



They're back

After a four-year hiatus, Maiden Vermont is returning to Town Hall Theater. See Arts + Leisure.



Tough night

Burr & Burton shrugged off an early Tiger TD and rolled to a win on Friday. See Page 1B.



Town clerk

Meet the new official in charge of Salisbury town land records and the like. See Page 2A.

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CONOR MCMANUS HAS taken over management of Middlebury's Happy Valley Orchard just as the growing season was rocked by a late spring frost and summer floods. But McManus has plans to keep the business humming along.
Independent photo/Steve James

Sparse apple crop won't deter Happy Valley's McManus

By **JOHN FLOWERS**

MIDDLEBURY — "When life gives you lemons, make lemonade," is American writer Elbert Hubbard's enduring ode to optimism.

Local orchardist Conor McManus has almost cornered the market on optimism.

But apples? Not so much.

A cruel spring frost robbed

Middlebury's Happy Valley Orchard of roughly 98% of its 2023 crop. So McManus's credo this year can best be described as, "If life doesn't give you apples, bring some in and diversify your operation to make it resilient for the long haul."

McManus, 44, has indeed picked a difficult year to take
(See Happy Valley, Page 13A)

\$25M city senior housing plan good to go

Vergennes Grand construction to begin soon

By **ANDY KIRKALDY**

VERGENNES — Five years and several setbacks after first launching their plans for a major expansion and renovation of Vergennes Residential Care, a home for seniors just off the city green, Charlotte residents Dan and Rebecca Hassan have finally lined

up the financing for what is now just over a \$25 million project.

Beginning in a few weeks, Dan Hassan said that funding will allow the transformation of the existing 18-bed senior housing facility, a 200-year-old property at 34 North St., into an interconnected 53-room, four-building care home

capable of accommodating up to 82 seniors with modest means. It will also triple the business's employee count from 18 to an estimated 48.

The Hassans call the project Vergennes Grand Senior Living. It will include roughly 40,000 square feet of new construction and what the Hassans call a historically sensitive renovation

of the existing 10,000-square-foot North Street building that fronts the northwest corner of Vergennes' central park.

Their plans have been backed by city officials and members of the Vergennes business community, who see Vergennes Grand meeting a need for area seniors, providing jobs, and bringing patrons to other
(See City housing, Page 9A)



Puppy plunge!

A **HUMAN ORGANIZER** of Woofstock Walk for the Animals in Middlebury gushed about how the weather really turned out for Sunday's fundraiser for Homeward Bound, Addison County's Humane Society. But this beagle didn't seem to care whether it was raining or sunny when her turn came to dive into the Middlebury town pool. It was a lot of fun for everyone. See more photos on Page 10A.
Independent photo/Steve James

MUMS teacher inspired by a Holocaust hero

Bérubé learns by tracing his footsteps

By **JOHN FLOWERS**

MIDDLEBURY — Middlebury Union Middle School French teacher Denise Bérubé's summer experience as an inquisitive tourist is about to pay nice educational dividends for her students.

Her recent two-week trip to

France, Spain and Portugal has given her new insights into the late Aristides de Sousa Mendes, a Portuguese diplomat who saved thousands of Jewish refugees from the Nazis during the early stages of World War II. The aftermath of her sojourn will produce pen-pal

opportunities, as well as lessons in history, languages, geography, selflessness and compassion for many MUMS sixth-, seventh- and eighth-graders.

Bérubé developed an interest in the experiences of World War II Holocaust survivors through her long friendship with Simon Barenbaum, a former

Middlebury College educator. Barenbaum was part of a Jewish family residing in France during the German occupation of that nation during the early 1940s. He and most of his family were able to escape deportation to Nazi concentration camps thanks to their determination, family
(See Mendes, Page 8A)

Climate group will help homeowners decarbonize

By **MARIN HOWELL**

ADDISON COUNTY — The Climate Economy Action Center of Addison County is launching a pilot program that will offer free one-on-one support to county residents looking to

reduce their home's energy use and greenhouse gas emissions.

The "Navigator Project" will kick off later this fall and is designed to help homeowners and renters identify
(See CEAC, Page 9A)

Thompson steps down as Porter president

MIDDLEBURY — Tom Thompson, who has been leading Porter Medical Center for around three years, will step away from his role as president and chief operating officer of the Middlebury health care hub as of Sept. 18. He will focus his time and energy on a pressing family health matter.

"We have had opportunities to face many challenges and achieve great success together at Porter," Thompson said in a message to staff. "I leave feeling like my work with you all remains unfinished but know you will continue to serve and care for our patients and residents with the professional, compassionate care you have always shown our community."

As of Monday, Bob Ortmeyer will begin serving the UVM
(See Thompson, Page 11A)



SGT. JASON COVEY, a 23-year veteran of the Middlebury Police Department, has been named its new chief. He begins his duties Sept. 18.
Independent photo/John Flowers

Covey new Middlebury police chief

Sergeant promoted to lead department

By **JOHN FLOWERS**

MIDDLEBURY — The Middlebury selectboard on Tuesday unanimously selected a new police chief: Jason Covey.

Currently a sergeant with the department, Covey joined the MPD 23 years ago as a patrolman.

Covey, 47, will officially begin his new duties on Sept. 18. That's when he'll take over the top spot from longtime Middlebury Police Chief Tom Hanley, who's retiring after having led Addison County's largest municipal police department since 1991.

"It's exciting," Covey said of his new job. "The possibilities are endless. I'm energetic, I have so many ideas that are racing in
(See New chief, Page 14A)



By the way

Middlebury Union High School French teacher Michelle Steele never imagined her fall semester sabbatical spent in Morocco would coincide with a natural disaster. But it has. Steele and her family are currently in Rabat while she's visiting local public
(See By the way, Page 8A)

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Mendes

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connections and luck — though Simon’s older brother perished in Auschwitz.

“He was my mentor,” Bérubé said of Barenbaum, who has since moved away from Middlebury. “His own story is nothing short of remarkable; the fact he is still among us is miraculous.”

Deepening Bérubé’s interest in Holocaust survivors was the 1993 film “Schindler’s List,” which follows Oskar Schindler, a German industrialist who saved more than 1,000 Jewish refugees from the Holocaust by employing them in his factories during World War II.

She had also heard of Raoul Wallenberg, a Swedish architect, diplomat and humanitarian who — while serving as Sweden’s special envoy in Budapest between July and December 1944 — saved thousands of Jews in German-occupied Hungary from German Nazis and Hungarian fascists. He did so by offering them protective passports and shelter in buildings that he deemed “Swedish territory.”

But good teachers are always learning, and Bérubé this past March became aware of yet another heroic figure of World War II, while attending a Vermont Holocaust Memorial workshop: Aristides de Sousa Mendes, who, as the Portuguese consul stationed in Bordeaux, France, issued thousands of visas to refugees trying to escape the Nazi war machine that was sweeping across Europe during the spring of 1940.

Sousa Mendes issued an estimated 30,000 visas in defiance of an order from Portugal’s pro-Hitler dictator Antonio de Oliveira Salazar. Salazar had ordered all of Portugal’s diplomats to deny safe haven to refugees — “including explicitly Jews, Russians, and stateless persons who could not freely return to their countries of origin,” according to a narrative posted on the Sousa Mendes Foundation website.

“He said, ‘From now on, I’m giving everyone visas. There are no more nationalities, races or religions,’” Bérubé said.

She wanted to learn more about Sousa Mendes and found a wonderful opportunity to do so. She and other attendees of the March Holocaust Memorial workshop learned of an 11-day “Journey on the Road to Freedom” trip from Bordeaux, France, to Lisbon, Portugal. Participants would retrace the footsteps of Sousa Mendes and the refugees he saved back in 1940.

“I found the price reasonable, read more about it and thought, ‘I have to attend this; there’s no way I can let this go by,’” Bérubé recalled.

She signed up, and on July 15 was winging her way to Bordeaux for the first leg of the “Road to Freedom.”

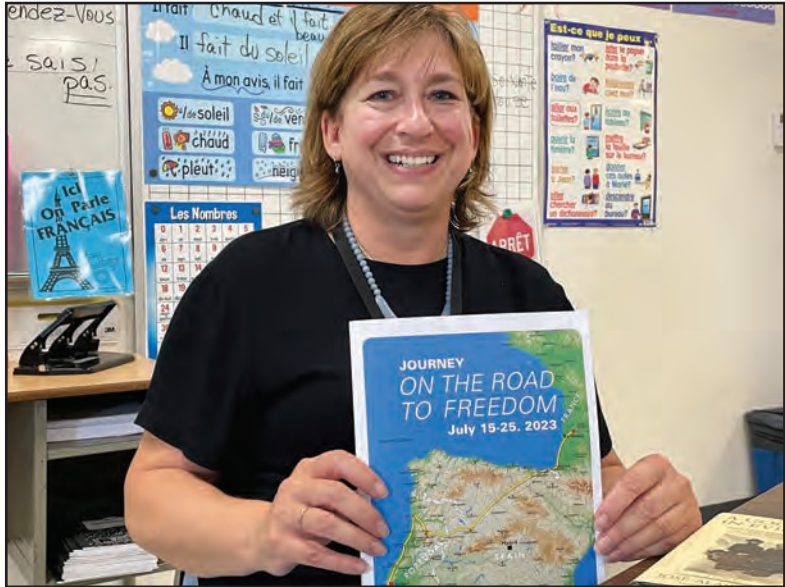
Bérubé was one of a few dozen participants from all walks of life. There were educators, businesspeople, retirees and another demographic that made the trip even more palpable and moving: Folks who had either secured one of the Sousa Mendes “freedom visas” 83 years ago, or who had a descendant who had hit that lifesaving lottery.

FELLOW TRAVELER



MIDDLEBURY UNION MIDDLE School educator Denise Bérubé stands between Teresa de Sousa Mendes and Aristides de Sousa Mendes — who bears the same name as his grandfather, one of the unsung heroes of World War II. The elder Aristides de Sousa Mendes, as Portuguese consul stationed in Bordeaux, France, issued thousands of visas to Jewish refugees trying to escape Nazi persecution. Bérubé retraced the steps of those refugees during a recent trip to Europe.

Photo courtesy of Denise Bérubé



MUMS FRENCH TEACHER Denise Bérubé recently traveled to France, Spain and Portugal to learn more about Aristides de Sousa Mendes, who saved thousands of Jewish refugees during World War II. Independent photo/John Flowers

She spoke with particular fondness for fellow Road to Freedom trip participant Marc Cassier, now 88, who had been 5 when he received a Sousa Mendes visa. He brought his wife and their three children to France to retrace the steps he had taken as a scared child fleeing what would have likely been deportation to a Nazi death camp.

“We found the locations where Marc stayed with his mother and father,” Bérubé recounted. “The emotion during that was incredible.”

Indeed, 2023 has been a year of astounding revelations for the Cassier family. Bérubé noted that only six months prior to the trip, Marc had learned his father’s last name was in fact “Horowitz.”

His parents thought it would enhance their son’s survival chances if he didn’t carry a Jewish family name.

“(Marc) went through 88 years of his life thinking he was a ‘Cassier,’” Bérubé said.

The Road to Freedom travelers began their odyssey at Sousa Mendes’s former office in Bordeaux, then it was off to Bayonne, France (where Sousa issued visas); Hendaye, France

(site of a bridge linking France with Spain); Vilar Formoso, Portugal (where a new “Frontier of Peace” museum pays tribute to Sousa Mendes); Cabanas de Viriato, Portugal (site of the Sousa Mendes family home and his burial plot); and the Portuguese capital of Lisbon (to see the Sousa Mendes visa registry book, listing the names of the visa recipients).

Each stop offered nourishment for the eyes and soul, as the story of the original Road to Freedom unfolded amid the panorama of some of Europe’s most scenic and historical locations. Readings and survivors’ testimonials transported Bérubé and her colleagues back in time.

The 2023 Road to Freedom trip culminated at Lisbon’s harbor, where the refugees had left their old lives to begin a new chapter in safer surroundings.

“It was absolutely moving, quite often emotional, educational and inspirational,” she said of the trip. “It went way beyond my expectations.”

While his humanitarian deeds command great respect today, Sousa Mendes was pilloried by the Salazar regime following his visa actions. Salazar stripped him of his diplomatic position and essentially forbade him from earning a living.

Sousa Mendes had 15 children, who were themselves blacklisted and prevented from attending university or finding meaningful work, according to the Sousa Mendes Foundation. The family’s ancestral home, known as “Casa do Passal,” was repossessed by the bank and eventually sold to cover debts.

Aristides de Sousa Mendes died on April 3, 1954, in “poverty and disgrace,” according to the foundation that bears his name. He was buried in a Franciscan tunic for lack of resources.

“He had to rely on soup kitchens to eat,” Bérubé said.

Bérubé has already begun sharing her Road to Freedom experiences with her students. She said the children are grasping the principles of selflessness and altruism that Sousa Mendes was practicing long before they were born.

“It’s important to respect differences and to be caring,” she said of a major takeaway for students.

She noted one of her 7th-grade students drew this profound conclusion: “‘We have to study history to be aware of the mistakes that were made so we don’t repeat them.’ This was a 12-year-old who said that,” she marveled.

Bérubé hopes students at MUMS and other schools will want to learn even more about Sousa Mendes, perhaps elevating his name and reputation to that of Schindler and Wallenberg. That momentum has begun, with Portugal more fully recognizing their native son’s lifesaving civil disobedience by naming a school and creating a museum in his honor.

“He’s virtually unknown, and that has to be changed,” Bérubé said. “We’re living in a time when we need examples like the one he left us — to do the right thing, to be kind, be empathetic for the sake of humanity.”

Bérubé said a correspondence exchange is in the works between 34 MUMS 6th-graders and their counterparts at the Sousa Mendes school in Carregal do Sal, Portugal. Those Sousa Mendes students are learning English.

“It opens so many doors,” Bérubé said of cultural exchange.

Reporter John Flowers is at johnf@addisonindependent.com.

By the way

(Continued from Page 1A)
schools, taking courses, leading seminars and collaborating with Moroccan and American colleagues as part of a Fulbright Distinguished Teacher honor. Steele, through social media, announced she and her family are safe and sound following a magnitude 6.8 earthquake responsible for more than 2,900 deaths in the North African nation. “Luckily, here in Rabat we’ve seen no damages, and life is continuing as ‘normal,’” she wrote. Steele, a Bristol resident, is suggesting donations to nonprofits that are helping affected Moroccans. Check them out here: tinyurl.com/2p85hfyf.

Vermont Emergency Eats (VEE) continues to distribute meals to flood-impacted Vermonters through September and October — including here in Addison County, via The Giving Fridge at 51 Main St. in Middlebury. The program is based on the COVID-era Vermont Everyone Eats program, which ended earlier this year. But the program has been revived for a limited time in light of summer flooding throughout the state that knocked out public infrastructure and damaged homes and businesses. Thanks to a state-authorized extension, VEE — which was originally set to last 30 days — will continue for up to 90 days in areas hardest hit by recent flooding, including Addison, Caledonia, Chittenden, Lamoille, Orange, Orleans, Rutland, Washington, Windham and Windsor counties. Any local folks whose food security has been affected as a result of recent flooding and meets the qualifications outlined on the Vermont Emergency Eats website, may email meals@givingfridge.com to reserve meals for delivery. Call 2-1-1 or visit vtemergencyeats.org for more information. Also, visit givingfridge.com.

The United Way of Addison County is organizing its annual “Days of Caring,” which on Sept. 21 and 23 will see local folks help more than a dozen nonprofits with projects ranging from paperwork to fence painting. It’s all part of the launch of the United Way’s 2023 fund drive (which will be detailed in next Thursday’s *Independent*.) If you are an individual able to help out or an employer with workers to spare on either (or both) of the Days of Caring, please contact Amy Hoekstra at amyh@unitedwayaddisoncounty.org.

Middlebury Safe Routes celebrates walking and biking to school on the first Wednesday of the month from September to June. Organizers are encouraged by the growing numbers of students and their families and staff walking and biking to school and work. Mary Hogan Elementary had 25 bikes on its racks this week, and Middlebury Union high and middle schools each had about a dozen. Those numbers typically increase on “Walk & Roll” days. Middlebury Safe Routes recognizes students walking or rolling (bus, bike, skate, scooter) to school with a special greeting and reward (pencil, sticker, etc.). Families are encouraged to form Walking School Bus Routes or Bike Trains

from their neighborhoods, or get dropped off at remote points (such as the Shaw’s Supermarket lot or Memorial Sports Center) and walk in from there. And note that the Oct. 4 Walk and Roll to School Day is an international event that will join children all over the world.

Gov. Phil Scott and mental health professionals are urging Vermonters to check in on themselves and on others and to learn about the many mental health supports and resources available throughout the state. September is National Suicide Prevention Awareness Month, a time to focus on helping ourselves and others navigate stressors and difficulties and recognize the warning signs that someone is in crisis. In 2022, there were 127 suicide deaths among Vermont residents, a slight decrease from 2021. “We do not need to face our challenges alone. It’s important to recognize that it’s OK not to be OK, and seeking help is a brave step on the journey of healing,” said Department of Mental Health Deputy Commissioner Alison Krompf in a press release. “By listening and sharing our experiences we can start to make it easier to ask for help and get help when we need it.” Vermonters are encouraged to tap into the many state- and community-based services to support their mental and emotional health. Call 988 for the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline or text “VT” to 741741 for the Crisis Text Line. Trained counselors are available 24/7.

Join the Addison County Democrats for a panel discussion on Traditional Medicare vs. Medicare Advantage at 5:30 p.m. on Monday, Sept. 18, in the Community Room at Middlebury’s Ilsley Public Library. In anticipation of the upcoming enrollment period, scheduled speakers will provide insight into these plans from the perspective of healthcare providers and policy experts. Pizza and refreshments will follow the discussion. Zoom attendance option is at tinyurl.com/ACDCpanel (pre-registration required).

The Five Town Friends of the Arts (FTFA) is now accepting applications for the fall round of community grants. These grants are meant to help fund activities and events in the fine arts, performing arts, history, and other cultural experiences that will enrich the lives of people living in Bristol, Lincoln, Monkton, New Haven and Starksboro. The goal of FTFA is to expose children and teens to arts and culture. Preference will be given to projects that meet that goal. Previous recipients have included libraries, schools seeking funding for special events or artists in residence, theater programs and other community groups with great ideas in need of funding. Applications are due on or before Oct. 15 and can be downloaded from the organization website: www.5townfriendsofthearts.org. Please send completed applications to FiveTownFOA@gmail.com (preferred) or mail to FTFA, c/o Art on Main, 25 Main Street, Bristol, VT 05443.

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Addison, VT Homeowner Recommends Bristol Electronics

Bristol Electronics installed our solar panels early this summer and all the sunny days have been pushing our meter backward at a good rate. It feels good to be contributing to “the grid”. Working with Chris, Steve, Dave and the other B.E. employees was a pleasure. They were well informed, patient and flexible as we worked through some early unforeseen roadblocks. We strongly recommend this company if you are interested in having solar energy at your home installed by a responsive, responsible company.

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