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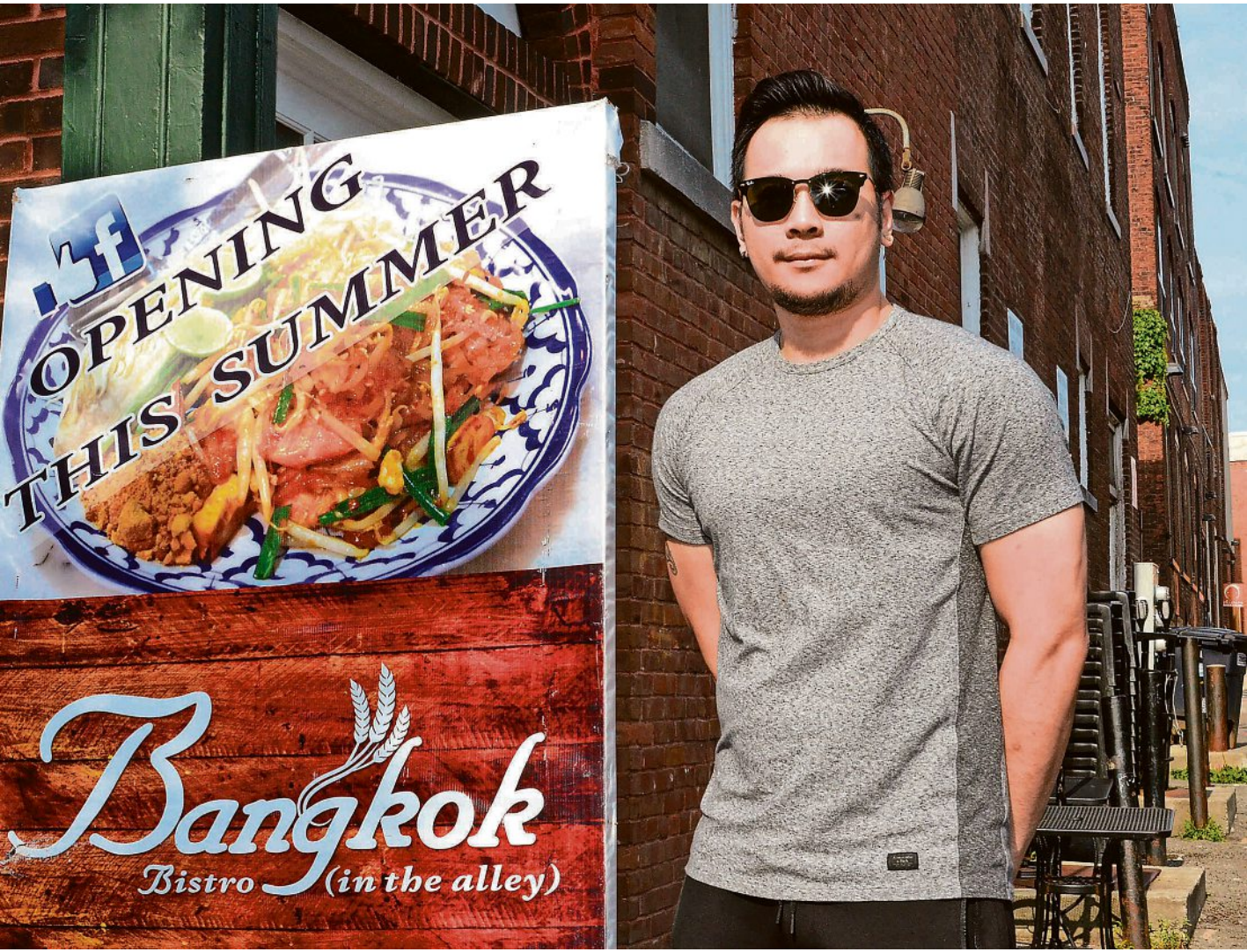
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# Burlington Free Press

WEEKEND

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Bobby Chompupong stands in 2017 by the sign on the Church Street Marketplace in Burlington that points the way to the Thai restaurant, Bangkok Bistro, he opened that year. AKI SOGA/FREE PRESS

## Thai restaurant closes after eight-year run

**Brent Hallenbeck**  
Burlington Free Press  
USA TODAY NETWORK

The BKK in the Alley restaurant shut down this fall after eight-year run, closing the chapter on a family legacy downtown.

“BKK in the Alley as a brand and a business is closed permanently,” co-owner Bobby Chompupong said of the restaurant off Church Street Marketplace that began in 2017 as Bangkok Bistro. “That is due to the climate of Burlington and how hard it’s been for restaurants up and down Church Street, all over Burlington, to stay alive at this point.”

Chompupong told the Burlington

**“The restaurant took a lot out of me mentally, physically. At the end of it, I had nothing left. It got harder and harder. It hurt to let the legacy go.”**

**Bobby Chompupong**  
Restaurant co-owner

Free Press that public-safety issues were the main factors affecting business. Many shop owners in Burlington have cited public drug use and homelessness as contributing to downtown’s

woes. The ongoing street reconstruction — the other common complaint of business owners lately — played a lesser role in the end of BKK in the Alley.

“It’s difficult times right now. We at BKK have been trying really, really hard to keep the business going and push forward, and we have a really deep, deep bond with our employees,” Chompupong said.

He said he tried to make sure his employees could keep working and be taken care of, but meanwhile he was suffering. The rising cost of goods added to the problems.

“It got to the point where it was like,

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## Shutdown threatened U.S. leafy greens

Harvest went on as AZ officials pushed to clear way for foreign workers

**Stephanie Murray**  
Arizona Republic  
USA TODAY NETWORK

PHOENIX – The federal government shutdown nearly derailed this fall’s produce harvest in Arizona’s Yuma County, which is responsible for almost all the leafy greens on American and Canadian grocery store shelves in the winter.

However, thanks to a behind-the-scenes scramble to reopen agriculture work visa processing during the closure, Yuma County’s vegetable harvest got back on track even before Senate lawmakers struck a deal to reopen the government.

Arizona officials say they worked with the Trump administration to clear the way for temporary workers to enter the United States and work on Yuma County farms in November.

The episode underscored how the government shutdown strained some key industries. It also highlighted how reliant the nation’s produce supply is on foreign workers, even as President Donald Trump continues his crackdown on immigration.

“All of your leafy greens. Every leafy vegetable that is in the store from October to April comes from Yuma, Arizona,” said Yuma County Supervisor Jonathan Lines. “Not being able to deliver food, it would have been kind of scary.”

Yuma is known as the winter salad bowl of America because of its optimal growing conditions for vegetables such as lettuce, spinach, broccoli and cauliflower. Its agriculture industry generates around \$4.4 billion in state economic activity each year, according to a University of Arizona study released in February.

More and more, produce shippers rely on foreign workers to do the skilled labor of harvesting those crops. Those workers, who often come from Mexico, enter the United States on temporary

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## South Burlington volunteer honored for helping taxpayers

**Beth McDermott**  
AI-assisted reporter  
Burlington Free Press  
USA TODAY NETWORK

AARP Foundation volunteer Philip Soltau of South Burlington has been named the 2025 winner of the AARP Andrus Award for Community Service in Vermont.

Soltau has been a dedicated tax-aide volunteer in Vermont for nearly 10 years, playing a key role in helping Vermont taxpayers claim all the credits and deductions they qualify for, according to a community announcement.

As the district coordinator for Chittenden County and the assistant state coordinator for the AARP Foundation tax help program in Vermont, Soltau has

been a leader not only in promoting the program but also in making sure his team is prepared and eager to provide free tax-filing assistance to those who need it most, with sessions held in senior centers, libraries and assisted living facilities, the foundation said.

In 2025, the Chittenden County team of 57 volunteers, under Soltau’s leadership, helped generate \$1.3 million in federal and state refunds by preparing 1,859 tax returns, according to the foundation. He has experience as an insurance trainer and field training specialist at Horace Mann, which helped his efforts, the announcement said.

“We are incredibly proud to honor Phil Soltau with the 2025 Andrus Award for Community Service,” AARP Vermont State Director Greg Marchildon said.

“Phil’s dedication to helping the most vulnerable among us truly embodies the spirit of service that Dr. Andrus envisioned.”

The award is named for AARP founder Dr. Ethel Percy Andrus, an educator and tireless advocate of community service and volunteerism who coined the motto, “to serve, not to be served,” which remains part of the AARP credo to this day.

The Andrus Award is AARP’s highest honor and is presented annually to a volunteer who has made a powerful difference in their community.

This story was created by reporter Beth McDermott, [bmcdermottl@gannett.com](mailto:bmcdermottl@gannett.com), with the assistance of Artificial Intelligence (AI). Journalists were involved in every step of the information



Phil Soltau has been a dedicated tax-aide volunteer in Vermont for nearly 10 years, playing a key role in helping Vermont taxpayers. PROVIDED BY AARP VERMONT

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