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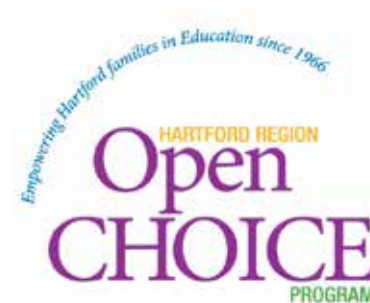


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EDITOR'S NOTE //



A Pause to Reflect and Celebrate

I've always loved the holiday season, and revel in the celebrations and connections with my biological and chosen families. It's also a time of year to connect with ourselves, our humanity, and our spirits, however that may be expressed. It is in the pause when, in the words of the prayer, "the busy world is hushed," that we may find peace.

This year, especially, we need moments of that peace. These are turbulent times. There is war around the world, there are those who would cruelly deprive LGBTQ+ people of their rights—and their humanity. Yet—and this the paradox of life—there is also room for joy. Our work is to accept these realities and to do what we can to support the best in ourselves and our communities, no matter how difficult that may seem at times.

Fortunately for us in Connecticut, the LGBTQ+ communities have advocates like Senator Richard Blumenthal, who has contributed our Final Word for this issue. In it, he talks about his commitment to our communities—and the work he's doing for us. In addition, we talk to David Grant of the Hartford Gay and Lesbian Health Collective about their 40 years of service to our communities... and the big plans ahead.

Jane Latus has written an important and comprehensive piece about the realities of trans athletes. Jane is a voice of reason, reality, and science, tackling with grace and insight an issue that needs more understanding and compassion in our culture today.

Dawn Ennis looks at drag dining, both as a night out and a political statement. As always, Dawn finds and amplifies voices that need to be heard. Plus, it's a whole lot of fun.

Frank Rizzo profiles theater director Mark Lamos as he retires and reflects on Lamos' role in moving theater forward in our state to confront pressing issues and rediscover what the classics can teach us.

Brian Lipton profiles the Queer Food Foundation, a grassroots organization designed to foster representation of queer people in the food industry.

In the second part of her articles on travel, Ashley Rogers highlights great destinations for LGBTQ+ travelers, including what you need to know. If you're struck with wanderlust this holiday season, you'll want to check this out.

Our regular columnists have a lot to share in this issue, too. Meghan Crutchley has tips on making joy a year-round experience. Kim Adamski has some sound advice for staying safe if you're headed to a circuit party, and Michelle Cutrali has great advice to keep you from busting your budget this holiday season.

As always, there's so much more in these pages and online at CTVoice.com. Also, be sure to check out our Voice Out Loud podcast.

From all of us here, we wish you a safe, happy, and peaceful holiday season and a joy-full New Year.

Chris

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“THERE IS NOTHING IN THE WORLD
SO IRRESISTIBLY CONTAGIOUS AS
LAUGHTER AND GOOD HUMOR.”

—Charles Dickens, *A Christmas Carol*

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CONTRIBUTORS //



FRANK RIZZO
Frank Rizzo caught up with director Mark Lamos as he retires (page 30) and looks back at the movie Longtime Companion (page 37). 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 loves writing about food, and his curiosity took him to the Queer Food Foundation (page 67). He also gives us a peak at Goodspeed's *Dreamgirls*. 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 takes us drag dining for fun and political statements (page 40). 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.



ASHLEY ROGERS
Ashley Rogers, a long-time traveler destination tips for LGBTQ+ travelers (page 56). Ashley is a former marketing director and an award-winning network television producer and documentary filmmaker from NYC and LA. In 2010, she moved to Cuenca, Ecuador for "a new adventure" and found her next career passion as a real estate agent, founding the company, Ecuador At Your Service (ecuadoratyourerivce.com). She also continues with freelance writing and production.



JANE LATUS
Jane Latus covers health and politics. She writes about Middlesex Health's LGBTQ+ supportive emergency care (page 70), and digs behind the myths about trans athletes (page 44). 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.



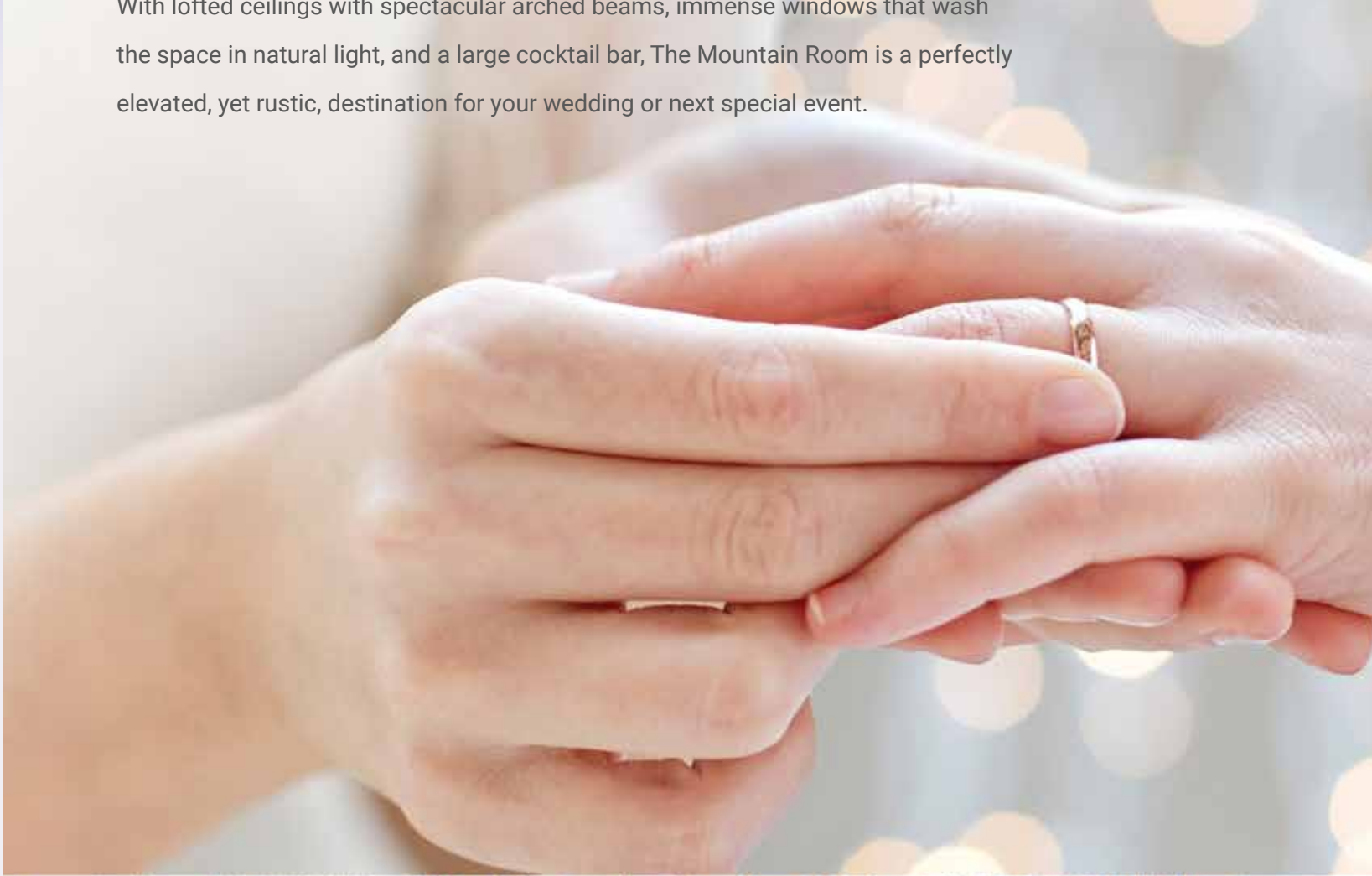
RENEE DININO
Renee Dinino is our resident pet maven and wrote the piece on Protectors of Animals (page 75). She is the director of community affairs for iHeartMedia in Connecticut, the midday host on The River 105.9 and host of a syndicated talk show on all CT iHeart Radio stations. An avid animal lover and advocate, she and her husband Sal have a German Shepherd, Luke, a rescue. Instagram @reneedinino.



MEGHAN CRUTCHLEY
Meghan Crutchley is a National Board Certified Health and Wellness coach, educator, speaker, writer, and the CEO of Habitqueer, a company founded to improve the health and well being of queer professionals one habit at a time. With content and solutions developed for the individual, leadership or large group audiences they are uniquely positioned to focus on health issues including stress reduction, sleep, nutrition and behavior change.

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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 her full columns on CTVoice.com, and here's a preview of the topics she's been talking about since our last issue. The online columns have links to these amazing interviews.


Facing the End—Chion talks with Dr. David Meyers about facing his inevitable death with love and grace. He faced brain cancer, and treatment extended his life for five years. Yet, when the inevitable eventually arrived, he faced it with grace and compassion. Chion writes about how Dr. Meyers chose to go out with love in his heart, gratitude, and, ironically, a lifetime supply of dark chocolate sent from people who had heard the original interview.

Meet the Psychopaths—Anyone who has been to a movie featuring a crazed weapon-wielding villain is

familiar with the popular portrayal of psychopaths. However, this romanticized, fictional portrayal is inaccurate. In this column, Chion talks with two diagnosed psychopaths, and neither is likely to leap out of a cupboard with a butcher knife or chainsaw. In fact, you would be hard-pressed to accurately identify a true psychopath. Chion explains that pathology of this disorder and how these people walk among us mostly unrecognized, and she makes the distinction between psychopaths and “neurotypicals,” which is pretty much the rest of us, as far as we know. One of

the adaptive techniques psychopaths have mastered is “masking.” And, no we’re not talking about the classic hockey goalie mask. It’s an adaptation these people make in order to seem more like neurotypicals—in order to keep things on an even keel. Though, of course, there are always variations. Chion doesn’t want to spoil horror movies for fans; she’s just adding a dose of reality.

Platonic Partners—They’re like besties...only more so. Chion digs into the idea of Platonic Life Partners—people who are committed to one another in ways analogous to a traditional marriage, but there’s no sex.

These individuals become primary life partners, or are what were known more than a century ago as “Boston Marriages.” While some might judge these, be made uncomfortable, or simply not understand, Chion puts it in context. There are almost as many kinds of relationships as there are people, and as Chion explains, binary or rigid descriptions of love and connection no longer need apply. She notes, “the term, Gay & Lesbian wasn’t inclusive—or descriptive—enough. So now we have LGBTQIA+.” It’s a fascinating take, and it’s pure Chion—warm, open, curious, and accepting. 



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DREAMGIRLS

DREAMGIRLS

THE MUSICAL

Some musicals quickly fade into the dusty books of history, and some get numerous revivals, both on Broadway and in regional theaters, speaking to both old-timers who may have seen their original productions and new generations. The latter description certainly applies to Tom Eyen and Henry Krieger's 1981 tuner *Dreamgirls*, which will play Goodspeed Musicals in East Haddam from November 10 to December 30.

"I consider it a new classic," says Donna Lynne Hilton, Goodspeed's artistic director. "When you look at the text and hear the songs, you realize just how good this show is. There's nothing not to love about it!"

For those unfamiliar with the musical (which later

"We are already hearing a lot of excitement from subscribers and ticket-buyers of all ages about this show."

became a hit movie in 2006 starring Beyoncé, Jamie Foxx and Jennifer Hudson), it tells the story of a Supremes-like trio of R&B singers whose stratospheric rise to fame causes numerous personal and professional complications, including replacing the

temperamental (and overweight) singer Effie White in order to appeal to more mainstream audiences.

The original Broadway production ran for nearly four years and won six Tony Awards. Among its many

accomplishments, it made a superstar of Jennifer Holliday—the original Effie—whose performance of the Act I closer "And I Am Telling You I'm Not Going" earned minutes-long standing ovations every night, sold out for months, and won the actress a well-deserved Grammy Award in 1982.

"I always felt that the show would live on," says Krieger, who composed the score. "It speaks in different ways in different times to different people. But at the end of the day, I think it's still so popular because it's good. I am glad that so many people can still experience it so many years after Tom and I first wrote it."

Hilton agrees wholeheartedly. "While we only have 398 seats to fill for each performance, we still need to program something

that will attract people of all generations," she notes. "Thankfully, we are already hearing a lot of excitement from subscribers and ticket-buyers of all ages about this show. Some of our older patrons want something they can feel nostalgic about, and younger audiences are excited for the chance to finally see the show."

While that may well be true, one thing *Dreamgirls* does not have is any kind of Christmas sequence. So why did Hilton choose to put the show on during the holiday season, instead of *A Christmas Carol* or a reprise of last year's offering, *Christmas in Connecticut*?

"In a way, it's a test to see if we have to do a holiday show every year, and we'll see what we learn from doing this show," says Hilton. "And,

honestly, even though it's not a so-called holiday show, it gives people something to do with friends and family during the winter, especially our audiences who live in Connecticut. We really believe we can maximize our attendance with this show."

While Goodspeed is the production's originator, the show is now a co-production with Princeton, New Jersey's acclaimed McCarter Theater, where it will play in February. "These kinds of collaborations are so important to theaters like Goodspeed and the McCarter in this post-pandemic era. It's so important to us to have these sorts of connections," says Hilton.

Whether they're in Connecticut or New Jersey, however, audiences should



Lili-Anne Brown
Dreamgirls Director

expect a different take on *Dreamgirls* than they might expect. "I don't want to say much about our cast, but I will note our Effie is a bit of a discovery," says Hilton. "And I am so excited about our director Lili-Anne Brown. This is her first time

at Goodspeed, and she's so well-respected in the theater community. She has brought us a new team of designers we're so excited to work with. And most importantly, I think it makes a difference to have both a woman and an African American woman direct this show. That's what I really wanted, and I would not have chosen anyone other than Lili-Anne."

Goodspeed has already had great success this year with its productions of *Gypsy*, *Summer Stock*, and "The 12," and Hilton sees "Dreamgirls" as the icing on the proverbial cake. "I believe we have curated a very strong season of wildly diverse shows for our audiences, and, for me, that's the most important thing we can do."

—Brian Scott Lipton



FORTY YEARS OF COMMUNITY SERVICE:
HGLHC Celebrates Its History

Forty years ago in 1983, as HIV/AIDS was devastating the LGBTQ+ community, a group of volunteer healthcare professionals and supporters came together to form the Hartford Gay & Lesbian Health Collective (HGLHC). Its mission has always been to provide client-centered quality services in a safe, non-judgmental environment. In the last four decades, the organization has continually worked to reflect and embrace a dynamic community with unique health concerns and challenges.

Earlier this year, David Grant took over as executive director of HGLHC with an impressive resume in LGBTQ+

social service and advocacy. He championed such efforts as Universal Basic Income, and Hartford's Charter Revision. He also worked as special assistant to the superintendent of Hartford Public Schools.

Grant spoke with *Connecticut Voice* about his new role and his mission, saying that while he was still in his first

90 days with the organization at the time of our interview, he was "humbled" by what he is learning. He said that as he prepared for the organization's largest fundraiser—One Big Event, which took place November 11—he had been in touch with people who had been involved with HGLHC through its history, and that he's been inspired by the "stories they tell me of the incredible work the organization has done over the last 40 years."

Grant described the work of HGLHC, saying, "We don't turn anyone away for services. Our medical department really educates about HIV and STI, prevention and offers support and treatment. We also provide basic dental services."

"We also have another site outside of Hartford in Manchester. And, through that site we have a collaboration with Advancing Connecticut Together, and we offer support groups for individuals living with HIV. We also have a food delivery service, a food pantry, and we're implementing a workforce development program."

It's not all about health, however. Grant says there are support groups, gamer nights, and more. And HGLHC makes it facilities available to different community organizations. He says it's both a way to serve the community and to bring people into the collective to learn about what it does—and how it can support other organizations' missions.

Still, HIV remains central to the work of the HGLHC. Grant says that while treatments have been



“Even as healthcare organizations adapt to be more inclusive and sensitive to issues faced by the LGBTQ+ communities, this is what has always characterized HGLHC.”

effective, transmission in some groups is at an all-time high. He cites high rates of transmission among people who identify as heterosexual over 50, in particular. So, he says, the goal is to implement "targeted outreach into those communities where we have not been in the past. "The virus," he says, "is still very real, and more work has to be done. Transmission among individuals who are LGBTQIA-plus have gone down, but they're definitely not where they need to be."

As for what's ahead as Grant settles into the role, he and his board have big plans. He says they are looking at launching services that are new to community, such as a vision center and comprehensive mental health programs,

specifically for people who may have substance abuse issues. He also wants to target domestic issues including spousal abuse or parenting and child abuse, as well as issues such as anger management. "There are many issues that face our community, and the health collective should be there to support people who may not feel comfortable going into more 'traditional' space to receive the level of help they need."

The HGLHC is also thinking beyond Connecticut. Grant says that he is currently putting together a delegation to travel to Washington, DC to advocate for increased federal funding for HIV spending and safe spaces for LGBTQ+ individuals. While Grant says that



David Grant
HGLHC Executive Director

this is not work that the organization has typically done in the past, he believes that it is increasingly important for HGLHC to become actively involved with.

As the organization enters its fifth decade, Grant

is excited about what's ahead. Even as healthcare organizations adapt to be more inclusive and sensitive to issues faced by the LGBTQ+ communities, he says, this sensitivity is what has always characterized HGLHC. While it will continue to evolve, HGLHC has always been sensitive to the intricacies of treating its patients. "We already understand those intricacies, and we treat everyone with dignity and respect."

You can listen to my entire conversation with David Grant on the Voice Out Loud Podcast, which you can find through CTVoice.com.

—Christopher Byrne



BACK TO THE 90S:
**Author David Kennerley Chronicles
Club Life in 1990s NYC**



Gay clubs in New York proliferated in the 1990s. In fact, competition was so steep to get people to come that an entire industry grew up around trying to draw crowds. In the days before online invitations or social media, there was one medium clubs relied on: cardboard.

An entire industry that mixed art and commerce grew up,

and invitations to parties were everywhere...and often in the gutter. Author David Kennerley, however, saw magic where others saw trash. Indeed, one of the less flattering names for these invites was “puddle art” because while promoters would stand outside clubs and hand them out to people as they were leaving most of them ended up tossed aside heedlessly. In his book,

Kennerley notes that at the height of the 90s club scene, more than 50,000 of these cards were printed and handed out every month.

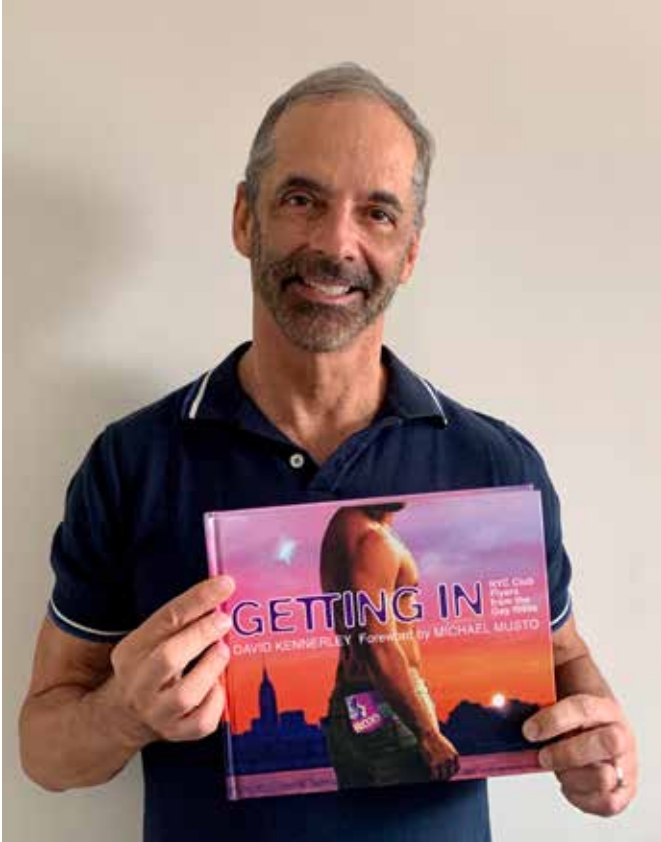
Kennerley has lovingly gone through his trove (“I’m a bit of a hoarder,” he says.) and collected the best of the best in his gorgeous book called *Getting In: NYC Club Flyers from the Gay 1990s*.

Kennerley chronicles the evolution of an artform as well. While the early flyers were mostly photocopied from Kinko’s, by the end of the decade, photographers were making names for themselves. Photographers like Sean Kahlil defined the era. Kahlil defined the “Chelsea boy aesthetic,” with ubiquitous promoter John Blair. Kahlil had started out photographing for Blair’s

American Fitness Gym, a hotspot in Chelsea, and did invites for Splash, where these same hot boys took showers on the bar (more or less) every night.

In addition to the flyers, Kennerley has included interviews with a wide variety of promoters, photographers, and has a foreword by Michael Musto who was the *de facto* “Nightlife Guru” for the period from the perch of *The Village Voice* and his column “La Dolce Musto,” which was must-reading for all the nightlife *cognoscenti* in the era.

Over and above the music, the dancing, and the seemingly non-stop party, Kennerley also chronicles a very jubilant time in gay history in New York. It was a very specific time when community happened in the clubs. The dizzying dancing till the wee hours played out against a backdrop of Mayor Giuliani cracking down on nightlife, ostensibly to preserve “quality of life, but what he really did was enforce the Cabaret Law, which was hard to get and expensive...and meant people couldn’t dance in the clubs.” Giuliani’s raids spelled trouble for the clubs. At the same time, ACT UP was insisting that AIDS be addressed, and protests demanded respect and attention to the now-more-visible LGBTQ+ communities. Kennerley makes clear that the dichotomy between the



Over and above the music, the dancing and the seemingly non-stop party, Kennerley also chronicles a very specific time in gay history in New York.

need for political action and the need for community, connection, and sexual expression are not mutually exclusive. In fact, it was just this mix of glitter and grit that defined elements of

gay life in the 1990s. AZT was first used to treat HIV in 1987, and understanding of sex seemed to relieve some of the anxiety of the previous years. As Musto says in his foreword, people

were ready to come out from under the cloud of AIDS and party again.

In addition to the wet blanket Giuliani tried to throw on the clubs, gentrification and real estate took their toll as well. As Kennerley notes, the transformation of the Meatpacking District from dilapidated outpost to hot business and residential area pushed the clubs to Brooklyn, for one. Then the rise of apps like Grindr and Scruff, and all the hookup sites that went before, robbed the clubs of their overtly sexual and cruising element.

The clubs were a community, and Kennerley notes that in conversations with young gay men today, he senses that they feel disenfranchised, that they don’t necessarily know where to go to find the community that was so much a part of individuals discovering who they were—and who they were in the context of a culture.

The era may be gone, but Kennerley has preserved it beautifully. This is an important book both in terms of art and culture. *Getting In* should be at the top of your gift lists this holiday season. Order yours at www.gettinginclubbook.com.

—Christopher Byrne

The Savvy Saver

The Holidays are approaching and if you're like me, you may be pulling your hair out thinking, "What do I get for Aunt Helen?" You would love to take her to the theater again, but tickets are TOO expensive! Heck, everything these days is TOO expensive. So, how do we manage our budget to afford the things that we want and the things that we need, like groceries? Here are some tips to incorporate into your daily habits to help give your bank account that extra padding.

1. Beverages-coffee, tea, and WATER! Come on, if you're not part of the end single use plastic bottle movement, get there! Stop paying \$3/day for a bottle of water when tap water is FREE (in most cases). Get yourself a reliable and reusable water bottle, put a lemon in it and move on to savings as much as \$84/month.

The amount that we spend on coffee and tea is just absurd, and we don't even blink, we just pay it! That \$6/day adds up to \$2160/year. That is equivalent to a lot more shoes in your closet! Invest in an AMAZING system that will give you the perfect cup of coffee or tea and you'll never want to pay \$6 at the chain stores again. There will be an upfront expense, but it will have itself paid off in less than 6 months.

2. Skip the Doordash. It's so easy and tempting, and



expensive! On average, you're paying an extra \$20 in delivery fees and tips. Cutting that out once a week can give you an extra savings of \$80/month. If you're not a cook, stop at the grocery store, pick up a prepared meal and enjoy that extra \$960/year!

3. Stop with the subscriptions, please! We are in the mindset where it's okay to spend \$39.99/month on whatever because "it's ONLY \$39.99/month!" There are many times we are not using what we are paying for. Ask

yourself, "Do I need this or do I want this?" If you need it, spend it. If you want it, do you want it more than an extra \$480/year in your bank account? Stop letting marketers lure you in with a low monthly price because that adds up to a big expense.

4. Check for coupons before you check out. This actually works and can save you extra money on the items that you need. There are many times for which grocery stores will run a digital coupon on their app or a pharmacy will send

an extra 25 percent off coupon via email. Before checking out, check for coupons!

5. Get your gas on Monday or Tuesday! We often find ourselves pulling into the nearest gas station when the low gas light comes on, and we just pay whatever the price is. Gas prices matter and where you get your gas from can add up to big savings. Gas stations connected with grocery stores can offer savings of up to 40 cents/gallon. Gas prices tend to rise as it gets closer to the weekend, so pick a Monday or Tuesday each week to fill up at a store affiliated station and enjoy at least another \$312/year in your bank account.

Incorporating these tips into your daily habits will surely help that bank account increase. It is always wise to be considerate with your savings and make your money work for you. Start thinking of using a high-yield savings account to earn a better interest rate. There is always a credit card offering a cash back option to put more money into your pocket. They are great for charging all your monthly expenses, paying off that credit card statement at the end of the month, and then collecting your cash back bonus...a bonus to enjoy on that new pair of shoes and Aunt Helen's theater ticket.

—Michelle Cutrali

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WHAT'S THE BUZZ?

If You're Circuit-Bound...

Travel. Dancing. Drug use. Loud music. Anonymous sex. These are some of the things we associate with circuit parties. For the uninitiated, circuit parties (also simply called “the circuit”) are extended, multi-event celebrations that gay folks travel from around the world to attend. Originating in the 70s with gay disco parties, these parties have been more or less popular at times in the ensuing years. While the circuit can be a ton of fun—dancing, meeting new people, and having exciting sexual experiences can be very appealing—there are also risks associated with the circuit.

Given that this is a sex column, let's talk first about sexual safety. Circuit parties are very sexually charged events. A lot of attendees are there specifically to have sex, whether with their partner, a stranger, or a group. Of course, normal sexual safety protocols apply here. Condoms, lube, and PrEP are all good safety precautions. In such an intense environment, though, there are extra considerations. While the press coverage of MPOX has died down, it's not totally gone, and a crowd at very close quarters like on the dance floor of a circuit party is a very efficient way for MPOX to spread. Add anonymous sex to that mix, and it's the perfect environment for MPOX transmission. A good way to protect yourself is to get the Jynneos vaccine, a two-dose series that reduces your risk of contracting MPOX. Maintaining a physical barrier from others' skin also helps. Keeping your shirt on while dancing may seem lame, but it will protect you if you come into contact with someone who has a contagious rash. And of course, if you yourself have a fever, rash, or otherwise feel unwell, stay home. The circuit is not worth risking other peoples' health.

COVID is another concern when it comes to any party, particularly one where folks are at close quarters. First and foremost, get vaccinated and

boosted if you haven't already. Wearing an N95 or PN95 will also reduce your risk of contracting COVID, especially variants that the vaccine isn't as good at preventing.

Drug use is very common at circuit parties—and comes with its own risks. Some of the most common drugs used are cocaine, ecstasy and molly, meth, and ketamine. These are used to enhance partying and sexual experiences. Frankly, the only way to totally eliminate the risks associated with drugs is not to take them. However, if you do choose to use drugs, invest in a drug testing kit. Testing your drugs helps ensure they contain only what you expect them to and that no other drugs or adulterants have been added. This can save your life; so don't skip it! You can get testing kits online. Another good thing to have is a Narcan/Naloxone overdose kit. If you encounter someone who is overdosing from opiates, dosing them with Narcan can save their life.

Again, normal precautions are also advised with drugs—staying with a friend to keep an eye on you, taking only a small amount to start, and knowing what drug you're taking, the effects, and the correct dosage. DanceSafe.org and Harmreduction.org are good sites to visit to learn about the risks of many kinds of drugs and how to reduce the risk of negative effects should you choose to use drugs.

I would be remiss not to address the issue of consent. I discussed this more fully in a recent column, but I cannot impress enough the importance of good consent practices. Always ask your partner(s) before engaging in ANY sexual activity and continue to communicate throughout the encounter to make sure everyone is feeling comfortable with what's happening. Remember, when drugs



are involved, consent becomes more complicated. Having sex with someone who has been incapacitated with drugs is sexual assault. If you aren't sure, err on the side of caution, and don't have sex with them. There will be other opportunities to have sex with a person who is alert enough to enthusiastically enjoy sex.

It's unfortunate that this has to be said, but it's also smart to take precautions to protect yourself. Sadly, there are predators in the circuit (as there are in all scenes), and it's important to have your wits about you. Be aware of your surroundings, and go with a friend; or at least make sure someone knows where you are and when you'll be back. If something seems unsafe, don't ignore your gut. And if you witness a sexual assault (or something that seems like it's about to be), intervene, or alert someone who can safely do so, like a bouncer.

It is possible to protect yourself at circuit parties if you plan ahead. You can't eliminate all risks completely (except by not attending at all), but by taking precautions, you can reduce them significantly. Indeed, taking safety measures can help you more fully enjoy your experience. Be safe, be prepared, and have fun.

—Kim Adamski

Pre-seeding Your Joy This Season

I love the fall. I love the weather, the beautiful colors of the New England foliage, and the energy around the natural harvest season. As it gets darker and colder, it's often a time for more focused attention and reflection, and of planting the seeds that we'll reap in the Spring.

We all know that for seeds of any kind to grow, the right conditions need to be present. Human beings are the same. For things in our lives to come to fruition and bloom, the right conditions need to be established and nurtured. But don't take my word for it; take a minute to

examine different seasons in your life when things bloomed, worked out, or things ended and new things took root. Think of the factors and conditions that facilitated that change. Some were probably in your control, and some were not. One way to directly influence what grows in the garden of our lives is to make room purposefully for those experiences that we need to take root. Without that expressed purpose—and sometimes in spite of it—we'll soon find we're in the weeds!

This season focus on planting seeds that you want to grow.

Seems simple right? But that doesn't mean it's not powerful. We often get overwhelmed and lose our sense of agency because we lose sight of the simple things we need for ourselves. Getting clear around where you can affect change in your life means seeing the behaviors that are connected and aligned with your identity, values, and goals, and setting boundaries around those to effectively move you forward. One of the most powerful things you can prioritize this season is personal time for hobbies and activities that bring you JOY. Here's why:



Meghan Crutchley

Experiencing positive emotions like joy, flow, and gratitude are all significantly more impactful than we often give them credit for, probably because we view them as fleeting—and experience them less

“One of the most powerful things you can prioritize this season is personal time for hobbies and activities that bring you JOY.”

intensely than negative emotions. Barbara L. Frederickson's seminal paper, "What Good Are Positive Emotions" established the broaden-and-build framework illustrating the wide-reaching effects positive emotions have on our health and how we think. Positive emotions influence our overall outlook on life. They broaden our attention, allow for higher level processing, and increase our willingness to engage in new experiences.

These states have also shown to be resilient, meaning we're able to access them long after the experiences of joy have passed. Thus, they help us develop and grow overtime, with research showing those who experience more positive emotions have greater life satisfaction, stronger interpersonal relationships, higher incomes, and better overall physical health. Frederickson wrote in 2008. Open hearts build lives: Positive emotions, induced through loving-kindness meditation, build consequential personal resources.

Decide what types of environments your joy needs to flourish.

When the environment in

which we live is considered in how we approach our habits, things really get interesting! Our behavior cues are triggered by time of day, the environments in which we're working, and the sequence of action. Ensuring these are supportive allows us to create the conditions for the seeds of habit to grow. And grow they will!

In almost a decade of working with busy professionals, I've seen that real, sustainable life transformations happen when my clients nurture the environments around their habits. Let me explain, since we don't directly control how things change (the outcome), but we do control what daily actions we take towards that change (our behaviors). We then create conditions that make it easier to do the behavior and getting things done.

Just as certain plants need the right conditions to grow and thrive, we have to think and plan around our habits—like using one calendar so personal needs are scheduled alongside professional appointments, or scheduling time each week to meet friends or go exploring with your camera.

Or, if we consider the conditions around getting

optimal sleep: make the room as dark as possible, keep it cold, and put away screens one hour before bed. Do something that's relaxing prior to bedtime like a warm bath, gentle breathing etc., and only use your bed for sex and sleep. Then, while we can see that we can't will ourselves to sleep, we can lull ourselves to sleep! That's creating the conditions that help nurture the habit.

season to pre-seed your life's garden with the seeds of joy by getting clear on what brings me joy, and what are the conditions I need to direct for those experiences to happen. Reach out and let me know what you're planting for yourself this year! Reach me at Meghan. habitqueer@gmail.com or @habitqueer on Instagram.



So, take some time out this

—Meghan Crutchley



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Authentically Entertaining: Andrew Keenan-Bolger



Photo courtesy of Andrew Keenan-Bolger.

"I like to be busy," Andrew Keenan-Bolger said as we spoke about his career and his current role in the hit Off-Broadway play, *Dracula*, *A Comedy of Terrors*. "I do terribly with unstructured time. That's my absolute worst nightmare." At 38, Keenan-Bolger has been busy most of his life, from childhood on. He made his

Broadway debut at age 10 as Chip in *Beauty and the Beast* and has appeared in six Broadway shows, national tours, Off- and Off-Off Broadway productions, films, podcasts, and appeared on TV shows from *The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel* to *Nurse Jackie*, and *The Blacklist*.

Dracula has been getting raves, and it's a comedic retelling of the classic legend, complete with gender-bending characters and situations. Running through January at New World Stages in New York, the play has a script by Gordon Greenberg and Steve Rosen that's part meta-commentary, part campy romp, and part

slapstick farce. It's also got a touch of horror and more than a hint of sex, and the 90-minute piece flies by like the proverbial bat. Keenan-Bolger takes on seven quick-change roles including Jonathan Harker, a timid real estate broker who, once bitten is anything but shy—as the change from argyle to fetish gear makes abundantly clear.

Speaking of busy, Keenan-Bolger, along with Kate Wetherhead, wrote a three-book series for young people called *Jack and Louisa*, about two MTN's (musical theater nerds) and their adventures. Keenan-Bolger describes it as "really the book I wish I had, growing up as a theater-obsessed, little music theater nerd."

Helping young people accept themselves, come out (if that's where they are) and live authentically is a passion of Keenan-Bolger's—and one he's worked for. "When I graduated from college and moved to the city, [being out] was, weirdly, a conversation that I had to have with my agent. But I didn't like the way it made me feel—that choosing to be who I am publicly might possibly eliminate work. I always felt like that was a weird trade."

It's a topic Keenan-Bolger takes up in his blog (The Keenan-Blogger), which includes such articles as "5 Tips for Coming Out," which include coming out to yourself, and taking your time. As he writes, "being honest and accepting yourself is more than just lifting a burden—it's putting on a suit of armor."



Through his blog and being outspoken on social media and in interviews, Keenan-Bolger says, "I've been trying to show young people that you can be whoever you are, and if you are passionate, and if you work hard, and hopefully you are a little talented, at least you can, you can find a place, especially in the theatre community, which is, I think just the most accepting place that, honestly, it values you being authentic."

"We don't want someone who is like anyone else. We already have a Kristen Chenoweth, we don't need another one. Well, we don't necessarily have this... whoever you are. So, I've tried to put that out. And having worked with Disney on a bunch of stuff, knowing I have a young audience and always trying to be transparent about what it is like being an out person. And oftentimes having dialogue with a lot of my followers who are often queer or questioning and just trying to be open and say that it's not always easy,

but surrounding yourself with people who know you and who love you make this whole thing called life possible."


Keenan-Bolger is also mindful of the struggles many go through, writing, "I recognize that as a cis-white male, I've been

afforded privileges that are not necessarily available to everyone in the LGBTQ+ community. I can only speak to my own experience," adding that he feels called to share things he wishes he'd been told as a gay youth growing up in the Midwest. Above all he wants to encourage young people to be patient and take time to discover—and live—an identity that feels right to them.

In his personal life, Keenan-Bolger married journalist Scott Bixby in 2018. He's close to both his sisters, Tony-winner Celia Keenan-Bolger and playwright and teaching artist Maggie Keenan-Bolger. Andrew says that while they weren't a theater family growing up—instead were quite musical—Celia blazed the trail for all of them. Andrew says that being raised around seeing her in shows had a huge influence on him, and he lovingly describes the family as "theater carny folk."

Andrew is keenly aware that not everyone has the kind of family relationship he and

his sisters do, and since they both live in New York, the holidays will be about getting together. Nonetheless, for working actors, there is often a show on Christmas, and he anticipates that there will be a lot of celebration backstage at *Dracula*. "If you have to work on a holiday, it's a gift to spend it with a cast you love. Being in the theater is really its own kind of chosen family," he says. He adds that his husband Scott will be visiting family while Andrew works, "but any person who goes into show business knows it's going to be different every year. So, having partner who is flexible and understanding is just what's needed."

Looking ahead, unlikely that Keenan-Bolger will have to deal with that dreaded unstructured time. He has more movies, blogs, and books in the works—all powered by his dynamic spirit and wholly authentic approach to life. 

—Christopher Byrne



The company of *Dracula* above, and Keenan-Bolger with James Daly in the title role. Photos by Matthew Murphy

MARK LAMOS:
**Finding An
Artistic Home—
and Self—in Theatre**

By FRANK RIZZO

Mark Lamos and husband Jerry Jones sit on the stone wall in the backyard of their colonial home on a rolling green lawn off a winding countryside road in Litchfield County.

Bella, their English Springer Spaniel, nudges to be included, too.
It's a time of year Lamos would normally be gearing up for another season of plays in Connecticut, something that he's done for more than 30 years, first as artistic director at Hartford Stage and then at Westport Country Playhouse.



But not this year. Lamos is stepping down from his position at Westport, a not-for-profit theater like many across the country that are facing unprecedented financial crises that threaten their very existence.
But after an extensive career, first as an actor, then director, artistic director and freelance theater and opera director, Lamos is stepping away from full-time theatre responsibilities.
Trim and still buoyantly boyish at 77, Lamos is as charming, erudite, and curious, quick with a quip or a hearty laugh, as he was when I first interviewed him more than 40 years ago. But this time our conversation has a broader, deeper and unflinching perspective, both professionally and as a gay man.



A GOOD BOY

Lamos and his older sister grew up outside of Chicago in Melrose Park, the children of Lutheran parents and in a house filled with music.

“I was a very good boy, if you know what I mean,” he says. “I loved music and my parents sensed that in me so when I was in the third grade, I began studying the violin religiously, and continued up until college.”

But in high school, Lamos became

involved in theater and discovered he found another home on stage. That’s when the tension began between the two arts began and continued into college, where he majored in music.

“But all my best friends were in the theater department,” he says. “I didn’t feel copesetic with the musicians.”

A pivotal moment came when he was offered the role of The Dauphin in Jean Anouilh’s *The Lark* which conflicted with a concert.

“By being offered this part I was

being validated and whatever [the theatre director] was seeing in me was more than any of my music teachers ever saw.”

An angry orchestra conductor confronted him with the soul-searching question: “When are you going to decide what you want to do with your life?”

At that moment, Lamos says he instinctively knew—and immediately called his parents on his decision to focus on theatre, not music. “My

mother was furious and in tears, but my dad heard a voice coming out of me that he never heard before. By the end of that conversation he said he would figure out how he could make it all work out for me.”

Following college in 1969, Lamos remained in Chicago, working in theaters there. Veteran New York actor Shepperd Strudwick, who was in a play with Lamos, was so impressed with the young actor that he urged him to relocate to Manhattan to continue his career there. Lamos did, sleeping on a friend’s couch, and getting signed with Strudwick’s agent, the legendary Milton Goldman, who represented Laurence Olivier, Meryl Streep, and a host of theatrical greats.

Within in a week, Lamos had a part on a Broadway stage and by the end of 1972 he was in a new Arthur Miller play, *The Creation of the World and Other Business*. By the following year he was playing Christian on Broadway in the musical *Cyrano*, opposite Christopher Plummer.

HEART’S DESIRES

But for years there was always something tugging at his heart. Throughout his teens and early career, Lamos struggled with his sexuality. His acceptance of being gay, he says, “was a long time coming.”

In college, “it just wasn’t on my radar. I knew I had feelings for men, but I felt it was just because I was ‘artistic.’ I dated women, though not a lot.”

Shortly after college he married a female dancer, a union that lasted seven years. “I thought maybe I was bisexual, but maybe not. Looking back, I saw I was so uptight I could not break out of the culture at the time. It’s hard for younger gay men now to know that in that day and age it was unsafe [to come out]. When I became an actor in the ‘70s, and being cast as a leading man, I thought to myself, ‘I cannot be gay. I have to be straight.’”

Lamos began to direct plays when he was part of the company at Minneapolis’ Guthrie Theatre in the mid-’70s, staging modest shows at its smaller venue. When he was starring in *Hamlet* in San Diego in the late ‘70s, he received an offer from the Arizona Theater Company to direct *Equus*, his first large-scale production.

While in Arizona, he fell in love with an actor in one of his productions—Jones—and Lamos no longer had any doubts. “It was our attraction that turned it around completely,” he says.

While in Arizona he was asked to be the theater’s interim artistic director and in 1979 he was offered the permanent position—but at Hartford Stage. That would begin his long association with Connecticut and its theaters.

While at Hartford Stage he occasionally acted (*The Importance of Being Earnest*, *Anatol*, and

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A Doll's House), but principally he directed and oversaw the theater's programming, mixing fresh interpretations of the classics with new works. He also became an early advocate of non-traditional casting.

During his tenure, Lamos formed a close working relationship with actor Richard Thomas, supported adventuresome directors like Richard Foreman and Anne Bogart, transferred more than a half dozen productions to Broadway, and elevated careers of theater artists, like Lincoln Center's Bartlett Sher, who was then Lamos' associate artistic director. In 1989, Hartford Stage received a Tony Award as outstanding regional theater.

GAY THEMES

Now partnered with Jones, Lamos was assured when he accepted the job that his sexuality would not be an issue in Hartford. "That said, Jerry was pretty much under wraps."

Lamos recalled an instance in the mid-'80s when he was invited to a dinner party at a board member's home in which composer Stephen Sondheim arrived as expected—but unexpectedly with a male date. "So, here was Sondheim with someone who was clearly his boyfriend, while Jerry stayed home because that wasn't public. I felt, 'Shit, here's my lover locked away.' I remember that whole evening feeling so regretful."

During his tenure in Hartford, he programmed two significant events with gay themes. The first was in 1985 when he wanted to produce Larry Kramer's landmark AIDS-era play *The Normal Heart*, which was a sensation off-Broadway. The Public Theater's Joe Papp gave the go-ahead for this regional premiere; the Connecticut-born Kramer was thrilled. But Lamos says the theater's managing director "just lost it, saying, 'We cannot have that play on our stage. What are you thinking?'"

The play eventually landed at New Haven's Long Wharf Theatre with Oscar nominee Thomas Hulce in the lead role.

When the opportunity in 1991 to combine for the first time two of composer William Finn's gay-themed one-act musicals as *Falsettos*, Lamos seized the chance. "It was a wonderful experience because people could see this is what I believed." The managing director relented, "because it was a musical...but he was still nervous about it."

The production, staged by Graciela Daniele, who Lamos added "revealed

"Not-for-profit theaters may be permanently changing to something else. Maybe it will just go away. Maybe it was a moment that lasted for half a century, and maybe that's it."

so much heart in the show," was such a hit "that there were limos from New York lining up to the theater.

Falsettos finally did transfer to Broadway—but not the Hartford Stage production. James Lapine, who directed the original one-acts off-Broadway, ended up staging the now-twinning musicals. (Lapine, however, was denied Daniele's coup de theatre when at the end of the production the AIDS quilt was unfurled.) Seeing Lapine's production—not Hartford's—win the

Tony Award was heartbreaking for Lamos.

In 1989, Lamos was offered a major role in the landmark movie *Longtime Companion*, the first feature film about people with AIDS, with Lamos playing a man in a loving relationship dying of the virus. [See related story.]

FREELANCE LIFE

After 17 years, Lamos left Hartford Stage to begin his freelance directing career "which was liberating and fulfilling."

But early in his freelance career Lamos was being wooed to head Yale School of Drama and Yale Repertory Theatre. "But it was just too soon, and I didn't want to be tied to academia."

He and Jones bought their home in Sherman as he received offers for projects in opera, regional theater, and New York. During this period, Lamos became the A.R. Gurney's directorial collaborator for the playwright's later plays.

After a decade of freelance work, though, Lamos missed not being fully in charge of productions and as various openings for artistic directors around the country emerged, "I had twinges, but I didn't want to leave this area."

In 2008, Lamos received a call from Westport Playhouse's Anne Keefe, who was interim co-artistic director with Joanne Woodward, who years before led the campaign to rescue, renovate and revitalize the summer theater into a year-round venue. Lamos was asked to direct *Of Mice and Men*, replacing Paul Newman who had stepped down as director as health issues dramatically worsened.

Lamos was in rehearsals when he received a call that Newman had died at the age of 83. "I arrived in Westport and the playhouse driveway was filled with flowers. The actors were shellshocked. Annie was awash in tears. Nobody could rehearse and I told everyone to go home."

Shortly after, Lamos was offered the role as artistic director.

When asked about the difference between the two theaters, Lamos says

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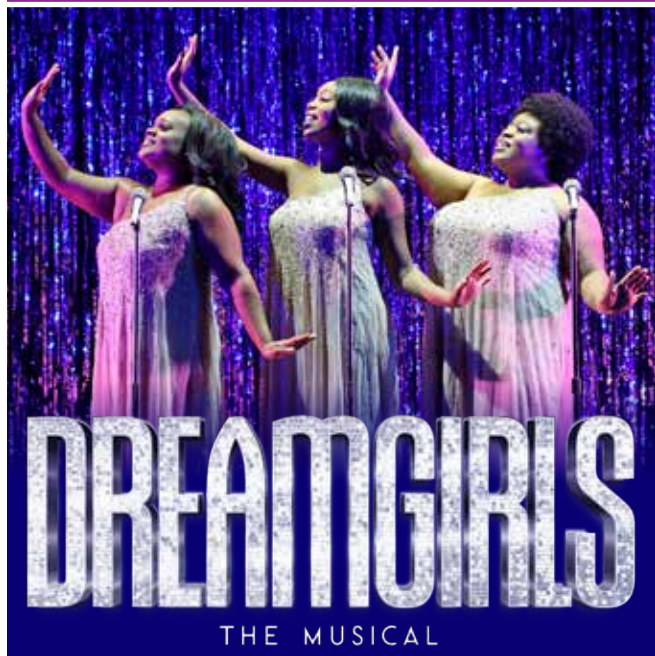


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Pictured: Keirsten Hodgins, Ta-Tynisa Willson, Trejah Bostle • Photo by Diane Sobolewski

“Hartford Stage came into existence because a group of people in the community wanted a theater. Westport Playhouse was started [in the 1930’s] by commercial producers, so it never had a grassroots solidity and a mission that was behind it.”

When the board announced it was cutting its 2023 productions from five to three this year, Lamos felt it was time to leave, especially when the nature of the season’s shows he had selected was challenged. One of the trustees asked Lamos, ‘Who’s the target audience for *Antigone*? And the director thought, “Oh, maybe the world? Women?”’ (A colleague suggested the trustee’s question would a great title for Lamos’ memoir.) And when even Gurney’s quintessential WASP play *The Cocktail Hour* was questioned as a fit for tony Westport, Lamos knew he was making the right decision.

As for the future of the playhouse, Lamos says: “One of the wonderful things is that I don’t have to worry about it anymore.” But he sees the playhouse’s financial challenges as part of a wider crisis for American not-for-profit theaters.

“I think [not-for-profit theaters] may be permanently changing to something else. Maybe it will just go away. Maybe it was a moment started by a group of like-minded people that lasted for half a century, and maybe that’s it. This whole sea change could end up being wonderful, but I have no idea what the future’s going to bring.

“In my remarks at the Connecticut Critics Awards in June I talked about what it was once like when foundations insisted I do works of Shakespeare and new works—and audiences came to see these plays and filled houses. You can’t imagine what it felt like for an actor playing before 1,400 people night after night at The Guthrie, performing in works from Shakespeare to Shaw. That’s where I started—and look what I’m walking away from in institutional theater.” 

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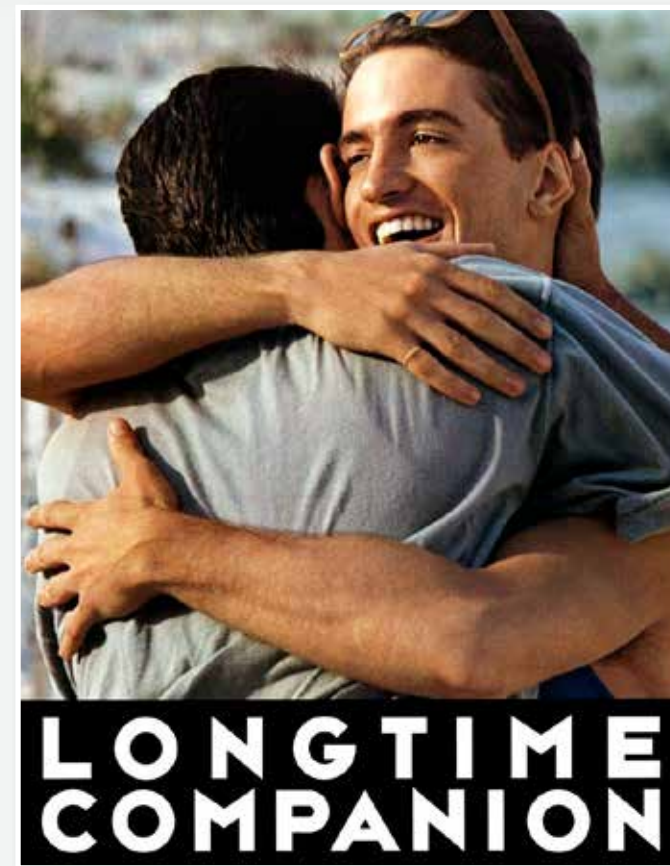
By FRANK RIZZO

Long before the utopian rom-com *Fire Island*, there was a movie that told a far darker and disturbing story, set principally on that LGBTQ+ sunny enclave at a perilous time: the 1989 landmark film, *Longtime Companion*.

Though there were several plays and a TV movie (*An Early Frost*) that dealt with the AIDS epidemic, *Longtime Companion* was the first major commercial film dealing directly with the subject seen through a gay perspective. The film was released at the time the deadly HIV virus was still raging—and the numbers were still climbing, taking tens of thousands of lives from the LBGTQ+ community—with no end or treatments in sight.

The film project began when Lindsay Law, executive producer for PBS’s *American Playhouse* series, asked playwright Craig Lucas (*Reckless*, *Prelude to a Kiss*) to write a screenplay.

The story Lucas chose centers on a group of upper- and middle-class gay men and the effect of the AIDS on this group from 1981, when the virus first appeared in the mainstream, to 1989. The film opens with a group of gay men



summering on Fire Island and discussing a New York Times story identifying a “rare cancer” in “41 homosexuals.” (The film’s title was a euphemism in newspaper obituaries for lovers of gay men and women.)

The project was seemingly an unsurmountable challenge to finance,

produce, and distribute. In the end Law and *American Playhouse* bankrolled the entire project, with the original budget of \$3 million halved to \$1.5 million.

“It’s the combination of AIDS and the gay community,” Law told me at the time of the movie’s release. “We would have had a better chance of getting it made if it dealt with AIDS from the point of view of drug addicts, I also think we will shock some people that we portray the [gay] lifestyle in such a matter-of-fact way.”

The film would have been far easier to finance if any of the big-name actors who were approached signed on—except for Alec Baldwin, whose star was quickly rising. But he had to drop out when he was offered Hollywood’s most sought-after roles at the time: the lead in *The Hunt for Red October*. In the end, the

cast was made up of talented but hardly well-known actors then: Bruce Davison, Campbell Scott, Patrick Cassidy, Mary-Louise Parker, John Dossett, Dermot Mulroney, Stephen Caffrey—and Mark Lamos in his first screen role, who was artistic director of Hartford Stage at the time and the only gay cast member—“as far as I know,” he says.



“We were all aware of the film’s importance and worried it wouldn’t get a distributor, so when word came through that Samuel Goldwyn had signed on, everyone was cheering and crying.”

The film was directed by Norman René, who had staged many of Lucas’ plays. (René died of complications from AIDS in 1996.) Stan Wlodkowski, a West Hartford native, was a producer of the film, which was eventually distributed by The Samuel Goldwyn Company.

“I was moved to tears when I read the screenplay and knew that I had to be involved with this,” Wlodkowski told me at the time. “I think one of the things that makes the film successful is that it emphasizes how a community comes together to take care of itself.”

Those involved with the film knew they were involved in a project that was not just another movie, says Lamos.

“We were all aware of the film’s importance and worried it wouldn’t get a distributor, so when word came through that Samuel Goldwyn had signed on, everyone was cheering and crying.”

There were challenges in filming, too. During the shooting on Fire Island, “there were residents there who demonstrated and tried to disrupt the scenes with noisemakers and stuff,” says Lamos. “They acted like they didn’t want people to know that there were gay people on Fire Island and had gay people who lived there who were getting sick. It wasn’t a huge group [of protestors] but enough to make us very worried because if Fire Island was going to be against us, then we were going to be in real trouble.”

Lamos played a 40-ish gay man in a committed relationship with his partner, played by Davison, who earned an Oscar nomination for the role—the Academy’s first recognition of AIDS, which predated *Philadelphia* with Tom Hanks and Denzel Washington by four years. Lamos’ character dies from the disease in a scene that was one of many memorable and heart-breaking moments in the film.

“Norman was very emotional during the shooting of that scene and he was trying to keep [his emotions] at bay. As



for me, I was like having an out-of-body experience. I looked so terrible with the make-up and wig, and I had to lose so much weight for that scene. It was the last scene we shot, and I really had to look as thin as possible.”


The film was a critical success and has become a beloved classic in LGBTQ+ cinema.

Lamos says he has been stopped on the street more than a few times by strangers who thanked him “for helping them deal with the death of someone they knew. Those instances were very emotional, and it was tremendously gratifying to know you’ve helped someone because of your performance.”

Though it did deal with tragic circumstances, the film’s humor and life-loving characters kept it from being unbearably painful. The emotional wallop of the film’s ending was both

uplifting and heartbreaking as it depicted a fantasy moment where scores of gay men who had died from the disease were all lovingly reunited on the island’s beach. (The end of the first half of the Tony Award-winning play *The Inheritance* has striking echoes of the film’s wish-fulfilling ending.)

Lamos says he saw the film again a few years ago during a gay history salute on television “and I loved it and I thought, ‘What a good movie this is.’”

But it was also bittersweet, he says, reminding him of those who died and those who survived. “I watched it in the context that we got through the crisis, for the most part. Now we have friends who are living and healthy on medication and who are here as we age together. It was a relief of sorts but it was still shocking to see again what we were all going through back then.” 

Drag Dining: Beers, Wine, Wigs and Waffles

**CONNECTICUT QUEENS WELCOMED BY BREWERIES
AND WINERIES DESPITE BACKLASH**

Written and photographed by **DAWN ENNIS**

The mom-and-pop owners of a brewery in New Hartford aren't backing down to the haters who have let them know, online and in person, their feelings about drag performers.

"GOOD BYE," said one of the anti-drag keyboard warriors who claimed to be a customer when he targeted the venue's social media. He was swiftly ratioed by supporters who mocked him and posted positive comments; others had their negative comments deleted. Another hater went so far as to vandalize a sign advertising a drag event in one of the brewery's all-gender bathrooms.

"I try to ignore it, and it bothers me. I want to respond to it," Christina Sayer, founder and co-owner of Brewery Legitimus, told *CT Voice* at its "Dinner with the Divas" event in May. "But what I'm seeing here tonight, I believe the people that are here are having a beautiful time. And it makes me emotional. This is beautiful!"

A large crowd, strictly 21 and older and mostly cisgender straight folks,

enjoyed the night's entertainment, as well as a buffet dinner provided by Avon Prime Meats, and of course, beer, cider, hard seltzer and cocktails. Despite threats posted online, not one protester showed up.

"I think it's really stupid and ignorant, and I think it ignores a lot of the actual issues that are going on in the country in terms of violence," said Frank from

said Danielle from Harwinton. She came with her friend Kelly from Farmington, and news of the backlash was a surprise to them. "I didn't hear anything about that, but I think that's kind of silly. Drag has been around forever," Danielle said. "It's fun!" Kelly added, "We're having a great time!"

That night in May was so successful in large part because of the performers Summer Orlando and Barbra Joan Streetsand.

"This is what support looks like!" said Summer. "We need more of this, in our venues, in our bars, and in our wineries, everywhere right now."

"We're not out to groom anybody!" added Barbra, with the punchline: "I can barely groom myself!"

Summer Orlando and Barbra Joan Streetsand, each of whom actually sing the Broadway anthems and pop hit songs made famous by Madonna, Cher, ABBA and of course Barbra Streisand, have left a trail of glitter all across the state: from Labyrinth Brewing Company in Manchester to

Amici Italian Grill in Middletown, as well as Counter Weight Brewing Company in Cheshire, Brignole Vineyards in East Granby and WeHa Brewing and Roasting Company in



Summer Orlando and Barbra Joan Streetsand

Cincinnati, one of at least two gay men in the audience who spoke with *CT Voice*. Chris from Simsbury said he just wanted to have a good time. His favorite part? "The show tunes!" he said.

"I love the costumes and the energy,"





West Hartford, to name a few.

But they're hardly the only show in town. This past summer, Thomas Hooker Brewery hosted drag brunches on Sundays. Xiomarie Labeija hosted a drag brunch featuring Moxie Angel at Parkville Market in Hartford. Carlös & Patty Bourrée were the headliners for Sky Casper's Pink Eggs & Glam drag brunch cabaret at the Heritage Hotel in Southbury. Frankie Cyanide, Clemintine Ku'Lay'd and Damela Cuca Deville appeared at Piggy's Café for a brunch hosted by Mz. October May Lay titled, "B!#ch Please, It's Brunch!" And that's just a sample.

However, there are still places where their art is not appreciated or welcomed.

"There's a lot of venues that don't believe drag shows should happen," said Summer. "The fact that Brewery Legitimus and other breweries in Connecticut are for it and support it and love it, it's a wonderful thing. We're very grateful for that. They've opened up the door for us and let us do a show here."

As for those who express their disapproval of drag online, and in person, with vandalism, Barbra didn't hold back. "It's just disgusting," they said. "It's disgusting that these people

don't have anything better to do with their time. And maybe they need to look into something in their own lives, you know?"

"All things come to pass," said Barbra. "This is going to become an old story. These evil people are going to disappear some way or another."

"I've been doing drag for about 12 years now," said Summer, 30, who noted Barbra has been doing drag for 31 years. "Yes, longer than she's been alive," added Barbra, who is 55.

Both performers use she/her pronouns in their act. When not in their drag personas, Summer is a gay man who uses he/him pronouns; Barbra is nonbinary.

Although the drag dinner earlier this year was a 21-plus only event, Summer said they also host Drag Queen Story Hours that have sparked controversy across the country, and in some towns in Connecticut, too.

"We do a lot of family-friendly shows and events," she said. "We do Pride events. I also have a drag queen story hour called 'Once Upon a Queen,' and I've partnered with Bridgeport Public Library, New Haven Public Library. I do readings at a lot of different Pride events, and I love working with kids and seeing them.

You know, to them we're just characters in sparkly outfits."

According to the Movement Advancement Project, two states outlaw drag performances outright—Montana and Tennessee—and four states have laws on the books restricting "adult performances" that are aimed at preventing a venue from hosting a drag performer: Arkansas, Florida, North Dakota and Texas. Courts in Florida and Tennessee have struck down those laws as unenforceable, pending appeal, as of press time.

Those laws are among more than 500 anti-LGBTQ+ bills proposed by Republicans this year from coast to coast, including here in Connecticut.

Barbra told *CT Voice* those lawmakers are wasting their time and taxpayer money.

"They really should be paying attention to answering the real questions, how to solve the economy and all that stuff," they said. "Instead of singling out people because of how they like to appear in life. Real world problems versus, they talk about 'grooming.' Well, you know, more children are more in danger going to a church than they are to a drag show. Sorry."

"Our demographic is, I like to say, six to 60," said Summer.

"Summer and I did *Wizard of Oz* back in 2017, where she was the first male to play Dorothy, and I was the second male to play Glinda," recalled Barbra. "The Scarecrow was quite the diva and was making the kids cry. So, they all gathered around my pink skirt. I was the one that they came to for nurturing, me of all people. They came to me for that comforting aspect because this man was scaring them, and that says a lot."

For Summer, the roots of her performance hail back to her experience in theater.

"I'm a theater kid, so I'm all about characters and costumes and all of that," she said. "My first experience was with the *Rocky Horror Picture Show*. As a lot of people in the LGBTQ community say, especially drag, we say, 'You're either a *Rocky Horror Picture Show* drag queen, or you're a Halloween drag queen, like the first time in drag on Halloween kind of situations like that, which is wonderful. All drag is valid."

As someone who's been in show business even longer, Barbra said their journey to drag had a different origin.


"I have no qualms with saying I do drag. And I've been trying to really glam up my drag look."

—Barbra

"I started off more of as a celebrity impersonator to impersonate Barbra Streisand, because I look like her, so I started off doing it that. But I've always been a singer," said Barbra. "I'm a performer. And yes, I do drag on top of that. People used to say, 'Well, you're not a drag queen. You're a celebrity impersonator.' And I said,

'No, I'm a drag queen. My friends are drag queens. I'm a drag queen. All my friends are either trans or drag.' And so, I have no qualms with saying I do drag. And I've been trying to really glam up my drag look."

"Barbra and I say, 'We take from the old school, and we also have new school.' Celebrity impersonation is a great form of drag," said Summer. "And as she said, we sing live, so it's really a big deal, what sets us apart from all the other drag shows and stuff around. And we make it family-friendly and something for everybody."

Summer offered this advice to anyone considering going to a drag show for the first time: "I highly recommend just taking the jump and going because you're going to leave having had the best time of your life, You're going to walk away having had fun. We always promise fun. We always, always promise hilarity. And, you know, just to get away from the real world for an hour or two and just have a good time, you know, let your hair down!" 

The Truth About Trans Athletes

By JANE LATUS

Do trans women have an unfair advantage in sports? If evidence is behind the bans against their participation on women’s teams, then the answer *must* be yes, right? After all, twenty-three states, as of press time, have enacted laws barring trans girls from competing as girls. In some other states, individual school districts and athletic conferences have adopted bans. Even a U.S. House of Representatives majority declared this year that “sex shall be recognized based solely on a person’s reproductive biology and genetics at birth.” So, it must be scientific.

Not so fast. The problem is ... Well, according to medical professionals, there are several:

- There is essentially *no* scientific evidence supporting these bans: research is insufficient, inconclusive, or irrelevant to the athletes in question.
- A few top-name extremist groups are behind these bans and many of the lawsuits ostensibly filed in the name of cisgender girls claiming to be put at a disadvantage.
- Biological sex is so complex that there is no standard definition for the terms “biological male” and “biological female”.
- If fairness is the goal, there are bigger, proven problems to tackle, such as income and racial inequalities that hamper access to equipment and training, and general deprioritization of girls’ sports. These result in fewer opportunities and lower budgets.
- A certain result of these bans is that trans youths are unable to play sports: 300,100 of them ages 13-17 alone, the Human Rights Campaign estimates. That doesn’t include kids in states with local bans.



Terry Miller, left, and Andraya Yearwood. Courts have rejected challenges to Connecticut law guaranteeing that trans girls can play on girls’ teams. Photo courtesy of Terry Miller and Andraya Yearwood.

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TRENDING:

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STUDY: MALE ATHLETES
TRANSITIONING TO
FEMALE RETAIN MASSIVE
STRENGTH ADVANTAGE
DESPITE HORMONE
THERAPY

A female athlete in a black singlet with 'NEW ZEALAND' on it is performing a clean and jerk lift with a barbell. The background shows 'Gold Coast 2018' and various sponsors like 'THE STAR', 'LONGINES', and 'OPTUS'.

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Given all this, LGBTQ+ advocates conclude the goal of these bans is exclusion, not fairness. Furthermore, they call them demeaning to all girls, inferring girls are fragile and need protection. Worse, some states (including Florida and Idaho) adopted laws allowing anyone to challenge a player’s gender, requiring a subsequent genital inspection. All girls, especially those who perform highly or look “masculine”, are vulnerable to having their identity challenged and privacy invaded.

The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) has called these laws “ripe for abuse.” Satire site The Onion, however, “quoted” Rep. Jim Jordan (R-OH) as saying “It’s great training for the sexual violations they’ll endure at the college level.”

Bluntly put, advocates say all girls are being exploited as part of a long-reaching, national legal strategy.

Gillian Branstetter, ACLU communications strategist, tells *Connecticut Voice*, “The motivation is quite clearly to limit the reach of court precedents recognizing anti-transgender discrimination as sex discrimination, including the 2020 ruling from the Supreme Court in *Bostock v. Clayton*. Because athletics already relies on broadly held assumptions about sex and gender, groups like Alliance Defending Freedom and the American Principles Project identified it as their chosen arena for promoting transgender exclusion more broadly.”

The Alliance Defending Freedom (ADF), designated a hate group by the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC), was also behind the lawsuit that challenged Connecticut’s inclusive interscholastic sports policies. [See “A Question of Fairness,” Fall 2019 *Voice*]. Others include The Heritage Foundation, Family Policy Alliance, Family Research Council and the American College of Pediatricians (intentionally named to cause confusion with the real professional organization the American Academy of Pediatrics.)

These groups’ goal is to encode conservative Christian beliefs on gender and sexuality into American law, says R.G. Cravens, PhD, a research analyst for SPLC’s Intelligence Project, which works to identify and counter hate and

extremist groups. ADF is on record as saying, back in 2017, that it plans to use trans people as a wedge to roll back LGBTQ+ rights, Cravens says.

“ADF has written model legislation banning trans athletes from competitive school sports,” says Cravens. Legislators have acknowledged coordinating their bills with ADF. Cravens says ADF is also the chief group responsible for suing school boards.

The lawsuits and laws are designed to appear initiated by individuals, particularly cisgender girls. “I wouldn’t imagine most folks realize

there’s a concerted campaign to challenge LGBTQ+ rights at different levels,” says Cravens.

Several legislators, when testifying for bans, have come right out and said it: they want to “eradicate” (their word) transgender people (or, as they put it, “transgenderism”). **The foundation of bills like Idaho’s “Fairness in Women’s Sports Act” is the proponents’ belief that trans women are not really women.**

But what about that powerful hormone testosterone? How can it be possible that it doesn’t confer inherent advantages to people born

male? Doctors, including the American Medical Association, say there is no evidence that testosterone leads to higher athletic performance. Just like trying to pin down what gender itself is, it’s complicated. We’ll get into it.

The level of competition is another issue. Experts tell *Connecticut Voice* that *all* students should be welcome to participate in sports as the person they are. At the elite level, they agree that after a year or two, trans and cis women’s bodies are as equal as any two bodies can get. But they say more data is needed and disagree on whether there should be any restrictions at the

elite level until more is known.

Still to be answered: does it only become “fair” for a trans woman to compete after she has suppressed testosterone? And for what length of time? Is it only “fair” if she didn’t go through male puberty, as some international organizations require? If she’s intersex and has a naturally high testosterone level, must she suppress it to an “acceptable” level? And where does that leave nonbinary athletes? Again, it’s complicated, and we’ll get into it.

Even if research ever does demonstrate an advantage for those who go through male puberty, experts say it’s important to ask: does it matter?

“The most valuable studies show what sports give to people when they play them,” says Kathryn Tierny, APRN, medical director of the Transgender Medicine Program at Middlesex Health. “Sports are inherently unfair,” she adds. “The answer is, all kids should be allowed to compete in sports. These are human beings who live in our community.”

Ironically, or by design, policies that elite sports governing bodies have adopted are increasingly impossible to meet. The states banning trans athletes have also criminalized gender affirming medical care for youths, and in some states also for adults.

“It’s not a reasonable thing to put on kids to expect them to avoid a male puberty. It isn’t possible in many states,” says Tierney.

WHAT WE KNOW

- Kids, not adults, are primarily impacted by restrictions on trans participation. Trans women are statistically underrepresented in elite competitions, but as ESPN’s Bruce Kelley and Carl Carchia wrote, “Youth sports is so big that no one knows quite how big it is.”
- There is no test or exam to determine gender (see sidebar, “What is Gender?”).
- For many trans women, the question of testosterone-endowed advantages is moot because they took puberty blockers, so didn’t go through male puberty.
- Not all trans people want, or are able (financially, medically, or legally) to opt for, all available types of gender affirming care.
- “People assume that men transition hormonally to female to gain a competitive advantage in sports. This is literally not true. No one does this,” says Tierney. Eric Vilain, MD, pediatrician and

What Is Gender?



The science is clear: it isn’t what’s between your legs, or even what organs are inside you. For starters, 1.7 percent of people are born intersex, a term that encompasses multiple conditions outside of the typical binary. [See interview with Liat Feller, this issue.] So, what is it? The best definition we’ve seen is this one that went viral online, from biologist Rebecca Helm, PhD, of Georgetown University.

I see a lot of people are talking about biological sexes and gender right now. Lots of folks make biological sex seem really simple. Well, since it’s so simple, let’s find the biological roots, shall we? Let’s talk about sex...

If you know a bit about biology you will probably say that biological sex is caused by chromosomes, XX and you’re female, XY and you’re male. This is “chromosomal sex” but is it “biological sex”? Well...

Turns out there is only ONE GENE on the Y chromosome that really matters to sex. It’s called the SRY gene. During human embryonic development the SRY protein turns on male-associated genes. Having an SRY gene makes you “genetically male”. But is this “biological sex”?

Sometimes that SRY gene pops off the Y chromosome and over to an X chromosome. Surprise! So now you’ve got an X with an SRY and a Y without an SRY. What does this mean?

A Y with no SRY means physically you’re female, chromosomally you’re male (XY)

and genetically you’re female (no SRY). An X with an SRY means you’re physically male, chromosomally female (XX) and genetically male (SRY). But biological sex is simple! There must be another answer...

Sex-related genes ultimately turn on hormones in specific areas on the body, and reception of those hormones by cells throughout the body. Is this the root of “biological sex”?

What does this all mean? It means you may be genetically male or female, chromosomally male or female, hormonally male/female/nonbinary, with cells that may or may not hear the male/female/nonbinary call, and all this leading to a body that can be male/nonbinary/female.

Biological sex is complicated. Before you discriminate against someone on the basis of “biological sex” and identity, ask yourself: have you seen YOUR chromosomes? Do you know the genes of the people you love? The hormones of the people you work with? The state of their cells? Of course, you could try appealing to the numbers. “Most people are either male or female,” you say. Except that as a biologist professor I will tell you...

The reason I don’t have my students look at their own chromosomes in class is because people could learn that their chromosomal sex doesn’t match their physical sex, and learning that in the middle of a 10-point assignment is JUST NOT THE TIME.

- geneticist from UCI Health Affairs in Irvine, CA, tells *Connecticut Voice*, “This is fearmongering, not based on reality.”
- There are isolated bans, but no movement to prevent trans boys from playing on boys’ teams.
 - The Trevor Project reports that LGBTQ+ kids are half as likely to play sports as straight kids, citing fear of bullying and harassment. Psychologist Derek Fenwick, assistant director of the Center for Gender Health at Hartford HealthCare, says discriminatory policies cause higher rates of depression and school absenteeism in LGBTQ+ youths. “Exclusion perpetuates the stigma and discrimination that one’s identity is invalid, and it outright legitimizes the claim around rejection of gender identity,” he says.
 - Backing the charge that trans sports restrictions are rooted in chauvinism and transphobia rather than science, this past summer the chief international chess organization announced that trans women can’t compete as women, but can keep any titles they won before transitioning. Trans men, however, must relinquish titles they won playing in women’s categories.
 - *Outsports* reported that 44 states use pre-participation forms asking about menstrual periods, purportedly because non-menstruating girls are at increased risk of stress fractures. Lisa Rapalyea, Ph.D. of UC-Davis refuted this, telling *Outsports*, “The only form any high school athletic association needs is clearance by a physician. They don’t need all this medical history.”
 - This summer the Human Rights Campaign declared a “National State of Emergency” for LGBTQ+ Americans because of the record number of legislative anti-LGBTQ+ attacks: 567 bills in 49 states (the exception: Delaware) at press time, according to Trans Legislation Tracker.

ONE-SIZE-POLICY DOESN'T FIT ALL (ESPECIALLY KIDS)

Women can be over 6 feet tall; men can be tiny. LA Clipper Kawhi Leonard’s hands are 11.5 inches wide. Michael Phelps has a wingspan unlike any other Olympian. Those born with predominantly fast-twitch muscles are faster sprinters; those with more slow-twitch ones are gifted at endurance.

We all know bodies differ dramatically, yet we somehow still stereotype men—and boys—as larger and stronger, and females as smaller and weaker. Not all of them, we say, but most.

Doctors tell *Connecticut Voice* it’s especially problematic to apply these assumptions to youths, whose sizes and rates of development are nowhere near consistent or constant. The American Medical Association’s position on trans youth in sports is to let them play.

“Playing on sports teams helps youth develop self-esteem, correlates positively with overall mental health, and appears to have a protective effect against suicide. These bills not only ignore these recommendations, they undermine them. Forcing transgender children to play on teams according to their sex assigned at birth, rather than the gender they live in, also puts their physical and mental health at risk,” reads the AMA policy.

WHAT THE SCIENCE SAYS

Higher levels of testosterone are associated with increased muscle mass, red blood cell count and oxygen delivery, bone size, and speed. Trans women who went through male puberty and who suppress testosterone lose those attributes (except for bone size, which does not revert). They presumably also lose athletic advantages. What little data exists doesn’t suggest otherwise, experts say. They agree more data is needed, including on how long it takes for testosterone’s results to dwindle and disappear.

Doctors and gender researchers say there is no evidence that trans women have an athletic advantage over cisgender women. They even speculate (although again, they say more research is needed)

that in some cases trans women may be at a disadvantage.

The most common inaccuracy about trans athletes, says Dr. Vilain of UCI Health Affairs, is the assumption “that trans women have a biology that is identical to cis men.”

Joshua Safer, MD, is executive director of the Mount Sinai Center for Transgender Medicine and Surgery. He testified in 2020 on behalf of Lindsay Hecox, who was banned by Idaho law from running on the Boise State University women’s track team.

“That those who suppressed testosterone still have an absolute advantage is an assertion based on speculation and not borne out by evidence,” said Dr. Safer, cautioning that the assumption must particularly not be applied to youths, whose levels of testosterone vary widely.

Dr. Safer tells *Connecticut Voice* that in the two years since his testimony, “The data have not changed much. It still seems that after a couple of years on typical feminizing hormone therapy, trans women are pretty similar to cis women in middle distance running (1.5 mile run along with 5K and 10K runs), push-ups, and sit-ups.”

“The main caution when regulating the participation of trans women with other women in sport is to avoid using fear instead of data,” he adds. “For example, it’s true that trans women who have gone through a typical puberty before beginning gender affirming hormone treatment are bigger than cis women. However, it’s possible that a trans woman who has larger bones but who has slightly smaller muscles may be at a disadvantage athletically. Also, **trans women who have not gone through a typical male puberty would not be predicted to be any different athletically relative to cis women.**”

As for elite athletes, Dr. Vilain tells *Connecticut Voice* that success depends on many unequal factors (including body type, and access to the best nutrition and coaches). “So, the real question is whether trans women have an athletic advantage that is disproportionate to all other competitive advantages. And the answer to this question is:



Terry Miller, left, and Andraya Yearwood. Photo courtesy of Changing The Game

we don’t know. There is very little data about trans women athletes in real life competition. Bans to exclude these athletes result in preventing the collection of data that would actually help answer the question.”

“Exclusion of trans youth is even less sensible, physiologically, than excluding trans adults,” adds Dr. Vilain.

There is one study that trans-exclusion advocates point to as in their favor, and its author wishes they wouldn’t. The British Journal of Sports Medicine in 2020 published a study by Christina Roberts, MD, testing trans members of the U.S. Air Force at sit-ups, push-ups, and timed runs. Dr. Roberts found that after two years, trans and cis women were equal at sit-ups and push-ups, but trans women still ran 12 percent faster.

Dr. Roberts criticized legislators who cited the study when arguing for bans, saying “I feel my data is being misrepresented. They’re cherry-picking the one number that agrees with their pre-existing notions.”

Right-wing Breitbart’s headline about the study was all caps and all wrong: “MALE ATHLETES TRANSITIONING

TO FEMALE RETAIN MASSIVE STRENGTH ADVANTAGE DESPITE HORMONE THERAPY.”

Dr. Roberts’s study contradicted a previous one, by medical physicist Joanna Harper, that found that after testosterone suppression, trans women ran 10 percent slower than cisgender women.


Last year, the AMA came out against requirements to suppress testosterone levels in intersex and transgender athletes, even in elite competitions, saying there is no evidence of performance advantages.

Also last year, the Canadian Center for Ethics in Sport conducted a review of scientific literature on trans women in elite competitions. Its conclusions: there is no evidence that trans women have an advantage from testosterone after a year of suppression. Physical factors from male puberty like bone density and lung size “do not predict athletic performance.” More data is needed, and sports policies overvalue biomedical factors in comparison to social factors.

Still, legislators keep proposing bans. In Connecticut this year, State

Representative Doug Dubitsky (R-47) introduced “An Act Prohibiting Student Athletes Who Were Born As Males From Participating In Women’s Interscholastic Athletic Events.” State Senator Robert Sampson (R-16) proposed civil immunity for youth sport governing agencies that require participants to play on the team of the gender cited on their birth certificate. Neither bill progressed.

Dubitsky’s bill states that its purpose is “to eliminate unfair competition in women’s interscholastic sporting competition.” Dubitsky did not reply to multiple requests from *Connecticut Voice*, and Sampson’s prepared response did not address the issue. Neither was able to provide any of the evidence they relied on to draft their bills.

The Women’s Sports Foundation, the advocacy group founded by Billie Jean King, in 2021 issued a list of “well known, documented” challenges to girls’ sports, like abuse of athletes, unequal pay, and in compliance with Title IX, concluding, “These are some of the real challenges to opportunities for girls and women, not the inclusion of transgender girls and women.” 

Get Fit with Pride



PRIDEFIT STRENGTH

Pridefit offers three specially crafted programs to meet your exact skill level and help you crush your goals.

If you're looking for a way to start an exercise program, or an alternative or complement to your gym membership, there is, as the cliché goes, "an app for that." For members of the LGBTQ+ community, there's a new, specialized app designed to foster education, community, and self-confidence.

Creating an empowering platform for LGBTQ+ people was the motivation for personal trainer Sam Leicht to create PrideFit, a subscription-based app designed to help people be fit and healthy—in a holistic manner. Leicht, who was bullied as a teen involved with sports felt that as a gay man, he couldn't find a community at a gym. He's not alone. That level of intimidation has often been a deterrent and for many LGBTQ+ people.

Through PrideFit, Leicht hopes to educate and support people so they can experience the benefits of increasing


fitness—no matter where they start from. "If we are educated, we can walk into a gym, be confident, and not worry that you're going to look dumb."

Leicht says that the app was developed partly out of the pandemic and the isolation many people felt. It includes on-demand workouts at different skill levels that can be done at home, often with just bodyweight, or at the gym. The important thing, he says, is to get moving. At the same time, his approach focuses on more than just lifting weights, the app also focuses on mindset, nutrition, sleep, and community. Leicht is a friendly, encouraging, and effective coach, and his workouts, at a range of levels, are easy to learn and follow.

However, it's the community that sets PrideFit apart from other apps, all of which are essential to overall health. Obviously, Leicht says, there's no difference between an LGBTQ+ fitness program and one for straight

people. However, he notes that using community to support others, and creating a safe space is critical—and that it's important to "offset all-too-prevalent, non-queer-friendly places." From his own experience with private clients, Leicht says those people who have the most success are those who are connected to and motivated by a community.

Even so, there are no "magic bullets." You still have to do the work, but PrideFit is designed to keep people motivated and consistent in their efforts. No matter how you identify, that's the only way to make a fitness program work long term.

PrideFit is a subscription-based app, with a cost of \$34.99 per month. Find out more at PrideFit.com, and listen to our interview with Sam about his journey, his passion for fitness and serving the LGBTQ+ community on the Voice Out Loud podcast. 

NEWS 8

75 YEARS





This page and next: Wade McCollum as Kenneth/Kate Marlowe. Photos courtesy of Triangle Productions!

HIDDEN NO MORE:

Gay Trailblazer Kenneth Marlowe and His Life Head to the Stage

By CHRISTOPHER BYRNE

Long before Stonewall, there were sexual renegades—people who dared to live authentically and at odds with the strictures of “conventional morality” in the first half of the 20th Century. They occupied a world just out of sight where men, mostly, who had been, or felt, forced into a heterosexual lifestyle could explore and express their true natures. Then, there were those who never hid, or at least didn’t pretend to be anything other than they were.

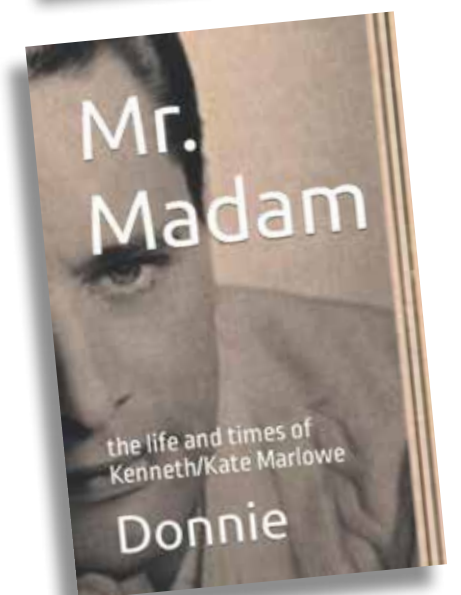
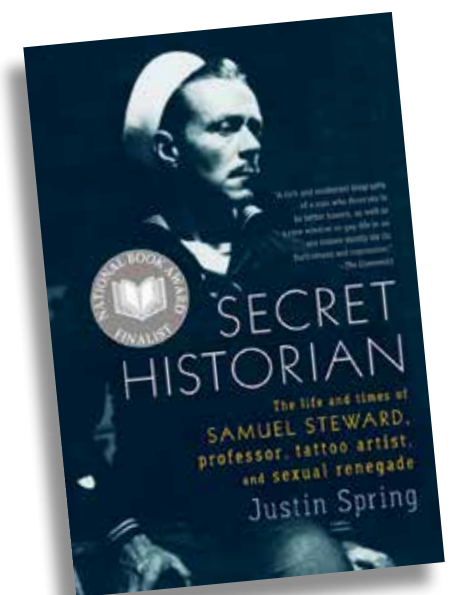
In his 2010 book, *Secret Historian*, author Justin Spring told the story of Samuel Steward who had sex with many of the most famous men of his time while being a professor, tattoo artist, and pornographer known as Phil Andros. Steward’s detailed notes on each of his conquests, or “Stud File,” provided the basis for a glimpse into his personal demi-monde.

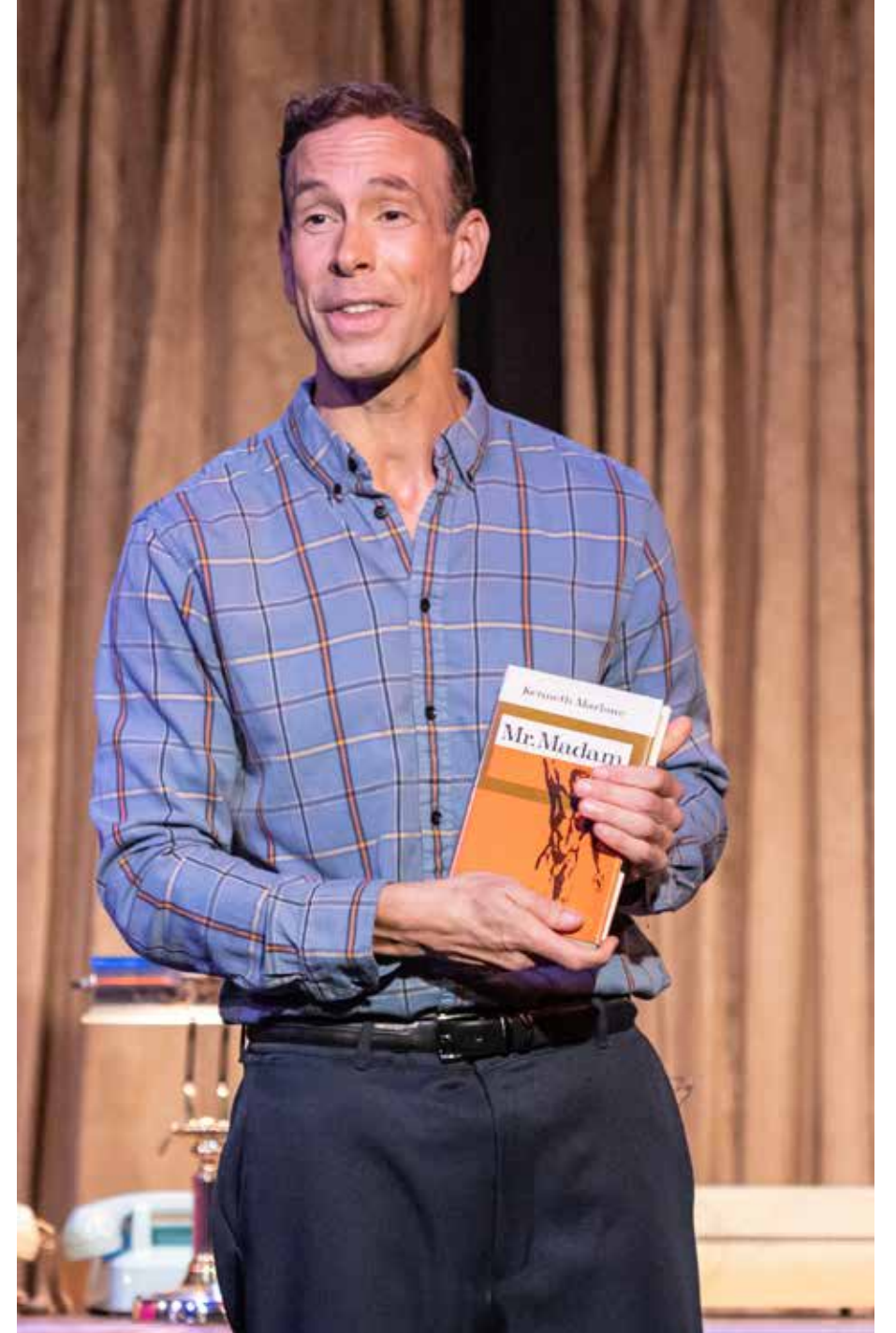
Slightly later, Kenneth Marlowe, born in 1926, was a larger-than-life, vibrantly out personality who during the 1950s and 1960s was a drag performer, the madam of a stable of gay call boys in Los Angeles, and later at age 5 transitioned and became Kate Marlowe.

Both these men, significant to LGBTQ+ history, would have been lost had they not been rescued by scholars eager to tell their stories. In the case of Marlowe, he had written a book called *Mr. Madam* in 1964, which in a gushing way told the story of his life with a stable of “working boys,” but the book had languished in obscurity until playwright Donnie discovered it and recognized its significance.

“I was writing a play about a woman who had a floating bordello on the Willamette River in Portland, Oregon, and in 1890, she had been arrested not for prostitution but because she didn’t collect liquor tax.

“I thought, ‘is there a man out there in that era—or any era—who had been a Madam?’ And Kenneth Marlowe came up. And I started quite a deep dive into that.” That dive resulted in a new edition of *Mr. Madam*, which in turn led to a new play called *Make Me Gorgeous*, which is had its New York debut in





November, as it happens to coincide with Transgender Awareness Month.

What fascinated Donnie about Marlowe was that he had live authentically, “the incredible adventure of becoming a drag queen—or gender illusionist—in Chicago in the 1940s,” though his time as a madam and through his transition to Kate. Donnie adds that what’s significant about Marlowe is the sense of dignity he carried in whatever he pursued, no matter what he was pursuing...and no matter if it raised eyebrows.

How, though, to translate a life, which, as Oscar Wilde would have said, was “crowded with incident” to the stage, particularly when, as Donnie says, “you have 90 minutes to tell a story?” That’s the challenge. Like Steward, Marlowe had many different vocations in his life. He was a hairdresser to the stars, Christian missionary, writer, female impersonator, and served in the Army. He wrote horoscopes for a newspaper, wrote books, produced gay porn and had a biography that inspired

Armistead Maupin to appropriate elements for Anna Madrigal in *Tales of the City*. (Marlowe claimed to have been raised in a whorehouse in Winnemucca, Nevada.)

All of this has been integrated into *Make Me Gorgeous!* Wade McCollum, an actor the *Los Angeles Times* has described as “a force of nature,” portrays Marlowe. McCollum calls Marlowe “a kaleidoscopic personality,” and says that the excitement in portraying Marlowe comes from balancing all the identity structures he

explored and bringing them to life on stage.

As for why now? Donnie and McCollum note that Marlowe’s life offers both an education and a glimpse into history in the world before Stonewall. Donnie notes that Christine Jorgensen, who made international headlines when she transitioned in 1951 and 1952, was for many the first time they understood even the concept of gender identity, though of course it wasn’t referred to in that way then. In the early 1970s, tennis player

Renée Richards transitioned, and it cost her her tennis career because the U. S. Open Committee then required all players to verify their sex with a chromosome test. (See Jane Latus’ piece on page 45 for insight into the science of transitioning and the political landscape half a century later.)

The play had a well-received run in Portland before heading to New York. It’s undergone some revision since then, but Donnie says what he wants most to do is honor LGBTQ+

history, the people who were, in their own ways, trailblazers, and help audiences understand why it’s still so important to fight for our rights and our freedoms.

“I think it’s essential so that people can perhaps open their hearts and be more compassionate to someone they see going through [transition].” It’s a noble effort and a testament to the power of theater.

Hear a full interview with Donnie and McCollum on the Voice Out Loud Podcast. [V](#)

“Oh, the Places You'll Go!”

PART 2

LGBTQ+ TOP TRAVEL DESTINATIONS, DANGER ZONES, AND EXPERIENCES TO TREASURE

By ASHLEY ROGERS



LGBTQ+ people are some of the most itinerant and exuberant travelers, and many have the income and the inclination to “do it up right.” Even if your beer budget doesn’t match your champagne tastes there are tremendous, life-changing destinations, both globally and close to home, that are welcoming the queer community with like-minded people and great adventures to explore.

Although there’s no one-size-fits-all vacation spots or business travel destinations, there are some areas of the world that are more inclusive, accepting, and welcoming to LGBTQ+ travelers. Select hotels, airlines, booking agents and guides that cater to this large travel audience have also jumped on the Rainbow bandwagon, recognizing the lucrative opportunities with this audience, who LGBT Capital

says has purchasing power exceeding \$3.9 trillion globally.

Same-sex couples also tend to have more disposable income, because they are less likely to have children and more likely to both be employed, according to an article in *The New York Times* in June, 2023. Married gay men have the most spending power, with a median household income that is more than \$25,000 higher than their straight and lesbian counterparts, the article reports.

To identify which companies are truly gay friendly—and not just providing lip service to get a piece of the LGBTQ+ pie—the International Gay and Lesbian Travel Association (IGTLA) has created an innovative initiative for LGBTQ+ travelers who seek genuine accountability in their travel experiences.

John Tanzella, IGLTA President and CEO explains. “The 2022 Edelman trust and credibility survey unveiled a compelling shift in consumer behavior: nearly 60 percent of consumers now make purchasing decisions based on shared beliefs. These findings hold significant implications for businesses aiming to attract LGBTQ+ travelers who seek genuine accountability in their travel experiences. To address this need for authenticity, IGLTA has introduced

IGLTA Accredited. This groundbreaking initiative—which is open to hotels and accommodations worldwide—establishes an independent quality assurance process that offers concrete evidence of participating hotels’ sincere welcome to LGBTQ+ guests through tangible actions, going beyond mere words. Travel advisors can now confidently direct LGBTQ+ clients to accommodations that truly embrace and support them, wherever they go.”

Misterb&b has been likened to Airbnb for the LGBTQ+ community. The company’s founder, Mattieu Jost, says “Hosts are able to sign up through the platform and list their extra bed, room, or full house with a verification of identity and proof of residency. Guests can then explore over one million accommodation options from our hosts, as well as LGBTQ+-friendly hotels and hostels. Users can sort accommodations by amenities that are important to them, from LGBTQ+-friendly gyms and spas on-site to naturist-friendly accommodations.

“After booking their stays through the app, misterb&b users can connect with their host or, with the launch of our new in-app travel social network Weere, they can find and connect with other travelers,” Jost says.

International brands such as Hyatt, Marriott, and the W hotel are on the IGLTA’s list, as are Others World Rainbow Hotels, Purple Roofs, and Sparticus, which list gay-owned hotels and guesthouses. LGBTQ+-friendly airlines include American, United and Delta. The best search engines for LGBTQ+ travel according to IGLTA are FabStays, Trip Advisor (type in LGBTQ+ or Gay and get real traveler reviews), and Misterb&b. And reputable tour companies include Out Adventures, HE Travel, Atlantas Events for cruises aimed at the party crowd, and BRANDg.

BRANDg (<https://www.brandg-vacations.com>) is one of the premier LGBTQ+ river and land cruise travel companies in the world. The luxury company offers a buffet of exotic, top-of-the-line, all-inclusive trips including

river cruises along the Danube, Rhine, Mekong, Ganges, and Amazon Rivers; glamorous African safaris; and land expeditions to places like Egypt, Bordeaux, Nepal, Morocco, Cambodia and Colombia.

They cater to well-seasoned travelers, with a median age of 60, but also have guests ranging in age from 20-80 on their trips. Approximately 20 percent of travelers are singles, and the company has a program that provides discounts for single travelers and also matches single travelers with other solo guests. All trips are 4.5- or 5-Star luxury experiences.

According to their co-founder and owner, Brian Van Wey, what makes their trips special is the size of the trips (from 40–200 people), the intimacy and service such small groups afford, and the lasting friendships that result from this environment aimed at “real travelers”, not traditional tourists.

“Our trips are authentic. The people are authentic, and the experience is authentic. Because we are a smaller



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group, we are able to offer trips that are really curated to our travelers. Whether it's the food, the entertainment, the excursions, it's not just a cookie-cutter type thing. We provide something unique for our guests," says Van Wey. "You can play the right music. You can have the right appetizers, but it's really the people you invite to the party that make it a success. And yes, you're going to see the big five in Africa, but it's that sunset that you had with these new friends 3,000 miles away, on a trip you've all always dreamed about. That is the magic and the memories you will cherish."

Philanthropy is an also a huge part of BRANDg. "From our first trip, where we were working with Prague Pride, and then when we were in Vietnam there was a school there that we have a long-term relationship with. We built a library. We provide books, and we get computers. We put a roof on a school in Miramar. In India we have a project with an orphanage. So, for each destination we go to, we try to have a local charity. I think giving back is beyond instrumental to what we do because it is



Casa Batlló designed by Antoni Gaudí in downtown Barcelona Spain.



Streets of Madrid, Spain

the core of who we are as people. Also, it really makes our guests feel good about the destinations we’re in.”

Insider Monkey (<https://www.insidermonkey.com>), a finance website that aggregates select data from SEC filings to help users trade like insiders, compiled an informative list of the “15 Gayest Cities in the World” in 2023. In ascending order they are: Rio de Janero, Toronto, Miami, Sydney, Berlin, Chicago, Los Angeles, Tel Aviv, Madrid, Paris, Amsterdam, Barcelona, London, New York City, and San Francisco.

The publication also identified the 20 Most Dangerous Cites, with the top 5 being (5) Saudi Arabia, (4) Nigeria, (3) Somalia, (2) Afghanistan, and (1) Yemen.



A popular beach in Rio de Janero.

Misterb&b’s John Tanzella cites São Paulo, New York City, Palm Springs, London, Sydney, Cape Town, and Osaka as offering vibrant LG-BTQ+ communities, diverse cultural experiences, and a range of LGBTQ+ events and festivals.

If your next vacation is a “staycation” in Connecticut, Anthony Anthony, Chief Marketing Officer of the Connecticut Office of Tourism, offers up his state’s best of the best. “Connecticut is an incredibly welcoming state. From pro-LGBTQ+-friendly legislation being passed and signed by Governor Lamont, to Harford being named one of the most “exciting LGBTQIA-friendly cities

SPECIAL INTEREST AND LGBTQ+ TRAVEL

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New Haven was also hailed as one of top 52 places to go in the world by *The New York Times* in 2023 (<https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2023/travel/52-places-travel-2023.htm>). “For those who want to experience a coastal vibe, Mystic has a welcoming and inclusive atmosphere that appeals to LGBTQ+ travelers. Visitors can explore its charming downtown area, visit the acclaimed Mystic Aquarium, eat copious amounts of oysters, and indulge in unique boutique shopping experiences,” Anthony adds,

As potentially exciting as travel is, LGBTQ+ business travelers may face a few issues that regular vacationers do not, so it’s important to know your company’s policies, rights and support network prior

to traveling to any country that is not welcoming—or has explicit anti-LGBTQ+ policies. Conducting business in a country that does not respect, recognize or even worse punishes homosexuals can be tricky, while trying to represent your business in a positive light. Understanding the cultural, legal, and social nuances of these countries, as well as the corporate complexities of doing business in these regions is key.

Whether business or pleasure, there’s a big, incredible world out there and the LGBTQ+ community is taking this world by storm. So do your homework, find the right destination, and activities that are tailor-made for you ... then enjoy, have fun and be proud.

This is Part 2 of our travel series “Oh, the Places You’ll Go.” To read Part 1 go to [ctvoice.com](https://www.ctvoice.com)

Cooking with The Queer Food Foundation

By BRIAN SCOTT LIPTON

When one hears the word “Queer Food Foundation,” one’s mind may go to many strange places, but, rest assured, this three-year-old, grass-roots organization is not about celebrating vegetables in same-sex relationships. Instead, it’s mission is to serve the LGBTQ+ food-oriented community in a variety of important ways, all of which are aimed at building an intersectional, equitable food system where queer folks are represented and thriving.

Connecticut Voice recently spoke to one of the organization’s co-founders, Vanessa Parish, and one member of its board of directors, Sunny Levine, to discuss the organization’s beginnings and its goals, accomplishments, and challenges.

CV: Let’s talk about how it started?

VP: During Covid, there was a collapse of the economy and a lot of people in our community were facing food insecurity and having trouble paying bills. So, we really started QFF as a mutual aid society. But we quickly realized there were deeper problems than just food insecurity. It’s a systemic issue that marginalized communities are not on the front lines of corporate ladder. So, ultimately, we had to find ways to help each other. We used social media and the internet to reach people, which was easy because it was Covid and everyone was at home. We also reached out to all our personal networks.

Thankfully, we got some donations from members of our community, and we got some funding from grants. Ultimately, we were also able to make some partnerships with like-minded companies and collaborations with non-profits.

CV: Now, let’s talk about how it’s going.

VP: We have quite a few buckets. We are still sending funds to those who are food insecure. But we are also creating community building activities, like a food festival, and trying in a variety of ways to bring people together who might not otherwise know each other. For example, we create virtual panels with the James Beard Foundation, cookbook authors, and agricultural people.



Most recently, we launched our Queer Food Directory, which is a virtual space where our members can find each other. If you are opening a restaurant, you can find a queer-owned winery. Or if you want a queer person to be a back-of-house worker or help to create a menu or help cater an event, this is how you find and connect with them. We have signed up 100 people in the last five months and hope to grow it even internationally.

CV: What do you consider your biggest triumph so far?

VP: Our biggest triumph was our first Queer FoodFest. It was held in Socrates Park in Queens in 2022, and we co-hosted with Dave’s Lesbian Bar. We had 10,00 people come! More recently,

Holiday Breakfast Scone Bars

By Chef Vanessa Parish

Serves: 12-16 bars

A perfect breakfast to serve on your favorite holiday morning! Prepare overnight and bake the next day to have a quick and easy treat sure to delight all ages. Use your favorite winter fruit, and be sure to add that pop of festive color.

Filling:

- 1 ½ cup Fresh Cranberries (thaw and drain if frozen)**
- 2 Granny Smith Apples, diced**
- 2 Tbsp Apple Pie Spice (or 1 tsp each Ground Allspice, Cinnamon, Nutmeg, Cloves & Ginger)**
- ½ cup Granulated Sugar**
- ½ cup Brown Sugar**
- 2 Tbsp Cornstarch**
- ½ cup Pecans, chopped and untoasted**

Dough:

- 2 Cups All Purpose Flour**
- ¾ Cup Granulated Flour**
- 1 Tablespoon Baking Powder**
- ¼ Teaspoon Salt**
- ¾ Butter, Grated and Chilled**
- ⅔ Cup Heavy Cream**
- 1 Tablespoon Vanilla Extract**
- 1 Egg**



Instructions:

- 1. Preheat the oven to 400 Degrees Fahrenheit. Prepare apple-cranberry filling:** In a medium sized bowl, add cranberries and apples. Mix in spices, sugars and cornstarch. Set aside.
- 2. Prepare the dough:** In a medium bowl, add the dry ingredients; flour, sugar, baking powder and salt. Use a fork to incorporate.
- 3. Add the grated butter** and use the fork to cut the butter into the flour mixture until crumbly.
- 4. Add the wet ingredients;** heavy cream, vanilla and egg. Use a spoon to bring all the ingredients together until the dough is soft and hydrated. Do not overmix or your gluten will overdevelop and make your bars tough.
- 5. Using a greased 8x8 oven-safe baking dish,** spread a thick layer of dough on the bottom and reserve about 1/4 cup of dough for later.
- 6. Scoop the cranberry mixture** on top of the dough layer making sure to not add too much liquid. Use the reserved dough to scoop small dollops on the berries to keep them in place but not cover. Sprinkle the top with the chopped pecans.
- 7. Bake the bars in the oven for 35-40 minutes.** Depending on the amount of liquid extracted from the berries in the oven, it could take longer. Allow to cool before cutting. This helps the liquids thicken and the bars to keep shape.
- 8. Cut bars into 2x2 inch squares ... And enjoy!**




we hosted an event in the James Beard space in New York during Pride Month. And, of course, we are hoping to do another food festival.

SL: We are also planning to do community pop-ups, with queer chefs preparing their favorite food. Every city has different opportunities to make this happen.

CV: Finally, what do you consider to be your greatest challenges right now?

SL: Making sure we have the infrastructure to support the community right now. Unfortunately, the food industry has a long way to go, but I think in 15-20 years we hope the inequalities we are trying to combat will no longer be part of our food system.

VP: Finding the right people to work with. We always say that there is a comfort level in some companies where they act progressive, but they are not really being progressive. We use this as a guideline in deciding who we partner with. We want to make sure your company supports what we really believe in. We're not here to make your company comfortable. 



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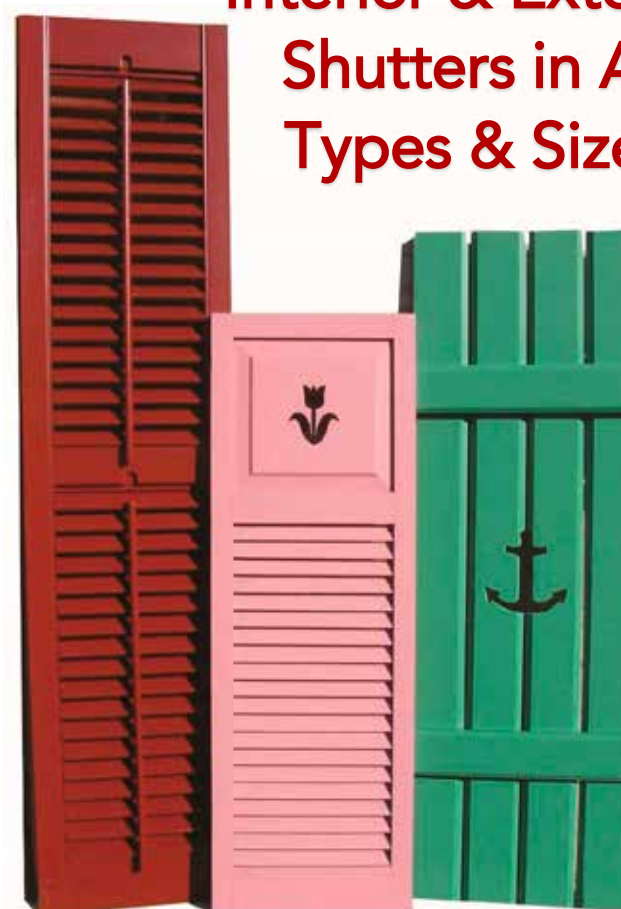
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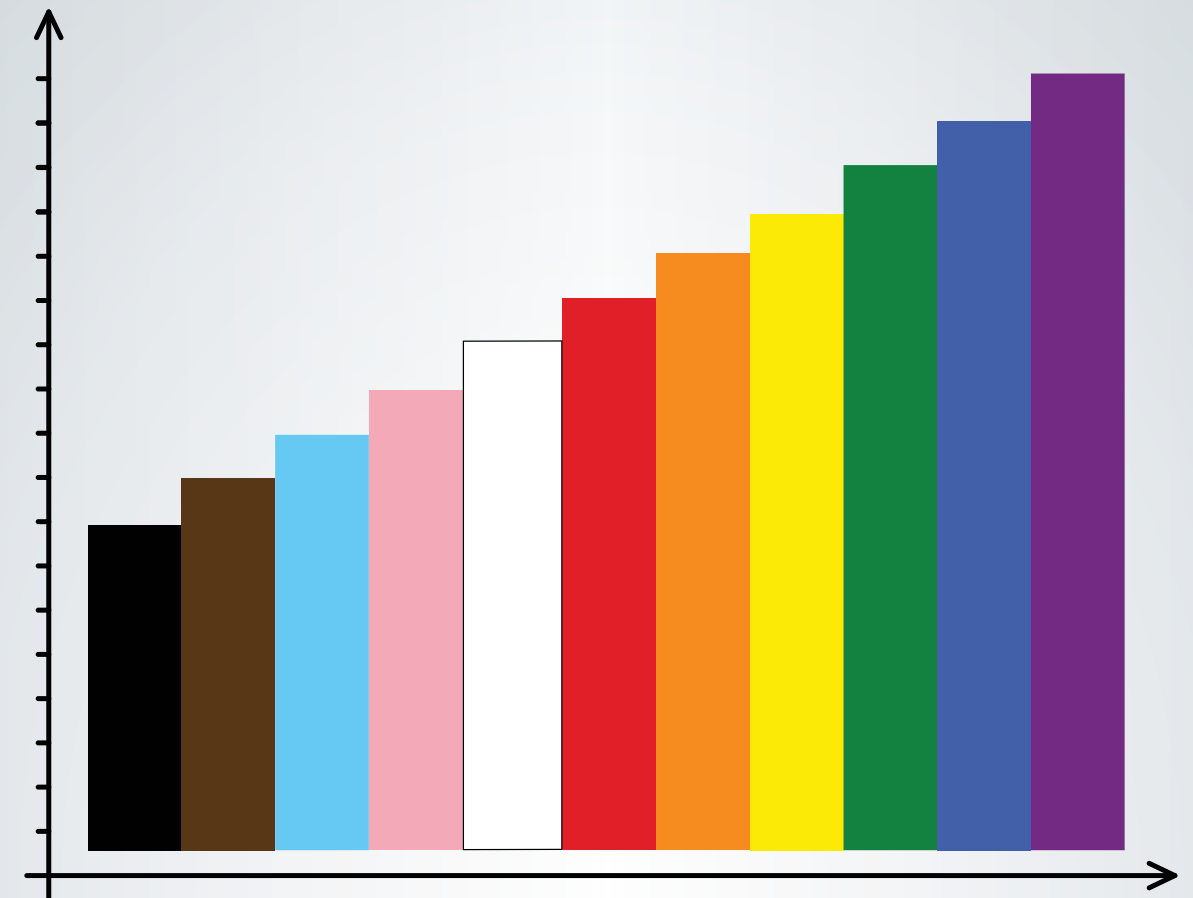
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FEELING COMFORTABLE AT THE EMERGENCY DEPARTMENT: A PRIMER FOR LGBTQ+ PATIENTS

By JANE LATUS

If you can complete this sentence, you really need to read this article: “I dread seeking medical care because I’m worried I will be stigmatized and my care will be compromised because I’m (fill in your orientation/ gender/color here.)

Two-thirds of LGBTQ+ people share that fear, according to a 2021 Center for American Progress survey. They’re not the only organization to identify the magnitude of this problem. In many other surveys, responders report disrespect and discrimination based on who they are.

From the refusal to respect your gender, to asking irrelevant and intrusive questions, to dismissing your same-sex partner accompanying you to the appointment ... all these forms of discrimination are prohibited by federal law. However, many patients still worry—even in Connecticut—and it’s hard for them to feel secure.

Survey data also shows that for many reasons—ranging from lack of insurance to fear of discrimination—LGBTQ+ people are less likely to have a primary care doctor. Therefore, they are more reliant on emergency departments for what would otherwise be routine care.

As a result, planning for medical emergencies is even more important for LGBTQ+ people. Even though by definition you can never predict what kind of emergency it may be, there are several steps you can take to plan ahead.

Siri Dulaire, MD, and Sheeja Thomas, MD, are emergency medicine physicians at Middlesex Health, as well as members of the LGBTQ+ community, and they have some advice for you.

TO DO NOW

If you don’t have medical insurance, check with Access Health CT or the State of Connecticut Office of the Healthcare Advocate for free help finding a plan.

Familiarize yourself with your copays and which hospitals and urgent care clinics are in-network with your insurance plan.

By law, all hospitals have to treat you in case of emergency, but your costs will be higher at an out-of-network hospital. Check on this each year, because networks are subject to change.

Check whether your insurance will cover telehealth appointments, for instances when you need answers or a prescription, but not stitches.

Figure out how to get to the emergency room, or urgent clinic, of your choice.

Think ahead about who you would ask to drive or accompany you, assuming you won’t need an ambulance. Have a backup support person, if possible.

Keep a current list of your medications and allergies in your wallet or on your smartphone.

If you have insurance and a primary care doctor, emergency department doctors really, really want you to see your doctor for non-emergencies, and before they become urgent. Otherwise, those whose lives are in danger are going to compete with your sinus infection for doctors’ time. “We’re not the place to go when it’s convenient; it’s for people who are dying,” says Dulaire.

On the other hand, she warns not to dismiss serious symptoms. “I’d rather people come in a million times with symptoms of something life-threatening, and I tell them, ‘You’re not dying,’ than have someone stay home with chest pain from a heart attack because they don’t think it’s an emergency.”

IN AN EMERGENCY

Call 911 if you have symptoms of a life-threatening emergency. Don’t call your best friend at work or your out-of-state son for an opinion on what to do. Call 911.

If your symptoms are manageable and you’re able to drive yourself or have someone drive you, decide whether you need a hospital emergency department (You seriously need care, soon.) or an urgent care clinic. (You’ll live, but can’t wait until your primary care doctor is available.)



Sheeja Thomas MD (l) and Siri Dulaire MD are committed to making an emergency room visit attentive, comfortable, and supportive to all LGBTQ+ patients. Photo provided by Middlesex Health.

Urgent Care Center vs Emergency Department:

HOW TO MAKE THE RIGHT CHOICE.

Some hospitals, like Middlesex, post their emergency department wait times online. Dr. Thomas warns patients to take that with a grain of salt, because while you are on your way, a dozen others might arrive ahead of you.

If you choose to go to an urgent care clinic, before you leave, check their hours to make sure they're open.

Even if you can drive yourself, take an ally with you, arrange for someone to meet you there or at least have them be there with you virtually with during a telehealth appointment.

Take a phone charger with a long cord.

WHEN YOU ARRIVE

Most hospitals have made their registration process more LGBTQ+-friendly. But if you aren't asked, tell the staff your pronouns and gender. If your sexual activity might be relevant to your medical condition, be forthright about it.

When you register after arriving in one of Middlesex Health's three emergency departments (in Middletown, Marlborough and Westbrook), you'll be asked your preferred pronouns, your sex assigned at birth, your gender identity and your name.

You're asked these questions not to be invasive, but so staff can provide both appropriate medical care and respect for individuals, say Thomas and Daulaire. Sometimes these questions are pertinent to your symptoms. Also, they help staff speak to you respectfully, with your correct name and pronouns. Importantly, doctors also don't want to inadvertently out you in front of your family members in the waiting room, says Thomas.

If anything, the doctors say, it's the registrars who occasionally get grief from cisgender people, confused by or objecting to being asked for their pronouns.

If medical staff misgender you, correct them. Daulaire says she hates to put that onus on the person being mistreated, but notes that most of the time, staff make the mistake unintentionally, and the only way to fix it is to bring it up.

WHEN YOUR IDENTITY MATTERS

Too many trans people report being asked by doctors about their reproductive anatomy when the matter at hand is clearly irrelevant. This possibility is one reason it's good to have an ally with you as an advocate.

At Middlesex, all staff are trained to provide competent care to LGBTQ+ patients. Doctors Thomas and Daulaire (who, as noted, are members of that community) say that when they ask about your queer identity, it's because it could be relevant to your health issue. "It's all about your risk profile," says Daulaire. In a gay man, pain and fever may be related to STDs or prostatitis. Daulaire orders pregnancy tests for people of all genders if they have a uterus. She won't ask you these questions,

she says, if you're there because of a broken toe.

Thomas says that knowing a patient's identities helps her to advocate for them even within their families—like the teenage trans girl whose parents kept using "he/him" pronouns. The girl was experiencing extreme stress. "I said to the parents, 'You do know her preferred pronouns are she/her?'" This is precisely why she was there in the emergency department."

SOME REASSURANCE

Both doctors say they've also been patients and know how stressful it can be. They also know being part of a marginalized minority sometimes makes patients feel even more stress. That's why Middlesex caregivers go out of their way to reassure queer patients, they say.


Older patients, especially those near the end of life, and those who've kept their relationships closeted, tug at Daulaire's heart particularly. She's not content for a patient to introduce their partner as a "roommate" or "friend". She'll ask, "Is this your partner?"

"I need this person to be recognized as who they are to the patient," she says. "Having a loved one who is acknowledged as your partner, as your support person, is really important."

Daulaire says she tries to make queer patients comfortable even before words are spoken. When people see her pronoun badge, she says, it helps. So does her rainbow-colored hair.

Putting people at ease is hugely important to Thomas. "I'm a very short, queer, woman of color. I feel there are places in Connecticut that are very scary for me. I'm often the only brown person in the room." Luckily for her LGBTQ+ patients, she says, "I guess I look queer enough. I walk into the room—and they have a certain idea of who Dr. Thomas is going to be—and they are often like, 'woah! I feel their relief.'"

In September, Middlesex Health's employee resource group, MH+ PRIDE, was named Out & Equal's New Employee Resource Group Chapter of the Year. Co-chaired by Daulaire, MH+ PRIDE aims to create a welcoming, affirming, inclusive and safe environment for all Middlesex employees. Since its launch two years ago, MH+ PRIDE created pronouns badges that staff wear, and created a transgender resource guide as a tool for all employees. The group also works to improve care for LGBTQ+ patients. It has already helped, says Thomas. "It has really translated to the patients."

Middlesex has received five consecutive "LGBTQ Healthcare Equality Leader" designations from the Human Rights Campaign. The honor is based on the facilities' policies and practices related to equity and inclusion of LGBTQ+ patients, visitors and employees. 

WHEN SHOULD I USE AN URGENT CARE CENTER?

Urgent Care Centers offer patients easy access to care for minor, non-emergency medical needs. Some of the benefits of an Urgent Care Center include:

- No appointment required
- Economical
- Short wait times
- Open evenings, weekends, and most holidays
- Local and convenient
- Access to labs and X-rays

Conditions Cared for in an URGENT CARE CENTER

RESPIRATORY INFECTIONS

- Sinus pain
- Sore throat
- Cough/mild asthma
- Pink eye
- Earache

MINOR INJURIES

- Cuts needing skin glue or stitches
- Accidents, falls
- Sports injuries
- Broken bones
- Neck, back, and joint pain

OTHER CONDITIONS

- Bladder infections
- Sexually transmitted diseases
- Rashes
- Mild vomiting and diarrhea

NOTE: If greater care is needed, our staff will direct patients to the proper health care provider. In a true emergency, we will transfer patients directly to an emergency department.

WHAT IS CONSIDERED AN EMERGENCY?

Patients may have many different types of emergencies. Most emergencies require at least one of the following:

- Immediate blood work
- Ultrasounds
- CAT Scans
- Placement of IV (intravenous) line

Conditions Cared for in an EMERGENCY DEPARTMENT

PAIN

- Severe/sudden onset headache
- Severe abdominal pain
- Difficulty walking

Signs of a Heart Attack:

- Severe chest pain
- Difficulty breathing
- Loss of consciousness

INJURIES

- Serious head, neck or back injury
- Severe fracture
- Deep or large wound
- Large burn
- Poisoning

OTHER CONDITIONS

- Pregnancy-related problem
- Heavy, uncontrollable bleeding
- Fever in infants
- Convulsions or seizure

Signs of a Stroke:

- Loss of vision
- Numbness/weakness
- Slurred speech/confusion

Dial 911 immediately for any medical problem that is life threatening



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for April 27, 2024 at
The Bushnell!



Announcing Connecticut Voice Honors!

Make plans to attend our second Connecticut Voice Honors gala. On April 27 next year, we'll be celebrating the people making a difference for our LGBTQ+ communities in Connecticut.

We're planning a festive evening at The Bushnell Performing Arts Center. in Hartford as Connecticut Voice recognizes the many leaders in our state who devote their time, energies, passions, and careers to making our state one of the best in the nation for people to live their authentic lives.

From political figures, to sports and entertainment stars, medical professionals, and the people who work behind the scenes, this is a special night to applaud them—and to celebrate the rich diversity of LGBTQ+ life in our state.

Watch **CTVoice.com** for announcements, tickets, and much more. AND—this is your chance to nominate the People's Choice recipient!



For sponsorship opportunities contact Jim Tully at (860)729-2938.

See you at The Bushnell in April! And get ready to party!

CTVoice.com

PETS //



Protectors of Animals: 'A Call to Help'

Written by **RENEE DININO** / Photography by **CHRISTINE PENNEY**

Jody Macrina is the current president and a volunteer of Protectors of Animals, Inc. (POA), and has been for 22 years. Starting as a volunteer when she moved to Connecticut from Southeastern Massachusetts, she decided to continue her volunteer work with animals at various rescues until she found POA. POA now has a strong board of directors with 13 accomplished individuals with various backgrounds with approximately 250 to 300 volunteers in varying capacities from foster homes to medical to program coordination and shelter staff. Transparent about their operating funds, the group only has two full-time employees and one part-time employee. More than 95 percent of the funds go directly back into the care of the animals for building maintenance, food, medical needs and more.

POA was first imagined by three women in South Glastonbury who started rescuing stray dogs and then cats. It wasn't until 1975 that the group incorporated and received its nonprofit status after a few years of hard work. POA remains one of the oldest and most respected grassroots rescues in Connecticut. At the beginning of the incorporation and 501c3 status, the group concentrated on abandoned, abused and stray cats and dogs.

Fast forward to 2000, the group secured its first brick-and-mortar facility where they opened a cat adoption center at 144 Main Street in East Hartford. POA is still located in the same spot where employees and volunteers take care of all the cats' needs: cleaning, food, medical, playtime, cuddles and their favorite day of prepping for adoptions.

After volunteering for only one year with POA, and with the blessing of

the board and other members, Macrina became president of POA in 2001; she hasn't looked back! In 2017, POA added another space to that property, the POASpay Clinic, which was created for high-quality, low-cost spaying and neutering performed by highly skilled, board-certified veterinarians supported by an incredible staff. This is by appointment only.

"It's just the fabric that you're made of, something you're born with; it's just woven into who you are and strengthens as you grow. It happens organically. At least it did for me. I even remember as a kid seeing a kitten hanging on the ledge of an embankment, begging my father to let me help," said Macrina. She can even remember what she was wearing because the experience was so traumatic. In her yellow sundress with brown polka dots, her father clearly recognizing the desperation from his daughter, crawled

down the rocks on the side of a dam and grabbed the kitten. The kitten became one of many rescued cats, dogs, sheep—anything Macrina felt needed saving that would come into the Persson (her family name) household where her mother lost the battle of “No Pets Allowed!”

“A common misconception about running a rescue is that we can help everybody, and we can’t,” added Macrina. “There is just so much need; it absolutely breaks our hearts to say no to people. It’s gut-wrenching that we can’t help everyone that calls us. We try to offer solutions, but when we have to say no, it breaks our hearts more than I think people understand. I would think this sentiment rings true for other rescue groups, too. I don’t think people understand or truly know the amount of animals that need help, from stray dogs and feral cats to accidents and the horror stories of neglect and abuse. There’s so much. It’s overwhelming, and to say ‘no,’ it runs through our minds, my mind, that we couldn’t help. It’s haunting.”

“The trauma rescue workers and volunteers experience is real, and they need help and support from mental health

community, too,” said Macrina as she recalled stories of people and animals that haunt her to this day. “Rescue really is a good network of like-minded people who understand this calling.”

In 2022 alone, POA placed 509 cats and kittens and 66 dogs in loving homes. The dog adoptions from the city pound they work with are not included in this number. Additionally, they spayed/neutered 3,429 dogs and cats, not including the feral cat community numbers, which could be in the thousands. They’ve helped hundreds of pet owners keep their pets in home with medical aid, food and training.

Cats have a special place in the mostly volunteer-run organization. There are so many feral colonies in Connecticut and, left alone, they tend to multiply. Many municipalities do not have a “cat plan.” In other words, rescues like POA are needed to help control the cat population with their TNR programs. Specifically, POA has many volunteers trained to trap strays and help educate the public on feral colonies. TNR stands for trap and release; many of these cats are not fit for domestication. What they can do

at the least is give a cat some medical treatments, neuter/spay the cats, and release back out to their “home.” If a cat is assessed as a potential adoptable cat, they will keep it in the center, find a foster and help to re-home the cat in a safe environment within a loving home.

When adopting a kitten or a cat from POA, you must fill out an application, and there is one important thing to keep in mind: you must agree to keep your cat as an indoor cat. Most of them have come from horrific conditions, abuse and severe neglect, so they want to ensure their kittens or cats will live a happy and longer life inside. POA works with many animal control officers and other groups and volunteers to help with the ever-growing cat population in Hartford, East Hartford, Glastonbury, and other communities around the state. This is in addition to helping dogs! In fact, they have a wonderful partnership with the Wethersfield Police Department and their city pound. The volunteers handle the cleaning, food, exercise, play, and kisses with treats, and enrichment programs to help get the dogs adopted out of the pound.

“The animal control officers appreciate us very much, and we appreciate them just as much,” said Macrina. “Our work in Wethersfield exceeds 28 years of a respectful partnership of helping to get these dogs what they need from spay/neuter, medical, vaccinations and ultimately adopted.”

The start of 2023 is especially memorable; they received a call from an animal control officer friend about a dog left badly beaten New Years’ Day at The Cove in Wethersfield on a dog bed by the water. This dog was nurtured back to health at a cost of over \$5,000; it is living a safe and happy life thanks to the efforts of POA. This is just a small breakdown of what POA does for the communities, people, and pets they serve.

You may also see POA’s Hip to Snip van around the state. The van is used for transporting food, dogs, and cats to their clinic and as a reminder to spay or neuter your pets. They have a kennel in East Hampton for smaller dogs (to keep the big dogs from the smaller dogs).

“Currently, POA is active in helping



educate the public about being a good neighbor amongst rescues and citizens wanting to help. Education is key, and we need volunteers and, of course, donations to keep our mission alive,” said Macrina. Their application to adopt cats and dogs may seem a bit long. When you realize the love, hours and funds that are happily invested into the lives they save, you can begin to understand and appreciate the process.

“Oh, my gosh, POA could not do what it does without our volunteers,” added Macrina on a personal note to all the POA team and volunteers. “They give so much of themselves. We have 15-year volunteers, 10-year volunteers, etc. It’s the people that make POA what it is. I don’t like my title of president because I’m just a volunteer; we are all there to make a difference. POA is a team. They are why we do what we do.”

For more information about Protectors of Animals, to donate, volunteer or adopt visit poainc.org.





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THE FINAL WORD //



Senator Blumenthal and supporters at the signing of the Respect for Marriage Act.

Where We Stand

By SENATOR RICHARD BLUMENTHAL

A very happy and healthy holiday season to all! This time of year is appropriate for both celebration and reflection—a time to look back on what’s been accomplished and what still needs to be done.

As always, I am honored and grateful to serve Connecticut—a leader in supporting the LGBTQ+ community for decades. Our welcoming and affirming spirit is one of the many reasons I am proud to call our state home. As I travel across the state, I am overjoyed to connect with many of you at Pride parades, health centers, press conferences and many other events. Your advocacy and engagement is inspiring and uplifting.

Around this time last year, Congress

passed the Respect for Marriage Act, legislation codifying marriage equality. It was a long overdue step to protect LGBTQ+ Americans and I was honored to celebrate that milestone with many of you. We started the 2023 calendar year on a high note with a win for marriage equality, but also with the clear understanding that there was still much more left to be done to protect LGBTQ+ rights in this country.

This year, as with last year, we have seen an alarming increase in hateful and extremist measures and messages targeting the LGBTQ+ community. In July, the Supreme Court ruled that a Colorado graphic design business could discriminate against same-sex couples—rolling back decades of progress in the fight for equality. Let me be very clear: granting business owners

the right to refuse service based on who someone loves is immoral, indecent, and incompatible with Constitutional values.

Adding to this alarming legal decision, hundreds of laws targeting the LGBTQ+ community were introduced across the nation. To date, over 520 anti-LGBT+ bills have been advanced in state legislatures—an all-time high according to Human Rights Watch. These bills do everything from restricting health care access to allowing strangers to harass LGBTQ+ youth in schools. These measures are cruel and utterly unacceptable. They prove the desperate need for strong federal protections that prohibit discrimination based on sex, sexual orientation, and gender identity in all areas of public life.



Celebrating landmark legislation codifying marriage equality. (Our own Dawn Ennis to Sen. Blumenthal's left.)

To combat these measures, we reintroduced the EQUALITY Act in June, this legislation would ban discrimination and enshrine federal protections for LGBTQ+ people. This critical legislation has never been more urgent. Discrimination against someone on religious, racial, or ethnic grounds is already illegal. The EQUALITY Act simply extends these same protections to sex, sexual orientation, and gender identity.

I'm also proud to co-sponsor the Gender Affirming Care Access Research for Equity (CARE) Act, which authorizes \$25 million for the National Institutes of Health and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to study the barriers to gender affirming care and how those barriers might affect health outcomes.

We know that a transgender or nonbinary person faces huge barriers to appropriate, medically necessary

health care, and that accessing this care can be a matter of life and death. Of those 520 anti-LGBTQ+ bills, dozens target gender affirming care for trans and non-binary people. As attacks against the LGBTQ+ community escalate and spread, we must fight to ensure access to strong, consistent health care so they can live their truest and most authentic lives. Gender affirming care is backed by decades of research and supported by every major medical association. Our bill will help eliminate health disparities and enable all transgender and non-binary individuals access the care they need.

Finally, we took steps to protect the LGBTQ+ community from discrimination on misapplied religious grounds. Too often, religious freedom laws are used as a weapon to discriminate against the LGBTQ+ community. This year, we introduced

the Do No Harm Act to clarify that the Religious Freedom Restoration Act—which was originally intended to protect religious freedom—cannot be used to discriminate and undermine well established civil rights protections.

While I never say I am confident about action in Congress, I am definitely hopeful that we will continue to see progress – thanks to your strong advocacy. I stand with you in this battle for rights and fairness and will keep working and fighting for critical protections.

I wish you all a happy new year full of joy and peace. 🍷

Richard Blumenthal is the senior United States Senator from Connecticut, a seat he has held since 2011.

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- Nurse Educator, MSN
- Physical Activity and Chronic Disease, MS

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- School Health Education, MS***
- School Psychology, MS, 6th Year*
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