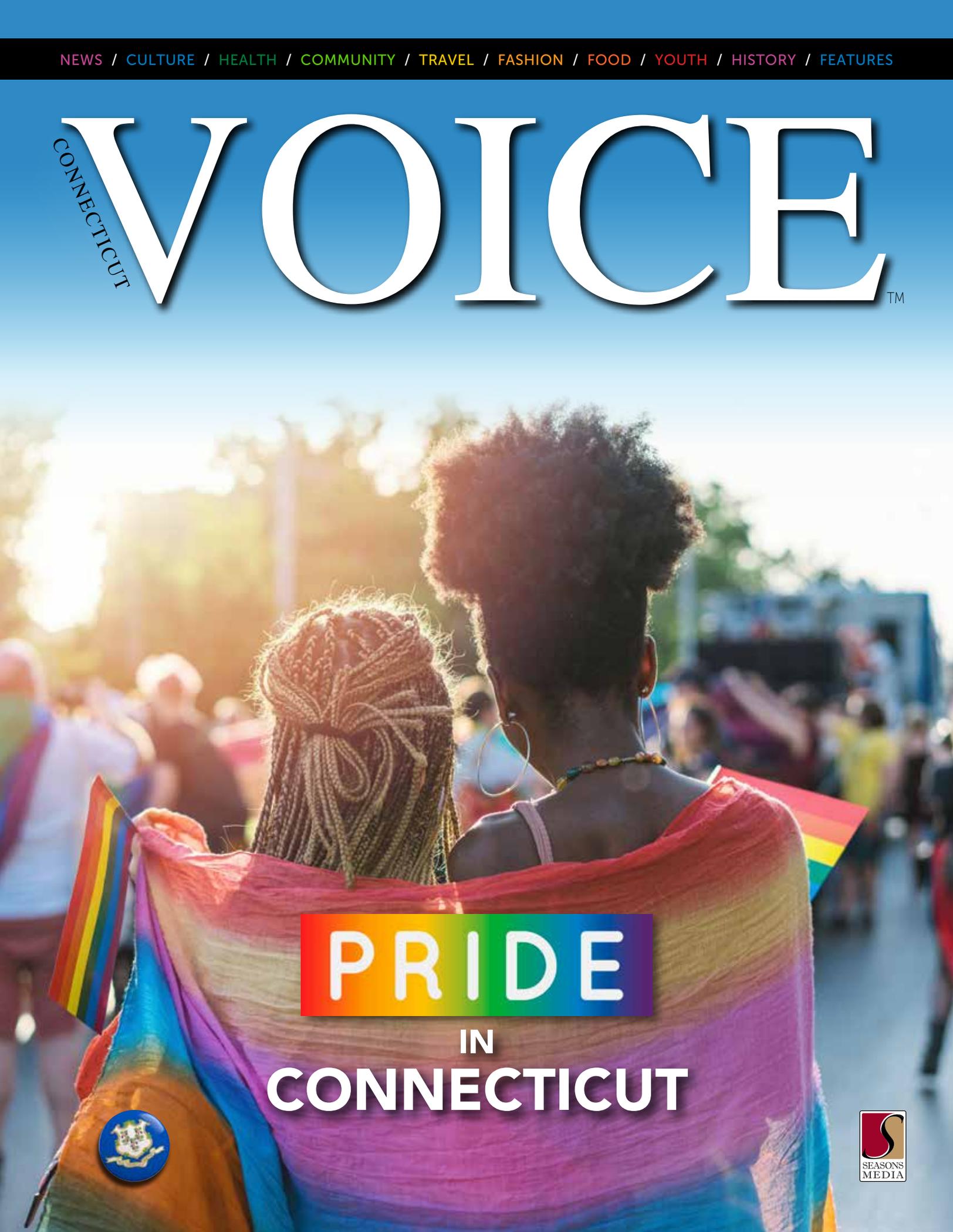


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EDITOR'S NOTE //



Welcome to the Summer issue of *Connecticut Voice!*

It's June, which means summer is here and – perhaps more importantly – so is Pride Month. In this issue, we pay tribute to this special time of year by taking a look at where Connecticut stands when it comes to LGBTQ rights and issues: how far we've come, and the progress we still need to make.

We've also rounded up a list of Pride events across the state. After the pandemic upended so many events last year, it's nice to see such a full

calendar of Pride events, both in person and virtual. As we try to work toward some sense of “new normal,” we also check in with theaters and music venues statewide, which are setting the stage for some amazing live performances later this year.

We highlight personal journeys on these pages as well. LGBTQ foster and adoptive parents give us a window into their experiences, nonbinary individuals share their struggles and triumphs, and young CABO Foundation scholarship recipients tell us their hopes and plans for the future.

As always, I invite you to connect with us on Instagram, Twitter and Facebook, and let us know what you think.

Happy reading,

Cara

Cara Rosner, Editor
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Fresh Ideas

New LGBTQ Programmer Brings a New Vision to a Longstanding Festival

By FRANK RIZZO

The first thing you notice about Malakhi Eason, besides his beaming smile and upbeat personality, is his hair. It's a towering creation, a woven golden crown sitting above braided dark follicles, running like tributaries down his scalp, creating an extraordinary work of salon art. That's just how Eason, the new director of programming and community impact for the International Festival of Arts & Ideas, wants us to feel about all aspects of ourselves. Hair styles are art.

Clothes are art. And people are artworks, too — if we can only imagine it.

“Imagine” is the theme Eason has chosen for this year’s International Festival of Arts & Ideas. This is the 26th year for New Haven’s two-week presentation of 200-plus performances, exhibits, discussions and tours. Most, about 80 percent, of the festival’s offerings are free.

Because of the pandemic, last year’s festival had to quickly move to an all-digital format. This year, the festival will build on the success of that online engagement but will also position itself for live events on the New Haven Green — if Covid-19 numbers and vaccination levels allow.

Eason, who arrived in town in November, and Shelley Quiala, the festival’s new executive director, hustled to create a new gathering in 2021, not knowing if it would be in-person or virtual. The envisioned end result will be a hybrid of both.

The 26th annual festival began mid-May and will continue to the end of June, with its high-profile events happening during between June 18 to 27.

Included among the events are Jacob’s Pillow-awardee choreographer Ronald K. Brown, Indigenous playwright and Forbes “30 under 30” theater director Madeline Sayet, and several unexpected events not seen before at the festival.

One of the homegrown highlights will be a celebration of hair design and its cultural history. Also on tap is a drag spectacular. Both events are examples of Eason looking at festival programming in new ways.

Before his New Haven hire, Eason was programming manager at Omaha Performing Arts, where he curated the expansive Jazz on the Green series, ranging from intimate cabaret performances to outdoor concerts featuring artists like Ladama, Big Sam’s Funky Nation, Kim Waters, Sammy Miller and the Congregation, and Marcos y Sabor.



Malakhi Eason is the new director of programming and community impact for the International Festival of Arts & Ideas, and is eager to bring new ideas to the long-running event.

IMAGINE

A Circuitous Path

It's been a long and circuitous road for Eason, both professionally and personally, as he arrives at his new programming position for New Haven's well-established festival, one that has brought high-profile acts and notables from around the world to the city.

Eason grew up in Boston in a life he called "eventful and challenging." Eason says he "grew up in the church," coming from a religious family of ministers, preachers and singers, "so I started, too, at a young age."

He was raised much of his early life by his grandmother, Lovestine Eason.

"She's my girl — and the most glamorous woman I ever met in my life, wearing sequined dresses, pearls, rings, makeup — and she had a different wig for every day of the week. She always had me looking fresh. I couldn't wear baggy clothes. She had me in suits, suspenders, sweaters and bowties. I have a love of bowties. I even have a tattoo of one."

Eason graduated high school from Boston Arts Academy where he was a vocal major. After high school he eventually went to hair school, but learning he would become a father at the age of 19 made him reassess his life.

"Having a son forced me to be more

methodical with my decisions in life," he says. With the help and encouragement of friend Linda Wells — "I will always say her name" — Eason enrolled at the University of Bridgeport, where he majored in mass communications and entertainment business. Along with school and being a youth pastor at a Bridgeport's Mt. Aery Baptist Church, he would venture to New Haven's Pulse nightclub, known for its fierce dance music and gay clientele.

New Haven is where he celebrated his secret self.

"This is the first time I've ever talked publicly about this," he says. "I call

myself an ally because I don't like a whole bunch of labels. But I had a male partner right after [my relationship with] the mother of my son. After that, it was all guys."

He says he knew he was attracted to men since he was 16, but went back in the closet until he left for college.

Eason says he was raised in a conservative, religious, don't-ask-don't-tell environment "where we're used to knowing that a church leader was gay but we're not supposed to say anything because if you don't talk about it, we won't talk about it. That was me — as long as I was respectful and wasn't too

flamboyant. But I was living two lives and in Boston I was always the 'straight' man."

Things are different now and he says he is planning a gathering of his friends to "officially" come out to everybody. "I don't care now. I'm grown. I'm 34. I'm old," he says laughing.

Nebraska Rebound

After Eason graduated from the university in 2012, he came across an opportunity to work in the music business in Los Angeles. After talking it over with the mother of his child, he headed to California. But the promise of a job and

a career path failed to materialize and he found himself essentially homeless, living on friends' couches and scraping by with a few gigs, but not enough to flesh out a living, much less a career.

"Someone I was in love with at the time presented a better opportunity for me in the state that he lived in — Nebraska — where the job opportunities were real."

He also went to graduate school there, earning his masters of arts in leadership degree from Grace University, a private Christian college. Eason is currently working on a doctorate in interdisciplinary leadership from Creighton University, a private Jesuit school in Omaha.



IMAGINE

THE HUMAN CANVAS



The International Festival of Arts & Ideas, shown here in pre-pandemic times, is a big draw for lovers of music, theater, drama and other arts. Photo courtesy of the International Festival of Arts & Ideas.

After receiving his master's degree he landed a job at Omaha Performing Arts and that's where he found his niche.

He began as programming coordinator overseeing contracts, helping with the bookings and running the outdoor series that brought in about 13,000 people over six weeks.

"Then I moved into management as a programming manager and had a close hand on Broadway series, as well as the jazz and children's series, and overseeing several 2,000-plus-seat venues as well as a 500-seat black box theater.

His relationship with his Nebraska boyfriend ended — and so did his job when the pandemic hit. "That's when I decided I needed to get back home," he says. He got the New Haven job last fall.

Festival plans

His International Festival of Arts & Ideas title not only includes "programming" but "community impact."

"Usually such titles are worded as 'community engagement' but 'impact' has a deeper meaning. We just don't want to engage but be a resource," he says.

There was no programming set up when he arrived and the new director Shelley Quiala encouraged him to be as creative as possible. With the support of a long-established staff, many of whom have worked at the festival for more than 20 years, Eason plans to do just that — but on two simultaneous levels: online and live on the New Haven Green.

"I came up with the theme 'Imagine' because I wanted to imagine what we are going to look like after this pandemic. I also wanted to explore how we think about art: what is considered art, how we imagine it," he says.

He adds, "We always pay attention to dance, theater, the singing; but there are so many different forms of art. There's chair-making, gardening, food and, of course, the first thing I thought of was hair, which is my passion. I also used

to own a salon in Omaha, the Muse Beauty Bar. So when I suggested a hair show for the festival, I was able to go for it. I think it's going to be a highlight of the festival because there's never been a hair show like this before. It's a good way to show how hair is not just something you wear but that it's art because it's visual — it's texture; it changes your mood, the atmosphere and your look on life. We'll also follow it up with an 'ideas' conversation about hair and the historical and cultural part of it all."

Other events will include a gospel brunch and the festival will end with a drag show "that is going to be so cool. We're partnering with New Haven Pride and bringing in LaDiva Monet, she's a Fantasia impersonator from Atlanta. It's not just a drag show but it will also give the historical meaning behind drag and tap into what drag means and why it's considered an art, too."

Says Ellis, beaming, "I want to look at the hopefully post-pandemic festival moving towards joy." 🍷



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.



FESTIVAL HIGHLIGHTS

For the most up-to-date information, visit artidea.org.

Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra: June 18 at 8:30 p.m., New Haven Green.

The Huneebee Project, Beekeeping 101: June 19 at 11 a.m. Participants will suit up and experience beekeeping at an established beehive located in New Haven's Hill neighborhood.

Juneteenth 2021: Day-long event. June 19.

Art & Hair Show: June 19 at 5 p.m. CEO of Pro Touch Hair Magazine and overall hairstyle innovator Shawn Jon will craft ultramodern hairstyles in real-time, sending models down the catwalk alongside models exhibiting trends from six other local stylists.

"Equality of Night and Day:" June 20 at 8:30 p.m. A first glimpse of a new piece choreographed by Ronald K. Brown for Evidence will be performed on the festival's mainstage.

"Where We Belong": June 24-27. Woolly Mammoth Theatre Company's production by Madeline Sayet will be available on demand.

Ladama: June 25 at 8:30 p.m. A band of four female musicians and activists originating from Brazil, Colombia, Venezuela and the United States.

StorySLAM: June 26 at 6 p.m. A group of curated professional performers will battle head to head for the title of top festival slammer.

The Legend Drag Show: June 27 at 8 p.m. including a performance by La'Diva Monet.

The free events listed below will be livestreamed on Facebook Live, YouTube, Twitch and the festival's virtual stage:

Listening to Earth: Indigenous Wisdom & Climate Futures: May 26 at 5 p.m., with NPR Science Friday's Diana Montano, and native environmental justice activists Eriel Deranger and Kyle Whyte.

The Legacy & Future of Love as Liberation: June 2 at 5 p.m., featuring the founder of Love Fed New Haven, Raven A. Blake; with Leah Penniman, Rachel Sayet, Farron Harvey, Tenaya Taylor, Charline Xu, and Disha Patel.

Crowning Glory: The Art of Hair: June 19 at 1 p.m.

Black Futures: June 25 at 5 p.m. Alicia Garza, co-founder of the Black Lives Matter movement, in conversation with Mercy Quaye, founder of The Narrative Project.

Everything You Touch, You change: Visionary Science Fiction and Liberation: June 25 at noon, featuring musician Toshi Reagon, cultural producer Hanifa Nayo Washington, and writer-activist Walidah Imarisha.

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The Power of Pride

Stanley Black & Decker Builds Success with Diversity

By **CHRISTOPHER BYRNE**

For companies of all sizes, building and keeping a competitive advantage in today’s dynamic market requires much more than offering products and services people want. Customers and employees alike want to be engaged with businesses that reflect their values.

To succeed in the long term, it’s imperative to build a company that reflects and responds to the contemporary world, which means in addition to social, environmental, and governmental responsibility, creating a corporate identity and culture where diversity and inclusion (D&I) is a core value — authentically built into every aspect of an enterprise.

D&I isn’t a new concept. It’s been a management topic since the 1960s when women began entering the corporate workforce in greater numbers. Yet it’s within the last two decades that the people who grew up in this changing world have become a driving force for the future. Their beliefs — and what they

want from work and the companies they do business with — have rendered obsolete old orthodoxies such as “military management” and an assumption of white male, heterosexual leadership.

D&I has, in effect, spurred a cultural evolution, and a company’s performance in this area can have a significant impact on its valuation. In businesses of all sizes, the role of implementing D&I programs is now a C-suite function, one that has a profound and positive impact on bottom-line performance. In fact, studies show that a diverse workforce and a culture built on D&I is better positioned to address changing markets, is a better place to work, and most importantly turbocharges innovation. It is an imperative for present success and future growth.

In the case of New Britain-based Stanley Black & Decker, D&I is at the center of a company with 53,000 employees in 60 countries around the world. It is a guiding passion of CEO Jim Loree, and the success is demonstrated by the number of organizations that have cited Stanley Black & Decker as an exceptional place to work. It’s also earned the company a perfect score in the Human Rights Campaign’s Corporate Equality Index, which

evaluates companies on the basis of their practices and benefits directly related to the LGBTQIA+ communities.

How a Town Hall Meeting Started a Transformation

When he was six months into his tenure as CEO, Loree had his first company-wide town hall meeting.

“I got up and I started talking about different things, performance, innovation, social responsibility,” he says. “And then I talked about diversity and inclusion, and I got really pointed about it. And I said that we are going to be a company that welcomes, with open arms, all diverse groups. And I said ‘African Americans, Hispanics, women, LGBTQIA+ folks.’ It was a live audience. There was at least one gasp and several people broke into tears.”

Loree notes that when he joined the company in the late 90s, they talked about diversity, but it has been in the past five years under his watch that the company’s efforts have accelerated.

“We really turned it into a strategic component of our company’s cultural and talent development platforms,” he says.

“There’s an incredible war for talent going on, and if you don’t actively seek out diverse individuals, you are screening out two-thirds of the talent.” He adds that the company is experiencing the power of D&I, saying, “there’s documented proof that diverse and inclusive teams perform better, and I’ve definitely seen that here. They’re also more resilient and prepared for the future.”

For Loree, though, it goes beyond strategy or performance studies. It’s a human issue; it’s personal. “I’m a big believer in equality and equal opportunity. It’s a deep belief I hold, so for me it was very authentic and easy to embrace diversity. In my seat, the power to influence is so high. We’ve made a lot of progress over the last five years, and there’s still significant opportunity ahead.”

To support this commitment, Stanley Black & Decker has nine Employee Resource Groups (ERGs) designed to create support and information for members and as a tool for all employees to understand different perspectives. They include groups dedicated to abilities; veterans; women; working parents; African, Asian and Hispanic ancestry; developing professionals; and LGBTQIA+. Loree notes that almost half of the company’s salaried employees are involved in these groups and deeply engaged. He adds that the entire executive team is involved by sponsoring ERGs, and that participants are getting valuable leadership experience and interaction with the executive team, including those at the board level.

“Of all the groups, Pride and Allies was perhaps the most restricted in terms of what they could and couldn’t talk about and how they came to work,” he says. “I realized that if I can be supportive to them and be a role model for the rest of the leaders and executive sponsors, it’s the most productive way to get the resource groups off the ground and affect some positive change for the LGBTQIA+ community in our company.”

Loree himself is the executive-sponsor of the Pride and Allies group.

Support, Education and Authenticity

Fiona Mohring, who says she “bleeds black and yellow” (the corporate colors of Stanley Black & Decker), is as ardent a supporter of the ERGs as Loree. As she says, her “day job” is vice president of health and group benefits, but her “gay job” is co-chair of the Pride and Allies steering committee. One would be hard pressed to know which role she loves more.

As she explains, “the purpose of the Pride and Allies employee resource group is to bring together people who have a like-minded desire to foster education around our community and be able to serve the community.”

“So, what does that mean? One of our



Jim Loree
Stanley Black & Decker
CEO



Fiona Mohring
VP Health & Group Benefits
CEO

biggest initiatives is what we call ‘LGBTQIA+ 101 Safe Zone Training.’ That’s where we do 90-minute session with employees, managers and leaders about the LGBTQIA+ community. We talk about coming out. We talk about the letters and what they all mean. We talk about unconscious bias.” She adds that for

“I feel like I have been the most successful in my career in these last three or four years,” she says, “because I’m not hiding who I am. I don’t have to work to exclude that part of me to be successful in my role. In fact, it enhances my role in what I do, and it unleashes this power of individuality to be successful.”

A Culture of Allyship

As Loree says, the Pride and Allies group, and all the ERGs, create a culture of allyship in which every employee of the company is an ally to every individual. He says, “that with a company-wide level of support for all these diverse groups who really live D&I, then we will actually live in and operate a company where we have achieved the art of the possible.”

Mohring adds that there are three things



Stanley Black & Decker Pride Day

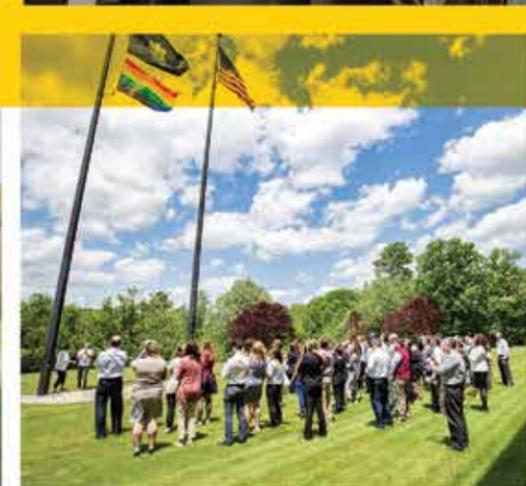
many participants, it’s their first introduction to the community, and that it has been very successful in raising awareness and breaking down barriers.

Mohring’s own story is a testament to the power of D&I. She started at Stanley Black & Decker (then the Stanley Works) in 2005, and at the time was in a heteronormative marriage with two kids. Four years later, she fell in love with a woman and came out. It was a time of great self-questioning and examination, but ultimately after a very amicable divorce, she married her wife. Still, she felt that despite a supportive manager, she couldn’t bring her authentic self to work. So, she left and went to a company which had a long history of LGBTQIA+ inclusion.

From afar, she watched how Loree was transforming the company culture, and when the chance to return presented itself, she leapt at it.

companies need to be successful with D&I. First, senior leadership needs to buy in and support it unequivocally. Second is to hire a Chief Diversity Officer who can really represent these values, champion them, and integrate them into the corporate culture. And, most importantly, it needs to be an active, visible and collective conversation throughout the organization. In addition to in-person events, employees have engaged with and benefitted from talking about D&I online through the company’s Workplace social and communication collaboration platform — which amplifies important messages and shares them in local languages around the world.

It is a huge shift, but it’s one that for Stanley Black & Decker has driven new heights of innovation and success. And everyone gets a share of the pride.



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MEET //

Sheep Saved Me

Guilford Man Goes From World Tour to Hometown Farm

Written By ALLIE RIVERA

“This. This is what sold me,”

Schuyler Beeman says, stopping his long, uphill strides and turning around to survey his north Guilford property. The trees sway in a slight breeze and the bright sun shines down as Beeman puts his hands on his hips. Just as a happy smile begins to spread across his face, Big Boy the rooster lets out a long, loud crow.

“Yup. That, too,” he says with a laugh.

A native of Guilford, Beeman now owns and runs his own small farm with sheep, chickens, and his dog, Marti, running around. Though his journey started in Guilford, Beeman had no idea that his life would take him back to the very same small town he once tried to leave.

“I never was like, ‘I’m going to be the person who comes back to Guilford.’ I was like, ‘Get me out of here,’” Beeman recalls. “I did not want to be a townie. That, to me, was failure. And now I couldn’t be more

against that concept.”

Now a full-time gardener and farmer, his passion being raising sheep, Beeman says he never expected his life to turn out this way when he was a child.

After graduating from Guilford High School, Beeman enrolled at Middlebury College in Vermont with the plan to become a zoo habitat designer.

“I loved biology in high school, I loved art, I loved working with animals, it just seemed to put it all together,” he says of the decision. “And then I took my first biology course my first semester of my freshman year at Middlebury, and bombed it. I was like, ‘This is really hard.’ Who knew?”

With encouragement from a friend in his a capella group, Beeman attended a show produced by the school’s theater department, and immediately felt pulled in a new direction.

“I grew up going to Goodspeed and to Ivoryton and seeing these beautiful musicals. This was like, *Beirut*, the two-person play in a black box [style theater], and I’d never seen theater like that,” he says. “I was blown away by it. I said, ‘If a student can do that, then I want to do that.’ So, I immediately switched.”

Though he expanded his theatrical experience to what he described as more “heady” plays, his heart still loved musicals. After graduation, he followed that love on his next adventure to New York City. With plans to act on Broadway, he began “beating the pavement,” looking for work.

Shortly thereafter, Beeman earned his Equity card for the Actors’ Equity Association by playing Carmen Ghia in the

Ivoryton Playhouse production of *The Producers*.

“After I got my card I was like, ‘Great! I’m in the union now, I’m going to get all this work,’ and I literally didn’t work after that. I literally didn’t get a job at all, which you hear all the time [about] people getting their cards too soon and then they never work again,” he says.

Unsure what his next steps would be professionally, Beeman began taking any opportunity he could find, including choreographing a community theater production of *Annie* with Artful Living Productions in Killingworth. It was there that Beeman met Bill Berloni, a theatrical animal trainer who was providing the dog for the show. Berloni’s experience dates back to training the dog in the original

After personal and professional journeys that took him elsewhere, Schuyler Beeman knows just where he wants to be. Photo by Allie Rivera.

Annie in the 1970s.

As choreographer for the production, Beeman was tasked with coordinating and teaching a massive cast.

“I had to choreograph ‘Hard Knock Life,’ and I had two casts of 40 orphans each, plus the main eight orphans. I was given all 88 children for an hour and a half, once a week, by myself, to choreograph ‘Hard Knock Life,’” he recalls, his eyes wide remembering the ordeal. “The Berlonis came back to me after and they were like, ‘Well we figure if you could do that, you could probably take care of one of our dogs.’”

Though Beeman had always had a fondness for animals, he never anticipated working with them in a theatrical capacity. Not wanting to turn down any opportunities, however, he accepted the new position, hoping that staying in the theater realm would get him other acting work. In addition to dog handling, he would often be cast in the ensemble of shows.

“[It was] a great way for me to meet the directors of the shows and be like, ‘I have talent! Cast me in other things!’” he says with a laugh. “Which never happened, by the way. Never. But that’s what I really got into it for.”

As he began working with the animals, including dogs for such shows as *Legally Blonde* and *The Wizard of Oz* and even a lamb for Long Wharf Theatre’s production of *Curse of the Starving Class*, Beeman began to find that he was good at the job.

“Come to find out, I actually had a knack for it, and it actually was something that I really enjoyed, and it taught me so much, not only about dogs and animals, but also about theater in so many different ways,” he says.

Although he enjoyed the work, which took him throughout the country, he found that the job was not always fun.

“It was a really stressful job for me, though. I mean, you’re basically saying, ‘Hey dog, I need you to do the exact same thing, eight times a week, perfectly.’ And it’s a dog,” he says. “Yes, it’s a trained dog, but it’s a dog. Like, sometimes a moth flies by on the stage and they get distracted. Things happen.”

A “big break,” and an epiphany

Despite the stress, Beeman accepted a position to go on a world tour with actress and former model Isabella Rossellini, serving as both the dog handler and onstage puppeteer.

“It was just her, the dog, and myself, on stage talking about animal minds and consciousness and how evolution plays a role in it, which I was like, these are all the things that I love,” Beeman says. The tour took him throughout the United States and Europe where he performed on stages in Paris, London, and beyond.

“It was great! I mean, I got to see the world with a superstar and stay in incredible hotels and eat amazing food and drink incredible wine, and it was like a dream,” he says. “And I was miserable. I was absolutely miserable.”

It seemed that Beeman was living the exact life he’d always wanted, the life he’d dreamed about as a teen wanting to leave Guilford, but it was not what he’d imagined.

“I hated being on the road. I never had a sense of place. It was stressful. Getting a dog to do the same thing over and over and over again, for me, was very stressful,” he says.

What was supposed to be a dream turned into a dark time for Beeman.

“I started using drugs and alcohol a lot when I was on the road because I was so depressed,” he says. “Not many people knew that about me. I was a very high-functioning addict where people had no idea.”

In between shows during the tour, Beeman found respite visiting a friend from college at their sheep farm in Maryland, and the experience soon proved to be life-changing.

“Sheep saved me. There is no doubt about it,” he says. “I remember when I first started trying to work with sheep, and I came in with my big New York City, type-A energy, and they would run the other way. They were like, ‘We don’t want to deal with you. Bye.’”

Beeman says that helping to care for sheep forced him to calm down, relax, and move with a more assured sense of purpose.

“I just had this sense of peace when I work with sheep. There’s something incredibly calming about it,” he says.

While still on the road with Rossellini, Beeman began dreaming of his days spent with the sheep, and his own vision of his future began to change.

“Every show that I did out on the road with Isabella, I was like, ‘Okay, this is another check for my sheep farm.’ I just knew that that’s where it was going,” he says.

The tour ended in the spring of 2019, and immediately after Beeman did one more off-Broadway production of *Curse of the Starving Class*, but after that he decided to leave the business for good.



Farm friends. Photo courtesy of Schuyler Beeman

A NEW DIRECTION

Through his experiences, his dreams had shifted, and his new goal was to own his own sheep farm. To Beeman, there was no question as to where that would be.

“What I realized, mainly when I was on the road with Isabella and I’m seeing all these beautiful places – I played Paris, I played London, I played all these huge cities across Europe – and I realized there were very few places in the world, if any, like Guilford. And that’s where I needed to be,” he says.

After purchasing his first two sheep from his friend’s farm in Maryland, Beeman’s flock began to grow as opportunities for free sheep kept coming to him. Soon he had seven.

“Slowly but surely, I was just piling on all these sheep, and then I was like, ‘Where am I going to keep these?’” he says.

Just off the green in Guilford, near the home where he grew up and where his parents still live, Beeman saw a pasture that was not being used. After reaching out to the land owner, he learned that there was an agricultural easement on the property and the owners were having a hard time finding someone to use it. They offered the space for Beeman’s sheep for free.

“So I had this stunning pasture in downtown Guilford, right off the green,” he says. “People just loved driving by there and seeing the sheep out on the pasture.”

Beeman kept the sheep in that pasture for more than a year as he worked to purchase his own house and land in north Guilford, close to the Durham town line. As he was shifting his career, he was also working to change his personal life by getting sober.

“I was a loose cannon,” he recalls. “I could have done it a lot better, there’s no doubt about it, but I did it, and now I’m taking better steps in sobriety.”

Now sober since December 2019, Beeman says it was not only the sheep that helped lead him to a healthier lifestyle.

“I just feel so incredibly grateful that I’ve been able to do this. My parents have helped a lot and the community has helped a lot,” he says. “I knew even amidst that haze that I was going to be healthier in this lifestyle, and it is just proving that more times than not in so many ways for me.”

After purchasing his home in October 2019 and moving his full flock to the property mid-2020, Beeman is now living a fully agrarian lifestyle in his hometown. He opened his own gardening business, Lodestar Gardening, where he works with clients to create beautiful outdoor spaces. He describes his style as “new cottage,” whimsical, flowy, and packed with flowers.

“I consider myself a regenerative agriculturalist,” he says. “Sustainable, we can sustain a lot of things for a long time. Sustainable just means you’re holding on. That doesn’t really do anything. What I want to do



Farm life has proven to be the best life for Beeman. Photos courtesy of Schuyler Beeman.

is be regenerating, and helping to rebuild and then build from there, so I like to do that in my gardens, as well.”

In addition to the gardening business, Beeman started a growing flock of chickens which he uses to sell eggs. At present, he has roughly 25 chickens in his coop, 14 chicks he is raising, and 35 more arriving in the coming months.

While the egg sales help financially, Beeman says that the sheep remain his passion. He now provides nearly all of their care except for sheering, for which he brings in a professional.

“The amount of equipment that you need, it’s actually cheaper to bring a professional in who is trained to do it, and they do a really good job. Plus, I’m 6’3”, I don’t need to be bending that much,” he says with a laugh.

Looking forward, Beeman says that his dream is to expand the farm and someday open an artists’ residency.

“I want to have a place where artists can come and do their craft, have a little respite from the city, get a little country air, and be able to create,” he says. “So that is the ultimate dream. In the meantime, my gardening pays the bills, which I feel incredibly fortunate about because it’s something that I love to do.”

Living His Best Life

To those who know Beeman best, watching his shift from world-touring performer to hometown farmer has been inspirational.

“There is a certain resonance to when you witness people doing what they’re supposed to be doing,” says Carly Callahan, who worked with Beeman on a series of summer concerts at the Ivoryton Playhouse. “I think Schuyler getting into this piece of his life is allowing us to also reimagine where we’re from and where we are and where we can go. I think it’s brave and I think it’s wonderful.”

Bethany Taylor, Beeman’s aunt and first reader at the church where Beeman still regularly sings, similarly finds joy and inspiration in Beeman’s story.

“He’s willing to do what is right for him to be doing. It doesn’t matter what direction that takes, in his relationships, in his work, in his community, whatever

he feels he needs to be doing, he stays true to that,” she says. “He’s fiercely devoted to whatever he puts his mind to, and I really admire those qualities in him.”

As an openly gay man in the farming community, Beeman said that he has never felt the need to hide who he is among fellow shepherds.

“What I love about it is that sheep bring everybody from all different walks of life together. When you’re with those people, everything else goes away and you just get to connect with somebody,” he says. “I’ve never not been myself. I’ve never felt the need to stifle myself with those people, and I’ve never run into any issue.”

Through both his social media accounts and on Patreon, a site which allows “patrons” to sponsor artists and creatives in their work, Beeman has been able to bring all of his passions together, often posting videos of himself singing to his sheep in the pasture. He hopes that by continuing to be his most authentic self, he can shed new light on what it means to be a young, gay farmer.

“This is who I am. I’m very open about every part of myself, my sobriety, my personal life,” he says. “That’s how I connect with people. I show them that this is me, here I am.”



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Allie Rivera is a writer and improviser based in Middletown. Her work has been recognized by the New England Newspaper and Press Association and the Connecticut Society of Professional Journalists. She also is an associate artistic director, teacher, and performer at the Sea Tea Comedy Theater in Hartford.



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YOUTH //

Funding the Future

LGBTQ Foundation Provides Crucial Scholarships

By DAWN ENNIS



Founder Dena Castricone, center, presented Leah Juliett, left, and Angelina Martin with the first scholarships awarded by the foundation.

Coming out is a rite of passage. But too often, it can divide adults from their children, who suddenly feel like strangers to one another. The joy and happiness that comes with announcing one's authenticity should be embraced by everyone, and yet it can lead to heartbreak across generations.

Mothers, fathers, grandparents and guardians believe themselves to be the ones who know the newly out best. After all, they've known them since birth.

But it's a new birthday of sorts for LGBTQ youth leaving the closet, as they announce an orientation or gender identity that may be different from what their elders perceive. Sometimes, instead of a celebration, they are met with silence – or worse, anger, denial and even rejection. Those results can lead to extreme and unfathomable circumstances: losing not just the expectation of unconditional love, but also unconditional privileges, such as a place to call home and financial support.

However, dreams need not be dashed or destroyed because of a lack of parental support or financial hardship. Even the LGBTQ children of accepting parents need assistance when they seek an opportunity to better themselves through higher education, given the overwhelming costs associated with earning a college education.

That's where the CTGLC Foundation comes in. Since its founding by legal legend Dena M. Castricone in 2017, when it was known as the Connecticut Alliance for Business Opportunities (or CABO) the CTGLC Foundation provides that much-needed boost to Connecticut's LGBTQ youth, and allies, too, through generous scholarships.

"The foundation has awarded more than \$12,000 in scholarships to Connecticut high school seniors in order to continue their advocacy and community support in the collegiate setting," according to the foundation's website.

"We wanted to do more than just write a check," Castricone wrote in an online post about the board and foundation's history. "We wanted to celebrate and

empower these budding leaders and to propel them into leadership positions in government, education and business. We wanted them to feel the power of the community supporting them and for these incredible young leaders to know that we stand with them now and in the future.”

In 2012, the National Gay & Lesbian Chamber of Commerce honored the board with the National LGBT Chamber of the Year award. The foundation started awarding scholarships in 2015 and board members were so impressed with the quality of the applications, they decided to award two a year, instead of just one.

A scholarship of \$500 is awarded to the winner of the Community Achievement Award, and a second winner receives \$1,500 for a scholarship named for Castricone, in recognition of her leadership of both CABO and the foundation. Jackie Thurston, a special education teacher and GSA co-advisor at her high school in North Branford, succeeded Castricone as foundation president in 2017.

“I’ve seen firsthand just how much mental health needs to be an utmost priority,” Thurston says. “These students who are leaders and catalysts in our community are helping a lot of their peers move forward, see the light at the end of the tunnel and keep them involved.”

Thurston, 36, was North Branford’s 2020 Teacher of the Year and previously

one of only 76 educators in the United States to receive the Fulbright Teachers for Global Classrooms Program grant for 2018-2019. She was the only educator in Connecticut to receive this distinction. But instead of talking about her credentials, Thurston gives a shout-out to her students in the GSA.

“This is exactly why we do the scholarships,” she says. “So that in the future they know they can make a difference, for the lives of the community and everyone around you.”

The deadline to submit applications for the annual scholarships is every June 1. This opportunity is open to all seniors attending high schools in Connecticut who have plans to attend an institution of higher education in the next academic year and maintain a minimum grade point average of 2.5. Most important, of course, is for the applicants to share how they are working to further the foundation’s mission.

“I was bullied for being trans,” says Cal Benitex, the 2019 winner of the Dena M. Castricone Scholarship. He’s 19 and now thriving as a sophomore at the University of Connecticut in Storrs. He won a scholarship for what he did when he was 17, when the rejection he encountered at his New Haven high school inspired him to take action.

“I came out my senior year and I didn’t really get a good response from

my closest peers,” says Benitex. Daily micro-aggressions piled-up, he says, and he felt endangered. “Teachers didn’t really do anything about it, and that made me feel more unsafe. So I thought I would channel whatever anger I had to create a workshop.”

Benitex reached out to the organization Teach for America and was booked to speak at a conference, offering teachers training on how to best serve their trans students. “I talked about the gender binary and different ways people could identify,” he says, “respecting pronouns or remembering to use gender neutral language.” His workshop included scenarios for teachers contending with students that are closeted, and “how to approach them in a way that prioritizes those students’ safety.”

His workshop was so successful, Benitex has been invited back year after year.

Winning the scholarship, he says, showed him that, “As a trans person, I can succeed in my own way. It’s just nice to get recognition for the workshop I did, because I still do it. I go to that conference yearly and present the workshop, and now I’m trying to adapt it to a college classroom.”

Says Thurston, “We keep in touch with a lot of our alumni and a lot of our past recipients, and what they are doing in the world is so incredible. Our first scholarship winner just became third runner-up in the Miss Connecticut pageant, as the first non-binary area contestant in the history of the Miss USA pageant, and also became Glamour Magazine’s college student of the year because of their activism.”

That’s Leah Juliett, the award-winning, queer non-binary writer and activist. They graduated from Western Connecticut State University in 2018 with an honors degree in political science, and Juliett is currently pursuing an MFA in Social and Environmental Arts from Prescott College

CONTINUED ON PAGE 28

Scholarship winner Cal Benitex turned the taunts of bullies and transphobes into a workshop for teachers, showing them how to be better trans allies.



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Scholarship winner and nonbinary writer Leah Juliett delivered a TedX Talk in March 2019 that addressed the need for an effective response to revenge porn.

“My fragile, 15-year-old flesh will forever flourish on Firefox, or Google Chrome, sprouting like weeds from my non-consented clitoris.com, my pixilated pink parts forever stretching into sensual screensavers for oversexed teenage boys who sold my body like a trading card you can’t buy back.”

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 26

in Arizona, under the direction of Patrisse Cullors, a co-founder of Black Lives Matter. Their goal is to be the first non-binary legislator in Connecticut. Juliett founded March Against Revenge Porn after having photos of their naked body circulated on the internet.

They talked about their experience in 2019, in a powerful TedX Talk: “My fragile, 15-year-old flesh will forever flourish on Firefox, or Google Chrome, sprouting like weeds from my non-consented clitoris.com, my pixilated pink parts forever stretching into sensual screensavers for oversexed teenage boys who sold my body like a trading card you can’t buy back.”

In 2020, the foundation awarded two scholarships, \$1,000 each to Adrian Huq of Derby and Nathan Posca of Naugatuck, each of whom were then high school seniors.

Described as one of the loudest voices of change at Naugatuck High School, Posca was a member of his school’s Gay Straight Alliance and worked to ensure all students felt included, according

to the CTGLC. He ran the GSA prom, Pride events for the National Honor Society, and led the school’s National Coming Out Days. “He inspires the younger students to carry his torch and is unapologetically himself,” wrote his teachers, who nominated him, “which gives the others students the power to do the same.”

Huq, who is non-binary, was president of their Gender Sexuality Alliance at Metropolitan Business Academy in New Haven. They are a climate activist now pursuing a degree in environmental studies at Tufts University. Huq actively worked to validate LGBTQ students through art and Pride events, and was a go-to resource for helping students deal with unaccepting family members. They also created an LGBTQ library at their school and created lesson plans for teachers that offered sensitivity training on topics ranging from pronouns to coming out and homophobia.

“I know that within the LGBTQ community, people of color can have very difficult experiences navigating

their queerness,” Huq said in their scholarship application, “and I hope to represent those who are not often seen and represented widely within the community.”

Says Thurston, “These are some of the most inspirational people I have ever met.”

“I felt affirmed when I was lucky enough to win the scholarship, and go to college and be able to live the way I want to live, in my own identity,” says Benitex. “Even when the country feels very hostile right now toward trans people, I genuinely think there’s hope for kids like me, and it’ll get better in its own way.”

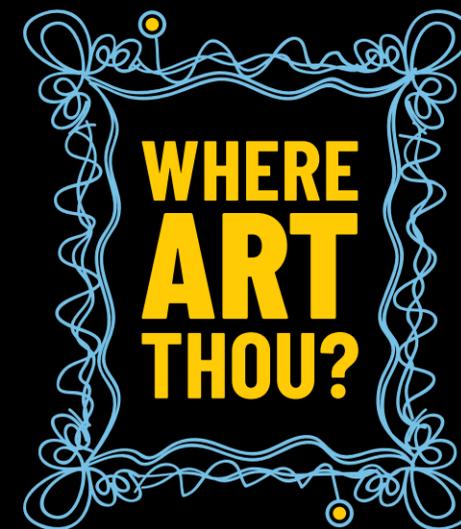
The CTGLC Foundation is in the process of finalizing its application to the IRS to be designated a 501 (c)(3) tax-exempt charitable organization, and is looking for donations to help fund its scholarship program. The group is also looking for more board members; anyone interested is invited to send a resume to scholarship@ctglcfoundation.org.



Dawn Ennis is an award-winning journalist, a professor at University of Hartford and writes for several news outlets. Ennis was America’s first transgender journalist in a TV network newsroom when she came out eight years ago. Follow her @lifeafterdawn on Twitter, Facebook and Instagram. Ennis and her family reside in West Hartford, Connecticut.



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A PLACE TO CALL HOME

State Seeks LGBTQ People Willing to Foster or Adopt Youths

By JANE LATUS

Has the parenthood bug bit you? Are you considering adoption? If you're an LGBTQ couple or individual, the Connecticut Department of Children and Family Services (DCF) has a message for you: you are more than welcome.

Queer parents who have adopted through DCF also have something to tell you: DCF means it. "They will welcome LGBTQ parents with open arms," says John Pica-Sneed of East Windsor, who with husband Brian is in the process of adopting their sixth child.

Adoptive parents say Connecticut has always been ahead of the curve in a country where, elsewhere, legal and de facto obstacles to adoption by LGBTQ parents still exist (such as prejudices of individual child welfare workers).

If Connecticut's embrace of LGBTQ adoptive parents is news to you, DCF would like to change that. It launched an outreach campaign in 2018, going to

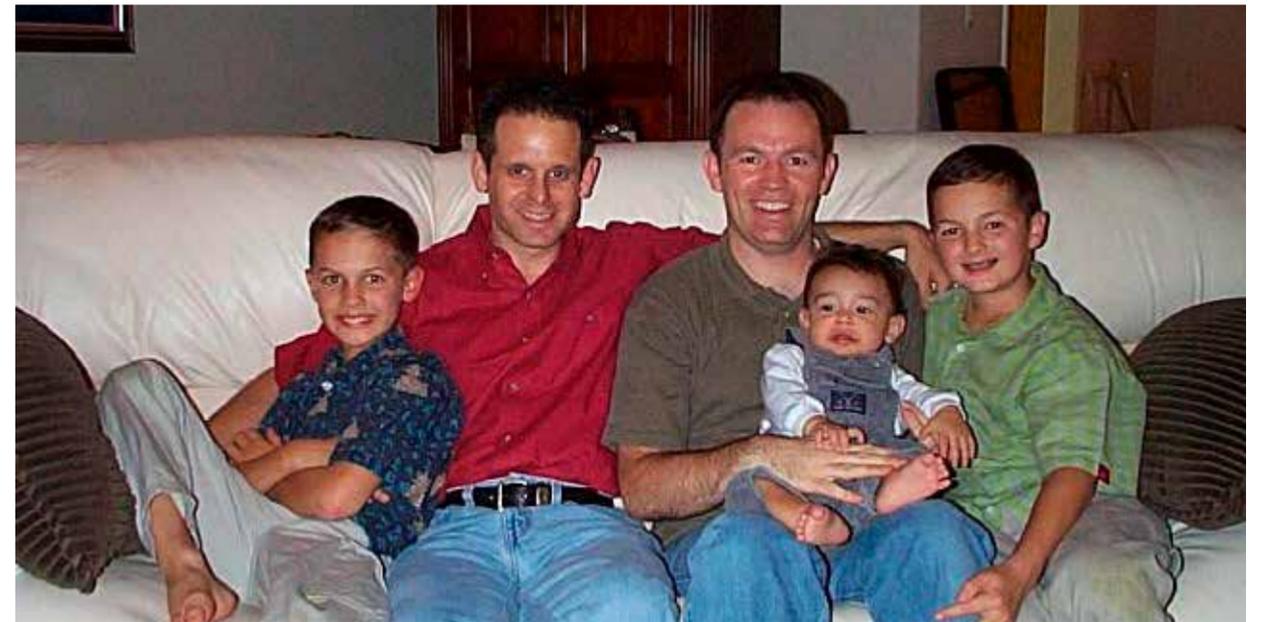
LGBTQ community centers and organizations. Around 90 applications resulted from that effort. DCF and the 16 agencies it works with statewide to recruit, license and support foster and adoptive parents, continue to reach out to the queer community to let them know they are actively wanted. And not only because they are needed, but also because they are exceptionally well-suited for the job, and —statistics show — more willing.

"They're very intentional about becoming parents. They're very attuned to what it's like being an outsider, which is what most foster children have been. They are very thoughtful, and do a lot of planning about their families. It's not just a simple matter of biology," says Carissa Cunningham of Boston, a communications consultant who worked with DCF. "LGBTQ parents tend to be older when they become parents and have a certain level of stability in their lives."

If you have any doubt, just take it from someone who knows: an adopted kid. Brad Kleinerman and husband Flint Gehre of Avon have three adopted sons. When son



John Pica-Sneeden and his husband Brian are proud of their inclusive, growing family. Contributed photo.



Brad Kleinerman (left) and husband Flint Gehre with sons Rick, baby Joseph and Ray

Ray came home from kindergarten one day, he told his parents another kid had asked him, “Why do you have two dads?” Ray had answered, “Because I’m lucky!”

THE NEED

The biggest demand is for foster parents because, as DCF Director of Foster Services Natalia Liriano explains, “The goal is to reunite the child with their family of origin.”

On the spring day we spoke, 3,876 children were in DCF’s care. Of those, around 450 were “legally free” for adoption, meaning parental rights had been terminated. Except for those children, the adoption process is “foster-to-adopt.”

Liriano says DCF appreciates knowing up front whether parents are open to fostering, or have their hearts set on adoption. When fostering-to-adopt, people “need to understand there’s risk in that, that if that kid goes back home, your heart might get broken.”

Ninety-three percent of children in the state’s care are living in a family setting, almost half of them with kin, says Liriano; the other 7% are in congregate care. Forty-four percent are age 6 or younger, 22% are ages 7 to 12, 21% are 13 to 17, and a small group is 18 and older.

Children end up in DCF’s care for a variety of reasons: neglect, abuse, abandonment. They may have been exposed to domestic violence, unaddressed mental health issues, or substance abuse. They aren’t newborn babies who have experienced nothing but loving arms. Fostering or adopting requires a big heart, but also open eyes and commitment.

A 2013 study by the Williams Institute at the UCLA School of Law reveals one reason why adoption agencies are smart to court the queer community: “Same-sex

couples raising children are four times more likely than their different-sex counterparts to be raising an adopted child.”

Looked at from another angle, the study found: “Among all children under age 18 being raised by same-sex couples, approximately 1 in 10 (10%) are adopted, compared to just 2% of children being raised by different-sex couples.”

Yet Cunningham says that when she began her work in Connecticut, she found that some in the gay community “didn’t even know it was legal for them to adopt. Not only had it been legal a long time, but they were welcomed by DCF.”

Parents’ sexual orientation and gender identity is irrelevant to DCF, in the sense that there’s no checkbox for these things on forms. DCF doesn’t keep any such records. No one knows how many LGBTQ parents have adopted children in the state – but social workers say they are happy to see that the number is growing.

Allison Casinghino is foster care specialist at Wheeler Clinic, one of the agencies that works with DCF to support foster and adoptive families. “In every training I’ve done for eight years, we’ve had at least one or two same-sex couple or LGBT individuals,” she says.

That wasn’t always the case. “Seven years ago, this lesbian couple came to my table [at an event] and said, ‘I’m sure the answer is no, but can we adopt?’”

QUEER KIDS DISPROPORTIONATELY NEED FAMILIES

Being LGBTQ is the reason many kids need a home. Most of the children Wheeler Clinic places are ages 10 to 17, and Casinghino says about 30% of them identify as

Meet The Parents

Adoptive Families Share Their Journeys

By JANE LATUS

Brad Kleinerman and Flint Gehre of Avon Adoptive parents of three



This couple has experienced – and played a prime role in – the advancement of LGBTQ family law, both across the country and over time.

Soon after they started dating 30 years ago in California, they knew they wanted to marry and raise a family. A civil union was all the state allowed. Same-sex adoptions weren't allowed either. But Los Angeles County saw an urgent need for work-arounds.

"In any given day, there were 80,000-something kids in the adoption center," says Kleinerman. He and Gehre filed adoption applications separately, identifying themselves as single men, and the county put them together. In 1997, they adopted brothers Raymond and Rick, then ages 6 and 5.

They were treated with open disdain by some of the other parents in the county's training class, but "the social workers said we appeared to be the most stable, and most on the same page, of any couple in the class," says Kleinerman.

"Our intention was to adopt the two," he says, but four years later a sharp-eyed attorney working on a newborn's behalf discovered he had two older brothers who'd been adopted. The attorney tracked the couple down, and their third son, Joseph, joined the family.

By then, California allowed same-sex adoptions, but not yet marriage. So they moved to Connecticut, where they married in 2009.

If their names are familiar, it is because they were plaintiffs in a lawsuit filed by GLAAD against the federal government, claiming the 1996 Defense of Marriage Act was unconstitutional. They won in 2012.

Their sons are now 30, 29 and 20.

First meeting: "From the very first time we saw them, there was this bonding between us," Gehre says. "We met them at their foster mother's house with the social worker. They both were so excited – they jumped in our laps. They weren't shy."

The next time, they met at a park. When it was time to leave, Rick tried to hide, fearing he'd never see them again.

Advice to new adoptive parents: "All the challenges we've faced with our children, I've seen countless friends with biological children who have the same issues. One advantage

you have as an adoptive parent is you prepare for them," says Gehre.

Words of wisdom: "Love doesn't solve everything, but taking a child from abuse and neglect and putting them in a loving family helps a whole lot," says Kleinerman.

Brian and John Pica-Sneed of East Windsor Adoptive parents of six



Technically, the adoption process is still in the works for their youngest, but in their hearts, Brian and John's new 15-year-old is officially their son.

The couple were empty-nesters. The girl and four boys they adopted through DCF at ages ranging from 5 to 12 years old had grown and moved out.

"The house was always clean!" says John. But they kept hearing about an increase in LGBTQ children in foster care, and they couldn't resist.

"We decided to give back to our community. Most LGBT people are constantly struggling to belong," says John. "I have friends who've been asked to leave their homes at 15 or 16, and ended up raising themselves."

Besides making it clear their son has a home forever, John and Brian immediately began introducing him to the gay community. They took him to Stonewall, an outdoor drag brunch in New London, and a gay comedy night.

"He's realizing he can be himself, and not have to guard himself, especially at home," says John.

After several months with his new family, their son is more relaxed and secure, and thriving. "Maybe too relaxed!" says Brian. "Why isn't that dirty glass in the sink?"

Says John, "He's an average 15 year old. He's doing fantastic in school now. The teachers were like, 'OMG, he's wonderful!' When you feel loved and accepted, it's amazing what you can accomplish."

Advice to new parents: "Each child is totally different, so you have to watch their needs," says Brian.

Words of wisdom: "It's probably the best thing you can do for another human being. You may not have given birth to them, but you've given them life," says John. ♻️

LGBTQ. She suspects the number is higher.

"They already have so much confusion and uncertainty in their lives, so they are less likely to proclaim their identity than if they were in a stable situation. One individual I know in particular, that's the reason he was abused," she says, trailing off into a brief silence. "The wonderful part of my job is I get to find them homes that love and accept them. He's in a very good place now."

Just because children are queer doesn't mean they need queer parents; they just need someone who will accept and love them, she says.

But in John and Brian Pica-Sneed's case, after adopting five kids who are straight, they deliberately chose to adopt a gay teenager.

"When you look at a group of people who have been cast aside, scorned or ridiculed – it just reminds you of what happened to you," says John Pica-Sneed.

When their son's social worker told him he'd be going home to a gay couple, the boy later told John, "I was so happy to hear that."

WAYS TO ADOPT

There are different types of adoption. Public agency adoptions (in Connecticut's case, through DCF) are usually foster-to-adopt, but there are some children who are legally free for outright adoption. There is no cost, and training and services are provided. So is medical insurance, and full tuition for Connecticut colleges and universities.

In independent adoptions, parents seek out on their own birth parents willing to put their child up for adoption.

International adoptions require a consultation with the U.S. State Department to see which countries allow LGBTQ adoptions. The Human Rights Campaign advises, "At this point, it is very difficult to pursue an international adoption as an openly same-sex couple, or as an openly single LGBTQ person."

A Second Adoption is necessary to secure both parents' legal rights if they are unmarried or if the state's adoption law doesn't allow both to adopt. These can cost from a few hundred to a few thousand dollars.

DCF's website is a good place to start, with answers to frequently asked questions and phone numbers to call for more information. Applications can be submitted online, and there is no obligation to proceed. Ten-week training sessions are offered repeatedly throughout the year, at many locations.

To sum it up, says DCF's Liriano, "You say 'I'm interested,' and we walk you through it." All DCF – and children – want from you, she says, "is unconditional love, to give them structure, and to give them a place they can always call home." ♻️



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The Show Must Go On

After an Extended Intermission, Theaters Look Ahead

By PAUL WHITMAN

It's time to rediscover the performing arts.

Over the last year, life's been very dull and you've kept a low profile for too long. In recent months, out of desperation for some kind of stimulation, you've maybe even thought about volunteering to go to the Department of Motor Vehicles for a friend! That's sad indeed.

Stop! Sit down. Relax. Now with loosening COVID restrictions, see what's been going on with the performing arts scene around the state. It's been revamped, reimaged and reinvented for enjoyable and safe entertainment.

The pandemic has been particularly trying for the theater industry. Since March 2020, many theaters have had to

get creative and adapt to the pandemic. They're offering their patrons virtual performances as well as some live entertainment with proper social distancing.

Here's a look at what's happening in the arts scene throughout the state. Due to the shifting COVID guidelines, please check dates and times of all performances presented here before making any plans.

THE BUSHNELL PERFORMING ARTS CENTER, HARTFORD

An architectural gem and one of the most important cultural institutions in the Hartford area, the Bushnell is looking forward to reopening later this fall. They're kicking things off in October with *Escape to Margaritaville*, a musical based on the songs of Jimmy Buffet. It has been described by *Newsday* as "a delightful, energetic frothy drink of a show."

Looking ahead, notable productions include *Hamilton* which sold out its entire run the first time it played at the Bushnell in 2018. It returns for a three-week run in June 2022. For more information, visit bushnell.org.

CAPITAL CLASSICS THEATRE COMPANY

Celebrating its 30th anniversary, and the return of outdoor theatre, Capital Classics is staging *As You Like It*, one of Shakespeare's

most popular romantic comedic tales. The Greater Hartford Shakespeare Festival runs Thursdays through Sundays for three weekends (July 29 – August 15), under the stars and on the lawn of the University of Saint Joseph's Autorino Center for the Arts, at 1678 Asylum Ave. in West Hartford. Audience members are encouraged bring blankets, lawn chairs, and dinners, and COVID-19 safety protocols will be in effect. Tickets and information at HartfordShakespeare.org.

COLLEGE STREET MUSIC HALL

Located in the center of downtown New Haven's arts and entertainment district, College Street Music Hall has become an important venue for live music performances and stand-up comedy. While COVID restrictions have eased, protocols don't make it practical to reopen just yet. However, upcoming shows this fall include comic Mike Birbiglia on Oct. 1. He is a regular contributor to *This American Life* and *The Moth*, and has also released several albums and television shows. On Nov. 4, stand-up comedian Fortune Feimster performs. Feimster, a lesbian, came into her own on *Chelsea Lately*. After this show, the venue is planning regular live performances well into 2022, including *The Moth Mainstage* on Sept 22, 2022. For more information, visit collegestreetmusichall.com.

FOXWOODS RESORT CASINO

Last fall, for a second time, Foxwoods was named "the best casino in the country" outside of Las Vegas. This title was bestowed on them by USA Today's readers' choice awards. So it's no surprise that for entertainment, major acts kick off the summer months, including internationally recognized comedic legend Dave Chappelle. He will bring his sharp wit and irreverent social commentary to Foxwoods for five performances on June 24, 25 and 26. Funnyman Tim Dillion will take center stage with his laugh-out-loud set on July 24. For more information, visit foxwoods.com/entertainment.



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GARDE ARTS CENTER

Built as a grand movie palace in the 1920s, the Garde had a masterful reincarnation over 30 years ago. Today, it is recognized not only for its innovative mix of programming but its atmospheric Moroccan interiors. Hoping to open at 100% capacity this fall, upcoming shows include Melissa Etheridge Sept. 5, *The High Kings* Oct. 9, Rosanne Cash Nov. 5, *Tusk* and *The Breakers* Nov. 6 and Chazz Palminteri in *A Bronx Tale* Nov. 12. For more information, visit gardearts.org.





HARTFORD HEALTHCARE AMPHITHEATER

This is the new kid on the block this season. Together with Live Nation Entertainment and the City of Bridgeport, the HHC Amphitheater will be bringing exciting change for the neighborhood and the cultural scene in Fairfield County. Formerly a ballpark and now a state-of-the-art amphitheater, its first concerts are scheduled for June. Organizers plan to host more than 75 annual events, in spring through fall, under its immense tensile membrane roof. At press time, a precise schedule of events had not as yet been released. For more information, visit hartfordhealthcareamp.com.

RIDGEFIELD PLAYHOUSE

This restored Cass Gilbert Jr.-designed theater in Ridgefield hosts local and national acts – from musicians to comedians to Broadway legends, speakers, dance, opera and more. It also features classic films on-site and live streaming events for viewing at home. As a finale

to Pride Month, on June 30, The Playhouse presents the 25th anniversary of the classic gay comedy *The Birdcage*, starring Nathan Lane, Robin Williams and Gene Hackman, on the big screen. Later in the season, the gayest of gay performers, comedian and satirist Randy Rainbow appears for two nights, October 27 and 28. Enjoy, too, an evening of conversation with cultural icon Fran Lebowitz on Nov. 7, David Sedaris on Oct. 11 and much more. For more information, visit ridgefieldplayhouse.org.

STAMFORD CENTER FOR THE PERFORMING ARTS/THE PALACE THEATRE

A center for music and theater for decades, The Palace offers one of the broadest ranges of entertainment in the state. Patrons enjoy performances by well-known comedians, pop music stars as well as symphonic music and opera. Following all pandemic protocols, The Palace is planning a return presenting shows in October. On Oct. 8, *Stayin' Alive* brings the timeless classics of the Bee Gees. Rising star comedian Anthony Rodia is live Oct. 9, American folk-rock icons The Indigo Girls return on Oct. 16 and family fun *Cirque-tacular's* Spooktacular entertains Oct. 29. The Palace's season schedule of live performances continues through the holidays and well into 2022. For more information, visit palacestamford.org.

GOODSPEED MUSICALS

Known for its classic Broadway productions and other plays on its main stage in East Haddam, the theater was originally a charming opera house in a wedding-cake design. Goodspeed also runs the smaller Norma Terris Theatre in nearby Chester, featuring new musicals and actors. Due to COVID concerns, *South Pacific* has been rescheduled from this June to September 2021, and *Anne of Green Gables* to next year.

While productions have been delayed indoors, there will be summer outdoor entertainment again this year, on the lawn at the Opera House. An exact program has not been finalized, but it will be a mix of show tunes and light-hearted fun. For more information, visit goodspeed.org.

THE HARTFORD SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

For more than 75 years, the Hartford Symphony Orchestra has been one of America's leading orchestras and one of Connecticut's premier musical organizations. Their outdoor chamber concert series, *Spring Splash!*, takes place at various locations in and around Hartford through June 16. HSO's Talcott Mountain Music Festival (July 2-30) kicks off with *Celebrate America* on July 2 at Simsbury Meadows Performing Arts Center. It's like Tanglewood in Connecticut. All concerts will require masking and social distancing, with limited capacities. For more information, visit hartfordsymphony.org.

THEATERWORKS HARTFORD

A small, intimate venue in downtown Hartford, TheaterWorks is known for producing important contemporary works in New England. Now in its 35th season, it offers annual memberships, monthly memberships and single ticket sales. New shows stream online monthly and will continue until it's safe to return to live performances. On-demand through June 25, a reading of a new play in development, *Moonlighters*: it's a love story set in a futuristic workplace by Hartford's own Cin Martinez. *Walden* by Amy Berryman makes its North American premiere in July; dates to be announced soon. For more information, visit twhartford.org.

WESTPORT COUNTRY PLAYHOUSE

A local tradition since 1931, the Playhouse is a national theatrical institution. Responding to the pandemic, they have reinvented theater for a virtual world. For the 2021 season, all Playhouse experiences will be presented online, with single tickets and packages available. New productions include *Tiny House* and *Doubt: A Parable*. Add-on events including LGBT Night Out. From the archives, *Man of La Mancha* and a second to-be-determined gem will be presented. The Script in Hand play-reading series continues. And free for the community: New Works/New Voices, Concept to Curtain, and Playhouse Radio Theater with WSHU. The theater is planning to be back in person in 2022. For more information, visit westportplayhouse.org.



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Living In ‘The Gray Space’ Between The Rainbow Stripes

Those Who Go By They and Them Share Their Stories

By DAWN ENNIS

Let's start with what nonbinary is not: it's not a third gender.

Those who identify as nonbinary say their gender identity is best described as part of a spectrum; nonbinary individuals can exist in between male and female and outside of that binary divide. They can be presumed male or female at birth, or intersex.

One of the pre-eminent trans nonbinary journalists, Britni de la Cretaz of Boston, wrote in *Sports Illustrated*: “‘Nonbinary’ can mean neither man nor woman. It can mean both man and woman. It can mean a million other things in between, each personal to the individual.”

Connecticut, like many states, has come a long way in a short time in recognizing the validity of the nonbinary identity, but there are still hurdles for gender non-conforming individuals who don't identify as either male or female.

“Nonbinary people live in the gray space,” says trans nonbinary therapist M. Reim Ifrach, 34, who is co-clinical director and art therapist at Lotus Counseling in Watertown. “We've created a binary world and we're telling people there's actually all this space in between and we all live in it and we might present closer to male or female or androgynous in the middle. But the reality is, when you live life in the gray space, you're sensitive quite often.”

Ifrach shared some of the art they made displaying that sensitivity, from reacting to the murder of George Floyd to struggles with reproductive organs. The goal of their art? “I just want people to know that our obligation as human beings is to each other.”

“The thing with being out as nonbinary is there's no one way to look nonbinary,” says Shayn Ember of New Haven. The trans nonbinary neuroscientist is a counselor at Wheeler Health and a volunteer facilitator of the Questioning Gender discussion group at the New Haven Pride Center. “A few times in my life, I've had somebody say to me, ‘Wait, are

you somebody who I should ask your pronouns?’ And my answer is, ‘You really should be asking everybody.’”

Ember, 34, says poetry they wrote as a young teenager predated their coming out by 11 years: “I'm neither male or female and my body is. And that's why I don't like my body and she doesn't like me.” But without role models or a word to describe them, they languished in their identity for more than a decade, until a college classmate introduced themselves as genderqueer.

“And I was like, ‘What's that?’” recalls Ember. “‘That's someone who doesn't identify as either a man or woman,’ they said. And I was like, ‘Oh, my gosh! That's me.’”

“I had a teacher tell me that they wouldn't expect me to use ‘they/them’ pronouns because I wear makeup,” says 16-year-old Naiyah McGlamery of Hartford. Conflicts they and their fellow students had with their high school administration over incidents of racism, anti-Semitism, homophobia and transphobia in school were enough for them to decide to become homeschooled. But that wasn't all the trans nonbinary student endured.

“I was being constantly misgendered and told my identity wasn't valid,” they say. “After you come out, you become the ambassador for all people under your identity. I basically educated my entire high school about what it meant to be LGBT.”

“THEY” AND “THEM” ARE NOT NEW

July 14 is celebrated around the world as International Nonbinary People's Day.

Unfortunately, many misinformed folks object to using “they,” “them” and “theirs,” rejecting what they see as a relatively new, politically correct way for someone to identify themselves. The truth is, writers Emily Dickinson, William Wordsworth, Geoffrey Chaucer and even William Shakespeare all used the singular noun “they” in their writing. In fact, *The Los Angeles Times* reported in 2019 that the use of “they” as a gender-neutral singular pronoun

dates back to the 14th century.

“They're not new, they're old. They're very old,” says Ifrach. “It's kind of like in fashion, right? Every so many years something comes back that used to be around. The pronouns are the same thing.”

However, there are more pronouns to consider than just “they,” “them” and “theirs.”

“Neopronouns” have grown in popularity and merited a recent article in *The New York Times*. A neopronoun is a word invented to serve as a pronoun without signaling gender, like “ze” and “zir.” Other variations include “hir,” “zirs” and “hirs.” There are even those who use “it” and “its.”

The Anti-Defamation League, which fights all forms of hate-speech, provides a guide to pronouns, as does GLSEN. Typically, nonbinary people embrace a variation on “they,” “them” and “their,” but some combine traditional pronouns like “he” and “she.” Transgender, nonbinary WNBA player Layshia Clarendon's pronouns are interchangeably “he,” “she,” “his,” “hers,” “they,” “them,” “theirs.”

“I've always known I was more than just a girl or a woman, but I didn't know what exactly I was,” Clarendon told de la Cretaz in *Sports Illustrated*. “And so, identifying as nonbinary and trans in terms of the larger umbrella is really important to me. That gives me a place to belong and gives me community.”

Clarendon has shared much of her identity journey with her followers on Instagram, from declaring “There's no one way to be trans” when they came out as trans and nonbinary in December, to the birth of their child and their top surgery in January.

But medical transition — taking feminizing or masculinizing hormones or undergoing gender-affirmation surgery — is not always the next step after coming out nonbinary, just as with many trans people. According to the 2015 U.S. Transgender Survey by the National Center for Transgender Equality, only 25% of respondents reported having some form of transition-related surgery, often because of a lack of insurance coverage, or poverty, in addition to those who don't want to undergo surgery. Only 9% percent of nonbinary individuals were likely to have had any kind of surgery, compared to 42% of trans men and 28% of trans women respondents. So it should



Shayn Ember



Brittney de la Cretaz



Mary Emily Ohara



Naiyah McGlamery



Lindsey Pasquale

be no surprise that for nonbinary individuals, medical transition is entirely optional, and more often than not an option not chosen.

TRANSGENDER AND NONBINARY: CONNECTIONS AND DISCONNECTIONS

Some people who are nonbinary identify as transgender and nonbinary; others use only “nonbinary” as their identifier. The reason why is individual and personal.

“I think it's up to each person to decide which words they use to describe themselves,” trans nonbinary journalist de la Cretaz says. “Personally, I define transness as inclusive of anyone who doesn't identify with the gender they were assigned at birth, which includes nonbinary folks. But I can't claim identity for anyone else; it's up to each person to decide for themselves.”

GLAAD Rapid Response Manager Mary Emily O'Hara of Portland, Ore., uses “they” and “themme” pronouns and is one of several prominent LGBTQ media people to publicly announce they identify as nonbinary this year. But O'Hara is one who does draw a distinction between nonbinary and trans.

“I identify as nonbinary, and as a lesbian or dyke since that is my primary community. I don't identify as trans, because I am not trying to change my gender or body to something other than what it is, if that makes sense. I am gender fluid and have expressed my gender differently throughout my life starting with childhood,” they say. “I have enjoyed being seen as a boy and as a girl at different times in my life, and my expression of masculinity and femininity changes internally and externally by the day or even hour.

“While I do sometimes experience gender dysphoria, I don't feel that I carry the same burden as my trans friends who experience a LOT of dysphoria, a strong identification with a gender, and who pursue medical treatment like blockers, hormones, or surgeries, and so it doesn't feel appropriate to me to claim the trans label,” O'Hara continues. “I obviously share some experiences with my trans friends, like being misgendered every day, but there are others that I don't share—and it's important to me to respect those subtle differences.”

Sarah Strong of Hamden, 53, teaches creative writing at Central Connecticut State University and at the University of

Hartford, and identifies as bisexual and nonbinary. “They” and “them” pronouns fit Strong best, but they do not feel they are transgender.

“The formulation of cis and trans is a binary gender system and – no shade at all for people who that works for – for me it feels too much like being asked to pick a side,” says Strong, who added that they tried being a lesbian, “but it didn’t work because I wasn’t one. While I would never say ‘never’ about an identity, to me, it doesn’t feel accurate, because, again, the thing that makes me nonbinary is that I don’t identify with a binary gender system.”

HISTORIC MOMENTS

In January 2020, nonbinary friends Dr. A.J. Eckert of Glastonbury and Lindsey Pasquale of Columbia learned Connecticut was joining the 19 other states and Washington, D.C. in allowing drivers to change their gender marker on their licenses to “X.” They jumped at the opportunity.

“The DMV let me know that I was the first person in CT to get my X Marker — very exciting!” says Eckert, who is the medical director in charge of Gender and Life Affirming Medicine at the Anchor Health Initiative, which has offices in

Hamden and Stamford. While the DMV couldn’t confirm that for reasons of privacy, Deputy Commissioner Tony Guerrero says how important making the X Marker available is.

“This was one of my top priorities for the agency,” Guerrero says in a statement. “Giving residents the opportunity to secure identification that accurately reflects their gender was a significant milestone for the DMV, and a step forward towards creating a culture of inclusiveness.”

Pasquale explained in a Facebook post why this was so important to them: “This was a really serious and affirming thing. I had more than a few conversations with my wife, going back to when different laws were being proposed last legislative session” they wrote. “For today, or at least the next few hours, I’ve given myself permission to just sit back and enjoy feeling the validation and gender euphoria.”

HOW BEING NONBINARY IMPACTS A RELATIONSHIP

Pasquale is PFLAG’s treasurer and serves as a member of its board of directors, as well as being a New Haven Pride Center board member. They also manage Facebook groups for nonbinary folks, totaling nearly 40,000. They are married

to Deb, a straight woman, and as a couple they face the same stigma as bisexual men and women and couples that include binary transgender people: presuming that loving someone bi, nonbinary, trans or trans nonbinary changes that person’s orientation.

“You don’t get to tell someone else what their identity is,” says Pasquale, in response to a question about their relationship. “My wife and I have been married 32 years. We’ve built a life together. We’ve been there for each other for the good times, but also some really dark ones, including the loss of a child.

“Along the way, my wife consciously came to terms with her definition of happiness, including me,” they say. “We both put in the hard work and were honest with each other and ourselves along the way. But none of this changes who my wife is. My wife is as cisgender and heterosexual as she’s always been. When pushed for a label, we both joke that she is ‘Me-Sexual.’ The truth is that relationships are complicated and the heart wants what the heart wants. I’m so glad that my wife’s heart happens to be kind of fond of me.”

Other nonbinary folks, like Ember of New Haven, expressed frustration at how legal systems still get in the way of their being able to live like everyone else. They are in a relationship

with a cis lesbian in New York, and they’re considering having a baby together with a sperm donor. But because Connecticut and their home state are not as progressive as they need it to be, they face big decisions.

“If I have the baby in Connecticut, then they’ll put me as the mother on the birth certificate,” and not her partner, Ember says. “But if we drive across the border to New York where she lives, then it will be ‘Parent One’ and ‘Parent Two.’ Because I’m from Oklahoma, I can’t change my birth certificate to X, I can only change it to ‘M’ or leave it as ‘F.’ And so even though my driver’s license is ‘X,’ my passport can’t be X, my birth certificate can’t be X, and when I want to have a baby, when I want to get married, all of these things, there’s not a space for us yet.”

Says McGlamery: “One thing that I wish people knew about being nonbinary, and about being trans in general: If someone you know comes out to you as trans, they’re not a different person. They’ve been that person all along. They’re just making your view of them more accurate. I’m exactly who I am. I’m still Naiyah, I’m just Naiyah with they/them pronouns. I’m not a different person. I’m just showing you more accurately who I am.”



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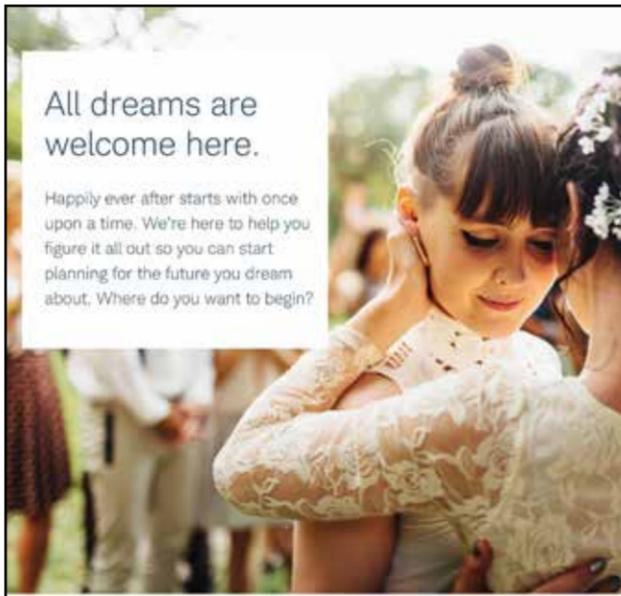
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Fiona Mohring never expected to fall in love with her best friend. But that love inspired her to help create new opportunities for LGBTQ people at Stanley Black & Decker. She shares her story with Dawn Ennis.

The experts at Middlesex Health speak with host Pat Lore about the challenges transgender men can face when it comes to binding. They showcase some cutting-edge options and offer advice.

Ashley Kohl visits Foxwoods Resort Casino to show what's on tap this summer, including a colorful new retreat focused on LGBTQ arts and culture.

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THE RIGHT FIT

For Trans Men, Binding Doesn't Need To Be A Pain

By JANE LATUS

For better or worse, it's one of the first things most people subconsciously notice when sussing out someone else for the first time: whether they have breasts and are "therefore" male or female.

Of course, gender identity is a spectrum, and can be fluid. And bodies are widely diverse. But in a rigidly binary world, the majority equates breasts with womanhood. So, if you have them, and are male or non-binary, you may want to be seen as such in others' eyes. More importantly, you probably want to look the part in the mirror, in your own eyes.

This is why binding is a daily part of dressing for many trans men, at least until (and if) they have top surgery. But unlike other aspects of getting dressed, which are taught starting in toddlerhood, no one teaches you how to do it. And doing it incorrectly can be painful. The Middlesex Health Center for Gender Medicine and Wellness is working to change that, by not only teaching how to bind, but even doing a first-of-its-kind study.

"Especially when you reach adolescence and have things you don't want to show, who do you turn to? We want that to be a health care professional," says Janine Stoner, an occupational therapist at Middlesex Health.

What she absolutely doesn't want is people to make their own binders, or use bandages or duct tape: "That's a tourniquet," she says. "We want to make sure people are safe, especially an already marginalized community."

Stoner isn't just talking about physical health: "This is essential to people feeling, finally, congruent with their appearance. If you're a trans male, it decreases your anxiety. It becomes essential for your emotional wellbeing."

MAKING PATIENTS COMFORTABLE

Looking for information online or from friends is less likely to accomplish what Stoner wants to do for her patients: make them feel confident in their appearance, but also be physically comfortable. "We did a survey, and we

discovered that 80 to 90% had discomfort or injury, or some negative impact, from binding, but none of them told their doctor," she says, adding that this data is in keeping with other surveys.

Help from an occupational therapist – who specializes in helping people increase their independence with Activities of Daily Living (ADLs) – will help trans men avoid the skin irritations, sore muscles, restricted breathing and nerve compression under the armpits that they might otherwise suffer.

"You want to present in the gender you are, and feel comfortable, and do it safely," says Stoner.

Her work has led to the current study underway at Middlesex Health on the pulmonary effects of binding. She welcomes new participants with open arms. [If you are at least 18 and bind on a regular basis, see details below.]

Participants will be measured, given a breathing test, and asked some questions during a one-hour-max visit. They will take home a small breathing meter to use at home twice daily for a week.

Here's the goal, says Stoner: "If we can find the binder that's least restrictive but does the job [appearance-wise], that's the one for you."

It really bugs Stoner that any trans men might assume that having back pain, or any other discomfort, is unavoidable. "No one should be in pain from getting dressed."

Cisgender people ought to be able to relate, she adds. Everyone wants to be comfortable, and "It's a good day when you wear something that makes you feel good."

PART OF A COMPREHENSIVE CARE PLAN

Occupational therapy is one of the wide range of services Middlesex provides through its Center for Gender Medicine and Wellness. Others are primary care, hormonal therapy, behavioral health services, continence and pelvic health therapy, gender affirming surgery, physical rehabilitation, infectious disease testing and treatment, and voice therapy.



Occupational therapist
 Janine Stoner of Middlesex
 Health. Photo by Stan
 Godlewski

There are around 1,200 trans and gender non-conforming patients in the program.

“We’re little, but we really are looking to make a difference in people’s lives, especially those who were less served before,” says Stoner. Personally, she sees teaching how to bind safely is just another aspect of being an occupational therapist. “Binding is an ADL. OTs do ADLs.”

purpose. It is worn to compress breasts, flattening them so the chest appears masculine. Also, unlike sports bras that you pull on overhead, you may step into a binder.

“Stepping in is definitely the easiest way to do it, because overhead is very difficult to do when it’s so tight, and also you need a lot of scapular movement,” says Stoner.

Binders look like tight tank tops, and typically come in two lengths. Stoner says you can get a binder from various sources, including online retailers. For those needing financial help to obtain them, Middlesex Health works with Health Care Advocates International of Stratford to provide free ones. Anyone needing help to obtain them can contact Tony Ferraiolo at tonyferraiolo@hcaillc.com or contact HCAI’s Youth and Family Program at www.hcaillc.com.

Lest anyone fear that compressing the chest is dangerous, or worry that it could last long-term health damage, Stoner says “It’s a basic part of dressing. Why wouldn’t you tell someone who is trans to do it?” She says while there are risks, the risks can be minimized if binding is done correctly.

The key precaution, other than to have a good fit, is to not wear it 24/7. Don’t sleep in your binder. Wear it only 8 to 10 hours at a time. Take an occasional day off.

“If you’re in a gym, and you’re a trans man, you’re going to want your binder on,” she says. If you want an intense cardio workout, though, she says a binder might hinder your performance (not to mention trap sweat). In that case, she says, “It’s a personal decision. You have to weigh the pros and cons.”

Overall, she recommends closely monitoring breathing patterns and the comfort of breathing when working out while wearing a binder. She says it is also important to shower and change as soon as possible after working out to decrease skin irritation.

The Human Rights Campaign awarded Middlesex Health its fourth “LGBTQ Healthcare Equality Leader” designation last year. The Human Rights Campaign Foundation is the nation’s largest LGBTQ civil rights organization.

Details on the binding study are at www.middlesexhealth.org/binding, or call Janine Stoner at 860-358-6718. 

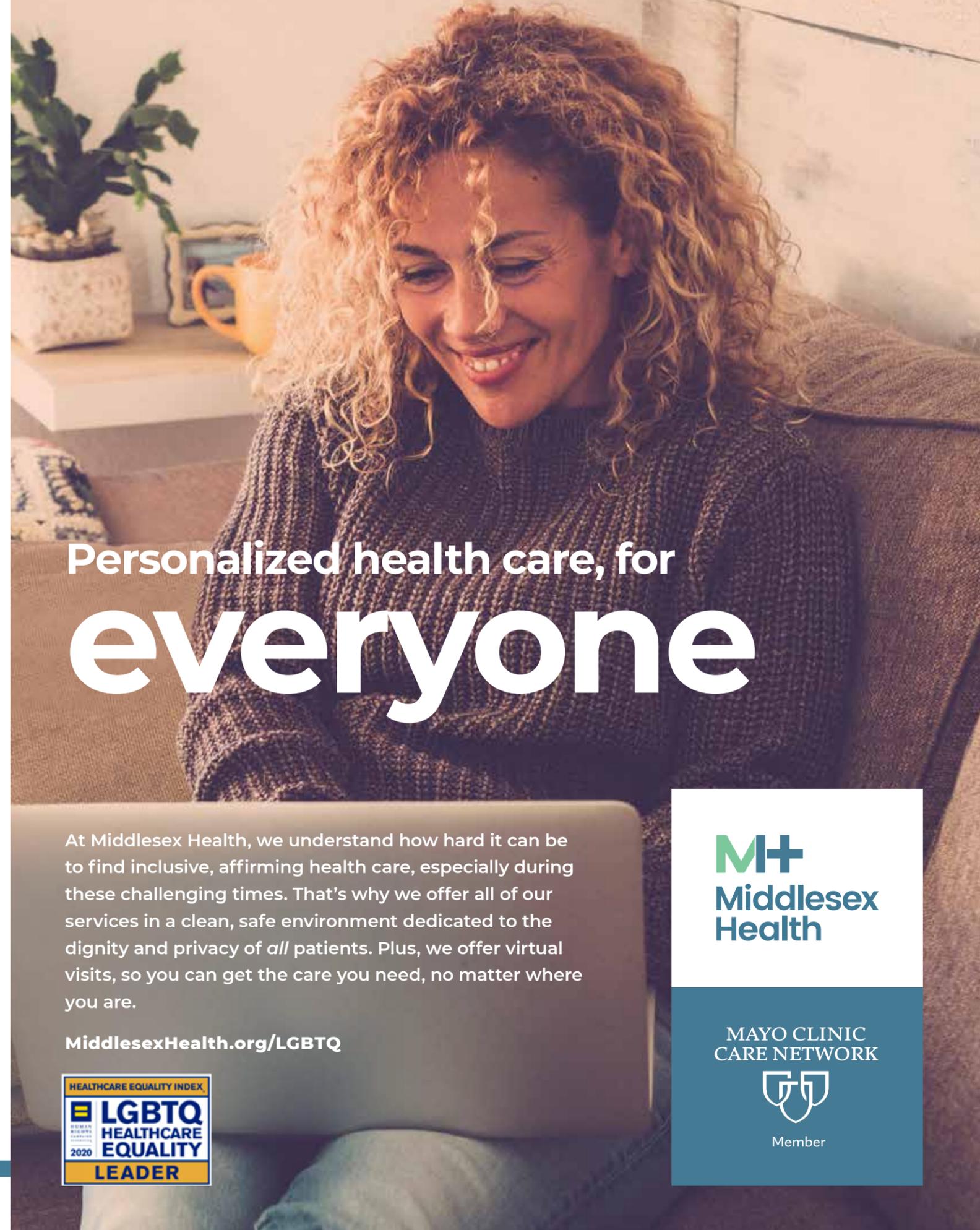


Finding the right binder can make all the difference. Photo courtesy of Middlesex Health.

An appointment with Stoner goes like this: she measures in three areas to fit you to the right size. She has you try out a few sizes and styles from samples that she keeps in stock. She makes sure you are happy with how you look and feel. Next, she’ll review safety guidelines created by a consulting with other health professionals and colleagues. Finally, you’re taught some simple exercises to avoid backache.

Unlike bras worn for support, a binder has a different

For more information about Middlesex Health services specifically designed to help LGBTQ+ patients, visit middlesexhealth.org/lgbtq.



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Leading By Example

Connecticut Has Been a Pioneer in LGBTQ Rights – But There’s Always Room for Improvement

By JANE LATUS



Lauren and Bridget Podann Musacchia kiss in the vineyard during their wedding portraits. They were married at Jonathan Edwards Winery in Stonington. Photo by **Carla Ten Eyck**



Forty-nine years ago this month, straight people probably didn’t know what to make of Connecticut’s first Pride Week.

A Hartford Courant headline about “homosexual groups” seeking to hold a “Gay Pride Week” in the city was buried on page 25.

The quotation marks have long since come off Pride events.

Night and day: that’s the no-exaggeration comparison between then and now — as well as between “us” and “them,” “them” being the 33 states that have introduced anti-trans bills this year (and that was only as of April.)

LGBTQ community leaders say still-imperfect Connecticut is light-years ahead of other states. But they aren’t slowing down, not when the most vulnerable remain the most impacted: kids and people of color, particularly those who are trans or gender non-conforming. Here in Connecticut, laws have your back, they say. Implementing them, though, is another story.

“I think Connecticut is a really amazing place to live for a variety of reasons. We have really strong laws that protect and work for equality for LGBTQ people. Connecticut has been and continues to be a leader in equality.” – **Patrick Dunn**, executive director of the New Haven Pride Center.

“I know there’s always more to do, but in many ways, Connecticut has been a leader.” – **Doug NeJaime**, Yale Law School professor and a key author of a bill that would close a gaping hole in LGBTQ family law.

“Connecticut has been a leader in the nation in adopting LGBTQ-inclusive laws, including in employment, public accommodations, education, incarceration and beyond. However, notwithstanding its clear laws, GLAD Answers (our legal information line) continues to receive calls from people in Connecticut who face discrimination and exclusion from core institutions because of being LGBTQ.” – **Jennifer Levi**, director of GLAD’s Transgender Rights Project.

“Kids coming up now, kids are ok. Kids can have a future.” – the **Rev. Aaron Miller**, pastor, Metropolitan Community Church of Hartford.

“We’re fortunate in Connecticut to have the background laws; that’s huge. But there’s a persistent gap between the law and how it is enforced.” – **Dan Barrett**, legal director at ACLU of Connecticut.

“Generally speaking, people feel as though Connecticut is a safe space for our community, whether it is to live, raise a family or work. For the most part, I’d say Connecticut is a fantastic place for our community.” – **State Rep. Jeff Currey**, East Hartford

“Comparatively, Connecticut is way ahead of the curve. I have a soft spot in my heart for the school districts that stood up to [former Secretary of Education] Betsy DeVos last year.” – **Sasha Buchert**, senior attorney for Lambda Legal.

“I am grateful that I live in Connecticut. Do I like the winter? No. [But] I feel protected. The leaders of the state think I exist.” – **Tony Ferraiolo**, advocate for transgender youth and director of Health Care Advocates International’s Youth and Family Program.

AN ADVOCATE FOR ALL

Ferraiolo will never forget how Gov. Ned Lamont stood up against DeVos – at great financial risk. In 2020, DeVos threatened to withhold \$18 million of federal aid because of Connecticut’s support of teen athletes competing on the team of their gender. Lamont’s reply to DeVos? “I just wish the federal government would just butt out on this subject. Leave our kids alone.”

Ferraiolo says he cried to hear that the governor believes he exists and matters. Buchert, too, says when she watched Connecticut school superintendents also stand up to DeVos: “Their fierce defense of trans people made me cry.”

Lamont says that when he replied to DeVos, “I just thought about being a dad. I want my kids to be loved, respected, and appreciated for who they are.” He adds, “I think my tone is important as governor, being



welcoming, open, and honest, and I trust that approach trickles down and sends a message to our residents that we're supposed to treat each other with respect, and look out for one another."

That was the second time last year that state government stood up for trans residents. In 2020, the state Commission

on Human Rights ruled that insurers must cover gender-affirming medical care.

Connecticut earns the highest scores from national LGBTQ rights organizations. But you're forgiven if you forget all this progress in the face of the cruel onslaught elsewhere against transgender people, primarily aimed at

removing their health care and banning trans girls from girls' sports.

Not even a pandemic could distract legislatures from their obsession with attacking trans children. Lambda Legal, a nationwide advocacy for the LGBTQ community, reports more than 75 bills nationwide targeting trans youth were

introduced in the past two years, as of April. According to the ACLU, 33 states introduced anti-trans bills this January through April.

Ferraiolo, who counsels trans people and their families worldwide, has heard from several desperate parents in Arkansas whose children's medical care is being halted



T.J. and Shawn Rutka-Benoit take a moment to laugh during their wedding ceremony in February of 2021 at Hartford's City Hall. Photo by **Carla Ten Eyck**

by that state's new law. "I sat here in silence and cried."

Why the hate? Ignorance, he says. Why kids? Because attempts to roll back adult LGBTQ rights have failed, he says. "All I can say is, shame on them."

Backlash tends to follow progress. "Visibility can come with a cost. When you're not on the radar, people aren't trying to pass laws to take away your rights," Ferraiolo says.

And there's always that someone around: the one who gave Dunn an eyeroll when hearing he's a drag performer, and the one who burned Bethel's Molten Java coffee shop's Pride flag this April.

CONNECTICUT'S CLIMATE IS NO ACCIDENT

In Connecticut, it's not news that a state representative is bisexual, a teacher is transgender, or the CEO is gay.

"Connecticut has a vibrant LGBTQ community, and a lot of resources. I find it's a place I can put down roots and find community, and celebrate community. New Haven is one of the most important queer cities. Connecticut, and New Haven in particular, are fabulous places to be queer," says Dunn.

This community didn't appear magically. Visibility, over decades, is what it took: vigils, rallies, film festivals, drag shows, art exhibits

and civil disobedience. It took the founding of the Metropolitan Community Church in Hartford in 1973, where four years later the pastor's car was torched in a hate crime. It took courageous "first" people to come out. It took the work of many organizations, over decades.

For a small state, Connecticut has an abundance of medical providers that are focused on providing LGBTQ care. They began with AIDS activists and the Hartford Gay and Lesbian Health Collective — going strong since

1983. A by-no-means inclusive list: Middlesex Health's Transgender Medicine Program, Anchor Health Initiative, Yale New Haven's Pediatric Gender Program, the Gender Program at Connecticut Children's Medical Center, and Health Care Advocates International in Stratford.

The climate here has made Connecticut a national leader of sorts. The Human Rights Campaign gives the state (and 18 others, plus Washington, D.C.) its highest score on its 2021 Statewide Equality Index. Criteria included anti-discrimination laws in: employment, housing, public accommodations, education, anti-bullying, second-parent adoption, transgender health care, name and

gender updates on identity documents, HIV/AIDS criminalization, hate crimes and anti-conversion therapy.

Lambda Legal, the Movement Advancement Project, and other rights advocates also give Connecticut top rankings.

Connecticut gained national attention for being the third state to approve same-sex marriage. Not to downplay marriage and its domino effect on access to other rights, but many in the community are more excited about other laws.

To Dunn, banning conversion therapy was huge; he's seen the lasting damage it's done to friends.

To Polly Crozier, GLAD senior staff attorney, Connecticut was "really progressive" as the first state to require that incarcerated trans people be housed and treated according to their gender.

To many, it's the easy ability to obtain identity documents with their correct names and genders.

"Connecticut has a proud record of being a leader on these issues," says Lamont. "I believe we are in fact a state where you are free to be who you are and we have taken necessary steps to ensure everyone is welcome and respected wherever they may live or work in Connecticut.

"Connecticut takes a common-sense approach to a lot of

these societal issues," he says. "We ask the questions: does this policy treat people with respect? Is this good for our residents? Is it good for business? The answer is yes. I'll be the first one to say I have had some understanding to do on my own on some of these issues, and I've listened to my children a lot to get their point of view."

LEGISLATION ON THE HORIZON

In one striking exception to its status as a leader, and one that is slated to be corrected by the time this magazine is in your hands, Connecticut does not provide LGBTQ parents with access to parentage through an "Acknowledgement of Parentage" form — the form used in hospitals to legally establish parentage.

The form is the most common way for straight, unmarried couples to establish their parentage, says Yale's NeJaime. A state bill, called the Connecticut Parentage Act, would allow the same process for LGBTQ parents, plus would correct outdated terminology. Current law still refers to "husband and wife."

"The good thing is when you tell legislators about it, they're surprised and disturbed," says NeJaime. Yale Law School students, with help from GLAD and State Rep. Jeff Currey, drafted the bill and expects it to become law this spring. It would include unmarried, same-sex or non-biological parents, regardless of their gender or sexual orientation.

The bill would also benefit straight couples who have children through in vitro fertilization, says NeJaime. Otherwise, their only option is an expensive Second Adoption.

Currey says his next priority is to amend the state constitution to extend its anti-discrimination protection to LGBTQ people. "That would make us the first





“DESPITE CLEAR EMPLOYMENT NON-DISCRIMINATION PROTECTIONS, WE REGULARLY HEAR FROM TRANSGENDER PEOPLE WHO CAN’T GET A JOB EVEN THOUGH THEY ARE HIGHLY QUALIFIED.”

physically around their communities, which is uplifting and lifesaving.”

His employer, Health Care Advocates International, provides training to employers, schools and other groups, and offers free at-home counseling for family members. Ferraiolo is alternately encouraged and frustrated.

A Travelers vice president asked him to speak to a department to help support an employee’s transition. “I thought to myself, ‘What a wonderful world this is becoming,’” he says.

On the other hand, it has been 10 years since the state included gender identity in anti-discrimination laws, and he says many schools have made no plans. “The number one question parents of trans kids ask is, ‘What are we going to do about school?’ They shouldn’t be asking that question in 2021.”

He adds, “Connecticut has one of the most strict anti-bullying laws in the country, but schools have trouble implementing it. I can’t figure out why.”

GLAD’s Crozier calls policy implementation the difficult work. “Formal equality is so important. But how do you translate that to real life? How do you make sure every teacher is calling students by their preferred pronouns? That’s the work of everybody. That’s the work of the LGBTQ equality movement, to make sure policies actually translate into an inclusive environment.”

Says GLAD’s Levi: “Despite clear employment non-discrimination protections, we regularly hear from transgender people who can’t get a job even though they are highly qualified.”

“For example,” Levi continues, “we have received a number of calls from parents with students who have complained of harassment or mistreatment in schools and report that administrators have not been responsive to their raised concerns. We also know that, despite there being a clear law that should ensure medical treatment for incarcerated transgender people and appropriate placement, people are regularly denied care and placed in the wrong facilities. This is true for incarcerated adults. It is also true for youth in the juvenile justice and child welfare systems.”

Miller of Metropolitan Community Church sees it this way: “We have work to do, but those laws, those laws shape our social conscience. The laws make people scramble to catch up.”

This year, the Human Rights Campaign says, “We anticipate continued attacks on transgender youth ... We also anticipate seeing a resurgence in interest in passing religious refusal legislation.”

Says Lamont, “We need to keep up our progress. We can’t afford to go backwards here in Connecticut or anywhere across our country. The more we keep moving forward, the better it is for all of our families and children, no matter how they identify.”

A 2018 American Academy of Pediatrics study found that having just one supporting person in their life reduces the suicide rate of trans and non-binary children by 40%. Says Ferraiolo: “Be that one person.” 

state to have gender identity and sexual orientation in its constitution.”

While other states are busy attacking trans rights, Connecticut typically approves six or so positive LGBTQ laws a year, with bipartisan support, Currey says. “We probably have the gayest agenda of any state legislature in the country.”

Sen. Matt Lesser of Middletown says he expects that this year, Connecticut will become the first state to prohibit unnecessary surgery on intersex newborns and children. COVID-19 previously stalled the bill he introduced 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 in 2020, but never got to a vote in the House of Representatives before the pandemic ended the session. Lesser says he will pursue its passage this year.

Despite the gains and progress, challenges remain in the state.

“It’s heartbreaking that Connecticut has such a huge population of LGBTQ youth who are homeless. It’s a huge issue in our state, worse than the rest of the nation,” says Dunn. At any given time, as much as 40% of the state’s homeless young adults are LGBTQ, compared to

15% nationally.

What keeps the New Haven Pride Center occupied, says Dunn, is homelessness, joblessness and lack of access to food. “LGBTQ people of color, they get the double whammy of racism. There’s always going to be work to be done. I don’t see an end in sight.”

LOOKING BACK, LOOKING AHEAD

Ferraiolo, who grew up in Connecticut, says it’s a much-improved climate for gender non-conforming kids. “Now there’s definitely verbiage, so trans and non-binary kids hear that. There are places to go where they can be



Jane Latus is a writer and personal trainer living in Canton. She and her husband Ken have an escalating number of cats and two grown sons, one transgender and one gay.

See additional photos at www.CTVoiceMag.com and follow us on [Twitter](#), [Instagram](#) and [Pinterest](#)



PRIDE 2021

June is Pride month and, this year, there is no shortage of events to celebrate. Here are some of the festivities happening across the state.

Please note: this information is accurate as of the date this magazine went to press. Please check with event organizers for the most up-to-date details.



OUT FILM CT

Connecticut's Annual LGBTQ Film Festival will take place June 4-13 as a hybrid event with both in-person and virtual screenings. It's been expanded this year to a 10-day run. The in-person movie screenings will be offered at Cinestudio, an historic cinema located on the campus of Trinity College in Hartford. After a successful launch in 2020, virtual screenings of shorts and features will return via the non-profit's website, OutFilmCT.org.

The festival is selling tickets for individual screenings as well as its popular FestiPasses for multiple-film viewing. Ticket prices vary. For more information and the full lineup of films visit, OutFilmCT.org. Questions can be emailed to info@outfilmct.org.

FAIRFIELD COUNTY PRIDE MONTH

Triangle Community Center has orchestrated a full month of exciting Pride events for June. While it won't host its usual "Pride in the Park" event this year, there will be lots of fun activities to bring the community together.

Some of the planned events include a Pride film series, drag bingo brunch, adult and youth silent discos, a health and wellness fair, a wine tasting, an open mic event, and much

more. For a complete list of events, visit ctpridecenter.org and find [ctpridecenter](http://ctpridecenter.org) on Facebook and Instagram.

MIDDLETOWN PRIDE

Middletown Pride will provide a safe space for the community, both in-person and virtually, throughout the month of June. They will once again raise awareness, celebrate, and empower the history, lives and contributions of Middletown's LGBTQIA+ residents. The Middletown Pride Parade will be virtual this year, on June 5. For a full calendar of happenings, visit middletownpride.org and find [middletownpride](http://middletownpride.org) on Facebook, [middletownpride](http://middletownpride.org) on Instagram, and MidtownPrideCT on Twitter.

NEW HAVEN PRIDE CENTER

A day of action for racial justice virtual event will take place from 10 a.m. to 9 p.m. on June 13. Racial Justice and creating opportunities for LGBTQ people of color is a fundamental priority of the center. Join them as they explore how people can do the work needed to ensure that our community is a place free of racism. The day's events will include workshops, discussion spaces, and a closing artistic performance. This program is free and will be livestreamed live on Facebook, Youtube and/or Twitch TV. For more information visit newhavenpridecenter.org/days-of-action.

The center also will host The Legend Drag Show at 8 p.m. on June 27, as an in-person and virtual event. Drag performers and educators will display drag performance styles across the decades. This event will be held on the New Haven Green and streamed on the center's social media. For more information visit artidea.org.

RIDGEFIELD PRIDE

Ridgefield Pride in the Park June 26th from 12pm-3pm, Ballard Park. For the second time, Ridgefield will hold its annual Pride in the Park celebration on June 26, from noon to 3 p.m. in Ballard Park. This is a free event. Bring a picnic lunch, blankets, your friends and family. There will be pods on the lawn for seating. Expect all kinds of music, fun games, activities and crafts. At 1 p.m. there will be a group "wave" where participants will wave their flags together, in unity and celebration. Due to COVID-19 protocols, all attendees must register in advance of attending. For more information, visit ridgefieldctpride.com. Questions can be emailed to info@ridgefieldctpride.com.

WEST HARTFORD PRIDE

West Hartford Pride 2021, June 26-27, In-Person & Virtual Events. Celebrate diversity and unity in West Hartford this

year. Pride events run throughout June, featuring the best local, regional and national LGBTQ talent.

Events include a Pride flag raising on Unity Green in West Hartford Center at 8:30 a.m. June 1, Pride Night at the GastroPark from 4-9 p.m. June 11, an LGBTQ storytelling event at the West Hartford Universalist Church at 7 p.m. June 23, a virtual mini-film festival June 26, and a Pride Festival in BlueBack Square from 1-4 p.m. June 26. For more information, visit westhartfordpride.org. Questions can be emailed to info@westhartfordpride.org.

WESTPORT PRIDE

This year marks the first annual Westport Pride Month. One of the main goals is to increase visibility of LGBTQ residents, issues and concerns, and all are invited to attend the festivities. Highlights include a panel discussion with Dan Woog June 2 at Westport Library, Staples High School Pride Day June 4, and a Westport Pride Rally at Jesup Green from 10 a.m. to noon on June 5. For more information and a full schedule of events, find Westport Pride on Facebook and Instagram. For more information, visit westportpride.org.



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Charred lettuce right off the grill will take your salad to the next level.

Grill and Chill

Turning Up the Heat on Salads Can Elevate a Casual Meal

By **AMY S. WHITE** / Photography by **MARY QUINN**

It's summer, and I wonder...is there anything that tastes better in summer than food that's cooked on the grill? The clear answer is "Nope."

This year, I encourage you to elevate your favorite summer meal by using your favorite summer cooking method and try grilling a salad. If you've never tried to grill a salad before, I get it. Lettuce seems a little too delicate to survive the heat of a grill, right? Salads are meant to be served cold, right? Repeat after me as I say again: "Nope."

The truth is that grilling transforms something as mundanely familiar as, well, lettuce, into something uncommonly delicious. Warm but still crisp, with charred ruffled edges, the tender crunchy leaves take on a smoky flavor that serves as the perfect palette to all of your summer salad fantasies. The simple act of grilling creates that elusive thing we all want in a salad – an amazing contrast of flavor and texture.

I tend to believe that there are no real rules in cooking. That said, there are a couple of things to keep in mind when grilling greens, or really, any fruits or vegetables. Make sure your grill grates are very clean, and brush them lightly with a little olive oil to prevent sticking. Grill at medium-high heat to create those pretty grill marks and infuse that smoky grill taste. And when cutting a head of lettuce, try to keep the leaves connected to the

core so things don't fall apart on the grill.

Here I offer a few starter recipes for grilled salads, but really, think of them as mere suggestions. In the first recipe, grilling a head of romaine lettuce modernizes the classic Caesar salad. A bonus recipe shows how to make your own garlic croutons, also using the grill. In the second recipe, the inherent bitterness of radicchio is effortlessly tamed by a few minutes on the grill, while creamy goat cheese, sugary glazed walnuts, and acidic balsamic vinegar merge with it to form a sweet and colorful accompaniment to any barbecue. Finally, the grill adds smoky, savory

sweetness to a simple fruit salad by caramelizing the natural sugars in the fruit.

As with all salads, you can keep it simple with store-bought additions, or you can challenge your culinary self by making your own. Buy a bag of croutons, or make your own with some stale bread. Shave parmesan cheese off a wedge using a vegetable

peeler, or grab a container of some that's already thinly sliced. Purchase bottled salad dressing or try your own creation. Let your mood, your time constraints, and the contents of your fridge be your guide. But most of all, keep calm and grill on, all summer long. 

Amy S. White is a Connecticut teacher, writer, and line cook.



GRILLED CAESAR SALAD

Ingredients:

- 1 head of romaine lettuce, cut in half lengthwise, core intact**
- 1 tablespoon olive oil, plus more to brush the grill with**
- ¼ cup shaved Parmigiano-Reggiano cheese (tip: use a vegetable peeler to shave thin slices easily)**
- Your favorite croutons, to taste (Have stale bread? See recipe below to make your own!)**
- Your favorite Caesar salad dressing, to taste**
- Freshly ground black pepper, to taste**
- ½ lemon**

Directions:

Preheat the grill to medium-high heat and brush grates with a little olive oil. Rinse the romaine halves and pat them dry. Brush each half on the cut side with olive oil and place them cut-side down on the grill. Close the grill and grill the lettuce for about five minutes (do not flip), until nicely marked with grill marks. Assemble the salad by topping the grilled romaine with cheese, croutons, Caesar salad dressing, and black pepper, all to taste, and then finish by squeezing a little lemon juice on top.

DIY GARLIC CROUTONS

Ingredients:

- 4 tablespoons olive oil**
- 2 cloves garlic, peeled and cut in half**
- Half loaf stale bread**

Directions:

Heat the olive oil in a pan and add the garlic. Cook for a minute or two over medium heat to infuse the oil with the garlic, then remove the pan from the heat and discard the garlic. Brush the bread slices with the garlic oil, then place them on a preheated grill. Grill about two minutes each side, until nicely marked with grill marks. Cut into crouton-sized bites.

GRILLED FRUIT SALAD WITH HONEY-LIME DRESSING

Ingredients:

- 1 watermelon, cut into slices**
- 1 pineapple, cut into spears**
- 1 pint strawberries, halved and placed on a skewer**
- 1 cup honey-flavored yogurt**
- Juice of 2 limes**

Directions:

Preheat the grill to medium-high heat and brush grates with a little olive oil. Place watermelon slices, pineapple spears, and strawberry skewers on the grill. Grill until fruit is nicely marked with grill marks on one side, then flip and do the same to the other side. Cut the watermelon and pineapple into bite-sized pieces and gently toss together with the strawberries. Mix the lime juice into the honey-flavored yogurt and drizzle over the fruit.

GRILLED RADICCHIO SALAD WITH GOAT CHEESE AND GLAZED WALNUTS

Ingredients:

- 1 head of radicchio, cut into quarters**
- 1 tablespoon olive oil, plus more to brush the grill with**
- 2 ounces goat cheese**
- ¼ cup glazed walnuts**
- 2 tablespoons chopped fresh parsley**
- Kosher salt, to taste**
- Balsamic vinegar, to taste**

Directions:

Preheat the grill to medium-high heat and brush grates with a little olive oil. Rinse the radicchio quarters and pat them dry. Brush each quarter on the cut sides with olive oil and place them cut-side down on the grill. Close the grill and grill the radicchio for about five minutes, then flip to the other cut side and continue to grill until nicely marked with grill marks. Assemble the salad by topping the grilled radicchio with goat cheese, glazed walnuts, chopped parsley, kosher salt, and balsamic vinegar.

It may seem counterintuitive to grill a salad – but you'll be glad you tried it.

PERFECT PAIRINGS

BY MARY QUINN

Sangria is the perfect excuse to clean out your fridge of all your fruit and juice! Sangria is best during the summer because it is so refreshing. When you use citrus that is in season, how could it be wrong?

These two recipes are here for your summer needs. Whether you are impressing a guest on your new patio, or in charge of punch during your special event, wine always has your back.

A classic red sangria is your first step to delight. Use a sweet, red wine for your batch. Paired with juicy citrus and a touch of spice, you'll find this classic recipe hits the spot every time.

If you are looking for something different, go with our Island Sangria. Choose a bright, juicy white wine for this recipe. Paired with your favorite melon and pineapple, this sangria is a tease toward the beach. Cheers!



CLASSIC RED SANGRIA

Ingredients:

- 1 bottle of juicy red wine, such as zinfandel, pinot noir, or merlot**
- 1 cup of orange Juice**
- Juice of 1 large lemon**
- 5 oz. triple sec/orange curacao**
- 3 oz. brandy**
- 12 oz. ginger ale**
- 1 cinnamon stick**
- Sliced Apples, Oranges, Limes, Lemons, Strawberries**

This recipe is best when left overnight to saturate fruit, but can also be enjoyed right away. Makes a large pitcher to share with friends; just add ice.

ISLAND SANGRIA

Ingredients:

- 1 bottle of sweet white wine, like pinot grigio, moscato, or sauvignon blanc**
- ½ cup orange juice**
- ½ cup pineapple juice**
- Juice of 1 large lemon**
- 5 oz. triple sec/orange curacao**
- 3 oz. Raspberry Vodka**
- 12 oz. Sprite**
- Fruit: Watermelon, Pineapple, Lemons, Oranges, Strawberries**

This recipe is best if left overnight to saturate fruit, but can also be enjoyed right away. Makes a large pitcher to share with friends; just add ice.



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Husband and wife team Eric and Rashi Khanna Wiese, hosts of CBS' "Lucky Dog," are passionate about making the human-pet connection as strong as possible. All photos contributed.

Feeling Lucky

The New Hosts of CBS' 'Lucky Dog' Offer Advice to Pet Owners

By RENEE DININO

When the CBS show Lucky Dog kicked off its eighth season in January, it did so with two new hosts at the helm: husband and wife team Eric and Rashi Khanna Wiese.

The duo knew they had big shoes to fill, following in the footsteps of the show's original host Brandon McMillan. Lucky Dog focuses on rescuing shelter dogs and finding them their forever homes. This wonderful couple will undoubtedly continue the mission of informing the public about animal care, rights, advocacy and kindness.

CBS' Lucky Dog is a must in our house! My mantra is, "People and pets: when we're kinder to animals we're kinder to people." Eric and Rashi believe in that, too, and share wonderful stories along with positive pet training and lifestyle tips.

"This has been a long-term dream of ours," says Rashi. "We always knew we wanted to rescue dogs. We couldn't wait to dive in and help as many animals as possible."

When they were approached by the show's executives, adds Eric, "we were already running a foundation and

training facility. I had already been working with rescues, animals and shelters for over 10 years. This seemed like a perfect fit to pass the torch along and keep those Saturday mornings going."

Eric is an American Kennel Club Canine Good Citizen Evaluator, as well as a member of the Association of Professional Dog Trainers (APDT) and the International Association of Animal Behavior Consultants (IAABC). Eric's journey began as a teen volunteering at a boarding kennel in St. Louis, Missouri, and he instantly fell in love with dog training. He became even more intrigued by animal behavior. He believes in positive reinforcement as a training approach and has devoted himself to teaching and sharing more positive, humane, and scientific ways to train dogs.

A big part of what Eric does is rehabilitating dogs in need, specifically German Shepherds at the Westside German Shepherd Rescue in Los Angeles. After becoming a foster parent, he was drawn to helping dogs that displayed fearful and/or aggressive behavior, to improve their temperament. It's not always an easy task, as sometimes larger breeds tend to get mislabeled, misrepresented and misunderstood.

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This is how he met Archie, a German Shepherd who was rescued from an L.A. dog fighting ring. "Eric was the only person Archie responded to," says Rashi. Eric and Archie's bond grew and, through rehabilitation, Archie became the loving family dog that would go on to seal the deal when Eric met Rashi in 2014. As Rashi jokingly recalls her first meeting with Eric with a smile, she says, "I'm sorry Eric, but if Archie wasn't there, I don't know...." It was love at first dog! Archie, who was in jeopardy of being euthanized at a shelter after an unimaginable life, united this couple for an exciting journey even they could not anticipate.

Rashi, who has a degree in psychology and a master's degree in social work, was impressed by the positive reinforcement training methods Eric used with dogs. At the time, she had actually never worked with dogs, and even had a slight fear of the unknown, but through Eric and Archie she became fascinated with dog psychology and how it could be applied to human psychology. She then decided to leave her work, and as she puts it, "I quit my job and joined Eric and here we are today."

The couple has four pets, with Archie at the helm, along with Enzo, Rupert and Winston. They sadly announced in April the death of their beloved dog Estelle.

In each episode of Lucky Dog Eric and Rashi introduce the audience to a new rescue. It starts at the beginning of the journey of this would-be unwanted, seemingly untrainable dog that Eric then takes to their training facility. You'll see a combination of efforts from Eric and Rashi with the prospective family, and then the end result: the dog is united with a forever family with all the right skills and tools for a successful life.

Eric has three tips for people who are new pet parents: patience, consistence and don't train your dogs with a heavy hand.

I also had a chance to interview Eric and Rashi and ask questions submitted by my listeners via iHeartRadio and The River 105.9. Below are a few of them. It's important to note, they answered as best they could without knowing the people or pets, and were sure to always remind fans to talk to your vets and consult with professionals. As with humans, every dog is different and there are many things to consider when training your pets.

Helena from Torrington asks: "I have 3 dachshunds that are wonderful family pets, except when people come over they get a little nasty and now that the pandemic has taken over I'm worried all the training we've done will be forgotten. Any tips?"

Eric answers: "Training is very similar to us learning a new language or musical instruments, it is something that we have to consistently do to retain. So this is something that we should be doing with our dogs, consistently training. It can be challenging at this time, because we're not having guests or as many people over. With that being said, maybe you can go to more public areas where they can at least see other people, following safety protocols.

Something else to consider [is that] with three dogs, one

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can be the trigger. When people start coming over you may want to introduce each pet one at a time on leash on neutral grounds, outside in the driveway or house. This may help. I'm not sure if there are any other behavioral issues, but this may be a good place to start."

Eric in Tolland asks: "I have two dogs – a four-year-old German Shepherd named Barry and a two-year-old Border Collie mix named Shep – and a tuxedo cat named Boo Boo. Barry keeps licking Shep and Boo Boo nonstop. They are very good with him, but what can we do to stop this?"

Eric answers: "So he's grooming the cat and dog, so to speak? That can be neurotic behavior, sometimes it's an allergy too, where dogs will lick certain things, they'll lick furniture, their tongue could be itchy. It could be a texture thing. It could be out of boredom, so take note of when he's actually doing it. It's important to break those habits, but also to get more insight.

Sometimes it's like clockwork. You may want to put Barry on leash and redirect him to a toy and see if he starts licking the toy and it may give us more insight. It could be an allergy. Sometimes dogs will lick their paws; it could be nervousness or anxious behavior. I'd have to see it to give it a better diagnosis, but just taking a stab at it [I] suggest redirecting Barry to a toy. Also bring these behaviors to your vet."

Eric notes that German Shepherds are particularly prone to food allergies, so always talk to a veterinarian about dietary needs.

Molly in West Hartford asks: "We have a two-year-old Pit Bull mix, how can we convince our neighbors he's a good boy? We follow ALL the rules, always on a leash, we dress him up, he loves everyone. He is the kindest soul on the planet; he's a rescue and looks like a tough guy, but he's not.

Eric answers: "That's a great question and unfortunately Pit Bulls do get that stigma. You can't force anyone to change their minds. I like that they're dressing him up maybe in cute outfits, as long as the dog is comfortable with it, to make the dog seem less threatening.

I don't know if they're friends with their neighbors or not. If they're not, I don't know if I'd maybe waste effort in trying to get them on board, unless there is some kind of a conflict. Especially with people and stigmatizing pit bulls. It's hard to change people's minds, but as long as you're happy and your dog is happy [that's enough]. I know judgment can be debilitating at times, especially if it's from someone living next door."

Rashi adds: "I'm hoping the behavior speaks for itself, and this will change [the neighbors'] opinion over time."

Eric and Rashi note, however, that just because people may not react to your pet the way you want them to, it doesn't mean they are assuming the worst about your pet. They may actually be respecting your space, or they may have a fear of pets and just be avoiding an uncomfortable situation. They may have had a previous encounter with a dog and an irresponsible owner, for instance, says Rashi, so try not to

take it personally.

Nicole in Rocky Hill asks: “I have a Labradoodle who also has Addison’s disease, diagnosed at four months. He does well within his family unit, friends and family, however when walking he tends to lunge at cars, other people and dogs – but it is not consistent. He’s a very friendly dog, but for some reason on his walks he changes. When we had a trainer, he walked and behaved perfectly for her, but not for us, any tips?”

Eric answers: “Addison’s may or may not affect training, but maybe not in this case. A lot of dogs will become reactive on leash because they’re tethered to their resource provider. In other words, the trainer did fine with him and is not necessarily the resource provider – meaning the trainer is not giving the dog their full meal daily. They may be only coming for an hour and a half and giving treats, but not their full meal. So when the dog

lunges on leash with their resource provider at other people, the people will keep walking and not stop, so the dog thinks ‘OK, I did my job and protected my resource provider. I got that person away.’ The dog thinks, ‘I lunged, they kept going; I did my job.’ With the cars too, because it’s over-stimulating them, they may think the same thing: they lunge, it kept going and they did their job.”

Eric and Rashi offered solutions to this problem, and others, when I spoke with them. You can watch our full conversation at <https://tinyurl.com/55tm6c2r>.

Eric and Rashi are truly using their education, life experiences, and their love for each other and dogs to make a difference in the world. People and pets, when we’re kinder to animals we’re kinder to people: A statement worth repeating! 



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 @reneedinino](https://www.instagram.com/reneedinino).



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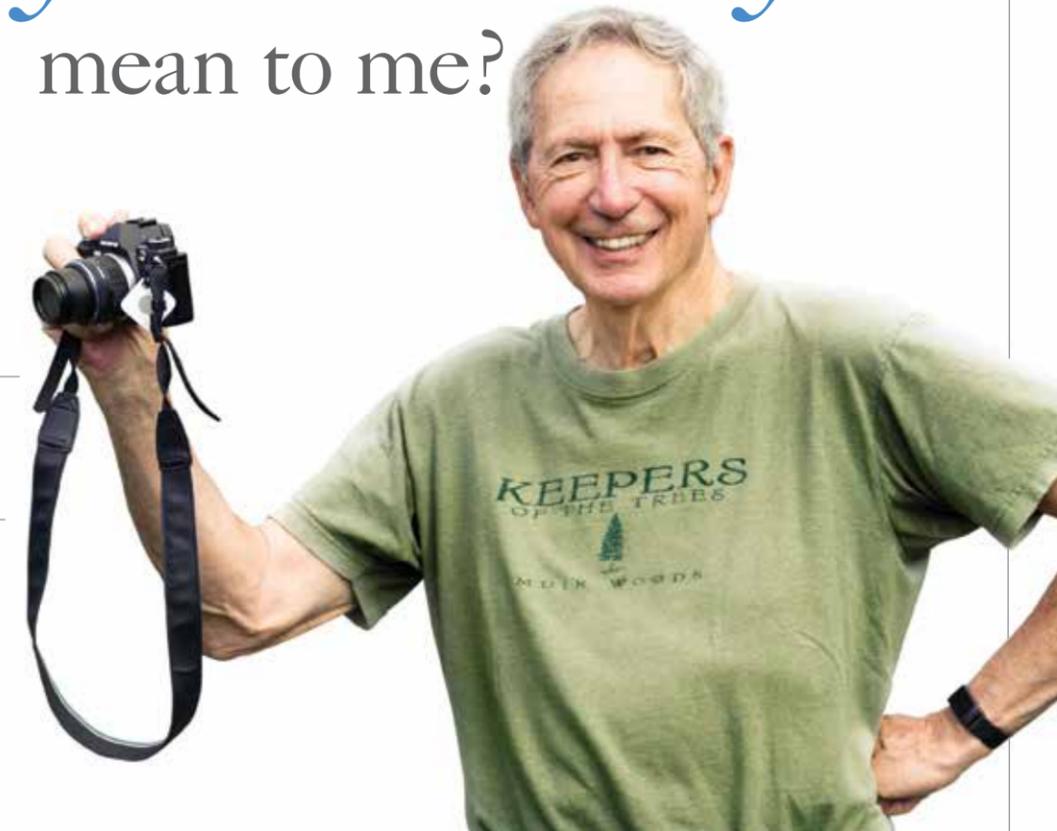
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