

New awnings firm is a family affair

By ANDY KIRKALDY

ADDISON — When Middlebury native Rene Paquette, a four-decade veteran of the residential and commercial awning business, describes his new full-service awning company as a family business, he's not kidding.

Paquette's Integrity Awnings, which officially came into existence on Feb. 1, is based at Paquette's Addison home.

His wife, Selena, is the business and office manager, and their five children — two of whom worked with Paquette during his 39-year career with Otter Creek Awnings — are all on board the new venture.

Son Adam Paquette brings 15 years of residential and commercial installation experience learned at Otter Creek, and daughter Heather Paquette Lavalla is on board after five years of office management and logistics experience, also with Otter Creek.

Hannah Paquette, another daughter, oversees social media marketing and works as a receptionist, daughter Hayley Ceresoli is a sales representative, and son Aaron Paquette is an installation specialist.

Rene Paquette, 62, responded to the question that he said everyone asks him: What's it like working with his family?

First, he joked that his wife's title as office manager is just symbolic.

"Even though we said office manager, she's actually referee," Paquette said.

Seriously, he said it helps that Adam and Heather already have successfully worked for him for a combined 20 years; that all seem to have inherited a strong work ethic from Rene's father, Addison County

Fair and Field Days founder Lucien Paquette; and that the family is already tight-knit.

"It's really challenging for some people. For us, it's not. It's like natural," Paquette said. "We have a unique relationship, business vs. home life. I am also very lucky that I am one of those fathers where the kids, all five of them, show up on the weekends because they want to."

CAREER IN AWNINGS

Paquette signed on with Otter Creek Awnings and company founder Max Eaton after graduating in 1981 from Hannaford Career Center. More recently, Eaton has written an endorsement for an Integrity Awnings press release.

Over the years, Paquette said, "I did everything for the company."

He first started "assembling parts and pieces" of retractable awnings. He also welded and stitched fulltime before serving as a production manager, vice president of sales, and vice president of operations before becoming vice president of the company.

In that role, Paquette said, he "basically oversaw all the operations," including vehicles, operations personnel, installation scheduling, purchasing, and "on top of that I sold a pretty good number of awnings."

"I knew the company from soup to nuts. And if you were to ask anybody locally who owned Otter Creek, they thought I owned it," he said.

Paquette lasted through three ownerships, and one company split. He went with the division that retained the Otter Creek name, which moved into a Williston showroom about two decades ago. (See Family affair, Page 3C)



ALL FIVE OF Rene Paquette's children — and wife Selena Paquette — are playing roles in his new company, Integrity Awnings. Pictured are, from left, Hayley Ceresoli, Hannah Paquette, Heather Lavalla, Adam Paquette and Aaron Paquette.

Photo courtesy of Rene Paquette



APPALACHIAN GAP DISTILLERY co-founder Lars Hubbard stands in front of solar panels his company erected in front of its Middlebury facility in order to move toward being carbon neutral. The company also is moving toward using "renewable natural gas" — also known as methane produced from rotting manure and other organic matter.

Independent photo/Steve James

Local distillery strives to go climate-neutral

By JOHN FLOWERS

MIDDLEBURY — Devotees of the Appalachian Gap Distillery like the taste and quality of the company's gins and whiskeys.

Now customers — at least those with an environmental ethos — have an additional reason to imbibe.

The Middlebury company is on the cusp of making its operations "climate neutral," a coveted NetZero certification for consumer brands. App Gap took a sizable step toward that goal last week with the announcement it would offset half its natural gas use with renewable natural gas, through Vermont Gas Systems.

Renewable natural gas, or RNG, is a moniker for the gaseous fuel gathered from the rotting remains of organic matter

The Goodrich Farm in Salisbury — endowed with a massive biodigester that will convert manure and food scraps into methane — will likely be a major source of the distillery's RNG, App Gap announced.

App Gap is positioned to be the first distillery in the country to be certified climate-neutral, according to company co-founder Lars Hubbard.

"I have this belief that we should leave as small a footprint as we can," he said. "That's the way I live my life and the way I've taught my children to live their lives. We're all environmentalists. I try to do everything I possibly can to minimize our footprint."

Vermont Gas Systems began offering RNG in 2019. Since then, business and residential

"We're not (pursuing climate-neutral status) to make noise; we're doing it because it's the right thing to do."

— App Gap Distillery co-founder Lars Hubbard



customers have collectively displaced more than 70,000 Mcf (thousand cubic feet) of traditional natural gas each year, according to VGS.

But RNG is only one of the steps App Gap has taken to reduce its carbon footprint.

The company also has a super-insulated 11,500-square-foot building that is powered entirely through solar energy. App Gap sends all its waste grains and liquid residue from alcohol making to the Purpose Energy (See Distillery, Page 2C)

Acorn Energy Co-op third community solar project in Bristol moving forward

BRISTOL — Fundraising for a local community-owned solar project in Bristol under development by the Acorn Renewable Energy Co-op of Middlebury is moving forward. The proposed project, Acorn Energy Solar 3, now known as Bristol Community Solar (BCS), will be a 500 kW solar array on the capped former municipal landfill located at 80 Pine St. in Bristol.

This past Friday, March 19, Acorn Energy Co-op received final approval of its documentation for the public offering of shares in the project by the Vermont Department of Financial Regulation (DFR). This review and approval by the DFR gives Acorn Energy the green light to begin marketing the Bristol project to Vermont residents with an electric meter in the Green Mountain Power (GMP) service territory. These off-taker/investors will receive the project's net-metered credits on their GMP bills, and ultimately take ownership of the project.

"If we are successful, we will have local investment, ownership, and management of a solar array developed in cooperation with the host community, and we will have made the most of a brownfields redevelopment opportunity as

well. There are multiple winners all around," said Energy Co-op President Benjamin Marks. "We hope that the installed price per watt of the array will also be attractive for prospective participants."

Initially, participation in BCS will be open to Bristol residents, businesses and organizations, members of the Interfaith Climate

"If we are successful, we will have local investment, ownership, and management of a solar array developed in cooperation with the host community, and we will have made the most of a brownfields redevelopment opportunity as well. There are multiple winners all around."

— Energy Co-op President Benjamin Marks

Action Network (ICAN), as well as Vermont Interfaith Power and Light (VTIPL), and Acorn Energy Co-op members. This local investment model was facilitated by 2014 changes to the Vermont Small Business Offering Exemption (now generally referred to as Vermont Equity Crowdfunding), which

is viewed as one of the nation's most progressive local investing regulations.

Acorn Energy Co-op, and Aegis Renewable Energy of Waitsfield (Acorn Energy's contractor), have developed the plan for the approximately \$1.8 million Bristol project. The Bristol Community Solar design calls for 1,840 solar

panels, 405 watts DC each, which will cover a little over three acres of undulating terrain on the 12-acre capped Bristol landfill site. The panels will be a new bifacial model, which also generate electricity from light reflected off the ground — a useful feature during Vermont's snowy winters. At 500 kilowatts AC, BCS will

be considerably larger than the Energy Co-op's two previous 150 kW AC projects in Middlebury and Shoreham.

The Bristol landfill is ideal for solar development since it has good solar exposure from the south and cannot be seen from public streets and neighborhood homes, Acorn says. In addition, this type of "brownfield" site receives favorable treatment from Vermont's energy permitting and approval agencies. Acorn Energy Co-op applied for a Certificate of Public Good for the project from the Public Utility Commission on Dec. 23, 2020.

The Co-op's investment model calls for two initial categories of investors in Bristol Community Solar: a single Series A Member, and multiple Series B Members. The Co-operative Insurance Companies of Middlebury will be the Series A investor. The Series A investor will provide around a third of the capital to construct the project and in return will receive federal investment tax credits for their project participation, rather than any electricity bill credits. The company's participation helps to keep the costs down for the Series B investors.

(See Acorn, Page 3C)

Northlands Job Corps Center gives virtual tours

VERGENNES — Northlands Job Corps Center is a fully funded residential career technical trade center based in Vergennes serving young adults ages 16-24. Students who have not yet completed high school can earn a GED or high school diploma. Although Northlands does offer non-residential opportunities to students residing within 25 miles of the center, most students choose to be residential and live on Macdonough Drive campus. Both of these options allow students to be part of the Northlands community, foster friendships and benefit from the supports of Job Corps.

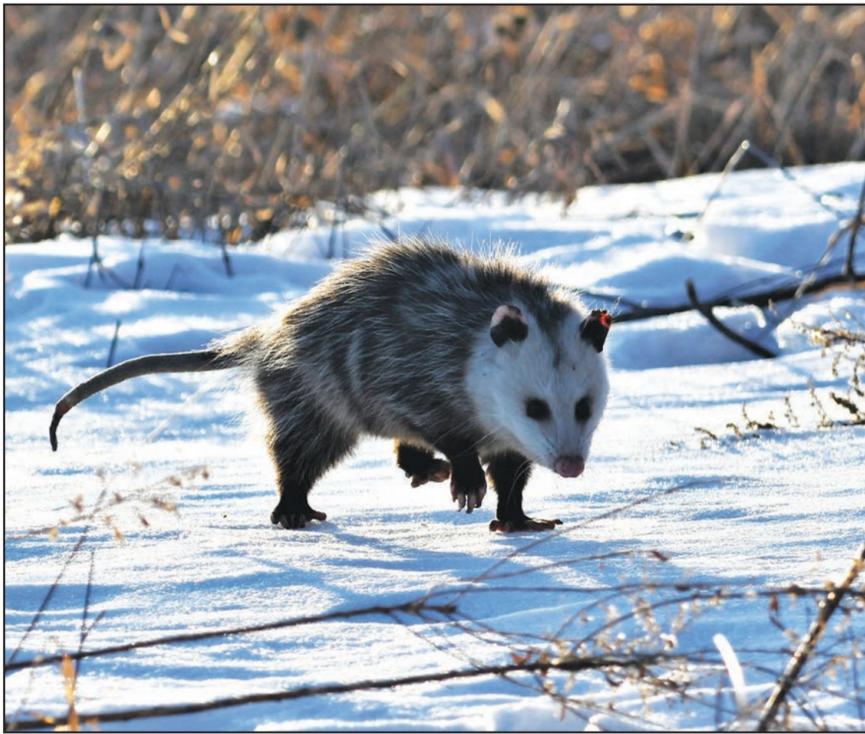
All students' Job Corps journeys are unique, as they come from a variety of geographic locations, cultures, linguistic and academic backgrounds. For students, a very important goal of going to Job Corps is to get a job upon completion of their program. Job Corps, a national program sponsored by the U.S. Department of Labor, has as its mission to educate and train highly motivated young people for successful careers in the nation's fastest-growing industries.

Northlands is the only Job Corps Center in Vermont. Some

say it is an untapped resource for Vermonters. Job Corps is a free program, and benefits include housing, meals, basic living allowance, driver's education leading to a driver's license, basic medical and dental care, and recreational activities. Additional student benefits include community college partnerships, military enrollment, apprenticeship programs and job placement services.

The trades for which training is offered at Northlands Job Corps Center are: Welding, Advanced Welding, Building Construction Technology, Culinary Arts, Carpentry, Automotive Technology, Certified Medical Assistant, Urban Forestry, and Office Administration. If there is a trade that is not offered there students have the opportunity to attend another center in New England/ Boston Region.

At capacity, Northlands can welcome up to 220 students. On the Northlands campus there is no shortage of leisure activities for students to participate in. In non-COVID-19 times this includes video game tournaments, crafting, athletics, movies, off-site trips and more. These allow students to balance their academics and trade with (See Northlands, Page 2C)



Tiptoeing around!

A VERGENNES RESIDENT was out taking photos at the old barn on Gage Road in Addison on March 7 when she spotted this opossum wagging around its prehensile tail as it made its way across a patch of soon-to-be-melted snow. Photo by Jeannette Armell

Family affair

(Continued from Page 1C)

The manufacturing division at that point stayed on Exchange Street in Middlebury under the Durasol name.

He said at times he considered going out on his own, but he was treated well and loved his job.

“I never got up in the morning and said, god, I’ve got to go to work. It was like, what am I going to do today. It was always a very positive feeling,” Paquette said.

But the last ownership, which Paquette said took over about two years ago, and his family members didn’t mesh. Both Adam and Heather chose to leave the company. Paquette stayed on, but the owners had other ideas.

This past September, Paquette pulled into the company after a full day’s work on a Monday. He said he was asked to turn in the keys to the company truck and his company phone and pick up his belongings. And that an Uber was waiting take him back to Addison from Williston.

Stunned after being told to leave by the only company he had ever known, Paquette realized when he got out of the Uber that he had left his keys in the truck he always drove home himself, and his house was locked.

“I’m walking in circles thinking, ‘Huh, isn’t this interesting? I’m going to open up my own awning company. I am going to open up my own awning company. I’ve got to open up my own awning company. How the hell am I going to open up my own awning company?’” Paquette recalled.

“This is all happening while being totally blindsided and just pacing while I can’t get into my house, and I can’t call anybody because I don’t have a phone.”

He finally crawled into a side window and started making calls. After discussions with advisers — notably Greg Beck and David Furney — and encouragement from former customers, other friends and family, Paquette hired an attorney and an accountant, and Integrity



ADDISON RESIDENT RENE Paquette brings 40 years of experience into his new business, Integrity Awnings — plus his wife and five children, all of whom signed on to work in the venture. Independent photo/Andy Kirkaldy

Awnings was born.

He soon learned business was waiting for him.

“I’ve done no advertising, I have no idea how they’ve gotten my phone number, but some of my old clients have said, yes, I want you to do some work for us,” Paquette said.

HITTING THE GROUND

That work can include providing and installing products for homes and businesses, such as retractable awnings, exterior window shades, exterior structures that can provide extra seating for restaurants in many weather conditions, and mesh that can be attached to awnings to provide shade for interior rooms without blocking views.

Awnings over decks can of course make them more safe and comfortable on hot, sunny days. Paquette also points out that awnings and shades can reduce interior temperatures.

As well as an office, Paquette’s Addison property also includes a shop for sewing and repairs, while he said he has developed contacts with a “supply network of manufacturers” that can provide whatever his customers might require.

As of midweek last week the company was readying its website, integrityawnings.com, and Hannah

Paquette had launched a social media campaign that Paquette said quickly gained traction.

“I think within an hour I had 70 likes and a bunch of followers,” Paquette said, adding he has already completed one job, with another 10 in the pipeline, and is also serving as a consultant to other awning companies under his company umbrella.

Paquette believes the time is right for his family business to take off. The desire of homeowners who have been stuck at home during a pandemic to upgrade their surroundings has sparked the home improvement sector in general, including the sale of awnings.

Paquette cited an industry-wide 30% increase in retractable residential awning sales in the past year, a trend that manufacturers and suppliers in the awning business expect to continue in 2021.

“I’m feeling very optimistic,” he said.

Paquette has another great hope for Integrity Awnings, one he has shared with his five children.

“I told them I’m 62 years old. I’m not going to do this forever. This is going to be your company,” he said. “That is one of my focuses. I would love to leave my kids a very thriving company they can take over.”

Tax filing deadline now May 17

MONTPELIER — The deadline for Vermont personal income tax filings for tax year 2020 has been extended from April 15 to May 17 in alignment with the federal due date change announced by the IRS last week.

This extension means taxpayers can file their 2020 Vermont personal income tax, and pay any tax owed, by May 17 without penalties and interest. This extended due date also applies to Vermont Homestead Declarations and Property Tax Credit Claims.

Although the filing deadline

has moved, Vermonters who wish to file their returns and claims before May 17 can still do so. The Vermont Department of Taxes encourages all taxpayers to file electronically and request a direct deposit if they are owed a refund.

If taxpayers need additional time to file personal income tax returns, they may request an extension of time to file until Oct. 15. Those requesting an extension of time to file for filing personal income tax returns are reminded that these extensions do not extend the time to pay any

tax owed, and tax must be paid by May 17 to avoid penalties and interest. Vermonters should still file their Homestead Declaration and Property Tax Credit Claims forms by May 17 to avoid late fees assessed by a taxpayer’s town.

This extension does not apply to any tax year 2021 estimated payments. Most taxpayers do not need to make estimated payments because their taxes are withheld from their paychecks and paid to the Department by their employer.

Congratulations, Megan!

MIDDLEBURY — President and CEO Caroline Carpenter of National Bank of Middlebury announced the promotion of Megan Norris to manager of the technology department and appointed officer of National Bank of Middlebury.

Norris joined National Bank of Middlebury in Dec. 2019 as the network manager of the technology department. She has a B.S. in Business Management from Johnson State College and an M.S. in Cybersecurity from Southern New Hampshire University. Before joining the bank, Norris served in the technology department of UVM Health Network/Porter Medical Center.

In addition to her technical skills and education, Norris brings to the bank an innate understanding of quality service and its mission to serve the community. She will help the bank meet the demands brought on by its increasing reliance on technology and help it manage the risks posed by cybersecurity threats. National Bank of Middlebury relies on its technology team to support staff and customers and help carry out initiatives involving seamless, reliable, and high-performance technology. Norris’s role will assure the bank carries out those goals now and into the future.

Norris resides in Whiting with her husband and three Labradors. She enjoys time outdoors gardening, hiking, and hunting.



Megan Norris

Acorn

(Continued from Page 1C)

The remaining equity funding will come from Series B investors (Vermont residents, businesses, churches, and organizations with an electric meter in the GMP service territory) from Bristol and surrounding communities, who will be project participants. These participants will receive net metering dollar credits applied each month to their GMP electric bills based on the amount of electricity produced the previous month for the number of units they have purchased (each unit corresponding to the output of one solar panel).

“We are extremely pleased to have Co-operative Insurance as a major participant in Bristol Community Solar,” says Richard Carpenter, Acorn Energy Co-op’s treasurer. “They played a similar major investment role in our Shoreham project, Acorn Energy Solar 2, as well as our Middlebury project, Acorn Energy Solar One.”

Six years after the Bristol project begins electricity production, the equity structure will “flip” and the individual local investors may take full ownership of the project, making BCS one of a small number of truly local, community-owned net-metered solar projects in the state.

“Acorn Energy Co-op is very excited to be moving ahead with this community-owned solar

project developed by Vermonters for Vermont residents,” said Marks. “We believe it will make Bristol more self-sufficient, and will help the State of Vermont to reach its ambitious goal of 90 percent renewables by 2050.”

Informational online meetings for prospective investors are scheduled for the participating groups:

- Acorn Energy Co-op members, 7 p.m. on Tuesday, March 30.
- Residents of Bristol, Bristol businesses and organizations 7 p.m. on Wednesday, March 31.
- ICAN/VTIPL, 7 p.m. on

Thursday, April 1.

Organized in 2008, Acorn Energy Co-op is a member-owned cooperative serving residents and businesses in Addison, Rutland and Chittenden counties. The Co-op provides education, outreach, products and services, as well as community solar projects that help members make the transition from our present reliance on fossil fuels to greater use of renewables and local solutions.

For more information on Bristol Community Solar email info@acornenergycoop.com or call Mary Mester at 802-385-1911.

WELLNESS Directory

Practitioner of the Week

Ron Slabaugh, PhD, MSSW, CBP is a former psychotherapist and family therapist who now practices BodyTalk. BodyTalk System is a holistic healthcare system that supports and promotes



Ron Slabaugh PhD, MSSW, CPD

wellbeing from within using a careful non-invasive protocol to subtly shift things from within to tap the innate wisdom of the body and tendency toward wellness. BodyTalk can help symptoms ranging from stress to diabetes, dizziness to chronic pain.

See if BodyTalk can help you with a free 60-minute introductory BodyTalk session with Ron.

Somaworks • Middlebury, VT
802-458-7549
ron.slaubaugh@gmail.com



A Center for Independent Health Care Practitioners

“Wellness is more than the absence of illness.”

50 Court St • Middlebury, Vt 05753

Jim Condon 388-4880 or 475-2349
SomaWork

Caryn Etherington 388-4882 ext. 3
Therapeutic Massage & Bodywork

Nancy Tellier 388-4882 ext. 1
Therapeutic Massage, CranioSacral Therapy, Ortho-Bionomy®, Soul Lightning Acupressure

Charlotte Bishop 388-4882 ext. 4
Therapeutic Soft & Deep Tissue

Ron Slabaugh, PhD, MSSW, CBP 458-7549
The BodyTalk™ System

JoAnne Kenyon 388-0254
Energy Work www.joanne.abmp.com

Victoria (Torl) Hovde, RN 233-3456
Licensed Acupuncturist
victoriahovdeacupuncture.com

Winfield Kelley, D.C. 453-6010
Chiropractic Treatment

Donna Belcher, M.A. 388-3362
Licensed Psychologist - Master

Want to advertise within this directory?
Call Sydney at 388-4944
or sydneys@addisonindependent.com



Are you looking for green or seasoned firewood?

Well we’ve got it all right here in Addison, VT!

We cut, split, and deliver hardwood firewood in 12-24 inch lengths. Coming soon we will have kiln dried firewood as well.

Gevry Firewood LLC
gevryfirewoodvt@gmail.com or 802-349-0699