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A MOMENTOUS TIME AND HOPE THIS HELPS A LITTLE

This issue of *Vermont's Voice* comes out in a momentous time. The worst pandemic in a century, a sharply contested election and a riot unseen in the nation's history impress themselves on our daily lives, producing fear, division, and isolation. We hope that the issue can help even a small bit.

We have articles on what we are doing to better the world as in solar generation and controlled burns, how we are all involved on town planning and a challenge to get involved in local government. We also show the broad involvement in the election and observations from poll workers. In another way we offer distraction, inspiration, and relaxation through craft and art.

These are challenging times and we need to see our commonality and how as Vermonters we can care for self, others and even our world. Take in what is here and come together.

Michael McDermott



LOCAL CITIZENS AND SOLAR GROUP BUY

By Warren Gaskill



Trisha McConnell and Jim Billings were convinced it was the “right thing to do.” And they had been thinking about making the move for more than a year.

But a first time Western Dane County Solar Group Buy that made it easy for them to connect to a qualified installer, lessons learned from the township residents who have made a similar investments, and a federal tax credit encouraged them to push the “Let’s Do It” button.

Their 11.1 kW system with 30 panels – raised high in a field above their home on County F – started producing energy directly from the sun for their home in early November.

For Michael McDermott and Charlene Taymor on Blue Mounds Trail it was, Michael said simply, what they could do “to save the world.” Their 13.2 kW, 36-panel array went live in early December.

Each household anticipates that the sun will now meet most of their electrical needs, saving on the cost of electricity and the CO₂ that is put into the atmosphere to produce a good portion of that grid electricity.

While the actual financial break-even point will be several years off from their lower utility bills, each household believes the investment adds value to their respective homes that will be there when it comes time to move on.

The decisions made as these two households went through the process to add solar were informed by the

experiences of a dozen others from Vermont Township who earlier made the solar investment. These lessons learned are on the Vermont Township website at www.vermonttownship.com/community/energy

The Western Dane County Solar Group Buy coordinated by Legacy Solar Cooperative of Madison was an outgrowth of the three-part Climate Action Workshop series early in 2020. The workshop series was organized by four Vermont residents –David Stanfield, Peter Antonie, Barbara Borns and myself. Interested businesses and residents from throughout the area participated.

Vermont native Kurt Reinhold, president of Legacy Solar, and his team coordinated the Group Buy after selecting two installer providers from several competitive proposals.

To date, 17 households from Verona to Mount Horeb, Cross Plains to Mazomanie took advantage of the program, together totaling over 120 kW of solar installed and some \$300,000 in sales to the two vendors – All Sky Energy of Baraboo and Eagle Point Solar of Dubuque, IA.

A total of 70 households requested solar profiles from Legacy, and 50 were forwarded on to the two installers for detail.

“A lot of folks who decided to wait before committing to a solar project in 2020 cited economic uncertainty,” reported Reinhold. “Of those who dropped out at the proposal stage, roughly a third said that they would consider the program again next year,” Reinhold added.

Legacy is planning on offering another group buy in 2021, anticipating more favorable alignment with the policies of the Biden/Harris administration.

Legacy will go through the bidding process to select 2021 vendors, and Reinhold said, seek firmer formal commitment up front from the villages and townships in the area to support the initiative.

“It was fun. I’m glad we did it,” Reinhold added of the co-op’s first group buy program. “We will improve on it and expand going forward.”

For more information about solar in Vermont: www.vermonttownship.com/community/energy





LATE FALL BURNS

By Jim Elleson

This fall has brought unusually long stretches of dry weather, which have made it possible to do a fair amount of prescribed burning. Normally, fall burning is a challenge, because of the short days and low sun angle. Typically the dew or frost doesn't dry out until midday, leaving a short window of time before the sun starts going down, the temperature drops and the humidity rises. If there is precipitation, it will take a few dry sunny days in a row to dry out the leaves and grass.

This fall, however, we've had long periods with no rain or snow and lots of sun and wind. That has kept the fuel dry and allowed area burn crews to do some catching up on the backlog of burns. The Quercus crew burned 250 acres at 20 sites in October and November, including Pheasant Branch Conservancy in Middleton, Morton Forest outside Mazomanie, and many private properties.

I also got some burning done on my own property. In mid-October, we were able to burn the upper edge of a southeast-facing wooded slope, but most of the area still had too much green vegetation on the ground to burn well. In mid-November, the vegetation had dried out well, and we got a great burn that consumed a lot of the heavy fuel on the ground and made some more progress toward restoring the historic oak savanna.

Jim Elleson is the founder of Quercus Land Stewardship Services, a local business that helps landowners improve the ecological health of their land.





KNITTING AROUND THE TOWN

By Judy Robb

December 2020: It's Wednesday morning, and I need to have the knitting complete, final sweater washed, blocked and dry by Sunday morning for delivery that afternoon. But I just don't like the way the increases in the yoke look. Ugh. I realize ripping out multiple rows of detailed work will mean a knitting marathon over the next three days. Let the ripping and unknotting begin...

"Knit on, with confidence and hope through all crises." Elizabeth Zimmermann, knitting revolutionary, 1910 – 1999.

When Elizabeth Zimmermann published these words in one of her early 1960's knitting newsletters, she probably had no idea how it would resonate mightily in 2021.

Anyone that is or has been a knitter can relate to the trials and tribulations the craft can bring with it. The mitten or glove that resembles more of an oven mitt. The socks that look like golf club covers. But as one learns, the knitting pains are worth the pleasure, and the art of knitting would not have been around for centuries if it were not enjoyable and useful. Many of us take up knitting as a winter activity and a way to create warm and cuddly items for our friends, family and ourselves. But it can be so much more.

With the preceding 12 months making for a bit different



year, many of us have found knitting (and crafting of any sort) a way to deal with a stressful time, work through grief, merely relax or sooth mind, body and soul. Whether enjoying country solitude, listening to an audio mystery thriller or binge-watching your favorite melodrama on Netflix, knitting can be the perfect companion.

Knitting and Spinning

Knitting aficionado Anne Bosch began raising sheep in the late 1970s and in the early 1980's she met members of a Mt. Horeb spinning group comprised of about a dozen women. Known as the Spin Drifters, they all raised

their own sheep, and with the group's guidance Anne learned to spin wool into yarn on a small spinning wheel and a career path was formed.

"Folks said that if I had sheep and was a knitter, I should learn to spin my own yarn."

Anne Bosch and co-founder Marc launched Blackberry Ridge in 1988 and have been in business for 32 years. Nestled on Forshaug Road in the Town of Vermont, Blackberry Ridge is a wool yarn manufacturer that provides custom wool spinning as well as spinning wool into yarn.

With the tribulations of this past year, Anne has seen many knitting groups go to Zoom gatherings or nothing at all due to social restrictions and notes many miss the friendly interactions in-person knitting circles provide.

Knitters still reach out to Anne with project questions and she is more than happy to assist.

"People email me with technical questions on patterns, will send a picture of what they are working on and I help them out."

Regarding her own recent project Anne noted, "I knit a little critter, a stuffed moose for a baby — but I like to do sweaters — a project that lasts about six weeks."

Blackberry Ridge is known for its annual fall open house with tours to share the inner workings of the woolen mill. "We did not do our open house this past fall, and we missed connecting with the general public" Anne said. "We will do the open house weekend again and hope people bring their families."

A Family Tradition

Town of Vermonter Diane Anderson is a long-time knitter. She recalls her first knitting experience as a kid, a 4H project. "We made slippers, then a pair of mittens," Diane said. "I've been a knitter ever since."

For Diane, knitting is a passion shared by fellow family members. "My mother-in-law was a knitter. She made a lot of Norwegian sweaters and Christmas socks for all of us."

This past year, Diane knit 11 pair of Christmas socks for



her family, using house yarn from the former Cat and Crow in Mt. Horeb and some worsted weight from Blackberry Ridge.

"My son-in-law for years and years asked for an 'ugly Christmas sweater' and I always blew it off. This year I gave him his ugly sweater on his birthday."

Like many knitters and crafters, Diane has a few projects going at the same time. With these times of settling in at home, many have revisited their project stash. "I finished a quilt for my granddaughter that I had been working on for years."

She said her next project is a Norwegian sweater, "but I have a cashmere sweater for my husband I need to finish."

With all the fancy fabrics and fleece, Diane noted "I hope people continue to appreciate knitting and it is not going to be a lost art".

Knitting for Mindfulness

Charlene Taymor has been knitting since the age of nine and refers to the past year as a catalyst for "anxiety knitting".

"Without knitting," she lamented, "I would have ground my teeth to nubs."

A member of a small local knitting group, in person knitting sessions are on hold and virtual meetings tend to lack social warmth – and food.

"I think part of our getting together is the eating part. You just don't get that on Zoom."

When asked if it is the process or the product, Char said "It's definitely the process. The meditative part is watching it appear. Seeing the colors, the pattern and the shape happen."

Working on her fourth sweater of the past months, Char cheerfully admits, "knitting is a favorite craft, but buying yarn is my hobby."



Where to Begin

If you are curious about how to get started with knitting, many knitters concur: best to keep your first project simple, such as a blanket or scarf and work your way to a more complex endeavor from there. Focus on the process and enjoyment rather than the finished product. This will help to ease any knitting frustrations you may stumble upon, similar to the lessons many of us learned from our baking disasters of the past year...

There are many online resources available and nearby yarn shops to get you going on your first knitting adventure. Knitting circles, hopefully soon to be gathering again in person, can be found in the area. Ravelry.com is a great resource to get you clicking your needles, with patterns, community and useful FAQs available. If you're into social media, you can do an

Instagram search for #knitting or #striking to gather world-wide inspiration and ideas. YouTube of course is an excellent resource for those specific stitching questions.

As for this author, I did complete the Oppland Forest Sweater, on time and delivered to a very appreciative recipient.

Now, on to the next sweater...

Happy Knitting!

Resources:

Blackberry Ridge Woolen Mills, 3776 Forshaug Road, Mt Horeb, anne@blackberry-ridge.com, 608.437.3762. Shop and mill open by appointment. [Blackberry-ridge.com](https://blackberry-ridge.com).

Books by Elizabeth Zimmermann, *The Opinionated Knitter*, *Newsletters 1958 – 1968*; *Knitting Around*.

[Ravelry.com](https://www.ravelry.com)

Oppland Skog Genser (Oppland Forest Sweater) pattern may be found here:

<https://www.ravelry.com/patterns/library/oppland-skog-genser>

Madison Knitters Guild, <https://www.madisonknittersguild.org/> for community and local shop listings.

Your vote counts!

This *Wisconsin State Journal* article dated January 6, 1877 about a voting mishap proves that every vote counts.

THAT ONE VOTE!—From the town of Vermont, in this county, we hear of another version of how little SAMMY lost that one vote he so much covets just now, as believed by a member of his party in the above town. It seems this Vermont Reformer wished to vote for a friend of his on the Republican county ticket, and approached an old Democrat—who had both tickets with the friend's name on each, and who was also laboring for the election of the Republican—and said he wanted to vote for Mr. ——. The Democrat, through some mistake, gave the Reformer a straight Republican ticket, and he not being very proficient in reading and supposing it to be all right as he got it from a fellow-Democrat, put it in the ballot-box; but he had no sooner done so, than some neighbors of his asked him, in an angry tone, why he voted "the picture ticket."

Of course he was shocked at his mistake, but nothing was thought of it till TILDEN lacked one vote of an election. Then it was that the wags of Vermont thought they would torment the "Reformer," and have succeeded in convincing him that his vote beat TILDEN, and he is reported to be in a very bad way, thinking seriously of committing suicide, etc. He thinks some of going to Washington to prove that he intended to vote for SAM, and would no doubt do so if TILDEN will forward him \$3,000 for expenses. We are told that he would most completely put CRONIN in the shade on the Presidential question, and insure the success of SAMUEL J. TILDEN!

O U R A R T I S T S A N D A R T I S A N S



**Old Granary at the Wilkens Homestead,
Town of Vermont**

Judy Robb
oil on linen
7" x 20"

THE TIME TO ENTER THE ARENA

By Karen Carlock



Let's begin with an excerpt from "The Man in the Arena" by Theodore Roosevelt:



"It is not the critic who counts; not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles, or where the doer or deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the area, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs, who comes short again and again; who spends himself in a worthy cause..."

2020 has been a unique year with so many things to consider, observe, reflect upon and care about. In the midst of this, I would like to add one more item to your list of things to consider: getting involved in local government. And I can't entice you with tales of fame or deep personal satisfaction. There is no impactful monetary compensation, but there is the internal awareness that you are serving your community and are putting yourself, in the words of Theodore Roosevelt, "in the arena".

Each year, Town of Vermont board positions come up for election. There is typically a shortage of individuals interested and willing to run for office. A role on the board of supervisors does not require a particular area of expertise (although some have found prior service on the plan commission to be helpful). It requires only an interest in the Township, service to its residents and a willingness to spend the time necessary to make decisions in as well-informed a manner as possible. In terms of time commitment, there is a monthly board meeting and either involvement in the plan commission or as a liaison to a public safety board.

The Town is also seeking folks interested in serving on the plan commission. The Plan commissioners serve as the "keepers" of the Town of Vermont land use plan. Commissioners meet monthly to review land use petitions and make recommendations to the Town's board of supervisors. The commission is made up of 4-5 community members and 2 or 3 election officials. You do not need to already be an expert to serve as a commissioner. You only need to be interested and willing to learn.

Another opportunity to consider is serving as a poll worker. Serving as an election inspector/poll worker involves a relatively small time commitment, some education prior to each election cycle and the time spent at the polls for each election. We would welcome the opportunity to involve additional poll workers in our election cycles.

I recognize that for many, serving in local government may not be where they feel their skills and time could be best applied. However, if you have found yourself, even for a moment, considering that you might be interested in getting involved in local government, please contact me, Karen Carlock at chair@townofvermont.com or reach out to any of the plan commissioners or board members listed in this publication or on our town [website](#). Wherever you chose to use your time and energy, your skills and commitments have value and can make a positive difference each day.

ELECTION DAY IN VERMONT TOWNSHIP—November 3, 2020

There was broad participation in the election and we have observations from the day. The turnout was very inclusive of the almost all Town of Vermont's 721 registered voters. The total number of Vermont Citizens voting in November was 656 or 91% of registrants, an impressive turnout. There were 331 absentee ballots for 50% of the total. 325 people voted at the polls on election day and of these 24 registered that day. This is a good expression of democracy and Vermonters can be proud of their participation. Below we have reflections by people who worked the polls that day. – Michael McDermott

By Sharon Gaskill with Sandie Stanfield

November 3 was a lovely, relatively warm day. No one was happier about this than the poll workers at the town hall, who worked with masks on and doors and windows open. Clerk Katie Zelle, coordinating with Chair Karen Carlock and Road Patrolman Jack Schulenberg, had strategized and planned for the safest possible conditions for voters and poll workers. The flow of voters was altered, with the ID and sign-in tables placed outside, limiting the number of people inside at any given time.

The first shift of workers arrived at 6:30 a.m. and proceeded to get the necessary prep done to open the polls at 7. A few people were waiting in line to vote by opening. From then on, throughout the day, a rather steady stream of people came to the town hall. The first shift of Sharon Gaskill, Kris and Peter Antonie, Barb Perkins and Jim Elleson gave way at 1:30 p.m. to Kay Butcher, Johnny Widdicombe, John Szalkowski, Sandie Stanfield and Larry Ziemer, who worked until the wrap-up after the polls closed at 8 p.m. Final reconciliation of the ballots was completed shortly after 10:15 pm.

Everything went smoothly on election day, thanks to good planning and committed poll workers. Vermonters have traditionally been good citizens and turn out to vote. This time 656 (about 92%) of the possible 715 registered voters cast ballots; of these, 331 were absentee ballots and 24 voters were newly registered that day. 368 absentee ballots were requested, but some were not returned, though a significant number of these citizens showed up in person to vote on the 3rd. A total of 325 voted in person at the town hall.

Poll workers greeted old friends and new residents; processing of absentee ballots was completed efficiently. It is always encouraging to see many young voters, especially those casting ballots for the first time. There were no big dramas; voters, of course, came masked up, and poll workers were kept busy sanitizing used pens. A news photographer stopped by, as did a deputy sheriff and an official observer from the League of Women Voters. All thought we had an impressive set-up for voting safely. One unanticipated wildcard was the bathroom light that burned out, necessitating bringing in the big ladder to change the lightbulb in the fixture at the top of the high ceiling.



JOHN HART, WISCONSIN STATE JOURNAL

Volunteer poll workers Kris and Peter Antonie.

LAND USE SURVEY 2020 – WHAT DID YOU HAVE TO SAY?

By Karen Carlock

Throughout this unique year, the Town of Vermont has seen an uptick in the number of land use petitions coming to the town board. Whether it is simply a coincidence or due in part to the pandemic that has altered our daily life as well as future plans is as of yet unclear. However, it was fortunate timing that the Town of Vermont board had already determined that 2020 was to be the year to survey property owners and residents of the township regarding land use and to organize town discussions.

It has been 15 years since the town had been surveyed for feedback on aspects of the Town's land use plan, and it was the ideal time for a focused survey on several aspects of the land use plan for which town officials were seeking feedback. It is not yet time to start the every seven-year process of revising the Town's land use plan but it is incredibly valuable to continually gather town feedback and engage in thoughtful discussion in order to be educated and prepared when it comes time to go through an update of the Town of Vermont Land Use Plan.

This past July, the 2020 land use survey was mailed to all 750 residents and property owners. 346 surveys were returned in mid-August for a 46% rate. The intention of the Town Board was to have a topical discussion at the Annual Town Meeting but with the ongoing pandemic, it is unlikely that a town-wide meeting will be able to take place until late 2021.

One of the primary objectives was to gather feedback from the township regarding whether or not there was concern about the rate of new housing build in the Town and whether or not folks believed that the current Town guidelines effectively control residential development.

The results are in Table 1 and 2 below:

Table 1:

Do you have concerns about the rate of new housing build in the Town of Vermont?

YES	NO	UNSURE	BLANK
30.6%	51.2%	1.4%	16.8%

Table 2:

Do you think current Town guidelines are sufficient to control growth and the location of residential development?

YES	NO	UNSURE	BLANK
56.1%	12.7%	30.9%	.3%

Prior to a town-wide follow-up survey or discussion, we would like to provide community members with information regarding the land use plan so that there is a greater understanding of the document that strives to balance the protections of the community as well as that of individual property owners. No document will ever be perfect and there is an inherent tension in the Town's land use plan in regards to residential build. As an example, the plan encourages shorter driveways to preserve farmland and it also encourages siting homes



in a way that protects viewshed which is often easier to do with a longer driveway. That type of tension in the guidelines is also the reason that each land use petition is reviewed first by the plan commission, which is composed of two elected officials and five community members. This collective knowledge as well as the varying perspectives of the plan commissioners are essential for the thorough evaluation and thoughtful consideration of each land use petition.

The survey results also indicate that 45% of respondents would prefer that the township discourage the clustering of homes as opposed to 26% who would encourage clustering and 16% who would prefer a neutral approach to clustering. Additionally, feedback from the survey was that a strong majority of respondents would prefer that the Town's land use plan maintain the current limit of four homes per driveway.

Additionally, 90 out of 346 respondents included comments with the returned survey, all of which were read and categorized. Several of the categories will be further explored and discussed, such as driveways, the Town's application processes, and environmental concerns.

45% of respondents would prefer that the township discourage the clustering of homes as opposed to 26% who would encourage clustering and 16% who would prefer a neutral approach to clustering.

At the October 2020 meeting, the Town of Vermont board did take the actionable step of adding the four guiding principles of the Town's Land Use Plan to the beginning of the form that is filled out by an applicant filing a land use petition. The goal of that initial step was to ensure that the comprehensive land use plan and the principles of the community are front and center when an applicant is in the planning stage and when the plan commissioners and board members are reviewing a petition. The Town of Vermont is a wonderful community, brimming with natural beauty. Feedback from the community is critical in preserving the rural atmosphere treasured by those who live in or enjoy Vermont Township.

OUR ARTISTS AND ARTISANS

Linda Koenig

The pond lily series was born early one June morning while my husband Scott Kremer and I were gliding silently along in our canoe. It was one of those breathless mornings, impossible to separate the water from the fog. Unforgettable stillness.

A New Day #17
watercolor on paper
22" x 30"



We need your ideas and photos!

Vermont Gardeners: Do you have garden story to tell or images of your beautiful flowers? We would love to include them in our Spring 2021 issue.

Or — do you have an up and coming business in the Town of Vermont? An interesting hobby or passion? Know of a long-time resident who has a fascinating story to tell? Contact us and we may include it in an upcoming issue. We'd also love to highlight the variety of views of our township — send us your photos!

Contact Micheal McDermott or Judy Robb at the email addresses below.



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