

WEST LEBANON

## ‘This isn’t about getting rich’

Child care center struggles to make ends meet

By CLARE SHANAHAN  
Valley News Staff Writer

WEST LEBANON — Last January, Twin River Children’s Center on Seminary Hill Road was on the brink of closure, and it is not out of the woods yet.

The child care center’s leaders are navigating a maze of challenges, primarily related to staffing and funding, Board Chairman Craig Babcock said at the center last week.

The nonprofit daycare opened in 1991 at the VA Medical Center in White River Junction and has been in West Lebanon since the mid-1990s. It currently serves infants and toddlers.

After losing and replacing the center’s entire staff, running things with board volunteers at the helm and working with the Lebanon-based nonprofit Early Care and Education Association, or ECEA, to navigate challenges and find some stability, the center is again facing turnover.

“You’ve just got that eerie sense in the back of your head again: We were here before and I don’t want to go backward,” Babcock said.

The nonprofit child care center is licensed for 48 children, but does not have enough staff or space to run at full capacity, Babcock said. It currently has 30 children enrolled and there were an additional 88 children, primarily infants, on the waiting list as of last week.

The center currently has seven full-time employees, which allows them to meet state-mandated student to teacher ratios with two teachers per classroom. If the center was to expand to full capacity, the number of teachers required depends on the age of the children enrolled.

The Upper Valley needs as many as 3,800 more child care slots to meet current demand, ECEA Executive Director Amy Brooks said. Of those, there are between 650 and 800 currently licensed spots that are not available due to inadequate staffing.

Even operating at a lower capacity is a challenge. With low staffing due to limited funding and a tight budget, Babcock said he has had to close the entire child care center or certain classrooms if even a single teacher calls out because it will not meet required student-teacher ratios.

Median salaries at Twin River are \$22 an hour this year compared to \$17 last year, according to Babcock. These rates are higher than the Upper Valley average of \$13 an hour for entry level child care positions, according to a survey conducted by the Early Care and Education Association and reported by Brooks.

The association provides support for

SEE CHILD CARE A4

CRIME

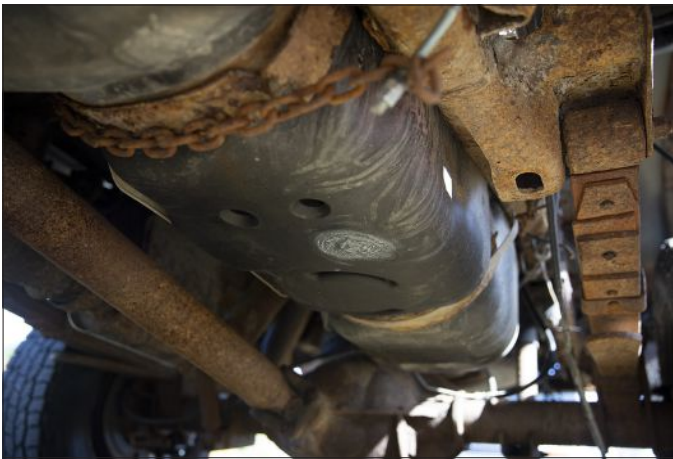
## Gas thefts on the rise



ALEX DRIEHAUS / Valley News photographs

Owner Mike Gherardi walks between rows of cars and trucks at Route 5 Auto in Bradford, Vt., last week. The odor of gasoline hit Gherardi as soon as he got out of his truck after arriving at work on Sept. 15, which he and employees traced to four vehicles that had their gas tanks vandalized. “I can’t wrap my head around it,” he said.

### Vehicles targeted in Bradford, Wells River and Wilder



By LIZ SAUCHELLI  
Valley News Staff Writer

BRADFORD, Vt. — A recent string of gasoline thefts have hit residents and businesses in the Upper Valley.

In mid-September, employees at Route 5 Auto in Bradford, Vt., discovered

A gas tank is patched with a plug and covered with epoxy after being vandalized at Route 5 Auto in Bradford, Vt.

holes had been drilled into the plastic gas tanks of four vehicles and their fuel stolen, owner Mike Gherardi said in a phone interview last week.

When employees arrived at the shop on Lower Plain the morning, of Monday, Sept. 15, “we could smell gas,” Gherardi said. At first, an employee suspected the fumes were coming from a Chevrolet El Camino that he was working on.

“After I was outside for a

SEE GAS A5

VERMONT

## 26,000 to lose Medicare Advantage coverage

Blue Cross Blue Shield also dropping all existing employer-sponsored plans

By OLIVIA GIEGER  
VtDigger

Vermont Blue Advantage will no longer offer any Medicare Advantage plans in the state for 2026.

On October 1, Blue Cross Blue Shield of Vermont announced Vermont Blue Advantage would not continue coverage for the

26,000 people in the state on its individual Medicare Advantage plans for next year. The company is also ending all existing employer-sponsored retiree plans.

Whether the company will return to Vermont’s insurance landscape in the future, “depends on whether market conditions improve, or new opportunities open that would enable Vermont Blue Advantage to offer sustainable and competitive plans,” Andrew Garland, a vice president and spokesperson for the insurer, told VtDigger.

Vermont Blue Advantage has provided

Medicare Advantage coverage for the state’s 7,000 retired teachers, but that contract was not renewed for 2026, the Office of the State Treasurer announced in September.

The shift was unplanned but necessary after Vermont Blue Advantage proposed a 50% premium increase in July, according to Treasurer Mike Pieciak.

Two other smaller employers also coordinated coverage for their retirees through Vermont Blue Advantage plans, Kaj Samsom, the

SEE COVERAGE A4

ROYALTON

## ‘We should be helping them’

Volunteers pitch in to feed seniors

By MARYELLEN APELQUIST  
White River Valley Herald

Along with food came unbridled laughter as volunteers-turned-friends in Royalton wound down the clock to a noontime meal on Tuesday for seniors.

The lunch preppers, themselves senior citizens in their 70s and 80s, hustled and bustled in the warm kitchen of Royalton

Academy — some, like chef Tony Perkins, since 5:30 a.m.

One wrested a deep bowl of hot potatoes from an old Hobart floor-standing mixer.

SEE MEALS A5

MARYELLEN APELQUIST / White River Valley Herald  
Senior center chef Tony Perkins of Randolph Center and volunteer Linda Fadden of South Royalton prep potatoes and other food on Oct. 7 in the kitchen of the Royalton Academy building.



INSIDE



SPORTS

### ANGLING FOR A REPEAT

White River Valley High School won the 20-team Vermont Principals Association bass fishing state tournament Saturday on Lake Champlain, making the Wildcats the first repeat winners in the young sport’s eight-year history. **Page B1**

WORLD & NATION

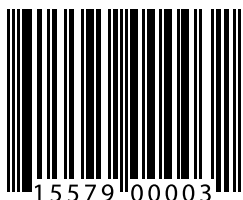
### DROUGHT DIMS FALL FOLIAGE

Leaf-peeping season has arrived in the Northeast and beyond, but weeks of drought have muted this year’s autumn colors, and sent leaves fluttering to the ground earlier than usual. **Page A8**



Classified B5 Local&Reg A2  
Close-Up B8 Obituaries A4  
Comics B7 Sports B1  
Editorial A7 World&Nation B3

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