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Rutland Cold Rolled fat bike event.

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# FAT BIKES

## *keep cyclist rolling all winter long*

By Janelle Faignant

**R**yan Thibault had been riding a regular mountain bike on frozen trails during the winter when he started to research a better way to bike in the cold season. Fat bikes were just hitting the market, with their extra-wide, low-pressure tires that had better traction on all kinds of terrain, and Thibault had found his answer.

“Boingy” is a common word used to describe what it’s like to ride them, and riders swear by them. Between the fun bouncy feeling of them, their ability to maneuver and climb trails, and to lock up and slide around on packed snow and ice, Thibault knew they’d be perfect in Vermont. “We were early adopters,” he said.

In 2011, he started a fat bike festival in northern Vermont through his two businesses, Mountain Bike Vermont and Ranch Camp bike shop and restaurant. Fat biking was still a relatively new



concept then, but 70 people turned up, five with their own fat bikes, and “it ballooned from there,” he said.

They held festivals in the Northeast Kingdom and Stowe, and in 2019 held the

first fat bike festival in Rutland at Pine Hill Park called Cold Rolled. The next one is coming up in February 2026, and Thibault teamed up with Down Valley Bikes owners Sam Mills and Paige Prouty





to head up the Rutland event.

Mills and Prouty said they've seen an uptick in fat bike sales in the last few years.

"So many more people have been coming in asking about fat biking and we serviced quite a few," Prouty said.

"They are multipurpose and you see people ride them all year," Mills said. "Especially on sandy beaches or places where it's really muddy they're really useful. But I think their primary use is for winter and snow biking, they're really versatile machines."

"Fat biking during the winter and riding on snow is an absolute blast," said Rutland City Bikes owner JT Look. "It's got to be on a groomed trail, so Pine Hill and Slate Valley, both of those trails are groomed in the winter with great options for riding."

There are regular fat biking trails at Hubbard Park and North Branch Park in Montpelier; at Millstone Trails in Barre Town; and at Perry Hill and Cady Hill in Waterbury. Day-trips can be made for fat-biking on Kingdom Trails, in Woodstock, and in Grafton. For more on fat biking in Vermont, go to <https://fpr.vermont.gov/recreation/activities/fat-biking>

"You have very sinuous compact snow trails and all of the rocks and roots and things you might come across are typically covered," Thibault said. "So from summer to winter it's night and day. The areas that are tumultuous in the summer, in the winter after they've been groomed are butter smooth, like a snow roller coaster."

Cady Hill in Stowe is a favorite spot for Thibault and colleague Dave Clifford at Ranch Camp. "Here in Stowe we're right at the Cady Hill trailhead," Clifford said. "It's easy access right here from the shop, it's kind of like Pine Hill Park, just mellow elevation changes and rolling terrain. There's also Perry Hill, which is a fantastic place in Waterbury."

"Some of the most fun I've had on a fat bike would be at the Aqueduct Trails in Woodstock," Thibault added. "There's a local guy that's taken it upon himself to steward the trails and groom it routinely and the riding has been so good."

Clifford said he's also seen fat bike popularity on the rise, particularly since the quarantine days of COVID. "People were looking for ways of getting out there. And when the skiing's poor, fat biking is usually pretty good," he said. "Ryan has helped promote fat biking and been part of it for a while."

"Fat biking is very much conditions dependent," Thibault explained. "If you have a horrible time your first experience, it's probably because conditions are poor, because it can be phenomenal. It can be as good if not better than regular mountain biking or cycling. I equate it to more like surfing than regular mountain biking."

Making sure to wear enough layers (similar to dressing for cross-country skiing) is key, and adjusting the pressure in tires can help navigate tricky spots.

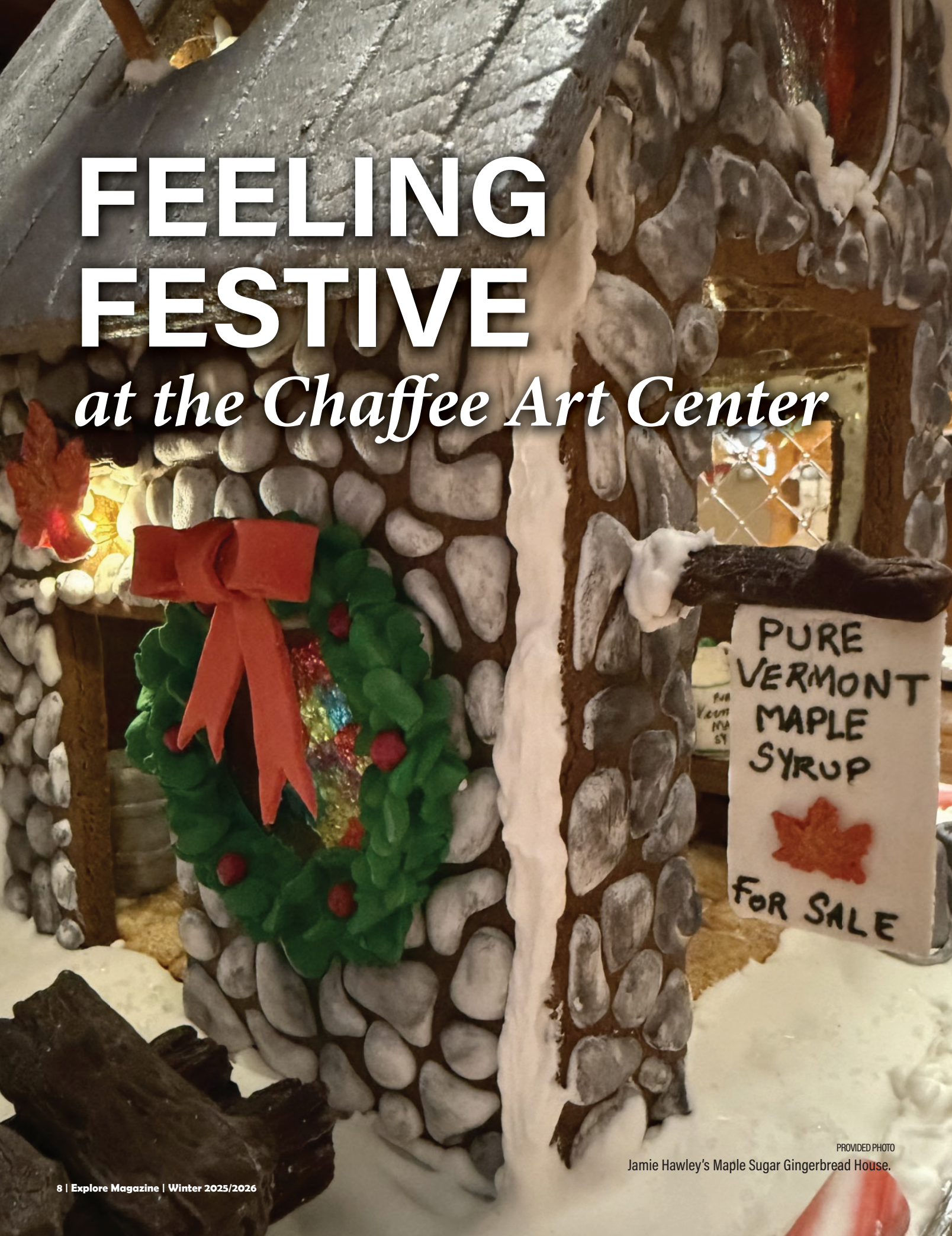
Thibault noted loyal fans of the bikes have continued to grow each year. "The fat bike community is pretty tight-knit," he said.

"There are people who want to ride their bike year-round," Look said. "I don't ski or snowboard; I'd rather be riding my bike."



# FEELING FESTIVE

*at the Chaffee Art Center*



PROVIDED PHOTO

Jamie Hawley's Maple Sugar Gingerbread House.



## By Janelle Faignant

**B**efore Jaime Hawley started entering the Chaffee Art Center's Annual Gingerbread Contest, she and her mother would go to see it every year.

"It's kind of how we set the Christmas season up in our family," Hawley said. "It makes us really happy going and looking at them, (they're) so creative."

Then one year, they decided to enter it.

"We (thought), 'We're not bakers, but this could be fun,'" she said.

This is their third year entering the contest and they spend an entire month creating their gingerbread house — with a twist.

"Last year I did a maple sugar house and used fondant to make it look like real maple syrup buckets," Hawley said, "and the year before I did a greenhouse."

It won that year, but even if it hadn't, the contest for them is about getting into the holiday spirit and having fun with it.

"You have full creative possibility," Hawley said.

The Annual Gingerbread Contest has a theme of "heART-ful" this year, and they'll be on display from the opening reception on Dec. 6 from noon to 2 p.m. until Jan. 3, with awards in a variety of categories.

The beautiful Chaffee Art Center, an historic Victorian mansion, offers a variety of year-round classes for all ages and a permanent gallery and gift shop filled with work by local artists. But during this time of year it has some extras to put you in the holiday spirit. When you first walk in the door you can make a cup of coffee, tea or hot chocolate at the little antique bar set up and take your time wandering through.

You'll see work by watercolor artist Rainey Dewey, a new Chaffee member who moved to Rutland from upstate New York last year.

She's taught landscape painting classes at the Chaffee for beginners and intermediates. "I want to teach people how to paint because art for me has been a lifeline. When things are tough you can lean on your creativity," she said.

"It's sometimes intimidating," Dewey said. "You think everybody else in the class is going to be a master and there are a lot of insecurities, but art can be very grounding. And the beautiful thing is, it can age with you. If you learn it and enjoy it, you can do it for many years."

She ventures out with her dog in the car to go for a drive, scope things out and accumulate photo references. From those drives she paints gorgeous watercolors of nature like purple coneflowers, colorful mountain views, and Lake George.

"I'll move things for convenience, like a tree, but typically I paint pretty close to the actual landscape so you'll recognize places, hopefully — if I did a good job," she said with a laugh.

She'll have landscape paintings on display in the Chaffee's holiday exhibit that began in November.

"Basically the holidays at the Chaffee start with the Gift Show in November," said Executive Director Sherri Birkheimer Rooker. "Every year we do a Holiday Member Exhibit and Shoppe through Jan. 10 all throughout the mansion. It's like a big huge gift shop, showcasing our member works and talents, but this gift show is both members of the community and members of the Chaffee."

She and local volunteers put a lot of time and detail into



PROVIDED PHOTOS

### Holidays at the Chaffee Art Museum.

decorating the mansion for the holidays with six trees and all the trimmings, and this year she was still in the middle of planning some holiday traditions like cookie decorating and caroling.

"We always try to do fun things for the community to engage them, to welcome them into the Chaffee, and expose the artists and the Chaffee to people," she said. "The mansion is beautiful all the time, it's art itself, but during the winter holidays, the Chaffee just shines."

Chaffee Art Center is located at 16 S. Main St. in Rutland. Go to [www.chaffeeartcenter.org](http://www.chaffeeartcenter.org), Instagram and Facebook pages for more information or call 802-775-0356.





# COOKING UP HOLIDAY TRADITIONS

*for the winter months*

PHOTO PROVIDED BY CAFE ON MAIN

By Janelle Faignant

**F**rom pull-apart snowflake rolls, to ginger-molasses cookies and specialty holiday soups, whatever shape your holiday meals take, local bakeries are ready to help you make it special this year, with their own traditional offerings made fresh in-house.

At Sweet Birch Bakery in Wallingford, apple, pumpkin, pecan and chocolate cream are their most popular holiday pies, and the requests were coming in for cookie platters, sugar cookies, and pre-orders of holiday rolls.

“We get a lot more pie orders, and cheesecake and carrot cake,” said co-owner and baker Chloe Parry. “We do an assortment of our traditional cookies with holiday cookies sprinkled in, like sugar cookies that are decorated.”

“Ginger molasses are a huge seller, they’re super popular this time of year,” she added, “and we also do a brown-sugar cookie, an espresso chocolate chip cookie, and we’re coming up with a few different things that I’m currently working on the recipes for.”

They also sell build-your-own gingerbread house kits, with bags of frosting, gingerbread baked in-house, and packages of



PHOTO PROVIDED BY HANNAFORD

candies included to take home, put together, and eat.

In addition to creative custom cakes and party platters designed for pig-outs, at the Hannaford Bakery in Rutland,





PHOTO PROVIDED BY CAFE ON MAIN  
Hungarian mushroom soup.



PHOTO PROVIDED BY HANNAFORD  
Hannaford dessert platter.



PHOTO PROVIDED BY CAFE ON MAIN  
Gingerbread cookies.



PHOTO PROVIDED BY SWEET BIRCH

Sweet Birch holiday cake.

Bakery Manager Ken Shattuck has seen all kinds of different meal traditions. But, he said, “The main focus for us is dinner rolls and pies, those are two of the biggest items for us.”

“Christmas, it’s a little of everything,” he said. “We make a snowflake roll and we do a ton of those. And pumpkin pie is huge.”

The snowflake rolls are specialty dinner rolls produced in the store that start with a white bread dough base, cut into 12 pieces. “We let them rise and they get sprinkled with flour, which is what creates the snowflake look, and we do them loose or in tins to pull apart,” Shattuck said.

“And a big thing for us is we sell cookie creations — we sell plain sugar cookies and we sell frosting and decorating kits and those sell really well for Christmas,” he said.

“Thanksgiving tends to be turkey and potatoes, but for Christmas some people do lasagna, some people do breakfast, it’s a wider spectrum of what the main course is,” Shattuck said. “And the sides, which is primarily what we sell, vary with that. We sell a ton of garlic bread, a ton of Italian bread, French bread, as well as the snowflake rolls on top of that. And I find that goes all season, whereas Thanksgiving it’s a much more condensed season.”

“My kids have all grown up but our family dinner used to be homemade pizza and pasta salad for Christmas dinner every year,” Shattuck said.

At Cafe on Main and Cafe on Moscow in Stowe, owner Neil Handwerger said the influx of holiday orders was just starting to come in at both cafes.

“Specialty cookies, pies for Thanksgiving, sometimes a savory side,” are some of the requests they get. “We do a lot of Thanksgiving sides for people’s holidays, soups and things of that nature,” he said.

“We do seasonally appropriate holiday-ish soups for this time of year,” Handwerger said. “A lot of butternut squash and apple bisque, and maple pumpkin soup. Hearty, end-of-harvest-style cuisine.”

They come up with the recipes themselves at the cafes, and include a lot of gluten-free options. “Our head baker has celiac so she’s very passionate about our gluten-free program,” Handwerger said.

Plus, “Cafe on Main is in the old depot building on Main Street in Stowe and every holiday we have cookie decorating, and Santa comes with his helpers and visits the children,” he said. “It’s very festive.”

“For those practicing Judaism,” he added, “I do matzo ball soup, and Hanukkah-inspired cookies during that week. We try to bake for everybody. We’re in the hospitality business, we’re just trying to make people smile through the holidays.”



# WINTER LIGHTS

## *decorate the Shelburne Museum*



By Peter Cobb

**A**nyone who has attended Winter Lights at Shelburne Museum knows that the holiday light show is one of the most spectacular holiday light shows in Vermont.

The event opened Nov. 21 and runs Thursdays through Sundays until Christmas and is open the full week of Dec. 26 through Jan. 4, 2026. There are also select weekday nights for drive-arounds. Sensory friendly nights are scheduled for Monday, Dec. 1, and Monday, Dec. 15.

“Winter Lights is a magical experience that has become a holiday tradition, drawing visitors of all ages from across the region to marvel at the brilliant light installations throughout Shelburne Museum’s campus. Iconic landmarks are transformed into a glittering wonderland including the historic 220-foot steamboat Ticonderoga, its companion 1871 Lighthouse, the twinkling forest of Beach Woods, and a kaleidoscope of glowing butterflies in Bostwick Garden,” said Leslie Wright, director of communications for the museum.

The installation includes features inspired by the museum’s collections including quilt patterns, weathervanes and circus figures.

New for 2025, Winter Lights will feature reimagined displays in the Bostwick and Pleissner Gardens, an interactive Illumination Station for children outside the Weathervane



PHOTOGRAPHY BY ADAM SILVERMAN

Top, Shelburne Museum aglow at Winter Lights. Bottom, Flow Artist performing at Winter Lights at Shelburne Museum.





Café, and a model train installation in the Diamond Barn. On Saturday evenings, visitors can enjoy watching local performers animate the museum's grounds, including the mesmerizing flow artistry of the Burlington Burn Club along with ethereal and whimsical giant puppet figures.

The light show includes hundreds of thousands of lights. Crews started stringing them in late October and spent two weeks transforming the museum into a glittering winter wonderland.

According to Wright, typically 60,000 visitors attend the various events annually.

Winter Lights is an outdoor experience. The museum advises visitors to dress comfortably for being outdoors and to wear footwear appropriate for uneven terrain and varied weather conditions.

The experience requires approximately

one-half mile of walking. There are changes in elevation both up and down. Anyone with concerns about the changes in terrain can check the Winter Lights map on the website (which notes inclines and declines) in advance.

For the drive-around event, visitors follow a lead car in their own vehicles, on a single loop through the light displays. Each drive-around loop lasts approximately 15 minutes.

For safety reasons, visitors must remain in their vehicles for the duration of the drive-around. The caravan will stop at key locations so that visitors can

roll down their windows to enjoy the music and take pictures from the safety and comfort of their vehicles.

Upon arrival, drivers are asked to present their vehicle's ticket to a staff member stationed in the circle in front of the museum store/admissions building.

The Weathervane Café is open on Winter Lights nights from 4:30 to 8 p.m. and serves light snacks and hot chocolate provided by Lake Champlain Chocolates. The café is closed on drive-around evenings.

For details about tickets and event schedules, check the Shelburne Museum website at [shelburnemuseum.org/visit/winter-lights](http://shelburnemuseum.org/visit/winter-lights).

PHOTOGRAPHY BY ADAM SILVERMAN





# CHRISTMAS LIGHTS

## *at the Joseph Smith Birthplace*

**By Peter Cobb**

SHARON — Looking for dynamic holiday light show? Check out the light show at the Joseph Smith Birthplace in Sharon.

Each December, the Joseph Smith Birthplace is illuminated by thousands of Christmas lights. Visitors can stroll the grounds and enjoy the lights and the nativity displays.

“This is a beautiful, powerful and serene location made even more beautiful by the thousands of Christmas lights and the nativity display. On the weekends, you can also stop by the chapel on the property for refreshments, many nativity displays and music,” said Kristen LaJeunesse, Northern New England regional communication director for The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

The opening night lighting ceremony is scheduled for 7 p.m. on Friday, Nov. 28.

The Joseph Smith Birthplace visitors’ center will be open from 1 to 8 p.m. daily through Wednesday, Dec. 31. The Christmas lights will be on display for

those same dates from dusk to 9 p.m. The visitors’ center will be closed on Christmas Day and New Year’s Day.

“The lights offer a calm, uplifting alternative to the busy holiday season — inviting guests of all ages to pause, feel the joy of Christmas, and celebrate a message of hope, service, and light.

Whether as a family tradition, a scenic winter outing, or a moment of quiet inspiration, the display provides a memorable and meaningful holiday experience,” LaJeunesse said.

The Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter-day Saints has held the Christmas light show and the Joseph Smith



PHOTOS PROVIDED BY THE CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST OF LATTER-DAY SAINTS

Joseph Smith Birthplace Memorial located in South Royalton, Vermont, in December.





birthplace for more than 30 years. The show features dozens of exhibits and more than 250,000 lights.

The experience is free of charge and no reservations are required.

According to LaJeunesse, it is difficult to calculate the number of people who attend each but the total is in the thousands.

"We count the number of cars that drive through and the total number of visitors to the visitor center, but some cars don't stop to get out, and some simply walk the grounds without going into the center. On average we get about 5,600

cars drive through each December," LaJeunesse said.

The significance of this historic site is connected to the Dec. 23, 1805, birth of Joseph Smith Jr., the founder of the church. A 50-foot monument made from Barre granite sits just a few steps from the original site of the Smith homestead.

Visitors are welcome to drive around the lights display while remaining in their vehicles, or they can park and visit inside the visitors' center.

There will be live music performances throughout the month of December at the small church at the bottom of the hill.





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## NELSONS CANDY

PROVIDED PHOTOS

These family photos from the Nelson family show generations of Nelsons preparing for the holidays, as well as their candy stand.

# Vermont's holiday CRAFT & ARTISAN FAIRS

By Katie Lyford

**A**t the end of stick season, when the leaves have fallen, the days grow shorter, and Vermonters are eager for snow, one tradition emerges: craft and artisan fairs. Shoppers find unique gifts, decorations, food and art. Vendors share their talents, connect with the community, and carry on longstanding traditions.

The Nelsons are one such example. They operate their family candy business, started by Allen and Annie Nelson, over five decades ago.

"My great-grandfather Allen used to work at Cross' Bakery in St. Johnsbury," says Donald Nelson, a fourth-generation candy maker. "Back then, bakeries sold candy. That's where he got an apprenticeship in candy making, and he and my great-grandmother, Annie, started Nelson's Candy Farm." My dad is one of seven, and every one of his six siblings has touched upon the business in one way or another. Now my daughters, Meghann and Nicole are involved. It's really nice to have them interested in the business."

"These events are very special to me," adds Nicole Nelson. "Many places we go, people share stories about knowing my grandfather when they were kids."

The Nelsons continue to make candy much the same way Allen and Annie did.

"I've always learned candy making, especially fudge, using a candy thermometer," Nicole says. "But I remember watching my grandfather do it differently. The rest of the candy is still made the old-fashioned way, and caramel corn is the hardest to master, you learn it over time."

Donald adds, "We still mimic what my great-grandfather did, except for the thermometer. In the busy season, we have to make every moment count. We still use the same copper kettles my great-grandparents did. There are only two of these left, and we have one of them."

Donald laughs recalling a customer story.

"A lady comes up and says she needs six pounds of 'bait' — our peanut butter fudge. She went on to explain how she divides it up and puts it in her freezer, then calls her kids when she wants them to visit, telling them she has Nelson's fudge."

You can find Nelson's Candy Farm at the Barre Auditorium and both the University and Berlin Mall events.

Just as vendors pour their hearts into these fairs, organizers do the same in bringing them together.

"It really has to be a passion project because financially, you don't get compensated for your time. But I feel fully rewarded in heart — through the community, the stories we share, and the experience itself," says Morgan Haynes, manager of shows at Vermont Farmers Market. "These markets are like social gatherings for everyone. Some vendors only see each other once a year at this event, so they catch up on a year's worth of business. Some shoppers come year after year to shop their favorite vendors."

For Vermont Gatherings, their Vermont Holiday Market, is a craft fair with a unique twist.

"We are the most unique craft show around," says Jeffrey Folb, owner of Vermont Gatherings. "About 20% of our crafters and artisans come from our genre shows. They've got that Renaissance, fantasy, sci-fi, steampunk kind of feel."

"A lot of patrons who haven't been to our other shows don't



know these items exist. When they see them, they're like, 'Oh my God, Johnny would love this,' allowing them access to items they wouldn't otherwise get."

The Chaffee Art Center offers yet another unique experience.

Each year, the center holds its annual Chaffee Holiday Member Exhibit and Shoppe in their Queen Anne Victorian mansion built in the late-1800s.

Executive Director Sherri Birkheimer Rooker shares: "The whole place transforms from an art gallery to a holiday gift shop. I bring everything to the center, decorate five trees and the grand stair, and showcase our gingerbread contest."

Rooker continues, "Whether it's paintings or ornaments, our members can submit one full-sized and ten small-sized versions of their work. The 'smalls' are often most popular."

Organizers agree that what sets Vermont's holiday craft scene apart is the strong sense of community.

"Regionally, we are still very traditional. Shoppers come looking for special holiday gifts only found here," Haynes says. "It's all about shopping local and supporting our neighbors. When you spend your money at the craft show, most likely it's going right into the hands of the person who made the item. I spend half of my stipend here! We advertise and source signage locally. We're like family; we lift each other up. It warms my heart to see vendors hugging and greeting each other year after year."

Folb echoes that sentiment.

"We started Vermont Gatherings to bring more fun family events, particularly Renaissance shows, to Vermont. As our community grew, we realized many businesses offered unique products, but had no brick-and-mortar stores. They needed somewhere to sell, otherwise these products wouldn't exist. We started the holiday market as our gift to local crafters and artisans," he says. "For vendors, it's about making money but also keeping their crafts alive and seeing returning customers. For patrons, it's about supporting local crafters and artisans and looking for options other than Walmart and Amazon. Being able to touch and feel the product the person in front of you made is a big selling point."

Folb feels it's the sense of community and continuity that creates lasting bonds between vendors and patrons.

"People don't come for the crackers or spices, they come to see the people who make them," he says.

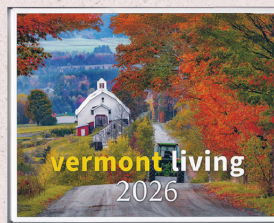
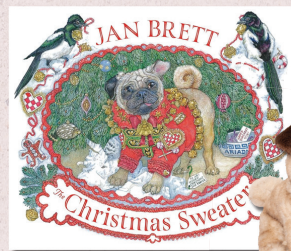
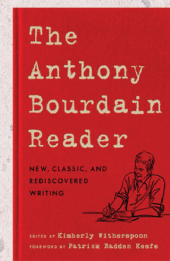
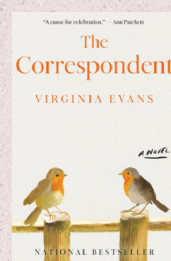
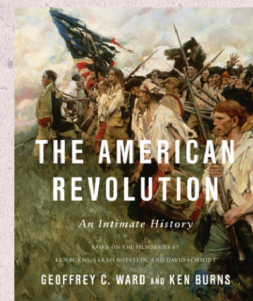
"One of the most popular vendors, Auntie Arwen's Spices, has been in business for over 30 years. Spices are simple, but it's the owner's passion and efforts that make them unique."

The same sense of connection shows up in unexpected moments. Birkheimer Rooker shares: "On rainy days, a patron and her kids come to the Chaffee and pretend this is their home. They walk around looking at art and speaking with different accents."

Whether it's tasting fudge made from a 50-year-old recipe, finding a gift you never knew existed or meeting vendors, Vermont's holiday craft and artisan shows are more than shopping, they're a chance to slow down, connect, and discover something new.


You can visit the Vermont Holiday Market on Dec. 6-7 at the Champlain Valley Exposition in Essex; explore the Chaffee Holiday Member Exhibit and Shoppe running through Jan. 10 at 16 S. Main St., Rutland; or stop by the Christmas Holiday Fair by Vermont Farmers Market Dec. 14 (9 a.m.-4 p.m.) at 251 West St. in Rutland.

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A woman with brown hair tied back, wearing a blue hoodie, is focused on working with greenery on a wreath. She is in a craft store, with shelves of supplies like ribbons and dried flowers visible in the background. A chalkboard with floral drawings is also visible.

# WRAPPING AROUND WREATHS *for the holidays*

By Peter Cobb

**H**anging a Christmas wreath on your front door tells the world, “I’m ready, bring it on, it’s the holiday season.” While the wreath doesn’t dominate the house like an oversized tree, it holds a place of honor, just above the welcome mat.

“The Christmas wreath is a sign of welcome, it tells your neighbors the Christmas season is here,” said John Milanese, a retired Roman Catholic priest who sells handmade wreaths at holiday craft shows and at the Forget Me Not Flowers and Gifts in Barre City.

Milanese sells under the business name, “John’s Hobby, Made in Vermont.”

Milanese, who served the Randolph parish for 24 years, has been making Christmas wreaths since the 1980s.

“I discovered I had a talent for making wreaths and I enjoy doing it. I love being at the craft shows and love meeting the people,” he said.

Marie Pratt, a wreath-maker from Williamstown who is new to the wreath sales business, also sells at craft fairs. She agrees that the main joy in selling holiday wreaths is helping her customers ring in the season.

“I love doing it. I started making wreaths for friends and I decided to try selling them at craft fairs,” she said.

Wreaths evolved from ancient pagan traditions when evergreens symbolized life during winter solstice celebrations. It was later adopted by



PHOTOS BY PETER COBB

Above, Kate Forsell in the Emslie's store and below, Emslie's storefront and various items inside.





Marie Pratt at the craft show at National Life



PHOTOS PROVIDED BY EMSLIE'S

Christians and evolved into the Advent wreath with candles, representing hope and the arrival of Christ.

The word wreath comes from the Old English word "writhian," which means "twist," as wreaths are usually made by twisting greenery together and adorning them with flowers, berries, and other decorative materials. Its circular shape and evergreen foliage symbolize eternity, continuous life and strength.

Kate Forsell, manager at Emslie's Flowers and Gifts in Barre, said wreaths are an important part of the holiday season.

"They are definitely a big seller along with many of the gifts we have in our store," she said. "Our customers look forward to them every year."

Emslie's sells both pre-made wreaths, as well as custom-made wreaths. Most of the greens used are sourced locally either from Vermont farms or from property owned by the owners, Tracie Lewis and her daughters Chesnee and Francesca Barney. Each wreath takes 15 to 20 minutes to create, Forsell said.

"We do a variety of styles and we'll custom make for people who have specifications. We have repeat customers every year who bring in their own decorations that we add to their

wreaths," Forsell said.

Emslie's wreath sales started the first week of November. Custom orders are filed in November for a December pick-up. Ten percent of the all pre-orders, including pre-orders for wreaths, boxwood Christmas trees, and centerpieces, are donated to Circle, a Washington County organization dedicated to ending gender-based violence. Last year the group provided emergency shelter to 12 women and nine children, totaling 2,869 bed nights, plus other services for victims.

"The owners are strong supporters of Circle," Forsell said. Emslie's has operated since 1897.



John Milanese at the craft show at National Life.

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# HOLIDAY MUSIC FAVES

*from music store owners*



By Katie Lyford

Vermonters have consistently ranked among the nation's biggest fans of holiday music, according to streaming and radio listening trends. While “Michael Bublé’s Christmas” has frequently been the nation’s most popular holiday album, in Vermont, music store owners claim Vince Guaraldi Trio’s “A Charlie Brown Christmas” comes out on top year after year, only taken out by Dolly Parton’s “A Holly Dolly Christmas” in 2020.

Many music store owners, such as Norbert Ender, of Speaking Volumes in Burlington, attribute that to nostalgia.

“It’s a lot of childhood memories that we connect with the holidays,” he said. “That’s why people are coming to tangible mediums like vinyl and tapes. It’s usually the stuff that’s kid-oriented — The Chipmunks, The Peanuts, John Denver and The Muppets. It brings us back to our childhood, to our youth, to family, to sitting together. This allows us to reconnect with our experiences we had in our younger years.”

Meshach Tourigny, of Mountain Music in Rutland, agrees: “Nostalgia seems to carry the most weight with Christmas music. We sell the most of my favorite, Charlie Brown Christmas, and John Denver and The Muppets.”

Knaye Lander, of Buch Spieler in Montpelier, adds: “The whole idea with



PHOTO BY KATIE LYFORD

Knaye Lander, of Buch Spieler, holding local holiday record Christmas by Burlington band Soule Monde.

a Christmas record is you’re dealing heavily with camp culture. That’s why those like Dolly Parton — a beacon of camp culture — are so popular.”

At Exile on Main in Barre, Sandy Thurston agrees, stating that “Grandma Got Run Over by a Reindeer” is her most popular song requested at the holidays, along with The Muppets and The Chipmunks albums.”

Greg Davis, of Autumn Records in Winooski, echoes the same sentiment. “The record we always sell the most of

is ‘A Charlie Brown Christmas,’ which is also my all-time favorite Christmas record. I also have a bin of used vinyl, which has John Denver Christmas and John Denver and The Muppets — all of the nostalgic ones, because people love the classics.”

When it comes to more traditional holiday classics, store owners had different results. Ender pointed to a legend: “One of the most important Christmas records is ‘Messiah’ by Handel,” he said. Davis reported John Denver as a classic in his store, while Thurston listed Michael Bublé, Andrea Bocelli and Bing Crosby for Exile. Lander finds Phil Spector’s ‘A Christmas Gift for You’ to be a personal favorite, as well as a popular choice in his store, while Tourigny highlighted holiday tracks by Mariah Carey, Willie Nelson and Ella Fitzgerald.

Vermont stores carry sections devoted to local artists and some even feature holiday records. Lander carries Christmas, a holiday album by Burlington band Soule Monde. For something more unusual, both Davis and Lander stock Matt Hagen’s ‘Christmas Bath,’ a wildly unique album. Davis described it as “kind of like a cheeky holiday record,” while Lander called it “fantastic, strange and subdued with a dreamy, Twin Peaks-like vibe, the sort of record that makes you think about Christmas music in a totally different



way.” Tourigny carries ‘A Christmas Present’ by William Wright & Jim Reiman, of the Pomfret area, which he calls “fantastic.”

For those looking to spin a little outside the turntable, Lander recommends the “Home Alone” soundtrack or the Hagen album, while Thurston suggests checking out the fairly new band Pentatonix, who recently released “Christmas in the City.” Ender points to some of his favorite European holiday compilations, especially those featuring a German-language version of “O Holy Night.”

When asked about off-the-beaten-track or less-popular holiday records, Mountain Music staff offered some deep cuts for adventurous listeners: “Merry Ole Sole” by Duke Pearson, “Merry Christmas To You” by Joseph Washington Jr., “Christmas Guitar” by John Fahey and “Sound of Christmas” by Ramsey Lewis.

Speaking Volumes is a distinctive set of stores. Not only do they carry the largest collection of used vinyl in the state, they also have a bookstore. Their music selections include a variety of “spoken word” items, from educational recordings to classic audio treasures. They also sell equipment, run a repair shop, and, back by popular demand this holiday season, will host “Story Time with Santa” at both locations. Check the website and social media for details.

Mountain Music is equally standout, packed with new and used records, vintage audio gear, and a little sparkle in the form of jewelry — including specialized pieces carved from antique silver coins.

For gift options, many of these stores offer gift certificates as well as record players, both new and used, with older and more modern models. Store owners frequently caution against the cheaper, all-in-one players, as they can damage records and diminish the listening experience.

Ender explains, “We dissuade people from buying the Crossleys or Victrols – the suitcase, all-in-one, budget-style players. They’re cute and fun, but they can actually damage your records. Spending \$30, \$40, \$50 or more on a record and putting it on one is almost sacrilege.”

Davis shares the sentiment: “A cheap, suitcase-style player can be great as a starter for kids, if you have records you don’t mind ruining. But I try to persuade customers to spend a bit more. The cheap ones don’t sound very good. Spending a bit more allows them to enjoy them more.”

Check out the list below to jingle all the way to these great music stores:

Mountain Music: [www.mountainmusicvt.com](http://www.mountainmusicvt.com), 5 Center St., Rutland.

Exile on Main: [www.facebook.com/p/Exile-on-Main-Street-100057400452013](https://www.facebook.com/p/Exile-on-Main-Street-100057400452013), 94 N. Main St., Barre.

Buch Spieler Records: [www.buchspielerrecords.com](http://www.buchspielerrecords.com), 27 Langdon St., Montpelier.

Speaking Volumes: [www.speakingvolumesvt.com](http://www.speakingvolumesvt.com), 377 Pine St. & 7 Marble Ave., Burlington and 10 S. Main St., Randolph.

Autumn Records: [www.autumnrecordsvt.com](http://www.autumnrecordsvt.com), Winooski and Waterbury.



## What's **new** in **DOWNTOWN RUTLAND**

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Kick off the holiday season by attending **Downtown Rutland's annual Tree Lighting** at Depot Park on Friday, November 28. The festivities begin at 6:00 PM, where you can enjoy free treats and holiday songs.

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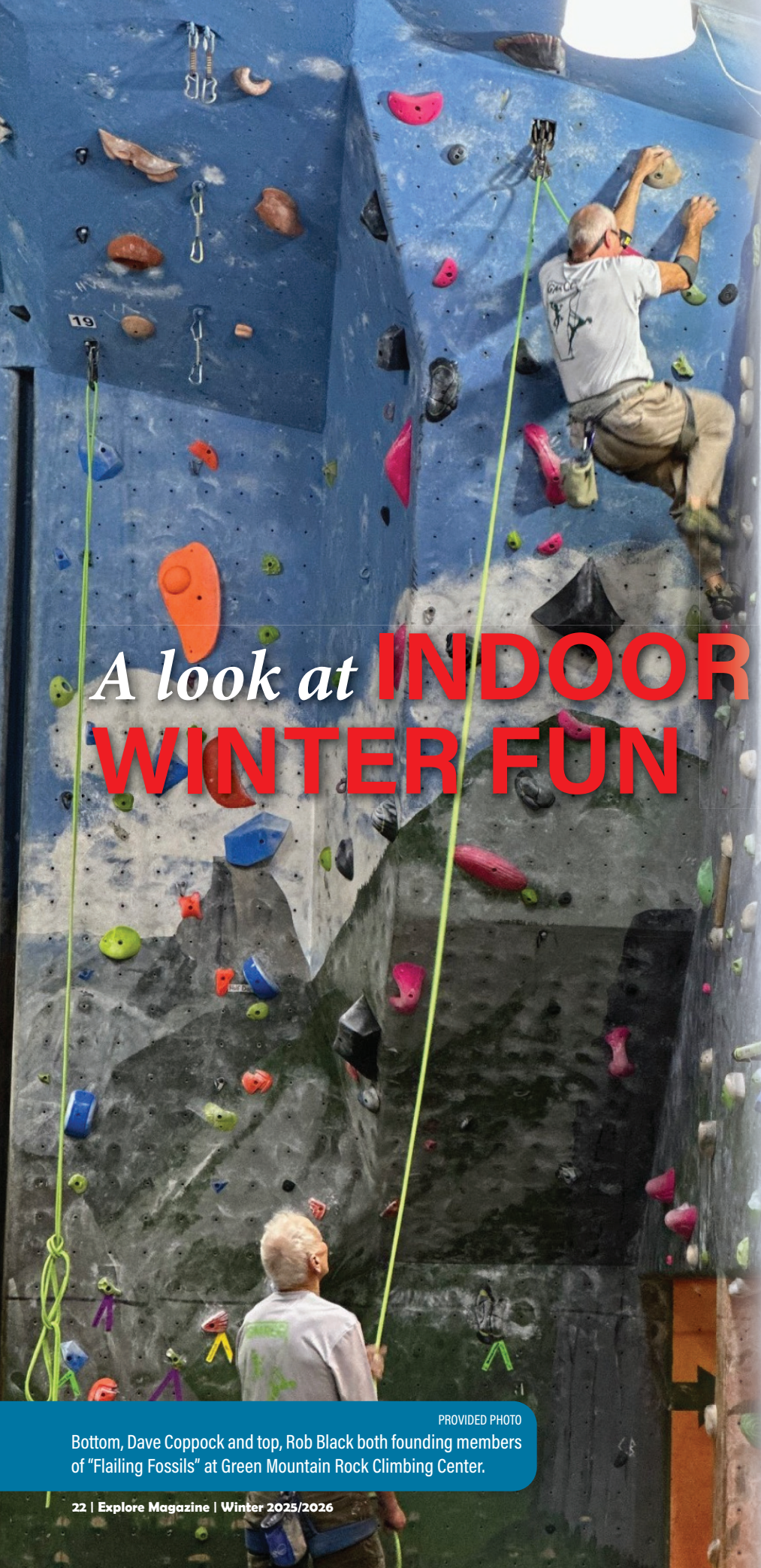
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**DOWNTOWNRUTLAND.COM**





By Katie Lyford

**T**wo men banter back and forth as one hangs from a small handhold high on the wall and the other manages the rope below him. The teasing is part of their way of supporting each other. While many Vermonters and visitors dream of fresh powder beneath their feet, others find their winter joy indoors, scaling climbing walls or riding ramps, or combining both worlds for a full winter workout, physically and mentally, where focus and connection matter as much as strength.

Susan Schreiber, member of the “Flailing Fossils” at Green Mountain Rock Climbing Center in Rutland is a prime example.

“During COVID the gym was closed, and my friends encouraged me to try it. I do lots of other sports, but this is one where you really have to focus, there’s no thinking about the grocery list or anything else. Here, you’ve got to focus to get up the wall. It clicked for me; I really enjoy it, plus it’s a great core workout,”

“We’re not a big gym, but we have a community vibe. We care about climbing, we care about people, we teach it in a way that people can learn in here and take those skills out anywhere in the world,” said owner Steve Lulek.

Lulek noticed a couple of members, Dave Coppock and Rob Black, were working around crowds, so he gave them a key and said, “Come in when you want.” These two recruited others and it snowballed into a bigger group now known as the Flailing Fossils.

“I like climbing outdoors, but this keeps you on your game in the winter, specifically working your muscles and your balance. Plus, it’s fun,” said Coppock.

Black added, “It’s not weather-dependent, it’s comfortable in here, we listen to the music we like and heckle each other. I started climbing when I was ten. With no gyms back then, you had to stop in the winter and find ways to stay in shape off-season.”

Candy Jones, another Flailing Fossil, added, “I came here to strengthen my hiking skills but it became more. It’s been super beneficial for me, it’s helped my balance, leg strength and core strength, (to) say nothing of the social aspects. It’s

## A look at **INDOOR WINTER FUN**

PROVIDED PHOTO

Bottom, Dave Coppock and top, Rob Black both founding members of “Flailing Fossils” at Green Mountain Rock Climbing Center.



great to find other forward-thinking, interesting people. We support each other. It's also been a huge confidence builder. It's not always about achievement, sometimes just drills."

Climbers aren't the only ones taking things indoors for winter. Hannah Deane Wood grew up in Colchester, always looking for places to skate with friends. Later, she managed a skate shop in downtown Burlington and watched kids do well all summer but get into trouble when the weather changed. That inspired her to start Talent Skatepark Inc. But Wood had to close, until some community members came to her. "You need to be open," I told them, "I'm broke." And they said, "We'll re-open it as a nonprofit. We'll be your board of directors," which they did and made her executive director.

Talent is open seven days a week, offering lessons for walk-ins, birthday parties on weekends, and clinics and summer camps during school breaks. They also launched an adaptive program with Green Mountain Adaptive Sports.

"We will keep looking for more adaptive athletes, as many do other sports like skiing and snowboarding in winter, but I want to keep skating going because it's incredible. I'd also like to expand to support veterans and people struggling with PTSD," Wood said.

At MetroRock Vermont in Essex, the focus is on encouraging everyone to try climbing. The crowd ranges from toddlers to college students, as well as older adults. Adaptive climbers are welcome, including groups like the Yellow House crew and veterans with Vermont Adaptive for Veterans.

For one veteran, climbing is a form of "church."

"I had been struggling; losing a military friend to suicide, drinking excessively, and losing my career," he said. "Going to rehab, they suggested I connect with Vermont Adaptive for Veterans. I remember the first time I went, watching the group, I was touched. I started skiing with them at Sugarbush and then tried climbing at Metro Rock. Now I do as many activities as I can, and I try to bring others along. It's year-round, and for me, it's like my church, I prioritize it because it's made a real difference, whether I'm struggling or not, and I'm grateful these opportunities exist."

"That's the cool thing, I really believe climbing is for everybody," said Joe Cor-

rado, general manager. "We had an older woman bring all her friends from a long-term care facility. They were intimidated at first, but before long she had them climbing to the top of the wall. I tell people, 'If you can climb a ladder, you can climb a wall.'"

At Burly Bloc in Burlington, owner Ben Bivins created a space for climbers serious about progressing in the sport.

"One of the driving factors for opening this place was seeing people who were serious about training and growth taking a back seat to kids' parties and team events," he said. "People were frustrated, paying over a hundred bucks a month and not having access to the equipment they needed."

"My gym is fully adjustable," Bivins said. "The user is totally in control. If something feels too hard, at the press of a button, you can make it more accessible. It's a great way of working through regression to progress."

Bivins also hopes to give youth new opportunities.

"I'm trying to work on getting an urban team going," he said. "Doing tryouts for kids that show they're serious, and then have them be sponsored so they don't have to pay. I want to take kids outside who wouldn't otherwise have the opportunity to be exposed to something like this. I wish I would've had that growing up, and I have a lot of friends that would probably be in a better place today if they would've been exposed to something like that."

Winter sports don't have to be outdoors. Sometimes, you might be surprised how much fun and challenge can be found indoors. Whether climbing a wall or riding a ramp, these activities offer many ways to stay active — physically, mentally and socially.



PROVIDED PHOTO

Bottom, Rob Black and top, Dave Coppock.



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