

Local items make great gifts for those both near and far

BY LYNDA TWARDOWSKI
Special to the Record-Eagle

When it comes to that special someone at the top of your list, chances are you want to give a gift that's special, personal and one of a kind. Luckily, Northern Michigan offers a treasure trove of gift options — beyond the region's famed wine, fudge, apple and cherry edibles — that can't be found anywhere but here.

■ **Warm Holiday Wishes:** Thinking of turning to your inner Martha Stewart and crafting some fashionable and functional homemade candles? In the midst of a flurry of cookie baking, holiday card addressing and party planning? Candles aren't impossible to make over your stove at home, but buying variety of ones made on site at the Candle Factory in Traverse City is infinitely easier. Make your season bright by picking up any of the heart-and-hearth warming original designs offered.

■ **Holiday Banquet:** American Spoon Foods offers a holiday sampler of brand-new Spoon items — Golden Fruit and Nut Mix, lime curd, lemon curd, peach grapefruit marmalade, Carmel Apple Syrup and a Cranberry Nougat Bar — which can be packed in an illustrated folk art box.

Got a special dieter on your list? American Spoon Foods has low-carb, low-gluten, no-allergy, low-fat

and no-fat, said Kathy Brewer, a salesperson at their store in the Grand Traverse Resort (There's also one in downtown Traverse City, Petoskey and Harbor Springs). You can order by fax, phone, Web, or pick and package your choices in the store and send them yourself. No matter how you do it, take advantage of American Spoon Foods' always-open invitation to sample before you spend or send.

"I always tell people, 'Only get worried when you bring in your plastic silverware and a folding chair,'" said Brewer.

See www.spoon.com or call (800) 222-5886 for more information.

■ **Holly Cherries:** If Christmases past have haunted your gift recipients' taste buds with all things cherry, why not inspire another sense with the area's famed fruit? The Leland Cherry Company in Leland recently launched a new line of cherry-based body products. Michelle's Miracle Cherry Smoothie Bath and Shower Gel, Cherry Moisture Seal and Cherry Body Polish are just some of the items. See www.lelandcherry.com or call (800) 939-3199 for more information.

■ **Winter Wonderland:** Diamonds aren't mined here, but a gift that can conjure romance is on a scenic train ride. In honor of the holiday season, each year the Grand Traverse



Crabapple butter, lime curd and lemon curd are just some of the new items that American Spoon Foods is offering for the holidays.

Record-Eagle/Meegan M. Reid

Dinner Train recreates a Victorian Christmas theme in which guests dine on an elegant five-course meal as they coast through northern lower Michigan's snowy landscape. Can't make it in December? Don't worry; the dinner train hosts various themed rides year-round, and the menu changes each month to reflect locally grown ingredients. Gift certificates (which are good for six months) can be purchased in advance. For more infor-

mation see www.dinnertrain.com or call 933-3768.

■ **Deck the Halls:** Northern Michigan is known for its beauty; as a result, it's also known for its artists. Let those who have been inspired by the landscape help you inspire the home of somebody on your list. Shop online at ArtistsNorth.com, an online gallery of area artists who have created everything from fiber works, furniture and sculpture to glass, mixed media

and painting as an ode to the nature around us.

Big-ticket items like the wild tangles of branch-headed beds, available from Boyne City's Anthony Williams and Robin Lee Berry, are available, as are small but no-less-stunning items, such as the whimsi-

cal twig-and-leaf-styled ceramic tableware created by Belize's Lynn Fisher.

■ **Tinsel Town:** Perfect for couples, clients and anyone who likes a gift that keeps giving all year round, the Two on the Town cards offer the best bang for any local's buck. For only \$29.95 you can give one recipient three cards, which together offer more than \$6100 in savings — that's 165 two-for-one offers — for local dining, lodging, recreation and entertainment. Nine Northern Michigan hot spots — from Sault Ste. Marie to Grayling and Gaylord to Mt. Pleasant — have their own trio of discount cards, each trio specially tailored to that locale's specific offerings.

"They encourage two people to go out and enjoy each other's company and to try different restaurants," said John Ridge, creator of the Two on the Town. "And every time they use the card they're reminded of the gift you gave them."

Sales are limited to 4,000 and are usually sold out by Dec. 25. See www.TwoOnTheTown.com or call 922-2222 for more information.

Lynda Twardowski is a local freelance writer.

Christmas energy

No, Virginia, there's no need to buy the most expensive brand of batteries.

Most of the time, cheaper brands work as well as costlier brands, according to a battery of comparison tests for Consumer Reports.

CR's lone exception is digital and automated flash cameras. In their tests, the Duracell Ultra, (96 cents per AA cell), outlasted other alkaline batteries by a wide margin.

But the lesser brands will still be more cost effective, even though you'll have to change batteries more often. The cheaper AAs cost a fraction of the Ultras.

Other battery tips include:

■ Even seemingly dead batteries may have life left in them. A cell that appears exhausted in a portable stereo, CD player or electronic game may have enough juice to power a wall clock or remote control for months.

■ Batteries may be stored at room temperature. Refrigeration extends shelf life only slightly.

■ Single-use batteries come in alkaline, lithium and heavy-duty types. Never mix types, and never mix old and new batteries. That can cause batteries to leak, thus ruining the circuitry.

■ And always use the right battery for the job.

Heavy-duty batteries are best for low-drain devices like wall clocks and remote controls. Heavy-duty have a short life compared with alkaline cells. But some alkaline brands are so cheap, heavy-duty batteries aren't worth considering.

Powerful but pricey lithium cells work best for digital and flash cameras.

■ Alkaline batteries are the workhorse batteries. They work best for almost any type of battery need, plus they're inexpensive, disposable, relatively long-lived and can be stored for five to 10 years.

■ Rechargeable batteries require a high initial investment in the cells and the charger, but they are cost-effective in the long term for frequently used electrical and electronic devices. They're least suited for gear like remote controls or flashlights.

— Copley News Service

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