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2025 Emerging Leaders of Southern Vermont Announced



2025's cohort of Emerging Leaders was honored at the Southern Vermont Economy Summit. Photo: Matthew Cavanaugh.

Southern Vermont – 27 Southern Vermont Emerging Leaders were recognized on May 20th during the 8th annual Southern Vermont Economy Summit. This annual recognition event, conducted by the Southern Vermont Young Professionals and the Shires Young Professionals, celebrates young people from the Bennington and Windham regions. Individuals were nominated based on their work as community leaders and volunteers, and for their professional accomplishments and commitment to serving the region. The celebration was sponsored by the Community College of Vermont, Vermont Community Foundation, and the Agency of Commerce and Community Development.

When nominated, each Emerging Leader was asked to share their thoughts and hopes for Southern Vermont. Many cited the region's strong community fabric as one of our most valuable assets. "I believe Vermont is uniquely positioned to confront our current challenges head on," said Zoe Contros Kearl, a recently elected member of the Shaftsbury select board. "The way forward is community – food pantries, investment in small business, strengthening of

infrastructure, and radical kindness. Vermonters have lived this way forever – independent, resilient, stalwart – and I’m proud to do my part.”

Ana Mejia, homeownership specialist at Windham & Windsor Housing Trust, is working to uplift Vermont’s BIPOC population. “I am really concerned about widening racial disparities in wealth, income, and homeownership, especially in our predominantly white state of Vermont,” she said. “Through my work and volunteer efforts I have been developing programs that specifically support communities of color in achieving their goals around homeownership and to prepare to serve on nonprofit boards or state commissions.”

Retaining younger residents and strengthening available career pathways were frequently noted as vital to our region’s future, and many of the 2025 Emerging Leaders have taken it upon themselves to mentor others in their workplaces. “By encouraging young people to build their confidence and develop their skills, I hope to contribute to a future where they not only stay in Vermont but actively help shape its continued growth and success,” said Stacey Reeve, a quality systems engineer at Chroma Technology, who grew up in Grafton and returned to the area after college. “I was fortunate to find a remarkable employer nearby, allowing me to build my career close to home.”

Many of the 2025 Emerging Leaders have grown up here and say they have chosen to stay or return because of their fierce love for and belief in this place. An equal number are fairly new to Vermont, and have sought out opportunities to support and enhance the communities they’ve so quickly fallen in love with.

“Southern Vermont’s environment of mutual respect for each other’s creative spirit is one that has helped me grow personally and professionally,” said Nathan Scull, food hub operations manager at Food Connects. “It is a dynamic and beautiful place. It is in this space that I choose to live, foster friendships, and raise a family. I happily root myself here.”

All of the 2025 Southern Vermont Emerging Leaders will be nominated for the Vermont Business Magazine Vermont Rising Star awards. Visit sovermontzone.com/emerging-leaders to learn about each of the 2025 Southern Vermont Emerging Leaders and see past awardees.

2025 Emerging Leaders of Southern Vermont

Jill Arkind, Bennington
Negina Azimi, Brattleboro
Sarah Blizzard, Shaftsbury
Francesca Bourgault, Brattleboro
Kayla Brookins, Brattleboro
Caz Clark, Brattleboro
Franklin Cody, Bennington
Zoe Contros Kearl, Shaftsbury
Gloria Cruzado, Bennington
Justine Curry, Bennington
Ashley Eaton, Manchester Center
Nate Fowle, Pownal
Hailee Galandak-Cochran, Bellows Falls
Jasmine Huff, Bennington

Julie Koehler, Wilmington
Samantha Kondracki, Wilmington
Luis Lascari, Wilmington
Kyle Mallory, Shaftsbury
Ana Mejia, Brattleboro
Karissa Myers, North Adams / Bennington
Logan O’Grady Snow, Bennington
Samantha Page, Williamstown
Tara Parks, Pownal
Stacey Reeve, Westminster
Nathaniel Scull, Putney
George Sprague, Guilford
Maureen Velsor, Brattleboro

About the Southern Vermont Economy Summit

The Southern Vermont Economy Summit is a daylong learning and networking event for municipal, community and business leaders that focuses on the long-term development of Southern Vermont's economy. The Summit is a joint effort of the Brattleboro Development Credit Corporation (BDCC), Southeastern Vermont Economic Development Strategy (SeVEDS), Bennington County Regional Commission (BCRC) and the Bennington Regional Economic Development Group (RED Group).

About Southern Vermont Young Professionals

The Southern Vermont Young Professionals is a workforce initiative of Southeastern Vermont Economic Development Strategies (SeVEDS) and the Brattleboro Development Credit Corporation (BDCC). Our mission is to attract, retain and support Young Professionals in Southern Vermont by providing engaging opportunities and networking through social and educational events, and volunteer opportunities. The YP initiative is increasingly important to Southern Vermont's businesses and communities as a strategic approach to growing the region's workforce and increasing the number of younger households. For more information, please visit brattleborodevelopment.com/southern-vermont-young-professionals.

About Shires Young Professionals

The mission of the Shires Young Professionals is to help young professionals and families create deep roots in our community that encourage them to stay and build a prosperous life in the Shires of Vermont. SYP looks to engage, emerge, and empower young professionals throughout the region. SYP events, programs and gatherings are open to all people, but the group's programming focuses on young workers in their 20s through 40s in Bennington County. More information at www.ShiresYP.com.

About BDCC and SeVEDS

Brattleboro Development Credit Corporation (BDCC) is a private, nonprofit economic development organization with the mission of investing in the drivers of the regional economy so that people, businesses, and communities in Southern Vermont can thrive. In addition to its private nonprofit leadership role in regional business acceleration and expansion programs and projects, economic, workforce and community development programming, BDCC also serves as the State of Vermont's certified Regional Development Corporation (RDC) for the greater Windham County area (including Windham County and the towns of Readsboro, Searsburg, Winhall and Weston). BDCC is one of 12 RDCs throughout Vermont. BDCC's activity is made possible in part by a grant from the State of Vermont through the Agency of Commerce and Community Development. For more information, visit brattleborodevelopment.com.

Southeastern Vermont Economic Development Strategies (SeVEDS) is an affiliate of BDCC that grew from a 2008 grassroots effort, initiated by BDCC, to reverse the economic decline of the Windham Region and plan for the economic impacts from the closure of the Vermont Yankee nuclear power plant. In 2014, after multiple years of regional input, education and data gathering, SeVEDS submitted the Windham Region's federally recognized S.M.A.R.T. Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy for federal approval. For more information, visit www.seveds.com.