

# *ADVANCING VERMONT'S*

# *CREATIVE ECONOMY*

Celebrating Models of Community Success



**The Vermont Council on Rural Development  
Annual Conference**

*Vermont State House—July 18, 2007*

Conference Report

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# I. Executive Summary

## *Background and Process*

The Vermont Council on Rural Development is charged by the federal farm bill to help coordinate state and federal rural policies in Vermont. VCRD serves as a neutral convener and facilitator of public dialogues at the state, regional, and local level to help diverse parties and interests work together in support of viable and sustainable rural communities. As part of this work, VCRD produces an annual Conference or Summit to bring Vermonters together with state and federal officials, business and non-profit leaders to consider strategies that can advance rural community and economic development.

Central to all VCRD conferences are facilitated “roundtable” discussions and strategic assessment sessions where all participants are equal and VCRD mediates what is, in effect, a “marketplace of ideas.” As convener and facilitator, VCRD is careful to remain neutral in these conversations and to provide a structure where ideas can develop and contend against one another. VCRD then serves as a non-partisan reporter of the outcome of group discussions, neither endorsing nor rejecting the ideas, opinions, or recommendations expressed. Ideas stand alone and succeed or fail on their merit to convince. The compilation of ideas and recommendations contained in this report represents the thinking of some of Vermont’s key entrepreneurs, artists, creative thinkers, community leaders and officials. It is presented for the use of participants, Legislators, and the Governor’s administration, but does not constitute a set of positions adopted by the Vermont Council on Rural Development.

VCRD chose the subject of the 2007 Conference based on the growing momentum in Vermont (and globally) to identify our unique local assets and use them as essential building blocks to strengthen our rural economies. VCRD’s 2004 report *Advancing the Creative Economy*, and the “Creative Communities Program” (CCP) VCRD led over the past two years, laid the groundwork for this high-energy State House event.

With the help of Jane’s Trust, VCRD developed the CCP to help residents look at their towns and regions through a creative economy lens and identify specific projects to pursue that would make them more vibrant communities—places that would attract and inspire innovative entrepreneurs. The program was modeled on the revitalization of Vermont towns like Brandon, Bellows Falls and Vergennes where local leaders built partnerships between artists, cultural non-profits, town government, and key businesses to build activities, redevelop properties, and establish reputations as towns that encourage innovative business development. Today, these towns are building their creative workforces, attracting businesses, and developing jobs. Tax revenues are up. They have a public image—a brand—as a town on the move with rising energy and spirit.

The CCP funding allowed us to work with 12 Vermont communities, but many other towns have found their own paths. All of them are part of what has evolved as a truly statewide movement. VCRD organized the 2007 Conference to provide an opportunity to learn about the diversity of approaches and success of different strategies each has pursued.

This day-long event succeeded in identifying the next essential steps in keeping Vermont communities vital and competitive. Vermont is well situated, through its brand identification, cultural heritage, and artistic depth, as well as its human and intellectual capital, to be a leader in innovation and creativity. The Conference discussions reflect and celebrate the progress we are making today and the dedication Vermonters share in realizing the opportunities ahead.

## *Speaker Highlights*

The 2007 VCRD Conference featured presentations by key Vermont leaders including **Lieutenant Governor Brian Dubie**, Speaker of the Vermont House, **Gaye Symington**, and **Bill Schubart**, CEO of Resolution, Inc.

Lt. Gov. Dubie opened the Conference with comments that laid out some overarching themes. The Creative Economy idea, he said, brings two dynamic aspects together—culture and innovation. Innovation cuts across many economic sectors, he pointed out, including agriculture, engineering, software development, and tourism. In Vermont, we're using our unique culture to retain and attract creative thinkers who spark the sort of innovation that gives Vermont's business enterprises an edge in the global marketplace.

House Speaker Symington offered her perspective, that the Creative Economy is about expressing and reinforcing what is unique and authentic about Vermont's economy in a way that adds value to our lives and work. For the Creative Economy to flourish in Vermont, it needs to express work and communities that are alive and real, not just portray a past or dream world.

Bill Schubart has come to realize the broad reach encompassed by the term Creative Economy. The questions he posed for participants were "What does it mean to Vermont? How will it improve our economy, our communities and the lives of, and opportunities for, young and older Vermonters?"

He believes there are five unique qualities that could make Vermont a leader in the Creative Economy. 1) Leadership and the will to make it happen; 2) People and fresh ideas; 3) A strategic plan that we stick to; 4) A tax code that supports our initiatives; 5) Comes back to leadership when the going gets tough, as it inevitably will.

VCRD Executive Director **Paul Costello** highlighted the Creative Economy projects happening in so many communities throughout the state. He pointed out that many towns are interested in promoting *regional* cooperation to recognize and build on existing assets, to create a whole that's greater than the sum of the parts. Communities also often enhance the regional economy through a strong downtown that can act as a center of gravity for activity. Several communities are building platforms specifically designed to appeal to entrepreneurs, and to develop new jobs directly. And in all of these efforts, an essential part of developing local assets is communicating to your neighbors and potential visitors what you have to offer.

This Conference, he concluded, celebrates the energy of communities that are doing this vital work. It's all about local leadership and the wonderful and fruitful efforts that are reinvigorating our community life.

Participants were also stimulated by a panel discussion held in the House chamber. **Alex Aldrich, John Casella, Ellen McCulloch-Lovell, Jim Saudade, and Gerianne Smart** all shared their perspectives on "The Creative Economy in Vermont Today."

This celebration of creativity was enriched by several musical performances and wonderful exhibits of "The Creative Economy at Work" (see complete list on page 58).

At the conference VCRD recognized **Monica Greene** of Alburgh with its annual Vermont Community Leadership Award (see the Awards section on page 55).

Advancing Vermont's Creative Economy Conference gave voice and visibility to amazing success stories throughout Vermont, as well as a chance to share the challenges faced in communities both large and small. At the Conference a diverse and engaged group of over 250 participants shared their expertise and ideas on advancing the Creative Economy in 8 separate work team sessions. These included:

- Advancing Agricultural Innovation
- Building a Creative Economy Region
- Developing Arts and Community Facilities
- Developing Downtown Activity and Accessibility
- Expanding Partnerships between Cultural Organizations
- Incubating Creative New Businesses
- Marketing the Creative Economy
- Using the Web as a Creative Economy Tool

**The deliberations of these working groups form the core of this report, and their two priority recommendations for local, state, and federal leaders follow on the next page.**

Vermont communities are making progress today, thanks to committed volunteers and grassroots support. However, to kick-start success, a number of common themes emerged. Many groups identified a need for leadership at all levels to increase resources for these efforts. Specifically, they called for tax incentives to support innovative downtown development, affordable housing, and inexpensive arts and business incubation space. Participants also identified an urgent need for policies that encourage collaboration at the community and state level, increased technical assistance for creative-based micro-businesses, and an improved and coordinated source for information on resources and best models of success.

## II. Priority Recommendations of the Conference Working Groups

Each working group was asked to distill their discussions down to two priority recommendations to report back to the end-of-the-day plenary session.

### *Advancing Agricultural Innovation*

1) Develop a mechanism for aggregating available Vermont foods into a single place for sale (either a physical place or a central information point). Higher demand will likely tax existing production capacity, particularly around meat processing, and so plans should be in place to increase capacity for these processes as well.

Vermont food producers enjoy a strong brand through their connection with “Vermont.” Vermont implies a particular quality and sense of place that many people, both inside and outside of our state, value. However, there are many practical obstacles for people other than individual local consumers (e.g. restaurant buyers, institutions, buyers who live outside of Vermont) to access our food products, particularly those from small-scale producers. Creating a central point for accessing local products should open up more markets to the average Vermont farmer. Food will be easier to locate and order and combining the products from different smaller farms can reliably fill large orders.

2) Outline a blueprint for how to balance different land uses in Vermont. A working group of diverse people should map this plan to use as a guideline for how to best apply the different policy tools that can shape our landscape.

There are many ways to use Vermont’s open land. But, the State lacks a clear blueprint for how to balance our different possible land uses and incorporate our many values for the working landscape. For example, in the agricultural sector alone there are different kinds of food production (varying scales, diversified, organic, conventional, etc.), energy production, forestland, and potential uses. Furthermore, many tools exist to shape how land is used, for example easements, affordability programs for farmers, a catalogue of unused agricultural lands, tax incentives, etc.

### *Building a Creative Economy Region*

1) Vermont needs a framework, a structure, a tool kit, a facilitated engagement process, benchmarks and training programs that will build out the economy from the top down to our locally chosen projects. This structure will ensure that locally selected projects can succeed and become sustainable.

Many communities have done visioning and “grown” the creative economy organically through grassroots action. Now they need state support and leadership to help them realize their goals.

2) There should be a mechanism for information sharing and outreach, something to communicate resources and stories. Possible tools include the Web, blogs, and a twice-yearly conference.

Communities need a way to share their problems and successes.

### ***Developing Arts and Community Facilities***

1) Create a one-stop-shop resource center for cultural and community facilities that arts organizations, non-profits, and community development organizations could use. This resource could convene various types of summits or working groups and would offer services that include: organizational development, board development, funding development, leadership development, and peer-to-peer support. It would also include alliance building both within local areas and regionally.

Organizations such as the Small Business Development Center and the Community Foundation provide examples of organizations supporting organizations.

2) Create a clearinghouse of information on financing for cultural and community facilities. Convene a committee of practitioners, arts organizations, community leaders, non-profits, funders, and executives to develop a cafeteria of project financing options including Limited Liability Corporations (LLCs), bonding programs, analyses of priorities, self-directed IRAs, local stock market/exchange options, etc. This group should explore financing options for organizations alongside investment options for Vermonters, promoting an "invest local" priority.

### ***Developing Downtown Activity and Accessibility***

1) Provide more support for Vermont's downtowns through the Downtown Program and other channels. Specifically, creative economy leadership at the local level needs state leadership support in the form of expanded tax credits for downtown projects. Even more importantly, Vermont needs to re-introduce the Downtown Grants Program that was fundamental to the Downtown Program at its inception.

These grants can be used to as starting point for key projects that will expand downtown branding, business incubation, streetscape improvements, trails and walkways, design and beautification, and other improvements that will celebrate the downtown as a center of innovative economic activity.

2) Create an online resource that lists state agencies and other organizations that provide information, grants, best practices, success stories, etc. for creative economy initiatives.

3) Support Buy Local campaigns while at the same time educating Vermonters about our potential place in the world economy.

### ***Expanding Partnerships between Cultural Organizations***

1) Develop and adopt common language around organizational missions that will encourage greater collaboration among groups with similar intentions.

2) Develop inventories of community-based assets and existing collaborative models. These can provide guidance and direction for organizations that are ready to collaborate but may not know how.

### ***Incubating Creative New Businesses***

1) Reduce and stabilize the cost of incubator space through loans, grants, business credits, tax credits, and other incentives. Policies that encourage and allow incubator landlords to keep rent low (perhaps looking at the affordable housing model) would encourage and support a vigorous Creative Economy. Also, increase resources for technical assistance providers.

Emerging and start-up businesses need space they can afford and technical assistance that will develop their skills and nurture them through initial setbacks.

2) Lessen the obstacles on emerging Creative Economy businesses by adopting policies that allow scalable permitting and encourage adaptive reuse and renovations of existing buildings. These policies should keep the cost of using existing buildings competitive with new construction. Recognize and promote the “embodied energy” of existing buildings when comparing costs.

“Embodied energy” is the amount of energy in an existing building’s materials when compared with the energy it would take to manufacture and transport materials needed for new construction.

### ***Marketing the Creative Economy***

1) Use the state’s ability to market as a leverage point for creative enterprises. The state should formally recognize creative enterprises and highlight these enterprises as a way to market the Vermont Brand

2) Encourage local, grassroots work that embraces a consistent message for the community. Communities should focus on a way to present themselves that is memorable, special, unique and powerful.

### ***Using the Web as a Creative Economy Tool***

1) Provide high speed Internet access across the entire state.

This goal will require a strategic plan and state leadership for bonding, coordination, overarching vision, prevention of duplicative efforts, and capturing possible efficiencies. The analogy of highway infrastructure is very descriptive for this process – it is a major undertaking that will result in a path for everyone to use.

2) Provide the education needed to make the best use of Internet technology.

This tool requires people with technical skills and the knowledge of possible applications for the technology. Education will also be needed at a community level so that towns and villages can improve their functions through technology resources.

### III. Panel Discussion

#### *The Creative Economy in Vermont Today*

Moderator: Paul Costello



**Alex Aldrich, Executive Director, VT Arts Council:** The creative economy is more like a movement than a single concept. A comparison is the environmental movement – which brings together many different fields and chooses certain indicators, like the health of coral reefs, to show how well it’s doing. For the creative economy, the diversity and health of the arts are key indicators of the movement’s strength.

Not everyone realizes it, but we make aesthetic decisions every day. Those decisions shape how we conduct our lives and our business. For example, the creative economy conference is being held today in the State House, with opening remarks in the grand House Chamber. While technically our state representatives could have chosen to conduct their business anywhere, the design of this Chamber imparts a certain gravitas to the responsibility of carrying on the work of the state. It is a conscious, aesthetic decision that improves how we function.

**Jim Saudade, Deputy Commissioner, Department of Housing and Community Affairs:** Businesses will look at land, labor and capital when deciding where to locate. But, if all these things are similar, they will look at where employees *want* to live. That might have a little to do with the specific business, but it will also incorporate considerations like where employees can go to the theater (as one company owner told him).

The arts add richness in communities. They provide full-time income for some workers and supplemental income to many more. They can draw investment, such as with the Windham Hotel project in Bellows Falls.

Vermont needs to look at the creative economy on the micro, statewide and global levels. Creative people want to be where other creative people are.

**Gerianne Smart, President, Smart Communications:** Gerianne worked as president of the Vergennes Opera House when it was renovated and reopened in 1997 (its 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary). The Opera House restoration was not the first project to contribute to revitalizing downtown Vergennes, but it did get a lot of attention, in part because the Opera House exists above the city offices. Residents remembered the space as it was, and its connection to their lives.

The work on the Opera House moved forward from 1993–1997, even though the city itself had empty, burned out, and condemned buildings at the time. The small dedicated working group placed an emphasis on events with high public relations value, planned

many celebrations, and showed the good things happening around town when the Opera House was open. Slowly, they picked up financial and volunteer support as residents began to see real progress.

Today, in 2007, the Opera House is truly a community space, Vergennes' storefronts are full, buildings are being renovated and made ADA accessible (including at least one purchased by local residents), there are decorative touches on the streetscape, and a local foods market is open. The Opera House project acted as a catalyst to focus on community involvement.

Gerianne's advice is to be true to the past, respect assets that tie to the past, celebrate success often, and never stop.

**Joe Fusco, Vice-president of Communications, Casella Waste Systems:** At Casella, "innovation is not a luxury." The company needs to look towards the future and design what the world will want 30 years from now. They need to attract, retain, and motivate creative workers. Joe divides creativity at Casella into three parts:

- 1.) Industrial creativity (solving problems)
- 2.) Aesthetic creativity (because public infrastructure is in the public eye)
- 3.) Intellectual creativity

Being a company that manages a key part of public infrastructure makes it very important for Casella to bring creativity to bear. Examples like producing electricity from methane illustrate how waste management is an innovative area.

Creativity integrates all that Vermonters do. And Casella brings those "Vermont Values" to other communities throughout the eastern half of the U.S.—where Vermont is a trusted source of information. Innovation should be part of the Vermont brand.

Joe's particular department is devoted to intellectual property and intellectual capital. He deals with the important questions of how to not only act on new ideas, but also reward everyone in the company for innovation and creativity.

**Ellen McCulloch Lovell, President, Marlboro College:** Key things for the future are:

- Creativity and innovation. Creativity brings disparate elements together in meaningful ways that haven't been previously used. This makes it naturally cross-disciplinary (see below).
- Investment in a variety of disciplines.
- Recognition that aesthetics matter.
- Development of creative clusters. Creative people feed off of each other. Vermont can be its own creative cluster.

Some specific next steps:

- Creative people at the policy table from community to state levels.
- Education, particularly education in the arts, as part of every child's day.
- Every community studying and understanding their own unique assets.
- Colleges as partners—both for education and for their alumni resources.
- Leadership—recognition of creative economy leaders and money invested in their projects.
- Tolerance and support of freedom

## IV. Conference Speakers

### *Introduction from Bruce Hyde*

**Bruce Hyde**, Commissioner of the Vermont Department of Tourism and Marketing, introduced Vermont's Lt. Governor. He began, however, by encouraging everyone to take advantage of the state's [Vermontvacation.com](http://Vermontvacation.com) web site for free listings and talking about the Department's support for Vermont Cultural Heritage Days from late May to July Fourth.

He also related his recent experience representing Vermont at the annual Global Travel and Tourism Summit in Lisbon, Portugal. The London-based World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC) chose Vermont's downtowns, and the Vermont Downtown Program, as a finalist in the 2007 Tourism for Tomorrow Awards Destination Award category. Ultimately Vermont shared runner-up honors with the Greenbox



Lt. Gov. Dubie and Commissioner Hyde exchange greetings

ecotourism program in Ireland, just behind the Great Barrier Reef in Australia.

“This honor gave us worldwide recognition. It’s all about sustainability, stewardship, encouraging the traditional settlement patterns, and the historic preservation of our buildings. These were the key things that set us apart from all the other applications.”

### *Welcoming Remarks from Vermont Lieutenant Governor Brian Dubie*

*“In Vermont, we’re using our unique culture to retain and attract creative thinkers who spark the sort of innovation that gives Vermont’s business enterprises an edge in the global marketplace.”*

**Lt. Gov. Dubie**

On behalf of our Governor Jim Douglas and myself I’m pleased to be here today to welcome you to this conference on Vermont’s Creative Economy. I’d like to express my thanks to the board of the Vermont Council for Rural Development and to Paul Costello and Helen Jordan for their work and leadership in organizing today’s event.

The purpose of this conference is to bring the Creative Economy into focus. The overview of the day is to share some Creative Economy success stories, to interact with some smart people in totally unrelated fields to your own as you discuss our Creative Economy -- and at the end of the day we are going to ask you all to recommend courses of actions to expand the Creative Economy.

When I was a boy I spent a lot of time with my grandfather. He told me how his father came from Ireland to Vermont. Being good Catholics, they were blessed with a big family. To help to support his family, he started making sausage using a family

recipe from Ireland. They also produced smoked hams and bacon using Vermont Maple Syrup.

My grandfather would tell me how, when he was a teenager, he would start out with his horse, Cricket, and a wagon full of maple cured hams and bacon and other products. Gramp said he and Cricket would head down the road to do some “trading”. Along the road he would stop at farms to trade his smoked hams or bacon for fresh meats. He would stop at small shops and markets and trade his smoked meats for other family needs.

He would tell farmers about how his family perfected the maple curing process. He would tell the shopkeepers about the hardworking farmers who he traded with who raised the hogs. During the Depression, my grandfather’s father died, and his mother ran the business for many years. They were tough years, but good times. On July 28, our family will celebrate 100 years of McKenzie Meats.

I tell this story to illustrate the “Creative Economy”.

First, John McKenzie created innovative products -- a family recipe from Ireland for sausage, maple cured ham and bacon. Many of you have also created an innovative product, a service, a process, an experience.

Innovation is key to our future. On a per capita basis, Vermont is second in the nation for patent approval.

Second, my grandfather’s success was dependent on how well he could tell the story.

He had good products, but to be successful he had to trade, interact, listen and to tell the story. He did most of his storytelling face to face. Today, we have many means to tell our stories, but the importance of telling the right story in the right way is even more important today.

Dean Dom Grasso is determined to shake up the curriculum for UVM’s future engineers, to equip them to be better able to tell their stories. The “Arts” are really all about telling a story, visually, with pictures, music, video, dance, with the written or spoken word.

My last point from my story is to illustrate a statistic. My grandmother ran a small business in the heart of the Depression. They growth of our economy in the United States and in Vermont is being driven by small businesses, and specifically women-owned small businesses.

I once asked my grandfather what made Vermont a special place. He turned to me and said. “It’s the dirt. Our dirt is good for farming. Vermont was settled by people who knew the importance of good dirt.” He said farmers believe in communities and believe in working together. They depend on the land and therefore respect and honor the land. Farmers also have to be innovative. A farmer by the name of Onan Whitcom once told me, “If I did things the ways my father did them, we would be out of business in 60 days.” For farmers, innovation is a survival skill.

The creative economy concept builds on Vermont’s strengths.

When our agricultural heritage and our culture of caring communities intertwine with Vermonters’ ingenuity, exciting things can happen. Through interweaving, our strengths reinforce one another.

Need proof?

Millions of tourists come to our state to see our working landscapes. They also come to see our downtowns, complete with historic architecture and authenticity. Our Vermont

downtowns were recently put alongside the Great Barrier Coral Reef and the Country of Ireland as finalists for one of the world's most prestigious travel & tourism awards this spring. Oh -- by the way -- did I mention that visitors spend over 1.5 billion dollars each year to see and experience our landscapes and villagescapes?

Another outstanding example of Vermont's caring and creative community is last year's Palettes Project. In the Palettes Project, 37,000 Vermonters built a virtual community around creating unique art, using an artist's palette.

The town of Springfield came together in the successful effort to bring the premier of the Simpson's movie to their town.

### Vermont Ingenuity:

Environmental entrepreneurship is creativity at its best. The Foster Farm in Middlebury is the oldest operating biodigester in America. The Audets', the Rowells' and St. Pierres' have all pioneered their own Cow Power projects, turning a waste product into an asset. NRG Systems and Northern Power are deploying innovative energy solutions around the world. And Professor Wally Varhue at UVM is conducting research on creating hydrogen fuel using sunlight. Clean Earth Technology took their technology for detecting water in an airplane's fuel tank and converted it into technology for detecting fuel spills in groundwater. That technology is helping clean up water supplies in China and around the world. These are all Green Valley Initiatives, applying creative engineering solutions to challenges in our physical environment.

Champlain College's Bring Your Own Business program draws in high school students who are *already* entrepreneurs, for further training

Ongoing innovation in established businesses – you'll hear how Casella Waste Systems exemplifies this principle in one of the panel presentations.

Seldon Technologies of Windsor uses carbon nanotubes to cleanse fluids of microorganisms, without using heat, UV radiation or chemicals.

MicroStrain Inc. of Williston first invented a sensor to measure knee ligament strain, to help perfect ski boot bindings. Now they make tiny sensors that measure strain in everything from aircraft and automotive components to building structures.

IBM Essex Junction's story of innovation is legend. The people who work there have made it the most inventive plant in the most inventive company in America.

IDX – now GE Healthcare -- and members of the Vermont Software Developers Alliance create software used the world over.

And it takes ingenuity to preserve Vermont's unique culture.

One thing that is so exciting about the Creative Economy is the deliberate incubation that communities are doing -- building facilities and working hard to attract creative entrepreneurs, who will innovate, invent and develop the products that will keep Vermont moving forward economically.

Vermont's business incubators provide everything from space for research and development, to help with intellectual property issues. The new Vermont Center for Emerging Technologies at UVM, the Bennington Microelectronics Manufacturing Center, the Vermont Food Ventures program, the Vermont Technology Incubator in Randolph and the proposed Sustainable Technologies Incubator in Springfield are all geared to helping inventors move from concept, to production, to market.

Vermont is also home to organizations and institutions that provide inventors with networking, mentoring and learning opportunities, as well as grants, financial assistance, technical expertise and commercialization resources.

The Vermont Technology Council at UVM is a premier example. Champlain College is developing an entrepreneurial training curriculum, and UVM's business school is also active in this arena.

The Creative Economy idea brings two dynamic aspects together—culture and innovation.

In Vermont, we're using our unique culture to retain and attract creative thinkers who spark the sort of innovation that gives Vermont's business enterprises an edge in the global marketplace.

The Creative Economy is a part of a creative process unfolding around the globe. Other states, regions, and countries are engaged in the same dialogs we're having. We are a small state – a small community -- and that may help.

In our state, our tight networks of relationships are vitally important. The Northeast Kingdom can compare economic development strategies with Pownal, an artist in Bellows Falls can work with a businessperson in Burlington, and so on. We form new connections, learn from each other, and launch strong, creative partnerships. We can learn from Rutland, St. Albans and Hardwick about ways to move our own local projects forward. It is great to see leaders from all these communities gathered together here today.

I asked Steve Arms from MicroStrain a question recently. Steve and I were students at the UVM together, in the College of Engineering and Mathematical Sciences. I asked Steve what three things Vermont needs most, in order to help innovative businesses like his.

His answer: education, education, and education. Our schools must impart skills and knowledge, but also inspire creativity. We also need to protect the intellectual property of our innovators, and we must reward our creators. UVM President Dan Fogel wants to see to it that UVM's researchers and inventors are rewarded for their achievements.

I had an interesting conversation once, on a trade mission to Asia. Lyndon Institute was participating in the mission, and their goal was to recruit students from Taiwan to attend school at LI.

I asked the Taiwanese parents I met why it was that they wanted to send their children all the way to Vermont to go to school. They told me first that they knew that Vermont was a safe place for their children. But they also told me that in Taiwan, the schools are very good, but children never learn to be creative. At Lyndon Institute, they told me, their children would learn to create and innovate and think in new and exciting ways.

And that's what you will be doing here today.

I'm glad to see such enthusiasm for Vermont's Creative Economy, and I look forward to hearing your conclusions and recommendations.

Thank you for being here.

## *Speaker of the House Gaye Symington*

*“For me the creative economy is about expressing and reinforcing what is unique and authentic about Vermont’s economy in a way that adds value to our lives and work.”*

**Gaye Symington**



A year ago I was pleased to add my voice of congratulations to the communities selected to be part of the inaugural group in the Vermont Council on Rural Development’s Creative Communities Program. And I am pleased again to join you this year as you share experiences among different communities engaged in economic development through creative economy ideas. I thought I would share with you my thinking about the ways in which the creative economy can add value to our agricultural economy as a way of emphasizing what the creative economy can do for Vermont as a whole.

I could use another example, say energy production, but agriculture seems a bit less raw and politically charged given last week’s actions that pass over opportunities in that world.

As I said last year, I frame my thinking about the creative economy by starting with Thomas Friedman’s assertion that the world economy is flat. That fewer and fewer jobs have geographic boundaries. That even Vermonters in service industries find themselves competing with employers across oceans. And certainly with our increasingly factory-like food system, Vermont’s agriculture must compete with farmers in California and the Midwest, South America, and Australia.

And yet, as a wise colleague of mine said, “The world may be flat, but Vermont is not flat.” And if we are to ensure a strong economy for the kids our children will raise, I believe we need to build on the unique horizons the state offers, and the creative economy is a critical element of that process.

The creative economy isn’t about making Vermont prettier, or even more interesting to look at. To me, it’s about reinforcing what is unique about life and work in Vermont:

Our strong sense of community fostered by our sense of physical place expressed through vibrant communities and working landscapes, as well as our social sense of belonging to a greater whole than just our individual selves or families;

Our equally strong sense of individuality, expressed in our independence and creativity.

And for the creative economy to work in Vermont, it needs to express work and communities that are alive and real, not just portray a past or dream world. It needs to be authentic.

When we invest in downtown preservation in Bellows Falls it works because the history expressed in the pressed tin ceilings now houses new businesses, bringing commerce across the threshold of each storefront, not just tourists to gaze at architectural details of the past.

Fifteen years ago folks in my home town created a community center in what had been a former church turned community hall turned high school gym turned elementary school gym and library. Those who lived in Jericho for generations value the building because of the memories of their high school years there. But, preserving the building for its history alone would not sufficiently engage the current community. It's because it has a new life as a community center, drawing little and grown-up feet across the threshold for birthday parties, exercise classes, concerts and land trust meetings that the community invests in this building.

The cultural heritage enriches these buildings and the experience of those who use them, but it would not stand alone without an alive building through which to express that heritage.

This summer I traveled with my daughter to Norway. After visiting a friend in Trondheim, fairly far north on the west coast, we took what used to be "the mail boat" south for two days along the coast to Bergen. The boat made brief stops along the way at coastal towns set in the inlets, or fjords. One of the things I looked for when we would stop was the manhole covers. Each town's manhole cover had a unique design that portrayed something specific to that town's heritage.

One of the first stops was Kristiansund, a town known for its history as the capital of the cod fishing industry. Guidebooks and the boat staff encouraged us to see the statue by the dock of a fishwife taking cod to dry. The fishwife was also the main subject of Kristiansund's manhole covers. And their cod fish museum reinforces this heritage. But, as cod fishing suffers from over-exuberant fishing, the industry represented by the statue, manhole covers and museum is suffering. The statue poses for the tourist's photograph, but it is not representative of a living economy.

Similarly, back in Vermont, Woody Jackson lawn placards of Holsteins do not make for a creative farm economy.

A creative economic approach to agriculture should build on what's unique about Vermont's agricultural opportunities – our proximity to major markets, our excellent grass and abundance of water, our identity or brand as a state where people trust each other and where we value our natural resources.

Those unique qualities and our brand can enable us to diversify our agricultural base away from commodity production, away from relying on imported federally subsidized grain loaded with nutrients that will make their way from one end of the cow to the other and then into our waters and streams; away from a food system of anonymous entities – farmer, distributor, markets – where seemingly unavoidable contamination breeds irrational national agricultural policies that only further emphasize factory conditions for food production.

We have the opportunity to move to a food system where we can emphasize the individual people and places behind our produce, whether it's Vermont Milk or Intervale lettuce greens or Champlain Orchards or Greensboro cheese or Putney pastured lamb or Richford grass fed beef. I know the pastures where the meat I consume was raised – they are part of my community landscape. I know the farmers who are growing the spinach and carrots my family consumes for more than half the year.

The folks organizing Eat Local week at the end of July have created a community focus on local agriculture through a creative and maybe a little competitive event. It's only partly about whether you can make it through the week without your olive oil,

coffee or Big Mac. It's about whether by breaking out of old habits for a week you can rethink your connection to the farmland all around you in Vermont and establish food consumption patterns that support the working landscape you associate with home. It may mean you acquire new skills like how to cut up a whole chicken if your family wants barbecued chicken or you find a way to cook turnips in a way that your family will tolerate. If you'd like to join me in the Eat Local challenge, speak to Helen Jordan or go to [EatLocalVt.org](http://EatLocalVt.org).

Eat Local Week is also a way of reminding ourselves that Vermont agriculture can't flourish only by relying on producing gourmet cheese for Manhattan consumers or even just Church Street restaurants. Vermont meat and produce needs to show up in our schools, hospitals, lunch boxes and workplace cafeterias. A creative approach to industrial menus can enable that shift. New marketing structures may be required in order to bundle small farm produce into large quantities for industrial scale customers. Creative business plans will nudge farmers to rethink their unique strengths and opportunities so they can become more viable for the long term. Branding and packaging can assure consumers of the place of origin, and with that, the reliability of the quality of the food product inside.

Our brand as a state is also critical in linking Boston consumers – and their lunch boxes and cafeterias - with Vermont farms. When the Lois McClure travels down the Hudson serving Vermont cheese at its public events, when Jay Ski Resort highlights Vermont made products at its events, we are expressing our brand, the unique quality and reliability of Vermont agricultural products in a way that allows those Boston consumers to feel, as I do, that when they consume Vermont products they are connecting with fields they consider their back yards and farmers they know and trust.

Again, I use this example to say that for me the creative economy isn't about decorating the places where we live and work. It's about expressing and reinforcing what is unique and authentic about Vermont's economy in a way that adds value to our lives and work, and strengthens our ability to maintain our unique horizon in an otherwise flat world.

Creativity in our food production, marketing, and consumption can help us realize a viable and uniquely Vermont agricultural economy whose authenticity adds value in an otherwise anonymous food system. That authentic creativity can help us avoid the day when a fall foliage tour bus stops at an Addison County green and encourages those who disembark to make sure to admire the bronze statue of the farmer leading his Holstein to pasture.

Again, I am grateful for your work in your communities and here today where you are learning from each other's experiences and successes in strengthening Vermont's creative economy. I wish you the best for the rest of your productive day.

## *Bill Schubart*

Bill Schubart is Chairman, Founder and Chief Executive Officer of Resolution, Inc., a fully integrated E-commerce services partner to clients like Sesame Street, CBS, Star Trek, Oprah, NPR, The History Channel and many others. He has lived in Vermont since 1947 and has twice served as Chair of The Vermont Arts Council. He has also chaired The Vermont Bicentennial Commission, The Vermont Board of Libraries, Circus Smirkus, Vermont Public Radio, The Vermont Business Roundtable and, most recently, Fletcher Allen Health Care. He currently chairs a Buy Local Task force in Hinesburg, his hometown. He thinks, reads and writes about Vermont at his website [Schubart.com](http://Schubart.com).



*“It is a good thing to revere the past but it cannot support us. We must look squarely at the future and work together to find our place in it. The good news is we are here together today talking about that future.”*

**Bill Schubart**

First, I want to thank the Vermont Council on Rural Development, both for convening us today, but also for the great community-level work they are doing around the State to engage towns in a dialogue about their future. As a result of that grass roots organizing work, I am chair of a modest, but vigorous committee focused on celebrating the local goods and services of Hinesburg. We are expanding our farmers market as well as a town harvest celebration, creating a database of our creative and economic output, initiating a community garden space and working with another local committee to make Hinesburg a paragon of lowered energy use in our homes and community buildings. Your work here today and in our communities is vital to Vermonters. So thank you Paul, and all your staff.

Now I can stir the pot.....

I dislike buzz words, labels and panaceas. When I first heard the term Creative Economy, I avoided using it until I could get some sense of what it was supposed to mean. Did it mean the arts or did it encompass creativity in the inclusive sense: science, medicine, design, architecture, pedagogy, invention, not just the creation of visual and performing arts?

I now understand that it means whatever its proponents want it to mean. To Alex Aldrich it may mean visual and performing arts. To Peter Gilbert it may mean the humanities, to a landscape designer it may mean the artful design of a private or public outdoor space, to the Town of Hardwick it may mean the economic benefits of building a performing arts venue in their town, or to a software developer it may mean a subtle

improvement to the checkout experience online. The question today is what does it mean to Vermont? How will it improve our economy, our communities and the lives of, and opportunities for, young and older Vermonters?

Let's talk for a minute about Vermont. I would be less than candid if I did not say that I worry daily about the evident lack of long-range strategic dialogue and planning in this State. This is a problem that crosses party lines, a Vermont problem, not just of one party or one administration. Vermont is not well served by a policy of stasis. The world is moving rapidly. Countries whose names we did not know a generation ago are moving strategically and intelligently to accommodate new ideas and new markets. I asked someone the other day what Vermont is becoming and they said, "...a good place for rich people to die -- six months out of the year." I really felt like crying.

We are still squabbling over an energy plan. Like many states we are wrestling with how to fund public education. We have no viable strategic economic development plan. We have decided late in the game that wireless and broadband are an economic necessity after wasting a decade debating the placement of cell towers. Our tax strategy is not integrated into a strategic plan because we don't have one. We are so politically risk averse that the moderated and vigorous civil debate that should resonate from leadership has become political background noise to Vermonters. Meanwhile our young are seeking greener economic pastures.

It is a good thing to revere the past but it cannot support us. We must look squarely at the future and work together to find our place in it. The good news is we are here together today talking about that future.

The way forward requires a plan, a plan driven by principles on which we can agree. Dialogue on shared principles is the first responsibility of leadership. Today dialogue seems to be more about personal ideologies and commercial interests than about a shared sense of community..."I've got mine vs. I deserve mine."

As Vermonters, we already agree on many principles: the value of our environment, the need to provide an economic future for our young people through educational excellence, access to affordable healthcare and vigorous economic sectors. We are innovative, industrious and, for the most part, willing to compromise in order to live in a benign relationship with each other and with nature. This is the essence of community.

I often hear that we in Vermont have a curious inclination to ensure that everyone must agree on an initiative before it can happen. This, of course, never happens since everyone never agrees on anything. Therefore nothing happens. Good leadership generates dialogue, derives consensus on principles and then reaches out broadly to elicit innovative ideas that support these principles and solve problems. The ideas are then measured against practical reality. There will always be opposition. We'll be in trouble if there isn't. Opposition keeps us honest and on our toes. The key to managing opposition is transparency, not blind loyalty. The good ideas that survive debate are forged into a strategic plan which must then endure our uniquely non-strategic two-year political term that we seem unable to change.

Now, let's retire a few shibboleths...

"Vermont is unique." Every place is unique. Vermont is special to us. It is not unique. Particulates from coal plants in Beijing and Ohio fall on us as acid rain. They also fall on upstate New York, New Hampshire and Maine. Our problems are as much a

function of what comes to us on prevailing winds or from Washington policy makers as anything we create ourselves.

“Vermont has a special beauty.” So do Ireland, Slovenia and Tibet. Our borders, our government and administrative structures were established at a time when few ever ventured out of their own communities. Today, Beijing is two flights away from Burlington. Fast, affordable travel, the Internet, media networks, air freight, global economic forces, and the roll-up of small businesses into ever larger more ubiquitous entities with more compressed ownership have changed all that. There is as much commonality of interest between VT, ME, NH, upstate NY and Quebec as there is between Burlington and Newport. Our biggest problems are regional, national and global. Our county and state borders are to some degree administrative artifacts. Not so our communities. The choices we make as individuals and members of small communities have the power to change everything. This is where we are unique.

“Taxes are too High.” This easy-to-join chorus unfortunately drowns out a critical voice. We are highly taxed in Vermont, but it is short-sighted to look at taxes in a vacuum. Taxes don’t just impose a cost. Invested strategically they satisfy a need and provide social and economic value. When we buy a product or service, we measure cost against value and need, not just cost. This will be an important distinction to remember as we begin to support our own communities by buying local and paying a bit more for more value.

The problem with taxes in Vermont is that we have become disconnected from the value they are imposed to produce. Vermonters are less and less convinced that they are being spent efficiently and strategically. They have little or no discernible design behind them. The tax code is willy-nilly, non-strategic. A strategic tax code can dissuade bad behavior and encourage good social and economic behavior. Give people the opportunity to control the amount of taxes they pay by behaving in a way that supports community and you have a strategic tax code. We must not lose our belief that taxes spent wisely are a good social and economic investment. They sustain and support community. It is foolhardy to simply cut taxes. It would make more sense to design a tax code that is aligned with the State’s strategic plan, if it had one.

As you all know, Ireland made a decision a decade ago before the Creative Economy was even articulated that income earned by artists, writers, composers and sculptors from the sale of their works would be exempt from taxation. I quote: “Section 195 of the [Taxes Consolidation Act, 1997](#) allows the Revenue Commissioners to make a determination that certain artistic works are original and creative works generally recognized as having cultural or artistic merit. Accordingly, earnings derived from these works are exempt from income tax from the year in which the claim is made. The Revenue Commissioners can make determinations in respect of artistic works in the following categories:

- Books or other forms of writing
- Plays
- Musical compositions
- Paintings or other similar pictures
- Sculptures.

This courageous and strategic decision to champion the arts and attract artists to Ireland both boosted their economy and their stature in the world of arts and letters.

“Globalization drives everything:” The abrasion between globalization and community will continue to accelerate and is playing out today in our communities both in job generation and job loss and in the choices we make as consumers about the origin of the staples and commodities we buy, as well as where we buy them. We must learn to balance the cost, value and the community benefit of intra-community commerce. The self-styled futurists who see globalization as the driver of all change are simply wrong or, worse, have a vested interest in our believing that the statement is true.

Now let’s look at a few ideas that could sustain us:

Vermont’s population is growing older. Many people do indeed retire here. Vermont has substantial higher education resources in its 17 private colleges and its State University system. What if the next three dorms that UVM, Middlebury or Marlboro built were retirement apartments for academics and stimulating older people retiring from their traditional jobs, but not from active learning? What if a formal residential community of retirees grew up inside our best educational institutions and became part of an ageless learning and teaching population? The intellectual communities would be enriched as would the economies of the institutions and the communities in which they reside.

According to a census done some years ago by the New England Foundation for the Arts, on a per capita basis, Vermont has the highest concentration of artists of any state in the Nation. We have many natural performing arts venues in our landscape, weather permitting, and even more man-made venues like ski areas, converted barns and movie theaters, churches, gymnasias, but no central large-scale venue for large concerts or better yet an ongoing international arts series. Write this down [www.Dalhalla.SE](http://www.Dalhalla.SE) Go there on the Web and take a look and ask yourself why we could not do the same thing here in Vermont. It is a massive abandoned limestone quarry in the Dalarna region of Sweden in the middle of nowhere that has become the major arts venue for Swedes with orchestras, opera companies, and pop groups from all over Europe performing there. When we were there the Estonian National Opera Company was performing Saint-Saens’ *Samson and Delilah*. The place was packed. Country singer Guy Clark had been there the week before and Elvis Costello was on the schedule for the following week. The area made our Northeast Kingdom look like a suburb of Boston. What a magnificent metaphor for Vermont’s transition from the great era of commodity stone quarrying into the creative economy! It could become a venue that might do for Vermont what Glimmerglass has done for Cooperstown, Tanglewood for the Berkshires or Caramoor for Katonah, NY.

Vermont already has three assets which together comprise a confluence of opportunity. The first is Vermont’s emerging slow food culture. The second is our natural landscape and well developed tourism infrastructure and the third is our world-class academic medical centers Fletcher Allen and Dartmouth Hitchcock. Imagine a 30 day institute marketed internationally where people recently diagnosed with type II diabetes, cancer, depression, obesity or any other endemic disease might come to both stay in a beautiful setting, learn about their disease from world authorities, learn to manage their disease through natural exercise and improved diet and come to understand the lifestyle changes that might enhance their options for recovery. Such an institute would use and add a new market to the three existing assets we already have in place. Imagine spending a day walking, canoeing or learning about wildflowers and native species, returning to a beautiful inn for meals made entirely of fresh Vermont food and spending the evening in

conversation with clinical researchers who bring you up to date on the very latest research and clinical trials relevant to your recovery... tourism, slow food and wellness.

Vermont is going to need to support its migration into artisan agriculture and slow food with infrastructure as we have done to a degree with the passage of H 522. This support should come from the Agriculture Agency working in tandem with UVM and the State colleges. UVM's VT Institute for Artisan Cheese ([UVM.edu/~VIAC/](http://UVM.edu/~VIAC/)) is a prime example of getting it right, but there will be more to do. In order to support this growth, Vermont will need mobile slaughter units, a central *affinage* or cheese ageing facility, hi-tech root cellars to extend the growing season, coop refrigeration and distribution warehousing. It also has the exciting opportunity to develop an e-commerce market for selling shippable items with "shelf life" around the world. Imagine an online Vermont-branded Artisan Food site supported by infrastructure to help farmers and growers extend their season and their market reach.

Here is another URL: [terramadre2006.org](http://terramadre2006.org) . With will, a strategy and funding, Vermont could become the central showplace for slow food in the Northeast, as Turin, Italy has become for the European and many international food communities. Vermont could have its own *Terra Madre* celebration bringing together the very best of New England or the Northeast region's finest artisan foods. It would support infrastructure already in place such as chef-owned restaurants, artisan farms, our network of Country inns and B&B's and, most importantly, would take advantage of Vermont's innate brand value which defines "quality food." Just as the Big E, the Eastern States Exhibition, has for years been the showplace for commodity agriculture, Vermont could claim the title for slow food or artisan food production and celebration.

Now go to [www.red.com](http://www.red.com) the film and broadcast production industry is going through an exciting technological transformation which, at least for the Indie film segment removes the extraordinarily high cost of film production as we know it. Ask Nora Jacobson, Alan Dater, John O'Brien or Jay Craven how much time they spend raising money and how much time they spend making movies. Red and Apple have combined forces to create a production package that enables an indie film maker to produce a feature-length film with a \$25,000 production package including lenses with no film processing or third party editing costs. The only investments are creative: script, soundtrack, location and actors. The result rivals 35MM production in quality, far surpassing hi-def video. Vermont could position itself as a Red production center and develop a plan to entice indie film makers, documentarians and TV producers to work here.

These are a few ideas, some more and some less feasible. We are limited only by our capacity to lead and by our imagination.

What are the five unique qualities that could make Vermont a leader in the Creative Economy?

First, is leadership and the will to make it happen; second, people and ideas, fresh ideas, not the tired copycat ideas that we so often recycle from other states and forge into third rate initiatives, next, is a strategic plan that we stick to, fourth is a tax code that supports our initiatives and fifth come back to leadership when the going gets tough, as it inevitably will.

Finally, we must understand and quantify the vital economic clusters emerging in Vermont, energy efficiency, bio-fuels, health care, higher education, artisan food, medical research, software development, high-tech, Web and graphic design, cultural and niche tourism, wellness, the arts (including cartoons) and, yes, retirement living.

I have carried on long enough. I want only to add that, as a State, we are really only limited by our imagination, our leadership and our courage.

Whether you are part of making sustainable agriculture flourish in your own community or volunteer at a concert on the green or take a leadership role in transforming Vermont, every action, no matter how small is important. Most sustainable progress is incremental. If we do many small things and one or two big things, we can transform the economy and vitality of Vermont.

I look forward to seeing the creative ideas that hit our common table this afternoon.  
Thank you.

## V. Working Group Reports

Summit participants registered for in-depth discussion in the following eight working groups.

Each session opened with brief comments from two different leaders who were invited to summarize their practical experience within each focus area. The groups spent the morning sharing their community's efforts as it related to the topic at hand—including successes, hopes, and difficulties. In the afternoon, the same groups reconvened to talk about key challenges, consider programs or policies that could support their efforts and spur collaboration, and suggest recommendations for advancing the creative economy specific to their topic area. In the end, Work Groups selected two of these recommendations to report to the plenary session of the conference.

### *1. Advancing Agricultural Innovation*

**Facilitator:** Helen Jordan, VCRD Creative Communities Program

**Opening Speakers:** Jenn Colby, Randolph Area Family Farms and David Lane, Deputy Secretary, VT Agency of Agriculture

**Scribe:** Bonnie Smoren

#### **Success Story One**

David Lane

David has experience in farming through his work with an organic grain company in Bethel and as former Executive Director of the Intervale. He currently has a llama farm and a sugaring operation in addition to his role as Deputy Secretary of Agriculture. He views agriculture as a part of the creative economy, noting that it touches on many different fields including engineering, science and manufacturing. David asserted that farming is dependent on the creative economy and that the agricultural sector needs to change how it works. He emphasized the quality of life issues inherent in the sector, which contribute to consumers' financial and environmental expectations. David advised the group not to forget the word "economy" in the days' deliberations as he believes "that's what makes things happen."

#### **Success Story Two**

Jenn Colby

Jenn discussed the work of the Randolph Area Family Farms, a group formed in 2002 when individuals representing many organizations (including NOFA, Fresh Network and other non-profits), convened to celebrate agriculture. One of their goals was to connect with people across generations, and to celebrate the diversity of farming endeavors. The organization holds a Farm Festival that provides a controlled opportunity for people to visit working farms, in the tradition of studio tours, and to participate in agricultural-related activities. The festival has grown to include pasture walks, twilight visits, Valley Quest treasure hunts, and place-based education. She noted that it is a sense of fun and creativity that engages people in the festival.

## A. What's Working in Vermont? Idea sharing

- The Farmers Market in Bellow Falls is working to coordinate with local businesses so that many people can benefit from the event. The market is also working to span the economic sector, and accepts food stamps.
- A “mobile market” is an untapped opportunity. Someone who parks a van or truck in a strategic location as employees are leaving work could generate a steady business. Partnerships could be developed with local businesses.
- There is a raised awareness and desire for discussion that has derived from events like the Localvore challenges. More people want to know the origin of their food and the conditions it was raised in.
- Be careful what you build. Traffic and parking issues can have a great impact.
  - The Applefest has grown to 12,000 people and resulted in a nine-mile traffic backup. The organizers have had to make adjustments to accommodate the size.
  - The logistical issues around an event can destroy its success. The speaker noted parking and access difficulties during a recent event in Barre.
- We need to ask how the momentum of a weekend or special event can be sustained. What is the ongoing benefit of a festival day? What does it really do for farmers?
- Is the revenue generated from farm visits meaningful, considering the time and expense required to open a farm? Has an analysis of models been done?
  - Product and animal sales increase once a personal connection with the grower has been established. Even if there are not many visitor purchases, it is an opportunity to make connections and expand a customer database.
  - Events need to be sized appropriately in order to maintain their vitality and be conducive to conversation between farmer and visitor.
- Bellow Falls Farm/Music Trains: This concept is an opportunity to link the arts, travel, and agriculture. For many people, Vermont represents a nostalgic time, and presents a comforting perception to stressed urban people. The speaker is working on a plan (based on a successful Canadian model) to run short train tours featuring Vermont foods and performances on board, as well as a catered Vermont dinner, an evening concert and room at an inn, with plenty of time for local sightseeing.
- The CVPS CowPower program is customer driven and an example of the willingness of some consumers to pay more for that quality. CVPS has a fund to help with capital costs for farmers interested in participating in the program
- CVPS is also in the early stages of developing a Plug and Go hybrid car that draws energy from the grid to a battery. This enables a customer to choose the source of their transportation power and to draw electric power from the grid during lower rate times, such as overnight, to charge their vehicle.
- Rutland is working on how to coordinate economic development, agriculture and the energy sector. The town wants to avoid corn-based ethanol, and is interested in partnering with someone for a wood-fired facility where the power generated could be used multiple times – for heat and for greenhouses. They also are considering incubator space adjacent to the plant, a year-round farmers market and a flash-freeze processing operation.

- The Vermont Milk Company has developed creemee machines that use real ice cream, rather than a powdered mix. It is self-service and easy to maintain with minimal points of contact for cleaning. It is a good example of innovation through technology, and is available for purchase for businesses.
- The Farm Viability Project identifies the most profitable part of an existing operation, as well as other creative parts. This provides the farmer with information to explore new projects, and can motivate people to change their method of operation. They help companies develop a business plan and have some seed money available.

## **B. Challenges and Recommendations**

### Challenges

- Infrastructure is a challenge.
- There has been some success in value added food, but more could be done to help traditional farms find a niche in artisan or organic foods.
- More incubators and processing facilities are needed, and there is not enough technical assistance.
- There is insufficient availability of year-round greens.
- Distribution is a challenge.
- Land access and affordability are serious issues.
- People don't know how to create a compelling story to market their product.
- Vermont's climate, and the limits that puts on production, is an obvious challenge.
- There is a human capital shortage, both for farmers and laborers and leaders.
- It is hard to appeal to different economic levels. Affordability is an issue.
- We don't have enough housing for laborers.
- There is a leadership vacuum in agriculture. We need more independent commissioners, and the current pay level is inadequate.
- There is rivalry among producers that goes both ways between traditional and non-traditional farmers. There is a lack of respect and understanding that leads to hesitancy to share resources.
- The cost of inspectors in meat processing plants is prohibitive.
- There is a dominance of dairy, and the Agency is challenged to talk about other forms of agriculture.
- There is a risk of deforestation. How can we manage biomass and land use in a sustainable way? Consumption levels need to be adjusted. Americans could look to the European model.
- The bureaucracy is hard pressed to keep up with farm families.
- Neither the food processing business nor farming pays decent wages.

## Recommendations

- We need rules for meat packing plants that are appropriate for Vermont's scale.
  - There should be incentives to private organizations to train workers for meat processing.
  - We need more processing plants and a vocational training program for workers.
- Training could encompass other agricultural areas as well.
- The hiring process for both domestic and foreign labor needs to be easier.
- We need a systematic distribution center, where we can pool resources. This could be a regional clearinghouse with centralized information and services for buyer and seller. This would be a way for purchasers who can't get to the source to buy into the Vermont brand. It would be a high-end collective.
  - Create a position for someone with expertise in large-scale transactions to advise the collective.
  - We could develop a regional market for Vermont based goods.
- Have an extended year-round farmers market.
- The book *Blessed Unrest* by Paul Hawken discusses a '4<sup>th</sup> sector', a working group that integrates disparate sectors 'for benefit'.
- We need to have a land policy discussion as part of developing a strategic direction. This should cover many areas, such as energy, affordability, food, types of farms, scale of production, dairy and organic.
- Provide tax relief and incentives for farmers.
- Impose a carbon tax on imported food.
- The Slow Food movement could be promoted as a central feature of Vermont agriculture.

### **PRIORITY RECOMMENDATIONS:**

1) Develop a mechanism for aggregating available Vermont foods into a single place for sale (either a physical place or a central information point). Higher demand will likely tax existing production capacity, particularly around meat processing, and so plans should be in place to increase capacity for these processes as well.

Vermont food producers enjoy a strong brand through their connection with "Vermont." Vermont implies a particular quality and sense of place that many people, both inside and outside of our state, value. However, there are many practical obstacles for people other than individual local consumers (e.g. restaurant buyers, institutions, buyers who live outside of Vermont) to access our food products, particularly those from small-scale producers. Creating a central point for accessing local products should open up more markets to the average Vermont farmer. Food will be easier to locate and order and combining the products from different smaller farms can reliably fill large orders.

2) Outline a blueprint for how to balance different land uses in Vermont. A working group of diverse people should map this plan to use as a guideline for how to best apply the different policy tools that can shape our landscape.

There are many ways to use Vermont's open land. But, the State lacks a clear blueprint for how to balance our different possible land uses and incorporate our many values for the working landscape. For example, in the agricultural sector alone there are different kinds of food production (varying scales, diversified, organic, conventional, etc.), energy production, forestland, and potential uses. Furthermore, many tools exist to shape how land is used, for example easements, affordability programs for farmers, a catalogue of unused agricultural lands, tax incentives, etc.

## ***2. Building a Creative Economy Region***

**Facilitator:** Ruth Wallman, Lake Champlain Islands Chamber of Commerce

**Opening Speakers:** Mary Harwood, Co-Chair of the Grand Isle County Creative Communities Project and Sharon Rives, Area Coordinator for Randolph Creative Communities Project

**Scribes:** Sonia Rae, am session, Lindsey Harty, pm session

### **Success Story One**

Mary Harwood

- We started with a focus group drawn from many local professional groups in our community (agriculture, arts and small local businesses) to establish an identity and a strategy for economic development. We call this initiative WAVES - Waking Vibrant Economic Sectors.
- Three focus areas were established and projects implemented:
  1. Off Season Activities: *Great Ice in Grand Isle* – Ice skating on the lake. We wanted to find an activity that would feature the lake, complement local businesses and offer winter activities.
  2. Farm and Arts Trail: *Discover the Heart of the Island*. A touring, open studio and farm event with map showing locations of participating artists and farms in the region. Businesses saw a huge increase in sales. Artists reported large visitor numbers. Got great press coverage.
  3. 4 Season Activities Spaces: A need was identified for 4-season indoor spaces for community activities in the Grand Isle region. An inventory of spaces is underway. A local landmark building was turned over to the historical society who can now pursue grants from outside sources for renovation. It was important to the community that this renovation not become a tax burden.
- More ideas being discussed are – activities in parks, a literary festival, branding the Champlain Islands, incubating local businesses, creative workshops in winter eco tourism and working with local farms to encourage visitor activities.

### **Success Story Two**

Sharon Rives

- We wanted support from VCRD not just for Randolph but for the entire area. Our community gatherings pulled in people from the technology, arts, recycling and green communities.

- We've been working on our community program for only 3 months.
- Energy Community and Randolph Greening Group are working on beautification of the area, and recycling and sustainability issues.
- Randolph Community Connects group is working to develop broadband access for the entire area (down to the last mile of road).
- We are also working on establishing and promoting a revolving loan fund to support local artists and small businesses.

#### **A. What's Working in Vermont? Idea sharing**

- Affordable housing for the entire community is seen as a major challenge and necessary for a healthy community.
  - Waitsfield, Warren, Moretown Community challenge in the Mad River Valley. Cost of living has gone up, businesses are moving away or closing, local people can no longer afford to live in their community. Second home owners fracture the local community. Not sure how to move forward to re-establish a sense of community and revitalize the local economy.
- How do you continually keep people interested and committed to community projects? Islands Creative Communities Program specifically picked projects that required minimal investment so that they could achieve some success right away.
  - Select a community champion – someone with name recognition in the community to help back a project. This helps to bring other people on board. Community leaders are key to the success of many projects.
  - Private/public cooperation and grass roots initiatives help to identify and then leverage the assets of a community.
- Acquisition of funding for projects is an ongoing challenge. Funding is needed to hire staff to help drive projects forward and handle administration, and to renovate spaces to make them suitable for community activities.
- Broadband Internet Access is seen as a major issue for all communities – down to the last mile. Central Vermont Community Action Council applied for and got a USDA Enterprise Grant to help establish Broadband Access through the entirety of Washington County. They are working with small local communications businesses to make this happen. The Government is also looking at other ways to help underserved areas. This includes using schools as an anchor and working with the Dept. of Education to help improve education about new technology.
- Creative Economy is not a sector in itself but a new way of approaching every sector. It's about how we adapt and change to sustain growth and improve our quality of life.
  - As a concept The Creative Economy is too complicated for many people to grasp. It's hard to fund an attitude and so, it's important to be able to describe any project in concrete terms.
  - How does the concept of "The Creative Economy" translate into raw numbers? How do you measure prosperity related to "The Creative Economy? How do you attract people to downtown? How do you attract a business to a downtown?

## **B. Challenges and Recommendations**

### Challenges

- There is a real challenge with the lack of definition in the term “creative economy.”
- It is difficult to articulate the concept of a creative economy to potential stakeholders in such a way that they will come to the table relaxed and open to conversation.
- Some stakeholders are resistant to change, particularly if the creative economy seems like an “unknown.”
- The term “economic development” can also be a scary for people, sometimes caused by misconceptions.
- It is hard to get people to come to the table without preconceived notions.
- There is a need for some concrete example to “show” people what the creative economy is.
- It can be difficult to begin the process of building a network of partners.
- It is challenging to get multiple towns to work together without competing for control.
- It is misleading and a disservice to talk about the creative economy’s relationship with the arts exclusively.
- There is a need/desire to balance the tourism economy with other economies and maintain revenue through all four season, otherwise business cannot survive.
- There is a general lack of knowledge of available resources.

### Recommendations

- Documenting and sharing success stories is really important to the process, especially when trying to communicate your situation to potential partners.
- Using existing resources (non-profits) that serve multiple towns can be a way to help overcome an individual town’s desire to have complete control and ownership.
- Some sort of incentive from Montpelier (administration or legislature) might help break down the barriers between locally focused communities and help unify a region.
- When trying to involve stakeholders and community members in initial conversations it can be helpful to “piggy back” on another meeting in order to draw people in.
- Speaking directly with key stakeholders is necessary (not just letters and email).
- It is helpful to shift away from thinking that the creative economy is something separate from other economies.
- There was a consensus that greater funding is desired.
- A toolkit that covers a wide range of information would help communities think about all aspects of the creative economy, then make the toolkit available online.
- We need a system/forum for information dissemination.

## **PRIORITY RECOMMENDATIONS:**

1) Vermont needs a framework, a structure, a tool kit, a facilitated engagement process, benchmarks and training programs that will build out the economy from the top down to our locally chosen projects. This structure will ensure that locally selected projects can succeed and become sustainable.

Many communities have done visioning and "grown" the creative economy organically through grassroots action. Now they need state support and leadership to help them realize their goals

2) There should be a mechanism for information sharing and outreach, something to communicate resources and stories. Possible tools include the Web, blogs, and a twice-yearly conference.

Communities need a way to share their problems and successes.

## ***3. Developing Arts and Community Facilities***

**Facilitator:** Jolinda LaClair, USDA

**Opening Speakers:** Ann Cousins, Preservation Trust of VT/National Trust Field Services and Mike Curtis, St. Albans for the Future board member, chair of Economic Development Committee

**Scribe:** Jonas Eno-Van Fleet

### **Success Story One**

Ann Cousins

- Preservation Trust VT offers encouragement, seed grants, technical resources, and larger grant support.
- We assist anyone working with historic preservation projects, but we also look at downtown restoration, which intersects with the Creative Economy. Our resident proprietors are what make Vermont unique. We look at our downtowns and find solutions that strengthen them.
- A lot of our projects involve arts and culture.
  - Every community has the opportunity to have a facility.
  - The painted curtains survey helped identify facilities around the state.
  - Many of the groups we work with have discovered places that served as opera houses. In Vergennes the rehab has been going on for over 15 years.
  - The Flynn Center is remarkable story; rehab of their facilities has been going on for 25 years.
  - Bellows Falls was very creative in planting seeds in becoming a cultural destination. Where there's interest, you can create a facility from what you have already.
  - The Elly Long Music Center in Colchester is part of Ft. Ethan Allan, and is now the home of Vermont Youth Orchestra.
  - Cultural venues don't have to be nonprofit owned, e.g. the Tip Top building in White River Junction.

- The Brookfield Town House was vacant since the 60s and was previously used for storage.
- The Vermont Arts Exchange in North Bennington has been a real stimulus for the economy.
- The Lyndonville Town House is now used for local dance and performance.
- In Hardwick, GRACE has been helpful in stimulating a blossoming arts community in Hardwick.
- Maple Corners in Calais rehabbed a facility that the community adapted through creative fundraising (Men of Maple Corners calendar) and is now used for small scale performance.
- The Ludlow town hall had an auditorium upstairs that was impossible for performance, but the town found an acoustic engineer to make it useable.
- We own the Grand Isle Lake House, and the building is used to host events including the Mozart Festival
- Wilder is just starting a cultural facilities project.

## **Success Story Two**

Mike Curtis

- St. Albans has been a victim of its own success. The city has seen renaissance over the last 3-4 years, and was looking at 3-4 buildings to start an arts center. The plan was to take older buildings in the city and create a Creative Economy incubator space which would provide rental stream. The problem is that building prices on Main St. have gone up significantly.
- We came to the conclusion that maybe we're doing it wrong. Maybe our "center for the arts" is the combined resources and facilities of the three arts organizations in town.
- Our Downtown Core Project is based on a design from PTVT. We should bring artists onto downtown committees for different perspectives; we need people who can visualize empty downtown core spaces as something that are going to be more than a building with offices.

### **A. What's Working in Vermont? Idea sharing**

- Gail Nunziata: The Arts Council of Windham County is trying to spread out from Brattleboro. The *Brattleboro Reformer* is a huge part of how the arts communicate in Brattleboro. I'm also part of "Alliance for the Arts." We're trying to get people not to be territorial about money, etc., and we've found some common interests. Out of this have come projects like Artists Town Meeting. We've heard from organizations, but we hadn't really heard from individual artists. Right now we're breaking into four working groups to pursue four areas. We're also in the middle of a waterfront review. This is another unifying factor to get people talking about downtown Brattleboro, and envisioning the kind of community we want around that waterfront.
- Ken Gross: In Windsor, we're just forming a Creative Economy committee. We have the Chandler and the White River Craft Center being rehabilitated in Kimball House, but the words Creative Economy brought negative comments

- from townspeople, who were saying “It’s all about arts, I don’t do arts,” so we changed committee name to “Collaborative Economy.” We’re also trying to involve agriculture in these discussions.
- Windsor took an inventory of what we had that was available to everybody, infrastructure and intellectual/artistic talent in the community, and we were very happily surprised. Our local paper is a great resource.
  - The Creative Economy idea is all about creative ideas. Vermont Council on Culture and Innovation is all about the right verbiage
  - We redefined the term in St. Albans. A healthy arts scene is indicative of a healthy Creative Economy. People have lost sight of that. In our definition, Creative Economy starts with people who are paid to create creative products. From that you have another ring of people who take that and create commercial products. Then manufacturing. Then distribution. It’s easy to tie in local business and get them to understand it.
  - Sonny Holt: Our Creative Communities committee was renamed the Heart of Vermont Collaborative, and tasked with creating a database of talent and assets in the Randolph area (Brookfield, Braintree). We haven’t done any solicitation yet, because we just knew a lot of them, but eventually we’ll have a website for them to go in and sign up themselves.
  - Plainfield is working on a skills database, too
  - We’re trying to reach young people in St. Albans. Our database has community calendars, etc., but the problem is that *we’re* maintaining it. We need to be more like Wikipedia, make it easy for people to put all their events on it, and not rely on one central organization.
  - Pat Hunter: A list of resources has great impact on communities, especially when they’re down on themselves. It’s been great to see in Rutland that there was so much that you don’t quite realize. One thing that has been an exciting part is collaboration with the *Rutland Herald*, and they’re making the decision to create a website that is going to be available for people to build that calendar we were talking about, and put it right online. It allows organizations and artists to put their info right into the calendar.
  - Gerianne Smart: One of the problems that can come up is that there are so many arts organizations and so many communication vehicles that it becomes chaotic. It’s great to see a solution using a local partner newspaper.
  - Curtis: With the *St. Albans Messenger*, we used the newspaper as a model of a Creative Economy business. The publisher said “Oh, I get it! We use artists, photographers, etc.”
  - Cousins: There’s a tendency for the arts and a sense of place to get lost as we talk about economy and business. PTVT, with our 25th anniversary, worked to produce the “Vermont Gathering Places” book, looking at diverse places in Vermont that capture the unique parts of the state, all the way from Thunder Road to the opera houses.
  - Katie Trautz: It’s interesting how Vermont has been advertised as unique and special, and we’re promoting the “Vermont-ness” of it, but the face of Vermont is changing with resettlement programs, and it’s going to be interesting to see how that new diversity can affect the Creative Economy.

## B. Challenges and Recommendations

### Challenges

- John Mandeville: One project in Hardwick is to look at creating an arts business incubator. We decided the best opportunity was The Centennial Building an empty building in the center of town. It's owned by three partners in New Jersey with no interest in the building or the community. I contacted them, they said they'd be willing to sell, so we pursued it. Through PTVT we got a \$250 seed grant, matched by the select board, to pay for an initial evaluation/architect walkthrough. We got the report back and I contacted the committee or anyone with interest, to set up a meeting two weeks later with the architect. Nobody showed up, not even the architect. I was ready to throw in the towel, but I was cajoled by members of the committee not to do that.  
We pursued it further and got 20 people to a meeting, including Community Capital, the Vermont Community Loan fund, our local RDC, and the USDA. We decided to do a full-blown feasibility study and have an application in with the USDA for a Rural Business Opportunity Grant. We have an option to buy, and the select board has put up the money if the grant comes through. Hopefully, by the end of year we'll be in business.
  - Your point is a critical one: Often there is a vision, but it's not feasible. You need to take the necessary step to take to test that vision, and find out if there are other options.
- Olivia Gay: Listening to these local food initiatives, eat local, buy local, invest local, are there mechanisms to make it attractive for people to invest their money locally, to invest in self-directed IRA real estate options, whether there are tax incentives to put in place, would a local or statewide stock exchange be attractive to people? Is there a way to support these ideas with bonds, or other local financing options? How can we invest in our communities without it being just through charitable donations?
- Cousins: We have examples of communities that have formed limited liability corporations. The premise is that we give to nonprofits for the benefit of those institutions, and in the same way people want their communities to be better places. In Vergennes, to improve the block, local investors formed an LLC to buy and rehab a derelict building without the expectation of getting a big return on their investment. That project was successful. The Bobcat Café in Bristol: a private business looking for local investment, offered opportunities for five-year loans to the business, paid back with interest.
- Andrea Rogers: Limited partnerships are an important option, and after five years they can get almost a parallel tax deduction. I've been serving on panels in Massachusetts, and they've had significant state investments in capital projects for historic and cultural facilities. We have a miniscule program, and it would be great to have a major initiative in the state for bigger grants. Underutilized old facilities are in many towns, but no one knows what their use is going to be. Feasibility studies are important and grants for that are important. New York has done it, Massachusetts has done it, it can be done and it would affect everyone.
- Josh Hanford: The state distributes block grants from the Federal government. The challenge for developing arts and culture facilities hoping to access our funds

is that housing is our two priorities are housing and job creation. This money has to be directly tied to benefit low and medium income Vermonters. You'd have to prove that 51% of the people who benefit from your services are low and medium income. Or that you can create X number of jobs. That's not to say that a well-crafted plan that has sustainability in it couldn't get funded, because they do every once in a while. There's a tremendous challenge to develop a separate facility in every small town in VT when these towns can't handle their own capital improvements and upkeep on established buildings. Why can't we all share this responsibility and all pay for it? There isn't enough funding.

- Mod: I want to highlight this because almost half of the work of USDA rural development is affordable housing. With that said, the advocacy for affordable housing in Vermont is tremendous. And the advocacy for arts and culture initiatives in the state, while good, doesn't equate. People need to realize, if you're looking for enhanced funding, you need to do a lot of advocacy. \$50k to \$200k for the cultural facilities grant program is great, but it's a drop in the bucket.
- Tracy Martin: I've served on a lot of boards of a lot of organizations. When groups go through a downturn, one thing that is lacking is long-term sustainability planning. You can pull people in with your big restoration, and the big projects are exciting, but what sustains these organizations are quality programs on a consistent basis. I'd like to find a way to help organizations plan and manage their growth and figure out how they're going to make it in the long run. Fundraising for special project is a challenge but doable, fundraising for operations is more difficult.
- Curtis: That sounds like a challenge of leadership, of maintaining energy.
- Nunziata: The advent of a managing director in an organization that didn't have one can be a challenge. The board might step back, or it might micromanage to death. Organizational development is essential. Also, accessibility, not in the sense of physical accessibility, but the availability to everyone in your community, not just everyone who has the income levels that can support you.
- Mandeville: One of the issues with the whole funding thing is that a lot of nonprofits try to exist almost solely on grants. It's almost impossible to get grants for operating purposes. You can get grants to buy stuff, or for developmental reasons, but not to pay salaries. Another problem is, with the demise of VANPO, who used to organize training opportunities, it's not happening any more.
- Richard Ewald: Every small community wants to produce their own unique identity, but it's got to be sustainable. How do we balance those small towns' wants against what is needed. Main Street Arts in Saxtons River is a nonprofit arts center but also serves a seniors lunch. It fills a need.
- Gay: There's the challenge of infrastructure: septic regulations, broadband availability, etc. If you're thinking about mixed use and how it contributes to income stream, how can you have the infrastructure to have for-profit businesses involved, which can contribute to sustainability?
- Rogers: You need the big communities, but you also need the small communities. The Flynn is seen as the big guy, but what's our relationship to all these little community developments? How can we create synergy that benefits us all?

- With almost every successful project, behind it there's been an activist artist. Robert McBride, Warren Kimble, SEABA, etc.
- Mod: You can get to a point where that's not sustainable. Staying with it for seven years or whatever is a long time.

#### Summary of Challenges

- Funding
- Feasibility studies
- Block grant definitions
- Leadership issue (local, regional, statewide)
- Infrastructure needs
- Management of an organization post-development
- Community accessibility
- Lack of statewide non-profit entity for training and technical assistance
- Greater Burlington versus rest of rural Vermont.

#### Recommendations:

- The Vermont Small Business Development Center in Randolph has offered to serve as a training and technical assistance resource.
- Board retreats can be very helpful if you have a firm, agreed-upon agenda
- The legislature should reconfigure VCRD to create "SWAT teams" to help with recommendations, information, and resources.
- We should create a mentoring program where people, especially coming out of the Creative Communities program, would meet with other people from the same area to take some of the burden off people like Geri and Robert McBride.
- We need a central repository for information and resources.
- Bring professional board members on in ex-officio capacity.
- Bring young people back in by taking risks: Reggae Fest, the Bread and Puppet festival, the big concerts, they're all gone. It's a missing link for youth in Vermont, and the rest of us.
- Better advocacy: We should help VAC be our lobbyist at the state and federal level. You have to be your own local advocate.
- An "Invest Local" summit to bring people together to talk about those other options. Maybe it would push the Community Foundation to take that on as part of their programming.
- A bond bank for community facilities that might be owned by a non-profit as opposed to the municipality. In New Hampshire they have the Community Development Finance Authority to manage Community Development Block Grant money. They have a tax credit program that is completely different than Vermont's.
- The state passed a bill that ~3% of state retirement and pension funds can be invested in arts and culture facilities, at below market return. This offers great potential.
- A new Council to keep all these issues in one place, a cafeteria of funding options that can mix with federal or state money, matching funds, or offsetting other kinds

- of criteria – a one-stop-shop for resources: experts, legal advice, funding options, board/leadership development resources, technical assistance, like SBDC but for non-profits.
- The above would have to come with some kind of commitment from the legislature. If we all need help, the whole non-profit sector needs a clearinghouse for assistance and support.
  - According to one participant you cannot be a tax-exempt organization and promote commercial artists. He believes this is not a tax-exempt activity and commented that many artist groups may be in violation of IRS rules. Technically, he said, an “artist guild” cannot be tax exempt.
  - Providing jobs and housing in communities through multi-use facilities.

**PRIORITY RECOMMENDATIONS:**

1) Create a one-stop-shop resource center for cultural and community facilities that arts organizations, non-profits, and community development organizations could use. This resource could convene various types of summits or working groups and would offer services that include: organizational development, board development, funding development, leadership development, and peer-to-peer support. It would also include alliance building both within local areas and regionally.

Organizations such as the Small Business Development Center and the Community Foundation provide examples of organizations supporting organizations.

2) Create a clearinghouse of information on financing for cultural and community facilities. Convene a committee of practitioners, arts organizations, community leaders, non-profits, funders, and executives to develop a cafeteria of project financing options including Limited Liability Corporations (LLCs), bonding programs, analyses of priorities, self-directed IRAs, local stock market/exchange options, etc. This group should explore financing options for organizations alongside investment options for Vermonters, promoting an "invest local" priority.

***4. Developing Downtown Activity and Accessibility***

**Facilitator:** Paul Costello, Executive Director, Vermont Council on Rural Development

**Opening Speakers:** Tara Kelly, Rutland Regional Planning Commission and Warren Kimble, Artist and Arts Advocate

**Scribe:** Diane Scolaro

**Success Story One**

Tara Kelly

For the past few years there have been many discussions about how to revitalize downtown Rutland, but there was a lack of confidence in the marketplace. Business owners were reluctant to take risks such as making Center Street a pedestrian mall. This spring, conversations between the Planning Commission, Chaffee Arts Center and others resulted in the creation of the Friday Night Live Series. It has been very successful so far,

bringing diverse participation, renewed energy among merchants, and spurring traffic in downtown businesses.

**Assets:** Historic downtown and railroad station, recently opened Artisans Gallery. Friday Night series has opened up many conversations about future collaboration and potential for winter programs such as an indoor farmers market.

**Challenges:** Downtown is off the main thoroughfare (Route 7). How to extend the recent momentum to keep it going throughout the year?

## Success Story Two

Warren Kimble

Until the late 1990s, Brandon was challenged by the reputation of the Brandon Training School, a downtown filled with buildings owned by a “slum” landlord, and few reasons for people traveling Route 7 to stop in the town. Finally the landlord died and a number of young, creative people moved into the affordably priced buildings. A group of artists formed a guild and asked to display art in the windows of the abandoned A&P store, and later to set up a small gallery. About that time, several new shops and restaurants opened. In 2002, the guild raised \$20,000 to purchase giant fiberglass pigs. These were painted and auctioned, raising \$180,000. The proceeds were used to purchase the A&P building and create a permanent gallery.

**Assets:** The pigs and subsequent community arts projects helped create a positive image for Brandon and a tremendous sense of community pride. Formerly disenfranchised people became more engaged. The town (pop. 4000) has 170 members in the Chamber of Commerce. “Brandon is for Brides” has been a very successful campaign.

**Challenges:** Keeping it going. There is an expectation that the Brandon artists will continue making substantial contributions to the success of the community, even though they make very little money doing it. Maintaining the flavor and business mix in downtown is difficult because they are competing with the big box stores in nearby Middlebury and Rutland.

### A. What’s Working in Vermont? Idea sharing

- Even though Richmond is 3 miles from Toys ‘R Us and other box stores in Williston, one small toy and gift shop in town has created a strong niche in their community and remains extremely successful.
- Discussions in Middlebury about development opportunities along the Otter Creek River have not been embraced by local businesses, even though they would be the primary beneficiaries. Consequently, non-business community members are leading the discussions, acknowledging that you can’t assume that our downtowns will survive without considering innovative ideas for change.
  - Middlebury/Frog Hollow: Both the organization and the town are riding on the wave of past success but as a result, neither are actively exploring new ways to insure sustainability or further community integration. The temptation to rely on any one thing (i.e. the college in Middlebury and outlets in Manchester) is foolhardy and not sustainable.
- Burlington’s North End is thriving and has developed a sense of community pride. A new outdoor vendors market gives low income and immigrant

- populations a chance to do business. Of the 18 current vendors, most have never been in biz before. Challenges include the need for vendors to have insurance, become registered businesses, learn how to collect room & meals taxes, etc.
- Unlike towns where there is ample space to develop, there is a lack of space in downtown Burlington. The infrastructure is very fragile and there are on-going efforts to nurture people and develop incentives for businesses to stay. The successful Farmers Market and Artists Market took time to build, but are now extremely successful. The most recognized asset of downtown Burlington is the authenticity and unique experiences it offers and the customer service visitors experience in Vermont.
  - A 40-acre parcel of privately owned land in S. Burlington is being developed to create a downtown area for South Burlington. Challenges include negotiations with landowner, and coordinating with, not competing with Burlington for community development.
  - In Montpelier, support for the arts is strong. Independence Day brings 20,000 people to town and the Green Mountain Film Festival annually draws a capacity attendance. The challenge is that the downtown is geographically divided—half is the state complex and the other half is the traditional downtown. Also, the challenge of maintaining the town's uniqueness and balancing the basic needs of the community with the desire to be a tourism destination.
  - It is important to support designated downtowns because they are the hub of the larger community. Small businesses and cultural attractions can't survive in surrounding towns without a strong Brattleboro. Also, we need to work on publicizing our assets in and outside of the state.
  - Waterbury recently received downtown designation. Currently surveying the 80 businesses located in the designated district which is showing how the town has grown over the past 10 year.
  - Bristol Friends of the Arts started a co-op 5 years ago (Art on Main) which now features 105 artists. The challenge of keeping it afloat is on-going. It is a struggle to bring in new people, adequately pay staff and successfully market the gallery.
  - In Barre, the Central Vermont Community Action Council is working with the new Local Agricultural Community Exchange (LACE). Community is already showing a lot of interest in this farm fresh market & café that strives to connect farmers with consumers. The success of LACE so far is bringing a lot of attention to Barre and to the Buy Local concept.
  - The VCRD's visit to Woodstock sparked many downtown conversations which led to Pentangle Arts Council working on a community assessment. Successes include the popular Concerts on Green, the town hall's development as a cultural center, and festivals in local schools that engage a large population. Cultural organizations and businesses are partnering to create weekend packages.
  - Closure of two key downtown stores in Chester two years ago prompted community-wide discussions about change and adaptability. This year a Farmers Market was created, and new Civil War enactment offered. New merchant incentives developed to coordinate marketing/branding.
  - In Plainfield a Transportation Enhancement Grant is helping to fund landscape design, Cross Vermont Trail and pedestrian paths as ways to help slow Route 2

traffic through the town. Downtown has a food co-op, Blinking Light Gallery and park where farmers market takes place.

## **B. Challenges and Recommendations**

### Challenges

- A healthy downtown needs a diversity of goods and services that are not tailored to a specific sector of the community.
  - The “experience” of shopping downtown needs to outweigh the convenience of shopping at a mall.
  - The business mix in any community needs to be healthy and owners need to provide exceptional service in order to make their businesses stand out.
- Entice young people/people with families to live and/or spend time in downtowns.
  - Alter the “car culture” to get people to get out and explore their downtowns.
  - Work to create more neighborhood communities where people get to know the people around them.
- Balancing the desire to attract tourists without sacrificing the things that are important to the locals.
- Winter weather can deter tourist visits/income so it is important to engage and attract local people year round.
- Educating local people about the value of Buy Local takes time. The value of supporting local businesses vs. shopping at out-of-state owned box stores is not always evident.
  - Making living locally more affordable. People feel they can’t afford to shop in local businesses so go to the box stores which are perceived as being more affordable.
- We need to be planning ahead to be self-supporting and sustainable within our communities, thinking about how our basic needs will be met after the oil runs out, etc.
- In some communities it is difficult to get grants that require a match because of lack of support from local businesses and/or municipalities.
- Communities need to identify outside funds and draw in new sources in order to keep from over burdening local resources.
- Local leaders need to step to the plate to help implement ideas, move them forward, and make them sustainable.
- Need for more leadership and support from the top, specifically from state agencies.
- Communication between organizations and regions needs to be improved to let locals as well as visitors know what is going on. Some of the Regional Marketing Organizations (RMOs) were helpful with this.
- Some long time business owners are reluctant to make changes and/or embrace the creative economy.

## Recommendations

- Work to promote a regional or multi-town presence by combining resources, coordinating schedules and exploring cooperative promotion opportunities.
- Develop greater support from VT Department of Tourism & Marketing to promote downtowns and creative communities as tourism destinations.
  - Better data/documentation of specific markets needed so that communities can make a stronger argument for support (i.e. revenues from bicycle tourism in Vermont)
  - Downtown Program could facilitate market analysis studies so communities can better understand how they can take advantage of opportunities and niches that exist locally and globally.
  - Encourage people to visit downtowns, not just the attractions along the byways on outskirts of town.
- Create an online resource that lists state agencies and other organizations that provide information, grants, best practices, success stories, etc. for creative economy initiatives.
- Develop incentives (i.e. tax credits) for businesses to invest time and money in planning for the sustainability of their businesses and their downtowns
- Downtown Reinvestment Project helped leverage millions of dollars from the private sector but has not been recommended for new funding.
- Explore private funding for community projects. Jane's Trust is a significant resource for creative economy funding.
- Instead of asking local businesses for donations, ask to purchase goods or services at their cost.
- Explore the benefits/challenges of creating a new community organization vs. expanding the roles of existing organizations; also have discussions about organizations run by volunteers vs. paid employees.
- Strengthen and support the Downtown Program because downtowns are the heart of our state.
- Increase promotion of “the creative economy” in order to improve recognition of the term and understanding of the concept.

### **PRIORITY RECOMMENDATIONS:**

1) Provide more support for Vermont's downtowns through the Downtown Program and other channels. Specifically, creative economy leadership at the local level needs state leadership support in the form of expanded tax credits for downtown projects. Even more importantly, Vermont needs to re-introduce the Downtown Grants Program that was fundamental to the Downtown Program at its inception.

These grants can be used to as starting point for key projects that will expand downtown branding, business incubation, streetscape improvements, trails and walkways, design and beautification, and other improvements that will celebrate the downtown as a center of innovative economic activity.

2) Create an online resource that lists state agencies and other organizations that provide information, grants, best practices, success stories, etc. for creative economy initiatives.

3) Provide support for Buy Local campaigns at the same time educating Vermonters about our potential place in the world economy.

## ***5. Expanding Partnerships between Cultural Organizations***

**Facilitator:** Alex Aldrich, Executive Director, Vermont Arts Council

**Opening Speakers:** Whitney Lamy, Assistant Director Chaffee Art Center and Beth Meachem, Greater Manchester Arts Council

**Scribe:** Linere Silloway

### **Success Story One**

Whitney Lamy

Ms Lamy is the former director of the Crossroads Arts Council. The Chaffee Art Center brought in Ms Lamy when it absorbed many of the Crossroads programs. They spent the last year transitioning. Crossroads does not exist as a separate 501(c) 3 anymore

During Ms Lamy's time at Crossroads she realized that it was important to begin some sort of dialogue with others in the arts community in Rutland. The Rutland Area Arts Alliance was born. It has been a challenge to bring the various art groups together to talk, break down old barriers, and network but is working.

### **Success Story Two**

Beth Meachem

Ms Meachem brings with her 25 years experience in the private sector. 8 years ago she inherited a non-profit art fund which was recently disbanded when the funds were gifted to Marlboro College.

In the meantime she was asked by the Manchester Chamber of Commerce to start an arts council. Its purpose is to act as a facilitator/collaborator to bring together the arts, local businesses, and the community. The successes are the Cultural Calendar and a revitalized downtown through programs such as Life After Dark. These projects bring people to the area and enhance the cultural life of all the residents.

### **A. What's Working in Vermont? Idea sharing**

What is a cultural organization?

- Difference from social services Agency?
- Are all cultural organizations Nonprofit?
- Purpose to enhance Quality of Life?
- Initiative thinking
- Non Art
- Woven into art sector
- Bringing together to enrich VT life
- Collaborate Farm Institutive
- Quality of Life, meaning in VT

- Gem – part of gem

What are Challenges?

#### Collaboration

- Breaking down barrier, not competing for the same donor dollars
- Including other cultural venues such library, etc.
- Attend each others events, represent their organization by attending other organization events
- Time to network
- Developing partnerships
- Finding common denominator(s)
- Finding peoples common passions
- Models – model template
- Overcoming history – who we are, communities self-contained
- Culture built through isolation
  - Protecting own resources
- Collaboration vs Competition
- Non-profit competition, same peoples dollars
- Bravery
  - Required to stop thinking of own organization
  - Broader mission of looking a whole community
  - Working together – chasing the money
  - Difficult to think broadly
- Think of all organization as threads to make a fabric
- How to serve community in effective way

Creative ways to meet financial bottom line--Step outside own organization, Outreach, Time

- Financial bottom line – private funding and government
- Break down of mission resources
- Percentage of administrative costs
- Other ideas from private sector
- Reach beyond the list of common contributors
- Combine grant request
- Business view
- Rather do project than administration

Organization aware of its intent – Mission

- Write policy – step back – larger collaborating
- Explore needs/wants vs values
- Service – who are you serving
- Group define organization
- Clearly define value of work, a clear idea
- Public benefit, define – who
- Evaluate the benefits for community
- Boards meeting with other Board to discuss missions – not just staff

Generosity – supporting each other - what are you willing to give up to contribute to community as whole

- Models
- Expand partnership reeducate role of nonprofit to play roll, nurture passion, need in community
- Network with partners, common missions
- Help build bridges to strengthen community
  - Investment, not charity
- Language to promote
- Identify needs of community
  - Survey
  - Desires
  - Benefits of contributors donations
- VT Brand – changes – not just for hunters anymore
- Broaden cultural experiences
- Steering Committee to include businesses, etc
- Map connections to other people
  - Divide into sectors
  - Create context – woven
  - Reasons to relocate to area

What are you doing in community now?

- Facilitating to assist town in obtaining library
- Projects take long time
- Develop vision
- List of resources, Knowledge of assets
- Creative Community Process – Doing anything together – merge farmers, flatlanders
- How the 7 people at the table to make decision – how to outreach to the community
- Community gives authorization to others
- Keeping community on track
- Public Policy – statewide or local, cumbersome processes, overcoming history
- Sense of pride in community
  - Too much past history
  - Fostering hope
  - Creating dialog
- Promoting local art by highlighting the town artist

Key Challenges – Solutions

- Arrogances
  - We know why it is important
- Social outcomes
  - Art education
  - Space needs for art events

- Raw space
- No technical support
- Cost of doing business in VT
- People, decrease of volunteer – burnt out – age
- Training, promotion, technical
- Service ethic – Community Service an idea of the past
- Civic Cultural, civic duty, not valued
- Entitlement
  - Need artist participation not just their art
  - Social contract breakdown on both sides
  - Different type of participation
- Facilities available to other community activities

#### Barriers

- Non-profit versus Profit
- Bias for the arts
- Business = Arts – reach out to business, agriculture
- Running art organization a business (Employ people, pay taxes)
- Better business people, creative
- Potential non-traditional partnerships, B&B Inns, Art Cultural Tourism, Realtors
- Technology
- Limited Resources – real or perceived

#### Solutions

- Combined grant requests
  - Harmonized thinking
  - Funding source – more than one entity
  - Planning Grants
- Non arts person to mediate
  - Art Alliance – Got newspaper to create an Arts Section as way to outreach to the community. Editor supportive which led to website
- Business and marketing
- Time to network with other organizations
- Communication – more details broadcast to public, notes from meetings
- Town Meeting forums to energize public
- SEABA Model – merging non-profit and profit
- Incubators – infrastructure collaborative – develop collaborative
- Leadership
- Willing to hold other interest. Collaborative needs to stay fresh, reaching out
- Revisit missions
- Baltimore Contemporary Collaborative
  - Match artist with business
  - Stay Fresh
  - Matchmaker

- Aging Demographics – how to make resource? What is being done for older people?
- Not utilizing older work source
- Tap into colleges as resource
- Skill Bank – reach out in a physical way – drive to meeting, meet people in community
- Sharing marketing and programs Young and old, engaging people of different ages
- Map
  - Resource flow
  - Barter Map
  - Where to focus
- Survey – where to spend money
- Value giving back to area
  - Packets to business Human Resources
  - Why to come to community
- Focus on outside money – marketing to outside borders vs locally because don't believe can get local support
- Scenic byway – Strategic Planning
- Complex community structure
- Small steps – Pilot circles, start small – local to regional to state
- Packaging events
- Network – luxury of time
- Models – SEABA, Pilot, Handmade in America
- Skills banks
- Sharing age demographics
- Share Infrastructure – physical operations
- Shared resources – Cross pollination
- Documentation Mapping – How systems work
- Local currency – packets for HY
- In-state marketing
- Pilot Circles
- Kick Start Collaborative
  - Carrot and stick approach
- Group visits/tours Models for partnership
- Common mission – language
- Opportunity not challenge

## **PRIORITY RECOMMENDATIONS**

1) Develop and adopt common language around organizational missions that will encourage greater collaboration among groups with similar intentions.

2) Develop inventories of community-based assets and existing collaborative models. These can provide guidance and direction for organizations that are ready to collaborate but may not know how.

## ***6. Incubating Creative New Businesses***

**Facilitator:** Michael Levine, Flywheel Communications

**Opening Speakers:** Steve Conant: Founder and owner of Conant Custom Brass, former President of Burlington's South End Arts and Business Association, and owner of the Soda Plant, a Pine Street incubator and Charlie Nagelschmidt, Champlain College, BYOBiz program

**Scribe:** Karen Lynch, Vermont Technical College

### **Success Story One**

Steve Conant

- The success of the Burlington South End corridor with its creative new businesses brings success to greater Burlington by attracting local visitors and tourists.
- A key challenge is: how to support the growth of entrepreneurial businesses.
- Another key challenge is how to maintain affordable housing for employees at these new businesses.
- There are four key needs of entrepreneurs: affordable space, kindred spirits, various resources, and landlords who keep rent low. For him, development pressure on Pine Street is the big change and challenge from when he began his business in 1979.

### **Success Story Two**

Charlie Nagelschmidt

- BYOBiz was created at Champlain College to provide the freshman class a way to bring their incubator business ideas into their class curriculums.
- Though the program was created for the freshmen, there has been growing interest by alumni, upper class students, professors and adults in the area to be part of the program

### **A. What's Working in Vermont? Idea sharing**

- Artists/Crafters of all types need know-how and financing for their business planning process.
- Artists and crafters have a very difficult time finding funding for their businesses under the current financing model.
- In Rutland:
  - "Vermont Creates" is a brand new non-juried gallery with 25 artists currently. It was funded by a grant from the USDA. "Vermont Creates" helps artists promote, price, and finance their creations/businesses. It's in a prime location for foot traffic which is the key to its success.
  - An event called "Friday Night Live" closes some downtown city streets to motorized vehicles to encourage more people to visit local businesses in the area.
- Vermont as a state could forward the creative economy attitude by creating a brochure(s) to advertise Vermont as a "Micro-Enterprising State".

- Vermont has a pastoral image. Vermont has a tourist economy, and the state should decide if it wants to encourage job development in other sectors.
- Landowners/landlords need encouragement/incentives to provide affordable space for new businesses. Those that now exist are often there as “commercial philanthropists.”
- Take advantage of the resources available in your own town. Don’t try to create what has worked elsewhere unless it fits your town. This point was made by someone from a town with a lot of empty industrial space to a participant from Woodstock who wondered how to get property owners to keep their buildings available and cheap for start-up businesses. His point was this may not be feasible or appropriate in Woodstock.
- It is a challenge to keep new growing successful businesses in the same physical space after the incubation period takes off. The challenge brought up by someone from the Mad River Valley is how to keep those businesses in the Valley instead of relocating elsewhere. Overcoming housing and transportation costs is tough.
- Just one example of a creative way to support new businesses: in Bellows Falls a new business is located right next to a hydroelectric dam, and the business has taken the opportunity to acquire low cost power.
- Should there be a funding distinction between for-profits and non-profits? How do we bridge the perceived gap in their interests?
- Remanufacturing is emerging as a business sector.
- In Bellows Falls, a renovated industrial cotton mill houses new businesses, and these businesses are growing so fast, they can’t be housed in that mill anymore.
- A large community is not necessarily more successful at developing new businesses than small communities. Each town has to find their own way to develop their creative economy.
- Historically, you will find that a core group of people will champion and develop the cause of the creative economy in each town. This is a good way to start the effort as opposed to looking for consensus in the community.
- In Windham County, the Brattleboro Business Development Corporation (BBDC) owns 500,000 sq ft of formerly underused space. Some now occupied by creative industries. They also host a business plan competition that awards a cash prize. “Advice is nice, but \$ really helps.”
- Communicate to new and prospective volunteers how they will benefit from being involved in the creative economy effort in their communities.
  - It is important to find ways for people to contribute and be involved in the community effort without having to attend meetings.

## **B. Challenges and Recommendations**

### Recommendations

- It is important to create critical mass in each community so that the creative economy effort is sustainable. It is important to draw the community in to shop locally, as well as encourage tourism.
- Vermont should consider making the state more attractive to relocating new or expanding small businesses.

- Some communities build the incubator space to attract business, then lease and eventually sell it to the business.
  - Landlords could build incubator space to fit the type of businesses they want to attract, and treat this like affordable housing. Maybe offer tax credits in exchange for cap on rent.
  - Economic tax credits actually increase tax revenue for the state by stimulating the economy.
  - The state could entertain a high risk investment strategy to put tax money into the state creative economy vision.
  - There would be opportunity in an interagency approach to economic development that supports high and low impact development.
  - There should be a state incubator plan. We're asking companies to take risks, but state isn't willing to do the same.
  - Is there a possibility of creating a capital pool that supports incubators?
  - Create a state position for someone to help incubators as a facilitator and catalyst.
- We need a state policy/vision regarding reuse of old buildings and creation of new ones. Currently, there is too little money available in preservation funds.
  - “Scalable permitting” could be a way to help incubators, and not to the point of endangering the public health or the environment.
  - Retail incubators like farmers markets could use cultural facility grants that work with municipalities to provide opportunities.
  - The creative economy market relies heavily on tourism, and a statewide marketing campaign would be valuable.
  - A web portal providing comprehensive support to entrepreneurs would be valuable, including a “Business 911” hotline for support.
  - Suggestions for revenue growth: self-directed IRAs, local stock exchange, investment portfolios with a cafeteria of options.
  - Change the conversation to one of “Investment opportunities” from one of “cost challenges.”
  - Build a common mission language. Put resources into identifying and highlighting assets and resources already in place that are available to support incubators.

## **PRIORITY RECOMMENDATIONS**

Emerging and start-up businesses need space they can afford and technical assistance that will develop their skills and nurture them through initial setbacks. To this end two recommendations for state policy:

1) *Funding And Financing*: Reduce and stabilize the cost of incubator space through loans, grants, business credits, tax credits, and other incentives. Policies that encourage and allow incubator landlords to keep rent low (perhaps looking at the affordable housing model) would encourage and support a vigorous Creative Economy. Also, increase resources for technical assistance providers.

2) *Infrastructure*: Reduce the obstacles on emerging Creative Economy businesses by adopting policies that allow scalable permitting and encourage adaptive reuse and renovations of existing buildings to keep these uses competitive with new construction. Recognize and promote the “embodied energy”\* of existing buildings when comparing costs.

\* “Embodied energy” is the amount of energy in an existing building’s materials when compared with the energy it would take to manufacture and transport materials needed for new construction.

## 7. *Marketing the Creative Economy*

**Facilitator:** Chip Evans, Workforce Development Council

**Opening Speakers:** Robert McBride Executive Director Rockingham Arts and Museum Project (RAMP), and Rose Wilson, Coordinator, Windsor Downtown

**Scribe:** Stacy Raphael

### Success Story One

Robert McBride

- McBride has an MFA from Hunter College. He founded RAMP 11 years ago; Although he came from the “outside” (NYC), he saw so many opportunities that the residents—who had been there for much longer—had stopped seeing. He had passion and energy and was willing to run with ideas; he found that his vision integrated into the community very well. He observed that being a leader who is willing to get things done is often very well-received.
- McBride’s definition of the Creative Economy is: “put creative people around the table and you do creative stuff; you put whiners around the table and you do “whiney” stuff.” He observed, “I have met the *most* creative plumbers and *least* creative artists. It is important to break down stereotypes and see creativity everywhere.”
- The first step in fostering a creative community is for each community to identify its own unique resources. Use common sense; pick creative partners, and... yes, money is important. However, money *without* vision is not enough to guarantee success. Developing vision within the community sets you up for success. The money will follow.

### Success Story Two

Rose Wilson

- Windsor Downtown (WD) has five goals. She emphasized that it is important to start small and let activities and community involvement build over time. Remember to celebrate your small successes; it helps people see the tangible energies and improvements, recharges the community and builds social capital. Thanking people consistently is exceptionally important. Publicity is crucial.
- You don’t need a ton of volunteers or support *at first*, but the first couple of motivated people make a huge difference in getting your program up and running.

- Share the common vision with seemingly disparate partners (e.g. Chamber of Commerce). Some of the benefits of this collaboration are: shared brand of the community, shared advertising costs, higher visibility overall with a broader population.
- Business support (large and small) is vital.
- Fundraising: Windsor had a “Much Ado About Vermont” FUNdraising event. And don’t forget to ASK: Sell the nonprofit “product.” Wilson stressed that making these “transactions” *in person* is so much more rewarding and effective for successful fundraising (and incidental marketing, as well).
- Make sure that there are multiple projects that are *initiative-driven*. That way, people can pick a project that excites them and also avoid collaborating with people they don’t particularly like or work well with. Smaller, discrete projects also are easier to get volunteers on board, since there is a clear beginning and end to the work at hand.
- Wilson talked about the creation of WD’s first marketing materials: a multipurpose brochure. It was homemade at first, on her computer, but you have to start *somewhere*.
- Another big development in marketing was focusing on brand and image creation. We didn’t want our town’s sole focus to be history; we wanted it to be the present and the future as well.
- Example of Success: Windsor had been producing this Moondance Festival, but the event didn’t have a clear mission. Once they identified one, they were instantly able to leverage some funding and the quality and appeal of the festival increased exponentially.

#### **A. What’s Working in Vermont? Idea sharing**

- Maggie Sherman noted that in 1981, she got 403 out of 680 community members to make a mask as part of a community project in Montgomery, Vermont
- Rutland received a creative economy grant; there are four committees
  - Arts Committee--Art Hops, Arts Alive!, Friday Night Live!, Iron Chef Competitions, Music, Festivals, etc.
  - Sustainability Committee--Localvore project
  - Recreation Committee--Multiuse path along East Creek, etc.
  - Community/Pedestrian Committee--a Feasibility Study is underway and an application for a federal transportation grant is pending.
  - Mayoral Election: Every platform included Creative Economy support
- Stores in Plainfield had been leaving the village. What could revitalize the area and reverse this movement? The effort started in informal conversations with friends and grew to 90 people coming to meetings. Small towns need to use smaller streams of communication as opposed to newspapers, etc. which don’t communicate as effectively.
- There are two ways of generating *Enthusiasm* or *Buzz*:
  - Rally discussions around a community *problem* (The Sky is Falling! Panic!)
  - Rally discussions about potential *opportunities* (Possibilities, “What if?” How Exciting!)

- One useful tool is a Centralized Ticketing Online for the community
- There was a Creative Economy Conference in Brattleboro
  - Chamber of Commerce was involved
  - Still, the efforts need to be more overt, visible to the general public

How can we link these statewide efforts in some way?

- Before statewide collaborations are appropriate, get your own community in order
- Create your partnerships in a much broader way (i.e. regional)
- *Authenticity* is a currency in abundance in Vermont that is often undervalued by residents. Our assets are right in front of us and we need to focus on them
- River Arts is turning the Lamoille Grange into an Arts Center. The vision is on total community inclusion.
  - River Arts also just transitioned to an E-newsletter format reducing a \$3K cost to \$15.
- Quick Tip: type emails *twice* in online forms; you'd be amazed how many mistakes get made
- Middlebury: There is a Creative Economy umbrella organization
  - The major component of Middlebury's Creative Economy success is the restoration of the historic Town Hall Theatre. *One person* is predominantly responsible: Doug Anderson. "Broad-base" is a mantra with Doug, as far as "vision"
- VT Businesses for Social Responsibility: A Healthy Economy is the Key
  - Economic Development people are IMPORTANT as spokespeople for the creative economy, not just artists, craftspeople, etc.
  - Supporting the creative economy is not philanthropy or charity; it's *self interest*
- There is the perception that the arts are external (enrichment), not so
- It is important to focus on concrete initiatives such as the Vergennes Opera House. This fosters productive conversations, possibilities.

## B. Challenges and Recommendations

### Challenges

- There is a need for a better definition of "Creative Economy": *where culture and innovation meet*; we need a better way to help people feel ownership of the process
  - Packaging, allure of the "Creative Economy," elevator speeches
  - Buy-in and visioning
  - Appropriate outreach, engaging key stakeholders
    - Richard Florida: "creative class" ← wrecks of snobbery
  - Securing appropriate partners
  - Challenge to define creativity broadly—not just artists
  - Communicating value
- Cost of marketing
- Energy levels/enthusiasm
- Nay-sayers, skeptics, whiners

- Lack of leadership
- Lack of a defined audience (target market)
- Fear of the arts (art-phobia, fear of the unknown)
- Devaluing the arts: expectation to not have to pay or reluctance to pay the value
- Gentrification alienates those responsible for the gentrification
- Weather, isolation
- Technology: no email, no cellular reception, dial up internet
- Regional red tape
- Time/multiple priorities

### Recommendations

- State marketing department could speak to uniqueness of each town
- Fund documentation of projects
- Make “Healthy Communities” the number one priority for economic development
  - Investment in natural/community/financial resources
- Use buying power to promote arts and creative industry
  - E. g. use VT artwork and VT images as often as possible
- Use state’s ability to market as a leverage
  - Encourage the Film Commission to use VT products in films/television
  - State and private sector get incentives to support LOCAL
- Create a state bartering system
- Promoting VT products online
- Business planning competitions (using Brattleboro Business Development Corporation model)
- Improve broadband access (to impact e-commerce)
- Increase visibility of state programs (using VT Housing & Conservation Board as a model for business planning)
- Support a value-added agriculture policy (part of a bigger picture)
- Streamline information resources at the state level
  - Recommendation: check out UVM extension: New Farmer Program
  - Promote existing resources
- Identify multiple priorities. Multiple bangs for the buck with taxpayer money
  - State parks programs that are “Creative Economy” based, etc
- Offer incentives for young people to stay
  - Health insurance issues with Catamount
  - Education costs
- Current priority: Enviro-friendly manufacturers of 500+ employees. State needs to be more inclusive of what defines “business”
- Artists and nonprofits are not feeling benefit of “entrepreneurial support”
- Assist small, creative enterprises such as VT Small Business Development Center, Microbusiness support, Arts/artisan businesses
- Artists don’t want to BE businesses, they want the business support.
  - State needs to fund groups providing professional development such as “From the Amateur to the Professional: The Art of Success”

- Support the agencies and nonprofits (such as Vermont Arts Council) that support artists and arts organizations with business planning assistance, grant resources, and professional development
- State could encourage public/private partnerships
- Have legislative leaders form a Creative Community Commission
- Town planning should include the Creative Economy
- Collaborative marketing efforts
  - Develops from the grassroots up
  - Branding consistency with local businesses
    - Take Vermont branding and incorporate it into local efforts
  - Local Public Access involvement
- Create Handbook for implementing Creative Communities in new communities
- Creativity through the curriculum
- Recognition of communities: Awards

#### **PRIORITY RECOMMENDATIONS:**

1) Use the state's ability to market as a leverage point for creative enterprises. The state should formally recognize creative enterprises and highlight these enterprises as a way to market the Vermont Brand

2) Encourage local, grassroots work that embraces a consistent message for the community. Communities should focus on a way to present themselves that is memorable, special, unique and powerful.

## ***8. Using the Web as a Creative Economy Tool***

**Facilitator:** Jack Hoffman, Vermont Broadband Council

**Opening Speakers:** Judi Danforth, co-owner of Danforth Pewterers of Middlebury and Jim Boutin, Town of Pownal Planning Board

**Scribe:** Elaine Dufresne

### **Success Story One**

Judi Danforth

- Selling on their website ([danforthpewter.com/](http://danforthpewter.com/)) has been critical to their business, comparable to having another store. Currently accounts for 8% of sales, with much more potential if more resources are invested in it.
- At the time website was launched in the late 90s, she was uncertain if people would buy their products without being able to touch them.
- The first 25 years the business was heavily wholesale; in last five years retail has become more important.
- Website takes as much attention as another store; takes more time than one might expect. Tending to it and improving it is a never-ending process. Wished they had a full-time webmaster.

- They are adding a video to tell their story, and to tell the Vermont story. They contribute to the lifeblood of their community and vice versa.
- Communicating with customers is key, including explaining their history, keeping information current such as new products, artists work in their gallery, community events.
- Home page needs to change frequently, and the site needs to be marketed.

## Success Story Two

Jim Boutin

- Needed to create a planning document and brochure
- Used a free web site ([pbwiki.com](http://pbwiki.com)) to work on the document collaboratively without having a lot of meetings and as a way to get public input. The site was easy to use, allowing public access and participation in the blog as well as restricted areas for the committee to use.
- Someone needed to oversee and manage the process, especially when it was opened to the public
- The site snowballed ([pownal.pbwiki.com/](http://pownal.pbwiki.com/)), starting out as work on a planning brochure, but expanding to include history, stories, information and local resources and map
- Document mockups were posted, people provided feedback, errors on the map were found and corrected
- Minutes of meetings are also posted
- Other free and easy-to-use options have become available, such as Google documents

### A. What's Working in Vermont? Idea sharing

- Hinesburg has a web site that is being updated, with more services being planned
- FrontPorch forum is being used in Burlington ([frontporchforum.com/blog/](http://frontporchforum.com/blog/)), offering free public forums for neighborhoods. Required a lot of volunteer work to get started. Provides user-generated content including announcements, news and local issues. Helps people feel more connected with their neighborhoods, even if they do not know many of their neighbors.
- New England Foundation for the Arts has developed a cultural database and a site ([nefa.org/projinit/onlinecultmkt.html](http://nefa.org/projinit/onlinecultmkt.html)) that connects performing artists to venues
- Things to consider in website design:
  - Access speed (dial-up vs. high speed)
  - Accessibility issues and rules, to make the site available to visually impaired users
  - Different formats needed
  - Knowing your audience very important – think about the user needs first, not the technical needs.
- Issues statewide:
  - Communities frustrated at not having high speed internet access
  - A few communities have received grants to get some services, but it is a slow patchwork solution not working well overall

- The new State telecom authority offers some hope for bringing broadband access to everyone in the state, but it is just getting started
- Risks of obsolescence slows down investment by towns

## **B. Challenges and Recommendations**

### Challenges

- Communications
- K-12 education infrastructure, as well as adult education on technology use
- Keeping up with emerging technologies across the state
- Needs for current and future employee and self-employed skills
- Interconnectivity of humans is happening online, with people finding common interests
- Can connect with people anywhere, but local is what we do best
- Hard to get a website that becomes easy for everyone to use; navigation is critical so people can quickly and easily find what they want
- Long-term strategic plan for whole state critical
  - High speed access across the state, or lack thereof
  - Need a distribution plan for voice, video, internet (bundled services)
  - A community infrastructure is needed, like a road system for everyone to use
  - The network is important (fiber, equipment, etc), but you can't just bring fiber to a town and be done. Other considerations are customer service and support, getting homes connected
  - Desire for local control makes things more complicated
  - Economy of scale needed to make the investment viable (example Burlington Telecom)
  - The amount of investment needed to carry fiber throughout the state is a fraction of people will spend over the life of that fiber for telecommunications services

### **PRIORITY RECOMMENDATIONS:**

- 1) Provide high speed Internet access across the entire state.

This goal will require a strategic plan and state leadership for bonding, coordination, overarching vision, prevention of duplicative efforts, and capturing possible efficiencies. The analogy of highway infrastructure is very descriptive for this process – it is a major undertaking that will result in a path for everyone to use.

- 2) Provide the education needed to make the best use of Internet technology.

This tool requires people with technical skills and the knowledge of possible applications for the technology. Education will also be needed at a community level so that towns and villages can improve their functions through technology resources.

## VI. VCRD 2007 Leadership Award

### *Monica Greene, Recipient*

#### **Introductory remarks from Catherine Dimutruk, VCRD Board Chair**

VCRD presents its Community Leadership Award annually to an individual who exemplifies community service in Vermont. In selecting a candidate for the award each year the operative word is “transformative”—we seek to recognize someone who has had a unifying effect in bringing people together, and through this leadership has a transformative effect on the community as a whole.

We deliberately exclude from candidacy individuals who are elected representatives, government officials, or are professionals whose excellent work may be, but are paid professionals in community development. We recognize, instead, people who make things happen and build momentum as volunteers.

Past recipients of the VCRD Community Leadership Award include:

**2005:** The late **Al Stevens** of Wells River, Vermont who led so many projects from housing to youth and education in eastern Orange County. His acceptance speech was moving in its brevity: “I’ll endeavor to earn it.”

**2006:** **Edgar May** of Springfield who on top of the myriad accomplishments of his professional life and volunteer service, spearheaded the efforts to envision and build the Southern Vermont Regional Recreational Center in Springfield, VT.

It is my pleasure to announce that the 2007 VCRD Community Leadership Award will go to Monica Greene of Alburgh, Vermont.



Monica Greene (left) with Catherine Dimutruk

Monica has served for the last 24 years in roles as co-owner, president, CEO, and CFO at Vermont Precision Tools, Inc. in Swanton, Vermont. The company employs 140 Vermonters in the manufacturing of high speed steel tooling and related processes.

In addition to her work and her family, husband Craig and sons Courtney (18) and Tyler (16), Monica devotes her time toward the advancement of her region and community.

She has served her region on the board of the Franklin County Industrial Development Corp, the Lake Champlain Islands Chamber of Commerce and the Board of Incorporators for the Northwestern Medical Center.

Monica has also dedicated her time and energy in persistent efforts to make Alburgh a great place to live and do business, and has been instrumental in rallying residents to the progress of that community. She has directed the Alburgh Industrial Park and served on the Board of Trustees of the Alburgh Town Library, the Alburgh Steering Committee, the Alburgh Multi-Generational Center Feasibility Study Group, the Alburgh Revitalization Committee, and as a key leader and mentor of the Alburgh Put-Backs, their local teen revitalization group.

In the year 2000, Monica's home community of Alburgh, VT was struggling to redefine its identity, set new priorities, and revitalize itself for a new time and new generation.

Monica took a special interest early on in the process and helped develop a Community Forum that was well received by residents. She then willingly became Chair of a Steering Committee, formed sub-committees and for 6 years has provided outstanding leadership to accomplish several community projects that have resulted in improved quality of life for the people in Alburgh.

Monica's outstanding dedication has been instrumental in the efforts of the Alburgh Revitalization Committee, the 8<sup>th</sup> Grade Parents Committee, and After School Teen Project. She has also led in a model program in Alburgh that removes and junks derelict mobile homes

Monica possesses an amazing range of business and interpersonal skills that allow her to see the problem, need or big picture; to analyze it, come up with viable solutions and move forward by motivating others.

And so it is my honor as chair of the Vermont Council on Rural Development to present the 2007 Vermont Community Leadership Award to Monica Greene. It reads: "In recognition of her dedication, integrity, and honorable service to her community and to rural Vermont"

Thank you, Monica, for all you do for your community, and for what you represent to all of us.

## VII. Acknowledgements



VCRD deeply appreciates the sponsorship support of the 2007 Advancing Vermont's Creative Economy conference by many of our valued partners in innovation, preservation, and rural development:

**Commission on the Future of Economic Development**  
**Department of Housing and Community Affairs**  
**Division for Historic Preservation**  
**Greater Burlington Industrial Corporation**  
**Housing Vermont**  
**Jane's Trust**  
**Lake Champlain Regional Chamber of Commerce**  
**Preservation Trust of Vermont**  
**Regional Development Corporations of Vermont**  
**USDA Rural Development**  
**Verizon**  
**Vermont Agency of Agriculture**  
**Vermont Arts Council**  
**Vermont Downtown Program**  
**Vermont Housing Conservation Board**

The Council is especially grateful for the leadership, support, and partnership of **Governor Douglas and his administration and the Vermont Legislature** in all our efforts.

VCRD also appreciates the key leadership roles of **USDA RD**, the **Vermont Community Foundation**, and **Vermont's Congressional Offices** in supporting our efforts in service to rural communities.

VCRD is grateful to the speakers for this discussion on advancing the creative economy in Vermont including **Lieutenant Governor Brian Dubie, Speaker of the House Gaye Symington, and Bill Schubart of Resolution, Inc.** In addition, our panelists **Alex Aldrich, John Casella, Ellen McCulloch-Lovell, Jim Saudade, and Gerianne Smart** brought a wealth of perspectives. All their presentations provided inspiration, challenge, and thoughtful analysis of the opportunities ahead.

This celebration of creativity was enriched by the performances of **Sheefra** and the **O.K. Duo**. The Creative Economy at Work was also on display, thanks to wonderful exhibits by **Artisans Hand Craft Gallery** (Montpelier), **Hands On Productions** (Burlington), **Hunter Studios** (Bellows Falls), **Prescott Galleries** (Lincoln), **Vermont Glass Workshop** (Hardwick), **Vermont WoodNet Inc.**, and the **Vermont MapleWood Gallery** (Stowe).

Thanks also need to go to the VCRD Creative Communities Steering Committee for leadership in planning this event: Chip Evans, Joss Besse, David Lane, Alex Aldrich, and Pat Menduni.

The Creative Economy conference was produced with the support of over 40 **presenters, facilitators, scribes, and panelists**—all of whom donated their time. They are listed in each section of the report. Their contributions made for an informed, efficient, and fair ‘marketplace of ideas,’ and we value each of their efforts.

We appreciate the work of **Candy Koenemann** in managing most of the logistics of the day, and **Michael Levine** for compiling and editing this conference report.

The Vermont Council on Rural Development and all the communities working through the Creative Communities Program owe their thanks to **Helen Labun Jordan** for her tireless and outstanding efforts in their service.

And finally, it’s all about local leadership. All of us at VCRD admire the strength and determination of the **Creative Communities leadership teams** and their commitment to advancing culture and innovation and making a better life for their communities. You are our heroes.

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