

[By Stephanie Peters, Rutland Herald](#)

When Patricia Menduni leaves her role as development director at the Paramount Theatre this month, the organization will lose a talented grant writer who's helped secure key funding for the theater in only nine months on the job.

The sting of her departure should be lessened somewhat, however, by the fact that now instead of advocating just for the theater, she'll be working for all Vermonters. Especially those in her adopted hometown of Rutland.

On Jan. 4, Menduni will join U.S. Rep. Peter Welch's staff as a community liaison.

Although based out of his Burlington office, she will work out of her Rutland home about half the time, serving as Welch's "eyes and ears" in the region, he said last week. She'll also accompany Welch on his visits throughout southern Vermont and handle casework and constituent problems that make their way to Welch's office – essentially "doing anything that needs to be done," he said.

The career move returns Menduni, who spent 10 years on Sen. James Jeffords' Rutland staff and, immediately afterward, a few months helping Welch's staff transition when he took office in January 2007, to a line of work she adores, but didn't think she'd ever experience again.

"We feel very fortunate to have Pat. I think it's been a longtime hope of ours that we might be able to get her back," Welch said. "She's so rooted in the Rutland region that we see her working with us as an enormous boost in our ability ... to be extremely responsive to the Rutland region and southern Vermont."

Though born and raised in Staten Island, N.Y., most of Menduni's family was in Rutland, including her Italian immigrant grandparents, who lived on Meadow Street. She knew early on that it was where she wanted to be, too.

After graduating from Trinity College and then Fordham University in 1984 with a master's degree in social policy analysis and administration, Menduni worked in elder services and briefly went to Washington to "try to find her way onto Capitol Hill" before settling in Vermont, she said. She worked as social services director at the Brandon Training School until it closed in 1993 and then moved to the state's Department of Aging and Disabilities in Waterbury before realizing that she was being pulled further and further from Rutland.

In 1997, "quite serendipitously" according to Menduni, she found that Jeffords' staff was hiring for a position in Rutland.

"I really got the kind of training I needed because he really ran an office that valued constituent services," she said.

Her other focus in Jeffords' office was on grant coordination. The melding of that kind of technical and governmental work with the human services aspect of constituent services made her realize "this is it" – in other words, the dream job – not too long after being hired, she said.

After her first stint in Welch's office, Menduni joined the Vermont Community Foundation as a philanthropic adviser, where she spent 14 months reading grants and helping to make awards. As the economy took a turn for the worse and job cuts appeared likely, however, she left the organization and placed a call to Bruce Bouchard, executive director of the Paramount, whom she'd met while serving as the Paramount's representative at the VCF.

Bouchard said he recalls meeting her and thinking, "Wow, this woman's so sharp."

Other than Bouchard, the theater didn't have a full-time fundraiser on staff at the time, but decided to take a chance and create a new position, he said. Bouchard and board member Paul Gallo quickly went to work raising 75 percent of her first year's salary.

She joined their staff in June, and immediately dived right into writing grants while also

streamlining what is a nonprofit theater's other major funding source, memberships, turning "a rusty Subaru into a classy, late-model Saab," according to Bouchard. Neither Bouchard nor Menduni will say how much funding she helped to secure the organization, as some grants she completed are still being considered, including an application for a sizeable grant from the government and a small capital piece that's a year away, according to Bouchard.

"It's not a huge (grant) foundation universe in Vermont, certainly not like in New York where you can keep several people (pursuing grants) year round, but anytime you lose a person of the quality of Pat Menduni, it's a huge loss," Bouchard said Saturday. "We'll also miss her as a colleague. She was clearly the smartest person in the room."

In taking the position with Welch, Menduni has decided to resign at year's end her seat on the Rutland Redevelopment Authority's Board of Commissioners, to which she was appointed last spring by Mayor Christopher Louras.

Louras said he appointed Menduni because he admired her philosophical approach to development. While her departure comes as the board is mired in discussions starting up a telecommunications agency, ultimately Louras said he thinks the move is a net gain for the region.

"Patricia's experience navigating the nuances of federal policy-making will be a boon not only to the Rutland region, but to the state as well," he said. "Her appointment really highlights the federal delegation's continued focus on the region."

As of late last week, Menduni was still hard at work in her Center Street office, putting the finishing touches on one last grant application. Taking a few minutes out from her work, however, she talked quickly, her excitement obvious, when asked to ruminate on what her new role might entail.

"It really is a treat for me to be able to represent Vermonters," she said. "I'll wait to find out exactly what my responsibilities will be, but the bottom line is if you're calling Peter Welch's office for assistance, you're going to get assistance."