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# Seasons' Greetings



There are many things to love about winter ... In white snowfalls, seasonal sports, and the unexpected storm that offers the perfect opportunity to stay indoors and spend the day in pajamas with the kids.

There's a certain magic afoot at this time of year, and whether you enjoy home-based activities or venturing out into the elements, it's important to make the most of every day.

In this issue, we share some ideas for doing just that. We start by showcasing some fun and fabulous holiday celebrations that you may have heard of, but never attended. Mystic Seaport's Lantern Light Tours take you back in time to holidays of old; Fire on Ice features a

spectacular menorah lighting and family-friendly activities; and the Kwanzaa celebration in New Britain offers both entertainment and enlightening cultural wisdom.

Up for a mid-winter mini-adventure? Writer Amy Barry explains why Foxwoods is not just for adults anymore. The casino and resort has morphed into a destination offering fun and excitement for everyone, from the very young to the young-at-heart, making it a perfect cold-weather getaway for the entire family.

This time of year not only brings cold temperatures but, often, clear skies – ideal for a glimpse of the oft-ignored wonders overhead. Our own Matt Broderick took a trip across the state to explore Connecticut's public observatories and planetariums, and shares the amazing things he discovered during his celestial adventure.

Meanwhile, humorist Matthew Dicks describes the ironies and agonies of winter golfing.

However you choose to spend the season, all of us at Seasons Magazines wish you warm and wonderful days ahead, full of precious memories to treasure in the years to come. Happy holidays, and as always, thank you for reading.

Carol Latter, Editorial Director



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# ute

A good life is when you smile often, dream big, laugh a lot and realize how blessed you are for what you have.

- Unknown

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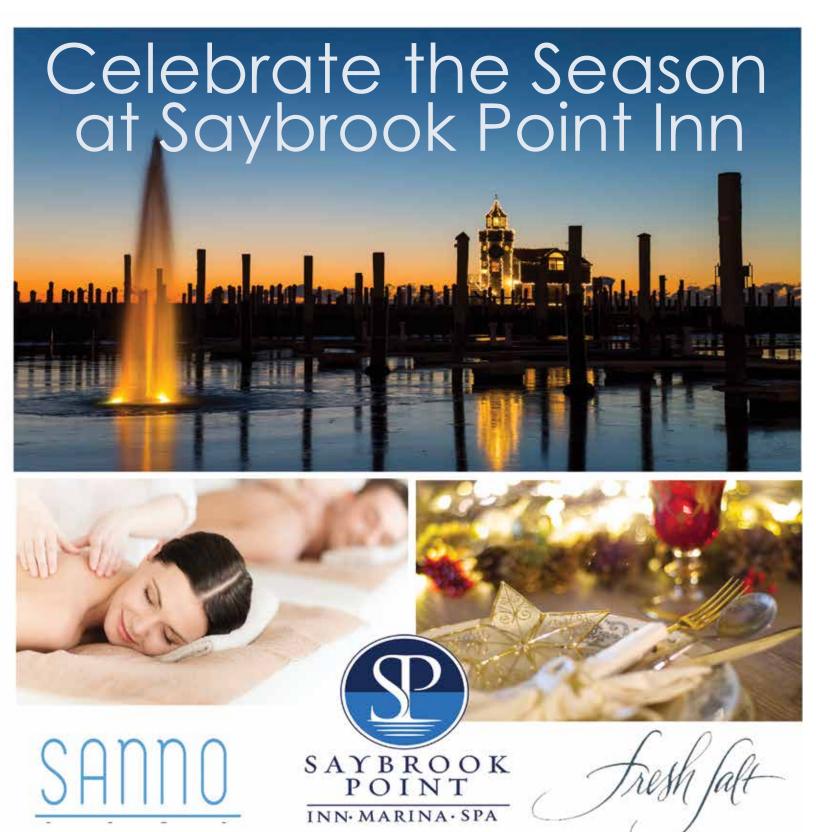
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Final Thoughts Snow Daze



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# Written by Theresa Sullivan Barger and Carol Latter

s the days grow shorter and more hectic with seasonal preparations, people of varied backgrounds and faiths have a welcome opportunity to enjoy celebrations that bring light and rejuvenation, and a break from the holiday hustle and bustle.

Whether young or young at heart, single or part of a large extended family, those wanting to capture the joy of the season are within easy reach of special events celebrating Christmas, Chanukah, and Kwanzaa.

# **Ghosts of Christmas**

Looking for a way to enjoy an old-fashioned Christmas? Mystic Seaport's Lantern Light Tours is a unique holiday adventure that you won't soon forget.

Dubbed "The Spirit of the Holiday: A Christmas Ghost Story," this year's traveling play is set on Christmas Eve in 1876. It unfolds through five scenes designed to entertain, capture the authenticity of Mystic Seaport during that period, and reflect the true spirit of Christmas, says Denise Kegler, supervisor of performances and gallery programming.

Rather than sitting in a darkened theater, attendees follow their guide as he or she leads them through the dimly lit streets of the seaport - and listen as yuletide narratives are told in authentic historical settings. Each performance lasts about 70 minutes, and each year's tour, described as "magical" and "heartwarming," is different from those of previous years.

Professional actors dressed in period costume present the story written by local historian and author Rebecca Bayreuther Donohue. During the half-mile tour, audience members cheer for contestants in a Victorian speed-walking contest, join a circle dance, tour a historic vessel, take a horse-drawn carriage ride, and visit with St. Nicholas.

"We always do try, every year, to have some connection to the sea," Kegler says. (During the 19th century, if a ship was in port during Christmas, its mast would have been adorned with a Christmas tree.)

"This year, we're really looking at some unexpected traditions," and incorporating a ghost story, she says. In the 19th century, Christmas celebrations commonly included telling ghost stories: Charles Dickens' "A Christmas Carol," grew out of that tradition.

Tapping into another fad of the period, this year's play involves two traveling spiritualists and fortune tellers, based on the playwright's research involving a fortune-telling and dream-interpretation book published in 1863.

"This show is a real blend of entertainment and authenticity," she says, and includes scenes that are "wonderfully silly and a little unexpected."

The costumes' historical accuracy is taken seriously. The museum's period costume shop staff members research appropriate attire, from undergarments to outerwear, and make its costumes from scratch, Kegler says.

The shows run Friday and Saturday nights from Nov. 24 through Dec. 23 and on Sunday, Dec. 17. Tours begin at 5 p.m. and at 15-minute intervals. Two tours run concurrently, so those in wheelchairs or with walking difficulties can still attend. The performances are open to all ages, but are not recommended for children under four, who are admitted for

Advance registration is required. Tickets range from \$26 for youth to \$33 for adults, not including member discounts. For information and reservations, visit: tickets.mysticseaport. org/public.



# **Light in the Darkness**

"Fire on Ice" - Connecticut's largest Chanukah celebration - will mark its 10th anniversary this year in West Hartford's Blue Back Square. As many as 1,000 people of all ages, faiths and backgrounds are expected to gather to watch as a master ice-carver sculpts a giant menorah from a block of ice. When the menorah is complete, six of its candles will be lit to mark the sixth night of Chanukah.

The free celebration, presented by the Chabad of Greater Hartford and open to the public, is held annually on the first Sunday of Chanukah. This year, it is set for Dec. 17 at 4 p.m.

The evening will include other attractions as well, from glow-in-the-dark face painting, Chanukah-themed manicures and 3-D printing of dreidels to holiday arts and crafts, and free raffles and prizes. Adding to the festive atmosphere, Chicago's Rogers Park Band - America's only Hasidic folk band - will perform live.

At the peak of the celebration comes the "Great Chanukah Gelt Drop," says Rabbi Shaya Gopin, educational director at the Chabad of Greater Hartford and one of the organizers of Fire on Ice. Firefighters from the West Hartford Fire Department will climb to the top of their truck's

extension ladder and sprinkle chocolate coins onto the crowd below, as children of all ages rush to collect them.

And, new this year, visitors can visit the "Chocolate Gelt Factory" - a twist on Willy Wonka's famed facility - to grind, melt and mold their very own chocolate coins.

In the weeks leading up to the event, children under the age of 13 have a chance to enter an essay contest, describing in no more than 300 words what Chanukah means to them. Judges will choose the best essay and it will be read at the lighting ceremony. Authors of the first 15 essay submissions will win a prize, and the winner will receive a tablet.

Chanukah, also known as Hanukkah, celebrates religious freedom. It commemorates the victory of a small group of Maccabean Jews who, in Biblical days, regained control of Jerusalem and drove the much larger forces of Hellenistic Greek king Antiochus IV from their temple. After the battle, the Maccabees discovered that almost all of their ritual olive oil had been ruined. They found only one sealed container, with enough oil to keep the menorah in the temple lit for just one day. Miraculously, that oil lasted for a full eight days - enough time to have new oil pressed and made ready for the menorah.

Each year, that miracle is celebrated as "The Festival of Lights."

Rabbi Gopin says for decades, public menorah lightings have been held at locations across the country and around the world - at the Eiffel tower, in Russia's Red Square, at Berlin's Brandenburg Gate, and on the Great Wall of China, to name just a few. The goal, he says, is to heighten awareness of the significance of Chanukah, and to "spread a little bit of light in the darkness."

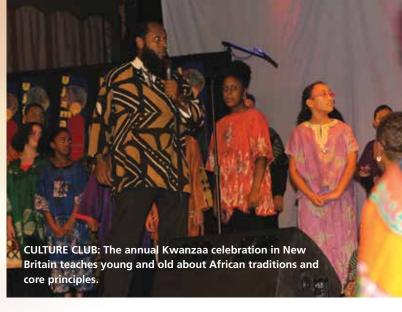
In 2007, members of the Chabad of Greater Hartford wanted to organize a public menoral lighting of their own, and were seeking the perfect locale. They quickly realized that the newly developed Blue Back Square fit the bill perfectly. Prospects for the inaugural celebration were not promising. "We held the first one in a heated tent and there was a terrible snowstorm," he recalls. "But the place was packed."

Each year, they've tried to expand it by adding new attractions, "and every year, more people show up. Now we can't fit in the square any more, and we've spilled down the street to take in the whole block."

Last year, the first Sunday of Chanukah fell on Christmas Day but some 700 people came regardless, from towns across the region. This year, organizers are expecting hundreds more.

Throughout the year, Rabbi Gopin and fellow Chabad members work tirelessly to share a central message: By doing even one good deed for someone else, a single individual can make a difference in their community, and by extension, the world. The menorah lighting underscores that theme, he says, noting, "you can push away darkness with a little candle."

For more information, call 860-232-1116 or visit ChabadHartford.com and enter the search term "Fire on Ice."



# **Celebrating African Culture**

More than 50 years ago, in 1966, Dr. Maulana Karenga - professor and chairman of Black Studies at California State University, Long Beach - founded Kwanzaa. Today, the African-American and Pan African holiday is celebrated by millions of people throughout the world.

A holiday honoring cultural traditions, Kwanzaa runs for seven days, from Dec. 26 to Jan. 1. It is observed to encourage the values of family, community, responsibility, commerce and self-improvement.

Dayna R. Snell, executive director of the Queen Ann Nzinga Center (QANC) in New Britain, says at the end of each year, Connecticut residents who have wondered about the holiday or have been celebrating it for years have an opportunity to learn more by attending the center's annual Kwanzaa celebration. The multigenerational celebration is open to people of all ages, races, cultures and faiths.

The event includes a student-written play and songs to entertain the audience while sharing the seven principles of Kwanzaa.

The play, called "Change at QANC High," tells the story of kids who are not working together, and because of this, they lose their basketball game. As the story unfolds, kids begin to apply the principles of Kwanzaa, with positive results.

The seven principles are: Umoja (Swahili for unity), Kujichagulia (self-determination), Ujima (collective work and responsibility), Ujamaa (cooperative economics), Nia (purpose), Kuumba (creativity), and Imani (faith).

"We integrate some of the rituals and some of the activities so people can learn about Kwanzaa and enjoy a really great show," she says.

The Kwanzaa celebration is intended as a fun play, designed to make its audience laugh, and help them to learn about this holiday, Snell says.

"It's about celebrating the gifts that people of African descent bring to the world. We're part of this great American gumbo. We've got to build bridges, not fences. You can get somewhere with a bridge."

QANC's 29th annual Kwanzaa celebration will be held on Saturday, Dec. 30 at 7 p.m. at Trinity-on-Main, 69 Main St., New Britain. Doors open at 6 p.m. Admission is \$10 for students and seniors, and \$15 for adults.

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Check out these five whippersnappers making life better for their local communities and for the great big world they're about to conquer.



# MELINA DEZHBOD

Melina Dezhbod was on the receiving end of volunteerism as a child, having come with her family as refugees from Iran in 2000. St. Paul's Episcopal Church in Woodbury sponsored her parents, their three children, and Dezhbod's grandmother. She attended Naugatuck Schools, graduating from

Naugatuck High School in 2013, and is currently a student at the University of Saint Joseph in West Hartford. She earned her bachelor's degree in Social Work there earlier this year and is set to complete her Master of Social Work in 2018.

Now 22, Dezhbod has spent much of her college career volunteering through Saint Joe's. She worked alongside other students during the school's "Alternate Spring Break," traveling to New Jersey and Delaware with Habitat for Humanity.

"It was an eye-opening experience," she says. "I had never touched a hammer before but they teach you everything. Now I know how to put up Sheetrock."

Next year, Dezhbod will attend seminary school to

have to figure that out," she says. "I've made this my life commitment because there were so many people who helped my family when we came here. They didn't even know us but they did so much. My life goal is to help as many people as I can."



## ABHISHEK MALANI

When Glastonbury High School made the decision to do away with separating graduating seniors by gender-specific gown colors last year, Abhishek Malani was instrumental in bringing about the change.

"I felt that if they're seniors, they deserve to feel comfortable," he says.

Now a graduating senior himself, Malani is still deeply involved in the school's government. Much of his time volunteering during his high school years has been through student council, class council, and Key Club, a community service group. Between fund-raisers, blood drives, and luncheons for the town's senior adults, Malani has logged countless volunteer hours.

He shares his knowledge by tutoring in French, Spanish and math. His parents came to the United States from India in 1999.

"My parents, my town, my school - they've all been so

# Written by Teresa M. Pelham



supportive," says Malani, 18. "I've had access to the resources to succeed, so I feel like it's my responsibility to make sure others are successful."

Malani has applied to Yale and Harvard universities and plans to major in economics and computer science. He intends to remain active in student government.

"I'm very grateful for my school community," he says. "I give back because I've been very lucky."



### **CAROLYN NEVIN**

When Carolyn Nevin was seven years old, her grandfather was diagnosed with cancer. Her family formed a Relay for Life team, and she's been walking in circles for the American Cancer Society ever since.

Now 18 and a senior at Lewis Mills High School in Burlington, Nevin has her own

team, iCure, based at her school. The team has grown each year, and has raised nearly \$13,000 over the last three years. She walked the equivalent of a half-marathon last year. This

**BUILDING RAPPORT:** Melina Dezhbod and members of her team smile for the camera while taking part in the University of Saint Joseph's "Alternate Spring Break," working in New Jersey and Delaware with Habitat for Humanity.

year's walk will be held on May 21 at the Farmington Polo Grounds.

"Nearly everyone knows someone who's been affected by cancer," says Nevin, who lives in Harwinton. "Plus, it's a fun way to get together towards a common goal. It's such a positive experience. Everybody wants to do it."

Team leaders are encouraged to hold fund-raisers prior to the relay, and Nevin's team has held a number of events, including Dine Out for Hope Night at Countryside Restaurant in Harwinton, which donated 20 percent of dinner sales to Nevin's team.

Nevin also organized the Coaches vs. Cancer volleyball game last year at Lewis Mills. The teachers against students game raised \$2,500

for the American Cancer Society.

"It was amazing," she says. "We had such a good turnout and it was so much fun. I've grown a lot closer to people working on these fund-raisers."

This year's game will be held on March 23.

Nevin, who is captain of the school's crew team, also volunteers with MILLS (Making it a Little Less Stressful) Club, and the Make a Mark Foundation, which provides grants to teachers in the region. She also serves on the student council. "Volunteering means a lot to me," she says. "Knowing that I'm doing something for other people makes me happy."



# **JOCELYN BOHLMAN**

One day, the name Jocelyn Bohlman could be as wellknown in the nonprofit world as Paul Newman.

The Farmington High School senior has been so inspired by her work with a Farmington-based nonprofit organization that she's planning to major in business and start her own nonprofit group.

Motivated by the work her parents have done for Farmington-based Amy's Angels, which provides assistance to families dealing with illness or injury, Bohlman played an integral role in starting and coordinating the group's 5K run. In its first two years, the race, held at Winding Trails, raised more than \$6,000.

"I really liked fund-raising through school and I wanted to help other people," says Bohlman, who is also president of the school's student council. "Being a part of Amy's Angels has made it so I can help not just people in my school, but also people in the community."

This year's event - "The Amy's Angels and Class of 2018 5K Run/Walk" - will be held on April 29. Register for the event at www.itsyourrace.com. Proceeds will go towards installing a lift in the home of a Southington family, whose son was recently paralyzed in an accident, and towards other local families in need.

"Amy's Angels inspired me because, through the years, I developed a passion for helping people," she said. "It just takes one person to spark change. There are so many people who need help out there. I like the concept of Amy's Angels because its goal is broad enough to help anyone in the community."



# **HANNAH SCHEYDER**

Two years after Hannah Schevder donated her notably beautiful hair to Pantene Beautiful Lengths which provides free wigs to chemotherapy patients - her hair was again long enough to donate. This time, however, she decided to ask her school community to join her.

Just 13 East Lyme High School students signed up for the hair drive, but by the end of the school day, two local volunteer hair stylists had cut more than 50 ponytails to be donated.

"It was just an absolute tidal wave of people," she says of the cut-a-thon. "I cried. It was amazing to see what our community could do. It was way beyond my expectations."

Schevder's volunteerism isn't limited to her school community, or even her local community. Through Christ Lutheran Church in Niantic, where her father serves as pastor, she's been on weeklong mission trips to Philadelphia and Queens, New York, helping with urban farming and sustainability projects. This summer, she'll travel to Texas to provide help for those affected by Hurricane Harvey.

A member of the National Honor Society and the French Honor Society, she also volunteers regularly with "I've always wanted to travel, and not just to visit," she says. "I want to make a career out of it. I want to keep my missionary work a part of my life."

— Hannah Scheyder

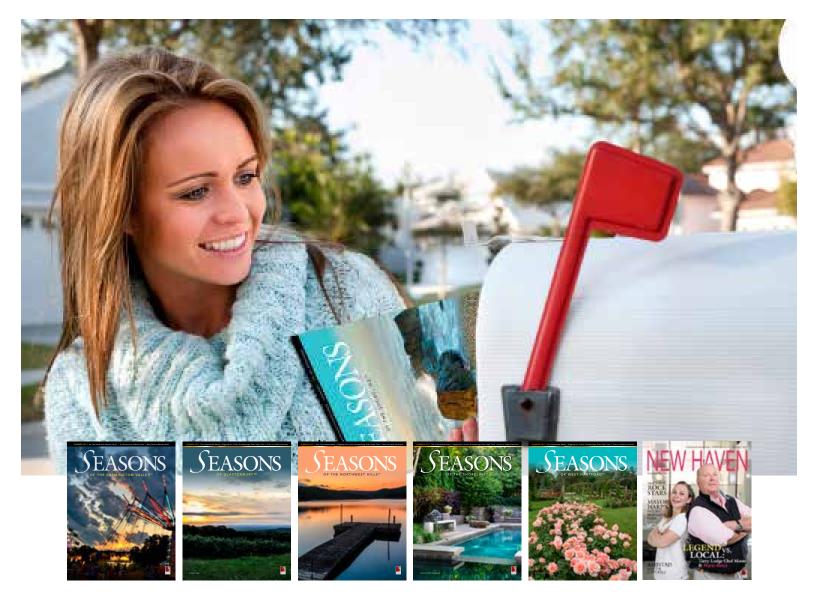
her mother at the New London Soup Kitchen. Scheyder was born in Houston and is the youngest of five children. After graduating in June, she plans to major in International Relations or Global Studies.

"I've always wanted to travel, and not just to visit," she says. "I want to make a career out of it. I want to keep my missionary work a part of my life."

Teresa M. Pelham is a writer living in Farmington. She is a parenting columnist for the Hartford Courant and a relationship columnist for Hartford Magazine. Teresa is the author of three books, including two written about her rescue dogs from Tennessee. Contact Teresa at tpelham@comcast.net.



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# **Not Just for Grownups**

# Nonstop adventures for families abound at Foxwoods.

by AMY J. BARRY / photography courtesy of FOXWOODS

ince its beginnings in 1986, Foxwoods Resort Casino in Ledyard, owned and operated by the Mashantucket Pequot Tribal Nation, has established a reputation as a premier gaming facility. The largest resort casino in North America, today it has seven casinos, four hotels, two spas, dozens of restaurants, six nightclubs, two theaters, two golf courses, and boutique and outlet shopping – pretty much everything to make adults happy.

But you may not know that Foxwoods is also a family-friendly destination with dozens of activities, events, dining options, shows, and educational experiences specially created with kids in mind.

Monique Sebastian, vice president of entertainment and marketing, says Foxwoods, celebrating its 25th birthday this year, is continually evolving and reinventing itself to stay current with the times.

"We ask ourselves, 'What do we need to be a full destination resort?' she says. "The old Vegas model was pure gaming for many years and they had to readjust their thinking. We're doing the same thing. People are bringing their families here. They're celebrating birthdays and engagements, and Mother's Day and Father's Day, and all holidays that incorporate children and teenagers."

Sebastian points out that in recent years, families are coming to Foxwoods for mini-staycations (three to four days). The resort has responded in a variety of ways.

While the casinos are not open to the under-21 crowd, the Tree House Arcade welcomes all ages and has been expanded from one to two floors of high-tech, interactive video games, and includes arcade classics and pinball.





# **Entertainment is another area** that has added many offerings for the younger set.

"Over the years, we've had performances by everyone from Hannah Montana [Miley Cyrus] to Big Time Rush to Fifth Harmony," Sebastian says. "Justin Bieber and Selena Gomez have performed here. We're now [presenting annually] the nationally syndicated dance show, 'So You Think You Can Dance?' We're looking forward to [violinist and dancer] Lindsey Stirling – she's very popular – in November, and The Power Rangers touring show in March. Also, we started a new Broadway series this year that's been a great success and lends itself to the family genre. We have 'Cinderella the Musical' coming in May."

New outdoor adventure attractions (safety restrictions apply) began opening this past summer at Thrill Tower, which currently offers the more adventurous visitor two extreme thrill rides. Sky Drop lifts four riders at a time to the top of Thrill Tower before they free-fall 120 feet to the bottom. Sky Launch propels two riders from the ground to the top and back again at an exhilarating speed. The soonto-open HighFlyer Zipline is a 33-story high adventure

that launches guests from the top of the Fox Tower to the Mashantucket Pequot Museum & Research Center at a top speed of 60 miles an hour.

A European-style, indoor karting center is slated to open in early 2018. The multi-level track will feature gaspowered, nine-horsepower karts that give drivers the power and control necessary to experience the thrill of high-speed

During "Kids Week" – held twice a year on winter and spring school breaks – 90 percent of activities are free and restaurants offer special pricing. Kids can stay occupied every day of the week, seeing movies on the big screen; participating in arts and crafts sessions, face painting, and balloon art; burning off energy in a play area with a bouncy house and such games as oversized Jenga, Connect Four, and foosball; competing at mini-golf; and enjoying hands-on cooking and baking demonstrations.

At Foxwoods, eating establishments abound, and many of them are family-friendly. The most recent additions are Junior's, its first location outside New York. Junior's features a full-service menu in addition to its famous cheesecake. The Sugar Factory, a popular spot for birthday parties, is known



STRIKE ZONE: High Rollers Luxury Lanes & Sports Lounge features 20 lanes, with bowling ball sizes for all ages and skill levels.



**LIVING HISTORY:** Children enjoy an interactive program at the Mashantucket Pequot Museum & Research Center.



for its monstrous milkshakes and smoking goblet drinks (both alcoholic and non-alcoholic), celebrity-endorsed Couture Pops, decadent dessert crepes and gourmet

High Rollers Luxury Lanes & Sports Lounge not only features 20 lanes with bowling ball sizes for all ages and skill levels, but a creative menu with such new spins on old favorites as Philly cheesesteak spring rolls with warm cheese sauce and spicy ketchup; white cheddar tater tots; and a cheeseburger pizza.

Other family favorite spots include California Pizza Kitchen, the Hard Rock Cafe, and Fuddruckers.

# **History Lessons**

In close proximity to Foxwoods Resort Casino is the Mashantucket Pequot Museum & Research Center, which opened in August 1998. The world's largest tribally-owned and operated museum facility of its kind, it offers a unique and inspiring educational experience for all generations to learn about the histories and cultures of Native Americans in the Northeast.

Featured in the museum's permanent and temporary exhibits are multi-sensory dioramas, films and videos, interactive programs, archival materials, ethnographic and archaeological collections, commissioned art, and traditional crafts by Native artisans.

"We wanted to create a world-class museum and research center that would tell our story, as well as preserve our tribe's history and culture," explains Lori A. Potter, director of communications for the Mashantucket Pequot Tribal Nation.

Potter explains why it's important that people know about the history of the Mashantucket Pequots.

"We have one of the most extraordinary 'comeback' stories in American history," she says. "Our history proves that although we were once nearly destroyed, we survived, thrived, and overcame adversity, against all odds."

But while there are somber aspects of Pequot history, in large part, the museum celebrates Native American food, art, music, festivals, and spirituality. Potter says the exhibits showcase "not only a renaissance of Pequot culture, but also the connection between the rich diversity of tribes throughout New England and North America – because as indigenous people, we are all related."

For more information and tickets to upcoming events at Foxwoods, visit foxwoods.com.



# Finding the Perfect Gift

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# BY CAROL LATTER

he holiday season is enjoyed each year by millions of people worldwide. It's a time when we can spoil the people we care about, and also have fun spoiling ourselves. The only challenge is finding the perfect gifts for each of the special people in our lives.

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In fact, the 1.3 million-squarefoot shopping Mecca is only a short hop for shoppers living anywhere in Connecticut, and provides access to new-to-market brands that they can't get in other portions of the state.

Those seeking luxury goods will find everything on their shopping list, and more.

Amanda Sirica, spokesperson for the center, says Westfarms boasts some of the best holiday fashion brands in the market, from Tory Burch to Michael Kors and Anthropologie, to name just a few. "Vineyard Vines opened in the fall and it's been hugely popular," she adds. The mall also features Connecticut's only The North Face retail store.

Nordstrom carries many fashionista favorites: Gucci, Prada, Manolo Blahnik, and David Yurman. Sirica says Nordstrom is a great one-stop shopping destination, offering gifts for men, women and children in one location.

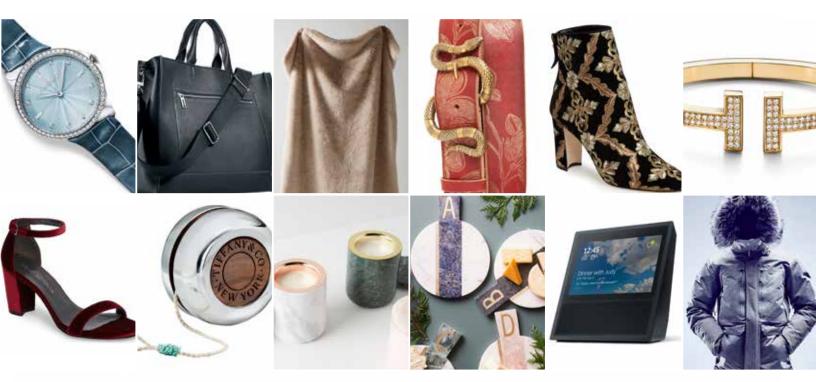
Thinking of jewelry? Westfarms is home to the only Tiffany store in Connecticut. "That little blue box is always a big hit," says Sirica. And Tiffany also carries fun gifting items like sterling silver yoyos and table tennis paddles, along with women's handbags and even a brand new tote for men.

Sirica notes that electronics are always on the hot list for holiday shopping, and this year is no different. "All the rage this season is Amazon's new Echo Show. It's a camera-equipped, hands-free device - it's like having your own voice-controlled assistant. It can tell you the best route to take to work, play music, and help you order things through your Amazon account. It has a screen so you can see the things you're buying, or you can tap into your Pandora playlist and it will show the album cover." Amazon will have a pop-up store in the mall's center court this holiday season.

And of course, no quest for the hottest electronics would be complete without a visit to the Microsoft store or the Apple store.

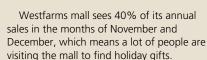
If you've been invited to one or more holiday parties, you might be looking for a little something to bring along other than the ubiquitous bottle of wine. "Anthropologie has a large assortment of hostess gifts, from specialty candles to beautiful monogrammed marble cheese boards," Sirica says, adding that Pottery Barn and Williams & Sonoma are also great gift sources.

Women looking to find a little something special for themselves might consider a pair of red velvet Stuart Weitzman heels, perfect to wear to the next holiday party. Sirica says Westfarms retailers offer terrific holiday sales and promotions, "and it's a good time to take advantage of that for yourself."



### PICTURED ARE SOME OF WESTFARMS' LUXURIOUS BRANDS AND THEIR POPULAR PRODUCTS FOR THE HOLIDAY SEASON.

Left: Prada Cahier calfskin shoulder bag from Nordstrom. Above, from left to right: Tiffany Metro 2-Hand ladies' watch from Tiffany & Co., Italian leather men's tote from Tiffany & Co., Fireside faux fur throw blanket in blush from Anthropologie, Gucci snake buckle leather belt from Nordstrom, Manolo Blahnik Isola Brocade bootie from Nordstrom, T-square diamond bracelet from Tiffany & Co., Stuart Weitzman NEARLYNUDE ankle strap sandal from Nordstrom, sterling silver yo-yo from Tiffany & Co., Luxuriate candle from Anthropologie, marbled monogrammed cheese board from Anthropologie, Echo Show from Amazon, Cryos Expedition GTX parka from The North Face. Pictured below: HardWear necklace from Tiffany & Co.



"As a result, Westfarms puts things into place at this time of year to make shopping more convenient for our customers," Sirica says, starting with extended hours that begin on Black Friday. The hours vary, but shoppers can visits the shopwestfarms.com website or use the app for a guick check of opening and closing times before they head for the mall.

Sirica offers a number of tips for circumnavigating the mall efficiently, and finding the perfect gifts.

The first step is to ask the people on your list to identify at least some of the gifts they'd like to receive, then make a list to keep you focused.

You can also ask for help from the stores you plan to visit. "If you know an item that you want, we recommend calling ahead to the store to check availability and reserve it," she says. Many stores, including Nordstrom, will scoop the item you want off the shelf and hold it at customer pickup until you arrive.

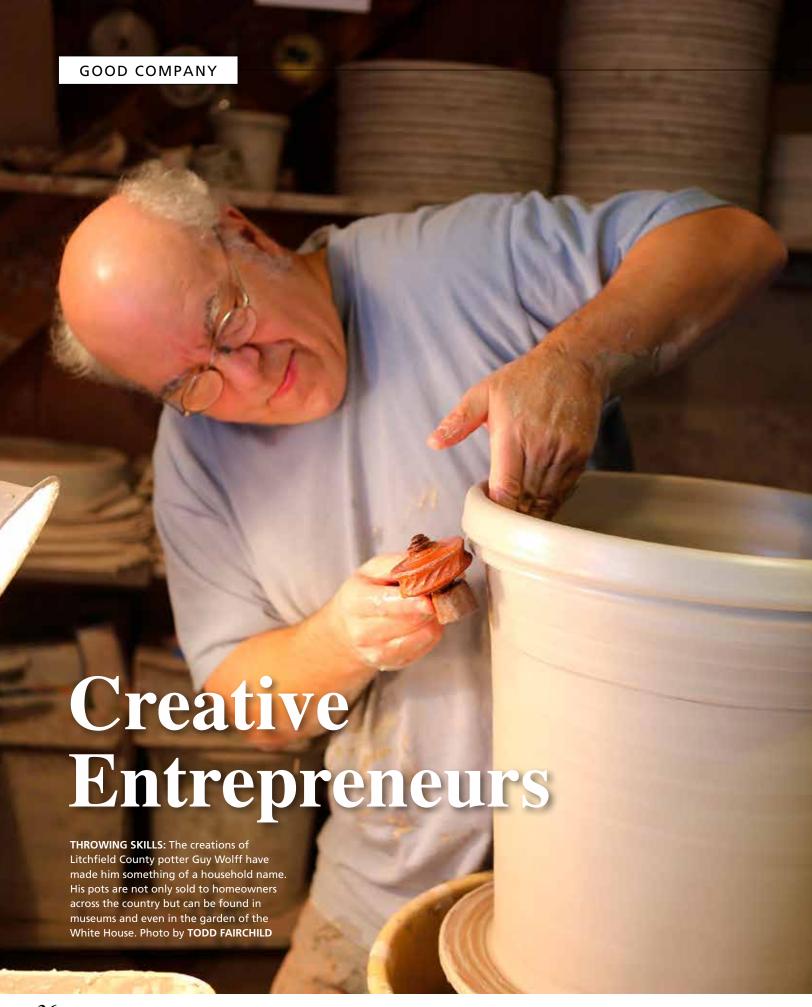
A number of stores, including Nordstrom and Macy's, offer personal shopping, a free service. "You can call ahead and give a personal shopper the sizes you're looking for and the types of styles and colors that your recipient likes. They will shop for you and put things aside. When you arrive for your appointment, you can pick and choose. They will even wrap your selections for you."

At Westfarms' digital wall behind center court, shoppers can enter their store list into one of the four larger-than-life iPads, and the device will not only show them what's on sale but will map their route. "Having a route will help keep you organized and efficient," she says. The mall's app offers the same functions.

Another tip: leave the wrapping to Westfarms. "We have a gift-wrapping station located on the second level, by Lord & Taylor. They do it while you wait, they are really fast, and they do a beautiful job. And 100% of the proceeds benefits a different nonprofit each year."

Stumped for a gift idea for that hardto-buy-for person? Sirica recommends the Westfarms American Express gift card. "It's perfect for any person, no matter what size they take or what type of gift they like, and it's accepted at all of the mall's 160 restaurants and retailers." The gift cards are available for purchase at the customer service center near center court, on the mall's lower level.

If you're looking to bring a little one to visit Santa, don't forget to use the "Santa express lane" - simply register at **shopwestfarms.com** before you come to the mall, and a time will be reserved for you so you don't need to wait in line.



itchfield County potter Guy Wolff, whose handmade clay pots can be found in the gardens of historic estates (including Monticello and the White House), museums (like the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum and the Met Cloisters), and suburban backyards across the country, draws inspiration for his creations from both master potters in Europe and traditional American craftsmen.

He says his signature white pots, for example, harken back to Regency England, featuring architectural details like the dentils that are found in the ornamental plaster ceilings of the great English houses of that period. "I'm mostly thinking of Jane Austen when I'm making them," he says. "Everything I do goes back to stories about people."

All three of the businesses profiled here are inspired by people's stories: Redstone Studios, which produces oneof-a-kind maps depicting the stories of people's lives; The Storyteller's Cottage, a new literary destination in Simsbury that celebrates books, writers, and readers; and Guy Wolff Pottery, whose pots pay homage to handmade traditionalism, the masters under whom Wolff studied his trade, and history. The imaginative Connecticut entrepreneurs behind these ventures turned their love for the arts into unique businesses that celebrate creativity.

# Connie Brown, Redstone Studios, Durham

Artist Connie Brown says it was an epiphany she had while on a summit in the Spanish Pyrenees that ultimately

led to the creation of Redstone Studios, her custom map-making business. "I got to the top and the thought I had was: 'I'm going to make a map of this hiking trip when I get home," " she recalls.

Brown had her guide mark the path they had taken on government maps she had collected while traveling. "I knew nothing about putting maps together, but I somehow reconciled the different scales of the maps," says Brown, who used the project as "a stalling technique" while applying for English teaching jobs. "I thought, 'Hey, maybe if I learn a little more, I can make one-of-a-kind travel maps for people who love to travel.' "

Brown's Durham-based business has evolved into so much more: Her beautiful, hand-painted creations - many of which are modeled after maps from the 17th century (the "golden age of cartography," according to Brown) - not only immortalize clients' travels, they document their ancestry and literally map out their lives.

Brown has created maps that celebrate treks, bike trips, honeymoons and international adoption odysseys, as well as life histories and family migrations. Her maps depict beloved destinations, alma maters, historic districts, environmental regions, and favorite fishing waters.

Her most recent project tracks the journey of a client's ancestors - who were slaves - along the Underground Railroad to freedom. Another map, hanging on a wall in her studio, plots the geographical origin of every known translation of Alice in Wonderland. The former incorporates a trompe l'oeil rendering of the first U.S. Census to include African Americans (the client's relatives' names are among those listed). The latter features drawings of characters from the famed Lewis Carroll novel and was actually printed on the endpapers for a series of scholarly tomes about Alice in Wonderland translations around the globe.

One of Brown's works even hung above former Vice President Dick Cheney's desk in the West Wing of the White House during his tenure: That five-and-a-half-footlong canvas, commissioned by Cheney's daughters to commemorate their father's sixtieth birthday, documented the route Cheney's great-grandfather, Captain Samuel

> Fletcher Cheney, took during the Civil War, and was created in collaboration with Brown's thenpartner, painter Julie Ruff.

Today, Redstone Studios is mostly a one-woman operation, though Brown occasionally gets help from her architect husband, Duncan Milne, who designed her studio on their 1843 property (formerly Durham Academy). She also works with art printer Mike Suozzi to produce museum-quality prints of her original maps.

IT'S ALL IN THE DETAILS: Connie Brown's custom maps are not only highly creative but are exquisitely executed to reflect the passions and life experiences of her customers. Photo by CARYN B. DAVIS **PHOTOGRAPHY** 



LIFE MAPS: Connie Brown of Durham makes custom, one-of-a-kind maps that reflect significant life events – everything from bike trips and honeymoons to adoption odysseys and family migration. Photo by CARYN B. DAVIS PHOTOGRAPHY

Brown, who has travelled across the country to visit properties she is mapping, and has even been known to bring back artifacts - like red clay from a ranch in Texas or a turkey feather and fly-fishing lures from a fishing camp near Asheville, North Carolina - to incorporate into her maps, says she spends an average of 200 hours on each project. And she charges accordingly: Her maps, which are typically painted onto 3x4 canvases, start at \$10,000 (though she occasionally makes smaller ones starting at \$5,000). "Sometimes, there are people who do have everything," she says. "Except this."

Brown never formerly studied art or cartography, but she does have a degree in English, which she claims is not irrelevant to her business. "Maps are about communication," she explains. Still, Brown says she has always been a "pretty good artist," and has even done some freelance illustration over the years.

"I was always drawn to scientific art, like botanical and zoological drawings, all the stuff I do now on a regular basis," she says. "And every now and then, I would actually copy an old map - I just liked doing it."

Brown admits that she initially spent more time on the decorative aspects of her maps - adding embellishments like compass roses, cartouches and antique lettering, and using a translucent brown wash to impart a vintage feel - than she did on cartography. But eventually she learned more about the history and science of mapmaking, joined the New York Map Society, and, in her words, "became a total map nerd."

Today, the map artist, a board member of the New York organization and founder of the recently launched Connecticut Map Society, gives lectures and workshops in the art of cartography.

"I don't populate my maps with place names and features in the way a general mapmaker would. I'm essentially



MADE TO ORDER: Each of Connie Brown's maps is completely individualized to her client. Photo by CARYN B. DAVIS PHOTOGRAPHY

depicting my client's world," she says. "That's the way people like it. We feel that way from childhood - that we are the center of our worlds."

# Lisa Natcharian, The Storyteller's Cottage, Simsbury

"I didn't start this project knowing I was starting this project," says Lisa Natcharian of The Storyteller's Cottage, a historic manor house in downtown Simsbury that she has transformed into a unique venue for all things literary.

The "cottage" came with the Fiddler's Green property that Natcharian and her husband, Matthew Natcharian, bought as an investment in December 2016. Though the Victorian house had been used as an office building, she says, "I looked at how beautiful all these historic details were and I thought, 'No, we can do better than that.' "

Natcharian started making lists of possible uses for the space, and realized that all of her ideas had the same underlying theme - they all related to literature. So the freelance writer, prolific reader, and self-proclaimed "book nerd" decided to create a "hub for people who love literature."

Home to an assortment of literary societies and themed

book clubs, a writing space for local authors, and a setting for writer's workshops and literary soirées, The Storyteller's Cottage also features three "mystery rooms," the book-lover's version of escape rooms (except instead of trying to find a way out, you try to solve a mystery). "The Jules Verne Steampunk Library," for example, the setting for the Detective's Dinner Party mystery adventure, is chock-full of old, leather-bound books and other vintage artifacts.

"I love the immersive aspect," says Natcharian. "When you do a specific activity in a themed space, it elevates that activity into something special."

Thus, the Mysterious Pendragon Society, "a private club for young thinkers and creators" who are fans of fantasy fiction, meets in the secret "Medieval Keep," accessed through a bookshelf in the "Enchanted Library." And the Great British Baking Club, a book club in which members enjoy recipes inspired by PBS's The Great British Bake-Off while discussing culinary mystery novels, takes place in the "English Country Kitchen."

Natcharian, who designed the house to make visitors feel like they are stepping into the pages of their favorite novels, had planned on a soft opening in October, but says the response to The Storyteller's Cottage has been overwhelming, with local authors coming out of the woodwork. "It's been crazy," she says. "People pop in off the street, they call, all kinds of authors want to offer classes and workshops - I can't believe how many authors there are in this area."

Authors currently running programs at the cottage include mystery writer Steve Liskow; Lisa Fiedler, author of books for children and young adults; fantasy writer Michael Bertolini; and children's book author Karin Lefranc. Other recent and upcoming offerings include a storytelling workshop with Moth StorySLAM champion Terry Wolfisch Cole, a talk about the road to publication given by young adult author Carrie Firestone, and a 6-week course on getting personal essays published by C. Flanagan Flynn, managing editor of Brain, Child and Brain, Teen magazines. There are creative writing programs and themed book clubs geared to both adults and children.

The Storyteller's Cottage allows Natcharian to be immersed in something she really loves. "I love the reading, I love the decorating, I love speaking with people who love





POTS APLENTY: Guy Wolff's Bantam studio, containing handmade pots of all shapes and sizes, is open to the public. Photo by **TODD FAIRCHILD** 

reading," she says. A mother of three who also runs a website for gifted children called Raising Wizards, says it has already been gratifying to watch kids come and connect with one another over their love of books.

At the venue's recent open house, Avon residents Julie and Greg Wolfe explored the cottage with their eight-yearold son, Connor, who sported a Harry Potter-inspired "Gryffindor" t-shirt. "We are both writers," says Julie Wolfe. "If we could birth a house, this would be it." Their son, who eagerly guided other visitors around the Medieval Keep, was equally smitten. Says the young bibliophile: "I want to stay here for the rest of my life."

# Guy Wolff, Guy Wolff Pottery, Bantam

It was almost inevitable that Guy Wolff, son of abstract expressionist Robert Jay Wolff and potter Elizabeth Wolff, would make a life in the arts. Wolff grew up surrounded by art: He spent a great deal of his childhood in the home of sculptor Alexander Calder, a close family friend, and his uncle was architect and furniture designer Marcel Breuer, who designed the Whitney Museum of American Art.

Wolff started playing around in his mother's pottery studio when he was just four years old, and continued to pursue his fascination with clay while in high school, spending hours a day throwing pots, and collecting and studying traditional New England pottery. "Everyone had these beautiful old pots lying around their house: the Calders, Breuer. I was fascinated with how beautiful and vigorous these pots were," he recalls.

During the 1970s - what Wolff refers to as his "journeyman" years - he learned from pottery masters at Jugtown Pottery in North Carolina, Wetheriggs Pottery in northern England, and Ewenny Pottery, the oldest working pottery in Wales. As he honed his skills as a potter, he continued to study antique flowerpots, and by the 1990s was not only being sought out to consult on the origins of antique pots but was being asked to reproduce them for museums around the country.

"Emerson once wrote that it took him 15 years to be

an overnight success," says Wolff. "For me, it completely hit the fan in 1999." That year, Horticulture magazine featured Wolff's pots on their pages, garden retailer Smith & Hawken invited Wolff to collaborate on a line of pots, and Martha Stewart presented his pots to Oprah Winfrey on national television in a segment about how to do Christmas right.

"After Martha gave my pots to Oprah in front of 10 million Americans, there was no way I could make enough pots to keep up with the demand," Wolff says. So he trained select potters in locations as disparate as Wisconsin, Honduras, and China, letting them in on "the secrets to making English flowerpots," and the Guild was born.

Pots stamped with G Wolff & Co were produced by members of the guild, whereas those stamped with G Wolff, along with the year made and the weight of the pot (a shoutout to the English tradition of numbering pots), were made by Wolff, himself, between 1971 and today. Those bearing the stamp Wolff Pottery were made and fired in Wolff's studio, either by his wife, Erica Warnock, or by a visiting potter working under Wolff's tutelage.

Though there was a period, Wolff says, when about 2,000 mom and pop stores across America were carrying his pots - not to mention bigger retailers like Smith & Hawken, Restoration Hardware and Seibert & Rice - business has quieted down and all Wolff pottery is once again produced in his Bantam studio, which is open to the public.

"I'd like to make a business card that says: I used to be Guy Wolff," jokes the 67-year-old potter. "Everyone thinks I'm amazingly wealthy and retired, which is amazing when you're still scraping the clay off the floor of the building and making pots." But Wolff, who insists that only when you work with a material long enough do you "know what it's about," remains committed to his art. "It's been a lot of fun," he says. "The whole run of it."

Lori Miller Kase is a freelance writer living in Simsbury.



Navigating food sensitivities around the holidays.

entered around family, friends, and loved ones, the holiday season is supposed to be welcoming and inclusive (aside from the usual family drama of course). But for those with dietary restrictions, being a guest at someone's house can be stressful and possibly ostracizing. Will there be something there for them to eat? What if there isn't? Should they eat beforehand just in case?

While guests shouldn't expect an entire meal to be catered around their habits, hosting a party comes with the responsibility of accommodating your guests' needs. Here are a few hosting etiquette tips for navigating dietary restrictions this holiday season:

Make sure to inquire about your guests' needs. By asking if there are any allergies or restrictions well before the event, you avoid any uncomfortable realizations the night of.

Be on the lookout for hidden ingredients. A lot of unsuspecting foods can contain allergens, and some we just plain forget about. For example: avoid soy for those with a gluten sensitivity and butter for those who are lactose intolerant.

Offer a variety for everyone. Not all dishes have to cater to someone's intolerance. By including several options, guests can skip an offending dish while still having alternatives.

Once you've gotten past how to handle the restrictions, you have to find the perfect recipe. Here's where I can help. Every year, my family makes an assortment of holiday desserts: Italian pizzelles, gingerbread cookies, chocolate tarts, you name it. When suddenly we came across egg allergies, celiac and lactose intolerance, we had to alter the usual Christmas spread. We kept the pizzelles, because, well, they're delicious. But we added meringues which are naturally gluten free, dairy free and nut free, and added egg-free melting moment cookies to the menu as well. I hope that these recipes will become a part of your holiday tradition, as they have mine. S

Alycia Chrosniak is a freelance food and travel writer, and the human behind CTEatsOut.com, your guide to the best eats in the state.



# **PIZZELLES**

Makes about 30 cookies

Special Equipment: Pizzelle maker

Ingredients:

6 eggs, room temperature

1 ½ cups sugar

1 cup butter, melted and cooled

4 tsp baking powder

1 tsp vanilla extract

1 1/2 tsp anise extract

3 ½ cups flour

Confectioner's sugar for topping

# Instructions:

In a large mixing bowl, beat the eggs and sugar together

Add the butter, vanilla and anise and mix until combined

In another bowl, sift the flour and baking powder together

Add the flour and baking powder mixture to the egg mixture in batches, mixing together in between

Turn on your pizzelle iron

Place one heaping teaspoon of batter onto each grid, placing slightly back and off center

Close the iron and cook according to your pizzelle maker's instructions, usually about 30 seconds or until lightly golden brown

Transfer to a wire cooling rack and continue with the rest of the dough

Just before serving, put confectioner's sugar in a sieve and sprinkle over the tops of the cookies

# To store:

Place in an airtight container for up to two weeks

# **MELTING MOMENTS**

(egg free, nut free)

Makes about two dozen cookies

Ingredients:

1 ½ cups flour

½ cup cornstarch

1/4 tsp salt

½ cup confectioner's sugar, plus more for topping

1 cup unsalted butter, room temperature

1 tsp vanilla extract

### Instructions:

In a medium bowl, mix together the flour, cornstarch and salt, and set aside

In a large bowl, beat the butter, sugar and vanilla until smooth, about 2-3 minutes

In batches, add in the flour mixture to the butter mixture and beat until incorporated

Cover, and refrigerate the batter until firm, about 1 hour

Preheat the oven to 350 degrees F and place a rack in the center of the oven

Line your baking sheet with parchment paper

Once your batter is firm, scoop out full tablespoons of dough and roll into balls

Place them on the cookie sheet, spaced 1-2 inches

Bake for 13 minutes, or until the cookies just begin to brown

Remove from the oven and let cool on a wire rack

Place a piece of parchment paper beneath the wire

Put confectioner's sugar in a sieve and sprinkle the tops of the cookies with the sugar

### To store:

Place in an airtight container for up to two weeks





#### Spirit of the Season

Written by Scott Clark

As the hectic holiday season descends upon us, everyone looks forward to stress-free time. Once the planning and prepping are done, and your holiday gathering is underway, it's time to relax with a creative yet simple holiday cocktail.

Preparing a simple signature holiday punch can be a crowd pleaser – from the traditional eggnog or the classic Champagne punch to the more exotic cranberry margarita or apple cider sangria. As with all cocktails, the better quality the ingredients, the better tasting the drink.

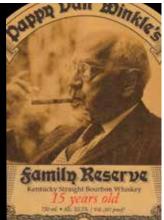
Holiday gatherings are a good excuse to relax those self-imposed restrictions on desserts and other sweets – you can re-evaluate these choices while planning this year's round of New Year's resolutions!

For a sit-down dinner party, pairing a good dessert wine with the final course is a great way to conclude the meal. Ice wines from Germany or Canada can be wonderfully rich, while still having enough acidity to finish light and clean on the palate. Another good option would be a Vin Santo from Italy or, for something even more celebratory, a nice Demi-Sec Champagne. Any of these choices will add the perfect punctuation to your gathering.

If your gathering is more of a cocktail style party with an array of sweets, there are several beverage options you can offer that will satisfy all of your quests. Check out your local craft brewers' winter seasonal selection. These brews range from Belgium Dubbels to coffee-infused stouts to spiced dark ales, and all are wonderful. A real crowd pleaser is to freeze coffee in mini ice cube trays, then add to a cocktail glass and pour a shot of vanilla vodka and a shot of Bailey's over it, for a cooler interpretation of the classic Bailey's and coffee!

Scott Clark is the general manager of Liquor Depot Inc.

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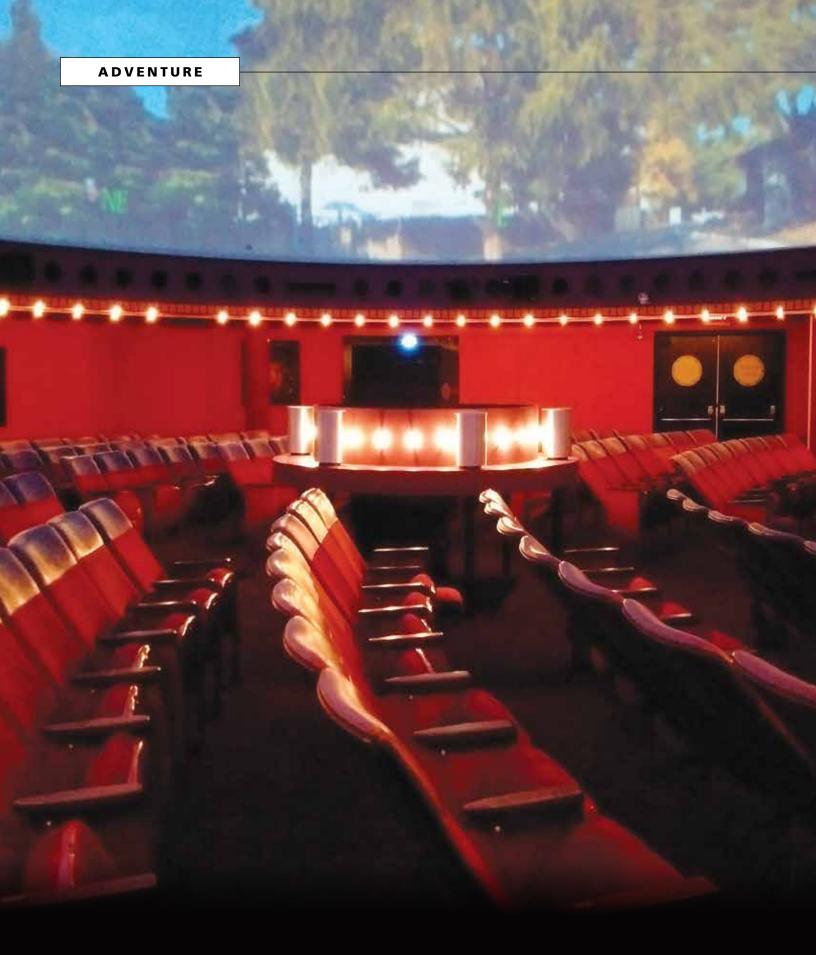




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**SKY SHOW:** The Travelers Science Dome offers theater-style seating for patrons who come to get a close-up look at the objects of interest in the night sky. Photo courtesy of Travelers Science Dome at the Gengras Planetarium in West Hartford.

# Seeing Slars

## Connecticut planetariums inspire students and community.

#### **by MATTHEW BRODERICK**

or a fleeting two-plus minutes on August 21, 2017, astronomy displaced politics, the NFL preseason and the Kardashians to capture America's collective attention. A solar eclipse, visible coast-to-coast only in America – for the first time since the country's founding in 1776 – plunged parts of the country into complete mid-day darkness, giving astronomy its moment to shine. Millions of Americans traveled to sites to view the sun's complete obscurity along the path of totality. Viewing parties were held in offices, in neighborhoods and on campuses across the county. Solar glasses became the nation's hottest cottage industry.

At Yale University alone, an estimated 1,500 people showed up on campus to admire the partial eclipse visible

from the Northeast. For Michael Faison, a senior lecturer in astronomy at Yale, who had traveled to Idaho to view the eclipse, the heightened, if temporary, interest in an astronomical event was welcome news. As the director of the school's Leitner Family Observatory and Planetarium, Faison – alongside a team of graduate students and volunteers - is working to expose and explain the wonders of astronomy to the public.

And they are not

alone. Connecticut is home to six public planetariums – which dot the state from New Haven and New Canaan to Willimantic and Storrs – and their employees and volunteers are sharing their passion for astronomy with everyone from toddlers to grandparents.

Since childhood, Noreen Grice has been drawn to the night sky. Her initial interest in astronomy, she says, traces its roots to a regular diet of "Star Trek," but her career path was forged under the 57-foot dome of the Charles Hayden Planetarium at Boston's Museum of Science.

"When the lights went down [in the theater] and the stars came out, it was amazing," Grice, a Malden,

Massachusetts, native recounted. "I've always been curious about what's beyond what we can see, about what's

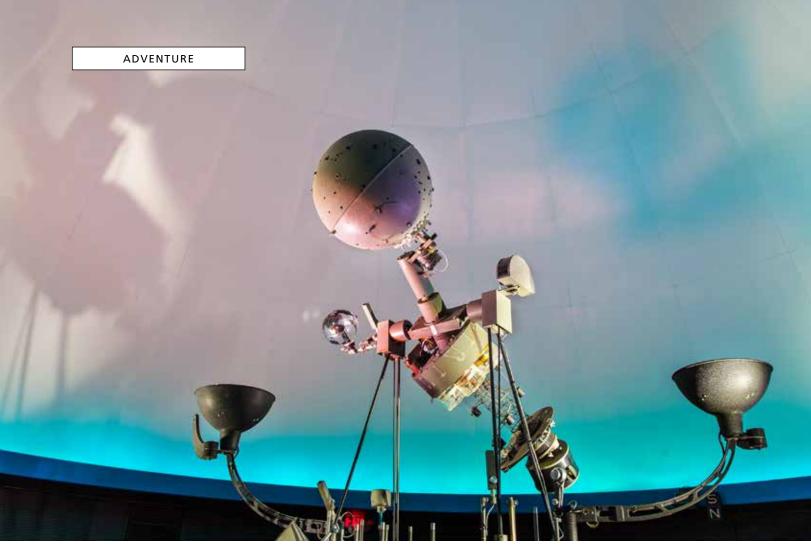
out there."

Today, as the planetarium manager and astronomy educator at the Gengras Planetarium at The Children's Museum in West Hartford, Grice runs a variety of ageappropriate shows each



#### A LIFELONG PASSION:

Noreen Grice, planetarium manager and astronomy educator at the Gengras Planetarium at The Children's Museum in West Hartford, has been fascinated with the night sky since childhood.



LIFE LESSONS: The domed theater at Mystic Planetarium draws nearly 10,000 students per year from schools across the region.

"People are generally interested [in astronomy] if they can understand how things fit together," Grice says. "In many ways, the sky, and the constellations in it, are like a puzzle."

For Grice, planetariums – facilities that project images of stars, planets and constellations onto a domed ceiling – provide a fun, engaging way to share the story of our planet. "I want kids to understand we're part of a solar system that's part of a group of galaxies, that's part of the universe," she says. "It's our home in space and while it makes you feel small, it also makes kids realize we're all part of something bigger."

In Mystic, Brian Koehler supervises the Treworgy Planetarium at Mystic Seaport Museum, as part of the seaport's education department. The 30-foot domed theater seats 85 people. Like all planetariums, he says, his facility – which draws nearly 10,000 students per year from school groups across Connecticut and nearby states – features traditional shows such as constellation identification and phases of the moon. But as part of a larger maritime history museum, he and his four-person staff also help familiarize visitors with some very basic ways to navigate by stars.

"Long before there were smart phones and GPS, explorers often relied on stars for navigation," Koehler

explains. "For instance, we have a program that shows the [navigational] tools Christopher Columbus used versus those who came here on the Mayflower. Planetariums are where history meets science."

At Yale's Leitner Family Observatory and Planetarium, it's also where science meets history, according to Michael Faison. "We have exhibits that celebrate the history of astronomy at Yale," he says, noting the school's observatory houses the telescope used to make the first American sighting of the return of Halley's comet in 1835. The observatory was built in 2005 and the planetarium opened in 2009.

Every Tuesday year-round for \$5, the Leitner Planetarium, with its 30-foot dome and capacity for 100 visitors, holds two one-hour shows. Clear skies permitting, the planetarium shows are followed by an opportunity to use the Leitner Observatory's telescope for public stargazing.

"Many people are drawn to the aesthetics of astronomy," Faison says. "To see a nebula or galaxy through a telescope is more beautiful and moving than to view it in a book or on a website."

Yale's planetarium also hosts student groups from area schools to inspire the next generation of astronomers.

The 70 gifted students at Talcott Mountain Science

Center & Academy, a private school in Avon with a focus on STEM learning, don't have to go far to find their inspiration. The center, established in 1967, has its own planetarium. The academy was created in 1983.

"It allows us to use the very technology we teach about to teach with," says Jonathan Craig, executive director of the center.

For instance, Craig notes, rather than teaching science, astronomy or weather from a book, students learn in a much more interactive way through a planetarium. "Students should be learning in a more natural way and if they experience science and the world around them, they'll have a better understanding of it," he says.

And it's not just the sciences that students can appreciate through a planetarium experience. "We were discussing Van Gogh's [painting] 'Starry Night,' and I asked if the stars

painted were from the real sky," Craig recalls. "Using the annual ephemeris of stars [in layperson's terms, a "journal" that gives the positions of naturally occuring astronomical objects and satellites at a certain point in time], I was able to use the planetarium like a time machine and go back to project the stars as they appeared the very night Van Gogh painted that famous work."

The school's integrated approach, Craig believes, is critical to providing meaningful learning for students. He notes that more than 600 children from the greater Hartford area participate in Talcott Mountain's summer programming.

"Planetariums allow kids to actually be immersed in an environment that inspires them and allows them to observe things," Craig says. "That's when learning really takes place and kids start internalizing things and making it their own."

Emma Mitchell can relate. As a child, she was drawn to planetariums. "I've always been into space and the universe and how it all started," she says. Today, with a doctorate in applied physics, Mitchell teaches

#### **BIG BANG FOR THE BUCK:**

The Leitner Family Observatory and Planetarium at Yale holds two one-hour shows for \$5, each Tuesday year-round.

physics and astronomy at Ethel Walker School in Simsbury, where she is working to launch a student-run astronomy club during the current school year.

She's also in charge of the school's on-campus observatory, which houses a professional-grade Meade telescope. "Once it's calibrated, the telescope can seek out more than 140,000 objects in the sky, including different planets and galaxies," she says. "I want our students to connect their learning with something bigger than themselves."

Mitchell anticipates the observatory will host community events as well, which she believes is important. "Science has always been about advancing the frontier of human knowledge," she says. "So having an observatory for both students and the public goes hand-in-hand with getting people excited about discovery."



## Dr. Lisa Diamond

Then Charlotte Hungerford Hospital psychiatrist Lisa Diamond was four, her grandfather, an "old-time family doctor," would bring her with him to his office and set her up with a little appointment book, plastic spine and shoulder joint models, and a microscope. Even at that young age, Dr. Diamond, now 58, knew she wanted to be a physician.

"Though my grandfather really led me toward medicine, my father also had a real impact," says Dr. Diamond, who in September became Chief of Service for the Department of Psychiatry at CHH.

She had started attending psychopharmacology conferences with her father, also a psychiatrist, soon after she finished her training. "My father, who is still, at age 88, seeing patients, started as a Freudian analyst, but he kept really current - he is a lifelong learner."

#### **CHOOSING PSYCHIATRY: A PERFECT FIT**

Dr. Diamond, a New York City native, went to Yale University, where she majored in psychology, and subsequently earned her medical degree at Columbia University College of Physicians and Surgeons. But after a year of internal medicine training at Lenox Hill Hospital in Manhattan, she reconsidered her plan. "Though I loved internal medicine, I felt like we didn't have enough time talking to patients," she says.

By the time Dr. Diamond finished her internship in New York, she had two children and another on the way. She wanted to find a specialty that allowed her "time to be a mom." Psychiatry, she says, was a perfect fit. The way the field was evolving - to encompass both therapy and psychopharmacology - aligned with Dr. Diamond's interest in both the emotional and biological sides of mental illness.

"I really do enjoy that much of my day is understanding people and what their issues are," she says. "But a big part of it is biology, and while I'm not one to throw a lot of medicine at people, we can

really help people who are depressed or anxious with medication."

Dr. Diamond completed her psychiatry residency at New York University, and ran a private practice in Manhattan for about a year before she and her husband decided to move their family to New Milford, where she had spent weekends with her family as a child. She served as Chief of Psychiatry at New Milford Hospital for 12 years, and then spent six more years in private practice.

She missed working in a hospital, so last year, she decided to interview for a part-time job at CHH. "I met with the outpatient medical director, Jeff Nachbar, and he said, 'I just gave my resignation - are you interested in my job?" "

#### **CONTINUITY OF CARE: FROM BIRTH TO GERIATRICS**

This past January, Dr. Diamond became Medical Director of Outpatient Psychiatry at CHH, and quickly concluded that the various psychiatric services offered at the hospital - inpatient, partial hospital (a more intense outpatient program that she describes as "a step down" from inpatient care), and outpatient - should be combined into one department.

"There wasn't enough communication going on, and the hospital also wanted a more unifying approach," she says. "So they reorganized."

As Chief of Service, Dr. Diamond oversees the inpatient and outpatient units, the partial hospital, the emergency room's crisis intervention program, and the hospital's Center for Youth and Families.

"It's been a shift, but one that I really enjoy," she says. "We can follow patients more completely from inpatient to partial to outpatient - it's really the continuity of care that we've always striven for, but having one department with one person overseeing it is very helpful."

Starting with the Center for Youth and Families -

Written by **Lori Miller Kase** Photography courtesy of **Charlotte Hungerford Hospital** 



a child advocacy center and a mental health service geared toward children, adolescents and their families - CHH provides psychiatric care for all ages and all diagnoses. Anxiety, depression, bipolar illness, schizophrenia and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) are the most common conditions she and her colleagues treat. In addition to Dr. Diamond and the other psychiatrists on staff, licensed social workers, licensed counselors, and APRNs round out the department, which offers individual and group therapy, as well as psychopharmacologic treatment.

While Dr. Diamond continues to see patients in her new role, she spends much of her day at patient disposition meetings, where "those doing the therapy meet with those doing the prescriptions" to discuss and coordinate patients' overall care. One of the things that appealed to her about CHH's psychiatric program was the way that it combined the therapeutic and medical components of treatment.

"It's not like 'Oh, here's a pill, you'll be fine,' " she says. "Often, there are things that trigger anxiety or trigger

depression. If you can talk through those things, or teach relaxation techniques to help patients cope with these stressors, that is as helpful as the medication. Often, you need both."

#### TACKLING THE OPIOID CRISIS

Dr. Diamond, a member of the Litchfield County Opiate Task Force, is excited that this winter her department will launch a new medication-assisted treatment (MAT) program to help the growing number of patients addicted to opioids. The number of patients admitted for opioid overdose to hospitals in the Northwest Hills has more than doubled in the past five years, according to a recent report released by a regional group of health organizations. Each year, hundreds of people die of opioid overdoses in Connecticut - 917 in 2016 alone - and the numbers continue to rise.

According to Dr. Diamond, medications like Suboxone and Vivitrol can help to wean patients off of opioids. Suboxone is a combination of buprenorphine, an opiate, which eases symptoms of withdrawal, and naloxone, which blocks the opiate receptors in the brain and prevents the "high" typically produced by opiates. Vivitrol is the trade name for naltrexone, which, like naloxone, blocks the opiate receptors, decreasing drug cravings.

"There are a lot of success stories where people undergoing medication-assisted treatment have been able to

> get their lives back together and go back to work," says Dr. Diamond, adding that success when they combine

"Often, there are things that patients have the most trigger anxiety or trigger drug treatment with talk depression. If you can talk therapy. through those things, or teach

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stressors, that is as helpful as

- Dr. Diamond

the medication. Often, you

need both."

patients cope with these

#### **HAVING IT ALL**

When she's not working, Dr. Diamond, a certified yoga instructor, teaches yoga and engages in a daily practice. "I've been doing it since before it was in vogue," she says. "I think it's very calming, and keeps you in good shape, too." But her

main hobby is spending time with her kids and grandkids.

Dr. Diamond remembers wondering as a high school student how she was going to balance being a doctor with having a big family. "I was of the era when Ms. magazine came out, and they said you can do it all. And I thought, 'Am I going to be able to do it all?' "

Today, in addition to running the psychiatry department at CHH, Dr. Diamond is a mother of five and grandmother of four. "It was a little tougher in reality," she says. "But I feel like it gave my life a certain fullness."

The medical legacy continues: Not only did Dr. Diamond marry a pulmonologist - Dr. Larry Wasser, who has a private practice in Brookfield - but the oldest three of their five children are also physicians. Says Dr. Diamond: "We call it the family business."

Lori Miller Kase is a freelance writer living in Simsbury.



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# **Snow Daze**

s the summer draws to a close and I bemoan the end of lazy summer days on the golf course, my friend, Jeff, will invariably interject, "But there's still fall golf."

leff speaks with an optimism that is genuine and energized, and I nod in agreement, but deep down in my soul, I know what fall golf truly is:

The rapidly decaying body of a summer filled with golf. With each golden leaf that spirals from the top of the sugar maples that line the 17th fairway, we take another step closer to winter and the end of another season on the fairways (but mostly the rough).

Fall golf is the aging, bastard stepchild of summer golf. It is summertime golf on life support. It is akin to a middle-aged man's purchase of a cherry red Corvette in hopes of preserving some of his fleeting youth.

Nevertheless, I play. It is, after all, golf.

But I also agree that it's odd that my friend, Andrew, and I have ventured onto the course on this particular November day wearing knit caps and coats. It's occasionally chilly enough on an early morning of golf to warrant a jacket and perhaps even a knit cap, but this is high noon, and the air is still bitter and seeming to get colder by the second.

Not exactly golfing weather, and yet here we are, playing. Sucking the marrow from these final throes of another season. Trying to squeeze in one final round.

My wife questioned my decision to play as I left the house. "It's a little cold for golf," she warned. "Will the course even be open?"

"It'll be open," I assured her. Even if it wasn't, we would sneak on and play. She doesn't play golf, so she doesn't understand.

I have spent the spring, summer, and fall walking miles with my closest friends. Complimenting their shots while secretly praying for bad bounces and impossible lies. We've laughed at terrible swings and freakishly terrible shots into gravitationally equipped ponds, menacing bunkers, and once, off the side of an unlucky waterfowl. We've shared stories, sought and offered advice, and commiserated on days that are harder than they should be. The golf course is where I stand between earth and sky and commune with nature while standing close to the men I love most.

This cannot happen anywhere else. If I called Andrew and asked if he wanted to get some coffee, he would assume that I was dying. If I called Jeff and asked him to go for a walk, he would run me over with his truck. If I called my friend, Plato, in hopes of chatting over the phone, he would likely change his number and

never speak to me again.

We are men of a certain type. We enjoy one another's company, but we can only do so if there is a small, white sphere to chase and a scorecard to mark our progress.

Still, it's cold. As cold as I have ever experienced on a golf course before. When I chunk my 6-iron into the semifrozen earth, my hands go numb and I cry out in pain. I secretly wonder if there is such a thing as golf mittens. I wish I had thought about foot warmers before I left the house.

Andrew laments the lack of a scarf. He whines a little.

Still, it's golf.

We're on the 15th green, trying not to shiver as we prepare to putt, when I notice the first flake.

It can't be, I think. It can't.

Then there is another. And another. It is. It can be. It's snowing.

I'm playing golf in a snowstorm.

Winter has raised its ugly head when we weren't looking. Awful, cruel, unforgiving winter, with its short days, biting wind, and snow. Hateful, unreasonable snow.

I look at Andrew. He smiles. I do, too. It's snowing, but still, it's golf.

Our phones buzz simultaneously. We look at our screens. It's Andrew's wife, Kim, texting. She's informing us that it's snowing. We know this, of course. Better than most, since we are outdoors.

What she's really saying is this:

"What would possess two otherwise reasonably intelligent men to play golf in the snow? Are you quitting? Coming home? Smartening up? Growing up? Please tell me you're aren't stupid enough to keep playing."

Oh, yes, Kim. We are stupid enough and then some. We are not quitting. We are not coming home. We will play these last three holes in the snow if need be, because this decaying corpse of a golf

season is gasping its last breath, and I feel honored to be here as it happens. Thrilled to have spent every last possible moment playing this game that I love with these men who I love more.

We play in the snow, damn it, because it is golf, and golf is perfect, even when played poorly in a snowstorm.

Matthew Dicks is a West Hartford elementary schoolteacher. Despite his general dislike for cold-weather sports, he will happily risk frostbite for one last chance at a round of golf. (And as he points out, when the ground is frozen, there is less chance of a divot.) He is the author of the new novel, The Perfect Comeback of Caroline Jacobs, as well as Memoirs of an Imaginary Friend, Something Missing, and Unexpectedly, Milo, which have been translated into 25 languages worldwide. Learn more at matthewdicks.com.

Sean Wang, an MIT architecture graduate, is author of the sci-fi graphic novel series, Runners. Learn more at seanwang.com



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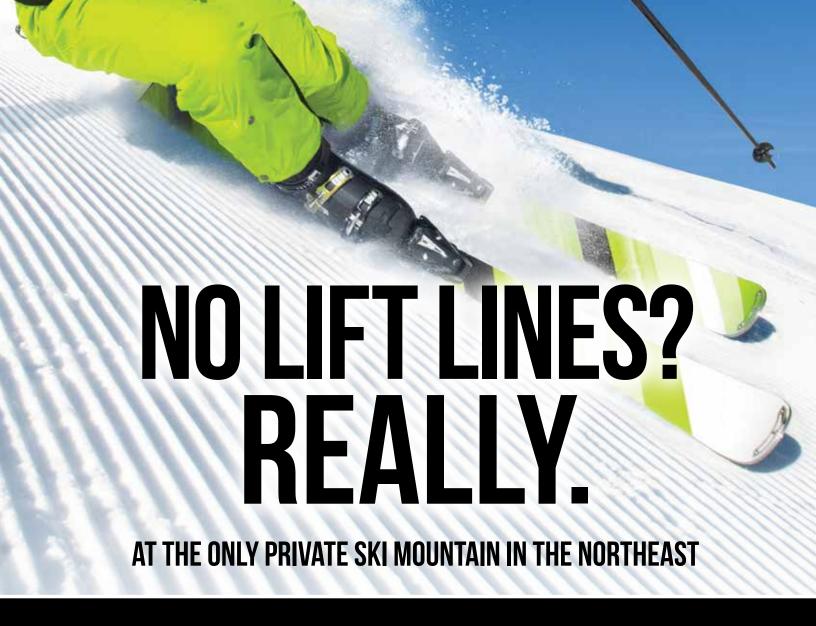
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