



Hazen Union Senior High School is spending the year in Senegal, on a YES scholarship.

## Hazen Senior Bridges Cultures During Year Abroad

by Elijah Lew-Smith  
Special Sub-Saharaan Africa Correspondent

**DAKAR, SENEGAL** — When I applied to the YES (Youth Exchange and Study) scholarship to go abroad for my senior year of high school I had to choose a country of preference. I didn't have any idea how to decide, but I knew two things: I wanted to learn a new language, and I wanted to find a country as different from the USA as possible. I chose Senegal because I spoke a little French and I thought that Sub-Saharan Africa and Vermont would be as different as two places could be. At the end of the day though, my path here was somewhat random and my task has been to try to understand this new world that I've been dropped into. One way I've found to do this is through running.

In Vermont, running was an escape from the world into myself. In spring, running meant freedom, flying through the open fields with warm mud splashing in between my toes. In summer, long, hot runs exploring the



Elijah Lew-Smith

woods accompanied by the smell of disinfectant and freshly-mowed hay were an expression of purpose. In fall, the short, quick runs on brilliant bright mornings were routine and comfort. Even in winter, running in the brush and snow was a bold rebellion against the world. To me, running was personal expression and personal exploration.

Here, that is different. Though Dakar smells like black exhaust, guller, and body odor. People pool in the streets and car push their way through standstill traffic. Children grab at my pant legs and stare down at the crooked roofs of his shacks. Debris piled on the sidewalk just out like islands in the river of humans flowing past. As I waded my way through the tight streets I got the unmistakable feeling that the city is pressing in. But each time my worn blue shoes pound into the cracked cement I feel connected to the relentlessly pounding heart-beat of the city.

In Dakar, my only mode of transportation is by foot.

See ABROAD, 4

## OSSU Board Considers Second Budget Proposal

by Emmett Avery

**HARDWICK** — The Orleans Southeast Supervisory Union (OSSU) board met for a regular meeting on December 2. At this time of year, school boards are moving into the busy part of the budget season, though budgets were set from the only topic of conversation.

OSSU Chief Financial Officer John Smith presented the board with draft 2.0 of the proposed FY2021 budget. The draft comes in at a 15.6% increase, or \$14.1 million over last year's budget. The increased budget is driven by a few big ticket factors, not all of which are in supervisory union (SU) control, Smith explained. Special education takes up nearly 40% of the total increase. This increase in special education spending, according to Smith, is mandated by law and is something that can not be changed. \$1.7% of the budget increase comes from the Health Services category, which deals with the school nurse program. This, according to Smith, is not actually an increasing cost. The costs have simply been taken out

of local budgets and added to the SU budget as part of a restructuring effort. Board Vice Chair Rose Moffat asked for a better explanation of what the SU is doing that the SU is moving to a model established by the state that will provide access to additional state resources. According to Smith, it will also allow the SU to expand nursing coverage to some schools that have been under-covered in the past, at a lower cost. General education takes up 15% percent of the increase. This category covers such things as paraprofessors. The increased services in this category, according to Smith, are all increases that individual schools have asked for. Transportation takes up 12.4 percent of the increase. This, according to Smith, is partially because the most recent transportation contract was negotiated after last year's budget. It included a 10% increase over two years of increases being reflected in the budget.

The SU is adding two new positions in the budget: an occupational therapist and school psychologist. These positions account for 8.8% of the increase.

See PROPOSAL, 4



Steve Mallatt (right) and his son Gibson Moffatt (left) of Moffatt's Tree Farm load 240 Christmas trees onto a trailer headed for The Garden Barn LLC, in Fort Edward, N.Y. The trees were transported by Joe Rago.

## Christmas Tree Demand High, Supply Short

by Michael Bielawski

**NORTHEAST KINGDOM** — Moller Christmas Trees in East Hardwick and Moffatt's Tree Farm in Craftsbury are already having another busy holiday season.

Moffatt's Tree Farm is in its fourth generation as a family business. The land has been in the family since the 1930s, when Bob and Edna Moffatt started their dairy farm.

Their grandson, Steve Moffatt, his wife and two boys now run the farm. Moffatt said this year there seems to be a little less supply of trees across the industry.

"The demand for trees is high. I think it's more about the supply is a little tight," he said. "Right now there are probably less people growing trees and most of the wholesale growers are older who are kind of cutting back. I don't know of a lot of people who are expanding their wholesale operation that much."

Moffatt added the demand for trees might even be a little bit more than it has been in the past. "I had a record number of people looking for trees this year," he said. "It seems like wholesale-wise, in October people were looking and I had a lot of calls."

Moffatt said had he better anticipated this upsurge and had the trees and labor ready, he could have sold even more this year.

Getting labor for the Christmas tree market is a challenge. Moffatt said, adding that "labor is a little tight" right now, especially for seasonal work.

"It's pretty tough to pick up people who are willing to work outside 'long, hard, miserable hours,' he said. "It's been tight not only for myself. I've been very fortunate. I have a good crew, but I could have used more help."

He noted that people who buy their trees in urban centers often pay close to \$100 per tree. The national average cost for a tree is about \$70. Vermonters typically pay on the low end, often in the \$40-\$50 range, because they are close to the source.

Carolin Brown works with Mike Moller at Moller Christmas Trees in East Hardwick. Their trees are mostly sold at the Berlin Mall. She said they're having another busy year, as well. "We're one of the smaller farms here," she said. "We have a tree stand at the Berlin Mall and he's done that for about eight or nine years, so he's down there every day from the day after Thank-

sgiving until about the day before Christmas."

She explained that the two most popular types of trees are balsam and Fraser fir. "I think the balsams have the finer needles and the Fraser seems to be a little bit stronger," she said. "I prefer the Fraser."

Brown shared some tips for those who are new to getting a real tree. For instance, it should be watered every day, or even twice a day if possible, the bottom should be re-cut so the tree can better absorb water. She said a tree is properly cared for, it can last up to a month or longer.

"A fresh tree is always delightful," she said. "And the annuals love them, they will sleep under them." Like Moffatt, Brown said getting good help is not always easy.

"It's his hard to find people that will do this type of job," she said. "It's very physical work, but it's fun because it's a nice product, it's just dirty and it smells nice." According to the National Christmas Tree Association, 30 million trees are sold per year, or about one tree for every 100 Americans. Approximately 350,000 acres of the country are used for growing Christmas trees — most of which is in the state of California. County



A crowd of people gathered in the Galaxy Bookshop to buy their favorite books kicking off the holiday shopping season with Small Business Saturday Nov. 30.

## Small Business Hums in Hardwick

by Doug McClure

**HARDWICK** — Small Business Saturday, a holiday created in 2010 by American Express in partnership with the National Trust For Historic Preservation, was intended to counteract the surge in online shopping on Black Friday and Cyber Monday, and encourage people to shop local small businesses.

"This is a big win for [Windsor], Tucker said. He added that while the grant program expires at the end of the calendar year, Efficiency Vermont compromised on the timeline to avoid rushing any projects. "We're not going to get the work done until they're up and with us that if we can demonstrate 60 percent of the work's completion, that they're good to carry it over into 2020," Tucker said.

LED lights use half the wattage of a comparable fluorescent light. According to EarthLED.com, LED bulbs last longer and are more energy efficient.

See BOOST, 3

## Library Expansion to Memorialize Scholar, Teacher

by Jane Pichel Cook

**CHAFFSBURY** — The proposed expansion of the Craftsbury Public Library was aimed at meeting last week with two options presented by architect Sandy Vitrum. The expansion will memorialize scholar and teacher Leona Rose Fine, as a gift from her husband, Neil Kubie.

"Chair of the Library Trustees Ned Hanson, addressing the board last week said, "This is a work in progress."

He explained the board had been discussing the needs of the library and "out of the blue we were approached by a donor interested in memorializing a family member."

"It is an expansion project to



Architect Sandy Vitrum explained proposed plans for the expansion of the library with memorials to Leona Rose Fine, a scholar and teacher, and a gift from her husband, Neil Kubie.

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