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photo by Eric Hanson

At the Nationals men's sprint held at the Craftsbury Outdoor Center last week, Ben Saxton (BSR) 72 - 103 leads in the downhill section of the classic sprint national championship race. From left to right: Saxton, Zak Kershaw - Northern Michigan Univ. (113), Logan Hanneman - APU (124), Peter Holmes - Sun Valley (108), Dominique Monsalve Gauvin - Team R.A.D. (122) and Julian Locke - Canadian National Team (109). Locke came from behind to win the 1.4 km sprint heat.

Taxes Up 5.92 Percent; East Hardwick Brings Up Village Concerns

by Doug McClure

HARDWICK – The Hardwick Select Board held its first 2019 meeting on January 3 with new town manager Shaun Pfeifer attending, although he doesn't officially assume the position until January 7. Identified by a handful as the town's new executive assistant, Pfeifer interjected a few questions that created discussion. The select board signed off on the 2019 budget.

The tax increase of 5.92 percent does not reflect a $96,000 payment that the state is leaving taxpayers by lowering the proposed tax rate. This one-time payment is the result of an error made by the state last year. If the payment is applied to this year's budget, the tax increase would be reduced to 2.08 percent.

The state pays every town for properties that are under the Use Value Appraisal (UVA) Program (also known as "Current Use") for any loss of tax revenue resulting from those properties. For 2017, the state failed properties in Hardwick to warrant around $120,000 in payments – and told Hardwick to expect the same in 2018. The payment that came through in 2018, however, was only $96,000, or about half of the promised amount.

Jewett was convinced the official warning was wrong for this assessment, but has little leaf to go on. In the end, Jewett proved right. The state had made a mistake, and the money came back, but it was too late to redo the taxes without a lot of extra money spent.

Jewett was a conspicuous critic of the budget and throughout his tenure voiced a lack of trust in treating one-time money such as this new $96,000 like a candy jar to be raided, as the State itself did. He advised the select board not to do that, and it was advise took.

Every town has expenses that are unplanned, and Hardwick has had $84,000 more in capital fund to use for those expenses. For example, the money could be used to cover the unplanned for expense for changing from using boilers to using stoves.

Using the windfall payment would, however, have lowered the tax increase rate and the select board knows that voters pay attention to that number.

Select Board Vice Chair Darcy Hale said, "It is what it is, folks. We have expenses [we can not]. It's gonna cost what it's gonna cost. If it has to go up, it has to go up. If the townsfolk don't say, that, come second of March, we'll have

See TAXES, 2

courtesy photo

Cheryl Michaels, founder of the East Hardwick Neighborhood Organization (EHNO), outlines East Hardwick's progress and goals to the Hardwick Select Board on January 2.

Craftsbury Enjoys Its Renaissance

Year In Review

by Jane Pickel Cook

CRAFTSBURY – The Craftsbury community continues to enjoy a Renaissance, with flourishing cultural activities, a growing school population and new business activities.

Community spirit manifested itself, from the emergence of the innovative Concordia's Festival of Light Parade lighting up the dark nights of winter, the Winter Arts Holiday Season, to the Craftsbury Farmer's Market 2nd Annual Vermont Blueberry Festival and the July 4th Block Party and 48th Annual Antiques & Uniques Festival.

The Wellness Center on South Craftsbury Road was among new businesses established. Three sisters from a multi-generation Craftsbury family – Katie Meyer, Lindsay Sedora and Jessie Upton – opened the holistic healing center last summer in the family homestead. Shopping locally remained new from with a town school committee mailing to residents the freshest parent in Wylie Hill as an outdoor classroom and community resource. Sterling College students designed a curriculum for fourth and fifth graders, utilizing the woodlot as a classroom, and presented the curriculum to school officials.

The Craftsbury Inn on South Craftsbury Road is transitioning into the Craftsbury Public House to create a community gathering place and workspace in the village. The property also is accessible prior to the Black River and connects with hiking and cross-country trails maintained by the Craftsbury Outdoor Center.

The Craftsbury Outdoor Center continued to be a central focal point to the community with its expansion of programs, including hosting sessions for Aging Active Seniors, under the leadership of Edith Kravetz. Seniors enjoyed modified interval training, modified biathlon, exercise sessions and hiking.

The Craftsbury Outdoor Sports Academy, a collaboration between Craftsbury Schools and the Outdoor Center, allowed various sports programs to integrate their academic studies with their various athletic training.

One of the highlights of the winter season was the World Cup Orienteering competition held in Craftsbury through the efforts of Adrian Orenne. Over 80 world-class athletes from 40 countries participated in the races held in the backwoods and fields in Craftsbury. A parade around the Common with flags flying from 18 different countries was a testament to the vitality and richness within the Northeast Kingdom.

The community welcomed news that the State Board of Education under ACT 46 approved an alternative structure or standalone status for the Craftsbury Schools PK-12 system, requiring no mergers with other districts. As the school population grows in kindergarten and early grades, the school board is seeking ways to expand classroom space for teens. Community meetings were held by the board to address options for classroom space. Building on the Danby Athletic field

See CRAFTSBURY, 8

Craftsbury School Board Addresses Multiple Issues

by Jane Pickel Cook

CRAFTSBURY – Preparing budgets that accomplish educational goals yet are palatable and affordable to the community appears to be becoming increasingly difficult and FY2018-FY2020 has presented challenges.

At the last Craftsbury School Board meeting, Chair Harry Miller reported on the status of the Orleans Southwest Supervisory Union (OSSU) meeting and failure of a proposed budget to be approved.

Miller said the budget was voted down with the request to increase spending by 80 percent, which would represent roughly $250,000. Special education funding would not be subject to reduction.

Miller indicated that he and Vice-Chair Mary Lou Sprague had voted for the OSSU budget. Aspects of OSSU meeting in plan and for January.

Sprague said, "It is hard to vote one when you don't know what is being cut. Fifty percent (50%) of non-related special education funds could be anything."

Superintendent Jeanne LeBlanc said the budget process started with a 12 percent increase in health insurance premiums along with contractual obligations.

Discussion ensued relative to the search for a new superintendent and hiring a consultant for the search process as LeBlanc has announced her retirement. She indicated the Vermont School Boards Association (VSBA) had given an $8,000 price tag for conducting the search.

"I was shocked," she said, "and have another idea. I am looking at another proposal and have worked with [the person]." LeBlanc said funds are available to apply to the search. "At some point," she said, "I am going to have to retire."

Of more significance, Sylacobs reported that Secretary of Education Rebecca Holcombe told OSSU can look at a three-year contract for a superintendent. She felt that may mean the OSSU board could look for a contract for the time being. Reviewing the OSSU boundaries and pairing Craftsbury with Greensboro Supervisory Union has been a concern of the board.

"It sounds like this (changing OSSU boundaries) is going to be put off," Sylacobs said. LeBlanc observed that having announced her retirement may have "tipped the scale a bit."

Facilities Manager Ryan Sparks reported on fixtures issues being problematic at the Craftsbury Elementary School.

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Cartoonist Cultivates Conscious Creativity

by Jim Flint

HARDWICK – Over the past 21 years, it's hard to imagine an issue of the Hardwick Gazette without a Julie Atwood cartoon. Over 1,600 Wordsmiles cartoons have appeared in print since the artist and author of five books drawing exclusively for the Gazette.

Atwood was born in New York City and raised on Long Island. She fondly remembered as the Green Mountains. A self-described country girl at heart, she jumped at the chance to move to Vermont 24 years ago, eventually settling in Woodbury.

"My love of the mountains and Vermont's many pristine lakes and rivers inspired not only my cartooning career but my passion for writing, as well," Atwood said.

In October 1987, Atwood picked up a copy of the Gazette and noticed a void of cartoons. She walked into the Gazette's office to share her portfolio with the new publisher, Sam Connolly. He chose Wordsmiles from a list of titles she submitted.

"I found it a bit ironic," Atwood said. "Just like smiles in the wind, my cartoons just drifted in! Drawing for the newspaper gave me the chance to share what was on my mind in regard to humorous issues as well as serious ones. It was an opportunity to voice – through my pictures – my feelings about the world around me, not just locally but globally as well."

In her early years of cartooning, Atwood drew down the mountain to Wordsmiles to hand deliver her weekly work to the Gazette. During the winter months, she dropped off multiple cartoons, so as not to have to travel on dicey roads. There were only a few times when she was required to leave her piled from her fine due to illness or a sudden onslaught of family members. Other than that, Atwood never takes a vacation from cartooning.

All of Atwood's children went to Woodbury Elementary School. Her two oldest sons attended Hazen Union. While to Woodbury, she took classes through the Community College of Vermont. After moving to Stockbridge, Vermont, her children brought her first computer and taught her how to access the internet and create a border. From borrowed online for cartoon ideas, assess her cartoons, and subscribe them via email.

Creating a cartoon requires research with a vivid imagination.

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photo by Vanessa Fournier

Julie Atwood, of Stockbridge, holds one of the many original cartoons she has created over the years for The Hardwick Gazette. Julie started working for the paper in October of 1987.

Act 46 Forced Mergers Frozen

by Doug McClure

MONTPELIER – In response to an appeal against the Agency of Education (AOE) Act 46 merger action, spearheaded by Greensboro attorney David Kelley, the state has decided it needs to take a breath and review the extensive arguments made against forced mergers. A five-week breath.

As reviewed by the Gazette and confirmed in the Attorney General's motion, there are at least a dozen legal grounds for the forced mergers not to happen. One of the arguments made was that there is a conflict of interest, but there were many others as that did not stand, by change the dynamic. The AOE needed an immediate meeting to organize a transitional board, but the timeline was always a major factor with personal laws on warning meetings. Orleans Southwest Supervisory Union (OSSU) found its deadline by two days, while another district missed it by weeks. Hence, all three meetings were already canceled.

The timeline will extend the entire process into late February. What that does in the initial deadline is fully up in the air, but it was impossible to begin with, is no one's guess.

"I don't have a crystal ball," said Kelley. "There's no way to predict the future, or the timeline, or the deadlines now."

The Gazette reached out to Attorney General TJ Donovan, but did not get a response by press time. In part, the Attorney General's motion says that the involved parties need more time to consider and respond to the appeal. At a previous meeting, OSSU Superintendent LeBlanc had described the timeline as unrealistic in the first place.

The motion states that, "The next set of deadlines in Plaintiffs' case in again are for organizational meetings that were originally set to be held prior to January 29, 2019. The parties have agreed that organizational meetings relating to Plaintiff districts will instead be warned to begin in the third week of February. The parties have also agreed to request that the Court schedule a hearing to address Plaintiffs' motion prior to the third week in February."

The January 2 meeting the OSSU had scheduled was cancelled and reset for February 13, according to LeBlanc when contacted before the motion announcement. At this point the timing is up in the air.

Kelley said the motion was in the best interests of all parties.

"It will give the Attorney General's office the time needed to respond comprehensively to the appeal with respect to forced mergers. It will also give the court an opportunity to make a decision regarding the appellants' motion for a preliminary injunction before entering dispositive rules dismissed and issue and assess heretics [sentiments] accordingly."

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Pete's Posse at the Music Box