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SUNDAY, JANUARY 4, 2015

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POLITICAL, INDIVIDUAL INDEPENDENCE



Nolan Mann is a member of the Free State project who moved to Keene in October. He says, "I'm not some radical."

BILL GNADE / Sentinel Staff

'LIBERTY ACTIVISTS'

Free State Project movers seek freedom, and a better life

Free State Project movers seek freedom, and a better life

By **MARTHA SHANAHAN**
Sentinel Staff

To watchers of the Colbert Report, Keene's libertarian residents are anything but conventional.

A recent segment of the comedy show depicted local "liberty activists" as angry radicals, harassing the city's parking enforcement officers as they fill the meters with coins.

Keene's community of libertarians and participants in the Free State Project — often collectively referred to as Free Keene

— have also drawn national media attention for public demonstrations and confrontations with local residents and city officials.

But the national media spotlight the city has received has little bearing on the decision of some members of the Free State Project, which began in 2001 as an experiment to persuade 20,000 libertarians to move to New Hampshire, to make their home in the Keene area.

"I'm not some radical," Nolan Mann, who is a member of the Free State project and moved to Keene in October, said. "At my job, if people ask why I moved to New

Hampshire ... usually my answer is 'live free or die.' I don't talk about politics at work."

Mann is one of several recent transplants to the region who chose the Keene area as their home partially for ideological reasons — New Hampshire became the project's destination because of its built-in slant toward political and individual independence — but also have more conventional motivations and aspirations for their move.

Maria Korfiatis, who signed the Free

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After decades of menu changes, fast food is ... still bad for you

By **KAREN KAPLAN**
Los Angeles Times

Fast food has gotten a little better for you over the last 18 years — except in cases where it's gotten worse.

Among 27 menu items subjected to scrutiny by Tufts University researchers, eight of the offerings contained fewer calories in 2013 than in 1996 and nine contained more. In addition, five of the 18 items tested for sodium content had less of it at the end of the 18-year period and seven had more.

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NEW YORK CITY

Grieving, not grievance

A week after snub, mayor is saluted at slain policeman's wake

By **TINA SUSMAN**
Los Angeles Times

NEW YORK — Police, firefighters, political leaders and regular New Yorkers stood in long lines in icy rain Saturday to pay tribute to Officer Wenjian Liu, one of two policemen shot to death in an attack that widened a rift between police and Mayor Bill de Blasio.

At the Brooklyn wake on Saturday, there was no visible evidence of the animosity on display Dec. 27, when many police officers turned their backs on De Blasio as he spoke at the funeral of Liu's partner, Rafael Ramos.

As De Blasio entered the funeral home alongside Police Commissioner William Bratton, officers saluted. Before the wake, Bratton had issued a memo urging officers to leave politics out of Liu's wake and funeral.

"A hero's funeral is about grieving, not grievance," the memo said.

Police union leaders have accused De Blasio of ushering in a hostile environment toward police, which they say laid the groundwork for the Dec. 20 attack on Liu and Ramos. The gunman, Ismaaiyl Brinsley, 28, posted online anti-cop statements before shooting the two officers. He later shot himself to death.

A meeting Tuesday between De Blasio and union chiefs did not to resolve their differences. Whatever anger remains, though, was kept quiet Saturday.

Blue ribbons honoring police and handmade banners praising the NYPD dotted the wide, busy avenue leading to the funeral home. Inside, relatives of Liu, including his wife of just two months and many relatives flown in from China, sat vigil near Liu's casket.

"Like September 11," one woman watching from across the street said as her eyes filled with tears. "Like September 11" she repeated several times in a thick Russian accent before walking away.

Many New Yorkers have compared the gloom over the city and the scenes of officers gathering for wakes and funerals to the days after the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, when scores of police and firefighters were killed.

"This is just like one of the saddest days in New York," said Calvin Hunt, who was outside the funeral home with his 7-year-old son, Cameron, and 10-year-old daughter, Olivia. All three of them held up pictures of the slain officers.

Hunt described himself as an

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REGION

THE KEENE SENTINEL

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“I’VE ALWAYS REALLY BEEN LIBERTY-ORIENTED. I SAW THAT ALL OF THESE PEOPLE WITH SIMILAR IDEAS ARE ALL MOVING TO NEW HAMPSHIRE ... I SIGNED UP FOR IT RIGHT AWAY.”

— JESSICA BRYANT

Free State Project movers seek a better life

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State Project pledge to move to New Hampshire several years ago, is now moving from New York to a rented house in the Winchester village of Ashuelot.

She heard about the movement from a friend and was immediately interested in the concept, which Dartmouth College lecturer Jason Sorens developed as a Yale University Ph.D. student almost 15 years ago.

The idea was simple: Get 20,000 libertarians to move to New Hampshire, where they could run for office and promote less government intervention in Granite Staters’ lives.

Since then, the Free State Project says more than 16,000 people have signed up to move, and just over 1,500 people have actually made the trip.

More than 20 Free State Project participants have been elected to the N.H. House, and others serve in municipal government positions.



BILL GNADE / Sentinel Staff

Free State Project movers to the Keene area, like Jessica Bryant, don’t always fit the mold of the radical activists portrayed in national media sources.

where she is arranging her final move to Ashuelot.

Korfatis didn’t decide to move to the Winchester village because of parking me-

“The whole community is amazing,” she said. “I asked around when it came to furniture and stuff like that, and they’ve even said they’ll move to Keene this month with her children to live with her boyfriend.”

Ready to start

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In and around Keene, local activists have instead made a splash by holding public demonstrations against the government and "Robin Hooding," or feeding expired city meters before parking enforcement officers can write tickets.

The loosely affiliated group has come to be known as Free Keene, named after the blog founded by Ian Freeman, who also hosts the daily syndicated satellite radio show Free Talk live.

People associated with Free Keene have been arrested and charged with a variety of crimes and misdemeanors. The "liberty-minded" group has drawn the ire of some local residents who protest the activists' actions online.

They have videotaped public, sometimes violent, confrontations with other people over drawings in chalk on city sidewalks.

Keene officials have taken legal action against various members of the community, in one case charging in the N.H. Supreme Court that the meter-feeders harassed parking officers.

Korfiatis has not seen much of the news coverage of controversies that have followed Keene libertarian activists, she said, and knows about Free Keene only through friends.

"I just heard a little bit about it," Korfiatis said by phone from New York,



where she is arranging her final move to Ashuelot.

Korfiatis didn't decide to move to the Winchester village because of parking meters or chalk drawings. She said she was drawn to the liberty movement because it aligned with her feelings against the use of police force and for women's rights to give birth naturally.

But moving to the Granite State also made sense to her for a number of reasons outside her ideological leanings, she said.

Winchester is only a few hours by car from New York, where her children still live. It was less crowded than the city. Korfiatis could attend a midwifery school in Fitzwilliam and continue to work as a doula, or a non-medical assistant who gives emotional and physical support to women giving birth. She guessed the Keene area would likely have a good choice of places to live.

"I've been saying for the past year that I'm going to make that move to New Hampshire," Korfiatis said. "It was the best move for me."

When a friend and fellow Free State Project mover in the area found a house for Korfiatis to rent, she jumped at the opportunity.

"When she said (she had found a place), I didn't even really care at that point about looking at the house," Korfiatis said. "I came right away."

Almost immediately, she said, she has found a community of other local Free State Project participants eager to help her settle in.

"The whole community is amazing," she said. "I asked around when it came to furniture and stuff like that, and they've even said they'll help me move in."

Mann chose Keene for similar reasons. He also moved from New York, and was fed up with the difficulties of being a libertarian there.

"My driving factor was finding a place that's more free," he said.

The existing community of like-minded people in the area made Keene both an attractive and convenient place to try to set down roots.

"It really was just a convenient move," he said. "I just wanted a place where I could save my money and live more freely."

A friend helped him find a room in a home across from the Leverett Street house where Freeman and several other activists live.

He spends much of his time at work as a paraprofessional and little time doing activism. He prefers to support the movement by supporting the work of fellow movers, he said.

While Mann thinks activism like "Robin Hooding" is beneficial, Mann doesn't like the aggressive tactics of some Robin Hooding people that landed them on the Colbert Report and in the N.H. Supreme Court.

"I enjoy the activism — I've done it, and I'm happy to support it in any way I can — but I disagreed with that (approach)," he said.

Jessica Bryant moved to Bradford a year ago as a

member of the Free State project, and has decided to move to Keene this month with her children to live with her boyfriend.

Bryant said her move from Texas brought her closer to people with similar beliefs.

"I've always really been liberty-oriented," she said. "I saw that all of these people with similar ideas are all moving to New Hampshire ... I signed up for it right away."

Bryant said instead of focusing on activism, she prefers working within existing legal and governmental systems to promote libertarianism.

She plans to get her New Hampshire real estate license and wants to start a company targeting Free State Project movers who need help finding a place in the area to live.

She also plans to run for the school board in Keene once she has moved and settled in.

Mann said he and Bryant are like many other Free State Project participants who come to New Hampshire to lead a fairly conventional life. He pays his taxes, he works full time and tries to stay out of trouble.

"I had to pass a background check to get my job," he points out. "Sometimes you have to be realistic."

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Diving into the proposed 2015-16 budget

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