

## Director's Report December, 2023

### *Ongoing and/or Completed Business:*

**Building Inspection:** As of December 14<sup>th</sup>, all the notes we received during our Building inspection in October have been responded to. We now have a fire extinguisher in the kitchen downstairs, a working emergency light in the storage room, and our sprinkler systems have been inspected and passed.

**Cleaner Contract:** I met with two area cleaning companies to get a better feel for how much it should cost to clean our library. One of them I contacted and the other just happened to walk through the door one day. Our current company, Shamrock Cleaners, is raising their prices on January 1<sup>st</sup> so I needed to know. It turns out that even with their hourly price increased to \$40 per, Shamrock is still the lowest bid. I have met with Terry to discuss this as well as to impress upon him that going forward standards cannot slip and corners can't be cut as has been happening in small, but noticeable ways lately. I have also updated the comprehensive list Terry must work from and Terry will be returning a signed contract before the end of the year.

**Electrician:** I await an invoice from J&J Sass Electricians, but a gentleman from that company was here on November 30<sup>th</sup> at which time he installed the emergency light in the storage room and repaired the faulty light switch in the upstairs public restroom. I am eager to learn if it is more reasonable than the bill we received from the last electrician we tried.

**Generator/Photovoltaics Grant:** This project/grant is turning out to be more complicated than I anticipated when I first learned that it existed and that I would be administering it. It is still well within my skillset, but it's going to take more work than I hoped. The fact that Prevailing Wage prices were not used to calculate the estimates we used to apply for this grant puts us behind the ball so to speak. I must get estimates for all phases of this project that include Prevailing Wage in their numbers before we can start the bidding process, let alone get to work. I haven't even begun to figure out how we deal with the work that has already been done (parking lot lighting). Don't be alarmed. I can handle it; it's just turning out to be bigger and harder than I thought it was going to be. Thanks for letting me vent.

**K/W Cross Connection:** Barry and his helper completed a needed repair to our Back Flow Valve on December 5<sup>th</sup>. He was also able to recommend a much more reasonably priced Sprinkler System Inspector out of Sullivan County instead of Westchester.

**Library Credit Card:** I have received a Library Credit Card in my name. However, in the process I was hasty and inadvertently removed Shannon from the bank account and invalidated the credit card we had in her name. As it is very useful for Shannon to be a

signer on the account and to have a card in her name, I would like to correct that oversight. In order to do that, I will need the Board to discuss and condone this action at an open meeting so that it gets into the official Minutes of the meeting.

**Otis Elevator Maintenance:** Our Otis Technician came for the “Preventative Maintenance Visit” that signing a new contract with Otis triggered. I expressed my fears about the clunks and jolts that I hear when riding it and he rode it down and up with me and reassured me that we just have an elevator that is noisy. Nothing to worry about in that department.

**Phone Lines:** Our third line, the fax line, has been problematic of late, again, giving a busy signal or no dial-tone at all.

1. **Verizon Technician:** A tech came on 12/14 and did something out there at the pole to make it work again. Quality remains poor, especially when it rains.
2. **Liberty Security:** I’m now waiting for four things from Liberty:
  - a. Pricing on Digital Phone Service.
  - b. Pricing on repositioning one of the security cameras. We need a camera pointing down the stairs, and we do not need one pointing at the circulation desk. I was taught in library school to avoid doing just that because it can possibly have a chilling effect on someone’s willingness to access books or other materials. Lucky for us, Liberty would only have to move the camera in question about ten feet to position it above the stairs.
  - c. An in depth tutorial about the key fob alarm system followed by the costs involved in adapting the system to allow key fobs to work on the front door instead of the door at the top of the stairs. That placement bewilders me by the way. We need front door key fob access to allow groups to use the community space before/after hours without a need for staff present.
  - d. Reconnecting the monitor near the circulation desk with the camera system. The system is still working, just not broadcasting on the monitor.

**Plumber:** After receiving prices from A-Team Comfort Systems for replacing the drinking-fountain and for repairing a pressure gage and valve by our water meter, we decided to try to get a comparison price from another area plumber. We are still working on that.

**Sullivan Fire Protection LLC:** As mentioned above, we were able to find a reasonably priced inspector thanks to K/W Cross Connect. Matt of Sullivan Fire came out from Fallsberg, NY on 12/14 and inspected out sprinkler systems. We have a wet one and a dry one and both passed inspection. We did manage to get the fire department called by accident, but were able to call off the alarm before trucks arrived.

**Ulster County Civil Service:** I hesitate to proclaim victory regarding this, but as of the afternoon of Friday, December 15<sup>th</sup>, significant progress had been made. Three of the employees who had not yet been processed by UCCS now appear on our List of Positions thanks to Annmarie Lubera (Shannon, Meaghan, and Laura). It seems that the gentleman responsible for not processing our Reports of Personnel Changes was on vacation when I started back in September and I was connected with Annmarie instead when I filed my own Civil Service paperwork. When he returned from vacation later that month, all of the problems that I had reported to Annmarie regarding our list of positions were passed back to him to resolve. The fact that he created the problems by not processing them in the first place was ignored. I tried everything I could think of to get him to at least have a conversation with me about this matter but he ignored emails and phone calls. I then went back to Annmarie in the hopes that she could point me toward a higher-up at Civil Service to complain to. Instead, she has just been doing the work. I do not know what will happen going forward, but I will milk this relationship I have formed with Annmarie for all that it is worth in the meantime.

**WiFi Printing:** On November 28<sup>th</sup>, Dexter from National Business Systems was here to turn on WiFi printing on the Kyocera Printer we lease from them. He did not succeed. We believe that it is a network issue and that someone from MHLS tech support can resolve this issue. We await a visit from Isaac.

### *Upcoming:*

**Employee Evaluations:** This has not begun yet as I believe it would be better to update the policy governing this process first. A resolution has been proposed to the G&P Committee and approved and will be presented to the Board at the upcoming meeting. So long as it passes, I will, with Shannon's help, conduct these evaluations in the two weeks following the meeting.

**Technology Funds On Their Way:** Rebekkah Smith Aldrich reached out to me on 12/11 to let me know that NY State Assembly Funds were coming our way soon in the amount of \$30,000. Assemblywoman Sarahana Shrestha promised us these funds for technology improvements and she came through. We should see a check sometime soon after 1/1/24. We already have some plans for these funds (improved WiFi, upgraded public PCs), but I intend to form an advisory group of key staff and a Board member or two to make sure we use these funds wisely.

### *Continuing Education/Community Outreach:*

**December 2<sup>nd</sup>** – Participated in the Port Ewen's *Winter Wonderland Parade*. The rain held off, the temperature was a bearable 45 degrees, and several staff members were glad to be a part of this community event. We will be certain to secure the use of a truck with a trailer for next year as a single pick-up truck proved to be an insufficient canvas for satisfactory decorating.

**December 5<sup>th</sup>** – Zoom meeting w/ERVK Regarding *Eleanor Roosevelt Book Club* Earlier this year I began working with staff at the Eleanor Roosevelt Center at ValKill on their idea of starting a Banned Books Club there. Their quest to highlight the need to defend books has now blossomed into an event on Saturday, February 17<sup>th</sup> at the Bard Fisher Center that will be (tentatively) called The Eleanor Roosevelt Bravery in Literature Awards. This will be a ticketed event but something tells me it will be well worth the price of admission.

Confirmed recipients at this point are:

- Judy Blume (Lifetime Achievement) (Live stream)
- Laurie Halse Anderson (*Shout*) (in-person)
- George Johnson (*All Boys Aren't Blue*) (in-person)
- Mike Curato (*Flamer*) (in-person)
- Alex Gino (*Melissa*) (in-person)
- Maia Kobabe (*Gender Queer*) (pre-recorded acceptance speech)

As more information becomes available I will pass it along.

**December 6<sup>th</sup>** – NY State Library Webinar *FAQ RE: Public Librarian Certification*. As boring as it is, I must keep abreast of requirements to continue to be a Certified Public Librarian. I'm sure no one will be surprised to learn that all of the info I gleaned turned out to be available in the drop-down instructions of the webpage they sent us to at the end of the webinar.



**Town of Esopus Library  
Finance Committee Minutes  
December 14, 2023**

**Attendance:** Reggie Heffernan, Nancy Beranek, Elaine Jaffe, Susan Barbarisi

**Absent:** Jesse Chance

The payment of claims for \$25,861.70 was reviewed by the Finance committee and a resolution for approval by the Board of Trustees will be presented to the Board at the December meeting.

Jesse made the following recommendations which we would like to present as resolutions:

- Marilyn Genter should be given retroactive payment for the difference between her actual pay and the normal payment to a clerk for this year.
- Shannon Powell's salary should be changed for 2024 to the equivalent of \$55,000/year to reflect her change in title of Circulation and Programming Manager.

We reviewed the Investment Policy Guidelines put out by NYS Office of the State Comptroller to get guidance on what are allowable investments for a municipal entity.

Next month we will review the 2023 Profit and Loss Statement and our 2024 Budget to begin developing the 2025 budget.

Respectfully submitted,  
Reggie Heffernan, Treasurer

**Next Meeting  
Thursday, January 11  
4 pm at Town of Esopus Library**

The Town of Esopus Library  
Governance and Personnel Committee Minutes  
December 12, 2023

Present: Nancy Beranek, Susan Barbarisi, Martha Farrell, Stephen Lewis, Don Carragher, Jesse Chance

The committee finished working on the Photography and Videography Policy. The policy will be presented at the next Board meeting for approval.

Minor revisions were made to policies on sick leave, staff evaluation, vulnerable adults, and programming. These will also be presented at the next Board meeting for approval.

We began a review of the Meeting Room Policy and expect to complete that next month.

The committee also proposes that a resolution be brought before the Board creating a new position, Circulation and Programming Manager.

Finally, we will present a resolution to replace the Public Exhibit and Display Request Form with a revised version.

Respectfully submitted,  
Nancy Beranek

## SUSTAINABILITY/ RESEARCH & DEVELOPMENT

December 13, 2023

Present: Elaine Rylance, Chair; Don Carragher, Larry Decker and Jesse Chance, Martha Farrell.

The Committee is looking at the MHL program Turning Outward which starts in March and continues through November. Hopefully then we will have information needed for future planning.

Below are the questions we will be asking people in our community:

1. What kind of community do you want to live in?
2. Why is that important to you?
3. How is that different from how you see things now?
4. What are some of the things that need to happen to create that kind of change?

I ask that you please give these some thought and we will be speaking to them at the Board meeting.

Respectfully submitted,

Elaine Rylance

Next meeting is January 10, 2024, at 4 p.m.

## December Adult & Teen Programmer's Report

### Adult Programs

From November 28 through December 13, the Esopus Artists Group and Mah Jongg continued to meet weekly with a total of 13 attendees for art and 21 for Mah Jongg. The artists did not meet on December 5. On November 30, John Bousquet from Medicare Resource Group led an Introduction to Medicare workshop. The December Duck Pond Gallery show opened on December 1 exhibiting the watercolors of Michael Davidoff. Readers' Choice Book Group met on December 7 with 11 attendees discussing *Magpie Murders* by Anthony Horowitz. Jessica Williams led a Decorative Twig Star Workshop on December 9 for 11 participants. One couple in attendance saw the digital sign advertising the program and came to make a natural tree topper rather than purchasing one. Daniel Kerry led the monthly Writer's Group session on Zoom on December 12 with 8 attendees. The Ulster County Photo Club met and held their holiday party on December 13 with 11 members present. Poughkeepsie author Jode Millman joined us for her rescheduled author visit and presentation on December 14 with 11 attendees. I led an Adult Workshop: Hot Chocolate Bombs on December 15 with 6 attendees. Also on December 15, the Mid-Hudson Astronomical Association (MHAA) came for a presentation and stargazing session. Each of the three MHAA members brought a telescope so our 11 attendees could wander around looking at different areas of the sky.

### Teen Programs

On November 27, I held a session of Bad Art Night for participants in Kindergarten-Adult. Bad Art Night is designed to be a fun, no pressure art program where the wackier the art is, the better! Ten participants created snowy scenes by collaging books and magazines with paint. Everyone's art came out so well that it just proves that there is no such thing as bad art!

A Tween & Teen Workshop to make hot chocolate balls will be held on December 18 and another session of Bad Art Night will be December 26.

Respectfully submitted,

 12/18/23

Town of Esopus Library  
December Board of Trustees Meeting  
Wednesday, December 27, 2023

**Agenda**

Call to order	Don Carragher
Approval of September Board Meeting Minutes	
President's Word	Don Carragher
Public Comment (2 minutes each)	Public
Treasurer's Report/Finance Committee/Foundation	Reggie Heffernan
Director's Report	Jesse Chance
Friends	Elaine Rylance
Committees	
1. Buildings and Grounds – Larry Decker	
2. Governance and Personnel / Trustee Training – Nancy Beranek	
3. Sustainability, Research and Development – Elaine Rylance	
Adjournment	

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Resolutions:

- 2023-66 – Payment of November Claims
- 2023-67 – Addition of Photography and Videography Policy
- 2023-68 – Vulnerable Policy Update
- 2023-69 – Update to Section 3 of the Personnel Policy Manual
- 2023-70 – Programming Policy Update
- 2023-71 – Update to Section 14 of the Personnel Policy Manual
- 2023-72 – Personnel Actions – M.Genter-S.Powell
- 2023-73 – Public Exhibit and Display Request Form Update

# **TOWN OF ESOPUS LIBRARY**

## **BOARD OF TRUSTEES MEETING MINUTES**

### **November 29, 2023**

**Board Members Present:** Susan Barbarisi, Larry Decker, Elaine Rylance, Reggie Heffernan, Nancy Beranek, Elaine Jaffe, Martha Farrell, Don Carragher and Stephen Lewis

**Board Members Excused:**

**Board Members Absent:**

**Staff Present:** Mary Garraty, Jesse Chance

**Public:**

The meeting of the Town of Esopus Library Board of Trustees was called to order by President Don Carragher at 6:02 p.m.

#### **II. APPROVAL OF MEETING MINUTES**

Written minutes for October monthly Board meeting held on October 25, 2023 was submitted and open for review. A motion to accept the updated minutes of the October monthly Board meeting held on October 25, 2023 was made by Reggie Heffernan and seconded by Nancy Beranek.

AYE: 9; NO: 0; ABSTAIN: 0

Board Members Excused:

Board Members Absent:

#### **III. Presidents Word – Don Carragher**

Don requested that each of the committee chairs do a short end of year synopsis at the December meeting. Don commented about the new deck furniture as well as recent donation of a garden shed. Thanks go to Barbara Taylor for the garden shed.

#### **IV. Public Comment - None**

#### **V. TREASURER'S REPORT/FINANCE – Reggie Heffernan**

Written report was submitted. Reggie reviewed the Finance Committee meeting minutes. Reggie presented a memo from the Foundation listing the slate of officers for 2024. Reggie discussed with the Board that the Director, Jesse Chance, needs to be on the Library credit card. The Board of Trustees all agree to have the Director, Jesse Chance, be added to the Library credit card.

- Resolution #62 of 2023 (Payment of October Claims):** The Board of Trustees of the Town of Esopus Library accepts and approves the payment of claims from October 1, 2023 to October 31, 2023 for items in the amount of \$14,428.81. A motion to accept the resolution was made by Elaine Jaffe and seconded by Elaine Rylance.  
 AYES: 9; NAYS: 0; ABSTENTIONS: 0  
 Board Members Excused:  
 Board Members Absent:
- Resolution #63 of 2023 (Gifts for Library and Staff Members Policy Update):** The Board of Trustees of the Town of Esopus Library accepts the changes to the Gifts for Library and Staff Members Policy. A motion to accept the resolution was made by Nancy Beranek and seconded by Susan Barbarisi.  
 AYES: 9; NAYS: 0; ABSTENTIONS: 0  
 Board Members Excused:  
 Board Members Absent:

**VI. DIRECTOR’S REPORT – Jesse Chance**

Written report was submitted. Tekcon completed the hanging heater work. Jesse presented three quotes for the Board to review. These quotes were for work or replacement of the drinking fountain. Jesse informed the Board that a sprinkler inspection needs to be done. Otis will be doing the elevator inspection.

**VII. FRIENDS – Elaine Rylance**

Elaine said that Friends is setting up two holiday sales tables which will have all Christmas related books.

**VIII. COMMITTEE REPORTS**

- Buildings and Grounds – Larry Decker**  
 Written report was submitted. Larry reviewed the meeting minutes. Larry and the Board acknowledged Elaine Jaffe on all her work that she has been doing on the grounds. The building inspections went well except for two items. J & J Sass Electric will be here tomorrow morning to correct the emergency light in the storage room. The fire extinguisher is now available in the kitchen.
- Governance and Personnel – Nancy Beranek**  
 Written report submitted. Nancy Beranek reviewed the meeting minutes. They are working on a photography and filming policy. Nancy presented the following resolutions:

- **Resolution #64 of 2023 (Personnel Actions: M.Genter-J.LaPolt-J.Wiggin-D.McMenemy):** The Board of Trustees of the Town of Esopus Library agrees to the personnel actions resolution. A motion to accept the resolution was made by Larry Decker and seconded by Martha Farrell.  
 AYES: 9; NAYS: 0; ABSTENTIONS: 0  
 Board Members Excused:  
 Board Members Absent:
  
- **Resolution #65 of 2023 (Addition of Tuition Reimbursement Policy):** The Board of Trustees of the Town of Esopus Library accepts the addition of the updated Tuition Reimbursement Policy to the Personnel Policy Manual. A motion to accept the resolution was made by Elaine Rylance and seconded by Elaine Jaffe.  
 AYES: 9; NAYS: 0; ABSTENTIONS: 0  
 Board Members Excused:  
 Board Members Absent:
  
- **Sustainability, Research and Development** - Elaine Rylance  
 Written report was submitted. Elaine reviewed the meeting minutes. She mentioned that there will be an exercise for the Board from the Committee in the future.

**IX. Trustee Training** – Nancy Beranek

**X. ADJOURNMENT**

There being no further business or discussion, Stephen Lewis made a motion to adjourn and it was seconded by Nancy Beranek. The meeting was adjourned at 6:47 p.m.

AYES: 9; NAYS: 0; ABSTENTIONS: 0

Board Members Excused:

Board Members Absent:

Prepared by M. Garraty, Secretary to the Town of Esopus Library Board of Trustees



Town of Esopus Library

Buildings and Grounds Committee

December 11, 2023

4:00 pm

Attending: Larry Decker, Don Carragher, Jesse Chance and Elaine Jaffe

Absent: Steve Lewis

Excused: 0

Went over old business to check off and finalize various projects:

1. Done with Tekon? **Completed**
2. Made decision with Tree Pro to wait until Spring and possible grants for plants? **Completed**
3. Emergency light in storage room fixed? **Completed**
4. Public Bathroom Lights? **Completed** Waiting for invoice.
5. Fire Extinguisher in kitchen? **Completed** All extinguishers will be inspected annually by Gorden Fire
6. Pressure valve leak fixed by KW Cross Connect? **Completed** Just need to inform the Town of Esopus.
7. Water Pump (Schmidt Wholesalers)? **Completed**
8. Gardens cleared? Shed set? Hoses secured? **Completed** Shed will be dismantled and stored until spring.

New Business and continued discussions:

**Elaine J. and Jesse** will continue to investigate grant possibilities for various landscaping projects.

Cleaning contract is set with **Shamrock Cleaners** for \$320 wk.

**Don** will supply locks and keys to be used for garden area.

**Don** has pallets of soil (with reimbursement) to be used in garden next Spring.

**Don** will provide wooden markers for garden.

**Jesse** is working on getting a new provider (possibly Liberty) to replace Verizon. Having trouble with line 3. Also want a moving security camera.

Signed preliminary contract with **Otis** for the elevator. Waiting for completed contract.

Have estimate for water fountain installation from **A-Team**. Want to get another estimate to compare.

The next Building and Grounds meeting is scheduled for Monday, **Jan. 8, 2024** at 4:00 pm

Submitted, Larry Decker



## Children's Program Coordinator Report - December

### ★ November Wrap Up:

- Overall attendance for November children's programming was 266 participants.

### ★ December:

- It's been another calendar chock full of programming for all ages groups. I wrapped up a whole year of story time sessions, seeing exponential growth in attendance for both my regular Tuesday and Wednesday sessions, as well as my monthly Monday "trial" sessions. Our monthly movie afternoon has seen wonderful family attendance as well: this month's showing of the original Grinch film coupled with a no-bake diy treat was so popular we had to repeat it with a second showing. The "Art You Can Eat" Ninjabread program had a large group of youth transforming their homemade gingerbread cookies into ninjas. We also welcomed back the talented folk musician/story teller, Jason Vance, who is amazingly engaging for any age range. We also will be holding a stuffed animal sleepover during winter break, as well as a Noon Years Eve Celebration, for families to celebrate the new year in the afternoon. At the time of this report (halfway through the month), attendance for **December 2023 is 188 participants** vs attendance for **December 2022 was 197** participants for the entire month.

### ★ Extra, Extra read All About it (see attached!):

- The DIY Gourd-geous birdhouse program held on 11/17/2023 was featured in the Daily Freeman newspaper.
- The upcoming Winter Solstice Program was featured in Hudson Valley One's Holiday guide.

### ★ In Your Neighborhood

- We joined in the town's holiday parade on December 2<sup>nd</sup>! Marilyn's husband, Keith drove his truck, with mascot, Charlie. Thanks to the donations of Don's solar generators, we were able to deck the truck out with lights, an inflatable "Ralphie" from a Christmas Story, a Christmas tree, music, and 8 costumed staff members. We handed out candy canes to the attendants along the street as we sailed down 9W.

★ **Looking Ahead:**

- Meaghan and I have been busy brainstorming programming for the New Year. Specifically, we would like to continue working on our goal of combining age groups for enriching and encompassing programs. This has been very successful in the last few months. While we take a brief winter pause in programming after the holidays, we will be working on weeding in the children and teen's rooms, and making lists to refresh the materials, which is greatly overdue, and will hopefully also add to the enjoyment of our patrons.

Respectfully Submitted,

*Am Powell* 12/14/23





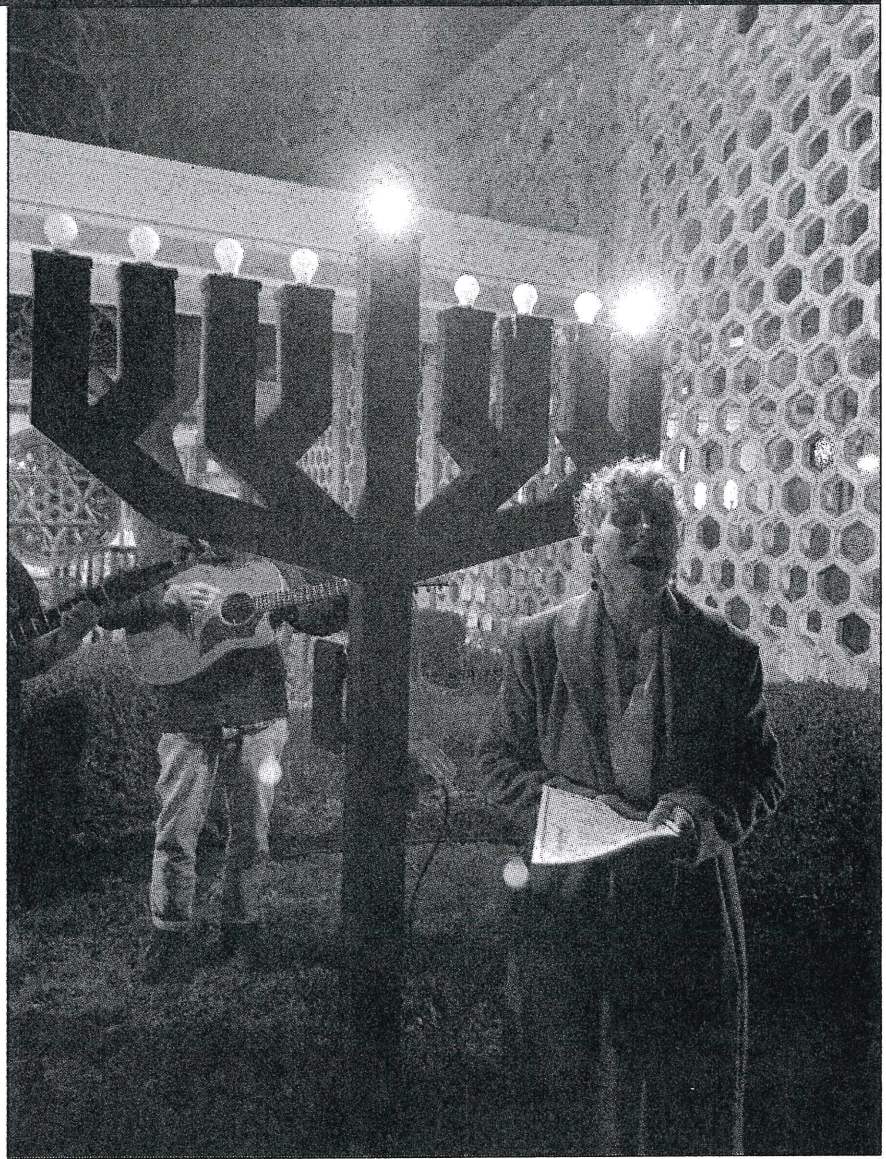
# The winter solstice

*December holidays  
invite the light*

by Susan DeMark

“**A**ND YOU, MY father, there on the sad height,  
Curse, bless, me now with your fierce tears, I pray.  
Do not go gentle into that good night.  
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.”  
— Dylan Thomas

A library will host a winter's evening of activities like storytelling and crafting paper lanterns. Local Native tribes and a community farm will host a gathering to give thanks and honor winter's slower rhythms that foster renewal for the coming seasons. A temple will hold its annual community lighting of the Hanukkah menorah. A Kwanzaa festival will feature the lighting of the kinara symbolizing the seven principles. A parishioner at a church will light an Advent candle for the new week as Christmas draws near.



PROVIDED

Rabbi Yael Romer leads a prior Community Candle Lighting of the hanukkiyah (the Hanukkah menorah) outside of the Congregation Emanuel of the Hudson Valley. On Dec. 10, the congregation's annual event will conclude with the lighting of the outdoor hanukkiyah.



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These celebrations will all take place in Ulster County about a month from now. Right here we'll tell you when and where.

Make no mistake. It's the time of winter solstice and the December holy days and festivals. While each celebration is different, all highlight what is so precious, powerful and sustaining at this time of year. During mankind's dark, challenging times, people in the Hudson Valley are going to gather at solstice ceremonies and events.

December's holy days and festivals of varied spiritual and cultural traditions will incorporate lighting rituals for healing, rebirth, resilience, and community.

The essence of taking notice, calling upon, honoring, and celebrating light, is embedded in the winter solstice, the day



of shortest daylight that humans have observed since ancient times. Daylight in mid- to late December lasts just over nine hours daily, while June days give those of us in the northeastern United States some 15 hours of daylight.

Amid December's days of tingling cold, snowflakes that promise more to come, and long nights with stunning moon shadows shaped by tree silhouettes, a day arrives when darkness reaches its pinnacle, after which the planetary cycle for the northern hemisphere will head toward gaining daylight. After the winter solstice, the hours of daylight begin to lengthen, by minutes per day.

The winter solstice, like the summer solstice and the fall and spring equinoxes, connects us to the natural world and its rhythms. The Earth is alive. In times of mankind's strife, turbulence, wars, and a sense among many that we are living in



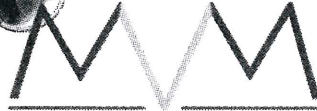
SUSAN DEMARK

The winter sunlight casts long shadows on a marsh in New Paltz. In winter, the North Pole is tilted away from the sun. In the Northern Hemisphere, the sun traces a lower arc across the sky, hence longer shadows.

dark days, the winter solstice represents a simple, profound comfort, peace and solidity. We take note of cycles that are around us in the natural world.

Our ancestors in ancient times were acutely aware of the days of shortest daylight. People may have observed the winter solstice as early as the last part of the Stone Age, about 10,200 B.C. Indigenous peoples held ceremonies that lasted for weeks and honored deities of death and rebirth. Various societies had

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and Happy New Year from  
our families to yours!**



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PHYLLIS McCABE

The tribal Winter Solstice ceremony in Kingston last year closed with an offering of tobacco for the release of what people do not want to take into the long night and winter. This year, the Native tribes' Winter Solstice ceremony, to be held at Seed Song Farm and Center on Dec. 21, will again have a tobacco offering.

their own ways of paying homage to it. In Scandinavia, the Norse had a pagan festival for weeks to months. They brought home long oak logs, which they set afire on one end, the Yule log, at times feasting until it burned to the other end.

This year, the winter solstice occurs on Thursday, December 21, at 10:27 p.m. EST. Pagan festivals and indigenous ceremonies in the northern hemisphere will mark the event. In Ulster County, a Native American ceremony will take place at Seed Song Farm in Kingston on December 21 at 4:30 p.m.

"We celebrate the solstice and the equinox. It's important to connect with the changing of the seasons and what those seasons mean," said the Rev. Nick

*Happy Holidays to You and Your Family!*

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Miles, Tecumseh Red Cloud, Pamunkey Tribe. "While it is still being finalized, the winter-solstice ceremony will begin with the Haudenosaunee nations' Thanksgiving prayer, referred to as words spoken before all others. In a tobacco offering, those participating will be invited to think about what they want to discard from their lives, and as the tobacco is set afire, the smoke conveys this to the Creator."

Coming after the autumn harvest, the beginning of the winter season represents a quieter time – one to go inside oneself, to reflect, listen, watch, and think about planting the seeds not just in the Earth but in one's being, according to Miles. If we liken this to the progression of the seasons and how the ground rests during the winter, the slower rhythms offer a time of feeding the spirit and renewing the soul.

The longest night of the year surely beckons many of us – as do many December days when the sun sets so early – to want to stay indoors and not head out into a dark night. Esopus Library is holding an event

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for people to do just that: The longest night of the year will be celebrated there on December 21 from 6 to 8 p.m. The library is inviting people to join in a program of reading stories, making an "enlightening" craft – paper lanterns – and closing out the evening "by creating our own perfect hot cocoas." (Talk about a delicious reward for braving the longest night.)

Shannon Powell, the children's program coordinator, explained that the winter solstice is something that everyone could enjoy together. She is fascinated by how people feel the effects of the change from Daylight Savings Time. By gathering on the date of shortest daylight, she said, "You're creating your own light and coming together as a community."

December's spiritual services and cultural festivities in Ulster County vary, but have in common the expression of values and community through candle-lighting ceremonies. On December 30 from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m., the Dr. Margaret Wade-Lewis Center will hold the its third annual Kwanzaa celebration at Redeemer Lutheran Church in New Paltz.

The lighting of the candles on the kinara, the candleholder, is an important component of this secular holiday. The seven candles, one of black and three each of red and green, represent Kwanzaa's seven foundational principles of Umoja (unity), Kujichagulia (self-determination), Ujima (collective work and responsibility), Ujamaa (cooperative economics), Nia (purpose and resolve), Kuumba (creativity), and Imani (faith). The candle-lighting provides an opportunity to share lessons and inspirations about the principles. There will also be drumming, dance, and refreshments.

This year, Hanukkah, the Jewish Festival of Lights, occurs from sundown on December 7 until sundown on December 15. Those observing this holiday place and light another candle on the hanukkiyah (the Hanukkah menorah) each evening. Congregation Emanuel of the Hudson Valley in Kingston is holding two candle-lighting events.

On December 8, the lighting of the hanukkiyah occurs before the Shabbat candles. The teaching that evening will incorporate the theme of bringing light to the Ugandan Jewish community, specifically the LGBTQ individuals who are enduring the targeting of that country's harsh anti-gay legislation.

On December 10 from 4 to 5 p.m., Congregation Emanuel will hold its annual community candle-lighting. The program will include a short play, storytelling with rabbi Yael Romer, congregational lighting for those who bring their hanukkiyahs, and

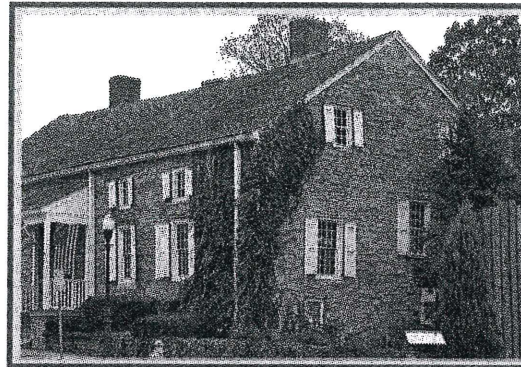


gathering in the social hall for donuts. It will conclude at 5 p.m. with the lighting of the outdoor hanukiah.

Said rabbi Romer said, "We all need light, especially when the daylight is shorter. In the world today, there is so much pain and darkness, to increase the light - bringing light, awareness, and healing - is so important.... In light we see, in light we are seen."

Throughout my life, I have held a special place for the winter solstice. I have honored it by sharing a meal with my dearest ones before a fireplace, reading stories and essays, saying prayers of gratitude, and taking long walks to watch the sunset that day. (I am an avid reader of sunrise and sunset charts.) The sun's arc, at its lowest of the year around the days of this solstice, causes incredibly long, beautiful shadows in the landscape. This year, I plan to make a wreath of evergreen boughs, twigs, pine cones, dried grasses, berries, and other natural elements, inspired in part by Mari Silva's book *Yule*.

Here's to the winter solstice! The December holidays feature the precious hours of sunlight that the heavens provide and that we fashion in our lives and communities. Just as the day of longest night comes, there is the sureness of daylight's return in coming days.



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# GOURD-GEOUS BIRDHOUSES



TANIA BARRICKLO — DAILY FREEMAN

Participants built DIY gourd birdhouses which they painted and decorated Friday afternoon, Nov. 17, 2023, at the Esopus Library.