

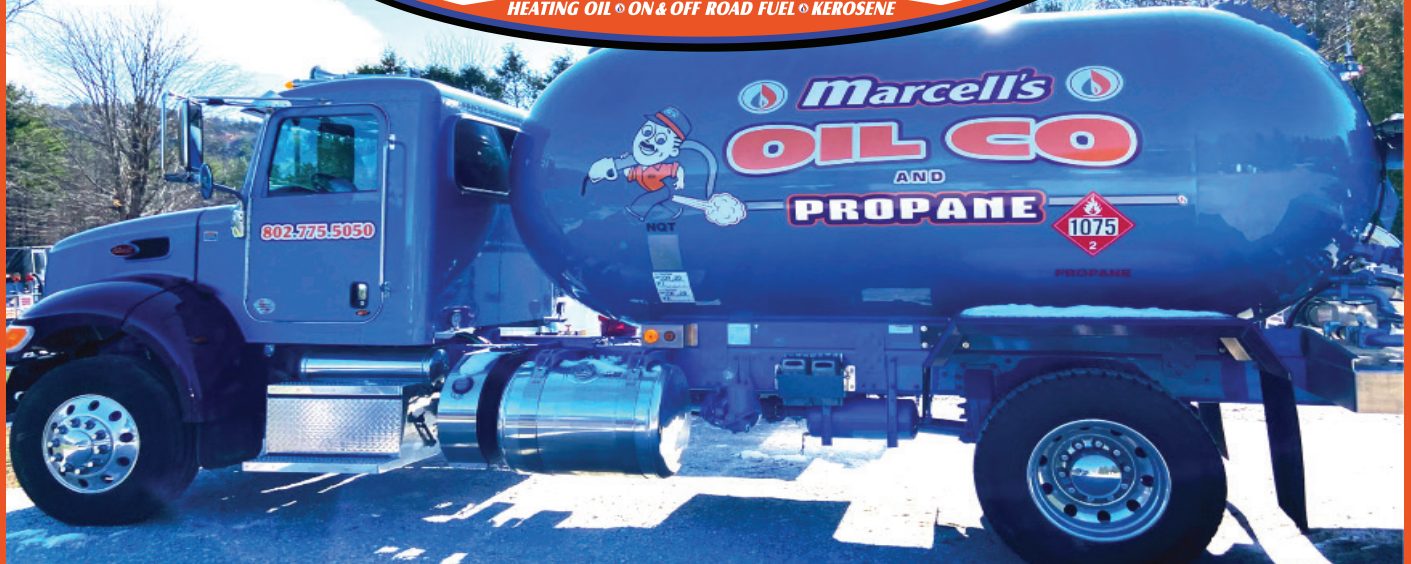
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WELCOME



Photo by Lorna Carty

While this year has provided us with more opportunities to be together, the pandemic has continued to make for a strange and challenging year. The holidays are the perfect time to come together to celebrate with food, music and tradition.

This edition of Explore looks at a few of those traditions, and hopefully opens your world to some new faces and new ideas.

Whether it is learning about the origins of “Messiah,” or holiday music played on some of the oldest instruments in the world, this Explore promises to be enlightening.

But we also look at how best to pick out that holiday tree, as well as introducing you to a Vermont family that has made holiday cookie cutters a boon for the local economy. (There might even be a few cookie recipes, if you are thinking about doing some holiday baking.)

What about holiday giving before the end of the year? Do it smart. Find out how giving can make a difference both to you and to organizations around Vermont.

And if you look to nature this time of year for solace, we offer a starter’s guide to bird-watching from your home (and elsewhere). These are invaluable connections your family can make with our winter friends.

Enjoy this edition of Explore. It is full of gifts (and gift ideas) that should make your holiday season that much brighter and fun.

Have a great holiday and end to 2020, from our staff to your family.

Steven Pappas
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 A photograph of Victoria Fraser, an older woman with glasses and a black patterned top, performing online. She has her hands raised in a gesture. The background is dark with several lit candles and a Christmas tree.

Tuning into the HOLIDAYS

By Sarah Galbraith

The lights, the warmth, being with loved ones, the music; it's all part of what makes the holiday season magical. But it's the music, in particular, that makes it memorable.

From community events to online performances, Vermonters are making music this holiday season.

Singing is Part of Humanity

Marianne Perchlik, of Marshfield, grew up in "a deep faith tradition." Her mother was a choir director and her grandmother was a choreographer, and her childhood was filled with performances in "great, old, giant Catholic churches," she told me by phone. These experiences, she says, were "one of the great gifts of my childhood."

Now, one of the ways she keeps their memories alive is by singing. In particular, Perchlik is recording a Christmas album, including pieces of her own and also some of the lesser-known carols that her mother used to sing.

"Singing," she says, "is part of human health. It's part of humanity, what we access when we come together in song." Still, she sees an increasing number of people opting out of singing, she laments, even at birthday parties. "People don't really sing anymore. More and more people consider themselves to be in the 'not singer' category."

But Christmas, she says, is one of the last stands.

"Christmas is a last association with

singing. It's an occasion that brings us together in song. Beliefs aside, it's about joy, generosity, beloved people, experiencing of the joy of being human."

When it comes to Christmas music, the old tunes are especially important to her. These old tunes, she says, have the spirit of the monastic life, and are dedicated to meditation on the sacredness of Christmas.

"There are so many universal themes in Christmas music," she says, "and I totally acknowledge that Christianity has alienated people. But there is a universal sacredness of a birth."

In addition to singing in a community gospel choir and producing her own Christmas album, Perchlik has played an organizing role in the annual Christmas pageant at the Old Meeting House in Montpelier. It's an outdoor pageant, including children, live animals, and the whole community singing carols, including some of the lesser-known ones she loves.

"(These songs) celebrate the sacredness of birth, of warmth in winter, the companionship of animals," she says of these older tunes.

While the pageant was held on Zoom last year, Perchlik is still mulling over how to put on the production this year. Either way, she says she hopes to make the meaning and spirit of Christmas accessible to all.

"People, fewer of them now, are dedicated to what the meaning of Christmas was," she says. "His family, his mother, his father, their lives; the meditations of Mary, the challenges of Joseph." These old songs, she explains, are

about "the experience of people who took the story really seriously."

Connecting with a Deeper Meaning

If you're looking to deepen your spiritual connection to the meaning of Christmas, all while being safe during the pandemic, you're in for a treat.

Victoria Fraser, a ceremonial performance artist living in Williston, is again livestreaming her moving annual series, "Holy Christmas: The Christmas Cycle." Each year, since 1982, Fraser has performed one of seven stories that tell about the meaning of Christmas, and for the second year, the event is being held online.

Last year, Fraser told the story "The Great Tree of Christmas," the first in her series. Her performance began with a "pre-talk," in which she shared context and history, setting the stage for the story to come. Then, in a shimmering beaded gown, set among bare evergreen trees and flickering beeswax candles, she began: "This is a story about the center of the world. An ancient tree has been growing there since the beginning of time. Sometimes people see this tree and think they know the place it is growing. But the truth is, it is everywhere at once."

Her stories were created through research, interviews with elders of different churches, and personal study. The result is an experience that is captivating, inspiring, educational, and thought-provoking — all in the spirit of Christmas.

"I wanted to feel more intimately

connected to the imagery that was offered to me,” she said of creating this series, when we spoke by phone recently.

Historically, Fraser would perform these stories live. She already had thought of including virtual performances, but in 2020, she said, “the pandemic made that happen.” Last year’s performance was the first one to be held online, and the result was a broader reach and even deeper connection for her audience: There were five times more people watching than ever before, and the audience included people from 22 states and eight foreign countries. In testimonials, audience members described being deeply moved, mesmerized, and honored to be a part of it.

Her stories draw on the Christian calendar’s connection to nature. “Christmas is only two thousand years old,” she explained. “It’s sitting on top of a mountain of history related to the natural world and how our ancestors understood reality.”

In fact, Christmas, she pointed out, is not a single day, but rather an annual cycle. The lead-up to Christmas truly starts, she explained, in mid-November, “when the Earth is moving into dreaming.”

As the cycle moves through the darkness of the solar year, she described, there are opportunities for things to emerge that are unknown, such as the birth of a never-before-seen miraculous child, a baby that was going to change the world. But it is also a time for change within ourselves, she added.

Truly, she said, “The birth happens inside you.”

This year’s story will be “Miraculous Child: The Nativity.” Of the story, she said, “I’m trying to give people an intimate experience of a story we already know.” It will include painting a picture of the journey for Joseph and Mary, including what Mary looked like, what happened as she rode along on the donkey, what Joseph was like, and what happened.

It all leads up to the miraculous birth. But, continuing on her earlier theme, she added: “The savior is you becoming more beautiful this year than last year. It’s every person becoming their whole self.”

For more information on Fraser, the Christmas cycle, and her upcoming performance in 2021, visit her website at www.christmascycle.com

Old Music on an Old Instrument

When I began asking around for introductions to people who played old



PHOTO BY JEB WALLACE-BRODEUR

Ben Power poses with the hurdy gurdy outside of his home in Montpelier earlier this fall.

Christmas music, a friend sent me a link to a trio of musicians, one on piano, one on trumpet, and one on ... I didn’t know what. It was a stringed instrument, something akin to a fiddle, but sitting on his lap more like a dobro, and with a drone note that carried on in the background like with the bagpipes. I left the video of them playing three old Christmas carols in the background, while I opened some other tabs on my browser to do more research. But within a minute of listening, I took pause: The music caught my attention and I had to stop and just listen.

The instrument I hadn’t recognized was a hurdy-gurdy, known in French as *vielle à roue* or “the wheel fiddle.” It’s “a mechanical string instrument that produces sound by a hand-crank-turned, rosined wheel rubbing against the strings,” explains Wikipedia. The article continues: “Melodies are played on a keyboard that presses small pieces of wood into the strings to make their pitch.”

All definitions aside, the sound was incredible. It was as if I had heard it before, even though I am sure I hadn’t; still, the familiarity of its romantic tones was something I knew, if only on an ancestral level. For sure, my European relatives had celebrated Christmas long ago to the sound of this music.

“Traditional Irish music is my main thing,” said Ben Power, the hurdy-gurdy player that was featured in the video. While he is sometimes in Montpelier, he was currently in New York City working on a Broadway

production. Power’s main vocations are playing the flute and Irish *bodhrán*, a pipe instrument, but he has since become what he describes as an intermediate hurdy-gurdy player.

“They’re not really in Irish music, but they show up around the periphery,” he explained of “the gurdy,” as it is sometimes called for short.

In truth, he shared, “It’s a real pain in the neck instrument, and it’s also really hard to get one.” To make matters worse, he added, “There are lots of terribly made instruments and terrible players around.”

For those reasons, his first experiences with the instrument were in fact simply avoiding them, he told me. But that became impossible at a music convention in southern California a few years ago. He had seen a musician walking around with a gurdy-shaped instrument case, and spent two days keeping his distance. However, while Power was playing in a group music session, he saw in his periphery the gurdy player join in. That player turned out to be none other than Scott Marshall, a world-renowned player, and his music forever changed Power’s thoughts about the instrument.

“It was like a string quartet started playing all around me,” he said.

He now views the gurdy as “an absolutely amazing instrument,” and set about buying one secondhand for himself. Now, he says, “I have like five gurdies,” and he made it his “pandemic project” to take lessons.

The gurdy, he says, is particularly good for playing Christmas music, especially very old tunes, because these songs harmonically work well above a drone.

“Old Christmas carols tend to sit very well on that instrument because they were written when that instrument was in its heyday,” he pointed out.

Since Christmas music is a ritual that comes back every year, people continue to discover them.

“There is a power to these old great tunes, if you can deliver them right.”

To hear some hurdy-gurdy Christmas music delivered well, Power suggests searching for videos of well-known players like Scott Marshall or Nigel Eaton. The video mentioned above, called “Ben Power, Darin Kelly and Eamon Kelly: Three Very Old Christmas Carols, Traditional Irish Music,” is available on the YouTube channel of Tune Supply. This group was created during the pandemic by professional musicians Caitlin Warbelow and Chris Ranney to connect people with live music and music lessons during the pandemic. Find them online on their website, at <https://tune.supply>, and one YouTube, at www.youtube.com/tunesupply



PHOTO PROVIDED BY VICTORIA FRASER

The traditionally decorated tree was part of the storytelling Victoria Fraser did in previous years.

The Return of Light

Wife and husband team Mary Bonhag and Evan Premo, who together are Scrag Mountain Music based in Marshfield, are performing a solstice concert at the Episcopal Church in Montpelier. They will be accompanied by Lynette Combs on organ and harpsicord.

The details of the event are still forthcoming, but they plan to host the concert on the evening of the solstice, Dec. 21, and will offer the performance to a live audience with their “come as you are, pay what you can” motto.

Celebrating the solstice is an important and long-standing tradition for the couple. Pre-pandemic, they always hosted a solstice party, complete with a yule log, Mary’s flaming glogg, and Christmas carols.

“Christmas is really a solstice holiday,” says Premo. “The timing was chosen to appeal to people also celebrating the solstice, the return of light.”

Even though it’s linked to the darkest time of the year, Premo enjoys this leadup to the return of light brought by the solstice.

After spending the dark, rainy morning in his cozy home with his wife, with the woodstove going, the beauty of this time of year was at the forefront of his mind when we talked by phone.

“Advent is a beautiful holiday for me, the waiting, the coming into darkness,” he said.

The couple is working to finalize the details of the solstice concert in Montpelier. Premo says he’s looking forward to hosting a live event this year, after streaming a “Messiah” event online last year. “It’s going to be a lot of work to check vaccine cards, do all that stuff, but it’s so worth it,” he says.

Find details on the upcoming event as they’re posted on the Scrag Mountain Music website, at www.scragmountainmusic.org

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One-of-a-kind **CHRISTMAS SHOW IN SHARON**



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By Peter Cobb

The largest and most impressive Christmas light show in Vermont may be the holiday display at the Joseph Smith Birthplace in Sharon. The display features approximately 120,000 lights and more than a dozen displays including a nativity scene and a display that represents the new star that appeared in the sky on the night of Christ's birth.

The Christmas lights show starts the day after Thanksgiving and runs to New Year's Day.

"We started putting up lights the first week of September. At that time we had approximately 70 missionaries donating their time for one day. Since that time, we've had missionaries working diligently to finish up the lights. We will finish just before Thanksgiving. We estimate about 1,000 man-hours to put up all the lights," said Grant Durtschi, president of the memorial site.

Everyone is welcome and no reservations are needed. The display is free. Visitors can simply drive through and enjoy the lights, they can stop and spend time on the grounds, or they are welcome to stop at the chapel on weekend nights on the grounds for hot apple cider, cookies, enjoy the nativity sets, enjoy pictures of Jesus Christ, his birth and life.

There is no cost for the refreshments. While at the chapel, visitors upon request, can receive a tour of the chapel, Durtschi said.

COVID guidelines this season include wearing masks where social distancing isn't possible and in situations where visitors feel more comfortable with a mask.

The site also offers visitor center tours during the Christmas season and a virtual live tour. Anyone can schedule a virtual tour at www.calendly.com/josephsmithbirthplace

Durtschi estimates that more than

20,000 visitors will enjoy the lights show this year.

The annual Christmas tradition has attracted thousands of people for the past 30 years.

"We are Christian and during the Christmas season we commemorate the birth of our Savior, Jesus Christ. We also believe that Jesus Christ is the Light of the World. These Christmas lights are symbolic of Jesus Christ," Durtschi said.

The Joseph Smith Birthplace includes a monument that honors Smith, the founder and first president of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. The monument, a 51-foot solid granite obelisk, was erected in 1905 to commemorate the 100th year from Smith's birth in 1805. The obelisk is a few steps from the original site of the roughly 800-square-foot farmhouse where Smith was born.

Today, the grounds at the birthplace serve as a contemplative space open to the public.

No reservations are needed.



‘MESSIAH’



RUTLAND HERALD FILE PHOTO

Rutland's Grace Congregational Church has been presenting Handel's "Messiah" at Christmastime for some 70 years, though only the Christmas portion (Part 1) and the "Hallelujah" Chorus.

HANDEL'S 'MESSIAH'

At nearly 300, still packing them in

By **Jim Lowe**

George Frederic Handel's "Messiah" is perhaps the most universal piece of music, being performed at Christmastime nearly everywhere on earth — though, the oratorio is perhaps more appropriate for Easter.

And nearly ubiquitous is its "Hallelujah" chorus. In fact, The Handel and Haydn Society performed the "Hallelujah" Chorus at the Grand Jubilee Concert on New Year's Day 1863 in Boston, celebrating the news of Abraham Lincoln signing the Emancipation Proclamation.

Vermont is home to two longtime "Messiah" traditions. It was the first work ever performed by the Vermont Philharmonic, the Barre-Montpelier community orchestra, when it was formed in 1959, and has remained a holiday staple ever since. And "Messiah" has been a holiday tradition at Grace Congregational Church in Rutland for nearly 70 years.

(Grace Church will perform its "Messiah" concerts at 3:30 and 7 p.m. Sunday, Dec. 5; the Vermont Philharmonic has canceled for the second year due to COVID concerns.)

"There is certain music that seems like it was floating around the universe, and some composer just reached up and managed to grab

ahold of it and bring it down and put it on a piece of paper," explains Lisa Jablow, assistant conductor of the Vermont Philharmonic, who has been directing its holiday "Messiah" performances for many years.

"That's what Handel did with 'Messiah,'" she said. "Those tunes in so many of the numbers, especially the 'Hallelujah' chorus, have just gotten into people's DNA."

"This is a season when we try to remind ourselves of what is good in the world," Jablow said. "The music of the 'Messiah' helps us do that."

And audiences continue to flock to community "Messiah" performances here and everywhere.

“They come out because it’s tradition — they’ve done it every year for the last 70 years,” explains Alastair Stout, minister of music at Grace Congregational Church in Rutland. “I think they come out because they’re excited about the stories. For me, it’s the wonderful, wonderful music, and the fantastically dramatic story that it represents.”

“I think it’s the sheer joy of it,” added Randolph soprano Marjorie Drysdale, who prepares the Vermont Philharmonic Chorus. “It’s not only joyful. It’s absolutely thrilling!”

The German-born Handel, at age 27, moved to London where he became hugely successful opera composer. But in the 1730s, when public interest in opera flagged, he found new success in oratorios (where the stories are told rather than acted out). “Messiah” was his sixth.

In July 1741, Charles Jennens, a wealthy arts patron and writer, sent Handel a libretto for an oratorio. Jennens compiled the text from the King James Bible, the Coverdale Psalter (an earlier English version of the Bible), and the version of the Psalms from the Book of Common Prayer.

Handel completed the composition

of “Messiah” — when performed in its entirety, a three-hour-plus oratorio — in an unbelievable 24 days.

Of writing the “Hallelujah” chorus, Handel wrote, “I was in my body or out of my body as I wrote it I know not. God knows.”

Part I announces the Messiah’s coming, and celebrates the birth of Jesus Christ. Part II covers Christ’s passion and his death, resurrection and ascension, and includes the “Hallelujah” Chorus. Part III celebrates Christ’s gift to man and redemption.

At the end of the score, Handel wrote “SDG” — “Soli Deo Gloria (To God alone the glory).”

“I think I did see all Heaven before me and the great God himself,” Handel said of composing the work.

Most contemporary Christmas performances include only Part I and the “Hallelujah,” and sometimes other choruses. Audiences traditionally stand for the “Hallelujah” Chorus, attributed to the likely apocryphal legend that King George II was so moved by it at the London premiere that he stood up. Still, it is the part of “Messiah” that resonates most for audiences.

“I’ve been doing this my whole life, either

singing it, directing it or watching it,” Drysdale said. “You’d think I’d be sick of it by now. But every time the ‘Hallelujah’ Chorus is done, I get that same emotional feeling. So there’s something very timeless about it.”

Interestingly, there is no historical justification for performing “Messiah” as a Christmas celebration — or in a church.

In fact, the 1742 premiere of “Messiah” was presented, not in a church, but in a concert hall. Interest was so great that the men of the 700-member audience — think Rutland’s Paramount Theatre or the Lebanon (New Hampshire) Opera House — were asked to forgo their swords and the women hoops for their dresses.

And the performance was in April — not exactly Christmastime.

“‘Messiah’ is the best example of why any piece of music transcends normal language communications,” explained Rip Jackson, former minister of music at Rutland’s Grace Church and an expert on Baroque music. “‘Messiah,’ like some other great works of music, transmits a powerful message that even the words don’t manage, as well.”

Jim Lowe is the arts editor for The Times Argus and Rutland Herald.



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LAUGHING MOON CHOCOLATES

Making holidays extra sweet

By Peter Cobb

The holiday season – from Thanksgiving to New Year’s Day -- is a very busy time.

Getting everything just right takes a lot of work. For Leigh Williams, the owner Laughing Moon Chocolates in Stowe, the busier she is, the better – as winter holiday sales comprises one-third of her yearly business.

Laughing Moon makes and sells

small-batch, handmade confections and chocolates; in past years the company has added candy canes for Christmas.

“Laughing Moon Chocolates offers a variety of hand-dipped chocolates and specialty confections. The chocolate’s centers are prepared in small batches using fresh, local ingredients. The finished product is distinctive, featuring unique Vermont combinations and flavors. You won’t find chocolates like these anywhere else,” Williams said.

Prior to COVID, the store offered public demonstrations of the making of the chocolates and candy canes. Due to the coronavirus and the uncertainties surrounding the ability to gather in groups this year, Williams has had to discontinue most public demonstrations.

“We are not offering daily demonstrations any longer due to COVID but we do have private make-your-own workshops available and large group private demonstrations, she said. “We hope that 2022 will see an opportunity to restart our holiday tradition of candy cane making demonstrations, but time will tell. We have struggles, as have many Vermont businesses, with staffing and increased demand, so for this season candy canes will only be available if staffing allows,” she said.

Williams opened Laughing Moon Chocolates in May 2002 in a tiny space out behind the Rusty Nail (now Tres Amigos). “During a time as uncertain as this one. My daughter Camille was born on April 29 and we opened the shop three days later. Looking back, I have no idea how we made it through those first few years. Each and every one of the dedicated team of people who has worked with and believed in making a fresh, delicious, love-infused product, and delivering it to our guests with the most attentive service possible, has made Laughing Moon Chocolates a place of learning and growth for 19 years,” she said.

Williams learned the candy craft while working in a candy store in Cape Cod.

“I learned the craft working at Chatham Candy Manor on Cape Cod and that shop





is second-generation. I consider myself third generation and now my daughter and son are making chocolates with me. Most of our recipes are passed down generationally since the '30s and '40s," she said.

Laughing Moon also make truffles, salted caramels, butter creams, butter crunch and homemade fudge, and sells everything from stocking stuffers to large family gift celebratory boxes.

"We specialize in small-but-very-special-gifts for teachers, clients, family and friends and the holiday season is our busiest time of the year," Williams said.

COVID 19 has been a tremendous challenge. The first pandemic year the

store closed on March 16 and didn't reopened until June 8.

"It happened to encapsulate the Easter season, so our mail order business exploded during a time when there was no staffing," she said. "I really had to depend on help from my children who were 14 and 17 at the time. Because they weren't in school, they helped me have a successful holiday season and change our website to accommodate the demand for curbside pick-up."

She went on: "When the governor closed us down, I thought it was the end of my business, but the availability of funds through both the federal and state governments allowed us to not only grow

back but improve all of our systems and efficiencies to make us better moving forward. It was the greatest challenge I have ever faced and I still feel uncertain of the future due to staffing and impacts on the supply chain, but I am mostly optimistic as the learning is something that can't be undone and has made us much more resilient as a business," Williams said.

Laughing Moon chocolates are available online, curbside and at local retailers throughout Vermont and New England.

More information is available on the store's website at www.laughingmoonchocolates.com

THE ART OF FINDING 'THE' TREE

By Peter Cobb

When all goes well, buying a Christmas tree is fun for the entire family. But when things go wrong, the tree is too big or too small, it falls off the car on the way home, there are mice in the tree that aren't discovered until it is in the house, the base is too wide for your stand, the tree withers in three days, the experience can add unnecessary stress to what should be a peaceful holiday.

To avoid stress, whether buying from a lot or cutting your own tree, the professionals say plan ahead, know what you want before you go, buy a locally grown tree, and dress for the weather.

"In my experience, buying a Christmas tree is a very personal experience. Some like tall and overly groomed trees, others prefer short heritage trees. While size and shape are considerations, my personal priority is freshness. Buyers



PETER COBB PHOTO

Finding the right tree in winter at Meadow Ridge Farm in Middlesex. There are 70 Christmas tree farms in Vermont with 3,650 acres in tree production.

should expect to see vibrant green needles that stay intact on the branches,” said Amy Marshall-Carney, co owner with her husband, Michael, of Fibonacci Acres in Waterbury. Amy is the secretary for the Vermont Christmas Tree Growers Association.

“If you cut your own be prepared to cut, drag, and transport your tree. Some choose and cut farms are setup to assist with these steps while others are not. Dragging trees in the snow can be a slow process. Trees are heavier than they look,” she said.

Tamara White, co-owner with her husband, Patrick, of Meadow Ridge Farm in Middlesex, agrees. “Like people, every tree is different. Some prefer tall trees, some short; some like wide trees, some skinny; some opt for denser trees, some people like ones that are thinner. So a lot of picking a tree out has to do with personal preference and just having fun,” she said.

For those cutting their own trees Tamara said, “Wear boots and bring gloves. It’s winter and you’ll have more fun walking around the field if you’re dressed warmly. At our farm, we provide saws for cutting the tree and twine for tying it on your car roof, so customers don’t need to bring anything with them. If going to a different farm, you might want to call ahead to be sure they have supplies like that.”

Buying a fresh tree is very important. When buying from a lot, ask whether the trees were locally grown and check for freshness. To test, give the tree a slight shake. A few falling brown needles are common, but falling green needles means the tree is too dry. You can also grab any branch on the tree between your thumb and forefinger and gently squeeze and pull. If you end up with a handful of needles, look for another tree. It is perfectly natural, however, for some dead needles to be on the inside of the tree due to cutting and transportation.

“One question we sometimes get is, ‘What about the brown needles inside the tree, close to the trunk?’ Those are perfectly normal. Like deciduous trees, fir trees lose their leaves, needles. For fir trees, that happens to needles after they’ve been on the tree about three years, so those older needles, close to the trunk, naturally turn brown and fall off. We put our trees we sell on a shaker before customers leave to help get most of them off. If you see brown needles on the outside of the tree (the newer needles growing on ends of the branches where you hang decorations) that is a sign of a problem with the tree and you should pick a different one,” said Patrick White.

When buying from a lot make sure to check the trunk for straightness. Hold your tree upright and look at the overall

straightness of the trunk. A straighter tree is less likely to fall over once you’ve put it up.

A standard rule in carpentry is ‘measure twice and cut once.’ The same is true when buying a Christmas tree. Before you buy, make sure you know what size tree will fit in your house. Measure the height of your ceiling and then subtract the height of your stand and the tree topper to get the maximum height tree. A good rule: Have at least eight inches between the top of your tree and the ceiling.

Also measure the space around where you want to put the tree to see how wide a tree you can buy. Trees have different girths so you want to be sure you buy one that’s too wide for the area.

And make absolutely sure the tree’s trunk will fit in your stand. If not, you’ll have to saw off the bottom until the base matches your stand or buy a new tree.

Equally important is keeping the tree in water. The longer the tree is in your house, the more it can dry out. With proper care, trees can last indoors for around four weeks.

According to Amy Marshall-Carney, there are 70 Christmas tree farms in Vermont with 3,650 acres in tree production. The U.S. Department of Agriculture says the value of the Christmas tree industry in Vermont is more than \$2.8 million.

PETER COBB PHOTOS

There is a large selection of trees at Meadow Ridge Farm in Middlesex. The U.S. Department of Agriculture says the value of the Christmas tree industry in Vermont is more than \$2.8 million.

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PHOTO BY JEB WALLACE-BRODEUR
A red-tailed hawk flies off its perch in a tree. Red-tailed hawks can often be spotted during fall and winter birding.

BIRDS OF A FEATHER

A seasonal guide to enjoying Vermont birds

By Sarah Galbraith

‘P ssshhh, pssshhh, pssshhh,’ says Chip Darmstadt, in loud whispering tones. He walks quietly along a path situated between a strip of trees bordering the main road. Behind him, there is an expansive field of native wildflowers and grasses who are displaying their fall colors. The field stretches back to several acres of conserved forest, with a river running between the field and forest, and a community garden, overflowing with autumn flowers and vegetables, is tucked in the back corner. It’s the perfect spot for birds.

Darmstadt is the executive director of North Branch Nature Center in Montpelier, where a small group of birders is walking the trails in the fields and woods, binoculars and field guides in-hand, looking for movement in the branches.

“That’s a technical term,” he jokingly

assures me about the noise he’s making. In fact, he explains, it’s a sound that brings birds closer.

We’re not disappointed. While the nesting birds, like warblers, have migrated already, several species were on display for our group. Some were migrating through Vermont on their way south for the winter, including white-throated and white-crowned sparrows. There were plentiful yellow-bellied warblers, affectionately called butterbutts, that morning as well. They’re stopping to snack on seeds, insects, and berries. And, said Darmstadt, more species are on their way, like common merganser and Canada geese, plus some species of shorebirds that are also starting to pass through.

Janet McSorley, from South Burlington, joined the group in Montpelier that morning. She was new to birding, and she showed me her “cheat sheet,” a laminated fold-up field guide tucked inside her

jacket. She took moments in between sightings to ask questions of Darmstadt and other members of the group.

In a hushed voice, so as not to disturb the brown creepers and butterbutts flitting around in the nearby maples, McSorley told me she has been birding very casually for many years, but never moved beyond the backyard bird feeder stage. That is, until recently. Newly retired, she joined a birdwatching trip with North Branch Nature Center.

“It was so exciting and so fun,” she says of the trip. Now, with more time for hobbies, she’s doing more birding.

“Going with others seems to be really huge, for me. It’s not as much fun on your own, because you’re struggling to learn it all. But still, you can’t argue with a good walk in the woods.” She tells me, “There’s such a thing as ‘ornithotherapy,’ I read it online.” She’s right; this morning’s 7:30 a.m. bird walk was a nice start to my day.

While birds are more active and

more numerous, in both species and individuals, in spring and early summer, fall and winter can be great times for birding as well.

Gwendolyn Causer, an environmental educator with Vermont Audubon, loves birding in winter “because things are quieter. There’s not the full chorus of all the birds that are here in the springtime. It’s easier to focus on individual birds during the winter and pay attention to what they’re doing and how they’re surviving out there in the cold.”

Causer says winter birders can look for species like chickadees, cardinals, nuthatches, and blue jays. There are also sometimes surprise visits from northern species, called eruptive migration. Last winter, for example, a group called the winter finches came out of their normal boreal winter habitat to northern New England, looking for food that was unusually scarce in their normal territory. Great grey owls and snowy owls are other examples of eruptive visitors from the north who sometimes make an appearance in Vermont during the winter.

Anna Morris, an environmental educator at Vermont Institute for Natural Science, focuses her work on birds of prey, which are also known as raptors. She says fall and winter are both exciting times for birding, though in different ways.

“In early fall, the raptors are migrating south for winter,” she explains. “They’re more conspicuous in fall than they are in the summer, and some are completely absent in winter.”

But in winter, Morris says, the raptors that do stay here are more easily seen because the leaves are off the trees. Winter birders can look for raptors like red-tailed hawks, rough-legged hawks, a variety of owls, and even the occasional snowy owl. The Dead Creek Wildlife Management Area, she says, on Route 17 in Addison, is a great place to spot raptors in winter. This part of the state has an abundance of prey with lots of big dairy farms and crop fields, and the wide, open, and flat terrain, with few trees, make great places to hunt mice and voles.

To spot a bird of prey, Morris has a few tips: “Look at every exposed tree branch. Scan the edges of forests, say by an old hayfield, there is probably going to be a hawk or owl sitting there, listening and watching for food.”



PHOTO BY JEB WALLACE-BRODEUR

A snowy owl, seen here in Berlin, is an example of an eruptive species that sometimes makes an appearance in Vermont during the winter.

Also, at the end of winter, owls are likely to come closer to people because many of their food sources have run out, so Morris says you might be more likely to see them sitting on a bird feeder at this time of year, watching for mice to come and feed on the birdseed that’s on the ground.

Back at North Branch Nature Center, our group spent three hours exploring the fields and forest, taking time to stop by the river and an adjacent wetland. Everyone was welcoming and kind, and quick to point out a bird they spotted or share with each other a tip or new resource they discovered, like a favorite birding app or podcast. While these regular birding walks are now finished for the year, they are offered on Fridays throughout the spring and fall. In fact, the center and other organizations like Audubon Vermont and Vermont Institute for Natural Science offer all kinds of birding events to members and the public.

For those looking to get started on their own, Causer, at Audubon Vermont, shared tips for winter birding:

- Wait until after black bears go into hibernation before putting out bird food.
- Place bird feeders within six feet of windows to avoid window strikes. While that seems counterintuitive, birds have an easier time recognizing a window from close up, while far away the reflection on the window’s surface makes the window harder for birds to recognize.
- Consider bird feeders that stick right to your window — they’re a great way to keep the birds safe from window strikes and see birds without leaving your home.

- Keep cats indoors or take your cat out on a leash. House cats kills 2.4 billion birds in the United States every year, according to the American Bird Conservancy.
- Add native plants around your home. Fall is a great time to plant, and you might find something on sale. Audubon’s website includes a native plant database that is searchable by location, type of plant, or the type of bird you’re trying to attract. The database also includes local lists of nurseries that sell native plants.
- Leave yard work until the spring, after the returning birds have built their nests. Seeds from plants like sunflower and echinacea are a great food source in the fall and winter, and the dead plant material is great for nests in the spring. Leaves on the ground are home to insects that feed birds, either in the fall or spring. Lastly, dead trees provide habitat for insects that are food for birds and nesting cavities for some species of bird.
- Remember to clean out bird houses every fall. Also, winter is a great time to build bird houses for spring, including houses for songbirds, owls, kestrels, and wood ducks.

Look for fun birding events, which are COVID-19-friendly because they’re outside. Audubon offers Pride birding hikes every month, plus there are annual events like the Christmas Bird Count, Great Backyard Bird Count in February, and the Mid-Winter Bald Eagle Survey, also in February.

If you’re new to winter birding, invest in a good pair of warm and dry boots and dry socks, such as wool or synthetic. Other pieces of gear to have are binoculars, fingerless gloves, and apps and field guides that help identify birds. Excellent field guide options are the laminated fold-out “Guide to Vermont Birds” by Waterford Press and the Peterson’s guide, which shows distinguishing features of each bird species.

When identifying birds, pay attention to the size of the bird, the size and shape of its beak, and its coloring.

Editor’s note: This article first appeared in the Weekend Magazine of The Times Argus/Rutland Herald.



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PLAN OUT YOUR *holiday* *giving*

PETER COBB PHOTO

Loren Polk, director of the Aldrich Public Library in Barre, urges people thinking about giving to nonprofits or charities to do their homework beforehand.

By Peter Cobb

The holiday season is the perfect time to give to your favorite charity. Sharing your time and money feels good and is a good deed. Holiday donations often make up a substantial portion of a charity's budget, frequently a third or more of all donations. Because the stakes are so high, most charities aggressively solicit donations in December.

How do potential donors, faced with a blizzard of requests, decide which charities deserve their support and which are not worthy?

The first step, according to Lee White, a accountant and owner of Lee White Associates in Barre, is to find a charity that fits the specific cause you would like to support. Next, you need to determine whether your charity does its job and

spends the bulk of its money on services.

"One very useful tool is GuideStar on the (Internal Revenue Service) site. GuideStar has all the 990 tax forms for every registered charity in the county, the form all charities must file which includes revenue, expense and balance sheet data. You can determine what percentage goes to programs and what percentage goes to administration," White said.

GuideStar also provides the charity's address, phone website, contact information, mission statement, programs, goals, and results.

For those not comfortable reading tax forms, another tool is Charity Navigator, a charity assessment organization that evaluates thousands of nonprofit organizations' financial status and adherence to best practices for both accountability and transparency. Among the information provided is its "Give with

Confidence" chart that scores charities from zero confidence to 100% confidence that the donor's investment is a good decision.

Sara King, CEO of the Visiting Nurses Association and Hospice of the Southwest Region, based in Rutland that serves patients in Rutland and Bennington counties, says donors should make sure the bulk of their donation goes to services and should not forget that holiday donations are very important.

"In general, for most not-for-profit agencies, almost a third of all the gifts received come in December. So, it is a critical time for us, too. We are fortunate that our community of donors supports us throughout the year by making memorial gifts in honor of a loved one, and those who wish to impact the care our community receives now and in the future through legacy gifts," King said.



PROVIDED PHOTO

Jessica Boutin and Sharon Davis work for Visiting Nurses Association and Hospice of the Southwest Region, which relies on donations from the community and supporters.

The association gets a very high 97% confidence rating from Charity Navigator.

“Gifts to the agency matter every day to the thousands of people who rely on us for exceptional home health, hospice and community wellness services. These contributions from our community provide program support to strengthen patient care and help us provide home health services to those recovering from injury or surgery and those that are living with a chronic illness. Support from our communities bring comfort and dignity to those facing life’s end and provides grief support for spouses, children, and those who have lost loved ones,” King said.

Loren Polk, the director of the Aldrich Public Library in Barre agrees that donors should do their homework.

“We have statistics that prove what we do. Statistics are very important.” Among the important data provided by Aldrich are the fact that the library had 127,625 user visits this year and lent 88,167 books, DVDs, and CDs.

“We are so proud to serve the community of Barre. These numbers tell the community, what we do,” Polk said. The Aldrich also scored 97% thumbs up

on Charity Navigator.

King agrees that meeting the agency’s mission is key.

“Simply put, everyone deserves quality care and donations help us support the services that enable people to stay in their homes, where they want to be. We remain steadfast in our philanthropic mission of helping all patients. When someone donates to us they do not have to wonder if their gift will make a difference. It will,” King said.

The American Endowment Foundation, an independent donor adviser fund, says when a donor is not sure they should:

- Read the charity’s mission to determine if what the charity does is important to the you.
- Review the outcomes such as checking how many people the organization has helped.
- Check to see if that number has increased or decreased over time and, given the size and budget, is that number reasonable.
- Visit the organization if possible or volunteer to get to know the people and quality of the work.
- Determine whether that the organization has a good reputation.



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In December, kick off the holiday season at the annual city tree lighting in Depot Park, featuring free hot chocolate and holiday light specs. Find the perfect gifts for everyone on your list throughout the month as you admire the festively decorated shop windows – don’t forget to vote for your favorite!

Warm your hands with a hot drink as you stroll through the snow or grab dinner at local restaurant, and enjoy downtown’s many amazing works of art along the way. Happy holidays!

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GOING CRAZY FOR COOKIE CUTTERS



ANN CLARK LTD. PHOTOS

Ann Clark of Rutland.

By Peter Cobb

Most Vermonters, if asked where the largest manufacturer of cookie cutters in United States is located, probably wouldn't say Rutland. But that's the correct answer.

Ann Clark Cookie Cutters produces more than 5 million cookie cutters annually at its 16,300-square-foot facility off Quality Lane in Rutland Town that had been a Keebler warehouse.

Founded in 1989, Ann Clark Ltd. has grown from a small gift company to the largest cookie cutter manufacturer in the nation. The company makes cookie cutters and ships them to customers worldwide.

The company started when Ann Clark had the idea to transform her popular pig-shaped ornament into a

cookie cutter. Blending her unique folk-art designs and custom hand painted recipes cards, she launched her first line of cookie cutters.

"I had a friend who owned a kitchen shop and she gave me the name of a manufacturer. I sent him my drawings and he loved them and made some samples. I added a recipe card to the samples. My husband suggested trade and gift shows. We were able to get a last-minute booth, and came home with a few thousand dollars in orders," Ann Clark said.

Prior to launching her company, she had spent several years creating small, handcrafted toys, dollhouses, and ornaments for sale. When she designed the pig-shaped cookie cutter, she launched the new business in her garage. Armed with a small amount of cash and unbridled enthusiasm she tackled her first trade show and sold out

her limited inventory of cookie cutters.

As the business expanded, her children, who grew up in Rutland but had left the state, returned home to Vermont to lend their expertise to the company. The business has been a family affair since the beginning.

Ann's late husband John became vice president in 1996. That same year her late son, John Jr., served as a key player when he moved back to Vermont; and daughter Elizabeth joined as sales manager. Elizabeth has since moved on to other endeavors.

Ann's son Ben came on board in 1998 and is now the company's CEO. Grandchildren Margaret, Rebecca and Alistair can be seen in company catalogs, and also lend their services as cookie makers, tasters and decorators.

The cookie cutters are manufactured on machines called roll formers that cut and roll plated steel into specified

lengths depending on the cookie cutter shape. These metal strips are then welded into closed rings. The rings are placed over a metal die and bent into shape on our custom designed forming tables. It takes less than a minute to cut, weld and form each cutter.

Sales have grown considerably in recent years as the company has extended its reach to wholesale customers that include thousands of gift shops and stores throughout the country, and large retailers such as Sur La Table, Williams-Sonoma, Crate & Barrel, Bed, Bath & Beyond, Cost Plus Warehouse, Wegmans, and others. The company also has a promotional products segment that designs and sells custom cookie cutter shapes to corporations and colleges.

In 2015 Ann Clark Ltd. launched a new website AnnClarkCookieCutters.com and also listed products on Amazon to sell directly to consumers online.

Initially the cutters were produced out of state, but the manufacturer couldn't keep up with demand, so Ann decided to manufacture her cookie cutters in Rutland.

"There are many benefits to making products in the United States," Ben Clark said. "We create jobs, support our community, control the quality of our product and deliver our products faster than the competition. The company's success is a testament to this philosophy."

He went on: "I believe products should be made in the United States. Our little company has proven

that U.S. made products can be profitable."

In 2018, the company was selected to represent Vermont at the "Made in America Product Showcase," hosted by The White House because of its "commitment to making products in the United States."

Ann Clark Ltd. is expanding its manufacturing capacity and is hiring additional staff.

"We're essentially a cottage business making a folksy product that keeps growing and improving. We're big on quality in terms of our product and work environment for our employees," Ben Clark said, adding that to compete with low-cost products made in Asia, his company embraces "lean manufacturing." That involves principles and procedures to identify and eliminate waste from the manufacturing process and administration, he said.

"It's an ongoing process of improvement in all areas of operating the business. To improve we have to measure our efforts and constantly look for ways to get better," he said.

Two key factors that have led to the success of the company, Ann Clark said, are the fact that making cookies is fun and that Ann Clark Cookie Cutters are high quality.

"It's a happy product, and people love to collect them. It's a great gift item. What makes our cutters unique is the extensive variety of shapes and the quality of the detail."

Ann Clark said.

For more information, go to www.AnnClarkCookieCutters.com

ANN CLARK LTD. PHOTOS

The production floor of Ann Clark Ltd.'s factory in Rutland Town.



Spring Photography Contest

Have a great spring scenic photograph?

If so, we may publish it in our next edition of Explore Magazine and maybe even use it on the cover. Specifically, we are interested in photo submissions that depict the spectacular outdoor scenery of Vermont. Each entrant is invited to submit up to six of their favorite spring outdoor scenic photos, each labeled with the photographer's name and a short description. Photographs may include flora, fauna, landscapes, close-ups or panoramic views.

People and/or animals can be included in the photo but should not be the subject of the shot.

We are looking for high resolution photo submissions of 300 dpi or higher in .jpeg format. The more vibrant the colors, the better. Judging will be done by our editors taking into consideration exposure, focal point, color and contrast as well as subject matter.

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MAY DAY STUDIO

Making an impression

By Peter Cobb

Inspiration for art can come from the most unlikely of sources.

For Kelly McMahon, owner of May Day Studio, a letterpress and bookbinding shop in Montpelier, the inspiration to create her first-ever line of gift wrapping came from Tropical Storm Irene.

Just after the 2011 storm, while driving on Route 9 from Brattleboro to Bennington on her way to a holiday show in Pittsfield, Massachusetts, the devastation along the road inspired her to create her “River” and “Field” wrapping paper.

“The rivers were enormous, they had overtaken the fields. There were fields of flattened corn everywhere. The

river rocks had been transported so far from the river beds it was a whole new landscape. It was really startling,” McMahon said.

McMahon opened her studio in 2006. In addition to wrapping paper she prints custom business cards, wedding invitation, custom stationary, birthday cards and more, pretty much anything she can print on her five letterpress presses.

Her small shop combines the past with the present.

One of her five printers is 110-year-old, foot-pedal press, not much different from the first presses used 700 years ago. Her newest press is 55 years old. There are six cabinets of handset metal type; 15 fonts of wood type; three 10-inch by 13-inch book presses; and many hand-

bookbinding and typesetting tools in the studio.

At the same, however, she uses a MacBook with Adobe Creative Cloud for many of her designs.

“May Day Studio is proud to incorporate 16th century technology into the design and execution of 21st century wedding and special events invitations, poetry broadsides, band posters, and business collateral,” she said.

She describes the lure of letterpress on her website. “The cool touch of decades-old metal type. A firm two-handed impression roll for a copy proof. A deft transfer from composing stick to imposing stone. A gentle tap of the planer. Two quick twists of the locking key and the chase with form is secure. The press is inked, the guides aligned,



PETER COBB PHOTOS
Kelly McMahon in May
Day Studio in Montpelier.



the chase slips into position, paper is correctly placed and your very first impression is ready to print.”

A “one-time poet and type junkie” McMahon learned about letterpress printing at California College of the Arts, where she received a master’s degree in creative writing. She has a bachelor’s degree in English Literature from Smith College. While in San Francisco, she interned at the San Francisco Center for the Book.

“I had the chance to learn letterpress in graduate school and got hooked. I spent a little time writing and much more learning the craft of letterpress. I learned the tools of the trade and never looked back,” she said.

Letterpress printing involves pressing an inked surface onto paper, which can be adjusted to leave an impression. It’s one of the oldest forms of printing but has been replaced by most printing companies with faster, computer-based technologies.

“Letterpress is a relief printmaking technique that was refined for the European market by Gutenberg in the fourteen hundreds based on earlier East Asian traditions,” she said.

COVID 19 has been very tough on her business.

“Basically the custom work for my studio has evaporated,” McMahon said.

Prior to COVID, McMahon taught

letterpress and bookbinding workshops in her studio and around New England. Those workshop have been suspended until further notice.

“One thing the pandemic has taught us is that human interaction is very important and even when we are far away from our loved ones we can still send them a card. I’ve sold more birthday cards last year than the previous three years. People want to reach out and sending a card is a way to send out love one a hug,” she said.

McMahon’s products are available at several stores and online.

For more information www.maydaystudio.com

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MINT CONDITION

By Rich Alcott

As Rutland's makerspace at 112 Quality Lane, The MINT, expands its shops and class offerings, local been-there-done-that, as well as would-be, builders, respond to with no unexpected bursts of creative energy.

"Our expansion was physical," says Morgan Over, operations director of The MINT, "so we came into this section of the building, and now we have over 19,000 square feet."

Along with the additional space came a learning curve. Over says, "What we're focusing on now is making makers."

In addition to more classes and more advanced classes for adults, Over says, "The huge thing that we've taken on is educating our young people." Over describes classes for young people aged 3 to 18 in what The MINT calls "The Boiler," which are based in science, technology, and mathematics.

The program was popular enough in the summer to enable the hiring of an educational coordinator.

"We've got tinkerers, we've got businesses, we've got large businesses, and now we have a whole line of education programming," Over says. "We just want to continue to empower the population to just make whatever they can."

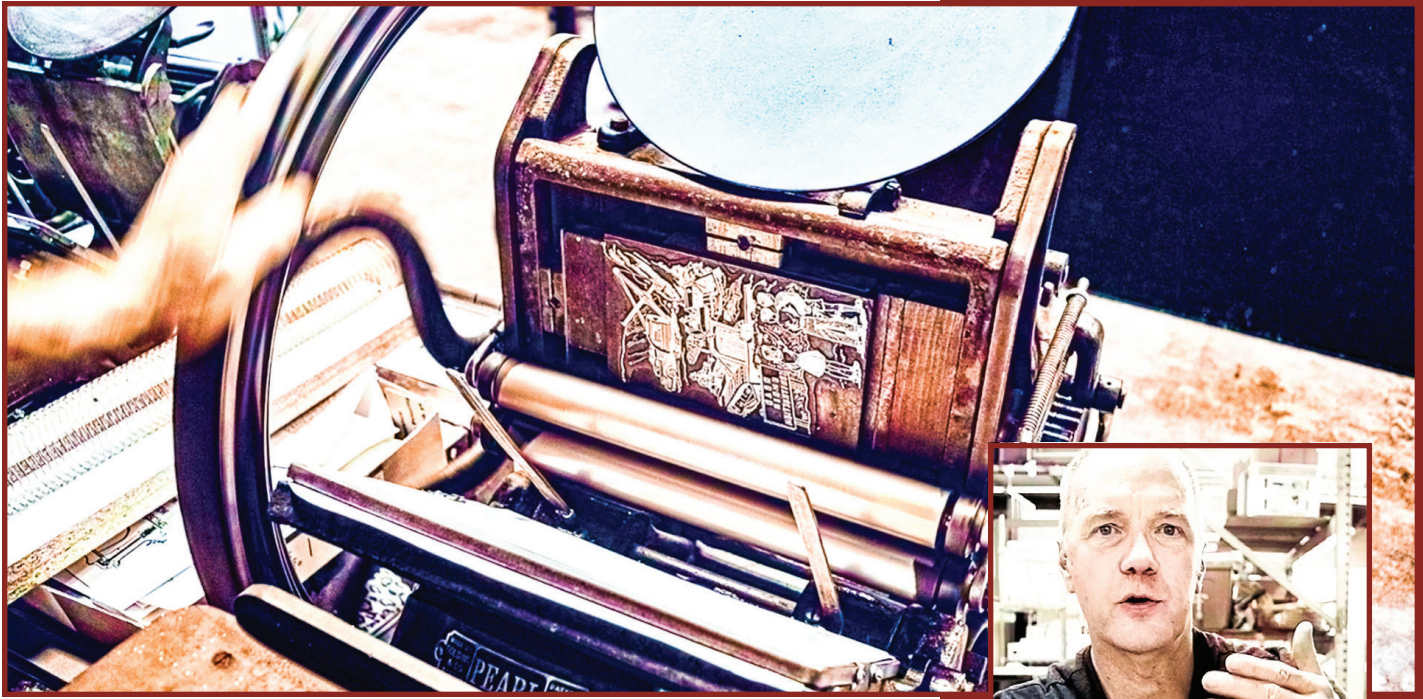
"The huge thing that we've taken on is educating our young people."



Morgan Over
Operations director, The MINT, Rutland, Vt.



PHOTOS BY RICH ALCOTT



PHOTOS BY RICH ALCOTT

The fully operational Pearl letterpress at The MINT was manufactured in 1876 by Golding & Co. in Boston.



Tom Lichtman is letterpress shop lead at The MINT. Below, the Pearl letterpress, circa 1876, remains in operation at The MINT.



SEE VIDEOS

bit.ly/MINTMorgan

Morgan Over talks about what's new at The MINT.

bit.ly/TomLichtman

Tom Lichtman talks about the letterpress shop and letterpress operation at The MINT.



OLD IS NEW AGAIN

An interview with Tom Lichtman

I think society as a whole becomes enraptured by whatever is new. I remember in the '60s-'70s plastic was the rage. Everything had to be made out of plastic. And then, eventually, society embodies plastic and it just becomes part of the terrain. And modern digital experience, social media, digital trading cards, YouTube videos are all intangible, they're the rage right now. But I'm feeling within myself and society overall that the pendulum is swinging back to the tangible and the tactile. And when the pendulum swings back, we have the advantage of history to be able to choose what are the finest aspects of the tangible world, of art prints, of physical printing. And offset, while great for commodity printing is not really embraced and is not looked to as the peak of physical prints. Instead, letterpress printing and silk-screening are seen and experienced as a different, higher level of print. So as the pendulum swings back to physical prints, this is the nature of the selection of what is the best.

And there is a rejuvenation of people who enjoy making things with their hands again instead of purely with their minds. Instead, there's a process of where you can envision it, but then you have to fabricate it with your hands — create the printing blocks, assemble the type, create an image and lay it out physically, which is an entirely different experience than moving a mouse around on a computer screen. And with that experience, you are putting a lot more attention and putting a lot more of yourself into the process and therefore into the end result. And that end result has a vitality and a vibrancy that was created by your attention at every stage of the process, from the selection of the imagery, the selection of the type, selection of the paper, of the ink color, the impression strength, how it fits on the paper, what you might overprint on the top of it. All of these things are personal decisions that you have made sequentially to arrive at this finished object and you feel much more connected to it as a result. That connection is felt by the viewer, the person who receives the print ... they can feel how much went into the production of that (object).



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DECKING THE HALLS, WITH WREATHS AND CRAFTS



PETER COBB PHOTO

Vanessa Greig of Emslie the Florist and Gifts in Barre has been keeping an eye on supplies for holiday floral displays and crafts.

By Peter Cobb

If you are a crafty person who makes your own Christmas wreath, the advice from the people who sell what you need is buy early because there are no guarantees the materials needed will be available in late December.

The same advice goes for anyone planning a flower arrangement for Thanksgiving or for the December holidays, the earlier you order, the more likely you'll get what you want.

"Buying what I need is like playing the lottery, you hope you win," said Alexis Dexter, owner of Forget Me Not Flowers and Gifts in Barre. Based on her experience with weddings this past year, Dexter placed her winter holiday orders in June, much earlier than usual.

"During the wedding season, I would order six months in advance and sometimes still not get what I wanted," Dexter said. Many of her suppliers, especially for hard goods such as glass and other decorative items, shut down for COVID and are still trying to catch up. Some of the flower sellers also are far behind schedule, she said.

Lillian Willis, chair of the wreath decorating workshop at St. Luke's Church in Chester, said her group is having a difficult time getting what they need, the

worst year for buying supplies in the 10 years she has helped run the program.

"The same supply chain problem that is affecting all sorts of businesses is also affecting wreaths," she said. St. Luke's is holding a wreath making workshops Nov. 18, 19 and 20. Due to supply problems, Willis is urging anyone interested to enroll early.

Vanessa Greig, one of the florists at Emslie the Florist and Gifts in Barre, agrees, the best advice is: Order early. "If customers come in early enough we can check with suppliers and usually get what they need," Greig said. She doesn't expect delays but based on the past year, delays are possible.

Peter LeBlanc, owner of Nature By Design, a landscape design and installation business, with a nursery, garden and gift shop in Barton, said getting the decorative goods he needs to make Christmas wreaths is not a problem, as he ordered what he needed a year ago, the problem for him is staffing. Normally he hires 20 people during the holiday season. He said he is hopeful but not confident he will find enough workers. LeBlanc is also worried there could be a shortage of the greens needed for the wreaths.

Customers looking for an artificial tree for Christmas may be out of luck, according to a recent report from the Wall Street Journal. According to WSJ, supply chain disruptions could result in fewer trees available and at a higher cost. WSJ reports some retailers are raising prices by 20% to 25% to keep pace with skyrocketing shipping costs.

Part of the supply problem, according



PETER COBB PHOTO

Alexis Dexter of Forget Me Not Flowers and Gifts in Barre placed her order for winter supplies much earlier this year.

to Bloomberg News, is the bottleneck in shipping. COVID outbreaks have idled port terminals and there aren't enough cargo containers, causing a significant price spike from a year ago.

Christmas tree sellers say they are not expecting problems. Brian Parker, who sells Christmas trees and wreaths in Barre City, said his supplier in Island Pond has not reported any problems and he expects to have a full supply of trees and wreaths this season.

Cassandra Kuhn, operations manager at Thomas Farm and Garden in Berlin, also said her store also expects a full supply of trees and wreaths.

"It was a lot worse last year but this year, so far anyway, seems good. We should have everything we need."



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