

No one attends PACE meeting in Vassalboro

by Mary Grow

Not a single resident came to the Vassalboro selectmen's September 16 public hearing on the new ordinance that will be on a November 2 local ballot. The Town of Vassalboro Property Assessed Clean Energy (PACE) Ordinance, if approved, will let owners of real property apply for loans to help cover the cost of energy-saving work.

Town Manager Mary Sabans will have no additional work under the program – administration will be by Efficiency Maine under a contract with the town. Efficiency Maine will approve and issue loans and collect repayments.

The town has two responsibilities: creating an education and outreach program to make residents aware of the program and assisting and cooperating with Efficiency Maine. Cooperation specifically does not include any personal liability of town officials for any aspect of the program, or any liability to property owners related to work the program helps finance.

Selectmen suggested during an earlier discussion that the town's energy committee might be an appropriate body to publicize the program.

In other business September 16, Sabans said Road Foreman Eugene Field has contracted for the winter sand supply. She said Field also reported, angrily, an incident in which a motorist using a cell phone almost ran over a public works crew member working as a flagger.

Selectmen decided to award a Spirit of America award honoring a resident for volunteer service this year. Former School Committee chairman Lori Fowle, honored early in the year, was their 2009 nominee. They will discuss possible 2010 recipients at a future meeting.

Board members canceled a scheduled September 30 meeting unless something comes up that requires action. Otherwise, their next meeting will be October 14.

Firewood and bridge projects at HVNC

Volunteers at Hidden Valley Nature Center, in Jefferson, are busy this time of the year filling firewood orders and building bridges to improve hiking, biking and skiing.

HVNC's firewood project is far from ordinary. First, the wood was harvested at the center as part of a FSC certified forest management plan that assures the very best forestry practices are used. The wood was cut and stacked more than a year and a half ago so it will be dry when it's burned.

Second, the wood is processed using a "Chomper." This unusual machine uses its own winch to draw tree length wood into the front of the machine. Once it has the wood, it automatically cuts the wood with a hydraulic guillotine shear. Each piece of sheared wood pushes the previous piece through an eight-way splitter. The wood exits the back of the Chomper where it lands on a conveyor that takes it to the truck. The machine needs to be seen to be believed. In addition to being interesting, the shearing fractures the wood and promotes even faster drying.

To learn more about the Chomper and how sheared wood dries 50 percent faster than chainsaw cut wood, see www.chomper.net/Seasoning%20Study.html.

When the day's firewood is done, the volunteers shift over to bridge building. There are four new bridges this year in the center's 25 mile of trails. Everyone is invited to see all of the new bridges and the Chomper in action at HVNC's annual open house Sunday, October 3. For more information visit www.hvnc.org or contact Gary at 586-6752 or waywards@hotmail.com.

Oakland Spirit of America Award



On April 14, Oakland town council chairman Michael Perkins, left, presented the Oakland Spirit of America Award to Alberta Porter for her long-standing and tireless commitment to researching and sharing the history of the Town of Oakland and its residents. She was nominated by Ramona Freeman.

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Senior Corner

Mental decline may be more gradual than thought

A new look at tests of mental aging reveals a good news-bad news situation. The bad news is all mental abilities appear to decline with age, to varying degrees. The good news is the drops are not as steep as some research showed, according to a study published by the American Psychological Association.

"There is now convincing evidence that even vocabulary knowledge and what's called crystallized intelligence decline at older ages," said study author Timothy Salthouse, PhD. This study was supported by the National Institute on Aging.

To learn what really happens as people age, Salthouse tackled how different research methods have led to different findings. Cross-sectional studies that compared the abilities of younger and older adults showed big drops in key areas. On the other hand, longitudinal studies suggested that, until about age 60, abilities are stable or even improve. Which type of study, if either, was right?

Practice effects were evident across the board, allowing test-takers to score higher the second time around not because they truly were more able, but because they knew the test – an unavoidable byproduct of repeated testing. Although the numbers varied by ability and age, practice effects were found to be as large as or larger than the annual cross-sectional differences.

Numbers in hand, Salthouse removed the practice-related "bonus points." Stripping them out generated a new set of cognitive scores that could be expected to reflect more accurately normal mental aging in healthy adults.

With practice effects taken into account, the age trends in the longitudinal data became more similar to results from cross-sectional studies in the places where they had diverged. The different methods now agreed on the downward direction of change.

However, the increments were smaller. In other words, the mental abilities of younger adults still rose over time, but not nearly as much. And the mental abilities of older adults still fell over time, but not quite as much.

Knowing how practice effects, selective attrition and actual maturation affect how people change over time will put psychologists in a better position "to evaluate true age changes, and how they might relate to late-life pathology and everyday functioning," Salthouse said.

Salthouse also found that practice effects played a bigger role in younger than older adults, possibly because younger people learn better.

"Longitudinal comparisons in people of different ages may be even more complicated because the amount of longitudinal change may be partially determined by the individual's learning ability at a given age," he noted.

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