

COMMUNITY NEWS SERVICE



Local reporting from the University of Vermont



2024 Review

80 students
published

371 pieces of
journalism

832 pickups

Student Journalism by the Numbers → → → →

Our program engaged more students and produced more pieces

UVM Programs

64 students working
for CNS published
340 article, audio
and photo pieces

News outlets ran
their work 805 times



Collabs with Other Campuses

16 students from
Castleton University,
St. Michael's College
and the
Underground
Workshop high
school program did
31 stories

Outlets ran those 27
times



Deep reporting from
public records
requests

Statewide Election
Day reporting at
polling places

Town Meeting Day
coverage across the
state

City Council
coverage in
Winooski

Weekly reports on
the legislative
session

Narrative profiles of
artists, athletes and
more

Environmental
reporting on water,
critters and farms

Public-service
stories at the local
level

vtcommunitynews.org

Richard Watts, CCN director and founder
Meg Little Reilly, CCN managing director
Justin Trombly, editor
Carolyn Shapiro, spring print instructor
Levi Krupp, spring audio instructor
Scott Finn, fall print instructor
Nathaniel Borrok-Hoffman,
spring webmaster
Nate Steltz, fall webmaster
Matt Dومان, social media
manager
Greta Solsaa, spring
administrative coordinator

Busy Anderson, fall communications intern
Steven Berbeco, Winooski News publisher
Lily Doton, spring southern bureau editor
Dom Minadeo, spring deputy editor
Siobhan Neela-Stock, spring Winooski News editor
Jim Welch, editor at large

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6, 2025. Front photos by Andy Duback.



Charlotte recently won a competitive scholarship from the New England Newspaper & Press Association for student journalists.

Community News Service helps students learn journalism firsthand by producing stories for professional outlets around Vermont. Interns work on assignment from news partners or on one of several specialized beats for CNS, such as legislative coverage or environmental reporting.

They learn how to interview, research, fact-check and write in a way that prizes accuracy, brevity and clarity. The end goal: to engage, inform and connect with Vermonters and help local news while honing how students communicate.



Smugglers' Notch Resort hit with fines for safety violations after 3-year-old's drowning in water tank; state says cover was unsecured

Run by local and statewide outlets alike, such as VTDigger, the Waterbury Roundabout, Vermont Public, ABC 22 and the Williston Observer

Senior **Charlotte Oliver**, a global studies major, wanted to be a journalist and found a way to jumpstart her ambitions with CNS.

She immediately showed the talent and drive for impact reporting. And after a fall 2023 semester learning to navigate public records requests and be fearless in front of powerful people, Charlotte published a major investigative piece in January. She looked at the drowning death of a toddler at Smugglers' Notch Resort and revealed new details about a tragedy that had gone unexamined.

She worked through deep public records requests and did hard interviews to hold one of the state's major commercial players accountable.



Jordan Barbour '24, a public communications major, was recruited for CNS' advanced reporting cohort this spring after a strong performance in our foundational class. She excelled as an arts and culture reporter with range. Her best piece saw her spend several sessions with a puppeteer preparing for a performance in Montpelier, deep reporting that allowed her to write one of the program's best narrative-style stories in the last few years.

After graduation, she was hired as a multimedia journalist for the local ABC22 news station.

Meet Stoph Scheer, the puppeteer behind Lost Nation Theater's new one-person play

Run by statewide outlet VTDigger and the regional White River Valley Herald paper

Students, Stories

Flood Resilience in the NEK

Senior **Lucia McCallum**, an English major, joined CNS in the spring of 2024 with a curious mind and a first-day interest in getting clips.

With the stories she put together across that semester, she drew the interest of the Hardwick Gazette, a 135-year-old weekly newspaper turning a new leaf as a digital nonprofit. The Gazette covers 10 towns in and around the Northeast Kingdom, including Lucia's hometown, Cabot.

The Gazette chose Lucia for a internship funded through the Leahy Institute for Rural Partnerships, and CNS collaborated with the paper to provide editing on eight of her 10 summer stories.

Lucia grew rapidly as a writer over the summer and provided key, insightful coverage to flood-wracked towns.



NEK homeowners and recovery group rebuild

Gov. Scott praises recovery, then floods hit again

Cabot community celebrates flood resilience amid receding waters

Flood mitigation solutions sought by Cabot task force



NEK Homeowners and Recovery Group Rebuild

by Lucia McCallum

SOUTH WALDEN – Lydia Race remembers the creeping feeling of defeat as she watched rain overpower the newly built culverts in her driveway the night of July 10.

“You gotta be kidding me,” was all she could think to herself.

Water ran “like a faucet” back into her garage, flooding her basement for the third time in a year.

Just three weeks before, volunteers from the United Methodist Committee on Relief had finished putting in drainage around her house in South Walden. She said the rain July 10 and over the following days made all their work virtually obsolete.

The next day, July 11, a volunteer with the church committee told her to call 211 and

See **REBUILD, 5**




photo by Lucia McCallum

Lydia Race stands in front of her South Walden home on Tuesday, July 9, as three days of rain began that flooded her basement for the third time.

Depth and Digging

Lauryn Katz '24, an environmental studies and Italian major, returned to CNS this past spring after a semester abroad with a goal of progressing to more advanced storytelling and reporting. She did so by trekking out to a state office and sifting for hours through eight years of records to shed light on rises in search and rescue cases. Her reporting not only revealed the trend — a 41% increase in cases from 2015 to 2023 — but described fears among authorities that more people are heading outdoors unprepared.



Vermont search and rescues are rising — and first responders fear more people are headed out unprepared

Published in VTDigger, ABC22, Vermont Public, the Barre-Montpelier Times Argus, the Rutland Herald, the Waterbury Roundabout, The Charlotte News, the White River Valley Herald and the Citizen.

Junior **Oliver Stavri**, a geography major working for the Waterbury Roundabout, turned in a perfectly tuned story about Vermonters missing timely deliveries on medications and important documents due to Postal Service staff shortages.

Lingering since the pandemic, postal woes show gradual improvement



Kids pitch bear's head tooth as Vermont's state mushroom

Bill cuts red tape around sunscreen in schools to start habit young

Biz on the hook for fixing PCBs in schools — but if they can't pay, Vermont has to pick up the tab



Senior English major **Holly Sullivan** broke out this year as one of CNS' three legislative reporters. Holly wrote 15 stories across the spring semester — proving herself a natural despite limited prior experience. Holly's work was run in at least 10 outlets across Vermont. Three of her best clips, above, focused on children and schools — which makes sense, given she's an afterschool staffer for elementary kids.

From small-town Vermont to Taylor Swift and 'Barbie,' two brothers stay busy in creative careers



Writing for the White River Valley Herald, public communications major **Rebecca Olshan '24** published a high-level narrative feature profiling a pair of brothers who went from performing in rural Vermont to working on some of the biggest pop culture productions in recent years. Rebecca deployed several advanced storytelling techniques few students have the confidence to try: jumps in narrative time, parallel perspectives.

Sports Writing

2024 saw us continue to expand our sports writing offerings for partners and readers.

Our students primarily craft sports features. Senior **Noah Diedrich**, an English and history major, penned an excellent profile of the Vermont Fencing Alliance on assignment for The Charlotte News, a story other outlets ran as well. Working for the Other Paper in South Burlington, junior English major **Wyatt Obering**, spent time with Wolfpack Wrestling Club, a nonprofit trying to bring the sport to youth around Chittenden County and the state.

Writing for CNS' statewide distribution, seniors **Jacob Miller-Arsenault** and **Will Thorn**, both English majors, produced two exceptional narrative profiles of Vermont athletes this spring. Jacob chronicled the career of the youngest son of Vermont's most notable basketball family and his induction into a hall of fame. At a time of unprecedented interest in women's basketball, Will gave us a portrait of the best girls hoops player in Vermont — who has also pitched for the national women's baseball team.

Jacob's profile ran in VTDigger, the Other Paper and the Shelburne News; Will's was picked up by The Charlotte News, the Citizen, the Shelburne News and the Williston Observer.



In Charlotte, fencers find their Yoda in Viveka Fox

Wolfpack Wrestling welcomes South Burlington to the mats

In following father and brothers, Bernie Cieplicki Jr. caps family hoops history with hall of fame entry

On the court or on the mound, Vermont Miss Basketball Elise Berger does it all

6 • May 30, 2024 • The Charlotte News

Viveka Fox helps

Noah Diedrich
Community News Service

The two opponents faced each other on the strip inside the Charlotte Central School gym, glinting blades held upright in front of their stone-still bodies.

Suddenly the fencers advanced, and the duel began.

Lunge. Parry. Riposte. Retreat. Silver blurs whipped past masked faces. The clash of their thin blades rang through the air. Amid the fray, one fighter guided her blade under her opponent's arm and struck his gray vest just below the pit. An electronic tone sounded, and the bout was over as quickly as it began. The fencers pulled off their helmets and exchanged a high-five.

Viveka Fox, 61, had been standing off to the side, watching closely. For nearly 30 years, the head coach of the Vermont Fencing Alliance has held practice here in Charlotte, teaching the sport to both hobbyists and competitors.

As an organized sport, fencing often requires pricey equipment and private lessons and attracts a fiercely competitive crowd. Like all sports, it also carries a history of sexism at the highest levels of competition. But Fox has ferreted out a way to remove these barriers to Vermont. Since 1992, she has taught fencing to students regardless of their age, gender, talent or financial ability. It costs \$65 for five classes, but Fox said the group makes exceptions.

For her, fencing seems so much more than competition: It teaches focus, quick decision-making and the importance of knowing one's opponent.

"I think our culture puts a lot of premium on being a star, and 'Who are the best of the best?' she said. "But everyone is intrinsically an

SPORTS



Ryan Bailey, left, weathers a leg grapple from coach Jack Caney at Wolfpack Wrestling Club in South Burlington. PHOTO BY CATHERINE MORRISSEY

Wolfpack Wrestling welcomes South Burlington to the mats

WYATT OBERING
COMMUNITY NEWS SERVICE

First came the sound of shoes slapping against mats, then the smack of sweaty skin the half-dozen training wrestlers, a white-board reads: "No one is born a champion. You must earn the title."

Husband and wife Zach and Julie regularly attend practices with their sons Isaac and Andrew.

Some seasoned wrestlers are looking to take advantage of available mat time.

The club aims to organize monthly competitions with other clubs or teams and to make wrestling more available for people across the state, regardless of financial status. Equipment costs for wrestling tend to be lower compared to other sports, but having access to training and regular



The photos you see on this page were all shot by senior **Catherine Morrissey**, a film and television studies major, who took assignments for a variety of local outlets.

Outdoors and the environment



The future of fertilizer? Pee, says this Brattleboro institute

Carving canoe with fire, Vermont Abenaki tribes find reflection along the Missisquoi



Junior **Wyatt Obering**, who spent the fall working for the Winooski News, devoted significant time on two profiles of public servants in the city. For the first, Wyatt wrote about the late longtime director of Winooski Senior Center, a city employee for nearly 40 years. For the second, he profiled officer Saja Almogalli, an Iraqi refugee taking on the job as the Winooski School District's new cop.

Ekaterina Raikhovski, a senior political science major also reporting for the Winooski News, landed one of the fall's highest-profile stories: a sitdown with Lt. Gov.-elect John Rodgers, whose upset victory provided plenty to talk about. Katya built contacts within Republican and independent spheres that helped her bring home a big piece for the small outlet.

Sophomore English major **Myla van Lynde**, interning for the White River Valley Herald, capped her fall with a striking profile of Richard Skarrow, a volunteer for Meals on Wheels around Randolph. Shadowing Skarrow on his delivery route, Myla turned in a humane portrait of local bonds.

Junior English major **Kate Kampner**, pictured to the left out in the field, served as the program's primary environmental reporter for all of 2024, producing more than a dozen pieces over the year. Her pieces — often trend stories or profiles — consistently proved among the most widely republished by state media. She's written about flood-induced contamination, the impacts of wildfires, regenerative agriculture at vineyards, pollinators, birdwatching and fish restoration, among other topics. Kate's memorable piece about urine as fertilizer was picked up by 16 outlets in Vermont and across New England.

Sophomore philosophy major **Natalie Bankmann** moved from our foundational section in the spring to our advanced team in the fall, where she marked herself as a talented storyteller. Her best work saw her travel to Swanton to spend time in a delta watching state tribe members carve a canoe with fire.

Impactful interviews



Kept from school as a girl, new district officer wants Winooski students to feel safe

John Rodgers on his political rebound, switching parties and priorities

Riding along with Meals on Wheels