

All 4,300 LED Customers Lose Power in Storm

by Doug McClure

HARDWICK — The snow storm that lasted through most of the final week of November left thousands of Vermonters statewide in the dark. Hardwick Electric Department (HED) was hit hard, with all 4,300 customers losing power multiple times. Wasting Electric GasCo (WEG) took a large hit, as well. The state's largest utility, Green Mountain Power (GMP), covers fewer people in our towns and reported only slightly more than 100 outages in the towns it partially serves locally: Cabot, Galais, Marshfield and Plainfield.

HED Foreman Brian Forant said the utility lost its transmission lines to GMP several times, down to fallon trees and wet snow, with some lines giving out after collecting five inches or more of snow on them.

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The Galaxy Bookshop celebrated its 30th Anniversary. Pictured (from left) are Linda Ramsdell who opened The Galaxy in 1988, Sandy Scott (center) who worked for the shop 14 years and now owns the shop along with Linda, and Linda Ramsdell (right) in 2014. Andrew Scott, CEO of the Bookshop Group, is on the far right.

Community Hears About Impact of Act 46 Decision

by Doug McClure

HARDWICK — The Hardwick Elementary School (HES) board and the Orleans Southwest Supervisory Union (OSSU) hosted a public meeting on November 28 to discuss the ramifications of the final Act 46 merger plan from the Board of Education and answer questions from the community.

OSSU superintendent Janine LeBlanc summed up the gist of the merger:

"We're no longer one school. You have to look at it as Orleans Southwest Union Elementary School District has three campuses. There is one in Greensboro, there is one in Woodbury, and there is one in Hardwick."

LeBlanc addressed the most

daunting short-term issue facing the now combined school district: the timeline.

"Almost immediately there needs to be an organizational meeting of a transitional board. That needs to occur within 60 days of the state board's issuance of its plan."

The state requires that two entities be created: a transitional board, comprised of two members each from Greensboro, Stannard, Hardwick, Woodbury and Lakeview, whose goal is to prepare budgets and warn members, and an eight-member interim district board with two members from each of the four towns.

LeBlanc said the Board of Education is requiring the first organizational meeting of the transi-

itional board to be held within 60 days of the release of its final report, but the first possible date for that next meeting date is January 8 due to legal warning requirements. Budget talks will need to begin immediately after this first meeting.

The transitional board must decide whether to use the state's default Articles of Organization or adopt its own and must adopt other basic committee rules. If the transitional board adopts the state's default articles, legal requirements make amending them difficult.

LeBlanc noted that the state's "very tight timeline" makes it impossible to set the details of the town for a public vote on Town

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A truck with 60,000 pounds of manure in its tank got stuck in the Lamoine River in 1982 near Hardwick, leaving 6,000 gallons of raw cow manure there.

Major Manure Truck Mishap In East Hardwick

by Doug McClure

EAST HARDWICK — On the morning of November 27, Fred Pike was driving his 60,000-pound truck to make a routine delivery of manure to the Michael Farm in East Hardwick. He had his dog, Riley with him. Snow had just begun to fall and Pike got quite a surprise when he tried to cross the bridge on Arsenic Avenue to get to the farm, as he had done thousands of times before. The snow was packed down a lot more than it thought," said Pike. "I fell the weight start to shift in the back."

Dennis Michaud said he saw the truck start to go over the edge of the bridge. Fortunately, the dog, Pike and Riley, only the back of the truck went all the way into the Lamoine. The two of them emerged, shaken but unscathed, from the back of the passenger door of the cab, which was resting on the bank of the river.

Pike said attracting the trailer and truck tractor only took about five minutes, but then as he got a wait because of the only machine that could pull the fully loaded truck out was a heavy crawler truck from Loudonville.

The trip itself took some damage, but Michaud said that

courtesy photo

30 Years On, Galaxy Bookshop Going Strong

by Doug McClure

HARDWICK — The Galaxy Bookshop celebrated its 30th anniversary on December 1 with a noisy stream of customers. The key, the owners said, is the Galaxy has always treated its original premise that locals want a community-centric spot.

Linda Ramsdell founded the Galaxy Bookshop on December 1, 1988, in the corner of the Old Firehouse Building (now GRACE), which was at the time, a yarn shop. She remembers the day the business moved into a former bank building on Bill Street in 2014. She said it was so cold — "I think it was minus-14 degrees" — with staff loading books into boxes and trucking the boxes down Spry's South Main to fill the store.

Thirty years and five locations later, the bookshop owners have stuck to the idea that community is the key to their success.

"One of the current owners, Sandy Scott, commented about the early 2000s decline of local

photos by Vanessa Fournier
The Galaxy Bookshop celebrated its 30th Anniversary. Pictured (from left) are Linda Ramsdell who opened The Galaxy in 1988, Sandy Scott (center) who worked for the shop 14 years and now owns the shop along with Linda, and Linda Ramsdell (right) in 2014. Andrew Scott, CEO of the Bookshop Group, is on the far right.

by Ray Small

HARDWICK — Peter Peltz is a member of the State Board of Education, which is currently announcing its decisions regarding school district mergers, as called for under Act 46. An interview with The Gazette offered some insights into why he voted in favor of the final report.

Peltz has experience with local and state education dating back to the late 1980s. He was a member and chair of the school boards for Woodbury and Hazen Union, served on the board of Green Mountain Technical and Career Center and was a trustee for the State Board of Colleges. He was elected to the Vermont House of Representatives in 2002 and served as vice-chair of the House Education Committee. In 2015, he was appointed to the State Board of Education by then-governor Peter Shumlin.

Peltz believes that consolidating school districts will improve educational opportunities for students through economies of scale.

"With the dwindling of schools' populations, the opportunities for kids have, in many cases, disappeared. If you combine your resources in a larger group and share these, the students will benefit," he said.

In his view, the benefits of a larger, shared pool of resources is not limited to academics. Citing his hometown school as an example, he explained: "There's huge social issues and behavioral issues in schools. It's very difficult for Woodbury alone to provide resources, but as a group you're much more likely to be able" to

for needed help.

Peltz noted that in 2008 Gov. Douglas and the state Board of Education focused on controlling education spending by cutting state-to-teacher ratios. Peltz said that approach might have controlled costs but "would not improve the quality of education in Vermont."

He noted that Act 46 will have reduced the number of school districts will both reduce school spending and improve the quality of education.

He added that Act 46 will have reduced the number of school districts from 276 to approximately 120, which will "reduce school

management and overhead costs of administering so many schools."

While the merger mandated by that report would yield savings, detailed numbers are hard to come by. Asked about the availability of projected savings, Peltz said: "That's what frustrating about this whole exercise. We have heard from new merged districts that they have saved ... sometimes millions of dollars in school costs — but the agency has not come out with firm numbers."

He said that while actual savings in the last budget year was projected to increase by 4.5

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Tops Markets Emerges From Bankruptcy

by Doug McClure

WILLIAMSVILLE, N.Y. — Tops Markets, LLC today announced that it has successfully completed its financial restructuring and emerged from Chapter 11 bankruptcy. The company recognized on a fully consensual basis, with the support of its secured creditors and the Official Committee of Unsecured Creditors.

The company is emerging from Chapter 11 with a substantially stronger balance sheet, reducing its debt by approximately \$445 million, and with over \$100 million in liquidity. This significantly enhanced financial flexibility will enable the company to maintain investment in its stores and create an even more exceptional shopping experience for its customers. The company also announces having re-



The St. Aster's Handbell Choir entertained in the Memorial Plaza during the lighting of the Hardwick Street Memorial Plaza. From left to right: Evelyn Lavelle (center) and Marisa Holcomb (right).

Wolcott's School Street Bridge Opens Three Weeks Early

by Doug McClure

WOLCOTT — Ahead of schedule by nearly three weeks, the School Street Bridge in Wolcott is back open for traffic, using a temporary structure erected from the Vermont Agency of Transportation (VTRANS). The pre-opening occurred just over 100 days after the bridge struck in south Vermont.

The Wolcott School Board first announced the bridge issue on August 22. Adding to the unenviable string of using the village's main and only reliable crossing, the town discovered it was not well positioned to secure the funds necessary to replace the bridge outright — over a million dollars, at least. One major advantage Wolcott had was that its school board chair, Eric Fure, works for VTRANS and had experi-

photos by Doug McClure
Workers install a temporary bridge on top of the School Street Bridge in Wolcott. The temporary bridge will allow the town to wait for a federally-funded grant for a permanent bridge.

one in similar projects.

Wolcott's select board brought Tyler Billingsley of Billingsley & Best Engineering, PLLC. The August 22 meeting demonstrated that while what Fure referred to as a "young (select) board" may be new to this sort of situation, what it lacked in experience it made up for in efficiency and hard work. Even though just two weeks had passed since VTRANS shut it down in south Vermont, the Wolcott School Board first announced the bridge issue on August 22. Adding to the unenviable string of using the village's main and only reliable crossing, the town discovered it was not well positioned to secure the funds necessary to replace the bridge outright — over a million dollars, at least. One major advantage Wolcott had was that its school board chair, Eric Fure, works for VTRANS and had experi-

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