

School Children Connect Their Community to Local Trails

Guilford Central School – Interpretive Trail Guide, Guilford

Any adult who has spent time in an elementary school knows that there’s an energy, idealism and enthusiasm there that can be felt in few other places. The townspeople of Guilford frequently benefit when that energy generated by local school children extends beyond the school walls right into the community. Guilford Central School’s commitment to service learning as an approach to education is responsible for numerous community-focused projects. The eighth grade students produce the *Guilford Gazette*, the town’s newsletter that goes out to every resident. Students also work closely with the local historical society to catalog old photographs, and they produced a video to help raise funds to restore the country store in the center of town.

Another project that got the Guilford students outside, literally, in the community was the creation of a high quality interpretive guide to a local trail. Students researched the plants, animals and habitats found on the trail, and they produced drawings and took photographs to go along with the information. Stuart Strothman, a middle school English teacher in Guilford, says that the drawings were an especially exciting part of the project because so many students didn’t see themselves as artists. And yet the artwork they created illustrates the guide beautifully. The student-produced trail guides sold like hot cakes, and the school actually made a small profit from the sales. In the process, these youngsters became the experts on trail flora and fauna, growing from the role of student into the role of teacher and community member.



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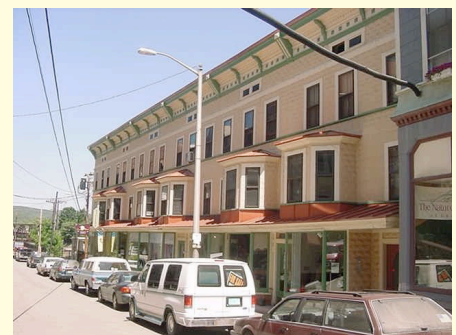


Bellows Falls – Where Arts and the Environment Meet

Rockingham Arts and Museum Project – Project Space #9, Bellows Falls

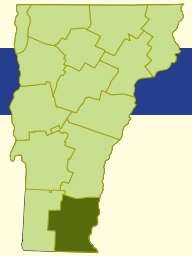
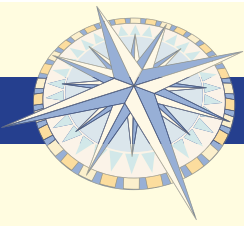
Bellows Falls has undergone some major changes over the years, and the story of its transformation is an inspiring one full of interesting characters deeply connected through work and community. This story has found its storyteller in Robert McBride and a home in Project Space #9.

The Rockingham Arts and Museum Project (RAMP) has been instrumental in helping to revitalize the downtown community of Bellows Falls. Robert McBride, the founding Director of RAMP, moved to Bellows Falls in 1995, and, he says, “so began the story of a person being passionate about a community.” Not only does McBride care deeply for the place he lives, he also firmly believes that art can make a difference. With that idea in mind, RAMP worked with Housing Vermont and the Rockingham Area Land Trust to restore the historic Exner Block in Bellows Falls. The building now includes affordable housing and studio space for artists, retail storefronts and a non-profit gallery space – Project Space #9.



Robert McBride

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The word gallery evokes images of paintings and photographs hung carefully on the wall or sculptures placed strategically on pedestals. One certainly can find such things within Project Space #9 from time to time, but often this space showcases the work of organizations in the local community. Past exhibitions have included the work of Connecticut River Transit, a local transportation program; the Rockingham Area Community Land Trust, which supports quality affordable housing; and Southeastern Vermont Community Action, an organization that helps people to create sustainable self-sufficiency. With the help of RAMP, these organizations and numerous others have had the opportunity to organize their messages and share them with their community. In this way, RAMP uses art as the medium through which it integrates local non-profit organizations into the everyday life of the Bellows Falls community.

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Farming Present Not All That Different From Farming Past

Taylor Farm and Hildene – Summer Camp Collaboration, Londonderry and Manchester

Vermont is a state rich with history, and Taylor Farm in Londonderry has been contributing to that history for some time. Taylor Farm has been a working dairy farm for the last 180 years. Today the Wright family runs the farm, where they care for 50 Holstein and Jersey cows, make delicious cheeses and offer sleigh rides through the beautiful winter landscape.

Fifteen miles away, Hildene was built in 1905 as a summer home by Robert Todd Lincoln, the only child of Abraham and Mary Todd Lincoln to survive to adulthood. Located in a quiet section of Manchester, the estate now houses a non-profit museum and education organization. Diane Newton, the Education Director at Hildene, says that the historical site offers summer camps that aim to, “connect campers with where they are.” To this end, the staff at Hildene smartly teams up with people who know the local area intimately. That’s why each year Newton turns to Mimi Wright of Taylor Farm to run a Farm Camp “to show children that despite all of the changes that have occurred over the past 100 years, many things have stayed the same.”

Wright says about Farm Camp, “My hope is that the children learn something about the lives of farmers and farm animals. I suppose the word I most want them to come away with is respect – respect for farmers, the land, animals and each other.” Due to the Lincoln family connection and the farm connection, it seems inevitable that campers also come away with a respect for history. To foster that respect, the campers visit other nearby sites including Taylor Farm, Wildwood Farm for berry picking, Anjali Farms to learn about vegetable farming and a local antique tractor collection. Food production also is a big part of camp. It’s not unusual to find the campers making breads, pies, jam, butter, simple cheese and yogurt just as the folks living at Hildene did at the turn of the 20th century. Not surprisingly, many of the activities in which children at Farm Camp engage foster a respect for the past and the hard work of being a farmer and making a living off the land, which is just fine by Mimi Wright.



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