

POULTNEY Hilliard appointed to panel on women

POULTNEY — The Senate Committee on Committees has appointed Alex Hilliard of Poultney to serve on the Vermont Commission on Women, the state's nonpartisan commission working to advance rights and opportunities for women and girls.

Hilliard is a personal trainer, entrepreneur and parent of three, according to a statement from the commission.



Hilliard

As owner and operator of VT AthletaFit, a year-old personal training studio business located on the second floor of the Reclaimed-Poultney Community Skills Center, Hilliard offers in-person or virtual personal training sessions, coaching advice for fitness, and training to prepare for sports or for an active lifestyle.

Priorities for Hilliard include diversity, athletics and outdoor recreation, and economic opportunities.

Holding a master's degree in business from Green Mountain College, Hilliard has worked in several civic organizations and steering committees for boosting the local community. Hilliard created "Lakes Region Women in Business Mixers" to help connect self-identified women and nonbinary individuals for a light-hearted and social networking experience.

Hilliard is committed to reducing social inequality within the state, and brings experiences as an LGBTQ-plus and BIPOC person.

The commission is an independent, non-partisan state commission working to advance rights and opportunities for women and girls.

Sixteen volunteer commissioners and representatives from organizations concerned with women's issues guide the commission's public education, coalition building and advocacy efforts.

Rich Earth Institute gets 3 grants

Group pioneers use of human waste as fertilizer

BRATTLEBORO — The Rich Earth Institute has received three recent grants from the U.S. Department of Agriculture for its ongoing research into reclaiming human waste as a fertilizer.

The institute is completing a 2020 Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education Program "Partnership" grant for projects that work closely with local farmers. That project expanded urine fertilization trials to five new farms and four new crops: sweet corn, cut flowers, figs and hemp, and explored new application methods.

A second partnership grant was received in fall 2021 to assess the feasibility of a bio-acidification process using whey to reduce nitrogen losses because of volatilization from urine, as well as dairy manures. And this spring, Rich Earth received a \$175,000 three-year "Research for Novel Approaches" grant to investigate the effects on soil health, and farmer perspectives concerning the use of human-waste-derived amendments (urine and biochar from biosolids), for sustaining ecologically sound agricultural systems.

For this project, Rich Earth is partnering with



PHOTO PROVIDED BY RICH EARTH INSTITUTE

As part of a farm field day related to Rich Earth's prior Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education Program Partnership grant, researchers and farmer partners discuss key findings with attendees.

Cornell University's Extension Service on Long Island, N.Y., to address farmers' interest in reducing the use of energy-intensive synthetic fertilizers, participate in sustainable nutrient cycling and promote soil health. The goal is to reclaim human waste in the form of biosolids-derived biochar and source separated human urine for use as fertilizer.

The project will evaluate the potential of these novel soil amendments through a three-year field experi-

ment at sites in Vermont and Long Island, measuring their effects on soil health, and through social research on farmer attitudes and perceptions.

The social research component builds on earlier research, which found strong farmer interest in using human urine as fertilizer, although farmers had some concerns about the potential for effects of residual pharmaceuticals in urine and concerns about biosolids related to microcontaminants, organic pollutants and heavy metals.

Rich Earth Research Director Abe Noe-Hays said the new work builds on the idea that "the high-temperature conversion of biosolids to biochar eliminates many organic contaminants and immobilizes heavy metals."

He adds that biochar "has also been shown to immobilize organic contaminants, such as the residual pharmaceuticals in urine."

For information, contact info@richearthinstitute.org.

Derby elected as BS&L's board chair

BRATTLEBORO — Brattleboro Savings & Loan recently announced that Carmen Derby has been elected as the bank's new board chair, replacing Tom Wallin, who retired from the board after 22 years of service.

Derby has been a force for good in the community for many years, as the former executive director of the United Way of Windham County and as the current director of Windham County Dental Center. After having been on the board since 2014 — and as the chair of its audit committee for the past four years — the board voted unanimously to elect her as the board chair at a meeting on April 20. She has been a tireless advocate for some of the underrepresented voices in our community for decades now. As the executive director of United Way, Derby worked to create new services to provide for underserved populations, such as free tax return preparation, the Kids In Coats program

and building a dental center that gave much needed oral health care to those who couldn't otherwise afford it. She left her position with the United Way last year to oversee and expand the dental center, which is finding and creating great success in our community.

Brattleboro Savings & Loan has been intentionally increasing its focus on diversity, equity and inclusion efforts and, as the benefit director for the bank, Derby has been a leader toward that. Her continued drive and leadership has directly led to her appointment as the board chair — the first woman and the first person of color to hold this position in the bank's history, as well as the first person of color to hold this position in the state of Vermont. Derby was born in Puerto Rico.

"Carmen has been a leader for the bank, but more importantly for our community as a whole," said Dan Yates, president of BS&L.



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KELLY FLETCHER PHOTO

Spicy

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Q And what were your favorite dishes as a child?

A Singara, aloo chop, postu, macher jhal, panta bhat [and] kosha mangsho.

Q Tell us a little about the origins of your business.

A I started Corner of India in the early 2000s. I began catering for a local business group that was very interested in authentic, home-cooked, Indian food. After that I began selling food at the local farmers' market. I have many family members and my children who inspired me to start the business. Around 2005, I stopped catering and worked with local businesses for a few years to sell my food. Thanks to a friend's suggestion to post my menu to Front Porch, a local community group, I restarted the Corner of India in 2019 with to-go orders from my home.

Q Did you face any challenges when you came and settled in Bennington? What are your thoughts on the melding of Indian and Vermont cultures?

A Some of the biggest challenges I faced early on were high expenses as a vendor at local markets, building reliable, long-term partnerships, and misunderstandings about Indian food. It's not all



PROVIDED IMAGE

A recipe for macher jhal, by chef Shanta Ghosh.

spicy! The challenges made me stronger and helped me grow the business differently.

I was lucky to come to Vermont with some of my brothers, so we were able to keep some of our home traditions alive as we learned new ones. It took time to acclimate and adapt to a new culture in Vermont, but I love it here now. Over the years, there seems to be more of a desire from the community to learn more about my culture and the history of the food I cook. I'm grateful and excited that people here are open to trying new things and supporting local businesses.

Q You are from Nayabasat, a small hamlet in the state of West Bengal in India. How have Bengali cooking traditions influenced your own cooking style? Are there any places there that stand out in your mind?

A I come from a big family, and we are very close. We all cook our traditional Bengali food and have regularly done family dinners with our children. My siblings and kids have always encouraged me

to cook in a traditional style. I love spicy food and enjoy adding spice to my recipes.

I have many memories of the small, family-owned shops at the local market in my village. As a kid, we would stop there on the way to school or for puja (a religious observance) to get home-cooked snacks, like warm samosas, aloo chop and chai or different sweets, laddoos, jalebis [and] gulab jamun.

Q Do you travel to India to visit?

A Yes, I do, though not as often as I wish I could. Our last trip was in 2018. My children, nieces, nephews, two of my brothers and sisters-in-law attended this trip all together. I have gone back home to visit my other two brothers, my two sisters, cousins, friends, teachers, as well as my extended family in different areas. Visiting with family and friends is a big part of our time spent there. In addition, I do shopping and of course make stops to eat some street food such as masala muri, pani poori, dosa and hot jalebi.

Q Among the expansive menu items of Corner of India, what are the most popular dishes that your customers keep coming back for?

A Salmon with Indian spices, lamb vindaloo, chicken curry.

Q What are some of your fusion or Vermont-Indian mashups?

A I enjoy exploring other types of cuisine and cooking new recipes. I often like to add new ingredients to recipes I have made before when I am cooking for myself or my family. I love using local maple syrup in many of my dishes, such as chai, salmon, rice pudding and barbecue sauce.

Q When home for your family, what do you make most often for them?

A Daal, torkari, dim bhaja, alu bhate [and] begun pora.

Q How about the most interesting ingredient in your kitchen right now?

A Methi powder. This is a spice I use in a lot of my recipes. It's a bitter flavor that enhances and complements others flavors well.

Q How did the COVID-19 pandemic affect you and your business?

A My family and I were fortunate to stay healthy

during the pandemic and business actually grew quite a bit. With folks unable to dine out at restaurants, take-out orders were very popular. Word spread quickly with the help of Front Porch, Facebook and word of mouth from happy customers.

Q As the world tries to make a return to hopeful normalcy, are you witnessing a surge of catering orders?

A I haven't seen a steady surge in orders, but am grateful for my regular customers. As news about Corner of India continues to spread, more opportunities are arising to partner with businesses. Fridays and Sundays from June to September, I will be selling my food at the Bennington Museum for the second year, in addition to movie nights at Park McCullough from June to July. I will also be returning to the Vermont Art Exchange for their 25th anniversary art show on June 18th.

Q What is the one, simple dish that is closest to your heart? If you would like, please share the recipe with our readers.

A Macher jhal (see attached or visit this story online).

Shanta Ghosh runs Corner of India, an Indian take-out and catering service operational from Tuesday to Saturday. You can have a look at the menu at cornerofindia.com and can reach Shanta Ghosh at cornerofindia132@gmail.com.

Scam

FROM PAGE 4

to a company data bank or unprotected home computers, interception of email or phone calls, information given to strangers on the phone or via the internet, or personal posts on social media.

Equifax, Facebook, Walmart, TJX, Amazon, Microsoft, Rutland Regional Medical Center, IRS and Stanford University are some examples of where data breaches have occurred. Combine those with the information people willingly provided to callers, on criminal websites or posted on social media accounts, and the picture becomes clear. The potential for criminal use of our private information exists, and the data breaches reveal that much of our lives and personal information are already accessible.

Since protecting ourselves from identity theft is impossible, we need to turn our attention to preventing and responding to data use.

The first best step is to contact the major credit bureaus and order credit freezes. A credit freeze locks out access to credit reports, which are used to determine risk and credit worthiness. Banks require credit checks when opening accounts. Many landlords also use credit reports when approving renters, and even car dealers consider them when selling or leasing vehicles. Freezes do not interfere with current activity, such as the use of credit cards; they affect new credit or activity. Credit bureaus can be contacted at the following: Equifax, 800-525-6285, equifax.com; Experian, 888-397-3742, experian.com; Innovis, 800-540-2505, innovis.com; TransUnion, 800-680-7289, transunion.com. There is no cost for a credit freeze.

The second step in self defense is to create or verify online access to all financial accounts, including banks, investment firms and credit cards (Medicare and medical insurance plans, as well). Then develop a routine of regularly monitoring account activity and searching for transactions that are out of place.

Finally, get free copies of your credit reports from annualcreditreport.com. This site is sanctioned by the federal government and will not barrage you with unwanted advertising. Review the content of the reports for errors or omissions and request corrections if problems are discovered.

(Special note: You will be asked for personal information when establishing freezes or requesting credit reports. It is safe to respond.)

Elliott Greenblott is a retired educator and coordinator of the AARP Vermont Fraud Watch Network. Questions, concerns? Contact egreenblott@aarp.org.