THE
Hardwick Gazette
INDEPENDENT LOCAL NEWS SINCE 1889

$1.00

Wednesday, December 18, 2019 | Hardwick • Cabot • Calais • Craftsbury • Greensboro • Marshfield • Plainfield • Stannard • Walden • Wolcott • Woodbury | Volume 130 Number 49

photo by Doug McClure

Linda Martin has been Wolcott's Town Clerk since 1986. In March, she will be resigning the role she has held for 34 years.

Linda Martin Moving on After 34 Years

by Doug McClure

WOLCOTT – The upcoming Town Meeting will mark the end of a chapter for Wolcott Town Clerk Linda Martin, who is departing the job after 34 years.

Martin moved to Wolcott from Connecticut in 1979 and became Town Clerk in 1986. Martin said she is "seriously considering" a run for select board in 2020.

Martin said that at the time she was hired, Wolcott residents wanted a town clerk who wasn't related to anyone in town, "an objective, open person." The previous town clerk was against Martin getting the role and had offered little support. "All she would do is give me the combination to the vault," Martin said.

Martin, who previously worked for the Center for Northern Studies, was not deterred. "I was a Sherlock Holmes, I spent a lot of time going into the files, looking at stuff, and figuring out how it worked. I asked a lot of questions. I hired someone who had been a former assistant who could lead me on how to do some of the work."

Martin said in those days she still wrote teachers' paychecks by hand, and she prioritized modernizing the office with computers.

"It was fairly quiet and the traffic wasn't as much. There wasn't much in Morrisville," Martin said. "There was no McDonald's. My sister came up to visit me and

See MARTIN, 4

photo by Vanessa Fournier

The SD Ireland Holiday Truck driven by Ben Abare of Waterbury led the Orleans Southwest Union Elementary School District River of Light Parade Dec. 2. About 250 students, parents and community members from Hardwick, Woodbury and Lakeview Elementary Schools participated.

Hazen Students Highlight Careers

by Caleb Friend and Kayleigh Thorpe

HARDWICK – At Hazen Union school's weekly event Career Cafe, a guest speaker, usually from a local business, speaks about their career, answers questions and demonstrates their area of specialization or expertise. The events are planned and led by high school students.

The purpose of Career Cafe is to introduce students to different career paths and increase their understanding of different career choices. This year's guest speakers included those who own businesses and those who work for others.

Shannon McIntyre, the second speaker of the year, is co-owner of Timber Homes, a local business that builds houses and barns in Vermont and New Hampshire. She talked about different styles of homes and barns and how they are constructed. Another speaker was business owner and blacksmith Jamie Teuscher, who operates a summer camp where kids learn hands-on trades.

Speakers have come from a variety of industries and careers. The first speaker was Evan Karp, a "smokejumper" who jumps out of airplanes to fight fires in the Alaskan wilderness. Karp graduated from Hazen at the top of his class and returned to talk to students about his job. Another speaker was TJ DeLaricheliere, the Technology Specialist at Hazen. He shared stories about training at Champlain College

See CAREERS, 4

Maple Corner Store Sold

by Will Walters

CALAIS – Tuesday was the day the big change in Maple Corner took place: the sale of the Maple Corner Country Store was finalized. The property includes the general store, the Whammy Bar, a post office and some apartment space.

The store is the center of town, as least the western side where the County Road changes to dirt and authenticates you have reached a rural hub of both community and commercial interest. It is one of three commercial hubs in Calais, the others being the Adamant Co-Op in the southern section of the town and the East Calais General Store on Route 14.

The property is being bought by a newly-established organization that has shareholders who bought shares to raise the money. Jamie Moorby took the lead of the community group that wanted to buy the store and keep it a local hub for the Maple Corner section of town. More than 150 people have bought shares at $500 each to purchase the building that was sold for a reported $500,000. Money will need to be raised to buy the store's inventory. Each shareholder will have one vote, regardless of how many shares they buy.

The plan, according to Moorby, is to raise enough money to buy the store and then operate it without a mortgage.

Jim Clark and Ann Marie Shea attended the recent select board meeting and asked for approval for liquor and tobacco licenses for the new owners, effective Dec. 17. The board approved first class, second class and third class licenses for the Maple Corner Community Store, Inc., effective on Dec. 17 assuming the sale was complete.

The North Calais Memorial Hall Association (NCMHA) requested a tax exemption for its property on Grand Army Of the Republic Road. The property was originally exempted by the legislature in 1888 when it was owned by the Stow Women's Relief Corps, a women's auxiliary of the Grand Army of The Republic. The Relief Corps owners sold the property July 10 because of declining membership, declining revenues and assets, and to relieve itself from liability from the people who visit the property. People cross the land to swim in #10 Pond and to visit a veteran memorial that was set back from the road in an alcove of hedges.

The NCMHA based its request on the legislature's statutory exemption and on the fact that the new owners are continuing to use the property for the benefit of the public. In addition to purchasing the property, the NCMHA has also purchased the parking lot for $14,000. At the meeting, the NCMHA went over the conditions that would allow it to qualify for town conservation funds, as set out in a letter from the select board. The association enumerated the ways in which it has complied with the requirements.

The Woodbury Volunteer Fire Department (WVFD) presented its annual requests for funding from the town. Chance Payette and Tim Neill said the 2020-2021 operating budget request from Calais is $33,908.35, the truck fund is $17,850 and the capital replacement fund is $31,000. Payette said the overall budget is down 0.7 percent and that vehicle maintenance costs are down because the department is buying new trucks. However, dispatching and insurance are the two areas where costs are going up.

Payette is now a certified instructor in active shooter training, CPR and other areas and would welcome the opportunity to present to town employees, if there is interest. Regarding medical training, Payette reported that there are eight medically-trained personnel at WVFD and they are looking to get a license from District 6 to have a Fast Squad. WVFD is working on lowering the cost to build a new fire station in Woodbury Village by focusing their fundraising efforts on large corporations.

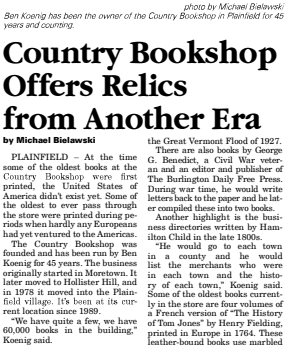

photo by Michael Bielawski

Ben Koenig has been the owner of the Country Bookshop in Plainfield for 45 years and counting.

Country Bookshop Offers Relics from Another Era

by Michael Bielawski

PLAINFIELD – At the time some of the oldest books at the Country Bookshop were first printed, the United States of America didn't exist yet. Some of the oldest to ever pass through the store were printed during periods when hardly any Europeans had yet ventured to the Americas.

The Country Bookshop was founded and has been run by Ben Koenig for 45 years. The business originally started in Moretown. It later moved to Holland, Vt., and in 1978 it moved into the Plainfield village. It's been at its current location since 1989.

"We have quite a few, we have 60,000 books in the building," Koenig said.

In addition to all kinds of books there are old photographs, postcards, prints, and other unique items.

The most intriguing items are the oldest books, many dating back to the 1800s and some even from the 1700s. In the past, Koenig has had books pass through that dated to the 1600s and 1500s.

One highlight are books from the mid-1800s by Vermont historical researcher Abby Maria Hemenway.

"Hemenway contacted every town clerk in the state and asked them if they knew of someone in their town who would write a history of their town," he said. "And then she compiled all of those histories."

Dudley Smith was a doctor in Plainfield who wrote the history of the town for Hemenway's collection. He is buried just across town, in the cemetery by the river.

Every copy of the index for Hemenway's books - including the copy at the Plainfield store - is water-damaged because all of the volumes were stored together in a Montpelier basement during the Great Vermont Flood of 1927.

There are also books by George G. Benedict, a Civil War veteran and an editor and publisher of The Burlington Daily Free Press. During war time, he would write letters back to the paper and he later compiled these into two books.

Another highlight is the business directories written by Hamilton Child in the late 1800s.

"He would go to each town in a county and he would list the merchants who were in each town and the history of each town," Koenig said. Some of the oldest books currently in the store are four volumes of a French version of "The History of Tom Jones" by Henry Fielding, printed in Europe in 1764. These leather-bound books use marbled paper, which gives the edges a color pattern unique to that era. Koenig explained that a book being very old does not necessarily make it very valuable.

"You can have a very rare book on religion, for instance, there are many, many books on religion from the 1700s and they don't sell particularly well. Now, if you have a book that has to do somehow with the Declaration of Independence and 1776, or a newspaper published at that time, the content of it will bring the value up." Some of the oldest books need to be rebound. Koenig explained that some professionals know how to carefully take the books apart and stitch them back together while maintaining the original covers.

Koenig said the store is open seven days a week and right now it is having its seasonal sale.

"Almost everything in the shop, until the end of the year, is half-price," he said. "I do this in order to make room."

He said in addition to the physical shop he has about 9,000 books online and he sells at book fairs across the Northeast throughout the year.

photo by Doug McClure

Snow showers in Hardwick dust a "Season's Greetings" banner displayed by the town at the Main Street bridge in the village.

Pedestrian Safety Still an Open Issue

by Doug McClure

HARDWICK – The safety of pedestrians was on the agenda at a December 10 meeting between members of the Planning Commission, two members of the select board and Town Manager Shaun Fielder. The ad hoc Pedestrian and Traffic Safety Task Force is seeking public input from Village businesses and residents about their concerns and potential solutions regarding pedestrian safety. A major consideration is that the two primary Village streets, South Main and Mill, are state highways and it is not clear how much control the state will cede to the town for improvements. The task force is in the midst of an ongoing series of surveys.

A major concern is that the town has little ability to influence the speed at which cars travel along the major thoroughfares. State law prohibits the town from lowering the speed limit below 25 m.p.h. and most respondents felt like vehicles were going faster than that, especially at the section of Mill Street by the Hays Service Station and Jiffy Mart. The intersection with Glenside

See SAFETY, 4

Grant, Private Funds Sought to Preserve East Calais Building

by Will Walters

CALAIS – Efforts are under way to maintain the economic vitality of the East Calais village district by preserving the historical building that houses the East Calais General Store. Both grant money and private donations are being sought to purchase the building and renovate it. In addition to the store, the structure contains three apartments.

David Schutz of the historical preservation commission told the select board the commission unanimously recommends the Certified Local Government (CLG) grant application for basic engineering to "resurrect" the East Calais General Store structure. "This project is for an historic building that is not only a gathering place, but a commercial necessity as a store that is vital to our residents on that side of town." He expressed his reluctance about the building and the need to conduct a needs assessment in order to put together a capital budget. The select board approved the application at its December 14 meeting.

Scott Bassage of the East Calais Community Trust (ECCT) said his organization is seeking to raise private funds to meet the match requirement of 40 percent of a CLG grant. Bassage said money for a CLG grant is funneled through the Historic Preservation Division of the Agency of Commerce and Community Development. The money comes from the U.S. Department of the Interior National Park Service.

The Certified Local Government program provides an opportunity to help local governments integrate historic preservation concerns with local planning decisions. If a municipality or non-profit organization owns a historic building, it may be eligible to apply for a Historic Preservation Grant to assist with the cost of repairing and maintaining the structure.

Bassage said the ECCT is a recently-formed non-profit corporation that is seeking tax exempt status from the Internal Revenue Service. He said being non-profit will allow it to buy the land and building under a historic preservation CLG grant and the tax exempt status will allow for private fundraising that will allow donors to claim a tax deduction. Directors of the ECCT are Denise Wheeler, Janice Ohlson and Mark Mihaly. Bassage is the registered agent. The corporation was formed on October 21.

Bassage said the CLG grant is for $18,000 and the match of 40 percent will be the responsibility of the town since it is the grant applicant. However, he said, the ECCT is taking on raising the match and keeping the town from having to use tax dollars toward the project. Bassage clarified the match is 40 percent of the money spent and not the top value of the grant. The $18,000 is the maximum that will be funded toward the project and the maximum match would be $7,200. He said if the money isn't raised by the ECCT the purchase and restoration will not be done so there will be no default to the town to make up.

Raising money will involve multiple methods, including direct solicitation, fundraisers, applying for assistance from private organizations that support historic preservation and maybe a gofundme page, said Bassage.

Restoring the building will conserve three apartments in East Calais and do make improvements that will make the general store more of a draw to customers. Raising enough funds to bring gas back by making necessary repairs to the tanks, which belong to the landowner, could make a great improvement to the community, commented Bassage. Yet anything that will be done must first have the funds raised in full so the ECCT can keep its commitment not to have any local tax dollars spent.

Bassage said Lesly LaPan has worked hard to have a viable and community oriented general store in East Calais village since she took over the store in 2008. The ECCT considers helping the store continue to be as important a community service as preserving the historic building.

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