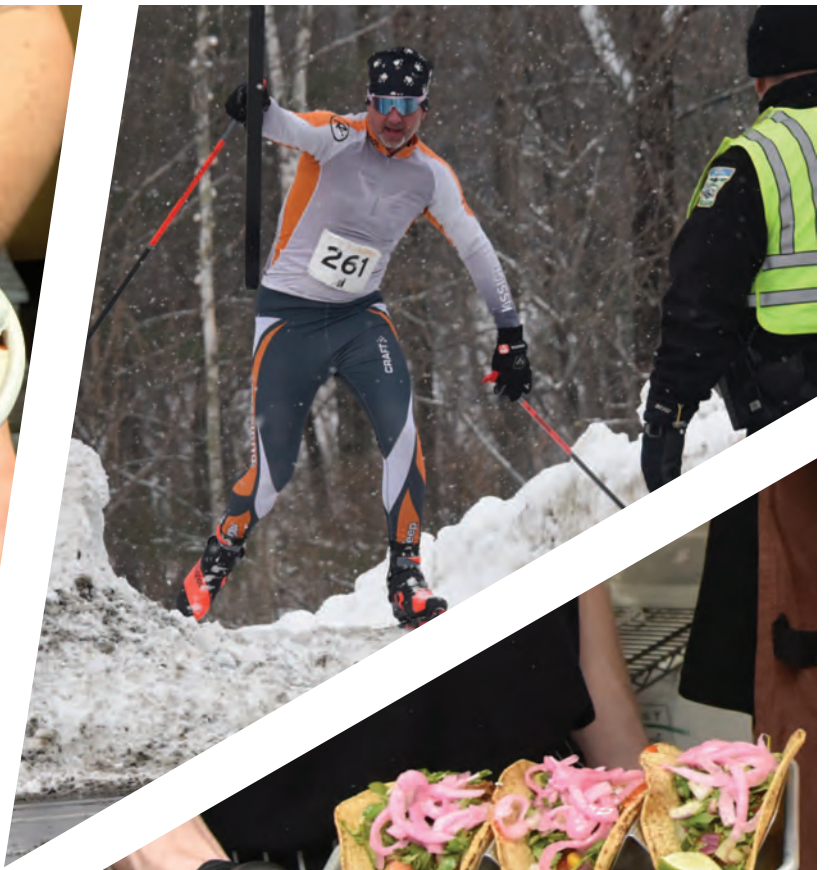




READERS' CHOICE 2025

Greater Mt. Mansfield Area

4393 is a special supplement to the Stowe Reporter
Check out the best of the best online, too! Visit vtcng.com/4393awards.



PEAK PERFORMERS

WELCOME TO OUR ANNUAL CELEBRATION OF HIGH QUALITY

IT'S ALWAYS an election year when you, the good people of the greater Stowe and Lamoille County area, cast your votes for the best of the best.

Here are the results of our eighth annual 4393 Awards, where the readers of the Stowe Re-

porter and News & Citizen choose their favorite people, places and things.

Included in the mix are businesses from

restaurants and retailers to home services and body work — both automotive and corporeal.

In these awards, you honor the individuals who contribute to the community in a civic manner and folks who create art to bring some beauty to our lives. And you shared your favorite places to go play — after all, in the region surrounding Mount Mansfield, we are blessed with some of the best recreation options out there.

Speaking of Mansfield, in case you're wondering about the curious name of our annual honors, the 4393 Awards are inspired by that very mountain. It's the elevation of Vermont's highest peak, and there is no higher honor.

This spring, hundreds of readers nominated their favorites in each category. Those receiving at least three write-ins made it to the final voting ballot, which voters filled out during the month of June.

We've listed the top three vote-getters in each category — more if there were ties — along with the rest of the nominees who made it to the voting ballot (in alphabetical order).

If you have suggestions for additional categories, send them, with "4393" in the subject line, to news@stowereporter.com or news@newsandcitizen.com. For instance, this year we had a voter who suggested we add a category for Best Yoga Studio. Is that a stretch? Maybe!

Congratulations to all the winners and nominees, and remember to support local — and that includes your local newspapers.

— Tommy Gardner, editor



GORDON MILLER PHOTO

4393 Awards READERS' CHOICE 2025

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Winner



Best Cannabis Retailer or Budtender



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Whether you're looking for a quick drink after a hard day's work or play, or a multi-course meal for a special occasion, basic grub like burgers, pizza, sushi or wings, or more creative, elevated fare, you'll find plenty of options in the shadow of Mount Mansfield. Vermont has good ingredients and tons of talent to prepare it.

BEST PIZZA

1. **Picasso**
2. **Pizza on Main**
3. **American Flatbread**

Nominees: Hoagie's Pizza & Pasta, House of Pizza, Jimmz Pizza, The Matterhorn

If there was a pie chart showing the breakdown of how many pizzerias have claimed this category, it would just be one big Picasso pizza. Every year since the 4393 awards were launched in 2015, this Mountain Road mainstay has claimed the best slice.

BEST BURGER

1. **Doc Ponds**
2. **Burger Barn**
3. **Gondolas Snack Bar**

Nominees: 10 Railroad Street, Backyard Tavern, The Bench, Grant's, Idletyme, Plate, Rimrock's Mountain Tavern, The Whip

The Adventure Man cometh, again. After a post-pandemic lull, Doc Ponds is back on top of the burger stack, the spot it enjoyed for the first three years of our contest. As usual, this category was one of the fullest, which might suggest that, no matter how many pages your restaurant has, if you include a burger, someone's going to order it.

BEST FRIES

1. **Doc Ponds**
2. **The Bench**
3. **Gondolas Snack Bar**

Nominees: Backyard Tavern, Burger Barn, Picasso, Pizza on Main

Sure, you could get a salad instead for two bucks, but there's a reason "do you want fries with that?" is one of those interrogatives of vague provenance that anyone of a certain age has heard, even in non-culinary settings. Burgers and fries just go hand in hand, and the Doc did both better this year.

BEST WINGS

1. **Black Diamond Barbeque**
2. **The Matterhorn**
3. **Shakedown Street BBQ & Grill**

Nominees: Doc Ponds, Grant's, Hoagie's Pizza & Pasta, Picasso, Rimrock's Mountain Tavern, Sushi Yoshi

Chicken wings are another one of

BEST NEW RESTAURANT



Gordon Miller photo

The Avocado Pit

For the second year in a row, the Avocado Pit is bringing home the gold — or bowl of guacamole — securing the spot as the best new restaurant in Stowe. Opening last year, the restaurant, located near the intersection of Main and Park streets in Stowe, has taken lunch and dinner pit stops to a whole new level and has quickly risen to stardom.

The offerings are a mix up from Stowe's usual cuisine, featuring a have-it-your-way set up. From burritos and tacos — corn or flour — to bowls and salads, the process offers a quick and easy approach to Mexican-style food, right here in the Green Mountain State. Perhaps most compelling about the Avocado Pit in a town like Stowe is the hard to beat prices. A burrito starts at roughly \$12 while an individual street taco is about \$4 and a two-taco deal is just \$10. Then, pick your proteins, toppings — we recommend getting the works — and

possibly a side or two. You can't go wrong with the Chorizo Corn Queso topped with chipotle chimichurri, cilantro and onion — Muy delicioso.

The restaurant is technically a chainlet with two other locations in southern Vermont, but the team says they're more than just a restaurant; they're an essential part of the community. Our readers think so, too.

On a typical warm and sunny summer day, it's likely you'll see neighbors lined to pick up their lunch, probably conversing with each other or shouting a passing "hello" to Kristi Tatro, the restaurant's general manager, who always seems to have a smile on her face. And if you're lucky, she might even have time to draw a personalized message on your to-go bag — just another way to show the community they're happy to serve you.

— Liberty Darr

those ubiquitous menu items, no matter if your establishment has 40 televisions playing five games. So, it's saying something if your little homey spot off the beaten path in Morristown Corners can lay claim to the best wings every year they've been on the 4393 menu. They are literally smoking.

BEST ICE CREAM

1. **Ben & Jerry's**
2. **Zach's Shack**
3. **Red Barn Ice Cream Shop**

Nominees: Gondolas Snack Bar, Stowe Sweets

Don't get us wrong, with the iconic Woody Jackson cow art and so many clever combinations over the year that there's an actual flavor graveyard, Ben & Jerry's is one of the few things, along with Bernie and Phish, that people associate with Vermont. But if you want to go local, Zach's got your creemee in Morrisville and Red Barn'll fill your cone in Stowe.

BEST COFFEE

1. **Black Cap Coffee & Bakery**
2. **Woodland Baking and Coffee**
3. **Vermont Artisan Coffee & Tea**

Nominees: GiraKofi, Goldfinch Gourmet, The Roastery, Starbucks

All the pre-angst about Starbucks hanging a shingle on Stowe's Main Street didn't stop the Black Cap mini-empire — with locations in Morrisville, Waterbury and Burlington — from claiming the top coffee stop spot. Have you seen the lines here? Have you seen someone you know every time you go in? Have you had the maple latte? It's so good they named the wi-fi password after it.

BEST COCKTAILS

1. **Moog's Place**
2. **Après Stowe**
3. **Lower Bar Stowe**

Nominees: Plate

The veteran of the group, Tom Moog's original spot next to the Bijou Theater in downtown Morrisville continues to draw locals for the laid-back vibe, where the music never stops and where the silver shaker keeps time to the beat — well, well, well, you can never tell.

BEST VEGETARIAN OR VEGAN FOOD

1. **Green Goddess Café**
2. **The Avocado Pit**
3. **Ranch Camp**

Nominees: Aladdin, Marsala Salsa, Raja Restaurant

If it grows together — or just simply

Continued on page 6

BEST ART GALLERY



Gordon Miller photo

Front Four Gallery

It's been just over a year since Jack Morris took over Robert Paul Galleries on Mountain Road in Stowe and rechristened it Front Four Gallery — a reference to the four classic ski trails on Mount Mansfield.

Under Morris, the gallery has begun featuring an eclectic range of contemporary art: from the delightfully fantastical ceramic monster sculptures of Gretchen Verplanck to the serene oil landscapes of Vermont artist Craig Mooney.

Morris has curated artists, whether they live in Vermont or not, who seem to evoke something of the area, whether it's the acrylic cows of Italian painter Nicoletta Biletti — which like many of their live counterparts, seem to stare straight into your soul — or the whimsical photographs taken by Hooey Mountain that place vintage ski figurines to look as if you're catching each mid-glide.

In July, it hosted a solo exhibit from artist Chip Haggerty, a Vermont self-

taught artist and longtime server in the restaurant industry.

Haggerty's work is done mostly on recycled paper bags pieced together to form a canvas for his acrylic paintings that are equal parts funky, funny and nostalgic.

Done in bright colors, the paintings sometimes feel like how you might look at the world on a sunny day: the watermelon is juicy and red, the petals of a sunflower shine like yellow rays, and as the heat creeps into your mind the world breaks down into collage.

This coming September, Front Four will host the lifework of Peter Heller, a Vermont artist who originally emigrated from Berlin and died in 2002.

Heller's work often feels like a moody abstraction of your own fractured thoughts: webbed masses of broken and intersecting pieces floating through space.

— Briana Brady



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grows from the earth — it goes together at this perennial category ruler. Unsurprisingly, the Green Goddess has a large salad menu, but the build-your-own option is where it's at. A math friend tells me that, just sticking to vegetarian options, there are 302,841 possible combinations.

BEST RESTAURANT — STOWE

- 1. Harrison's Restaurant
- 2. Doc Ponds
- 3. Picasso

Nominees: The Avocado Pit, Edson Hill, Grant's, Plate, Trattoria La Festa, The Whip

Other places have come and gone over the two-plus decades, but the place run by the mother-son dynamic duo of Kathy and Andrew Kneale remains top of mind for locals and tourists alike. The Kneales know how to set the vibe to make it feel like you're guests in their home, and the food — save room for Kathy's dessert — is always top notch.

BEST RESTAURANT — LAMOILLE COUNTY

- 1. Harrison's Restaurant
- 2. Moog's Place
- 3. Picasso

Nominees: The Avocado Pit, The Cork & Fork, Edson Hill, Plate, Topsy Trout, Trattoria La Festa

Stowe has so many different places to eat that the rest of the vibrant Lamoille County area dining scene may seem relatively quiet. However, folks from other towns like to get out once in a while — and the Kneales have a seat waiting for them, too.

BEST NEW RESTAURANT (OPENED IN 2024-2025)

- 1. The Avocado Pit (see page 4)
- 2. Goldfinch Gourmet
- 3. Gondolas Snack Bar

Nominees: Kitsune, Trattoria La Festa (New Ownership)

BEST CHEF

- 1. Aaron Martin (Plate)
- 2. Jonathan Nelson (Picasso)
- 3. Eddie Weiss (Shakedown Street BBQ & Grill)

Nominees: Dustin Johnson (The Roost/Topnotch Resort), *Jeff Ziegler (Trattoria La Festa), Kyle Garell (Moog's Joint), Sean Blomgren (Topsy Trout)

*Jeff Ziegler is not the chef at Trattoria La Festa; it's Jason Gelineau.

Aaron Martin spent time training at superstar chef Alice Water's Chez Panisse and has done work as varied as molecular gastronomy at TopNotch, BBQ at Black Diamond and Asian take-

ENTREPRENEUR OF THE YEAR



Courtesy photo

Goldfinch Gourmet Foods

In an unassuming storefront in Morrisville Plaza, sharing a parking lot with the McDonald's, a dollar store and two stores selling various discount clothing and domestic wares, Goldfinch Gourmet Foods sells surprisingly elevated foods in a cool and calm atmosphere.

After all, why should Stowe get all the high quality "provisions" stores, and why shouldn't Morrisville have nice things?

Sheena and David Davey seem to think it does. David is a well-trained chef with top degrees, and Sheena heads up the bakery. Their magpie approach to fine foods has their display cases and shelves in the cafe — complete with ample seating — filled with a hodgepodge of fine foods, breakfast and lunch sandwiches, and unique pantry items you're unlikely to find anywhere else in town.

Their entire culinary aesthetic is encapsulated in their rotating "supreme" croissants. Try just one and you'll have a hard time going back to plain old laminated butter pastries.

— Aaron Calvin

out cuisine inspired by Burlington's hal-
lowed Single Pebble. But Plate is his —
and wife Jennifer's — baby, and like
any child, it's always changing and
growing.

BEST BARTENDER/SERVER

- 1. Kalee Neville (Picasso)
- 2. Brian Krux (Plate)
- 3. Ray Knight (Burt's Irish Pub)

Nominees: Jonathan Weiss (Grant's)

Kalee Neville is one of the familiar faces behind the spacious Picasso bar and one of the nicest folks you'll meet. Whether you're popping in for a couple of slices and beer for lunch, making your way downhill after skiing, or bellied up for the weekly trivia night, Neville's there with a smile.

BEST RESTAURANT TO TAKE THE KIDS

- 1. Picasso
- 2. Hoagie's Pizza & Pasta
- 3. Gondolas Snack Bar

Nominees: Rimrock's Mountain Tavern, Shakedown Street BBQ & Grill, Sushi Yoshi

The top two places here share plenty in common that make it a draw for parents with the young ones. For one, pizza, pasta and sandwiches are always popular choices for the kiddos. There are also video games and side rooms for birthday parties. Picasso once again runs away with the kid-approved message.

BEST BREAKFAST/BRUNCH SPOT OR BAKERY

- 1. Butler's Pantry
- 2. Two Sons Bakehouse
- 3. Deb's Place

Nominees: The Bagel, Charlmont Restaurant, Goldfinch Gourmet, North Country Donuts, The Round Hearth Cafe, Woodland Baking and Coffee

The biscuits and home fries alone could hand Butler's Pantry the first-meal first prize. The Stowe village eatery has also been slowly expanding its post-lunch menu options this summer, but voters still favor it for the way it gets them off to a good start.

BEST TAKEOUT

- 1. Picasso
- 2. The Avocado Pit
- 3. Sushi Yoshi

Nominees: Aladdin, Hoagie's Pizza & Pasta, Pizza on Main, Ranch Camp, Sanfo Chinese Restaurant

Italian, Mexican, Asian. The golden trinity of takeout in bigger metropolitan areas is replicated at a smaller scale here in Stowe. Maybe it's because most folks don't prepare this kind of food at home, or maybe it's because it's so easily portable to a work desk or a picnic table. And this year, pizza again reigns supreme.

BEST OUTDOOR DINING

- 1. Idletyme
- 2. Gondolas Snack Bar
- 3. Shakedown Street BBQ & Grill

Nominees: American Flatbread, Cork,

Edson Hill, The Matterhorn, Picasso, Trattoria La Festa

Sure, the second and third place winners have their al fresco charms — Gondolas and its picnic tables and a view of the Lamoille River; Shakedown and its sculpture park. But Idletyme has taken outdoor seating to a different level, with a sprawling backyard area that has its own bar, different landscaped zones, and some lawn games for those too restless to sit still for a whole meal.

BEST BREWERY

- 1. The Alchemist Brewery
- 2. Stowe Cider
- 3. von Trapp Brewing

Nominees: Lost Nation Brewing, Rock Art Brewery, Soulmate Brewing Company, Ten Bends Beer

Gone are the days when hustlers were hawking four-packs of Heady Topper at Phish concerts for 100 bucks or when tourists from hundreds of miles away stalked the delivery truck and stores had a limit on how many cans you could buy in one visit. But even without the scarcity factor, the Alchemist still stands tall among the local breweries — and that's saying a lot in this area.

BEST LOCAL SPIRITS, CIDER OR WINE

- 1. Stowe Cider
- 2. Smugglers' Notch Distillery
- 3. Green Mountain Distillers

Nominees: Ellison Estate Vineyard

The hard cider boom is still going strong, and a softer adult beverage still seems to be more of a draw than the harder stuff offered by a couple of extremely popular local distillers. Stowe Cider only helps itself with its live music offerings, outdoor seating and in-house BBQ restaurant, making it a destination as well as something you can get at the gas station.

BEST LOCAL CATERER

- 1. Black Diamond Barbeque
- 2. Susanna's Catering
- 3. G Willikers Catering

Nominees: Aladdin, Sweet & Savory

If you drive through Morristown Corners on any given morning, keep your windows rolled down. That smell emanating from Black Diamond's large outdoor smokers portends deliciousness. The folks responsible for those mouth-watering hunks of pork, beef and chicken got their start bringing the meat to the masses and even now, with a successful restaurant on-site, they still bring the party with them.

Continued on next page

Whether you're going to one of these places with wallet in hand or simply window shopping, here's where you'll find the voter-approved best places to spend your money, plan your next big purchase or stocking stuffer, or just look at — and listen to — excellent art. It's also where you'll find the best doers and fixers in the area — whether what needs fixing is a leaky pipe, tight muscles or a bad hair day.

BEST DATE/NIGHT OUT

- 1. Harrison's Restaurant
 - 2. Sushi Yoshi
 - 3. The Bijou Theater
- Nominees: Edson Hill, Grant's, Stowe Bowl

Hopping over from the food and drink category, Harrison's proved it's simply a beloved place for people looking to impress or open the wallet a little wider. Sushi Yoshi is always a good idea for going big, thanks to its huge menu of small plates and its popular Good Guys local's discount. Meanwhile the Bijou continues to draw crowds, as relatively new owner Rick Welcome makes improvements to the historic movie house.

BEST HOTEL/INN

- 1. Green Mountain Inn
- 2. Topnotch Resort
- 3. The Lodge at Spruce Peak

Nominees: Edson Hill, Stowe Village Inn, Tälta Lodge, von Trapp Family Lodge & Resort

With a sprawling footprint smack in the middle of Stowe village, the Green Mountain Inn includes a variety of rooms, from tiny Main Street-facing units to larger suites. But it also has an outdoor heated swimming pool open even in the winter, two different dining options and a key location within walking distance to all the historic village has to offer.

BEST MUSIC VENUE

- 1. The Meadow at von Trapp Family Lodge & Resort
 - 2. Shakedown Street BBQ & Grill/Stowe Cider
 - 2. Spruce Peak Performing Arts
 - 3. Moog's Place
- Nominees: Alfie's Wild Ride, Lost Nation Brewing, Martell's at the Red Fox, Stowe Performing Arts, Zenbarn

When it's a nice summer night, there's simply nothing like the Meadow, tucked away in the Mount Mansfield foothills, looking west into the folds of the Nebraska Valley. Longtime concertgoers know that a well-appointed picnic basket — some wine and a little cheese and crudité platter; or some White Claws and a whole danged rotisserie chicken — make the music even better.

BEST WEDDING VENUE

- 1. von Trapp Family Lodge & Resort
- 2. Edson Hill
- 3. The Barn at Boyden Farm

Nominees: The Barn at Smugglers' Notch, Stowe Village Inn, Topnotch Resort, Zenbarn

Anyone swept away by the romance of Maria and Captain von Trapp as captured in "The Sound of Music" might want to capture some of that magic in the hillside lodge and resort where Maria made her home. The views are stunning, the staff is attentive and the grounds are vast, with biking and hiking trails to add a little adventure to the big day.

BEST SPA

- 1. Topnotch Resort (see page 14)
- 2. The Spa at Spruce Peak
- 3. The Elmore Spa

BEST ART GALLERY

- 1. Front Four Gallery (see page 5)
- 2. River Arts
- 3. The Current

Nominees: Bryan Memorial Gallery, Minemâ Gallery, Northwood Gallery

BEST MASSAGE THERAPIST

- 1. Kate Graves
- 2. Samantha Mills
- 3. Jenna Kelly

Nominees: Lisa Messier

Kate Graves is a Stowe-area institution. Over the last 30 years, her hands and healing touch — through countless modalities — have helped countless folks sleep better, manage pain, relieve stress and move around better. Just relax, you're in good hands.

BEST SALON

- 1. Salon Salon
- 2. Salon Ruelle
- 3. R G's Turning Heads Salon

Nominees: Sara's Salon

It just makes sense that a place called Salon Salon is a repeat winner — in fact, it's won this category all eight years of this contest, but it's probably a little much to start calling it Salon Salon Salon Salon Salon Salon Salon. It opened shop in the 1980s and is still in the same family, proving folks stay loyal to their "coiffurists."

Continued on page 8

OPEN THURSDAY - SATURDAY ♦ 2 COVERED PORCHES ♦ GARDEN SEATING ♦ VT BEERS ♦ CRAFT COCKTAILS



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BEST WOMEN'S CLOTHING STORE

The Boutique

Although we might gender the break-down of these clothing stores, don't let us stop you from shopping at either one. For men, or for anyone who might be on the lookout for something moisture-wicking, fleece-lined, or trail ready, AJ's Sporting Goods has you covered. After all, cotton kills, right? AJ's stocks everything from the explicitly sporty — say, a pair of bib shorts for your mountain-biking ob-

session — to things that could probably pass in an office, like a button up shirt you could still go hiking in (we're looking at you, armpit vents). Walk in looking like a New Yorker, and you might still walk out in a pair of Birkenstocks and covered in head-to-toe breathable fabric. That, and you can also rent a bike, skis or snowboard to match your new gear. The Boutique tops our list for those of



BEST MEN'S CLOTHING STORE

AJ's Ski & Sports

you who are more of the matching crochet set, statement necklace variety — a good bag isn't just for women, you know. The Boutique, run by a close-knit group of women, is the place to pick up something affordable to update your wardrobe — seriously, it's well-priced. They carry dresses, blouses, T-shirts, jeans and basically anything you'd need to outfit yourself for a date at the restaurant down the road. The Boutique is also known for stocking earrings and necklaces hand-made by one of its owners, Denise Early of Dearly Designs. Her pieces run the gamut from funky clay creations to twists of metal intertwined with beads. Man, woman, whoever — everyone looks good in a pair of dangly earrings and some splashes of color. Prove us wrong.

— Briana Brady

Gordon Miller photos

BEST CANNABIS RETAILER OR BUDTENDER

- 1. Higher Elevation
- 2. Zenbarn Farms
- 3. Goodfire

Nominees: Craft Cannabis, Wild Legacy

Higher Elevation was one of the first places to open when Vermont allowed retail sales three years ago, and it remains one of the most popular in the area. Open six days a week from seven to nine hours a day, Higher Elevation has become appointment shopping, with a different daily deal — like Tasty Tues-

day's 25 percent off edibles, or Friday's joint efforts with "Roll into the Weekend."

BEST JEWELRY STORE

- 1. Von Bargaen's Jewelry
- 2. Ferro Estate & Custom Jewelers
- 3. Remarkable Things

Von Bargaen's on Stowe's South Main Street takes a conservation-minded approach to its stores — 95 percent of the metals the store uses are recycled, because as the manager once proudly told the Stowe Reporter, "They rarely mine

new metals anymore." The store's gem workers and metal benders also have a knack for repurposing heirloom pieces into something new for the next generation.

BEST WOMEN'S CLOTHING STORE

- 1. The Boutique (see above)
- 2. In Company
- 3. AJ's Ski & Sports

Nominees: Archery Close, Coco Goose, Green Envy, Well Heeled

BEST MEN'S CLOTHING STORE

- 1. AJ's Ski & Sports (see above)
- 2. Marshalls
- 3. Archery Close

Nominees: MountainOps

BEST GIFT STORE/SPECIALTY SHOP

- 1. Stowe Mercantile
- 2. Bear Pond Books
- 2. Moss Home Goods
- 3. Country Store on Main

Continued on next page

Nominees: The Body Lounge, Craft Cannabis, Remarkable Things, Studio Store, Tangerine & Olive

Two of the top vote-getters — including the winner — are in the same building on Stowe’s Main Street. The downstairs Mercantile, quite simply, has that thing you’re looking for, whether it’s a cute sign for your bathroom or pool, a Christmas tree ornament or local soap. True to its name, the Mercantile’s bulk candy section is a highlight, located among its own line of dips, sauces and snacks.

BEST SKI/SNOWBOARD SHOP

- 1. Pinnacle Ski & Sports
- 2. AJ’s Ski & Sports
- 3. Power Play Sports

Nominees: MountainOps, Neon Wave

Whether it’s on-site gear for all seasons or its online companion, [skiesentials.com](#), Pinnacle is once again on top, after trading turns with AJ’s in early 4393 iterations. If you’re in towns north of Stowe, most folks say Power Play in Morrisville is the best play.

BEST BIKE SHOP

- 1. Chuck’s Bikes
- 2. AJ’s Ski & Sports
- 3. Hitchhiker Bike Shop



Gordon Miller photo

Hank Glowiak, the proprietor at Chuck’s Bikes in Morrisville, with the scores of cycles and accessories that cram his shop the brim.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR VOTES!

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Whether you’re planning a relaxing getaway, family vacation, wedding, meeting, or special celebration, we look forward to welcoming you!



Nominees: Bootlegger Bikes, Mountain-Ops, Pinnacle Ski & Sports, Power Play Sports, Ranch Camp

Celebrating a quarter century of bike sales and service, Chuck's has spent most of the time in our readers' choice awards on top of the heap. That's largely attributable to the shop's owner, Hank Glowiak, who has been with the place since the titular Chuck owned it. Glowiak can get you what you need and fix any little thing you haul in there, all while chattering away about whatever topic of the day.

BEST OVERALL SHOPPING EXPERIENCE

- 1. Stowe Mercantile
- 2. Forget Me-Not Shop
- 3. Bear Pond Books

Nominees: Archery Close, The Body Lounge, Commodities Natural Market, Country Store on Main, Craft Cannabis, Green Envy, In Company, Pinnacle Ski & Sports, Stowe Living, Studio Store, Tangerine & Olive

There really must be something about that old red building at 38 Main Street that keeps shoppers coming in — whether downstairs at the Mercantile or upstairs in the lively and busy Bear Pond Books. Voters also appreciate the vast array of clothing and goods — and bargain prices — at Forget Me-Not Shop in Johnson. All three are perennial stops in the holiday shopping circuit.

BEST FLORIST

- 1. Peck's Flower Shop
- 2. Uncle George's Flowers
- 3. Bramble + Bloom

Whether you want to say thank you, I love you or I'm sorry, it's often easier to communicate that through flowers. And for decades, Peck's Flower Shop in Morrisville has been the translator, putting together bouquets small and large, from the largest wedding or funeral to the most intimate encounter.

BEST REAL ESTATE AGENT (INDIVIDUAL)

- 1. Pall Spera (see page 20)
- 2. Dody Day
- 3. McKee Macdonald

Nominees: Angela Dodge, Grant Wieler, Kelley King, Maggie Macdonald, Pete Kelly, Steve Foster

BEST LOCAL FARM PRODUCT/PRODUCER

- 1. Foote Brook Farm (see page 18)
- 2. Sage Farm Goat Dairy
- 3. Sandiwood Farm
- 3. Stowe Maple Products

Nominees: Knee Deep Farm, Long Winter Farm, Naked Acre Farm

BEST MECHANIC



Gordon Miller photo

Willie's Village Auto

Picture this. It's a gorgeous winter day in January. A foot of fresh snow covered Mansfield last night and reports from the mountain are flooding your phone. "Fresh pow!" writes your friend, who's already made the trek up Mountain Road. You pack up your trusty Subaru with all the necessities and head on your way.

Along the journey, however, your car starts making some sort of ominous squeaking, grinding and clicking noise. Just when you start to think there's no way you could make it out to play today, the imaginary lightbulb above your head dings on: Call Willie's Village Auto.

Turns out, many of our trusted readers have had this happen a time or two. That's part of the reason he was voted Stowe's best mechanic. Willie Noyes, owner and operator of the shop, opened the business in 1975 originally on South Main Street, then moved it to the 2-acre site on Weeks Hill Road a short time later.

He was 24 when he built the shop on Weeks Hill Road "on a prayer," he told the Stowe Reporter in 2019. "I built it for peanuts."

The humble shop, tucked just behind Stowe's iconic main village Street, has been an integral part of the community, both for tourists and locals alike, as seen in his almost 5-star Google review rating. According to happy customers, the shop can fix just about anything, anytime — even in a pinch. From flat tires to a bent spindle, no job seems to be too big or small for the crew.

Even more than being a tourist's best friend when their car breaks down trying to leave town, he's also a trusty hand for locals. For decades, he's been called in the middle of the night to fish cars out of ditches, he told the newspaper.

"When you went off the road back then, I gave you a piece of my mind and then I smiled at you," he said. "I used to like doing that."

— Liberty Darr

BEST BUILDER

- 1. Donald P. Blake Jr. (see page 12)
- 2. Gristmill Builders
- 3. Patterson & Smith Construction

BEST ARCHITECT/ARCHITECTURAL DESIGNER

- 1. Andrew Volansky
- 2. Cushman Design Group
- 3. Paul Robert Rousselle

Nominees: Christian C. Carey, Harry Hunt, Sam Scofield

A winner for the third straight year, Volansky has been lauded by clients for his open-minded approach to designing, and for helping developers and builders navigate the often-tortuous permitting process. There's a good chance if you look at any development review board meeting summary, you'll see Volansky among the attendees.

BEST LANDSCAPE AND DESIGN

- 1. Ambler Design/Ian Ambler
- 2. Cushman Design Group
- 3. Stowe Home Care Maintenance

Nominees: Lawn Rangers, Martin Werth Landscaping and Excavation

Ian Ambler is a local boy done good, noted for his thoughtful approach to making a house a living home through a wide-ranging and adaptable approach to helping owners find the right tree, shrubbery or geo-shaping.

Continued on next page

BEST INTERIOR DESIGNER

- 1. Cushman Design Group
- 2. Stowe Living
- 3. Amber Hodgins

Nominees: Brenna B Interiors, Galen Arnot Interiors, Linda Post Interiors

Have you ever driven by a place and wondered what it looks like inside? Cushman designers go above and beyond hanging a nice painting or accenting a room with wood panels. Just check out the group's website for a sample of spacious, well-lit interiors featuring natural materials like hardwoods, stone and iron.

BEST LAWYER

- 1. Jesse Goldfine
- 2. Julia Compagna
- 3. Russell Barr

It's usually better to hire someone to represent you whenever things get complicated, whether a sticky lawsuit, a messy divorce, or, in the case of top vote-getter Jesse Goldfine, someone who specializes in real estate transactions. Real estate is real complicated, but Goldfine can make it all seem effortless.

BEST AUTO MECHANIC

- 1. Willie's Village Auto (see page 10)
- 2. Larson's Auto
- 3. 253-AUTO

Nominees: Bourne's Service Center, Checkered Flag

BEST PLUMBER

- 1. The Bearded Plumber
- 2. County Plumbing & Heating
- 3. Plumbing Solutions/ John Compagna

Nominees: Josh Grondin

The hirsute Josh Whittemore is the literal face behind his homegrown plumbing company — his beard and sunglasses make up the company logo and can be seen on his vans outside a home with a leaky pipe or in need of an upgrade. He's also a fun guy, which might be obvious, given the name.

BEST ELECTRICIAN

- 1. Local Electric
 - 2. Peak Electric
 - 3. Gould Corp
- Nominees: David Vlahos

Local Electric has grown in leaps and bounds over the past couple years, and is a feather in the cap for the instructors at the Green Mountain Technology and Career Center — the founders, owners and numerous electricians who populate the Morristown company are all tech center grads, keeping their skills, well, local.

Continued on page 12



Gordon Miller photo

Zach's Shack in Morristown is among the top vote-getters in out coolest category.



Photos: Ryan Bent



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There aren't a whole lot of couch potatoes in this basket. Folks in Vermont — and especially the Stowe orbit — are an active bunch, presented with an embarrassment of riches when it comes to playing, outside and in, 365 days a year. Whether it's getting onto the myriad trails for hiking, biking, running, skiing, snowshoeing and machinin', or keeping on top of your physical well-being between playtimes, this is a healthy bunch.

BEST BIKE TRAIL(S)

- 1. Lamoille Valley Rail Trail
- 2. Cady Hill
- 3. Stowe Recreation Path

Nominees: Cadys Falls

Bigger is better this year when it comes to cyclists' choice of where to take a spin. The 93-mile Lamoille Valley Rail Trail crosses the entire width of Vermont, between St. Johnsbury and Swanton. It's still new enough — if you can call a route that uses a 19th-century railbed new — that folks are still mostly using the parts of it nearest to where they live. It won't be long before near-century rides will be a regular thing for those with the stamina to conquer it all in one go.

BEST SKI TRAIL(S)

- 1. Smugglers' Notch Resort
- 1. Stowe Mountain Resort (some of the other trails on the list are at Stowe Mountain Resort)
- 2. Nosedive
- 3. Perry Merrill

Nominees: Goat Woods, Hayride, Jake's Ride, von Trapp Family Lodge & Resort

Thank goodness for ties. Stowe Mountain Resort has long claimed "best in the East" bragging rights, well before being bought out by Western corporation Vail Resorts. Meanwhile, Smugglers' Notch Resort has been the scrappy indie on the other side of the same range — it's only a short trek between the top of Stowe's Sensation lift and Smuggs' Sterling lift, with a playground of backwoods in between. However, despite the tie, if you dig down to readers' individual trail preference, Vermont's highest peak takes the cake.

BEST PLACE TO HIKE/
MOUNTAIN TRAIL(S)

- 1. Stowe Pinnacle
- 2. Elmore Mountain
- 3. Mt. Mansfield

Nominees: Smugglers Notch, Sterling Valley, Wiessner Woods

Not quite a summit, the Stowe Pinnacle sticks out like a beauty mark on the side of Worcester Mountain, overlooking the forested folds of Stowe Hollow. Locals sometimes wish the trail wasn't so busy — the two trailheads are shoulder to shoulder with residents' homes — but



Gordon Miller photo

BEST BUILDER

such is the burden of popularity. It helps that it is a legitimately great hike, easy enough for newbies to feel an accomplishment, but varied enough for locals to get a brisk workout.

BEST PLACE TO PADDLE

- 1. Green River Reservoir
- 2. Waterbury Reservoir
- 3. Lake Elmore

Nominees: Cotton Brook, Lamoille River

Sorry, locals, the secret is out. Long an unassuming place where northern Vermont denizens could get away, cast a line and pound some Budweisers, the Green River Reservoir has in the past decade become a jewel in the Vermont State Parks system. The other two lakes in the top three are also part of that system, giving paddlers plenty.

DBI

Donald P. Blake Jr. Inc. has been building in Lamoille County for 40 years.

Founded by Morristown's Donnie Blake in 1985 — and now owned by Donnie, Travis Cutler and Donnie's son, Jonathan Blake — the company handles a variety of projects in Vermont, including new high-end residential homes, renovations to beloved community buildings, commercial developments and energy enhancements for businesses and homes.

Donnie has held construction jobs since high school. After graduating from Peoples Academy in Morristown, he took a job in Stowe working for a well-known business owner Clint Thompson. He bounced around at a few different construction jobs — including craftsmen woodworking gigs — before stepping out on his own in 1985.

The company's focus has long been high-end homes in Lamoille County, but in recent years, it tackled a few prominent commercial projects in the area, including renovations to Johnson's Vermont Studio Center — the towering red building peering over the Pearl Street bridge and Gihon River — and the blacksmith building in Stowe, another historic structure, which today houses a branch of Simon Pearce, a New England glass company.

As home builders, the company materializes architectural dreams. A Stowe Guide and Magazine article from 2020 featured one of its more grandiose residential projects, a modern, sprawling domicile designed by architect Brian Hamor. Perched in the hills of Stowe, the home boasts cathedral windows and indoor spaces wrapped in cozy hardwood.

Beyond hammers and nails, Donnie has been recognized for his charitable work in the community. As a longtime supporter and volunteer with Boy Scouts of America, Donnie was named Lamoille County Citizen of the Year in 2018 by the Green Mountain Council of Boy Scouts of America. His company continues to make charitable contributions annually.

— Patrick Bilow

BEST SWIMMING HOLE

- 1. Waterbury Reservoir
- 2. Moss Glen Falls
- 3. Foster's

Nominees: Cadys Falls Gorge, Journey's End

The Waterbury Reservoir may lack the rugged cliffs and waterfalls that typically mark the other swimming holes garnering

Continued on next page

votes, but it sure draws the crowds on a hot summer day. Bring all your toys, though, because the Rez has plenty for water sports enthusiasts.

BEST PLACE TO PLAY GOLF

- 1. Ryder Brook Golf Club
- 2. Copley Country Club
- 3. Stowe Country Club

Nominees: Country Club of Vermont

Golfing voters went modest this year, with a pair of nine-hole courses in Morris-town scoring above par — or is it below par? Ryder Brook, conveniently located on Route 100 smack between Stowe and Mor-risville village, is a perfect way to get in a round and get on with your day.

BEST DISC GOLF COURSE

- 1. Smugglers' Notch Disc Golf Center
- 2. von Trapp Family Lodge & Resort
- 3. Center Chains

Boasting two world-class courses in one mountainside setting, Smuggs doesn't just offer a stellar experience for locals. It's hosted the world champi-onships more than once in recent years and is a regular draw on the professional tournament circuit. For any hucker looking to learn a thing or two from the best, this course is mando.



Gordon Miller photo

Continued on page 14

Whatever day of the week, the budtenders and management at Higher Elevation in Morrisville have a special deal.



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BEST LOCAL RACE OR SPORTING EVENT

- 1. Stowe Derby
- 2. Heady Trotter
- 3. Race to the Top of Vermont

The granddaddy of them all — happy 80th birthday this year — the Stowe Derby started off in 1945 as a bet between two legendary skiers, Sepp Ruschp and Erling Strom. The contest: who could make it first from the top of Mount Mansfield all the way to Stowe village on a single pair of skis. Most favor the Nordic style because of the long, flat trek along the Stowe Recreation path, which makes for some great wipeouts on the way down Vermont’s highest peak.

BEST PLACE TO TAKE OUT OF TOWN GUESTS

- 1. Downtown/Main Street, Stowe
- 2. Stowe Farmers Market
- 3. von Trapp Family Lodge & Resort

Despite it being a major through-highway, Stowe’s Main Street still typifies New England for many tourists, with the historic houses, brick town hall and sprawling Green Mountain Inn providing architectural flair and the annual al fresco Exposed sculpture exhibit adding a new artistic wrinkle every summer. The whole scene is anchored by the soaring spire of the Stowe Community Church, among the most photographed in the world.

BEST TRAINER/FITNESS INSTRUCTOR

- 1. Joanna Graves (see page 16)
- 2. Kyle Smith
- 3. Mel Senesac

Nominees: Charlotte Brynn, Ernie Roick, Hector Ortiz

BEST FITNESS VENUE/GYM

- 1. The Swimming Hole
- 2. The Forge Gym
- 3. Snap Fitness
- 3. RIDE

Nominees: Deep Roots Fitness, PHIT Performance

Located on Weeks Hill Road in Stowe, the non-profit gym that looks like a fancy barn tops the list for the fourth time, and the reason why is probably right there in its name. Sure, there’s all manner of weight and cardio equipment, but for the real experience, it’s best to jump right in



Courtesy photo

Topnotch

At the foot of Mount Mansfield, Topnotch Resort welcomes guests to a soothing salon, swimming pools, a hot tub, treatment rooms, lounges and a fitness center. Offering more than 100 treatments, Topnotch allows for mental and physical escape in the heart of the Green Mountains.

Play a game of tennis in the crisp morning air before switching between the outdoor pool and cascading waterfall as the summer day heats up — with a view of the mountains, of course.

Receive the signature massage — or any other of more than a dozen different massages — to relax your muscles after a day of biking in the resort’s 120 wooded acres. The spa therapists are experienced in catering to individual needs through the variety of services. Then bathe with aromatherapeutic oils to relax your mind. With 30 treatment rooms, privacy and quiet is a given.

The spa offers facials for radiance, anti-aging, restoration and more. If you’re in need of a salon treatment after a long week, Topnotch does it all from shampoos and stylings to bridal updos. Additional scalp and hair treatments are soothing and detoxifying.

On your way out, give your hands some love at the nail suite. Leave feeling relaxed, rejuvenated and ready to come back.

Perfect for a couple’s weekend getaway or a girl’s trip, Topnotch’s spa will leave you without a worry in the world other than choosing which essential oil you like best.

Topnotch Resort was built in 1959, with the spa added in 1987. The spa has won its category in the 4393 awards more than five times, with other aspects of the resort winning other categories.

— Sophia Balunek

the deep end. The swimming programs are headed up by an English Channel crosser, after all.

BEST PHYSICAL THERAPIST

- 1. Summit Physical Therapy
- 2. Heidi Noonan
- 3. Mary Chudzik

Nominees: Mila Deych (Summit Physical Therapy)

Summit Physical Therapy is appropriately named for a body shop that took the top spot this year — an honor further validated by one of its specialists garnering extra nominations. Folks around here like to play hard and not only will a good

physical therapist work with you to recover from injuries, but they’ll also help you move your body in ways that will help you best avoid injuries altogether.

BEST DENTIST

- 1. Stowe Dental Associates
- 2. John Hirce
- 3. Chris Pazandak

Going to the dentist is rarely anyone’s idea of a good time, but we still asked voters to open wide and say who they preferred rooting around in their maw. A family-run office in the middle of Stowe village, the McKechnies and Chris Altadonna have built up a reputation with the locals that puts them on top in this new category.

BEST ALTERNATIVE WELLNESS PROVIDER

- 1. Stowe Natural Family Wellness
- 2. James Charkalis
- 3. Kate Graves

Nominees: Kristina Dahl, Ryan Cashman, thrlVe hydration & wellness

“A sense of fulfillment in life and self-reported feeling of well-being.” That’s one of the attributes that Stowe Natural Family Wellness lists as a key ingredient in achieving “optimal wellness.” The center, located on Stowe’s South Main Street, has quietly worked its wonders on its clients over the years, and quietly made it to the top of the wellness heap this time around.

BEST VET

- 1. Gregg Goodson (Stowe Veterinary Clinic)
- 2. Sequist Animal Hospital
- 3. Lamoille Valley Veterinary Services

Nominees: Hardwick Veterinary Clinic, Stowe Veterinary Clinic, Waterbury Veterinary Hospital

It says a lot when, among the half dozen or so veterinary vote-getters, the top choice is a name, not an office. “Our pets now are part of the family,” Gregg Goodson said in 2018 when he uprooted his old practice on Stagecoach Road and moved into a former inn just a few hundred feet away on Route 100. And it’s a big family, with 5,000 square feet and enough room for 10 dogs at a time.

Continued on page 16

WHY GO LOCAL?

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144393 Awards



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It's all about who you know, and these people listed below are the ones who really make this area what it is. Whether you're talking about individuals who give back to their communities or talented artists and performers who allow us to see and hear the world in new ways, these are the people behind it all — and the events they bring to all of us every year.

BEST LOCAL MUSICIAN, BAND OR ENTERTAINER

- 1. Seth Yacovone
- 2. Rusty DeWees
- 3. Beg, Steal or Borrow

Nominees: Abby Sherman, Blackwolf, Chad Hollister, David Langevin, Deadbeats of Stowe, Dead Sessions, George Walker Petit, Sam Sheldon

Jam band kings Phish got their start at Nectar's, the legendary nightclub that — and I still can't believe I'm typing this — just closed its doors. So, you know it's saying something when Nectar's named its first lifetime award recipient, it went to Seth Yacovone. But look at that list of nominees and tell me these hills aren't alive with the sound of, well, you know.

BEST LOCAL PERFORMANCE ARTS GROUP/THEATER

- 1. Hyde Park Opera House/Lamoille County Players
- 2. Spruce Peak Performing Arts Center
- 3. Lamoille Valley Dance Academy

Nominees: TRIP Dance Company

Speaking of the "Sound of Music," the top vote-getter for performances goes to a troupe that cut its teeth on decades of performances of the Rodgers and Hammerstein classic. But that's just the tip of the iceberg for the Lamoille County Players, who stage half a dozen performances a year — this year's "Rocky Horror Show" was arguably its best-received production in years.

BEST LOCAL ARTIST (VISUAL ARTS)

- 1. Craig Mooney
- 2. Thea Alvin
- 3. Adele Taplin

Nominees: Dylan Nadeau, Katelyn Hudson, Katerina Werth/KAT, Michael Mahnke

Craig Mooney's paintings are like see-

ing the world through someone's memory — abstract and soft, as though seen through a haze. His places can't quite be attained, can't be clearly seen, but they evoke a sense of "you've been here" that all of us have, at one point, seen on the back of our eyelids.

BEST LOCAL PHOTOGRAPHER

- 1. Jack Morris
- 2. Jesse Schloff
- 3. Caitlin Kelly

Nominees: Amber Osgood, Chris Diegel, Gordon Miller, Mark Vandenberg, Paul Rogers, Ryan Bent, Scott Braaten

Jack Morris might be best recognized as the person who showcases other peoples' works — his Front Four Gallery is this year's top nod in that category — but one of a curator's best attributes is their eye. And Morris's own view of the world is just as singular as his view of other's views.

BEST MOUNTAIN AMBASSADOR/SKIER/ SNOWBOARDER

- 1. Caitlin Kelly
- 2. Noah Dines
- 3. Michy Lemay

Nominees: Aiden Chapdelaine, Andre Blais, John Stafford, Karen Wagner, Mark Aiken, Scott Braaten

Caitlin Kelly is also one of the area's top photographers. Her real gift, though, may be literally bringing people into her world, not just through her photos. If you see her, or either of her million-vertical cohorts in the top three, you're in for a good day on the hill, and in for an even better story.

MS. STOWE (PERSON WHO EMBODIES COMMUNITY)

- 1. Caitlin Kelly
- 2. Michy Lemay
- 2. Devon Williams
- 3. Leslie Anderson
- 3. Dot Hayden

Nominees: Courtney Percy, Janet Martinez, Kenzie Brunner

The women who make this town tick all share something in common — they give back more than they take. If the essence of community is leaving it better than you found it, these are the stewards of Stowe.

Continued on next page

BEST TRAINER/FITNESS INSTRUCTOR



Gordon Miller photo

Joanna Graves

This year marks yet another win as best trainer/fitness instructor for Joanna Graves, founder and owner of Ride indoor cycling. A welcoming force of positivity, Graves encourages people of any level to take on a fitness journey for the betterment of only themselves.

From teaching in parking lots to founding Ride, Graves works out for a living. She started her fitness business with JoMotion in 2012, while athletic director at Stowe High School. Founded in 2017, Ride is now located at Commodores Inn at 823 S. Main Street in Stowe.

In an April 18 episode of "The Octagon" podcast, Graves said, "I love cycling because you can do it at every level. It's not like you're running up the hill and you're last, because no one knows. No one knows how hard you're pedaling or what gear you're on. You're just in this dark room, feeling this accomplishment."

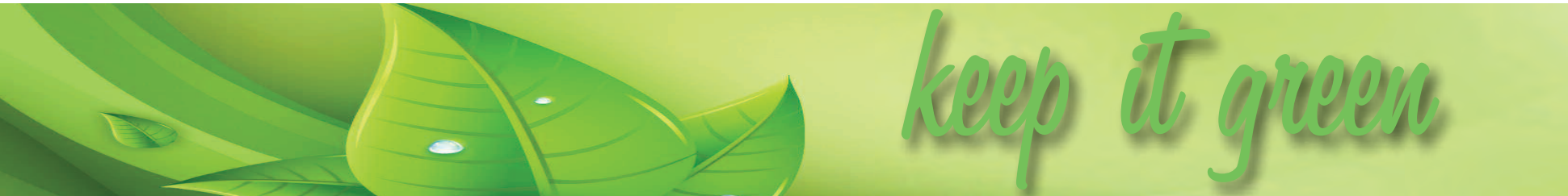
She makes her studio an inviting space of community. Gyms can be a great place to meet other people, and Ride is so welcoming. Her goal is for people to feel a sense of accomplishment for themselves.

Graves's teaching style is motivational. She brings an energy and enthusiasm that is contagious. She is also incredibly knowledgeable about the human body, its limits, but also how to push people beyond what they think they can do — creating those incredible feelings of accomplishment.

"You're here, you're showing up, you're putting in something that is so amazing for yourself and really for just you. And that's not always an easy thing to do," Graves said in the podcast.

Graves has won this award consistently for the past few years, if you're not already convinced to take a class with her.

— Sophia Balunek



MR. STOWE (PERSON WHO EMBODIES COMMUNITY)

- 1. Bobby Roberts
 - 2. Ryan Percy
 - 3. John Walsh
- Nominees: Adam Ogden, Dave Sautter, John Neville, McKee Macdonald, Nick Donza, Peter Kelly, Ray Knight, Steve Foster

Let's be real: Bobby Roberts literally drives around town with the only Vermont vanity license plate that reads STOWE. That and the goodwill he built up running the area's best nightclub — Burlington had Nectar's; Stowe had The Rusty Nail — might have played a factor.

MS. LAMOILLE (PERSON WHO EMBODIES COMMUNITY)

- 1. Amy Olsen
 - 2. Michy Lemay
 - 3. Denise Trombley
- Nominees: Amy Touchette, Bailey Evans, Becky Gonyea, Jasmine Yuris, Jen Hubbard, Kim Hanson, Kyle Nuse

For the second year in a row, the librarian at Hyde Park's Lanpher Memorial Library is Ms. Lamoille County. Amy Olsen treats the library as her town's front porch, holding regular speaker events and implementing such unique features as a wishing tree on the front lawn and a wind phone out back, which allows people to step inside and "call" a loved one who died.

MR. LAMOILLE (PERSON WHO EMBODIES COMMUNITY)

- 1. Allen Lamos
 - 2. Tom Moog
 - 3. Caleb Magoon
- Nominees: Damien Evans, Dave McAllister, Donnie Blake, Eric Nuse, John Walsh

Vermont may be one of the least religious states in America, but God works in mysterious ways, and this year, the spirit moved voters to choose a man of the cloth as Mr. Lamoille County. As one voter noted in their comments, "A man of God, friend, pastor and all-around good human! You can't go wrong with this one!"

ENTREPRENEUR OF THE YEAR

- 1. Goldfinch Gourmet (see page 6)
 - 2. Heather Smith/The Forge Gym
 - 3. Alexis George-Owen
- Nominees: Acer Tree Co., Bailey Evans, Ed Rovetto, Mark Ray, Michael Hughes, Michael Mahnke, Mike and Lauren Solech/Stowe Village Inn, Mike Mignone

VOLUNTEER OF THE YEAR (LOCAL WHO GIVES BACK)

- 1. Amy Touchette
 - 2. Beth Gadbois
 - 3. Devon Williams
- Nominees: Bailey Evans, Jasmine Yuris, Julie Frailey, Karen Weeks, Tanya Kateri

This category has really gone to the dogs. Amy Touchette founded Justice for Dogs, an animal rescue operation that has, over the past decade or so, played matchmaker for people and the newest members of the family.

BEST ANNUAL EVENT — STOWE

- 1. Fourth of July
 - 2. British Invasion
 - 3. A Traditional Christmas in Stowe
- Nominees: The Gala (The Current), Jam for the Parks

It helps that Stowe has two separate Independence Day celebrations. There's the parade that most people catch, working its way through the quintessentially New England Stowe village — followed by fireworks and other festivities at the town events field. Then there's the quirky Moscow parade, which has a more counterculture vibe, complete with a group of women who perform synchronized lawn chair folding maneuvers while marching.

BEST ANNUAL EVENT — LAMOILLE COUNTY

- 1. British Invasion
 - 2. LACiNg Up for Cancer Walk
 - 3. Lamoille County Field Days
- Nominees: Festival of Lights, Johnson Jubilee, Rocktoberfest

Stowe remains the place to be for folks in the greater Lamoille County area, who come every Labor Day weekend to check out the eye-catching automotive spectacle, all British steel and chrome, leather and rubber. The other top vote getters present a much more local time, from an all-day event that has raised over \$2 million for cancer survivors and caretakers to a three-day event celebrating all things agriculture.

BEST NONPROFIT/COMMUNITY ORGANIZATION — STOWE

- 1. Stowe Land Trust
 - 2. Friends of Stowe Free Library
 - 3. Stowe Vibrancy
- Nominees: The Current, Protect Our Wildlife

Housing crisis aside, do you like the way Stowe looks, with its wide-open vistas, miles of hiking and biking trails, and acres upon acres of undeveloped forest? You can thank the Stowe Land Trust for that.

Continued on page 20

Our team would like to thank everyone who participated in this year's 4393 Awards. We are grateful to be part of such a supportive community.



Ryan Bent Photography



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BEST LOCAL FARM



Gordon Miller photo

Foote Brook Farm

A few miles outside of Johnson, rooted on neat green plains between the Lamoille River and Route 15, is Foote Brooke Farm, this year's best local producer.

Foote Brook grows 145 varieties of organic produce — from asparagus to zucchini and everything in between — on 45 acres of Green Mountain soil in Johnson. It is owned and operated by third-generation farmers on the land of Tony and Joie Lehouillier.

Foote Brook is no hobby farm, punching well above its weight when it comes to getting produce to plates, but it's better

known for a charming seasonal farm store on the property, the heart of the Lehouillier's business and part of their longtime commitment to feeding their neighbors in Lamoille County.

On any given summer day from late-June through mid-November, the farm store is a bustling hive of familiar faces filling baskets with produce pulled from the ground a couple hundred yards away.

In addition to the store, Foote Brook wholesales produce through the Deep Root Organic Co-op, which the Lehouilliers

founded alongside a handful of farmers in Vermont and Massachusetts in 1985. You can also find Foote Brook's products in select local grocery stores.

The Lehouilliers have deep ties to and reverence for the land they cultivate, and they believe in sun-loved vegetables grown with organic material. But in Vermont, a state with differing climates, soil and geography on every hillside, growing anything can feel like an ongoing science experiment.

Foote Brook has been at the forefront of experimentation in recent years, particu-

larly as climate change raises water levels and dries soil more quickly on increasingly hotter summer days.

To combat these forces and keep its soil healthy and productive, the Lehouilliers are experimenting with different techniques, including cover crops — a method of planting in the shoulder seasons to keep the soil healthy — through a partnership with the Natural Resources Conservation Service. It's paying off and the produce from Foote Brooke is as green and tasty as ever.

— *Patrick Bilow*

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4393
4WARDS

BEST NONPROFIT/COMMUNITY ORGANIZATION — LAMOILLE COUNTY

- 1. North Country Animal League
- 2. Clarina Howard Nichols Center
- 3. Justice For Dogs

Nominees: Green Mountain Adaptive Sports, Lamoille Community Food Share, Lamoille Restorative Center, River Arts, Salvation Farms

How can you resist? From weekly social media photos of cuddly critters looking for new homes, to collaborations with Rock Art brewery to raise money and place a favored dog or cat on a limited-edition beer car, North Country Animal League is where you'll find your next pet — or just bring a smile to your day by saying hello to them.

IS THERE A DOCTOR IN THE HOUSE?

Some eagle-eyed readers may have noticed some categories that were featured during the nomination process didn't make it to the final voting ballot. That's because there simply weren't enough candidates to have a top three.

For instance, Dr. Kim Bruno, who was last year's winner in the Best Doctor category, was the only one who received three or more nominations this year.

That says a lot about Dr. Bruno's caring manner with her patients, but it also may say a lot about the state of health care — or not; maybe next year you'll remember to give your favorite M.D. a shout.

In other instances, we didn't get the minimum number of votes for either Zero-Proof Pours, for the teetotalers (or California sober) among us; Best Day Trip for Kids (sorry, junior, you're stuck with the adults again); or Best Teacher (perhaps there weren't enough apples).

BEST REAL ESTATE AGENT



Courtesy photo

Pall Spera

What else is left to be said about the Sultan of Stowe, the Grand Poobah of Realtors, the Ombudsman of Real Estate? When polling Lamoille County residents about the best realtor in the area, who else could it be but the man whose name is on so many "For Sale" signs popping up in a neighbor's yard.

The year 1969 was a big one in America, with the economy and culture shifting all over. It was a time for pioneers and for the people who would shape the second half of the 20th century to take their stand. Enter Pall Spera onto the Stowe scene, with the opening of the first Pall Spera Realty office at the historic Gale Farmhouse.

Now the company has three offices and a team of realtors. Spera himself, over a half-century into his career, is slinging multi-million homes, homes that have reached that value because of the market he helped to create by turning Stowe into the second-home haven and multi-season recreation hub it is today.

But Spera also has a large portfolio of more modest homes and, as much or more than any other realtor around, places a premium on helping first-time buyers take their first steps toward homeownership.

— Aaron Calvin



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Congratulations Bobby Roberts, Mr. Stowe!



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— Bobby Roberts

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We are honored that North Country Animal League has
been voted **BEST Non-Profit/Community Organization** in
the 2025 4393 Awards!

This recognition belongs to every adopter, volunteer,
foster, donor, and supporter who makes our lifesaving
work possible. Because of you, thousands of animals have
found love, safety, and second chances.

From the bottom of our hearts, thank you for believing in
NCAL and standing with us as we continue to serve
animals and the people who love them. Together, we are
building a more compassionate community.

With gratitude,
All of us at NCAL



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ANIMAL LEAGUE

Stowe SCENE

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Thank you for your vote!

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Congratulations to Jesse Goldfine on being named the Best Lawyer in Lamoille County!



L to R:
Jennifer Lajoie (Family, Civil Litigation), Jesse Goldfine (Real Estate, Business), Ashley Taylor (Trusts, Estates)

Lajoie Goldfine is a full service law firm, with decades of experience serving clients in Vermont. We provide effective legal services in a wide variety of practice areas and for a wide variety of individual and business clients. We are creative, tenacious and balanced in our approach to each client's matter. Our attorneys provide efficient, outcome-oriented advice guided by sound business judgment, meticulous attention to detail and a deep concern for the welfare of our clients.

In loving memory of Allen C.B. Horsley (1941-2025), our former partner and friend.

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