



# the Chronicle

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ONE DOLLAR

## Leap, frog!



Rainbow the frog arcs through the air toward the finish line and a \$50 prize for his young coach, Anna Kate Costo. Anna Kate found that blowing on Rainbow was an excellent way to stimulate the amphibian's competitive instincts. The frog-jumping contest was only one of many events at Newport's Aquafest on Saturday. To find out more about the event and about Shred Fest, which took place nearby, please see page sixteen.

Photo by Joseph Gresser

## Education law explained to OCSU

by Joseph Gresser

Over 30 educators, school directors, and members of the general public gathered at Lake Region Union High School Tuesday evening for a presentation on Act 46, an education law passed by the Legislature earlier this year.

The main question for most, if not all of those attending, was what will the law — which pushes school districts toward consolidation — mean for schools in the Orleans Central Supervisory Union (OSCU)?

Nicole Mace, general counsel for the Vermont School Boards Association (VSBA), paid special attention to issues related to consolidation. She was joined by Brad James, education finance manager for the state Agency of Education.

Nikki South is Act 46 Project Director for a collaborative consulting service formed by the VSBA, the Vermont Superintendents Association, and VSBIT, formerly known as the Vermont School Boards Insurance Trust.

Act 46, said Ms. Mace, is an effort to meet the ambitious goals set by the state for academic (Continued on page twenty-eight.)

## Wind project proposed for Irasburg

by Tena Starr

IRASBURG — A new, though small, commercial wind project has been proposed for Irasburg.

The plan is for a 5-megawatt project with two towers, up to 499 feet high, that would produce enough power for about 2,100 homes, says Kidder Hill Community Wind's website, which describes the project in detail.

David Blittersdorf, well known in renewable energy circles, is behind the proposal.

Not surprisingly, given the divisive history of commercial wind in the Northeast Kingdom, some Irasburg landowners are on alert, though no one wanted to talk on the record this week.

The turbines would be on 1,760-foot high Kidder Hill ridge, where wind speed at hub height averages 14.6 miles per hour, the website says.

"The site is a 1/4 mile long, windy hill in the western portion of Irasburg, Vermont, approximately four miles northwest of the Irasburg Village Center," it says.

Plans call for the power from the wind turbines to be fed into the Green Mountain Power line that runs between Lowell and Irasburg.

The website says that "numerous environmental, engineering and economical studies are underway, including the acquisition and analysis of on-site natural resource data, wetlands resource investigation, visual and sound analyses, electrical interconnection studies and economic analyses."

That work should largely be completed by later this summer, and at that point Kidder Hill Community Wind will apply for permits, including a Certificate of Public Good from the Vermont Public Service Board (PSB).

Groundbreaking is expected in May of 2016.

Mr. Blittersdorf founded NRG Systems, which provides wind measurement instruments, in the

(Continued on page thirty.)

## Newport Center says no to "green" burials

by Nathalie Gagnon-Joseph

NEWPORT CENTER — The selectmen here have voted against allowing natural burials in town-owned cemeteries. They made that decision at their July 13 meeting, less than two weeks after new legislation allowing so-called "green" burials took effect.

Among other things, they fear liability issues, as well as problems they're already well aware of because of old graves that have fallen in.

Anyone with private property can bury loved ones naturally — meaning without embalming, a vault, or even a casket — on their own land in Vermont.

The new law opens the natural burial option up to people who aren't landowners.

"[Act 24] provides rules in state law as to how natural burials are to be conducted if they are allowed either in a cemetery or a conserved area," said Representative Michael Yantachka of Charlotte.

He was the lead on moving the bill forward.

While green burial has always been legal on private property, each cemetery has its own rules.

There aren't any designated green cemeteries in Vermont, but the new law makes it easier to develop natural burial grounds by allowing people who own conserved land, which can't be developed, to make a green grave site on their property, Mr. Yantachka said.

Act 24 gives natural burial grounds special dispensation from certain traditional cemetery rules, like having a fence. The idea is to make natural burial grounds look as natural as its title suggests. Instead of headstones, GPS coordinates could be used to locate loved ones, since record keeping is obligatory no matter what.

But the law doesn't allow someone who wants to use GPS to mark a grave to do so in a cemetery where stones are required, for instance. In that case, those in charge of the cemetery can erect a headstone on the natural grave.

And select boards can decide what type of burial is allowed in their cemeteries, or not.

(Continued on page twenty-six.)



# Sinking graves give caretakers more work

(Continued from page one.)

The Newport Center Select Board's decision only applies to town-owned cemeteries, Chairman Steve Barrup said.

It was a unified board decision not to change burial practices in town cemeteries, Selectman Richard Gosselin said.

"The bill just passed," Mr. Barrup said. "It's very new. I don't know what other communities are doing."

He wants to wait and see how other communities react, but so far he hasn't seen any action elsewhere, he said.

To him, there are many things that could happen as a result of an increase in natural burials, and he's unsure if legislators took all possibilities into account.

The ground gradually sinks in spots where someone was buried naturally, creating a tripping hazard and a need to level the ground, he said.

"Legislators set out to make basic rules and regulations to be consistent with cemetery statutes that are already in place," said Chris Palermo, the president of the Vermont Funeral Directors Association, in an interview.

"Beyond that, the maintenance of the cemetery is really between the person who's purchasing the lot and the cemetery operator."

"The commissioner came and we took his recommendation," Mr. Barrup said, about Newport Center Cemetery Commissioner Chuck

Guadagni.

One of Mr. Guadagni's concerns was that sinking ground could lead to a liability situation.

Someone who falls into a hole could decide to sue, he said during a tour of the Lake Road Cemetery in Newport Center.

He once fell into the ground up to his knees, he said.

On the tour, he used a metal rod to show how deep soft ground goes in the case of natural burial versus vault burial.

A vault is a cement box that is placed into the ground. It's what a coffin is lowered into during a burial nowadays to prevent the ground above from sinking.

When Mr. Guadagni inserted the approximately four-foot rod where a grave was located, it struck the vault with a bit less than a foot to spare at the top of the rod.

The rod was buried to the hilt, and probably could have gone further, in spots where there aren't vaults.

In the old part of the Lake Road Cemetery, many of the headstones collapsed into the soft ground where vaults weren't used.

Also, using vaults to keep the ground level makes maintenance easier for caretakers.

Richard Colburn of Charleston is knowledgeable about cemetery history. He, too, expressed concern about sinking ground, should natural burials increase.

"I disagree with it because, for the caretaker, it's a constant battle



When someone is buried without a casket or a cement vault to keep the ground from caving in, the ground slowly sinks and needs to be filled in with dirt to keep it level. Pictured here, a gravestone in the Lake Road Cemetery in Newport Center has nearly tipped over into the ground because of sinking. Cemetery Commissioner Chuck Guadagni inserted a long metal rod to show how deep the soft ground goes for this grave. Photo by Nathalie Gagnon-Joseph

with sinking," he said.

Sinking ground is common in old cemeteries, but the sinking rate depends on what wood was used in the casket, and what type of soil it was buried in, he said.

As graves cave in, caretakers have to fill in the holes with dirt so the ground stays flat.

Mr. Colburn estimated that it

takes about 20 to 30 years on average for a grave to collapse, unless there was a vault placed in the ground, a practice that started at different times in different places.

In Charleston, it started in the sixties or early seventies, he said.

"I think everyone was sick of having sinking graves," Mr. Colburn

(Continued on page twenty-seven.)

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# Natural burial is a cheaper alternative

(Continued from page twenty-six.)

said when asked why the practice started. "I've dug lots of graves over the years, and I've dug near vaults, but they've never collapsed."

An argument in favor of green burials is the low cost. Without a vault, and in some cases, without a casket, the cost of burial goes down significantly.

The current method of burial is from the twentieth century, and is energy intensive and expensive, Representative Yantachka said.

There was a need for a simpler option, and a less expensive alternative to cremation, he said.

According to one local funeral home, in Orleans County it costs \$2,900 for cremation, \$1,470 for a basic vault, \$795 for a basic casket, \$525 for embalming, and \$35 per day for refrigeration.

Natural burial cuts costs, but it could be more expensive than people might think, Mr. Guadagni said. Winter burials are possible in Vermont, he said. If there is about a foot of snow over the ground, it insulates the earth so the frost is only a few inches deep, he said.

But that's not always what happens. If there's a wait for burial, the body must be refrigerated, which is an added cost.

Another argument is that green burials are better for the environment.

"Vermont has a very high cremation rate, about 60 percent, but with natural burial grounds, more people will opt for it because it's

more environmentally friendly," said Lisa Carlson, the executive director of Funeral Ethics Organization.

Crematoriums use natural gas for cremations, which take about three hours to complete, said Greg Camp of the Cabot Funeral Home in Woodstock.

Natural burial supporters object most to cremation because of that, he said.

Embalming is also a point of contention for some. But both Mr. Camp and Josh Slocum, the executive director of Funeral Consumers Alliance, said that burying embalmed bodies doesn't contaminate the ground.

The main ingredient in the embalming process is formaldehyde, which is a lung irritant and a carcinogen, so the health of embalmers is what's at risk, Mr. Slocum said.

But exposure to formaldehyde is minimal because of ventilation and mask use, Mr. Palermo said.

The main concerns voiced about the law were about soil and water contamination, Representative Yantachka said.

Mr. Guadagni worried about that, too, because the Lake Road Cemetery is so close to Lake Memphremagog.

The new law says that bodies must be buried at least five feet deep if they were adults, and be at least 200 feet away from a well, 500 feet uphill from ground water used as a potable water supply, and 150 feet across or downhill from the same.

While Newport and Newport Center don't use Lake Memphremagog for drinking water, in Canada, the cities of Magog and Sherbrooke do, Mr. Guadagni said.

Not everyone can automatically get a natural burial. If a person had a dangerous disease and a green burial is planned, the state health commissioner can step in and say no, the law says.

Many reservations to natural burial are due to the fact that the discussion is about the interment of human remains, Mr. Slocum said. Animal remains are generally dealt with in a natural way, and questions don't arise, he noted.

"Jewish faith people have been doing this for centuries, so it's not a revelation," Mr. Palermo said about natural burial. "[The law] is really about consumer protection."

Demand for green burials is practically non-existent in Orleans County for now. Mr. Guadagni never received any requests for it. Mr. Colburn had only heard whispers about the practice, he said. Barton Town Clerk Kristin Atwood never received requests either.

"Most people don't even realize they have options at all and won't even think to ask for green burial until they hear about it," Mr. Slocum said. "But when they do, it makes a whole lot of sense to folks. It's merely a return to the burial practices of a century ago, and what most of the rest of the world practices in some form."

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## Kingdom Farm and Food Days in August

Northeast Kingdom farmers and food businesses will host Kingdom Farm and Food Days on August 14, 15, and 16.

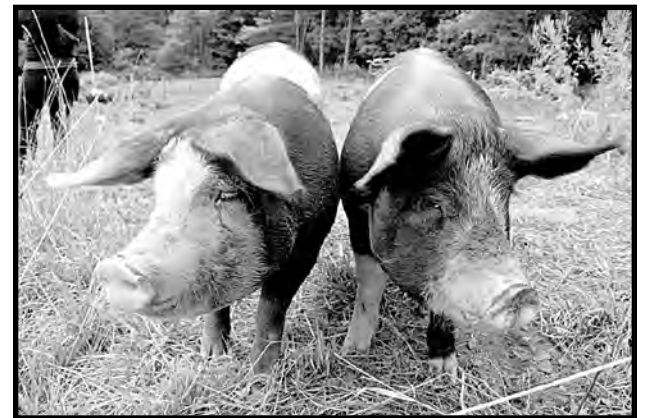
Free events over the weekend include Draft Animal Power Network demonstrations at Atkins Field in Hardwick on Friday, August 14; a tour and workshop at Eden Ice Cider apple orchards in Charleston on Sunday, August 16; and a free localvore meal prepared by the New England Culinary Institute at trial fields for High Mowing Seeds in Wolcott that evening. Farms opening their doors to the public that weekend include Log Cabin Alpacas in Albany and Pete's Greens in Craftsbury where people will be able to take tours and get hay rides Saturday.

Caledonia Spirits distillery in Hardwick will be open for tours, and Sterling College in Craftsbury will offer tours of livestock, solar electricity production, and gardens, ending with a light meal of local foods.

New partners this year include Valerie Desmarais of 802 Fresh, and Neal and Bekah Perry of the Draft Animal Power Network. The 802 Fresh local food truck will have local meals for sale during the draft animal demonstration by the Perrys of Brownington on Friday. Kingdom Brewing of Newport Center is another new partner. Beef cattle at this farm and brewery enjoy spent grains from the brewing process for their meals. Visitors can see the family's geothermal-cooled and wood-fired energy system.

Hardwick and Craftsbury farmers markets are participating partners on Friday, August 14, and Saturday, August 15.

Events are coordinated by the Center for an Agricultural Economy and Northeast Kingdom Travel and Tourism Association. For more information and a full schedule, check out: [www.kingdomfarmandfood.org](http://www.kingdomfarmandfood.org). — from the Center for an Agricultural Economy



All are invited to a free localvore meal put on by High Mowing Seeds and prepared by New England Culinary Institute at High Mowing's trial fields in Wolcott as part of Kingdom Farm and Food Days.

Photo courtesy of Center for an Agricultural Economy

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