

The REPORTER

Brandon • Pittsford • Proctor •
Lake Dunmore, Leicester, Whiting, Sudbury

*****CAR-RT LOT**R-004
B000485 A 10/19/22 L 2 3 4
RUTLAND NORTHEAST SU
ATTN: JEANNE COLLINS
49 COURT DR
BRANDON VT 05733-9407

Vol. 26, No. 39

Wednesday, October 6, 2021

75c

OV Principal will leave post in June of 2022

'It's time to let other's lead,' Avery said

BY ANGELO LYNN

BRANDON — At a school board meeting Tuesday night chock full of budget preparations, concerns of COVID cases at school and impending testing program to keep students in school and healthy as much as possible, plus a shortage of available teachers, substitutes and school bus drivers, the bombshell news of the meeting was something entirely unexpected: the board learned that long-time Otter Valley Principal James Avery had submitted his letter of resignation effective this June 2022.

At 63, Avery said the decision was very emotional for him and it didn't come easy, but he simply told RNESU Superintendent Jeanne Collins that "the time had come" to let someone else take charge as principal and take the school forward.

"I've always wanted the best for this place — this school, this community, these students,"



PRINCIPAL JAMES AVERY

Avery said in a brief interview Tuesday morning. "You always want to leave a place better than you found it... I hope I've done that. Now it's time to give it to

someone new and let them make it better."

Avery first came to the school in 1991 as a special educator hired by Supt. Bill Mathis during the first inklings of the "school-to-work" movement that later

"Whomever they get, you have to be all in. A principal has to be all in, every day. And the community knows it, and they give back when you are."

—James Avery

morphed into the school's Ca-
(See Principal Avery, Page 6)

State pushes school testing as recent data shows Covid falling

BY ERIN PETENKO, VtDigger

Vermont is hoping to implement a new model that would test Covid-19-exposed students to keep them in school — but staffing that testing strategy may prove to be a challenge, said Dan French, state education secretary, at a press conference Tuesday.

The state's Covid-19 mitigation measures in K-12 education

have shifted as the Delta variant has caused a surge in cases and classroom closures. At first, Vermont recommended lifting masking orders in high-vaccination schools, only to reverse that measure temporarily within weeks after schools began the fall semester.

The Agency of Education then recommended weekly surveillance testing of students to limit cases while dialing back contact tracing. It's unclear how many schools implemented that testing, but school officials and

(See School testing, Page 7)



On the run

OV QUARTERBACK CALEB Whitney, above, came in for the second half of play against top-ranked Windsor Jacks this past Saturday and was constantly on the run from the Jack's defensive front. See story and more photos on page 8.

Reporter photo/Angelo Lynn

SolarFest looking into Brandon for a permanent home in 2022

BY ANGELO LYNN

BRANDON — The town of Brandon is one of a dozen communities throughout central and southern Vermont that is in the running as the permanent home of SolarFest, the renewable energy festival that has drawn thousands of people annually for the past 25 years. The festival is known for its high-energy musical acts on the main stage, arts, education and hands-on workshops for a sustainable lifestyle.

"We're looking ahead to establish a home and are fortunate to have an experienced and dedicated group of volunteers working to find the right place to put down roots," said SolarFest President Bill Laberge. "We're hoping to return to our in-person festival in July of 2022, hopefully in our new home, wherever that may be."

The leaders in Brandon answered the call with Selectboard member Tim Guiles, Economic Development Manager Bill Moore and Jim Emerson of the Energy Committee arranging visits, property tours and ongoing discussions about poten-

(See SolarFest, Page 19)



ATTENDEES ENJOY A concert at an earlier SolarFest.



8 0 4 8 7 9 2 2 8 4 3 1

Principal Avery

(Continued from Page 1)

reer Center. “I was able to design, create and implement my own work programs here for those students under Dr. Mathis and it was a very exciting program and opportunity.” Three years later, in October 1994, he agreed to a one-year stint as an associate principal.

He stayed as associate principal until 2010, when he became co-principal with Nancy Robinson until she retired in 2014 and Avery was hired as OV’s principal. He was honored as the state’s Assistant Principal of the Year in 2005.

DECADES OF CHANGE

During his years at the school much has changed, Avery said. “When I came, we didn’t have a football program, or a girls’ soccer team, or a climbing team,” and Avery was a big supporter of the school’s theater program.

The public can see the yearly records of the school’s athletic programs, though not as noticed are the school’s climbing program, which is one of the very few in the state, and its theater program, which, Avery said, is “one of the best in the state,” and it has been for many years. It’s directed by Jeff Hull, who was hired in 1999, and for the second time has been invited this year to attend the Fringe Festival in Edinburgh, Scotland.

“If OV’s theater program was in athletics, it would be considered a dynasty,” Avery said. “It’s that good.”

Avery also launched the school into an innovative exchange program with China from 2004-2016. He started as part of the Sino-American Seminar on Educational Leadership, and then became Program Director for the Advanced Asian Studies Program, which lasted for 12 years between 2004-2016. During that time he spent three weeks each summer for 10 years in various parts of China through UVM’s Asian Studies Outreach Program, introducing teachers to the China language and culture.

“During those years we also hosted an exchange for three years of up to 30 Chinese students coming to OV and living in the district communities for two weeks,” Avery recalled, adding that he also worked with the Confucius Institute/Hanban organization to host two teachers over five years.

“We also have a partnership with the Vermont International Academy in Shanghai

and prior to COVID we hosted two tuition paying students that attended OV in their senior year. We began this relationship in 2016 with the plan that interested students from OV would be able to spend time in China at one of the Academy sites. COVID put these plans on hold.

“None of this could have been done,” Avery said, “without the district’s towns embracing these individuals and making them welcome in our community.”

EARLY NOTICE

Avery said he gave notice of his impending resignation, still eight months away, early to allow the school board and Supt. Jeanné Collins ample time to fill the position, to, in his words, “get out in front of this.”

Supt. Collins said Avery’s departure would certainly be felt, noting a few of his many accomplishments.

“Losing Jim means the end of an era and we are all sad to see him go,” Collins said. “Jim brought in the Chinese language program, supported student voice through building relationships with each student class as they moved through, supported extra-curricular activities through the building of sports teams and the support of the Walking Stick Theater program. Jim also has led through some challenging times, including school safety issues that touched too close to home and COVID. He has been a steady figure at events and in the school daily.”

Collins also said she greatly appreciated Avery’s advance notice and that she would be sending information to the community soon about a fall search process.

Of that search, Avery reflected on the job of principal and what it takes.

“Whoever they get, you have to be all in,” he said. “A principal has to be all in, every day. And the community knows it,” he said, “and they give back when you are.”

“For me, it’s been an incredible journey,” Avery added, with a reference to his late wife Mickey who died in October 2019 and who had been at his side at many school events for years. “It is an amazing community to be a part of. I have loved the students, school and community and they love you back. I think that is what makes this community amazing ... it’s that they love you back.”



PATRICK LEAHY FIRST ran for his U.S. Senate term in 1974 alongside fellow aspirants U.S. Rep. Richard Mallary, R-Vt., and then Liberty Union Party candidate Bernie Sanders. Archive Photo

Leahy’s future

(Continued from Page 3)

the senator to step aside because of his advancing age.

“The big question is whether Vermont’s 81-year-old U.S. Sen. George D. Aiken, R-Vt., will seek another term,” another article said. “The dean of U.S. senators is keeping his reelection plans a tightly guarded secret.”

What people didn’t know: Aiken not only had decided to bow out but almost hadn’t run in what would be his last campaign in 1968.

During his congressional tenure, the Republican raised a few eyebrows by sharing breakfast every morning with then-Democratic U.S. Senate majority leader Mike Mansfield.

“In the aviary of the Senate,” Mansfield once observed, “George Aiken is catalogued as neither a hawk nor dove but as a very wise owl.”

Steve Terry, the Middlebury-based author of two Aiken books, says that friendship swayed the Vermonter’s 1968 decision to seek reelection.

“The only reason he ran again was because Mike Mansfield asked him to,” Terry says today. “Mansfield wanted Aiken’s help on legislation to stop the war in Vietnam.”

The fact Aiken almost didn’t mount that last race might surprise those who know the resulting legend that his campaign spent only \$17.09 — mostly for 6-cent postage stamps and phone calls to place his name on the ballot.

Terry, a former reporter and editor, joined Aiken’s staff after the 1968 win.

“There was no talk about the 1974 election in his office and no preparations underway for any campaign,” Terry recalls. “He never asked for any campaign contributions and returned all to

people who sent them. In retrospect it was clear he had no intention of running again. He would often talk about going back home to plant his garden and tend to his blueberries.”

‘IS HE STILL AN EFFECTIVE SENATOR?’

But only Aiken and his wife and chief aide, Lola Pierotti Aiken, officially knew of his retirement plans, and they kept them private so no one could cast him as a lame duck.

Take, for example, the freelancer who soon persuaded Vermont Life magazine to pay him 10 cents a word to interview the elder statesman.

His name: Bernie Sanders.

The contrast between Sanders and Aiken couldn’t be more striking: A young Brooklyn-born revolutionary conversing with the small-town Republican. But the resulting story that ran in Vermont Life’s spring 1973 issue features a surprising degree of consensus, with the two men finding common ground in the need for cultivating the grassroots, championing the working class and challenging party machinery.

The magazine spread was a rare rose in an increasingly thorny media landscape. At the start of 1974, the Rutland Herald and Barre-Montpelier Times Argus published a story headlined “Aiken’s Seniority Helps and Hurts Him” that reported on an appearance in which “his speech at times was halting or confused.”

Howard Coffin, a reporter turned Montpelier-based Civil

War historian, remembers the moment.

“As the drama developed over the question of is or isn’t he going to run, I went to cover the meeting thinking what the story might be,” Coffin says. “On the way back, I knew it was that Aiken had a bad day.”

Writing about the speech in his diary, Aiken blamed the problem on speaking from notes he inadvertently shuffled.

“Of course I ramble,” Aiken added. “It is my nature to ramble when I get to speaking, but it isn’t always a question of fuzziness or uncertainty, because sometimes a speaker can fend off a more difficult situation by diverging from

the subject.” No sooner than Coffin finished his story, the Herald’s publisher — Aiken friend Robert Mitchell — was writing an editorial disavowing it.

“Vermont’s and the nation’s senior U.S. senator, George D. Aiken, got a sample of the kind of critical review he will be subjected to if he runs for reelection,” the editorial began. “If Sen. Aiken runs again, he should not be judged by his age or his speaking style but by his performance in office. Is he still an effective senator capable of carrying on the duties of his office as well as or better than other members of that august body in Washington?”

‘QUIT WHILE YOU ARE AHEAD’

Within weeks, Democratic Gov. Thomas Salmon went 500

(See Leahy’s future, Page 11)

When asked whether he’ll seek another term in 2022, Leahy has told the press that he and his wife typically decide by the December before an election year.