What’s in a name? A sense of familiarity, goodwill and trust if you can attach a name to a face at a local company where you do business. Whether you go into a store once a week or once in a while, it is always nice to know the name of the employee who greets you at the door, or the person offering advice on a product or service, or the staff behind the cash register. Part of the value of living in a small community is getting to know the people around you. We want to help you get to know the people who offer you goods and services right here in Addison County and Brandon. The pages in this four-part “Profiles in Community” section will help introduce you to more of those people who so visibly feel proud, connected and comfortable with those who provide important products and services in our area.

Community is at the core of what makes Vermont such an extraordinary place to live. Knowing the name or some tidbit of information about your neighbor, diaperson, hairdresser, banker or car mechanic is what helps us stick together.

We generally find that it’s easier to engage in public conversations and to volunteer your time and efforts for the community good if you know that your voice can actually make a difference; this is what keeps us engaged. And matching the names and faces is part of what makes this community run and makes it an enjoyable place to live.

Over the last couple years we’ve all seen the importance of supporting one another in our local community. We’ve seen how each individual and each business, institution and organization has a role to play that’s unique and important. And through each of our efforts, we create a vibrant community.

Please take some time to peruse through this thick special supplement and get to know some of the faces you see around town. Reflect on the importance of working together to make our towns and states a great place to live and work.

For nearly four decades, the Addison County Independent has published this special section to help our readers know a little bit more about the people who play such a vital role in our communities. In this year’s section, we visited more than 100 area businesses to take their photos, interview their teams and tell their unique stories. While the details of each story varies, the general theme is the same—hard-working employees and employers make our local businesses successful.

Our community is filled with neighbors and friends who provide crucial services and products, yet we take them and patronize their businesses.

The Editors
FROM THE PRESS

From the Addison County Independent’s first issue in 1946 to today our mission has been the same: to report the day-to-day events of the county and serve as a mirror that reflects life as it’s being lived throughout Addison County.

We do that by covering town and school news, sports, social news, events, arts and leisure, business and professional news, letters and commentary — and almost 50 special sections that put a focus on important aspects of our communities.

As we have for the past 77 years, we invite you to join us five days a week to learn about your neighbors, schools and community.

And, yes, that’s FIVE days a week. For those of you who don’t receive our four newsletters (Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday), please go to addisonindependent.com and sign up for the newsletters at the top of the screen. It not only allows us to be in regular touch with our subscribers (and those of you just browsing), but it’s the source of breaking news. Plus, the newsletters are free!

We work hard at covering as much of the news of Addison County as we possibly can all with the hope that the most complete picture of the county will yield strong, resilient, respectful and fun-loving communities. If you’re not part of that picture, join us today by becoming a subscriber and Addy Indy supporter!
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Left to Right: Amey Ryan, Beth Stanway, Courtney DeBisschop, Sarah Peluso
Brandon brewhouse Red Clover Ale builds community

By SOPHIA AFSAR-KESHMBI
BRANDON — Pete Brooks, 32, Andrew Gates, 34, and Riker Wikoff, 33, who together founded Brandon’s Red Clover Ale Co., are about to make their 250th batch of beer.

They attribute their success to making easy.

The milestone approaches after the brewery following the construction for our first year, “normal” year since opening the brewery calls the high

"We just started packaging everything, including our growler fills, curbside pickup and online or over-the-phone orders. It's been filled with growler fills, curbside pickup and online or over-the-phone orders. It's been filled with growler fills, curbside pickup and online or over-the-phone orders.

The three of us are about to make our 250th batch of beer, and we’re excited because we’ve been able to build a strong sense of community in our taproom. It’s a place where people can come to unwind, chat with each other, and enjoy some delicious beers.

One of the things that sets our taproom apart is the atmosphere. We’ve created a space that’s welcoming and inviting, with comfortable seating and a diverse selection of beers. We’ve also made an effort to create a family-friendly environment, with activities and events that appeal to all ages.

In addition to our beer, we also host live music events, which have become a staple of our taproom. We’ve been able to attract some fantastic musicians, and it’s been a great way for us to build a community around our shared love of music.

One of the things that we’ve been most proud of is our commitment to supporting local artists and organizations. We’ve hosted a variety of events and fundraising initiatives, and we’re always looking for new ways to give back to the community.

As we approach our 250th batch, we’re excited for what’s to come. We’re already planning a special anniversary event, and we’re looking forward to continuing to build and strengthen our community around our love of craft beer and music.
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Since June 1st 2021 experienced Real Estate agents Liz Marino, Jan Bark, Amy Young, Deb Hillman, Nikhil Plouffe, Sue Walsh and new agent Jan Jacobs have worked along with Brokers Neil Mackey, Sue Mackey, Jeff Olson, George Brewer and Managing Broker Lisa Sargent at their downtown office location at 32 Merchants Row. This group of dedicated and knowledgeable Realtors is ready and willing to help you with all of your real estate needs and questions in this ever-changing real estate market.
Thank you to our wonderful, hard-working staff and our devoted customers!

Despite the late season frost and more than enough rain, our apples are ripening and the orchard is lush and alive and we’re busy getting ready for the fall harvest season. We’re excited to welcome you to the farm!

**Town Hall Theater (THT)** is a non-profit multi-disciplinary performing arts center and historic landmark in Middlebury, Vermont. As a regional home for the arts, THT presents more than 165 events per year, as well as youth and adult classes in the arts. We use our 232-seat theater and main stage, gallery, and studio space to the fullest extent, and place a priority on providing arts access for all. We showcase plays, live music, dance, film, opera, musicals, visual art, readings, talks, community events, and all-ages education.

Our mission is to contribute to a thriving community in Addison County by presenting a diverse array of high-quality arts programming that educates, entertains, and inspires. Whether developing our own productions or collaborating with our dozen resident companies and other community partners, THT is a critical connector of artists, audiences, and students and a maker of creative, accessible experiences.

---

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---

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Champlain Valley Properties leader Nancy Foster has been a broker for over 40 years. Local Roots Run Deep & Strong

Champlain Valley Properties is comprised of a team of professionals who know and love Addison County and our local region.

Nancy Foster who leads the team has been a top-producing Broker in Addison County for years. She is a graduate of Middlebury Union High School, GMU and earned a Master’s Degree in History. She is the mother to 3 daughters who are all married. Nancy’s husband/real estate partner and co-founder makes GMO OO Products. Nancy enjoys visiting with both buyers and sellers at all stages of real estate transactions.

Diana Berthiaume has been assisting home buyers and sellers since 2006 and is well versed in the selling and buying process. She is proud of her ability to make the process a stress-free and enjoyable adventure.

Brenda Lario who runs the administrative office in the office is also the Weybridge Town Clerk. She was born and raised in Vergennes, and loves calling Addison County home. She also loves spending time with her three children and grandchildren.

John Snyder-White graduated from the University of Maine with a BS in History and Political Science. John grew up in Middlebury. An Addison County’s sole Green Designated agent, John enjoys helping buyers looking for energy efficient homes, and Sellers market the unique energy efficient properties.

Heather Foster-Provencher, the newest member of our team, has been around the Real Estate industry the majority of her life, as she is the eldest daughter of Nancy Foster. Heather passed the exam this spring, and is looking forward to helping buyers and sellers buy and sell energy efficient homes. (aka Moo® compost products). She is very excited to work with people and help them navigate and accomplish their Real Estate goals.

January Stearns offers dedication and compassion in assisting both Sellers and Buyers make their real estate goals a reality. January lives in Cornwall where her family has been for 9 generations. She is a back yard chicken fancier, an avid gardener, helps manage her husband’s excavation business, and has a lovely greenhouse business which she runs with other family members.
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- Furnishings & Mattresses, Hazardous Waste
- Leaf & Yard Waste, Maple Sap Tapping, Natural Wood Waste, Plastic Bags & Films
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More information online:
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From left to right: Ethan Gevry, Gavin Gevry, Ashlie Gevry, Hadlie Gevry, Zeke Clark, Michael Davis, Mitch Clark (missing from photo: Matt Gevry).

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photo by Caleb Kenna

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SECTION B

2023

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By SOPHIA AFSA-KESHMIRI

PANTON — BJ’s Farm Supply in Panton is so much more than a hardware store. “We used to be a True Value store,” said Robert DeGraaf, who along with his wife, Mikayla, took over the store in 2002. “We turned it into a local store that has a coop for their avian needs, as well as local farms being able to have a coop for their avian needs,” Mikayla said.

The store didn’t always offer such a wide array of goods and services. “We used to sell local goods,” Robert said. “Now we have an entirely new store.”

Mikayla said the store’s present-day offerings often prompt customers to say BJ’s is so much more than farm supply, and while the store’s name might be confusing to some (and they’ve considered changing it), their wide selection sets them apart, while keeping a strong, local identity. “We like the history of the farm supply (land means to the community),” Mikayla said, “so at this point we’re gonna keep it ‘Farm Supply,'” said Mikayla.

Robert and Mikayla officially became store owners at the start of 2002. Robert, however, had taken on the bulk of the responsibility of running the business in 2018, and the couple stepped up to run it through the pandemic — a time when area residents preferred staying home. “When the pandemic started, we had to close the doors,” Mikayla said. “We had to figure out how to keep the doors open. We had to figure out how to keep the store running.”

The store’s new owners said they have a seasonal group of people who come in every summer. “We have our new people who come in every year and grab their necessities. We have our core locals that keep us open from December to March, and then we have our new people come in every summer,” Mikayla said.

All-in-all, the couple said, the customer base is a relatively tight local community with an interesting and fun mix of seasonal visitors. “Throughout the summer — a clientele the store tries its best to cater to with its eclectic mix of goods.”

PANTON — BJ’s Farm Supply — to more closely reflect the wide selection of items at their Panton business but they have tabled the idea because of the history of the original name.

Drop-In Brewing
Thank you for 11 Years of Drop-In Brewing!
Addison County’s independent & locally owned brewery.
Stop by the tasting room for world class beer, in a relaxed atmosphere.

By SOPHIA AFSA-KESHMIRI

PANTON — Drop-In Brewing in Panton is far more than what its name implies, according to owners Mikayla, 26, and Robert, 44, DeGraaf.

“Someone has said before, ‘there’s not very many places that you can get your pet food, fishing rod, your bait, your grain, your steak and beer, and walk out the door,’” Mikayla said. Not only do they offer a diverse smattering of this-and-that, the business is also committed to selling local goods.

“Anything we can get, as far as local goods, we try to get,” said Robert. “A lot of local meat, lamb, rabbit, chicken, pork and beef is all within five miles of here,” his wife added.

And they get their quail eggs from even closer than that. “They have a coop for their avian employees right out their back door,” Mikayla said.

The store didn’t always offer such a wide array of goods and services. It’s evolved quite a bit since 1988, when Robert’s parents opened the business. “We used to be a True Value (brand) hardware store,” he explained. The store then transitioned to more of a “general store” as the number of local farms diminished and the remaining farms began to opt for supplies to be delivered to their doors, even as those necessary supplies began to change.

Mikayla said the store’s present-day offerings often prompt customers to say BJ’s is so much more than farm supply, and while the store’s name might be confusing to some (and they’ve considered changing it), their wide selection sets them apart, while keeping a strong, local identity. “We like the history of the farm supply (land means to the community),” Mikayla said, “so at this point we’re gonna keep it ‘Farm Supply,'” said Mikayla.

Robert and Mikayla officially became store owners at the start of 2002. However, Robert, however, had taken on the bulk of the responsibility of running the business in 2018, and the couple stepped up to run it through the pandemic — a time when area residents preferred staying home.

“Locals didn’t want to go anywhere,” said Robert, “so we rediscovered the store, added Mikayla.

Mikayla said taking on the store full time and dealing with the pandemic was a hectic time for the couple, but added it only became more-so when their family grew from two to four. Just inside the front door, there’s a bassinet for their two sons, a two-year-old and a six-month-old, who they bring to the store every day. Mikayla says she’s getting to live her dream by having them around.

“That was definitely my dream, growing up was to always be a mom and to always have my kids with me,” she said. “Whatever I was doing, I wanted my kids to be able to be with me.”

Her customers have enjoyed their presence too. On the day we spoke, she said a customer had come in earlier just to sip some coffee and visit with the baby.

“Those interactions are the couple’s favorite aspect of running the business. “It’s just getting to know everyone. Honestly, I think my favorite part is the fact that they become like family,” Mikayla said. “There are all these aunts and uncles that come and hang out and chat and I love that. I get to work next to my husband and kids and adddress with us.”

“And there’s the opposite side of that,” Robert said, “where we have a seasonal group of people — Bashin Harbor, Button Bay, all of that little network — some of whom we’ll never see again. But (the regulars) still come back every year and grab their necessities. So we have our core locals that keep us open from December to March, and then we have our new people come in every summer.”

All-in-all, the couple said, the customer base is a relatively tight local community with an interesting and fun mix of seasonal visitors. Throughout the summer — a clientele the store tries its best to cater to with its eclectic mix of goods.
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From left to right: Beth Erickson, Jenna Lossman, Steve Revell, Jeremy Revell, Linda Revell.
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Experience beauty at Rocky Dale Gardens

By AHELIA SEEPERSAUD

BRISTOL — Rocky Dale Gardens is more than your average garden center. As owner Ed Burke describes it, the Bristol business is “a specialty nursery that offers an experience, not just plants.”

The immersive experience that Burke offers is what he believes sets his nursery apart.

Located in a beautiful corner of Bristol along Route 116 east of the village near the road up to Lincoln, Rocky Dale Gardens attracts both local to the Bristol area as well as those from the larger New England region. He prides himself on the fact that Rocky Dale provides “an unusual palette of plant material.”

The nursery and garden center sells a wide variety of plants — around 12,000-15,000 flowering plants, trees, shrubs and more sold per year — on 5 acres. The grounds offer paths, barns and greenhouses for customers to wonder among and become enchanted by the plant life.

“Running a plant nursery is very different from a typical dry goods inventory. You care of each other. It feels like kind to each other, we all take nice people. Everyone is really of industry, tend to be really who want to work in this kind who are interested in gardening, to focus on a lot of woody plants that are more difficult to find in the plant life. ”

Burke said of his team. “We delegate the work, we try to teach people how to do things correctly. We hope it’s a learning environment and a caring environment. I find that people who are interested in gardening, we want to work in this kind of industry, tend to be really nice people. Everyone is really kind to each other, we all take care of each other. It feels like a family.”

Though he has owned and kept Rocky Dale Gardens running for nearly two decades, Burke was not the business’s first owner. Before him were gardeners Holly Weir and Bill Polland. Weir and Polland, originally from California, moved to Vermont in 1981 and ended up buying an old hobby farm that became what is now Rocky Dale Gardens.

After 20 years of running the business, Weir and Polland sold the business to Burke, who had started a landscape architecture studio in Minneapolis in 1985. In 2004, he had heard about the nursery being for sale in Vermont and thought it was the perfect opportunity for him to be close to his family, which was what he really wanted at the time, while also doing something he’s always enjoyed.

“I went to school for plant and soil science and environmental studies and I’ve always worked with plants my whole life. And so, it was just an attractive idea,” Burke said.

Running a plant nursery came with some unanticipated challenges.

“I have to say that running a nursery is very different from running a landscape business,” Burke said. “And I probably went into it with a lot of ambition but was quickly humbled by the amount of work it takes and how difficult it is to actually make a living in this business.”

Two of the biggest challenges he found were managing the living plants in the face of changing weather, which can be unpredictable. Burke said the nursery had to be flexible and adapt, which was challenging. Burke shared his experience with the gardeners and how they had to be fast on their feet. “The gardens have needed a lot of work over the years,” he said. “I’ve made a lot of changes in the way things were laid out; we built a solar array, we’ve put up the arbors, and we’ve continued to make improvements.”

“Though we’re not organic, we don’t use any pesticides or anything like that. That’s something we’ve always enjoyed. “Whenever we have issues, we do our best to handle it. “Whenever we have issues, we do our best to handle it.”

Burke hopes that the gardens will be a piece of coal that will shine through the challenges for his business. “When you close your doors two or three days a week but your plants still need to be taken care of,” Burke noted. “It’s not typical dry goods inventory. You can’t just shut the doors and wait it out.” He said that managing customers on plants has become more difficult due to the increasingly unpredictable climate patterns.

“Plants have hardiness zones,” Burke explained. “When ever so many of the things in the face of changing weather, which can be unpredictable. Burke said the nursery had to be flexible and adapt, which was challenging. Burke shared his experience with the gardeners and how they had to be fast on their feet. “The gardens have needed a lot of work over the years,” he said. “I’ve made a lot of changes in the way things were laid out; we built a solar array, we’ve put up the arbors, and we’ve continued to make improvements.”

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Sweet Cecily knows what you want

By AMELIA SEEPERSAUD

MIDDLEBURY — "It’s a general gift store and I think of it as the town’s gift shop because everybody shops here," said Dunn, the proud owner of Middlebury’s beloved Sweet Cecily, opened the store 36 years ago in 1987. Before opening the store, Dunn worked at the Vermont State Craft Center, formerly located in Frog Hollow Alley, as the gallery director. After working there for years, the building across the street had become available and she decided to open up her gallery, I wanted to have a store on and spread my wings," she said.

Later, in the early 2000s, she moved the store to "the heart of Middlebury," as the shop director. After working there for years, the building across the street had become available and she decided to open up shop there. "It was time for me to move on and spread my wings," she said. "I did not want to have a gallery, I wanted to have a store accessible to everybody.

"It was time for me to move on and spread my wings," she said. "I did not want to have a gallery, I wanted to have a store accessible to everybody.

Dunn said of the store. "And it has been a busy store in 1987, it was a busy store ever since," Dunn said. The store was a wide range of and handmade bowl, you can buy a wedding passes through its doors. "We have inventory that is accessible, and hopefully wonderful, interesting, unusual for people to choose from," she said. "You can buy a wedding present here, you can buy a handmade bowl, you can buy a compass for kids. It's really a wide range of gifts. I try to have it be something for almost everybody."

Dunn also strives to make Sweet Cecily an inviting place for everyone. "The warm and friendly ambiance is key," she said. "I think the location is convenient, we have a back porch overlooking the waterfall which is unbelievable. And we have a friendly ambiance is key," she said.

"I think the location is convenient, we have a back porch overlooking the waterfall which is unbelievable. And we have a friendly ambiance is key," she said. "I think the location is convenient, we have a back porch overlooking the waterfall which is unbelievable. And we have a friendly ambiance is key," she said.

Dunn finds objects that are colorful and unusual. "The prices are very reasonable and the things that I offer are unique, unusual, fun, and lovely." Dunn finds objects that are colorful and unusual. "The prices are very reasonable and the things that I offer are unique, unusual, fun, and lovely.”

Dunn hand-picks unique, unusual things that appeal to a wide audience. "I think the location is convenient, we have a back porch overlooking the waterfall which is unbelievable. And we have a friendly ambiance is key," she said. "I think the location is convenient, we have a back porch overlooking the waterfall which is unbelievable. And we have a friendly ambiance is key,” she said.

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"It’s been an incredibly interesting, fun, fulfilling, wonderful life’s work here. [It’s] one of the oldest stores in town at this point. People depend on the store. I still have all the energy I’ve ever had to boost for the store and deal with the store." she said, adding with her vivacious smile that she’ll be there several more years.
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Missing - Jarrett Kimball & Lisa Dupoise

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Richard Miller joined as partner in 1985 and served until 2009. Sadly, we lost Denny when he passed away in 2009. Another chapter began when long time employees Ron Warner and Tim Comes partnered with Mark and Cindy to manage the business. The leadership suffered another loss with the passing of Ron in 2021.

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