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Getting to know T.W. WOOD Gallery and Arts Center

By **Peter Cobb**

Sabrina Fadial, the director for the T.W. Wood Gallery and Arts Center in Montpelier, has both short-term and long-term goals for Vermont's oldest art museum.

Short term, Fadial, who took over as director last year during Montpelier's July flood, is preparing the gallery for two new shows this spring, artwork by Arthur Schaller and art from the gallery's member artists. Both shows open on the April 5 Art Walk and run to May 28.

In addition, the gallery will feature, from May 30 to July 30, art by Mary Admasian, as well as "Creative Aging" a celebration of aging creatively, presented in collaboration with the Vermont Council of Aging.

Long term, Fadial said she wants to get the word out about the museum, redesign the art space to provide a better experience for visitors, and add climate control to the gallery so that it can present works from other museums.

The Smithsonian, for example, owns more than 100 T.W. Wood's paintings but can't lend any of them to Montpelier



because the building isn't climate controlled.

Arthur Schaller is an architect and working artist who has been teaching architectural design and related courses for more than 40 years. He teaches at Norwich University.

His show will feature oil paintings and collages, and he will teach a course on collage at the gallery. His works include collected and assembled printed matter.

Admasian is an established multidisciplinary artist, curator and marketing consultant for arts organizations and socially responsible businesses. Her works have been exhibited nationally and in the collections of colleges, institutions and prominent art collectors.

The members' show features a variety of art, from the two

dozen artists affiliated with the museum.

The T.W. Wood includes two historic collections and the work of contemporary Vermont artists. The Wood Room Gallery features 19th century paintings from the collection of Montpelier native Thomas Waterman Wood.

Wood, whose 200th birthday was celebrated last year, founded the Wood Gallery of Art in 1895, donating 42 paintings, watercolors and etchings in trust to the residents of Montpelier. He subsequently left much of his estate, including many more paintings and drawings, to the gallery when he died in 1903.

Even though the Wood Gallery is Vermont's oldest art museum, too few Vermonters know it exists, Fadial said.

"The Wood Gallery is an absolute gift to the community but hardly anyone knows it's here," she said. She said she plans to change that.

The gallery, which is housed in the old St. Michael's elementary school, is considerably different from most museums.

"The gallery definitely is an odd space but we are excited to be working with students at Norwich University to see what

changes can be made to make it a better museum. We are in the midst of reimagining what we can do with this space,” she said.

The two main items for study are to determine what needs to be done to make the building climate controlled and to see whether changes to the building are possible to make the space more user-friendly.

“What we want to find out is: Can we take out a wall and open up the space so that the building feels more like a museum and less like a converted school space?” Fadiel said.

Fadiel said she is confident the building can be improved and the museum can become an important cog in the arts scene in Vermont.

In addition to the various artworks on display, T.W. Wood offers After School Arts, art camps, and art classes for adults.

The gallery is open Tuesdays through Saturdays, noon to 4 p.m. More information is available at www.twoodgallery.org.



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Charles T. Bowling, *Church at the Crossroads*, 1936. Oil on board, 24 x 30 in. Anonymous, courtesy of the Dallas Museum of Art.

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Chaffee Art Center in Rutland.

Explore the ART VENUES around Vermont

By Peter Cobb

Looking to view interesting art this spring? Two good options are the Chaffee Art Center in Rutland and the Shelburne Museum.

Chaffee Art Center

The Chaffee Art Center has two new shows this spring and summer: “Eye Candy,” from April 12 to May 24 and “Art ... The Equalizer,” from June 7 to July 19. “The title of this exhibit has many meanings, which makes it all the more fun and interesting,” said Sherri Birkheimer Rooker, Chaffee Art Center director. “An artist puts eye candy in their work to capture the interest of the viewer and to guide the eye around the piece of art. We invite visitors to find their favorite piece of Eye Candy.” “Art ... The Equalizer” celebrates individuality, uniqueness, originality, and diversity. “Art is the equalizer and gives the power of originality where no one needs to compare or be compared,” Rooker said.

Visitors to the museum also can explore the historic Queen

Anne Victorian mansion with six main galleries plus other gallery spaces filled with art.

Shelburne Museum

Opening June 22, and running to Oct. 20, the Shelburne Museum is featuring a special exhibit, “All Aboard, The Railroad in America Art, 1840-1955,” at the Pizzagalli Center for and Education. The paintings feature the world of trains in America during the transformative period of industrialization.

The exhibit was organized by Shelburne Museum, Dixon Gallery and Gardens, and Joslyn Art Museum of Omaha, Nebraska, a major museum with more than 11,000 works representing artists and cultures from antiquity to the present.

The museum also is presenting, from May 11 to Oct. 20, “Vermont Furniture at Shelburne Museum,” a new installation of Vermont furniture and associated material culture from the permanent collection with some of the finest chests, chairs, tables, and more to have graced the state’s interiors from the 19th century to the present.



Sugaring tradition sweets springtime

By Peter Cobb

David Strong is keeping alive a tradition in Orange that goes back at least to the 19th century. He and his family are sugaring land that was sugared in the 1800s, not the same trees, most were destroyed in the 1938 hurricane, but on the same land.

“It’s the love of tradition, of being outdoors and in tune with nature, the camaraderie among maple syrup producers, the pride in what we produce, and the satisfaction of sharing it with friends and family that counts,” Strong said.

The Strong family has been making maple syrup at their 350-acre property

in Orange since 1980 when David’s parents started tapping trees along the road past their house.

While they have adopted several modern conveniences over the years, the Strongs still boil down the sap the way their great-grandparents did back in 1889 in Dixville, Quebec, and they fuel their evaporator with firewood harvested from their land.

“My maternal grandmother, Pearl (Wright) Reid, told stories of her grandfather making maple syrup and how the train stopped at the sugarhouse in Dixville during the season. My mother’s father, Howard Reid (a longtime Barre dentist), sugared as a young boy at a farm on West Hill in South Barre

and shared stories about that,” Strong said.

David’s parents, Bob and Jane (Reid) Strong, bought the farm in Orange, just over the Barre line, not far from where his mother grew up. They moved to Orange in 1976, when they were 57.

“They began, like most sugarmakers, by tapping trees along the road and making syrup for their own use,” Strong said.

Four years later, David’s father bought a small wood-fired evaporator with the idea of making enough syrup for friends and extended family by tapping trees in an old, overgrown sugarbush some distance from the house.



PHOTOS BY PETER COBB

David Strong.

impractical as we grew, so we changed to tubing. At first, the sap came in by gravity, boiled with wood by lantern light, and used cloth and paper filters. Then we got a generator to power a vacuum,” Strong said.

In addition to a vacuum pump, Strong has a reverse osmosis machine that concentrates the sap before boiling and has reduced firewood use by more than half. Also, instead of using gravity and cloth filters to take impurities out of the syrup, Strong uses a filter press using air pressure that can handle larger volumes of syrup.

“I decided to help out but was living in upstate New York at the time, so we partnered with a neighbor, Ken Cochrane, to help collect sap and boil it down 50-50 basis. We built a small sugarhouse at the base of the sugarwoods and our operation gradually expanded. I came up on weekends to help out. I moved to the farm in 2000 to take care of the family place after my parents died and to devote more time to sugaring. My wife, Laura Zeisel, joined me in 2005 at a place we bought in nearby Plainfield,” Strong said.

Strong taught at the Community High School of Vermont in St. Johnsbury and later in Barre. He recently moved back to New York, but continues to operate the sugaring operation with the help of other family members, including his brother-in-law, Ron Hirsch, of Barre.

“We started out with about 200 taps and gradually expanded as we thinned and culled trees from adjacent areas of our 15-acre sugarbush. We currently have 1,200 taps on 10 acres. We did do buckets for a while, but the lack of equipment and at-the-ready volunteers made that



In 2017, the family built a new sugarhouse closer to the house.

“After 30 plus years, it was time to replace the old sugarhouse and it had become difficult to haul all the firewood we needed, so the family built a new sugarhouse closer to the farmhouse and electric service,” Strong said.

“When our family started making maple syrup, it was mainly for our consumption. That was true for many years. As we grew, we sold surplus to friends and at farmers markets in Barre and Plainfield. Now that we’re making several hundred gallons per year, we market what we don’t use or retail ourselves through the Maple Farmers collective,” Strong said.

“It’s a lot of work. There are always new challenges. Climate change is the biggest problem. Instead of tapping on Town Meeting Day, we’re tapping in January and making syrup much earlier than before. The downside is that the season seems to be getting shorter,” Strong said.

“Storms of greater intensity bring down more trees and limbs than before, making upkeep on tubing systems more time-consuming. We’ve never made much money from what we do. At best, we contribute something towards our property taxes,” Strong said.

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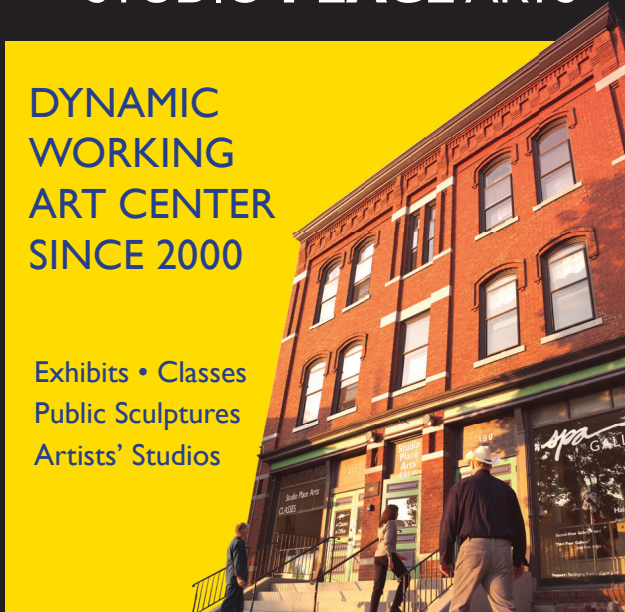
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PROCTOR'S MARBLE

history is set in stone



By Janelle Faignant

Lying on a table in Brent Wilson's shop in the Proctor Marble Company is a beautiful marble statue of the Virgin Mary, missing a hand.

"He's replacing (it)," his wife June says, noting that age crumbled and broke it.

Brent Wilson is one of the last marble craftsmen left in the business that used to be booming in this town. His business is housed in back of the sprawling former Vermont Marble Company building, and there is some general confusion with their similar names.

"We are a tenant in the building," June said. "Brent is one of the last in the trade here in Proctor, (along with) Herb Johnson of Johnson Marble, a third-generation marble worker. We're proud to carry on the tradition because it really is a lost art."

The history of the building stretches back to 1880 and is as vast as the building itself, with its cavernous, never-ending halls. It started with lawyer, veteran and politician Redfield Proctor, who founded Vermont Marble Company and served as its first president. The land in picturesque Proctor was a goldmine of water power, sand supply, quarries and railroad.



Brent & June Wilson of Proctor Marble Co.

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A photo from the early days courtesy of Kevin Thornton/Vermont Marble Museum. Photos like this, some dating back 100 years, are planned for an upcoming exhibit.

“Vermont won the jackpot geologically,” June said. “Not only the marble, there’s granite in the Barre side of the state and slate on the New York border.”

At its peak, Vermont Marble Company employed thousands of people, including immigrants from all over the world — mostly Europe — who were quarry and mill workers, stone cutters and hand polishers, engineers, managers and directors.

Over time, VMC acquired rights to all the marble deposits in Vermont, Colorado and Alaska, to become a giant of the industry. Workers there produced marble for everything from gravestones to the U.S. Supreme Court Building and the Jefferson Memorial in Washington, D.C. Even the sidewalks in Proctor are marble.

On the upper floor is the museum, still chock-full of exhibits, including the famous Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, and early photographs of workers standing beside mammoth columns of marble, pulleying slabs weighing thousands of pounds from quarries, and samples of shades of marble — Champlain black, Swanton red and Danby white.

“The marble exhibit opened as a company showroom in 1934,” said Kevin Thornton, Vermont Marble Museum board president. “There’s a room called the slab room with hundreds of different types of marble in it.”

“It was beyond belief what these people accomplished,” Brent said. He has over 40 years of private and commercial art experience, including the sweeping Hearst Castle Neptune pool, which sees over a million tourists a year. He opened Proctor Marble Co. in 1991 and is the longest tenant in the building.

“I do custom cutting, sculpture work and stuff that isn’t cookie-cutter,” he said.

“After the large company went out of business, businesses like mine grew out of the ashes from the big company,” said Brent, who was employed by VMC in the 1970s.

“Fashion changed after the Second World War,” said Thornton. “In the 1930s, a marble lobby in a bank or a hotel was considered the epitome of luxury and it just fell out of fashion.”

“Monumental public buildings stopped being built and the domestic marble industry was really hurt by that,” he said. “The economics of the whole industry changed.”

In the 1970s, OMYA, which manufactures calcium carbonate, bought VMC and in the 1990s sold it to Martin and Marsha Hemm, who had a stone manufacturing business. In 2012, it went to the Preservation Trust of Vermont. It’s currently owned by Zion Growers, an industrial hemp producer.

Thornton says the real history lies in the little-known stories of the workers. “The laboring people quarried the marble,



carved the marble, built the industry," he said. In November 1935, they went on strike, which attracted national attention. It ended in 1936 through arbitration.

"They did have a strike, at one point, that got violent," June said.

"It's a very compelling story and not very well known," Thornton said.

Today more than half of the building is unused industrial space but with the new ownership there is a lot of potential to see the building busy again. Travis Samuels, owner and COO of Zion Growers, said they plan to use part of the space for hemp processing, which would be used to make clothing and textiles.

"Our plans are to be up and running this year," Samuels said. "We don't need the whole building for our operations and part of what we've discussed with the town as well as with the museum owners and Preservation Trust, who we purchased the building from, was that our future plans involved renovations to make spaces for other industrial tenants (and) businesses."

There are a handful of tenants there now and, after a four-year hiatus because of COVID, the museum reopened last year and plans to continue.

"We have a lease in the old marble mill and we're staying put where we are," Thornton said.

"This summer we're going to have an exhibit on child labor in the marble industry," he said. "There was a fair amount of it."

"We've also got a very exciting project with the thousands of negatives that the company photographer took and have been stored for decades now," Thornton said. "They're about 100 years old and we were lucky enough to get a grant from Proctor Foundation to begin the process of scanning those negatives. So, we're going to start that in the spring. Our plan is to take a few hundred of those most compelling images and exhibit those."

Samuels says they are "full steam ahead to open for processing as soon as possible" and, with the museum opening soon, the long lull at the iconic building is set to see new life.



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LANDMARK

History still being made at **BARRE'S OLD LABOR HALL**

By Peter Cobb

The backstory for the Old Labor Hall in Barre is fairly well known. Built in 1900, it was the home of the Socialist Labor Party, and was at the center of radical economic and political movements of the early 20th century, not just in Barre, but nationally.

The Labor Hall has been designated a National Historic Landmark by the Department of the Interior and has been

nominated as a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

"The Socialist Labor Party Hall represents the rich diversity of the immigrant community of granite workers that made Barre, Vermont, their home beginning in the 1880s. Skilled artists from northern Italy brought their long tradition of stone sculpture to New England, along with quarriers and carvers of many nations including Scots, Scandinavians, Spanish, Swiss, Austrians, Germans, Irish and Lebanese," said Karen Lane, vice president of the board





of directors of the Barre Historical Society.

In its early days, some of the most famous labor leaders spent time in Barre, including Emma Goldman, Lithuanian-born anarchist and political activist; Luigi Galleani, a leader of the Italian anarchist movement; Mary Harris Jones, known as Mother Jones, an Irish-born American labor organizer and the namesake for one of the country's most noted magazines; William ("Big Bill") Haywood, founding member of the Industrial Workers of the World and a member of the executive committee of the Socialist Party of America; Anne Burlak, a member of the National Textile Workers Union and Communist Party, jailed numerous times for sedition; and Eugene Debs, also one of the founding members of the Industrial Workers of the World and five-time socialist candidate for president.

Goldman lived on Granite Street before she was driven out of town. Galleani lived in Barre from 1903 to 1912. Debs spoke in Barre for three of his campaigns for president in 1904, 1908 and 1912.

In the most infamous incident at the Labor Hall, in 1903 Elia Corti was shot in the hall's doorway while a crowd awaited the arrival of a speaker. The murder was related to the clash between the Italian stoneworkers who were



socialists and the stoneworkers who were anarchists.

The hall was built by Italians who had immigrated to Barre to work in the granite sheds. It served not only as a rallying place for the labor movement but also as a social and cultural center for the new Americans.

It remained an active political center until the great flood of 1927 which wreaked havoc on the building. During the first years of the Great Depression, the hall returned as



May 1 - Primo Maggio 1904
SLP Hall, Barre, Vermont
Photo courtesy of Mario Barberi

Primo Maggio celebration at the Socialist Labor Party Hall May 1, 1904.

PROVIDED PHOTO

a center for union activities, as the granite workers set aside a portion of their wages for their unemployed colleagues.

The Labor Hall closed in 1936. For the next 60 years, it was used as a produce warehouse under various owners. When the last owner declared bankruptcy in 1994, the Barre Historical Society purchased the building.

The Old Labor Hall was restored with contributions of labor and capital from the community and trade unions across Vermont and New England.

Today, the Old Labor Hall, which reopened in 2000 to honor its 100th anniversary, continues as a center for community activities, entertainment and education. It is the regular

business meeting place for several Vermont labor unions and is the home of the Barre Historical Society.

The building is available for rent. The hall can hold up to 300 people; it is handicap accessible, and it has a catering kitchen, banquet tables and chairs and wireless broadband internet access.

"The (Old Labor) Hall stands today as a unique example of a building that represents the desire of its creators for a better and more equal way of life for all people. In caring for the hall and making it available to everyone for family and community events, the Barre Historical Society strives to honor the heritage of the founders of the Socialist Labor Party Hall," Lane said.



Grave stone of Elia Corti.

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KNITTING CIRCLES *stitch together community*

By Janelle Fagnant

Judy Bond was knitting a vest recently and had to rip out five inches from it.

“They call it frogging — because it sounds like rip-it, rip-it, like a frog,” she said with a laugh. “But it’s better to frog and recover in process than to knit something that you have to give away because it’s too tight.”

Blanket stitch, frog, back loop, purl — it’s the lingo of knitters and it can produce anything from a scarf or sweater to a blanket or coffee sleeve. But if you’ve never picked up a knitting needle before or have been knitting all your life, there’s a knitting circle nearby that can help.

Bond is secretary of the Green Mountain Knitting Guild — a growing, statewide group of knitters that meet for a weekly knit night on Mondays. It’s open to anyone, no matter where you live.

“We started in Montpelier, Plainfield area but we really are focused on the whole state,” Bond said. “We meet on Zoom usually two hours, people hang on later or bail earlier,” she said. “We started meeting on Zoom once COVID threw us out of the real world and after a while we realized we had people from Newport, from New Hampshire, from southern Vermont, from all over the place who came regularly so we can’t go in-person for our weekly knit night, and it’s been great.”

The Green Mountain Knitting Guild started six years ago as a nonprofit with a mission of creating a community around knitting. “We’re building an inclusive community, and membership is open to anyone who lives in, near, or feels a connection to Vermont,” the website says.

“You just bring what you’re working on and we talk about it,” Bond said. “We talk about our dogs, our kids, the weather, just everything. There’s a lot of questions and answers and whatever pops up.”

They also occasionally have group knit-alongs separate from knit night, and an annual shawl knit-along where everyone knits the same pattern. Last year’s shawl was “Stitch Play” by Marin Melchior, with the pitch: Knit along with us and wear your shawl to the Vermont Sheep and Wool Festival.

This year the Vermont Sheep and Wool Festival takes place Oct. 5 and 6 at the Tunbridge Fairgrounds and several GMKG guild members are sourcing Vermont fleece to be processed into yarn by a Vermont mill, to knit garments in time for the festival — a showcase of natural fibers and fiber arts and a great venue for small farms and fiber producers to promote their businesses.

The most popular Rutland-area in-person knitting circle takes place at Green Mountain Yarn and Fiber, which moved a little over a year ago to its new location at 217 Woodstock Ave. in Rutland. The sit-and-knit meets Sundays at 1 p.m.

Ellen Parrino, of Chittenden, is a regular knitter there and has been since it was at its old location down the road.

“I learned it as a little kid, my grandparents and my aunts were knitting. I started crocheting around 4 and they started me on knitting needles at 6,” she said.

“We have a great group of people that come on Sundays — every ability, it’s a lot of fun and a great shop,” said Beth Charles, who also knits with the group there.

“I’m not going to say it’s easy,” Parrino said about learning. “Nothing that is new is easy, it just requires a little bit of practice.”

The number of knitters in the circle on any given week ranges from three or four to eight and sometimes 15 or 20, from Rutland and surrounding towns.

“It’s nice because you get to talk just about life but also you learn from each other,” Parrino said. “Some of the ladies that come here are part of bigger ones, and some of us sometimes get together for lunch at Olivia’s (Market) and knit.”

The Godnick Adult Center in Rutland started a weekly sit-and-knit Fridays at 1 p.m. and many smaller community libraries host knitting circles, including Proctor Library on Wednesdays at 6 p.m. Manchester Community Library’s Knit Wits welcomes crochet, knitting, needlework or quilting Mondays at 3 p.m. All the circles welcome all levels and abilities.

“If you want to learn,” Bond said, “the best thing is to sit down with somebody who can teach you the basics. It’s only really two stitches, a knit stitch and a purl stitch, and many of the yarn shops can set you up with a tutor or have classes for new people.”

“Everybody is really different about how they approach knitting,” she said. “Some people like it as a process, they like the action of knitting, and other people — they want that item. They’re just going to hump through it until they have that sweater or whatever done. It’s really individual. But that’s what makes it fun.”



PHOTOS BY MARIN MELCHIOR

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SCIENCE MUSEUMS SET FOR ECLIPSE

By Peter Cobb

With Vermont at the center of viewing for the once-in-a-lifetime solar eclipse on April 8, the region's science museums are ready. Scheduled activities include viewing parties, instructions on what to do, educational programs about eclipses and more.

Fairbanks Museum and Planetarium

The Fairbanks Museum in St. Johnsbury is planning a full day of programming on April 8, with Jane Lindholm, creator, host, and executive producer of Vermont Public's "But Why?

A Podcast for Curious Kids" and Mark Breen, producer of the popular Eye on the Night Sky and director of the Lyman Spitzer Jr. Planetarium. Anyone interested but unable to attend can join by tuning to Vermont Public's radio and TV stations and can live-stream on YouTube from 3 to 4 p.m.

Starting at noon, the family-friendly event will include interpretation stations with museum educators who will use models to illustrate how and why eclipses occur, guided craft tables to make and decorate pinhole viewers and safety shields, and other activities to enhance the eclipse experience.

From 3 to 4 p.m., there will be a live broadcast of "But Why" with Lindholm and Breen, who will guide the attendees

through the total solar eclipse and share commentary that draws on history, science and the astonishing experience of being in the path of totality. During this special coverage, Lindholm and Breen will be looking at solar eclipses from all angles: What are they? Why do they happen? When do they happen? What do animals do during an eclipse? How is this solar eclipse significant? When was the last solar eclipse in Vermont? How can people view them safely?

Food trucks will be on site.

There will also be eclipse related presentation in the planetarium April 6 and 7.

A limited number of tickets for the planetarium presentations on April 6-8 are available for advance purchase. In addition, tickets can be purchased at the door on the day of the show on a first-come, first-served basis. For ticket information and details: fairbanksmuseum.org.

ECHO

Visitors to the ECHO Leahy Center for Lake Champlain on the waterfront in Burlington will join the ECHO staff and the Vermont Astronomical Society for the Solar Eclipse Festival, April 6-7, to celebrate the coming of the total solar eclipse. There will be information on a variety of sun-safe viewing techniques, including sun-oculars, and telescope projections.

On April 8, visitors will watch the total eclipse live-streamed as it moves across the United States. Tickets are required for this event. Details are available on the ECHO website at www.echovermont.org.

The museum also has a special exhibit, "Mission Aerospace." This work, supported by the Simons Foundation and part of its "In the Path of Totality" initiative, allows visitors to explore the history of flight, navigation, and NASA in this immersive maze-themed exhibit.



PROVIDED PHOTO

Mark Breen from Fairbanks Museum and Planetarium.

VINS

The Vermont Institute for Natural Science in Woodstock is presenting "Eyeing the Night Sky" on Friday, April 5, from 6:30 to 8 p.m. Tickets are \$15.50 for the general public and \$13.50 for VINS members.

Visitors will journey into VINS' StarLab for an immersive experience to learn about moon phases and features, learn about eclipses and explore the mythology of eclipses from cultures throughout history. Reservations for seating in the StarLab are required as space is limited.





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Silver Frost



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On April 8, there will be live music, a special program about animals and the eclipse, and space to watch this amazing natural phenomenon. One pair of solar eclipse viewing glasses are complimentary with admission to the VINS Nature Center (while supplies last).

Detail at vinsweb.org.

Montshire Museum

The Montshire Museum in Norwich is celebrating Museum Solar Eclipse Day on April 8. It is the last total solar eclipse visible in the continental U.S. until Aug. 12, 2045. Eclipse glasses will be available at the museum store. Details are available at www.montshire.org.



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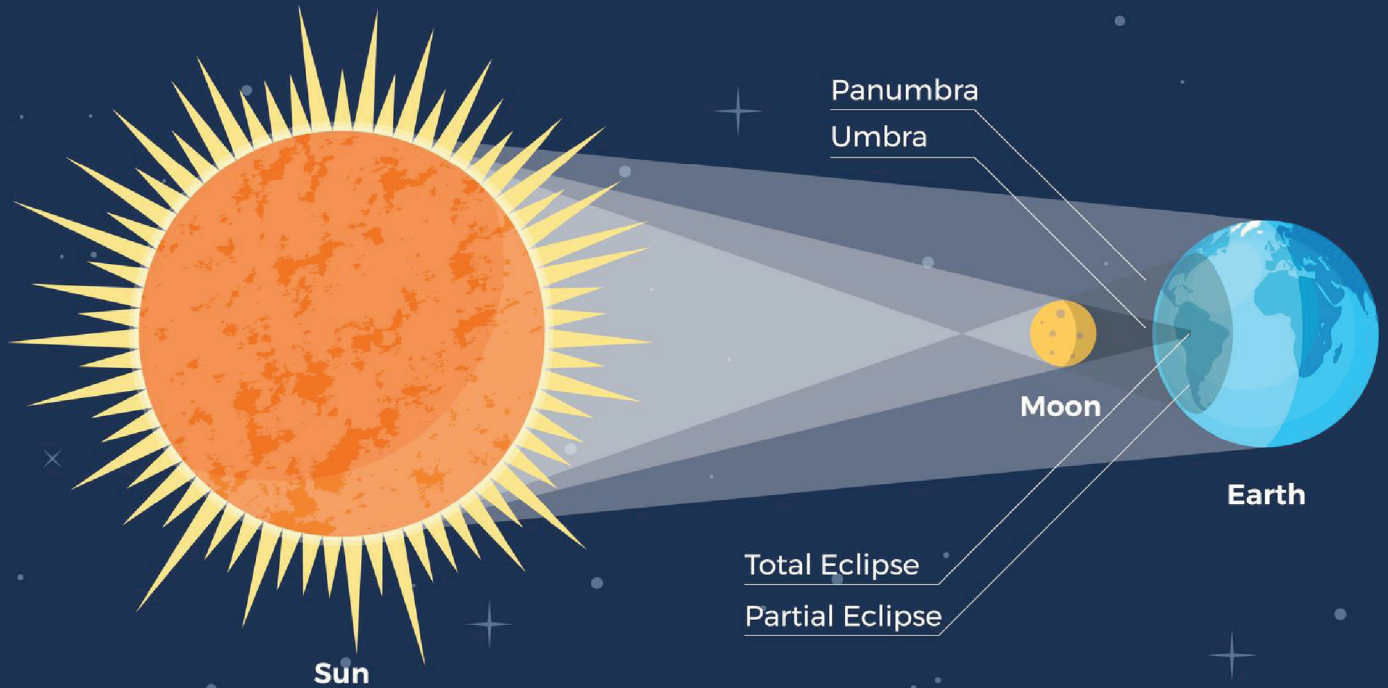
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Eclipse graphic: Dan Falk: "A full solar eclipse is one of the most spectacular sights you're ever going to see. Once every 18 months, this occurs somewhere on the Earth's surface... Some observers will see nearly 4 minutes of the eclipse. The 2024 eclipse might be one of the most watched celestial events in history."

SOLAR ECLIPSE



APRIL 8:

Get ready for the Great American Eclipse!

By Lou Varricchio

Monday, April 8, is being billed by astronomers as the day of the Great American Eclipse.

While most astronomers agree with this year's eclipse event's superlative epithet, the "wow" factor of any solar eclipse naturally depends upon the observer's location and the local weather.

For Vermonters, you simply can't be better placed in the path of a total solar eclipse than being in the Green Mountain State.

But as far as the local weather goes, well, the outcome of any

anticipated sky event becomes more of a proverbial crap shoot.

While spring in the Northern Hemisphere will be well underway in early April, Vermont's fickle weather patterns could easily render a mess of the day with cloud cover, rain or even snow.

No matter, area astronomers will be thinking positively, with a few probably performing clandestine, backyard sun dances to encourage Mother Nature's cooperation.

Award-winning international science writer and educator Dan Falk was among the first to bring widespread attention to the Great American Eclipse online nearly a year ago. Falk's



PUBLIC DOMAIN IMAGE COURTESY BRAZIL NATIONAL DIRECTORATE OF METEOROLOGY AND GEOPHYSICS DNMG. Totality pictured during the 2023 eclipse.

YouTube channel, “Danfalkscience,” includes several short, informative videos about the event and how to observe it.

“A full solar eclipse is one of the most spectacular sights you’re ever going to see ... once every 18 months this occurs somewhere on the Earth’s surface,” he said in one of the videos. “(This) is like the eclipse of August 2017, the path of totality comes really close to home... Some observers will see nearly 4 minutes of the eclipse. The 2024 eclipse might be one of the most watched celestial events in history.”

Falk has observed several eclipses and provided viewing tips for his science-minded YouTube followers.

“Your number one objective Monday, April 8, is to get into the path of totality. And in fact, you want to get as close as you can to the centerline (Burlington), the path that runs in the middle of the path of totality. If you’re at the edge of the path (Middlebury) you’ll see a much shorter duration of the eclipse. To see the maximum length of the eclipse, you’ll want to be on the centerline.”

Falk stressed that the moment of totality will be an eerie experience for observers.

“Remember to look around you (just) a few minutes before totality; look for subtle changes in the landscape as colors become more muted because of the reduced amount of (sun) light and as shadows get sharper.”

Falk also described the so-called “diamond ring” of a total solar eclipse. It’s the effect when the final bit of sunlight is glowingly visible behind the moon — then it’s totality.

“Suddenly it will be as dark as night or at least as dark as deep twilight,” he noted. “And you’ll see the Sun’s wispy outer atmosphere called the corona. When it’s completely covered up, it’s safe to look at; you won’t need the eclipse glasses. But the moment totality ends (soon) ... grab the eclipse glasses; you’re going to need them again (to prevent serious eye damage).”

The area of totality, which means the best view of the eclipse

with the longest time of spooky daytime darkness underway, will span a circle, more or less, of approximately 109 miles in diameter.

Moving roughly southwest to northeast, this circle of darkness begins its United States journey at noon along the Rio Grande in Texas. It will reach the Vermont region in the early afternoon, touching Middlebury on its southern edge and Montreal on its northern edge.

While Rutland lies just outside the area of totality, local residents won’t notice much of a difference during the height of the eclipse event. The effect, even if slightly outside the circle, will be awe-inspiring nevertheless.

The duration of the total eclipse will be just over 2 minutes in length.

Considering that the circle of totality is moving at 2,615 mph across the face of the Earth, thanks to our planet’s rotation in space, the time you’ll spend in totality will feel surprisingly long.

The total eclipse event begins here at 2:14 p.m. (in its early partial phase), starts totality at 3:26 p.m., and reaches full totality at 3:27 p.m.

By 4:37 p.m., the big event (now in its closing, partial phase) will end.

Meanwhile, the circle of totality will continue to move northeast into northern New Hampshire, Maine (the center of totality will pass directly over the summit of Maine’s Mt. Katahdin), and maritime Canada.

Recent solar eclipses in Vermont — a partial eclipse in October 2023 and a near total eclipse in August 2017 — may not have been quite as long in duration as the Great American Eclipse is expected to be, but they still provided Vermonters with superb experience to appreciate Mother Nature’s unique juxtaposition of Earth, Moon, and Sun to form such solar eclipse events.

According to NOAA, the National Oceanic & Atmospheric Administration officials, a solar eclipse occurs when the Moon passes between the sun and Earth at just the right moment.

The serendipitous fact that both the moon and sun appear at the same diameter in the sky when viewed by the eyes from the Earth’s surface, makes such total eclipse events unique in the solar system.

Last October, the moon blocked only part of the Sun’s light and thus was classified as a partial solar eclipse.

As in August 2017, and again this April 8, the moon passes in front of the sun to block all the sun’s light — a total solar eclipse.

“As the Moon blocks the Sun’s light, it casts a shadow on part of the Earth,” according to NOAA’s eclipse website. “The Moon’s shadow creates a trail as Earth rotates, and the trail is called the ‘path of totality.’ Places in the path of totality (like Vermont) will experience total darkness during an eclipse since the moon completely blocks the Sun’s light for a few minutes, resembling nighttime.”

Eclipse viewing safety

It will be tempting to look directly at the Great American Eclipse, especially during totality. But all eye experts agree: don’t do it.

"It's unsafe to look at the sun with your naked eye or with conventional eyeglasses, a Smartphone, binoculars, or a telescope," according to a news release by retina surgeon Rajesh Rao, of the world-renowned University of Michigan-Kellogg Eye Center. "As doctors and ophthalmologists, we want to make sure everyone is taking proper precautions. We know there's a lot of excitement. People want to look."

During the 2017 total solar eclipse, Rao was on hand to warn observers around North America to be careful while looking at a solar eclipse.

He noted that "looking directly at the sun without proper solar filters (or special eclipse glasses) can quickly spell trouble."

Rao said that certain photon wavelengths within the Sun's powerful rays can damage retina cells: "Namely, those in the fovea, a tiny pit in the central retina that facilitates high-acuity vision for reading, facial recognition and driving. That damage can cause a partial retinal 'hole' to develop, or other changes, in a condition called solar retinopathy. Depending on the length and extent of exposure, outcomes may vary. Blurred vision or seeing spots could be temporary."

SAFELY observing THE SUN

WARNING! Never look directly at the sun without proper eye protection. You can seriously injure your eyes.



Check with local science museums, schools and astronomy clubs for eclipse glasses—or purchase an ISO 12312-2 compliant pair of these special shades!



View the eclipse with special eclipse glasses.



Regular sunglasses are not safe to view the eclipse.

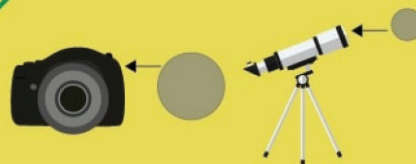
SUN FUNNEL



Inexpensive and easy to build, the sun funnel is a device that completely encloses the light coming from a telescope and projects a magnified image of the sun, large enough for many people to view at once.
<http://eclipse2017.nasa.gov/make-sun-funnel>

NASA recommends wearing special eclipse glasses, which you can purchase online or at some local drug stores. NASA graphic

SOLAR ECLIPSE VIEWING DO'S AND DON'TS



Sunglasses and camera or telescope lenses don't protect your eyes during an eclipse. Use specially designed glasses or lens filters to block the Sun's harmful rays. Image courtesy American Academy of Ophthalmology/American Astronomical Society

Lou Varricchio lives in Middlebury. A former NASA science writer at the space agency's Ames Research Center in California, he now teaches astronomy at Community College of Vermont.



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