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## Long Live Local

# **Mega-movie night**

These local resources bring screen-it-yourself parties within your reach

## by Frances Marion Platt

VEN BEFORE COVID shut down all the cinemas, pimping up one's home theater setup as far as one's space and budget would allow was becoming a hot trend. And now that the Omicron variant is fading, many people are feeling more confident about hosting or attending social gatherings. We're seeing a resurgence of ads for Super-Bowl snack platters and the like. Doubtless Oscar-Night watch parties are already being planned. The biggest screen available has become the focal point for many a soirée.

What our collective screen fixation, large or tiny, says about modern society is a matter for another essay entirely. We're here to contemplate a more celebratory question: Why not make showing a movie — something brand-new and much-anticipated in your geek circle, or some old beloved favorite — a centerpiece of your next social gathering, or even a big event like a wedding, graduation or retirement party? And while you're at it, why not transcend the confines of your home media den and throw the thing up on a cinema-sized screen?

There are several entities in the mid-Hudson, both commercial and not-forprofit, now making it easier for you to do just that. You can choose to bring your party to a movie theater for a private indoor event or have the screen, projector and sound system come to you, to set up under the stars, in a tent or a rental hall. Read on for more about three resources available for this purpose right now.

### Hudson Valley Backyard Cinema

A brand-new local business that brings portable screening setups to private events, Hudson Valley Backyard Cinema is the latest brainchild of Kingstonians Kari and Chris Politylo. "We just launched



Cari & Chris Politylo, owners of Hudson Valley Backyard Cinema.

about three weeks ago," Kari says. "We are very familiar with the event the Rosendale Theatre s-rental business. We noticed a few backyard movie businesses in the Southwest areas of the US and thought it could be a good fit for the Hudson Valley."

The couple has been running Paramount Photo Booths since 2013, providing a popular amenity that lets event attendees as well as hosts go home with custom-designed mementos of a special day. "We've had our photo booths everywhere, from basement birthday parties to weddings at private estates," writes Kari.

Now the Politylos are taking their event business to a new level, having acquired a 16-foot inflatable screen, a 1080P highdefinition projector, high-quality sound system, Blu-Ray/DVD player, seating, accent lighting and popcorn and candy concessions — all portable. "I expect that it will be rented for birthday parties, family movie nights, date nights, neighborhood gatherings et cetera," Kari says. "The nice part about this idea is that it's very pandemic-friendly, being that it's an outside activity."

Package prices for backyard screenings range from \$299 to \$499, depending on what bells and whistles you want. There's an additional travel fee for setups outside a 30-mile radius of Kingston, and a \$99 deposit required when you book a date. To learn more, visit *www.hvbackyardcinema.com*.

### Upstate Films

In the thick of the pandemic, when movie theaters couldn't open their doors to audiences, their operators were scrambling for alternative ways to generate income. Not-for-profit cinemas were especially hard-hit, since most of them are too small to sell enough tickets to pay for film rental costs when patrons have to be seated in small separate pods.

Upstate Films' two new directors, Jason Silverman and Paul Sturtz, "figured out how to take the show on the road with outdoor screenings," as they note on their website, www.upstatefilms.org. They acquired their own portable projection system and spent much of the summer of 2021 showing Hollywood classics, cult films, and even some documentaries at places where the public could safely gather, often with live music accompaniment. The Hudson Valley Picture Show, as they dubbed the series, visited such venues as Opus 40, the Old Rhinebeck Aerodrome, Del's Roadside, the Maverick and Art Omi.

This cinematic roadshow is slated to return in the summer of 2022, with Kaatsbaan among the new sites on tap. It's available on a rental basis as well. "Since you can't come to us, we'll come to you. We provide a movie-size 16-by-nine-foot image on our new screen using our highpowered portable projector, plus plenty of sound with a pair of thumping loudspeakers, and even fresh hot popcorn with our moveable feast popcorn machine!" Upstate promises. "We're ready when you are to liven up a summer evening with socially distanced cinema under the stars."

There's more to the story than that, however. Even before the public health emergency, not-for-profit film exhibition venues were looking to diversify their income streams by making their indoor screening spaces available on a rental basis for private events. At times of day when the regular film schedule isn't in progress, Upstate Films will book the Starr Cinema in Rhinebeck and the Orpheum Theatre in Saugerties to outside groups or individuals.

"We haven't actively promoted it, but we do a couple a month," says Sturtz. "Quite often, we hosted birthday parties during the height of the pandemic. It's a pretty popular thing."

The price for such a booking varies quite a bit, he says, with a baseline of \$600 for Upstate Films members and \$675 for non-members. Staffing the theater is part of the cost, along with the fee for the film rental. "We do need to pay for exhibition rights. We can't legally just show a movie to a big group of people without paying the distributor."



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Glenn and Dyana Warnock's wedding included a horror movie screening at Rosendale Theater.

Sweetening the deal is the fact that, Upstate being a 501c3 organization, part of the event rental fee is tax-deductible. According to Sturtz, they need about a six-week lead time to book a theater space for an event. Contact him by e-mail at *paul@upstatefilms.org* to inquire about availability.

### **Rosendale Theater**

Another local option for renting a theater space for a private celebration is offered by the Rosendale Theatre, another notfor-profit that has been struggling to stay afloat during a protracted time of no income from ticket sales.

What makes this space different, and especially appropriate for a wide range of events, is its splendid wooden stage, sturdily rebuilt in 2015 with the intent of presenting live theatrical and musical performances year-round on non-movie nights. Pulling down the movie screen adds the potential of using projected backdrops. And during the lull in operations necessitated by the pandemic, some of the seating in the first few rows of the theatre was removed and replaced by a hardwood dance floor.

"People have used our stage to get married. We've hosted lectures, conferences, panel discussions, battle-of-the-bands concerts by New Paltz Rock. Private schools have rented it to put on a play. Now that we have that dance floor, people can use it for dance, exercise and yoga classes," says director Carrie Wykoff. "If someone wants to rent it for a party, they could have a movie be part of that. We've had a fair amount of memorial services where they showed slide shows."

One couple who rented the Rosendale Theatre to stage their wedding, Glenn and Dyana Warnock, shared a love of horror films. "They showed their favorite horror movie for their friends, and then got married," Wykoff recalls. They then moved the entire wedding party next door to the Belltower catering venue for the reception.

In the near future, it will become easier to add a beverage menu to an event in the theatre itself, as the organization is expecting approval from New York State for a beer-and-wine license any week now.

As with Upstate Films, price points for hosting a private event at the Rosendale Theatre will vary depending on the resources needed, "How many hours, how much technical support they need, what time of day," says Wykoff. "If it's a movie, they have to pay for licensing." A onetime licensing fee can cost from \$50 to \$350 and up.

"If they own the rights to the film, those are different circumstances. We had one woman who wanted to show her short film to her friends and the crew in the early afternoon. All expenses were covered, and it was not cost-prohibitive."

To find out more about what the Rosendale Theatre can offer in terms of screenings and other private events, to schedule a walk-through of the space, or to discuss costs, e-mail Wykoff directly at *carrie*@ *rosendaletheatre.org*. Or come by to see a movie and check out the new tavern facility as soon as it's open.



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## A glimmer of hope Time to step into your local flower shop

### by Genia Wickwire

T IS THAT time of winter where the cold seems to be really weighing on people. The snow is not that fresh, fluffy beautiful new stuff. Instead, its remnants lie in dirty stiff piles along parking lots and driveways. It has hardened into ice along pathways.

On some days, the late-February air is so cold that it leaves you feeling like even when inside you can never quite get warm. People rush in and out of buildings never stopping, staring hard at the ground in an effort to avoid falling. The only thing worse than being out in the cold is falling on hard, icy ground.

The real glimmer of hope is that now, if you happen to drive home around 5:30 p.m., the sky is lighter, the horizon has an orange-pink hue that gets just a shade brighter every couple of evenings. Maybe there is hope. Maybe this eternal winter will end. Maybe we will see green again. Maybe the spring flowers will bloom





Floral design by Dancing Tulip, Saugerties.

MAISIE SNYDER

some day soon. People will slowly look up. Maybe we will celebrate again.

There is a more immediate short-term solution to breaking up this bleak winter

vibe: your local flower shop. Whether you are planning a party, a wedding or any other important event for the summer or spring, or just looking to add a little color to your day, these are the spots to go to. Stepping inside any of your local flower shops is heaven. The sweet smell, the warm damp air and the endless choices of yellows, pinks, and purples will make your stiff, cold shoulders drop.

Even through the face mask, taking in that floral scented air is divine.

The great thing about the local flower stores in the area is that they are independent and owned by familiar faces in the community. Not only do you get a beautiful bouquet, but also a friendly face, some local knowledge, and years and years of expertise.

### Jarita's, Woodstock

Jarita's in Woodstock is one of the mainstays of the community. It sits on Tinker Street across from the village green. It has been there for what seems like forever: 45 years, opening on the auspicious date of 7/7/77.

It is owned by Jay and Rita, who started in the floral market by selling flowers on the streets of Albany. They were subject to whatever the weather held in store for them, and it was about an hour drive each day and each way. So when "an opportunity for our storefront opened up we said why not?" they said. "It was all very serendipitous, and us being young. It evolved from there."

They have been there through hundreds of parties, weddings, small thank-yous and big I-love-yous every since. Working with people through their happiest and saddest moments has given them a feeling of connectedness that not everyone gets to experience.

What do they like best about providing floral arrangements for special occasions? "We like lighting up the room(s) with our flowers, and seeing the happiness that it brings to people for their special events."

"Special" is a subjective word. What



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Floral design by Jarita's, Woodstock.

might be special to one person might seem

horrible to another. Part of being a florist

is being able to figure out meaning for

each customer. Jay and Rita ask a variety

of questions until they have it narrowed down to the perfect arrangement.

what they want, they ask questions What

is the occasion? They usually ask about color; e.g. bright and colorful, soft and light. Are there any particular flowers thatthe customer likes or dislikes? Is there a

If the customer doesn't already know



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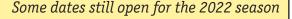


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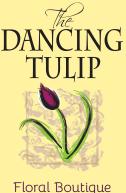
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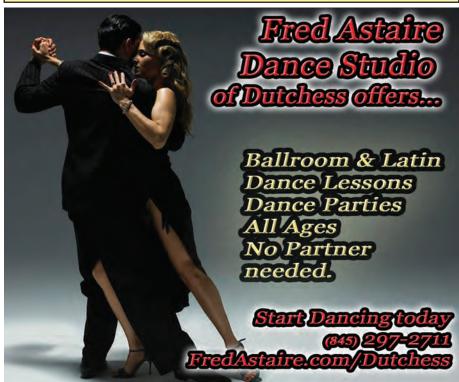
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Floral design by Meadowscent, Gardiner.

particular style that they want (gardeny, wildflower, compact, loose and airy, etc.)? After a few questions like these, they say they have a pretty good idea of what feeling and style the customer is looking for. Jay and Rita spend extra time getting to know their clients' vision. They continue to grow and change with the times and flower trends.

### Meadowscent, Gardiner

Theresa Colucci owns Meadowscent

Florist in Gardiner, where she grew up. She always loved flowers. When she was in high school she took an after-school job working in a flower shop. She had no idea that the youthful experience might turn into a 35-year career as a florist. But here she is, running her store on Route 44/55 in Gardiner.

Her store is nestled in a quaint shopping plaza and filled with not only beautiful flowers but also special gifts and hand-

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crafted items. She says she loves being a part of people's big moments in life right from the start, to the end, and everything in between.

"Special occasions are celebrated in

someone's life from birth to death," she said. "These are important moments in life, and flowers help make the celebration beautiful and memorable. I could not ask for a more rewarding job than to



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Hudson Valley Celebrations

make someone's celebration more joyful through flowers." Figuring out exactly what people want and what they envision can be a difficult process.

Theresa takes the old adage that a picture is worth a thousand words to heart. "Photos are the best way to see a customer's vision," she said. "There are many things a trained eye pulls from these inspiration photos such as color, style, texture, form and size. By using these, we can create the perfect florals for their special event."

Theresa has been doing what she has been doing long enough that she has a particular style that is recognizable. However, she says that it is important to her always to be willing to progress and stay current in order to meet her customers' evolving ideas for their celebrations.

### **Dancing Tulip, Saugerties**

For the past eight years Dancing Tulip,



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owned by Hazel Sherburne, has been brightening up Saugerties. Located at 114 Partition Street, it has quickly become a staple of the village and town.

Hazel attributes some of her success to the unique flowers the store carries. "We try to always have unusual blooms and greens in the shop," she explained. "Believe it or not, those are the hottest ticket items. Showy coral peonies, amazing clooni ranunculus from Italy, and exotic proteas from South Africa all make regular appearances when they are available. In turn, we take these exotic specimens and turn them into floral artwork."

Before opening Dancing Tulip, Hazel worked part-time at one of the town wine shops. She has worked closely with the Saugerties village business community. She had a sense that there was a need for a flower shop. "The timing for me and the town was right, and after researching the industry I jumped in with both feet," she said.

Her decision was correct. She has been

## **Hudson Valley Celebrations**

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**Hudson Valley Celebrations** 

working with the community illuminating their events and celebrations ever since. "Whether we are working with couples for a wedding, helping plan a surprise birthday bash or even celebrating a life well lived and past, we know that we are privileged to be an integral part of those moments," she said. "Flowers bring smiles, no matter what the occasion."

Hazel works closely with her customers. whether it be creating a small bouquet or creating floral arrangements for an entire event. "We know that when we are helping people develop a look or concept for their event, we are in collaboration with them. They are coming to us for our expert advice and wide range of experience," she explained. "Lots of times we start with example photos to get an idea of concept. Then, we narrow by color, style, flower availability and what the must-haves are. It's very important to understand the style and personality of our clients to ensure a good fit."

With her five-star customer service rating, Hazel must be doing something right. She feels her rating "says a lot about who we are and how we care."



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#### **Hudson Valley Celebrations**



Elizabeth and Elliot Steele in their food truck Manifest Coffee.

# **Meals on wheels**

Food trucks have become part of our Hudson Valley culinary culture

### by MK Brunell

S A PART-TIME wedding DJ, I thought I had a decent handle on wedding planning. A month into my engagement last year, I realized how clueless I really was. How do you throw a great party for 175 people, making sure there's plenty of food with options for all diets, in a responsible (pandemically speaking) way? We knew we wanted an outdoor wedding so that our guests could dance the night away without concerns about air flow. We also wanted to make the food at the event memorable, a little different from the traditional "chicken, fish or vegetarian" meal options.

A solution to that dilemma that is becoming more and more popular in the Hudson Valley: food trucks.

The Hudson Valley is home to a thriving food-truck culture. At any street festival, you're sure to find at least four or five different mobile kitchens slinging everything from cocktails to lobster rolls. Events like the Saugerties Food Truck Festival offers an opportunity to sample food from dozens of rolling restaurants in one afternoon.

It's not just for dinner, either. Cocktails, coffee, dessert and more are available on wheels!

Here are five of the food trucks that were operating in Ulster County, ready to pop

up at your next outdoor event.

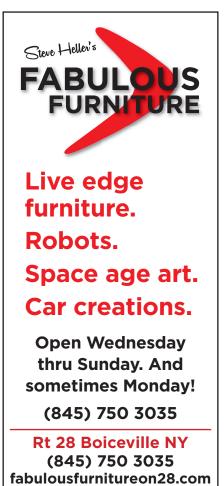
## For cocktails: Parked Prosecco

The brainchild of New York State native Alexa Carrington-Eden, Parked Prosecco's lovingly restored, Instagram-ready vintage camper (affectionately nicknamed "Tilly") can function as the sole bar for a smaller event, or as an ideal after-party addition. Packages are surprisingly affordable as well as flexible: from just bubbly to a full range of cocktails, beer and wine. Ice, straws, glassware, fruit and an expert bar crew!

Guests will be snapping selfies all evening long on the trailer's built-in photo bench. Want a signature cocktail? No problem! Says Carrington-Eden: "I love learning new recipes, and I'm always researching new cocktails to bring to our bar." The apple-pie sangria is a favorite.

## For vegetarian/vegan guests: The Green Palate

Vegan food isn't just for vegans, particularly when it's as delectable as the fare provided by the award-winning Green







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Palate food truck. With hearty fare like oat burgers, seitan sausage, and even vanilla waffles (who doesn't love a little dessert waffle?) plus a range of dips and appetizers, the Green Palate's menu will more than satisfy vegan guests and likely tempt the omnivores as well.

## For a caffeine infusion: Manifest Coffee

Dinner is over, the dance floor is open, but your guests are feeling sluggish. It's time for a little pick-me-up! Manifest Coffee is "essentially an entire working coffee shop in a small trailer," says co- owner Elizabeth Steele. Steele and husband Elliot, both SUNY New Paltz grads, spent 2020 building the trailer and bringing it to life in High Falls.

"We have the capacity to serve highquality traditional espresso drinks such as americanos, lattes and cappuccinos, as well as frozen blended espresso shakes, chai, and our own concoctions like turmeric or mushroom lattes," says Steele. They boast of all-natural ingredients and fresh-roasted premium coffee. Choose an open or cash bar, tailor the menu to your preferences, and watch your party go all night!

## For sweet treats: Leila's Crepe Station

A little bite of cake is rarely enough to satisfy your guests' dessert cravings. You know what they really want? Crepes! Flavors include s'mores, apple cinnamon, blueberry cheesecake and other mouthwatering options. There are savory options, too. A great way to provide dessert and a late-night snack in one!

## For lovers of local fare: Farmers & Chefs

Chef John Lekic's farm-to-able restaurant and fleet of mobile kitchens are a staple of the local food-truck scene, as well as the local food movement. Emphasizing seasonal ingredients sourced from farms, the customizable and ever-changing menu is a celebration of our area's bountiful agriculture. Bonus: an off-site liquor license and available bar staff means you can also count on them to provide local IPAs, wine and cider!

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# Hostess with the mostest

It's not the big bucks but the amount of ingenuity that make for the greatest parties



Money eyes for points in scavenger hunt.

### by Erin Quinn

s SOMEONE WHO had little time and even less money, hosting parties has been nerve-wracking. I wouldn't have hosted any had I not had three kids. They do enjoy being celebrated and recognized, and very much like having friends over for various holidays and festivities.

Okay. I'll be honest. Even if I did have a lot of time and a lot of money, party planning would still not be my thing. I do love the people in my life, though. I always want to do something memorable for them on their special day, whichever day was deemed "special." When the kids were little, summer parties at the public pool were easy and fun. I could always add an obstacle course in our yard, or an egg hunt, even a piñata from the dollar store. Since I have had one June and one August baby, the weather was generally cooperative. We could do mini-golf, a trip to one of a dozen local pizza joints, and a movie at the cinema or at home.

My minimalist parties were fun. They kept me far away from a Chucky Cheeses, a McDonald playroom, or an indoor jumping gym. I felt my values had not been even more severely compromised. I managed for the most part to avoid the panic attacks often at the forefront of my meager existence.

Somewhere along this not-so-linear timeline of raising kids, coaching and writing, I was invited to one of several high-school graduation parties, this one for twins Hudson and Madison Carroll. I'd spent years getting to know them, watching them grow up, and having the privilege of coaching them in swimming.

I wanted to give them something that was meaningful, although at 18, I'm sure cash would have been just as meaningful. But still I wanted to try. On my way to the party, I put together a small photo album of all the pictures I could get printed off



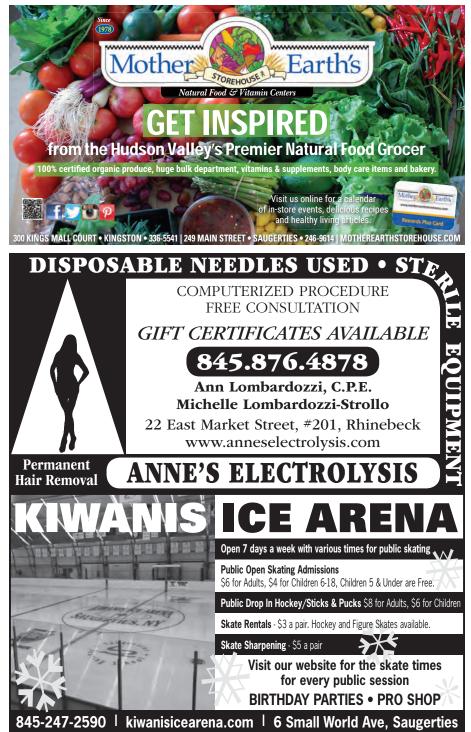
my phone from the drug store and tried to shove them in the impossible plastic sleeves. From my car, I saw people flood towards their front lawn..

I imagined cute baby twin pictures of them being bathed in a double kitchen sink, one of the talented members of their family possibly strumming on a guitar, meeting second cousins and greataunts, making small talk. eating too many cookies, and likely spilling something on my thread-barren white sundress.

### An unforgettable event

I didn't know it then, but I was about to enter the most unforgettable party I had ever gone to (except the ones that you might not remember for less wholesome reasons). Kathy and Rich Carroll, their parents, had put together an extensive and detailed scavenger hunt. They had organized teams of seven with a list of rules, assigning points to each thing found (or created), and providing a hard and fast start and end time.

Extravagance doesn't buy a good party any more than it buys happiness. The fact this party was low-cost and low-



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The port-a-potty challenge doesnt smell too good.

maintenance is proof of that.

The groups mixed parents, kids, friends, relatives and neighbors. I didn't know everyone in my group, but within 20 minutes we were soldiers in battle together. We were gladiators. We were going to pluck those treasures from the sodden soil or photograph our entire team inside a soccer net, with a government official and playing a musical instrument next to a horse.

The adrenaline was pumping. Everyone was packed into a car shouting to go this way or that way. Where might we find a Prius and all lie in front of it? How can we engage up to 25 strangers in a conga line?

We were laughing and screaming. Everyone's inner-competitor was transformed into an almost-instant team bond. Most of the items on the hunt required the participation of the entire team. There couldn't be one star or one superhero. We were a team, a battalion!

The rules of engagement were specific. The team had to stay together for the entire hunt. The first team back would get a bonus of 2000 points. Those who returned later than the appointed time would have a 1000 points deducted for each minute they were late.

We were looking for the number 2014 (the year they graduated), an American \$2 bill, a Harry Potter figure, two members of the team on a tandem bike, a picture of everyone checking out books at the local library, everyone swinging at the public park at the same time (except the picture-taker) eating a hand-cookie from The Bakery with the most icing on it, dancing with a stranger, hanging upside

**Hudson Valley Celebrations** 



Jumping off.



P&G's conga line.

down, and lying on a sidewalk with a chalk bubble above our heads that said: "Class of 2014."

I still remember hanging my head out of the window on the way back to the Carroll house, searching in vain for a horse while a teammate in her seventies made a sign that read "This is Spirit" to hold next to the mare if and when we located it.

We all filed into the house exhausted, dirty, chalk on our face, a crumpled list of things achieved or not. Camera rolls (from smartphones) were shown to the judges to prove the validity of our accomplishments. We swapped war stories. We heard tales of opposing team members tipping the balance on the human pyramid and everyone coming crashing down. One crafty team suggested that another team may have stopped at the home of one of its members (forbidden according to the rules) to pick up a Harry Potter figure or a \$2 bill.

Even the judges were under pressure to



Madison Carroll and staff at Dressel's ice cream stand.

tally those scores and make decisions as to whether something was verifiable or not.

### Customizing the scavenger hunt

What had inspired Kathy Carroll (Hudson and Maddie's mom) to do a scavenger hunt? She had designed one for the family camp program she ran in New Hampshire. "We were looking for fun activities that families could do together and did not require staff to supervise," she explained.

The Carrolls also made sure to include local attractions and fun spots. Anyone could tailor a scavenger hunt for a particular area. This party had a real New Paltz theme, but could just as easily have included landmarks, businesses and attractions unique to Kingston or Woodstock. Why did she think this a customized scavenger hunt might be a good choice for her children's grad party? "Our kids didn't like typical parties," she answered, "and we wanted something that they would participate actively in. We also wanted something that the kids and adults' could all participate in and have fun together."

People (like me) still talk about that June-afternoon event to this day. Carroll remembers some "real hits like getting in the back of a police squad car" and "the ones that required getting strangers to join in."

The Carrolls had made sure the event was specific to their children. "One great thing to do is to design it based on location. Hudson and Madison's was based thematically on locations that were related to their growing-up experiences and likes." Madison said that she thoroughly enjoyed her grad party. "It was much more fun than just sitting around," she said. "It was competitive and super-fun to see the team pictures at the end."

### The themes are endless

This event taught me a lot. I've always been a big fan of improvisation. I'm for doing things together rather than sitting around picking at finger sandwiches. For my daughter's Sweet 16, instead of a banquet hall or a shopping spree I came up with a list of things that she and her friends, broken up into three teams, had to find or do or record in downtown New Paltz.

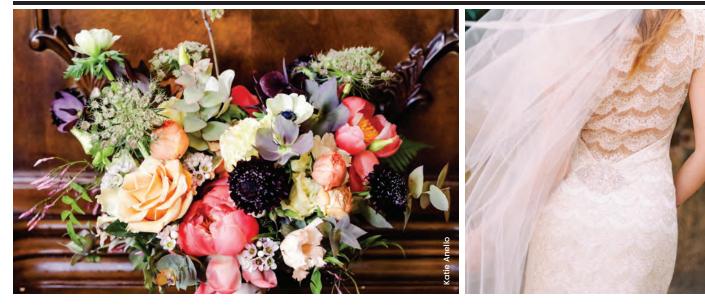
She's a February birthday, so they had to be bundled up, make snow angels, sing a song in P&Gs, get a picture with a Starbucks barista, make up a protest and hold a vigil for it outside of the Elting Memorial Library, form a human peace sign outside Kontiki, all do a handstand at the same time in Hasbrouck Park, and ask a stranger where they would go if they could go anywhere in the world.

The kids were off their phones, running around, playing in a park, singing in a bar, making snow forts, and getting strangers to laugh. And they had to take pictures or a video as evidence of their achievements.

There are a host of ideas based on theme at Pinterest to draw ideas from. Her camp in New Hampshire loved the pictures and the memories of the fun they had. These tools helps people want to keep on participating. "We have had to do all kinds of variations because they want to do it the next summer and the summer after that!," said Carroll. "You can do it with one group or 50, and the themes are endless."

I hope this story inspires more scavenger hunts. When you have a tale to tell, let us know! We can feature it on HV1 Instagram.









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