

# WHEN YOU'RE ON YOUR OWN, WE ARE THERE WITH YOU.

## #ThereWithYou

The world is a very different place now than it was just a month ago.

Stay-at-home orders are in place for both New Hampshire and Vermont. Non-essential businesses have closed, temporarily we hope, and traffic has slowed to a crawl.

Even in rural New England, the change in pace is striking. Most of us have not seen anything like this in our lifetimes.

The impacts of COVID-19 are unprecedented. And, at least for the next few weeks, those impacts will be unwavering.

Here at the *Journal Opinion*, we face challenges as well. Not only has advertising declined as businesses have shuttered, but gathering news is a challenge with the cancellation or postponements of events, programs and meetings.

Nevertheless, we will continue to publish every week and be there with you every step of the way. The size of the paper may be reduced, but we will continue to cover local news, town and school business, and the people and places that touch the lives of our readers.

And we're hardly alone. Despite

the dramatic interruption to daily life, we have already seen our communities confront the challenges of this new era head-on. While our health care providers are on the front lines during this global health emergency, the rest of us will support those efforts the best we can.

Much of the time will be spent at home to maintain physical distancing, venturing out only for essentials—essentials provided by local businesses and services.

Now more than ever, it is

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## ECFiber explores local expansion

by Alex Nuti-de Biasi

FAIRLEE—On town meeting day, dozens of communities in the Northeast Kingdom, including Groton and Ryegate, voted to form a communications district designed to bring high-speed internet to an underserved part of Vermont.

The NEK Communications Union District is one of several community-based efforts in Vermont to build and deliver broadband internet infrastructure where telephone companies and large internet service providers have struggled.

Many of the CUDs have modeled their efforts on a 13-year-old entity that will soon consider building in two local towns. In February, the selectboard in West Fairlee voted to request membership in the communications dis-

trict. And during the past month, the Fairlee Selectboard has been mulling over a similar request.

The discussions come as ECFiber, or East Central [Vermont] Fiber, has nearly completed its buildout among its existing 24 member towns, including Chelsea, Thetford, and Vershire. It now has 4,200 customers in 23 towns. In a telephone interview, ECFiber Managing Director Chris Recchia said the organization expects to begin constructing its network in Hartford later this year.

With an end in sight to that initial buildout, he said ECFiber's board of directors formed an expansion committee a couple of months ago.

"It was logical to reach out to

neighboring communities," he said. So far, Windsor and West Fairlee have sent letters to the board requesting membership. Fairlee could join those two.

Fairlee Town Administrator Tad Nunez said COVID-19 has taken up the selectboard's time in recent weeks as the board continues to perform due diligence. They talked about at their meeting on March 30 and could take the issue up again during the next scheduled meeting on April 6.

Regardless, ECFiber broadband will not arrive in Fairlee or West Fairlee overnight. In fact, just because the towns have requested membership does not mean the

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## Pandemic brings instant innovation to schools

by Lillian Gahagan

WOODSVILLE—The COVID-19 pandemic has brought everyone home.

All residents in both states have been told to stay put, going out for only basic necessities such as food and medicine.

School buildings have been shuttered since roughly the third week of March. And, both New Hampshire and Vermont have extended the period of time that the doors will remain closed.

New Hampshire has pushed back the date when the buildings might reopen to May 4. In Vermont, all K-12 schools will remain closed for the remainder of the academic year.

School districts have pivoted to a system not used extensively before—one that was developed over just a few days when the first directive to close was issued. This is called "remote learning" where all K-12 students are being educated at home.

To illustrate how this works and

what the typical school day looks like, Laura Sjolander of Woodsville, a parent and 6<sup>th</sup> grade teacher at Haverhill Cooperative Middle School, helped explain what remote learning means and how it functions.

According to Sjolander, the remote learning model was organized and put in place in about three days in her district. Administrators set up training for teachers so that they would be able to use various applications such as Google Meet and Google Classroom.

With these tools, students and teachers could hold classes online, creating a live, interactive classroom. A schedule was suggested so that teachers could organize these live events for students to check into. The remote classroom was born.

Students now log into their computers from home at the prescribed time. There, they can see

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## Drivers line up for cheap gas

by Linda Duxbury

BRADFORD—Not so long ago, they were empty. But there was a steady stream of traffic at the gas pumps in downtown Bradford last week.

Lower fuel prices were a welcome relief for customers of Thomson Fuels. In 2018, Stacey Thomson stepped in and reopened the former Perry's Oil gas station on Main Street. The pumps had been idle since Perry's Oil was sold in 2015.

He is once again filling a need by offering lower fuel prices. According to a company announcement, "We want to do our part to help the community during this uncertain time. Thomson Fuels will be passing on the current market wholesale pricing decrease to our customers. While supplies last, we are offering a \$1.99 per gallon special price for fuel oil deliveries. Our regular gasoline price also reflects the current wholesale decrease. We are doing our best to help our customers based on the daily market price. Be safe."

On March 24, the time of Thomson's advertised special price for fuel oil, the gasoline price was \$1.75 per gallon.

"The prices are staying pretty stable so who knows how long we can do this," said manager Jay Clark. "We've had an excellent response and being able to do this at this crucial time is great."

Thomson is sanitizing the pumps twice a day. Susceptible community members who need gas may call the office between 8 a.m. and 5 p.m. and someone will offer assistance at the pumps.

Prices are down throughout the local area with regular unleaded prices ranging from \$1.99 to \$2.21 at seven area gas stations on March 25, according to a survey by *Journal Opinion* staff.

Matt Cota, executive director of the Vermont Fuel Dealers Association, told the *JO* that the demand for refined gasoline is off by 50 percent compared to other years.

"A significant amount of fuel is not being moved which has repercussions all across the country," he said.

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Several area restaurants remain open for takeout and delivery despite widespread closures. Tuttle's Family Diner in Wells River is one. While 'Stay Home' orders went into effect last week in both states, some essential businesses remain open.

COURTESY PHOTO BY GREG MATHIESON/MAI

## TM outlines early COVID-19 response

by Alex Nuti-de Biasi

NORTH HAVERHILL—Haverhill Town Manager Brigitte Codling said during Monday night's selectboard meeting that the town has already logged an initial request for FEMA assistance as a result of COVID-19.

She said is aware of lost revenue resulting from the cancellation of the town's recreation programming. Meanwhile, the town has already incurred expenses as a result of the pandemic after installing plexiglass shields in the town offices, purchasing software for online meetings, and installing drop boxes at the town offices for mail.

She said FEMA could potentially reimburse the town.

"All those things have to be tracked," she said. "My day is primarily consumed with COVID-19 planning and preparation."

In other business, Darwin Clogston was re-elected as chair in an unanimous vote. Matthew Bjelobrck was elected vice chair.

"We're in some pretty tough times right now," Clogston said. "We really need to push forward. I appreciate your faith in me and I wish you a good year."

The meeting was the first one the selectmen held after the town meeting day election of newcomer Steve Robbins was confirmed in a recount.

Clogston welcomed Robbins to the board. Robbins is the former town health officer and emergency management director who resigned in December.

"We get hot," Clogston said

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## Quarantines ordered for travelers

by Alex Nuti-de Biasi

BRADFORD—Citing increased community transmission of COVID-19 in other states, officials in both New Hampshire and Vermont are instructing returning snowbirds and other visitors to quarantine upon arrival.

Vermont Gov. Phil Scott issued his latest emergency order on March 30, citing the increasing community transmission of the virus in New York, New Jersey, and Connecticut as well the warming

weather that could entice Vermonters and second-home owners to move north as the virus spreads in other parts of the country.

Simultaneously, he warned visitors displaying symptoms or visitors from "hot spots" such as Florida, Louisiana, New York City, Detroit, and Chicago against traveling to Vermont. He also tightened restrictions on hotel lodging operations by banning online bookings for short-term rentals like AirBnB

and VRBO.

"If you don't need to come to Vermont, please don't," he said on Monday.

Separately, New Hampshire Gov. Chris Sununu told visitors they need to take the same measures, including isolating for at least seven days upon arrival.

"If you're coming from out of state, you need to self-quarantine,"

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## Bradford businesses can tap local loan fund

by Alex Nuti-de Biasi

BRADFORD—Selectboard members approved an emergency measure last week to broaden access for local businesses to a municipal loan fund during the COVID-19 state of emergency.

During the regularly scheduled meeting on March 26, the selectboard approved a recommendation from the five-member Bradford Revolving Loan Committee, which oversees the fund and reviews applications. Specifically, the committee recommended increasing the amount available for emergency loans from \$500 to \$2,000 per borrower.

The committee made the changes "in hopes of providing assistance to local Bradford businesses and supporting our local economy during these unprecedented times of the coronavirus."

In addition, the selectboard initially capped the total amount available for the emergency loans at \$25,000. According to the annual town report, there was \$107,165 in the Bradford Revolving Loan Fund on Dec. 31, 2019.

Last week's selectboard meeting came one day after members of the loan committee met to make the recommendation. Selectboard members said they would revisit the terms and guidelines of the revolving loan at their next meeting on April 9, but they wanted to approve the emergency measure.

They agreed they did not want to make the total balance of the fund available for emergency loans, but wanted to take some urgent action on the fund.

"I think we need to do that," said selectboard member Carole Taylor.

"Holding off on any action may be problematic."

Taylor said they would not be handing out money to "just anybody." There is an application that prospective borrowers need to fill out. Applications are vetted and reviewed by the loan committee and the selectboard.

Revolving loan committee member Peter Terry said on March 31 that he was not aware of any applications made to the fund since the changes were made.

"This is a reminder that this is not free money," committee members added in a press release. "[It] is a loan to assist Bradford businesses in a time of emergency need."

According to the annual report, there were no new applications in

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Churches, are you holding virtual Easter services?  
Send us your church name, web address where you can be found, the time you are live or the video is uploaded, and we will publish a list in the April 8 issue.



