



Give from Your Heart

By Lisa Wolff | Executive Director, FoHVOS

Valentine's Day is coming. Show your love for that special someone by nourishing both body and spirit. Start by giving an "experience." Plenty of studies explain why experiences make people happier than material possessions, but for my purposes here, I'll rely on just one reason. Time you spend together enriches your connection. Think of it this way: are your best stories about material possessions or something you did? Make some nice memories.

Completely unrelated studies show that helping others brings benefits to both givers and receivers. So maybe we can maximize happiness by combining both giving an experience and helping others. Stay with me on this--we know for a fact that buying locally helps the community because local places contribute to the unique character of the neighborhood and money spent with them is reinvested locally. So, taken together, a *local experience* is both enjoyable and can help others, too.

An easy place to start for your Valentine's gift is to make reservations at a Hopewell Valley restaurant. There are great options in both boroughs and throughout Hopewell Township. Luckily, our local eateries have amazing food with just the right atmosphere for the occasion. Plus, they take care of the cleanup. Dining locally is a simple way to engage in an experience, be rewarded with a great meal and some excellent conversation, and take pride in knowing that you've made a little difference for your community. Trust me, it adds up.

Next, skip the candy, and consider other presents that "do good" locally. Support a nonprofit for a cool gift and maybe another fun experience in the process. Here are a few of my favorites, unique, and available in Hopewell Valley customized to your recipient:

Your eco-friendly, sustainable friend: The FoHVOS Tribute, available at fohvos.org.

A customized, framed certificate made of recycled materials shares that you donated a tree or native wildflowers to reduce carbon, help the environment, and beautify public lands all in their honor. Optional bonus: you get another date to come out and help on planting day.

Your inclusive, social cause supporting friend: Greeting Cards, soap & lotion, palsnj.org/store. Pennington Adult Living Services (PALS) helps individuals with developmental disabilities achieve productive, independent, and happy lives. Purchases support disabled individuals to gain social, economic and community inclusion. You receive items with heart and soul.

Your activist friend: A HPL library card and the first Wednesday series, redlibrary.org. Anyone throughout Hopewell Valley can get a free card to the little red library. The first Wednesday of the month will win the heart of your activist. January was a Nonpartisan Conversation about Climate Change. March provides native plant gardening tips that will attract pollinators and help the earth! What's more romantic than saving the world?

Your fair trade, globally responsible friend: Seeds to Sew gifts, 16 Seminary Ave., Hopewell. Cloth gift wrapping bags are colorful collectables that support education and job skills for women and girls from disadvantaged communities. That's two cool gifts – Reusable giftwrap that spares the landfill, plus, empowering support for impoverished areas of the world.

Your local history loving friend: If These Stones Could Talk – Book, ssaamuseum.org. Authors Elaine Buck and Beverly Mills raise awareness about our area's authentic African American history. They transform listeners to experience not-so-distant, past history. Between the book and the Stoutsburg Sourland African American



Museum, Elaine and Beverly demonstrate their labor of love, and the community has responded in kind.

Your gourmet Foodie friend: Cooking class or 5-course feast; thefarmcookingschool.com. School Founder Ian Knauer was a food editor for Gourmet Magazine and co-hosted television shows that won two James Beard Awards. The produce used is grown onsite to support the earth at Roots to River organic farm. Gravity Hill Farm uses their proceeds to make education and healthy food available to kids throughout Mercer County.

There is something for everyone to enjoy and make a difference to boot. Valentine's Day is just the beginning.

Enjoying local experiences that also give back to society, are a great way to ensure longevity for both your relationship and our planet.