

# Kearsarge

MAGAZINE

Winter 2009/2010

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## Vacations with a Purpose

To travel is to explore,  
dream, discover

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# To Travel Is to EXPLORE, DREAM, DISCOVER (So Says Mark Twain)

BY Deborah McKew

**“Q**ui non lavora, non mangia!” (*If you don't work, you don't eat*) barks Chef Donatella to the 16 would-be cooks in her kitchen. Andrew D'Amico is the first to respond, taking firm hold of the giant frying pan's 2-foot-long handle. The group, sporting bright red aprons, crowds around the oversized gas burners, inhaling the savory aroma emanating from the pan — a blend of lamb, rosemary and garlic sizzling in a pool of golden olive oil. In an instant, the room erupts with preparations for the four-course afternoon meal: against one long wall, a group kneads dough on wooden boards to roll into spaghetti; in the corner, a few chop onions and tomatoes; at the far end of a stainless steel table, several novices grate potatoes. Through it all, Donatella keeps her eye on their progress, snapping directives in Italian faster than the translator can keep up. D'Amico takes mental notes, fodder for the story he will write of this experience.

D'Amico and his wife, Liz, of Springfield had shared a lifelong dream of venturing to Italy, but they put it off for years. Both educators, they wanted more than just a vacation, they wanted to learn something new. In 2008, the couple signed up for a creative adventure in Tuscany offering art and writing workshops organized through Compass Travel of New London. “The minute we went to the informational gathering we knew this was a natural for us,” says Liz. “We had never been to Italy, and we wanted to go there in a meaningful way.”

For one week in October, Liz, an artist who teaches at Plymouth State College, sketched her way through the Tuscan hills; Andy, a pre-engineering

teacher at John Stark Regional High School, captured his Italian journey through vivid verbs and descriptive nouns. Since returning home, Liz has sold a few watercolors she painted from her pencil sketches of that trip; Andy earned professional development credits at his school, which encourages writing across disciplines. The program allowed the two to delve deeper into their experience. They didn't just wander the market in Cortona, they telescoped in to capture details of Italian life in words and drawings; they walked the ancient town more observant for their mission. For Liz, sketching “makes a scene real and memorable.”

Savvy travelers today are leaving home in search of much more than just

rest and relaxation. According to the U.S. Travel Association, one out of five travelers claim learning something new or improving a skill is the priority for their trips. Nearly one out of every two adults travels for an adventure. A new vocabulary has sprung up when it comes to travel, including such terms as voluntourism (combining some type of community service with a cool destination) and geotourism (taking care of the planet in a cool destination on said planet). The residents of the Lake Sunapee region are no exception to these trends; locals find all sorts of reasons to travel — to improve themselves, protect the places they visit, or connect with the people they encounter.

Ann Hargraves of Hanover has many memorable educational travel moments — there was the time she was “treated like royalty” on a trans-Canada train trip, or when she cruised the inside passages of Alaska's waterways through massive ice channels, or woke up at 4 a.m. to trek across the desert sands of Cairo in order to be the first in line at the museums in the Valley of the Kings. This adventurous soul journeyed with other interested and interesting folk who soaked up all they could before they packed their bags, studying the music, history, literature, politics and religions of these distant lands in courses offered by Dartmouth's ILEAD program.

For nearly 20 years, local residents have taken advantage of the educational and cultural programs presented by ILEAD (Institute for Lifelong Education at Dartmouth). Since its inception in 1990, ILEAD has offered more than 1,000 study groups with participation by more than 18,000 members. One of

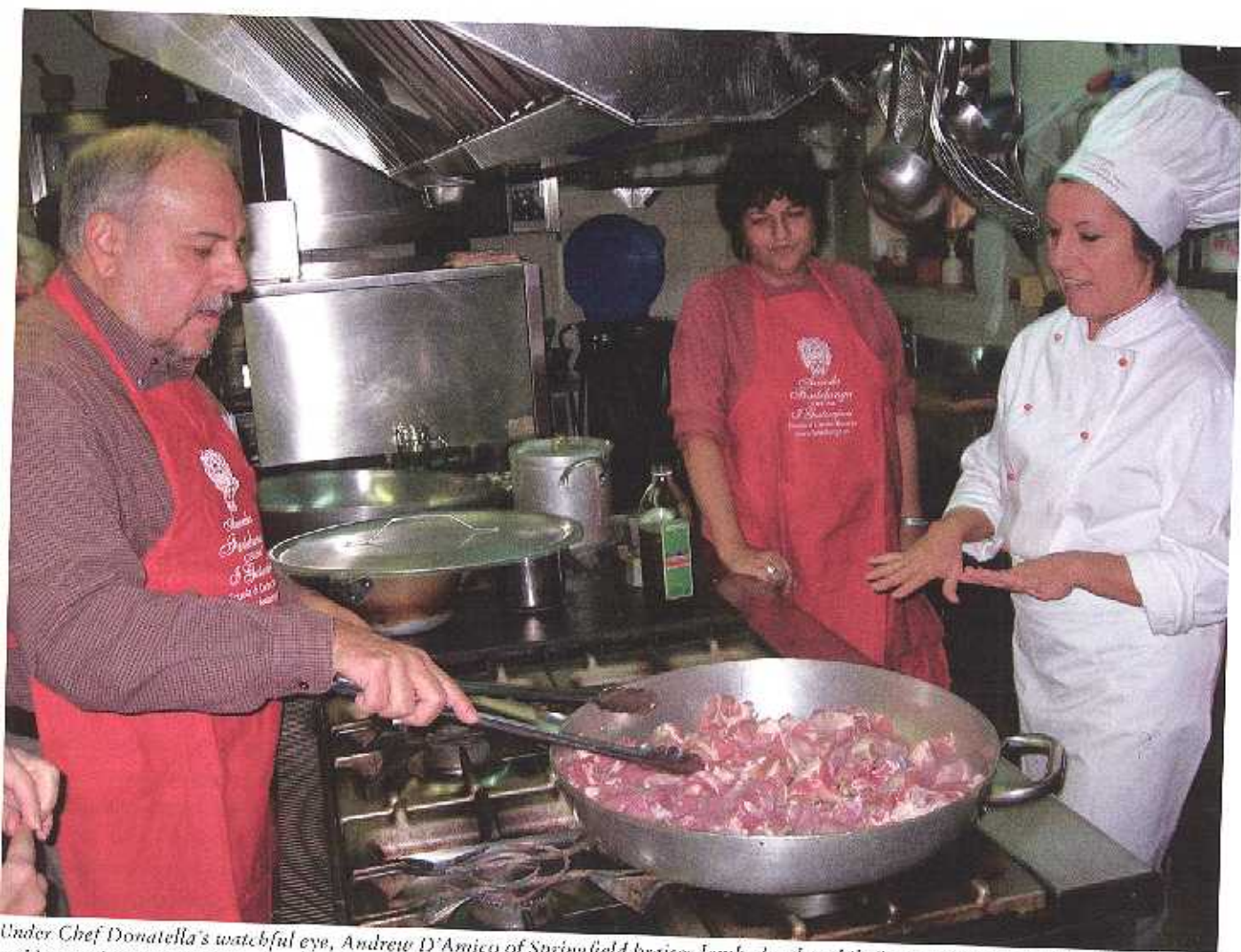


Members of ILEAD take a balloon ride over Capadoccia, Turkey.



Randy Richards of Sunapee climbs the French Ridge in Mount Aspiring Park, New Zealand on a reconnaissance mission for Mountain Spirit Institute program offerings.





Under Chef Donatella's watchful eye, Andrew D'Amico of Springfield braises lamb chunks while Susan Bellavance of Newbury listens and learns during a cooking class in Italy.

the more popular components of this charter is the travel program. Usually, at least one trip is planned each year, depending on the interests of members and tour organizers.

"I don't know if we would have gone to Egypt without the ILEAD courses," says Hargraves, a retired CPA who is now president of ILEAD. "Knowing a little about the place you are going to helps you appreciate what you are seeing." On that Egyptian trip, Hargraves explains, "the tour leader would write our daily itineraries in hieroglyphics, and we could read them!"

Bob Koester of Grantham helped organize an ILEAD program to Turkey in March 2006. A retired engineer, Koester's avid interest in astronomy takes him around the world to follow solar eclipses. He and his wife, Elaine, had planned to visit Turkey that year, when the sun would be hidden in broad

daylight. In his research (he admits to "devouring any book I can to make the trip more memorable") he recognized that traipsing through Turkey might be of interest to ILEAD, of which he was a member. He proposed the tour to the study travel group, they accepted, and he helped organize the courses to be offered in preparation for it. Most of the people who signed up were not all that interested in the eclipse, Koester relates, but "when that eclipse happened, I had more people come up to me hugging me and thanking me for this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity."

To participate in a travel program, members must complete a minimum of three ILEAD courses related to a particular trip. "One of the joys of ILEAD," says Hargraves, "is that you take out of it what you want. There are no grades."

#### **A traveler, not a tourist**

On a warm March day in 2009,

nearly two dozen people crowded into the living room of Shelby Blunt's New London home; seats circled a movie screen, blankets covered the large windows to block sunlight, and anticipation filled the air. Blunt's sister, Sunny Coady, was about to present photos of her two visits to India. Contrary to the common notion that vacation slide shows are good opportunities for naps, Coady entertained her audience with vivid stories, weaving humor, history and cultural trivia into a true armchair traveler's experience.

In that New London living room, Coady's audience peppered her with questions; her answers solicited both laughter and awe. Wilmot resident Heidi Leighton enjoys the occasional slide shows Coady presents because "it's a way to continue learning, albeit vicariously."

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In 1994, Coady's office colleague, Ashish Malhotra, invited her to his wedding — not unusual, except that the ceremonies would take place in Delhi, India. "What was so special about that event was that I was included as part of the family," says Coady. For the festivities, Coady participated in traditional Indian wedding customs, such as having her hands painted with a henna tattoo to signify the celebration of a joyous occasion. "When I went to the local shops afterward, people who saw my hands knew I had been to a special event," says the New London resident who extended her visit to India to tour the country by train. On that tour, she befriended a group of British travelers she has since visited in England several times. Coady recently returned to India for one week that included a stop in Calcutta and a stay at a Darjeeling tea plantation where she met new friends.

"When you are out there," says Coady of her penchant for travel, "things happen." She likes to "understand the culture of a country, to learn about its people — how they are the same as me and how they are different. I like the surprises, the art, the history, the people and the food." Traveling to a beautiful destination for the sake of a vacation is fine, she says, but "it's not the same as sharing a wedding or a train adventure" with friends in new places.

"She's not a tourist," says Blunt of her sister's adventures around the world. "She's a traveler."

#### See the world, view life differently

Cultural awareness is fast becoming a necessity more than a luxury. As Thomas L. Friedman expounds in his book, *The World is Flat*, one must be empathetic as well as internationally savvy to be successful and live in harmony in our global community. To this end, many young people study abroad in a myriad of programs offered through colleges and universities, or culturally oriented nonprofit groups that help place volunteers in programs around the world.

Kai Eldredge, a 2008 graduate of Sunapee High School, deferred her



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acceptance to the University of Chicago to spend a year immersed in other cultures. She chose to begin her journey with India "because it seemed such a stretch and so far out there," says the teen. Eldredge took this gap year to gain experiences she could never find in the classroom. "I want to do university justice," reports Eldredge in an email from Peru. "It would be a complete waste of time and money to just skid through it, as I would if I went straight there [from high school], whereas with the break, I will be able to go to college and really appreciate what I am offered."

For one year, Eldredge lived in several countries that offer diverse opportunities to explore: she nurtured preschool children in an Indian day care; assisted patients in Russian nursing homes and children's hospitals; fed rescue animals and cleared trails in the Peruvian rain forests ("I'm now wicked good with a machete," she boasts); and taught English in Argentinean classrooms. While participating in these projects, the college-bound young American authentically experienced each culture, befriended citizens from around the globe, discovered her passions, and toyed with possible vocational plans. In addition, she came away with a profound appreciation for what so many of us take for granted. During her stay in the rain forests of Peru, Eldredge writes, "We went into town only on the weekends... so for a day we all experienced Internet, ice cream and hot showers!"

#### Pay it forward

Another young person who is learning that helping others echoes back tenfold is 16 year-old Garrett Stuart of Concord. Stuart has a neurological disease called dystonia which affects his ability to move. He was wheelchair bound for years until a revolutionary surgical procedure gave him back his ability to walk. When granted a once-in-a-lifetime trip by the Make-A-Wish Foundation, Stuart opted to pay forward the gift of mobility that the surgery provided him by giving "the freedom of movement and pride back to people who have lost it," Stuart and his parents

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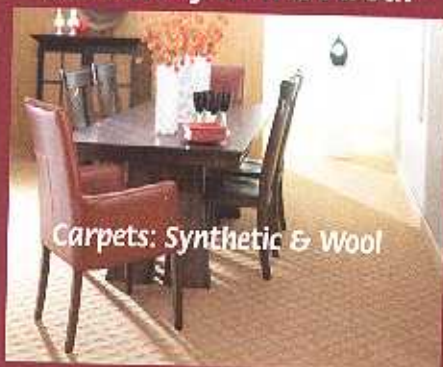
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traveled to Cambodia in July 2009 to spend a week building wheelchairs, which they then presented to people who had lost limbs or were paralyzed. "It will be really cool to see a different culture," said Stuart just before he left, "to meet and talk to these people and to get their perspective on life."

Stuart's trip was organized through the nonprofit group GlobeAware, whose mission is to promote peace and positive change in the world by offering people the opportunity to understand other cultures on a deeper level. "It's about connecting," says Catherine McMillan, GlobeAware's vice president of volunteer communications. "We're global citizens, we're all neighbors, and we need to help each other."

You don't have to travel abroad to be a global citizen. Susan and Larry Chase, residents of Andover, have found a way to travel extensively through

North America and help both others and the environment. The Chases often spent family vacations at national parks and, along the way, learned about their volunteer programs. Retirement gave the New England couple a perfect opportunity to return some of the joy they found in our natural treasures. Their first assignment was at Arches National Park in Moab, Utah, where they lived for five months as interpreters — knowledgeable and friendly ambassadors for the site (staffing the visitor center, leading hikes through the park, maintaining the trails, always encouraging thoughtful appreciation of the ecology of the area).

"It was a privilege," says Larry Chase about his experiences in southeastern Utah's striking red-rock country. "Until this assignment, we'd spent our entire working lives in a totally different environment: behind desks in suburban New Jersey."

The Chases returned to Utah

several times and have volunteered in other programs in New Mexico, Florida and Alaska, often receiving room and board in exchange for their time. "In addition to having a great time, living in beautiful parts of this country, and meeting fascinating people, perhaps the most important thing to us personally is that these experiences have pushed us to keep learning new things and meeting new challenges while also being of help to causes and concerns we think are worthwhile," writes Susan in an email sent from Haines, Alaska, where the couple spent last winter volunteering in local community programs.

Each summer the Chases return to their cottage on Bradley Lake in Andover, and each winter, with no permanent home to migrate to, they pack lightly and move to a new place, as Larry explains, to "experience, for an extended period, a part of our country about as different from New Jersey as any place could be."

#### Views from a mountaintop

"You can feel the energy of the glacier," says Randy Richards of the climb up the rugged face of the French Ridge in Mount Aspiring National Park, New Zealand. "It's a living, breathing entity, very powerful."

Richards, a longtime resident of Sunapee, is spending most of his time these days on mountaintops, presently in the land down under. He is the founder and director of Mountain Spirit Institute (MSI), an organization whose mission is to encourage people to climb high in order to understand what's deep inside. Richards believes wholeheartedly in helping people connect to themselves, to others and to the environment.

MSI provides "out-of-the-ordinary travel"; Richards sponsors experiential adventures around the world from the Rocky Mountains of the American West to the Sacred Mountains of India. His institute is built upon a hybridization of adventure travel mixed with cultural immersion and a good dose of environmentalism — all of which is designed to encourage participants to think differently about the world they live in and to foster empathy, tolerance and compassion.

## VACATIONS WITH PURPOSE

Whether you want to sketch or study, climb high or dig deep, you can find a program that suits your needs. Here are a few places to start your research.

### Compass Travel

Specializing in escorted tours, the staff at Compass Travel provides a guide to all the ins and outs, nooks and crannies of destinations around the world.

[www.compasstravel.net](http://www.compasstravel.net)

### Mountain Spirit Institute

The institute combines experiential wilderness programs with spiritual development. Some programs are solely wilderness based, while others are workshop based.

[www.mtnspirit.org](http://www.mtnspirit.org)

### Institute of Lifelong Education at Dartmouth

As a self-supporting department of Dartmouth College, ILEAD's purpose is to promote learning through a continuing series of thought provoking topics.

[www.dartmouth.edu/~ilead/studytravel.html](http://www.dartmouth.edu/~ilead/studytravel.html)

### GlobeAware

GlobeAware develops short-term volunteer programs in international

environments that encourage people to immerse themselves in a unique way of giving back.

[www.globecaware.org](http://www.globecaware.org)

### National Parks Service

The National Park Service Volunteers-In-Parks Program (VIP) began in 1970. The primary purpose of the VIP program is to connect the National Park Service with people who wish to volunteer their help and services.

[www.nps.gov](http://www.nps.gov)

### The Nature Conservancy

If you are interested in volunteering to help nature and the environment, performing volunteer work with others who share your love of nature, check out the opportunities with this nonprofit.

[www.nature.org](http://www.nature.org)



Richards founded MSI on the basis of what he learned from Outward Bound, but he strives to emphasize the spiritual element of one's excursions into the wilderness. One person who took that message even further is Georges Mills resident Beck Bowles, a former board member of MSI. During her tenure with the institute, Bowles organized a program presented by Theo Paredes, Ph.D., an anthropologist who studies indigenous cultures worldwide. (The program was featured in *Kearsarge Magazine* fall 2006.) He inspired Bowles to learn more; she has gone on to study shamanism in the United States and in the forests of Peru.

Bowles describes her journeys in a tiny boat up the Amazon River to the primitive village of Tamshiyacu, from which she treks 45 minutes through the rain forest to a thatched hut with few creature comforts. To her, this is a means to an end; the destination is a sacred, healing place where she purges toxins from her mind and body and shares in the energy around her. "It's fascinating to sit with indigenous people and hear their stories," says Bowles of this retreat center in Peru she has visited several times. "There's an interconnectedness to everything." A licensed massage therapist and cranial sacral therapist who practices in New London, Bowles applies her experience and knowledge of shamanism to her vocation. The shaman, she says, learns to look at a person holistically, using intuition to guide them in their healing.

Whether cooking in an Italian kitchen, climbing ice capped mountains in New Zealand, floating down the Amazon River, or helping to preserve our national parks, curious souls can find what they are looking for in just about any corner of the world. The key is not to be a tourist, but a traveler!

*Deb McKew is a freelance writer, editor and teacher. She incorporates travel into her work whenever she can. The people she meets and the experiences she has both inspire and inform her writing. You can learn more about her workshops at [www.wordsinplay.net](http://www.wordsinplay.net)*

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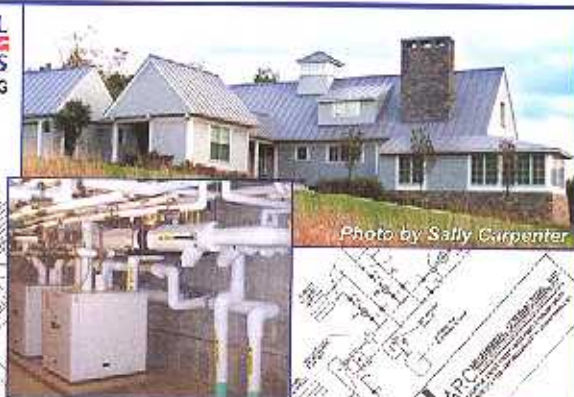
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