

■ Mountaineers sweep into playoffs / B1

■ Teachers take lessons in Woodbury woods / D1

T H E B A R R E

M O N T P E L I E R

TIMES

ARGUS

Sunday, August 1, 2004

\$1.75



Sunday Edition

and Rutland Herald

Hiya!

More welcome signs greet Vermont motorists

By KEVIN O'CONNOR

Staff Writer

Ludlow Town Manager Frank Heald was driving along Route 103 when he saw his community's welcome sign had a new neighbor: A freshly painted marker greeting motorists to adjacent Cavendish.

"When I pass from town to town, if it has a sign, it captures my attention," Heald says. "I like to know where I am and what's going on."

Whiz by the town-line post between the two welcome signs and

you, too, might wonder what's going on. The Ludlow sign appears to be planted in Cavendish. The Cavendish sign appears to be planted in Ludlow.

Welcome to this story about welcome signs, those seemingly simple blinks that are more than meet the eye.

Historians can't say when signs started hitchhiking along area highways, only that Vermont became the first state to outlaw billboards, in 1968. That ban, however, doesn't prohibit the municipal welcome

signs, which are spreading as fast as purple loosestrife along local roadsides.

Ludlow and Cavendish posted their signs to celebrate the state bicentennial in 1991. Ludlow's carved-wood welcome has held up over the years. But Cavendish saw sun and rain eat away its simpler painted sign. By the time the town replaced it this year, many residents admitted they didn't know there was something there beforehand.



Photo by Jeb Wallace-Brodeur

A sign on Route 12 welcomes visitors to Worcester.

(See Signs, Page A6)

(Continued from Page A1)

Cavendish now is ringing with congratulations.

"I called to compliment how good it looked," Heald says in neighboring Ludlow.

Cavendish Town Manager Richard Svec appreciates the notice, but he'd be happier if other towns shared the spotlight. The state, it seems, has an office that keeps an eye on signs: the Vermont Agency of Transportation's Program Development Division's Traffic Operations Section's Sign Control Unit.

"It's really just myself and one other part-time helper," Roger Koniuto reassures.

State statutes title 10, chapter 21, section 494 says of welcome signs: "Signs erected and maintained by a town outside the highway right-of-way, each of which does not exceed 64 square feet in area, excluding panel and frame, which may show the place and time of services or meetings of churches and civic organizations in the town, and which may include a panel which identifies the name of the town, the charter date, the date the town was founded, or any other significant date in the history of the town, and which the town wishes to identify."

Oh, and by the way, "The panel may bear the wording 'welcome to' the particular town." (Section 495 "says a bunch of other things, like you can't have flashing lights or moving parts," Koniuto adds.)

Ludlow and Cavendish say their signs meet standards. But speed by at 50 miles an hour and it appears each town's welcome sign is actually posted in the other. A closer look shows the Cavendish marker is in Cavendish. But the nearby Ludlow sign is, as suspected, in Cavendish, too.

"It has always been a running source of humor between Cavendish and Ludlow," Svec says. "We were threatening to tax it."

(Instead, Cavendish is tapping its town budget to pay for its new \$1,500 signs.)

Wherever planted, such signs are truly welcome, says William Rockford, secretary of Vermont's 251 Club. The group, celebrating its 50th anniversary this summer, encourages people to visit all of the state's cities and towns and, if they want, document their travels with photographic proof.

"I know a lot of people take pictures in front of the signs, because I have pictures in my scrapbook," Rockford says. "It's safe to say the signs are quite

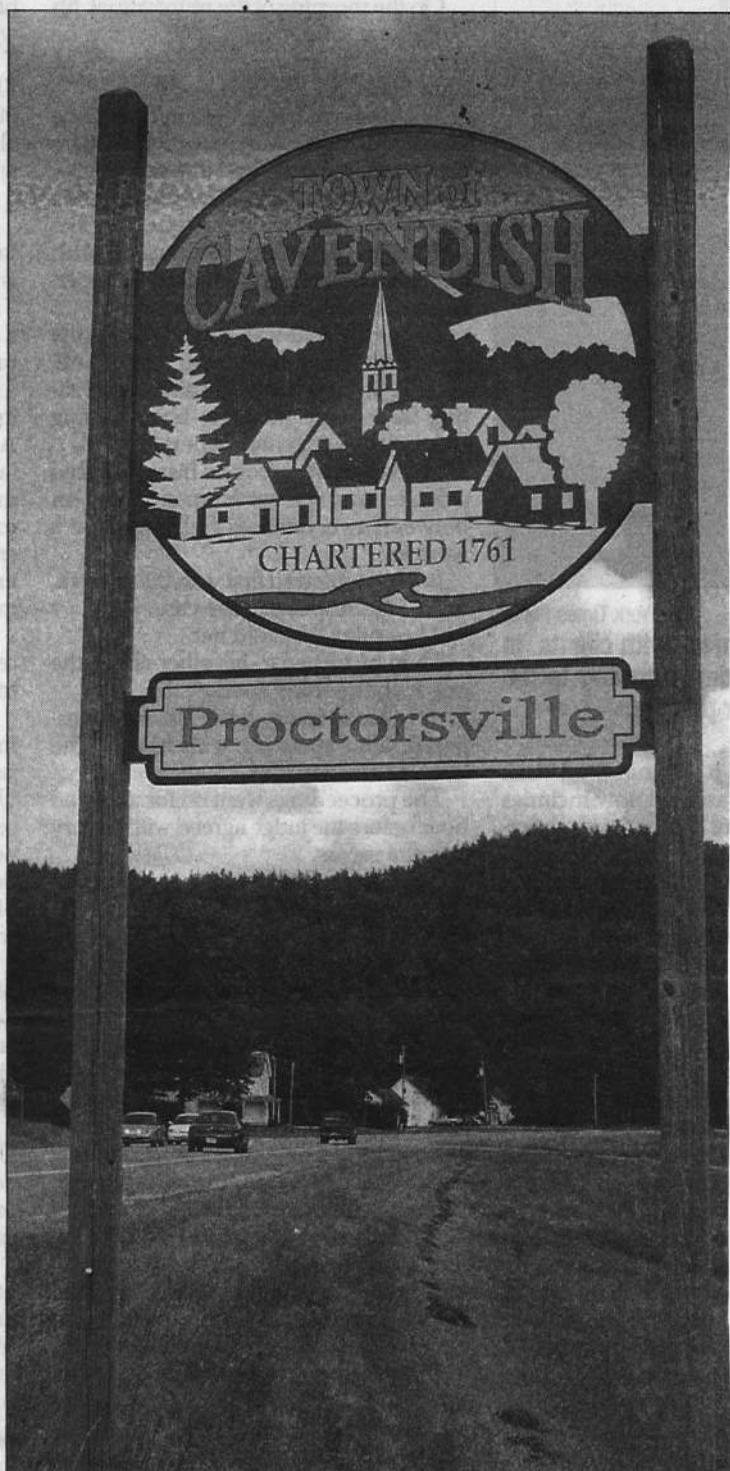


Photo by Margo Smithwick

A sign along Route 103 welcomes visitors to Proctorsville.

helpful for us journeying around. It's often difficult to find something with the town name on it."

The state's five unorganized land parcels – Averill, Ferdinand, Glastenbury, Lewis and Somerset – offer a good example. The 4,100-member club would love to see markers there.

"Of course, since they're unorganized towns, there isn't anybody to put up the signs," Rockford adds.

Supporters like that welcome signs offer travel information not found anywhere else. What other source, for example, reports the town of Grand Isle is the "Beauty Spot of Vermont"?

"I am a staunch supporter of Vermont sign laws – I like the fact we don't have billboards

here – but we feel something to demarcate the town boundaries is a public service," Svec says. "I don't think it should become a competition, but if the signs are kept within the bounds of good taste and placed in a place that the Agency of Transportation can live with, it's a winner for the town, the state and the motoring public."

The flip side to some welcome signs are words like "see you again soon." But this welcome story isn't over. Ludlow is thinking about spiffing up its sign.

"It's not related to Cavendish at all," Heald says. "Ours in comparison to the 'Welcome to Killington' signs are reasonably modest."

Contact Kevin O'Connor at kevin.oconnor@rutlandherald.com.