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EDITOR'S NOTE //



Welcome to the fall issue of *Connecticut VOICE!*

In this edition, well-known meteorologist Scot Haney gets personal – sharing childhood memories, his coming out story, relationship regrets, and the highs and lows of his personal and professional life. Haney is one of the most recognizable television personalities in the state, and many people feel as if they know him, but you likely haven't heard the revelations and reminiscing he shares here.

We also shine a spotlight on intersex individuals, a segment

of the community who often feel misunderstood, marginalized and unrepresented. And we catch up with Jacob G. Padrón, the relatively new leader of New Haven's Long Wharf Theatre, who is trying to bring new life to the cultural institution.

With COVID-19 still dominating the news and our lives, we examine how mental health issues can be exacerbated by current events, as well as the importance of seeking regular medical care – even in the midst of a pandemic. We're also lamenting the 2020 Pride season that was largely upended this year, but are still able to share some reader-submitted photos of how you embraced the spirit, even in these challenging times.

On the lighter side, we're giving you tips on how to foster or adopt the perfect pet, and sharing our picks for what shows and movies to stream so you can feel like you're on vacation, even if you're on your couch.

As always, I invite you to join the conversation by connecting with us on Instagram, Facebook and Twitter.

Happy reading,

Cara

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"LOVE IS NOT ABOUT HOW MANY DAYS, WEEKS OR MONTHS YOU'VE BEEN TOGETHER, IT'S ALL ABOUT HOW MUCH YOU LOVE EACH OTHER EVERY DAY."

– Unknown



Photo by iStockphoto/Drazen_



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The Interview: WFSB Channel 3 meteorologist Scot Haney is a familiar face to many, but few know the personal journey - full of ups and downs - he's embraced.

Photo by Todd Fairchild



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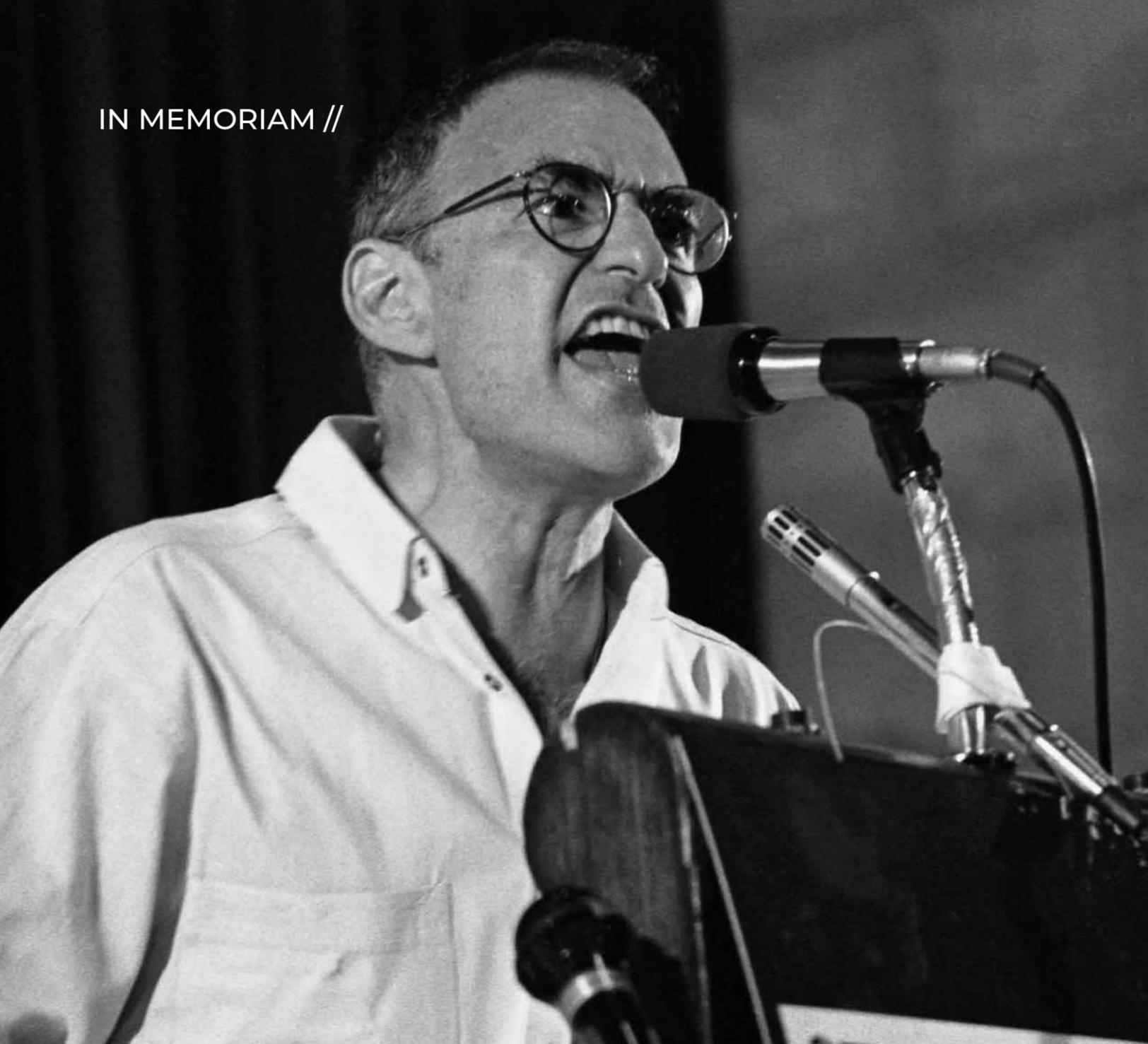
On the Cover:
Scot Haney discusses growing up, coming out and moving on.

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PETS

Before making the commitment to foster or adopt a pet, there is much to consider.





Larry Kramer (1935 - 2020) Sounding the alarm, fighting for rights

By FRANK RIZZO

Seeing Larry Kramer’s primal scream of a play “The Normal Heart” when it premiered in April of 1985 was a passionate, heartbreaking, and harrowing experience I’ll never forget. The play was meant to be an in-your-face polemic with no place to hide. Theatergoers were surrounded

by walls scrawled with the names of those who died of HIV/AIDS. Set in the early days of that pandemic, which decimated the gay community, the play followed writer Ned Weeks – an outspoken, exasperating gay man who, like Kramer himself, found himself rising to a historical moment in a role for himself he had never envisioned.

In the play – and in life – Kramer boldly named names, calling out New York City Mayor Ed Koch, President Ronald Reagan, *The New York Times* and even the gay community itself, for its lack of action in the face of the growing scourge. He was the living embodiment of the war cry of the era: “Silence = Death.”

At that point, the disease had taken tens of thousands of lives. Hundreds of thousands more would perish in the United States, and millions more globally, by the time the play was revived in 2004. When the drama finally made it to Broadway in 2011 in a Tony Award-winning revival, and later became a television movie on HBO in 2014, AIDS no longer made headlines. It was an increasingly distant memory for some, and for a new LGBTQ generation, it meant hardly anything at all.

Larry Kramer, the Bridgeport-born, Yale University-educated writer-activist, died May 27 at age 84 of pneumonia.

I interviewed Kramer several times over the years at his Manhattan apartment off of Washington Square, a home that he shared with his husband, David Webster. My first visit was in 1986, when New Haven’s Long Wharf Theatre presented its own production of “The Normal Heart” starring Tom Hulce (Academy Award nominee for “Amadeus”).

“Now AIDS has a human face,” Kramer told me at the time.

With a scruffy beard and big brown eyes, Kramer could be gruff, relentless, and exhausting but he was also inspiring and, yes, funny and charming, too. He was a teddy bear with teeth.

Kramer first found success in his early life in Hollywood as a producer and writer, earning an Oscar nomination for his screenplay for 1969’s “Women in Love,” based on the D.H. Lawrence classic. (And what gay man then will forget the homoerotic nude wrestling scene by firelight between Oliver Reed and Alan Bates?)

Kramer was a novelist, too,

challenging norms – and other gay men – with his 1978 novel “Faggots,” which pulled the curtain to reveal the gay community as he saw it, and it wasn’t all pretty.

“We should get people – and ourselves – to stop defining us by the sexual acts that we do,” he told me.

In 1982, shortly after news began spreading of a “gay cancer,” he co-founded Gay Men’s Health Crisis (GMHC), the nonprofit AIDS service organization. (Kramer resigned in 1983 due to his many disagreements with the other founders.)

An article Kramer wrote in 1983 for the *New York Native*, titled “1,112 and Counting,” was a further wake-up call. “If this article doesn’t rouse you to anger, fury, rage and action, gay men have no future on this earth,” Kramer wrote.

In 1987, Kramer founded the grassroots, more militant group, ACT UP (AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power), which took to the streets demanding an acceleration in AIDS drugs research and an end to discrimination against gay men and lesbians. Both organizations he started reshaped national health policy in the ’80 and ’90s.

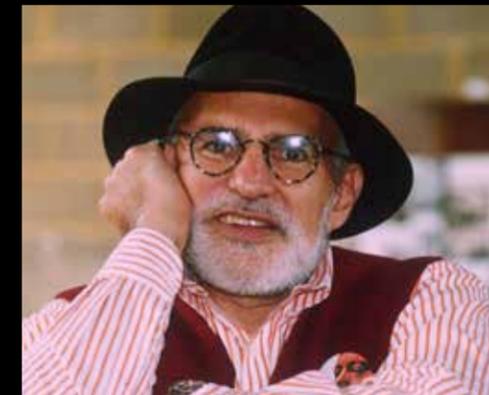
By his own accounts, he should never have lived as long as he did. He was HIV-positive since the ’80s, and in 2001 he was dying of a liver disease until a transplant allowed him to live into the third decade of the 21st Century.

In a memorial piece written for *The Guardian*, playwright Matthew Lopez (who wrote the epic “The Inheritance,” which spans several generations of gay men) recalled a panel that included Kramer last year celebrating the 50th anniversary of the Stonewall riots. When asked about the importance of that now-hallowed 1969 event, Kramer said it wasn’t important at all. One can imagine the gasps and the clutching of pearls.

But that was Kramer. Deliberately contrarian, wanting to shake people out of complacency and easy narratives. Though Stonewall brought visibility, it did not bring meaningful change, he said, adding that it took the scourge of AIDS to turn gays queer, and to launch an unstoppable political movement around the globe.

His mantra throughout had always been that until gays came out of the closet, until people recognized the LGBTQ community – not in the abstract or as “the other,” but as their sons and daughters, brothers and sisters, fathers and mothers, friends and neighbors – meaningful change would not happen.

Larry Kramer was right – absolutely – and millions of LGBTQ people living today, survivors and descendants alike, owe him their eternal thanks. 



Taking the Stage

Jacob Padrón plans dramatic changes for New Haven theater

By FRANK RIZZO

Jacob G. Padrón stands outside Long Wharf Theatre, located in the middle of the New Haven Food Terminal on the outskirts of the city. The building is closed and its large outdoor parking lot is nearly vacant. It's oddly quiet on a sunny summer afternoon, the silence broken only by the hum of the nearby highway and the occasional squawk of a seagull. We are meeting to take some photographs and talk about his career, his evolution as a gay man, and these unexpected times.

Outside the theater, a poster promotes a season that was cut short in March by the pandemic. This wasn't how Padrón imagined his inaugural season when he became the theater's new artistic director. But Long Wharf's dire financial struggles and the COVID-19 crisis decimated plans to transform the Tony Award-honored theater from one that was on the verge of collapse into one that would hopefully thrive as it became rooted in and reflective of its city.

"There's sadness about not being able to be in the space, but I also look at the promise of what is to come, too," says Padrón, a soft-spoken, measured man whose seriousness of tone is balanced and brightened by a glistening smile.

"He's not an ostentatious kind of guy," says Stephanie Ybarra, a classmate of Padrón's when both were students at the Yale School of Drama and who is now artistic director of Baltimore Center Stage. "Not in his personal life and not in his artistry. He is thoughtful, reflective and deliberate in his leadership – and in his relationships."

Like Ybarra, Padrón is one of many people of color or women who are part of a new wave of leadership at not-for-profit regional theaters across the country, one with a goal of systemic change towards equality, diversity, and inclusion.

Padrón, 40, is a third-generation Mexican-American, a social activist, and a gay man who came out in his mid-20s.

"Jacob's journey is one of understanding and exploring how that part of his gay identity intersects with his Latinx identity, intersects with his Catholic upbringing, intersects with his artistry," says Ybarra, one of the first people Padrón

came out to about 15 years ago at Yale. "The fact that he is gay did not become the sole way he defined himself, but rather contributed to this beautiful tapestry of identities that were already operating within Jacob."

Padrón says each part of his identity has informed his values and often complement each other – but not always.

"I love the values the Catholic church has instilled in me but I also struggle with other parts of it," he says. "The same thing with being gay. There are aspects of the gay community that I love and others I am challenged by – like the body shaming and the premium based on external factors. So, with each of those pieces of my identity there is both the good and the bad."

GROWING UP

The son of a business inspector for the state and a bookkeeper, Padrón grew up with an older brother and sister, and a younger sister, in the conservative community of Gilroy, Calif., 80 miles south of San Francisco, self-promoted as the "garlic capital of the world" and last year the site of a mass shooting at its annual festival.

Padrón came of age in the '90s during the specter of HIV and AIDS.

"For my generation, to be gay meant to be sick or to have so much fear about sex and intimacy," he says. "So much has changed now but yes, that was always a trauma for me, and I think it still lives in my body."

Reflecting on his youth, he says: "I think I was outgoing, but I struggled with social pressures in terms of fitting in, finding my way. I definitely didn't have a great high school experience – the way in which high schoolers now are able to express themselves. There was a fair amount of teasing, actually, which was really difficult. At that age, I'm not sure I even had cognizance of being different. If I was attracted to other men, I wasn't at all ready to acknowledge that."

In his junior year of high school, Padrón moved in with his grandparents, who lived 25 miles away, so he could go to another school which his cousins attended – one he felt was

more friendly and safe.

His first experience in theater was when he was a boy at the Children's Musical Theater of San Jose in "The Wiz" and "Peter Pan," he recalls, "but it wasn't a particularly joyful experience because there weren't a lot of people who looked like me. I remember the white kids being really dismissive and already, at that young age, I was feeling the dynamics of microaggressions."

It wasn't until he experienced a different type of theater – the civic-centric, Latinx-based El Teatro Campesino in nearby San Juan Bautista – during his teen years that he felt a special connection, one in which he not only felt refuge and comfort but a sense of community and purpose.

"That's where I understood that theater could be a catalyst for social justice," he says of the company.

Though he took some directing classes when he went to Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles, his interest in college turned to social work. After he graduated in 2003, Padrón joined the Jesuit Volunteer Corps and worked for a year in North Carolina, providing support for those living with HIV and AIDS.

During an internship at Baltimore Center Stage, he felt the pull of the theater – and the power in its storytelling. He decided his passion for social justice and love of the theater could be compatible.

COMING OUT

In 2005, Padrón arrived at the Yale School of Drama for its theater management program but still had not come out as a gay man. He says he was "still in the questioning,



Jacob G. Padrón, shown here outside Long Wharf Theatre in New Haven, never imagined he'd be guiding the organization through a pandemic when he became artistic director. Photo by Frank Rizzo.



Despite some challenges on the horizon, Padrón has a vision for Long Wharf Theatre. Photo by **Frank Rizzo**.

rather than accepting, stage. I was dating women, and even in college I had a pretty serious girlfriend whom I thought I was going to marry. So it was a real pivot when I got to graduate school.”

In his second year at Yale, Padrón had an internship at Los Angeles’ Centre Theater Group. “During that time, I met this gentleman and when people talk about falling in love and your heart really swelling, being really so happy to be in someone’s orbit – that, for me, was the moment where I thought, ‘Oh, this is what it means to be in love.’ That was

the moment that I knew I wanted to live freely and joyfully as a gay person and to really embrace my gay identity. It was also the time I told my family.”

On the last night of a visit to Gilroy that year, he came out to his older sister and brother-in-law. “They were very supportive, and my sister asked me, ‘When are you going to tell Mom and Dad?’ It was around midnight and I told her I would tell them before I went to the airport in the morning and she said, ‘No, I think you tell them right now. Let’s go! Let’s do it!’”

His father was asleep, but his mother was in another room, awake.

“My sister sort of opened the door for me and said, ‘So Mom, Jacob and I had a really good night, and we talked about a lot of things and he has something to share with you. Jacob...?’”

Padrón gives a great grin at that moment of the retelling. “It went well,” he says. “My parents are very supportive. I come from a very religious family and, like so many Latinx families, very Catholic. But for my family, it’s about placing love and acceptance at

the center.” He says he is now in a relationship.

MOVING ON

For the next 10 years, Padrón’s career touched on some of the leading institutions of American theater. While still at Yale, Padrón so impressed Bill Rauch, who was about to take over at the Oregon Shakespeare Festival (OSF), that he offered him a job as associate producer on the spot.

“I felt like we were in deep synch about the importance of equity, diversity, and inclusion,” says Rauch, who is now the inaugural artistic director of The Ronald O. Perelman Performing Arts Center in New York City. “I thought Jacob had so much positive energy and was so thoughtful about the kind of culture we wanted to create there – and for the American theater.”

But after four years in rural Oregon, Padrón yearned for an urban, diverse environment and went to work at Chicago’s Steppenwolf Theatre. There he oversaw the artistic programming for the Garage, Steppenwolf’s second stage dedicated to new work, artists, and audiences. It is a period that he remembers with mixed emotions.

“It was really a difficult time,” he says. “Martha [Lavey, the artistic director] was really tough on me. She was smart and passionate but my experience with her was that if she didn’t believe you to be worthy of her intelligence, she didn’t engage with you. Steppenwolf is a predominantly white institution so navigating that was really painful as a Latinx person, and as one of the few people of color there. Nonetheless, I’m grateful for my experience there because I learned a lot.”

Padrón says it was frustrating trying to change the institution solely from the inside. “I was trying to bring my value system and to shift

the culture by advocating for artists of color by asking critical questions but it was painful work. The OSF was probably where I felt the most empowered with Bill Rauch. I felt he really listened to me and was open to feedback and critique.”

Padrón left Steppenwolf in 2013 to work at New York’s The Public Theater as senior line producer.

“One of the things I love most about The Public was that you were never unclear about why you were there, that it was about [founder] Joe Papp’s mission of being in a theater company formed by the people and being deeply committed to social justice.”

During his time there, the musical “Hamilton” was developed ahead of its 2015 premiere. “That was really exciting, and I got to go to those early workshops and be part of that experience as a member of the artistic staff.” Padrón also worked with his Yale classmate, playwright Tarell Alvin McCraney, for a new play at The Public, “Head of Passes,” which starred Phylicia Rashad.

“But it could also be very challenging there, too,” he says. “Even at The Public, we have to do a better job of amplifying the voices of Latinx stories. It’s just not happening. New York City is a city of Latinos, Dominicans and Puerto Ricans, and their stories are nowhere to be found.”

It was at The Public in 2016 where Padrón had the idea for an initiative which would become The Sol Project, designed to amplify the voices of Latinx playwrights and build artistic homes for artists of color nationwide.

“Once it was launched and it started to take off, that’s when I decided to leave The Public and focus on The Sol Project full time.”

FINDING HOME

In early 2019, Long Wharf Theatre named Padrón its artistic director.



Press photos by **T. Charles Erickson**



Photo by T. Charles Erickson

“... it really is going to be up to all of us working together, working in partnership, around this vision of what it means to be a theater company that is for the community.”

—Jacob Padrón



Press photos by T. Charles Erickson

Soon after, Hope Chávez was named artistic producer and Kit Ingui joined as managing director. (Padrón remains artistic director of The Sol Project and also teaches at the Yale School of Drama.)

Padrón arrived at a time when the theater is in a financially perilous state.

“The board realized they could no longer do business as usual,” he says. “The organization was in crisis and it continues to be so. I also walked into a culture that was unhealthy and unsafe. There was a lot that needed to happen.”

He adds, “The city has always had activism as part of its DNA. I’m excited for Long Wharf to be part of the connective tissue that brings neighborhoods together, for Long Wharf to be held accountable to its community around the work of social justice and anti-racism, for the way in which we can all transform and grow together as a civic institution and as a

civic community.”

Says Ybarra: “Jacob inherited quite a heavy lift but now he can do what he does best. Jacob sitting in the artistic director’s seat carries with him, even among all of the scarcity, a spirit of abundance, joy, and hope.”

Padrón had announced the 2020-21 season – its theater’s 55th – just as the pandemic began in March. That season will now jump a year and begin in late 2021. But Padrón is planning activity before then, with the theater leaving its safe haven on the outskirts of the city to present some programming throughout New Haven.

“One city, but many stages,” says Padrón. “But it really is going to be up to all of us working together, working in partnership, around this vision of what it means to be a theater company that is for the community. Art has a bigger purpose to play, especially now.”



Frank Rizzo has written about the arts in Connecticut and nationally for more than 40 years; for the *The New York Times*, *American Theatre Magazine* and dozens of other outlets. He is also a theater critic for *Variety*. Follow Frank’s work at ShowRiz.com and on Twitter @ShowRiz.



Safe Haven

Danbury's GSA gives students a place to be their true selves

By DAWN ENNIS

Given the ongoing coronavirus pandemic, educators and students across Connecticut are experiencing school this autumn in a way that is unlike anything they have seen before – even compared to last spring. On March 13, uncertainty over the risk of contagion abruptly forced most districts to move classes online, creating homeschool alternatives that had immediate consequences for students and their families.

School sports: canceled. High school proms: canceled. Field trips: canceled. And commencement ceremonies, from kindergarten through 12th grade, were also canceled. The

decision to shutter schools and cease in-person education led to one disappointment after another, all in the interest of stopping the spread of COVID-19, and thereby saving lives.

But most straight and cisgender students have not experienced the same consequences as their LGBTQ, nonbinary, gender nonconforming and asexual classmates.

The students who take part in Gay-Straight Alliance clubs lost something essential when schools closed in March: not just face-to-face interactions, but the safe space in which they had them. High school is often a time of self-discovery and exploration, and that's best achieved in a supportive environment. A GSA provides exactly that, out of sight from less-than-accepting peers, siblings, and parents.

Zoom meetings, Skype, Webex and Google Classroom connections are a poor substitute for the kind of face-to-face interactions that happen in a GSA.

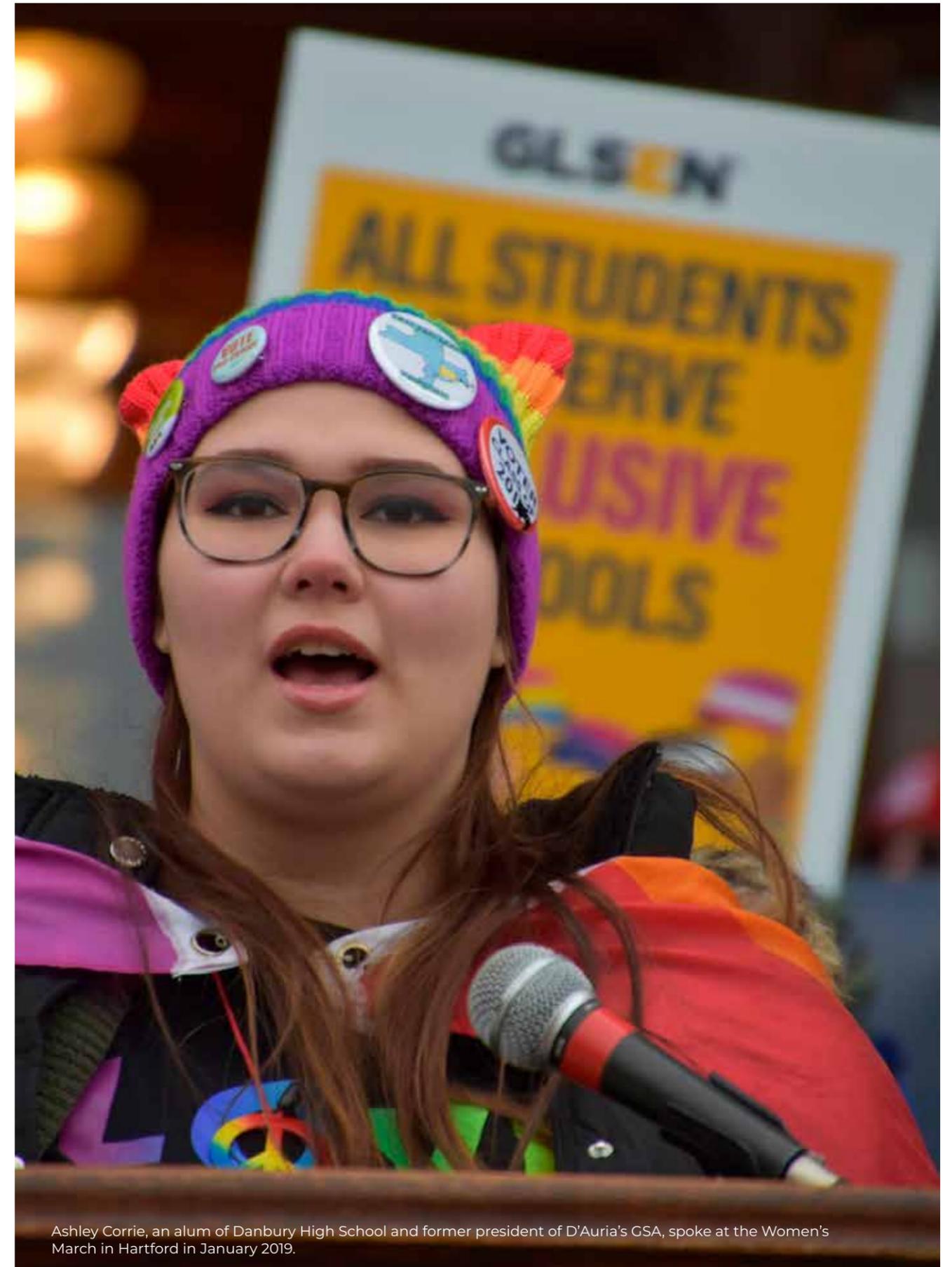
And they also can pose a danger for closeted kids, says Kimberly D'Auria, the teacher who leads Danbury High School's Gay-Straight Alliance club.

"A lot of their parents don't know," D'Auria says. "So, if, God forbid, their parents walk into the room and we're on a conference call or Zoom meeting or whatever, you might just out them."

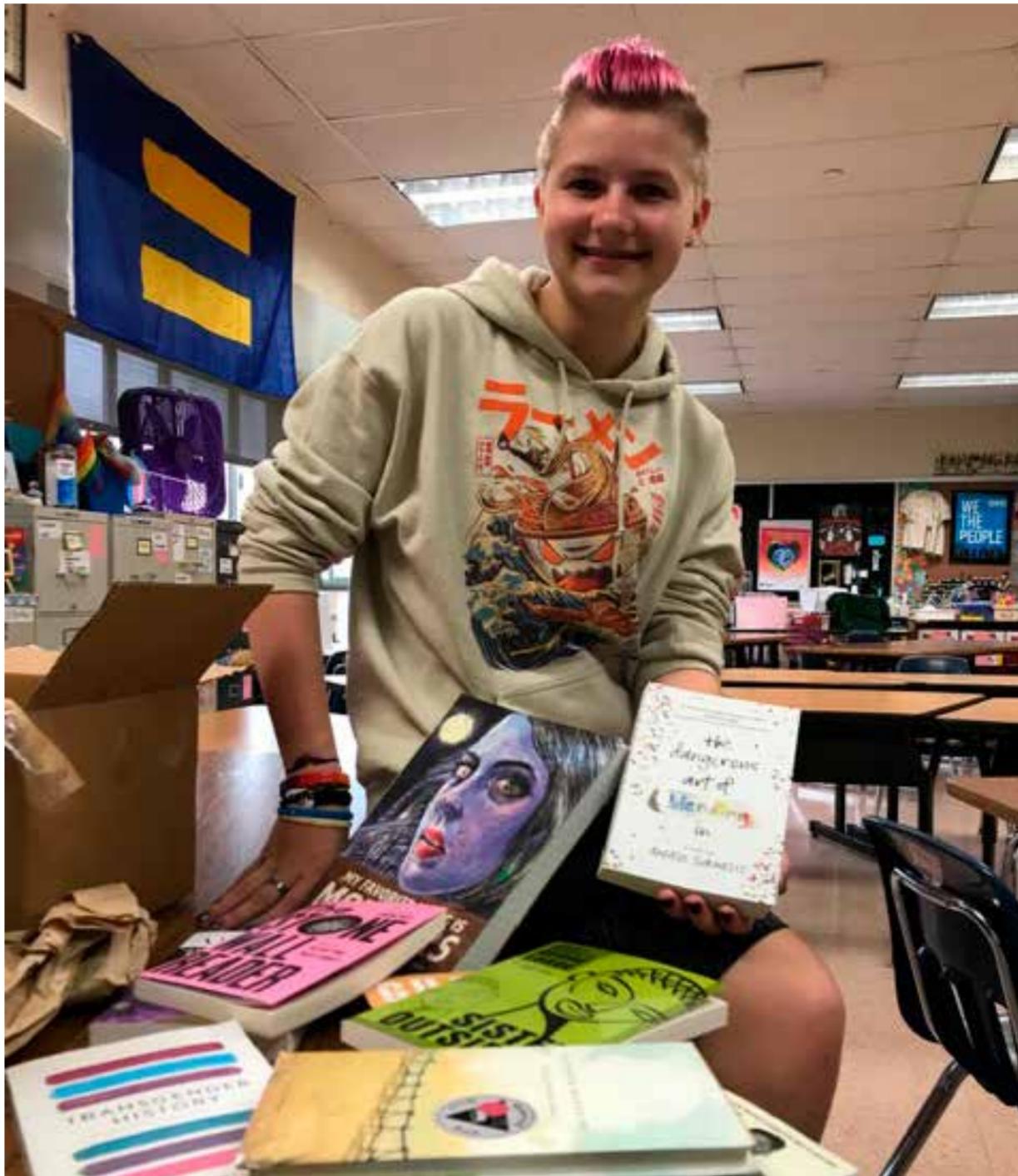
"Before, we had a lot of kids who couldn't meet after school because then their parents would know. So we would meet every single Thursday, during 'flex,'" says D'Auria.



Teacher Kimberly D'Auria not only leads Danbury High School's Gay-Straight Alliance club, The Diversity Council, she is also active in civil rights, such as the Women's March in Hartford in January 2019.



Ashley Corrie, an alum of Danbury High School and former president of D'Auria's GSA, spoke at the Women's March in Hartford in January 2019.



Chase Davis, a member of the Diversity Council who graduated earlier this year, identifies as non-binary. They took out a yearbook ad to salute D'Auria, saying she "does her very best to fight for the rights of not only her students at DHS but wherever she can find!"

"Flex" is a flexible period of 45 minutes during the school day in which students can attend club meetings, band rehearsals, school plays, and the like.

To further protect closeted students, D'Auria says, the school dropped the name "GSA." "We changed it from GSA to Diversity Council so all kids can come and not tip their parents off. I don't want it to be a secret, but some of

these kids are not out," she says of her 15 or so students. "So this was a safe place."

But all that ended on March 13th when Danbury High closed its doors. The Diversity Council went on hiatus. Despite scheduling conference calls that no one joined, and making individual wellness checks, D'Auria confesses she felt abandoned, and sad.

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Chris Davis, seen here at the Women's March in Hartford in January 2019, says D'Auria and the Danbury High School GSA helped her child find their way as a non-binary individual. "Kimberly is a champion for the cause and a protector of the kids."

"Well, I think we all abandoned each other at one point," she says. "I felt like my students and my GSA were more connected. But they were going into situations that were the unknown. And that was my biggest fear, because I'm like a mama bear."

"Miss D'Auria is just the example of what an ally should be," says Danbury High School alum Ashley Corrie. "She doesn't care, on God's green earth, who you are or what you are, as long as you are just a whole-hearted human being. Miss D'Auria accepted anybody into that room with open arms."

Corrie was president of the Diversity Council for two years. She graduated in 2019 and is now a sophomore at the Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts, where she is an English

major pursuing a degree in secondary education. Corrie identifies as bisexual.

"For the longest time, as many bisexual people do, you come to terms with your internalized homophobia," she says. "And then you get people who are telling you that, 'Oh, well, you just need to pick a side,' or 'Oh, you just don't want the label. You don't want the stigma that comes with it.' I've always just kind of had to have that stance, 'Well, you're not me. You don't know how I feel. Therefore, you can't tell me what I do and try and identify as.'"

Both Corrie and rising Danbury High School senior Viktoria Wulff-Andersen say they've encountered pockets of anti-LGBT sentiment at their school, even though most students are accepting. They say D'Auria has been key in giving them tools to survive those who aren't.

"There were kids who would come up to us and call us slurs, or they would try to pick a fight," recalls Corrie. "We had people who would come and pretend to join the club and then slander it and yell and make a big scene in front of everybody."

Wulff-Andersen, who was also a student in D'Auria's psychology class, says, in the past, she's kept her membership in the GSA a secret from some "conservative" people. "Because I just don't want to open up that can of worms." D'Auria, she adds, empowered her and her fellow students in the Diversity Alliance.

"We have to fight back," says Wulff-Andersen. "We have to continue getting our name and recognition out there; the more you normalize homosexuality and

the LGBT community, the more you can fight the stigma and the heteronormativity of a society."

Corrie also credits D'Auria for helping her find her way. "Honestly, if Miss D'Auria hadn't been there my freshman year, I am absolutely certain I would not be the person I am today," Corrie says. "She welcomes anyone. You can be like a roach on the ground and she'd be like, 'Oh yes, please come in, make yourself comfortable.'"

D'Auria, who is married to a man and identifies as a straight ally, says the story of how she became Danbury High School's GSA leader is "crazy."

"I wasn't an educator at first," says D'Auria. "I was a crazy person! I was a fabric designer. I was working in the garment

industry; I'm a hat maker. This was in the mid-'80s when I did that."

The 1980s were, of course, when the world first learned about AIDS, and D'Auria, now 56, was living in one of the epicenters of that crisis.

"I was hardcore, living in the AIDS crisis, and being part of the whole social activism of the '80s in New York City," D'Auria says. "My first cousin died of AIDS ... I was with him when he passed. And it was the saddest thing I've ever experienced in my life. He didn't want to tell my aunt because we were a Christian family and what was my aunt going to think because he's dying of AIDS? It was the whole crazy story with my family with that."

"I always wanted to keep his memory alive. I went through the whole journey with him, and that's where it started," she recounts. "And that was the turning point for me to say, 'Hey, what is going on in this community?'"

D'Auria decided to pursue a master's degree, the study of humanistic, multicultural education. She researched all the "-isms," she says: racism, sexism, genderism, classism, all of which she said led toward her goal "to make a change on all human rights, and it led me to do my penetrative research project on transitioning youth."

That was in 2007-2008, and D'Auria says that was the beginning of her journey to better understand life within the transgender community. "It was a calling," she says. "It was like a spear. It's like the craziest thing. I've met the most fabulous people in my life this way. I'm just following this journey and it's really paid off. It really honestly has. It's gotten to the point that my students, especially my trans students, trust me."

"I am proud to be a GSA advisor, but I'm not just an advisor; I am a community [leader] within our school. And I'm proud of that, because it took many years to build that trust, to have that in my school with my students, my colleagues, and my administrators," D'Auria says.

"Kimberly is a champion for the cause and a protector of the kids," says Chris Davis, the mother of a nonbinary graduate of Danbury High. "She is an advocate to the extreme. And I'm really, really proud to know her."



Kimberly D'Auria drove more than 200 miles to protest President Trump and his administration's cuts to Planned Parenthood when she heard he was visiting her hometown of Utica, N.Y. Planned Parenthood is the number one health care provider in the nation for transgender Americans.

Davis' child, Chase, was a member of the Class of 2020. After a gap year, they plan to attend the College of Culinary Arts at Johnson & Wales University.

"They were very confused internally," Davis says of her child. "And I'm very happy that the GSA helped Chase to learn how to identify and learn how to relate with themselves better."

At the time of our interview, Danbury's administrators, like many across the state and the nation, were deciding how to teach students this fall, and keep everyone safe from the coronavirus. D'Auria says the memories of the sudden shutdown in March still linger.

"It was like we were not prepared for this," she says. "I don't think anybody's had a reality check. And the reality check is: we didn't go back on that Monday and we didn't go back on that Tuesday. And we are where we are right now." 



Dawn Ennis is an award-winning journalist who hosts the talk show "RiseUP with Dawn Ennis" and co-hosts the "Before the War" podcast. Ennis was America's first transgender journalist in a TV network newsroom when she came out six years ago. Follow her @lifeafterdawn on Twitter, Facebook and Instagram. Ennis and her family reside in West Hartford, Connecticut.



Mental Health in the Age of Coronavirus

These days, many in the LGBTQ community need help more than ever

By DAWN ENNIS

Several months into the pandemic, we have settled into our new 'Rona Reality. We've all memorized the symptoms, what experts say we should and should not do to avoid the spread of coronavirus, and what to do if you feel you or someone you love has become infected. Can you even recall a time when you didn't take a mask with you when you left your home? When was the last time you attended a concert or some other huge public gathering? Remember flying or cruising to faraway places?

Sure, this is a reality shared by everyone in Connecticut, no matter if someone is gay, lesbian, bisexual, queer, transgender or nonbinary, or straight. And the experience covers all age ranges. But experts in helping LGBTQ people cope with stress, depression, anxiety, and loneliness say that COVID-19 hit our marginalized community in a way unlike any other, right from the very start of the pandemic.

Connecticut VOICE asked LGBTQ people who have struggled with mental health if they would be willing to talk about their challenges during the pandemic. Two shared their stories via Facebook.

"We sought a trans-affirming therapist for my FTM son," wrote Cynthia Rahill Zschack of Orange, the straight cisgender mother of a trans boy and another child who identifies as part of the community. She works in education.

"We found someone who was a lesbian, and pretty good, but when we switched to a therapist who was himself trans, it was a much better fit," she wrote. "Also, for myself as the parent of kids who are LGBTQIA+, I've had a very difficult time finding a good therapist who takes my insurance. They tick the box (in *Psychology Today*) that they are LGBTQIA+ affirming, but then once they start misgendering your kids, you know they are not."

Danielle Lee Thompson is a trans woman from Winsted

who said she's "been open about the real me" for more than two years. "I am in therapy for schizoaffective bipolar disorder and gender disorder," she says.

Dr. Laura Saunders, PsyD, AABP, assistant director of psychology and the clinical coordinator of Young Adult Services at Hartford Hospital's Institute of Living, says, "we had particular concern with the LGBTQ population" as COVID hit. Saunders plays a key role in training campus staff who care for those patients.



Dr. Laura Saunders

"They have higher rates of suicidal ideation in behavior, depression, social isolation, and social anxiety. The restrictions for COVID, which made sense to reduce the spread of the virus, only further isolated members of the community," she says. "The difficult part was refocusing them on safe ways to reintegrate back into communities after such a long period of isolation."

It's a particular challenge for patients who identify as transgender, according to Saunders' Institute of Living colleague Dr. Derek Fenwick, a post-doctoral psychology fellow. That population's rate of suicide ideation is higher than other members of the queer community, and far higher than straight, cisgender Americans. More than 40 percent of trans adults have thought about, planned, or attempted suicide,

according to the research conducted by the Williams Institute at UCLA in 2016, and a study released this summer by The Trevor Project found more than half of trans and nonbinary youth considered taking their lives at some point.

"That is something that we obviously worry about for this population, especially during these tough times, with COVID, due to isolation," says Dr. Fenwick. "So for us, it was really about trying to [increase their] sense of connection with other people by trying to get them outside the house one time per day – even if it's just going on a walk by themselves or with a friend." This increased connection, he says, "reduces the feeling of loneliness, hopelessness, and

Unfortunately, this situation may not be resolved anytime soon. "We know that there are many [college-age] youth who find their greatest amount of freedom living on campus, for example, and many of those colleges and campuses have shut down. And youth don't know when next they'll be going back to them," she says.

Pick, who identifies as a cis lesbian woman, says another concern is "the intersectional way that the broader issues of COVID specifically affect LGBTQ youth unemployment, uncertainty about the future of their finances, housing. These are all areas where we know that LGBTQ people experience discrimination. They experience greater degrees of poverty



A study released this summer by The Trevor Project found more than half of transgender and nonbinary youth considered taking their lives at some point.

depression – and decreases that suicidal ideation – in this population."

That's also the goal at The Trevor Project, the nation's leading organization providing crisis intervention and suicide prevention services to LGBTQ young people under the age of 25. In addition to other challenges that the pandemic has imposed on these young people, says Casey Pick, the organization's senior fellow for advocacy and government affairs, "many of them find themselves at home for extended periods of time, sometimes with families that are not accepting – which can range from the refusal to use the correct name or pronouns, on over to physical abuse."



Casey Pick

and homelessness. And COVID-19 is amplifying that effect."

What can people in the community do when their situation becomes unmanageable? The Trevor Project operates a lifeline that is available by phone as well as by text and online. Pick says the organization realized as far back as January that it needed to be able to provide support remotely, as the pandemic worsened.

But, she says, something far more personal can also make a big difference: kindness.

"I would call on people to be kind, be giving to each other," says Pick. "Check in on your friends, check in on the youth.



Doctors work to re-establish “a sense of connection with other people by trying to get them outside the house one time per day – even if it’s just going on a walk by themselves or with a friend,” says Dr. Derek Fenwick at Hartford Hospital’s Institute of Living.

TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF

They may not have the connections that they used to have, so really reach out and establish those connections. I would also tell folks to model good self-care. Now is a time where everybody is under a tremendous amount of stress, and if you treat yourself well, that gives permission to others to treat themselves well.”

Pick also calls on community leaders to “remember sexual orientation and gender identity when you are thinking about providing needed resources, access to health care, doing data collection on who is being affected by COVID-19, and telehealth.”

Dr. Saunders calls access to telehealth “the silver lining” of the pandemic. Through telehealth, doctors can conduct a house call over the internet, using video conferencing technology. She and Dr. Fenwick discovered through their work that the pandemic has opened up new pathways to treatment that might not have been used as much, if not for the lockdown.

Dr. Fenwick adds that telehealth has also “allowed us to increase communication between LGBTQ youth and their family members.” He says it offers care providers an opportunity to visit patients at home and view the family dynamic in a way that may not have been possible if patients were coming on their own for in-person appointments. This has enabled the team to help patients “work through some of the rejection that they felt from family members.”

Dr. Saunders says through the Institute of Living’s LGBTQ support group, the team is also able to reach people who may live too far away to visit in person, including previous patients who now live out of state and may feel alone and unsupported. “Previous members who are now in New Hampshire or in other places have been able to reconnect with us,” she says. “We’ve also been connecting with families of younger folks from New London and Fairfield County – people we would never have been able to access without telehealth.”

“When patients get on telehealth, they witness a mirroring from other individuals in the community, so that they can see that they’re not alone,” says Dr. Fenwick. “And that really helps them.”



If you are a **TRANS OR GENDER-NONCONFORMING** person seeking help, Trans Lifeline can be reached at 877-565-8860.



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A Taste for Adventure

The Flying Monkey's menu and vibe draws a growing clientele

By CARA MCDONOUGH / Photography by TODD FAIRCHILD

They've got a saying at The Flying Monkey. "Let your monkey fly," recites Junior Baez, owner of the Newington restaurant. "Just be yourself. Here, we are big believers in everyone being treated the same. We have a very diverse clientele, and we all get along."

At this American fusion restaurant, the vibe includes treating regular customers like family and treating every visitor to the innovative, fresh, and simply fun dishes that The Flying Monkey Grill & Bar does best.

"We take traditional dishes and we recreate them," says Baez. The Flying Monkey first opened at 2016 at the Hartford-Brainard Airport – which is why its name and many dishes are aviation-themed – and moved to its current location on the Berlin Turnpike in Newington last fall, where it's now open with special seating, increased outdoor space, and other precautions due to the pandemic.

Baez's love of food and cooking began early. His father worked at a produce market and he remembers learning the ropes as a child by watching his dad. He was so into the scene, in fact, that he opened his own fruit and vegetable stand in his hometown of Hartford when he was only 16 years old.

"I loved the fast pace of it," he remembers. "I've always had a passion for food."

He's always had a passion for the Hartford area, too. After going to college for nursing, and then studying business, he ended up in the industry he'd always liked best. Baez's 20 years working in fine dining establishments before eventually opening his own

place included stints at The Hawthorne Inn, Carmen Anthony, and Ruth's Chris Steakhouse, never veering far from his Hartford roots.

His education in the fine dining industry is what helped him craft the fare at The Flying Monkey, which he calls "casual with upscale touches." That refers to both the food served and the service provided.

The move to Newington was a result of the institution's growing popularity. The Flying Monkey now seats nearly double the amount it did at the airport, says Baez, and with a building nearly five times the size of its original location, there is plenty of room to keep growing. That means many years of taking care of and increasing its lively, diverse and loyal customer base.

"Some people say I take it all too personally, but a lot of my customers have become family," says Baez. "They followed us all the way from Hartford to Newington."

And that "let your monkey fly" attitude extends to the menu, as well, which is innovative and enticing.

The restaurant is perhaps known best for its wide variety of wings served with an unusual, irresistible roster of sauces. The lineup includes traditional BBQ and buffalo, honey soy ginger, Thai peanut sauce,



At The Flying Monkey restaurant in Newington, owner Junior Baez and his staff make everyone feel welcome.

The Flying Monkey's eclectic menu has something for everyone.

"We take traditional dishes and we recreate them."



Restaurant staff are working to keep themselves and diners safe with increased precautions amid the pandemic.

garlic parmesan and its most popular sauce: the "spicy monkey," made with a sweet chili base and a touch of honey.

Other highlights include Chairman's Reserve steaks, wild-caught fish, and chicken dishes, as well as vegan offerings. Its signature eggrolls feature combinations you won't find anywhere else, including its Bacon Cheeseburger, Buffalo Mac and Cheese, and Steak and Cheese. Of course, you can't go wrong with crowd pleasers like the Lobster BLT or the classic charcuterie board, either. And Sunday brunch is sure to please everyone, with everything from Bananas Foster Waffles to Butter Poached Lobster Bennies. All ingredients, says Baez, are brought in fresh, never frozen.

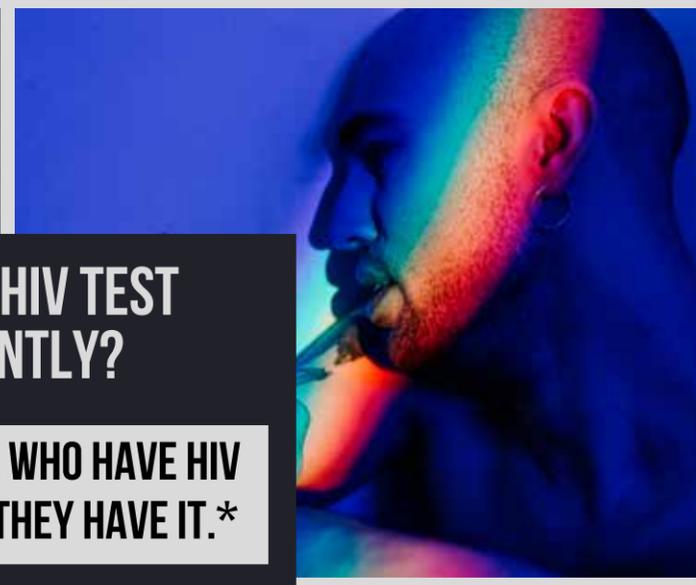
With wittily named offerings like The Classic Lindberg Burger, The Charter Chicken, and the Pineapple Pushback (one of many house-crafted cocktails, this one a mix of vanilla vodka, Cointreau and pineapple) the restaurant pays homage to its airport-inspired roots at its new location.

It's been a journey, both literal, from Hartford to Newington, and figuratively. Baez says his personal journey – learning the ropes starting at such a young age, and staying loyal to his hometown roots – as well as his identity as a gay man, has affected the way he runs his restaurant. He makes sure that their atmosphere is open and accepting to every single customer who walks through the doors, meaning the customer base at any given seating represents a range of backgrounds. This isn't a restaurant known for a certain "type" of crowd; it's a hangout where every single customer feels they belong.

"My journey is to try to make a comfortable space for all, no matter financial status, political views, religion, race, or sexuality," he says. "I strive to make our restaurant environment as comfortable as possible."

His passion for doing what's right over what's easy became even clearer at the outset of the pandemic. As Connecticut shut down in March facing the threat of coronavirus, The Flying Monkey kept its doors open for take-out, committed to providing customers their favorite dishes during a turbulent time, even if they couldn't serve them in-house as usual.

"We thought we needed to be here for the community, plus some of my staff didn't want to stop working," Baez says. Taking adequate



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Food, fun and flair: The Flying Monkey offers it all.

“Our staff looks after each other. I’m grateful.”

If it wasn’t for our staff, we wouldn’t have the kind of place we have.”

precautions, including that all staff wear masks during their shift and wear gloves when handling food and drink, he was able to take care of his customer base with meals to lift their spirits, and take care of staff with regular paychecks.

But Baez went even further. He offered all of his team members gift certificates to the Public Market of Newington, a local grocery store, to help them through the tough time, and started a GoFundMe page for staff to ensure those who weren’t making regular wages had a little extra from well-wishers. He made sure that staff members who were suffering under even greater financial strain were fed and taken care of, taking funds from his own pocket when needed.

“It was tough times,” he says. “Our staff looks after each other. I’m grateful. If it wasn’t for our staff, we wouldn’t have the kind of place we have.”

He was thankful, too, for the loyal customers who would call to simply check in on the restaurant during those early weeks and has been happy to see them return over the past few months.

As the state began a slow re-opening this summer – backed by the town of Newington, which was a big proponent of helping local businesses get back on their feet – Baez and his team prepared to open in the new normal forced by the ongoing pandemic.

They expanded seating outside on their patio, with room for 98 people outside, and another 98 inside. They added partitions at the bar and four “sanitation stations.”



Beyond safety measures,
the restaurant was able to welcome back live music. Jazz and blues bands play outdoors two or three times a week, a much-loved tradition at this upbeat, laid-back eatery.

Staff moved furniture to help with distancing and attended an hours-long course on how to properly clean, serve food, and deal with guests in the safest manner possible. In addition to the masks, gloves, and other gear already



Junior Baez

in use, the additional measures ensured The Flying Monkey team was ready to safely welcome guests back their establishment.

Beyond safety measures, says Baez, the restaurant was able to welcome back live music. Jazz and blues bands play outdoors two or three times a week, a much-loved tradition at this upbeat, laid-back eatery.

As for Baez, he can't deny it's been an unusually busy, unpredictable few years, with a major move, a pandemic, and new guidelines.

But he's in it for one reason above all, and that keeps him going through the tough times and the happy ones, and will keep him going through whatever comes next.

"It's all about the customers," he says. "It makes me happy when someone leaves happy." 



Cara McDonough is a freelance writer who lives in Hamden with her family. You can find more of her work at www.caramcduna.com.

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Creating A Kinder World

Collaborators on Connecticut-born musicals hope to put an end to bullying

By CAROL LATTER



Anyone can be the victim of bullying: young or old ... rich or poor ... people of any race or ethnicity ... those with disabilities or without.

But for those in the LGBTQ+ community, bullying is almost a given. A huge number of LGBTQ adults report being bullied – either online or in person – as they were growing up, and many face continued discrimination today.

The picture continues to be dire for American teens. Bullying is rampant in schools, despite efforts to reduce it, and studies show that LGBTQ youth are more likely to be bullied and report suicidal thoughts as a result than their straight peers.

But the Connecticut-based co-creators of an anti-

bullying play have been working to change all of that. They have written and produced an evocative musical – one that they hope will one day appear on Broadway and eventually be seen across the country. Emmy-nominated singer, songwriter and producer Jill Nesi and Spotlight Stage Company founder and director Christopher Zullo hope that the play, “Stand UP: The Musical” will change the culture of bullying that has persisted for decades – and give peace and resolution not only to young victims and their parents, but to bullies as well.

The pair first developed a condensed “showcase” version, suitable for younger audiences. The production, featuring young people from across the state who responded to local casting calls, toured middle schools across the state to rave reviews.

Nesi and Zullo planned to present the first public

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The premiere of the video is now just weeks away. In early October, anyone – not just children and teenagers – will be able to “Zoom” their way to a front row seat to the showcase by visiting wp.cga.ct.gov/cwcseo.

performance of the full-length musical, intended for adult and teenage audiences, on May 16 in North Haven. When COVID made that impossible, the play’s world premiere was moved to October.

But with COVID-related restrictions persisting, the state’s Commission on Women, Children, Seniors, Equity & Opportunity (CWCSEO) – a non-partisan arm of the Connecticut General Assembly and a supporter of this endeavor – approached Nesi and Zullo with a Plan B. The showcase version of the production would be videotaped, using the same cadre of young actors, and made available for free online.

The premiere of that video is now just weeks away. In early October, anyone – not just children and teenagers – will be able to “Zoom” their way to a front row seat to the showcase by visiting wp.cga.ct.gov/cwcseo.

Steven Hernández, Esq., executive director for the commission, says an updated practice guide developed in collaboration with Nesi’s “Stand Up and Speak Out” organization (standupspeakoutct.com), Central Connecticut State University’s Center of Excellence in Social and Emotional Learning (ccsu.edu/seps/socialEmotionalLearning.html), and Social Eyes (social-eyes.org) will also be available on the CWCSEO site in early October. He describes the guide – “Building Kindness and Empathy Online Activity Guide: A Virtual Enrichment Experience for Middle and High School Students” – as an important resource for teachers and home-schooling parents who want to discuss bullying with their students and children.

Hernández says teaching young people to build their social and emotional skills, and to treat one another kindly, is part of the commission’s ongoing efforts. “We’re expanding all the ways we can promote empathy and understanding,” he says. He and members of the commission have long been staunch supporters of Nesi and Zullo’s live productions, and they welcome the chance to continue that alliance.

STANDING UP FOR WHAT’S RIGHT

In the play, a high school sophomore who is bullied by her classmates at school and on social media is visited by the ghost of a gay, African-American teen, in scenes reminiscent of Dickens’ “A Christmas Carol.”

The ghost, who committed suicide after being bullied himself, urges her not to give up hope. He encourages her to stand up and speak out on behalf of herself and others,

and to surround herself with allies who can help put an end to the bullying. In the process, she is also able to show compassion and kindness to the perpetrator, a young girl who has been bullied and mistreated by her own mother.

Both the showcase and the full-length musical are part of an anti-bullying initiative called Stand Up and Speak Out. The mission is to raise awareness about today’s global bullying epidemic “by building connection and empathy through the arts.”

The whole effort got its start a few years ago, after Nesi’s seventh-grade daughter revealed she was being bullied in school. Nesi – who had been writing and performing inspirational music for nonprofits and created a healthy lifestyle program for kids called the VITA 4 – not only intervened in that situation but wrote a song about it. She shared that song in a meeting with State Rep. Noreen Kokoruda (R-Madison), a panel of school superintendents, and Steven Hernández. “And from that song came 14 other songs,” she says.

Nesi got help on several of them from Guilford musician Nick Fradiani, Sr. The result was a musical called “Her Song,” which debuted at the Ivoryton Playhouse in May 2017, and was funded entirely by Nesi. “We had seven shows there. Four were school shows – there were probably over 1,000 kids – and then three public shows, which all sold out,” she recalls.

More than two years and several rewrites later, the production has morphed into the showcase that has been touring schools as well as the full-blown stage version – thanks in large part to Zullo, who was brought in last year as the musical’s director and ended up rewriting much of the show, with plenty of input from Nesi.

“It’s been an amazing collaboration,” says Zullo. “I never considered myself a writer.” The subject matter speaks to him. He is gay and was bullied in school as well.

He says the response to the shorter school-oriented showcase has been amazing – with everyone from students to parents to politicians loving every minute of it. He notes that audiences have been moved by the messages of compassion, empowerment, and hope in the productions, and the student actors – whether they’ve been bullied themselves or not – have gotten a fresh outlook on the topic.

Nesi couldn’t agree more. “For the people who have viewed this, or been part of this, I see a change. And that alone is just amazing,” she says.

“There’s one girl who tried out for the play and she was

painfully shy - she could not even talk - so we gave her a main part in one of the songs where she is a dancer. Now when she comes to rehearsal, she's a different kid. I've never seen anything like it. She used to wear her hair back and her shoulders were hunched, and she would just hide in the corner. Now, she's dancing and hair is down. She's flying around. It's worth it, just to see that. Her mom came up to me after one of the public shows that we did and she said, 'Thank you for doing this. It's changed her life.' And a lot of people have said that."

SPREADING THE MESSAGE

Nesi says the central message of the play is clear, even to younger audience members. Rather than hide from bullies, fight back, or withdraw, "we want kids to stand up and speak out for themselves, and stand up and speak out for one another, as well. Because kids experience, and witness, bullying all the time, and they don't say anything because they're afraid."

She says because the school showcase involves high schoolers performing for younger students, "the younger kids see 'themselves' on the stage, and they're learning through music and the arts about kindness and compassion and empathy without even realizing it."

Zullo says they also want to illuminate this potentially devastating issue for parents and teachers. "For some reason, bullied kids often don't think that they can tell anyone what's going on," he explains. "We want to hold up a mirror and say, 'This could be happening right under your nose.'"

Since the anti-bullying plays began, Nesi and her group have performed songs from the shows at the state Capitol

- and even for the United Nations, last March. "It's really been an amazing experience for the kids and for me," she says. Now comes the challenge to find funding to keep the effort going, and to expand it geographically. Nesi, Zullo, and the rest of their team are seeking partners, sponsors, grants and fund-raising opportunities to keep the dream alive.

The ultimate goal, post-COVID, is to license the musicals to school dramatic directors and PTAs as well as community theaters, so that the productions can be performed using local talent. "That's impactful because it's life-changing for the kids in the play, as well as for the kids who see it," Nesi says.

When kids are bullied, she explains, "they feel belittled by other kids and it affects their self-esteem for the rest of their lives."

For some, the impact is even more severe. "Bullying is causing some kids to end their lives," Nesi says. "They need to see that if you stand up for yourself and other people stand up for you, and you open up to adults and we speak about it - you can see what your life can become rather than, 'Oh my God, this is the worst thing that's ever happened to me. I don't want to be here anymore.' And that's what the play tagline that Chris Zullo created is about: No one is too broken to be fixed."

As convener of a statewide collaborative on social and emotional learning (SEL) and school culture, Hernandez advises folks to keep a lookout for more resources on the topic of social and emotional skills building from the commission. "It's a critical topic," he says. "Especially now." 



Production team, from left: Sandy Mascia (company manager), Jill Nesi (creator/ music and lyrics), and Christopher Zullo (director and writer)

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CONTINUOUS CARE

Middlesex Health is supporting transgender patients who face additional health concerns during the pandemic

By JANE LATUS

We all heard the warning as the COVID-19 pandemic spread across Connecticut and the nation: Don't let the fear of becoming infected stop you from seeking medical care when you need it. Otherwise, medical experts warned, patients could experience worse health outcomes down the road – especially those with chronic illnesses – and delay could result in preventable deaths of those too worried about the coronavirus to seek emergency care.

The warnings were well-founded. Across the country, emergency room visits have dropped by 40 to 50%, according to the president of the American College of Emergency Physicians, and nearly half of adults responding to a national survey said that they or others in their household had postponed or skipped medical care during the pandemic.

“Nationwide, there has been a significant increase in mortality rates – more deaths than can be attributed to COVID-19,” says a statement from Middlesex Health. “The worry is that people are not seeking emergency care when they feel very sick.” That includes people with symptoms of potentially life-threatening conditions, including heart attack and stroke.

While the cisgender majority stayed away from medical offices and emergency departments because they feared contracting COVID-19 and because elective procedures were delayed, the pandemic has had unique consequences for trans patients, says Transgender Medicine Program Medical Director Kathryn Tierney, MSN, APRN, FNP-BC, FAANP. Obviously, trans people have the same health issues as anyone else, but they have additional medical concerns and needs as well. “It's our job to make sure these patients have access to the care they require,” Tierney says.

If anyone has expertise in bulldozing barriers to obtaining medical care, it's the staff at Middlesex Health. Its Transgender Medicine Program isn't one that waits around for patients to show up; it's an advocacy bullhorn for attracting and supporting transgender and gender non-conforming patients.

And if ever there was a community that needed medical champions, it's the trans and non-binary community, for whom the fear of contracting COVID-19 from medical settings may be amplified by their fears and frustrations surrounding their other obstacles to health care.

Fortunately, Middlesex Health's Transgender Medicine Program is well-versed in encouraging and enabling one of the already most-reluctant communities to seek health care. And during the

pandemic, it has ramped up its efforts to make sure transgender and gender non-conforming people get the help they need.

BARRIERS TO HEALTHCARE ACCESS

“It's always been a challenge to get trans people to access health care,” says Tierney. “We're looking at people who have huge difficulty accessing health care to begin with, and the barriers keep increasing. Trans people are more likely to have transportation issues, to have financial issues, to be unemployed, and to be food insecure. On top of that, if you're sick, you wonder, are you going to a place that will treat you well?”

Compounding these issues for trans people, the pandemic has led to job – and thus insurance – loss. “We've seen an increase in the number of patients deferring care because of no insurance, and lapses in filling prescriptions,” says Tierney, noting that Middlesex Health follows up on cancelled appointments. “We try to figure out if it's an insurance issue and try to get them connected, to make sure they get care. When a community is told for years and years that they don't deserve equal health care, they [patients] often don't tell you what the issue is.”

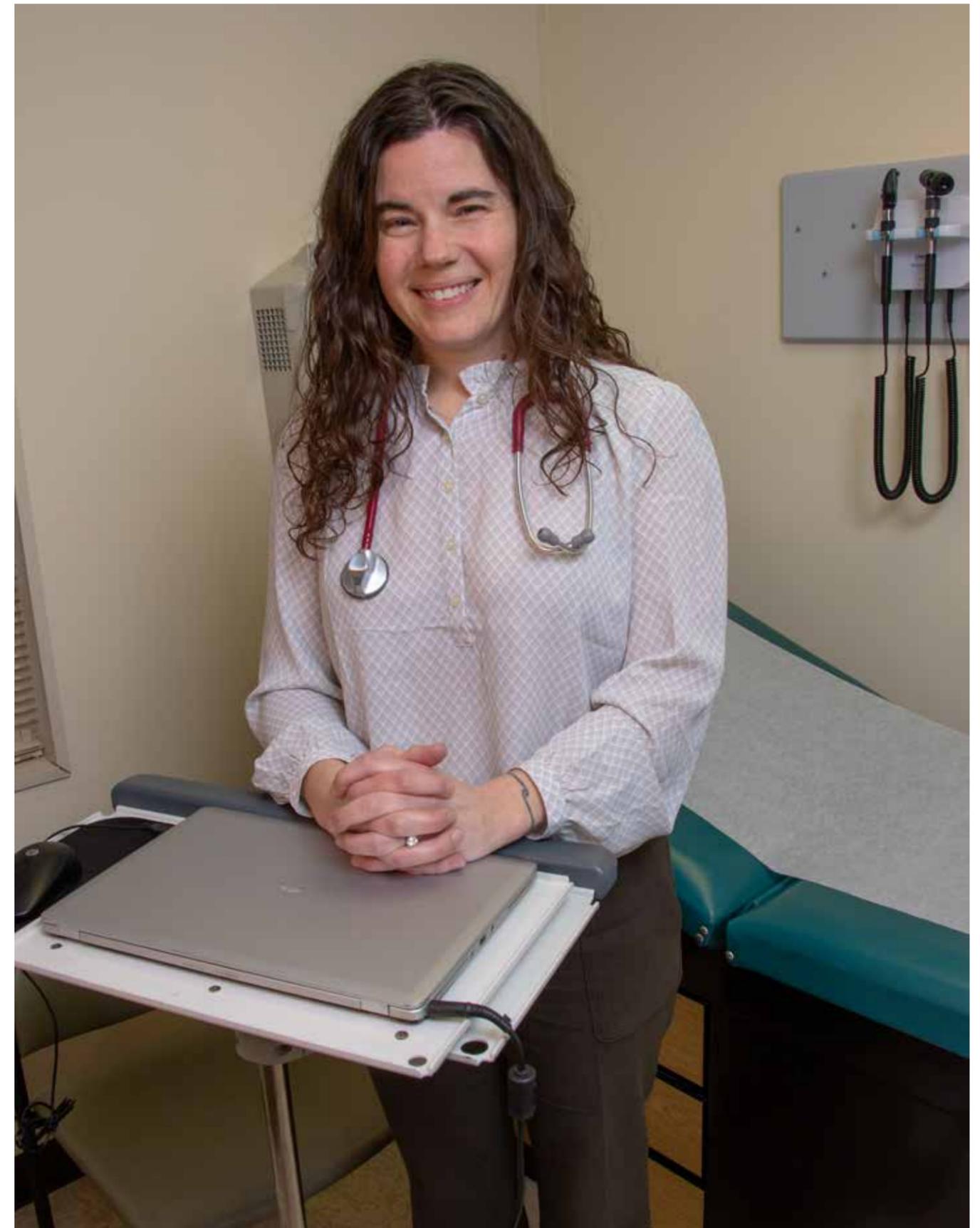
In some cases, the pandemic has pushed trans people into high-risk jobs, says Tierney. “It has forced trans people, who already have a very high rate of unemployment, into working jobs that others have left. A lot of patients are definitely working those front-line jobs – grocery stores, restaurants, retail. You're faced with the choice of not working or putting yourself at risk. Then there's the double-edged sword of not knowing, if you get sick, whether you can get care.”

And then there are the effects of isolation or being quarantined in risky situations.

“A lot of young people are forced to be home, including from college. A lot are living in places that are anywhere from uncomfortable to dangerous,” says Tierney. “I'm grateful that remote visits have allowed us to continue our continuity of care.”

Middlesex Health is also still seeing patients in person. The health system is again performing gender-affirming surgeries after delaying some due to the pandemic. The deferral was hard on patients, says Tierney. “For many patients, this [surgery] is the culmination of years of work. It can require being out of work for weeks or months. These procedures take a lot of coordination, and to not know when you are going to be able to do it has definitely been a source of anxiety.”

Tierney stresses that all types of care are now available. “I



Transgender Medicine Program Medical Director Kathryn Tierney, photographed here prior to the pandemic, and her team stand ready to meet the unique challenges faced by the transgender and nonbinary community amid the COVID-19 pandemic. Photo by **Tony Bacewicz**.



Middlesex Health has been named an “LGBTQ Healthcare Equality Leader” by the Human Rights Campaign Foundation and offers a variety of support groups for transgender and questioning patients. Photo courtesy of Middlesex Health.

don’t think at this point there’s a reason to delay care. There is always a sufficient workaround. Do not delay and inadvertently worsen your health,” she says.

FEAR OF DISCRIMINATION

As if the pandemic wasn’t enough, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) in June revoked anti-discrimination healthcare and health insurance protections for transgender patients, a change slated to take effect in August. The Monday morning after the Friday announcement, Tierney says, “already I’m getting messages from people worrying about whether they should move up their procedures.”

Connecticut prohibits such discrimination, but the fear is real for those with insurance through the federal government, says Tierney. Out of state, she adds, “the biggest concern is that it’s now allowable to discriminate against trans people.”

Roughly two dozen states, along with an array of health care providers and LGBTQ+ organizations, immediately launched federal lawsuits to forestall this change, asking the U.S. District Court to set aside the regulation and declare it unconstitutional.

In mid-August, a New York federal judge blocked HHS from ending anti-discrimination protections for LGBT patients, citing the U.S. Supreme Court’s recent ruling in the case *Bostock vs. Clayton County* that discrimination based on sex included both sexual orientation and gender identity. “The Court concludes that the proposed rules are, indeed, contrary to *Bostock* and, in addition, that HHS did act arbitrarily and capriciously in enacting them,” the NY judge said. Finding that the plaintiffs opposing the new HHS rule have standing to sue, he granted a preliminary injunction blocking the rule from going into effect.

Actual discrimination, not just the fear of it, has all along been the chief obstacle to health care for trans people. A 2015 survey by the National Center for Transgender Equality found that in the previous year, “23% of respondents did not see a doctor when they needed to because of fear of being mistreated as a transgender person.”

That survey also found:

- 33% of those who had seen a health care provider in the prior year “reported having at least one negative experience ... related to being transgender, such as verbal harassment, refusal of treatment, or having to teach the health care provider about transgender people to receive appropriate care.”

- 15% reported that a health care provider asked them invasive or unnecessary questions about their transgender status that were not related to the reason for their visit, and
- 13% said that one or more professionals, such as a psychologist, counselor or religious advisor, tried to stop them from being transgender

“The worry of trans people is that they’ll come in with the same symptoms [as other patients], and yet not be treated the same,” says Tierney. This is why Middlesex Health works proactively to spread the word that “we’re available for competent transgender and LGBTQ care.”

“We’re so lucky that Middlesex is willing to be out in the community,” at Pride celebrations, trans health conferences and other events, she adds. “People need to know you are there. There’s a subtle difference between doing a good job and being vocal about it. You see the cultural leadership.”

PROVIDING QUALITY CARE

Middlesex Health’s Transgender Medicine Program has grown since its 2016 inception to now providing care to more than 1,000 patients. The entire staff at Middlesex, from receptionists to administration, is trained to provide comprehensive and respectful care to LGBTQ+ patients.

“The science of transgender medicine is so nascent compared to other health care fields,” says Tierney, explaining that providing appropriate care requires skilled clinicians and well-trained support staff. “We have providers in almost every area, and we can look at trans health from every perspective.”

At Middlesex Health, a Transgender Services Navigator helps patients access a full array of care, including primary care, hormonal therapy, behavioral health services, continence and pelvic health, gender transition surgery, physical rehabilitation, infectious disease testing and treatment, and voice therapy.

The Human Rights Campaign Foundation – the nation’s largest LGBTQ civil rights organization – consistently names Middlesex Health an “LGBTQ Healthcare Equality Leader.” Middlesex Health offers free online support groups for transgender, gender non-conforming or questioning patients, as well as support groups for friends and families. Visit middlesexhealth.org/lgbtq to learn more. 

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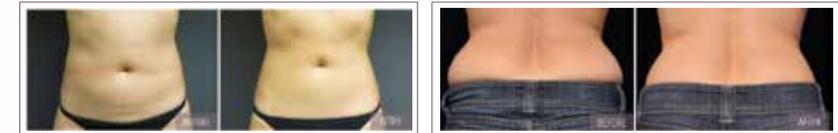
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Many of us feel like we know WFSB Channel 3 meteorologist Scott Haney, having watched him on television for years. But have you heard his personal journey? His coming out story? His regrets? Haney

shares the ups and downs that have guided him along the way - and his philosophy of moving past the negative to seek out the positive.

What does COVID-19 mean to transgender health care and its patients? CT Voice Out Loud Host and health reporter Hilary Russo sat down with Katy Tierney, endocrinologist and Director of the Transgender Medicine Program at Middlesex Health. Tierney get real about how their program is finding positive ways to face the pandemic, support their patients and what she sees looking forward.

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FINDING HIS WAY

Scot Haney is living the life he's meant to live

By CARA ROSNER / Photography by TODD FAIRCHILD

When you know, you know. Before then, you just think you know. Scot Haney first suspected he was gay when he was in first grade and a sixth-grade student came into his Long Island classroom to help the teacher.

"I had the biggest crush on this sixth-grade student. They looked like Christopher Atkins in 'Blue Lagoon,'" Haney recalls, thinking back to 1970. "I was in love with this person. Then I found out that person was a girl, and I was upset. I was, like, angry. Because I wanted it to be a boy. As far back as first grade, I knew that something was different here."

But, of course, having that realization and accepting what it means are two very different things. It would be nearly 20 years before Haney would come out, at age 26. And, like many young people finding themselves, his path took some confusing turns. In third grade, he dreamed one night he lived with a girl and woke up thinking, "I might be straight!" But years later, in middle school, he was "grossed out" playing Spin the Bottle with girls.

"The kids at school, the bullies knew. They knew before I knew," he says. "I was like, 'I'm not gay because I haven't acted on it.' [But] they knew, and it was not great in high school."

But his first kiss, in ninth grade with a girl named Karen, brought more certainty for him. "Everyone was like, 'You and Karen should go out.' And I kissed her, and I was like, 'Ugh.' I really didn't feel anything. [I thought,] 'I clearly like boys and I don't like girls in that romantic sense.'"

These days, many in Connecticut know Haney as the meteorologist who delivers forecasts weekday mornings on WFSB Channel 3's "Eye-witness News." Over the past two decades, he has become one of the



Scot Haney, shown here in West Hartford's Elizabeth Park, has undergone a long - and continuing - journey, but is enjoying the ride.



Haney, who lives in Harford, is best known to many in Connecticut for delivering weather forecasts weekday mornings on WFSB Channel 3 and doing lifestyle reporting for the station.

highest-profile on-air personalities in Connecticut and has helped thousands of people wake up and start their days. He also brings his warm and lighthearted personality to the network's "Better Connecticut" lifestyle show.

While he loves his job, and appreciates the journey – both professional and personal – it took to get here, Haney, 56, says people have misconceptions about him.

"A lot of people see me as constantly happy, 'on' all the time," he says. "You can't be 'on' all the time. I suffer from a little bit of anxiety, just about things, the world. The way the world is today, it stresses me out. I suffer from more anxiety than the average person would [guess]."

COMING OUT

Growing up on Long Island, Haney spent many weekends of his childhood out on his family's sailboat. When he was between the ages of 8 and 17, he recalls fondly, they took many trips to Cherry Grove on Fire Island, which became a family favorite.

He remembers thinking, during those Fire Island visits, "This is like heaven here. I see people like-minded, like me. As I got older, my family would always walk down to the gay beach because that's where all the action was happening."

His parents, Marlene and Bill, were supportive of the gay lifestyle they saw on display in places like Fire Island and New York City's Greenwich Village – to a point.

"My dad was accepting, I think, as long as it wasn't us," Haney says of his father, who was an artist and often worked in Greenwich Village. His mother, he says, was more progressive. "I remember walking down the street in the Village and my mom would explain to me when I saw two guys holding hands, 'That's just the way they are.'"

But as the years went by, the trips to

the gay beaches stopped. "You just do what is expected and you don't want to be different from anybody else," Haney says. "I never had sex with anybody; I never dated anybody. I tried to date a girl in college, which didn't go well."

Then Haney met Steven, at a Pathmark supermarket in Long Island where Haney was working full time as he prepared to go to graduate school and had his "first real kiss." It was 1990 and Haney was 26.

"Two thoughts ran through my mind: I was never gonna run for Congress, and it was one of the best moments of my life," he remembers. The relationship soured quickly – Steven broke up with him after two weeks, sending Haney into a depression – but it was a turning point in his life.

The first person he came out to was a close female friend, who immediately wanted to introduce him to another newly out man named Dan. Haney dated Dan for only a few months in grad school, but it was this relationship that prompted him to come out to his mother in 1991. When Haney was home on break from grad school, Dan called his house frequently (in pre-cell phone days, when there were only landlines), which made his mother curious.

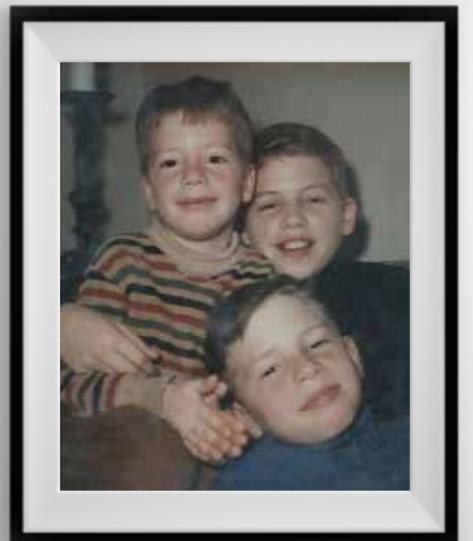
"I started to cry; I felt like a big disappointment," Haney says of that moment, but his mother was supportive from the outset. "[Shesaid,] 'It's not gonna be an easy life. I just want you to be happy and I want you to be prepared.' AIDS was still pretty rampant; she was worried about my health. She didn't want me to get beat up. It was a real, honest conversation, but I had an ally. My mom's always been my strongest ally."

His two brothers, both Christian, weren't as supportive when Haney came out to them; one even initially tried to talk to him about conversion therapy treatments.

But by then, Haney was with long-



Haney as a child.



Haney and his two brothers, Rick and Jeff



Haney (center front) with his brother and mom, Marlene



Haney "trying to look like a model."



Haney in his younger days.



Haney, his middle brother Rick and godson, Brandon

"I PARTIALLY CHOSE MY CAREER PATH BECAUSE THERE ARE OTHER GAY MEN IN TELEVISION, AND IT'S GOOD TO BE SURROUNDED BY LIKE."

—Scot Haney

time boyfriend Paul Marte, who he would be with for 19 years until 2012. "I think [my brothers] saw the fact that I was with Paul, I was in a great relationship, I really hadn't changed much since before the time I told them to the time after I told them," says Haney. "I just loved them and hoped they'd love me back. Over time, they realized that I'm not any different."

Today, Haney says, his brothers are "very supportive."

FINDING A HOME ON-SCREEN

Just a month after meeting Paul, the out-and-in-love Haney got his first job in television in 1993 – in Topeka, Kansas, home of Fred Phelps, the controversial Westboro Baptist Church minister known for his extreme anti-gay views. Phelps even went so far as protesting at gay people's funerals.

"I was terrified," says Haney, who feared being outed and was a constant mix of homesick, worried, and nervous. "I had just met my partner a month before I moved to Kansas and we decided we were gonna try to make it work. I was so miserable. The interesting thing was, the audience was very receptive and they liked me; I just didn't like being there."

After moving back to the East Coast, he took several years off from TV and was working in advertising in New York City when a friend from grad school called to say News12 was seeking a part-time weatherperson in New Jersey. After getting that job, Haney moved on to News12's Westchester affiliate before landing at Channel 3 in 1998.

"I partially chose my career path because there are other gay men in television, and it's good to be surrounded by being on television; I would watch the news growing up."

At Channel 3, he found his career home. "I'm so lucky; [being gay] was never an issue. Channel 3 has been so supportive. My management team there has been incredible," he says. "I'm living the life that I'm supposed to be living, and the station is appreciative of that."

CONTINUING THE JOURNEY

Haney looks back on his breakup with Marte with a mix of nostalgia and regret. The two remain very close. After moving out of the large home he and Marte shared in Canton, Haney now lives in a townhouse in Hartford's West End.



Haney, Marte and Haney's nephew Jonathon

"We parted amicably," he says of Marte, who is senior communications manager at the Bushnell in Hartford. "We text every day. The first thing every day, I get a text from him, 'Have a good day. How are you?' It wasn't always that way; it was hard at first. There was no cheating, there was no horribleness. I was probably the one to blame for the relationship ending. I was just always curious about what else was out there."

Haney met Marte when he was 28, just two years after he came out. "Hindsight is 20/20, but I had a good thing," says Haney of the relationship. "My career took front and center, sometimes when it shouldn't have."

With a rigorous day job and a packed philanthropic calendar, Haney is a busy man. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, at least two weekends a month were booked with public appearances, most of which were to help charities. He also is on the board of directors of the Hartford chapter of Rebuilding Together, a non-profit that rebuilds homes and revitalizes communities; speaks to schoolchildren; and attends many evening events. In his rare downtime, he enjoys retreating to his home in Fire Island with his 17-year-old cat, Dash. "It's about 125 steps from the ocean; that's where I go to recharge and refuel."

So, after all he's been through – what he's achieved, what he's lost, and what he's learned along the way – what would he say to his younger self, that closeted kid in Long Island? "You're



Haney has worked in TV since 1993

gonna be okay, you're gonna be good, and you're gonna be great. You might not be great in every part of this country, but there are places to live your life where being gay is completely terrific."

Through his ups and downs, he has strived to push

away the negative and seek out the positive, a strategy that has served him well, even if it's sometimes been challenging.

"People might reject you. Those are the people that are not worth having in your life; they just don't get it," he says. "My mother was kind of right in a couple ways. It hasn't always been an easy life, but it beats being in a closet, married, with pent-up feelings. There's light at the end of the tunnel. It might not always seem that way, but there's light at the end of the tunnel, and you just gotta ignore the naysayers and move toward the positive people." 

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EVEN APART, WE'RE IN THIS TOGETHER.

THE SHOW WILL GO ON



SPEAKING THEIR TRUTHS

Intersex individuals seek greater visibility and understanding

By JANE LATUS

LGBTQIA+. In social movements, employment, journalism, education, and society at large, this acronym has become a familiar and widely accepted acknowledgment that our identities matter. While most of the letters have been widely recognized for years, those who identify as “I” are advocating for increased visibility.

“Intersex” is a general term used for a variety of conditions in which a person is born with a reproductive or sexual anatomy that doesn’t seem to fit the typical definitions of biological sex, which we typically think of as “female” or “male.” Some of these characteristics are visible at birth and some are not apparent until a child reaches puberty.

“When a lot of people find out they’re intersex, they end up in a bubble of silence, with no one to reach out to. It’s very isolating and stigmatizing,” says Sarah Kosheff, a 30-year-old intersex person from Bridgeport.



Sarah Kosheff

Some intersex people would rather not be in the acronym at all, saying it amplifies misunderstanding of what it means to be intersex – in particular, mistakenly conflating being intersex with being transgender.

However, one can be both intersex and LGBTQ, and even those who aren’t LGBTQ say they share the stigma and discrimination aimed at the queer community. Also, like others in the acronym, there is no “one” way of being intersex. In fact, there are 30-plus variations, some with their own spectra.

“Our society is becoming more accepting of the non-binary. Just as there is no binary for gender, there also is no binary for biological sex. Everyone has different genitalia,” says Ellie Kraus, 22, a West Hartford resident who is intersex. “Most people aren’t aware that intersex even exists. While it’s not common, intersex is also not rare and occurs in as many as 1.7% of the population.”

Intersex people say they are misunderstood because it’s a subject that’s historically been hushed, and still isn’t up for much discussion. They have hardly any cultural representation. And unfortunately, there’s some attention they’d rather not have; many dislike a widely read novel with an intersex protagonist: Pulitzer-winner “Middlesex” by Jeffrey Eugenides. Hans Lindahl, an intersex writer, explains some of the harms the book caused the intersex community in a YouTube video, “An intersex person reacts to Middlesex.”

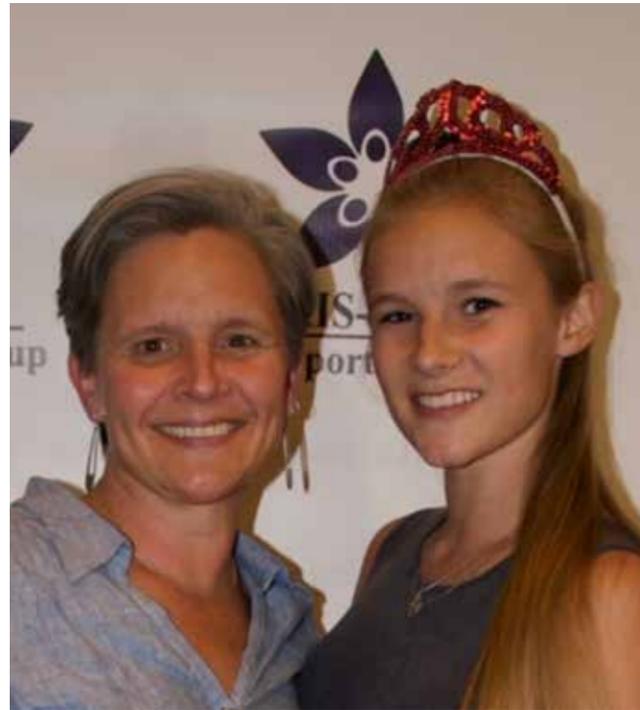
What intersex people say they want others to know about them is – essentially – more. They want parents discovering their newborn is intersex to have ready access to accurate information and support. They want parents and doctors to not rush to surgical intervention. They want autonomy over their own medical decisions. They want to be understood and helped to make their own choices.

Bonnie Scranton, a licensed clinical social

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Ellie Kraus, right

worker, agrees. In her role as a family support therapist with the GUPPE Clinic at Connecticut Children's Medical Center, she works to take care of the emotional needs of families and children with intersex traits. Since 2006, when a broad Consensus Statement identified multi-disciplinary care as a best practice in the field, psychosocial support has been seen as integral.

"Because intersex conditions are so medically complex, these teams are essential to provide the best care," she says. Rather than have children attend multiple appointments with providers who are either unfamiliar with or disconnected from other specialties, the CCMC program sees children and families together at the same time.

"So I will meet with a family, alongside of endocrinology, urology, gynecology, and genetics, depending on what the child needs," adds Scranton. "Having us all in the same room is not only more efficient for the families but helps ensure that any questions a family has are answered in a well-rounded way. The child's right to an open future is critical."

"I'd like people to know we're here, and we don't need medical intervention to regulate how we look," says Kraus. "The medical community has a history of 'normalizing' bodies through irreversible and often non-consensual surgeries, and that needs to change."

She also hopes for an end to the stigma. Historically, she says, the attitude was, "This isn't normal, so we don't want to talk about it." I want to talk about it as much as I can."

Scranton echoes this sentiment, sharing that the work she does with families is largely around acceptance, education, and helping parents to explain their child's condition to them in developmentally appropriate ways. "Having a conversation with a teenager who is just learning about the specifics of their condition is very different than gradually sharing age appropriate details with a child from birth, but both are very important," she says.

Research shows that parental adjustment correlates to a child's self-acceptance, so Scranton feels it is essential to start there. In the past, some doctors never shared a child's diagnosis with the parents. In cases where they were told, parents were encouraged to keep their child's diagnosis a secret, for fear of negative mental health effects.

"We know now that secrecy breeds shame," she says. "I try to help families see the distinction between privacy and secrecy. One is about healthy boundaries and the other is about shame. While there are some aspects of our development that some children and families wish to keep private, intersex bodies are not shameful."

MANY WAYS TO BE INTERSEX

Because the term intersex encompasses a wide variety of bodily variations, resulting in genitalia and sex organs that are outside of traditional expectations, and because these impact bodies differently, not all people claim "intersex" as an identity.

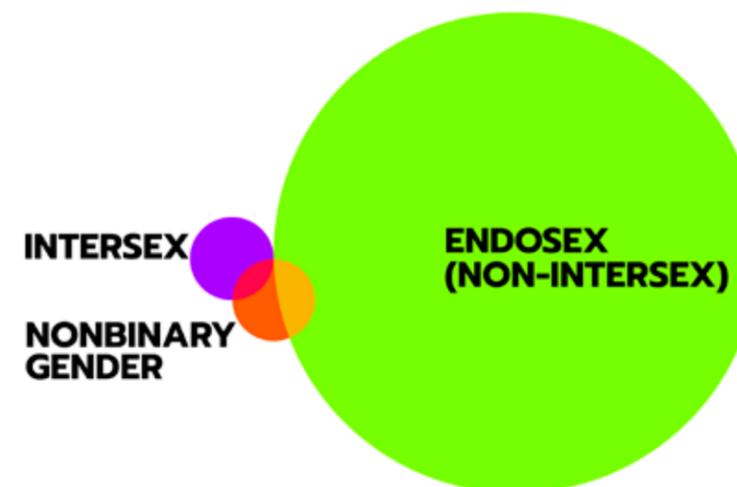
"I know people who've had surgery when they were too young to consent. They wish they could have grown into their bodies."

– Ellie Kraus

As an inkling of its complexity, not all who have the most common intersex condition – Congenital Adrenal Hyperplasia (CAH) – even consider themselves intersex. Some forms of CAH make the body unable to produce cortisol, resulting in a truly life-threatening condition requiring lifelong medication. Also, with CAH, the adrenal glands produce excess androgens. (The so-called "male" hormones, like testosterone). These hormonal anomalies can cause differences in the appearance of the genitals at birth.

There are spectrums of CAH, ranging from newborns born with a vulva and clitoris, to those who have a vulva and naturally large clitoris that may resemble a small penis, to those who develop facial hair, deep voices, and genital changes at puberty due to higher testosterone.

Another intersex variation is Androgen Insensitivity Syndrome (AIS), which also varies on a spectrum from partial (PAIS) to complete (CAIS) inability to process androgen hormones. People with AIS have XY chromosomes but because the receptor sites on the developing genitalia and organs do not respond to androgens, they are



Intersex and endosex (non-intersex) both intersect with non-binary gender.

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born with some or most of the physical traits of a typical XX female – for example, a vulva and average-sized clitoris – with internal testes.

Kosheff’s parents found out she has AIS when she was born, but she didn’t know until age 11, when her parents thought she was old enough to understand. Prenatal testing had her parents expecting a boy. “But I was born a girl,” she says.

Her parents told her the surgery she’d had at age 10, which they’d previously described as removing “excess tissue,” was a precautionary removal of undescended testes. “I learned I’d never have a period, and never be able to have children,” she says. “It was a lot to process. I began thinking I was inferior, that I was somehow less of a girl.”

At 16, Kosheff went to an AIS conference with her mother. “That was the turning point, when I really started to take pride in it,” she says. “I finally felt less alone. It was really a life changer.”

Kraus has CAIS – but she and her parents didn’t know it until she was 14. She was born with typical female genitalia, but a combination of factors, beginning with a hernia at age 2, made her mother wonder if her child was developing typically. The surgeons just repaired the hernia and sewed her back up. When Kraus hadn’t had her period and had few signs of entering puberty, her nurse practitioner ordered an ultrasound.

Kraus’s mother says, “They saw she had no uterus. And that

was certainly not news that we were expecting.” A further test showed her daughter has XY chromosomes.

“When I found out, it was definitely shocking to me,” says Kraus. “Even at 14, you’re thinking about what your life might look like as an adult, and about having a family. For a while, I was in denial about my diagnosis. What helped me to accept it was meeting other people like me.”

Kraus learned about a national support group, called InterConnect (formerly the AIS-DSD support group), where she could gather every summer with other children, teens, and adults to meet, talk, learn, and share their experiences.

While the surgeon clearly missed the signs of CAIS back in 1999, Kraus now feels lucky.

“I know people who’ve had surgery when they were too young to consent. They wish they could have grown into their

bodies.” She also knows people whose surgery left them with genitalia that doesn’t correspond to their gender. “It’s changing and improving quickly. There are less children who’ve had that surgery,” she adds.

Legislating intersex surgery is complicated and controversial even within the intersex community and is currently under consideration in Connecticut (see sidebar on following page).

LIFELINES

Kraus’s mother says that when her daughter was diagnosed with an inguinal hernia at age 2, “I asked the surgeon, ‘Isn’t this the route the testes take?’ He said, ‘Oh no, she has ovaries and will give you lots of grandchildren.’”

Eight years after learning her daughter had internal testes rather than ovaries, and no uterus, she says, “we have talked about how there are many ways to have a family,” but adds, “I can’t pretend it’s not going to be sad for her.”

For parents, meanwhile, “at first, beyond understanding the medical complexities and being sure that your child has the best care possible, the most difficult part is that it’s very lonely.” Support is crucial, she says, adding that the InterConnect/AIS-DSD support group “became a complete lifeline for us. We have made lifelong friends and have found a lot of meaning in being there for other families like ours.”

Kraus and her mother now both volunteer with the group.

“We get calls all the time. Most parents are afraid, confused, and worried about what the diagnosis will mean for their child’s future. As a parent, you worry about how your child will be treated, how their relationships will evolve, and about how they will feel about themselves. There is no substitute for peer support in fostering the self-esteem and connection that we all need to develop in a healthy way,” she says.

“The bottom line is that it helps to know there are people who have walked this path before you and will continue to do so. Many doctors have told us that we will probably never meet another person like us, which is just not true. We want to break the silence and stigma and celebrate our kids.”

There are precious few cultural examples of intersex people. One is Belgian model Hanne Gaby Odiele, who proclaimed her intersex status in a 2017 Teen Vogue article.

Kosheff says, “I’m a big television fan and I’ve seen some representations of intersex people that have been alarming, and some that have been beautiful.” She cites MTV’s “Faking It” and an episode of “Freaks and Geeks” as positive examples. “I’d like to see more representation, more intersex voices and awareness in general. The intersex community has been very silent, very invisible for such a long time.”

“Most parents are afraid, confused, and worried about what the diagnosis will mean for their child’s future.”

–Ellie Kraus



A Global Movement

Intersex rights is not just of concern in the United States. Countries around the world have been working for many years to bring awareness and acceptance to the issue, launching what has become a global movement.

Intersex Awareness Day (October 26) and Intersex Day of Solidarity (November 8) are marked each year to promote human rights actions and support for the intersex community, and to document and share the history and works of the intersex movement.

Learn more at:
intersexday.org/en/intersex-awareness-day
intersexday.org/en/intersex-day-of-solidarity
facebook.com/intersexday

TO LEARN MORE, VISIT:

InterConnect: aisdsd.org

interACT: interactadvocates.org

Intersex Society of North America: isna.org

United Nations for Intersex Awareness: unfe.org/intersexawareness

United Nations Fact Sheet: unfe.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/UNFE-Intersex.pdf



Sen. Matt Lesser, the bill's sponsor



Priya Phulwani, MD

PROHIBITING MEDICALLY UNNECESSARY SURGERY ON INTERSEX CHILDREN

The COVID-19 pandemic stalled a bill introduced by Connecticut Senator Matt Lesser (D-Cromwell) that would “prohibit any licensed health care provider from engaging in medically unnecessary surgeries on an intersex person without such person’s consent.”

The bill flew through the senate 34-0 early this year, but never got to a vote in the state House of Representatives before the pandemic ended the session. Lesser says he will pursue its passage when the session resumes.

“I really think we can pass it expeditiously. We were the first state to pass a law codifying same-sex marriage. There is no reason we can’t be the first to protect the rights of intersex people,” he says. “I’ve talked to people who had surgery 50 years ago; it was really barbaric. Doctors say it’s not the case anymore, but to be honest, there are a lot of interventions being done on newborns and those who are very young. They’re surprisingly common.”

There is no comprehensive data on the numbers and types of surgery done on intersex children. There is growing agreement that surgery should be reserved for medically necessary conditions, but disagreement over what those are, and whether and how to legislate. Intersex people say doctors are still steering parents toward cosmetic surgery, but most of the doctors testifying on Lesser’s bill said that is not the case.

The *Journal of Pediatric Urology* in 2017 published a study of 37 pediatric patients at 11 U.S. hospitals, showing that 95% of the parents chose surgery for their intersex children, all of whom were under the age of 2.

“This is in stark contrast to some doctors’ claims that such procedures are no longer performed, or are performed only in a minority of cases,” says Hans Lindahl, an intersex writer and director of communications and outreach for the advocacy group interACT.

“In some ways, data can be a distraction. Considering how many human rights organizations have decried the practice, one nonconsensual intersex genital surgery is too many,” says Lindahl.

A 2013 report by the United Nations stated that “Children who are born with atypical sex characteristics are often subject to irreversible sex assignment, involuntary sterilization, involuntary genital normalizing surgery ... leaving them with permanent, irreversible infertility and causing severe mental suffering.”

At public hearings before Connecticut’s Public Health Committee, some in the medical community outright supported the bill. However, most encouraged modifications, primarily fine-tuning the definition of intersex and the makeup of the task force that would write the statute. Many said surgery is already a last resort and warned that the legislation could inadvertently prevent the best option for some children.

“Though the language suggests the goal is limited to prohibiting ‘medically unnecessary’ surgeries, it may lead to a de facto ban on medically appropriate surgeries,” testified Dr. Priya

Phulwani, medical co-director of the Clinic for Variations of Sex Development and medical director of the Gender Program clinic at Connecticut Children’s Medical Center.

“These are a diverse collection of medical conditions that require an approach that is individualized to the patient and, in the pediatric practice, to the family as well,” she added.

Urologist Dr. Ilene Wong called the legislation necessary to prevent the trauma she has witnessed, including “a young woman whose earliest memories are the painful dilations her parents learned to perform on her newly constructed vagina, years before that anatomy would be needed,” and “an infant with genitalia considered too small to be a penis who had feminizing surgery so that their body would conform to a preconceived standard, only to identify as male in early childhood.”

Many intersex Connecticut residents supported the bill. Said Brenda Reyes, “As an intersex young adult who had surgical procedures done without my consent, I firmly believe that having the agency over my body is not only righteous but also a human right.”

A mother and father of a child with Congenital Adrenal Hyperplasia (CAH), testifying without disclosing their last names, asked that CAH be exempted from the legislation because “timely medical and surgical intervention is vital” to development.

Sarah Kosheff, who is intersex, says she cried while watching the hearing. “Doctors don’t want their hands tied in any way. One doctor testified that the parent would have difficulty bonding with their child if they’re different.”

Intersex advocacy groups urge that surgery be done only when a team of doctors, including a mental health practitioner, concludes it is necessary. But while some favor laws deferring cosmetic surgery to the age of consent, others oppose legislation and instead favor improving physicians’ and parents’ education.

Three former U.S. Surgeon Generals (doctors Joycelyn Elders, David Satcher and Richard Carmona) issued a statement in 2017 saying that cosmetic surgery in these cases “can cause severe and irreversible physical harm and emotional distress.” They advised that surgery only be done in extreme cases, including hypospadias (when the urethra opening is not at the head of the penis) so severe that it could lead to infection, and chordee (a curved penis) severe enough to cause pain.

Organizations supporting legislation regulating intersex surgery include: the World Health Organization, American Academy of Family Physicians, Physicians for Human Rights, Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, Lambda Legal, ACLU, The Trevor Project, GLSEN, GLMA: Health Professionals Advancing LGBTQ Equality, and the United Nations. 

SWEET ESCAPES

Yearning for a vacation? Try some virtual traveling, with an LGBTQ twist

By FRANK RIZZO

We're all armchair tourists now. Since March, we've been hoping that easy vacation travel was only a speed bump away. But the reality is, well – complicated, because of the continuing COVID-19 crisis that has made airplane travel, border crossings and destination requirements problematic, to say the least.

So how does one satisfy an LGBTQ wanderlust in the meantime?



Jude Law and Matt Damon in *The Talented Mr. Ripley* (1999)

While it's certainly no substitute, I've found that certain downloads and streams of films and series set in beautiful faraway places can make for a diverting escape from politics and the pandemic.

While it's unlikely we can fly away to exotic locales, cruise the high seas and party like it's 2019 anytime soon, here are some virtual vacations you might enjoy in absentia:

THE TALENTED MR. RIPLEY

WHAT IS IT? A 1999 psychological thriller film written and directed by Anthony Minghella, an adaptation of Patricia Highsmith's 1955 novel. It stars Jude Law, Matt Damon, Gwyneth Paltrow, Philip Seymour Hoffman and Cate Blanchett.

WHAT'S IT ABOUT? A tycoon mistakes a charming sociopath Tom Ripley (Damon) for a preppy friend of his playboy son and hires him to persuade the lad to return to America. Ripley gets caught up in the lush life abroad – and affairs, intrigue, identity swapping and a

murder or two (or three) soon play out among the filthy rich.

ESCAPIST ASPECT: 1950s Italian elegance amid yachts, swanky hotels and very beautiful people. The film was shot in Venice, Rome, Anzio, the cliffside resort town of Positano, and various villages on the islands of Ischia and Procida, near Naples.

A TOUCH OF GAY: Bisexual intrigue and a hot killer man-to-man kiss by Matt Damon.

WORTH THE TRIP? It's great to travel first class and this film is platinum status all the way.

SUMMER LOVERS

WHAT IS IT? A 1982 American romantic comedy film written and directed by Randal Kleiser, starring Peter Gallagher, Daryl Hannah and Valerie Quennessen.

WHAT'S IT ABOUT? A young couple from Connecticut graduate college, spend the summer on the

Greek island of Santorini and explore their libidos.
ESCAPIST ASPECT: Filmed on location on Santorini. Other scenes were filmed on the islands of Crete, Delos and Mykonos, all featuring gorgeous skies, glistening white homes and nude swimming.

A TOUCH OF GAY: A threesome relationship complicates paradise.

WORTH THE TRIP? Ah, the '80s, with carefree youths, Peter Gallagher before the eyebrows went rogue, and lithe Daryl Hannah before she made her "Splash." There's a great pop score, too.

THE DURRELLS [IN CORFU]

WHAT IS IT? A four-season British comedy-drama series inspired by Gerald Durrell's three autobiographical books about his family's four years

(1935-1939) on the Greek Island of Corfu. The series, which ran from 2016 to 2019 on PBS, is written by Simon Nye and directed by Steve Barron and Roger Goldby. It stars Keeley Hawes, Milo Parker, Josh O'Connor, Daisy Waterstone, Callum Woodhouse and Alexis Georgoulis. Available on Amazon Prime.

WHAT'S IT ABOUT? A British widow and her four self-possessed, nonconformist children escape dire circumstances in Bournemouth, England to live cheaply in Corfu. They adapt to a spartan and challenging – but also happy and gorgeous – life there among Greeks and other expatriates.

ESCAPIST ASPECT: Breathtaking scenery of various places around the island.

OF NOTE: Josh O'Connor, who plays oldest son Larry, went on to play Prince Charles in "The Crown"



Summer Lovers

and starred in the 2017 gay indie film “God’s Own Country.”

A TOUCH OF GAY: Some hunky men, beautiful women and even a same-sex romance.

WORTH THE TRIP? The setting is sun-drenched (once they get out of England) and the family eccentric and warm-hearted. It’s my all-around favorite feel-good escape during the pandemic. The 26 episodes were the perfect antidote for these sequestered times. I might watch the series all over again, too.

CALL ME BY YOUR NAME

WHAT IS IT? A 2017 coming-of-age romantic drama film directed by Luca Guadagnino. Its Oscar-winning screenplay is by James Ivory, based on the 2007 novel of the same name by André Aciman. It stars Timothée Chalamet, Armie Hammer, Michael Stuhlbarg, Amira Casar, Esther Garrel, and Victoire Du Bois.

WHAT’S IT ABOUT? Set in 1983 in northern Italy, the film chronicles the romantic relationship between 17-year-old Elio Perlman and hunky Oliver (a 24-year-



Call Me By Your Name



The Durrells

“Traveling is useful, it exercises the imagination. All the rest is disappointment and fatigue. Our journey is entirely imaginary. That is its strength.”

old graduate-student assistant to Elio’s father, an archaeology professor), who comes to live with the family one summer.

ESCAPIST ASPECT: The film was shot mainly in Crema, Lombardy, in northern Italy.

OF NOTE: The film features two lovely original songs by American singer-songwriter Sufjan Stevens.

A TOUCH OF GAY: It is a sophisticated, nuanced gay coming-of-age film. Two scenes are frequently mentioned: the peach/masturbation scene is one; but a more important one is the gorgeous monologue by Michael Stuhlbarg as the youth’s father, consoling his heartbroken son with delicately chosen words that would make him father-of-the-year to any queer kid. (I thought he’d get the Oscar for that scene alone.)

WORTH THE TRIP: Instead of a picture-postcard perfection, the film’s landscapes are naturally imperfect and somehow feel more real, more approachable and just as inviting.



The Great Beauty. Photo by GIANNI FIORITO

THE GREAT BEAUTY

WHAT IS IT? A 2013 Italian art drama film co-written and directed by Paolo Sorrentino.

WHAT'S IT ABOUT? Jep Gambardella is a seasoned and socially connected journalist, critic, bon vivant “and Roman sensualist.” But at 65, he sees the superficiality of his world and his life as mundane. News of the death of a long-ago lover sends him on a peripatetic, poetic and meditative journey of his past, present and future.

ESCAPIST ASPECT: It’s a love letter to Rome.

OF NOTE: The film begins with a quote from Céline’s “Journey to the End of the Night”: “Traveling is useful, it exercises the imagination. All the rest is disappointment and fatigue. Our journey is entirely imaginary. That is its strength.” Speaks to our times now, no?

WORTH THE TRIP? The film won the Oscar for Best Foreign Language Film, as well as the Golden Globe and the BAFTA awards in the same category. Deservedly so. And you won’t want to miss the soulful performance by Italian actor Toni Servillo in the role of Jep.

A TOUCH OF GAY: Only in the sense of appreciating great beauty of a city and its people, from sensual statues to its fashionistas.



Call Me By Your Name



Under the Tuscan Sun



Katherine Hepburn and Gregory Peck, 1953's Roman Holiday

UNDER THE TUSCAN SUN

WHAT IS IT? A 2003 American romantic comedy-drama film written, produced, and directed by Audrey Wells and starring Diane Lane and Sandra Oh. Based on Frances Mayes' 1996 memoir.

WHAT'S IT ABOUT? After being cheated on by an unfaithful husband, a divorce, the loss of her home and getting writer's block, an American seeks an escape to Tuscany and finds herself the owner of a lovely-yet-dilapidated villa. Ups and downs, romance, wine and a wedding follow.

ESCAPIST ASPECT: Florence, Rome, Siena, Cortona, Arezzo, Salerno and other spots in Tuscany.

WORTH THE TRIP? It's a formulaic and lightweight tale that you can gather from the trailer alone. But Lane and Oh are charming and the peaceful setting is better than a prescription of Ativan.

A TOUCH OF GAY: Oh, as Lane's best buddy, is a lesbian. Several heterosexual romances fill the plot but the whole spectrum of genders might find Raoul Bova a cool drink of Prosecco.

AND JUST A FEW MORE...

These following movies and television shows also take us away from it all, though not necessarily with a LGBTQ component: "Enchanted April," "Roman Holiday," "It Takes a Thief," "End of the Century," and "Bridgeshead Revisited." And, of course, there are all those LGBTQ couples searching for vacation homes in the hundreds of episodes of HGTV's "House Hunters International," or its much better series, "Mediterranean Life" and "Off the Grid." 



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PETS //



Susan Wollschlager and Autumn



Jody Smaglis



Brian Rogers



Roz and Dana



Deborah Monde

Will You Love Me Forever?

When adopting or fostering a pet, there's a lot to consider

By RENEE DININO

When we're kinder to animals, we're kinder to people. I cannot take credit for that phrase, but I say it every single day. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, things were "normal" in the animal world. Shelters were open; rescues were fostering and doing their best to get animals adopted safely, and were watching out for neglect and abuse cases. Animal control officers were answering calls, picking up strays or dumped pets, arresting animal abusers – you know, "normal."

When the pandemic became a reality in Connecticut, it seemed as if a magic wand spread its reach across the state, edge to edge, over all municipal shelters, rescues, and pet adoption facilities. All dogs and cats were placed in homes or foster homes. And then, nothing. Absolutely nothing. In fact, calls to animal control reduced drastically. When I spoke with several animal control officers across the state – Sherry DeGenova at Hartford Police Animal Control, Laura Burban at the Dan Cosgrove Animal Shelter, Roz Nenninger and Dana Natrillo at Wolcott Animal Control & Wolcott Police Department, and Deborah Monde at Wethersfield Animal Control and Police Department – they all said

the same thing: in fact, even invoking the same phrase: "eerily quiet."

Everybody, it seemed, had room in their homes for pets, finally! An actual positive side effect of COVID-19. But one question rang through my brain, "Will you love me forever?"

It's certainly tempting to adopt a furry new best friend. You won't be alone; they'll keep you company. But it's oh so much more than that. A real concern for many animal advocates, and what we are seeing now, is the result of mass fast adoptions/fostering and the realization that the right pet may not have been put in the right home, whether it be for personality, lifestyle, or financial reasons.

In one of my many conversations with DeGenova, she said, "One thing I always ask is, 'What is the plan when your life goes back to normal?'"

So, what do you need to know before you adopt or foster? There are some serious questions you need to ask yourself before offering to house a dog or cat.

"Are you willing to invest 12 to 15 years of your life to a

dog? Do you honestly have the quality time to give to a dog? Does it make sense in your current living situation? Why do you want a dog?" asks Brian Rogers of Leash on Life LLC, who has been a K9 behavioral trainer for 25 years.

Monde, of the Wethersfield Police Department and K9 Solutions of Connecticut LLC, who is a certified search and rescue canine handler, offers tips for new pet owners bringing an animal into their homes for the first time.

"Allow the animal some time to figure things out safely," she says. "If you have another pet in the home, take as much time as needed to blend the animals into their new pack. This does not happen with one meet and greet. Consider training and teach the new pet the boundaries in the home. A new pet in the home should never have free range of the house until the animal can be trusted and understands the new boundaries."

Susan M. Wollschlager, marketing and communications manager at the Connecticut Humane Society, agrees. "Have lots of patience and understanding," she says. "Give them



Sherry DeGenova



The Shannon Lewie Family



Laura Burban



Laurel Cox



calm and quiet as they settle in. For cats and small critters, their own room may be best at first. That then becomes their safe zone, one they will feel comfortable going to if they get nervous exploring the rest of their home later on.”

Wollschlager adds, “We don’t always know their backstories, so just be as understanding as possible as they try to learn your routines and their place in the family. Especially the shy ones – give them time and let them come to you.”

Also keep in mind when adopting a cat, there are differences between indoor and outdoor living arrangements.

“I strongly believe cats should be kept indoors to avoid dangers such as cars, predators, exposure to other cats that may carry diseases, parasites, etc.,” says Laurel Cox, volunteer and treasurer at Kenway’s Cause, a nonprofit that raises money to provide medical care to injured animals picked up by City of Hartford Animal Control. “This will result in a longer life span for them. So long as family members keep their feline companions entertained inside

the home, they can and will have very fulfilling lives.”

There are many things to consider before taking in a pet, even in a foster situation.

“Fostering is so very important to the rescue cycle. Without fosters, we can’t rescue animals,” says Shannon Lewie, volunteer and rescue coordinator at Kenway’s Cause. “Fostering is a commitment, and often for an undetermined amount of time. As a foster, you play an important part of the adoption process because you are the most familiar with the animal’s behavior, needs and wants.”

Jody Smaglis, event coordinator, says foster owners “should be confident in knowing they can commit to the care and well-being of the pet until the pet is adopted. They should also be prepared to fall in love with the pet and become a foster failure.” (Despite the negative name, a foster failure refers to temporary pet parents or families who fall in love with their foster pets and decide to adopt.)

People who foster pets are tasked with giving the animals as stable an environment as they can, says Rogers.

“You should also be able to understand behaviors so you can give a clear description of how the dog acts while fostering. Pack change is the hardest thing on a dog, in my opinion. The last thing we want to do is add more stress as a foster parent,” he says.

And if there are already pets or children in the home?

“Transition slowly and establish rules and boundaries,” advises Lewie. “With existing pets, it’s important to make them feel that they are still equally as important and loved. Do not leave them unattended until you feel it is safe to do so.”

There are, of course, various expenses that come with taking in a pet, including vaccines.

“Vaccines and parasite prevention protocols should be tailored to the lifestyle and environment but should never be ignored or forgotten,” says Dr. Joshua Atz of Manchester Veterinary Clinic, noting rabies vaccinations are particularly important for many.

On average, cat owners can expect to spend at least \$750 on a healthy kitten in the first year of its life, estimates Atz. That includes neutering, basic health testing, vaccines, and food. Basic needs for a dog can run between \$1,000 and \$1,500 in the first year. In subsequent years, if they’re healthy, cats cost about \$400 annually while dogs can be between \$500 and \$1,500 depending on food choices and levels of parasite prevention, he says.

“Except for breeding animals, [spaying or neutering is] always recommended for disease prevention, reproduction control, and avoiding behavioral issues,” Atz says.

In all my years as a pet owner, I’ve always had a rescue in one way or another. Luke is my current dog – well, truth be told, I’m one of those people; he’s my son. My four-legged, handsome son from the streets of Hartford, rescued by Animal Control Officer DeGenova. I can tell you with certainty, adopting a pet is rewarding and brings love and joy to your world, but it is not always picture perfect. You must work with your pet, with your spouse, children, or roommates to make it a positive and enjoyable living situation.

One thing to consider is whether you rent or own your home, and how much space you have.





Renee DiNino and Luke

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“Pets should be obtained with considerations of your living situations. If you get a dog that requires a lot of exercise, then a condo may not be a good fit. Same with renting, as the landlords may have animal clauses in the lease that prevents certain animals,” says Monde.

“If you do get an animal when renting and you’re not allowed to have one, hiding that animal is not a good thing to do. That landlord can make you remove the animal. Most times in this situation, the animal pays the price of bad human decisions.”

Jody Macrina of East Hartford-based Protectors of Animals notes, “Rescues should require landlord permission from the renter.” She also suggests renters “should make sure their insurance carrier does not have restrictions on the number of pets or breed.”

Like everything else, shelters, rescue groups, and foster programs have been affected by the pandemic.

“It was always busy, but since COVID-19 we have seen an uptick in the need for people to owner-release animals, and they need help financially for medical issues regarding their animals and they need pet foods,” says Burban, director of Dan Cosgrove Animal Shelter and animal control officer for Branford. “I think the needs financially are increasing because people do not have the finances to care for the animals, and I think we will keep seeing the need for animals to be owner-released.”

Burban adds she’s seen an increase in the number of dogs, cats, and other critters being abandoned or dumped.

Unfortunately, that is not an isolated issue – other towns like Hartford, Wolcott and more also are noticing the trend. There’s also an increase in animal abuse being reported across the state. Desmond’s Army Animal Law Advocates have a full roster of court dates and cases to be the voice for the voiceless.

Dr. Alexis Soutter of Manchester Veterinary Clinic perhaps puts it best: “It’s tempting to adopt a new pet right now, when social activities are so limited, and we are spending more time at home. But that will not always be the case! Do you have the appropriate time to devote to the species and breed you are considering? An active, high-energy dog breed like a German shepherd or terrier or border collie will have different requirements than a cat or a bunny, but those species also need their own environmental enrichment, affection, and care. When thinking about this, consider the time needed to train the pet, play with them, and groom them, and not just now, but in six months or five years or 10 years.”

She adds, “Is everyone in your household prepared to help in the care for the pet? When adopting an animal, you are truly adding a member to your family, and everyone should be on board, or ideally excited, about that prospect. This includes cleaning up messes, dealing with household or personal objects being chewed or damaged, and potentially dealing with overly buoyant puppies or kittens who don’t understand that humans don’t like being stabbed by teeth and claws. Animals can provide us with so much love, but there is no such thing as an ‘easy’ animal to adopt, as they all have their own unique challenges and rewards. It is best to be honest and realistic about those factors before you open up your home and heart.”

So I ask you again, on behalf of all would-be pets: Will you love me forever? 🐾



Renee DiNino is the director of community affairs for iHeartMedia in Connecticut, the midday host on The River 105.9 and host of an hour-long syndicated talk show on all Connecticut iHeartRadio stations. She also appears weekly on WFSB Channel 3’s “Better Connecticut.” An avid animal lover and advocate, she and her husband Sal have a German Shepherd, Luke, they rescued in Hartford. Instagram @iheartcommunities.

MEET //

Coming Together

In These Trying Times, Our Community Hears a Call to Action

By QUINN ROBERTS

This year's Pride Season looked different than it usually does, with the COVID-19 pandemic and demonstrations

against police brutality putting a stop to the typical festivals and celebrations. But, of course, the LGBTQ community always has opportunities to get educated and join the action.

We spoke with advocate Claude Louis - who recently hosted a webinar during Pride with the Center for Family Justice in Bridgeport - about the evolving meaning of Pride and our community's role in these unprecedented times.

CT VOICE: The COVID-19 pandemic and the recent protests put a halt to the typical Pride celebrations. But in lieu of festivals and gatherings, we have opportunities to reflect on what Pride really means. This year, what does Pride mean to you?

CLAUDE LOUIS: Pride is usually hard for me every year. It's supposed to be a celebration - we're queer, we're able to live openly, we celebrate our culture and liberation. But not everyone is liberated. So, at times I've felt that Pride overshadows conversations about what it means to be queer and truly free and equal in America. Yes, we have marriage

equality and, in some places, we can hold hands and express same-sex love openly, but for most of the country, queer people are still afraid.

In the midst of every Pride season, I remind myself that Pride started as a riot. We demanded equal rights, an end to violent persecution of queer people, the freedom to be ourselves. It's great that we're dancing and celebrating, but it's always easy to forget that a lot of members of our community are still fighting for that freedom. And in light of recent killings of unarmed black men and women, and especially recent murders of trans women of color, the protests all around the world have been thrilling to me. I'm glad that this year Pride is a little less celebratory, and a little more call-to-action. It's unfortunate that we've been brought to action by COVID-19 and police brutality; I wish it could be more organic and gradual, but I'm just happy to see people linking arms and joining in solidarity.

CT VOICE: What issues are especially relevant and specific to Connecticut's LGBTQ community?

CLAUDE LOUIS: Connecticut has a huge issue with LGBTQ homelessness, especially transgender homelessness. Nationwide, LGBTQ people are overrepresented in our homeless populations. The Trump

administration's recent attacks on LGBTQ healthcare protections, too, make me think of the struggles I've witnessed working with these populations in shelters.

It was always a struggle to get homeless trans individuals to their shelters and watch them get placed in environments that don't match their gender identity. For instance, a trans woman in the process of hormone therapy might get placed in a male shelter, and that's not safe for her - it heightens her risk for violence, for sexual assault, and the misgendering also retraumatizes her.

In recent years, most of the shelters in Connecticut have done a great job learning about cultural competency with trans populations. Trump's rollback erases that work though - it's no longer required, and it makes it easier to ignore the threats trans people are facing. On top of that, Connecticut also got some attention for the recent lawsuit against transgender high school athletes in Glastonbury. It might not seem related to Trump's rollback at first, but the precedent it sets is extremely dangerous for trans people in our state, and the lawsuit is an example for this.

Connecticut has a long way to go in accepting and understanding our trans residents. The LGBTQ community has a responsibility to educate our public, give platforms for transgen-



Claude Louis



Quinn Roberts is a writer and Connecticut native. He contributes to digital content and marketing for *Connecticut VOICE Magazine*.

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der people to speak about their issues and needs, and increase the resources for trans individuals, especially among homeless populations. Most of all, we need to make it clear that transphobia just isn't right.

CT VOICE: How would you like to see the community reshape our priorities?

CLAUDE LOUIS: I want our community to devote itself to being anti-racist. For white allies, becoming anti-racist is really hard work - it's uncomfortable to sit with these feelings. People aren't born bigoted, but they're socialized in a bigoted environment and given subconscious biases. It's extremely difficult to unpack the ignorant things you've been taught and analyze your awareness of it all. But the LGBTQ community needs to unpack its biases and, really, we need to stand up for one another. If one of us isn't free, then none of us is free. Trans people are still subject to violence, queer black people still face a great deal of racism. We've been avoiding these realities for a while, but now is the time to unpack them and to truly support each other.

CT VOICE: Your work in Connecticut's LGBTQ community is focused primarily on youth issues and youth programming. How do you feel young queer and trans teens are responding to this uncertain time?

CLAUDE LOUIS: Our youth are really the leaders. All around the world, on social media, they're the ones saying, "Enough

is enough." They're bringing attention to these issues, and their voices are reaching people and changing opinions. A recent Black Lives Matter march in New Haven drew thousands of demonstrators, and it was organized by a teenager! That's amazing to me.

Among the LGBTQ youth in Connecticut, we still have an apprehension towards the system. But in lieu of systems, queer and trans youth are forming bonds and developing mutual aid independent of the system - something I refer to as the "queer survival network." It shows that young people can survive without the help of adults, and it also shows that young people believe that being true to their identities is a central, urgent issue. In the face of violence and discrimination, they want to be themselves. As a gay man, it makes me extremely proud.

CT VOICE: What do you love most about Connecticut's LGBTQ community?

CLAUDE LOUIS: As a Connecticut native, it brings me joy to watch children come out of the closet at younger ages than I ever did. This summer in particular, I've also been grateful to hear no complaints about the cancellation of our regular Pride. So many of our LGBTQ figures and organizations have been using their platforms to draw attention to Black Lives Matter, and they did it without being asked. There's still a lot of fight in the LGBTQ community, and I love seeing that. It's something to celebrate. ♡

What is Queer Art?

How do we determine what represents a community?

By PATRICK J. DUNN

Humanity is defined by our art – be it the sculptural ruins of ancient Egypt, the hand-crafted silks of Japan, the incredible collection of the Louvre, or the architectural marvels of Machu Picchu. Art comes from the soul of humanity. It is a place of joy when we are sad, a place of beauty when we are blinded by ugly, and a place to celebrate who we are as individuals, as a community, and as a culture.

One of the most beautiful aspects of art is how different it can be for different cultural identities. Paint is paint but can create an incredibly different result when used by a northern artist versus a southern artist, or by a Muslim artist versus a Buddhist artist. These differences create unique artistic perspectives that are indicative of the shared experience of a community. Because humanity is defined by our art, a community is thus also defined by its unique artistic perspective, whether that is the color choices, the styles, or the subject matter.

This brings me to my question: What makes art uniquely “queer?”

When I try to answer this question for myself, I tend to spiral into a onslaught of additional questions: Is it queer because the subject is queer – i.e. does our art always have to tell stories of same-sex attraction or be defined by the gender identity of characters? Is art queer because the artist is queer – i.e. can a landscape of rolling waves of water be queer art when painted by a queer person? Is it queer art if a non-queer person creates it when the subject is queer? And when we look at a larger project like a film or a piece of theatre, how many queer folks need to work on it for it to be queer art? These questions go on, and on, and on in my head.

As a community, we are starved to see our stories put on canvas, in song, and featured in public spaces. Years (or even decades) will go by without a queer story appearing on a regional theatre’s stage or without making a splash on the walls of a prominent gallery. Or a queer composer’s work will be presented, but because their queerness is deemed “not important” to their work, it will be glossed over or completely unmentioned. Because of this starvation, we flock to any slightly queer-adjacent art that is created, which also means that we don’t always stop to ask the important question: Is this actually our community’s art?

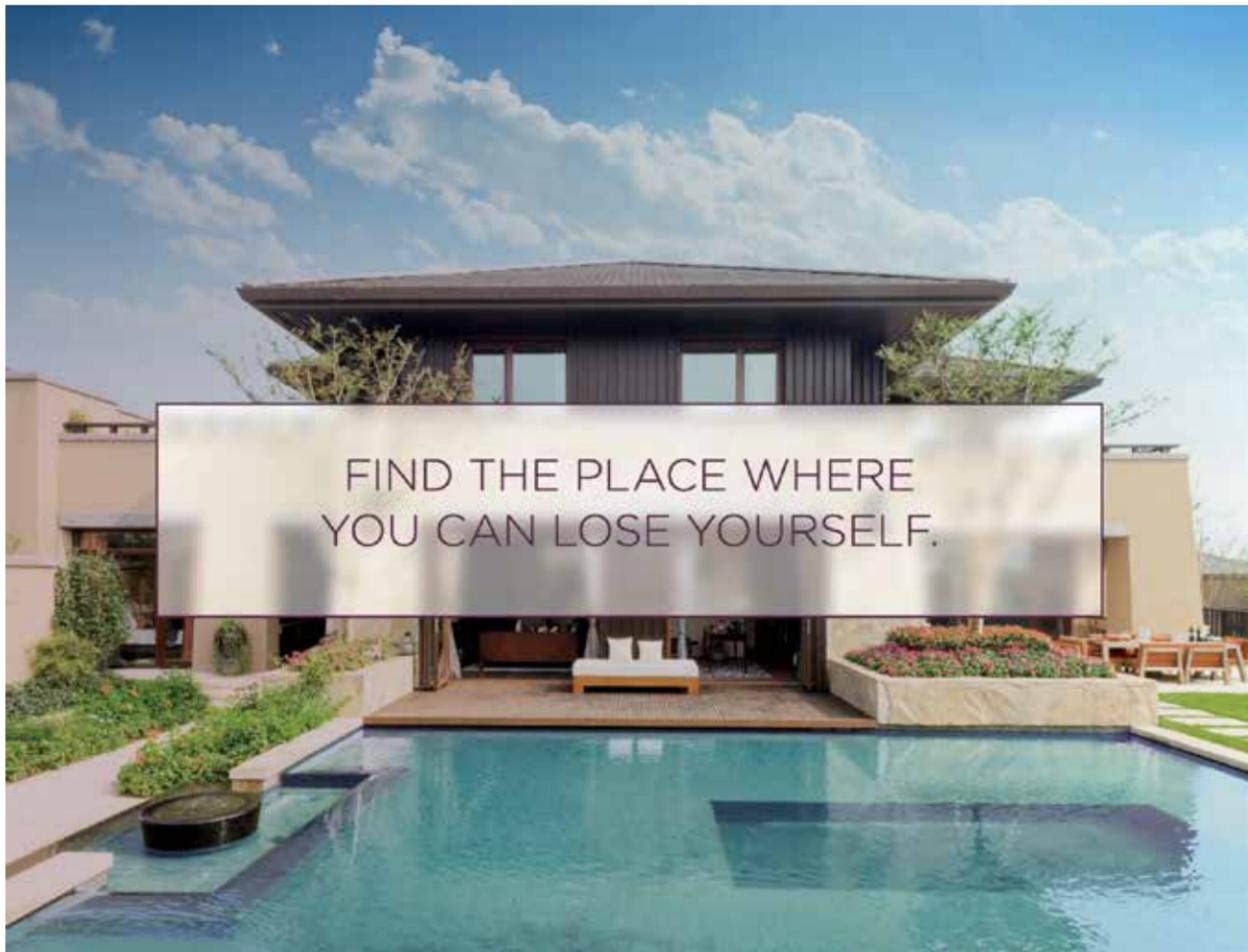
When I approach creating events for the New Haven Pride Center’s arts and culture programming, this question of “what is our art?” taunts me. Every time I make a decision about an artist to feature in our gallery, a performer to put on one of our stages, or a musician to play at an event, I ask myself a series of questions in my head over and over. “Is the artist queer?,” “Is the subject matter queer?,” and “Does it tell the queer community’s story?” This matrix is not perfect by any means, but it is the closest I have been able to get to answering this question for myself. To quote a good friend of mine, drag artist Xiomarie LaBeija (yes, she’s from the House of LaBeija): “Representation matters” – and representing a queer narrative created by queer artists is how I have answered this question.

So again I ask you: What makes art uniquely “queer”? 

Patrick Dunn is executive director at the New Haven Pride Center, which provides educational, cultural, and social enrichment for the LGBTQ community and its allies.



Kiki Lucia and Patrick Dunn. Photo by **Cate Barry Photography**



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