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Dear Readers,

*"Out of the chilly landscape goes the fat and drowsy bear.
He smooths his fur pajamas as he crawls into his lair.
Setting the clock for April, he sleeps for days and days;
No income tax, no ration books, no war communiqués!"*

Inez George Gridley

Like the bear of Gridley's poem, we are tempted to crawl into our lairs and wait out the chilly winter. And yet, this is also the season of light, festivities, feasting, family and giving. So, hibernation will have to wait.

In these uncertain times, it is more important than ever to keep friends and family close, and to remember those less fortunate. In this issue of **Our Country Home**, we bring ideas for ways to give to various worthy organizations in your town. We present lots of ideas for having a happy and homespun holiday while safeguarding our planet. We bring you recipes for holiday baking and ideas for homemade holiday gifts. We reflect on the origins of our winter celebrations and how they connect us to ages past and to the mysteries of nature. We invite you to make a pinecone wreath for your door or a holiday centerpiece, and to get other decorating ideas from Eddie Dudek of the Bradstan Country Hotel and Cynthia Lee Quinn of Interior Transformations.

For housing those out of town guests, we invite you to get to know the hosts at ECCE Bed & Breakfast. If you are looking to sell your home, we offer tips from a local real estate broker on how to make the sale go quickly and well. And just for fun, we take a look back at the life and music of Harry M. Woods, who wrote well and lived hard in Callicoon.

Enjoy.

Mary Greene

Mary Greene, Editor
Our Country Home



TRR file photo

Mary Greene, Editor



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Eddie Dudek displays a newly finished holiday arrangement.

Photo by Ted Waddell

Elegant Opulence

Decorating for the holidays with Eddie Dudek

By TED WADDELL

“You’ve got to have a poinsettia in there someplace,” said Eddie Dudek.

Dudek is partnered with Scott Samuelson as co-proprietors of the Bradstan County Hotel in White Lake, NY, which has enjoyed many years as a cabaret hotspot in the Catskills. His professional interest in decorating began in 1975, when the New York City dancer was asked if he was interested in decorating Christmas trees in the Big Apple after the summer stock season went dark for the winter. After a one-day training session, he joined a crew of fellow decorators and hit the bricks, faced with the daunting task of dolling up some 15 trees every day at big-name stores like Macy’s, Sterns and Two Guys, plus a few garden centers. “You had to be fast,” he recalled.

After six years, Dudek went out on his own as a freelancer, and worked as the seasonal decorator for Tolin’s in Bensonhurst for the next 20 years. He would begin the day after Labor Day, setting up 40 large trees and assorted holiday scene villages and displays. He began branching out (so to speak) to private residents, restaurants and offices. “My clients were wealthy people who wanted their trees to look spectacular,” he said.

As times changed in the city, more and more of the big box stores used in-house decorators to adorn the holiday displays, and the annual toy fair moved overseas to China. At present, Dudek beautifies only about ten Big Apple or New York City-area trees for clients, assisted by Samuelson, who said, “I do the grunt work.” The cost for each tree begins at around \$1,000.

Dudek brings a sense of playfulness to his impeccable standards of color and fullness. One year at the Bradstan Country Hotel, Dudek set up a small 1950s-themed tree with pink lights and old 45-records, and used a vintage poodle skirt to decorate the base.

Although The Nancy LaMott Room will no longer be hosting cabaret, Dudek and Samuelson, who have always decorated the hotel lovingly and lavishly, still plan to pull out their 11-foot artificial tree and grace it with some of the 2,000 ornaments that the pair has picked up during travels to China, Mexico, Canada, Israel, Italy, France and Africa, as well as Arizona and New York. Ornaments from France feature the Eiffel Tower and the Arc de Triomphe de l’Etoile; Italian ornaments showcase a long-nosed Pinocchio and a carved olivewood Nativity; and from Puerto Rico, a ball filled with a tiny palm tree.

Dudek likes to use traditional colors of green, red and white, with perhaps a bit of purple and gold. He is a master at offsetting greens and reds with white accents, which can make the display “pop.” He recommends using artificial trees that “you can put up, enjoy and not worry about it,” but he realizes some folks still want a real tree for its earthy freshness and scent of pine.

Wreaths, said Dudek, can be placed inside and outside the house and decorated with draped ribbon and beads, along with the added touch of a few colorful balls or special ornaments. Homes can also be glorified with centerpieces, fine linens and smaller real or artificial trees.

“As a child,” said Dudek, “it was a big thing to decorate the tree, and most people have those same memories. Today, a lot of people have a different agenda; they care about how beautiful the tree looks, how good the house looks. They want it picture-postcard perfect.”

Dudek said that no matter what your personal tastes or traditions, the most important thing in decorating for the holidays is to create a feeling of warmth and belonging.

But don’t forget the poinsettia.

Continued on page 6

Eddie's Tips on Decorating Christmas Trees



Photo by Ted Wadell

- Use artificial trees instead of live trees, which can stay up longer, don't require water and aren't an inherent fire hazard.
- Shake out artificial trees and shape them after off-season storage to make them look like a real tree.
- Put on the top decoration before adding other decorations.
- Add lights from the bottom of the tree toward the top, interweaving them between the branches, going in and out, back and forth. A good rule of thumb is to use at least 100 lights per every foot of tree: a seven-foot tree would be strung with a minimum of 700 lights.
- Multi-colored lights should have green wire; white (clear) lights should have white wire.
- With ribbon or garland, create peaks and swags.
- At each peak, add bows or ornaments.
- Finally, fill in the empty spaces with your favorite heirloom ornaments, homemade treasures or novelties collected from traveling and from friends.

ELIZABETH DAVIDSON
ARCHITECT



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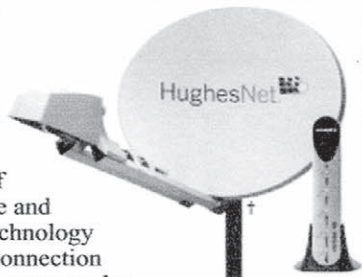
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Circle of welcome

Fashioning a pinecone wreath

By CASS COLLINS

A wreath is a welcome in itself. Adorning your front door, the wreath signals to visitors that you are ready and willing to welcome them. When the wreath is one you have made yourself, the welcome is doubled.

The wreath is an ancient custom—laurel wreaths were given to Greek athletes and Caesars alike. Christian traditions carry on with ever-green wreaths symbolizing eternal life at Advent. Pagans celebrate the winter solstice with a wreath. Its circle signifies the sun, whose light will begin to wax again after December 21st.

I make a simple pinecone wreath adhering to the frugal housewife's axiom—use what you have. In autumn, we have pinecones. Lots of them. They line the driveway

and litter the yard. A nearby pine glen is paved with them.

A well-constructed pinecone wreath will last many years, unlike ones made with greenery. It can be decorated with berries, spray-painted white or gold or silver, bowed or left bare, as you prefer.

Many do-it-yourself craft books and articles suggest using a hot-glue gun for this project, but I believe the less technology, the better when it comes to crafting. My first pinecone wreath was made using a wire wreath form. I simply stuck pinecones in until they were seated firmly in the form. The wreath lasted many years until it was discarded in debris from the flood of '06.

There are several ways to proceed with a pinecone wreath. Here is one of them.

Materials needed

- wreath form - wire, straw or foam
- pine cones
- white glue
- floral wire
- wire snips

Planning tips

Consider the size of your wreath in relation to your entryway. A wreath's maximum width should be slightly less than one-half the width of your door.

The smaller the pinecones, the more you will need.

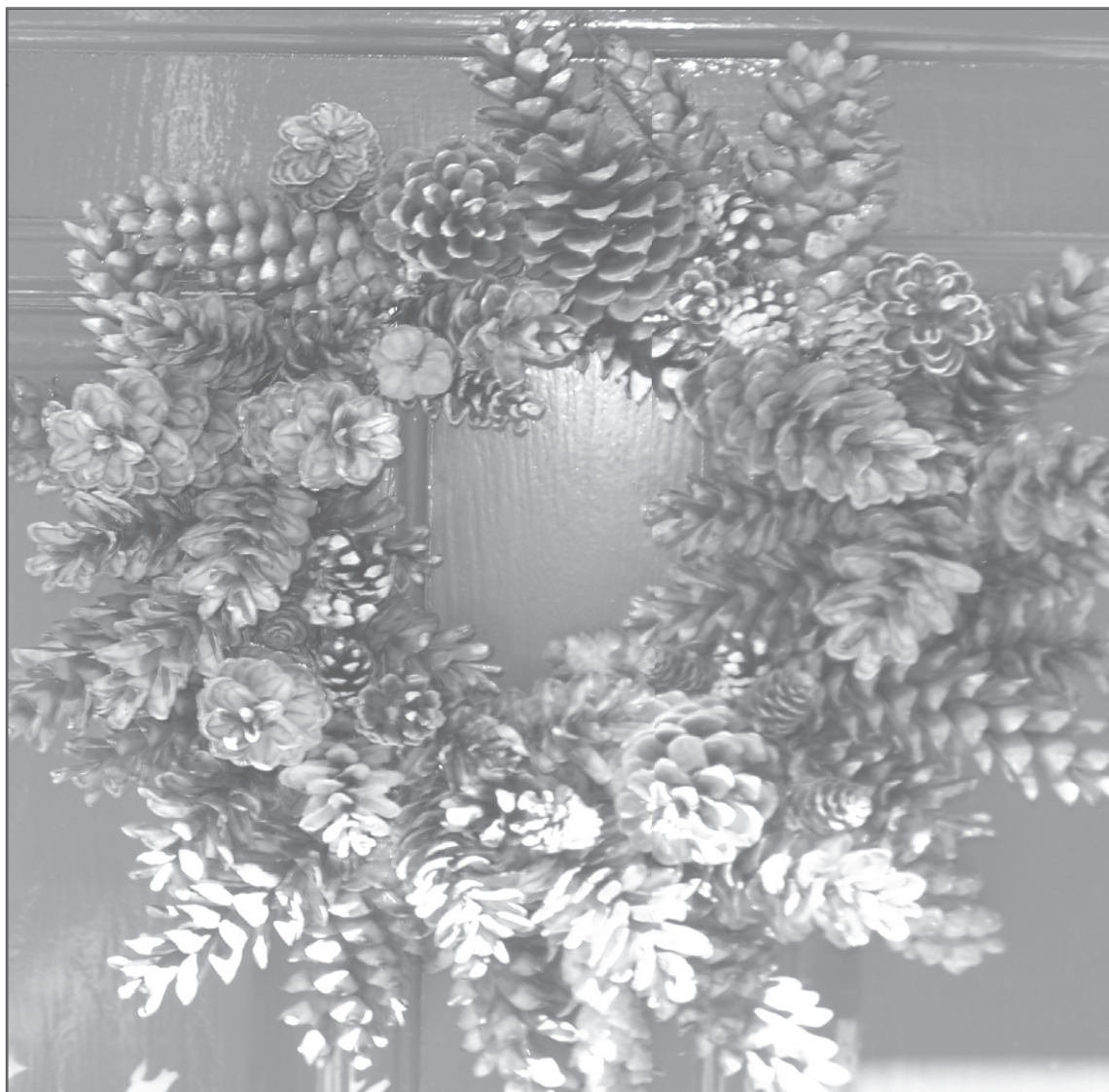
A mix of sizes works best. Try collecting from various locations.

Decorative ideas

Wrap the entire wreath loosely with fancy ribbon, letting a long length dangle from a bow.

Insert stems of berries around the wreath.

Use the wreath as a centerpiece for a three-inch or larger candle.



Photos by Cass Collins

Completed wreath



Gather materials



Dry pinecones



Sort pinecones



Wire pinecones



Assemble pinecones

1. Begin on a crisp autumn day and take a walk to a place near you where pine trees grow. Be sure to bring a few roomy bags with you to collect your cones.

2. Assemble your materials. You will need a wire wreath base (available at craft stores), some white glue, pinecones (60 or more for a small- to medium-sized wreath), some green floral wire and wire snips.

3. Cover a baking sheet with aluminum foil and spread pines evenly. Heat oven to 350 degrees and cook the cones for 30 minutes. This will open closed cones and rid them of any pests. It also fills your kitchen with the scent of pine.

4. After they have cooled, sort your pinecones by size.

5. Cut several lengths of wire, using snips. You will wrap the cones with this wire individually. Until you have started the process you will not know how long a wire suits you, so don't cut it all at once.

6. Wrap one length of wire around the top of the wreath form. This will let you hang the wreath to check your work, and it is easier to do it now than when your wreath is finished.

7. Begin by wrapping a large pinecone with wire about a quarter of the way from the base of the stem. Twist the wire, leaving a length to wrap around the wreath form. If you prefer, you may want to omit the wire with larger pinecones. Just stick them in until they are seated firmly.

8. Work from the outside of the wreath to the inside or complete the outside rim, then the inside, leaving the middle for last.

9. When you have finished, fill in open spaces with bits of pinecones that you have dipped in white glue.



CASS COLLINS is known locally as *The River Muse*. A city girl, she has always had one foot in the country. She and her husband Jim Stratton, both writers, spend their free time do-it-yourselfing their city loft, Narrowsburg home and Monticello bungalow.

Wake up with us and...



Savor the view

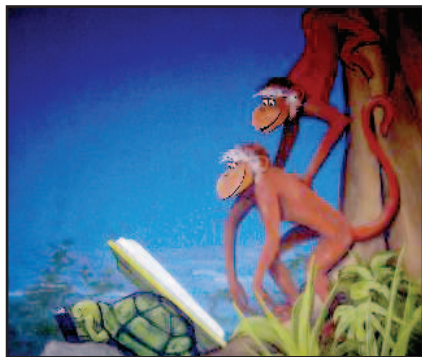


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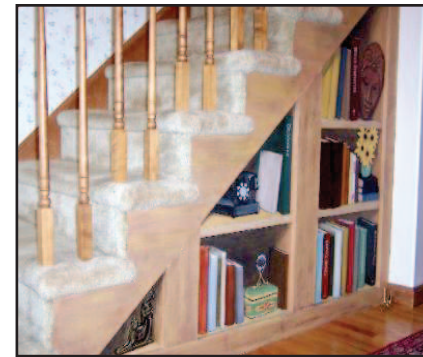
Library mural



Dog portrait



Library mural



Bookcase trope l'oeil

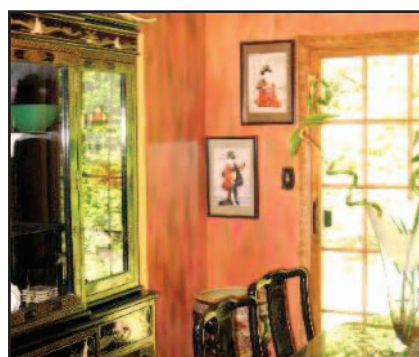
Childrens mural



Wall art



Painted wall treatment



Cynthia Lee Quinn



Contributed Photos

Whimsy and transformation

Interior artist Cynthia Lee Quinn

By EMILY GRILLO

You can create extraordinary effects with paint and a paintbrush if you have the know-how. Certain tricks and brush strokes can turn ordinary, flat paint into a multi-dimensional wonderland of texture and free-form patterns or one-of-a-kind works of art.

Cynthia Lee Quinn of "Interior Transformations" is a master of such transformations. She paints interiors of homes with dramatic colors and bold touches that create artistry on walls and ceilings. Her work, especially on children's room murals, encompasses imagination and wonder. The detail and precision of Quinn's work create visual illusions that are as convincing as they are pleasing.

Quinn would say that her current line of work is due to an epiphany. She realized that, even though she had "no art classes in high school or college and not enough drawings in my lifetime to fill a sketchbook," she wanted to do set design. "The first thing I did was volunteer as a painter for a couple of theater productions to acquaint myself with the profession. It was hard work, but I loved every second of it. For me, formal training combined with learning by doing was essential to master technique, gain product knowledge and build confidence. Theater work led to mural work, decorative specialty painting and then to room makeovers. I could not have predicted this path, or even where I'll be in another five years . . . I just keep leaving myself open to possibilities."

Her hard work began to pay off. Quinn started

getting local clients by word of mouth. Spending time with her clients in their home allows her to get a "feel" for the project and for what her clients envision.

Quinn advertises her work as a transformation of space. "A huge part of these spaces is how you feel when you're in it," she said. "A combination of color, floor plan and arrangement of furnishings are all factored in to capture an atmosphere. Often it feels like a completely different room; it is rewarding when you get that exclamation from the client. It doesn't always take a complete room makeover; sometimes you succeed with a simple wall-color change or moving furniture.

"For interiors," Quinn said, "I'm drawn to warm colors and modern, earthy simplicity; for murals and lighthearted spaces, the colors are usually brighter. It's typically about finding a combination that brings out the potential of the space based on the tastes of the client."

Quinn also uses technique for inspiration. "Besides the feeling of the roller or brush, my favorite is Venetian plaster. Troweled on with a blade, it can look either rustic or elegant and conceals wall flaws. I've recently discovered an amazing concrete technique for floors, countertops and fireplaces that is flexible, durable and will adhere to anything. You can line a shower stall with it and actually use the shower."

Transforming a room on television was an engaging challenge, said Quinn. She was initially contacted through a referral to be on HGTV's Kid-space, a program that shows how to transform a

child's room. "I think it helped that they thought my voice sounded like Snow White," she said.

Closer to home, she created the whimsical mural that adorns the narrow stairwell of the Jeffersonville, NY branch of the Western Sullivan Public Library. The mural, which can be seen on her website, features characters from Maurice Sendak's "Where the Wild Things Are."

The extensive portrait work that Quinn has done is also on her website. Many of the portraits are of pets, especially dogs. "There's something about a happy-dog face that links a person to their own happy-dog experience." She can also handle historical portraits, such as George Washington.

Transforming your home, office or business into a personal oasis of color and creativity is what Cynthia Lee Quinn does best. To best view her talent, visit her website at www.cynthialeequinn.com, which has examples of her wide-ranging styles, including room makeovers, color consultations, wall designs, murals or hangings of any size, specialty finishes and trompe l'oeil (an art technique using optical illusion to create an appearance of three-dimensions). You may also call Quinn at 914/799-1224.



EMILY GRILLO graduated from the University of Scranton and has been employed by The River Reporter for six years as a senior sales executive and NYSCAN director. She has written articles for special sections and for the paper, including Wanda Wayfarer, since 2004.

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OUR COUNTRY HOME
FALL 2008

Our Country Home, a special publication of **The River Reporter**, is published by Stuart Communications, Inc. Entire contents ©2008 by Stuart Communications, Inc.

The River Reporter maintains an office at 93 Erie Ave., Narrowsburg, NY. Its mailing address is P.O. Box 150, Narrowsburg, NY 12764. Phone 845-252-7414. E-mail ads@riverreporter.com. **The River Reporter** is online at riverreporter.com.

Subscription to **The River Reporter** is \$60.00 for two years, \$35.00 for 1 year or \$25.00 for six months. USPS 354-810. Periodical postage paid at Narrowsburg, NY 12764, and additional mailing offices.

Publication date: October 30, 2008

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By **LESLIE RUTKIN**

“Eat dessert first” has been a mantra in our family since 1986, when it became clear that our increasingly exuberant 18-month-old son could no longer sit quietly with us in a restaurant. A wise acquaintance suggested we order him dessert first while we perused the menu and waited for our entrees. The waiter placed a bowl of vanilla ice cream in front of Andrew, which kept him busy and happy and even whetted his appetite for his own dinner. Perfect! Eating out was once more a pleasure.

Now the phrase “eat dessert first” reminds me that there is always something to look forward to, like spending Thanksgiving and Christmas with family and friends around the table. And although the food is key in such settings, the desserts top off these events and leave everyone smiling.

The individual chocolate soufflés are easy to make and satisfyingly decadent. The pumpkin pie comes with a twist—the addition of crystallized ginger and a pumpkin seed crust. A friend told me it was the best pumpkin pie she had ever eaten. I would have to agree. Here, too, is a refreshing sorbet that is perfect after a heavy meal. It is made with my favorite after-dinner liqueur, Calvados, a delightful apple brandy from France. For an all-American sorbet, substitute Apple Jack (it’s less expensive, too). I’ve included a stunning cranberry and pear dessert because it is beautiful and delicious. Peeled pears are poached with lemon, orange peel and cranberries and look like jewels when served in small, fancy bowls. And be sure to try the rich chocolate truffles enrobed in toasted coconut and chopped nuts. These little one-inch delights pack a lot of satisfaction in a small package. Finally, the hazelnut cookies are small morsels of flavor that take less than two hours to make from start to finish.

Let them eat cake

Sweets for the holiday season

Individual Chocolate Soufflés

(from Marcia Back as given to Carol Roig)

Serves 8

Have all the ingredients at room temperature.

6 ounces bittersweet chocolate

6 tablespoons unsalted butter, plus more for coating the custard cups

¼ cup cocoa powder

1 tablespoon strong coffee

4 large eggs, separated (recipe uses only the whites)

⅛ teaspoon cream of tartar

2 tablespoons granulated sugar, plus more to coat the custard cups

Whipped cream, sour cream, ice cream or crème fraîche

Butter and coat with sugar 8 small custard cups (½ cup size)

In a double boiler, melt the chocolate and butter and blend until smooth. Remove from heat and add cocoa; whisk until completely smooth. Whisk in the coffee.

In a medium bowl, combine eggwhites with the cream of tartar and beat to soft peaks. Add 2 tablespoons of granulated sugar and beat until stiff.

Fold about ¼ of the beaten egg whites into the chocolate mixture, then carefully fold in the rest.

Fill the custard cups about ¾ full and set them on a cookie sheet or jellyroll pan. (Note: at this point you can refrigerate the cups for at least 8 hours prior to baking, if you wish.)

Bake at 400°F for 7-9 minutes. (Use the longer baking time if you have refrigerated the cups prior to baking.) Don’t overbake; the center should be very moist. Let sit about 2-3 minutes and then invert onto your dessert plates. Serve with a dollop of vanilla or coffee ice cream, sour cream, whipped cream or crème fraîche.

Calvados Sorbet

Makes about 3 cups

Calvados is an apple-cider brandy from Normandy, France. You can easily substitute Apple Jack for the Calvados in this sparkingly festive dessert. Serve in small bowls with a rich cookie or apple slice as garnish. Can be prepared 4 to 7 days ahead of your holiday party.

⅔ cups water

½ cup sugar

1 ½ cups nonalcoholic sparkling cider

⅓ cup Calvados, Apple Jack, or more sparkling cider for a nonalcoholic sorbet

Bring water and sugar to a boil in a small saucepan, stirring until sugar has dissolved; then simmer 5 minutes. Transfer to a metal bowl and set into an ice bath; stir in cider and Calvados and quick-chill, stirring occasionally, until very cold, 15 to 30 minutes. (You can also chill in the refrigerator for at least 4 hours to eliminate the ice bath step.)

Freeze sorbet in ice cream maker according to manufacturer’s instructions; transfer to airtight container and put in freezer until soft-frozen, at least 2 hours.



Continued on page 14

Coconut Almond Truffles

- About 50 one-inch truffles
- 12-ounce combination of bittersweet and semisweet chocolate bits
- 1 1/3 cups almond slivers, toasted
- 1 1/4 cups sweetened, flaked coconut, toasted
- 1 1/4 cups heavy cream

Toast almond slivers on a cookie sheet in a 350°F oven for 5 minutes. Mix up the nuts and watch carefully that they don't burn. They are ready when some of the nuts start turning a golden brown. Use same method for the coconut.

Put chocolate in food processor and process until finely ground. Add 3/4 cup of almonds and 1/4 cup coconut to the chocolate and process for about a minute.

Heat cream in a small saucepan until the cream simmers and small bubbles appear around the edges of the pan. Immediately remove from heat.

With food processor running, pour hot cream through feed tube and process until chocolate mixture is thick and fairly smooth. Pour mixture onto a shallow pan and refrigerate, uncovered, until firm to the touch, about 1 hour. (Note: You can stop at this point and continue up to a day later.)

Put remaining coconut and remaining nuts into separate bowls. Chop the nuts a bit if they seem too large. Take chocolate out of refrigerator and, with a spoon, scoop up enough chocolate to roll a 1-inch round. Then roll truffle in either coconut or almonds. Transfer to an airtight container and refrigerate until ready to serve.

Ginger Pumpkin Pie with Pumpkin Seed Crust

- 3/4 cup hulled pumpkin seeds
- 2 cups graham cracker crumbs
- 1/2 teaspoon ground ginger
- 1/4 cup granulated sugar
- 10 tablespoons melted unsalted butter
- 2 cups canned pumpkin puree
- 2 eggs lightly beaten
- 2 egg yolks lightly beaten
- 1 1/2 cups heavy cream
- 3/4 cup dark brown sugar
- 2 teaspoons cinnamon
- 1/4 teaspoon ground cloves
- 1/4 teaspoon nutmeg
- 1/4 cup finely chopped crystallized ginger

Preheat oven to 400°F.

Spread pumpkin seeds on a baking sheet and toast for 5 minutes until you hear them pop. Check seeds often as they easily burn.

Chop 1/2 cup of the seeds in the food processor, mix with graham cracker crumbs, ground ginger and granulated sugar. Stir in melted butter.

Pat this mixture firmly into the bottom and sides of a 10-inch pie pan and refrigerate for 15 minutes. Bake the crust for 15 minutes and remove from oven. Reduce oven heat to 350°F.

Mix pumpkin puree, eggs, egg yolks, cream, brown sugar, cinnamon, cloves and nutmeg in a bowl. Stir in crystallized ginger and mix until smooth. You can do all this by hand. Pour mixture into baked graham cracker crust and bake about 1 hour until filling is set and a knife inserted into the center comes out clean. Remove pie from oven and scatter remaining seeds on top, pressing lightly so that they adhere to the pie. Cool to room temperature before serving.

Note: Crystallized ginger must be chopped very fine. Do not use the food processor as the ginger will get gummy.

Cranberry-Poached Pears

- Serves 8
- 8 small pears, such as Seckel, peeled, stems intact
- 2 tablespoons superfine sugar
- 1 cinnamon stick
- A 4- to 5-inch strip orange peel
- A 4- to 5-inch strip lemon peel
- 5 tablespoons honey
- 1 teaspoon fresh lemon juice
- 1 vanilla bean, split lengthwise
- 10 ounces fresh cranberries
- 1 tea bag, such as green tea or fruit tea

Place pears in saucepan just large enough to hold them and add water, about 4 cups, to barely cover them. Add sugar, cinnamon, citrus peels, honey and lemon juice. Using the tip of a paring knife, scrape vanilla seeds into pan and toss in pod.

Bring to boil, stirring until sugar has dissolved. Reduce heat and simmer gently until pears are tender, about 10 to 20 minutes. Add cranberries and simmer until cranberries are soft but not mushy, about 3 minutes more. Use a slotted spoon to transfer pears to a dish. Spoon cranberries and syrup around pears. Add tea bag. Cool for 15 minutes, cover and refrigerate overnight.

Place a pear and syrup in a shallow dessert bowl, adding a dollop of yogurt, crème fraiche, vanilla ice cream or cheese.

Hazelnut Cookies

- 1/2 cup hazelnuts (2 ounces)
- 1/4 cup plus 3 tablespoons sugar
- 3/4 cup plus 2 tablespoons flour (I used a mixture of white and buckwheat flour)
- 1 stick (1/2 cup) cold unsalted butter, cut into small pieces

Preheat oven to 350°F.

Toast hazelnuts in a shallow baking pan until fragrant and skins begin to loosen, about 5 minutes. Rub nuts in kitchen towel to remove any loose skins. Not all the skins will come off which is okay.

Pulse nuts and 1/4 cup sugar in food processor until nuts are finely ground, then add flour and a pinch of salt, pulsing until combined. Add butter and pulse until dough just forms a ball. Divide dough in half, then roll dough on a work surface dusted with sugar and flour into two 11-inch-long logs, each about 1 inch wide. Chill, wrapped in plastic wrap, 1 hour or up to 3 days.

Cut logs crosswise into 1/2-inch slices and arrange 2 inches apart on 2 baking sheets. Bake 1 sheet at a time until bottom edges just begin to turn pale golden, 12-15 minutes. Cool on a cookie sheet about 2 minutes.

Place remaining 3 tablespoons sugar in a small dish and dip tops of cookies in it, then cool on racks.

Dough can be chilled up to 3 days or frozen, wrapped well in plastic wrap, up to 1 month. Thaw before cutting and baking.

Cookies will keep in an airtight container at room temp for 2 weeks.



LESLIE RUTKIN has been a copywriter, creative director and owner of a graphic design and marketing company. She and her husband have an antique business and are avid auction goers. She writes every day and has finished a memoir that is in search of a publisher.

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WINTER CELEBRATIONS

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The most festive season

By LIZ HUNTINGTON

The winter months, in our part of the world, are a time of special appreciation of tradition and family. The beginning of the season is marked by the Winter Solstice, the point at which the hours of sunlight are the shortest of any time in the solar year. The Winter Solstice announces the start of the long return of sunlight and fertility even as it marks the deepest day of winter. No wonder people celebrate! The holidays of this season, from time immemorial, are centered around the home and involve joyous celebration with a glorious diversity of customs.

Twelve Days of Christmas

The traditional Twelve Days of Christmas are the legacy of the oldest recorded celebrations of the Winter Solstice, practiced by the peoples of ancient Mesopotamia. The Mesopotamian priests took 12 days around the time of the solstice to make amends for the shortcomings of their people in order to help the gods win the renewal of light and life for another year. In the western Christian tradition, the holiday season traditionally begins on the eve of December 25 and concludes 12 days later on the eve of January 6 with the feast of the Wise Men.

Let there be light

Our love of multi-colored lights, candles in the windows and a crackling Yule log fire as an expression of seasonal cheer connects us with our northern hemisphere ancestors as well. December 25 has been recognized for over 4,000 years as that point at which, after three days of stasis in the winter sky, the sun begins its return, with daylight hours slowly beginning to lengthen throughout the northern hemisphere. Part of the Ancients' practice of purification and renewal in preparation for another season of growth was the lighting of candles, torches, sacred logs and bonfires. The brilliance of

these homemade fires in the depths of winter was a sacred and hopeful evocation of the sun itself.

O Christmas tree

On our blue planet, green is the universal color of life and growth. Our modern wreaths and holiday trees are the continuation of Nordic traditions that hang evergreens of all kinds in the home as a reminder through the months of darkness, ice and snow that life is an ever-renewing cycle. The hanging of mistletoe, an evergreen plant sacred to the Druids for its healing and pro-creative powers, is a part of this tradition.

Eat, drink and be merry

Feasting, drinking and merriment is another theme of winter celebration from ancient times, when people plundered their sometimes scarce winter food stores to produce fruits and sweets in celebration of their faith that another season of plenty would soon begin. The exchange of gifts is also a part of winter custom, dating from pre-Christian celebrations called Saturnalia, where costumes, song and dancing were also part of the winter festivities.

There are some special foods that only make an appearance during the holidays. In Finland, Christmas Eve supper might include a casserole of liver, rutabaga, carrots and potatoes with cooked ham or turkey. In Latvia, a traditional Christmas day feast is cooked brown peas with bacon, cabbage and sausage. In Portugal, it is the custom to have a special meal of salted dry codfish and boiled potatoes at midnight on Christmas Eve. In Holland, sweet, spicy biscuits called "peppernoot" are popular.

We are the world

Here are a few other winter customs from around the world:

In Scandinavia, families place all their shoes

together in the center of the house to invoke harmony in the home in the coming new year. Shoes take the place of the Christmas stocking in many cultures, and are set by the door or under the bed in anticipation of receiving sweets and small gifts.

In Spain, the Urn of Fate is brought out, into which participants place their names on slips of paper. Names are drawn in pairs, and each pair is then charged with serving each other with special devotion throughout the coming year.

In Scotland, Hogmanay is perhaps the biggest party of the year, kicking off at midnight on New Year's Eve and continuing throughout the night. One of the customs of Hogmanay is "first-footing," following the folk wisdom that if a tall, dark man is the first person to enter the home in the new year, the year will be a prosperous one. The dark stranger traditionally brings a lump of coal, a coin or a small cake as a gift. In return, he is offered food and a "wee dram" (or two) of whiskey. The traditional drink of Hogmanay is the Het Pint, a mixture of ale, nutmeg and whiskey. Modern Hogmanay invites all friends and neighbors to travel together from house to house, celebrating the prospects of a bright new year together.

In the middle of all that is new and modern and very busy, there is some deep assurance in knowing that we are still walking in the thoughtful steps of our ancestors. We can borrow and blend traditions, and still find ourselves true to the most profoundly satisfying essence of this time of year, which brings people together to share, enjoy and to hope.



LIZ HUNTINGTON teaches composition and speech at Sullivan County Community College (SCCC) and coordinates the SCCC Writing Center. Her poetry has appeared in numerous national and local publications. She is currently working on a novel about farming, wizards and unemployment.

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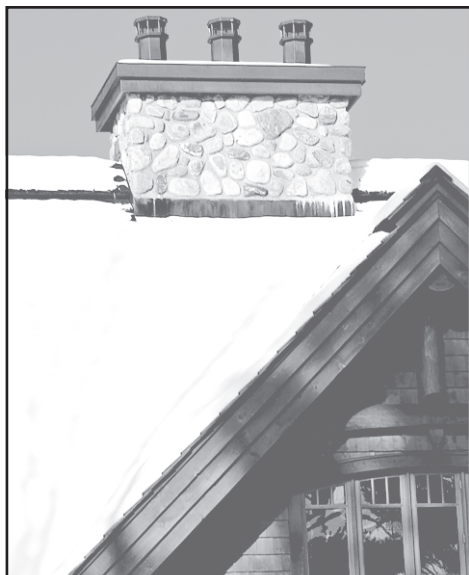
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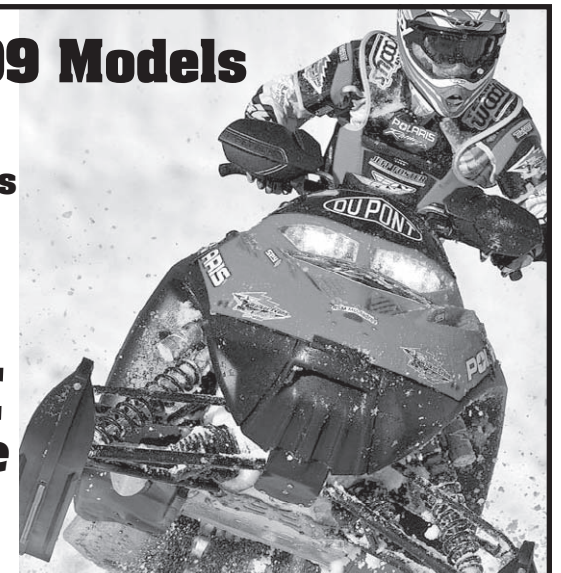
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A room with a view **ECCE** Bed and Breakfast

Contributed photo

By **TED WADDELL**

ECCE (pronounced “et chay”) is Latin for “behold,” and a more appropriate description can’t be found for this intimate Barryville, NY bed and breakfast high in the sky above the Delaware River. Perched on a massive rocky outcropping 300 feet above the nationally protected river, guests can gaze at the stars, watch American bald eagles fly along the corridor and greet the gods while cloud formations dance across the sky. No matter what the season, there are plenty of outdoor and indoor activities in the region to keep visitors occupied, and the stone fireplace in the living room invites cozying up with your favorite book or your favorite companion during winter’s chill.

Alan J. Rosenblatt and Kurtis S. Kreider are the owners and enthusiastic ECCE hosts. They first came to the region as weekenders and, as they fell in love with the area, began looking for a local business opportunity. “Nothing really clicked,” said the pair, until they encountered the private residence that, over the course of an extensive year-long renovation was transformed into a one-of-a-kind B & B.

“We were hypnotized by the view,” recalled Rosenblatt, adding they are currently hard at work creating hiking trails on the 60-acre property so that guests can further relish the experience and river views. “We felt the site was perfect for a bed and breakfast and it really took off,” he said, noting that since the opening of the Bethel Woods Center for the Arts, concert and museum goers are frequent guests, both on weekends and during the week.

“People who grew up in the 1960s or went to Woodstock [the 1969 Music & Aquarian Exposition that took place in nearby Bethel, now the site of Bethel Woods Center for the Arts and Museum] come to visit the museum that opened up in June, and that’s been a big draw.”

History

What is now ECCE began with the Fisher family, who were restaurateurs in NYC from 1917 to 1945. They built their first weekend home across the Delaware in Shohola, PA, but that house sat lower down, and Henry and Agnes Fisher were unable to view the river. They eventually bought the property on the New York side because “the view was better,” said Rosenblatt. The Fishers constructed “The House in the Sky,” as it was then known. (From ECCE, it is still possible to see the first home of the Fishers.)

In the 1980s, the house was bought by Sam Fishman, who hoped to keep it as a family retreat. However, when the Fishman family scattered far and wide and did not gather often at the location, Fishman decided to give the home to his son and daughter, Larry and Janet. Rosenblatt and Kreider bought the house from the Fishman siblings and, after renovation, opened ECCE to guests in July 2004.

As they worked on the property, historic artifacts came to light, including an original wooden sign with the words “ECCE” attached. “I was working on the bluff one windy day and heard this clatter,” recalled Rosenblatt. “The sign had fallen off, and we had a name for the bed and breakfast.”

A while later, they were clearing brush and unearthed a bench engraved “Rest and be Thankful,” and so another message from the past was added to the ECCE lore. As renovations progressed, an old laundry chute was uncovered, and workers discovered part of a poem penned by Henry Fischer in 1956 with calligraphy by his wife Agnes, which reads in part, “Give me the man who is content with his lot in life, who never cares what others have got, who cheerfully looks forward to each new day, thankful to providence to live his own way.”

“I get chills when I think about it,” said Rosenblatt, referring both to the sentiment and the lucky find that opened a window to the past.

Today

ECCE is now a five-bedroom B & B with central air conditioning. The bedrooms all have private baths and some have whirlpool baths. Each bedroom is named for its own special view: Sunrise, Sunset I and Sunset II, The Woods and The Ridge, and each has a television with a DVD and VCR player, a CD player, a refrigerator, a coffee and tea maker and Internet access. Guests can savor full country breakfasts while overlooking the river from one of the several decks, the breakfast room or the formal dining room. The made-to-order breakfast menu includes house specialties such as baked stuffed French toast, “Eggs in the Clouds Benedict,” eggs New York style or a selection of tasty omelets.

Co-host Kreider comes up on weekends from his job in the city to take on the role of master chef for the succulent breakfast repasts, while Rosenblatt



Contributed photo

Winter view from the monument



Photo by Ted Waddell

“The Woods” bedroom



Photo by Ted Waddell

Breakfast on the porch



Photo by Ted Waddell

Alan Rosenblatt



Photo by Ted Waddell

The “ECCE” sign

serves as sous chef. “During the week, I get a promotion to master chef,” joked Rosenblatt.

The hosts of ECCE pride themselves on offering the ideal spot to celebrate special occasions such as birthdays, anniversaries and reunions, and creating a perfect setting for small outdoor weddings and ceremonies.

“When people call for reservations, we ask them casually why they’re coming,” said Rosenblatt. If guests are headed to ECCE for a special occasion, they get a special surprise tailored to reflect the reason for their stay in the clouds. “If it’s a birthday or anniversary, it might be champagne, served in our log glasses, which they get to take home,” said Rosenblatt.

Award winner

ECCE Bed & Breakfast is the winner of several local awards, including the Upper Delaware Heritage Alliance “Recognition Award,” inclusion in the Catskill Regional Medical Center “Distinguished Home Tour,” the Greater Barryville Chamber of Commerce “Business of the Year Award” and several **River Reporter** “Readers Choice” awards, including “Best Customer Service” and “Best Local Getaway.”

Nationally, in 2007, “The Discerning Traveler” selected ECCE as among the top 12 “Romantic Hideaways” along the Eastern seaboard with this comment: “On the terrace you get the full ‘Wow’ impact with the river stretching for miles in both directions.” ECCE has been reviewed in **The New York Times**, **Kaaterskill Life**, **Backroads**, **GO**

NYC and **InsideOUT Magazine**. Terry Teachout, a drama critic with **The Wall Street Journal** and a recent guest at ECCE, had this to say: “I have never stayed in a more beautiful place... or a more comfortable, unostentatiously luxurious one. (Or one with pencil-signed Hirschfelds hanging on the wall.)”

Community appeal

ECCE maintains a strong commitment to its river valley community, and features a rotating art gallery that showcases the works of local artists such as John Beck, Anthony Biancoviso, Daria Dorosh, Mauro Giuffrida, Julie Gross, Tom Holmes, Janet Rutkowski and John Tomlinson. Outdoor sculptures by Holmes are located around the property. It has hosted numerous community events including The Liberty Museum & Arts Center Annual Architectural Tour and the Barryville Area Arts Association 2007 Art Exhibit. “From the beginning,” said Rosenblatt, “we wanted to make it more than just a bed and breakfast—not only a place that people come to for overnight stays, but also a spot for retreats and larger occasions.” ECCE is often the site of local weddings, anniversaries and celebrations.

The great outdoors

Part of ECCE’s appeal is its dramatic setting and easy access to outdoor activities such as boating, fishing, hiking, biking and skiing. “It’s a great Audubon site for people,” said Rosenblatt. Last January, they watched three eagles mature and then depart the region. More common sightings include

scarlet tanagers, indigo buntings and waxwings. There are all sorts of woodland creatures living nearby, including deer, fox, coyotes, raccoons, black bear and, of course, an army of chattering squirrels and chipmunks.

The rocks themselves hold stories. Before the Fishers built their vacation house on the bluff, the rock outcropping were visited by guests staying at Maple Grove Farm, a popular vacation spot just down the road. As the spirit moved them, they would visit the area to carve their initials into the stone. “It was a sort of lover’s lane,” said Rosenblatt. Wind and rain have done their work and most of the initials are eroded away, but it has become a pastime at ECCE to find the oldest date carved in the rock. The oldest one so far dates back to 1923.

Living in a home richly textured with historic memories has rubbed off on the new hosts. “Our legacy is to make this a place people will remember,” said Rosenblatt, “something that will carry on in family photo albums, something that will hopefully carry on beyond us.”

For more information and reservations call 845/557-8562, 888/557-8527 or visit eccebedandbreakfast.com.



TED WADDELL, a freelance photojournalist, has won 19 New York State Press Association (NYPA) awards since 1997, including first place “In-Depth Reporting,” second and third place “Reporter of the Year” and numerous photo awards. His photographic works have been exhibited locally and nationally. He is working on a book.

Handmade gifts for the holidays

By NANCY DYMOND

Is there any better feeling than receiving a gift that was lovingly fashioned by hand? Well, maybe. New research (see www.sciencentral.com) shows a link between giving and the brain's feel-good chemicals that support our emotional health. Using functional MRI scanning to reveal the activity of brain structures, National Institute of Health researchers asked 19 volunteers to play a computer game similar to Monopoly. They found that areas of the brain associated with the release of dopamine and oxytocin were activated whenever the participants received rewards in the game. Not surprising. What was surprising was that these same areas were stimulated to an even greater degree by donating to the game's charities.

It is not much of a stretch to speculate that the activity of creating handmade gifts would do more than let the recipient know that they are thought of in a special way. The person who spelled out "Doing Good Turns Won't Make You Dizzy," on a marquee in front of a local business may have already read the new report. Find out the truth for yourself. Perform your own experiment by crafting one or more of the simple gift ideas below.

Hanging around

Colorful padded hangers can be made simply from cloth ribbon and recycled plastic shopping bags.

You will need:

- Plastic hangers
- 12 plastic bags per hanger
- Tape
- 4½ yards of ribbon (1½ inches wide) per hanger

Directions:

Wrap plastic bags evenly around each hanger, using short strips of tape to attach them at both ends. Cover everything except the hook. Leaving a one-foot tail at the top, start at the base of the hook wrapping ribbon around the plastic bag padding. Overlap the ribbon to hide the padding. When you get back to where you started, leave another one-foot tail before cutting the ribbon. Tie the two ends together into a tight bow.



NANCY DYMOND creates from her home in Bethany, PA. In addition to contributing writing to *The River Reporter's* special sections, she served as newsletter editor for the Wayne County Arts Alliance and is a participating poet in the Upper Delaware Writers Collective. She is interested in traditional music and is currently working on her guitar 'hammer-ons' and 'pull-offs' with a hope of playing in a bluegrass group someday.

A cup of love

A canning jar filled with the dry ingredients for your favorite baking or soup mix is a simple idea that will be a true crowd pleaser. Decorate the top of your jar with festive cloth and ribbon and tie a card with the recipe to the jar, using matching paper and ribbon.

Here is my own suggestion for Blueberry Muffins.

Directions:

Mix together and funnel the following ingredients into a quart-sized canning jar: 2 cups all-purpose unbleached flour, 1½ teaspoons baking powder, ½ teaspoon baking soda, 1 teaspoon ground cinnamon, ½ teaspoon nutmeg and 1/8 teaspoon salt. Place 2/3 cup of dark brown sugar in a small zip seal bag and push the bag into the canning jar on top of the mix you just made. Close jar tightly.

Recipe:

Beat together ¾ cup buttermilk, ¾ cup unsweetened applesauce, the dark brown sugar from the bag, 1 egg, 1½ tablespoons vegetable oil, ½ cup blueberries (fresh or frozen—do not thaw) and 1 teaspoon vanilla extract until frothy, about 2 minutes. Pour the dry ingredients from the jar into a second bowl. Make a well in the center of the dry ingredients and pour in the buttermilk mixture. Mix just until moistened. Fill greased or paper-lined muffin cups two-thirds full. Bake at 350 for about 20 minutes. Yield: about 1 dozen muffins

Worth a thousand words

CD box photo frames can be decorated with paints, sparkles and glue, sequins, buttons... you name it. This is a great project to do with children to get them into the giving spirit.

Directions:

Remove paper inserts and the molded plastic piece that holds the CD. Trim the photo you wish to frame to 4¾ inches wide and 5¼ inches tall and attach it inside using tape, positioning it so the box opens out with the hinge at the top to allow it to stand on a flat surface. For a fancier effect, trim the photo smaller and put a colorful piece of fun foam or cardboard behind the photo to give it a matted look.

Folk art flower pot

The time needed to make this beautiful plant pot mosaic project is under one hour!

You will need:

- Newspaper
- Pottery shards, tiles, beads, marbles, beach glass, shells or charms
- Ceramic tile grout (available at hardware stores)
- Plastic knife
- Terra-cotta flowerpot
- Sponge

Directions:

Cover the work area with newspaper. Spread a heavy layer of tile grout onto the flowerpot using the plastic knife. Then press whatever decorative pieces you are using into the wet grout. When finished, spread a little more grout between the pieces so that most of the broken edges are covered. After the pot is dry, wipe off any grout film with a damp sponge.

Glass half full

Hand-painted glass bowls filled with candy, fruit or nuts offer sumptuous treats in unique keepsakes. For a variation, hand-painted canning jars, clear vases or bottles can create decorative and unique vases. Glass paints are available in hobby shops or departments at reasonable prices. A three-step, air-dry sample set of glass paints costs \$5.99 and is enough to paint at least six glass bowls.

Tips:

Where bowls are intended for food, paint on the outside only.

Study folk art books and other craft reference materials to get ideas for your hand-painted designs.

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Contributed photos

Centerpieces for the table

Bringing nature indoors with 'everlastings'

By ANNE HART

When I was a child, my favorite fall activity was to rake leaves into a big pile and then jump into them, enveloping myself in the smells and sounds of fall. Another favored activity was to collect leaves, then dip them in paraffin (under adult supervision, of course) to preserve the brilliant fall colors. As winter closes in and the holidays approach, our thoughts focus inward, toward home, family and friends. We can bring the outdoors with us by creating simple yet beautiful arrangements using the last harvests from our land and local markets.

Celebrate Thanksgiving with a centerpiece of baby pumpkins, dried baby corn and preserved leaves. Your guests can take the corn and pumpkins home, a warm reminder of the time together.

Holidays center on family and bring on memories of other times. Each year, my mother would organize a "pinecone hunt," sending my brother and me out for the biggest, most perfect pinecones our trees could provide. Painted silver, gold or dusted in

glitter, these pinecones would become an integral part of all of our holiday decorations. Other centerpieces or arrangements she created would include dried amaranth, fragrant Sweet Annie or the wonderful shapes of Pee Gee hydrangea.

As the December holidays approach, turn to evergreens, dried peppers and other dried flowers saved from the garden. Fill the center of the table with pine, topped with globe amaranth, strawflowers and the ever popular pine cones.

The New Year follows quickly, with winter nights suggesting sparkling white and pale winter colors. Fill the table with silver and glass candlesticks and scatter pale dried flowers and glitter in a pattern suggesting the clear night sky.

Seed catalogs will begin to arrive shortly after the New Year, and the time to begin planning your summer garden begins in earnest. As the winter stretches on, plan a place in your garden for "everlastings," flowers and plants that dry well and give you joy throughout the winter months.

1) Fresh pine needles are topped with dried red peppers, strawflowers, globe amaranth and a touch of gold glitter.

2) Silver glitter and dried pale pink strawflowers suggest the night sky, stars and planets when placed on a dark blue tablecloth.

3) Baby pumpkins are nestled with dried baby popcorn while resting on a bed of leaves.

continued on page 23

Plant an everlasting garden

Flowers that dry well are characterized by blooms that have little moisture in them. Pick before fully open as the flowers will continue to open as they dry. Pick after the dew has dried on a clear day. Choose only the most perfect blooms. Remove the leaves and tie the stems loosely together, storing upside down in a warm, dry and airy place. A dark-

ened room helps keep the flowers' color. Some stems will weaken as they dry out. Use florist's wire to strengthen them, or insert in place of the stems. While collecting flowers to dry, make sure to save blooms that have begun to set seed for next year's crop. Many of these varieties are open-pollinated and will come true with each generation. Below are some tried and true favorites.

- Amaranth/Amaranthus** – a grain with lush maroon to burnt orange colors in bold shapes
- Sweet Annie/Artemisia** – aromatic green-yellow bud-like flowers.
- Baby's Breath/Gypsophila** – white lacy florets
- Bells of Ireland/Moluccella laevis** – bright green bell-shaped calyx with tiny white flowers
- Common Stock/Matthiola** – densely packed spires in many colors
- Globe Amaranth/Gomphrena** – round, button-like blooms in many colors
- Globe Thistle/Echinops** – blue, spiny, globe-like shapes
- Lady's Mantle/Alchemilla mollis** – small yellow to chartreuse star-like flowers
- Lavender/lavandula** – tiny blue florets atop fragrant leaves
- Love-in-a-Mist/Nigella Damascena** – green-gray striped pods follow airy blue, white and pink flowers
- Money Plant/Lunaria** – flat silver gray pods resembling coins
- Pearly Everlasting/Anaphalis Margaritacea** – globular button-like blooms
- Sea Holly/Eryngium planum** –burr-shaped flowers resembling thistle
- Sea Pink/Armeria Maritime** – pom-pom like clusters of flowers



ANNE HART is the proprietress of *Domesticities & The Cutting Garden* in Youngsville, NY. When she's not there, she's playing in the dirt somewhere else.

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| <i>December 5 & 6</i> | Holiday Open House
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| <i>December 6</i> | Hot Cocoa & Donuts with Santa
Papa's Primo Pizza | | Holiday Open House
Wayne County Public Library |
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THE SEASON OF GIVING

Volunteerism is in

By ERIN VANDERBERG

There are a wide variety of area organizations—arts, community, environmental, social work and animal rescue—that already exist on limited budgets. Now, with belts tightening around the nation, these organizations require community support more than ever to keep their doors open. Luckily for them, 'tis the season of giving where cautionary tales of miserly people remind us all to open our hearts and commit acts of kindness. While charitable contributions go far and are the easiest commodity for any organization to work with, volunteering is another way to give back without breaking the bank, with the added satisfaction of doing a good deed.

The arts

Elaine Giguere, executive director of the Delaware Valley Arts Alliance (DVAA) in Narrowsburg, NY, is seeing the effects of the economic fallout “coming home to roost” with the cancellation of 2009’s EagleFest, an annual festival celebrating eagles and other wildlife in the Delaware River valley, due to cuts in travel budgets. She is concerned for her organization in this climate. “People have to be made aware that all this can go away. We are all a couple of paychecks away from closing our doors.”

Volunteer support makes a world of difference at a place like the DVAA where the “honey-do” list is a mile long. The organization can always use hands in the gift shop; ushers and box office volunteers are needed for shows at the Tusten Theatre; and storm windows on the DVAA’s second floor would save on energy—to name just a few items on the list. “If the grants go away, so do rural places like this,” Giguere said of the DVAA. “Lots of people don’t even think about it until such places are gone.”

Think globally, act locally

The classic volunteer organizations, like Rotary Clubs, remain great footholds for people who want to become regularly involved in the community. At the Rotary Club in Port Jervis, NY, recent local projects have included the construction of the Rotary Skateboard Park in town, the Dictionary Project that donates a dictionary every year to local third graders and a program that provides annual scholarships to Port Jervis High School seniors. The Rotarians of Port also think globally, with international projects like sending Shelter Boxes to disaster

victims around the world, a water purification project at an AIDS orphanage in Thailand and the commitment of each member to contribute a matched sum toward the eradication of polio. Additionally, members fundraise for the Rotary-wide project, “The Gift of Life,” which provides children with life-saving heart surgeries.

Charlene Trotter, president of the Rotary Club of Port Jervis, finds her motivation for giving from the positive impact she sees it create. “Every time I think: ‘I’m too busy, I don’t have the time,’ it does not end up a problem, because I know someone will be touched,” she explained. She recently volunteered with the Rotary Club at the food pantry out of Temple Beth El in Port, which clarified her humanitarian purpose. “I looked at this person I was giving clothes to and, seeing their emotions of embarrassment and gratitude, I saw myself. There was a table between us, but there is really no difference between me and the people I help—we are the same.”

Save the planet

A deepening concern for many is climate change and the pressures of development; preserving the clean, pristine environment of the river valley is, without vigilance and dedication, something that could easily be squandered. The Delaware Highlands Conservancy (DHC), a group that places land into preservation easements, is just one of quite a number of groups that need funding and volunteer help. According to Helle Henriksen, land protection coordinator at the DHC, there are generally two reasons people find giving time to the environment so fulfilling. The first is the personal benefit they receive: “It’s very rewarding to be helping out and doing good for the community—if we all do a little of that, it’s a better world,” said Henriksen. Protecting resources for future generations is the second. “We take the long view that, because of our work, our grandchildren will be able to have forests, healthy air to breathe and clean water,” she said.

People helping people

Barbara Drollinger, who works on a number of projects including the Narrowsburg Ecumenical Food Pantry and the St. Francis Xavier Outreach program, believes that her work feeding the hungry and clothing the poor are all part of the plan. After retirement and inspired by the food pantry in Callicoon, NY, she spearheaded these programs out of the basement of the St. Francis Xavier Catholic Church in Narrowsburg, NY. It

was a large endeavor and she worried that she wouldn’t be able to handle the load, but while she was cleaning out the room, she stumbled on a sign: “Ye Who Enter Here Is a Stranger but Once.”

“When I found that,” says Drollinger, “everything fell into place. I knew in my heart that this was the right thing to do. That was the sign that it was going to work.

“Everyone knows: if they need anything, call Barbara,” said Drollinger. “I don’t want to see anyone go hungry.” By definition, “ecumenical” denotes religious cooperation, so several churches and the surrounding community provide the donations that run the program. St. Francis Outreach arranges the delivery of holiday baskets on Thanksgiving, Christmas and Easter and organizes an Adopt-A-Family program that coordinates a real-life secret Santa with a family. Forty-nine families were sponsored last year. The outreach program continues through the year, passing along donations of clothing, toys and school supplies to children in need.

Animal aid

Kelly Monahan, director of community development at the Olga & Dorothea Dessin Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals in Honesdale, PA, envisions a time when “we can control pet overpopulation and provide all companion animals with a loving, compassionate home.” Her organization depends on volunteers in all capacities: fundraising assistance, shelter operations, dog walking, cat socializing, maintenance, operating the thrift shop and board membership. It can also use pet food, litter, toys, office and cleaning supplies, and groundskeeping tools. (Dessin suffered a fire in October; luckily no animals or people were hurt, but funds and assistance are needed more than ever.)

Adopting a pet from your neighborhood shelter instead of buying one from the pet store is another way to make a positive impact. These pets are often older and easier than puppies or kittens; they are housebroken and through the chewing or scratching stage. They have a lot of love to give back.

No matter what your passion and interest, there are many worthwhile organizations near your home that will value the gift of your time and money. As the saying goes, you don’t know what you’ve got until it’s gone. But perhaps Giguere says it better: “If you’ve thought about it, and haven’t acted on it, do it now!”



Deck the halls

A simple and green holiday

By **MARCIA NEHEMIAH**

For most of us, the holiday season is steeped in family and cultural traditions. This year, we are suggesting some new approaches to decorating, entertaining and gift-giving that are conducive to a more sustainable lifestyle. The changes might even reduce the stress of the holidays by suggesting a simpler approach, thereby improving your mood and your family holiday merrymaking.

Decorating

One of the great felicities of the holidays is decorating our living spaces in celebration of the season. Bring outdoor beauty into and around your home with attractive, compostable and biodegradable cornstalks, pinecones, pumpkins, gourds, poinsettias, berry garlands and evergreen boughs. It can be a great treat to search for such items in your yard or woods with a basket and clippers and young ones in tow.

If your holiday calls for a tree, consider buying a hardy live evergreen that you can plant when the celebrations have ended. (Dig a roomy hole and line it with a gentle layer of straw and compost before the earth freezes. Keep the dirt in a wheelbarrow where it won't freeze so it will be ready for planting. Keep the burlap-wrapped roots plenty moist but not soaking. Plant your tree as soon after the holidays as possible.) A marker under the tree can make note of the year, bringing back memories for seasons to come.

Alternatively, place your pre-cut holiday tree in a corner of the yard until spring, festooned with peanut-butter-dipped pinecones and other treats for the birds and squirrels.

Light up your tables and mantle with candles to commemorate the shortening days. Consider substituting paraffin wax candles (which are petroleum-based) with beeswax or soy candles for longer lasting light that will also reduce your exposure to carcinogens.

Entertaining

Sharing home-cooked meals with family and friends is a hallmark of holiday celebrations. Even if you don't own "good" silver, crystal or china, do

avoid the definitively un-festive and eco-unfriendly paper or plastic disposable "dinnerware." Candles, centerpieces, cloth tablecloths and napkins can go a long way to setting a festive mood, even with your every day plates. You can acquire some "special" affordable china by scouring antique stores and flea markets. It can even be fun to collect an "unmatching" set of beautiful old dishes and glassware for the holiday meal.

The meal

For many of us, the bird is the centerpiece of the holiday meal, sometimes substituted with a ham or a roast beef. Increasingly, vegetarian alternatives are becoming popular or at least grabbing the spotlight as side dishes. Your guests will have the opportunity to enjoy such savory dishes as Brie and Wild Mushroom Fondue, Butternut Squash and Ginger Soup, Individual Artichoke and Olive Tarts, Pumpkin Ravioli, Pine Nut Risotto, Roasted Garlic and Potatoes.

Many such dishes are easy to prepare and the Vegetarian Society's website offers holiday menu suggestions and accompanying recipes, noting animal-free alternatives to most traditional Christmas options. (If you're unfamiliar with products like Tofurky, try them out before the holidays to avoid any surprises on the day of your gala.)

For those of us who truly love our meat, there are an increasing number of local or online sources for organically raised, free-range poultry and grass-fed beef, where conditions are humane and cruelty-free.

Gifts

Americans buy 3.6 billion toys a year. Sometimes the packaging can be ten times the size of the toy itself. Most toys are made from petroleum-based plastic and often contain toxins. After the kids lose interest (and sometimes before), the toys break and end up in the landfills.

This might be the perfect year to institute new gift-giving guidelines for the family, turning away from the commercialism, over-spending and extravagance of the season. Before the holidays, sit down with the family and decide what form gift giving will take this year.

There are many ways to reconfigure holiday gift giving and at the same time make it fun and meaningful for the family. One way is to set the ground rule that you can only give a gift you didn't buy. Start looking at options such as re-gifting or giving away a valued possession. Or, you can make someone truly happy by presenting a coupon for something you can do for the person at a later date—clean the yard, take care of a pet, cook a meal, babysit. Or, offer to teach someone a skill that you have.

Another option is to stipulate that all gifts must be handmade. What a great way to spend time with your children as they come up with ideas for gifts to make, and then set out to make them. There are lots of simple crafts to do with kids, and it might be the perfect time to teach them the basics of knitting or baking. A third idea is to stipulate that all gifts must be purchased from a second-hand book, clothing or antique store. Of course, a combination of all three methods is allowed.

The website buynothingchristmas.org has many wonderful ideas for holiday gift giving that will cost nothing or almost nothing, but show lots of care and love.

Once you've found that one perfect gift for the person on your list, wrap it using the traditional Japanese art of furoshiki, or fabric wrapping. A decorative kitchen towel, tablecloth, pillowcase or napkin creates a unique package and the wrapping doubles as an extra gift. You can find instructions for this simple technique online.

Colorful newspaper pages, such as the ones this magazine is printed on, also make good wrapping material.

Creating fresh, sustainable traditions for you and your family can reduce stress, increase joy, help the family pocket book *and* the environment this holiday season.



MARCIA NEHEMIAH writes *The River Reporter's* monthly sustainability column, "In Our Hands." She is a member of the Upper Delaware Writers Collective and lives in Lackawaxen, PA.

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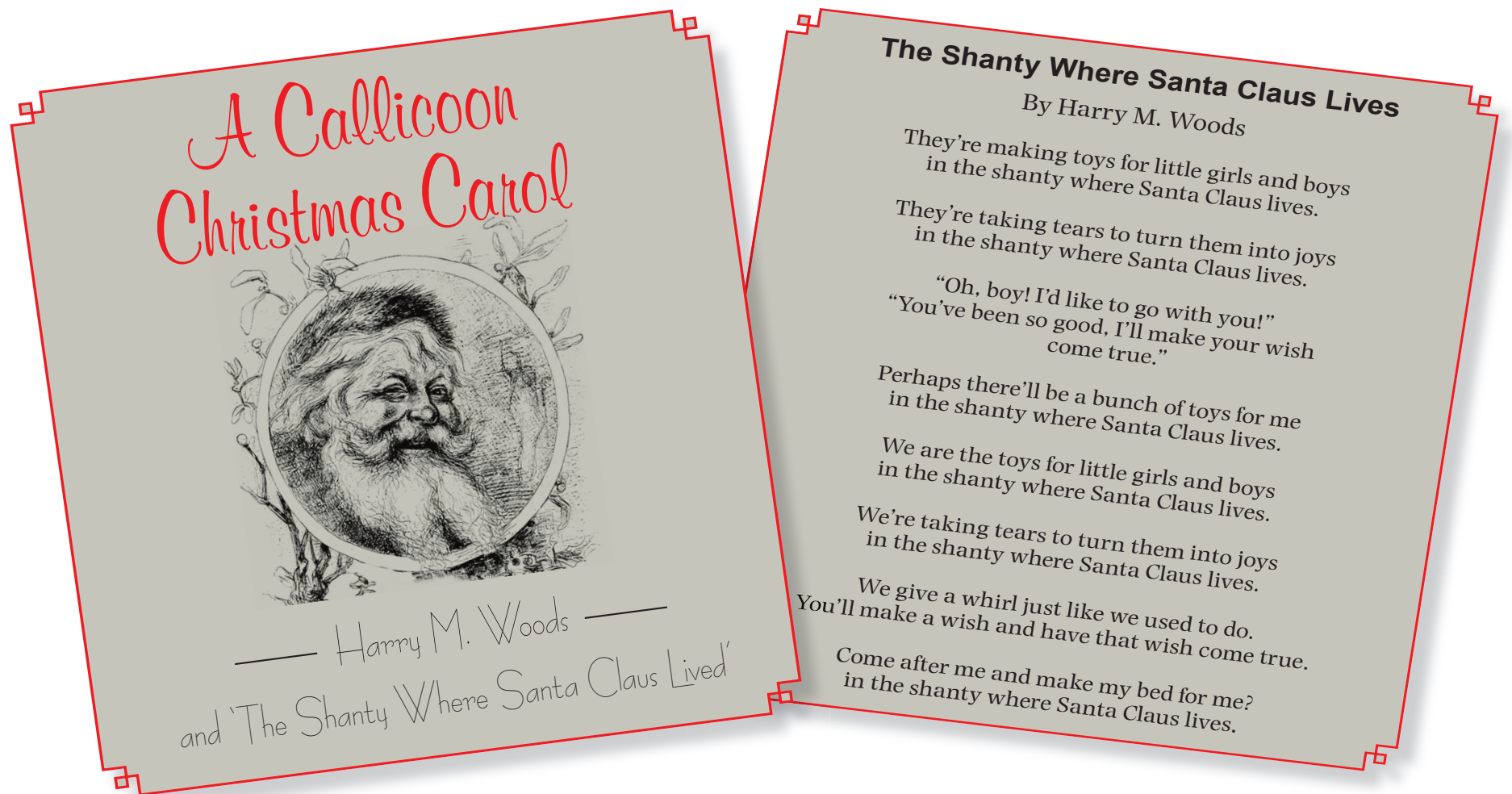
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By ERIN VANDERBERG

In 1991, Hortonville resident and singer Annie Hat performed a one-woman show consisting of 22 songs written by Harry M. Woods. She had become intrigued by Woods—who lived in New York City and worked on Tin Pan Alley, but kept a house in Callicoon, NY about four miles up River Road in the 1920s and early 1930s—because her neighbor had known him well and often related old stories of the songwriter to her.

Woods wrote some classics: “Try a Little Tenderness,” “What a Little Moonlight Can Do,” “Side by Side” and “When the Red Red Robin Goes Bob Bob Bobbin’ Along.” But his more obscure hits, like “In the Sing Song Sycamore Tree,” written about the old sycamore a mile out of Callicoon on River Road, and “Heigh Ho, Everybody Heigh Ho,” are beloved in this area because they are the sing-along tunes with which he would entertain the crowds at the old Fischer place in Hortonville. The barroom is still there behind the Buddenhagen Ford on 17B. When Hat was researching the show, they let her in to the old red stucco building behind the showroom to see the piano and mirrorball that are still there after all these years.

Woods’ mother was a professional singer who, despite his birth defect that left him with no fingers on his left hand, encouraged him to play piano from a young age. Against the odds, he became a great talent, and put himself through Harvard by playing recitals. After graduation, he intended to live out his days on a farm in Cape Cod, but the Army had other plans for him. When World War I ended, Woods started songwriting and composing music in New York City while keeping a house (that has since burned down) in Callicoon. Though he would later move to London and later still retire in Glendale, AZ where a tragic pedestrian accident would kill him at the age of 70, his years spent between New York City and Callicoon, recording under the label Callicoon Music, were his most inspired and prolific.

According to Callicoon historian Mary Curtis, whose parents were contemporaries of Woods and his wife, “Harry liked to party.” Local legend has it that he was a charismatic and

consummate entertainer who drank like a fish and had a volatile temper when drunk. He was also incredibly strong and would demonstrate his strength when he was especially “well-oiled,” as Curtis puts it; there are stories of him shaking pipes so hard someone thought their house would fall down and banging his fist so hard on a bar that it went right through. He and his wife would have “roaring” parties—it was the ’20s, after all—and she was known to check herself into Callicoon Hospital, on occasion, to detox.

Hat found that many people had stories about how Woods came up with his tunes. According to his housekeeper, he was looking out the window at a robin one day and he had no more than to utter the words, “Look at the robin just bobbin’ along,” and he had a song. Another story they told of his driving home after a particular bender and waking up in his car to a full moon rising over the mountain, which became “When the Moon Comes Over the Mountain.” While probably apocryphal, Hat thinks they make for great stories.

Though Woods left the area in the mid-1930s, he maintained an affinity for the river valley and often came back to visit. His son, David Woods, is a new-age composer living in the Poughkeepsie, NY area who runs a non-profit called Music to Light, teaching guitar and composition to inner-city kids and prisoners, the funding for which is partially provided by the hard-won royalties from “The Red Red Robin Goes Bob Bob Bobbin’ Along.”

People still ask Annie Hat to repeat the performance of Harry Woods’ repertoire. Her journey to investigate Woods took her around the county where a lot of folks, most of whom have since passed away, had colorful stories to tell. Since she was researching before the days of Internet, she went as far as the Lincoln Center Library in New York City to collect as much sheet music as she could find. Her show, which played twice at the Tusten Theatre in Narrowsburg, NY and twice at the Harmony Hall in Callicoon, was a hit. “It was amazing to see 50-plus people in the same room who hadn’t spoken to each other in years, but they all knew the songs,” says Hat. All she needs is a piano player, and she will play it again.

A lesser known hit, but one that suits the season, is Woods’ only Christmas carol, “The Shanty Where Santa Claus Lived.” Copyrighted in 1933, the song was adapted to a Merrie Melodies cartoon classic by the same name. If your caroling repertoire needs a little local flavor, look no further.



ERIN VANDERBERG settled in Forestburgh, NY in 2004 after traveling the country as an AmeriCorps NCCC volunteer, and throughout East Africa, the Middle East, western Europe, India, Mexico, Ecuador and Indonesia as a student. At her country home, she enjoys growing vegetables and baking bread.

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Preparing for the Sale

A Conversation with Carol Malek

By EMILY GRILLO

Selling your home in a timely fashion and for the best price possible can take patience and planning. In a buyer's market like the one we are currently in, buyers have options and can be as picky as they want. There are lots of small adjustments you can make that will help your home sell more quickly and for more money.

Getting your home ready for re-sale doesn't have to cost a ton of money. Simple improvements like painting can make your home seem brighter and more inviting. Also, taking your "stuff" to storage or to its new home can create an uncluttered look that makes the home appear bigger.

Our Country Home spoke with Carol Malek, broker and owner of Malek Properties in White Lake, NY, to see what a real estate professional recommends when putting your home on the market.

OCH: Can you talk about current market trends and any changes you see on the horizon?

CM: The majority of the properties we sell are to second-home buyers who are looking for a country getaway. Sullivan County real estate has been that way for quite some time. With the arrival of Bethel Woods [Center for the Arts] and the talk about the Capelli-Trump project in Kiamesha, that market has been constant. More recently, the number of first-time buyers is increasing. These buyers are searching out some of the new bargains with home prices stabilizing.

OCH: Are second-home buyers looking for something different than a full-time dweller?

CM: Second-home buyers are more concerned about distance from their primary residence, privacy, peace and quiet and low maintenance. They often are seeking amenities, especially lake access. The full-time dweller is more concerned about size

of the home, schools, property size, accessory buildings or garages and distance from their jobs. Those buyers who intend to live here year round are not as concerned with amenities and are more willing to do some work on a home if it is the right fit.

OCH: What is the biggest recommendation you can make to homeowners that will make their home more attractive without spending a lot of money?

CM: Cleanliness is most important and only costs some of the sellers' time and elbow grease. I frequently do suggest to my clients that they give a fresh coat of neutral paint inside when needed. Exterior spruce ups could be more costly, but when it is just cleanup or small repairs that are needed, it is definitely worth the extra effort. Keep the lawn maintained and maybe add some seasonal flowers to give "curb appeal."

OCH: What is curb appeal and does it really make a difference?

CM: Curb appeal is the way a property is viewed from the street. Everything prospective buyers can see before they turn into the driveway might make them want to take a closer look at a house—or not! Some buyers say they will not even go into a home to view it based upon the outside appearance. It does make a difference.

OCH: I have heard that scent plays a huge role in buyers' decisions. If this is true, what can a homeowner do to improve the house's scent?

CM: It is very true that scent plays a roll, but usually only if it is offensive. It is important to eliminate odors from pets, cigarettes, moth balls or mustiness, which can be done with a good cleaning and deodorizing. When the home smells, the showing goes poorly; the potential buyers cannot wait to leave. A home should really smell clean and odor-free. Remember too that some people have allergies, so it isn't even a good idea to have air fresheners that can be too fragrant.

OCH: What kind of landscaping appeals most to buyers?

CM: The majority of buyers, especially second-home buyers, feel that the lower the maintenance, the better. Some have a green thumb and appreciate more elaborate gardens, but more often than not, buyers don't know how to care for the garden and the question of cost to maintain it becomes a sticking point. Neat, easy, year-round shrubbery looks great and softens the architecture of any home, and a splash of easy-to-care-for colorful perennials always cheers things up. Flowering shrubs are also a great way to go. If you don't have a garden or green thumb, consider container gardening; you can buy plants already made up. Another quick fix is mulching. Whatever you decide, keep the grounds neat and mowed and shrubbery trimmed.

OCH: Do minor renovations such as painting and fixture replacement enhance a home?

CM: Painting the interior is the least expensive improvement you can make other than cleaning up. A fresh, newly painted interior could fetch \$5,000 more. If colors are loud, you may want to consider toning things down with some neutrals. Some colors offend certain people and they cannot see beyond that coat of paint. Hardwood floors that are damaged should be tended to if you can afford to do so. Newly re-finished hardwood floors almost always bring a return.

You may have heard that kitchens and baths sell a house. That does have some truth, but you could wind up investing in an expensive makeover that the buyer will not like. I suggest to my clients that they offer a credit to the buyer, or give them a discount off the price for renovations or appliances. When fixtures do not work, they should be replaced and again, always go neutral unless you are matching.

OCH: Is it true that moving clutter out of a home can help move you out of the home more quickly?

CM: A de-cluttered home is easier to see and to navigate. I strongly recommend to my clients to box things up wherever they can and store things away. Even a neat stack of boxes looks better than a huge array of knick-knacks or other collections that will distract the buyer. You should be able to see the walls and the floors. If you have an enormous display of family photos, then you may want to also box them up. This allows the buyer to see him or herself in the space.

OCH: Do certain colors attract the eye?

CM: Again, I believe in neutral tones. Personally I favor light warm colors, like antique white, very pale yellow or beige. They are inviting and soft. Lighter colors reflect more light into the home and helps to lift the mood. Lighter colors also help the space appear larger. Colors can be so personal. If the selling agent cannot help buyers visualize a paint job in another shade, they may not consider the home. I have seen it happen.

OCH: Do you help you clients arrange furniture to make the home appear larger?

CM: Yes. I am very fortunate to work with some talented agents and we have actually staged a few homes to sell. It was fun and everyone gained from the experience. One thing to consider is traffic flow. Bring attention to focal points, such as a fireplace, and add depth with mirrors.

OCH: Do open houses sell homes?

CM: We have sold homes through open houses, but it really depends on the neighborhood. Some places work and some do not. Today, with the price of gas, it is more common for buyers to search the Internet and see all the photos before they will just head out to an open house in the country.

As we see the trends in home buying and designs change, one thing remains constant; de-cluttered homes that are clean and in good shape sell much quicker than their counterparts. Minor renovations, including a fresh coat of paint, can make a world of difference on the visual eye and reap the benefits of a higher price.

A lifelong resident of Sullivan County, Malek grew up on a farm in Liberty and currently resides in Bethel with her husband and two sons. A graduate of Marist College, she earned her BA in Communications. She founded Malek Properties in 1997. She recently served two years as president of the Sullivan County Multiple Listing Service and presently serves as the Vice President of the Bethel Business Association. She volunteers her time on numerous committees and is a strong supporter of the tourism industry in Sullivan County.

area & holiday HAPPENINGS

Friday, Oct. 31

Halloween dance party benefit

MILFORD – Dedicated to the late Lorrie Pacich, proceeds to benefit her children at the Muir House, 10 p.m., \$5. 570/296-6373.

Halloween parade

LIBERTY – Line up at 5:30 p.m. in the municipal parking lot behind the Elks Lodge. Costume contest follows with candy, cider and donuts. 845/292-7690.

Halloween theme weekend – thru November 2

CLARYVILLE – Halloween fun for the entire family at Frost Valley YMCA, 5 p.m. 845/985-2291, ext. 205.

‘Misery’ performance – thru November 2

SOUTH FALLSBURG – Psychological drama performance at Rivoli Theatre, Oct. 31 & Nov. 1 at 8 p.m.; Nov. 2 at 2 p.m. General admission \$15, seniors \$12, students/children \$7. 845/434-7232 or 435-5336.

Safe house for trick or treaters

MONTICELLO – Open to all at the YMCA, 6 to 9:30 p.m. 845/794-7700, ext. 10975.

Storytelling & harvest dinner

HAWLEY – Featuring folklorist Josepha Sherman at The Settlers Inn, 7 p.m. \$55 includes dinner, tax & gratuities. 570/226-2993.

Saturday, Nov. 1

Folk and coal-mining music

HAWLEY – Hand-clappin’, foot-stompin’ music by Jay Smar. Free, registration required. 570-251-6196.

Haunted carriage rides

MILFORD – Pike County Historical Society offers horse-drawn carriage rides through the streets of Milford Boro. Begins at the Columns, 12 noon, \$25. 570/296-8126.

Italian buffet

GLEN SPEY – Pond Eddy United Methodist Church hosts dinner at the Lumberland Town Hall, 4:30 to 7 p.m. Adults \$10, 10 and under \$5, take-out available. 845/856-1129.

Jay Smar performs folk songs

HAWLEY – Learn about local history while enjoying music by Jay Smar at PPL’s WELC Auditorium, 1:30 to 3 p.m. 570/251-6196.

Michael Rice performs

MILFORD – Broadway and cabaret performance at the Muir House, 6:30 p.m. 570/296-6373.

‘Music of Our Time’

NARROWSBURG – Concert by area composers at Tusten Theatre, 7:30 p.m., \$12. Tickets 845/252-7272 or information 252-3136.

Nighttime hike

CLARYVILLE – A chance for star gazing and watching nocturnal animals at Frost Valley YMCA, 6 p.m., free. Registration suggested, 845/985-2292, ext. 397.

Poetry of High Point State Park

NEW JERSEY – Discover poetry’s place in the history of High Point State Park while enjoying autumn tea. All ages welcome. Limited space, registration required, 973-875-1471.

Post-Halloween celebration

LIBERTY – Program of scary satirical fables, food, drink and music by Crazy Cat Lady at the Liberty Free Theatre, 7:30 p.m., free. 845/292-3788.

Turkey dinner

JEFFERSONVILLE – First Evangelical Lutheran Church, 4 to 7 p.m. Adults \$10, under 12 \$5, take-out available. 845/482-4293 or 482-3224.

Sunday, Nov. 2

Chicken barbecue

HONESDALE – Texas #4 Fire Company, 12 noon to 3 p.m., \$8.50 drive-through take-out. 570/253-0481.

Hiking the Catskill high peaks – thru November 7

CLARYVILLE – Eldershostel program: explore the “forever wild” forest preserve at Frost Valley YMCA, check-in 4 p.m. 800/454-5768.

Pancake breakfast

LIBERTY – Breakfast at Liberty Masonic Lodge, 8 a.m. to 12 noon. 845/794-0674.

‘Poetry in the Gallery’

WURTSBORO – Poetry reading series with Frank Boyer at the

Wurtsboro Art Alliance, 8 p.m., free, donations accepted.

Pork and sauerkraut dinner

LIBERTY – A Thrivent event at St. Paul’s Lutheran Church, 2:30 to 6:30 p.m. Adults & take-out \$9, under 12, \$5.

Monday, Nov. 3

Roast beef dinner

MONTICELLO – Elk’s Lodge, 5 to 7 p.m., \$10. 845/794-7274.

Tuesday, Nov. 4

Election Day luncheon

LIVINGSTON MANOR – Chicken and biscuits at Masonic Hall, 11:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m., \$7.50, take-out available. 845/439-3938.

Election Day meals

WESTBROOKVILLE – Westbrookville Methodist Church, lunch 11 a.m. to 2 p.m., \$5; dinner 3:30 to 7:30 p.m., \$7 adults, \$4 under 12. 845/754-7902.

Election Day turkey dinner

NARROWSBURG – Sponsored by Narrowsburg United Methodist Church at the Tusten Town Hall, 4 to 7 p.m., buffet style. Adults \$10, under 10 \$5.

Wednesday, Nov. 5

Turkey dinner

LIBERTY – Dinner with all the fixings, dessert and one beverage at Liberty Elks Lodge #1545, 5 to 7 p.m. Adults/take-out \$9, age 5-11 \$5, under 5 free. Public invited. 845/292-3434.

Saturday, Nov. 8

Church fair

PORT JERVIS – White elephant sale, bake sale, activities, merchandise and food at Drew United Methodist Church, 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. 845/856-3423.

Craft fair and bake sale

DAMASCUS – Damascus Community Center, 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. Refreshments available. 570/729-8320 or 224-6671.

Spaghetti and meatball dinner

ELDRED – Sponsored by Boy Scout Troop 102 at the Eldred Town Hall, 4:30 to 7 p.m. Adults \$8, under 8 \$4, take-out available. 845/856-1873.

Sunday, Nov. 9

Eric Barsness and Joe Hannan perform

NARROWSBURG – Tusten Theatre, 2 p.m.

‘Hear ‘Em’ acoustic storytelling event

WAVERLY – Roy Book Binder performs, 7:30 p.m. Workshop prior to performance, reservations required, \$20 in advance, \$25 at door. Waverly Community House, 888/800-POCO.

Thursday, Nov. 13

Twilight walk for children ages 6-10

NEW JERSEY – Walk in the twilight and watch the rising full moon at High Point State Park, 4 to 5:30 p.m. Registration required, 973/875-1471.

Saturday, Nov. 15

Craft fair and flea market

DINGMANS FERRY – Rain or shine, Camp Spears Eljibar, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Raffles and lunch available. 570/828-2329.

Friday, Nov. 21

Quilting weekend – thru November 23

CLARYVILLE – Variety of quilting classes by renowned instructors at Frost Valley YMCA. 845/985-2291, ext. 205.

Saturday, Nov. 22

Fall craft workshop

LIBERTY – Explore new mediums and fine tune skills at Gerald J. Skoda Extension Education Center, 10 a.m. to 12 noon, \$5. 845/292-6180.

Gingerbread house competition

LIBERTY – All ages are invited to construct and enter original gingerbread structures at the Liberty Museum & Arts Center for awards and prizes. Pre-registration required, 845/292-5242.

Holiday bazaar

MATAMORAS – Craft vendors, bake sale, flea market, food concessions at St. Joseph’s Church, 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. Photos with Santa & Mrs. Claus 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. Vendors needed. 570/296-5376.

Sunday, Nov. 23

All-you-can-eat breakfast

CLARYVILLE – Pancakes, eggs, French toast, sausage, hash browns at Claryville Volunteer Fire Department, 7 a.m. to noon. Adults \$7, children 5-11 years \$3, under 5 free. 845/985-7270.

Saturday, Nov. 29

Museum holiday open house

HONESDALE – Open house at the Wayne County Historical Society Main Museum, 4 to 7 p.m. 570/253-3240.

Saturday, Dec. 6

Bronx Opera performs

CLARYVILLE – Winter concert at Frost Valley YMCA’s Forstmann Castle, 8 p.m. Open to the public, \$10, doors open 7:15 p.m. 845/985-2291, ext. 205.

Choral society concert

MILFORD – Pike County Choral Society performs at the United Methodist Church, 7 p.m., \$10. 570/775-9436.

Ongoing

Acting workshop for adults

MILFORD – “On-Camera” acting workshop every Friday at the Biondo Community Room, 6 to 7 p.m. 570/686-4064 or 917/902-4172.

Adult book discussion

PORT JERVIS – Every third Wednesday of the month at the Port Jervis Free Library, 7 p.m., refreshments. 845/856-7313.

Book sale

ROSCOE – Roscoe Free Library, Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. and 1 to 5 p.m.; Tuesdays 10 a.m. to 7 p.m.; Saturdays 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. 607/498-5574.

Calder House Museum open

EQUINUNK – Museum open by appointment. 570/224-6722.

Creative Arts Center classes

MILFORD – Art, acting, set and costume design classes for ages 6 to 14 every Saturday. 570/296-8408.

Dorflinger Glass Museum open

WHITE MILLS – Open to the public, Wednesday-Sunday 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., Sunday 1 to 4 p.m. 570/253-1185.

Green Drinks chapter meets

MILFORD – Fourth Friday of the month at the Hotel Fauchere, 5 to 7 p.m. 570/409-1212.

Grey Towers tours

MILFORD – Open weekends through November, tours at 1 and 3 p.m. of all three floors. 570/296-9630.

Life class

LIVINGSTON MANOR – Artists get together to work in all mediums, all levels welcome, live model supplied. Saturdays 9 a.m. to 12 noon on 10/25, 11/22 & 12/20; Mondays 6 to 9 p.m. on 11/3 & 12/8 at CAS Arts Center, \$15 members, \$20 non-members. Registration required, 845/436-4227.

Museum at Bethel Woods open

BETHEL – Open to thru January: call 845/583-2079 for tickets and winter hours.

Neversink Valley Area Museum open

CUDDEBACKVILLE – Thursday-Sunday, noon to 4 p.m. and by appointment through the end of October. 845/754-8870.

Renewable energy workshop

CALLICOON CENTER – Every second Saturday through December at Apple Pond Farm, 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. 845/482-4764.

Study and meditation session

GLEN SPEY – Sunday morning service dedicated to creating a more peaceful world by developing inner peace at Kadampa Meditation Center, 10:30 a.m. to 12:15 p.m. Everyone welcome. 845/856-9000.

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