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I Believe: 'There is something about this state that inspires us'

I believe in Vermonters.

I am not narrow-minded enough to think we are somehow different or better than other people, but there is something about this state -- the smallness of our numbers, the manageable size of our cities and towns, the unforgiving extremes of our weather, the generous beauty of our open spaces -- that **inspires** us to be both self-reliant and intimately connected to our friends and neighbors. We count on each other -- partly because we know that others count on us.

I believe that we, given the right tools, make choices that contribute to the **health** and well-being of our families, our children, our co-workers and our communities.

Vermont is not a place to hide. Seeing someone from work on the sidelines of a Saturday **soccer** game or waiting at a stop light when I dash across the street reminds me I am part of the fabric of a larger community, and my actions contribute to its health and welfare.

For 27 years, I commuted three miles from downtown Burlington to IDX (now GE **Healthcare**) on Shelburne Road -- or more frequently to Burlington International Airport so I could catch a flight to visit a customer in New York, California or Texas. I loved Vermont with an abiding passion, but my work took me elsewhere. Whenever I flew home, and the plane banked over Lake Champlain and Shelburne Bay, icy white and gray in the winter, blue and golden in the summer sun, I pressed my face to the window like a tourist and murmured, "I'm home."

For the past year, I have worked at Efficiency Vermont, charged with giving Vermont's businesses the tools they need to reduce their

energy use. I've visited every corner of this state and met people who are running businesses, making products, employing **workers** and keeping the economy alive. I have watched chocolate being made in St. Albans and cardboard boxes come off the line in Sheldon Springs.

Doing business in Vermont is not easy. Manufacturers in Vermont compete with plants in Asia, where labor is cheap, and in the American South, where energy is both plentiful and cheap. Some complain Vermont is not friendly to business, while others are here because they chose to be in a state where multiple generations of the same family work side by side, and husbands and wives split shifts so one of them always is home with the children.

Regardless of their motivation and beliefs, I have seen business owners and managers reach into tight budgets to invest in making their plants, ski areas and offices run more efficiently.

I asked a business owner in White River Junction why, in a down economy, he spent money to replace old lighting in his warehouse with occupancy-controlled, **efficient** lighting. "I'm a boss," he said. "I made payroll in the downturn by saving money. And I'm a grandfather. I want to pass a better world to my grandchildren."

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NO, I have some rules!

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That warehouse today is using 30 percent less electricity and seeing the results in significantly decreased energy costs. And its owner survived the recession without laying off a single employee.

Over and over we see business owners like him take advantage of **Efficiency Vermont's** information and use our incentives to replace inefficient motors, snow guns, coolers and lighting. Whether they do it to improve their bottom line, keep their doors open, create a positive workplace for employees or reduce their carbon footprint, the result is the same. Their actions pay off in a cleaner, economically healthier Vermont for all of us.

That's what keeps me here, and that's what keeps me stepping through the doors of Vermont businesses as often as I can. I know behind those doors are Vermonters who will use the tools at hand to improve their workplaces and make this state a better place now and for generations to come. We all play a part in building a sustainable Vermont -- whether we are business owners, entrepreneurs, employees or families. It starts with the power of us.

And that's why I believe in Vermonters.

Kate Hunter is director of key accounts at Efficiency Vermont.

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