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Free Press Photo by STU PERRY

Champ in Ice

Delta Psi fraternity members apply finishing touches to their fire-breathing entry in the ice-sculpture competition during the University of Vermont Winterfest this weekend. The sculpture's body was hollow for sliding. Champ's entry in the annual competition follows a summer in which 18 sightings of

the legendary Lake Champlain monster set a one-year record, according to the Lake Champlain Phenomena Investigation in Wilton, N.Y. The UVM carnival continues today, concluding with a campus sing at 1 p.m. at Ira Allen Chapel followed by an awards ceremony.

Pyramid Mall: Fighting Words Divide Williston

By CANDACE PAGE
Free Press Staff Writer

WILLISTON — The woman, a 30-year resident of Williston, says she'd like to talk about Pyramid Mall, she really would.

Only, it's her husband. He does a lot of business in town and talking about why she's opposed to Pyramid could only make trouble for him.

She sighs. "That mall divided the town right in two."

The bitter feelings, she says, linger on both sides.

"The words Pyramid Mall are still fighting words around here," she says.

It has been six years since the Dewitt, N.Y.-based Pyramid Co. announced it would build an 80-store shopping mall, the largest retail project ever proposed in Vermont, on a Williston hayfield next to Interstate 89.

Vermont's biggest environmental battle of the '70s raged before the town Planning Commission, the District 4 Environmental Commission and, finally, the courts.

Friday, Pyramid asked the Vermont Supreme Court to reverse the district commission's 1978 decision that the mall cannot be built. Pyramid has promised to take the case to the U.S. Supreme

Court, if necessary.

What Williston people think about the mall ceased to be the center of attention long ago. It has been nearly five years since the town Planning Commission approved the project, after bitter debate that split Williston residents into two roughly equal factions, for or against the mall.

Shortly after the vote, the Pyramid issue was lifted out of local hands to be decided at the regional level, largely on regional issues, such as the economic impact the project would have on Burlington.

Nevertheless, Williston residents have not forgotten. The issue remains as important and, for some, as painful, as it was five years ago.

"We still can't talk about it easily," said Ruth Painter, a ski shop owner and one of those who fought the mall. "It's very difficult, very emotional."

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Real estate broker Arthur Benoit, who strongly supported the mall, said, "I don't want to raise old wounds."

The strains Pyramid has put on Williston are familiar to residents of other Vermont towns where the

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Patriotism Converted Into Pacifism for Ex-Soldier

By CARY GLADSTONE
Free Press Correspondent

NEWPORT — James Bergeron said he joined

the U.S. Army in March 1968. An honorable discharge when he accepted a less-than-honorable one.

An honorable discharge "would have come after

democracy?"

During 1981, "I had come to the point where I could no longer justify my commitment that I had

blowing up the world with nuclear arms," Davignon said.

The priest has worked with peace groups on

Pyramid Mall: Fighting Words for Williston Folks

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pressures of growth divide people with different visions of what Vermont's future should be.

In Williston, those divisions seem to go deeper, perhaps because more is at stake.

"I just keep coming back to the free enterprise system," said Benoit, a graying man who has been in business in Williston for 25 years.

"We're right dead center of the county here. We've got in astry all around ... and that brings people. So the commercial people come in and count the roofs and say, 'Hey, we can do business here.'

"That's free enterprise. Our country was the greatest country in the world for many years because of free enterprise.

"Government should set the criteria, but people shouldn't be denied the right to do business," he said.

Benoit, 61, was chairman of the Planning Commission in 1977, when the Pyramid case was being considered. He estimates he was spending 30 hours a week then on the Pyramid case.

Although a picture of Benoit's farm, which is no longer farmed, hangs over his desk, his vision of Williston of the future is not of the largely open spaces that dominate the town now.

"In 30 years, I think there will still be some areas that will look rural ... but we've already become an industrialized county, and I think Williston is bound to have steady growth.

"There's a big housing need here, and we need to provide industries where our young people can work

"I love my farm, but it costs me money to keep it. Economics forces decisions.

"It all comes back to free enterprise. You can't deny the right to do business, or the farmer the right to sell his land," he said.

Ginger Isham's roots in Williston go as deep as, or deeper than, Benoit's, but her vision is a very different one.



BEATRICE AND GEORGE DANA ALLING



ARTHUR BENOIT

A native Vermonter, she and her husband, David, farm the 160 acres on Oak Hill Road that have been in the Isham family for four generations.

She belies the contention of Pyramid supporters that most mall opponents are relative newcomers to Williston who want to close the door to development after getting in themselves.

"You know, there used to be 10 or 12 farms along this road, my husband says. Now there are three," she said.

"We love this farm and we

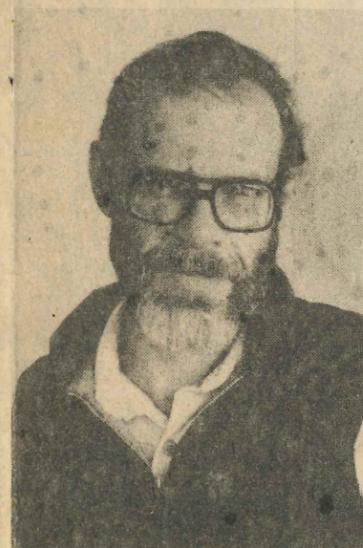


GINGER ISHAM

want our children to have it. Developments like Pyramid keep pushing the farmers farther and farther out.

"Vermont's a very special place and I want it to stay that way. I like the quiet rural life. Progress isn't always the best thing," she said.

Mrs. Isham joined Williston Citizens for Responsible Growth, an anti-mall group, to preserve what she sees as a family-oriented town, where people share small-town morals and values.



DAVID STANTON

"People and families — that's more important than having a mall nearby," she said.

Most other farmers in Williston, she said, joined a pro-mall group, the Williston Landowners Association.

"They felt a farmer has a right to do what he wants with his land and they've got a point. I can see that. But you shouldn't be able to sell without thinking what it will do to your neighbors," she said.

Mall opponents, like Ginger Isham, say they were fighting to

preserve their town from the evils of strip development, traffic jams, more crime, more urbanization.

What leaves them saddest is that, having won, at least temporarily, the Pyramid battle, they may lose the war.

Each year brings another new manufacturing plant to the town's western edge. A new 30-lot commercial development, Blair Park, will begin construction this spring. International Business Machines has taken an option on land in Williston. The Planning Commission meets regularly to consider new housing subdivision applications.

"Probably this (the Pyramid fight) was a delaying action. Williston has changed in the 30 years we've been here and 30 years from now we probably won't recognize it," said Herbert Painter, a University of Vermont financial official who lives in a 19th century home in Williston village.

"You saw people at those (Pyramid) meetings that you never saw before, but I don't think it generated greater, or continuing, participation in town affairs," he said.

Painter and his wife, Ruth, long active in town affairs, were among the six people who organized Citizens for Responsible Growth shortly after Pyramid announced its plans.

"Right away, it was like an ominous cloud It was something that was going to disturb our village," Painter said.

"It was anti-Vermont, it was all the things we moved to Vermont to get away from," Mrs. Painter said.

"People who don't like what's happening here should move and be happy to move," George Dana Alling said.

Alling, a developer who owns a small industrial park in Williston, said he means that in a nice way.

"For their own piece of mind, they should go," he said.

"In 30 years, Williston is going to be the center of activity With or without Pyramid, we're going to grow," he said.

Alling, 67, another strong supporter of Pyramid, recalls his own

experience with a winter home in South Palm Beach, Fla.

When he started going there, he said, he could walk the beach five miles in either direction and see hardly anyone. Fourteen years later, he had to dodge bodies to get to the sea.

"So we sold out. We didn't like what was happening in Florida, so we moved. I take the same view in Williston," he said.

Alling's ranch home fronts on busy Williston Road. What he would like for Williston, he said, is businesses like those in his own industrial park, "quiet and clean."

"People who come to Williston for the rural life have come to the wrong place. They should be out in Huntington or Jericho or someplace," he said.

A number of those who opposed Pyramid have, in fact, left Williston, if not for the reasons that Alling cited.

Peter Judge, a former selectman who was one of the first to speak against Pyramid, has moved to Burlington. So has David Whitehorn, the first president of Citizens for Responsible Growth. Peter McDivitt, another anti-mall selectman, has left Vermont.

Those who remain on both sides, the leaders at least, seem divided by a gulf so wide that each side can only dimly comprehend the perceptions and motivations of the other.

Anti-mall architect David Stainton: "As a project, Pyramid was cheap and ugly."

Mall supporter Helene Blair: "I think the meadow would look just a good with Pyramid as it does without it."

Anti-mall Stainton: "If your tax structure is not too bad you can get any number of different enterprises. You don't have to take the first one that comes along."

Pro-mall Blair: "Most of the people against Pyramid were at the height of their earning power. They forget it is harder (to pay taxes) for older people. We need Pyramid."

Anti-mall Ruth Painter: "We have a village that is part of Vermont and we should hang on to it."

Pro-mall Blair: "Realism says Williston can't stay the way it is."