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Did you know? You can get this newsletter ready to print in color at the vaics.org website.

NEWS

SUMMER 2006

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.

PRIVATE BRANDS PROJECT HEADLINES ANNUAL MEETING

THE FIRST OF THE PRODUCTS MADE FOR THE VERMONT ALLIANCE OF Independent Country Stores will be available in the next few weeks. That's the news from the 5th Anniversary Annual Meeting held at the historic Old Tavern Inn in Grafton on May 11.

The first product lines available to Alliance members are from King Arthur Flour (Norwich) and Almost Edible Soap (St. Johnsbury), with condiments from Fox Meadow Farm (Wolcott) coming soon.

The King Arthur products include "homemade made easy" scones co-branded with the Alliance logo, available in small quantities or with attractive, compact displays for the featured products. The Almost Edible Soap bars come in numerous scents (maple syrup and chocolate being among the favorites, with spearmint, melon, coconut, vanilla, lemon, orange and others), fully branded with the Alliance logo. Full information sheets will be in the mail to Alliance member stores in early July.

(Continued on Page 2)

FLOODING INFO FROM EPA

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, in response to flooding in New England, has prepared a tip sheet. Available on their website, it covers drinking water, food, mold, septic systems, and general warnings and advice.

The information discusses boiling water, adequate safe water, household wells, spoiled food, mold cleanup in homes and businesses, and post-flooding questions about wastewater and septic safety.

The EPA also emphasize that generator exhaust is toxic. "Put generators outside or carefully vent the exhaust outside because the exhaust contains dangerously high levels of carbon monoxide a poisonous gas."

The website is <http://www.epa.gov/region1/topics/water/flooding.html>

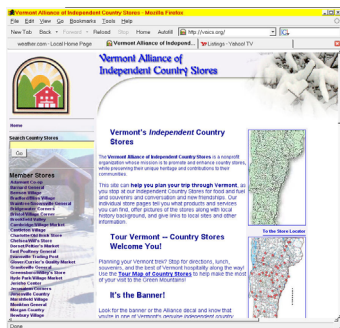
Also, the U.S. Department of Agriculture has declared an agricultural emergency in each of Vermont's 14 counties, Governor Douglas announced that his administration is convening an emergency summit to discuss ways to provide immediate assistance to farmers. [See story on page 9]

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 another facelift this spring. 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 a very popular store map and tour guide of Vermont.



At the home page, visitors can click on the Vermont map with the location

of each Alliance member, together with directions to your store—which you should always make sure are clear and updated! 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, or you can send a list via email or on paper. Why keep up your goods and services list? Because the website has a site-wide search. Someone coming through Vermont on a camping trip can look for member stores who might have propane or deli sandwiches or firewood. Families will want souvenirs. In a pinch, your local customers can check if you're a pickup for UPS or if there's an ATM to be found inside your front door.

The tour map was introduced last year, with suggested routes to follow into and across the Green Mountain State. The map is set up so that each route will bring visitors to your store—whether it's a fall foliage ride, a quick trip from Massachusetts to Montreal, a skiing trek, a winding weekend along the river, a tour through the southern hills, a visit to the Northeast Kingdom, or any one of several routes.

The Alliance website also features how-to articles, and we welcome more. Send your notices and articles to dennis@vaics.org. It's <http://vaics.org/> — your voice on the Web.

ANNUAL MEETING HIGHLIGHTS

(Continued from Page 1)

The upcoming Fox Meadow products will be branded with the Alliance logo and its new "Vermont Village Foods" mark. Following the announcements and the Alliance's successful appearance at this year's Vermont History Expo in Tunbridge [see story page 5], additional Vermont manufacturers expressed interest in providing specialty products to the Alliance members.



The members discussed how important it is for stores to make the new product line fly. It's been a focus of the Alliance since its formation over five years ago, and is now become a reality.

The annual meeting was brought together around a Vermont products theme. Aside from the unveiling of our first

private label efforts with King Arthur Flour and Almost Edible Soap, highlights included a presentation by members of the Vermont Cheese Council on artisan cheesemaking, details of our exclusive promotion with the Vermont Cheese Council during September's Country Store Month, presentations by Brammer Seafoods and Fox Meadow Farm, discussion of our Passport Program to encourage visitors and Vermonters alike to visit our stores, presentation of the Big Heavy World CD for Alliance members, and a tour of the Grafton Village Cheese Company facility.

September's Country Store Month will be a low-key affair in 2006, with member participation supported by many vendors and the Vermont Department of Agriculture. Full information on Country Store Month will be available on the Alliance website (<http://vaics.org/>) in July.



Stores present at the meeting included the Adamant Co-op, Mach's (Pawlet), Falls General, Warren, Taftsville, Castleton, Waits River, Wayside Country (West Arlington), Currier's (Glover), Northern Exposure Country (Orleans), Willey's (Greensboro), and Harborview General (Hydeville). Also joining in were representatives from Brammer Seafoods, the Vermont Cheese Council, the Grafton Village Cheese Company, Frog City Cheese, Vermont Smoke & Cure, Fox Meadow Farms, King Arthur Flour, Almost Edible Soap, New England Label and Pepsi, along with the VGA's Jim Harrison.



The wonderful lunch and samples were provided by the Vermont Cheese Council members, Vermont Smoke & Cure, Grafton Cheese, and Mystic Pies.

ANNUAL MEETING GALLERY



Full room at Grafton; Finlaysons of Harborview; Jim Currier, Jayne Nold-Laurendeau, Celia Latham; Vermont lunch; Bill MacDonald and Doug Tschorn; Janet MacLeod; Vermont Cheese Council; Chris Bailey; John Rehlen, Jayne Nold-Laurendeau, Charlie Wilson.

WHEN THE MEDIA CALL YOU...

WHAT DO YOU SAY? WHEN A REPORTER 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 brightly. 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 they can travel to a place where services and products are not mediocre. Where families run stores, not boardrooms. Where employees have served long enough to know their products and their customers. Where politeness is normal.

If they ask what's different from a big box store, tell them that you have that BST-free grain you were asked for last week. Tell them that you deliver hot meals to homes. Tell them that you make 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. Tell them you don't have to answer to boardrooms to add products customers want—whether it's new wines or cheeses, or a hard-to-find soap, or a healthy drink they've just heard of. Tell them that customer service isn't an advertising slogan, but that it is your 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

(Continued on Page 4)

GETTING READY FOR THE MEDIA

(Continued from Page 3)

same—because you will *remember* them in your mind one at a time, not by computer.

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.

MEMBERSHIP: WORK AND WIN

IT'S ALREADY SIX YEARS. OUR VERMONT Alliance of Independent Country Stores has grown into a large and proud force of 60 Vermont stores and dozens of associate members and community supporters. We have gained respect inside Vermont and across the country. Organizations in New Hampshire, Colorado, and Alaska have begun emulating the project begun by visionary store owners here in the Green Mountains.

We have a reputation for uniqueness and quality, and we enjoy increased community interest. We have built and continue to build a strong network of independent business owners who promote our stores, contribute to our communities, and maintain our historical place in Vermont.

In the past year, the Alliance has spread its message around the state, the country, and the globe 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, coordination with other members of the Tourism Board and Cultural Heritage Month, and the representation of Vermont's independent country stores as emblematic of personal service and quality.

Your membership will make 2006-2007 an astounding year. Renew today!

SOME RANDOM THOUGHTS ON RUNNING A COUNTRY STORE IN THE SPRING OF 2006!

by Nancy & Doug Tschorn, Wayside Store, West Arlington

IT IS NOW ALMOST THE END OF JUNE SO I SUSPECT THAT I MAY HAVE missed the deadline for the June newsletter. But, truth to tell, there was not much happening this spring.

Did any of you feel as we did ... that the rains and plagues of tent caterpillars and their accompanying flies were almost of Biblical proportions?

Fortunately, June for us is a very "event oriented" month. We have graduations and weddings, the Duck Derby, the Mt. Equinox Hill Climb, the Hildene Car Show, a hot air balloon festival a few miles down the road but over the border in New York (and all that is on one weekend!). Following weekends, while not quite so cluttered with events followed the pattern, including the rain! But with events planned, the die was cast and we managed to keep afloat (no pun intended) with sales.



While we were expecting and hoping for more, we had to remind ourselves, as we do each year, that our tourist season does not really start until the 4th of July. We tried to use our time wisely planting window boxes, housecleaning, re-setting the pet section and doing some creative purchasing to slightly re-invent ourselves. Funny, but folks like to reach in the same place for their bread and milk but get bored if they don't see some new and different merchandize being displayed. We've found great interest in organic

items, wines, and fun and funky seasonal goods. We hope for you all a good summer season keeping the "country store" alive and well in Vermont.

FIRST PRODUCTS: KING ARTHUR

BEGINNING WITH ITS EASY-TO-MAKE SCONES (AND BELIEVE ME, THEY ARE EASY and delicious, as your editor grabbed a bag to take home!), King Arthur Flour is offering baking products and a store display; Annemarie Linnehan speaks.



ALLIANCE RETURNS TO VERMONT HISTORY EXPO

THE VERMONT ALLIANCE OF INDEPENDENT COUNTRY STORES MADE ITS third appearance at the Vermont History Expo on June 25-26.

The Expo is held annually at the Tunbridge Fairgrounds, and hosts exhibits and presentations from across the state, include booths from Vermont craftspeople, manufacturers, retail businesses, and organizations.

This year's Alliance booth featured good conversation with store owners, plus a peek at the various videos and news reports about the Alliance. In charge of the festivities at the Alliance booth once again was Charlie Wilson of Taftsville, who spearheaded the group's contact with the Agriculture Department's Seal of Quality program.



Joining Charlie this year were other store members including DeWayne Bush of Falls General and Gary Hatch of Newbury.

For more information about the annual event, contact Charlie at taftsville@vaics.org, or visit the Vermont Historical Society website.

FIRST PRODUCTS: ALMOST EDIBLE

ST. JOHNSBURY'S ALMOST EDIBLE SOAP OFFERS A LINE OF HAND-CUT, AROMATIC soaps for the Alliance. Show below are some of the products, and proprietor Mavra Adams passing out samples at the Alliance annual meeting in Grafton.



ALLIANCE VIDEO DEMO IN STORES, SCHOOLS

THE ALLIANCE'S DEMO VIDEO, PRODUCED four years ago and shown every year 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 present and past 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.

Get a copy by emailing jim@vaics.org

VERMONT SEAL OF QUALITY: GET YOURS

WE HAVE HAD THE VERMONT SEAL OF Quality for three years. Aside from support from the State of Vermont, we're also entitled to display the seal prominently in our stores as "Farm Heritage Partners"

For more information on our participation, including promotions and rebates, contact Jayne Nold-Laurendeau at jayne@vaics.org



DISPLAY YOUR LOGO!

THE ALLIANCE'S LOGO HAS BEEN IN USE FOR more than three years 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

BURGLARY CONCERNS

ANY NEWS IN THERE ABOUT THE NUMBER of small stores that have been burglarized lately? I've been hit twice in 8 days and have heard that several other stores, including Teago's, Plymouth, Tracy's Midway in Sharon, and others have been similarly hit.

Rebecca Dean, Bridgewater

THE STATE POLICE WERE QUOTED IN THE Valley News article about the Taego break in as saying it has become a growing problem in the last year.

Charlie Wilson, Taftsville

COUNTRY STORE COOPERATION

by Charlie Wilson

IN LATE MARCH I HAD SOME SURGERY DONE WHICH DID NOT HEAL AS PLANNED. The incision had to be reopened and left open, putting my immune system on overtime. By early April I came down with the flu, which knocked me out for a week. At the same time one of my employees was in a car accident, hurt her



back, and was laid up for 6 weeks. My other employee came down with the flu (probably got it from me) and some other viral infections, taking her out of commission for over three weeks. For the first time in 15 years I had run out of bodies to man the store, and had to close it for two days. I reopened after my fever was gone, and for some reason felt worse than when I had the flu the previous

week. By the following day I was having trouble breathing, so closed up the store that afternoon, went to the Health Clinic, and was diagnosed with pneumonia. I was told in no uncertain terms that my body could take no more and I had to stop, so over Easter weekend the store was closed once again.

Jireh at F H Gillinghams in Woodstock heard about my plight, and called me the following week offering to send over an experienced employee of his to help me out. For the entire month of May a wonderful Gillinghams employee named Katrina worked at the Taftsville Store two days a week. In return I compensated Gillinghams for part (but not all) of her Gillinghams salary. And I had two days a week of much needed rest to recover from my illness.

Another way in which VAICS members can and do work together. I'm trying to picture this same sort of thing happening down in New York, and I'm having trouble with it!

GILLINGHAM'S HONORED FOR LONGEVITY, INNOVATION

ON MARCH 20, 2006 THE THIRD ANNUAL CENTENNIAL BUSINESS AWARD ceremony took place on the UVM campus at the Billings Center. FH Gillingham & Sons was among 20 businesses ranging from scale makers to general stores that were honored for their longevity and innovation. This is a joint project of the Office of the Secretary of State, the Vermont Chamber of Commerce and the Vermont Business Magazine.

In the same vein, Gillingham's will be celebrating its 120th year anniversary in business throughout 2006, with several special events in the works during the year.

Also this summer, we are a sponsor of the Pentangle Council On The Arts 'Brown Bag' concert series held every Thursday at noon on the Village Green. Bring a lunch and enjoy the free live performances of jazz, dance, folk/rock, blues, string band & brass band music to be held each week.



TAFTSVILLE IN TRAVEL MAG

THE TAFTSVILLE STORE CONTINUED ITS MARCH TO INTERNATIONAL FAME WITH AN article and photo in the June-July issue of Country Discoveries. A glossy publication featuring notes from around the world, it published a short article and photo in the “Compass Points” section by Nora Jansen in Las Vegas, who wrote in part, “It offers a marvelous selection of anything and everything made in Vermont—including fantastic cheeses and maple syrup!” She recounted some history and gave directions. She also seemed amazed that Charlie Wilson actually lived above his own store.



Compass Points

Historic Country Store Stocks Vermont's Best

WHILE exploring in Vermont, I discovered the Taftsville Country Store, established in 1840 by Daniel Taft. Listed on the National Register of Historic Places, this treasure still serves as a grocery store, post office and social hub for locals.

But it also offers a marvelous selection of anything and everything made in Vermont—including fantastic cheeses and maple syrup. Proprietor Charlie Wilson lives right upstairs!

Nearby is the 190-foot Taftsville Covered Bridge. Built in 1836, it's one of the state's longest and oldest covered bridges.

Taftsville is on U.S. Highway 4 in east-central Vermont, about 7 miles west of I-89 (Exit 1) and halfway between Quechee (home of the Quechee Gorge; see page 42 of the Sept/Oct 2005 issue) and Woodstock (home of the Billings Farm Museum, featured on page 41 of the same issue).

The store (404 Rt. 4) is open from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. from Memorial Day weekend through October; it closes an hour earlier the rest of the year. Products are available by mail order. To learn more, call 1-800/854-0013.

▲ ▲ ▲ www —Nora Jansen, Las Vegas, Nevada



“It offers a marvelous selection of anything and everything made in Vermont—including fantastic cheeses and maple syrup!” She recounted some history and gave directions. She also seemed amazed that Charlie Wilson actually lived above his own store.

So Charlie, tell us—inquiring fellow store owners want to know ... is the Taftsville Store your personal Golden Nugget?

ADAMANT 4TH BLACKFLY FESTIVAL

THE ADAMANT CO-OP JUST SPONSORED OUR 4TH ANNUAL BLACKFLY FESTIVAL with a day of music food and art. It is partly a fundraiser for building restorations but mostly a way to make people aware of Adamant. We hoped to finish a new porch which is attached to the store but has access only from the outside. It will be screened and it overlooks the park and waterfall which are maintained by the Adamant Music School. The idea is to provide to place where people can comfortably sit outside and visit, have lunch, watch their kids who love to play in the stream.



hopefully the first in an obvious series. They sold well at \$15 at the festival and as they were printed on a laser printer by a board member the cost was low.

We are also working with the local library to have a book return and pick-up service at the store. We have big red canvas bags which people can drop their library books in and someone will return them to town with another trip thus saving people from spending unnecessary time and gas money. People can also call in to the library and have them locate and sign out a book which they put in another red bag ready to be picked up. As the library is beside one of our bread suppliers, two errands can be done in one stop.

We have drilled a new well on neighbors' land—a generous offer for which they asked nothing but a stipulation that the use of the well was only for the building as a Co-op or similar venture.

We have created a limited edition 11x17 poster called “summer” which is

ONLINE MEETING PHOTO ALBUMS

ON THE ALLIANCE WEBSITE, THERE ARE three photo albums from the meetings at the Wayside in West Arlington, Willey's in Greensboro, and the annual event at the Old Tavern in Grafton. Find the photo albums at VAICS.org



STORE FOR SALE

WEST CHARLESTON: COUNTRY STORE

with gas station, take-out restaurant and 3-bedroom apartment on 1/2 acre of land. \$399K. Store has been in continuous operation for more than 50 years. An additional acre of land is also available, along with a house and barn. For complete details: www.vtstoreforsale.com



Owner will consider all reasonable offers. Some financing available. 802-895-4881 or vtstoreforsale@aol.com

FAN MAIL FROM AFAR!

MAY 29, 2006

Subject: Delighted About Website!

As a travel journalist and an absolute Vermont and Country Store lover I just stumbled upon this wonderful website in the Internet. Congratulations! That is great to have such site!

In the past 22 years that I have been traveling in the US and Canada I have often come to New England. And one of my favorite pastimes was taking a rest in one of those wonderful wonderful country stores. Only last year I was in Warren, Waitsfield and Ripton and several others on my way. I am always so delighted there is something like that in our hectic world. Ever since I came first time to New England I have been in love with the country stores. I stop at every one I see on my way, also in Maine and New Hampshire. My son and I were T-shirts with our favorite stores on them.

That was something personal as I really got excited to see your website. May I refer the readers to look at the website?

Would you be able to provide me with a map of Vermont Country Stores and other written information?

Thank you very much!

Your delighted reader,

Heike Wagner

Travel Journalist

Duisburg, Germany



MACH'S NEW SNACK BAR

Mach's General Store in Pawlet has new store hours: Sunday 7am-8pm, Monday-Wednesday 6am-8pm and Thursday-Saturday 6am-8:30pm. Our brand new snack bar is open at 11:30am every day and closes one-half hour prior to store closing. We also carry frozen-at-sea seafood from Brammer Creek, and fresh cut meats.



REDUCING ENERGY COSTS WITH EFFICIENT REFRIGERATION

SMALL STORES THROUGHOUT VERMONT ARE REDUCING OVERHEAD BY IMPROVING the energy efficiency of their refrigeration equipment. With technical advice and financial incentives from Efficiency Vermont, store owners reduce energy use while increasing the reliability of their refrigeration systems.

"Country stores have great opportunities for reducing refrigeration costs," says Paul Lambert of Efficiency Vermont. "By improving the energy efficiency of existing equipment or by upgrading, owners are seeing significant reductions in their energy costs." How much? What's the return on investment for these improvements?

Efficiency Vermont recommends that owners consult their refrigeration contractor to choose the right energy-saving equipment for their stores and budgets. Efficiency Vermont also offers technical advice about energy-saving opportunities and provides financial incentives for recommended equipment. More information is available toll-free at 888-921-5990 or at efficiencyvermont.com. Energy-saving opportunities in Vermont country stores:

Door Heater Controls

Most cooler and freezer doors have heaters to prevent condensation. Heaters run continuously. Humidity-based door heater controls limit operation of door heaters to periods of high relative humidity. Annual savings are up to \$60 per cooler door and more than \$100 per freezer door.

Zero Energy Cooler Doors

Zero-energy doors have a high insulation value, eliminating the need for door heaters. They are typically installed in new buildings or during major renovations.

Outside Air Economizers

This equipment reduces the amount of time that the refrigeration system runs by introducing outside air into walk-in coolers. An outside air economizer brings in outdoor air when exterior temperatures fall below those in the refrigerated box. This unit can be installed on most coolers and can include an evaporator fan/door heater control.

Evaporator Fan Motor Controls

This control turns off a portion of your evaporator fans while the compressor is not running, thereby saving a significant amount of energy.

High-Efficiency Evaporator Fan Motors

Permanent split capacitor (PSC) or brushless DC motors are more energy-efficient than conventional motors. Annually, a PSC fan can save up to \$60 and a brushless DC motor can save as much as \$120. These can be installed in new or existing coolers. Maximum fan savings can be achieved by combining efficient motors and motor controls.

New Compressors

Both discus and scroll compressors save greater amounts of energy than standard compressors, and can last up to 30% longer.

Display Case Covers

Covered refrigerated cases and freezers save energy by reducing the mixing of refrigerated air with warm room air.

Floating Head Pressure Controls

Refrigeration systems are designed to constantly operate at the high pressure level required for the hottest, most humid days. Floating head pressure controls allow systems to reduce the pressure level to match the actual temperature and humidity, resulting in significant savings during more typical conditions.

Lighting

Lighting equipment inside the cooler adds heat. Where lighting operates for hours at a time, T-8 fluorescent lights are a more energy-efficient option than T-12s. T8s operate cooler and use less electricity.

PEAK OIL NETWORK CONNECTS WITH ALLIANCE

By Carl Etnier, Vermont Peak Oil Network

I WAS TROLLING THE VERMONT HISTORY EXPO, LOOKING FOR ORGANIZATIONS to connect with the Vermont Peak Oil Network (VPON)—of which I am a member—when I was delighted to find the VAICS stand. VPON and independent country stores are natural allies.

Members of VPON recognize that, for reasons of geology, world oil production is at or near its all-time high (hence the term “peak oil”). When production starts declining—or when a hurricane or terrorist attack takes a significant portion of oil production off line overnight—oil prices are likely to jump so high that we’ll look back with nostalgia at \$3.00/gallon gasoline. With transportation costs skyrocketing, most economic activity is likely to become more local.

Independent country stores embody part of the resilience the state needs. You are located near where people live, so they can get their groceries without burning large amounts of expensive gasoline. The connections that people make at your stores can help people find each other to create new local enterprises when the chain stores’ 12,000-mile supply routes become too costly to maintain.

VPON, a network of individuals and groups working regionally on issues of relocation and sustainability, is helping to prepare Vermont to be more resilient and self-reliant in the face of such a suddenly changing economic landscape.

Please visit the VPON web site (www.vtpeakoil.net) to learn more about peak oil, its likely effects on our economy, and what VPON groups are doing about it. VAICS’ web page has been included in the Vermont Resources section of the VPON site. VPON would welcome articles for its monthly newsletter on what VAICS is and how VAICS or any particular member store helps prepare communities for an energy-constrained future.

BIG HEAVY WORLD TO OFFER CD OF VERMONT MUSIC

by Jim Lockridge, Big Heavy World

BIG HEAVY WORLD OF BURLINGTON WILL BE PRESSING 1,000 COPIES OF THE *In Silver Light* compilation CD showcasing singer-songwriter and instrumental talent from Vermont. In the course of our mission at Big Heavy World we’ll be exploring every opportunity to distribute and promote this project, which is made possible through the sponsorship of businesses and organizations that contribute to the costs of manufacture and have a logo presence on the tray card (back) of the CD package. Their attachment to *In Silver Light* demonstrates (above and beyond the promotional benefit to themselves) their appreciation of an effort to both expose Vermont’s musical talent and support the work of Big Heavy World in preserving and promoting Vermont-made music.

Information: bigheavyworld.com, (802) 865-1140, Fax (802) 264-9753, or email jim@bigheavyworld.net



VERMONT AG EMERGENCY

The U.S. Department of Agriculture has declared an agricultural emergency in each of Vermont’s 14 counties, Governor Jim Douglas announced.

U.S. Agriculture Secretary Mike Johanns said that heavy rains and flooding, Damage Assessment Reports and requests submitted by the Farm Service Agency justify the declaration.



High water spills over dam structure near Falls General in Northfield Falls

“USDA has determined that there were sufficient production losses in all 14 Vermont counties to warrant a Secretarial natural disaster designation,” Secretary Johanns said. “Therefore, I am designating the entire State of Vermont as a primary natural disaster area.”

The designation makes farmers in Vermont eligible for low-interest emergency loans, provided eligibility requirements are met.

Governor Douglas, who last week announced that his administration is convening an emergency summit to discuss ways to provide immediate assistance to farmers, said this was an important step forward, but noted that farmers need more capital, not more debt.

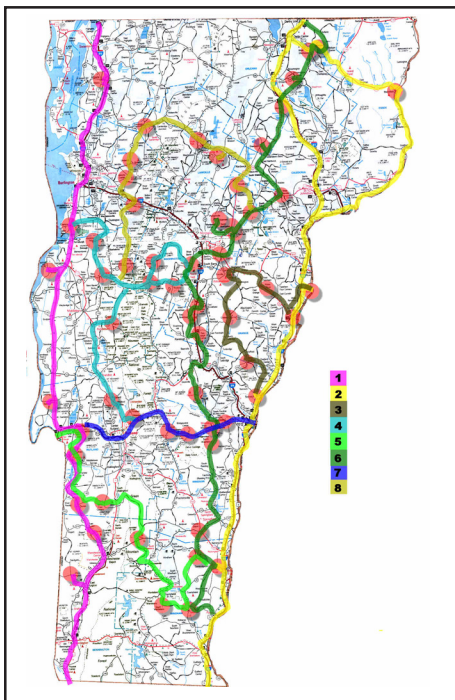
“Declaration of this emergency will help qualify farmers for low-interest loans to purchase seed, feed and tend to other needs,” Governor Douglas said, adding that he’ll continue to urge federal officials to provide emergency relief to farmers through appropriations.

“Everyone is being asked to help, because it’s going to take some good old fashion Vermont team work to pull together a plan that provides relief to farmers and helps them get this season back on track,” the Governor said.

DID YOU KNOW...?

THE TOUR MAP ON THE ALLIANCE website (<http://vaics.org/tourmap.html>) can be downloaded and printed for your customers.

At the bottom of the page is a link to a large version of the map, which clearly shows the roads and towns. Want to give your tourist customers a way to get back to you again and again? Print the webpage on the front, with its eight country store tours of Vermont, and print the big map on the back—then *autograph it!* What a memory of Vermont, right from the store-keeper!



NEWS, NEWS, NEWS

WE NEED IT, WE WANT IT, WE LIKE IT. And we know you've got it. So if you have news items, stories to tell, photographs, videos—you name it—this newsletter and our website both need them!

Associate members and sponsors should also send along their news and especially photos and graphics.

Send your news to Dennis via email (bathory@vaics.org) or postal mail (176 Cox Brook Road, Northfield 05663) and it will appear as soon as possible.

(Please note that the website is updated only seasonally.)

NEWBURY CELEBRATES ITS 166TH

NEWBURY WAS FILLED WITH HOLIDAY FESTIVITIES ON MAY 20 AS THE NEWBURY



Village Store celebrated its 166th year as a town landmark—and its third anniversary under the ownership of Gary and Maggie Hatch. The store opened in 1840, providing the village with food, clothing, grain, dry goods, hardware and tools. When the Hatches purchased the store from Jim and Mary Collins in 2003, they became active in the Alliance at the same time, spreading the word

about independent country stores and their value to community. They acted on that belief, and celebrated their third anniversary by thanking the community.

Balloons and free coffee were available all day, and music and grilled food were plentiful. Prizes, including the Precision Kayak (shown in the photo with its winner, Sarah Coburn), were given every fifteen minutes. Other prizes from the grab bag included coolers, clocks, tote bags, tickets, and a camping tent.

Gary has been an active Alliance spokesperson, appearing on news programs and manning our 2006 Vermont History Expo booth.



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.

The Alliance has been taking advantage of its partnership in the Farm Heritage Program, but individual stores will benefit the most.

For more information on the Alliance's participation as a Farm Heritage Partnership, contact Jayne Nold-Laurendeau at jayne@vaics.org



MARCH ALLIANCE BOARD MEETING: MILK AND MEMBERSHIP

THE ALLIANCE BOARD MET AT THE GREEN MOUNTAIN CREDIT UNION IN BARRE on March 27 to plan the annual meeting, to discuss how the Alliance helps its members, and to hear a presentation from the Vermont Milk Company.

Vermont Milk Company

Vermont Milk Company representatives arrived to explain their plans for “a real Vermont homegrown milk.” The organization includes farmers from around the state that hopes to capture the market for Vermont products. The milk will be offered in both glass bottles for quarts, and in half-gallons and gallons in plastic. The milk is vat pasteurized at lower temperatures to retain fresh milk quality.

The organization is developing price points that will be competitive, but still slightly more expensive than the mass market product, depending on how the milk is distributed to Alliance members (through a distributor or using their own trucks). The dairy farmers that attended explained that they believe “Vermonters will support Vermont farmers” if they succeed in their consumer awareness program—which they call “a nickel for Vermont.”

The Vermont Milk Company is not yet ready to co-brand with the Alliance, but would like to know if members are interested in the Vermont milk, in what volume, what kinds (whole, skim, or chocolate, for example), and if other products such as ice cream and mozzarella cheese would be valuable.

If you are interested, please contact Jayne Nold-Laurendeau <jayne@vaics.org> or Charlie Wilson <taftsville@vaics.org>

Membership and the Community

Alliance members need to maintain the good will of the community and learn from other members, particularly through the occasional meetings—the idea that support at meetings “lifts you up.”



Currier's

Evansville Trading Post has a room filled with Native American goods for sale. Both provide excellent photo and art opportunities. The Alliance website <http://vaics.org/> has a photo tour of both stores.

- Find what media teams live nearby, and invite them by. A new video team is now in Johnson, for example, and is interested in pursuing local stories. Likewise, ski areas, hotels, and bed & breakfasts are always on the hunt for new material to offer their guests.



Evansville

- Define ‘what you are’ as a store, and create a press packet that’s always available when distant visitors arrive. More than one fine article has appeared out of the ready and willing approach of store owners. Recently a photo team from *Travel & Leisure* visited Floyd’s Store in East Randolph just in time for a dramatic photo with sun and clouds. When CNN was in town, they made a point to stop off at Snowsville General for an interview. And just last month, a story on Taftsville Store appeared in *Country Discoveries* magazine.

- Contact business leaders and local schools to work together. Present your challenges that can tie into their curriculum and ask, “How would you solve this?” Future business leaders need practical challenges, and your store can benefit from school participation.

Other Business

Janet MacLeod was congratulated on the success of her program of painting the country stores. The paintings appeared at Vermont Welcome Centers and also at a special month-long display in the Governor’s reception office.

The Board discussed Country Store Month, which is set for September this year. Once again, various vendors will help support the events; further information will follow this summer.

The Passport Program was again explored, and it was felt that a program so extensive might need another year of work to do well.

The annual meeting was planned (see lead story on page 1), sponsorships for 2006 were discussed, and the board was reminded that membership renewals will be going out in July.

MORE BANNERS!



Do you have your Alliance banner? A second printing has been made from Green Screen Graphics, and if you want one, please contact Jayne N o l d - Laurendeau for the price. These are perfect for this

September's Country Store Month, and great all year with their strong, weather-resistant surface. You can write your specials in the blank space with dry-erase markers, and show your membership at the same time!

COUNTRY STORE MONTH: DO IT!

COUNTRY STORE MONTH MOVES BACK TO SEPTEMBER IN 2006, JOINING IN THE traditional celebration of Vermont's agricultural harvest and the opening of school. Following last year's success, Country Store Month will again feature special events organized by each independent Alliance store.

Why should you participate with special events and tastings and contests and games and prizes? Because Country Store Month is an opportunity to bring focus back to your store's central role in your community. Like the Newbury Village Store [see Newbury story, page 10], you can always find a reason to celebrate—and whatever your anniversary, it's even more of a Country Store Month celebration.

For example, last year Mendon Country Store celebrated 25 years with the present owners Frank and Kathy Domenicucci and Waits River General celebrated 15 years with the present owners Donna, Bill and Bobby MacDonald. What's your reason?

The opening of school is another one, when children stop by every day for sandwiches and snacks, and parents drop their children off at your store ... it doubles as a school bus stop, of course! There are contests to be had, and important ways you can re-launch your active participation in the community [see March Board Meeting story, page 11].

What did we forget? The new private brands! Get your orders in—order sheets are arriving shortly—and introduce your customers to Vermont Village Foods [see Annual Meeting story, page 1].

Let everyone know—your local newspaper, radio station, and television station, and also send your info to the Alliance website at <http://vaics.org/>



Vermont Alliance of Independent Country Stores
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