



Perfect sort

Up your trash stats this weekend at Middlebury College's Chip Kenyon Arena. See Page 2A.



Starting fast

The Tiger Nordic teams finally hit the trails, and the boys won their first two meets. See Page 1B.



MLK tribute

Conductor will bring a powerhouse choir to town for Martin Luther King Day. See Page 12A.

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Act 46 to expand school board ballots

Unification vote offers election options

By JOHN FLOWERS

MIDDLEBURY — Middlebury-area voters will see a lot more names than usual on their Town Meeting Day ballots this year. That's because the Addison Central Supervisory Union is pursuing a unified school district under Act 46, which means a brand new, 13-member school board will need to be elected. And that's in addition to positions on the current elementary and UD-3 school boards that will have to be filled to ensure a

smooth transition for the new panel. Town clerks from the ACSU-member towns of Bridport, Cornwall, Middlebury, Ripton, Salisbury, Shoreham and Weybridge are scheduled to meet this Thursday, Jan. 14, at 4:30 p.m. at the ACSU central office to train for the new wrinkles that Act 46 will present for the upcoming March 1 local elections.

Voters in the Addison Northwest Supervisory Union, which is also voting on an Act 46 unification plan,

will similarly vote for a new unified board in addition to filling out current boards (See story on Page 3A).

"This is quite complex," Will Senning, director of elections with the Vermont Secretary of State's Office, said of the process.

Here, in no particular order, are some of the more dramatic Act 46-related changes that ACSU voters will notice when they go to the polls on March 1:

- A referendum on creating the new unified district and unified school board. If approved, this would

set into motion a transition from the ACSU's current nine school boards to one panel overseeing a single, global spending plan for all seven district elementary schools, Middlebury Union Middle School and Middlebury Union High School.

If the unified district referendum fails in one or more of the seven communities, the ACSU will need to fashion a different route to governance consolidation that will come with fewer economic incentives from the state of Vermont. A successful, (See Candidates, Page 13A)



MIDDLEBURY COLLEGE SENIOR Hanna Nowicki leads a January Term workshop on hula dancing in Proctor Hall Tuesday afternoon. A wide variety of workshops, many led by fellow students, are offered during the college's J-Term.

Independent photo/Trent Campbell

J-Term students dive into unique coursework

By JULIA JOHN

MIDDLEBURY — Despite the meager layer of snow half-heartedly draping campus, Middlebury College this week opened its Winter Term.

Students returned from their holidays to begin a unique month of intensive classwork, extracurricular workshops, skiing and socializing that is integral to the Middlebury experience.

What sets apart the Winter Term, more popularly known as J-Term because it lasts the month of January, from the rest of the academic year is that each student is registered for just one course credit. Most students take a class that meets at least eight hours a week, picking from a stimulating and diverse catalog of liberal arts options that are not typically (See J-Term, Page 13A)

On the front lines



LINCOLN RESIDENT MARI Cordes stands on the shore of the Greek island Lesbos with another volunteer and a family of Syrian refugees who had just completed a precarious journey to the island. Cordes, a nurse, volunteered her services to the refugees earlier this month. Courtesy photo

'Team Vt.' brings aid to Syrian refugees

By GAEN MURPHREE

LINCOLN — "We didn't sleep very much," says Mari Cordes of her recent week on the Greek island of Lesbos.

No, it was not a winter vacation in search of the sun. The Lincoln resident went to Greece to provide humanitarian and medical aid to refugees from Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan and elsewhere, who continue to arrive by the thousands,

often on dangerously overcrowded inflatable dinghies, drenched and shivering as they flee their war-torn homelands.

"On an average day, there were thousands of refugees coming ashore," said Cordes.

"These are not terrorists," she continued. "These are people who know they could die making this crossing. They know that it's a perilous journey. These are people who are fleeing

such horrific war scenes in their homeland that they're willing to risk even their children's lives to get out of there and to get their children out of there."

A registered nurse who works at the UVM Medical Center, Cordes, 56, went to Lesbos as part of a seven-member team of volunteers put together by Burlington resident Megan (See Refugees, Page 14A)

VUHS to make cuts to reach \$10M budget

Board OKs figure; vote date still TBD

By ANDY KIRKALDY

VERGENNES — The Vergennes Union High School board on Monday adopted a \$10,026,000 budget proposal for the 2016-2017 school year that represents a 2.23 percent spending cut from current spending.

In what Addison Northwest Supervisory Union Superintendent JoAn Canning on Tuesday called an over-

sight during a lengthy budget discussion, the board did not take up a separate \$100,000 capital fund article.

Canning said the board would briefly meet next week to look at such an article, which board members have said is central to their long-range school maintenance plan.

"They expect it to be part of the budget," Canning said.

Counting that \$100,000, total VUHS spending would be reduced by about \$134,000, or 1.3 percent, from (See VUHS, Page 15A)

Middlebury backs signal to fix Court St. intersection

By JOHN FLOWERS

MIDDLEBURY — The Middlebury selectboard on Tuesday endorsed a fix for one of the most troublesome intersections on Court Street, a solution that would call for a realigned Charles Avenue to produce a four-way, signalized stop at Monroe Street.

The proposed solution relates to the inefficient traffic flow, driver

confusion, pedestrian safety issues and periodic bottlenecks at what is really two intersections: the one where Charles Avenue meets the west side of Court Street, and the one a hundred feet south where Monroe Street meets the east side of Court Street. This setup, near the entrance of Middlebury Union High School, promotes inefficient north-south (See Court St., Page 16A)

Painting, poetry shed light on forest work

Vt. Folklife Center features local artist

By JULIA JOHN

MIDDLEBURY — Lincoln artist Kathleen Kolb has been painting enchantingly radiant, realistic scenes of local forestry for two decades. Three summers ago, when Kolb shared her work with Vermont poet Verandah Porche, her longtime friend and former colleague at the Governor's Institute on the Arts, the writer suggested they collaborate. So Porche spent last spring conversing and writing verses with foresters featured in Kolb's paintings, complementing their visual depiction with words.

In the traveling exhibit "Shedding Light on the Working Forest," the evocative power of Kolb's visual art and Porche's poetry unite to tell the story of the surrounding woods and the people working within them. It will open at the Vermont Folklife

Center this Friday evening and continue until April 30.

Consisting of 27 or 28 paintings, more than half on loan from private collectors, the exhibition features landscapes and forestry professionals from Addison County. Twelve poems, mostly composed with the foresters themselves, accompany the artwork.

It follows the Folklife Center exhibit "Portrait of a Forest: Men and Machine," which profiled, in photos and writing, seven men who make their living from the Vermont forest.

Kolb remarks that although "Shedding Light on the Working Forest" constitutes a fraction of her landscape work, this collection is unique because it gives greater focus to people through a theme, and includes (See Exhibit, Page 16A)



LINCOLN ARTIST KATHLEEN Kolb works on one final image for her upcoming exhibit "Shedding Light on the Working Forest," which opens at the Vermont Folklife Center in Middlebury on Friday. Independent photo/Trent Campbell



By the way
Two important deadlines are coming up for those interested in having a say in what will be on Town Meeting Day ballots. First, Thursday, Jan. 14, is the last day (See By the way, Page 15A)

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Refugees

(Continued from Page 1A)

Frenzen, a health economist. Calling themselves “Team Vermont,” the group included two physicians, three nurses, and a young Syrian immigrant named Ruba Orfali. Currently a student at St. Michael’s College, Orfali acted as translator for the group during their time in Lesvos, Jan. 2 through 9.

Frenzen had approached Cordes around Thanksgiving to ask if she would join the volunteer medical team. Cordes said yes because she knew that with her nursing skills she’d be able to make a small but valuable contribution and because she was distressed by so much of the rhetoric labeling the refugees as terrorists — especially in the aftermath of the Paris and San Bernardino attacks.

“Both of us were getting more and more agitated by the hateful rhetoric that was being voiced in our country and in our state,” Cordes said.

Cordes is no stranger to pitching in on international relief efforts. In 2010, she helped organize the Vermont Federation of Nurses and Health Professionals’ relief effort in the aftermath of the Haitian earthquake, and she was among the first to arrive in Haiti.

“We sent a fresh team every week for six months,” Cordes continued, “literally hundreds of people.”

Cordes led several relief trips to Haiti. And individuals from that group of volunteers also provided medical relief after Hurricane Irene, Hurricane Sandy, and the 2013 tsunami in the Philippines.

For this month’s “Team Vermont” relief effort on Lesvos, Cordes and Frenzen knew that they wanted to organize their group independently, rather than go as part of a larger non-profit such as Doctors Without Borders.

“We’ve learned as people who respond to disasters that while there

are some larger organizations that truly are helpful, as a smaller and independent group we’re more efficient. The donations and the huge support we got from our families and communities gets funneled directly to the people who need it. There’s no overhead. We’re more facile. It’s not for everybody, but for us, it’s best if we go independently and then plug in.”

Frenzen coordinated with the non-profit Off Track Health, which has ongoing relief efforts on Lesvos. The group runs a 24-hour clinic outside the official boundaries of the Moria refugee camp, on a spot called Afghan Hill. There are too many refugees to fit inside the camp itself, said Cordes, and Afghan Hill is one of the places where spillover people set up a temporary homes while they wait to be processed and allowed to move on to mainland Greece and then, hopefully, on to new lives elsewhere in Europe. That was the goal — get to Greece, a member of the European Union, and from there disperse throughout the continent.

Cordes and the Frenzens raised funds for the trip through the Gofundme website. Cordes herself raised over \$4,000 in about a month. To make the trip doable, she took unpaid leave from UVM and both her mortgage and her car lenders agreed to defer her monthly payments. UVM Medical Center donated supplies.

“The money we raised helped us get there and then buy hundreds of blankets for refugees, (and) shoes,” Cordes said. “We brought over 11 huge duffel bags full of medical supplies and clothing that people had donated.”

Cordes explained that the group knew they wanted to purchase blankets and as many other supplies for



SYRIAN REFUGEES COME ashore on the Greek island of Lesvos early this month. Lincoln resident Mari Cordes spent a week volunteering with the refugees.

Courtesy photo



LINCOLN RESIDENT MARI Cordes has just returned from volunteering at the Moria refugee camp on the Greek island of Lesvos. Cordes works as a nurse at the University of Vermont Medical Center.

Independent photo/Trent Campbell

the refugees as they could in Lesvos, where the beach-based tourist economy has taken a hit because of the thousands of refugees pouring onto the island’s shores.

‘A TOTAL M.A.S.H. UNIT’

Once on Lesvos, Off Track Health paired up Cordes and Team Vermont pediatrician Jenna Arruda on the 3 p.m. to midnight shift at the clinic, which Cordes described as “a total M.A.S.H. unit — plywood and a tent.” The rest of the Vermont medical team was assigned to the overnight shift.

While work at the clinic varied, Cordes said they treated a lot of people for sprains, fractures, respiratory infections, exhaustion, shock and hypothermia. Hypothermia, she said, was especially lethal among the youngest refugees.

“I believe that’s probably the reason the majority of the little ones die is because of hypothermia, if they didn’t drown on the way over,” said Cordes.

It’s evident, to hear Cordes talk, how important it was to put her nursing skills to work. The most intense and moving words come when she talks about her daytime assignment on the beach, where she and other volunteers would post themselves every morning, clad in reflective yellow vests that identified them as health professionals, scanning the Aegean Sea for the next boatload of refugees coming ashore.

For the relief workers, the routine on the beach stayed the same, as boat after boat rolled in — help people get out, get them into dry clothes. If no clothes were available get them wrapped in blankets right next to the skin. Distribute emergency sugar tablets or cookies or crackers for quick energy, escort the refugees off the beach, out of the wind, and into the waiting United Nations High Commission on Refugees vans for transport to the Moria camp or, if full, to one of the surrounding places, like Afghan Hill, where refugees could find shelter and get a hot drink, food and dry clothes.

Cordes described many of those arriving as in a state of shock both emotional and physiological, often battling hypothermia and complete exhaustion. These were people, she said, whose homes and communities had been destroyed by war, who’d faced incredible hunger, sometimes close to starvation, women who’d been raped, women who didn’t know where their husbands were — possibly dead or imprisoned, fathers and mothers who’d seen their children brutalized.

“And that’s on top of missile strikes in their towns,” said Cordes. “It would be like a missile strike happening in Bristol or Burlington.”

Fleeing Turkey on the small inflatable dinghies most commonly used by the smugglers who arrange the journeys is also dangerous, said Cordes. The smugglers themselves don’t make the five-mile, open ocean



Lincoln resident Mari Cordes was understandably moved by seeing refugees make the dangerous ocean crossing from Turkey to the Greek island of Lesvos. The gravity of what she witnessed on the beach is best heard in her own words:

“There was a 24-hour presence on the beaches with binoculars looking for boats. We’d be waiting with worry and anticipation. And then there’d be a spotting, and we’d have some excitement that they might make it. Sometimes the Greek Coast Guard would help them, even to the point of towing them towards shore. The boats would get closer and closer and we would line up waving our arms so they could spot us and know where to land.

“Sometimes one boat would come in, but more often three, four or five at a time, full of, overflowing with 90-year-old elders, babies, kids as young as nine traveling alone, families, young men in groups of twos or threes.

“When the boats got closer, the people on the boat were so excited to know that they had made it safely that they would start cheering. All of us on the beach would be cheering. Many of the people, as soon as they fell out of the boat would kiss the ground.

“The first few minutes were just chaotic, trying to get people out of the boat, trying to keep them dry, but most everyone was already saturated. It was so cold. There was a lot of hypothermia and at one point it was dropping into the high 20s, Fahrenheit, while we were there.

“The babies and the children would be handed off first. The parents would willingly just thrust their baby up for some stranger to grab and take it up on the beach and start to work to get the baby dry clothes and make sure it was warm and OK,” she concluded.

— Gaen Murphree

trip from Turkey to Lesvos. Oftentimes the boats are overloaded, the seas can be rough, the boats can capsize and the refugees drown. Sometimes the smugglers only fill the gas tank partway to make more money. Yet the refugees, said Cordes, might pay as much as \$4,000-\$5,000 per person. The Turkish Coast Guard might fire into the water surrounding the boats, as they did the week Cordes was in Lesvos. That week, more than 30 refugees drowned because the smugglers gave them fake life jackets.

GRACE AND COURAGE

Cordes is tough — the kind of medical professional who’s clearly at ease when humanity faces the worst. But what seemed to cut this veteran of disaster relief’s heart the deepest was the grace with which the refugees met their situation. Oftentimes,

in the makeshift clinic where the group provided medical care, Cordes and the other medical personnel would try to figure out what might be happening in the extended conversations Team Vermont’s translator often carried on with the refugees.

“When Ruba was working with us in the clinic with people who needed medical help, she would translate the medical situation. But then we would be sitting there and a person would be saying something more. And we, the healthcare providers that didn’t speak Arabic or Farsi, thought they were talking about medical things. But Ruba would say, ‘No, they’re saying things like, ‘God bless you,’ ‘May you have a long life,’ ‘May you have many children’ — like just five minutes of blessings on us. And they had lost practically everything. It just blew me away.”

Cordes says that she hopes to be able to engage her Addison County neighbors in greater dialogue about the refugee crisis. She’s been asked to speak in Craftsbury and Burlington and would welcome opportunities to speak with church or civic groups in Addison County. She intends to return to Lesvos later in 2016 and has already begun a new cycle of fundraising at Gofundme.com. Cordes also said that one does not have to be a medical professional or speak Arabic or Farsi to be a useful volunteer.

Mari Cordes can be contacted through her Facebook page or by email at mari.vermont@gmail.com. The Team Vermont Facebook page can be found at www.facebook.com/groups/977364542311577.

Reporter Gaen Murphree is at gaenm@addisonindependent.com.

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