

HOLIDAY TRADITIONS

By Tara Collins



During the holidays, The Dirt Path is lined with local foods and gifts to share at your final destination. Get outside, enjoy nature and bring it indoors. A holiday Dirt Path inevitably leads to a heart-warming hearth. Enrich your home-based festivities this holiday by filling them with traditions and stories, wholesome foods and beverages, laughter and camaraderie with family, good friends and travels from along the way.

Start With Tradition

For Heather Hilson, no holiday season is complete without a trip to Hawley's Family Tree Farm in Meredith. And no tree-picking adventure is complete without her best friend, Anita Hall and her two kids, Abi and AJ. For it was at Hawley's that Heather met her good friend over a cup of hot cocoa and finger cookies. "I've been getting my tree from Hawley's since I moved to Delhi in 2003. The second year I went, I met my best friend in the warming shed and we just hit it off," says Hilson. "Now, spending a December afternoon together at Hawley's has become a yearly tradition for us. We love the family atmosphere there and the homemade

baked delights, hot cocoa and hot apple cider are just the ticket after picking and sawing down the perfect tree."

Hawley's, a 25-acre family-owned and -operated tree farm, has been creating family traditions like this since the early 1990s. Take a short jaunt up Peakes Brooke Road off State Route 10 in Delhi to find Hawley's, an intimate Choose-and-Cut (C&C) experience and one of Delaware County's best kept secrets. "We planted our first trees back in 1981," notes owner Harry Hawley. "They were a gift from my good friend John Lennox, who avidly promoted forestry. He told me he'd come back and buy them from me when they were big enough to harvest. At the time he was in his eighties, and when those first trees were ready for harvest, well, my good friend John was long gone. But we decided to sell them on our own and we've been at it ever since. We have second and third generations tree-cutters coming back year after year—they really have a ball."

Since starting the family business-turned-tradition, Hawley enrolled the farm in the Watershed Agricultural Council's Forestry Program. Hawley holds a forest management plan and

regularly attends forest owner workshops to learn about pests and invasive species that may affect his tree business. "When we planted our first trees, we did so with the idea of making money, of course," remembers Hawley. "When we were planting the very first ones, I got the first half-row planted and said to my son, who was about 12 at the time, 'John, this is going to pay for your college education.' About half way down the next row, he turned to me and said, 'I'm not so sure I want to go college.' Sure, planting trees is hard work but it's also rewarding. John did go to college. And we enjoy meeting new people, being out in the open, and knowing that a day spent with us is a family day."

In any given year, Hawley's has about 12,000 trees in the ground, with roughly a third ready for harvest. C&C'ers can choose from Balsam, Frasier, Douglas and Norway spruce. "We're prepared for all weather, too," continues Hawley. "We have sleds for when it snows. In the cabin, you'll find hot soup or hot chocolate and Christmas cookies made by my daughter, Dawn Vaghts. My wife, Ruth, and daughter Athena make wreaths from an assortment of evergreens." Ranging in size from 18 inches to 5 feet, the wreaths are for sale at the farm and at Hawley's realty office, at 4 Court Street, Delhi. "You'll find us at the farm for Choose & Cut starting the day after Thanksgiving on weekends from dawn until dark," adds Hawley. The price for a fresh tree, picked and cut by you: \$25 to \$35.

Hawley offered just two tips for choosing and cutting the perfect tree. "Everyone has their own idea of what makes the perfect tree," says Hawley. "My favorite is the balsam tree. It's dark green and smells really good when you bring it in the house. But, trees are like people; they come in all sizes and shapes. My advice—just find the one you like." Once found and cut, Hawley says the key to keeping a tree fresh is water, and lots of it. "If you get a fresh cut tree right into water, it'll soak up a good gallon or so. Keep it well watered and it'll last until after New Year's." For more information on the Hawley Family Tree Farm, call 607 746 3543 or e-mail harry@hwhawley.com.

Try Something New

Head over Shandelee Mountain outside Livingston Manor in Sullivan County and you'll notice a new sign along the road announcing, "Raw Milk Sold Here." Before you scurry, screaming, down the Dirt Path, consider giving this farm-fresh commodity a try. Since April, Richard and Mary Ann Dirie have been retailing raw milk from their farmstead. The New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets approved their license to sell the milk that is neither pasteurized nor processed. After working diligently with their milk inspector to ensure everything was in order for the license, the Dirie's are now one of 25 farms approved by the State to sell raw milk. Overall, the largest challenge for raw milk sales has been maintaining a consistent stream of customers. The Di-



rie's state license limits sales to on-farm only, making for limited convenience to those not already passing by. To accommodate their customers' needs, the Dirie's are flexible, allowing morning container drop-offs and afternoon customer pick-ups of freshly bottled milk.

Richard's parents started the farm operation 1944. Currently, the Dirie's are milking 40 to 50 Holsteins that eat a grass-based diet of pasture from May through November. Hay and silage hold the herd through winter months. According to Mary Ann, a large part of the raw milk business has been educating customers about the basics of farming. A few educated customers are purchasing several milk gallons at a time and processing their own cheese, yogurt or butter at home. If you're looking to "wow" holiday guests at breakfast, consider making a quick quiche with fresh eggs, raw milk and local cheese. Customers can purchase one gallon of Dirie Dairy Farm milk for \$5; for customers bringing their own container, milk costs \$4. Smaller containers are welcome and orders for five or more gallons receive a discount. A limited supply of farm fresh eggs is also available at \$3 per dozen. The farm is located at 1345 Shandelee Road between the villages of Livingston Manor and Youngsville. For more information, contact the Dirie's at 845 482 4301 or visit www.purecatskills.com.

Gifts That Keep Giving

Many community farmers' markets are committing to monthly markets with impeccable timing for holiday shopping. Keep your buying power local and stimulate the regional economy by choosing gifts, foods and cheer made in the Catskills. You can find everything from fiber arts to baked-today pastries at these day



Photo by Heather Hilson

events or visit www.purecatskills.com for other ideas. Committed to a gift certificate? Give one for a local farm store or attach it to a jar of homemade apple butter or blackberry jam.

Callicoon Farmers' Market holds its festive holiday market on Sunday, December 6, from 10 am to 3 pm, indoors at the Delaware Valley Youth Center, Creamery Road, Callicoon. For more information, contact Mary Gruszka at manager@sullivan-countyfarmersmarkets.org or 845 292 6180, ext. 115.

Saugerties Farmers' Market features local farmers, specialty bakers, food producers using local ingredients, and craftspeople for its monthly holiday market on select Sundays this winter, noon to 4 pm, indoors at the Senior Center, 207 Market Street, Saugerties. This market offers free parking, music, crafts and holiday gifts; EBT/food stamps are accepted. Market dates include: December 20, January 17, February 14, March 28 and the May 16 Plant Sale. For more information, call 845 246 6491 or visit www.SaugertiesFarmersMarket.com.

New Amsterdam Public Market in New York City is organizing monthly markets featuring regional farm and food vendors. Visit the Pure Catskills booth on December 20, 11 am to 4 pm at South Street Seaport, in front of the old Fulton Street Fish Market at Beekman Street and Peck Slip. For more informa-

tion, contact Cerise Mayo at cerise@newamsterdammarket.org or visit www.newamsterdammarket.org.

Offer Up to Charity

Several environmental organizations are worthy of your support this year. Make a donation or give a gift membership, in your name or someone else's, to one of these local groups working to keep the Catskills green. Your donation can help protect farmland, get new farmers started, preserve the region's cultural heritage and protect Catskill streams, water and forests.

Ashokan Center

www.ashokancenter.org

Catskill Center

www.catskillcenter.org

Catskill Mountain Keeper

www.catskillmountainkeeper.org

Farm Catskills

www.farmcatskills.org

Trout Unlimited: Catskill Mountain Chapter

www.cmtu.org

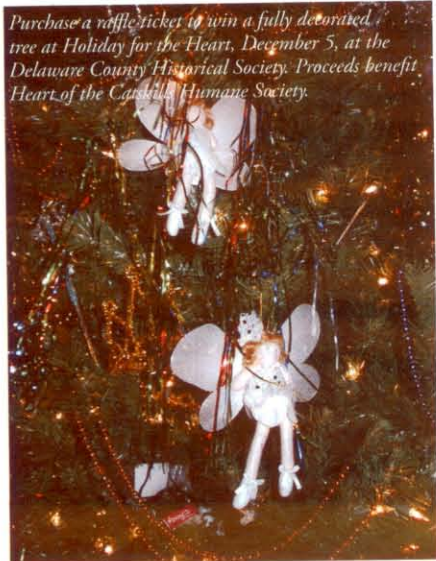
Watershed Agricultural Council's Conservation Easement Stewardship Fund

www.nycwatershed.org

Start A New Tradition

John Lennox had it right: plant trees, watch them grow and enjoy them year-round. Forests are the best land use for protecting water quality. They fight climate change and global warming. Woodlands maintain habitat corridors and encourage wildlife. Start a new tradition this year: take a walk in the woods. You can find short trails, educational kiosks and interpretive signs explaining forestry practices at the Lennox Model Forest (Delhi, Delaware County). This 140-acre model forest, a collaborative effort between the Watershed Agricultural Council and 4-H Camp Shankitunk, was set aside by the same John Lennox that got Harry Hawley started. Two other model forests are open to the public and set up in similar fashion: the 140-acre Siuslaw Model Forest at Cornell Cooperative Extension's Agroforestry Center (Acra, Greene County) and Frost Valley YMCA's Model Forest (Denning, Ulster County). For more information on these Dirt Paths, visit www.nycwatershed.org.

Purchase a raffle ticket to win a fully decorated tree at Holiday for the Heart, December 5, at the Delaware County Historical Society. Proceeds benefit Heart of the Catskills Humane Society.



Pure Catskills Events, December-January

December 4, 10 am-5 pm, Hudson Valley

Beef Marketing Tour features three beef farms in the Hudson Valley. The focus will be direct sales to customers at the farm and at farmers' markets, restaurant and retail sales, and cattle sales. The tour will feature the Sir William Angus farm operated by Justin and Bruce Conover, Craryville; Trowbridge Angus operated by Phil Trowbridge and family, Ghent; and Grazin' Angus Acres operated by Dan Gibson, Ghent. Transportation from Delhi, Stamford, Windham and Liberty (depending upon interest) will be provided. For more information and to register, contact Leslie Deysenroth, Watershed Agricultural Council (WAC), at 607 865 7090 or e-mail ldeysenroth@nycwatershed.org. Registration fee (lunch included): \$15

December 17, 11 am-3:30 pm, Hamden Town Hall

Small Grain Production Workshop focuses on production techniques for growing winter and spring small grains such as oats and barley triticale, production for on-farm grain production and feeding considerations. Speakers will include Nate Herendeen, Cooperative Extension Crop Specialist from Western NY; IPM specialists; local CCE specialists; and local farmers with experience in growing these grains. NYS DEC Pesticide Recertification and Certified Crop Advisor credits will be provided. For more information and to register, contact Judy Morse, Cornell Cooperative Extension-Delaware County (CCEDC) at 607 865 6531 or e-mail jam49@cornell.edu. Registration fee: \$5

January 14 (snow date 1/15), 11 am-3:30 pm, Sanford Hall, SUNY Delhi

The Catskill Regional Dairy, Livestock and Grazing Conference features the latest research and its application in three concurrent sessions; Dairy, Sheep and Goat, and Renewable Energy on The Farm. Speakers will include farmers, university professors and others. Banquet featuring local foods provided. Registration fee (includes banquet lunch of local foods): \$15 for CCEDC members and WAC participants, \$20 for non-member participants. For more information and to register, contact Kim Holden, CCEDC at 607 865 7090 or e-mail kmh19@cornell.edu.

January 22-24, 2010, Saratoga Hilton Hotel & Conference Center, Saratoga Springs, NY

28th annual organic farming and gardening conference, "Circle of Car-ing," hosted by Northeast Organic Farming Association of New York. More than 80 workshops, three keynote speeches, organic trade show, entertainment and local organic meals is open to new, beginner and experienced farmers and gardeners. For more information, contact Greg Swartz, Conference Coordinator at 570 224 8515, by e-mail at conference@nofany.org or visit www.nofany.org.