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Notes from editor (not for publication):

This grew a little bit to get fully comprehensive! Nice looks behind the scenes. It was a pleasure to edit all of it from multiple writers.



HEADLINE ELEMENTS:

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1 Celebrating independence, striving for unity

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####BEGIN SUBHED####

2 For Windham County towns, traditions old and new will
3 commemorate the nation's 250th birthday on Independence Day

####END SUBHED####

4 TEXT BODY:

####BEGIN TEXT####

5 This year, we celebrate the United States' 250th birthday
6 — its semiquincentennial. On July 4, 1776, delegates from the
7 original 13 colonies officially declared themselves as a new,
8 independent nation by signing the Declaration of Independence.

9 The very meaning of the word “semiquincentennial”
10 implies we’re halfway to 500. Where have we gotten, and what
11 might the next 250 hold?

12 Here in the hilltowns of southern Vermont, the folks
13 planning town celebrations for the Independence Day have a
14 bigger theme to consider than just hot dogs and fireworks:
15 bringing community together, despite our differences, to
16 celebrate what we’ve made and the potential it holds for our
17 beloved communities.

18 Commemorating such a milestone for our still-young
19 nation means reflecting on the past while considering what our
20 future could look like. It also means centering our present: a time
21 of perceived divisions in this country that challenges us to come
22 together and celebrate as one.

23 *The Commons* offers a snapshot of these celebrations
24 and traditions old and new, compiled and written by Joslyn
25 Hamilton McIntyre and Robert F. Smith, with some additions
26 from your editors.

27 **Guilford: Fourth of July revival**

28 At Broad Brook Community Center (BBCC) in Guilford,
29 Executive Director Ada Brown is in charge of planning the town’s
30 Independence Day celebration and sees it as an opportunity to
31 zoom out and find a unifying perspective.

32 “I like to think about the past, and our history, through
33 the lens of how we can build on it and take what we learn from it
34 to help shape our future,” she says.

35 The former Guilford Grange Hall once hosted the
36 celebrations by decorating the porch with bunting, offering lawn
37 games for children, and inviting a prominent community member
38 to lead a rendition of “The Star Spangled Banner” on the porch.

39 A motley procession of Guilford residents — sometimes
40 consisting of town fire trucks, farm tractors, kids with decorated
41 bicycles, and the occasional farm animal — would make its way
42 up Guilford Center Road.

43 Longtime resident Don McLean recalls that for “a few
44 years, a farm tractor pulled a hay wagon with the Guilford
45 kindergarten. Once, maybe, the Franklins had a cow or calf
46 walking.”

47 This summer marks only the third consecutive year
48 Brown has organized a modern Fourth of July event at the BBCC,
49 but these celebrations have been in many ways a continuation of
50 the older Guilford tradition.

51 “I love history, and that’s one of things I love about
52 running the BBCC,” Brown says. “It’s a perfect example of taking
53 something old and transforming it into something usable for the
54 present, while still maintaining its connection to our past.”

55 Guilford’s July Fourth will begin with a noon reading of
56 the Declaration of Independence by community members of all
57 ages at the Guilford Center Meeting House. The traditional
58 Guilford “motley procession” will then parade down Guilford
59 Center Road to the BBCC to start the festivities, which include
60 bingo in the dining room (hosted by the Guilford Grange) and
61 yard games down the road at the Playscape.

62 The Guilford Country Store will host its annual BBQ,
63 complemented by strawberry shortcake by donation and free ice
64 pops and watermelon. And on the porch of the BBCC, musicians
65 Laurie Indenbaum and Mary Cay Brass will provide a backdrop
66 of songs.

67 A centerpiece of this year’s commemorative celebration
68 will be a children’s art show at the BBCC, “Past, Present and
69 Future.” Brown has invited local children to submit up to three
70 pieces, each reflecting on three themes: exploring what Vermont
71 might have been like in 1776, imagining this place in 2276, and
72 capturing what folks love about the town today.

73 The Guilford community is also co-creating three large-
74 scale mixed-media banners to hang in the BBCC in a project led
75 by local artists Joan Peters, Susan Bonthron, and Uriel Najera. The
76 banners will hang opposite the children’s art.

77 Brown believes that art is a powerful catalyst to shift
78 perspective and recognize how “regular people doing seemingly
79 small things can instigate a shift toward a better future.” She adds,
80 “Each participant will have the opportunity to collage their own
81 creative piece to these shared works or add directly to the
82 painted banners, helping to build a collective vision across
83 generations.”

84 As Brown says, “To me, this 250th celebration, and our
85 youth art show, are an opportunity to lift our heads up for a
86 minute, look beyond our current divisions and remember how
87 much things changed in those few years before and after 1776—
88 and think about how much they will change again in the next
89 250 years.”

90 She adds, “It’s also a chance to change our perspective, a
91 reminder of how quickly the world can shift, and that often it’s
92 just regular people doing seemingly small things that can
93 instigate that shift toward a better future.”

94 **Wardsboro: a long tradition of** 95 **low-tech Americana**

96 The Wardsboro 4th of July Street Fair and Parade stakes a
97 claim as the longest continuously running 4th of July celebration
98 in the State of Vermont, and in many ways, the celebration hasn’t
99 changed.

100 It begins on Main Street at 9 a.m. and includes a street
101 fair with vintage cars and trucks, floats and live music. The street
102 fair, now in its 77th year, spills down Main Street with more than
103 40 vendors, plus chicken barbecue, pie and strawberry shortcake
104 sales. There’s also a whole zone of kids’ activities, which this year
105 will include a bouncy house and obstacle course, a petting farm,
106 a “touch a truck,” face painting, and more.

107 Pete Carlson, known as “Pastor Pete,” of the Wardsboro
108 Yoked Parish, helps organize the event every year. He notes how,
109 over the years, a once-small celebration has grown to draw

110 thousands of people, partly because of its old-fashioned, low-
111 tech feel and the way it knits generations together.

112 “There’s families, there’s people dressed up in patriotic
113 outfits, there’s bikers, there’s out-of-state campers — it’s just a
114 blend of people, and they’re all there, first and foremost, to
115 celebrate Independence Day,” Carlson says.

116 Reflecting on the past, he continues, “For older folks, I
117 think it sort of allows them to relive their younger days, when
118 they could get out and be with family.”

119 Organizers have resisted bringing in a big public address
120 system or high-tech effects, and phone reception is spotty in
121 Wardsboro, so “you don’t see people walking around with their
122 face stuck in a phone,” Carlson observes.

123 “They’re enjoying the day,” he says. “It’s really about
124 community. People like to be with people. That’s the big draw.”

125 **Saxtons River: Americana on** 126 **parade**

127 The annual Saxtons River Fourth of July Celebration is
128 about as picture-perfect, small-town America as you can get —
129 complete with races, a parade, pie eating contests, and a street
130 fair.

131 Now in its 81st year, it will bring an estimated 1,000
132 people to the village’s Main Street. And with the area’s many
133 longtime activist residents, it often includes some good-natured
134 political satire, particularly in the parade.

135 An all-volunteer group of organizers pull the event
136 together every year, and they have a well-established template to
137 work with.

138 Susan Saunders, the president of the Fourth of July
139 Committee, describes the group as small, but she says that
140 everyone works equally hard to make it a success.

141 The day begins at 8:30 a.m. with the Firecracker 5K
142 taking advantage of the early morning coolness.

143 The parade lines up starting at 9:30 a.m. and begins its
144 march down main Street at 11 a.m. This year's theme is Once
145 Upon a River, and the grand marshals are Berta Martin and
146 Denny McArdle.

147 The parade includes local dance and gymnastic groups,
148 farmers, area fire and rescue vehicles, local civic groups, antique
149 cars, trucks and tractors, creative floats from citizens and
150 businesses, local music groups, and a kid's bike troupe organized
151 by Bonnie Anderson of the BF Community Bike Project.

152 Saunders says that they've never rejected any would-be
153 participants for the parade, but all are required to submit a
154 description of their entry before the parade.

155 "We require appropriate signs," she said. "No profanity,
156 and people are asked to keep things positive. This is a family
157 event, and we may see the need to talk with some entrees about
158 the guidelines."

159 New this year is a bike ride, the Tour des Villages, with 9-
160 or-14-mile loops starting in Saxtons River at 9:30 a.m. and
161 heading toward Grafton. It includes a contest where riders
162 estimate how far and fast they will ride. The participant who
163 comes closest wins a \$100 prize.

164 There is a \$5 entry fee, certified helmets are required,
165 and riders can't use any device like a watch or bike computer to
166 track their time and distance. E-bikes are welcome.

167 Bringing back an old tradition of the event in honor of
168 the nation's 250th anniversary, Saunders said, is a reading of the
169 Declaration of Independence from the bandstand, this year by
170 Mike Peller, Vermont Academy's head of school.

171 The popular hula hoop competition — which always
172 brings out a bunch of expert young teen competitors — is held in
173 the street in front the Saxtons River Village Market, often under a
174 brutal midday July sun.

175 A local drumming group provides the rhythm for the
176 event, which can stretch on for a half hour or more. Maryann

177 McArdle, along with her partner, Mark Ragonese, has organized
178 and judged the event for many years.

179 Anyone with a need to cool off can walk to the far end of
180 Main Street after the parade for the Firefighter’s Water Polo
181 contest. Depending on where and how close you stand to the
182 competition, you might be subject to a cool mist or a serious
183 soaking.

184 The afternoon’s street fair includes several food vendors,
185 a dunking booth, and live music. This year’s live entertainment
186 from the bandstand includes local duo Andrew and Felix, and a
187 performance by Saxton Rivers’ Shamus Martin.

188 In the evening, the traditional pickup softball game will
189 be held at the Saxtons River Recreation Center organized by
190 Dave Moore, and this year introduces a pickleball contest at the
191 same location.

192 FACT-TV, and WOOL-FM will help promote and record
193 the day’s events via community media.

194 In past years, the day ended with a fireworks display after
195 dark. Saunders said that practice stopped during the pandemic.
196 Since then, due to sharply increased costs, the complexity of
197 organizing the fireworks, and other factors, the Fourth of July
198 Committee has chosen to discontinue the pyrotechnics.

199 For more information, visit srvtfourth.org.

200 **Brattleboro: going fourth in a** 201 **big way**

202 In Brattleboro, the annual “By the People: Brattleboro
203 Goes Fourth” Independence Day celebration begins on Saturday,
204 July 4 at 10 a.m., with bands from the American Legion and
205 Brattleboro Union High School joining veterans and members of
206 civic groups and youth groups in marching from the intersection
207 of Flat Street and Main Street to the Town Common.

208 This year, the parade will feature a giant Statue of Liberty
209 puppet that is part of 118 Elliot’s “I Lift My Light” gallery show —

210 a project that honors the welcoming spirit of the Statue of Liberty
211 and the fact that its pedestal was designed by architect Richard
212 Morris Hunt, born in Brattleboro in 1827.

213 Brattleboro's Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks,
214 which is sponsoring the parade, "will lead the march with its
215 giant American flag, while local personality Alfred Hughes Jr. will
216 conclude the event by debuting his annual top-secret ensemble,"
217 parade organizers write on the event's [Facebook page](#).

218 Anyone seeking to decorate a bicycle for inclusion can
219 do so before the parade at 9 a.m. at the Whetstone pathway
220 beside the Brattleboro Food Co-op.

221 The parade route also will host athletes in the Red Clover
222 Rovers Firecracker 4-Miler, set to run from Living Memorial Park
223 at 9:15 a.m. through downtown to the Common.

224 From there, townspeople are invited to head to Living
225 Memorial Park for a free public concert, sporting events, and
226 family activities until the fireworks at 9:30 p.m.

227 Highlights include a Small Fry baseball All-Star Game at
228 2:30 p.m., a New England Center for Circus Arts performance at
229 5:45 p.m., and the Gaslight Tinkers band from 7 to 9:30 p.m.

230 When "Brattleboro Goes Fourth," it will be the 53rd such
231 celebration. Recreation and Parks Director Carol Lolatte said,
232 "Even though this is a special anniversary, we're going to do what
233 we've always done: offer free activities to everyone to create a
234 sense of community."

235 People seeking to support the event can mail donations
236 to "Brattleboro Goes Fourth," P.O. Box 1112, Brattleboro, VT
237 05302.

238 More information, including weather updates, will be
239 posted on the [Brattleboro Goes Fourth Facebook page](#).

240 **Marlboro: ice cream and**

241 **costumes**

242 The Marlboro Historical Society is sponsoring an ice
243 cream social and a costumed parade for Marlboro residents
244 starting at the Fire House at 1:30 p.m.

245 The annual event takes place on the first Saturday in July,
246 which this year coincides with Independence Day and the
247 Semiquincentennial.

248 The parade will conclude at the Historical Society,
249 “where everyone will find a variety of ice cream, toppings and
250 baked goods,” Marcia Hamilton writes in the town newsletter,
251 *The Marlboro Mixer*.

252 Hamilton requests that participants “avoid parking along
253 the road in the town center and at the firehouse.”

254 Townspeople are invited to participate.

255 **Newfane: A new tradition**

256 **emerges**

257 A community organization, Neighbors of Newfane,
258 spearheaded by Toni Powling, is planning a brand-new Fourth of
259 July event on the Town Common.

260 From 10 a.m. to 2 p.m., people are invited to celebrate
261 with free hot dogs and hamburgers provided by the Newfane
262 Store, chocolate milk donated by Miller Farms, a birthday cake,
263 face painting, and a petting zoo.

264 There will be old-fashioned games for kids, some of them
265 dating back to 1776. And rumor has it that Paul Revere may
266 swing through.

267 “We’re hoping to bring people together to celebrate the
268 Fourth of July and realize what’s happened in the last 250 years.
269 This is our country, and we should be able to celebrate,” Powling
270 says. “We’re hoping for a good turnout, and we want a fun day,
271 especially for the kids in the area.”

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Deerfield Valley: Pre-fourth

273

fireworks

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Deerfield Valley residents and visitors can celebrate

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Independence Day and enjoy a spectacular fireworks display on

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Thursday, July 2.

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The event at Hayford Field begins at 6 p.m. and features

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food vendors, cotton candy, music, a bounce house, and many

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vendors.

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Rain date is Friday, July 10.

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Free shuttles to the festivities will be available from

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parking at Howe Farm Field (off Route 100 North), and the

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Wilmington Town Garage (off Chimney Hill at 21 Haystack

284

Road).

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On Friday, July 3, Mount Snow will host a block party

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and a grand fireworks display over the mountain, with food trucks

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and beverages available.

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“Please feel free to bring a chair or your friendly dog on

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a leash, but outside alcohol is not permitted,” the resort writes.

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