FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Dear Friends,

With this newsletter, we’re announcing some refreshing changes, sharing some hearty welcomes, and offering one big farewell.

There’s no denying that many Vermonters have seen difficult times over the last two years. Our state’s cultural nonprofits have certainly been through a lot, and we’ve done our best to help these crucial community partners. Working with the Vermont Arts Council, we’ve distributed almost $3 million in critical support for cultural organizations.

We’ve also taken a step back from business-as-usual to examine the effectiveness of our own work and make some changes. We’ve improved the accessibility of our programs by offering virtual and hybrid events. We’ve reimagined Vermont Reads with much stronger, interdisciplinary community partnerships. We’ve refashioned our suite of early literacy programs with a new focus on equity and justice. And we’ve launched a new website that’s more accessible, easier to navigate, and more reflective of our vision for Vermont Humanities. You’ll learn about all of this and more in the following pages.

As we’ve reflected on where we’ve been and where we want to go, we’ve also thought deeply about what the humanities mean to us in 21st century Vermont. We know that the humanities are much more than a series of academic disciplines. Over the last five years, we’ve been working with our friends at Abundant Sun, experts in using an equity lens in community development, to write our strategic plan for the next five years. You’ll learn more about that work this summer, and we’re excited to reimagine the role of the humanities with you.

We will recognize that we aren’t always the ones with the answers, and that we have long-term connections in our communities and form a broader spectrum of partners. We will aim to integrate the humanities into the educational, civic, and economic life of our state. We commit to eliminating barriers to access. We’ll work to address historic gaps in power between groups and amplify voices of under-represented voices. We’ll strengthen long-term connections in our communities and form a broader spectrum of partners. We will recognize that we aren’t always the ones with the answers, and that we have much to learn from every Vermonter. We’ll create spaces for complex—and sometimes difficult—conversations about the human experience. We’ll support joy.

You’ll see these concepts reflected throughout this newsletter, but also in our day-to-day work. We do hope you’ll join us as we strive to live up to our aspirations.

Yours,

Christopher Kaufman Istrop
Executive Director

Vermont Humanities Debuts New, More Accessible Look

This spring we are re-imagining our organization’s visual identity while improving accessibility for all Vermonters. With this newsletter, we’re excited to debut a fresh color scheme, a revamped design, and a new Vermont Humanities logo. And if you’ve visited vermonthumanities.org recently, you’ve probably noticed major changes to our digital presence as well.

With support from the Vermont Department of Libraries and the A.D. Henderson Foundation, we’ve been working for almost a year with Place Creative Company (Place) of Burlington to reboot our communications strategy. Place has a strong track record working with many Vermont non-profits, and brings a particular expertise in creating fully accessible websites.

The partnership with Place strengthened our own storytelling skills and helped us identify new ways for Vermont Humanities to talk about all of our work, not just signature programs like First Wednesdays and Vermont Reads. Based on these insights, Place designed a suite of tools to guide our future communications and gave us a fresh, contemporary look.

Developing the revised vermonthumanities.org was the most labor-intensive portion of the project. Place helped us reorganize the site to highlight accessible digital content—such as videos and podcast episodes—and to raise the profile of our early literacy offerings and our increasingly important role in funding public humanities work across Vermont. The reorganized website aims to make it easier for visitors to book programs such as Speakers Bureau talks, learn about upcoming events, and apply for grants.

One of the most important lessons of the ongoing pandemic revolved around how to make our work more accessible to Vermonters with disabilities and/or limited time or resources to attend in-person events. The new website was built to Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG 2.1), which define how to make web content more accessible to all people, including those with visual, auditory, physical, speech, cognitive, language, learning, and neurological disabilities. Before the new site was launched in March, we tested the functionality of the site using many software packages and tested it using screen-reader software that’s often used by people with visual disabilities to navigate websites.

Please let us know what you think of our new look and feel—but most importantly, whether our storytelling now helps you better understand the depth and breadth of our work to help individuals and communities engage with the humanities across Vermont.

THANK YOU!

We’d like to thank our long-time colleague, Mason Singer of Laughing Bear Design in Montpelier, who did an outstanding job designing our newsletters, Annual Reports, postcards, Fall Conference brochures, and other print materials over the years.
Vermont Reads 2022 Showcases Migrant Worker Stories

When many people imagine Vermont, they picture cows, such as the black-and-white Holsteins on Ben & Jerry’s ice cream containers. But much of the work on Vermont dairy farms is now done by people from Latin America. Over a thousand migrant laborers from Mexico and other countries milk cows, fix tractors, shovel manure, and take care of calves in our state.

Our Vermont Reads 2022 choice, The Most Costly Journey (El Viaje Más Caro), tells the stories of 19 of these workers in their own words. Illustrated by New England cartoonists in a variety of styles, each short chapter describes aspects of life as an immigrant farm worker in Vermont: crossing the southern border, struggling with English, adapting to winter, growing gardens, raising children, dealing with health crises, and working long hours.

The book had its genesis at The Open Door Clinic in Middlebury, a free health clinic that serves people who do not have health insurance, and those who are underinsured. About half of the clinic’s patients are agricultural immigrant workers.

Many of these workers stay close to the farms where they work out of fear of deportation, lack of transportation, or many of these workers stay close to the farms where they work. The clinic serves as a central place for these workers to get support, including medical exams, health crises, and working long hours.

She chose cartooning as the medium for the pamphlets, as comics are common in Latin America and can be enjoyed by people of all ages and literacy levels.

To make the comics, Julia, other clinic staff and volunteers, and faculty and staff from the UVM Department of Anthropology and UVM Extension’s Bridges to Health Program collected stories from migrant workers. The Vermont Folklife Center helped connect cartoonists— including Tillie Walden, Glynis Fawkes, and Marek Bennett—to the workers’ stories to create a series of black-and-white Spanish-language pamphlets.

While the project’s original goal was to mitigate isolation and loneliness in Vermont’s migrant worker population, “I found that the storytellers themselves seemed to get the best effect,” said Julia. “Some of them had never shared their story before.”

Grants from the UVM Humanities Center and the Vermont Community Foundation funded a series of English translations of the pamphlets. A Kickstarter campaign helped raise the capital needed to print the English-language The Most Costly Journey, which includes a foreword by Vermont novelist Julia Alvarez.

“Well, the project has had the biggest impact—which was not something I had even considered—was in the English-speaking community,” said Julia Doucet, noting that Vermonters who hadn’t known about migrant workers in their communities expressed compassion for them after reading their stories.

To support Vermont Reads 2022 we’ll host a series of monthly public events starting in July, featuring in-person and online discussions and presentations around the book’s themes, including up to a dozen events for our new Fall Festival in October and regular First Wednesdays lectures on these topics throughout our 2022-2023 season.

Vermont Reads 2022 projects can begin as early as July 1 and must conclude by June 30, 2023. Visit vtreads.org to learn more about the book, view a list of upcoming events related to the book’s themes, apply to host a Vermont Reads program, and discover ways to support Vermont’s migrant farm worker community.

Illustration by Glynis Fawkes, courtesy of Open Door Clinic.
Poets Return to Vermont State Parks through Words in the Woods

The past two summers, five of our six Words in the Woods events took place online in the form of pre-recorded videos. This year, we look forward to joining four Vermont poets in-person at different Vermont State Parks. Some of the events will be recorded for viewing online for those who aren’t able to make it out to the parks.

We encourage you to register in advance at vermonthumanities.org/words-in-the-woods to attend these in-person programs. Families camping at or otherwise visiting the parks will be able to join the presentations without advance registration. Three of the events will be held at accessible facilities, such as a park pavilion located on a paved path.

BRYAN BLANCHETTE
Saturday, June 11,
6:00 pm
Elmore State Park, Elmore
Accessible event

Bryan Blanchette is a singer-songwriter who brings more than ten thousand years of Abenaki tradition to his contemporary compositions. He began powwow drumming more than two decades ago and soon after began writing Abenaki language songs. Bryan also studied at the Berklee College of Music in Boston. Photo credit: Vermont Abenaki Artists Association

CAROL POTTER
Saturday, August 20,
10:00 am
Wilgus State Park, Westminster
Accessible event


TOUSSAINT ST. NEGRITUDE
Saturday, July 9,
10:00 am
Boulder Beach State Park, Groton
Accessible event

Toussaint St. Negritude describes himself as “Black, queer, artist, mountaineer, devout congregant of the wilderness.” He frequently intersperses his words with compositions on his bass clarinet. His work has been published in journals such as The Michigan Quarterly Review, The Savannah Literary Journal, and The San Francisco Bay Guardian. Photo credit: Toussaint St. Negritude

KEISELIM (KEYSI) MONTÁS
Saturday, September 10,
10:00 am
Lake Shaftsbury State Park, Shaftsbury

Keysi Montá is born in the Dominican Republic and migrated to New York at the age of 16. He has published five poetry books, two collections of short stories, and two collections of essays.

Words in the Woods is a collaboration between Vermont Humanities, Vermont State Parks, and the Vermont Arts Council, and it’s made possible by a gift from a Northeast Kingdom donor in honor of Vermont poet Judith Chalmer.

Center for the Book Rejoins Vermont Humanities

After two years of planning and a year of pilot programming, The Vermont Center for the Book (aka the Mother Goose Programs) is once again officially part of Vermont Humanities. The Vermont Center for the Book had been established as the Vermont Reading Project in 1985 and became the Vermont Center for the Book in 1994, originally working under the auspices of the Vermont Humanities Council before ultimately establishing themselves as an independent organization that operated for over 25 years.

We are delighted to again join forces to bring vital early literacy programs to Vermont teachers and children. As an affiliate of the Center for the Book in the Library of Congress, we will work within a network of 50 state-center affiliates to promote books, reading, literacy, and libraries locally, regionally, and nationally.

Wendy Martin, former director of the Vermont Center for the Book, has joined Vermont Humanities as Early Literacy Associate, teaming with Literacy Programs Manager Jonny Flood and Early Literacy Associate Leanne Porter.

In addition to new and improved versions of traditional Vermont Humanities literacy programs, we have adapted and modified the Center for the Book’s high-quality trainings for local libraries under the banner of the Vermont Early Literacy Initiative (VELI).

VELI was started in 2010 by the Vermont Department of Libraries and the Vermont Center for the Book. Beginning in January, Jonny Flood and Wendy Martin now meet every other week with 11 libraries around the state (Bennington, Lyndonville, Enosburg Falls, Hyde Park, Bradford, Randolph, Castleton, Barre, Bells Falls, Colchester, and Bristowe, representing diverse geography, size, audience, and experience but focusing on communities that often have limited access to high-quality professional development.

Each library is creating community programs that will best meet the needs of their local area, specifically with an eye toward populations that do not typically use the library. They will co-develop booklists on topics important to their community, and Vermont Humanities will provide books from those lists to add to their collections.

Library projects discussed at these initial meetings include creating take-home bags of books and other supplies for families, working with a translator to translate children’s books into Dari for five Afghan refugee families with young children, and a summer camp for middle schoolers from Orwell to help prepare them for a move to a larger school.

We are grateful to the Vermont Department of Libraries and the A.D. Henderson Foundation for providing the funding for this merger. Both of these funders and others are continuing to offer support for the Vermont Early Literacy Initiative to help us build in the principals of diversity, access, inclusion, equity, and justice across all of our early learning work.
Vermont Humanities Grants
$78,500 to Support 18 Projects

At their November meeting, the Vermont Humanities Board voted to approve the following Project Grant awards:

Art in the Neighborhood
Image to Page II: Art, Poetry, and Books
Brattleboro
$3,000 to provide students at three Brattleboro low-income housing communities access to interactive art and poetry classes.

Big Heavy World
Mobile Exhibits with Interpretive Language and Audio for Big Joe Burrell’s Engraved Alto Saxophone and the 2000 Lane Series
Commemorative Quilt
Burlington
$5,000 to circulate visual and audio interpretation of two unique cultural artifacts to Vermont’s libraries and historical societies.

The Center For Cartoon Studies
How We Read, A Graphic Guide To Literacy
White River Junction
$5,000 to print and distribute a comic to schools and literacy organizations throughout Vermont to help kids experience the joy of reading and overcome the stigma of struggling to read.

The Current
Catherine Opie Exhibition Event Series
Stowe
$4,000 to present a virtual lecture, artist talk, and panel discussion in connection with an exhibition of landscape photos.

Epsilon Spires
Multidisciplinary Salon Series Connecting Artists of Color in New England
Brattleboro
$5,000 for Epsilon Spires and Shanta Lee Gander to organize a multidisciplinary salon for artists of color in the Northeast to connect and collaborate through different mediums of expression.

Ethan Allen Homestead Museum
Lifelong Learning at the Crossroads of History
Brattleboro
$2,500 to add a free facilitated community book discussion group to the museum’s Lifelong Learning program.

The Current
Catherine Opie Exhibition Event Series
Stowe
$4,000 to present a virtual lecture, artist talk, and panel discussion in connection with an exhibition of landscape photos.

Epsilon Spires
Multidisciplinary Salon Series Connecting Artists of Color in New England
Brattleboro
$5,000 for Epsilon Spires and Shanta Lee Gander to organize a multidisciplinary salon for artists of color in the Northeast to connect and collaborate through different mediums of expression.

Inclusive Arts Vermont
“Masked” Virtual Artist Talk Series
Essex Junction
$5,000 to host a monthly series of virtual talks featuring artists from the “Masked” exhibition, which highlights visual artwork by Vermont artists with disabilities.

The Lafayette Trail, Inc.
“Follow The Frenchmen” to Vermont
Gaithersburg, MD
$5,000 to produce a “Follow The Frenchmen” episode that will tell the story of Lafayette’s visit to Vermont in June 1825 and describe how it intersects with the French background of the state.

Lake Champlain Maritime Museum
Clean Water Conversations: The Clean Water Act at 50
Vergennes
$5,000 to host a series of public conversations with experts, practitioners, and historians that examines the impact of the Clean Water Act.

Lost Nation Theater
“How One Dreams: A Storytelling Gathering”
Montpelier
$5,000 for a three-week series of performances, facilitated discussions, readings, and open mic events celebrating Abenaki culture.

LEARN MORE about our Grants program at vermonthumanities.org/grants.
Welcome to Four New Trustees

Denise Bailey of Montpelier is a member of the legal bar in Vermont, Connecticut, and Pennsylvania, and operates a law office in Montpelier. In addition to working as an attorney, she has served as Human Resources Compliance Manager for the Burlington School District, Direct Services Coordinator at the Vermont Center for Independent Living, and as the Vice President of the Vermont Anti-Racism Action Team. She graduated from Yale University with a B.A. in English from the University of Southern California, a M.A. in English from the University of Illinois at Chicago, and a B.A. from the University of California at Irvine. Welcome, Denise!

Jinny Huh of Burlington is an Associate Professor of English at the University of Vermont, specializing in comparative race studies and detective fiction. She authored The Arresting Eye: Race and the Anxiety of Detection (University of Virginia Press) in 2015. Jinny earned a Ph.D in English from the University of Illinois at Chicago, and a B.A. from the University of California at Irvine. Welcome, Jinny!

Patricia Menduni of Rutland has served as Community Liaison for Representative Peter Welch and spent ten years on Senator James Jeffords’ Rutland staff. She has also worked as a philanthropic adviser at the Vermont Community Foundation and as the Development Director of the Bellwether School in Williston. From 2014 to 2021, she ran a lifelong learning program in Woodstock, where he taught American history and other topics. He is a leader at the National Park Service, specialized in environmental humanities. He was chair during the transition from Dewey during his time on the board while offering thought leadership around our environmental programming. Welcome, Patricia!

Ron Miller of Woodstock has been an educational scholar and activist, teacher, publisher and bookseller, community leader, and philanthropist. He received a Ph.D. from Boston University in American Studies. He has authored several books, and has founded, published, or edited several magazines. He has taught at Goddard College and Champlain College, and helped establish the Bellwether School in Williston. From 2014 to 2021, he ran a lifelong learning program in Woodstock, where he taught American history and other topics. He is past president of the Norman Williams Public Library in Woodstock and has served on several other nonprofit boards. Welcome, Ron!

Welcome to Two New Staff Members

Community Programs Officer Jacob Pelletier joined Vermont Humanities in January. He previously worked as Assistant Director of Alumni Engagement at St. Michael’s College in Burlington. He also served three years in the Peace Corps in Peru where he facilitated projects in education, public health, and community development. He holds a BA in Political Science, Sociology Anthropology, as well as a Masters in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages from St. Michael’s College. Jacob is responsible for organizing and implementing the First Wednesdays, Fall Festival, and Words in the Woods programs. He lives in Washington, Vermont.

Development and Data Associate Kathryn Tufano joined our team in February. Kathryn has worked in non-profit cultural institutions in a variety of roles for the last 20 years. She previously held development positions at the Ridgefield Historical Society, the Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum in Connecticut, and MASS MoCA, among others. She’ll be a key member of our Development and Communications team working to ensure that we can tell interesting, and accurate stories of impact. Kathryn moved to Montpelier in February.

In Gratitude: Talented Board Members Move On

Katy Smith Abbott of Middlebury served on the board for six years, including as board chair for two years and vice chair for one year. Katy, an art historian, helped to move the board to a co-chairs model that helps build more sustainability in board leadership. Thank you, Katy!

Todd Daloz of Middlesex served on the board for six years, including as vice chair for one year. As an attorney, Todd offered significant assistance in the areas of human resources and board governance as well as driving the push for more racial diversity on the board. Thank you, Todd!

Rolf Diamant of Woodstock served on the board for seven years, including as board chair for two years. Rolf, as a leader at the National Park Service, specialized in environmental humanities. He was chair during the transition from Dewey during his time on the board while offering thoughtful leadership around our environmental programming. Thank you, Bob!

Sarah Dopp of South Burlington served on the board for seven years, including as board secretary for three years. Sarah is a skilled local historian, and her record keeping during three years as secretary was much appreciated. Thank you, Sarah!

Bob Pepperman Taylor of Colchester served on the board for three years. An English professor at UVM, Bob presented talks on Thoreau and educational theorist John Dewey during his time on the board while offering thoughtful leadership around our environmental programming. Thank you, Bob!

If you are interested in serving as a governing trustee at Vermont Humanities, write to us at info@vermonthumanities.org for more information.

Staff Transition Notes

Vermont Humanities is grateful for the service of Program Officer Rachel Edens and Communications Production Manager Sahra Ali. We congratulate Rachel on her appointment as the first Chief Equity and Human Rights Officer for Buncombe County, North Carolina, where she will lead anti-racism efforts in the Asheve area. Sahra Ali left Vermont Humanities in February to work for Kingdom County Productions on their new film that tells the stories of colonial-era African American poet Lucy Terry Prince and Vermont patriot Ethan Allen.
Reflections on a Career at Vermont Humanities
by Linda Wrazen, Development Director

Linda Wrazen will retire on June 30, 2022 after 22 years at Vermont Humanities.

I have had the good fortune to work at Vermont Humanities for 22 years. I still remember my first day with the organization. It was late August 2000, and I joined a staff retreat in Stowe. We met for lunch and had a golf lesson together in the afternoon. It was a lot of fun...but I discovered golfing is not for me!

This is one of many good memories that I can reflect on during my tenure. Eating jellybeans as we created our Filemaker database. Enjoying a year-long 1970’s theme as we celebrated our 30th anniversary in 2004. Our successful Humanities at the Center capital campaign that allowed us to purchase our office building at 11 Loomis Street in Montpelier.

Also: celebrating our 40th anniversary with a successful Double Your Devotion campaign, visiting Humanities Camps, the joy of meeting our yearly fundraising goals, participating in four NEH self-assessments every five years (I organized three of these!) and meeting many people along the way.

I also remember the sad memories of saying goodbye to talented colleagues and board members as they moved on.

I have seen Vermont Humanities grow by challenging itself to do better and not become stagnant under the leadership of three different executive directors. As the organization plans for its 50th anniversary in 2024, I hope that I have helped to build a solid development foundation that will allow its success to continue.

As my time with Vermont Humanities comes to a close, I also look forward to exploring new possibilities myself in retirement. Thank you to all who I have crossed paths with, and to all who were selfless in their commitment to the mission of this organization.

“LIFE ISN’T A MATTER OF MILESTONES, BUT OF MOMENTS.”
– ROSE KENNEDY
Humanities Camps Mark 25th Anniversary with Creativity

Since 1997, our Humanities Camps have helped middle school teachers engage students with the humanities during the summer. As the program marks its 25th anniversary, we’re expanding the ways Vermont schools and nonprofits can develop immersive and collaborative projects that directly meet the needs of young people in their communities.

Literacy Programs Manager Jonny Flood noted that the camp hosted by the Blake Memorial Library in East Corinth last summer can serve as a model. The program was led by teacher Miranda Miller and used the book Braiding Sweetgrass by botanist Robin Wall Kimmerer as a central text.

To complement what the students read, Abenaki botanist Lynn Murphy led students in creating traditional Abenaki crafts such as “burn bowls” and small baskets. Students also spent time talking with each other and journaling. “Some of the campers sat on rocks in the river, thinking, and writing,” Jonny said. “And I thought, ‘This is the humanities. This is a classroom. This kind of engagement with the natural world and each other is what makes us human.’”

“In a departure from previous summers, Vermont Humanities has not offered prescribed Humanities Camp themes or book lists for 2022. Instead, Jonny encouraged camp directors to consider new learning methods for students who may not be thriving in traditional academic settings. Applications to host summer camp programs were due in March, but teachers should contact Jonny at jflood@vermonthumanities.org if they have ideas for such programs at other times of the year.

Over a dozen middle schools and Vermont nonprofits that work with young people will host summer programs through Vermont Humanities in 2022. Jonny hopes that the lessons learned during these programs will continue through the school year, and onward.

Learn more about Humanities Camps at vermonthumanites.org/humanities-camps.

Susan Piccoli Honored with Swenson Humanities Educator Award

In late 2021, Vermont Humanities awarded Susan Piccoli, a librarian at Woodstock High School and Middle School (WUHSMS), the 2021 Victor R. Swenson Award. Named after our first executive director, the award recognizes a Vermont educator who exemplifies intellectual curiosity and a lifelong love of learning.

This year, we’re asking nominators to tell us how teachers have excelled in working under the difficult circumstances presented by the twin pandemics of Covid-19 and structural racism. The deadline for nominations is August 1, 2022.

To learn more about the Swenson Award and to nominate an educator, visit vermonthumanities.org/swenson.

“The moment I was proudest of during the field trip for Vermont Reads was when my students lined up to shake John Lewis’s hand as they were waiting for the bus.”
– Susan Piccoli
Congratulations to this Year’s Vermont Book Award Winners! See page five for details.