

## Consolidated Communications Missing Benchmarks

by Doug McClure

HARDWICK Consolidated Communications bought Fairpoint last July and a state audit suggests in at least one area that the state measures, the result is below state standards. The matter the state is concerned with most, according to director of the Vermont Public Service Commission's Telecommunications Division Jay Purvis, is how quickly the company responds to its customers. In the first quarter of 2017, Fairpoint was able to resolve customer problems within 24 hours 59% of the time. In the same quarter in 2018, Consolidated is resolving those problems 26% of the time, according to Purvis. The state aims for 70%.

There is no comparative metric for Comcast, because the federal government does not let the state regulate privately-held internet services. Consolidated has inherited a 1990s-era regulation under it is charged with providing universal phone service. When Fairpoint purchased Verizon in Vermont from Verizon in 2008, it inherited the obligation to provide phone service. Supply-

ing and maintaining a landline phone service is very expensive, because the fixed costs are high and the revenues are declining as households "cut the cord," relying only on mobile phones.

In related reports, Consolidated has said it has hired thirty people to improve the support. The state is advocating a system under which Consolidated would be less regulated in competitive markets to offset the costs of improving services to its markets with little or no competition, according to Purvis.

"We're having meetings," he said. Purvis said that Consolidated is not in a position to choose its network footprint, like Comcast or many other fiber providers, as the regulatory obligation to provide universal phone service throughout the state. Maintaining that regulatory obligation is not profitable in areas in which there are not enough customers to offset the required investment.

All of this was public information when Consolidated Communications bought Fairpoint. The obligation to provide standard service in the Northeast Kingdom remains.



Curl league, age 21, steds with his dad, Will League, at the July 3 Block Party in Craftsbury Village. Snow donated by the Curling Center was trucked to the back of the Craftsbury Granite Store to create the snow slide.

## New Leadership, Same Local Activism for Community Allies

by Michael Bielawski

HARDWICK Community Allies has facilitated community conversations and worked to improve quality of life in the region since its first meeting in the fall of 2013.

Now its leadership is in limbo. Director Tara Reynolds, who had been running monthly meetings and leading efforts to organize events is moving on. She is increasing her role with WholeFoods, an organization that also works for social change. She is also the executive director of AWARE, a local organization that supports victims of domestic violence. AWARE has been very involved with the Community Allies since its inception.

Purvis said that the concept for the Allies came about in the aftermath of the murder of Brandon Gravel Gray in Fairlee by her husband on Aug. 13, 2013. In the following months, a group who were meeting to discuss efforts for social change decided to turn their efforts into a long-term commitment, and Community Allies

came to be. Reynolds stepped forward and became the new group's director.

Some notable events hosted by the Allies over the years include a 2014 community dinner, which drew over a hundred, to discuss social issues and, most recently, a community group discussion on racism, which drew 52 adults and 16 children. Purvis said next on the agenda is the third annual community block party to be held at Atkins Field on Sept. 8. In years past, this event has included lots of locally prepared food, live music, arts, and games. It has generally been a community-driven event, with material and financial support from local businesses.

This time around it might be scaled down, but it will remain a significant gathering.

"The block party is going to look a little different," Purvis said. "We just don't have the people power."

She said it might be more of a pot luck event this time around to garner more community involvement. She added that, as in years past, they will approach local businesses for support.

photo by Jim Pirt

## A Danville Barn Gets New Life

by Doug McClure

DANVILLE On a cool, cloudy July 6, Governor Phil Scott and Senator Jane Kitchel (D-Caledonia) of Danville were on hand to see for themselves what Vermont's Offender Work Programs (VOWP) are doing for Emergo Farms' barn restoration project. This step was just one of many the Governor made as a part of the Capital for a Day initiative.

The Capital for a Day program is intended to give the Governor, his cabinet, and senior staff a first-hand insight into the challenges unique to different regions in the state. The July 6 event was focused on the Northeast Kingdom. Sen. Kitchel has a personal interest in the barn project. Her own family's land is right next to the farm, and both her land and this one, owned by Bebo and Lori Webster, have been awarded 21st-century farm award. The Webster family dates to 1828, with six generations of the Webster family running it, and the McDonald farm has been operated by Kitchel's family since 1830. Bebo Webster and Sen. Kitchel connected with the VOWP's Northeast Correctional Complex superintendent, Al Cornner, who invites inmates participate in the VOWP. "I think it works well," said Cornner. He added that another barn restoration is in the works.

working since the fall to restore a massive old barn on the farm. The VOWP uses public and private funds, as well as work camp labor, to complete projects which, like this one, would be financially impossible otherwise. Bebo Webster said that restoring just the barn's cupola would have cost tens of thousands of dollars without the program. The expense for carpentry and painting alone would have made the project impossible. He was impressed by the work crews.

"These guys have been great," said Webster. "They're polite, they're friendly, they do great work." In a firm believer this program should hang a lot, and really can't say enough good things about it."

Cornner said it was just a year-and-a-half ago the entire program was in jeopardy, under the previous administration. He worked it out with St. Johnsbury who kept the program going," said Sen. Kitchel. The program has also historically run into an unusual problem that has been corrected. It spread around, and St. Johnsbury, where the Correctional Complex is located, wanted more inmates to work in that town. Cornner said that inmates participate in the VOWP. "I think it works well," said Cornner. He added that another barn restoration is in the works.

See BARN.



Carol Fairbank of Greensboro held a pasta-making workshop, sponsored by Snow Island, at the Midwest Farmers' Market on July 6. Helpo Carlo showed the curd is Larine Duni (center) and Kiley Boggs (right) of Woodbury.

## Antiques & Uniques Celebrates 48th Year

by Jane Pichel Cook

CHAITSBURY — Craftsbury's Antiques & Uniques Festival will celebrate its 48th anniversary on Saturday, July 14, as a summer highlight extraordinary on the Common. Each year, the festival brings thousands of visitors to savor delicious local food, listen to music, and browse leisurely through offerings of 100 vendors and artisan craftspale.

As a special event, the Old State House Museum is organizing a vintage fashion show from the 1800s. Antique car owners are asked to drive to the event for special parking and viewing.

Noting one big change, Festival Coordinator Ann-Marie Keppel said, "Food will still be grilled outside, but the cafeteria in the school will be open for sheltered seating. If it's the perfect weather, we are hoping for, then picnicking on the Common grass will be fun."

Vendors and artisans across New England, and as far away as Florida, will share their wares

with visitors; the majority of vendors and artisans are from Vermont. Live demonstrations by artists and vendors will give visitors the opportunity to watch how the antiques tools were actually used," according to Keppel.

Visitors will always enjoy neighborhood socializing, picnicking, and browsing through unique collections of new and old handmade quilts and hand sewn clothing, pottery and wood work, old and new jewelry, sculptures, drawings, and paintings, and old tools and antiques.

Time out from browsing can be filled with enjoying the lobster goods, barbecue, hot dogs and hamburgers that will be an offer.

Fun activities, such as, hula hooping, face painting, and jump rope, and more energetic children entertained.

The festival on the Common was started by the Children's Aid Foundation in the early 1970s. "When a presentation could no longer sponsor it several years ago, the town rallied under the leadership of the guidance to keep the festival traditional. The entire



The Village Restaurant, newly open, got a make-over. The exterior siding, interior walls and windows were replaced to give the building a fresh, new look.

## Gov. Scott, Cabinet Make Hardwick Capital for a Day

by Doug McClure

HARDWICK On Friday, July 6, Governor Scott and his extended cabinet visited Hardwick, using a stargazing room at Caledonia Spirits as the staging point for a day of activities. The day was designed to let state officials see the historic town and the Northeast Kingdom's unique challenges and opportunities.

The meeting began with a cabinet meeting at Caledonia Spirits, where the Governor and nearly two-dozen cabinet and extended cabinet officials met before the events and visits began. The locations range from barns to potations to resorts. Danville from Hardwick to Ryegate, Vermont, Danville and St. Johnsbury.

between Canada and the United States. Vermont exports over a billion dollars in trade with Canada annually and Canada also trades heavily with Vermont, most notably lumber, would get hit coming and going because the wood might begin in Vermont, then be shipped to Canada for finished products, then re-exported.

The Capital for a Day agenda included the opportunities for recreation unique to the Northeast Kingdom, with visits to the Kingdom Tower, stargazing and Burke Mountain Club. Business initiatives were another focus, with a roundtable sponsored by the Northeastern Vermont Development Authority, a tour of Caledonia State Airport, and a visit to the Food Processing Center in Danville.

The group also visited the Kingdom Tower, stargazing and had a roundtable discussion about the Regional Energy Affordability Initiative.

photo by Doug McClure

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