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2021 HAS FINALLY ARRIVED!

This might just be the year that we've all been waiting for. Not necessarily because we're excited for 2021, but more so because we've all been anxiously awaiting the end of 2020. I found though that most of us adjusted quite well and pivoted well during the challenges of the pandemic year. And from that we can only deduct that we are strong and can take on any challenge that is thrown our way.

With that said, looking ahead to a new year: the possibilities are only limited by our imaginations! It is a new year, and in many ways we have a fresh start. And I for one am excited to focus my energy on positivity, creation, growth, and not have to worry about health and safety - or so I hope! And with that in mind, we decided to devote the month of January to focusing on the topic of wellness. This past year has really highlighted how much of an emphasis we should be placing on our overall wellness, whether that be mental, emotional, or physical wellness. And so, as you flip through the pages of this magazine, you'll notice a plethora of stories focusing on various aspects of the topic of wellness.

The new year also marks the time when every other person seems to make a New Year's resolution, and traditionally gym memberships soar. This year might be slightly different on the gym membership front, but that's not to say that folks won't be re-committing to their fitness. But for all of the reasons mentioned above, we decided to make this January issue our "wellness" issue. And in addition to focusing on this topic in this print issue, throughout the month of January we will be posting information, helpful tips, articles, videos, and more from local experts in the wellness realm on our website. So please check our website and follow us on social media so that you don't miss any of our wellness stories.

From my personal perspective, I don't think that I'll be making a specific New Year's resolution, but instead I'll do what I usually do around this time of year. I examine (quite critically often) where I am in my life, ask myself what I like and don't, and I assess my goals and dreams - and from that I set a roadmap for myself. In 2021 I will continue on my wellness journey, but I now have a clearer path. I have a more precise roadmap for myself and I hope that 2021 will be cooperative in helping me achieve my goals, but frankly, I just hope that 2021 will bring us all safety and health. So I wish us all a happy 2021, and hope that it will be full of health, light, and good things!

- Thorunn Kristjansdottir



JANUARY 2021

Carrying hope into the New Year.

Cover photo by
Olivia Valentine

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Deconstructed, revitalized ... reconstructed



By CB Wismar
info@mainstreetmag.com

Perhaps Oscar Wilde was correct. “Life imitates art far more than art imitates life.” Should one be in need of a living example, please welcome Richard Griggs. An artist who finds elegance and beauty where others see pieces that should be consigned to the local transfer station, Griggs creates pieces that take on new and whimsical dimensions.

And, as far as the life/art continuum, his own story is very much an illustration of the immense value of reconstruction. By any common measure, Richard Griggs should have been a name from distant memory long ago. Rather he is a vibrant, insightful, somewhat cryptic occupant of a house of his own modification and construction on Cream Hill Lake in Cornwall, CT. Enter Richard’s world and be prepared to be both captivated and bemused.

Born in New York, Richard moved to Cornwall when his father, a former vice president at Merrill Lynch, retired to a more bucolic life. The quirkiness of Richard may, in fact, be an inherited trait, as his father, leaving

the pressurized environment of high finance found an early retirement reimagination ... as a school bus driver in the town.

With an artistic drive matched with a flair for the dramatic, Richard graduated from Boston’s Emerson College where he focused on theatrical set design and ended up with a job as stage manager in the burgeoning dinner theater world at the legendary Chateau de Ville in Framingham, MA. “Bob Hope would play the Chateau for a full week,” Griggs remembers, along with the recollection of the public needle Hope gave him on his closing night. “I’d do his introduction from backstage, reading what his road team would give me each night. On the final night, I asked Hope how he wanted to be introduced and he rattled off the introduction as he wanted it. When I parroted the words back, Hope took the stage and shared with the audience, ‘Well, the kid finally got it right.’”

Go West, young man

When dinner theaters began to fade as costs rose and income didn’t, Richard headed west to Los Angeles. “My first full-time gig was working with the legendary theatrical rock group, The Tubes.” As an electrician and

occasional stage performer, Griggs became a lasting part of the entourage that made The Tubes concerts massive theatrical productions.

Then, there was television. Touring takes its toll on everyone involved, so when the opportunity presented itself to become part of a Disney Channel television program, Richard bid the road farewell. As a “grip” on *Dumbo’s Flying Circus*, Griggs translated his electrical and carpentry skills into the intricate world of film and video production.

The combination of puppetry and live actors was intriguing and when the cult classic *Alf* offered Griggs a spot on their production crew, he joined Paul Fusco’s team and became, in his words “one of the trap door rats” that were kept busy managing the stage entrances for the alien puppet from underneath the stage.

That dramatic split second

All seemed like it was moving in the right direction for Griggs as his place in the production world of Los Angeles seemed set. That was until the



fateful day when, out for a bicycle ride in his San Fernando Valley neighborhood, Richard Griggs was hit by a car. Instant, life-changing experience that would require a staggering amount of reinvention.

He was hit hard ... so hard, in fact, that he was slammed into the windshield, then catapulted through the air to crash into a tree. Surgery was lengthy and intricate as Griggs had a broken back and broken pelvis and had suffered serious traumatic head injury.

Recuperation and physical therapy were excruciating and long. "Not only did I have to learn how to walk, again, I had to learn how to speak ... how to do simple daily functions. I decided that when I was strong enough, I wanted to go back home," recalls Griggs.

And, so he came ... back to Cornwall and the serenity of the lake and the Litchfield Hills. Talented and imaginative, it was not long before Griggs was invited by long-time family friend Tim Prentice to join the team of art constructors who have brought Tim's imaginative designs into artistic reality.

One professional bonus to working in the Prentice workshop was the proliferation of bits and pieces

of the materials required to fabricate the enormous air-capturing sculptures. With permission and blessing, Richard began to see the trimmings and cuttings as more than refuse for the recycling center. They became elements in his own creations – gentle mobiles that move lyrically in the air or fantasy creatures that can dot the landscape.

"Found art" is an entire category of sculptural invention, and "found art" has become Richard's specialty. Obsolete computer hard drives, plastic inserts designed to hold pieces in place while shipping then discarded, beer bottle caps, metal discs, pieces of abandoned machinery and wire ... lots and lots of wire. Named by the French *objet trouvé*, the individual pieces of sculpture are created by utilizing objects originally purposed for other uses, not the creation of art. One of the most prominent artists who made extensive use of found art was Robert Rauschenberg who has been famously quoted as saying "You begin with the possibilities of the material." That captures Richard Griggs's creations and their infinite possibility.

The love of his life

One of the artifacts of his time in California on the *Alf* set is *Elenore*, a car that sits nestled under a tarpaulin in the garage beneath Richard's studio. It's a 1963 Ford Falcon that he purchased from "Alf's left hand," puppeteer Lisa Buckley who, with Paul Fusco, operated the puppet during production.

It was one day when he was out driving his prized Falcon that Griggs spotted Bianca Langner walking alongside the road. Conversation ensued, followed by other conversations and adventures and, ultimately, marriage. Bianca is the proprietor of West Cornwall's Wish House and the Souterrain Gallery. Together, the



Above: Virus mobile in the foreground. Below, left: Reflecting discs hanging sculpture. Opposite page, top to bottom: Found art mobile. The artist, Richard Griggs and his work in progress.

couple has become deeply immersed in community life, sponsoring The Original Cornwall Farm Market that runs on weekends through the growing season, establishing and managing a very active Facebook page for the community and being engaged in a variety of volunteer community activities.

It is in The Wish House that Richard's fanciful creations ... his "things" ... can be seen and appreciated ... and acquired by those with a sense of discovery and whimsy. ●

For more insight into the artistic mind of Richard Griggs, visit his website at rgthing-maker.com. There are several videos that will engage and entertain ... just like the "things" that come from the studio of Richard Griggs.

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 through the arts form on our "arts" page on our website.





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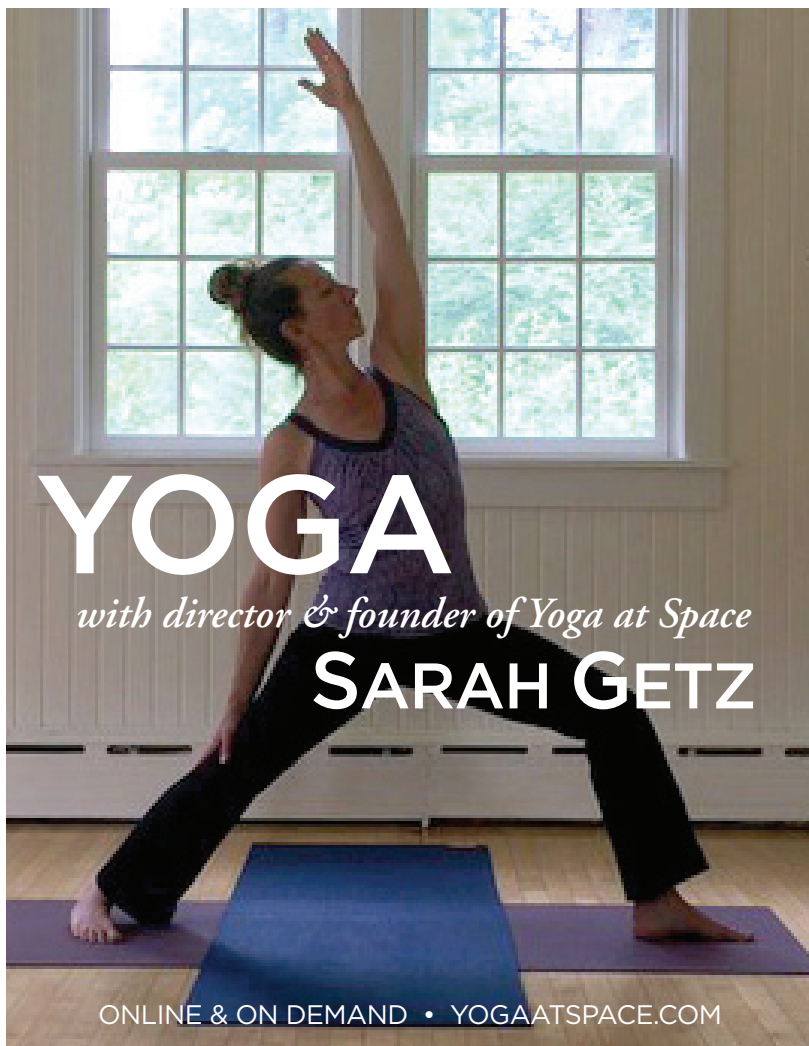
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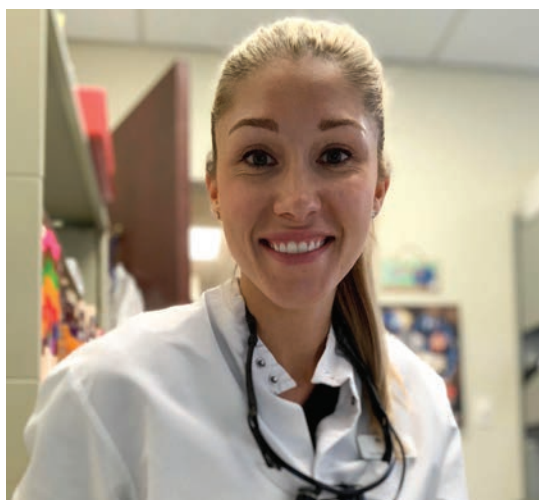
New owner of Bacon's Pizza in Craryville, NY, serving up delicious New York Style Pizza, **Corey Bacon** has been making pizza since he was 14 years old. "The thing I love most is making people happy through food," he says. "Nothing feels better than to see the community embrace you when you present them with a quality product." When not in the kitchen, Corey says he loves spending time with his girlfriend Heather and daughter Ava. "I am a very family-oriented person," Corey says. "In the new year, I am looking forward to engaging with the community and becoming a staple for pizza in our area. Without the community, Bacon's Pizza would not be here and everything we do is for the people who live and work in this place we call home."



Carrie Lake joined the Sharon Hospital family in 2003 as a nurse in the primary care office. In July, she shifted gears to a career in phlebotomy in the hospital's outpatient laboratory. The Maine native moved to New York 25 years ago and currently resides in Torrington, CT. You will often see her riding her motorcycle through Connecticut's scenic region outside of work hours. She is also an avid exercise enthusiast. "Something people don't know about me is that I'm a power lifter! I work out about six times each week and encourage others to get active for at least 30 minutes each day," she said. In the New Year, she carries a positive outlook about a return to our regular routines. "I believe everyone is hoping for an impactful change in 2021, and working together now can help us achieve that goal," she added.



For instructor **Lucas Geller**, martial arts are life. Lucas is the owner and head instructor at The Chinese Martial Arts Academy in Latham, NY. "I help students ages four to 84 achieve their individual goals in martial arts," he says. "Chinese martial arts have the unique ability to help individuals of all ages and skill levels achieve success." Lucas has practiced martial arts for over two decades and has taught full-time for the past ten. He says, "What I love most is being able to share my passion with so many people who benefit from the practice in different ways." Outside of martial arts, Lucas professes his love for family and community. "My incredibly supportive wife **Zoey** and I have a two-year-old boy, Kai," he says. "I am looking forward to continued growth while offering the best to my students and community!"



Amanda Maher is a general dentist who's been practicing for a little over three years now. "I hear 'No offense, but I hate coming to the dentist,' a lot. There's nothing more satisfying than seeing a patient completely change their attitude towards the dentist after a good experience. I also love giving patients' their smile and quality of life back." Outside of work Amanda loves spending time outdoors – hiking and hunting, and spending summers at Copake Lake. "Our area has so much to offer between the Catskills and Berkshires." Although she left for school and work, Amanda always finds her way back home – to Hillsdale, NY, where she was born and raised. At the end of every year, she reflects on what she's thankful for over the past 12 months because gratitude is a powerful catalyst for happiness. "2020 has been tumultuous for all of us, but I know there's so much to be grateful for. The New Year is a time for new beginnings and a fresh start, 2021 is no exception."



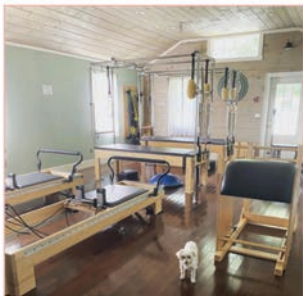
Columbia County native, **Meagen Skelley** has been a corrections officer for the Columbia County Sheriff's Office at the county jail for five-plus years. "I enjoy working with my co-workers who have become friends. This career field can come with a lot of added factors. Having peers who experience the same things to get you through the stressors, really helps." Aside from work, Meagen enjoys spending time and doing new things with her son and step-daughter, going on hikes, doing her at-home workout program, and spending time with friends and family. As for her New Year's resolution? Meagen will continue to focus on her health and wellness. She's currently running a virtual workout group on social media and hopes to increase the number of women in her group and overall continue to succeed in her own weight-loss journey.



Jeff Harvey is a lift maintenance manager at Butternut Basin in Great Barrington MA. Jeff has been working in the outdoors for most of his life, "I'm a third-generation ski lift mechanic," he says. "I like the months of hard work all summer and then watching the enjoyment that hard work brings to people who ski in our area during the winter." Jeff says he likes to spend his days off snowboarding and spending time with family. "What I love most is being around family," he says. "I have been all over the world snowboarding and I have found that there really is nowhere like where we live." Jeff says that he is looking forward to snowboarding more than ever this year. "My resolution is to go shredding and getting a sunburn in the process," he says. "There's no place like home, so here I am."

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The Reformer

MASHA LOUCKS OF
MASHA'S FITNESS STUDIO
IN MILLERTON, NY

By Christine Bates
info@mainstreetmag.com

Main Street in Millerton, NY, is home to numerous small, independent businesses, many of them owned and run by women – from Carol Sadlon at The Moviehouse to Joanne Scasso at Country Gardeners Florist. We selected Masha Loucks, who trained as a ballerina in Moscow, Russia, as the subject for Main Street's wellness issue, and conducted a socially distanced interview to discover her story and fitness philosophy.

Why did you leave Russia?

When I was studying economics in Moscow there was a program to work abroad and learn a language. I chose America because my father, who was a marine biologist, had been everywhere in the world except for the United States. I thought it would be so cool to go to a place he had never been and talk about it with him. As a little girl I always dreamt about going to New York City, so I sent in my resumé and got three job offers in three different states, but none of them were in New York. So I chose Connecticut because it was the closest.

For three summers I worked at the Interlaken Inn in Lakeville. I learned to love this part of Connecticut, which was very different from big city Moscow where I grew up. I worked as a waitress and it wasn't easy to learn to speak American English. I learned British English in school and the pronunciation was quite different in the United States. I couldn't understand and was afraid to speak in the beginning.

At the end of second summer I met my future husband, Jesse Loucks, at a party in Sharon. Unfortunately my student working visa was over after I finished school and I couldn't come back to the US to be with Jesse. We dated long distance for two years. Jesse came to visit me in Moscow about seven times and we finally decided to get married and start living together in America.

Has physical fitness and wellness always been part of your life?

First, at the age of four or five my mom signed me up for gymnastics, which I did for about a year. Then I was chosen to join a ballet school. Ballet school instructors were looking for boys and girls in gymnastics or dance studios based on body type, ear (talent for listening to music), ability to move gracefully, and learn. Training was 15 hours a week and sometimes I had to miss school if there was a performance.

I danced until the age of 13, and then my mom decided that I needed to focus on my education. After tenth grade I went to a teaching college for four years studying psychology and then to university for global economics. In Russia all of this education was free. My dancing career was over, but I always knew body movements would be with me as I was a dancer from the soul. As a girl growing up in the USSR, ice skating and dance are like peanut butter and jelly. If you dance, you ice skate and vice versa. Ice skating was my hobby and I even got second place at age seven in dancing on ice at a local competition.

How did you discover Pilates?

When I started to work as a trainer, my clients always asked me about my techniques, as they were a little different than just usual fitness routines. I didn't have a good answer for them as I was just using my body movement routine memories that I had learned in dancing school. Then one day I went to NYC to meet a friend. She was late and I decided to kill some time by going to a Pilates class. I had heard about Pilates but didn't know exactly what it was. After finishing the class I realized that the techniques I used to train my clients were based on Pilates. That was a big discovery for me and I received certification training through Balanced Body with a former ballerina from NYC.



Were there any business role models for you as a young person?

Russia did not legalize small private businesses before 1988. But I grew up around self-motivated and hard-working people who set a very good example for me. I learned that if you set goals, work hard, and love what you do, you will be successful.

Do you go back to visit Russia or have family come here to visit? What do you miss?

Yes, we go to visit my family every year and they visit here with no problem at all. I am lucky enough to have friends who still come to visit once in a while. Of course I miss my family and friends. I miss the culture – museums, theaters, ballet, drinking 5pm tea with grandma, eating Russian candies, and talking about history. I miss the busyness of Moscow. Going to concerts and shows with my friends, sitting near the fire in the summer

Above: Masha Loucks in her studio that overlooks Main Street in Millerton, NY. Next page: Masha makes Pilates look easy! Images courtesy of Masha Loucks.

Continued on next page ...

singing and making *shashlik* kebobs, New Year's celebrations, the Russian sense of humor, the Victory Day parade in Red Square, and GUM, the big department store on Red Square.

Does the Russian idea of fitness differ from the US?

Pilates came to Moscow just two years ago and seems to be growing very quickly. Absolutely everyone can work on their fitness, but in Russia it's mostly younger people who are concerned with fitness. It's just now becoming popular for more people to work with a trainer on a weekly basis or go to a class. Russians are very creative people and the fitness industry has started to boom.

When did you start your business? What was most difficult?

I started my business in Russia about 20 years ago teaching water aerobics and regular Jane Fonda-style exercise in the basement of my local school and swimming pool. When I moved to America in 2003 I continued teaching in the basement of churches, legion halls, Canaan YMCA, Housatonic High School, and Noble Horizons. I also worked as an in-home trainer for a while until I opened Masha's Fitness Studio in Millerton, NY, in 2010.

My son was born that year and I couldn't go to clients' homes with a child in my hands. That's when I came up with the idea that maybe they could come to me instead. That's how Masha's Fitness Studio was born. To be a new mother with the new business and the family in a not very populated area was difficult. Owning a small business is, of course, time consuming and at times overwhelming, but exercise helps me deal with these stresses both physically and mentally.

What help did you seek out?

In the beginning I hired a web designer to build my website. But ended up doing everything myself. It was difficult to find a technology teacher. It was also challenging to find the time and not be with my family as much as I wanted. I just wanted my

website to look inspirational and to motivate people to understand that everything is possible for everyone, and that Pilates is very friendly. The movements are simple but very effective – it's never too late to make changes and be safe at any age.

Can you describe your client base?

They are very successful, smart, open-minded people who want to improve their body. They understand the importance of living with high energy and that their body is as important as their mind. They come with many different issues – neck, back, knees, hips, and ankles. We then set goals and get results.

Why do most clients come to Pilates? What sort of person is it best for?

Clients understand that Pilates works from within the body toward the exterior, unlike the usual gym approach, which works from the outside toward the inside. With the gym routines, when you stop, the results do not last long and the body becomes out of shape very fast. With body control exercises, results may not be immediate, but in the long run, the benefits will become obvious. When you stop practicing for a time the results still stay with you and when you restart, even after a two-year break, you will feel like you had stopped only yesterday.

By working from the inside out, you develop a greater understanding of your body. Smaller muscle groups come into use, and you begin to discover muscles that you never knew you had or you may realize that what you once thought was fat actually hides a muscle!

The aim of Pilates practice is to produce fluidity and awareness of the body's movement. It creates a mental focus and control over movements without the need to concentrate on them – the body thinks for itself.

What is most satisfying about your business?

To see the results my clients achieve, like more mobility, better posture, greater strength, healthier backs or even improved confidence – the way they look and feel.



What happened to your business during the Covid shutdown this spring?

I was forced to close mid-March and it was a challenging time financially to pay rent and other overhead costs, but the silver lining was that it forced me to bring my training online. This was something that I had wanted to do for a long time but Covid gave me that push and opportunity. The studio is still only open for private training.

How does online training work? Has it been popular?

It's been very popular so far. Some of my clients were already doing it with me for a year and love it. It was challenging in the beginning, as it was new for everybody, but now works just fine. We use small Pilates and other equipment or even no equipment at all. We prefer to do FaceTime when one-on-one, but use Zoom when is more than one person. I am not a technology-oriented person and it's not super easy for me, but it's something new and exciting to learn! It seems like my online business is definitely growing.

What other health/fitness needs do you address?

Aerobic activities like walking, running, swimming, biking, jump roping, trampoline jumping – it will keep your heart, lungs, and circulatory system healthy. I love yoga as well. I also conduct group classes.

Can children do Pilates? How do you encourage the physical fitness of your own child?

Absolutely, it's super healthy for chil-

dren. With my son, we do fun morning routines, jump on the trampoline, abdominal exercises to wake him up and increase his focus. We like to hike and walk, I still believe in the expression, "Monkey see, monkey do."

What sort of professional resources help you with your business?

Before Covid I was very active in going to Pilates and fitness conferences all over the world. I have my favorite groups of Pilates and fitness professionals and we continue to exchange knowledge and ideas. The best source for me is talking with my colleagues and reading books about the human body.

How do you market your business? What has proven most effective?

Of course my favorite place to advertise is *Main Street Magazine*, but other than that, I don't market much. I have been fortunate that my clients spread the word for me.

What should people look for in a fitness instructor?

I think the teacher should be attentive, helpful, and kind. They should also encourage safe movement rather than just working you so hard that you feel the burn regardless of your form. A good Pilates instructor will be highly qualified, appreciate different learning styles, and have a passion for what they do. •

To learn more about Masha and Masha's Fitness Studio, visit her online at www.mashasfitnessstudio.com.

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Photo: Hogel Hill House

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BEST EVER Blondies

By Jessie Sheehan
info@mainstreetmag.com

Blondies, for those not in the know, are essentially chocolate chip cookies in the form of a brownie. I adore a chewy chocolate chip cookie, with crispy edges and soft middles and pools of molten chocolate, as much as the next person, but I just might love these particular blondies a tiny bit more. You might think it is the brown butter that makes me love them, as it adds a wonderful nuttiness to the flavor of the blondies. Or you might think it is the two kinds of chocolate – both milk and dark – that get me excited.

Or maybe the addition of toasted pecans, which I never add to chocolate chip cookies, but are just fab in these blondies. And, yes, I do love these blondies for all those reasons. But I really love them because they could not be easier to assemble and I am extremely fond of simple recipes that one can throw together quickly and with minimal fuss. And these blondies are just that and then some.

Here's what you need to do:

First, you brown your butter – but you do it in the microwave – if you have one, which makes it an entirely hands-off task and a slightly less messy one (sometimes browning butter on the stovetop can get a bit splatter-y). But if you do not have a microwave, no worries – I give directions in the recipe for doing it in a saucepan on the stovetop, as well.

Next you combine your warm, butter with your sugars – I call for both granulated and brown sugar, as that is the best combo for that chocolate chip cookie flavor we all love (or, I hope we all love...). You then add two eggs and a yolk. I like an extra yolk in this recipe, as it adds wonderful moisture to the blondies. I also add a generous tablespoon of vanilla, as I am very vanilla-forward (as I may have already mentioned in the pages of this magazine).

I then fold the dry ingredients, as well as the chocolate and nuts, into the wet – but I do so gently to avoid a tough blondie. I transfer the dough to the prepared pan and bake for 30 to 35 minutes until the top is crackily-looking and lightly browned. The baking is the only complicated part of the recipe – if you can all it that – as you do not want to overbake your blondies, and yet, you cannot test them for doneness as you would a cake... Instead, I look for a brown, golden color and a slightly cracked top. And under baking these is 100% recommended as a gooey blondie, is one of life's great pleasures – in case you did not know.

These blondies are lovely as after school snacks, lovely with a cup of coffee mid-morning, and lovely in a cookie box that you gift (or that you just keep on your counter and steal blondies from while binge watching Netflix). You do you.

Ingredients

2 sticks salted butter
1 cup all-purpose flour
3/4 cup bread or all-purpose flour
1 teaspoon baking powder
A generous 1/2 teaspoon kosher salt
1 cup toasted pecans, chopped



1/3 cup milk chocolate chips
1/3 cup bittersweet chocolate chips
1 1/2 cups light brown sugar
1/2 cup granulated sugar
2 large eggs
1 yolk
1 tablespoon vanilla extract

Directions:

Preheat the oven to 350°F. Spray a 9x9-inch pan with cooking spray and line it with a piece of parchment that extends up two sides of the pan.

Place the butter in a microwave-safe bowl, cover it and microwave on high for eight to ten minutes, until the butter smells nutty and brown bits have sunk to the bottom of the bowl. To do this on the stove, turn the heat to medium and melt the butter in a small saucepan until the butter exhibits the above described nuttiness and brown bits.

Meanwhile, in a medium bowl, whisk the flour, baking powder and salt. Add the pecans and chips and toss the add-ins with the flour.

In a large bowl whisk the browned butter and the sugars. Whisk in the eggs and yolk one at a time. Whisk

in the vanilla. With a flexible spatula, gently fold the dry ingredients into the wet. Do not over-mix. Transfer the blondie batter to the prepared pan. Bake for 30 to 35 minutes, until the top is lightly browned and crackly (I'd say pull them sooner rather than later as they can get dry and crumbly very quickly). Let cool on a rack until room temp, or until just cool enough to keep their shape if you want to eat them gooey and melty. Lift the blondies out by the parchment paper overhang and slice. Serve warm with vanilla ice cream, if you know what's good for you. •

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



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How much is your house worth today?

By Christine Bates
info@mainstreetmag.com

If you're a real estate agent a question friends often ask you – casually over drinks – is “How much is my house worth? I've heard the market is going crazy.” Especially today when housing prices have had a Covid-run-up after years of a buyer's market, people want to know how much more their house is worth. Rather than ask a broker for a wild guess at a party, or request an in-person market appraisal with an agent, it's fairly easy for most people to access online information and come up with their own informed estimate.

DYI property valuation

Are you considering selling your property some time in the near future or just wondering what it might be worth in today's market? You can get a rough idea before talking to a real estate broker. Besides, it's always a good idea to have your own well-founded opinion of your home's value before you invite a broker to advise you. After showing you what they believe are comparable properties, most agents will ask you what you think your house is worth. Remember the seller does set the listing price based on market conditions when the house goes on the market.

Try to objectively look at your house compared to other homes around you and remember that there is no exact mathematical answer – just a good range of possibilities. It is possible to come up with an estimate in a town that has substantial real estate sales and for a home that does not have special features, is situated on a standard amount of land, is moderate sized, and in good condition.

Let's get started

For the purposes of illustration we will use an actual house in Lakeville, CT, that went to contract in late Decem-

ber of 2019 and closed in February for \$495,000 before the great Covid work-remotely migration began. Located in Lakeville in the town of Salisbury, CT, this house was selected because it was in the median range of homes when it was purchased and in move-in condition. Compared to other towns in our region, Salisbury has a very active real estate market right now with a record 102 sales year-to-date compared to only 47 last year.

Step 1: Gather information on your own property

Type your address into www.realtor.com and first write down the public record of square footage, lot size, and the number of bedrooms and bathrooms (see chart for step-by-step process on the following page). Check to make sure this basic information is accurate against public records.

Please ignore the current price estimates provided by online sites. In this case www.realtor.com calculates \$474,600 – less than the purchase price of \$495,000. Zillow and Trulia estimate \$538,558, while www.redfin.com comes up with \$662,669 and a range of \$630,000 to \$696,000. All the internet sites employ proprietary algorithms based on assessments, sales, size, market, age, etc. to estimate a value; however, these estimates may not be very meaningful in small rural markets with diverse housing stock like ours.

Step 2: Check your property tax assessment and market value

In Connecticut each town's assessor first estimates the market value of an individual property and then calculates the assessed taxable value at 70%. That's the amount your property tax is based on. In some towns the market value is a fairly accurate representation of what your house might be worth, and, in others, much less.

For this house Kayla Johnson, Salisbury's Assessor, determined a



market value of \$581,714 at the time of the last valuation of all town properties five years ago. Salisbury is now completing a revaluation, which property owners will receive early next year. Johnson expects a slight increase across the board reflecting higher real estate values. Properties in the million dollar plus range will probably see proportionally greater increases. These new values will be reflected on the July 2021 tax bill. On average the six sold houses we selected below for comparison closed at 33% over the assessor's estimate of market value.

Step 3: Look at recently sold properties near you within the last six months

Online real estate sites will give you a sampling of recent sales. Select listings that are similar to your home in size, style, condition, age, desirability of location, views, and special features like an in-ground pool or fireplaces. While real estate brokers have a much more complete record of recent sales from the Multiple Listing Service, online

Above: This carriage house in Lakeville, CT, sold just before the Covid migration for \$495,000 in February and now has an estimated market value over \$600,000. Photo courtesy of Elyse Harney Real Estate.

Continued on next page ...

public sites do provide enough examples for your purpose. Record the sale date, address, square footage, lot size, price, and dollars per square foot. You might want to drive by and try to objectively evaluate sales compared to your own home.

Look at the interior photographs online and try to honestly assess the condition of bathrooms, living spaces, and the kitchen compared to your own. Is your house a “wow” house, just OK, or in need of serious renovation? In this market, despite high demand and low supply, houses requiring renovation sell more slowly at lower price points.

By focusing on houses most similar to our test case, a per square foot of around \$300 would translate into a sale price of over \$700,000. This is in line with the realtor.com estimated median price of \$647,500 and \$318 per square foot for all Salisbury real estate. In February 2020 the median house price in Salisbury was \$500K, about what this house sold for, and in November 2020 the estimated median sales price had risen to \$649,000 – an increase of 30%. This correlates with the fact that these six houses sold for 33% more than their assessed market values. Looks like our test case should have a market value today of between \$650,000 and \$700,000.

Step 4: What’s on the market now?

When you scan houses on the market now there are fewer comparisons be-

cause inventory is so limited. Our test carriage house is certainly not Pocket Knife Square nor does it come with an ore pond. It doesn’t need a total renovation. It’s not a \$5.5 million home, a horse property, or a \$125,000 tear-down. It’s not near Lime Rock Race Track and it doesn’t have a spectacular view. The three active comparisons selected seem somewhat similar to our carriage house including two village locations. Again the price per square foot is around \$300, suggesting that this is what homeowners are expecting.

When doesn’t this approach work?

Trophy properties, estates with large acreage, houses with spectacular views, and homes in less active real estate markets are not appropriate candidates for this systematic approach to valuing your home. This works well for median-priced homes but not for the exceptional or unusual. A farm in the Town of North East, NY, that had been on the market since 2015 recently sold for \$2.4 million with silos, barns, a house in need of restoration, and over 300 acres. There’s little information readily available online which might help in figuring out whether this was a great buy or not.

For this type of property in a geographic market where only five properties have sold above \$1,000,000 in the last two years, it’s best to consult with an experienced realtor. This agent will have access to more



sales data and also have a sense of the demand for this kind of property.

Most importantly an agent can advise you on the steps you might take to maximize the value of your property. Should you add a pool? What about repainting? Is it necessary to redo the bathrooms? Preparing a house for sale takes time – it’s a project. If you think you might want to sell in the spring you should start talking to brokers now.

Where will I go?

Looking at houses on the market and sold properties can also help you decide where you might relocate if you sell your house. The process works for buying as well as for selling! Remember that nationally all housing prices have risen 12.4% over the last year. If you are contemplating selling your house you should also think of how much it will cost to live elsewhere. In Atherton, CA, the most expensive city in the US, a median house is \$5.9 million, but you can buy a typical house in Syracuse, NY, for \$107,000. Something to consider! •

Christine Bates is a registered real estate agent in New York and Connecticut with William Pitt Sotheby’s and has written monthly for Main Street Magazine since its first issue.

Above: The market value of trophy and farm properties with hundreds of acres of land is difficult to determine from on-line information. This property on Route 22 in North East, NY, with 318 acres sold in November 2020 for \$2,375,000. Photo by Christine Bates.

STEP 1: DESCRIBE YOUR OWN PROPERTY

Square feet = 2,407 Acreage = .97
Bedrooms = 4 # Bathrooms = 2.5
Sold for \$495,000 on February 18, 2020

STEP 2: ESTIMATE MARKET VALUE BASED ON PROPERTY ASSESSMENT

Reported Assessed value \$407,200
Market Value in CT = Assessed Value / .7 = \$581,714

STEP 3: RECENT SALES NEAR YOU

Sale Date	Address	SF	Acreage	Sale price	\$/SF
A 24-Aug	70 Lincoln City Rd.	2,262	1.4	\$630,000	\$279
B 11-Nov	86 Factory	2,381	0.8	\$643,000	\$270
C 9-Sep	99 Robin Hill Lane	2,389	1.9	\$739,000	\$309
D 14-Aug	272 Taconic	2,578	2.3	\$830,000	\$322
E 17-Jul	77 Indian Mountain	3,777	2.9	\$1,200,000	\$318
F 14-Sep	53 Upland Meadow	1,824	4.0	\$525,000	\$288

STEP 4: WHAT’S FOR SALE NEAR YOU

Listed date	Address	SF	Acreage	Listing price	\$/SF
A 27-Aug	35 Walton	1,770	0.6	\$569,000	\$321
B 20-Apr	97 Belgo	2,448	1.1	\$699,000	\$285
C 20-Jun	15 Library Street	2,570	0.6	\$795,000	\$309

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Come on, get happy!

The *Science of Well-Being* course, adapted from the most popular class in Yale's history, is available free on Coursera

By Regina Molaro
info@mainstreetmag.com

With 2020 unfolding as it did, 2021 couldn't arrive quickly enough. Over the past year, the pandemic has dominated our lives, lifestyles, media, social media, and conversations. All the uncertainty and fear of this novel coronavirus has certainly compromised our happiness and wellbeing.

It's a new year, so let's scrap that and focus on how we can create happiness and foster wellbeing, which is "the state of being comfortable, healthy, or happy." Happiness is something most of us hope to attain and over the course of the past year, it seems even more difficult to achieve.

"Stress, loneliness and burnout were exploding pre-pandemic and a stronger focus on mental wellness has been part of a cultural mega-shift for the last few years," says a spokesperson at Miami, FL-based Global Wellness Institute. People have been awakening to the importance of integrative solutions including meditation and sleep and brain health.

Happiness on demand

During Spring 2020, when the Covid-19 crisis was at its peak, I enrolled in Coursera's free online course, *The Science of Well-Being*, which is led by Dr. Laurie Santos, Professor of Psychology and Head of Silliman Residential College at Yale University in New Haven, CT. Immersed in the study of what makes the human mind unique, Dr. Santos also hosts *The Happiness Lab* podcast and is the director of Comparative Cognition Laboratory and the Canine Cognition Center at Yale.

During the course, Dr. Santos highlights aspects of our lives that we believe will make us happy (Think: a lofty salary, luxury car, or posh house with an Instagram-worthy pool) yet don't as well as acts of kindness and

feelings of gratitude, which do create feelings of satisfaction.

The course was adapted from Yale's Psyc 157, *Psychology and the Good Life* class, which is taught by Dr. Santos. Recognized as the most popular class in Yale's history, in its inaugural year, nearly one-quarter of all undergraduates enrolled in the class.

"*The Science of Well-Being* increased its numbers by 2.5 million learners during the pandemic and now has more than 3 million students. We are the third-largest class at Coursera," reveals Dr. Laurie Santos.

After taking the course, enrollees reported positive changes. According to Coursera, 26% of them started a new career; 25% received a tangible career benefit; and 10% were granted a pay boost or promotion.

Course close-up

The Science of Well-Being has students engage in a series of challenges that are designed to boost their own happiness and build productive habits. The course helps enrollees cultivate gratitude, happiness, and the act of savoring. It also encourages people to set aside some time for meditation.

Let's take a crash course on the art of savoring, which is the simple act of stepping outside of an experience to review it and take time to appreciate it. When we savor the things we love whether it's a walk along the beach or an ice cream cone, positive emotions emerge.

Experiencing gratitude can elevate a person's mood, diminish stress, strengthen the immune system, and lower blood pressure. It also creates stronger social connections, which also come with a host of positive benefits. During the course, Dr. Santos asks that enrollees complete a gratitude worksheet that highlights what they're grateful for.

In *The Science of Well-Being*, Dr. Santos also addresses some common misconceptions about happiness. She refers to them as "annoying features of

the mind that lead us to think the way we do and the research that can help us change."

She illustrates the illusion of some of these misconceptions such as the notion that having a dream home, new Cadillac, or the latest iPhone would make us happy. In fact, the truth is that being materialistic takes a toll on happiness levels. It's experiences such as that last vacation to Iceland that stick with us and continue to deliver happiness and excitement well after our luggage has been unpacked.

Misconceptions aside, happiness does, in fact, come from being kind, connecting with others, getting more sleep, exercising, and meditating. Some of these activities such as catching some Z's and working out require having ample time.

Rather than focusing on wealth affluence and nabbing those flashy Louboutins, we should focus on how we can achieve time affluence – the idea that we have enough time to do what we want to do whether its working out, engaging in a hobby, or spending time with family and friends.

In review

The Science of Well-Being received a 4.9 rating on Coursera. It also inspired more than 9,000 people to post reviews. A retired psychotherapist posted that the course was extraordinarily helpful because although she has her health, a loving family, and more money than she needs, life can be difficult.

"The course has helped me re-center and to feel that there are things that I can do to enjoy living without perseverating about the negatives. I have become an advocate of the course, sharing details with friends I hope will take it," she says.

Another fan learned to shift into a more positive and productive mindset after completing the course while another satisfied student posted, "The course helped me think of new

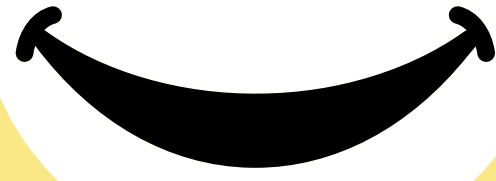
ways to think and new ways to reach certain goals that I would have not thought about."

Dr. Santos certainly practices what she preaches. Although she's inundated with inquiries, questions from students, podcast listeners, the press, and people interested in speaking requests, she's trying her own personal wellbeing experiment: to reduce the amount of time spent on email.

"I'm sorry to disappoint, but I also want to be a role model for my students by forming better, happier personal habits," concludes Dr. Santos.

The online course, which is offered free through Coursera, enables enrollees to earn a certificate upon completion. Students can learn at their own pace and establish their own schedules. Deadlines are flexible and can be reset to allow for shifting schedules. The course, which takes approximately 19 hours to complete, may just have the capacity to change your perspective, foster happiness, and set you on a lifelong path to wellbeing. •

https://www.coursera.org/learn/the-science-of-well-being?utm_source=gg&utm_medium=sem&utm_campaign=01-BrandedSearch-US&utm_content=01-BrandedSearch-US&utm_nid=380484307&adgroupid=102187343498&device=c&keyword=&matchtype=b&network=g&devicemodel=&adpostion=&creativeid=433079694377&hide_mobile_promo&gclid=Cj0KCQiAzzs-BRC-CARIsANotFgOBjs0H7BIQ_Mo_rD3-QjNeqGQTIH0h8HX-jVUPGghR-bLwJuEG3ChEaAvx0EALw_wcB





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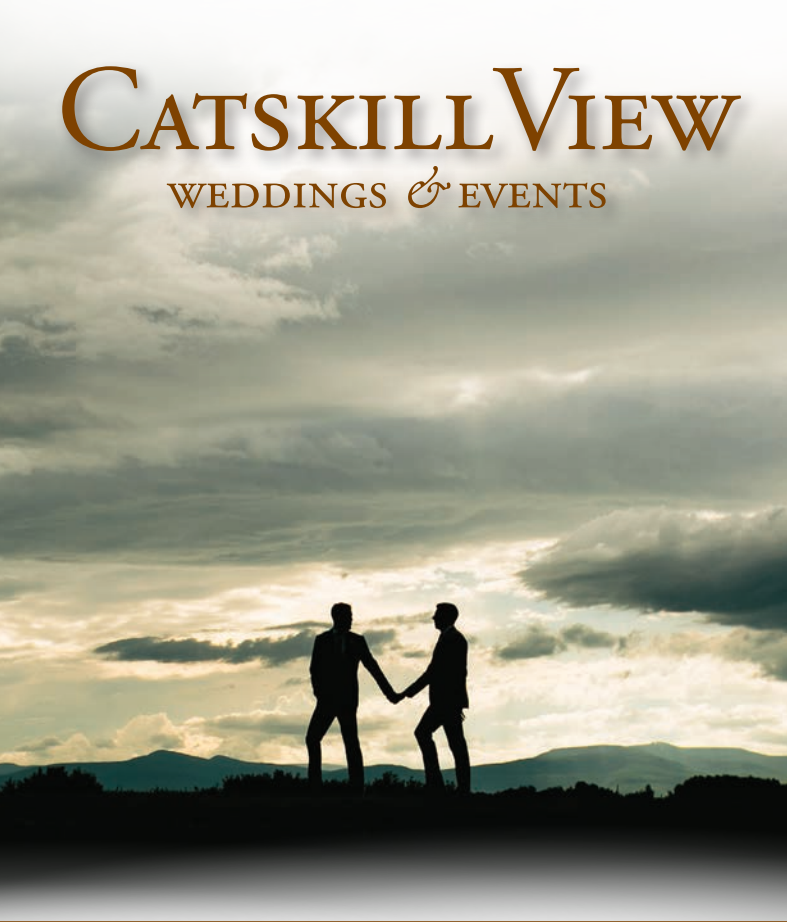
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Help is only a click away...

By Ian Strever
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There are few pieces of furniture as loyal as a couch. Part-time seating support, part-time napping support, they endure the clawing of cats, the gnawing of dogs, the marathon binge-watching sessions, and the rambunctious kid who trampolines all over them. Apple founder Steve Jobs famously spent a decade in search of the Goldilocks sofa, preferring to live without one until he had settled on just the right one to meet his needs.

I myself spent several years visiting furniture stores, sitting on floor samples, lying down on them, evaluating their durability, texture, and design. There's a lot to consider. The winner was an eight-foot, squared-off leather model that I found at Jordan's Furniture in New Haven. It has very little clearance underneath for pets and hiding children, with deep, commodious seating that is great for napping. Several thousand customers had

plopped their kiesters on the display model in the entrance to the store, attesting to its durability. It's all I could ask of a piece of furniture.

But sometimes our couches can be too accommodating. While I don't love the squared armrests on mine, they prevent me from getting too comfortable by resisting my insistence that they could be pillows. They're not, and that's a good thing. I might never get up.

It's been tempting to pull a Rip Van Winkle to escape the pandemic. We'd love to fall asleep on our couches and wake up without masks and the insufferable chatter about social distancing. It's all so tedious and mundane. For most of us, our world has been restricted to our houses and our favorite form of seating, the couch.

Getting on a therapist's couch

So why is it that getting someone off of one couch and onto another — a therapist's couch — is so hard?

During stressful times, the solace of familiar places and objects is a balm against uncertainty, and physics itself reminds us that objects at rest tend to stay at rest. But if you

suspect that your couch routine is something more than COVID-coping and is veering into avoidance or apathy, how can you get moving toward a more productive routine?

Psychology Today

Chances are, you've spent time on your couch surfing the web on your phone or laptop, so checking out this website shouldn't take too much effort: *Psychology Today*. I spoke with two counselors who independently recommended it as a go-to source for information and resources about mental health issues. Let's slow this down a bit, though.

You've been lying on your couch, looking for anything still interesting to watch on television. You notice that this is the same routine you follow just about every day. You're not convinced there's a problem, but maybe. You're not about to reach out to an actual therapist, but you're curious enough to read about it from the comfort of your living room.

Psychology Today has just the thing: dozens of self-assessments, many of which are free and designed to help you reflect upon your wellbeing in areas ranging from mental health to career choice. Best

Continued on next page ...



Image: istockphoto.com contributor IrinaBort

of all, there is no risk to browsing it. The self-assessments provide a series of questions that guide users to evaluate their behavior and ultimately explore treatment options if their answers are cause for concern.

So let's say you decide to look for a therapist. Type your location into the search bar, and the site will return a list of local providers, along with descriptions of the kinds of therapies they provide or specialize in, which can quickly narrow the field to one that works with the kinds of issues you may be experiencing. Each therapist composes a brief biography about their practice that mentions their work with addiction, adolescents, relationships, and other kinds of issues. Some of them will also describe their approach, which is helpful for those who have some experience with therapy and may prefer a particular method. Perhaps just as importantly, when you click on a specific therapist, you can find information about their rates and the kinds of insurance they accept.

while psychology is not immune to that phenomenon, web-based solutions can serve patients and therapists instead of causing more of a hassle. Alongside a list of local providers, *Psychology Today* provides a list of teletherapists (a word that is still new enough to get clogged in my spell-checker), some of whom may be just a little too far to drive to, and some of whom are in an entirely different part of the country. How far is "too far" differs from person to person, though, and because the website sometimes limits searches by state boundaries, it is a good strategy to do some searches in one of our neighboring states to get a more comprehensive list.

Don't wait for a crisis to make the call

You really can narrow your search with the descriptions and pictures (which can be pretty revealing, too), and many of the practitioners have revised their biographies to incorporate the scope of their work during the pandemic. But here's the trick: demand for them is at an all-time high, so they might not be accepting patients. Sara Cousins, an LCSW with a practice in Lakeville, CT, advises people, "don't wait for a crisis. Schedule an appointment before there's a problem."

The word "psychology" is derived from Greek, meaning "study of the soul," and for many of us, working with another human being is an essential element for reflecting upon ourselves. More and more, however, we turn to technology for solutions to our problems, and

Cousins also advises those who are "testing the water" for the first time to "try a meeting first. Sit in the back of the room for an Alcoholics Anonymous meeting to see what it's like." Many of those meetings have migrated online, so it may not even be necessary to leave your couch to join.

Frankly, I wondered why she had mentioned AA meetings at first, but then it occurred to me that just about everyone I know has increased their intake of alcohol to dull the acute boredom of the pandemic. National Institutes of Health data show increases in the volume of liquor sold this year in Connecticut and Massachusetts over the previous three-year period (New York data are not available), and a simple count of new dispensaries in Berkshire County tells you all you need to know about the amount of self-medication that is happening.

But the suggestion of starting with AA is more nuanced than just seeking help for alcohol addiction. The group context for meetings is anonymous but supportive. When I spoke with one long-time participant, the distinguishing characteristic of his diction was a reliance on the first-person plural. When I pointed this out to him, he pointed out that the word "we" begins eleven of the twelve steps of Narcotics Anonymous – a reminder that others are a part of the solution.

Group dynamics also offer a more gradual on-ramp to help. Attending a meeting these days is as passive and noncommittal as changing a television channel. Both AA and Narcotics Anonymous websites offer searchable databases of meetings, including virtual meetings, so in the words of the aforementioned participant, "get to a meeting, raise your hand, and we'll do the rest." •

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Going Nuclear:

Emotional reactivity and our health

By Mary B. O'Neill, Ph.D.
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Caution: This article contains a trigger warning and a spoiler alert.

Trigger warning: *Your unconscious emotional triggers and emotional reactivity can harm your psychological and physical health.*

Spoiler alert: *The happy ending is that addressing your reactivity is within your control, and with practice and perhaps some professional help, you can calm your system, make different choices on how to respond, and take your finger off the switch that will cause an emotional nuclear meltdown.*

What is emotional reactivity?

As we walk through life, we encounter people, places, and things that dredge up old wounds and trauma and their attendant feelings of anger, shame, and hurt. The re-emergence of these feelings is a misplaced act of self-preservation in the face of a perceived threat that is no longer present.

When old emotional reactions are triggered in the absence of our awareness, we feel under siege. We raise our defenses against this imagined threat and prepare for a fight. This leads to an interaction or response that has negative ramifications for our health and our interpersonal relationships.

We can lash out with judgment, criticism, and blame, or we shut down and engage in self-judgment and suppress negative feelings.

Distorted lens on the world

We can identify emotional triggers when our feelings and reactions are out of proportion with an event

or situation. These reactions seem beyond our ability to rein in. Yet, they are within our control because they come from inside us – not from external circumstances.

Sara Cousins, a Lakeville-based therapist, describes, “With emotional reactivity, the response is not about what’s currently in front of us. It’s about how we process what’s happening in light of our own experiences. It causes us to confuse what is currently happening with those past encounters.”

As Cousins explains it, “Emotional reactivity is not about the other person or the circumstances facing us. We think we are responding to an external event, but we are reacting to the thoughts, feelings, and memories left over from past traumas and injuries. It’s an inside job. On a fundamental level, it has little to do with external circumstances,” she continues, “Holding on to past traumas, memories, and feelings is a wonderful survival skill. We hold on to the past so we can recognize danger. The problem is that we can be too good at it. We then get triggered by the slightest provocation even when the danger isn’t extreme.”

The ability to self-regulate our emotional lives is a skill that’s within reach. Cousins asserts, “We all can stay present and regulate ourselves. We can strive to stay with the person we’re in conversation with and stay with the situation in which we find ourselves. It’s about connecting first with ourselves through awareness and acceptance, then with the person or event in front of us in the present.” Practicing these skills improves our confidence and autonomy, along with our relationships and our emotional and physical health.

Putting the finger on the trigger

The first step is self-awareness of our triggers and connecting those triggers to past life experiences that give birth to them. Many times, it’s a traumatic experience that rightly sent us into fight or flight. However, it’s often the case that long after the trauma has stopped, we still carry the gut-punch responses around with us. So if that original trauma evoked feelings of fear, shame, guilt, and lack of control, then events or conversations that stir up those feelings can send us right back there – to that unconscious survival mode that emanates from deep inside our brain.

It’s this “lizard brain” that kept us safe from saber tooth tigers early in our evolution and one that creates physiological responses such as a quickening heartbeat, butterflies, shallow breathing, and the release of stress hormones.

In our modern lives, we have many of what Dr. Rangan Chatterjee, author of *The Stress Solution*, calls Micro Stress Doses (MSD). MSDs elicit in us these same fight or flight responses repeatedly each day – even when our life is not in danger.

These physiological responses, aptly suited to surviving an occasional attack by the tiger, are known as acute stressors, meaning they come and go over a short duration. When we evaded the tiger, and the threat was no longer present, we went back to what Chatterjee calls a “thrive state.”

In contemporary life, we’re bombarded with a constant stream of MSDs, and we’re overwhelming our system with those fight or flight responses that just don’t let up.

The body talks – you need to listen

These are chronic stressors, and they can make dealing with our emotional triggers even more difficult. Constant emotional reactivity in the mind can lead to high blood pressure, obesity, diabetes, hormonal imbalances, digestive disorders, autoimmune disorders, anxiety and depression, and chronic inflammation in the body.

Mind-body duality is so yesterday. We know better now, or we're remembering what ancient and indigenous peoples knew all along. The mind and body are intimately connected. An inflamed mind connects to an inflamed body.

It can also lead us to impulsive, addictive, or self-destructive behavior in a misguided effort to soothe our injured selves. The work of Dr. Gabor Maté points to the roots of addiction stemming from childhood trauma and emotional loss. The inability to regulate difficult emotions and reactions to situations leads to addiction, which he defines as a repetitive behavior that gives temporary relief or pleasure and has negative consequences.

For Maté, addiction is born of a person's desire to be happy in the face of unfilled needs and attempts to solve a problem. These circumstances often arise early in life, potentially before individuals have the tools and language to cope with the experience. Lyrics from *Hamilton*, with one small addition, help frame what Maté is talking about:

*There are moments that the words don't reach
There is suffering too terrible to name
You hold your (inner) child as tight as you can
And push away the unimaginable
The moments when you're in so deep
It feels easier to just swim down*

To grapple with addiction means giving a voice to the past trauma so that the person can heal and have an opportunity to loosen the grip of addiction.

The answer lies within

If emotional reactivity stems from unconscious responses to trigger events, then coming out of a reactive state lies in increased awareness of triggers and the reasons why specific conversations or situations evoke a reaction.

In *Full Catastrophe Living*, Jon Kabat-Zinn writes, "The healthy alternative to being caught up in any of our self-destructive patterns is to stop reacting to stress and to start responding to it."

Kabat-Zinn's Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) uses mindfulness and meditation as a tool to overcome physical and psychological pain. According to Kabat-Zinn, "...the cultivation of greater mindfulness also gives us new ways of working with what we find threatening, and of learning how to respond intelligently to such perceived threats rather than react automatically and trigger potentially unhealthy consequences."

Cousins advocates that mindfulness can forge the awareness needed to create a conscious response, which calls for self-kindness, non-judgment, and curiosity. "Mindfulness and meditation are not about relaxation. They're about making the world a better place. If you know your mind and can view yourself with self-compassion and sit with your pain, then you can extend that to compassion for others – and that makes the world a better place. By being non-reactive through self-awareness and non-judgment, you make better relationships with others – and yourself."

The space between

A first step toward this awareness is the act of breathing. Focusing on our breath defuses fight or flight response and anchors you to the present moment. Ruminating in the past and going down the rabbit hole of the future is impossible when immersed in the present moment – the only moment we have control over.

Armed with greater awareness of our emotional triggers and their causes, we can begin to choose a different response. The space between the provocation and response is the seat of freedom from those triggers and our emotional reactivity.



Above: istockphoto.com contributor fizkes. Opposite page: istockphoto.com contributor HbrH.

Creating distance in space and time between you and the trigger is also helpful. The physical space fosters space within your mind. The passage of time allows reactivity to recede. Next time you feel triggered, take a walk, go to another room, back away from the conversation, roll the chair away from the keyboard, or put the phone back in your pocket before you send a retaliatory text.

"This is a practice," Cousins emphasizes. "There are no shoulds. It's a lifelong challenge for everyone. The process allows us to be inside ourselves in a loving way, to be in relation – not reaction – to others. We can get it right today and get it wrong tomorrow. That's okay." ●

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Cooperative recipes

FOR A HAPPY & HEALTHY
WINTER SEASON



By Griffin Cooper
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As winter begins it's three month offensive on our collective attitudes and – potentially – our waistlines, it can be hard to resist temptation. However, just because the temperatures outside may cause many of us to yearn for comfort food does not mean we have to sacrifice a healthy diet.

Founded in 1981, the Berkshire Food Co-op in Great Barrington, MA, has held strong to its commitment to provide the community with a place to shop, gather, eat and learn by offering good food and sustainable products. The result has produced a veritable cornucopia of community engagement with food in the Berkshires and the introduction of versatile chef artisans skilled in the heart of delicious healthy food. Fresh foods assistant manager Billy Boudreau has been working at the Berkshire Food Co-op since July after arriving from Canyon Ranch in Lenox, MA, where he was the culinary theater chef. Boudreau has focused his work at the Co-op on developing future favorites and expanding the community reach of recipes throughout the area. Here are two that infuse the idea of winter comfort food and healthy eating, with a few inspiring twists.

Butternut Squash Soup

Ingredients

1 butternut squash, peeled and cut in half
2 cups apple cider
2 cups vegetable stock
2 cinnamon sticks
2 carrots, peeled and cut into 1 inch pieces
1 large white onion, cut into 1 inch pieces
6 Granny Smith apples, peeled and cut into 1 inch pieces
3 tbsp safflower oil
Salt and black pepper
Roasted pumpkin seeds

Directions

Preheat the oven to 325°F. On a large baking sheet lined with parchment paper, roast the butternut squash halves for one hour or until completely soft.

Meanwhile, in a pot, begin sautéing onions, carrots, Granny Smith apples, and cinnamon sticks with oil.

When tender, add apple cider and vegetable stock. Bring to a boil, then reduce to simmer. Add fully cooked butternut squash, simmer for 30 minutes or until all vegetables are completely cooked through. Remove your cinnamon sticks.

Puree with a blender. Add water as necessary. Season with salt and pepper to desired taste. Garnish with roasted pumpkin seeds.

Roasted Vegetable Salad

Ingredients

1 cup carrots
½ cup Delicata squash
½ cup fresh figs
¼ cup garlic, raw, peeled
½ tsp fresh thyme, chopped
1 ½ tbsp olive oil
1 tsp sea salt
½ tsp black pepper
¼ cup balsamic vinegar

Directions

Preheat the oven to 350°F. Place a rimmed baking sheet on the upper and lower third racks.

In a large bowl, combine carrots, squash, figs, pear, garlic, and thyme. Add olive oil and season with coarse salt and pepper. Toss to combine. Remove hot baking sheets from the oven and divide vegetable mixture evenly between them, spreading in an even layer. Return baking sheets to the oven and roast, stirring occasionally, until golden brown and tender, about 35 minutes, rotating baking sheets from top to bottom halfway through baking.

Remove baking sheets from the oven and drizzle with vinegar, shake to combine. Transfer to a serving platter, drizzle with olive oil, and garnish with thyme leaves. Season with sea salt and serve. •

To learn more, visit www.berkshire.coop or call (413) 528-9697.



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Spiritual healing:

A powerful alternative or complement to Western medicine for people and animals

By Henry Levin
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In 2006, after over two decades in the business world, I did something previously unimaginable to me. I began to study the spiritual healing practices of the Apache people. Equally if not more remarkable, in 2019, my wife and I founded a 501©3 non-profit organization, The Pinchas Foundation, to spread spiritual healing and support equine rescue work.

My journey to spiritual healing

In a nutshell, spiritual healing is about healing from the inside out. Spiritual healing practitioners believe that physical illness is caused by the emotions, thoughts, and life-choices that we make that are not in our best interest. Achieving deep and long-lasting healing requires identifying and working on these emotions, thoughts, and choices.

As a generalization, people tend to find their way to spiritual healing in one of two ways. First, they are exposed to it, usually by their families, at a young age, and so it simply becomes part of them like reading and writing. Or second, when they are older, they struggle in one or more areas of their lives, and nothing more traditional helps them move through their challenges. So, they try a spiritual healing approach; it works; and they become believers.

The latter is what happened for me. Starting in my late twenties, I wrestled with health issues for the better part of 15 years. Finally, I met a woman who practices the healing ways of her Apache ancestors, and she helped me to finally break through and feel so much better. In addition to making progress on my physical health, these methods also helped transform all areas of my life, including repairing some of the closest and most important relationships in my life. And believe me they needed repairing. More on this below.

Spiritual healing and Western Medicine

So there is no confusion, I am also a big believer in and greatly respect Western medicine. Indeed, I regard the advances in Western medicine and its stunning capabilities and successes as nothing short of remarkable. And Western medicine has made an important difference for me over the years.

But for many people and animals who have not been sufficiently helped by Western medicine, I have seen spiritual practices make a real impact. In these cases, spiritual healing has complemented and improved on the results of Western medicine. Sometimes, it is a powerful alternative to Western medicine. So then, what is spiritual healing exactly?

The goal of spiritual healing is to help bring balance, healing, and joy to our bodies and the situations in our lives. Let's say you have a problem with your leg, your heart, your stomach, etc., you go to a Western doctor and maybe you do rehab, take medicine, have an operation, make lifestyle changes, etc. And hopefully things improve, because we believe in doing these things.

But spiritual traditions take things a bit further and generally believe in healing from the inside out. This means that to have the deepest and most long-lasting healing, work must be done to address not just the physical symptoms but also the underlying thoughts, feelings, and ways we are living our lives that cause our bodies to become sick – either physically or emotionally – and out of balance.

None of this is to point fingers and blame people for becoming sick. We believe that life is about learning and growing... for all of us. And problems with our bodies are not accusations, but merely messages that some work is needed. And this is really good news because it means that by doing the work, there can often be healing that might not otherwise have been expected.



Images courtesy of The Pinchas Foundation.

Therefore, our work is to try to assist people in understanding at the deepest level what is causing illness and help them in bringing their bodies and lives back into balance.

Spiritual healing “examples”

Just like Western medicine, there are a whole series of what I call “diagnostic” practices. For example, people who have lower back pain often first feel pain when they lift something heavy. Indeed, lower back muscles are very much involved in lifting; that is one of their core functions. And it often turns out that people with lower back pain are either doing too much for other people or not enough – in other words, they need to do more or less “lifting” metaphorically for others. In such cases, the healing process can involve trying to help the person identify where they need to do more, or less, for the people in their lives.

This doesn't mean that there isn't something physically wrong; there often is, and traditional interventions like rehab and exercise may be needed. But it can also mean that rebalancing certain relationships may

Continued on next page ...

deepen, hopefully accelerate, and make longer-lasting the healing.

As a second example, in autoimmune diseases, our own immune systems are basically attacking our own bodies. While this can suggest many things, it can reflect that mentally and emotionally we are attacking ourselves by constantly thinking negatively about ourselves. The spiritual healing process may therefore include things like doing self-esteem work and asking the person to devote a certain amount of time each day or each week to activities he or she finds nourishing – for example spending time in nature, listening to music, or spending more time with supportive friends.

Finally, as I mentioned above, I needed to repair many of the key relationships in my life. One of my physical symptoms was that my body felt toxic a big percent of the time. Well, I also used to be angry a lot. And I think many would agree that depending upon how anger is handled, it can be very “toxic.” As I learned techniques to better manage my anger, the feelings of toxicity declined.

Our practice

The core of my practice is the spiritual healing ways of the Apache people. But I also incorporate Kabbalah practices in my work.

A number of the specific methods we use are on our website’s spiritual healing page, www.pinchas.org/spiritual-healing, and I list some of them below. But really when I am honored with the opportunity to help somebody, I start by going into prayer, confirming if I am meant to work with the person, and then asking what is needed. I will get information about what I need to do to help the person and as well what the person needs to do.

Regarding part of what I am meant to do, we believe that there is healing energy all around us, that the Universe has an infinite amount of healing energy. I work to tap into this energy and channel it to the people I’m trying to assist. This both helps them to heal and assists them in doing the work they are meant to do.

Some of the specific healing modalities I use (and teach) are:

- Healing with color and light
- Healing with sound
- Breathing, meditation, and visioning (or visualization) techniques
- Connecting with nature
- Working with stones, plants, oils, and herbs
- A variety of energy work including Reiki, which is a powerful method for channeling the universal healing energies
- For some, prayer
- Dream interpretation
- Connecting with one’s spirit guides
- Spiritual protection teachings
- Life purpose and other work that can resemble traditional coaching/counselling work
- A variety of teachings and tools from Kabbalah.

Regarding connecting with one’s spirit guides, this is a core practice of the Apache tradition. In brief, our guides are always with us and ready to assist and guide us in how to best walk in the light in all areas of our lives. Like many spiritual practitioners, I have come to believe that there is a greater intelligence or wisdom in the Universe, well really it is Creator’s wisdom and light. In the Apache spiritual tradition, working with one’s guides is how one receives guidance from this wisdom and light.

But I try to meet people where they are and can assist people who do not believe in guides or Creator.

Connection

I’d like to take a moment to discuss connection, which so often is vital for healing. As I wrote above, our bodies fall out of balance when there is a mental, emotional, or spiritual imbalance. And the more we

- connect with and value our true selves,
 - connect with and pursue our genuine life purpose so we are truly living from the heart,
 - connect in a mutually nurturing way with other people, and
 - for some connect with Creator;
- the more our lives fall into balance, the more we heal on all levels, and the happier we become. So an important



part of the healing often involves working on deepening these connections.

Teaching

An important part of our work is teaching classes in the techniques we practice so people can learn to self-heal over time. This goal is worthwhile for reasons including: 1) It costs less than having to always work with a practitioner when things come up, 2) It reduces dependence on the practitioner, and 3) it is empowering.

Equine rescue

The bulk of the Foundations resources are dedicated to supporting equine rescue efforts. Because many of the horses we help support were rescued from very difficult circumstances, they need a lot of medical attention to have the best chance of having happy, healthy, and productive lives. So in addition to funding more routine procedures, the Foundation has also funded more advanced treatments, for example stem cell therapy.

For us, equine rescue and spiritual healing are connected in a few ways. One, our spiritual healing teacher has dedicated her life to equine rescue. Two, interacting with horses is proven to be remarkably healing for many. And three, we believe that all people and our planet can only fully heal to the extent that all people and animals dependent on mankind are honored and treated with compassion. •

To learn more, you can call (917) 860-7945, email info@pinchas.org, or visit www.pinchas.org.



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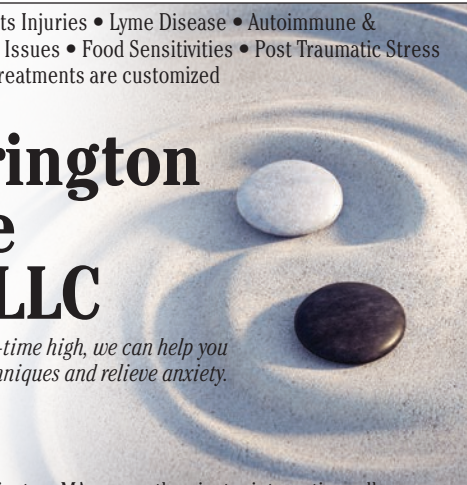
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Finding Zen

Explore the ancient practice of meditation to experience its many health and wellness benefits

By Regina Molaro
info@mainstreetmag.com

Happy New Year! We were all eager to transition into a hopeful time of new beginnings since 2020 was such a stressful year for people all over the globe. After many months, the pandemic has continued to devastate people's health and impact their well-being, and the uncertainty of what lies ahead only ignites more fear. Unfortunately, a weakened economy and unprecedented election only continue to tear apart an already divided country. We've certainly been living through some rather intense times. Stress levels are soaring, but luckily there are ways to manage anxiety, find a sense of serenity, and restore balance.

We encourage you to find your Zen. Although many of our wallets are strained, the practice of meditation is free and can be practiced anywhere. It's a simple way to bring about some positive changes in your life.

Meditation and mindfulness

2021 marks an ideal time to start anew. Since resolutions are plentiful this time of year, be sure to set an intention to free up some time for meditating.

What is meditation? It is defined as the act of engaging in mental exercise – such as the concentration on one's breathing or repetition of a mantra (a word or sound that is repeated to aid concentration in meditation) – with the intention of reaching a heightened level of spiritual awareness.

The practice traces back to India around 5,000 to 3,500 BCE. Some of the benefits include reducing stress

and anxiety, relieving depression, and lowering blood pressure. Through regular practice, we can boost our focus, improve our tolerance for pain, and help battle substance addiction.

Through a continual practice, the amygdala (the emotional/fear center of the brain) shrinks, which creates more emotional control. Meditation also thickens the hippocampus – the part of the brain associated with learning and memory. Reducing brain chatter, enhancing self-awareness, and promoting emotional health are among the other many perks of establishing a practice.

"Now more than ever, we need to incorporate meditation into our lives. It boosts immunity, and is vital to physical and mental wellbeing as well as spiritual health. Meditation provides a strong foundation, grounds us during challenging times, and creates a sense of calm and inner harmony," says Tobi Sacco-Hacker, LMT, AWC, RYT200, a yoga instructor.

Rick Hanson, PhD and author of *Hardwiring Happiness* chimes in and shares his "Let Be/Let Go/Let In" concept, which involves accepting our suffering. As we do this, we release pain by venting feelings and challenging unhealthy thoughts. Through a regular practice, we can cultivate gratitude and compassion. Hanson sums up the practice as "Be with the garden, pull weeds, and plant flowers."

Getting started

When we practice meditation, we strive to be "mindful" or "present." That mindfulness is achieved by focusing one's

awareness on the current moment (this means not reflecting on what happened yesterday or thinking ahead to tomorrow), while calmly acknowledging and accepting our feelings, thoughts, and bodily sensations. It's about being aware when the mind wanders – and simply returning to the present moment without judging ourselves or our ability to focus.

Unlike when we're nodding off, during meditation, we're tuned into our thoughts and feelings, but we intentionally refrain from getting entangled in them. Instead, we focus on our breath – the continuous flow of inhales and exhales.

Sacco-Hacker explains that mindfulness is just one type of meditation, but there are many other ways to meditate. Spiritual meditation incorporates elements of silent, spoken, or chanted prayer while movement meditation focuses on the body in motion. This may include a walking meditation in which we are mindful of every single movement we make. Some people chant mantras while focusing on the sound of the words and the melody while others prefer visualization techniques that involve imagining a place of calm such as a warm, sandy beach or serene mountain scene.

"Meditation is about being completely focused on our inner selves and being completely present and focused in that moment. It can take place while doing ordinary activities such as gardening, playing a sport, or even washing dishes," says Sacco-Hacker. She recommends that those interested in establishing a

practice read, *The Miracle of Mindfulness: An Introduction to the Practice of Meditation* by Thich Nhat Hanh – a Vietnamese monk, renowned Zen master, poet, and peace activist.

"Meditation is really simple if you don't arrive to the practice with preconceived notions about what meditation actually is. The basis of meditation is finding a state of bliss and calm within. It's fundamentally about creating inner awareness and connecting with yourself on a deeper level," says Sacco-Hacker.

Many meditation guides recommend that when beginners recognize that they're thinking, they simply label that act with the word "thinking" and then return to the present moment and focus on their breath.

Guided meditations are also ideal for beginners. Start by downloading videos on YouTube, Googling "10-minute meditation" or asking your Alexa smart home device to "play a guided meditation." It's important to note that this challenging experience does get easier with practice.

Other ways to find Zen include listening to wellness music and "forest bathing" – the concept of "taking in the forest atmosphere" on a leisurely stroll through the woods. The Hudson Valley area certainly offers plenty of serene spots, which are ideal for these practices. Invite a friend, grab a mask, and explore the journey together. Best wishes for a healthy, peaceful, and happy 2021. •





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Challenge makes the heart grow fonder

LISA MCAULIFFE LEADS FROM A DISTANCE

By Griffin Cooper
griffin@mainstreetmag.com

A new year is upon us and apart from the start of a new calendar year, there exists among us a hopeful feeling of transition like never before. With each new year comes a time of reflection. In 2021 however, it feels especially poignant to reflect on the perilous and seemingly endless journey we have endured together. While it is incredibly difficult for many to comprehend the mountain of obstacles 2020 has wrought, what is more awe-inspiring are the individuals who carried the weight of those challenges to December's finish line.

Friends, neighbors, and individuals who established themselves as the new generation of titans by carrying the weight of their communities on their shoulders while walking a tightrope between hope and despair. If we zoom in on our small towns and villages we see them everywhere – and in Salisbury, CT, Lisa McAuliffe, the town's director of recreation and senior services exemplifies the meaning of community service.

As a leader in two arenas that felt the full force of the effects of a pandemic, Lisa met the challenges head-on by trusting her colleagues and, like so many, adapting in times of great uncertainty. As the calendar turns, Lisa took some time to reflect on her career, her path to Salisbury, and how the past year has changed her outlook on community engagement.

How did you find your way to Salisbury and the Salisbury Association?

I grew up outside of Boston, MA, and later graduated from Springfield College before I came to Salisbury in 1998 as a volunteer EMT for the Salisbury Ambulance. That is where I started my involvement with the community. Later, I was offered a

job at Camp Sloane in Lakeville as their assistant director of outdoor education. I am very thankful for the many ways in which my degree in Education has helped me to navigate various positions in town.

Before long, a few folks in town were encouraging me to apply for the recreation director position. Mike Beck, former director of senior services as well as the former director of outdoor education at Camp Sloane has been a guiding light for me during my time here in Salisbury. We worked together for twelve years and my experience working alongside him has proved invaluable. Both the senior services and rec department share an office so we were often reunited during his tenure, and his leadership has carried over into how I have handled many challenges.

That was back in 2005, and the last fifteen years have been a learning experience and an absolute honor.

There were of course many different challenges when I first took on the position. Simply having to learn the position and all the responsibilities that came along with it was a challenge on its own, but my previous experience at Camp Sloane and the assistance of everyone in Salisbury and Lakeville really emboldened my confidence in my ability to manage everything.

Speaking of challenges, have you had a chance to reflect on the past year?

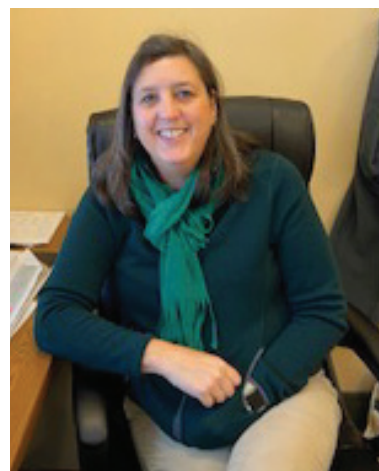
This year has been an exhaustive challenge in both recreation and senior services for many obvious reasons, but mainly because we, as a community, couldn't engage in nearly all of the traditionally beloved activities we offer each year. As a result of that reality, we've had to reinvent ourselves a bit. As direc-



tor of recreation for example, each season I rely heavily on volunteers – and of course this year we couldn't take volunteers. As an alternative, this year we implemented a variety of virtual programs while catching up on maintenance projects and doing an excellent job refurbishing all of the sail boats for Lakeville's instructional sailing lessons.

We are so fortunate to be able to offer so many fun and engaging programs in the town of Salisbury. Especially the summer recreational swim leagues throughout Region 1. Lake Wononscopomuc (or Lakeville Lake as commonly referred to by locals) defines the season for many young people in our community. The truth is, even within the very necessary guidelines, we were able to adapt and still provide variations of activities – it's all about adjustment. We were very fortunate in

Continued on next page ...



Photos with this article are glimpses of Lakeville and Salisbury, courtesy of Lazlo Gyorsok. The image above is of- and courtesy of- Lisa McAuliffe.

many ways due to the nature of many summer activities being naturally socially distanced. Still, we made sure to implement our own detailed protocols and limited numbers.

Normally for our sailing programs, we have two kids on a boat. This year, we were allowed one. Our tennis program was also modified into smaller groups with four instructors assigned, no mixed groups, and separate balls for each class. Our disinfecting protocols were enforced immediately and often. We were also very fortunate that the dock system on Lakeville Lake allowed us to continue our swim lessons with individual lanes and instructors instructing from the dock.

There were even a few unexpected bonuses to come about this past summer, sort of like diamonds in the rough if you will. A family friend happened to be a Right to Dream student, an outreach program based in Ghana that utilizes soccer to bring children to prep schools here in the US. We formed a relationship with one of these families who housed an exchange student who went on to become the captain of the Villanova men's soccer team. This summer he found himself home due to the postponement of major sports and we were lucky enough to have him run soccer clinics for us all summer.

How have you faced similar challenges in senior services?

The challenge was tragically more so for our senior population and my heart went out to them everyday. Because face-to-face meetings for consultation purposes were no longer possible, most everything was – and still is – being communicated in written form so it got to be a bit overwhelming for everyone.

Salisbury First Selectman Curtis Rand has been very supportive of all the department heads in town and I also have a strong group of colleagues in Torrington Area Health. We've all shared many late nights

discussing strategies that would help those in need and watching for government updates. The guidelines were often changing rapidly.

Though 2020 may be over, the challenges are still many. Our most vulnerable population is constantly at high risk – meaning they must spend a lot of time isolating. Isolation breeds loneliness and that loneliness becomes a fundamental issue in older populations.

Society has since adapted toward an online model, but when it comes to many senior populations, lots of folks don't have access to the online landscape or do not comprehend it. The challenge has been trying to get them help in that way. We began to offer a small in-person exercise class at the Salisbury Town Grove led by seniors and others via Zoom. We have traditionally offered a nutrition program, but because we haven't been able to help in-person, a shift was made for our residents that were participating in our on-site nutrition program to the Meals on Wheels program that delivers food to seniors stuck at home. Despite these adaptations, there is still an entire social aspect missing that remains a concern.

The AARP tax program which was cancelled on a national level as well as the safe driver class have also become major obstacles for seniors everywhere. Choices is a statewide program designed to assist seniors navigate the medicare program. As a Choices counselor, I provide unbiased information about medicare options for seniors. I can assist them by answering medicare questions, creating online medicare accounts, enrolling in medicare advantage, original medicare, and Part-D prescription drug plans. Having to create an account online for many folks can be daunting for me and completely overwhelming for them. Before COVID we would meet and make decisions together, now,

everything happens remotely and that will remain a challenge moving forward.

What have you taken from the experience and what are looking forward to in the coming year?

My motto since this all started has remained the same – be flexible, be patient. That's all we can do throughout this. All of the positions I've had throughout my career have taught me incredible lessons about flexibility. This year, we will be more efficient. We wouldn't have made these new changes without going through the previous year and they will stick around moving forward. My hope of course is for a vaccine, but our biggest challenge is the new tax season for seniors and how to implement that program here in Salisbury.

When it comes to our wonderful and beloved senior population, I would love to bring back more social programs that marry traditions with innovation and adaptation. Our monthly potlucks at the Grove and senior pontoon boat rides. We will achieve these goals – one day at time. •



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Camping: *The winter edition*

By John Torsiello
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With the COVID-19 pandemic and its restrictions on indoor socialization, people turned to whatever activity they could in 2020 in order to enjoy the great outdoors with friends and family, whether it was playing golf, hiking, walking, or camping.

While the winter will limit some outdoor activities that doesn't mean we can't be outward bound to get exercise, socialize, and seek relief from the pandemic – especially during the sometimes claustrophobic winter months when the days are short and nights long.

Head into the woods

Why not head to the woods, whether it be on snow shoes, skis, or in warm, sturdy boots and set up camp for a few days this winter? Camping during the winter is a wonderful way to beat the blahs and see nature up close and personal in all its white glory.

"One of the best things about camping during the winter is that with all the leaves off the trees there is so much more wildlife that is vis-

ible," said Harold MacMillan, owner of Housatonic River Outfitters in Cornwall, CT. "It is so much quieter during the winter. One of the things I love to do when I'm camping is to strap on a headlamp and snowshoe at night."

Andrea Westerlind, founder and owner of Westerlind, which has four brick and mortar locations, two in New York City, one in Utah, and one in the former Saperstein's store on Main Street in Millerton, NY, has camped during the wintertime. I mean, she grew up and lived in Sweden before moving to this area several years ago. She has camped near the North Pole, northern Norway, and on ice flows. Now that's some major winter camping for you!

Westerlind said, "It is common to camp during the winter in Sweden where I am from. I think this will be a good winter for people to enjoy the outdoors. I enjoy camping in all seasons but it is different during the winter – the sounds are subdued, especially if there is snow, and there are no bugs," she added the latter consideration with a laugh.

Stacey Twing, general manager of Barrington Outfitters in Great

Barrington, MA, believes people will want to stay outside and socialize this winter, no matter what the weather may bring.

"We have been selling a ton of fire pits that people put on their decks so they can enjoy friends outside. With the right outerwear it is such an enjoyable way to be outdoors. People have been winter camping for years and if you wear the proper apparel, have good boots or snowshoes, and trekking poles, it makes it so much easier to get into the woods. You just have to be aware of the weather and educate yourself as to how to dress properly and stay warm at a campsite, even in the coldest temperatures."

Don't forge to bring...

There are certain necessities one must have to make a winter camping trip successful and safe. A thermal sleeping bag, a sleeping pad that insulates the person from the cold ground, a propane stove for heat and cooking with extra propane canisters (or rough it and build a fire with fallen

tree branches and logs), extra socks, and hand warmers will be needed when braving temperatures that could plummet into the single digits or lower at night. “And you need extra lighters, you can never have too many,” MacMillan stressed.

Of course, being safe when camping in the cold means having a cell phone for communication in case anything unexpected happens. “Have extra batteries for the cell phone,” said MacMillan, “and keep them close to your body so they aren’t exposed to the cold.”

One other tool MacMillan says is a must is a simple hatchet. “If you need to make a lean-to or have some type of emergency, a small hatchet can come in very handy.”

As for concerns about a quick storm that may blow in, MacMillan said to be smart and not push your luck. “It’s not the cold that is an issue when winter camping or even a snowfall. It’s a freezing rain or sleet storm that can collapse tents.”

Avoid taking a wrong turn

Taking the wrong turn in the deep woods in Maine or upper Vermont and New Hampshire can find you wandering 200 miles before you find a road. While it may be difficult to get lost if camping in the immediate area, you should have a few things in mind if you make a wrong turn, especially when breaking camp in a storm. If you get disoriented, follow a stream or river downstream and you will likely hit a road pretty quickly.

Westerlind likes bringing a few comfortable accessories on a winter camping trip. “Not everything has to be made of nylon fiber. You can take a comfortable chair from home to sit in or a shearling rug, something cozy to make the experience more pleasant. Even take a real pillow from home, which will be much better than resting your head on a bag of socks or a rolled-up sweater.”

While there are many tents that can be used for camping, summer or winter, Westerlind only uses

the Heimplanet from a German manufacturer. Heimplanet means “home planet” in Deutschland. “The Heimplanet tent takes only seconds to assemble. Pump it with air and within 20 seconds you have your tent. It’s good looking and very sturdy.”

As for apparel, she espouses layering, something she calls “the golden rule” when it comes to being outside in the winter. “We have a product called Woolpower, which the Swedish military uses that is comfortable and warm next to your body.”

As to where to camp this winter, check the status of state campgrounds to see if they are open. Many people used the Appalachian Trail and its various camping sites in 2020 and the same can be done this winter. Also, if you are fortunate enough to have a large piece of property or know someone that wouldn’t mind if you use his or her property for camping, you’re in luck.

To recap, courtesy of REI Co-Op website, here is a list of some considerations when camping in winter:

- Pick a spot that’s sheltered from the wind and free of any falling dangers, then prepare your tent site by packing down the snow.
- Stay hydrated and eat lots of calories: Proper nutrition and hydration will help you stay warm. Make hot, nutritious breakfasts and dinners and enjoy quick snacks and lunches. Be sure to hydrate throughout the day.
- Use gear that’s right for winter camping: You’ll need a sturdy tent, a warm sleeping bag, two sleeping pads, and a stove suitable for cold temperatures.
- Bring warmer clothing: Midweight base layers, fleece pants, a puffy coat, and a waterproof jacket and pants are standard. Don’t forget accessories like warm socks, a hat, gloves, and sunglasses.
- Prevent cold injuries: Frostbite and hypothermia are legitimate concerns



while winter camping. Learn how to avoid them.

- For longer trips and expeditions, some winter campers pull a sled. A sled helps you to reduce weight on your back and lets you carry more gear. A sled is not practical for all terrain (steep slopes and narrow trails can be difficult), so research your route and trail conditions beforehand.
- Learn how to make your own sled for winter camping.
- You can wear boots, snowshoes or even skis to get into the woods or to a secluded spot near a meadow or field and then use the gear to enjoy browsing around your camp site or even a longer trip through the countryside.
- Eating food, filling a bottle with hot water, and doing jumping jacks are just a few tips for staying warm on a cold night.
- If you’re having a fire, use dead downed wood. Do not cut or break limbs off of live trees.
- Be respectful of wildlife and view them from a distance. Winter is a vulnerable time for animals.

Being outside has helped many of us endure the pandemic of 2020. As we enter 2021, staying outside will help the hardy maintain a more healthy attitude and relieve some of the stress that can build so easily these days. ●

Above: One should always be well prepared for a winter camping adventure. Image: istockphoto.com contributor matdupuis. Opposite page: Westerlind’s Heimplanet tent can be seen in the background, along with some cozy comforts of home. Image courtesy of Westerlind.

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Walking to better your health with Rail Trail pals

By Lisa LaMonica
info@mainstreetmag.com

During and after the holidays many of us think about our weight while we overindulge just a bit in treats of many kinds. At the end of the year and before a new year begins is also when many of us think about changes to make to improve our health; mental, spiritual, and physical.

These days are challenging us to come up with safe, creative ways to do that. With the constant presence of COVID in our lives, activities like going to the gym, which we used to take for granted, may be something we wish to avoid.

Walking groups

With the completion of many area rail trails throughout the Hudson Valley, rail trail walking groups are forming among friends and family. Community members are turning into friends for a safe and also social way of staying healthy. These days, thanks to Facebook, it's easier than ever to make new friends in big and small towns by putting out a request to find others to walk with. The motivation becomes stronger and more consistent to walk and stay in shape with other people than perhaps by yourself.

In the fall of 2020, I found a local group when Denise Fix of Brain Pain Art, Christine Young of Christine Young Antiques, and Melody Basolt Howarth of Mel's Belles Restoration

put out a call in our small town seeking walking companions. The benefits of this type of safe gathering are many. As Randy J. Hinz of the Sycamore Garden Center in Columbiaville, NY, stated: "the paved trails are wide enough to not have to worry about ticks too much as long as you stay away from the greenery."

The width also allows for social distancing while still being near enough for conversation while walking. Many walkers wear masks the whole time walking, which adds warmth too.

Beautiful scenery, sunsets, birds and animals with also some historical enrichment are all part of the experience. Museum-quality historical markers installed along rail trails give a brief history lesson on the Native Americans who lived here first, as well as early transportation methods.

Rules and information

Each rail trail section has its own website for rules, information, and up-to-date weather conditions.

As winter bears down on us, many people feel isolated and walking groups can be helpful to alleviate that in a way that is more social than solitary. In a gym setting, many people would go by themselves to exercise and it would be a solitary experience not conducive to conversation, exchanges of ideas and creativity, laughter and making friends.

The benefits of walking include weight loss, better sleep, improved circulation, better joint health, and walking is known to lessen disability

in people over 65. Daily walking is now known to add seven years to your life.

Winter has its own beauty to be appreciated while walking. During the winter it is especially important to receive and retain vitamin D so outdoor activities are a way to do that. At sunrise and sunset, the sun is not harmful to look at, and in fact, sunsets contain lithium which is known to give the viewer that experience of euphoria.

Walking is a great way to start or end your day in winter, which in this year you may feel offers limited options.

It is a truly great achievement that our state has given us these impressive rail trails to use and share with others. Make this a part of your new health regime in the new year. •

For more information on a trail near you, visit these websites:

- <https://empiretrail.ny.gov/poughkeepsie-albany/kinderhook-nassau>
- <https://www.albanycounty.com/departments/recreation/albany-county-helderberg-hudson-rail-trail>
- <https://www.traillink.com/trail/hudson-valley-rail-trail>
- <http://hvrtr.org>



Photos courtesy of Lisa LaMonica and Sycamore Garden Center/Randy J. Hinz.

Digging deeper into who you are

By Dominique DeVito
info@mainstreetmag.com

Welcome 2021! There is so much about 2020 that we all want to kick to the curb forever. Turning the calendar to a new year feels like a way to make a new start; this is true of all years, but this one especially so.

A new year is also a time for reflection, for assessing the pros and cons of our lives and for committing or recommitting to changes that we hope will improve them. One thing about spending so much time alone or with far fewer people in 2020 – and all with this palpable fear of sickness and death that might befall you or your family, friends, co-workers, and fellow human beings if you behave as you did for all the previous years of your life – wow! – is that it provided a time of intense introspection. How could it not?

Someone who knows a lot about digging deeper is Keren Weiner. She's a professional genealogist, and has been for years. Part Indiana Jones, part Sherlock Holmes, part personal memoirist, Keren knows how to dig to bring the past alive.

Bitten by the Bug of Genealogy

An interest in genealogy was already in her family. Keren's sister is a professional genealogist, and Keren heard a lot about it from her and was intrigued. When her own daughter went to college, Keren finally had some time to get a taste of genealogical research and, she says, she got "bit."

Her first big project came in 2003, and working on it she realized it satisfied her on a number of levels. "I love the history, of course," she says, "and the creativity and writing, but also working with people. When I finish a project I present the work to the family, and it is often an illuminating and transformative experience for them."

Most of us are familiar with genealogy on a very basic level as the research into a family tree. It conjures up a task of a research project a teacher would have given us in grade school involving hours at the library going through books and documents searching for clues, often finding just names and dates that didn't really mean anything. Or maybe you have a relative who did some of that research and you have a rudimentary family tree that still is only names and dates on paper.

"When people think about their family tree and wanting to know more," she says, "what is it that they are longing for? It's the stories. How did family members manage in difficult circumstances? What were their challenges? The details of their lives show how and why they made their choices."

It's these details that Keren uncovers for people.

A longing for stories

"Most of my clients are older," Keren says, "and they've come to realize that they have a lot of questions about their parents and grandparents that they didn't get to ask, but they still want to know more. Doing the research across the generations does involve going back." She continues, "but it also involves going across – to second cousins and third cousins in order to get the stories."

"The names and dates are the 'what,' and the rest of it is the who, why, and where – and also the 'what did that mean' for someone's parents and grandparents," she continues.

"Did you see the movie *Contact* with Jodie Foster?" she asks. "Foster's character is in a time travel vehicle, looking out the window and seeing all kinds of scenarios. As she's looking at all of this, she says in the most profound way, 'I had no idea.' That's what it's like for my clients," Keren says.

The role of DNA testing

I have to ask Keren about the DNA testing that has become so popular and what that means for people who are interested in their ancestry. With promises to "uncover stories of your family's past and find relatives you never knew existed," it certainly holds great appeal. No wonder the services have proliferated. There's AncestryDNA, 23andMe, Crigenetics, FamilyTreeDNA – any number of companies that do DNA testing. The reports give you information about your genetic ancestry, others who share your DNA, an ancestry timeline, and even information about health and habits that are genetically related.

These reports in and of themselves can be extremely revealing and life-changing. In the book, *Inheritance: A Memoir of Genealogy, Paternity, and Love*, by Dani Shapiro (2019, Knopf), she writes about how her DNA test revealed that the man she had known as her biological father for her entire life was, in fact, not. In a review of the book by Heller McAlpin for National Public Radio, McAlpin writes, "With the rising popularity of genetic testing, the relevance of Shapiro's latest memoir extends beyond her own personal experience. *Inheritance* broaches issues about the moral ramifications of genealogical surprises... privacy versus the rights... to know [one's] roots, medical history, and half-siblings."

In a recent review of the DNA companies for the "Wirecutter" e-newsletter from the *New York Times*, it was stated up front, "But such DNA testing services also come with inherent privacy concerns, and they're bound by few legal guidelines regulating the use of your data. The ramifications of sharing your DNA with for-profit companies are continuously evolving, and opting into a recreational DNA test today will likely lead to future consequences that no one has anticipated. If you're comfortable with that..."

Keren agrees that there is interesting information to be obtained from DNA testing, but she's quick to point out something few take into consideration: a bigger picture. Any individual only has a certain percent of the DNA from their parents, each of whom only has a percentage from their parents, etc. If you are the only one of your relatives to be tested, you're only getting a percentage of the story. She directed me to the website support.ancestry.com for an easy-to-understand summary of this issue:

"Many people believe that siblings' ethnicities are identical because they share parents, but full siblings share only about half of their DNA with one another. Because of this, siblings' ethnicities can vary. All the genes passed on to siblings come from the same gene pool (that is, the genes of both parents), so each ethnicity passed on to children must be present in one or both parents as well. However, some siblings may inherit ethnicities from their parents that others don't, and it's likely that each sibling will inherit different amounts of ethnicities from one another. Children inherit 50 percent of their DNA from each parent, but unless they're identical twins, they don't inherit the same DNA as each other."

"I've recommended DNA testing to some clients to address a particular road block," she says, "but it doesn't give you enough of the full picture unless another relative or relatives also test."

History come to life

She also provides me with a wonderful example of what she means by finding the stories behind the names and dates. "My current client is 91 years old," she starts. "I found a 1923



Photo: istockphoto.com contributor grandaded

newspaper article about her grandmother. I was excited to share the article with my client, first because it is harder to find documentation for women than for men and because this particular article was so unusual. It had six headlines!

Auto Bandits in Three More Hold-ups. Two Men Beaten by Organized Band of Thugs. Quartet of Auto Bandits Blamed for Seven Robberies in Eight Days. Purse is Snatched, Robber Flees as Woman Screams and is Picked Up by Pals in Machine. Saves Ring Loses Purse in Holdup.

"The latter headline was over my client's grandmother's photograph. It was a harrowing story, detailing the mugging and describing how a man accosted her on the city street, grabbed her purse and then attempted to get her wedding ring off. The man got away with the purse, but she held onto her ring fiercely. I called my client on the phone and read the article to her. When I didn't hear an immediate response I asked, 'Are you OK?' My client answered, a bit choked up, 'That ring is on my finger right now.' She had never heard this story before," Keren finishes.

Essential research

Keren loves the research that goes into each client's report. She acknowledges that there is a lot to be found online, but that the work requires much more digging, and this is where someone with even their own strong interest can get derailed. Like any good detec-

tive, a good genealogist develops what Keren describes as an "intuitive sense of finding unfindable things." She adds, "The Association of Professional Genealogists (APG) has guidelines for the professional genealogist to follow. It can be plodding and pragmatic at times, and you have to follow the bread crumbs and take the time to adhere to guidelines for sourcing your work." Her research projects typically take about six months.

"There are lots of archived materials to go through – records and resources from historical societies, libraries, town halls, tax departments, probate courts. And I have to give a huge shout-out," she adds, "to the staffs of these places, who are without exception caring and helpful. They love sharing!" Her research often involves records from other countries, and there are genealogists around the world who assist each other with translations and digging deeper. There's even an organization of volunteers called Random Acts of Genealogical Kindness – raogk.org.

The Final Report

As she works, she puts together timelines and photos and newspaper clippings and photos – whatever documentation serves the stories. She sends the initial family tree to the client so that she's sure that names are spelled correctly. Then she prepares

the final research report and the family is gathered so that she can share the research with everyone. She's done this in places as varied as living rooms, family reunions held at hotels, outdoor patios – wherever the most people can gather – though this year and for the foreseeable future, it's by Zoom.

"It's a very interactive presentation," she says. "People ask all kinds of questions. It's quite revealing for everyone to get a sense of their ancestors' struggles and triumphs. Often, the family is a bit flooded with the amount of information they've gotten and things they've learned. They need time to process what it means."

Keren and I both go to the analogy of Jodie Foster's line from the movie *Contact*: "I had no idea."

"It's funny," Keren muses, "every-one jokes about finding the horse thief in the family, the particularly colorful character or maybe a villain. But most often it's the pivotal life-changing circumstances that are discovered in every generation that are the most revealing." She shares, too, that when this information is shared, the families experience a kind of peace and grounding. To know so much more about the real lives of their ancestors goes to the core of who they are – of who we all are.

The lure and appeal of history

As a lover of history and someone whose job it is to look into the past to understand how people lived in it, I

also asked her if there's a period she's come to particularly like, one she may have wanted to live in.

"I would have enjoyed the 1890s, the decade leading up to 1900," she says after giving it some thought. "By 1900 there was a lot percolating in America." Keren is quick to add that a period she has learned a lot about and that gets her emotional just thinking about is the American Civil War. "The suffering was so profound," she says, "and made such a mark on this country." She admires the work of Bruce Catton, the Pulitzer Prize-winning historian and journalist, for how "gorgeous" his writing is about that period.

Bringing It forward for future generations

Genealogy illuminates the past. What does doing this work make Keren think about for people in the here and now? "I'd like people to take genealogy forward in addition to backward," she says. We all have oodles of photos on our phones and our computers that have replaced traditional photo albums. We get overwhelmed with them and rarely spend the time to properly identify and archive the people, places, and events the way people in the past made photo albums. Genealogists will continue to do research, but there will be less to physically access if the photos aren't printed out and identified. "The Census used to be full of information," she shares as an example, "but not anymore."

"How will our children find our stories," she muses?

January and the reflective winter months leading to spring seem the perfect time to do this deeper digging. Consider working with Keren on a project. Go through the photos on your phone or social media and start an album. "We hold the legacies of these stories in our hands," Keren says. This past year may be one we all want to scratch, but our children and grandchildren will want to know what it was like. They will have no idea, unless we bring the stories to them. ●

Learn more about Keren Weiner at kerenweinergenealogy.com. Her business is based in Pittsfield, MA.

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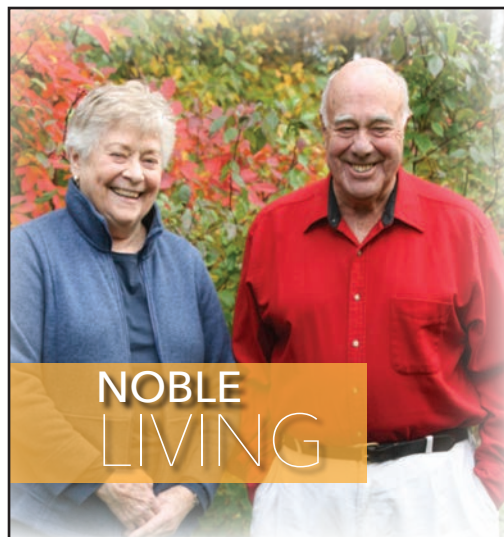
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How you can breathe easier

By Molly Burke & Tamara Martucci
info@foodandmoodnyc.com

At Food + Mood NYC, we create and lead customized wellness programs for our clients, which range from individuals to corporate employees. Now more than ever, wellness – from food and fitness to spirituality and social life – is critical as we navigate this unprecedented and stressful time in which home and office are one and the same, lunch breaks are non-existent, and downtime is hard to find.

One of the things we recommend to clients as we guide them on their wellness journey is Mindfresh, a fusion of mindful movement, meditation, and breathing techniques. This mindfulness program is perfect for anyone needing a mental cleanse during the workday (and who doesn't?) and the benefits are plentiful, including increased energy, lower anxiety, better circulation, improved confidence, and a recharged body and mind.

We sat down with Mindfresh founder, Jen Kluckowski, to learn how she incorporates mindfulness into her everyday life. Plus, we share one of our favorite Mindfresh sequences for you to try.

Can you tell us a bit about Mindfresh and its benefits?

The mission behind Mindfresh is simple: bring more peace into offices in our digital age. There used to be a time when we had plenty of opportunity to take care of our wellbeing outside of work. With 24/7 connectivity, it's time we integrate wellbeing into our dynamic and expanding workday.

How do you start your day? What is your morning ritual?

I used to have a very different morning ritual before I became a mother, but now I start my day playing with

my sons and making them breakfast. I try to be as present as I possibly can with them so I can carry that awareness into whatever follows. I do meditate for 15 minutes minimum each morning ... but the time varies based on my schedule that day.

How do you end your day on the right note? What's your evening ritual?

Putting my boys down for bed, followed by dinner and a glass of wine with my husband. I try to savor each of these moments.

What are three Mindfresh techniques we should all do everyday?

1. Try to avoid thinking about what you will say next when someone is speaking to you – just listen. 2. Feel your heartbeat with your hand on your chest for just a few seconds – just say “thank you” for life today. 3. Take a lion's breath (loud open mouth exhale – maybe even with the tongue out!) when you hit the wall – just to remember “this too shall pass.”

Besides Mindfresh, how do you take care of yourself on and off the plate?

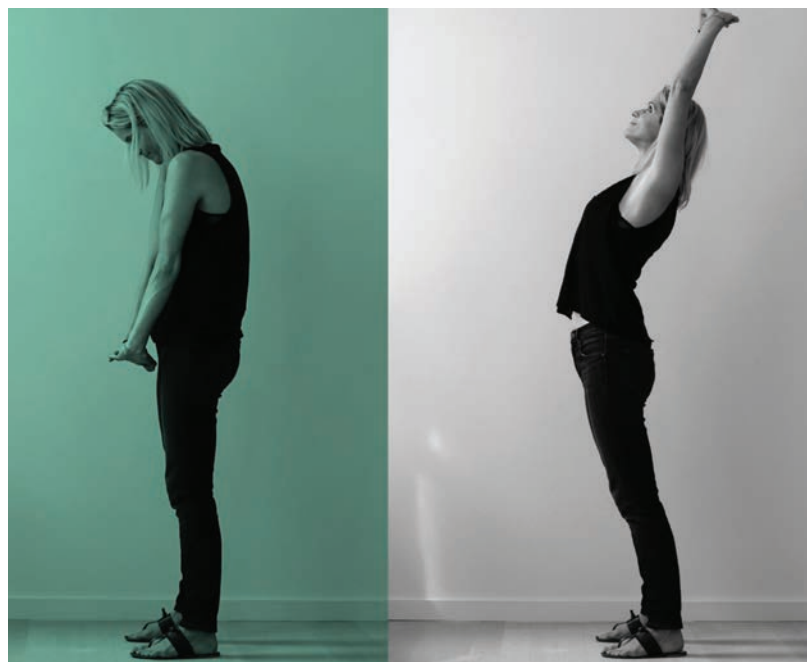
I eat a mindful plant-based diet that's good for me, the environment, and the animals. I like to study texts from spiritual masters. I chant mantras to get me out of my head and into my heart.

Our favorite Mindfresh sequence

One of Food + Mood NYC's favorite Mindfresh sequences is Standing Spine Release and a very simple but very powerful breathing technique called Even Part Breath. You can use this technique anywhere, anytime!

Standing Spine Release: This pose opens the front of the chest, reverses desk slump, and brings movement into the spine. This is a helpful pose for those who experience back pain from sitting all day.

Have your feet a little wider than



hips distance apart (a short straddle). Toes pointing forward. Stand up tall and press down through your feet to lift through the crown of your head. Interlace your fingers and have your palms facing down toward the floor. Inhale and sweep your arms up along side the ears and open up the front of your chest. Exhale and round everything forward and bring the hands and face toward the floor. Repeat this movement six to eight times.

Even Part Breath: The idea is to create a mind that is more steady. This is our go-to technique to slow down a racing mind.

- To begin, gently close your eyes or gaze at the floor.

- Inhale for the count of four through your nose (1-2-3-4) and exhale for the count of four (1-2-3-4) through your nose.

- Try it and see how it feels. If it does not feel good let go of the count and breath consciously.

- Try to keep your inhale and exhale even and conscious.

- As you're doing this, your nervous system is beginning to unwind and you're moving out of a fight or flight state, which most of us reside in all day long. The Even Part Breath will move you into a much more calm space known as rest and digest to make space for your creativity to bubble up.

- Continue this for 1-3 minutes.

- At the end of the 1-3 minutes, let go of the count on an exhale and come back to your natural breathing.

- Take a moment to observe how you feel in your body and mind. •

To learn more or if you're interested in booking a Mindfresh session for yourself or your business, visit Food + Mood NYC's website at www.foodandmoodnyc.com – and be ready to breathe a little easier.

A State Of The Art *frame of mind*

By Griffin Cooper
griffin@mainstreetmag.com

Famed designer Robert L. Peters once opined about the implications of design saying, “Design creates culture. Culture shapes values. Values determine the future.” With such a vast scope of varying design elements and skilled artisans sweeping across the hills and valleys of our region, it is hard to deny the influence design has on our lives. It isn’t simply about the spaces we occupy anymore, it’s about how those spaces frame themselves around how we see ourselves – our spirit, our function, our personal reflection. For *New York Times*-featured curator Katharine Dufault, extensive experience has led to a holistic approach to design philosophy.

Dufault has emerged from a life immersed in the world of the arts and brought her skill for discerning the design-mind connection to the quiet foothills nestled within Berkshire County. Katharine grew up amid a flourishing art scene in Cambridge, England, and from a young age was exposed to a range of inspiring interiors which helped inform her contemporary eclectic aesthetic. After studying visual arts, graphic design, and photography at Anglia Ruskin University, Cambridge, she came to New York and graduated with honors in painting and literature from Columbia University in New York City.

Design + identity

Since launching her design firm State Of The Art in 2015, Katharine has designed spaces that have helped redefine the terms “workplace” and “home.” Driven by her intuitive desire to revitalize interiors, Dufault has become a veritable

guide through the growing cultural link between design and identity. Now, as she lays roots down in an area where artistic inspiration has made respite for generations, she seeks to finally cross the bridge that connects aesthetic design with a cultural state of mind.

How has being immersed in the ever-evolving world of arts for most of your life influenced your design path? How does that world inform your design instincts?

It has given me a familiarity and ease within the world of art, and allowed me to keep on top of what is trending. Growing up in Cambridge, England, amid a flourishing art scene, has given me, I suppose, a certain cultural sophistication and knowledge of the art world. Both my education and my work as artist and curator has led me to a deeper understanding of the contemporary scene. I have an eye for balance and symmetry and an ability to communicate about why things work, or don’t work, visually. Giving time to art and making it a priority was nurtured from an early age. I am comfortable in a gallery setting discussing art; I have knowledge of the history of western art but have travelled to India and have visual familiarity with eastern culture as well as art. I am aware of the ever-evolving Manhattan art gallery scene and I have a wide network of artist friends and peers whose work I often see and discuss. I am used to looking at art and understanding it.

I was influenced by dwellings in England whose mix of antique furniture and textiles, with contemporary art and design informed my aesthetic. I also learned about Indian prints and textiles. I studied painting, graphic design, and photography which gave me visual language and formalized my sense of design. My experience as a curator for the past decade honed my skills in selecting, placing, and installing work for a wider audience. I am ex-

cited to create a dialogue between the works which flow throughout the gallery.

I led multiple curatorial tours to the public where I talked about the various artists and their artwork in the context of the exhibition. (Two of the exhibitions I curated were reviewed in the *NY Times*), I enjoy enhancing the visual dialogue, if you will, in a client’s home by sourcing the perfect artwork.

After finding out what they are interested in, what they like and what they want their personal space to reflect, I will propose several selections for their approval. I have a good visual memory and I have been trained to ‘look’ in a particular way: as an artist, curator, and designer. Everything I have seen, learned, and studied informs my design aesthetic. I have designed spaces for myself and for friends, then later for clients. I have an understanding of what we call the Golden Sector: the alignment or composition of size and shape and placement, which is harmonious and satisfying, and I have an intuitive sense of Feng Shui.

Do you see each design project as something that exists in its own space? Or do you find links between each project as they relate to your overall style?

Yes – each project is customized specifically for each client. I like to see their space, the light, the colors, and find out what they like, what is important to them, what they are interested in. This gives me a



sense of how they want their space to reflect who they are. As an artist and designer there will be a certain link or aesthetic to all my work, and perhaps clients seek me out because they resonate with it. However, each project is fully individualized for each client.

I work with several different types of clients – those interested in acquiring artworks for their home or office and would like to be guided by a professional because they don't know how to go about it; clients who know what they like but don't have time; or those who have a fixed budget and no idea what they can acquire and need a helping hand.

Much of your philosophy revolves around the revitalization of space. Do you see a connection between the spaces we occupy and the way we interpret them spiritually or emotionally?

Absolutely! Our space is a reflection of our spiritual and emotional wellbeing. We immediately feel at ease, and relaxed when we enter a space that is harmonious and inviting. However, some people are not sure how to articulate this for themselves and that is where I can help guide them. Visual harmony can be achieved through color choices, furniture shapes, and of course, artworks. How the pieces relate to each other can create this effect – or not! I am of the 'less is more' school of design. Clutter can fill up a space and bog you down emotionally. However, that does not mean spaces need to be empty but rather discrimination can be applied to what is kept visible and what is stashed or donated!

Many clients require encouragement to change and are not sure how to begin; or perhaps they have moved – and need to edit their furniture and find new placement for their artworks. Often a client wants to update their space and

make it more contemporary. I can guide them to make small changes such as frames and placement, or larger changes like paint colors and furniture upgrades.

Other clients want artworks to reflect their knowledge of contemporary art – they want artworks that provoke dialogue, that are statements. Some like to know that they have a 'blue chip' – or established a well-known name hanging on their wall!

Do you feel that the prominent arts scene in our area is in tune with your design style? Have you been inspired in any way by the eclectic local arts community?

Yes, I have an eclectic design aesthetic which was formed in the university city of Cambridge, and honed throughout my lived experience in the arts – as an artist and curator. I have visited the Berkshires for nearly thirty years and have been aware of the cultural and arts scene here so the decision to move had been discussed for quite a while. There is a sophisticated and cultured community here, also informed by the desire to live in nature. Everyone who visits here comes because they love the beauty of the Berkshires – and beyond. I am delighted to see mountains, forests, and great swathes of stunning sky when I drive around.

Of course there is an eclectic community of makers, artisans, and emerging artists as well as galleries which show more established artists. The Berkshires have long been a place where designers from New York and Connecticut have come to source antique furniture, or specialized items such as antique colored glass, or Asian artifacts. I notice a plethora of delightful independent household goods and design stores which have cropped up in the past few years. I am inspired by the homemade, craft, and design which permeates the Berkshires. Even the local Rudolf Steiner schools have an enduring European design aesthetic of hand-knit, natural colored, handcrafted wooden toys – a design ethos which trickles up!



What do you see moving forward for State of the Art, from your own philosophy and from the design community in the coming years?

I hope to build my client network in this area by helping more clients create spaces which reflect who they are. Guiding clients to find contemporary artworks which bring them pleasure and enhance their rooms, artwork that is meaningful within their space is important. Working closely with local makers, designers, galleries, and artist. Fostering connection and community is also a goal, and of course, I would like to bring artists and existing contacts into play. The Berkshires are a thriving community, and despite the pandemic, many new people have come to this beautiful area. I hope to be of service to them. •

To learn more about Katharine Dufault and her work, you can visit www.katharinedufault.com or www.stateoftheearthhome.com.

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Great Barrington Public Theater

By CB Wismar

info@mainstreetmag.com

"There's such an incredible pool of talent up here... from Connecticut through Massachusetts into Vermont and throughout New York." Jim Frangione is very expressive when talking about regional theater in the Litchfield Hills, the Berkshires, and the Hudson Valley. "We've got great theater here that draws incredible talent from New York and Boston. It's the local talent that impresses us."

The "us" Frangione refers to includes Great Barrington Public Theater co-founder Deann Simmons Halper, an actor/producer/director whose extensive list of theater credits compliments his lengthy listing of film, television, and theater roles as a writer/actor/director.

Together, Halper as managing director and Frangione as artistic director harnessed the energies and contacts of such celebrated efforts as the Aglet Theatre Company and Berkshire Playwrights Lab to form a unique addition to the regional theater scene.

Resumés worth noting... and applauding

Theater-goers through the region will likely have seen both company founders on the "boards" at Shakespeare & Company, Barrington Stage Company, Sharon Playhouse, and Aglet Theatre Company productions. They've been honored with not only excellent critical reviews, but nominations for theatrical awards including the OBIE and Berkshire Theatre Critics' Award.

Halper reflects on the creation of the company in a way that reaches out to the entire creative and appreciative theatrical community. "Both Jim and I had been involved with presenting staged readings for several years, in

various forms, and with several different theater companies. While readings are essential to the development of new plays, we'd heard from a number of playwrights that what they really desired was a production – actors not holding scripts, a lengthier and more substantive revision and rehearsal process, basically a deeper dive into the new play, opening it up to audiences and critics alike."

Finding their niche as "the other guys"

"We're the theatrical alternative," offers Frangione when assessing the potential competition from the regional powerhouse companies that draw marquee names to appear in recognized plays. "We focus on new plays... pieces that may have had theatrical readings or small, regional productions, but are not widely known." One such play is David Mamet's *The Christopher Boy's Communion*, which was to be the centerpiece of the company's 2020 season but, for the obvious reasons of a national pandemic, had to be postponed for an anticipated East Coast premiere in summer of 2021.

Frangione's connection with Mamet has deep roots. From Jim's years with The Stage Company of Boston, where he first met Mamet, to his theatrical "break," first as understudy to William H. Macy in Mamet's *Oleanna* at the Orpheum Theatre in New York to stepping into the lead role on the play's national tour, the two have remained personal and professional friends. Frangione appeared in Mamet's *The Spanish Prisoner*, the film that boasts Steve Martin's one straight dramatic role and will be remembered, locally, appearing in *American Buffalo* at Berkshire Theatre Festival in a production that starred Chris Noth.



Above: *Breakwater*. Ryan and Anne on the bench. Image courtesy of the Great Barrington Public Theater

Continued on next page ...

Originally from Cape Cod, Frangione has been a local resident for years, connecting his oceanside roots to his passion for writing in a trilogy, the second part of which, *Breakwater*, was the premier production of Great Barrington Public Theater. “We have close connections to Bard College at Simon’s Rock and have been fortunate enough to find a home for our productions in their amazing theater complex.” The Daniel Arts Center at the college not only offers a state-of-the-art, 300-seat proscenium stage theater – the McConnell Theater – but the more intimate Black Box Theater that is designed for readings and lab productions of new plays.

Going virtual

Not unlike all of the regional theater companies, Great Barrington Public Theater exerted great energy in finding and presenting alternate presentations during a summer season completely erased by COVID-19 and the strict limitations required to attempt containment. From live, in-person performances to virtual performances designed to attract both the attention and the support of a burgeoning audience, the company has mounted two series. What would have been a live performance – *Bear Tales* – became *Bear Tales – Six Feet Together*, a series of solo pieces that matches area writers with area performers in bringing fresh work to the audience.

Drawing, again, on the long-term relationship with David Mamet and his wife, actor Rebecca Pidgeon, the free, online productions include a one act play by Mamet in which Pidgeon portrays the legendary, complex and tragic New York media personality, Dorothy Kilgallen.

A similar effort to bring the arts to a virtual audience is represented in a joint venture between Great Barrington Public Theater and the Berkshire Film and Media Collaborative, an organization that unites creative professionals throughout the region, serves as a clearing house for

the skilled media disciplines and has brought together a star-studded list of board and advisory members. The Collaborative reinforces Frangione’s assertion that the region is peppered with extraordinary talent, so combining the reach of the Theater with the skills of the Collaborative has resulted in *Berkshire Outdoor Shorts*, an ongoing series of short films that focus on the natural environment of the Berkshires.

The websites of every arts program in the region echo the uncertainty and resilient hope that each has for a 2021 season that may bring at least a half-step toward “normalcy.” As the months continue to pile up and the virus continues its relentless march through the population, it is the hope of available vaccines that keeps the flame alive. Well within the collection of organizations hoping for a brighter future is Great Barrington Public Theater. Their founding mandate, to be “a collaboration of seasoned theater professionals and newcomers to professional theater, all committed to bringing new work, new voices, local talent, and always-affordable tickets to audiences in the Berkshires” lives on. The theaters at Bard College at Simon’s Rock remain dark, awaiting their hoped for return. In the interim, both Deann Halper Simmons and Jim Frangione, along with the other talented individuals who have linked themselves to the theater – Anne Undeland (associate artist/playwright/actor), Andy Reynolds (associate artist/playwright/grant writer), Elizabeth Nelson (associate artist/playwright/marketing), and Mike Clary (marketing/communications) – soldier on. •

Stay connected to Great Barrington Public Theater through their website, www.great-barringtonpublictheater.org or on Facebook.



Above, top to bottom, L-R: Poster for *Breakwater*. Deann and Jim. Images courtesy of the Great Barrington Public Theater

New Year = New marketing plan!

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INSURING YOUR WORLD

The New Year is a time of renewal and reorganization of all of our lives, we rethink our diets, exercise routines, and for some, even our jobs! It is also a great time to take a real hard look at our insurance programs. Starting with your homeowner's policy is a great place – since the beginning of the Pandemic, building costs have risen between 30-40%! This means that your home replacement values have risen by the same percentage. The current cost to rebuild a 2000-square-foot home of average quality materials is between \$250-300 per square foot. That makes the replacement value between \$500,000 and \$600,000. Check your policy and see where your home value limits are currently, it may be time for an adjustment. Another spot to review is your liability limit. Do you have an umbrella policy? This is a place that most folks are woefully lacking, for as little as \$200/year, you can purchase a \$1 million umbrella that will provide excess liability coverage over your home, auto, and any personally-owned rental properties that are four families or less. Next comes your automobile policy: check and see that your comprehensive and collision deductibles are not too low since a significant savings in premium can be realized if they are increased to \$500 or \$1000. Do you need comprehensive or collision on that older high mileage vehicle? If not cancel it, since a nice premium savings will be realized. And lastly, when was the last time that you checked how much life insurance you had? Probably a long time ago would be my guess. Get your policies out and have a look, term policies are an extremely efficient way to get low cost protection, yet a good whole life policy is a great way to lock in rates as well as build a nice cash value. Remember what we always say: people don't plan to fail, they fail to plan.



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Perfect At Home Facial

During the pandemic it's understandable to not want to leave your home to go to the spa and get a facial. But you can still cater to your skin needs at home. Here is a step by step "at home facial."

Step 1: Create a relaxing environment, light some candles, put some soft music on in the background.

Step 2: Double cleanse. The first cleanse should be oil-based to melt makeup and impurities away. The second cleanse could be a gentle foam, gel, or cream based. This second cleanse is a deeper cleanse leaving your skin squeaky clean. Foam is great for clearing out pores. Cream is best for sensitive skin.

Step 3: Exfoliate. Use a manual or chemical exfoliator to remove dead skin cells which allows your skin to breathe and better product penetration. Be careful with this step, it is easy to "over exfoliate" which can cause damage to your skin's natural lipid barrier.

Step 4: Mask. Use a mask based on your skin care needs at that exact moment. For oily/breakout-prone skin look for clay-based masks. For dry/dehydrated skin use a hyaluronic acid to replenish you skin. For aging skin look for masks with peptides, antioxidants, & vitamins.

Step 5: Massage and moisturize. After removing your mask this is your time to apply all your serums, eye creams, and moisturizers. (Tip: work thinnest to thickest with products for which order to apply them). While applying these products gently massage them all in to work the blood flow and circulation which helps promote new collagen growth keeping your skin healthy and glowing.

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Take Small Steps

With the pandemic still raging, and not seeming to be stopping in the near future, health and wellness have never been more important. It's a great time to create a new lifestyle around your life and that can be achieved with even the smallest of changes.

We've never needed wellness more in our lives than today. Every time you read the news it's apparent that fitness and wellness are two of the major keys to fighting off a good amount of sicknesses and diseases including Type 2 diabetes and heart disease. One way to incorporate a healthier lifestyle is to pick one sweet treat you have – and ditch it. Just one? Yes! Small steps always work best when starting a new habit. There is no need to ditch everything all at once and dive headfirst without a plan. Add on to that a 15 minute walk, or an online Zoom fitness class, and you'll be moving even further. It's not about trying to climb the whole mountain in one trek. Rather it's about creating base camps to work from, and conquer small victories.

Take your time to create a plan to succeed and work slowly and consistently. Always reach out to professionals, like personal trainers and coaches, when starting a new fitness journey to reap the most benefits! You can do it, and every little step helps.

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Help in the darkest days of winter

Worldwide more people are suffering from symptoms of anxiety, depression, trauma, grief, increased substance abuse, and thoughts of suicide. One study reports depression symptoms prevalence was more than 3-fold higher during the Covid-19 pandemic than before – and that was in September.

As we head into the darkest days of the year, what emotional and spiritual tools do we have to navigate these trying times? As a shamanic practitioner and teacher, I hear this question a lot. Here is what has helped me – community, nature, spiritual practices, and therapy.

Create connections, find a community. Humans are social by nature. We need to be seen and accepted. Whether it's your work colleagues, fellow club or organization members, or your friends and family – reach out. Stay connected via phone calls, video chats, and texts. Maybe even send an old-fashioned card, letter, or care package.

Seek nature as much as possible. Spend time outside, play with your animals, appreciate the beauty of a snowy landscape. Nature soothes the nervous system. Go ahead and build a snowman or woman, or just shovel the walkway for your neighbor. Get outside and soak up as much vitamin D as you can.

Try a spiritual practice. Learn to meditate, practice yoga, chanting, shamanic journeying, daily prayer. Begin new rituals that bring meaning to your life. Find the sacred in the ordinary.

Reach out for expert help. Call your church, addiction counselor, therapist, or shamanic practitioner. If you don't know where to begin with therapy, try online therapy at Talkspace or BetterHelp. Just reach out. For an open community of spiritual seekers, you can join us at www.sacredcircles.community.

Terri Lundquist
www.terrilundquist.com



Finding Home Farms

Fourth-generation maple farm specializing in maple syrup and soy candles. (845) 355-4335. findinghomefarms.com

Starting in 2010 with a blog and a dream, Finding Home Farms is a family-owned, lifestyle brand that offers the Hudson Valley some of the best organic maple syrup in the entire state. Dana Putnam and wife Laura combine their award-winning maple syrup with home decor products, creating the perfect pairing for the creation of an inviting, Hudson Valley home. From their pure maple syrup and pantry offerings, to soy candles and home decor, the folks at Finding Home Farms are proud to source and produce all of their products in the US. For 14 years, the Putnams were “backyard sugar makers,” crafting just enough syrup to share with neighbors and friends. Today, they’ve turned sugar-making into a full-time career pursuing a big dream while proudly living a simpler life and doing what they love best – crafting maple syrup and creating a welcoming home. The folks at Finding Home Farms control every aspect of the production and packaging of their maple syrup, and recently won the 2020 Specialty Food Association Product of the Year award for their Rye Barrel-Aged Maple Syrup. The farm has recently developed a Sugarhouse, an online store, and a wholesale line. Visitors can shop for organic maple syrup, soy candles, home decor, and holiday items on their website and bring the taste of tradition home anytime.



Foxy & Winston

Letterpress printing and design studio. 2642 NY-23, Hillsdale, NY. (718) 928-4588. foxyandwinston.com

Jane Buck started her first stationery business in 2005, in Brooklyn, NY, selling handmade cards. Today, Jane is the proud owner of Foxy & Winston, a studio and shop named after her parents that is located in Hillsdale, NY, where she resides. Jane illustrates, designs, and prints custom wedding invitations, birth announcements, as well as business and social stationery for all occasions. Foxy & Winston employs three machines whose origins range from 1890 to 1920. Jane also designs patterns for textile and home decor and occasionally even logos and poster graphics. These days, due the times, Jane conducts her client meetings via Zoom and then ships out the finished product to clients wherever they may be. “I think when clients come to me, they get a much more personal design,” Jane says. “For example: I will draw and print a lot of maps for specific occasions. Wedding clients give me a list of landmarks or buildings ranging from where they had their first date, their homes, or their favorite place to get pizza or ice cream, and I will weave together each rendering into a map that tells the story of their relationship.” Apart from happy clients, Jane says she loves working with her hands in the studio, making her own hours and being able to bring her two Beagles, Beatrice and Junie, to work with her everyday.



Bear Creek Farm

Award-winning flower farm located on Route NY-82 in Stanfordville, NY. (845) 466-2836. bearcreekfarm.com

The hamlet of Stanfordville, NY, plays home to Bear Creek Farm, a 38-acre flower farm of bucolic land giving life to thousands of larger-than-life dahlias that dot the countryside with magnificent blooms. Perhaps even more beautiful than the farm itself is the loving relationship of owner Debra Kaye and her colorful cultivations. As an innovation and marketing consultant living in New York City in 2013, Debra wanted her upstate farm to host her wedding ceremony, but she could not manage to find anyone willing to provide the perfect flowers. Thanks to her novel way of thinking and her knack for botanical beautification, Debra transformed her homestead into one of the most popular flower farms in upstate New York. Today, Bear Creek Farm cultivates over 100 varieties of dahlias, peonies, and rare flowers. Bear Creek has also taken the lead in hosting events and educational workshops. This year, the farm has pivoted to offer online tuber workshops where visitors learned how a commercial grower processes dahlia tuber, digging and washing tubers, tuber division and its various methods, and a full discussion of tuber storage. Born out of love and grown into a phenomenon, Bear Creek Farm has quickly become the standard for sustaining rural economies and working hard to maintain the spirit of rural beauty in the Tri-corner region.



Sky Farm Riding Stable

Horseback riding center offering lessons, boarding, and training. Sky Farm Rd., Copake, NY. skyfarmridingstables@gmail.com

Lillian Becker, owner and president of Sky Farm Riding Stables has been riding horses since the age of three. After graduating cum laude with a Bachelor of Science degree in Equine Science and a concentration in equine industry and management from University of New Hampshire, Lillian opened the celebrated stables. Today, Sky Farm Riding Stables offers training, boarding, starting young horses, instruction, coaching, and even a 4-H group certified in eventing and dressage in two locations in Copake. Sky Farm practices holistic management with a friendly atmosphere and are, what they call, person- and equine- centered, focusing on both human and animal behavior. With a master's degree in social work with a clinical concentration from the University at Albany, Lillian enjoys sharing her knowledge with clients and helping both horses and people achieve their goals. The folks at Sky Farm say their goal is to continue to expand their lesson programs and competition schedules while still offering quality instruction, boarding, and training. Though a sister facility in south Florida may be on the horizon, Sky Farm's first priority remains offering a safe, educational, respectful and trusting environment in which all horses and students can grow and thrive in the discipline of their choice in the Hudson Valley.



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