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July 16, 2026



COMMUNITY

Adamah Farm
Grows Food,
Community and
Connection **8**

BUSINESS

North Canaan's
Accordian Museum **4**

DANCE

BalletCollective
Returns **7**

FISHING

Tangled Lines
vs. Big Bugs **10**

CALENDAR

Upcoming
Local Events **16**

**AND
MORE**

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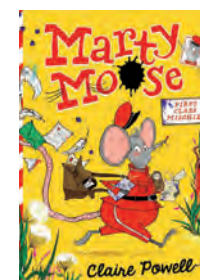
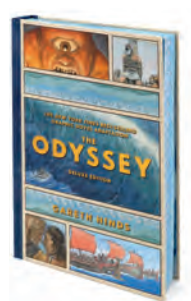
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BUSINESS

At North Canaan's accordion museum, every instrument has a story

By Christian Murray

For visitors stepping into the New England Accordion Connection & Museum inside North Canaan's historic railroad station, the first thing they notice is the sheer number of accordions.

Rows upon rows of instruments line the walls. Some are polished, while others show the wear of decades spent traveling across continents and sitting in family attics.

"There are about 500 accordions in this room," museum founder Paul Ramunni said during a recent tour. "We have another 200 in the basement, so we're cracking 700."

But Ramunni insists the collection is not really about accordions.

"It's the stories," he said. "The instruments are just the carriers."

For more than a decade, Ramunni and his wife, Marsha, have been collecting not only instruments but also the family histories attached to them. The result is what may be one of the most unusual museums in New England — a place where music, immigration, war and local history come together.

A Childhood Instrument Rediscovered

Ramunni's own relationship with the accordion began on Long Island in the 1950s. His mother, who was of Italian ancestry, insisted he learn to play.

"I said, 'Anything but that,'" he recalled. "The kids are going to make fun of me."

He played for about three years before eventually putting the instrument away

when he went to college.

More than four decades later, while spending time with Marsha in rural Vermont, something unexpected happened.

"I woke up with the urge to play the accordion again," he said.

Soon after, he found a collector who was preparing to send several accordions to a Holocaust museum. The instruments had reportedly come from Dachau, a WWII concentration camp, where the victims were forced to give them up or perform for the guards.

The story stunned him.

"You mean to tell me every one of these accordions has a back story?" he remembered asking.

From that moment, Ramunni began seeking out instruments to collect and asking their owners about the back stories.

More Than A Collection

One of the first stories involved an elderly woman in Torrington whose late husband's accordion sat unplayed for years.

When Ramunni picked up the instrument and began playing it, the woman broke down in tears.

"That was my husband's voice," she told him, referring to the sound of her late husband's favorite instrument.

The couple had fled Europe during WWII with little more than a suitcase



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Paul Ramunni playing polka music.

PHOTO BY MADI LONG

and the accordion.

"It was the family album," Ramunni said.

Many of the instruments tell stories of immigration and war.

One accordion currently in Ramunni's museum belonged to a World War II veteran who operated a landing craft during the Normandy invasion and often played it for his fellow marines.

The museum displays a photograph the veteran took of the soldiers aboard the vessel before they landed on the beach. Family members said many of the young men pictured never returned home.

More recently, a Ukrainian immigrant donated an accordion after losing family members during the current war with Russia.

"He said, 'I can't play it anymore,'" Ramunni recalled, noting that it had too many memories that he wanted to forget.

A Labor Of Love

The museum's location is closely tied to Ramunni's own history. In the early 1980s, he and a business partner purchased the North Canaan railroad station, where he operated a CPA firm.

He sold the building after a 2001 fire devastated the station. Two decades later, when space became available in the restored building, he returned to house the collection that had outgrown his North Canaan home. Since opening the museum in 2021, he said, it has welcomed more than 9,000 visitors.

Visitors come from throughout New England and beyond, many bringing their own stories along with old accordions. Some arrive hoping to repair an instrument.

The museum functions as more than just an exhibition space; Ramunni repairs accordions. The couple also buys and sells instruments. They host events, tours for school groups, senior centers, day-care programs and historical societies.

Sometimes they take the collection on the road.

"Everything fits in a Subaru," Marsha said.

She sees the museum as both an educational resource and a community gath-



PHOTO BY MADI LONG

Paul and Marsha Ramunni have turned a collection of accordions — and the memories attached to them — into one of the Northwest Corner's most unusual attractions.

ering place.

"We're trying to make an impact here on the town and the area," she said. "Bringing people in, educating them, giving them a place to learn about history."

The collection continues to grow through donations.

On a recent afternoon, Salisbury resident Gary Peterson arrived carrying an accordion that had belonged to his grandmother, a Swedish immigrant who played polka music. Now retired and downsizing, Peterson said his family wanted to find someone who could appreciate the instrument rather than simply discard it.

Looking around at the hundreds of accordions on display, Peterson said he was struck by the variety and craftsmanship of the collection. "There are so many different types of accordions," he said. "It's awesome."



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COMMUNITY

A family legacy: Roxana Robinson tells Harriet Beecher Stowe's story for America's 250th

By Natalia Zukerman

The award-winning novelist, biographer and scholar Roxana Robinson, who has longstanding ties to Litchfield County through her family's centuries-old roots in Cornwall, was recently invited to tell the story of her great-great-aunt, Harriet Beecher Stowe, the abolitionist author born in Litchfield in 1811.

The invitation came from historian Heather Cox Richardson, whose national storytelling initiative, "250 to 250," is marking the nation's semiquincentennial with a series of short videos highlighting 250 people, places and moments that helped shape American history.

"We designed the videos to emphasize the agency of Americans — mostly everyday Americans — to change the country," wrote Richardson. "Each falls into a category that defines what it means to be an American, including community, democracy, innovation, mobility, civil rights, education, conservation and creativity."

According to an article Robinson wrote for The New York Times, she grew up hearing her family refer to "Uncle Tom's Cabin" simply as "The Book," a work that was treated as both a literary achievement and a source of family pride. In telling Stowe's story for 250 to 250, Robinson reflects on not just a family lineage but a moral one.

"I am very proud of Great-Aunt Harriet," Robinson said. "In an act of extraordinary courage, she challenged the economic,

political and ethical structures of the entire country."

That courage can be difficult to appreciate from the vantage point of the 21st century, she said.

"The main thing that amazed me about 'the book' was HBS's courage. From this vantage point, now, 'the book' seems a bit obvious and heavy-handed, melodramatic ladies' fiction, but at the time it was a deadly serious critique of the entire United States of America."

Published in 1852, "Uncle Tom's Cabin" arrived at a moment when many Americans, particularly in the North, could afford to look away from slavery.

"Slavery was a linchpin in the American economy," Robinson said. "It was something the North could allow itself to ignore, since northern agriculture did not depend on slavery as southern agriculture did. But HBS, with these intertwined narratives of pain and love, made it impossible for northerners to ignore the human costs of slavery."

Stories do that. They collapse distance. They insist that someone else's child is your child. Someone else's grief is your grief. Someone else's freedom is bound up with your own.

"All people," Robinson said of Stowe's theology, "meant all people."

It sounds simple. It was revolutionary. "She wrote the Black experience just as she wrote the white experience, and showed readers, in heart-wrenching terms, that these stories were family stories, and



COURTESY OF THE LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

Harriet Beecher Stowe, author of "Uncle Tom's Cabin" and great-great-great aunt to author Roxana Robinson.

that what the readers had been ignoring was a human tragedy. She made that tragedy impossible to dismiss."

"Her book started a shift in public response to slavery, a movement toward revulsion and condemnation," Robinson said. "Stowe's book, like those of her peer Charles Dickens, lit up the dark places within the republic, and cast upon them the light of moral clarity."

After all, movements most often begin this way — not with certainty, but with imagination. With someone refusing the accepted story and offering another one. For Robinson, Stowe's story is also inseparable from the landscape that shaped her.

"The Litchfield Hills have always been a place where people have stood up for their own beliefs, tended their fields and raised their children to be responsible."

Her own family's roots in Cornwall stretch back to before the American Revolution.

"My corner of it, Cornwall, where my family the Scovilles have been since before the Revolution, has been populated by farmers and ministers ... and in the last

century or so, writers and artists."

She describes people from this region who felt and feel a deep responsibility to this country.

"I'm very proud of our state, with its strong history of support for public education, public health, gun control, agriculture and culture in general."

For Robinson, civic engagement begins close to home.

"Politics begin at the bottom of your driveway," she said. "Our neighborhood is made up of smart, kind, generous, engaged people whom I trust and love. Our first selectman is also our local organic farmer and a member of the EMT. How much more American can you get?"

That local focus is precisely what attracted her to Richardson's project.

"I love the HCR project, linking our national history to these stories of individuals," Robinson said. "This kind of story — one person committed to something about which they feel passionately — is the story of our country."

To learn more about "250 to 250" and to view the videos, visit 250to250.substack.com



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DANCE

BalletCollective returns to Millbrook for 12th summer residency

By Brian Gersten

For the 12th consecutive summer, the acclaimed New York City-based dance company BalletCollective will return to Millbrook, continuing a residency that has become a vital part of the organization's creative process and an increasingly significant cultural event for the Hudson Valley.

Founded by Troy Schumacher in 2011, BalletCollective was created as an interdisciplinary laboratory where choreographers collaborate with composers, writers and visual artists from the earliest stages of a work's development. Rather than simply commissioning a score or set design, the company builds each ballet through a creative exchange among artists working across disciplines. The company has produced 26 world premieres and has performed at venues including Lincoln Center, the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Joyce Theater.

This summer's residency will feature new works by choreographers Shane Urton and Noelle Kayser, alongside Schumacher, all of whom are creating pieces for BalletCollective's fall season. Running from July 13 through Aug. 2, the residency will bring dancers, choreographers and composers to the village as they develop new works that will premiere later this fall at New York City's Cathedral of St. John the Divine. Joining the company in Millbrook will be dancers from New York City Ballet, including Davide Riccardo, Maya Milic, Simeon Neeld and Keenan Kiefer.

The residency culminates with two public performances at Millbrook School on Aug. 1 and 2, offering audiences a rare opportunity to experience works in progress before they premiere in New York.

"Millbrook continues as the spine of how we develop new work," said Schumacher. "The community here has become an essential part of our creative process."

Schumacher's connection to the region extends beyond the company's annual residency. During the height of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, he organized "The Nutcracker at Wethersfield," an ambitious outdoor production staged at the Wethersfield Estate in Amenia. The production became a symbol of artistic resilience during one

“
The community
here has become an
essential part of our
creative process.”

TROY SCHUMACHER,
FOUNDER OF BALLETCOLLECTIVE



PHOTOS BY PARKER WHITEHEAD-BUS

Members of BalletCollective.

of the performing arts' most challenging periods and was later chronicled in the feature-length documentary "The Nutcracker at Wethersfield," directed by acclaimed filmmaker Anne Sundberg.

As BalletCollective celebrates its 15th anniversary season, Millbrook remains at the heart of the company's creative process. For three weeks each summer, the village becomes a creative laboratory where choreographers, dancers and composers experiment, collaborate and refine new work before sharing it with the community that has helped nurture the company for more than a decade.



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COMMUNITY

Rooted in reciprocity: Adamah Farm grows food, community and connection

By Natalia Zukerman

This is phacelia,” Janna Siller said, as if introducing an old friend.

Pausing beside a patch of violet blossoms humming with the work of tiny insects, Siller, farm director at Adamah Farm in Falls Village, explained that it attracts some of the most beneficial insects on the farm because “they’re predators of the pests we don’t want.”

She continued, “If you spray and kill both the predators and the pests, the pests always come back faster. But if you create habitat for the good bugs, eventually the balance returns.”

At Adamah, where a vibrant Jewish life is cultivated in deep connection with the earth, farming goes beyond sustainability, which asks only how to keep things from

getting worse. Here, they practice regenerative agriculture, which asks how to leave the land healthier than it was found.

Across the farm’s 20 acres, vegetables grow alongside perennial plantings, chestnut agroforestry, rotational grazing, compost systems and pollinator habitat. More than 100 pounds of food scraps from the Isabella Freedman Jewish Retreat Center, with which the farm shares the land, are composted every day, feeding both the soil and a flock of laying hens. Cover crops protect and enrich the earth. Trees pull carbon from the atmosphere. Native flowers welcome insects that do work no pesticide can replicate.

“Our goal is to leave the land even more prolific than it would have been without us,” Siller said.

That vision reaches back thousands of years.



PHOTO BY NATALIA ZUKERMAN

Hand-painted signs at Adamah Farm serve as blessings and reminders.

Long before “regenerative agriculture” became part of the modern farming vocabulary, Jewish law contained agricultural teachings that assumed the land itself required care, rest and reciprocity.

“There’s so much wisdom in approaching farming from a perspective of partnership,” said Siller.

According to one ancient Jewish teaching, pe’ah, farmers should leave the corners of their fields unharvested to allow people experiencing hunger to gather food.

Now, instead of leaving literal corners untouched, the farm intentionally grows food destined for local emergency food providers. Through its Food Access Fund, produce is planned — not simply donated after harvest — to supply regional pantries with fresh, culturally appropriate vegetables. The farm provides food for The Corner Pantry in Lakeville, Tri-Corner FEED in Millerton and other community partners.

“The law is really asking how we make sure everyone eats,” Siller said. “We reinterpret that to meet today’s reality.”

Another ancient practice, shmita, instructs that farmland rest every seventh year.

For a farm committed to feeding hundreds of local families, abandoning production for an entire season would create another kind of scarcity. Instead, Adamah interprets the principle through ecology.

Roughly one-seventh of the farm remains in cover crops and wildflowers, re-

storing soil health while creating habitat for native pollinators.

Rather than treating Jewish law as a rigid historical artifact, Adamah treats it as a living conversation, one that asks not only what previous generations practiced but what those values require now.

That distinction feels especially meaningful in a moment when Jewish identity is often flattened into political shorthand.

“It’s like the opposite of the internet here,” said Siller. “Here, people are in community with each other, understanding each other as whole people.”

Each participant in the educational fellowship program run by the farm defines what being in Jewish community means to them. Some arrive hoping to reconnect with ancestral agricultural traditions. Others come because they want to farm in a pluralistic Jewish community.

Jewish programming is only one aspect of Adamah’s work. Beyond its religious affiliation, Adamah is a community farm with a wide reach in the local community. For many in the region who join the farm’s CSA, Adamah is a source of fresh, seasonal produce. For local composters bringing their scraps, it’s a place where they can transform their food waste into rich fertilizer. For attendees of the farm’s public programs and children’s activities, Adamah offers connection to local food, soil and the ecosystem.

This summer, Adamah educators are partnering with the David M. Hunt Li-

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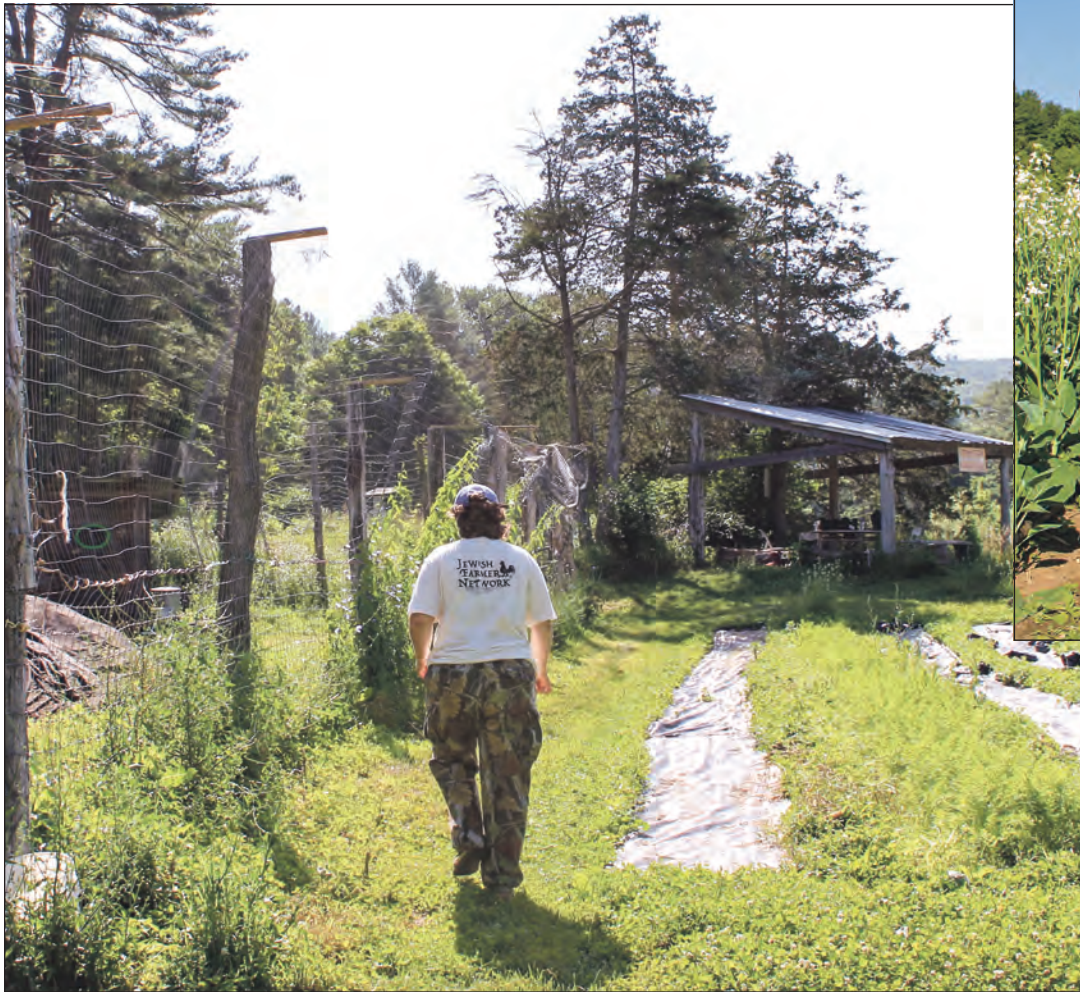


PHOTO BY NATALIA ZUKERMAN

Participants in the educational fellowship program at Adamah define what being in Jewish community means to them.

library in Falls Village for four free, family-friendly workshops in the library's community garden. On July 1, participants harvested basil to make pesto. On July 16, they'll pickle cucumbers while learning the science of lacto-fermentation. On Aug. 4, they'll press flowers and they'll explore seed saving on Aug. 18.

"The library received a Sustainable and Resilient Communities Grant from the Association for Small and Rural Libraries," Hunt Library executive director Meg Sher said. "That supported purchasing the seedlings and compost for the garden from Adamah, as well as paying for the educational programming and supplies that go with it."

The grant is also supporting a new Abundance Stand.

"The idea is for it to be a 'leave what you want, take what you want' stand," said Sher. "When people have too many zucchinis, or kale, or flowers, they can drop them off at the Abundance Stand

and other people can take what they want. It's a way to share the abundance within our community."

This spirit of sharing is one of Siller's favorite parts of farming in this area. Knowledge itself is communal.

"Local farmers support each other," Siller said. "We text each other all the time, like, 'Are you seeing this bug? I'm seeing this bug. What are you doing about it?'"

This openness is just another expression of a regenerative philosophy: Healthy ecosystems do not depend on sameness. They depend on diversity held in relationship.

The phacelia blooms for insects most visitors never notice. The compost nourishes organisms hidden beneath the soil. The corners of the field belong to someone the farmers may never meet.

And the work is rooted in trust that generosity, like healthy soil, becomes richer the more deeply it is cultivated.



"Borei Pri Ha'Adamah," is a Jewish blessing recited before eating vegetables and other foods that grow from the ground.



A squash blossom in all its golden glory.

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Tangled Lines vs. big bugs, hot weather and the Hound of the Baskervilles

PHOENICIA, New York My annual week off in the Catskills in early June got off to a satisfactory start. The first week or so of June usually means a lot of different bugs hatching, which in turn means the angler can sling three or four patterns with a fair bit of confidence.

This time around the isonymchia were dominant. This is a big reddish-brown mayfly, sometimes known as a Slate Drake and most frequently imitated on the Esopus Creek with a traditional winged wet fly, the Leadwing Coachman.

I remember as a callow youth of 12 being instructed by an impossibly ancient codger -- hell, he was probably 65 -- that a Leadwing Coachman wet fly, size 10-14, would produce on the Esopus when nothing else would. In the intervening half century I have put this proposition to the test and found it accurate.

What was different this year was the isos were flying around. Usually we see their casings on the rocks, but not the adult mayflies in the air.

The first night it was all browns in the 14-18 range. The second night it was all rainbows in the 10-14 range.

That was early in the trip. Three days in, things warmed up considerably, and without any mitigating rain.

So the range of options was limited, and the preferred time of day was just before dawn. Note I said "preferred." The actual start time varied depending on how late my attorney, Thos., and I stayed up watching Fu Manchu movies.

I low-crawled up a mountain brook at dawn with a Tenkara rod and did okay with wild browns. On the scramble out I had a brief and alarming encounter with a descendant of the Hound of the Baskervilles, whose owner helpfully said "Don't make any sudden moves."

"Any chance of a leash here?" I said in what I hoped was a cheerful, non-threatening tone of voice.

So there's that.

Gary Dodson alerted us that the Spot That Must Not Be Named was in play. This is a cold mountain brook that enters one of the New York City reservoirs and depending on how full the latter is, forms a channel of cold water that mixes in with the warmer reservoir water. If the timing is right, the angler can latch into some decent trout and whatever else has fins and an inquisitive nature.



Tangled Lines

Patrick L. Sullivan

So one morning, while the boys worked the big deep cold pool by the bridge, I made my way downstream, deploying the stream thermometer frequently to try and figure out the magic spot where trout would be comfortable enough to hang out and nosh.

I used a favorite tactic: a dry/dropper rig, with a Chubby Chernobyl as the top fly and de facto bobber, and a series of nymphs and wet flies on an 18-24 inch fluorocarbon tipper dropper, 4X or 5X, tied directly to the bend of the Chubby's hook.

This worked immediately, with good browns in the 16-18 inch range hitting the nymphs and a Jerry Shillcock isonymchia wet fly pattern.

In a nod to tradition, I used one of my late father's Orvis Battenkill bamboo rods for the purpose. It is eight feet long in three sections and weighs about 100 pounds. At least that's how it feels after using graphite rods.

On the last morning the cold to warm

water ratio was getting less favorable at the Spot. It was now or never.

Thos. was chucking dries up the big pool.

I waved him down, rerigged him with the dry-dropper combo and gave highly technical instructions.

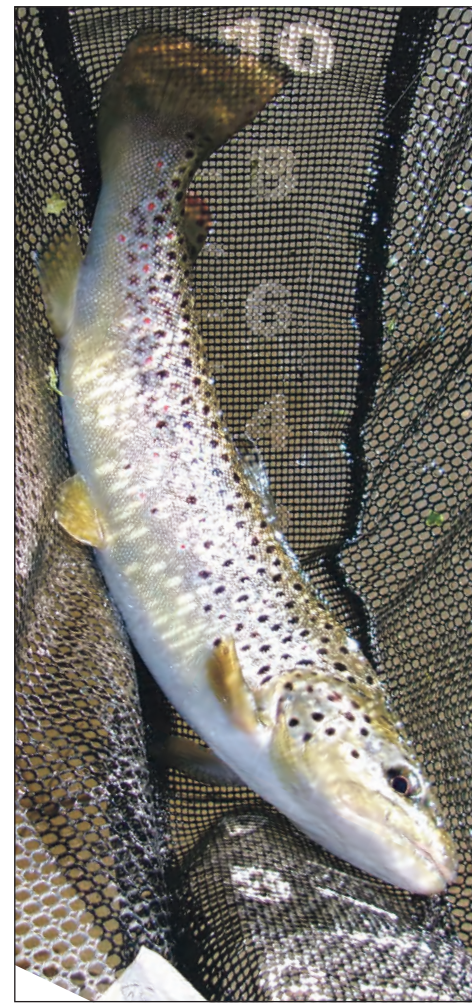
"Walk around the left of that clump of vegetation, slowly so you don't make a huge wake, and when the waves die down heave this in there and let it sit, and count to 30. Then twitch it a bit."

Lo and behold, it worked.

On the medical front, my new right hip didn't give me any trouble. I didn't push it either.



Adult mayfly.



Trout.



A cold mountain brook that enters one of the New York City reservoirs.

PHOTOS BY PATRICK L. SULLIVAN

COMMUNITY

After 20 years at WAMC, Sarah LaDuke is following the music

By Natalia Zukerman

You might recognize Sarah LaDuke's voice without ever knowing what she looks like. For years, it's a voice that has arrived through kitchen and car speakers, introducing authors, moderating conversations and helping listeners make sense of the day's events. Her voice has become a familiar companion throughout the region. Now, after nearly two decades at WAMC, LaDuke has stepped away from public radio news and into a role that brings her closer to what she says has always animated her most: music.

"I've been at WAMC for almost 20 years, and I love it," LaDuke said. "But I felt like I was ready for something. I didn't know what."

The longtime radio host, producer and arts advocate has been named executive director of Folk Alley, the member-supported folk music streaming station and website operated by the FreshGrass Foundation. LaDuke now leads the nationally respected platform from her home office in Albany while helping shape its next chapter.

The opportunity arrived unexpectedly.

"I was just talking to a friend," LaDuke recalled. "And she said, 'The executive director of Folk Alley wants to retire.' I was like, 'What? No way.'"

What followed felt remarkably organic.

"The first interview wasn't billed as a job interview," she said. "The pressure and stress weren't there. I was just having a great conversation about loving music and radio and broadcasting."

The move marks a significant shift for LaDuke, whose voice became a fixture on WAMC's airwaves through programs including "The Roundtable" and "The Book Show."

While she loved the work at WAMC, producing shows like "The Roundtable" and "The Book Show," the demands of daily news coverage felt heavy.

"I'm not a news guy," she said with a laugh. "The music and arts part of it has always gotten me the most enthused."

Hosting discussions about politics and current events often brought anxiety, she admitted.



PHOTO PROVIDED

Sarah LaDuke

"To fill in as host of 'The Roundtable' and get ready to talk about news live on the air for two hours — it generated a tremendous amount of anxiety," she said. "I would read all the news I possibly could at 9 p.m. and then go in and talk about it at 9 a.m. It was getting hard to bear on the old soul and skeleton."

At Folk Alley, LaDuke sees an opportunity to focus on the cultural conversations that have always energized her.

Founded in 2003, Folk Alley offers a curated stream of folk, Americana, roots and singer-songwriter music alongside artist interviews, articles and specialty programming. Now part of the FreshGrass Foundation, the nonprofit behind the FreshGrass festivals, No Depression and Folk Alley, the platform reaches listeners around the world through its website and mobile app.

LaDuke believes its greatest strength is its human touch.

"People who care about and know about folk music are choosing the songs," she said. "No song is selected because of an algorithm or AI. It's human-curated music."

One of her primary goals is simple: help more people discover it.

"I think the people who know Folk Alley love it and value it," she said. "I think more people need to know about Folk Alley."

She hopes to expand the organization's presence at festivals and concerts while

connecting artists and listeners more directly.

"We have this 24/7 marvelous coming together of folk music," she said. "We've got to make sure people know about it."

The role itself is broad. In addition to overseeing programming, LaDuke will manage memberships, donor relations, budgets, contractors and technical operations.

"It's very adult," she joked.

Though she's only beginning to learn the intricacies of the job, she already has ideas for the future. Among them is the possibility of creating a podcast network focused on music, culture and conversation.

"I would like to start a podcast network of good talkers talking about music and art and humanity," she said. "To be able to find and present conversation — that's been my

steer for the last 20 years."

For now, she's focused on learning from outgoing executive director Linda Fahey, who will remain through the summer to help with the transition.

LaDuke also sees Folk Alley as part of a larger mission.

"Music is one of our great unifying forces," she wrote in announcing the position. "Folk music has always shared and preserved the stories of its communities' historical struggles, current concerns and desire for a better future."

In a world that is feeling increasingly fractured, she believes that mission matters more than ever.

"Alongside the important cultural impacts of folk music," she added, "is the undeniable truth that music is fun — and having some good times in a world gone mad might just get us through."

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FILM

Boondocks Film Society's big secret

By D.H. Callahan

On Saturday, July 18, Boondocks Film Society heads west to Catskill for its exclusive screening of the indie comedy darling “Maddie’s Secret.” The group, which has been putting on one-night-only screening events throughout Litchfield, Dutchess and Berkshire counties for the past nine years, is crossing the Hudson yet again to take over its new home away from home, the Community Theatre. Last month, the society returned to the theater for its second screening there, bringing in Ira Glass, host and producer of NPR’s “This American Life,” to discuss comedian Mike Birbiglia’s “Sleepwalk With Me.” Glass, who produced the film, was joined on stage by his wife, writer and director Susanna Fogel. Connecticut-based indie-pop duo Mates of State also got in on the action, performing original songs, including “Now,” which was featured in the film.

Boondocks has earned a reputation for exactly this kind of enhanced screening. The society offers much more than just a movie. For each event, it works with local eateries to create custom food and cocktail menus inspired by the night’s film. There is usually film-themed music from local acts, though booking a band with a song featured in the film was a particularly fitting touch. But what Boondocks has become best known for is its conversations with actors, directors and other key figures behind the films. For “Maddie’s Secret,” the society is bringing in a quadruple threat: actor, director, writer and producer John Early.

Early has gained recognition for his roles in “Search Party,” “Eternity,” “Wet Hot American Summer: Ten Years Later” and “At Home With Amy Sedaris.” But beyond those larger titles are the projects he has developed himself, including the HBO stand-up special “Now More Than Ever,” an episode of the Netflix series “Charac-

ters,” and the web series “555,” which he created and starred in with his longtime comedic collaborator Kate Berlant.

All of those projects demonstrate an extraordinary commitment to a particular style of cringe comedy. Early often embodies deeply unlikeable characters, mining humor from their boundless self-interest. His character in “Search Party” falsely claimed to have had cancer as a child. In “555,” he stole from a wheelchair-bound fan. His characters in “Characters” revel in awkwardness and unabashed narcissism.

While Early is accustomed to writing his own characters, “Maddie’s Secret” marks his first time directing and producing a feature film. Supporting him is a standout ensemble that includes Vanessa Bayer, “3rd Rock From the Sun” star Kristen Johnston, Conner O’Malley and, of course, Kate Berlant. Festival audiences have embraced the film, which, after a modest initial release, is now receiving wider distribution as word of mouth continues to spread.



PHOTO PROVIDED



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BUSINESS

More than coffee at Best Damn Espresso

By Elena Spellman

Asio Highsmith, co-owner of the bright red espresso truck in Great Barrington, greets patrons with the kind of warmth and energy that can change the trajectory of a day. There is laughter, conversation and a genuine sense of connection. And the coffee is amazing. It's clear that Best Damn Espresso's popularity has as much to do with people as it does with espresso.

Despite becoming one of the Berkshires' most recognizable small brands, its owners maintain a surprisingly low profile, focusing more on their craft than on self-promotion. "We didn't move up here to be on Front Street," said Highsmith. "We came because we love nature and wanted to start a new chapter of our lives." That chapter began after years spent in New York City.

Asio's wife Angela, a California native drawn to nature, had spent years bringing their children to the Berkshires. The family already owned property there, and the pandemic simply accelerated the move they were already considering. Their son summed up the family's feelings best when he was 5 years old. "He said, 'I want to be in a place where there's more trees than people,'" Angela recalled.

The move wasn't motivated by business ambitions. In fact, neither Asio nor Angela intended to become entrepreneurs again. "We came up here for the outdoors and for the beauty," Angela said. The espresso truck emerged almost by accident. When old café equipment began taking over their basement, Angela suggested putting it on a truck.

"That's exactly what happened," Asio laughed. What began as a practical idea soon evolved into something much larger.

Asio brings decades of hospitality experience to the business. A lifelong bartender and mixologist, he approaches espresso the same way a master cocktail maker approaches a drink — with precision, intention and respect for the craft.

"Coffee means community," he said. "It's a big part of the hospitality vision that my wife and I want to bring to the world." For Asio, every drink matters. "My motto is one drink at a time," he said. "I focus on what's in front of me."

That philosophy extends beyond the



PHOTOS PROVIDED

Owners Asio and Angela Highsmith

espresso machine. Customers aren't simply buying a beverage; they're entering an experience shaped by two people who view hospitality as an act of service. "Food is magic. Coffee is magic," Asio said. "It's an exchange of great energy."

Angela, who often works the front of the truck, describes the customer relationship in similar terms. "When someone comes to the truck, you're hosting them," she said. "You're entertaining them. You're giving them exactly what they want."

Despite doing almost no traditional marketing, Best Damn Espresso has developed a devoted following throughout the region. Asio attributes that growth to consistency rather than promotion. "Advertising is overrated if your product is mid," he said.

The name itself — Best Damn Espresso — is intentionally bold. Many businesses would hesitate to make such a claim. Asio sees it differently. "It's actually me challenging myself," he explained. "Every time I look at that truck, I see 'Best Damn Espresso.' The aspiration for being great at what we do happens every day." That relentless pursuit of quality appears to

“Coffee means community. It's a big part of the hospitality vision that my wife and I want to bring to the world.”

ASIO HIGHSMITH,
CO-OWNER



To find out where the Best Damn Espresso truck will be on any given morning, text 'BDE' to 844-659-1203

resonate with customers.

Four years after launching, the company has expanded from a single truck to multiple units. Yet despite the growth, Asio and Angela remain focused on maintaining the same personal connection that defined the business from the beginning. They have also become unexpected pioneers in the local food-truck

scene. "There wasn't really a food truck presence in Great Barrington before we started," Asio said. Today, several food trucks operate in the area, some inspired by their success. "The benefit is inspiring someone," he said.

To receive daily updates on the truck's location, customers can text "BDE" to 844-659-1203.

BOOKS

Hotchkiss Library of Sharon's Book Signing Weekend returns

By D.H. Callahan

For more than a quarter century, the Hotchkiss Library of Sharon has been connecting readers with some of their favorite authors at its signature Summer Book Signing Weekend, returning for its 28th year July 31 through Aug. 2.

The weekend is one of the library's biggest fundraisers, attracting a wide range of book fans from across the region, as well as out-of-towners who make it a point to be there. Authors represent every corner of the literary world, from children's books to nonfiction, poetry to historical fiction and even cookbooks. They also come from all over the country, though there is an emphasis on authors local to the area.

One notable local author was former Secretary of State and Secretary of Defense under Presidents Richard Nixon and Gerald Ford, Henry Kissinger. Authors from farther away have included Pulitzer Prize winner and former executive editor of The Washington Post and The Boston Globe, Marty Baron, Bard College writer-in-residence Francine Prose and National Book Award winner Susan Choi.

This year's featured headliner was scheduled to be E. Jean Carroll, whose book "Not My Type: One Woman vs. a President" chronicles her legal battles with President Donald Trump. Unfortunately, another legal decision was issued in her favor in June, sparking outrage and violent rhetoric from some Trump supporters.



PHOTOS BY STEPHANIE STANTON

Hotchkiss Library's Book Signing Weekend draws readers of all ages

Consequently, Carroll's appearances have been canceled.

But there is still plenty to be excited about at this year's Book Signing Weekend, and a lot of it has to do with food. For years, the weekend has featured Author Dinners, intimate gatherings hosted by library patrons in their homes in Sharon and neighboring towns. Among the authors at-



2025's Hotchkiss Library of Sharon's Summer Book Signing Weekend

tending these dinners are New York Times Bestselling author of "Pineapple Street" Jenny Jackson, whose new novel, "The Shampoo Effect," was released this year; trailblazing genealogist, women's health-care expert and author of "The Bedroom Gap" Dr. Maria Sophocles; and British-American reporter Simon Winchester, best known for his storied career at The Guardian. His novel, "The Breath of the Gods," was released last November, examines the history and future of wind — something of particular interest in our region these days.

The dinners, however, are just the beginning. On Saturday, the library will host its second annual Page to Plate, a literary

celebration of food.

Throughout the day attendees can enjoy talks, demonstrations and perhaps even a cocktail or two from chefs, bakers and, of course, writers. Featured guests include Anna Stockwell, author of "The Butter Book"; Eliza and Robert Bildner, who co-wrote "The Berkshires Farm Table Cookbook"; and Melissa Clark, author of the New York Times bestselling cookbook "Dinner In One."

Programming is divided into morning and afternoon sessions, with tickets available for either session or the full day.

For tickets, visit hotchkisslibraryofsharon.org

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HISTORY

Kingston Guards bring baseball back to the basics

By D.H. Callahan

The Kingston Guards are playing ball the way it used to be played. To be specific, they're playing baseball by the rules of 1864, the last full season before the Civil War. To them, it's a purer form of the game, devoid of constant rule changes and all that pesky equipment like gloves, helmets and catchers' masks. Sure, there are umpires, but they're really there more to settle arguments than make actual calls.

The whole game feels less aggressive and more friendly. In fact, many of the players on the Guards and other teams in the vintage baseball scene came from softball leagues that had simply become too competitive. These aren't your standard gym rats trying to relive their high school or college glory. More often, they're history buffs looking for something a little more athletic than the synchronized marching of Civil War reenactments — though, to be fair, some of them are still Civil War reenactors.

While decidedly less competitive, this brand of vintage baseball isn't necessarily less involved. The Guards practice every week. They travel the eastern seaboard playing teams like the Boniva Dairymen, the Ulster Nine and the Hunkey Dory Base Ball Club of Lansdale. They even attend a two-day vintage base ball festival in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, where teams from across the country gather to take in a side of military history with their friendly competition.

The vintage baseball movement appears to have gotten its start in the mid-1990s, perhaps as a response to the 1994 Major League Baseball strike, which resulted in a canceled postseason and World Series. As the Major League Baseball Players Association prepares to renegotiate its collective bargaining agreement after the 2026 season, rumors swirl of another such eventuality. With many baseball fans disillusioned by an increasingly capitalistic league, another strike could fuel interest in vintage baseball.

The rules are the same for all these



PHOTO BY SCHUYLER MEYER

The Kingston Guards and the Bovina Dairymen

“
These aren't your
standard gym rats
trying to relive
their high school
or college glory.

clubs, but the uniforms certainly are not. The Guards wear thick woolen uniforms that team member Brock “The Badger” Mehan describes as not just hot, but “humid.” The Dairymen, in the Catskills, don slacks, button-down blouses, suspenders and newsboy caps. But no matter the uniform on their backs, everybody seems to be on the same team.

You can catch the Guards in all their old-time action when take the field at the Rhinebeck Aerodrome on Aug. 14 and Sept. 11.



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Submit calendar items to editor@lakevillejournal.com.

■ JULY 16

Grow With Us: Pickling

David M. Hunt Library, 63 Main St., Falls Village, Conn. huntlibrary.org

Join educators from ADA-MAH Farm to turn cucumbers into pickles and learn about the science of lacto-fermentation in this hands-on garden workshop for all ages. 4:30 p.m.

The Art of Book

Illustration with

Chris Pouler and Rita Marshall

Scoville Memorial Library, 38 Main St., Salisbury, Conn. scovillelibrary.org

Artist Christopher Pouler and Rita Marshall, award-winning art and design director for Creative Editions, offer a behind-the-scenes look at the creative partnerships between illustrators and art directors. Their conversation will explore how words are transformed into visual worlds through the collaborative process of book illustration. Thursday, July 16, from 5:30 to 6:30 p.m. Registration is required. More information and registration at scovillelibrary.org.

■ JULY 17

Garrison Starr

The Grace Note at the Stissing Center, 2950 Church St., Pine Plains, N.Y. Singer-songwriter, Grammy-nominated record producer and acclaimed performer Garrison Starr brings her soulful blend of folk, rock and Americana to The Grace Note at 7:30 p.m. Starr's upcoming album, *Garrison Starr and The Gospel Truth*, continues her exploration of healing and self-discovery, following her 2021 release, *Girl I Used to Be*. She has toured with artists including Steve Earle, Emmylou Harris, Bruce Cockburn, Patty Griffin, Mindy Smith, Glen Phillips and Indigo Girls. More information and tickets are available at stissingcenter.org.

"Letters From Max"

Ancram Center for the Arts, 1330 County Route 7, Ancram, N.Y.

Performances of Sarah Ruhl and Max Ritvo's poignant play run Wednesdays through Saturdays at 7:30 p.m. and Sundays at 3 p.m. Adapted from the pair's 2018 book *Letters From Max: A Poet, a Teacher, a Friendship*, the production explores the extraordinary bond between the playwright and her former student through a series of heartfelt letters written as Ritvo faced the return of childhood cancer. Special events include a post-show Salon Sunday talkback with the cast and creative team on July 19, Pay What You Wish Wednesday on July 22 (tickets available at the door only), and a post-show TGIF Hang with the cast and staff on the porch, with a cash bar, on July 24. Tickets and information are available at ancramcenter.org.

"Rebel Town The Musical"

Kathleen E. McDermott Auditorium, Monument Mountain Regional High School, Great Barrington, Mass.

"Rebel Town The Musical," a new original American musical developed in the Berkshires, returns for America 250 with performances July 10-19. Set in colonial Boston in 1773, the production follows ordinary citizens swept into the events surrounding the Boston Tea Party through the eyes of apprentice Peter Slater and historical figures including Samuel Adams, John Hancock, Paul Revere and Mercy Otis Warren. Created by Berkshire native John Alan Segalla, the musical features 27 original songs and a Berkshire cast and creative team. For tickets and information visit RebelTownTheMusical.com.

Company

The Center for Performing Arts at Rhinebeck, 661 Route 308, Rhinebeck, N.Y. July 10 through July 26

Rhinebeck Theatre Society

presents Stephen Sondheim's Tony Award-winning musical "Company." The production follows bachelor Robert as he navigates friendship, love and marriage with the help of those around him. Performances are Fridays and Saturdays at 7:30 p.m. and Sundays at 2:30 p.m.

Cold Wax Painting

Workshop With Artist Carolyn Abrams

Mad Rose Gallery, 3 Main St., Millerton, N.Y.

10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Explore the versatility of oils and cold wax medium in this hands-on workshop with artist Carolyn Abrams. Participants will learn intuitive painting techniques using beeswax-based cold wax medium and unconventional tools to create abstract landscapes inspired by favorite seascapes, landscapes, skylines or imagined worlds. All materials are provided, and no previous art experience is necessary. For more information, email info@madrosegallery.com.

■ JULY 18

Whispers of the Past: South Cemetery Tour and Glebe House Museum

South Cemetery, Main Street, and Glebe House Museum & Garden, 49 Hollow Road, Woodbury, Conn.

From 4 to 7 p.m. experience Revolutionary War-era Woodbury through guided tours, live historical reenactors portraying local Revolutionary War soldiers at their gravesites, cemetery history presentations, stone restoration demonstrations and tours of the Glebe House Museum. The evening concludes with refreshments on the museum grounds, where visitors can explore the restored 18th-century home of Rev. John Marshall and learn about its role in the founding of the Episcopal Church in America. Free; donations appreciated. Advance reg-

istration is encouraged at glebehousemuseum.org.

Summer Sidewalk Sale at Whistle Pig Books

Whistle Pig Books, 62 Main St., North Canaan, Conn.

Celebrate Summer Nights of Canaan with Whistle Pig Books. Shop a Summer Sidewalk Sale featuring gently used books for \$1 each, or fill a provided bag for just \$5. Browse fiction, children's books, non-fiction, and more while enjoying the festivities. The event begins at 10 a.m. Learn more at whistlepigbooks.com.

Boondocks Film Society

Presents "Maddie's Secret" + Q&A with John Early

Community Theater, 373 Main St., Catskill, N.Y.

Boondocks Film Society presents a screening of "Maddie's Secret," the directorial debut of comedian and actor John Early. Blending melodrama with comedy, the film features performances by Kate Berlant, Kristen Johnston, Conner O'Malley, Vanessa Bayer and Chris Bauer. Q&A following the screening. The event runs from 7 to 9:30 p.m., with the film beginning at 7:30 p.m. Tickets at boondocksfilm-society.org

Revolutionary

Roundtable: A Reading and Discussion Group Focused on Our Emerging Nation, 1740-1791

David M. Hunt Library, 63 Main St., Falls Village, Conn. huntlibrary.org

10:30 a.m. Avid amateur historian and Falls Village resident Richard Berzine will lead the first session of a monthly reading and discussion group exploring the people, ideas and documents that shaped the United States from 1740 to 1791. The July program, "Our Declaration of Independence," will feature a discussion of Walter Isaacson's "The Greatest Sentence Ever Written," along with excerpts from "The Virginia Declaration of Rights" and John Locke's

"Second Treatise of Government." Copies of the readings will be available at the library in advance, and the first 20 participants will receive a copy of Isaacson's book. The series continues Aug. 8, Sept. 19, Oct. 17, Nov. 14 and Dec. 12. Visit huntlibrary.org for information.

Stissing Sea Boil

Stissing House, 7801 S. Main St., Pine Plains, N.Y.

Wood fired pots of sea fare, corn, potatoes and herby drawn butter alongside friends old and new. The evening includes a snack on arrival, followed by a sea supper and dessert- all shared at a communal table. A welcome drink and drinks at the table will be included. Any additional call drinks will be available for purchase at the bar. 6 p.m. Reservations at stissinghouse.com

LIVE @ AMP: The Love Dogs

American Mural Project, 90 Whiting St., Winsted, Conn. 6:30 p.m. doors; 7 p.m. swing dance lesson; 8 p.m. show. Boston-based septet The Love Dogs bring their high-energy blend of blues, boogie-woogie piano, horn-driven swing and R&B to AMP for an evening of music and dance. The program includes a swing dance lesson with Nate Evans of Hartford Ballroom (included with admission). Tickets at americanmural-project.org

Hidden Gardens Tour & Market on the Green

Spencertown Academy Arts Center, 790 NY-203, Spencertown, N.Y.

Spencertown Academy Arts Center's 21st annual Hidden Gardens celebration takes place from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., featuring a self-guided tour of five private gardens and landscapes in Spencertown, Chatham and Old Chatham. Highlights include perennial gardens, woodland trails, historic properties, dahlia collections, ponds, patios and scenic views. Ticket holders also receive access to the grounds and gardens of Edna St. Vincent Millay's

historic home, Steepletop, from 9:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. The free Market on The Green runs from 9 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. and features plants, flowers, garden items, local food vendors and more. Tickets are available at spencertownacademy.org

■ JULY 19

Beethoven's Piano in Concert

Stissing Center for Arts and Cluture, 2950 Church St., Pine Plains, N.Y.

Enjoy a rare opportunity to hear this extraordinary music on an instrument modeled after the Viennese fortepiano of Beethoven's own era. Performance by acclaimed fortepianist Daniel Adam Maltz. 3 p.m. Tickets at thestissingcenter.org

■ JULY 21

Book Discussion: "AI Snake Oil"

Scoville Memorial Library, 38 Main St., Salisbury, Conn. scovillelibrary.org

Kat Zdan and Stevo Ledbetter lead a discussion of the book "AI Snake Oil: What Artificial Intelligence Can Do, What It Can't, and How to Tell the Difference." The conversation will explore artificial intelligence and its growing role in everyday life, work and society. Tuesday, July 21, from 5:30 to 7:30 p.m. Registration is required. More information and registration at scovillelibrary.org.

Making Confitures the French Way with Flora Lazar

Scoville Memorial Library, 38 Main St., Salisbury, Conn. scovillelibrary.org

Join pâtissière Flora Lazar for a hands-on workshop exploring the techniques behind traditional French confitures. Participants will learn methods for preserving summer fruits with less time and effort while achieving the bright flavors associated with renowned Alsatian pastry chef Christine Ferber. Tuesday, July 21, from 2 to 4 p.m. Registration is required. More information and registration at scovillelibrary.org.

JULY 22

Creating Picture Books with Caroline Nastro

Scoville Memorial Library, 38 Main St., Salisbury, Conn. scovillelibrary.org
Aspiring and published writers and illustrators of picture books are invited to a three-part workshop series with Caroline Nastro. Participants will receive expert guidance, practical techniques and constructive feedback in a supportive environment designed to help develop emotionally resonant and effective stories. The workshops meet Wednesdays, July 15, 22 and 29, from 1 to 2:30 p.m. Registration is required. More information and registration at scovillelibrary.org.

Berkshire High Peaks Festival

Various locations
July 22 through Aug. 3

Close Encounters with Music presents nearly two weeks of free concerts, master classes and chamber music across the Berkshires, Hudson Valley and Catskills. More info and tickets at cewm.org/high-peaks-festival

Chocolate Tasting

NorthEast-Millerton Library, 28 Century Boulevard, Millerton, N.Y.
6 p.m. Join Christophe Armero of Mudgetown Chocolate for a guided tour into the world of chocolate. Register at nemillertonlibrary.org

JULY 24

Berkshire Resilience Brass Band Concert

David M. Hunt Library, 63 Main St., Falls Village, Conn. huntlibrary.org
The David M. Hunt Library, in partnership with the Falls Village Recreation Commission, presents Summer Concerts on the Library Lawn. At 6 p.m., enjoy a concert with the Berkshire Resilience Brass Band. Bring chairs or a blanket, a picnic and beverages for an evening of great music!

Happy Hour Piano Series: Calla Begley & Friends

American Mural Project, 90 Whiting St., Winsted, Conn. 5 to 7 p.m. AMP's Happy Hour Piano Series continues with live music and libations in Connecticut's unique art space. Calla Begley, a singer and multi-instrumentalist from Collinsville, performs selections by artists including Lake Street Dive, Yebba and Cat Power. The series highlights emerging Connecticut musicians. Tickets at americanmuralproject.org/piano-series.

Linoleum Printmaking Workshop With David Lesako

Mad Rose Gallery, 3 Main St., Millerton, N.Y.
10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Discover the art of linoleum printmaking with artist David Lesako. Using simple tools and materials, participants will learn to transform ideas into bold designs, striking images and creative scenes on paper. This hands-on workshop introduces the essential techniques of printmaking while encouraging artistic exploration. Suitable for beginners and anyone interested in a fun, expressive and rewarding art-making experience. register at madrosegallery.com

Sam Lardner and Barcelona in Concert

Salisbury Congregational Church, 30 Main St., Salisbury, Conn.
A benefit concert for Vecinos Seguros 2. 7 p.m.

JULY 25

PLACE | MEANT

Millbrook Library, 3 Friendly Lane, Millbrook, N.Y.
"PLACE | MEANT," a group exhibition curated by Sharon Bates featuring collage-based work by Laura Canamela, Monica Church, Elisa Lendvay, Susan Newmark and Barbara Todd. Presented in conjunction with "Making Meaning: A Collage Symposium" at the Vassar Institute for the Liberal Arts, the exhibition explores themes of

place, memory and materiality through layered works that transform fragments of the physical world into reflections on landscape, perception and lived experience. The exhibition runs through Aug. 22. A hands-on collage workshop, "Collage Your Place," is scheduled for July 25 at 2 p.m. Visit millbrooklibrary.org for information.

Live Staged Reading:

Nebula + Q&A

The Moviehouse, 48 Main St., Millerton, N.Y.
The Moviehouse is proud to present a live reading of Chelsea Altman's acclaimed play NEBULA for members only. A Q&A with Altman and the cast will follow, moderated by Director Claire Karpen. 5:30 p.m.

Amenia vs. Millerton Fourth Annual Golf Tournament

Undermountain Golf Course, 274 Undermountain Rd., Copake, N.Y.
To benefit the Amenia Free Library and NorthEast-Millerton Library. 2-person 9 Hole Scramble. Top prizes. Register through Undermountain Golf Course by calling 518-329-4444 or email service@undermountaingolf.com

Looking at Nature: Great Trees of Innisfree with Noted Horticulturist, Teacher and Innisfree Trustee Brad Roeller

Innisfree Garden, 362 Tyrrel Road, Millbrook, N.Y.
10:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. Advance registration strongly suggested at innisfreegarden.org

JULY 26

"Color in Motion"

Kent Memorial Library, 32 North Main St., Kent, Conn. kentmemoriallibrary.org
An exhibition of paintings by Woodbury artist Lucy C. Pierpont will be on view in the library gallery. Pierpont's work reflects a life-long engagement with art and draws inspiration from artists including Edward Hopper, Norman Rockwell,

Joan Mitchell and Helen Frankenthaler. An opening reception will be held July 26 from 2 to 4 p.m. Registration for the reception is requested by calling 860-927-3761 or online.

JULY 31

Large-Scale Painting with Joel Haynes

Mad Rose Gallery, 3 Main St., Millerton, N.Y.
10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Create bold, large-scale paintings using house paint, exploring the exciting possibilities of working on a mural-like scale. Embrace the "happy accidents" and open to the unexpected! Register at madrosegallery.com

"Babette's Feast"

The Gary-The Olivia Theater, Abbey of Regina Laudis, 249 Flanders Road, Bethlehem, Conn.
July 31 through Aug. 9

The Gary-The Olivia Players present "Babette's Feast," based on the story by Isak Dinesen. Set in a remote 19th-century Norwegian fishing village, the play follows the arrival of a mysterious French refugee whose culinary gifts transform a small religious community. Performances take place in the Abbey of Regina Laudis' covered open-air theater. Admission is free; donations are welcome. Seating is limited and reservations are required. Reserve online at abbeyofreginalaudis.org, by email at garyoliviaheater@gmail.com or by calling 959-988-6068.

AUGUST 1

Garden Wellness: Forest Bathing with Fru Molnar

Innisfree Garden, 362 Tyrrel Road, Millbrook, N.Y.
10:30 a.m. to 12 p.m. Advance registration strongly suggested at innisfreegarden.org

Summer Bash 2026

The Farm at Pond Lily, Elizaville, N.Y.
The Ancram Center's annual Summer Bash returns from 6 to 10 p.m. at The Farm at Pond Lily. The evening features a cocktail hour with drinks and hors d'oeuvres, pop-up performances, a buffet dinner, a live musical performance, dessert and an after-party. Tickets are required at ancramcenter.org



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