

SHOP LOCAL

this holiday season

NEW HAMPSHIRE UNION LEADER
WEDNESDAY, DEC. 3, 2025 • PAGE B1



SMALL SHOPS, BIG HOLIDAY SPIRIT

Inside The Christmas Dove: A season of story and art

By Kathleen D. Bailey
Special the Union Leader

Artist Karen Busch Holman cocked her head to listen to the velvety tones of Dean Martin and “Baby, It’s Cold Outside.” Though the performer achieved his greatest popularity before she was born, Busch Holman likes to listen to him — and to Crosby, Como and Andy Williams as they warble the sounds of the season from the speakers at The Christmas Dove. “I love it — I’m a Christmas person,” Busch Holman said.

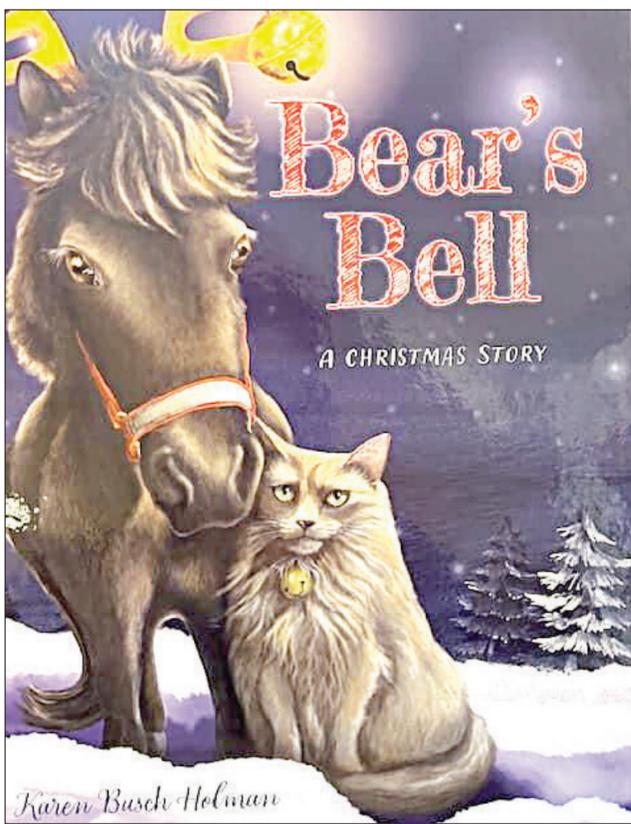
Busch Holman is one of four artists-in-residence at the classic Christmas shop in Barrington. Over the holiday season, she works from a compact studio in the Victorian farmhouse’s maze of rooms. She’s done her own projects from the shop and also illustrated children’s books.

This holiday season she’s debuting her own book, “Bear’s Bell, A Christmas Story.” It takes place in Barrington — and around the globe.

Busch Holman grew up in New Jersey and received a bachelor of fine arts degree from the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, which cemented her love for New England. She moved to New Hampshire in 1994, living first in Concord, then in Salisbury and finally in Barrington.

She’s always painted and drawn, but another passion led her into illustrating. In 1997, she became a Master Gardener with UNH Cooperative Extension. The service needed an illustrator for some publications, and Busch Holman wanted to give back.

At that time, Poet Laureate Marie Harris was interviewing artists for her first children’s book, “G Is for Granite,” and she couldn’t find the right fit. At lunch with a friend, the friend pulled out a publication illustrat-



The cover of the book, “Bear’s Bell” by Karen Busch Holman.

ed by Busch Holman, and Harris called for an audition, eventually hiring Busch Holman.

She discovered Barrington while at a 2001 book signing with Harris at Calef’s Country Store. “I love this town, it’s amazing,” she said. “It’s like life was 100 years ago. I wanted to live in Barrington.” But she was to live in Ohio from 2011 to 2014, when she moved back East for good.

Her first experience with The Christmas Dove was a collaboration with owner Garth Svensen, in which she gave painting

classes in his back barn. COVID brought those to a halt, but the relationship was established. She continued with her own fine art, focused on equestrian and nautical themes, and she fielded many requests to illustrate children’s books. She illustrated the “Mouse” series for Mitten Press and several titles for first-time authors.

The Christmas Dove has a “store cat” named Portland, and Busch Holman knew she wanted to put Portland in a book. So she asked one of the authors she



Karen Busch Holman takes a break in her studio at The Christmas Dove in Barrington, where she is an Artist In Residence.

worked with to write “A Cat’s Christmas Tale,” and Busch Holman illustrated it. “It did really well,” she said.

But the book made her nostalgic for her days at the store. “I told Garth, ‘I miss being here,’ and he said, ‘This is your place,’” she recalled.

Svensen carved out a spot in the back and Busch Holman moved in. Her husband built shelving, a wall and a door designed to look like a stable door, to complement her horse paintings. The room features two rocking chairs and stacks of her books.

Busch Holman kept busy with her full-scale paintings, affordable prints, Christmas cards and

other projects. But she couldn’t shake the idea of another children’s book.

This time she wanted to write it herself, and she wanted to feature her miniature horse, Little Bear. The impetus, when it came, was a sad one.

“We had to put down our mare, Hwin, last year,” she said. Little Bear missed his companion. She conceived a tale where Little Bear meets Santa, where Rudolph ate too many cookies, and where Santa had to call on Little Bear to lead the

reindeer. “I wanted to help kids realize that when you lose a pet, you can

“I love Barrington. It’s a real Christmas town.”

KAREN BUSCH HOLMAN
Artist

► See **Christmas Dove**, Page B2



Maryrae Preston’s shop, Sand and Santa in Hampton Beach, combines her love of the beach and Christmas.

Hampton Beach celebrates a decade of Christmas cheer at Sand and Santa

By Rob Levey
Special to the Union Leader

When Maryrae Preston decided to combine her love of the beach and Christmas into a single business concept, Sand and Santa was born. Celebrating its 10th season now, the Hampton Beach shop has become a destination for visitors seeking unique nautical-themed Christmas items.

“I have always loved the beach and Christmas — it’s such a perfect combination for a seaside community gift shop,” said Preston, who serves as the store’s self-proclaimed head elf, owner, buyer, and one-woman show.

Open weekends from May through mid-June, every day from mid-June through mid-September, and then weekends until closing on Dec. 21,

the store features a carefully curated inventory.

“We have thousands of Christmas ornaments with the nautical theme, and many are custom-done for Hampton Beach and Seabrook Beach,” Preston said. “I try to have items in my store that are not in every other store on the boulevard at Hampton Beach ... Over 200 companies are represented.”

The store’s pricing strategy follows advice she received from her father when she first opened, which was to buy for the masses.

Items range from 50 cents to over \$100, with Christmas ornaments priced from \$1 to \$40.

Preston adds up to 20 new companies annually as trends evolve, including the recent addition of “December Diamonds,” featuring

merman and mermaid ornaments. The shop caters to theme shoppers.

“We have theme shoppers who come back every year on vacation looking for flamingo, sea turtle, shark, mermaid-themed items, and if they are Christmas themed, even better,” she noted. “Who doesn’t like a sandy snowman?”

Among the shop’s unique offerings are Preston’s hand-painted “Merry Mermaid” line, featuring Grinch and Santa designs on oyster shells and starfish priced between \$8 and \$15.

Her “Sea Dreams by Maryrae” card line showcases photographs taken by family members, selling for \$3 each.

The store’s most distinctive feature may be its 16-foot fiberglass beach Santa, one of only six such figures

► See **Sand and Santa**, Page B2

Christmas Dove

From Page B1

get over it," she said.

The book features intricate acrylic images and little touches such as a cookie hidden in each illustration. Its Barrington references include Svensen hopping into a little red truck to deliver condolence flowers to Busch Holman and her family. (Chewy.com sends flowers to customers whose animals cross the Rainbow Bridge, and a floral service is part of The Christmas Dove family.)

The "little red truck" is modeled after one on the show floor in the shop. Santa, his reindeer and his substitute driver fly over The Christmas Dove shop on their way around the world. And the colorful primitive painting of Barrington in the frontispiece has been reproduced as the "Welcome to Barrington" billboard.

"I love Barrington," Busch Holman said, adding, "It's a real Christmas town."

She has illustrated two dozen children's books including "P is for Passport" (the letter "E"), "Primary Numbers" and the "Mouse" series. Large-scale projects include the Primary Place and Little Farmer exhibits for the Children's Museum of New Hampshire.

She also illustrated the New Hampshire Folk Art website and designed a silver coin for the city of Concord. She has spoken to more than 15,000 school children over the past 22 years as a guest artist teaching illustration.

In addition, Busch Holman was the designer and artist for the New Hampshire Heirloom Birth Certificate. She had two small children at the time, but couldn't resist the challenge.

"I stayed up late at night to work on it," she recalled. The resulting design resembles a quilt, with New Hampshire symbols surrounding the birth certificate.

Owner Garth Svensen said the

Christmas Dove has been hosting local artists for about 15 years. In addition to Busch Holman, he gives space to George Calef, who does duck decoys and other wood carvings. "He's a great storyteller," Svensen said, adding, "I have to avoid him on busy days."

Charlie McCoy works in Swarovski crystal, making items such as snowflakes; Richard Doucette is a wood-burner and a "fan favorite at the Deerfield Fair"; and Nancy Wasson makes paper stars.

"They're like real-life elves," Svensen said of his artists. "People can watch them crafting before their eyes."

Busch Holman is up to further challenges, including another book. But for now she's happy in her studio, as customers stop by on purpose or by mistake. The store goes on forever, she said, and people come to her when they're lost or overwhelmed. "I give a lot of directions," she said with a smile.

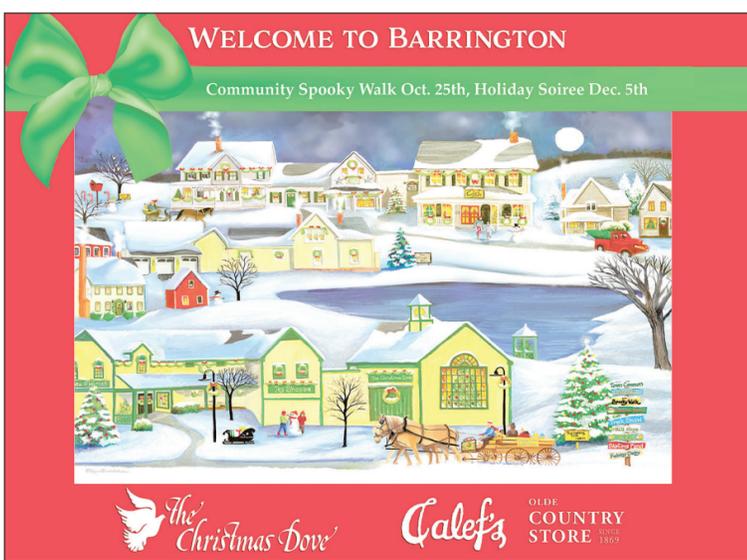
Barrington will hold its Holiday Soiree on Friday, Dec. 5, from 4 to 8 p.m. There will be caroling, food, horse and buggy rides, a holiday market and collections of letters for servicepeople. Visit barringtonchamber.org for details.

For more information on Busch Holman, visit karenbuschholman.com. For details on The Christmas Dove, visit christmasdove.com.

Heirloom birth certificates are meant for display in a home, are 11 by 14 inches, and do not include a frame. They are \$25 each and available from the Division of Vital Records, with \$15 of each sale going to preserve vital records. They are not legal documents to prove citizenship or identity. An Heirloom Marriage Certificate will be available in 2026. For details, visit sos.nh.gov.



KATHLEEN BAILEY PHOTO



Above: This red truck features prominently in Karen Busch Holman's new children's book, "Bear's Bell." When it's not being used for a holiday story, the truck is part of the floor displays at The Christmas Dove in Barrington.

At left: Barrington artist Karen Busch Holman designed the new mural welcoming visitors to the town.

PROVIDED



ROB LEVEY PHOTO

If you are searching for a gift for your favorite beachgoer, look no further than Sand and Santa in Hampton, open until Dec. 21.

Sand and Santa

From Page B1

reportedly in the country.

Originally an icon on Route 1 in Hampton Falls, the Santa was purchased as a surprise gift from Preston's brother Bob and customized with beach-themed decorations.

"Santa is fiberglass, and my other brother Jimi had a custom steel base and 24-inch or so screws made to hold him in the ground," she said. "He has survived some high winds here at the beach."

Protected by a fence to prevent people from climbing on him, Santa has become a popular photo opportunity for visitors from around the world. "I have had inquiries from folks who want to purchase him; sorry folks, Santa is not for sale," Preston said with a laugh.

In addition to her inventory and Santa, the shop maintains its festive atmosphere with pine-scented air and Christmas carols that begin playing in November.

"I have folks that come into the store just because they say it is their 'happy place,'" said Preston. "Pretty

much everyone who comes in the door says, 'It smells so good in here.'"

Community involvement remains central to her mission, as Sand and Santa supports many local charities through donations of gift baskets, toys and time. This commitment stems from life lessons instilled within her from a young age.

"I was brought up by my folks, Bob and Charlotte Preston, who told us at a young age you can 'live off the community or in the community,'" Preston said. "Supporting charities is very important to me, as not everyone has been as fortunate."

Her passion for community and Christmas has become a family tradition that extends beyond the shop, as her three adult children — ages 27, 29 and 31 — have inherited what she calls "the Christmas bug."

"I am blessed," she added.

Sand and Santa is open weekends, from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., through Dec. 21.

For more information, call 603-770-0006.



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At WREN, holiday shopping builds futures

The Bethlehem shop fuels opportunities for artists across the North Country

By Kathleen D. Bailey
Special to the Union Leader

Julia Webb remembers growing up in the WREN Collective and Cooperative. Her mother was part of the second group of “WREN graduates” in 1995. “As a newly divorced single mom, she found nurturing and support from WREN. I saw it for her, I saw it in the rest of the WREN world.”

For Webb, it’s personal. As the current executive director of the WREN (Women’s Rural Entrepreneurial Network) organization, she sees that nurturing going forward to a second and third generation, of both men and women, and especially through its store on Main Street in Bethlehem.

It’s the place for North Country shoppers, among others, to find unique holiday gifts and help others at the same time.

Teach someone to fish

“It is more than a shop,” Webb said as she took a break on a weekday morning. “We give entrepreneurial support along the way.”

This often comes from WREN’s grant program, she said. The grants are HUD-funded and administered by WREN through the Community Development Block Grants. “They typically go to low- to moderate-income business owners or people who want funding to expand their businesses, for things like establishing a website, a marketing plan or learning needed skills.”

For example, one potential client operated a dog day care, she said, adding, “But she always wanted to do service dog train-



KATHLEEN BAILEY PHOTO

Franconia artist Joan Hannah’s pottery has its own display case at the WREN Gallery’s retail store in Bethlehem.

ing. She wanted to add it to the classes she held at the kennel.” WREN’s grant enabled the woman to pay for the classes, and for her, Webb said, “It was a game-changer.”

Other “direct grants” go for infrastructure such as supplies and equipment, according to Webb.

Webb said the average grant for technical training is \$2,500, for a maximum of three years. The one-time direct grants for equipment can be up to \$5,000. The organization also runs its own classes on starting and keeping a business, although she said the art

and creative classes are the best attended.

The organization was formed in Littleton in 1994, and originally focused on entrepreneurial support, according to Webb. The organization purchased a business condo in 1999, and moved to Main Street in Bethlehem. The retail shop and the art gallery opened at this time.

Something for everyone

In the shop, sunlight pours through the tall windows on pottery, glassware and fabric arts. There are candles, honey-based skin care products from Beeline



KATHLEEN BAILEY PHOTO

The Women’s Rural Entrepreneurial Network runs a store featuring the work of local creators.

in Henniker, maple syrup from Mount Cabot Maples in Lancaster, scarves and bags in every color of the rainbow. Paintings, photos and prints hang from the walls.

The program isn’t juried, Webb said, although the staff has an “informal” jury process. This year, 130

artists and makers from New Hampshire and Vermont have their creations in the shop. The shop is run on consignment, with 55% to the artist and 45% to WREN.

Some of the artisans are new to selling their wares, and the WREN shop is a way to “test the waters,” ac-

ording to Webb. “It’s a way to test their branding, their packaging. Some people have started out with us, for the marketing access, and then they move on to their own storefronts or wholesaling.”

Other WREN artists, like

► See WREN, Page B4

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On the Vine: A dream that became Exeter's go-to for holiday feasts

By Rob Levey
Special to the Union Leader

What started as a dream shared between childhood friends and a husband-and-wife team has blossomed into On the Vine Marketplace, Exeter's premier destination for holiday feasts — and it all began with a simple philosophy.

"If it's fresh, we are all about it," said Abel Schultze, one of three owners, including his wife, Angela, and childhood best friend, Scott Edwards. "We try and stay local with as much product as possible without sacrificing quality."

Open since May 2006, the

philosophy has proven successful, especially during the holidays.

"We are definitely a holiday destination," said Schultze, who said the specialty roasts set them apart from conventional grocers. "The prepared foods department will set up the remainder of your holiday plate, which will leave your company asking where you got the food."

To round out the holiday meal, the bakery features a variety of scratch pies and pastries. "The fish department has a good variety of fresh fish, lobsters cooked or live, and cocktail shrimp cooked perfectly," he added. "Angela also has made a little niche in the store with some unique

home goods."

In addition to a butcher shop, fish market, bakery and home goods, On the Vine features a deli with sandwiches and made-in-house prepared foods, produce from the Boston/Chelsea market, specialty beers/wine, cheeses and groceries.

As for why they wanted to open On the Vine, Schultze cited inspiration from his family, as his grandfather started and owned Schultze's Meats in Portsmouth from the 1930s to the 1990s.

"I really enjoy working with food," he said. "As a child, it was my favorite thing to do — going to the grocery store. My mother did everything she could to not bring

me, and now I tell her I get to go grocery shopping every day."

The journey to On the Vine was not immediate. After leaving the U.S. Marine Corps, Schultze entered the wholesale produce business with his sister and brother-in-law in the Portsmouth area.

After a couple of years, Schultze said he wanted to be in business with his wife, who had an accounting background, and Edwards, who had previously operated a fish market.

"We came up with the idea of a specialty store that focused on the fresh portion of a grocery store," he explained.

"With Scott's background in

cooking and fish, my background in produce and meat, and Angela having an accounting degree, we found a spot in Exeter and went for it."

The early years required patience and reinvestment, as the trio lacked sufficient capital to immediately realize their vision.

"We did not have the money to put it all together in one shot, so every year we invested in the store to make it what it is today," noted Schultze. "Now, 20 years later, the store is flourishing."

On the Vine Marketplace is open every day except Thanksgiving and Christmas.

To learn more about On the Vine, visit otv.rocks.

WREN

From Page B3

Franconia's Joan Hannah, have been where they're going. Hannah has had a career as an Olympic skier and ski instructor, and in her 80s, still plays golf and maintains a "huge" garden, according to Webb.

"She still fires up the kiln she made herself," Webb said.

Hannah is a juried member of the League of New Hampshire Craftsmen. She doesn't do pottery in the summer because she has so much going on, Webb said. "She does things on her own terms."

There's also a small online store, Webb added. The online store provides items that are duplicates or "small and easy to ship," according to her.

More than just pots

The Gallery at WREN hosts a revolving number of exhibits, changing every other month. The featured artist for September/October was Becky Field of Concord, who displayed her photos of the immigrant experience.

"We look for art experiences that are meaningful and thought-provoking," Webb said.

She's concerned about arts funding being cut on the federal and state levels, noting, "Art is what makes us human."

A holiday show, "Simple Joys," runs through December and features the work of members. It is sponsored by The Franconia Inn and will have a little bit of everything, according to Webb: Hanukkah items, Christmas items and general winter-themed items.

Webb grew up around WREN, went off to college and other things, and came back three years ago as a part-time bookkeeper. She took over the director role last September.

It was like coming home, in more ways than one. "What is clear to me," she mused, "are the values I came back to, the strength of being a community organization."

WREN wants to be "a good community partner, active and inclusive," Webb



Part of the shop floor at the WREN Gallery's retail shop in Bethlehem.

KATHLEEN BAILEY PHOTO

said. To that end, it runs art programs for both children and adults. It also hosts the

WRENegades, a group for seniors.

And though they're

proud of the "Women" in the name, Webb emphasized that WREN is for

everyone.

"We know what it's like to be shut out for gender," she said.

Webb never knows who'll walk through the front door, or what they'll want.

"A few years ago a person was traveling, and they were stuck here due to a snowstorm," she said. "It was Hanukkah, and they needed a menorah. And we were here. It was our first 'menorah emergency.'"

The store and gallery are open Monday through Saturday, from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., and Sundays, from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m., at 2011 Main St., Bethlehem.

Programs also are funded in part by the New Hampshire Charitable Foundation's Neil and Louise Tillotson Fund, and by the New Hampshire State Council on the Arts Public Value Partnership Grant. The Adair Inn and Restaurant is the principal sponsor of The Gallery at WREN.

For more information, call 603-869-9736 or visit wrenworks.org.

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If you're looking for something unique and not available at a big box store, here are some ideas from the creative staff, faculty and students at the University of New Hampshire that are sure to make your friends and family smile — because every day is a great day to be a UNH Wildcat.

Inspirational dates

Start each day of the new year with a beautifully curated calendar from UNH's Institute on Disability (IOD). For almost 25 years, the IOD has produced full-color calendars featuring 13 original works of art paired with uplifting quotes. The calendar, which often features work from students, faculty and staff, is an opportunity to remind people of the IOD's mission to promote full inclusion and equal opportunities for people with disabilities. To order the 2026 calendar, visit iod-calendar-store.mybigcommerce.com.

Shore to Shoals

For the ocean lover on your list, how about a T-shirt adorned with sea creatures? Or a hat embroidered with colorful flowers inspired by poet Celia Thaxter's island garden? The Shoals Marine Laboratory — a remote marine field station located on Appledore Island — offers a variety of sea-inspired T-shirts, totes and sweatshirts. Thoughtful items for any marine enthusiast or avid gardener who longs to take a pilgrimage to Thaxter's ocean garden. Part of the proceeds help support marine science education, research and outreach at the Shoals Marine Laboratory, which has been jointly operated by UNH and Cornell University for 60 years. To

order, visit yourprintedtees.com/shoals_marine_lab/shop/home. To learn about unique educational opportunities, [shoalsmarinelab-baroatortory.org](http://shoalsmarinelab/baroatortory.org).

UNH Steelhead Trout

For the foodie on your list, UNH's Aquafort, an offshore aquaculture platform, offers a delicious locally raised steelhead trout that is available both fresh and smoked. Similar to salmon, the fish is harvested weekly and is available through the holidays at several local fish markets — including Seaport Fish in Rye and Sanders Fish Market in Portsmouth. A smoked version of the UNH fish is available online year-round and makes a nice addition to a charcuterie board or layered on a breakfast bagel. All proceeds from online sales go directly back to research at UNH's Center for Sustainable Seafood Systems. To order, visit unh-usnh.nbsstore.net/center-for-sustainable-seafood-systems.

UNH Makers Expo

Looking for something unique for those hard to buy for? Come shop over 50 curated artisans at UNH's

Makers Expo — all UNH students, faculty and staff. Imagine engineers that knit and jewelry by biologists. Grab some friends and get into the spirit by buying something special from a UNH wildcat. The event is free and open to the public on Friday, Dec. 5, from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., in the Granite State Room of the Memorial Union Building, Durham. For more information, visit unh.edu/mub/events/unh-makers-expo.

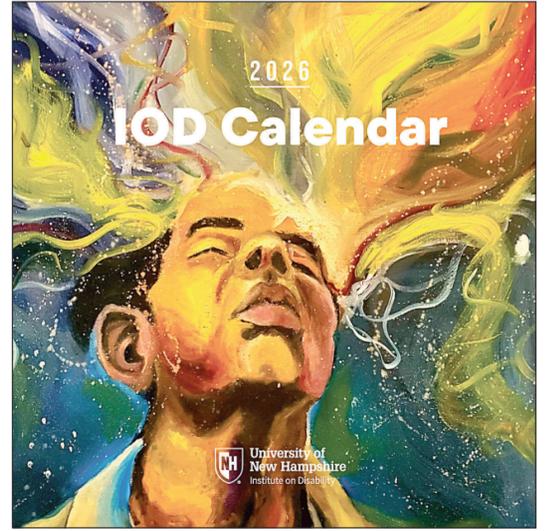
Armchair explorers

For book lovers, history buffs and travelers, offer them a trip through the past and present of the Granite State's most memorable sites. From stories of New Hampshire's fiercely independent spirit to a peek inside the state's lavish historic mansions and a visit to Exeter's UFO festival, all the places that make N.H. unique are on display in "A History Lover's Guide to New Hampshire." Co-authors Kathleen D. Bailey '74 and Sheila R. Bailey take readers on an adventure without ever leaving their armchair. Available on Amazon: amazon.com/History-Lovers-Guide-New-Hampshire/

dp/1467155985.

Seasonal spectacular

Give the gift of music by kicking off the season with a festive holiday concert featuring familiar classics to more contemporary works from UNH's talented musicians from the symphony orchestra, wind symphony, concert choir, jazz bands, chamber singers, symphonic band and Wildcat marching band. The concert takes place Sunday, Dec. 7, at 5 p.m., in the Granite State Room of UNH's Memorial Union Building. Tickets must be purchased in advance. Tickets are \$20 general admission, \$15 senior and military and \$10 students. For details and to buy tickets, visit usnh.venue.net/events/UNHPA-MU.



The UNH Institute on Disability produces a full-color calendar of 13 original works of art paired with uplifting quotes. The calendar often features work from UNH students, faculty and staff.

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Our tours book up quickly - we have 40 tours available now, with more coming soon! Grab a seat before they are gone or add your name to a waitlist!

UPCOMING 2026 TOURS

- Philadelphia Flower Show ~ March 1-4
- An Evening in Providence feat. WICKED - March 11-12
- Southern Coastal Discovery Tour ~ March 16-27
- Nashville Getaway ~ April 9-13
- The Outsiders at the Boston Opera House ~ April 11
- Springtime in New York City ~ April 19-21
- Cape Cod & Nantucket Daffodil Festival ~ April 24-26
- Midwest Explorer feat. Chicago & Holland, MI ~ April 27- May 8
- Long Island Discovery ~ April 27- May 1
- Cape May Getaway ~ May 3-6
- Ottawa Tulip Festival ~ May 13-16
- Boston Ballet Spring Experience ~ May 16
- Buffalo-Niagara Region ~ May 17-21
- 1000 Islands Getaway ~ May 26-29
- Scenic Iceland Signature Tour ~ June 8-19
- Provincetown & Cape Cod ~ June 15-18
- LES MISERABLES at the Boston Opera House ~ June 21
- Tanglewood & the Berkshires ~ July 12-13
- Alaska Land & Small Ship Cruise Tour ~ July 8-23
- Saratoga Springs ~ July 21-23
- Quebec's Eastern Townships "Lakes & Lavender" ~ July 26-27
- Newfoundland Signature Tour ~ August 7-22
- Martha's Vineyard Getaway ~ October 18-20
- A Williamsburg Christmas ~ December 3-8

Visit our website to see all of our tours!



Visit TERRAPINTOURS.COM to see all of our upcoming tours, register online, join our newsletter, or request a 2026 Tour Catalog.

ALL TOURS DEPART FROM CONCORD, NH

To learn more or to order a holiday gift certificate, contact us!

603-348-7141 ~ info@terraptours.com
Register online! www.terraptours.com

