

Town-by-town preview of Town Meeting, Pages 12A-18A

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Bristol eyes contentious town plan vote

By KATHRYN FLAGG
BRISTOL — The long-simmering issue of sand and gravel extraction in Bristol comes to a head on Tuesday when residents cast votes on a proposed update of the Bristol Town Plan and a new ordinance that would regulate gravel mining.

In a town gripped by the debate about gravel mining, the two documents — both of which would have implications for the industry in Bristol — have drawn heated debate among residents. The run-up to the vote has been marked by the same contention that has colored the debate about land use, gravel extraction and town planning in Bristol for more than four years.

The votes on the proposed plan and extraction ordinance will take place by Australian ballot on Tuesday, March 2, from 9 a.m. to 7 p.m. at Holley Hall.

The most vocal concerns have come from residents worried that the proposed plan would open more Bristol land up to gravel mining, and that the extraction ordinance does not provide strict enough regulations for the gravel industry. Meanwhile, the Bristol Planning Commission, which drafted both documents, has repeatedly pointed to the plan and ordinance as examples of compromise between the town's opposing factions.

Trust may buy, upgrade trailer park in Waltham

By ANDY KIRKALDY
WALTHAM — The Addison County Community Trust (ACCT) is seeking funding for and the support of the town of Waltham to buy and rebuild Gevry Trailer Park as a permanent site for 14 new affordable manufactured homes.

The 2.3-acre park sits on Maple Street on the Vergennes city line and has frontage on Otter Creek. The park's last tenant moved out last year, said ACCT Executive Director Terry McKnight, who has had his eye on the site for years as a place to provide housing for moderate- and low-income families.



Dramatic play

MARGO WHITCOMB TEACHES an acting workshop for students in grades five through eight Tuesday afternoon in the Town Hall Theater in Middlebury. Whitcomb and the Town Hall Theater hope to expand the class this summer.

Independent photo/Trent Campbell

Winter of wacky weather takes toll

Jet stream blamed for inconsistent snow

By KATHRYN FLAGG
ADDISON COUNTY — Finally! That's what many in the area said when they woke up Wednesday morning to the first real snow storm in Addison County in more than a month.

Those looking for a scapegoat when it comes to the relative lack of snow this February can just blame the jet stream, a fast flowing, narrow air current that moves from west to east, and influences much of North America's weather patterns.

That's the culprit that Burlington-based National Weather Service meteorologist William Hanley offered up as an explanation for the bare ground that frustrated many Vermont outdoor enthusiasts since the late January thaw while other parts of the United States have been hammered with snow.

And while this week's snow was abundant on Wednesday morning, it was put at risk by rain showers forecast when the *Addison Independent* went to press.

Bringing noticeably less snow this month than usual, the weird winter weather has had repercussions for winter sports enthusiasts, local

ski areas and road crews alike. Meanwhile, other parts of the eastern United States — including southern neighbors like Washington, D.C. — have clocked record amounts of snow.

That disparity comes because the jet stream has split into two branches. The southern branch has scooped up moisture from the Gulf of Mexico, and that's translated into snow days galore for many eastern towns and cities.

Meanwhile, Vermont is under the influence of the northern branch of the jet stream, a weaker weather system that carries less moisture. Hanley said that sometimes the two jet streams "fade" into one big system — that's been the case occasionally in the past during Vermont's larger snowstorms.

Another factor in the winter's weather this year is the El Niño weather pattern we're experiencing. El Niño cycles happen roughly every five years, and take place when surface water on the Pacific Ocean warms abnormally. This year, with sea surface temperatures running warmer than usual, more moisture is available in the atmosphere for storms.

"The conditions here (at the Blueberry Hill Cross Country Ski Center in Goshen) have really been outstanding much of the winter, but we've had a hard time convincing people down in the valleys that that's the case."

— Tony Clark

Nonprofit seeks immortality through technology

Bristol group ramps up Web experiment

By KATHRYN FLAGG
BRISTOL — There's a saying that, once something exists online, it can't be destroyed. A photograph posted to a Facebook account is

logged in search records and Internet caches. Pull it down, if you like, but know that a digital copy is probably pinged around in the ether, like it or not.

In a sense, that information is immortal.

But what if immortality through technology didn't just apply to

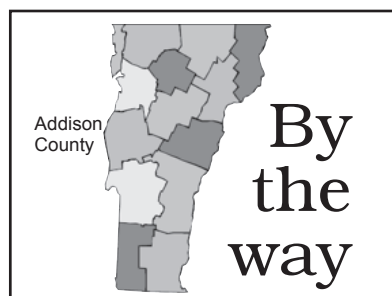
photographs or old Web sites, to online dating profiles and MySpace blogs? What if we could preserve personalities, and individual consciousness, through the same tools we now use to chat with friends and e-mail relatives?

Call it far-fetched, but that concept — that technology may just be the

key to immortality — is the idea behind research being conducted by the **Terasem Movement Foundation, a Bristol-based nonprofit.**

Led by managing director Bruce Duncan and manager of cyberbiological systems Nick Mayer, the organization is exploring how

(See *Terasem*, Page 3A)



By the way

There's an antidote for skiing fans frustrated by NBC's Olympic coverage: Middlebury College's Snow Bowl and Rikert Ski Touring Center will host the college's 87th annual winter carnival this Friday and Saturday. This year the carnival also doubles as the Eastern collegiate skiing championships. On Friday at 9:30 a.m. and 12:30 p.m., the men's and women's slalom will be contested at the Snow Bowl, and at the same hours on Saturday the giant slalom

(See *By the way*, Page 2A)

VUHS Spanish teacher wins \$100k fellowship

Student portfolio system the goal

By ANDREA SUOZZO
VERGENNES — It's not often that high school teachers can take a semester away from teaching to focus exclusively on creating a more progressive learning environment.

But that is just what Vergennes Union High School Spanish teacher Kristine Kirkaldy will do next fall. She recently became the second teacher from VUHS to win a Rowland Fellowship, which each year awards \$100,000 to up to 10 Vermont secondary school educators to fund a semester researching and developing a project focused on "enhancing the institution's culture and climate," according to the foundation's Web site.

Kirkaldy, a Middlebury resident who has been teaching at VUHS for six years, plans to use the grant in order to continue the work she has been doing for the past year on VUHS's graduation requirements. She will take a sabbatical from teaching next fall to focus on developing an electronic portfolio system for students, in which they will collect the work that best exemplifies what they have done in their years at VUHS.

The project has the eventual goal of increasing the percentage of students pursuing post-secondary education. To Kirkaldy, the portfolio system has the potential to do this by encouraging

students to take a more active role in their own education.

"Students feel more involved when they have to think about what they want in their portfolio," she said. "That way, they're not just a vessel with the teacher pouring in knowledge. That's a very old-fashioned idea."

Kirkaldy will explore ways to develop these portfolios as



KRISTINE KIRKALDY WORKS with advanced Spanish students Marissa and Courtney Andersen at Vergennes Union High School last week. Kirkaldy will use part of a \$100,000 grant to work on a new electronic portfolio system for the school's students.

Independent photo/Trent Campbell

online projects in order to make them easily accessible and interactive.

"In the 21st century, (portfolios should be) electronic rather than in an overflowing three-ring binder," she said. "(Students) can add to it, or substitute a new piece."

Half of the grant money will go to fund a substitute for Kirkaldy during the fall and to pay for travel and research

expenses, both for herself and, she hopes for other interested teachers and students. The other half will go to ensure that she is able to continue researching and developing the project after she has returned to teaching.

FELLOWSHIPS FOR CHANGE

The Rowland Foundation was founded by Barry and Wendy

(See *Kirkaldy*, Page 19A)

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Terasem

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“mind files,” or digital repositories filled with information about individuals, can be used in the future to recreate personalities.

They’re not developing the software that could reanimate these “mind files,” but Duncan and Mayer believe that artificial intelligence software could advance to the point where the data in these files could be, in a sense, brought back to life.

They are doing this in a project called “Lifenaut,” online at www.lifenaut.com, where users can begin logging data about themselves.

Duncan and Mayer admit that, at first, some people are taken aback by the project.

“People tend to fear the unknown,” Mayer said. “And I think it’s unfortunate that in the media artificial intelligence is always portrayed in this negative light.”

But Mayer pointed out that, though the plans sound “sci-fi and crazy at first glance,” there is a lot of academic research happening in the fields of personality capture and machine consciousness.

Duncan uses another approach to ease others’ ambivalence about the project: He talks about the Terasem idea as another way to “back up” our lives, just as computer-users back up copies of their documents or photos. That “backed up” version of their lives in pictures, documents, movies and sounds can be looked back at throughout their lives, then, as a sort of “digital bridge” from one part of their life to another.

When it comes to concerns like privacy, Duncan warned that no one should put anything online — be it on Lifenaut or Facebook or another service — that they don’t want the world to know about; even the Pentagon has had security breaches, he pointed out, and information privacy can never be guaranteed 100 percent.

The trick, he said, is to be thoughtful and careful about what one puts online.

DIGITAL TIME CAPSULE

Though Duncan and Mayer are both confident that artificial intelligence software isn’t far from the point where it might be able to make sense of these “mind files,” they point out that this experiment does have concrete benefits to offer. At the very least, collecting information digitally creates a “digital time capsule” for individuals — and their families — to reflect back on.

That could mark an enormous change in the way society thinks about the roughly 250,000 people who die every day, Duncan said.

“There’s no record. There’s no information about their rich lives that they lived or the lessons that they learned. There’s no way to pass that information on to future generations, even if it’s just with your family,” he said.

Terasem Movement Foundation, which has had an office in Bristol for several years, is getting ready to launch a new Web site this quarter, and it’s also opening up a new avenue for people to preserve their identities: the “bio file.” For \$1 a day, the foundation will collect and store information about a person’s genetic makeup. That information could theoretically be used to generate a physical home for a “mind file” in the future, a body of sorts generated by stem-cell technology or robotics.

That’s much further down the line, Duncan and Mayer said. But the future is just what intrigues them most. They’re beginning

to experiment with new headsets that monitor brain waves as a way to enrich the “mind files” that individuals create.

That said, Duncan also keeps an eye on the past. What he and Mayer are working on isn’t so divergent from the evolution of expression, he said. He likes to think of the Lifenaut project as the next step on a timeline that began with cave paintings.

“It transformed into more and more elegant ways of people



NICK MAYER, RIGHT, and Bruce Duncan of the Terasem Movement Foundation in Bristol are researching ways to preserve personalities and individual consciousness through technology.

Independent photo/Trent Campbell

Though the Terasem Movement Foundation’s plans sound “sci-fi and crazy at first glance,” Terasem’s Nick Mayer said there is a lot of academic research happening in the fields of personality capture and machine consciousness.

expressing what was important in their environment,” Duncan said. “In some ways we’re paralleling that same kind of course in trying to come up with ever more and more robust ways and rich ways to capture information that’s important to them.”

MOVING TO PARK PLACE

The Terasem Movement Foundation is located in a small office on Prince Lane, across the parking lot from the Shaw’s grocery.

But soon it will be moving to more expansive quarters. A separate nonprofit, called the Terasem Movement Transreligion Inc., purchased a Bristol home at 2 Park Place on Dec. 15, 2009, for \$525,000. Alan and Sonja Cleland of Naples, Fla., sold the home to the organization. Bina Rothblatt, a founder of the movement who also has a residence in Lincoln, signed the property transfer documents for Terasem Movement Transreligion.

The Terasem Movement

Foundation — the operation run by Duncan and Mayer — is a separate nonprofit and private operating foundation. But both the transreligion organization and the Terasem Movement Foundation will occupy the Cleland house, and both were founded by Martine Rothblatt, a millionaire entrepreneur who is the driving force behind the Terasem family of organizations.

According to 2008 tax records, Martine and Bina Rothblatt made a personal contribution of \$515,000 to the Bristol-based Terasem

Movement Foundation.

Rothblatt, who is the president of the Bristol-based Terasem Movement Foundation’s board of directors, launched both Sirius Satellite Radio and one of Maryland’s largest biotech companies.

She founded the Terasem Movement Foundation in addition to the transreligion movement, which believes that, so long as information about a person exists, that person is not dead. The religion, according to its Web site, is “beyond the scope of

all existing religions.” The religion believes in God, “partially so,” and blends prayer, visualization, meditation and mental stillness and yoga throughout the day.

Duncan said that he is confident that both the Terasem Movement Foundation and Terasem Movement Transreligion will be good neighbors in Bristol, and that residents can be sure that the house will be well taken care of for a long time to come.

Reporter Kathryn Flagg is at kathrynf@addisonindependent.com.

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