



Lyndon
 INSTITUTE

A comprehensive town academy
 dedicated to providing a unique
 educational experience
 for grades 9-12.
[Click to learn more!](#)

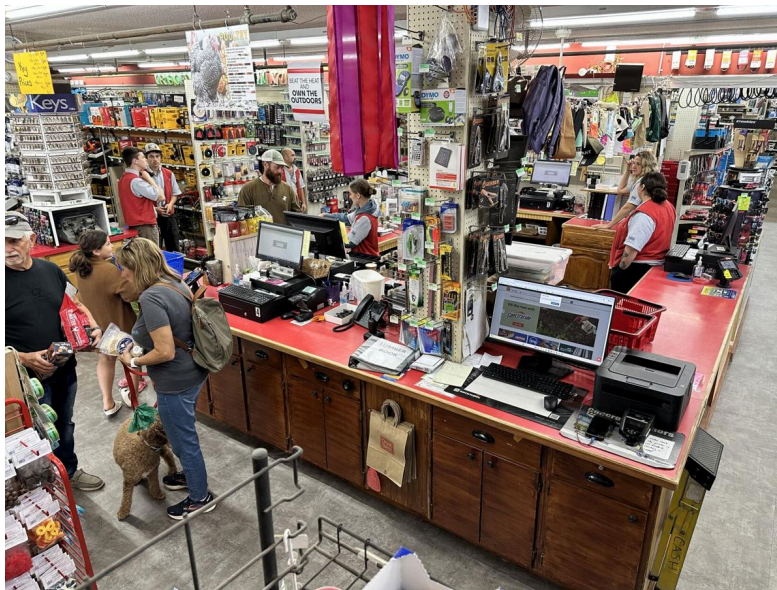
Home / News, Features from the Northeast Kingdom of Vermont

GROWING AGAINST THE GRAIN

Why Farm-Way and the Pick & Shovel Chose to Grow, Not Shrink

Two family-owned Vermont retailers ignored the usual advice to stay small and niche — and built sprawling, thriving stores instead

By James Bressor Sep 8, 2026 Updated Sep 8, 2026 0



The Pick & Shovel's busy front counter, known to regulars as Cashiers Corner, serves customers from 7 a.m. to 8 p.m. seven days a week.
Credit | James Bressor



A good place to begin a tour of [Newport's](#) Pick & Shovel — and the store is a labyrinth of aisles, corridors and walkways — is Cashiers Corral by the main building's two entrances. Here on a typical summer midafternoon, three red-vested clerks are ringing up customers.

A few steps away, an employee is cutting a pipe for someone planning to install a bird feeder. One story up, two children are eyeing goldfish for sale while their mother studies a pair of Keen running shoes. In the laundromat attached to the garden supplies department, a young couple waits for a load of whites to dry.

Click for details!

JOE'S POND COTTAGE
WITH 3-BAY GARAGE

TIM SCOTT
 REAL ESTATE

[PREV](#)

[NEXT](#)

"Where else can you buy a hammer, a hamster, and a pair of underwear and get an ice cream on the way out? It's this weird mix that we've created here that makes it all work," says Greg Hamblett, co-owner of the Pick & Shovel with his brother Chris. For many customers, as the store's website declares, the Pick & Shovel is "an adventure, not just a hardware store."

In a retail world dominated by big box stores and online shopping, locally owned businesses need to be nimble and focused to thrive. One common piece of advice for hometown retailers is to stay small and carve out a niche.

However, that isn't the way two prominent family-owned area businesses operate. Instead, they've diligently grown their product lines while keeping a locally owned, customer-focused feel.

The Pick & Shovel, downtown [Newport](#)'s most prominent retailer, celebrated its 50th anniversary last year. Open every day from 7 a.m. to 8 p.m., it's a hardware and appliance store, clothier, pet shop, lumberyard, sugaring equipment retailer, laundromat, ice cream stand, community gathering space and more.

Sixty-five miles south, Bradford's [Farm Way](#) is also buzzing. The Metayer family has successfully expanded the store in multiple directions over the past four decades. Footwear and clothing are its bread and butter, but Farm-Way also offers supplies for camping, hunting, cooking, furnishing a den and lounging on a patio — a distinctive mix of products ranging from pressure-treated posts to Vera Bradley bags.

The Metayers and Hamblett's say they've succeeded by trusting their intuition, listening to their customers, stocking quality products and providing excellent customer service. Both stores carry highly regarded brands such as Carhartt and Darn Tough and employ knowledgeable staff who are quick to help customers. As a result, both have legions of repeat customers and attract patrons from beyond the region.



Greg Hamblett, co-owner of the Pick & Shovel, says excellent customer service is central to the store's success.

Credit | James Bressor



The Metayer family — from left, Carol, Skip, Paul and Shelby — sells more than 3,000 pairs of shoes and boots each month, accounting for half of Farm-Way's revenue.

Credit | James Bressor

"Our staff tries to help any way they can," says Carol Metayer, president of [Farm-Way](#). "You're not just walking up to a stack of boots and picking out something. You've got somebody who gets the shoes, fits you for them, answers questions, and can offer recommendations."

Newport's downtown anchor

"Chris and I, we're almost always on the floor. We're not office managers," Greg Hamblett says. "I like to be in the thick of things, working with everyone else. I'm outside pumping propane or loading up lumber."

Hands-on retailing is in the Hamblett DNA. The family has run local businesses for more than a century; Chris and Greg's father, Tim, opened the Pick & Shovel with his brothers Mike and Rick in 1975. Tim's siblings didn't stay with the store long, and a cousin, Doug Hamblett, became his partner. They steadily grew the business, converting attached apartments into retail space and acquiring neighboring properties as new departments took shape.

From the store's earliest days, Chris says, customers asked the Hamblett family to carry more clothing, particularly after the Ames department store in Derby closed. His mother, Beverly Hamblett, grew the clothing department over several years, and the mix became higher end as Walmart arrived in the region. "We just listened to our customers," Chris says. "We changed with the times, which we've always done."

One addition, the ice cream shop, was met with skepticism. "People thought my dad was crazy," Greg says. "But people see it now and think it was kind of a brilliant idea."

Greg and Chris initially pursued other careers — Greg was an accountant and Chris worked as an electrician — before coming back to the store about 20 years ago. Chris was the driving force behind the expanded sugaring equipment inventory. "It happened to be just the right time, when people were really starting to get into it as a business instead of it just being a hobby," Greg says. "And it just blew up from there."

The Pick & Shovel is a member of Do it Best, the world's largest home improvement cooperative, and generally follows the co-op's suggested pricing. Even then, the store can't always beat The Home Depot or Lowe's — but it makes up for that with customer service, Greg says.



Sam Marrott holds a bearded dragon in the Pick & Shovel's pet shop, also known as the Newport Zoo.
Credit | James Bressor



75 Mount Pleasant Street, St. Johnsbury, VT 05819 | (802) 748-8189

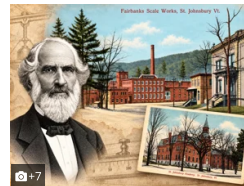
More from this section



Mid Burke Lodge returns to its CCC roots in major rebuild



In Matsinger Forest, kids learn fire, baskets and silence



How a Fairbanks heir's scandal shook St. Johnsbury for good

"We probably spend more than most stores do on payroll," he says. The store has approximately 70 employees during the summer when the ice cream shop is open, about half of them full-time. Competitive wages and benefits such as health care coverage have kept many employees for 20 or more years.

The Pick & Shovel puts its employees front and center in its advertising. Since 2016, as the Derby Walmart was preparing to open, the Hamblett family has partnered with Mount Mansfield Media on a series of videos featuring dozens of staff, positioning the store as a "wicked, wonderful, not so general store."

"By the time Walmart opened, we already had people coming from a lot farther away than we ever had seen before," Chris says. Revenues still dipped nearly 20 percent during the new Walmart's first year, he adds. By retooling its product lines and advertising more aggressively, the Pick & Shovel was growing beyond its pre-Walmart revenues within three years.

"The Pick & Shovel has been the most important retail operation in our downtown for decades. It is to Newport, with our values, what L.L. Bean has

been to Freeport, Maine," says Rick Ufford-Chase, Newport's mayor and executive director of Newport Downtown Development.

"Everything is quality."

The heart of Farm-Way's multi-building, 18-acre operation is its shoe department. Farm-Way sells more than 3,000 pairs of shoes and boots per month, accounting for half of the store's revenues.

That volume is a far cry from the store's early years. Farm-Way was initially a feed store, founded in 1983 by three brothers, Winston, Wendell and Neil Oakes, who hired Carol Metayer as their first employee and her husband, Ernest "Skip" Metayer, to manage a nearby lumber shop. When the Oakes brothers got out of the feed business after three years, the Metayers joined with Carol's parents, Paul and Bobbie Gallerani, to take over.



Carol Metayer, right, chats with a customer. Listening to customers' suggestions over four decades has helped Farm-Way succeed, Carol says.
Credit | James Bressor

Carol recalls they were making only about a dollar on each 100-pound bag of feed. She and Skip owned horses and loved the outdoors, so they began adding farm- and recreation-related products their customers were asking for: snowshoes, camping equipment, hunting and fishing gear, backpacks, kayaks.

"The consultants were the customers," Carol says.

The Metayers have faced unexpected challenges. When they purchased the store and its land from the Boston and Maine Railroad, an environmental assessment found the soil contaminated by petroleum products. Later, on two acres they bought across the road for parking, they discovered two railroad tankers containing 12,000 gallons of fuel oil buried underground. Skip says cleaning up that site alone has cost \$80,000.

"We're pretty proud of that. A lot of people wouldn't have taken it on," he says. The family has since demolished several dilapidated buildings and installed a 132-kilowatt solar array that covers nearly all the store's electrical needs.

Carol's parents have passed, and she and Skip now share ownership of the store with their two children, Shelby and Paul. The Oakes brothers opened Farm-Way with three employees and about \$100,000 of inventory. Today the store employs a staff of 40, carries more than \$5.5 million in inventory, and also sells online as Vermont Gear.

Shelby says the two crucial factors to Farm-Way's success are customer service and the commitment to long-lasting products. "There's nothing in this store that will fall apart on you," she says. "Everything is quality." Several of the store's high-end lines — Patagonia, The North Face, Le Creuset cookware — aren't available at discount chains at all.

The Metayers' commitment to quality, customer needs and environmental stewardship led the Vermont Retail and Grocers Association to name Farm-Way the state's Retailer of the Year in 2013.

Carol says Farm-Way is thriving, with total revenue at a plateau. The family isn't planning major additions and has no interest in opening a second store — and they intend to keep the store closed on Sundays.

"Human beings need a day of rest," Carol says. "There are probably all kinds of arguments about how much money we could make if we were open on Sunday. But it's not all about money. It's about having a lifestyle that is good for us and the people who work here."

That choice is one more example of how Farm-Way and the Pick & Shovel — in a time when independent retailers are expected to specialize or fold — have diversified and grown while staying true to themselves.

James Bressor is a freelance writer living in Newport.



Tags: Pick & Shovel Farm-way Newport Bradford Family-owned

James Bressor

★ Follow James Bressor

0 comments

Welcome to the discussion.

Log In

Recent News



'Stuff the Bus' Food Drive to Aid St. Johnsbury Pantry

Updated 1 min ago

ST. JOHNSBURY, Vt. — RuralEdge will host a nonperishable food collection drive from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Saturday, Sept. 26, at White Market, 385 Portland St., to benefit the Neighbors Helping Neighbors Food Pantry, a community food shelf in St. Johnsbury supplied in part by the Vermont Foodbank... [Read more](#)

Catamount Arts, Museum of Everyday Life Win VCF Grants

19 hrs ago

ST. JOHNSBURY, Vt. — Two Northeast Kingdom arts organizations are among 25 Vermont groups sharing more than \$250,000 in grants from the Vermont Community Foundation's 2026 Arts & Social Cohesion program, which funds projects that use the arts to build community connection. [Read more](#)



Vermont State Research Trains Students to Track Ticks

19 hrs ago

Maya Suarez spends any spare time she has between her two majors, biology and math, in the molecular biology research laboratory on Vermont State University's Johnson campus, where she is entering her senior year. She has worked there for more than three years, performing DNA analyses on bla... [Read more](#)

Load more

Flashback Favorites

Old stories worth remembering — and rereading.



When Boomer's businesses boomed in St. Johnsbury

By Beth Kanell Updated Feb 17, 2026



When Vermont sunshine took the White House by storm

By Spencer Kuchle Updated Feb 17, 2026



Father John Bruder's Life of Solitude and Service in the Northeast Kingdom

By Terry Hoffer Updated Mar 6, 2026

View more

Under the Same North Star

Stories about rural America and national issues affecting communities like ours.



Craft Growers, No Market
Vermont cannabis small farmers seek reform in retail rules



Rural health transformation program faces funding hurdles



Vermont marble on display at Smithsonian through 2029



Need care for routine medical needs today?



Sections

- Home
- Search
- News
- Features
- Profiles
- Recipes
- Columnists
- Opinions
- Events
- A Guide to the Northeast Kingdom
- Arts & Entertainment
- What's Happening at Town Hall
- Obituaries

Services

- Subscribe
- Advertise
- Pay an Invoice
- Privacy Policy
- Contact Us
- About Us
- Join our team!

Contact Information

Northstar Publishing LLC
29 Hill St - PO Box 319
Danville, VT 05828
Phone: 1-802-684-1056
Email: info@northstarmonthly.com


NORTHSTAR
PUBLISHING

PREV



NEXT