

**SPECIAL ISSUE**

# DownEast

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VIRGINIA  
OLIVER,  
STILL  
LOBSTERING  
AT 101

# 70 OVER 70

**LOOKING BACK  
AND LOOKING  
AHEAD WITH  
70 EXTRAORDINARY  
MAINERS**



# CREATIVE SPIRITS

*Many older adults find it's never too late to unleash the artist budding within.*

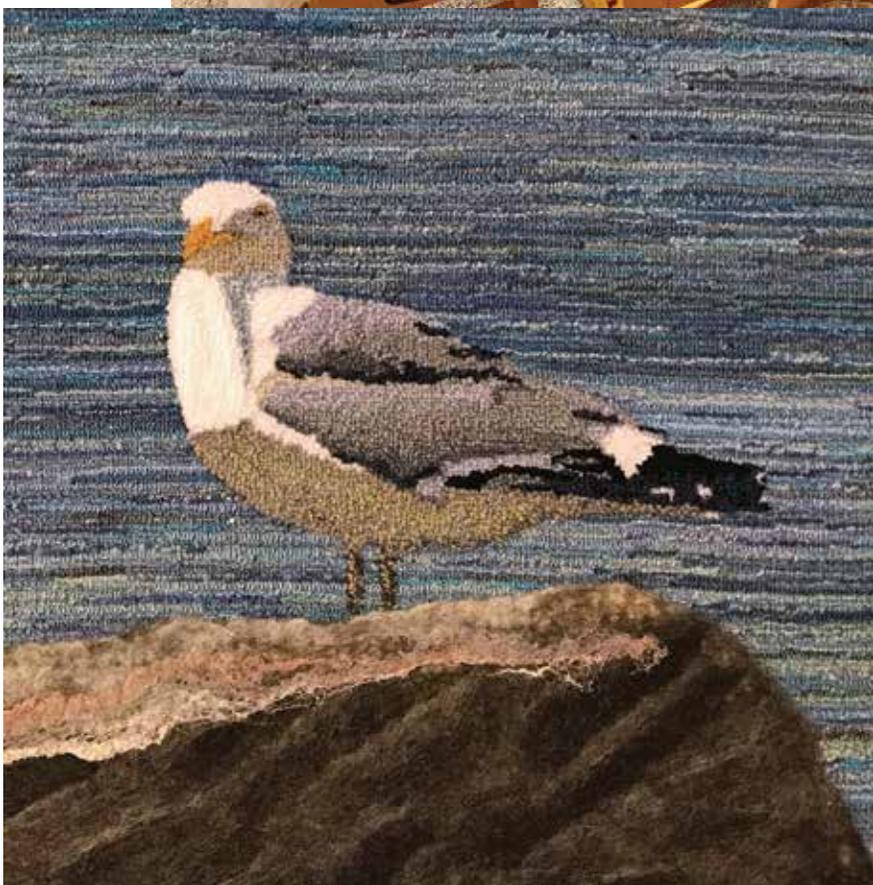
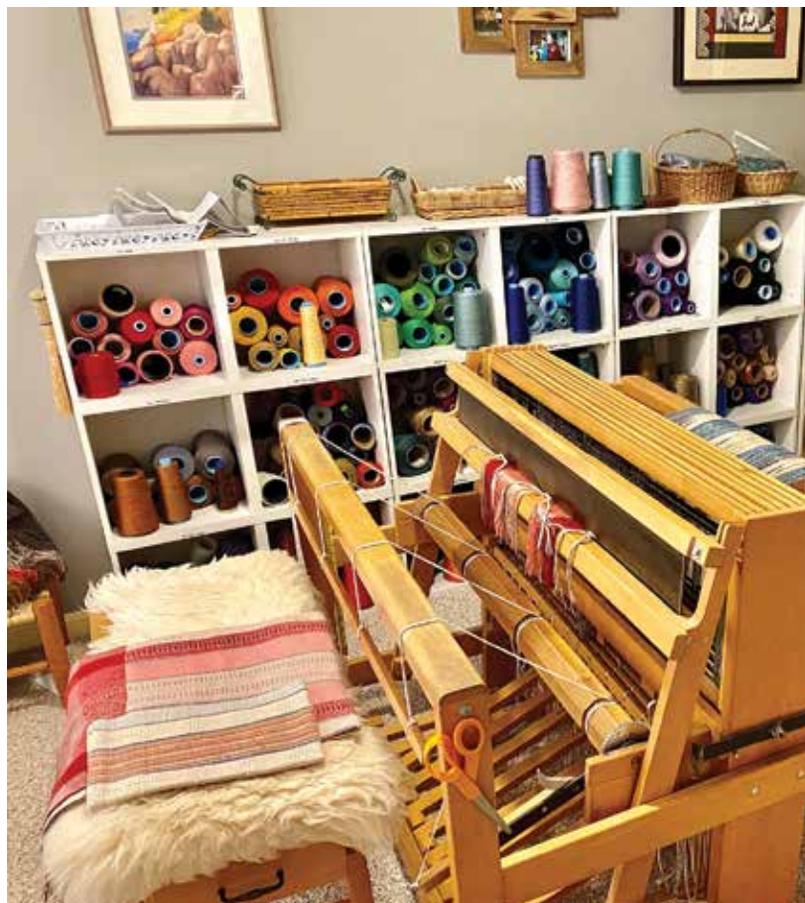
**B**ob Henrici fell in love with woodworking as a teenager, but for most of his adult life, the hobby got relegated to the back burner while he was raising kids and working as a land surveyor. His wife painted, and after she died six years ago, he decided to try painting as well. He was immediately captivated by the challenge of rendering tiny details in acrylic. "I find it really therapeutic and relaxing," says Henrici, who is 84.

He began working with a painting teacher on a weekly basis, then started making frames for his finished pieces out of rough-sawn cedar. He even built a workstation to keep his brushes, paints, and other materials within easy reach. "As I get older, the painting and woodworking keep my mind going," he says.

Henrici isn't alone. Research has shown that people who engage in artistic pursuits later in life tend to stay mentally sharper, physically stronger, and happier. A 2015 study published in the journal *Neurology* found that individuals 85 or older who were involved in crafts and artistic endeavors were 73 percent less likely to develop memory loss and reduced mental function. In a landmark 2006 study, researchers from George Washington University found that a group of seniors with an average age of 80 experienced lower blood pressure, had fewer falls, made fewer doctor visits, took less medication, had higher morale, and were less likely to experience depression if they were involved in the arts.

What's more, other research suggests that brain changes associated with age might make it easier to unleash creativity later in life. Certain areas of the brain involved with self-consciousness thin out over time, and the brain becomes better at coordinating activity between its more methodical left hemisphere and more visual and intuitive right hemisphere.

The mix of right- and left-brain stimulation is a big part of what Andrea Williams loves



## AT HOME AT RIVERWOODS EXETER

HENRICI, WILLIAMS, and Irish have more than just a creative life in common. They're all neighbors at RiverWoods Exeter, a continuing-care retirement community in New Hampshire. The campus, just 20 miles from the Maine border and about an hour from Portland, is the flagship property of the RiverWoods Group, the largest family of not-for-profit CCRCs in northern New England. The campus offers apartments where residents can live independently, plus three fitness centers, three swimming pools, and four miles of trails, plus a health

center, assisted living, memory support, and nursing care.

RiverWoods Exeter's proximity to Maine was a part of what attracted Irish and her husband to move there in 2012. Her husband's family has roots in Maine, and she has attended workshops at St. Joseph's College, in Standish, and Pleasant Mountain Fiber Arts Workshops, in Denmark. She stocks up on materials at Halcyon Yarn, in Bath, and loves to go beachcombing on Bailey Island, which has inspired many of her works. Most of all, Irish loves living in a community that provides so many

opportunities for artists to pursue and showcase their work. RiverWoods Exeter has a pottery studio, art studios, and a woodshop, plus regular art shows, rotating exhibits, and an annual calendar that features residents' work.

Irish enjoys popping into the studios to see what others are working on and being in a community where so many people write, create, play music, and sing.

"People who are interested in those things are people I'm more interested in, and it makes it easier to connect," she says. "And the range of talent that's here is incredible."



Clockwise from top: the looms where Andrea Williams weaves her scarves, table runners, and other works; *All Tied Up*, a painting by Bob Henrici; a scarf woven by Williams; one of Peg Irish's pieces of rug hooking, *Myron's View*, inspired by a trip to Bailey Island.

about weaving. Williams, who's 82, learned to weave when she was in her late 50s and began pursuing it seriously after she retired from careers in clinical psychology and computer programming. "I love the way weaving combines science and art," she says. "You have to have a vision of how you want your piece to turn out, understand how to get there, and what materials you'll need for the end use, whether it will be a dish towel, a wall hanging, a table runner, or a scarf."

She enjoys the challenge of hammering out the calculations she'll need to set up the loom, as well as the physicality that weaving demands. "It's creative expression, it takes a lot of focus and concentration, and it's a full-body workout," she says.

Peg Irish took up rug hooking in her late 30s and immediately fell in love with its versatility and the tactile nature of the work. She has taught workshops around New England, and her work has been featured in dozens of exhibits around the region. "You go to a museum and you don't have a desire to touch the Van Gogh, but there is a desire to touch rug hooking," the 77-year-old says. "You have to feel everything, and that aspect is comforting."

Learn more at [RWExeter.org](http://RWExeter.org)

