

'Businesses see us investing in infrastructure that surrounds them, and it gets them excited and makes them more confident to invest in their business.'

—TRISHA CHEEVER PETERBOROUGH PLANNER

on top," Ferland said in a phone interview.

Ferland strongly agreed with others that Keene's downtown is economically vibrant and were it not for the needed infrastructure repairs, there likely would not be any changes at street level.

Among the improvements in the design of Main Street will be more "equitable" spaces for businesses on the sidewalks, Ferland said.

"It will provide more outside retail access," she said. "Now, some have a lot of room for outside dining while others have very little. Some businesses have the ability to put racks outside; others don't."

Ferland said the project, which is being done over three years to avoid a complete shutdown of Main Street, includes a planned solar pavilion on Gilbo Street to supply power needs downtown but also create a new space for the farmers market and other events. Railroad Square is also being improved.

Ted McGreer, owner of Ted's Shoe and

Sport on Main Street, doesn't dispute the need for infrastructure upgrades on Main Street, but he worries about the disruption to businesses during the three-year project. To him, success of the project will mean that no downtown businesses were forced to close because they lost too much income during construction. "That would be a success in my book," he said.

When the city comes out on the other side, McGreer is hopeful it will mean an even more robust downtown Keene.

"I think my hope is, it certainly will boost the economics of downtown," McGreer said. "This is the hub of the city, so I think everyone has a vested interest in the downtown. I think a lot of the people who are involved in this care about the vibrancy of downtown because it's so unique. Not a lot of downtowns across the country are as healthy as this one. So I just really hope we can keep it that way and come out of this with an even more magical downtown Keene."



Mayor Jay Kahn waves to the crowd during the "Jumanji" Festival parade in downtown Keene in June. The film was shot in the city 30 years ago. (Sophia Keshmiri photo/The Keene Sentinel)

Resource constraints in rural areas force creative partnerships

BY CODY MORRISON



It's no secret that rural communities feature a charm incomparable to their urban counterparts, with rolling bucolic hills, a relaxed atmosphere and picturesque downtowns emblematic of a

Norman Rockwell depiction. These attributes have become a selling point for many looking for a simpler lifestyle.

While escaping extreme population density has countless benefits, there are trade-offs. Rural communities face resource constraints unique to their counterparts in regional economic hubs. Societal issues do not discriminate on setting, and rural communities have fewer tools to address them. Smaller tax bases, human resources, industry and infrastructure necessitate creative partnerships to achieve community goals.

Some of the Monadnock Region's greatest developments and initiatives are

innovations. But what does that mean?

A 2022 McKinsey & Co. article defines innovation as "the ability to conceive, develop, deliver, and scale new products, services, processes, and business models for customers." That same McKinsey article reinforces this point by stating that "successful innovation delivers net new growth that is substantial."

The definition of net growth in a community can be subjective. It is often thought of as a new factory, retail store or housing development in the neighborhood. The value of the municipal grand

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Continued from page 18

list, or property tax base, is likely the better way to quantify net growth. But economic development reaches all corners of society, and sometimes change does not result in tax base expansion.

In the spirit of innovation, the following two projects are among MEDC's most innovative efforts: a public library expansion and a first-of-its-kind approach to child-care expansion.

The first is a downtown redevelopment project, the Keene Public Library expansion, that is enjoyed by many throughout the region. The project involved the purchase, renovation and repurposing of the historic Heberton Hall building into a technological and creative community facility.

The \$13 million expansion project connected the main library to a neighboring annex. A former Masonic lodge, the annex contains nearly 15,000 square feet of finished space and includes Heberton Hall. The project created new community spaces and brought the historic structure up to code.

The project was completed in late 2018. As part of the financing package, MEDC arranged for \$4 million in New

Markets Tax Credits, geared toward promoting economic development in low-income areas. This is an economic development tool that allows investors or private firms to put money into projects and then get that investment back through federal tax credits. MEDC has used this program for other community projects, including the Cheshire County Courthouse renovation and development of the former Smith's Medical manufacturing site for Bensonwood, creating 100 jobs in Keene.

Construction costs for the library project accounted for \$8.2 million of the total project cost. In addition to the tax credits, MEDC spent another \$2.5 million buying the property from the City of Keene. The expansion project had two other main funding sources: \$5 million in private donations raised by the library and a \$2 million bond by the City of Keene, which also provided \$1.8 million in "bridge funding" as an advance against pledged donations. MEDC owned the property during the seven-year duration of the tax credits, returning it to the City of Keene in late 2024.

Child care

Workforce recruitment and retention issues are a common concern among employers.

Smaller tax bases, human resources, industry and infrastructure necessitate creative partnerships to achieve community goals.

The solution to this issue can be addressed in many ways – wages, housing, child care and more. The second initiative highlighted in this column is an investment in child care, intended to strengthen workforce participation.

MEDC launched the Bringing It Home Project in 2023 to address a growing imbalance of child-care need and accessibility. As traditional day-care centers close, the need for licensed, high-quality child care has grown throughout New Hampshire.

The premise of the program is simple: business technical assistance in the form of expansion planning, licensure and navigating regulations, with grant funding for home renovations. This effort has helped bring stability to many families throughout southwest New Hampshire.

More than 50 child-care slots have been created and retained throughout 11 communities in Cheshire County and Hillsborough County so far. This has been achieved by engaging more than 20 family child-care businesses in partnership with over 13 community partners.

This effort has made news outside of the southwest corner of the state. The Monadnock Region's innovation was the inspiration for a new statewide effort, the NH Community Development Finance Authority's Family

Childcare Pilot Program, a \$1 million effort to create regional family child-care networks throughout New Hampshire. In 2024, MEDC was awarded "Partner of the Year" by the New Hampshire Department of Business and Economic Affairs in recognition of this innovation.

The McKinsey article's definition of innovation centers on the ability to create something new for customers. What sets these activities apart is the last part, and most important – customers. Economic development reaches all corners of society, and stakeholders in rural communities often overlap. In a social context, customers are likely both the innovators and the beneficiaries.

Cody Morrison is executive director of the Monadnock Economic Development Corp.



(Courtesy photo)

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Past connections can resonate into the future

BY JULIE SCHOELZEL

Shortly after I joined the chamber in 2021 as a project manager for our Magnify Monadnock initiative, a regional marketing campaign that promotes what it's like to visit, live, work and learn in the Monadnock Region, I met a business owner at an event. As we talked about the work I was doing, he stressed to me how important it is for businesses not only to succeed here but also to be meaningfully connected to the place they operate in, not just drawing from its labor pool.

He had grown up in Pittsfield, Mass., and as a young man, he was deeply impacted by the closure of GE in the 1990s. He watched family members and friends lose jobs and purpose, and he watched his hometown struggle with pollution. The experience marked him so deeply that he vowed to leave Pittsfield and never return. It was a promise he'd clearly made good on.

I think of that story often — the generational effect of a once-prosperous town losing its economic anchor. It's a stark reminder of what's at stake. The presence or absence of economic vitality and environmental responsibility shapes how young people see their future. A teenager can look around and think, *I can't wait to get out of here and never come back* — or they can think, *I hope I get to raise my kids here and give them the kind of childhood I had*.

It's also a lesson in the importance of diversity, accountability and adaptability — because a healthy economy depends on a mix of industries, leaders who act as responsible stewards, organizations that value the connections among all of us, and the ability to evolve when circumstances inevitably change. Working together, we can collaborate on complex challenges, share resources and create opportunities none of us could achieve alone.

We're fortunate to live in a region with room for a regional chamber of commerce

'The spark from a connection may fade from view, but it can fuel outcomes long after.'

— the Greater Monadnock Collaborative, two additional local chambers (Rindge and Jaffrey) and the Hannah Grimes Center for Entrepreneurship. While our missions sometimes overlap, that overlap is an asset. It multiplies connection points, encourages collaboration and builds a more resilient network.

As this year's Radically Rural summit celebrates the theme of "Rural Resonance," I'm reminded how these ties — a network, you might say — amplify our capacity to keep this area vibrant, adaptable and full of opportunity.

In networking, the most valuable connections are often the ones that don't yield immediate results. We must set aside the expectation that every introduction will quickly produce a tangible benefit; authentic networking is done in the spirit of service, not entitlement. It's understandable to look for fast payoffs, but building strong relationships takes time. The spark from a connection may fade from view, but it can fuel outcomes long after, and we may not even realize that a good result today began with a conversation years ago.

A connected business community also benefits from experience flowing across generations of leaders. Those with decades of practice bring lessons learned from navigating shifting markets, surviving downturns and managing growth.

When they share these insights, they give newer leaders something data alone cannot — context. That perspective can shorten the learning curve, inspire innovative thinking and help the next wave avoid pitfalls others have already faced.

History and lived experience connect the dots in ways that can transform the future for the better.

Because, in the end, whether you're running a company with offices worldwide or greeting customers by name in your storefront each morning, our real strength lies in the relationships we nurture. Together, we're not just growing businesses — we're building a durable, interconnected and welcoming place to live: a place to stay, return to or establish new roots.

That's why I return to Radically Rural every year. I leave inspired, hopeful and reminded that people *can* work together to create meaningful change.

As I write this, I think of you, the reader, and wonder if we had a chance to meet over those exciting three days. And even if we're never formally introduced, we remain united in our shared search for connection and in our gratitude to our hosts at the Radically Rural summit.

At its heart, this gathering proves that when people come together with curiosity, generosity and purpose, rural places like ours don't just endure — they flourish.



(Courtesy photo)

Julie Schoelzel is president and CEO of the Greater Monadnock Collaborative regional chamber of commerce.





Reflections of Vermont: Tavernier's retail chocolate shop at 128 Main St. in Brattleboro.

Tavernier crafts wildly creative chocolates

BY KARA MCGRATH | PHOTOS BY AARON LIPSKY

The storefront of Tavernier Chocolates in Brattleboro is almost entirely glass. Through the nearly floor-to-ceiling windows, you'll catch a glimpse of their wares: a block of goat cheese wrapped neatly in parchment paper shares a shelf with artfully arranged chocolate bars covered in dried flower petals, nuts and seeds.

Step through the door and, in addition to the expected display of bonbons in a glass case and tray upon tray of chocolate bars, you'll find yourself among a display of ceramics, plants and other trinkets that co-founder Dar Tavernier-Singer has collected over the years. "We decorated the place in a way that sort of illustrates



Dar Tavernier-Singer stirs melted chocolate to be used in the shop's artisan confections.

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THE KEENE CHORALE

BUSINESS PROFILE

Continued from page 22

what we love and what inspires us,” Dar explains of the design choices she and her partner and co-founder, John Singer, made when they moved into this location at 128 Main St. at the end of 2023.

The process of finding unique bits and bobbles seems to be at the core of the couple’s confection-making as well. While there are some familiar combinations on Tavernier’s menu, the majority of the offerings pair chocolate with unexpected ingredients: milk chocolate bars topped with Vermont-foraged spruce needle and rosemary, a dark chocolate bonbon infused with chaga mushroom and black birch syrup, white chocolate blended with lavender and salt.

Tavernier has been open since 2014, but Dar and John moved to the area from San Francisco about 25 ago. “We thought we were going to move to Montreal ... but then we just fell in love with it here,” she says.

Part of the draw to Vermont were all the local ingredients. “When we were living in California, we were hearing a lot about the foods that were made here, like cheeses,” Dar says. “There’s so much happening in this little area.”

Dar comes from a foodie family: Her maternal grandmother was listed in the census in the 1940s as a confectioner. “She used to make very elaborate cakes and desserts. I think that always intrigued me,” Dar says. “They were really delicious, but man, she put so much work into them. She had photo albums of what she made.”

Still, Dar didn’t plan to go into food service as an adult, even though she did work at a chocolate shop in college. Always a fan of the outdoors, Dar got her undergraduate degree in biology.

“Then, since I couldn’t really make up my mind all the way, I decided to also study French and art.”

After she graduated, she started working in restaurants, including Peter Havens in Brattleboro, which she says is where she learned a ton and fell in love with working with food. “The original owners, Tom [Dahlin] and Gregg [Van Iderstine], were amazing,” she recalls. “It’s a small kitchen, so you got to see everything happening. You got to be a part of the whole deal.”

Dar started making chocolates for fun, teaching herself by “just getting in the kitchen and working with it,” she says, noting that her science background helped. “I like challenges.”



From left, John Singer, Dar Tavernier-Singer and Kestrel Peavy make artisan chocolates at Tavernier Chocolates’ commercial kitchen in Brattleboro.

Truffles were her signature back then. “I would take a cocktail recipe and use local ingredients to translate it into a bonbon.”

At first, she would give them to friends and family as gifts. Then, people who got the gifts started asking if they could pay Dar to make them for events. “That’s when my husband and I looked at each other and said, ‘I think this could be a business.’”

They opened their first commercial kitchen space about 12 years ago; that still-functional kitchen is no longer open to visitors but used to double as the storefront. “It was our factory store, [but] it was really small,” Dar says. “It was really hard for people to find. We didn’t get walk-ins.”

The prime real estate on Main Street has led to more chance encounters.

Before starting Tavernier, John worked as a roaster at a local coffee shop, a job that included buying the beans from suppliers in Central and South America. His coffee connections led him to chocolate connections; today, the majority of Tavernier’s chocolate is imported from Ecuador.

While some companies might source beans from another country and turn it into chocolate once it comes to the U.S., Tavernier sources the chocolate, not just the cocoa beans. “The people who are the farmer co-operatives that are growing [the beans] are selling it to the people

While there are some familiar combinations on Tavernier’s menu, the majority of the offerings pair chocolate with unexpected ingredients: milk chocolate bars topped with Vermont-foraged spruce needle and rosemary, a dark chocolate bonbon infused with chaga mushroom and black birch syrup, white chocolate blended with lavender and salt.

who make [the chocolate] there,” Dar says of why this decision was important to her. “They’re working closely together and seeing the end result of the product.”

Plus, Dar says, the suppliers can be paid more money since they’re selling the finished product.

The chocolate may be imported, but the add-in ingredients that make Tavernier’s options truly unique are primarily locally sourced, either grown at local farms or foraged from nearby forests.

“I grew up in the Northern Adirondacks. My father was a big outdoorsman. I would eat a lot of pine tips, spruce tips ... wild mint ... a lot of berries,” Dar says. “Going out and foraging seemed pretty natural.”

While Dar does do a little foraging herself, she mostly leaves



Dar Tavernier-Singer holds newly packaged Golden Nugget Bars.

that up to one specific pro: Lia Sanders from Halifax Hollow, whom Dar and John met at the farmers' market. Other local partners include Miller Farm, Saxtons River Distillery, Sugar Bob's, Walker Farm and many more, all listed on the Tavernier website.

So how does one figure out that spruce or mushrooms would go great with chocolate? When it comes to developing new flavors, Dar's technique is simple: "I like to eat." She says she'll have a taste of something and imagine how it would pair with one of their chocolates.

"I'll just be able to taste it as I'm thinking about it, and then we'll try it out in the kitchen."

She says this method is nearly foolproof; so far very few imagined combinations have turned out to be less than delicious. While visiting the shop on a scorching Thursday in June, I was treated to a generous spread of samples, all of which were ideal for someone like me whose sweet tooth must never have fully come in. (If forced, I would name the dark chocolate bonbon filled with local

black trumpet mushroom and the "moss" – a cocoa butter white chocolate ganache blended with spruce, wild peppermint and matcha – my two favorites.)

One of the most unique options is what they call a chocolate pâté, a spreadable blend of chocolate and cheese. At the shop, I sampled the salty-sweet chevre honey lavender.

These chocolate charcuteries are award-winning and very popular over the holidays, Dar says. The company also sells drinking chocolate and s'mores kits that come with an unscented soy candle you can use to toast your marshmallows.

The Tavernier product you're most likely to stumble across in the wild are the chocolate bars, which are sold at a long list of retailers across the Northeast (plus Virginia and Texas), including Brewbakers in Keene and the food co-ops in Brattleboro, Keene and Putney. The bars come in clear compostable packaging, an intentional choice to show off the ingredients.

"We don't paint our chocolates or anything like that. We want them to look like

what we're trying to do with the flavor," she says. The mushroom chocolates, for example, look a bit dusty on purpose.

Now that John and Dar are well settled into Brattleboro, they want to host more community gatherings like the ones that convinced them to stay in the region. Another opportunity the new space offers is live events. This past summer, they took groups on nature hikes at nearby farms, where attendees got to eat chocolates that corresponded with each stop on the trail.

There's an event space in the back of the shop, where they'll host chocolate tastings and wine pairings, as well as DJ sets.

The success of Tavernier is proof that you don't have to travel far from a rural setting to dabble in the gourmet. As Dar puts it: "You can find farmers or foragers or go out in the woods yourself and find ingredients to work with that are just really pure and good."

Kara McGrath is a Keene, N.H.-based writer and editor. You can find more of her work at karamcgrath.com.

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Veronika Sokol, assistant librarian at the Fitzwilliam Town Library, will lead a keynote panel on public libraries as the nexus of rural communities during this year's Radically Rural summit. (Helen Joy George photo)

'Rural Resonance'

RADICALLY RURAL TO LAUNCH 8TH ANNUAL SUMMIT

BY ANNA MERRIMAN

The streets of downtown Keene will burst with life as hundreds of people with a sharp focus on growing and sustaining their local communities arrive for the eighth annual Radically Rural summit Oct. 7 through 9.

About 500 people from rural communities around the country are expected to participate in workshops, talks, panel discussions and more focusing on sustaining every facet of local communities — from agriculture to small-town journalism and beyond. In addition to hundreds of attendees, the summit will host around 50 to 80 speakers.

Radically Rural began in 2018 as a partnership between the Hannah Grimes Center for Entrepreneurship and The Keene Sentinel newspaper. The original goal was to use downtown Keene as a kind of conference space, where people who are passionate about their local, rural communities could come together to exchange ideas about how to make those communities thrive.

“It was meant to bring rural folks together to learn about grassroots ideas that are working,” says Lillian Chase, program and development coordinator for the Hannah Grimes Center. “For instance, what’s working in rural Maine that might work here?”

Each year, the summit features multiple tracks focused on different elements of rural community life. New this year is an education track, led by Elizabeth Cardine, an internship coordinator with Making Community Connections Charter School (MC2) in Keene.



Last year's summit participants collect swag.

(Helen Joy George photos)

Other tracks include Arts and Culture, Clean Energy, Community Journalism, Land and Community, Main Street, Entrepreneurship and All in For Health.

In the past, Chase says, those tracks were clearly separated, with participants focusing primarily on their track topic throughout the summit. This year, she says, Radically Rural is moving in a different direction: Organizers have been working on ways to integrate the tracks, so participants can share ideas and interact with each other.

They have added a day to the summit. Rather than starting on a Wednesday, as in the past, the first day of the summit will be a Tuesday, devoted to individual track sessions — similar to the approach Radically Rural took in previous years. But the following two days will see tracks come together, allowing for sharing ideas among participants from different tracks and backgrounds.

In line with the idea of more integration among tracks is the theme of this year's summit: Rural Resonance. Chase says the theme comes from the concept of sharing ideas among a group of people — even if they have different interests. “It’s the idea that a single vibration bounces off of things and grows,” she says.

“People are saying the best part of the summit is getting to interact with people whom they wouldn’t normally,” she adds.

The theme of “rural resonance” will also be underscored in the two keynotes, which will highlight the importance of ideas that resonate among members of local communities.

One keynote, set for Thursday, Oct. 9, will focus on libraries as key gathering places in rural areas. Three librarians from rural communities across the country will participate in a panel discussion led by Fitzwilliam’s Assistant Librarian Veronika Sokol about how libraries can serve small communities beyond simply providing reading material.

“In rural areas, libraries are one of the only places you can go for resources, so I’m really excited about that keynote,” Chase says.

The closing keynote, “Mending the Arc: Stories that Guide Us Forward,” will focus on storytelling and connecting past, present and future. The keynote will be led by Ed Heisler and Alexis Flanagan of the Resonance Network, a Maryland-based organization that focuses on relationship-building in communities. Participants will engage in brief story circles and use prompts that they have learned over the course of the summit.

Tracks and sessions

The eight tracks this year cover a wide



The Colonial Theatre on Main Street in Keene serves as the principal gathering spot for the Radically Rural summit.

(Helen Joy George photos)

Continued to page 28

Continued from page 27

range of topics. The community journalism track, for example, will cover ways journalists can make their newsrooms sustainable.

Highlights include a session called “Do Medium Things,” about ways newsrooms can tackle achievable goals. Another, “Community Journalism Lightning Talks,” will bring in journalists to talk about innovative ideas they’ve implemented in their own newsrooms.

“You Don’t Need a Journalism Degree to be a Journalist” will pull in several accomplished editors to give examples of people who have served their communities through journalism without ever getting a degree in the field.

The new education track will focus on ways teachers and administrators can serve schools in rural settings — as well as go over some of the challenges rural educators face. One session, “Keene as Our Campus,” will involve a walking tour of the city, during which members of local charter school MC2 will discuss ways they’ve used the city as their campus by leaning on local resources and allowing students to pursue less-traditional methods of education.

Arts and culture sessions will highlight the importance of storytelling in local communities. Attendees will take part in story-sharing facilitated by Elise Kieffer, assistant professor at Murray State University in Kentucky. Participants will also get to see a staging of “You, Me, and the Woodsmoke,” an immersive performance by applied theater collective, Troupe, which uses puppetry and a soundtrack of ’90s alternative rock to deal with themes of friendship and the natural world.

Meanwhile, the Main Street track has gone very specific, with sessions entirely focused on brownfields — run-down sites that were formerly polluted or at risk of pollution — and how to redevelop them. One notable session is “Brownfields and Underutilized Land,” which will look at how communities have cleaned up and redeveloped brownfields, often using government funding. Another will involve a walking tour of Keene, during which leaders will show some of the successful redeveloped brownfields around the city.

The land and community sessions will deal with the importance of perennial farming and reducing the risk of food

‘We’re focusing on grassroots work. Sometimes it’s helpful for people to build what works from the ground up.’

—LILLIAN CHASE

HANNAH GRIMES CENTER

scarcity in rural areas. That will include a field trip to Yellowbud Farm in Northfield, Mass., and a discussion about perennial foods. Another notable session is “Feeding Ourselves and Our Communities,” which includes a panel discussion with experts on perennial-based farming.

For clean energy sessions, participants can expect to take a field trip to Peterborough on the first day and examine some of the specific practices the town has undertaken to promote clean energy, especially after adopting a renewable energy plan in 2021. While in Peterborough, participants will also hear a panel discussion focusing on federal clean energy initiatives.

The entrepreneurship track will focus on rural economies and supply chains, with one key session called “Rebuilding Regional Supply Chains: Circular Materials and the Future of Local Economies.” This session will look at how rural regions can revitalize their supply chains and will feature speakers from Cabot, Dartmouth College and the Coalfield Development Corp. in West Virginia.

For the All in for Health track, leaders will focus primarily on natural disasters and how they impact rural areas, as well as trauma response in smaller communities. The Tuesday sessions will focus on storytelling, with participants sharing their experiences of traumatic weather events and how their local communities responded. The sessions will look at how to build connections within rural communities on good days, so community members can best support each other during or following those traumatic days.

The Radically Rural summit offers ways to address problems facing many rural



Lillian Chase, program and development coordinator for the Hannah Grimes Center

(Courtesy photo)

communities today. Chase says those challenges now include inability to get access to the same level of federal funding that they have in years prior.

“We’re focusing on grassroots work. Sometimes it’s helpful for people to build what works from the ground up,” she says.

The summit is also a chance to highlight the importance of supporting local businesses and organizations in smaller communities. “There are great local businesses supporting the economy ... We’re highlighting those things to see how we can become more self-sufficient in our communities,” Chase says.

Ultimately, Chase says, she hopes participants will walk away from this summit with new contacts. “We also hope that people have more ideas and feel inspired to act on them,” she says. “They can take that hope and inspiration into their own lives.”

For the most up-to-date information on the summit, visit radicallyrural.org.

Anna Merriman is a journalist who has written for the Valley News, VTDigger and Vox, among other publications. She splits her time between Vermont and Warsaw, Poland, where she is editor for an arts and culture magazine.

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1/25 - Rani Arbo & daisy mayhem at Showroom

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RADICALLY RURAL TO HOST SPEAKERS FROM RESONANCE NETWORK

BY ANNA MERRIMAN

At the heart of every small community across the country is one commonality: storytelling.

“Rural communities are communities with a lot of storytelling,” says Ed Heisler, one of the keynote speakers at this year’s Radically Rural summit. He adds that, especially in regions where people are often physically far away from each other, storytelling is something that binds, allowing people to relate to one another and remember their joint past. “Storytelling is an essential part of how we understand ourselves and each other.”

And that will be the focus of keynote discussions at the Radically Rural summit to be held Oct. 7-9 in Keene.

The keynote for Thursday, Oct. 9, will involve Heisler and Alexis Flanagan, both of the Maryland-based Resonance Network, telling stories about their own relationships with rural communities. They will also invite the audience to share experiences, in an act of bonding and mutual understanding.

The Resonance Network’s mission is to build a world beyond violence by bringing together diverse populations.

Rather than one main talk, the summit keynote is broken into plenary sessions, with the first being “The Power of Resonant Storytelling” at 9:30 a.m. on Wednesday, Oct. 8. There will also be smaller sessions and breakout groups during which participants can practice storytelling. And it will end with “Mending the Arc: Stories that Guide Us Forward” at 4 p.m. on Thursday.

“This is really an opportunity for people to step into what they know about the places that they love, the people that they love and the way the community is trying to help one another thrive,” says Heisler.

It’s also a chance to connect past and



Ed Heisler

(Courtesy photo)



Alexis Flanagan

(Courtesy photo)

present, says Flanagan. “What we’re trying to shape from the beginning of the conference is an experience of *being* in a particular way that helps people connect to their curiosity,” she says, adding that the conference and this keynote are also about underscoring the connection to ancestors and descendants.

“Through telling the story of how we got

here and remembering what has helped us and brought us to this point — this gives us a launch pad to imagine the future and our responsibility to the generations that are coming after us,” Flanagan says.

This is especially important in rural areas, which have seen many changes with industries leaving and younger people moving away more than they did in previous generations, says Heisler. Telling stories about their local communities allows participants an opportunity to reconnect with their shared past.

It also gives them a chance to bridge gaps that arise in every community — rural or not — that come from issues like racism and homophobia, he says.

“The nuances of how people understand their own stories is really important. Who are we and how do we build connected communities is an aspect of what is important in rural communities,” he says, adding, “There are opportunities through story to talk about what community is and what community isn’t.”

He says he hopes people will feel more connected to one another — in a meaningful way.

“I hope that the way that they’re connected is in the way that it’s the essential part of what matters, what holds you about the past to this day-to-day existence,” Heisler says. “There will be a sense of pride and a sense of responsibility and possibility.”

Flanagan says she also hopes that participants leave with a sense of hope for the future. “Our stories will remind us of our interconnectedness and therefore amplify what is possible.”

For the most up-to-date information on the keynote and other summit sessions, visit radicallyrural.org.

PANELISTS TO DISCUSS THE ROLE OF LIBRARIES IN RURAL COMMUNITIES

BY ANNA MERRIMAN

A Radically Rural keynote panel on Thursday, Oct. 9, touches on a core aspect of rural communities: public libraries.

Set for 9:45 a.m., the panel, “Libraries: the Nexus of Rural Communities,” will include a discussion among three librarians from local communities around the country: Lillian Newton, library branch manager for the Loudoun County Public Library in Virginia; Kristi Hagstrom, library director of the Ord Township Library in Nebraska; and Eliza Skenanore, library director of the Oneida Community Library and Green Earth Branch in the Oneida Nation Reservation in Wisconsin.

The panel will be moderated by Veronika Sokol, assistant librarian with Fitzwilliam (N.H.) Town Library, who says the focus will be on the way libraries often serve as the beating heart of local communities.

“Libraries offer their patrons and their communities a lot of opportunities beyond just information and books. As time goes on, they’re really evolving to serve more as community hubs and hubs of information and learning,” Sokol says.

Many of the questions for the panelists will focus on the specific ways they serve their rural communities and how they have been evolving to provide resources beyond reading material, especially in the digital world. Specifically, they’ll focus on the intersection of libraries and other aspects of rural communities: arts, health, technology. But additionally, they’ll focus on resources many people don’t even know libraries offer, such as food access and items that patrons can check out beyond books.

As an example, Sokol points to seed libraries, which have increased in



The Peterborough (N.H.) Town Library

(Peter Vanderwarker photo)

‘Libraries truly act as one of the last true public commons for rural communities.’

—VERONIKA SOKOL

FITZWILLIAM ASSISTANT LIBRARIAN

popularity and allow patrons to “borrow” seeds to plant. When they grow their plants, patrons can then collect seeds and return them to the library.

Panelists will also discuss how libraries can play a role as second responders during emergencies in small communities and how they serve as a hub in cases of natural disasters. Many libraries in smaller regions have natural disaster plans in place to serve a public that might not have access to outside resources immediately, Sokol says.

“Libraries truly act as one of the last true public commons for rural communities,” Sokol says. “For many rural communities, libraries are really the only place where people can swap and share information and resources.”

For the most up-to-date information on keynote panels and other sessions, visit radicallyrural.org.

THE ARTS STRENGTHEN RURAL COMMUNITIES

BY ANNA MERRIMAN

The importance of the arts as a way to unite rural communities will be underscored during this year's Arts and Culture track sessions at Radically Rural.

The track, one of eight at the Oct. 7-9 summit in Keene, differs a little from the others in that it doesn't have a leader this year. Rather, participants will be invited to join sessions dealing with the importance of the arts in local communities: from a play to discussions on civic participation and collective action in the arts.

The goal of this track is threefold, according to Radically Rural Director Julianna Dodson. She says first, the goal is to cultivate and establish relationships among peers in the art world, then "explore values and multipronged identities through story and visuals," and finally, allow participants to experience a relatable story of conflict, which will hopefully get them talking about their own relationships with conflict and growth.

One of the track's session leaders, Geoffrey Kershner, adds that a primary goal is to underscore the point of art in communities. He quotes Bertolt Brecht in saying, "Art is not a mirror held up to reality; it's a hammer with which to shape it."

"It's this idea that the arts are a utility for accomplishing larger community goals. It's a convener, a way to express and consolidate information at points ... It brings people together," Kershner says. That is especially important at times when a community is struggling to come together, he adds.

As founder of Small Town, Big Arts, a Virginia-based organization that works to bring the arts to rural communities, Kershner is primarily concerned with helping small, rural areas implement places for the arts.

Not only do the arts act as a force that unites a small community, but they also can have



SESSION LEADER
GEOFFREY KERSHNER

economic benefits, Kershner says. He points to session speaker, Kay Decker, who implemented an arts district in her small Oklahoma community following the 2008 financial crisis.

"It began to create an identity and a brand for the downtown, which was failing at that time," he says. "It spurred economic activity. People began to come downtown, invest more in downtown. It helped existing small businesses."

He says the initiative gave the town more of a reason for outsiders to visit and spend money there – as well as underscore the importance of the arts in general.

"It was actually something helping to fill a void that they really needed at a time when the economy was struggling."

Sessions

So far, there are only two sessions meant just for arts and culture. The first is a "getting to know you" session at the Hannah Grimes Center at 1 p.m. on Tuesday, Oct. 7. The session, facilitated by Elise Kieffer, program director and assistant professor at Murray State University in Kentucky, will include

story-sharing.

The next is a performance of "You, Me, and the Woodsmoke" at 7 p.m. at the Hannah Grimes Center. The performance includes five members of Make Create More, a creative collective based in New Hampshire, and draws in themes of friendship and nature – and involves puppetry and a '90s alt-rock soundtrack.

Over the next two days, participants will join other tracks for several sessions that handle ideas like storytelling, community culture and civic participation.

Kershner will be co-leading one of the sessions in the Arts and Culture track, called "Arts as a Catalyst for Collective Action," which will be held at 11 a.m. on Thursday, Oct. 9, at Cohen Hall in the Keene Public Library. He'll be joined by Kieffer and Decker as they discuss how creative collaboration across different parts of a community can help build and strengthen that community.

"In order to provide a clear value to the community and bolster the arts, the arts have to be seen as valuable," Kershner says, adding, "Often that's done through cross-sector collaboration."

Kershner says he hopes this track is valuable for participants and that they leave with "an awareness that the arts can be and could be a part of helping accomplish goals within all the different tracks and focus areas that exist within the conference."

Dodson adds that she hopes participants can walk away from this track with tools they can use and models to inspire them.

"More than anything, I hope they feel cared for, inspired, hopeful and recharged to return to their home places and carry on this essential work," she says. "The communities we need to survive the future will always be fueled by the arts."

For the most up-to-date summit information, visit radicallyrural.org.



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RURAL BROWNFIELDS CLEANUP IS DOABLE

BY ANNA MERRIMAN

This year's Main Street track will focus on brownfield sites, their cleanup and their revitalization. Track leader Jason Cooper describes these sites — like former auto body shops and dry cleaning facilities — as having a “perceived or real” risk of contamination.

Through several sessions and workshops, the track will focus on “what cleaning up these sites actually looks like” according to Cooper, a planner with New Hampshire's Southwest Region Planning Commission.

He says the topic will resonate with many members of small, rural communities around the country, as brownfields are present everywhere. “Most people can picture one or two [brownfields] in their town that you walk by or drive by and think, ‘Oh this is such prime real estate, if only we could do something with it and clean it up,’” Cooper says.

The topic of brownfields is particularly significant for small towns because addressing contamination and revitalization is actually a feasible project for many rural areas. “It's not the hardest thing in the world for a small town to get their own brownfields assessment program started,” Cooper says.

His own region has had a brownfields assessment program for around 20 years, and towns in the region can submit sites to the program, which decides whether to fund the assessment and revitalization of those sites using a grant from the EPA. The cost can be anywhere from \$5,000 to \$60,000, and the funds are

available to all, including some very small rural communities that don't have access to that kind of money on their own.

“So there are opportunities for really small, rural places to redevelop their brownfields and it's more accessible than it might seem at first,” Cooper said.

Sessions

The sessions will kick off on Tuesday, Oct. 7, at 10:30 a.m. with “Brownfields and Underutilized Land: How to Revitalize your Community” at Delegation Hall, 12 Court St. in Keene. The panel will go over the basics: What are brownfields? What does cleaning them up look like? Speakers will share anecdotes on brownfield success stories.

Included in the panel will be professional consultants who do brownfields cleanup for a living as well as representatives who can speak to the municipal side of the process — including people who serve on community groups in their local towns, dedicated to brownfield work. Cooper says they expect to see Ross Cunningham, economic development director for Lisbon, Maine, and two members of the New England EPA: Jim Byrne, the brownfields coordinator who handles cleanup grants and quality assurance, and Paul Pietrinferni, who handles multi-purpose grants.

The panel will include a range of voices and aims to highlight brownfield success stories that can serve to inspire track participants to take on brownfield cleanup projects in their own communities. Included among

the panelists is Matt Ashby, vice president of development services for Ayres Associates Inc. in Wyoming, who specializes in downtown revitalization projects and has a long history of securing EPA grants and overseeing projects to drive economic renewal.

After lunch and a networking session, track participants will undertake a walking tour of Keene called “Keene's Brownfield Success Tour,” which starts at 1 p.m. from Delegation Hall. The tour will be led by the Monadnock Economic Development Corp., which has been instrumental in Keene's brownfield projects, to see brownfields in the city that have been successfully redeveloped.

“Keene has many of these sites, and many of these brownfields have been successfully redeveloped into all kinds of really amazing uses,” Cooper says, giving as an example a former railway area, which has been cleaned and redeveloped into a co-op, housing and other uses.

Following the walking tour, participants can join a brownfields redevelopment workshop at 2:30 p.m. called “Taking Action: Breathing New Life into Forgotten Spaces.” Also held at Delegation Hall, the workshop will go over how to start projects to redevelop brownfields or other underutilized spaces in small communities. The workshop will propose new uses, like renewable energy, parks and community areas, or private investments.

“Hopefully everybody has some inspiration. Maybe they're thinking about a site in their town,” Cooper says, adding that



TRACK LEADER
JASON COOPER

the hands-on workshop following the walking tour aims to “help people plot out what some next steps might be to get these sites redeveloped in their town or assessed for contamination.”

The workshop will bring in renewable energy representatives, including Rob Greer, senior director of clean energy solutions for Encore Renewable Energy in Burlington, Vt.

“The strength of Radically Rural is its ability to excite its audience, inspire its audience ... My goal for this programming is really to help folks walk away with a vision, with maybe a short list of things they can start working on in their towns to get a redevelopment project going or even maybe start a conversation about the eyesore on Main Street,” Cooper says.

The new structure of the Radically Rural summit this year sees the first day devoted to individual tracks — in Main Street's case, that means several sessions on brownfields — and the remaining days focused on sessions that pull in multiple tracks.

For the most up-to-date summit information, visit radicallyrural.org.

GREEN OPTIONS REMAIN WITHIN REACH

BY ANNA MERRIMAN

Lead by example — that’s the goal of the first part of Radically Rural’s clean energy track. And the example is in Peterborough, just 30 minutes away from Keene, where the Radically Rural summit is being held.

“There’s a lot that Peterborough is doing in the way of clean energy,” says track leader Rob Werner, state director for the League of Conservation Voters. Participants can expect to kick off this year’s track with a visit to Peterborough, which Werner says has taken on several great clean energy initiatives in recent years, including installing small hydropower units, solar panels and more.

Residents of the town also voted by overwhelming majority in 2021 to pass a measure that would commit Peterborough to 100 percent reliance on renewable energy by 2030, according to the town’s website. And, in 2023, the town received a U.S. Department of Energy grant to replace fossil fuel heating systems in multiple buildings around the town with the more energy-efficient, cold-climate heat pumps.

Because of Peterborough’s numerous steps to implement clean energy initiatives, Werner says it was a natural choice for the first day of the clean energy track sessions. He said he hopes participants

will be inspired and leave with actionable steps they can take in their own communities.

“We wanted to provide a hands-on, inspirational learning experience,” Werner says.

The energy track aims to shine a light on some of the steps that small, rural communities can take when it comes to clean energy initiatives, especially in the current political climate, which has seen many initiatives canceled on the federal level.

“We want to make sure that people understand that, even in this situation we find ourselves, there are still opportunities” for clean energy projects in local communities, Werner says.

Sessions

The track will open on Tuesday, Oct. 7, at 9:15 a.m. with the visit to Peterborough, where participants will see firsthand various clean energy initiatives the town has taken. Though details were still being ironed out at press time, Werner said he’s thinking of the entire first day as one large session.

The tour around Peterborough will be followed by a panel on clean energy initiatives on the community and federal levels. The panel discussion will be a chance to educate participants on federal clean energy projects — where they stand and what the

deadlines are for application to some of these initiatives, Werner says.

The panel will also highlight the importance of C-PACER (Commercial Property Assessed Clean Energy and Resiliency), which is a financing mechanism for clean energy projects in commercial properties. Those projects can include things like infrastructure for electric vehicle charging stations and water conservation projects.

“It allows people to finance projects in a way where the municipality doesn’t have to take a financial risk or provide the administrative aspect,” Werner says, adding that it’s a good opportunity for local communities, which may not otherwise have the money, to get access to those funds. “[C-PACER] would make it a lot easier for these kinds of upgrades or new construction to be more energy efficient.”

He adds that the goal of this panel is to stress the idea that no matter the size of your community, there are local initiatives that “can be valued and supported and can make a difference.”

Werner says his group is partnering with Clean Energy New Hampshire on this track. Sam Evans-Brown, executive director of Clean Energy New Hampshire, is one of the confirmed panel speakers, Werner says. He also



TRACK LEADER
ROB WERNER

expects to have an expert with C-PACER on the panel to discuss the program and answer any questions.

This track comes at an apt time, Werner says, explaining that many communities, both large and small, have expressed concern since many federal clean energy initiatives that once existed have been lost.

“Now that’s all been turned upside down... Part of what we’re trying to do is make sure that people understand that, even in this environment, there are still opportunities and ways to make a difference,” Werner says.

Following Tuesday’s visit to Peterborough, the track will join others on Wednesday and Thursday for joint sessions that cover topics like federal legislation, community design, natural disasters and more.

For the most up-to-date information, visit radicallyrural.org.

PERENNIAL FARMING CAN HELP PREVENT FOOD SCARCITY

BY ANNA MERRIMAN

Perennial farming — and how it can help prevent food scarcity — is the primary focus of this year's Land and Community sessions at the Radically Rural summit.

Led by Martin Castriotta, a farmer with Village Roots Permaculture in Cheshire County, the track will look at how perennial farming can provide an alternative source to grocery stores, as well as the benefits of perennial farming and reliance on locally sourced food.

"I hope that participants will come away from this experience with an understanding that local access to food and the land-use patterns that make this possible touches every aspect of a community's well-being," says Castriotta.

The track will explore four main aspects of this topic, beginning with the crossover between food insecurity and housing insecurity. It will also look at the long-term benefits of perennial farming and agriculture systems.

Perennial farming refers to the practice of cultivating crops that can live longer than two years. Some key examples are nut and fruit trees, and certain vegetables like asparagus and rhubarb. This type of farming has benefits not only for farmers, but also for health and native ecosystems, as well as rural communities in general, Castriotta says.

Perennial farming can not

only aid in climate issues like erosion control and water retention but also promote food security in smaller communities by providing more consistent and reliable access to food.

"I hope that participants gain a deeper understanding of the current implications when it comes to food access: three days of food in most supermarkets when an emergency strikes," Castriotta says. "We need to build in food solutions that increase community resilience, and that this starts on the land, but also by exposing people to different — sometimes more ancient — food options."

The track will go on to look at land-use patterns that could benefit homes, businesses and schools, and the importance of maximizing biomass production — essentially, growing mulch next to crops — which can increase their fertility and overall crop yield, says Castriotta.

Participants "will see agriculture in a whole new light, as we transition to a permaculture that embraces a more holistic view of human habitat and the production of our basic needs," Castriotta says.

Though many of the activities will be based in Keene, Castriotta says the track will also look at patterns of land use in hyper-rural areas because access to enough open land is crucial to promote farming and thus shift a community's reliance from supermarkets to

locally sourced foods.

Sessions

The Land and Community track will kick off at 9 a.m. Tuesday, Oct. 7, with a visit to the Hundred Nights Shelter at 122 Water St. in Keene. The shelter has recently installed a "food forest" and community garden space which participants will get to tour.

Following the visit, participants will join the Downtown Agroecological Restoration Sites tour, also at the Hundred Nights Shelter, at 10 a.m. This visit will include a site where degraded agricultural land has been restored. Once a patch of gravel next to an old factory, this site has been revamped into an outdoor cafe with many native plants, herbs, fruits and more.

Castriotta says the new space represents "the connection between growing food, restoring habitat, healing soil and community restoration."

That will be followed by two farm visits: one to Yellowbud Farm in Northfield, Mass., at noon, which will include a discussion on perennial farming and regional foods; the other will be a visit to Village Roots Farm and Orchard Hill Community in Alstead at 3:30 p.m. This will include talks on forest-pastured chickens, community gardening and more.

The farms "represent some of the possibilities for integrating perennial solutions into regional



TRACK LEADER
MARTIN CASTRIOTTA

farming, such as growing nut trees as a regional source of protein, carbohydrates and fat, and regenerative animal rotations under woody crop production," Castriotta says.

The penultimate session will be at the Orchard Hill Community in Alstead at 4:30 p.m., where participants will enjoy a dinner made from local ingredients at Orchard Hill Breadworks and a discussion on organizing food and community.

Finally, the first day of the track sessions will end with "Feeding Ourselves and Our Communities," a panel discussion at 6 p.m. at the Orchard Hill Community. Regional experts will discuss strategies for transitioning to perennial agriculture.

The following two days will see the Land and Community track join others for sessions about farming, storytelling, community neighborliness and more.

For the most up-to-date information on summit sessions, visit radicallyrural.org.

JOURNALISTS TO SHARE TOOLS TO SUSTAIN RURAL NEWSROOMS

BY ANNA MERRIMAN

As the digital age continues to put a strain on traditional newspapers around the country, leaders of this year's community journalism track want to dive into ways to sustain rural newsrooms.

"It's not just the publisher's responsibility or that of the people typically focused on fundraising," says track leader Emily Lytle, Innovation in Focus editor for the Reynolds Journalism Institute in Missouri. She adds that journalists, editors and everyone else who make a community newspaper run are responsible for keeping the newsroom alive. "It's about communicating the newsroom's importance in the community."

Lytle will be co-leading the track alongside Jack Rooney, director of communications and community engagement for the Lebanon (N.H.) School District and former managing editor for audience development at The Keene Sentinel.

While sustainability of newsrooms in small, rural communities will be a main focus of this year's track, Lytle says another spotlight will be on community engagement — specifically how newsrooms reach out to members of their communities, what their audience strategy is, and what kinds of tools and tech they're using to be as accessible as possible.

"Even though sustainability is a big part of the conversation, it's all related to community engagement. It's related to your audience strategy, to the tools



TRACK LEADER
EMILY LYTLE

and technology that you're using," Lytle says.

The last few years have seen changes in how the editorial and business sides — previously operating mostly separately — have started to interact as newsrooms begin looking at new ways to bring in an audience, Lytle says. She adds that some of the discussions at this year's summit will look at how to connect the editorial side of the newsroom with the fundraising and business side to achieve that goal of drawing in more readers and viewers.

"We're breaking down those walls and thinking of our work through a wider lens," she says. "Looking at really using all the resources we have — a lot of that is the people in your newsroom."

Sessions

Tuesday, Oct. 7, will be a packed day for the journalism track, with multiple sessions and even a press tour, all highlighting the importance of local journalism and looking at ways to keep rural



TRACK LEADER
JACK ROONEY

newsrooms alive and thriving.

Sessions will kick off at 10 a.m. Tuesday at Keene Public Library at 60 Winter St. with a talk called "Do Medium Things," held by Claudia Laws, director of consumer revenue and subscriber innovation for the Times-Picayune in New Orleans. Amid "big picture" discussions about the future of journalism and how to sustain local newspapers, this talk will put the focus on the medium things: the tangible steps that newsrooms can take to grow readership and thrive.

That's followed by "Community Journalism Lightning Talks" at 1 p.m., also at the library, which will give the journalists attending Radically Rural a chance to speak up and share stories about how to bring innovative ideas to their newsrooms.

This session and others are a great chance for journalists, especially rural, to know they're not alone in their efforts to sustain their newsrooms, Lytle says.

"You can forget sometimes why this matters — it's easy to get

burnt out," Lytle says, "but being in a space where people are focused on rural journalism is really special. People feel they are capable of moving the industry forward."

Later, at 2:15 p.m. at the library, a talk by several editors will drive home the idea that journalism is a profession anyone can get into. At the "You Don't Need a Journalism Degree to Be a Journalist" session, Claudia Yaujar-Amaro, editor-in-chief of AB&C Bilingual Resources; Andrea Schoeny, president of Kent News Inc., the Kent (Conn.) Dispatch; and Michael Guidry, managing editor of Mississippi Today, will meet to share stories of passionate journalists who got into the profession despite not following the traditional track of getting a degree.

At 3:45 p.m. at the library, participants can join "Community Journalism Ask and Give Workshop" in which journalists facing similar issues in their communities and newsrooms will break into smaller groups to share their experiences. That session will end with the groups coming together and sharing their key solutions — all to help prepare a master document of ideas.

As with the other tracks, attendees of the journalism track will spend the next two days meeting with other Radically Rural participants for various sessions pertaining to journalism, civic participation, connecting local communities and more.

For the most up-to-date summit information, visit radicallyrural.org.

SESSIONS TO LOOK AT COMMUNITY RESPONSE TO DISASTERS

BY ANNA MERRIMAN

Health sessions at this year's Radically Rural summit in October will discuss natural disasters in rural communities.

The All in for Health track will tackle the concept of health in a broader context, looking at ways to communicate and respond during those events and address lasting trauma within affected communities.

"It's really an opportunity to zoom out and think about health from maybe a nontraditional viewpoint such as social fabric, emergency preparedness, trauma-informed communities and how we show up for each other in blue-sky days and post-traumatic days," says track leader Tricia Zahn, senior director of Population Health for Cheshire Medical Center.

The track's focus is coming at an apt time: Oct. 9 marks the 20th anniversary of the Alstead floods, during which days of rain led to extreme destruction in that rural New Hampshire town. The flooding killed four Alstead residents and destroyed nearly 40 homes as well as much of the town's infrastructure, according to local news reports.

Zahn says anyone in a rural community who has experienced or is anticipating an extreme weather event should find a lot of value in this track. That includes first responders like EMTs, and members of police and fire departments, but also people who

are members of departments of transportation, public works and other municipal divisions. Ultimately, she says, it's a track for anyone in a rural community who's looking at ways to prepare for extreme weather events or who has been part of an extreme event and wants to share their experiences of how to respond.

Though extreme weather events can happen anywhere, Zahn says the local focus of this track will be on looking at how rural communities take care of themselves, as they often have to during and immediately after a traumatic weather event, before outside resources are able to come in and provide aid.

"We're really looking at that 72-plus hour mark during which these communities are asked to take care of themselves without expecting any outside help and knowing that resources might be limited ... we're looking at those non-traditional opportunities for relationship-building," she says. That includes examining other modes of communication in rural communities, like ham radio, and convenient points for resource allocation or ways of connecting people who might be displaced.

Sessions

Though the details of specific sessions were still in the works at press time, the track is set to kick off on Tuesday, Oct. 7, with a focus on storytelling

and community-building around traumatic events, including the post-traumatic aspect of these events.

"We have to support each other after emergencies like extreme weather events," Zahn says, adding that assets of rural communities, like small businesses, neighbors and nonprofits, will be available much faster than other resources during those emergencies. That discussion will include looking at how to develop communication in rural communities, which can be difficult especially during extreme weather events.

"How do we start those relationships on the blue-sky days so that we have that trust and that knowledge before something happens?" Zahn says.

The third portion of the session will focus on healthy coping mechanisms and looking at different experiences people have had following traumatic events. It will also spend time examining how communities come together after those events — how to lean on neighbors and nonprofits. In addition to allowing participants time to share stories of their own experiences, the session will include a writing activity during which participants will be able to record their own experiences of traumatic events.

A session at 11 a.m. Thursday called "Trauma Informed Community Care" will look at how local educators, health-care



TRACK LEADER
TRICIA ZAHN

providers and community leaders can apply trauma-informed care to build healthy, compassionate communities that are prepared for major events.

Zahn says she hopes participants have a "transformational experience" and leave with new strategies to help better prepare their communities for disaster or support them following it.

"I hope they can leave with a tool to go back to their communities and learn more about how to set up a response infrastructure, a communication infrastructure, learn more about a ham radio, or even just feel comfortable telling some stories or creating space for others," she says.

The All in for Health track will join other tracks on Wednesday and Thursday to participate in sessions that intersect with the concepts of health and community-building.

Visit radicallyrural.org for the most up-to-date summit information.

PARTICIPANTS TO EXAMINE ISSUES FOR RURAL SCHOOLS

BY ANNA MERRIMAN

Organizers have added a new track to the Radically Rural summit this year: education. The new track joins seven others at the summit.

Education track leader Elizabeth Cardine hopes the three-day summit will give educators from small communities a chance to collaborate and problem-solve for issues specific to rural schools.

She also sees the summit as an opportunity to introduce participants to her own school's innovative method of education: using the community as a campus.

Cardine is an internship coordinator with Making Community Connections Charter School (MC2) in Keene, which focuses on learning through real-life experiences, where students often work with mentors on projects that are specialized to their interests while meeting curriculum standards. The school is also focused on community-based learning in settings around Keene.

"It's literally how we operate — is to use the city as our campus. We don't have a gym; we use the YMCA. We don't have a theater; we use local venues," Cardine says.

Just as MC2 will share its unique style of educating, Cardine says she hopes other participants will come ready to share their own innovative ideas and solve problems they face as educators, particularly in rural settings.

National conferences are "a really great place to get perspective on things when you have no one in your rural area that you can bounce ideas off of," Cardine says. "Having the opportunity to share challenges and problem-solve with people who are in similar enough contexts ..., that will give you a new way of thinking that's outside of your normal



TRACK LEADER
ELIZABETH CARDINE

colleagues' perspectives, is invaluable."

The rural focus of the summit is especially important for this track, as a lot of innovation that happens in the field of education is based in urban settings, Cardine says.

One of the sessions on Tuesday, Oct. 7, will include a SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats) analysis of how to tackle issues — like cuts to federal funding, transportation lengths, or even students not having access to Wi-Fi outside of school — that particularly affect rural schools around the country, Cardine says.

"We're all kind of working from the same context. Even though a rural school in Alaska is very different from a rural school in New Hampshire, there are still similarities in those resource categories, so being able to share innovations is really good."

Sessions

The education track sessions will kick off Tuesday, Oct. 7, at 9 a.m. with a meet-and-greet for people interested

in rural education at Brewbakers Cafe at 48 Emerald St. From there, participants will join a walking tour, "Keene as Our Campus," conducted by Cardine "{at 9:30 a.m.

During the tour, Cardine will be discussing the ways MC2 embraces learning within the community and the way the school has come to view the entire region as its campus. This is an important talk, Cardine says, because it's only been within the last 20 or so years that student experiences outside school walls have counted for credit.

The walking tour will be followed by "Rural Education SWOT," at 10:30 a.m. at the MC2 charter school at 310 Marlboro St. This will give educators from rural communities a chance to come together to address issues affecting rural education on local, state and national levels.

At noon at the charter school, track participants can join "Let's Dig into YOUR Work," during which trained protocol experts and participants will dedicate time to discussing "big questions" and issues facing participants now.

Following that discussion, participants can join "Gallery Walk Conversations" at 1:30 p.m., also at the school, which will be a chance for feedback as participants discuss ideas that have emerged throughout the day, questions that have been raised and more — a chance to dig into the unanswered. Finally, at 2:45 p.m. at the school, Cardine is hosting a wrap-up, which will celebrate the day with networking activities and more.

As with all tracks this year, the education track will join other tracks over the remainder of Wednesday and Thursday for breakout sessions.

For more information, visit radicallyrural.org.

SESSIONS TO DISCUSS CIRCULAR ECONOMIES

BY ANNA MERRIMAN

This year's entrepreneurship track at the Radically Rural summit will deal with circular economies, trade work and envisioning new economic systems for rural communities.

Session co-leader Chris Harris, senior director of programs for the Patterson Family Foundation in Kansas, says the track will essentially be divided into two main sessions. The first will be a session on Wednesday about revitalizing supply chains and promoting material circularity in small communities. Material circularity refers to the practice of companies reusing or repurposing used materials in new products.

"When we're thinking about material circularity, we'll be thinking, 'What are some of the opportunities that are being left on the table with sort of traditional models, and how can those models create more connection, and create more innovative thinking?'" says track co-leader Sara Powell, program director at the Hannah Grimes Center for Entrepreneurship.

The second main session will be focused on trade work in rural communities — specifically, how to promote the trades and even the playing field for trade workers, including encouraging more women to join the trades and addressing issues of inequality in trade work.

Powell says the entrepreneur track fits particularly well with this year's theme for the summit: "rural resonance." The theme, described by Lillian Chase, program and development coordinator for the Hannah Grimes Center, is "the idea that a single vibration bounces off of things and grows."

In line with that idea, the



TRACK LEADER
CHRIS HARRIS

entrepreneurship track will give participants and speakers time to bounce ideas off each other about establishing new economic systems, tackling problems facing trade workers and more.

"People will be able to problem-solve and work together. They can draw in different connection points that haven't been fully explored because of different infrastructures that are set up in our rural ecosystems ... Reframing that and adding to that just creates more intersections and possibilities," Powell says.

Harris says that this track looks forward in anticipation of another economic shift, similar to the one that led many manufacturers in rural communities to close down over the last few decades.

"In previous economic shifts in a lot of rural communities — the job loss and displacement ... in retrospect it looks like people said that was acceptable collateral damage," he says. "It's really exciting to say, 'OK, for the future, if there's going to have to be another economic shift, how can we engage rural communities on the front end ... rather than something that has to be retroactively solved



TRACK LEADER
SARA POWELL

after the fact?"

Sessions

The sessions will kick off with a five-hour meeting at noon on Tuesday, Oct. 7, at Cohen Hall in the Keene Public Library. The interactive session, "Rebuilding Regional Supply Chains: Circular Materials and the Future of Local Economies," will explore a number of different topics, mainly related to material circularity. But it will also cover topics like re-skilling and supply-chain collaboration.

Confirmed speakers include Matt Swihart, founder and brewmaster at Double Mountain Brewery in Oregon; Kristen Graf, global director of Environmental and Social Responsibility at Cabot Hosiery Mills in Vermont; Christa Daniels, lecturer at Dartmouth College's Irving Institute for Energy and Society; and Brandon Dennison, executive president of Coalfield Development Corp., which handles workforce training and revitalization projects in West Virginia.

Regarding this session, Powell says she hopes there will be some industry officials present who make supply-chain decisions — especially if they have started working on

regenerative processes.

"I would love to have those kinds of folks in the room to see how they got started," she says.

The second main session of the entrepreneurship track, "Reclaiming the Trades: Rural Skills, Circular Economies, and the Future of Local Work," will be held Wednesday at 2 p.m. at Heberton Hall in the Keene Public Library.

The talk pulls in four speakers to address trades and skills work, including mentorship models, skills education, access to training and sustainable economic systems, and the general culture of trade work.

"What does it really take to change culture within these industries and make sure they're inclusive of women, of BIPOC folk, of gender non-conforming people?" Powell says.

The speakers include Mason Lord, founder of TradesUp in Connecticut; Robina Moyer, Trailblazers program manager for Vermont Works for Women; Cassidy Riley, chief program officer at Coalfield Development Corp.; and Marilyn Wrenn, chief strategy and development officer, also with Coalfield Development.

Harris says he hopes people will leave this track session with something they can apply to their own communities. He says he hopes "it looks a little less scary, the idea of economic reinvention and progress on new ideas."

The entrepreneurship track will meet with other tracks for joint group sessions on Wednesday and Thursday, Oct. 8 and 9, handling topics like local investment funds, problem-solving and tourism.

For the most up-to-date information about the summit, visit radicallyrural.org.

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RADICALLY RURAL FEATURED COMMUNITY NEWTON, KANSAS



Thousands of people attend the annual Taste of Newton event each October, when food booths of all kinds take over blocks of Main Street.

(Wendy Nugent photos/Harvey County Now)

‘THE WICKEDEST TOWN IN THE WEST’ NOW EMBRACES A FRIENDLY VIBE

BY LINDSEY YOUNG

On a hot summer night in Newton, a train whistle floats on the air.

It’s a sound that connects the present to the past in this small town, built on the Kansas prairie over the course of only a few months in 1871 as the railroad established itself in the area.

It’s a sound that drew families from Mexico, who created their home in Newton, not knowing their descendants would still be making their mark on the city 150 years into the future.

It’s a sound that led German-speaking Mennonites to found a college just north of town in 1887, without realizing it would still stand more than a century later.

That familiar whistle is Newton’s

identity, its history and its soul.

While most modern residents would tell you they would rather never see a train again, lest it make them late for yet another appointment on the other side of town, the railroad is responsible for making Newton what it is today: a beautiful mixture of heritage and culture.

That’s not to say that Newton was all sunshine, rainbows and “kumbaya” when it began. It was far from it.

In its infancy, Newton earned the moniker of the “wickedest town in the West.”

A shootout on Aug. 24, 1871, that left a number of men wounded and several ready to be laid to rest at the town’s Boot Hill, for example, led the Abilene

Chronicle to write, “Thus ends the third or fourth chapter in Newton’s bloody history — a town only a little over three months old. [...] But if the worse than beastly prostitution of the sexes is continued and the town is controlled by characters who have no regard for virtue, decency or honor, it will not soon become fit for the abode of respectable people.”

Today, the event is remembered in an annual August reenactment of the “Hide Park Shootout,” which includes activities for families, along with food vendors.

But luckily for today’s Newton residents, the violence of its founding no longer resonates outside of the historical society’s archives. Despite the Chronicle’s warning,

it turns out that “respectable people” did indeed decide to call the city home.

Mexican-American heritage

Even though the railroad and the Chisholm Trail attracted plenty of cowboys and unsavory business people, workers from Mexico, who followed the Santa Fe Railroad as it built up in Kansas, also planted their roots in Newton.

Thanks to those early immigrants, Newton still boasts a robust Mexican-American population, which means the Mexican food scene is not one to be missed — although it will take a visitor several meals (and several days) to sample all the offerings around town.

The robust history of this part of the population is especially evident each July, when the city is home to the Newton Mexican-American Men’s Fastpitch Softball Tournament, the oldest one in the country. 2025 was year 77 of this event. Teams travel from all over to compete, and Newtonians are always happy to climb into the bleachers, elote in hand, to watch some of these extremely competitive matchups and cheer on the home teams.

Mennonite influence

At the same time Mexican families began making their homes in Newton, Mennonites also arrived on the scene.

After settling in the area, ready to farm, they decided to build a place of higher learning, and Bethel College was born. Its buildings were erected in the middle of prairie land that is now the city of North Newton, and Bethel, as well as the Mennonites, are still a part of the rich cultural landscape of the area.

Kauffman Museum, right across the street from the college, features a permanent exhibit about these early immigrants.

The flour mill in Newton, which ships around the nation, is testament to these early farmers, with Russian Mennonites introducing turkey hard red winter wheat, which was perfectly suited to the Kansas climate.

“The different cultural traditions of Newton bring color and life to our community,” City Manager Daniela Rivas says. “We’re blessed in Newton to have rich traditions in food, music, arts and family that continue generations after the first immigrants came to our town.”



Brent Strickland with the Los Viejos team, representing Newton, Kansas, slides into home during a game at the Newton Mexican-American Men’s Fastpitch Softball Tournament in 2023, the tournament’s 75th year.

Appealing to the senses

Thanks to the mixing and melding of so many traditions in Newton, the community boasts plenty of wonderful art, music and food.

While visitors can always find something delicious in town — whether it’s fresh carne asada or German sausage — one of the best times to experience the local cuisine is during the annual Taste of Newton event, which attracts thousands of visitors to Main Street.

Vendors serve up a little bit of everything — egg rolls to pork chops, apple dumplings to chicken noodle soup.

For the art enthusiast, there are murals all over town, and many businesses have pieces from local artists hanging on their walls. There is also an active local theater group and a performing arts studio.

And music is constantly in the air. The Newton Mid-Kansas Symphony Orchestra holds regular performances. Bethel College hosts an annual outdoor summer concert, free for the public to attend. And the local newspaper, Harvey County Now, fills the Athletic Park bandshell the fourth Saturday of each September with its Blues, Brews and Barbecue concert, a free event with food trucks, live music and plenty of Kansas-brewed beers on tap.

All are welcome

From families who can trace their lineage all the way to the 1800s to those who have more recently decided to call it home, community is strong in Newton.

This town, which could so easily have faded into obscurity due to its tragic past, is alive and well, thanks to residents who strive to make it a better place to live.

“Newton has so much to offer for a community of our size — a vibrant, historic downtown

with unique local businesses, dozens of community events and festivals throughout the year, great public parks and bike trails and a culture of caring for our neighbors,” Rivas says.

The social media “trolls” will often claim there’s nothing to do in this south-central Kansas town of 20,000, but a quick visit to the community calendar tells a different story — there’s a little bit of something for everyone in Newton.

Don’t believe it? Visit choose-newton.com, or head over to the newspaper homepage at harveycountynow.com.

And when you come to visit, be prepared to sit and wait on a train or two. It’s an important part of what makes Newton, Newton.

Those are the tracks that made a community, and this is a community that continues to make tracks.

Lindsey Young is co-owner and publisher of Kansas Publishing Ventures, which publishes three weekly community newspapers in south central Kansas. She and her husband, Joey, introduced the journalism training platform Earn Your Press Pass to states around the nation and are often invited to speak on the value of local journalism.



Hundreds of Newton residents flood the park each September for Blues, Brews and Barbecue, a free community concert hosted by the local newspaper, Harvey County Now.

RADICALLY RURAL FEATURED COMMUNITY LEWISBURG, TENNESSEE



The seat of Marshall County wears all the seams of a classic southern hamlet. There's a Neoclassical courthouse with a clock tower, perched on an idyllic square, watching life drift through the town of about 13,000 below.

(Photo courtesy Marshall County Chamber of Commerce)

THIS SMALL CITY DOESN'T MOVE IN BIG GESTURES, BUT IT MOVES

BY BRADY FLANIGAN

Tucked in the belly of the Tennessee Valley, halfway between Nashville — Music City, USA — and Huntsville, Ala. — the Rocket City — rests a small city on the banks of North America's most biodiverse river: the Duck. The city's name honors American frontiersman Meriwether Lewis. This is Lewisburg, Tenn.

The seat of Marshall County wears all the seams of a classic southern hamlet. There's a Neoclassical courthouse with a clock tower, perched on an idyllic square, watching life drift through the town of about 13,000 below. There's a patchwork of farm fields and factory floors, where residents spend their days baling hay and welding aircraft wings.



The Lewisburg Rotary Club holds a carnival in May every year at Rock Creek Park. It's the club's biggest fundraiser.

(Photo courtesy Marshall County Chamber of Commerce)

And on the edge of town, just off the shoulder of Franklin Pike, one of Lewisburg's arteries, there's a tiny pavilion beside a creek. The creek flows from the mouth of a dark cavern, wide as a trolley car. And beside that, there's a rock.

This is Berlin Springs. The water runs cold year-round, even in the thick Tennessee heat, and the cavern captures sound like a natural amphitheater. It's been a gathering spot for nearly two centuries — ever since 1844, when two men placed a large stone beside the mouth of the cave before a speech by James K. Polk. That's Berlin Rock. Today it rests quietly by the spring — just a little brass plaque marking its significance. That's how much of life in small southern towns like Lewisburg passes — quietly.

Less than a mile down Franklin Pike sits Rising Glory Farm. It's part working farm, part horse archery school, and for members of Christopher Carlough's inner circle, part wedding venue. Carlough moved to Lewisburg from Oklahoma more than 20 years ago. He's a former engineer and paramedic who speaks in clean lines with a sandpaper voice. His partner, Elizabeth Tinnan, is ranked among the best horseback archers in the world.

"We've got more foot traffic now than we ever had," Carlough says. "And I think Miss Ida's smiling down about it — except maybe the chickens."

Miss Ida is his late wife, who purchased the property in 1998 after a global career with General Motors. She died in 2016, but the farm still bears her imprint — especially in the way it operates with intention. Diversified livestock. On-farm education. Young people learn how to herd chickens and drive a tractor without flipping it.

"This isn't a dude ranch," Carlough says. "We're not out here performing anything. We raise animals. We teach. We work. And if people want to come out and learn something, they're welcome."

The farm's model is practical, not romantic. Chickens provide cash flow. Pigs and cattle are on longer timelines. The goal, Carlough says, is to build a business that sustains the land — and the people on it.

Drive 10 minutes toward downtown Lewisburg and you'll find a different flavor of quiet — one where red meat and archery are swapped for muscadine grapes and a steel guitar. Pickers Creek Winery

sits at the end of a gravel road, hidden from the highway by everything but an innocuous wooden sign.

There's a tasting room tucked inside a board-and-batten farmhouse, with hand-painted portraits on the walls, string lights above the porch swing and a stage across the field, where local musicians play on weekends. It doesn't look like much from the road — because it doesn't try to — but go on a Saturday and see how full it gets.

Phil George trims the vines himself, usually in the hottest part of the day. His brother Kenneth manages the music, the vineyard, and just about everything else that needs doing. They both live on the property they grew up on — Kenneth in the old family home, Phil just down the road.

The winery opened in 2009, after Phil and his wife, Lydia, moved back to Lewisburg. The idea was to build something rooted on

"We're not trying to be slick. We're just making something that feels like us."

—KENNETH GEORGE

PICKERS CREEK WINERY

their family land. Wine, music and art, all in one place. Lydia's mosaics hang inside the tasting room, alongside paintings by Phil's sister, Janet, and other local artists. The stained-glass window? Made by their brother David. The wine names — **Blackberry Blues**, **Harmony**, **Rockabilly Red** — sound more like track titles than product lines.

"This isn't Napa," Kenneth says. "We're not trying to be slick. We're just making something that feels like us."

The winery hosts live music most weekends, poetry readings now and then, and the kind of porch-sitting that turns into hours if you're not careful. You can bring your own picnic, walk the vineyard or follow the old railroad bed that still cuts across the back of the property.

It's not a place trying to scale. It's a place trying to stay.



Pickers Creek Winery sits at the end of a gravel road, hidden from the highway by everything but a wooden sign. (Courtesy photo)

Downtown, not far from the courthouse square, Tracy Harris is one of the people trying to hold the town's shape as it grows. She directs the Marshall County Chamber of Commerce, where she keeps one foot in yesterday and the other in tomorrow.

"One day I was standing at Berlin Springs, and I realized — this is what everything was built around," Harris says. "Even Lewisburg started there. Just Berlin."

The spring sits outside city limits, in unincorporated Marshall County. There's no staff. No maintenance crews. Just locals who sweep the gravel, trim back the vines and clear the runoff when it rains too hard. Harris says it works the way a lot of things in Lewisburg work — informally, and because someone cares enough to show up.

She's watched that same energy start to take root downtown. There's state money backing new facades and street work. A greenway extension is taking shape at the edge of town — part of the city's Vision Lewisburg 2035 plan. And a farmers market where neighbors still show up twice a week. None of it flashy, none of it fast. But it's happening.

"All of the community people are responsible for cleaning and taking care of this," Harris says. "If the citizens don't do it, who does?"

Lewisburg doesn't move in big gestures. But it moves. Through chicken coops and trimmed grapevines, through Sunday music sets and backyard bonfires, through cold water still flowing beside a rock older than anyone here.

Brady Flanigan is a journalist in Middle Tennessee. He writes about power, culture and whatever people are mumbling about at the gas station. He says he's drawn to places where official stories fall short.

RADICALLY RURAL FEATURED COMMUNITY SKOWHEGAN, MAINE



An aerial view of Skowhegan, a historic mill town along the Kennebec River

(Photo courtesy MXH Marketing)

A HISTORIC MILL TOWN USES NATURAL RESOURCES TO REINVENT ITSELF

BY BOB MARTIN

Skowhegan, Maine, sits at the crossroads of routes 201 and 2, where 30,000 cars travel through town each day.

Like many historic mill towns, Skowhegan has sought to overcome adversity. The revitalization efforts of the community have been strong, and the future is promising thanks to cooperation among its proud residents, dedicated business owners and organizations who care deeply about this town of roughly 8,600 along the Kennebec River.

A rich history

Skowhegan (SKOW-hee-gan) was settled in 1771 by the Massachusetts families of Peter Heywood and his brother-in-law Joseph Weston, but Native Americans called the area known as Skowhegan Island home

for thousands of years prior. They would travel the river in the spring to fish and plant winter crops like corn and squash.

“The highland and surrounding opposite shores [have] always been known as Skowhegan, and our books tell us that it is a Native American word for ‘a place to watch,’” Melvin Burnham, retired director of the Skowhegan History House, Museum and Research Center, says of its Abenaki translation.

The Westons and Heywoods brought their families to the settlement in 1772, and over time they developed a community that was originally part of Canaan.

While never overly wealthy, Skowhegan was certainly busy and productive. As the Industrial Revolution hit, a centralized area for shops was needed.

The Lumen Mill used fiber both locally and worldwide to create material for uniforms, which Burnham noted even included the attire of the Russian Army. Down the street was a spinning mill with hundreds of employees, and later the Solon Manufacturing Building created items like popsicle sticks.

Thanks to Gov. Abner Coburn, a Skowhegan resident, the railroad arrived in the mid-1800s allowing residents to get to Boston in nine hours instead of days by horse and buggy. Fruits came up from the south, and items like potatoes and paper were delivered south via train. Actors came into the area, and in the early 1900s took the stage at the Opera House.

“The train brought the outside in and took

Continued to page 48



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Continued from page 46

us to the outside,” Burnham said.

At the turn of the 20th century, the shoe industry started to boom locally. Leaders in town built a factory to be used for manufacturing, and it eventually became the current home of New Balance.

Revitalization efforts

Main Street Skowhegan is part of the revitalization plan, which Burnham calls “a god-send for this community that has created and focused energy from all different directions.”

“Both community and government seem to be working together with common goals,” Burnham says. “As times changed, we have changed.”

A former president of the board of directors, Burnham is proud of the efforts that have come about. This is especially true in the past decade since the Strategic Plan for Community Transformation has been put into place under the leadership of Main Street Skowhegan CEO Kristina Cannon.

Cannon says about 500 residents and business owners in the community were polled about what they wanted for the next 10 years. Supporting local businesses was a top priority of the residents, as well as attracting new ones. Cannon says that much like in the town’s history, the river and natural resources are key to the revitalization.

“The Kennebec River runs right through town, and it is in a gorge, so it is that much more beautiful,” Cannon says. “We also have trails and wooded parcels within a stone’s throw as well. We have a lot of natural resources right in the heart of our community, so people wanted to make sure we were asset

based with development.”

An exciting development on the horizon is the Skowhegan River Park, scheduled to be completed next year. The Whitewater Kayak and Surf Park is in the works, with the final design nearly complete and the first phase of construction starting in 2026, according to runofriver.org.

“We will be able to change how the wave works using vegetable oil hydraulics, so people can kayak on the wave one day and surf the next day,” Cannon said of what will be the only adjustable wave in the Northeast.

The Riverfront Boardwalk will connect the Kennebec River to the commercial district, and construction is scheduled for fall 2025. The trail network will involve more than 50 miles of multi-use trails, as well.

“We are about to cross the finish line,” Cannon says. “It will be ‘park and play’ as we call it, with a paddle and surf park where people can whitewater paddle right in town.”

Local food scene

Main Street Skowhegan promotes its food and related businesses to bolster the local economy.

One example is a grist mill called Maine Grains, run by co-founder and CEO Amber Lambke, a Skowhegan resident of 24 years. She became part of the efforts of Main Street Skowhegan in 2005, when she was a speech pathologist and wanted to volunteer her time to help revitalize the community.

Lambke organized the Kneading Conference, an annual event that now brings in 250 participants from around the world. Maine Grains was born out of these early conferences, and Lambke worked on a business plan to create a mill. The old Somerset



The Bankery on Water Street is housed in a former 1864 bank. It features a bakery and flower shop, Skowhegan Fleuriste.

County Jail building was purchased in 2009 to be repurposed as a spot for local food activity and entrepreneurship alike.

“It is a unique business that happens to be in the center of our downtown,” she says. “We’ve been a hub of innovation, and it has helped to put us on the map.”

Maine Grains provides free grist mill tours, a fun, educational opportunity for residents and visitors. “That is one of the reasons people travel: to discover good local food and to learn something new,” Lambke says.

The Miller’s Table is a cafe and bakery housed inside the mill, where people can eat woodfired pizza, cookies, salads, macaroni and cheese and other items that all use Maine Grains.

The Bankery is housed in a former 1864 bank in downtown Skowhegan. It features a bakery alongside a flower shop, Skowhegan Fleuriste.

Matt DuBois, who owns the business with his husband, Michael, and twin brother, Mike, explained that The Bankery offers an experiential element to retail. People can watch items being baked and decorated, and also observe floral arrangements being made.

“We wanted that entertaining element where people can walk in, grab flowers and baked goods, or not have to buy anything and just watch what we do,” DuBois says. “This kind of sets us apart from the grab-and-go culture.”

From outdoor recreation to food, there is plenty for travelers and residents alike to enjoy in this Maine river town.

Bob Martin has nearly two decades of journalism experience covering news, sports, and arts and entertainment throughout New England.



Maine Grains offers free grist mill tours. The Miller’s Table cafe and bakery, housed inside the mill, includes menu items made from the local grains.

(Photos courtesy Main Street Skowhegan)



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CHESHIRE MEDICAL CENTER

The Heart of Monadnock

Cheshire Medical Center, a leading member of the world-class Dartmouth Health system, advances the health and wellness of the communities throughout the Monadnock Region through a combination of outstanding care and exceptional service.

On our Keene campus, we deliver an impressive range of clinical services that reflect the needs of the individuals and communities we serve. Being part of Dartmouth Health enables us to provide services far exceeding those of a typical rural hospital, including extensive programs in primary care, cancer care, cardiology, and orthopaedics.

Our clinical practice is distinguished by an exceptional staff, a deep commitment to safety and quality, and a culture that values the contribution of every staff member and volunteer. In addition, we perform extensive, innovative outreach efforts focused on removing barriers to good health throughout the region.

Our membership in the Dartmouth Health system also enables us to provide access to hundreds of highly trained specialists and a depth of clinical and technical resources.

Our work in population health embodies the best of Cheshire: a commitment to the community, an emphasis on partnerships, and a belief in social equity. Cheshire's capacity to



Family Medicine Residency Program Director Karl Dietrich, MD, MPH, meets with a patient at Family & Community Care (FCC), the primary clinic for Cheshire's Family Medicine Residency.

serve as a force for good extends far beyond our Keene campus. Working with other respected agencies and nonprofits, our Center for Population Health engages in dozens of beneficial outreach programs, emphasizing low-income and underserved communities.

In October 2023, we opened a new family medicine practice, Family & Community Care (FCC), at our West Campus location at 62 Maple Avenue. FCC is the primary care clinic associated with the Family Medicine Residency (FMR). We welcomed our first residents in July 2024 and will have a total of 18 residents by the summer of 2026. The opportunity to add the Family Medicine Residency program at Cheshire comes at a

‘Training the next generation of family physicians locally positively impacts the health of our community and the future of our primary care workforce.’

—KARL DIETRICH, MD, MPH

critical time when community health needs require the training of more family physicians. Currently, only 2 percent of residency training occurs in rural areas. Training physicians in rural areas increases the likelihood that they will practice in a rural community. FCC also expands Cheshire's primary care access to more patients.

For more information, visit cheshiremed.org

COMMUNITY HEART & SOUL

A Path to Build Thriving Communities

Every town wants to thrive. Yet too often, decisions are made without hearing from the people who live, work, and play there every day. For residents and local leaders alike, making a difference can feel overwhelming. The challenges can seem too big, the resources too limited, and the path forward can be unclear.

That's where **Community Heart & Soul®** comes in.

We believe building and maintaining a vibrant community should be achievable for everyone willing to care and collaborate. What's needed is a clear, trusted roadmap — and that's what Heart & Soul provides.

Here's how we do it:

■ **Involve Everyone.** Our proven, step-by-step process starts with listening and giving everyone in the community a voice.

■ **Focus on What Matters Most.**

Together, residents uncover what matters most to the community, and based on those priorities, create an actionable plan to make the town a place where people love to live — now and for generations to come.

■ **Play the Long Game.** With shared priorities and plans in place, residents and local leaders forge community-driven partnerships for lasting impact.

Our approach has helped more than 130 small cities and towns across the country — from Downeast, Maine, to the Heartland, to the Pacific Northwest — move toward a brighter, more prosperous future. Heart & Soul communities report increased trust, stronger civic engagement, and renewed pride.

As a proud sponsor of the 2025 Radically Rural Summit, Community Heart &



Soul is honored to support the Land & Community track. Together, we'll highlight the power of resident-led change and celebrate the creativity and resilience of rural towns everywhere.

Interested in learning more about Community Heart & Soul? Visit communityheartandsoul.org and schedule a call with us to talk about helping your town move forward.

kcs ARCHITECTS

Architects of local community projects like the Monadnock Food Co-op Addition/Renovation, MoCo Arts, Jenna's Market, Brewbakers Cafe, Miller Orthodontic Specialists, Our Town Dental in Peterborough, the Summer Stage at Peterborough Players, and the Mayfair Farm Events Barn.

THE COLONIAL

When the Colonial Theatre first opened its doors on Jan. 29, 1924, Keene gathered together to see *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*. That evening was more than a film screening; it was a declaration that culture belonged here, in the heart of a rural New England town. For over a century, The Colonial has been more than a building; it has been a living monument to the ways small communities gather, celebrate, and thrive.

Now, 101 years later, that same spirit is being renewed in exciting ways through both The Colonial and its sister venue, the Showroom. Together, they reflect a set of values that resonate deeply with the vision of Radically Rural: community, collaboration, stewardship, and curiosity. These values are not just aspirational. They are visible in the daily life of the organization, and they highlight how arts and culture are essential to rural vitality.

Community is at the center of it all. The Colonial and Showroom are not just performance spaces; they are gathering places. More than 50,000 people walk through their doors every year. Neighbors meet for shows, families share experiences across generations, and visitors from outside the Monadnock region bring new energy into downtown Keene. Much like Radically Rural's mission, The Colonial reminds us that rural places are not defined by scarcity, but by richness of connection.

Collaboration fuels the work. Recent partnerships with organizations like Nova Arts, MoCo Arts, Arts Alive!, and the Keene Public Library expand the reach of each institution. By working together, these organizations create a cultural ecosystem where no one stands alone. This mirrors Radically Rural's belief that when rural entities collaborate rather than compete, the whole community grows stronger. Whether it is co-presenting concerts, offering space for community groups, or hosting regional arts gatherings, The Colonial is proving that collaboration is the future of rural resilience.

Stewardship is about care: for our community, our region, and the role we play within it. The Colonial is one of Keene's most iconic landmarks, a century-old theatre



that has undergone a significant renovation to prepare it for the next hundred years. But stewardship does not stop with preserving a historic building. It means ensuring that our stages continue to generate vitality for Main Street, that restaurants and shops see the benefit of audiences flowing through our doors, and that the region as a whole thrives because we are here. True stewardship means taking seriously the responsibility to nurture both the cultural and economic health of the Monadnock region, so that future generations inherit not just a theater, but a stronger, more connected community.

Curiosity is what keeps the programming fresh. The Colonial's main stage honors tradition with beloved performances and films, while the Showroom pushes the boundaries with indie rock, global music, experimental film, and new voices. This dual approach embodies the essence of being radically rural: not content to be nostalgic, but daring enough to ask what rural audiences might want next and trusting them to come along for the ride. Curiosity invites risk, and risk creates growth.

The Colonial and Showroom also align with Radically Rural's emphasis on economic vitality. Every performance ripples outward into the local economy. When audiences attend shows, they eat at restaurants, shop in local stores, and book hotel rooms. According to Americans for the Arts,

the nonprofit arts and culture sector generates millions in economic activity in the Monadnock region each year. Supporting The Colonial and Showroom is therefore not only an investment in culture but also an investment in rural prosperity.

At their core, The Colonial and Showroom are about cultivating a sense of belonging. They invite us to see our small city as a cultural hub, a place that values creativity as much as commerce. They remind us that rural places can lead with bold ideas, that we do not have to imitate big cities to matter. In fact, by leaning into what makes us unique — historic architecture, community spirit, collaborative energy — we create something that feels authentically ours.

The capital campaign gave The Colonial a new body; new leadership and vision are giving it a soul. As we move forward, these venues will continue to embody the ideals of being radically rural: rooted in place, yet open to new ideas; small in scale, yet expansive in spirit; steeped in history, yet alive with innovation.

For those who step inside these spaces, whether to hear a jazz legend, watch an indie film, or gather with neighbors, the message is clear: The Colonial and Showroom are not just about entertainment. They are about identity, resilience, and the radical belief that rural communities deserve vibrant, creative, and connected lives.

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CONNECTION

Connection ran the Delta Dental/Elliot Corporate 5K in Manchester, N.H., to support the Solinsky Center for Cancer

Care at The Elliot Hospital. Every dollar raised helps fund vital services like nutrition assistance, rehabilitation therapy, integrative medicine, and emotional support programs for patients navigating their cancer journey. We're proud to stand with our community and run for a future filled with hope.

THE EDUCATION ALLIANCE FOR NEW HAMPSHIRE

The Education Alliance for New Hampshire is dedicated to expanding access to educational opportunities for all students, regardless of where they live. We believe every student deserves the chance to thrive in their learning journey, and we work to ensure they have the tools, guidance, and support to succeed not just in school, but in life.

Through our grant-funded initiatives including the Statewide Family Engagement Center, GEAR UP NH, and North Country PACE, we deliver a range of services: career exploration, college exposure, life skills training, and wraparound supports that meet students' academic, social, and emotional needs. These programs are designed to open doors, build confidence, and

connect students to postsecondary opportunities that fit their goals.

Our commitment to rural communities is central to our mission. Many of the students, families, and schools we serve are in rural parts of New Hampshire, where access to resources can be more limited. In 2023, we opened an office in Berlin to strengthen our presence in the northern tier. With eight dedicated staff members there, we now offer true statewide coverage and are better able to respond to the needs of students and families in the most remote areas.

We are excited to sponsor this year's Radically Rural conference, which embraces a holistic approach to serving rural communities. Its multi-track design reflects the



Students learn about construction while participating in a career exploration day in Littleton, N.H.

breadth of innovation happening in rural places, where nimbleness, creativity, and locally driven solutions thrive. We believe education is deeply connected to every aspect of rural life, and we are proud to stand alongside this work.

The Education Alliance serves over 8,000 students across 86 school districts and, in just the past two years, has engaged more than 3,000 parents, families, and caregivers. We are proud of this progress and remain committed to building a stronger future for New Hampshire's students and communities.

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All across New Hampshire, residents and businesses treasure our state's rural character — it's why many people stay here and what keeps visitors coming back. Preserving that character means ensuring that the communities at the heart of it can continue thrive, and electric reliability plays a critical role in our state's collective economic vitality.

At Eversource, we continue to see firsthand how the Granite State has been experiencing more frequent and unpredictable storms in recent years due to the changing climate, with four of the 10 largest storms in our history in terms of total customer outages occurring between December

2022 and April 2024. That is why we're laser-focused on reliability and developing a stronger, smarter electrical grid that stands up to extreme weather and enables the increased interconnection of solar energy and other renewable energy sources that can further support our local rural economies — all while keeping costs as affordable as possible for customers.

As one of the most heavily forested states in the country, trees remain the primary cause of power outages in New Hampshire along with public safety issues like blocked roads during storms, so our comprehensive and thoughtful vegetation management program is also critical to

those efforts. Through this program, we carefully trim or remove dead, dying, and hazardous trees that threaten electric reliability while balancing the need to preserve the natural beauty and other many important benefits that trees provide.

Moving forward, we will continue to focus on making our electric system smarter and more resilient with fewer outages, and we will continue to pursue all cost-effective solutions that enhance the safety and reliability of the electric system for our customers — while also helping to ensure they can adopt new energy technologies as they choose so we will all be more resilient for years to come.

FRANKLIN PIERCE UNIVERSITY

Career Paths@Pierce: Helping Students ACHIEVE More

Franklin Pierce University delivers a personalized approach to education which equals value for students and families. Our class sizes are small, which allows personalized instruction and mentoring from caring, dedicated faculty, and Pierce's focus on career-readiness means our grads have a significant advantage in terms of landing a great job that leads to an exciting career.

Our students can customize their pathways through Career Paths@Pierce. This intentional career-readiness model allows Franklin Pierce students to engineer, with a lot of direct support, the path to academic and employment success which best fits them — and their ambitious goals.

While no two pathways will be the same across all majors, every Franklin Pierce student will individualize their experience through career preparation that's embedded in our first- and second-year curriculum, and all students will be presented with opportunities for internships or similar work-related



experiences in their third and fourth years.

At Pierce, the ability to combine in-person and online learning helps each student create a schedule that works optimally for them.

Career Paths@Pierce is a win for employers, too.

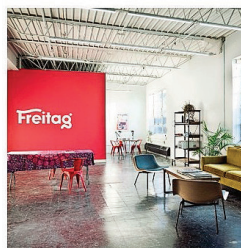
Employers agree that career readiness competencies such as good communication, critical thinking, leadership skills, professionalism, teamwork, technological

proficiency, and self-development are critical when hiring and developing high-performing employees. At Franklin Pierce, these competencies are baked into every program so that our motivated, business-savvy students will be ready to contribute to your workforce.

Recruit, develop, and retain high-performing employees by partnering with our Career Education Center. Through Handshake, employers can take advantage of opportunities to hire our interns, graduates, or alumni. Partnering companies can also post jobs or host a virtual event — or connect face to face with our Ravens by hosting an information table or job shadow opportunity.

Looking to hire a Raven? Contact the Lloyd & Helen Ament Astmann '69 Career Center at CareerCenter@franklinpierce.edu to learn more.

Want to learn more about Career Paths@Pierce? Visit franklinpierce.edu/paths.



FREITAG

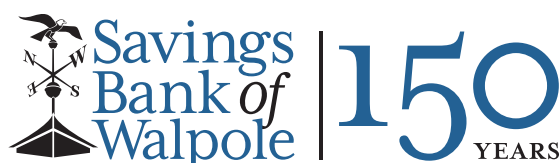
Freitag is a modern digital marketing agency born in Keene that helps mission-driven businesses grow through thoughtful, creative strategy. From brand identity and paid advertising to SEO, web design, and storytelling, the Freitag team brings big-picture thinking and a global perspective to every project.

Founded by entrepreneur Jan Ziegler, Freitag started with a simple belief: that good businesses deserve great marketing, and that bold ideas can come from anywhere, especially small towns like ours.

Today, we're a global team working with clients across the U.S., but we're still deeply rooted in our local community. That's why sponsoring Radically Rural and supporting the Hannah Grimes Center feels like home to us. Rural communities are full of resourceful, creative people doing important work, and we're proud to help shine a light on them.

At its core, our goal is always the same: to help good businesses connect with the right people and grow something real. Whether we're supporting local makers, nonprofits, or growing startups, we bring curiosity, clarity, and care to every project.

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Savings Bank of Walpole opened in 1875 as a community bank. 150 years later, we're still the same bank—deeply committed to serving our customers and supporting our community.

As we celebrate our 150th Anniversary this year, we're incredibly grateful for the support of our customers and community. And while we're proud of our past, we're even more inspired by what's ahead—continually enhancing our services and strengthening our communities.

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KEENE YOUNG PROFESSIONALS NETWORK

In an effort to make classical music feel more accessible, the Keene Young Professionals Network partnered with Monadnock Music to bring young locals to their '60s-themed 60th Anniversary Gala at Milliken Manor in Jaffrey, with steeply discounted tickets and free rides to the party. It was a vibrant evening and a wonderful time was had by all!



In an effort to make classical music feel more accessible, the Keene Young Professionals Network partnered with Monadnock Music to bring young locals to their '60s-themed 60th Anniversary Gala at Milliken Manor in Jaffrey, with steeply discounted tickets and free rides to the party. It was a vibrant evening and a wonderful time was had by all!

SAVINGS BANK OF WALPOLE

*What matters most —
Celebrating 150 years of community and connection*

As the Monadnock Region's local bank, Savings Bank of Walpole is proud to be celebrating our 150th anniversary this year, a milestone made possible only through the strong, lasting relationships we've built with our customers and community.

That's why the 2025 Radically Rural theme "Rural Resonance" feels especially meaningful to us. The idea of resonance, interdependence and collaboration that amplifies impact is something we live every day. After all, this is where we live and work. It's our home. And just as sound carries further when voices join together, our community grows stronger when we support one another.

When the only bank in the town of Winchester closed, we recognized the importance of stepping in to fill the void. In 2021, we opened our sixth branch there,

not just to provide banking services, but to strengthen the connections that sustain rural communities. Since then, our team has become woven into the fabric of the town, working alongside organizations like ELMM and participating in events like the Pickle Festival. Winchester is a vivid example of "Rural Resonance" in action, where collaboration and community spirit amplify resilience and spark revitalization.

If you live in the Monadnock Region, you've probably seen SBW's presence at community events like Taste of Keene, SwampBats games, Keene Pride Fest, and the Clarence DeMar Marathon. Beyond sponsorships, our employees give where they live, with more than one third volunteering or serving on local boards and committees. In 2025 alone, we supported over 250 community events and initiatives.

That ripple effect of engagement is what "Rural Resonance" is all about.

Founded in 1875 as a mutual, community bank — a distinction we proudly hold today, SBW has weathered challenges from the Great Depression to the Pandemic by staying true to our purpose: reinvesting deposits back into the Monadnock Region. For 150 years, we've put our customers and community first, helping to build the foundation for long-term success and sustainability.

As we mark this milestone year, we remain as committed as ever to strengthening the communities we serve. By working together, supporting one another, and fostering innovation, we can ensure that the resonance of rural life continues to inspire growth, resilience, and possibility for generations to come.

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AND DON'T MISS RADICALLY RURAL'S
SOLUTIONS SLAM & CONNECT EVENTS!



Radically Rural summit participants gather at the 2024 CONNECT event at Alyson's Orchard in Walpole.

(Helen Joy George photo)

CONNECT networking event to be held at Alyson's Orchard

The Hannah Grimes Center (HGC) is set to host its 19th annual CONNECT Event at Alyson's Orchard on Oct. 8, the second night of the Radically Rural summit.

CONNECT has been a staple in the local small business community since 2006. The inaugural event celebrated Hannah Grimes program alumni and brought together startup and existing entrepreneurs in the Keene community. In 2016, HGC partnered with The Keene Sentinel to bring the event to the larger community, hosting 400 individuals at Keene State College to network in a fusion of art, food and music.

This collaboration sparked the first Radically Rural summit in 2018, which now hosts 500 to 600 community members and national rural innovators annually with the mission of building networks of engaged people willing to share ideas and resources and take action to strengthen their small communities across the country.

CONNECT has remained an integral part of the summit, bringing Radically Rural attendees and other local residents together to share knowledge from the day's sessions and network with live music over local food and drinks. This year's local musicians

This year's CONNECT will feature an exhibit of 'Foodstories,' a multimedia project created by New Hampshire-based writer and visual artist Shanta Lee Gander.

include Rachel Bell and Yann Falquet, whose dynamic mix of traditional folk and original tunes will set a lively tone for the evening. Attendees are encouraged to bring their own instruments and join in on the jam.

This year's CONNECT will also feature an exhibit of "Foodstories," a multimedia project created by New Hampshire-based writer and visual artist Shanta Lee Gander.

"This year's summit theme of 'resonance' features storytelling as integral to nurturing the kinds of communities we all want to live and work in," says Julianna Dodson, HGC executive director. "Shanta's project does a beautiful job of taking the innate physical and cultural nourishment of food and helping us know each other better by relaying the stories that go with it. Come see which ones resonate with you!"

--Lillian Chase



Mason Lord (right), winner of the 2023 Solutions Slam, shakes hands with presenter Roger Weinreich, owner of Good Fortune Jewelry in Keene.

(Helen Joy George photo)

SOLUTIONS SLAM

Your small-town idea could win \$500

Radically Rural is looking for ideas and models that demonstrate how individuals, businesses and institutions are making small cities and towns more livable.

Individuals are invited to share ideas, initiatives and programs that work to solve rural issues during the third annual Solutions Slam, which will take place at the morning keynote session on Thursday, Oct. 9, the final day of the Radically Rural summit.

“A lot of our speakers aren’t on the speaking circuit. They are people who are out there doing the work, and we love elevating their voices. The Solutions Slam is a way to hear more and more of those voices,” says Julianna Dodson, executive director of the Hannah Grimes Center.

A signup sheet will be made available to Radically Rural attendees on the morning of Oct. 8. Each participant will have one minute to share an idea. After all the ideas have been shared, the audience will vote on the best solution, sending the winner home with a \$500 prize to put toward their initiative, courtesy of Guyer & Son Roofing.

Solutions may answer the following questions:

- What is your organization doing to better your community?
- What have you learned that you want other rural communities to know about?
- What’s working in your community?
- How can your rural solution be replicated?

Previous winner Mason Lord of Connecticut, recognized in 2023 for his Touch a Trade event — now part of the organization TradesUp — will return to the summit this year as a speaker in the entrepreneurship track session “Reclaiming the Trades: Rural Skills, Circular Economies, and the Future of Local Work.” Lord will share more about TradesUp, which offers young people the opportunity to try different trades alongside professionals.

TradesUp is registered as a nonprofit organization and has expanded its geography to include events in both Kent, Conn., and Martha’s Vineyard, Mass.

—Lillian Chase

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Heidi and Joe Hope, owners of W.E. Brown Roofing

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THE COUNTRY STORE



Fondly remembered Richmond resident Harry Morse enjoys a moment on the porch of the Four Corners Store in this vintage photo.

(Photo courtesy Richmond Public Library)

When lost, rural general stores are sorely missed

BY PATRICK O'GRADY

General stores once dotted New England's small-town landscape and were as common as bleached white churches with towering steeples. They served not only as a place to buy the essentials but also as a community hub for neighbors and friends to interact.



Richmond Selectman Doug Bersaw points to where the gas tanks were at the Four Corners Store. Behind him is the spot where the store once stood.

(Aaron Lipsky photo)

When a general store shuts its doors, it's a monumental and costly effort to try to bring one back, as the residents of Richmond and Marlow are discovering.

Julie Atkins, administrative assistant to the Marlow selectboard, said that, while she believes the community would support a store, there has been no interest expressed thus far in the appeal for a general store and gas station posted on the town's website.

In Richmond, selectboard member Doug Bersaw said the town has received some inquiries about its desire for a new store to replace the one that was at the corner of routes 32 and 119, but none have been "viable."

The Four Corners Store, which included gas pumps, operated for about 60 years at the intersection of the main roads running through Richmond. Its demise came when the underground gas tanks were found to be polluting wells in the neighborhood, Bersaw said.

The owners were unable to afford the costly cleanup and ended up going out of business. The town eventually took possession of the property and demolished the building about 10 years ago. Then, through a brownfields cleanup program, the town was able to have the contamination remediated.

"The town wants a gas station and store

Community support is a fundamental piece to a rural store's success. And the success stories are becoming a rarity.

back there," Bersaw said, adding that locating at the Four Corners intersection would be critical to a new store's success. Residents in this rural town of about 1,200 now have to travel 6 miles or more to the neighboring towns of Winchester, Fitzwilliam or Athol, Mass., for gasoline and groceries.

The Four Corners Store was a meeting place for both residents and summer vacationers, including those at Shir-Roy and other local campgrounds. "It had a great deli, special dinners on Saturdays and pizza. It was a big community center of town," Bersaw said.

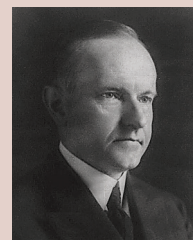
Richmond has been working with the Monadnock Economic Development Corp. (MEDC) to find someone who might replace the old store.

Cody Morrison, MEDC executive director, said the organization regularly receives inquiries from community leaders and elected officials who may want to bring a business to their community



The 160-year-old South Acworth Village Store was kept operating when the town's historical society took it over in 2001. Today it is a community-run nonprofit. (Courtesy photo)

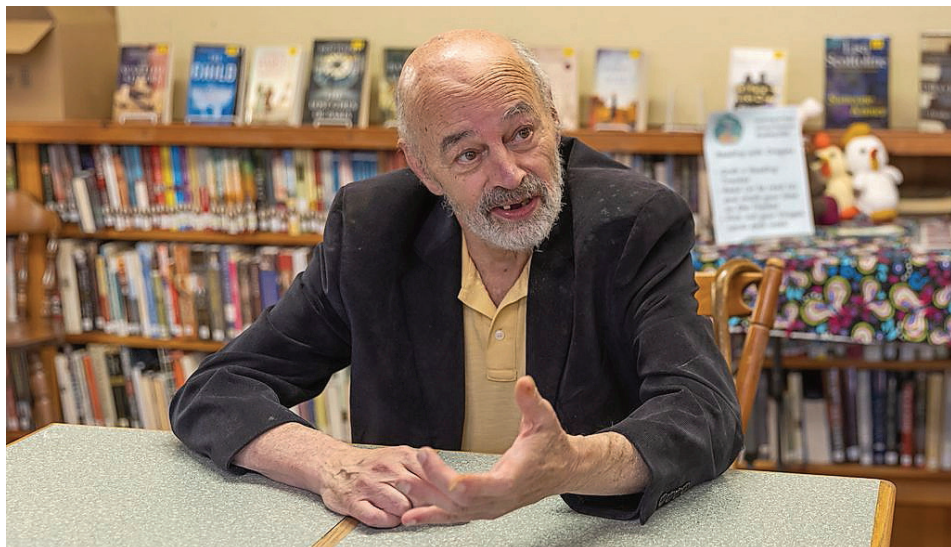
Stored knowledge



President Calvin Coolidge (Courtesy Library of Congress)

Republican President Calvin Coolidge successfully reduced the national debt during his time in office from \$22.3 billion in 1923 to \$16.9 billion in 1929, according to the Calvin

Coolidge Presidential Foundation. How? Early lessons learned from his parents, John and Victoria Coolidge, who ran a general store in the president's hometown of Plymouth Notch, Vt. Rejoice Scherry, administrator for the Calvin Coolidge State Historic Site, writes in the July-August issue of Vermont Country magazine that Coolidge operated the federal budget in much the same way his parents ran the store. The store yielded a set income, and the family had to live within those means.



Richmond Selectman Doug Bersaw discusses how much the Four Corners Store meant to the town. "It was the center of community life," he says. "It feels like the town lost something very important to its character." (Aaron Lipsky photo)

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or have underutilized property for that purpose. MEDC can also help entrepreneurs looking to buy a business for a general store or other purposes.

“We can provide gap financing for businesses in the area that are having issues accessing capital, so we will work in partnership with a bank,” Morrison said. “We can help finance acquisition of a building or purchase of equipment and also provide working capital.”

With an investment Bersaw estimates could be up to \$1 million, when gas tanks are included, he said the town needs to look at “outside-the-box funding options.”

“The town is willing to bend over backwards to help out whatever entrepreneur or business would like to come and set something up,” Bersaw said.

Some communities, desperate to retain their general stores, have turned to a nonprofit model. The 160-year-old South Acworth Village Store was kept operating when the town’s historical



A customer browses the offerings of the meat and cheese case at the Hancock Market.

(File photo by Hannah Schroeder/The Keene Sentinel)

society took it over in 2001. Today it is a community-run nonprofit, as is the Harrisville General Store.

Changing times

Improved transportation and the arrival of large supermarket chains with more variety and lower prices forced

many general stores out of business. The ones with staying power — having weathered rough economic patches, changes in consumer tastes and multiple owners — pride themselves on remaining a gathering spot for the community. The

Continued to page 68

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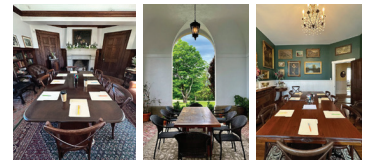
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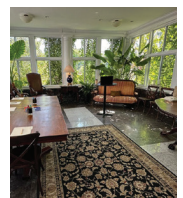


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connections and commitment to the community are fundamental aspects of that success, they say.

The Hancock Market on Main Street has operated in the same building since 1879 and today is owned by Eleanor Briggs and Rob Sokol. They are the fourth owners in the last 10 years of the market, Sokol said.

The business came up for sale earlier this year when the owners, Kaylee and Rod Wilkins, who moved to the area from Wyoming, “could not make it work” after about six months of ownership, Sokol said.

Sokol and Briggs, his step-mother, reopened the market in May. Sokol said they aspire first and foremost to keep the market and café a center of the community.

“The intent of the market and the (Fiddleheads) café are the same,” said Sokol. “The way we see it, it is a service to the community. We are not trying to create something super profitable. The primary focus is to be a gathering place in the community.”

Chef Samantha Rule manages the café and market. She agrees that a general store is a community’s lifeblood with an atmosphere that supermarkets, even chain convenience stores, cannot imitate.

“Yes, there is the convenience aspect, but I see that as secondary to our real mission of keeping this store the vital beating heart of the community,” Rule said in a phone interview. “The market is a place to buy maybe milk or eggs, and the café is a gathering place for the community.”

Rule believes country stores serve as a much-needed antidote in a society overloaded with anonymous social media

posts and ever-widening political fault lines.

“Life has become so centered around these superficial interactions, and here is an opportunity to be greeted by the same people every day who know your order and they are your neighbor, your friend,” Rule said. “In this time of separation and disparate political views, to have the opportunity for this human connection is so important.”

Community buy-in

Community support is a fundamental piece to a rural store’s success. And the success stories are becoming a rarity.

Rural independent grocery stores are nearly three times more likely to close following the opening of a new dollar-type store, according to a report issued by the USDA last year. When a new dollar store opens in a rural area, the likelihood of an independent grocery store closing is 5 percent, nearly three times greater than in urban areas (1.7 percent).

“My community has completely backed me and my sister,” said Elisabeth “Libby” Branch, owner of the Mill Village Country Store in Stoddard, which is managed in part by her sister, Annie. “Once you show commitment to the town, the town will support you.

“Our community is unique. People driving through will stop and say ‘I’m going to Keene, do you need anything?’”

Branch bought the store in 2021 after COVID and remote work convinced her to look for a career change from working at a law firm.

Branch said her store benefits from being near Highland Lake, which brings a summer population in addition to a fair number of seasonal construction workers who stop in for lunch. There



A Massachusetts couple gets married at the Four Corners Store in Richmond in 1973.

(Keene Sentinel archives)

are no other options in any direction for 25 minutes by car, but that does not mean Branch takes her customers for granted.

“You have to listen to your community, and you listen to your customers,” Branch said about building a strong following and a successful business.

The store, similar to Fiddleheads Café, offers a variety of freshly made foods, such as sandwiches and pizza, and also carries local products including maple syrup and honey.

“We really try to hone in on local and fresh made,” said Branch, whose experience managing a coffee shop in Rhode Island for several years served her well in learning how to run

the store.

Sokol shares Branch’s view on the primary ingredients to a rural general store’s survival in this day and age. “Understand your customers is key,” Sokol said. “We try to offer what we think people will need.”

Patrick O’Grady has been a reporter covering central western New Hampshire for more than 30 years. He was a reporter and later managing editor with the Eagle Times in Claremont and currently reports for the Valley News in Lebanon and The Business Journal of Greater Keene, Brattleboro and Peterborough. He has also written for the Granite State News Collaborative.



Jan Ziegler

Freitag Marketing in Keene

Ziegler stands outside his office at 310 Marlboro St. in Keene.

(Courtesy photo)

BY AVERY MILLER

Originally from southern Germany, Jan Ziegler earned his degree in business and sports management at Cooperative State University in Stuttgart, where he first discovered his passion for marketing. Whether it was designing banners or promoting events, he says he was drawn to the creativity and strategy behind every campaign.

Ziegler, 32, owner and CEO of Freitag Marketing, now calls the Monadnock Region home — a place he says he appreciates for its small-town charm and welcoming community. Since moving to the area in January 2022, he has found inspiration in the collaborative spirit of local residents, many of whom have offered their support and guidance, he says.

With Freitag Marketing, Ziegler combines his international background with a hands-on, community-focused approach to helping businesses grow. His

enthusiasm, fresh perspective and drive make him a standout figure in the region's entrepreneurial scene.

What drew you to getting into the marketing world?

Germany has cooperative state universities. They are kind of like half-undergrad degrees and half-apprenticeships, so you have this active working component. You go to university for six weeks, then go to a company for six weeks. The company that I was in was sports marketing and they promoted sporting events. So, I completely got obsessed with all things marketing there. I also drove a forklift, but for the most part it was very much marketing and designing banners. It was a small company and there were only eight people working there, so I got to do all the different things — which was fun. That management degree really got me on the marketing track.

How did you end up living in the United States?

I fell in love with an American — we are no longer married, though. She was an American diplomat living in Germany at the time. We ended up traveling together and living abroad a lot. We were in New Guinea for a while, and then we were in D.C., and Austria, and back in D.C. It was a bit of a back and forth every year and a half or so, for her job. I always went to local agencies for jobs and had all sorts of random roles. Then, when I was in D.C., I got a job as a marketing director in a real estate company and basically ran their marketing. It was a big company with big budgets and a big team. I did marketing there for two years through the COVID times. I got divorced, and then met my now-girlfriend, who is from Keene, New Hampshire, and

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she grew up in Harrisville. That is what got me up here. I worked remotely for a while; then my company moved to a hybrid work environment, and basically I left because I wasn't going to commute to D.C. twice a week.

What made you decide to start Freitag Marketing?

After I stopped working for the company in D.C., I started looking for marketing jobs locally, and I didn't find all that many. But there was one company I talked to and it made me realize that there's not really a small marketing company. That's when I decided to start up, and it's been a year and half now.

Tell me a little bit about Freitag Marketing and what you specialize in.

We do web design, we run digital advertising, we run social media accounts, we build websites and do a little bit of photography and videography. We do a whole bunch of branding, such as logo designs, packaging design — that kind of stuff. We have 22 employees, and we are located at 310 Marlboro St. in Keene.

Do you have any plans for future growth?

We have grown really fast, and I think we will keep growing. For us, really — right now we have a lot of Main Street businesses that we work with — six or so. I really enjoy that. For us, it's really about helping more local businesses because that is really where the fun is for us. We also have a couple of clients regionally and nationally, but we really like working with local businesses, so we will probably work with more local businesses. But it's not like these giant expansion plans. I think we are actually more about slowing down a little on that right now.

Have you always wanted to be an entrepreneur?

I think I have always wanted to do that. For the longest time I thought I needed a completely original idea. I always thought



Ziegler photographs a client. (Courtesy photo)

you needed this amazing product, or like the idea of Airbnb. Then, I realized that I can just start a marketing agency because it's something people already know and need. I think I had that backwards for the longest time. I thought I needed this perfect idea that I just never had. Being a marketing agency, being a little bit of something different, is actually enough, it turns out. I didn't know that.

What are you most passionate about when it comes to being an entrepreneur?

I think the one thing that I am passionate about is that I really like the region. I think what I realized is that it's a really unique and amazing region. I find Keene surprisingly similar to southern Germany, with a lot of manufacturing in the area and there being a very vibrant small-town life. I think it's really cool how supportive everybody is. You can just ask people for advice, and they will give it to you. I am really passionate about that and how I can give that back. I do things like, I am now a coach at the PitchFork challenges, and I am a coach at Hannah Grimes.

We just did this huge nonprofit marketing grant. I think there are so many people that helped me in the last two years, and I want to give that back somehow.

For more information about Freitag Marketing visit freitagmarketing.com.

Avery Miller is a freelance writer and editor from Keene, N.H. She is the editor of Parent Express and writes columns for many local publications, including Monadnock Table, ELF and My Keene Now.

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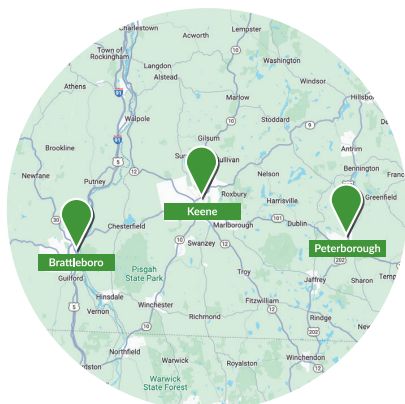
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