

The REPORTER

*Brandon • Pittsford • Proctor • West Rutland
Lake Dunmore, Leicester, Whiting, Sudbury, Gosben*

Vol. 18, No. 31

Wednesday, July 31, 2013

A nod to Brandon's past Compass Arts Center honors the Brandon Training School

By JESS BERRY

BRANDON — The Compass Music and Arts Center honored its past on Saturday with an emotional opening of its exhibit dedicated to the Brandon Training School.

Building K of the former Brandon

Training School, which ceased operations in 1993, now houses Compass, which officially opened in June after almost two years of construction and preparation. The July 27 opening of the permanent

(See Compass, page 20)

(Continued from page 1)

exhibit of historical information and memorabilia marked the 20th anniversary of the closing of the training school and honored the building's past.

A large green and yellow banner reading "Brandon Training School" hangs directly across from the entrance to the exhibit. Hung on the wall is a small blanket owned by a former resident. A picturesque aerial photo shows off the entire grounds of the

leader in institutional treatment for people with mental health issues. Aside from the idyllic surroundings, the Brandon Training School also offered a real community to those who lived there.

For those who were able to work, jobs were provided in order to create a self-sufficient community. There were gardens and a large bakery, and the residents also helped the staff in the kitchen and with housekeeping. It was believed that this labor would be therapeutic for the residents.

toward caring for the developmentally disabled in a community setting. Instead of living somewhere like the Brandon Training School, many residents were placed in group homes or with individual caretakers in Brandon and surrounding towns.

With these two major changes, the costs to keep the training school running were too high, and it was closed in 1993.

For the 78 years that the Brandon Training School was in operation, however, it was an important part of life in Brandon. It provided safe and dependable care for Vermont's impaired residents, as well as job opportunities for residents of Brandon, with more than 700 staff members on campus.

After its closing, and even to this day, the Brandon Training School continued to have an effect on Brandon and the surrounding areas. Many people in town, and many former employees, took in residents when the training school closed and they had nowhere else to go, forming lifelong friendships.

The continued influence of the training school was apparent at this past Saturday's opening event. In attendance were many who had worked at the Brandon Training School, and even some former residents. The evening was emotional for many, as they remembered the place where they lived and worked for many years.

Karen Hawley, who worked at the school for 17 years, starting out as a maid and eventually running one of the units, remembered her time there fondly.

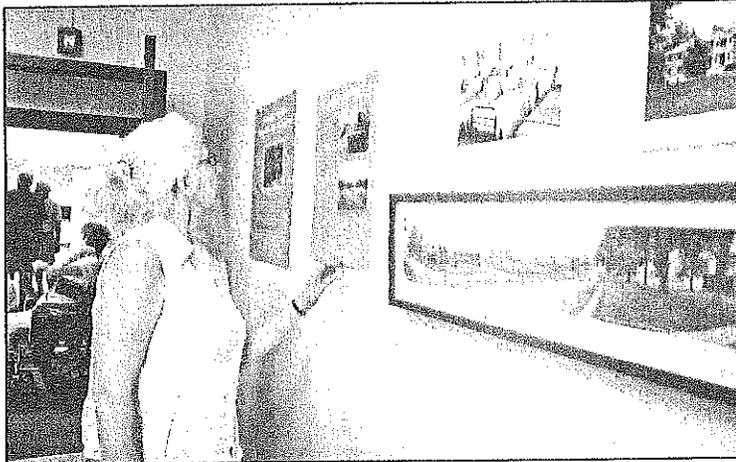
"It was really positive," Hawley said. "I think the staff worked really hard to make it as normal as it could be."

She said that the exhibit was "neat." Aleida Kenny, who is now 85 years old and worked at the Brandon Training School for over 20 years as an aide, liked the exhibit as well.

"It looks nice," she said. "It's good to see things again from back then."

She said she continues to see people who lived at the Brandon Training School while she worked there.

"I'm still close with them," Kenny



Jennie Masterson, who worked with the division that facilitated the closing of the Brandon Training School, reads about the history of BTS.

Photos by Jess Berry

Brandon Training School. Mixed in are maps, information boards, framed photos and a digital slideshow. The exhibit is at once informative and powerful.

The Brandon Training School opened in 1915, making Vermont a

In the 1970s, however, it was determined that using the residents for labor was a form of exploitation. Instead, the duties were given to the staff, and the number of employees increased.

A few years later, the nation turned



Black Bear

Tree, Land & Forest

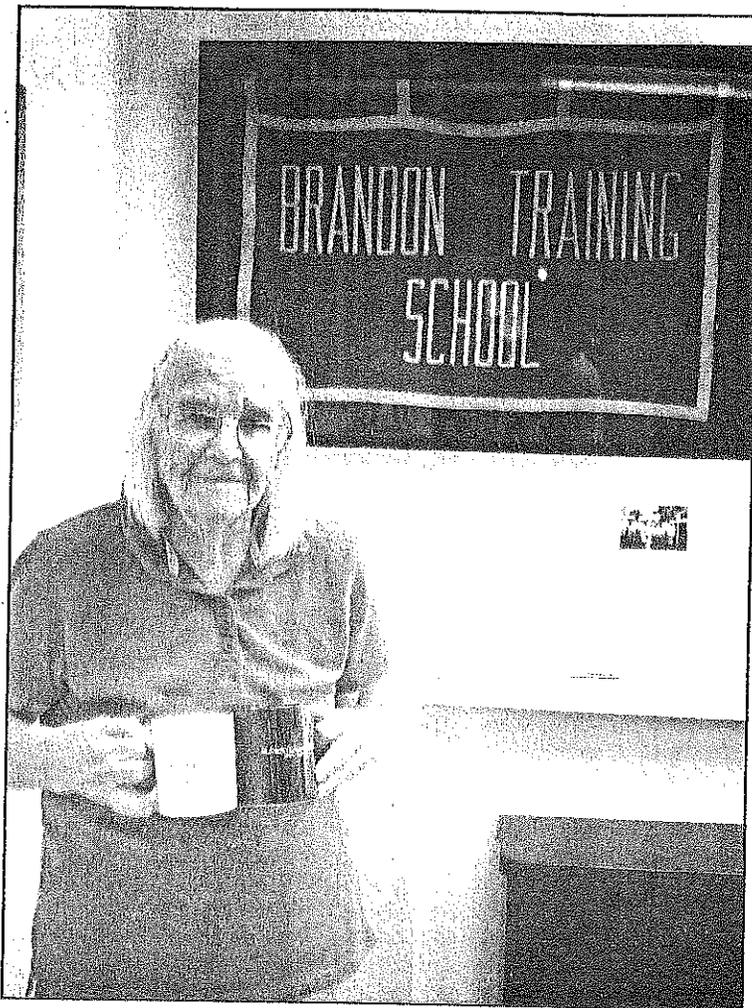
Tree Planting • Pruning • Removals • Repair • Stumps

Timber Harvesting • Land Clearing • Firewood

Educated & Experienced, Fully Insured Professionals

Thad Poremski 802.345.2815

10%
off tree
planting
after
removal



Aleida Kenny, now 85 years old, worked for over 20 years at the Brandon Training School as an aide. She brought to the exhibit two mugs from her time working there that say "Brandon Training School."

said, noting one man, currently residing in Middlebury, who she still sees three times a week.

Over 50 people looked around the exhibit, and later in the evening, Chair of the Compass Board Maria Ammatuna gave a speech thanking everyone for coming.

"The one thing I've learned from speaking to people here today is just how much care each of you that worked there put into your jobs and the residents," Ammatuna said.

She added that the exhibit is not complete, as she and the rest of the board will work to expand the exhibit as much as they can.

"We'll continue to seek out caregivers and residents," she said. "The stories you have to tell are

important."

In particular, Ammatuna thanked June Bascom, who works for the state in the Division of Disability and Aging Services, and helped put together the exhibit by searching through the state's archives.

Bascom also worked as a public guardian during the time after the closing of the Brandon Training School, giving her a personal connection to the work she did for Compass.

As a public guardian, Bascom supported adults who left the Brandon Training School and had no one else to help them. In all, she helped 45 people, many of whom she says she still keeps in touch with.

In the end, Bascom was pleased with the way the exhibit turned out.

"I am thrilled," she said. "I'd love to have them expand it sometime, but I think it's a great start. I think it's beautiful what they've done, and I'm so pleased that they decided to honor the past and their history."

Stephen and Edna Sutton, who own CMAC, were also happy with the opening.

"We're so delighted to welcome so many people, many of whom worked here for many years," Stephen Sutton said. "It's quite apparent how they're moved to come back here after all this time. It's very emotional for many of them."

Edna Sutton agreed, adding that, while honoring the past and the history of the building, they are also looking to restore life and purpose to it.

"[The building] was quite the keystone in its time," she said, "and we just have to make sure it is again, but for different reasons."