

HOW SWEET IT IS:  
FESTIVE DESSERTS

MAKING MERRY AT  
THE WILBURTON INN



# Our Vermont

WINTER 2022



*Yours to experience—the traditions, people,  
and places of the Green Mountain State*

# Seeing Through a Child's Eyes

I have friends who now head to warmer climes, most often just after New Year's. Their explanations tend to go like this: weary of shoveling snow, weary of scraping windshields, weary of bundling up. And after this comes the litany of what they will do instead: golfing, biking, sunning by a pool. OK, fair enough—most have lived decades in the Northeast and have earned the respite. But I think back to when I was a child, and then to when my two sons were young, and I want to ask my southbound friends if they have forgotten how magical a New England winter can be.

I know "magical" can be too easy an adjective to toss around, but consider: A Vermont village, all decorated for Christmas. Meeting school friends at the local ski hill. A first snowfall, made only better by the next. Trees and hillsides coated in white.

Remember what it was like to experience all this as a child. You wake at dawn to find steady flakes already piling up outside the window. School is closed, and now you have what seems more excitement for what you might do than any one day can hold. That feeling bores into you and becomes a part of who you are, and it never leaves.

Maybe that is what nostalgia means: remembering true feelings. And to me, those feelings always touch on home, and that home lies north. It is why my son who lives in Hawaii is homesick for mountains and snow, and every vacation day he saves is put toward finding that rush of snow underfoot again. I will never believe that shorts and shirt sleeves can evoke the same sense of comfort—or just being *settled*—that we find in flannel and soft wool and knitted hats that sparkle like dew with melting snowflakes. And of course, there's the deep comfort of winter food and holiday get-togethers.

I want to say to my friends: You were once children, and winter carried so much wonder then. Stick around and find it again. It is all around us, ready to be rediscovered as the most wonderful time of all.



*Mel Allen*

Mel Allen  
editor@yankeepub.com

# YANKEE

1121 Main St., P.O. Box 520, Dublin, NH 03444  
603-563-8111; newengland.com

*This special edition was produced by Yankee Publishing Inc. for The Vermont Country Store. Select stories and photographs are excerpted from articles previously published by Yankee.*

**Vol. 5 No. 4**

*Copyright 2022 by Yankee Publishing Inc.; all rights reserved.*

PUBLISHER  
*Brook Holmberg*

MARKETING DIRECTOR  
*Kate Hathaway Weeks*

EDITOR IN CHIEF  
*Mel Allen*

EDITOR  
*Jenn Johnson*

ART DIRECTOR  
*Katharine Van Itallie*

SENIOR FEATURES EDITOR  
*Ian Aldrich*

SENIOR FOOD EDITOR  
*Amy Traverso*

ASSOCIATE EDITOR  
*Joe Bills*

PHOTO EDITOR  
*Heather Marcus*

#### CONTRIBUTING WRITERS

*Dorinda Beaumont, Kim Knox Beckius,  
Julia Clancy, Edie Clark,  
Lisa Gosselin Lynn, Naomi Shulman*

#### CONTRIBUTING PHOTOGRAPHERS

*Corey Hendrickson, Abigail Johnston,  
Oliver Parini, Kristin Teig*

*On the cover: The chance to take a horse-drawn wagon ride through the town of Weston, home of the The Vermont Country Store, is one of the many family-friendly lures of Christmas in Weston (Dec. 3).*

*Photo by Mark Martins*

# Contents



Along with destination dining and shopping, a day trip to Middlebury offers the chance to explore pristine wooded trails at the nearby Rikert Outdoor Center. Story, p. 36

## 'Tis the Season

### 4 A Gift of the Sun

Oranges—those old-fashioned stocking stuffers—never fail to brighten a winter day.

### 5 How Sweet It Is

Full of sugar and spice, these easy-to-make, hard-to-resist desserts are perfect for any holiday feast.

### 11 Brighten the Night

Luminarias of ice and snow offer the warm light of welcome.

**Plus:** A handy how-to guide for making your own.

### 14 To Give and to Receive

How three remarkable guests bring joy to the Manchester inn that became their home away from home. **Plus:** A celebration of southern Vermont's holiday inns.

### 20 Time to Shine

Tap into Yuletide magic all across Vermont at these sparkling seasonal light displays.

### 23 The Storytellers

A Q&A with John and Jennifer Churchman, whose Vermont farm inspires their heart-warming series of children's books.

### 26 A Different Light

Finding meaning and belonging in a tradition that isn't your own.

## Winter Fun

### 29 Out & About

We round up some favorite events across the Green Mountain State that are worth the drive this season.

### 31 The Soul of Skiing

The enduring appeal of Vermont's community ski hills: compact, affordable, and filled with boundless small-town spirit.

### 36 Head of the Class

A winter trip to Middlebury shows a college town at its best.

## Made in Vermont

### 39 Local Color

Mixing cozy fabrics with eye-popping patterns, Burlington-based Skida excels at making some of the coolest ways to stay warm.

## One Last Thing

### 42 Jolly Good

How Putney's classic Christmas theme park got a new lease on life.

**YANKEE** NEW ENGLAND'S MAGAZINE  
BEST-EVER HOLIDAY BUCKET LIST  
GIFTS of The SEASON  
2021 Yankee Food Awards  
Recipes for Family Feasts  
Decked-Out Historic Homes  
Artisan Crafts Shopping Guide  
PLUS: How Myrtle the Turtle Brings Joy to the World

**SAVE 58% off cover price**

**A special deal for customers of**  
**The Vermont Country Store**  
**One year of *Yankee Magazine* for only \$19.97**  
Subscribe now at [vermontcountrystore.com/YANKEE](http://vermontcountrystore.com/YANKEE)

# A Gift of the Sun

*This old-timey Christmas treat never fails to brighten a winter day.*

My father used to tell us, when we were little, that what he got in his stocking for Christmas was oranges. My sister and I always reacted with surprise. *Oranges?* They seemed so common. Why would these be given as gifts? Were his parents trying to tell him something? The crayons and tiny games and chocolates that came in our stockings seemed much more exotic. But, he tried to tell us, when he was a boy in the early part of the century, an orange was just as exciting as Swiss chocolate was to us. In those days, oranges came at great expense, making an incredible journey north from the orchards of Florida.

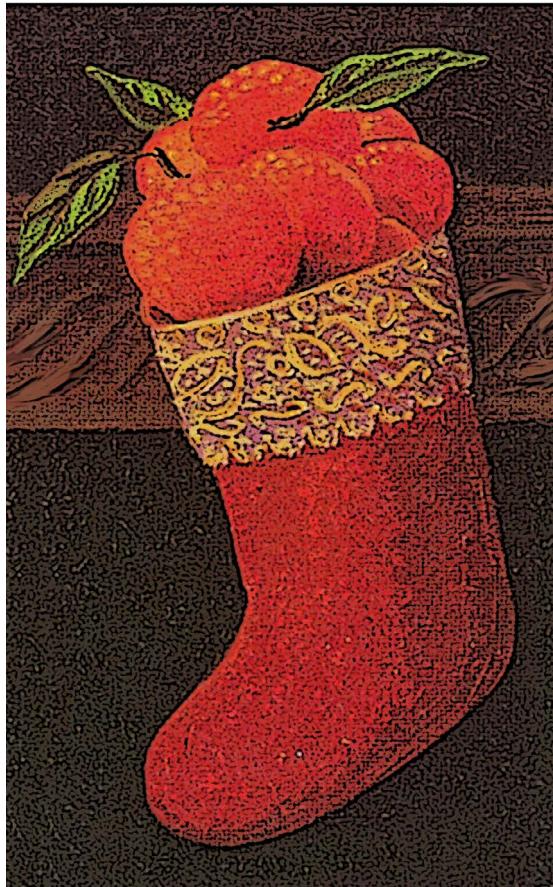
Over the years I have honed my taste to think of oranges in a New England winter as not only exotic, but also useful in surprising ways. My only criterion is that they come directly from Florida without stopping first at the supermarket. I accomplish this by buying oranges from Agway. The store takes orders in October and the fruit arrives in mid-November in big half-bushel boxes, as if right from the orchard. I buy the navel oranges. They come softball-sized, good and sweet and only slightly orange on a field of green, just the way oranges really look when they come off the trees, not the bright orangey-yellow of those in pyramids at our supermarkets, the skin stamped with a brand as if it were a container.

The first time I bought these big boxes of Agway citrus fruit, I did so a bit nervously. After all, they were not cheap, and I wondered if we would be able to eat them all before they went by. It took me a couple of years before I realized that oranges could be put in the

root cellar like all the rest of our produce. I suppose I didn't think of citrus and the root cellar in the same way. Root cellars were for good old-fashioned root vegetables like potatoes and turnips. But once I made the connection, I found these southern beauties kept as well as squash and pumpkins down there—not for the whole season, but for long enough to make it possible to get to the bottom layer of the box before the fruit spoiled.

To that end, in these winter months I eat an orange a day, a delight in itself. But I've found that there are two additional perks to having fresh citrus in the winter. I eat the orange at lunch, the old Glenwood parlor stove warming the room where I sit. I take the peel off in coin-sized pieces and place these pieces in a row along the backside of the stove, where the heat is less intense. An aroma creeps forth, a mouthwatering scent stronger than that of the orange itself, more like something cooking, like marmalade or some custardy-rich, orange-scented confection. As the coins of citrus peel slowly dry and turn dark, their scent fills the house, a big, satisfying aroma that lingers for several hours in the warm wood-heated air.

I've also discovered that the dried peel has a use all its own. In the rind is oil. The drying process evaporates the moisture in the peel, but retains these oils. Throw a chip onto dying embers and the fire flares up, a phoenix rising. I keep a jar filled with dried peel beside the stove. When the fire dies and I'm short on kindling, I toss these onto the coals, and my warmth is revived, a surprising, and yes, maybe even exotic treat to us in the north from our friends in Florida. —Edie Clark





*'Tis the Season*

# How Sweet It Is

*Easy-to-make, hard-to-resist desserts for your holiday feast.*





## Shortbread Stars

*These cookies look so pretty but take very little time to decorate. The trick to great flavor is to combine the simple, buttery shortbread with the richness of bittersweet chocolate (though you can use whatever style of chocolate you prefer).*

**16 tablespoons salted butter, softened  
1 cup confectioners' sugar  
1½ teaspoons almond extract  
1¼ teaspoons ground cardamom (optional)  
½ teaspoon table salt  
1¾ cups all-purpose flour  
¼ cup cornstarch  
5 ounces bittersweet chocolate  
Flaky sea salt (optional)**

Preheat your oven to 300 °F and set racks to the upper and lower third positions. Line two large

baking sheets with parchment paper and set them aside.

In a large bowl, cream together the butter, sugar, almond extract, cardamom, and salt. Add the flour and cornstarch and beat until a dough forms. Gather into a ball, press into a disk, and wrap in plastic wrap. Refrigerate at least 1 hour and up to 2 days.

Gently roll the dough out onto a floured surface to a ¼-inch thickness. Cut out your stars and transfer them to the prepared baking sheets. Gather and reroll the dough as needed.

Bake until pale golden brown, about 30 minutes. Transfer to a wire rack to cool. When cooled, melt the chocolate in a double boiler or a microwave. Dip half of each cookie into the melted chocolate, then return to the parchment paper and sprinkle with sea salt, if using. *Yields about 2 dozen cookies.*



## Gingersnap Brownies

Dense and chewy like chocolate brownies, these delicious bars are packed with warm spice and molasses.

### FOR THE BARS

- 16 gingersnap cookies
- 2 cups all-purpose flour
- 1 cup granulated sugar
- 1½ teaspoons ground ginger
- 1½ teaspoons ground cinnamon
- ¾ teaspoon cloves
- 1 teaspoon baking soda
- ½ teaspoon baking powder
- ½ teaspoon table salt
- ¾ cup vegetable oil
- ½ cup molasses
- 1 large egg
- 3 tablespoons water

### FOR THE DRIZZLE

- 1 cup confectioners' sugar
- 2 tablespoons milk

Preheat your oven to 350 °F and set a rack in the middle position. Line a 9-inch-square baking pan with parchment paper so that some of the paper hangs over two sides, like handles. Line the bottom of the pan with the gingersnap cookies, breaking them into smaller pieces as needed to fit.

Using a stand or handheld mixer, combine all the remaining ingredients in a large bowl and beat until combined. Pour into the pan and bake until the center is puffed and set and the brownies begin to pull away from the sides, 25 to 30 minutes. Remove from the oven and set the pan on a wire rack; when they have cooled, remove from the pan using the parchment handles.

To make the drizzle, whisk the confectioners' sugar with the milk in a medium bowl until smooth. Drizzle over the brownies in a pretty pattern. Let the glaze set for 15 minutes, then cut into pieces and serve. Yields 12 servings.

'Tis the Season



## Lemon-Pistachio Bundt Cake

Here's something especially cheerful for winter dining, with a deep flavor and a bright green and yellow color from the lemon and pistachios.

### FOR THE CAKE

- 16 tablespoons unsalted butter, softened, plus more for greasing pan
- 2 cups granulated sugar
- 3 cups all-purpose flour, plus more for dusting pan
- 2 teaspoons table salt
- 1 teaspoon baking powder
- ½ teaspoon baking soda
- 4 large eggs, at room temperature
- 1 cup buttermilk, at room temperature
- ½ cup unsalted pistachios (roasted), roughly chopped
- Zest of 1 large lemon
- 3 tablespoons lemon juice

### FOR THE GLAZE AND GARNISH

- 1½ cups confectioners' sugar
- 3 tablespoons lemon juice
- Lemon zest curls
- Chopped pistachios

Preheat your oven to 350 °F and set a rack to the middle position. Grease a Bundt pan with butter and sprinkle with flour; turn to coat and shake off excess. Set aside.

Using a stand or handheld mixer, cream the butter and sugar on high speed until pale and very fluffy, about 6 minutes. Stop and scrape down the sides of the bowl halfway through. Separately, in a medium bowl, whisk together the flour, salt, baking powder, and baking soda. Set aside.

Add the eggs, one at a time, to the butter mixture, beating well and scraping the bowl after each. With the mixer on low speed, add a third of

the flour mixture to the batter and mix until just incorporated. Add half of the buttermilk and briefly mix. Repeat with another third of flour mixture, then the remaining buttermilk, then the rest of the flour mixture. Fold in the pistachios, lemon zest, and lemon juice until smooth.

Pour batter into the pan and bake until a tester inserted into the center comes out clean, 45 to 55 minutes. Remove from oven, turn out onto a cooling rack, and let rest for 10 minutes. Then remove the pan and let cool to room temperature.

To make the glaze, whisk together the confectioners' sugar and lemon juice in a medium bowl until smooth.

Generously drizzle the cake with the glaze, letting it run down the sides. Let it set for 5 minutes, then sprinkle with lemon zest curls and chopped pistachios. Let the cake set for 10 minutes, then serve. *Yields 10 to 12 servings.*



## Pumpkin Pie Crumble

*Pumpkin spice fans will love this easy crumble. The trick is to apply the topping about halfway through baking so it doesn't sink to the bottom.*

### FOR THE FILLING

- Butter, for greasing pan
- 2 (15-ounce) cans pumpkin puree
- 2 cups heavy cream
- 1 cup firmly packed light brown sugar
- 3 large eggs
- 2½ teaspoons pumpkin pie spice
- 1 teaspoon table salt

### FOR THE TOPPING

- ½ cup all-purpose flour
- ½ cup chopped pecans or walnuts
- ½ cup rolled oats
- ½ cup firmly packed light brown sugar
- ½ teaspoon table salt
- 6 tablespoons chilled salted butter, cut into small pieces
- Whipped cream or vanilla ice cream

Preheat your oven to 350 °F and set a rack to the middle position. Grease a 9-by-13-inch baking dish with butter and set aside.

In a large bowl, whisk together the pumpkin puree, cream, brown sugar, eggs, spice, and salt. Pour into the baking dish. Bake for 20 minutes.

Meanwhile, make the topping: In the bowl of a stand mixer or food processor, mix all the ingredients until the mixture looks like wet sand with some pea-sized lumps of butter.

After cooking for 20 minutes, the edges will be just set and the center will still be loose. Sprinkle the topping evenly over the filling. Return to the oven and bake until the center is set, 25 to 30 minutes more. If the top needs extra browning, run it briefly under a broiler. Serve warm with whipped cream or vanilla ice cream. Yields 8 to 10 servings.



## Chocolate-Peppermint Cloud Cake

*Crushed peppermints give the whipped cream frosting its gorgeous pink color.*

- 6 large eggs, whites and yolks separated, at room temperature**  
**½ teaspoon cream of tartar**  
**½ cup plus ¾ cup granulated sugar**  
**⅔ cup steaming hot water**  
**½ cup Dutch-process cocoa powder**  
**1¼ cups all-purpose flour**  
**1¼ teaspoons baking powder**  
**¼ teaspoon baking soda**  
**½ teaspoon table salt**  
**½ cup vegetable oil**  
**1 teaspoon vanilla extract**  
**15 peppermint candies, finely crushed**  
**1½ cups whipping cream**

Preheat your oven to 325 °F and set a rack in the middle position. Line the bottom of a 9-by-13-inch baking dish with parchment paper cut to fit, and set aside (do not grease).

In a very clean bowl, using a stand or handheld mixer, beat the egg whites with the cream of tartar on medium speed until they begin to foam. Add ½ cup sugar in a very slow stream and beat on high until stiff peaks form. Set aside.

In a medium bowl, whisk together the hot water and the cocoa powder. Set aside to cool. In a large bowl, whisk together the

flour, ¾ cup sugar, baking powder, baking soda, and salt. Set aside.

Whisk the egg yolks, oil, and vanilla into the cocoa mixture. Add this to the dry ingredients, whisking until smooth (scrape the sides of the bowl halfway through). Now gently fold in a third of the egg whites until evenly combined. Add remaining egg whites and gently fold until evenly incorporated.

Pour batter into the prepared baking dish. Bake until the cake is set in the center and just begins to pull away from the sides, 30 to 35 minutes. Remove cake from oven; immediately invert pan onto a baking rack and let cool completely.

When the cake is cool, turn it right-side up. Take ½ cup of the crushed peppermint candies and set them aside for sprinkling over the cake.

To make the frosting, beat the whipping cream until stiff peaks form. Fold the remaining candy into the whipped cream. It will turn a pretty shade of pink. Spread this frosting over the cake in thick swirls. Sprinkle with reserved candy. The cake will keep in the refrigerator for up to two days but is best served right away. *Yields 8 to 10 servings.*



'Tis the Season

# Brighten the Night

*Luminarias of ice and snow offer the warm light of welcome.*



**A**t four o'clock on Christmas Eve, the family scene is rapidly growing chaotic. My 9-year-old son, Nathan, is trying to get his uncooperative uncle interested in a card game. His younger sister, Becky, is concerned about putting out the reindeer food—a mixture of oatmeal and red glitter—her kindergarten teacher gave her, and she's so wound up she can neither be still for an instant nor find anything she wants to do. Baby Sarah, meanwhile, seems to have a bit of tummy trouble and is not her usual sunny self.

What we all need is a project. It should be a short project with no messy aftermath, one that will get us away from the steamy kitchen, away from the plates of cookies, and preferably outside.

We go out into the blue dusk. While the children add a few last touches to the crooked snowman we made earlier in the day, I have an idea and go back in for plumber's candles and a box of matches. Soon Nathan is busy constructing a miniature igloo out of hardened lumps of snow. Becky is highly motivated because she wants to be sure the reindeer will find their food. She runs back to the kitchen to get

a Bundt pan to use as a mold. In 15 minutes we have half a dozen snow lanterns, and we're ready for the lighting ceremony.

We collect the more sedentary grown-ups and stuff Sarah into her snowsuit. Becky pushes a candle into each hollow mound of snow and Nathan lights the matches. Gradually the familiar snow-clad farmyard begins to fill with a soft glow. We all stand silent, our nervous energy momentarily stilled. The lifeless blanket of snow is illuminated by the small warm flames, and I become aware of the vast dark bowl of sky overhead studded with cold and distant stars. I picture how it will look to Santa tonight as he approaches from above.

A few days later there was a fresh snowfall. We were looking forward to some friends and neighbors dropping by for New Year's Eve and I realized that the snow lanterns could be put to practical use—the



Whether you opt to make snow lanterns (above) or ice lanterns (previous page), the process is something that the whole family can help with—and the beautiful results speak for themselves.

icy path to the house can be slippery in the dark. But the weather had turned bitterly cold and the new snow wouldn't pack. Could there be a way to make lanterns out of ice?

It took some fooling around to work out an easy system; at 2:00 a.m. on December 31 I was out on the porch topping off buckets, dribbling icy water on my bedroom slippers and wondering why I was doing this. A vixen called across the river and a fox answered. The waxing moon was setting in the west in an unearthly pink glow. I stopped wondering and went back to bed.

That evening, ice lanterns glittered along the path and I told all the guests I'd planned it that way: soft snow for Christmas, bright ice for New Year's, what could be more natural? —Dorinda Beaumont

# HOLIDAY CRAFT 101

Want to try your hand at creating nature's luminarias? Here's how to get started.

## \* \* \* \* \* \* \* \* \* \* \* \* \* \* \* HOW TO MAKE SNOW LANTERNS \* \* \* \* \* \* \* \* \* \* \*

When you have plenty of good packing snow (try to think of it as a blessing), these are a cinch to make. Just pack fresh snow into a five-gallon plastic bucket or similar deep container, tamping it down well as you go. It

should unmold tidily right away; tap around the sides if necessary to get the snow to release. Use a long-handled kitchen spoon (or a small well-gloved hand) to hollow out the center, making a tube about 4 inches wide

and 8 to 10 inches deep. Push in a candle; the snow at the bottom will hold it upright. Any size candle will do as long as the flame is below the top of the lantern, where it's safe from drafts.

## \* \* \* \* \* \* \* \* \* \* \* \* \* \* \* HOW TO MAKE ICE LANTERNS \* \* \* \* \* \* \* \* \* \* \*

These are a bit more trouble to make, but they last a long time if you don't get a thaw, and they cast a lovely light. To make one, you'll need:

- a five-gallon bucket
- a two-liter plastic soda bottle
- a sharp craft knife and scissors
- a weight that will fit inside the bottle (a rock, small brick, anything that weighs about three pounds will do)

**STEP 1.** Fill the bucket with about 4 inches of cold water and set on a level surface somewhere outdoors. (Locating one of these in the middle of the winter may be the hardest thing about making ice lanterns. The back porch is probably not as flat as you think.) Let it freeze solid.

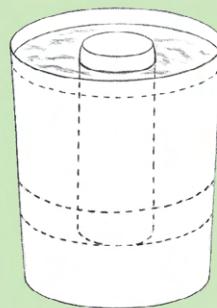


**STEP 2.** Cut a small horizontal slit in the bottle an inch above the label (just above where it

starts to taper). Using the slit as a start, cut off the top of the bottle with scissors and discard.



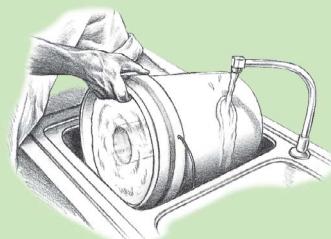
**STEP 3.** Set the soda bottle in the center of the bucket on the frozen bottom layer of ice and put the weight in the bottle. Add about 2 inches of water, being careful not to get any in the bottle.



**STEP 4.** When the second layer is frozen hard, add water to come within an inch of the top of

the bottle. Again, make sure none gets inside.

**STEP 5.** Allow the water to freeze. At 0 °F it will freeze overnight. You'll know it's done if you tilt the bucket and don't hear anything slosh.



**STEP 6.** Remove the weight. Peel the flexible bottle away from the ice and remove. Run warm water over the outside of the bucket to free the ice lantern, or just set the bucket in a heated place for half an hour.



**STEP 7.** Place a wide candle in the lantern or use a handful of snow to support a taper.

'Tis the Season

# To Give and to Receive

*How three remarkable  
guests bring joy to the inn  
that became their home  
away from home.*



Pamela Ogden decks the halls  
at the Wilburton Inn, where  
she and two close friends have  
returned year after year to serve  
as ambassadors of good cheer.

**F**or one peaceful evening in Manchester's Wilburton Inn, the fresh-cut tree in the grand living room will stand tall, stout, and fragrant, but bare. The tumult of boxes, dragged down from the attic, will sit untouched. Canine inn concierge Jetson, a floppy-eared Cavalier King Charles spaniel, won't have to share his mansion with a sleigh-load of other pups. And the Wilburton's mischievous angels—three women from New York state whose friendship has been a constant through the ups and downs of four decades—will exchange gifts and reminisce about Christmases past in their head-to-toe-matching sleepwear: red robes, sequined hair bows, and black PJs printed with gingerbread girls.

Tomorrow is Thursday, December 2. Tomorrow, three intense days of decorating and joy-making begin. "Even though it's work here, it's different work," says trio member Julia Scarincio.

What started as a lark—decorating the Christmas tree while the Wilburton Inn's owners slept—has become something more than a 16-year tradition. It's a commitment. A challenge. And after missing 2020 due to pandemic restrictions, "the girls" have some surprises up their fur-trimmed sleeves. It's all a bit like improv theater, with twice-daily costume changes (no outfit is ever repeated).

"We don't even know what's going to happen next," says Pamela Ogden. A devoted grandmother and daycare provider, she's the eldest of the three; the youngest is Janice Blair, a nurse. The women are particularly secretive about their entry in the upcoming Manchester Merriment Lighted Tractor Parade, just three days away. From the way they talk, though, they are clearly feeling confident.

When it's time to turn in for the evening, Julia, Pamela, and Janice climb the mansion's ornate staircase to Room 5—the Best Friends Room, named in their honor. Dozens of photos of the trio are on display in the hallway outside their room. Whether they're dressed in matching holiday garb or springtime getups like butterfly costumes, they're all smiles during their twice-annual stays.

Yet it was a life-changing event that first brought them here from across the New York border 17 winters



ago. Pamela's marriage was ending when they arrived at this 11-bedroom Harvard-brick manse. "I told the girls, 'I need to get away,'" she recalls.

Julia, who manages a clothing store in Lake George, jokes that at the time, "we did not know what an inn was." And they were unnerved to learn they'd be left to their own devices for the night while the Wilburton's owners, Dr. Albert and Georgette Levis, returned to their own home. But soon the 1902 mansion—the hilltop centerpiece of the Levis family's collection of rental homes and guest units—"turned into our soft haven," Julia says. "The fireplace. Being together. It was everything."

Once back home in upstate New York, Pamela printed photos from their Vermont stay to fill spaces that once held pictures of her former husband. "Before long, the whole wall was Wilburton. I knew it was real love," she says. During the girls' second annual holiday-season visit, it was her idea to decorate the Christmas tree under cover of night.

"You're going to be in trouble," Janice cautioned her.

Julia was hesitant, too. "I'm not a rule breaker."

But when innkeeper Georgette swept in the next morning, she gushed, "It's the most beautiful tree I've ever seen."

\* \* \* \*

**A** Greek Holocaust survivor and eminent psychiatrist, Albert Levis has always preferred real estate investments to money in the bank. Still, his family was shocked when they left his 50th birthday dinner at the Wilburton Inn in 1987 with a plan hatched to purchase the property that their waiter told them was about to be auctioned.

Georgette Levis felt from the start that stunning mountain views weren't all visitors craved. Guests came to the inn seeking connection. They were looking for something more in their lives. "People like being part of something bigger. Everyone likes feeling purposeful," says her daughter Melissa, a writer and singer-songwriter.

Even before Georgette's passing in 2014, Melissa and her three siblings—playwright Tajlei, farmer and bread baker Oliver, and psychologist Max—had

## The Wilburton fosters the ability to look on the bright side of life and not take things too seriously—in other words, playfulness.



begun to lend their ideas and creative talents to the inn's offerings. And here, their father began realizing his dream of utilizing the mansion and its expansive grounds as an education center, where his ideas about conflict resolution and the creative process would inspire sculpture installations, exhibits, workshops, and everyday conversations.

Dr. Levis's teachings can be challenging to grasp, but at their heart, they emphasize wellness over illness in the arena of mental health. Every aspect of the Wilburton fosters the ability to look on the bright side of life and to not take things too seriously—playfulness, in other words.

"Everyone is welcome here; you can bring yourself," says Melissa, who loves it when the mansion's formal lines dissolve into a blank canvas for guests' creative self-expression. You don't need to cram your overnight bag with funny Christmas sweaters and twinkling headgear. Then again, if you want to escape from the world for a while, perhaps you do.

\* \* \* \*

**T**he costumes make people want to talk to us," Julia says. Her snowman dress is cinched at the waist with a red, white, and green scarf, and her shaggy white fur boots glow with mini lights. The

FROM LEFT: Julia Scarincio strings lights onto the Wilburton tree; four-legged guests get into the spirit during the Canine Christmas Slumber Party, another beloved tradition at the inn; Janice, Julia, and Pamela step out for lunch at The Equinox, dressed to the nines.

triplets are back from Thursday morning breakfast in the village, where they caused their usual stir. Now, their labor of love begins in earnest. It's not just the towering tree that cries out to be adorned. As Georgette's portrait above the roaring wood fire surveys the scene, the women trim the mantelpiece, the windows, the doorframes. It's an all-day undertaking that will continue late into the night, when no one else is stirring.

The earliest guests to arrive, Michael and Nancy Kaleski, help hang ornaments while their four-legged companion, Pippi, gets reacquainted with Jetson. Like most who book dog-friendly rooms and cottages the first weekend in December, they're here for the merry madness of the Wilburton's annual Canine Christmas Slumber Party. Others who are gathering on this hilltop have come to celebrate Hanukkah with extended family. "Frequently, we have simultaneous joy going on," says Melissa.

"Our dad loves to see the inn used so well," Tajlei chimes in.

Janice takes extra care fluffing the tinsel tree outside the Best Friends Room. To members of the public who



will parade through during Saturday's regional Holiday Inn Tours, coordinated by the Shires of Vermont, this little fuchsia tree won't appear to be anything more than a store-bought accent. But it speaks of intimate connections. Before 2020, the women had missed decorating the Wilburton only once, when Pamela was diagnosed with breast cancer and required surgery in Maryland. Her best friends spent two weeks by her side. Julia quit her job to be there; Janice took all of her vacation time. And Melissa Levis sent this shiny

tree, along with Wilburton T-shirts and robes. "I wasn't scared or anything," Pamela remembers. "These girls were with me. They never left me once."

The winter sun shoots through my third-floor window, rousing me from the comfy four-poster bed. I tiptoe downstairs to see what the elves have accomplished overnight. I peek at the tree: gorgeous. But the hubbub of ladders and lights and vacuums sends me retreating with a mug of coffee to a quiet bench seat on the staircase landing.

The inn's wedding planner and front desk manager, Meesha Kropp, breezes through, surveys the scene, and proclaims, "Glitter days are here again!" In a phrase, she's captured a universal hope for this holiday season: sparkling normalcy. If the pandemic has a silver lining, it's the lessons it's taught grown-ups about appreciating things previously taken for granted.

I'm eagerly awaiting Friday's costume reveal, and Pamela, Julia, and Janice do not disappoint. They descend the staircase dressed as three Mrs. Clauses, with coordinating red velour and white fur shopping totes. And they're headed to Manchester Village to stimulate smiles and the local economy. But first: a traditional stop at The Equinox for lunch with "Doc,"



as they affectionately call Dr. Levis.

"The ho-ho-hos are here!" Pamela announces as they stride through the elegant resort in high-heeled black boots with white fur cuffs. The silliness turns serious over their meal, though, as this is the first time Doc has heard the story of why they originally came to stay at the Wilburton. It's an emotional tale, but one with a plot twist: Pamela and her ex, Malcolm, reunited 15 years later, after taking their daughter to prom together. He'll be driving the Wilburton float in tomorrow's parade, with Doc and Tajlei seated in a place of honor on the flatbed. One float secret is out of Santa's bag.

The next day, a wild dash of festive events unfolds at the Wilburton, starting with the Ugly Christmas Sweater Fashion Parade and Party. Guests and their pups have dressed not just for photos but to win prizes and bragging rights. The breeds are diverse, and so are the owners: couples of all ages, best friends, a mom and a daughter. Sharon Spevock drove solo from West Virginia with little Winnie (and a weekend-long lineup of matching owner-and-dog attire). When the Food Network's *Cupcake Wars* winner Heather Saffer joins in dancing the hora around the menorah, so does her dog, Donald.

It feels like one big doggy-adoring family when the group reconvenes for a Saturday morning stroll through town. By Saturday night's Slumber Party and Fireside Sing-a-Long, the comfort level is so high, we're all in jammies, singing carols, and sharing holiday memories from varied religious and ethnic traditions.

**Dr. Levis, who bought the Wilburton in 1987 with his late wife, Georgette, takes a stroll outside the strolls the inn's grounds with Melissa and Tajlei, along with canine concierge Jetson.**

The fire and newfound friendships provide a welcome surge of warmth. Just hours before, the outdoor temperature was plummeting toward the teens as we waited for the start of the lighted tractor parade. For the first time, the girls had invited their families to join the assembled crowd. Janice's mom, dad, and husband made the trip, as did Julia's son and daughter-in-law and Pamela's four daughters, their husbands, and all six grandchildren. At last, they would glimpse the wonder these three conjure every time they slip into "only in Manchester" mode.

Twinkling tractors and floats rumbled by, with children waving, music playing, and faux snow flying. Then came the Wilburton's flashy winter wonderland float, with Doc and Tajlei waving from their seat at the rear. All eyes, though, especially the children's, were on the three snow princesses with their cascading blond wigs, fur-trimmed capes, and illuminated tiaras. No regal waves from these three—they're kicking up their white go-go boots, hands in the air.

The crowd dispersed quickly after Santa and Mrs. Claus made their appearance. I was the only soul standing by, shivering, while the judges deliberated. I already knew, though, who'd be bringing home the \$300 prize for best overall float. Because in every good holiday story, it is the loving, the selfless, the generous of spirit who experience miracles. Who reap joy as their reward. —*Kim Knox Beckius*

# JINGLE ALL THE WAY

Visit the Wilburton and other “holiday inns” as part of a festive fundraiser.

**C**an you visit *every* decked-out property participating in **The Shires' Holiday Inn Tours** in a single Saturday? “If you’re fast!” says John Burnham, executive director of the Manchester Business Association, which is organizing this 30-plus-year-old tradition as it returns Dec. 3 and 10.

Don’t think of it as a race, though. This inn-to-inn journey through Bennington County, the only Vermont county with two “shires,” or county seats, invites you to drive from one picturesque town to another, relish the scent of pines and the crunch of snow underfoot, and feel inspired as you taste homemade treats and snap photos of wondrous decor. A warm welcome awaits at:

- **South Shire Inn, Bennington**, an architecturally significant Victorian mansion where you’ll be enchanted from the first whiff of hot apple cider.
- **Rockwell’s Retreat, Arlington**, the former home of beloved artist Norman Rockwell (plus, one of Vermont’s oldest covered bridges is right outside). *12/3 only*
- **West Mountain Inn, Arlington**, a century-old estate with a grand mountain backdrop and a fire burning in the woodstove.
- **The Arlington Inn, Arlington**, a red-shuttered stunner on Route 7A, where the locally harvested tree is a sight to behold.
- **The Ira Allen House, Sunderland**, built by Green Mountain Boys leader Ethan Allen and one of the oldest inns in the state.
- **The Wilburton Inn, Manchester**, a lavishly decorated hilltop mansion that also hosts a separately ticketed Christmas cabaret with Broadway’s Melissa Marlin. *12/3 only*
- **The Inn at Ormsby Hill, Manchester**, known for mantelpiece decorations that grow more elaborate each year and a rich history stretching back to 1764. *12/3 only*
- **The Barnstead Inn, Manchester**, a farmhouse B&B with its own local market and a country Christmas vibe.
- **The Equinox, Manchester**, a landmark



The Shires' Holiday Inn Tours offer the chance to peek inside more than a dozen beautifully decorated lodging properties in Bennington County, including the Dorset Inn (TOP PHOTOS) and Arlington's West Mountain Inn (LEFT).

luxury retreat that’s transformed into a holiday wonderland of floral artistry.

- **The Reluctant Panther, Manchester**, where evergreen adornments and golden light invite tour-goers in for a cozy visit.
- **Hampton Inn & Suites, Manchester**, a pet-friendly family favorite in Manchester Center, ideally located if you’re staying for the Dec. 3 lighted tractor parade.
- **Kimpton Taconic, Manchester**, an upscale boutique hotel with a grand, picture-perfect front porch.

■ **Wilson House, East Dorset**, famed as the birthplace of Alcoholics Anonymous co-founder Bill Wilson and now a welcoming destination for those in recovery.

- **The Dorset Inn, Dorset**, a gracious haven that has greeted travelers since 1796; you may want to return for dinner by the fire.
- **Barrows House, Dorset**, which is at its loveliest dressed up in white lights.
- **Squire House B&B, Dorset**, which will welcome you as if you’re returning to your own antiques-furnished country estate.

## IF YOU GO

■ **The Shires' Holiday Inn Tours** run from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. on two Saturdays, Dec. 3 and 10. You can buy tickets when arriving at any participating inn or purchase online at [exploretheshire.com](http://exploretheshire.com). Tickets are \$20 for one person; \$30 for two. All proceeds will go toward three area nonprofits that help to feed those in need.

'Tis the Season

# Time to Shine

*Tap into Yuletide magic at Vermont's sparkling light displays.*



A constellation of holiday lights  
fills Church Street Marketplace  
in downtown Burlington.

**V**ermont isn't the kind of place that touts miles of splashy holiday lights along big city boulevards; instead, towns across the Green Mountain State find their own ways to shine, large and small. From tractors to a waterfall, from a historic steamship to a blazing Yule log on a village green, Vermont has no end of wonderful, unique displays to brighten the holiday season.

## Shelburne

Shelburne Museum had a big hit on its hands when it debuted **Winter Lights** last year, so it's no surprise the event is back and more sparkly than ever. Visitors can explore an extravaganza of illumination throughout the museum's campus, including the Lake Champlain steamer *Ticonderoga*—high, dry, handsome, and bedecked with lights. Special events include a Lake Champlain Chocolates member night and an ice bar evening. *Select dates 11/25–1/1; shelburnemuseum.org*

## Stowe

At Stowe Mountain Resort, the **Spruce Peak Lights Festival** offers evergreens laden with tiny lights as the picture-perfect background for the evening's Christmas tree lighting, while the mountaintop itself is the launch locale for a spectacular fireworks display. While waiting for the pyrotechnics, take to the ice at the Village skating rink. *12/17; sprucepeak.com*

## Burlington

All along its bustling four blocks of shops and restaurants, **Church Street Marketplace** is decked out for the holidays, with garlands of lights weaving overhead and businesses vying to outdo each other with window displays. Take it all in on the day after Thanksgiving, with the lighting of the 30-foot evergreen that stands at the head of this popular pedestrian mall. *11/25; churchstmarketplace.com*

## Middlebury

Any town can light its streets, but how many get to light a waterfall? During the monthlong **Very Merry Middlebury** celebration, this college town's central water feature, the falls of Otter Creek, is spectacularly illuminated in an array of glowing colors. Not that the rest of downtown will be in the dark—holiday lights abound, reaching a bright crescendo at the town Christmas tree in the Marble Works Riverfront Park. *"Midd Night Strolls" 12/2, 12/9, and 12/16; experiencemiddlebury.com*

## South Royalton

At the **Joseph Smith Birthplace**, extensive grounds surrounding a monument to the founder of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints blaze with color each holiday season. Tens of thousands of tiny lights cast



Shelburne Museum's iconic steamship *Ticonderoga* gets a fanciful new look during Winter Lights.

'Tis the Season



The Spruce Peak Lights Festival invites families to come for the twinkling displays, and stay for ice skating, fireworks, and more.

nearly every tree in a different color, while visitors make a slow circuit of the site's paved drives to take it all in.  
11/25–1/1; [newsroom.churchofjesuschrist.org](http://newsroom.churchofjesuschrist.org)

## Manchester

To be sure, Manchester will be adorned with plenty of holiday lights that stay serenely in one place. But to really catch the spirit of the town, the place to be is along the roadside to watch the lights roll by at the annual **Lighted Tractor Parade**, featuring more than two dozen tractors, with floats in tow, illuminated to the nth degree and competing for prizes. 12/3; [manchestervermont.com](http://manchestervermont.com)

## St. Albans

St. Albans enjoys one of the state's loveliest downtown green spaces, Taylor Park. Graced with a magnificent fountain, it also has dozens of stately trees that are illuminated for the annual **Festival of Trees** and laser light show. Plus, all season long, visitors are invited to take a "Tree Walk" to view decorated trees in downtown shop windows. 11/26; [vtfestivaloftrees.com](http://vtfestivaloftrees.com)

## Essex Junction

Beginning after Thanksgiving and running through the new year, **Winter Lights in the Park** is truly a

signature holiday celebration. Trees throughout Maple Street Park, just a few blocks from the village's Five Corners center, glitter with lights as speakers play seasonal tunes. Special ornaments are hidden in the trees, and visitors are challenged to spot them in a merry scavenger hunt. [essexjunction.org](http://essexjunction.org)

## Woodstock

Woodstock's streets are bedecked with lights all through the Yuletide, but the best time to visit is **Wassail Weekend**. Village homes show off their decorations during a house tour, Billings Farm basks in the glow of old-fashioned lighting and decorations, and the town green is the scene for the most spectacular light of all: the towering Yule log flames that cap off the weekend. 12/9–12/11; [woodstockvt.com](http://woodstockvt.com)

## Quechee

Although wild critters are the undisputed stars at the Vermont Institute of Natural Science (VINS), the landscape itself steps into the spotlight during **A Forest of Lights**, when the VINS Forest Canopy Walk and surrounding woodland are dressed in thousands of twinkling bulbs. Visitors are invited to stroll through the immersive illuminated forest and experience its peace and wonder. Fridays & Saturdays 11/25–1/15; [vinsweb.org](http://vinsweb.org) —Bill Scheller



# The Storytellers

*For children's book authors John and Jennifer Churchman, the animals on their Vermont farm are a gift that keeps on giving.*



Writing a children's book together was always on John and Jennifer Churchman's "someday" list—and then along came a lamb named Sweet Pea. When this orphan at their Essex farm injured her leg, John posted online updates about her recovery—and people's response to Sweet Pea's story was so overwhelming that the Churchmans realized they had the makings of their dreamed-of book. But they had a lot more than that: Their self-published tale, *The SheepOver*, caught the attention of a top literary agent who'd helped bring the first "Harry Potter" books to the U.S.; sparked a bidding war among major publishing houses; and in 2015 became a best-seller. Since then, the Churchmans have gone on to write and illustrate six more children's books inspired by day-to-day life at their home, Moonrise Farm, and tapping into their individual talents (John is an artist and fine-art photographer, while Jennifer hails from a professional writing background). We recently caught up with them to talk about their creative work, life on the farm, and the coming holiday season. —Jenn Johnson



**So, what was it like to see your very first attempt at creating a children's book take off so dramatically?**

**John:** There was one article at the time that called *The SheepOver* "the unicorn of children's publishing." [Laughs.] I think that year, it was one of only two self-published books on the *New York Times* best-seller list. It was quite something, going from wondering what we were going to be doing, to this point where CBS News and Jim Axelrod showed up, and the book got all this attention across the country. It was a lot of fun to be sure, but it didn't particularly change our life. Let's put it this way: It meant we were able to build ourselves a really nice barn and spend time working on the next books in the series.

**How did Moonrise Farm itself come to be?**

**John:** We got married in 2004 and we bought our house here, which wasn't actually a farm at the time; it just had some old farm fields that were primarily wetland, not really good for a lot. We started with a couple of sheep, bottle lambs—Jen grew up in Williamstown, Vermont, and her parents had a sheep farm there—and then we added chickens and ducks and geese, and five or six years ago we got alpacas.

But fiber is difficult to make a living from, and we didn't want to produce meat. We consider ourselves

a picture-book farm. Our products are really our books, and the farm animals, you could consider them models. And I have such a trove of pictures, thousands and thousands, on my computer, which means there's a lot of books yet to come out.

**What is your creative process like, as children's book authors?**

**Jennifer:** We're always out with the animals, doing chores, and observing them. We see them in community with each other and, you know, which ones are grumpy and which are the helpers. Those all become characters and story lines. And then a lot of the time, John will get some amazing photographs that will spark a story in me. So I

would say I'm the primary storyteller and he's the primary designer, but we do a lot of back-and-forth on that. [Laughs.] We have to be careful because we create and we live together!

**What's the secret to your books' appeal?**

**John:** The stories basically take place within several hundred feet of our house, so it's not like you have to go somewhere.

You don't have to go to a foreign world or some other fantastical place. There aren't any dragons. Everything just happens here in this little world, where we try to show how the animals are kind and decent and sweet to each other.





**Jennifer:** There aren't many children's books where you could actually meet the characters in real life. We've been honored to be presenters for the Children's Literacy Foundation, which is an amazing organization here in New Hampshire and Vermont, and when John and I go into the schools we may bring Laddie the sheepdog, or a bottle lamb, so the kids can tie the story to the real characters. You know, *Farmer John is coming to our school, and he's also in a storybook!* That's a real hit.

**John:** I once had a little boy send me a picture of him dressed up for Halloween as "Farmer John," complete with my green checked shirt. That's a very sweet thing, that I actually have somebody dressing up like me.

#### Speaking of real life, can you tell us about what inspired the plot of your recent holiday book, *The Christmas Barn*?

**Jennifer:** We'd had a couple of really big storms that brought down this huge generational pine tree, and its wood was cut up by our neighbor—who's in the book, of course—and that wood went into a new barn for the animals. And my father came up with his toolbox and helped John with the particulars of building the barn, and there was that feeling of people helping and giving advice and gathering around. The story brings together so much about this season: community, friendship, hope, joy, simple pleasures, and kindness.

#### What do the holidays look like at Moonrise Farm these days?

**Jennifer:** We definitely gather our family at our home—and we're new grandparents, so that's very exciting! It's such a festive time. We love to decorate, but John and I both love the European-style Christmas, which tends to be a little less commercial and more about handmade things and gifts from the heart.

We haven't done this recently because of the pandemic, but we've also enjoyed inviting people to come for a

Using pictures taken around Moonrise Farm, John creates painterly photo illustrations to go with Jennifer's text, as in this spread from their first book, *The SheepOver*.

barn lighting in December, when we decorate our barns and bring our sheep up from the summer pastures. We'd do a huge bonfire, and have apple cider and hot chocolate, and usually some music by friends who play instruments.

Families wander around and look at the chickens and sheep and alpacas, and even though it's freezing out, it's also very warm—it feels like the heart of the holiday for us. And while we won't have it this year, we will definitely do it again in the future!

#### Aside from working on more children's books, do you two have any other big projects going?

**Jennifer:** Something we'd wanted to do for a long time was open an artists' gallery, and when our last child went off to college we thought, *OK, it's time to take this off the list*. So, in 2019 we opened ArtHound Gallery in Essex, and now at 13,000 square feet and over 350 artisans and local product makers, it's the biggest in Vermont. It's not only an outlet for our own work but also a place where we look for new talent, emerging artists, where we can be their first gallery and do some mentoring with them. It's about expanding our community and giving back to it, too.

#### TO LEARN MORE

- To catch up on the latest from John and Jennifer Churchman and the animals of Moonrise Farm, go to their website, **Sweet Pea & Friends** ([sweetpeafriends.com](http://sweetpeafriends.com)). You can also find all their books in the online shop—as well as cards, prints, and more—and pre-order the Churchmans' newest book, *Happy Birthday to Ewe*, coming this March.

'Tis the Season

# A Different Light

*Finding meaning and belonging in a tradition that isn't your own.*



I was 7, and I was a Sugarplum Fairy. Standing backstage in my sequined blue tutu, I was awestruck—not by the spotlights, but by the hundreds of tiny colored bulbs on the enormous Christmas tree at the center of the stage. A teacher whispered frantically behind me: I was missing my cue. I tiptoed delicately toward the tree, the audience *ahhh*-ing as the band plinked out the familiar Tchaikovsky-inspired tune. But I barely heard the music and was only slightly aware of the other dancers around me. I was all about that tree, looming huge and sparkling. When my part was over, I'd take my place beneath it with the other children and spend the rest of the concert gazing up into the branches from below, drinking in its beauty.

We didn't have a Christmas tree at home. My family was Jewish, one of a handful living in the Northeast Kingdom in the 1970s, and from the day after Thanksgiving till January 2, I was reminded of that fact everywhere I looked—because everywhere I looked was Christmas.

I loved Hanukkah, of course—it was my favorite holiday. Eight days of presents, crispy fried latkes, playing dreidel for chocolate gelt—what wasn't to like? But it did seem ironic to call Hanukkah the Festival of Lights when ours was the one undecorated house on the street. Leaning my head against the frosted window in the backseat of our car, I loved looking at my neighborhood—from the quiet understated beauty of the clapboard houses, with a single candle in every multipaned window, all the way up to the animatronic Santa singing Irving Berlin songs in his neon-lit sleigh. “Irving Berlin was Jewish, you know,” my dad might comment. “Then why can't we have a tree?” I'd reply as we pulled into our own dark driveway. One year my mother hung a poster of the Tree of Life in Jerusalem. “Here's your tree!” she sang out. It didn't cut it. No tree. No stockings. No Irving Berlin, even. I watched it all unfold through the frosted car window, through glass.

There was one place where I participated, though. In Lyndonville, Vermont, in the 1970s, teachers didn't always hew to the separation of church and state, so I—along with every other child in my public-school class—received hymn books that included just about every Christmas carol you can think of. I loved to sing, and I loved these songs—the vigor of “Joy to the World,” the quiet reverence of “Silent Night.” It wasn't until I found myself inadvertently humming “We Three Kings” one Sunday afternoon that my Hebrew-school teacher raised an eyebrow. “Why are you singing that?” she said. “You can't sing that. When they sing those songs at school, you stay quiet.”

And since my need to please outweighed my love of song, I did stay quiet. I stood with my mouth shut, staring into the middle distance, until the music teacher—a New York City-born back-to-the-lander—finally stopped the class and called me out. “Naomi, I'm missing your lovely voice,” she said.

“I can't sing these songs, Mrs. Fried,” I explained. “I'm Jewish.” Thirty children's heads craned on 30 small necks to look at me.

“So am I, hon,” she said.

Of course. I'd seen her at our synagogue—two rented rooms, actually, above a pharmacy in St. Johnsbury. People hailing from Montreal, New York, and Philly filled the seats each fall for the High Holidays; together we represented the tiniest of tiny groups in an already-tiny place. Children fidgeted through Shabbat services,

**I was invited to enjoy the sights and smells and sounds along with everyone else, but it was like looking through the storefront at the toys inside.**

looking forward to the promise of challah and grape juice at the end; mothers kibitzed in the kitchen as they prepped oneg shabbats and Yom Kippur breakfasts. Sanka percolated endlessly in a big silver carafe.

Eavesdropping on adults, I noted that the older the participants, the more Yiddish was sprinkled into the conversation. In our little Sunday school we used our Hebrew names and stumbled our way through the alefbet in dim winter light. The windows downstairs were lined with twinkling lights and gold tinsel ropes, but up here the lights in the windows were menorahs, placed on the sills to fulfill the mitzvah of *pirsuma d'nisa*, or “publicizing the miracle.” How many people noticed their quiet flickers, dwarfed by the blinking red-and-green explosion all around them? Oh well. That was what we had.

Well, it wasn't *all* we had. A community so tiny has to have chutzpah to survive. Our congregation might have been a dot of blue in a landscape painted red-and-green, but it was a vivid blue. It attracted just about every Jew within a 50-mile radius: conservative, Orthodox, Reform. All were welcome. Birkenstocked hippies commingled with housedress-clad bubbles and beeper-wearing physicians. Here, no matter where we fit in our other lives, we were all of a kind—for a little while, anyway. When we walked back down that narrow staircase, back into the small downtown, Main Street was draped with red lights leading toward the apex of a golden crown. *For lo, a king is born*, but not

our king. Not our holiday.

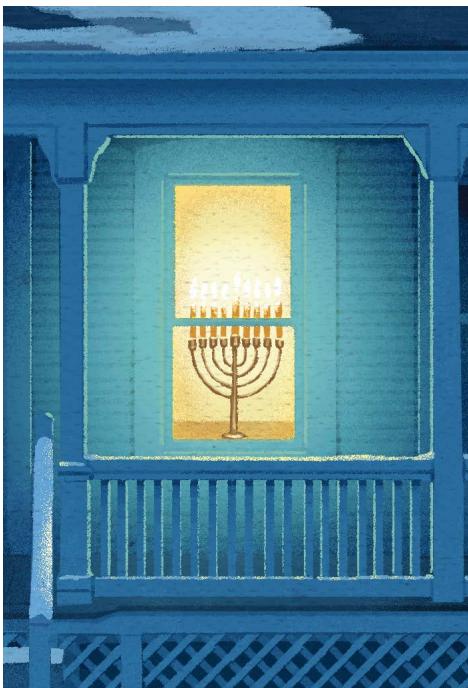
I came up with a strategy for music class. I started singing again, but I'd slide softly over lines like "Jesus is king." When our class art project was making ornaments for our Christmas trees, I said nothing, gamely attaching bits of felt to a length of gold string. I wasn't passing, exactly, but I wasn't sticking out, either. I was invited to enjoy the sights and smells and sounds along with everyone else, but it was like looking through the storefront at the toys inside, knowing none of them were for me. Through glass.

Years later, on my very first date with Chris, the man I would eventually marry, the fact came up that I was Jewish and he was not. We held this fact up to the light, examined it for a few moments, then put it aside. Another Vermonter with liberal political leanings and two educators for parents? It didn't feel like a stretch. Our marriage is technically mixed, as Chris hasn't converted, but our home functions with only one religious tradition: mine. Our daughters are Jewish by law and by practice. Still, our girls don't experience Christmas through the glass window as I did, because as soon as they were born, we began spending every Christmas at Chris's parents' house.

Here, finally, is the Christmas celebration I've always longed for. We drive up to Burlington through the snow to find a huge red-ribboned wreath on the front door and tasteful white lights in a curlicue around the windowboxes. The log in the fireplace crackles, with stockings hung just above. And yes—of course!—a floor-to-ceiling tree, resplendent with hundreds of glittering ornaments, some of them made by my own children.

"Aren't you lucky?" I say to them each year. "We celebrate our holidays here at home, and then we get to share Grandma and Grandpa's holiday with them." *Christmas is theirs*, I'm saying, *not yours*. That was my experience, and I'd assumed it would be theirs, too. But for the girls, Christmas is a magic show, one for which they have a ticket. Snuggled in sleeping bags, they look up at their grandparents' tree and know that they'll wake up to bulging Christmas stockings embroidered with their names. They feel left out of nothing. They've gained entry into that world in a way that I couldn't.

But then, I did.



One year in early November, my mother-in-law fell down the stairs. At first we didn't know whether she would walk again. Weeks of physical rehab made it clear that she eventually would—but not in time for the holidays. And so Chris and I for the first time found ourselves purchasing a Christmas tree—which, as fate would have it, had been grown in my hometown in the Northeast Kingdom. The tree seller and I played a little Vermonter geography game: *Do you know so-and-so? How's his cousin doing?* As I handed over the cash, I realized that I had no idea how to get the tree on top of our car, or how to care for it once we got it back to our in-laws' house. *Not my tree*, I thought as we hauled it across the parking lot. *Not my tree*, I repeated to myself as we steadied it in my in-laws' living room.

*Not mine*, I continued, as my daughters and I began trimming it, lacing the lights slowly around the base and working our way up, carefully perching each delicate glass bauble among the branches.

But the relief on my mother-in-law's face quieted my inner monologue. She had welcomed me into her family with nothing but openness and acceptance, and now she needed me. And what she needed me to do was to bring Christmas to her. And so the glass window has opened a crack, and I've found that the snow-tinged trappings of the Christmases I so coveted as a child aren't magic. Or rather, the magic isn't what I thought it was: The glitter is simply window dressing; the magic is something else.

One day my in-laws' generation will be gone. And our annual excuse for Christmas will go with them. And I'll miss it. Talking to our now-teenaged daughter, I said, "One day we'll celebrate Jewish Christmas."

"What's Jewish Christmas?" she asked.

"While everyone else is celebrating regular Christmas, we'll go to the movies and then get Chinese food," I said, explaining to her the ancient ways of our people.

"That sounds kind of nice," she answered. And it does, but not because of the movies or the Chinese food. It's just the same as all other holidays: The point is to set time apart from the everyday and to spend it with the people who mean the most to you. Someday we'll be eating General Tso's chicken and watching a matinee. But as long as their grandparents are here with us, my family and I will be sitting beneath the tree with them, and that is its own kind of miracle. —Naomi Shulman

# Out & About

*We round up some of our favorite Vermont events that are worth the drive this season.*



Audi FIS Ski World Cup at Killington

**NOV. 25–27**

## Woodstock

*Thanksgiving Weekend on the Farm*

Turkey Day takes on traditional flavor this weekend at Billings Farm & Museum, as it shows what a Thanksgiving spread would have looked like in the 1890s. Plus, pie-making lessons, crafts, firepits with hot cocoa and s'mores, and more! [billingsfarm.org](http://billingsfarm.org)

**NOV. 25–27**

## Killington

*Audi FIS Ski World Cup*

One hundred top athletes from 22 countries are expected to

participate in the slalom and giant slalom events on the Superstar trail as Killington Resort again plays host to this premier Alpine racing event. Along with the racing action, there will be live entertainment, a vendor village, and fireworks. [killington.com](http://killington.com)

**NOV. 25–27**

## Putney

*Putney Craft Tour*

Now in its 44th year, the oldest continuous craft tour in the country invites you to meet and buy from 20 top local makers: painters, jewelers, potters, weavers, glassblowers, painters, and woodworkers—not to mention artisan cheese and wine makers. [putneycrafts.com](http://putneycrafts.com)

*Pottery by Ken Pick, one of the featured artisans on the Putney Craft Tour*

RUTHBLACK/ISTOCK (GINGERBREAD); COURTESY OF KILLINGTON RESORT (WAGON RIDE); COURTESY OF THE VERMONT COUNTRY STORE (WAGON RIDE)

**NOV. 26–27**

## Barre

*Winter Festival of Vermont Crafters*

Barre Municipal Auditorium hosts central Vermont's biggest crafts show, with more than 70 talented makers offering everything from pottery to beeswax candles and specialty foods. If it's better when made by hand, you'll likely find it here. [greaterbarrecraftguild.com](http://greaterbarrecraftguild.com)

**DEC. 2–JAN. 1**

## Manchester

*"Christmas Eve in 1912"*

Tour Hildene, the beautiful Georgian Revival mansion that Mary and Robert Todd Lincoln once called home, and see how it was decorated during one of a handful of Christmases the Lincolns spent here. [hildene.org](http://hildene.org)

**DEC. 3**

## Weston

*Christmas in Weston*

A day of fun for all ages is in store during this townwide celebration, which includes

all the Yuletide staples: wagon rides, caroling, a tree lighting, and of course, visits with Santa. The Weston Theatre Company's Holiday Cabaret offers a great way to close out the evening. [westonvt.com](http://westonvt.com)



**DEC. 3–24**

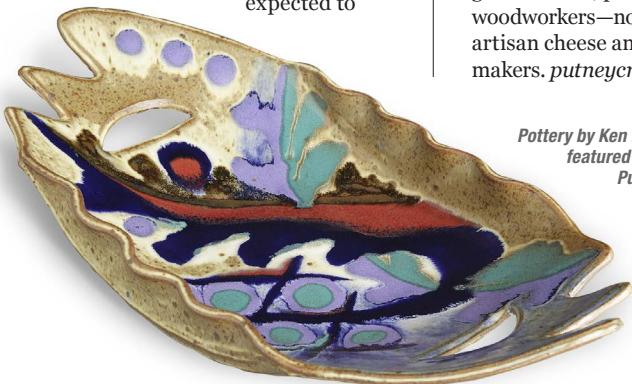
## Rutland

*Gingerbread Showcase*

Find sweet inspiration for your own holiday baking projects at the Chaffee Art Center's historic 1890s mansion, where entries in the annual Gingerbread Contest will be on display in all their sugary splendor. [chaffeeartcenter.org](http://chaffeeartcenter.org)



*Christmas in Weston*



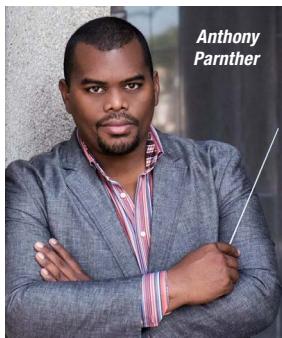
## Winter Fun

**DEC. 8–10**

### **St. Johnsbury**

*St. J Sparkles! Holiday Celebration*

Among the many merry, don't-miss events during this weekend fete is live holiday music at the historic St. Johnsbury Athenaeum, along with a reading from Dylan Thomas's "A Child's Christmas in Wales." [discoverstjohnsbury.com](http://discoverstjohnsbury.com)



**Anthony Parnther**

**DEC. 9–11**

### **Barre, Burlington & Rutland Holiday Pops**

Guest conductor Anthony Parnther leads the Vermont Symphony Orchestra in a program of traditional favorites guaranteed to get you in a joyful mood. *Barre Opera House, 12/9; The Flynn, 12/10; Paramount Theatre, 12/11; vso.org*

**DEC. 10**

### **Brattleboro**

*Jingle Bell Jog*

Get a head start on working off those sugar plum calories at this delightful family-oriented 5K race, where jingle bells will be provided and prizes are awarded to the best costumes as

well as the top finishers. [brattleborochamber.org](http://brattleborochamber.org)

**DEC. 17–18**

### **Burlington**

*Vermont's Own Nutcracker*

The dancers of Vermont Ballet Theater are joined by other artists from across the Green Mountain State in bringing to life the timeless tale of Clara and her Nutcracker Prince, packed with colorful spectacle and performed exclusively at The Flynn. [vbts.org](http://vbts.org)

**JAN. 13–15**

### **Woodstock**

*The Flurry Snow Sculpting Championships*

Need some out-of-this-world ideas for your next snowman-building session? Check out the creativity on display at The Flurry, a snow sculpture celebration at SaskaDena Six, whose past winners have gone on to compete at the national level. [saskadenasix.com](http://saskadenasix.com)

**JAN. 19–22**

### **Stowe**

*Stowe Winter Carnival*

From ice-carving demos to stargazing to zany sports events (including the infamous snow volleyball tournaments), there's something for everyone at this annual salute to the season. [stowewintercarnival.com](http://stowewintercarnival.com)

**JAN. 28–29**

### **Craftsbury Common**

*Craftsbury Marathon Doubleheader*

The largest Nordic ski event in the East comes with a twist: You can register for the classic races on Saturday, skiing either 25 or 50 kilometers on some of the most scenic terrain in New England, or opt for the



*The Flurry Snow Sculpting Championships*

25km freestyle marathon on Sunday. [craftsbury.com](http://craftsbury.com)

**FEB. 18–26**

### **Brattleboro**

*Brattleboro Winter Carnival*

At this townwide party, you can see a movie, a puppet show, a concert, or a variety show; hit the ice rink; and still find time for pancake breakfasts, sleigh rides, and games. Note: The Fred Harris Memorial Ski Jumping Tournament is slated for Feb. 19. [brattleborowintercarnival.org](http://brattleborowintercarnival.org)

**FEB. 25**

### **Norwich**

*Igloo Build*

Kids love to play in the snow, but at this beloved Montshire

Museum of Science event, play and learning intersect. Eager builders are guided by Dr. Bert Yankielun, author of *How to Build an Igloo and Other Snow Shelters*, and you hear wonder in their voices when construction ends and exploring begins. [montshire.org](http://montshire.org)

**FEB. 25**

### **Quechee**

*Winter Wildlife Celebration*

Visit the Vermont Institute of Natural Science (VINS), the home of many winged ambassadors—owls, hawks, falcons, and more—for this day that's all about family fun. Join expert educators to explore exhibits and trails, and enjoy games, crafts, and activities. [vinsweb.org](http://vinsweb.org)



*Igloo Build at the Montshire Museum of Science*

# The Soul of Skiing

*The enduring appeal of Vermont's community ski hills: small, affordable, and filled with local spirit.*



At Northeast Slopes in East Corinth, young skiers hitch a ride on the beginner rope tow, which runs off the engine of a 1960 farm truck.

In the village of East Corinth, Wade Pierson is gearing up for a busy Saturday night at Northeast Slopes. “Yankee ingenuity, that’s how we keep going,” he says, gesturing toward the two rope tows that have been whisking skiers up this community ski hill for more than eight decades. They are the oldest continually running tows in the U.S., he estimates. The area’s tagline is “Keeping It Real Since 1936.”

Beyond the addition of a T-bar, the ski hill doesn’t look much different than it did in the 1930s, when Percheron draft horses dragged farm tillers to groom the ski slopes on what was then Eugene Eastman’s sidehill farm. Across Route 25, behind a split-rail fence, a bull nuzzles a hay bale. He glares at the skiers booting up in the dirt parking lot and slowly chews his cud.

The short winter afternoon fades into a clear, starlit night. The air is crisp, and the Milky Way appears as a brightening streak across the sky. Soon, lights flash on for night skiing, and by 6 p.m. the parking lot is full.

There’s a party atmosphere here. Everyone seems to know each other. The attire is more Carhartt than Patagonia, and the gloves are mainly Kinco work gloves—for good reason, as you need the leather palms to grasp the inch-thick hemp rope. Not many folks use poles, as it’s too hard to grab the tow rope while holding them.

Kids latch on, get jerked up the hill, then skitter off at the summit. They form free-range packs, screaming and catching air on small bumps or jumps on the 360-foot vertical drop to the bottom. In the lift line, there is chatter, flushed faces, and a sense of unbridled joy.

Wade, a sixth-generation Vermonter, inherited his role as a Northeast Slopes volunteer from his father. “My dad was a farmer and a mechanic—he helped put in the T-bar and volunteered here for 50 years,” he says. “In the fall, he’d go down to the ballfield and scoop up the outhouse with his tractor and run it up to the hill. Put a road sign over the holes in the two-seater, and that was our summit lift shack.”

In the early 2000s, after a few lean snow years and a dwindling number of visitors, Northeast Slopes was at risk of closing. “My dad and a few others decided we

really needed a T-bar here, so we managed to raise about half the \$180,000 it was going to take,” Pierson recalls. Then a local patron named Leland Blodgett heard of the effort. “He called my dad and says, ‘How much do you need?’ My dad estimated about \$72,000.” A few days later, that

**Looking down the slope of Brattleboro Ski Hill offers a view of neighborhood streets and homes, underlining the small-town vibe that draws so many people to this and other community ski areas across Vermont.**





amount appeared in the ski area's bank account. Blodgett passed away not long after. A Northeast Slopes grooming machine, a hand-me-down from a ski area out west, is named "Leland" in his honor.

**A**t one time there were 119 ski areas in Vermont—an impressive number considering the state has 251 towns. They were to each community what basketball courts and local pools are today: places to play, to exercise, and to gather with neighbors.

Today, there are 22 ski areas with uphill lifts that operate publicly; of these, nine are run as nonprofits. Middlebury College and Northern Vermont University support Middlebury Snow Bowl and Lyndon Outing Club, respectively. The Woodstock Foundation owns Saskadena Six, and a co-op owns Mad River Glen. The rest are small, community-supported nonprofits: Northeast Slopes, Hard'Ack, Brattleboro, Cochran's, and Ascutney.

"These smaller places are so important to the future of skiing," says Molly Mahar, president of the trade organization SkiVermont. "These are the feeder hills

**ABOVE:** Volunteers are a key part of keeping local hills operating. Here, Northeast Slopes volunteer Dylan Kidder greets young skiers on the T-bar with a high five. **RIGHT:** In its early days, Brattleboro Ski Hill charged 35 cents for a day ticket; today it's still less than the price of a fancy coffee drink.



## Winter Fun



that get people and kids into skiing. Even the big places know the roles they play and try to help them out.” Mount Snow, for instance, sends its instructors to Brattleboro Ski Hill on weekdays to teach local kids for free.

Brownsville’s Mount Ascutney was once a “big place,” a full-fledged ski resort that was trying to make a profit. But despite efforts by a number of owners, the resort repeatedly struggled. And in 2010, it closed, seemingly for good.

“This was a time when we were at risk of losing our school, our restaurants, our general store, and our post office—we had to do something,” says Glenn Seward, a former operations manager at Ascutney. “Brownsville had lost its identity as a ski town.”

In 2015, villagers packed into the town hall and voted overwhelmingly to purchase what remained of the ski area: 470 acres. Working with the Trust for Public Land, they raised more than \$900,000 and founded Ascutney Outdoors, a nonprofit. “We didn’t need or want someplace as big as what Ascutney had been,” says

**LEFT:** Tubing at Ascutney Outdoors, in Brownsville. **TOP:** A 9-year-old racer zips downhill at Cochran’s Ski Area. **ABOVE:** A slopeside Cochran family portrait shows Barbara Ann (center) with sisters Lindy and Marilyn, along with some of the younger generation (from left, Ryan Cochran-Siegle, Tim Kelley, and Jimmy Cochran).

Glenn’s wife, Shelley. “It had to be right-sized, and it had to work for the community.”

As part of the strategy to “right-size” Ascutney, the T-bar goes only partway up the mountain, leaving the steeps and glades of the upper portion for backcountry skiers to explore. When a storm dumped 52 inches at Ascutney in December 2020,

skiers left at dawn from as far as Burlington and Stowe to ski the untracked powder that piled up here.

“This place isn’t intimidating—it’s cozy and welcoming,” says Laura Farrell, whose own kids learned to ski at Ascutney before going on to become top ski racers. “And for those who come from out of town, when they get here, they are not just weekenders who are skiing by themselves. When you come to a small area like this, you become part of a community.”

**F**amily" is also a word that comes to mind in describing the feeling at community ski hills. And nowhere is that more true than at Cochran's in Richmond. On any given day, you can find many of the Cochran clan—one of the winningest family dynasties in sports history—still involved in the ski hill founded by patriarch Gordon "Mickey" Cochran in 1961. Grandson Jimmy Cochran, a four-time national champion and two-time Olympian, manages the ski area. His aunt Barbara Ann, an Olympic gold medalist and professional coach, is the ski school director. On weekends, other Cochrans can be found running around, setting up gates, tending the firepit at the base, or serving Friday-night lasagna dinners at the long picnic tables in the base lodge where the family's historic race bibs hang on the walls.

In 1998, Cochran's became the first ski area in the nation to become a tax-exempt 501c3. "It was always a nonprofit—it just became official then," jokes Jimmy's dad, Bobby, a former champion downhill racer. The mission is: "No child will be denied the opportunity to ski or ride."

Tiny bobbleheads in helmets lumber up the slopes to the lifts, balancing their skis on two arms in front of them like waiters carrying trays full of glasses. A stray kid falls, starts to cry, and gets picked up by another parent. This weekend is Rope-A-Thon, the time when Cochran's Ski Area raises the money it needs to operate and provide the opportunity to learn to ski and race to those kids whose parents might not be able to afford it.

Meanwhile, Ryan Cochran-Siegle is in the sugarhouse next door, where he and two cousins are boiling down sap from their trees for their separate business, Slopeside Syrup. Like so many in his family, including his mother, Barbara Ann, Ryan is a world-level athlete, recently winning silver in Super-G at the 2022 Winter Olympics.

When asked how a small ski hill like Cochran's could have turned out such great skiers, he thinks for a minute. "First, it's a great opportunity to focus on your form and develop as a skier. Second, emotionally you find a different connection to skiing than, say, if you went up to Stowe every weekend. You're a little more invested."

"Growing up here and making do with what we had was a big part of it," he continues. "If there was no snow, we would

go make a jump and do that all day. There's a certain stubbornness and determination and New England mentality you get from skiing here."

And what would happen if this place or others like it went away?

His answer is quick and simple: "You would lose skiing's soul." Then he adds, "A goal of mine is to ski every little area in Vermont."

---

*This is an abridgment of "The Soul of Skiing" by Vermont writer Lisa Gosselin Lynn, published last winter by Yankee magazine. To read the full story, go to newengland.com/soulouskiing.*



# Head of the Class

*A winter trip to Middlebury shows a college town at its best.*



Students step out into a snowy day on the campus of Middlebury College, founded in 1800 and regarded as one of the best liberal arts schools in the country.

**A**s the season edges toward the holidays, a clapboard hot-cocoa hut—sized for a single person or a cadre of elves—perches curbside in downtown Middlebury. Sidewalks wear a new coat of snow. Strings of lights twine around gas lamps and meander across shop windows stocked with winter essentials: wool blankets, cast-iron cookware, raw honey, the year's best paperbacks. The Otter Creek falls tumble 20 feet beneath the stone Battell Bridge, an architectural nod to Middlebury's past as a 19th-century hub for marble quarrying.

Chartered in 1761 and anchored in 1800 by its eponymous liberal arts college, Middlebury is as much an enclave of farmers and winter-sports seekers as it is a destination for academics. At the cocoa hut, the line grows: a trio of Middlebury College professors; cheese makers on a delivery run; a family of four suiting up, toddlers in tow, for a few runs at the nearby ski hill.

The cocoa is good—*really* good. “Isn’t this just Swiss Miss?” someone wonders. “It’s probably the milk,” says the smiling hut tender. It’s from Monument Farms Dairy, headquartered just one town over, in Weybridge.

Flanked by the Green Mountains to the east and Lake Champlain to the west, Middlebury sits in the valley of Addison County, the largest chunk of agricultural land in the state. The location is a boon to the area food scene, where you’re as likely to find local dairy at the gas station as you are at the town’s food co-op. Perhaps you’ll wander past cows huddled in snowy pastures as you snowshoe along the Middlebury Land Trust’s 18-mile trail system, the TAM (Trail Around Middlebury).

About 20 minutes’ drive from downtown via a mountain pass once meant for cows, **Rikert Outdoor Center** offers cross-country skiing, snowshoeing, and fat biking in a nook of the Green Mountain National Forest. The 35 miles of trails fringe Middlebury’s Bread Loaf campus, a series of cottages painted the soft yellow hue of Christmas lights. It hosts an annual writers’ conference, one of the country’s oldest gatherings of laureates and emerging writers since Robert Frost first helped set up shop in 1926.

**Middlebury Snow Bowl**, a fully decked-out ski mountain owned by the college since 1934, claims 110 acres of terrain along the nearby Long Trail, the oldest

**FROM TOP:** A Middlebury institution for 70-plus years, the Vermont Book Shop is today run by Becky Dayton, who bought it in 2005 from the original owners; a view of Main Street, dressed for the holidays; a savory brioche bun filled with bacon, Grafton Farm truffled cheddar, and sautéed leeks at Haymaker Bun Co.





long-distance hiking trail in the country. A tiny lodge offers rentals, lunch, and local hot cider for a post-run warm-up. For an in-town family stroll, **Middlebury College's** campus is the ideal self-guided walking tour. The windows of Old Chapel are decorated with holiday candles and fronted by an enormous Christmas tree in the courtyard. At Starr Library, you can get a glimpse of what studying looked like when Alexander Twilight, Class of 1823 and the first African American to graduate from a U.S. college, hunkered down here with his books.

Fueling all that academic activity and outdoor adventuring is a lively food scene. Sitting on the bank above churning Otter Creek is **Haymaker Bun Co.**, a sun-drenched spot beloved for its chubby doughnuts, salted chocolate chip cookies, and revelatory sweet and savory brioche buns. At **American Flatbread**, meanwhile, the ever-changing roster of Vermont beers invites diners to elbow up to the bar with a wood-fired pie, destined to be polished off down to its craggy crust. And for a quick lunch stop, there's **Costello's Market**, with a lineup of terrific homemade sandwiches and stuffed-to-order cannoli, among other foodie treats.

Ready to do a little shopping? You actually would have to live here to visit the entire cast of artisans, makers, and farmers packed into a town of less than 40 square miles. Alternatively, you can go to the **Middlebury Natural Foods Co-op**, a bustling grocery stocked with

Just a short drive from Middlebury, the Rikert Outdoor Center in Ripton draws winter sports enthusiasts with miles of groomed trails and equipment rentals ranging from skis and snowshoes to fat bikes.

all things local. **The Vermont Book Shop** offers a range of titles, from cookbooks and literary journals to darlings of the best-seller list. **Sweet Cecily** has eclectic gifts that encompass locally made jewelry and Vermont-inspired candles and ornaments, while **Vermont's Own** is the go-to for things like aged cheese and maple syrup. **Addison West** has not only stylish home decor and kitchen goods but also apparel and accessories, cards, books, and candles.

To be in Middlebury—well, to be in Vermont—is to drink like the locals. Tea guru John Wetzel of **Stone Leaf Teahouse** imports loose-leaf teas from small farms across the globe; the oolong is roasted in-house

over coals, while the made-to-order chai comes as spicy as you'd like. **Vermont Coffee Company** roasts organic beans at its café on Exchange Street; meanwhile, at **Drop-In Brewing**, founder and brewmaster Steve Parkes turns out British-style ales, satisfying hops junkies and dark-mild lovers alike. (Note: **Foley Brothers Brewing** and **Red Clover Ale** are off-the-beaten-path gems worth the 20-minute jaunt down Route 7: farmhouse-style brews backed with locally grown ingredients at the former, and inventive ales with an eye for classic styles at the latter.)

If all this sounds like too much to pack into a day trip, fret not: Built in 1814, the 20-room **Swift House Inn** blends farmhouse comfort with old-school elegance. Fires crackle in a sitting room outfitted with plush armchairs and a local fir tree winking with lights. Breakfast is served at the in-house restaurant, Jessica's, while homemade cookies beckon from their jar. From here, it's an easy walk to town, but you may well find yourself cozied up by the fireplace in your room instead, watching the snow fall. —Julia Clancy

## IF YOU GO

■ **Very Merry Middlebury**, the annual townwide seasonal celebration, makes December a lively time to visit—with special strolls, promotions, pop-ups, and more. For more information, go to: [experiencemiddlebury.com](http://experiencemiddlebury.com)



Made in Vermont

# Local Color

*Burlington-based Skida excels at making some  
of the coolest ways to stay warm.*



**E**n even in a lift line full of skiers dressed in every imaginable brand of gear, it's hard to miss Skida. The hats, headbands, balaclavas, and other accessories made by this popular Burlington-based company are known for their bold colors and eye-catching, often floral patterns that can bring to mind anything from William Morris to Marimekko. Against winter's monochrome landscape, Skida's joyful designs stand out like neon signs.

By contrast, if you talk for a while with Skida founder Corinne Prevot, a Burke Mountain Academy alum with a personality that seems as easy-going as her creations are energetic, you get the sense she's content to keep a low profile despite her company's success.

Case in point: After Prevot launched Skida [+1], an initiative that donates Skida hats to cancer center patients, a neighbor who works as a UVM oncology nurse made a point of thanking her—knowing she worked at Skida but not realizing Prevot actually *ran* the company. "She told me, 'The hat donation, it really brings a lot of joy to people's days. You can tell your bosses that it's a good thing they're doing,'" Prevot says, and chuckles. "I replied, kind of tongue-in-cheek, 'Thanks, I'll do that!'"

The anecdote is easier to understand when you realize Prevot is barely in her 30s, leading a thriving business that will celebrate its 15th anniversary this January. She began her company while still a teenager—and some of its foundations were laid even earlier. Prevot had a rural childhood, growing up on a Pennsylvania farm with her parents and two brothers, which fostered a strong work ethic and a knack for finding her own creative outlets.

"There was such a joy I felt in creating and crafting things," she recalls. "My mother taught me to sew and knit, and I was always making things to use, making things as gifts."



A love of skiing and a connection to northern Vermont were likewise instilled at a young age. Her parents had met while cross-country skiing at Craftsbury, and after moving to Pennsylvania they'd bring their kids back to visit relatives in the Lyndonville/East Burke area. They often stopped by the campus of Burke Mountain Academy, which her father had attended, and Prevot says she knew early on that it was a place she wanted to be.

When she eventually went off to attend BMA, she took her love of crafting with her, making warm, colorful hats to wear while cross-country skiing.

A turning point came when she decided to create hats for her and her teammates to wear for a race in Maine. "We showed up to this race, all styled out and having so much fun. And in all that joy and enthusiasm, some girls from the Stratton Mountain School came up and were like, 'Hey, what's up with these hats?'



ABOVE: Skida founder Corinne Prevot, who grew her sewing hobby into a nationally recognized headwear and accessories brand.

FAR LEFT: A sampling of cashmere hats, a rare Skida product not made in Vermont but instead consciously sourced from Nepal, building on local connections that Prevot made during a study-abroad program there.

LEFT: Skida's bold style shines through in "North Beach," a pattern created with sunglasses maker Pit Viper.

Can you make us some?' And I said, 'Sure!'

From there, word spread through the tight-knit New England cross-country skiing community, and demand for Prevot's creations grew. "Everything just happened organically," she says. "When I look back on that original weekend, I can identify all the things that kind of got us here to this day—and that feels really special."

By the time she was in college at Middlebury, Prevot was working with a network of sewers in the Northeast Kingdom to keep up with orders at her fledgling company, which she'd named Skida, from the Swedish word for "ski." But it wasn't until *Forbes* tapped her as one of its "All Star Student Entrepreneurs" that the 20-year-old Prevot began seeing her creative venture in bigger terms. "I was just thinking about making and selling hats to my ski buddies, you know? I hadn't translated it to being a business yet. So the *Forbes* thing really formalized things: *Oh, OK, this is a business, and I'm going to learn about how to talk about it that way.* That was really pivotal.

"And of course," she adds with a laugh, "my mind also went to: *Oh my God, we're gonna be in Forbes magazine!*"



ABOVE: A sampling of Skida's endlessly creative prints including, at far left, one of its oldest: "Strawberry Fields," inspired by a long-ago experiment with an actual scratch-and-sniff fabric from eBay.

BETWEEN: Brim and bucket hats, bandanas, and headbands in the showroom speak to Skida's year-round appeal.

By the time *Forbes* came calling again, to name Prevot to its 2018 "30 Under 30" list of entrepreneurs and innovators, she had set up her company headquarters in Burlington and was selling some 78,000 products a year. These days she heads up a staff of 25—and still uses her trusty Kingdom sewers—in turning out headwear and accessories that are sold online and at some 300 retailers.

Yet even as Skida has grown, it has maintained its strong core values. In addition to its commitment to local production, it works to limit fabric waste to less than 1 percent and uses recycled materials whenever possible. All packaging materials are PVC-free; boxes and poly-bags are recycled throughout the supply chain. It emphasizes fresh, limited-edition designs but is continually expanding partnerships in that area—collaborating on lines with, for instance, the High Fives Foundation, an adaptive sports organization, and Camp Brave Trails, a leadership-focused summer camp for LGBTQ youth.

As for Prevot, she is looking forward to the Dec. 1 launch of "Field of Dreams," a special pre-holiday collection inspired by the colors of Vermont summer, and then the 15th anniversary celebration in 2023. Beyond that—and possibly chipping away at her goal to ski the legendary 300-mile Catamount Trail—she's says she's not thinking about exactly what the future will look like.

"I just love trying ideas and learning what works, and being around great people and seeing them grow and learn and contribute in different ways," she says. "So I think as long as we can keep doing that, and offering that opportunity, I'm really excited about that." —Jenn Johnson





Although Santa's Land is open in the warmer months too, winter provides the park with a North Pole-worthy blanket of white.

# Jolly Good

*How Putney's classic Christmas theme park got a new lease on life.*

When he was 8, David Haversat had a vision of his future. It was summer, and his family had just arrived at Santa's Land in Putney for their annual vacation visit from Connecticut. Catching sight of a teenager mowing the park's lawn, he told his mom excitedly: "That's what I want to do when I'm older!"

Of course, he wasn't the only kid that Santa's Land—a 42-acre theme park with a train ride, animatronic figures, and holiday dioramas amid a grove of evergreens—has inspired to dream. The brainchild of broadcast radio pioneer Jack Poppele, Santa's Land opened in 1957 to the delight of families from across Vermont and beyond, who flocked here for an immersive Christmas experience that ran from summer through the holidays.

Haversat is, however, the one who made his Santa's Land dream a reality. A magician and auction house co-owner by trade, he bought the property in 2017. At that point, changing owners and changing times had taken their toll: The park had sat idle for nearly four years, its walkways overgrown and its buildings vandalized.

So Haversat got to work: fixing up the structures, rebuilding the rides, and even introducing an antique

carousel from Coney Island. He reopened Santa's Land in December 2017, the icon of his childhood restored. "I remember at one point mowing the very same lawn and thinking, *I can't believe this really happened*," he says.

In 2018, Haversat earned the Preservation Trust of Vermont Award for his work in saving the park. But what means the most to him, he says, is hearing from visitors who are grateful to have Santa's Land back in their lives.

"It's a place from another time," he says. "People who came here when they were kids will tell me it looks just like it did back then. And that means something. Because maybe their parents are gone, but for a moment they can go back to when they were all together. That's pretty special." —*Ian Aldrich*

## IF YOU GO

■ **Santa's Land** is open 10 a.m.–4 p.m. weekends from late July to Christmas. Tickets are \$17.95; \$15.95 seniors. *655 Bellows Falls Road, Putney; santaslandusa.com*



# This Christmas, Make Us Your Holiday Destination!

The Vermont Country Store has been making Christmas dreams come true for over 75 years—even Santa fills his sleigh here! And for good reason...we're the real deal. A genuine country store stocked with holiday delights from homemade fudge and Vermont cheddar to twinkling ornaments, fun toys and games, and stocking stuffers galore. Spend the day finding the perfect gifts for everyone on your list and end the day by treating yourself to a tasty comfort-food meal at one of our restaurants. Bring the whole family—and make it a Christmas tradition you'll look forward to every year.



**Make a day of it – visit both of our stores!**

**WESTON | ROCKINGHAM**  
657 MAIN ST • RT 100 | 1292 ROCKINGHAM RD • RT 103

**IN SOUTHERN VERMONT • OPEN 7 DAYS A WEEK**



**The Vermont  
Country Store®**

PURVEYORS OF THE PRACTICAL AND HARD-TO-FIND  
802.824.3184 • [VermontCountryStore.com](http://VermontCountryStore.com)