

UVM students build monument marking end to bottled-water sales

Written by Tim Johnson Free Press Staff Writer
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In a season full of familiar celebrations, the University of Vermont conjured up a new-and-different one Wednesday: an upbeat event applauding the end of bottled-water sales on campus.

The mid-day program, in the atrium of the Davis Center, featured brief congratulatory speeches and a march through the emblematic centerpiece of the festivities: a 10-foot tall arch constructed of more than 2,000 (empty) plastic water bottles.

The arch, conceived by Beth Haggart of the UVM art faculty, was built over the last month-and-a-half, using bottles collected from [recycling](#)

and trash bins on and off campus. Haggart got assistance from senior art majors Ashley Roche and Casey Smith,  who said one of the challenges was matching the same size, shape and texture in building the columns.

In an impromptu moment, Haggart dubbed the sculpture “Arc de un-Triomphe” — in other words, a monument to waste. A placard on the side displayed the sculpture’s formal title, another editorial comment on throw-away culture: “Inherently unstable and prone to collapse.”

UVM administrators decided in February to allow a 10-year exclusive beverage contract with Coca-Cola to lapse on July 1, and to ban the sale on campus of bottled water on Jan. 1. The ban followed several years of lobbying by environmentally minded students. In anticipation of the ban’s effective date, UVM has been converting campus drinking fountains to filling stations for reusable bottles.

The university appears to be in the vanguard of efforts on campuses across the country to ban plastic water bottle sales. At least 22 schools have instituted bans, according to Emily Wurth, water program director for Food & Water Watch, a nonprofit consumer advocacy organization that’s an offshoot of Public Citizen. At least 60 schools are the in the process of phasing out bottled water, she said.