

## BUSINESS

# 'I'm really sad about it'



JAMES M. PATTERSON / Valley News photographs

Royal Auto Parts owner David Whitney gets a hug from Sandra Hoyt, of Tunbridge, after helping carry her purchases to her vehicle on the store's last day in South Royalton on Thursday.

## South Royalton auto parts store forced to close

By ALEX HANSON  
Staff writer

**SOUTH ROYALTON** — When Royal Auto Parts opened in 1983, David Whitney wasn't planning to be involved in its day-to-day operations.

He'd been working as a mechanic at what was then called the Corner Mobil and is now the Corner Stop Mini Mart, a gas station and convenience store. His boss, James Blakeman, asked Whitney if he wanted to be a

**Kyle Blakeman, owner of Blakeman's Towing and Recovery, and his daughter Brinlee, 5, center, wait with other customers as Eunice Gavin, front left, and David Whitney, front right, fill orders at Royal Auto Parts.**

partner in a new auto parts store.

At the time, the nearest parts store was in Bethel, and there were plenty of independent mechanics, farmers and

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## ENFIELD

# 'Something you want to touch'

New fabric shop aims to fill void left by JoAnn's closing

By LIZ SAUCHELLI  
Calendar Editor/Staff Writer

**ENFIELD** — Becca Finnegan had spent years thinking about opening a fabric shop, but it wasn't until JoAnn Fabrics announced it was closing last winter that she really put her long-held dream into motion.

Finnegan, now 48, was working at JoAnn's West Lebanon location when the national chain announced in winter 2025 that it was declaring bankruptcy and closing locations around the country. Finnegan was at the West Lebanon shop until the day it closed on April 22, 2025.

"If JoAnn's wasn't going to close, I don't think I would have had the courage to say, 'I'm going to open my own fabric store,'" Finnegan said in an interview from Common Threads, her new shop at 78 Main St. in downtown

Enfield, which had a soft opening scheduled this weekend.

"I felt a deep loss for the community," Finnegan, of Lebanon, said of JoAnn's closing. Frequent JoAnn's customers expressed a similar sentiment to the Valley News at the time and took to social media expressing their disappointment.

Finnegan started working at JoAnn's in November 2023 after she got back into sewing during the early years of the COVID-19 pandemic when her daughter, now 16, decided she wanted to

learn.

She was inspired to apply for the JoAnn's job by the help she received from employees.

"It opened me up to this whole other community," Finnegan said about the conversations she'd have with customers about the quilts and Halloween costumes they were planning to make.

The customers' delight in their creations was something she shared. As a teenager and young adult, Finnegan, who grew up in

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## A LOOK BACK

# Riding the waves

How Vermont Public became the state's largest news organization

By STEVE TAYLOR  
Contributor

Who would listen other than "cows and chipmunks?" asked a skeptical official up from Washington to talk about grant money to help get a public radio

network going in Vermont half a century ago. He was told he just didn't know Vermonters.

The meeting was in Brownsville, and a tiny group of advocates was hopeful that they could raise enough in local contributions to qualify for a grant of \$82,000 from the Corporation for Public Broadcasting plus a one-shot award from the Department of Health, Education and Welfare to buy equipment.

Initially, the network was to consist of two transmitters that had the potential to reach all of Vermont, adjacent areas of New Hampshire and New York and into southern Quebec. One would be on Mount Mansfield and the other on Mount Ascutney in Windsor. It would be the Windsor station that would eventually be, after months of

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TOM WOLFE / Valley News file

Sen. Patrick Leahy, D-Vt., and Vermont Public Radio host Marianne Blake open up the portion of a 60-minute program to listeners in Windsor in February 1982.

## INSIDE



## SPORTS

### HOME BODIES

Photos: Although Friday's result against West Rutland wasn't what they would have wanted, the members of the White River Valley softball team are in the midst of an ongoing six-game homestand. **Page B1**

## WORLD & NATION

### THE TRUTH IS OUT THERE — PERHAPS

Donald Trump says the Pentagon is preparing to release some "very interesting" UFO files uncovered by his administration, generating a mix of buzz and skepticism. **Page B3**



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