

By GREGORY SHARROW

An innovative teacher from Burlington and a world-music artist from Brattleboro are the winners of this year's Governor's Heritage Awards. Co-sponsored by the Vermont Folklife Center and *Vermont Life*, the awards are given each year (one to a teacher, one to an artist) with the aim of strengthening Vermont's culture in a time of technological and social change.



Andy Duback

TEACHER

Colleen Cowell

MEMORIES THAT CHANGE

In 2008, schoolteacher Colleen Cowell coordinated a yearlong project that involved every fourth and fifth grader at Champlain Elementary School in Burlington. With the help of photographer Andy Duback, students searched for historic photographs of sites in their neighborhood — using the image database of the Landscape Change Program at the University of Vermont — and set out to photograph those sites today. Students then wrote about the lessons they'd learned by exploring change on the ground in their own hometown.

This is only one facet of one project, but it exemplifies the innovative and thoughtful approach that has characterized Cowell's 25 years at Champlain Elementary. Cowell is always reaching for new ideas and growing as an educator, drawing on resources in her community to craft learning experiences that are relevant and fun.

Perhaps most strikingly, Cowell ensures that her local history projects are as much about the future as they are about the past. When students interview Burlington residents about life in the old days, for example, the essential question posed is: "How can these memories help us envision an even better future?"

ARTIST

Souphine Phathsoungneune

LINKS TO LAOS

A native of Laos, Brattleboro resident Souphine Phathsoungneune is a master singer, composer and teacher in the moh lam folk tradition of Laos.

During the 1960s, while still living in his native country, Phathsoungneune achieved widespread fame as one of his country's leading folk-opera performers. This led to work, sponsored by the U.S. government, composing and singing pro-American songs in rural villages during the Vietnam War. But when the conflict ended, Phathsoungneune came under attack for his role in the war and fled to a refugee camp in Thailand.

In the early 1980s, Phathsoungneune and his family resettled in Brattleboro, which has been their home for nearly 30 years. Over this period, he has continued to write in the moh lam tradition, with his songs documenting his experiences, integrating past and present lives through music.

Earlier this decade, Phathsoungneune was able to stage his first public performance in Vermont, offering Vermonters access to a musical style rarely heard here. Through the years, younger Laotian artists have also come to value his work and see it as relevant to their own. 🌿



Zachary Stephens