

Fall 2015

OUR COUNTRY HOME



The rise of Eva Drizhal

From waiting tables
to 'avant-garde surrealist'

Beauty and the bath

How to best light up your vanity

Extreme gardening
and the growing of a
giant pumpkin

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Cover photograph by Adam Marcus

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Letter from the editor

Tricks and treats

Belt too tight? Mine is—and it's been that way, it seems, for years now. So how can we treat ourselves in these times of economic hardship without entirely obliterating the already broken bank? Fret no more, as this issue of **Our Country Home** is full of tricks to quell the blues.

Engage in artist/designer Eva Drizhal's extraordinary story as she emerges from Stalin's rule a free-thinking artist/designer. Drizhal uses ordinary wares mostly from local hardware stores as well as stone to create home environments (down to each and every doorknob) that are not only practical and sturdy but also delightfully beautiful.

Take a trip to meet one of our local, artisan dessert chefs where you can also view fine and affordable art worthy of a museum! Trix (yep, that's her name) at Willow River Gallery and Café in Honesdale, PA offers hand-made chocolate pleasures, finely crafted baked goods, and high-quality artwork of her own making as well as from artists local and otherwise. The Trash Queen (Kathy Reiser) invites us to bargain shop and spruce up our home with second-hand treasures.

If you're really at a loss on what might impress your neighbor, parents, teacher, spouse, or even yourself, expert and award-winning pumpkin-grower Edward "Ned" Sandercock (Wayne County's prothonotary) provides tips on how to increase the size of your pumpkin—and oh yeah! I'll show you some practical ways in which you can and should recycle dead leaves or do something entirely frivolous with them on stolen time.

And as we head into the gray of yet another winter, color a small but precious part of your world under the guidance of beauty expert Robert Montagnese by incorporating his simple, fun and affordable lighting schemes into your bathroom.

— Ramona Jan
Section Editor



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The rise of Eva Drizhal

From waiting on tables to ‘avant-garde surrealist’ and the making of something out of practically nothing

By RAMONA JAN

Born in 1951 during the reign of Stalin in what was then-called Czechoslovakia, Eva Drizhal says she felt the oppression of communism everywhere in the air even as a child. Nonetheless, she was a happy kid who “saw the difference between outside and inside.” At school, there was constant indoctrination, but at home (with her parents, a brother and sister) there existed plenty of free-thinking and always a plan for escape.

Around 1967, there was a movement toward democracy in Czechoslovakia, and the borders briefly opened. The entire Drizhal family took this opportunity to emigrate to America—all except for rebellious 17-year-old Eva, who insisted on staying in her homeland. Bold political opinions and the fact that her parents fled, however, barred Drizhal from attending any Czech university. “They looked at me as a potential spy, so I couldn’t get an education. It was forbidden for people with that kind of background. But it didn’t matter. I studied by myself, and I think I know more than those who went to school, since they were under the influence of the communistic rules.”

Drizhal was eventually permitted to attend a trade school, where she studied drawing, painting and weaving. She fell in love with the making of kilims and tapestries and soon used her skills to express herself in three-dimensional forms using various ropes gleaned from fisherman, construction sites and the like. As she matured, Drizhal realized more and more that she had to leave her beloved birthplace, but the borders were already closed and getting out wasn’t easy anymore. In fact, she couldn’t get out.

Finally in 1979, at age 31, Drizhal received special permission from the Czech government to emigrate to the United States. “They realized that they couldn’t change people like me—people who saw outside the box and were very vocal about it. We became enemies, so they offered us an immigration passport. The United States had to agree to take me because my whole family was there. When I stepped onto the American continent, I got a green card right away at the airport.”

The first question from her family was: what do you want to be now that you’re here in America? “An artist,” was Drizhal’s immediate answer. “America doesn’t need an artist,” her mother flatly stated, but Drizhal continued weaving her ropes anyway, and didn’t stop for 25-years.

In 1980, Drizhal married another Czech immigrant and together they had two sons. They resided in Queens, NY but traveled to the countryside whenever possible to visit her aunt and uncle in Damascus, PA. On one such trip, Drizhal met the famous Prague artist Kristian Kodet, who happened to live in Damascus and who also coincidentally emigrated in 1979. As Drizhal puts it, “he really dragged me here. It was a better way of living.” Kodet has since gone back to the Czech Republic, and Drizhal now lives in Callicoon, NY.

Drizhal eventually divorced and raised her sons alone, while waitressing and painting houses for a living “inside and outside, not artistic work—just paint and make money,” she explains. At night and on the



Eva Drizhal relaxes on the porch of her home.

TRR photos by Ramona Jan



Here’s a peek inside Drizhal’s art studio as she prepares for a golden show.

weekends, she painstakingly refurbished her entire home down to every last doorknob, using mostly found objects, stone and items from the local hardware store. As people visited her home, they became familiar with her work not only as a fine artist but also as an interior designer, and she was asked to re-do several home interiors in the area.

Today, aside from her interior decorating business, Drizhal works in many different fine-art mediums including pen and ink, acrylic and oil paint, and fiber; her most current is paper-clay. She exhibits her work on a regular basis at the Bau Gallery in Beacon, NY. She also curates the gallery space at Café Devine in Callicoon. I had a chance to sit down with her and ask a few essential questions. Here is our short interview:

Q: Most people will ask at what age you first realized you were an artist. However, you are obviously a born artist, so I’m interested to know at what age did you realize you were never going to stop being an artist?

A: About 10 years ago when I turned 55, I suddenly realized the older I am, the more of an artist I want to be, because it’s the only thing I know and can use for my expressions. I feel I am stronger in these expressions now because I have more to say. When I was young, I was just flirting with art. Time is ticking now and I need to make

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Eva Drizhal

Continued from page 4

my statements.

Q: How would you describe your statements?

A: My statements are surrealistic. I consider myself an avant-garde surrealist—not an artist in a box. I'm always idiosyncratic.

Q: What does it mean to be surreal?

A: It's in me from my country, where the whole system was very surreal to me. I see things a little bit different—a little weird. There's a dark side to everything—not everything's nice, beautiful and fluffy. It can be even sometimes a little gross.

Q: Is seeing the dark side of things typical of Czech artistry?

A: Yes, because we were not necessarily religious people, and therefore we have no borders around thinking. We can slip into the dark side because it's a part of life.

Q: What's important about showing the dark side?

A: Some people like the dark side and can dig out something interesting because it shows something that a lot of people don't want to say or admit to. I lived in a dark regime, so I also had to develop a lot of fun and overlook of that dark and gray system. As artists, we made something surreal out of it even to the point of humor being dark and more raw, rough and ironic than here in America.

Q: How do you manage your idiosyncratic ways within your interior work?

A: I call my interior design work "left-hand." When I go to somebody's house, I have a vision of the color and shapes, and even though it's not my house or taste, I am able to adapt myself to that particular space.

To see Drizhal's 3D art and other drawings visit www.evadrizhalart.com. For her interior work, call 845/887-5807.



This bathroom is tiled entirely by Drizhal in cut stone.



The Drizhal-designed stairway banister is made from black pipe.



This guest room has parchment painted walls.



Doorknobs made from found objects are a Drizhal hallmark.

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Beauty and the bath

How to best light up your vanity

By Robert Montagnese

Once referred to as the “outhouse,” the bathroom has morphed into a place of beauty—a place to linger, pamper and dream. It’s an environment for pleasure and indulgence and, today, much more than just a room of necessity, which is why consideration of diverse and proper lighting is so important.

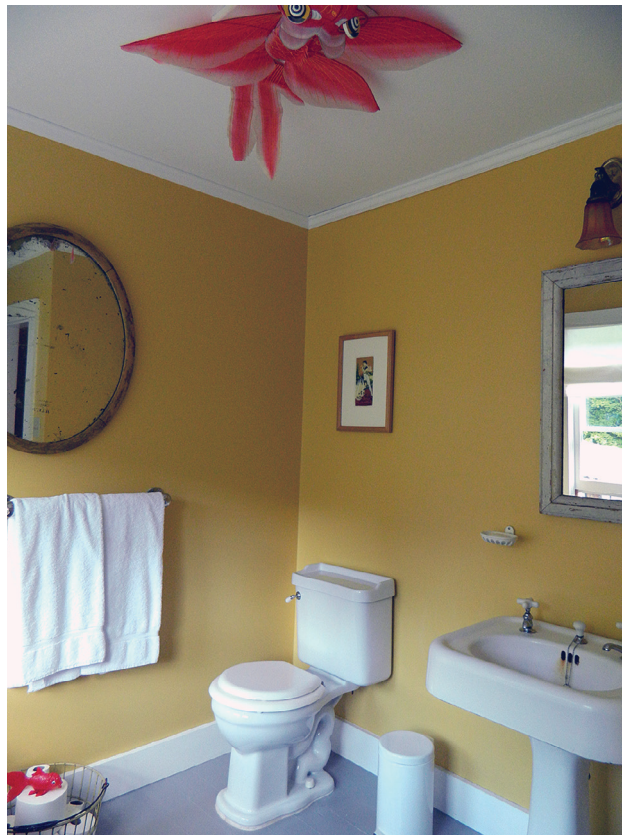
When I worked as Executive Vice President Brand Director at L’Oreal Paris, we had a room devoted to simulating various light—outdoor, indoor, office and evening. The goal was to provide a real-time effect to analyze the look and texture of our makeup products. For example, red lipstick in the daytime looks very different than it does in the evening light when it might very well appear a romantic soft pink. (And forget about how it looks in the florescent blue or yellowish tones of today’s commercial bathroom lighting.)

This same versatile technology—outdoor, indoor, office and evening light—was made available to women in the early ‘70s on a smaller scale. The most common method was the four-way light mirror, which you may remember your mother, sister or perhaps even yourself owning. The light source was on each side of the mirror or in a ring around it. The four-way lighting adjusted to replicate various occasions: daytime, evening, home and office. Today, in powder rooms everywhere, interior designers are utilizing multiple lighting sources to obtain the same effects.

“Task lighting” is the new term being used for the most important source of light in which to apply makeup, shave and to perform one’s overall grooming. This lighting is best achieved by mounting wall sconces on each side of your mirror with bulbs bright enough to match the illumination of a ‘70s lighted mirror. To fully light your face, 75 watts of incandescent lighting on each side is recommended. The second effect designers suggest for the bath is mood lighting. This form of lighting is used to create a sense of calm and to induce a feeling of



Turn-of-the-century porcelain fixtures with mica shades provide task lighting on each side of this chestnut-trimmed mirror, while a natural spectrum bulb replaces the fluorescent bulb above.



TRR photos by Ramona Jan

A cheery paper kite dims a too-bright overhead fixture as an inexpensive alternative to mood lighting.



A very small Japanese satsuma lamp on top of an old-fashioned medicine cabinet provides accent lighting in this washroom.

relaxation as you perhaps soak in an oversized tub sipping wine and listening to one of Philip Glass’s operas. Free-standing candelabras or overhead chandeliers on dimmer switches are popular choices for setting moods. The last lighting element essential in today’s bath is accent lighting, which simply allows one to focus on an element in the bathroom like the Picasso (a gift from mother), that works so well hung over the toilet. Small table lamps of alabaster, Japanese *satsuma* pottery, or stacked crystal with low wattage bulbs make excellent accent lighting.

While all of these options are available for purchase, there is something to be said for the ultimate natural light Mother Nature provides. Our country morning mist helps filter light to a clear and clean quality. As a result, when we wake and approach the bathroom mirror, we can enjoy a healthier reflection. One quickly discovers a simple source of lighting for the bathroom is a strategically placed window or skylight. After all, who wouldn’t be touched by the magic of a starry night coming through an overhead skylight while luxuriating in a tub surrounded by candlelight? It’s the ultimate indulgence in a most indulgent setting.

As sunlight shifts throughout the day (not to mention season), we experience warm, hot to silvery blue tones that drift into our washroom. The mercurial effects that natural light provides accentuate corners and elements static light sometimes misses, allowing one to explore color, space and an endless display of highlights and shadows in a new and different way. (No doubt even the Picasso will take on new meanings in this vacillating light.)

We’ve come a long way from the single over-the-sink pull-chain lighting of years gone by. The bath lighting we create today, whether installed or natural, needs to provide comfort and pleasure in our increasingly fast-moving world. Yes, even in the country we find that the ubiquitous half-hour drive into town can be grueling—often times requiring a “Calgon, Take-Me-Away” evening in the quiet of a perfectly lit bathroom. [Robert Montagnese’s website and newly released book, *Mr. Beauty*, can be found at www.mrbeautybook.com.]



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Cultivating personality through the home

By ISABEL BRAVERMAN

Walking into the Trash Queen Store, home decorating ideas are all around. That's on purpose: owner Kathy Rieser and partner Jill Weiss specifically created vignettes in their store so you can imagine your life in these scenes and take elements home with you. The space, which they recently expanded, is broken up into rooms and areas, and the empty space is just as important as what is filled. As Weiss said, "It's not packed to the gills."

Kathy Rieser is the "Trash Queen." She's been in the trash removal business for 25 years, and has lived in North Branch for 37 years. She started the Trash Queen Store in Callicoon Center five years ago and moved it to Main Street Callicoon two years ago. A lot of what you see in the store is from her extensive collection, acquired from auctions, yard sales and more. But after years of rummaging through yard sales, she said she was "tired of being rained on and thought it would be brilliant to be indoors."

Relocating to Main Street was a good move, Rieser and Weiss agree. Now they receive a lot of foot traffic, as well as repeat customers, especially those who come here on vacation and make a point to stop at the Trash Queen. They also love being among the other Main Street stores, and if they don't have something a customer is looking for, they will recommend a fellow business. Weiss has a background in fine art and psychology, and both of those come in to play in creating the store's window display. Always an eye catcher, the displays usually have a theme and a narrative, such as this summer's "American in Paris." Weiss says it creates "a sense of being someplace

Continued on page 12



Photos by Isabel Braverman

Kathy Rieser, the "Trash Queen," creates vignettes throughout her store in Callicoon, NY so visitors can imagine themselves in these scenes and take a little piece home with them.



The tool wall at Trash Queen is for the kings who may visit.



There's always something to look at in the Trash Queen Store. From practical to fine art, objects line the walls and lend themselves to decorating ideas.



Original art and poster art hangs on the walls in the Trash Queen, often hovering above mid-century furniture that is sure to be well designed.

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The Trash Queen Store sits on Callicoon's Main Street and offers vintage items and furniture as well as many other treasures.

else." She puts kids' stuff at the bottom of the display, at eye level for the little ones, and other things on display might include furniture and mannequins dressed in vintage clothing.

Weiss said Trash Queen "specializes in unusual, quirky, rare and unique vintage and modern items that appeal to all ages and prices." The women particularly like unusual design elements that are well made, as well as mid-century design. The items run the gamut from practical to fine art. An entire wall is dedicated to tools, and there are shelves of bargain items. The unusual? Boxing gloves signed by the trainer of Mike Tyson, and rare rap vinyl albums. Everywhere you turn there is

something to look at; one's eye is caught by books, an accordion, dishes, a fully stocked bar cart, an easel and a scuba suit. The main event, it seems, is the furniture, with everything from dressers to tables to chairs. The back room is dedicated to vintage clothing, accessories and linens. The store also has jewelry, rings and eyeglass frames. Weiss said Trash Queen offers "not [necessarily] what you need, but what you desire."

Rieser and Weiss have created mini rooms in their store, and you can borrow ideas from their concepts and even take them home with you. The environments have personality, they say. Go to Trash Queen and try out a new one.



There are pieces for all ages and price ranges at the Trash Queen.

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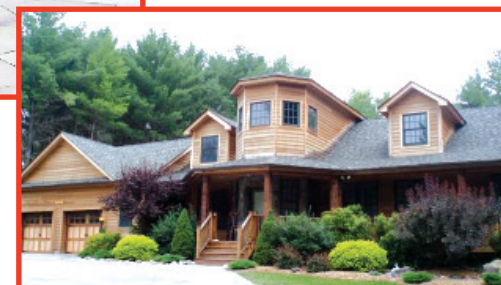


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Willow River Gallery and Café

The *luxe* life: art & cuisine

By JOHN HIGGINS

The owners of Willow River Gallery and Café, Trix Render and her husband, Philip Wells Garfield (an elegant name for an elegant man), have set a new standard in hosting, offering not only exquisite, original and memorable cuisine, but also beautiful art work in an inviting and *luxe* setting. Add to this the nearly mystical energy and vibe of a woman who is the creative force and director of the gallery and restaurant. (Philip is decidedly happy to be behind-the-scenes as sous chef and amanuensis to Trix's inspired leadership. Behind every great leader....)

I will never forget the first time I met Trix—a pre-Raphaelite beauty with piercing blues eyes set off by flawless alabaster skin. And then she spoke, introducing into the world's audio catalog the silkiest South African accent.

Trix was born and reared in Cape Town and then moved to New York City to pursue her passion, gift and skill as an artist (painter, sculptor, jewelry designer and dessert chef extraordinaire).

Trix confessed that in the time between her childhood years in Cape Town and her adult years in New York City she was longing to “find roots again.” It was on a lark one weekend (with her then beau, Philip) that they visited Wayne County and in short order bought 25-acres nestled in the woods in Damascus, PA. Shortly afterwards they



Photos by John Higgins

Photo portrait of artist and culinary visionary Trix Render of Willow River Gallery and Café

also bought the building at 118 Willow Ave. in Honesdale, PA that would become the Willow River Gallery and Café. Proving even further what a rare and game kind of gal she is, Trix (so named by her cousin when she was a little girl because she was “rather naughty and always playing tricks”) said “yes” when I asked her if she would be willing to explore the Proust Questionnaire with me—a long time favorite game of mine. Here are Trix's answers (and the champagne helped!)

- **What is your idea of perfect happiness?** Spending time in the woods.
- **What is your greatest fear?** Not having any woods.
- **What is the trait you most deplore in yourself?** Taking on too many projects.
- **What is the trait you most deplore in others?** Unawareness.
- **What is your greatest extravagance?** Champagne and birdseed.
- **What is your current state of mind?** Grateful despair.
- **On what occasion do you lie?** When I can spare someone pain.
- **What do you most dislike about your appearance?** Where do I begin?!
- **What is the quality you most like in a man?** A clean shirt.
- **What is the quality you most like in a woman?** Not being competitive.



Portrait of a man painted by Trix Render

- **Which talent would you most like to have?** To be able to sing like a wood thrush.
- **If you could change one thing about yourself, what would it be?** To be smarter.
- **If you were to die and come back as a person or a thing, what would it be?** I would like to be a bird, or an old healthy chestnut tree.
- **What is your most treasured possession?** My sanity, my health, a bunch of feathers, a little box of cat whiskers.
- **What do you most value in your friends?** A good chinwag*, honesty, loyalty and access to champagne.
- **Which historical figure do you most identify with?** A cross between Florence Nightingale, Frida Kahlo and Margaret Mead.
- **Who are your heroes in real life?** Social workers, teachers and people who work with abused animals.
- **What is your greatest regret?** I cannot mention them.
- **How would you like to die?** At peace on my deck with Philip by my side.
- **What is your motto?** Keep it simple and be nice.

**chinwag*: South African term for a really good chat.

I asked Trix what her favorite and signature dessert recipe is (drum roll)—a flourless chocolate cake! This was a clever ploy by me, because I knew if I asked, Trix would make it for me. She did. I wept openly and angels sang; it was so good! Here's the recipe if you want to try making it at home. Better yet, go to the Willow River Gallery website (www.willowrivergallery.com) or call 570/253-3013, make a reservation and discover for yourself the wonder that is Trix, her exceptional paintings and sculptures on display at the gallery and the food and desserts created by this beautiful artisan and her wonderful husband.

Continued on page 16



Tromp l'oeil spoon painted by Trix Render

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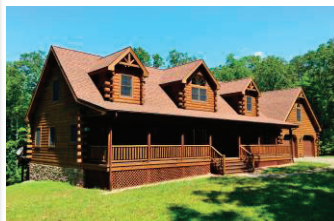
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Flourless chocolate cake with berry melange

Willow

Continued from page 16

Trix's Willow River Café Flourless Chocolate Cake

2/3 cup water
 2/3 cup sugar
 1 1/2 sticks unsalted butter
 1 pound good-quality semi-sweet chocolate chips
 1/2 cup liqueur—coffee, chocolate, orange, or cassis.
 9 eggs
 Pre-heat oven to 325 degrees.
 Butter an eight-inch cake pan and line it with parchment paper, and then butter again. Heat sugar and water, stirring often. When the water boils and sugar is

dissolved, remove from heat. Add butter and chocolate and let stand for 5 minutes. Whisk until smooth. Whisk in liqueur and eggs, one at a time. Make sure each egg is fully incorporated. Pour the batter into cake pan and place in a hot-water bath. (For a hot-water bath: place your filled baking pan in a larger pan and then add enough boiling-hot water to the larger pan to reach halfway up the side of the smaller pan.) Bake for an hour. Remove cake from water bath and let it cool for about 15 minutes, then invert onto a plate. Place in refrigerator and chill for at least 6 hours. Top with whipped hazelnut or pistachio cream, macerated berries, sliced ripe nectarines or peaches. Sprinkle with chopped pistachio nuts. Best paired with champagne, but also delicious with morning coffee or espresso. Enjoy!



Trix and partner, Philip Wells Garfield

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Ask the Expert: Ned Sandercock

Extreme gardening and the growing of a giant pumpkin

By NANCY DYMOND

Unlike Jack in the well-loved fairy tale “Jack and the Beanstalk,” Honesdale resident Edward “Ned” Sandercock, did not willy-nilly trade his cow for some magic beans. Sandercock bought his first magic seeds only after he had invested time in researching soil, taking road trips (to learn about the judging process of pumpkin contests), and in studying (via books and the Internet) the science of growing giant pumpkins.

“When I was younger, I used to grow some normal-sized pumpkins,” Sandercock says. “One day I saw a book about growing giant pumpkins by Don Langdon.” After he read the book, Sandercock and a friend, Andy Box, and their families, drove to a contest and “weigh-off” of giant pumpkins in Collins, NY. “Once we saw our first 1,000-pound pumpkin, we were hooked.”

In 2001 Sandercock and Box bought some top-notch seeds and grew their initial giant pumpkins. At their very first contest in Altoona, PA, they came in 5th place (statewide) with a 797-pound pumpkin.

Transporting these gargantuan vegetables is a project in itself. “It takes a lot of men to lift it up, or a tractor with a harness,” says Sandercock, who uses a snowmobile trailer for hauling.

“My goal has always been 1,000 pounds. I’ve had pumpkins that have weighed 920 pounds, 940, 992 and 996. The year mine weighed 996 pounds, I said, ‘Oh! This has got to be the one that’s going to be over 1,000 for me.’ It hopped on the scale and the scale was going back and forth over 1,000. It settled at 996, so it was a little bit of a disappointment.” Although the world record stands at 2,323 pounds (grown by a man in Germany), Sandercock said that beating or even coming close to the world record is unrealistic for a small, backyard garden.

Yes, there is money to be made selling super-large pumpkins. The buyers of giant pumpkins want to spruce up an event, create a memorable display, promote businesses and/or raise funds with “Guess-the-Weight” contests. Winning a contest can bring prizes ranging from \$1,000 to \$25,000. Contest winners and even growers of large pumpkins have opportunities to sell seed,



Ned Sandercock and his mother, Margaret Freeman, proudly display this year's giant pumpkin.



Giants line up in Dolyestown, PA.

although seeds and/or pollen are many times given away. But monetary gain is not the goal, according to Sandercock, “It’s not about the money. It really isn’t. It’s just pride and the reward that comes from growing them.”

Sandercock admits that it takes a lot of work to grow a giant. “People don’t understand how much time you put into them, and you [must] to get a big one. Sometimes I’m up at 5 a.m. watering them before work. [Sandercock’s real job? He’s Wayne County’s prothonotary—look it up! Hint: It’s an elected position.] At lunchtime I peek at them, and at night I spend another half hour to an hour weeding, watering, pruning and fertilizing.”

It’s an amazing sight to see a 1,200-square-foot, fenced-in plot overgrown with curling, hose-like vines sporting hundreds of platter-sized leaves collecting sunlight all for the sake of one pumpkin. “[The] goal is to get a [single] pumpkin on the main vine. You cut and bury the secondary and tertiary vines to force all the energy into the main vine.”

The pumpkin flowers only bloom for a day, so pollinating the female blossoms takes close supervision. “I’ll keep the female flowers covered the night before I want to pollinate. In the morning, I place the pollen from the selected males into the females, and then cover them back up so that no bees can get in and contaminate that cross. So now I have a pure cross for genetic purposes to hopefully create a better seed. All three pollinations were successful. I saw which one was growing fastest and I cut the other two off.

“Once the pumpkin gets going, you keep it shaded. You don’t want the sun to prematurely ripen the pumpkin. If you keep it shaded, it’ll keep it softer. It’ll stretch more, grow quicker and won’t ripen so early.” Sandercock began uncovering his choice pumpkin specifically in the daytime during the month of September, intentionally to bring out its color. He then re-covered it at night in hopes that the warmth will make it grow a little more.

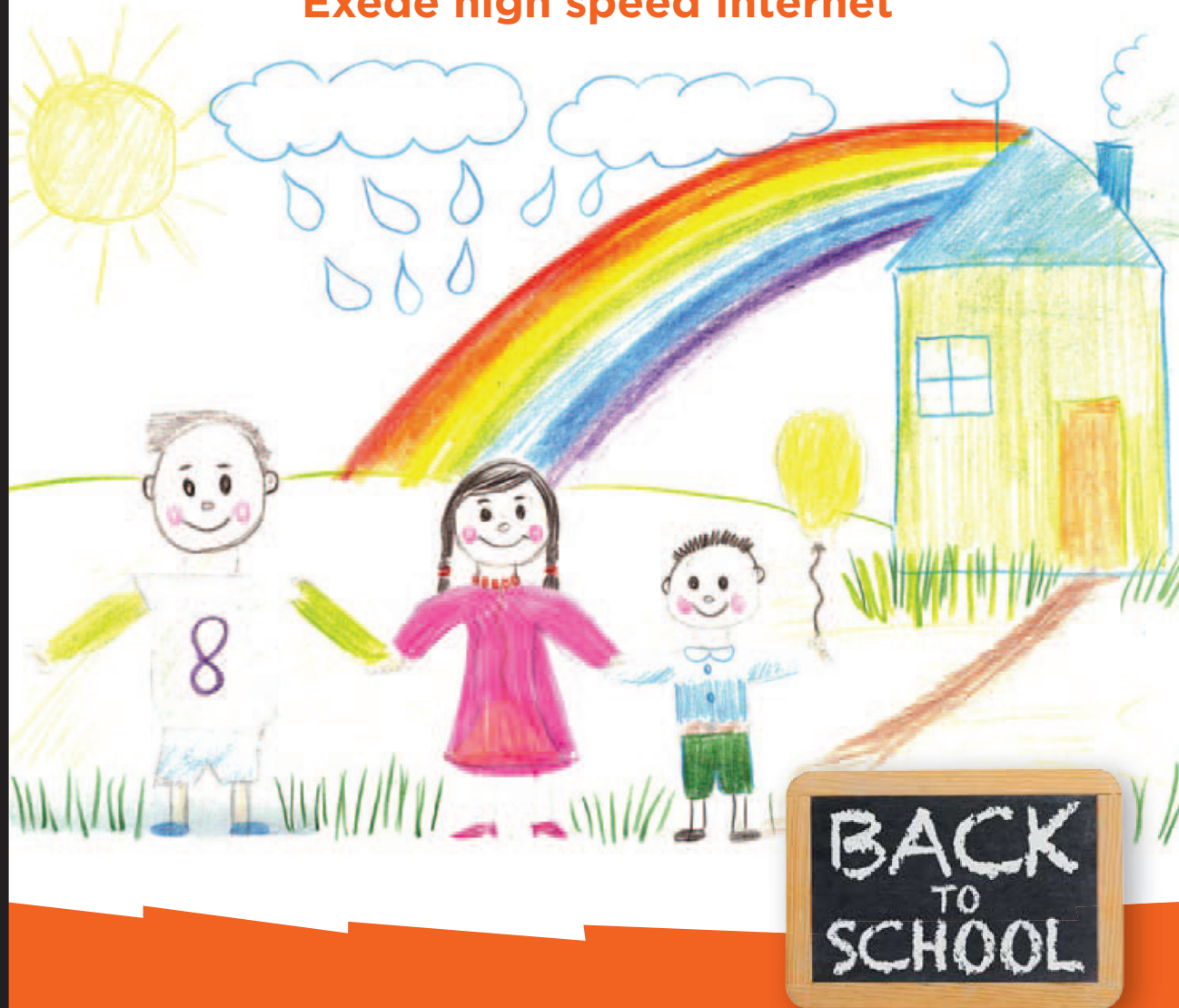
The pumpkin Sandercock grew this year originated from the seed of a 942-pound pumpkin grown the previous

Continued on page 20

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Extreme gardening

Continued from page 18

season. The pollen was purchased from a grower of a 1,870-pound pumpkin. Sandercock has high hopes of achieving his goal of a 1,000-pound pumpkin this year. According to his measuring tape (which has a circumference reading marked with an estimated weight along the length of it), at the time of

this interview, his “baby” weighed 489 pounds, and it was gaining in size at the rate of 40 pounds a day. [*See bottom right photo for update.] “There’s no other fruit or vegetable, if you like gardening, that you can physically see grow before your eyes,” says Sandercock.

Sandercock’s tips for newbie giant pumpkin growers

1. Begin on the Internet: Over 400 growers from all over the world use www.bigpumpkins.com. In addition to tips on getting started, this website has a diary section where growers submit photos of their giant pumpkins.

2. Create good soil: Get a soil test so you know what your garden needs or what it’s lacking—add what is needed.

3. Join a club: Clubs include the Pennsylvania Giant Pumpkin Growers Association (www.pgppga.com) and the New York State Giant Pumpkin Growers Association (www.nysgppga.com). For a \$20 membership fee, you’ll get free seeds, newsletters and tips.

4. Attend a contest and weigh-off: Become familiar with judging guidelines. It’s fascinating to watch the pumpkins get lined up smallest to largest, measurement-wise, and then get weighed.



It was a busy scene at the inspection and harvest of partner Andy’s 1,503-pound pumpkin.



Sandercock at best friend and fellow grower Andy’s patch on harvest day.



It takes a lot of help to move a giant pumpkin.

Photos contributed by Ned Sandercock

***UPDATE:** The below photo shows Sandercock and the pumpkin he grew this year on harvest day. He hit his goal: the pumpkin weighted 1000.6 pounds.



The River Reporter's 20th Annual 2015 READERS' CHOICE AWARDS

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Good Luck to all!

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Bagels _____	Locally-Sourced Menu _____
Bakery _____	Local Watering Hole _____
Barbeque _____	Lunch _____
Beer Selection _____	Martinis _____
Breakfast _____	Menu _____
Brunch _____	New Restaurant _____
Budget-friendly _____	Pasta Dish _____
Buffet _____	Pizza _____
Candy Shop _____	Off The Beaten Path _____
Cheesesteak Sandwich _____	Outdoor Dining _____
Chinese Restaurant _____	Overall Restaurant _____
Coffeehouse _____	- Delaware County _____
Deli _____	- Orange County _____
Desserts _____	- Pike County _____
Diner _____	- Sullivan County _____
Dinner _____	-Wayne County _____
Dinner Specials _____	-Region _____
Early Bird Specials _____	Ribs _____
Family Restaurant _____	Romantic Restaurant _____
French Fries _____	Salad _____
Gourmet Restaurant _____	Sandwiches _____
Grocery Store /Supermarket _____	Seafood _____
Hamburgers _____	Soups _____
Happy Hour _____	Steakhouse _____
Health Food Store _____	Vegetarian Food Restaurant _____
Home Cooking Restaurant _____	Wine Selection _____
Hot Dogs _____	Wings _____

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Fitness Center _____	Rental Center _____
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Heating Fuel Company _____	Spa or Personal Pampering _____
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Modular Homes _____	Women's Health Center _____

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Golf Course _____	Playhouse Theatre _____
Historic Site _____	Post Office _____
Horseback Riding _____	Private School _____
Hotel _____	Radio Station _____
Law Office _____	Resort _____
Library _____	Shopping Area _____
Live Music Venue _____	Ski Lodge _____
Local _____	Special Area Attraction _____
- Artist _____	Sullivan Renaissance Project _____
- Author _____	Wedding Reception Location _____
- Celebrity _____	Winery _____
- Farm _____	Youth Center _____
- Getaway _____	Youth Program _____

BEST PEOPLE

Accountant _____	Green Developer _____
Architect _____	High School Athlete _____
Auto Mechanic _____	Holistic Practitioner _____
Baker/ Specialty Cakes _____	Interior Decorator _____
Bank Teller _____	Landscaper _____
Barber _____	Lawyer _____
Bartender _____	Law Enforcement Officer _____
Builder _____	Local Hero _____
Butcher _____	Massage Therapist _____
Caterer _____	Medical Specialist _____
Carpenter _____	Painter _____
Car Salesman _____	Pediatrician _____
Chef _____	Plumber _____
Chiropractor _____	Politician _____
Clergy _____	Postmaster _____
Coach _____	Radio Personality _____
Custom Cabinetry _____	Real Estate Agent _____
Dentist _____	Roofer _____
Doctor _____	Teacher _____
Electrician _____	Veterinarian _____
Event Planner _____	Waiter/Waitress _____
Excavator _____	Web Designer _____
Friendly Staff _____	Yoga Teacher _____

HOW TO VOTE: Please print clearly your choices for "THE BEST" from the categories listed. Best choices are limited to Delaware, Orange, Pike, Sullivan and Wayne counties. You may also VOTE ONLINE: www.RiverReporter.com/BEST

HOW TO ENTER: NO PURCHASE NECESSARY. Additional ballots are available at **The River Reporter** office at 93 Erie Ave, Narrowsburg, NY. Ballots MUST be complete and include full name, address and phone number of voter. All ballots must be received by December 17, 2015. Employees of **The River Reporter** and **Stuart Communications** are permitted to vote but not eligible to win prizes. Entries that are late, damaged, illegible or missing voter's name will not be eligible. One entry per person. Mechanically reproduced or Photocopied entries are not eligible. A business, organization or person may win no more than three (3) categories. Winners will be chosen based on the number of votes received by December 18th, 2015.

HOW TO WIN PRIZES: All ballots will be included in a random drawing for prizes. Drawing will be held in January 2016. No duplicate winners. BEST Winners will be notified in January 2016.

OFFICIAL "BEST" BALLOT ENTRY FORM

PLEASE PRINT CLEARLY

Name _____

Address _____

City, State, Zip _____

Phone _____

E-mail _____

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Fallen leaves

To leave or not to leave (them alone)... that is the question

By RAMONA JAN

It's a luxury these days to be able to sit quietly and do a craft project—not even an art project—but a simple craft for no reason at all or maybe just to spend time. I made a promise to myself this fall to see what idle crafting would feel like and therefore spent an afternoon with a young friend (eight-grader Emma Switko) while she painted a small guitar, and I painted the fallen leaves I collected from the yard.

Rendering impressions of feathers upon dry pointed leaves was my only idea, and without the Internet that day, I couldn't reference what even one real feather looked like. I sort of remembered blue jay plumage but had difficulty re-creating it. So what? I thought. Isn't painting a bunch of dead leaves called fun? Meanwhile, Emma was having a splash, applying all sorts of flowers, polka-dots, swirls and even eyeballs to my sad guitar. At least someone was enjoying (and not second-guessing) themselves.

I was breathing and my hands were steady, but my mind raced: What am I going to do with these leaves once they've been painted? Make a necklace? Nah! That would be ridiculous. Tie them all together on a string and then hang them in the window as a fall decoration? Not too likely at my house. How about nothing?

Just the thought of doing nothing with something I was spending precious time on gnawed at me. Meanwhile, Emma (also inspired by the fall foliage) had finished the underside of the guitar with an impressive array of impressionistic indigenous flora and fauna. Even though she was struggling with the discomfort of newly installed orthodontic braces, she remained all smiles; her paintbrush smoothly sailing, as I nipped colors from her beautifully mixed palette.

"Does this look like a feather?" I asked.

"No," she said emphatically and then made the very smart suggestion, "Why don't you start with larger dots at the top and then graduate them down to smaller ones at the tip or the other way around?" She never once asked why I was (wasting my time) painting leaves. Soon my whole being was lost in the miracle of creating—gone were thoughts of having to hurry, of what else I had to do that day, of what I might eat later, or of what better place I could be. There was no better place than the here and now, and the precious moment opened to contemplations on the many practical uses of fallen autumn leaves.



TRR photos by Ramona Jan
Painted leaves inspire thoughts of upcycling.



Painted guitar by Emma Switko



Mulch

My neighbor does this every year. It requires a push lawn mower. One goes back and forth over a pile of dried leaves to crunch them up into flakes. The leaves are either gathered into the mower's basket or raked up and then used to mulch the garden. "It's important that the leaves are chopped up," my neighbor advises. Apparently if you use the leaves whole, water and air do not reach the soil as readily and instead of mulching you might suffocate your garden.

However, I've read that you can layer about four to six inches of whole leaves around the base of shrubs (especially roses) for added winter protection. Place whole leaves around the plants after the ground freezes and remove them before the ground thaws otherwise the roots will become overheated.

Chopped leaves can also be spread upon the lawn. This will add nitrogen to the soil, and you may not have to fertilize in the spring.

Compost

Regularly turning/stirring dry leaves into your compost will enrich the soil with nitrogen and other important nutrients. It takes only about three to six months for leaves to compost completely into black gold.

Fish

Aquaria-tics (I think I just made up that word) know that dead leaves added to an aquarium provide a more natural environment for domesticated fish. Post-mortem leaves add tannins to the water, which lowers the PH level, therefore making it much healthier for our finned friends. Tannins fight bacteria and fungi as well as reduce heavy-metal content that may come from your piped-in tap water. Don't be surprised if your fish nibble on the dead leaves. It's good for them, especially if they're not feeling or looking too well.

Wild Things

If you're fond of making habitats for the many little critters that share our properties in the winter, then build them a brush-pile home from dried leaves and sticks. Choose a spot (not too close to any foundation) and make a teepee using sticks. Then add dead leaves in and around the base making it nice and comfortable. Some chipmunk, snake, lizard, turtle or wild bird will thank you.


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