

VERMONT'S VOICE

AGRICULTURE

GOVERNMENT

NATURAL BEAUTY

6 Months in Local Government

By Karen Carlock – Town of Vermont Clerk

Until becoming the Town of Vermont clerk, I had never voted in a local election. While I do remember taking Civics class in school and learning each of us had civic duties such as voting and jury duty, what I didn't take away from that course was the key role local government plays in a democratic society. As I've become immersed in local government, I've been wrestling with how to articulate why I now believe in the importance of local government. Is it just because I'm involved now and I want it to matter?

In the English translation of *De la democratie en Amerique*, first published in 1835, Alexis Tocqueville concludes that local government promotes responsible citizenship by encouraging the formation of civic associations and attaching citizens psychologically to the ideal of democratic self-governance. The Wisconsin Towns Association motto states the importance of local government more directly: "Lose Local Government and You Will Lose America."

TheUSAOnline.com lists the basic services of the state and local governments as the following: plan and pay for roads, run public schools, provide water, organize police and fire services, establish zoning, license professional and arrange elections. Every day, the existence and quality of these services impact each of us directly. These services

our local towns provide should matter to members of the local community and prompt interest in local government. Yet, in my view, there is something less tangible that has the potential to cultivate engagement in, and awareness of, local government - community.

I recently came across a 2007 Vermont's Voice article featuring Lola Forshaug. She is asked what has changed the most about Vermont and one of her immediate responses is "the residents." The author of the article, Jane Hanson, adds that "no longer are residents solely the closely-related third and fourth generation offspring of the first settlers, who lived miles apart but were true help-mates in times of need." As a community or business grows, some amount of the much-dreaded "bureaucracy" is inevitable, but as part of a community with an active local government, you are known, represented and your interests matter. Residents of the Town of Vermont may have differing views. Each one of us will not always have our viewpoint implemented. While no longer solely comprised of family members, residents of Vermont can be united as members of this community. I assert that local government is best positioned to develop trust between community members and a sense of pride of "ownership" in one's community. With residents' involvement and participation in local government, we can foster and grow a better, stronger Vermont community.

Clerk's Corner

Get Involved - Vermont Town Picnic Event!

For the past several years, Vermont has held an annual Town Picnic at Tyrol Basin. While always well received by those in attendance, we're looking for your feedback on the event. Please call Karen Carlock, Clerk, at 608-767-2457 to share any suggestions. And please let Karen know if you are interested in participating on the committee to plan the 2015 event.

Do you live in the Mt. Horeb Fire District?

We have an opportunity for you to get involved in your community and **represent Vermont** on the Mt. Horeb Fire District Board. The role involves one meeting each month and a monthly report to the Town Chair regarding any meeting outcomes. This is a key role where your representation helps the Mt. Horeb Fire Department to best serve their Town of Vermont residents. Contact clerk@townofvermont.com if interested.

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The Renewal of the Helmenstine Woods

By David Stanfield and Earl Brandt

The 300-acre Helmenstine Farm, located on the western edge of the Town of Vermont on County Road FF, has been in the Helmenstine family for over 100 years, and is now managed by Jerome and Jackie Helmenstine.

Jerome grew up on the farm when cattle pastured in the approximately 130 acres in woods. Fences had to be repaired each spring to contain them. The woods were like manicured parks, with stately burr oaks, hickory, oak and a few walnut. They framed the cultivated fields stretching from the ridges on the south and west to the marsh land bordering East Branch of the Blue Mounds Creek across FF. Some wooded ridges had been cleared for work land, as Jerome says, "to help pay the mortgage and taxes on the land".

In 1979 Jerome decided to modernize the dairy, and built facilities for confining the dairy cows along with an upgraded pipeline milking system. This revised management of the cattle meant they no longer roamed the woods. In a few years honeysuckle, buckthorn, and prickly ash invaded the understory of the majestic trees.

In 2002, the Helmenstines enrolled 80 acres of their woods in the Managed Forest Law program administered through Wisconsin's Department of Natural Resources. This program reduces property taxes on the enrolled woodlands in exchange for management of the woods that encourages re-growth of hardwood trees and a flourishing wildlife. This work is also supported by the Natural Resources Conservation Service of the US Department of Agriculture.

Jerome and Jackie embarked on a program of renewing the 80 acres of woods, a few acres at a time. They receive 50% of the cost of brush removal to allow for re-growth of hardwoods and the awakening of long dormant native grasses. This financing also covers seeding of native grasses such as sideoats grama, and wild flowers. The Helmenstines themselves finance the other 50% of the costs, which also includes contracting a large brush cutting machine and chain saw wielding teams of contracted workers.

None of this would have been possible, however, without the help of Jerome's and Jackie's sons, Dustin and Daren, and other family members' friends who have been willing to spend a considerable amount of their time climbing the ridges, wading through the brambles with chain saws and burning the refuse around the woods.

Jerome and Jackie envision the woods as it was 40 years ago, but with more hardwoods, along with the addition of a couple of small ponds and their wood ducks and fish and the return of once rare birds, such as red headed woodpeckers, whippoorwills, killdeers, and even turtles nesting on the hills. The moon can now be seen from the kitchen window shining through the burr oaks. The Helmenstines have been able to mobilize many people who share their enjoyment of the renewed woods, native plants and wildlife to help make real what was once just a dream.



Jerome and Jackie Helmenstine pose on one of their hills

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Wonderful World of Bees

By Chris Coffin

Because I recently talked with a friend who lost her entire bee colony due to a neighbor's pesticide use, and because President Obama recently outlined an agenda to help the pollinators' lot in life, it seemed a good time to write a bit about honeybees.

Over the past 10 years or so there have been many articles about the declining numbers of *Apis Mellifera* as it is known. Colony Collapse Disorder, a sudden massive die-off of bees, has been blamed on pesticide use, loss of habitat, parasites, fungicides and viruses. Whatever the cause, about half of the managed US bee colonies have disappeared. This translates into the fact that our food supply will be markedly affected with so many fewer pollinators.

Bees pollinate about one third of our food supply. They are a \$15 billion economic resource and are shipped all over the United States to pollinate various crops. Blueberries in Maine & Michigan, apples in Washington, almonds in California and cherries in Wisconsin are a few of the crops bees pollinate around the country. Cotton and coffee are also on the list.

Pollinators create a greater diversity of plant life by carrying pollen between plants. This helps ensure plants will be better able to adapt to changes in growing conditions naturally. Flying from plant to plant, bees carry pollen grains stuck to their hair, from the male part of one plant to the female part of other plants.

Honeybees also take nectar into their stomachs and regurgitate it numerous times in the hive and then fan it with their wings to help evaporate the water. Honey is the result. A pound of clover honey comes from visits to about 8.7 million flowers.

President Obama outlined three points in his Pollinator Research Action Plan on May 19. Stem the population loss, increase the number of monarch butterflies and set aside land for all pollinators to thrive. He called for more research into the impact of pesticides on pollinators. Some studies have shown adverse effects of Neonicotinoids on pollinators-some commercial seeds are coated with these to ward off pests. The report focused on environmental and economic impacts of pollinator decline.



In 2006 researchers decoded the honeybee genome. Further research is focusing on building a "superbee" that would be more able to resist pesticides and parasites such as the varroa mite, a tick-like mite that weakens the bee. Trying to genetically modify bees has proven difficult. The basic question remains also-should we try to genetically modify the bee or modify our own behavior? Phil Chandler, author of *The Barefoot Beekeeper*, calls it a "persistent delusion" that humans can control nature. Chandler feels better bees will be built by bees themselves as they adapt to changing environments. According to Chandler, the biggest threat to honeybees is industrial agriculture. He maintains it is better to think of what is best for the bees instead of what is best for us.

A century ago feral bees pollinated most crops. Family farms became agribusiness operations with single crops which have flowers for just a few weeks each year. Bees need to forage most of the year for food. Weeds that could fill the gap are killed by herbicides, while roadsides are frequently mowed. Large dandelion-free lawns are commonplace in many suburban settings.

A January 12, 2015 article in *National Geographic* by Rebecca Rupp notes the long historic therapeutic use of honey for ailments such as burns, amputations, bedsores and stab wounds. Honey has a pH of 3.5, making it fairly acidic and helpful against bacteria. Rupp cites the ancient Egyptians as the first to domesticate bees. The knowledge was transferred to the Romans as evidenced by Virgil in Book 4 of his work *Georgics*, which is totally devoted to beekeeping. Honey was used as a principle sweetener until sugarcane was introduced into the West Indies in the 16th century. Honeybees were brought to the New World in 1620 from Europe.

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What's to be done? Studies from the University of California at Berkeley (Claire Kremen) show restoring native habitat to large monoculture farms greatly increases crop yields. A Michigan blueberry farm interspersed with paths of wildflowers greatly increased the number of harvested blueberries. Bees find flat or shallow flowers most appealing-blue, purple or yellow-queen Anne's lace, zinnias, daisies or asters for example. Native plantings, a variety of plantings including wildflowers and a bit of weed tolerance all help too. Plantings that bloom from spring to fall with a variety of heights-flowering trees, bushes and shrubs are all beneficial.

Interestingly Mount Horeb is one of the few Wisconsin villages that has banned beekeeping inside the village limits. Honeybees are known to be docile and will not sting unless stepped on or the hive is threatened. They also can sting just once while wasps or hornets can sting multiple times and are known to be more aggressive.



Scott McKay keeps 6 hives along Bohn Road "for the bees." He has been taking over from his Dad Don, who has had bees for as long as Scott can remember. As a hobbyist, Scott enjoys the bees and splits his hives when they get too big so he doesn't have to purchase new bees each year. Most honeybees come from California or Hawaii says Scott, so he has been slowly trying to winter over his bees and get them acclimated to our winters. Four out of his six hives made it through the last winter. Luckily in the Vermont valley there is an abundance of variety of plant life the bees can enjoy. The wetland through the middle of the township provides plenty of flowers of all kinds the bees can pollinate. Scott welcomes anyone who wants to learn more about beekeeping to come and see his setup. The bees' survival may just depend on our backyard beekeepers.



A Bike Event Poem for Summer 2015

Spring is sprung and the roads are clear
Bikers, walkers, nature enthusiasts come from far and near

June 20th – what a day that will be!
200 bikers in Vermont for Horribly Hilly

And on July 11th at Brigham Park
The Blue Mounds Classic Bike Event will both end and start

The Town Board always works with an event rep
To ensure all events have completed the needed prep

Event maps and schedules must be supplied
And events must guarantee all impacted residents are notified

~Karen Carlock

Please note: If you would like to see an event map, please call Karen Carlock, Clerk, at 608-767-2457 or check the Vermont Event Calendar at townofvermont.com

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Spring Has Sprung With A Vengeance

By Jim Elleson

Our focus in early spring is on garlic mustard. This weed spreads fast once it gets a toe-hold, and within a few years it can overrun wooded areas and crowd out native wildflowers. In severely infested areas it completely blankets the ground and shades out all other vegetation.

Garlic mustard has a two-year life cycle. The seedlings that germinated last spring grew into basal rosettes that stayed green under the winter snow. As the temperature warms these rosettes are putting on growth, and in late April and early May they will be sending up flowering stalks with numerous white 4-petaled flowers. The flowers will form long, thin seed pods that each contain many seeds. If not controlled before they go to seed, the pods will dry out and drop their seeds in late summer, to start the cycle over again.



Garlic mustard is commonly spread by the seeds hitchhiking on animals, people, and vehicles. That is why you will often see an infestation beginning along trails or roads. The Town of Vermont is doing its part to slow this spread by controlling the plants along our road right-of-ways. If we can keep the plants from flowering in the right-of-ways, we can prevent movement of seeds through roadside mowing and slow their spread from one property to the next.

Since we started our control efforts in 2008 we have significantly reduced the population of garlic mustard in our right-of-ways. There are still scattered individual plants and patches but very few of the huge, dense concentrations that you can see along the roads in neighboring towns.

Japanese hedge parsley is another invader that is proliferating in our woods. It looks similar in some ways to its relative Queen Anne's lace, but the fern-like leaves are even more finely divided, and the white flowers are smaller. The small, Velcro-like seeds attach readily to clothing and animals. These plants also go through a two-year life cycle similar to garlic mustard.

Garlic mustard and Japanese hedge parsley can be controlled by pulling, mowing, or herbicide. Pull the plants when they are flowering. Mow close to the ground after flowering has begun. If seeds have begun to form, they may continue developing into viable seeds even after the plant is pulled or cut, so proper disposal is important. I like to pile the plants to dry in a place where I can burn them, and where I can later eliminate any seedlings that crop up.

The best time to apply herbicide is in late fall and early spring, when the rosettes are green but desirable plants are dormant. You can use a 3% solution of glyphosate (Roundup). Spray carefully if desirable plants are nearby - the herbicide will kill anything green that it contacts.

For more in-depth information, check the websites of the Invasive Plants Association of Wisconsin, <http://www.ipaw.org>, and Wisconsin DNR, <http://dnr.wi.gov/topic/invasives/>. There's also information on garlic mustard on the Town website, <http://www.townofvermont.com>.

Vermont resident Jim Elleson is the proprietor of Quercus Land Stewardship Services, a local business dedicated to helping landowners improve the ecological health of their land. He can be contacted at jim@quercus-ls.com.

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Mission Statement: It is the mission of Vermont's Voice to provide information about our town and articles of interest to the residents of our town in order to promote a sense of community, encourage participation in and understanding of town government, and improve communication among residents. Vermont's Voice is a volunteer, citizen-run publication that encourages and depends on citizen participation in providing information, articles, or suggestions for articles, photos, criticism, and help with mailings. The cost of printing and postage is included in the town budget. Vermont's Voice is not the official voice or viewpoint of the town government.



Lisa and Chris

Keep up to date on town ordinances, meetings and other business at <http://www.townofvermont.com>.

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Summer 2015

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