THE
Hardwick Gazette
INDEPENDENT LOCAL NEWS SINCE 1889

$1.00

Wednesday, November 6, 2019 | Hardwick • Cabot • Calais • Craftsbury • Greensboro • Marshfield • Plainfield • Stannard • Walden • Wolcott • Woodbury | Volume 130 Number 43

photo by Vanessa Fournier

The Fisher Bridge picnic area in Wolcott was flooded Friday after water overflowed the banks of the Lamoille River.

photo by Doug McClure

At the Craftsbury end of North Wolcott/Wild Branch Road, half of the road was washed out by the Wild Branch during the Halloween storm.

photo by Doug McClure

Brook Road at North Wolcott Road in the aftermath of the Halloween storm. The road washed out and is impassable.

courtesy photo from Bruce Urie

Town Line Road in Craftsbury became a torrent of debris, mud, and water by early Friday morning, with washouts more than six feet deep. Quick responses by the road crew, Dwight Denton, and others made it possible to restore the road into a one-lane passage by Friday afternoon.

photo by Vanessa Fournier

The town-owned ATV and river access parking area on Wolcott Street in Hardwick, adjacent to the Lamoille River, was flooded when the river overflowed Friday.

Halloween Storm On Track To Break Records

by Tyler Molleur

HARDWICK – The torrential rains which may go down in history as the "Halloween nightmare storm" shattered several local records during its path of destruction. In some areas, flooding was so severe that river gauges and citizens alike compared it to the flood of 1927 and Tropical Storm Irene.

While the storm packed an impressive volume of rain and strong winds, October, 2019 was a wet month overall. Prior to the October 31-November 1 heavy rains, four separate rainfall events registered an inch or more in gauges near Hardwick, including St. Johnsbury, Morrisville, and Montpelier. In places where observations are kept by the National Weather Service, significant rainfall events were noted on October 1, October 7, October 17 and October 27.

Rainfall totals for October ranged anywhere from five to eight inches. Even with the deduction of rainfall measured on the last day of the month, all three recording stations reported above-normal rainfall. From October 1 through 30, St. Johnsbury report 4.78 inches of rain; 0.91 inches above the monthly normal. Montpelier had an excess of two inches of rain with a 5.55-inch total, and Morrisville led the measurements locally with a cumulative 6.51 inches, nearly three and a half inches above the monthly average.

Morrisville received the largest single-day rainfall of the three stations on October 31, which likely included flooding in nearby Wolcott.

Previously saturated grounds were a contributing factor, but the volume of rain played a big role in flooding. Most of the rain fell in a span of a few hours, causing flash floods rather than slow-rising river floods common this time of year.

The system responsible for the heavy rains began gathering strength in the 48 hours preceding its arrival. Energy over the western Gulf of Mexico formed into a low-pressure system deepening as it traveled through the Mississippi River Valley and into

See RECORDS, 3

Wolcott Takes Storm Beating

by Doug McClure

NORTH WOLCOTT – Of the many towns hit hard by the Halloween storm, Wolcott arguably took the worst beating. The Wild Branch River in North Wolcott lived up to its name, jumping its banks as it has several times in the past few years following torrential rains. The river took a lane-sized bite out of the middle and both ends of North Wolcott Road and spat utility poles into the river. One end of Brook Road completely washed out and several other town roads flooded or were partially washed out.

The damage comes as the town and multiple agencies explore solutions for recurring flood issues and as Wolcott continues efforts to install a fully-staffed road crew. According to those on the scene, damage from the Halloween storm was first discovered by Consolidated Communications and Hardwick Electric, who were on-site to investigate outages. County sheriffs blocked either end of North Wolcott Road and connecting roads were guarded by highway emergency signs. A&B Tree Service was also on the scene as HED and Consolidated trucks worked to fish their poles from the swollen river.

The Wild Branch also surged into the ball field, depositing huge logs across the field and onto home plate. Even hours after the rain – which some reports measured at nearly four inches – had subsided, the field and parking area remained partially flooded. Two projects are currently in the works to address the flooding problems that have plagued North Wolcott Road; one seeks to remove a disused bridge to remediate the area adjacent to the highway and adjust the river flow, and the second employs state funding to tackle flooding issues.

Residents affected by the storm included Linda Thomas and Stephanie Earle, who said they were among the few houses with electricity late Friday night following an outage earlier that morning. Thomas said she was

See BEATING, 5

Commuter Bus Service Comes to Hardwick

by Doug McClure

HARDWICK – Rural Community Transport (RCT) began a free commuter bus service from Morrisville to Barre via Hardwick on Monday, November 4, according to RCT Executive Director Nick D'Agostino. The route offers morning and afternoon commuter service between Barre and Morrisville. Hardwick Town Manager Shaun Fielder said, "Adding a commuter bus route that passes through Hardwick is good to hear."

RCT is testing the waters for demand and provisioning a fourteen-person, ADA-accessible bus, D'Agostino said. He added that if more people want to ride the bus than can be accommodated, even with strap-hangers, RCT will find a way to serve those passengers.

"Right now," he said, "We're taking a guess about demand. If there is sufficient demand, we may use larger buses or add routes over time. Whatever the case, we would not strand people, even if it means sending out a second bus to pick them up. I'm hoping our biggest problem is we need a bigger bus."

Along with Hardwick, the free

See COMMUTER, 6

Five Dark Hours for Hardwick

by Doug McClure

HARDWICK – Fierce storm winds and monsoon-like rains failed to wash out Halloween for Hardwick's determined trick or treaters. The violent storm, which caused significant flooding and statewide power outages, stayed relatively tame until most of the town's children had safely returned home with their bags full of candy. Hardwick woke to a drier November 1, but Orleans Southwest Supervisory Union closed schools, including GMTCC, due to high winds, flooding and downed power lines. Hardwick roads took on water in the usual places: by Atkins Field, Route 14 at M&M Beverage, and Route 15 across from Jackson Dam, but damage was relatively minor.

And then the winds came.

An incoming cold front caused windchill temperatures to fall to the 20s. By midday, Hardwick had lost power, along with all of Hardwick Electric Department's customers in Craftsbury. As winds increased, a large tree fell across Bridgman Hill road, blocking it, and town roads were decorated with fallen branches. With no power and few generators, many businesses shut down.

Generators hummed at the Memorial Building, Hardwick Electric Department, and a handful of other places lucky enough to have them. Storefronts went dark. Tops Friendly Markets, which has a generator, remained open, but much of the store was in semi-darkness as meat staff rushed perishables into the back of the store, where it was colder.

Some businesses stayed open, keeping their front doors open for light while temperatures fell into the low forties with wind gusts in the thirty-mile-per-hour range. The Jeudevine Library stayed open, handing out flashlights to patrons in search of a book to get them through a Netflix-free night. As daylight waned, most businesses closed.

By dinnertime, Hardwick was enveloped in darkness. The typical bustle and noise of a Friday night was replaced by the persistent hum of generators. Houses were lit by camp lights and candles. South Main Street was pitch black on either side. One of the few lights visible throughout Hardwick was the streetlight in front of the Memorial Building.

Five hours after the first outage, power was restored to most of Hardwick. As of Sunday afternoon, the Hardwick Electric Department reported a handful of scattered outages, mostly in outlying areas.

Roads Closed, Washed Out

by June Pichel Cook

CRAFTSBURY – Mother Nature was more into tricks than treats on All Hallow's Eve, as high winds and heavy rains wrecked havoc throughout the night and into the next day. Downed tree limbs, washed out and flooded roads and other damages forced the Select Board into an emergency session on Friday.

Board Chair Bruce Urie credited the road crew and fire department for a well-organized response to the storm, which enabled most roads to recover quickly, even if only one lane was open.

Road Foreman Steve Marckres and crew member Kent Young worked from 2:00 a.m. Friday morning until 6:00 p.m. Friday night. Crew member Steve Perkins joined them at 6:00 a.m.

Cones were put in place at approximately 5:00 a.m., and emergency signage was posted to alert drivers to road conditions.

At Wild Branch Road, 100 feet of guardrails dangled 12 feet in the air above the river after half the roadbed was washed away. Town Line Road was awash in a torrent of debris and mud rushing down and over Route 14. Cemetery Road was under water, and sections of Collinsville Road were washed out. Power outages occurred throughout the town.

Urie said the storm hit hard, with heavy winds and four inches of rain falling on earth already pre-saturated from recent rainfalls. On Wild Branch Road, rip rapping held up, but the river swirled around the corner and dug into the bank.

"We didn't go far enough," Urie said. "The river swirled around the corner just beyond where rip rap was laid. It's an angry, angry river, taking down trees, and where it snakes around the corner and swirls."

Traffic was detoured over Denton

See CLOSED, 6

Water Systems Heavily Affected by Intersection Design

by Will Walters

PLAINFIELD – Proposed design changes to the intersection of Route 2 and Main Street presented by the Agency of Transportation (AOT) have raised serious concerns in the water and wastewater department. The plan must overcome major engineering and financing hurdles before the project can move forward.

AOT's proposal calls for Route 2 to be dropped two feet at the intersection where pipes for water and wastewater interconnect the town on either side of the road. The current plan will require the pipes, which are currently five feet below the road's surface, to be completely re-engineered. While costs of the redesigned intersection will be funded by the state, the water and wastewater work will be paid for in full by the town.

Water and Wastewater Department employee Tristan MacGregor-Stewart said that without grants or loan forgiveness programs to cover at least 90 percent of the costs, the standard budget will not have the funds to replace the system. At the last select

See DESIGN, 4

Washington Electric Puts in Overtime to Get Power Back On

by Michael Bielawski

PLAINFIELD – Approximately 36 crew are working around-the-clock to restore power to Washington Electric Co-op (WEC) customers following a massive windstorm that began on Halloween night and wreaked havoc on much of the northeast throughout the next day.

Four days after the storm, many trees and power lines are still down. According to WEC general manager Patricia Richards, crews are working from dawn until after sundown.

"We go into kind of a numb mode after about two or three days," Richards said Monday morning. "We're pushing on. We've got mutual aid crews from Massachusetts, New Hampshire, and a couple of small municipalities in the state that don't have a lot of tree coverage."

She said all 41 of their towns experienced high winds, and there's still more work to do.

"About 500 members right now are out of power still," she said. "It's extensive damage. At one point I believe there were 120 different breaks on the lines."

Richards said as of 9 a.m.

See OVERTIME, 6

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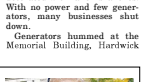
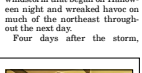
In Sports, *8*

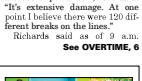
LOCAL OLYMPIAN RUNS FIRST MARATHON



In Towns, *2*

CAMARADARIE AT CABOT HARVEST SUPPER



In Local, *3*

HARDWICK ELEMENTARY HARVEST DINNER