



## OUR EVOLVING HERITAGE

As the Business Culture Expands, the Tradition Grows

By Gregory Schoenfeld

As much as the age-old fields of unrivalled sweet corn, a pioneering innovative spirit also helps to shape the distinguished legacy of the New Paltz region. Case in point: The realized vision of Maurice and William Wurts who, in 1825, staged an impromptu appeal for investors in a café on Manhattan's Wall Street. When their gambit garnered an astounding \$1 million, the result was the groundbreaking, 108-mile trade route known as the D&H Canal, helping to put a sleepy, remote area on the map. Now, not two hours from the brash, nonstop roar of New York City, our bucolic retreat certainly still provides an entrancing alternative, and our rich history serves as a sedate and measured juxtaposition to the constantly shifting "modern" world. Still—in its perhaps more pleasant way—this region remains equally driven by determination and transformation. There is a unique strength that comes from being informed and influenced by our traditions, yet continually assimilating new ideas and new members to our culture.

### NEW-OLD-FASHIONED HOSPITALITY

One of the primary definitions of the region's character—and one of its chief economic engines—has long been the hospitality it offers, the promise of a country home-away-from-home. The old-fashioned, amiable custom it presents, and bountiful cuisine that goes with it, is maintained by a steady complement of fresh energy and input. Rob and Gillian Rones and their quaint-country-home-turned-bed-and-breakfast, affectionately called

**"They want to escape to something from another era, and that's what we are, and what we offer."**

—Rob Rones, **A Little Guest House**



Above: Back patio and dining area of **A Little Guest House**.

**A Little Guest House**, provide a poignant testament. (It was former NPRCoC president Joyce Minard who recommend they use "A" instead of "The", cleverly putting them at the top of the lodging listings.) Longtime weekend residents, the birth of the business was fueled by a desire to share their idyllic experience with other metro-area residents in need of a country getaway. The two transformed their 1850 High Falls farmhouse into their vision of the perfect country escape, reaching into the past to shape their business. "That's why people come here," explains Rob. "They want to escape to something from another era, and that's what we are, and what we offer." The Rones' find that, even though they provide all the modern amenities, sometimes the most satisfying thing for their guests is to forego them. "People like to enjoy the slower pace—in the city everything is incredibly fast, it pushes you, and sometimes the best thing is detaching yourself from it," says Rob. "For instance, though we offer WIFI, we have city guests who actually decide to put away their laptops!" he adds with a laugh.

One of the newest and most promising additions to the New Paltz business landscape is another example of looking back to move forward: Darrin Siegfried's **Il Gallo Giallo**. The Newburgh native returned to the area he loves after 26 years as a top-shelf chef and sommelier in New York City, opening his unique wine bar in early August. The yellow rooster insignia on the village's Main Street heralds a menu truly comprised of the classic fruits of this region. "From the local beef to the locally-made artisanal cheeses to the famous sweet corn, I have such

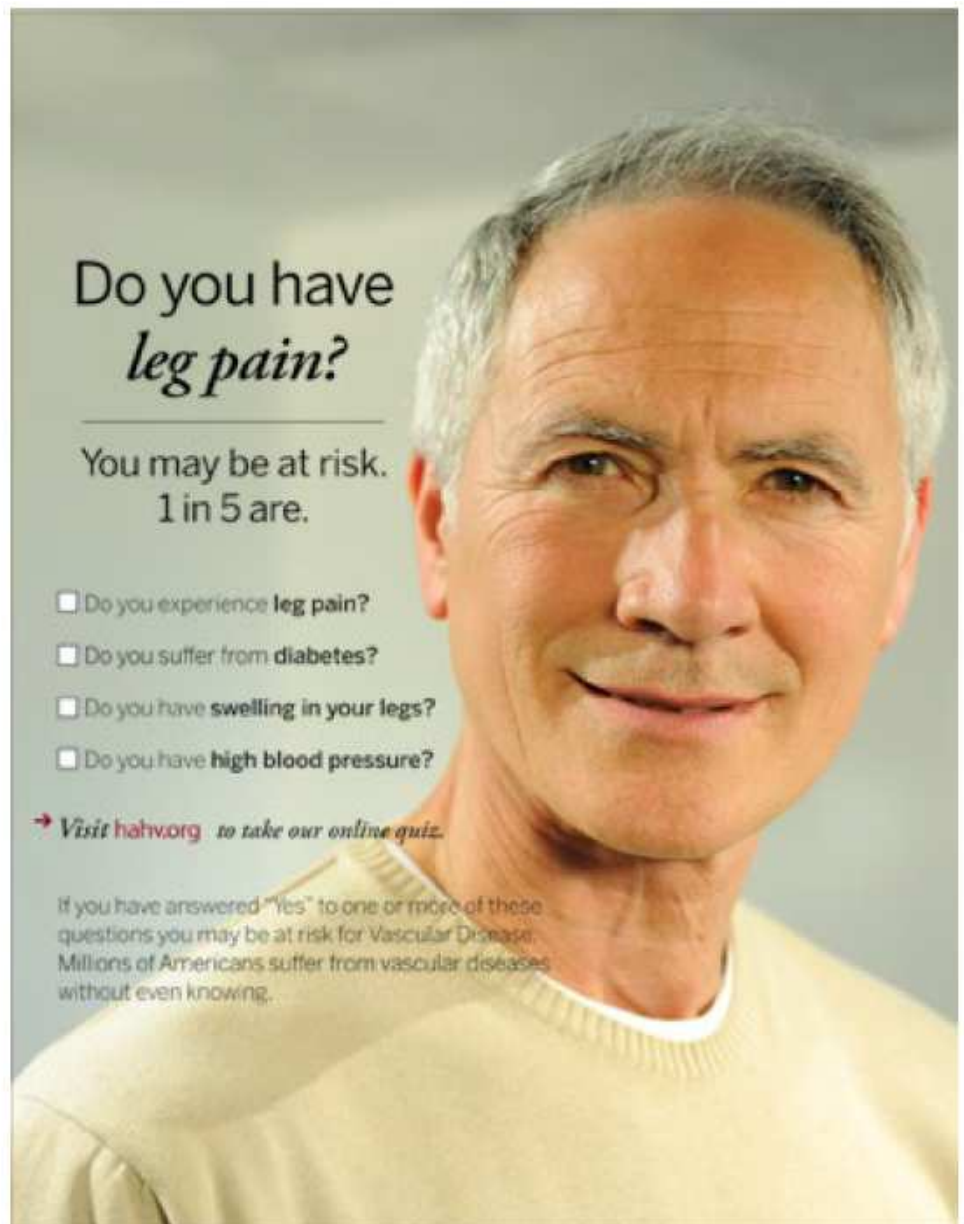


an appreciation of the roots and the real truth of this area," says Siegfried. As with the Italian cuisine he prepares, Siegfried is motivated by authenticity above all else. Adamant about sourcing locally, his largely Italian wine list features an exclusive selection of New York vintages, and his marrow bones and burgers alike feature local, grass-fed meat. "Though we're a wine bar, you've got to have a great burger!" the chef asserts with a smile.

#### MODERN TRADITION

Fresh local meat, in fact, is another deep-seated way of life in the New Paltz region, one that **Brykill Farm's** Susan Eckhardt has put her own progressive stamp on. As a Bard College student, Eckhardt gained a love for the area; however, the art and art history student hadn't the faintest inclination back then that she would one day join time-honored ranks of those who raise cattle. She bought **Brykill** in Gardiner in 1997, committed to fixing up an historic property. It was actually her growing concern for unhealthy and inhumane "Big Agriculture" practices—and 100 available acres—that motivated her to try farming. "I thought 'well, how hard can it be to raise some beef on my own?'" says Eckhardt, jovially. "I was fortunate enough that a few old-time farmers and farming neighbors were either kind enough or curious enough to help." Now, with 450 acres and a burgeoning business, Eckhardt recognizes and appreciates how much her humane, grass fed, sustainable approach has become an integral part of the local culture. "I love that this community has embraced agriculture with so much enthusiasm," she explains. "Ulster County is becoming known as a place to go to check out the newest, coolest food and farming trends."

Rather than a new spin on a traditional business, **J.T.S. Design Inc.**'s Jeff Severson offers an approach to new technology richly steeped in time-honored local values. A lifetime Ulster Park resident, whose grandfather owned the town's Vineyard Lodge—a piece of local history in its own right—Severson has no regrets about choosing to keep his web development business here in the region. "As someone who enjoys hiking and photography, the region's natural beauty and many hiking opportunities is what makes it special to me," says Severson. "It's worth it for me to work from here. The pace, the community we have here helps me focus on the business." After ten years and growing success, says Severson, the balance that defines his home continues to be the right choice. ■



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