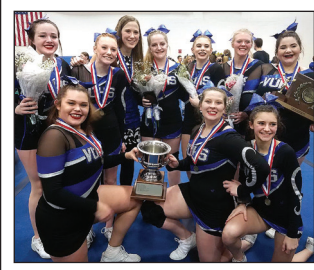




Dulcet duo

A pianist and cellist have formed a deep trust during four decades playing together. See Arts + Leisure.



Rah VUHS!

The Commodore cheer squad cruised to the D-II title in Vergennes on Saturday. See Page 1B.



FFA Week

Education in agriculture and land stewardship takes center stage for these youths. See Pages 12A-13A.

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BEAU SCURICH AND NAILA Baloch are the Middlebury College Muslim co-chaplains. They shared their experiences as Muslim Americans at Sunday's forum held at the Congregational Church of Middlebury.

Independent photo/Gaen Murphree

Being Muslim in Middlebury

Community members tell what it's like for them in Trump's America

By GAEN MURPHREE

MIDDLEBURY — Beau Scurich is an American; he grew up in California, like his parents and grandparents.

But as a Muslim — he is co-chaplain with his wife, Naila Baloch, at Middlebury College — Scurich was deeply wounded when President Donald Trump banned entry to the United States from seven Muslim countries and banned Syrian refugees indefinitely.

"After the executive order of the ban, it was the first time in my life that I began to question my place here in the United States," Scurich told an audience of more than 150 people Sunday in Middlebury. "My parents were born here. My parents' parents were born here. But sort of coming to terms with

(the fact) that maybe a third or a half of this country really wishes I wasn't here (has) brought up a certain inner turmoil."

Scurich and Baloch were joined by fellow Addison County residents Farhad Khan and Ata Anzali in a forum held at the Congregational Church of Middlebury and organized as a series of Community Conversations by the Rev. Andrew Nagy-Benson of the Congregational Church and Emily Joselson, a board member at Havurah, the local Jewish community.

The goal of the series is to help people in the community get to know each other. The focus of this forum was the community's Muslim members.

"We're here to learn and to (See Muslims, Page 15A)

"After the executive order of the ban, it was the first time in my life that I began to question my place here in the United States."

— Beau Scurich

Drug treatment center headed to city

Valley Vista finally set for Alden Place

By ANDY KIRKALDY

VERGENNES — Years after Valley Vista initially intended to operate in Vergennes, officials of the Bradford dependency treatment center now hope to open their doors at 1 Alden Place in Vergennes in a matter of weeks to help Vermonters suffering from drug and alcohol addiction.

Valley Vista's urgency is being

prompted by January's state-ordered closure of Underhill's Maple Leaf Treatment Center, a 41-bed facility that had been serving drug- and alcohol-dependent adults since 1956. State officials said they took that action following undisclosed complaints and a subsequent investigation.

Those 41 beds comprised about 30 percent of the inpatient beds in

Vermont treatment centers, for which state officials said there were already waiting lists.

Valley Vista has 80 beds in Bradford, including the only nine beds in the state reserved for teens, and Serenity House in Wallingford offers 24 beds.

Valley Vista co-owner Rick DeStefano said Vermont is feeling the loss of Maple Leaf at a time the state is increasingly struggling with heroin and opioid dependency.

"We were deeply saddened that Maple Leaf closed," DeStefano said. "We feel the need is great. We continued to have a waiting list when Maple Leaf was open."

He said work remains to be done, but there seem to be few barriers to Valley Vista opening soon at 1 Alden Place, a 19-bed, 9,100-square-foot former nursing home. The building sits on a cul-de-sac at the very northern edge of the city's downtown, (See Treatment center, Page 16A)



Red all over

A BRIGHT RED barn shines in the morning sun in Whiting Tuesday.

Independent photo/Trent Campbell

Bray seeks to put teeth in renewable target

By JOHN FLOWERS

MONTPELIER — It was six years ago that then-Gov. Peter Shumlin recommended the state satisfy 90 percent of its energy needs through renewable sources by the year 2050.

Sen. Chris Bray, D-New Haven, is spearheading a bill that he hopes will make Shumlin's goal a reality.

Bray, chairman of the Senate Natural Resources & Energy Committee, is the lead sponsor of S.51, which would pace the 90-percent goal in statute. It also proposes to establish additional

supporting goals, and to require that state plans affecting energy be tailored to achieve the objective of 90-percent renewables by 2050.

"People might be surprised by this, but the goal started in 2011," Bray said in a recent phone interview. "We are in our sixth year, already. But what we haven't done is committed to it. And for the Legislature, the way we make commitments is we make



BRAY

them in black and white and we make them in statute. So the opportunity here is to be clear and intentional about making this commitment, and then figuring out the best path to getting to a higher level of renewable energy by 2050."

The so-called "Consolidated Clean Energy Planning and Economic Opportunity Act" would require, among other things, that the state:

- Make an effort to produce 25 percent of its energy through renewable energy sources by 2025 — particularly from its farms and forests.

- By 2025, derive from renewables 10 percent of all energy consumed for transportation purposes; and 30 percent of all energy consumed in buildings, including heating and cooling.

- By the year 2035, supply 40 percent of all energy consumed in Vermont from renewable sources.

(See Bray, Page 11A)

40 'workforce housing' units proposed for the shire town

By JOHN FLOWERS

MIDDLEBURY — A Williston company is seeking permission to build a three-story, 40-unit apartment building off Middlebury's Court Street that would provide "moderate affordable housing."

The approximately 43,000-square-foot building would be built on a 1.2-acre lot in Middlebury South Village (MSV), a planned unit development that already includes a mixture of housing, businesses and offices between Creek Road and Middle Road.

The parcel in question had in 2014 been slated to host 16 townhouses proposed by Burlington's Retrovest Companies.

But Retrovest abandoned the townhouses plan, thereby freeing (See Apartments, Page 11A)



ADDISON COUNTY TRANSIT Resources Executive Director Jim Moulton has announced that ACTR will merge with Randolph-based Stagecoach Transportation Services. The merger is expected to result in more efficient operations, savings and ultimately new routes for passengers.

Independent photo/Trent Campbell

ACTR set to merge with Stagecoach; pluses seen

By JOHN FLOWERS

MIDDLEBURY — An impending merger between Addison County Transit Resources (ACTR) and Randolph's Stagecoach Transportation Services won't affect current local bus routes, but it is expected to pay substantial future dividends for the county's public transportation company and the people it employs and serves.

Specifically, the merger with Stagecoach — which provides transportation to residents in Orange County and the northern part of Windsor County — will create economies of scale that should drive down the future costs of new buses and equipment, according to ACTR (See Bus service, Page 11A)



By the way

Calling all former UD-3 school board members! All those who have stepped up since 1954 to serve as a board member from one of the seven towns in the Addison (See By the way, Page 15A)

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Muslims

(Continued from Page 1A)

listen and to share," Joselson told the crowd, explaining that the series "grew out of our concern about how to move forward as a country all the way down to a community with such drastically different perspectives on who we are and what community means.

"So one of the things we decided we wanted to do first off was get to know all of us better."

Nagy-Benson initiated the discussion by asking the panelists if their sense of well-being as American Muslims had been affected by recent events. The responses highlighted both an increasing tension experienced by the panelists as well as an outpouring of support from the local community.

"Since the election results," Baloch started, "I think a lot of Muslim students were afraid of being known as Muslims visibly, or sometimes afraid not for themselves but for other people."

Baloch said the shifting political climate has affected her sense of "security in my place," and noted that it reminds her of the shifts in public opinion after 9/11.

"I think after the election, and especially after the ban, a similar sense came up for me," said Baloch, who is a green card holder and is married to a native-born U.S. citizen. "Even though technically I'm allowed to live in the country and it shouldn't be a problem, internally I feel that anything could happen and that maybe there isn't space for me here."

Anzali is a professor of religion at Middlebury College and lives in Weybridge with his family. He and his family were tripped up by the travel ban when they tried to return from a research trip to Iran, even though the Iranian native holds a U.S. green card that shows he and his family had been vetted by the U.S. State Department.

At the forum, Anzali described his deepening connection to Addison County over the years he and his family have lived here.

"Because of moving to this really wonderful community, I had started to feel like ... 'this is your home, this is where people receive you warmly and greet you kindly and they want you here,'" he said.

The ban hit him, said Anzali, "in my heart, like there was a danger of frost, basically that there was really a danger of 'well, maybe I don't belong here.'"

Khan, is outgoing president of the Vermont Islamic Society and owner of Middlebury's One Dollar Market on Court Street. He has lived in the United States for 26 years, 25 in Vermont. He said he had never experienced intolerance in Vermont until recently.

"About six months ago, my wife she's driving down the street on Court Street and somebody pulls up next to her and rolls down the window and they say, 'Go home you terrorist,'" he recounted. "In the past six to seven months, I know of six to seven incidents of bigotry that I can document right now, not just against Muslims, but against Haverah, against somebody who is of color, against everybody."

OUTPOURING OF SUPPORT

Each panelist stressed the incredible outpouring of support they have received and how it's reaffirmed their sense of belonging and helped them regain a sense of equilibrium as an American.

Khan described how hate mail that's come to the Islamic Society was followed by "a couple of thousands of postcards in our mosque saying nothing but love.

"There's an organization called Love Brigade in Vermont and they're sending postcards to all the mosques in the country with just hearts on them. So that's one of the positives," Khan said.

He then drew laughs from the crowd when he added, "The other positive I've seen: I get a lot of hugs now in my store. I have people come and give me hugs. I feel I'm so blessed."



EMILY JOSELSON ADDRESSES a crowd of more than 150 at the Congregational Church of Middlebury Sunday evening during a forum on Muslims in Addison County. Panelists behind Joselson are, from left, Farhad Khan, Ata Anzali, Beau Scurich and Naila Baloch. Joselson, a Haverah board member, organized the event with the Rev. Andy Nagy-Benson as part of a series of community conversations in response to President Trump's recent executive order restricting entry into the United States from several Muslim countries.

Scurich also appreciates the positive feelings that have integrated him into the community.

"I was feeling a little bit separated and a touch isolated," he said. "But within days there was just such a flood of support that I felt that the power of community support, people reaching out, had a profound affect on me. It was almost like people would not allow me to be separated from my community, which was very powerful."

A theme among the questions and answers was how to keep America an open and welcoming society and how to counter the kinds of fear and misinformation that lead to anti-Muslim sentiment.

Khan made a plea. "I don't want people to assume who I am. I want people to see who I am," he said. "This is so important for us."

One answer was for people of different faiths to work to understand each other better.

Scurich, for example, addressed the often-misunderstood Islamic concept of "jihad" and explained that it comes from an Arabic root meaning to "exert" or "struggle."

"What it means in the lives of Muslims is something of an inner struggle to be a better human being. That is the jihad for 99 percent of Muslims," he said. "That is the jihad that they live with on a daily basis. Going to bed at one in the morning and then trying to get up and do your morning prayers: a jihad."

Khan noted the importance in Islamic tradition of "taking care of your neighbors ... If one of your neighbors goes hungry, you are responsible."

Several panelists also offered the observation that the "clash of civilizations" narrative of "the West vs. Islam" promulgated since 9/11 is also itself misleading.

"In terms of people I knew in Pakistan and people I knew in America (at the time of 9/11) that was not true," Baloch said. "People are people everywhere. It's not that there is some kind of deep ideological clash that people can never come

together. So I think for me it was important that people like me who knew both worlds talk to both sides and try to build bridges.

"And I think many people are doing this in many different ways. More and more, each one of us in whatever capacity can be a bridge. We can do that."

Scurich said it was important for individuals not just to be publicly active, but also to have the courage to assess themselves.

"We need to take charge of our own hearts and what is inside of us and to purify what we are reflections of, where maybe we are afraid or have a tendency to move toward hatred in any subtle way," he said.

Several audience members emphasized how important it is for those in a place of majority or privilege to speak out.

"Knowing and loving people who are from a different group than we are really helps bridge those gaps," said the Rev. Susan McGarry of St. Stephen's Episcopal Church, drawing parallels between those in a religious minority and the experience of gays and lesbians.

The panelists all expressed their willingness to engage in similar dialogues with groups across Vermont and to reach out to other groups of colleagues and to neighbors, building bridges one by one.

Khan said that in recent months the Islamic Society had received a flood of requests for guest speakers, from around the state.

"There is a responsibility for both Muslims and the larger community to make connections," said Anzali. "I have to make more connections, I have to reach out more to help people realize I'm human, I'm a Muslim, I'm not a threat to you. And then likewise the community has to reach out."

"This is going to change from the grass roots ... We have to make one connection at a time."

Reflecting on Sunday's forum as he and Joselson begin planning the next communitywide discussion, Nagy Benson said: "The project of getting to know each other is not new.

Independent photo/Gaen Murphree

The challenge of talking with people of different faiths and backgrounds is not new. But in times like this, a renewed commitment to increase our perspectives and to dismantle stereotypes can be an antidote to division, locally and nationally."

By the way

(Continued from Page 1A)

Central Supervisory Union (Bridport, Shoreham, Cornwall, Salisbury, Ripton, Weybridge and Middlebury) are cordially invited to come to Middlebury Union High School next Tuesday, Feb. 28, from 6:30 to 7 p.m., for the final UD-3 annual meeting. Current board members would love to share conversation and cake with you. The newly formed Addison Central School District will hold its first annual meeting immediately after.

Organizers of an effort called "Resistance Tuesday" told us that any interested in being an "active participant in our democracy" is invited to a half-hour gathering in the College Park (opposite Sama's) in downtown Middlebury to discuss the issues of the day and find strength in solidarity. The date is Tuesday, Feb. 28; the time is 12:30 p.m. This is the first of what is hoped to be a weekly gathering. Children, dogs and posters will be very much welcomed.

Come out and support the Leicester Central School 6th-grade class trip to NYC this Sunday afternoon and have a little fun while you're at it. There will be a "Paint and Sip" fundraising event on Feb. 26, 2-4 p.m., at the Brandon American Legion. Participants will be asked for \$35, which will go in to a pot to help

the kids pay for their big trip. If you're planning to take part in the fundraiser you must preregister at www.atasteofartvt.com — Click on "calendar" and select "Leicester School Fundraiser."

The Vergennes Union High School Music Department's annual Black and White Cabaret that was scheduled for Feb. 13 was snowed out. The new date for the cabaret is Wednesday, March 1, at 6:30 p.m. in the VUHS Middle School Gym. There will be tasty desserts and hot beverages for the audience to enjoy while hearing music from the Commodore Jazz Ensemble, Commodore Singers and various small vocal and instrumental ensembles. Admission is by donation, with proceeds to benefit the VUHS High School Band and Chorus performance trip to Philadelphia in April.

The public hearing for the Middlebury Downtown Improvement District Commission that was scheduled for this Friday, Feb. 24, and featured in a guest editorial in this newspaper earlier this month, has been postponed until early- to mid- April. A date for the hearing will be announced soon. If you have any innovative ideas for potential projects to support and improve the shire town's downtown, forward them to kramsay@townofmiddlebury.org.

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What is the Best Way to Heat Your Home?

Informational workshop

Tuesday, February 28th from 6:30 pm - 7:30 pm
Vergennes Opera House, Vergennes

This workshop will make sense out of the broad range of home heating options available in Vermont, including:

- Heat Pumps
- Natural Gas: Why Gas? Considerations & Program Support
- Pellets, cordwood & central systems vs. space heaters
- Traditional Fuels: Fuel cost comparison & the difference between boilers & furnaces
- Insulation & Air Sealing: Plug the holes first!

This workshop is one of many activities happening in Vergennes to help businesses and residents save energy.

For other activities, contact either **Efficiency Vermont** at 888-921-5990 or **Vermont Gas** at 802-863-4511.

The workshop will be led by Jake Marin, HVAC Program Manager with Efficiency Vermont, and Jeremy King from Vermont Gas Systems.

The workshop is co-sponsored by



Do you have an upcoming concert?

Let us know!

news@addisonindependent.com