

THE Hardwick Gazette

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This snowman made using the most recent spring snow on March 26 by Theresa Davis of Hardwick, sets a good example by wearing a mask and sends an encouraging "We Welcome Spring" message in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic.



Kit Basom, co-owner of the Craftsbury General Store, wears gloves and a mask to help Joe Tuttle of United Natural Foods bring in a shipment of bulk foods on Tuesday morning. In response to the COVID-19 crisis, the store has transitioned from in-store shopping to having customers call in to order. Orders are picked up at the store or delivered to local homes by staff and community volunteers.



Hardwick Village Market cashier Cathrina Cavies cleans around her station Sunday, March 29, before waiting on the next customer. Signs placed throughout the store state "You must maintain a distance of at least six feet from other shoppers."



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Locals Cope with Isolation, Hard Times

by Michael Bielawski

HARDWICK — Vermonters are dealing with the effects of the economic shutdown — and the uncertainty of how long it will last. Gov. Phil Scott said last week in a press conference that things might not get going again for months. In contrast, President Trump has said he hopes the economy starts taking steps to open up again in April. In any case, local businesses are adapting here and now. Outside the Tops Market, some NEK folks shared some thoughts on how it's going.

"We're doing the best that we can," said Peggy Burbank, of Wolcott, who works for the government. "We're trying to keep in touch with our clients and serving the families that we work with. So yeah, it's a struggle, but we're making it go." She noted that she deals with some people who are handling the stress pretty well and others who are quite worried.

Dale Manning, of East Hardwick, works for the Capitol Police in Montpelier. During normal times, he'd be in the halls of the statehouse chatting with resi-

dents and lawmakers. He said most of what is done from within the office for now. "We have an emergency operations center set up," he said. "Actually, we have not seen a lot of people where I've been going to work. The streets are bare and I very rarely run into people."

Tinaothy Edgars, of Wolcott, was already largely living off the grid before the virus showed up. He said he's mostly avoided all the media. "I don't follow the news. I just know that things are closing down and flights are closing down," he said. "There are a lot of people from the south, cities like New York City and Boston, that are leaving and coming up. I've heard."

Berk Keene, of East Hardwick, said he's seeing people coming to work. "We're doing quite well," she said. "Like the restaurants and many public gatherings are closed."

See TIMES, 4

Concern Over Surge of Second-Home Owners

by Doug McClure

HARDWICK — As the state encourages social distancing and passes new measures to slow the spread of COVID-19, some residents have a new concern: second-home residents from much-harder-hit states fleeing to their second homes in Vermont. Hardwick Electric said there was an increase in summer homes' electricity being turned back on earlier than normal.

One resident said, "It's getting bad up in Greensboro." At the same time, many Vermonters who were away at school have had to come home as their schools closed and others have cut out-of-state vacations short. On Monday, Gov. Phil Scott issued a mandatory 14-day quarantine for anyone coming in from out-of-state.

State returns and out-of-state nonresidents are not quarantining themselves, according to some residents, especially at camps around Greensboro.

towns, and some residents do not want to create a negative or inferior perception. Others are blunter. In a WCAAX interview, U.S. Sen. Patrick Leahy said, "I wish people would stay away." The Greensboro Emergency Response Team issued a statement for those returning to town, pleading, "If you have recently visited areas where there are cases or have come here from elsewhere, please self-quarantine for 14 days and utilize the support of the community to do so."

Gov. Scott's new order acknowledged that COVID-19 "threatens to overwhelm the State's ability to respond."

The Northeast Kingdom has much less medical capacity than most of Vermont. Four hospitals serve the three-county population of about 65,000 with under 200 beds each, according to state data. Half of its residential population is in the age group that is most susceptible to COVID-19.

The summer visitor population, in some cases, more than the total year-round population. Beyond the critical importance visitors' second homes have to local tax rolls, local businesses depend on the summer surge of tourists. Leahy said this necessary revenue is going to hurt our businesses that rely on it, but we have to do it. I'll try to make sure we do it to help these small businesses.

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03/29/20 09:00

Local Schools Shuttered

by Doug McClure

HARDWICK — Governor Phil Scott has issued a new executive order directing schools "to remain dismissed through the end of the 2019-2020 school year... Districts will close schools for in-person instruction. The new order extends an order temporarily closing schools that we issued March 15. Of the previous order, Gov. Scott said, "While we hoped this would be enough, that has not proven to be the case."

The new order leaves many of the details up to schools and supervisory unions. "We find no reason to believe that there's any change at a time when there's no road map available," said Gov. Scott. He acknowledged the "incredibly difficult" action and said it was "sad" but necessary because "the sobering reality is: before too long, each of us will know someone who has lost their life from this virus. That's why we must come together and support each other to get through this."

OSSU Superintendent Adam Rosenberg said the order did not come as much of a surprise. "We figured, once the 'stay at home' had been issued, that the closure would be extended at least to the 15th. However, we anticipated an additional extension. Regardless, this extension hit all of us hard, given the implications. That's not to say that we don't understand the need in order to reduce the spread of the virus."

Rosenberg added that OSSU is putting together an extended learning plan. "Gov. Scott directed and said, 'We've gotten a good head start on an annual, and parents in order to adjust as necessary.'" He said at this time no layoffs were planned and said, "I have been encouraged that many of our Vermonters are taking things inside out with our switch

See SHUTTERED, 4

Open Meeting Law Amended

by Will Walters

MONTEPELLIER — Temporary changes to the Open Meeting Law were enacted by the legislature recently to free municipal bodies to meet and conduct business without the strict requirements the law has on public attendance at meetings. The changes to the current law are meant to address the stress municipalities have been put under by the COVID-19 outbreak, while trying to fit in with the public's right to participate in what municipalities are doing.

The changes concern teleconferencing a valid way of meeting when the public is able to participate in the teleconference. The

law enacting the changes clearly states that this is only for emergency purposes and only for the duration of the COVID-19 crisis.

Prostate towns such as Calais, have used under the prior requirements of having a space where the public can go and participate by telephone that calls in to the meeting and can hear and speak remotely to the board members. The suspended requirements that a board member or staff be present did not completely isolate the board members from the public. Participation by the online meeting uses the public's right to participate with both the members and public.

Plainfield suspended all public body meetings because it closed

See LAW, 4

Gazette Exploring Options for Survival

by Ray Small

HARDWICK — The Hardwick Gazette is exploring options to continue operations in the face of the economic disruption brought on by the COVID-19 outbreak. The newspaper plans to continue producing its print and digital versions for now, but will review that decision week by week. Options range from business as usual to suspending the print version for the duration of the crisis to shutting down the paper.

One threat is a drop in advertising revenues as local merchants cut expenditures to ride out at the economic turmoil brought about by the coronavirus outbreak. Declining newspaper sales may also pose a threat to the paper's ability to continue to print and deliver. The Gazette is not alone among Vermont newspapers. According to Seven Days, the Wa-

terbury Record published its last edition last week and "three Chittenden County weeklies — the Milton Independent, Essex Reporter and Colchester Sun — announced Tuesday that they will cease publishing print editions 'until further notice.'" The papers will continue reporting local news online.

If the Gazette suspends distribution of its print edition, it will distribute its electronic version to current subscribers. Those who receive only the printed version of the paper in the mail are urged to register for the digital version at hardwickgazette.com. Subscribers can contact the Gazette with questions and for troubleshooting support. The electronic version arrives via email early Wednesday mornings and can be viewed on computers, tablets and smart phones.

If the print edition is suspended, the plan would be to resume distribution of its paper version once the economic situation stabilizes, though that is not assured. The paper has lost mon-

ey for several years. It is in the process of applying to become a nonprofit organization — a 501(c)(3) organization under IRS statute — to solicit tax-deductible donations in hopes of strengthening its financial position and continuing to serve Hardwick and surrounding communities. Historically, the IRS has not granted 501(c)(3) status to newspapers, but seemingly changed its policy late last year when it approved an application by the Salt Lake Tribune, the first legacy newspaper to be granted nonprofit status. The Gazette's IRS application and its pursuing a similar approach. The timing and outcome of an application for 501(c)(3) status is unknown.

The Gazette's office remains closed to the public, but continues to operate. Staff can be reached at (802) 472-6521 or new@hardwickgazette.com. Advertising orders can be sent to ad@hardwickgazette.com.

Hardwick Health Center Retools to Maintain Service

by Emmet Avery

HARDWICK — The Hardwick Area Health Center is still open and will remain open, though some operating procedures have changed. In an interview Monday, CEO of Northern Counties Health Care Michael Costa, and Dr. Susan Morgan, of the Hardwick Area Health Center, outlined the health center's response to COVID-19.

Costa said that the health center has retooled to provide face-to-face visits with patients where such care is necessary, but that wherever possible, he has converted meetings to secure online video chats and phone conversations. "It is almost like we have turned things inside out with our switch

Select Board Looks to Zoom

by June Pichol Cook

CRAFTSBURY — The select board hopes to have its next meeting on April 7 set up on Zoom and to keep the town business open and running. Town Clerk Urie said the town is pursuing a set-up before the next meeting.

"To learning how to use it," Urie said. "We are figuring it out."

Basically, he noted, "We are trying to be respectful of each other's space and doing the town's business in a whole new way. We are being dropped into the office individually to issue some licenses and weight permits."

Town Clerk Yvette Brown, who recently returned from Florida, is in a two-week self-quarantine. Assistant Town Clerk Betty Urie is at the town office that during the continued crisis. Assistant Michelle Warren is there on alternate days and

clinic in St. Johnsbury. "We will see people at our health center with respiratory symptoms," Morgan said, "but only if they wish to. It turns out we can do a lot of primary care that way."

Morgan explained that the health center is screening people for fever or respiratory symptoms by phone and at the front door. If symptoms are found, the patient will either be evaluated further outside or referred to a different

Costa then continued, "Northern Counties is really trying to limit face-to-face visits, to make it as absolutely essential, to make

See RETOOLS, 4

Brown is working from home. The town garage is closed to visitors. Urie said an emergency repair with Wild Bread was needed over the weekend as water swirled behind the riprap and around the front door. Pire's road crew has been grading some roads. "It's a weird, weird world we're in now," he said.

The town website has eight links to the Center for Disease Control with COVID-19 updates and updated list of resources.

The Thompson Family Farm, Craftsbury General Store, Pire's and updated list of resources.

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The businesses are donating vegetables, hamburger and staples for our and looking to round out their offerings. We're

See ZOOM, 4