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MAKING A DIFFERENCE

My parents always told my younger brother and I that no matter what we do in life that we have to “contribute.” When I was younger I didn’t fully understand what they meant (as most young children wouldn’t), but as I’ve gotten older, this statement has rung more and more true. Part of contributing is not just being a good person but being the best person that you can be, and also doing the right thing. Contributing also means that you make a difference.

Making a difference can be anything from the smallest of gestures to the largest of gestures that are done on a global scale – and everything inbetween. But starting at home is always the best policy, and then radiating out from there. But some of you might be asking “Why should I care about making a difference?” The reason is very simple: we all coexist in this world, and if we can help someone to have a better day or a better life, that will help all of mankind. With that being said, we should not limit our good deeds to just mankind; helping the environment and animals is also important for they too share this world with us.

Last year the then-director of the North East Community Center (NECC) of Millerton, NY, asked me if I would donate some of my time and expertise to them and so I designed their annual report and newsletter. I had been somewhat familiar with the NECC before working with them, but it wasn’t until I began working on these projects that I learned of the scope of services that they provide to our local community. It was truly an eye-opener for me. The newsletter that we produced focused on the subject of “who’s hungry” and I have to tell you that it made me so sad to learn how many of our neighbors are struggling and can barely put food on the table. Learning about these issues and working with the NECC made me think really hard about what my parents have always said about contributing and making a difference – and it feels even more important now than ever. Those thoughts are what sparked the focus of this very issue.

We have a vast amount of organizations to private individuals in our region who make a *huge* difference to our community, environment, and to our every day lives. I wanted to not just shine a spotlight on them and their efforts, but to also highlight some of the challenges that we and our region face. After reading, I hope that you will consider pitching in and helping to make a difference to our community as well as to our world. Let’s all pay it forward.

– *Thorunn Kristjansdottir*



FEBRUARY 2019

An up-close look at the natural elements that contribute to life.

Cover photo by
Lazlo Gyorsok

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By *CB Wismar*
 arts@mainstreetmag.com

Sue Schwarz of Gallery315Home might well be categorized as an installation artist.

For those who spend time in museums, the notions of installation art may gravitate to those usually massive pieces that occupy galleries with carefully placed components expressing the notions, the fantasies, the anxieties, or the fixations of the artist. The constructions exist for a time, then are disassembled to either appear somewhere else ... or disappear.

Sue's works of installation art have no such trajectory. Instead of climate-controlled, guard-protected museums, her installations live in the very personal lives of her clients' homes. The summer house is turned into a joyful blend of a lake, a forest, expanses of meadow, and the life cycles of the owner. A high-rise luxury condominium in Manhattan becomes somehow more spacious and comfortable with furniture and finishes selected to reflect the tastes and needs of the occupants.

Living installation art

Sue Schwarz is much more than an interior designer, as if being that kind of special visionary would not

be enough. She is also a true curator of the tables, chairs, cabinets, armoires, pottery accents, side tables, and ottomans that appear in her creations. She has an artist's eye and a sculptor's sense of space ... the innate ability to both dream and act in three dimensions and to make every room, every home charming, warm, and unique.

Sue's road to Gallery315Home may seem circuitous and, at first glance, rambling. After all, her first career trajectory was rooted in psychiatric nursing, which, after the first attack on the World Trade Center in New York in 1993 morphed into the challenge of recruiting trauma nurses to serve during that crisis.

Her keen ability to listen to patients and practitioners in those early stages translated to the next stop on her journey – working in the delicate world of human resources for companies that were “downsizing” and forcing former employees to become job seekers in times of confusion and anxiety. Her capacity to listen, to empathize and to gently direct would have great long-term impact as Sue Schwarz continued to listen, to learn, and to discover.

It was during these periods of constant professional pressure that

Sue took heed of the voice inside of her that resonated with the old axiom: “find your passion.” It was likely in the encouraging words she had shared with those who were stepping off the cliff of employment uncertainty, but it was just as poignant for her.

Aware that merely finding fulfillment in seeking out and acquiring antiques and artifacts could not sustain a career, Sue's pragmatic side pointed her back to school, this time in appraisal and acquisition of antiques. With course work at the NYU School of Appraisal Studies as well as at both Sotheby's and Christie's on her resume, Sue was eager to turn passion into profession.

Gallery315Home ... the beginning

Gallery315Home found its first incarnation in the legendary Center 44 in Manhattan where 75 of the most experienced international antique dealers occupied 25,000 square feet of second floor space. The building had been, during its rich history, a horse stable. “There was a huge elevator that made moving furniture pieces to and from the second floor so easy,” recalls Sue, who also fondly remembers the cooperation between the dealers – an environment that led to making



Above, top to bottom: A New York City condo that Sue designed. Sue Schwarz. Photos courtesy of Sue Schwarz.

lasting connections and friendships.

There are times when progress and antiques do not blend well, and with the “urban renewal” replacement scheduled for the building, the dealers in Center 44 were forced to relocate. For Sue, another bend in the road became the chance to move her base of operations from Manhattan to the Berkshires, first finding space north of Sheffield, MA, and most recently moving to Litchfield County, CT. “We had a weekend place in the Berkshires and over the years, I had attracted some wonderful clients in Massachusetts, Connecticut, and New York,” reflects Sue, whose office/gallery now shares space with The White Gallery in Lakeville, CT. “The move simply came at the right time, and we never missed a beat.”

“I continue to have clients in Manhattan, and generally spend several days a week in New York sourcing new pieces, working with craftspeople, and hosting clients as we explore resources and discover unique pieces.”

It is during these prolonged travels and visits with clients that Sue’s inherent listening and reflective skills come to the fore. “Whether we’re doing one or two pieces or tackling the design of an entire home, I never want the client’s expectations or hopes to fade. It’s their home, it’s where they live, it’s for them and their families.”

Sue is charmingly forceful as she reiterates what has been so impor-

tant in her success. It’s the customer’s home. She wants them to be comfortable. And, comfortable they are. The appreciations that come pouring in when a project has been completed with artistic flair and personal sensitivity are uniformly positive.

Design, décor, and delightful antiques

Dotted on her website (Gallery-315Home.com) are not only photos from the range of projects (urban high-rise to rural lakeside) and comments from her appreciative customers, but also select items that she has discovered, acquired, and offers for sale.

An early participant invited to be represented on the online international fine antiques web market created and curated by the Paris antiques center Marche Aux Puces “1stdibs.com,” Sue’s special discoveries reach an international audience. “I’ve had people travel from overseas to see and buy pieces I’ve collected and offer online.”

Her inventory also appears on houzz.com, a domestic web marketplace that aggregates builders, contractors, collectors, furniture makers, interior designers, architects, antique dealers, and art dealers in presenting the best purveyors in the market. For four years in a row (2015-2018) Gallery315Home has been awarded “Best of Houzz” with the results for 2019 still to come.



Above and below left: Glimpses of a lakeside house that Sue Schwarz designed the interiors. Photos courtesy of Sue Schwarz.

At the heart of Sue Schwarz’s energetic and engaging success is a fine blend of the mutual respect she shares with her clients, the integrity she sets as a standard for every project, and a seemingly indefatigable love of the search, the research, travel, and investment of time that is required to match a client’s expectation with the reality of a completed, successful project. “I am willing to search far and wide to find the right piece for a client project,” she offers with conviction. “I love the thrill of the hunt.”

Frequently in New York and many times with clients in tow, Sue knows the dealers, the showrooms, the designers, and the creative artisans who can offer the best. “When it comes to utilizing craftsmen and women who have great talent, I find most of them right here. This is an area with deep resources and highly regarded talent. It’s a great compliment to a project when the fine construction and finish work is done by a local artisan.”

Carried forward by the positive “word of mouth” that is shared from one satisfied client to a potential customer, Sue Schwarz continues to follow her passion, discover beauty ... and create elegant installation art. ●

Find Sue Schwarz at Gallery315Home.com or at her office/showroom at The White Gallery, 342 Main Street, Lakeville, CT. You can also call (917) 701-3841.

Are you an artist and interested in being featured in Main Street Magazine? Send a brief bio, artist’s statement, and a link to your work to arts@mainstreetmag.com.





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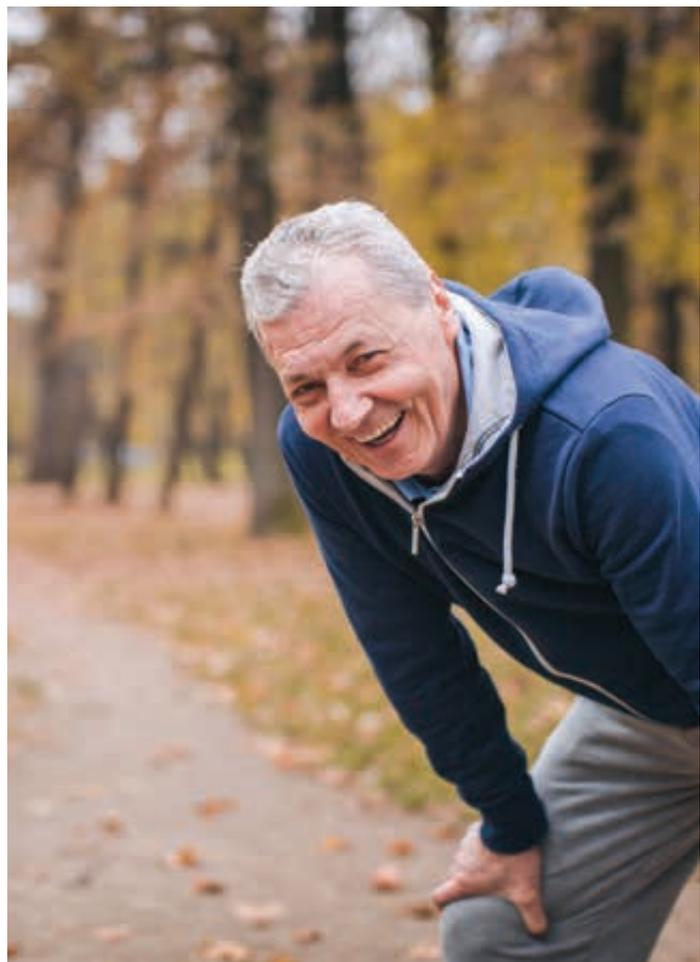


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After retiring from a career with Fortune 500 manufacturing businesses having executive roles in marketing, operations management, and finance functions, **Dennis Noel** has been volunteering for the last seven years as a mentor with the nonprofit organization called SCORE. "SCORE supports small business by offering free and confidential mentoring as well as educational programs. I get satisfaction in supporting the business communities of NWCT, constantly being challenged and motivated to learn about new business concepts." Family is very important to Dennis his wife Joan of 43 years, and Dennis enjoys golfing, biking, hiking, skiing, and meeting with friends to solve the world's problems over coffee. Dennis is originally from a small town in Indiana, and later lived in Connecticut, which was home to his family for almost 40 years.



Amy Michael has been a respiratory therapist for six years. "What I love most about my job is being part of a team; with the goal of saving lives and helping people improve their health." Outside of work, Amy says she loves date nights with her husband, being a mom and spending time with her daughter, Claire, who is about to turn two years old. "She teaches me how to live in the moment." In 2019 Amy is looking forward to continuing her education and working on her Bachelors Degree. Amy now resides in Claverack, NY, but is originally from Chatham, NY. "I love the small town feel and my friends house is pretty famous for their annual holiday decorations. I look forward to seeing them every year!"



Ian Strever is in his first year as principal of Housatonic Valley Regional High School in Falls Village, CT. Before becoming principal, Ian was the assistant principal at Housatonic for seven years, allowing him to truly get to know the school community. "I love the students and the ability to be a part of an intellectual activity on a daily basis." When he's not working, Ian enjoys writing, often contributing articles here at *Main Street!* Additionally, he loves outdoor activities, such as hiking, skiing, and cycling. Because of this, Ian appreciates the access to nature the area provides, as well the familiar, friendly faces he sees in it. These include the students, faculty, and staff who benefit from Ian's considerate and committed leadership. "One of the reasons I got into administration is to be able to make a difference on a larger scale than I was able to in the classroom."



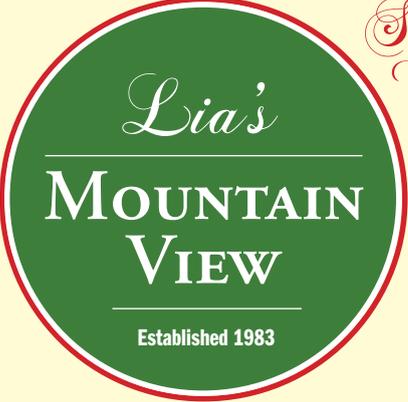
Jonathan Scarinzi was born and raised in Millerton, NY, where he currently resides with his wife Sarah and a menagerie of pets including a cocker spaniel, cat, parrot, reptiles, goats, and a hedgehog. "We absolutely love the area and enjoy all the great restaurants, local attractions, hiking the various trails, jet skiing, and snowboarding." It's Jonathan's passion for the area that influenced his decision to join Elyse Harney Real Estate this past summer. "Real estate is an exciting new adventure that I am enjoying learning from the most supportive, family-oriented group of professionals." Jonathan is also a special education teacher at Webutuck High School where he is advisor to the student council, eighth grade class, and work-based coordinator. "My students work out in the community with different locations learning real life job skills. It is a great program where both students and businesses benefit."



Amanda Neilsen has been in healthcare since 2001 and a registered nurse since 2009. "I am currently a registered nurse in the operating room and I absolutely love taking care of people." When Amanda isn't in the OR and caring for her patients, she enjoys reading, going for health walks, and skiing. In her spare time, Amanda is also a local consultant for skin care company Rodan + Fields. "This is such a great product line and I love how well it works. I also love being able to share this gem with others!" She grew up in Copake Falls, NY, and she just couldn't imagine living anywhere else. "I love that most of my family lives here and the accessibility that we all have to nature – not to mention being able to enjoy all four seasons, too."



For the past year and a half, **Willie Hallihan** has published *sportingAcause.com*, a website that promotes and celebrates sports-related fundraisers in the Tri-state area. "There are hundreds of small charities around us, each working hard to raise money and awareness for their causes. I hope my site helps." Willie is also one of the directors of Salisbury Winter Sports Association (SWSA), a non-profit which, among other things, sponsors ski programs for area youngsters and puts on the annual Jumpfest. In the non-winter months you are likely to find Willie splitting firewood, mowing the lawn, and playing a weekly round of mediocre golf that pretty much fills his time. "I live in North Canaan, CT, and have always lived in the Northwest corner – I cherish the pace and surrounding beauty of country living and see few downsides to the rural life."



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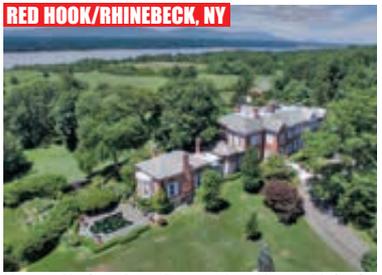
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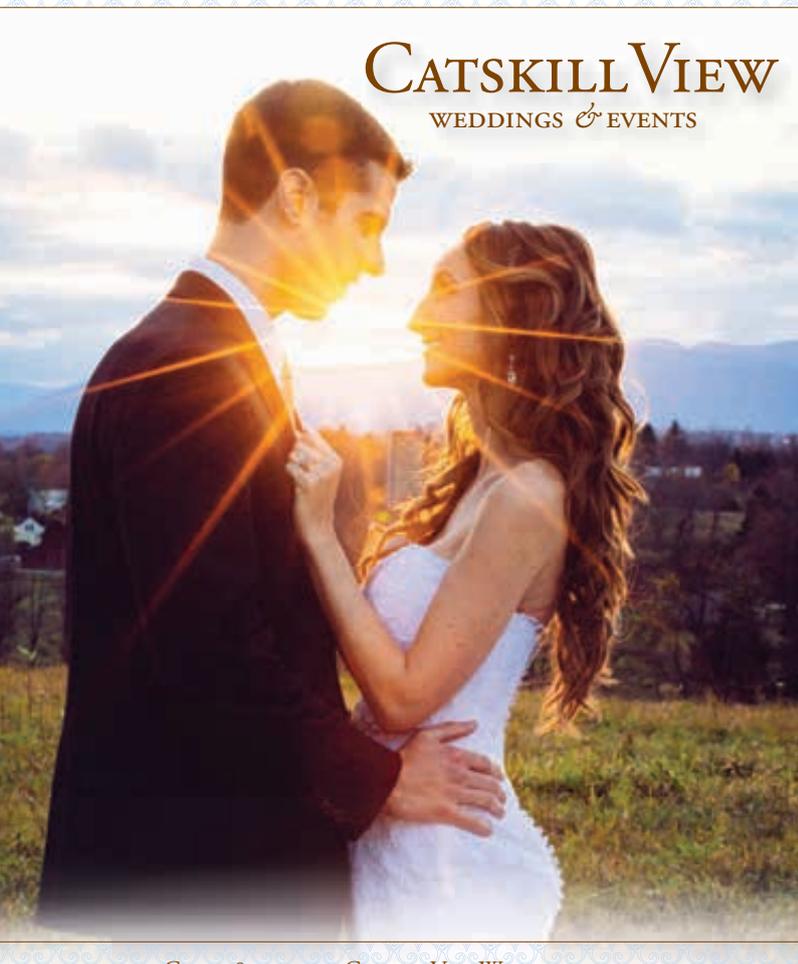
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Love actually

CARRIE CHEN OF CARRIE CHEN DESIGNS, CASANA T HOUSE, THE BARRINGTON, & MORE

By Christine Bates
christine@mainstreetmag.com

Carrie Chen opened her design studio and Casana T House next door early on a Monday morning so we could squeeze in an interview with Main Street. She showed me her weightless cashmere scarves and started up the Swiss-made espresso machine. We sampled teas and talked about her entrepreneurial career and her passion for excellence in all aspects of her life.

You are involved in so much! How would you describe yourself?

I'm a human being, a mother, a wife, a designer, a Buddhist.

Why Hillsdale, NY?

Five years ago I was living in Seattle and spending much of my time doing landscape/design projects in China and Southeast Asia. One of my daughters went to boarding school at Northfield Mount Hermon in New Hampshire, and on one of my many trips to visit her, I met my husband Stanley. I'm here because of love – of my child, of a man, and for nature. I love the beauty of the landscape here.

Taiwan, Seattle, China?

I was born and grew up in Taiwan and went to Tunhai University majoring in fine arts. I studied abroad in Seattle, WA, fell in love with the city, and returned there to get a degree in interior design from the Art Institute of Seattle. After graduation, AGC Design Group (a large Seattle interior and environmental design, landscape architecture company) hired me. My first project was a seafood farm in Thailand designing systems for filtering water and harvesting shrimp.

A college girlfriend of mine who lived in Hong Kong got me involved in some of her company's projects in China, and eventually the two of us thought we could do this on our own. In 2002 we set up our own landscape design company doing commercial projects – primarily golf courses and resorts. China was booming and after our first two months we had 16 people working for us and grew to 68 people in two years. I love the mathematical part of landscape design and creating something in an empty space, but I do interior design in my own firm as well.

So explain the cashmere scarves?

I continued to have interior design clients, which led me to custom rugs in Nepal. While I was there, I visited Pushpa Basnet's Butterfly Home, which provides children of imprisoned mothers in Nepal with an alternative to growing up in jail.

I returned there with both of my young daughters to volunteer during the summer. I learned so much and I so value the contributions of the social workers. When we left they presented us with a khata scarf to spread love, which sparked my scarf idea.

Through another friend I identified a socially responsible factory outside of Kathmandu, the capital of Nepal, that could manufacture and print fine cashmere. This factory has over 100 employees, mostly men, less women, and provides health care, and education for their families. Some of the young weavers have been rescued from human trafficking in Nepal and India. Here their past is protected and they are given life skills and training to start again. And they are great workers. The cashmere scarves that I create are a way of spreading love and 5% of the proceeds go to education in both the US and Nepal.

Where do you sell these scarves? Is this your only retail store?

The selling part is a little difficult. This is primar-

ily a wholesale business – we sell a luxury product to specialty boutiques in the United States in places like Newport, Pacific Heights, Seattle, and the Hamptons that found us at trade shows in New York and Paris. Our largest customers are hotels and department stores in Asia. Our scarves are very sought-after at Aman Resorts International, which has 33 resorts around the world – primarily in Asia – where these fine and very light-weight scarves are perfect for air conditioning.

We bought this building in Hillsdale next to the Home Chef Cook Shop in 2016. I was just looking for office space, but then we decided to add an apartment upstairs, the show room/store for the scarves, and this café. This building has great bones, but when the walls were taken down, we discovered lots of things needed fixing. It was a good thing I have a design background! We started work on it in March and opened in August of 2017. To our complete surprise we have been selling a lot of scarves at retail prices in what we thought would just be a showroom for wholesale customers. It really took off.

Last year our team went to Nepal, Tibet, and Mongolia to visit the goat herders, which harvest our cashmere. In the spring the fibers are shorn from the neck and chest and then graded. Our scarves are woven from 15-micron yarn – the finest possible. While we were there we did a fashion shoot of our collection with photographer Yumiko Izu and 2016 Miss Nepal, Asmi Shrestha.

Casana sounds Latino. Where did the name come from?

People always wonder about that. It's a combination of my name, Carrie, and my daughters' names – Sabrina and Natalia. I have a strong bond with my daughters and learn so much from them. Being a mother is my best accomplishment. It's indescribable. The one thing we taught each other is to have respect for other people, for everyone, no matter what.



Above: Carrie Chen modeling a Casana cashmere scarf in her Hillsdale store. Photo by Christine Bates. Below, left: A glimpse of some of Casana's scarves. Photo courtesy of Casana Design.



Continued on next page ...

What is your concept for the T House and restaurant?

My intent was to create a gathering place to enjoy good food and friends in a calm atmosphere. My husband loves to drink coffee so that's why we have this amazing Swiss machine that can make any kind of coffee from a cappuccino to a double macchiato. But we also have the finest teas available. We have a limited menu with very fresh ingredients. This has become a place where people who live here like to gather.

There are gifts to buy, including these teacups by internationally collected ceramist Paul Chaleff. We also have talks and the room is packed. Last spring and summer we hosted ten events. Jed Perl, who is the author of *Biography of Calder*, spoke. Gennie Gardiner did an exhibit based on my scarves. Kenro & Yumiko Izu gave us an incredible lecture on photography and Paul Chaleff talked about the science of clay.

What is the hardest part of running a restaurant?

The most difficult part is finding good staff and keeping them. It's hard to inculcate the concept of professional service. How to put a coffee cup down on a table. How to welcome a customer. In my Asian businesses there is almost no turnover. But here after someone is hired and trained they don't show up the next day. Maybe it's me. I'm very precise. Everything should be carefully done. No matter what you are doing you should try to do it well, not just OK. When you clear a table don't *bang bang* the plates. If you take on a task, master it. I love serving people – it brings happiness.

And now you have The Barrington B&B on Main Street in Great Barrington, MA

We first started looking at a place for investment purposes, but I was specific in what I wanted. I told the realtor I wanted it to be on Main Street because I had a dream some time ago of a place in Great Barrington. The realtor showed me a building nearby that needed a lot of work. So, then, Stanley (my husband) started researching and found this location that even the realtor did not know about. From there, we contacted the seller's realtor and when we saw the space, we were very impressed – everything was designed precisely for its purpose. The previous owner was an architect and did a beautiful job with the space. We didn't quite know what we were doing, but the space was beautiful and intimate. Soon after, I knew that I could run this place as a bed and breakfast or we could convert the space into small condominiums for sale. I chose the first.

How did you find the fabulous manager/chef?

Stanley's really good at finding good people. He put an ad on the internet, and we had about seventy applicants. Stanley reviewed the applicants and selected a handful for me to also review. But when William Merelle's application came in, we were very impressed by his resume. He had a restaurant in West Stockbridge, MA, for 16 years called Rouge. So, we met with him and, during the meeting, I was impressed by his experience, and his ideas. I invited him to work with me over the weekend to see if it would be a good fit for both of us. I was extremely impressed by his abilities to



Above: Enjoy a wonderful dining experience at the T House in Hillsdale, NY, or (below, left) you can stay at Carrie Chen's The Barrington in Great Barrington, MA. Photos courtesy of Carrie Chen.

not only run the B&B itself, but also his attention to detail. However, since he's a chef, we also wanted to try his food. We invited a few friends and asked him to prepare a dinner for us. We were absolutely blown away by the food, the presentation, the table setting ... everything was done to perfection. We knew then that we got lucky.

How often do you go over there? What is different about running a hotel and a tea shop?

I go almost every day except on weekends. Essentially, it's all very similar. It's all about having a knowledgeable staff that has a good sense of service and hospitality. The only big difference I notice is that at The Barrington people are looking for an experience that matches the comfort of their own home and beyond. It's unlike the T House where people come in for a meal, they look at your menu, choose a few things, and after an hour or so, leave happy. But in the B&B business, guests are staying for a whole day, if not longer. I, myself, travel a lot. I understand the desire for comfort and cleanliness when travelling. So, all of our rooms are very clean because we have great housekeepers. We also have the amenities that make travelling more comfortable. For example, we have sets of luxury toiletries, terry-cloth slippers, and robes. We have late afternoon turn-down service with chocolates, and each individual room has a climate control AC/heater system that is very quiet. So, The Barrington is a home-away-from-home for the guests, whereas the T House is a quick dining experience.

I have to mention, our in-house made-to-order breakfast is divine. Our

guests can invite their local friends to experience the gourmet breakfast that William creates.

What are your future plans for The Barrington?

We plan to open our dining room to the public for dinner, as well as host events like corporate meetings, family gatherings, and weddings at our other location in Copake, NY.

How important is the internet to your businesses?

For my cashmere scarf business we created an internet presence immediately to tell our story and we've upgraded the site three times since then. E-commerce is not so important to us and maybe accounts for 10% of our sales. For cashmere customers always want to feel the quality before buying.

Utilizing the power of the internet for The Barrington has made all the difference in our business. The previous owner did everything manually which resulted in lost reservations and over bookings. We found software that pulls everything together in one place from all the reservation sites on the internet. It saves so much time. What a difference! And we are redesigning the website for The Barrington which will be a big improvement. ●

To learn more about Carrie Chen and her businesses, you can visit the following: www.casade-signs.com, www.ccdgus.com, www.casateatea.com, or www.thebarringtongb.com.



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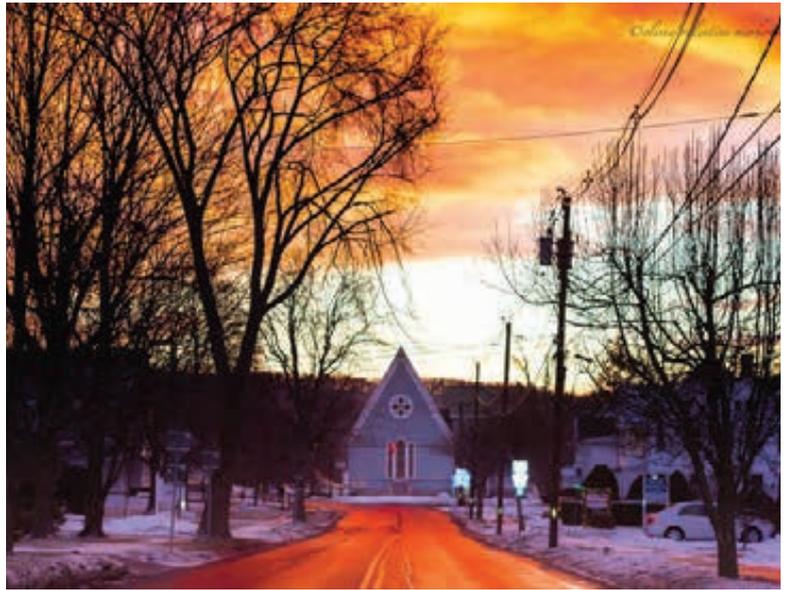
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MAPLE PECAN

Biscotti

By Jessie Sheehan
info@mainstreetmag.com

Although in general I am not someone who enjoys a “not very sweet” sweet, I make an exception for biscotti and so should you. Biscotti are oblong-shaped, Italian biscuits. They are twice-baked and have a dry and crunchy texture. They are the ultimate “dunking” cookie – be it in coffee, tea or hot chocolate (or milk) – but honestly, I even dig them straight up, no accompanying beverage necessary.

My relationship with biscotti

I first made biscotti about a decade ago when I worked in a professional bakery – the bakery was essentially my “culinary school,” as it were. And though I grew fond of them there, I had not actually made them from scratch since those days in a professional kitchen. But lucky for you, recently I decided to do something about that.

Biscotti flavored with maple syrup and deeply toasted pecans seemed seasonally appropriate, not to mention delicious. A little biscotti “research” revealed that traditionally the cookie is made without butter or oil. But the ones we always made at the bakery called for butter, which adds a lovely richness and depth of flavor to the crispy crunchy funny-shaped treat that is the biscotti. Thus, butter seemed the right direction to take – plus, is it even a cookie if it doesn't have any butter in it?

Another ingredient choice

I used brown sugar instead of the usual granulated, as it compliments the pecans and maple syrup so well, and a little bit of vanilla and salt to bring it all together. And if you can

find it, maple extract will make the maple flavor really pop. I toasted the pecans for longer than one might think necessary, until they were super fragrant – and I think you will find the resulting biscotti comforting and tasty, and as special for dipping, as they are for nibbling on their own.

Ingredients:

3 cups all-purpose flour
2 1/2 tsp baking powder
1/2 tsp baking soda
3/4 cup table salt
1/2 cup unsalted butter, room temperature
1 1/4 cups light brown sugar
3 eggs, room temperature
1 to 1 1/2 tsp maple extract, optional
1/3 cup maple syrup
2 cups pecans, toasted and chopped

For the egg wash:

1 egg
pinch of table salt

Turbinado sugar for sprinkling

And here's what you'll do:

Preheat the oven to 350 degrees. Grease a baking sheet with cooking spray or softened butter and line with parchment paper.

In a large mixing bowl, whisk together the flour, baking powder, and soda, and the salt. Set aside.

In the bowl of a stand mixer, fitted with the paddle attachment, or with a hand held mixer, beat the butter and sugar until light and fluffy, about three minutes.

On low speed, add the eggs, one at a time, scraping down the bowl as needed. Add the maple extract, if using. If not, substitute vanilla extract. Add the maple syrup and mix just to combine; do not over mix.



Add the dry ingredients and pecans and mix only until a few streaks of flour remain. Finish mixing by hand with a rubber spatula.

To make the egg wash, whisk the egg and salt together in a small bowl.

Divide the dough in half and transfer the two halves to the prepared pan. Dampen your hands, as the dough will be sticky, and shape it into two logs approximately 14x2-inches. If it is too sticky to work with, lightly flour your hands. Make sure there is space between the two logs, as they will spread. Brush with egg wash once shaped and sprinkle generously with Turbinado sugar.

Bake until firm and golden, about 30 to 35 minutes, rotating at the halfway point. The two logs will spread while baking. Do not worry. Once you remove them from the oven, use a stiff spatula or knife to separate the logs and using a dish towel and your hands, gently mold the logs back into shape.

Reduce the oven temperature to 325 degrees. Let biscotti cool until just warm to the touch and then slice the biscotti about 1/2 inch thick, set-

ting the slices cut side down on your prepared baking sheet.

Bake the sliced biscotti for 25-30 minutes, rotating at the halfway point and flipping the slices over onto the other cut side, until both sides of the biscotti are nicely browned.

Let cool to room temperature before dipping in coffee (or hot chocolate) and enjoying. Biscotti will keep tightly covered on the counter for up to three days. Freeze them in a zippered plastic bag to keep them fresh longer. •

Jessie is a baker and cookbook author; you can learn more about her through her website jessiesheehanbakes.com.



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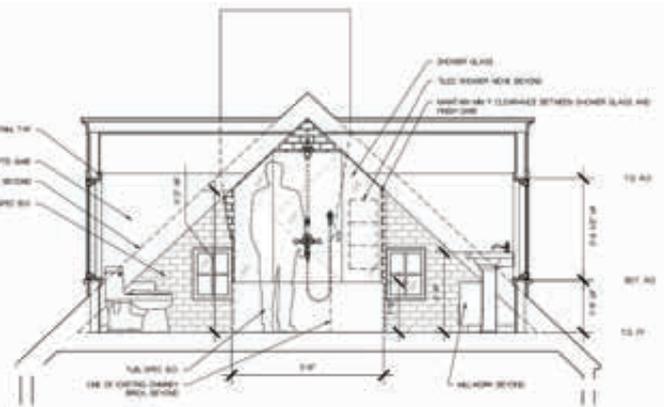
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ELAINE LA ROCHE OF PASSPORTS, SALISBURY; LION ROCK FARM, SHARON; ETC.

Community investing: purpose over profits

By Christine Bates
christine@mainstreetmag.com

The very private Elaine La Roche agreed to a rare interview for Main Street's "Making a Difference" issue. As a first generation child of immigrants to the United States the purpose of her investments in commercial real estate is to support small businesses, create local jobs, and contribute to the sustainability of our community.

Your business career has been focused on China. How and when did you arrive in the northwest corner? What attracted you?

As a college graduate in the early 1970s working in New York City I did spend time in the Hamptons for a few summers and it wasn't very satisfying. One year I rented a share with friends at Twin Lakes and it was love at first sight. I was attracted by the rural beauty and cultural and recreational offerings only two hours away from New York.

As a young professional looking to make my first foray into real estate I saw you could buy so much more in the country than in the city. When interest rates were at 18% in the early 1980s I bought my first house in Norfolk and renovated it. It was so satisfying to come up on weekends and see all the work that had been done. In the financial world there is so much that is uncontrollable – here there were results.

After that house I did several more.

I love the process of restoring fabulous old houses. I would live in them for a while and then sell them.

When did you buy Lion Rock? Why? How did it become a wedding venue?

Lion Rock was a farm that had been in an estate for many years. In 1997 I saw developers circling and made a very emotional decision to buy it. The widow who owned the property wanted to find a young family who would preserve the farm and I was looking for a place for a family home.

After I purchased it I was transferred to China, and the seller remained on the property until our return. The purchase had nothing to do with financial gain. In fact, a few years after I bought it the bottom fell out of commodity markets, and raising grain and hay became unprofitable. Farming is a difficult business under any circumstances. Now we are diversifying our farm business model and growing non-GMO corn and rye for local distilleries that want locally sourced products.

About four years ago a friend asked if her son could have his wedding on the property. We were happy to supply the venue but they had to do everything else. By the end of that summer we were deluged with wedding requests and we sat down with local vendors – caterers, tent suppliers, wedding planners, florists – and



Above: Lion Rock on a wedding day. Below, left: Lion Rock at sunset. Photos courtesy of Elaine La Roche.

explained that we were happy to rent the venue but they had to manage everything else. By providing this platform it has made the pie bigger for everyone, created opportunities for many local vendors and hotels, and brought people to our community – if only for a weekend.

What about your other commercial properties in Salisbury, CT?

When I returned from China in 2001 and considered retiring from Wall Street, I realized there were lots of vacant commercial properties in Salisbury. My focus was not driven by financial returns, as I saw an opportunity to be a catalyst for providing opportunities and affordable places for people to grow businesses. Communities can't thrive; they are not viable, unless there is a reason to come into town. It's very challenging because our population base is so small, and half the people are here only on weekends or seasonally, being driven to other states, like Florida, for tax reasons. It's difficult for local, small businesses to survive and provide jobs on a year-round basis. I wanted to give businesses a platform so entrepreneurs could do what they can do best. I try to be a good landlord and upgrade and maintain the properties and rent them at affordable rents. I work with the businesses so they have stability.

Continued on next page ...



Everyone has a different way of being philanthropic; each person connects in a different way. Some volunteer and support not-for-profit organizations, others are more public or prefer the charity circuit. My choice is to provide a catalyst or platform that businesses can leverage. There are others in our region with the same motive, and I'm pleased that I was one of the earlier ones.

What about the Salisbury Pharmacy?

When the Whitbeck family that had owned the Salisbury Pharmacy for generations approached me about purchasing the business and building, I thought it would be a passive investment. I was naïve. It was at a time when everything was changing for pharmacies – the internet, third party payers, and drugstore consolidation. I wanted to preserve the pharmacy as a social and economic center of the town and to protect the jobs of the talented professionals who worked there. In September of last year I transferred the business to Peter D'Aprile, whom I had hired years ago as our managing pharmacist, knowing he would preserve it for the good of the community.

And how did Passports happen? Can you learn retail?

While I was travelling and living overseas, I approached friends in Salisbury asking if they would run a store if I

would source exotic merchandise for it. On weekends I would scour the countryside and send back containers of Chinese country furniture and other vintage items. We were very early in buying artisan products and I'm delighted to see the growth of fair trade networks working with artisans around the world. While it's wonderful to see how this has developed, it also makes it more difficult to find the unique. Along with Christopher Baetz, our incredible store manager, I still do much of the buying for the store and try to have something to appeal to buyers at all price points.

With respect to learning retail, the business aspect of retail – importing, financial and inventory management, trade shows, etc. are all things that can be learned. Having an eye and a point of view is something you can't learn. You have it or you don't.

You're still working full time. How do you manage all of this?

I cannot do this alone and have been fortunate to have a small staff of dedicated and committed professionals both at the farm and at Passports. We rely on local small businesses to help take care of the properties.

What is the key to making and holding this type of investment?

With any business you have to multitask, and be financially and detail-oriented. You also have to understand the strengths of each of employee and



Above: Coffee at Sweet William's has become a morning destination in Salisbury. La-Roche renovated the 1854 Eliza Peet Building. Photo: Christine Bates. Below, left: Trade Secrets, weekend weddings and parties at Lion Rock bring people from everywhere to our community. Photo courtesy of Elaine La Roche.

let them do their job. Don't micro-manage.

Are you planning on making other real estate investments?

You know, on the one hand, it may be time to start handing over everything to the next generation, but sometimes opportunities present themselves that are irresistible. I'm a sucker for old houses with old floors and bringing them back to life. Something can be a challenge from a financial perspective, but still be a positive experience. It just depends on your long-term goals and objectives.

Do you think the northwest corner is a good place to buy real estate?

I think it's special because of its proximity to New York and Boston, its rural appeal and cultural and recreational offerings, as well as its excellent public and private schools. Former students are always returning here to buy in a place that they learned to love. The challenge is to offer opportunity and inclusion for all. Technology has changed how we work, and allows for remote business management which should attract more businesses to our community. And everyone needs to understand the importance of buying locally. I'm proud of the jobs we have helped to

create and the businesses we have fostered.

There is an evolutionary challenge in our region. People want to preserve the old, rather than focusing on how we can change and evolve in a measured way which is critical to long term survival. An example of this is weddings at Lion Rock Farm, which help preserve open spaces and our farm for future generations. We need to develop other types of attractions and opportunities that benefit the larger community. I also feel strongly that towns need to collaborate on issues like regional economic development and affordable housing.

Do you support other local activities?

The farm supports local not-for-profits in their need for a venue for their events, as well as our decade-long support for Trade Secrets and the work that Women's Support Services does.

With all of this, what do you do to relax?

For me, working is relaxing. I don't play bridge or golf and am a terrible tennis player. Being busy in the country with projects, my three grown children and friends is reinvigorating after a week working in the city. ●



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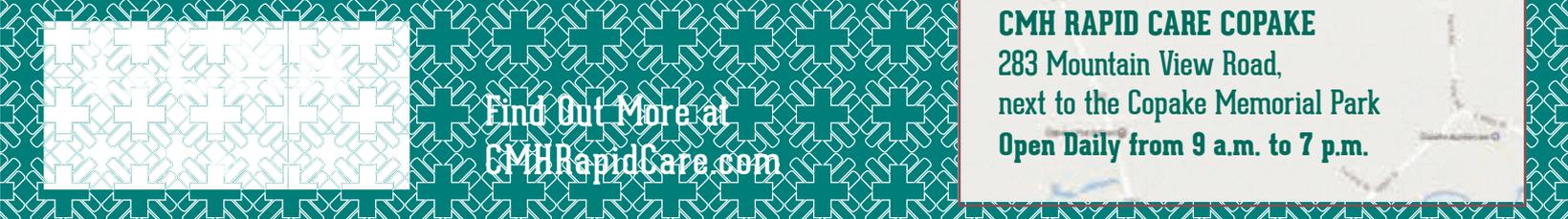
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Power Play

THE AGE DEFYING WORK OF NANCY VAUGHAN

By Mary B. O'Neill, PhD
info@mainstreetmag.com

Aging takes a toll on our bodies, and it's not always fun either. Nancy Vaughan knows that and she's making it her personal mission to address both. Through her strength training and water aerobics classes targeted primarily for women 60 and older, Nancy is telling age and gravity to take a hike – or pick up a kettlebell.

For most of her working day, Nancy is the wellness program administrator, student strength coach, and associate director of student activities at The Hotchkiss School in Lakeville, CT. There, she works with students, faculty, and staff on fitness, diet, healthy living, and fun. Crammed into those full days are the extra hours she devotes to keeping this area's female elders fighting fit.

For over 13 years, Nancy has been running water aerobics classes on a volunteer basis in partnership with Salisbury Recreation Commission and Hotchkiss. For the past five, she has developed two land-based classes with differing intensity levels hosted in the Hotchkiss wrestling room.

Using her nursing background plus her exhaustive and exhausting list of additional certifications as a personal trainer, weightlifting performance coach, functional strength coach, and movement and mobility specialist she is an effective blend of compassion and drill sergeant discipline. She pushes her mature students hard, but always within what their bodies can tolerate.

Nancy is grateful to Hotchkiss for the chance to make a difference both within its community and the community at large. From this writer's perspective, Nancy's classes are arguably one of the most profound ways that Hotchkiss improves the lives of local residents as part of its good neighbor policy.

Power up

Nancy observes, "My work with the women in my class centers on increasing power – making their bodies move more explosively, quickly, and with conviction. Our ability to generate power is lost at a greater pace as we age, more than our strength and aerobic capacity. I'm also trying to get that neurological conversation between head and feet to happen again. Somewhere along the path of aging, those two parts of our body stop talking." For some women, remembering how to jump is such an act of concentration that Nancy starts them out with literally jumping over the seam in the wrestling mat.

Regardless of their individual starting points, Nancy treats her mature students as if they were her teenage student-athletes. "I'm using the same mechanics but modified for the age group. I don't treat these women like old people. To me, they're athletes."

For new class member Joanne Hayhurst, "Nancy brings dignity to women of a certain age." This sentiment is echoed by every student. They're not talked down to, coddled, or treated as less capable due to their age, which ranges from early 60s to mid 80s.

Julie Himmel, a five-year veteran of Nancy's strength training class, calls her "a great motivator and respectful of limitations" of which Julie has quite a few – a steel rod in her spine and two knee replacements. Between reps of banded weighted glute bridges on the exercise ball cuddling a medicine ball for extra resistance, Julie comments, "I don't think I'd be moving without this class. It literally keeps me on my feet."

Modify, modify, and modify some more

Nancy works with all the restrictions that class members bring with them. "There are body changes and limitations that aging brings that I can't change. But I can modify every



Above: Nancy, far left, explains shoulder mobility mechanics.

exercise, explain the body mechanics behind the movements, and come as close to perfect form as possible."

Nancy meticulously explains how the deadlifts they do in the class use the same body mechanics and require the same attention to form as lifting a bag of birdseed or a bedbound husband.

Class members, some in their 80s, can deadlift 65 to 75 pounds easy. Nancy's awe is evident, "I'm constantly amazed at what they can do. They could take on RBG any day of the week." Her one rule with weights: No one- or two-pound "weenie weights." Connecting the work in the class with the work of life helps keep these women more independent in their daily routines. "With exercise and proper form I can help slow down the aging process and buy these women some time and independence and take control of their own aging process."

Saved by the bell

Nancy's main approach to building strength is timed circuit training. Around the room, women are working at exercise stations. When the bell rings, off they go panting to the next exercise. Jump squats lead

to rockets, then to TRX rowing and face pulls, followed by the rowing machine, Schwinn Airdyne, planks, kettlebell swings, jump ropes and rope battles, elastic bands, and squat leg lifts. This is a hardcore core-building, heart-pumping fitness regime and one that Alison Hale sums up by saying, "When you're 80, you don't expect to be doing this!"

Janice Fitch, a retired physical education teacher with old volleyball war wounds, appreciates the diversity of Nancy's fitness offerings. "We use the boxing gloves and weight bag and run sleds when the wrestling mats are up." Running sleds? Yup, the same ones the football players are pushing in practice. Janice reels off a list of new activities Nancy has introduced the group to, including paddleboarding and pickleball.

Girls just want to have fun

For Nancy, all work and no play makes for a very dull workout. That's why she injects fun and spontaneity into the classes. Nancy's infectious and

Continued on next page ...

irreverent sense of humor keep the class lively and sets a playful tone.

She ends each class with laughter. “The last ten minutes are playtime. The class engages in indoor soccer, bounces around on the stability balls, plays catch with 4 lb medicine balls, and throws Nerf balls at each other. They love to hit each other with those balls,” Nancy says with an amused smile. These lively class interactions brighten her day as well. “I laugh more with my more senior groups than anywhere else and no matter what kind of day I’m having. When I watch some of them working so hard and know what some of them are dealing with, it shuts me right up.”

What they’re dealing with can be considerable. Parkinson’s disease, multiple sclerosis, arthritis, heart issues, joint replacements, and osteoporosis to name a few. Then there’s the fear of getting older. For Ann Levine, the fear of falling was impacting her quality of life as were aches in her hips and knees. “At first I thought, ‘I can’t do this.’ But after coming to Nancy’s classes for two years, it’s changed my attitude about getting old. I have core strength, no pain, and I have confidence that if I start to fall, I’ll be able to regain my balance.”

Many exercise trainers might not prefer to work with this demographic of clients because of their age or physical limitations, but Nancy clearly loves teaching this generation of exercisers. She knows her life would be less rewarding without them. “I love what I do with Hotchkiss students, but they’d be awesome and amazing with or without me. But for my ladies, without these classes, they might not be as vibrant. For that reason, they mean so much to me.”

Party girls

While the exercise provides health benefits, there’s also the social aspect that impacts healthy aging. Nancy has observed that “For some women, there’s no place else they can go for this camaraderie. Some are pretty isolated.”

Donna Durbridge of the 9am class is the social coordinator for NOGs – Nancy’s Old Girls. Twice a week after class, they head out for coffee and

twice a year they gather at Donna’s house for a BBQ and holiday celebration. New members of the class are always welcome and embraced.

Donna explains that social anxiety is not just for teens. Coming to this class for the first time can feel intimidating with its combination of new faces and physical demands. NOG members help ease that transition and create “a caring family group.” She wishes all older people had access to this kind of class and a person like Nancy. She comments, “If there were enough Nancys to do this work, we could save a lot on hospital bills.”

Everybody in the pool

Nancy’s water-based classes are also a worthy workout with a large social component. The intensity and cardio benefit in the water vary with individual effort and the use of the resistance hand and ankle accessories available at the pool.

These classes are an effective complement to the land-based workouts. Nancy explains, “Water workouts involve less joint trauma. The weightlessness created in the water produces a balanced workout. Opposing muscle groups must fire for each movement without gravity interfering.” In Nancy’s experience, water workouts are the perfect place to begin exercising if you’ve been inactive.

Groovy 50s and 60s music plays in the background. Nancy stands poolside and calls the exercises, demonstrating what they’re supposed to look like underwater and providing visual entertainment doing the Twist, imitating Elvis, and playing a mean air guitar to Creedence Clearwater Revival. Women chat while bobbing up and down, creating waves, and laughter.

Nancy embraces the high level of social engagement in the pool, “If someone has the motivation to get out of their house, drive here, put on a bathing suit, get into water that’s less than warm, move a little, and talk a lot, I’m okay with that.”

Where the boys aren’t

Nancy possesses wonder and curiosity about this group, “Where did all these amazing women come from? Many of



them went to college at a time most women didn’t. All of them are mentally fit and intelligent. How did they find this class?”

The answer: Word-of-mouth and Nancy’s devoted following. Over and over, every woman testifies to Nancy’s humility, expertise, dedication, and energy. They gush about positive changes to their bodies. For Deb Fails, “Nancy’s positive reinforcement makes you want to push a little harder. I started this class in September and now I’m doing planks.” Judy Gafney observes that Nancy treats each woman as an individual, “I feel like I have my own personal trainer. She offers help, explanations, and corrects my form.”

Rindy Higgins sums it up most succinctly, “This class means everything to me.” ●

For more information about the classes, availability, fee information, and schedule, email Nancy Vaughan at nvaughan@hotchkiss.org or call her at (860) 435-3163.

Above, clockwise: Students demonstrate banded weighted glute bridge, traffic cop seated-core exercise, kettle bell swing, and med ball figure eights.

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Our Town

By Ian Strever
info@mainstreetmag.com

Before you begin reading, let me precede the article with an explanation because we realize that the contents may upset some readers. Of course we here at Main Street like nothing more than to tell a positive story and our intent is never to upset anyone. With that being said, reality is reality – and one has to be in touch with reality in order to be able to move forward and to make progress. From there you can look at what areas need help and which are already prospering, and everything in between. Ian took on our theme of “making a difference” with the eye of realism, and he highlights some of the challenges that our communities face – much like many other communities throughout the United States. But in line with our ethos, he concludes with what he believes our communities need in order to be able to deal with our issues and to move forward. Perhaps you will help with the conversation?

In Act One of Thornton Wilder’s *Our Town*, the avuncular stage manager invites the local polymath, Professor Willard, onto the set to provide some historical background for the audience. The professor obviously drones on about the geological and prehistoric beginnings of Grovers Corners, NH, but with some gentle redirection from the stage manager, he finally arrives at “the history of man” in the area.

We have our own corners here – Boston Corners – and an elaborate history of man that reflects econom-

ic and political trends over several thousand years, with the most dramatic changes occurring over just the past few hundred. The vestiges of our agrarian past live on not only in stone walls but in large and small farms that continue to feed us. Our industrial era left us with silent iron furnaces and a few mills we are still trying to repurpose. But who are we today, in 2019?

Who are we?

Census data begin to tell a story, county by county, town by town. At the county level, *Main Street* primarily covers Columbia, Dutchess, Litchfield, and Berkshire counties where, for the first time in over a century, population decreased across the board according to the 2010 census, and is expected to continue its decline in 2020. Among the four counties, the concentration of that population decreases as you head north: Columbia and Berkshire counties contain fewer people per square mile than Litchfield and Dutchess (which is due to its proximity to the greater New York City area).

At the risk of droning on about geology, our towns are defined by it. The flood plain that cradles the Housatonic provides plenty of flat, fertile farmland, and the Berkshire Hills, Taconic, and Catskill ranges that once provided iron for industry now provide geographic buffers and scenic backdrops that make us the nearest retreat for world-weary urbanites. (Boston Corners is the

nearest terrestrial “green” zone to New York City on the Dark Sky Map). Upwards of 30% of the homes in places like Salisbury, Sharon, and Cornwall in Connecticut are second homes, and income disparity is most pronounced in Litchfield County, where the aforementioned towns rank in the top fifty in the state for highest per capita income, while North Canaan is in the bottom ten percent (*Partnership for Strong Communities, 2015 Housing Data Profiles*).

Economically, however, Litchfield County has the lowest poverty rate of the area (6.7%), with the surrounding areas reporting double-digit figures. The lowest per capita income is in Berkshire County, where median income is actually below the national average, although the towns in that area tend to have greater parity in their income levels, with the cities of Pittsfield and North Adams saddled with more poverty and lower-income households. The same is true in New York State, where the contrast between Millbrook’s horse farms and Hudson’s row housing reflects a sizable economic divide that can’t be totally dissolved by the latter’s trendy enclaves.

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Our demographic pie chart

Most of the income in our area derives from human services, including healthcare and education, with construction, manufacturing, and agriculture filling in most of the remainder of the pie chart. Retailers provide important services in the area, but the emergence of Amazon and other online retailers has taken its toll on Main Street businesses – much like elsewhere in America. Our three states are among the top ten in the nation for per-person online shopping according to *Adobe's Digital Price Index*, and since the 2008 recession, counties across America like ours with fewer than 100,000 people lost 17,500 businesses, according to the Economic Innovation Group. In other words, more and more of our income is being outsourced to larger cities and other economies.

Opioids and politics

As is the case across the country, substance abuse is a concern in our communities, and we are not immune to the opioid epidemic that is decimating rural America. In the five-year period from 2012-2017, opioid-related treatment admissions increased 110% in northwest Connecticut, and opioid-related deaths increased in Berkshire County (*Community Foundation of NW CT, Massachusetts Dept. of Health*). While 2018 marked a decline in these numbers, local social service providers continue to battle the problem.

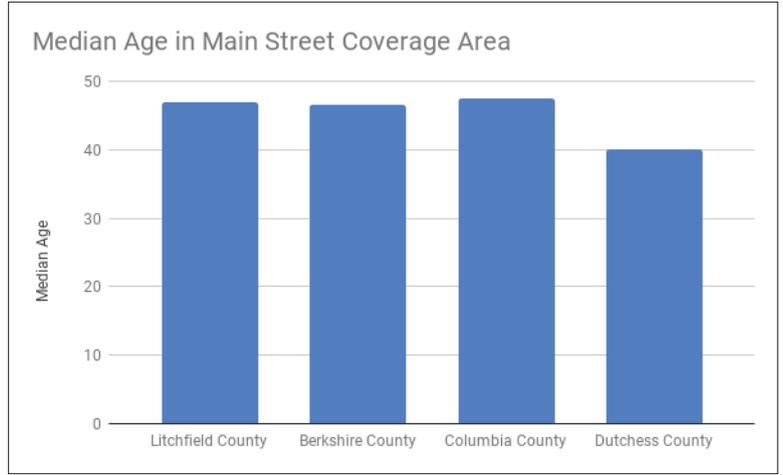
Politically, we are a mixed bag. Berkshire County, like most of Mas-

sachusetts, is reliably Democratic, as is Columbia County, although this is a relatively recent phenomenon that likely reflects a shifting demographic: before 1992, the area was a Republican stronghold. Litchfield County, despite some strong Democratic representation, was the lone Connecticut county that voted for Trump in the 2016 presidential election, somewhat surprisingly to some liberals.

It is that level of surprise that is most intriguing and telling. Some disappointed liberals will speak in almost apocalyptic terms about the last presidential election, but some of their more conservative neighbors across town ardently believe we are moving in the right direction. Taken together, the economic and political divisions paint a portrait of our area that is more nuanced than the data alone suggest.

Community impact from the private schools

“Community” here can mean several communities, really, and sometimes there is not a lot of overlap among them. Take education, for instance. Many of the preparatory schools in the area make efforts to interact with their local communities, but with their own dining halls, athletic facilities, theaters, activities, and calendars, they are micro-cultures unto themselves. They employ local residents and send their students to the local elementary schools, but their dormitory lifestyle constitutes a culture that primarily revolves around school events, not town ones. And given the signifi-



cant number of private schools in the area, this is not an insignificant portion of our towns.

Red Sox vs. Yankees fans

It is tempting to suggest that our culture is as fragmented as it is anywhere in modern America. Go to Anytown, USA, and you will unearth fissures among races, creeds, and Red Sox and Yankees fans. (A 2014 *New York Times* map places Berkshire County squarely on the faultline between the two, with a cameo appearance by the third-party Mets).

But the divides here are sometimes more pronounced and deliberate. Our proximity to New York City produces an economic and cultural divide that is difficult to bridge; the financial and social realities are just too disparate. I sat at a dinner party awhile back where several Manhattanites were either unable or unwilling to reorient their conversation out of the midtown restaurant scene, the gustatory nature of which I could not appreciate even with my *New York Times* and *The New Yorker* subscriptions.

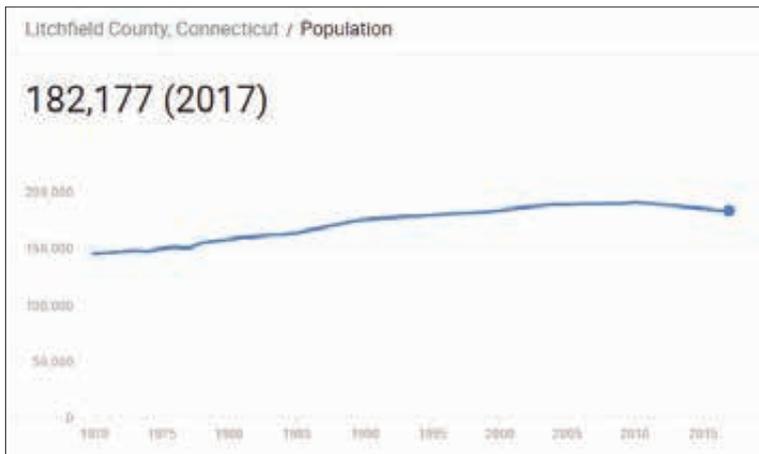
The importance of the conversation

But at least we were involved in a conversation, sort of. Economic differences do not necessarily precipitate social silences, but complete absence does. When a sizable portion of a population isn't present to have a conversation, it falls to the remainder to wonder about solutions. Add to that the balkanization of our sundry communities, and you have a recipe for resentment

and misunderstanding that shuts down communication before it begins.

Although I am not directly involved in the agricultural community, I talk with farmers regularly, and their concerns about national economic policy and its impact on the international dairy market are illuminating and thoughtful. While I can't personally change those policies, I also occasionally interact with people who wield that kind of influence, and those perspectives eventually make their way into the consciousness of rainmakers. It all starts with a conversation.

So how does all of this belong in an issue about “making a difference”? First, knowing the issues and realities of our communities leads us to acknowledge that some things should or could be different. All of these problems will impact us unless we collectively find ways to live as true communities. Second, realizing that part of the solution is simply talking with our neighbors can help us to appreciate their insights and perspectives on the issues that are shaping our community. Conversation between and among disparate factions will not solve our problems on its own, but lack of it prevents us from even getting started. Will you help with your community's conversation? ●





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Berkshire Taconic Community Foundation

By Betsy Maury
info@mainstreetmag.com

I remember first seeing the logos of Berkshire Taconic Community Foundation when I attended an after-school musical at my son's school in 2011. As a new resident in the area, I wasn't quite sure what connection the foundation had to the school or the musical it was putting on, but I gathered it was some kind of funding organization involved with children's educational programs.

Supporting the community, and touching many demographics

Several months after that I again saw the Berkshire Taconic banner at the Jane Lloyd Fund clambake on Satre Hill in Salisbury, CT. A friend had encouraged me to attend this fun, neighborly event of traditional New England seafood the first summer I was here but I really had no idea who Jane Lloyd was or what the event was about. I found out much later that Berkshire Taconic supported a fund that helped local cancer patients manage day-to-day living costs, and that it was named in honor of a woman whose friends and neighbors rallied behind her with financial support during her battle with breast cancer. The memory of the late Jane Lloyd – and that chain of generosity and good will – is now linked to many Northwest corner residents.

Being new, with knowledge of only a small part of the regional landscape, I was for the first few years here still somewhat hazy on what Berkshire Taconic was and did in this area. After a while, I began to see the familiar logo in brochures in the doctor's office and at the school, and at community art events and concerts. The foundation seemed to be involved in activities that supported community residents in various ways, and seemed to touch many demographics across many different towns.

It wasn't until 2018 when I had the opportunity to join the staff of Berkshire Taconic that I fully understood the scope of their work or their value in the community.

A public charity

Berkshire Taconic, like other community foundations, is defined as a public charity. This means that they pool and invest the money of generous donors and make grants in the public's interest. Like most community foundations, Berkshire Taconic administers a variety of fund types – from scholarship funds, to arts enrichments funds, to field-of-interest funds – in which donors and community groups can build charitable resources for the purpose of making place-based grants.

Berkshire Taconic currently holds eleven area funds that cover specific subregions, such as the Northeast Dutchess Fund, which is dedicated to improving the quality of life for residents in Dutchess towns; 33 education enrichment funds that award grants for projects in every public school district in the foundation catchment area; more than 50 agency funds that provide lasting endowed support for the missions of local nonprofits; and over 100 donor-advised funds that let people make grants to their favorite nonprofits. In 2017, the foundation distributed \$6.5 million in grants and scholarships to individuals and nonprofits throughout the entire region.

A community assessment

Shortly before I joined the foundation, Berkshire Taconic embarked on a year-long community assessment of the area, asking residents about strengths and weaknesses, challenges and opportunities in the communities where they live. The foundation serves residents of 70 towns in four counties across three states, within a 2,200-square-mile footprint encompassing Berkshire County in Mas-

sachusetts, Columbia and northeast Dutchess counties in New York and northwest Litchfield County in Connecticut.

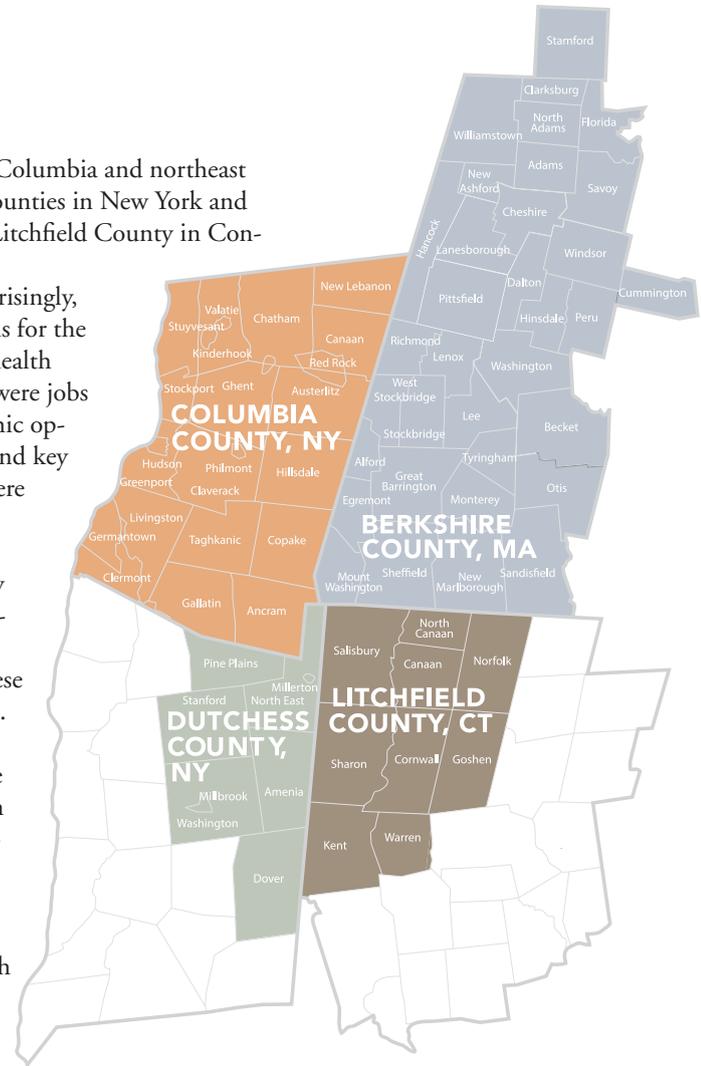
Not surprisingly, top concerns for the long-term health of the area were jobs and economic opportunity, and key strengths were the natural beauty and high-quality arts organizations that embrace these small towns. Across the board, there was concern about deepening inequality.

By conducting such an ambitious study, the foundation was able to learn about common trends and issues across the region and get an idea of how it could best leverage its relationships and resources to address them.

A Closer Look

The community assessment (later published on the website ACloserLook.net) seemed to me indicative of one of the core strengths of Berkshire Taconic as a convener of community-minded people within its catchment area. It was, in fact, the thing that drew me to work there.

The study captured data from donors, full-time residents, business and civic leaders and nonprofit professionals in the region, all of whom brought a different perspective to the research.



Above: Berkshire Taconic Community Foundation's coverage area. Map courtesy of Berkshire Taconic Community Foundation.

Continued on next page ...

It chronicled the demise of a community social net in some places and a lack of optimism about the future in others. Reading these differing viewpoints made me think my own perspective on life in the country was woefully incomplete.

A growing understanding

Over the year since I've been here, my understanding of the foundation's strength as a convener has deepened as I've met with and listened to all kinds of people engaged in the life of their communities, working to enrich them in one way or another.

I've met donors concerned about access to fresh and healthy food in Columbia County and opioid addiction in northwest Connecticut, and program officers working to get teens into summer jobs or move the needle on child literacy rates.

I've met volunteers who give their time and resources to the tiny arts organizations and historical societies that make up the unique character of this rural area. Over many listening sessions and Marketplace sandwiches in the Sheffield office, I've seen what community connection looks like.

The foundation's work is:

The work of the foundation is deliberate, responsive and innovative. Much of it is human work – making that extra phone call, listening to that different point of view, connecting this person to that one. All of the work is informed by the belief that communities matter, that leadership matters. The work is undertaken by a foundation staff that has deep roots in towns in the area – from Pittsfield to Falls Village, Ghent to Millerton. It is guided by a board that hails from all corners of the four-county region who volunteer time, resources and expertise to the foundation's mission of strengthening communities through philanthropy and leadership. Taken together, it is a powerful partnership of good will.



Three strategic priorities

Out of the community assessment, the board and senior foundation staff landed on three strategic priorities where they could best assert their leadership to meet community needs: economic opportunity, educational attainment, and community engagement. In the last year, a flurry of activity has taken place around these goals, bringing new expertise into the foundation and reaching out to knowledgeable local leaders to think creatively about best practices. These efforts have yielded fruit in innovative programming around school-to-work and new partnerships focused on increasing participation in the arts in Berkshire County.

The knowledgeable staff

Getting to know the Berkshire Taconic staff has been an unexpected pleasure for me. The organization is filled with the kind of people who pitch in at fall festivals, or serve Christmas dinner at a soup kitchen; they are usually the ones who say “yes” to another school fundraiser.

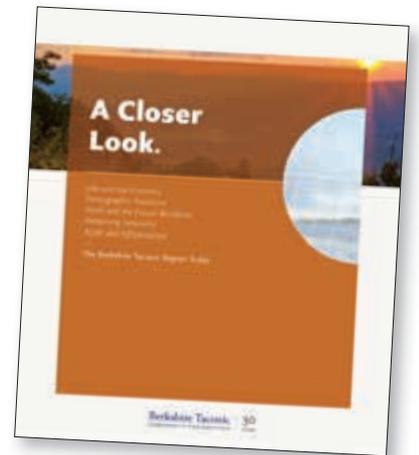
They are collegial and generous with their time and talents. Some have advanced degrees in education or law and some know a lot about things like local bow-hunting regulations, dive bars in Pittsfield, or secret places in the Great Mountain Forest. Many have library cards, most keep the heat at 60 degrees in the winter and they all vote. They have babies, teenagers,

and aging parents. To a person, they are hopeful about the future of the region.

The New York Times reported toward the end of 2018 that the 60 million people living in rural America's small towns and farm communities have experienced “relentless economic decline” in the last 25 years. Some places in the Berkshire Taconic region have seen this trend along with an aging and declining population. Yet, donors have made a difference for many community nonprofits in this area by providing vital funding to support their core missions. Generosity can tip the balance in small communities. There is no question that philanthropy will need to work alongside public policy and the private sector in the years to come to ensure that all residents stay and thrive in this area.

Community foundations like Berkshire Taconic are well-poised to lend agency to this effort. With their convening power, knowledge of community needs, and access to philanthropic resources, they can help lay out kindling for a bright future for every resident. •

To learn more about Berkshire Taconic Community Foundation or how you can help, please visit its website at www.berkshiretaconic.org.



Above, top to bottom: The Berkshire Taconic staff meets. Photo by Sarah Kenyon. *A Closer Look* is the written conclusion of a community assessment. Image courtesy of Berkshire Taconic Community Foundation.

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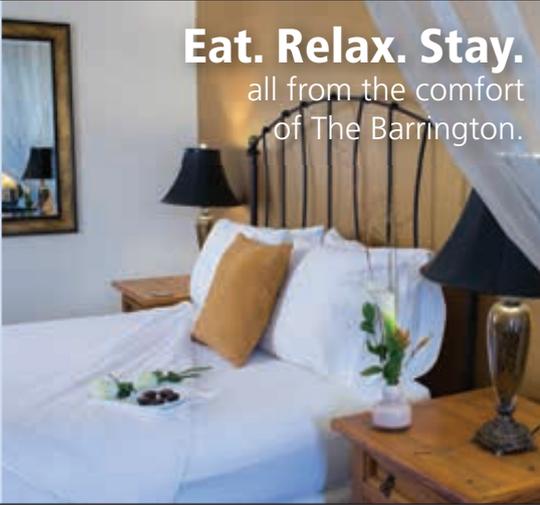
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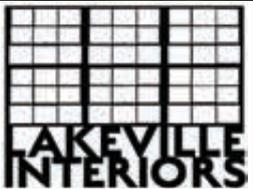


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By Regina Molaro
info@mainstreetmag.com

Every year, more children are being diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, prevalence in America is estimated at 1 in 59 births. This impacts many families both locally, nationally, and beyond.

“They say it takes a village to raise a child, but when you have a child on the spectrum, many people run away, effectively ostracizing families. Historically, families have felt devastated when their loved ones received an autism diagnosis and many felt isolated,” says Eliza Bozenski, chief development officer of the Anderson Center for Autism.

“I remember thinking nothing in life could ever feel as dark as 9/11” says Jackie Cannizzaro, who lost her husband Brian in the World Trade Center attacks. After remarrying, Jackie had a son, Kyle who was later diagnosed. “When I heard the diagnosis, it was like a loss of life for my child – the life that I had imagined for him as a parent,” says Jackie Cannizzaro.

According to the Global Autism Project, there are an estimated 70 million people worldwide with autism. The staff at Anderson Center for Autism in Staatsburg, NY, work together to optimize the quality of life for these individuals and reduce disparities. Through a variety of programs, it teaches academics and daily tasks such as doing laundry, meal prep, and work training. It also provides opportunities for individuals to engage with their

local communities.

Anderson’s history can be traced back to 1924. That’s when Dr. Victor V. Anderson – a psychologist and psychiatrist initially opened a boarding school, Anderson School. It served students with special needs and/or those who struggled in traditional public school settings. While Anderson’s name and mission has evolved over time, the organization always remained focused on serving children with special needs.

Anderson Center for Autism serves individuals with a primary diagnosis of autism, and those it believes will respond positively to the interventions and services provided.

Bozenski explains the nature of autism as a “spectrum disorder.” Some individuals are considered to be “higher functioning,” and can communicate verbally and succeed in less restrictive environments within their home districts. Others require more support. Anderson caters to individuals who are challenged by autism, as well as other cognitive and behavioral impairments.

“Beyond receiving an education based on NYS Standards, students learn how to communicate, develop vocational skills, and build social- and self-management skills,” says Dr. Tina Covington, chief operating officer of the Anderson Center for Autism.

Quality of life

Anderson’s current mission is to optimize quality of life for people with autism. Creative arts, gardening, and cooking, are just a few of the fun activities that keep individuals engaged. There are also Special Olympics, trips to sporting events such as Mets and Yankees games, and more.

“Everyone has talents, and recreational and leisure activities that they enjoy. Individuals with autism are no different. Our



Above: Christian. Photo: Pace Communications. Below, left: Business Center. Photo: Jim Smith Photography.

job is to ensure that everyone enjoys quality of life,” explains Dr. Covington.

The staff at Anderson works together to uncover and cultivate each person’s talents. Individuals are continually exposed to new activities and experiences, which include art, swimming, fitness, bowling, gardening, and beyond. Volunteer opportunities at local businesses such as Red Cap Cleaners in Hyde Park enable individuals to give back to their communities.

Through the Expressive Outcomes Program, individuals create art in multiple ways. Their expressive, colorful artwork is often prominently displayed and available for sale at various art shows across Dutchess and Ulster counties. The Noteworthy collection of greeting cards are created in art classes by students on Anderson’s children’s campus. They are available for purchase at several local businesses and online. All proceeds support the program.

Anderson Center for Autism’s idyllic country locale was befitting for the creation of the Organic Outcomes program, which invites people to tap into nature’s bounty. While working in gardens and greenhouses, individuals learn to grow vegetables, flowers, and spices. They also harvest seeds, which are later pressed into recycled

paper. The colorful paper is used in the creation of the Growing Gift collection of greeting cards and gift tags. After use, the cards and tags can be planted. In time, wildflowers will blossom. Growing Gift is available at various shops in the Rhinebeck area. All proceeds support the program.

One of Anderson’s newer initiatives is a partnership with the Village of Rhinebeck. Anderson’s Consulting team is currently working to provide training for businesses and organizations in Rhinebeck, so they can better accommodate those who are on the spectrum. This designates Rhinebeck as an “Autism Supportive Community” – the first of its kind in the region.

People in communities such as Rhinebeck are reaching out and taking initiatives to learn more about autism. Businesses are adjusting to ensure that the families of those with ASD are welcomed, supported, and understood.

“The move to create autism-friendly environments is new, but has already made a positive impact. It’s a recognition that our communities are making efforts to understand the lives of families and children with ASD,” says Dr. Covington.

Continued on next page ...





Above: The campus. Photo: Jim Smith Photography. Below, left: Kelton. Photo: Pace Communications.

A stellar staff

Learning is both academic and personally enriching. Anderson’s top-notch staff of clinicians, educators, and direct support professionals are dedicated to working with some of the most vulnerable individuals in our communities. They strive to help them learn the skills necessary to become as independent as possible.

Anderson is considered a “restrictive environment.” This is based on a high staff-to-student ratio, as well as the residential and 24 hour/365-day component of the program. It employs the techniques of Applied Behavior Analysis, the “gold standard” of instruction for individuals challenged by autism.

Anderson also employs evidence-based practices across educational, residential, and adult programming (The National Professional Development Center has identified 27 evidenced-based practices). These interventions have been vetted through peer reviewed research methods and are regarded as effective teaching strategies for individuals with ASD.

The organization measures the quality of teaching and its classroom environment against these practices and focuses its intensive teacher training on understanding and incorporating each of these strategies into its learning environments.

Although the decision to place a child into a residential school or adult home is traumatic, Anderson garners a strong network of support from families. The stress families face in navigating programs, and dealing with health and behavior challenges is greatly alleviated once they decide to seek assistance.

Families have repeatedly stated that although the decision to send their children into a residential program was the most challenging ever made, yet it was also the best decision. Children are more engaged in their daily lives than ever, and this, in turn, elevates the overall health of the entire family.

“We enjoy tremendous support from our thriving parent group, Anderson Family Partners. The members, who represent the majority of families we serve, provide advocacy, peer support, and fundraising activity all of which help the organization continue to provide the highest quality services to their loved ones. It’s truly an instrumental partnership between Anderson

and our engaged families, that rounds out the entire experience for the children and adults we serve, and their families,” says Bozenski.

Enrollment and other details

The Staatsburg location houses the children’s educational and residential program, and administrative offices. It serves 138 children ages five-21 on its main campus. Residential students account for 124 of those individuals while 14 are day students who attend the Anderson Education Center Monday through Friday.

The residences tap into personal preferences, enabling residents to select their own paint colors and bring in their own furniture from home.

Anderson also operates 23 other adult group homes throughout Dutchess, Ulster, and Orange Counties. In addition, it operates four Life-Long Learnings Centers in Dutchess and Ulster counties. Here, adults receive instruction, but these locations also serve as home-bases for participants as they volunteer and engage in community opportunities. These include managing the greenhouse at Indoor Organic Gardens of Poughkeepsie and volunteering at Hudson River Housing where janitorial and custodial services are provided.

As for enrollment, applicants must be referred, typically by their school districts, for residential or day placement. Referrals hail from all over New York State as well as other states nationwide. Occasionally referrals come from other countries. Rolling admissions enable people to apply at any time. The application process involves a paper review, parent and student interviews, tours, and communication about each potential candidate.

Beyond local initiatives, the organization operates Anderson Center International (ACI) – a 12 to 18 month intensive, highly interactive, capacity-

building training program for fellows who hail from countries worldwide. According to Global Autism Project, eighty-five percent of people with autism reside in developing countries where resources are scarce. Via ACI, it aims to contribute to global efforts to reduce disparity and elevate quality of life.

“We strive to achieve this objective by increasing our efforts to open opportunities for qualified applicants from developing countries. We’re also reaching out to relevant governments in the home countries of the applicants to facilitate connection and dialogue, and to foster cooperation and support. We already have historical evidence that this approach is exceedingly effective and efficient,” reveals Dr. Sudi Kash, chief clinical officer of the Anderson Center for Autism.

As for the future, the visionaries at Anderson yearn to continue efforts toward evolving the organization into a national Autism Recourse Center. Its goal is to become the agency that people go to for support or to learn how communities can support the growing number of individuals with ASD. •

To learn more about the Anderson Center for Autism, you can visit their website at www.andersoncenterforautism.org.



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Art for everyone in Columbia County — for real!

By *Dominique DeVito*
info@mainstreetmag.com

Columbia County is home to plenty of exciting, dynamic arts organizations. It's one of the reasons people flock to it, establishing it as home to the third highest concentration of creative professionals in the US (behind Brooklyn and Taos, NM). Its appeal to artists is nothing new; the father of the Hudson River School of Painting, Frederic Edwin Church, chose it as his place to call home in the Hudson Valley, settling just south of the city of Hudson in 1860. Today, Church's "Olana" is one of the top tourist destinations in the county.

If Church could revisit Columbia County today, he'd marvel at what's available for the artistically inclined within a short 40 miles of his beloved farm. One of the places he'd surely love is the Art School of Columbia County (ASCC). It's hard for anyone to resist its charms. Located at 1198 Route 21C in Ghent, the one-room schoolhouse is circa 1880. Positioned where Harlemville Road intersects with Route 21 when it turns into 21C (ah, country roads!), the school is painted an eye-catching shade of aquamarine. With Church's passion for Persian tiles, there's no way he could pass by and not want to stop in. What he'd discover — and what today's school devotees know — is that, like a masterwork, there is more to it than meets the eye.

A vision for an Art School

The Art School was the vision of Nicole Furnee and Thomas Chulak. Nicole ran Red Maple Books out of the building after purchasing it in 2005. When the opportunity to take over the Chatham Bookstore presented itself in 2012, she and Thomas couldn't resist. But abandon the schoolhouse? No way. They imagined it as a great space for artists to meet, take classes, exhibit their work, and eventually take their talents out into the community. They imagined it as a home base for "art for everyone" — not just locals and weekenders who wanted to take art classes, but for kids, teens, and even senior citizens who might not be able to get to classes, or whose classes in schools weren't quite enough.

In 2014, with the administrative details of forming the not-for-profit school secured, the search was on for a program coordinator. Kathryn Kosto, an artist and arts administrator, met with the board and was impressed with "the vision, mission, and structure," she said. "From the beginning, the Art School had eyes on both its community, and its organization. To succeed," she noted, "you need both." Kathryn was hired, and was soon promoted to executive director.

Art on wheels

Eager to fulfill the "art for everyone" mission, Kathryn got busy securing funding for what has become a signature feature of the School, its Art on Wheels Program. The objective is to bring additional art experiences to children of (almost) all ages throughout the county. And not just coloring books and crayons, but serious, integrative art experiences. "Grants are highly specific about what you should be providing," Kathryn



Above: The bright exterior of the Art School of Columbia County is a gem in the middle of the county. Below, left: ASCC Intern Jared Raphael helps install an art show. Photos courtesy of ASCC.



explained. "Many are integrative and interdisciplinary and require the incorporation of literature and history into the programs."

The Art School employs professional, local artists to conduct the programs. The artists work with Kathryn to decide what will be presented and how. It's a dance of applying for grants, awaiting their receipt, coming up with ideas for the programs, and then getting out into the community to work with the kids.

"I'm in touch with the teachers and principals in the school districts to determine the needs of their students," Kathryn explained, "and when funding is likely, we make things happen. The Art School has a dedicated base of hardworking volunteers who come in weekly to prepare materials for the programs (and many other things)," she said. These include everything from papers to colored pencils, paints, and often found objects that can be incorporated into the program's theme. The programs typically use a poem to springboard into artistic expression.

You know something's working when people want more of it, and that's what's happening with the Art

on Wheels programs. It's now offered in four school districts in Columbia County: Hudson, Chatham, Ichabod Crane, and Taconic Hills. A separate but similar Art in the Library Pop-Up Program is also thriving. As a local librarian effused after a session she witnessed, "A great deal of effort went into the designs, and it encouraged creativity on multiple levels. Both the instructor and assistant encouraged and supported the children's efforts ... I was incredibly impressed and couldn't be any more pleased with the project from start to finish."

All who have been involved in the school and library programs — the artists, the teachers, the school administrators, the librarians, the ASCC staff and volunteers — have had the pleasure of witnessing the transformation that art brings to the kids. "I call it 'The Big Yes,'" Kathryn said. "When you see the quiet joy on the teachers' faces and the kids fully engaged. When that happens, I know we're on the right path."

Continued on next page ...

Classes and exhibits

The Art School is also itself a school – a place where professional artists offer instruction in a variety of mediums, where members can exhibit their work, and where aspiring artists can learn about the business of being an artist. Classes and events are held year-round. “There are so many artists in Columbia County,” founder Nicole Furnee acknowledged, “and the Art School is positioned in the heart of the county, with a special role of connecting our diverse populations in a love of art.”

The typical annual calendar for the school includes classes held at different times of the day on Mondays, Thursdays, Saturdays and Sundays; seasonal student-faculty exhibitions; faculty exhibitions; member exhibitions; ARTalks; and fundraising events. Interested in exploring mixed media? Always wanted to try figure drawing with a live model? Maybe you want to experiment with a new medium for just an hour and have the materials provided? The ASCC’s classes change four times a year, but always offer a diverse selection. (Visit the website for the most up-to-date offerings).

Making it happen

Inspiring? Yes. An amazing resource for art in Columbia County? Yes. A sustainable mission? For now, anyway.

In truth, this article may not have been written, as the ASCC was faced with not one but two fundraising goals it had to meet by the end of December 31, 2018. One was its Annual Campaign for funding for the variety of its offerings, and the other was a Capital Campaign, which raised money to secure the schoolhouse itself as the permanent home of the ASCC.

Enter current Art School board president Karen Martin, who took over the post with just months left in the year and some lofty goals to meet. A relative newcomer to Columbia County, she and her husband relocated from Long Island in early 2016. Enchanted with their new home, they spent a lot of time driving back roads and marveling at all they were discovering. “We were finding everything here,” Karen said, “and we were excited about learning more and meeting new people. I eventually found out about the Art School,” she continued, “so I went to the website and was really impressed. I reached out, became involved, and next thing I knew I was not just on the board, but president!”

A self-described “artsy girl,” Karen was particularly inspired by the school’s mission of imagining art for everyone. “When kids need special help in school,” she noted, “art can be the first thing taken from them, and it’s usually the most important.”

Karen made it her personal mission to ensure that the fundraising goals were reached. And they were. “It was celebration time in January,” she said. “We are all so grateful for everyone who stepped up and made donations.”

“The story of the Art School is a great one to tell,” she said, glowing. “It was a fun challenge to close in on the fundrais-



Above: Children in ASCC’s free Art in the Library program. Below: ASCC faculty member Eileen Murphy teaching landscape painting in a program in Hudson High School. Photos courtesy of ASCC.



ing goals. Most of all,” she confessed, “doing these wonderful things for kids really makes me feel like I’m making a difference, and that feels good.”

On with art!

“We’re just getting started,” she continued as she spoke of thoughts and plans for 2019 and beyond. “More outreach in the schools, for sure,” she said, “but also more support in the community. We have a really good thing going on here, and I know our membership is going to increase as word spreads. I mean,” she said, “\$25 for a basic membership and you can show your work – and the more you give the more you get, with reduced pricing on classes, tickets to events, and much more. And you’re supporting this great cause of ‘imagining art for everyone!’”

Kathryn chimed in to share that the Art School is always welcoming new members and donors at all levels – and volunteers – to keep the school up and running. ASCC is also looking for donors who would like to match grant opportunities so they have a greater impact. Strategic planning is in the works for 2019, and community feedback will be sought through meetings and surveys.

“The Art School has literally become an ‘art for everyone’ establishment,” Nicole shared. “And the fact that the schoolhouse is remaining a schoolhouse – it’s a wonderful way to start 2019. I’m really thrilled with the success of the Art School.”

There aren’t many quotes attributed to Frederic Church about art and the making of it, but he did say this about his spot in Columbia County: “Nature has been very lavish here in the gift of her beauty – I am sure you would enjoy the noble scenes which our windows command.” Those ‘noble scenes’ abound here, and the windows of the Art School look out into the county as a beacon of truly imagining – and providing – art for everyone. •

To learn more about the Art School that could – and did – and will – visit the website at www.artschoolofcolumbiacounty.org. You can also follow the ASCC on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. Sign up for classes. Come to an exhibit. Share in Art for Everyone.



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THE BIG PICTURE, FASHION FANTASIES:

The women behind Staley-Wise Gallery

By Joseph Mentebello
info@mainstreetmag.com

In 1981 Etheleen Staley, who was working as a fashion stylist for photo shoots, was offered a commercial space in a loft in SoHo, having no idea how she would use it.

“I said I would take it,” Staley recalls, “and I enlisted my friend Taki Wise to share it with me. We both put in a little money, the owner put up some walls and Staley-Wise Gallery was born.”

Over thirty years later it is one of the most successful and popular photography galleries in the business. When it began it focused primarily on photographers who shot fashion.

Fashion and advertising

“Taki and I had met at Grey Advertising and we both worked in fashion,” explains Staley. “I had done a lot of work with Ralph Lauren and Estée Lauder. After working at Grey, Taki went on to be the photography editor at *Seventeen* magazine.”

“Fashion is what we knew and that’s what we wanted to show. We made a wish list of photographers, Horst, Louise Dahl-Wolfe, Erwin Blumenfeld, and Richard Avedon – all of the top ones and we decided that’s who we would solicit.”

Back then photography was not yet considered a major art form and the photographers who shot fashion were usually a work-for-hire: they took the pictures, got paid, and the publications kept the photos. How the world has changed since then.

Tapping into something

“Nobody had shown fashion photography and all the photographers we contacted wanted to show in our gallery,” says Wise.

The two women planned their first show of Horst photographs, framed everything themselves, sent out invitations, and hoped for the best. And they got much more: Andy Grundberg, at the time the art critic for *The New York Times*, gave them a glowing review in the Sunday *Arts & Leisure* section and set the gallery on its way.

At the time Staley-Wise opened, there were very few galleries showing photography, very few clients who were interested in buying fashion photography as an art form, and very few people writing about the shows.

“What was big at the time was street photography and photojournalism,” says Staley. “Photographs



Above: Taki Wise, left, and Etheleen Staley in their highly successful gallery. Photo by Harry Benson. Below, left: A scene from the exhibition of Richard Avedon. Courtesy of Staley-Wise Gallery.

were small in size and usually in black and white. And certainly no one cared about fashion pictures. Even though there were some great photographers working for fashion magazines, the photos they took were not considered valuable. Publications commissioned them, published them, then put them in a file, never to be seen again. When Hearst moved into their new building they threw out all of their files. Ironically when they needed a photograph they came to us. They had no idea of the value and I don’t think photographers did either.”

Growing

After the favorable review Staley and Wise were asked to give up their space because too many people

Continued on next page ...



were coming to see the exhibitions. So they found another space on Prince Street and then a larger space after that one. For the past several years the gallery has been located at Crosby and Prince Streets.

Raising the relevance of fashion photography – and more

Together Staley and Wise have forged an amazing career in the world of photography and are well respected and extremely knowledgeable about that world. From Lillian Bassman, Hoyningen-Huene, Arthur Elgort, Sidney Skolsky to Norman Parkinson, Herb Ritts, Deborah Turbeville, and Helmut Newton, the gallery has featured the best of the best and has been instrumental in raising the importance and relevance of fashion photography.

The gallery produces four shows a year, with the most recent one being David LaChapelle: *Will You Still Love Me Tomorrow?*

Changing times

But, with the advent of the internet and online buying, the gallery business has changed radically since Staley-Wise was launched.

“People don’t go to galleries to buy anymore,” explains Staley. “They go to art fairs, auctions, online sources like artnet and 1stdibs.



People buy expensive pictures that they never see beforehand, except on the computer screen. We now ship all over the world and so far there have been no complaints. While we have more sales, I miss the personal exchange. I can remember when Taki and I would open the gallery on Saturdays and people would be lined up outside to come and look at the pictures.”

Color vs. black and white

Another significant change in collecting fashion photography is that originally the medium was black and white. Today color has become prominent as well.

“People want color,” Wise says. “And the sizes have gotten much larger. We’ve also branched out to include other categories, such as celebrity photographs. We now sell style, more than strictly fashion.”

Be it fashion, style, celebrity, internet or not, Staley-Wise has cornered

the market on representing and presenting to the public the finest in photography and photographers.

Locally connected

Both women, when they are not ensconced on their gallery, spend time here in Dutchess County, NY – Staley in Amenia, Wise in Red Hook. And they actually do have down time.

“My husband Alan’s family kept horses and his brother was an Olympic rider. We had rented houses in the Hamptons for years, but when we decided to buy a house we wanted a place where Alan could do winter sports. We remembered Millbrook and then found this house in Amenia. We have been there a long time and love it. It’s a welcome respite from being in the city. I garden, I read, I cook.”

And then it’s back to Staley-Wise and the successful, magical world they have created through photography. ●

To learn more about Staley-Wise Gallery and the women behind it, you can visit them at 100 Crosby Street, Suite 305, New York, NY, or online at staleywise.com, or call (212) 966-6223.

Scenes from exhibitions. Above: Patrick Demarchelier. Below, left: Harry Benson. Courtesy of Staley-Wise Gallery



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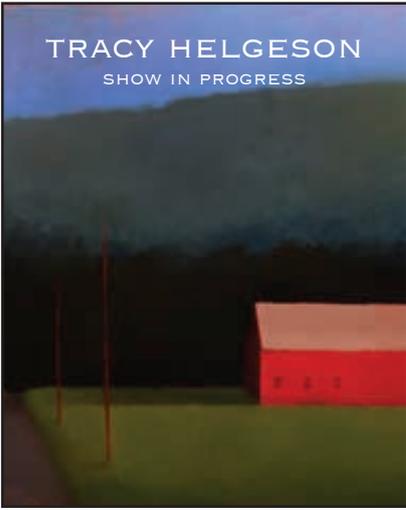
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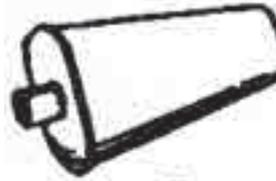
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ACTING THE PART

THEATREWORKS NEW MILFORD

By CB Wismar
info@mainstreetmag.com

There was an abandoned church.

There was a group of talented individuals who reveled in staging well chosen, well directed, well acted plays.

There was an audience of residents, weekenders, and summer visitors who seemed eager to take advantage of the mysterious transaction that happens when disparate individuals are transported into two and a half hours of fantasy – another space – another time – another way of looking at life.

Enter TheatreWorks New Milford. “We’re a volunteer, non-Equity theatre company,” offers board president Christine Daley, “but we act like professionals.”

The church had been standing on Brookside Avenue since 1901 when the cornerstone for Second Advent Church had been set in place. With time, the building was no longer used as a place of worship, so it became available for any suitable use.

The talented people who enjoyed discovering and producing interesting, amusing, and challenging plays had been presenting their work since the 1965 premier of Graham Greene’s *The Potting Shed*. Their stage had been the old high school auditorium. Their marketing had consisted of word-of-mouth, simple ads in the local papers and the hope that the third essential ingredient – the audience – would come to see. And, they did.

When the company opened its first season at TheatreWorks New

Milford’s permanent home in 1973 with *The Fantasticks*, the company solidified its position in the regional theater scene – a position that has been consistently well reviewed and celebrated with awards including the 2017 Northwest Connecticut Council on the Arts “CultureMAX” award for Best Cultural Organization.

Season after season of great theater

Through the years of bringing vital, engaging works to its stage, the TheatreWorks New Milford company has done a coordinated and choreographed job of selecting major works, tailoring them to fit a rather compact stage, and assembling casts that bring a level of acting ability to each production that resonates with the company’s wish to appear and present themselves as “professional.”

TheatreWorks New Milford (the name started out as The New Milford Players) went through a period of organization as The Creative Arts Center until their purpose became their name. The company presents fully realized plays and musicals on the compact stage of the former church to an audience occupying 100 seats.

The 2019 season

For the 2019 season, five productions will grace their stage – each one quite unique and, as a result, quite worthy of the attention of both the loyal audience and newcomers.

When the winds of February are blowing up and down the Housatonic River Valley, David Mamet’s *Race* will be presented, directed by TheatreWorks stalwart Francis A. Daley. Not an easy play, *Race* is a challenging piece that has grown more pertinent, more engaging, and more relevant with time. The choice to inaugurate the 2019 season with this play may not have been an easy one, but the keen ability that TheatreWorks has to



Above: TheatreWorks’ performance of *Young Frankenstein*. Below, left: The exterior of TheatreWorks New Milford. Images courtesy of TheatreWorks New Milford.

assemble excellent casts and Daley’s intimate understanding of the space, the audience, and the material should make for an energizing beginning.

Jane Farnol will direct the second offering, a delightful play set in an English retirement home for performers. *Quartet*, Ronald Harwood’s piece that was adapted to the screen and directed by Dustin Hoffman has great humor and undertone of great music.

The July into August presentation of TheatreWorks New Milford is Christopher Durang’s Tony-Winning comedy *Vanya, Sonia, Masha and Spike*. Jocelyn Beard will direct this send-up of Chekhov themes which requires no pre-knowledge of Chekhov ... merely a sense of humor.

From comedy to drama, the fall presentation will be Agatha Christie’s *Witness for the Prosecution*, directed by Frank Arcaro. Then, capping the year, Brad Blake will bring his holiday send-up *Wreck the Halls* to New Milford after having met great reviews at The Ridgefield Playhouse in years past.

Continued on next page ...



Actively building community

Throughout the year, other projects and presentations will be offered by TheatreWorks New Milford, including a one act play festival in early June, *Tales From the Brookside*, curated by Jane Beard.

With sensitivity to the appetites of the community, TheatreWorks also offers a robust children's theater program known as TWKIDS, as well as Improv Nights and a Playwright's Workshop on Wednesday evenings that encourages budding playwrights to get insight and commentary on their work.

Among many attributes of the TheatreWorks New Milford mindset and operating philosophy is the stated intent to "be professional." Christine Dailey proudly speaks to the willingness of the company to take risks ... to step outside the expected community theater cycle of familiar musicals and easy revivals to challenge – both on stage and in the audience. "We've been willing to premiere new works that haven't been seen by most of our audience," she cites. "We try at least one play each season that may seem like a bit of a risk. It's energizing and it keeps the audience fresh."

As with all companies – theatrical, dance, musical – the desire to both keep and build an audience is a constant pressure. As the resident population shifts, how to best attract new playgoers? "Last season we staged *Zombie Prom*," recalls Christine. "The results were terrific. We brought in an entirely new audience segment to see the production. We'll continue to offer pieces that will broaden our attraction."

Special nights ... special programs

One way of serving the range of theater lovers who make up the normal TheatreWorks audience is to offer nights with incentives and price reductions. "We need to build out our lobby area," remarked Russ Posthauer, current treasurer of TheatreWorks New Milford and a long-time board member. "When we offer Free Senior Nights or 'Pay-What-You-Want' nights at the theatre, the crowding gets a bit intense." Dates for those popular offerings are posted on the TheatreWorks New Milford website for the entire 2019 season.

Plays are chosen each year based on the "pitches" of directors interested in presenting pieces they, themselves are passionate about. Once selected, the casting process begins. The original geographic draw was quite compact with New Milford at its center. As years have passed, the company's reputation has grown and the crop of eager

actors has expanded, and casting calls go out from Hartford to New York City. The results are what one would expect.

The casts are superb, the dedication to amateur theatre intense and the productions well worth the invested evening. Among those who have made a career visit to the New Milford stage are TONY nominee Robin De Jesus and dancer/actor/choreographer Adam Battelstein, along with Pilobolus Dance Company and, since 2009 the creator and director of Catapult Entertainment, and finalists on *America's Got Talent*.

The 2019 season will bring with it the usual challenges of a small company working diligently to bring first rate theatre to their stage. There will be capital improvements that need to be made – the lobby needs to be expanded, bathrooms on the theatre level (in addition to those in the lower level) would be a great boost for attendees. The proposed sale of an adjacent large building and parcel of land that has served as audience parking for years will present diplomatic as well as logistical challenges.

Through it all, however, the volunteer team that is TheatreWorks New Milford is far from daunted. To the contrary, they are energized and eager to move forward. "This is great fun," explains President Daley. "We can't think of anything else we'd rather be doing!" ●

Visit the TheatreWorks New Milford website at www.theatreworks.us for information, schedules, and tickets.



Above, top to bottom: A scene from the performance of *Avenue Q*. A scene from the performance of *The Man who shot Liberty Valance*. Below, left: The inside of TheatreWorks New Milford. Images courtesy of TheatreWorks New Milford.



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Townscape of Millerton and Northeast

A nonprofit organization focusing on community revitalization and beautification. townscapeofmillertonandnortheast.com

Townscape is a nonprofit organization founded in 2007 with a focus on community revitalization and beautification. But, the real question is “Who is Townscape?” And the answer to that question is community members who work together for the betterment of the place we all share. Here are some of the things that Townscape has done: It has planted and maintained over 40 trees in the Village, created the Millerton Historic District, helped restore the Millerton Clock Tower, decorated Main Street for the winter holidays, provided new signage at the entrances to the Village, helped design and finance the iron railing on the sidewalk in front of Gilded Moon, planted and maintained the flowers at the monument in Veteran’s Park, provided new benches throughout the Village, provided the tables and chairs in the park in front of Veteran’s Park, and help finance the new composting toilets on the Rail Trail behind the Irondale Schoolhouse. What do we want to do next? Well, the wish list is long: Help the Village renovate Eddie Collins Field. Participate in the Millerton Business Alliance and partner in the sponsorship of village-wide events. Collaborate with the Village and Town to launch a 21-day climate smart/drawdown challenge in April. In short, continue providing partnering energy to help this remarkable community grow and improve and become an even better place to live.



Women’s Support Services

Domestic violence intervention and prevention. (860) 364-5767. 158 Gay Street, Sharon, CT. wssdv.org

Women’s Support Services (WSS) is a nonprofit domestic violence agency committed to creating a community free from violence and abuse. It provides services confidentially and free of charge across the Northwest corner of CT, the eastern Dutchess corridor, and the southern Berkshires. It works with women, men, and children, offering services that range from a 24-hour hotline, counseling and support groups, to court advocacy and emergency shelter. Staff members provide training for local professionals and community groups, working both in the office in Sharon, and off-site wherever they are needed. WSS has developed a robust violence prevention education program for students pre-K through grade 12. “Transforming lives for the better is one of the most rewarding aspects of our work,” notes executive director Betsey Mauro. This transformation would not be possible without the incredible community support WSS receives. Volunteerism and engagement take many forms at WSS: program volunteers, board of directors, and their corps of nearly 200 Trade Secrets volunteers (their primary fundraising event). “And of course, the thousands of donors, supporters, ticket buyers, vendors, underwriters, and Main Street Partners – our community who believe in us, support us, and ensure that our clients always have a place to come to for safety, support, and hope.”



Book Buddies

Literacy Connections of the Hudson Valley. (845) 452-8670. 504 Haight Avenue, Poughkeepsie, NY. literacyconnections.org

Today a reader, tomorrow a leader. That was the concept that inspired a determined tutor at Literacy Connections to propose an idea to launch a reading assistance program for early elementary school students. In 2012, Book Buddies was introduced. Blossoming from four schools, the program now operates in 16 schools in the Arlington, Beacon, Newburgh, Pawling, Pine Plains, Poughkeepsie, and Webutuck districts. Book Buddies differs from traditional literacy programs in that it pairs each volunteer with his or her own student. Since the teams meet weekly, there’s lots of time for individual reading, as well as opportunity for volunteers to foster relationships that instill confidence. Other Book Buddies programs include Classroom Book Buddies, which brings volunteers in weekly to read with children on an individual basis and to engage in activities with small groups. There’s also a Math Buddies program. Teachers select students who they feel could benefit most. All programs are offered on school premises during regular classroom hours, eliminating the need for parents to obtain transportation. Book Buddies provides all necessary materials. Literacy Connections is a nonprofit organization. Funding is provided via grants from Dutchess County and United Way of the Dutchess-Orange Region, and from donations from Literacy Connections supporters. Literacy programs are also available for adults.



The North East Community Center (NECC)

Strengthening our community through social service, education, etc. (518) 789-4259. 51 S Center Street, Millerton, NY. neccmillerton.org

The North East Community Center was established in 1988 by a group of individuals who were concerned about the lack of services for Millerton and Northeast citizens. The NECC’s mission is to strengthen our community through social service, educational, cultural, and recreational programs for toddlers through seniors. It envisions a healthy, caring, responsive, and welcoming community for all who live in and visit the region. They embrace the values of respect, flexibility, transparency, collaboration, and inclusiveness. Cumulatively, the NECC now reaches the entire northeastern quadrant of Dutchess County with one or more services, and also serve clients from CT, and Columbia County through the farmers market, senior exercise, tax prep, and case assistance programs. “Our organization was founded upon a purpose to help resolve issues of access to services in this rural area. We are strengthening ourselves so we can meet the ongoing and emerging needs of the community. We are building our staff and programs for the long term, and will be embarking on a path to improving our facilities for even greater service in the future. Many hands and hearts are coming together to ensure we can continue to adapt and grow, in whatever way our community needs from us,” says Christine Sergent, executive director.

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Holidays and seasons play a large role in our emotions as well. The invigorating pallet of spring colors and flowers from tulips, iris, peonies and lilacs rejuvenates as a new season springs to life. Likewise, the warm autumnal grace of fall tones brings comfort as we settle into the cooler weather.

In addition to the color scheme, consider the scale of your design in proportion to the emotions you are looking to convey. Towering centerpieces, enormous vases, and decadent florals all evoke an astounding "wow." Meanwhile lower compact, simplified or monochromatic styles invite more of a reserved "awe." Either way, flowers bring out the best in all of us and can help you create anything from elegance and flare to whimsical and carefree. Whether you looking to simply acknowledge an occasion, brighten someone's day, or express condolences, the right flowers can make all the difference.



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When we work collaboratively for our individual empowerment, the well-being of our neighbors, and to bring healing to the regional and global community, we make a difference. Heal yourself, then work on loving your family, move next to your neighbors and co-workers. Then go big and bring your love and kindness to larger platforms – run for office, become a foster parent, send a donation and help someone across the globe. There are countless ways you can make a difference.

When you remember that you are Love – you make a difference. When you remember that we are all Love and that we are all interconnected by the unseen force of Love/Source/Spirit/God, we remember that one small kindness for another will bring kindness into our shared life on this planet.

You can make a difference, you have to make a difference. Imagine the world as a place where every person made one small difference in someone else's life each and every day. That's the world I dream of, can you help?



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