

BBA OFFICERS

Pres: Nick Nikolaidis
VP: Bev Washburn
Sec: Heidi Nikolaidis
Treas: Carroll Ketchum

BBA NEWS

Mar. 2006

Bethel Business Association

BBA ANNUAL MEETING APRIL 5!!!

The BBA's annual meeting time is approaching. It will take place on Wednesday, April 5, at 6:00 PM at Bethel's White Church. The BBA will elect officers for the coming year, and provide a forum to discuss the Association's continuing programs to develop and revitalize the community.

A particular treat this year will be a talk by Richard J. Wobby, Jr., of the Vermont Chapter of the Associated General Contractors of America. Wobby, a popular and much-in-demand public speaker, has presented over 300 seminars since 1978, and continues to average 50 programs a year.

Wobby's topic on April 5 will be "FAMILY- A Powerful Word." Mr. Wobby believes that "family" not only includes blood family, but also working relationships, business relationships, and community relationships. He will explore how different aspects of "family" intersect and can affect the future of your "family."

The event is open to the public—to BBA members and non-members alike—and there is no charge. Bethel-Gilead's well-known violinist Spencer Lewis will provide his popular brand of mellow music, and there will be scrumptuous delicacies by master caterer Travelin' Willie B's. Come and see what the BBA is about!!

COMING EVENTS

Monday, March 27

7:30 AM

Legislative Breakfast
at the Black Forest Cafe

Wednesday, April 5

6:30 PM

Annual Meeting
at the White Church.

Thursday, April 20

6:30 PM

Regular Meeting
at Paradigm Consulting Co.

Monday April 24

7:30 AM

Legislative Breakfast
at the Black Forest Cafe

JOIN THE BBA !!!

The BBA is a non-profit, unincorporated association of professional and business people dedicated to improving the commercial, aesthetic, civic and environmental aspects of the town of Bethel. We want YOU to join the BBA. Come to our meetings and see what we are all about. You may write us at: **BBA, PO Box 342, Bethel, VT 05032,** or call the membership chairperson Geneva Gaiko at 234-9876.

BBA HOME AND GARDEN SHOW BIG SUCCESS!!!

Twenty-two vendors, ranging from purveyors of garden supplies, plants, building materials, bath and kitchen products, utensils, furniture, appliances and specialty garden foods, to local history and health organizations spent most of last Saturday, March 11, at the Bethel schools hosting an estimated 400 visitors to the BBA's first Home and Garden Show. BBA vice-president Bev Washburn, who organized the event, noted that the outcome generated such enthusiasm that the BBA may stage the event again next year.

NOTICE: BBA DUES DUE

Membership dues for April 1, 2006 through March 31, 2007 are due. Please fill out the enclosed form. Keep in touch with the town and business community.

THE BBA'S FEBRUARY LEGISLATIVE BREAKFAST

At the Bethel Business Association's legislative breakfast on Monday, February 27, Sandy Haas (legislative representative for Bethel, Rochester, Pittsfield, and Stockbridge) said she opposes the use of the state's education fund beyond its stated purpose.

Haas' statement was in context of an item on the agenda for the forthcoming Bethel town meeting that would call on Bethel's state and senate representatives to oppose any use of the fund beyond the law's initial intent to subsidize Vermont's school districts and supervisory unions. She did comment that it would not be illegal for the legislature to modify existing laws, which it could do in new legislation with the simple addition of the phrase "notwithstanding (the previous law)," but she opposes such a modification of the existing legal purpose of the educational fund.

Haas noted the rationale put forth by the state administration is that since the Department of Corrections runs a school for its detainees, the educational fund may be tapped to support it. Nevertheless, Haas said, "The Department of Corrections should take care of its school from its own budget." Some attendees at the legislative breakfast commented that the reason the educational fund is a tempting source of money is that the state has obviously overtaxed the public, and that the money should therefore be returned to the public in lower taxes.

The subject of education went on to take up much of the legislative breakfast. Jeff Barcelow noted that the cost-per-pupil basis for determining school tax in different communities was unfair to smaller communities that don't enjoy an economy of scale. He suggested a sliding formula that would adjust the cost-per-pupil in proportion to school size. Jennifer Ankner-Edelstein proposed "separating out" such fixed costs as building maintenance that remain the same regardless of school population, and which generate a high cost-per-pupil in small schools.

Haas discussed the health care bill, which she characterized as "much more modest" than last year's legislative proposal. Signing up for state insurance (to be subsidized in part from tobacco settlement money) would be strictly voluntary, and the premiums would be on a sliding scale based on income. If after 5 years, a significant percentage of Vermonters remains uncovered, then the legislature would revisit the possibility of a mandatory program. Haas noted that one of the thrusts of the health care bill is to encourage early intervention and prevention, which could be carried out relatively cheaply by non-physicians, which would reduce later, more expensive care by a physician. As an example, she pointed to prevention or delay of diabetes through lifestyle changes and early detection.

Also discussed was the so called "ancient highways" bill (which actually covers all local roads that are not on a state register). An updated version of the bill would give the towns several years to research and record their town rights-of-way for the state, and appropriate funds for the work. Haas noted that the funding provision might kill the bill because there is little money available.

NEXT BBA LEGISLATIVE BREAKFAST

The BBA's next legislative breakfast will be on Monday, March 27, from 7:30 - 9:00 AM, at the Black Forest Cafe on Main Street in Bethel. The public is invited. There is no charge for attendance, or for the delicious pastries, juice, and coffee. Come and talk to your local representatives first-hand in a relaxed atmosphere. Learn about pending legislation and, political machinations in Montpelier. There is plenty of time for questions, comment, and venting from the floor, as our representatives give ear. It is often noted that Vermont's public officials are among the most accessible in the country. Take advantage of this particular opportunity offered by the BBA!!

SCHOOL TAX WAY UP

To the surprise of many observers, the voters at Bethel's annual school district meeting approved a 2006-2007 school budget that is \$80,000 higher than the budget presented by the school board.

Originally, the proposed budget was for \$4,404,566, which is 3.1% less than last year's budget. The cuts in the budget were a direct result of voter dissatisfaction with the rising tax rate, as manifested last year when it took three district meetings to get the 2005-2006 budget approved. This year the school board slashed the budget and eliminated 6.6 positions in the Bethel schools. The reduced budget was initially computed to yield a residential tax rate of \$2.189 per \$100 of property value (versus \$2.131 last year), later corrected to \$2.177 (as the result of a last minute adjustment of Bethel's common level of appraisal).

But it was not to be. In an emotionally charged school district meeting this year, many parents complained that the cuts would have an unacceptably adverse effect on educational quality, particularly in the elementary grades. Pursuant to a motion to add \$80,000 to the budget to restore some of the elementary positions, the voters passed an expenditure of \$4,484,566 by a vote of 86-83.

The new budget will bring Bethel's cost-per-pupil to an all time high of \$12,439 (including a penalty for excess spending). It is expected to generate a residential property tax rate of \$2.26 per \$100 of valuation. The business property tax rate will not be affected, and will be around \$2.00.

TOWN TAXES KEPT LOW

At town meeting on March 7, Bethel's voters approved the new one-time eighteen-month budget of \$1,050,271 (versus \$675,016 for twelve months last year). The new budget, which is designed to put the town's budget (until now on a calendar year basis) in synch with the fiscal year school budget by mid-2007.

The budget holds the annual municipal rate at around \$0.75, the same as in 2004, and only a little higher than the \$0.73 rate of in 2005.

Related to the budget was the new tax payment schedule by which municipal and school taxes would be combined and payable in four installments on August 15, November 15, February 15, and May 15 (the last two dates being next year). During the transition period, the town will collect about two-thirds of its eighteen-month revenues in two installments this year to approximate the payments of a twelve-month budget.

As for school taxes, they will be in equal installments right off the bat, but the second half of the normal 2006 payments may now be paid in the first two installments of 2007. The new payment schedule passed easily.

Selectboard chair Neal Fox pointed to an increased allocation in highway rehabilitation from \$15,000, budgeted for the twelve months of 2005, to \$50,000 for the eighteen months of 2006 and first half of 2007, as well as an increase in the expenses for certain related materials. Fox said the selectboard wants to identify sections of Bethel's road system that require rehabilitation. "We're not just trying to see how many miles we can do," he said, "but trying to see what we can do best so it will last."



Nick and Heidi Nikolaidis with Bethel crafts at the BBA Home and Garden Show

TOWN HALL UPDATE

In late February the Bethel selectboard reviewed in detail an invitation to bid on the installation of a drain around the town hall, and two drains in the rear, to eliminate the town hall chronic moisture problem around the foundation. The drains would replace an existing curtain drain that is inadequate. The project also includes grading the surface around the building, and installing a new water access system to the building.

The cost of the foundation is not known exactly, although a grant application prepared for the town by a hired facilitator cites a \$96,500 figure. Bethel's town hall fund holds about \$70,000 (thanks to \$25,000 in this year's town budget earmarked for it), which along with grants and other donations might make it possible to begin some rehabilitation very soon.

BBA member Neal Fox, who is chair of the Bethel selectboard, stated that if at all possible he would like the town to give the business to local contractors. Accordingly, the bid is being advertised locally, and answers are expected by early April.

BBA DINNER AND 40th ARMY BAND DRAW CROWDS

The 40th Army Band appeared at Whitcomb High School, preceded by a BBA fundraising dinner in support of the BBA and the music department of the Bethel schools. As usual, the band enthralled the public with its stirring renditions of anthems and patriotic songs. Particularly meaningful was "A Greater Courage," a vocal tribute by Staff Sergeant Tom Stephens to the families who keep the home fires burning when family members go off to to serve their country. The evening ended with a moving rendition of "America the Beautiful," sung with audience participation. WHS music students played several selections with the band.



**WHS music students
Maggie Eddy, Scott Killian
served at the BBA dinner**

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