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Skydiving with an instructor at Skydive the Ranch Gardiner.

# Catskills thrills

*Five extreme outdoor activities in the Hudson Valley*

by Zac Shaw

**I**N OUR REGION, the great outdoors offers countless opportunities for leisure. But what if your idea of fun includes maxing

out your heart rate while risking injury and performing daring acts of skill and finesse? We've got you covered.

Some of us like a healthy shot of adrenaline in our dopamine hits. For the thrill-seekers, here are five extreme

outdoor activities in the Hudson Valley that everyone should try at least once, provided they have the guts and the physical prowess:

## Paintball

If you haven't gone "paintballing" yet, let's get the most frequently asked question out of the way first: Yes, getting hit by a paintball often hurts. You will likely leave the field with enormous bruises, especially from paintballs that fail to break on impact. These will be your "battle scars," and you will be proud of them. Getting hit stings just enough to make your pulse quicken and your senses heighten on the playing field.

This is the closest the average person will get to fighting in a war, thankfully. Paintball injuries are rare and usually the result of failure to navigate terrain. At most fields, safety is taken very seriously, and rules are firmly in place to prevent serious injury. As with many items on our list of extreme outdoor activities, be

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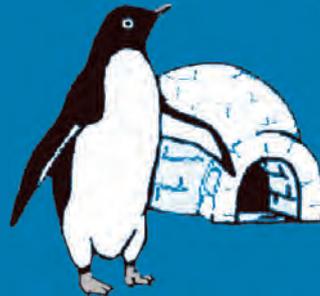
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prepared to sign a waiver indemnifying management from responsibility for injuries.

Paintball is best played as a team sport, so bring a large group. Depending on the field, you may get paired up with other players, pitted against another team, or even pitted against members of your own team. It's a full-day affair, and while many fields offer some food and drink options, it's best to bring your own.

Bring a bunch of cash, too. Unless you have your own gear, you'll be renting paintball guns, face masks and jump-suits. And then there's the paintballs themselves – again, you can bring your own, but the field will have them for sale. If you're doing a decent amount of shooting, you'll need hundreds to make it through the day.

Besides the heart-racing feeling of projectiles whizzing by your head, paintball is extremely social, with opportunities

to meet new characters and reconnect with your own clique. The pressures of (fake) war will bring you and your friends closer together, give you a solid workout, and provide great stories at your post-paintball hangout.

Most of the other folks at the paintball field are likely to be serious players with serious equipment. It's not uncommon to see folks dressed in full army fatigues with \$1000 paintball guns and the skills to use them. The referees will usually make sure teams are balanced. Don't be surprised if you're looked at as fresh meat when teamed up with others.

Since paintball typically requires large swaths of cheap land, you'll likely need to take a bit of a drive to reach the local fields. We recommend Paintball Sports New York in Clintondale for its wide variety of outdoor playing fields, friendly staff, decent prices and amenities. HornetsNest Paintball in Ancramdale has an interesting indoor course for those wishing to experience an urban shooting environment. Roadrunner Paintball in

Arlington is another good option.

## Skydiving

Skydive The Ranch in Gardiner is a regionally-known mecca for folks who love to plummet from the sky. Billed as "the highest skydive in New York," the ranch's frequent fliers are happy to facilitate your first jump and every jump thereafter.

Skydiving is not as simple as throwing on a parachute, getting on a plane, opening the door, and shouting "Geronimo!" (On second thought, it's probably not okay to say that any more).

On your first jump, you'll need to go through some training. Your instructor will run through all safety procedures, teach you proper diving posture and form, familiarize you with equipment, and prepare you for any contingencies. And yes, you'll need to sign a waiver.

You'll need to make sure you come dressed appropriately, avoiding baggy clothes for more athletic wear. And come mentally prepared as well: You still pay full price whether you jump or chicken out.

The last thing to know: You'll be strapped to the front of another human being who has lots of experience skydiving. That might come as a relief and a shock at the same time, but safety is paramount, and skydiving is not without risk. If you truly love the experience, you

## Hudson Valley Explore

*Spring in the Valley*

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Celia Gottlieb climbing straight up  
 a rock cliff, photo by Rich Gottlieb

[www.hudsonvalleyone.com](http://www.hudsonvalleyone.com)

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### Hang gliding

Oh, falling from the sky wasn't enough for you? You want to be able to literally fly around? Head to Ellenville Flight Park, where local hang gliders are born.

In a gorgeous location in the Shawangunk Mountains, certified instructors at this flight school will train you to leap

from ledges and glide gracefully to the ground, experiencing the world through the eyes and wings of a bird.

As you might expect, hang gliding is not something to get the hang of (sorry) overnight. Ellenville Flight Park offers a \$150 introductory lesson which includes everything you'll need to know to get your foot in the door (foot in the air?) of this hobby.

For more serious aerial adventurers, a full ten-to-twelve-day course is available for \$1250, which should develop your skills enough to qualify you as a beginner with the United States Hang Gliding and Paragliding Association (USHPA), which is necessary to start pursuing hang

gliding in earnest.

Let's be honest: Few reading this will make the leap and feel the freedom of this one-of-a-kind extreme activity, but those who do will have a transcendental experience.

### Ziplining

If flying through the air appeals to you as much as being secure and safe, try the extreme outdoor activity that's low-risk enough that even kids can do it.

Here again, the Hudson Valley lucks out, this time with one of the longest and highest zipline tours in North America: New York Zipline Adventures at Hunter Mountain. This attraction features two paths over and through the treetops. The Mid-Mountain Tour has six ziplines and four suspension bridges, and is the family-friendly option for all ages (over ten years old recommended) and courage levels.

The more adventurous Skyrider Tour is accessed by chairlift or off-road ride to Hunter's Summit Lodge, includes a training session, and features five spectacular ziplines spanning 4.6 miles. You'll reach speeds of up to 50 m.p.h. while you're



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up to 600 feet above the ground below. Oh, and there's a 500-foot-long Burma bridge. If you've never seen one of these rope bridges, search it up on Google and feel your stomach drop.

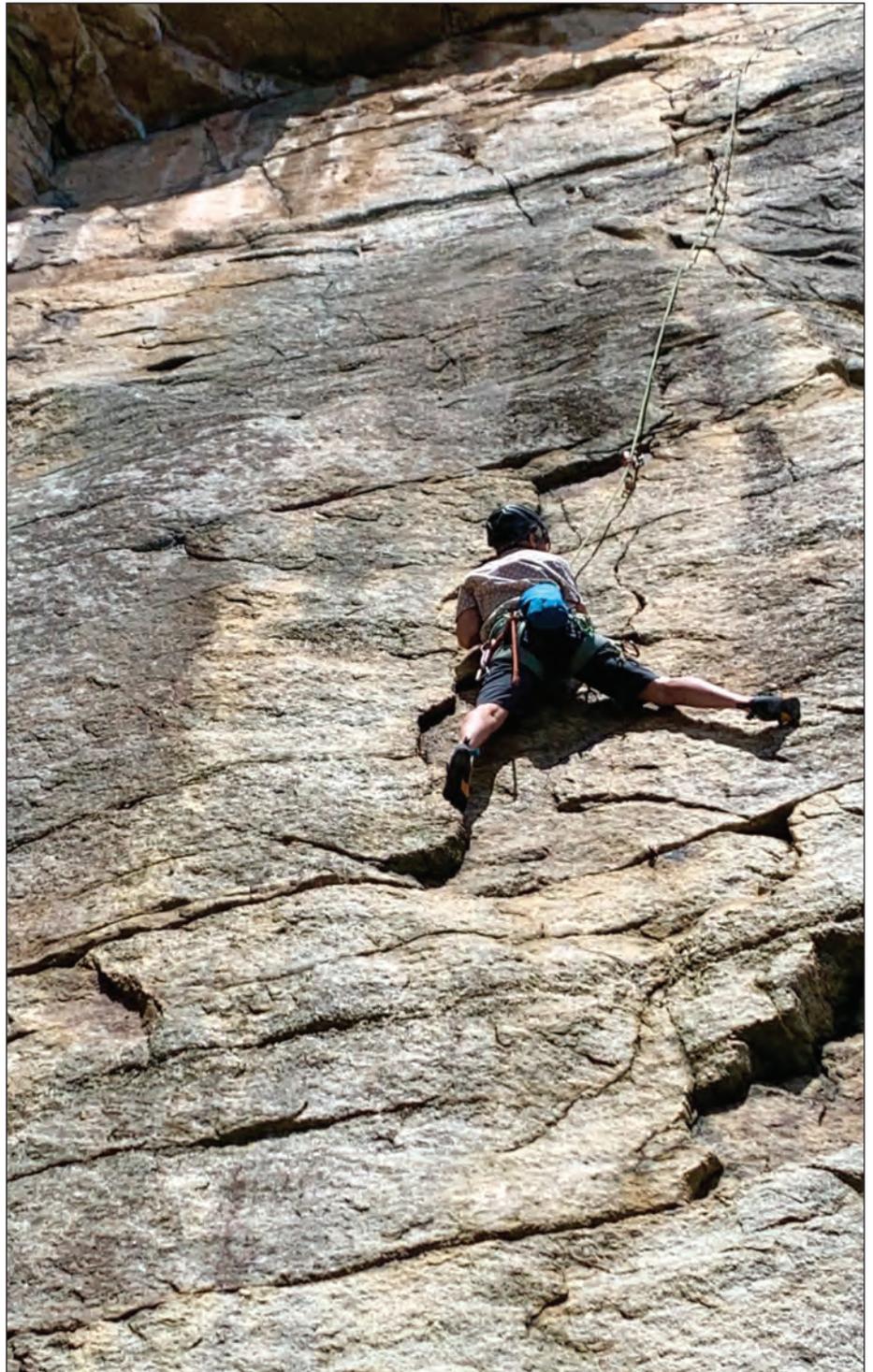
All these thrills come with experienced safety instructors to guide you through every zip of the way. The Mid-Mountain Tour starts at \$99, and the Sky rider Tour at \$149. Keep in mind there are weight, height and mobility requirements to ensure the safety of all riders. Check their website to make sure you qualify.

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# All the valley's a stage

*A glimpse of live theater offerings this spring through fall in the mid-Hudson region*

by Frances Marion Platt

IF SPRING HAS come, can the summer theater season be far behind? It's time to start giving thought to what shows we most want to catch in the months to come, whether they be offered in an intimate modern black box, on a vintage vaudeville-era stage or out under the stars.

Truth be told, it can be confusing to try to pigeonhole regional theater productions by "season," since the timing of such will vary by venue. Some major summer theater seasons (such as the one at the Woodstock Playhouse) hadn't even been announced yet as of press time. Other theaters are projecting way ahead (Bridge Street Theatre is already booked into 2024). A few venues, including college theater departments, are just



Woodstock's Bird-on-a-Cliff Theatre Company.

winding up their 2022/23 seasons and will take the entire summer off, returning in the autumn.

This roundup of what we have to look forward to on local stages this spring, summer and fall is necessarily incom-

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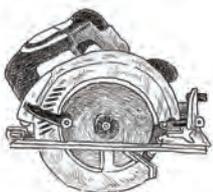
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*Pippin*  
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November 12, 18

CP2 Readers' Theatre festival weekends  
*The Cake* by Bekah Brunstetter, directed  
by Brittany Proia

Friday, October 13, 8 p.m., Saturday,  
October 14, 2 p.m.

*The New Century* by Paul Rudnick,  
directed by Michael J. Frohnhoefer

Saturday, October 14, 8 p.m., Sunday,  
October 15, 2 p.m.

*Freud's Last Session* by Mark St. Ger-  
main, directed by James Steinmeyer

Friday, December 1, 8 p.m., Saturday,  
December 2, 2 p.m.

*The Half-Life of Marie Curie* by Lau-  
ren Gunderson, directed by Michael J.  
Frohnhoefer

Saturday, December 2, 8 p.m., Sunday,  
December 3, 2 p.m.

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New Paltz

845-743-5364, [information@denizen-theatre.com](mailto:information@denizen-theatre.com)

<https://denizentheatre.org>

*The Empty Locket: Part 1 of The  
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Christine. A one-of-a kind interactive  
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Autumn 2023 Black Box Season T/B/A

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<https://hudsonhall.org>

*Happiness in the Spotlight*, Camphill  
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<https://hvshakespeare.org>

*Henry V* by William Shakespeare,  
directed by Davis McCallum, featuring  
Emily Ota as King Henry

Previews May 31, June 1-3

June 9-11, 15-17, 22-25, 29-30, July 1, 19,  
23, 29, 31, August 2, 6, 10, 14, 16, 20-21

All performances at 7:30 p.m. except  
2 p.m. June 25

*Love's Labor's Lost* by William Shake-  
speare, directed by Amanda Dehnert,  
with original music by Amanda Dehnert/  
Andre Pleuss

Previews July 12-14

July 12-17, 20-22, 24, 26-28, 27-30

All performances at 7:30 p.m. except a  
2 p.m. matinée July 26

*Penelope* (world premiere), music/lyrics  
by Alex Bechtel, book by Alex Bechtel/  
Grace Mclean/Eva Steinmetz, directed  
by Eva Steinmetz

September 2-3, 5-10, 12-17

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September 10 and 17, a 2 p.m. matinée  
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*Two Gentlemen of Verona*

Ages 8-10, July 3-15

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*The Merchant of Venice*

Ages 14-18, August 7-19

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Three Thornton Wilder one-act plays  
June 2023 - Dates/times T/B/A

*Infancy* (from *Seven Ages of Man* se-  
ries), directed by Joe Bongiorno

*Such Things Only Happen in Books*,  
directed by Richard Ralff

*Queens of France*, directed by Lena  
Adams

### Phoenicia Playhouse

10 Church Street, Phoenicia

845-688-2279

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<https://phoeniciaplayhouse.com>

*Kittens in the Catskills Burlesque Show*  
Saturday, May 13, 8 p.m.

*The Addams Family: A New Musical  
Comedy*

Thursdays-Saturdays, 7 p.m. June 22-  
24, June 29-July 1, July 6-8 Sundays, 2  
p.m., June 25, July 1 and 9

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Poughkeepsie

[www.vassar.edu/powerhouse/season](http://www.vassar.edu/powerhouse/season)

July/August programs/dates T/B/A

### Rosendale Theatre

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❧ May 27 & 28 ❧

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*Just Another Day* by/ starring Dan Lauria, world premiere co-production with Great Barrington Public Theatre

June 2-18, MainStage  
*The 39 Steps*, adapted by Patrick Barlow from novel by John Buchan, movie by Alfred Hitchcock, original concept by Simon Corble/Nobby Dimon

June 23-July 9, Studio  
*Always ... Patsy Cline*, created/original direction by Ted Swindley

July 14-August 6, MainStage

*Million Dollar Quartet*, book by Colin Escott/ Floyd Mutrux, original concept/direction by Floyd Mutrux, inspired by Elvis Presley, Johnny Cash, Jerry Lee Lewis, Carl Perkins

August 11-September 10, MainStage  
*Off Peak* by Brenda Withers

September 15-October 1, Studio  
*Skeleton Crew* by Dominique Morisseau (Part 3 of *The Detroit Project*)  
 October 6-22, MainStage  
*Miss Bennet: Christmas at Pemberley*

by Lauren Gunderson/Margot Melcon  
 December 1-17, MainStage

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[www.newpaltz.edu/fpa/theatre/productions/mainstage](http://www.newpaltz.edu/fpa/theatre/productions/mainstage)

*Bat Boy* by Keythe Farley/Brian Fleming/Laurence O'Keefe, directed by Catherine Doherty, music directed by Katya Stanislavskaya

April 21-23, 27-30

Thursdays-Saturdays at 8 p.m., Sundays at 2 p.m.

Autumn semester 2023 season T/B/A

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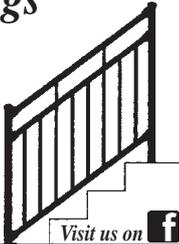
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Summer 2023 Season T/B/A

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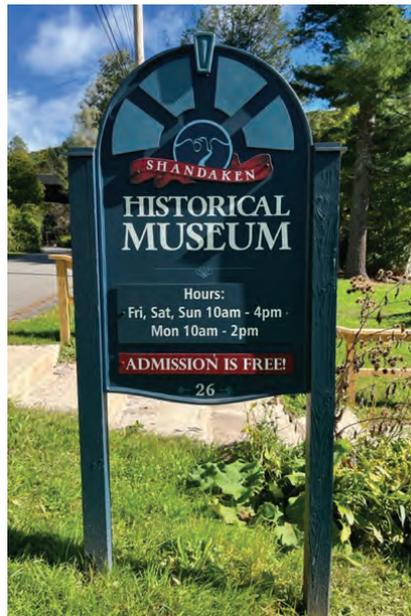
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years later to John and Mary Eagen who operated it until 1948. In 1950 Max and Ruth Bruggmann purchased the property and in 1952 opened a restaurant, the Dutch Rathskeller, in the Kirkland's basement. The Bruggmanns closed the hotel in 1968 and the restaurant and bar in 1972.

With a stone and brick foundation, the building features a wood and brick wraparound porch and a tower with a rounded balcony. The exterior has wood siding on the first two floors and stucco on the third and attic stories. Decorative wood trim highlights the upper stories and gables of the building and windows feature a nine-over-one grid.

In 2001 RUPCO purchased the Kirkland and renovated it, reopening in 2008 with a restored wraparound porch, copula, affordable housing units, and their executive offices.

**DUTCH RATHSKELLER**

**THE DUTCH RATHSKELLER** restaurant offered an old-world atmosphere, steins of beer, and European master chefs. Owner Max Bruggmann previously had a restaurant named Hermon's on Wall Street, which closed in 1948 when Schneider's Jewelers bought the building. The Rathskeller advertised "banquets, parties, and catered affairs of up to 125 guests...elegantly served in our Senate Dining Room. All our public rooms—Senate Dining Room, Dutch Rathskeller, Grill Room, Keg Room, Gift Shop—are air-conditioned!" The coast shop next door is still remembered today and had a similar Tudor-style design to the neighboring Kirkland. Its neon sign and that of the Rathskeller were made by the Modjeska Sign Studio.

**EXCERPTED FROM OUR 300-PAGE BOOK: The Story of Historic Kingston, featuring 100 images. The book is for sale online and in local shops. Information about all Kingston's historic buildings, businesses, restaurants, walks, trails, and more can be found on our website (below).**

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At *Rough Draft\** - 82 John St.
- 2 - Rotating Exhibits**  
At *Persn House* - 74 John St.
- 3 - Mohican & Schneller's Markets**  
At *Win Morrison Realty* - 63 John St.
- 4 - Clermont Hotel**  
At *Win Morrison Realty\** - 56 John St.
- 5 - Courthouse & Old Dutch Church**  
At *Ulster Savings Bank* - 280 Wall St.
- 6 - Old Post Office & City Hall**  
At *Old Dutch Church* - 272 Wall St.
- 7 - Kirkland Hotel**  
At *RUPCO/Kirkland* - 2 Main St.
- 8 - Volunteer Firemen's Hall & Museum**  
At *Law Offices* - 260 Fair St.
- 9 - Elston's Hobby Shop & Elk's Club**  
At *Law Offices* - 260 Fair St.
- 10 - Loughran House & Chipp House**  
At *Chloe* - 288 Fair St.
- 11 - Kingston Opera House**  
At *Hamilton & Adams\** - 32 John St.
- 12 - Stuyvesant Hotel**  
At *RUPCO/Stuyvesant* - 37 John St.
- 13 - Woolworth**  
At *Blue Byrd's\** - 320 Wall St.
- 14 - Keeney's/Reades/BSP Theater**  
At *HV1 Publishing* - 322 Wall St.
- 15 - 1950s & '60s Wall Street**  
At *Gargoyles* - 330 Wall St.
- 16 - Senate Garage**  
At *Rhino Records\** - 6 North Front St.
- 17 - Senate House**  
At *Senate Garage* - 4 North Front St.
- 18 - Tappen House & Bernstein's**  
At *Buns Burgers* - 32 North Front St.
- 19 - 1950s & '60s North Front Street**  
At *Hill Valley Candles\** - 55 N. Front St.
- 20 - Peace Park**  
At *Peace Park* - Crown & N. Front Streets



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# Conquering Godzilla

*Endurance athlete David Barra sets his own goals*

by Erin Quinn

**B**OULDER, BOZEMAN OR Bend have nothing on the 845 in terms of outdoor folks doing badassery types of challenges.

We could all go somewhere else to do something special, but why not start in our own back yard? Why not get to know what fence you need to learn to hop over, what tree you need to climb, what rock you need to shimmy up, what lake to swim across, or what summit to ascend on your mountain bike not once but 58 times in one day?

David Barra is one of these people who never ceases to amaze and inspire. He's elegant, clever, kind, skilled, and one hell of an endurance athlete. Coming from Brooklyn, Barra was originally drawn to the area by access to world-class rock climbing and bouldering right off the hairpin turn of Route 44/55.

It's a common thread among the outrageously talented multi-sport and multi-season athletes roaming around these parts to set FKT's (Fastest Known Times). FKTs can be for swimming the entire length of the Hudson River, running unsupported ultramarathons along the ridgeline, or trying to ride up and down the steepest hill you can find as many times as your body and the daylight will allow.



Dave Barra, Godzilla in progress.

Here's the thing about Barra. He's not doing any of the things he does, like swimming the English Channel or around the island of Manhattan, or the 120 miles from the Rip Van Winkle Bridge to the

Verrazano Bridge as part of the 8 Bridges open-water event he founded, directed, and participated in for years. He does all of what he does quietly, without fanfare or social-media posts.

It's who he is and how he chooses to live. He's not one for clicking off the years like a parade of cheesy Hallmark cards and wax candles melting onto a cake.

"I hate birthdays," he said, sitting

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outside The Bakery in downtown New Paltz. “That’s not how I want my life to be defined.”

## From water to dry land

After 20 years of hardcore masters swimming, logging in ten to 14 hours a week at the SUNY New Paltz pool or some body of open water from the Hudson River to Catalina Island, Alcatraz or the English Channel, Barra had participated in many tough, fun, tribal-like birthday swim sets to mark the years. His athletic challenges were made celebratory by the camaraderie of the other swimmers in Speedos spending their special day in a chlorinated pool with their buddies -- getting their heart rate far greater than whatever age they’d just turned.

With the pandemic restricting access to pool time, Barra began finally to say yes to the friends who’d for years been asking him to go for a bike ride. “It’s not that I didn’t bike. I raced bikes all the time when I was in Brooklyn,” he explained. “I was in a racing club, and it was my only form of transportation.”

When the mountain biking craze hit almost 30 years ago, Barra bought one and spent time looping around the trails at the Mohonk Preserve and Minnewaska State Park. The swim life pulled at him like an undertow, taking him to beautiful places with wonderful people.

But he was not doing all the things he moved here to do. “I love the mountains. I love the trails. I love being outside and seeing all of the incredible views we have here, and wildlife.”

Barra admits that he felt a bit shamed when his cycling friends snickered at his 30-year-old bike. “I eventually bought a new one,” he said. “They were making fun of me,” he laughed. “And, to add insult to injury, my body wasn’t handling the old hardtail the way it used to.”

No one makes fun of Barra for long. Whatever he sets his mind to, he goes all in for, full tilt, foot on the throttle, no time for making excuses.

“I don’t know how triathletes do it,” he said. “I make fun of them all the time, but really I pay great homage to them because I couldn’t imagine biking for this amount of time, and then running later in the day, and then get a swim in or a bike to run. I can only give my full attention to one thing at a time.”

He began biking, going on rides with friends and then turning up that dial,

## The Woodstock-New Paltz Art & Crafts Fair

**T**HE HUDSON VALLEY’S favorite celebration of handmade, **The Woodstock-New Paltz Art & Crafts Fair**, will return to the Ulster County Fairgrounds in New Paltz on May 27<sup>th</sup>, 28<sup>th</sup>, and 29<sup>th</sup>. This long-standing event is a gathering of hundreds of the country’s most creative small businesses, and this Memorial Day weekend will mark its 42<sup>nd</sup> anniversary year and 80<sup>th</sup> show.

Promoted by Quail Hollow Events and consistently voted one of the top 10 contemporary craft shows nationwide by *Sunshine Artist Magazine*, the fair teems with handmade wares from carefully curated exhibitors. Director Ola Rubinstein explains, “The real beauty of this festival is the vibrant environment generated by gifted exhibitors and an enthusiastic public. Our artists value sharing their process and work via meaningful one-on-one interactions, and visitors enjoy learning the history of the objects and engaging with the maker of the unique pieces they purchase.”

Fairgoers can look forward to discovering uncommon, standout finds for the home, body and beyond – from wearable fiber art, to mixed media wall art, to hand-thrown porcelain table settings, large-scale garden fountains, dining room tables and everything in between. Visitors may well find that long-sought-after Adirondack chair or a one-size-fits-one jewelry piece. An exciting new addition this Spring is Bar

Fiore, a vintage-inspired flower truck brimming with colorful whimsy and offering visitors an opportunity to create their own Spring bouquets.

**The Woodstock-New Paltz Art & Crafts Fair** is cherished for both the relationships it fosters and its vast array of features that appeal to every style and generation. “The opportunity to observe so many creative processes in one place is significant, especially as we continue to move away from face-to-face experiences,” says Rubinstein. Visitors will delight in ongoing craft demonstrations, a variety of small-batch artisanal and prepared-on-site foods and, of course, local wine, beer, and spirits. Live musical performances round out this broad celebration of handmade. The youngest attendees (and their parents) will appreciate a complimentary children’s craft tent, filled with a wide range of materials — many supplied by the artists themselves.

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doing more gravel bike events, even some road cycling challenges, commuting to and from his home in Allgerville to Kerhonkson, where he has a marble fabrication and installation business. He hit the local mountain-bike trails as often and as much as he could.

This monster isn't fictional

Which brings us to Godzilla. If you don't know it, just think about the name. It's massive, it's steep, it's gnarly, and there are times when you feel like you're trying to scale a monster's back. It's that hill at a four-way carriage road intersection at the preserve, among Undercliff/Overcliff, Laurel Ledge and Oakwood Drive. Though it's called Old Minnewaska Drive, locals know it only as Godzilla. It gains 300 feet in about seven-tenths of a mile, a 1.4-mile round trip up and back down.

arts & events

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When Barra's birthday came rolling around, he began to think of a bike challenge that might help him usher in this new trip around the sun. In the catacombs of his brain, he thought it might be fun to try to go up and down Godzilla 58 times in one day. Why not?

"My constraints were time and weather," he ex-



Dave Barra at the Shawangunk Grit finish line.

plained. "It was February, there was an oddly warm day predicted, no snow, so I kind of put it together a few days before."

This is the crazy thing about living in the 845. An outdoor enthusiast myself, I'm out on this foggy February day on a long run, no one on the trails. Coming around a corner, I see a duffle bag and a handwritten

cardboard sign saying, "Do not disturb, Godzilla repeats in progress." A black Sharpie marker has drawn a stick figure on a bike half-way up a bumpy hill.

"It has great access," reported Barra. "I could put my fuel and water down at the bridge, and people could ride out and meet me if they wanted to. I had about eleven hours of light to get it done."

How'd it go, David? Hard as hell, he said. He hit his first "demoralizing low on hill repeat number three." He realized his calculations were off. "I had thought it would take me eight minutes each loop but I quickly realized that even on fresh legs it would take me nine and a half. That doesn't sound like a big difference, but when you multiply it by 58?"

He had visits from Dr. Mike Halstead, who rode about ten repeats with him, and then Alex Sherwood, voice of the Survival of the Shawangunk Triathlon, who did 13 hills alongside his friend. Cali Kircher, Chris Sullivan and Scott Markle then helped to bring him home those last few hills.

"I was really hurting at repeat number 50," he said. "My vision was getting blurry, my neck was locked up, but Scott texted



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me and said he was on his way. That helped. Each person brought their own energy, which was great.”

What did he enjoy most about the grueling experience? “Seeing that view of the ridge change with the light all day,” Barra replied. “I saw the sunrise from that vista, and the sunset and every hour in between.”

He admitted that part of these endurance adventures were masochistic. “Life has a lot of suffering, and this allows you to control the suffering and that takes the power out of it.” He had ridden 70 miles

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and climbed almost 18,000 feet in one day, finishing it off sharing a beer with his buddy Bill Metzger. “He made sure to come when I was all done,” said Barra with a smile.

If you didn’t happen to be at this particular crossroads in the middle of the 8,000-acre preserve on an oddly warm February day, then it’s likely you never heard about this challenge. That’s how Barra and his friends are. They’re not posting their exploits on social media. There’s no camera crew or go-pro. It’s just the rider and Godzilla having a day of it.

Future adventures

While he does have further bike-packing escapades on the horizon, Barra was happy to take part in the Shawangunk Grit at the preserve in November. He’s



Dave Barra and friend celebrating his 58 year birthday challenge.

also gearing up for the local Cabin Challenge Full Monty that will take road cyclists 101 miles from New Paltz to the Catskills and back. Though other biking adventures around the globe have piqued

Barra’s interest, for now he’s commuting to work and back, riding with friends on the weekends, and hitting the trails any chance he gets.

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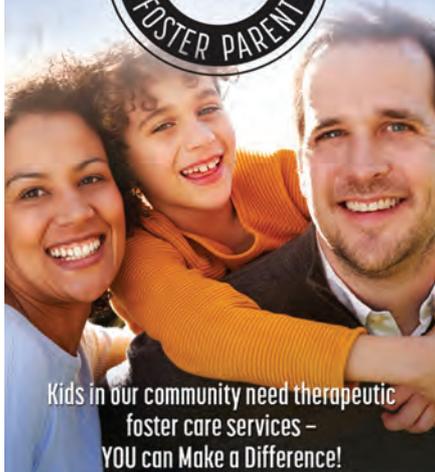
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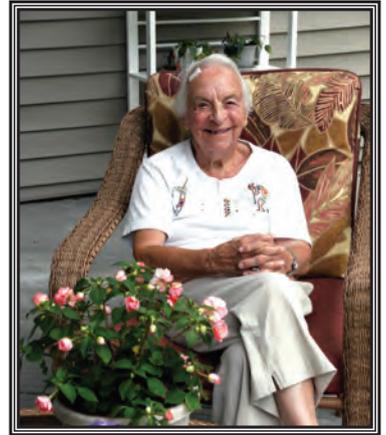
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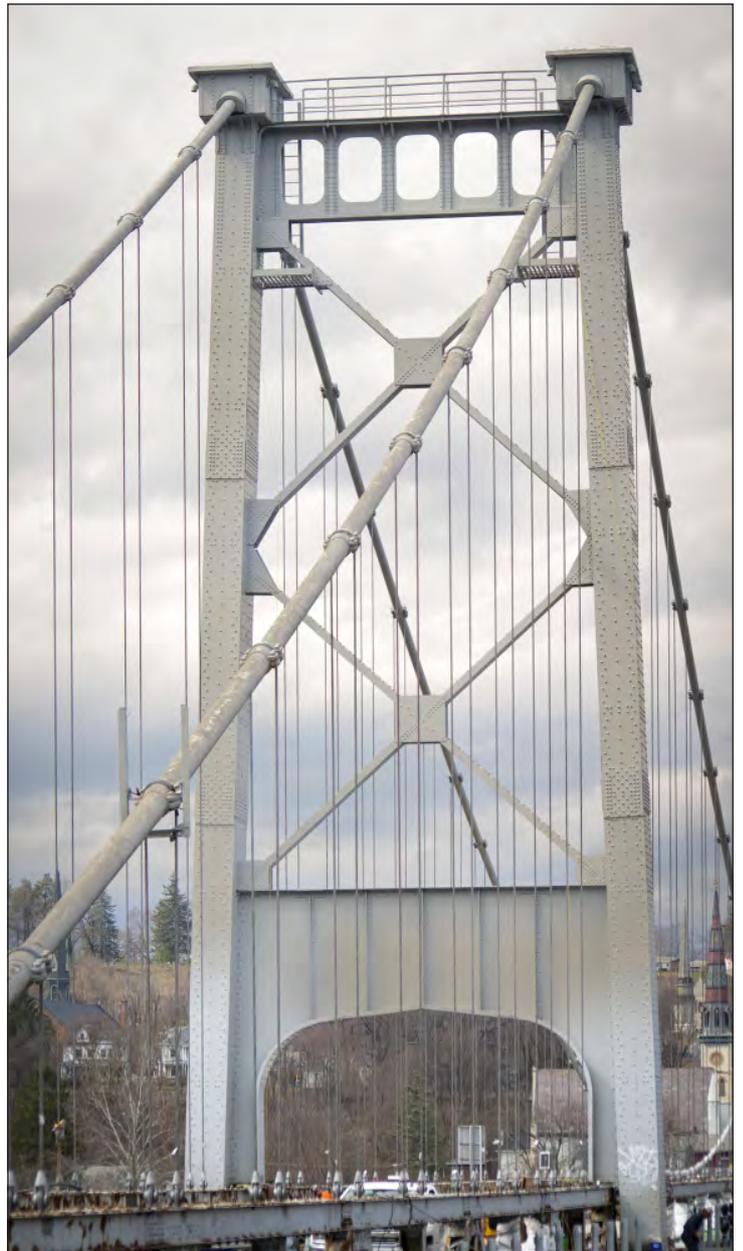
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# A bridge over quiet waters

*The historic Wurts Street structure will host pedestrians and cyclists*

by Lynn Woods

**A** DECADE AGO, THE fate of the Wurts Street Bridge, whose graceful span over the Rondout Creek is one of the attractions of Kingston's downtown district, was uncertain. Inaugurated in the governorship Nathan Lewis Miller in November 1921, the bridge had undergone an overhaul in the 1970s. When a new sidewalk-less highway bridge, the Judge John T. Loughran Bridge, was built over the creek to serve Route 9W just to the east of it in 1979, the obsolescence of the Wurts Street structure was official, though its walkways continued to serve pedestrians and cyclists. Its historic and aesthetic qualities, enhanced by the framing of the creek's wooded bluffs, made it a candidate for preservation.



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In 2014, a portion of it was repainted and some cable repairs were made, but the rust-covered girders were evidence of its advanced state of deterioration. In September 2020, the bridge was found unsafe and closed to traffic. The decision to restore it or to tear it down was up to its owner, the New York State Department of Transportation (DOT).

The Wurts Street Bridge is the only suspension bridge in the provenance of DOT. It was built as a link between Kingston and Port Ewen on what was then Route 9W, a state highway. When completed in 1921, it was the final part of New York's north-south highway on the west shore of the Hudson River.

Then-assemblymember Kevin Cahill was instrumental in drumming up \$37 million in state Assembly money, and

the DOT provided the difference for the \$44.6-million restoration project. In September 2021, work by four contractors commenced. It is scheduled for “substantial completion” by August 30 of this year.

**This span has a story**

Restoring the bridge has been a feat of engineering that’s inspired the making of a documentary film which will describe the many engineering challenges through dramatic footage. The film will also cover the history of the bridge and its impact on local industries. It will tell the stories of the workers and surrounding community now and then, spanning a century. A video previewing the film along with information on the project can be viewed at [wurtsstreetbridgefilm.com](http://wurtsstreetbridgefilm.com).

Unlike the renowned *The Bridge On the River Kwai*, in which World War 2 prisoners of war of the Japanese destroy the structure they had painstakingly built over a Burmese river, this film will document a construction project to rebuild a century-old historic bridge in Kingston, New York.

Robert Vandeweghe, a filmmaker, community TV producer and licensed drone pilot based in New Jersey, had recently

**The Wurts Street Bridge’s historic and aesthetic qualities, enhanced by the framing of the creek’s wooded bluffs, made it a candidate for preservation.**

purchased a drone with a broadcast-quality video camera when he visited his friends Neville Bean and Harris Diamant at their loft in downtown Kingston.

Fascinated by the bridge renovation, Vandeweghe introduced himself to the foreman just as construction was beginning and began filming, positioning himself 2021as he piloted his drone in the parking lot below the bridge day after day in the fall of 2021

In 1999, he’d made a documentary film of the renovation of a highway interchange in northern New Jersey and gained some experience with the rebuilding of roadway infrastructure.

Neville Bean has been a fan of the bridge ever since she and Diamant, an

antiques dealer and artist, left New York City and moved into a local loft in 2016. The couple frequently photographed the structure, which was visible from their patio overlooking the Rondout Creek

(they have since left Rondout and now reside in Connelly). An art director, designer, and ceramist who has volunteered with Kingston’s Midtown Arts District on many community art-related proj-

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ects, Bean had previously worked with Vandeweghe on a series of promotional videos for two of his clients, the Boy Scouts and Ronald McDonald House. It was natural to partner with him on this project, too.

Upon viewing his footage, she felt there was a bigger story, “touching on the metaphors of bridging the community through time and capturing the breathtaking beauty of the bridge.”

### Out with the old

The film will include interviews with the engineers illustrating the stress dynamics and a CGI 3-D rendering of the bridge based on the schematics, Vandeweghe said.

Context will be provided about other significant historic preservation projects in Kingston. There’ll also be a description of community arts projects happening in conjunction with the renovation.

“We see the documentary as an opportunity to shine a light on the community, along with the science and engineering techniques involved in the restoration,” Vandeweghe explained.

The bridge renovation entails the installation of a new roadway deck, guide rails, sidewalks, railings, and suspension cables, of which there are 157, according to Vandeweghe. Some deteriorated steel compo-



Neville Bean (left) and Robert Vandeweghe (right) are documenting the renovation of the century old Wurts Street Bridge.



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nents are being replaced. The pedestrian walkway, which will extend off the deck, is being widened to comply with ADA requirements. Climate-control systems will be installed in portions of the bridge to discourage moisture.

“The bridge was built with twentieth-century technology, and the materials have changed since then,” said Bean. “Even the formulation of the steel was less precise than it is now.”

Because the tens of thousands of rivets

that hold the bridge together are no longer manufactured, they are being replaced with high-tech bolts. This is the most costly aspect of the project, according to Vandeweghe.

The Wurts Street structure was the first suspension bridge built in the Hudson Valley. Part of its magic derives from its relatively small proportion for a type of structure normally associated with sublime heights and great distances. Its 1145-foot span is slightly over a third of the length of the Mid-Hudson Bridge crossing the Hudson River at Poughkeepsie, and much shorter than the span of the mighty multi-level George Washington Bridge between New York City and New Jersey.

Positioned 85 feet above the creek, the span is supported by two main cables suspended from the two towers, whose tops measure 190 feet from the creek, according to Vandeweghe. Each of the main cables consists of twelve smaller cables comprised of thousands of wires bundled into a steel tube. They were manufactured by John A. Roebling's Sons Company, the firm founded by the designer of the Brooklyn Bridge and for over a century was a world-renowned supplier of cable wire. These horizontal cables have retained their strength and more than a century later need no repairs, Vandeweghe said.

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Called the Rondout Creek Bridge when opened in 1921, the span is described by William B. Rhoads in his 2003 book *Kingston, New York: The Architectural Guide* as “a modest triumph of early-twentieth-century engineering and a clear sign of the coming of the automobile age to Kingston.” It replaced a primitive

chain ferry that for two centuries had connected Kingston’s Rondout with Sleightsburgh and Port Ewen across the creek.

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According to Rhoads’ *Architectural Guide*, a massive concrete-and-steel

bridge supported on piers embedded in the creek bed was proposed in 1914. That design was discarded when it was discovered piers located midstream in the creek weren’t permitted. The project was further delayed by World War 1.

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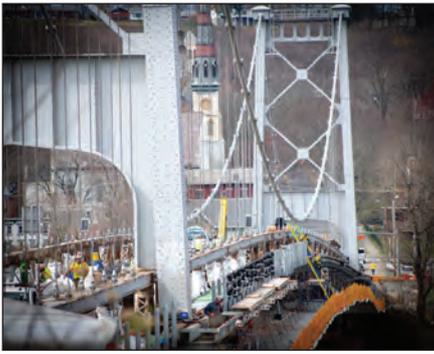
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highways commissioner in September 1919, and construction started soon after. Moran later was a consulting engineer on the George Washington and Golden Gate bridges, among others. His design partner on the Rondout Creek Bridge was marine engineer William Yates, also based in New York City.

Contractor Terry and Tench Construction Company retained Holton D. Robinson as a consulting engineer. Robinson, a long-span suspension bridge pioneer,

had been head engineer of the Williamsburg and Manhattan bridges in New York City. After forming a partnership with Daniel Steinman in 1922, Robinson designed the Henry Hudson Bridge and many other noteworthy bridges in the U.S., Canada, and Brazil.

The original construction of the bridge attracted unusual attention due to the presence of a female welder, Catherine Nelson, a 33-year-old Danish widow

with two children who had emigrated to America following her husband's death and had learned to weld in a machine shop as a way of supporting her family. According to Bean, Terry and Tench hired Nelson away from the Weehawken Cable Company to weld cables. Rhoads noted in The Architectural Guide that according to a 1921 article in The Daily Freeman she was "the only woman welder in the world" and was slated to be featured in



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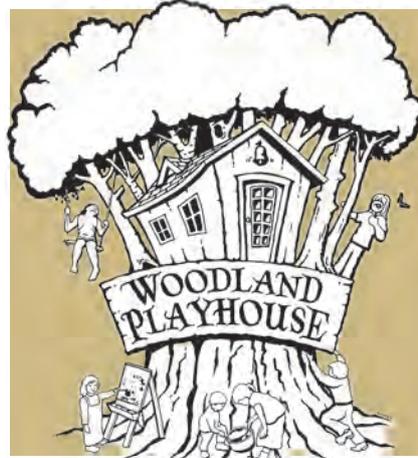
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a Pathe newsreel.

So far, Vandeweghe has at least 100 hours of footage, which depicts dozens of yellow-vested, orange-helmeted workers poised on the cables, deck, and struts midair as they weld, drill, bolt, scrape, saw, and paint. Viewed from above, alongside, or below, we see

them prying up old pieces of concrete roadway; attaching giant water-filled plastic cubes lowered from a crane onto the steel girders beneath the exposed deck (the cubes are critical to stabilizing the weight on the bridge as pieces of the concrete roadway are removed, according to Vandeweghe), and exam-

ining a mammoth cluster of exposed horizontal cables at the bridge's base. He captures the bridge in various weathers and times of day, creating a portrait of a steel structure whose gray curves and gridded geometry transcend the material, taking on a poetic power.

In the course of the renovation, workers discovered a copper time capsule behind the bluestone cornerstone. Unfortunately, the paper material within the box that contained it had rotted. But Vandeweghe and Bean had an idea. Why not replace it with a time capsule that would create a snapshot of Kingston in the early 2020s?

The capsule is currently being conceived of as both a physical object and a community project. As stated in the pair's press materials, it would provide a representative sampling of current

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**Priorities, priorities**

by Geddy Sveikauskas

**W**HAT SHOULD GOVERNMENT do with taxpayer money? What should government not do with taxpayer money?

Surely restoration of “a steel structure whose gray curves and gridded geometry transcend the material, taking on a poetic power” is worthwhile. But is it worth \$51.8 million, the final estimate from the state DOT, to the approximately 70,000 households of Ulster County?

Split 70,000 ways, that expenditure would amount to \$74 per household. Might the average householder in Pine Hill, Kerkonson or Wallkill be happier with seven pizzas at the table or 100 or so daffodil bulbs in the garden than with the knowledge that whenever they choose they can walk for free over a graceful historic suspension bridge in the Rondout neighborhood of Kingston?

Supporters cite the great success of the Walkway Over the Hudson State Historic Park. And indeed it has been an incredible tour de force, drawing an estimated 595,900 visitors in 2022. Its largest non-governmental supporter, the Dyson Foundation, put \$20 million into its initial purchase and rehabilitation, al-

and upcoming projects of the city's various cultural organizations -- a kind of "message from today to the future." On Father's Day weekend, June 17 and 18, an event is being organized at the Hudson River Maritime Museum which will feature displays by the museum, the Reher Center for Immigrant Culture and History, Rupco, My Kingston Kids, and possibly other groups, along with videos, photos and information about the bridge project.

Vandeweghe and Bean are applying for grants and planning to raise money in other ways for their full-length documentary film, which they hope to broadcast on regional and national PBS stations. They estimate the post-production process will take eight months to a year. They hope to have the film done late next year or soon after.

most as much as the state's \$22.5 million.

Over a decade in the planning, the Irish Cultural Center Hudson Valley site at nearby 32 Abeel Street has failed to raise the funds to trigger ex-assembly-member Kevin Cahill's longstanding promise of state funding. The project has fit the dismissive description of it by alder-at-large Andrea Shaut as "a fantasy project." Site plans, but no money behind them.

Cahill learned a lesson. By contrast, the Wurts Street Bridge years later was able to begin construction because it was financed primarily by Assembly money and placed entirely under DOT auspices in the state budget.

The bridge restoration is a capital project. What alternative investments of social capital suggest themselves?

There are about 700 stone houses in Ulster County. For \$5.2 million, the county government could grant each of them \$700 for site improvements. Imagine the visual impact of maybe 1000 daffodils outside every stone house in Ulster County every springtime for the foreseeable future!

If I had my druthers, though, my own favorite urgent use for that money right now would have involved finding housing and social services for the homeless of Ulster County and those evicted from their homes because they couldn't afford the rent.

If you had your druthers, what would you have used the \$5.2 million for?

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# A wild experience

*Reconnecting with the culture  
of the Hudson Valley's native inhabitants*



PHOTOS COURTESY OF WILD HUDSON VALLEY

The front entrance to Wild Hudson Valley's Eco Camp and Forest Farm in Cairo, NY.

by Violet Snow

**A**T THEIR 95-ACRE forest farm and camp near the Greene County town of Cairo, Justin Wexler and Anna Plattner are re-creating the landscape as it was known to the native inhabitants of the region. Each weekend throughout the summer, they invite visitors to the property, Wild Hudson Valley,

to learn about edible plants, medicine, folklore, history, and both ancient and modern forest farming practices.

Guided nature walks and workshops are geared toward all ages. Programs for families help kids and adults connect with nature. For an even more immersive experience, visitors can stay overnight at one of four eco-campsites.

Unlike most nature education programs, Anna and Justin emphasize the

role of native peoples in relating to the land. Justin's fascination with the natural world began when he was a child growing up in the Hudson Valley.

"I realized by time I was eight or nine that the people who would know the land best were the people who lived here for generations but were driven out of their homeland," he said. By his teens, he was trying to visualize the life of the Lenape, who inhabited the area before they were

displaced by European settlers.

As he researched the history of the Hudson Valley and its occupants, Justin made connections with descendants of the Lenape, now dispersed to communities in Ontario, Wisconsin and Oklahoma. After befriending residents of those communities, he hosted Lenape people who came to visit their homeland. He continues to make links with organizations that would help represent their culture and history.

Anna also grew up in the Hudson Valley. With a degree in natural resources from Cornell University, she went on to work in agroforestry and became the general manager of the largest wild-simulated ginseng farm in the world, American Ginseng Pharm.

“Ginseng is picky about where it will grow,” said Anna. “It has a history of being overharvested and exploited, but you can cultivate it by planting seeds in the wild.” Stewarding ginseng habitat, part of returning the land to its pre-colonial state, involves removing invasive species and planting other species that would have flourished before settlers brought

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Anna (and Corinna) with July's Wild Harvest Box.



Wild-simulated ginseng plants growing with ripe berries.



One of four eco-campsites.

European plants to this continent.

“Without a time machine, we won’t know exactly what it was like in those

times,” Anna said. “But going through historical records, plus the details of Justin’s research, we’ve been learning

which plants would have been here. We can’t do large prescribed burns the way native people would have done, but we do have a diversity of habitats,” including forest, meadows and wetlands. Burning sections of forest in a controlled way, native people used to create open spaces that were followed by growth of white oaks. The acorns nourished an abundance of deer, which the people hunted as a source of food, clothing and tools.

The goal of Wild Hudson Valley is to inspire learning and build connections through shared experiences in nature, history, and wild foods. “When we lead a walk through the woods,” said Anna, “we talk about the trees and plants, how they might have been used by native people, and what they mean in the landscape. Each one tells something different about ecology and the wildlife it supports. If a plant is edible or medicinal, we talk about

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how you might harvest and prepare it.” On Memorial Day weekend, Wild Hudson Valley will hold a mushroom walk and farm tour, including their mushroom cultivation area, along with a workshop in mushroom identification. From Memorial Day through October, the eco-campsites are available for weekend-long experiences, accessible even to people who are not experienced campers.

Each of four campsites is equipped with a four-person canvas tent and beds on platforms. At a covered dining area with picnic table, storage cabinet, grilling utensils and plates, visitors cook over a fire -- with firewood provided. There's also a communal area with nature-centered games, books, displays, historical artifacts, pictures. Weekend programming includes a bonfire with stargazing and storytelling, a guided nature walk

and farm tour, hiking on the trails, and leisure time to observe nature.

Wild Hudson Valley offers a bird-watching walk that not only teaches

**The only surviving native person who speaks Munsee is a woman living in Ontario.**

how to identify birds but also focuses on native folklore surrounding birds. Justin, who has studied several Algonquian

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languages, explained that the names for birds often describes their calls, such as for the song sparrow, with its lilting, articulate melodies. In each language, the word for “waterfowl” refers to the call of a common local species, showing where a particular tribe is from.

Justin was 15 when he began to study the languages of the region, unearthing vocabulary

that was lost in the tribes’ exodus west. The only surviving native person who speaks Munsee is a woman living in Ontario.

Through his research, Justin has found words that he shares with university language scholars, helping to revitalize and preserve language and culture.

As a college student, Anna learned to read the forested landscape by developing a deep understanding of trees. “They tell you so much about the ecosystem where they’re growing,” she explained. “A tree will grow in a spot because of the soil or the way the hillside is facing, how much sun it’s getting. Then the tree will alter that landscape by creating places

“Without a time machine, we won’t know exactly what it was like in those times.”



On the trail at Wild Hudson Valley



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for wildlife and other plants to grow. Learning trees helped me understand how everything is connected.”

One of her goals is to help people witness nature’s balance and see what a healthy landscape is. A disturbed landscape reduces biodiversity. “It starts with learning to identify and relate to plants and animals.”

Another way for adventurous cooks or people curious about foraging to learn about native wild edibles is through Wild Hudson Valley’s food box subscription, which costs \$15 to \$20 a month. Subscribers receive a monthly assortment of foods that are either wild-harvested or grown on the property where Justin and Anna cultivate traditional native crops of corn, beans and squash.

Changing with the seasons, varieties include ramps (wild leeks) and other greens, mushrooms, berries, nuts, and more. The box contains a description of each ingredient, recipes, identification tips, and information on their historic value for native people. Pickup locations are in Catskill, Cairo and Hudson.

As Anna explained, “We’re trying to cultivate a passion in people for learning what’s out there in their own back yard.”

For information on Wild Hudson Valley’s programs visit <https://www.wildhudsonvalley.com>.

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