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EDITOR'S NOTE //



Happy Pride!

And there is so much to be proud of this year. We are particularly fortunate here in Connecticut because we continue to be one of the most accepting and welcoming states in the nation. At a time when in many parts of the country and in national discourse (if we can call it that), ignorance and bigotry seems to have a megaphone, actively challenging LGBTQ+ rights and many other civil rights, our state continues to set an example for others of what is possible when we create a place where everyone can live their authentic lives.

This issue celebrates that authenticity. We are beyond excited to see the number of communities that have implemented their own Pride celebrations. It sends a clear message that Pride is in our own backyards—and that there are dedicated people working tirelessly all year long to ensure that happens. We are encouraged to hear how whole communities have embraced their LGBTQ+ members, and we encourage you to turn out for your local events this year. Our calendar is complete as of press time, and we'll continue to update events online.

We are also fortunate to have such strong allies as Governor Lamont who contributed our Final Word, stressing his commitment to equal protection for all.

Our cover story about UCONN basketball great, and former Olympian and pro Sue Bird talks about her journey to living authentically as an out member of the LGBTQ+ community. Staying on the boards, we also talk to Stephanie White, the new coach of The Sun. We think you'll find both these women incredibly inspiring.

We also cover the importance of local engagement to ensure that our rights are protected and that we all can take actions to support our allies and advocates. We spoke with Colin Hosten of The Leonard Litz Foundation about the importance of local action, and former chair of Lambda Legal, and Bridgeport-based attorney John Strafstrom talks about the ongoing importance of privacy rights.

And love continues to win. Dawn Ennis writes about trans joy—heartwarming stories of individuals who have found their authenticity as something that has transformed their lives for the good. Our regular contributor Jane Latus writes an inspiring story about her personal journey—and delight—as her husband became her wife. Frank Rizzo looks at a marvelous documentary about men loving men for a century or more. And just for fun, he gives us his take on Season 15 of *RuPaul's Drag Race*. Brian Scott Lipton talked with Chasten Buttiegieg about his book and encouraging young people to find their communities and live their truths—and what it takes to do that.

Plus, there's much more from Chion Wolf, Kim Adamski, and Meghan Crutchley.

We're thrilled to bring you so much that's positive, so much that's good in Connecticut, particularly at this time of year. Enjoy this issue, and enjoy your Pride celebrations.

Chris

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“YOU LOOK RIDICULOUS IF YOU DANCE.
YOU LOOK RIDICULOUS IF YOU DON'T DANCE.
SO YOU MIGHT AS WELL DANCE.”

— *Gertrude Stein*

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CONTRIBUTORS //



FRANK RIZZO

Frank Rizzo covered a new documentary (page 43) and spills the tea on *Drag Race* (page 84). He 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.



BRIAN SCOTT LIPTON

Brian Scott Lipton talked with Chasten Buttigieg (page 14) and did our piece on sustainable fashion (page 33). He has been a nationally renowned journalist for over 30 years. He has been Editor in Chief of TheaterMania.com and Resident Publications, Managing Editor of men's fashion magazines DNR and MR, and his byline has appeared in *Forbes* and *The Wall Street Journal*.



DAWN ENNIS

Dawn Ennis dedicated the last few months to finding trans joy (page 46). She is an award-winning journalist, a professor at University of Hartford, and writes for several news outlets. Ennis was America's first transgender journalist in a TV network newsroom when she came out nine years ago. Follow her @lifeafterdawn on Twitter, Facebook and Instagram. Ennis and her family reside in West Hartford, Connecticut.



KIM ADAMSKI

Kim Adamski contributes our frank column on sexual health. She is a sex educator in Hartford, Connecticut. She currently works at the Hartford Gay and Lesbian Health Collective. Kim loves answering the questions people are afraid to ask, and that's what motivated her to go into sex education. If you have questions about sex, contact her at adamski.kimberly@gmail.com.



CHION WOLF

Chion is the host of *Audacious* on Connecticut Public Radio. A two-time recipient of the Gracie Award, from the Alliance for Women in Media Foundation, she received The Advocate's Champions of Pride 2021 as an "unsung" LGBTQ+ hero. She has produced storytelling events in Connecticut and is on the board of Night Fall, Inc, an annual performance event. Chion is also a certified judge with the International Chili Society.



ALEX ACQUARULO

Alex Acquarulo grew up in North Haven and is the owner of CT FoodGirly, LLC, a social media marketing platform that discovers and showcases Connecticut's best restaurants. You can follow her via Instagram (@ctfoodgirly), Facebook (CTFoodGirly) and her website, www.ctfoodgirly.com. To learn more about Ashley Amendola and Coven Catery, visit covencatery.com.



JANE LATUS

Jane Latus covers health and politics. She covers Middlesex Health (page 72) and compiled our Pride calendar (page 59). She also tells her very personal story about her husband's transition (page 16). She is a writer and personal trainer living in Canton. She and her wife live in Canton with an escalating number of cats. They have three grown children: two sons (one trans and one gay) and a foster daughter.



MICHELLE CUTRALI

Michelle Cutrali has been a Financial Advisor for more than 20 years and has earned a Certification in Long-Term Care Planning. Her business, Cutrali Insurance and Financial Services, is geared towards helping LGBTQ+ folks with investments, insurance and retirement planning. Her specialty in long-term care & life insurance helps to shed more color on subjects that our community needs to start planning for.



TOM CIUBA

Tom profiled Mental Health Connecticut (page 89). He serves as vice president of communications for a global transportation provider, has previously worked in consumer public relations and nonprofit, and dabbles in podcasting and filmmaking. Tom has called Connecticut home for 15 years.

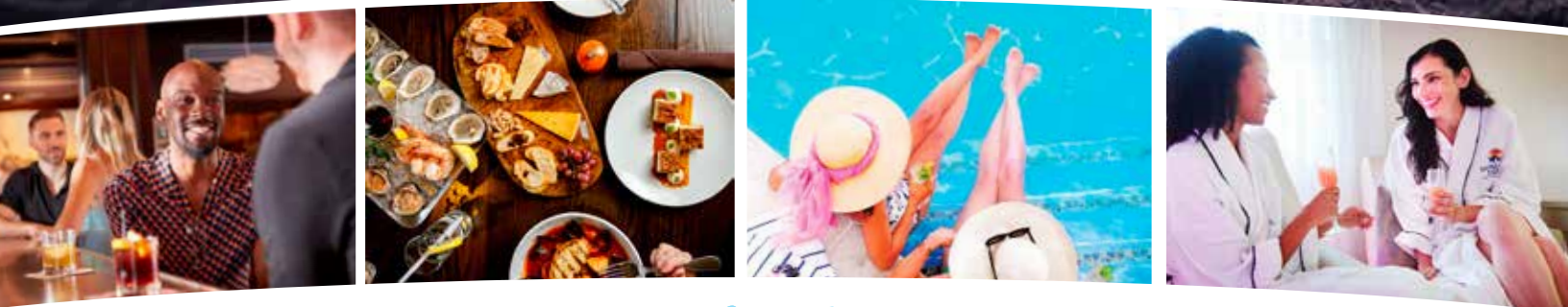


MEGHAN CRUTCHLEY

Meghan is the founder of the consulting company Habitqueer, and is committed to helping LGBTQ+ individuals lead rich, authentic, and fulfilling lives. In her column, she outlines healthy life changes (page 30) that you can really stick to.



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The Audacious Voice

Our contributor Chion Wolf continues her wide-ranging columns on, well, all kinds of topics. Chion puts the human in human interest and manages to find great stories that are sure to amuse—and touch—you.

You can see the full columns on CTVoice.com, but here are the topics, she's been talking about since our last issue:

Cuddling Parties—Yes, they are apparently a thing. In a world where people are disconnected and lonely, can a “professional cuddlist” be the solution? Chion talks about her childhood connections and awakening to her feelings as well as a crush on her fourth-grade teacher. It's highly likely that everyone has experienced something like that during their school years, and Chion writes about it with a lot of great heart.

However, as an adult, coming


out of a divorce, she suddenly found herself going to a cuddling party. She attended with a very reasonable mix of anticipation, questions, and wondering what the heck this was in the first place. How did it turn out? Click over the to the site and see, but let's just say that it was a catalyst to deeper reflection and wondering.

Being a Producer—No, it's not a revival of a hit Broadway musical. Chion takes us backstage at what her radio show *Audacious*,

and talks about what it takes to get the thing produced. True to Chion, however, the story is always more than the story. She talks about her life and her background and the importance of working with—and respecting—colleagues and how subtle things like the specific choices of words can affect relationships, both personal and working relationships. The underlying question Chion's experience poses for all of us is: how do we want to be with the people we work with?

Down in the Dungeon—No one was as surprised as Chion when she did a two-part series on dom/sub, BDSM relationships. Her interest piqued, Chion talked to the doms and to the subs and explored a broad range of human sexual expression.

From games to kinks to roles and descriptive names, Chion had some fairly honest conversations. And perhaps, or perhaps not, you'll be surprised to learn that what many people think of as kinky is more common than one would think. Perhaps you're not hiding online. Perhaps you're attending a party. At the end of the day, though, Chion has a typically clear-eyed assessment of all of this: sex is about connection and communication...and we don't talk about it enough.

Read all of these complete stories online, and tune in to hear much more on Connecticut Public Radio Saturdays at 10 AM and Wednesdays at 11 PM, or stream the podcast any time. 



Host of the *Audacious* radio show and podcast on Connecticut Public Radio, Chion Wolf.
Photo by **Keith Claytor**

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Chasten Buttigieg Has Something to Tell Us

For the past four years, Chasten Buttigieg—husband of former presidential candidate and current U.S. Secretary of Transportation Pete Buttigieg (featured in our last issue)—has proven to be one of the LGBTQ's community most inspiring advocates, tackling some of the toughest issues facing our country, while also being a teacher, spouse, and father of twins.

This summer, Simon & Schuster is releasing a newly revised edition of his best-selling memoir, *I Have Something to Tell You*, aimed specifically at young adults. In it, he honestly—sometimes painfully—describes his struggles of coming to terms with his sexual identity while in a small, conservative Michigan town. His stories prove to be relatable to many people (LGBTQ+ and otherwise) of all ages.

Buttigieg recently spoke to *Connecticut Voice* about the book—and an upcoming book tour (which will stop in Connecticut)—as well as the importance of teachers, the dangers of social media, and the reasons we still need to celebrate Pride in an increasingly dangerous society.

CV: I think this book will inspire anyone of any age who feels like a fish out of water and is trying to discover their own path to self-acceptance. How important was it to you to convey that message.

CB: That was the goal from the start; I wrote this version

for LGBTQ youth who are questioning whether they fit in, as I did. I wanted to hand my story down, not just for that reason, but because it also emphasizes that if anyone fights for us or shows up for us, it can help any of us find where we do fit in! I truly wish I could have handed this book to my eighth-grade self.

CV: You talk in the book about the importance of self-advocacy in seeking acceptance and representation as a teenager. But as recently proven, self-advocacy also remains important to adults, including you and your husband. What should we all be doing about sticking up for ourselves?

CV: We often get tied up in the issue of what's right and what's wrong, but just because someone says or does something bigoted or homophobic, the law and justice don't always see it that way. So doing the right thing, which includes speaking up, is so important even though some people will get away with doing the wrong thing. I also believe in something bigger than myself. When I speak up, I am also advocating for the health and safety of my husband, my kids, and my community. And that can be especially hard when dealing with people who offer nothing but hatred. Those people think we are weak, but many members of the LGBTQ community are among the strongest people I've ever met.

CV: What about having other people stick up for us? Do we need that?

CB: I hope that parents and teachers see they are being called on more than ever for their roles as allies. Teachers not only don't get enough pay or respect, but they are on the frontlines of so many different things, from balancing lockdown drills to dealing with book bans; you understand why people are stepping away from the profession. The teachers who stay are among the most dedicated people on the planet.

CV: You advocate for finding your own "people," which can be very hard for anyone of any age in the LGBTQ+ community. Do you have specific advice on how to do that?

CB: I agree there's a bit of bravery at any age in making friends. I do want teens to know that school makes it easier to find your tribe, but you have to stick your neck out, put in the effort, and, yes, do it where it is comfortable for you. You also have to remember your immediate surroundings aren't your permanent surroundings. You don't know where you might end up or who might find you five or 10 years from now.

CV: You seem very attuned to the dangers of social media, especially for younger people. Do you think all of us need to spend less time on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram?



CB: I think social media can help LGBTQ people—especially teens—find community where it does not exist or if someone believes they are the only person who thinks or acts like them. But the thing that worries me about social media, especially Twitter, is so many people assume the people on it are talking for the entire school cafeteria, when they are just one table. It's a very small group of people partaking in a large conversation, and whatever they say is not the entire national narrative. And yet, too often, they get to sway the popular opinion. So, it doesn't have to be abandoned, it just needs to be given the appropriate weight.

CV: I think many of us are a little concerned about celebrating Pride Month, not for fear of being outed, but fear of "retribution". How do we navigate the current state of homophobia in this country with our belief in Pride?

CB: I love this quote by Eleanor Roosevelt: "No one can make you feel inferior without your permission." Of course, it's important to



Chasten Buttigieg, author, and husband of US Secretary of Transportation Pete Buttigieg.

protect yourself —both your heart and your safety. On the other hand, being yourself boldly in public is an act of bravery and rebellion, and in doing so, you're making a statement that your personal joy is celebrating you. The goal of these haters is to make us go back quietly into the closet. It's a scary time now because they want to make it a scary time. Our fear is what they want from us. I refuse to give it to them.

CV: Your book tour includes a stop in Connecticut (June 16 at the Ridgefield Playhouse with Harvey Fierstein and Richie Jackson). But you're also

“No one can make you feel inferior without your permission.”


—Eleanor Roosevelt

going to the “red” states. Are you looking forward to meeting this cross-section of America?

CB: Hopefully, the book

tour is different than the presidential campaign, but one of my favorite parts of that adventure was meeting so many different members of the LGBTQ

community. I don't know what conversations I will have in Texas, Utah, Florida, but I want anyone who shows up to know I won't turn away from the hard conversations. Honestly, I would do this tour for a month or two, but free time is scarce, and I have to go home and help take care of our twins.

For more information on the Ridgefield Playhouse event, visit: <https://ridgefieldplayhouse.org/event/i-have-something-to-tell-you-chasten-buttigieg-in-conversation-with-harvey-fierstein-richie-jackson/> 

—Brian Scott Lipton

Now We're Wives

What's new? How's the family? What's everyone up to? You know, the usual way conversations start? Well, they don't often head in the direction mine do these days.

I haven't found a better way to say it, since I first put it this way in an email to the family in December. And geez have I had practice. I've said it over and over, when I've run into friends, talked with colleagues, gone to the dentist, explained to the mail carrier... so I'll put it the same way again:

My husband of 40 years is now my wife. And we are both very happy about it. My first thought when she told me she'd decided to transition was mild, fleeting exasperation: dammit, I'd have to exchange those L.L. Bean men's slippers before Christmas.

Since then, I've learned that lots of people are surprised by my reaction. Which surprises me—though I know it shouldn't. I personally know people whose marriages ended because one came out as trans, and I know of others. I also know that most people don't even know a trans person, let alone be able to imagine loving one.

I've loved my wife since my lucky eyes first landed on her during our first year in college. We married a week after we graduated. We had a baby who's now a 33-year-old trans man. We had another, now a 30-year-old gay man. We took in a foster daughter, who married and had two kids of her own. There's been a whole lotta love.

Whatever life lobbed at us, the constant has been knowing that I always have



CT Voice contributor Jane Latus shares her personal journey with wife Kendra Rose.

my partner's immediate, full, inexhaustible, and unwavering love, support and attention. That hasn't changed. The way her eyes crinkle when she smiles at me—that hasn't changed. The comfortable feeling when I know she's in the house, even if I can't see her. That hasn't changed. Other than the fact that transitioning is a huge deal for her (Believe it when people say they're trans; they wouldn't transition if it weren't necessary for survival.), and her deals are also my deals, for me this is a non-issue.

That doesn't mean my stomach wasn't all a-flutter the first day she left the house wearing hair. "Be kind to her out there," I told the world as she went down the

driveway. Her experiences out in the world so far, mainly venturing out as a woman, going through the process of changing her name and gender IDs, and the near-daily need to come out over and over, have been a reminder that our simple, lifelong love isn't really so simple in some eyes.

Fortunately, reactions have been mainly supportive, although not without some shock and confusion.


Some first reactions: "Are you going to separate?"—a friend.

"Do you have sex?"—my psychiatrist.

"Does this mean Grandma Jane's a lesbian?"—our deep-

thinking grandson, 9, whose mother replied, "I don't know."

Wonderfully, my nephew Tom's reaction was a typical one from the family. He wrote, "I feel great pride and happiness for my Aunt Kendra, and truly admire the love that you and your family have for her and for each other."

Despite my family's embrace of our trans son, Kendra still asked me to be the one to break her news. She thought they'd want an assurance directly from me that I am good with this. If you don't know anyone who is trans, or who came out later in life, that letter might help you to understand. 

—Jane Latus

Hi Family,

I'll get right to the point: my husband of 40 years is now my wife. And we are both very happy about it.

The baby born on March 29, 1960, who the doctor said was a boy, and whose mother named Kenneth, has always had a sense of being at least partly female. That feeling grew and persisted over the years. This year, that feeling insisted, I am female, and I'm no longer going to hide it.

We are so very lucky and grateful that you are our family. When Elliott came out, you all supported him and loved him just as much, maybe even more. We know it may be a little more surprising to see someone come out as transgender at age 62 (though believe me, it's common—people put their families first throughout their lives, and suppress their personal needs).

To briefly explain, gender identity (our personal sense of what our gender is) is not a choice. It's a fact. It just is. For some people, it isn't set in stone. It can change over a lifetime. For some it even changes day to day—that's why some people call themselves gender fluid. For some, it's never male or female, so they are nonbinary.

On the other hand, gender expression is how you present yourself to the world. For most trans people, gender expression is also not a choice—it's an absolute necessity. There are lots of ways trans people choose to make that transition into presenting as their true gender. Here's what my wife (I'm gonna' get a kick out of saying that, for a long time.) is planning.

She's going to change her name to Kendra Rose. Since she is a woman, she asks that everyone refer to her as "she" or "her". I am, a few times a day, still catching myself as I start to call "Hey, mister!" to her. She will not be offended by all the "he's" and "Kens" that you call her—it's going to take repetition before we get used to the new name. She'll be happy that you're trying.

She's going to have hair! That will be the biggest change for me, to be honest.

She'll soon begin medical transitioning, beginning with hormone replacement therapy.

If you want to learn more about how to be supportive, you can educate yourself about what it means to be trans. You can also be supportive by being aware of the way politicians in many states are literally persecuting and endangering the lives of transgender people and their families.

Also, if there's anything you're unsure of or want to ask us, ask us. It's good to know you care enough to ask.

I love Kendra more than ever, and it matters not one bit to me whether I have a husband or wife as long as it's this one. Hilary put it well. When Kendra came out to her she said, "Our bodies are just vessels for our souls."

Jane

On With the Show: Summer Reading Edition

If your idea of a relaxing summer activity is kicking back with a book, or idly leafing through pages and looking at pictures, we've got you some ideas for you. Particularly, if you love the inside story on show business and the theater, for summer 2023, we've got you covered. (Pun intended.)

Check out these titles, and get ready to be entertained. When it comes to books, you might say that this is your summer stock...up.

The American Theatre 1962-2002 as Seen by Hirschfeld Brilliant Printing \$60

Anyone who loves theatre knows the work of iconic caricaturist Al Hirschfeld. Over a 75-year career, he captured the plays and the people of Broadway in his instantly recognizable works,

not to mention an obsession with looking for "Ninas." (Hirschfeld hid the name of his new daughter in the lines of one of his drawings as a joke, and it became a trademark with the number

following his signature indicating how many were in each drawing.) This gorgeous book, which follows the second half of the artist's career includes more than 300 drawings

from last sixty years, including productions such as *Hello Dolly!*, *Fiddler on the Roof*, *Funny Girl*, *Cabaret*, *Annie*, *Sweeney Todd*, *Les Misérables*, *Fences*, *Phantom of the Opera*, *Chicago*, *Rent*, *Angels in America*, and *Hairspray*. and portraits including Stephen Sondheim, Neil Simon, Edward Albee, Wendy Wasserstein, Tom Stoppard, and Hal Prince. Leave this book out for your guests to find—and they'll happily entertain themselves for hours.

Sex, Drugs and Pilot Season: Confessions of a Casting Director By Joel Thurm Bear Manor Media \$32

We've spent the last weeks mopping up all the tea that's been spilled by noted casting agent Joel Thurm in his highly readable, delightfully



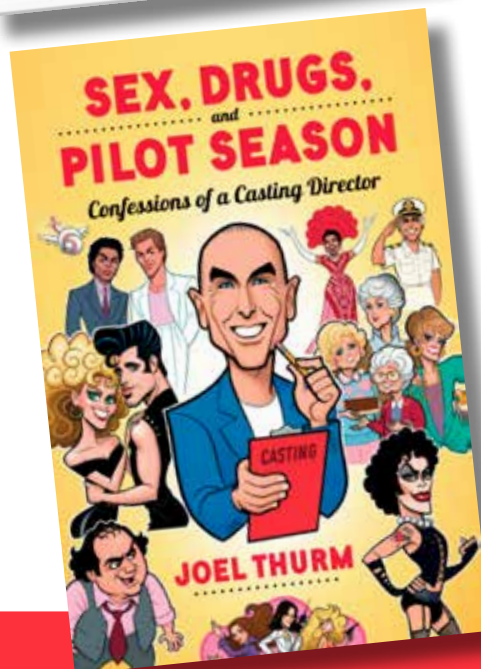
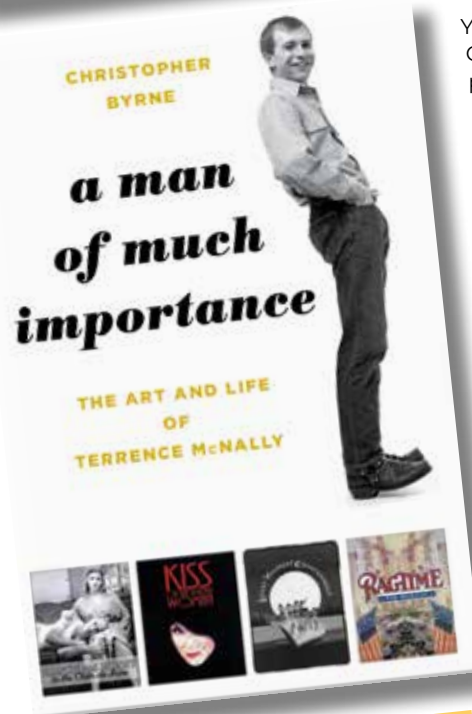
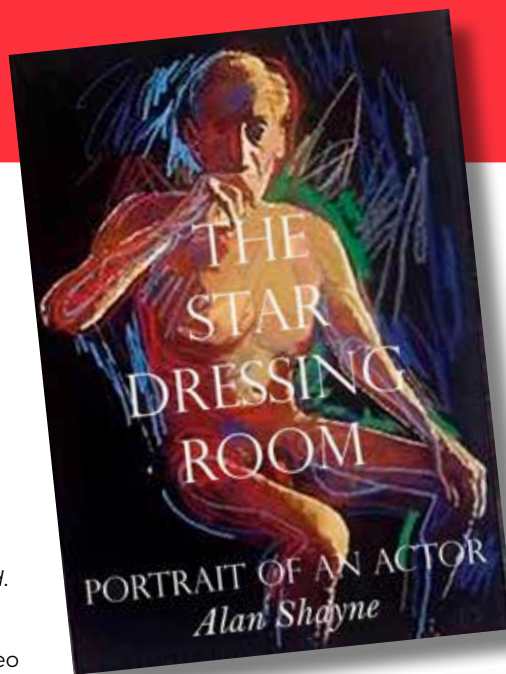
dishy book about the ins and outs of Broadway and Hollywood. Thurm was instrumental in starting the careers of Tom Cruise, Ted Danson, Madonna, and many more. Thurm's breezy writing, and great stories include inside looks at the "sausage-making" process of *The Golden Girls* and *Seinfeld*. We particularly loved how he convinced Broadway legend Ethel Merman to take a cameo role in the movie *Airplane*, and that's just for starters.

Thurm was also openly gay in a business when at the time career survival depended on staying deep in the closet. He was the first to bring his partner to industry events. Though he has a gimlet-eyed view of all the goings on, Thurm is a humble storyteller, and like the best casting directors and producers knows how to make the stars shine.

The Star Dressing Room: Portrait of an Actor
By Alan Shayne
Rand-Smith \$32.00

At age 97, actor/executive Alan Shayne has written a wonderful theatre memoir. He starts out as a struggling actor—as so many do. Although financially struggling, he tried his best...only to be upstaged by no less than Marlon Brando in early acting classes. For fans of theater from the 1940s and 1950s—a kind of golden age—the stories about Gertrude Lawrence, Katharine Cornell, Maureen Stapleton, Greta Garbo, Lotte Lenya, and Elaine Stritch are engaging and border on the kind of show biz gossip this type of book is noted for. The title comes from an anecdote about one night when he went on for Ricardo Montalban opposite Lena Horne in *Jamaica*...and got the star dressing room.

Shayne, however, has a deeply personal approach. He writes feelingly about his search for love and wanting one person to love, struggles with his bisexuality, even a marriage of convenience (as they were



called at the time) until finally coming out as gay. In later life, he became a casting director and president of Warner Bros. Television, racking up Emmy Awards and writing books with his partner Norman Sunshine.

This is a wonderful look into a bygone era, and a top pick for a summer read.

A Man of Much Importance: The Live and Art of Terrence McNally
By Christopher Byrne
Applause \$34.99

Yes, this was written by the same Christopher Byrne who edits this publication. Over many years of knowing and interviewing Terrence, in 2015, he was talking to him, and Terrence said he had decided not to write an autobiography. Chris said, "Can I write the book?" And Terrence said, "sure."

The book is based on lengthy conversations with Terrence prior to his death in 2020, as well as interviews with such boldface names as Nathan Lane, Christine Baranski, Patti LuPone, Audra McDonald, and many others onstage and behind the scenes, many of whom credit their careers to their early (and often ongoing) work with Terrence.

It's also the story of a gay man who was never able to be in the closet. First, Terrence abhorred denying an essential part of himself, and since his first play *And Things that Go Bump in the Night* featured a gay character, he felt he never had the choice.

Throughout his life, Terrence wrote fearlessly, fought for his beliefs, broke barriers, and became one of the most important playwrights of the second half of the 20th century. The doors Terrence opened and the legacy he created changed the theater forever. 🍷

You can find these books on Amazon, and some discounts are available.

Helping the Sun Shine: Stephanie White Joins the Team as Coach

As she takes on the challenges of being head coach for the Connecticut Sun, Stephanie White is excited about the season, the team, Connecticut and the drive to win championships. A star player for Purdue during her college years, she was named the top female basketball player in the U.S. She previously coached in the WNBA for the Indiana Fever and at Vanderbilt and is known to basketball fans for her great analysis of college hoops on ESPN. She officially hit the boards in April.

White joins an increasing number of out-and-proud people in sports and women in the WNBA. *Outsports* reports that more than 20 percent of players and several coaches are LGBTQ+, the highest percentage of any professional sports league. The publication defines out as individuals either explicitly stating that they are LGBTQ+ or living publicly as such. Moreover, the WNBA continues to lead in diversity and inclusion in all areas according to reporting in ESPN. White is a leader in this area, but she's also dedicated to being great on the courts.

Asked what excited her about coaching, she said, "just about everything. I love competition. I love strategy. I love studying the game. I love being in a gym. And, you know, it's funny because the things that I miss not being in a gym, little things like the ball bouncing and sneaker squeaking and, practice planning... Just, all of those things.



Connecticut Sun's new head coach Stephanie White.

"It's much less about, about wins and losses, and it's about competitiveness and helping put people in positions to be successful, in relationships that you build with players and staff and community and, and quite honestly, being a part of,

of something bigger than yourself. When I was just working in television, I didn't have that, and I miss that."

White's lifelong love of basketball began when she was a kid, but there weren't many young girls playing at

the time, so she had to play with the boys—who weren't always keen on letting her play. White, though, says that the experience made her tougher, adding, "I had to earn my stripes." When she was ten, some of her dad's friends who played at the local gym allowed her to join them, and they didn't take it easy on her, but White says that's how she learned the game. "It's not just skills like dribbling and passing and shooting. It's little things like how to come off screens and pass ahead, different defensive angles, shot fakes. These guys weren't going to take it easy on me, and all the little things that it takes to be a really good basketball player, I learned playing with those guys."

White sees her role as a coach largely as putting her players in a position to be successful. "Every day you're responsible for bringing your best," she says. She adds that her job is to strategize what's going to make the team the best on the floor and continue building relationships—one area that White has felt was one of her strengths.

White sees herself as a "straight, two-way communicator," and that success means managing many different voices and perspectives to build a team. "At the end of the day, I'm the one who makes the decision—good, bad, or ugly—and I don't have a problem doing that.

"One of the biggest things with professional athletes is you've got to be honest and





“One of the biggest things with professional athletes is you’ve got to be honest and shoot straight. As a player, I always wanted to know where I stood. I’m always going to have your back, but I’m always going to push you to be the best you can be—and create the best team we can be.”

Connecticut Sun will play 40 games this season with 20 of them at Mohegan Sun Arena. Photo courtesy of Mohegan Sun.

shoot straight. As a player, I always wanted to know where I stood. I’m always going to have your back, but I’m always going to push you to be the best you can be—and create the best team we can be.”

It’s the same approach White takes to her role as a mom. In addition to coaching, with her partner in a blended family, White is mom to four boys (twins age 11, and a 9-year-old and a 10-year-old stepson) and she says that her decision to come to the Sun was made as a family. The only concern of one of her sons was that White could still


coach his YMCA team. With that settled, everyone was on board. Still, White says it may be tough to miss some of the daily activities, during the school year, and it will be new for everyone, but the family plans to be in Connecticut during the summers.

White is as nurturing with her family as she is with her team, helping her kids find their passions and know that they have to work for what they want. “I think so often young people see athletes or actors, or people they admire, and they think they just ‘got there,’” she says, laughing. “They don’t

see the daily work, structure, and habits it takes to get there.” White says one of her roles as a parent is to model that—whether it’s schoolwork, sports, or even playing Monopoly.

Knowing that Connecticut can be, well, a little intense about its basketball, White is ready. “I think one of the things that makes Connecticut really special is that the community love basketball, and a lot of the credit goes to Geno Auriemma and what he’s done at UCONN and how he’s impacted the community.

“That’s a blessing and a curse sometimes when the expectation is always to win championships. But it’s also what you want as a player—and those are the hopes, too. And that for me—for us—is being a part of something that’s really exciting.”

The Sun’s 2023 season kicked off in May, appropriately enough against White’s old team the Indiana Fever. They’ll play 40 games this season, with 20 of them at Mohegan Sun Arena. For more information and tickets, visit connecticutsun.com. 

—Christopher Byrne

A Life of Activism:

John F. Strafstrom, Jr. a lawyer with Pullman & Comley a Bridgeport-based law firm, has won many accolades for his work over the years. Moreover, he's made significant contributions to supporting LGBTQ+ communities through nine years on the board of Lambda Legal, the last two as chair of the national board of directors. When he stepped down last fall, he was honored at a Connecticut Cares event that raised more than \$400,000 for Lambda Legal's ongoing work.

As he looks at the legal landscape today, two of the key issues he sees affecting LGBTQ+ communities are the attempt to limit privacy rights and limit expression in violation of the First Amendment.

Particularly in a climate where nearly 300 anti-LGBTQ+ bills have been introduced in state legislatures, with the vast majority coming in 2022 according to GLAAD; these are attempts to regulate everything from access to healthcare to public performances with potentially life-threatening impacts.

During his tenure as board chair, Strafstrom oversaw a revamping of Lambda Legal to better position the organization to address the inevitable legal challenges these bills will face. Asked how people should respond to the current situation, he said, "I think people need to be vigilant. I think people



Pullman & Comley Attorney,
John F. Strafstrom, Jr.

need to be vigilant that this can happen anywhere. Connecticut is blessed. We have about as much rights as anybody's state can have. I think we're even ahead of California. We've had very progressive leadership in this state."

Even with vigilance, he adds, some of these bills will get through, and they will need to be challenged. Supporting local organizations—and national ones like Lambda Legal—help make these organizations more effective.

Strafstrom notes that what is happening at the legislative level is a "red herring." In other words, saying that anti-drag and anti-trans bills are designed around the concept of "protecting our children." However, he says, "they're cloaked that way, but what they're doing in many states are the exact opposite of what they're talking about.

"These folks who are supposed to be for parental rights are taking away the rights of a trans parent to decide how their kids should be raised and what they should do. It all goes back to the right of privacy, which was obviously recognized by the Supreme Court in *Roe v. Wade* and *Griswold v. Connecticut*, which was a birth control case. And, if you notice, we're actually fighting the battle over birth control pills now, too, which is unbelievable."

Strafstrom adds that the long-term risks of these kinds of bills go beyond taking away rights from families, children, and the trans community. He says, "we're also tearing at the fabric of society, in my view. Just because your neighbor is different, that doesn't mean they're bad. I have to say a lot of these bills are just intrinsically evil. They really are. They are aimed at driving a wedge between communities and between people. How does it affect a neighbor if parents are making the right decision for their trans child? How does it affect the other kids in school, other than perhaps sending another happy child to school as opposed to an unhappy child to school.


"I have to say it's intrinsically, evil. I don't think we ever thought we'd be fighting the *Roe v. Wade* fight 50 years later. Right? But what I say to the gay community, is wake up folks because you know what, we all went to sleep a little bit after we got marriage equality. It's not just marriage equality that's on the line

but it's your equal rights to housing, and it's your equal rights to employment. And it's a lot of other things that, at least in some states, we've come to take for granted."

Strafstrom is thinking long-term. When asked if he thought that the current situation, particularly as it's being played out in educational settings was going to force kids back into the closet or keep them from coming out in the first place, he took it one step further. "I think now every kid knows there are gays and lesbians, and trans kids in the world. I think that when the government starts to discriminate against these people, it carries over into the implicit—and in some cases explicit—education that kids are getting in certain states, and I think it's so much more evil than just pushing people back into the closet.

As to what to do, Strafstrom encourages Connecticut residents to look beyond just our state, pay attention, donate when possible, and supporting those organizations and candidates that support the LGBTQ+ communities in real ways.

Strafstrom is still involved with Lambda Legal. He's co-chairing the organization's 50th Anniversary drive to raise \$50 million.

For more on Lambda Legal's work, how you can get involved, and donate, visit lambdalegal.org. 

—Christopher Byrne



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Giving Back: It's The LGBTQ+ Way



LGBTQ+ people take pride in being a community of givers. It's almost as if the “give back” mindset is in our DNA. Many—if not most—in the LGBTQ+ world recognize the need to donate to causes that help everyone in the community. When we are inspired to give, we also tend to put economic fears aside, and it's no surprise that charitable giving in our community is on the rise. *The Funders for LGBTQ+ Issues* reports that \$201 million went towards our cause in 2020 and a record number that same year of \$36.1 million went to transgender communities.

However, for many, money may be tight, and inflation is having an impact. While we may want to give, we worry

about our daily budgets. However, there are several financial strategies you can consider, which will still allow you to donate. The good news is, if you're in a position to, you can take advantage of these strategies to complement other philanthropic efforts. Here are a few:

- **Donate an existing life insurance policy**—If you already have a policy and no longer need the death benefit, you can gift the policy to your desired charity, which may give you some tax benefits. The charity will receive the full benefit amount when you pass away.

- **List the charity as a beneficiary of your life insurance, 401K or IRA**—As the owner, you remain in control of your


account and can leave money to as many beneficiaries as you like: children, grandchildren, or even multiple charities. Another benefit: your gift is passed on tax free to your charity!

- **Purchase a separate life insurance policy or ILIT**—There are times when it makes sense to have separate policies: one for loved ones and one for charitable gifts. This technique can prove especially helpful by leveraging an insurance policy to leave a lasting philanthropic legacy. There has been success with using an ILIT (Irrevocable Life Insurance Trust) for charitable purposes. This clever technique allows the donor to contribute to a life insurance policy for a number of years, which is considered a

“loan” to the ILIT. Once the “loan” is fully paid, the donor may recoup the contributions in the form of a loan payback. The policy stays in place until the insured is deceased, leaving the death benefit to the charity.

- **Reposition your RMD**—Gifting your Required Minimum Distribution (age 72 and up) may qualify as a charitable donation and won't be a taxable event for you. Your RMD can also be used to fund a life insurance policy for your children or grandchildren, leaving your charity to be the beneficiary of your IRA. This creates a tax-free legacy for everyone!

- **Create a Charitable Remainder Trust**—While this planned-giving tool is designed to shelter appreciated assets such as investments and real estate, you can also incorporate life insurance if it's set up properly. While charitable gifting may fulfill your heart, it may also allow you to reap a variety of tax benefits. This is a win/win for those who have a “give back” mindset.

If this is something you wish to pursue, it's advisable to consult a licensed financial advisor, tax advisor and/or attorney to help you make the best decisions and effectively achieve your objectives. 

— Michelle Cutrali
contributed to this article.

DISCLAIMER: This article is for informational purposes only, and it does not replace professional investment advice, for legal, tax, financial, or any other reason. It is recommended that you seek such advice from a financial advisor who will understand your individual situation.

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SEX ED: Its Importance and History

Sex education has been a hot button topic for years. Many people grew up without receiving a drop of sex education at school or from parents due to fear (they thought) of what it could lead to. Would knowing about sex cause our kids to become sex deviants? Would learning about condoms encourage our kids to have sex very young? Is talking about sexual orientation going to make our kids gay?

I can assure you, the answer to all these questions is “no.” There is no evidence that knowing about sex drives children to become sex maniacs; indeed, the facts show that kids armed with comprehensive sexual health information have sex later, on average. But the key word here is “comprehensive.” Historically (and even today in many, if not most, schools), sex education has always been lacking, if it existed at all.

Prior to the 1960s, the primary focus of public health when it came to sex was moral purity, not safety. The main message was not to have sex before (heterosexual) marriage. Before we had things like antibiotics and effective condoms, this made some sense, since with fewer sex partners, likelihood of a sexually transmitted infection is reduced. Before modern medical care, an STI could result in undesirable outcomes, not the least of which were infertility or death, to say nothing of shame and fear. After such treatments and preventives were available, the attitude of moral purity persisted until the 1960s.

The 1960s were a pivotal time for sexual attitudes. For starters, they marked what many consider to be the beginning of the modern LGBTQ+ movement: Stonewall. The 60s also saw the legalization of the birth control pill in the United States, which gave women unprecedented freedom and control over their lives. At this time, school sex education gained widespread support in the United States. However, in the 1980s, as the US swung back toward more conservative politics, a debate

began between proponents of comprehensive sex ed and proponents of abstinence-only education. This debate continues today, as schools all over the country grapple with how to provide sex ed in a way that is both appropriate and informative.

Of course, it goes without saying that LGBTQ+ sexuality was not even on the radar until recently. When we are arguing over whether we should be allowed to say the word “condom,” we aren't likely to get into nitty-gritty on the human sexuality spectrum, are we? Consequently, LGBTQ+ inclusive sex ed has been provided largely on the fringes of educational efforts. Many public health professionals would not even broach the subject, and so such education happened by sharing personal experience, experimentation, and by seeking out the rare healthcare professional who was willing to discuss it. Eventually, organizations dedicated to LGBTQ+ health (notably Fenway Health in Boston, which opened in 1971) began popping up to provide needed education in a more traditional healthcare setting.

Today, the fight we embark on is to improve existing sexual health education in schools and to make it inclusive of the LGBTQ+ community, as well. Excluding LGBTQ+ students' needs from sex ed curricula implicitly tells them that their sexual interests are abnormal or not worth addressing. In other cases, well-meaning teachers may not be trained sufficiently on the subject and deliver partial or inaccurate information.

The attitude in the school is also an important factor. If teachers deliver LGBTQ+ sex education in a prejudiced manner, intentionally or unintentionally, or if they tolerate homophobic bullying by students, it creates a hostile learning



SEX TALK

With Kim Adamski

environment, which makes LGBTQ+ students less engaged, and according to a 2004 study by Ellis and High, worse off than if LGBTQ+ sex ed wasn't mentioned at all.

Progress isn't made in a day. The fight for comprehensive and inclusive sex ed has been, and continues to be, a battle. However, it is clear from the progress we've made since the “moral purity” era of sex education that we are capable of making huge and positive advances. The fight can be very discouraging at times; making history is slow going. Take heart in the huge amount of progress we have made in the last 75 years, though. Keep the progress ball rolling by taking action today! The most obvious way is to educate your own kids. Make sure you are providing them with the best possible information by educating yourself, too! Want to push schools and other public health spaces to improve their sex ed curricula? Write to your local and state representatives about what you want to see. Talk to other parents about the subject. Many parents are simply unaware or misinformed, and this is easy enough to fix with the right information. The more people are invested in providing kids with LGBTQ+ inclusive sex ed, the more likely and sooner we are to have it in every school. 🍀

—Kim Adamski

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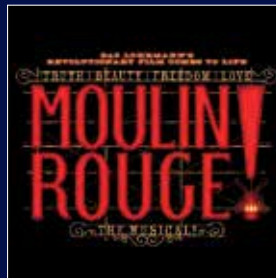
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Happy Pride, Connecticut!

Community Pride and the Impact of Belonging

Pride always feels like queer New Year's to me—a combination of celebration and reflection. Some might say it's a time for reckless abandon, when we let all the sparkly bits of ourselves shine! But community and belonging are far more important to our overall health and well-being than we might think.

As human beings, our feelings of belonging and acceptance go to the core of our deep health, especially concerning our mental, physical and emotional

needs. Feeling we belong is associated with a multitude of positive health outcomes including mental health, physical health, health behaviors, and mortality risk. As philosopher Simone Weil writes: "To be rooted is perhaps the most important and least recognized need of the human soul."

Humans are social beings, and we know from research, including the Harvard study on happiness, that having strong interpersonal relationships "creates mental and emotional stimulation", while isolation can lead to significant changes in

mental and physical health.

In fact the impact of social connection and feeling like we belong, and our mental and physical health has been well-documented. A study from the University of Michigan showed that when people lack a sense of belonging it's a stronger predictor of depression than commonly associated predictors like loneliness, conflict, and lack of social support.

There are significant physical responses to feeling othered and excluded as well. A recent MIT study found that when humans are deprived



Meghan Crutchley

of social interaction, we crave it in the same way we crave food when we're hungry, and it occurs in the same region of our brains. Another study found that feeling excluded from a group lights up the part of our brains where we feel physical pain.





If we take our overall health in the context of our lived experiences, we don't have to look far to see that the impact of being othered, not just in anti-LGBTQ+ spaces, but in our most "accepting" workplaces and institutions, is significant. A recent GLSEN survey found that 46 percent of LGBTQ+ youth in CT. experienced discrimination at school.

A recent McKinsey survey found that only one in four LGBTQ+ professionals are out at work globally, citing fear of discrimination, fear of being passed up for higher level positions, and not feeling supported by HR and higher management as major reasons for being closeted.

If we look at the experience of trans professionals, one in four have lost a job due to

“To be rooted is perhaps the most important and least recognized need of the human soul.”

bias, and more than three-fourths have experienced discrimination at work.

The same statistics that cut across health outcomes, also reflect the inequality that exists in the LGBTQ+ community overall. This is not just about living through our basic humanity and insisting that others are free to do the same. This is also about the health of our community as a collective; its strength and power to come together at a time of great crisis in our country. We

need to address the historic exclusion of the T in LGBTQ+ that started from the very inception of Pride; the spark that started the queer revolution was ignited by two trans women at Stonewall.

The way that we show up for each other in our own community significantly impacts the health of our chosen family. The way that those “elders” in the community showed up for me when I was outed at 17 literally saved my life, and

there are countless stories among us to attest to the power we have as a group.

As individuals, we can significantly influence the health of others through our social networks and the strength of our relationships. In short, this is our work to do together.

We can foster a more inclusive culture of belonging and improve the health of our own community this Pride by educating ourselves and others, connecting to community events, taking action by showing up, and releasing fear. We're part of the most beautiful, diverse community of humans on the planet; there is nothing to fear. We're all just flowers in the garden. 🍆

—Meghan Crutchley

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The Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao, Spain unveiled new uniforms by the brand Ecoalf.

SUSTAINABILITY Has Staying Power

By **BRIAN SCOTT LIPTON**

The fashion business is synonymous with the here today/gone tomorrow “trends.” After all, do Nehru jackets, mood rings or culottes mean anything to you? One trend we will be talking about 20, 30 or 40 years from now, though, is sustainability!

First things first: What exactly is “sustainability?” Today, the term can take on a lot of meanings from using recycled, upcycled, ethically sourced and biodegradable materials to using less water in the production of a specific product (mostly denim) to wearing clothes originally from other’s people closets—or perhaps even your own.

In fact, when Oscar winner Cate Blanchett showed up at many film award ceremonies this year in couture outfits she had previously worn, there was a great deal of chatter about how she was embracing “sustainable fashion.”

Global red carpets aside, there’s little question that embracing sustainability has become a worldwide phenomenon. The Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao, Spain recently unveiled new uniforms by the brand Ecoalf that are made from recycled materials, including 100 percent recycled polyester jackets, 100 percent recycled cotton T-shirts and sweatshirts, footwear made from recycled polyester and polo shirts made from recycled cotton.

Meanwhile, national thrift shop Goodwill—a leader in selling recycled clothing—devoted its 2023 gala to the theme of sustainability and showcased one-of-a-kind upcycled designs by Todd Snyder, Willy Chavarria of Calvin Klein, Rinat Brodach, as well as Tommy Hilfiger’s adaptive team.

Or take former *Project Runway* contestant and FGI Rising Star Nancy Volpe Beringer who has become renowned for her sustainable adaptive fashion and has found great success with her online site, The Vault by Volpe Beringer, which minimizes ecological and social costs by extending and renewing the life of previously worn upscale garments. “I feel that I was provided the opportunity to become a fashion designer at age 61 for a specific reason, and that is not to create more fast fashion,” she says.



Nancy Volpe Beringer has found success with The Vault by Volpe Beringer, which minimizes ecological and social costs by extending and renewing the life of previously worn upscale garments.

CONSCIOUS CONSUMERISM

Moreover, sustainable fashion has made leaps and bounds in recent years in so many categories—from jeans to cashmere sweaters to swimwear, underwear, shoes and jewelry—that it’s practically inescapable for those who care about it.

And, as experts agree, it’s the younger shoppers—those in the age 21-39 category—who absolutely do care about it (along with climate change and similar environmental issues) and who are the reason so many manufacturers are stressing their commitment to sustainability.

“I always remind people that even as a consumer, we have the power to change the world and create a better tomorrow by just being mindful of how and what we buy,” says Melissia Hill, founder of Ooshie, a Brooklyn-based company whose stylish women’s dresses and caftans are manufactured using biodegradable and organic fabrics.

At MABI Swimwear, a Brazilian-based company, all the tags on its suits are made from biodegradable fabrics, and the vivid colors on its apparel are created via natural dyeing and mineral salts. (Flowers, roots, and seeds are the main components of the prints, while local plants, spices, and vegetables provide the pigment.) “Sustainable can be sexy!” exclaims Maristela Soares, the company’s founder and head designer.

HEAD TO TOE

In 2023, one can wear sustainable products from head to toe. “Like so many companies, we value sustainability and sustainable fashion,” says Ayelet Lax Levy, president of the popular shoe manufacturer, Naot. “We have started incorporating environmentally friendly vegan



Naot has started using environmentally friendly materials in their footwear.



Brazilian-based Mabi is determined to prove sustainably made swimwear can be sexy.



Bleusalt, a favorite of celebrities such as Cindy Crawford and Alicia Silverstone, creates a wardrobe of luxury basics using sustainable materials.



Moral Code's vegan women's Gala model is made from apple leather.

materials into our shoes in order to lower our carbon emissions even further, and we are always looking for a better and more improved way to lower our environmental impact.”

Moral Code's Ethical Living line of sneakers and accessories is also devoted to sustainability, including its new York Vegan model, which is made of apple leather, an eco-friendly alternative produced from waste by-products of the apple juice and jam industries, such as peels and fiber from the fruit. In addition, the company uses Olivenleder—a patented technology using fallen olive leaves that would otherwise go to waste—as its tanning agent in many of its accessories and shoes.

Other favorites include Gobi Cashmere's pieces, which use ethically sourced, organic cashmere yarns that are left untreated



Gobi Cashmere uses ethically sourced and organic yarns.

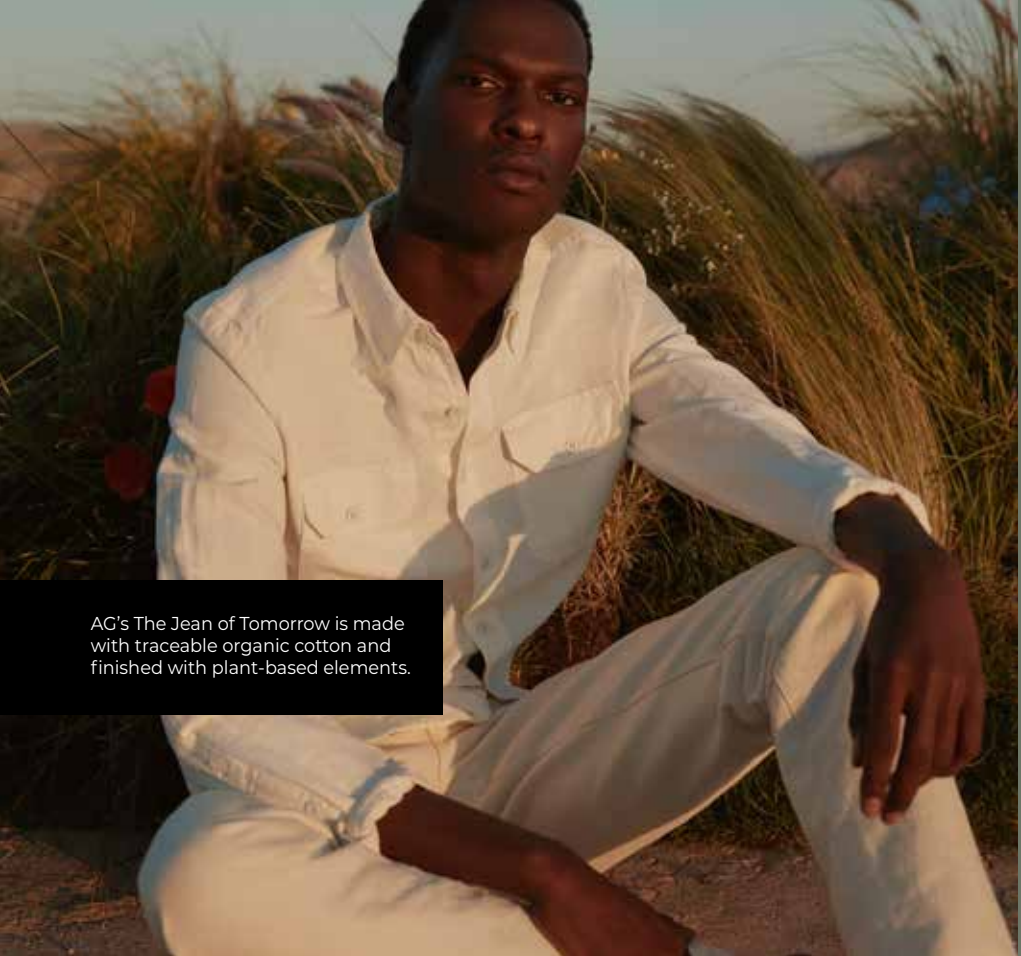


Jewelry maker Askari's new "warrior pins," are made from cruelty free bio-leather, recycled silver, and lab grown diamonds that are produced using wind and solar power.

with dyes to celebrate the raw beauty of the natural fiber; Con.Struct's recently introduced Green Collection of casual clothing using recycled materials; luxury everyday basics from Bleusalt (a favorite of such celebrities as Alicia Silverstone, Cindy Crawford and previous *Connecticut Voice* cover subject Christian Siriano); Skyway's "Rainier" backpack, which is constructed from reusable water bottles; and Filippo Loretto's watches, which are crafted from recycled plastic from the ocean.

One can even show off jewelry maker Askari's new "warrior pins," which are made from cruelty free bio-leather, recycled silver, and lab grown diamonds that are produced using wind and solar power. "As citizens of planet Earth, it is our responsibility as individuals to do everything in our power to protect the planet from which we draw life and inspiration," notes founder Marco Dal Maso.

Sustainable fashion doesn't even have to be visible.



AC's The Jean of Tomorrow is made with traceable organic cotton and finished with plant-based elements.

No part of the fashion industry has been more devoted to sustainability than denim.

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Fruit of the Loom recently introduced its Threads Men's Underwear Collection, which uses special viscose fibers that are made from certified renewable wood resources.

Underwear giant Fruit of the Loom recently introduced its Threads Men's Underwear Collection, which uses special viscose fibers that are made from certified renewable wood resources and produced through a sustainable process.

FOREVER IN BLUE JEANS

Perhaps no part of the fashion industry has been more devoted to sustainability than denim—in large part because of the outrageously large amount of water needed to grow the cotton that creates denim as well as its finishing, rinsing and dyeing procedures. It's one reason it made headlines in 2021 when online visionary retailer Revolve partnered with Recover, a textile fiber producer, to launch a 14-item collection of jeans that were each made with at least 15 percent recycled cotton.

A longtime leader in the field, AG, is constantly updating its eco-friendly efforts. This spring, the company introduced a new edition of The Jean of Tomorrow, which is made with traceable organic cotton and finished with plant-based elements to ensure it is 100 percent biodegradable, as well as unveiling its new Vapor Wash technology which achieved a radically more sustainable process with 65 percent less water, 65 percent fewer chemicals, and 35 percent less energy than ever before.

Many other popular denim brands, including Levi's, Wrangler, Lee, Devil-Dog and Liverpool take sustainability into account (at least in some of its products and manufacturing processes). "Sustainability is definitely important to us, even if it doesn't always drive sales" says Mark D'Angelo, Liverpool's vice president of men's sales.


Adds Sean Connelly, vice president of Mens Merchandising & Sales for Devil-Dog Jeans: "In our factory, we are constantly reviewing our procedures for efficiency. If there is a more sustainable and environmentally friendly method available, we choose it. Examples of this are our use of solar power for electricity, reduction in unnecessary chemicals, recycling waste, and water treatment. As far as material



Devil-Dog Dungarees has switched dye methods for its denim fabrics where possible to liquid indigo dyes, which cut down on chemicals required to dye and wash its fabrics.

choices, we have already switched dye methods for our denim fabrics where possible to liquid indigo dyes, which cut down on chemicals required to dye and wash our fabrics, as well as water consumption on garments."

"Moreover, wherever possible we will use recycled cotton and polyester yarns—some made from empty soda bottles and plastic containers for our woven fabric," he continues. "Our approach is not to make a sustainable brand, *per se*, as much as we try to make the best and most responsible choices we can as a company and create the kind of products our customers demand from us!"

Indeed, much like the love of George and Ira Gershwin's classic song, sustainability is here to stay. 

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Talia Sushauer. Photo by Diane Sobolewski.



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ARTS AND ENTERTAINMENT //



What The Gaze Reveals

100 Years of Men In Love Documentary Shows a Century of Declarations

By FRANK RIZZO

Look into their eyes, these tender young men of a century or two ago. In haunting vintage tintypes from the 1840s, secret snapshots taken in mirrors, clandestine shoots in bedrooms, narrow strips of private images taken behind a photo booth curtain ... They are all evidence that their private love existed, that it was confident and real, through their rediscovery, it endures.

A total of 350 of nearly 4,000 photographs from the collection of the married couple Hugh Nini and Neal Treadwell is the foundation of the 2022 film documentary *100 Years of Men in Love: The Accidental Collection*, directed by Emmy-winning actor-producer David Millbern.

The 57-minute film is based on Nini and Treadwell's 2020 photo book *Loving: A Photographic History of Men in Love, 1850s-1950s*.

Like messages placed in a bottle and tossed into the sea, these intimate vintage photographs—some joyful, some sensual, always loving—were accidentally discovered starting in the 1990s by Nini and Treadwell in flea markets, tag, garage and estate sales where discoveries were often found in shoe boxes filled with a family's

“We start with just the eyes, then body parts touching, then the men being in bed, and finally the ultimate intimacy, a kiss ...”





long-forgotten images. Collecting these specific photographs of male couples gradually became their passion.

Making the film

The film was made with during the pandemic without Nini and Treadwell even meeting Millbern in person with Millbern shooting scenes of the couple remotely using a New York film crew.

The power of the film comes in the contemplative relationship between the seer and the seen as the camera slowly zooms closer.

"It's not just a quick montage of images," says Millbern from his home in Los Angeles. "We let the audience study the photos and the significance of the times when these gentlemen put everything on the line to take those pictures. They were doing this when being a homosexual was illegal, when they could have lost their jobs."

The film is a completely different experience than one of merely flipping through pages of a book, says Millbern.

"I want audiences to slowly immerse themselves with images of these men from the past," he says. "I want people to be on a journey: with the film's music; and quotations about love from gay writers like James Baldwin, Walt Whitman and Henry David Thoreau; and hearing the words taken from the backs of the photos spoken by me as these

couples' avatars come alive.

"We escalate the amount of intimacy as the film proceeds," says Millbern. "We start with just the eyes, then body parts touching, then the men being in bed, and finally the ultimate intimacy, a kiss. That was our through-line."

Favorite Images

One of Millbern's favorite pictures is one taken a century before same-sex marriage was made legal in the U.S. It was a

photograph of two young men holding up a sign that says, "Not married ...but willing to be." "Did they have the vision of men marrying or was this just the momentary need of expression of their relationship to say, 'Our love matters?'"

"That picture is our superstar," says Nini who lives in New York with his husband Treadwell. They have been a couple for 31 years.

"So many of the pictures show men clearly happy and in love," says Treadwell. "There's one picture taken in 1902 of two men together taking a picture in a mirror. We call it the first gay selfie."

Millbern, Nini and Treadwell are aware of the small number of images of men of color—less than two dozen—which were all presented in the film.

"Photography at the time was kind of a *chi chi* thing to do," says Millbern, "and not everyone had access to cameras and equipment, so the end result was there are many fewer of these images out there. Also remember that the stakes were even higher for these men if they were exposed."

Nini and Treadwell never declare unequivocally that any of the men in the photographs are definitively gay. They say the images simply reflect a loving relationship between the men depicted. The rest is up to the viewer to infer.

But Nini and Treadwell have one gay confirmation by the nephew of one of the pictured gentlemen—a Johnny from Texas—posing with another soldier in the Alps during World War II. Ironically enough they belonged to "The Rainbow Division," though the name, coined by Gen. Douglas MacArthur, did not have the gay connotation that it does today. Before his uncle's death, Johnny revealed to his nephew a shoebox in the closet that included the photo of the two men together along with a gold ring. Johnny told the nephew, "Please keep these safe after me," says Nini, who adds the nephew now wears the ring in memory of his uncle.

Clues of relationships can come from surprising places. On the back of a color picture from the early 1950s is written—perhaps by someone's wife: "Here's a picture of Bob and his friend. Bob loved horses. Your dad says they were both as queer as ducks."

Sometimes the clues are directly from the men pictured. Another photo shows



Hugh Nini and Neal Treadwell whose collection inspired the book and documentary.

two men on a carriage pulled by a horse and on the back is hand-written: "Here's a glimpse into a little part of my life that you may not know about."

"Now doesn't that say it all?," says Millbern. "It's up to the viewer to imagine relationships, but it's very clear that there was something going on with the men in these photographs." He points to the famous Kinsey scale which measured different degrees of same-sex attraction.

Other clues that indicate a more personal context is in the use of a romantic photographic trope of the late 19th and early 20th century: Being pictured beneath an umbrella or parasol. There are multiple images of men huddled beneath the intimate covering, shoulders touching, fingers brushing against each other on the handle just so, with the couple having a private or playful moment. "The images of two men beneath an umbrella was a kind of a rainbow flag in the late 1800's," says Millbern.

Future life

The film was presented at Palm Springs this past spring, and further museum and festival presentations are planned for later this year and into next. There will also be a touring exhibition of some of the photos with its first stop in Geneva,

Switzerland in June. Several high-profile museums have also reached out to the men interested in their archives.


"The pictures have now taken on a life of their own," says Treadwell, who adds a follow-up volume is in the works.

An earlier book published in 2000—*Dear Friends: American Photographs of Men Together, 1840-1918*, by David Deitcher—also takes intimate and vintage photographs of men but places the often more ambiguous images in a broader context of male relationships.

Nini says he's sure these men never imagined their clandestine, loving, joyous photographs being seen and appreciated in 2023. "I'm sure they're looking down and going, 'Holy shit. Our photographs are in books and in a movie.'"

"We feel someone is looking over our shoulder," says Treadwell.

Millbern says he hopes the film is a call to action for new generations of gay men.

"If these guys faced imprisonment, loss of employment and a complete dismissal of their lives, yet still created these images to document their love, we have to be bold, too," he says. "We stand on the shoulders of these gentlemen who said their love mattered. It should be an example for the rest of us to be authentic, too." 

Finding Trans Joy: It's Out There

Stories of hope amid heartbreak in the transgender, nonbinary, and trans nonbinary community

By DAWN ENNIS

For months now, the headlines have been full of articles detailing outright oppression and discrimination against transgender people, with social media hammering the hate home with everything from mockery to threats and violence.

And if you find a story profiling someone who is trans, nonbinary, gender nonconforming or any other

kind of gender expression under the transgender umbrella, you will read, see, or hear heart-wrenching tales of rejection, isolation, loneliness, and desperation. Recent months have even included stories about mass murderers who are trans and nonbinary, as if their gender was responsible.

Dig deeper, press harder, look further, and one finds the narratives the straight press often ignores: The success stories, the uneventful transitions and the instances of trans joy. That's what *CT Voice* spent months accumulating, during even the darkest days for this marginalized population. Positive outcomes, fulfilling relationships and inspiring accomplishments that didn't happen despite someone being trans or nonbinary, but, in fact, because they are living authentic lives.

We received close to 100 responses from trans people all around the world, from Connecticut to California, from Canada to Australia and even the Philippines, all sharing stories of trans joy.

Dr. Richard Stillson, the nonbinary psychologist in Hartford known to many as Mucha Mucha Placer, said they found joy in helping young adults

“cross the gender divide.” For Pride Month, they're planning an outing in Torrington to view the drag comedy, *To Wong Foo, Thanks for Everything, Julie Newmar*.

“Seeing trans, gender nonconforming or nonbinary people live lives that defy the horrible narrative about us,” is what out trans woman Kelli Huber of East Hartford said brings her joy. “Joy comes from living full lives despite that hate,” she said. “I also get personal joy from the love of my family and friends and time spent with them.”

Isaac Griffin agreed: “Looking forward to my first summer with the ability to sunbathe shirtless.”

“I've been in the military for over 18 years now, and I find joy that we have leaders that actually care about DEIA [Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Accessibility],” said Alexandria Holder. “We're doing our best to help make the military a more inclusive and equitable employer.”

Erika Gieseke and Barbara Curry said their joy comes

from music. Curry is a trans woman who said she was welcomed into Another Octave: the Connecticut Women's Chorus. “The music alone is therapeutic, let alone the true camaraderie of a sisterhood of women.”

“Art,” said Melody Ann. “My pets and husband,” Oz DiCampanetti told *CT Voice*. “My trans activism and my positivity,” said Deja Nicole Greenlaw. Reid Sindelar said, “My children.”

“I have had several moments of joy since I came out as nonbinary to my family but the biggest one would have to be when my mom surprised me with my first binder,” said Kay E. of Indiana. “At the time I hadn't even realized how much I was missing until I put it on and started crying, I was so happy. The amount of love and support I have from my mom is incredible.”



Blu Del Barrio

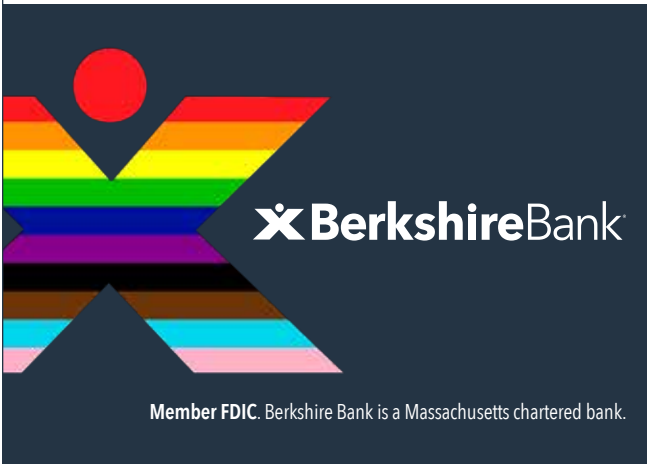


Blu Del Barrio



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The essential need for joy was cited at the State Capitol in Hartford in January, at the news conference announcing the formation of a new LGBTQ+ rights group. “Equality Connecticut’s founding principle is to harness our collective power by fostering the joy of being LGBTQ,” said executive director Matt Blinstrubas. “When we come together and when we truly see each other, we become a force that’s unstoppable. We look forward to building a sense of power and joy together with everyone in Connecticut.”

Trans joy also can be found in corporate boardrooms and in academia. A transgender trailblazer—Schuyler Bailar, the Harvard graduate who was the first out trans NCAA Division I athlete to compete on a men’s team—started an online coaching business in which he shows how cultivating “radical trans joy” can help every employee. Queer PhD. candidate Brendon Holloway published a paper in February calling on practitioners, researchers, and educators to understand the importance of highlighting trans joy in research, higher education, and practice settings.

Some folks, unfortunately, are still searching for that elusive experience.

I myself struggled for weeks writing this because of the overwhelming onslaught of new legislative attacks I am responsible for reporting. Our hope is that in reading and learning how others have found joy, all of us will continue to strive toward that goal.

Meghan Crutchley

“To find joy, I like to be in community with other people, friends, people who love and support me,” said Meghan Crutchley of Stamford, a queer nonbinary board certified health coach, educator, speaker, and corporate consultant. They’re also the CEO of Habitqueer, which services the LGBTQ+ community, and a columnist for *CT Voice*.

Crutchley said they find joy by spending time in nature and doing things that they said, “give me peace or empty my stress bucket. Also, things like riding bikes, reading, gardening and being in the fresh air, in the sunshine,” they said. “Those are the places that I find the most joy.”

Through their work, Crutchley also coaches those struggling to find their own joy. “To invest in our health as queer people is a revolutionary act,” they said. “There is such a resurgence, or at least a loudness to negativity and to hatred right now in our society. So, I have been actively turning up the joy. That’s what I talk about with people in my community.”

Blu del Barrio

“I’ve been a year-and-a-half on ‘T’ [testosterone]. I’m at the horrible cracky-voice phase,” said actor Blu del Barrio, whose pronouns are “they/them” and “he/him.” I caught up with del Barrio in March, as they walked the red carpet at the GLAAD Media Awards in Beverly Hills, Calif., wearing a yellow raincoat with the words, “Trans Joy.”

“I wanted to do something that brought some trans joy. And my roommate helped me paint this,” they told *CT Voice*.

The actor plays Adira, a nonbinary character on the streaming television series *Star Trek Discovery*, who came out to the starship crew at the same time del Barrio came out to

family, friends, and their co-stars. Now, at 25, they've become an inspiration to LGBTQ+ fans.

"That makes all of it worth it because that's what I wanted," del Barrio said. "It truly is. That is a massive reason why I want to keep doing this, and I enjoy doing this. I love doing this as myself and being really transparent with my personal life as well. Because it's what I wanted. It would have changed my life for the better, the fact that kids are identifying with Adira, at the age where I was trying to find someone to identify with."

Wynne Nowland

"I am just happy to wake up every day and be the person that I am," said Wynne Nowland, when asked about trans joy. "I enjoy my life. I enjoy my friends. I enjoy my career. I do a little bit of activism here and there. I enjoy that, and I'm thoroughly enjoying my life."

Nowland, the out trans CEO of a financial services and insurance firm on Long Island who came out more than six years ago, has been profiled in the *Wall Street Journal*. She said she refuses to be intimidated by the legislative moves to oppress, ban, and restrict trans people and their healthcare, which she called "draconian."

"Probably due in part to the force of my personality," Nowland said, "I'll be damned if they're going to intrude on my happiness."

She's aware of her privilege. When she went to the DMV to get a new driver's license with her gender marker changed from M to F, Nowland said she was questioned by a suspicious clerk about her doctor's letter, proving she'd transitioned. She called her doctor's cellphone and got a new letter faxed to the DMV within minutes. "The fact that I run this \$150 million insurance company, I'm not an easy person to say 'no' to. So, I was able to get it all resolved," the 61-year-old said. "But I remember walking to my car and saying to myself, 'What if I had been a 20-something year old Black woman, trying to get this done? It would have been horrible, and I try to be cognizant of that.'"

Tanner Arnold

"My wife has always been my biggest champion," said Tanner Arnold, an out



Wynne Nowland

trans program manager for Intuit in Tucson, AZ, who spoke at the company's annual Trans Summit in Mountain View, CA. He said the event, now in its fourth year, was a source of joy for providing a safe space to discuss trans issues. But nothing compares to the story he told *CT Voice* about his wife, Sandra.

Arnold came out to her as a trans man five years ago, as they prepared to renew their vows for their 10th wedding anniversary. The 46-year-old said he was nervous, but he knew he couldn't keep this secret from his beloved.

"I can't ask you to marry me again without me telling you what's going on," Arnold said. And she told him: "This is new territory for both of us." But as he recalled, she then said: "I love you too much to keep you from being yourself and stop you from being who you are."

"That absolutely brings me trans joy," he said. "And we're still together!"

Saoirse

"I am not only a transgender woman, but I don't pass so well in terms of physical appearance or voice," wrote Saoirse on Medium, and gave *CT Voice* permission to quote portions of her essay, *Weathering the Storm of Overwhelming Transgender Hatred*.


"I pass well enough that no one has any doubt of my identity, but I also pass poorly enough that no one has any doubt of my identity," she wrote. Saoirse described a women's religious retreat she attended with five cisgender women, sharing sleeping quarters and a single bathroom and shower. In addition to studying women cited in the New Testament, they discussed what she called, "details of the female experience that I will never be able to fully experience myself."

Saoirse shared her own experiences as a trans woman. "This retreat was an oasis of safety and hope," she wrote, during the current "storm of political expedience," the hundreds of bills and laws oppressing the trans population.



Saoirse

"I know this time will pass. It may pass soon, or it may get worse for a while yet. But it will pass," wrote Saoirse, echoing the words of my own rabbi when I sought his counsel. "Please don't hide from those that would care for and support you."

That is exactly the point of the International Trans Days of Visibility, of Awareness, National Coming Out Day and Trans Day of Remembrance, and most of all, Pride Month: Stepping out to celebrate our transness, sharing our joy in defiance and resistance to those trying to extinguish it. 

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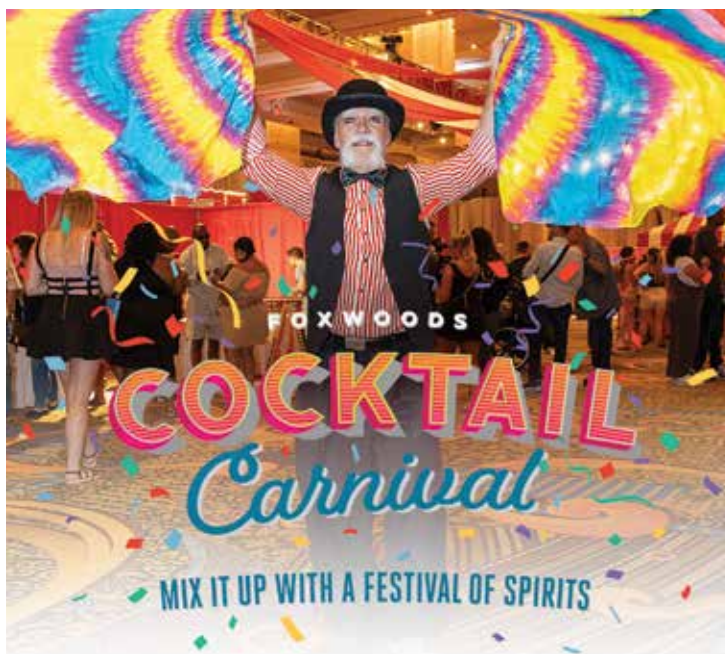
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No Place Like Home: The Enormous Importance of Small-Town Pride

By JANE LATUS

Connecticut is bursting with Pride, with 35 events in 2022 and even more in the works this year.

“Some see them as dandelions. I see them as beautiful wildflowers that make a beautiful bouquet,” says

Richard Stillson of Hartford (also known by his drag name Mucha Mucha Placer), founder of Connecticut Pride. There’s been debate about whether the large number of smaller events detract from the larger ones, but Stillson has no doubt: “The more the merrier.” Xi is not alone in that opinion.

It’s not just the number and size of events that matter, organizers tell CT Voice; it’s holding them at home that counts. People planning their local Prides say hometown events are vitally important to them year-round.

There’s comfort in knowing your town has your back. “People go to those big Prides, and you come home, and it’s depressing. I want to be myself here,” says Jill Adams, organizer of Suffield Pride.

There’s importance in being visible locally. There are town officials working against the queer community, says Enfield Pride President Greg Gray. “We need to flash it out to everyone that we are here, we exist, and we are a force to be reckoned with.”

There’s security in community. “You need somewhere to go to feel safe, a group of people to talk to

who know where you’re coming from and what you feel,” says 15-year-old Grace Collins, co-founder of Small Town Pride, which is organizing Hebron’s first event.

There’s the need for local advocacy for the next generation. “Darien has a history of a lack of inclusion,” says Darien Pride Chair Dan Guller. “My focus is to make queer kids feel like their hometown supports them.”

There’s even a kind of bonus to hometown pride. Unlike the anonymity of big events in Boston or New York, says Stillson, “It takes it to another level when you come out in your own hometown.”

Brandi Mandato, co-chair of North Haven Pride says that the town has embraced their event wholeheartedly, and they have had the support of First Selectman Mike Freda, who has stated that this year’s celebration will be the first of what will become an annual event. Mandato says that people in the community wanted to make sure that North Haven celebrates and welcomes diversity.

Finally, the abundance of Pride events reflects the state’s embrace of diversity, says Noelle P. Stevenson, director of the Connecticut Office of Tourism. “It says the LGBTQ+ community is part of Connecticut’s DNA,” she says. Her office highlights LGBTQ+ venues and events year-round on its website, CTVisit.com. Stevenson adds that the number of activities







year-round “is highly significant and demonstrates how genuinely welcoming and inclusive we are as a state, and it’s what makes Connecticut the perfect destination for the LGBTQ+ community.”

Planning Pride

When you’re parading in the warm June sun, take a moment to remember that back on a snowy night in February, a couple dozen of the state’s Pride group leaders got together to help make it all possible.

Snow forced the annual Connecticut Pride Summit to meet on Zoom instead of in-person in Waterbury. There, leaders discussed practicalities like liability insurance and accessibility, shared last year’s experiences (“super successful,” “small but great,” and “so big they’ve outgrown the location”), and discussed responding to (fortunately few) hecklers. Of course, this was just one of countless planning meetings across the state, some of which started not long after last year’s Pride month had ended.

Waterbury, Enfield and Hebron are among the towns holding their first events this year. Many others are back for seconds or thirds...and are growing. Torrington, which started last year with a flag-raising ceremony and teen lawn party, will add a Pride movie night at the Warner Theatre. Some have been at it a while, like Stamford—where it’s hard to beat the sight of the Old Town Hall lit in rainbow colors.

“Connecticut is just kickin’ it!” concluded Adams of Suffield Pride at the summit’s end.



Visibility really matters at home

Did you notice that last year, just after receiving requests to fly Pride flags, several Connecticut towns suddenly worried this might open the floodgates to an unmanageable tsunami of requests to fly all the flags? Town officials might waste hours on deliberations that would distract from their “real” work. Some towns adopted policies to manage flag requests. Others, like Darien, enacted bans.

Guller of Darien Pride was incensed. He told the Board of Selectmen about The Trevor Project National Survey’s findings, that LGBTQ+ youths who live in a non-accepting community are almost three times as likely to attempt suicide than those whose towns affirm them.

“I’m concerned our government is setting us up to be a non-accepting community, which makes Pride even more important,” says Guller. Almost 700 people attended last year’s inaugural event, including many kids who came up to Guller to thank him.

Shortly after Darien enacted the flag ban, The Trevor Project announced its fundraiser “40 Meaningful Miles.” Guller’s house is one mile from Town Hall. So yes, you can guess where he walked 20 times and back in protest, carrying the flag. He didn’t go unnoticed, attracting support from passersby, one middle finger, and one wannabee crime-stopper checking that he hadn’t stolen the flag.

Small Town Pride co-founder Collins, a 10th-grader, says she’s experienced homophobia in her hometown of Hebron. “It’s sad to say, but I’m used to it. But it’s a reality. You have to get used to it and let the other person know you aren’t gonna’ tolerate it.”

Enfield Pride’s Gray, pastor of Enfield’s United Church of Christ, is a vocal advocate for local queer kids. When a Board of Education member proposed banning several queer-themed books, Gray read aloud to the board from one of them, *This Book is Gay* by June Dawson. He then read from the Bible, Ezekiel 23: 11-21, which features comparisons of human and animal genitals, breast-fondling and prostitution. “If you’re going to ban this one, you need to ban the Bible, too,” he said.

Gray didn’t stop there. His congregation chipped in to buy hundreds of copies of the books on the list and held a bulk book giveaway.

Gray has all ages in mind when planning Pride, though. “Enfield has a substantial queer community, but no organization, and they don’t talk to each other except on Grindr,” he says of his impetus to form Enfield Pride.

This will be Suffield Pride’s third year. Says organizer Adams, “Small-town Pride is so important.” Not everyone can get to big-city events if they want to, especially teens without transportation. Lots of people told Adams it







was their very first Pride, and there was a large teen turnout. And the speakers, she says, were moving. “There were thoughtful words, and realness, and it was raw and beautiful.”

Mandato from North Haven is passionate about the visibility that small town Pride can provide, not just as a celebration. “I think this is a pivotal moment to be visible on the national landscape when young, queer people are discovering their sexuality and their gender, and they’re getting a constant message that it’s not okay.” She adds that it’s traumatic for these young people, and that while they can walk in the shoes of those who came before and fought to bring down barriers, there are still so many to overcome. What excites Mandato is that no one has to travel to be authentic. “It’s right in your own backyard. You don’t have to go somewhere else to be yourself.”

We get knocked down, but ...

When the Avon Town Council rejected high school student Julia Gordon’s proposal to paint a rainbow crosswalk, as neighboring Simsbury had done, she responded by creating “Avon Cares” lawn signs, which ended up plastering Avon lawns and raising \$7,000 for an Avon equality group. The signs caught on in several


neighboring towns.

Thieves stole the Pride flag from Blue Orchid restaurant in New Haven three times last year, but the owners kept putting out a new one. A community member donated one of the replacements, plus more flags to hand out.

And when vandals struck, the Tolland Democratic Town Committee got creative—and defiant. Last year, the group had painted a giant Pride flag on their permanent billboard. Someone covered it with red spray paint, which the Dems then topped with “Love Conquers All” in white paint.

Shortly after, someone knocked down the billboard. Tolland folks repaired it and put it back up. Tolland police charged two people for the separate acts of vandalism.

Katie Murray, a Democrat on the Tolland Town Council, says, “It was very heartening to hear from so many members of our community about their outrage and disgust with these actions. I felt there was a lot of support for the LGBTQ community, and the general sentiment in our community was that this wasn’t okay. We’re a small town and we generally care about each other.”

So, don’t be shy—or cowed—get out and show your pride. We’re here... And, well, you know the rest. 



Pride 2023

You don't have to leave your backyard to celebrate Pride! So, get out with LGBTQ+ folks in your town! Events and details known at press time are listed. Check with organizers for updates. Also check for newly-scheduled events at Connecticut Pride, on Facebook @ ConnecticutVirtualPride, and at CTVoice.com

AVON

June TBA

Avon Cares Family Picnic

At Avon Congregational Church. For area LGBTQ+ residents and allies. Bring a picnic lunch and gather for music and fun. Avon-Church.org and Facebook @AvonCongregational

BETHEL

June 3

Bethel Pride

Pride Parade and Celebration, Noon-5 at Bethel Municipal Center. Sidewalk parade starts at 1 pm, followed by celebration. BethelCTPride.com and Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and Telegram @BethelCtPride

BRIDGEPORT

July 20 and 29

Greater Bridgeport Pride

July 20: OUTwork Art Exhibit, 12:30 pm at City Lights Gallery. Featuring work with LGBTQ+ themes and issues. Runs through Sept. 10.

July 20: Sunday Brunch, 2:30 pm at Crabby Cabaret

July 29: Pride March and OUTwork Art Exhibit, patio reception, variety show, and post-party at Trevi Lounge.

CityLightsGallery.org and Facebook @ GreaterBridgeportPrideCT. Inquiries at GreaterBptPride@gmail.com

CONTINUED ON FOLLOWING PAGES

Perceptions
PHOTOGRAPHY



BRISTOL

June 10

Bristol Pride Celebration

Rockwell Park
Instagram @BristolCTPride

CANTON

June 10

Canton Pups and Pride Parade

10:30 am-1 pm. Parade begins 11 am at Canton Dog Park and ends at Shops at Farmington Valley for a Pride Celebration featuring music, local artists, snacks and drinks. TheShopsatFarmingtonValley.com and Facebook @DogParkCanton

DARIEN

June 11

Darien Pride

Darien Pride Celebration, Noon-4 pm at Tilley Pond Park. With food, music, entertainment, speakers, crafts, community information, and more. For all ages. DarienPride.org and social @darienctpride

EAST HAMPTON

June 24

East Hampton Pride 2nd Annual East Hampton Pride Stroll, 11 am-evening at East Hampton Village Center, 72 Main St.. Featuring Drag Queen Storytime with Miss Summer Orlando, face painting, bike decorating parade and contest, tie-dye-your-own shirt, dog parade and karaoke at Dexter's Tunes, Tales & Ales, food trucks, raffle prizes, 21+ dance party at Rule of 3 Brewing, and more.

EastHamptonPride.com and Facebook @East Hampton CT Pride

EASTON

June 1 and TBA

Easton Pride

June 1: Flag Raising & Community Celebration, 5-7 pm. Flag raising at Easton Town Hall and celebration at Easton Library. With music, food truck and ice cream. EastonCTPride.org and YouTube, Instagram and Facebook @EastonCTPride

ENFIELD

June 3

PFLAG Enfield Pride Festival

10 am-5 pm at Enfield Town Green. With vendors, kids activities, local talent, drag performers and food. PflagEnfield.org/pride-festival

June 11-27

Enfield Pride Concert Series and NOH8 Photo Shoot At Enfield Congregational, United Church of Christ
June 11: Hartford Gay Men's Chorus, 3 pm
June 16: Opera House Players Broadway Songs, 7 pm
June 24: Another Octave, 7 pm
June 27: NOH8 Campaign photo shoot, 6-8 pm
EnfieldUcc.org

June 17

Enfield Pride

1st Annual Enfield Pride Celebration, 10 am- 5 pm, United Church of Christ. Vendors, bounce houses, food trucks, DJs and drag performances. EnfieldPride.org and Facebook @EnfieldPride

HAMDEN

June 10

Hamden Pride in The Park

10 am-2 pm, Town Center Park (enter through Hamden Middle School). Rain date
June 11. A free, family-friendly celebration with food trucks, live music and entertainment, vendors, kids' activities, door prizes and more. HamdenPride.org, Instagram @HamdenPride and Facebook @HamdenGayPrideFestival

HARTFORD

June 3

Pride After Party Hartford

At Chez Est, 8 pm-2 am, featuring Salina EsTitties. Tickets online from Chez Est. Chezest.com

June 6

Hartford Yard Goats Pride Night

7 pm at Dunkin' Park
YardGoatsBaseball.com

June 22

Pride Month Creative Cocktail Hour

6-10 pm at Real Art Ways.

Live music, art exhibits, food, drinks and community. \$15 at door, \$10 for members or bicyclists, free for members on bikes
RealArtWays.org and Twitter, Facebook, tumblr and Instagram @realartways

Sept. 9

Hartford Pride Fest

HartfordPride.org and Facebook @hartfordpride

HEBRON

June 30

Small Town Pride Social

5-8 pm at Douglas Library. Featuring vendors, a storybook corner, Safe With Me Station, and wood flag painting. For all ages. Facebook @Small Town Pride - CT

MANCHESTER

June 17

Drag Jamboree

7:30-9 pm at Galleries @ WORK_SPACE, 903 Main St, Manchester. For ages 16+. A joyful, saucy evening of musical performances and trivia hosted by Giganta Smalls. Info and RSVP: workspacemanchester.com/events-programs/ and Facebook @ WORKSPACE, and Twitter and Instagram @workspacemanch

MANSFIELD

June 1 and 9

Mansfield Pride

June 1: Flag Raising Ceremony, 4 pm at Town Hall. Raising of the Intersex-Inclusive Progress Pride flag.
June 9: Celebrate Pride, 7 pm and on at Betsy Paterson Square, Storrs. With giveaways, music, local resources, tie-dye-your-Pride t-shirts and other Pride-themed activities, Drag Queen Storytime at 8 pm, and movie screening of Bohemian Rhapsody at dark. Free with suggested donation of \$10 for the tie-dye activity. In case of rain, check for change of location. Mansfieldct.gov/pride and Facebook @Mansfield Youth Services

MIDDLETOWN

June 1 - TBA

Middletown Pride

June 1: Pride Month Kick-Off and Flag Raising, 10-Noon. Meet at the Pride Crosswalk on Main Street to hear from local leaders and PrideFEST Grand Marshals. Then head to City Hall to raise the flag and for a mayoral proclamation of Pride Month.

June 1: Drag Artist Story

Hour, 6 pm, outdoors at Crystal Lake at McCutcheon Park. With Midnight, Ethel De Luxe and Mia. For kids ages 4-8, siblings and families. Reservations and blankets suggested.

June 3: Fifth Annual

PrideFEST (Rain date June 4), Noon-10 pm, Main Street. A street fair with exhibitors, entertainers, food, and activities for all ages, including a 21-plus area. Events include **Pride March** (1-2pm), **Pride Rally** (2:30-4) on the South Green, **Pride Showcase Concerts** (4-7 pm), and the first-ever **Tea Dance** (ages 21+, 7-10 pm) on Main Street. Music and sound by DJ Lady Tita and Ambassador Entertainment. See website for ADA accommodations, parking and more info.

June 22: Band Night, time TBA, at Wadsworth Mansion. MiddletownPride.org, Instagram @MiddletownPride and Facebook @MiddletownCTPride

NEW BRITAIN

June 5 and TBA

5th Annual Pride Flag

Raising, 9:30 am at Central Park. With community leaders. Facebook @NewBritainPride, Twitter @NB_Pride and Instagram @NewBritain.Pride



NEW HAVEN

June 10

New Haven Black Pride

1-5 pm at Dixwell Community House, (aka Q House).

With open mic, free food, vendors, drag performers and workshops by Gilead Sciences and Planned Parenthood.

Organized by APNH with Q+

Facebook @

NewHavenBlackGayPride

Sept. TBA

PRIDE New Haven

NewHavenPrideCenter.

org and Facebook @

PrideNewHaven

NEW LONDON

August TBA

New London Pride Festival

OutCT.org and Facebook,

Instagram and Twitter @

outCT

NEW PRESTON

June 11, 17 and 23

Pride in the Hills

June 11: Silent Auction

Wrap-Up Party, to benefit the Pride in the Hills Fund, 2-6 pm at the Owl Wine and Food Bar

June 17: Friends and Family

Fun Day for youth and their families, at Quassy Amusement park

June 23: SHAG with Pride

Festival, 6-10 pm Spring Hill Vineyards. Performers TBA. PrideintheHills.org and PrideintheHillsFund.org and Springhillartsgathering.com



NORTH HAVEN

June 17

North Haven Pride 1st Annual Pride Celebration,

11 am-2 pm on the North Haven Town Green. Joy, love and fun!

NorthHavenPride.org and Facebook and Instagram @ North Haven Pride

NORWALK

June 10

Pride in the Park

Details TBA by Triangle Community Center
Ctpridecenter.org/pride-in-the-park/

OXFORD

June 2

Beers&Queers Pride Event

5-9 pm at Black Hog Brewery.

A fun happy hour event including delicious beer, raising money for a local LGBTQ+ charity, raffles, giveaways and more.

Facebook and Instagram @ladiesinactionct and @blackhogbeer

RIDGEFIELD

June 3

Ridgefield Pride in the Park

Noon-3 at Ballard Park. A family-friendly event with music, games, activities, karaoke, live performances, and more. Bring a picnic and blanket, or grab some food from local merchants.

RidgefieldCTPride.com and Instagram @ RidgefieldCTPride

SOUTHINGTON

June 17

Southington Pride 3rd Annual Pride Family

Day, 11 am-4 pm at Mount Southington Ski Area. The day starts with the Pup Strut dog show and will include family-friendly activities and music.

June 25

Southington Pride Celebrations – TBA

SouthingtonPride.org and Facebook, Instagram and Twitter @SouthingtonPRIDE



STAMFORD

June 1

Stamford Pride & Flag Raising, Noon

June 1: Pride Lights at Old Town Hall, right after sunset (around 8:30 pm). Plus Class Picture and Mini March to Social Hour at local bar

TBA:

Drag Brunch Pride Trivia Night/Gayme Night

Panel Discussion
Rainbow Rave, an alternative Queer+ youth prom for high school students

Pride in the Pews at The First Congregational Church at Walton Place

StamfordCTPride.com and Instagram @Stamford CT Pride and Facebook @ Stamford CT Pride

SUFFIELD

June 11

Suffield Pride

Noon-4 on the Suffield Town Green. With performers, speakers, vendors and more.
Instagram @SuffieldPride

TORRINGTON

June 1, 8 & TBA

Torrington Pride

June 1: Flag Raising TBA on Torrington City Hall steps

June 8: Pride Movie Night, 8 pm at Warner Theatre, featuring "To Wong Foo, Thanks for Everything." Tickets are \$8 and available from the box office.

TBA: Torrington Library teens' third annual Pride celebration

Facebook and Twitter @ TorringtonPRIDE





WATERBURY

June 26-July 1

Greater Waterbury LGBTQIA+ PRIDE

June 27: Pride Flag Raising and announcement of LGBTQ Mayor for the Day

June 28: Open Mic Night, 6-9 pm at the Afro-Caribbean Cultural Center. For all ages. Sober event.

June 29: PRIDE FEST, Noon-6 pm, downtown Waterbury and LGBTQ Families PRIDE After Party (6 pm at Roller Magic, for all ages. Sober event.) and PRIDE After Party (ages 21+, 6 pm and on, at The Turf Restaurant. Featuring drag show and DJ.)

June 30: Kiki Ball for youths, 6-9 pm at TBD. Sober event.

July 1: Post BRIDE Brunch, 10 am-2 pm at Lakewood Park Pavilion

July 2: Drag Gospel Fest, 11:15 am - 12:15 pm at Hopeville Church

Facebook @Greater Waterbury PRIDE and Twitter @WaterburyPride

WEST HARTFORD

June 1

Havana Night

6:30-11:30 pm at The Pond House, Elizabeth Park. A fundraiser for CLARO, Inc. and Hartford Pride. Enjoy a night full of colors, feathers, and hats. Dress code is for a tropical Havana night. Tickets are \$125 and include dinner, wine, music, DJ, and entertainment. Purchase of a table for 12 includes a free 11x8 ad in the award-winning magazine OUTINCT. HartfordPride.org for tickets

June 1 - July 2

West Hartford Pride Festival Most locations and some times TBA.

June 1: Flag Raising, 6 pm at Unity Green

June 2: Pride Kickoff, 4-9 pm June 9: Pride Fun Ride, 5:45 pm

June 10: Tell Me Another, LGBTQ+, 8 pm

June 11 and 12: Pride Weekend

June 12: Caffeine Queens Drag Brunch

June 15: Hartford Athletic, 7 pm

June 17: Laugh With Pride, 7 pm

June 22-July 2: Children's Art Celebration

June 24: Out Loud Rally, 11:30 am

June 25: Pride Festival, Noon-6 pm at West Hartford Town Hall parking lot WestHartfordPride.org and Facebook, Instagram and Twitter @PrideWeHa

June 23

Queer Prom Garden Party is the theme of the 28th Annual Queer Prom, 6-9 pm at West Hartford Town Hall, with live DJ and food. For high school students. \$20 suggested admission. Sponsored by Hartford Gay & Lesbian Health Collective.

HGLHC.org and Twitter, YouTube and Facebook @ HGLHC

WESTPORT

June 4, 17 and TBA

Westport Pride Month

June 4: Pride Celebration, 1-3 pm at Jesup Green. Featuring local performers (including the high school's Staples Players), local politicians, local activists and vendors.

June 17: Family-Friendly Drag Show, 5:30-8 pm at Westport Museum of Contemporary Art. Featuring three professional drag performers singing and dancing to pop hits and show tunes. Get tickets asap; it sold out last year.

WestportPride.com and Facebook and Instagram @ WestportCt.Pride Drag show tickets at MocaWestport.org

UNCASVILLE

June 25

Connecticut Sun Pride Day 1 pm against the Chicago Sky. Fans are encouraged to show their Pride.

ConnecticutSun.com and Facebook, Twitter and Instagram @ConnecticutSun

STEPPING INTO SUMMER:

Easy Recipes from Local Connecticut Chefs

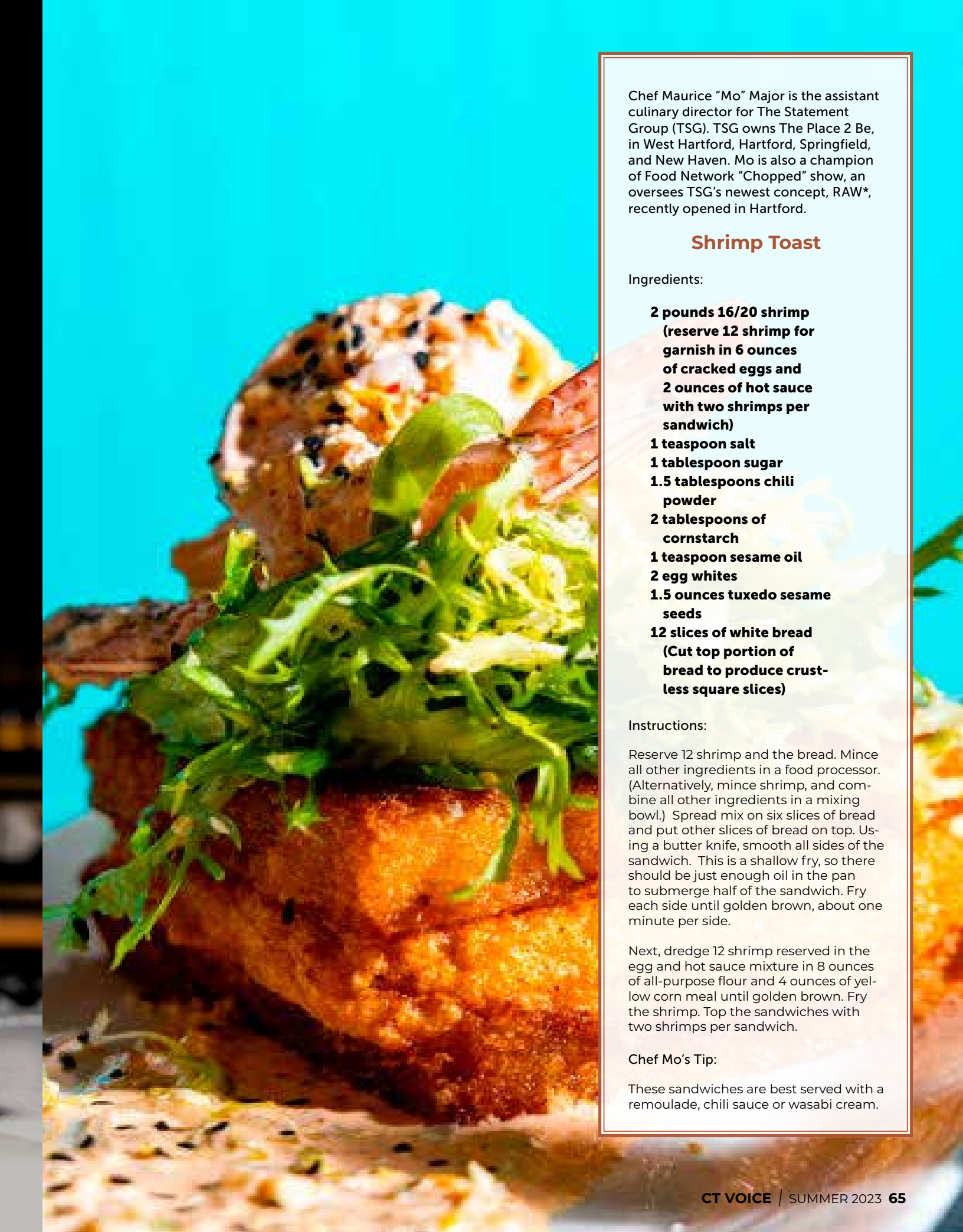
By ALEX ACQUARULO

Hosting that perfect summer meal does not need to be an all-day cooking event. These easy summer meals from local chefs and restaurant owners in Connecticut can expand your summer menus and make meals marvelous. Plus, they're easy to prepare ahead.

Louise Albin, owner and operator of Café Louise in West Hartford, has been in the same West Hartford plaza for more than 30 years, providing elegant gourmet catering and delicious meals-to-go.

Chef Albin's tarragon chicken salad and curried chicken salad are among Café Louise's most popular items. To make these even easier, use store-bought roasted chicken. Elevate both of them by adding the chicken salad into a sandwich or serving it as an hors d'oeuvres in a filo cup, tart shell or cream puff, or on a Belgian endive slice or bed of lettuce. **V**





Chef Maurice "Mo" Major is the assistant culinary director for The Statement Group (TSG). TSG owns The Place 2 Be, in West Hartford, Hartford, Springfield, and New Haven. Mo is also a champion of Food Network "Chopped" show, an oversees TSG's newest concept, RAW*, recently opened in Hartford.

Shrimp Toast

Ingredients:

**2 pounds 16/20 shrimp
(reserve 12 shrimp for
garnish in 6 ounces
of cracked eggs and
2 ounces of hot sauce
with two shrimps per
sandwich)**
1 teaspoon salt
1 tablespoon sugar
**1.5 tablespoons chili
powder**
**2 tablespoons of
cornstarch**
1 teaspoon sesame oil
2 egg whites
**1.5 ounces tuxedo sesame
seeds**
**12 slices of white bread
(Cut top portion of
bread to produce crust-
less square slices)**

Instructions:

Reserve 12 shrimp and the bread. Mince all other ingredients in a food processor. (Alternatively, mince shrimp, and combine all other ingredients in a mixing bowl.) Spread mix on six slices of bread and put other slices of bread on top. Using a butter knife, smooth all sides of the sandwich. This is a shallow fry, so there should be just enough oil in the pan to submerge half of the sandwich. Fry each side until golden brown, about one minute per side.

Next, dredge 12 shrimp reserved in the egg and hot sauce mixture in 8 ounces of all-purpose flour and 4 ounces of yellow corn meal until golden brown. Fry the shrimp. Top the sandwiches with two shrimps per sandwich.

Chef Mo's Tip:

These sandwiches are best served with a remoulade, chili sauce or wasabi cream.

Tarragon Chicken Salad with Grapes and Walnuts

To Prepare Chicken Breasts:

Bring 8+ cups of water to a boil with ½ cup dry white wine or dry Vermouth. Add chicken, return to boil, and turn heat off. Cover tightly and let steep for 20 minutes. Check to see the breasts are cooked through. Remove from water and let cool before cutting into cubes.

Ingredients:

- 5 cups poached chicken breast, approximately 2 pounds raw breasts**
- ¾ cup sliced red seedless grapes**
- ¾ cup coarsely chopped walnuts**
- 1 teaspoon dried tarragon or more, or 2 teaspoons fresh tarragon**
- ¾-1 cup of your favorite mayo**
- Salt and pepper to taste**

Instructions:

Wash and slice the grapes and chop the walnuts. When the chicken is slightly cooled, dice into bite-sized pieces; add it to a bowl with the nuts, grapes and tarragon. Stir in the mayo. Add salt and pepper to taste. Add more tarragon, grapes and walnuts if you prefer.

Chef Albin's Tip: You can add dried cranberries, diced apple or diced pear for more of an ambrosia-type salad.

Curried Chicken Salad

Ingredients:

- 5 cups poached chicken breast, approximately 2 pounds raw breasts**
- ½ cup diced celery**
- ¾ cup coarsely chopped raw cashews**
- ¾ cup raisins (golden raisins are a good option for look and taste)**
- 1 tablespoon curry powder or more**
- ¾-1 cup of your favorite mayo**
- Salt and pepper to taste**

Instructions:

Cut the chicken into pieces as above, and add the raisins and cashews. For a nuttier taste, roast the cashews before adding. Add the curry powder, and stir in the mayo. Add salt and pepper to taste.

Chef Albin's Tip: Granny Smith apples are a great addition.

Israeli Couscous Salad

Ingredients:

- 4 cups Israeli couscous**
- ¾ cup julienned fresh basil**
- 2 cups julienned, fresh baby spinach**
- ½ cup diced pitted kalamata olives**
- 2 cups diced artichoke hearts (either in water or marinated)**
- ½ cup diced fresh green onion/scallions**

Bring a pot of water to a boil with salt. Add couscous and cook for approximately 8-10 minutes. Check after 8 minutes so it's al dente. When done, drain, strain, rinse and add to a big bowl.

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Lemon Herb Vinaigrette

Ingredients:

- 4 cups blended oil**
- 1 cup champagne or white wine vinegar**
- 1 cup lemon juice**
- 2 cups fresh parsley**
- 2 cups scallions/green onions**
- 1-2 teaspoons dried thyme (If using fresh, double the amount.)**
- 2 teaspoons ground black pepper**
- 2 teaspoons salt**
- 3 tablespoons sugar or honey**
- Zest of two lemons**

Instructions:

Blend together in either a food processor or blender. This dressing is great on all sorts of salads. It can stay in the refrigerator for at least a month. Make it ahead of time and spend more time basking in the beautiful summer sun.

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Orzo Pasta Salad

Ingredients:

- 1 pound orzo pasta**
- ½ cup sliced fresh basil**
- 1½ cups sliced fresh baby spinach**
- 1½ cups crumbled feta cheese**
- 1 cup sliced sun-dried tomatoes**
- ½ cup diced fresh scallions/green onion**

Instructions:

Cook orzo for approximately 12+ minutes in boiling salted water. Drain, rinse, and transfer to a large bowl. If you are using sun-dried tomatoes in oil, add the oil to the pasta. Toss all the ingredients in a mixing bowl and add ample dressing to the salad.

All these salads will keep for up to a week in the refrigerator.

Chef Jared Schulefand is the owner and operator of Home in Branford. Home has been serving comfort food classics for ten years updated seasonally.

Gluten-free Jalapeno & Cheddar Cornbread Muffins

Ingredients:

- 6 tablespoons butter, melted**
- cup applesauce**
- ½ cup honey**
- ½ cup white sugar**
- 2 eggs**
- 2 cups buttermilk**
- 2 cups cornmeal**
- 2 cups gluten-free, all-purpose flour**
- 1 teaspoon salt**
- 1 teaspoon baking soda**
- 6 jalapenos, diced with seeds removed**
- Vermont shredded cheddar for topping**

Instructions:

Preheat the oven to 325°F. Lightly grease muffin tins with butter. Mix butter, applesauce, honey, sugar and eggs together. Mix in salt, baking soda and half the jalapenos. Add buttermilk, gluten-free flour and corn meal. Whisk until combined well. Fill muffin tins to the top (10 muffins). Sprinkle remaining jalapenos on top. Bake for about 10 minutes. Remove from oven and sprinkle cheddar cheese on top of muffins. Place back into the oven and bake another 8 minutes or until golden brown (toothpick should come out clean when done).

For easy prep, make the muffin batter ahead of time, cover it, and keep it in your fridge until you're ready to fill your muffin tins and serve. The recipe makes 10 muffins.

RECIPES //

Avocado & Tomatillo Gazpacho

Chef Jared's chilled gazpacho doesn't have a tomato base and is refreshing and cool. The recipe makes 10-15 servings.

Ingredients:

- 5 tomatillos, peeled and washed**
- 6 garlic cloves**
- 5 jalapeno peppers, cut in half and deseeded**
- 4 fennel stalks, chopped**
- 1 cup shallots, chopped**
- 1 cup fresh cilantro, chopped**
- 1 quart vegetable stock**
- 1 cup water**
- 4 tablespoons fresh lime juice**
- 5 avocados, pitted and halved**
- 1 tablespoon kosher salt**
- 2 tablespoons sugar**

Instructions:

Put vegetable stock and water in a large bowl or saucepan. Preheat the oven to 275°F. Place the tomatillos, garlic and jalapenos on a sheet tray covered with foil. Roast for 5 minutes, turn, and roast for another 5 minutes. Remove from the oven. Put roasted vegetables and all juices into a blender. Add all other ingredients, and blend until a smooth consistency. Add blended ingredients to the stock and water. Cover and refrigerate for at least 2 hours to allow flavors to blend. Serve chilled.

Enjoy your summer meals!

PERFECT PAIRINGS

BY DELAVIGNES
GOURMET FOODS
& GIFTS



As the weather turns to summer, it means we need quick, go-to crowd pleaser meals. Delavignes Gourmet Foods makes it easy to add exceptional flavor to all your dishes, so long as you keep our award-winning olive oils and balsamic's in your pantry. One of our favorite easy to make recipes is our Roasted Veggie Mediterranean Pasta Salad. It is delicious served hot or cold, and can be made ahead, or at the spur of the moment. Our Tuscan Herb infused olive oil complements the roasted vegetables, and gives the pasta a luxurious texture.

Chef Laura Miller and Delavignes Gourmet carefully select and manufacture amazing gourmet products from all corners of the globe, including products grown and manufactured in Connecticut. Join us for in-person shopping at our retail location with tasting bars open daily, join us for a cooking class, or tasting, or shop online at ShopDelavignes.com.



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your order**

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Use code
SEASONS



Need a Father's Day, Thank You or anytime gift? Send the gift of gourmet with Delavignes OOV Club. Once monthly the recipient will receive a subscription box filled with our infused olive oils, balsamic vinegar, and other gourmet ingredients, as well as seasonal themed recipes, and notes from Chef Laura to inspire recipes and creations from the goodies found in each month's box. 1 month, 3 month, and yearly subscriptions available.

Roasted Vegetable Mediterranean Pasta Salad

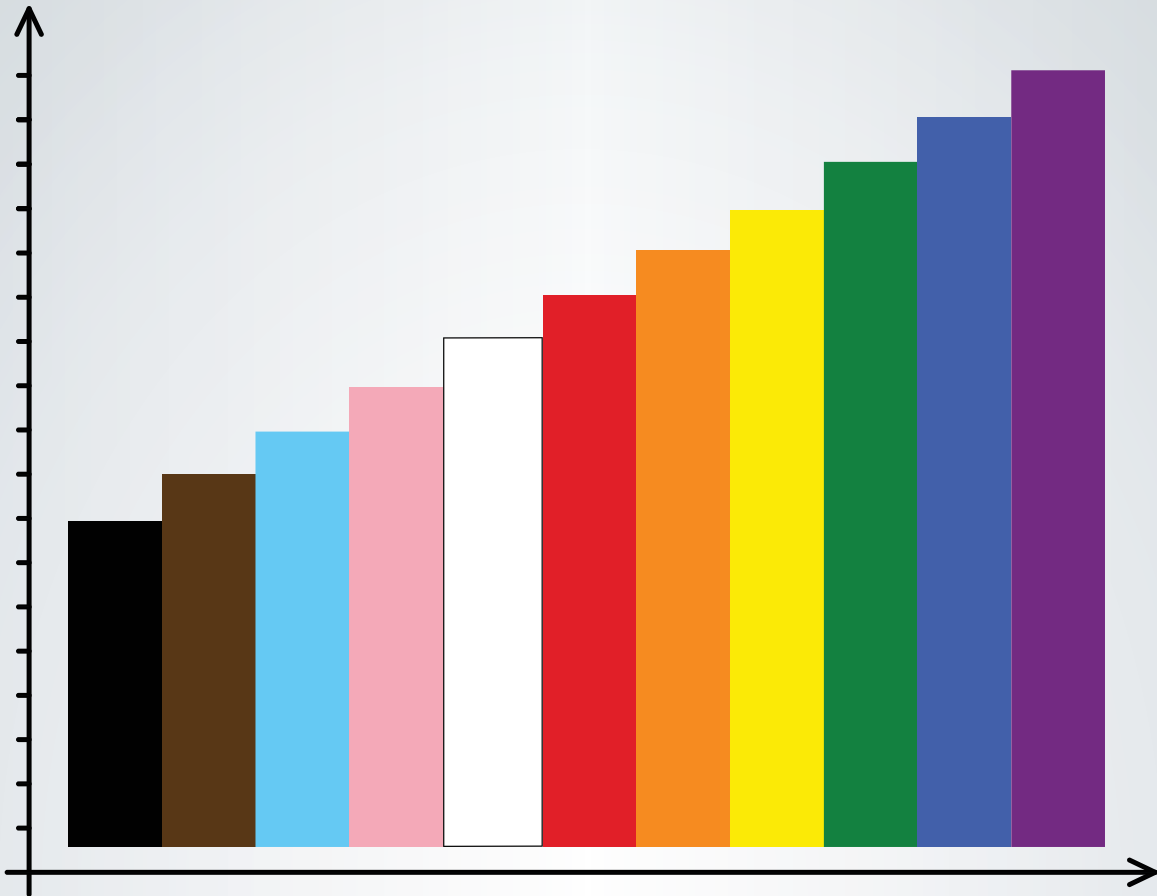
Ingredients:

- 1 Pound Pasta- Boiled to al Dente (Cooked but Firm) & Drained**
- Vegetables of your choice - 4 cups total. We recommend a blend of: Broccoli, Cauliflower, Bell Peppers, Asparagus, Cherry Tomatoes, Summer Squash, Green Beans, Artichoke Hearts, Spinach, Mushrooms, Cauliflower etc. Feel free to use up what you have in the fridge or pantry. Frozen or canned veggies also work great!**
- 4 Medium Cloves Garlic- Rough Chopped**
- 1 Medium Red Onion- Diced**
- ¼ Cup Delavignes Tuscan Herb Infused Olive Oil**
- 3 Tbsp Delavignes Red Wine or White Balsamic Vinegar**
- 1 Tbsp Dried Italian Seasoning, or a handful mixed of fresh basil, parsley & oregano- chopped**
- Parmesan Cheese**
- Salt & Pepper**

Instructions:

Preheat Oven to 350 F. Prepare & Chop all vegetables. Toss the vegetables in olive oil and roast in the oven for 30 minutes, or until the vegetables are cooked through and start to caramelize.

Prepare the dressing, In a mixing bowl, whisk together Vinegar, Olive Oil, & herbs, Toss cooked pasta, roasted veggies, and dressing together, dust with parmesan cheese, and salt & pepper to taste. Chill for 1 hour before serving, or serve warm.



**Build your local LGBTQA business community
by becoming a member of CTGLC today.**
Meetings are held state-wide & virtually.



**CONNECTICUT GAY &
LESBIAN CHAMBER**

**For more info, visit ctglc.org
or call (860) 612-8351**

June 6  Sept. 8



A Lifestyle Built Just for You



Discover independent senior living at McLean, and the lifestyle built just for you! The Village at McLean is buzzing with the recent renovations to The Burkholder and the addition of The Goodrich - featuring over 35,000 square feet of amenity space. Now's the time to see the few remaining unreserved residences in The Village and to explore all the enriching opportunities that await you on our campus in the heart of the Farmington Valley.



To Learn More, Scan or visit McLeanCare.org

75 Great Pond Road | Simsbury, CT 06070 | 860-658-3700 | McLeanCare.org



EMPLOYEES ARE MIDDLESEX PROUD

By JANE LATUS



Physical therapist Lisa Gramlich and emergency medicine physician Siri Daulaire were satisfied with their jobs at Middlesex Health, but something was missing: they realized that while there was work being done to support LGBTQ+ patient care, recognition and support of LGBTQ+ employees was less visible. Gramlich and Daulaire didn't exactly hide their identities at work, but they still felt the need to leave them at the door. Gramlich remembers one day walking down a hospital hallway thinking, "Is there anyone working here like me?"

So the two talked, then acted. They are now co-chairs of MH+ Pride, an Employee Resource Group (ERG) that is fully supported by the health system and aimed at creating a welcoming, affirming, inclusive and safe environment for all LGBTQ+ employees.

MH+ Pride has filled the vacuum Gramlich and Daulaire previously felt by providing connections between employees, a safe environment and—most important of all, they say—visibility.

Before creating the group, Gramlich says, "I was a different person outside the hospital and felt like just an employee at work. Now I feel like I can be an LGBTQ+ employee."

Daulaire says she feels relieved. "It's been really nice to connect, and to feel like part of the community instead of educating other people...and waiting for the side-eye when I mention my wife. It's a really nice feeling."

Especially because she works the night shift, Daulaire appreciates how MH+ Pride has connected her with employees she doesn't ordinarily meet.

Although employees are the group's primary focus, patients also benefit from its work. When queer employees are proudly out, and all staff is respectful of and educated about LGBTQ+ patients' health needs, patients feel welcome and in good hands. Something as simple as an employee wearing a pronoun badge (one of MH+ Pride's first actions) can make all the difference to a patient.

Daulaire says she's seen a change in Middlesex's affirmation of its queer employees since she started working there in 2017—and seen the benefit for patients as well. There once was a policy



Lisa (l) and Siri celebrating at Middletown PrideFEST 2022
Photo courtesy of Middlesex Health.



against “unnatural” colored hair, says Daulaire who, at the time she spoke with *CT Voice*, had vivid red hair. Now she sees a lot of patients with multi-colored hair, and believes her appearance makes patients feel comfortable.

In just four years since getting organized (more like three, thanks to COVID’s interruption) and only two since officially launching, the Pride committee’s efforts have, well, worked. People tell Daulaire they feel seen, and safer. Gramlich says she’s even happier at work. “It gives you that sense you are not alone.”

MH+ Pride’s efforts have been so successful that Gramlich thinks it should inspire other organizations to form LGBTQ+ ERGs. “Such groups offer a non-confrontational way to ask questions, make changes, and do better,” she says, and “the result is a stronger organization.”

The first thing the MH+ Pride Committee did was to define its purpose, which is to:

- Provide a forum for discussion, mentoring and support.
- Serve as a resource to ensure a safe and welcoming climate.
- Ensure visibility, awareness and understanding of the LGBTQ+ community in all aspects of the organization.
- Educate healthcare providers and staff about the LGBTQ+ patients’ healthcare issues.

In 2021, the group launched a membership drive, adopted its logo, surveyed its members, and designed and launched the pronoun badges that are now offered to all employees.

Then they really got busy. They created a resource guide for transitioning and transitioned employees that contains resources for employees, managers, and human resources, including sample announcement letters, to-do-checklists, and educational information.

They conducted staff-wide education on diversity and the importance of pronouns. They held a Progress Pride Flag raising



ceremony at Middlesex Hospital. During last year’s Pride Month, they created systemwide screensavers featuring LGBTQ+ statistics and information.

When the health system conducted an employee survey on Diversity, Equity and Inclusion, MH+ Pride participated in creating the survey’s LGBTQ+-related questions.

They held a Trans Awareness Week and Transgender Day of Remembrance in 2022, and again used screensavers to honor trans people who have been murdered.

They also had fun while creating visibility when marching in the Middletown Pride Parade. The number of employees marching in the parade grows each year.

More social events are “on the horizon,” says Gramlich. “We had plans, but COVID got in the way.”


There’s still a lot of work to do, say Gramlich and Daulaire. They have begun meeting with the city of Middletown’s LGBTQ Commission to establish a relationship and plan cooperative work.

The Pride committee expects to generate more ideas for projects to follow from the results of the health system’s employee survey.

They are currently creating an intranet site for employees with information on educational opportunities, as well as resources like the resource guide for transitioning employees.

And beyond continuing to provide education, they are also beginning to create toolkits that medical providers can work through to establish competency and be designated as “LGBTQ+ providers.”

A measure of Middlesex Health’s responsiveness to its LGBTQ+ patients and employees is its Center for Gender Medicine and Wellness, which specializes in caring for trans, nonbinary and gender nonconforming patients.

In addition, The Human Rights Campaign has awarded Middlesex five consecutive “LGBTQ Healthcare Equality Leader” designations. The honor is based on the facilities’ policies and practices related to equity and inclusion of LGBTQ+ patients, visitors, and employees. 



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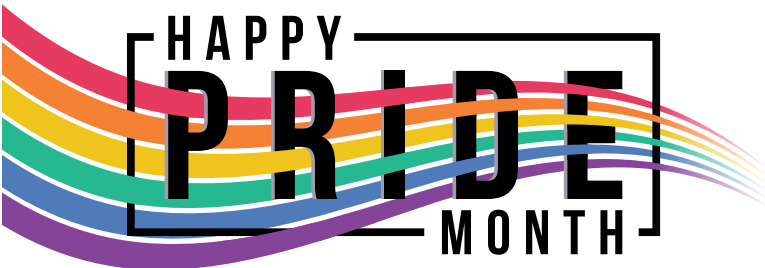
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COVER STORY //



Authentically Inspiring:

Basketball Great Sue Bird on Her Career and Living Her Truth

By CHRISTOPHER BYRNE

Her basketball career is nothing short of trailblazing. Sue Bird was the consummate player who spent her entire WNBA, professional career with the Seattle Storm. She's racked up an incredible list of firsts, records, championships, and even four Olympic gold medals. She's been a star almost since she first took to the court. She's also one of the first WNBA stars to have a 20-year professional career and has been a teammate, leader, and role-model for the game and those women who play, whether professionally or at the college level. She's also, according to everyone who has played with her, one of the nicest people who's ever hit the boards, though a fierce competitor. Even her opponents have been in awe of being on the court when she plays. Certainly, that easy charisma and joyful outlook was evident when she spoke with *CT Voice*.



UCONN was years ago, but Connecticut still claims Sue Bird as their own. She's good with that.

And for all her global success, there are many in Connecticut who still claim Bird as their own. She had an outstanding career at UCONN where as a player she led the Huskies to many wins and records, and though it's more than two decades since she left Storrs, her memory lives on—as well as the doors she's opened for other women in the sport.

Bird returned to Connecticut in May where she joined coach Genno Auremma and another former UCONN player Morgan Tuck on a panel at The Connecticut Forum in Hartford to talk about their history at UCONN and, equally importantly, life after competitive play.

For Bird, she's been able to follow a path to being more authentic and being able to live openly as a lesbian, but it wasn't always a, you should pardon the expression, straight path.

"The way things played out as a professional basketball player, you're in the news...on TV. There are a lot of wonderful things that come with that. I entered UCONN in 1988. I graduated in 2002, and I remember upon graduating, I was starting to choose an agent. And the vibe back then was, 'Oh, they don't want to know if you're gay.' Or, if you're gay, you don't want to show that because it might impact your off-court opportunities.

"So, that immediately kept me in the closet. I was scared, and there was a lot of fear out there. What's interesting is that entering the WNBA, it was a very welcoming place. In the locker room, I felt very comfortable to be myself.

"I would say that from around 2003 until I came out publicly in 2017, I was basically out in every facet of my life—friends, family, coaches, colleagues. Everyone at the Storm knew. And it wasn't until I said [that I was gay] publicly that I realized the burden I had been carrying by not, you know, kind of just being myself out in the open. It was just a wonderful experience for me to come out that way.

"That's my experience. Everybody has to come to it in their own way, in their own

"It's easy
to compare
yourself and feel
bad about it.
But the message
I always like
to deliver is,
there's only one
of you, and you
need to bring
that.

time. I was 23 when I told my parents, and yet I was 37 when I told the world. It's not that I was struggling; I just didn't realize that that authenticity piece was so important.

"I think everyone who has ever come out can relate to the idea of what happened in 2017 for me. I had to stop doing all the little come outs." Bird describes the awkward moments when she would meet someone to whom she wasn't out and had to go through the process again and again. When she finally came out publicly, she felt the burden was lifted.

Bird is encouraged by the ability of more athletes to come out and believes that it bodes well for professional athletes of all genders in the future. Still, she's conscious of—and grateful for—the people who have gone before, which eased her process. Bird is engaged to soccer star Megan Rappinoc, whom she met in 2017. (Publicity around

that relationship is one of the reasons Bird came out publicly.) They got engaged in 2020 but are planning to set a wedding date after the World Cup in August of this year. As Bird says, she and Megan have had "ups and downs" in their relationship, but they know their situation isn't unique and that they are traveling "roads that have been paved well before me and Megan.

"There are people who came out like Billy Jean King. You could throw out tons of names—such as Martina Navratilova—where it was extremely difficult. It was so much easier [for me] because of them.

"And you just hope because of people like myself and Megan and other athletes, other public figures who have come out in the last 20 years or so will make it easier for the next generation and so on and so forth." In particular, Bird was referring to Raiders defensive end Carl Nassib who came out in 2021. Nassib announced he was gay in an Instagram post where he said that he had "agonized over this moment for the last 15 years.

Helping others to avoid that "agonizing" is important to Bird, and she points to women's basketball as playing a key role in helping people to feel free enough to live authentically. "Women's basketball has always been ahead of society, and I feel like society finally caught with us in terms of the things we've stood for, the demographics we represent, especially the communities that are marginalized." She notes that this is endemic of a larger cultural awareness and shift—one that more sponsors want to be part of and that they want to support and amplify in the culture at large.

Bird hopes to inspire others to be able to live authentically. "I can't emphasize that enough." She hopes to encourage young athletes to be able to live their truths on and off the court. She adds that in a world of social media, "it's easy to compare yourself and feel bad about it. But the message I always like to deliver is, there's only you; one of one; there's only one of you, and you need to bring that. And even though [you're] different, that doesn't





make it better or worse.

“I always speak from an athlete’s standpoint,” she adds, noting that one of the most important things she can do is showing up for the game...and realize her own gifts. “I can’t do what Bre Stewart can do, that’s just not gonna’ happen. I just can’t do what she can do. She’s amazing. But if I don’t bring my part, we’re not winning championships, and there’s equal value in that. So, I just try to remind people of that. I think when you are yourself, and you are authentically yourself—the good, the bad, the ugly, the pretty; there’s beauty in that. There’s beauty in living that way, and I just really encourage people to do that.”

Living authentically extends to the transgender community as well, which Bird supports. “I am a hundred


percent for trans athletes being able to compete. I think, sadly, this is a community being used politically for other reasons. I think it’s disgusting.

“I think that the idea of policing young people’s bodies is awful. The reality to me is: what are we really talking about? Especially in youth sports, we are talking about someone being able to live their life authentically, and you’re worried about them winning a championship when the odds they won’t even go professional. Are you going to take away this experience for young people’s lives?”

“I can tell you firsthand—forget being in professional sports—as a young person [playing sports] did everything for me. You learn so much in sports. And so, the idea of taking

that away just because someone’s trying to live their life authentically. It’s just really sad.”

Moving ahead, Bird is not resting on her laurels. There may be coaching or other involvement in the game in her future, and she has just founded a media company called Togethxr, which she created with soccer great Alex Morgan. Their goal is to tell stories about women in sports that don’t typically get coverage in mainstream media. “Hopefully they’ll become mainstream. It’s about covering women athletes, people of color, marginalized groups, stories that don’t get the time or exposure they deserve.”

It’s a fitting next step in a career that’s been all about team building, creating community, and living with one’s truth and integrity. 



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Connecticut's Season of *RuPaul's Drag Race*: Dish, Shade, and Sashay Away

By FRANK RIZZO

There was Amethyst killing it on her first Lip Synch-For-Your-Life—and triumphing—after making the ultimate *faux pas* of wearing sneakers on the runway.

Then there was Robin Fierce, trying to be her glamiest in a photo shoot while straddling a blazing red chopper with a nearly naked hunk behind her, as a flockful of feathers stuck stubbornly to her glossed face.

But most of all there was Loosey LaDuca, winning challenges both maxi and mini, withstanding waves of covert and overt bitchery and proving herself to be one tough Connecticut cookie in the 15th season of *RuPaul's Drag Race* which crowned a new super-queen in mid-April when Sasha Colby took the crown.

Connecticut drag fans were stunned when it was announced in December that after 14 years and nearly 200 queens from around the country—there would finally, finally, be Connecticut representation in 2023.

But few would have imagined that there wouldn't be just one queen from the state but three—and four if your count the New York-based Jax who grew up in Darien.

But alas, from this nut-megadose of talent, each eventually sashayed away, though Loosey came this close to the

Final Four before having to pack her bags and head back to Ansonia. Still, she emerged as Connecticut's queen of queens, branded a song and a slogan, and proved she could deliver big time on the national stage.

So, what did we think of Season 15 and the Connecticut glamour gals?

Well, allow me to spill the tea. (Spoiler alert though: Details of the season are discussed but if you're a true fan, none of this is breaking news.)

There wasn't one Land of Steady Habits drag:

Watch each Connecticut queen make their entrance in the workroom in the opening episode and see that this trio reflected their own individual essence, rather than a group dynamic style of pageantry, performance or personality. Just check out the appealing quirkiness of “resident meme queen” Amethyst from Bristol—and with less than three years of performing. Though her stay was relatively brief, this “baby queen” still shone with her off-beat humor and witty confessionals, demonstrating from the get-go that she deserved to be there, too. She also got makeup contouring tips from Michelle and RuPaul confessing that “I'm a nose queen and I love your nose. It's gorgeous!”

Then, consider the allure of Hartford-based Robin Fierce (“Connecticut's

great diva, darling”), so classy, so cool, so mysterious: an enigma wrapped in fabulousness. The “tea” that an earlier tryst with Amethyst was a tantalizing tease in the early episodes, but dammit, there was no drama, mama; they're just friends now. And soon Robin would join Amethyst at the exit after confessing that she wasn't a gambler.

Then there was Loosey, the last Connecticut queen standing, so polished, so professional, and often just pissed—though her Joan Rivers, Dolly Parton and other comic portrayals were such a hoot.

And yes, I'm now claiming Jax as a Connecticut queen, too.

And who wouldn't want that cutie as their wing-queen? Jax was a fireplug of fun and spirit—and gymnastic dare. Flips in heels? We can now check that *Drag Race* firsts box. This lovable performer had an infectious glow that didn't require any additional makeup. Also note that both sporty Jax and Lucy—a construction worker by trade—showed that having muscles does not preclude you from looking divine.

Best lines and moments:

“Take a breath,” Ru advised a hyper-enthusiast Selina EsTitties who urged the hyperventilating performer to calm down and focus her energies. Sage



Robin Fierce...werking it!



Robin Fierce and Jax

advice from the queen of cool.

— “Smile,” Ru told Anetra, an amazing and stylish performer who listened to Mama and turned the “bitch resting” face to fab-friendly — and made it to the finale.

— “So who’s working in Connecticut now?” asked Jax when then third queen from then state arrived. “No one,” deadpanned Loosey.

— Loosey denying her arch rival Luxx Noir London the teacher that she most

wanted for the make-over challenge.

It was a savvy move, revealing a significant weakness in empathy and taste in Luxx’s otherwise stellar run. (We also hope Luxx leaves that white patent leather cap behind, which made her look like the doorman at an Apple Store. It was a glaring gaffe in what otherwise was a stylish queen.)

— When a store security tag was accidentally discovered on Luxx’s fur coat. Oops.

As always, there were questions about editing.

Sometimes the editing showed that Loosey was a queen always on edge whereas anyone who knows her understands that yes, she’s strong-willed, strongly opinionated and, well, just strong, but not authentic? Loosey may not come across as cuddly, but she had to fight to survive and triumph—and clearly she was laser-focused on the win, perhaps too much so. But it



seemed the producers needed someone to be cast darkly and wanted to make her narrative a bitter one. Blame it on the edit, as they say.

Mistress was a shrewd player.

Gotta give props to her—and so young, too, to be such a savvy manipulative player. But it was painful to see how Mistress Isabelle Brooks triggered Loosey so much. At least we saw a glimpse of Loosey’s authentic self when

she shared her touching story about growing up queer in Ansonia. And what a fabulous family, too, which we saw in the “Untucked” room.

This season came at a pivotal time in drag and LGBTQ+ rights.

With legislative campaigns by conservative lawmakers across the country to curb the rights of the

LGBTQ+ community, this season seemed even more important in showing the real world of drag, nicely displayed in the “Wigloose” the Rusical. (And can’t Ru get better writers for these limp scripts? Try as these queens do time and time again to make it funny, it always looks like heavy lifting.)

With its move to MTV, the show had a rushed feel.

Yes, there were the backstage glimpses of “Untucked,” and the dishy post-



Alina Es Titties and Amethyst



Loosey (top left) as "Joan Rovers"



Loosey in hostess mode.

show analysis with the hysterically funny Bianco del Rio and sweet exit interviews of “Unpacked” (where I really appreciated Michelle’s warm interviewing skills). But this season it seems viewers—and queens—got shortchanged with the mini-challenges, the shortened table talks with RuPaul and the oh-so-brief critiques and “squirrel talk” with the judges. It diminished the season, with some episodes clocking in at way under an hour, and dealing with 16 contestants. I kept thinking of the thousands of dollars the queens paid

for these gowns with so little airtime to model their creations. Yeah, “Unpacked” helped—but not enough.

Is Loosey NYC-bound?

Maybe it’s up to Rocko, Loosey’s Yorkshire chihuahua. In a post-elimination interview with Michelle, our local hero hinted that she’s ready to “Let Loose”—and check out her Spotify number—on a larger stage. But we hope she remembers her Connecticut roots, too, because we love Loosey. ♡

Continuously Striving for Inclusivity and LGBTQ+ Representation at Mental Health Connecticut

By TOM CIUBA

With the Mental Health Alliance reporting LGBTQ+ individuals as 2.5 times more likely to seek mental health programs and services than non-LGTBQ+ people, organizations that support mental wellbeing serve a vital role in helping LGBTQ+ community members navigate the stresses and anxieties that can come with the current political climate. Farmington-based Mental Health Connecticut (MHC) is one such organization offering services across Connecticut.

MHC's roots date back to early last century. Connecticut native and Yale University graduate Clifford W. Beers founded the Connecticut Society for Mental Hygiene (which eventually became Mental Health Connecticut) in 1908 and co-founded the National Committee for Mental Hygiene (which evolved into Mental Health America) in 1909 after witnessing firsthand the healthcare system's inability to offer effective and humane care for mental illness. Beers had spent three years in several Connecticut hospitals shortly after experiencing his first manic episode while working as a Wall Street financier.

"As a wealthy, college-educated white man, Beers came from tremendous privilege," says Luis Pérez, who celebrated a decade as MHC's president and CEO this past January, "but that privilege was of little service to him once he began experiencing mental health distress. Today, we recognize the universality of mental health matters and work to

promote individual recovery and wellness through an array of programs and initiatives."

While MHC is not a direct provider of clinical mental health services, the organization of roughly 220 employees partners with individuals, families and communities to create environments that support long-term health and wellness through a diverse service menu, including:

Residential services that assist people living with mental health conditions in preparing for, obtaining and maintaining independent living within their communities. This includes individual in-home care to promote engagement with family members and community involvement, as well as Robinson House located in West Hartford, which provides assistance to members of the deaf and hard-of-hearing community;

Employment and education services to help those with mental health conditions and disabilities secure work or gain equitable access to education;

General wellness initiatives, including at MHC's Independence Center in Waterbury, which offers daily workshops that help individuals with mental health conditions build skills and confidence to achieve personal goals; Deaf Rec, a club that brings people who are deaf or hard-of-hearing together for recreational activities such as museum trips, lunches and dinners, and local fairs and festivals; and artistic programs such as Write On!, Art of Wellbeing, and GROW, a year-round horticultural therapy program;

Business coaching through the MHC Collaborative, which counsels small-

to-mid-sized companies on fostering psychologically and culturally safe workplaces. The Collaborative's custom workshops tackle stress management; diversity, equity, and inclusion; effective communication and mitigating burnout, among other topics. There are also certified trainings, such as Mental Health First Aid, which guides participants through finding help for a coworker or someone else experiencing a mental health crisis; and

Advocacy with elected officials to promote policies that fight discrimination and help people achieve mental wellness. In addition, the organization advocates for those who experience mental health conditions to break down stigmas by sharing their personal stories.

Historically, MHC has found that not everyone chooses to identify their sexuality upon intake, while less than one percent chose to identify as either gender non-binary or transgender in 2022.

"All of our services are guided by industry best practices, and our direct care staff continually receive high marks for their ability to create inclusive spaces," says Suzi Craig, MHC's chief strategy officer. "Overall, MHC is seeing a growing number of program participants share their identity and preferences, due in large part to the organization's culture and commitment to creating safe environments."

That being said, roughly 25 percent of those seeking MHC's services and programs for deaf and hard-of-hearing individuals have identified as LGBTQ+. One such individual is Kaja Hanson.



Kaja Hanson, former program participant of MHC

“Several years back while living home with my parents, I began suffering from undiagnosed bipolar disorder,” Kaja recounts. “My dad, a psychologist, located a deaf counselor working at Capitol Region Mental Health Center. After a few sessions, she referred me to MHC’s Robinson House program, a temporary stay group home for deaf adults with mental health issues who need help learning independent living skills.”

Kaja lived at Robinson House for 10 years. “It’s longer than most people live there,” Kaja continues, “but I have particular ongoing challenges.”

Throughout her stay at Robinson House, Kaja also participated in MHC’s art program as well as the Deaf Rec social club.

“MHC is an excellent organization, and I have encountered only respect from its employees,” says Kaja. “Not only did Robinson House staff respect my name and pronouns as a

transgender person, but they actively assisted me in locating transition-related services. Overall, I am doing vastly better than before I crossed paths with MHC and started living at Robinson House. I would highly recommend the program to deaf adults who are struggling with self-care or other life-maintenance tasks.”

Robinson House also helped Kaja locate and enroll in programs for continued service once she left the home, such as the Mental Health Waiver program that can help clients meet daily living needs, including keeping up with personal hygiene as well as cleaning and other household chores.

“Kaja taught our staff a lot about the complicated process of transitioning, so we now have the experience to support another person going through a similar transition while utilizing our services,” says Amelia Saunders, MHC’s director of residential services.

Recognizing the importance of continuously building trust among Connecticut’s LGBTQ+ community, MHC has taken deliberate strides over the past few years to demonstrate a specific commitment to supporting LGBTQ+ individuals.

In 2020, MHC launched the Equity, Social Justice & Antiracism (ESJA) Advisory Committee comprised of volunteer staff members from across the state. The group hosted an LGBTQ+ History, Health & Inclusion seminar as part of its monthly educational programs and created a resource and advocacy guide for the LGBTQ+ community.

After the November 2022 mass shooting at Club Q in Colorado on Transgender Day of Remembrance, MHC issued public support for the LGBTQ+ community, stating that the organization “stands in compassion and solidarity with the victims, their families and the LGBTQ+ community”

and that “violence, discrimination and hatred toward this community cannot be ignored or written off as anything other than what it is, a hate crime.” (The organization also released statements in response to mass shootings in Atlanta in March 2021 and in California this January, to the Supreme Court’s overturning of *Roe v. Wade*, and to police brutality against George Floyd in 2020 as well as Tyre Nichols earlier this year.)

MHC also partners with IDONTMIND, a program of Mental Health America with international reach. IDONTMIND inspires open dialogue around mental health and promotes free support resources for anyone in need. In fall 2023, MHC and IDONTMIND will once again partner to offer a Write On! class specifically for LGBTQ+ adults ages 18-25 in Connecticut and beyond. Write On!

helps participants hone writing skills to become powerful storytellers. The course is sponsored by Macy’s, which is also supporting MHC to hire an artist to create a color therapy-focused Pride mural in Connecticut this summer.


Through MHC’s ongoing Let’s Face It campaign, the marketing team has highlighted several members of the LGBTQ+ community and is spotlighting LGBTQ+ people during Pride Month.

“This particular campaign centers on visibility of individual challenges, promoting community support as well as the idea that a journey to mental wellbeing does not have to be faced alone,” says Craig.

In addition, MHC’s annual cultural humility training for staff and board of director members will focus on LGBTQ+ inclusion in 2023, with the goal of making the organization an

LGBTQ+ Safe Zone.

“MHC strives to meet people wherever they are on their personal mental health journey and recognize their individuality, experiences and unique cultures,” says Jacquilyn Davis, who was hired as MHC’s first DEI and engagement coordinator in June 2021. “Whether making public statements to formalize philosophies that have been ingrained in our organizational DNA since Day 1 or taking formal action on social justice matters via ongoing trainings, assessments and outreach, we are working diligently to ensure more inclusive practices that strengthen our effectiveness and better enable full recovery for those who seek our services.”

To learn more about MHC and all of its programs and services, visit mhconn.org. 



Amy Smith (l) and Jazz Borst (r), staff of MHC’s Art of Wellbeing program



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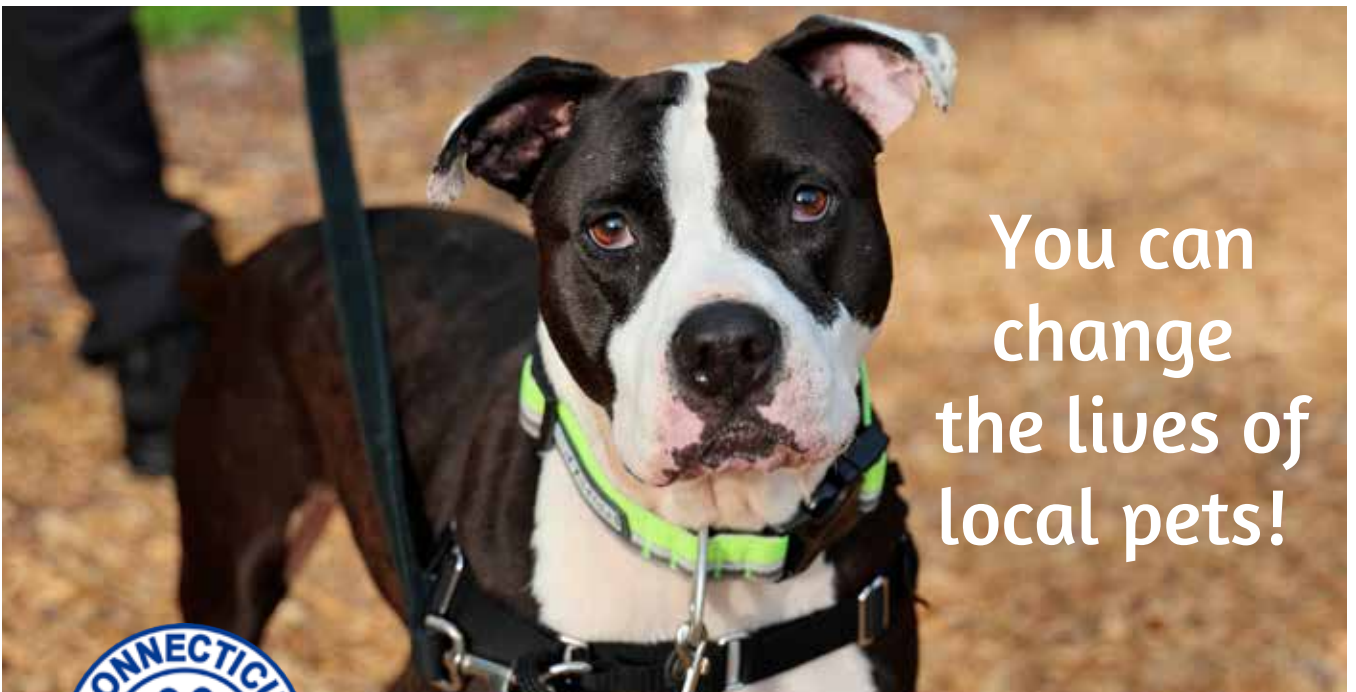
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WHY LOCAL PRIDE MATTERS: A Conversation with Colin Hosten of the Leonard Litz LGBTQ+ Foundation

Committed to supporting pride on the local level, the Leonard Litz LGBTQ+ Foundation is engaged, passionate, and dedicated to supporting community-based organizations in their ongoing efforts to achieve representation and equality. *CT Voice* talked with executive director Colin Hosten about the organization, its mission, and why Pride matters so much now:

CV: What is the mission of your organization as it relates to LGBTQ+ communities, particularly in Connecticut?

CH: I think “communities” is exactly the key word when it comes to our mission. We as LGBTQ+ people are under vicious attack throughout the country right now—and the other side is well resourced—making many individuals and organizations understandably eager to support the larger national nonprofits fighting for our rights. But our main focus at the Leonard Litz LGBTQ+ Foundation is on the smaller, community-based organizations doing boots-on-the-ground work in towns and neighborhoods throughout Connecticut and the Northeast. These are the community centers driven largely by volunteers who work tirelessly to help people socially, emotionally, legally, financially, and otherwise. It is life-saving work, often performed with little to no recognition—



Hosten (l) celebrating Pride

but in many ways, these groups are the heart and soul of the movement, and we at Leonard Litz are proud not only to uplift and support their work, but to encourage others in all our communities to do so, as well.

CV: You have teamed up with Circle Care Center to support Pride celebrations around the state. What's the thinking behind that, and why is it important?

CH: I think a sentiment from an 11-year-old attendee last year at Easton Pride sums it up pretty well. He was simply happy to know that there were other LGBTQ+ people living right there in this community—that he didn't have to travel to another town, or another state, to feel represented and welcome. Visibility is vitally important when it comes to this

fight for equality. It's easier to hate and denigrate people if you don't think they are your neighbors, your relatives, a reflection of your own humanity. Harvey Milk famously said that one of the most important things we can do as advocates is come out of the closet—in New York, and Boston, and other big cities, yes—but also in Norwalk, and Middletown, and New London, and in every corner of Connecticut. We're here, and we're not going anywhere, so let's celebrate!

CV: We are mostly aware that Connecticut is a fairly progressive state in terms of LGBTQ+ issues. So, why do people need to stay involved?

CH: The word “fairly” is doing a lot of work there. Without taking for granted the important strides we have made for LGBTQ+ equality in our state, it is critically important not to rest on our laurels and think our work here is finished. That can lead to a level of complacency that causes us to be blindsided when a local Board of Education removes references to LGBTQ+ protections in its Title IX policy, for example, or when a municipality bans all non-U.S. flags from public spaces in a thinly veiled attack on LGBTQ+ Pride. Even today, the state of Connecticut is violating federal law by denying constitutionally mandated medical care to a transgender person who happens to be incarcerated. I am thankful every day for our leaders in state and local

governments who have protected the LGBTQ+ community in Connecticut from the more insidious attacks we are seeing in other parts of the country. But while we've coming a long way as a state, we still have a long way to go.

CV: The early Pride parades were designed to ensure that the LGBTQ+ community visible and seen *en masse*. Is that still necessary, and why?

CH: Progress is simply easier to achieve when we achieve it together. Just look at what's happening on the other side. These are people who don't always agree on the federal tax code, or on what's happening in Ukraine, for example. But they have linked arms *en masse* when it comes to attacking the LGBTQ+ community. We cannot fight them on our own, one by one. That said, Pride is not just about marching in parades. It can mean supporting a local drag queen story hour or going out to dinner with a rainbow pin on your shirt. It all adds up to make a whole that's greater than the sum of its parts. But I also encourage folks to venture out to their local parades, especially if you've never been to one. Many of us have spent too much of our lives learning how to love ourselves in the face of constant messaging to the contrary. It's the greatest thrill to be surrounded by an outpouring of love, unity, celebration, and, of course, pride.

CV: The transgender community, in particular, has been singled out for targeted and controversial attacks throughout the country and right here in Connecticut. How can Pride celebrations be as inclusive as possible in celebrating all the communities under the LGBTQ+ banner?

CH: Let's be clear: Trans rights are Human rights—period. Pride is about celebrating every sexual orientation and gender identity/expression under the rainbow. Today, it is more important than ever

for the LGBTQ+ community—and our allies—to be loud and proud in support of our transgender family. We cannot for a second delude ourselves into thinking that this is “not our fight.” First, we know that these attacks will not stop with the transgender community. Already your favorite drag queens are being threatened in places like Tennessee and Arizona. Legislators in Iowa have proposed a ban on marriage equality. And Florida's infamous “Don't Say Gay” law has spawned copycat legislation in more than a dozen states. They are coming for all of us, and all of us need to be in the fight. There is no LGB without the T.


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CV: What are some other ways that people can get involved and support the LGBTQ+ community throughout this Pride season?

CH: That's the best part: there are so many opportunities to be part of Pride, right here in Connecticut—from a karaoke fundraiser in Darien, to a Pride goat walk in Easton, to community dinners in Middletown, a cooking competition in Westport, and family-friendly drag shows in places like Hartford and New Haven. If

you're looking for something specific in your hometown, you can send an email to info@leonardlitz.org. Part of why the Foundation has decided to support these Pride efforts in a meaningful way, in conjunction with our friends at Circle Care Center, is to help connect people to all the amazing events happening right in their own communities—and to connect communities to one another so that we can all come out and support each other. Now is the time to get out and do something. And to have a fabulous time doing it!

CV: What are the criteria the foundation uses to determine grants? And how can organizations apply?

CH: Our Community Grants are available to any 501(c)(3) organization providing services and programs to the LGBTQ+ community in the Northeast U.S. Since 2021, we have awarded or approved almost \$3million in grants, in every Northeast state from Maryland to Maine. We prioritize direct programming assistance that reaches those who need it most, and special consideration is given to organizations that center those who have been historically marginalized even within the LGBTQ+ community, including communities of color and transgender, gender-nonconforming and nonbinary (TGNCNB) people. Actually, this year, partly in response to the unprecedented attacks on the TGNCNB community, we are excited to launch the Leonard Litz TransPLUS Initiative, a separate grant application with a specific focus on traditionally underserved groups. We invite nonprofit LGBTQ+ organizations in Connecticut and throughout the Northeast to check out our website to learn more, or feel free to reach out directly to info@leonardlitz.org. Happy Pride, everyone! 



Don't miss the Connecticut VOICE Honors Special airing on WTNH, June 3 from 7:00 – 8:00 p.m.

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Governor Ned Lamont

“It is an honor to contribute a Final Word for Connecticut Voice’s Pride Issue”

As the governor of Connecticut, I am incredibly proud that our state is an accepting, welcoming place for everyone. Our state reflects our shared values: inclusion and opportunity are our birthright; love makes a family, and hate has no home here. It one of the reasons why Connecticut is ranked as one of the best states for families. It is why businesses are choosing to move to Connecticut and it is why Connecticut is emerging as a destination for LGBTQ+ tourism. (We recently became the first state to join the LGBTQ+ Travel Association.)

Connecticut historically has been one of the leading states in the nation



in protecting the rights of LGBTQ+ individuals and families. Continuing this progress has been an important part of my work as governor.

Any day that we can expand equal protection for all individuals is a good day. That is why in 2021, I was proud to work with members of the General Assembly—and with Rep. Jeff Currey, in particular—to sign the Connecticut Parentage Act. We took this action to help break down bureaucratic barriers that families can face simply because of the sexual orientation or gender of the parents.

The law ensures that all children have equal access to the security of a legal parent-child relationship, regardless of their parents’ sexual orientation or gender. The law recognizes that all children are

deserving of the same protection that legal parentage provides by making it easier to establish parentage at birth, regardless of whether the child is born to married parents. It also provides important protections for intended parents of children who are born through assisted reproduction.

And while, nearly two decades ago, Connecticut was one of the first states to expand its hate crime law to include targeting someone based on “gender identity or expression,” we know our work protecting individuals from hate is not done.

In 2019, I signed legislation prohibiting criminal defendants in Connecticut from using a victim’s actual or perceived sexual orientation or gender identity as a legal tactic to bolster the defense of the violent crimes for which they are accused. Commonly referred to as the gay and transgender “panic” defense, the strategy asks a jury to find

that a victim’s sexual orientation or gender identity is to blame for the defendant’s violent reaction. When the tactic is employed, the perpetrator claims that their victim’s sexual orientation or gender identify not only explains—but excuses—their loss of self-control and subsequent assault.


Claiming that meeting or interacting with someone who is gay or transgender elicited some type of temporary insanity that is supposed to justify a violent crime is ludicrous, and quite frankly it is absurd that this tactic has ever been successfully utilized in the court system. The strategy also implies that the life of a gay or transgender person is valued less than others. We will not allow homophobia and transphobia to be legitimate reasons that justify violent crime.

We have also worked to right some of the wrongs of the past. For

decades, American servicemembers were subject to unjust discharge from the service solely for their gender identity or sexual orientation. In 2021, we passed legislation restoring state benefits to Connecticut service members who were denied honorable discharge under these circumstances.

More work remains, but it is undeniable that Connecticut is a state where you can be who you are meant to be and love who you want to love. Not only are we committed to protecting the LGBTQ+ rights, but we celebrate them.

At a time when it seems that LGBTQ+ rights are under attack across the nation, it is my hope that Connecticut stands out as a welcoming state.

I look forward to celebrating Pride and working together with you to make Connecticut the best place to work, live, and raise a family. 



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