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EDITOR'S NOTE //



Welcome to the Spring issue of *Connecticut VOICE* magazine!

We did it – we made it through 2020, a year unlike any other. For too many, it was a year full of challenges, pain, solitude, and loss, and now we turn a hopeful eye to the remainder of 2021 and beyond.

In this issue, we pay homage to “Faces of Hope,” LGBTQ essential workers who have been on the front lines of the pandemic since it began a year ago. We asked medical professionals, nursing home workers,

grocery workers, teachers and others: “What keeps you going? And what gives you hope?” Their answers will move and inspire you.

On a lighter note, we spend some time with Chion Wolf, a powerhouse you may know from Connecticut Public Radio – or one of her many other ventures – each of which are driven by a personal passion. Her journey continues to evolve, both personally and professionally, and she is loving every minute.

We also examine how choirs throughout the state are finding a way to connect and do what they love in the COVID era, and we delve into the juicy 1970s history of *After Dark* magazine.

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

Happy reading,

Cara

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“LET’S PARTY!”

-Robin Williams



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Photo by Todd Fairchild



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Faces of Hope

After an unthinkable year, essential workers look to the future

By JANE LATUS



We put out our heart lawn signs, we clanged pots and pans from our windows, we gave generous tips to our grocery deliverers, we sewed masks. And we wondered of those essential workers, how do they do it?

Well, we asked them, and it turns out the answer is: it's been hard. But ultimately, what's getting them through is each other, and their passion for their work.

We asked teachers, nursing home staff, medical workers, funeral directors, food growers, and more: What keeps you going and showing up to work, day in and day out, during these challenging times? And what are you hopeful about in 2021?

We heard about doctors sleeping outside in tents, or if they were lucky, a borrowed RV, to avoid infecting their families. From teachers whose jobs now heavily include managing students' stress. From a nurse who described work as "a war zone." From people who swallowed their personal fear of COVID in order to do their jobs.

From funeral directors who risked their health carrying the dead out of hospitals and nursing homes, over and over, at a rate unlike they've ever seen. From people who tried to take the place of the families that aren't allowed to visit. We heard of "lives turned upside down."

Many say they now feel fortunate to have received a vaccination. And when looking toward the future, most use the same word to describe their dream: a return to "normalcy."

But let them speak for themselves.

Maria Ellis, MD

**Partner, Woodland Women's Health Associates
Women's Health Connecticut
Hartford**

What keeps me going is watching my co-workers taking care of everybody else. I've had colleagues worry about bringing this infection home to their families and their kids. In fact, I have watched them lose their family members yet still come back to work to care for everyone else's loved ones.



I have watched the creative ways we have cared for each other: the hospital made it easier for us to buy staples on our way home from our shifts, the Hilton lit up their windows with inspiring lights for us to see on our tough trips back into the city. My gym family brought me masks and goggles and made gear to protect our ears from the constant pressure of the elastic headbands; one sent her construction worker husband to the front door of the hospital to donate his own N95 masks. Folks met me on the highway, at my home, at the gym, anywhere I could get to, so they could give me food or supplies to bring into the hospital.

When we couldn't get enough of our own PPE, the OR staff saved precious wrapping material for us to bring to volunteers who would sew it into masks to be distributed back to healthcare workers. These sewing volunteers would make both pickups and drop-offs so that we could use every moment outside of the hospital to rest and sleep. People donated tents and campers and RVs so medical staff could at least sleep in their own driveways, even if they couldn't go inside to hug their kids. When we learned enough about this scourge, we changed scrubs at the hospital – but we still undress in our garages and driveways so we can shower first instead of bringing germs into our homes.

Restaurant owners and workers who couldn't feed their own families made sure to provide meals and sustenance for us. Most people in our community wore masks to protect each other, and this prevention of infection eased our daily workload.

I am relieved to have been vaccinated. I want to spend more time with my 83-year-old mom, and I cannot wait for her to be vaccinated also. When she was my age, she had three kids and three jobs, and thanks to her, I have this one job that I love. I want to ease her isolation and relieve the fears she has about the state of our country and the damage this pandemic is causing.

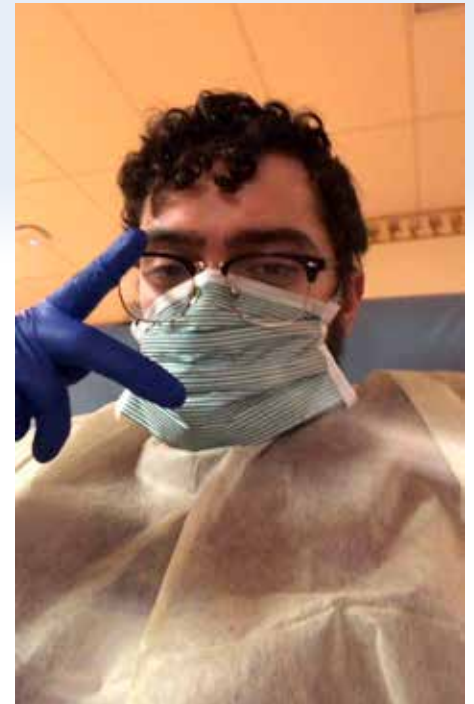


Lisa Tyndall, BSN, RN
Interim Nurse Manager, Emergency Department
Saint Francis Hospital

Some days I have to ask myself this very question [what keeps me going]. I've been a nurse for 35 years. I never imagined I would be working during a global pandemic. What makes me come in, day in and day out – it's the team that I work with. My mentors as well as the incredible nurses, techs, secretaries, and doctors that also come back, day in and day out. This pandemic has altered the lives of everyone – physically, emotionally, financially – in a multitude of ways. Many lives have been turned upside down. I come back to try to help in whatever way I can.

I am hopeful that we will be able to return to some semblance of normalcy. I don't think it will ever return the way it was, but we need to continue to try to slow the spread by continuing with vaccinations and all the necessary precautions we have in place. I am hopeful for the rejuvenation of the economy, and people's faith in humanity and kindness to one another. Without these key elements of life in place, staff across all avenues, patients and families

potentially will remain in crisis survival mode rather than moving towards recovery and personal growth and healing.



Eddie Brewer
CNA and nursing student
Soldiers' Home, Holyoke

I like helping people and, working in long-term care, I get the best opportunity to do that. I take care of elderly, disabled veterans so it's a nice way of giving back to those who helped bring the world to where it is now. We had a major COVID outbreak toward the beginning of the pandemic, but we've come a long way since then, and it's really my duty to continue helping my vets and making sure they're safe.

I'm hopeful that in 2021, people will take precautions to protect themselves and the people around them. I'm hopeful that the vaccine will be distributed more efficiently in the near future and we see a big change in the fight against this pandemic. It would be nice if the world can start reopening by summer but, obviously, we need to be safe now for a better future for all of us.



Dusty Rader
Teacher, Introduction to Women’s, Gender, and Sexuality Studies, Central Connecticut State University AND Customer Service Associate at The Home Depot

For the class I teach, I show up for my students. I know that none of this transition has felt natural or easy. I know that many of them have been dealing with the pandemic and quarantine as best they can, and I also know that a lot of my students are struggling. When my students come to class, I know I have to be there for them. I do everything I can to make things easier, from changing due dates to allowing re-dos to helping them talk out their ideas. I show up because I care about them, and I want them to succeed.

I also work at The Home Depot, and I show up and keep going because I honestly love my job. Helping somebody pick out the right lightbulb or order the product they need for their project makes their life a little easier, and I think now more than ever, we could all use that kind of kindness. Helping people, whether they’re students or customers, is what the world needs right now, and I’m honored to do my part.

I hope that 2021 will see the general end of the pandemic and a release from quarantine, and I hope that once we’re all able to go out and see each other again, the “absence makes the heart grow fonder” adage will be true. I hope the joy of freedom will bring people closer together and allow us to appreciate our friends and family and everyone else more. I hope that when we can go outside whenever we want, we appreciate the environment and what’s around us. I hope we can learn to forgive. And I hope, after the seemingly endless stream of difficulties in 2020, that this year will be a year of compassion.



Monika Olszewski
Occupational Therapy Assistant Litchfield Woods Health Care Center

What kept me going through the pandemic was the support of my loved ones, friends, and colleagues. Most importantly, the patients. The pandemic unfortunately took a toll on many people, whether it was mentally, medically, or physically. Every day, my colleagues battled the fear of COVID to give the patients what they needed, whether it was skilled nursing,

emotional support, or skilled therapy services. It was a war zone, to say the least. The number one goal was to take care of the patients however they needed it at that moment. The days seemed long and drawn out, but there was a purpose to our work. COVID-19 made me appreciate life more. I always valued my job, colleagues, and loved ones; but this time it was more of an eye opener.

I am hopeful for 2021 with the start of the vaccine. I have been fortunate to be a recipient in hopes of being part of the cause to end this dreaded virus.



Tiana Cardone-Hill
Director Cremation Society of Connecticut

What keeps me going and showing up to work is my community. They need us right now and we cannot let them down. I am honored to serve families during such a difficult time.

I am hopeful that the death rate will go down and that our neighbors and loved ones will not be ripped from us by such a violent virus. I am hopeful that we won’t have to hide in our homes anymore. I miss my family and friends.



Marcelo Sousa
ESOL (English to Speakers of Other Languages) Specialist/Teacher
Hamden Public Schools

The truth is, we can never return to life as it used to be before this pandemic. As an ESOL specialist/teacher in Hamden Public Schools, I was fortunate to find multiple ways of reaching my students and families, and the results have been very rewarding. It's important to keep families' strengths in mind at all times. As an ELL (English Language Learner) educator, I was able to help and support by providing and building community outreach family nights in our district and by building family relationships and providing supports where they were needed.

The depths of commitment and sacrifice that our ELL families have gone through in our community on behalf of their children, the extraordinary measures they are taking to keep their families safe during the pandemic, and their courage in the face of great diversity, has been remarkable. As an English learner myself, coming from Brazil at the age of 9, I see myself in a lot of my students and their families. This is what kept me going

and showing up to work, day in and out, during these challenging times.

I'm hopeful that in 2021, we will take and apply the lessons learned last year and build a stronger future for our children and our communities. More than ever, we now understand the rewards of remote learning, while still appreciating the need for in-person human interaction that will always be part of our education system. I am hopeful we could begin to assemble parents, students, educators, legislators, and local policymakers to create a new vision and new goals for Connecticut educational systems. This is the time to rethink how we educate our children. Students learn in school environments that value the richness of diverse perspectives that cultivate cross-cultural knowledge and awareness. I'm so happy that I get to be part of this next movement towards continued progress in education.



Siri Daulaire, MD
Middlesex Health Emergency Department

I went to medical school because it is important to me to help people, even when it's challenging – sometimes especially when it's challenging. (That's

why I work in the emergency room.) It's a field of medicine where we have always had the privilege of transmuting a person or family's worst moment into one of healing and compassion.

Even in 2020, I was still able to hold on to those moments where the doctor-patient relationship is a mutual one – a shared laugh at me being unable to get out of my PPE gown, rolled eyes at the masks we're all forced to wear, or even shared tears over a loved one who I may not be able to help. Every time I make the choice to go to work, I do it knowing that I will find a human connection. That connection is the thing that keeps me in health care during this pandemic more than anything else.

This past year and the lockdown also brought our family quarantine chickens and a new rescue dog, and the joy in our home is the foundation that gets me up every morning, even when I'm feeling afraid and overwhelmed.

The first week of 2021 brought my second dose of the Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine. As I write this, I am 95 percent immune, though my N95 and face shield aren't going anywhere any time soon. While I can't say I feel "safe," I certainly feel safer than I have for the last 10 months.

I am hopeful for a data-driven national public health policy that can actually roll out these vaccines across the country in an equitable way.





William Remington, RN
Anchor Health Initiative

My patients keep me going. It's been a difficult year for everyone, but I believe if we stick together, we can make it through. I'm hopeful that the vaccines have a great success rate, and we can begin transitioning back to some type of normalcy.

with many friends who have quickly become family, the thing that keeps me going most is being able to provide a sense of normalcy for people and their families. Whether it's out at Pick Your Own or on the patio outside of the Creamery, being able to put a smile on people's faces, regardless of everything currently going on in the world, makes it all worth it. This past year has come with all sorts of challenges that have affected everyone in different ways, so if I can help someone forget about everything else going on, even for just a few minutes, it makes everything worth it.

In 2021, I am hopeful that the world will begin healing. I hope normalcy can return for some, although for many that is not possible. I'm hopeful for unity in our country, as well as progress towards racial equality, gender equality, and equal rights for all.

to receive adequate and competent healthcare. Now, more than ever, our clinic is such an important resource to those who may not be able to seek healthcare otherwise. Lastly, there is an incredible amount of disinformation and misinformation surrounding COVID-19 and the COVID-19 vaccine. It is so important for patients to be able to come to us for factual, evidence-based information.

I am hopeful about many things in 2021. I am hopeful that our vaccine rollout will increase and help us return to some form of normalcy before the year end. I am hopeful for meaningful changes to start dismantling the building blocks of systemic and institutional racism. I am hopeful that our government will take meaningful action to address all the crises facing the nation, in an equitable and just fashion.



Jared Moore
Pick Your Own and Creamery
Supervisor
Bishop's Orchards in Guilford

When it comes to working at Bishop's, there are many things that keep me going and showing up to work during these trying times. Besides getting to work



Christopher Adams, RN
Practice Manager
Anchor Health Initiative

It's not easy showing up to work over and over again, as our nation and our healthcare providers are overwhelmed with the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite the grim reality of the challenges we continue to face, there are countless individuals who continue to need care and support. We tend to see a majority of LGBTQ+ patients at our clinic. This population is already filled with lots of medical distrust and a lack of safe spaces



Emerson Cheney
Baker, ShopRite of Canton
Artist
Speaker on Trans Rights and
LGBTQ Sexual Health

What keeps me going every day is seeing my co-workers and regular customers, because they're like my family. Also, that we're making not just food, but good food that makes people happy. This is honestly a really fun place to work. This isn't just a job for me; I love every moment, even the stressful ones. Working in the bakery is another

form of creating art to me, art that people will love to both see and eat.

My hope for 2021 is that we are going to see necessary changes, both politically and socially. I personally want to see more progress in terms of trans rights and protections. I also want to see more accountability and transparency in public officials, everyone from politicians to police.



Anne Rajotte, RN
NICU
Saint Francis Hospital

As the COVID-19 pandemic completes its first trip around the sun and the globe, the challenges of healthcare continue to be at the forefront of the news and our lives. As healthcare providers, it has been a year of physical and emotional demands that we have never experienced. We, as humans, have been tested in ways that we never thought imaginable. Social beings by nature,

“Oh, how my girlfriend and I miss sitting at Tisane Cafe on Farmington Avenue, surrounded by members of the LGBTQ community!”

—Anne Rajotte


we have been forced into a lengthy, and seemingly unending period of separation. The only places that seem to have maintained an attendance level of “standing room only” are hospitals. Because of this, we, as healthcare providers, have been called to the frontlines. Yes, we “signed up” for this job. However, no one could have anticipated this extreme level of need and stress.

Yet, we continue to come to work each and every day. For the past year, most adult ICU and adult medical/surgical floor staff have come to work both exhausted and overwhelmed, yet they continue to come to persevere. I have been blessed to have worked in the Women and Infants’ Division of Saint Francis Hospital for 20 years, the last 15 in the Neonatal ICU. With regard to the pandemic, the NICU has (mostly) been within a protected bubble. Throughout the month of April, I was one of the RNs who helped out by working in the (non-COVID) adult ICU. It was an eye-opening, awe-inspiring experience. That month infused me with an energy to continue to serve our central Connecticut community in an unprecedented way.

Many of those adult ICU patients were intubated, and unable to communicate. For various reasons, they were among the sickest of the sick, and they all received EQUAL levels of care. Without family members present, the staff became their caregivers and their family members, merged into one. Regardless of gender, race, color, creed, or sexual

orientation, each patient was treated with equal levels of dignity and respect. And we, as a healthcare team, worked as a well-oiled unit, regardless of our personal and professional backgrounds. And within each department of Saint Francis Hospital, we continue to do so.

As we embark on 2021, we can see the proverbial light at the end of the tunnel. The distribution of the COVID-19 vaccines, at first slow out of the gates, has gained momentum. The new presidential administration has focused its efforts on ramping-up both production and distribution of the vaccines, and that gives me hope that I have not felt in the past year-plus. Having already been one of the fortunate ones to have received both doses of the Pfizer vaccine, I am looking forward to reconnecting with friends and family.

This past year has challenged all families with physical and emotional struggles on unprecedented levels. Simple things that we once took for granted will be possible again: handshakes and hugs, dining indoors at homes and restaurants. For me, my “family” includes both my blood relatives, and my other relatives within the LGBTQ community. Oh, how my girlfriend of eight years and I miss sitting at Tisane Cafe on Farmington Avenue [in Hartford], surrounded by members of the LGBTQ community! I greatly miss and very much look forward to that level of comfort that results from sitting in a familiar setting among the people we love and respect. 



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.

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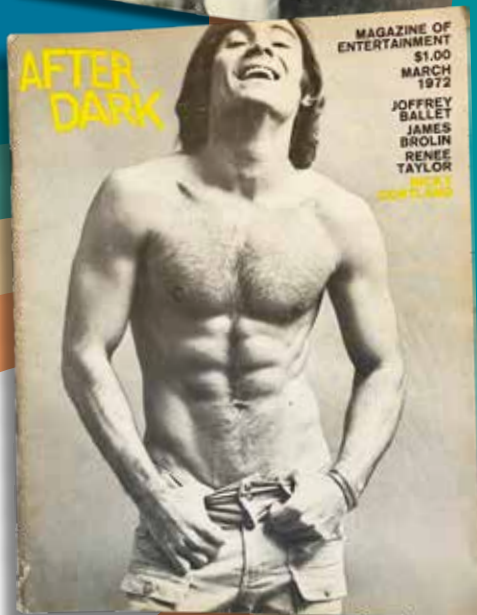
The Fabulous '70s Decade of *After Dark* Magazine:

When gay culture winkingly slipped into the mainstream

Written & Photographed By **FRANK RIZZO**

Billy Ordynowicz and Lawrence Degley have a gay obsession. Over the past few years Ordynowicz, a 38-year-old theater technician and Degley, a 43-year-old claims adjuster, have developed a fascination for vintage gay-related periodicals, especially those of the second half of the 20th Century.

“We can’t forget what our community had to go through to get to where we are now,” says Ordynowicz, who compares their ephemera pursuit to modern hipsters collecting vinyl records to better appreciate and honor a past culture. >>



There was an air of danger, he says, for gay men and women during that subterranean era when deep secrets, knowing glances, and coded words were de rigueur in order to keep jobs, families, and reputations intact while still being able to connect with other LBGQTQ persons.

Degley and Ordynowicz, who live in West Haven, are especially intrigued with *After Dark* magazine, published from 1968 to 1983.

“*After Dark* was as closeted as the gays had to be then,” says Degley. “Still, if you were a closeted gay man, you just knew the magazine was for you. But for others, it usually went right over their heads.”

SECRET SELVES

Degley’s and Ordynowicz’s passion for the publication brought to mind my own love of the glossy magazine. I remember spending 50 cents and picking up its first issue in May 1968 at a Boston newsstand. It was as if I just shook hands with my secret self.

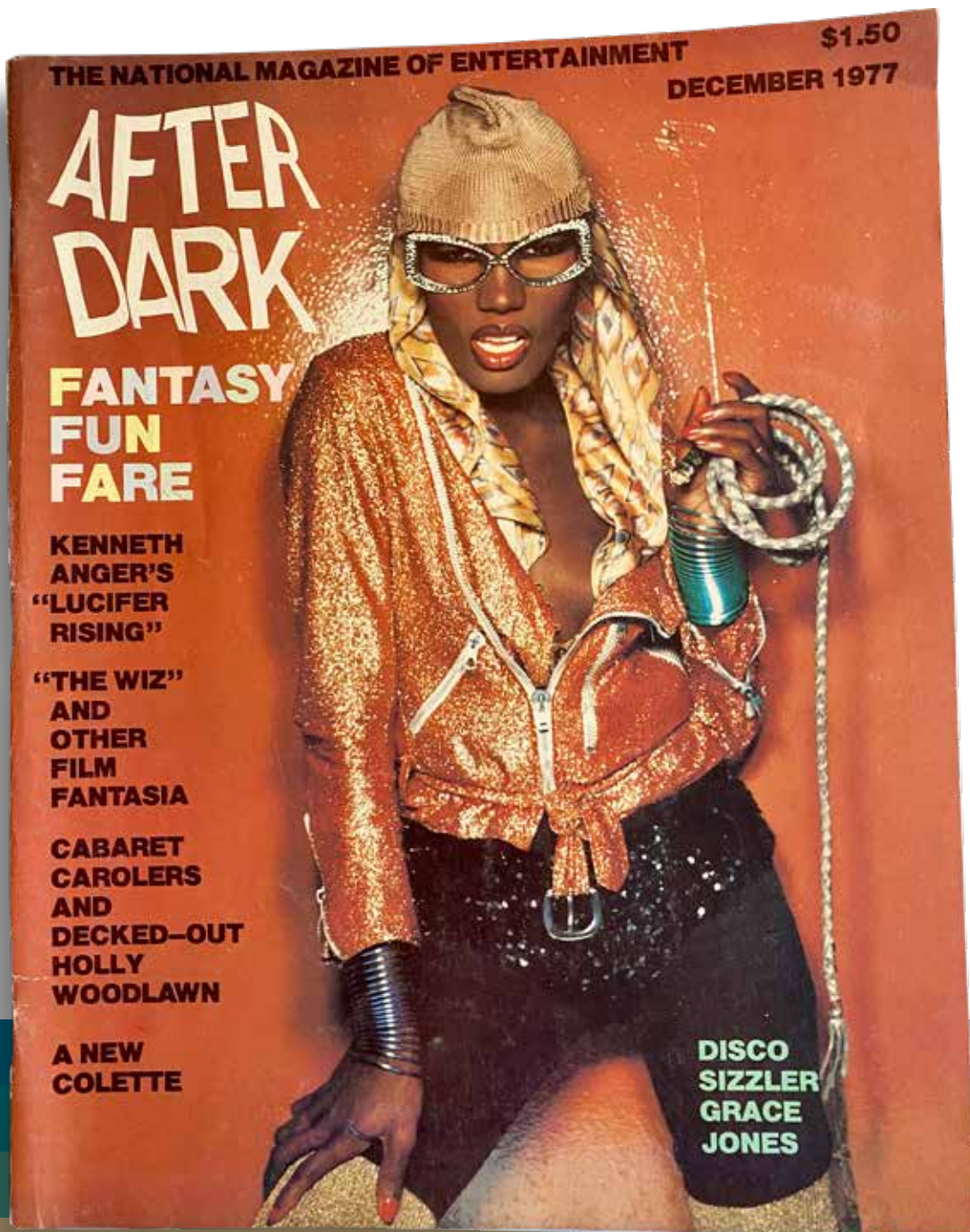
That magazine and the 168 that followed (all of which I’ve treasured like old friends) reflected all the things I love: theater; dance; television; cabaret; visual arts; film; fashion; opera; pop music; and beautiful, sexy men. It was a champion of experimental art, cutting-edge theater, and up-and-coming artists. It embraced sensuality on any kind of stage, be it Vegas clubs, circus tents, ice rinks, or bullrings.

“It was a lifestyle and celebrity magazine as seen through a gay male lens,” says New York-based Eric Marcus, creator of the podcast *Gay History*. “It was

clearly a gay magazine, but it could pretend that it wasn’t.”

Yes, there were plenty photographs of handsome shirtless men; gay icons like Liza, Bette, and Rudi; sexy spreads of Andy Warhol; stars and glamour gals from an earlier era like Mae West, Ginger Rogers, and Veronica Lake – but there were also stories about hetero cover boys such as Burt Reynolds, Robert Redford, Mikhail Baryshnikov, and Arnold Schwarzenegger, too.

As for the ads in the back of the magazine for



mail-order fashions by Ah Men, Parr of Arizona, and International Male – and curious places like the Club Baths – one could always plead the Playboy magazine defense, “Oh, I just buy the magazine for the stories.”

But *After Dark* wasn’t beloved by the entire LGBTQ community. Says Patrick Pacheco, a former writer and editor of the magazine: “Gay activists had some

disdain for the magazine and its closeted staff and its lack of political action and activity. They saw us as dilettantes.”

That was understandable, given the content of divas, disco and hunks. But as lightweight and dishy as it was, in its own way it was subversive.

Marcus points to the magazine’s ability to connect the gay community on a national level with a shared cultural

aesthetic. “It served an important role of being visible,” he says.

For those in communities that weren’t on the front lines of the gay rights movement, *After Dark* still made you feel part of something larger than yourself, especially in closeted times. “I would be more comfortable picking up a copy of *After Dark*,” says Marcus, “than I would be picking up a copy of *The Advocate*.”

THE CHANGING TIMES

The launch of the magazine emerged from the '60s decade of sexual revolution, artistic experimentation, and a massive generational shift in society, politics, and culture. And it celebrated such liberating signifiers as "Hair," "Barbarella," "Oh! Calcutta!," "The



Rocky Horror Picture Show," drag, and disco.

"The post-Stonewall days was a period of enormous flowering of gay male sexuality and of gay and lesbian liberation, and that's what you saw in the pages of *After Dark*," says Marcus "It was an 'opening up' that hadn't been experienced before."

Marcus notes, however, that the magazine was aimed at a particular demographic that advertisers were just starting to be interested in. "*After Dark* offered one perspective on gay male life, certainly that of young, middle- and upper-class gay men, and served that very specific market."

It was one that journalist Patrick Pacheco knew well. Pacheco started at the magazine in 1972 as a gofer, then worked his way up as writer, managing editor and, in its final year, editor-in-chief.

He first discovered *After Dark* in the early '70s. "I was in college, after having left the Catholic seminary, and a friend

in the Hollywood Hills had a copy on his coffee table," says Pacheco. "It seemed like the most exciting magazine in the world. I was struck by its view of New York, its chic and urban sophistication, its inclusion of world cinema – and all of that erotic content – and, of course, the nude pictures. These photographs would

often have a woman in there with the naked man, but there was no question that male beauty was at the forefront."

COVER BOYS AND GIRLS

The visionaries of the magazine were its founding editor-in-chief, William Como, and its managing editor, Craig Zadan; the latter would go on to be a major film and television producer. *After Dark*'s visual style was also shaped by its art director, Neil Appelbaum, and especially its principal photographer, Kenn Duncan.

"Kenn could not only convey a certain eroticism in his work but also a kind of innocence," says Pacheco. "There might be a hunky, shirtless male model or actor being photographed but instead of a giving a come-hither look, he would be laughing. Playful eroticism was key."

Harvey Evans was in the original Broadway production of "Follies" in 1971 – and was about to be featured in the television version of the musical "Dames at Sea" – when he was invited to be in a photo shoot for the magazine.

"I told my friends that I would be photographed by Kenn Duncan and that I would definitely not take my clothes off. But when I got there, Kenn was so charming and delightfully funny, within a half hour I had my clothes off," recalls Evans, now 80. "Of course, I loved the magazine. Where else could you read

about Maureen Stapleton on one page and see a naked person on the next? Some liked the showbiz element and some liked the sexiness of it."

It turned out that the main photograph of the shoot would be the magazine's cover in October 1971, and one of the magazine's most memorable, featuring a naked Evans playfully dancing, holding his sailor cap strategically in front of him.

When the issue came out, Evans sent a copy of the magazine to his father, "who remarked, 'Your body's not bad.' I was an out gay man but we didn't talk about that."

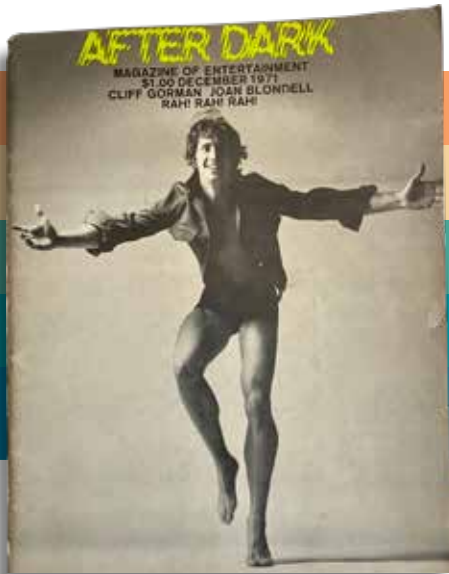
Another iconic cover capturing that sense of joyous abandon was of Rory Foster, who was a dancer with the American Ballet Theatre in the '70s.

"Everyone loved *After Dark*," says Foster, "Broadway people, dancers, artists. It was kind of cutting-edge at the time because of the stuff that Bill put in – those risqué, semi-nude photos that made some people blush but, overall, people

were really excited by this. They were really hungry for what's happening in all the arts.”

On the December 1971 issue cover, Foster wore short-shorts and an open shirt, dripping wet from being sprayed with a hose and looking rapturous with outstretched, welcoming arms.

“My roommate at the time kind of summed it up. He held up the cover and said, ‘The face that



launched a thousand orgasms.”

For June Gable, who earned a Tony Award nomination for the 1974 Harold Prince revival of “Candide,” *After Dark* meant a mixed bag of feelings for a lot of her friends. “Some thought it was almost pornographic,” says Gable, who was on a spoofy cover in December 1978. “Others just loved it. I thought it was fabulous. It was bold, joyous, and free. It celebrated bodies, a new culture, and it opened up doors for a lot of people.”

Actor Keir Dullea doesn't remember much of his photo shoot. At the time, his career was red-hot after starring in “2001: A Space Odyssey” and Broadway's “Butterflies Are Free.” For his September 1970 cover, he was paired with Susan Browning, who was starring in the musical “Company.”

“It wasn't a magazine I had been familiar with,” says Dullea from his Connecticut home, “but I was happy to do the publicity.”

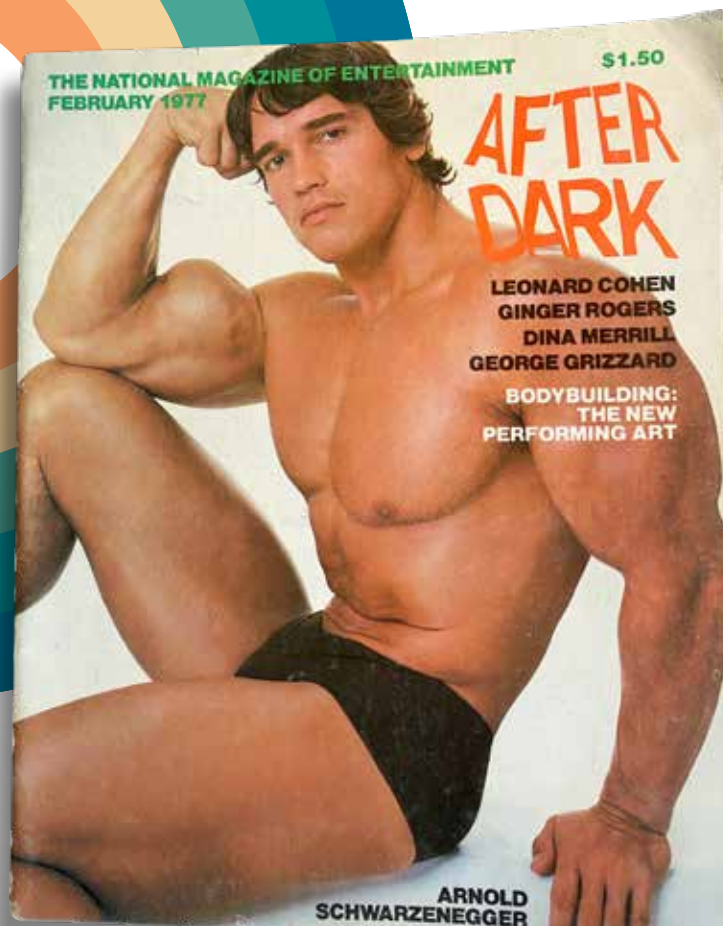
He doesn't remember much of the shoot – or the magazine. But what stayed in his mind was the over-the-top '70s clothes he was given to wear; think double knit jumpsuits and see-through voile shirts. “Let's just say they were clothes I would not wear for myself,” he says laughing.

A BETTE, A PENIS, AND THE END

“No question that *After Dark*'s cachet in the entertainment world came from its early discovery of Bette Midler,” says Pacheco, of the star who began her career singing at The Continental Baths before an audience of gay men wearing towels.

“Record companies in particular would look at *After Dark*, especially during the disco period, and we did cover stories on Donna Summer, Helen Schneider, Ellen Greene. We were constantly being bombarded by publicists who wanted to break through with their up-and-coming performers.”

Male stars were a different matter. “If they cooperated, people might think they were gay,” says Pacheco. One of the major exceptions was Schwarzenegger, who was on the February 1977 cover. >>




The beefcake cover and what was inside made it the biggest-selling issue.

“Arnold had no problem with appearing in the magazine because he was secure in his heterosexuality and he was just breaking through films at the time,” says Pacheco, who wrote the cover story. However, Schwarzenegger was not pleased when an inside picture showed him naked in a locker room with his penis peeking out from a towel. Pacheco reminded him that he approved all the pictures used and besides, it was so small – the picture, that is – no one would notice.

The magazine began a slow decline in the late '70s. Como left in 1980 to work solely at *Dance Magazine*, having become editor-in-chief at that publication in 1969. Subsequent editors of *After Dark* realized that the magazine’s tasteful

eroticism couldn’t compete with the explicit male nudity in new, plastic-wrapped periodicals like *Blueboy*, *Mandate*, and *Playgirl*. A new strategy of diminishing *After Dark*’s gay identity and moving more mainstream didn’t work either, when it found it couldn’t compete with big-time celebrity magazines like *People* and *Us* that took over newsstands in the mid and late ‘70s.

After Dark bookended two LGBTQ landmarks and was a chronicler of that special time of liberation and innocence. The magazine that began just before Stonewall published its final issue in January 1983 – one month before *The New York Times Magazine* reported on the birth of a new disease called AIDS.

“We thought it would go on forever,” says Pacheco, “but the party was over.” 



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.



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Taking Care of Business

Chamber offers inclusive networking and growth opportunities

By PAUL WHITMAN

The Connecticut Gay and Lesbian Chamber is the voice of the LGBTQ business community in Connecticut.

It's a place not only for LGBTQ business owners, but their allies as well – anyone who is supportive of LGBTQ causes, including diversity and inclusion, inside and outside of the workplace.

The chamber seeks to increase the economic strength of its members through business development, leadership, advocacy, and visibility. It does this with the help of some well-known corporate sponsors: Foxwoods Resort Casino, Travelers, the Hartford Yard Goats, and Comcast Corp., among a growing roster of others.



Executive Director John Pica-Sneeden and former Lt. Governor Nancy Wyman at the One Big Event.

MAKING CONNECTIONS

Since the group's founding in 2007, when it launched under the name of Connecticut Alliance for Business Opportunities, the chamber has become an integral part of the Connecticut's small-business engine.

An affiliate of the National LGBT Chamber of Commerce, the chamber is non-partisan but will always remain politically concerned, especially regarding health, equality, justice, fairness, and the many civil rights issues that impact the LGBTQ community. It's also the exclusive certifying body for Certified LGBT Business Enterprise companies, which are majority owned by LGBTQ individuals.

Networking is a key component of the chamber, which helps promote member businesses within the LGBTQ community as well as more broadly statewide, says President Martin L. Heft. This network fosters a sharing of informa-

tion, ideas, contacts, and products and services, which in turn strengthens and expands businesses, careers, and the LGBTQ community.

The chamber also focuses on events and educational programs. From monthly meetings to educational workshops and community involvement, the chamber strives to connect members of the LGBTQ community and unite them for success, both personally and professionally.

Since the beginning of the pandemic, all meetings and events have been available online. Additionally, members have been kept informed of COVID-19-related business matters through the chamber's website, social media, and email blasts.

Happily, in recent times, membership has actually expanded since, no matter where people live in the state, they can fully participate in the group's virtual happenings.

Given their success, chamber leaders plan to continue offering a "hybrid" mix of events – both in-person and online – once the pandemic ends. In this way, the group can be the most accessible to the LGBTQ community and its allies.

As the chamber grows, leaders are working with partners to secure office space in the Hartford area to house operations and provide meeting space.

COMMITTED TO THE COMMUNITY, AND EQUALITY

The chamber's contributions to the community remain a source of pride for its members. Among its initiatives, the CTGLC Foundation seeks to showcase and celebrate bright, successful LGBTQ students or allied leaders. These youths are seen as exemplary young citizens and role models for the

Key 2019 Findings:



American LGBTQ-owned businesses contributed about **\$1.7 trillion** to the US economy.



The LGBT community holds an estimated purchasing power of **\$917 billion dollars**.



LGBTBEs have created more than **33,000 jobs** in the United States.



Certified LGBT Business Enterprises stay in business longer than the average small business. nglcc.org/report

up-and-coming generation. The foundation has awarded more than \$12,000 in scholarships to Connecticut high school seniors, enabling them to continue their advocacy and community support in a college setting.


Advocacy is another important tenet of the organization. The chamber seeks parity in the marketplace. It is constantly striving to break down barriers that divide LGBTQ business professionals from the greater business community. To that end, the organization has advocated for LGBTQ minority inclusion in the state government. The Connecticut Parentage Act has once again been submitted for the 2021 legislative session, and the chamber is listed as a supporter.

BOLSTERING BUSINESSES

Being a member of the chamber gets businesses' names out there, creates networking opportunities, and establishes a sense of authority. It's affordable, too. For LGBTQ entrepreneurs and their allies looking to build local business-to-business relationships or grow a local business, the chamber is a good place to begin.

The chamber offers memberships based on experience, a range of benefits, and leadership opportunities for professionals who want to grow their businesses and their networks. There are membership options for individuals, businesses, nonprofits, and corporate sponsorships.

A chamber affiliation can benefit businesses. A national survey of 2,000 adults conducted in 2012 by The Schapiro Group revealed 49 percent of consumers were more likely to think favorably of a local business if it was a member of the local chamber of commerce. Being part of a chamber also increases consumer awareness by 73 percent, local reputation by 68 percent, and likelihood of future patronage by 80 percent, according to the Association of Chamber of Commerce Executives.

LGBTQ and ally business professionals are encouraged to join Connecticut's most influential LGBTQ business organization. The chamber represents more than 165 businesses from all major industries. For more information, contact Executive Director John Pica-Sneed at 860-612-8351 or john@ctglc.org. Visit ctglc.org for more information. 



The National LGBT Chamber of Commerce released the first-ever snapshot demonstrating the economic and social impact of America's leading LGBTQ business owners and entrepreneurs in 2019. The report explores the types and sizes of LGBTQ-owned businesses certified by the NGLCC, the number of jobs they create, other data – and the personal narratives of successful LGBT business owners who reflect the very best about America's innovative and entrepreneurial spirit.



Paul Whitman is secretary of the Connecticut Gay and Lesbian Chamber and a sales executive at Connecticut Voice. He resides in Southport and is an avid fine art photographer.



The John Allen and Keith Hyatte Fund

For LGBTQ+ Interests

The 50th anniversary of the Stonewall riots inspired John Allen and his husband Keith Hyatte, to start thinking about their legacy. They decided it was time that giving back to the LGBTQ+ community take on a new form — one that will provide a revenue stream long after their lifetimes.

In 2019, they established a donor advised fund at The Community Foundation and included a bequest in their wills so that the support of these interests will be advanced for generations to come.



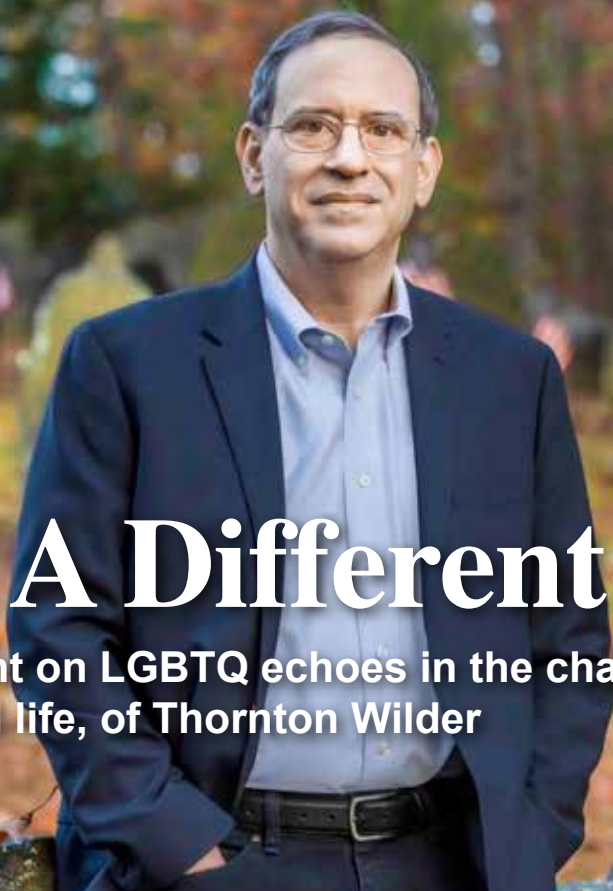
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Through A Different Lens

Author shines light on LGBTQ echoes in the characters, and life, of Thornton Wilder

By FRANK RIZZO

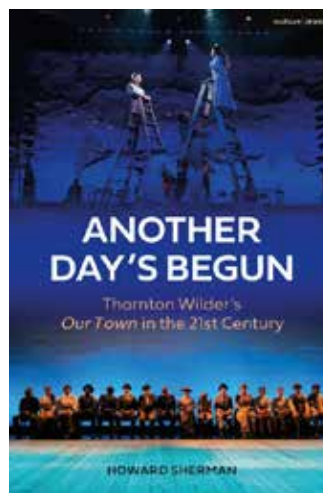
In Howard Sherman's newly published book *Another Day's Begun* – his “biography of a play” on Thornton Wilder's *Our Town* – several actors interviewed talked about the LGBTQ subtexts they found in the classic work.

As reflected in the new book's subtitle, “Thornton Wilder's *Our Town* in the 21st Century,” Sherman deals with contemporary approaches to the metatheatrical work which had its Broadway premiere in 1938 and still remains one of the most-produced American plays. Sherman's book includes interviews with more than 100 artists who have staged adaptations of the play or have otherwise been inspired by it.

Set at the turn of the last century in the small, fictional New Hampshire town of Grover's Corners, and detailing the

unremarkable minutiae of family and civic life there, *Our Town* is sometimes thought of as an old-fashioned, sentimental work of vintage Americana. Nothing could be further from the dozen wide-ranging productions that Sherman, a New Haven native, profiles in his book, all of which have taken place in the last 20 years.

Some of these productions served as a community balm following national and local tragedies. A 2002 production at the Westport Country Playhouse starring Paul Newman followed the shock of the 9/11 attacks. (That version



transferred to Broadway and was later televised for PBS.) Another production in Manchester, England by the Royal Exchange Theatre followed the 1971 arena bombing there.

Sherman also profiles David Cromer's New York landmark work in 2009-10 – the longest run of the play in its 83-year history – as well as productions as varied as those by Deaf West Theatre in Los Angeles, which incorpor-

ated American Sign Language, and the Miami New Drama production, which was trilingual.

Sherman also includes several extraordinary amateur productions, too, including

one presented at a Pennsylvania mental health facility in 2014 and another at Sing Sing Correctional Facility in New York in 2013. “That was one of the most extraordinary theater experiences I’ve ever had,” says Sherman, who worked at Hartford Stage, Goodspeed Musicals and the Eugene O’Neill Theater Center in Connecticut, prior to a run as executive director of the American Theatre Wing.

The play – seemingly mundane, until it’s not – often affects both actors and audiences in profound ways, Sherman learned.

As one of the Sing Sing inmates said of the play: “It’s like a ‘Seinfeld’ episode. This is a play about nothing until it’s revealed that it’s everything. Your family, your friends, every moment of each day that you’re experiencing while you’re waiting for something to happen; everything is happening right now.”



Keith Randolph Smith & the company in *Our Town* at Miami New Drama. Photo by **Stian Roenning**

munity, says Sherman. “Yet the play can encompass a vast variety of experiences without ever needing to change a word of the text. That goes to gender, that goes to disability, that goes to race and ethnicity – and that’s part of why I think the play

is obviously frustrated and unhappy. He could perhaps represent a closeted man, especially in the era of Grover’s Corners at the early part of the 20th century. Simon Stimson, certainly in his frustration, in his otherness, in that era is easily, and to my mind, perfectly and legitimately often interpreted as a closeted gay man at a time when such a thing would not be discussed yet. In a small community, [it was] probably known by many people but they just didn’t talk about it.”

One actor who played the character in a production Sherman profiles says: “The play, when it starts out, it’s like a Norman Rockwell painting and Stimson doesn’t fit in there.” Another actor in a separate production says he “chose to play him gay. It was very easy to find that in him... so I think he realizes that that’s what’s different about him.” Still another actor says: “I very much agree with the theory that he was gay at a time when he really



David Cromer in a Huntington Theatre Company production of *Our Town*. Photo by **T. Charles Erickson**

FINDING AN LGBTQ AUDIENCE

“What I also found moving,” says Sherman, “was a production I saw entirely by trans-queer actors as part of the Pride plays last year. It was very interesting that in a program of otherwise ‘alt’ plays explicitly about the LGBTQ experience, their opening night play was *Our Town*.”

Wilder’s Grover’s Corners was originally presented as being an entirely white and seemingly entirely heterosexual com-

continues to live.”

LGBTQ audiences may also connect with the play’s character of Simon Stimson, the town’s choir master, whose alcoholism and undisclosed “troubles” have been the subject of gossip. Later in the play, we learn that the character commits suicide.

“It was a very different time,” says Sherman. “You can read into the Stimson character a great many things. There’s no question that he is a choir master who

wasn’t permitted to be openly, and I think that’s Thornton Wilder airing that side of himself, the side of himself that he felt he had to keep locked up.”

WILDER TIMES

It was a don’t ask/don’t tell dynamic with which Wilder, too, could identify.

Robert Gottlieb wrote in 2012 in “The New Yorker” of the omissions in “the biography,” *Thornton Wilder: A Life* by Penelope Niven, “She ignores (or doesn’t



A Louisiana State University production of *Our Town* features Marielle Lambert-Scott, Angelle Thomas, Fa'amaepaepa Laupola, and Sydney Prochaska. Photo by Howard Sherman



Louisiana State University is among the many schools that have performed their own, unique take on the classic play over the years. Photo by Howard Sherman

recognize) disturbing complexities in Wilder’s nature and slides past episodes and relationships that are less than attractive.”

“To his father, Thornton, though clearly brilliant, was also a weakling, a dilettante,” writes Gottlieb. “Every summer, well into his twenties, his father sent him off to do physical labor on farms, thereby ‘ridding him of his peculiar gait and certain effeminate ways.’”

Although Wilder never discussed being gay publicly or in his writings, Samuel Steward, an intimate friend – introduced by Wilder’s close confidant, author Gertrude Stein – is acknowledged by some to have been a lover of Wilder. Steward chronicled in detail his relationship with Wilder in a book of his own.

A 1920 Yale University grad, Wilder purchased a home in Hamden later that decade where he, his mother, and his sister Isabel lived all their lives. Though Wilder was a regular at the Anchor bar in downtown New Haven, his time spent in the area was limited. He used the Hamden residence more as a home base, spending much of his life traveling abroad and throughout the United States. Wilder died in Hamden of heart failure in 1975 at the age of 78. Isabel died in 1995.

Wilder’s first book was 1926’s *The Cabala* but it wasn’t until his second novel the following year – *The Bridge of San Luis Rey*, which earned the first of his three Pulitzer Prizes – that his literary career was launched. Turning

to playwriting in the late ’20s, he had a series of one-act works produced, but it wasn’t until *Our Town* that his reputation in theater was made, followed by another nonconforming masterwork, the Pulitzer-winning *The Skin of Our Teeth*.

Wilder began *Our Town* in 1936, writing it primarily at The MacDowell Colony in New Hampshire and then at an isolated hotel in Zürich, Switzerland. The third act of *Our Town* was allegedly drafted after a long walk, during his brief affair with Steward in Zürich.

Many versions of the play followed, including the 1940 film that starred William Holden as George and – spoiler alert – created a happy ending. (Emily lives! Her death was just a bad dream.) There was also a musical version for television in 1955, with Frank Sinatra as the stage manager and Paul Newman as George (and which featured the now-standard tune, “Love and Marriage”). After Wilder’s death, there was a Ned Rorem opera in 2006 and in the late ’80s, a stage musical version of the play planned to tour but was cancelled in 1989 when its star, Mary Martin, bowed out because of illness.


CRY FOR US ALL

The power of the play is revealed through the hard-edged existentialism and relatable philosophy that comes in the third act, set in a cemetery and the great beyond. The storyline leaps from the joyous marriage of George and Emily at the end of the second act to the audi-

ence suddenly discovering that the play’s young heroine has died in childbirth and has joined other deceased community members in the town cemetery. She implores the omnipotent character of the Stage Manager to allow her to return invisibly for one more glimpse of her past life. But while she now sees all the small wonders of life, she also realizes they are not appreciated by those living in their everyday existence.

Playwright John Guare called the third act of the play a “coup de theatre that helps sweep the play out of the commonplace into the realm of the eternal.” Playwright Edward Albee called the play “brutal,” adding, “You should be crying at the end of *Our Town*, not for the characters but for ourselves.”

Sherman says he wouldn’t be surprised to see a surge of productions of *Our Town* – and its embrace of mindfulness – once the current pandemic reaches the point when theaters are allowed to reopen. He says a theater in Australia has already announced that *Our Town* will be the first play it presents when it reopens.

“It does feel like we were all spending 2020 in Act Three. Thanks to science, there will be an Act Four for us. We aren’t Emily. We will go back and hopefully we will take from this the best lessons – that we appreciate the things we have that we could not experience during the pandemic, and then keep them to the best of our ability.” 

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Spring Ahead to a Better You

Seven suggestions for
positive changes in your life

By DAWN ENNIS

We are survivors, if nothing else. Think about everything we endure and what many of us have overcome: childhood bullies, the rejection of relatives, our own doubts and fears, and the struggle to find our tribe. And that's not even taking into account COVID-19, culture wars, and the current political climate.

Seems like just a few months ago so many of us vowed to hit the gym or clear the clothes off the treadmill, start a new diet or find some other way to change up our routine, right after ringing in the New Year. So how's that going?

Yeah. Same here.

That is why instead of making (or trying to keep) those long-lost New Year's resolutions, I say, let's embark on what I'm calling a Spring Wring – wring out bad habits, create a space that's safe from negativity, and take action to overcome anything that stands between reaching your goal from where you are now.

This guide is different, in the same way that we are different. It's aimed specifically at those of us who are out and proud, closeted and stealth, and still trying to find our way in the world. One thing is certain: there is no one-size-fits-all solution to any

issue related to being LGBTQ. We do experience, however, something that separates us in relation to the rest of society – no matter how much we embrace the idea of “community,” society itself too often sees our community as standing apart.

With that in mind, here are seven LGBTQ-specific self-improvement tips:

IDENTIFY WHAT WE CAN CHANGE, AND WHAT WE CAN'T

Whether your anthem is Gloria Gaynor's I Am What I Am by Jerry Herman, Ke\$ha's We R Who We R, or Born This Way by Lady Gaga, the bottom line is, this is us. Coming out is life-affirming and life-changing. As the saying goes, “We're here, we're queer, get used to it!”

But what have we gotten used to that no longer satisfies us? If you're feeling stagnant, stale, or stuck, it's time to take stock of what works and what doesn't. Waiting for things to change on their own is, as self-help guru Tony Robbins says, like stumbling around in a dark room hoping to find the light switch.

So the first part of this requires a heavy dose of introspection, self-awareness, self-determination, and self-actualization. We are often described as the most introspective people on the planet, based on how deep down the rabbit hole our exploration of identity goes.

In our fight for our rights in the workplace, in the





courthouses and in the statehouses, many of us have had to become activists, or are perceived to be, simply because we won't settle for being second-class citizens. Some say, "Be the change you want to see in the world." But flip that around: Can you also see the change you want to be in the world?

As for how to proceed, those who like spreadsheets and to-do lists will draw up pros and cons. Others will ask their most trusted friends for their honest opinions. Many will meditate. Those who follow a faith tradition or were raised with religion may rely on what's called the Serenity Prayer: "God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can, and wisdom to know the difference."

You don't need to believe in anything to recognize the message: like it or not, there are some things that are out of our control. We are often our own worst critics. Accepting ourselves as we are, when it's not something we can change, can be a sign of maturity and inner peace. It's not settling to see yourself as merely "good enough."

For those aspects that can be changed, provided we have financial and healthcare equity, we can make adjustments that better reflect to the world how we see ourselves or want to be seen. We can transform our hairstyle, revamp our wardrobe, address body dysphoria with medical means, and make other physical changes.

What can you change? Can you accept that some things are fine as they are?

ADDRESS OUR BAD HABITS AND OUR WORST VICES

Suicide and HIV are leading causes of death among gay and bisexual men. But across the LGBTQ community, research also shows that we have higher rates of obesity and heart disease compared to the general population. And we're at twice the risk for dangers associated with smoking. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention found that a whopping 31 percent of queer Americans smoke.

All that said, LGBTQ individuals certainly have good reasons for our vices. Conversely, studies show acceptance results in positive experiences for people who come out – in particular, LGBTQ youth. So it's possible that one of the "bad habits" to consider quitting is putting some distance between you and those who can't or won't support you or embrace your truth.

What bad habits have you allowed to fester? Are you making excuses for your vices or for your involvement with bad influencers?

CREATING SPACE AWAY FROM NEGATIVE PEOPLE AND THINGS

People we thought would always love and support us unconditionally have been letting us down for as long as LGBTQ people have existed, which is as long as people have existed. And for just as long, we've been moving out and hoping to find a better experience someplace, anyplace but home. But moving out or relocating to a new city isn't always possible or financially feasible, especially during the pandemic.

That's why the third self-improvement step is one that takes place inside our minds rather than in the physical world. There may be no escaping our harsh reality but consider this a way to find a welcome respite instead of a total break. And it can be applied to those who make our lives miserable in all kinds of ways, not just rejection.

Even when we cannot find space away from negative people, we can create space inside our heads. Just like shutting a window to stop the breeze from blowing in, or closing a door to keep someone out, we sometimes need to put up some barrier to keep those who cause us harm at a distance, even if it's just imaginary.

How? It's about first putting on our own mental oxygen mask before attending to others in an emergency. And when people stress us out, that constitutes an emergency. That's when we need alone time, to give ourselves the space we need to breathe and feel safe. Never let anyone live rent-free in your head. Admittedly, this may be harder for some to accomplish on their own, but that's what therapy co-pays are for.

Which people in your life make living your life harder?

What would make your life easier? Can you separate yourself from them, in your thoughts, to achieve that?

AVOID OVER THINKING SELF-IMPROVEMENT

Daniel Gefen is the author of *The Self Help Addict: Turn An Overdose of Information Into a Life of Transformation*. He's an entrepreneur who hosts the podcast, *Can I Pick Your Brain?* And as *Forbes* reported in 2018, he warns against getting hooked on the consumer side of self-improvement: books, diets, online subscriptions. And to be on guard for over-thinking: "You say to yourself, 'I'm going to lose this much weight, I'm going to make this much money.' But then another thought comes in and says, 'No you're not, you're going to fail!' And now you have a battle," Gefen says.

Instead of letting the devil on your shoulder inhibit you from taking action, Gefen advises trying a skill recommended by psychologists, called "opposite action." Get out of your head and choose the opposite behavior of your negative thoughts.

Ask yourself: are your thoughts what stand in the way of you making progress?

SET A GOAL, AND THEN ANOTHER

This one is the easiest self-improvement step of all. All it requires is some basic planning, and not stopping after taking your first step. Speaking of steps, consider it akin to dance lessons: left, right, right, left, and so on. But no leaping!

Goals should be what you know you can do – perhaps adding daily exercise one week, making time for meditation or some other form of self-care the next, a switch-up in your dietary plan when you're ready, or carving out time for something you've always wanted to do but never tried... like dance lessons!

Try using your calendar or reminder app on your smartphone or tablet to help you set and meet goals. This is all about being realistic as to what you can and cannot do.

CELEBRATE EVERY MILESTONE AND FORGIVE YOUR FAILURES

Reward yourself when you reach a goal and allow yourself to take a break once in a while. This is critical. Give yourself credit for every accomplishment, even if it's just sticking to your plan. Self-improvement is, as people say, a marathon, not a sprint. Take care to not beat yourself up if you suffer a setback or find the goals you've set too arduous. Forgive your missteps and re-evaluate those goals so you always remain within the realm of what can be achieved. Set yourself up for success and celebrate yourself whenever you make progress. Note: that doesn't have to mean a donut or a candy bar, or "just one more cigarette."

What can you do to show yourself that what you're doing is



GIVE YOURSELF CREDIT FOR EVERY ACCOMPLISHMENT, EVEN IF IT'S JUST STICKING TO YOUR PLAN.

making a difference? Pride is both a personal and community experience. Share your success, no matter how small!


SHARE YOUR SUCCESS

Instead of giving in to temptation, share how proud you are of yourself on your social media! Text your friends the news and embrace the feedback when you receive it.

This step toward self-improvement will require you to lean on your chosen family and friends, those who bolster you when times are tough. It's hard for some of us to crow

about things we've done, but that is exactly what's needed to change our own negative self-assessment.

Recruit friends to check in on you and promise to do the same for them, providing feedback, holding each other accountable, offering constructive criticism, but most of all praising each and every successful step we take toward our goals. Ignore the haters, the naysayers and put the word out into the universe that you are on your way.

Before you know it, you'll have made improvements that everyone will notice and even you can see! 



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



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SPIRIT //



Singing a Different Tune

The Connecticut Gay Men's Chorus, shown here in a production of "Oh Boy," a tribute to boy bands, has had to change the way it operates amid the pandemic. Photo by Henry Tan.

Choirs adapt amid the pandemic, and look toward the future

By CARA MCDONOUGH

The pandemic put an abrupt stop to many activities, with no clear answer about when we'd be able to resume doing the things we love.

Singing together in a group was an activity that got hit particularly hard. COVID-19 is airborne, meaning that singing in choruses is a particularly risky activity in the new, pandemic world. And while many activities (like dance lessons and "happy hours" among friends) slid somewhat seamlessly onto the internet, singing online together – or making any music as a group – isn't as easy. Time lags and technical glitches can make it impossible

for a group to sing coherently when every member is on their own computer.

But many singing groups, including several Connecticut-based choruses, found ways to keep making music – as well as to foster the camaraderie that's so important to their members and perhaps became even more important over the last year.

The Hartford Gay Men's Chorus is one of those groups.

"I'm happy for our group," says Robert Reader, cofounder and executive director of the chorus. "We're continuing to march forward."

The group – known as HGMC for short – was founded in 2012 after a conversa-

tion around a kitchen table, Reader says.

"We needed to have our voices heard," he recalls.

Once they launched, the HGMC grew – and grew quickly. Their holiday concert that first year sold out, and over the years, their performances eventually garnered large enough crowds to be held in Hartford's Aetna Theatre. They've had 60-plus members at their largest, and today the group welcomes all gender identities, as long as they can sing in the tenor or baritone/bass range. In the years since it began, the HGMC has participated in events including "Pillow Pride" at the Jacob's Pillow performance space in Massachusetts, Hartford's (and other) Pride events,



In pre-COVID days, the Connecticut Gay Men's Chorus put on a holiday production of "Twinkle." Photo by William Berg.

and singing the national anthem for sporting events, including for the Hartford Yard Goats and the Connecticut Sun.

"These have been some of our most shining moments that make me feel really proud," Reader says. "We are doing this to show love and outreach and inclusion."

So when the pandemic hit, Reader and the rest of the group knew life for the HGMC was going to look very different for a while. But they couldn't let it go entirely. They moved weekly rehearsals to Zoom and hosted regular social hours on the platform. The group produced a

few songs and an online version of their annual holiday concert for their YouTube channel (a version of "Bridge Over Troubled Water" at the beginning of the pandemic was particularly comforting to fans).

For Reader, keeping the chorus alive during the pandemic was especially meaningful: he lost his job of 13 years at Hartford Stage when the pandemic necessitated cancelling its season and letting go of employees. He knew the continued connection was crucial for other members, too, and in the months since, many have communicated how much the ongoing connection to the group – with its inherent enthusiasm, artistic talent, and friendship – has meant.

"A lot of people have struggled, and a lot of people have thanked me," says Reader about chorus during quarantine. "What really moves me is that this is a place where I find love and support, just being with everyone. We create a safe environment to be together, and for some of the members, the rehearsals have been a lifeline."



Connecticut Gay Men's Chorus at Norwalk Pride in 2018. Photo by Henry Tan.



Another Octave, shown here singing at New Haven City Hall in 2017, is among the choirs throughout the state that has had to adapt during the pandemic. Photo courtesy of Another Octave.

FINDING A FAMILY

Members of Another Octave: Connecticut Women’s Chorus – founded in 1989 with its roots in the lesbian community – describe their experiences with the group in a similar light.

“It’s family,” says Gina Juliano, the chorus’s board chair. “I think what’s killing us right now is that we are really missing our family.”

Another Octave didn’t move to doing online rehearsals or concerts during the pandemic for a variety of reasons, most notably that singing and producing music online is so difficult and time consuming.

The lack of weekly rehearsals and the face-to-face time these allow has been no small loss. Many Another Octave members have been with the group for years; some joined when facing personal challenges in their own lives, looking for an artistic outlet, as well as solidarity and support.

“There are always the baby showers and funds or a sympathy gift when a member loses someone,” says Elle Pow-

ell, the group’s fund-raising coordinator. “We celebrate birthdays every week. For me this is a community – a family.”

“For so many of us, singing is what makes us feel better,” says Melinda Walwer, the group’s artistic director. “Some members sing together in small groups in addition to the full ensemble.” She adds that many members normally eat dinner together before weekly rehearsals, and that they’re all big fans of social time over snack breaks.

“We just can’t get enough of each other,” she says.

Juliano, who has been with the group for nearly 30 years, echoed that thought, saying that within 10-15 minutes of getting to rehearsal every week (back when rehearsal was in person) she could feel the day’s stresses easing as the music – and friendly faces – worked their magic.

And, sure, you can sing at home. But members are quick to point out that it’s not quite the same.

“I enjoy harmonizing with others. That’s huge. I just love to sing,” says Karen Kriner, the group’s publicity coordinator. “I still sing around the

house. But singing with other people is the best.”

Powell agrees: “I sing along with the radio and sing songs about my pets all the time. But singing in the chorus with other people, that feels like an accomplishment, especially when you have a piece that feels really hard. When it sounds good, it just boosts my confidence in general.”

The group’s music is particularly impactful for the singers, as well as audiences at their regular concerts, because the leadership chooses pieces meant to represent women and the diversity of their experiences. That includes everything from showtunes to traditional choral pieces and folk songs in a variety of languages to pop, all showcasing a variety of accompanying instruments to keep their repertoire exciting. The group’s website features several recordings, including the “Iraqi Peace Song” and a traditional American piece, “Goin’ to Boston.”

Walwer emphasizes that this mission – representing women’s experiences and diversity in general – is a key aspect of

Another Octave, and something they'll eagerly get back to when singing together is safe once again. For now, they are hoping for summer singing sessions outside, or at least beginning a new season this fall.

The Connecticut Gay Men's Chorus is wondering about similar timing when it comes to being back together in person. The organization is in its 35th year, and it is safe to say it has never seen a year like this one, says chorus President Ken Sawicki.

The group, made up of about 30 members of all ages and backgrounds, was founded in 1986 as the first organization of its kind in the state. Their normal routine includes in-person weekly rehearsals at New Haven's St. Thomas's Church, and performances at places like the Shubert Theatre and other locations, with large, enthusiastic crowds. The group's members are warm, funny, and friendly, says Sawicki, and over the years they've held memorable concerts complete with



Another Octave performs on the New Haven Green at the International Festival of Arts & Ideas in June 2015. Photo courtesy of Another Octave.

costumes, choreography, and plenty of emotion as they celebrate the LGBTQ community and their commitment to the arts.

They've also developed a robust fund-raising system, including monthly "BingoMania!" nights at The Annex YMA club in New Haven – events that

not only support the group financially, but are joyful get-togethers for the group, their fans, and their friends.

Their pandemic setup lacks the in-person sense of community that has come to mean so much for this group. But the weekly Zoom rehearsals and recorded concerts and songs – which



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“Folks joined our chorus because of their interest in music, but of course as an LGBTQ group, there’s also a sense of community and connection. For some folks, joining was really their first statement as a gay person .”

–Scott McEver

included a Boyz II Men cover in honor of Black Lives Matter and a full Valentine’s Day concert in lieu of their annual holiday event – have been a salve throughout the pandemic months.

“Tuesday night on Zoom, we see everyone’s faces and focus on music,” says Sawicki. “It’s what we love, and it’s been great to have the fantastic, enthusiastic group that we have at this point to fall back on. You realize you’ve not only been working with these guys, but you’ve developed friendships that will last a long time, and there’s so much to be said about that.”

LOOKING FORWARD TO REUNITING


Sawicki is confident that the pandemic experience will make the group stronger than ever when its members come back in person.

“What we have is a wonderfully diverse group,” he says. “A group of people who really care for each other, and really enjoy each other’s company. It’s such a good feeling to get up there and do what we do for an audience. I hope we can do it again soon.”

Scott McEver, president of the HGMC chorus council, has positive things to say about the group’s eventual reunion, too, noting that because their chorus – like the other groups – is rooted in such a meaningful mission, the bond the members have with one another is nearly impossible to break.

“Folks joined our chorus because of their interest in music, but of course as an LGBTQ group, there’s also a sense of community and connection,” he says. “For some folks, joining was really their first statement as a gay person.”

McEver says that once chorus members are able to gather safely, the challenge presented by the pandemic could result in a positive new outlook, yielding even more appreciation for the importance of such a committed group.

“I’d like to think that as we get towards that moment, we’ll be able to reflect on what we’ve gained being a chorus in this challenging time,” he says. “And about what it means to be connected again.” 



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Paul Manship, Flight of Night, 1916. Bronze on a veined black marble base. Gift of Philip L. Goodwin. © Estate of Paul Manship

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Connecticut Sun players are embracing social justice reform efforts. Players shown here last summer are (from left to right) Essence Carson, Brionna Jones, Kaleena Mosqueda-Lewis, Alyssa Thomas, Jasmine Thomas, and Briann January.

A Level Playing Field

For the Connecticut Sun, Social Justice “Change Can’t Wait”

By ANDREW KELSEY

Connecticut Sun Director of Player Development Awvee Storey, whose career included several seasons in the NBA, has a 12-year-old daughter, Averi. Naturally, she follows in dad’s footsteps; she plays basketball and looks up to the professionals.

Averi got to spend some time around the Sun when the team played in the bubble in Florida during last year’s coronavirus-impacted season. The Sun players were among those who spoke out about racial injustice during their time in the bubble. Players wore jerseys that included Breonna Taylor’s name, in memory of the woman who was shot to death by police in her Kentucky home.

“Seeing the impact they’ve had on my daughter has been absolutely amazing,” Storey says of the players.

Now, Storey is working with the Sun players to help the organization not only win games but have an

impact on the community, including Sun fans, through its “Change Can’t Wait” social justice reform platform this coming season.

The Sun’s social justice reform mission, according to its website, is “to create year-round programming, messaging and activation via team and player outlets to eradicate racism and reverse systemic oppression in black and brown communities in Connecticut and throughout New England.”

It is supported by four pillars – voting, education, community outreach, and amplification. The pillars guide the Sun in efforts for the platform and help create year-round programming based on each topic. This helps the team get involved in the community, create in-game programming, and educate its fans and the public on current events and topics. Details are available at sun.wnba.com/change.

Storey is not only coaching team members for their in-game performance but also their off-the-court lives.



**BLACK
LIVES
MATTER**

Player Kaila Charles and the Connecticut Sun organization are trying to eradicate racism and reverse systemic oppression in black and brown communities throughout New England.



Jasmine Thomas (left) and Kaila Charles (foreground) warm up with Connecticut Sun teammates last season.

This season, a big part of that piece is the Sun's Change Can't Wait initiative.

RAISING AWARENESS, TAKING ACTION

"My player development holistic approach is not just on the court," says Storey, noting that while the on-the-court element of his coaching is significant, there is a lot of consideration for the players' lives off the court – as well as in what the future holds once their playing careers end.

"It makes it that much more important for them, not just playing the game they love and how important it is to them but having an impact on the fans and the community," the coach says of these off-the-court efforts.

"These events are important because they help educate people on the world around them," says player Kaila Charles. "A lot of times, we are stuck in our bubble, but these events help raise awareness of issues that may not get much attention or are overlooked. Also, the money that is fundraised is used to help others in need or

even help fund programs and bills that can help create a positive and real change in our communities as well as our country."

Storey believes all races should be able to come together and have dialogue to find equality, and notes that Connecticut has a large Hispanic population.

"We don't want to exclude anybody but want to bring minorities to the forefront to have a voice," Storey says.

"Social justice to me means that regardless of your race, class ethnicity, etcetera, everyone is treated equally; everyone has the same rights and opportunities in life," Charles adds.

Amber Cox, vice president of sports at Mohegan Sun, notes the WNBA has always been at the forefront of social change.

"On many occasions, WNBA players have taken action against racial inequality. However, I think because all the WNBA teams and players were in the bubble this season together in Florida, coupled with the nationwide uprising against racism

after the deaths of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and others, what you saw was an incredibly organized effort by our players, which garnered national attention. It was amazing to witness," Cox says.

The season may still be ahead, but the Sun has already taken action – from educational components to amplifying Black-owned businesses, most of which has been virtual, Cox notes.

"I think once we return to some sense of normalcy and our players are back in our community, we'll be able to do even more around games and in person. We'll be able to not only educate ourselves through this process, but our fans as well, on how to get involved and support our efforts, along with those in our community who are promoting racial equality."

"BIGGER THAN BASKETBALL"

While scoring baskets and winning games are on-court goals for the Sun, the efforts in the Change Can't Wait platform are significant.

“The importance can’t be overstated,” Cox says. “And really, our players drove the development of the Change Can’t Wait platform. It was our job to listen to them share their own experiences and work with them to define ways to take action in our community. That was the main takeaway. It can’t just be a team statement. We wanted to create sustainable pillars that we can activate as long as it takes to finally end racism once and for all.”

Kaila Charles agrees. “I think it’s very important to prioritize the Change Can’t Wait mission because change can’t wait. Racial injustice has been plaguing our country since the beginning and if we want a real change, we can’t keep sweeping these issues under the rug,” she says.

“We can’t waste any more time! And the only way for us to achieve real change is to come together as one team. Not as an individual, but as one team, fighting together towards one common goal. This is bigger than basketball. This is reality for me and some of my teammates, a reality

where we don’t feel safe in our own country and that must change. That is why we must make a decision to come together and fight for injustice today.”


Following the season, Connecticut’s WNBA team (and all other WNBA teams) auctioned off game-worn and individually signed jerseys. All game jerseys featured Breonna Taylor’s name under each respective Sun player name. The recognition of Taylor, who on March 13, 2020 was shot and killed by police in her Kentucky home, is part of an overall effort by WNBA players to recognize women who have died due to alleged police brutality or racial injustice.

Free throws were worth more than just a point last summer, with money for each made foul shot going toward the team’s efforts via the Connecticut Sun Foundation.

“One of the amazing things about our fan base is that they always are behind us – win or lose, home or on the road, on or off the court,” Cox says. “It’s unlike any-

thing else in our league. It was no surprise that when we launched the T-shirts for sale to benefit a local nonprofit, they got online and bought them. They supported our free throw effort. Again, these were very quick turnarounds this season and no games with our great fans, but it didn’t matter. They jumped on board and got behind their team per usual. The outpouring from the local community to get involved with Change Can’t Wait has been more than we could have ever imagined.”

The Sun is hopeful of playing in front of its fans at Mohegan Sun Arena this summer, depending on coronavirus protocol.

“The health and safety of our fans, players, coaches, staff remains our top priority,” Cox says. “That will guide our decisions, but certainly we are hopeful and look forward to the day when we can all return to Mohegan Sun Arena for a home game.” 



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FATHERLY LOVE

LGBTQ dads-to-be travel unique journeys to parenthood

By LISA BACKUS

Brian Rosenberg, Ferd van Gameren, and their three children wore matching blue snowflake pajamas on New Year's Day.

As a gay man living with HIV, Brian Rosenberg presumed in the 1990s that he would never become a father.

But thanks to advances in medicine and a shared desire to start a family, more than a decade later, Rosenberg and his then partner (now husband), Ferd van Gameren, found themselves racing through a buybuy BABY store in 2009, in preparation for bringing their newborn son Levi home from the hospital.

“We had no family near us to help advise us. As first-time dads, we were bringing home a newborn baby and we had nothing,” Rosenberg says. “The staff helped us grab everything we would need. But what we noticed was that a majority of stuff was geared toward moms. We were like, ‘Are we not supposed to be buying this stuff?’”

That was the tip of the iceberg in terms of their enlightening moments as gay dads, the two quickly realized. From the pediatrician to the pre-school, Rosenberg says, they continually had to explain their family situation.



After the birth of their twin daughters Ella and Sadie through surrogacy 17 months later, Rosenberg decided that he wanted to connect with other gay dads and offer gay, bi, and trans men hope and a way to become parents themselves.

What started as a labor of love, Rosenberg's Boston-based organization Gays With Kids has become one of the world's largest online communities of gay, bi, and trans parents and prospective parents, offering information and support on family building options including surrogacy, adoption, and foster care.

"I knew I wasn't the only gay dad out there," the 55-year-old Rosenberg says.

The Gays With Kids website, gayswithkids.com, and social media accounts on Facebook and Instagram tell the stories of hundreds of gay men who successfully entered parenthood, while explaining the joys and pitfalls that came along the way.

Equally as important, Rosenberg provides weekly webinars with step-by-step instructions and an overview of each of the paths to fatherhood typically available to queer men, from in vitro fertilization and surrogacy to

foster care and adoption, the potential costs, and amount of time and paperwork each route can take.

The organization has 250,000 followers on social media, with the website garnering 140,000 to 175,000 visits a month.

Gays With Kids also works with fertility clinics and surrogacy, adoption, and foster care agencies who are supportive of LGBTQ parenthood, providing information on which family-building organizations queer men can access for help.

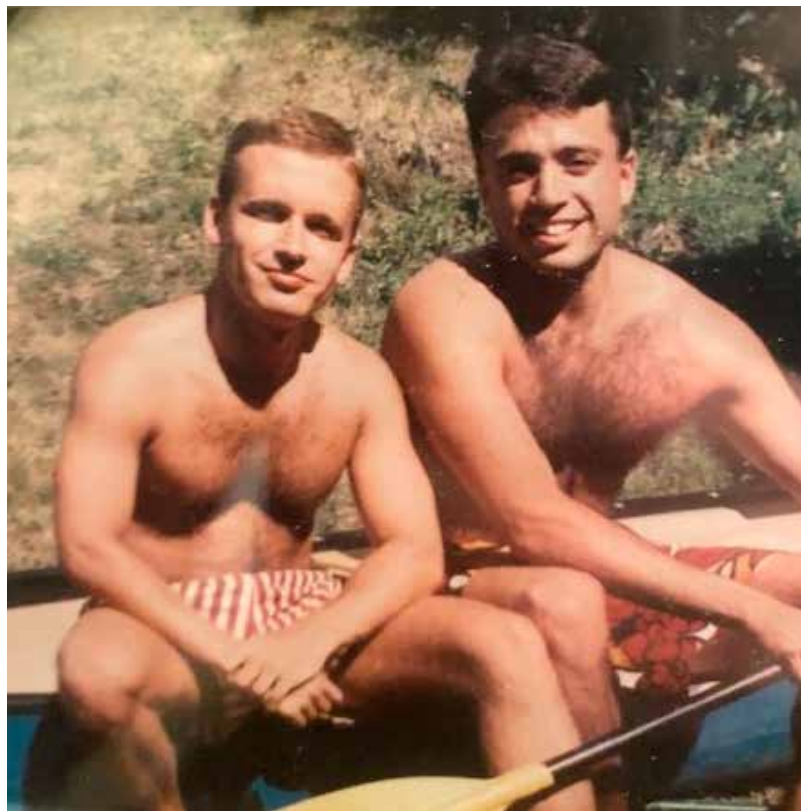
"We don't come to fatherhood by accident," Rosenberg says. "A lot goes into us becoming parents."

THE JOURNEY TO FATHERHOOD

In Vitro Fertilization and surrogacy offer gay men a chance to have a biological connection to their children. The process requires the implantation of an embryo, usually created with the sperm of one or both prospective fathers and an egg from a surrogate or other female donor. The cost ranges from \$170,000 to \$250,000 and includes a fee for the surrogate mother who will carry the baby to term.

This route usually requires gay men to seek the help of a surrogacy agency which arranges for a surrogate. It can take up to two years to become parents, including the three to five months required to match a surrogate and create an embryo, according to Gays With Kids.

Foster care and adoption are also viable options and require fewer financial resources in about the same timeframe. But the process can be a rollercoaster, Rosenberg warns, especially if biological parents or other family members ultimately choose to keep or be reunited with their child.



A photo from van Gameren (left) and Rosenberg's first road trip in 1993.

Agency adoptions cost \$20,500 to \$63,000, while independent adoptions range from \$18,500 to \$47,000. International adoptions cost \$28,500 to \$54,500 and can take anywhere from one to five years. Foster care-to-adoption is the least expensive proposition at \$1,800 to \$4,500 and takes the least amount of time – an average of six to nine months.

As part of each option, a home study will be done that involves a case worker, legal paperwork and, in some cases, training.

In addition to financial challenges, there are also legal stumbling blocks. Some states have laws allowing adoption and foster agencies to decline to work with members of the LGBTQ community on the basis of religious beliefs, and not all states allow surrogacy.

Marital status can be heavily connected to the right to be listed as a parent entitled to make medical and schooling decisions for a child, and may also have immigration implications.

At the time Rosenberg and van Gameren became first-time parents, van Gameren had been living in the U.S. legally for several years using a tourist visa, which expired and needed to be renewed from outside the country every three months. Shortly after Levi's birth, van Gameren was told he could no longer stay in the U.S. using the tourist visa. Rosenberg and van Gameren decided to move to Canada.

They got married in Toronto on their 20th anniversary (June 20, 2013), since Canada offered federal recognition of gay marriages. Several American states also recognized gay marriage at the time but the federal government did not. This meant that gay couples who married would only receive state benefits and not federal benefits such as marriage-based immigration rights.

After the U.S. Supreme Court ruling in favor of marriage equality in 2015, the couple moved back to the U.S. Since that time, they have not only continued to build their family but to help other LGBTQ couples do the same.

"For queer men, the journey to fatherhood is very often overwhelming

and exhausting," Rosenberg says. "What we're trying to do is make it less so. We provide a lot of anecdotal stories of men who have already gone through the process. People can look at them and say, 'They did it; there is no reason why I can't do it.'"

FAMILY PLANNING ON THE RISE

The support comes at a groundbreaking time for gay, bi and trans Millennials who, according to a 2019 national Family Equality Council survey, are now considering family building at about the same rate as non-LGBTQ Millennials, with 48% actively planning to grow their families compared to 55% of non-LGBTQ Millennials.

"What I think is amazing now is that when I talk to twenty-somethings, they know they are getting married and having kids," says Dr. Mark Leondires, who specializes in reproductive endocrinology at his practice, Reproductive Medicine Associates of Connecticut. "In a matter of 30 years, the LGBTQ community feels safe to have a family. It's heartening to me that the younger generation feels it's possible."

likely never become a parent, he says.

"For 15 or 20 years that's what I thought," Zola says. "There was an attempt to try and change me; they said, 'You'll never be able to enjoy the experience of being a parent,' and that's not true."

Leondires and Zola are raising sons Luke, age 9, and Owen, age 7, in their Westport home. It's a lively time, as the boys consistently remain one step ahead of their parents, both say.

"One of the things that I don't think anybody ever shares is that your kids keep getting smarter," Leondires says. "Our boys tag team us continually."

Their first surrogacy ended in miscarriage, the couple says. It was a heartbreak that Leondires credits with making him a better doctor. "I learned what it's like to be on the patient's side," he says. "There were some powerful lessons from it."

Leondires heads his clinic's Gay Parents To Be program (gayparentstobe.com/about), which provides support to prospective gay parents considering or undergoing fertility treatments in the hopes of starting or expanding a family.

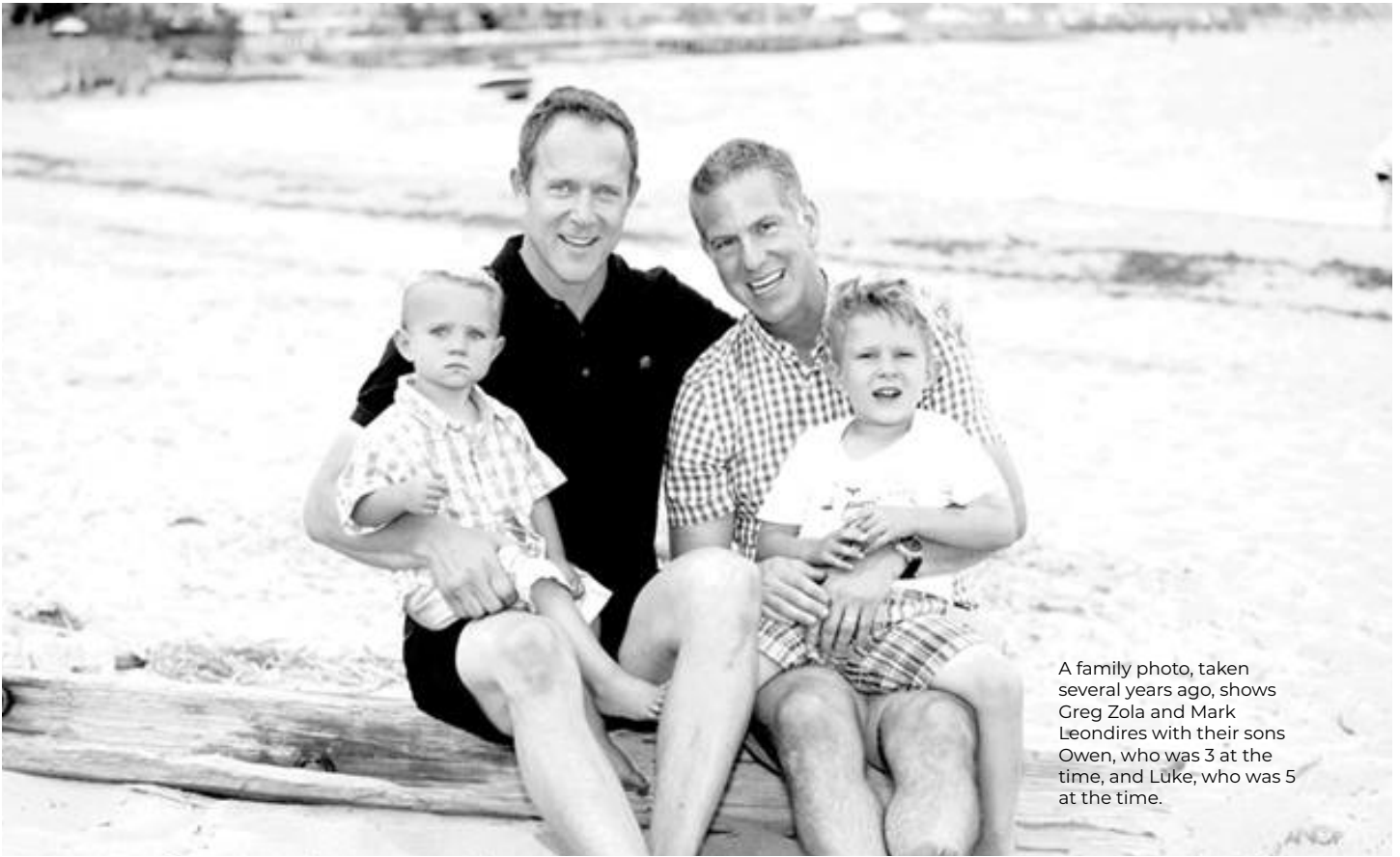
Leondires' and Zola's journey to



Greg Zola and Mark Leondires

It's a totally different mindset from when Leondires' husband Greg Zola came out as gay decades ago and loved ones tried to dissuade him by saying he would

parenthood includes their own mad dash in the hours before Owen was born. The couple was living in Connecticut but the couple's surrogate had moved while



A family photo, taken several years ago, shows Greg Zola and Mark Leondires with their sons Owen, who was 3 at the time, and Luke, who was 5 at the time.

pregnant to Washington state, where compensated surrogacy was not legal.

The original plan was to have the surrogate's husband bring her to a hospital in nearby Idaho, which did allow compensated surrogacy, when she went into labor. But they all had to quickly form another plan when her water broke unexpectedly on a day that her children were sick.

Zola had been staying at a hotel across the street from the Idaho hospital, waiting for the big day to arrive. When the call from the surrogate came with unexpected news, he sped across the state line in a small rental car to Washington. On the 45-minute drive back to the hospital, as he was trying to drive at a more reasonable rate, "she starts having contractions in the car," he recalls.

Compensated surrogacy is legal in 47 states, with New York recently joining the list – on February 15, 2021 – but laws differ by state. And while the surrogacy law that affected Zola and Leondires has since been overturned, there are still obstacles, legal and otherwise, to gay

parenthood.

Just one example is a brief submitted by the Trump Administration to the U.S. Supreme Court in June 2020, supporting a religious nonprofit that is suing the City of Philadelphia on the grounds of religious freedom. The nonprofit, Catholic Social Services, runs a child welfare agency in that city and has been refusing to place foster and adoptive children with same-sex and other LGBTQ parents, in violation of Philadelphia's non-discrimination ordinance. The federal Department of Justice argued that the city's position reflects "unconstitutional hostility toward Catholic Social Services' religious beliefs." Arguments in the case were heard in November; a decision is still pending.


"There are 400,000 children in the United States who are in foster care," Leondires says. "There are 100,000 waiting for permanent homes. But in the interest of religious freedom, they [the plaintiff and the previous administration were] allowing that discrimination at the peril of 100,000 children waiting for their forever home."

BECOMING A FAMILY

Rosenberg assumed that he would never be a parent after he was diagnosed with HIV, the virus that causes AIDS, in 1990. He met van Gameren three years later. Although he recognized at some point that those who were HIV positive were living long lives with proper medication, diet, and exercise, the two were still torn about parenthood, but eventually they knew that the enjoyment they derived from parenting a dog and from spending time with their nieces and nephews pointed to one simple conclusion: they had to become dads.

Rosenberg says van Gameren, especially, "could see my love for kids and he knew that if I didn't have kids, I'd really regret it."

The couple's formerly quiet home is now full – of noise, fun, and love.

"Our life is crazy and exhausting but it's awesome. I wouldn't change it for anything," Rosenberg says. "I would imagine it's no different for anyone else who has three kids and two dogs." 

LIVING AUTHENTICALLY

Masculinizing Hormone Replacement Therapy Can Empower Trans Men

By JANE LATUS

Even with his long eyelashes and beautiful eyes, the young man was able to pass as male in public – until he spoke. His high voice would betray him, and awkwardness or worse would follow. People who had addressed him as male would say, “I’m so sorry, ma’am,” and he’d have to reassure them. He was continually reminded that his identity – although certain to him – was questioned by others.

So, he went to Kathryn Tierney, medical director of the Transgender Medicine Program at Middlesex Health, and began masculinizing hormone therapy. “Within the first four weeks on testosterone, the voice drops, which is very important to a lot of patients,” says Tierney, MSN, APRN, FNP-BC, FAANP. “Going on testosterone, for him, was primarily to allow him to settle into his identity both internally and externally.”

For another of Tierney’s patients, 24-year-old Aidan Persaud of Vernon, taking testosterone was important mostly for their own reasons. “I don’t like the word ‘passing’ for myself, because it doesn’t apply. I don’t do this for others, but to be myself,” they say.

“Being on testosterone literally saved my life,” says Persaud, a college student studying critical psychology who identifies as non-binary. They add, though, “I hope people understand that hormone therapy isn’t a requirement to consider yourself trans. Trans simply means you identify as something other than the gender you were assigned when you were born.”

After coming out to their sisters, and experimenting with pronouns and names, Persaud reached what they



call a “realization phase,” which ultimately led them to choose a name and pronouns – and Middlesex Health.

“I knew of Middlesex through a friend, and that they’re very LGBT friendly.” Persaud decided to check it out. “I drove around Middletown one day, went inside and talked to the person at the desk. They didn’t ask why I was asking these questions. I felt very respected. I felt listened to for the very first time.”

Before beginning hormone therapy, Persaud needed to obtain the requisite therapist’s go-ahead. “It was a very huge ordeal to me,” they say, because they couldn’t use their parents’ medical insurance without coming out to them. They worked for months to pay for the therapist. “I’d work 4 to 8 a.m., go to class 8 to 12, go back to work

from 1 to 10, and then do it all over again, every day of the week except Tuesday.” But they finally got that piece of paper and made their first appointment with Tierney in November 2016.

Persaud left that appointment carrying a prescription for testosterone. They stopped at the pharmacy, went home and spread everything on a table. “I was just staring at it. Wow, it’s actually in front of me. I never thought I’d have this.”

The next time Persaud returned to Middlesex, for Tierney to teach them how to self-inject, they were so excited, they say, that “My palms were sweaty, my hands were shaking, I was so nervous. She comes in, she washes her hands, she puts gloves on, starts explaining – and I spaced out! She had to repeat herself, because I was so excited.

“Four years in, I feel very grateful for this opportunity and privilege, because I know there are people in other states and countries who can’t do this. I also feel very grateful to have



Transgender Medicine Program Medical Director Kathryn Tierney. Photo courtesy of Middlesex Health.

someone like Katy. A friend sees an endocrinologist who's just like, 'Here are your hormones, have a nice day.' I feel respected and heard."

'A FIGHTER AND AN ADVOCATE'

Tierney has provided gender affirming hormone therapy to transgender and gender non-conforming patients from ages 16 to 80-something, although most patients are in their 20s or 30s. They come to Middlesex Health whenever that precipitating moment arrives that gives them the vocabulary to explain how they have been feeling, and the realization that they can own their identity and seek medical help to do so, if they so wish.

Middlesex Health serves approximately 1,200 trans patients. It offers a comprehensive range of care including primary care, hormone therapy, behavioral health services, continence and pelvic health, gender transition surgery, physical rehabilitation, infectious disease testing and treatment, and voice therapy.

In addition to receiving hormone therapy at Middlesex, Persaud also had chest surgery there in June 2020. Another service they appreciate is Tierney's advocacy. "She's a fighter and an advocate," they say, recounting how Tierney battled with bureaucracies on their behalf. "Katy called [the pharmacy] and raised hell, for lack of a better phrase. She also fought with the insurance company because they were refusing to pay for [hormones]. She said, 'This isn't something you can go without. You need this to live.' Within a week, it was rectified."

It may take time before testosterone's changes become apparent, but patients often benefit immediately, says Tierney. "There's something to be said by being heard by the medical profession. It's such a process getting to that point. It's such a milepost in their life. Just receiving confirmation that they are who they are relieves a sense of anxiety. People come in with high blood pressure because they're afraid they're going to have to fight for what they need."

Beginning on testosterone "is very much like going through a second puberty, but it's the one they expected to have in the first place," says Tierney. There may be unwanted acne temporarily, but otherwise the changes are usually welcome ones.

First comes the voice drop. Second comes what Tierney says is important to many patients: cessation of periods (usually within six months of starting testosterone). "Having a period can be really dysphoria-inducing," she says.

Eventually, what happens is what Tierney calls "my favorite thing to see: they are happier. Ninety-nine percent of the time people's depression improves and their anxiety improves."

Also important is what doesn't happen: the biggest myth about masculinizing hormone therapy is that it causes "'roid rage."

"We're not giving testosterone the way people are taking steroids," says Tierney. "The goal is to match what people would be making on their own."

Persaud says, "One of the first things I noticed was my eyebrows got thicker." Then came more facial hair and a voice drop that was so gradual they didn't notice it for months, although others did. The only downside, they say, was acne. "I got hit really hard with that. It's starting to subside now, four years later."

Four years into masculinizing hormone therapy, Persaud says they feel at ease, no longer guilty about disappointing their parents and ex-girlfriend for not being the person they hoped they would be. "From a physical standpoint, I feel like I could climb a mountain every day – and not beat myself down for being myself."

Chest surgery was "like the icing on the cake," they say. "I feel even better."

QUALITY CARE FOR ALL

Before beginning a patient on testosterone, Tierney conducts a mental and physical evaluation, to be sure the patient is "ready to go and that it will do no harm." She also educates patients on the importance of exercise, adequate sleep, a good diet and, if necessary, smoking cessation. "I also educate people that they can still get pregnant if they have a uterus and ovaries."

Testosterone is administered by weekly injections that patients can learn to do themselves. For those averse to needles, it can be applied topically. Blood tests are done every three months for the first year, and subsequently every six months, to look for uncommon side effects like polycythemia (an elevated hematocrit and hemoglobin count that can put a person at risk for deep vein thrombosis).

Some testosterone-induced changes are irreversible, including voice deepening, enlargement of the clitoris, and facial hair growth.

But should a patient decide to discontinue testosterone, reversible side effects include weight gain, acne and cessation of periods.


Some of the weight gain from hormone therapy is attributable to increased muscle mass. There are also changes in weight distribution. "Testosterone bodies tend to hold fat in their abdomen, while estrogen bodies tend to hold it in their hips and buttocks. A lot of people do list that as a positive change."

Because many patients begin hormone therapy after their going through their first puberty, their height and facial bone structure are pretty set, so don't change much.

If a trans man wishes to become pregnant, it typically takes 3-6 months after stopping testosterone before periods resume. Patients who make this choice are impressive to Tierney. "It requires a lot of emotional fortitude." Consider omitting this – it's really not up to me to be impressed or not impressed with people's reproductive choices

"We're seeing more trans guys deciding, after transition, to get pregnant. I've had three in the last two years, which is three more than in the previous 15 years. Our hospital is ready for that kind of thing, and has the background and resources to make it a positive experience."

Middlesex Health in 2020 earned its fourth "LGBTQ Healthcare Equality Leader" designation from the Human Rights Campaign Foundation. The Human Rights Campaign Foundation is the nation's largest LGBTQ civil rights organization.

Middlesex Health offers a comprehensive Transgender Medicine Program. Its network of medical providers work with transgender persons to meet specific needs, and services are coordinated throughout the health system. 

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

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LIVING AUDACIOUSLY

COVER STORY //



Chion Wolf (right) and wife Emily Petersen.

Chion Wolf takes public radio and Connecticut by storm

By ALLIE RIVERA

or
Chion Wolf,
working in public
radio is more
than a job; it's a
lifelong mission.

Raised listening to NPR,
Wolf has worked her way to
now hosting and producing her own
show, Audacious, on Connecticut Public
Radio.

"One of the things I love so much about public radio is that when you listen to it a lot, you become a better interviewer in your own life, you become a better listener," the Hartford resident says. "So I hope that, if I'm doing this right, after every episode of Audacious, you'll become more curious, you'll be braver in the questions that you ask, and you will shut up and listen."

Wolf's journey to this point began more than a decade ago while she was working at a T-Mobile. After learning that Connecticut Public was looking for people to answer phones for their latest fundraising drive, Wolf immediately reached out. There, she met radio news veteran John Dankosky, who was news director at the time.

"I just started machine-gunning questions at him," Wolf recalls, laughing. "He was like, 'It sounds like you might be interested in our internship program.'"

Once her time in that

program began, Wolf says, her next mission was to make sure it didn't end.

"As soon as I started, I tried to find a way to make it so they couldn't get rid of me," she says with a smile.

Starting with her own small, point-and-shoot camera, Wolf began photographing shows, guests, and events at Connecticut Public and pitched the idea of being the photographer for the radio station, a concept which was initially met with some confusion.

"It was difficult to explain in 2007," she says, shaking her head. Undeterred, she pushed forward and helped develop the station's photojournalism section.

As Wolf continued with Connecticut Public, her role began to grow. She started learning more about producing and editing, but a big shift came when she began working with Colin McEnroe.

"He said he wanted me to be the first and last voice people hear on his show, which is an awfully amazing thing to hear for a goofy, NPR nerd, freelance intern," she says. "That changed everything."

Wolf sharpened her skills working on the show, becoming the producer and technical producer, as well as offering her voice on air during the show.

"I think she developed a strong name for herself and it, of course, helped that she was the announcer on the Colin McEnroe show, so she would get name recognition on his show for years," says





Wolf, who first worked with Connecticut Public Radio when she volunteered to answer phones during a fundraising drive, has worked her way up through the ranks at the station. She later worked as a producer and now hosts her own show, "Audacious."

Catie Talarski, now senior director of storytelling and radio programming at Connecticut Public Radio.

Talarski, who started at the station around the same time as Wolf, was not surprised to see her colleague and friend moving up the ranks.

"I think she just has a way of diving into things and just 100 percent putting herself into them," Talarski says.

While working to build a name for herself at Connecticut Public, Wolf also began working on her own projects around Hartford, following her passions in whichever way they pulled.

"Chion has these ideas and, unlike a lot of people, she decides to follow through on them," says Joe Barber, a longtime friend who has helped in a variety of Wolf's projects. "For someone with so many ideas and to see them come to fruition is really impressive."

"I don't know where she gets all the energy or the ability to focus

on all these different things," says Barber, who is director of community service and civic engagement at Trinity College. "When she gets enthusiastic about something, she really digs into it, and that's what she's been doing with all of her different projects."

The two initially met roughly 10 years ago through burgeoning storytelling events in Hartford, one of which was Wolf's personal project, "The Mouth-Off." Having originally pitched the idea for a storytelling show at Connecticut Public, which didn't work out, Wolf brought the event to another Hartford landmark.

"I thought, right down the street is the Mark Twain House, [home to] one of the best-known storytellers in American history. What a great spot to have it! And so I approached them," Wolf says. "They said, 'Hell yes,' and it went for eight years before the pandemic."

The events were held five times per year, each time with a different

theme that Wolf created. Unlike other storytelling events, however, Wolf did not work with storytellers in advance or coach them on their performances. Most times, her reactions were as raw as the audience's, and while not all stories made it into the final show, Wolf said she was in awe of what she encountered.

"Many of the stories would leave you breathless, and I wondered how they did that," she marvels. "What made those stories different? What made me still think about them days, weeks later? So I started learning a lot about storytelling and then I started becoming a better storyteller."

While these projects helped Wolf follow her passions, they also helped her to sharpen her skills. As a big fan of AM radio and call-in shows, Wolf came up with the idea in 2016 to start her own live advice show.

"Being live is a totally different headspace and ball game than when it's pre-taped. Audacious is

totally pre-taped, so I can fumble my questions. I could talk to the person for an hour and a half and only show you the bits that are the most glimmering or interesting or powerful. Whereas when you have a time limit and you've got to be out for the next show," she says, "it is a mental exercise unlike anything else."

With the idea in mind, Wolf knew she needed to next plan logistics. She knew she wanted to start the show at her favorite underground comedy theater, Sea Tea Improv in Hartford, and Managing Director Julia Pistell was game.

"When you do a project with Chion, you know that she is ambitious enough that it's going to be good and compassionate enough that it will be warm," Pistell says. "She's creative, she's curious, and those are the kinds of things I always want to say yes to."

The monthly show ran at the theater from late 2016 until the start of the pandemic. Wolf and her rotating panelists addressed issues of varying intensity, from pet problems to structural inequities.

As she grew her projects, Wolf also continued to grow her network throughout Hartford by exploring more of her passions, one of which became particularly important to her in June of 2016 when she was hit by a car while riding her bicycle in the West End of Hartford. The crash resulted in a shattered collarbone, for which she needed a plate and eight screws put in, but it did not deter her from riding.

"As soon as I got the OK from my doctor that I could ride my bike, the first thing I did was ride through that intersection where it [the crash] happened," she says. "And that day, as I was getting acclimated to being on the bike again, I was fantasizing about what it would be like to ride on these streets without any vehicles."

This inspired moment came shortly before the Hartford Marathon, so Wolf quickly noticed the road closure signs

around the city.

"I thought, wouldn't it be cool to ride the marathon route while they were, like, setting up the banana and water stands? It would be in the pre-dawn hours, they would have all the streets shut down, we wouldn't be running into the runners because it would be too early, and then we could ride without worrying about getting hit by cars, which of course, now, is an intimate interest of mine," she says with a sly smile.

Not wanting to miss the opportunity, Wolf, along with two friends and her now-wife, Emily Petersen, arose early that marathon morning and rode their bikes along the route.

"It was thrilling. We would pass by the people setting up the water and banana stands and be like, 'Good morning!'" she says, throwing her hand up in joyous triumph.

As soon as their ride was over, Wolf began thinking about how she could help others feel that same joy. The group went out for Irish coffees following the ride, and Wolf immediately pulled out a pen and began writing her ideas on a napkin.

"I started writing down everything that was great about it and what stuck out about it, like how beautiful it was to watch the sunrise, and how much fun it was, and how secure we felt," she recalls.

Wolf brought the idea to the Hartford Marathon Foundation, calling the event Pedal to the Medal Hartford. She hoped it would get folks comfortable riding bikes for the first time, advocate for safer street design, and raise funds for BiCi Co., a Hartford-based bicycle shop that works to strengthen non-automotive travel throughout the city.

Intrigued by the idea, the Hartford Marathon Foundation board asked Wolf to start the ride a bit earlier, at 5 a.m. instead of 7 a.m., and to let them know how it went.

For that first experimental year,

Wolf put up fliers and invited people on Facebook. Unsure how many people would come, she printed out 42 release forms, an homage to The Hitch-Hiker's Guide to the Galaxy, and arrived for the event. When that morning came, so many people turned up, she ran out of forms.

She got the green light to make the event larger the following year, but needed to raise \$25,000 to do it, to help cover the cost of police security, EMTs, and insurance. She did, and the event was even better than she imagined. The event's 240 slots sold out four weeks prior to the ride.

Despite the ride's success, concerns over potential safety issues moved the event the following year off the marathon route to CTfastrak. While the event is paused due to the pandemic, Wolf is already thinking of new ideas for how Pedal to the Medal could continue to grow and change to still encourage bicycle use in the city. In total, the events have raised \$16,555 for BiCi Co.

Wolf's myriad experiences have culminated in her most ambitious project to date: Audacious.

"It's what I've been training for my whole life," Wolf says. "The standards that I think people have for my work, for anyone who's followed what I've done, are what I need to live up to."

Wolf describes the show as "topics that you didn't know you wanted to know more about, or questions that you didn't realize you wanted to ask about things that seem everyday."

Though the show is now successfully running with Connecticut Public, it hit some difficulties along the way. It initially was supposed to premier in April 2020. Then the pandemic hit, so the radio station pivoted and started "US in the Time of Coronavirus: A Living History with Chion Wolf."

"US in the Time of Coronavirus" became a nine-episode series that addressed how various people were handling the pandemic.



Wolf founded Pedal to the Medal, a pre-dawn bike ride that travels the route of the Hartford Marathon, raising money and awareness.

“I think that was a great way to get these personal stories on the air about what we were going through, about how people were dealing with a pandemic in so many different ways,” Talarski says. “It had little sprinkles of what Audacious would be, just those sorts of personal, emotional stories.”

After those nine episodes aired, Wolf went back to committing her time and energy to Audacious.

“She’s like a one-woman band. She’s doing everything ... she’s hosting, she’s producing, she edits her show together,” Talarski says. “It’s amazing to me to just watch her and how passionate she is about putting this show out every week. There’s a fire in her to do this and it’s exciting to watch.”

Wolf hopes the show encourages people to flex their “empathy muscles.”

In order to do that, Wolf is unafraid to ask potentially difficult questions. “I’m not a confrontational person, but I feel that I have a really healthy respect for curiosity. If I’m thinking about the question, then someone listening probably is too,” Wolf says. “It’s definitely a show that humanizes those who have been stereotyped.”

Shows so far have included interviews with women who had double mastectomies, parents who have children with life-threatening diseases, and people who have found photos of themselves turned into international memes. Wolf says the interviews she finds the most satisfying are with people whose ideas will not only challenge listeners but will challenge her.

One particular interview that deeply resonated with Wolf was with a woman who is a 99-year-old, transgender, World War II fighter pilot. After her husband died and she was denied his Social Security Administration benefits because she is transgender, she fought and won a case that changed the policies for other trans people moving forward.

“She told me, ‘It doesn’t matter. I’m not male, I’m not female, I’m a pilot,’” Wolf says of the woman. “There’s this tension of just wanting to be acknowledged for who you are, while at the same time, part of who you are is really important to point out, and I love that tension.”

That tension is one that Wolf experienced throughout her own life since coming out at the age of 16.

“I remember saying to my mom that it’s not everything about me,” she says. “And I also didn’t know, and still don’t have a label for me. I know I’m not straight. I know I’m not totally gay either. I don’t know what the name for it is.”

With that came the fear that her future accomplishments may be marred by a label of her sexual orientation, and she still sometimes feels that tension to this day.

“I do remember feeling worried that I would be Chion, the lesbian fill-in-the-blank,” she says. “But that tension is, inevitably, in all of us, recognizing that we are all so much more than this one thing, but this one thing is important, too.”

Wolf says she is grateful to live in a community wherein she does not feel as though her sexual orientation is the defining part of her life, and she feels free to continue thriving in her home in Hartford where she lives with her wife, Emily Petersen, whom she married in October 2020.

“I love calling her my wife. I’m still not over it,” she says, a grin sprawling across her face. “I have a feeling that calling her my wife will be novel for a long time, because I never thought I’d be able to get married. I never thought I’d be able to call someone my wife. I don’t mean partner, or someone you domestically live with, but wife. And I never thought anyone would call me their wife. So growing up with the expectation that it would be something else, if anything, to me is still hard for me to wrap my head around.”




“I love calling her my wife. I’m still not over it. I have a feeling that calling her my wife will be novel for a long time, because I never thought I’d be able to get married. I never thought I’d be able to call someone my wife.”

They share their home in Hartford’s Asylum Hill with two cats, a dog, and numerous chickens.

Petersen, a NICU nurse at Connecticut Children’s Hospital, says all aspects of Wolf’s life go into creating the best work that she can.

“Every part of her life is this ongoing thread of curiosity that she’s been able to make into something that I think has touched a lot of people, creating those spaces for storytelling to take place when other people might not make those channels of communication happen,” Petersen says. “She’s a special person.”

Looking forward, Wolf is excited and eager to continue her work with Audacious, and she’s confident to watch how it will continue to grow.

“Because I wholeheartedly put everything into this, and I clearly believe in its power as a show, there’s no doubt that it will continue to get bigger and bigger and braver and scarier,” she says. “And maybe, maybe, maybe, one of these days, I will be on live radio so I can bring everything that I’ve learned to light, and I can slay it.” 



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Creating Community

Campus LGBTQ centers adapt to continue helping students amid COVID

By MCKENZIE MORGAN

While walking to English class to take a midterm in March of 2020, then-sophomore Taylor (whose name has been changed to protect their identity) received an email from the dean of students instructing Central Connecticut State University students and staff to leave campus because a student had been exposed to the coronavirus.

As students and faculty rushed to get off campus, the campus' parking garages became backed up and then the campus was empty soon after, Taylor recounts.

"It was really weird," Taylor, now a junior psychology major and student worker at CCSU's LGBTQ Center, says. "It was just kind of like the apocalypse."

Like many other college students across the country, Taylor's college experience was shifted completely online, where the campus resources he relied on were now entirely virtual.

A HUMAN TOUCH IN AN ONLINE WORLD

As universities across the country shifted their classes online, so did their clubs and organizations that supported their most vulnerable students.

While the dramatic shift happened almost immediately, the centers that serve the universities' LGBTQ students were most concerned with keeping the community alive.

"The greater concern was the loss of community, because the community that they had established on campus really supported and nurtured them," says William Mann, CCSU history professor and coordinator of the university's LGBTQ Center in New Britain.

Once the university decided to shut its doors and move to virtual, the LGBTQ Center was one of the first organizations to shift programming to make sure it could still serve its students as efficiently as possible, says Mann.

"The goal was to keep the students connected so that they didn't feel isolated during this period of time," he adds.

It hasn't stopped the program from running at full speed. Since shifting to virtual programming, the center has organized several online-based events, from movie screenings to panels with guest speakers.

In New Haven, Southern Connecticut State University has seen its own set of challenges as its LGBTQ resource center also adapts to virtual life.

The Sexuality and Gender Equality Center, known as the SAGE Center, closed its doors on campus in March 2020 and immediately launched virtual programming and engagement efforts.

For Jenna Retort, coordinator of the SAGE Center and the university's assistant director for the Office of Student Conduct and Civic Responsibility, the hardest part has been

making sure the students are feeling connected.

"It's really hard in this environment and it doesn't seem like anybody has the best or the right answer," Retort says.

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, the SAGE Center offered a variety of services for students, including running the "Open Door Closet" (where students can obtain donated clothing and toiletries) and collaborating with the university food pantry. Since then, it has organized limited in-person events, and the center itself is open for students to visit and access the closet. The SAGE Center has also hosted events on Instagram Live, such as a virtual Welcome Week, movie streaming, and an Among Us "Gayme Night" in December.

Southern's Lavender Graduation, which honors graduating LGBTQ students and their achievements, virtually paid tribute to graduates in May 2020 by posting short biographies of each of them, along with positive messages written by faculty and administrators, on its website.

"It was kind of a quick turnaround and kind of thinking on our feet and offering our services and our programming in different ways," Retort says.

"As we continue to be in this pandemic, part of the focus is creating outreach spaces," says Diane Ariza, the university's vice president for diversity, equity, and inclusion.

To make sure that the students are staying connected with the center's staff quickly and safely, the SAGE Center added a live chat feature to its website.

"I think it is really important for students, and even for prospective students who might not be out, might be questioning their identity, and who [might need] a more private avenue to be able to explore what resources are available to them," Retort adds.

The University of Connecticut also transitioned to fully remote learning around this time and The Rainbow Center, the campus' LGBTQ center, immediately set out to be proactive.

UConn, which was voted the top LGBTQ+ friendly college in the state in 2020, has also shifted the Rainbow Center's programming online to make sure its students still have access to their community.

Aside from virtual movie screenings and game nights, the Rainbow Center also established virtual "coffee hours" where students can have more personal interactions outside of their classes.

"I think that's really important because

we needed to have times where it wasn't always just the next Zoom," says Kelsey O'Neil, director of the Rainbow Center. "You also need those little personal interactions."

When the state shut down schools and universities in March, Trinity College students were on their spring break as they heard the news that they were moving to remote learning, says Carrie Robinson, the former director of LGBTQ Life at Trinity College, now director of diversity and inclusion at the University of New Haven.

"It was really figuring out a new way of advocating for students and getting students to see [the Queer Resource Center] as a safe space and me as a safe person during this time," Robinson says.

Connecting to their students during a time of isolation with better programs has been a main priority for Trinity College and the LGBTQ Life Center, Robinson says.

"It's just been being more intentional with the type of the types of programs that we've got and focusing more on the quality of the program versus the quantity of

the programs," she adds.

Like its fellow universities, Trinity has hosted several events for its students online over Zoom, from a livestream of their annual Transgender Remembrance Day vigil to a "Friendsgiving" event on Thanksgiving which included a Grubhub gift card so students could virtually gather for dinner.

To make sure that students still have a safe space and connection with the university, even remotely, these universities have worked to ensure each student has access to the proper technology.

PEERS HELPING PEERS

Student workers play an important role in campus LGBTQ centers. They offer peer-to-peer relationships that students can't get with faculty members, and which allow for a different kind of connection, Mann says.

"Sometimes it is very empowering to talk with a peer," he adds.

UConn has a peer mentoring program called FAMILLEE where first-year and transfer students are matched with mentors to help them, O'Neil says.



Having student workers who can relate to their peers who use the centers helps make it a more comfortable environment, Taylor says. "I think it makes the environment even better because we understand each other. It makes it easier for us to communicate with each other."

Before the pandemic, CCSU held training and workshops about twice a month for campus faculty, staff, students and campus police, Mann says. The training courses offer instruction and education on allyship, intersectionality and racial justice, and various LGBTQ-specific issues.

Although they have since moved online, the training courses still remain a top priority for Mann and the center, he adds. And throughout the 2020 winter break, more than six other campus organizations reached out to the LGBT Center, asking for virtual training to make their spaces safe and inclusive for their students, Mann says.

From September through mid-February, the center has conducted more than 13

pieces of training for faculty, departments, and organizations across the university, according to Pat Bingham, university assistant for the LGBT Center and counselor education Master of Science student.

Trinity's LGBT Life Center also offers a "Safe Space" training course that educates the university's faculty and staff on current LGBTQ issues and allyship, and is currently working to move online so more people can be trained during the pandemic, Robinson says.

"This virtual world has amplified the need to move quicker on getting that online," she adds.

Even though the training and discussions are now held over platforms like Zoom and Webex, it hasn't impeded on the conversations that need to be had, Bingham says. "I feel like it's given a lot more people the ability to be comfortable asking questions that may be uncomfortable to have asked in person."

For students like Taylor, these training programs are significant in creating an

inclusive and accepting environment.

"It's just one way to help the students who are home in abusive and toxic environments find some sort of safe space with their professors and with the LGBT Center, which I think is a great way to help our faculty understand us more," Taylor says. "It just makes me feel really good knowing that I have people who are okay with me and are glad to be there to make me feel safe."

A SAFE SPACE FOR ALL

These LGBTQ resource centers have also adopted an understanding of intersectionality into their programming and training to better support every aspect of students' identities.

"We need to have an intersectional understanding of the LGBTQ experience because if we don't talk about things like institutionalized racism, ... implicit bias and implicit sexism, we are failing an awful lot of our students," Mann adds. "None

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of our students have only one identity and when we understand that they have multiple identities, we have to look at the different needs for each of those identities.”

Says Southern’s Ariza, “We understand the importance of intersectionality of sexuality, gender, race, ethnicity, religion, political, spectrum, disability – all of these come into play. We have to be more intentional about that.”

“We want our work to look at oppression across multiple identities,” O’Neil says. “We try and advocate for increasing education, access, retention, identity development, and community building for queer and trans spectrum communities.”

LOOKING TOWARD THE FUTURE

As the COVID-19 pandemic forced some LGBTQ students back to unsupportive homes, the risks of housing and food insecurity became major concerns

for the centers’ leaders. Even before the pandemic, LGBTQ youth were twice as likely to experience unstable housing than their peers; now they are at even greater risk, according to a 2020 report by The Trevor Project.

Mann also worries about university drop-out rates increasing among the LGBTQ community, as he’s watched several of his students leave the university since the pandemic started.

Taylor agrees. “Even as a student, I’m worried about these other students because, you know, they’re gonna be losing out on a great education that they could be getting,” Taylor says.

In an effort to combat this, center leaders are striving to make their spaces a home-over-Zoom for their students.

“The main thing is to provide a safe space for students, but also a nurturing space and a creative space,” Mann says.

“The safe space was at the college or the university, it often was not at home,”

Ariza adds.

While the resource centers are striving to keep their students engaged and connected, they still can’t beat the Zoom fatigue that most students are experiencing.

“I think folks are also feeling the fatigue of Zoom or virtual because you’re on all the time,” O’Neil says. “The answer is maybe we actually give people a break and listen to what our students need.”

Robinson at Trinity College hopes to get the students reconnected back to the LGBTQ+ Life’s center when in-person activities are allowed to fully resume, to help bring back that sense of home.

“We worked really hard over the past couple of years to get students to feel like they had a home in the center,” Robinson says. “So my hope is that when we come out of this pandemic and out of COVID, they still ... see this as a place and as a home for them.”

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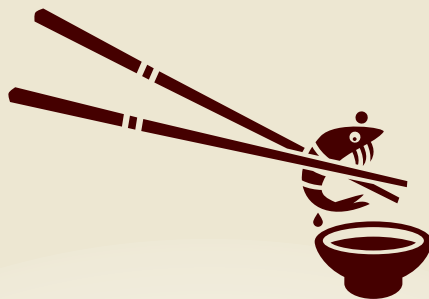


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FRESH TAKE: Your favorite garden vegetables, herbs, and protein can be used to create your own healthy and delicious variant of the traditional spring roll.



Spring Forward!

Celebrate the freshness of the season with DIY spring rolls

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

Spring is synonymous with freshness. The world slowly but surely reawakens from its long, cold winter with sunshine and fresh air and budding gardens, and you know what? So do people. As the late, great comedian Robin Williams once said, “Spring is nature’s way of saying ‘Let’s party!’” In fact, many cultures have always celebrated spring with a party, and as any reader of this column knows, the best part of a party is the food.

Fresh spring rolls are one such festive food. They originated in mainland China during the spring festival known as Chinese New Year. Filled with seasonal spring vegetables, spring rolls are a refreshing change from the preserved foods of winter, their fresh, clean flavors creating delightfully light warm-weather fare.

The rolls we are talking about here are neither fried nor baked. While ingredients can vary by region, and they go by many names, including summer rolls, or salad rolls, spring rolls typically consist of a filling of rice noodles, a cooked protein, raw vegetables, and fresh herbs, all rolled up in a rice paper wrapper, and served with a dipping sauce.

While they do take a little bit of practice to perfect, spring rolls are extremely adaptable, versatile, and forgiving. There is no one set list of ingredients. Once you’ve purchased the rice paper wrappers and noodles (try a local Asian market if

you can’t find them in the grocery store), you can use almost anything you have in your pantry or your fridge to fill them. For proteins, I like to use leftovers, usually cooked shrimp, shredded chicken, sliced pork, or tofu for a meat-free choice. One of these days, I’m going to make a version with the deliciously sweet meat found inside a lovely crab leg, maybe with a little bit of avocado!

Contrasting textures and flavors are key to creating a well-balanced spring roll. I love the scrumptious crunch you get from adding certain vegetables like shredded carrots and purple cabbage. Feeling lazy? Store-bought coleslaw mix is the hack for that. Julienne (cut into long thin slices) other veggies like cucumbers or green onions, or thinly sliced water chestnuts or radishes. Like it tangy? Try pickled vegetables. Don’t want to do any extra work? Try some bean sprouts.

Even more of that fresh flavor for which spring rolls are known comes from adding leafy herbs like Thai basil, cilantro, or mint. No matter what I put inside, I almost always dip my rolls in peanut sauce. In a pinch, a store-bought sweet-chili sauce also works well.

Let’s put tradition aside for just a quick moment and imagine a non-savory spring roll. For a sweet treat, make a fruit version! A few combinations that come to mind are berries and mint, coconut and mango, or citrus and basil. For these, you’d probably

like to leave out the noodles, although it's your party – roll how you want! Dip them in yogurt or, if you're feeling more decadent, try whipped cream.

Sweet or savory, made with the right ingredients, spring rolls are a healthy and flavorful appetizer, light meal, or snack. Their size makes them nicely portable, easy to eat on the go, and a great snack for kids. They can be adapted to suit most diets, too! For example, leave out the noodles for fewer carbs; vegetarian and vegan versions are easy to conjure up. Since the wrappers and noodles are made from rice, these are, by nature, gluten-free.

Once you've decided your individual ingredients list, it becomes less about the cooking and all about the prep work. Have your protein cooked, your rice noodles (if you're using them) soaked, your vegetables peeled and chopped, and your herbs rinsed and plucked. Put it all within reach, and then it's time for the assembly line.

You're going to make these one at a time, so feel free to mix it up. The ingredients in each roll can be different, if you like. If presentation matters to you, remember that whatever you put on the bottom is likely going to be what ends up being seen on top through the translucent wrapper.

Before assembling each roll, you'll want to make the wrapper pliable by giving it a 10-second soak in a shallow dish filled with warm water.

Spring rolls are best eaten right away – remember, these are all about freshness! However, if you need to store them, wrap each roll individually in plastic wrap. The plastic wrap ensures the wrapper won't dry out, and wrapping them individually prevents them from sticking together and tearing. Put the wrapped rolls in an airtight container in the fridge and consume within a couple of days.

So “spring” into action! Trying these DIY takeout spring rolls is a great way to usher in the spring season – one fresh, healthy, balanced bite at a time. 🍴

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

TRADITIONAL SHRIMP SPRING ROLLS (MAKES A DOZEN)

Ingredients:

- 1 package spring roll (rice paper) wrappers**
- 1 package rice vermicelli, prepared according to package directions (usually involves soaking them in warm water)**
- 24 medium-sized cooked shrimp (or as many pieces of cooked protein of your choice)**
- 1 cucumber, julienned**
- 1 package coleslaw salad mix (or 1 shredded carrot and ½ head purple cabbage, shredded, if you like extra work)**
- 12 leaves Thai basil**
- 12 leaves mint**

Method:

Dip the wrapper in a shallow bowl of warm water for about 10 seconds. Lay the soaked wrapper flat on a cutting board. In the center of the wrapper, place small quantities of the vegetables, 1 basil leaf, 1 mint leaf, 2 shrimp, and a pinch of vermicelli, taking care not to overstuff. Pick up the two sides of the wrapper and fold them over the fillings. Then pick up the edge closest to you and pull it tightly over the fillings. Continue to roll all the way up as if you were making a burrito, keeping everything snugly inside. Repeat the process until you have used up all your prepared ingredients.

Optional: Perfect Peanut Dipping Sauce (recipe below)





OPEN SESAME! Your taste buds will have you clamoring to dive into these chill, state-of-the-plate snacks.

MIXED BERRY AND MINT SPRING ROLLS (MAKES A DOZEN)

Ingredients:

- 1 package spring roll wrappers (rice paper)**
- 1 pint raspberries**
- 1 pint blackberries**
- 1 pint strawberries, sliced**
- 24 leaves fresh mint**
- Optional dipping sauce: a cup of yogurt or whipped cream**

Dip the wrapper in a shallow bowl of warm water for about 10 seconds. Lay the wrapper flat on a cutting board. In the center of the wrapper, place a couple of raspberries, blackberries, and strawberry slices, and top with two mint leaves. Pick up the two sides of the wrapper and fold them over the fillings. Then pick up the edge closest to you and pull it tightly over the fillings. Continue to roll all the way up as if you were making a burrito, keeping everything snugly inside. Repeat the process until you have used up all your berries.

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MY
WINTER
FAT IS
GONE.
NOW I
HAVE
SPRING
ROLLS!





PERFECT PEANUT DIPPING SAUCE

Ingredients:

- ¼ cup creamy peanut butter**
- 2 Tbsp. hoisin sauce**
- 2 tsp. soy sauce**
- 1 clove garlic, minced**
- 1 tsp. chili garlic sauce or Sriracha**
- 1-2 Tbsp. warm water**
- 1 Tbsp. crushed peanuts**

Whisk together the peanut butter, hoisin sauce, soy sauce, garlic, and chili garlic sauce in a medium bowl. Add warm water to desired sauce consistency. Garnish with crushed peanuts.

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"I think having an animal in your life makes you a better human."

—Rachael Ray



Dog Star Rescue Volunteer Eric Michaud and Buck

For The Love Of Buck

A couple's devotion expands to include a rescue pup

By RENEE DININO

This couple questions everything – including life, love, politics, and pets. Amid all the questioning, there is one answer that seems consistently clear:

all paths lead them to each other. I found myself absolutely fascinated by these two. They have such a different approach to everything, yet I am certain they've found the secret to living life with pure harmony and love.

Ben De Bari, 26, and Jason Cheung, 28, met at the University of Connecticut as undergraduate students. De Bari is a full-time graduate student at UConn and a PhD candidate in experimental psychology. He expects to complete his doctorate within the year. Cheung, a data analyst, works for the nonprofit Connecticut Data Collaborative, making

data accessible for all, and helps other nonprofits assess their programs and needs through data analysis. Oh, and he's also a grad student, pursuing his Master of Science degree in data analytics from Georgia Tech.

You might be wondering, where do intellectuals meet? Rock climbing, of course. In 2013, while at UConn, De Bari was studying cognitive science and Cheung was studying actuarial science. Cheung says he was, "never into sports or fitness," but at some point, friends suggested rock climbing and off they went!

"The best part of the culture of climbers is that there are very interactive people. All good vibes. We met, started chatting, and very organically our relationship grew!" Cheung recalls.

De Bari says they "fancied themselves hard-core rock climbers and went up to

four times a week."

Soon, they arranged their first date. Since both were undergrads at UConn, neither had a car, and who had time to go anywhere, with all of their studies? They borrowed a friend's car, headed to the Willimantic Food Co-op where they loaded up on bread, wine, and cheese. Then off they went to Horsebarn Hill on the UConn Storrs campus, sat on a blanket with all their snacks, and formed a bond. "It was beautiful," says Cheung.

He was a year ahead of De Bari, and they dated through all of their undergrad studies. When Cheung started a job in Boston, he would drive every weekend to spend time with De Bari. They survived a short break, a test, to be sure they were indeed meant for one another. Not a traditional break-up, but more of a study. While apart, their bond only grew stronger.



Buck with his foster brother, Pedro, at the door.

The adoption was far more emotional than they anticipated. Buck had been in foster for four months and no one could figure out why the poor pup wasn't getting noticed. Cheung and De Bari explain in unison, "He was waiting for us and we were waiting for him."

For Cheung, their time apart led to a defining moment. “I knew Ben was the right person after we had been apart for three or four months ... when we got back together, everything made sense.”

For De Bari, it was “the realization a good relationship would require work and Jason was worth it.”

ENTER BUCK.

They had talked about getting a dog for six years. De Bari had always grown up with dogs but there was a roadblock: the lease where they were previously staying didn't allow pets. They didn't give up. On a whim, they asked their landlord how strict that no-pet policy was, and to their surprise and sheer delight, he answered, “Oh, for you guys? You can totally get a dog!”

Having talked about getting a dog on a weekly basis, and feeling excited at the prospect of adopting, they went on a search.

Cheung's first experience with dogs was at De Bari's parents' house where he met the family dogs – Sam, a black Lab/Shepherd mix, and Jenna, a Springer Spaniel. Cheung knew in that moment that he and De Bari would definitely become pet parents.

As it happened, Dog Star Rescue in Bloomfield and other groups were holding adoption events. Cheung had seen a photo of Buck, a 3-year-old mixed breed, but thought he was adopted, so they went to look at other dogs at various adoption events, armed with questions, research and hope.

Cheung initially had his eye on another dog, but then fate stepped in. Somehow, they stumbled upon Buck and his foster and Dog Star Rescue volunteer Eric Michaud. They spoke to Michaud at great length about Buck, spent some time with him, and even had all of their roommates at the time meet the pup, to be sure this would be a good fit.

“I remember the day they met Buck like it was yesterday,” Michaud recalls. “They came to an event in East Hartford. I saw them come in with a notepad with questions. We spent over half an hour going over the list. When we were done, I told them, ‘Never mind your list. Buck is a rescue pup; things may be different once you get him.’ They said they were going to grab some food, and check out another pup in a different rescue. I recommended that they get an Italian combo at the restaurant across the way and adopt Buck. They left half of their grinders and came back in a rush to let me know they were adopting Buck – and the grinders were great!”

The adoption was far more emotional than they anticipated. Buck had been in foster for four months and no one could figure out why the poor pup wasn't getting noticed. Cheung and De Bari explain in unison, “He was waiting for us and we were waiting for him.”



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Ben De Bari (left), Jason Cheung (right) and Buck chat virtually with Renee DeNino.

There wasn't much information on his history, but De Bari and Cheung do know that Buck was a stray from Georgia before he was rescued. Despite the time he spent with Michaud in a loving foster home, Buck exhibited some behaviors that made the couple think he must have endured heartbreaking experiences as a stray. He had to learn to trust and was in independent survivor mode at first. He would guard his food and treats.

When he saw things like a flyswatter or even a curtain rod, he would retreat and shut down. Even now, when he meets someone new, there has to be an introduction and he has to feel safe.

De Bari thought, "Since I grew up with dogs, I thought I knew how to take care of a dog. I didn't."

Cheung soon signed them up for training classes and they learned how to bond with the newest member of their family.

The three musketeers are now all at place of commitment and trust that

is a powerful force in their lives. De Bari learned that having a dog is more of a relationship, "not like you see on TV, not Lassie." And while he and Cheung perhaps expected the perfect live-in companion, they learned he was perfect in his own way and through their commitment as one loving unit, they are all learning about love and trust, securing a bond like no other.

I asked the couple to sum up their relationship.


"I learn so much from Jason. I learn how to grow, and he makes me want to be a better person. We constantly want to grow and leave the world a better place. Making an impact on the community we live in is so important," says De Bari.

"Two things," says Cheung. "One, Ben is always striving to be better. He's always working on getting better at what he loves with his music, and after a decade of playing guitar, he fills the house with jazz. Two, I feel like we are a nontraditional and spontaneous

couple, we're both weird and we embrace each other's weirdness! I can be myself around Ben, no judgement."

Being an interracial gay couple with a big rescue dog, they feel they have no preconceived notions of what their relationship is supposed to look or feel like. It just is, and it's beautiful.

I was able to get an exclusive quote from Buck, whose trust I earned over Zoom: "This is how my life is supposed to be – safe with two loving dads, lots of attention, love, laps to snuggle on, and lots of chicken to eat. I am finally home."

Cheung and De Bari would truly like to thank Dog Star Rescue for letting them adopt Buck "and for the continued friendship and support of Buck's foster, Eric. We really appreciate how easy Eric made it to adopt our first dog, never letting us down or leaving us to fend for ourselves when we had questions." 



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

IN MEMORIAM //



Jerimarie Liesegang speaking at the Connecticut TransAdvocacy Coalition.

A LEGACY OF LEADERSHIP

**Transgender activist, anarchist, and revolutionary
Jerimarie Liesegang was a pioneer**

By **DAWN ENNIS**

The death of Jerimarie Liesegang in November 2020 was keenly felt across Connecticut's LGBTQ community. The 70-year-old Willimantic resident was well-known for her intersectional work over 25 years, fighting for and winning changes to state laws chief among her achievements.

Tributes poured in from the New Haven Pride Center; the Hartford Gay & Lesbian Health Collective, where she served on the board of directors; GLAAD; and other organizations across the nation. A queer anarchist group called attention to her powerful chapter in the 2008 book *Queering Anarchism* about "The Tyranny of the State and Trans Liberation," in which she proclaimed: "The fear of challenging the State as a non-operative trans person is a significant challenge and barrier to putting my beliefs into actions."

Liesegang repeatedly overcame those challenges and more on behalf of the state's transgender community and other marginalized groups.

"You modeled anti-racist allyship and literally put your body on the line, not just for trans justice, but for everyone facing injustice," writes Dru Levasseur, the director of diversity, equity, and inclusion at the National LGBT Bar Association. "Your political protests landed you in jail at times, terrifying for any trans person, but not you. I remember how you told me you didn't drink or eat before and during being locked up to lessen the abuse from prison guards."

"She was the first person to welcome me into this community with kindness," recalls Tony Ferraiolo, an author, inspirational speaker, life coach, and trainer from New Haven who knew Liesegang since 2004. Together with Levasseur, he co-founded The Jim Collins Foundation. Liesegang was with him every step of the way.

"I will always remember her kindness, and willingness to share her story, and help others understand transgender people a little better," out journalist Doug Stewart of FOX 61 says.

"One of the amazing things about Jerimarie was how she

juggled family, work, and activism,” says Frank O’Gorman of West Hartford, a gay Christian social justice activist. “She lived with her partner Anja, daughter Tasha and two cats. She worked at a high-powered job at the Hartford Insurance Co., with lots of long-term project management responsibilities.”

She told him that at her job interview, she was close to broke and desperate, and opted to remain seated upon hearing the traditional “We’ll let you know” line. “I really need this job,” Liesegang told the hiring manager, over and over. And she got the job.

“Somewhere in between family and work, she founded CTAC [the Connecticut TransAdvocacy Coalition], co-founded Queers Without Borders, planned lobbying strategy at the state capitol for TBLG rights, sent out political emails, and rallied for BLM, immigrant rights, people without housing, Chelsea Manning, and anyone struggling under oppression,” says O’Gorman. “Where did she manufacture the time to do all of this? One of life’s great mysteries!”

“She had an amicable personality yet would stick to her principles when the occasion demanded,” he adds. Both O’Gorman and her longtime friend Richard Nelson remember her extraordinary confidence. She stood up to bullies and big mouths, but was in fact a shy person, they say.

“She never really wanted a spotlight on her. She never really wanted all that,” Nelson says. “But she had to go to the state legislature. She had to organize with all of these different groups. She could hold her tongue and work with them and the legislature. She had to do it for the good of her community.”

Liesegang’s activism dates back to the 1990s. One of her greatest achievements was in 2008, when she went to the state capitol representing the Connecticut TransAdvocacy Coalition, which she co-founded and served as a board member of until her death. Liesegang spoke in support of changes to the state’s hate crime law: an amendment which added protections based on “gender identity or expression.”

“I lost most everything in my life,” she testified. “I have two wonderful adopted children [and] basically, I lost almost all visitation rights to them. My visitation rights were basically equivalent to that of a sexual predator. I lost my job. I lost my family. I was disowned by some of my family.”

Born on Long Island to a longshoreman father and a mother who was a nurse, Liesegang earned degrees from

Notre Dame and the University of Georgia in chemistry and a Ph.D. from Harvard, and her testimony reflected her education.

“Deciding to have an inground pool is a choice. Being transgender is not,” Liesegang told state lawmakers. “This legislation is not about ‘special rights’; it is about basic human rights!”

In 2011, Liesegang was instrumental in the adoption of the state law that expanded protection from discrimination to include gender identity and expression. “That was a shining moment for her, for sure. Her voice was so powerful, and her organizing was so powerful,” recalls Jennifer Levi, director of GLAD’s Transgender Rights Project. “She drew people to her, and to the work.”


For Linda Estabrook, executive director of the Hartford Gay & Lesbian Health Collective, the connection with Liesegang was both professional and personal. “Jerimarie was instrumental in the planning and implementation of the first ‘Transgender Lives: The Intersection of Health and Law Conference,’ – my final project towards my MPH. She was a friend and a mentor,” Estabrook says.

Liesegang’s work was not carried out just at the capitol or in the streets, but in writing and creating videos about LGBTQ history, even during chemo treatments for the cancer that left her gravely ill. “It is in a revolutionary’s blood to keep fighting, and fight she did,” blogged Nelson.

But with Liesegang’s health failing, Estabrook came up with the idea of producing a video tribute to Liesegang from all her friends, colleagues, and members of the community. Nelson and Anne Stanback, the founding executive director of Love Makes a Family – Connecticut’s marriage equality organization where Jerimarie served on the board of directors – stepped up to assist, as did Jennifer Levi and many LGBTQ community members and allies.

Among the many moving messages on the recording is one from Rev. Aaron Miller, transgender clergy, who is pastor of the Metropolitan Community Church of

Hartford. He made this promise to Liesegang: “To continue your good work until we have finally achieved justice and equality for transgender people, and for us all.”

Rest in Power, Jerimarie Liesegang. 



REST IN POWER, JERIMARIE LIESEGANG.



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