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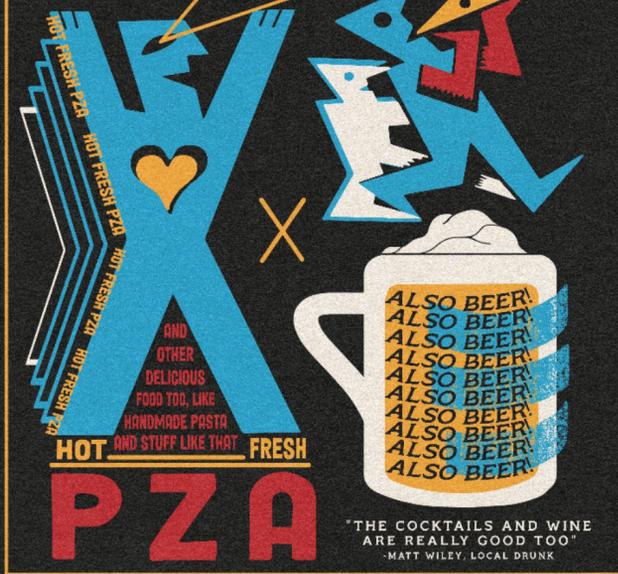
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JEB WALLACE-BRODEUR / STAFF FILE PHOTO  
Jim Harvey, of Barre Town, rides his fat bike on the  
Millstone Trails Association network in Barre Town.



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**Explore Central Vermont**  
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# Winter 2023

JEB WALLACE-BRODEUR / STAFF FILE PHOTO

A hairy woodpecker probes for food on a dead tree in Montpelier.

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OUTDOOR

# MAKING ART OUT OF STONE

By Peter Cobb

**T**raining the next generation of stone carvers is a daunting task. Sculptor Heather Milne Ritchie knows this first-hand. Over the past several years she has had several apprentices.

Ritchie also knows that unless a new generation of stone carvers emerges fairly soon, the granite industry in Central Vermont may not have enough carvers to do the work.

A professional granite memorial carver for the past 20 years and mother of two, the Plainfield resident who has a studio in Barre, is one of only 12 local stone carvers, six of whom are over 70. She is 48. The other five carvers are in their 40s and 50s.

Ritchie is passionate about her art, and equally passionate about making sure

stone sculpting thrives in Barre. She is optimistic there are plenty of artists who would make great stone carvers.

“I think there are a lot of people out there looking for something and they don’t know where they fit in. It’s the dreamers. It’s the zoners. I wouldn’t be putting my head against a piece of stone for six hours a day if I didn’t need to be in that mental and physical space. I like working hard with my body. I like working hard with my mind too and this is a beautiful combination of both,” she said.

Ritchie’s colleague, Sophia Bettmann-Kerson, agrees new artists are needed. She is equally passionate about her art.

“Stone carving is like a drive or a medicine. For both of us, it’s peace of mind where you’re physically and mentally engaged. It’s satisfying,” Bettmann-Kerson said.



Heather Milne Ritchie.

PHOTO BY PETER COBB

Ritchie and Bettmann-Kerson are the only two women stone sculptors in Barre. Both began carving as apprentices to master carver George Kurjanowicz. Kurjanowicz apprenticed with Korean War Memorial sculptor Frank Gaylord. Gaylord was the mentor for several of the older Barre carvers.

Ritchie said one of the reasons she has thrived in the physically demanding, male-dominated world of stone carving is her reaction to getting cut from the ninth-grade field hockey team.

“I was told I wasn’t strong enough. I’ve spent my adult life proving I am strong enough,” she said.

Ritchie’s apprenticeship lasted four months but her training and employment with Kurjanowicz lasted over five years and she was regularly engaged in his studio for more than 15 years.

“Even recently with the flood, I was welcomed with open arms to share his studio to continue to work and rehab tools until my studio was repaired,” she said.

The July flood totally swamped her Mill Street studio and it took her and the other carvers who work from that building until the beginning of October to get the studio back in business.

Barre began to attract expert carvers from Europe in the late 19th century, men who helped establish the town as “The Granite Capital of the World.” The carving side of the industry has been male dominated since the early days.

Both Ritchie and Bettmann-Kerson have experienced their share of harassment, some intentional and some not. When Bettmann-Kerson first tried to get into the industry in 1993, she was rejected because she was a woman, she said.

Bettmann-Kerson is a native Vermonter. Her varied employment working with artists in many media has been an asset to her stone carving work. She was a student of the original Vermont Granite Museum Stone Arts School. She also works part-time as a licensed nursing assistant.

Ritchie, a graduate of Bennington College, is an instructor for Design and Fabrication, a program of the Central Vermont Career Center hosted at the Vermont Granite Museum. She is a subcontracted guest instructor for the granite trades portion of the class which she says is crucial to keeping stone trades vibrant in Barre.



PHOTO BY PETER COBB

Coffee break benches.



PHOTO BY PETER COBB

Mill Street studio.

“What the program does is train people to be ready for the industry, not to do what I do, but to learn the skills of design and fabrication on the newer equipment. The reason I’m so invested in this program is we need people in this industry,” she said.

Ritchie foresees a day when the carvings she does will be done mostly by computer.

“It probably won’t be in my lifetime but it’s only a matter of time,” she said. “I embrace it, it’s the future.”

Both women give a nod to Vermont Traditional Arts Apprenticeship Program

Left, Heather Milne Ritchie and right, Sophia Bettmann-Kerson.



for supporting them during their training. Established in 1991, VTAAP was created to support the vitality of Vermont's living cultural heritage and is funded by the VT Folklife Center.

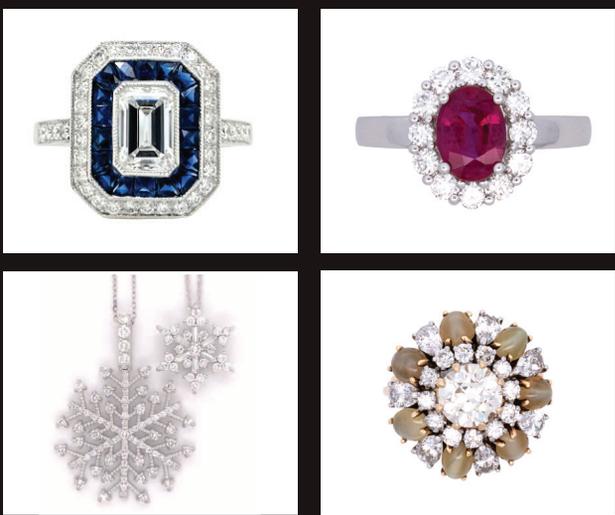
Ritchie also was assisted by a 2012 grant from the Charles Semperebon Fund's Stone Sculpture Legacy Program for Barre's public spaces. She created the well-known "Coffee Break" in downtown Barre and the bike rack at the Barre pool featuring two life-sized big-wheels and the excited children riders. Her most recent commission was from the town of Hanover, New Hampshire, for a large turtle sculpture in granite for the School Street Sustainability Park.

"Coffee Break put me on the map," she said.

Ritchie, a Barre native, can trace her heritage to the granite industry. Her grandmother's maternal grandfather, a Scottish immigrant who arrived in the late 1800s, owned the local Littlejohn quarry. Ritchie's studio name, Bonnie Wee Arts, is the childhood nickname her Scottish great aunt Ethel gave her.

Twenty years in the business, Ritchie retains her passion. "Being able to partake in an art that really matters to people means a lot to me. One of the rewards of the job is my art is part of the healing process," she said.





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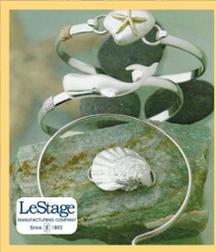
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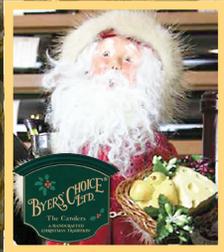
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# THE ROTARY TREE SALE

*A Rutland holiday tradition*



## By Janelle Faignant

**B**ack in June, when the sun was shining and summer was finally here, Will Gormly was thinking about Christmas.

A member of the Rutland City Rotary Club, as fundraising chair he's been in charge of its annual Christmas tree sales at Rutland's Main Street Park for the last several years.

"I usually secure the trees in the

beginning of the summer," he said. "This year we've got 525 trees."

"Last year I called about 30 places before I finally found somebody," he recalled. "This year I had at least one extra backup if we needed it."

Known for its string of holiday lights in a corner of the city's most visible park, the tree sales are run completely by volunteers every year, and on a sunny Monday afternoon in early November about a dozen people met outside the

landmark small red shed at the park to get ready for the tree sales which start the Saturday after Thanksgiving.

It's the club's biggest yearly fundraiser and it takes all hands on deck to pull it off.

"It takes everybody in the club to set everything up and stack the booths," Gormly said. "It's a lot of work."

But it's also a lot of fun.

"When it's busy, the time flies and the holiday excitement is infectious," said club president Keri Franzoni. "And

when sales are slow the volunteers, both Rotarians and others, get to know one another better. Tree sales and service projects are great ways to make connections and better friendships.”

“Service Above Self” is the Rotary’s motto, emblazoned on its website, and it’s actually a worldwide organization of over a million members. “We are both an international organization and a local community leader,” the website says.

With about 30 members in the local chapter, friends, family, neighbors, and coworkers are recruited to help during the tree sales.

“Our club has gotten smaller since COVID so getting Rotarians to fill all the shifts has always been the main challenge,” Gormly said. “In the past we’ve also had the Rutland High School Key Club come down to help out, so we reach out to a couple volunteer groups to try to supplement the Rotarian numbers.”

“A lot of the work is setting up the tree lot, which we did last weekend when it was warm,” Gormly said. “Getting the stands set up, adding the lights, getting the Christmas tree shed moved over, and then we have a training day at the park and go over hours and tree shed operations and work that needs to be done.”

“Volunteers sign up for shifts, so it’s not a full day out in the cold,” Franzoni said. “And we always have the shed onsite with a heater when the temperature drops to warm up. If you’re a people person, you help people find the perfect tree. If you’ve got good knot-tying skills, you help people tie the trees to their vehicles. If you can lift trees, you replenish the trees on the racks. There are many different jobs on the tree lot, something for everyone.”

Over 500 trees are sold with the goal of at least 100 of them donated from its Gift a Tree program, which began three years ago. Gift a Tree connects generous donors with anonymously selected families, and with each \$65 donation, one Rotary Christmas tree is given to a local family in need.

“Many families have made a tradition out of getting their tree from Rotary every year,” Franzoni said. “So we do see many of the same people from year to year. There are always new faces and since the start of the Gift a Tree program, we’ve seen more families with small children.”

“I wanted to reach out and thank our generous community on behalf of the Rotary Club of Rutland,” Gormly wrote in a letter to the editor published in the Rutland Herald in 2020. “Being the first year for this program, we were not sure how it would go, but are pleased to announce that more than 160 trees were gifted!”

The tree prices vary with size, from 50 dollars to 75, and the proceeds go into a general donation fund. The Rotary Club has supported local nonprofits and community partners for over 100 years, selling Christmas trees for over 60 of those.

“Every year the Rotary gets grant requests,” Gormly said. “So we as a board vote on and fund those and we also have a specialty in security where we actively seek out ways that we can help with that problem in the community, and we use the funds for that as well.”

But at the heart of it, the tree sales are an annual tradition that for many families just means a fun start to the holiday season.

“We’ll try to get some hot cider there on the weekends,” Gormly said, and hinted, “The club does have a Santa costume.”

Rutland City Rotary Club Tree Sales begin the Saturday after Thanksgiving; hours are Thursdays and Fridays from noon to 7 p.m. and Saturdays and Sundays from 9 a.m. to 7 p.m.



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# *14 facts about the* WINTER SOLSTICE

**T**he winter solstice occurs each year during the month of December in the northern hemisphere. In 2022, the winter solstice will take place on December 21 at 4:48 p.m. EST.

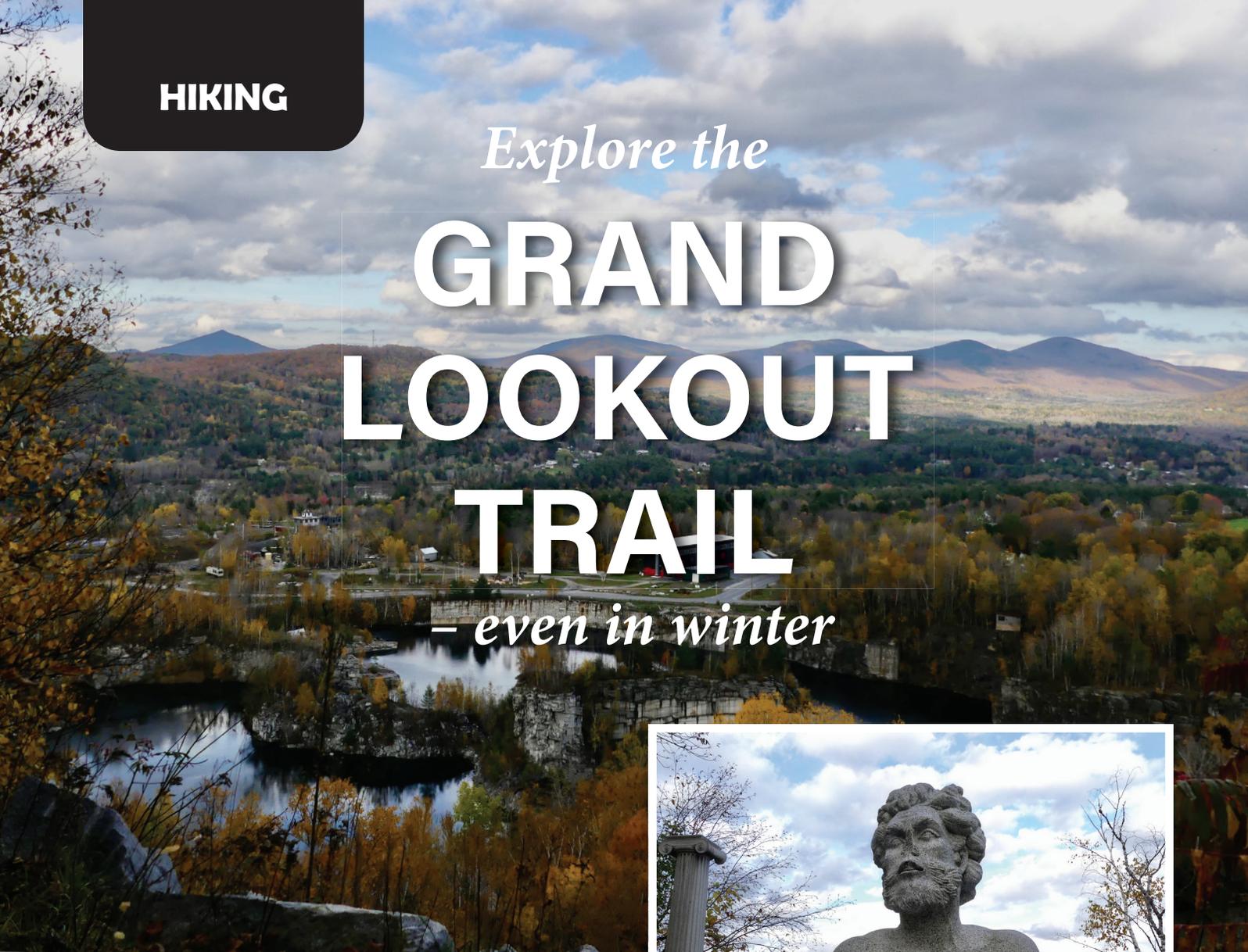
Solstices are significant events that occur twice per year. One occurs in the winter and one in the summer. The winter solstice also is known as the first day of winter and occurs when the Earth's pole reaches its maximum tilt away from the sun. During the winter solstice, people will experience the shortest period of daylight and the longest period of nighttime of the year. Here are 14 fascinating facts about the winter solstice.

1. Depending on the hemisphere, the north or south pole will experience continuous darkness or twilight around its winter solstice.
2. The winter solstice sometimes is referred to by the term midwinter.
3. Even though the solstice is marked by a whole day on the calendar, it actually is just the brief moment of time when the sun is exactly over the Tropic of Capricorn.
4. The word "solstice" can be translated from Latin and means "sun stand still"
5. The Tropic of Capricorn is located at 23.5 degrees south of the equator.
6. Tourists flock to Stonehenge to track the movement of the sun. The stones will frame the sunset on the

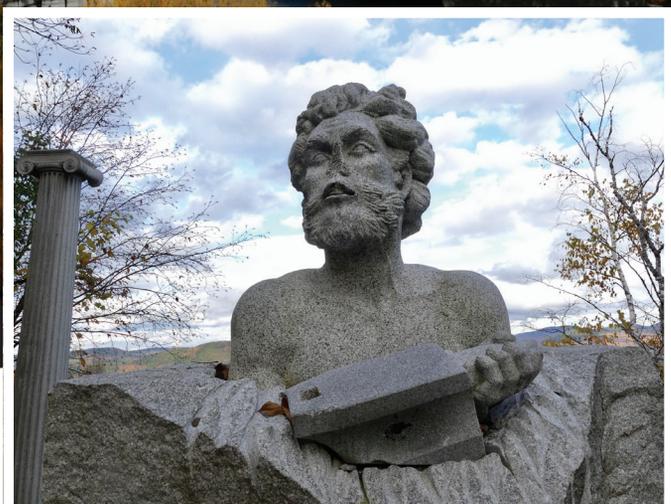
winter solstice and the sunrise on the summer solstice.

7. Ancient cultures viewed the winter solstice as a time of death and rebirth.
8. Important events in history have taken place on winter solstices. The Apollo 8 spacecraft launched on the solstice in 1968. Pilgrims also arrived at Plymouth on the winter solstice in 1620.
9. Each planet in the Earth's solar system has its own solstices and equinoxes.
10. The southern hemisphere experiences the winter solstice in June each year.
11. A full moon on a solstice is even more rare than a blue moon. The last full moon to occur on the winter solstice was in 2010 and the next one won't happen until 2094.
12. Earth is closer to the sun around the winter solstice in December. However, the northern hemisphere receives less sunlight and has cooler temperatures because it is tilted away from the sun during winter.
13. Even though the winter solstice features the shortest amount of daylight of any day during the year, it does not have the earliest sunset. That takes place roughly two weeks prior. In 2021 in New York, the winter solstice took place on December 21, but the earliest sunset occurred on December 7 at 4:28 p.m.
14. Meteorological winter begins on December 1 rather than December 21.

Explore the  
**GRAND  
LOOKOUT  
TRAIL**  
– even in winter



PHOTOS BY PETER COBB  
Grand View Trail at Millstone Trails in Barre Town.



**By Peter Cobb**

**T**he Grand Lookout trail at the Millstone Trails in Barre Town is one of the most unique and stunning short hikes in Vermont. Not only does the easy-to-hike trail offer a spectacular, panoramic view of Barre, the granite quarries and the Green Mountains including Mount Mansfield and Camel’s Hump, it also features dramatic and whimsical carvings in the granite walls near the end of the trail.

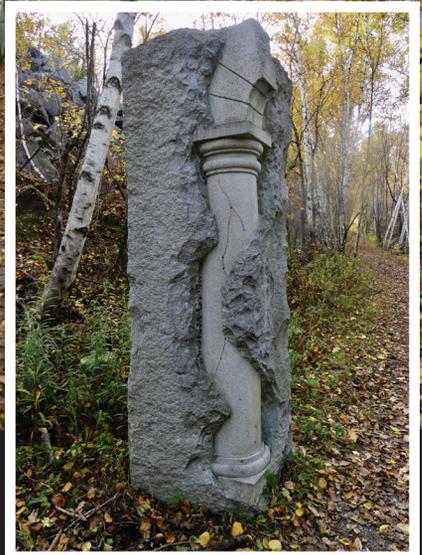
The skillfully done carvings include an ancient warrior, a granite worker, a jackhammer used by the granite cutters, a distressed man, two owls, a monster, a dinosaur, and several more. The challenge is to find all of them.

There also is a tribute to the son of Zeus and Hera, the Greek god Hephaestus, god of fire, artisans, craftspeople and more. That display, unfortunately, has been damaged by vandals.

In addition to the carvings, the grand vista, the towering grout piles, and the abandoned quarries, there are several historical



PHOTOS BY PETER COBB



markers throughout the trails that give a history of the granite industry at Millstone Hill.

The three-quarter-mile hike to the summit of the Grand Lookout starts at the Barre Town Forest parking lot at Brook St. There is ample parking.

Walk on the path (the beginning is one of the holes for the disk golf course) through the trees for about 50 yards to the main trail, which is a snowmobile trail. Turn right (southwest if you have a compass – you don't really need one) and stay on the main trail, a gradual uphill walk, until you reach a junction that includes several directional signs.

Follow the sign that points to the





PHOTOS BY PETER COBB



Grand Lookout. You'll quickly come to Church Hill Road. Look to your right. Across the road there is a gate to the trail. If you are snowshoeing or cross-country skiing, you'll need to remove your gear to cross the road safely.

The Grand Lookout trail is fairly easy and is perfect for children. Caution is needed at the top, however, as the rocks at the Grand Lookout, especially in the winter, can be slippery and very dangerous.

The Grand Lookout trail is one of dozens of trails in the

Millstone Trails, a network of multi-use trails that traverse the historic quarry lands of Millstone Hill. The trails wind their way through northern hardwood and coniferous forests.

As with all trails, trail users are asked to respect the trail, especially as some of the trails are on land owned by Rock of Ages.

A trail map and directions to the various parking lots are available on the Millstone website at <https://www.millstonetrails.org>.

Cupcakes are diminutive, hand-held treats that come in a variety of flavors and styles. Each December, the humble cupcake gets its own day of celebration (December 15), but people know well that cupcakes are enjoyed throughout the year, particularly during birthdays and other special occasions.

It may seem like there is no way to reinvent

the cupcake, but “Sticky Cinnamon-Walnut Spirals” marry the best of cinnamon rolls with the convenience of a muffin/cupcake tin preparation to form a flavor-packed product that can either be breakfast, brunch or dessert. Try this recipe, courtesy of “Small Sweet Treats” (Gibbs Smith) by Marguerite Marceau Henderson, to elevate your cupcake game.

## Sticky Cinnamon-Walnut Spirals

Serves 6

- 1/2 cup dried currants
- 1 cup hot water
- 1 sheet frozen puff pastry (from 17.3-ounce package), room temperature
- 1 tablespoon butter, melted
- 1 teaspoon finely grated orange zest

- 1/2 cup finely chopped walnuts
- 1/2 cup packed dark brown sugar
- 1 teaspoon ground cinnamon
- 1 tablespoon butter, melted
- 1 tablespoon sugar



Place currants in a bowl and pour hot water over top to cover. Steep for 15 minutes and then drain off excess water. Cool currants to room temperature.

Roll out the pastry on a work surface. Brush the pastry with the melted butter. Combine the orange zest, walnuts, brown sugar, cinnamon, and reserved currants in a bowl. Spread the mixture evenly over the

pastry. Roll up jelly-roll style, loosely. Place seam side down and cut into six slices, each about 2-inches wide.

Brush the interior of the muffin tin with the remaining tablespoon of melted butter and sprinkle with sugar. Place the cut slices of pastry into each muffin cup. Bake on the middle rack of a preheated 400 F oven for 22 to 25 minutes until golden brown and puffed. Allow to cool for a minute or two before removing from muffin pan.

*Note: This recipe easily can be doubled. Just use two sheets of pastry, double the filling, and use a 12-cup muffin tin.*



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# ARTISANS HAND

*celebrates 45 years*

**By Peter Cobb**

It's been 45 years for Artisans Hand Craft Gallery in downtown Montpelier — 45 years of art, crafts, glass, pottery, jewelry, fabrics, wearable art, wood, photography, prints, cards and more. All of the products are handmade.

“The gallery’s mission has always been to present the exceptional work of Vermont’s most talented craftspeople in an artistic and beautiful way,” said board member and jeweler Lochlin Smith.

The downtown store, which is back open after closure due to the July flood, exhibits the work of more than 130 Vermont-based craftspeople in a variety of media.

The store was founded in December 1978, when a group of craftspeople decided to open a temporary gallery in a slightly dilapidated storefront on Langdon Street in Montpelier. The pop-up gallery was so successful the artists decided to make the store a permanent fixture in Montpelier.



One of the biggest changes since 1978 has been the internet, where artists and craftspeople can sell directly to the customer.

Store manager Elissa Campbell said one reason Artisans Hand has survived competition from the internet is because customers enjoy the experience of coming into the store.

“They like to hold what’s here. They like to touch the art. They like to see the art firsthand,” Campbell said.

In addition to managing the store, Campbell creates hand-bound journals, photo albums, and guest books using traditional bookbinding techniques.

“I have a website and I sell from that site but for our customers, the internet is not the same,” she said.

Board member Maggie Neale said she believes Artisans Hand has been successful because the artists bring their “creative energies into the gallery.”

Initially, the gallery was a cooperative. The artists worked in the gallery, helped with marketing and maintenance, and with anything else that needed to be done. Now all major decisions are made by the five-member board of directors, consisting of jewelers Bill Butler and



PHOTOS BY PETER COBB

Left, store manager Elissa Campbell and right, store clerk Melissa Storrow.

Lochlin Smith; silk and chenille scarf maker Maggie Neale; and potters Leslie Koehler; and Lucinda Rochester Smith. There is also a professional staff.

All exhibitors are juried and most of them are Vermont residents.

For more information, go to [www.artisanshand.com](http://www.artisanshand.com).





PHOTOS BY PETER COBB



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# The business of POTTERY in VERMONT



By Peter Cobb

**W**hen customers buy pottery or ceramics at a farmers market, craft store or studio, they buy for the beauty and functionality of the work and marvel at the skill of the artist. Few give much thought to the business end of the art. For the hundreds of Vermonters working in clay, the business of pottery drives the art as much as the art drives the business.

“Once you decide to sell, the market is your boss,” said Lucinda Rochester Smith, owner of Greenwood Pottery in Wolcott.

Smith, who has been making functional, hand-thrown pottery in Vermont for more than 40 years, says what sells, determines what she makes.

Pamela Wilson, a visual artist working primarily in clay and fiber, agrees. “No two years are exactly alike, and you are definitely subject to market forces and trends,” she said.

There are more than 200 potters listed with the Vermont Crafts Council, according to Council Director Martha Fitch, and she guesses there are an additional 200 or so in Vermont producing pottery for sale.

PHOTOS BY PETER COBB

Potter Pamela Wilson works in her Barre studio.

Many potters learned the business end of their craft either on the job or from mentors.

“I’ve spent all my life near or within fine craft communities, surrounded by folks who ran small, micro-businesses steadily or intermittently. I learned the technical side of working with clay along with the business side assisting in studios and art centers, working in galleries and then pursuing the additional small business skills as they became relevant to my own practice,” Wilson said.

“The Vermont Arts Council, Studio Place Arts and Capstone (Community Action) all offer development programs, classes, and coaching for working and teaching artists to maintain economic viability,” Wilson said.

According to Finch, one of the biggest challenges for potters and all artists is marketing products — a task especially difficult for first-time artists.

Smith agrees but says marketing today, while challenging, is much easier than it was 50 years ago. When she started in the business there were few craft stores such as Artisans Hand Craft Gallery in Montpelier, and there was no internet.

“With the internet, the whole world is your marketplace,” Smith said. What she had to do in her early days was truck her goods to farmers markets, which is not an easy task as pottery boxes are heavy and the product is fragile.

The internet market has created a new challenge: shipping.

“Shipping is a nightmare. It’s a lot of work. You have to double box everything,” Smith said.

Another challenge with pottery, it is physically demanding.

“Most trade crafts are hard on your body, especially working with clay,” Finch said.

Potters need to create a safe and



healthy workplace, Smith said, including ensuring their workplace has decent ventilation and developing work techniques that lessen common problems such as carpal tunnel issues.

The top health hazard for potters is the risk of silicosis, a lung disease caused by inhaling large amounts of silica dust over many years, according to the National Health Services.

“The workplace is certainly much different and much safer now than it was 20 years ago,” Wilson said.

Diversity of the products sold is key for some potters and other craftspeople.

“Most of the craftspeople I know work in more than one medium or method. For instance, I teach, organize community arts projects, make marketable work that goes to shops and galleries. It’s always a combination of revenue streams that support being able to make my own designs at all,” Wilson said.

Ceramics and pottery also can be quite expensive due to the equipment needed.

“Running a clay studio where you’re making at scale represents a significant investment in tools, equipment and space. That said, potters tend to be generous, scrappy, inventive problem-solvers,” Wilson said.

Vermont is a good place to work because artists here help each other, artisans say.

“There’s not a lot of us out there, so we need each other. Get a few potters in a room and they’ll immediately figure out who they know in common and start sharing stories about firings gone wrong or favorite glaze recipes. When two potters get married, it’s not unusual for them to ask for kiln bricks instead of appliances. Making things is a way of life,” Wilson said.



# HOW TO MAKE A BUCKET LIST A REALITY

Here are some tips for putting  
bucket list plans into action.

**T**he idiom “kick the bucket” is a euphemism for passing away that does not paint such a rosy picture if you consider its origins. However, the phrase “bucket list,” though undeniably related to “kick the bucket,” definitely sheds a brighter light on the topic of mortality.

A bucket list is a plan for living life to its fullest and prioritizing opportunities to engage in all sorts of activities. A bucket list can be made at any point in life and is not exclusive to individuals facing their own mortality. Here are some tips for putting bucket list plans into action.

- Stop and think about what you really want to experience in your lifetime. Leave factors like money or proximity out of it. No ideas are off-limits. This is your opportunity to brainstorm, and nothing is too crazy or silly.
- Write the bucket list in a comfortable or inspiring place, which may help ideas flow more freely. The place might be a cozy nook at a bookstore or a quiet spot on the beach.
- Choose things that are meaningful to you as well as ideas

that are frivolous and fun. Make your list a mix of each, and don't take yourself too seriously.

- Divide the bucket list by time. Are there items you can check off in a particular season, such as skiing the Alps? If your bucket list involves moving to a bustling city, determine if you'd like to do that after your children have reached adulthood or if you want to expose them to city life as youngsters. Categorizing the list by periods of your life can make it easier to prioritize certain activities over others.

- Determine if each bucket list activity will be a solitary or joint pursuit. Various activities are more enjoyable when shared with others, but some you might be more inclined to do alone.

- Set aside a budget for funding bucket list activities. Bucket lists may include some costly activities, so start saving now so money does not stand in your way. Open a savings account specifically for funding bucket list excursions and set up automatic deposits.

Bucket lists can encourage people to live life to the fullest and it's never too early to get started on a list of your own.

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**FAMILY**

# GET ONBOARD

## Santa Train a popular holiday adventure

**By Janelle Faignant**

**S**o anticipated are Santa Trains around the state that the majority of them had already sold out at the time this was written.

But the popular Manchester Lions Club Santa Express still has some seats left. Back for its ninth year with more Christmas carols, hot chocolate, and surprises, when you book a ride on the train it's also for a good cause.

Specially chartered holiday trains run all over Vermont on tours through our lovely Green Mountains, and the train sponsored by the Manchester Lions Club is its biggest charity event.

"We do a lot of stuff under the radar," said Club President and Co-Chair of the Santa Express, Penny Charbonneau. "We were helping when Londonderry got hit with the flood recently. We

### **IF YOU GO...**

The Manchester Lions Club Santa Express runs Saturday, Dec. 16, and Sunday, Dec. 17, 2023. Departures at 9 a.m., 10:30 a.m., noon, 1:30 p.m., 3 p.m. and 4:30 p.m. Saturday only at the r. k. MILES Depot Station, 670 Depot St., Manchester Center. Tickets: Adults (13+): \$40; Kids (ages 2 - 12): \$35; Under 2 (lap rider): Free. Online sales end Dec. 12 at 6 p.m. Tickets will be available at the event for most rides unless sold out.



bought water and cleaning supplies and that's not just our Lions Club, surrounding clubs all helped with that. We work with a lot of people, the community supports (us) in all of our endeavors. It's a great organization."

The proceeds from the completely volunteer-run Santa Express support local causes like the Manchester Food Cupboard, Vermont Reading Partners, and Interfaith Council, all in the name of good holiday fun.

Passengers are entertained with Christmas characters and refreshments, and Charbonneau, who joined in 2011, said they start planning it in September. Once the holidays are over they meet in January to assess how it all went and how to make it better.

"We have conductors and we have elves, we have characters in old Victorian costumes and the kids get a goodie bag," Charbonneau said. "(But) each year we try and do something a little different. We have numerous families that come

back year after year and couples that come that don't have children and they have a great time."

"Once we catch our breath we say, 'OK, how did it work for everybody, what can we do differently, were there any complaints?'" Charbonneau said. "Definitely let us know because we want to make it right. We want everybody to have a good time."

The train leaves r.k. MILES Depot Station in Manchester and takes a tour

south, with a mailbox stop to drop off letters to Santa, and opportunities to take photos with Mr. and Mrs. Claus, the conductors and the elves.

"We're ringing the bell and waving goodbye as they go down to Arlington," Charbonneau said. "You're not just sitting there, you're interacting with the conductor, and the big guy in the red suit makes a surprise visit. The kids just flip out, they have a great time."

With over 200 riders on each train, Charbonneau said, "It's a whole atmosphere."

"Santa goes to the mailbox and picks up his letters, and it looks like Santa's village," she said. "We have things for people to do while they're waiting to get on the train. It's really a great event and we really try each year to switch things up."

"We held off for two years (due to the COVID-pandemic)," she said, "and when we came back last year everybody was ready to get on the train."



PHOTOS BY PETER COBB

Darren Ohi owns the Vermont Bicycle Shop in Barre City.

# WINTER IS THE BEST TIME FOR FATBIKING

By Peter Cobb

**F**atbiking on snow, a strange name for a vigorous sport, has grown significantly over the past 15 years to where what used to be rare, sharing a snow trail with a fatbiker, is common.

“We started to see a few fatbikes on the trails in 2012. In 2013, Kingdom Trails began to groom trails specifically for fatbiking, and fatbiker trail use has grown from there,” said Lilius Ide, communication and education director at Kingdom Trails in East Burke.

Fatbikes (also spelled fat bikes, fat tire bikes, fat-tire bikes

and snow bikes) are mountain bikes with wide tires that can be used in snowy conditions. Fatbikes have oversized tires, 3.5 inches or wider.

“The goal of the fat tire, similar to snowshoes, is to provide a wider surface so that the bike can float on top of the snow surface rather than digging in,” Ide said. “Riding on snow with a skinnier tire is extremely difficult, to impossible. Even fatbiking is ideal on a groomed, hard-packed surface. Deep, three plus inches of soft snow, is not a rideable surface.”

J.T. Look, owner of Rutland City Bikes, agrees the best fatbike ride is on a groomed trail. “There are more and more groomed trails every year,” he said.

One of the advantages fatbikes have over other winter sports, Look said, is the bike purchase (and a rack if needed) is the only expense. “There are no annual fees or daily fees, just the cost of the bike,” Look said. He recommends bikers donate to the various trail organizations, however.

Fatbikes also ride well on dirt which is a plus. “With the way winters are lately, you never know, you could get snow or dirt, fatbikes ride on either,” Look said

Fatbiking is allowed on VAST snowmobile trails on state land, and there are trails at several state parks including Little River in Waterbury, Seyon Ranch and Groton State Forest.

Fat-tire biking is allowed, year-round, in Pine Hill Park, Redfield Trails and the Carriage Trail in Rutland and Proctor, and Slate Valley Trail in Poultney. There are also several trails in Woodstock.

The Pine Hill Partnership asks users to check its website for trail conditions. Daily updates start in November. The trails range from beginner to advanced. A trail map is available on the website.

Fatbiking is permitted on the Millstone Trails in Barre Town, weather and snow conditions permitting, according to Kevin Spaulding, president of the Millstone Trails Association. This winter, Millstone will have more than eight miles of groomed trails.

Darren Ohl, owner of the Vermont Bike Shop in Barre, gave a shout-out to the Millstone Trails Association. “They really know what they’re doing. They groom every day and they do it right,” he said.

There are several fatbike trails in the Stowe area including the Stowe Recreation Path, Edson Hill, Cotton Brook, Callaghy’s Trail Split Rock in Sterling Forest, and Cady Hill Forest and the 94-mile Lamoille Valley Rail Trail allows fatbikes.

Some cross-country ski areas allow fatbikes; however, some do not. At Kingdom Trails, fatbikes are not allowed on groomed ski trails, but are permitted on the non-groomed trails. Be sure to check for any restrictions.

The fatbiking season on state lands, according to James Duncan, state lands manager for the Department of Forest Parks and Recreation, opens in late December and runs until the snow melts and causes muddy conditions in the spring. If there is inadequate snow, managers may temporarily close trails throughout the winter to prevent damage to the trails.

When using trails on state land, fatbikers are asked to stay on designated trails, avoid soft snow, use bikes only with tires at least 3.8 inches wide, yield to hikers, snowshoers, skiers, and snowmobilers, and wear reflective gear.

“Riding on a hard-packed surface can be smooth and easy. The softer the surface, the harder it is to get traction. Because of the wide tire, fatbikes are very stable feeling and roll more slowly,” Ide said.

Ohl notes that not all fatbikes are good on snow. “The buyer should be aware,” he said. But once the right bike is purchased, Ohl said, “Fatbiking is great exercise, you’re outside in the fresh air, what could be better. It’s the perfect winter sport.”

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**HOLIDAY**



**'A  
CHRISTMAS  
CAROL'**  
TRADITION WITH  
WILLEM LANGE

**E**ach year, writer and storyteller Willem Lange, of East Montpelier, performs all of the parts of Charles Dickens' "A Christmas Carol." For many Vermonters, the tradition of hearing the story is a huge part of their holiday season. We recently asked Lange, who writes a weekly column in The Times Argus and Rutland Herald called "A Yankee Notebook," to discuss his connection to the story and how it has impacted him and others.

Explore: Can you recall your earliest interaction with the story? If so, what were your earliest impressions?

Lange: My first exposure to the story (spoken, not read) was as a freshman at the College of Wooster in Ohio. An elderly speech and rhetoric professor emeritus was close to winding up 50 years of giving annual readings of the story to the undergraduates. The college chapel was packed; many of us had dates; we were dressed as for church. I thought, as I listened, entranced, "Wow! But who's going to do this when Dr. Lean is gone?" Now we know.

Explore: Over the years of its retelling, how has the story changed for you?

Lange: The theme of the possibility of redemption has sharpened for me over the years. That, and the idea that most of us have plenty to share with the less fortunate, if we only will.

Explore: Why do you think this particular story is so important?

Lange: "A Christmas Carol" is universal, rather than sectarian. Who could quarrel in good conscience with the idea of sharing our good fortune, especially at Christmastime and the dark winter solstice, "when Want is keenly felt and Abundance rejoices"?

Explore: Do you have a favorite moment in the story? If so, what makes it so?

Lange: An overjoyed Scrooge throws open his window on sunny Christmas morning to his first human interaction since the events of the night before, and shouts down to a loitering boy on the yard, "What's today, me fine fella?" I love the transformation in his voice, his language and his entire affect.

Explore: You've always been a storyteller. What can be done to keep this art going?

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**There are storytellers everywhere. As Barry Lopez points out in his great illustrated book, "Crow and Weasel," our stories help us define ourselves, remind us of the boundaries of behavior, and plant our values in consistent soil. To keep the art alive, we need to read, listen to, and honor the great ones — Homer, Cervantes, Dumas, Dickens, Twain, Will Rogers, Marshall Dodge, and a whole passel of Southern yarn-spinners.**

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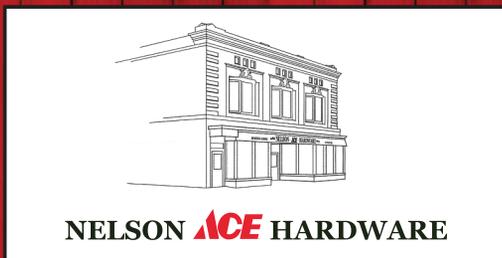
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