



photo by Vanessa Fournier
A third-grade classroom of empty desks at Hardwick Elementary is a silent after all schools in Vermont were officially closed on March 18 after Gov. Phil Scott declared a State of Emergency.



photo by Doug McClure
At lunchtime on Friday, March 20, cars were few and far between in downtown Hardwick as the seriousness of the COVID-19 pandemic became clear. Many downtown businesses have closed their doors but remain ready to help customers with take-out, online orders and some home delivery.



photo by Vanessa Fournier
Burlington Co-op worker Katherine Arnold (right) delivers an order to customer Marisa Neheyfus (left) of Walden on Friday, as the Co-op has closed its doors to the public.

People Gather at the Only Place Left: Online

by Emmett Avery

HARDWICK — Over the past few weeks, as measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19 have tightened, communities in the greater Hardwick area have come together virtually, sharing advice and knowledge about how to make the best of current conditions. Front Porch Forum, the online mixture of town hall and yard sale, has been a popular platform for this virtual gathering and sharing. Resource lists have sprung up to gather and organize potential volunteer efforts, and individuals have written in offering help, advice and concerns. A Google Doc was created for the greater Hardwick area on

which people from Woodbury, Walden, Plainfield and Hardwick have signed up to provide various services to anyone who may be in need. Services ranging from running errands and delivering groceries to monetary assistance with fuel bills and Spanish-English medical interpretation and translation are available. For the Southern NEK, and Craftsbury specifically, two sign-up forms have been put into circulation. Megan Mathers, organizer of the southern NEK list said that over 175 people have already signed up to provide support to their community should the need arise. "People are offering services anywhere from running errands to providing peer-to-peer support for those in isolation," she

said. "Luckily," according to Mathers, the list has not yet received any requests for help. "Right now we're just trying to get the word out, especially to people who may not have internet access." Mathers, along with many others, are volunteering their time to try to help their communities. "I think it's important to have a network of volunteers set up to

support the community no matter the circumstances," she said, "It sometimes takes a flame under our feet to get it going." Front Porch Forum has also provided many other bits of information in its standard listings. These posts have ranged from serious warnings by the administrators of the platform instructing people to fact-check what they

are posting before they do it, they might have added advice to fact-check the things you read before taking action as well, to advice on how to deal with kids home from school and the standard-issue "free pet birds," and someone apparently looking for an update on a missing cat asking, "Did they find it?" One user offered to talk to any-

one by phone who might be living alone and taking isolation badly and encouraged others to "check in on people" by phone. "You might not have anyone to talk to. In this time of isolation and "social distancing," the message that community is what will carry everyone through comes up over and over. Many in the community are opting for social isolation, the name of physical distance. While some are collecting names and

collating potential volunteerism, others are trying to re-frame our community's conversation at a time. Hardwick resident Karen Brown recently noted that the term "social distancing," which has seen a rapid entrance into the national psyche, is kind of a misnomer. It is physical separation that is so important to slow the spread of the disease while, she says, being socially isolated is optimal.

Buildings Closed to Public, Meetings Suspended

by Will Walters

PLAINFIELD — Governance of the town is coming to an end standstill with the recent action by the select board to suspend meetings of all boards and commissions in town as part of its response plan for the COVID-19 pandemic. While governance and administrative bodies of the town government are currently in abeyance, the working sectors will continue to operate as usual. The highway department, water and wastewater departments and the town clerk's office will continue operations, but will limit contact with the public. The clerk's office will continue behind closed doors with Clerk Linda Wells and Assistant Clerk Carol Smith working their usual hours in the municipal building. The public will not have access to the office itself, but will be able to be in contact with Wells

and Smith by telephone, email and USPS mail. The other departments will be available to the public by telephone or email. The suspension of meetings is the result of the select board's closing the municipal building and the Town Hall and Opera House to the public to help stem the spread of COVID-19. Since the public must be able to attend meetings of public bodies by law, meetings cannot be held in these buildings. The board cancelled March 23 meeting and will stay scheduled for its April 13 meeting and how low the situation develops.

The board discussed whether there should be an exception for Emergency Management Director Alexandra Thayer, who is also the select board chair, to the closure of the Town Hall-Opera House to all since the building would

See SUSPENDED, 6

Hardwick Grocery Stores Adapting to Pandemic

by Doug McClure

HARDWICK — In Hardwick, even with two full-sized grocery stores and a co-op, the combination of people rushing to stock up and the state's urging people not to congregate in large numbers has created interesting times. The Hardwick Village Market is operating as normal, but the Buffalo Mountain Co-op has taken the step of doing shopping for customers and having people pick up their food curbside rather

than letting people shop in close quarters inside the store. The Buffalo Mountain Co-op has taken the step of doing shopping for customers and having people pick up their food curbside rather than letting people shop in close quarters inside the store. The Buffalo Mountain Co-op has taken the step of doing shopping for customers and having people pick up their food curbside rather than letting people shop in close quarters inside the store. The Buffalo Mountain Co-op has taken the step of doing shopping for customers and having people pick up their food curbside rather than letting people shop in close quarters inside the store.



photo by Doug McClure
Craftsbury resident Michael Roussel, who has owned The Tailor Shop in Stowe for decades, is busy assembling surgical masks from unused, cloth vacuum bags and has put out a call for donations.

Tailor Shop Makes Medical Masks from Vacuum Bags

by June Pichel Cook

CRAFTSBURY — When Gov. Phil Scott ordered nonessential businesses to close, the owners of The Tailor Shop in Stowe chose to use their time, expertise and facilities, productively. Michael and Lise Roussel, who have owned and operated the shop for decades, immediately turned their attention to making medical masks. In the face of an acute shortage of medical masks, the Roussells are making and donating face masks and reusable face masks for first responders, medical personnel and essential businesses.

The Roussells' daughter, Jodie, said they closed their shop but wanted to do something to help and started making the face masks. "We can sew and sew fast," she said. "We put out a call to help up with donations of fabric cloth vacuum cleaner bags, unused, because they are made of melt blown fabric." Roussel explained that cloth vacuum cleaner bags are made of a fine mesh, synthetic polymer fiber and are used for the inner filtration layer of the face masks they are making. It allows the wearer to breathe and reduces in-flow of infectious microorganisms.

A study published by Cambridge University following the H1N1 Avian Flu Epidemic showed it as the second best material in comparison to an industrial manufactured surgical mask. Melt down fabric fibers have diameters less than one micron and are in the nano area, she explained. The Roussells' Front Porch Forum post was a "call to help with donations," but as importantly, lists web sites looking at the science behind the homemade mask. "We want people to be the science," Roussel said. "We've made several dozen and donated them

to the Craftsbury General Store and others." Roussel said they are coordinating with towns and Copley Hospital and are also making covers for N95 surgical masks. The cotton covers can be washed and the high-quality surgical masks reused. "The basic cotton mix in the cover masks blocks about 60 to 70 percent of particles," she said. "The reusable masks are made with the vacuum cleaner bag cloth." The masks are made with ear straps and a nose band and have See MASKS, 3

Neighbors Helping Neighbors, Task Force Helping

by June Pichel Cook

CRAFTSBURY — The town's Neighbors Helping Neighbors task force response to action was almost immediate last week, with residents alerted by post card and on the town website. Select board member Susie Houston formed the task force with co-chair Kris Noville and community members. The Craftsbury Neighbors Volunteer Team is available at townof-craftsbury.com.

Houston said people had already stepped up; volunteers, village businesses, the library, school, college, and churches. The task force grew out of these efforts. "It is my meeting last week, the select board discussed emergency management protocols, and Houston invited people who represented public spaces to attend the meeting. We discussed this so we could all have a plan," she said, "and from that, the Neighbor to Neighbor task force was formed. They charged ahead with post cards, lists of people who are vulnerable,

and resources." The task force has been meeting through videoconferencing with Zoom and teleconferencing. As of Monday, Houston said many volunteers have signed up, but calls for help have been received. "I received one call," she said, "from someone thanking us for putting it together. One person signed up for help. A lot of volunteers and neighbors have taken it upon themselves to help others they know." The town's website has information on North Country Federal Credit Union, food producers, unemployment, food, procurement, insurance. See GRAPPLE, 5

Towns Grapple With COVID-19

by Doug McClure

HARDWICK, WOLCOTT — With COVID-19 impacting daily life, both Hardwick and Wolcott have persevered with scheduled select board meetings via Google Meet. The open question is whether these virtual meetings are completely legal, given that Vermont's Open Meeting Laws were drafted when carrier pigeons were state-of-the-art and Secretary of State Anne Condos was quoted in media as having no

idea videoconferenced meetings could be recorded. Both Hardwick and Wolcott managed to put together cohesive meetings without incident, except for the awkward failure to hit mute a few times. Hardwick Town Manager Shaun Fielder said both at the meeting and separately in a statement that he "wouldn't want anybody to think our critical operations are affected" and said the focus for the public should be on following direction from the state.

Apparently people have started flushing cleaning wipes down their toilets, or trying to, which is creating problems. He said, "Please remember only flush #1, #2, and toilet paper. Other products, such as baby wipes, do not break down and can cause significant problems with wastewater collection lines and pump stations. For anyone on a private septic system, the same concept applies: anything you flush in #2 and toilet paper will not break down and clog the lines." See NEIGHBORS, 4