

Guest columnist Meg Gage: Ideas for local holiday gifts

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By Meg Gage

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The town is boiling over with dramatically speeded up processes for dealing with controversial matters — it feels like a maelstrom of passion and change. There's one thing on which I hope there is no controversy: supporting our local businesses and organizations. I have 10 suggestions for end of year holiday gifts, generosity and local fun!

1. Hastings has an astonishing selection of puzzles, games, holiday decorations and small tchotchkes for amusement. Check out their Pomegranate art puzzles: they are high quality, challenging and gorgeous. We have found Jigsaw puzzles to be a superb COVID pastime that brings the household together and calms nerves.
2. Amherst Books also has a great selection of puzzles and games in addition to a wide range of new and used books. They have a whole wall of great fiction. I am particularly drawn to their many shelves of cookbooks. Maybe there's someone in your household for whom you could buy that cookbook you've been wanting. This is our last remaining independent book store and is a priority for me. (The well-stocked used book store, Unnamable Books, under The Works is temporarily closed.)
3. Amherst Cinema is selling gift cards as well as memberships. The business plan for independent movie houses is challenging, up against corporate chains. What a generous gift a year's membership would be for someone you care about as well as for Amherst Cinema. Maybe you might give yourself a membership to Amherst Cinema.
4. How about a beautiful scarf or pair of earrings from Clays or Zanna?
5. Many people have not yet discovered the fabulous new General Store at the Mill District on Cows Road in North Amherst. The General Store has an extraordinary range of products including art supplies, pet supplies, games and toys, kitchen equipment, pottery and linens. They even have picnic equipment including a few picnic backpacks to help you take your picnic into the woods. Imagine a cross-country ski outing with your fancy lunch and bottle of wine on your back! You can walk across the courtyard to Provisions for that bottle of wine! And while you're at the General Store, visit the adjacent art gallery, one of the very few venues in town where local artists can show their work.

6. Most of us with children in our lives don't need to be reminded of The Toy Box. In spite of the problems with the supply chain, they are loaded with inventory, although they encourage everyone to "buy it if you see it" because restocking is unpredictable. They have the best selection of games in town, something for every age, competitive and cooperative. The staff is very knowledgeable about which games are most likely to work for different ages and interests.

7. All of the local restaurants have gift certificates which make great gifts while supporting a local restaurant. I think all of our restaurants have recyclable to-go containers. When you stop in to buy a gift certificate or pick up a meal, perhaps you might encourage them to switch to compostable containers since much of the so-called recyclable plastic is not actually recyclable.

8. The Black Sheep also has gift certificates as well as delicious and creative sandwiches. As a break from your downtown shopping, stop in for lunch and pick up some baked goods to take home.

9. There are numerous worthy nonprofit organizations addressing a range of charitable needs and interests. Many people who don't need more "stuff" often appreciate a contribution made in their name to a worthy organization. A few include Amherst Cinema, the Survival Center, Valley Community Development (with major tax benefits if you give \$1,000 or more), the Dickenson Homestead, A Better Chance (ABC), the Peace Development Fund, Community Involved in Sustaining Agriculture (CISA), Amherst Community Land Trust.

Hmmm... a little dangerous to name specific organizations when there are so many and the needs are so great, especially after 18 months of the pandemic. Pick a contribution that matches the person's interests in whose name you are making the gift and then go to Hastings for just the right card to give them the news.

10. Many people see Austen Jewelry as a place to buy expensive antique furniture and jewelry. But they also have a number of beautiful and less expensive pieces that bring both beauty and history to the people own them. I love my Austen Jewelry earrings!

Our household made a commitment at the beginning of the pandemic to spend \$100 a week at Amherst businesses. I'm happy to report that it hasn't been difficult. Take out once a week, a book, a haircut, gas at Ren's, a baguette from the Black Sheep. It all adds up to a lot of good stuff and a boost to our local businesses.