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Handmade Christmas

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It's only 12 days until Christmas. The organized shopper has all the presents bought, wrapped and under the tree, while last-minute shoppers figure they still have 11 days to start shopping!

Whatever happened to working on a special gift all year long, only to give it with pride on Christmas Day? Not everyone can be expert enough to craft handmade gifts, but the North Country is full of craftspeople who have some very unique and helpful products for Christmas or any other time of the year.

The argument could be, "Where can I find these handmade gifts?" I'm glad you asked! Newsroom staffers scoured the Tri-County area and came up with a multitude of favorite finds that come in a number of categories.

Let's start out with Adirondack-themed gifts, popular in city and country. The Adirondack Council, 103 Hand Avenue, Elizabethtown, has joined local manufacturers, authors and artists to offer locally made and environmentally friendly gifts.

Elizabethtown resident John Chestnut was asked by the council to create a gift that would incorporate their logo, the loon, which gave birth to the Big Belly Loon Bank. The patented money-saver has a serpentine coin track design, allowing kids to watch their coins add up in the loon's belly. Chestnut contracts with another Elizabethtown resident, Peter Belzer, to handcraft the banks.

At a cost of \$45, shipping included, the banks are hand decorated with non-toxic paint from formaldehyde-free wood, and measure 23-inches tall by 16-inches wide. The creation complies with the Consumer Product Safety Improvement Act of 2008.

The Council also offers a folding Adirondack chair, matching footrest and end table, constructed of northern pine at Old Adirondack in Willsboro. The chair sells for \$230, the footrest for \$110 and the end table for \$125.

Along with the bank and furniture, the shop sells an illustrated poster map, adorned with landscape and wildlife paintings, created by the late Anne E. Lacy, an Adirondack artist, for \$25 or, if laminated, \$45.

A "Forever Wild" wall calendar, created for the Adirondack Council by landscape photographer Carl Heilman II of Brant Lake, sells for \$13.

For the readers on the Christmas list, "Adirondack Birding: 60 Great Places to Find Birds," co-authored by John M.C. Peterson of Elizabethtown and Gary N. Lee of Inlet, covers the many

boreal birds that pass through or make their homes in the Adirondacks. The book sells for \$21 and has 240 pages loaded with photos and detailed maps.

If looking for a gift for that environmentally conscious person, the Adirondack Council has carbon-reduction certificates for \$25.

That price will permanently retire three tons of carbon. But since carbon dioxide is hard to wrap, the recipient will receive a personalized certificate in their name.

Order certificates and other gifts from the Adirondack Council at their Web site www.adirondackcouncil.org.

Is there a musician on the list of hard-to-find presents? Check out the Cigar Box guitars, also known as Rot Gut Junk Rockin' Twangers made by Trevor Cole, also known as T-Bone. Available at Koffee Kat on Margaret Street, Plattsburgh, Cole was impressed with what he calls "trashy made-at-home instruments from the Great Depression." The unique instrument can be plugged into an amplifier and is made to be played across the lap, steel-guitar style. Purchase these creations starting at \$65 for the Penrose model or \$75 for La Flor de Tabacos Partagas and Macanudo guitars at Koffee Kat or from Cole at 493-4185 or cole.trevor@gmail.com.

What better way to say I care than with a delicious gift of food or a beverage? At The North Country Co-op on Bridge Street, Plattsburgh, award-winning honey by Richard Crawford of Morrisonville will delight the most delicate taste buds. The member-owned shop also offers many locally made gift items including pottery by Bill Colquhoun of Keeseville. Call the Co-op at 561-5904.

Any cold North Country winter night can be warmed up with a bowl of freshly popped popcorn. Try Miller's Popcorn. This Amish-grown treat, packaged in Brushton, isn't widely available, but can be purchased at Alix's Hardware in Chateaugay and Plattsburgh, Yando's in Malone and a few other outlets for less than \$3.

Highly recommended on the "Green Think" blog, written by Press-Republican System and Design Editor Jack Down's, this unprocessed popcorn is green. Yes, green. The reason why it's green is the fact it is real popcorn, not "nasty microwave popcorn!" Buy a big pot with a lid, a bit of oil, start a fire, and maybe, some butter, and see how many bushels of Amish popcorn you can make for \$3.

To go along with that popcorn, maybe a glass of wine or cider from Elfs Farm Cider Mill would top off the night. Located at 7411 Route 9, Plattsburgh, their gift baskets are made with locally made products and range from \$15 to \$150. Besides their own wine or cider, they can include maple syrup from Parker Family Farm in West Chazy, coffee from Lakeside Coffee in Rouses Point, jam and jelly from Suprenant's Berry Farm in Mooers or venison and Michigan sauce from Stone's Smokehouse and Meat Market in Morrisonville. They are open from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Tuesday through Sunday until Jan. 15. Call them at 563-2750 or email headelf@elfsfarm.com.

Purely a North Country icon, Adirondack Michigan sauce mix comes as a small packet of spices to mix with water and ground beef. Made by Taste of the Adirondacks, Morrisonville, at \$2.79, it's a great stocking stuffer. Call 561-6706 or buy at General Trading Company, Plattsburgh.

To satisfy that sweet tooth, try a handmade truffle from Adirondack Truffle Company. Located at 4 Seasons Plaza, Plattsburgh, more than 40 flavors of truffles are made at the chocolate shop including gingerbread, roasted chestnut, raspberry, tiramisu, peanut butter and chocolate-chip cookie. Stocking stuffer boxes start at \$5.50 and the popular 24-piece box, which holds more than a pound of truffles, sells for \$28.

Other homemade chocolate treats include almond butter crunch, pecan and cashew turtles, nonpareils, nuts and caramels, pretzels, malted milk balls and chocolate-covered coffee beans. They can be reached by calling 324-2462 or online at www.adirondacktrufflecompany.com.

High in the mountains, the Well Dressed Food Company offers chocolate "moose," a hot-fudge sauce made with hazelnuts and Adirondack maple syrup, a culinary craze created right in Tupper Lake, 95 Lake St. David Tomberlin, company founder and chef, sells products at his store and at the winter farmers markets, including the one at Lake Placid Center for the Arts. His complete line of gourmet flavor and culinary creations is online at www.welldressedfood.com or call toll free at 866-567-0845.

In Wilmington, the palate is again tested by chocolate at Candy Man Homemade Adirondack Chocolates. Among a large selection, the almond bark, at \$15.95 a pound, is popular. It is a chocolate "bark" made with almonds, striped with more chocolates and comes in milk, dark and white bark. Their store is at 61 Main St., Lake Placid, and a factory store located at the junction of Whiteface Highway and Route 86 in Wilmington. Check out their selection at www.candymanonline.com.

Take time to dress up and accent that special outfit with handcrafted accessories from Wolf Pack and Dreamcrafters Quilt Shop, 1422 Route 37, Akwesasne. Georgia Bell crafts necklace and earring sets, many from green aventurine gemstones, in sterling silver for \$45. Kathy Colburn sells her quilted purse sets for between \$40 and \$60. They are double quilted, machine washable cotton with optional matching wallet and checkbook cover. Colburn also creates quilts, one specially inspired by the book "The Secret," that sells for \$225. Call the shop at 358-4285.

The Market Barn, Route 11, Malone, is a mix of sellers including many local craftspeople with a wide variety of products. Trendy yarn hats, created by Grace Carkey of Malone, make wonderful stocking stuffers and are affordable at \$15. Jill Tedford of Saranac sells her re-purposed bottles, all dressed up with an assortment of designs and characters, accented with pretty lights. They sell for \$27. Also at the Market Barn are plush and useful photo albums. The 100-page padded albums and book covers are made by Phyllis Williams of Morrisonville and sell from a few dollars to \$20.99.

At the Crafty Ewe Yarn and Fabric, 174 Lake George Avenue, Ticonderoga, Regine Hebert sells her large chocolate and teal carry bag for \$55. Call Hebert, who is the store's proprietor, at 585-6325.

In the practical and necessary category, Marjorie Swift is best known for her "bug bonnets" and "gnat hats," a creation made from colorful cloth, featuring a wide brim and netting. They have become a favorite for gardeners and hikers throughout the spring, summer and early fall in the Adirondacks. She also offers winter hats and scarves made from a plethora of materials. Hat prices range from \$16 to \$40. In addition, her pot holders sell for \$3. To buy her products or for custom orders, contact MA Swift Originals, 92 Serenity Lane, Wilmington, call 946-7642 or mas7642@yahoo.com. They can also be purchased at The Mountaineer in Keene Valley and Old Forge Hardware.

Also in the practical and necessary category is the all natural balsam scented powder created by Gail Relyea at Mountain Gift and Powder, 13 Broadway, Saranac Lake, 891-4206. This specially designed product is good for deodorizing boots, shoes and sneakers and sells for \$5.25.

Decorate your home year round with tea and sea recycled objects by Judith Beckley of Tea and Treasures, located at Tip Top Frame Arts Center and Galley, I-87 exit 36, 4161 Route 22, Plattsburgh. A tea aficionado, Beckley creates lamps from sugar bowls, vintage canning jars filled with buttons and Maine lobster buoys. Prices range from \$50 to \$75. She also creates teacup chandeliers, priced at \$125.

At Yarborough Square, Bear Swamp Road, Peru, home décor gets a boost with Adirondack images in 8x10-inch prints, matted, for \$10, by Bonnie Rondeau of AuSable Forks. Lee and Sherry Cross of Jay have crafted pottery in various designs, ranging from \$17 to \$44, and accent pieces with matching pine-cone designs on vases, bowls and mugs. For a unique accent on the favorite outfit, try a copper enameled pendant, crafted by Stevie Capozie of Wilmington, that sells for \$24. The pendant is two-inches round with wildlife and floral images. Call Yarborough Square at 643-7057.

Wall art is available from Connie Cassevaugh, an artist who paints Lake Champlain scenes. She sells prints of her artwork, but also makes note cards and coasters. Note cards sell for \$3, coasters for \$1.50. Some of her art work is available at Lakeside Coffee in Rouses Point and at Tip-Top Frame in Plattsburgh. Contact Cassevaugh at 297-3536 or ccassevaugh@yahoo.com.

In the "unique" category, Adirondack mosquitoes and black flies are in season. These large replicas are made out of thistle, partridge feathers and pipe cleaners. Available at Adirondack Itch owned by David Mayette, Beekmantown, he can be reached by calling 561-5363 or smayette5363@charter.net

Also very unique are Sasnu's Bizarre Bazaar soft sculpture people. Susan King of 325 Moffitt Road, Plattsburgh, has been making her soft sculpture people for over 40 years, each an original design. Faces are sculptured using panty hose filled with batting, sewn into whimsical visages, and then attached to a variety of materials. Prices range from \$2 for her flower children to \$10 for hand puppets and \$40 or more for larger puppets and wall decorations. She also creates santas, snowmen and tree ornaments. Reach her by calling 802-598-5248.

It is virtually impossible to highlight every beautifully handmade craft in the North Country, so be sure to check small and large shops that offer these wonderful keepsakes and useful products. Purchasing locally boosts the area's economy and encourages artisans to continue in their expertise.

No matter which item is chosen as a gift, there are sure to be many smiles when they are opened on Christmas morning or any morning for any occasion all year long.

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