



Fabulous

In this 'season between,' 15 local artists celebrate frost and fable in a new show. See Arts + Leisure.



NCAA time

Panther teams were upset in their league tournaments, but bigger prizes loom. See Sports, Page 1B.



United Way

2024 has been a rollercoaster but UIWAC has kept us on track. See the special pull-out section inside.

ADDISON COUNTY INDEPENDENT

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Rollicking good fun

MIDDLEBURY UNION HIGH School singers, actors and singing actors will perform the "best musical you've never heard of" — "The Drowsy Chaperone" — this Thursday through Saturday. At a recent rehearsal are K Haugen playing Feldzeig (right) and Bea Hooper as Kitty (center). They are supported by Paras Biancosino as George, Subia Khan as a gangster and Piper Farnsworth as Mrs. Tottendale. See more photos on Page 11A, then go see the show.

Photo by Jason Duquette-Hoffman

Midd. students were pumped for election

That's just one takeaway from local results

By MARIN HOWELL

ADDISON COUNTY — Middlebury College students Daniza Tazabekova and Laura McDow said they saw a lot of enthusiasm among college students about this year's election.

"Excitement about voting and participation in democracy was far higher this semester than previous years, according to both my lived experience since 2022 and our organization advisor's experiences from the last two decades,"

said Tazabekova, president of MidVote, a nonpartisan student organization that works to increase civic engagement.

"Though it is standard practice for voters to be less engaged during midterm elections, the 2016 and 2020 presidential elections did not see similar turnout from the college."

Tazabekova pointed to a few examples of that engagement, such as professors and staff recognizing (See Election reaction, Page 18A)

ACSD wrestles with a tight budget year

Board targets 2% hike, but cuts loom

By JOHN FLOWERS

MIDDLEBURY — The Addison Central School District board on Monday asked ACSD staff to begin crafting a fiscal year 2025-26 budget reflecting a 2% increase compared to the current spending plan. But holding the spending increase to 2% would still require the district to absorb approximately \$2 million in contracted employee salary increases, health

insurance premium hikes, surging transportation expenses and other fixed costs.

In other words, a 2% increase would still necessitate major cuts — ones that would affect personnel and programming — and board members said they're prepared to make tough choices in deference to local taxpayers who're being stretched to their limits.

(See ACSD budget, Page 13A)

Bristol police getting help with non-criminal issues

By MARIN HOWELL

BRISTOL — The town of Bristol has hired its first ever community resource specialist, a new position created by the municipality last year to help the Bristol Police Department respond to mental health calls, animal complaints and other instances where residents might not be breaking the law but need support.

It's seen as a trend that other local police departments may imitate.

Bristol Police Chief Bruce Nason said the town has hired Bristol resident Amy Smith for the position. Smith was expected to begin her new role this week.

"We look forward to working with her and (providing) this valuable resource to the Bristol community," Nason told the Independent.

The Bristol selectboard this past December voted to establish the community resource specialist position to assist police respond to non-criminal calls they receive and to perform other non-law enforcement responsibilities.

At the time, Nason told the selectboard the new position would support his department in its community policing approach and providing residents with compassionate and (See Bristol, Page 10A)

College students teach grade schoolers to cook, and try new produce

By MARIN HOWELL

MIDDLEBURY — Grade-school students learn a variety of important life skills in school each day, such as responsibility, critical thinking and collaboration.

A program run through the Middlebury College Center for Community Engagement is helping local elementary students add another key skill to their toolkit — cooking.

The Nutrition Outreach and Mentoring program, or NOM, works with area schools to provide hands-on cooking lessons for students with the goal of building community and introducing students to different foods and food practices.

"Our main aim is to create community and connect with people through food, and especially families and kids in the local (See Outreach, Page 10A)

Local farm equipment dealer grows into N.Y. state

By JOHN FLOWERS

MIDDLEBURY — On the cusp of 63 years old, Champlain Valley Equipment President Brian Carpenter thought he'd be easing into a more measured work schedule in tandem with his role as chair of the Middlebury selectboard.

But sometimes, life doesn't go according to plan — especially when a good business opportunity materializes.

That opportunity, for Carpenter, was a chance to add Central New York-based Empire Tractor Inc. to CVE's already broad portfolio of 11 dealerships offering farm, lawn & garden, and light construction equipment. Empire, a well-established company whose wares include Kubota and New Holland equipment, has store locations in Batavia, Atlanta, Cortland, Waterloo, Watertown, and Canton, N.Y.

Carpenter said Empire majority owner Tim Call — with whom he's been friends for some 30 years — first reached out to him in 2015 to gauge his interest in buying the company.

Carpenter was intrigued, but a merger wasn't in the cards at that time.

"I had other things going on here in Vermont, and it just didn't work," he said.

But when Call reached out last year with an acquisition pitch, Carpenter and his CVE colleagues (See CVE, Page 13A)



By the way

Volunteers will be seeking Vergennes Community Food Shelf donations at Shaw's Supermarket in Vergennes this Friday, Nov. 15, from 4 to 7 p.m., and Saturday, from 9:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. The Vergennes Lions and Rotary clubs are co-sponsoring the event to collect food and non-food items needed for the Thanksgiving holiday season. Cash donations will also be gratefully accepted.

The Independent on Nov. 7 (See By the way, Page 16A)

New Haven offers a space to heal through crafts and connection

By MARIN HOWELL

NEW HAVEN — Navigating grief can be an isolating, painful and overwhelming experience, but we don't have to go through it alone.

A new program starting up at the New Haven Community Library aims to offer community members a space to process grief together while enjoying the healing benefits of crafting. It's called "Grieving and Weaving," and is being spearheaded by New Haven resident Jen Grilly.

"Everyone says that there's no timeline on grief, and so people who have lost someone years ago are still grieving this process and may not feel like there's space for that grief anymore because of that timeline," Grilly said during a recent interview. "I don't want people to feel that way. I want people to feel like (See Connections, Page 16A)

After long wait, Salisbury town hall fix is imminent

By JOHN FLOWERS

SALISBURY — Thanks to a couple of major grants and dedicated community volunteers, a more-than-20-year effort to renovate Salisbury's historic 1869 Town Hall building at 918 Maple St. is expected to come to fruition next year.

One of the project's top beneficiaries will be town hall's primary tenant: the Salisbury Free Public Library. But the work will also greatly enhance the community's overall use of a building that's thus far been limited by accessibility issues and the absence (See Salisbury, Page 17A)



COLLEGE STUDENTS INVOLVED in Middlebury College's Nutrition Outreach and Mentoring program led a cooking lesson on Zoom with local families last month. Recipes are centered around a different produce each month and offer a chance for multiple people to get involved in the cooking process.

Photo courtesy of Lucca Franz

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Election reaction

(Continued from Page 1A)
 MiddVot's efforts and first-year students frequently checking in on a residence hall pledge challenge. "I would go as far as to say that Middlebury now has a strong culture of voting. Students not only see it as a privilege, but treat it as a responsibility," Tazabekova said.

Tazabekova was a speaker at a community conversation hosted at Town Hall Theater on Tuesday, where over 50 people gathered to discuss the results of the elections and next steps.

The "Good Talks: Election Reflection" event was sponsored by Middlebury College's Kathryn Wasserman Davis Collaborative in Conflict Transformation and is the latest in a series of such events, which feature a brief overview on a topic from an expert and structured conversations in small groups led by a facilitator.

Tazabekova was one of three panelists who started things off with remarks on Tuesday, along with State Sen. Ruth Hardy, D-Middlebury, and Middlebury College political science professor Bert Johnson.

"I first want to acknowledge some of the emotions that have come with this election and with the results of the election," Sen. Hardy said. "I know lots of people are feeling sadness, and some people are feeling elation and excitement ... Right now, I'm feeling determined and grateful,

and I just want to make sure that everybody feels OK and safe to feel whatever they're feeling about the election and about the results and about what happened before and after last Tuesday."

Tazabekova described the experience at the college.

"The last week has been filled with a lot of energy and emotion, but for me the long haul really started the moment I got back to campus (in late August)," she recalled. "We did voter registration drives almost

every week, in the last month twice a week. We helped over 200 students send absentee ballots back home, a lot of them from the New England area but a couple from Arkansas, Texas, Michigan, Missouri, California."

Tazabekova acknowledged that election excitement on campus can't all be a direct result of MiddVot's civic engagement efforts, as this election is generally viewed as one of the most consequential elections in American history.

"However, it is reasonable to say that we have substantially helped generate excitement and education surrounding absentee voting," she added.

COLLEGE TURN OUT
 Tazabekova told the *Independent* that MiddVot has traditionally held voter registration drives and offered absentee voting assistance.

"However, one of my goals when I became president of MiddVot

GOP fortunes improve

ADDISON COUNTY — Local Democrats' political fortunes took a significant hit on Nov. 5 after they'd executed — for the first time ever — a clean sweep of all the county's Vermont House and Senate seats in 2022.

The county's delegation now includes three Republicans — state Sen.-elect Steve Heffernan of Bristol, along with Ferrisburgh's Rob North in the Addison-3 House district and Jim Casey of Hubbardton in the Addison-Rutland district.

Heffernan in January will become the county's first

Republican state senator since 2002. That's when longtime GOP incumbent Tom Bahre of Addison was defeated by the late Gerry Gossens, a Salisbury Democrat.

Republicans last controlled a majority of the county's Statehouse seats back in 2000. The delegation then included Bahre in the Senate, along with former GOP state Reps. Craig Scribner of Bristol, Ward Mann of Leicester, Connie Houston of Ferrisburgh, Harvey Smith of New Haven, Mark Young of Orwell and Dean George of Middlebury.

— John Flowers

to expand MiddVot's reach to community building more generally," she said. "As such, we have hosted community watch parties for students to watch the presidential and vice presidential debates in the Student Center together."

Those events were moderated by Johnson and political science professor Matthew Dickinson. Tazabekova noted that over 300 students in total attended those watch parties, and more than 350 students gathered on Election Night to watch results come in.

This fall MiddVot also hosted a panel with Middlebury College community members who served as delegates at the 2024 Democratic National Convention and worked to strengthen its ties with various cultural organizations on campus to engage historically

disenfranchised groups in local and state politics.

McDow, the communications director for MiddVot, noted that the organization also works to connect with first-year students and provide them with resources to vote while at college.

"This year we held voter registration drives during the first-year orientation activities and registered around 100 new students in both Vermont and their home states," McDow said.

MiddVot also organized its second First-year Pledge to Vote Residence Hall Challenge, which asks freshmen to pledge to vote if they are able or commit to other civic engagement activities if not. The residence hall with the most pledges wins a bonfire and doughnuts, McDow said.

"We have found that specifically

engaging with the freshman class creates a new wave of civically engaged and excited voters who want to share that with their peers," she said.

McDow saw results.

"I was absolutely blown away by the commitment, engagement, and enthusiasm that I saw in the weeks leading up to the election."

Students' enthusiasm was reflected in the number of students who took part in MiddVot's offerings this fall. Tazabekova said the organization registered at least 200 students to vote leading up to the election and around 90 college students took advantage of a shuttle service providing rides to the poll on Election Day.

"We heard reports that the

Middlebury Rec

Center polling station

got a record amount

of students registered

to vote on the same

day," Tazabekova said.

"A huge block of it

voted one way, and a

huge block of it voted

another way, and to me

that was equally

empowering because

it means that students

are getting their voices

heard despite being in

what could be seen as a

bubble of Middlebury."

Middlebury Town

Clerk Karin Mott

confirmed that the

polling station saw a

substantial amount of

same-day voter

registration on Election

Day, anecdotally in the

hundreds, but could not

say how many of those

voters were Middlebury

College students. She

noted that it's

common to see a lot of

same-day registration

during presidential

election years.

Following Election Day, a variety of different events were held on campus to help students reflect on the election and build community. Tazabekova said she's been in conversation with college officials about post-election events.

"We hope to engage a wide variety of student organizations to address both the emotional and educational implications of the election results, and MiddVot will play a critical role in these events," she said. "We want to give community members (faculty, staff and students alike) space to relieve stress and connect with others emotionally, and learn the potential political, social and economic consequences of a second Trump presidency."

OTHER TAKEAWAYS

Attendees on Tuesday also heard from Johnson, who offered insight on the election results on the national level from a political scientist's perspective.

"This election, for all the momentous potential impact that it may have, was not far and beyond what we might have expected given the economic context," he said. "This was about a 49%-51% election; that is about what economic indicators would have prepared us to expect."

Johnson provided context on some of the voter trends seen in this year's election.

"There were some demographic shifts that were in many ways continuations of what we've seen before, particularly among Hispanic voters moving farther to the right, people in rural areas moving a little farther to the right, working class people moving a little farther to the right, but these are all continuations of trends that existed beforehand," he said.

Johnson also offered attendees an idea of what to look for in the months to come, based on what's occurred during previous presidencies.

"Typically, a new president who is newly elected gets a lot done in the early months of the

term and gets very

ambitious, and there's

a lot of enthusiasm,

particularly if we have

a unified government

as we expect to have,"

he said. "Then the

immediate agenda may

pete out, ambitions

may get beyond what

voters are willing to

accept, and there may

be a diminishment in

enthusiasm among the

majority party and a

backlash among the

minority party, and then

the midterm election

comes around and that

tends to reverberate

against the party in power."

IN ADDISON COUNTY

Hardy spoke with the crowd about how the election played out in Addison County and Vermont, noting that prior to Election Day Democratic lawmakers held a supermajority in both the Vermont House and state Senate.

"After last week, the Democrats had pretty big losses," she said. "We lost our supermajority in the House and the Senate. We lost six senate seats in the majority."

Hardy noted that Democrats also lost 18 seats in the Vermont House. In Addison County, GOP candidates unseated two longtime Democratic lawmakers — incumbent state Sen. Chris Bray and Rep. Diane Lanpher of Vergennes.

"After being a completely blue county for the last two years, having a completely blue delegation, we now have a decidedly purple delegation with a mix of Democrats and Republicans," Hardy said. "I think that says a lot about what's happening nationwide and a microcosm of what's happening in our state and in our county."

Following the election, Hardy said she feels fortunate and grateful to have been re-elected (she was the top vote-getter in her race).

"I've been thinking a lot about processing what's going on; what did I learn and what do I need to focus on, but I've also been thinking about how I work with new colleagues," she said. "I think a lot of that is the conversation that maybe we'll have tonight, how do we talk with and work with people who have a difference of opinion from us."



STATE SEN. RUTH Hardy was one of three panelists to speak at a conversation reflecting on the election held this past Tuesday at Town Hall Theater. Attendees heard remarks from Hardy (center) Middlebury College political science Professor Bert Johnson (left) and Middlebury College student Daniza Tazabekova. Then the crowd split up into small groups to discuss the election results and next steps.

Independent photo/Marin Howell

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