



Northville's Renaissance

By Tamara Johnson

Chances are, if you've driven Route 30 through the southern Adirondacks you've passed the village of Northville without realizing it. In the town of Northampton there's a bridge that crosses the Great Sacandaga Lake. Driving over it transports you to a Norman Rockwell-esque place filled with history, and more than a few surprises.

Northville is home to 1,100 people and two lakes: the Northville Lake, called the "Little Lake" by locals, and the aforementioned Great Sacandaga. You'll also find life-long residents and transplants, a revived Northville Central School, the Northville-Placid Trailhead, and numerous local businesses. The more you peel back the layers, the more you see how dynamic the village is.

This small corner of the park has a unique history. According to the Northville-Northampton Historical Society, "The first permanent settlement took place in the late 1790's. The village was incorporated in 1873." K.B. Shaw, author of *Northampton, Then and Now*, wrote that Northville grew rapidly after it was incorporated. When the railroad came along, "the village was the financial hub of the logging industry and the gateway to the entire area to the north."

The Sacandaga Valley was home to farms and families at that time. The Sacandaga River fed into the Hudson causing flooding. Folks downstream in cities like Albany took to the streets in rowboats when its banks would overflow.

On the other side of the river from Northville was a popular tourist attraction: Sacandaga Park. Formerly a Methodist camp, the F.J.&G. Railroad purchased the land and created the amusement park to help bolster their revenue.

It was bursting with entertainment. To name just a few aspects of the park, it had: a nine hole golf course, midway, Sport Island, which held popular for baseball games, a bowling alley, roller skating rink, and a bandstand where J. Philip Sousa and E.W. Prouty's Orchestras played. In the "Rustic Theater" well-known actors such as Zasu Pitts performed.

Trains arrived from New York City everyday. Shaw wrote, "At its peak, the park area drew close to 100,000 visitors annually." Many Northville residents worked there in the hotels—such as High Rock Lodge, The Pines, and the Adirondack Inn—and on the midway, running the train, and so on.

Village historian Gail Cramer said, "It was a very, very busy place. Northville took advantage of that. We had nine hotels (maybe six at any one time—some burned down)." She related that several different trains would arrive each day bringing "people from Albany, Schenectady, Troy, New Jersey..."

Unfortunately for the park, and Northville's economy, the state eventually decided to do something about the Hudson's flooding. In 1930 the Conklingville Dam was completed and the reservoir, now known as the Great Sacandaga Lake, was created.

Gail said that the, "Hudson River Regulating Board bought all the land. You didn't have a choice of how much. They just said this what you're going to get. None of it was really fair if you think about it." She went on to say that when she was younger she never fully realized the extent of what happened to the people in the valley. "Back then ... people didn't talk about things."

She feels that the film, *Harnessing Nature: Building the Great Sacandaga* opened people's eyes to what took place. "I think in a sense, the film has made people so aware of what was there. I do think in those terms, even though they weren't affected personally, now they're thinking about how others were."

When the reservoir filled, the flooding downstream stopped. Many families from the valley lost their homes, farms, and livelihoods. Altogether, 12 towns were either completely or partially lost. Places with names like Cranberry Creek, Parkville, and Day Center, are now under water.

Harnessing Nature explains the mixed feelings about the project in excellent detail. Described in the movie as, "an unhappy time for a lot of people," the creation of the reservoir was seen as a tragedy in the area. Now it's viewed as a "beautiful lake" that "provides jobs and a way of life for a new generation of families."

The lake has greatly benefited the area with tourism, vacation homes—and thus, the extra tax base—excellent fishing, boating, and so on. Gail said, "I rarely go across the bridge and don't think [about] how fortunate we are to have it."

Another gem that gets part of its name in the village is the 136-mile Northville-Placid Trail. Hikers start out under the beautiful wood archway in Waterfront Park, made by local artisanal woodworker, Bill Coffey. They finish up in the famed Olympic town of Lake Placid.

Bill said, "[The village] called me into a town meeting, and they said, can you make this? And can you make it big enough

so a tractor-trailer and a fire truck can fit under it?" Local schoolteacher Pat Bittell came up with the design, but told Bill to craft the sign as he saw fit. He added his own special touch, "On top I put the fire tower [made] out of copper."

While the sign may be new, the trail has some history behind it. According to the Adirondack Mountain Club's *Adirondack Trails Northville-Placid Trail* guide, work on the trail started in 1922. It was the club's first project, backed by an officer at the Standard Oil Company, George D. Pratt, who was also the first president of the club. In 1924 the project was completed, and in 1927 the club donated it to New York State.

The Northville-Placid Trail takes hikers through the varied landscape inside the Blue Line, into some of the wildest lands in the entire United States. Author, Walt McLaughlin, writes poetically about his experiences on the trail in his book, *The Allure of Deep Woods*:

The wild is that intangible, unnamable otherness that's so pervasive out here. I see it in the green infinity all around me. I hear it in the deep forest silence.... It excites all my senses yet remains imperceptible, ever elusive, mystical. It's something raw and unfettered. It's what motivates people like me to come out here time and again.





When it comes to the future of Northville, Mayor John Spaeth says the village has a 20-year comprehensive plan. He calls it a two-pronged attack: “managed growth of [the] economy and businesses, and looking at the larger projects that we need to fix.” One project is a waterfront revitalization program to make the Little Lake more accessible and tourist friendly.

According to the mayor the goal is to increase tourism, and entice families and younger people to put down roots. “What we’ve found [is] if we can get people across the bridge and into the village, [they] will come to like us and potentially want to come and live here.”

Originally from New York City, Bill Coffey is one of many local artists living in the area. “I came up here 18 years ago. It wasn’t by mistake but it was close to it. I came here to work on a piece of commercial property. Six weeks turned into 18 years.”

His gallery hosts eight other artist’s work, including Rhea Haggart Costello’s beautiful pottery and paintings. Bill’s own work can be found around the village. Aside from the archway in Waterfront Park, he built the bar in the Timeless Tavern, along with pieces at the Johnson’s Farm Store and the Inn at the Bridge. He also recently made the memorial for fallen Northville Police Officer, and personal friend, Bob Johnson.

When asked what’s so great about Northville, Bill had this to say, “I find Northville ... it’s where you go to get away from the city, it’s where people come to vacation; I get to live where people vacation.”

The village also boasts the Sacandaga Valley Arts Network (SVAN). The SVAN gallery and gift shop is on Main Street in the old parsonage of the First United Methodist Church. SVAN also has a gallery in the second floor of the Northville Library, among other places.

In addition to providing space for artists to show their work, SVAN acts as a gathering place for the people of the village. President Rick Hasenauer says they host weekly concerts during the summer at the Waterfront Park. “Summer is our busiest season. We can get 300 to 400 people to some of our concerts.”

SVAN also sponsors five monthly concerts from January–May, as well as an arts education program. Rick said the programs “have been quite varied in the past, including painting, photography, textile/fabric art, pottery, quilting, and wood-working.”

While Northville has businesses like a Tops Grocery store and Rite Aid, these kinds of services aren’t always a given in Adirondack towns. Many people inside the Blue Line drive long distances for basics like food and medication. The next grocery store you’ll find going north along Route 30 is Charlie Johns in Speculator—and that’s some 30 miles away.

Aside from those two chains, Howard Hanna Realty, and the Stewart’s, the rest of the businesses in the village are locally owned. That’s by design. Mayor Spaeth shared a defining moment for Northville, “There was a company that was looking to bring in a big box store. There was a public hearing and a huge uproar over that. What it brought out was the whole idea of trying to do something to preserve the character of the village.”



These days along Main Street you'll find shops like the Johnson Family Farm Store. The Johnson's started out selling produce from their town of Hope-based farm at farmers markets around the region.

Anne-Marie Johnson said, "Brad [her husband] always had a dream of opening up a store. I was very nervous of letting go of all these markets." But when the Johnson's were offered first refusal on their current 200-year-old space, they took it. The store was open four weeks later. Aside from produce, the shop offers healthy lunches, and dinners to bring home. They also sell a variety of goods from other local producers.

"I've seen a big change in Northville. Every year there's new faces coming in and more ideas from a lot of people who are motivated. Lots of little things that have added up," Anne-Marie shared.



The Adirondack Country Store is Joyce Teshoney's beautifully appointed gift shop. In January of 2018, she was recognized by the Fulton-Montgomery Regional Chamber of Commerce with the Small Business of the Year Award.

For Joyce, opening a shop was something she always had an interest in. After moving to the area for her husband's job in the 1980's, they bought the building and things took off from there. "Northville has come a long way in the last 30 years. There's just more here in town for people to come up and see. It's the kind of place you can take a drive to and just spend the afternoon, walking from one place to another."

Northville is also home to the oldest five and dime in the country, dating back to 1907. It's famous for its fudge, which co-owner Susan Correll started making a few years ago. According to her husband Brian, "She really enjoyed making fudge, and started making 15 varieties at a time. [It's] worked out real good."

The Correll's recently received a \$500,000 grant from the State's Economic Development Fund. They plan to build a camping and fishing section on the second floor, and a tea-room/bakery/restaurant in the building next door, which they purchased.

They already have their baker, Erick Draper, a local who moved back from South Carolina for the position. The couple also wants to add a courtyard, a banquet hall, and then some.



Another interesting store is Sacandaga Dog Supply. Bill Ellsworth, the owner of this family run emporium, stocks dog feed and supplies as the name suggests, but he also sells items for all kinds of pets—including cats and birds—along with wood pellets, farm feed, canoes ... "Whatever works," he said.

Originally from Binghampton, Bill says his family—including son Sam and daughter in-law Melissa, who also work at the store—is blessed to live in Northville. "There's gobs and gobs of good people up here. We ended up moving here totally by accident... I'll never leave, it's perfect."

Peck's Flowers recently opened its second shop across from Tops in an old red stagecoach barn on their property. The original store in Gloversville was started by Bob Peck's family years ago. The addition of a second shop in Northville marks a new chapter for the Peck family. The store has an "earthy"-themed full service flower shop, and sells American-made gifts.



Sally Peck said she knew the village was the place for her decades ago. “I crossed the bridge one day—oh my gosh—30 years ago, and I just fell in love. I [told] my husband [Bob] we had to live there.”

Lapland Lake in Benson, while not in the village proper, is an important part of its economy. Many of the cross-country ski resort’s guests shop, eat, and get gas in Northville. Founded in 1978 by Olympian Olavi Hirvonen, Lapland is a much-loved institution.

Now owned by Kathy and Paul Zahray, the resort offers 11 housekeeping cottages at present (soon to offer 12), a semi-private lake, and over 50km of trails for cross-country skiing and snowshoeing in the winter—hiking and mountain biking in the summer and fall.

Restaurants run the gamut in Northville. The Inn at the Bridge, run by Michael Intrabartola and his wife, is a Bed & Breakfast that opens up to the public for meals on Fridays and Saturdays. The building has welcomed people into Northville from its place next to the bridge for over a century. You can’t miss this impressive structure, built in 1910 by the logging baron John A. Willard.

In the June 2018 issue of Adirondack Life Magazine, the Inn was named the number one Bed & Breakfast in the Adirondacks. Quite an honor, especially after the Inn had been shuttered for many years before the Intrabartola family took on the task of rehabbing it. “It’s been a really nice journey, you know, building this and having it for the people of the village. Everyone seems to be happy that the lights are on here again,” Michael said.

A few blocks down Bridge Street you’ll find a village mainstay, Klippel’s Kozy Korner. Started by their father Russ in 1993, brother and sister, Heather and James Klippel, provide delicious comfort food and a gathering place for locals and tourists alike. Longtime friend and employee, Sara Wilson, uses her humor and infectious smile to make everyone feel at home.

The village’s fine dining establishment—which also has rooms for rent—is the Timeless Tavern, owned by Lisa and Tom Wood. The tavern is rustic with an inviting atmosphere. Lisa, the chef, grew up in Northville and “always loved the area and the people.”

She “tries to work with the local farms and farmers markets as much as possible. Everything is prepared to order and with fresh ingredients.” The Woods feel the restaurant has benefited from the growth in the area, and they “believe that giving back to the community is important and appreciated.”

Lisa asked, “Who wouldn’t want to live here?” As she said, the area’s beautiful, safe, and the people are friendly.

One could mistake Stewart’s as the village square, due to the number of people there at any given time, eating ice cream in the summer at the picnic tables, or having coffee with friends at an inside booth.

That being said, there are two main centers to this civic-driven village: Northville Central School and the multitude of events put on by groups like the Rotary Club and the Civic Association.

Mayor Spaeth said, “If you’re looking for a single place to say that’s the hub, the school would be it.” However, he quickly pointed out, “There’s a lot of events that take place in the town that are not school-centric.”

He credited many of these events to the Community Collaboration Council. “We have a lot of volunteer organizations.” The purpose is to get everyone into the same room regularly to coordinate and plan. It seems to have paid off.

Area events include a weekly farmers market at Waterfront Park, the Woodworking and Fine Art Weekend, “The Doins” and parade for Independence Day, movie nights provided through the Joint Youth Organization, the Winter Festival, and much more.

When it comes to Northville Central School, Superintendent Dr. Leslie Ford and Middle and High School Principal, Kyle McFarland, have taken the graduation rate from 76–94% in recent years. Kyle credits much of this to adding college

classes, a focus on careers, and community service. "We want our students to understand that they are vibrant members of the community," he said.

The school also has a Capital Project going. It's expanded the playground, created new basketball and softball fields, added a pre-K playground, and a walking path. Dr. Ford said, "We're also placing an amphitheater [on the property—mic'd and lighted] for evening performances." Additionally, the project will provide Wi-Fi for the entire community, among other improvements. "All that was done with the school in mind," Dr. Ford said, "because the district is a hub for the village."

Mayor Spaeth says, "I don't know that you can necessarily put a finger on what makes Northville special ... unique shops, [the] school, civic [aspects], walk-ability, proximity to lakes and proximity to Saratoga and Albany. I think it's a combination of those things that makes up the village of Northville. We have a unique character."

Northville is home to many genuine people who are working to support and grow the community. Together they are creating what Sally Peck refers to as a renaissance in the village. Take a drive over the bridge and experience it for yourself. Maybe, like Sally, you'll decide to stay too.



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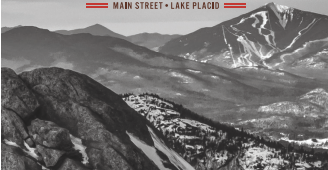




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