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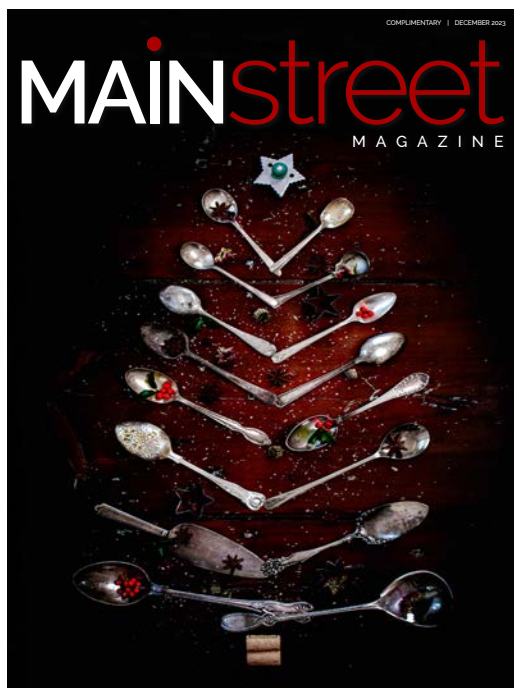
To say that 2023 zoomed by would be an understatement. I feel like we just got used to writing "2023" on our checks and now we have to start all over again. When this time of year circles around, I like to take a moment to look back.

First off, I have to start with *Main Street's* ten-year anniversary this past March. I cannot believe that we've been sharing good, positive, and interesting stories of our neighbors, family and friends for ten whole years! Thank you all for celebrating with us and for your continued support and readership. Our March issue, the anniversary issue, was our biggest ever and it was a pretty great one too! It was nice for everyone here at *Main Street* to take the time to reflect back and share that with our readers.

Secondly, I'd be remiss if I didn't talk about some of the people we've lost this year. To be honest, the number of people who left us this year seems staggering. Whether it was someone that I actually personally knew, someone that was more of an acquaintance, or a stranger, it just felt that there were so many losses this year. I made note here of two particular losses earlier this year when my third-grade teacher, Mrs. Hunter passed and then when Robin Hood Radio's Marshall Miles passed in early summer... As I think back, I take a heavy sigh, because losing someone is never easy and we're never fully prepared. These people all leave a hole that can never be filled, but they also leave a permanent imprint on our hearts and souls. I won't mention more folks here for fear of leaving someone out, but just know that I think often and fondly of those who are no longer with us. The lesson I take from this is that life is short. Seize the moment and tell those you love how much you love them.

Thirdly, as I reflect back on all that has transpired in 2023, I also look ahead to what's to come. What will 2024 bring? Gosh, I hope it's kindness, peace, and good. Forget about "things" this holiday season, I'd love nothing more than if each and every person were to perform one act of kindness for a complete stranger. In fact, that will be my goal this holiday season: to perform random acts of kindness. Will you join me? Will you help make the world kinder and brighter? We could all use more joy. Happy holidays – may they be kind to you.

– Thorunn Kristjansdottir



DECEMBER 2023

What do you get when your photographer is also a baker? You get a baking-inspired holiday-themed cover, that's what! Wishing you all a very merry holiday season.

Photo by
Olivia Valentine

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HANDCRAFTING AT ITS FINEST: INGRAINED 'N WOOD

— MELISSA FOURNIER

*By Anna Martucci
anna@mainstreetmag.com*

Growing up in Stockport, NY, as the second child of four girls, Melissa Fournier spent most of her time outdoors with her sisters riding bikes, swimming, and exploring the woods around their home. Her favorite memories are the summers she spent with her aunts, uncles, and cousins vacationing in an RV and traveling from campground to campground. They swam, cooked hot dogs and hamburgers over campfires, boated on the lakes, and traveled around New York State.

Crafting is a family affair

Melissa is a self-described “crafty” person as it was something that was always a part of her life growing up. Taught from a young age by her father who “is very smart and can do anything on his own,” her motto has always been, “If I can do it myself, I’ll do it myself.” Additionally, her grandfather owned and operated a number of ceramic businesses while her grandmother knitted and crafted in a variety of mediums. Melissa learned scrapbooking from her aunt, who she continues to craft with to this day.

Once a month Melissa, along with her aunts, cousins, mom, and sisters, get together and have a family craft

day. Melissa and her aunt brainstorm what the craft will be, and then her aunt gathers the supplies. They have made chunky hand-knitted blankets, “make yourself at home” door hangers embellished with greenery, scarecrows made out of wine bottles, painted pinecone floral bouquets, and picture frames with inspiring quotes vinyled to the glass. “It’s a lot of sharing, it’s a day away from the kids, we get to bond, and it’s always a good time.”

Making a go of it

After Melissa and her husband Mike had their second child, she decided she wanted to find something that would keep her occupied during her downtime that would also make some extra money for her family. Since she always enjoyed crafting, she thought it would be the perfect job for her to do from home.

Melissa started by purchasing a “Cricut,” an electronic cutting machine that cuts designs from materials like paper, vinyl, card stock, and iron-on transfers. Then her husband bought her a CO2 laser for Mother’s Day. A CO2 laser is a cutting tool that uses a focused laser to precisely cut a wide range of flat materials such as paper, wood, acrylic, and leather. For the most part, the designs work on any materials you choose. Melissa uploads the design to a computer program called Lightburn, connects it



Melissa Fournier is the woman behind all of the creations at Ingrained 'N Wood. A small sampling of her creations are depicted here as well.

to the laser, and then cuts the design.

Once Melissa had the machines, tools, and supplies she needed, she and her husband began renovating their backyard shed into a craft studio. "I started out in just a corner of the shed, then once my husband cleared the rest of the space out, I put up shelving, we did the floors, and now we are working on the walls." She had everything she needed, but she had to teach herself how to use it all. "I learned everything on my own, there was a lot of trial and error, a lot of research, and a lot of tears."

And then there was Etsy

Melissa came up with the name "Ingrained 'N Wood" because "crafting is ingrained in me and I like working with wood." She started her business in May 2020, and at the beginning was pretty much just doing it for fun.

Then Melissa figured she would start up an Etsy page, post a few random gift items and see how they did. She also began to use a Facebook website auction page, which is essentially an auction page for moms who work at home. "It's got a little bit of everything, all homemade, I could purchase things there and decided to sell there as well because it generated traffic to my Etsy site. I also use it to gauge what people like and don't like. If I post something and it doesn't get a lot of bids, I won't post it again."

Going to the next level

Melissa's store really began to take off in the winter with "baby's first" Christmas ornaments, sippy cups with engraved baby names, and buffalo plaid initial ornaments. The business has continued to grow from there. And, now that her second child is in school and she has more time, she is ready to take the store to the next level. "If I could grow the shop more, I'd like to add larger items such as personalized signs, wedding signs, and wooden home decorations."

While planning ahead to the upcoming holiday season, Melissa created some new and exciting holiday gifts that include family tree signs, ornaments, personalized recipe boards, sippy cups, and earrings. With custom-made and individualized items like this, the holidays just became a lot more personal and special.

•

Melissa has included a special 10% off on all items for the month of December. Simply use the code "MAINSTREETMAG" at checkout to get the discount. You can learn more about the items Melissa has available at [etsy.com/shop/ingrainednwood](https://www.etsy.com/shop/ingrainednwood). You can also reach her via email at ingrainednwood@gmail.com.





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Kristie Watson is a licensed massage therapist with a wealth of knowledge and experience to provide a safe and supportive space for people to relax and de-stress. Kristie is coming up on ten years in the massage therapy field. She said that it's "very satisfying seeing clients leave their sessions less stressed and pain free. Knowing I can make a difference for them is rewarding." Outside of work, Kristie spends most of her time with her family. She has a four-year-old daughter, a one-year-old son, and a wonderful husband who "are the world" to her. She's lived in Millerton for eight years now and said that "with a mix of city and country living, I can enjoy the convenience of a town with the necessary amenities, while also having easy access to the natural beauty of the surrounding countryside." Kristie wanted to add, "massage therapy is a great option to consider. It's a powerful tool that can help you live a healthier and happier life by improving your physical and mental health."



Ariel Yotive (L) and Erika DaSilva (R) are the women behind Ten Mile Table and its incredible bakery counter, Vitsky Bakery. Located in Wassauc, NY, Erika officially opened Ten Mile Table earlier this year and they've already amassed quite the loyal following. "We try to carry ingredients that are hard to find and that offer something for everybody," she said. Aside from the incredible pantry shelves, the other undeniable star of the show is the one-woman-show known as Vitsky Bakery. Ariel Yotive is behind the bakery and on days that they're open, you can find her in the kitchen bright and early at three in the morning, baking all of that day's goods fresh. While Ten Mile Table and Vitsky Bakery are open until 3pm, you'd better get there early to secure your baked goods, as Vitsky is typically sold out around noon on any given day. "I've been wanting to have a bakery since I was five years old," Ariel said. "And now here we are."



Some of you might recognize **Quentin Kindred** as the owner of Kindred Landscape Group, which will be celebrating its ten-year anniversary in 2024. Happy birthday! Others might know Quentin from his post serving in the Sharon Fire Department as a lieutenant. His wife, Michaela, and their kids, Kinsley (age six) and Everett (age eight), know him primarily as a husband and dad. Between his landscaping business, volunteering with the fire department, and his family, Quentin keeps pretty busy. He originally hails from California, "but I've been in the Sharon, CT, area since I was about four. I love that we get all four seasons here," he shared. "My favorite thing about this area are the mountain views. They are both beautiful and grounding." When asked what he does outside of work, Quentin said that he and his family have a lot of fun together, "we especially love to go boating and camping."



Kelsey Reed is the production manager at Gilded Moon Framing in Millerton, NY. She has been working in custom framing for over six years and learned this skill while living in Okinawa, Japan. "I fell in love with the process and creativity. I enjoy seeing the beautiful works of art that come through the shop," she said. Outside of work, Kelsey enjoys taking care of her many indoor plants, going to concerts, reading, and exploring on scenic adventures with her husband and their dog. She is originally from Oneida, NY, but now resides in Hyde Park. "I enjoy the beauty in nature and all the Hudson Valley has to offer! I also look forward to meeting new people from the area. See you around town!"



Andy Anderson spent ten years serving in the Marines. He is currently a teaching assistant at Seymour Smith Intermediate Learning Center in Pine Plains, NY. He coaches a long roster of sports for both the Pine Plains Central School District and for the Pine Plains Recreation Department, including football, flag football, baseball, wrestling, track and field, and basketball. Originally from Delhi, NY, he now lives in Milan, NY. His work with young children is one of the things he values most, "I like to say that I have 240 kids in my life," he laughed. "I want them to know that they can do everything, but that they're going to have discipline while doing it. They have to speak confidently, hold their chest out, and ask questions. I want them to know that I'm always going to have their back." Outside of work, Andy enjoys spending time with his family.



Dorrie Carolan is the founder and executive director of the non-profit organization, CT Parent Connection. Since 1993, she's been working with families whose loved ones were abusing drugs. In 2003, CT Parent Connection officially became a non-profit organization. "That's when we really branched out in the community," Dorrie said. Outside of work, Dorrie is a ballroom dancer and very recently started line dancing. She has three children and five grandchildren, three of whom live locally. "I love spending time with them!" She's lived in Newtown, CT, for 30 years and sold her home following her husband's passing. "I lived on Candlewood Lake for several years, and then moved to Middlebury." When asked if there was anything else she'd like to add, Dorrie said: "With the world being in such a state of turmoil, it's so important that we share kindness with one another."



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JACLYN RYAN OF HITHER LANE

A holiday pop-up shop in North Canaan

By Christine Bates
info@mainstreetmag.com

Main Street discovered Hither Lane at a party in Lakeville, CT, not on Instagram or while searching for cocktail glasses on the Internet. This is the story of an international fashion professional who worked for luxury brands like Saint Laurent, only to leave New York City behind to start her own business in the country.

What is Hither Lane?

Hither Lane is a lifestyle e-commerce brand with ethically sourced and curated products for kitchen and dining, including glassware, bar ware, serving pieces, tools for cooks, and delicious specialty pantry items. We also release monthly recipes that are gourmet yet easy to prepare at home. You can search the site knowing that everything has been vetted for sustainability and consumer safety and browse in a number of ways – of course by product category, but also by the social impact most important to you (made in the US, woman made, eco-friendly, etc.) or even by the “vibe” of your own home.

Our vibes include: Baroque Cottage, Coastal Calm, Jungled Pine, and Sunset Echo, each with their own distinct style. Hither Lane's products are luxurious, not commodities that you can buy in any

big-box store. However, in price point, we aim to stay in the accessible middle range, offering luxurious products that work for most budgets.

Why did you select the name Hither Lane?

The name is aspirational for me and a little mysterious. I grew up as a part of the year-round, blue-collar community of East Hampton on Long Island. My family wasn't of means, but often my mother and I would take walks on Hither Lane, one of the most opulent streets in the Hamptons. I would daydream about what could be found inside these beautiful homes. Once I grew up and started decorating my own home, I realized what a market gap there is between common but poorly made home wares and those that are unrealistically expensive for most people. Unfortunately there was an even bigger gap when it came to ethically produced home wares. Everyone can feel like they live on Hither Lane. It starts with the little touches that bring joy to the day-to-day.

How did you launch an e-commerce site?

That was the most intimidating part for me as someone who isn't super tech-savvy. My experience has been in luxury sales training, and I studied art history at Pratt. But one of my best friends from childhood had always encouraged me to start my own business. He's a skilled programmer and taught himself to code, so together we were able to launch Hither Lane online. His help with the technical aspects allowed me to focus on the creative parts of the business and build a cohesive brand. I've even taught myself photography and now do all the product shots myself.



Hither Lane is growing organically, and we attract clients mostly through Instagram, as well as partnering and collaborating with other small businesses. Our customers come back to the site again and again to buy. Our retention rate is extraordinary – our biggest point of pride: people love the products and are loyal to the brand.

Is there a product you're really proud of?

I cook a lot and do a lot of recipe development, so I had an idea for years to make a scented candle specifically designed to work with kitchen odors – one that would detoxify the air but smell natural and not perfume-y. Our kitchen candle is the first product we designed ourselves after investigating small candle makers all over the country. We've started with three scents: orange chili pepper, cinnamon bark, and tomato leaf.



Top: Jaclyn Ryan in the kitchen of her historic home. Above: Premium cotton hand towels are a practical luxury. Left: The Clara Nick & Nora glass is one of Hither Lane's most popular products. It's sustainably made in Italy but can go in the dishwasher.



Continued on next page ...

They work by complementing, not just covering up smells. We tested them on some of the worst lingering kitchen odors, like garlic, fry oil, and seared salmon to make sure they really work. After a lot of trial and error, we introduced them, and they flew off the shelf. They're hand-made in the United States, natural, non-toxic, and part of our effort to support local economies and small businesses.

Where is your business located?

Hither Lane currently operates out of a historic building in Ancram, NY. My husband and I purchased it in 2020. The idea was that it would be a refuge from COVID and an occasional country house. We quickly decided that we relished a quiet, simpler life and didn't want to go back to city living. Even though I traveled to exciting places all over the world in my career, I didn't want to live out of a suitcase anymore. I knew that I wanted to start my own business and spend

more time at home, so it made sense to focus my branding efforts on those cherished moments at home, particularly in the kitchen.

What is the most difficult aspect of your business?

Surprisingly finding makers and vendors we can work with that can supply us with sustainably made, beautiful, useful, and fairly priced products is much harder than it may seem. Product safety and the environment are also a big concern. You are eating off of plates and drinking out of glasses that could impact your health. Our crystal is lead-free and carbon neutral, our table linens are made of organic cotton with natural dyes, and our dinnerware is free of heavy metals like cadmium and mercury. The US is very far behind in banning dangerous substances, so I invest a lot of time in tracking down the origin, manufacturing, and materials of the products we sell.

Why did you decide to do a pop-up store?

Before my corporate career, I'd been working in some aspect of retail since I was 14, and I really miss the face-to-face time with customers. We rented the front space of the Colonial Theater in North Canaan through the end of December and will be there every day talking to people as they engage with our products. We are passionate about cooking, eating, drinking, and cocktail making so the collection is rich with kitchen, barware, and specialty foods.

The pop-up will allow me to test products that we don't carry online, such as dried flower bouquets that aren't suitable for shipping. It's more difficult to learn from exclusively online sales, whereas in store, I'll be able to get more qualitative feedback on the collection. The best part about owning a small business is the freedom to adjust your offering according to such feedback and how you see people responding to different items. Depending



on our success in North Canaan, we'll explore the option of a more permanent brick-and-mortar store.

What products are your particular favorites?

I love our daisy cocktail coupes that come in sets of six. Each glass is a different color so guests don't get their drinks mixed up. The colors are muted jewel tones, which add a touch of elegant whimsy to the scene. I also love everyday useful items like our French oak crumb set to tidy up your table or the sleek, covered Irish butter dish that fits the shape of butter found at many of our great local farms. Our eco-crystal glasses are a favorite, as well, made in Italy with zero carbon emissions — all the glamour of crystal without the spooky chemicals! •

To learn more about Hither Lane and all of their offerings, visit them online at shophitherlane.com.

Above: Hither Lane's product offering includes outdoor dining pieces like these eco-friendly acrylic wine glasses, which float if you're drinking in the pool.

Left, top: A hand-painted rabbit pitcher sourced through an artisan collective. Left, bottom: Hither Lane's versatile baroque wine glass matches local historic house styles.



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Almond crusted French toast



By Olivia Valentine with
Caroline Markonic
info@mainstreetmag.com

'Tis the season for giving, so Caroline and I are giving you a breakfast recipe that will surely make everyone happy this month ... as long as they like almonds. And French toast.

I first had something like this while at one of my favorite breakfast joints on Martha's Vineyard. I knew that I wanted to share it with Caroline and the fam when I got home. Caroline is as much of a breakfast fan as I am. This version isn't an exact replica of the one I fell in love with, but it's pretty darn close!

We strongly suggest you use brioche, but if you can't find it, challah will do. And as an FYI, we only spread the almond paste on one side of the bread. If it were on both sides, it would likely be too sweet; which is a lot coming from two people who both have a sweet tooth.

Ingredients

8 1" thick slices brioche (day old works best)
1 cup sliced almonds
Maple syrup
Fresh fruit (optional)
Confectioner sugar

Custard

3 eggs
1 1/2 cups milk
1/4 tsp almond extract
1 tsp vanilla
1/2 tsp cinnamon
Pinch of nutmeg
Pinch of salt

Almond paste spread

1 7oz pkg almond paste
1 large egg
2 tbs butter

Instructions

Place sliced almonds on a plate or shallow dish and set aside.

Mix all the custard ingredients into another shallow dish until thoroughly combined (we normally use a square 8x8 baking dish.) Set aside.

Combine almond paste, egg, and butter in a mixer or food processor and mix until you have a spreadable paste.

Preheat a non-stick or cast iron skillet over medium heat.

Spread one side of the bread with the almond paste and then dip both sides into the French toast mixture, letting the excess drip off. Press each

side of the bread into the sliced almonds so both sides are evenly covered with almonds.

Generously butter your pan, and cook each side of the toast for three to four minutes or until golden brown. The almonds should be nice and toasted but not burnt. Adjust the heat if necessary.

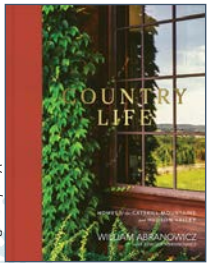
Dust with confectioners sugar, add some fresh fruit, and serve with warm, pure maple syrup!

Happy Holidays! ●

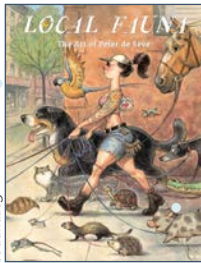
Olivia and Caroline are enthusiastic foodies and bakers who are constantly in the kitchen, as well as explorers who create their own adventures in our area – and did we mention they are mother and daughter? Follow Olivia on Instagram to see her many creations at @oliviauwvalentine.

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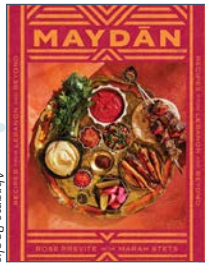
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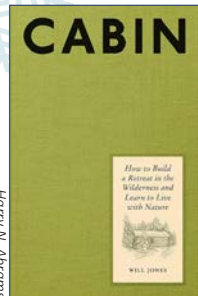
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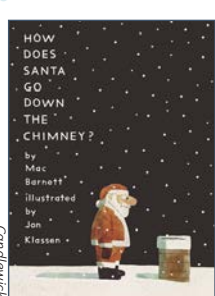
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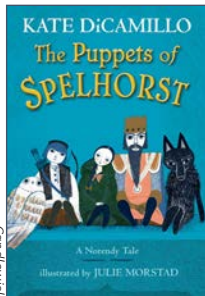
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The Gift of Land

REBECCA THORNTON, PRESIDENT
OF DUTCHESS LAND CONSERVANCY

By Christine Bates
info@mainstreetmag.com

“We are so lucky to live here in Dutchess County – with its incredible tapestry of open meadows, wooded hillsides, streams meandering through hidden valleys, orchards, and cornfields. It is a tapestry rich in natural resources and stunning scenic vistas. The work the DLC does helps to provide us all with clean water, local farm produce, picturesque landscapes, and places where we can leave the stress of daily life behind. We are rewarded with the knowledge that we are protecting and stewarding this land for generations to come.” This quote from Rebecca Seaman, past chair and board member of the Dutchess Land Conservancy, reminded me at this holiday time of the gift that all land conservancies and trusts bestow on our communities. *Main Street* interviewed Rebecca “Becky” Thornton, president and CEO of the DLC, who has guided it for the last 30 years, during a break in her busy schedule.

How much land has the DLC protected?

The DLC now protects over 20,500 acres of farmland, 20,730 acres of forests, and 5,000 acres of water – over 46,000 acres in all, largely through conservation easements. The land is primarily in Dutchess County, especially in the more rural northern part. But in addition to protecting land, the DLC also has an active education and research program and community involvement efforts.

Does the DLC own these properties?

We typically don’t own properties but work with landowners to place conservation easements that limit development on their land and ensure that the landowner’s goals for the property will remain intact for the future. The landowner’s reasons for placing an easement are balanced with DLC’s conservation goals and include preserving a scenic view or protecting open fields, ponds, streams,

forests, and wildlife habitats. We want to protect the land that hosts the resources necessary for us to live and contributes to rural character of our communities.

After establishing a stewardship plan, the DLC monitors the properties to make certain that they remain in compliance with the easement. Every year we fly over these properties to assure that no buildings have suddenly appeared or forests have been cut down. Right now we are guardians for 436 separate parcels.

Is a tax deduction the primary motivation for property owners to create conservation easements?

While it is true that there are federal benefits in the form of income tax deductions that may be taken over 16 years, as well as a relatively small state income tax credit, in my experience the overwhelming reason to place an easement on a property is the owner’s love of the land and wish never to see it altered significantly.

How does the DLC help family farms? How does it protect our water resources?

By purchasing development rights to agricultural land, the DLC provides cash (raised through grant sources) that helps protect the future of farms that have been in families for generations. An example is Locust Grove Farm in Salt Point, which has been in the Atkins family since 1832. With help from the DLC, along with Scenic Hudson, the NYS Department of Agriculture and Markets, and Dutchess County, development rights were purchased from the Atkins to protect the farmland, which in turn also secured a major viewshed.

The purchase of development rights on the Jordan Lane Farm in Pine Plains protected farmland as well as 40 acres of wetlands adjacent to the town’s wellhead protection zone, completing a contiguous block of 5,000 acres of protected farmland.



This project is an example of DLC providing the planning and protection expertise with funding by New York State DEC’s water quality improvement program and the assistance of Dutchess County.

Farm landowners often use the money paid for their development rights to improve farm infrastructure, purchase much needed equipment, buy neighboring land, or to transition the farm to the next generation. Keeping farmers on the land is important in a county where farming is still one of the primary industries.

Where does the money come from to support the activities of the DLC?

DLC activities are paid for by generous private contributions, our annual fundraisers, and some private foundation grants. Federal, state, and county grants are provided for specific special projects. The DLC tries to be very transparent and our financial statements and annual reports are easily accessible on our website.

Does the DLC hold land for public access?

Several years ago, the organization made the conscious strategic decision to focus on protecting resources



Top: The Dutchess Land Conservancy owns 1,258-acres of land, donated by Gayle and the late Jesse Bontecou, which is protected by a conservation easement. Photo by Kathy Landman, courtesy of the Dutchess Land Conservancy. Above: Rebecca “Becky” Thornton has been the very public face and head of the Dutchess Land Conservancy since 1996. Photo by Douglas Ohlandt, courtesy of Dutchess Land Conservancy.

Continued on next page ...



Above: The Cookingfarm in Red Hook was conserved while still allowing development for affordable housing. Below: The cave of Dover Stone Church and surrounding land was protected with the help of the Dutchess Land Conservancy. Photos by DLC staff, courtesy of the Dutchess Land Conservancy.

through conservation easements rather than developing land for public recreation as many land trusts do. Dutchess County is already blessed with substantial state, county, and public parks, so we decided to focus our efforts on protecting farmland, water, forests, and views. The DLC does have a program to work with towns that want to acquire land for passive public recreation but don't have the expertise to do so. An example of this is the Dover Stone Church Preserve in Dover Plains, which the DLC partnered with the town, the county, and the Friends of Dover Stone Church to acquire and protect. While this continues to be the DLC's strategy, most recently, the DLC accepted the generous gift of over 1,258-acres of land from Gayle and the late Jesse Bontecou which was simultaneously protected by a conservation easement held by Scenic Hudson. As a one and only property of its kind, we plan to own and manage the land as a wildlife conservation preserve.

What is the DLC's position on affordable housing?

The DLC understands that there is a need for affordable places for people to live and work in Dutchess County. We support well-planned communities that are sustainable, and we support density in villages and cities, which takes the pressure off the more rural landscape. We just completed a project in partnership with Red Hook and Scenic Hudson to

provide land for affordable housing, a future community solar field, public trails, and a buffer for the municipal water source, all while conserving the majority of the farm. A working farm was protected as the scenic gateway between the town and village with affordable housing located at the edge of the village.

Does the DLC accept gifts of land?

The DLC accepts gifts of land in fee, but as noted above, as a practice, we do not hold the land for public access. Instead we make sure that the landowner agrees in advance, and we resell the property with a DLC conservation easement, ensuring that the land is forever protected. Sales of donated properties bring in much-needed revenue to support our conservation and long-term stewardship efforts.

What is the process for placing an easement on a property? How long does it take?

The DLC works with landowners on a plan for their property that protects the most important resources while allowing for limited building to occur in pre-designated locations. After agreeing on the future goals for the property, an easement is drafted that is reviewed by the landowners, their advisors, and the DLC. Once everyone is in agreement, the easement is approved by the DLC's Board. If there is a mortgage, the lender needs to subordinate its interest. If the landowner is seeking an income tax deduction for the gift, the DLC helps with a list of qualified appraisers. The DLC prepares a baseline documentation report on the current conditions

of the property that is then reviewed and signed by the landowner and the DLC. A closing occurs and the easement is filed at the County Clerk's office and forever runs with the land no matter who owns it. It can take a couple to several months to complete an easement if clear goals and title are established. We always let the owner know that active stewardship by the DLC is part of the ongoing process to protect the land.

How do you monitor the land? Are easements ever found in violation of the agreement?

In order to ensure good landowner relationships, we always contact landowners in advance. Every year we fly over each protected property in a small plane and then every couple of years we make certain to visit the property on the ground in person. There are lots of minor technical violations of easements that are easily resolvable and very few big ones. If someone builds a structure in a field where they are not supposed to, worst case scenario is we go to litigation, but we try to resolve issues without having to go to court.

Where are the bulk of the DLC's easements?

The DLC first started working in northeastern Dutchess County, because like most grass-roots organizations, we were founded on a threat by a proposed large development on farmland that would impact the rural character of the community. So we have a lot of acreage protected in the Towns of Washington, where our office is, Stanford, North East, Amenia, and Pine Plains, as well as other towns. We also protect some land in Columbia County, particularly in Ancram. When we began our work

early in the 80s and 90s, communities in the southern part of the county were very interested in development versus conservation, but that is now changing.

How did you become involved with conservation?

My initial educational background was in landscape architecture; however, I was influenced early on by Ian McHarg, a Scottish landscape architect, author of *Design with Nature*, whose goal is to promote ecological design that takes into account pre-existing ecology and natural systems. After graduating I worked in a landscape firm for several years, then for a watershed protection organization before starting a company with a colleague that focused on conservation planning and preserving land. With that background I joined the DLC as a land projects manager in 1989, very early in the life of the organization which was founded in 1985. In 1996, when I became the head of the DLC, there were 6,800 acres under conservation and now we're over 46,000 acres. I am blessed to work in a community that is so supportive and cares about the land, with a wonderful board of directors who walk the walk and talk the talk, and a very dedicated and hardworking staff. I can feel good about what I do every day. It's very rewarding work when you can look back and see not changes, but how the landscape has remained virtually the same over time. The resources we so need to maintain our lives, are forever protected. ●

Christine Bates is a registered real-estate agent in New York and Connecticut with William Pitt Sotheby's. She has written about real estate and business since Main Street Magazine's first issue in 2013.



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Santa Claus

POST OFFICE

We Wish You a Merry Christmas

Ho Ho Ho! Greetings from the North Pole!

We're heading into the busy season up here at the North Pole. I've been making my list and checking it twice, and you'd better believe that I've found out who's been naughty and who's been nice! My workshop has been buzzing with the elves working hard at making toys, taking care of the reindeer, baking cookies, and helping me prepare my sleigh. The reindeer are just as excited, if not more so. Dasher, Dancer, Prancer, Vixen, Comet, Cupid, Donner, Blitzen - and of course, we can't forget Rudolph - have been eagerly awaiting the night that they get to gear up to fly my sleigh across the globe. Mrs. Claus told me that the reindeer have taken up extra cardio training to ensure that they'll be faster this year than ever before!

I know many of you are looking forward to opening the presents I will leave under the tree for you, but I want to remind you that many of life's most precious gifts don't come wrapped in red and green paper and topped with a sparkly bow. The most important gifts are ones that you give and receive on a daily basis (and they also help land you on the nice list!). We're talking about the gifts of good behavior, thoughtful actions, and words of kindness!

Good behavior starts with treating others the way you would like to be treated. This gift is particularly important in social settings where potential conflict and disagreements can arise, such as work and school. Rather than reacting with anger, take the opportunity to listen and learn. When we treat others with compassion and empathy, we end up feeling better too. Thoughtful actions can take many different forms. You can share something special with those you love, offer to help someone in their time of need, or stick up for someone who is being treated poorly. But thoughtful actions don't necessarily have to be big or grandiose. They can be as simple as opening the door for someone, sending someone a handwritten note, or offering to cook a friend's favorite meal.

Perhaps the most meaningful gift of all is kindness. Being kind or doing a good deed is never expected and always appreciated. We can be kind in many ways, no matter how young or old we are. Smile at a stranger, compliment someone in a meaningful way, or offer to shovel your neighbor's driveway. No good deed goes unnoticed, and more often than not, making other people feel good makes us feel good too.

Before you snuggle up in bed on Christmas Eve, please remember to leave out some snacks for my reindeer and me - we get hungry flying all over the globe! And while you're opening up your gifts on Christmas morning, remember that many of our most precious gifts are things that you can't wrapped and put under the tree. I already know if you've been bad or good, so continue to be good for goodness sake!



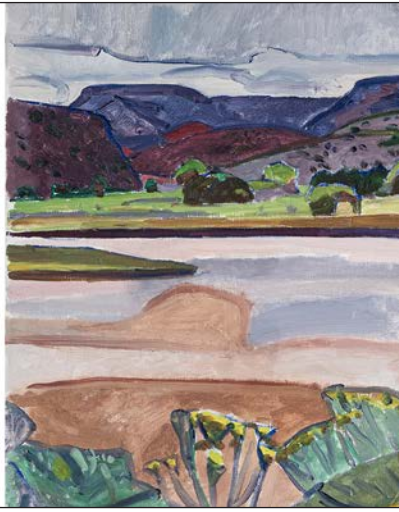
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A Holiday Journey

Santa waves to passengers aboard the Catskill Mountain Railroad Polar Express. Photo: Catskill Mountain Railroad

By Regina Molaro
info@mainstreetmag.com

All aboard! It's that time of year when the Catskill Mountain Railroad Polar Express takes a series of fun and festive journeys to the North Pole from right here in the Hudson Valley. Passengers of all ages are welcome to hop on board for this annual adventure. The holiday event, which will run from November 17 through December 29, departs from Westbrook Lane Station at 55 Kingston Plaza Road in Kingston.

Once passengers are on board, scenes from *The Polar Express* magically come to fruition. Passengers are immersed in partial recreations inspired directly from the film, which debuted in 2004.

From movie to railroad

The Polar Express, starring Tom Hanks, is a Warner Bros. production based on the children's fantasy picture book written and illustrated by Chris Van Allsburg in 1985. The award-winning book sparked the creation of the Catskill Mountain Railroad Polar Express.

"A company by the name of Rail Events secured the rights to the Warner Bros. copyright and franchised it to railroads across America," said Harry Jameson, chairman/marketing director of Catskill Mountain Railroad. Its mission was to recreate some of the iconic scenes from the movie. Thanks to this partnership, a wonderful Christmas story has become a holiday tradition for many.

The Catskill Mountain Railroad began offering this holiday-themed train ride event in 2014. Since then, except for a period during the pandemic, the journey has consistently been a part of Catskill Mountain Railroad's annual schedule.

Take a ride

Catskill Mountain Railroad's round-trip Polar Express journey lasts about an hour and 15 minutes. Just like the characters in the book, guests are welcome to don pajamas on the train. Before the Catskill Mountain Railroad Polar Express departs, a conductor personally greets each passenger and punches their "golden tickets." While on the journey, guests warm up with yummy hot chocolate served by synchronized dancing chefs and waiters.

An engaging live musical performance on board creates a fun atmosphere filled with holiday spirit. A cast of characters leads the crowd in holiday caroling and entertainment. The scenes that unfold on the train are set to the soundtrack from *The Polar Express*. While on board, guests also tune in as *The Polar Express* is read aloud to them.

Once the train arrives at The North Pole, passengers are greeted by Santa Claus and his team of elves. Just like in the book, each guest is granted the first gift of Christmas – a shiny silver sleigh bell. Guests can take these keepsakes home to commemorate the experience. They'll also have a host of wonderful memories made with friends, family, and others who partake on this unforgettable adventure.

The storyline

For those unfamiliar with the storyline, *The Polar Express* is set partially in Grand Rapids, MI, which was once home to Van Allsburg. The tale was inspired, in part, by his early memories. In the story, a young boy who is skeptical about the existence of Santa Claus is rattled by the booming sound of a passenger train known as the Polar Express. On Christmas Eve, it arrives outside his family's home. To his astonishment, he finds it waiting for him. After racing downstairs, he meets the train's conductor. He then

reluctantly boards the train, which is bound for the North Pole.

While aboard, he meets a spirited girl and other children. A platoon of dancing waiters serves them hot chocolate. The boy soon notices that the girl's ticket wasn't validated, and he tries to return it to her. The wind blows it out into the wilderness, but it finds its way back on the train.

After the girl discovers that her ticket is missing, the conductor leaves with her. Assuming that she will be thrown off the train, the boy locates the ticket and traverses the rooftops to find her. The train later arrives at the North Pole. The conductor announces that one of the children will be selected to receive the first gift of Christmas from Santa.

After Santa's sack is loaded onto the sleigh, a bell from a reindeer's reins flies loose. The boy initially cannot hear it ring until he finds it within himself to believe. He returns the shiny bell to Santa, who chooses him to receive the first gift of Christmas. Santa agrees to let the boy keep the silver bell. As the children board the train to return home, the boy discovers that he lost the bell through a hole in his pocket. The train brings him back home, and he goes to sleep.

Continued on next page ...

When he awakens on Christmas morning, he discovers a gift – the lost bell with a note from Santa. He and his sister Sarah joyfully ring the bell, but their parents do not hear its chime because, as adults, they no longer believe in Santa Claus.

The boy reflects on how people eventually grow deaf to the chime of the bell as their belief fades away over the years. However, even after he grows to adulthood, the bell still rings for the boy, as it does “for all who truly believe.”

Behind the scenes

Just as any other train experiences unforeseen schedule changes and interruptions, Catskill Mountain Railroad Polar Express also had its schedule derailed during the COVID-19 pandemic. Luckily, it pivoted and continued to operate throughout that challenging time.

“In 2020 and 2021, we built a fleet of open-air flat cars with canopies and offered a special Christmas train ride that allowed us to stay in business while meeting the pandemic requirements. With that behind us, we brought back the iconic Polar Express in 2022,” said Jameson. Last year, the Ulster County event lured 28,000 customers back to its holiday season.

The experience remains true to the storyline. “As required by Rail Events under the Warner Bros. copyright, the event adheres strictly to the movie script,” said Jameson.

For the train enthusiast

Revelers aboard the Catskill Mountain Railroad Polar Express will enjoy traveling on Catskill Mountain Railroad No. 401, which is fully operational. Since 2008, it has transported people through the historic city of Kingston on seasonal train rides.

Some history: The 401 first arrived at Catskill Mountain Railroad in June 1988. That’s when the locomotive was purchased from the Green Mountain Railroad in Vermont. It was built in March 1950 by American Locomotive Company for the Illinois Terminal Railroad as “756” and was later renumbered “1056.”

It was then sold to Gulf, Mobile, and Ohio Railroad and became “1052” before folding into the Illinois Central Gulf in 1972 under the same number and paint. In July 1976, the train was acquired by Green Mountain Railroad; it entered service a few months later in December. No. 401 hauled freight and passengers in Vermont until it was sold to Catskill Mountain Railroad in 1988.

The train can accommodate up to 350 passengers and has five coaches. In 2007, the decision was made to repaint the locomotive, which still boasted the green paint that was initially applied in Vermont more than 20 years earlier. A version of New York Central’s famous “lightning strikes” was chosen, substituting the Catskill Mountain Railroad’s colors for New York City’s two-tone gray.

The Catskill Mountain Railroad currently owns five P72 coaches, which were all purchased by the Long Island Railroad in 1955 and 1956 from Pullman Company. They were originally equipped with steam heat but later converted to electric. In 1999, the LIRR retired these cars from service.



Above: A smiling conductor spreads some cheer. Below, top: Happy children pose with Santa aboard the train. Below, bottom: The 401 cruising down the tracks on its annual holiday adventure. Photos: Catskill Mountain Railroad

The fine print

In order to offer a pleasant, smooth, and efficient on-board experience, seating is assigned prior to event day. During the online ticket purchasing process, there is an opportunity to select seats. During checkout, be sure to review the seating charts carefully as selections cannot be changed. A limited number of emergency restrooms are available on board; however the train is not equipped with wheelchair accessible restrooms.

Catskill Mountain Railroad requests that passengers arrive 45 minutes prior to their departure times and check-in at the “Will Call” ticket office desk, which is in the Westbrook Station Ticket Office. Boarding starts 20 minutes before departure time.

While waiting for the boarding call, guests are encouraged to remain in their cars and tune in to 87.7 FM Polar Radio for announcements. All trains will depart as scheduled; no exceptions can be made.

Eager to accommodate

Limited wheelchair seating is available, and special seating can be reserved for families with members with sensory sensitivities. These seats offer softer audio and lighting levels. Please note that no food or beverages will be sold aboard the train. Since the Catskill Mountain Railroad Polar

Express is a family-friendly event, alcohol is not permitted on board.

Year-round events

The Catskill Mountain Railroad offers other fun programming throughout the year. The schedule includes scenic rides every autumn and an ice cream express train in the summer.

Those who ride the rails or attend themed events, support the Catskill Mountain Railroad – a for-profit organization dedicated to preserving the railroad corridor for all-season recreational use. Despite its for-profit status, it operates similarly to a non-profit organization in that it reinvests all operating surpluses back into the railroad. •

Off-peak tickets are \$44 for adults and \$34 for children. During peak time, tickets are \$53 for adults and \$43 for children. Visit catskillmountainrailroad.com/event/the-polar-express/ for the complete schedule and details about peak season and off-peak season tickets. Good news for Ulster County residents, they’re entitled to a \$9 discount off the regular price of each ticket.

For further information, email reservations@catskillmountainrailroad.com or call (845) 332-4854. The Westbrook Lane Station is in Kingston Plaza adjacent to Uptown Kingston’s Stockade District in Kingston. Plenty of free parking is available.





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Winter Solstice:

A long-celebrated annual milestone

Photo: istockphoto.com contributor Mailte74

Most of us in the Northeast know the winter solstice as the shortest day of the year. This is because the Earth's poles reach their maximum tilt away from the sun, which results in the shortest period of daylight and the longest night of the year. In the northern hemisphere, it takes place in December, and in the southern hemisphere, in June.

*By Abby Audenino
abby@mainstreetmag.com*

Others know the winter solstice as the first official day of winter, but for many cultures, the winter solstice is an important date in the annual cycle, frequently marked by festivals and celebrations. For us folks in the northern hemisphere, the winter solstice will occur on Thursday, December 21 at 10:27pm.

The date was celebrated in the cultures of ancient Rome, China, and England and is currently still celebrated by pagans and Buddhists, among many others from various cultures.

The history of the winter solstice
The History Channel estimates that humans likely observed the winter solstice as early as the Neolithic period – otherwise known as the last part of the Stone Age, beginning about 10,200 BC. Many

Neolithic monuments, including the Newgrange in Ireland and the Maeshowe in Scotland, are directly aligned with the sunrise on the winter solstice. Stonehenge in England is also oriented toward the winter solstice sunset. Many historians and archaeologists theorize that these structures once served as ritualistic monuments for the Stone Age people to “capture the sun on the year's shortest day.”

In many cultures, the winter solstice was recognized as the symbolic death and rebirth of the sun. For the ancient Romans and Greeks and others that used cyclic calendars, the solstice was viewed as the start of the new year.

Ancient solstice celebrations

One ancient solstice celebration includes Yule, which was celebrated by the Norse of Scandinavia from the winter solstice in December through January. The men would bring home logs, which later became known as Yule logs, and would set one end of the logs on fire. The people would then feast until the log burned out, which “could take as long as 12 days. The Norse believed that each spark from the fire represented a new piglet or calf that would be born during the coming year,” according to Britannica.

While folks may not feast for 12 days during the solstice anymore, the concept of a Yule log has made its way into modern culture and become synonymous with the holidays.

Wiccans are a group of modern pagans who typically identify as witches and draw inspiration from pre-Christian religions in Europe. They celebrate the winter solstice as the second sabbat of the Wheel of the Year, which is often marked by rituals that welcome the return of the sun. According to Britannica, “some mark the holiday with reenactments of the battle between the Holly King (representing darkness) and the Oak King (representing light) of Celtic legend.”

Another ancient solstice celebration took place in Peru and was known as “Inti Raymi.” The Inca Empire used their celebration to pay homage to the sun god, Inti. They would fast for three days prior to the solstice. On the day of the solstice, they would go to a ceremonial plaza and wait for sunrise. When the sun came up, the Inca would offer cups of chicha, a sacred beer made from fermented corn, and sacrifice animals, including llamas. Following the Spanish conquest of

Continued on next page ...



Stonehenge at sunset, Wiltshire, England. Photo: istockphoto.com contributor Andy-Roland

the Inca Empire, the Inti Raymi celebration was banned, but it was revived in the 20th century and continues to be celebrated in Peru (sans the animal sacrifices – they now use mock sacrifices instead).

Saturnalia was an ancient pagan Roman celebration that honored the god Saturn. Saturnalia is the source of many modern traditions that are now associated with Christmas, including wreaths and gift-giving. The celebration initially began as a single day but later expanded to be a weeklong festival.

Modern celebrations

St. Lucia's Day is a festival of lights celebrated annually in Scandinavia to honor one of the earliest Christian martyrs, St. Lucia. The celebration was originally incorporated with Norse solstice traditions after many converted to Christianity in the 10th century.

St. Lucia's Day incorporates earlier solstice traditions of lighting fires to drive away spirits with Christian traditions in honor of St. Lucia (St. Lucy in English) who is known as a symbol of light. Each year on St. Lucia's day, girls wear white dresses and wreaths of candles on their heads in honor of

the candles that Lucia wore on her head to light the way as she brought forbidden food to imprisoned Christians.

Dong Zhi is the Chinese celebration of the winter solstice and is most frequently celebrated by families getting together to feast and share positive wishes for the year to come. Dong Zhi means "winter arrives" in Chinese, and the celebration "welcomes the return of longer days and the corresponding increase in positive energy in the year to come." In southern China, the most traditional food is tang yuan, or glutinous rice balls, and in northern China, plain or meat-stuffed dumplings.

In Japan, people celebrate Toji, which is a traditional practice in which people light bonfires to encourage the sun's return, take warm baths scented with yuzu to ward off colds and foster good health, and eat kabocha squash, which is thought to bring luck.

Iranians celebrate Shab-e Yalda (which translates to "night of birth"), a traditional festival with traditions such as gathering together, making wishes, feasting on festive foods, and lighting fires to ward off darkness. "Some stay

awake all night to rejoice in the moment when the sun rises, banishing evil and announcing the arrival of good."

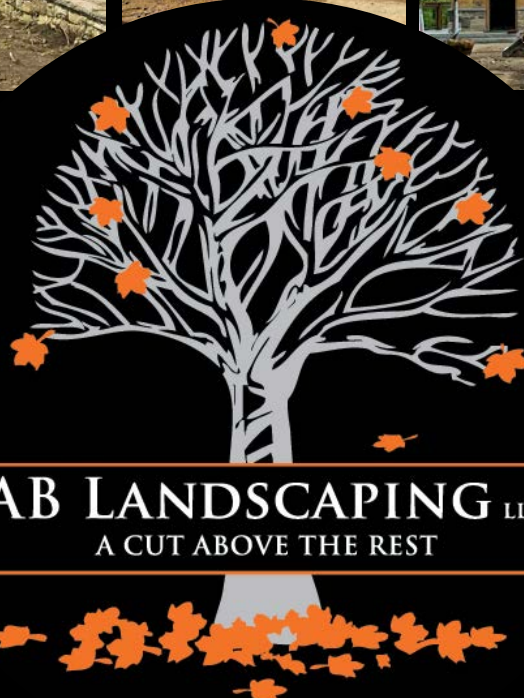
Native Americans have many traditions for the solstice as well. The Zuni tribe, native to New Mexico, celebrate with a ceremonial dance known as the Shalako. For the Zuni, the winter solstice represents the beginning of the year. Soyal is celebrated by the Hopi tribe in northern Arizona. Their annual ritual is similar to that of the Zuni in that an all-night ceremony occurs, including burning fires, dancing, and occasionally gift-giving. The Hopi also welcome kachinas, protective spirits from the mountains, at the time of the solstice and craft prayer sticks to use for blessings and rituals.

Your own solstice celebration

Whatever your cultural traditions are, celebrating the winter solstice has been around since the Stone Age and will continue to be celebrated long after we are gone. So burn a yule log, light a candle, or prepare a feast to mark the winter solstice and celebrate the shortest day of the year and the rebirth of the sun. •



A school group in Liljeholmen performs a traditional Santa Lucia celebration with song on the steps of school in Stockholm, Sweden. Photo: istockphoto.com contributor Alexander Farnsworth



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ALONG CAME ST. NICHOLAS

By Jesse DeGroodt
info@mainstreetmag.com

In 1823, a dismayed Clement Clarke Moore would learn that his poem, *A Visit from St. Nicholas*, nowadays popularly known as 'Twas the Night Before Christmas, had been published in the Troy (NY) *Sentinel*, albeit lacking attribution.

The poem has since been published in the neighborhood of 2,500 times and illustrated by such luminaries as Jessie Wilcox Smith, W.W. Denslow, and Grandma Moses.

Austere in bearing, Moore, the 1798 Columbia College (now University) valedictorian, who preferred to be viewed as a scholar, brought the now world-famous poem into being in 1822 at a holiday gathering inside his New York home. Following the 1811 imposition of the New York City street grid, of which Moore was no admirer, that property is now located at West 23rd Street and Ninth Avenue. In 1822, Moore was in his second year as a literature professor at the General Theological Seminary in New York. Historical aside: Moore's father, bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of New York, in 1804 administered holy communion to the mortally wounded Alexander Hamilton.

Happening near you

On Wednesday, December 6, at 5:30pm, Pamela McColl, author of *TWAS THE NIGHT: The Art and*

History of the Classic Christmas Poem, will be on hand for a book talk at the Roeliff Jansen Historical Society in Copake Falls.

A few days prior, on Sunday, December 3, the Rensselaer County Regional Chamber of Chamber, will intertwine its 41st annual holiday Victorian stroll in Troy with events celebrating the December 23, 1823, *Troy Sentinel* publication of Moore's work. At press time, the Victorian stroll/Twas schedule of events had yet to be completed – it will be available on the Chamber's website at rensco-chamber.com in the days preceding December 3.

Also on Sunday, December 3, the Roeliff Jansen Historical Society will hold its annual Winter Walk, complete with an appearance from Santa.

A happy coincidence

In one of life's delicious coincidences, Roeliff Jansen Historical Society President Lesley Doyel grew up in a Chelsea brownstone that had been built by Clement Clarke Moore. Her mom and dad, Rowena and John Doyel, purchased the house in 1965, and John, who designed lawn-ornament Santas for a time, began in earnest to accumulate antique and mechanical Santas from the four corners of the globe. At Christmas time, the Doyels would open their home to neighbors and friends.

For those among us who recall those idiosyncratic Ronco "as-seen-on-TV" commercials –think Miracle Broom and Duck Brush, to name a couple– that began working their way into our lives in the 1960s, that would be Lesley's father behind the invention and design of many of those products.

Several years preceding his 2012 death at the age of 92, Mr. Doyel's metamorphosis into Santa Claus was nearly complete, as a *New York Times* story observed: "That he has come to look like Santa, albeit a skinny one, is, at least in his case, aesthetically appropriate. For years he has been living,



Above: The Doyel family parlor decorated for Christmas. Below: A pop-up Santa book.

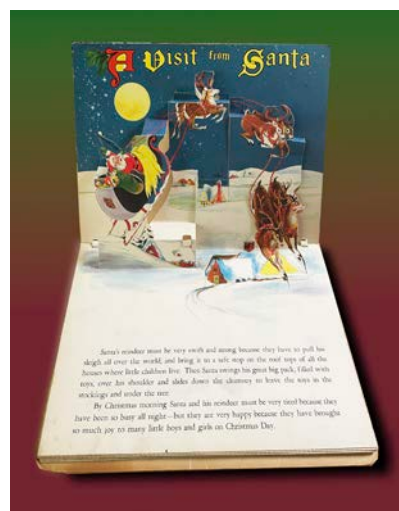
incongruously and year-round, amid a riot of mechanical Christmas kitsch – singing bears with red and white Santa caps, a flirty fir who shakes her thing, a Santa from the 1920s whose jingling bells have gone silent, and another from the '50s who flips the pages of the book he is holding."

"Over time," said Lesley, "this collection amassed. Then it became one of those things where people find out you have this collection and begin bringing you things from all over the world." Eventually, he possessed a number of editions of *'Twas the Night Before Christmas*, including one illustrated by Denslow and some antique versions. When the family moved to Washington Heights, they found themselves living adjacent to the cemetery where Moore was buried.

More writings, further grumblings

Clement Clarke Moore's writing might best be described as eclectic in scope. His first published work, in 1804, was, according to poemanalysis.com, "a pro-Federalist pamphlet that attacked the religion of Thomas Jefferson. He was the incumbent president

Continued on next page ...



at the time and a candidate for the 1804 election. In full, the work was titled "Observations upon Certain Passages in Mr. Jefferson's Notes on Virginia, which Appear to Have a Tendency to Subvert Religion, and Establish a False Philosophy."

Other Moore works included *A Compendious Lexicon of the Hebrew Language* (1809), a translation from the French of *A Complete Treatise on Merinos and Other Sheep* (1811), and the historical biography, *George Castriot, Surnamed Scanderbeg, King of Albania* (1850).

The life of *'Twas the Night Before Christmas* comes with no small degree of fuss and bother. It wasn't until 1844, when the work was published in a collection of his poetry, that Moore would claim "A Visit from St. Nicholas." Later in life, he would refer to "A Visit from St. Nicholas" as his "long-ago trifle," according to the New York Public Library.

Meanwhile, like moths flocking to a light, the poem's burgeoning popularity was attracting a fair number of others claiming authorship, the most notable of whom was Henry Livingston, Jr., who not only left an enduring footprint in the Hudson Valley, but whose family heartily contests authorship of the poem, although Livingston himself never did. Indeed, there exist several books and an entire website (henrylivingston.com) devoted to making the case – among a multitude of other proposed evidentiary items comes a claim that Livingston's *A Visit from St. Nicholas* was first published around 1800 in the *Knickerbocker Magazine*.

Will the true author please stand up?

In 2016, MacDonald Jackson, English professor emeritus at the University of Auckland in New Zealand, published his book *Who Wrote The Night Before Christmas? Analyzing the Clement Clarke Moore vs. Henry Livingston Question*, which claims authorship for Livingston.

According to CBC News, Seth Kaller, a recognized expert in the authentication of rare documents, who at one time owned an original manuscript of the poem said to be in Moore's handwriting, said "the matter was in 'Obama birth certificate territory.' Yes, there is a controversy. The controversy is why so many people are still questioning the authenticity of something indisputably proven to be true. There is literally no contemporary evidence that Livingston ever claimed to be or was the author. He didn't, and he wasn't."

Santa Claus is still smoking

Roughly a dozen years ago, along came publisher Pamela McColl, a resident of Vancouver, British Columbia, and a longtime tobacco-prevention activist. "What," she wondered, "could I publish that could bring attention to this issue? I went to the library and saw smoking leprechauns and smoking bunny rabbits, and I went, wait a minute, Santa Claus is still smoking. I scooped up all the editions I could find and saw that nobody had ever made him smoke free. So, I published an edition of the poem that was smoke free."

Then the fun really got underway.



Above: The Doyels' first Santa show. Below: A pair of vintage Santa books.

"It went nuts," said McColl. "Stephen Colbert did a spoof on me and called me a Nazi. Barbara Walters got hold of it and she went crazy. Kelly and Regis went crazy. It wound up on *NBC Nightly News* with Brian Williams reading it as a news story. People, including the American Library Association, were upset that I was censoring a poem. That is completely not true. It was all rather ridiculous but it gave me a platform."

In 2013, McColl was asked to participate in a "Livingston v. Moore: Who Really Wrote 'A Visit from Saint Nicholas?'" mock trial held in the Rensselaer County Courthouse in Troy, NY, complete with distinguished Capital Region attorneys, a judge, and a jury. With E. Stewart Jones representing Moore and Jack Casey standing up for Livingston, no end of courtroom shenanigans were afoot. At the end of the day, the six-person jury could not reach a decision, and a hung jury declared.

"The whole time I was working on this, I was always looking for more evidence. Literary sleuthing is really fun, but if you get too excited about it, it can distract you from everything else. I cautioned myself to not make my writing and my research about the sleuthing," she said.

McColl emerged from her personal scrutiny of the did-Moore-or-did-Moore-not-pen-the-famous-work controversy on the pro-Moore side. "I do think Clement Clarke Moore wrote it. His spirit is in the poem. The biggest piece of evidence, I guess, is that the oldest handwritten copy of the poem is on watermarked paper

from 1824 in the handwriting of Moore's godfather's daughter. All the Livingstons have is a family story that when he died, there was a copy in a drawer, and that that copy went to Wisconsin. Then the house burned down, and everything was destroyed, except miraculously the manuscripts of all his other works survived, but this poem didn't."

Who dunnit?

Was it Clement Clarke Moore or Henry Livingston, Jr.? As can often be the case, it depends on who catches your ear, and let's leave that there for the reader to adjudicate following his or her own investigation.

"The biggest thing about the poem is its longevity," said McColl. "It's 200 years old. It's still read the way it was written two centuries ago. It's also a benevolent, kind work, with no threat of punishment. No naughty or nice business – that came later."

*He sprung to his sleigh, to his team
gave a whistle,
And away they all flew, like the down
of a thistle:
But I heard him exclaim, ere he drove
out of sight—
Happy Christmas to all, and to all a
good night.*

'Twas the Night Before Christmas •



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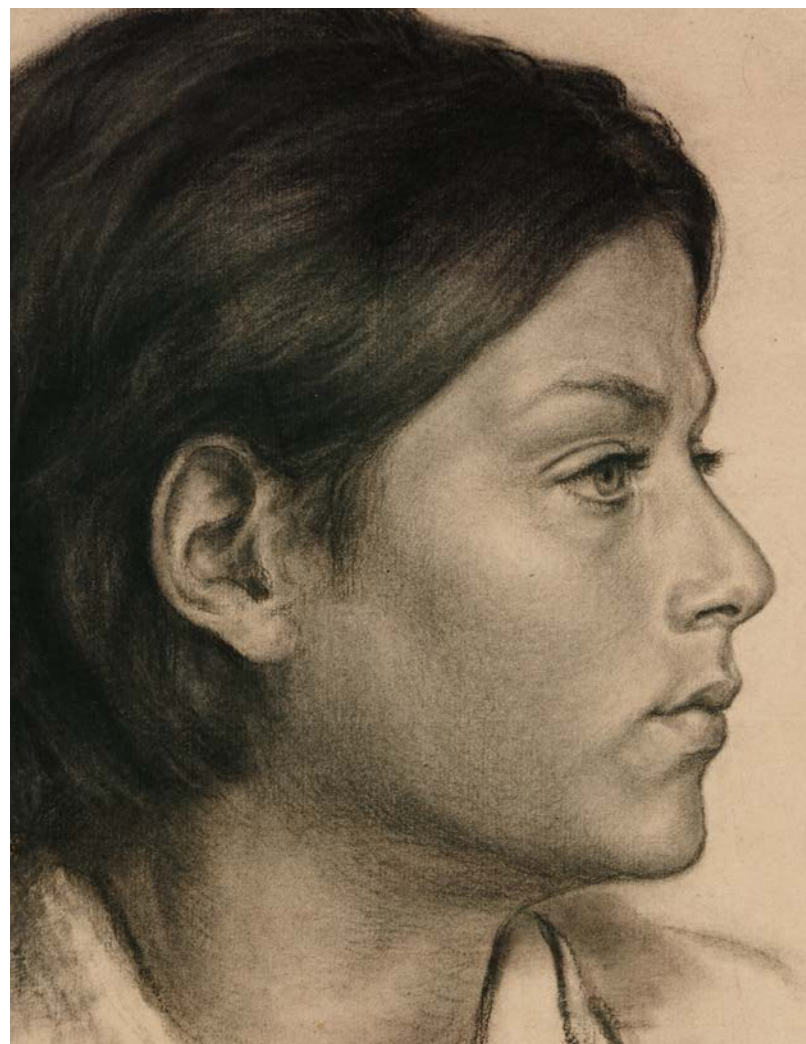
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JÓLABÓKAFLÓÐ

AN ICELANDIC HOLIDAY TRADITION GONE GLOBAL

By Thorunn Kristjansdottir
info@mainstreetmag.com

For those who don't know this about me, I hail from the small and isolated North Atlantic island of Iceland. Yes, yes, that country that's been in the news since November due to the thousands of earthquakes and impending volcano (at the time of this writing there hasn't been an eruption ... yet). But Iceland is known for way more than seismic activity; we're also well known for our bravery, gung-ho attitude, and Viking ways; gorgeous landscapes and (sometimes) harsh climate; being the home of Björk and some of the most beautiful women and strongest men in the world; and having had the first female president in the world ... to name just a very select few facts. But in recent years we've also become known for an almost 80-year-old tradition.

Jólabóka-what?

Jólabókaflóð, which literally translates to 'Christmas-book-flood,' is a tradition that began in Iceland during World War II. You see, Iceland had been under Danish rule until 1944 when, while Denmark was under Nazi occupation, Iceland declared its independence. Paper was one of the very few commodities that was not rationed in Iceland during the war. This simply helped fuel Icelanders' love of books because other types of presents were

or in short supply, and so most gave and received books as gifts, particularly during the holidays.

As jolabokaflo.org explains, "This increase in giving books as presents reinforced Iceland's culture as a nation of bookaholics – a study conducted by Bifröst University in 2013 found that half the country's population read at least eight books a year. Every year since 1944, the Icelandic book trade has published a catalogue – called Bókatiðindi ('Book Bulletin', in English) – that is sent to every household in the country in mid-November during the Reykjavik Book Fair. People use the catalogue to order books to give friends and family for Christmas. During the festive season, gifts are opened on December 24 and, by tradition, everyone reads the books they have been given straight away, often while drinking hot chocolate or alcohol-free Christmas ale called jólabland."

How Jólabókaflóð gained global notoriety

Jólabókaflóð has Christopher Norris to thank for, essentially, giving it global notoriety. In 2015, Norris (a senior executive-level media, publishing, and social entrepreneur and a pioneer of World Book Day in the UK) was looking into the subject of Iceland's book trade and book market and there learned about Jólabókaflóð.

Long-story-short: Norris "realized that the Icelandic tradition of Jólabókaflóð offered a fabulous opportunity to promote book buying and reading within the same initiative, so the seeds of Jólabókaflóð were planted." Norris then launched a London-based version of Jólabókaflóð in November of 2015.

A month later he met "with Hlynur Guðjónsson, the Consul General and Trade Commissioner at the Consulate General of Iceland in New York, to share the vision of spreading the custom and practice of Jólabókaflóð to the UK and beyond. Mr Guðjónsson gave Christopher's Jólabókaflóð plans his endorsement and facilitated contact with Icelandic organizations of potential mutual interest, including embassies and book trade bodies such as the Reykjavik UNESCO City of Literature and the Icelandic Literature Center, both players in the annual 'Christmas book flood'."

And the rest, as they say, is history. Through Norris' continued efforts and collaborations with various organizations and book-related articles and events, Jólabókaflóð has continued to spread across the globe.

Give the best gift: a book

Iceland is one of the most literate countries in the world, with a 99% literacy rate. A correlation between the two? Quite possibly!

As a people, we genuinely love to curl up with a good book and get lost in its world. And the Christmas holiday simply would not be complete without a new book. For anyone who's ever been in Iceland during the holidays or leading up to them, the book stores and book markets are crazy-busy! Publishers release new books in the weeks leading up to the holidays, and folks scramble to scoop up the latest and greatest novels in time for Christmas Eve (the day when we open our presents).

So perhaps this holiday season, you might consider an old Icelandic tradition and curl up with a lovely book on Christmas Eve while you wait for (the American) Santa to arrive with presents. (I say American Santa because in Iceland we have 13 Santa Clauses who "come down from the mountain" in the days leading up to Christmas Eve ... but that's a tradition to be told another day).

As for me, I know that I will certainly be honoring my country's tradition of Jólabókaflóð (hint hint to my family: get me books!), and perhaps I'll manage to finish reading my 200th book in 2023 on Christmas Eve! •

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COPIING WITH GRIEF

DURING THE HOLIDAYS

By Abby Audenino
abby@mainstreetmag.com

For many, the holidays are the happiest time of the year. Chock full of gift shopping, preparing meal after meal, and spending lots of time with family, the holidays can occasionally feel a bit stressful but are generally thought of as the most joyful time of year. For some, though, the holidays bring dread, anxiety, and even depression, particularly for those who are grieving the loss of a loved one.

Can the holiday season exacerbate grief?

Sara Cousins, a clinical social worker and therapist based in Lakeville, CT, noted that feelings of grief can surface during the holidays because of associations, habits, and routines that we have.

“When we’re around other people that we associate with the person that we’ve lost, or we’re doing activities that we traditionally did with the person we’ve lost, it can make it really difficult,” she said.

Sara also explained that sometimes it’s not only the loss of the person that affects the holiday, but can also be the loss of their personality or their energy.

“If that person was the life of the party, we can sometimes feel like the loss of that person is going to make the holidays bad because they’re not there, and also because we fear that it’s going to make the celebrations feel hollow or empty without their energy.”

How to cope

Sara’s best piece of advice for those who are grieving during the holidays is first to acknowledge the reality of the situation.

“The reality is that if that person is gone, then that person is gone. There’s inevitably going to be sadness and memories that come

up, but being kind to yourself and knowing that this is going to happen, and more importantly, accepting that it’s going to happen, can go a long way.”

Much of the preparation can occur beforehand by simply anticipating that these feelings are likely to occur. Sara explained that if a person can adequately prepare themselves for these feelings, then they are often better off and are less “argumentative” with themselves when it happens.

She also noted that altering holiday traditions can be a beneficial thing, so long as it feels right.

“If you’ve lost the person who was the one who purchased all of the presents, maybe this is the year that you don’t do gifts and change the tradition to something else,” she said. “If the person who hosted the holiday celebration every year is the one who passed, maybe you change the house that you go to this year. Sometimes doing everything exactly the same can make people feel worse, so change your plans as you see fit.”

However, Sara also said that for some, changing traditions can bring

on feelings of anxiety or exacerbate sadness, so she maintains that it’s important for people to do what they feel is right for them.

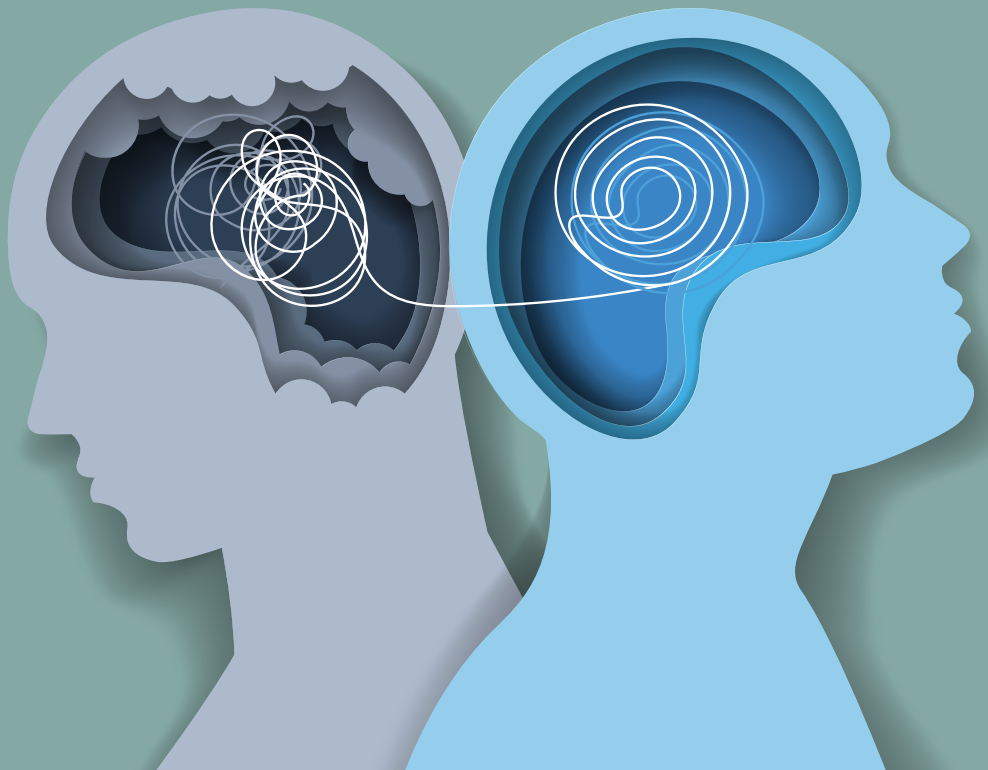
“Maybe it makes sense to celebrate the same way, but add in something that honors the person you’ve lost, like telling stories before you have dinner or visiting a location that was important to that person,” she said. “It doesn’t always have to be about radically changing something, but about honoring the person you’ve lost, engaging in self-reflection, coming to terms with reality, and bringing that attitude to the important people that you gather with.”

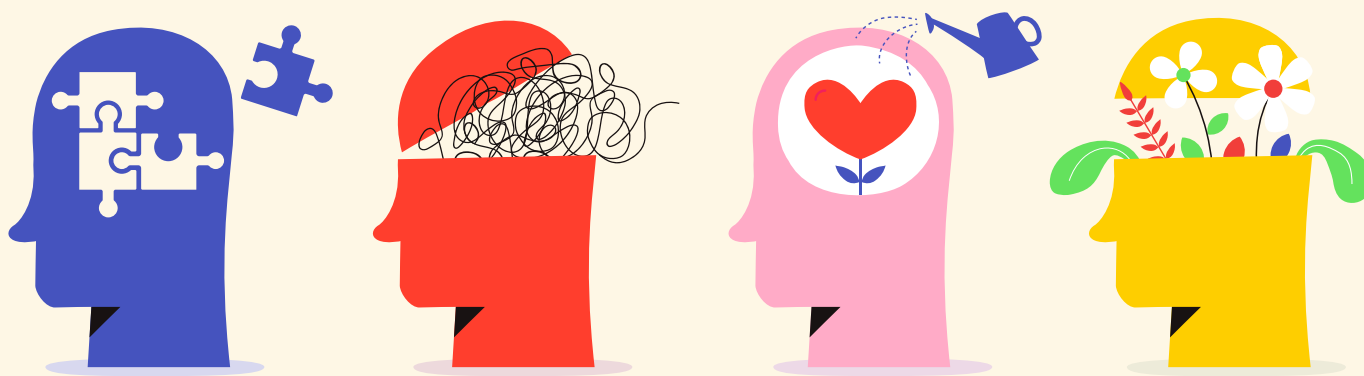
Realistic expectations

It’s also important to set realistic expectations for yourself and your loved ones when grieving during the holidays.

“There’s a Buddhist expression that says, ‘pain is inevitable, but suffering is optional.’ Suffering is the distance between reality and expectations,” Sara said. “Bringing our expectations close to reality is one of

Continued on next page ...





Graphic: istockphoto.com
contributor Vladimir Ivankin

the ways that we can take charge of our own loss and suffering.”

Sara continued to explain that it’s important to be honest with yourself about what expectations you have and then to bring those expectations to those around you. Being open and honest with your loved ones paves the way for communication surrounding your grief.

“Oftentimes when we lose someone, everyone is afraid to talk about them or bring them up. People typically think that if they bring that person up in conversation, it’s going to make the grief worse, but it actually tends to be worse when the loss isn’t acknowledged,” she said.

Grieving the loss of a relationship

Something else that Sara highlighted that is oftentimes overlooked is those who could be estranged from their family or grieving the loss of a relationship in any form – whether it be familial, romantic, or platonic – during the holidays.

She said that family estrangement is more common than many think and can make the holidays especially difficult for people going through it.

“We have a lot of idealized images about what family looks like in American culture. There’s the saying that ‘blood is thicker than water,’ all of these myths about what family is, and holiday movies that show that no matter how crazy or difficult your relatives are, you always rally around family,” she said. “My

experience has been that family estrangement is incredibly common and profoundly painful.”

Sara noted that many times, people become estranged from their family due to abuse, addiction, and other unsafe conditions. Sometimes, someone pulls away from their family because they are suffering from some kind of addiction or other struggle that they feel is harming their family. Regardless of the reason, the person who removes themselves from the family dynamic typically is the one who carries the most responsibility for the decision and therefore also bears the most pain.

“Keep your eyes and your hearts open for people who are estranged from their families or estranged from others because they’re struggling with something. It’s much more common than many people think.”

Sara’s advice for those who feel alone during the holidays due to family estrangement is to, “be strong and be true to yourself. I’m going to trust that they made that decision for good reason.”

She also noted that sometimes family estrangement isn’t permanent and that there is a chance for reconciliation down the road, but for many, “the family you choose is stronger than the one you’re born into.”

Resources and support groups

Most places of worship, funeral homes, and hospitals have grief-support resources and work with local support groups to regularly host events. Check your local place of worship or contact your local

hospital to find out where and when support groups are being held.

Regionally, multiple hospice organizations also provide bereavement services. Hudson Valley Hospice offers bereavement support via individual counseling, telephone support, workshops, and support groups that provide services for up to 13 months following a loss.

HospiceCare in the Berkshires offers counseling services in either individual or group sessions free of charge to anyone grieving in Berkshire County. Its bereavement team also offers community education programs and training programs on the subject of grief and loss; support groups; programs for adults, teens, and children; and remembrance services.

Regional Hospice of Connecticut provides bereavement support through its Healing Hearts program, located in Danbury, CT. It frequently hosts support groups; social groups; workshops; and memorial events for children, adults, families, and caregivers. It offers support groups for coping with the death of a spouse, living with the loss of a child, or dealing with loss in general. •

For more information about bereavement services offered at Hudson Valley Hospice, visit its website hvhospice.org/grief-support-services/; for HospiceCare in the Berkshires, visit hcib.org/bereavement-services/; and for Regional Hospice of Connecticut, visit regionalhospicect.org/healing-hearts-program-for-grief-loss/.

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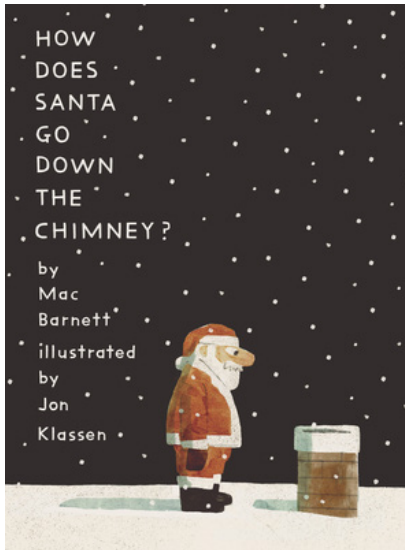
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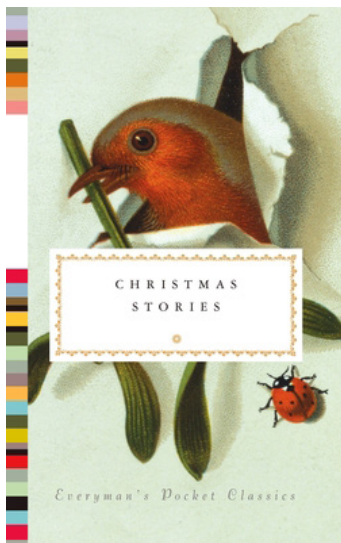
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How Does Santa Go Down the Chimney?
by Mac Barnett, Jon Klassen (Illustrator)

When Santa arrives at a child's house on Christmas Eve, does he go down the chimney feet first or headfirst? What if he gets stuck? What if there's no chimney? Maybe he slides under the door, as thin as a piece of paper?



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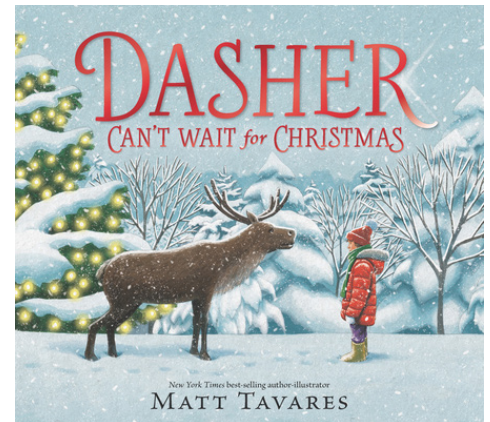
Three Holidays and a Wedding
by Uzma Jalaluddin and Marissa Stapley

As strangers and seatmates Maryam Aziz and Anna Gibson fly to Toronto over the holidays – Maryam to her sister's impromptu wedding, and Anna to meet her boyfriend's wealthy family for the first time – neither expect that severe turbulence will scare them into confessing their deepest hopes and fears to one another. At least they'll never see each other again. And the love of Maryam's life, Saif, wasn't sitting two rows behind them hearing it all. Oops.



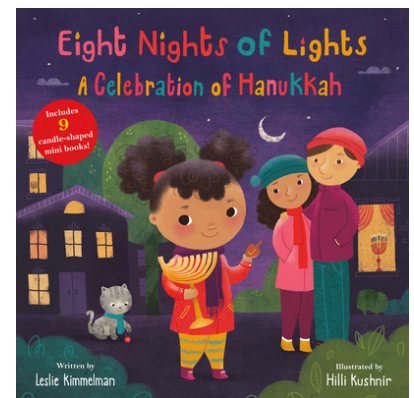
One for Each Night: The Greatest Chanukah Stories of All Time
by Sholom Aleichem, Elie Wiesel, and S.Y. Agnon

In humorous as well as meditative tales from Israel, Central Europe, and the United States, these stories underscore what it means to be Jewish in a world that's not always welcoming and include intriguing commentary about Chanukah's origins and what it means now.



Dasher Can't Wait for Christmas
by Matt Tavares

With only one sleep left before Christmas Eve, Dasher can't contain her excitement for her favorite holiday. With the sound of Christmas carols on the breeze and twinkling lights radiating from a nearby city, she sneaks off to visit the festivities. But as night deepens and snow starts to fall, Dasher realizes she can no longer spot the North Star in the sky to lead her home. Will the kindness of a child, an unexpected gift, and a dose of Christmas spirit get her back in time to help guide Santa's sleigh?



Eight Nights of Lights: A Celebration of Hanukkah
by Leslie Kimmelman, Hilli Kushnir (Illustrator)

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Gone Sleddin'

some of the best sledding spots in our area

By Dominique DeVito
info@mainstreetmag.com

We all have love-hate relationships with aspects of the seasons, and so it goes with me and winter. My hesitation is brief when asked if I like winter. “No!” I exclaim. “It’s cold, it’s dark, and it seems to last forever.” And snow? If I see a flake in the forecast I shiver with worry about driving anywhere. My brothers know I don’t venture north to see them in Vermont or Maine starting in November and going until April, sometimes May to be on the extra-safe side. I’m a wimp, I know.

But there are times when I really love winter. One of them is when the snow is falling and I know that no one in my family has to travel in it. We are all in warm, safe places with the provisions we need. There’s a magical silence to snowfall that is perfect for rest, reflection, and baking. The second time I really love winter is when the snow has stopped and enough has fallen to go sledding. I love sledding. Once the necessary pathways are shoveled, I grab a sled and head for a hill.

I was lucky to grow up in Chester County, PA, where there were lots of great sledding hills and kids from several families would get together and make a day of it, sharing Flexible Flyers and toboggans and out-of-control saucers. The thrills and spills we shared were, for me, more fun

than any amusement park rides. My kids know this about me: If the conditions are decent, we’re going. When they were little I’d bundle us all up in snow pants and boots with hats and waterproof gloves and lots of layers, grab whatever sleds were in the attic or barn or garage, and find a hill. Luckily, the property where I raised my boys in Ghent, NY, included a few good slopes, but when the roads were clear we would also drive to join people at a park with a great hill.

Who knows how much snow we’re going to get this winter, but my advice is to be ready to enjoy it with the simple and sensational experience of sledding.

The sled

Do you already have a sled? Take a look at it and check for cracks or missing rope handles you need for pulling it up the hill behind you. Even small cracks in the hard plastic will ruin the ride. Sad, but true.

I did a Google search for best family-friendly sleds to see what the latest types and designs are, and I wasn’t surprised to find one from L.L. Bean at the top of several lists. It’s the Polar Slider DLX. It’s on my wish list for Christmas!

The gear

Another thing you’ll need is the right clothes. Snow pants are a must. Boots and gloves that are waterproof and

warm. A good hat that covers your whole head and ears. Sledding will shoot snow into your face as you zip down a hill, and if you put your feet out to use them as brakes, you’ll also get snow in your face. Bailing out at the bottom of the hill or even falling off at some point while you’re going down puts more snow in your face and in the spaces between your coat and gloves. Fortunately, the exercise of going up the hill warms you up so much that the snow can feel good.

Refreshments

If you’re going to be sledding for a while on a particular hill, bring a water bottle – or two! Sledding is good exercise, and you’ll get thirsty. It’s nice not to have to worry about your water getting warm. Just be sure to put your name on your water bottle so it doesn’t get mistaken for someone else’s. If there are several of you out sledding together and you want water bottles and maybe cider donuts or another energizing snack, you could bring a small cooler to have them together in a container that’s easy to carry. Remember, be conscientious and don’t litter on the hill, no matter what!

Where to go

I did a Google search for best sledding spots in the counties served by *Main Street Magazine*. I was delighted to find there are quite a few. Here are some top spots. I suspect that if you’re a sledding aficionado like I am that you know some others. Please share!

Hope to see you on a sled this winter – but not too often!

Oh, and another great part of sledding? Coming home and making hot chocolate and buttered toast, getting into comfy clothes, and enjoying a fire in the fireplace.

Sledding in Dutchess County

Just a couple of miles from downtown Rhinebeck is Drayton Grant Park at Burger Hill (3158 NY 9G), a wonderful spot any time of year, and home to a hill that’s over 500-feet high and arguably one of the best sledding spots in our sled-happy area. If there’s snow to cover it, you’ll find folks of all ages sledding on Burger Hill. While it’s big, it’s not crazy steep, so you don’t get the speed demons whizzing by the rest of us. There’s a nice, big flat spot at the bottom for lazy landings and great views of both the Catskill and Berkshire Mountains in the distance when you get back to the top.

If you’re anywhere near Wappingers Falls, you have to check out the sledding at Bowdoin Park. The park is located at 85 Sheafe Road on the banks of the Hudson River. It covers over 300 acres, and is another all-season gem, with everything from a great playground to a disc golf course, hiking trails with amazing views, a picnic pavilion, convenient restrooms, and a wonderful sledding hill! Sledgers find their own grooves there,

Continued on next page ...



Above: Good times at Siegel Kline-Kill in Ghent, NY. Photo by Dominique DeVito.
Below: Sledding in Mills Mansion. Photo courtesy of Mills Mansion.

from the whizzers-by to the wanderers. Hay bales at the bottom assure that stopping is safe.

Not far from Rhinebeck is Staatsburgh, where the Mills Mansion was built in 1832 on a premier property on the banks of the Hudson River. The Mills, like their neighbors the Rockefellers and Vanderbilts, were a wealthy family that built spectacular mansions in the Hudson Valley. Today the stunning Greek revival home is a tourist attraction lovingly preserved by the Friends of Mills at Staatsburgh. And it just happens to have a great hill behind the house sloping toward the river. It's a long and gentle hill that, fortunately, slopes up at the bottom so you don't have to worry about sailing off into a hedgerow or the mighty Hudson itself. It's fun to imagine the families of these Gilded Age icons dressed in their winter clothes sledding on these same hills.

Don't overlook Thomas Boyce State Park in the hamlet of Wingdale near Dover. This is a park for people of all ages — it got a new playground installed recently, and there are batting cages and picnic spots. In the winter, you can enjoy the grounds for skiing or snowshoeing, and the hills are perfect for some easy sledding. The park does have some steep parts with great views — it housed a now defunct

hang-gliding launch site — but for sledding and snow sports, stick to the gentler slopes in the main area.

Sledding in Columbia County

Columbia County is known for its diverse topography, ranging from near flat lands along the Hudson River to steep hills toward and as part of the Catskill Mountain range (where Catskill Mountain Resort is located just over the ColCo border on the Massachusetts side). Oddly, the only publicized sledding spot in the county is the hill at Siegel Kline-Kill in Ghent, NY.

Siegel Kline-Kill is one of several wonderful and well-maintained recreation areas overseen by the Columbia Land Conservancy. The park is deceptive in that for the most part it's a flat space that's great for dog-walking, jogging, and quiet contemplation. But it has a serious hill that's a short walk from the parking lot. It's not long, but it's steep and fast. Older kids and thrill-seeking adults are its biggest fans. If you're going with little ones, you can stick to the lower part of the hill. There's an extended flat area for coasting to a comfortable stop.

Clermont State Historic Park in Germantown in southwestern Columbia County is a great place to admire the Hudson River, and it has gently sloping hills that are nice for sledding.

Sledding in the Berkshires

Western Massachusetts is called the Berkshires because of the Berkshire Mountains, which run north to south along its western border. Suffice to say there are some great hills in the Berk-

shires, and sledding is popular there. A favorite place for families looking to enjoy the outing with children of various ages is Clapp Park in Pittsfield. The expansive sledding hill is adjacent to a large parking area, making it easily accessible. The hill is steep enough, but not too steep. The snow gets packed with all the use, so it's enjoyable at many different spots. It's at 233 West Housatonic Street.

The more adventurous (and older) hightail it to hilly Williamstown, home of such cultural icons as Williams College and the Clark Museum. It's also home to Williamstown Rural Lands, a conservation trust organization headquartered at Sheep Hill, a former dairy farm known as Sunny Brook Farm, located at 671 Cold Spring Road. Several of the farms buildings are still on the 52-acre property, and they now house interactive exhibits about life on the farm. Sheep Hill is so-named for the sheep that once grazed its steep slope. Sightseers and tourists enjoy it year-round, and serious sledders visit when there's enough snow.

A little farther south in the Berkshires, there are sledding hills at Tanglewood, and also at Monument Mountain Regional High School in Great Barrington.

Sledding in the Litchfield Hills

There are several parks in Litchfield County in northwestern Connecticut. Many of them are forested, and while they offer great hiking and cross-country skiing, it's hard to find a sledding area that's accessible to

the public. I imagine there are some sledding hills around the Hotchkiss School in Lakeville, but I couldn't find anything online.

Sledding in Putnam County

If you want to make a day trip for sledding and outdoor winter fun, head to Fahnestock Winter Park in Carmel. It's a 16,000-acre park featuring a "winter park" with an elevation of 1,100 feet. Fahnestock's Winter Park offers nearly ten miles of groomed and mapped trails for skiing and snowshoeing, plus a sledding hill. Rentals of baby sleds and snow tubes are available for the sledding hill, and rental skis and snow shoes are available for the trails. For hungry and thirsty snow lovers of all ages, there's a concession stand that sells hot chocolate and other hot and cold food and beverages. The restrooms are clean and comfortable, with room to change.

Knowing all these options are in our area is inspiring! I'll wait for the snow to stop and the roads to be clear before heading out to spots that aren't that close to me, but I know I'll enjoy them when I get there. I may take my grandson, too. He's three and should love it. Convincing his dad, my son, to join us will be the more challenging part, as he knows only too well how I will go up and down a hill for hours before I retreat to the indoors.

Do I like winter? "No!" Do I like sledding? Yes, yes, a thousand times yes! If you know of some good hills in your area, please share them with the magazine and they'll be posted on the website. Thank you! •





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BALANCE

By CB Wismar
info@mainstreetmag.com

Ah, it's December! It's time to roll out the traditional holiday favorites: *Miracle on 34th Street*, *White Christmas*, *Polar Express*, *It's a Wonderful Life*, and that all-time classic, *Fiddler on the Roof*.

Fiddler on the Roof?

True, the musical based on *Tevye and His Daughters* by Sholem Aleichem, is not a Christmas story. Far from it. Set during the time of the Jewish pogroms in Russia, it begins with Tevye, the poor milkman of Anatevka, telling the audience that the lives of his people are as precarious as a fiddler perched on a roof. And what allows them to keep their fragile balance?

Tradition!

So, as we mentioned with a profound flair for the obvious, it is December. If ever there was a time of year when tradition takes center stage in our lives, it is now. Both Christian and Jewish traditions fill this month with moments of celebration and remembrance – resurrecting rituals that keep heritage and identity alive.

It is true. As children and grandchildren age and become both wiser and more cynical, the dragging out implements of mass celebration are often met with lightly veiled disdain. “That old thing?” “Are we going to do that again?”

Yes, we are.

We are going to bring out an Advent Calendar and mark the days until Christmas with rewards for each day. We are going to bring the menorah out of the closet in the extra bedroom, set in a fresh set of candles, and mark the miracle when one day of sacred oil in the temple lamp lasted for eight days and the Maccabean Revolt led

to the re-dedication of the Second Temple.

We'll set a Christmas (or, call it holiday) tree in the living room; string it with lights that always get tangled, causing a traditional fit of frustration; hang ornaments on the branches; struggle to buy presents in person and online and get them wrapped in festive paper; and spin the dreidel on the dining room table and watch our stock of chocolate “Hannukah gelt” rise and fall with each spin. This is that time of year, and we gingerly reach out to embrace it.

Despite what big-box retailers wanted us to believe by bringing the artificial trees and blow-up Santa Claus onto the sales floor in late September, the holidays really begin with a gentle, candy-laced flourish at Halloween, ramp up to a family food frenzy at Thanksgiving, and then roar through December with delirious intensity.

A new intensity

That intensity has found a roar of competition this year, unlike anything we've experienced in decades. Memories of life during the horrible, tragedy-strewn days of World War II have faded. It would seem, however, that this year has brought us close to the emotional struggles and human tragedies experienced by other generations. We are torn. We are conflicted. We are almost fearful of turning on the news – in whichever medium is our choice – to hear about what catastrophe has found its way to the top. War, disastrous weather, mass shootings, homelessness, ugly politics. It is a full-time job to simply maintain our emotional balance, which is why this month becomes so important. This is the month of regaining a bit of equilibrium, of getting our balance back with the considerable aid and support of the very things that make teenagers roll their eyes. Traditions.

Life and art have a very strange way of intersecting at times. The story of *Fiddler on the Roof* is set in a mythical town in Russia – Anatevka. When the invasion of Ukraine was perpetrated in 2014, families were uprooted and became refugees, much the same as Tevya and his family at the conclusion of *Fiddler*. We are in the midst of our own refugee crisis in many places around the world. One way in which authorities in Ukraine attempted to provide a modest solution to the crisis of their own was, in 2015, to create a town in open land outside of the capital, Kyiv. The name of this created sanctuary city? Anatevka.

Now more than ever...

We are not viewing the calendar through “rose-colored glasses.” The turmoil is real, the insecurity we feel is very much a part of our days. These are moments, however, when reaching back to remember St. Nicholas tossing bags of gold into a poor man's stockings, which has led us these many centuries later to hanging stockings by the mantle and filling them with small presents, or lighting the candles of the menorah each night and taking a moment to reflect on the importance of our traditions can provide something we all need very much during these challenging times.

Balance. ●



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Here we are again! Christmas time and apparently open season for my kids to try their luck at asking for anything and everything that's nabbed their attention for even a nano-second over the last 12 months. Gone are the days of hoping that they will like their surprise – if it's not on an itemized highlighted list (with links provided), I've learned not to go there.

By Pom Shillingford
info@mainstreetmag.com

Tricky gifts?

My husband, when he reads this, will protest that if there is one truly tricky member of this house to buy presents for, it is me. He also has the unfortunate double whammy that my birthday falls five days later, so in the past we've often not gotten over the confusion of the Christmas day fiasco before doing it all over again.

I will admit I am a notoriously hard person to buy for. I would like a surprise (no teenage list will be

provided, so set powers of telepathy to high, please) but I also want to love it – and preferably instantly! Ideally, I would like something I would love but, as yet, I actually don't know exists. My husband may have a point when he says I'm a nightmare when it comes to gift giving.

The perfect gift?

Luckily for all of us, he actually came up with the perfect gift two years ago. Even better, it's a gift he can repeat year after year, and I will always be absolutely beyond thrilled to receive it. Those of you who follow me on Instagram will know that I write my posts based on exactly what is happening outside my window right now. I never post a throwback or out-of-season flowers. My account is basically an almost daily diary of my garden, flowers, and the seasons. My genius husband found a company (aptly called Photobook Genius) that will take social media posts and turn them into a book. (Oh, how this tickles every Luddite bone in my body!) In short, he gave me the book I wrote

without even knowing I was writing it. As I say, genius all round.

Dropping ideas?

So, I'm now set every year for life – or as long as I'm on social media. But as my children start to clutter my inbox with their 'updated' lists, I've been pondering my otherwise dream wish list and, more to the point, what would give me real pleasure to give to someone else. (Full disclosure here, I know there is a world outside of gardening, but I don't live in it, so if you are after something non-horticultural, this is not the article for you.)

Aside from practical tools, (a Hori Hori knife or a pair of Willow Crossley secateurs) or, because there is no such thing as too many, a book (Jinny Blom's new masterpiece *What Makes a Garden* is top of my list) or an heirloom piece of beauty (a Francis Palmer vase), the number one item I

Continued on next page ...

Photos: The opportunities for online garden learning are endless – from border design, to flower arranging to seed starting.

would give the garden/flower lover in my life is the gift of education.

Learning is at the heart of gardening. It is constant by its very nature and it's what makes gardening so addictive to those of us who love it. And oh, my word; the plethora of paths to go down – from design to horticulture, from flower arranging to botanical art. Endless opportunities to discover and learn.

Memberships are gold

Every year my brother gives me a subscription to *Gardens Illustrated* magazine – if the Bible came in a magazine format and was only about gardening, this would be it. Although a UK publication, despite actually being printed in the US, on a ridiculously slow delivery schedule, its scope is global and the perfect source of inspiration. It is the happiest day of the month when I find it in my mailbox.

Membership to a gardening organization is also a gift that gives that long-term slow-burn joy. Access, discounts, classes, talks, often just a really nice day out – a membership gift can be just the impetus you need to actually make use of the resources close to home. The New York Botanical Garden, Hollister House, and the Garden Conservancy would be my top three.

COVID completed the journey?

Back in the day, we really had two choices when it came to learning: do an in-person course (really for those with a gardening career in mind or a lot of spare money and time) or a reference book. The latter was usually my choice. Today, however, the ability to access the knowledge, experience and wisdom of experts has never been greater. I'm not exaggerating when I say that Google has been my university on my gardening journey.

If the Internet began the revolution in the way we learn, then COVID completed it. Not only was there an explosion of gardeners and growers sharing their expertise on social media, but the number of online classes, courses, and platforms also exploded. The brilliance of this format, the access that it gives, and the opportunity to learn is immeasurable. Combined with gardeners' generosity and willingness to share, this is truly the mother lode of learning. I was lucky enough to take the now world-renowned Floret flower farming online six-week course three years ago, and I would testify under oath that it was the happiest six weeks of my life!

Class is in session

For anyone in your life who might be of the gardening mindset (in fact this really applies to anyone who is interested in just about anything), online classes provide the perfect gift material. They can vary in length and depth from a one-off hour-long class to a multi-module course covering either a broad range of all the basics or a really deep dig into a single topic. There are classes and courses out there for complete beginners to those looking for a change in career.

For gardeners, my top three would be Masterclass (Ron Finley teaching how to grow your own food more than lives up to its moniker); the UK-based Create Academy (somehow, they have persuaded all my favorite gardening experts to spill the beans); and for those looking to really go deeper, Learning with Experts, which offers online interactive classrooms and the option of personal tuition and



marked assignments with the actual experts – and I mean world-class top-of-their-game experts. (I'm holding out for the Art of Environmental Floristry class and the chance to learn first-hand from the self-same Shane Connolly who arranged the flowers for the Queen's funeral and William and Kate's wedding!)

Unlike some of the Christmas days of the past in this house, I can guarantee that the gardener in your life will love and long appreciate any of the above. They would truly be the gifts that keeps on giving. ●

Pom Shillingford is an obsessive gardener originally from England and now based in Salisbury, CT. She offers seasonal cut flowers through English Garden Grown. Find her on Instagram @english_garden_grown.



Top and left: Give the gift of learning from the experts to grow vegetables or arrange flowers. Above: The genius of all Christmas gifts, the book that unknowingly wrote itself.



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Treefort Toys & Gifts



By Anna Martucci
anna@mainstreetmag.com

When Emily Van Steenberg's husband Tyler opened a chiropractic office on Main Street in Millerton, NY, he only needed half the allotted space for his practice. Emily decided they should do something with the extra space that aligned with the needs of his clients. So she created a wellness store and brought in natural body products, supplements, palo santo, beeswax candles, soaps, organic chocolate, and even greeting cards and artwork.

"Tyler has access to the best vitamins and supplements, all made in America, many in Connecticut and Massachusetts, from small independent makers, so I thought, why not make these available to his clients? These, along with the natural body products, are items that I've been using for years and that I've always loved. All the products are of the highest quality, with simple ingredients, and nothing bad for you in them."

The wellness store proved successful and Emily felt there was room for growth in her vision of bringing more natural products to Millerton. "When a new space became available, I didn't even know what I was going to do with it, but I knew I could make it something beautiful."

A niche market

In part because she and Tyler were new parents, Emily decided to open a children's store. "There are so many new parents in the area, and so many people who just moved here are having young children. I knew there would be a market for a children's store. I also had my own baby at this time and was really trying to expose him to, and surround him with, high-quality and non-toxic toys and clothing, and that's what I wanted to bring to the store."

Although not knowing much about children's toys, Emily knew she didn't like plastic because of the chemicals it often has and the bacteria it can harbor. Since bacteria cannot grow on wooden surfaces, she

thought having toys made primarily from wood would be perfect for little kids who are putting things in their mouths all the time. She also "loves searching for things that are unique and that not a lot of people have."

With these values in mind, Emily started Treefort Toys & Gifts with alderwood and beechwood toys made by Bajo in Poland and Haba in Germany. The wood is dyed with different types of nontoxic dyes and finished with natural oils. The toys include wooden puzzles, animal figures, and blocks geared to children aged zero to ten. "I love wooden toys because they encourage open-ended play: there's no right or wrong, just a million different options for creativity and exploration." Treefort also has hypoallergenic stuffed animals, dolls, rattles, watercolor paints, crayons, and modeling beeswax. Many of the items are handmade, and all are made from non-toxic organic materials.

Taking it a step further

Emily then expanded the store to include clothing. "I originally started with clothes for children up to two years old, but so many Indian Mountain School parents were asking if I would have older kids clothing that

I decided to go for it. Now I have clothes for children up to 11 years old."

Treefort carries Serendipity clothing from Denmark. "I love Serendipity clothing because it has color but they are neutral tones – the shirts, sweaters, and basics can be for boys or girls." All the clothing is made from organic cotton and is GOTS (global organic textile standard) certified. This means that all the fabric is grown according to strict ecological and toxicological guidelines without the use of synthetic fertilizers or pesticides.

"I only have things in the store that I would put on my own child and would let my own child play with. I know that the prices are a little higher, but the pieces are meant to be heirlooms. They will last forever and be in your family for a lifetime. My mission is to offer the highest quality products for children." •

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Flock to do these holiday traditions with friends

By Whitney Joseph
info@mainstreetmag.com

One of the most beautiful and heart-warming realities about the holiday season is that it carries with it a magic and mysticism that seems to surpass any church wall, temple vestibule, or mosque ground. No matter what religion one practices – if one practices a religion at all – this time of year allows people to somehow stow away their daily stressors (even if only temporarily) to focus instead on doing deeds of goodwill and sharing moments of pure joy.

The whole of society seems miraculously willing and ready to spread kindness and love, just as instinctively as the sun is to radiate warmth and light. It's an incredible phenomenon that repeats itself year after year as soon as the calendar flips toward its last page. What's just as incredible – and equally as sad – is that as quickly as the holidays end, mankind reverts to its habits of greed, violence, excess, insolence, and other antics too numerous (and depressing) to list.

Rather than focus on those negative behaviors, let's enjoy a quick glance at a couple of this region's trademark, and dare I say delightful, holiday traditions. I believe they show how we, as Northeasterners and as Americans, hold on dearly to our treasured times of togetherness and celebrate that which is important to us when we can. I like to think it says something about our moxie and determination to keep the holiday spirit alive despite challenging times and circumstances – even when the world climate makes that increasingly difficult.

Best holiday traditions?

As this country is the ultimate melting pot – with many of the most eclectic, interesting, intelligent, and creative people converging in New York – it's an ideal showcase for some of the best holiday traditions in the US of A. That's a big statement, considering there are 50 fabulous states in this country, stretching from the most northern point of our nation, down the eastern seaboard to the very southernmost point on our map. (Quick geography lesson: That would be in the Florida Keys, where you can get some of the tartest and best Key Lime pie to help celebrate the holidays. I highly recommend Capt. Craig's Restaurant in Islamorada after personally touring and taste-testing my way through most of Key West and the surrounding keys this past spring – the things I do in pursuit of knowledge! Did you know Key Lime pie was originally made with meringue versus fresh whipped cream atop the custardy lime filling?)

There are, of course, plenty of quirky holiday traditions right here in our area. We have a couple of classic ideas to consider that we think you'll love!

The lights in New York City

Starting with one of the most well-known and highly publicized holiday events not only in the Northeast or the US but worldwide, may we suggest the annual Christmas tree lighting at Rockefeller Center in NYC? Just like last year's holiday tree that bedecked the stunning metropolitan area known to many as 30 Rockefeller Plaza, this year's tree at 30 Rock also came from the town of Vestral. Vestral is located within the more familiar city of Binghamton, which is in the south-central part of New York State.

Donated by the McGinley family, the 80-foot-tall, 43-foot-wide Norway Spruce was cut down on November 9 and then transported more than 200 miles across the state on a flatbed. Two days later it arrived in Manhattan. The tree weighed 12 tons.

Within days of arriving in The Big Apple, the nearly 85-year-old spectacular specimen was adorned with countless Christmas ornaments and illuminated with 50,000 multi-colored, energy-efficient, LED lights, primed to twinkle in the twilight. The lights, if all laid out, would be about five-miles long.

In keeping with tradition, the boughs and branches of the seasonal spruce were soon festooned with festive fandangle, which served as but a mere backdrop for the stellar Swarovski star that shall sit atop the Rockefeller tree throughout the holiday season, bedazzled with three million crystals, featuring 70 sparkly spikes. The nine-foot-four-inch studded star weighs a whopping 900 pounds.

All that bling lit the sky ablaze starting on Wednesday, November 29, when the gigantic spruce was illuminated at 7pm during a live telecast from Rockefeller Plaza. The show included live performances from some of the top names in Hollywood. Christmas in Rockefeller Center is always a free event that's open to the public – for those who can score a spot; tickets are never required. NBC airs the event nationally to get a jumpstart on the Christmas season; the holiday tree at 30 Rock shall remain on display until January 13, 2024.

Continued on next page ...

Birds of a Feather

The Christmas tree at Rockefeller Center is absolutely a sight to see, and worthy of checking off your holiday bucket list. But there are other activities nearby that will bring you out into nature, where you'll be surrounded by a heck of a lot more trees, ideally populated with myriad species of birds waiting to be seen, recorded, and counted. Many of those who have an interest in birding, or who live in the Northwest Corner or the Harlem Valley region within close proximity to the Sharon Audubon Center in Connecticut may know where this is headed. Just think for a moment... it's Christmas time ... there's a call out to birders interested in taking part in a bird count ... That's right – it's the annual Audubon Center's Christmas Bird Count! It's pretty much akin to our US Census Bureau's Decennial Census of Population and Housing. According to audubon.org, "The Christmas Bird Count occurs December 14 to January 5," and is among the most ambitious and successful "wings" of the not-for-profit organization's community science programs.

This is the CBC's 124th year, making it a long-standing tradition both nationally and here in the Northwest Corner. It's a 24-hour affair; Sharon's CBC is scheduled to begin at 12:01am on Sunday, December 18,

and to run until midnight. The volunteer birders will meet at The Hotchkiss School in Lakeville, CT, which is the center of the counting circle. The count covers a 15-mile diameter stretching across much of northwest Connecticut into Amenia and North East, NY.

Participants should dress warmly and in layers, wear comfortable shoes, and come armed with a good set of binoculars – and it probably isn't a bad idea to bring along a thermos or two of hot cocoa.

The Trixie Strauss connection

The Sharon count's formal name is the Trixie Strauss Christmas Bird Count. Strauss was an ardent birder from the area who helped give flight to the CBC when the Sharon Audubon was trying to get the event off the ground. She was also the grandmother of North East town clerk and local artist Tilly Strauss. Hmm... perhaps there are ornithological and genealogical links, in addition to the obvious artistic reasons, as to why Tilly's paintings of birds are so extremely popular both in person and on social media.

But enough with the mysticism of birds, the sources of Tilly's talent, and the history behind Sharon's CBC – the reality is interesting enough. The Audubon began the CBC in 1900, making it the longest-running community science project focused on birds. Within a few decades, the data collected by those citizen counts were being put to good use.

Bird data and its importance

According to the Audubon's website, "Bird data reported by community scientists have been used by researchers since the 1930s to report on the health of bird populations, and Audubon's scientists have used those data in creating innovative analytical methods that include our CBC population status and trends and learning how birds are responding to a changing climate."

Additionally, the Audubon's national science team works in concert with its conservation strategy leadership to share their knowledge of conservation-relevant science to both state and regional Audubon centers, along with those outside of the Audubon. "We aspire to practice translational ecology whenever possible and believe, through our collective experience, that the best science is produced in collaboration with diverse stakeholders ... This science we produce provides a foundation for Audubon's conservation, advocacy, and engagement work."

The findings learned through the CBC get recorded and reported back to the conservation organization, to help assess how birds are surviving today's world. That data is then shared with Audubon Canada, further protecting the future of our feathered friends in North America.

It's pretty incredible to think that as of the 122nd CBC two years ago, a total of 76,880 birders participated – the fourth highest level of participation on record, according to the Audubon Society – all for an activity that began in response to the early

20th Century Christmas bird hunts that were growing in popularity, decimating bird populations. Clearly, we Americans care about our birds. It's no secret here in the Harlem Valley and Northwest Corner we likewise get sentimental over our swallows, finicky about our finches, and haughty regarding our hummingbirds.

So, if you would like to don your comfiest of hiking boots and coziest of scarves to help track some of those lovely larks, make sure to register with the Sharon Audubon Center. It's not essential that participants take part in the full 24 hours of the CBC if that seems too taxing, though it promises to be a fun adventure reminiscent of our younger years when we would camp out under the stars, eat s'mores by the fire, and tell ghost stories. This time, though, no drifting off to dreamland as you must keep your eyes focused skyward – and toward the trees – to make sure you don't miss your feathered friends. The best of birders are often called "eagle eye," for their ability to catch sight of an avian in a flash; many are hoping to earn that moniker – a true badge of honor – during this year's CBC. If you sign up now, you could be among them. •

To contact the Sharon Audubon for more information, or to register, call (860) 354-0520 or go to sharon.audubon.org. The center itself is located at 325 Cornwall Bridge Road, Sharon, CT 06069.



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Festival of Lights



By Regina Molaro
info@mainstreetmag.com

Set against Hudson Valley's dark, twinkling nighttime sky is The Wonderland of Lights – Rhinebeck – A Memorable Drive-Thru Holiday Light Show at the Dutchess County Fairgrounds. Come celebrate the season and witness the kaleidoscope of colorful lights at this holiday festival, which kicks off November 22 and runs through December 30.

This unforgettable journey will whisk guests through a mesmerizing parade of dazzling lights and magical displays in which there will be lots of holiday cheer. From fun tunnel displays to impressive towering structures and whimsical designs, The Wonderland of Lights is a memorable experience that is apropos for the entire family.

From the moment guests cruise in to the fairgrounds, spectators will witness various enchanting scenes. They include a parade of Santa Claus' riding bicycles, a traditional nativity scene, a duo of doves spreading a message of "Peace on Earth," and all of Santa's graceful reindeer completing their all-important annual task of pulling Santa around on a sleigh.

Where it began

Created by Tammy Peters, owner

and producer of North Pole Productions, The Wonderland of Lights was established in 2016 in, of all places, the Sunshine State. It also entertains guests in Florida's Auburndale and Port Charlotte areas.

"We want to give our guests a wonderful holiday experience. Our motto is 'Producers of Memorable Experiences' and that's what we try to do for every person who takes the time to drive through the fairgrounds. If this is their first time visiting, we hope that it will become a new family tradition. If it is their second or third time, we've done our job," said Tammy Peters.

Winter Wonderland

From Florida, The Wonderland of Lights arrived up north in 2020 –its inaugural year in Rhinebeck. The 2023 season marks its third year at Rhinebeck's Dutchess County Fairgrounds.

"This is an outstanding activity for the whole family. Babies will love the twinkling lights, little ones will be excited to see some of their favorite characters, and adults will not only love watching the expression on their kids' faces, but may also be a little nostalgic themselves as well as entertained by some of the more contemporary lighted

displays," added Peters.

To get the full experience, visitors are asked to take a leisurely drive at about three mph through the grounds. Depending on the number of cars traveling ahead, the holiday-themed ride can take 20 to 30 minutes.

Some of the highlights of this dazzling display include scenes from the 12 Days of Christmas; a Cinderella scene complete with the mice, majestic horses, and a fairy godmother; and a larger-than-life toy shop filled with fun and fabulous toys. The display measures 30 ft. tall by 130 ft. wide.

According to Peters, the team strives to showcase a bit of variety every year with the displays, but feedback from previous events dictates what attractions will remain the following year. "Every year will be just a little different from the year before," said Peters.

She said rather than "themes," it's really about incorporating all the holidays of the season, plus the whimsical displays that makes sense to the region. Of course, New York reflects more wintery displays, but in Florida visitors will see a moose who is busy working as a lifeguard on the beach.

The schedule

The Wonderland of Lights will host its opening night on November 22. The spectacular light show is open select dates until December 14. After that, it is open nightly through December 30.

Tickets are priced at \$30 per vehicle for up to eight passengers. "We want to make sure folks know the price is per car, not per person. We also have prices for limos, mini-buses, and motorcoaches," said Peters.

Please note that guests should bring their own snacks. Refreshments are not available this year, but a concession is something North Pole Productions is considering for future shows. ●

The event runs from 5pm to 9pm. Please note that it is closed from November 27 to 29, December 4 to 6, and December 11 to 13. Visit the website for additional ticket options.

The Wonderland of Lights is at the Dutchess County Fairgrounds, 6550 Spring Brook Ave., Rhinebeck, NY. Call (845) 876-4000 or visit thewonderlandoflights.com.

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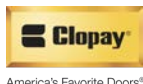
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2023: THE Year in Music

Photo: istockphoto.com
contributor Cesare Ferrari

By Abby Audenino
abby@mainstreetmag.com

Every year, we're gifted with a variety of new music. New singles, new albums, re-releases, reunion tours ... you name it, we got it this year. Aside from a bunch of new stuff to listen to, we also lost plenty of talented individuals who changed the music industry in ways that are hard to articulate. Here are some of music's most memorable moments (in my humble opinion) throughout 2023.

January

The year kicked off to a solid start. Miley Cyrus released her first single since 2021, "Flowers," which went on to break multiple Spotify records, including the most-streamed song in one week. U2 announced the release of its new album *Songs of Surrender*, a 40-track album of re-imagined and re-worked versions of their most iconic songs. 2021 Eurovision Song Contest winners and Italian rock band Måneskin released its the studio album, *Rush!* It was the band's "debut international album," with 14 of the songs written and sung in English and three in Italian.

February

Paramore released its first studio album in six years, *This is Why*. The 65th Grammy Awards took place in Los Angeles, CA, where Beyoncé and Maverick City Music took home the

most awards. At the Super Bowl LVII in Glendale, AZ, Chris Stapleton performed the National Anthem, Sheryl Lee Ralph performed "Lift Every Voice and Sing," and Rihanna performed the halftime show.

March

Taylor Swift began her record-breaking Eras tour in March, and the select Swifties who were able to get tickets rejoiced, while the majority cried and cursed ticket-selling websites for price-gouging. The tour has taken the cake for being the highest-grossing solo tour in a single year. Continuing her journey of re-recording her entire discography, she released *Speak Now (Taylor's Version)* in July and *1989 (Taylor's Version)* in October.

Also in March, Billy Joel and Stevie Nicks officially launched their "Two Icons, One Night" tour in Inglewood, CA. The nine-date tour spanned the United States, with stops in Nashville, Philadelphia, Baltimore, and Minneapolis, among others.

April

Harry Belafonte passed away at the age of 96. Perhaps best known for songs like "Day-O (The Banana Boat Song)" and "Jump in the Line (Shake, Senora)," Belafonte was credited with introducing calypso music, a style of Caribbean music that originated in Trinidad and Tobago, to international audiences in the 1950s and 1960s. Over the course of his life, he won three Grammy Awards, an Emmy, a

Tony, and an Oscar, making him one of the few performers to be a part of the esteemed EGOT category. He was also a Kennedy Center Honoree and was awarded the National Medal of Arts in 1994.

May

Rock and roll powerhouse Tina Turner passed away in May at her home in Switzerland. After suffering from a variety of illnesses in her later years, including high blood pressure, kidney failure, and intestinal cancer, she passed at the age of 83. During her tenure as a musician, she sold more than 100 million records worldwide, received 12 Grammy Awards, and was the first Black artist and first woman to grace the cover of *Rolling Stone*. She was inducted into the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame twice, with Ike Turner in 1991 and as a solo artist in 2021, and was the recipient of the Kennedy Center Honors and Woman of the Year award in 2005.

June

The Foo Fighters released *But Here We Are*, its first album following the unexpected loss of drummer Taylor Hawkins in March of 2022. Dave Grohl performed and recorded all of

Continued on next page ...



Photo: istockphoto.com
contributor SlayStorm

the album's drum tracks – his first drumming credit on a Foo Fighters album since 2005. Naturally, the major theme of the album is dealing with grief, which Dave Grohl suffered in a double-whammy in 2022 with the loss of Taylor and Grohl's his mother, Virginia. The album is not only a poignant and emotional journey through the band's grief, but it's also one of the Foo's strongest albums to date, despite the Taylor Hawkins-sized missing piece of the puzzle. The Foo's website states that the album, "marks the band's return after a year of staggering losses, personal introspection, and bittersweet remembrances ... *But Here We Are* is the sound of brothers finding refuge in the music that brought them together in the first place 28 years ago, a process that was as therapeutic as it was about a continuation of life."

Billy Joel announced an end to his historic and iconic monthly Madison Square Garden residency in New York City, with the final show taking place in July of 2024. The residency spanned the course of ten years, and Joel said that he's "kinda flabbergasted that it did last as long as it did," during a press conference. "My team tells me that we could continue to sell tickets, but ten years, 150 shows – all right already!"

July

New York icon and jazz singer Tony Bennett passed away in July at the age of 96. Over the course of his life he won 20 Grammy Awards, a Lifetime Achievement Award, and two Primetime Emmy Awards. He was also named a Kennedy Center Honoree and founded the Frank Sinatra School of the Arts in Astoria, Queens. He sold more than 50 million records worldwide and broke the record for the longest run of a top-10 album on the Billboard 200 chart. His first record was in 1962, and his last, *Love for Sale*, was released in collaboration with Lady Gaga in 2021. With this release, he also broke the *Guinness Book of World Record* for the oldest person to release an album of new material at 95 years old.

August

Irish musician Hozier released his third studio album, *Unreal Unearth*. In an interview with *Rolling Stone UK*, he said that he wrote much of the album during the pandemic and that it was his way of making sense of that chaos. Hozier said the album was inspired by *Dante's Inferno*, which he was reading at the time. In the interview, he stated, "there's a subtle element and I wanted to be light and playful with it. The album can be taken as a collection of songs, but also as a little bit of a journey. It starts with a descent, and I've arranged the songs according to their themes into nine circles, just playfully reflecting Dante's nine circles then an ascent at the end." *Unreal Unearth* also features Hozier writing and singing in the Irish language for the first time on an album.

September

Margaritaville icon Jimmy Buffett passed away in his Sag Harbor, Long Island home in September at the age of 76 from complications of Merkel-cell carcinoma. Known for his tropical rock music, Buffett's songs promoted enjoying life and following your heart. Eight of his albums are certified gold, nine are certified platinum or multi-platinum, and in total, he sold over 20 million albums.

October

The Rolling Stones released their first studio album since 2005, *Hackney Diamonds*. The album is the band's first following the death of drummer, Charlie Watts, in 2021. Watts received a drumming credit for the work he did on the album prior to his death. *Hackney Diamonds* features guest appearances from Elton John, Lady Gaga, Paul McCartney, and Stevie Wonder, and some critics have rated it the Rolling Stones' best album in decades.

November

Dolly Parton released her first ever rock album *Rockstar* in November, following her induction into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 2022. Parton initially declined her nomination for induction, stating, "I don't feel that I have earned that right. I really do not want votes to be split because of me, so I must respectfully bow out."

She later accepted the nomination, and at the induction, noted that, "If I'm gonna be in the Rock and Roll Hall of fame, I'm gonna have to earn it." The album is 30 tracks and features legends like Richie Sambora, John Fogerty, Stevie Nicks, and Joan Jett, among many, many others.

December

On December 2, KISS will conclude its End of the Road world tour, with the final performance after 50 years as a band taking place at Madison Square Garden in New York City.

As they say, all good things must come to an end. Now we can look forward to all of the music that 2024 will bring us. •

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The Corner Counter

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Lauren Cunningham-Housman shared, “I was in my early-30s and working in finance and accounting. I enjoyed cheese as a hobby; I would always go to specialty stores when traveling, bring cheese plates to parties, and take cheese and wine pairing classes. I was questioning ‘what do I want to do for the rest of my life?’ and thought ‘maybe I can turn my interest in cheese into a career.’” The Corner Counter offers a variety of pantry picks; baked goods and pastries; a variety of local cheeses; a full menu of sandwiches, salads, and small plates; and a shelf full of local wines, beers, and ciders. The broad menu is also what sets The Corner Counter apart from similar businesses. “In the city, you can get away with being just one thing, but knowing that we were going to be in a smaller village, I wanted to have a broader menu and offerings to ensure that we can serve everyone,” Lauren said. Going forward, Lauren is interested in partnering with the community to host events, classes, and workshops. “We want to promote cheese education through classes and working with local schools. I also want to provide education opportunities for our staff by bringing them to visit local farms and cheesemakers. That’s what drew me to cheese initially, the stories behind the cheese and learning about the cheesemakers.”



Grace Smith House

1 Brookside Ave., Poughkeepsie, NY. (845) 471-3033
gracesmithhouse.org

Grace Smith House is a private, nonprofit organization that provides residential and non-residential services to victims of domestic violence and their families. It offers shelter, transitional housing, advocacy, counseling, and outreach to residents of Dutchess County. Its mission is to enable individuals and families to live free from domestic violence by providing resources to victims and families, raising community awareness, and by initiating and taking positions on public policies in order to provide options that empower victims of domestic violence. “At the end of the day, the services that we have are tailored to the situation and to what the victim wants to do. They don’t have to leave for us to be able to help them,” said Branka Bryan, Grace Smith House’s executive director. It also offers domestic violence counseling and support groups, advocacy and accompaniment, and Spanish-speaking advocacy and counseling outreach. “Having an advocate to talk to and help you understand the dynamics in the relationship, the resources available, and how to leave is so important. Everybody’s situation is different, so having someone who understands those complexities is vital,” Bryan said.



Irwin Feld Design

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Irwin Feld first opened his studio in August of 2023. “I wanted a business close to my home in Hillsdale and found the perfect spot right in the hamlet. I knew immediately that this was meant to be, and it has proven to be everything I had imagined.” Irwin Feld Design provides interior design services and sells vintage furniture, art, and decor. Also included are select items from CF Modern, a furniture brand that Feld founded in 2011. “Together, these items have created a distinctive visual landscape and have been a great addition to the town’s businesses.” What sets Irwin Feld Design apart from similar businesses? “I’m not a one-size-fits-most designer. I have formulated deep connections with my clients and have taken their wishes and blended them with my expertise to create a space that is a reflection of who they truly are and suited to their lifestyle.” For Irwin, the most rewarding part about being in the business is the incredible people that he’s met. “My love of design and perseverance have taken me on an incredible journey over the years.” Going forward, he will continue to “trust the process” and allow the next chapter of his career to unfold. “I will continue to grow professionally and expand my talents as I have done previously.”



CT Parent Connection

2 Washington Square, Newtown, CT. (203) 270-1600
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CT Parent Connection began in 1993 and was officially registered as a non-profit organization in 2003, following the death of a young man in the Newtown community. “It was established in response to an urgent need in our town to educate and empower parents to assist in curtailing substance use and abuse among our youth,” said Mia DiFrancesco-Licata, marketing director of CT Parent Connection. The services that it provides include hope and support groups that meet three times a week as well as bereavement support groups. It also hosts forums and workshops for parents and youth alike. What sets CT Parent Connection apart from similar organizations is that it “takes a different approach from the typical ‘tough love’ and teaches the skills necessary for both parents and children. Other support groups don’t always allow interactive communication and only allow the featured speaker or counselor to lead.” The most rewarding part about its work is “saving lives, empowering, educating, and embracing.” Going forward, CT Parent Connection sees much more work to be done. “We need to get the word out there in order to prevent the insidious disease known as addiction.”



INSURING YOUR WORLD

Liability coverage ... how much is appropriate? This is a question that is being asked more and more frequently by all our customers and for good reason. Let's start with a person's underlying homeowner limits. I believe that all homeowners policies should have at least \$500,000 of personal liability coverage and preferably \$1 million. The cost to increase your limits from \$500,000 to \$1 million is, generally speaking, only in the \$25-30 range! Most umbrella policies require that the underlying limit of the homeowners personal liability be \$500,000, so check your current policy and see where your limit currently stands. Automobile limits are even more important than ever to review since the cost of auto related liability lawsuits are skyrocketing. Considering this, NYS requires that a person carry limits of \$25,000/\$50,000 for bodily injury and \$10,000 for property damage liability. When is the last time you heard of a bodily injury claim being settled for \$25,000? How about repairing or replacing damage to another person's car? \$10,000 won't go too far either. Any settlements above these limits will have to come from the insured's pocket, which can lead to many personal financial issues. Lastly, buy an umbrella – a \$1 million umbrella starts at \$160/year. This is a very inexpensive legal retainer should one get sued for an amount over their underlying limits. Call your agent now and do a quick review.



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Keeping your pets safe during the colder months

The winter months bring new challenges for pet parents, so here are some tips for keeping your pet safe during the cold weather. Different breeds of dogs will tolerate cold conditions differently. If your dog is a northern breed like husky or Newfoundland, it will have a special undercoat and a body size that will keep it warm, so it can play in the cold and snow for an hour or two. But if your dog is short-coated or small, then the rule of thumb to follow is this: if you feel the cold then so does your dog. Don't let it stay outside longer than it takes for you to feel the chill. Also, any dog can suffer injury to their pads by walking on icy and salt-treated surfaces. Some will tolerate boots, but always be sure to wipe your dog's feet down as soon as you get inside, and towel your dog off if it gets wet. Cats can really suffer from the cold and should never be outside, especially in freezing weather. If you are caring for feral cats, be sure to provide a shelter for them with insulating straw bedding – never use towels or blankets in the cold weather for a feral house. If bedding gets wet, a cat can freeze to death. If you find your pet or any stray dog or cat suffering symptoms of hypothermia, do not douse them in warm water. Get them to a vet as soon as possible.

By Lynne Meloccaro,
Executive Director of Dutchess County SPCA

Dutchess County SPCA provides services to the community including affordable payment plans for veterinary care, safety-net pet housing, pet food pantries, free rabies clinics, and pet retention assistance.



For more information: www.dccspca.org

Advice for the newly engaged

Newly engaged? Congratulations! You have already decided the who (which is the hardest part), now you have to figure out the what, when, where, and why.

The date, the venue, the photographer, and the florist are all very important, but I think in today's world most people are forgetting the most important part, which is the why.

Why are you getting married to this person? It is easy to see a beautiful ring and romantic proposal and jump right into party-planning mode. My advice to any couple that is recently engaged is to slow down, take a minute, and think "Why?" Why is this your person? Why do you want to spend the rest of your life with them? The color schemes, members of your wedding party, and the honeymoon destination can wait a little longer. A marriage will hopefully last your lifetime – and if it doesn't that is okay too. But make sure that you don't get so wrapped up in the details of your big day that you forget what it is about. A wedding is not solely meant to be a big party. It is meant to be a time when you commit yourself to your person while the most important people in your life witness you vowing to do so.

Take a breath, maybe have a glass of champagne, and when making your wedding inspiration board on Pinterest, making sure never to forget the real reason you are planning this big party: each other.



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Helping dogs adjust to visitors

There are several ways to help dogs adjust to a visitor's presence without bad behavior. Effective options include:

- Provide the dog a safe space and training them to use it. This can be a crate, bed, or just a corner of the room where it knows it is safe. The dog should be trained to go to that spot with a simple command, which can be used whenever a guest arrives.
- Reinforce all training commands, especially "stay," "down," and "no." Focusing on commands that will be important around guests will help the dog remember its manners and exhibit proper behavior when guests visit.
- Leash the dog when a guest arrives. Using a short leash can remind the dog about proper behavior and keep the owner in control to minimize jumping or other poor behavior.
- Greet guests outside first, then move inside. Very territorial dogs may do best when guests are initially greeted outside in a neutral area. Then the guest can enter the home and get settled, and after a minute or two the dog and owner can go inside.
- Be confident when guests arrive. Dogs take behavioral clues from their owners, and if an owner comfortably greets a guest with a good tone of voice, the dog will know this is a person to be trusted and welcomed. A hug or handshake can also give the guest a touch of the owner's scent, which will help the dog feel more comfortable.
- Introduce the dog properly. Dogs get to know newcomers through sniffing, so allow the dog to greet guests in their own way. Permit the dog to approach and learn about the guest so it can accept the visitor more readily.
- Reward good behavior. When a dog responds to commands and reacts appropriately to a guest, reward that behavior.

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season and a new year full of joy and wonder



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