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Notes from editor (not for publication):

Lovely column. I added a phrase at line 124 to avoid people getting distracted by the “it’s not anybody’s business but the guy who owns the property” argument that comes up every time someone mentions the Home Depot space online and “what we should do with it.” If that’s not exactly what you meant, let me know. I’ll actually make the correction this time.

HEADLINE ELEMENTS:

####BEGIN HED####

Pool, interrupted

####END HED####

####BEGIN SUBHED####

The Colonial Pool in Brattleboro closed abruptly in April,
leaving hundreds of members in the lurch. After three months, a
resolution is nowhere in sight.

####END SUBHED####

TEXT BODY:

####BEGIN TEXT####

I WAS SWIMMING LAPS at the Keene YMCA pool one day
last week when a gentleman I did not recognize turned and

8 asked me, "Do you think the Colonial Pool will ever open
9 again?"

10 That's when I realized that I have been asked some
11 version of the same question every single time I swim.

12 Maybe people ask me because, when the Colonial Motel
13 and Spa on Putney Road closed in April, taking the two indoor
14 pools and its members down with it, I wrote an elegy to
15 swimming there [["Ode to a pool,"](#) Column, April 15]. I wrote
16 how much my pool membership meant to me, how much I
17 needed lap swimming in my life, and how deeply I treasured the
18 pool community.

19 I'm not alone in this.

20 "I have been going three days a week to the Y in Keene
21 with three friends, but it definitely isn't the same," said Kate
22 Dodge, the retired co-owner and founder of the Putney Winery.
23 "The drive is long, the schedule is difficult, the classes aren't what
24 I need and, most importantly, our community isn't there."

25 Dodge has been a member of the Colonial for 13 years,
26 and she participates in water aerobics classes three or more days
27 a week.

28 "Aside from the obvious physical benefits of that
29 exercise, it was a place where I found a community of people
30 who came from numerous different towns in the area and
31 different social communities," Dodge said.

32 "I made friends who I only saw at the pool and most
33 likely never would have met otherwise, and we became a caring
34 and fluctuating group," she continued. "People came and went,
35 but new people were always welcomed with the same friendship.

36 "Now that it's closed, I see very few of those friends. I
37 have lost one of the most important pieces of my daily life."

38 * * *

39 IT IS UNCONSCIONABLE that Brattleboro is now a town
40 without an all-year indoor swimming pool, but that is where we
41 are right now.

42 It's not like we members did not know things were shaky
43 back in April, when we lost the pools.

44 We knew there were deep and expensive problems. The
45 showers hadn't had hot water for weeks. The rickety A-line
46 structure over the multipurpose pool leaked. The roof over the
47 exercise equipment leaked. Some idiot had thrown water on the
48 electric heater in the women's sauna and put it out of
49 commission.

50 Locker doors had signs saying "Broken. Do not use." The
51 sign on the women's steam room warned that "large pieces of
52 ceiling are falling."

53 But we — and by "we," I mean over 400 pool members
54 — ignored the problems (OK, maybe we griped about the
55 problems) because summer and winter, we could swim there.

56 On April 2, they did fix the ladies' sauna, but then things
57 went from bad to worse. On April 7, Green Mountain Power shut
58 off electricity to the motel complex, including the pool, for not
59 paying the electric bill.

60 "Closed for an unexpected issue," we members were told
61 on April 8.

62 Then the power went back on, and we all continued
63 swimming as if it was our natural-born right. Which it was, in a
64 way, because membership in the pool was not cheap, and many
65 of us paid by the year.

66 And then, on April 10, the pool was closed "for an
67 indefinite time."

68 The staff was let go, our memberships vaporized, the
69 motel was closed and emptied, and the brand new Afghan
70 restaurant in front was closed, too. Welcome to the USA, guys!
71 (They, better equipped to survive disaster, immediately started a
72 successful GoFundMe campaign and are now happily serving
73 Afghan food up at the Royal Diner on Route 9.)

74 * * *

75 THE COLONIAL MOTEL AND SPA, according to the
76 Brattleboro Town Clerk's office, is valued at \$2.5 million. Its

77 yearly property tax is \$83,608. It occupies 8 acres on Putney
78 Road, and it has, for some reason, two freshwater wells.

79 The property quickly sold to Dinesh Patel, a real estate
80 entrepreneur from Springfield, Massachusetts.

81 Patel and his business partner, Vid Mitta, were named Top
82 Entrepreneur in 2021 by [BusinessWest](#), the business journal of
83 western Massachusetts, for their work developing Tower Square
84 in Springfield. Patel owns properties — including many motels —
85 in three states.

86 I met with Patel two weeks ago. He is a charming and
87 energetic man. While he asked that our meeting be off the
88 record, I can report that he knows the hotel and motel business
89 inside out.

90 But he appears to be baffled by the intense outcry over
91 the closure of the Colonial pools.

92 I think he thought he was buying a motel with a little
93 pool where frazzled parents could drop off their kids while they
94 took a breather on a weekend holiday. I don't think he ever
95 anticipated buying such a passionately loved and needed town
96 resource.

97 First, Patel concentrated on refurbishing the motel and
98 getting it open again. He's done that.

99 He is now in the process of getting estimates for the
100 repair work that must be done on the pools before they can
101 reopen. It is taking a long time. This being summer, contractors
102 are slammed. And holiday weekends are also getting in the way.

103 If the estimates, when they are all collected, come in too
104 high, as may of us fear, he may decide to fill in the pools and take
105 his land in a different direction.

106 * * *

107 I BELIEVE THESE POOLS and the large community they serve
108 — especially seniors — are too precious to be managed for
109 profit.

110 Babies and children learned to swim in those pools.
111 Differently-abled men and woman floated there in peace. People

112 with compromised mobility could feel their bodies naturally
113 moving and performing motion in the water. The Special
114 Olympics-bound Windham Waves trained there.

115 The water aerobics folks formed tight-knit communities.
116 People learned how to walk again after knee transplants there. It
117 was an important part of many people's physical therapy. The
118 older I get, the more I realize that swimming is keeping me alive
119 and working well into my 80s.

120 * * *

121 SO I HAVE DONE what I can to help. I wrote to the former
122 board chair of the Keene YMCA asking if the organization would
123 be interested in buying the Colonial pools and having a satellite
124 system in Brattleboro, should Patel be amenable.

125 They were wonderfully sympathetic.

126 "I'm truly sorry to hear about the recent events at the
127 Colonial," wrote back attorney Elana Baron. "I can only imagine
128 how upsetting this has been for everyone who uses the pool."

129 The interim board chair, Michael Blume, wrote, "I'm
130 sorry to hear about the closure of the Colonial pool and the
131 challenges it has certainly created!"

132 But it turns out that my request turned out to be too
133 complicated.

134 "Brattleboro is outside of our service area," Blume wrote.
135 "That means the idea of expanding to or operating in that area
136 comes with more complexities. Since Brattleboro falls within
137 another service area, our YMCA is limited in what we can offer
138 without approvals from multiple groups within our Y movement."

139 There are still YMCAs in Bellows Falls and Greenfield,
140 Massachusetts, to contact.

141 Next, I called Brattleboro Town Manager John Potter. He
142 first pointed out there was no money in the budget to buy and
143 manage the pools. Then he said I should write a proposal and
144 bring it to the Selectboard. That could take months, and again,
145 we have no money to back up our proposal.

146 We — the members — are more than willing to
147 fundraise if a new management structure could be established
148 and if Patel would be willing to sell.

149 But for us swimmers right now, the choices are grim. We
150 can always swim in a lake or pond for the next few months. I've
151 done that, and it's wonderfully freeing. I felt like that orca that got
152 sprung from SeaWorld in that movie *Free Willy*.

153 But colder weather will be here before we know it.

154 * * *

155 SPRINGFIELD, VERMONT has a lovely pool at the Edgar May
156 Health and Recreation Center, but it is 35 highway miles away.
157 Franklin County's YMCA, in Greenfield, Massachusetts is 24 miles
158 away. Keene's marvelous pool is 15.5 miles away.

159 "I joined the Colonial Pool in April of 1996," says
160 another member, retired civil engineer Louise Legouis. "The pool
161 has continued to provide me grounding and wellness. The pool
162 helps smooth out the edges. It saved my life. People might argue
163 it's expensive. For \$700 a year I got fitness, mental health care,
164 socializing and drug-free living.

165 "I live with the concept of upstream wellness. It's a new
166 expression that means keeping people from falling into a stream
167 of diseases. The pool is a place like that. It's very important to
168 have vibrant system of wellnesses places in small towns,
169 especially when the health care is struggling. \$700 is a bargain!"

170 And another lap swimmer, Newfane resident Bobbe
171 Ragouzeos, summed it up this way.

172 "The water is our magical place and swimming is our
173 super power," she says. "The Colonial pool was our community.
174 It may not have been a perfect aquatic center, but we all loved it,
175 flaws and all."

####END TEXT####

BIO/COATTAIL:

####BEGIN BIO/COATTAIL####

176 **JOYCE MARCEL** is a reporter and columnist for *The*
177 *Commons*, where she regularly covers politics, homelessness,
178 economic development issues, and the arts.

####END BIO/COATTAIL####

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LOGLINE (SOCIAL MEDIA):

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