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LOVE & LOSS

February, to some, is the heart month. Heart as in, yes, love with Valentine's Day, but also because February is American Heart Month. No matter your relationship status, we implore everyone to give their heart some extra love this month, whether that be to go see your doctor and get a physical or to do research for ways to be healthier and strengthen your heart – or whatever is right for you, your body, and your well-being.

The heart is a funny thing: it gives us life, yet when we're hurting, the saying is that our "heart hurts." Unfortunately, most of us have experienced hurt like that, and when you're in the midst of it, it truly feels that your core hurts in a way that you've never felt before. As I sit here and write this, I'm thinking about a family that is very close to me, and right now their hearts are hurting from losing their patriarch. My heart hurts for them.

While I was contemplating what to write this month in this editor's note, of course love and the heart were at the forefront, but then the thought of how it is all connected occurred to me, hence these ramblings. As I've been doing said rambling, I've also been stuck in my thoughts and feelings, and it made me realize the truth in the Icelandic saying that "the distance between laughter and tears is short." (In Icelandic, it is more poetic because the words rhyme). The sentiment is there though. I say this only as a reminder that no matter what's happening in your life, be grateful for what you have – and most importantly, be grateful for the people in your life, because they are the substance of our lives. So pull your loved ones tighter, give them a hug, call them up and tell them you love them, or shoot them a text to let them know you're thinking of them ... whatever you want.

I think the concept of bringing joy to your heart every day should be something that we should all strive for. The world would be a much better place if we did. There's so much bad and negative happening in today's world, and all of these things are out of our control, so why not spend more time and energy on the things that we can control? Why not spend our energy on love and compassion? Why not spend our energy on spreading said love and compassion? We can control our actions and we can control hugging our kids and telling them we are proud of them and that we love them. We can control helping our community and spreading kindness. So this month, let's take care of our hearts. Spread love and kindness.

– Thorunn Kristjansdottir



FEBRUARY 2026

We all know that Disney has the monopoly, and probably the copyright, on a certain question, but like... do you wanna... like... build a snow man?

Photo by
Olivia Valentine

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LARGE

By Leora Armstrong
info@mainstreetmag.com

RUTH
 AIZUSS
 MIGDAL

A vital energy exudes from Ruth Aizuss Migdal, a sense of joy and perseverance strides through our conversation. She has been creating work her whole life, with the seed of painting planted early. For more than 50 years, Migdal has been making sculptures and, since 2009, has increasingly focused on large-scale public works across the United States. These vibrant abstract sculptures, some rooted in female forms or tree forms, tower over the viewer, asserting independence, resilience, and joie de vivre, while unmistakably carrying Migdal's own force of presence. Her studio is filled with ongoing projects; shelves are layered with bronze and steel-patinated female forms, constructed and deconstructed, reflecting the body in movement. Some angular, whilst others appear sensuous, many are realized as monumental works. I had the great pleasure of speaking with Migdal about her industrious journey, equally devoted to both teaching and her own art practice.

What first sparked your entry into the world of painting and sculpture? What motivates your practice?

First, let me tell you: I'm now 93. My parents were poor Jewish immigrants

who settled in Chicago's West Side. My father's family came to the United States in 1906 from Russia and Poland. My mother arrived after the First World War, but her parents never made it. They were murdered in 1942, and their entire town was wiped out. It was a very difficult history to grow up with.

I was born a twin, weighing just a few pounds, in the days before incubators, so we stayed in the hospital for two weeks. In those days, mothers stayed in the hospital for weeks after giving birth, not days like today. My mother took care of my brother while the nurses took great care of me. That amazing ministrant saved my life, and we both thrived. Interestingly, my twin has no interest in art at all; the artistic gene stayed with me, luckily.

In first grade, our teacher drew something on the board and asked us to copy it. Mine looked exactly like hers, while everyone else's were little doodles, so I was declared "the artist." I was given as much paper as I needed, a rare privilege, since paper was expensive. These were rough, small sheets, and carefully rationed, but I treasured being able to draw. I loved school; I was inquisitive, eager to learn, and felt supported there.

So, I feel I became an artist the moment I chose to be one, at the age of eleven. The Women's Board of the Art Institute of Chicago sent invita-

tions to public school students for lecture classes, and my teacher gave me one. When I walked in, I saw this large painting on the wall, and a man was discussing the program in detail. In that moment, I knew that was what I wanted to do. After the lecture, we were asked to draw an image in the manner of what we had just seen. If your drawing was selected, you were invited to attend Saturday classes at the Art Institute, where we drew clothed models on a stage. Thankfully, I was selected, and whilst there, I discovered another program for children, which had two sessions a day, from nine to twelve and from one to four, which cost \$25, which was a fortune to me at the time. However, I didn't have the money, but my older brother gave me the \$25 so I could attend. It was thrilling.

Amazing to have that inspiration so young. You went on to art school and began painting seriously. Can you talk about that transition?

Even in Saturday school, I was always drawing. I began painting seriously, earning my BFA from The School of the Art Institute of Chicago, where I received a partial scholarship. In those days, tuition was divided into quarters at \$100 each session. Educational life was cheaper then; my husband went to the University of Chicago, and it cost \$200 a quarter. Even without much money, it was possible to live

and work. I completed an MFA from the University of Illinois in Champaign, both in painting and printmaking. More recently, in 2019 I received an Honorary Doctorate of Humane Letters from the University of Illinois, Chicago. I continued to focus on painting for a long time; architects loved my large abstract paintings. Interestingly, people used to tell me they felt like sculptures.

However, the work began to feel repetitive, and I felt it was time to move on. There are painters still working who I think should have done what I did – stop. We must continually evolve as artists, keeping our work and minds open. So, I did. In 1971, I began working in clay; in essence, I became a self-taught sculptor. Of course, many mistakes were made, but with a strong artistic background, I could learn anything with perseverance. Clay figures became my focus for twenty years. In 1990, I joined a study group at the International Sculpture Conference in Washington, DC, where I learned to make molds and waxes and finally had the work cast in bronze. UPS shipped all these bronzes back to Chicago. I did not look back and never returned to clay; I have stayed with bronze for both its permanence and flexibility.

Wanting to work on a larger scale, I approached Orsolini Welding and Fabricating Co., across the street. I showed him an eight-inch clay maquette, asking, "This is eight inches. Can you make it eight feet?" And they did. When I saw it at that scale,

I was hooked. There began my Diva Series, works often 12 feet in height, way beyond my physical ability. Now, I make a variety of maquettes in steel before realizing the final, larger pieces, often as a series, which are fabricated in steel, painted with red epoxy, and assembled for installation. The larger bronze works, cast using the lost-wax method, are also reassembled and welded in place. I leave these pieces unwaxed so the patina will grow over time, allowing the work to continually evolve.

In addition to your practice, you've had a long teaching career. What can you share about your approach to teaching?

I grew up in a family that favored boys. My mother had wanted me to become a secretary so I could support my brother and the family. However, I rebelled and made sure I never learned to type, just in case. So, I supported myself through teaching, never expecting to make any money as an artist; none of us did. If you wanted to be an artist, you had to find a way, so I chose work that didn't interfere with being creative. Most women artists don't have children; however, I wanted them, so I adopted my children. I had no illusions about becoming famous. I raised my kids, I taught at school during the day and at night, when they were asleep, I painted in the basement.

I had the privilege of teaching for over 30 years at both Malcolm X College and Harold Washington College.



Above, left: A small sculpture in steel, 22" x 16" x 16", serves as a maquette before making a large one called *Starlight*. *Starlight*, 264" x 192" x 192", is on public display in Lincoln Park, Chicago, IL, through May 2026.

Above, right: *Whirling Dervish*, Steel, 276" x 76" x 120" (2010).

Opposite page:
Left: *Red Dancing Cloud Tree*, stainless steel, 192" x 96" x 96" (2019). Image courtesy of Morrison Gallery in Kent, CT.

Right: *Radiate*, bronze, 84" x 36" (2015). Image courtesy of Daphne Gallery Bantam.

Below, left: Ruth Aizuss Migdal from her graduation photo and today.

I feel art engages a different part of the brain; it is not the part damaged by bad schooling; it draws on your natural intelligence. Art teaches you to look, and learning how to look makes you more curious.

My students were wonderful. I also taught on Saturdays, with graduate students from other colleges working alongside me in clay. I often wrote recommendation letters, telling admissions committees, *you really should take this person – you'd be missing something important if you didn't*. And they would get in; it was joyful to see them succeed. It is important to follow your dream, but make sure you have a way to support yourself that doesn't interfere with it. Artists have always known this.

On your journey, were there particular sculptors or artists who motivated you to dig deeper?

I admire many artists and have spent an enormous amount of time at the Chicago Art Institute. From the moment I decided that I was going to be an artist, I was constantly making notes on the works I loved, just looking and looking. I was especially drawn to the dark, early Italian Renaissance. When I encountered a piece that moved me, I would copy it, get it out of my system, and then move on. I loved the figure, especially the large bronze figures. I still do. When I finally saw Rodin's original works in Paris, I understood how extraordinary they are; his best works



Continued on next page ...



Ruth Aizuss Migdal sitting with *Red Tree Rising 2025*, in the AIDS Garden, Lincoln Park, Chicago.

are in Paris. But Camille Claudel, his muse and lover, was also magnificent, yet she struggled with familial disapproval of being an artist; being a woman artist was very hard, particularly then.

Early on, I studied Toulouse-Lautrec, particularly his use of angles and composition. I am very conscious of composition. I translated those angular relationships into sculpture. And I'm still learning, always trying to understand a better way to create.

What inspired your focus on the female form?

I have always had a fighting spirit, especially as a girl in my family with brothers. When I was five years old, I came home from kindergarten, and my older brother said to me, *I'm smarter than you*. This made me furious. I vowed to show people how smart I could be throughout grammar school and high school.

My work is a protest about how women are treated. My earlier paintings and wood sculptures were more abstract, but in the early 1970s I became more immersed in the female figure, working in clay through to the 1990s when I switched to bronze. I made the larger steel sculptures red as I felt that would truly register with the viewer. You cannot ignore them; they are bold and defiant. Men don't always want to look at women who are not beautiful, but they will look at the color red; red demands attention. These sculptures are my protest. Look at what's happening to women's rights; the situation is worse than ever. Some people keep diaries. I look at my work and remember exactly what was happening in the world when I made each piece.

Is red the only color you use in these public works?

Yes. Public steel works are red and finished with epoxy. It's expensive. This isn't ordinary paint; it's engineered so the sun won't destroy it. I've learned that if you don't use the best materials, you'll only have to make everything again.

All my money goes into the making process. It's worth it, but I must sell enough to cover the costs. I've always had to be careful. My parents never gave me a penny; they didn't have one to give. During school, I worked constantly, with night jobs alongside a five-year art program. I was always running from place to place.

How does the placement of your public work usually happen? What is your most recent work that we can see?

There is often a call for work where you submit images, a maquette, and information, and if you're selected, the larger piece is installed for a set period, often one year or two. My most recent piece, *Red Tree Rising 2025*, is situated in the AIDS Garden, Lincoln Park, Chicago. Trees are another common thread throughout my work; they are like women, with roots deep in the ground and branches reaching upward, powerful and beautiful.

Another tree-focused sculpture, *Red Dancing Cloud Tree*, 2019, came to Kent, CT, with the Morrison Gallery who represent my work.

Before making anything large, I always build multiple scale maquettes, which I also sell. I recently finished a new maquette after completing the Lincoln Park piece, but I don't have the funding right now to realize it at full scale.

Sometimes, when the time for a public work ends, if I don't have another placement for the sculpture, it will remain on loan, so the sculptures can stay in place for the public. I don't have a large storage space, so this is a way to keep the work and message alive in the world. Everyone can enjoy it. I just love working; I do what I love. One thing I always told my students is this: time is not money; time is quality. Use it well.

Migdal continues to work weekly in her studio and is deeply devoted to her practice, reminding us that passion and curiosity carry vitality throughout our lives. Her impressive sculptures gaze across the landscape, resonating both the strength and joy of being a woman.

One can see Migdal's pieces in Kent through the Morrison Gallery; Celebrate and Red Dancing Cloud Tree sit majestically within the landscape, both in stainless steel adorned in bold red, holding forth throughout the seasons.

Daphne Gallery in Bantam also currently has Radiate, an eight-foot bronze on a three-foot bronze base. The female form is both voluptuous and deconstructed, with a sensational gold patina.

You can see more of Ruth Aizuss Migdal's work: Instagram: @ruthaizussmigdal, website: ruthssculpture.com, or you can email: ruthsculptor@gmail.com. For further info you can visit morrisongallery.com or daphneartgallery.com.



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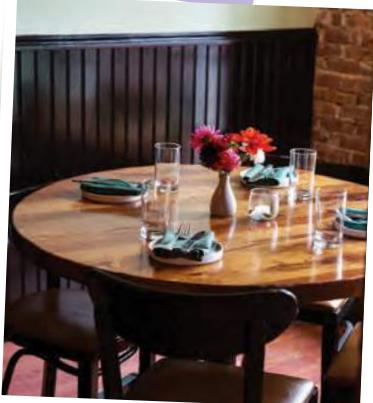
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FEBRUARY MUSTS

to eat



Dinner at Willa. Abby's Pick: Willa Bar, located at 52 Main Street in Millerton, NY, is focused on creating beautiful food in a beautiful setting. Willa provides its guests with local, elegant, and classic dishes that rotate regularly and are sure to satisfy any appetite. Willa sources its food from small producers throughout the Hudson Valley, including local farms like Chaseholm Farm, Kinderhook Farm, Hudson Valley Fisheries, and Thistle Pass Farm, amongst others. Leaning into the flavors of the season, some of the delicious items on the menu currently include appetizers like the brussel sprout caesar and grilled carrots; mains such as the ever-popular Kinderhook Smash Burger; and make sure you save room for a sweet treat at the end of your meal, such as the chocolate cake or the tangerine sorbet. Make a reservation or pop into Willa's warm and welcoming atmosphere to enjoy a fantastic meal, complemented by a wonderful cocktail and even better service. *Photo courtesy of Willa Bar.*



to Watch

Bridgerton Season 4. Ashley's Pick: I have a love/hate relationship with the Netflix series *Bridgerton*. I hate how long each season takes to come out, but absolutely love watching the show. Lucky for us, season four will be premiering in two parts: January 29 and February 26. This season will focus on the character of the second-eldest sibling, Benedict Bridgerton. His love story begins at a masquerade ball, where a woman in a mysterious mask becomes Benedict's love interest. The woman in the mask is none other than Sophie Baek, a maid with a hidden past. Grab your popcorn and clutch your pearls, because this season will explore forbidden love, class divides, and Benedict's hesitation to settle down and find happiness once and for all. *Photo courtesy of the Bridgerton Official Instagram page.*



TO MAKE

Lotion Bar Workshop at Clover Brooke Farm. Abby's Pick: If you find yourself in a crafty mood on Saturday, February 14, head over to Clover Brooke Farm at 175 Ruskey Lane, Hyde Park, NY, for a lotion bar workshop. During the workshop, you'll craft six luxurious solid lotion bars using all-natural, plant-based ingredients such as nourishing shea butter. Personalize the lotion bars with essential oils, learn step-by-step techniques, and package your creations in reusable tins – perfect for gifting or personal use! The lotion bar workshop is held on the farm at 1pm and runs for one hour and 15 minutes. Clover Brooke Farm also regularly hosts a variety of other classes and workshops, including soap making, beer brewing, fiber arts, loofah making, tapestry weaving, spinning, and knitting. Tickets (\$50) and additional information can be found on Clover Brooke Farm's website cloverbrookefarm.com. *Photo courtesy of Clover Brooke Farm.*

To do

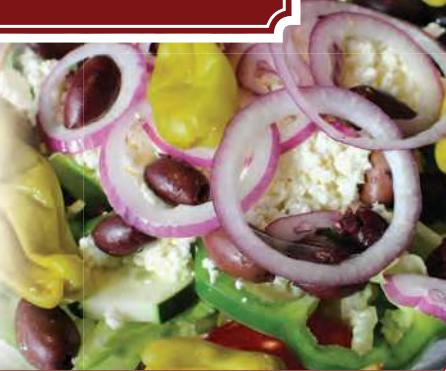


Snow tubing at Catamount. Ashley's Pick: Who doesn't love a good date night? Although it's nice to receive flowers and chocolate and be wined and dined, it's also nice to include the kiddos in fun experiences, too. Nestled between Hillsdale, NY, and Egremont, MA, snow tubing at Catamount Mountain Resort is the perfect outdoor winter activity to get the whole family involved. Catamount's website states, "It's fun for the whole family! Come experience the exhilaration of tubing down one of our multiple lanes. With a magic carpet lift to bring you back up to the top, the fun is endless!" To ensure a quicker check-in so you get your full two-hour time slot for fun, it's highly recommended to schedule a reservation on Catamount's website as well as fill out a waiver for each person in your party ahead of time. For more information, visit Catamount's website catamountski.com. *Photo courtesy of Catamount.*

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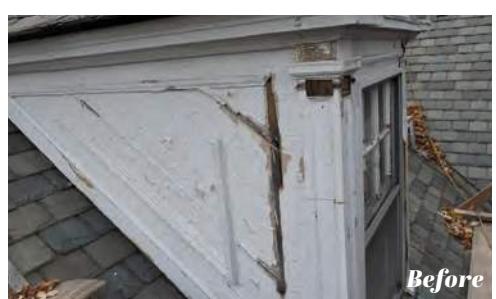
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Jane Buck of Hudson Valley Letterpress in Hillsdale, NY

CUSTOM WEDDING ANNOUNCEMENTS

By Christine Bates
info@mainstreetmag.com

Main Street Magazine spent several hours with Jane Buck, the voluble English artist of Hudson Valley Letterpress, in her ground floor studio in the heart of Hillsdale, NY. Watched over by her office beagle she explained the history and mechanics of her five printing presses, far too complicated to go into, and showed samples of wedding and party invitations, save the dates, and special event announcements. All are custom designed by her, each one very different, but most with a light touch of humor and whimsy. It was a fascinating and instructive afternoon.

Why is there a letterpress revival? What is letterpress?

Brides and technology with the help of Martha Stewart ignited the revival of letterpress in the 1980s. The wedding industry in the United States has grown enormously as weddings moved from churches to venues, think of Jeff Bezos in Venice, fueled by social media. Bachelorette parties, rehearsal dinners, and destination weddings in exotic places were added, along with wedding insurance, wedding planners, five-figure flowers, and gigantic engagement rings. With the help of Martha Stewart's 1987 wedding book, custom-designed, letterpress wedding invitations, menus, and save-the-dates became expected for high-end weddings.

Letterpress itself goes back to the 15th century, and the basics are still the same except that the technology of photopolymer plates replaced movable type and metal plates and allowed printers to easily create an elegant design and then use the traditional equipment of a letterpress to print the image.

Why is letterpress preferred for wedding invitations?

Letterpress is the only way to produce the tactile quality of deep printing on thick cotton paper. People sometimes request letterpress announcements for births and other special events

and even business cards but 95% of my business is specifically wedding related.

How did you and your business end up in Hillsdale?

You may have detected that I'm English. I studied fashion/textile design and art history at Bretton Hall, University of Leeds. After gigs in retail, merchandising, and freelance illustration, my husband and I moved to Red Hook in Brooklyn where I opened a shop in 2009 called Foxy & Winston named after my parents. Clients kept asking me about letterpress wedding invitations, so I learned to print in Williamsburg and rented press time by the hour. My shop was a success, but my husband, who's a Kiwi, and I decided we wanted to live in the country instead of a cramped apartment and found a wonderful old home up here. For about three months I commuted into Brooklyn to my store but quickly decided it wouldn't work, relocated my business here, and renamed it Hudson Valley Letterpress. I found an affordable space with a concrete floor and was able to start buying my own presses.

How do brides find you? Where are the weddings?

Brides and wedding planners find me on Instagram. About half of my business is through planners and half direct to brides. The weddings can be in the Rainbow Room in New York or a ranch in Texas. Destination weddings happen all over, especially here in the Hudson Valley, and sometimes I'm invited.

Is it easy working with bridezillas?

Actually, sometimes, I prefer working directly with the bride rather than adding the planner to the communication chain.



Hudson Valley Letterpress projects often include a detail card that accompanies the invitation for a wedding weekend. Letterpress "Save the Date" cards go out at least six months before the actual wedding. Photos courtesy of Jane Buck.

Continued on next page ...



Wedding invitations designed by Jane Buck capture the spirit of the event. Photos courtesy of Jane Buck.

Right: Jane Buck at the Vandercook letterpress in her Hillsdale studio. Photo by Christine Bates.

What is the process?

There are three stages. The first is the overall theme and the save-the-date card. The second is the actual invitation with the details, and any other collateral like RSVP's included with the invitation. Then there's the third stage of the actual wedding day with programs, escort cards, seating charts, signage, matchbooks, cocktail napkins, menus, and place cards.

How much does a custom letterpress invitation cost?

An average wedding project of around 100 invitations would cost around \$3,500. That includes everything from designing and printing the invitations to printing, addressing, assembling, stamping, and mailing the envelopes. If you add an additional day of the wedding pieces it could add up to \$10,000 depending on the stock, colors, shapes, and printing type. Still, it seems like a very small expense compared to flowers, music, photographers, venue, and food.

How many invitations are usually ordered? When?

I always ask that question because the number of invitations required is different from the number of guests coming. Usually, 100 to 120 invitations are necessary. Depending on where the wedding will be, the save-the-date usually goes out at least six months in advance and then the actual invitation eight to twelve weeks or so before the wedding. Any remaining day-of materials can be printed as close as two weeks before the wedding.

What's most difficult about the letterpress business?

The juggling of the clients and all of their timelines. There's a lot of hurry up and wait in this business. At the same time, it seems that I'm a people pleaser. To me, custom means that I keep the design going back and forth until the client is happy. Few people understand how much work that is and how many hours go into each printed item.

Like many small businesses I don't seem to be able to pass along my increased costs of paper, insurance, and even electricity, much less time.

How much does a letterpress cost?

The question is how much does a letterpress cost to move! They weigh tons. It's a nightmare. One press I purchased in Springfield, MA cost \$2,500 but was over \$3,500 delivered. I bought another press in the Adirondacks for \$750 and one in Elmira, NY

for \$500 and a laser cutter from Tybee Island, GA. I paid a mover \$2,500 to deliver the cutter and pick up both of the other presses on the way.

You've received a lot of press coverage? How did that happen?

It's true. *New York Magazine* voted me "Best Letterpress Printer" of 2012, and I've had mentions in articles in *Real Simple*, *Martha Stewart*, and *Brides* magazines. But now the only thing that seems relevant is Instagram, though it's a miracle that works since I only have 1,600 followers, and sometimes I don't have the time to post for weeks.

What are the trends right now in letterpress projects?

It's all about interesting shapes. I have a laser cutter that can produce items in the shape of flowers or even the Chrysler Building – it's a time-consuming, one-at-a-time process. More and more clients are requesting unusual envelope liners like velvet or botanical designs. No two jobs are ever the same.

What's next for you in 2026?

I have plans to learn how to use my Heidelberg press to be able to do higher volume jobs and my new Vandercook press for large-size prints. And I'd like to have a moment to print my own designs for notecards, posters, and wall art. •

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Mocha

HOT CHOCOLATE

By Olivia Valentine with
Caroline Markonic
info@mainstreetmag.com

I spent an entire week testing and tweaking this hot chocolate before declaring it officially recipe-sharing worthy. My chief taste tester is now in a hot-chocolate-induced coma, which feels like the highest form of culinary praise.

This recipe absolutely demands good-quality cocoa powder and chocolate – this is not the moment for the dusty can of cocoa powder that's been living in the back of your pantry since 2017. Semi-sweet or bittersweet chocolate both work beautifully, depending on your mood, your sweet tooth, and how dramatic you're feeling that day. Prefer things less sweet? Reduce the sugar. I fully support you following your gut.

Top it with whipped cream, marshmallow fluff, or drink it straight from the mug if that's your style. For the sake of making it picture perfect (and because restraint is wildly overrated), I made homemade fluff and toasted the rim of the cup. Honestly, hot chocolate without fluff or whipped cream is like cake without frosting. That said, I've mentioned oodles of times that I have a major sweet tooth, so I'm always *Team Fluff or Whipped Cream*.

If you have a sweetie in your life who loves hot chocolate, this makes the perfect Valentine's Day treat.

If you're making this for your kiddos, you may want to omit the espresso powder ... unless you like to live dangerously.

As always, enjoy.

Ingredients

8 oz milk of choice
2 Tbs good quality cocoa powder
1/8-1/2 tsp espresso powder (depends on your mood)
1/8 tsp cinnamon
1/2 tsp pure vanilla extract
1 Tbs granulated sugar
1 Tbs vanilla syrup (such as Monin or Torani)
2 oz semi-sweet or bittersweet chocolate (I use my kitchen scale to measure)

Instructions

Pour the milk into a medium saucepan and heat over medium heat. Add all of the ingredients except the two ounces of chocolate. Heat until the mixture is hot but not boiling.

Once it's hot, add the chocolate and stir until melted and fully incorporated. At this point, I like to bring out my handheld frother to really mix things up and give the hot chocolate



a slightly thicker, extra-luxurious texture. If you don't have a frother, a whisk will absolutely get the job done.

Add whipped cream or fluff – or both! – to your heart's desire. Likewise sprinkle some chocolate shavings on top. Be careful of that first sip, no one likes a burnt tongue. Enjoy! •

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 @oliviauvalentine.

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What real estate professionals expect in 2026 FORECAST FOR THE RESIDENTIAL TRI-STATE REAL ESTATE MARKET



Left: This renovated retreat at 354 Route 7N in Falls Village, NY is listed for \$1,350,000 by Anne Stettner of Neil Charles Real Estate. Photo by Walter Esner.

Right: 30 Knibloe Hill Road in Sharon, CT is listed for \$1,975,000 by William Melnick of Elyse Harney Real Estate and is move-in ready. Drone photo by Brian Wilcox.



By *Christine Bates*
info@mainstreetmag.com

What do real estate professionals, economists, and bankers predict will happen to the housing market in 2026? The answer depends on geography. While national markets face uncertainty and correction with Sun belt markets seeing price corrections after years of explosive growth, the entire Northeast and Mid-Atlantic region is emerging as the exception characterized by continued high demand, price appreciation, and constrained supply. Goldman Sachs and other banks predict the Northeast will significantly outperform the rest of the country. Realtor.com foresees Hartford, CT as the hottest housing market in the country for 2026 with significant combined growth in sales volume and prices, driven by buyer demand for affordability and value.

“It’s not just the relative value of our real estate that insulates our area from national trends. What truly sets this region apart is its widespread and growing appeal. Buyers from across the country and around the world are drawn to Connecticut, the Berkshires, and the Hudson Valley, not only for the real estate, but also

for the lifestyle,” according to Elyse Harney Morris of Elyse Harney Real Estate. “Clean air, open space, vibrant small towns, cultural richness, and the ability to enjoy all four seasons continue to distinguish the Tri-State region. In 2026, there are real opportunities in the real estate market – particularly for well-priced homes in desirable locations. With accessibility to New York City and Boston, ease of travel to nearby airports, and strong year-round livability, the Tri-State region continues to attract new buyers seeking both lifestyle and long-term value.”

The mortgage rate factor

Most economists project the 30-year fixed mortgage rate to average around 6.1% to 6.3% in 2026. “Mortgages will be a critical factor influencing buyer behavior, as lower rates translate into stronger purchasing power, but they are just as critical for sellers,” observed Paul Breunich, Chairman and CEO of William Pitt – Julia B Fee Sotheby’s International Realty. “As mortgage rates course ever further downward, more and more homeowners will feel better about entering the market. Far from the peaks that neared 8% in 2023, the average 30-year fixed rate mortgage has dropped to its lowest point in three years, dipping to 6.15% at the end of 2025 according to Freddie Mac. We are pre-

dicting that mortgages will fall below 6% by the middle of this year.”

This prediction is particularly significant for homeowners who secured mortgages of 2.5% to 4% during COVID. As rates drift downward to 6% and potentially below, the pain of relocating diminishes, and the inventory of houses for sale will increase.

The new plateau

But what about our rural, less densely populated market? Some real estate agents are reluctant to be quoted, saying “markets will remain unpredictable” given the broader economic uncertainties, geopolitical tensions, and unexpected shocks to consumer confidence. Others, like Morris, are decidedly positive and more than willing to go on the record. “As we look ahead to 2026, the Tri-State market – Connecticut, Massachusetts, and New York – remains resilient and well-positioned. With the stock market at an all-time high, interest rates easing, and inventory remaining limited, buyer confidence is returning. Homes that offer quality, setting, and long-term value are seeing thoughtful and motivated demand. Historically, spring is the most active season, and we anticipate a strong spring market

Continued on next page



Top: This classic cape in Sheffield, MA is listed for \$750,000 by Juliet Moore of Elyse Harney Real Estate. Photo by Juliet Moore.

Above: 5846 South Elm Street in Millerton, NY was listed at \$319,000 in July of 2025 and will require interior modification. Photo by Christine Bates.

as new inventory comes online."

Overall the outlook for the Tri County region is for steady appreciation of 3% to 5% above 2025 levels, unlike national markets, which are seeing price corrections, especially in the south and southwest.

Limited inventory will continue to be challenging for buyers and well-priced, attractive homes will go under contract in less than 30 days. "As regards the real estate outlook in the region for 2026," sums up Anne Stettner of Neil Charles Real Estate, "I anticipate that we will continue to have more buyers than we have inventory, at least on the lower end and the middle of the market. Sellers are hesitant to sell as many have lower interest rates on their existing mortgages and don't want to take a hit by selling and then having to buy at a higher interest rate. That coupled with capital gains taxes takes away a lot of incentive for people to sell."

Hyperlocal trends

Drilling down to specific towns reveals fascinating micro-trends that offer a more nuanced picture of our region. The general forecast for northeastern Dutchess County and northwestern Litchfield County is for stabilization at historically high price points. In 2026 the greatest median price increases may occur in the most

affordable towns like North Canaan, CT where the median price rose in 2025 to \$340,000 or Pine Plains, NY which rose 46% over 2024. These affordable markets are benefiting from the substitution effect as buyers are priced out of towns like Salisbury and Millbrook; they expand their radius and discover communities with more accessible price points. For example, buyers who could not afford Rhinebeck, NY where the median price rose only 0.7% to \$790,000 in 2025, might move to Amenia, NY where the median price rose 10.4% to \$387,500.

While lower than their 2023–2024 interest peaks, the combination of high prices and 6% rates will continue to challenge local first-time buyers. "The local real estate market is shifting as rising costs squeeze 30-to-40-year-old buyers, the primary demographic for housing," said Brad Rebillard of Dutchess County Realty. "In particular, soaring health insurance premiums have significantly eroded their purchasing power. Concurrently, inventory remains suppressed, largely because homeowners are reluctant to trade in their current record-low mortgage rates. 2026 is poised to be a pivotal year; a combination of lower interest rates and health insurance reform will be essential to restoring local affordability." Rebillard's observation about health insurance highlights how housing affordability isn't purely about mortgage rates and home prices. Monthly budgets must include health insurance premiums, which have increased dramatically, along with higher prices at the grocery store and everywhere else.

Return to rational pricing

Strategic, sensible pricing will continue to be critical in a market with greater balance between buyers and sellers. The bidding wars, offers over asking prices, waived inspections, escalation clauses, and emotional decisions of the past few years will diminish in 2026; however, most properties will continue to close within 5% of their asking price. Sellers who overprice based on optimistic comps or irrational assessment of their home's

value will find their homes lingering on the market with a reduced price and few lookers.

Fixer upper value gap will continue

The generation of HGTV millennial buyers will continue to demand homes that are ready to move into and require no renovation. Years of watching property transformations on television have made buyers both more design savvy and less willing to renovate themselves. The premium buyers are willing to pay on homes where the kitchens and bathrooms are professionally renovated is growing wider while fixer uppers are closing at bigger discounts, primarily to flippers. The appeal of redoing an old farm house has disappeared.

Tri-corner fundamentals unchanged for 2026

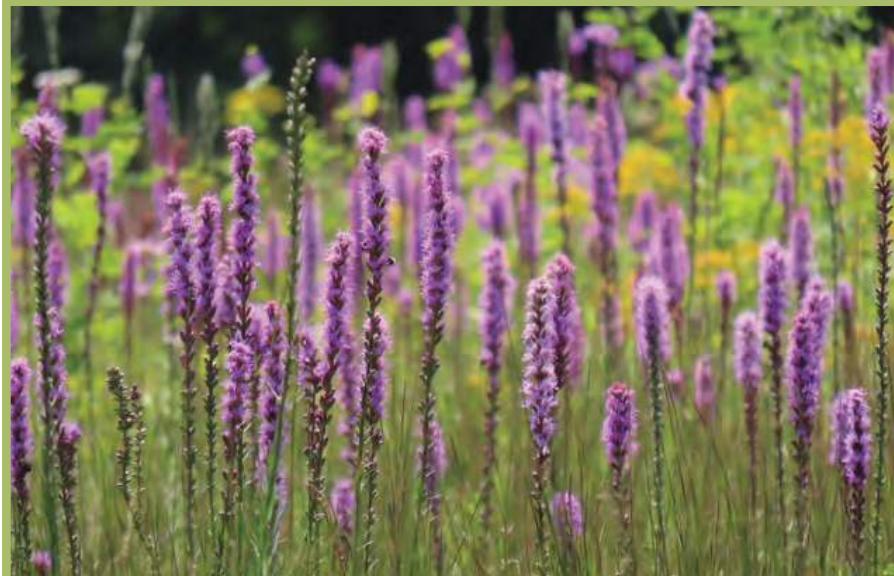
Our real estate markets are slow to respond to dramatic or traumatic events, like the black swans of 9/11, the Great Recession, and COVID. No one can predict these events or even whether their impact will be positive for local real estate, as 9/11 and COVID were, or negative. While many offer predictions, a famous quote by Peter Lynch emphasizes the futility of forecasting: "Nobody can predict interest rates, the future direction of the economy, or the stock market. Dismiss all such forecasts and concentrate on what's actually happening to the companies in which you've invested." This applies especially to buying or selling real estate. The fundamental drivers of the tri-corner market – limited land, strong lifestyle appeal, proximity to a major metro area, constrained supply, and steady demand will continue to anchor the residential real estate market in 2026. •

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ORTHOPEDIC CARE

*right here in the
Hudson Valley*

By Regina Molaro
info@mainstreetmag.com

Whether it's a sports related injury or general wear and tear, at some point many of us will need to rely on the expert care of an orthopedic team. The doctors and surgeons at Columbia Memorial Health's Bone & Joint Center in Hudson, NY are here to help.

The region's only Level 1 trauma center is part of the Albany Med Health System and provides treatment options for adult and pediatric orthopedic conditions, from fractures and dislocations to joint replacement surgery.

Its team, many with decades of experience, recognizes that every patient is different and has unique needs. Before choosing to perform surgery, they look to exhaust all non-surgical and minimally invasive treatments. Sometimes there's no option, and surgery is inevitable.

The Bone & Joint Center is well equipped with all the technology needed to transform bodies and lifestyles. Beyond having an on-site MRI scanner, Hudson's Bone & Joint Center was the first in the region to perform MAKO robotic arm assisted joint replacement surgery. It has nearly a decade of expertise in using this system. It also offers computer-

ized, custom shoulder replacement.

The center offers robotic and computerized joint replacement surgery of the hip, knee, and shoulder as well as arthroscopic rotator cuff, shoulder stabilization, and knee ligament reconstruction. Its team also helps those with disc herniation, degenerative cervical spine, diabetic foot problems and deformities, sports-related injuries, and illnesses.

Offering "big city orthopedic care, right here in Hudson," the center is renowned for delivering a high degree of personalized care. Its orthopedic surgeons handle the most complex surgical cases in northeastern New York and western New England. Its services are now better connected to rehabilitation needs in its network, making care easier to manage.

Meet the Docs

Time is on their side. Many of the surgeons have been with CMH's Bone & Joint Center for decades. The team includes Dr. Louis DiGiovanni, who has dedicated more than 40 years to the Hudson area community. He performs reconstructive surgery on adults, is board certified in arthroscopic surgery, and is MAKO-trained to perform personalized knee,



Above: The entrance to the Greene Medical Arts Center. Below, L-R: Dr. DiGiovanni and Dr. Gorczynski. All photos courtesy of Albany Medical Health System

hip, and shoulder surgeries.

Via the MAKO system, Dr. DiGiovanni creates 3D patient-specific plans from CT scans. These guide the robotic arm that assists in removing damaged bone and placing implants accurately for potentially better movement and quicker recovery. It's important to note that during surgery the surgeon remains in control, only relying on the robot for guidance within pre-planned boundaries, ensuring precise cuts and optimal implant positioning.

Dr. DiGiovanni is joined by Dr. Christopher Gorczynski, who has been with CMH for 20 years. He performs robotic hip and knee replacement and computerized shoulder replacement and is fellowship trained in sports medicine. From 2014 through 2025, Hudson Valley magazine named

him a Top Doctor.

Other team members include Dr. Gregory Pace, who handles general orthopedics and is fellowship trained. He also specializes in foot and ankle surgery. There's also Dr. Scott M. Pregont, who is a sports medicine specialist, and Dr. Catherine Shin, who specializes in hand and upper extremity surgery.

If you're in need of any care for the hands, shoulders, elbows, knees, feet, ankles, or spine, reach out to one of these top docs. They'll certainly help you return to a better quality of life. •

To learn more about The Bone & Joint Center, they are located at 23 Fish and Game Rd. in Hudson, NY. Call (518) 828-7644 or visit them online at albanymed.org/location/bone-and-joint-center-hudson/



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TRI CORNER FEED

MAKING FOOD ACCESSIBLE FOR THOSE WHO NEED IT THE MOST



By Abby Audenino
abby@mainstreetmag.com

Tri Corner FEED (which stands for food equity, education, and distribution), was established in 2023 as an evolution of Linda and James Quella's seven years of hands-on farming experience in the region at Q Farms, which was located in Sharon, CT. Through their farming work, they came to understand not only the strengths, but also the weaknesses of the local food system.

"While nutritious, locally produced food is grown in the area, it remains out of reach for much of the community," explains Tri Corner FEED's director of food programs, Blake Myers. "At the same time, local farmers face ongoing challenges in accessing strong, sustainable markets that support their long-term viability."

In response to these gaps in the system, Tri Corner FEED was launched as a nonprofit organization dedicated to strengthening the regional food system through expanding access to nutrient-dense food by partnering with local farmers and making food available to community members based on their ability to pay. "This

approach supports both community food security and the economic stability of local farms."

A history of farming

Like Linda and James, Blake also comes from a lengthy farming background. She grew up in Central Illinois on her family's nearly 200-year-old farm. "The community that I was raised in was deeply rooted in agricultural heritage, and from an early age, I was surrounded by farming as both a way of life and a cultural foundation."

In high school, she was in Future Farmers of America for four years, and although most of the agriculture in the region where she grew up focused on commercial corn and soybean growth, the agriculture classes that she took broadened her perspective. These classes introduced Blake to farming technology, the impacts of agriculture on the environment and communities, and the complexities of food systems beyond large-scale commodity production.

After graduating high school, Blake spent several years living and working around the globe as a model, spending much of her time in big metropolises, which naturally offered a sharp divergence from her rural upbringing. "Traveling internationally sparked

a deep curiosity about how different cultures grow, prepare, and value food – and how food shapes daily life across the globe," she shares.

Feeding that curiosity, Blake put down roots in New York City in 2015 and began her bachelor's studies at The New School through the Bachelor's Program for Adults and Transfer Students. "The flexibility of the program allowed me to pursue a course load that reflected my wide-ranging interests, including film, food studies, gender studies, and cultural studies. Exploring these subjects side by side helped me understand the many intersections between food, culture, identity, and social systems, and how they continue to shape and influence one another."

When she and her partner began looking for a home in the Hudson Valley in 2019, Blake says the region immediately felt "familiar and grounding." The agricultural landscape echoed the environment that she grew up in and made returning to a rural, agrarian setting feel natural. Since joining the Tri Corner FEED team in 2024, she says she has, "been deeply grateful to be a part of a project that feels like a culmination of my life's experiences – bringing together my agricultural roots, global perspective, and academic interests into

work that feels both meaningful and aligned."

Feeding the community at the Tri Corner FEED Market

Tri Corner FEED operates as a 501(c)3 nonprofit, with the Tri Corner FEED Market serving as one of the organization's core programs. The market, located at 56 South Center Street in Millerton, NY and operating from Friday through Tuesday, offers a carefully curated selection of products from local farms and producers, alongside a number of other culturally relevant staple items. Shelves at the market are stocked with fresh vegetables, proteins, milk, dairy products, eggs, and other pantry essentials.

"The guiding philosophy behind the product mix is intentional: the market is designed so customers can assemble complete, nourishing meals using what is available, while supporting local farms and producers," Blake shares. "While the store might not carry everything, we strive to offer most of what people need to cook and eat well at home."

The market prioritizes sourcing food as locally as possible and makes every effort to purchase from local

Continued on next page ...



All photos with this article are courtesy of Tri Corner FEED

farms and producers whenever it can. Climate and seasonality occasionally require sourcing beyond the immediate region, but the primary guiding principle is simple – “if a product is available locally, it is purchased locally.”

Currently, Tri Corner FEED works with nearly 20 local farms and producers, as well as a few regional distributors. These partnerships ensure that farmers have consistent, reliable outlets for their products, while the community gains access to fresh, high-quality food grown close to home. “Investing in nearby farms helps keep food dollars within the community, supports local livelihoods, and contributes to a stronger, more connected community. In addition, reducing the distance food travels lowers its environmental impact.”

The market functions on a sliding scale payment system, which allows customers to pay according to their budget and circumstances. Customers who plan to shop regularly are invited to register through the organization’s online form, where they are able to select the pricing tier that feels most accessible to them. Currently, Tri Corner FEED offers three pricing tiers: 100% or no discount, for those who can comfortably meet all of their needs; 30% discount, for those who can sometimes meet all of their basic needs, and 60% discount, for those

for whom it is difficult to meet all of their basic needs. Pricing tiers are also flexible and can be adjusted over time as life circumstances change.

“This approach accomplishes two important goals. First, it preserves dignity and privacy by ensuring that a customer’s pricing choice remains their own business. Second, it allows staff to build genuine relationships with the community – learning names, offering a warm greeting, and creating a welcoming, human-centered shopping experience. At its core, the sliding scale model is designed to make choosing food easier, more affordable, and more accessible for everyone,” Blake explains.

For Blake, the daily interactions within the market are one of the most rewarding parts of her work. “Meeting new community members, witnessing conversations unfold, and seeing connections form across different backgrounds makes the space feel truly alive,” she says. “Hearing directly from customers about how the market has made a tangible difference in their lives – whether by improving access to food, creating a sense of belonging, improving health, or simply offering a welcoming space with friendly staff – reinforces the importance of the work and the impact it continues to have.”

Food equity & education programs

Tri Corner FEED’s food equity and education programs are designed to address immediate food access needs, as well as the long-term health of the local food system. Each of the programs is rooted in the belief that aspects such as food security, farm viability, and community are all deeply intersectional.

The Food Sovereignty Program focuses on purchasing food directly from local farms and donating it to three food pantries in the area. This program is modeled after the Glynwood Center for Regional Food and Farming’s food sovereignty program, located in Cold Spring, NY. Like Glynwood, Tri Corner FEED’s program guarantees farm income for the duration of the agreement, providing stability and predictability for the local producers. At the same time, partner food pantries receive a consistent

supply of high-quality, locally raised proteins and/or produce.

“As funding cuts continue to make regional food bank supplies more unpredictable, this reliable access to fresh, nutrient-dense food has become especially meaningful for pantry partners and the neighbors they serve,” Blake says.

Another core program is the Community Advocates for Food Security, which is a volunteer-based effort that supports community engagement. “This group plays an essential role in helping Tri Corner FEED carry out projects, connect with community members, and sustain its programs over time,” Blake explains. “Volunteers act as both supporters and ambassadors, strengthening the organization’s relationship with the broader community.”

Education is an important piece of Tri Corner FEED’s work and is woven throughout all of its programs. The organization partners with other local organizations and businesses to highlight the many individuals and efforts contributing to the regional food system. “Through collaboration and shared learning, these education programs aim to build awareness, deep understanding, and inspire collective action around food equity and food security.”

Turning passive participation into active action

Tri Corner FEED initially started as a small pop-up stand serving roughly 40 customers one day each week. The organization has evolved into a fully established market operating five days per week and reaching about 400 households. This growth has not only expanded the organization’s capacity to support a greater number of local farms, but has also provided the opportunity to connect with more community members and create a more welcoming, inclusive space “where everyone feels they belong.”

Naturally, with this growth has also come increased reach and impact, but the core of the work has remained the same: Tri Corner FEED continues to operate from the belief that food is a basic human right and that everyone deserves access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food.

“Through education, advocacy, and collaboration, the organization remains committed to empowering individuals and the broader Tri Corner community to build resilient food systems that support the health and well-being of people and the planet alike,” Blake shares.

Looking ahead, Tri Corner FEED hopes to continue to deepen relationships with those working in the local food system, as well as the community at large. Blake says that the market has also helped shift many customers from being passive consumers to active participants in the local food system.

“Moving forward, Tri Corner FEED hopes to build on that momentum by continuing to share knowledge, resources, and information that deepen understanding of where local food comes from and why local systems matter,” she says. “Expanding education and community engagement efforts will remain an important part of this process, helping to foster informed participation, mutual support, and sustainability for both farmers and our community.”

“There are countless rewarding aspects to this work, but at its core, it is deeply rooted in people and relationships,” she continues. “One of the most meaningful parts is getting to know the local farmers and learning about the many thoughtful, innovative ways food is grown and produced in the Tri Corner region. The agricultural landscape here is incredibly inspiring and being able to share the stories, practices, and products of these farms with the wider community is both a privilege and a source of ongoing motivation.”

Tri Corner FEED is located at 56 South Center Street, Millerton, NY. They are open on Mondays, Fridays, and Saturdays from 10am-5pm, and Tuesdays and Sundays from 10am-4pm. Learn more about Tri Corner FEED at tricornerfeed.org and follow them on Instagram @tricornerfeed.



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Daniel "Dan" Mahar of Mahar Real Estate THE DAN BEHIND THE CURTAIN

By Abby Audenino
abby@mainstreetmag.com

"My process is all about prioritizing action before reaction, adaptability over ego, and clarity over speed. By defining my own success, I'm able to adjust as conditions change, rather than be structured to fight against them," explains Daniel "Dan" Mahar, a Columbia County native and the founder of Mahar Real Estate.

Growing up in Columbia County has not only shaped his business, but also who he is as a person. He graduated from Pace University with a degree in philosophy and religious studies. After performing as a stand-up comedian and working as a senior fitness specialist, he discovered that real estate was his true calling. While it may be an unconventional path, Mahar says that all of his roles share a common thread – people. His degree taught him to "think deeply and pivot when necessary," stand-up comedy sharpened his wit and allowed him to connect with people from all walks of life, and his work as a fitness specialist encouraged him to build trust and guide his clients toward their goals – all of which have proven to be incredibly useful skills in real estate.

"Long before I opened Mahar Real Estate, I spent years studying how the most successful people on the planet operate. When I was able to dissect how they got to where they are, I took what worked for me and turned it into a repeatable process," he shares. "I paid attention to patterns: discipline over urgency, patience over pressure, and structure over chaos. I've also learned through mentorship and experience that the difference between success and failure is usually discipline."

Showing up for the community

Buying or selling a house is no easy feat, and Mahar understands that. Helping clients through one of the most major life transitions is not

something that he takes lightly. "Our focus is on the locals – first-time buyers, working families, and business owners trying to get a foothold. Some people only buy or sell one house during their entire lives, and it's a serious transaction. You can't enter something like that untrained. That's not just a marketing strategy, it's a mission."

Indeed, for Mahar it's always been about the community, both at work and in his personal life. In 2025, Mahar Real Estate participated in Hudson's Pride Parade, the 25th Annual Ghostly Gallop, a 5k race to benefit the Hudson Area Library, City of Hudson's Winter Walk Celebration, and the Festival of Wreaths. Outside of work, Mahar is a sponsor of the Saratoga Auto Museum in Saratoga Springs, NY, and created a scholarship for students at his alma mater, Taconic Hills Central School District.

When it comes down to it, it's about showing up for your community," he says. "I don't separate my personal beliefs from my professional life. If I'm visible here, I believe I should contribute here. If I'm going to build a team in my own name, I'm responsible for protecting the culture as much as the clients."

New office space and continued growth

Since launching Mahar Real Estate in August of 2024, the company has seen unprecedented growth. The reason that Mahar Real Estate is centrally located in Columbia County is two-fold. For one, Mahar grew up in Columbia County and loves the area. Also, being located in Columbia County allows Mahar Real Estate to serve the eight surrounding counties: Dutchess, Columbia, Ulster, Greene, Albany, Schenectady, Rensselaer, and Saratoga.

Appropriate for the start of 2026, Mahar Real Estate has also recently moved offices. The company transitioned to a larger office space on the first floor of Hudson City Centre,



which not only gives the team more space to work, but also gives Mahar Real Estate the opportunity to invite the community in, host fundraisers, and bring vendors, business partners, and other real estate professionals in to collaborate.

Although both he and Mahar Real Estate as a whole continue to grow and change, Mahar's philosophy remains the same. "The vision hasn't changed, but the players have. I rely on knowing that I don't know. By that I mean there have been some people, tactics, and strategies that I've used that worked, while some didn't. But I'm always willing to try and always looking to meet new people," he shares. "The vision is to help my community through real estate, and ultimately, to bring people together." •

Mahar Real Estate is located at One Hudson City Centre, Suite 104, Hudson, NY. For more information, visit their website maharrealestate.com and keep up with them on Instagram @maharrealestateny.

A TRIBUTE TO HEART ANIMALS



February is all about love and hearts. Granted, that usually assumes we're talking about people, but animal owners know that love also extends to their pets. Most, if not all, would say that there was that special one, who was their heart animal.

Here are tributes to four pets who were especially beloved. Sadly, all were lost over the past year.

Bailey, a Beagle

Bailey started his life with Carl and Laurie Quinn as a heart dog; his adoption from Columbia-Greene Humane Society in Hudson finalized on February 14, 2013. "He picked Laurie," Quinn reported, "I was holding a female pup with a tornado-shaped marking when Bailey went up to Laurie. She had not been an animal person, but he was her dog from the start."

In his first couple of days home, "He was at his dish and tipped over into it with his head shaking, almost as though he was having a seizure." Carl picked him up, became the comfort person, and Bailey became his heart dog too.

The Humane Society said they had heard of similar problems with other dogs from that litter. Seeking answers, Laurie reached out to Andrea Beth, who had adopted the pup Quinn had first picked. They then found Wendy Weeden and Rose Porter, in

Loudonville, who adopted the mother dog, and compared notes. As the pups grew older the attacks stopped; no explanation was ever found.

Quinn said Bailey would sleep on the couch with him, but "Laurie stole him! She put him in bed and he'd sleep in between us."

"He was just so up for everything you'd want to do. He loved the patio, checking all the parts of it." He also loved green beans; this past summer he ate most of the ones they grew, "I don't think I cooked more than a few." Every time he came back in the house, he'd bark for treats, "And if he didn't get them quick enough, he would start to howl."

Bailey was the couple's only dog for several years. When they went to Laurie's family in Syracuse for Christmas, "She packed all his stuff. I think she'd spend as long packing his things as ours. It was crazy," Quinn observed.

At Andrea's 'Bark-B-Q' reunion with Bailey's mother and littermates in Pennsylvania, "It was like they all remembered, just happy to see each other, running like they'd been together forever. Makes you wonder if a scent stays with them?"

Bailey adjusted well to everything, Quinn said, even losing Laurie when she suffered a brain aneurysm several years ago. "He knew things shifted that day, after she was gone."

Benjamin, the Hero Dog

"He was the only one who didn't bark," Sara Martell said about meeting Benjamin at the Eleanor Sonsoni Animal Shelter in Pittsfield, MA. "He

sat in my lap and licked my face."

Her husband David revealed, "Unbeknownst to her, I had followed Benjamin on social media for two months, saving photos of 'The dog I want to have someday.'"

On December 27, 2018, he was theirs and Sara's heart dog as of "he first day he came home." He became her constant companion at physical therapy, "I think he transferred all my mobility issues to himself. I never loved an animal immediately like that, and I think it was mutual."

It took him longer to warm up to David, who "got so excited the first time he jumped into his lap." Sara remembers reassuring David, "He'll be great," about taking Benjamin to work for the first time at their Hilltop Orchards store and tasting room. Instead, she says, Benjamin got loose and "jumped into a Subaru with a stranger."

"We just laughed," when he knocked their first Christmas tree over. Citing his cleverness, David related, "He discovered blankets in the ottoman, so he opened it and jumped in." However, a dog trainer holding classes at their space said he was disruptive, didn't play well with others, and, they laughed, "He got kicked out!"

Then, on Christmas Eve, 2021, in the middle of the night, Benjamin's barking woke them up to discover the building housing their livelihood was on fire. His early detection brought mutual aid fire departments from two states, saving the structure and earning Benjamin the title 'Hero Dog.'

By Barbara Peduzzi

info@mainstreetmag.com

Above, L-R: "You workin'? Mom, I'll help," Streetcar.

"He licked my face. He never licks faces," Benjamin's person Sara Martell told about their first meeting.

Bailey waits for a treat, if not given soon enough he would bark, and then howl.

across much press coverage.

"Benjamin taught us lessons," David said. "He taught me to slow down. I had to plan steps around his disabilities and appointments. Work can wait."

Sara echoed her husband's sentiments: "He ended up 80 pounds of cripple who had to be carried everywhere." That did not deter them from taking him along with them: "The last year he went everywhere with us. He'd stay in the truck with the heat or AC going while we got out and did things."

Towards the end, Benjamin started, "Just staring at David," Sara recalled, "He never gave that kind of attention. I think he knew the end was near, and was saying, 'I love you. I need you to know I've always loved you.'"

Sara wiped a tear, "It was an absolute honor to be fortunate to be his parents in his lifetime. No one ever loved me like Benjamin did."

Shorty, a therapy horse

Laura Corsun, owner of High and Mighty Therapeutic Riding & Driving Center, Inc., was looking for a bigger horse for their bigger riders. After a "go, look, and see" visit to an advertised draft horse, she was trying to decide whether she could afford him. His owners looked at the High and Mighty website and decided, "We'd like to donate him to you," and Rockek Rexio, aka Shorty, became hers.

"We weren't sure it would work. He'd never been in an indoor arena or around so many other horses, but he seemed to be adjusting," Corsun remembered. What he wasn't adjust-



Laura Corsun gives her heart horse, Shorty, a big hug.

ing to was the heavier riders: "From about 200 pounds and up, he couldn't handle the weight, he'd just get grouchy."

Research and talking with a veterinarian revealed that many draft horses are built to pull, not carry weight. "He was fine with the kids, though."

Meanwhile, "I was falling in love with him," Corsun admitted. "He lived in a stall that I could see through the kitchen window, and he could see me at the sink. He knew when I was making coffee. I'd say, 'Good morning, Shorty,' and have coffee with him."

"He could tell when I was away. Do you think they understand?" she asked.

They used him for small and middle-sized riders, and he "really liked some of the young people in the program. He loved the little ones; he would come to the gate to see them, drop his head, smell, and say hello to them. He was very trustworthy with children," she remembered. Corsun's daughter also rode him, gaining prizes in some dressage and hunter pace events.

Saying she thought he really wanted to pull, Corsun said, "That was his calling, and we didn't get to do it." Finding a harness to fit him and a carriage was not practical for the non-profit.

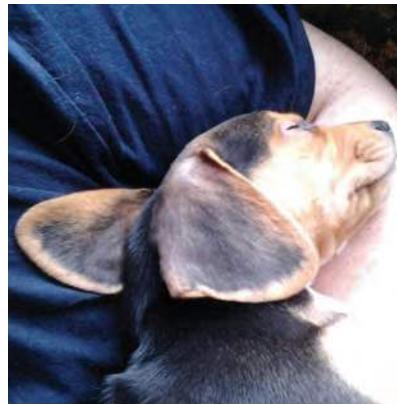
"Even when he got sick, he was so stoic," she recalled wistfully. "He left me knowing something so big at the end. Even when I was under that stress, I learned to take that moment to really listen to him." She vowed, "I will be prepared if this happens again, and I will be a much better person to the next one in this situation."

Corsun mused, "He loved to be groomed," looking out the window and remembering their eleven years together.

Streetcar, a kitten on Desire Street

He meowed until the rescuers stopped the van where he was on the curb in New Orleans. He'd been on his own for a month after Hurricane Katrina flooded the city. They opened a door and he jumped in.

He became my [Barbara's] heart cat when I went to put him into a cage at Camp Katrina, the Humane Society



Top, L-R: Carl Quinn became Bailey's 'comfort person', and Bailey became his heart dog, when the young pup started having seizure-type attacks, which were never diagnosed and he eventually, "He was my heart horse," Lauran Corsun said, seeing this photo of him with admirers during their annual 'Kick Up Your Heels' benefit party. Above, L-R: Old guys just like a soft place for their nap. Bailey tells. Rita holds Streetcar, after she and Cassandra rescued him on Desire Street, one month after Hurricane Katrina.

of Louisiana animal shelter in Tylertown, MS, and he crawled up my chest, put his little paws on either side of my neck and nuzzled my chin with his little nose. All I could do was say, "Well, hello. How do you feel about a long ride north in a few days?" Seeing 'Ktn-fnd -2400 blk Desire' scrawled on an envelope, I told him his name was, "Streetcar", and that he was named after a famous play.

We estimated he was about five months old then. He was 20 when his health issues became too much.

On his last day, he stared out the window, from the table where he'd chirped at the birds outside. I sat by him on the couch and when I went to my desk, he came to tell me I needed to come back with him.

Barbara shared, "For just a few months shy of 20 years, you were my Little Mister. Meowing, insisting, loving. How many times did I move you from lying between my eyes and the book I was reading in bed? Tell you 'Get out from under foot!' and 'I do not put my nose in your food dish; therefore you should not put yours in mine,' and ask 'Why don't you drink from your water dish, but you do from around the tub drain?'"

Reaching to anyone walking past

your cage at Camp Katrina as if to say, "Stop! Pet me!" Your astonished look when I stepped out of the shower the first night of our trip home, "That was water! You got in that on purpose?" Playing catch with Nerf balls and meowing around the house with one in your mouth. You and Prettypurr playing mouse hockey in the bathtub.

Your raucous "Maieos", pushing under the covers on chilly nights, curled up in the chair by my desk, causing computer havoc walking across the keyboard ... and so much more. "You proved 20 years ago you were a survivor. But you told me this time you could not be. You will be my heart cat forever."

There is more about Streetcar and Bailey in the books *A Kitten On Desire Street* and *The Adventures of Bailey the Beagle*. These are just four of many, many, many heart animals. Is there one in your house? •

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Gallop into the Year of the Horse!



istockphoto.com contributor photoguns

By Dominique DeVito
info@mainstreetmag.com

So long, Year of the Snake, and hello, Year of the Horse.

To me there couldn't be any finer animal to welcome in another Chinese zodiac year than the horse, and on February 17, when it starts, I'll be tuning myself into what's possible for the year to come by keeping my thoughts and actions equine oriented.

Why?

Well, why not?

My love affair with horses started young for me. My parents had them on our farm in Chester County, PA, and as soon as I could convince my mother that I would be far happier on the back of a horse than on a bench at the piano, there was no separating me from these majestic animals. I took to heart the proverb often associated with Winston Churchill that says, "There is something about the outside of a horse that is good for the inside of a man," (except that I replaced man with person).

When I was on a horse or with a horse, I was happy. Lucky, lucky me that I was able to spend so much time with horses. And while I don't have that same proximity to them today, they are forever in my heart and, I suspect, in my blood. So 2026 is the Year of the Horse. I lay carrots, oats, alfalfa, and sugar cubes at its feet until it trots away for another 12 years on February 5, 2027, when it will be the Year of the Goat/Sheep.

What is the meaning of the Year of the Horse?

Of all the information out there about the origins of the Chinese zodiac, what I like best is the fable that seems to have survived. It claims that a prominent emperor declared that 12 animals should race, and their finishing times would determine their order of importance in the zodiac. The 12 animals were the rat, ox, tiger, rabbit, dragon, snake, horse, goat (or sheep), monkey, rooster, dog, and pig.

The tale goes that the rat cheated. It thought the ox would win, and so jumped on its shoulders for most of the race, jumping off at just the right time to cross the finish line first. The rat thus became the first animal in the zodiac, followed by the others in the order listed above. The horse finished seventh because the snake, lurking in the grass, startled it, causing it to rear backward, at which time the snake slithered across the finish line just ahead of the horse. Why did the pig finish last? Because it stopped to eat and nap during the race.

Tale or tail or whatever, the 12 animals have been presiding over people's fortunes for thousands of years. Personality traits are associated with each of the animals, and just like we Westerners take our monthly zodiac sign traits to heart, so do Easterners with their animals. That the animals hold court for a full year and only resurface a dozen years later lends extra importance to their presence. Which animal are you?

Here is a description of the signs with the associated birth years:

Rat

1924, 1936, 1948, 1960, 1972, 1984,

1996, 2008, 2020.

Family-oriented, frugal and quick-witted, the Rat is also known to have a good sense of humor and is optimistic. They are a delight to have around and cleverly adapt to any situation.

Ox

1925, 1937, 1949, 1961, 1973, 1985, 1997, 2009, 2021.

Steadfast, relentless and hardworking, an Ox values integrity above everything else. They are always loyal and dependable. There is a chance they might be taken for granted by others due to these qualities and may feel sidelined at times, but they always keep going and are rewarded in the end.

Tiger

1926, 1938, 1950, 1962, 1974, 1986, 1998, 2010, 2022.

Passionate and high on energy, the tiger is an impulsive romantic who loves taking risks. The majestic persona also mirrors a huge ego. Not afraid to make mistakes, the tiger doesn't shy away from trying new things.

Rabbit

1927, 1939, 1951, 1963, 1975, 1987, 1999, 2011, 2023.

The rabbit hates conflict of any kind and is very affable in nature. Social creatures that they are, they look for attention and are great in relationships. A rabbit is also known to be even-tempered and artistic.

Dragon

1928, 1940, 1952, 1964, 1976, 1988, 2000, 2012, 2024.

The Chinese consider Dragons to be great leaders. Enthusiastic, result-oriented and independent, they are one of the most popular animals in the zodiac.

Snake

1929, 1941, 1953, 1965, 1977, 1989, 2001, 2013, 2025

The Snake is mysterious and can be warm and open but also cold and secretive. Highly intuitive and compassionate but only to those who unlock this side of them.

Horse

1930, 1942, 1954, 1966, 1978, 1990, 2002, 2014, 2026

Carefree and wild, people born in the Year of Horse seldom turn an adventure down. They also like to experiment and surround themselves with many people. They have an infectious energy and can sometimes put people off with their slightly imposing opinions.

Goat/Sheep

1931, 1943, 1955, 1967, 1979, 1991, 2003, 2015, 2027

The Goat has a mild temperament and is known to have a kind heart, but do not mistake it to be a push-over, for they value their independence and hate compromising.

Monkey

1932, 1944, 1956, 1968, 1980, 1992, 2004, 2016, 2028

Continued on next page ..

The Monkey has an innate ability to lead and is found to be really good at problem-solving. Monkeys have a tendency to seek new and exciting opportunities and therefore sometimes stray from their partners.

Rooster

1933, 1945, 1957, 1969, 1981, 1993, 2005, 2017, 2029

Flexible and resilient, especially in uncomfortable situations, the Rooster loves things to be perfect. They are bound by duty and pride.

Dog

1934, 1946, 1958, 1970, 1982, 1994, 2006, 2018, 2030

Faithful to the core, those born in the Dog years love to do what is expected of them and to honor their commitments. They are also very detail-oriented, selfless, and giving.

Pig

1935, 1947, 1959, 1971, 1983, 1995, 2007, 2019, 2031

Kind and lovable, Pigs like to keep their circle tight. Usually non-confrontational, they do not shy away from a fight if they are convinced that they are right.

What about your elemental nature?

Besides the influence of the animals in their birth year, the Chinese Zodiac is also rooted in five elements that are considered influencing energies. They are metal, water, wood, fire, and earth.

Metal is rigid and unmovable. It symbolizes strength and a penchant towards making and obeying rules. Its season is autumn.

Water is creative and full of free-flowing energy. Those under its influence are considered calm and forward-thinking but can also be destructive. Its season is winter.

Wood is warm, nurturing and encourages growth. Its season is spring.

Fire is impulsive, passionate, and full of life, with a tendency to be aggressive. Its season is summer.

Earth is dependable, balanced, and consistent. It has both yin and yang energies and so transitions between seasons.

Determining which element relates to you is simple, per this chart:

Metal: The last digit of your birth year is 0 or 1

Water: The last digit of your birth year is 2 or 3

Wood: The last digit of your birth year is 4 or 5

Fire: The last digit of your birth year is 6 or 7

Earth: The last digit of your birth year is 8 or 9



istockphoto.com contributor ma_rish

Each animal sign has a fixed element, as well. They are:

Tiger and Rabbit – Wood

Snake and Horse – Fire

Ox, Dragon, Sheep, and Dog – Earth

Monkey and Rooster – Metal

Pig and Rat – Water

The Year of the Horse is symbolized by fire, just as the Snake was before it. What does this mean for us as we enter it?

What to expect

The Year of the Fire Horse is one of the most dynamic and powerful cycles in the Chinese zodiac. It blends the Horse's natural speed, independence, and vitality with the intensity and transformative force of the Fire element. Together, they create a period marked by rapid movement, bold decisions, and emotional intensity. Historically, Fire Horse years have been remembered for their dramatic shifts, their bursts of creativity, and their ability to push individuals and societies toward reinvention.

At its core, the Fire Horse year is defined by momentum. Opportunities tend to appear quickly, and circumstances can change just as fast. This is a time when people feel compelled to make choices they have long postponed, driven by a sense that staying still is no longer an option. The year encourages bravery, not in a reckless sense, but in the form of stepping into one's own agency and embracing the unknown.

Emotionally, the Fire Horse year is vivid and passionate. Fire heightens the Horse's expressive nature, creating a climate where feelings run strong and authenticity becomes a priority. People may find themselves less will-

ing to tolerate stagnation, dishonesty, or confinement. Instead, there is a collective desire for freedom – freedom of movement, freedom of expression, and freedom from outdated structures. This can lead to breakthroughs in creativity, personal identity, and relationships, but it can also spark impulsive decisions if not tempered with reflection.

Creativity flourishes under the Fire Horse's influence. The combination of boldness and imagination makes this an ideal time for launching new projects, experimenting with fresh ideas, or taking leadership roles. The year rewards those who are willing to take risks and express themselves fully. At the same time, the very intensity that fuels innovation can also create challenges.

Fire Horse years are known for volatility: sudden shifts, emotional flares, and the potential for burnout if energy is not managed wisely. The key is to channel passion into purposeful action rather than scattering it in too many directions. Working with the Fire Horse energy requires a balance of courage and grounding. It is a year that invites movement, but it also demands intention. Those who lean into change with clarity and self-awareness can experience profound growth.

Horses and more to celebrate

If you want to creatively explore how the Chinese New Year and the Year of the Fire Horse can inspire you, stay present to horses all around you. Cut out pictures of them and make a collage. Find an equine center near you and visit the stables (call and ask first). Watch movies about horses (one

of my favorites is *The Horse Whisperer* with Robert Redford). Read stories and poems about horses – there are so many! If you've always been interested but never done it, take riding lessons. Take a vacation that involves riding.

If you want to celebrate the Chinese New Year with foods that are said to bring luck in the Year of the Horse, load up your pantry with greens and hearty foods that represent strength, dumplings and oranges that represent prosperity, noodles and fish that represent vitality and longevity, and rice cakes – these represent upward movement! Red foods, red clothes, red flowers, red decorations – these all bring protection and good fortune.

A parting thought for the mares and fillies of The Year of the Horse and those who love them, from the author of *The Handbook of Chinese Horoscopes*, Theodora Lau:

"A woman born in the year of the horse likes to arrange all things in perfect order. She is so energetic that she would like to appear in ten different places simultaneously, if that was possible. Her appearance, which may be like a lithe soap bubble, gives people fresh and bright feelings... She will have deep love for tender plants, natural scenery and pleasant sounds. She has unusual methods for entertaining, and her imagination and passion may be aroused by the roar of the waves and rustling of leaves. She will become overjoyed and full of eagerness when she throws herself into nature. If you fall in love with such a woman, remember not to shut her into your own little worlds."

Happy Year of the Horse! •



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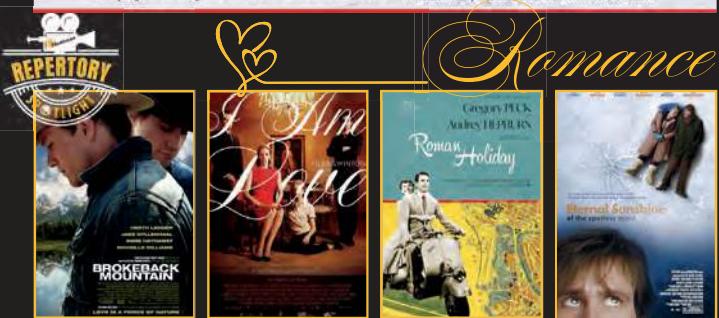
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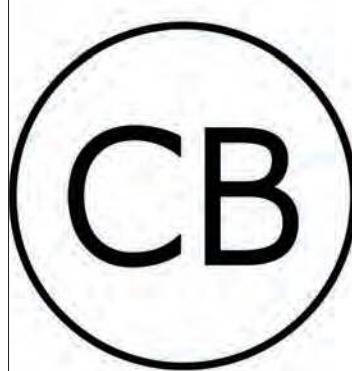
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Ice HARVESTING

By Jesse DeGroodt
info@mainstreetmag.com

A profession for the feeble, most assuredly this was not. For all involved, commercial ice harvesting requires strength, a sturdy constitution, and keeping your wits about you. Top of mind: You don't want to wind up in the drink and become an instant human popsicle.

"Ice harvesting was a job for a strong man, and no weakling needed to apply," confirmed H.L. Van Deusen in a 1940 *Kingston Daily Freeman* column. "Men who were boys then were employed to ride the backs of the horses used in the ice harvesting. This was a cold job, and the boys would be so bundled up in warm clothing that they could not be recognized at a short distance, and when they dismounted from the horse's back they would be so stiff they could hardly walk."

Real winters and the ice box

Back in the day, as they say, the whole of New York State would transform into one big ice machine come the cold weather, which, I might add, was a more reliable occurrence in that era than it is these days, despite the "normal, old-time" winter we seem to be experiencing this year. Yet even in those days of more reliable – read cold and not only cold, but consistently cold – winters, it was hardly the surest of things. The heaviest days of ice harvesting would ordinarily occur in January and February.

Fortunately, modern refrigeration, a relatively new phenomenon, had the decency to come into existence. Two things, of course, had to happen first. One, for it to be invented and put into use, and two, that the rural electrification project be completed, accompanied by a radical shift in thinking in the pursuit of keeping things cool. Whereas ice involves the introduction of cold to facilitate the cooling process, modern refrigeration calls for the removal of heat.

The start of the ice harvesting industry

Let's back up for a second. Writing in the *Rhinebeck Gazette*, Louise Tompkins noted, "Hamilton Pray of the Clove in the Town of Union Vale revolutionized ice harvesting in 1870, when he invented an ice plow. One plow was drawn across the ice by a single horse, cutting the ice through far enough to permit a man with an ice saw to saw through it quickly. An ice plow, drawn by two horses, could cut twice as much ice in the same amount of time. With this machine, Mr. Pray created an ice harvesting industry in Dutchess County, which employed 2,500 men during the season."

Added Tompkins, "An elderly man told me that he had worked with men harvesting ice on the Hudson River. He said the cakes on the river were usually 20 to 21 inches thick, which

was thinner than the ice harvested on ponds because of the tide and currents in the river. The cakes of river ice were placed in large ice houses on the shore of the Hudson and packed in quantities of salted hay. In the warm weather, most of the ice was sent on boats to New York City, where there was a great need for it. He said he was paid \$3.00 or \$3.50 a day for harvesting ice."

The Staats and Wilder ice businesses in Chatham

Wouldn't you know it, but there's an ice harvesting business in my blood. In the Chatham area, two of the largest ice dealers were George Staats and Herbert Wilder, my great-uncle, who would go on to be killed in action in World War II on July 3, 1944, in the V-1 attack on Sloane Court, England. According to another uncle, on the site of my home, built by Uncle Herbert's dad, there once stood an enormous pile of sawdust, a byproduct of the family's adjacent sawmill operation and handy to have around at ice storage time.

Staats Pond (now known as Sutherland Pond, centerpiece of the Ooms Conservation Area) on Rock City Road in Chatham was home to Staats' ice house, from which they would

Top, L-R: Ice harvesting in Saranac Lake. Ice delivery man. Cutting ice.

Above, L-R: Ice harvesting. Ice house at Old Pond in Chatham in 1895. An ice harvesting man saw.

All photo sources unknown.

Continued on next page ..

deliver ice all around Chatham. (Another personal aside: My grandfather, Don Wilder and Herbert's brother, would announce we were off to visit "Staaty," and off we'd go in his ancient green Ford pickup, up to Rock City Road to visit George, who seemed equally ancient, although just about everyone over the age of 10 seems ancient when you're seven.)

An undated *Chatham Courier* story relates that, come home delivery time, Staats would arrive at the "house with the block of ice to be placed in the great old oak-paneled ice box in the rear hall." In that story, Donald Kerns of Ghent is quoted discussing the actual harvest: "Sometimes a horse would go in; sometimes we'd fall in. Everybody and everything got sunk one time or another, but we'd always get out, freezing to death, but we'd get back up on the ice."

Quoting Dr. Frank Maxon as he recalls his childhood in Chatham observing ice harvesting at the Old Pond: "I always remember that in the area where the ice was taken out, the water refroze absolutely crystal clear, so clear in fact that you could see the pickerel swimming around in the pond!"

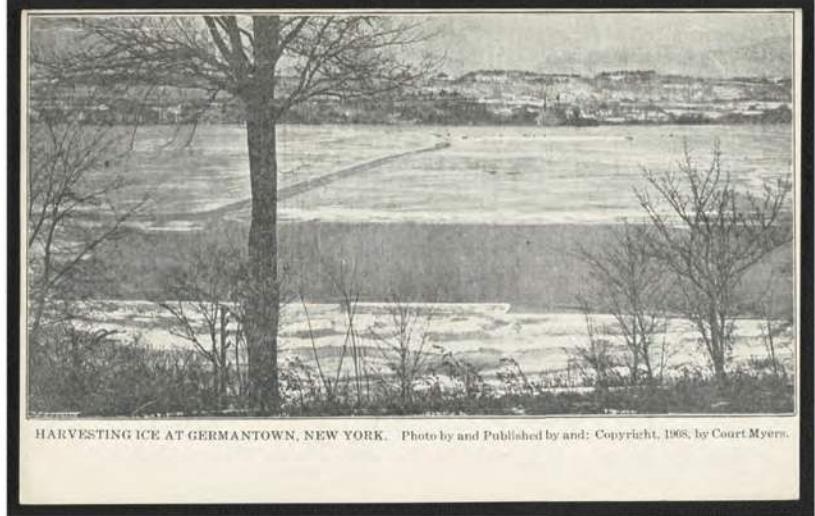
From a 1930 *Chatham Courier* story entitled "Ice Harvest Next Week to Employ Many": "About 60 men will be given extra employment in the immediate vicinity of Chatham next week, when local ice dealers and the Borden plant start to harvest the winter supply of ice. Herbert Wilder,

dealer, stated today that he planned to fill his house early next week, and George Staats of Rock City is filling his house this week, giving employment to approximately twenty-five more men. All of the dealers are rushing their tasks of getting the winter crop in as the ice, while of good quality, ranges from nine to ten inches in thickness on local ponds, and it has been their experience, they say, that the first crop of ice is always the best."

In those days roughly 30 cakes of ice, with one cake running around 110 pounds, would be conveyed by horse and cart to the ice house, which was built with sawdust in the walls for insulation. Let's keep in mind, pavement was not then a thing, the roads were oftentimes muddy and not easily passable even without several tons of ice aboard.

The particulars of ice harvesting

At the former East Chatham pond, I was once told, dealer John Weaver built a platform over the pond across from the now-East Chatham Fire Company firehouse on Frisbee Street, then cut the ice using horses and a plow. In time, a gentleman named Bill Eckert made a power saw out of a car motor. He used it to cut down around two inches from the bottom of the ice, hit it, and get it loose, where an existing channel moved it along. Once it was loose, men would deploy claws and hooks to get it into position for the horses to pull it up onto the platform. It would take two or three



HARVESTING ICE AT GERMANTOWN, NEW YORK. Photo by and Published by and: Copyright, 1908, by Court Myers.

Above: Ice harvesting in Germantown in 1908 published by Court Myers. Below: Ice being moved into an ice house. Source unknown.

men, exhibiting great care and shod in steel-tipped shoes, to pull it up and load it.

It sounds relatively straightforward, all in all, with known hazards and the like, but no. As with any business endeavor, things are always capable of going haywire owing to circumstances that are neither controllable, well understood, nor foreseeable.

Case in point: Reported Troy's *The New York Press* in 1909, under the headline "Ice Dealer Fights Water Pollution by Cement Co.," members of the Independent Retail Ice Dealers' Association were keenly interested in the fate of the lawsuit that Patrick Doherty, described as the owner of large ice houses in Jersey City and on the Hudson River, had lodged against the Catskill Cement Company.

"One of the charges made by the ice men is that a joker put into a bill regulating the cutting of harvest of ice in the Hudson River has practically deprived them of all chance to harvest ice profitably, because that joker permits the Catskill Cement Company, which is known among ice men as the Cement Trust, to pollute the waters of the Hudson."

Doherty, who had been battling the "Ice Trust" for half a decade, owned a large ice-harvesting facility at Alsen, near Catskill, on the river. Along comes the cement company to "build an enormous plant adjoining that of Doherty, and is now planning to build four more plants further upstream. In Doherty's complaint it is set forth that dense smoke, ashes, cinders, coal dust,

clay dust, offensive gases and fumes, soot, and other deleterious matters come from the cement plant and settle on the river, polluting it."

Consequently, alleged Doherty, the water is polluted before it turns to ice, yielding ice made "unhealthful, unwholesome, worthless, and unsalable." No word on the ultimate disposition of that particular skirmish.

The changing tide

Wartime, as is its wont, brought with it hiccups of its own. As 1918 opened for business, out in Central New York, *The Auburn Citizen* would report, under the subhead "Many Horses Taken for War Use," that "one difficulty which the ice harvesting companies on Cayuga Lake are now in direct contact with, is the problem of obtaining teams for filling houses that are located at points distant from the lake shore. ... In years past the ice harvesting season saw a continuous string of horse-drawn wagons or sleighs from Bridgeport to Seneca Falls. Now there are but a few teams that can be secured for work."

Horsemen were quoted to say that the few remaining horses "are now being used behind the battle lines in France."

Ice harvesting as an industry continued along a relatively fruitful financial path until the early 1930s, when it began to peter out, leaving behind a rich legacy and scores of empty buildings once dedicated to helping keep things cool. •

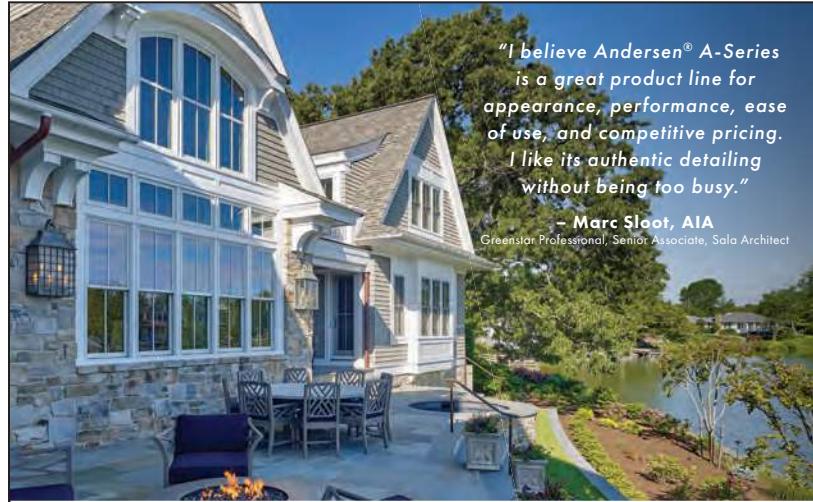




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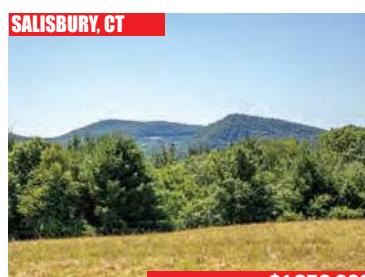


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AS THE YEAR TURNS

By CB Wismar
info@mainstreetmag.com

Ah, February. The month of love. Flowers and candy and jewelry sales hoping to boost engagement proposals. Those awkward moments in grade school where one is expected to contribute “be my Valentine” wishes to everyone in the class. Boys and girls. Awkward? Doesn’t matter. Be my Valentine. It’s a special time on the calendar.

Which musing led us to become passingly interested in the entire notion of “the calendar.” Celebrating love on a single day dedicated to someone who may or may not have existed 1,800 years ago on what could have been either their birth or death date ... seems like a bit of a reach. Who sets the rules?

Long ago and far away

As a human race, we’ve managed to encourage some of our best and brightest to come up with ways of measuring the year. From creations called Kojoda in Central Africa over 10,000 years ago to native efforts in Australia around the same time, the notion of measuring years has been a significant effort. Elamite, Assyrian, Sumerian, Egyptian, Julian, Gregorian ... the evolving list of calendars goes on. And, dare we suggest, it continues.

Welcome to the present. Welcome to measuring our years with “The Marketing Calendar.”

Month by month, we move from one carefully choreographed corporate sales and marketing campaign to the next. Since time is merely a concept, let’s start from here and move forward, brazenly ignoring the premise that the year must begin on January 1.

Mark your calendars

March – St. Patrick’s Day celebrations are punctuated with promotions of silly green hats, plastic shamrocks, gallons of Guinness, parades, and dumping green dye into the Chicago River.

Then comes April with Easter ... bunnies and chicks, Peeps and Cadbury eggs, flimsy baskets filled with plastic “grass,” and millions of eggs – hard boiled, dyed ... then thrown away. Throw Passover in and food marketers find a second reason to push items that normally don’t do well during the rest of the year.

In May, we are inundated with items designed to improve our Memorial Day celebrations, including flags, bunting, and decorations for bicycles to enhance the local parade. College graduations are also popular this month with gift suggestions of pens and watches and special discounts for recent grads on cars they can hardly afford.

June is wedding month. Need we say more? From Walmart to Tiffany’s, please refer to our convenient gift registry to see what the happy couple has selected.

July brings a second wave of patriotic nostalgia, supplemented by boxes of both legal and illegal fireworks sourced from pop-up roadside stands with garish signs for those who feel the local display in the park isn’t quite enough.

August is back-to-school time in earnest. While pre-teens dread heading back to the halls of academia,

their parents search the weekly mailbox stuffing sales sheets to see where clothes and shoes and pencils and three-subject notebooks are allegedly on sale. Pencils?

September is the arbitrary start of the holiday season, so Halloween finery gets promoted alongside the furtive displays of Christmas necessities. It’s not too early to pick up the giant skeleton to be hung out of the second-floor window or the string of 1,000 lights soon to be stapled to the fence! October is jammed with more Halloween blitzes including massive amounts of spending on “fun-size” candy, costumes for children and adults alike, and plastic objects depicting graveyards to be judiciously placed in the front yard and strung with fake spiderwebs.

In November, it’s impossible to avoid the holiday marketing tsunami. Thanksgiving means frozen turkeys, huge bags of dry stuffing mix, and mountains of yams crowding the aisles of our neighborhood market in anticipation and encouragement of the indulgent overeating to come. And, Christmas. Don’t forget Christmas shopping. Home for Thanksgiving? It’s “Black Friday,” and, we are urged to gather outside the Target, Best Buy, and Walmart front doors by 6am to take advantage of the sales – while still working through yesterday’s food coma! Interestingly enough, “Black

Friday” seems to begin on the last Tuesday of October. Best of luck finding a parking space.

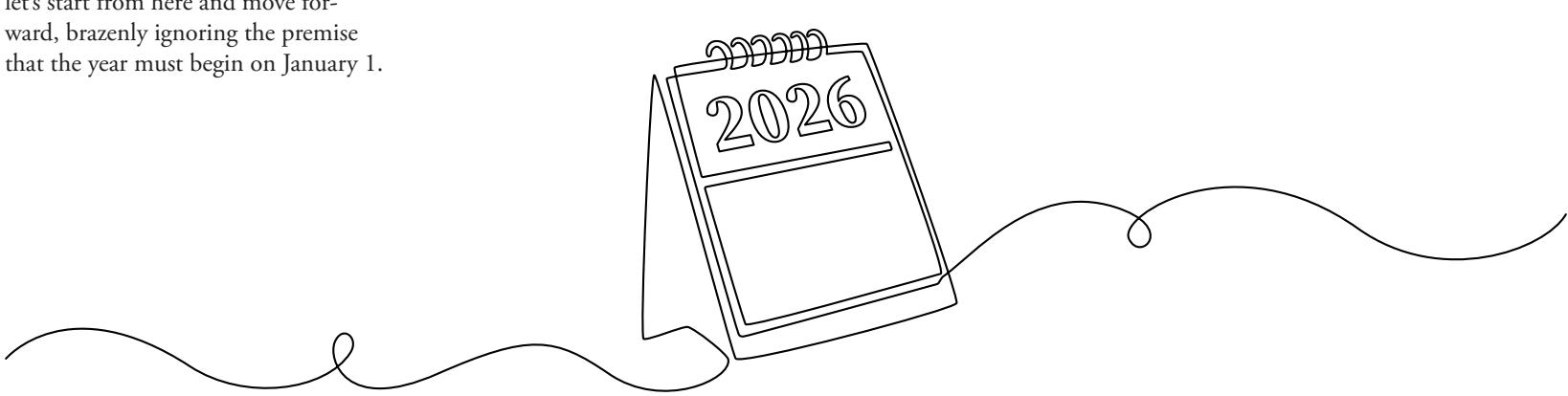
December is all about St. Nick the Spendthrift. By mid-month, there are sales piling up on sales as retail establishments promote their specials in a frenzied attempt to make their numbers for the year. Buy now! 60% off!

January offers no respite. It’s white sales and appliance sales and car sales to get rid of last year’s models and enticements to steal away for a week on a cruise ship before we finally get to ... where we started.

February. The month of love. Expensive cards in oversized envelopes that require additional postage. Heart-shaped boxes of stale candy and bouquets of flowers conveniently wrapped and ready for Valentine presentation.

Have we succumbed? Have we followed the unwritten instructions to buy what we were supposed to buy in the time designated to keep The Marketing Calendar on course?

Now, where were those stamps? I need to put extra postage on this card to my ex-sister-in-law’s cousin’s podiatrist. •



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Beyond the Screen



hen I reflect on the 1980s, I remember people being hooked on video games. My siblings and I took turns playing *Pac-Man* and *Donkey Kong* in our basement via our Atari home consoles. Beyond these faves, other games of the decade included *Tetris* and *Final Fantasy*. This era introduced beloved characters, innovative gameplay, and enduring franchises that shaped the future of gaming.

That was the last time I devoted any time or considerable thought to the topic of gaming. I don't have much knowledge about this leisurely pursuit or its history, but I became curious when I tuned into "Hidden Levels #5: Press B to Touch Glass" on *99% Invisible* – a podcast that explores unnoticed design, architecture, and the hidden stories behind everyday things.

An evolution

Although I had no interest in video games, every podcast topic presented by radio producer Roman Mars manages to capture my interest, so I listened in. During the episode, Mars spotlighted the evolution of nature in video games – a subject I never wondered or thought about.

Apparently, through the years, depictions of nature – trees, landscape, and flora – in video games have evolved from a simple backdrop-style rendering to what is now an essential portal for some people, specifically those like Cassie Anne, who is fea-

tured in the "Hidden Levels" episode and uses gaming to connect her with the outdoors is limited due to allergies.

Anne is a prominent *Minecraft* influencer. Due to severe, unexplained allergies to the sun and grass, she must spend much of her life indoors and has found solace in the endless terrain of the *Minecraft* game. For Anne, *Minecraft* became an escape and a vehicle for exploring diverse biomes and connecting to all the aspects she loved about nature. I became intrigued by her story.

Tools for enhancing mental health

Later that week, I stumbled upon an article on the BBC about a video game called *MindLight*, which is set in a haunted house filled with shrieking monsters that stalk the player's avatar. While navigating the game, the player dons an EEG headset that measures brain activity and directly controls a light situated on top of the avatar's head. As the player becomes calmer, the light shines brighter, reinforcing relaxation and easing the situation.

If the player/child can maintain a relaxed state during an attack of the shrieking villain, the monster suddenly morphs into a cute, cuddly kitten that follows the avatar around the haunted house. If the child becomes too frightened, a message pops up that offers advice on how to regain some calm before proceeding in the game.

Both snippets of video game information made me wonder if there's much more to the art of video games, so I began exploring the topic.

Back to nature

99% Invisible cites that the ability of games to create this kind of connection to the natural world is the product of decades of technological advancement. Nature scenes have shifted from the simple, gridded 2D backgrounds of early titles like *The Legend of Zelda* to today's hyper-detailed "open world" games.

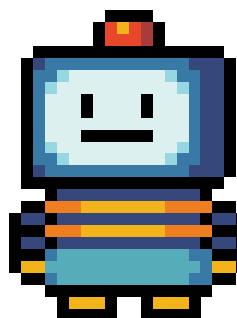
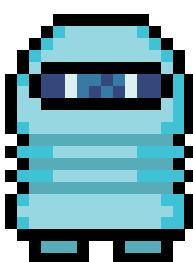
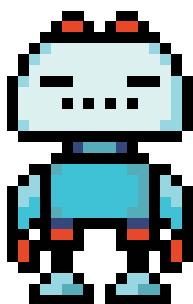
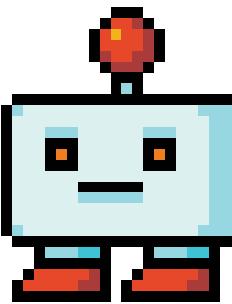
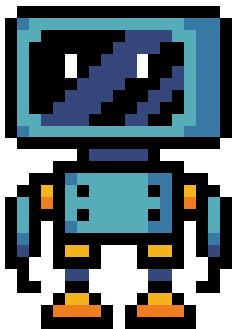
"These immersive environments, like the dynamic ecosystems found in *Breath of the Wild*, are made possible by two key innovations.

The first is procedural generation, where rules are fed to a computer to algorithmically create seemingly infinite, non-repeating landscapes, giving games like *Minecraft* their unparalleled scale. The second is the relentless pursuit of photorealism. Professionals use high-tech scanning to capture real-world objects and feed them into powerful game engines that simulate light and physics with breathtaking fidelity."

99% Invisible continued, "It's clear that nature has a profound influence on games. But it's also true that the

By Regina Molaro
info@mainstreetmag.com

Continued on next page



very technology perfected to create virtual entertainment is now being used to solve real-world problems. The same game engines and procedural generation techniques are employed to create immersive 3D simulations of real cities or coastlines (known as 'digital twins'), which are in turn used to visualize the impact of sea-level rise, plan for a world of increasing wildfires, and aid in urban development. This utility demonstrates the powerful real-world applications of virtual design."

Eco-gaming

It's also important to note that researchers estimate that the energy consumption required to develop and play visually demanding games generates around 50 million tons of CO₂ annually.

Despite this immense environmental footprint, the games themselves are improving ecological awareness; they are capable of teaching players about sustainability – for example resource management in *Minecraft* – and dramatically boosting public interest in wildlife.

At its best, video game nature serves a dual purpose: offering a vital connection for those unable to "touch grass," while improving the real-world tools for protecting the planet. The digital nature experience may not be an exact replacement, but it can foster a level of engagement and care that translates back into the world beyond the screen.

In recent years, the nature scenes found in games such as *Minecraft* have become quite advanced. There's also evidence that virtual worlds are shaping real-world environmental improvement.

Boosting ecological awareness

Oxygen Conservation was founded with the aim of tackling the climate crisis and biodiversity collapse. Its website highlights the topic of simulation games and their unique potential to foster environmental awareness. The organization scales conservation across the United Kingdom.

Again, the impact of eco-gaming extends well beyond the virtual world. These games provide incredible potential to inspire real-world environmental action by raising awareness

and fostering a sense of responsibility. They provide a safe space for players to experiment with sustainable practices and witness the consequences of their actions, which can translate into behavioral changes in their daily lives.

The Oxygen Conservation site says, "Imagine *Eco Tycoon: Building the Nature-Based Economy*," a game where players take on the role of environmentalists or conservationists. They're tasked with designing sustainable land use change, restoring degraded landscapes, and building a regenerative nature-based economy. The game could simulate the dynamics of ecosystem recovery, showcasing the interplay between human activity, wildlife, and natural processes.

In *Eco Tycoon: Building the Nature-Based Economy*, players begin with a landscape that is damaged by industrial activity, intensive agriculture, or traditional sporting exploitations like grouse moors – a moor where grouse live or are hunted in the UK.

Their mission: to restore the ecosystem while building the systems, processes, and sustainable infrastructure required to develop a regenerative society. The game would incorporate real-world environmental principles and challenges, providing a realistic simulation of landscape recovery."

Restoration and conservation

In one scenario, players might be tasked with restoring a virtual wetland degraded by industrial runoff. They would need to clean the water, reintroduce native plant species, and create habitats for wildlife. This process would involve careful planning and resource allocation, teaching players about the complexities of wetland restoration.

Players could use drones and other technologies to monitor the health of the ecosystem, simulating modern conservation techniques. As the wetland recovers, players would see an increase in biodiversity and improvements in water quality, reinforcing the positive impacts of their efforts. It's a win!

Back to *Minecraft*: a new version of the game aims to teach students about coastal erosion, flood resilience, and climate adaptation, and shows how children can use computer games to learn about complex situations.

Inspiring the next generation

Eco-gaming has the potential to inspire the next generation. Young players are highly impressionable and can develop a lifelong commitment to sustainability through engaging and educational gameplay. Games like *Eco Tycoon: Building the Nature-Based Economy* can serve as gateways to deeper environmental education, encouraging players to pursue careers in conservation, ecology, and sustainable development.

With continued innovation and collaboration, virtual worlds can become powerful platforms for environmental advocacy and education, inspiring a new group of environmental stewards and fostering a deeper connection to the natural world.

Real world applications

Beyond nature and helping kids with anxiety, there's yet another interesting connection between video games and the medical field, specifically surgery. Studies show that surgeons who are also gamers make fewer errors, are faster, and achieve higher overall scores in robotic and laparoscopic training. Beyond hand-eye coordination, gaming can improve dexterity, and visuospatial ability, which leads to better performance in surgical simulations. Video game-based training can be a useful tool to help medical students and surgeons acquire these technical skills more quickly.

An article in the *Journal of Pediatric Surgery Open*, referenced a study about the impact of video gaming on robotic surgical simulator performance. According to the article, study participants with previous gaming history had 33% higher overall robotic performance scores. There was no difference in performance between surgical trainees and attending physicians with high volume laparoscopic surgery experience (average of 77 laparoscopic procedures).

I'm glad I got a glimpse behind-the-scenes of video games and their real-world applications. It is also a reminder to be curious rather than judgmental regardless of the topic – a reminder to strive to keep an open mind. •

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Christina DiBernardo officially started Kinrove in May of 2025, but her interest in perfumery was piqued 12 years ago when she took a class while living in Los Angeles. Two years ago, she gifted one of her perfumes to a friend, Melissa Davis, and Melissa later made Kinrove's Original Scent the signature scent of her shop in Chatham, NY, Marton & Davis. Currently, Christina is working on collaborative projects designing scents for local hotels and venues. "Kinrove stands apart by being inspired by history and memory-driven storytelling," DiBernardo shares. Each scent is crafted slowly in small batches, rooted in the textures and folklore of the Northeast region. The result is an atmospheric, modern fragrance with a quiet sense of familiarity – wearable folklore shaped by place, people, and mood. "For me, it's hearing how people connect to a scent – what it evokes for them, what memory or place it stirs up. Scent is such a personal language, and watching someone respond to something I created feels like a powerful form of kinship," she says. In the near future, DiBernardo is focused on expanding Kinrove's scent library; a few fragrances inspired by seasonal shifts and regional stories are in development and slated for an early spring launch. "Longer term, I'd love to grow Kinrove into home fragrance, limited-edition collaborations, and an inspirational space to gather."



Canaan Kids Artspace

Art center. 27 Railroad Street, Left Unit, Canaan, CT. breetel@canaanartspace.org. canaanartspace.org

Canaan's Kids Artspace grew out of Breetel Graves' lifelong work with children and art. The idea took shape during the pandemic when daily, open-ended art-making became central to her family life. After hosting successful pop-up craft workshops in 2024, Breetel opened a permanent space in North Canaan in July of 2025. Canaan Kids Artspace offers free and low-cost, child-led art programs for ages 6 to 12, including an after school art club, mobile workshops, and special weekend events. "We emphasize creative reuse, inclusive access, and process-based art-making that encourages curiosity, independence, and joyful exploration," Graves explains. Canaan Kids Artspace is rooted in child-led, process-based art rather than step-by-step projects. "People of all ages donate materials, encouragement, and time – united by the belief that it takes a village to raise happy, healthy kids. Turning discarded materials into art feels like a hopeful, shared act of care and creativity," Graves shares. Looking ahead, Graves hopes to build a financially stable foundation for Canaan Kids Artspace in North Canaan, ensuring affordable, child-centered care continues. "Over time, I hope to expand programs and reach more children, growing CKA into a creative hub for the Northwest Corner, rooted in curiosity, care, and shared creativity."



Isabela Restaurant and Bar

3330 NY 343, Amenia, NY. hello@isabela-amenia.com. isabela-amenia.com

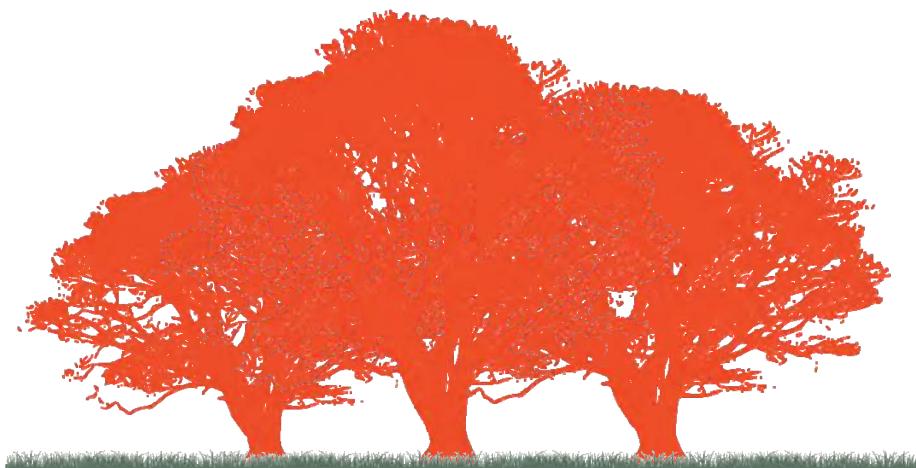
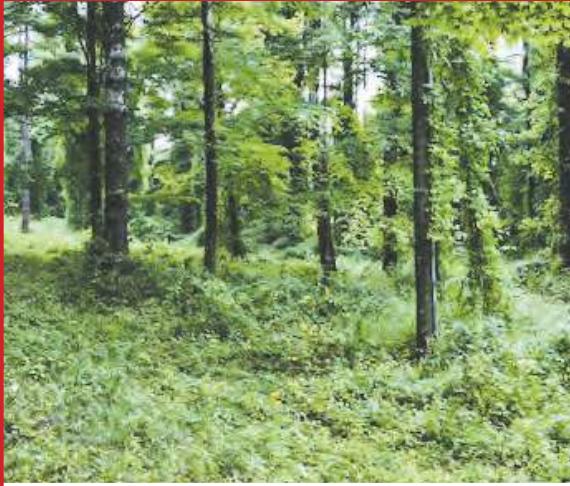
Pursuing his dream of moving to the Hudson Valley and operating a restaurant, owner-chef Jose Ramirez opened Isabela (at the former Monte's location in Amenia) on March 22nd of 2025. Isabela is a full service restaurant and bar and is open Wednesday through Sunday. Jose shared, "We are open five days a week and offer a full dinner menu, a more casual bar room menu as well as a \$2 oyster happy hour (5pm-6pm). We also offer brunch on Sundays, 11am-2:30pm." Jose continued to explain, "Our approach is one of seasonality because we are committed to buying as much product as we can from local producers. This approach extends to the bar program where we source 70% from local producers. Our separate bar room also allows guest to enjoy the restaurant in different spaces and in two different ways. The most rewarding things about running Isabela is the amount of support that we have gotten from the local community as well as the incredible product that we get to work with from local farms and producers." Looking ahead, Jose said that they look forward to celebrating their one year anniversary in March and continuing to serve the local community for many years to come. "We are also looking forward to adding outdoor seats as soon as the weather warms up."



Richard Mack, LCSW

Clinical social worker/therapist. Sharon, CT. richardjohnmack@gmail.com. psychologytoday.com/us/therapists/richard-john-mack-sharon-ct/816174

Richard Mack started working with clients back in 2003 following a successful business career as a technologist in the music business. Although that work was satisfying, Mack increasingly felt as though something was missing. "I was looking for something deeper, something more oriented to helping others, so I trained as a psychotherapist." Mack offers psychotherapy for individuals and couples. By working through this process of self-realization and change, Mack says his clients are able to remove the obstacles that prevent them from living happy, fulfilling lives. Mack conducts sessions on a weekly basis using video teleconferencing. "What is different about how I work is my interest in dreams, which predates even my becoming a therapist," he shares. "Dreams can provide a powerful tool to look 'under the hood' and see the unconscious mechanisms which can cause us problems, as well as potentially provide the gold for future development." For Mack, the most rewarding part of his work is seeing his patients progress towards more satisfying lives. "To the extent that each of us can become a little more self-aware, we can take responsibility for our own shadow, and be less likely to project our dark side onto others – which we see so much of today. We can help ourselves and make the world a better place."



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