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—For section..... News
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—Dateline..... Brattleboro
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Notes from editor (not for publication):

Nice job, especially in a difficult week. Happy to go over changes. In your writing, watch for words that can be eliminated purely by the choice of verb tense: “previously,” “currently,” etc. I added some context about Obie. Changing the lede makes the story about people and not a meeting or a rubber chicken dinner. When you distance yourself from covering an event and remove the timeline of the event as a structure for the story, you can free yourself to reorder material to emphasize the most important material. By moving the introductory material to the end, you’re able to tie it all together rather than lose steam and peter out at the end of Gerisch’s award.

HEADLINE ELEMENTS:

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1 Burke, Gerisch receive Obie Awards

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####BEGIN SUBHED####

2 Vermont Democrats honor retiring Brattleboro lawmaker,
3 longtime Bennington activist

####END SUBHED####

4 TEXT BODY:

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5 Vermont Democrats gathered for their annual
6 Obuchowski Awards ceremony, honoring the service of retiring

7 Rep. Mollie Burke of Brattleboro and Mary Gerisch, a longtime
8 health care, housing, and human rights advocate from
9 Bennington.

10 The awards, presented by the Vermont Democratic Party
11 (VDP) on July 17 at the Brattleboro Museum and Art Center
12 (BMAC), are named after former State Rep. Michael “Obie”
13 Obuchowski, who represented Bellows Falls in the House for 38
14 years, from 1973 to 2011, and who served as speaker for three
15 sessions, from 1995 to 2001.

16 The awards recognize party members who have
17 demonstrated outstanding service and commitment to their
18 community and state.

19 **A nine-term lawmaker retires**

20 Burke received the Windham County award in
21 recognition of her 18 years in the Vermont House of
22 Representatives, where she represented the southernmost
23 neighborhoods of Brattleboro.

24 Windham County State Sen. Wendy Harrison presented
25 the award to Burke, commending her achievements that have
26 continued to better the state during her tenure, most notably her
27 work on transportation, community health, climate policy,
28 pedestrian and bicycle safety, and public transit.

29 Burke’s political career took root 36 years ago, when she
30 was elected as a Town Meeting representative in Brattleboro. She
31 was elected to the House in 2008 and has served on the
32 Transportation Committee for her nine terms.

33 Additionally, Burke chairs the House Sexual Harassment
34 Prevention Panel and is also active in the Vermont Women’s
35 Legislative Caucus and the Vermont Legislative Climate Solutions
36 Caucus.

37 “I’m so humbled to be here,” Burke said after receiving
38 her award.

Burke announced in May that she will not run for re-election this year. Though she is formally leaving the Legislature, she still plans to be involved in politics.

“And now that I’m leaving [the] Legislature, I’m also looking for new ways to work on the next issue,” she said.

Burke concluded her acceptance speech by thanking the VDP and its members for their tireless dedication to the Democratic Party.

“I will miss my role as a legislator deeply,” she said.

Dignity and worth

The Bennington County Obie award was given to Mary Gerisch, a longtime Democratic activist known for her dedication as an advocate for human rights, housing, and healthcare.

Gerisch serves as the housing chair on the board of the Rutland Area Branch of the NAACP and as a board member of the National Center for Law and Economic Justice.

She has previously served on other boards for a number of causes, including the Vermont Workers’ Center, the Rights and Democracy Project, Turning Point Recovery Center, and the Bennington County Coalition for the Homeless.

Gerisch, of Lakota descent, grew up in Detroit as the daughter of a nurse and a cardiologist.

“Do you remember watching them care for people who couldn’t afford treatment?” VDP Secretary Jonathan West, who presented the award, asked her.

Gerisch, noting that her parents did in fact play a leading role in her decision to enter politics, said she was “honored and humbled to accept this award, on behalf of my parents, who taught me about human rights, particularly the right to healthcare.”

Gerisch concluded her acceptance by reminding people that inaction is the antithesis of positive change, community is essential to democracy as a whole, and that basic human rights are all interconnected.

73 “We each deserve to live a life of dignity and worth,” she
74 said.

75 **Roots in supporting working** 76 **families**

77 Earlier, VDP Executive Director May Hanlon reflected on
78 her upbringing in rural Vermont and placed emphasis on the
79 importance of community and what politics are truly all about.

80 She harkened back to neighbors who struggled to afford
81 groceries, healthcare, and housing despite working a full-time job
82 — sometimes two jobs — and still finding themselves “coming
83 up short at the end of the month.”

84 Hanlon said the party’s mission is rooted in supporting
85 working families and organizing in communities, particularly in
86 rural areas. She urged attendees to invest time and effort in
87 grassroots organizing, volunteerism, and the like, asserting that
88 efforts like these are what truly bring communities together.

89 “I didn’t come into politics because it looked
90 glamorous,” Hanlon said. “I came into politics because I watched
91 too many people I loved fall through the cracks.”

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BIO/COATTAIL:

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