

EDUCATION

Combating chronic absenteeism



JENNIFER HAUCK / Valley News photographs

Dana Decker, the program director for the MTSS (Multi-tiered System of Supports), a middle school program for students who have not thrived in the traditional classroom, works with students on Thursday in Royalton. The students were reading "The Most Costly Journey," a graphic novel about migrant farm workers in Vermont. Students Trenton Geno, 14, of Bethel, Vt., left, Carter Ashley, 14, of South Royalton, and Mason Barre, 14, of South Royalton, contribute to the conversation about the book.

Alternative learning program serves White River Valley schools

By NICOLA SMITH
Valley News Correspondent

SOUTH ROYALTON — On a recent weekday morning, Micah Perez Halsey and Olivia Kelley made lunch for the students at the White River Valley Supervisory Union's Waterman campus in South Royalton.

Micah, a 10th grader from Bethel, and Olivia, an 8th grader from South Royalton, are two of 15 students in grades 5 through 10 who attend the Alternative Learning pilot program at the Wa-

terman campus, off Route 107 and separate from other campuses within the district.

Dana Decker, the program director, asked Micah whether he turned on the oven, and told Olivia to cut the rolls. Olivia halved hamburger rolls for cheese steaks while Micah kept an eye on a frying pan, first sauteing onions, then breaking up a slab of hamburger and shaking in salt and pepper.

"Or should I say pepper pig," Micah joked, riffing on

SEE ABSENTEEISM A5



Xzander Mas, 11, of Sharon, plays chess with staff member Mindy McKenna, a behavioral interventionist, on Thursday. It was Mas's last day in the district's MTSS program; he was headed to the Sharon Elementary School.

IMMIGRATION ENFORCEMENT

Upper Valley activists arrested

Group aims to bring awareness issue in Vt.

By ALEX EBRAHIMI
Valley News Staff Writer

WILLISTON, Vt. — Upper Valley activists are among 13 people facing criminal trespassing charges stemming from a protest of U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement in Williston on Monday afternoon.

During the sit-in, a group of roughly 25 people gathered in the atrium of privately owned White Cap Business Park to protest a space occupied by ICE, at around 1 p.m., reading the names of 38 people who have died in ICE custody nationwide over the last year, said activist Dr. Donald Kollisch, 74, who works at the Good Neighbor Clinic in White River Junction and lives in Hanover.

They also sang protest songs such as the old union hymn "We Shall Not Be Moved" to the beating of a drum.

"Militarism and racism that run deep in our country takes many forms," Kollisch said.

Kollisch was arrested on charges of criminal trespass along with Upper Valley residents Karen Bixler, 83, of Bethel, Douglas Smith, 85, of Sharon, and Roan Wade, a 22-year old activist who had been suspended by Dartmouth last spring for orchestrating a sit-in and arrested on the campus in October 2023 for a pro-Palestine demonstration.

Laura Simon, 72, of White River Junction, and another Vermonter from Jericho were not arrested, but issued citations on charges of criminal trespass at the scene and were released.

The 11 arrested and transported to the Williston State Police Barracks were all released that day on personal recognizance,

SEE ACTIVISTS A8

NH says number of layoffs at Sturm, Ruger was 63

By LIZ SAUCHELLI
Valley News Staff Writer

NEWPORT — Sturm, Ruger & Co. laid off about 10% of the employees at its Upper Valley firearms factory last week, according to state.

The company reported 63 layoffs this month to the state Department of Labor, John Garrigan, the department's general counsel, said on

Tuesday.

Before the layoffs, Sturm, Ruger employed 655 people in Newport, Garrigan said, adding that the Southport, Conn.-based company said that it had no plans at this time for additional job cuts.

"They're not closing the location," Garrigan said in a phone interview.

Ruger produces some of its pistol

models, most of its revolvers, and some of its rifle models at the Newport facility, according to its 2024 financial disclosures.

On Monday, Sturm, Ruger spokesman Rob Werkmeister confirmed there had been layoffs across the company but had declined to say how many people the company had laid off in Newport.

The company, which also oper-

ates firearms manufacturing plants in Arizona, Kentucky, Missouri and North Carolina, had about 1,750 employees, according to a regulatory filing from last spring.

Werkmeister said Monday that the total number of layoffs across all facilities was less than 5% of the company's total employees. That would suggest the majority of the cuts were in Newport based on the

numbers from the state.

The entire firearms industry has in recent years.

In a conference call with investors in November, Sturm, Ruger & Co. CEO Todd Syfert, who took over his role last year, said the market is trending down 10 to 15%, and added that background checks were down roughly 4% to date compared to 2024.

CLOSE-UP, B1

DANCE FUNDRAISER

MC DeBelina and Ann Bosse, of Bosse DeBelina Dance, rehearse "The Duet" at Dance And Movement Center in Barre, Vt.. The dance company will perform on Saturday during Junction Dance Festival's winter fundraiser in the Briggs Opera House in White River Junction.

ALEX DRIEHAUS / Valley News



Colby-Sawyer offers full ride for nursing

Effort aims to boost workforce

By CLARE SHANAHA
Valley News Staff Writer

NEW LONDON — Colby-Sawyer College is introducing 16 full-ride scholarships for nursing students to help address a national workforce

shortage.

They will be awarded to eight "talented" students pursuing a bachelor of science in nursing degree starting in fall 2026 and eight in 2027. Students applying for 2026 must already be accepted into the program.

The scholarships will

SEE NURSING A3

INSIDE



SPORTS

ON THE TRAILS

Winter brings on damage from erosion and other water-related issues as the season of repairs nears. Page B3



WORLD & NATION

CLASH AT THE CAPITOL

Attorney General Pam Bondi stands as a defender of President Trump against Democrats probing the Epstein files. Page A8



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