

# Next Summer in Bolton Landing: Interview with Store Owner Matthew Slaughter

By **Monica Sirignano and Dave Bower**

*It isn't always easy to find unique shops; often they're hidden away in the places you might least expect. Such is the case with the mother-son owned store, **Next Summer**, located in the quaint town of **Bolton Landing**, about 10 miles north of Lake George Village.*

*Occupying a building that once stood as the town's hardware store, owners **Matthew and Cathy Slaughter** built upon that idea—modernizing the concept of the old hardware store that carries everything, with a variety of quality and unique products that represent the “lake house life.” Their motto, “Supplies for the lake house life,” sums up much of what you'll find here, including fun and eclectic housewares, clothing, artisan items, toys and candy for the kids, along with other products that represent what it means to be living the lake house life.*

*But don't get too carried away with that idea, these aren't products that can only be used at the lake; as they'll tell you themselves, “The lake house life can be lived anywhere.” Another added plus of this store is that its reasonably priced, a pleasant surprise when you see the range and quality of products offered. In fact, once you enter, you may just find you want to the lake with you wherever you go.*

*We recently spoke with store-owner **Matthew Slaughter** about the shop, its history, and his motivations behind opening Next Summer nearly four years ago.*

## **The Free George: Are you originally from Bolton Landing?**

**Matthew Slaughter:** No, I was born in Los Angeles. I left there when I was three and I've lived in a million different places, but I've been summering here and we moved to Glens Falls when I was 12 or 13, so I've been here for 20 something years but I moved here full-time about four or five years ago.

## **TFG: What inspired you to start Next Summer?**

**MS:** I was practicing law. I was an environmental and land use attorney and I hated it. I absolutely hated it. After law school, I went to Cornell to study urban planning. My first assignment as an attorney was to get more blacktop in front of a Lowe's store. And I thought, this is not what I signed up for. *[laughs]* I was practicing with a firm down in Albany and our largest client was the developer of the largest mall in America. In urban planning school malls are the Devil and they're kind of passé actually, so it just felt like I was doing this horrible, horrible work. One day I was on my way to work and I almost got into a car accident and I thought “Wow! If I got into a car accident, then I wouldn't have to go to work” and I thought, this is it!

## **TFG: That's really an eye opener.**

**MS:** Yeah, I hated what I was doing. I sort of kept it to myself for a little while and then it was just getting miserable. I would sit in front of a computer for 12 hours a day with no interaction with people. Then I finally said to my parents “I hate this, I hate what I'm doing.” So we sat down and they said “don't do it, life's too short to be in a bad job”... life's too *long* to be in a bad job was the thing I realized, so I left the firm and bought this building. The whole idea was that I could do a lot more good, and have a lot more fun opening a business in a community that I cared about and helping that community develop in my vision, not that I have that much control in a town this



size. We wanted a place that was unique here, that served a need that was not addressed and we felt that there wasn't any place in the area that was doing housewares.

**TFG:** *How long ago did Next Summer open?*

**MS:** This is our fourth year, and we're really finally starting to become known after all the changes that we made last year. We're sort of looking at it as our first year, because so many circumstances have changed.

**TFG:** *How has your recent expansion been working? Has it been very helpful?*

**MS:** It's changed everything. It's a whole new world now. Now we're getting our target customer, and it's great. And finally people are really finding us and they seem really happy to have discovered us.

**TFG:** *And you and your mother own the store?*

**MS:** Yes, my mother and I are business partners. This year she doesn't work any hours, which she's thrilled about. She comes in and helps out with setting up displays and everything. She takes care of my sister's kids during the summer. My sister lost her husband about four or five years ago, so the kids come up here for the summer and it's really nice that she gets to spend time with them.

**TFG:** *How do you go about choosing your products that you want to sell in your store?*

**MS:** For us, we have a real mantra of great design at a good price. That's the most important thing to us. A good price can be two dollars, it could be a thousand dollars, there has to be that value in it, and I think that we've got an interesting situation. We have three different types of customers, we have second homeowners, we have tourists and we have locals, so we have to have a selection of items for all of them and I think that's been a really good thing. Some might see it as a limitation, but, it's forced us to have a great variety of things and it's made a nice mix and has kept our items unique. We don't want to have something that you can just go and get at Target.

**TFG:** *And if you were to say something about what Next Summer represents as a store, how would you describe it?*

**MS:** I would say that it's supplies for the lake house life. For us, the lake house life doesn't need to be lived on a lake, you can live the lake house life in the mountains, you can live it in the city; it's a lifestyle about getting closer to your family and recognizing what's important. The reason people come here is because they want to relax; they want to feel comfortable. It seems that's what people are searching for, so those are things that we want to have here. Like the sheets we carry, we want sheets that remind people of what it was like to come here on vacation. They take these back to the city or they put them in their second home here, but they have to be soft and cozy and comfortable; that's what life is like here.

**TFG:** *Do you get people ordering from you year-round, even if they're not up here?*

**MS:** We do, we're starting to get more. We had people calling us during last winter, so we hope that will continue. We have a lot of action going on our Facebook page, so that's been good.

**TFG:** *You've mentioned your mother has a really good aesthetic, and we remember when we were in here in the early spring, that you used to have all this art on the walls, will you be doing more of that?*

**MS:** You know we'd love to feature artists. Last year we had a whole wall of photographic prints by Sonny Wooley for a while. I was an art history major in college, my family lived in Europe for three years when I was very young



and we were halfway between Brussels and Paris, so we'd travel around to Paris on the weekend and see great pieces of art. Art has always been a big part of my life, my wife's an artist, she teaches art down at Emma Willard, so that's always been something that I've wanted to support. One of the biggest charities we support is the Hyde, so I definitely want to have art in here, they do such a nice job at the Hyde and I don't think people realize what an amazing collection that is for a local museum for such a small place. There are fantastic things in there, they have a Rembrandt; there's tons of great pieces, they have a drawing from the Mona Lisa.

**TFG: Are the prints for sale?**

**MS:** The ones that are the interiors. Ed Osberg did those. Those are black-and-white photographs of the interior of my parents' home. We took color vintage postcards of Lake George and photoshopped them and they're for sale, but they're expensive because of the labor that goes into them. For us it's important, we want to do things that are a little different. Sonny's prints are more abstract, but they're images of life in the Adirondacks. Our furniture aesthetic is rustic, but contemporary; this is sort of the same idea with the rustic photographs, but it's not just pictures of the lake. Sonny has a lot of abstract images and they're beautiful. I really like them; we want them to be a little bit off the beaten path.

**TFG: That's a good thing.**

**MS:** Yeah, I think so. I hope so. We want to be the distinct, unique place that has our special aesthetic.

**TFG: What are some of your most popular products?**

**MS:** We do very well with the Joseph Joseph, they're a British company. They do kitchen designs and they've won a lot of design awards, Red Dot design awards. They do these folding cutting boards, and have come out with some new products this year. Their stuff is just great, they've come up with really innovative solutions. To say that they're innovative solutions is kind of funny, because once you see the solution you say, of course! [laughs] Why didn't somebody think of that? They're just simple problems like spilling onion bits over the floor on your cutting board, so let's just make a folding cutting board. How easy is that?

**TFG: But those are often the most brilliant things. They're so simple that nobody has done it for some reason.**

**MS:** That's why we love them, and the other nice thing about them is that they're a New York-based company. They're British, but they're based in New York, so it makes it so easy for us to work with them. We love our Dash and Albert rugs, they're based in Pittsfield, Massachusetts, so we can get things from them very easily and those companies have taken an interest in us. People from Dash & Albert have come over here a few times to check it out. They showed us how we could use an indoor/outdoor carpet runner to put on our benches outside. We just hose it off if it gets dirty, there's no muss or fuss. It's really nice when those sorts of companies help out.

**TFG: So you support a lot of local artisans as well?**

**MS:** Yes. I try to. The important thing for me is that the aesthetic works in our store and that can be tough because the large market here is for Adirondack traditionally, Adirondack bear sculpture and stuff and that's just not who we are. We've tried to do as much local as we can. JK Adams is just over in Dorset, Vermont. I've got a lot of Sarah Pfau jewelry which is really popular; she's great to work with, she's in here a few times a week so that just makes my life easier. There's Ed Ostberg's Lake George cutting boards; they've got Brazilian Cherry inlaid with Maple and it's the shape of Lake George in a cutting board. I can call him up, tell him I'm running out of cutting boards and in a few days I'll have some. And Ted Thompson's wooden bowls—they're stunning; he got his start working as a golf course shaper, they're just like these organic, undulating forms. They're beautiful and they're really reasonably priced. He just walked in one day and said "I was wondering if you'd be interested in carrying these?" And I said "Oh my God, yes. These are fantastic!" That sort of stuff is great. I love when that happens.

Kathy Miller, who lives over on the other side of the lake showed us these great shopping bags that are designed to always be handy and available. She's made them especially for Lake George—they say, "Love is



on Lake George” on them—and she offered them to us. They’re great and we love having more of those local pieces.

**TFG: Where do most of your customers come from?**

**MS:** The largest amount of people seem to come from Saratoga, if they’re not from here. We get a ton of people obviously from New York City. It’s funny, there was a woman in the store the other day, some people think that we’re just a bunch of hicks up here and I think that we surprise a lot of people to that effect. People have said that we should be in the Hamptons, and we don’t want to be in the Hamptons. We want to be here.

**TFG: Traffic’s much worse in the Hamptons anyway. It’s bumper-to-bumper and takes three hours to go 20 miles.**

**MS:** Well, that’s why I just take a helicopter out there. [laughs]

**TFG: Where do you keep it parked?**

**MS:** Up in Coolidge Hill, you must’ve seen it? [laughs]

**TFG: I think you definitely serve a need that’s not addressed. The first time we ever came into the store, we thought it was really interesting, with practical items that are really clever and brilliant.**

**MS:** I think so and I hope that’s true. We’ve certainly worked to do that, it’s been so rewarding and I’m interacting with people all day long and I love that, it keeps you going. I really enjoy talking to people and that’s one of the cool things here, we do get people from all over and I do get to hear interesting stories and that’s fun.

**TFG: What are your favorite things about the Adirondacks?**

**MS:** Oh gosh! You know what it is really, and this is going to sound funny, but the sense of community. I love that I know the names of the UPS guy and the FedEx guy. I love that I can be outside sweeping my front sidewalk and I know the people who are walking by with their dogs. I just got married and some people have come up and congratulated me and it’s really nice. I’ve lived in a lot of places where I was 3,000 miles away from my family and I just never felt like I was welcomed or a part of the community, and even in small places that you don’t feel it, as welcomed here, there’s always conversation about whether or not you’re local or you’re a newbie, even if you’ve lived here for 25 years. The lake is gorgeous, I love being out on the lake. You sort of take it for granted and when you get out there you realize that’s why all these people come here.

**TFG: It’s as if you get so enmeshed in what you’re doing and you realize there’s a lake five minutes away.**

**MS:** I can go to the beach, I can go sailing, and if I can’t do that then I could be anywhere. One night, we closed the store and Lindsay said let’s go swimming, and I said yeah, we can do that, and you forget about it and you really have to go and do those things, so I love that. I love being able to look out and see mountains. I think a lot of locals feel this way that their favorite time of year is the fall because it’s still warm and you have great weather and you’ve got a place to yourself that’s so nice, but each season has such distinct qualities. I like the change of seasons. It’s not just that winter’s colder than summer; there’s an entirely different feel, there are people around it’s probably more communal. Even in the summertime everyone talks about how hard they’re working and how tired they are and they’ve got to keep pushing so you can pay for your winter. I like that, I like those qualities; that’s what really appeals to me.

**TFG: What other kinds of interests do you have outside the store?**

**MS:** Well, I sleep a lot. [laughs] Art is definitely something I really care about. I try to go to the Hyde. I think there are some really cool smaller cities. I lived in Portland, Oregon for a while. I love Portland, it’s a fantastic city. It’s sort of a mecca for urban planners. They tore up the freeway that ran along the river and turned it into a park. They have a ton of parking garages downtown because they want people to come in,



park their cars and walk. They have the Fareless Square they call it, its free public transit within this large square, so once you park your car you don't have to go back and use it. They've got small streets. It's great, you feel really comfortable walking around there, everyone's outside even in bad weather; it's nice. There's a chance I might've stayed there had my family not been on the East Coast but there's no question, I'm an East Coaster; things move at a different pace out there.



The strongest thing I've noticed is people out here, what you see is what you get, it's very sincere out here. It's not like that out there. I went to law school in Oregon and there were a number of students from the East Coast. If someone's nice to you out here, it means something, if someone's nice to you out there it doesn't mean anything at all.

We just got a new dog and it's amazing how many people you meet when you have a dog. They would have no reason to talk to you before, but I like that a lot. Everybody has always said too that the weather plays a bigger role than the economy and it is probably true. I feel that his area never gets the booms and we never get the busts; we stay pretty even.

We have people come in from the city and from other places and say "you need to open a store where we live, there's nothing like this where we are, I've never seen a store like this." There's definitely interest, we just have to be able to tap into it. We do a ton of shipping too because of larger products and people don't want to take those with them on the plane. I'd say the majority of our shipping is to Florida. I had one week where I had a ton of boxes that were sent out to Miami, so I'm thrilled that people are finding stuff that they like here.

**Next Summer** is located at 4955 Lake Shore Drive in Bolton Landing, NY. For more information, stop by the store or visit their website at [www.thelakehouselife.com](http://www.thelakehouselife.com).

–Monica Sirignano and Dave Bower are Co-Publishers of The Free George.

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