

# The Boston Globe

## She's obsessed with the 251 Club of Vermont, and now she's its executive director

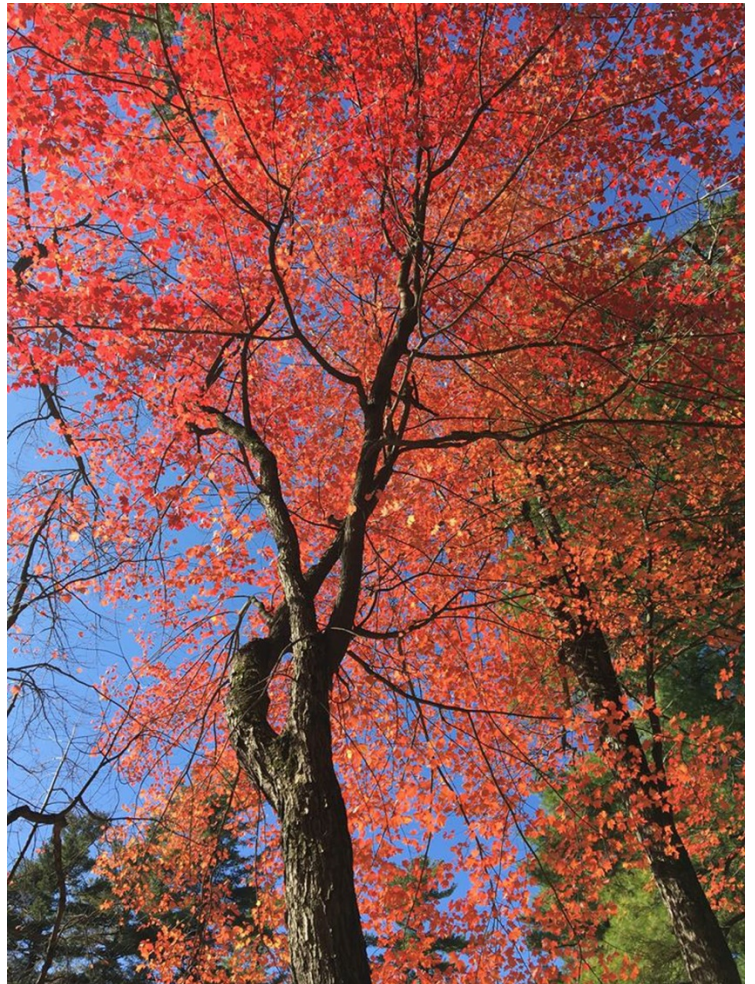
**Burlington resident Stephanie Young took the job in January.**

By Diane Daniel Globe correspondent, Updated September 3, 2020, 12:00 p.m.

In 1954, the Vermont poet, professor, and historian Arthur Peach suggested in Vermont Life Magazine that people get off the beaten path to see “the real Vermont.” That recommendation sparked the 251 Club of Vermont, whose members are committed to visiting all 251 of the state’s towns and cities. Burlington resident Stephanie Young took over as the group’s executive director in January. Below are edited excerpts from an interview with Young.

**Q.** Your background is in marine science and environmental law. Why were you interested in heading up the 251 Club?

**A.** There was a notice in the newsletter that Sandy [Levesque], the director for 10 years, was retiring and they were looking for someone. When I mentioned it to my husband, he said, ‘You should go for it because you’re obsessed with the 251 club.’ And it’s true. I talk about it all the time and I love hearing everyone’s stories. I also still teach law online through Purdue University Global.



Scenes from Vermont. Stephanie Young



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**Q.** What do you love about Vermont?

**A.** I love Vermont for the natural beauty and scenery, no billboards, the history, the general stores, the community spirit. I sound like an ad. I grew up in Connecticut and went to Vermont Law School. I was in the D.C. area for several years, but my husband and I knew we wanted to move to Vermont, especially to raise children. (Their sons are now 10 and 6.) In D.C., we'd sit in traffic to go to a nature center. Now, when we're on the road, even the roads are beautiful.

**Q.** How many members are in the group and what are the rules and benefits?

**A.** We have 4,200 active members and no rules. Some people just drive through towns for them to count, but my family has to at least step out of the car — we've just passed the 100 mark. Members get a profile page, with a public link, a subscription to the newsletter and an invitation to the annual meeting (Sept. 27). This year it had to go online, but we're really excited about the speaker, Lydia Clemmons. The Clemmons Family Farm in Charlotte is one of the largest African American family farms in Vermont. After COVID, we'd like to do more meetups.

**Q.** Has there been more interest in the 251 Club this summer, with more people staying closer to home during the pandemic?

**A.** We have seen a spike in membership, but some of that is from starting online signup. Until this year, you had to mail in a check. The governor has been heavily promoting staycations. Using 251 is a great way to explore while also being able to adhere to public health guidelines. One new member said they were signing up 'to shake away the virus blues.' A Vermont couple who had to cancel their honeymoon in Maine decided to honeymoon with 251. We also got more attention after the 251 documentary "One Town at a Time" came out. It's now airing on Vermont Public Television and you can see it online. The producer, Mike Leonard, is one of our board members. And we've partnered with Vermont state tourism. We survey members about things like fall foliage spots and the best creemees, which they turn into stories. So we're getting a lot more visibility.



**Q.** Looking through the stories on your website, a lot of 251 members come up with themes, like visiting cemeteries or general stores. What are some others?

**A.** Many members come up with their own twists. Some walk or cycle, or visit with a classic car. One person ran the entire route. Some visit post offices, libraries, or schools. One man hit a golf ball in every town. In the end, no matter how they finish, it's really about the journey and the memories.

For more information, visit [www.vt251.com](http://www.vt251.com). Fees are \$22 for one year, or \$58 for five, for the household, with a discount for renewals.

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