

## Loans Available to Support Dairy Farmers

by Michael Bielawski

**HARDWICK** — For four years and counting, dairy farmers in Vermont and across the nation have struggled with low milk prices, which are often either at or below the cost of production. Now, at least two loan organizations are stepping up to try and make a difference.

The federal government had started an insurance protection program, but during a visit by U.S. Representative Peter Welch to Hardwick earlier this year, there was clear feedback that this program has failed to help. One organization trying to help with a new program is the Vermont Economic Development Authority (VEDA), headed by CEO Jo Bradley. She noted that VEDA has been making loans to farmers since 1967 and that its total agricultural portfolio is over \$100 million.

Bradley said that VEDA currently has \$10 million, which they are trying to distribute to the farmers who need it most. Each farm can apply for up to \$150,000 and VEDA has already distributed \$1.5 million in 17 loans.

"We have various programs, but we have a new special program that we hope will help farmers, with continued low milk prices, to pay some of their operating expenses, to be able to stay afloat, whatever they need to do for work until they get their crops in the ground this year."

Bradley said it would be that these low-price cycles would last a year or two and rebound back to an extent that would allow dairy operations to remain profitable. In 2014, farmers received \$24 per hundredweight but, as of mid-March of this year, the price was just \$13.5 per

hundredweight and prices are not predicted to recover soon.

"This is the fourth year now of low milk prices. The cycles used to be a lot shorter," she said. "This one has made it very difficult. The break-even price is different for every farm, but it's often below what they are able to get for their milk right now."

The impact will be felt well after the price starts to rise again. From March 2017 to March 2018, the Agency of Agriculture reported that the number of Vermont dairy farms has declined from 813 to 761. There are some that have weathered the storm. Bradley noted the farms that did not have major debt on their balance sheets before this big downturn are in better shape than those that did. She also said that a lot of farmers have had difficulty to get through these tough times by growing hay, vegetables, making cheese, and using means of generating cash to keep operations viable while the milk business struggles.

Bradley noted that in the past that the federal government has helped drought victims, paying farmers to stop producing milk. But she noted this has not happened in several years.

The last time VEDA ran a big loan initiative like the current one was in 2009, just after the 2008 economic downturn. Those interested in a loan can call in to get 2017-2018 they will be put in touch with a farm leader who will be able to help them.

"We're trying to do marketing to get the word out," Bradley said. "We want to make sure everybody knows about it."

VEDA is headed by president and CEO of Yankee Farm Credit (YFCU), **See LOANS, 6**



The winners of Saturday's Master's Memorial in their newly-awarded green jackets were left to right: Steve Parker, Colton Niosi, Steve Rogers, Brian Morris and nephew Mike Cies. In the background is Roger's wife Helen, Matt Kelly and fellow organizer Dave Burman.

## Master's Memorial Hosts 96 Golfers

by Patrick Hussey

**GREENSBORO** — Hardwick golf legends were smiling down on the event that saluted their names this past Saturday at Mountain View Country Club, as the Master's Memorial presented "wonderful weather, a beautiful course, and a great day for everyone."

The event was a success for all involved. The 96 golfers played in the morning and 17 more in the afternoon. Once complete, there were 150-200 people celebrating reunions, friends and classmates for the barbecue after the event.

The day proved that old friends love to reunite, as the crowd was a mix of old and new. The 1988 and 1978 classes posed for pictures in place on social media. Members of the class of 1968, who

will be hosting their 50th reunion at MYCC on July 14, were in the crowd as well.

Organizers Mike Clark, Dave Burman and Pat Hussey agreed to re-establish an alumni tradition and Saturday was a big step in the right direction. The event's proceeds benefited the Vermont Historical Society. Lorraine Hussey, now in her 90th year, was on site with a display of historical photos.

"The Master's Memorial golf tournament proved the alert they give each player will one day salute many more standard golfers from the area. Only nine strokes separated first place from last place."

In the end, no team could match the prowess of Steve Rogers and Steve Parker, Brian Niosi and Colton Niosi. Over the nine-hole scramble, they produced five birdies and four pars, including birdies on their first hole, with a posting of five-under-20. **See MASTERS, 4**

## Enterprise Board Grants Support Local Businesses



**MONTEPELLIER** — The Working Lands Enterprise Board awarded over \$700,000 in grants to 25 Vermont agriculture and rural sector businesses and service providers in support of businesses and organizations that support Vermont's working landscape.

The Working Lands Enterprise Initiative has distributed over \$1.8 million in grants since its inception in 2012.

**Stannard Farm Vermont Maple Syrup** was one of the Caledonia County grant recipients. The farm received a \$150,000 grant for increasing its capacity for maple retail marketing in the Northeast Kingdom.

Washington County grant recipients include Bartlett Apple Orchard in Cabot, which received a \$140,000 grant to support its Pick Your Own and retail operations. Sawyer Made, which received \$200,000 to upgrade its manufacturing facilities in Woodbury, Vermont, also works with the Vermont Community Loan Fund (VCLF) and the Vermont Economic Development Authority (VEDA) to provide zero- or low-interest loans to Working Lands entrepreneurs.

The Vermont Working Lands Enterprise Initiative (VLEI) was signed into law in 2012. It supports, grows, and sustains Vermont entrepreneurs by providing technical assistance, grants, and other support to help businesses innovate and grow. The initiative also works with the Vermont Community Loan Fund (VCLF) and the Vermont Economic Development Authority (VEDA) to provide zero- or low-interest loans to Working Lands entrepreneurs.



Lyle, Lyke, Travis and James Reynolds outside their superstore. Lyle and Lyke received \$180,000 from the Working Lands Enterprise Initiative to assist with marketing their maple syrup.



After eight and a half years, the Hardwick Inn Clothing Company will close its doors by end of summer.

## Hardwick Clothing Company to Close After Eight-Year Run

by Doug McClure

**HARDWICK** — Hardwick Clothing Company owners Larry Hamel and Johnnie Fradette have decided to close the store after over eight years in business. Hamel cited the difficulty in competing with online stores, especially in a small community.

"Brick and mortar stores cannot compete with on-line shopping, and that challenge even more real," said Hamel.

She added that she and Fradette work full-time in addition to running the store, which was another factor in the decision.

"The additional work that the business required is no longer worth the cost to personal time and a work-life balance," she said.

The business employs between five and seven people part-time.

The Hardwick Clothing Company took a year-and-a-half of planning before opening its doors in March, 2011. Hamel said the plan is to continue operating through the summer.

"The business plans to stay open through the summer of 2018. The business is gone."

Hamel said she is very grateful for the community's support.

A statement on the store's Facebook page reads: "We would like to thank all our loyal customers, our sales associates and vendors who are others who have supported us through the years."

The store was a part of the late-2000s renaissance of Hardwick Village. The store opened its doors shortly after Larry Hamel's \$1.2 million renovation of the Hardwick Inn. That renovation was his second such effort in the village.

"There are some definite ways to bring the village back, and no firm rules yet, but it's not impossible to bring it up to date. It's the most prime real estate in downtown Hardwick," said Hamel.



Kenneth W. Brown, Jr. of East Hardwick turned 132 years old on June 6, and gathering for family and friends was held in his honor at the Vermont League of Cities and Towns. He is pictured with the daughter, Grace Brown (left), West Dennis and his son Gray Brown (right) of East Hardwick. Kenneth W. Brown Jr. was a World War II POW. He was presented a copy of his book, "A World War II POW." Brown has 12 grandchildren, 16 great-grandchildren and three great-great-grandchildren.

## Fire Station, Library Play Structure Move Forward

by Will Walters

**CABOT** — Bobby Seelars asked the select board when did the town vote on the fire department, or when will the town vote on it? The town has purchased the property at 448 Main Street to relocate the station, but the voters have not yet voted on whether to build it.

Seelars said he has been told that the town will be an advisory vote on August 12, during the primary, asking voters to give the board approval to build the fire station. The board is planning to build the fire station through bond issues, donations, with minimum cost to the taxpayers. He said statute does not require a vote for the fire station, but the board will not dig up the result. The advisory vote, as allowed by statute, gives the select board the level of public support and

gives the board an indication of how to proceed. Hagan said it is a long-term project and it is not possible to tell what it will cost at this time. As things develop, there will be a clearer forecast, which will point to either putting the project into the budget or not doing it at the town garage, or look at a loan or bond, which may require voter approval.

The board reviewed two bids for the fire station. The purchase and demolition of the structure at 448 Main Street. The board accepted the Union Bank bid for \$100,000. The bid was for a 1,000 square foot, four-year use. The note will require a 10% down payment.

The board also reviewed the town's request for a new fire station. The town is planning to build the fire station through bond issues, donations, with minimum cost to the taxpayers. He said statute does not require a vote for the fire station, but the board will not dig up the result. The advisory vote, as allowed by statute, gives the select board the level of public support and

## Chinese Student Exchange Program Returns to Hardwick

by Michael Bielawski

**HARDWICK** — Host families are wanted for a Chinese exchange student program, set to take place at Hapen Union this summer. Arranged by the Offshore Southwest Superiority Union and the Spiral International Chinese student exchange program, students will visit from July 14 to 28.

The program is arranged by Spiral International coordinator Stefanie Lingenshaw, who is also the guidance counselor at the Lakeside Union in Greensboro.

"The program provides a unique opportunity for local American students to experience a culture at exchange with middle and high school-aged students from China," she wrote in an email. "The Chinese students are coming from very poor areas, and many of them do not have a rural experience like we do, which we can offer here in Vermont."

Lingenshaw said the ideal scenario is host families will take in two Chinese students. Compensation is \$200 per student per week. Families are expected to provide housing at home and all weekend meals. They are also expected to have a rural experience like we do, which we can offer here in Vermont."

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provide transportation to and from Hapen from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. Lingenshaw said it's more than just Chinese and American culture that will be shared.

"The Chinese students are coming from very large cities, and many of them have not had a rural experience like that which we can offer here in Vermont," she wrote.

She has advice for families who are seriously considering hosting one student, based on past years' experience.

"For first-time hosting, my biggest advice would be just treat the students as you would to your own child," she said. "They are no different than American teens, and they are here for the experience, and they are thinking of hosting, just simply be the family you are and share your family life with them."

She added that a career language will be an obstacle, but it's manageable. "Language may be a barrier but not a big problem since we all know one language very well: body language. By any case, always write down the important rules or announcements and provide names and contact information for the exchange program."

**See EXCHANGE, 4**

## Net Metering Said to Cause Rate Increases, Grid Complications

by Michael Bielawski

**HARDWICK** — In May, the House Select Board voted to support the 500-kilowatt Novus solar array project to be placed in a brownfield site in East Hardwick. The bill will be signed by the state's attorney general, Michael S. Hanley, and the Vermont (HED) manager Mike Sullivan voiced opposition to the project, suggesting it will harm

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