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**VERMONT ALLIANCE OF  
I N D E P E N D E N T  
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Did you know? You can get this newsletter ready to print in color at the vaics.org website.

• **N E W S** •

**JANUARY-FEBRUARY 2005**

*The Vermont Alliance of Independent Country Stores is a nonprofit organization whose mission is to promote and enhance country stores, while preserving their unique heritage and contributions to their communities.*

**ALLIANCE RAISES VISIBILITY  
OF VERMONT'S INDEPENDENT  
COUNTRY STORES IN 2004**

IN WHAT CAN ONLY BE DESCRIBED AS A TRIUMPH FOR SUCH A NEW ORGANIZATION, the Vermont Alliance of Independent Country Stores appeared in no fewer than six feature stories in print and broadcast media in 2004.

From local news through NBC *Nightly News*, the success of the Alliance and its member stores caught the eye of journalists, who made the trip to the northland to observe first-hand the resurgence of Vermont's community cornerstones.

The news attention began in February with "Old-Time Store with a 21st Century Heart," a profile of the Old Brick Store in



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**ALLIANCE TO CELEBRATE  
CULTURAL HISTORY MONTH**

AS A FOLLOWUP TO THE FIRST INDEPENDENT COUNTRY STORE MONTH IN SEPTEMBER 2003, THE Alliance has joined with the Vermont Department of Tourism and Marketing in an informal 2005 Independent Country Store Month during Vermont's annual Cultural Heritage Month. As the Department writes in their announcement, "The tradition of country stores as a cornerstone of a community is alive and strong at the more than 50 member stores of the Vermont Independent Country Store Alliance. Many will host Vermont food

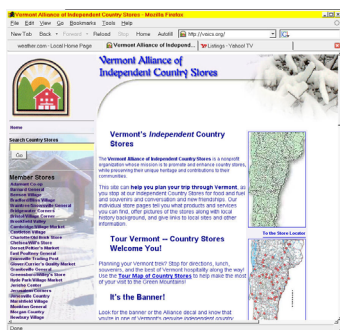
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**MEMBERSHIP INFO ONLINE**

ALLIANCE MEMBERSHIP INFORMATION AND APPLICATION FORMS ARE AVAILABLE FOR download and printing at the vaics.org website. Under the heading "Membership" click the link for Microsoft Word or Adobe PDF format. For potential members, there's also the PowerPoint slide show, our video, and other features.

# VAICS ON THE WEB

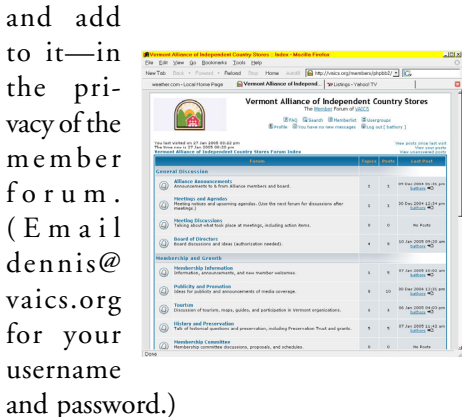
OUR WEBSITE [HTTP://VAICS.ORG/](http://vaics.org/) HAS undergone a facelift following the extensively publicity in 2004. Your home base for information about the Vermont Alliance of Independent Country Stores, the site has profiles of each store, our member list, articles and how-to features, and an important member forum.



At the home page, visitors can click on a Vermont map with the location of each Alliance member, together with directions to your store. Clickable links are also in place for members with websites, as well as to the Alliance's own store pages.

The members-only area has a form to update your store's goods and services list—and the member forum. The forum has been revitalized with a new format as the place to read notices, post questions, and keep up-to-date on Alliance activities. Although important notices do come via email (and some via postal mail), it's on the forum where discussions should be happening. *Make the VAICS Forum your home page!* Catch up with news—and add to it—in the privacy of the member forum. (Email dennis@vaics.org for your username and password.)

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The Alliance website also features how-to articles, and we welcome more. Send your notices and articles to [dennis@vaics.org](mailto:dennis@vaics.org), and post your comments and questions on the member forum. It's <http://vaics.org/>—your voice on the Web.

# PUBLICITY RAISES VISIBILITY

(Continued from Page 1)

Charlotte that appeared in *Business People - Vermont*. Rolf and Carolyn Sennhenn told their story, which was relayed in text and photos.

The visibility went regional in May, as Boston.com (the online version of *The Boston Globe*) published "Everything's In Store: Vermonters are still working hard to stock and diversify the stores that have long been features of village life." Correspondent Christina Tree explored Floyd's General Store in Randolph Center, Currier's Quality Market in Glover, Dan & Whit's in Norwich, Peltier's Market in Dorset, F.H. Gillingham's in Woodstock, Taftsville Country Store, and Bliss Village Store in Bradford, with a peek at Hastings in West Danville and Willey's in Greensboro.

The publicity heat was turned up to high in September. Beginning with a mention in the *Christian Science Monitor* in "The Vermont Approach: One of a kind", it quickly included a featured "My Turn" article by Alliance co-chair Jayne Nold-Laurendeau in *Champlain Business Journal*, and a recommendation in "Le Vermont par set villages et ses auberges" in Quebec City's *Le Soleil*.

It wasn't long before the regional coverage expanded downcountry to New York, where the *New York Times* spread the story nationwide with "Vermont's Country Stores Organize to Face Threats." The piece, reprinted via the wire service and summarized for the business community in the next day's *The Morning Beat*, took a less positive point of view, emphasizing struggle over success. Nevertheless, the *Times* article, with its photos of Taftsville and Arlington's Wayside Store, gave the Alliance substantial attention.

That attention also arrived on the desk of NBC News, where the production team for the just-retiring Tom Brokaw decided a visit to the Green Mountain State was in order. The team arrived for an Alliance meeting, where they videotaped events, interviewed members including co-chair Nold-Laurendeau, and picked up the supportive flavor of the gathering. The production group also spent time in the Wayside Store, where owners Doug and Nancy Tschorn had good camera time. The day of filming was distilled into nearly three minutes of nationwide visibility in December.

New England Cable News quickly followed up with an interview at Falls General Store with Naida and Steve Wolf, a story which ran that evening on local television stations.

The publicity story for the Alliance continues. Aside from its participation in the Vermont Department of Tourism and Marketing's regular meetings and June's Cultural Heritage Month (see front page story), the group is being featured in an upcoming wire service story in Scandinavia as well as a future issue of *Travel and Leisure*.

Most significantly, a production group from *Lou Dobbs Tonight* on CNN is arriving for the Alliance's February 10 meeting in Greensboro, where they will cover the group's activities as part of their "insourcing" series about keeping jobs in America.

If you have information about news stories about the Alliance, please contact Jayne Nold-Laurendeau at 802-485-8954 or [jayne@vaics.org](mailto:jayne@vaics.org), or visit the Alliance website at [vaics.org](http://vaics.org)



## MEETING AGENDA SET FOR FEBRUARY 10 IN GREENSBORO

### VAICS Membership Meeting – February 10

*Greensboro Historical Society  
Greensboro, Vermont*

Members of the Vermont Alliance of Independent Country Stores are invited to a membership meeting, hosted by Tom Hurst and Willey's Store.

When: Thursday, February 10  
Where: Greensboro Historical Society

Time: 9:00 a.m. Coffee & conversation  
10:00 a.m. Meeting  
12:00 p.m. Luncheon  
1:00 p.m. Tour of The Willey's Store

#### Agenda:

- A review of 2004 achievements
- The organization's financial status
- Participation in Cultural Heritage Month (multiple activities)
- Participation in the Vermont History Expo in Tunbridge
- Committee work & updates (membership, fundraising, pricing, private labeling, special projects)
- The film/video project
- The store flier project
- Current Tourism Department report
- Website content and updates
- Communication with membership
- Open discussion of member needs and ideas

Please fax or mail your store information to VAICS c/o VGA, 33 Lafayette Street, Rutland, Vermont 05701. For more information and directions, contact Jayne Nold-Laurendeau at 802-485-8954, jayne@vaics.org, or Tom Hurst 802-533-2613, greensboro@vaics.org.

Please note that this exciting meeting will be attended by a production team from Lou Dobbs Tonight on CNN. They will be videotaping, interviewing, and getting a sense of who we are and why we exist. Please be ready to tell your wonderful stories about why independent country stores are thriving in Vermont — your personal service, community involvement, responsiveness to customers, charm, long-term employees, families and more. They have an ongoing look at what might be called “in-sourcing” of jobs in America. (And they sound like fun, too!)



Charlotte

Jerusalem Corners

Barnard

## GETTING READY FOR CNN

WHAT DO YOU SAY? WHEN CNN ASKS you a question, you're a representative not only of your own store, but of all of our independent country stores in the Alliance.

So what *do* you say?

First, be positive. Newspeople expect the worst ... to hear about your struggles and the woes of the individual storekeeper fighting against all odds. That's a story, but it's not *our* story.

Our story is one of success. Despite the changes that have washed over the nation, Vermont's independent country stores have kept the lamp burning. They are the center of their communities, the place where Vermont's true spirit lives, where business is personal, where response is individual.

Remind them of what they have forgotten—or perhaps never knew: That it is possible to travel to a place where service and products are not homogenized. Where families run stores, not distant boardrooms. Where employees have served long enough to know their products and their customers. Where charm rules and politeness is normal.

If they ask what you offer that's different from a big box store, tell them that you have the BST-free grain you were asked for last week. Tell them that you deliver hot meals to homes. Tell them that you make deli sandwiches to order rather than from a manufactured list.

Tell them that, when they come to live here, you'll remember what they buy and always have it in stock. Tell them you have local products and healthy goods whose origins you know personally. Tell them that in emergencies, you'll be there to open up for the community.

Tell them you don't have to answer to boardrooms to add products customers ask for—whether it's new wines or cheeses, or a soap that's hard to find, or a healthy drink they've just heard of. Tell them that customer service isn't a bolt-on advertising slogan, but that it is your

(Continued on Page 4)

## GETTING READY FOR CNN

(Continued from Page 3)

business, day after day.

Tell them that while the big box store needs enormous computers to keep track of your purchases, that you'll do the same—because you will *remember* them in your mind one at a time, not by numbers in a machine.

Tell them stories. Tell them how you closed to bring food to firefighters on the job or clothes to stricken families. Tell them how you were involved in helping the local sports team make it to the regionals. Tell them how you direct the lost visitors day after day to the places they seek.

Tell them the history of your store—and how it weathered change and time and the seasons with character and strength, and how it is the heart of what America has always believed it must be: self-reliant, individual, fair, and proud.

## VAICS LOGO:

### WARM, NEW LOOK

THE ALLIANCE'S LOGO HAS BEEN IN USE FOR more than a year now, and is being well received everywhere. With a simple design and warm colors, the logo was selected from nearly a dozen submissions and now graces letterhead, banners, membership decals, and other items.

The Alliance logo was designed by **Small Planet** on Merchants Row in Rutland. The Alliance is grateful to Small Planet for their fine, creative work and wonderful cooperation during the development.

If you need a high-quality copy of the logo for your store, please email Dennis, [bathory@vaics.org](mailto:bathory@vaics.org)



## STILLS FROM "THE CORNER STORE" ON NBC NIGHTLY NEWS

*Hosted by Roger O'Neal*



*Didn't see it? Ask [jim@vaics.org](mailto:jim@vaics.org)*

## SUCCESSFUL OPEN HOUSE AT MACH'S

FREE SAMPLES OF LOCALLY PRODUCED SPECIALTY FOODS WERE ENJOYED AT Mach's General Store on the weekend of December 18. The store is a Pawlet landmark, in the heart of the village, and has been a classic country store since 1945, according to business owner, Marilyn Bellemare. Bellemare and her husband Mike invited the public to try out their selection of Vermont-made foods at the special holiday event that began at 11:00 a.m. The event also commemorated the Bellemare's two-year-old venture. They served various flavors of Vermont's prize-winning Cabot cheese, Rupert Rising breads, Granny Blossom's salsas and relishes, cider from Brown's Orchard, and many more examples of locally produced delicacies. Grandpa's Stuff, an outstanding maple cream, fudge sauce from Vermont Gourmet Candy Dish, and Greene's Gourmet of Vermont's hot sauce were also represented. Sampling stations were be set up around the store, along with other items suitable for holiday gifts and gift baskets. Mach's General Store is open 6am to 8pm Monday through Saturday, and 7am to 7pm on Sunday. The store is located at the intersection of School Street, Route 30, and Route 133.

# CULTURAL HERITAGE MONTH

(Continued from Page 1)

tasting and other agriculture and community-based special events.” Jayne Nold-Laurendeau, co-chair of the Alliance, has encouraged all store members to participate during the weekends of June with cheese tastings, special events with milk and other dairy products, maple syrup, and Vermont fruits and produce.

The Alliance banner will be reprinted for those stores which missed it the first time--a beautiful weatherproof vinyl banner which has our logo and the “Buy Local” motto. Please contact Jayne at 802-485-8954 or jayne@vaics.org for information on product promotions, banners, logos and other specials for participation in Cultural Heritage Month.

Plans for the month at the Vermont state level are still being made. The events will begin with Open Studio Weekend May 28-29, with Vermont Days in mid-June, and culminating with the Vermont History Expo on June 26-27 at the fairgrounds in Tunbridge. As information becomes available, it will be posted on the Vermont Partners website at [http://www.vermontpartners.org/html/comm\\_eletter1204.html](http://www.vermontpartners.org/html/comm_eletter1204.html)

The Alliance will have a booth at the History Expo. Plans for booth content will be firmed up at the Alliance meeting in Greensboro on February 10 (see meeting information & agenda on page 3).

## WILLISTON REST AREA FEATURE

Vermont’s Interstate 89 Williston rest area will be home to the Alliance’s latest display. Your photos and images are needed!

According to coordinator Janet MacLeod, “Most of the space is wall space. There is a small locked display area shelf we can also use. If stores have postcards of their store we might put them in there or if you have ideas of small items that we need protected.”

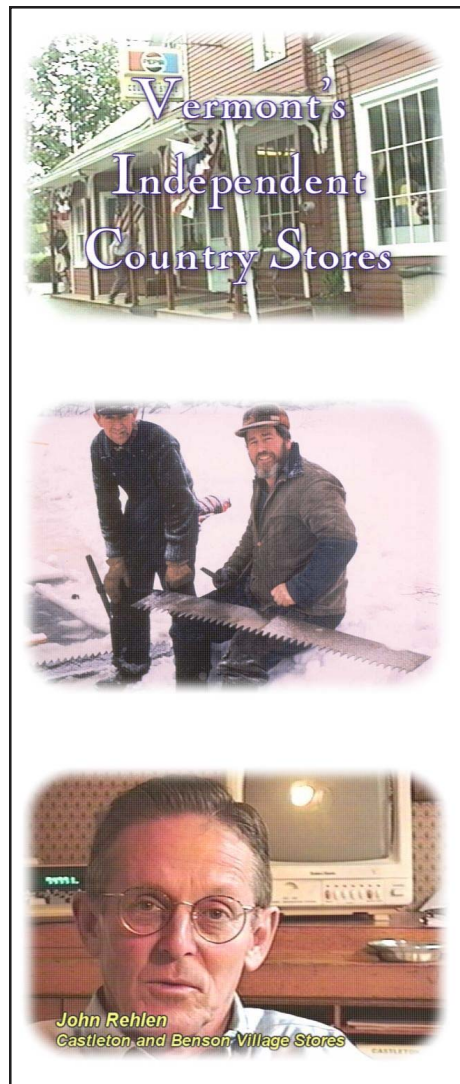
Janet is doing original paintings from store photos on the VAICS.org website, but she says, “We need larger things. There is a place for a banner as you come in and we can put things on the counter like brochures. I’m most interested in a large map of the state with all the stores located on it.”

Send pictures to Janet (adamant@vaics.org). The photo to the right gives an idea of the display spaces.



## ALLIANCE VIDEO DEMO IN STORES, SCHOOLS

THE ALLIANCE’S DEMO VIDEO, PRODUCED two years ago and shown at Vermont History Day in Turnbridge, is still available to stores and schools. The 50-minute video, originally only on VHS, is now on DVD.



The presentation interviews Alliance members about their stores and history, and takes a look at how the owners view their work, their clientele, and their place in the history of Vermont.

Six hours of video were condensed into the 50-minute demo, which will be used as a guide for producing future promotional and historical presentations about Vermont’s independent country and general stores. (See accompanying story on the Alliance’s new video project.)



## CHEESE TASTING: DO IT AT YOUR STORE

A customer enjoys a slice of Vermont cheese at Kamuda’s Store in Pittsford. Contact a VAICS board member to learn how to get your cheese promotion pack!

## MEMBERSHIP: EVERYONE WORKS, EVERYONE WINS

FOUR YEARS HAVE PASSED. OUR VERMONT Alliance of Independent Country Stores has grown into a working reality, and now is a large and proud force of more than 50



*Adamant*

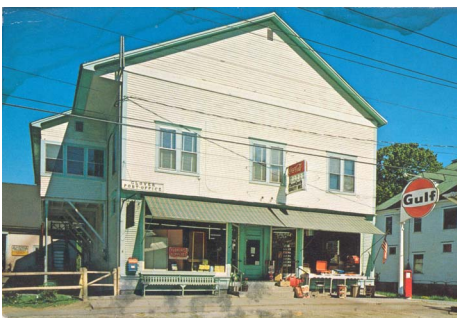
Vermont stores and dozens of associate members and community supporters. Its visibility is enormous, with respect gained inside Vermont and across the country. Organizations in New Hampshire, Colo-



*Cambridge*

rado, and Alaska have already begun emulating the project begun by visionary store owners here in the Green Mountains.

Our reputation for uniqueness and quality is known and is growing, and we have



*Glover*

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## JANUARY 13 MEETING MINUTES

Reported by Gary Hatch

THURSDAY, JAN. 13, 2005 – VGA OFFICE, RUTLAND – 12:00-2:30 PM  
Attendees: John Rehlen, Jayne Nold-Laurendeau, Dennis Bathory-Kitsz, Bill MacDonald, Charlie Wilson, Tom Hurst, Gary Hatch

### 1) Where we are – Dennis

a) Reviewed recent inclusions in PR media, including but not limited to *New York Times*; *NBC Nightly News*; *Boston.com*; *Boston Globe*; *NECN*; *Vermont Business People*, etc. The feeling is we should be taking better advantage of this media coverage of VAICS with follow-up. Dennis stated that among other benefits of the PR, it gives us positive value in recruiting and/or retaining store and vendor membership.

b) Tour Map is the most popular visit on our website. Map gets about 500 visitors a week.

c) Membership and dues discussed. John Rehlen brought up that if members are in arrears for dues, they should not be benefiting from active placement on the tour map. Jane stated that dues-lapsed stores should have to pay up to stay on the map, plus they should pay an additional fee to be reinstated onto the site due to technical costs of deleting and adding.

### 2) CNN and General VAICS Meeting

To coordinate with the expected visit from producers and crew of *Lou Dobbs Tonight* on CNN, meeting is scheduled for Feb. 10, 2005, Historical Society Building – Greensboro: 9am coffee, 10am meeting. Host: Willey's Store / Tom Hurst

General discussion. We agreed that meeting and lunch should be at same location. the message or "talking points" we would like to convey were discussed. We will likely get 2-3 minutes of exposure on the program, and it is expected that the content will be analyzed from an economic perspective.

Bill suggested personal service, community involvement, responsive to customer needs. Tom Hurst suggested charm, employee longevity, family of employees, personal interaction with customers, community focus.

Generally agreed that we want a positive message, *not* "just barely surviving" as some felt was the tone of the *Times* article. On the other hand, we do not wish to "b.s." and state all are thriving, which would also not be accurate.

It was felt that CNN will control the content, and we could only present fair and informed facts for them to use. It is anticipated that CNN perspective will be on how stores adapt to changing market conditions. Example: Store-prepared home meals to sell to busy families and "soccer moms".

Tom wanted more scripting plan of our message, but general consensus was that the crew will have their own agenda and not give us advance questions or content control. They will not fall for pre-rehearsed "fluff" and will more likely want a business perspective of how/why our stores exist, adapt, and do business.

# JANUARY 13 MEETING MINUTES

(Continued from Facing Page 6)

### 3) Financial Status

Jayne passed out current financial statement and specific sponsorship opportunities were discussed. (The financial discussions are available to members on request.)

### 4) Cultural Heritage Month

Jayne presented this as a wonderful opportunity to get supplier promotional money and also tie in to the Cultural Heritage Month, to increase store traffic, etc. She suggested using wine tastings, cheese tastings, etc. There was somewhat mixed enthusiasm, re: the difficulty of getting participation of “independent” stores, who take their independence seriously. Coordination and consistency of participation by member stores has been difficult.

### 5) Vermont History Expo

VAICS will have a booth. Expo is located at Tunbridge Fairgrounds and runs on June 25-26, 2005. Volunteers are welcome to staff booth.

### 6) Williston Rest Area

Opportunity has been presented for VAICS to present a display at the Williston Rest Area pavilion for one month. Janet MacLeod from Adamant is also an artist and will help oversee the creation of an attractive display. Needs a banner with logo, good quality photos of stores.

### 7) Business Info for State

General discussion of the Tourism & Marketing meetings in which VAICS participates.

### 8) Committees

General discussion of the need to reinvigorate the committee participation of VAICS members.

### 9) Projects

#### a) Film Project

b) Flyer Project. Back of flyer would have highlights from different stores. Front could be personalized for your individual store, directions to local places, etc.

### 10) Travel and Tourism Meeting.

Jayne attended Vermont Travel and Tourism meeting today. Mentioned a new web vehicle called MS MapPoint. Also, “Vermont Partners” in an online site looking for Vermont Products.

Jayne also handed out a few copies of “10 Reasons why Vermont’s Homegrown Economy Matters and 50 Ways to Revive It”.

### 11) Newsletter

All agreed that Dennis should write a newsletter and distribute fairly quickly alerting member stores to the importance of the upcoming Greensboro meeting and the CNN story, etc.



# MEMBERSHIP

(Continued from Facing Page 6)

even enjoyed increased community interest. We have built and continue to build a strong network of independent business



*Bristol*

owners who promote our stores, contribute to our communities, and maintain our historical place in Vermont.

In the past year, the Alliance has built



*Newbury*

an infrastructure for you with our **logo** and popular **VAICS.org website**. But more than that, our Alliance has initiated many important projects, including a set of promotional videos, an online tour map, coordi-



*Pantony*

nation with other members of the Tourism Board, and the representation of Vermont’s independent country stores as emblematic of personal service and quality.

Your membership will make 2005 an astounding year. Renew today!

## FROGGY'S IN TOWN

FROGGY (WFFY 100.9 FM), BARRE'S country music station, visited Alliance stores throughout Central Vermont in January, with live remote broadcasts from village centers. Did you see Froggy at an Alliance member store? Was it your store? If you saw the broadcast in progress, take pictures and send them for the next VAICS newsletter!

## OLD GAMES & TOYS UPCOUNTRY

THE WEST Charleston Corner Store is offering a collection of reproduction kits from the 19th and early 20th centuries. Grammar books, games and toys are on the shelves.



## VAICS = SEAL OF QUALITY

IN APRIL 2003, THE ALLIANCE WAS AWARDED THE VERMONT DEPARTMENT OF Agriculture coveted Seal of Quality.

In a letter from the Vermont Seal of Quality Program, Director Steven F. Justis wrote, "On behalf of the Vermont Department of Agriculture, Food and Markets, I am pleased to welcome the Vermont Alliance of Independent Country Stores into the Vermont Seal of Quality Program as a 'Farm Heritage Partner'."

As a partner with the Seal of Quality program, Alliance members may display the Seal of Quality on their stores, as well as participate in *Vermont Harvest*, an Agriculture publication that reaches 150,000 households, businesses, and visitors across the state. The Seal of Quality is not handed out lightly, and the Alliance had to make a case for its inclusion in the program.



Ideas for cooperation with Agriculture have already been put in practice with the cheese, apples and chocolate milk programs that will be both part of the Independent Country Store Month celebrations and as part of their own special Agriculture Department promotions.

At its recent board meeting, the Alliance prepared ideas to take advantage of its partnership in the Farm Heritage Program.

*For more information on the Alliance's participation as a Farm Heritage Partner, including promotions and rebates, contact Jayne Nold-Laurendeau at [jayne@vaics.org](mailto:jayne@vaics.org)*



Vermont Alliance of Independent Country Stores  
c/o Vermont Grocers Association  
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Rutland, Vermont 05701