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Notes from the garden

By Henry Homeyer

Create a labyrinth

Despite my jokes to the contrary, I know that you gardeners won't really turn to a life of crime now that gardening is over for the summer. But you might go into a decline, wasting time watching afternoon television or reading trashy novels. Don't. Please don't. There are



always possibilities for projects outside, even after flowers and vegetables are through for the season. One such project to consider is building a labyrinth.

I recently visited a labyrinth at Harmony Farm, a non-profit nature-based education center, open to the public at 28 Bowers Rd, Hartland, Vt., (www.harmonyfarmvt.com). They have built a 55-foot diameter labyrinth in memory of Derek Cooper, a young worker at the farm who is now deceased. It is a simple, though time-consuming project that, once completed can be very spiritual in nature.

Labyrinths are sometimes confused with mazes. Both involve walking a path in an area usually defined by a circle. But a maze is a puzzle with many choices about which way to go. A labyrinth has no choices. The pathway winds around, turns corners, and seems to go to the center of the labyrinth - only to turn and lead back to the outside. Eventually you reach the center after walking every step of seven or more concentric circles.

History is unclear about the origin of labyrinths. Labyrinths appeared in Crete and Egypt over 2,000 years ago. They were introduced inside Catholic cathedrals in Italy in the 12th century and in France in the 13th. Worshippers walked them as a way of calming the mind and becoming at one with God. Some crawled on their knees while praying. Some walked labyrinths instead of going on a pilgrimage. Famous labyrinths are at the Cathedrals in Chartres, Reims and Amiens in northern France, but now they can be seen outdoors all over the world.

Knox Johnson, one of a family of farmers and gardeners living and working at Harmony Farm, introduced me to their labyrinth and explained how it was created. The first step in creating a labyrinth was to find a relatively open, flat space for it. Barbara Johnson recommends getting someone to dowse the site to find just the right spot, using either crystal dowsing, or rods.

Once the spot was identified, Knox tilled the soil late in the summer of 2011. He allowed the weeds and wild grasses to come back for a few weeks and then tilled it again, getting rid of most of them. He added lime to improve the soil pH. He raked the area, smoothing out the surface and finally seeded it with a seed mix called "Eco Blend with Clover" from North Country Organics (www.norganics.com).

Clover is good in a seed mix because clover plants fix nitrogen from the air, turning it into useful nitrogen and enriching the soil. Unfortunately, many seed companies no longer include clover seed in their mixes because "weed-need" treatments have herbicides that kill clover. So clover has been declared a weed. This summer the real work began. Once the grass was well established, Knox and a friend laid out the pattern. He used a device that holds a can of spray paint to mark out the lines. He used a long light-weight cable to define the circles. The spray paint in its holder was attached to one end of the cable, while the other end was looped over a stake in the center of the labyrinth.

Knox sprayed white paint while keeping the cable taut. The center of the labyrinth is a 4-foot space which eventually was surrounded by seven concentric circles, each 31 inches apart from the next. He had a design copied from the cathedral in Bayeux, France, and used stakes to mark turns in the walkway. He told me it really on took an hour or two to mark the lines.

Because of all the twists and turns, that path to the center of the labyrinth is about 1,000 feet from the entrance. That amounts to a lot of stones needed to line the path. They used smallish stones, so 4 or 5 were used in every foot. But if you create your labyrinth you can use whatever size you want.

Knox directed me to the Universalist Church in Hartland, Vt., just half a mile from the labyrinth at Harmony Farm. Bryce Lloyd, a Boy Scout, built a lovely labyrinth near the church as his Eagle Scout project. Bryce used larger stones, and installed gravel instead of allowing grass to grow. I assume that landscape fabric was put down beneath the gravel to keep weeds out - though some weeds will persist no matter what, I fear.

Walking a full-sized labyrinth like the one at Harmony Farm takes five minutes or so. I find that walking one is an easy way to clear the mind and to forget for a few minutes the deadlines and worries of life. One moves forward, one turns back, one concentrates on the journey. I find walking a labyrinth very relaxing. I don't think I will build one myself, but they are nice to visit and are more common than you might think.

Henry's new book is out: *Wobar and the Quest for the Magic Calumet* from Bunker Hill Publishing. It is a chapter book for kids, a fantasy-adventure about a boy born with a mustache and a magical ability to speak to animals and understand them. Learn more at www.Gardening-Guy.com.

Bellows Falls painted out of contention

Town excluded from top 10 list of 'Prettiest Painted Place in America'

By DOMENIC POLI
Reformer Staff

BELLOWS FALLS — Roger Riccio liked the village when he visited while on vacation nearly 12 years ago.

He liked it a lot. So much, in fact, that he bought a house while still on vacation and has lived in Bellows Falls ever since he moved from Redding, Calif.

His love of the village led Riccio, now the director of the Great Falls Regional Chamber of Commerce, to apply for nomination to win Bellows Falls the title of "Prettiest Painted Place in America," a competition sponsored by the Paint Quality Institute. He hoped others would see the beauty he saw more than a decade ago, but the village was excluded from the list of 10 finalists from the Northeast. Chester and Stowe also entered the competition but the former was the only Vermont town to crack the region's top 10.

Riccio said he is disappointed his village missed out but said Chester, which his chamber of commerce covers, is also a very pretty town and is deserving of the distinction.

"I'm heartbroken Bellows Falls did-

n't make it into the top 10, but in my opinion, it's still No. 1," he said.

Riccio said he stumbled across the competition on the Internet and decided to apply. He went around the village and took various photographs, sending along 19 of them to the Paint Quality Institute. He said there are 200 nominees but thinks his village can hold its own.

"Bellows Falls is a very beautiful village," he said.

He said the village is beautifully painted and has wonderful houses and architecture.

"We have different styles over 200 years old. It's very unique," he said. "Things like that don't stand the test of time like they have in Bellows Falls."

Judges with expertise in color selec-



Zachary P. Stephens/Brattleboro Reformer
Downtown Bellows Falls.

tion, exterior painting, and home improvement reviewed the entries, conducted additional research and made selected site visits. The 12 prettiest places will be revealed in mid-October.

Over the years the village has developed somewhat of a negative reputation and there are a number of buildings that have recently been under investigation by Health Officer Ellen Howard and the Bellows Falls Village Board of Trustees. But Riccio said he doesn't think these cases take away from the village's beauty as a whole.

"You can't live anywhere where there isn't a run-down house," he said. "I've seen more and more people take pride in their homes here."

The Paint Quality Institute has conducted this competition twice before,

most recently in 2000. It says the purpose is to vividly show how an attractive paint color scheme can greatly enhance the "curb appeal" of any structure's exterior.

"We feel there is no better way to demonstrate the importance of exterior paint color than to focus on these beautiful real-world communities that take so much pride in their appearance," said Debbie Zimmer, paint and color expert at the Paint Quality Institute. "The places involved in our competition are a tremendous inspiration to us all, and by giving them recognition, we hope to instill in the public a better appreciation for the role exterior paint can play in protecting and enhancing the appearance of any home or building."

Nominees for the honor range from famous locations such as Napa, Calif., and Cape Cod to little-known places like Bell Buckle, Tenn.

The names and locations of all of the nominees are posted on the Paint Quality Institute website at blog.paintquality.com.

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Improving the relationship between people and horses



Mike Faher/Reformer
Horse trainer Heidi Potter coaxes a smile from a horse at New England Center for Horsemanship on Weatherhead Hollow Road in Guilford.

By MIKE FAHER
Reformer Staff

GUILFORD — Several of Heidi Potter's horses have no problem flashing a big, toothy smile.

And now Potter, a long-time horse trainer, has an even bigger reason to smile: She and her husband, Rob, are opening their New England Center for Horsemanship in Guilford.

An open house is planned from noon to 5 p.m. Saturday at the facility, 761 Weatherhead Hollow Road. Visitors will see what Potter believes is the right spot to further her work with "natural horsemanship."

"What they can expect when they come here is to learn how to interact with a horse in a gentle, understanding manner," Potter said. "I teach people to see things from a horse's point of view."

Potter says she was hooked on horses while growing up in New Hampshire. She began riding at age 6 and purchased her first horse at age 13.

In 1994, she founded Maple Ridge Stable in Guilford. And she worked to expand her knowledge and training skills, studying the principles of "centered riding" and becoming a certified instructor through the Certified Horsemanship Association in 2000.

She went on to gain master-level and clinic-instructor certifications. Last month, she traveled to Colorado to conduct a clinic.

The new property, not far from Maple Ridge Stable, became available when friends moved, Potter said. She and her husband have been hard at work for a few months renovating a barn and making other improvements.

The plot's 17 acres of mostly pasture land "allows us to have much more useful land for the horses and for the business," Potter said, adding that the open space suits her training methods.

"We have brooks and we have bridges and lots of space to work out in the natural environment," she said. "My business is really geared toward the pleasure rider and the trail rider."

The new center will be used for training, instruction and for boarding — Potter said there are two boarding spots open.

She is focused mainly on "helping improve the relationship between people and their horses." She brings her training in martial arts and yoga to that task, writing that she "emphasizes how strongly our minds, bodies and emotions influence our horse's behaviors and reactions."

That's what centered riding is all about. And Potter also plans to offer regular horse-agility clinics at the facility.

"It's a new sport," she said. "I just got into it this



Heidi Potter prompts Chance to pick up a small cone.

year." Horse agility involves leading — not riding — the animal around an obstacle course. Potter is an accredited trainer with the International Horse Agility Club, and she believes the activity has potential to draw more people to the center.

"It allows people of all ages and abilities to enjoy doing something new with their horses," she said. "It also allows horses of any age or ability to participate."

Saturday's open house includes a horse-agility clinic and competition along with food, refreshments and door prizes. More information is available by calling 802-380-3268.

Centered Riding was developed by Sally Swift, who lived in Brattleboro for more than 50 years and died at the age of 95 in 2009. In 1985, Swift wrote "Centered Riding," a book based on her method, which included using body awareness, centering, and imagery.

More information about Potter and the center is available at www.inharmonywithhorses.com.

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Heritage Festival to feature record number of vendors

By MIKE FAHER
Reformer Staff

NEWFANE — After four-plus decades, this town's fall festival continues to grow.

More than 90 vendors are expected at the Newfane Heritage Festival, scheduled from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. on Saturday and Sunday on the Newfane Common off Route 30.

"This might be the biggest number of vendors" ever to set up shop at the event, said Nissa Petrak, publicity chairwoman for the festival.

"And it's very reassuring that most of the people from last year are returning," she added.

In fact, the festival this year will feature just 10 new vendors — "The smallest turnover we've ever had," said Chris Petrak, Nissa Petrak's husband and the festival's exhibitors' chairman.

Organizers believe that's a testament to the festival's reputation as a long-established, well-attended event. Crowds totaling 4,000 to 5,000 are expected over the weekend.

They'll be perusing booths bearing items such as photography, pottery, jewelry, furniture, clothing, candles, art and toys.

There is live music, a children's corner and a farmer's market. Food options include the Church Deli, where there will be offerings such as soups, pizzas and baked potatoes, and an outdoor food booth serving hot dogs, burgers, chili and sandwiches.

The festival also features a "Super Raffle" that includes quilts, gift certificates, books and other items. There also are collectibles available at the flea tent.

"From little children to older adults, there's something for everybody," Nissa Petrak said.

The heritage festival, in its 42nd year, is organized by Newfane Congregational Church. Members of the historic church recently broke ground for an expansion, but festival proceeds support day-to-day church activities — not the construction project.

"This is the major fund-raiser for the church so it can continue to provide the many services that it does to the community," Chris Petrak said.

White Cane Awareness Day recognizes independence

BRATTLEBORO — The fifth annual White Cane Awareness Day event will take place on Monday, Oct. 15, at the Brattleboro Common across from Park Place to promote recognition of the growing independence and self-sufficiency of blind people in America and the white cane as a symbol of that independence and self-reliance.

The event will begin at 3 p.m. with a brief walk using Brattleboro's accessible and safe pedestrian sidewalks on the roads near the Common. Refreshments and information about community resources will be provided before and after the walk. A limited supply of free T-shirts will be available to participants.

White Cane Safety Day was authorized by President Lyndon B. Johnson in 1964 after advocacy by the National Federation of the Blind gained congressional approval the year before. In his proclamation, President Johnson commended the blind for the growing spirit of independence and the increased determination to be self-reliant that the organized blind had shown. The Presidential proclamation said, in part, that the annual reminder would make "people more fully aware of the meaning of the white cane and of the need for motorists to exercise special care for the blind persons who carry it."

The White Cane Awareness Day Walk is free and open to the public. This event is sponsored by the Vermont Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired (VABVI) and Vermont's Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired. For more information, call 802-254-8761.