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## FUN IN THE SUMMER SUN

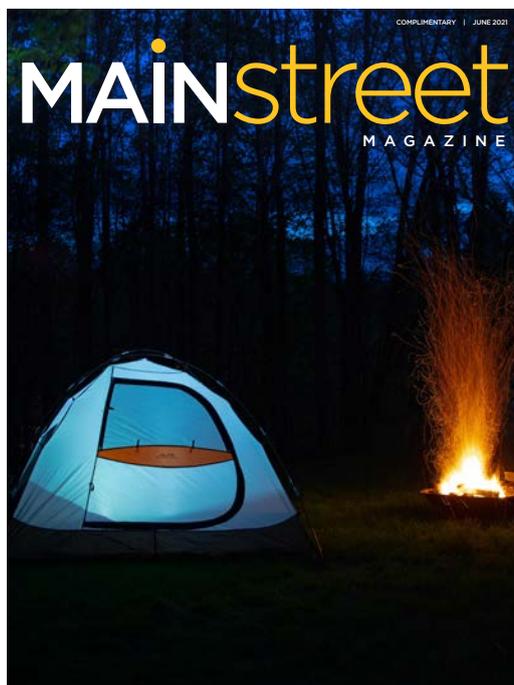
It truly is hard to believe that this month marks the six month mark of 2021 – how is this year almost halfway over? It is just crazy to me. So much has happened in the last 12 to 15 months of our lives, so many changes and so many adjustments – yet here we are! The United States seems to be leading the world in vaccinations, and as of this writing, Dr. Fauci is saying it is safe for those vaccinated to walk around without a mask... does this mean we are close to returning to some form of normalcy... whatever that may mean at this juncture!

But those questions aside, what I do know is that it is officially June and that means summer fun! And we could all use a little fun right about now. Summer traditionally means great, warm weather; longer days; school getting out; get-togethers with friends and family; bonfires, s'mores and camping; barbecues; and so much more. I am excited for some summer fun and I am definitely ready for some warm weather after this chilly, but beautiful, spring that we've had.

In celebrating the arrival of summer, this June issue is here for your reading pleasure. This issue does not have a specific theme and so you will find stories that run the gamut, and as a result, there is definitely something here for everyone. To start, one of Olivia's photos graces our cover – an image that's a bit different for us (because it is a darker image, set at night), but it is nostalgic and evokes feel-good feelings of summer nights with a warm campfire, surrounded by good friends, and lots of laughs. Well, I certainly hopes that it evokes these feel-good feelings for you when you look at it!

That said, I won't dive into our June content too much, but I will leave it to you to explore, to hopefully learn a thing or two, and to be entertained. That is always our goal with everything that we here at *Main Street* produce. Whether you read our monthly magazine, read content on our website, catch us on social media, or hear me on my weekly radio spot on Robin Hood Radio – or all of it – I hope that there is something of interest to you in all of the things that we produce. Our goal has always been to be a source of good, positive stories about the people, places, curiosities, and things that make our region what it is. I feel humbled and honored to state that we have, on most occasions, achieved said goal, and it continues to be our mission to fulfill that goal every day – in every thing that we create for you. So as always, thank you for reading! And please do support our advertisers, because it is thanks to them that you're able to read this – for free!

– Thorunn Kristjansdottir



JUNE 2021

Let's kick off the summer right! Summer is here, which means longer days and warmer nights full of campfires, get-togethers, and s'mores. Enjoy because we all deserve it.

Cover photo by  
Olivia Valentine

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# The call of the wild

THOMAS  
BLAGDEN  
AND THE  
SIREN CALL  
OF NATURE

By CB Wismar  
[info@mainstreetmag.com](mailto:info@mainstreetmag.com)

There is the realization in exploring the vivid, breathtaking photography of Thomas Blagden, that he is much more than a simple recorder of nature's most profound and elegant moments. He is part of them. As Jack London declared in his landmark 1903 novel *The Call of the Wild* "he was sounding the deeps of his nature, and of the parts of his nature that were deeper than he."

Tom Blagden's life – his exceptional career as an artist with a camera – has taken him to some of the wildest portions of the globe where he has explored "the deeps" and brought back images to share. From Alaska's majestic Denali National Park to Patagonia, Nepal, and Bhutan, he has captured the majesty and elegance of nature.

He recalls fighting deadly surf in an overloaded dugout canoe on Costa Rica's Osa Peninsula and being charged by an irate mother elephant in Africa. More intent on looking skyward at the colorful native birds, he was saved from stepping on a deadly Fer-de-Lance viper on a Costa Rican jungle trail by his intrepid niece who pushed him out of the way just in time. He has served as expedition photographer for 15 rafting descents of the Colorado River through the Grand Canyon, a trip that can be both idyllic and deadly ... and been harassed by alligators in South Carolina swamps.

Through all of his experiences, he has always returned to his roots, living in the house where he grew up, nestled in the Litchfield Hills. In self-declared "retirement," he has turned his artistic eye to Great Mountain Forest which encompasses parts of Falls Village, Town of Canaan, and Town of Norfolk, CT, and has begun creating an archive of the striking beauty so close to home.

## Heredity and environment

A child of an artistic family, Tom progressed through the logical flow of attending Indian Mountain School and Hotchkiss School, then Harvard. Through it all, the attraction to be out in nature was strong. "I loved being outdoors in the intensity of nature," he recalls. "It was likely in my days at Hotchkiss that I realized that photography would be the way I could merge that passion with the artistic streak that seemed to be almost genetic."

His first camera (and still his preferred photographic line) was Nikon. Learning to master the settings and lenses of a professional system gave Blagden the opportunity to be "creative and lasting" in his work.

Drawn to the complexity of nature, it seems quite logical that Blagden has developed an intense awareness of the fragility of the environment and the absolute need to preserve and protect the ecological balance of the world. A long-term fascination with Maine's Acadia National Park (he has published two elegant books of photogra-



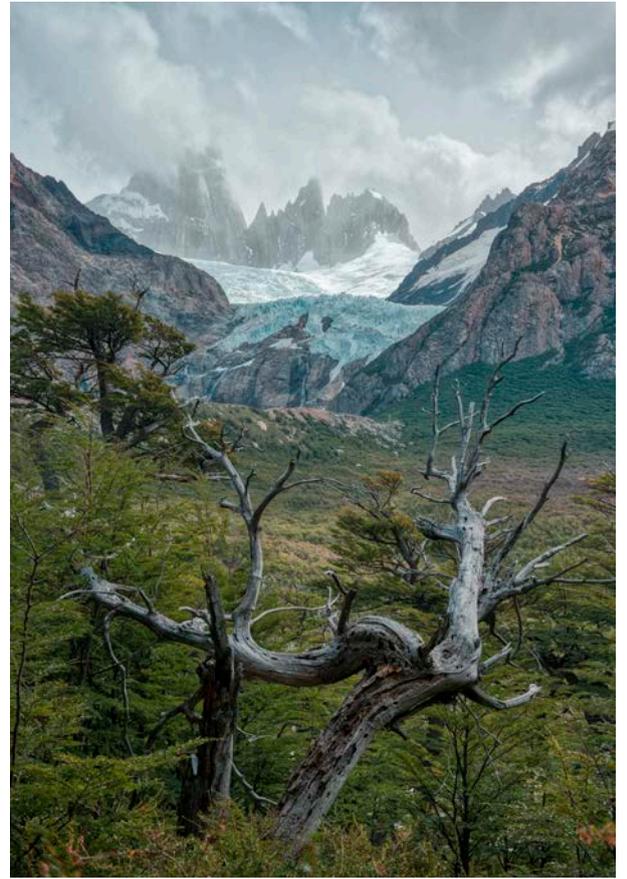
Above, top to bottom: Tiger's Nest, Bhutan. The artist, Thomas Blagden. All images courtesy of Thomas Blagden.

phy from the park) has led to several gallery shows. In an artist's statement offered at an opening at the Gallery at Somes Sound on Mount Desert Island, he wrote, "The enlightenment of person by place is the baptism of Acadia. I photograph to evoke a landscape that is temporal, forever dynamic, vulnerable, mysterious, unbounded and, above all, humbling."

**Focusing closer to home**

The same might be said of Tom's experience in the close-by Great Mountain Forest. The forest, encompassing over 6,000 acres of classic New England countryside, has emerged from an effort begun over 100 years ago to reclaim once rich forest land that had been denuded during the region's industrial period. Iron-making in the 18th and 19th centuries required monstrous amounts of charcoal, and the Litchfield Hills had an abundance of hardwood trees ideal for harvesting and turning into blast furnace fuel.

It took the foresight and dedication of early ecologically-minded citizens, Frederic Walcott and Staring Childs, to reclaim thousands of acres that had been harvested, reintroduce trees that have grown to replenished forests, reintroduces wildlife that had been driven from the land, and create a forest that is permanently preserved. In the words of Great Mountain Forest, "We practice sustainable forest man-



agement, promote biodiversity and resilience to climate change, support education and research, and welcome all who love the woods."

**Recognition for excellence**

Thomas Blagden loves the woods. And with an area so rich in visual and spiritual experiences close to home, the allure of recording the life of the forest has been intense. In accepting the North American Nature Photography Association's Environmental Impact Award, the honor accorded him for his brilliant work along the Colorado River in the Grand Canyon,

Blagden highlighted the comfort of his latest pursuit. "I have to admit to loving the freedom to photograph when and where I want, all within the immediate area of my home or short, elective trips."

The requirements for receipt of the highly coveted Environmental Impact Award are quite clear: "The nominee's photographic imagery is of exceedingly high quality and demonstrates the nominee's mastery of the artistic and craftsmanship aspects of nature photography."

Viewing Tom Blagden's photographic journeys deeply reinforces the notion of his "mastery" in breathtaking succession. His books, available on Amazon, and his growing archive of local photography at Great Mountain Forest accessible on their website, [greatmountainforest.org](http://greatmountainforest.org), offer hours – even days – of transcendent photography that encourages us, as Jack London suggested, to explore "the deeps of our nature." ●

Above, L-R: Travertine Grotto, Grand Canyon. Mt. Fitzroy, Patagonia. Below, left: Moonrise over Mount Denali Range, Alaska. All images courtesy of Thomas Blagden.



*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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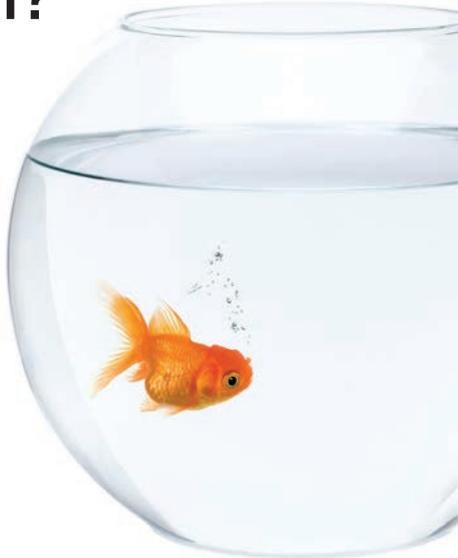


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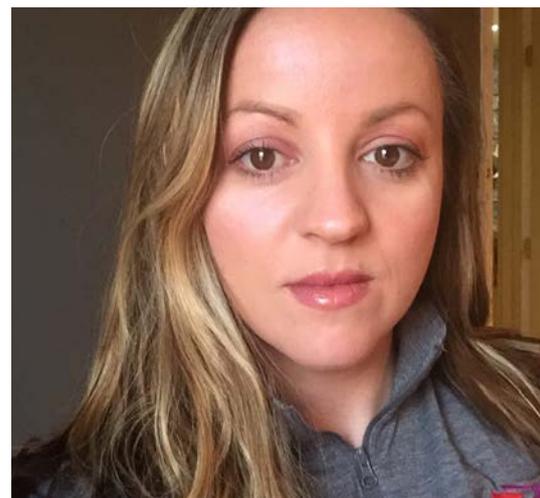
## friendly faces: meet our neighbors, visitors and friends



**Hailey Cookingham** is a New York State-licensed cosmetologist and beautician working at the Hair Lounge by Loren in Millerton, NY. “I love my profession because I get to be very creative while having fun and making people happy,” says Hailey. “I am very excited to expand upon my career in the industry, take on new clients, and meet new people.” Outside of work Hailey enjoys hanging out with friends and helping her mother around the family farm, Daisy Hill in Millerton. “I’ve lived in Millerton my entire life and a few of my favorite things about this area are its amazing views and sunsets,” Hailey says. “This summer, I am looking forward to warmer weather and the ability to do more things outside.”



**Robin Leech** is a real estate broker and owner of the firm known as Robinson Leech Real Estate, located in Lakeville, CT. “I have been in business since joining my father in 1972,” says Robin. “I love my profession and serving the public in a uniquely genuine way.” Mr. Leech is also an active, fully-certified PSIA ski instructor at nearby Catamount, and over the years has instructed many real estate clients, as well as others, in improving their skiing. “I have grown up in the Northwest Connecticut corner,” Robin says. “The environment is second to none and I enjoy having four real seasons of change: We possess a conscientious respect for the environment and can easily travel anywhere else in the country or world, and come back to what I consider is one of the best locations that anyone can live in, in the US, Salisbury-Sharon, CT.”



**Heather Barrett** is an operations manager for Taconic Biosciences in Germantown, NY, and this year will mark her sixteenth year with the company. “What I love most is that we are the key gateway to leading research discoveries for many diseases that affect both human and animal health,” says Heather. “I have had the opportunity to travel to Europe and cross-country to learn and develop working alongside our other sites.” Outside of work, Heather can be found spending time with her husband and three kids, whether it’s small family gatherings, riding bikes, or snuggling up to a good movie. “What I love most about this area is the community, our neighbors, and our school district,” Heather says. “For this summer I look forward to living more in the moment. Instead of planning grand ventures or vacations, I’m looking forward to creating small and intimate activities.”



**Wendy Eichman** has been a realtor for 16 years and in 2018, became the principal broker at Raynard & Peirce Realty in North Canaan, CT, where she is joined by a litany of local businesspeople, men and women, who helped build the reputation of the company over the years. “I love helping people realize their goals,” she says. “Whether it’s buying their first home or selling their current home.” Though she doesn’t enjoy much free time due to her busy schedule, when she finds a quiet moment, Wendy enjoys spending time with her family and friends, camping and traveling. “I have lived in this area almost my entire life,” says Wendy. “I love the sense of community and the natural beauty all around us.”



A registered nurse for nearly 23 years, **Candy Osborn** has spent two decades with the Sharon Hospital maternity team. For the Unionvale, NY, resident, helping families grow and bond together is a true passion. “I enjoy making each experience personal for our maternity patients and families,” she said. With three boys of her own, you will often find Candy watching baseball games and traveling with the family. “I also love to read, do puzzles and garden in my free time,” she added. With deep ties to the area, she has fond memories of growing up on the family farm in Pawling, NY. She continues to carry on the tradition of growing vegetables for her family and enjoys the relaxed lifestyle this area has to offer. With summer fast approaching, she and the family look forward to their annual tradition – a vacation to Maine. “It’s a nice getaway and time to hike, kayak, and enjoy quality time together,” she said.



**Heath Horn** has been a project manager for Prutting + Company Custom Builders for nearly ten years. “My role is primarily about passing information between the design teams and field crews, and overseeing the correct execution of the work,” Heath says. “I enjoy the opportunity to work alongside talented designers that are pushing the boundaries in construction. Every project is a unique set of challenges, meaning the work is always varied and never boring. I also enjoy working in our Millerton office and being part of the downtown scene.” Heath and his wife Kaitlin have a two-year-old boy who they enjoy spending time with outside of work. Heath also makes furniture as a way to exercise his own design skills. “My wife is from Westerly, Rhode Island,” Heath says. “We’re looking forward to traveling to the beach again after missing it all last year.”

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# Building houses for 46 years

By Christine Bates  
info@mainstreetmag.com

*Once we decided to do a real estate feature on new house construction in this June issue, it was logical to interview Rick McCue who has been building custom homes in New York and Connecticut for 46 years. We had an early morning conversation at his office on Walton Street in Lakeville, CT, before he hit the road to do his daily visit to check on progress on all his current projects.*

## Do you really get up at 3:30 in the morning? What do you do?

It's very quiet until about 6am and I can get a lot done before then – answering emails, doing proposals, going over contracts, and planning the days. From 6 to 8 I talk to my sub contractors solving problems that have come up with missing materials, delays, change orders, etc. I spend about six hours of everyday in my truck visiting job sites. Every year I drive about 50,000 miles. I try to visit every job every day.

## How busy are you right now?

We're always busy and typically booked 12 to 24 months out. Usually we are working on 3.5 houses a year, but right now it's double that. I have everyone who has worked for me in the last 30 years busy on projects working hard.

## Do you only do new house construction?

About 75% of our business is building new houses. We have five full-time carpenters that work for me who stay busy providing service to existing customers and doing renovations and punch lists. We do small jobs as well, like an \$8,000 siding repair in Cornwall they are working on right now.

## What's the process for building a new house?

Usually I am brought into the process at the very beginning and work with the client and architect to develop the design and specifications.



## Who does all the work?

Over the years I have developed an extensive network of specialized sub contractors. I provide work, pay them promptly – sometimes before they are done – and they produce exceptional results. The list includes excavating, foundations, framing, exterior finishing, roofing, electrical, HVAC, plumbing, tile work, millwork, interior and exterior painting, finish carpentry, flooring, cabinet makers, appliances, hardscaping and driveway, swimming pools, dry wall and plasterers.

## Have you ever fired a client or had a dissatisfied customer?

First, I don't take jobs that I won't enjoy. It should be a good time for the 12 or 14 months it takes to build a house. I've built 110 houses in the last 40 years and don't have a dissatisfied customer. I always tell the client what I think even though they may not want to hear it. One Sharon client wanted us to renovate an old barn and I recommended tearing it down and starting over. He was upset but listened. Later he said it was the best advice he'd ever had. I've only stopped working with a client on two occasions in 46 years. Life is too short to spend arguing.

## What are the key talents for a contractor?

Contracting is all about organization – if one thing goes wrong everything collapses. Communication with client, architect, and subs is critical and being available 24/7. Visiting jobs every day is a way to control quality. It also helps to be a psychiatrist.

## Why do you have such a stellar reputation?

Because I work so hard. And it's always in your best interest to make sure the client is satisfied.

## Has COVID affected your business?

The major impact is that people don't have anything to spend their money on except for their houses. It's not how much will it cost, but when. The price of materials is the biggest impact. Prices on metal roofing and plywood have doubled. In February I ordered materials in advance to avoid price increases.



Above, top to bottom: McCue's most recently completed project on Belgo Road in Lakeville, CT, is a contemporary masterpiece. Photo courtesy of Rick McCue. Rick McCue at work in his office. He never dresses up for clients. Photo by Christine Bates.

Continued on next page ...

**How did you build your business?**

I worked for another contractor for six years and then went out on my own at age 23 building small additions, putting on roofs, and doing repairs. When I first started out I was on the job as a carpenter/overseer all day every day. In my early 30s I went up on a roof of a house we were building in Kent to make sure it wasn't too icy for my guys to work on, and I found out quickly it was. I fell off the roof and fractured three vertebrae. I was paralyzed from the waist down, not a good situation. All my subcontractors used to come to the hospital at 6:30 in the morning so we could meet. After a couple weeks, I started to get feeling back in my legs and was rehabilitated so I could walk again. Not quite that simple, but after I recovered I built two more houses hands-on myself just to prove that I could do it, and then I hung up my tools and became a general contractor full-time.

The fine home building really started when a client asked me to do a mega-mansion in Sharon. He was very pleased and very social and recommended me to everyone. Since then all my business has been by referral. I'm so fortunate to live in a place where people want to build beautiful homes. Our website showcases our work and has client comments. We never advertise and I don't put up any

signs on our worksites or even on our trucks.

**How much does it cost to build a high quality, custom home?**

It varies enormously, but a range for us would be \$600 to \$1,000 per square foot.

**Is there any way to save money?**

There are some items that can be factory-made. For example, high quality factory kitchen cabinets might be \$40,000 while custom would be double that. Our clients always know exactly what they are paying for with each sub according to a schedule of values and the details of work performed.

**You grew up in Lakeville. How has it changed?**

There were always a few wealthy people in the Northwest corner, but in the 1980s it changed. Suddenly New Yorkers could afford country houses and demand for fine home building increased. Farms were going out of business so land was available. I was lucky to be in the right place at the right time.

**What do you like most about this business?**

I get a really big kick out of starting and then finishing a house. Right now I'm very pleased with the contemporary house we just finished on Belgo



Road (see photo). Three homes we built have been published in *Architectural Digest*.

**What kind of house did you build for yourself?**

My previous house was a Georgian, but my current one is Adirondack style – a very different style from the houses that I build for my clients. The massive square cut logs are from an old growth forest in eastern Canada. The government gave permission to a religious group to cut and haul logs out of the forest in the winter time with horses so there was no environmental damage like commercial logging. The house is a dovetailed hand-hewn Swedish design log house. I think the longest log in the house is 54 feet. The logs are all approximately ten inches thick, and hewn on both sides and the bottom to top dimension varies depending on how big the tree was. The house was designed by my wife, an architect friend, and myself sitting at the kitchen table having a beer and coming up with an idea. We lived in the barn in the front which has an apartment above while the house was being constructed. It took about 14 months to finish and the inside is more like a castle than a rustic log house.

**What do you enjoy in your spare time?**

I love the outdoors and hunting. One of my clients actually took me hunting in Spain. I've travelled out west, to Canada, Europe, and New Zealand to hunt. ●

Above: This new house in Columbia County, designed by architect John Murray, looks like it's been there a long time. Photo courtesy of owner. Below, left: McCue's own house is made from hand-hewn old growth tree logs from Canada. Photo by Christine Bates.





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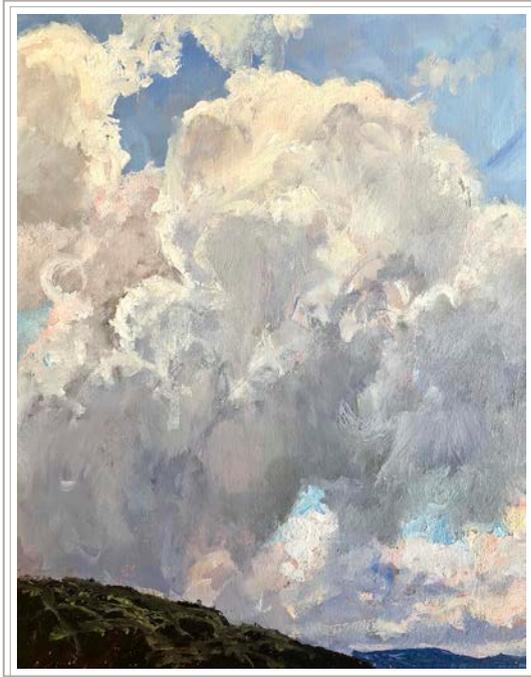
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# Strawberry rhubarb pie



By *Olivia Valentine & Caroline Markonic*  
*info@mainstreetmag.com*

Summer has arrived and with it are fresh, seasonal fruits (and vegetables) like strawberries (and rhubarb)! With that in mind, there's no better match for our June recipe than a can't-go-wrong-with-this-pie... pie. Strawberry rhubarb pie is a classic, and has just the right combination of tangy and sweet.

## Ingredients

1 1/4 cup sugar  
 1/2 tsp salt  
 1/3 cup flour  
 2 cups sliced fresh strawberries  
 2 cups 1" fresh rhubarb pieces  
 2 tbs butter  
 1 tbs sugar  
 1/4 tsp nutmeg

## Directions

Use your favorite pie crust recipe or store bought; this is a two-crust pie.

Preheat oven to 425 degrees.

Combine sugar, salt, flour, strawberries and rhubarb in a large bowl and mix well. Pour the mixture into the pastry-lined pie plate. Dot with 2 tbs butter and sprinkle with 1/4 tsp nutmeg. Place top pastry on top of mixture, cut plenty of vents in the top or create a lattice top as we did.

Brush top pastry with water and sprinkle with sugar. I did not use the entire tablespoon of sugar as I thought it was a little too much sugar.

Bake for 40-50 minutes (ours was done at exactly 40 minutes).

This recipe was given to me by my mom. My mom is an incredible cook/baker. She makes everything from scratch. There was always some sort of a homemade sweet treat to be had in the house when we were growing up. This pie being a spring- and summer-time favorite.

As a little kid, I recall following my mom into the back yard to the rhubarb patch with a small dish of sugar excited and eager to dip my rhubarb stalk into it. Rhubarb without sugar is quite bitter tasting. To be honest, I'm not sure if I ate the rhubarb or just sucked the sugar off the stalk!

This past Mother's Day I had the pleasure of making this pie with not just Caroline, but with my oldest daughter, Claire, as well. We went to a local farm stand, visited the rhubarb patch and offered up two fun facts about rhubarb. One being that the leaves of the plant are poisonous, the other being that rhubarb isn't actually a fruit, it's a vegetable.

For this pie we also used my mom's super flaky and delicious pie crust recipe. I have to admit that I am not the best pie crust-maker and my

mom's always tastes so much better and is way flakier than I could ever master, however, for this pie, it was pretty darn close to tasting and flaking like hers.

This pie is very simple. The strawberries and rhubarb aren't masked by anything else. They are the shining components to this pie and sometimes in life isn't simplicity best?

So, support your local farm stands, grab some rhubarb and strawberries and make yourself a super easy homemade pie!

## Tips:

Fresh fruit pies can tend to be very runny. I did pre-bake the bottom crust for about 5 minutes. You may also want to place the pie on a baking sheet and then placing it in the oven to catch the drips.

It is yummy on its own, but served warm with a scoop of vanilla ice cream and – holy moly – deliciousness! ●

*Olivia and Caroline are enthusiastic foodies and bakers who are constantly in the kitchen, as well as explorers who create their own adventures in our area – and did we mention they are mother and daughter? Follow Olivia on Instagram to see her many creations at @olivaiavvalentine.*

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# It's not your imagination

NEW HOUSES  
GOING UP  
EVERYWHERE

By Christine Bates  
info@mainstreetmag.com

*It sure seems that houses are popping up all over our region. Main Street's June monthly real estate feature looks at new house construction, and explores the reasons for this sudden burst of activity. How long will it last?*

## Who is building? Why?

At the same time that many Americans can't pay their rent, a brew of economic, market, and demographic changes are fueling the new house boom in our area. With the stock market at an all time high, for some it seems like a time to take some profits and invest in hard assets, especially while interest rates are low and construction lending is available. Many Millennials have discovered they can live and work full-time within the weekend radius of a 100 miles from their pre-Covid offices. They can have lunch at home, avoid a commute by subway or highway, take a break in the garden, and go hiking at the end of the day. Covid may have driven them to the country, but working remotely has changed everything.

For others it's just the time to build the dream house they always wanted, despite the high cost of materials.

But why build when you can just buy an existing home? That's not easy in this real estate market with historic low inventory of houses listed for sale, and high prices coupled with the need to renovate. Making a decision to buy on the spot and bidding wars with multiple cash bids over asking price make potential buyers feel hopeless. On top of it all, there are fewer buyers

who like antique, or just old houses. They don't want to renovate and are suspicious of the maintenance older homes may require. They imagine a house that suits their needs today – a home with space for living and working, offices, rooms, studio and gym space, and land.

“My goals for the new house have always been: simple, light-filled, and energy-efficient,” reflected one new homebuilder. “It is sited perfectly to take advantage of a beautiful view, the sun and privacy from the road.” (See photo of model below). “My existing house was deemed by a home inspector 15 years ago as only good for the short-term. It was an early design pre-fab and had not held up well. The wood was not high quality and is rotting. The insulation, if any remains, is way below effective.” Another Brooklyn couple purchased an old farm in Pine Plains, NY, and is waiting for a custom prefab to arrive on site to experiment with country living.

## Start at the beginning

In order to build a house you have to start with something to build on. In the past it's taken awhile to sell raw land, especially large tracts of land. Some properties have been listed for sale since the housing bubble. An example might be, according to www.realtor.com, a 91-acre property on Sawchuck Road in Millerton, NY, which was originally listed for \$1,850,000 in 2008 and, after no takers and many price drops over



Above: One of Jimmy Crisp's houses in New York is nearing completion. Photo courtesy of Crisp Architects. Below, left: A new house begins with an idea. Here a model constructed by architect Patt Scarlett for a new home.

the years, remained unsold until April 2021 when the parcel closed at \$800,000. A modest one-acre building lot in Pine Plains came on the market in October 2020 sold quickly for \$80,000 in April.

New York State data shows a 54% increase in land sales in 2020 compared to 2019 for towns in Dutchess and Columbia counties in the circulation area of *Main Street Magazine*. Over the border in Connecticut, land sales in the towns of Salisbury, Sharon, Canaan, Cornwall, and Kent reveal a similar pattern. In these five towns combined there were only 21 land sales from May 2019 to May 2020, but in the last 12 months there were 65 – more than triple the previous twelve months! And most of the homes planned for this land are just in the planning stages.

## The septic test

In a rural area where sewers, if they exist, service only town centers, requests for septic permits are another indicator of construction activity to come for new houses, additions, and swimming pools. The Torrington Area Health Department was very helpful with our inquiry about requests for septic permits and ran a special

report. We discovered that permits and inspections in the Torrington Area Health Department increased 51% in the first four months of 2021 compared to the previous year. More new houses are on their way. Septic installation firms confirmed that they are “backed up” with orders for installation of new septic systems.

## Call back in the fall

“It's off the charts – I have never seen it this busy. We can't keep up,” responded Millbrook, NY, architect Jimmy Crisp. “I have to tell people to call me back in the fall if they can't find another architect. I can't even tell them when we can work with them. You can only do so much. We are working on a dozen new houses and I can't count the number of additions. Almost every project has at least one or two home offices. There's no sign that it's slowing down, but this can't last forever. Because of Covid people realize that they don't have to be in a city office, they can be up here in the Hudson Valley and the Berkshires. But they still want to be close enough to go into the city when necessary.”

Continued on next page ...



**Builders, contractors, trades, and subs**

It's even harder to find a builder to add your house to their schedule. Construction firms specializing in already designed prefabricated houses, which often seem like a solution to save time and money, are also fully booked because of increased demand and COVID-related slow downs. Bob Segalla of Segalla's TurnKey Housing in North Canaan, CT, was too busy to talk long but had time to say, "Every day two or three new potential clients call to ask about a prefab house. I wish we could spread them out over three or four years."

High-end custom builders, like David Prutting of Prutting + Company Custom Builders, have followed their customers north from New York City as they have bought large tracts of land for new homes and a new way of living and working. Prutting even opened a satellite office in Millerton, NY, to strengthen his relationship with local trades and service his clients. According to Prutting, "The land is relatively affordable and people are taking money out of the stock market and investing long-term. They are thinking of creating gardens, raising animals, and even planting vineyards. The trend is remarkable and significant. It's because of COVID and working remotely."

Since it takes about a year from first contact with a builder to actually start construction expect to see more new houses going up.

Fridrik Kristjansson, the owner of Nailed It Building & Construction, [also the brother of this magazine's

owner] is building a large, modern farmhouse just outside the Village of Millerton, NY, based on a design he saw in a magazine. He secured the plans, modified them slightly, and construction began in January 2021. The 5,200 square foot house with three bedrooms was listed for sale in February at \$1,495,000 and already has an accepted offer even though the house won't be ready to move into until August (see photo above). "People are constantly calling about building new houses," according to Fridrik. "I'm just trying to fit everyone into a schedule. It's crazy out there."

**New house permits**

Although land sales are up, architects are crazy busy and contractors are booked, evidence of a dramatic increase in new home building permits is mixed. Issuing of building permits happens after land is purchased, septic is approved, an architect is hired, and a builder selected. Mike Carbone, Salisbury's Building Inspector, looked at his records and reported that there were five new houses permitted in 2020 and he expects eight or nine this year. Amenia's building department has issued only two new house

permits this year in the town – both for modular homes. BUT Silo Ridge Club applied for ten new houses inside the gated community owned by Discovery Land. In the Town of North East, Ken McLaughlin issued permits for four new houses in 2020 and expects about the same this year... he may be surprised.

**What's next?**

There is a definite uptick in new house construction, not only driven by wealthy owners who can afford to spend \$400 to \$1,400 a square foot for a large luxury home. While in communities like LaGrange where 20 new permits were issued in one week, and Poughkeepsie where more affordable new housing is going up to meet the needs of the expanding medical and educational complexes, many new homes in our area are design driven and more expensive. Many of these houses will be appearing up long driveways on big pieces of land. They do not solve the problem of affordable housing or the general housing shortage. However, new house construction does supply jobs and will increase the assessed value of a town's property tax base. There is no reason to suppose these trends are going to reverse anytime soon. It's just beginning. ●

*Christine Bates is a registered real estate agent with William Pitt Sotheby's International Real Estate in New York and Connecticut. She has written monthly for Main Street Magazine since its very first issue.*



Above: This house on Rudd Pond Road in the Town of North East was designed and built by Nailed It Building & Construction. Construction started in January 2021 and it has been sold before completion. Photo courtesy of Fridrik Kristjansson. Below, left: A fire that destroys a house can be a reason for building new on an old footprint. Photo by Christine Bates.



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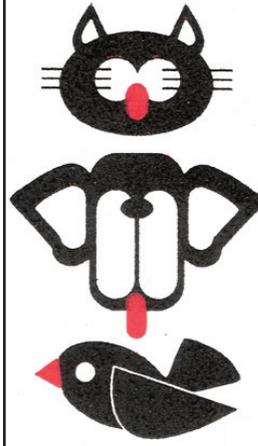


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# Didi Barrett: *Championing the Hudson Valley*

By Griffin Cooper  
griffin@mainstreetmag.com

After almost a decade in New York State’s Assembly representing District 106, which includes parts of Dutchess and Columbia Counties, it’s easy for residents to feel as though Didi Barrett has been present for most of their lives – and in a way she has. Barrett was elected to the State Assembly after a special election in March 2012 and her following four terms, has become one of the most recognizable names in local government. Despite a recent penchant for many a lawn sign adorning her name come November, Assemblymember Barrett has made the Hudson Valley her home for more than 30 years. She has enjoyed careers as both a writer as well as a museum professional, but what has come to define her deeply-rooted connections to the area is her life’s work with local not-for-profit organizations.

## Fighting the good fight

As a member of the Assembly, she is Chair of the Assembly Committee on Veteran’s Affairs as well as the Chair of the Legislative Women’s Caucus, and also serves on the

Committees on Agriculture; Environmental Conservation, Mental Health and Tourism, Parks, Arts and Sports Development. Barrett is also a longtime advocate for women and girls, and helped spearhead the creation of the Dutchess Girls Collaborative to support local girls and young women. She helped launch the North East Dutchess Fund (NED) of the Berkshire Taconic Community Foundation; helped create the pioneering NED Corps program to deliver social services to the region and served on its affiliated Latino Roundtable. She is currently on the advisory committee for BTCF’s Fund for Columbia County. She is formerly a trustee of the Anderson Foundation for Autism and former board member of the Millbrook Education Foundation and of Sprout Creek Farm, an educational farm in Poughkeepsie.

Didi’s other affiliations have included Girls Incorporated of NYC as the founding chair; New York Women’s Foundation, Planned Parenthood of NYC, the Women’s Campaign Forum and NARAL Pro-Choice New York as a former board member and the American Folk Art Museum as a trustee emeritus.

## Deep-rooted connections

Much like the spirit of the Hudson Valley, Assemblymember Barrett’s passions are driven by the agricultural, environmental, historical, and cultural resources of the Hudson Valley and their critical importance as economic drivers and job creators. She even authors a blog, *Diner Dialogues: Talk of the Hudson Valley*, which explores many of these issues.

Though Barrett’s likeness on local television and in print may make her most familiar, there are deeper reasons for her success and longevity. Like her family farm in Ancramdale, which was purchased in 1938 by her grandfather and great-uncle



and has remained in the family for generations, Didi’s values have become ineffably infused with the rural character of the area in which she serves. As she takes a moment out of her busy schedule to discuss her time and career serving the Hudson Valley, Didi personifies the connection between the area’s agristic traditions, and its willingness to advocate for change, making her the State Assembly’s perfect champion for the Hudson Valley.

**Was an elected office something that was always present in your mind growing up? What compelled you toward the New York State Assembly in 2012?**

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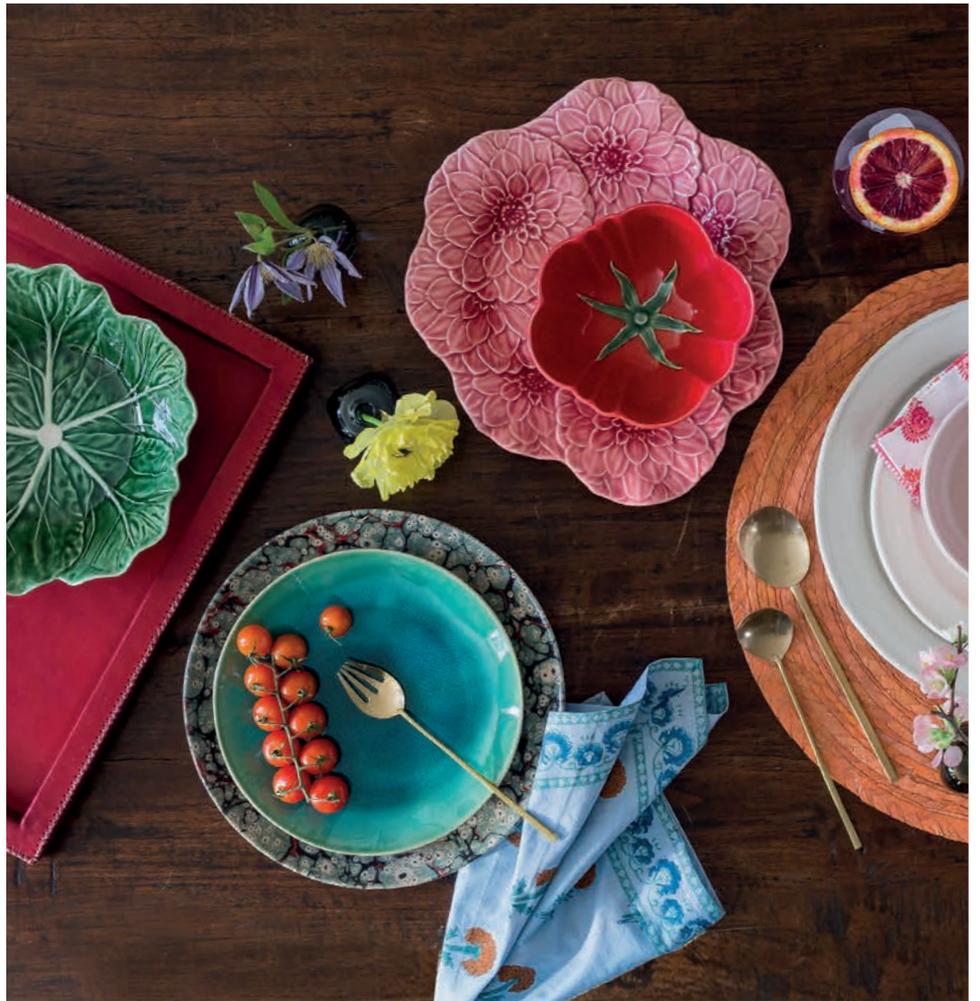
Photos this page: Didi Barrett, New York’s Assemblymember for District 106. All images courtesy of Didi Barrett.

# Tent.

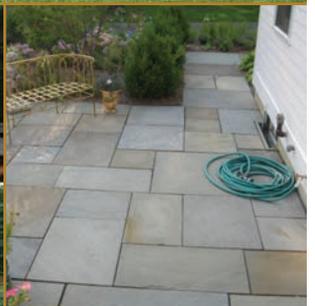
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Truthfully, I have always taken an interest in the government and its function in society. When I was younger, I served in student government both in junior high and high school and those experiences gave me a wonderful perspective on public representation. Previously, Dutchess County Executive Marc Molinaro had been serving as a member of the State Assembly representing roughly the same area as myself, which meant the seat was open when he was elected to the County Executive office.

Historically, as is the case with many women in government, I was asked to run. The idea of running for office wasn't something that was on my mind, but I knew that public involvement and activism were two major aspects of my life, and those passions ultimately compelled me to run.

I think my background in journalism as well as my previous involvement within the public sector has made me a bit more unique among my colleagues, but I feel that those two facets of my life help make my platform more expansive. I believe my passion for comprehensive community involvement helped me to become the first Democrat to win in this area.

**As a writer, do you feel you have mastered both the temperament as well as the patience needed to navigate the ever-changing landscape of the local political arena?**

I don't think it is necessarily having the writer's perspective that has helped me uniquely in government, but moreover being a mother has helped me bring some temperament to the job. Having a mother's perspective allows for a certain level of patience as well as commitment that has complimented my time in the office.

Aside from the experiences I have gained personally, it is the rich history of the Hudson Valley that so easily inspires me as well as the area's world class art and agriculture.

When I stop for a moment and contemplate all the cultural touchstones that inhabit the area, it is quite overwhelming. From the Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library and Museum in Hyde Park and The Culinary Institute of America, to the Olana State Historic Site as well as the many historic homes and buildings that dot our landscape, not to mention the iconic Hudson River School, the character of the Hudson Valley is enough to compel anyone to represent the folks who live here.

Personally, one of my favorite historic landmarks in America are diners. One of the initiatives my office and I have undertaken is our Diner Stop Tour. We have visited the many historic local diners in our area as a way to meet with people and support small businesses. I love going to diners in general – they are my venue of choice for a great breakfast – and local diners are one of the greatest features of the Hudson Valley. What better place to catch up with friends while enjoying living history and supporting the small businesses that have struggled throughout the past year.



**As a member of the Assembly, you chair or are part of a host of local and progressive committees. Have those experiences helped to shape the way you view the Assembly and its role in government?**

My goal in the State Assembly is to bring the resources of the State to my district and showcase my district to the rest of the State of New York. The idea of shining a spotlight on the people and businesses that make up Columbia and Dutchess counties has certainly been part of my personal inspiration to serve in state government.

Government as a general entity can have a tendency to be sort of insular and so it's good to seek out innovation and ideas – many of which are thriving in the Hudson Valley. The past year and the COVID pandemic has shown a light on many issues – in particular mental health; there isn't one person in our area who hasn't been affected by mental health. I, and Democratic State Senator Elijah Reichlin-Melnick, have introduced a constitutional amendment that will make mental health equal to physical health, in other words creating parity between physical and mental health.

Broadband for tele-healthcare economic development or schooling is also a major concern in our



Photos this page: Didi Barrett speaking on behalf of District 106, and depicted out in the community, including at the Oakhurst Diner in Millerton, NY, because Didi loves nothing more than to frequent the area's historic diners. All images courtesy of Didi Barrett.



Continued on next page ...

area, which also became clear this past year. While we are looking forward to children returning to school safely, greater bandwidth and more widespread infrastructure are imperative for our growing region.

Nature in the Hudson Valley was also affected by the changes last year and our state parks were overwhelmed by folks looking to heal and enjoy the natural world. With that, many issues including Lyme Disease are still at the fore of concern. Local farming and agriculture need our help as well. The food supply chain, food insecurity including food waste are all issues that I include as part of my role in state representation.

**As a longtime resident of the Hudson Valley, how important is it in your view to uphold the history of our area? How important is it to balance the preservation of history with the natural evolution of change within communities?**

We all stand on the shoulders of those who have come before us. It is very important to continue to learn and understand where we are and how far we've come. I think there is so much in the region we can learn from. I believe one of the gaps in our understanding is the skewed history that didn't accurately tell the history of the women, minorities, disabled people, and of course the native population of New York.



I, along with the Mid-Hudson Library System, am proud to present *Women's History in the Hudson Valley: Ten Stories from Columbia and Dutchess Counties*. This booklet series focuses on retelling the lives and deeds of extraordinary local women, ultimately ensuring they are remembered for their significance in history. I believe it is especially important for girls, and boys, to hear these stories. Knowing what your roots are makes it possible to grow and explore – and this area has given birth to many innovations in that arena.

**After the events of the past year, can you feel both area small businesses and communities rebounding? Is there a specific policy you look forward to tackling in the upcoming term?**

I think the reason for my running in the first place was to make sure that the things we love about this region are the things that propel us forward and that inspiration still very much holds, right now especially. The rich history of the Hudson Valley, its natural resources, the agriculture and the incredible history of artistic innovations are the tools we will use to come back and come back strong.

Our biggest challenge is to attract young families with local jobs that pay liveable wages. We don't want an economy completely depen-



dent on tourism, but we should maximize the assets of our region, support local farms, producers and other small businesses.

Small businesses are truly the backbone of our economy and the folks who own and work in the small business community are the same ones who serve on school boards and volunteer fire departments, they are crucial to our future. We don't want our home-grown residents to feel the need to live so far away and we want to keep our young people here so it's a balancing act.

However, I do see a path moving forward and the goals remain constant. It's not just about blaming shifting demographics and declining birth rates.

We have to be innovative because that is who we are, perhaps we focus on creating communities that are perhaps less car dependent. Either way, we must focus our efforts on creating opportunities for folks to earn a living in the Hudson Valley. I really do see both sides coming together on these issues. Because I work in the New York State government, I have seen many of my colleagues go on to run for higher offices. It can be hard not to be cognizant of certain divides, but our area looks a lot more like America than other parts and I believe that sense of solidarity can broaden out to other parts of the state, making us all one community. ●

Photos this page: Didi Barrett (pictured left of Marcus Molinaro) at the recent Harlem Valley Rail Trail ribbon cutting in Millerton, NY, celebrating the expansion of the trail north from Millerton. All images courtesy of Didi Barrett.

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# Summer...

*Enter stage right*

By CB Wismar  
info@mainstreetmag.com

How long has the year been? How deep the winter? We have plumbed the depths of streaming videos, watched endless re-runs of programs we once loved, learned how to squint at a computer screen to watch dancers, tiny and flickering ... and longed to be present, to be in the moment, to be consumed with the experience of theatre, music, dance.

As spring morphs into summer in the Tri-state area, the memories of summers past come into focus and we remember sitting on the lawn at Tanglewood, patiently waiting as the parking lot at Sharon Playhouse clears on an August night or checking the GPS to see how close we were to Shakespeare & Company in Lenox, MA.

COVID-19 has changed many of the rhythms of life, and the summer delights of dance, concerts and live theatre in the region are not excluded from the erratic beat of our metronome. But, with eager anticipation, we have been presented with a view of the “new normal,” or at least the current normal of 2021.

Live performances are back, and although the summer is not jammed to overflowing with events too many to schedule, the offerings are energizing and not to be missed. Advance planning is highly recommended since the mindfulness of the venues to the health and safety of both performers and audience will have an impact on the number of tickets available for each event.

**Berkshire Theatre Group, Pittsfield and Stockbridge, MA**  
Kate Maguire and her seemingly unstoppable team of dedicated staff and volunteers made headlines

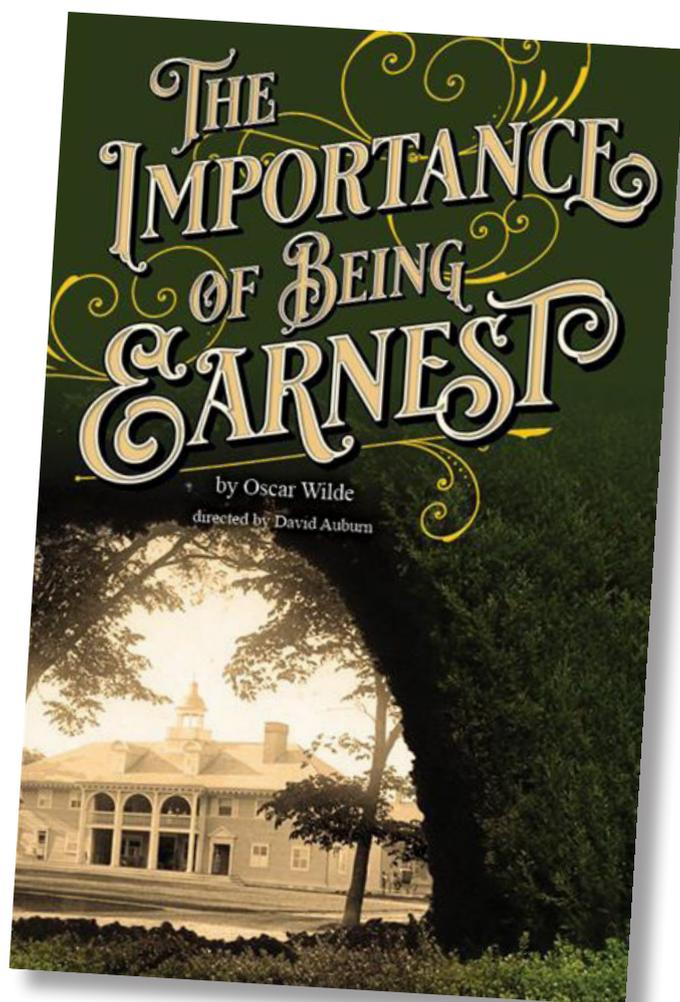
around the world when *Godspell* broke the creative drought last summer to great acclaim. Under a tent stretched across a parking lot adjacent to the Colonial Theatre in Pittsfield, the musical was performed as a ballet of characters moving between safe spaces, a band placed off stage at a responsible distance and seating managed in socially distanced clusters.

Tents are back for the 2021 season and the immense amount of creative energy and determination (“There’s got to be a way to feed our souls!”) that Kate and company invested in 2020 will pay audience dividends in 2021. “This was the most important thing I’ve done in my life,” offered Maguire as she reflected on both *Godspell* and the winter production of *Holiday Memories* outside at the company’s Stockbridge campus.

There’s almost poetic irony in the title of the first offering for the Berkshire Theatre Company which will be staged under a tent behind the Fitzpatrick Main Stage on the Berkshire Theatre Festival grounds in Stockbridge. *The Importance of Being Earnest* is one of Oscar Wilde’s most celebrated plays – a comedy that will bring one of the most critical elements of societal recuperation to the fore – laughter. The play runs from June 18 to July 10.

With a rich tradition of education and nurturing young talent, the summer will also welcome *The Wizard of Oz* to the tented outdoor stage at the Colonial Theatre in Pittsfield with performances presenting school children from the area from July 23 to August 18.

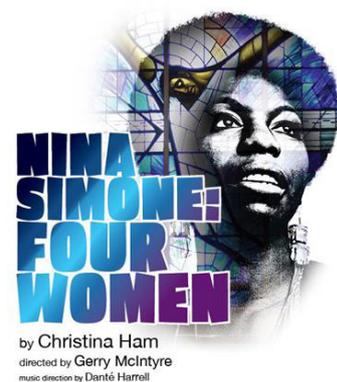
Music was the soul of Nina Simone and the August 13-through-September 5 production of *Nina Simone: Four Women* in the courtyard at the Unicorn Theatre in



Stockbridge will complete the summer cycle. Live concerts have been a staple of the Group’s Pittsfield offerings, and they will continue on the outdoor stage through the summer. Checking with the company website – [berkshiretheatregroup.org](http://berkshiretheatregroup.org) – will unveil all the options.

**Sharon Playhouse, Sharon, CT**  
When the pandemic shuttered the two theaters at Sharon Playhouse last summer, artistic director Alan M-L Wager and managing director Robert Levinstein pivoted, and in the spirit of “the show must go on” they cobbled together a stage in the parking lot, spray painted a socially distanced parking grid that could accommodate 50+ cars and brought live musical events and Sunday night film screenings to a clamoring public. From the swing-era vocals of *America’s Sweethearts* to the anniversary screening of Peter Benchley’s classic *Jaws* the Playhouse remained active through the tumultuous summer of ’20.

Continued on next page ...



Above: The poster art for the two upcoming shows.

“This year we’re bigger and better,” Robert Levinstein suggests, referring to the expanding of the outdoor stage, creating a tented covering to protect the performers, and noting an expanded schedule of concerts and events. “We’ll have our Patio Cabaret series with performances by Wanda Houston and John Davidson among many other towering talents.”

“We’ve got something for every musical taste. From Broadway to classic rock to Motown to a return of The Connecticut Virtuosi Chamber Orchestra,” commented Alan M-L Wager. “And we’ve brought back a very important part of our reaching into the community – our children’s theater program.” Michael Kevin Baldwin has been tapped to head the education program which, once announced, was immediately filled with a waiting list established for local students who will be part of four productions including *Frozen, Jr.* and *Seussical, Jr.* the adaptation of *Seussical the Musical*.

**Shakespeare & Company, Lenox, MA**

As 2020 began, the venerable Shakespeare & Company announced with great pride that the centerpiece of the season was to be *King Lear* starring none other than Christopher Lloyd, whose estimable talents ranged from playing “Doc” Brown in three iterations of *Back to the Future* to being “Rev. Jim” Igna-

towski on television’s revered *Taxi* (two EMMY Awards) to appearing in over 200 theatrical presentations. Lloyd is back.

With the construction of outdoor The New Spruce Theatre on the Lenox, MA, campus, Shakespeare & Company is prepared to offer both *King Lear* starring Christopher Lloyd from July 2 to August 28 but offer the truly engaging play *Art* from July 30 to August 22 on the stage of the outdoor Roman Garden Theatre, which has hosted so many memorable productions in the past.

But wait, there’s more. The flexibility of the outdoor staging makes it possible for the company to add shorter runs to the 2021 schedule, including *Becoming Othello: A Black Girl’s Journey* starring author Debra Ann Byrd, directed by Tina Packer and a workshop production of Shakespeare’s *Measure for Measure* from September 1 to 5.

Late summer into autumn brings not only a change of seasons, but the hope that it will be possible to move productions back into the company’s theatres. The Packer Playhouse stage is the setting for *hang* to be directed by Regge Life from August 10 to October 3 and, capping the season, production of Ionesco’s *The Chairs* from October 8 to the 31. An ambitious season, choreographed to ensure safety for all while offering a stunning collection of productions.

Updates, tickets, and information



Above: Artist rendering of the new Spruce Theatre at Shakespeare & Co. Below, left: The one and only Christopher Lloyd. All imagery courtesy of their source.

are all available on Shakespeare & Company’s robust website – [shakespeare.org](http://shakespeare.org).

**Jacob’s Pillow, Tanglewood, Music Mountain...**

Music and dance will be back, in person, to the region this summer with the jubilant return of three stalwart production venues. Jacob’s Pillow Dance Festival in Becket, MA, which will offer a series of in-person productions on outdoor stages from June 30 to August 29. “It is essential that we find safe and inventive way to return to dance, to bring people back together and put artists back to work,” commented Jacob’s Pillow executive and artistic director, Pamela Tatge. That effort will be showcased in presentations of work by Dorrance Dance, Archie Burnett and “Ballet Coast to Coast,” which will feature artists from Boston Ballet, Houston Ballet, and Pacific Northwest Ballet.

It is always best to check programs, times, costs and any schedule updates on the company’s website – [jacobspillow.org](http://jacobspillow.org).

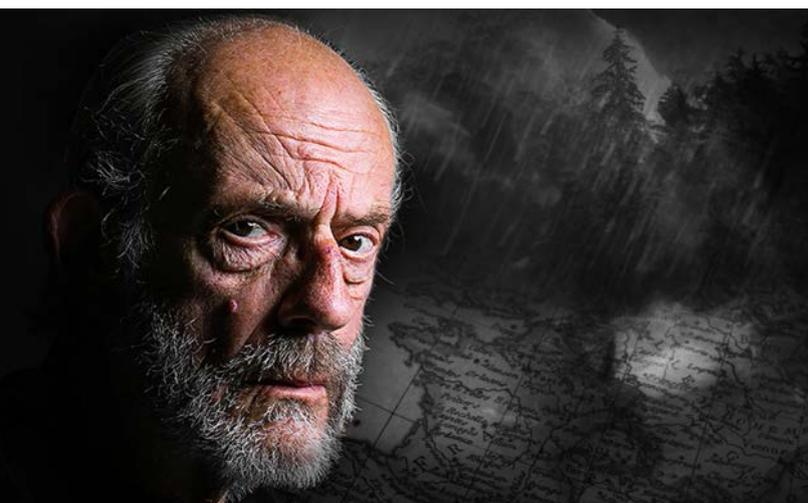
Chamber music will be returning to the Litchfield Hills this summer as Music Mountain in Falls Village, CT, returns from a year of having to post concerts online to bring world-class talent back to in-person performance. The company has announced that the Shanghai Quartet will perform the season opening

concert on July 4 with limited in-person tickets available on their website – [musicmountain.org](http://musicmountain.org). The company has announced that seating will be limited inside the venue, but that during upcoming concerts there will be lawn seating, as well.

Finally, the Boston Symphony Orchestra under the direction of Andris Nelsons triumphantly returns to Tanglewood to headline a series of classical concerts throughout the summer. Joining *The BSO* will be performances by The Boston Pops with both Keith Lockhart and John Williams on the podium. Jazz will also fill “the shed” as Wynton Marsalis brings Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra back to Tanglewood for a concert.

The Tanglewood summer season is filled with performances by the Music Center Orchestra including some chamber music concerts and the always popular “rehearsal” programs which can attract as many music lovers as official evening performances. Information about the entire schedule, which is evolving as potential popular music concerts are added, is available on the website – [tanglewood.org](http://tanglewood.org).

Summer is here! Concerts and plays await you – enjoy! ●



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# Getting schooled at work

MY BUILDING TOMORROW'S WORKFORCE EXTERNSHIP AT BD

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

I'm the Coordinator of the Career Experience Program at Housatonic Valley Regional High School (HVRHS) in Falls Village, CT. This initiative helps students become more career aware and expose them to opportunities to gain that awareness. In this Covid year, it's been a challenge to create opportunities for worthwhile career-related interactions in the absence of in-person job shadows, internships, and career fairs.

I've been calling it a building year, thinking about big-picture priorities and strategies. One way I'm doing this is through my participation on behalf of the school in the pilot Building Tomorrow's Workforce (BTW) Externship Program. It has been a godsend in connecting me with other educators and career program staff in schools around the State, BTW program staff, and speakers from various Connecticut employers.

The BTW Externship Program is a collaboration between the Joyce D. and Andrew J. Mandell Academy for Teachers at the Connecticut Science Center, the Connecticut State Department of Education and Ready CT initiative of the Connecticut Business and Industry Association.

The goal of BTW is to "gather insight into the current workforce" by gaining exposure to the skills that workplaces seek in their employees. In turn, program participants bring that knowledge back to their schools. The externship takes educators out of the school building. It places them in a partner workplace to interact with employees about their jobs, gain a firsthand understanding of the skills needed, and hear about the varied paths to careers.

## Career and Technical Education

The focus of the BTW is on careers in health, information technology, and science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM). The program examines these career clusters through the lens of Career and Technical Education (CTE) courses and programs. CTE courses are those that are more career preparatory in nature. They include offerings in business, computer science, health, engineering, and technical education, such as metalworking and carpentry.

Why these specific clusters and why through CTE courses? Because these are the areas of job growth in Connecticut and throughout the country. Research shared by BTW indicates that jobs in these areas will continue to grow through 2026, and the cumulative job openings across all these fields are upwards of 16,000 per year.

CTE is the perfect vehicle for cultivating technical skills and the inaptly named "soft skills." These vital hard-won capacities are the ones that allow workers to stay nimble in the face of workforce changes. Soft skills are portable, transferrable, and in high demand. They include collaboration, cooperation, speaking, listening, executive function, curiosity, creativity, gratitude, and problem solving.

## Getting granular

HVRHS has a CTE Program Career Cluster in its agricultural education department but it isn't a specialized CTE high school. We also have courses that tick other CTE boxes.

My goal in participating in this program has been to understand on a granular level what skills employers are looking for and convey that information to teachers and school leadership. An employer might say they want applicants with math



Above: BD's HR Administrative Coordinator, Ruby Swartz with the author.

skills. But which ones – specifically? This is not so the school can teach to the job. Instead, it's to inform how we can cover the curriculum and make real-world connections.

I also hope to reinforce my school community's awareness of where job growth is in the northwest corner of Connecticut and statewide and use the evidence I've gained to help persuade students that the courses they take and the skills they gain in high school really do matter in the "real world."

Enhancing my network of local professionals and creating a closer relationship with one of the northwest corner's largest employers is another substantial benefit.

## Happy 60th, BD Canaan

My externship placement has been a local one at BD (Becton Dickinson Company), a New Jersey-based leading global medical technology company and manufacturer of medical devices with 80 manufacturing sites worldwide. Set back off Route 7 in a low-slung building

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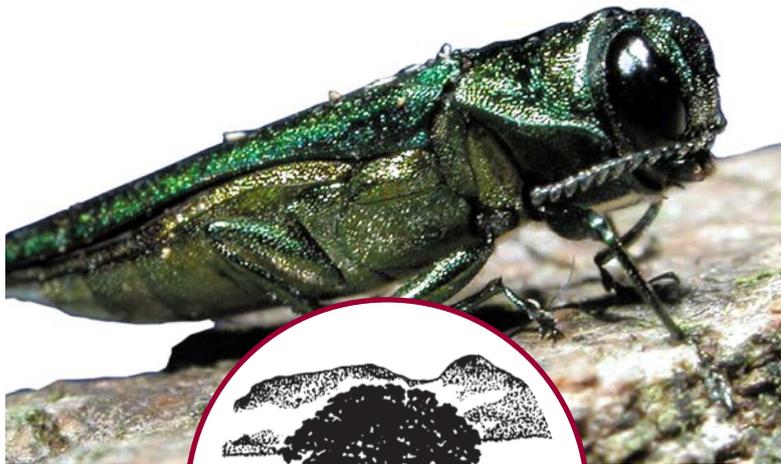
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in Canaan, CT, this BD site has been making syringes and needles for the past 60 years. It's here that nearly 450 employees work round the clock in a facility that measures 360,000 square feet (around 10 acres). A map in the hallway shows the reach of BD syringe customers, which radiates from Canaan in all directions.

BD Canaan's output of syringes and needles clocks in at 80 per second, equating to 7 million a day. Providing syringes and needles for COVID vaccinations drove that figure to over 3 billion syringes in 2020. Back in 1961, the year that the Canaan plant opened, it produced 10 million hand-assembled glass syringes.

The BD of today is not your grandparent's version of manufacturing. It's clean, orderly, and highly technical with numerous entry points, skill levels, and an emphasis on diversity of all kinds.

Arriving at BD, my contact, HR Administrative Coordinator Anubys "Ruby" Swartz, greets me enthusiastically and typifies the BD employees that I met throughout the day. Driven by her desire to move up, Swartz began with BD on the production line working nights. She progressed through several departments and discovered her love for the human side of the manufacturing business.

This winter, Swartz earned her bachelor's degree in organizational management, courtesy of her hard work and BD's generous tuition reimbursement program. While being promoted up and across the company, she identifies the skills that helped her – a hunger to progress,

attention to detail, self-advocacy, communication skills, and a curiosity to know how things work so she can fix them herself.

She loves her job, her family of coworkers, and BD's workplace culture, which thrives on the purposeful knowledge that medicine is life-saving, but without the syringes and needles they make to deliver it, that beneficial drug is not going anywhere.

### Toolmaker's apprentice

Our first stop on the externship visit was the tool room. It's here that toolmakers create the tools and parts needed for the machines and robots that manufacture the syringes and needles and move them throughout the plant.

Brett Benham, a former apprentice and now a toolroom technician, works with two apprentices. Ephram Aragi was a forklift operator who wants a change and a more straightforward path to greater skill and stability. Jamie Miasek is a recent high school graduate who needs to understand how things work on the ground before pursuing an engineering degree.

Apprenticeships in the trades provide an exciting opportunity to earn while you learn. With a combination of work experience and theory, apprentices accumulate hours and pay increases as they progress through the program, which takes several years.

While BD provides supervised work experiences, an apprentice gains the theory hours in night classes at Oliver Wolcott in Torrington, CT, or Northwestern Community College in Winsted, CT. Both Aragi and Miasek enjoy the hands-on application of the academic subjects they took in high school, math being the prime example.

I asked Benham about which skills specifically help toolmakers in this highly-mechanized precision process and what advice he might have for teachers in high school.



"Find those students with mechanical ability – the ones who take apart an engine or like using tools. Try to encourage them to explore the trades. There's demand and stability in the trades, along with the ability to move up. As for math skills, I rely on trigonometry concepts, Cartesian coordinates in graphing, arcs, circles, and lines," articulates Benham. The non-technical skills he reels off are punctuality, patience, coachability, willingness to learn, admitting mistakes, and accepting you will make them (that's a big one).

### Engineering a career

The next stop was a visit with Rodrigo Silveira, manufacturing engineering leader in process engineering. He joined BD after an internship at its home office in New Jersey. With a master's degree in mechanical and civil engineering, he ensures all machines and robots operate safely, efficiently, and at capacity to meet production commitments on time. Part of his job is troubleshooting, creating workarounds, and figuring out ways to make current equipment more flexible and serve multiple purposes.

I inquired what skills are helpful to be successful on his team. His response is immediate, "Project management is critical. That means being able to see a project through

Above: Toolroom technician Brett Benham (left) shows apprentices Ephram Aragi (center) and Jamie Miasek (right) how to calibrate a precision machine. Below, left: MDP Program Engineer Caleigh Waskowicz and the author.



Continued on next page ...



Above: Manufacturing Engineering leaders, Rodrigo Silveira and Landon Phillips. Below, right: Project Support Specialist Silcris Gomez and the author.

from concept to completion, define the resources you'll need, devise contingency plans, anticipate problems, and meet financial budgets and targets." He refers to a Gantt Chart, a much-used project management tool that gauges activities across time. It includes a start date, end date, and duration depicted in a bar form and illustrates the overlap of various tasks and departments involved.

Another skill Silveira points to is communication. For him, this includes understanding and establishing communication channels and fluency in the terminology of the equipment and processes. "Presentation skills are also needed. Presentations in school are very different than work. At school, you build your case and arrive at a conclusion. At work, we want the result right up front, then include the steps for anyone who wants to look at them." This professional writing and presentation style is much more akin to the journalistic genre.

Landon Phillips, Silveira's office mate and fellow engineering leader arrived at his title via a different path. He's been with BD for over 20 years and has worked his way up from an entry-level position, incorporating that fundamental knowledge gained in previous roles as he's

progressed. Both he and Silveira agree that younger employees must be able to take feedback without taking it personally. It's not about them as individuals; it's about their professional growth, the success of the team and the organization, and being able to do the job well – and owning the job they do.

Both emphasize the importance of understanding who in the organization can help you get the job done. Your colleagues are a resource, just like the raw materials. It's essential to know how to utilize all your resources. Every project involves multiple departments who intertwine and engage with production at different stages. No link in the production chain acts in isolation from any other link.

### Solving problems

Caleigh Waskowicz is a recent Worcester Polytechnic Institute graduate with a degree in biomedical engineering and a minor in electrical and computer engineering. She's part of BD's Manufacturing Development Program (MDP) program, a three-year rotational introduction to diverse aspects of BD's business. Finishing up her first year at the Canaan plant, she'll transfer to the Baltimore area for year two.

"Engineering is such a broad field. For me, it's less about specific studies and more about finding what suits my passions and values. This year I've practiced my problem-solving skills, as well as communication. I've gained comfort in creating structure instead of

having it provided for me," explains Waskowicz.

This year, Waskowicz's main task was to address inefficiencies in the Molding Tote Handling System (MTHS). "We love acronyms here!" she chuckles. MTHS is a transportation system that transfers products from the presses where syringe components are created to the lines where the complete product is assembled and packaged. Her mission: determine why totes that carried product were being rejected by the system at a high rate, which slowed down production.

Fast forward, and through conversations with team members, observations of the process, and lots of hard thinking and creativity, she was able to isolate and ascertain the problem, fix it, and create a training video for newly hired operators.

"My clients are the operators. I need to understand what they're experiencing and how they're engaging with the system. I also need to clearly define my problem and bring my training and creativity to solving it. One of the most important lessons I've learned is showing gratitude for what people do and how they help me get my job done."

### A place for everything

Project Support Specialist Silcris Gomez is a technical writer with a gift for creating order from chaos. She loves devising information systems to support each project and ensure all the documentation is updated and disseminated to all project team members.

New to BD, her role is to draft documents, process production change requests, and update protocols for each project. She enjoys working with computer systems and is currently pursuing her engineering technology associate's degree, having already earned a certificate in quality control from Gateway Community College.

Her ability to recreate herself professionally comes from being open to learning new things and putting herself in new roles and unfamiliar situations. "I've always been curious, and I like to organize and

take tasks step-by-step. Although I haven't been here long, it's been really important to depend on my coworkers and keep asking questions until I find someone who has the answers.

### Lessons learned

I still have two more visits with BD this spring as the BTW Externship program culminates. However, I've seen enough to understand that there are various entry points into this global company. A high school graduate in an entry-level machine operator position can earn a living wage with benefits, pursue a degree or further training with the tuition reimbursed, and be part of a purpose-driven organization. Once hired, opportunities to move in all directions are available to those who prove themselves.

I understand more readily how the skills developed in the school curriculum can become the foundation for success at work. Technical skills are essential for sure. So is showing up with enthusiasm and collegiality, bringing your A-game to whatever your job requires, knowing how to learn and find the information you need, and recovering from mistakes. My time at BD through the BTW Externship Program has reinforced that these skills are all part of the package known as career success. ●



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# Getting grounded

IT'S TIME TO GET OUT AND HIKE THE HUDSON VALLEY AND BEYOND



By Regina Molaro  
info@mainstreetmag.com

As the summer season heats up, we're all yearning to spend time in the great outdoors. Our leisure time is gleefully filled with a host of fun activities – from kayaking to swimming, camping, biking, and hiking.

By now, the trees are covered in verdant green leaves and the flowers have blossomed in a rainbow of hues. It's a great time to take to the trails for a long walk or a more challenging hike – whichever suits your style.

Great hikes abound – from New York's Millerton, Copake, Rhinebeck, and Pine Plains to Great Barrington, MA, and Connecticut's Canaan, Lakeville, and Sharon regions. So, get your hiking shoes on and go explore!

## Starting in New York, Millbrook

Just a ten-minute drive from Millbrook is Dover Stone Church Preserve. Once used as a refuge by the Pequot Indians, the ancient, natural cavern provided a haven for Indians who were fleeing from the English army during the 1600s. The site draws its name from the

cave's triangular entrance, which resembles the shape of a steeple. Listed in the National Register of Historic Sites and Places, the bucolic property boasts three miles of nature trails. Go find your zen. Cool off at the waterfall. Camp out on the banks of the lake with a book. While here, you'll witness the splendor of unique rock outcroppings, take in scenic vistas, and spot lots of fauna that hails from the West Mountain ridge. [doverny.us/dover-stone-church-preserve](http://doverny.us/dover-stone-church-preserve)

## Copake

Chase more waterfalls at Bash Bish Falls State Park – a two-mile trail that straddles New York's sprawling Taconic State Park and South Egremont, MA. On a warm summer day, you can bask in the mist of the cascading waterfall – the highest single-drop fall in all of Massachusetts. The short hike, which ensures Instagram-worthy photos, is ideal for all skill levels. While there, explore the neighboring wilderness at Mt. Washington State Park. [mass.gov/locations/bash-bish-falls-state-park](http://mass.gov/locations/bash-bish-falls-state-park)

## Rhinebeck/Pine Plains

Just a short hike up Drayton Grant Park at Burger Hill – one of the highest points in Rhinebeck – will

reward you with majestic views of the Hudson River and expansive surrounding countryside. To the west, you'll see the Catskill Mountains and to the east, the Taconic Mountains. This serene spot is ideal for taking a leisurely stroll, picnicking, practicing yoga, or meditating. [winnakee.org/burger-hill/](http://winnakee.org/burger-hill/)

Just four miles from Rhinebeck is Poets' Walk Park – a 120-acre park located in Red Hook. Its name was inspired by the many writers such as Washington Irving who enjoyed rambling here. Listen to the enchanting song of colorful songbirds, traverse through the meadows, stroll the wooded ravine down to the Hudson River, and enjoy the sounds of rushing water. Poet's Walk is an ideal place to curl up on a bench with a book, picnic, or cool off in the shade of the rustic gazebo. [scenichudson.org/explore-the-valley/scenic-hudson-parks/poets-walk-park/](http://scenichudson.org/explore-the-valley/scenic-hudson-parks/poets-walk-park/)

Stissing Mountain is also located in the Pine Plains/Rhinebeck region. Its 1.8-mile trail offers a lake-side setting and picturesque views. The trail, which is rated as difficult,

Above: Bash Bish Falls State Park is a Massachusetts state park located in the town of Mount Washington, which is named after Bash Bish Falls, Massachusetts' highest single-drop waterfall (60 feet (18 m)). Image istockphoto.com contributor Taariq\_Jacobs.

Continued on next page ...



Above and below: Poets' Walk is located in Red Hook, NY. It is intended to celebrate the connection between landscape and poetry. Images by Regina Molaro.

is primarily used for hiking, walking, nature trips, and bird watching. One of the biggest attractions is the Stissing Fire Tower, which also promises sweeping views. The shortest and easiest point of access is from Lake Road in Pine Plains, just down from the Thompson Pond Preserve entrance. [alltrails.com/trail/us/new-york/stissing-mountain-trail](http://alltrails.com/trail/us/new-york/stissing-mountain-trail)

**Columbia County/Hudson**

Nature buffs can head to Greenport Conservation Area – a 736-acre site that includes seven miles of trails. The paths are primarily flat, which makes Greenport an ideal place for beginner hikers. The summer season is apropos for birdwatching and enjoying dining al fresco. The park, which is within walking distance of Hudson, also offers scenic views of the Hudson River and Catskill Mountain. [clctrust.org/public-conservation-areas/greenport/](http://clctrust.org/public-conservation-areas/greenport/)

**Starting in Connecticut, Norfolk and Falls Village**

Great Mountain Forest, located in Norfolk and Falls Village in the northwest corner of Litchfield County, CT, a green space that offers more than 6,000 acres of contiguous forestland. Escape the cha-

otic world just beyond the woods. Here, you can enjoy long stretches of forest trails, which welcome both hikers and mountain bikers. A pioneer in forest stewardship, Great Mountain Forest practices sustainable forest management, promotes biodiversity and resilience to climate change, and supports education and research. Nature buffs can learn more on the non-profit organization's website, [greatmountainforest.org](http://greatmountainforest.org)

**Sharon/Canaan**

There are lots of fun things to discover at Kent Falls State Park. Wander across the covered bridge or hike one of the falls. Explore the Kent Falls Trail, which winds one-quarter mile up along the falls. Although not a difficult hike, be aware that there's a steep incline. [portal.ct.gov/DEEP/State-Parks/Parks/Kent-Falls-State-Park/Hiking](http://portal.ct.gov/DEEP/State-Parks/Parks/Kent-Falls-State-Park/Hiking)

Less than a half hour drive from Canaan and about thirty minutes from Great Barrington is Haystack Mountain. It boasts a 34-foot high stone tower at its summit, which is perched 1716 feet above sea level. Indulge in spectacular views – from the Berkshires to the peaks in Massachusetts, New York, and the Green Mountains of Vermont. Travel the twisting roadway, which provides quick and easy access halfway up the mountain. Along the road, you'll see delicate mountain

laurel adorning the grounds. More adventurous folk can opt for hiking the rugged trail to the top. [portal.ct.gov/DEEP/State-Parks/Parks/Haystack-Mountain-State-Park/Getting-Here](http://portal.ct.gov/DEEP/State-Parks/Parks/Haystack-Mountain-State-Park/Getting-Here)

Also near Canaan is Bartholomew's Cobble – a natural wonder created by geologic upheavals. It was named for its two rocky knolls or "cobbles" that rise above the Housatonic River. Situated on the Massachusetts/Connecticut border, the landscape offers mountain vistas and panoramic views of the Housatonic River Valley. Boasting an enormous variety of woodland flowers and fern species, the Cobble's diverse flora earned it a National Natural Landmark designation in 1971. Hurlburt's Hill marks the property's highest point. Ascending 1,000 feet, it uncovers a 20-acre upland. [thetrustees.org/place/bartholomews-cobble](http://thetrustees.org/place/bartholomews-cobble)

A short drive from Canaan and Great Barrington is Lion's Head Trail – a four-mile trail that is ideal for experienced hikers. Renowned for its dramatic overviews, wildlife and bird watching, it also offers access to Connecticut's highest peaks. Along the hike, you'll see a range of terrains from waterfalls to woodlands. From mid/late June to early July, you'll enjoy the fragrance and beauty of a bounty of white and pink mountain laurel. <http://berkshirehiking.com/hikes/lionshead.html>

Before you head out, check for COVID-19 updates, hours of operation, and other details. ●





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# One man's earthly pursuit of family and community: An off-world incident in the Berkshires

By Griffin Cooper  
griffin@mainstreetmag.com

There are times when the universe thrusts a moment upon us that possesses the capability of forever altering the course of our lives. As if thrown by some cosmic legionary, fate's javelin can pierce a quiet life, leaving difficult choices, harsh lessons and unknown paths in its wake. What these moments – often traumatic – do offer us are choices. Choices that are not always clear, but ever-present. Some choose acceptance, others denial – there is no right or wrong, only choice.

For Thomas Reed, it was a late summer's evening in September of 1969 that the universe would fix its cross hairs on him and his family while they enjoyed a quiet ride home in Sheffield, MA. Despite the event that took place that evening, and the life-altering decades since, Thom's choice has remained steadfast – perseverance.

## Foo fighters

Thom's experience, as personal as it has become to the man himself, lives among the stories that exist on the fringes of formal society. These happenings however, cannot universally be dismissed as tales that solely belong within the vacuum of fantasy. Ever since Allied aircraft pilots began to describe mysterious aerial phenomena, or foo fighters, in the skies over both the European and Pacific theaters of operations,

modern society has been captivated by lights in the night sky, mysterious objects hovering silently over the earthly horizon – UFOs.

What began as innocent curiosity would morph into full-blown history when, in July of 1947, what the US Air Force claims was a weather balloon crashed at a ranch near Roswell, New Mexico, launching countless conspiracy theories that claim the crash was actually that of a flying saucer, and the truth has been covered up by the US government to this day. The incident, combined with the development of the atomic bomb, soon drew the gaze of science fiction and both literature and film would soon feature political commentary mixed with the concept of UFOs. Stories by authors like Ray Bradbury and films like *The Day the Earth Stood Still* and *The Thing from Another World* would embed themselves in the public consciousness.

Despite its prevalence in popular culture, UFO sightings and any form of accompanying alien phenomena have yet to hurdle the “little green men” stigma that has fashioned itself to those who might consider the possibilities, or who have experienced something unexplained themselves. Much like the character of small towns across America, seeing is believing and historically, the Hudson Valley as



well as residents in the foothills of the Berkshire Mountains have seen plenty. Some thousands of residents of the Hudson Valley witnessed strange objects in the sky from March of 1983 until the following July of 1984. Eyewitness reports suggested that a large object moved slowly north over the Hudson River Valley. Local police received countless calls from people reporting the shape. Two officers who saw something together later gave different descriptions at the same time describing the object as a series of small planes flying in tight formation. Mysteries like this have woven themselves into the history of our area.

Above: Corn near the covered bridge where Thom's encounter occurred growing abnormally high. Below, left: Thom Reed. All images with this article are courtesy of Thom Reed.

## The 1969 mass-sighting

In Sheffield, MA, three years of enigmatic phenomena culminated in one fateful evening in September of 1969 when what can only be described as a mass-sighting engulfed the towns of Sheffield, Great Barrington, and Canaan in Connecticut's Northwest corner.

Continued on next page ...





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For some, the events of that evening would forever divide a small town. For others, it would strengthen the bonds between neighbors who shared a common experience.

For the last 52 years, the one remaining constant has been Thom himself who snatched fate's cosmic javelin and defiantly chose to keep the incident alive in the public eye. Reed, who established a commemorative park where the incident took place, has carried the sightings memorial torch for the better part of three decades appearing on numerous television programs including most recently Netflix's reboot of the cult-classic television show *Unsolved Mysteries*.

Though the subject of Thom's quest may seem far-fetched to some, his reasons are as noble as the Berkshires themselves. For decades, Thom has kept the memory of his sighting alive despite resistance in order to preserve the integrity of those in the community who witnessed something incredible, fight ridicule with legitimacy and, perhaps most importantly, honor the family who he has loved so dearly.

**September 1, 1969**

"My family has always been open minded in general," recalls Thom as he recounts his time in Sheffield from his home in Concord, TN. "That sense of openness pervaded

throughout our family diner in Sheffield."

Until the age of two, Thom lived in Cherry Hills Colorado, at the home of William Roosevelt, the grandson of President Roosevelt. His grandmother Marian was the governess for the household. Thom's family would move back to New England in 1963 buying 80 acres of land and a diner in Sheffield. His father, Dr. Howard Reed, was an attorney and town selectman. His mother, Nancy, owned the aforementioned Village Green Diner. "My mother would run a tab for children and would hand them quarters to use the jukebox," recalls Thom. "Those same kids later supported my family years after our sighting, added crucial details that would ultimately lead to our case being officially inducted into the state's history, and helped fund the monument at the park in Sheffield."

In 1966 and 1967, sightings abounded around Sheffield causing residents to theorize on the many reasons why the small town had suddenly become a UFO hotspot. For decades, the Sprague Electric Company in North Adams, MA, served as the area's industrial backbone. Throughout the 1960s, Sprague became one of the major contributors to NASA's ambitions by making a wide range of electrical components and would become highly motivated to manufacture



Above and below: The Thom Reed UFO Monument Park.

the silicon disk that contains the Apollo 11 Goodwill Messages left on the Moon's Sea of Tranquility by the Apollo 11 astronauts in 1969. The company's push to join the Space Race led many to speculate whether the string of sightings could be related.

It was in the booths of the Reed family diner that members of Sheffield's community began to speculate on the strange sightings in the years leading up to September 1, 1969. Despite the flurry of conversations, Thom says he felt like an outsider for much of his childhood spent in Sheffield. "Not everyone took kindly to those types of conversations taking place at the diner during those years," says Thom. "My mother had to endure many disrespectful criticisms from folks even before our experience in 1969."

What began as the background noise of residents and witnesses discussing some of the strange goings on, as nebulous to a young Thom Reed as the Milky Way, took center stage in his life with a meteoric impact on the evening of September 1, 1969. What occurred just outside Sheffield's covered bridge while Thom, his brother Matthew next



Continued on next page ...

to him, his mother driving, and his grandmother in the passenger seat as they drove home from the diner in the fading light of summer has become a testament to Thom and his life's journey.

**A sphere above the water...**

As he recounts in his own words, "We left the diner around 8:15 that evening and arrived at the covered bridge shortly thereafter. As we neared the bridge, we became aware of what I can only describe as a sphere above the water, another whitish light not far from the bridge, and a disc down the road near a telephone pole. It appeared to me in those brief moments, that all three were performing some kind of function, or maneuver."

Thom continues in the same manner one might describe a traumatic event, sometimes hazy, but thoroughly authentic in conviction. "When we pulled off the side of the road to get a better look, I distinctly recall everyone in the car feeling an odd sensation of being muted. It was like we all entered a vacuum of silence, we were alert but... not there." The next Thom recalls, three hours had passed and the car was now over a mile away from where they had previously been, with his mother now in the passenger seat and his grandmother – who Thom says never drove – behind the wheel. "I have never said my family was abducted by aliens," says Thom. "I do believe however, that someone or something removed us from our car, we were taken elsewhere. What I do remember is the sensation of coming to, almost as if I was waking up from an anesthetic. As my grandmother inexplicably drove down the road back to town, she missed the first entrance to the diner, and stopped at Silks General Store, which was just about to close, making it around 11pm despite us leaving the diner at 8:15 and only driving a few miles round trip. What people don't understand is

that lost in all of the sensationalism, is the trauma we endured that evening. It was almost as though we had been in an accident and were wandering around in a hazy fog of shock."

The sightings that culminated in that night over 50 years ago have, perhaps unfairly, been dubbed *The Berkshire UFO Sightings*, and are one of the famous UFO-related events in American history. That evening, over 250 witnesses from Sheffield to Canaan would report seeing something strange in skies over Berkshire County including a flurry of calls into the local radio station, WSBS, to report what they were seeing. Though today, the incident is more widely accepted locally than it is dismissed, there remains mysteriously little records from the evening itself and in the immediate aftermath, the Reed family became the subject of much ridicule.

**A down-to-earth family legacy**

Though 1969's mass sighting made UFOs the topic of conversation throughout the community, it was his mother Nancy who bore the weight of scrutiny. "Folks who had established themselves in the community just didn't want Sheffield associated with this type of thing," says Thom. "Because our diner was a safe haven for those, young and old, to talk about their experiences, she endured a lot of criticism the year that followed that fateful evening." Indeed, it was less than a year after the encounter that Nancy Reed would sell the family diner and relocate the family to Great Barrington, MA. Still, for Thom, the incident would imprint itself upon his young mind. "Of course, what I saw changed my life. I was an altar boy when I was young, my faith was undoubtedly shaken." For Thom, it was more than just the search for truth that led him to pursue a decades-long crusade for legitimacy. It was his love and admiration for his mother's struggle and his father's faith in him that has propelled Thom into a community celebrity today.

"My father never doubted us, and because he had the means, he



Above: Thom's parents, Dr. Howard and Nancy Reed.

became our biggest advocate," says Thom. Dr. Howard Reed, an attorney and former mayor of Canaan, CT, assisted friend Robert Bletchmen, who was known internationally for his knowledge and studies on UFOs, organize a symposium on the UFO phenomenon and even aided in getting the incident presented to the United Nations on October 2, 1992, the same date Dr. Reed would tragically pass away. "My father was friendly with former Governor of Connecticut William O'Neill and Senator Christopher Dodd who backed him during his campaigns, making him somewhat connected. However, he used those connections to advocate for the people in Sheffield, those who felt that nobody believed them, but he did." Thom would pick up where his father left off after his passing in October of 1992, fighting to garner recognition for both the incident itself as well as the place where it occurred.

**Now a permanent part of US history**

In February of 2015, Thom's quest for vindication enjoyed a major victory when the Great Barrington Historical Society and Museum confirmed the Reed UFO incident and officially inducted the case into United States history. A concrete monument was erected outside the bridge to commemorate the incident and the Thom Reed UFO Monument Park was born thanks to locals who collectively paid for the monument, which was unveiled live

on *ABC News New York*. "If not for my father, there would be no park, and there would be no park without the diner," says Thom. "So the park itself is a tribute to my late father to commemorate his support of local people, my mother who selflessly welcomed any and all to the diner, and the families who experienced something back in '69. There's a similar family element to the park that existed in our diner. Because of that kinship, we were able to move forward with the park and the monument."

Today, Mr. Reed manages the Thom Reed UFO Monument Park with the helpful support of sponsors and locals. In the end, for Thom, along with those among us who have had an experience that falls hopelessly outside our preconceived notions, the phenomena itself takes a backseat to the real human impact on our lives. Thom's experience, though found in the universe of the unknown, is grounded well within the realm of what is timelessly familiar if one chooses to look deeper. His is a journey driven by trauma, struggle, perseverance, and the very earthly love for his family and their legacy. •

*Follow Thom Reed's "OffWorld Incident" and check out updates at the park at [ufopark.org](http://ufopark.org).*



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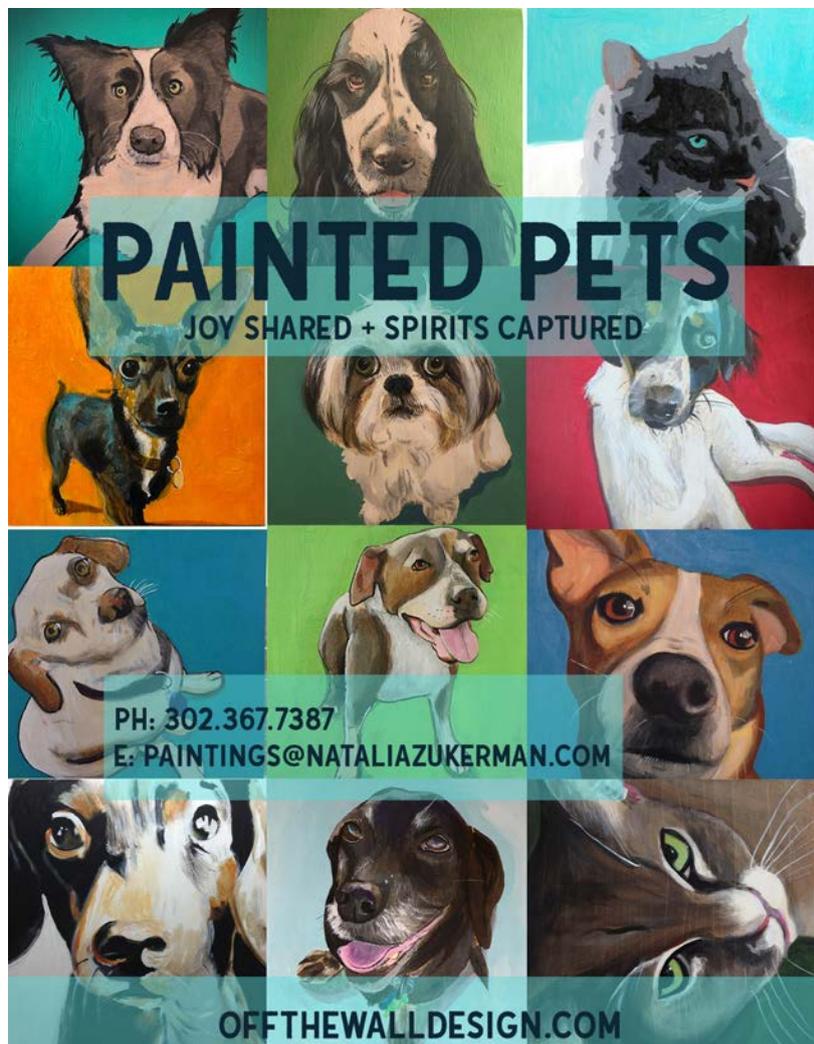


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# HOW AND WHY YOUR BUSINESS SHOULD

# stand out



Image: istockphoto.com contributor peterschreiber.media

By Thorunn Kristjansdottir  
info@mainstreetmag.com

When times get tough (or prosperous) for a business, the first thing to go (in most cases) seems to be marketing. Money gets tight, and the business pulls back all “unnecessary” spending, with any and all forms of advertising being the first on the list. The oxymoron in this scenario however is that this is often the time that the business should *not* stop, but in fact put more effort and resources into their marketing to try to create more work and brand recognition.

I feel it is important to add this disclaimer right here at the start, that every business should obviously be fiscally responsible and that I am not advising any business to throw precious dollars at just any type of advertising in the hopes that will be the saving grace. Quite the contrary. Any and all marketing, and one of its tentacles, advertising, should be done with a plan in place, where every dollar is spent with the goal and expectation of seeing a return. There’s a huge difference between a marketing strategy and an *effective* marketing strategy. And that differentiating factor can mean all of the difference.

## Extreme times

Almost all businesses have had to pivot and endure the great challenges of the last 15 months or so. Right now, it seems that those who made it, have made it. Then there are others who have really thrived during this time. There are certain

sectors of business in particular that are simply too busy and as a result, they are turning work away, looking to hire more employees – and are struggling to keep up. And that is a very real problem, too. That is another situation that businesses have found themselves in, and as a result, have also slowed and or stopped marketing and advertising.

At this point you might be asking yourself, “So what? Of course they’d stop, they can’t handle any more work. Furthermore, it’s not a good look to be saying ‘no’ and pushing business away – that will impact their reputation in the long-term, too.” And that is true – but to that I respond with: out of sight, out of mind.

Let’s say that after we reach herd immunity here in the US (hopefully by the end of summer), and our lives begin to return to some form of previous normalcy, including our business lives (when the demand for work shifts), where will the businesses find themselves then? They might find themselves out of sight and out of mind.

For these two reasons, marketing is crucial for a business when things are both slow as well as busy. And don’t think that these reasons are fear-based. They are simply strategy-based. Again, this is where good and effective marketing play a key role.

## Not your mother’s marketing strategy

When you think of marketing and advertising, you might be thinking of your (sometimes) boring and typical methods, and sure, they are

definitely in the top ten outlets. But when you think of marketing and advertising, are you perhaps also thinking, “What’s the big deal? This isn’t rocket science! You slap some ads together, put it in the local paper; have some business cards mocked up, get them printed on VistaPrint for cheap; and throw up a few social media posts on Facebook and Instagram. Not that hard and anyone can do it.”

That is one approach. But that’s not a plan, necessarily. Herein lies the difference between having a strategy and having the right design in place that is true to your brand and emotes the message and visuals that represent your brand correctly, while appealing to your customers; and further, gets your customers (existing or desired) to act. That is what you want – you want to incite a reaction!

The plan and execution of these things can make all the difference for your business in its time of need. The true and tried methods of marketing can be effective in some cases – sure – and you can certainly get lucky. Sometimes it is definitely better to be lucky than good. Your personal and or business reputation and connections can go a very long way (something that is very much desired for any business). But beyond these factors, to help your business’ chances, strategy and execution can help your business stand out from the competition and can mean the difference between success and failure.

This is of course a multi-faceted thing, but when it comes to helping

your business to stand out and be memorable, the important factors that should be at the forefront are: your brand, your message, your visuals. The means for getting them “out there” are varied, and sure, lots of them are the very traditional forms of marketing and advertising (print and online ads, paid boosts, website, Google ads, phone book and yellow pages ads – to name a few).

But to really stand out and be memorable enough to be the first choice that comes to mind, the creative and sometimes out-of-the-box ideas and their execution are what help to make your business be memorable and incite the reaction that you desire. Right now, in this past Covid year, being creative and thinking outside-the-box has meant the difference between success and failure. As we continue to adapt, as things continue to be challenging (in the same or new ways), considering your marketing strategies for today as well as tomorrow should be at the forefront of your business strategy. That strategy and its execution can directly affect how your business will be doing in six, 12, or 18 months from now. How will you make sure that your business stands out from the rest? •

*Thorunn Kristjansdottir is the owner of this magazine, as well as the owner of Thorunn Designs, LLC., a design and marketing firm.*

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# Blissed in the Berkshires

*Discovering new highs in this already beautiful part of the world*

By Dominique DeVito  
info@mainstreetmag.com

I recently read a book called *The New Chardonnay: The Unlikely Story of How Marijuana Went Mainstream*, by Heather Cabot. Essentially, the book challenges the conception by people of my age and generation, who may have experimented with marijuana and other drugs in their 20s but have been wine drinkers since “growing up,” that pot is a mind-altering gateway drug whose only long-term effect is, well, dead brain cells. Getting stoned was for drop-outs. It may have been fun, but it was inherently dangerous, which is why it was illegal.

What a different world we live in. In her book, Cabot challenges these long-held beliefs, and by looking at how and why marijuana is going mainstream she suggests that, for wine drinkers like me (and you?), getting together for gummies may be a more satisfying – and even healthy – alternative to our recreational drinking habits.

With legalization well established in Massachusetts, and finally imminent here in New York, I decided to check out the new world of dispensaries and see what the buzz was about. I was goaded to do so by online sites promoting “cannatourism” in the Berkshires, where dispensaries and “budtenders” are presented like craft beverage businesses and the tastings they’re famous for. Imagine a day or a weekend in the Berkshires where, instead of relaxing with a cocktail before or after enjoying a cultural event or the area’s natural beauty, you consume a piece of chocolate or a lozenge or a gummy to take you to that slightly altered state of more focused and full enjoyment. An intriguing prospect! In my research, I discovered that there are lots of dispensaries to choose from in the Berkshires. In the roughly 25 miles between Sheffield and Pittsfield, there are currently eight well-established locations. I targeted Sheffield and Great Barrington because there were several within just a few miles of each other.

## Setting out on a Sunday

I planned my trip for a Sunday. Originally I was going to bring a friend and we were going to explore them like we would if we were on a wine trail, with a safe amount of imbibing included. I imagined bringing along a picnic of non-alcoholic beverages and hearty sandwiches to consume before and after whatever edible we would choose. We’d go to a park, eat and partake, then spend a few hours hiking before heading home.

Thankfully the cannatourism literature is honest about what to expect, noting that the effects of an edible might not even begin to be felt until over an hour after consuming, and that the effects could last several hours. Not wanting to feel compromised in any way to drive home, I decided instead to visit the dispensaries and bring selections back to where my friend and I live so we could enjoy them without needing to get in a car for any part of the rest of the day.

## First stop: The Pass

It was a lovely spring morning when I headed to the first dispensary I wanted to visit – The Pass – that conveniently opened at 9am. In fact, like the other dispensaries, The Pass is open seven days a week, with long hours (9am to 8pm every day). I arrived at 9:30, which seemed very early for a Sunday morning, but there were several other cars in the lot. To maintain social distancing inside and out, I had to wait to enter. The very friendly associate at the door thoroughly checked my ID, and asked if I was shopping or picking up an order.

While I waited to shop, I scanned the QR code that brought up the extensive menu of offerings. These were also posted on large screens around the store. I was curious about the others who were there, finding it so hard to shake my judgmental twenty-something self from this experience. I know marijuana has many proven medical benefits, and this dispensary



was more like a specialty pharmacy than a head shop. That was reflected in the clientele, some of whom were young, of course, but many of whom were elderly, accompanied by a spouse or a partner or friends.

When it was my turn to order, I was greeted by Carlisle, who was patient and obviously experienced in helping newbies like me. He recommended that I “start low and go slow,” an easy-to-remember mantra around getting started with recreational marijuana products. He advised me to start with ingesting 2 to 5 milligrams of an edible, and that it can take up to two hours to take effect. Along with a line of The Pass-made products, there were treats from some other manufacturers, too. I wanted something that would take effect sooner rather than later, and Carlisle confirmed that the cannabis-infused seltzers from Levia – at 5 mg/20 ounce can – were a good choice. I chose the raspberry lime from among the selection of flavors.

## Rebelle

As I was driving the 2.5 miles up Route 7 from The Pass to Rebelle, I passed a sign proclaiming Great Barrington to be the birthplace of W.E.B. Dubois. Dubois is a legend. Among his many noted achievements



Above, top to bottom: My special bud-tenders: Tyler at Rebelle and Carlisle at The Pass. You have questions? They have answers.

Continued on next page ...



Above: The selection of edibles from my trip to Berkshire dispensaries. Below, right: Owner and founder of Calyx, Donna Norman, in front of the hand-painted calyx in her store on Main Street in Great Barrington.

are first African American to earn a doctorate, and a founder of the NAACP (in 1909). I imagined what he would think of the new landscape in his hometown, which was considered integrated when he was born in 1868. Dubois once said, “The power of the ballot we need in sheer defense, else what shall save us from a second slavery?” Yes, what would he have to say about the state of his state, our country, the world?

With these heady thoughts, I turned into the parking lot of Rebelle. Where The Pass had more of a warehouse feel, Rebelle was reminiscent of a coffee house. In fact, it is an old house, with steps leading up to a wooden deck that wraps partly around the outside, benches and planters waiting to welcome people to sit and relax. Inside, the feel was warm and light. It was airy and open, with sun streaming in from a bank of windows on a far wall. As soon as you enter you are asked for your ID at the counter. Once checked, you are free to explore the space.

I was helped here by Tyler, who was very knowledgeable and enthusiastic. I felt slightly more informed now, so my questions were more about recommendations. Rebelle has a chocolate bar called Incredibles, with perforated squares of 10 mg each, or a half a square (small triangle) of 5 mg. “My parents love this chocolate bar,” he told me, which brought the message of Cabot’s book home in a big way. This is what it’s about – choosing to chill with a nibble of THC/CBD-infused chocolate at the end of the day rather than a drink. “My mom likes a very small dose,” he said, “half

a triangle.” Tyler was making it real for me. I must be his parents’ age. I felt like, hey, if they do it and enjoy it, I probably will, too.

After chatting about choices and options and making my selections, Tyler encouraged me to explore the bud bar, where Rebelle has on display the kinds of flower they sell. The displays are lucite containers with built-in magnifying glasses for close examination of the product, and a panel of air holes so you can shake the pot and sniff it. There are detailed descriptions behind each with the name of the plant, its chemical composition, its tasting notes, and its effects. This reminded me so much of looking at wines. Oddly, it’s a sterile presentation of an organic product with psychoactive effects. Quite a consideration! There is so much to learn, just like with wines.

I thanked Tyler for his patience and personality, and headed a mere mile along Route 7 into downtown Great Barrington, where I had to visit one of the only women-owned dispensaries in Massachusetts, Calyx Berkshire Dispensary. It’s in the heart of downtown, at 307 Main Street, next door to a toy store, and two doors down from a coffee shop. Welcome to the new Main Street USA!

#### Calyx Berkshire Dispensary

There’s an engaging ID checker at the entrance to Calyx, too. Once cleared, the space, which is described on its business card as “not your typical flower shop” feels funky and feminine. Calyx is in fact the resin-dense female part of the cannabis flower, so it’s a well-chosen name, for sure.

The space is a kind of cavity, with a long bar along one wall and display shelves on the other. The bar has a plexiglass top to showcase the variety of product sold there. Shelves on the opposite wall and some islands in the middle of the room feature artsy and well-heeled accessories including large cloth bags that proclaim, “Buy weed from women.” The colors are warm and earthy.

The associates at Calyx – mostly women – are hip and approachable. The large whiteboard sign behind them was drawn by one of them, Jonah, and when I asked to take a picture of them together in front of it, Stephanie and Hunter made sure to squat so that Jonah’s handiwork was clearly captured.

I was happy to meet the owner, Donna Norman, whose enthusiasm is fully warranted and hard-earned. She recognized the potential for a dispensary downtown after visiting some in Colorado, and she struggled for years to get through the red tape to be certified as a woman-owned cannabis business, finally opening her doors just this year.

When I asked what motivates her around cannabis, she responds without hesitation about how the product can improve people’s lives. She has stories from many people about how even small amounts of marijuana relieve pain, nausea, and even impaired vision. She’s proud of the local influence in her store, and she’s delighted with its reception in the community.

#### Back home

I was so excited with my selections from each of the dispensaries, and couldn’t wait to get home and try one with my friend. It was early afternoon when I got to her place, and we decided we’d split the seltzer while nibbling on some cheese and crackers, then go for a walk. We walked for about an hour and a half, ending up back at her place. We agreed that we felt something, but not much, on the approximately 2.5 milligrams of THC we got through the drink. “Fuzzy” was the word we both chose to describe our mental and physical states after drinking the seltzer. It was nice to be home and have nothing else to do through the evening. I was

hungry later! It was explained to me that effects vary greatly depending on the frequency that one uses marijuana and an individual’s body chemistry – just like they do with any “drug,” be it alcohol or an antidepressant or anything.

#### My take-aways

The adage “start low and go slow” is a good one. Also, set aside the right time and place. Carlisle said, “It’s a recreational product; don’t plan on driving,” and Tyler said, “It’s great for a movie night.”

I couldn’t resist calling this piece *Blissed in the Berkshires*, because that’s a desired experience from partaking in pot with friends, right? While I felt very happy shopping in the dispensaries imagining how and where and with whom I would indulge in The New Chardonnay, I didn’t want to risk being impaired in any way on the hour-long trip to home base. However, I can imagine planning a weekend with a partner or good friend or even just myself where I didn’t have to be anywhere but in one of the beautiful parks in the Berkshires and then a cozy room to relax. As I would on a wine-tasting weekend. •

*There are many other dispensaries in the Berkshires – and so, so much to do and see. Enjoy responsibly. The Pass. 1375 North Main St., Sheffield, MA. thepass.co. Open 7 days, 9am to 8pm. Rebelle. 783 South Main St., Great Barrington, MA. letsrebelle.com. Open 7 days, 8am to 7pm (til 9pm Thursday, Friday and Saturday). Calyx Berkshire Dispensary. 307 Main St., Great Barrington, MA. calyxberkshire.com. Open 7 days, 10am to 6pm Mon-Thurs, 10am to 7pm Fri-Sat, 11am to 5pm Sun.*



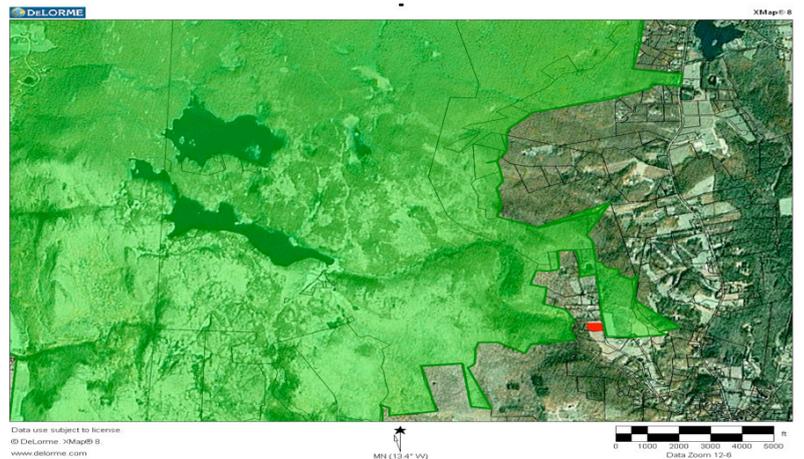


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Abby's Sealcoating, which began over 20 years ago and whose name is derived from the original owner's last name, was purchased in 2019 by its current owners, and Craryville, NY, residents, Joe and Tessa Argus. Today, Abby's offers sealcoating of any blacktop surface as well as crack filling and line striping. The established name has no doubt helped Abby's find early success among locals of Columbia County. Owners feel committed to maintaining the incredible reputation Abby's has established every single day. Customers feel confident that they're receiving reliable service when they contact Abby's, and are assured a job done with pride and integrity, that's why their motto is "always doing a super job." Joe and his wife Tessa say that being able to give back to the community is definitely the most rewarding part of being a small, local business. They love being able to help customers maintain their investment and say even the simplest of jobs can make a huge difference in curb appeal. Abby's enjoys helping customers spruce up their homes for the spring and summer months. In addition, they've been able to donate to several local youth organizations, as well as a couple of local animal rescues. In the future, Abby's hopes to expand its business so that they may acquire a second truck and crew. Joe and Tessa say they would love to be able to serve even more customers than they already do.



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### Sheffield Farm Products

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The Whalen family, residents of Great Barrington, MA, purchased the land they refer to as The Farm, in April 2020, naming it Sheffield Farm Products, LLC. The Farm sells topsoil, planting soil, and compost. They also sell natural, black and brown mulch for all landscape and gardening needs. Logs, stumps, brush, and fill are accepted year-round, and customers can drop off wood chips and leaves for free for The Farm to recycle. The Farm has continuously impressed businesses and homeowners alike with high-quality products and outstanding customer service. They offer a wide variety of products using locally-sourced materials. Being a family-run business gives the Whalens the opportunity to create a legacy that will help keep the family together for generations. Members of the Whalen family say it is rewarding to be helping the local economy by providing much needed jobs. As they move into their second year of operation, they will continue offering high quality products, and serve their customers to the best of their abilities, expanding their product line as needs arise. They hope to continue to expand and grow, potentially adding additional jobs as well. The Whalens have also owned and operated Whalen Nursery, Inc. for over 30 years. This knowledge and experience in the landscape industry is the reason for their unmatched expertise on landscape products in the Berkshires.



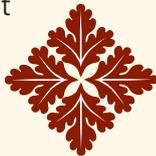
### Reiki-Ho

Japanese Energy Healing practice. 22 Upper Main Street, Sharon, CT. (646) 696-0959. reiki-ho.com

Laurence Guillem discovered Reiki energy healing 25 years ago when she was living in France. Supported by two years of study in Tibetan Buddhism, and a 12-year meditation practice, she came to realize the importance of Reiki as a way to bring about spiritual awareness, and to help us connect with our inner intelligence. It is a powerful, yet gentle practice that has been used as a Complementary Integrative Medicine in various hospitals across the United States for over twenty years. Reiki works both on the emotional and physical level by taking us to a state of deep relaxation. It induces the body to heal itself, restoring balance and wholeness. Feeling a strong desire to deepen this method of energy healing during the pandemic, Laurence decided to study with a Japanese Reiki Master in New York City, and became a certified Level III Reiki practitioner. She believes that taking an active role in our own healing process is essential in becoming aware of our own potential. Reiki may help us to shift some of our daily habits to live a happier, richer, and more meaningful life. Laurence is looking forward to become a Reiki Master, wishing to pass on this ancestral method of energy healing. She is now practicing in Sharon, CT, receiving the gift of healing herself, while offering healing to others.

## INSURING YOUR WORLD

This column will be devoted to some fun insurance coverages that you probably didn't know existed or could even be purchased. Did you know that Heidi Klum, Victoria's Secret runway model insures her legs for \$2.2 million! Her left leg is worth less than her right due to a tiny scar. Singers will routinely insure their vocal chords. Mariah Carey insures her five-octave voice for \$35 million! Food critics and restaurateurs play a huge part in the success of the restaurant industry. Famous food critic Egon Ronay has his taste buds insured for \$400,000! Harvey Lowe, a 13-year-old YoYo champion insured his hands for \$150,000 just as surgeons will do the same to protect their careers. Golf tournaments routinely have hole-in-one grand prizes on par 3 holes giving a car away if the golfer scores a hole in one at that hole – insurance covers the cost of the car. Lastly, did you know that over 200,000 people in the US insure their lives for Alien Abduction? So the moral of the story is that insurance covers many interesting risks that you may not have ever thought about.



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## CALLING ALL FLEA MARKET SHOPPERS:

The hunt for hidden treasures will heat up for those of us who enjoy scouring the many flea markets in our area. For those in the know, the thrill of a flea market excursion comes with the chance you'll find something truly unique. Here's a bit of advice to help you get the best pieces at the lowest prices this summer.

**Go early (and late):** This is especially true for both the first and last days of week-end flea markets. Get there early on the first day of the flea market for the best selection and again at the end of the last day to get the biggest discounts.

**Commit:** Don't be afraid to go after what you want. One of the biggest mistakes flea market shoppers make is walking away from items they feel an instinct to get. If you love an item, someone else does too. Don't risk losing an item you treasure!

**Cash is king:** Chances are you will not encounter an ATM at very many flea markets and considering most flea markets are pop-ups, don't expect card readers either. So be sure and take cash, including plenty of small bills.

**Let's haggle:** Look, haggling isn't everyone's cup of tea – and that's completely understandable. Negotiation isn't necessarily my favorite thing in the world either. Remember though, flea market sellers worth their salt expect shoppers to haggle, and they build negotiating room into the prices on the tags. So don't be afraid to make your own offer on an item whose price seems high. There's no downside in the end, only deals!

For more tips or to find some deals of your own, stop by my shop, Merwin Farm and Home, on Main Street in Millerton, NY. You can even practice your haggling skills on me, I won't mind! Follow me on social media @merwinfarmandhome



MERWIN  
Farm and Home

518 567 6737  
20 MAIN STREET, MILLERTON, NY  
MERWINFARMANDHOME@GMAIL.COM

## Emerald Ash Borer

In my youth, human hitchhikers were common, it seemed. You'd get or give a ride more freely, with less fear. Conversations provided a friendly diversion in your day. These days it seems hitchhikers are more frequently in the invader category – insects, diseases, viruses, plants, etc. The insect Emerald Ash Borer is among them.

Presumed to have arrived in wood packing material from the Orient, it was discovered in White Ash trees in Detroit in 2002. A massive eradication effort failed to contain its spread. With the ability of the adult borer to fly, combined with human assistance in the moving of logs and firewood, it has spread to at least 35 states. And it thrives on the nutrient-rich wood layer just under the outer bark of our native Ash tree species.

You may notice an odd texture and color change to the bark of scattered trees in our yards and forests. The effect known as "blonding" is caused by woodpeckers pursuing the borer larvae of White Ash trees. A close look might reveal perfectly incised D-shaped exit holes of the adults. Because best control measures are applied in advance of infestation, identification and prophylactic treatment of important Ash trees is critical. This concern is not exaggerated. Hundreds of millions of Ash trees (of baseball bat and basket weaving fame) have been killed since its importation.

If you have an Ash of personal value, have an arborist assess it for treatment potential, and to provide advice on a long-term strategy. To learn more, visit <http://www.emeraldashborer.info> and <https://ag.umass.edu/landscape/factsheets/emerald-ash-borer>



RON YAPLE, Licensed/Certified and  
Registered Consulting Arborist

(413) 229.2728 • [www.RaceMtTree.com](http://www.RaceMtTree.com)

## SUSTAINABLE AIR FILTERS?

Several air filter companies have recently been promoting "sustainable" air filters. By sustainable, they mean that filter elements trap more debris before they completely clog so that they sustain for longer periods before they need replacement. However, while they are clogging, they increase wasted energy because the debris they collect makes the fan work harder to overcome the resistance of the accumulated material. Hence, making the filter element bigger only allows it to waste more energy before it needs to be replaced.

True sustainability means that the filter sustains the same performance for years. No clogging. No restricted air flows. No falling air pressure. No change in air quality. No maintenance of filter elements. No wasting of energy.

To produce truly sustainable air filtration systems that produce constant results in places such as mines, deserts, and steel plants, as well as houses and schools, we developed Air-Cleaning Blowers™ (ACBs) that use no filter media of any kind to clean air. They separate debris and water out of the air, using only their momentum. ACBs then eject those particles out of the blower and send only clean air to your application. As a result, ACBs assure you of sustainable and predictable air flow, air pressure, air quality, and energy consumption, even in remote, unattended applications.

If you need truly green air filtration, visit [aircleaningblowers.com/white-papers-green-air-filter/](http://aircleaningblowers.com/white-papers-green-air-filter/) for a thorough discussion of sustainable air filtration.

Ed Roston, Air Cleaning Blowers, LLC  
180 South Street, Suite H, Highland, NY  
(845) 244-3091 | [AirCleaningBlowers.com](http://AirCleaningBlowers.com)



# Growing your business with ideas and action

The first step in growing a business is the idea. The second step is action. We help with both! Could your business benefit from a new brand or a new website, or perhaps it needs supporting materials like a brochure, or maybe it needs help in the marketing and PR department? No matter the need, how small or large, we're here to help.

## Services:

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