It is another gray day in central Vermont. Blink. It is another gray day in central Vermont. Blink.

What do you do with a gray day in central Vermont? How does it affect your day and your moods? January’s grayness has settled into February. There is still a noticeable lack of sun, blue sky and white snow. You may not relate color to stress. However, stress reactions to colors do occur and will affect behavior, mood and physical well-being.

Research has shown that different colors have different effects on us psychologically, emotionally and physically. Your mood may veer towards irritability, anxiety, unhappiness and depression. This can affect your immune system, making you more susceptible to colds. In addition, lower levels of vitamin D from the lack of sunlight may also affect your health. Some common behavior reactions to the grayness of the day may be to overeat or eat less, procrastinate, isolate, or increase dependency on alcohol, tobacco or drugs.

We respond to colors on a conscious and nonconscious level. They are a great tool to manipulate the way we feel. This form of addressing health issues is recorded far back in time. Today, complimentary medicine practitioners often introduce colors by working with chakras, gemstones and prisms.

Reducing Stress with Color
When you dress for the day and choose colors based on how you feel or what is ahead, you practice a bit of “colorology.” This is another name for chromotherapy. It uses color and light to balance energy wherever a person’s body is lacking, whether it’s mental, emotional, physical or spiritual. If you are feeling overly stressed, you can use color as a stress management tool. The calming effect of color can help you relax. In sidebar at right, notice the colors that have positive and relaxing qualities. See if you can recognize some of the feelings that they describe.

To use colors to relieve stress, wear them and decorate with them. You may soon find yourself feeling more relaxed and revitalized.

What To Do on Another Gray Day!
Winter is a great time for indoor projects. Now may be a great time to paint a room or a wall of a room. Changing one wall in a room will change the mood. If you are not up for a large-scale project, you can fancy a new look to your body. This may be your nails, toenails, hair color or visit your local tattoo parlor. Be mindful when choosing any color products to read ingredients for toxins. Another option is to shop at your favorite consignment store to expand the color palette of your wardrobe. Have some fun with this. Wear a variation of these colors: green hat, blue coat, violet sweater, blue jeans, pink socks, and top it off with a yellow scarf.

Sherry Rhynard is a stress-management coach, wellness consultant, biofeedback specialist and meditation teacher. She has a business called Ease of Flow in Barre and Montpelier. Contact her at 479-3223, sherry@easeofflow.com or easeofflow.com.

Colors and Our Moods
by Sherry Rhynard

RED is not one to use for stress management. It is an exciting and stimulating color, usually associated with passion and vigor. You might want to use red when you want to lift yourself out of an emotional slump.

PINK is a soft, tranquil color. Its peacefulness promotes the balance of your energies.

ORANGE like red, does not exhibit a calming effect. Instead, orange is a stimulating and intense color. It can work to invigorate you when you are feeling low.

YELLOW is softer than red or orange and is sunny and cheerful. It’s a great color to lift spirits. When you live in a positive state you are well equipped to combat stress.

GREEN is restful and quiet. It’s a soothing color that invites harmonious feelings that can diffuse anxiety.

BLUE is tranquil, peaceful and calm. This color has a tremendous stress-management quality to it, making us feel cool and sedate.

BLACK can be overpowering at times, as it exudes a feeling of power, sexiness and elegance. It can also represent submission.

VIOLLET represents strength, peace and wisdom. It can give you feelings of inner peace when you wear it. Decorating with it can give your space a peaceful feeling, relieving stress internally and externally.

WHITE is symbolic of clarity and freshness. It needs to be a clean, bright white, because once it gets dingy and dull your emotions can mirror the dullness.

How Do Colors Affect Us?

Free alpaca-sitting!

Also free housework, rides, computer help, yard work, cooking, child care . . . .

Reach Service Exchange Network is a non-profit, federally-funded program to improve Vermonters’ health and quality of life. And help them keep living in their homes, through the mutual exchange of volunteer time.

Reach Service Exchange Network

Reach members use time instead of money to get help they need. Join Reach, and for every hour you help someone, you earn an hour of help in return. Give what you can, get what you need! Reach members trade hundreds of hours of free services each month.

Join Reach! Call (802) 262-6043 or e-mail info@reachvt.org for more information!

Spring is Coming!!!

Pre-pay for your spring compost by Feb. 28 and receive a 10% discount.

Just call to order before Feb. 28!
Limit: 100 cubic yards | Delivery not included
Open Tuesday – Saturday: 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. | Delivery available
802.882.8154 | growcompost.com | 2046 U.S. Route 2, Waterbury

SALE
20-70% OFF
WINTER BLOWOUT STARTS FEBRUARY 17
The Cheshire Cat
28 Elm St., Montpelier
802-223-1951
www.cheshirecatvt.com
Wellness Camp Leads Teens to Authenticity and Healthy Expression

by Dani Bois, Katie Sereika, Jen Taylor and Jeff Mandell

“I believe that there are an infinite number of activities, practices, perspectives, and experiences that can bring wellness to everyone.” — Gabi, VIHW counselor

The sun is setting over Ninja Hill in the small town of Starksboro, the crickets are chirping their summer-time symphony and the fireflies are dancing on top of the fresh Vermont grass. Eighteen anxious students scramble from their eco-friendly cabins with flashlights and journals in hand and march down the dusty rock path to the Hay Barn for the first official meeting of camp. The students enter the barn to find a blank, white dry-erase board surrounded by an inviting circle of purple yoga mats. The staff is huddled up arm in arm, giggling on the side of the room with their matching mesh t-shirts. The students situate themselves on the mats and wait for the meeting to begin. Silent questions such as “What are we going to do here?” “Should I have brought an extra toothbrush?” “What if people don’t like me?” fill the room with a rigidity and stiffness.

Gently, staff members join the students in the circle, while one walks over to the dry-erase board and writes the question “Who do you want to be when you grow up?” This is the essence of the Vermont Institute on Health and Wellness (VIHW), a two-week camp that aims to help teenagers, from Vermont and beyond, to discover their matching mesh t-shirts. The students practice breathing exercises, go on an herb walk with a clinical herbalist and learn how to find cooking ingredients in their own backyard. They practiceKrishna yoga, Acro-Yoga and laughter yoga—and they take dance and theatrical improvisation classes. They take a workshop on effective communication and conflict resolution and meditate with a Buddhist monk. They are pushed to their physical limit by a “fit rebel,” and then they take a workshop about healthy communities and community organizing! They share their unique gifts in a group talent show and finish with a dance party.

Sound esoteric and weird? This incredibly diverse group of experiences create a fertile learning ground for the students to discover what they are truly interested and passionate about in the world. It opens the doors for the students to open their minds and hearts to create a life for themselves that aligns with their authentic passions and dreams.

“Back in the chaos of school and life, I was able to be clear with myself as to what I wanted and what was best for me. I actually made some pretty big decisions for myself and have been more conscious as to how I treat other people, my body, and myself.” Erickson writes about returning home from VIHW.

Daniel Gilbert, Harvard professor and author of Stumbling on Happiness, sums it up nicely through his observation; “Once we have an experience, we are therefore unable to see the world as we did before.” The opportunity for this kind of experience is available for students at VIHW.

Dani Bois, Katie Sereika and Jen Taylor are counselors at the Vermont Health and Wellness Institute. Jeff Mandell, of Middlesex, is its executive director.

Teen connect at the two-week summer camp run by the Vermont Institute on Health and Wellness. Photo courtesy Jeff Mandell.
Embezzlement in Vermont

by Peggy Munro

Vermont is exceptional in so many ways; we have Vermont cheddar, Vermont maple syrup and Vermont teddy bears, not to mention Green Mountain Coffee Roasters, the ski slopes, the ridge lines and the billboard-free scenery. Burlington has been rated one of the best places to live in and retire to in the nation in recent years; our statewide foreclosure rate is this country’s lowest; and our children are the healthiest. Hiding amongst our sterling achievements, though, is one that seriously tarnishes the brand: we have the dubious distinction of being among the best embezzlers in the U.S. For the third straight year, Vermont in 2011 had one of the highest loss ratios from embezzlement in the nation—apparently, practice makes perfect, and we practice a lot.

Embezzlement, a crime where the perpetrator, usually an employee or other trusted individual, steals assets, typically money, from a person or organization, is on the rise; the biggest targets are the financial industry, nonprofit and religious organizations, and cities and towns. To paraphrase the bank robber Willie Sutton, embezzlers go where the money is. This so-called victimless crime victimizes all of us, whether in higher costs for goods or services, in higher taxes to replace missing tax revenues, or in fewer services available for those most in need.

Many people will point to the lax enforcement of current laws, to the miniscule punishments meted out to offenders if and when they are caught, to the government’s inability to compel restitution to the victims. These are all valid points. But I suspect that, at least in Vermont, the answer rests more strongly on the close relationships we have with our neighbors. Neither you nor I would ever suspect the person next to us at the local church supper of skimming gravy from the top. We’ve trusted the criminal and his or her family going back generations; even when the evidence is impossible to ignore, we want, indeed need, to find excuses to explain away his guilt and our gullability.

So we ignore the signs: money being spent for which there is no apparent explanation, checks missing from checkbooks, bank and credit-card statements that we cannot reconcile, or even worse, never see. What might have begun as something minor—an invoice paid for goods not received or missing petty cash—quickly escalates. The average loss across the country from embezzlement in 2010 was slightly under $1,000,000; the median loss was $590,000. In Vermont in 2010, the seven reported embezzlement cases netted the thieves over $3,000,000 of easy money.

This is not acceptable, and it can be prevented. In almost every embezzlement situation, unequivocal trust has been given, only to be repaid with fraud. It is not enough to vet new employees, to check criminal records prior to hiring. It is not adequate to say, I’ve known her since she was a child; I’ve been friends with his family for years, and neither he nor she would ever abuse that trust.

It is possible to stop this epidemic, but everyone must participate in the solution. The legislature must craft legal consequences that reflect the severity of the crime. But more importantly, we need to stop this before it happens. No one, under any circumstances, should have unfettered access to the finances of a business or a municipality; and no one should ever be unsupervised for extended periods of time. If you are an employer, you need to install safeguards, such as multiple signatures required on checks, limiting access to online accounts, reviewing all invoices before they are paid and making certain that you, and you alone, reconcile your bank and credit card accounts each and every month. For cities and towns, the new audit rules being championed by Tom Salmon, the state auditor, should be adopted.

It’s sad that Vermont’s singular reputation for the finer things in life is tarnished by the reign of individual greed by those closest to us. Preventative mechanisms must be beefed up at the state level to prevent neighbors and communities being split apart by suspicion and anger. Sadly, and what hurts us most, is that enforcement must be compulsory and thorough—when our friends and neighbors steal. Vermonters can no longer afford to excuse, or facilitate, their behavior.

Margaret Atkins Munro, EA, is a licensed tax professional living in Essex Junction. She is the author of 529 & Other College Savings Plans for Dummies and coauthor of Taxes 2009 for Dummies and Estate & Trust Administration for Dummies (coauthored with Kathryn A. Murphy, Esq.).
**Message from City Hall**

This page was paid for by the City of Montpelier.

**More Taxes:**

by William Fraser, city manager

I remind everyone that the annual city meeting elections are on Tuesday, March 6 at City Hall. Polls will be open from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m.; early ballots are available now. You will be electing a new mayor, three city council mem-
bers, two school board members and a new city clerk. For the first time in 21 years, that clerk will not be Charlotte Hoyt, who is stepping down from her outstanding service in that position. Let’s all thank Charlotte for her many years of dedicated work.

Voters will also be acting on the city, school and recreation budgets, an $87,000 bond for infrastructure, equipment and facilities, three proposed charter changes and several ballot items for funding of specific items. I will explore the city budget in detail in the March 1 edition of *The Bridge*.

**Local Option Taxes**

Two of the proposed charter changes have to do with local consumption taxes—known as local option taxes. The proposals call for a 1 percent local tax on sales and a 1 percent local tax on meals, and alcoholic beverages. These items are already taxed by the state—6 percent for sales, 9 percent for meals and 10 percent for alcohol.

How much money will these taxes raise?

The sales tax is estimated to generate net revenue of $484,000; the rooms, meals and alcoholic tax is estimated to generate net revenue of $183,000. The two taxes combined would generate $667,000.

What does that mean with regard to property tax?

The total net revenue represents about 8 percent of the current property-tax total and translates to 8 cents on the dollar. While this will appear as an increase in current property-tax total and translates to 8 cents on the dollar. While this will appear as an increase in current property-tax total, it will result in a direct property tax reduction as people not using these programs.

Does the state take 30 percent of this money?

Yes. The numbers above, however, represent the city’s net revenue after the state withholding. The state’s 30 percent share is dedicated to the payment in lieu of taxes (PILOT) fund for municipalities with state-owned properties, of which Montpelier is the largest recipient. Over the last few years, the city has seen its PILOT revenue jump by a couple of hundred thousand dollars solely because of the local option taxes assessed in other communities around the state. The PILOT formula is somewhat complicated, but it appears that this proposal would result in a small net PILOT increase to Montpelier (approximately $5,000).

Will this add new administrative burden or paperwork for merchants?

No. The state continues to handle all the collection and administration exactly as it does now. Merchants will simply add the additional percent onto transactions and send the money to the state. The state then issues checks to the city.

Will this hurt merchants and the business community?

No. The question is: are there any new changes in commerce. Some of those communities, like Williston or Manchester, are dissimilar to Montpelier. Others, particularly Rutland, Brattleboro or Middlebury, and to a lesser extent Burlington, share the characteristic of being a smaller, central-downtown-oriented city hosting large numbers of nonresidents and facing direct local competition from malls and commercial sprawl.

The city has made significant contributions to supporting downtown merchant communities—the creation of the ongoing support of Montpelier Alive, financial and staff support for major activities like Independence Day, First Night and others, infrastructure improvements like sidewalks, crosswalks, street lighting, holidays, lighting, business and assistance in obtaining Vermont Downtown Fund grants and tax credits for both individual property owners and projects of general public benefit.

In recognition of concerns about competitive disadvantage, the city council included the provision for 20 percent dedication of funds for business promotion and development.

Is this adding taxes on Montpelier residents or nonresidents?

Any items that are now exempt from state sales taxes will also be exempt from these taxes. This includes food (not counting restaurant meals), clothing, medical drugs and many others. Automobiles and gasoline, for instance, are not subject to this tax. Sales taxes are addressed in Title 32, Chapter 233 of the Vermont Statutes. Section 9741 sols “sales not covered” in detail: leg.state.vt.us/statutes/sections/cfm/Title=32&Chapter=233.

As stated, the expected tax-rate reduction for the average residential property is $104 annually. In order to pay in more to local option taxes than was raised in property taxes, a household would need to spend $30,000 in taxable transactions within the city in a year, which equals $200 per week for 52 weeks.

Will renters and lower-income people pay a disproportionate share of the tax?

Flat sales or consumption taxes are unquestionably regressive in nature. As mentioned above, many essential items are already tax exempt to help mitigate this situation. In addition, income sensitivity and property-tax circuit-breaker programs already exist, which result in lower property taxes for people in lower income brackets. In all fairness, though, these programs exist today so yes, people benefiting from these programs will not see the same commensurate property-tax reductions as people not using these programs.

Will city just keep increasing the tax once it’s in place?

Not without future votes of the public and the legislature. The proposed charter amendment is clear and direct and limits the potential tax to “one percent.” The city could not increase the rate without going through the entire charter amendment process all over again.

Why is this being proposed now?

This is not a new concept for the city. In 1993, city voters approved a charter change authorizing a 1 percent meals and alcohol tax expected, at that time, to raise about $100,000. This amendment was, however, never approved by the legislature.

Interestingly, the city stated in the 1993 annual report, “Approval of the meals and alcohol tax is Montpelier’s chance to send a message that we can’t continue to support the services which make Montpelier the daytime home for approximately 19,000 people, on the backs of 8,000 night-time residents.”

In 2004 a charter change authorizing these taxes, this time including sales, was defeated by Montpelier voters. Since then the city council has looked at many different ways to generate alternate revenues and manage the budget.

In 1999, the city completed a survey of Montpelier residents. In that survey, 76 percent of respondents strongly agreed or somewhat agreed that “the City should consider alternate revenues” (e.g., sales tax, rooms/meals/ alcohol tax) to reduce residential property taxes and bring in more funding from nonresidents.

In 1985, residential properties represented 54 percent of the city’s grand list (total taxable valuation). After the 2010 reappraisal, residential properties now represent 66 percent of the grand list. Given the lack of new residential development during this time period, this 12 percent shift in tax burden is only explained by changes in relative value between residential and nonresidential properties. At today’s tax rate, this means $2.3 million dollars has shifted onto residents.

Haven’t there always been a lot of nonresidents in the city? What is different now?

The following chart compares Montpelier’s population with that of the combined total of Berlin, Calais, East Montpelier, Middlesex and Worcester (the so-called U-32 towns).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Montpelier</th>
<th>U-32 Towns</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>8,241</td>
<td>7,882</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>8,247</td>
<td>7,841</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>8,035</td>
<td>9,602</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>7,855</td>
<td>9,661</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The city’s population has declined by 4.7 percent (586 people), while the neighboring towns have grown by 2.4 percent. The city’s ratio (Montpelier population: U-32 Towns population) has shrunk from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m.; early ballots are available now. This means $2.3 million dollars has shifted onto residents.

The city’s population has declined by 4.7 percent (586 people), while the neighboring towns have grown by 2.4 percent. The city’s ratio (Montpelier population: U-32 Towns population) has shrunk from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m.; early ballots are available now. This means $2.3 million dollars has shifted onto residents.

If taxes are too high, why not cut the budget and lay off personnel?

The central policy question being asked—regardless of the size of the budget—is whether it makes sense to expand the sources of local revenue and to include a contribution from nonresidents who use local services to finance the budget. And if so, are these proposed taxes the best way to accomplish that goal? That’s an entirely different question from whether the budget should be increased or decreased. The local option taxes proposal is the next step to be judged on their merits and voted up or down on those terms rather than being diverted by budget arguments.

As stated earlier, I will outline budget issues in the March 1 Bridge.

The city council is holding a public hearing on these charter proposals on Wednesday, February 22, and Montpelier Alive is holding an informational forum on the proposed local option taxes on Thursday, February 23. Both of these meetings are at City Hall to review all of the available information and make an informed decision about this important proposal on March 6.

As always, thank you for your interest in Montpelier city govern-
ment. Please feel free to contact me at wfraser@montpelier-
ev.org or 223-9502 with any questions or concerns you may have. Please vote in our annual election.
The Montpelier School Page

by Brian Ricca, superintendent of schools

There can be no keener revelation of a society's soul than the way in which it treats its children.
—Nelson Mandela

With that quote, and with the mission of the Montpelier Public Schools in mind, the administrative team set off to craft the FY13 budget. We framed the concept of the FY13 budget around the values established by the Board of School Commissioners within the context of policy governance, and we attempted to answer the following question: What do we need to ensure that the mission is alive and well for each and every student in the district.

Our priorities were to maintain programs to achieve the ends, as established by the Board of School Commissioners, within reasonable class sizes, pre-K–12. We are well into the 21st century, so we continue to integrate technology into our educational system, utilizing online opportunities in classrooms that are safe for all learners. Along with facilities planning and maintenance, economic sustainability in an uncertain economic time was also a focus of our work.

We offer a comprehensive education program, pre-K–12. For a district of our size, we offer many challenging courses that make us academically competitive with our neighboring supervisory union schools. Our faculty works diligently in professional learning communities, utilizing student data to make informed decisions at grade levels regarding planning instruction and assessment. We offer cocurricular activities across the district and have an inclusive list of educational support services designed to provide the resources necessary for all students to realize the mission of the Montpelier Public Schools.

We made a number of additions to the FY13 Budget:

• A one-time increase of $19,500 for stipends for the three head custodians at each of the buildings.
• A one-time increase of 0.4 FTE for our facilities director for the district.
• $15,000 for an inquiry-based science program (UES).
• 0.4 art (MSMS).
• 0.4 family and consumer science (MSMS).
• $10,000 for common core professional development (district-wide).
• There has been an increase in heating oil and electricity costs due to the current prices.

The challenge that we face is the declining enrollment at Montpelier High School. For the first time since 2009, the high-school enrollment will be below 300 students. That is where majority of the reductions will take place:

• 2.0 instructional assistants (district-wide).
• 0.2 English-language-learner teacher (MHS).
• 0.4 English-language-learner teacher (UES).
• 0.52 science teacher (MHS).
• 0.2 social-studies teacher (MHS).
• 0.2 student-assistance-program counselor (half-day decrease at both MHS and MSMS).
• Eliminate softball (MSMS)—(No softball at MHS).
• Reduce financial contribution to girls' hockey and football—share program and costs with other schools.

We were able to calculate the following information for the purposes of tax impact on the residents of Montpelier:

• The state base education payment for FY13 is projected to be $8,723, per equalized pupil.
• Our equalized pupil count for FY13 is 975.39.
• The residential tax rate is projected to be 0.89 and 1.37 for non-residential property.
• The common level of appraisal is 99.63 percent.

The General Fund budget for FY13 is $15,724,040. That is a total budget change from FY12 of 5.31 percent. However, with offsetting revenues, the change in Act 68 expenses is only 2.74 percent. We have applied $180,000 from our fund balance to minimize the tax impact to the residents. This works out to an increase of $0.014 or approximately $14 per $100,000 house value. That is an increase of only 1.06 percent from the FY12 Budget.

We are committed to the future of this district.

We are committed to the mission being alive and well for all the high-school students when the current freshmen graduate from Montpelier High School in 2015.

We are committed to the mission being alive and well for all the middle-school students when the current sixth graders from Main Street Middle School graduate in 2018.

We are committed to the mission being alive and well for all the elementary school students, when the current kindergarteners from Union Elementary School graduate in 2025.

We are grateful for the consistent support of the Montpelier Board of School Commissioners, as well as the dedication of the faculty and staff of this district who ensure that the mission is a reality in all of our buildings.

Please look for a more detailed breakdown of our FY13 budget, along with our FY11 audit in the City of Montpelier’s annual report.

“There can be no keener revelation of a society’s soul than the way in which it treats its children.” We are planning for, and expecting excellence from, all our students. We hope that you will support us in this important work.
Tell them you saw it in The Bridge!

Creative Carpentry & Construction
Design & Build
Custom Energy-Efficient Homes
Additions - Timber Frames
Weatherization - Remodeling
Kitchens - Bathrooms - Flooring
Tiling - Cabinetry - Fine Woodwork

by Jeremy Lesniak

Most people are good people—a statement I believe to be true. Most people are terrible e-mailers—this, too, I believe to be true. For most, it’s not their fault. There was never a class on proper e-mail etiquette or respectful computer use. Thus I submit my list of rules that we should all follow.

Avoid typing in all caps. In the early days of the Internet, this was understood to be the text equivalent of shouting. While it still holds that same meaning for many, there are those that don’t know this. Please follow proper capitalization in your e-mail.

Spelling and grammar rules apply in e-mail. Just as with capitalization, spelling and grammar rules still matter in e-mail. It’s odd to me that, despite the readiness of spell-check on every computer, the spelling errors posted on the Internet are epidemic. Please take the time to check your spelling and grammar in e-mails.

Never use reply-all unless your response needs to be read by everyone. Have you ever been the recipient of a “reply-all war”? Where two people have a discussion but feel the need to hit reply-all instead of just reply? It’s frustrating and rude, so please stop. Reply-all is for just that—replying to everyone. If your response only needs to go to one person, address your e-mail to that person only. If it requires only a few, then address the e-mail to only those people.

Do not remove the quoted text in a reply. This leads to confusion when the recipient reads your e-mail. Some of us receive lots of e-mail every day, and it’s frustrating to receive an e-mail reply with two or three words. “Yes” or “That sounds good” is meaningless without context. If your e-mail program removes the quoted text when replying, learn how to change the setting.

Business e-mail should always have contact information in the signature. It is now 2012, and there’s no reason I should have to go to your website to locate your phone number. A proper business e-mail signature should have your full name, your company name, your position, email address (in case an e-mail is forwarded), and direct phone number at a minimum.

By Jeremy Lesniak

Jeremy Lesniak started Vermont Computing (vermontcomputing.com) in 2001 after graduating from Clark University and opened a store on Merchants Row in May of 2003. He lives in Duxbury.