

Final Bid for Act 46 Forced Merger Appeal

by Doug McClure

MIDDLEBURY — On January 15, the Vermont Supreme Court heard final arguments from plaintiffs seeking to reverse Act 46 forced merger. In the appeal, plaintiffs claimed two statutory and three Constitutional violations.

The appeal argues that the forced merger took a stated goal of Act 46, "to encourage and support local decisions and actions," and rendered it "illusory." Plaintiffs claim if there was no choice but to merge, as was demonstrated by the forced merger, the question of local decisions about whether or not to merge was no choice at all. Plaintiffs claim the state failed to establish that forced mergers were "necessary," and instead relied on its own judgment as to what was "possible" and "practicable" thereby committing a "reversible error."

The appeal states the State Board of Education ignored that "many districts can meet Act 46 goals without merging."

The Common Benefits Clause of the Vermont Constitution and the Brighton decision.

Kelley said he expects justices will take "a couple of months" to hand down a decision. If the ruling is not in the plaintiffs' favor, so far their recourse ends. Kelley said.

"The only appeal from a state supreme court is to the U.S. Supreme Court, and that generally requires a federal or U.S. Constitutional issue," Kelley explained. "We focused only on the Vermont Constitution, so there is no avenue of appeal from here."

It is unlikely that the justices will ask for further information, Kelley said, despite that new information surfaced right before the trial. The Orleans Superior Supervisory Union was hit by a \$10.000 budget surprise. Schools which voluntarily merged receive an annual cap on budget increases. They must absorb that to a drop in the number of equalized states, while forced-merged schools have no such cap.

If the justices rule in favor of the plaintiffs, Kelley said "it is likely that local boards will have to be restored, and will need to sort it out." The matter could also be sent back to the state boards or could end up in the legislature, Kelley said.

In recent weeks, voters in two towns where schools merged to avoid a forced merger voted to undo the merger.



The Judeville Library is hosting a fundraising event. For 1 per hour, people can try to guess how many pennies are in the jar. Prizes will be awarded by Ross and Sawyer Community. The closest three guesses will win a gift certificate from Galaxy Bookshop.

photos by Doug McClure

Jeudevine Kicks off 2020 Fundraising

by Doug McClure

HARDWICK — The 2020 fundraising effort for the Jeudevine Library's Expansion is off and running. The first official event of the year involves a "demi-john" or "carbony," more commonly known as a gigantic jug. This particular jug is full of pennies and "weights a lot," according to Library Director Lisa Sammet, and it has a story behind it.

Former Gazette publisher Ross Connolly and his wife, the late Susan Jayzema, first moved to

Hardwick in July 1986 and, according to Sammet, decided to acquire a gas and heavy propane tank in thirty-three years on, Connolly and his son Sawyer, who had continued the tradition after Jerry's passing in 2011, donated the new full jug to the Jeudevine.

Sammet said Connolly contacted her last summer to make the arrangements, which included borrowing a daily to save the heavy object. Due to its weight, the jug has remained on the floor of the library.

See FUNDRAISING, 6

Select Board Candidates Outline Their Priorities

by Doug McClure

HARDWICK — At the 2020 Town Meeting, voters will elect their representatives to the Hardwick Select Board. This year, three positions are open: a three-year term currently held by Vice Chair Dennis Hale and two one-year seats held by Lucian Avery and Shari Cornish. Hale has been on the select board since 2010 with the exception of one year, 2015. Cornish is the longest serving select board member, having continuously held her seat since 2008, and Avery is the newest member, first elected in 2017.

One candidate vying for Hale's position is Galloway-Kane of East Hardwick. No formal candidate has filed a petition to run against Cornish or Avery. Voters can opt to write in a candidate during Town Meeting, and present their names in Vermont history where writers win office.

For the profiles printed in this week's Gazette, all of the candidates were asked the same set of 11 questions. The first question was to get some background on the candidate, the last was a summary form where general questions about what candidates view on how Hardwick was doing and what new ideas the person brought to the table, and the remainder were more open-ended questions addressing concerns residents have raised. The topics that the questions addressed included:

1. Should the town have a part-time person for economic development?
2. What are your thoughts on income inequality in Hardwick? Is there more the town could do?
3. Do you think anything can be done to lower property tax rates? Are there services you feel are too expensive to keep providing as a town?
4. What do you think are the best ways to address parking, pedestrian safety and walkability in Hardwick?
5. Do you think the town should help provide after-school gathering places for teens? If yes, what?
6. Some candidates addressed additional topics based on these questions; their responses are documented in the related series of articles. Without exception, all candidates expressed their opinion that Hardwick was a great place to live.

Lucian Avery: 'For the Public Good'

by Doug McClure

HARDWICK — Lucian Avery was born in California and moved to Hardwick from Marlville in 2000. He attended Peoples Academy and has his own blacksmithing business in Hardwick, which also offers classes. He feels that his job on the select board is something he should do "to make sure things are happening for the public good." He has been on the select board since 2017.

Avery said he feels Hardwick "is in a really great place to be a great place to live." He is "hesitant about big changes." Avery said the Yellow Barn project is "really large and super cool." He said he "likes a lot of hardwork and has mixed feelings" about it. At the same time, he feels that "the project works as proposed" and that "some good things" to come out of it. He said he isn't convinced the town needs more projects like this.

"I think it's good to the things that have people at the center," he said. "If we have large things we've been held to, it can get us in trouble." He does not agree with the proposed economic development position or its rationale. Avery said for people curious about his or her opportunities: "There are 3,000 people to talk to."

See AVERY, 6

Shari Cornish: 'A Self-Appointed Cheerleader for Hardwick'

by Doug McClure

HARDWICK — Shari Cornish has been on the Hardwick Select Board since 2008, its longest serving member. She said, "In those years, my regular job has changed from being a Sales Rep in the Gift Industry and working with clients in the entire state of Vermont and western Massachusetts to having my own business on Main Street in Hardwick." She runs the Whistle Ensemble on South Main, which opened in 2013.

Cornish described herself as a "member of this community, a volunteer and a self-appointed cheerleader." She is a volunteer on the Northeast Kingdom Arts Council for the Hardwick Town House. She said, "As president of that board of directors, I've been working with many other local volunteers for nearly 15 years to preserve and restore our historic opera house and cultural facility. I like to serve in these roles to help contribute to our town."

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She is a volunteer of the Yellow Barn project and has a happy that she has been on the Hardwick from that direction will continue to have the iconic, restored, historic yellow barn. It will welcome visitors and locals to town. The activities and jobs the entire project will create will benefit the local economy for years to come with the tenants that will set up business there. It will also offer more than 100 jobs to the town. She would love to communicate out of town for work.

See CORNISH, 4

Public Discusses Route 2 Plans

by Will Walters

PLAINFIELD — Issues and ideas regarding the redesign of the Rte. 2 and Main Street in the villages were brought before the select board recently.

A major concern was what responsibility the town will assume, and how the Vermont Agency of Transportation (VTAs) will act, if town infrastructure requires funding but the state will not absorb the cost for the work.

No VTAs representatives attended the meeting, but board chair Alexandria Thayer said the agency will be informed 2/3/20.

Topics of discussion, VTAs representatives have attended previous meetings when the redesign project was brought before the select board and public. Thayer said the meeting was an opportunity to raise any concerns or questions that are not addressed at an informational agency will be informed 2/3/20.

Several funds and therefore federal guidelines must be followed. Thayer said the state has indicated it has a declining amount of money to spend on roads. See PLANS, 5



According to Greensboro Fire, on the afternoon of January 20, Hardwick Police contacted the department to report a pickup truck had partially rolled over through the ice about a mile out, near the border along on Colgate Lane. The occupants had made it safely to shore. The truck was successfully righted out of the ice after nearly ten hours.

Cabot Wins Scholars' Bowl for Second Year

by Doug McClure

MONTPELIER — The team from Cabot School captured its second straight small-school state title at the Vermont-NEA Scholars' Bowl held its preliminary round playoffs at Montpelier on Saturday, January 25.

The Scholars' Bowl is the state-wide high school question-and-answer competition, similar to "Jeopardy!" but featuring teams of high school students and with a heavier focus on the academic curriculum. Schools with enrollments of 500 or fewer students in grades 9-12 are eligible for the small school title. Cabot is by far the smallest school in the league with just over 30 high schoolers.

The small-school playoffs start-off with semifinal matches that saw Cabot defeat Lamotte, 380-130, and Woodstock knock out Montpelier, 365-125.

Earlier on Saturday all the league's teams played five preliminary playoff matches, with those winning at least three earning the right to compete for the overall state championship at the state level on March 28. Cabot posted a 3-2 mark to earn a place in the final rounds alongside Burlington, Champlain Valley Regional, Hanover, Lamotte, Middlebury, South Burlington, St. Johnsbury and Woodstock.

the small-school final, pulling away in the second half for a 320-235 victory. The Hankins join Montpelier as teams that have won the small-school competition twice in its sixty-year history.

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Ceildh Galloway-Kane: 'A Community of Possibility'

by Doug McClure

HARDWICK — Ceildh Galloway-Kane said she was "one of the most fortunate people in Hardwick." She was born in 1989. She attended Hardwick Elementary School and Hardwick Union, then went to Saint Colville High School in Northampton, Massachusetts, where she majored in Art History and Museum Studies. She found a passion for Art Education and took a position at the Portland, Maine Children's Museum. But she missed home and returned to the area.

She worked at Americanos in St. Johnsbury first, and since then has worked as the head of Cultural Arts at the Orleans Southwest Shippers' Union, and served on the Hazen board for three years. She also was the Executive Director of GreenVT's WoodArts for five years. Currently, she is the REACH Program Director.

She said several factors to explain her move to Hardwick. She said that in her view Hardwick is a "community of possibility, of support and collaboration, and we're leading in a good direction." At the same time, she said she "misses things going on in town," especially whenever every one has the ability to access those advantages.

See GALLOWAY-KANE, 4

Danny Hale: 'Think of Hardwick as an Entity'

by Doug McClure

HARDWICK Danny Hale was born in Hardwick and has served our citizens for almost 20 years. He has been on the select board since his tenure, the select board has seen Hardwick through the later stages of its sometimes painful rebirth, which Hale described as "brave."

"It has been through the hard and what I consider the good," Hale said. "We're bringing our institutional knowledge" to the table and strong infrastructure background. Hale said only understands the infrastructure, but he's been on the front lines doing some of the work himself. He said along with the select board, the town's involvement comes a knowledge of how much it costs.

"The town is almost like a living thing," Hale said. "Something you need to feed. You need to think of Hardwick as an entity."

Hale said the select board has been practicing about "paying attention to state mandates" which he put the town in a favorable position to handle.

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