



EMERGING LEADERS

of Southern Vermont

2021 HIGHLIGHT REEL

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AWARD BY:



**BETTER WHEEL
WORKSHOPS**





Beth Wallace

Family and Community Partnership Manager,
Bennington County Head Start / Early Head Start
North Bennington, VT

Career Accomplishment:

I am most proud of my contributions to the construction of the new Spring Center early childhood education addition to the Bennington Recreation Center. This has been a multi-year process involving innovative partnerships with the municipality, the federal Office of Head Start and the Berkshire YMCA. When the project is completed in May 2021, we will have increased our capacity for childcare by 18% and our workforce by approximately 8%. The community will benefit from a newly-accessible rec center space, large community room, community kitchen and public playground for young children. This is a game-changer for our community's working families and for children and families in the downtown Bennington neighborhood.



Community Accomplishment:

Each year for the past several decades, Bennington Rotary Club has awarded four high school seniors scholarships of \$2,000 each to be used at the students' discretion. As the President of the Bennington Rotary Club in 2019, I introduced a proposal to the Board of Directors to make a change to the scholarship award structure... My proposal was to designate one of the four scholarships as a "First Generation Scholarship." This would be open to high school JUNIORS whose parents did not attend higher education. The recipient would be chosen in January of their Junior year and given \$1,000 at that time to put toward anything that would improve their success and process in applying for college (SAT prep courses or travel expenses for school visits, for example). The recipient would also receive the valuable services of Lora Block, College Advisor. (After a presentation she made to our club, I had reached out to pitch this idea to Lora and she had generously agreed to donate her college advising services for this purpose). The second half of the award would be distributed the summer before the student's freshman year of college, provided the student succeeded in enrolling.

What is SoVermont?

SoVermont is home! It is strong, close-knit community, beautiful natural resources, fresh air and fresh energy. There is strong movement in our region right now, so many people doing great things to improve our systems, revitalize our towns and to welcome a new generation of Vermonters. From the Putnam Block to the purchase of the Southern Vermont College by SVHC, from new breweries and splash pads popping up to taking stock and doing the hard work of police department reform, SoVermont is a place of opportunity and creative solutions. And lastly, for me, it is a refuge. When so much on the national stage can be disappointing and frustrating, I take solace in the strong community connection and accessible leadership in this corner of our "brave little state."

Special Thanks:

My mother, Kathy Cardiff, raised me to believe that we are responsible for those most vulnerable among us. She instilled in me a sense of duty to serve my community and has always encouraged me to be bold. My supervisor and mentor, Betsy Rathbun-Gunn, has provided invaluable guidance and opportunity. She has allowed me to take on many passion projects and has given me countless opportunities and encouragement to grow as a professional and leader.



Brittany Schmidt

Chiropractic Physician / Business Owner,
River Bend Chiropractic
Town, State

Career Accomplishment:

Nearly two years ago, at 26 years old, I purchased a chiropractic practice in Brattleboro, which I currently own and operate. I feel this is a huge accomplishment for anyone.

Community Accomplishment:

Serving on the Events Committee for the Young Professionals has been something I am proud of. Organizations like these are especially important during the COVID-19 pandemic because they foster connection and community. I am happy that I have been apart of that, helped nourish the community through engaging events, and made connections through the organization.



What is SoVermont to you?

Southern Vermont is the place I chose to call home. I have lived in cities, rural areas, and suburban areas all across the country. Each place is special to me and has its own neat characteristics, however, Southern Vermont, in particular, has an exceptional feel. It is warm, flavorful, tranquil, and engaging. I see it as a place that is full of opportunity; nestled in quaint New England, between farmlands, rivers, and mountains, it provides an eccentric backdrop for many different people. I am proud to call Southern Vermont home and every day am thankful that I landed here.

Special Thanks:

Dr. Craig Anderson, DC, Josh Roberts, Christine Abdelnour-Mckenna



Conor Floyd

Farm to School Program Manager, Food Connects
Bellows Falls, VT

Career Accomplishment:

I'm most proud of managing the Farm to School Program at Food Connects through a pandemic, when our work in schools shifted dramatically and we were unsure of what the future may hold. We were able to stay true to our mission, continue to support educators and students in accessing healthy school meals, but also expand to encompass a truly community-wide scope. Heading into the spring now with the pandemic end in sight, we have new, stronger community partnerships, thriving programs in schools, and a revived energy around school meals as everyone has come to appreciate their necessity for a healthy and well-nourished community.



Community Accomplishment:

It's not one definitive accomplishment, but my time volunteering as a Restorative Justice panelist has been incredibly fulfilling, for myself and (hopefully) those referred to the program. It's been a gateway for me to experience the entirety of our community and given me the privilege of helping my neighbors work through some of their least proud moments. It's often a messy, confusing process that doesn't have a clear outcome, but the process of working with individuals over the course of multiple months means we see clear personal growth and progress towards a more connected community.

What is SoVermont to you?

A strong community; beautiful and accessible nature; a growing local economy. But also a place small enough for each person to have their impact felt, which inspires more civic and community participation.

Special Thanks:

I work with a host of wonderful people and am incredibly grateful for that. Notably, my colleague Sheila Humphreys brings a caring and compassion to our work that I am always striving to emulate.

Richard Berkfield, my supervisor, has been the most impactful mentor in my professional career. His capacity to listen and help guide me towards the right solutions is always welcomed and never overbearing. His vision is inspirational but he also constantly inviting your own passions into the project.



Dane Whitman

State Representative and
Business Owner of Grey Oak, LLC
North Bennington, VT



Career Accomplishment:

Being elected by my neighbors to serve in the Vermont House of Representatives has been the greatest honor of my life. In a way, the greatest challenge to overcome was believing in myself as a leader. As a first-generation Vermonter, there was also a fear that I would be labeled “not a real Vermonter.” Part of running for public office is putting yourself in the spotlight, and there is always uncertainty as to what people will think or say about you. After taking the leap of faith to announce my candidacy, the 2020 campaign season was quickly defined by the COVID-19 pandemic, the reckoning of racism within the United States, and the increasing division of our nation. By being present throughout these events, and communicating with my community from a leadership role, I earned the respect and trust of my neighbors necessary to be elected as their state representative. As I continue my work through this historic legislative session, I continue to be honored and humbled by the responsibility my community has vested in me, and the impacts I am able to make through my contributions as a legislator.

Community Accomplishment:

When the COVID-19 Emergency first came to Vermont, I responded as the crisis demanded. With the help of multiple stakeholders and talented individuals, I helped lead a Mutual Aid network to respond to our communities' needs. Over a matter of days, our impromptu team launched a Mutual Aid website and enlisted over 50 volunteers linked in to our emergency response network. I served as a coordinator between the needs of non-profit food pantries and the volunteer network, in some cases coordinating grocery deliveries to individuals in isolation. I personally worked shifts at Meals on Wheels and the Kitchen Cupboard, preparing food and making deliveries. Fortunately, the first wave of the COVID-19 Emergency did not hit Vermont like other states, and non-profits soon found that their volunteer needs were met. It felt great to know that we were prepared and able to mobilize for our community in a time of need.

What is SoVermont to you?

SoVermont is a "nobody" being able to walk into a conference room with the Governor and your entire county's legislative delegation and take a seat at the table. No questions asked.

Special Thanks:

To all of my friends and neighbors in Bennington who have supported and helped me in my times of need and given me confidence that this is my home.



Danielle Salway

Business Manager / CFO, Mount Snow Academy
West Dover, VT

Career Accomplishment:

I started my own business. My business allows other businesses to be successful. I do the behind the scenes work: taxes, state and federal regulations, accounting, insurance, and the paperwork side of things so that new business owners can really run the business that they have worked so hard for. I feel good about helping people and making them and their business thrive.



Community Accomplishment:

I want to see my community do well and my business does just that. I have secured more than 10 PPP loans for local businesses. By doing this, I am keeping our local community employed. People need to work during these hard times and my business allows for this by securing PPP loans.

What is SoVermont to you?

I have young children ages 1 and 6. I want them to stay in the SO VT area. I want them to know that SO VT is a great place to raise children, work, open a new business and overall have a great life. SO VT is the place I call home. SO VT allows for growth and opportunity in ways that I want my children to know and remember. I hope they will call this place some day as well.

Special Thanks:

Vickey Renkowitz- She was my mentor when I first got into the field of accounting and bookkeeping. She is the best bookkeeper in the valley and she taught me everything I know. I owe my current job and my current business to her. None of this would be possible without her. She came into my life when I needed her most.



Eric Durocher

Economic Development Director, Town of Dover
East Dover, VT

Career Accomplishment:

I believe the accomplishment in that I am most proud of is the creation and implementation of our Town of Dover Economic Development website DiscoverDover.com. I personally designed and built the site with three main goals in mind:

1. To give our businesses access to our current incentives and programs that could help them to start and grow their business.
2. To provide access to COVID-19 resiliency and relief information to our local businesses in their time of need.
3. To show prospective business owners that the Town of Dover is truly a special and attractive place to start or expand their business

It has been truly amazing to hear from our community about how the site has been helpful to them since it has launched! It continues to evolve and grow and I see it as an opportunity to show everyone what an incredible Town and business community Dover really is.



Community Accomplishment:

My proudest accomplishment in my community would definitely be my efforts to provide assistance, programming and resiliency to our local businesses in their greatest time of need. I am proud of the planning, initiatives and work I have done to help lead them through the COVID-19 pandemic so that we can come out on the other side stronger than ever. I am also incredibly proud to have been nominated by someone in our community for my hard work and dedication to the community I love.

What is SoVermont to you?

SoVermont to me is home. It is where I grew up and where I now get to raise my family and serve my community. It is warm summer nights, moonlight on the snow, incredible towns and neighborhoods, and one of a kind experiences. I have travelled to many parts of the world and always find myself drawn back to home. Our area of Southern Vermont offers so many opportunities for people of all ages and backgrounds, it is truly a very special place to visit, live and work.

Special Thanks:

A special thanks to all of the people I have worked with now and over the years who have helped to teach me and foster my growth as a professional. An extra special thanks to my beautiful family Amy, Zoey and Delilah for always providing me with your unwavering support and love. Without it, I wouldn't be where I am today



Francie Huntley

Coordinator at Everyone Eats!, Downtown Brattleboro Alliance
Brattleboro, VT

Career Accomplishment:

I am proud of the trust that my peers and supervisor have put into me to carry out my role. I am proud to be someone who's voice, insight, and opinions are taken seriously and valued by those around me. I have not had this in every job I've done, so this feels like an accomplishment in what still feels like a very new career.



Community Accomplishment:

I am incredibly proud of the volume at which I help to serve the community nutritious and free meals all while keeping restaurants afloat. When I hear people tell me how much Everyone Eats! has been a lifeline for them during the past few months I know that I have helped to make a crucial program happen in the community.

What is SoVermont to you?

I feel so lucky to be able to call Southern Vermont home. I think that the commitment that people have to each other and to their community is incredibly unique compared to other places that I have lived. It is a place of immense care.

Special Thanks:

I could not have come this far without the help of my Everyone Eats! team: Stephanie Bonin, Executive Director of DBA and Director of Everyone Eats! and Amanda Witman who help me every day in making the program in the best it can be.



Ian Goodnow

Vermont Law Office Study Program Participant
Brattleboro, VT

Career Accomplishment:

Due to the nature of my work, I cannot go into detail about the cases that I work on. However, I am most proud of my work when I am able to make a difference in the life of someone who has faced hardship or injustice at the hands of forces beyond their control. Though there are days when this becomes overwhelming, the daily effort of supporting and defending Vermonters is work I am grateful to be suited to.



Community Accomplishment:

I am immensely proud of the work we've done on the Brattleboro Selectboard over the last year, leading the Town through the Covid-19 pandemic. This included the funding, supporting and acceptance of a Community Safety Review as a direct response to the national movement on policing in America in the wake of George Floyd's murder. Furthermore, I worked hard to pass a security deposit ordinance which will help low-income renters in Brattleboro find and keep their housing. We supported numerous low-income housing projects and funded a study which will help us to better understand the housing market in Brattleboro and how we can best address the housing crisis this state is facing. Finally, I am proud of my work in simply engaging my community as a local leader. I am proud to be available for weekend phone calls, and I like being stopped on the street to speak with neighbors about issues that directly impact them and our community.

What is SoVermont to you?

How I feel about SoVermont is embodied in the West River Trail in Brattleboro. It is beautiful in every season, has immense potential, and people love to be there.

Special Thanks:

I'd like to thank my mentor, Thomas W. Costello, Esq. I hope to one day be as courageous a fighter for justice and as bold a leader.



Ian Hefele

Admissions Officer, School of International Training
Vernon, VT

Career Accomplishment:

Through my Peace Corps service, I learned the art of navigation through bureaucracy... I volunteered to manage the vendor relationship with our visa agent. When NAFSA, the National Association for Study Abroad, posted a position on the visa liaison officer committee, I balked originally thinking I couldn't take on the extra work on top of my normal work responsibilities. However, after careful thought, I realized I could and should apply. I applied and was accepted for the volunteer leadership position as a NAFSA World-at-Large Visa Liaison. A few months later, I applied to lead a workshop training session about "visa knowledge 101" at the national conference. I was selected from over 50 applicant groups to do this training digitally at our national conference in June of 2020. I am also currently in training to become the Principal Designated School Official for the School for International Training in visa sponsorship working with the Department of State and the Department of Homeland Security - achieving my first major career goal by further specializing my skill set within the field of international education.



Community Accomplishment:

Proposition 8 was fresh in the collective consciousness. I heard about a theatre company that had the transcript from the Prop 8 Trial in script form for companies to perform Nationwide, for free. I submitted my proposal to the theatre company and had to convince the director, Dustin Lance Black, that performing this in Vermont was worthwhile. Succeeding, I went on to produce and direct the first bilingual performance of "8" - in American Sign Language and English.

Post 2016, the tone changed in Brattleboro. We live in what Bernie Sanders once called, "the bluest county in the bluest state" in the country, the outcome of the election that year was less than ideal. As I connected with my community through social media, a photo from Wilmington in the 1980s caught my eye. It was a photo of a handmade banner stating "Hate Does Not Grow Well In the Rocky Soil of Vermont". I mentioned to a friend that I thought the banner should go back up - given the climate at that time. Talking with her, I realized if I wanted the banner to go up, I would have to do it. I initiated the GoFundMe to raise the necessary funds for the fees to hang the banner and pay for supplies. When the banner went up, and our Congressman retweeted the picture offering his support to the stated ideal, I knew I had found home.

What is SoVermont to you?

SoVermont is where my husband and I found our family by adopting our kids. SoVermont is a place where my family's values are put into practice. SoVermont is the "Brave Little State", because we all know each other, look out for each other and hopefully learn a bit from each other. SoVermont is where democracy goes into practice and I treasure the yearly reminder of it in our Town Meeting Tradition. SoVermont is "flooring it" over dirt roads rutted through mud season to not get stuck while enjoying the scenery. SoVermont is going to rebuild after the challenge of COVID-19. SoVermont is family. SoVermont is home.

Special Thanks:

I would like to thank my husband for following me to Vermont and staying here so we could find our kids. Thank you to my kids who have introduced me to a "fostering" friends circle, a group who is now family. Thank you for supporting this crazy family from day one. Thank you to my theatre family out there; we are small but mighty in these parts. All of you have helped this new family more than you know.



Jake Stone

Campus Pastor, Mission City Church
Bennington, VT

Career Accomplishment:

Starting a church that is alive and thriving in under 5 years. Statistics show that most church start ups do not survive past 3 years, much less become a self-sufficient entity like the one I have the privilege to lead. I suspect that, because of leadership and culture, that my church will survive and thrive long after I'm gone. That is something I'm incredibly proud of and give God credit for.



Community Accomplishment:

Picking up the mantle of Night to Shine host and carrying it across the finish line year after year. The church I lead had the opportunity to say "yes" to becoming the host organization for an incredible event that has now become a staple in our community. Night to Shine is an annual prom for people with special needs. This is a community of people that desperately need love and affection and we are thankful to host an event that they look forward to each and every year. Not only do we see well over 100 Honored Guests, but nearly 300 volunteers from our community rally together for the cause.

What is SoVermont to you?

Independence. Individuality. Community. Passionate. Authentic. I grew up in Alabama, and these words stand out to me as something that differentiates SoVermont from other places. The thing that has kept my wife and I here, and helped us fall in love with the area, is the sheer rawness of its people. We love that and hope to help that characteristic thrive.

Special Thanks:

My wife, Laura-Ashley. Without her, I wouldn't have a shot at even being considered for this list of emerging leaders. She is the hardest worker I know. She has shown me what it looks like to love someone regardless of how they act, give to someone regardless if they deserve it, and how to persevere even when it's hard to remember your purpose. At the end of the day, she deserves to be filling out this form instead of me. Last, but not least, my God. Being a person of faith, I have no doubt that God has given me more wisdom than I have the experience or worth to merit. Without Him, I would just be a good 'ol boy from Alabama. Actually, I hope I still am.



Juliette Carr

Herbalist & Farmer at Old Ways Herbal & Riversong Farm
Soon-to-be Nurse Practitioner
South Newfane, VT

Career Accomplishment:

Making it work! My business actually draws tourists to my un-touristy corner of Southern Vermont, as students come for classes from across the Northeast. Just being able to make it here on our farm for the last 8 years, through COVID and power outages and the cost of living...still being here would be enough, but thriving here is something I'm really proud of.



Community Accomplishment:

West River Valley Mutual Aid is a really cool collaborative effort among neighbors. We work together to help each other, with the understanding that we all need a hand sometimes, and help should be given freely from person to person as an act of community. Our volunteer network of about 250 people does a number of different projects based on what needs we notice, including direct assistance to neighbors; phone calls and distanced visits to isolated people; free food stands in the villages; advocating for accessibility in town government; distributing Veggie Van Go, Farmers-to-Families food boxes, and 500 weekly Everyone Eats meals, mostly to elderly residents and young working families; an organized community response to last summer's racist graffiti spree that affected Newfane and Jamaica, eventually resulting in official statements from both Selectboards (despite their initial great reluctance), and now exploring anti-bias training for town officials.

What is SoVermont to you?

It's home! It's my community, my family, the place where we thrive. Sitting on the porch enjoying the rhythms of the year, skiing out of my own back door, or stopping for a quick swim with friends on my way home from work is an incredible gift. We gain so much from slowing down and really living in place.

Special Thanks:

My professors at Georgetown have really pushed me to see myself as a leader, and my local clinical preceptors have taught me so much about serving our community in Southern Vermont. My community members working together in West River Valley Mutual Aid are all an inspiration in citizen-leadership. My West River Valley working mom friends are also leadership inspirations—I absolutely could not keep all these balls in the air if I weren't surrounded by a community of people facing the same obstacles and excelling as leaders in their families and our community.



Lani DePonte-Disorda

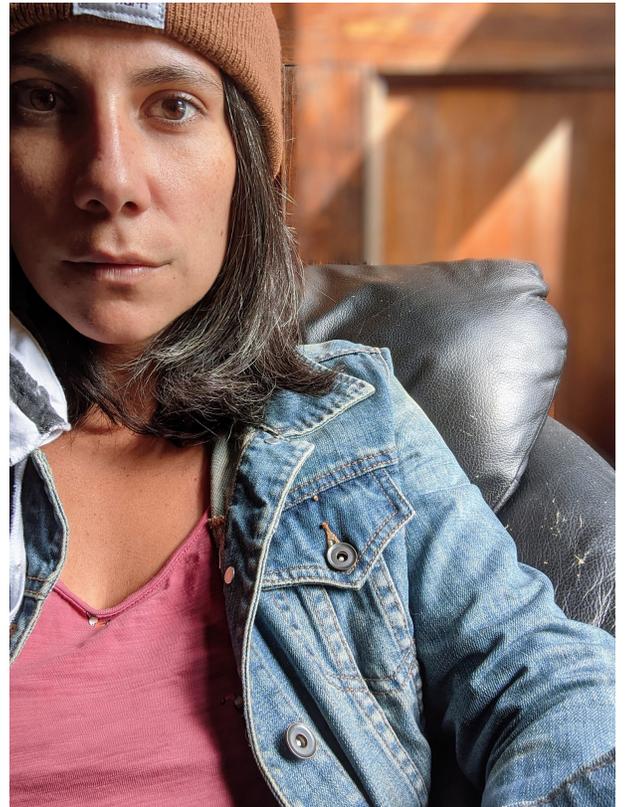
Partner / Vice President,
Pangaea Restaurant
North Bennington, VT

Career Accomplishment:

I am most proud of the shift towards equity in our wine list. I do not view it as an accomplishment but as an overdue necessity that I will be continuously advocating for.

Community Accomplishment:

I am most proud of the work we do with the culinary program at Mount Anthony and seeing interns and young chefs pursuing their dreams after getting foundational experience at Pangaea and I hope to continue to strengthen that bridge.



What is SoVermont to you?

Southern Vermont is peace and growth. A community that supports each other and is not afraid of the hard work but also knows how to enjoy the beauty in the slowness of the world.

Special Thanks:

Special thanks to Bill Scully for the guidance, the trust, the patience (and sometimes the motivating lack there of). To my husband/business partner Nick Disorda for always meeting my ideas with enthusiasm and support. To the network of women in my life near and far, inspiring me with all the amazing things they strive for and supporting me every step of the way.



Maribeth Fonda

Intensive Services Behavior Interventionist,
Windham Southeast Supervisory Union
Brattleboro, VT

Career Accomplishment:

I'm very proud of the fact that I am in the process of supervising my third graduate student pursuing their BCBA credential. I try to teach my supervisees how to navigate this challenging field with high integrity and a strong ethical compass. Similarly, I've also been fortunate enough to help teach my school district's Registered Behavior Technician courses for all three cohorts. Teaching others is a passion of mine and I'm proud that I got this interest from my father who was a professor of Anatomy and Neurobiology at the UVM Medical School for over 20 years.



Community Accomplishment:

My proudest accomplishments in our community are the behavior-analytic workshops I have taught for the Windham Early Educator's Network. I was asked to lead 4 trainings for early educators and not only do I enjoy the teaching side of it, but I also enjoy disseminating Applied Behavior Analysis knowledge to my community in hopes of supporting and empowering educators.

What is SoVermont to you?

Southern Vermont has been a fresh start for me. I moved here 11 years ago from Burlington, VT and it was quite an adjustment. However, it has become my home as a young professional where I've made new lifelong friends, attended graduate school, and built a career. Southern Vermont has been a place where I could create a life on my own that I'm proud of.

Special Thanks:

I would like to thank Gregg Stoller, the WSESD Behavior Coach, for supporting me in my journey toward becoming a BCBA. I would also like to thank Shelley Wilson, the WSESD Special Education Coordinator, for helping me find my niche in the district and supporting the integration of ABA across the district. Lastly, I would like to thank Mary Ross, Vernon Elementary School Principal, who models how to be a strong leader every day in her school building. I've learned a lot from all of them.



Mikaela Lewis

Event Designer and Manager
Southwest VT Chamber of Commerce



Career Accomplishment:

I am extremely proud of... 'Garlic Town, USA'. With COVID-19 disrupting the usual plans of our top-rated garlic festival that brings over 16,000 people to our town, our team knew that we needed to pivot and adapt in order to safely host something that would produce revenue for residents, vendors, and local businesses alike. I could have never imagined the degree of positive feedback we received from them afterwards – almost all of them made more in sales that day than an entire weekend at other festivals or events. To sweeten it up even more, our team heard many similar reports from our local businesses and restaurants who were highlighted through the day's activities as well. I was so humbled to have been able to bring the next evolution of our garlic festival into existence and provide such a successful, safe, and stinkin' awesome day for everyone.

Community Accomplishment:

I'm very proud to have brought together a day-long community wellness fair two years in a row that welcomed over 500 attendees from our area. I was able to work with a variety of local organizations and healthcare providers to highlight an extensive list of holistic healing practitioners and services available in our region. The wellness fair served as a terrific opportunity for the public to experience a wide array of traditional and complementary services available... I was honored to bring this event to fruition and bring something beneficial to our healthcare community!

What is SoVermont to you?

When I think of Southern Vermont, I automatically feel the warm sense of "home" in its entirety. I am a native Vermonter, born and raised in Pownal, until I had to spend 10+ years throughout middle and high school living in various southern states due to my father's job. However, I was lucky enough to be able to travel back home to Vermont each year during summer vacations, and those months were always absolutely priceless to me.

When I was about halfway through college and I had the opportunity to turn those short summer months into a permanent move, I jumped at the chance. I began the transfer to Southern Vermont College, where I completed my communication degree and met some of the most influential people in my life. Luck proved in my favor once again when I was honored to become the last valedictorian in SVC's history, as my graduating class would sadly become the last through the doors due to its closure afterwards. Now with working so closely with our town and surrounding communities in the Shires of Vermont, I am able to exemplify and share with others everything I appreciate about living here. In addition to sharing my passions, I absolutely love hearing aspects that visitors and new residents admire about our state. From breathtaking natural resources and our outdoor scenery, to our relaxed way of life and even the amount of cows we have - no matter how small the quirky compliment is, all the better! Though we Vermonters have always been humble, and so has our little state, we truly have so many reasons to be vivacious and proud of our incredible home.

Special Thanks:

I wouldn't be where I am professionally without learning the ropes of planning events from my late mentor, Lindy Lynch. Lindy was an absolute incredible force of nature - no-nonsense, tenacious, and selfless. I continue to utilize and appreciate the many qualities she exemplified through her work ethic, appreciation for her community, and life in general.

I also owe many thanks and gratitude to my current boss, Matt Harrington, who consistently pushes me to my very best, believes in my capabilities, and demonstrates true leadership in everything he does. And of course, the unmeasurable support from my family and friends through everything!



S. Luella Strattner

Assistant Head of School and Director of Admissions
Mount Snow Academy
Newfane, VT

Career Accomplishment:

surviving this year! But in all honestly, it is probably working my way up through my current organization, starting as a tutor - now in a leadership position. I'm proud to be able to facilitate incredible learning opportunities & experiences for passionate and purpose-driven young adults - our future Olympians.

Community Accomplishment:

Either designing the website for the West River Valley Mutual Aid Group OR supporting the board of Timson Hill Preschool for 3 years via secretary/board chair positions.

What is SoVermont to you?

Home :) (born & raised here). I also think SoVT has a vibrant community with the arts & agriculture holding center stage, a beautiful landscape & recreational areas, & potential for incredible & hopefully sustainable growth, given our proximity & easy access to major urban areas.

Special Thanks:

Todd Ormiston - for mentorship and recognizing my potential
Julie Lineberger - for seeing me & all that I have to offer
Mom & Dad - for their unwavering support





Samba A. Diallo

Harm Reduction Outreach Specialist
AIDS Project of Southern Vermont
Brattleboro, VT

Career Accomplishment:

Doing outreach work in both Windham and Bennington county. Going to meet people where services are needed because of the lack of transportation and most importantly gaining the trust of the communities and members we serve.

Community Accomplishment:

Although I get to help people as part of my job, the one thing that I'm proud and enjoying doing for my community is volunteering. We have some many local organizations and individuals doing amazing things for this community. Whether it is helping new asylum seekers or delivering food for other people. Volunteering and seeing others come together for a common is what drives me to getting involved in my community.

What is SoVermont to you?

A welcoming community, giving families from different backgrounds the opportunity to be a part of building a better future for Southern Vermont.

Special Thanks:

Definitely would have to thank my parents for the sacrifices and dedication they still have, making sure that I know they are always here for me. Also, would like to thank the AIDS Project of Southern Vermont for giving me the opportunity to help community members, for always pushing me to get out of my comfort zone and be more involved in shaping a better future for Southern Vermont.





Sarah Wiggins

Admissions Counselor
SIT Study Abroad
Northfield, MA

Career Accomplishment:

In March 2020 World Learning/SIT Study Abroad was tasked with bringing over 900 students' home from their study abroad experience with the announcement of the COVID-19 global pandemic and global shutdown. We had students on all continents and as the announcement of a global shutdown was made, we were thrown into crisis mode to bring all students home immediately. I was the first person in my department to volunteer to help with the efforts. After a few days, we ended up organizing the efforts by departments (instead of having people volunteer) and I helped lead the Admissions Department in training others and organizing shifts to bring students home. This work was grueling, we were on the phone hours with airlines and on hold with travel agencies until every student had a flight out of their study abroad location. It was a giant lift, as borders were closing, with shifts going 24 hours round the clock. We were able to repatriate all students within a few weeks and our organization won an award for Innovation In Crisis Response. I am particularly proud of the leadership role I took during this time, and to know that I am responsible for making sure a number of students got home safely.



Community Accomplishment:

I helped cofound the Windham County NAACP Branch in Spring of 2018. The Branch is one of two active branches in the state and the first in Southern Vermont. I was voted in as the secretary at the founding of the Branch and it is a position that I continue to hold today.

The Branch has been able to create real change not only in Southern Vermont, but the state as a whole through various initiatives, most recently helping set up BIPOC vaccine clinics throughout the state, vaccinating a total of 1100 Vermonters of Color and their households. We have also been advocates for various Bills addressing social justice in the Vermont State House such as H.145 and J.R.H.2. I feel proud to be an ally in an organization addressing racial and social justice issues in our state.

What is SoVermont to you?

It's being cozy during the Winter season, while making sure to get sunlight during the Spring/Summer seasons, all while feeling strengthened and full of purpose in work, and the "afterwork" activities (again as my husband calls them). SoVermont to me is my adopted home and chosen community.

We used to live in downtown Brattleboro, and we had a full view of the intersection by Pliny Park. It's a spot that I think would represent at least a chamber of the heart in SoVermont. Not so much because it's a vital intersection (though, there is food and coffee in the vicinity), however, more that it provides paths across the street. From one side to the other we've walked over these years, and seen friends, family, and thrown our arms up at speedy vehicles. It's been there for protests, date nights, dog walks, and Strolling of the Heifers. Side story, during Strolling of the Heifers, we'd look out our window to check the crowd, and join it as things were starting to look bustling. First time I saw Bernie Sanders was in that parade. He didn't have a float, but was just walking. Anyway, that spot just means a lot, and plays its own tune to it's own story.

When you are on a trip to another place, I think that's when you think about home, and what it means to you the most. Maybe not in obvious ways, like "how much you love this" or "that", but more like "I am going to get a pulled pork sandwich from the Vermont Country Deli", or "I have to make sure to walk my dog up the Ski Jump in spring." Just remembering the things you subconsciously got to do, because you love doing them. And the thing I love doing, is living here. I guess that's SoVermont to me.



Shannon Wheeler

Assistant Director, Economic Development
Town of Dover
West Dover, VT

Career Accomplishment:

I found myself only 6 months into a part time job as a single member of a department and a newly created grant program to help our businesses affected by COVID-19 approved but in need of someone to determine the logistics of administering it and doing it quickly – to get aid into the hands of our local businesses as quickly as possible... I was able to help 108 businesses get immediate financial support even before Federal funds were announced. In all the program distributed over \$190,000 in funding to these businesses. The climate between the local businesses and my department hadn't been the warmest prior to this and it was so wonderful to lead that healing change. While the funding was certainly necessary and appreciated; forging those relationships or strengthening them is one of the things I am most grateful for this past year. So many changes for many of our businesses but we all went through it together. We shared the constantly changing guidelines and programs and learned this new normal together.



Community Accomplishment:

Reviving our local Girl Scout Troop is what I am most proud of in our community. I've been able to grow membership for the first time in 4 years and am cultivating a space for these girls to grow, learn to lead, learn to take up space and speak up for themselves, find ways to serve our community and ways to be a part of the conversation for things we feel should change. The greatest part of all of that is that they just think they're having fun. I see them changing and growing their leadership skills and their personalities. I am so lucky to be on this journey with them and see how they are affecting their school and local community with their service.

What is SoVermont to you?

When I booked weddings for the area I used to describe it as 'a destination wedding feel with the closeness of home'. We are just a couple of hours from so many different places and experiences. Being here can be as busy or as relaxed as you want it to be. A military child and a nomadic young adult; I have moved over 60 times in my life, attended more than 5 schools before middle school and yet, I have lived in Vermont longer now than anywhere else. My daughter has known only SoVermont as home. As she's grown I have learned to love even more of what we offer. It's not just beautiful foliage and family and maple syrup. It's relying on yourself and your circle. It's enjoying all of the seasons as best you can – even mud season. It's appreciating a warm, sunny day to the fullest... or a huge powder filled snowstorm. It's making dinner each night with goodies from a local independent shop because no one delivers food. It's taking a run on your snowboard and then heading out on your paddleboard or kayak... on the same day. It's maple creemees and exploring trails. It's the joys of a more simple life with small schools, wide open spaces and clear skies for stargazing.



Tai Morse

Classroom Teacher
Vernon Elementary School
Keene, NH

Career Accomplishment:

I am most proud of the way I build community within my classroom. I strive to make all students feel welcomed, safe and provide them with engaging lessons that fosters a curiosity of learning. For example, at the beginning of the 2020-2021 school year, my students came up with the idea to learn sign language as a way to communicate during COVID. Being able to learn alongside my students has been an authentic way to build our classroom community and gives us something that we can grow at together.



Community Accomplishment:

There have been so many community accomplishments over the past year, so hats off to the WSESDVT district for navigating all the challenges that came with COVID. Our school district has established equitable ways for all students to receive education in person and remotely. Additionally, our district, with many volunteers, has been able to serve meals to many, many families. From car parades that celebrated graduating 6th graders to socially distant school wide celebrations, the WSESDVT community seems to be closer than ever!

What is SoVermont to you?

SoVermont is a beautiful place. SoVermont is full of collaborative, hard working and dedicated folks who rally around common goals. I am very lucky to have a career in such a supportive and thoughtful community.

Special Thanks:

As someone who grew up in the foster care system, I am very thankful for all the hard work and tireless hours our community spends to make children's lives better, including mine. I am thankful to my past teachers, friends and colleagues who have and continue to make me a better, more thoughtful educator, friend and professional.



Zack Rounds

Lieutenant, Rescue Inc.
Vernon, VT

Career Accomplishment:

In 2018/19, when the application process opened up for the position of Lieutenant/Shift Supervisor, I decided to apply for it... making me the youngest member of operational management that Rescue had. It is such an honor to serve my community and its citizens when someone is having the worst day/moment of their lives. On top of this, I am very proud of the recognition Rescue Inc has received in late 2020 as a Vermont Pediatric Safe Agency. I took it upon myself on behalf of the organization to get Rescue to be compliant, develop a pedi safe initiative internally that promotes the better care and welfare of our youth population in our region, and implement it in accordance with the State of Vermont's policy. These accomplishments are not just mine, but they are those of my place of employment. Everything I do is with respect to this non-profit service that goes above and beyond for our region.



Community Accomplishment:

Upon the suspension of the town's fire and emergency medical services department, the Select board needed to find someone within the field of EMS that could rebuild the medical aspect of the department rather hastily... I was the one they picked. Due to the urgency and nature of what was asked of me, I took great pride in the effort I put into this. Myself and the team of EMS officers made it a successful outcome. Within two weeks of this appointment, EMS response had resumed, the Town of Vernon was receiving first response medical care, and the medical services component of this department was healthy and operational.

What is SoVermont to you?

I see SoVermont as a group of professionals that is working toward the longevity of the Vermont workforce pre-emptively, to prevent failures that could occur from an aging population. It motivates young people to do great things, specialize in something, and recognize that special trades and talents are what is needed for Vermont to continue to thrive... SoVermont helps young people along the way, and supports them in ways otherwise not possible.

Special Thanks:

Christine Hume & Ellen Walsh (Rescue Inc)- For constantly supporting my life goals, career endeavors, and honestly just believing in me.
Chris Parker & Michael Root (Vernon Selectboard)- Allowing me to prove myself to the Town of Vernon as someone that can be counted on when it really mattered.
Barbara and Milt Gilmore (Brattleboro Ski Hill)- Inspiring me to give back to the community whenever I can. Inspiring me to go above the minimum requirement and put myself forward in life. To reach my goals.
Clara Morlock & Ellen Stein, MD (school mentors)- Helping me to achieve my goals of becoming a physician one day. The long road toward medical school has only just begun, but I have the support I need to get where I want to be. Clara for giving me the ambition to apply to community college and take a step back to realize what I need to do to accomplish what is important to me.
My mom and dad (Cidalia Medeiros & Keith Rounds)- For supporting me, although sometimes not being excited about the safety component behind what I do, understanding that being there for people is what I want to do.



Thank you to the Nominators!

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