

Sterling College Runs Blacksmith Workshop

by Michael Bielawski

HARDWICK — Under the hot sun, students chipped away at wooden axe handles with custom-made knives. In a garage, sparks flew as a steel blade was pressed against a belt sharpener. A student practiced throwing his custom-made axe against a log.

Last week, a group of adventurous college students took part in a unique workshop near Mackville Pond, where they learned the ancient trade of blacksmithing as part of the New American Farmstead Program at Sterling College.

Local blacksmith Lucian Avery taught the one-week class. He started with basic farmstead tools such as axes, knives, and screwdrivers. From there, students advanced to other projects, including designing wooden spoons.

Sterling faculty member Rick Thomas, an expert horseback maker, helped organize the workshop. "I've taken a few private lessons from Lucian," he said. "I took my first class with him in 2003."

The organizers gathered the basic resources for the workshop by scavenging local salvage yards, such as a metal salvage in nearby Hardwick. Avery gathered metal coils from there and brought them to the workshop to be straightened for the first step in crafting knives.

The wooden handles for the knives came from apple wood cut by a logging department crew as they cleared brushcrops away from power lines.

One of the most impressive aspects of the workshop was the assortment of vintage hand-crafted tools from the 1800s. A 1890 "Power Hammer" machine was manufactured by the Dupont Manufacturing Co., then

based in St. Johnsbury. The massive machine still works after generations of pounding metal. Operating it is not for the faint-hearted.

Most of the anvils in the workshop are approximately 150 years old.

Those who attended this workshop were happy for the experience.

Zane Donaldson of Nottingham, New Hampshire, said that it was there to see how to teach a blacksmithing class.

"I would not become a professional, to see how a class is taught," he said. Donaldson learned a lot about blacksmithing on his own by watching YouTube videos. He said that he would like to be a full-time blacksmith one day.

"I was in the military for a while and I find Sterling College is a great place for learning," said Sam Husted, who is carrying an axe handle with a custom-made handle.

Avery said he enjoyed teaching the class.

"I couldn't find a class like this, so this is my dream," he said.

Kyle Donaldson, Avery also said he had to learn mostly on his own, but without any YouTube to watch, he had to go watch the real thing. "I went and visited other blacksmiths. They are super open and sharing what they know, and there are a bunch of blacksmith organizations every year they have multiple meets I go to," he said.

"These blacksmiths are mainly people who need tools, but not everyone has the convenience of a hardware store. He added that he does a lot of custom-made tools for special interests.

"They appreciate that I've taken the time to put a nice finish on the end product. It looks nice and feels nice in their hands," he said.

Photo by Vanessa Fournier



Hot Dog Sewer

Steam billows out along Church Street in Hardwick last week as Green Mountain Pipeline Services from South Royalton cure a lining in the existing sewer line.

photo by Vanessa Fournier

Community Allies Plan Block Party, Wall Mural

by Michael Bielawski

HARDWICK — In a recent interview, Tara Reynolds, director of Community Allies, gave an update on the community-building group's planned activities.

Plans include a mural painting project, the second annual September block party and efforts toward fostering community dialogue on social justice-related issues.

The mural project is underway on Daniels Road, and can be seen across the Lamelle River while traveling on the south end of Wolcott Street. Local students are painting the mural, which has the theme "Safety, Trust, and Respect."

"I went down the other day to see them and they added more to the sections they had done, but I think that's about it, at least for a little while, because the students are away on vacation," Reynolds said. "So that's a taste. What I've learned from the Hazen art teacher is that they want to expand upon it. Reynolds said that Community Allies will apply for some funding for the mural, but that the project will happen in stages.

At least part of the project will be dedicated to Rhonda Gravel

Gray, who was killed in a domestic violence incident on August 13, 2013. Gray was from Hardwick and the Allies originated from the candlelight vigil soon after her death. Anna Pirie, the director of the domestic violence victim support group AWARE, said that she is happy to confirm the dedication.

Community members have shown interest in similar projects. Gary Michaels, of East Hardwick, wants to see a mural on the retaining wall of the parking lot across from the Village Market.

Michaels said that the project probably won't finish until next year, but in the meantime, he would like to raise public awareness at the monthly First Friday street festivals. His plan calls for the wall to be power washed and to get a fresh coat of white paint before the fall.

Reynolds said, "I've raised boats' worth of mural projects are taken up by different groups."

"We're all in this together. The more we can do to not only benefit the community, but to encourage people to slow down and feel like it's a community, the better."

The Allies have also hosted a special community discussion on justice and equity.

"What do justice and equity mean in the community we serve and the organizations we work in? (The community discussion) is a preliminary step in trying to make change around racism in our community," she said. "We hope that more people will become interested."

Reynolds said that a handful of organizations attended the discussion, including a representative of the Hazen Union/Sterling College collaborative organization. Stump Up and members from the Global Campus Foundation, based in Randolph.

Photo by Will Walters

West Nile Virus Found in Local Mosquitoes

by Michael Bielawski

BURLINGTON — Mosquitoes collected in Hardwick have tested positive for the West Nile Virus. These are the first signs of the mosquito-borne virus this year. There have been no positive test results for Eastern equine encephalitis virus (EEE) in this surveillance season. The Vermont Agency of Agriculture reports that as part of the State's arbovirus surveillance program, the Department of Health Laboratory performs the testing. Over the years, the virus has been found in every county in Vermont.

Eight cases of West Nile Virus have been reported in Vermont residents since 2011, though no human cases of illness from West Nile Virus or EEE virus have been confirmed in this year.

Mosquito trapping for this surveillance season began on June 6. A total of 686 pools have been tested. In 2016, the State tested 3,243 mosquito pools. Of those, 19 tested positive for West Nile Virus and none tested positive for EEE Virus.

West Nile Virus appears in mosquitoes in Vermont every year, so it is not a surprise to find it again," said Bradley Tompkins, infectious disease epidemiologist with the Department of Health. "All the rain we've had this year is good for mosquitoes. That makes it especially important for everyone to do what they can to prevent getting bitten," Tompkins said.

According to the Department of Health, simple steps to prevent mosquito bites include:

- Wear long-sleeved shirts and long pants when outdoors.
- Limit the time you spend outdoors at dawn and dusk.
- Use insect repellent. Check labels for safe and effective repellents.
- Cover baby carriages or outdoor playpens with mosquito netting.
- Mosquito-proof your home. Fix doors in your screen and make sure they are tightly attached to doors and windows.
- Eliminate standing water. Drain water from gutters, old tires, watering cans and other places where mosquitoes can breed.

For more tips and information about preventing mosquito bites and disease, visit healthvermont.gov/mosquito.

Photo by Vanessa Fournier

Sterling College faculty member Rick Thomas (left), swings a steel hammer as he works on an axe handle with custom-made knives. Inset (right), Instructor Lucian Avery (center) has been a blacksmith for 25 years. The farmstead took place at Sterling College in Craftsbury. The week-long workshop was held in Hardwick.

New Fire Truck Placed on Order for Plainfield

by Will Walters

PLAINFIELD — Fire Chief Pat Martin said there are four bids received for the new fire truck and that Emergency One of Ocala, Fla., is the best choice for the four. He said Emergency One had built the other two trucks the department has.

The bid cost of the truck is \$215,000, which includes all the add-on equipment. It is expected that the truck will take a year to build.

build and payments do not start until the truck is received and inspected by the fire department. The select board will need to approve the final cost, as the quoted price is an estimate, based on the specifications.

Rainier agreed that a stop sign was appropriate at the exit of the Plainfield Loop loop into Main Street. He felt that it would be best placed at the utility pole in front of the fire station. The board agreed and approving placing a sign there.

Bill Dunham, a major issue now being considered by the select board is silt and phosphorus flowing into and contaminating the Winooski River. He said that the state has had concerns about silt flowing into the Winooski River when the town applied for permits to fill the silt, but the commission is part of the project. The Friends of the Winooski River are seeking grants to deal with the matter.

Silt and phosphorus flowing into the Winooski is a major issue now being considered by the select board because the state is being monitored the federal Environmental Protection Agency regarding materials entering the river. The state is in the process of an agreement between the EPA, New

Pollinator Festival Creates and Gives a Buzz

by Michael Bielawski

HARDWICK — Caledonia Spirits hosted a Power to the Pollinators Festival on Sunday, July 23. The event featured a presentation by Caledonia Spirits founder Todd Hardie, live music, a talk by John Hayden from Jeffersonville-based Farm Between, and eight vendors from local businesses, including Caledonia Spirits.

Will Duane of Caledonia Spirits briefly discussed the company's recent announcement to move the bulk of their production to Hardwick. He said that the Hardwick location would likely remain open for "retail and production" purposes.

Founder and former owner of Caledonia Spirits, Todd Hardie, was also at the event, and said "they need room to grow, and that wasn't available in Hardwick."

"We're sorry to see them leave their main focus to Montpelier, though they will keep working here."

"After they tried for quite a long time to find space in Hardwick, they had to make this decision, and we have to support them. The bottom line is they [Montpelier] have the space, the facilities they need. Hardie's important, but the mission is really all about Vermont."

Hardie said that he will keep supporting grants to Montpelier via his Horn Hill Farm and will "help them in any way."

The focus of the festival was bees and their work as pollinators of our food supply.

"Our message was to share and show people that bees are gentle," Hardie said. "They pollinate much of our food supply. [Beekeeping] is a time-honored tradition."

He said that around a century ago, caring for bees in the backyard was as common as having dogs.

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Photo by Vanessa Fournier

Todd Hardie, a beekeeper for 52 years and founder of Caledonia Spirits, gives a talk about his observation hive at the first Annual Power to the Pollinator Festival, held July 23 at Caledonia Spirits.

Photo by Will Walters

Apollo, a Cabot Library regular, is the subject of a preliminary effort to amend the dog ordinance that would ban him from the library. He has a faithful partner that breeds for nearly 8 years and often accompanies his owner, librarian Kathleen Hoyne, nearly every day.

Canine Reading Companion Faces Library Ban

by Will Walters

CABOT — Apollo, the friendly, gentle 12-year-old dog that greets everyone who comes to the library, was discussed as a potential liability by the select board. The board is considering reworking the dog ordinance to prohibit animals from the library building that are not therapy dogs or service-related.

Apollo is librarian Kathleen Hoyne's personal companion at work. He is known for providing a calming and quieting atmosphere to those who enjoy seeing him, according to comments made by library patrons. "His our group therapy dog," said one.

Therapy dogs at libraries is not an unheard-of concept. In animal-assisted reading programs at schools, libraries, and other facilities, "children read to animals in a safe, non-judgmental environment," states therapydogs.org. The animals include dogs, cats, birds and other animals.

One such program is in the Caledonia Public Library in Hingham, Massachusetts. Dash is a "Library Dog" who has been reading with children at the Hingham library for two years, alternating Saturdays with his friend Boo, a fluffy white Shih Tzu, whom he has trained to read to.

Dash, because of his size, is occasionally the lower end of the children eye to pry their books on the shelves and the stories out.

"The dog uses an environment where they are not reading," said Dr. Deborah Lind, associate director of the Tufts Institute for Human-Animal Interaction and an author of several studies looking at the effects of reading assistance programs.

A reading-to-dogs program, Sit-Stay-Read, has been used in Chicago Public Schools and was studied by a doctor of veterinary medicine by Corine Serra Smith, which said that reading performance improved 20 percent in the dog-assisted group over a dogless control group.

Apollo often joins the Tuesday

morning children's reading hour and lies on the floor with the children, looking out beyond his paws at the library trustee Beth Wade, who is often the reader. He's one of the group and the children appear to greatly enjoy his company.

The board will consider the ordinance at the ordinance at its August 1 meeting.

The board will also review the proposed new town plan. The proposed update is intended to replace the plan that was approved June 22, 2012. The current plan expired in June. The proposed plan is an eight-year life, with a four-year extension.

In March 2016, the Central Vermont Regional Planning Commission conducted a preliminary review of the proposed plan and found that it met all statutory requirements. If the board approves the plan, it will be sent to the state for final approval. The town may also be eligible for various grant programs once the plan is approved by the Regional Planning Commission.

The plan is the first one to be developed since the town and village merged. Eric Vordal of the Central Vermont Regional Planning Commission said that it is one of the better plans for the town. The town may also be eligible for an eight-year life with a four-year extension, it includes mandated flood development since the town and village merged.

Mike Hogan circulated some pages of the plan and said that it was modeled on the code found in St. Johnsbury. Hogan said that the plan is a good representation of the town's current code and it is fully compliant with state law. He said he would draft a version for consideration by the board.

The work on restoring the land at the old town garage site was studied by a doctor of veterinary medicine by Corine Serra Smith, which said that reading performance improved 20 percent in the dog-assisted group over a dogless control group. The hearing was held on August 15, at 8:45 p.m. The hearing is required to be held on the ground. The restoration work was during which the old building was razed and the land restored.