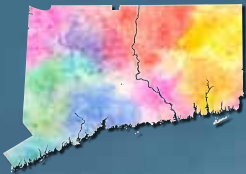


# VOICE

CONNECTICUT

## *Pride in Connecticut*

INSIDE:



WE HIT THE ROAD AND FOUND SOME FUN PLACES TO CELEBRATE!





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# CONNECTICUT VOICE™

## EDITOR'S NOTE //



Happy Pride!

I could probably write that for every issue, since pride in who we are is celebrated every day here at *CT Voice*. June and the summer months, however, are a time when our year-round pride takes to the streets and the parks in a celebration of who we are—and our right to live our lives openly and freely as our authentic selves.

There are few states in the nation as supportive and inclusive as Connecticut; it's a great place to be—and fully express—ourselves.

This issue focuses on that celebration as we provide an extensive listing of all Pride celebrations throughout the state, gathered by Jane Latus (page 48). There are more events to come, too, so

be sure to check out [ctvoice.com](http://ctvoice.com) as we do our best to stay on top of the schedules.

This issue is also packed with Connecticut Pride. Our friend, Representative Jeff Currey writes about the efforts of the “small but mighty” LGBTQ+ coalition in Hartford (page 95). We profile activist baker Kevin Masse whose work to support LGBTQ+ youth is as impressive as it is heartfelt. Jane Latus also wrote about the ways in which Middlesex Health supports transgender individuals as patients—and colleagues. Speaking of great places to work, Tom Ciuba has profiled companies around the state that support LGBTQ+ individuals and have made diversity, equity, and inclusion central to their corporate cultures.

Dawn Ennis writes about how to talk to your “Gayby” (page 60), and I’ve written about the changes in language and how we can negotiate this dynamic environment. Dawn also wrote the serious and lighthearted quiz (page 19) that tests your knowledge of LGBTQ+ terms and issues.

On a national scale, Brian Scott Lipton talked to swimmer/author/icon Greg Louganis, gay icon, director John Waters, Frank Rizzo profiles entertainment legend Varla Jean Merman and LGBTQ+ historian Eric Marcus.

There is so much to celebrate as we continue to expand our community. In the next weeks, look for expanded features on our website and more local events. And be sure to mark your calendar for September 17 when we will present the first Connecticut Voice Honors at Foxwoods.

As you’ll see in these pages, pride is for everyone. There is still work to do, but the commitment, passion, and dedication of the people in these pages—and many more throughout the state—stand as an inspiration to us all.

Thanks to all who write to me and continue to do. I’m loving the conversation.

*Chris*  
Christopher Byrne, Editor  
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# CONTRIBUTORS //



## FRANK RIZZO

Frank Rizzo interviewed drag superstar Varla Jean Merman (Page 34) and gay historian Eric Marcus (Page 12). 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 interviewed Olympian Greg Louganis (Page 78), designer Andrew Werner, and icon John Waters (Page 10). 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 wrote about talking to your LGBTQ+ kids (Page 60) and created our Are You an Ally? Quiz (Page 19). 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.



## TOM CIUBA

Tom looked at strategies and initiatives for LGBTQ+ employee equity at some of Connecticut's most recognized companies (Page 26). He serves as vice president of communications for a global transportation provider, has previously worked in consumer public relations and nonprofit, and dabbles in podcasting and filmmaking. Tom has called Connecticut home for 14 years.



## ALEX DUEBEN

Alex joins CT Voice this issue with his profile of activist baker Kevin Masse (Page 69). Alex is a freelance writer specializing in comics and poetry, books and art.



## JANE LATUS

Jane Latus covers health and politics. She compiled our roundup of all CT Pride events (Page 48) as well as covering Middlesex Health's support for transgender individuals. (Page 56). She is a writer and personal trainer living in Canton. She and her husband Ken have an escalating number of cats and two grown sons, one transgender and one gay.



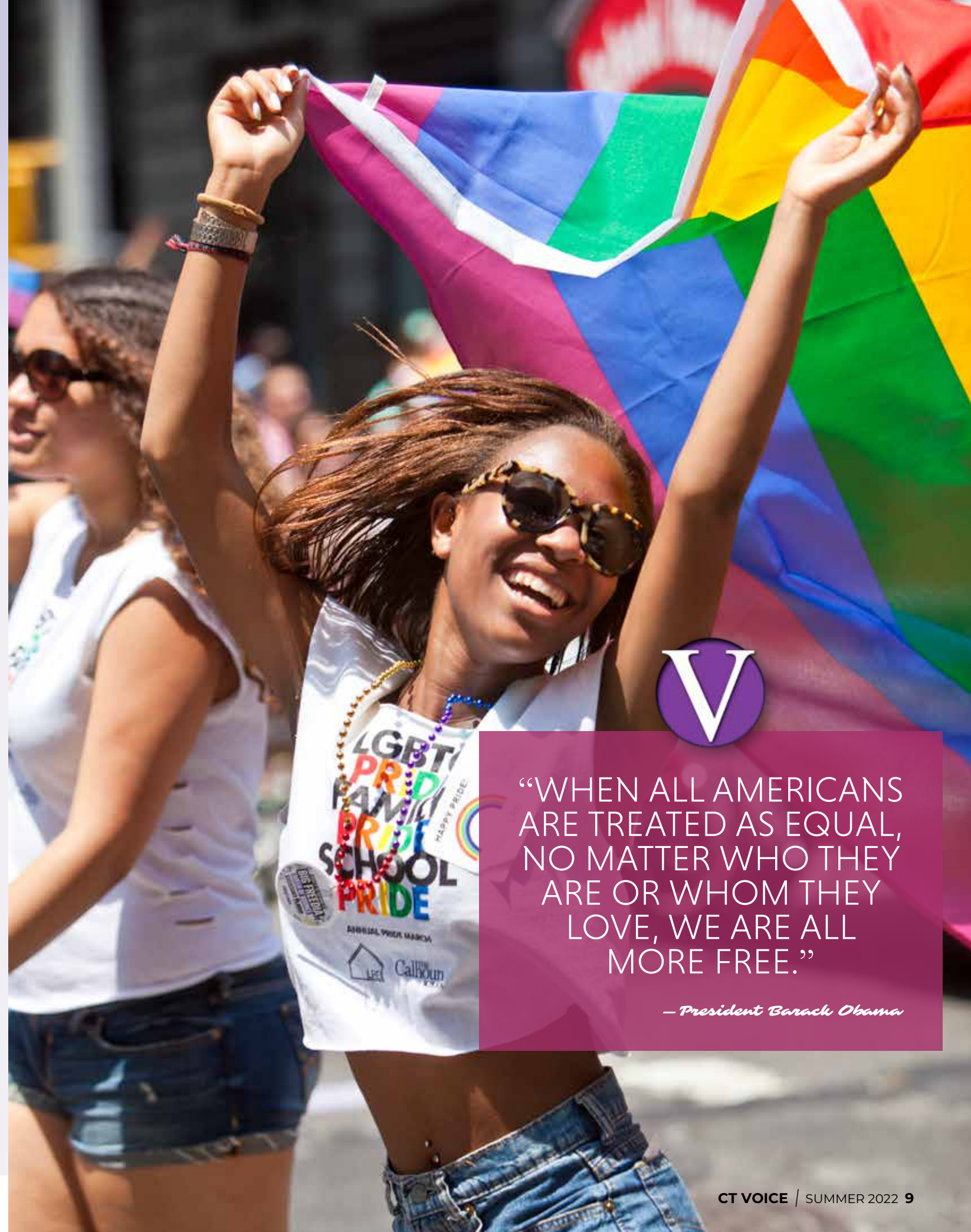
## MICHELLE CUTRALI

Michelle Cutrali has been an 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.



## TEDD LEVINE

Tedd brings more than 40 years' experience as an attorney and CPA to the discussion of matrimonial and relationship law. His insights on protecting assets in a relationship (Page 14), are based on many successful cases. In addition, he has worked in business, finance, corporate, and licensing law. He is on the Connecticut Bar and admitted to practice before the Supreme Court.



“WHEN ALL AMERICANS ARE TREATED AS EQUAL, NO MATTER WHO THEY ARE OR WHOM THEY LOVE, WE ARE ALL MORE FREE.”

— President Barack Obama

## Camping It Up

While he may be most famous for his work behind the camera as the director of such films as *Pink Flamingos*, *Hairspray* and *Serial Mom*, John Waters has become an instantly recognizable pop culture (and gay) icon, famous for both his signature mustache and equally outrageous sense of humor.

From September 9-12, the Baltimore native will return to Club Getaway in Kent, Connecticut to host his 5th Annual "Camp John Waters," this time alongside guest counselors Deborah Harry, Colleen Fitzpatrick and Mink Stole. Campers will be invited to participate in such fun activities as a John Waters Costume Contest, a John Waters Movie Marathon, *Hairspray* Karaoke, Bloody Mary Bingo, Bobbing for Hotdogs and more.

*Connecticut Voice* recently spoke to Waters about this delicious annual event, his latest book, his favorite gifts, and his work in front of the camera in movies and television.

**V: This is the fifth year for John Waters Day at Camp Getaway. What makes you want to do it again and again?**

**JW:** C'mon, it's Jonestown with a happy ending. We actually put that on T-shirts the first year. Seriously, it's this joyous, amazing experience where people come from all over the world, and anything can happen. They even get married there. The campers are straight, gay, whatever, and everyone gets along, although sometimes we have to tell the more "senior" campers to be nicer to the newer ones.

And I love that so many of the campers stay in touch with me and each other; some of them always show up at my spoken word shows.

**V: Like any good camp, it has plenty of activities. What are some of your favorites?**

**JW:** One year, the campers made hate bracelets in arts and crafts, which I thought was very inventive. And we had a strip twist contest at lunch once, and that wasn't even planned. And, of course, I love the costume contest, which I personally get to judge.

**V: What are your judging standards for Best Costume?**

**JW:** These campers are so smart that many come up with the most obscure details, which I love. Last year, someone came as a painting of Don Knotts in a flea market that was featured in *Serial Mom*. The guy had to spend all day wearing a frame around his head! Who knows, maybe someone this year will come as my mom and me since we're having a bit of a mother-daughter theme this year—not that I should give anyone any ideas.

One year, the campers made hate bracelets in arts and crafts, which I thought was very inventive. And we had a strip Twist contest at lunch once, and that wasn't even planned. And, of course, I love the costume contest, which I personally get to judge.

**V: Did you ever go to summer camp, and if so, can you share your worst memory?**

**JW:** Yes. When I was 10, the camp had a bowel movement chart, and we had to check it every day. Of course, we did the same thing one year at Camp Getaway, but the campers knew it was coming! It is never our goal to humiliate our customers.

**V: Tell me about your new book *Liarmouth: A Feel-Bad Romance*?**

**JW:** The short version: It's about a woman who steals suitcases at airports. I think she's a good villain, but I also think you'll root for her.

**V: How do you come up with all these amazing ideas for your projects?**

**JW:** I have a great imagination that I've relied on for 50 years. Also I watch people, look at their behavior, make up an instant biography for them when they walk by, and I especially love to eavesdrop.

**V: What's the best present you've ever gotten from an admirer? And what gift do you absolutely not want?**

**JW:** I often get the most

amazing presents; my favorite is a book called *Ear Masturbation*. On the other hand, I will be really mad if someone ever gives me an astrology chart. I don't believe in that stuff. I don't want a crystal either. Andy Warhol had a crystal in his pocket when he went into the hospital for that surgery—and a lot of good it did him.

**V: You regularly pop up in small roles in TV and movies. What makes you say "yes" to a part?**

**JW:** First, I never agree to independent movies; I only say yes to the biggest hits, as well as projects that people would not expect to see me in, whether it's *Law & Order*, *Search Party*, or *The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel*. I love that kids recognize me from the *Alvin and the Chipmunks* movie, and people on the subway often mention that they loved me in *Seed of Chucky*. I like to spread the love around.

**V: Do you actually like being recognized in public?**

**JW:** Sure, but I don't ever like being recognized at the doctor's office. It's no fun to have people yell across the room "Hey, what's wrong with you?" And once a reporter found out I was at the doctor, and it took two weeks to straighten out the story of what really was going on. But otherwise, it's great.

**For information on this event, visit [clubgetaway.com](http://clubgetaway.com)**

—Brian Scott Lipton

“ I have a great imagination that I've relied on for 50 years ... ”

—John Waters

## Saving Gay History

ERIC MARCUS HELPS US DISCOVER HOW WE GOT HERE

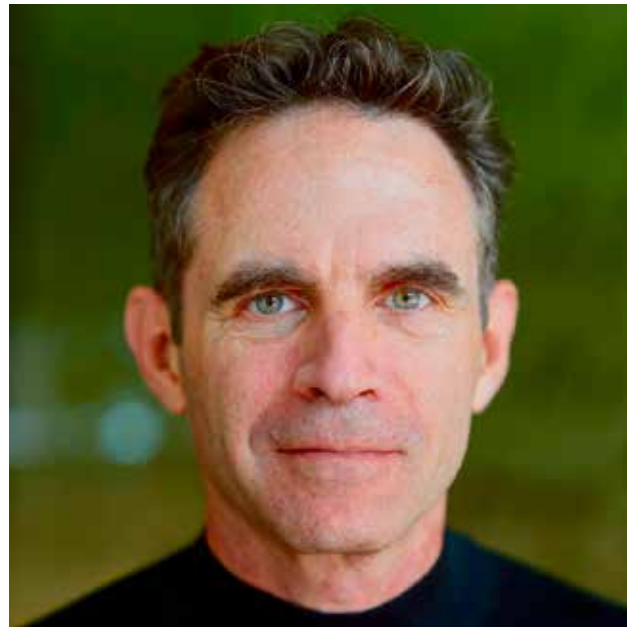
In 1988, Eric Marcus was working as an associate producer at CBS when he left his position to embark on an oral history project that would change his life—and affect the lives of so many others. These conversations led to two books *Making History: The Struggle for Gay and Lesbian Equal Rights, 1945–1990*, and *Making Gay History: The Half-Century Fight for Lesbian & Gay Equal Rights*.

Those interviews—and new ones—now make up the rich personal histories of his popular podcast, *Making Gay History*.

I met Marcus, 63, at a cafe not far from his Chelsea home in New York where we talked about how he put a spotlight on a hidden history, how he was surprised at the richness of gay life before Stonewall and of the latest wave of homophobia.

**How did you even begin to chronicle a history that was so closeted, especially at a time of crisis and fear?**

There were few resources, but resources weren't the only problem. I knew nothing. As far as I knew, the movement began in 1969 with Stonewall. But I quickly discovered in the U.S. it started around 1950 with the founding of the Mattachine Society in Los Angeles by five men, including Rudi Gernreich—who became famous in life as the designer of the topless bathing suit. There was also a short-lived gay rights organization in 1924



Eric Marcus

in Chicago, and you can go back to 1897 in Berlin for the very first gay rights organization in the world, which was destroyed by the Nazis in 1933.

**And after three decades, the archival hunt goes on.**

Today photos, films, and diaries are turning up that were never expected to see the light of day. We have no idea how many other personal archives have been destroyed because families didn't want anyone to know their relative was gay.

**What were you most surprised to discover?**

I was surprised at the richness of gay life, that even within societal constraints, many gay people were leading happy lives. They had community. They had social networks. They had relationships. It was challenging, and especially

looking at photos and films from these eras, you see people who were happy. I didn't know that existed. I was told that it was a dark time, and it didn't occur to me until I started talking to people and seeing these personal pictures and home movies that gay people had very full lives and built relationships.

**How is gay history viewed by subsequent generations from those who lived through the AIDS epidemic?**

With every generation, if you didn't live through that period yourself, and it isn't far enough in the past to be taught in schools; it's just a blank spot.

**With the word "gay" being outlawed in schools in some states, how are young people going to learn this history?**

The advantage historical perspective is knowing that what's happening in Florida and other states is not new. The first modern anti-gay wave came with Anita Bryant in the late 70s after there had been successful passages of gay rights bills in cities across the country. That was the 'Save Our Children' campaign where gay people were portrayed as pederasts.

In this current wave where we're being called "groomers" and "predators," it is simply the latest round following a time when we've made so much progress with marriage equality, military service, and many other issues.

There are still enough people who hold negative views about homosexuals, and now not just against gay men and women but trans people, too. That has been very useful for right wing Republicans to animate their audiences. But the good thing about knowing your history is that you know it happened before, and you also know how it was defeated. So, you can look back and learn from that.

**The 70s seemed to be a decade-long party of sexual liberation and pride for LGBTQ+ people, but AIDS changed everything.**

AIDS was a huge turning point. If you look at the transformation of gay rights movement from before AIDS and after, early rights organizations of the 1970s were terribly underfunded. They were not large or professional compared to the way they evolved. Those organizations were also not

as politically connected as they became later.

AIDS forced all sorts of people out of the closet and gave gays and lesbians the opportunity to organize, fundraise, challenge people in power.

**You wrote two books on pessimism. How are you feeling these days?**

My basic default is pessimism, and I'm feeling pretty grim at the moment. We're seeing a new wave of anti-gay activism that has some traction [in the culture].

That said, I hear routinely from young people, and they are not shy.

A 17-year-old from Florida gave a report at his high school history class on the Stonewall uprising wearing a dress. He's gotten a lot of negative press but a lot of positive press, too. I had an email from a disabled 15-year-old lesbian from Russia who asked if she could translate a transcript from the podcast episode so her friends, who couldn't speak English, could be inspired the way she was. She posted the translated interview on her blog, and it was downloaded hundreds and hundreds of times across Russia, and we've since stayed in touch.

So my hope is in this next generation, LGBTQ+ people who have come into this world made better by the people whose shoulders I stand on. They're not going to let anyone take their rights away from them, and they're certainly not going to go quietly into the night. That gives me hope. But these are still really challenging times.

*The next turning of Making Gay History which centers on coming of age in the 70s is in pre-production. The Stonewall anniversary season will be released during Pride this year. Info at makinggayhistory.com*

—Frank Rizzo

## Culture Is History, Too

LGBTQ+ images have been in culture for a very long time—some better, more affirming, and accurate than others with respect to LGBTQ+ history. Marcus shared a few of his favorites:



*The Front Runner*, a 1974 novel by Patricia Nell Warren. "I don't know if it was great literature, but I remember reading this gay love story in my bedroom in Queens and weeping at the end."

*Consenting Adult*, Laura Z. Hobson's 1975's novel. "It was about how a mother reconciles her relationship with her gay son. That was the first time I read anything about people like me and it was stunning."

*Falsettos*, a musical by William Finn and James Lapine. The show combined *March of the Falsettos* (1981) and *Falsettoland* (1990), depicting gay and heterosexual family dynamics in the years before and during AIDS.

*La Cage Aux Folles* (1983) connected to mainstream heterosexual audiences with a gay portrayal of family values. "That song 'I Am What I Am' still makes me cry every time I hear it."

*The Celluloid Closet: Homosexuality in the Movies* (1987) by Vito Russo: "That book was seminal to me."

The marriage of body builder Bob Paris and model Rod Jackson

(1989). Paris was the world's first male professional athlete to come out while still an active competitor. "Seeing these two beefy gay men who were not shamed or afraid was major for me."

Other gay sports milestones were made by football running back David Kopay coming out in 1975 and Olympian Greg Louganis in 1996. (See our interview with Louganis on page 78.)

*The Phil Donahue Show* (1970-1996) "Phil Donahue did so much good. My grandmother referenced him when I came out to her. She said, 'I watch Phil Donahue so I know you're not going to change.'

*Ellen* (1994-1998) "When Ellen Degeneres said, 'I'm gay' on network television (1997), the cheers went up not just in our apartment but across Chelsea you could hear people cheering. It's hard to imagine now what that moment was like unless you lived during that time. It was breathtaking and thrilling."

*Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* (2003) and *Queer Eye* (2018): "It turns stereotypes on their heads. It shows gay people as nurturers."



When President Obama in his second inaugural speech (2013) collectively made reference to civil rights touchstones of Selma, Seneca Falls and Stonewall, "I couldn't believe it. That made me feel that our history was American history and something that I've been fighting for since I started my work in the late '80s."



## Don't Go Unprotected Proxies, Wills and Trusts

Structuring the legal parts of any relationship is very important, and it's particularly important for LGBTQ+ couples to do if they are not going to enter into a marriage. Even if you do get married, it's smart to get all of these issues taken care of so you can go about living your life knowing that you've taken care of all this.

I once had a client who in a deposition was told that he was "disingenuous" by opposing counsel for considering the business and legal aspects of a same sex relationship where the couple did not marry. Of course, I objected to the inappropriate badgering, but the opposing lawyer was trying to make her self-serving opinion known that certain things should just be assumed when people are in a committed relationship, and her client was entitled to things not specifically designated. Aside from the fact that such assumptions won't stand up in court should it come to that, the only way to make sure that your wishes will be honored is to formally memorialize them.



Historically, the sad truth has been that in many LGBTQ+ relationships where no such protections existed, outside people have been able to force their wishes on a couple on anything from health care to inheritance. Even in today's more liberal climate, those risks still exist. Bottom line: take care of yourself and your loved ones.

As you look at what applies to your situation, the first thing you should consider is a health care proxy, especially where no marriage exists. If you do not have this power, one partner can often be precluded from making any decisions concerning a partner's health-related issues and possibly prevented from certain hospital visitations. When creating a health care proxy, you should consider other close relatives. There may also be children involved, particularly adult children, and those children may want to participate in these decisions. You can nominate several people and require that majority decisions be required unless it's an emergency situation.

You should also consider creating a limited power

of attorney where another person has the authority to make some kind of decisions regarding your financial situation. It's important to create specific limits on the scope of that power, for example if it comes to real estate. Still, you may want to give that party some level of authority in the event that you are incapacitated.

You may or may not be surprised to learn that many people avoid making wills. Don't make that mistake. You should be designating who will inherit what. It's a relatively simple process, certainly compared to the mess that happens if you die intestate and the power to distribute your estate is taken completely out of your hands. If you have a partner, you can make a reciprocal will in which you can make specific bequests or simply designate a percentage of the residuary estate to any heirs.

Another device you can use for transferring your wealth are trust instruments. There are basically two kinds of trusts: revocable and irrevocable.


Revocable trusts are used to transfer wealth to circumvent the process of probate later on and also to divide up income. It's a good device to transfer money, or even real estate, without transferring the principal. In other words, you can move your assets into a revocable trust and create a situation where the other party can live off those assets for the remainder of their life. And then, when that person dies, the asset can go to someone else. By being revocable, the party who



Attorney Ted Levine

created the trust can change the beneficiaries and remove assets any time they want. In that way, it's like a will, which you can also freely alter. (How many murder mysteries have used that as a plot device?)

One of the disadvantages of a revocable trust is that your creditors can still get at those assets. The alternative is an irrevocable trust, which insulates you against your creditors, but it takes away your authority to make changes, including the beneficiaries. You are also prevented from making any decisions over the trust's assets. That authority lies with the trustees who are separate persons. You can, however, be a trustee of a revocable trust.

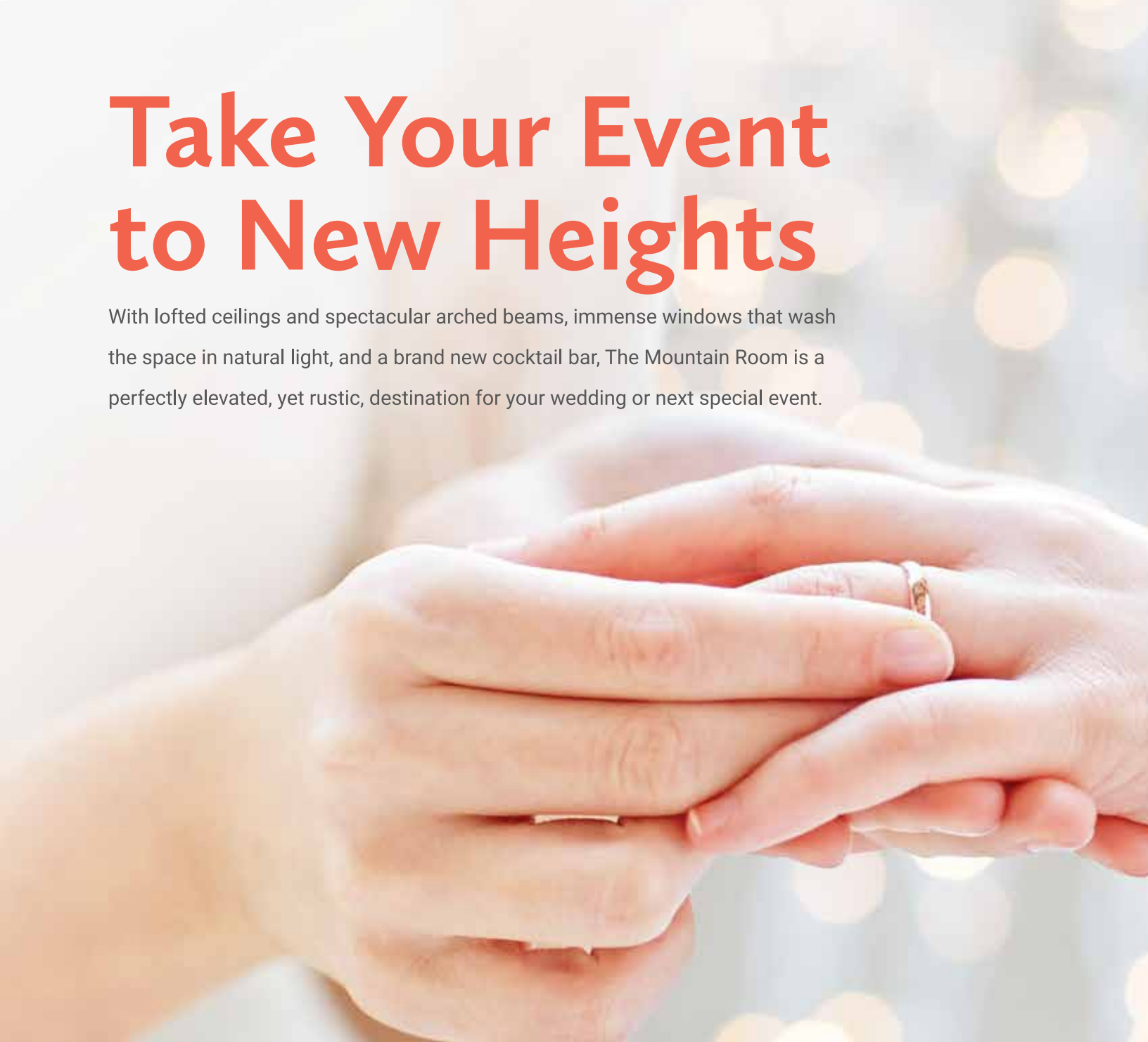
The ultimate goal of all of this is your peace of mind as you live your life. Taking care of these issues helps give you as much control as possible. Yes, things will change, and that's why it's also a good idea to meet with your lawyer every year or so to review your decisions and see if there are changes you want to make. You may be surprised at how good it feels to know that you've done everything possible to protect yourself and your assets, and, most importantly, the people who are important to you. 

—Tedd S. Levine, Esq.

**DISCLAIMER:** The information provided in this column does not, and is not intended to, constitute legal advice, or be relied upon in any legal matter. Instead, all information in this article is for general informational purposes only. You should always contact your lawyer for advice based on your individual situation.

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## Building Communities, Service and Social Impact

**W**hen John Holt, CEO of Nutmeg Financial Credit Union talks about building communities, service, and social impact, his passion is evident. Holt has been with Nutmeg State for about twelve years, and he says, "We've gone through a lot of changes here at Nutmeg, all for the good. I am part of the LGBTQ+ community. I'm happy to represent the community. I'm happy that Nutmeg supports the LGBTQ+ community."



Nutmeg Financial Services CEO, John Holt.

Nor, is it just the LGBTQ+ community. Nutmeg State is dedicated to equality in the many vibrant and diverse communities throughout Connecticut. "When we're thinking about social impact and how we invest in the communities, our goal is to focus on equitable access to resources."

Holt notes that helping create "multi-generational prosperity" is one of the key goals of serving members. This is essential in all families, even in non-heteronormative families. "Our goal would be to be able to go into a family and build that wealth and be able to help pass it down." In practice, this means taking an empathetic approach to every individual and every community, understanding their unique financial situations and goals—and providing the programs and services that meet those needs. In terms of community involvement, Holt adds, empathy and

understanding is essential to be able to really help people in the communities.

Nutmeg State has recently recrafted its overall mission statement to reflect these values. "We have to educate the communities and the families, the family units, we have to collaborate with them so we can make sure we understand the needs and we have to support the local commerce." All of this has created an approach to business that emphasizes partnership with everyone.

"Obviously, the goal is to make every one — including LGBTQ+ individuals — feel supported with equal access to resources including education and financial services. We have employees that are LGBTQ+, including myself. We have activities planned for Pride Month in June, but we celebrate equality all year, every day in the company. June is Pride

Month and we're going to show our pride, to LGBTQ+ members and communities. And we do the same thing when it comes to Juneteenth, which has become a national holiday."

The focus on equality for all members is an essential component of Nutmeg State. As Holt points out, a credit union is different from a bank in that it is a not-for-profit, which means that profits are returned to members in the form of affordable products and services. That factor alone allows the focus to be on the members and their needs, rather than profits. On an organizational side, Nutmeg State invests in technology and providing solid returns for the members. Fees are often lower or non-existent on rates and loans.

People must join a credit union as members, but the structure of Nutmeg State means that membership is open to virtually anyone in Connecticut. Members find all traditional banking services including many technology options—and programs to help people build and restore credit. Their entire approach is based in helping the individual achieve their financial goals.

Nutmeg State is also a great place to work. Not surprisingly the focus on serving the community extends to the employees. Holt says that the culture is focused on transparency and openness. In addition to an openness that encourages



people to be their authentic selves at work, Nutmeg State engages in roundtables, conversations, and programs designed to strengthen the employee base—all to be able to provide better service and a positive experience for everyone.

Holt, who describes himself as Gen-X, is keenly aware of the culture shifts of recent years that have impacted management styles. As CEO, he says his job is to look in the mirror and engage in the kind of soul searching that allows him—and the organization—to understand the generational differences in employees and members to be able to support them. It requires, he says, a great deal of humility and a willingness to embrace change.

One other factor that distinguishes Nutmeg State is that everyone who works there is a member of the community as well. In sports terms, one could say it's the "home field advantage." The people one sees in the bank are their neighbors—including Holt. That, he adds, is one of the advantages of a credit union; no one ever feels like just a number. Holt stresses the advantage of the local feel for anyone who walks through their doors. Nutmeg State is for the people...ALL people.

For more information on Nutmeg State and membership eligibility, visit [www.nutmegstatefcu.org](http://www.nutmegstatefcu.org).

—Christopher Byrne

## Flower Power for All

**W**ith Pride month in June, many of our LGBTQ+ brothers and sisters may feel the need to proclaim our identities through our wardrobes this summer. But what do you wear if you don't want to don some cliché-adorned t-shirt, socks with rainbow stripes at the top, or a kitschy pair of sneakers? Photographer and fashion designer Andrew Werner has the answer: one his "Pride" lapel flowers, which are just a small part of his ever-growing collection of accessories from his company, Fleur'd.

"As a photographer who frequently covers society events, red carpets, and black-tie affairs, I so often watched men in tuxedos blend into the background because other than inconspicuous accessories that were seldom noticed by most people, the entire ensemble lacked both individuality and a pop of personality," notes Werner, who is based in New York City.

"Moreover, because I grew up in the fashion retail industry, I was aware that the lapel flower has always been a symbol of refinement and sophistication. So I made it my goal to modernize and propel the lineage of the boutonniere into the 21st century, for men and women alike," he continues. "To achieve this, I decided to create this collection of pins in which I craft diverse flowers from a variety of fabrics, including cashmere, leathers and exceptional exotic skins, which means they look just as good on denim jackets as they do on tuxedos." (The pins retail for \$85 and up.)



Photographer and fashion designer Andrew Werner.

While Werner started the business in 2015, he created his first Pride collection of pins in 2017. "As a proud gay man who is continually inspired by the queer community, this collection is deeply personal, and I am grateful that it has been embraced by both the LGBTQ+ community and its allies," he says. "The initial Pride Satin Dahlia quickly became a fashion-forward symbol allowing its wearers to express what they believe in and stand for in a way that was subtle yet powerful." As a result, it has empowered people to strike up conversations about their beliefs, particularly when receiving compliments on their fashion sense, he adds.

Despite the success of that Fleur, Werner has never been content to leave well enough alone, periodically adding new pins to the Pride collection. "While we started with the rainbow Dahlia in Satin, in 2019, we released a Pride Dahlia in leather as well as the Helms Leather Dahlia depicting the symbolic pink, white and blue of the transgender flag. It was named in honor of Monica Helms, the transwoman who designed and created the Transgender Flag in 1999," says Werner.

"For 2022, I felt it necessary to create another Fleur'd Pin for Pride. I chose a carnation this time, which is a symbol of love and devotion. I believe it is everything we as a

community need more than ever right now. (The 2022 Pride Collection includes four new options: a Pride Carnation and a Helms Carnation, each available in both leather and satin.)

One of Werner's missions with Fleur'd goes beyond celebrating identity and diversity through his creations; he also helps many important causes by donating some of his proceeds to such charities as UNICEF, the Stonewall Community Foundation and the Breast Cancer Research Foundation.

"In March, Fleur'd Pins released a Leather Sunflower with a crystal center in response to the invasion of Ukraine, representing the country's national flower. I was so pleased that these have sold out twice," he notes. "My goal with every Fleur'd pin is to allow the wearer to make a visual impact, express what he or she cares about, and create an everlasting piece of individual style."

To view the Fleur'd collection or place an order, visit [www.Fleurdpins.com](http://www.Fleurdpins.com).

—Brian Scott Lipton





First Choice Health Centers' location dedicated to LGBTQ+ health has re-opened for in-person medical visits.

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<https://www.firstchc.org/>

## WHAT'S THE BUZZ?

Answers  
on  
PAGE 48

### Are You Really An LGBTQ+ Ally?

Will your straight friends get a perfect score on our CT Voice Quiz? Will YOU? Answer these 13 questions to find out!

**W**e know these people, right? Right? Our friends, our chosen family, and coworkers all tell us they are LGBTQ+ allies, ride or die. But are they? Are they really? Do you consider yourself an ally to trans folk? Are you a true supporter of bisexuals? Do you count yourself among the allies of only some parts of the wider LGBTQ+ community, or do you support everyone under the rainbow? Answer the 13 questions to find out! Also, if you want to put others to the test, just visit our website at ctvoice.com where you can get a link to share with family, friends and frenemies alike!

**1. We'll start with the easiest one. What does the acronym LGBTQ+ stand for?**

- A. Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and HIV positive
- B. Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and/or Questioning and other identities
- C. Lettuce, Garbanzo Beans Tomato Quesadilla plus extra cheese
- D. I don't know, but I'm willing to learn

**2. Sometimes the community is referred to as LGBTQIA+ What do the I and the A stand for?**

- A. Intersex and Ambivalent
- B. Impotent and Androgynous
- C. Intersex and Asexual and/or Agender and the plus sign represents other identities like pansexual
- D. I don't know, but I'm willing to learn

**3. What is the most populous group within the community?**

- A. Gay men
- B. Lesbians or gay women
- C. Transgender and nonbinary individuals
- D. Bisexuals
- E. Furrries
- F. I don't know, but I'm willing to learn

**4. Where is "P Town"?**

- A. Port St. Lucie, Florida
- B. Provincetown, Massachusetts
- C. Providence, Rhode Island
- D. The men's public rest room at Dunkin Donuts Park
- E. Portland, Connecticut

**5. Who started the annual Dyke March in the 1990s?**

- A. The Lesbian Avengers
- B. Captain Marvel
- C. LesBeStrong
- D. The Dyke Marchers
- E. Audre Lorde

**6. Which one of these historic names was not a member of the community?**

- A. Audre Lorde
- B. Harvey Milk
- C. Bayard Rustin
- D. Betty Ford
- E. Sylvia Rivera

**7. What does the acronym AMAB stand for?**

- A. All Men Are Bastards
- B. Assigned Male At Birth
- C. Avocado Meatball And Bacon
- D. American Medical Ambulance Brigade

**8. Which of these statements is false?**

- A. Actress Catherine Deneuve sued a lesbian magazine for using her last name.
- B. The Stonewall Inn is still operating as a five-star hotel in Midtown Manhattan.
- C. The Reagan Administration created the first commission to investigate HIV.
- D. The U.S. Navy christened a ship named for gay rights leader Harvey Milk.

**9. Who was the first LGBTQ+ astronaut?**

- A. Ellen Wilson
- B. Buzz Aldrin
- C. Sally Ride
- D. John Young
- E. John Christopher

**10. What is "Transface"?**

- A. What RuPaul's Drag Race contestants call applying makeup
- B. When a cisgender woman is judged to look masculine or a cisgender man appears feminine
- C. When Hollywood actors who are cisgender play trans roles. It comes from the word "Blackface"
- D. The name of a crossdressing Batman villain

**11. Pansexual, polyamory and bisexual mean different things. Which one of these is not true?**

- A. Pansexual people are attracted to people regardless of their gender
- B. Monosexual is attraction to one gender: Straight people, gays and lesbians are monosexual
- C. Polyamory refers to an involvement in multiple romantic relationships at once with people of any orientation, with the knowledge of all partners
- D. Bisexuality means a person is attracted to two or more genders often including nonbinary
- E. Binary attractions and sexual relationships are not LGBTQ+ relationships

**12. What does someone mean when they say they are "trans masc" or a trans man?**

- A. They are someone who was presumed female at birth and were raised to be feminine but now identify as male, as a man or as masculine

- B. They are someone who was presumed male at birth and were raised to be masculine but now identify as female, as a woman or as feminine
- C. That's another way of saying they are trans nonbinary
- D. Their birth gender is different from their gender identity and they now compete as a woman in sports

**13. Gay, lesbian and bi couples can adopt children in...**

- A. All 50 States
- B. All but 11 states where state-licensed child welfare agencies can refuse to place and provide services, if doing so conflicts with their religious beliefs
- C. Only in Connecticut, New York and California
- D. Only overseas

**BONUS QUESTION:**

**14. Which of these statements is FALSE?**

- A. Trans women are men or "biological males."
- B. Gays and lesbians "groom" young people to be like them.
- C. The word "cisgender" is a slur and should be replaced with "normal."
- D. Bisexuality is just a phase.
- E. LGBTQ+ Americans account for 20 percent of the U.S. population.
- F. The Equality Act is anti-American and would give LGBTQ+ people "special rights."
- G. ALL OF THE ABOVE

—Dawn Ennis

## Call Me by My Name

The most common question I receive from readers is about why we at *CT Voice* choose the language we use to define individuals and communities. The comments can get somewhat intense as people object to the use of specific words, particularly “queer” and “LGBTQ+.”

There are two responses to these questions. First, for editorial consistency, we use “LGBTQ+” as being broadly inclusive and readily recognizable and is the preferred acronym in many style guides. That’s a somewhat clinical and mechanical response.

The second—and more important—reason is that we always allow people to identify themselves. So, if someone featured in our pages refers to themselves as “queer,” that’s what we use. We also think it is our responsibility always to respect individual’s pronoun choices.

The larger conversation, however, is about how language is changing throughout our society. That can be daunting and challenging for some and can create a lot of resistance, but for me and others, it’s very exciting. Eric Pliner, CEO of YSC Consulting, a global firm that focuses on helping leaders and corporations develop and implement Equity, Diversity and Inclusion programs, summarizes the dynamic environment this way: “As our understanding of the full range of identities is more and more sophisticated, the need to keep up is more intense. But what a gift to be able to update our language and framing because our collective understanding is so much better than before.”



Admittedly, however, it’s not easy, and it can be upsetting for people. Particularly for older people, “queer” was an epithet often hurled in anger, and understandably it can still sting. However, for younger generations, “queer” is preferred because it feels natural and inclusive. The word encompasses a broad range of identities and has been reclaimed and transformed into something positive. Nearly anyone who does not fit the cisgender, heteronormative mode can call themselves “queer” and find identification with community. In a time when gender identity and expression are more fluid than ever, it can be a positive for those who choose to self-identify in that way.

This language went further mainstream when Ariana DeBose in accepting her Academy Award described herself as “an openly queer woman of color, an Afro Latina, who found her strength in life through art.” Her expression of identity was heard around the world and made the word “queer” a magnificent expression of pride.

For some people, this rapidly changing linguistic landscape can often feel like a

minefield. That’s no surprise, language is extremely powerful. Nobody wants to make a mistake or offend another person, particularly a family member or colleague.

So, let’s start with the assumption of goodwill, at least when it comes to talking with friends, families and colleagues. (There will always be people who use language to hurt and divide people, but that’s not what we’re talking about here.) Given how dynamic current usages are, we are going to make mistakes. There is going to be awkwardness. We run the risk of misgendering someone, and some constructs are going to feel uncomfortable, at least initially. However, if we start by assuming the intent to respect each other’s humanity and identity, it can be easier.

When someone tells you how they want to be referred to, your job is to respect that. Do your best to remember and honor that request. Self-definition, as Pliner says, is an individual’s right to determine how they want to be called and identified.

At the same time, it’s important to acknowledge that specific words will hold different meanings for differ-

ent people, and it’s equally important to understand that. Interpretations of words can vary as well. In that case, if, for example, you identify as “queer,” you may want to acknowledge that while some may be uncomfortable with it, that’s what you use. In this, as in so many things about our LGBTQ+ identities, education and transformation happens one person at a time. Pliner adds that the way we take responsibility and recover from mistakes in an ever-changing landscape that’s getting more intense—for good reasons—is a signal of our humanity, caring, and integrity.

From Shakespeare to stump speeches language is—and has always been—powerful. It can draw us closer or divide us. It can inform, enlighten, or persuade. It can change the world. In short, language is an essential tool of human communication, and like any tool, it needs to be used consciously, carefully, and responsibly so we can achieve the desired outcome. In this case, that is greater understanding and connection. It’s what we owe our fellow humans. 🍷

—Christopher Byrne



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## Start 'em Young—The Power of Investing Early

We have all heard the phrase, “the earlier the better.” This also holds true with retirement savings. It can be tough when you’re just starting a career, adjusting to having your own money, and balancing a budget for expenses and entertainment. “I am young. I am paying off my student loans. I still have 40 years of working until retirement” – I’ve heard it all. But there’s this almost magical thing called “compound interest” that can help you acquire wealth. This is where time is on your side.

The three most popular ways for young professionals to save is through traditional and Roth IRAs and an employee sponsored plan like a 401(k) or 403(b). Traditional and Roth IRAs both offer tax advantages, but there are significant differences.

Before we get into those, let’s talk about how much you should save. There are many schools of thought on this, but it’s most important to do what works for your individual situation. You may not want to survive on a diet of ramen in order to save money for retirement. One thought is to gradually increase your retirement contributions as your income increases. You might want to max out contributions for ten years and then pull back. You might want a steady plan that you can keep up with. Like so many things in life,



you’ll likely be happier and more consistent if you plan in a way that reflects and expresses yourself.

Let’s talk about those IRAs. A Traditional IRA may have tax advantages for you NOW. You fund it with after tax money and it grows tax-deferred. Those contributions are generally tax-deductible for most people (there are income limits), and the earnings in the account are taxed at withdrawal. Withdrawals at retirement are generally taxed as ordinary income for that year. There are penal-

ties if you withdraw money before age 59½. Uncle Sam requires you to take mandatory distributions from your IRA at age 72½. The assumption behind a Traditional IRA is that by the time you start taking withdrawals from your account, you will be in a lower tax bracket.

On the other hand, the Roth IRA is attractive because the growth and withdrawals are Tax-Free. Roth IRAs are available to individuals with adjusted gross incomes below specified amounts and contributions are allowed up to

specified maximums. These contributions are made on after-tax income and are not tax deductible. Contributions may be withdrawn at any time without tax implications. After the Roth IRA has been in place for at least five tax years, tax-free withdrawals of earnings may be made once the owner reaches age 59½ or is disabled. Earlier withdrawals may be taken for first-time homebuyer expenses up to \$10,000 (lifetime maximum).

The employee sponsored retirement plan, whether that’s



a 401(k), 403(b), 457(b) or Simple IRA, may give you access to FREE money! Many of these plans are designed to provide an employer match as a correlated percentage of your contribution. It’s your employer’s way of saying, ‘Thank You’ for saving for your own retirement!

Everyone’s financial situation is different. We know there’s nothing cookie-cutter in this community and that’s why it’s recommended that you speak with a financial professional to determine which of these, or another plan, may suit your needs. If you are investing through your employer, most HR departments have people who can advise you or direct you to professionals who can.

As noted, these savings do grow over time. It might be useful for you to run some different models to see what you can earn. A financial professional can help with that too! It can be very inspiring, motivating, and eye-opening to see how compounding interest can work in your favor.

Realistically, you still have to live your life. Budget for vacations, experiences, and special things you want to purchase. After all, you’ve earned those too. You’ll want to make sure you have what you need

and want today, even as you have your eye toward the future. That’s why putting away a little bit and giving it time is a great practice. Unfortunately, it’s all too rare for people to get financial education. I can’t tell you how many people say to me, “I wish I learned this when I was younger.” Now’s your chance, particularly if you’re in your twenties or thirties, but really, it’s never too late!

Like so much in life, balance plays an essential role. And planning a little today can pay off significantly down the road. 📌

— Michelle Cutrali contributed to this article.

**DISCLAIMER:** This article is for informational purposes only, and it does not replace professional investment advice, for legal, tax, financial, or any other. It is recommended that you seek such advice from a Financial Advisor or Certified Long Term Care Planner who will understand your individual situation.

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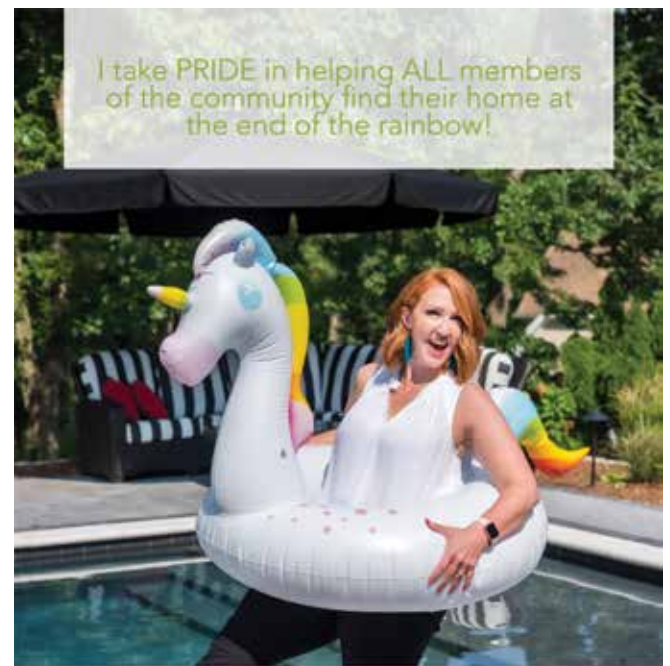
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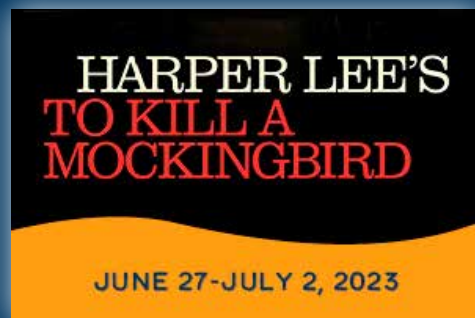
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## Weaving an Inclusive Corporate Culture:

# More Than 15 Connecticut Companies Listed in Human Rights Campaign Foundation's 2022 Corporate Equality Index

BY TOM CIUBA



**T**wenty years ago, the Human Rights Campaign Foundation (HRCF) launched the first Corporate Equality Index (CEI) to measure U.S. companies' support for LGBTQ+ employees. The CEI examines corporate policies and actions as well as employees' overall experiences to determine a firm's commitment to equality and inclusion.

Thirteen companies scored 100 percent in that inaugural index, earning the coveted "Best Place to Work for LGBTQ+ Equality" designation.

Fast forward two decades, this year's

CEI saw 842 companies nationwide receive a perfect score, 15 of which operate in Connecticut. Here is a look at just some of the practices and initiatives that contributed to their ranking:

### AQR Capital Management aqr.com

Headquartered in Greenwich, AQR is a global investment management firm. The company's founding partners serve as executive sponsors for various diversity and inclusion initiatives, including the AQR Pride community for LGBTQ+ and allied employees to promote inclusivity in AQR's recruiting, philanthropy, networking and education

efforts. The firm's HR team has also established a partnership with Out for Undergrad, an organization that connects high-achieving LGBTQ+ students with professional mentors.

### BlueTriton Brands bluetriton.com

Based in Stamford, BlueTriton makes and distributes bottled water throughout North America via Arrowhead, Deer Park, Poland Spring and other highly recognizable brand names. Among the company's employee engagement groups is the Pride Alliance, which empowers colleagues to live their most authentic selves in and outside the workplace. BlueTriton has also given public support to the United Nations

Standards of Conduct, which aims to tackle corporate discrimination worldwide. The firm has ensured equitable healthcare benefits are extended to transgender employees.

### Boehringer Ingelheim USA boehringer-ingelheim.com

This Ridgefield-based corporation develops pharmaceutical solutions for humans and animals. It hosts Courageous Conversations, which are scheduled blocks of time for employees to come together and gain a better understanding of one another and encourages participation in the company's Working With PRIDE business resource group that has about

200 members. Extensive medical, surgical and wellness coverage for nonbinary and transitioning employees and their dependents is also offered, and gender identity and expression workshops are held frequently.

### BridgewaterAssociates bridgewater.com

Westport's Bridgewater is a global asset management firm. The company's B Proud network of LGBTQ+ and allied employees works to attract LGBTQ+ talent as well as form partnerships with external organizations and communities that promote diversity and inclusion. Steven Kryger, Bridgewater's team lead for emerging markets research, was named in Yahoo Finance's "2021

OUTstanding LGBTQ+ Executive Role Model List" for making the firm a more welcoming company for all.

### Cigna cigna.com

This health insurance behemoth has headquarters in Bloomfield. Cigna supports LGBTQ+ employees through its 1,100-member Pride employee resource group, which has recently hosted programs on Transgender Visibility Day and issues affecting LGBTQ+ seniors. The group also offered training on LGBTQ+ health issues to more than 600 clinicians as well as transgender inclusion awareness for all employees.



### Diageo North America

[diageo.com](http://diageo.com)

A national company with an office in Stamford, Diageo oversees renowned alcohol brands, including Johnnie Walker, Smirnoff, Captain Morgan, Baileys, and Guinness. The business boasts multiple global Rainbow Networks that strive to ensure that contributions from LGBTQ+ employees are respected and embraced. During Pride Month 2021, a rainbow flag was displayed at all offices and production sites around the world. The company also hosted a virtual HIV awareness session and a program on being trans and gender-expansive that was co-sponsored by the Transgender Law Center, The LGBT Center and The Human Rights Campaign.

### FactSet

[factset.com](http://factset.com)

Based in Norwalk, FactSet develops software solutions for investment professionals around the world. One of the firm's four diversity pillars is creating an inclusive culture, aimed at "enabling people to be themselves at work and have opportunities to join in, be heard, contribute, and grow." FactSet's Pride business resource group supports the recruitment, development and retention of LGBTQ+ employees.

### Gartner

[gartner.com](http://gartner.com)

Housed in Stamford, Gartner develops data-analysis solutions for companies. Their Pride at Gartner employee resource group develops educational programs and policies that increase understanding of sexual orientation and gender identity and expression. During the pandemic last year, the company hosted a virtual Pride parade with more than 150 participants and sponsored a keynote address from out tennis player Gigi Fernandez, who spoke about LGBTQ+ parenthood and intersectional identities.

## What Employees Are Saying



"As an openly transgender woman for 14 years who leads as a client-facing account management executive and as a co-lead for our Pride ERG, I have experienced continual understanding, support and respect for who I authentically am. Cigna promotes an inclusive work environment where employees like myself are empowered to bring their whole selves to work inclusive of gender expression, gender identity and sexual orientation."

*-Erika Askew, senior account executive at Express Scripts, a Cigna company*

"Across our workforce, products and content, Comcast embraces diversity of background, perspective, culture and experience, and our mission to champion equality starts at home with our employees. As a Comcast employee and member of the LGBTQ+ community, I know my voice is valued, heard and respected and that I can confidently show up to work every day as my best, most authentic self."

*-Matthew Teter, manager at Comcast's Western New England region and Connecticut Gay & Lesbian Chamber Board director*

"As a member of the LGBTQ+ community and a LEGO employee, I have been profoundly inspired by the values-driven diversity and

inclusion momentum and super cool product and play opportunities at the LEGO Group. I work closely with leadership and a cohort of engaged employees to ensure we are always innovating to build community and make the world a better place for all children, and especially keeping in mind the challenges faced by LGBTQ+ youth here and abroad."

*-Karen Hughes, LEGO's principal lead of public affairs for the Americas*

"I am proud to work for Otis, where I am able to bring my true self to work and have the respect of my coworkers. Over the past few years, we have developed our PRIDE employee resource group for the LGBTQ community and allies as well as many other ERGs that foster a welcoming and inclusive environment for all employees. Simple things like being supported and encouraged to use pronouns in our email signatures let other coworkers know they have a safe place or person to speak to."

*-Dean Norwalk, purchasing project manager at Otis*

"Stanley Black & Decker does more than just accept me and my family. I am embraced, supported and valued for the experience I bring to our company as an LGBTQ+ community

member, and my perspectives are sought out to ensure our community is represented. I couldn't ask for better support or a better place to make valued contributions every day."

*-Fiona Mohring, vice president of health and group benefits at Stanley Black & Decker*

"Management doesn't just talk about diversity and inclusion. Their commitment is reflected in company policies. For example, they've made sure that death and adoption benefits are available to employees in non-heteronormative relationships. The bottom line is I can be my authentic self at work because that's what Synchrony expects me to be."

*-Joseph Andrasko, vice president of credit risk management at Synchrony*

"As a gay executive, I am proud to work at Xerox where you can truly be yourself, everywhere. Xerox has been driving equality forward for more than a half-century and is one of only seven organizations to receive 100% on the HRCF CEI every year since the survey's inception 20 years ago."

*-Mike Feldman, executive vice president and president of Americas operations and global document services at Xerox*



### The Hartford thehartford.com

Based in—you guessed it—Hartford, this home, auto and business insurance provider serves the entire U.S. The company's SHINE program provides leadership development and training to members and allies of the LGBTQ+ community. For Pride Month 2021, The Hartford held a discussion about being both LGBTQ+ as well as a person of color and made donations to several organizations, including The Trevor Project. The sign atop the firm's headquarters building gets lit in rainbow colors each June as well as in blue and pink for Transgender Visibility Day each March.

### Otis Worldwide otis.com

Headquartered in Bloomfield, Otis manufactures, installs and maintains elevators and escalators around the world. This April, Otis launched a new Gender Identity & Expression Policy in

its Americas region to affirm the right of all colleagues to freely express gender identity at work. Otis is also extending its global Employee Assistance Program benefits to all spouses and domestic partners, regardless of gender. And its LGBTQ+ employee resource groups around the world—PRIDE in the U.S., Elevar in Latin America and Together in the U.K.—are collaborating to foster fellowship and promote equity throughout the organization.

### Pitney Bowes pitneybowes.com

Known for its shipping and mailing solutions, Pitney Bowes calls Stamford home. In the last few years, the company has expanded its LGBTQ+ Council and launched an inclusion network, enhanced new-manager training to highlight bias, incorporated inclusive language into all policies and established means for LGBTQ+ employees to self-identify in the firm's HR system.

### Stanley Black & Decker stanleyblackanddecker.com

New Britain's Stanley has manufactured tools and equipment for the housing, do-it-yourself, construction and security sectors since 1843. The company's Pride and Allies employee resource group hosts events and activities aimed at maintaining a positive work environment for people of all gender identities, gender expressions and sexual orientations. Stanley also became a member of the Human Rights Campaign Business Coalition for the Equality Act and drove efforts for supplier diversity by joining the National Gay & Lesbian Chamber of Commerce.

### Synchrony mysynchrony.com

This consumer financial-services firm is located in Stamford. In 2021, Synchrony donated \$75,000 to the LGBTQ Youth Scholarship in addition to \$25,000 and hundreds of volunteer hours at Pride events across multiple cities.



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The company hosted an internal Pride campaign as well, kicked off with a message from the CEO to all employees.

### Thomson Reuters thomsonreuters.com

This multinational media services conglomerate, located in Stamford, has a Pride at Work business resource group that assists in building equitable professional development, recruitment and retention opportunities as well as in identifying unique market prospects. The organization recently placed emphasis on domestic partner benefits, transgender benefits and LGBTQ+ inclusion in supplier diversity programs.

### Xerox xerox.com

Headquartered in Norwalk, Xerox offers hardware/equipment and software to help businesses in their day-to-day. Of note, the company has scored 100 percent on the HRCF CEI all 20 years. Xerox's resource group for LGBTQ+ employees, entitled GALAXE, was founded in

1988 and now has more than 400 members worldwide. Both employees and prospective candidates can identify sexual orientation and gender identity in HR systems. And the company encourages employees to use pronouns in their email signature.

Also noteworthy are these Connecticut companies that incorporate diversity, equity and inclusion into their corporate strategy:

### Booking Holdings bookingholdings.com

Norwalk's Booking Holdings owns numerous travel and entertainment reservation platforms, including Kayak, OpenTable, CheapFlights and Priceline. The company has a B.Proud employee resource group, and in 2021 hosted LGBTQ+-focused recruiting events as well as donated to The Trevor Project.

### Charter Communications corporate.charter.com

Headquartered in Stamford, Charter delivers broadband network connectivity to customers across the U.S. Their LGBTQ business resource group is partnering with the company's procurement team to expand supplier diversity. Charter recently sponsored the National LGBT Chamber of Commerce conference with more than 1,400 LGBTQ+ business leaders gathered to explore business development opportunities.

### Comcast of Western New England newengland.comcast.com

With its Western New England division operating out of Berlin, Comcast provides cable, internet and other telecommunications services to consumers and businesses. The company's OUT employee resource group empowers colleagues at all levels

of the organization to enhance inclusion. Comcast Western New England has been a premier sponsor of the Hartford Pride Parade and a participant in Middletown's Pride Parade.

**Henkel**  
**henkel.com**

Located in Rocky Hill, Henkel delivers innovations within the adhesive technologies, beauty, and laundry and home care industries. Last June, Henkel joined Out Leadership, the largest coalition of global companies working to enhance LGBTQ+ equality. The organization also has a Pride-centric network for employees.

**Linde**  
**linde.com**

Operating out of Danbury, Linde is a global provider of industrial gas and engineering solutions. Emphasizing allyship, the company's resource group for LGBT employees partnered with the resource group focused on African culture and heritage in June 2020 to amplify the role that Black experiences

have played in Pride Month and LGBTQ+ history.

**LEGO**  
**lego.com**

Enfield's LEGO partners with global organizations such as Workplace Pride, Stonewall and Open for Business to shape strategies and programs that support both employees who identify as LGBTQ+ and allies across the company. In 2021, LEGO released two LGBTQ-themed sets in honor of Pride.


**Middlesex Health**  
**middlesexhealth.org**

Middlesex Health sponsors Middletown's annual Pride event with participation from members of its MH+ Pride employee resource group. The hospital distributed employee pronoun badges across the system and established the Center for Gender Medicine and Wellness, aimed at offering equitable and inclusive care to transgender, gender-non-conforming or gender-expansive individuals.

**TD Bank**  
**tdbank.com**

This consumer bank has more than 40 locations in Connecticut. TD has multiple LGBTQ+ employee resource groups that focus both on internal awareness and education of LGBTQ+ issues and community outreach. The company sponsors numerous Pride-centric events each year. Perhaps most noteworthy, however, is TD Bank's groundbreaking move in 1994 as the first bank in North America to offer same-sex spousal benefits to employees.

**XPO Logistics**  
**xpo.com**

Greenwich-based XPO is a global transportation/logistics provider. In addition to having an LGBTQ+ Employees and Allies resource group and offering medical coverage for gender-affirming treatments, XPO sponsors PFLAG as well as Lesbians Who Tech, a professional community of queer women and non-binary and transgender individuals who share a passion for technology. 

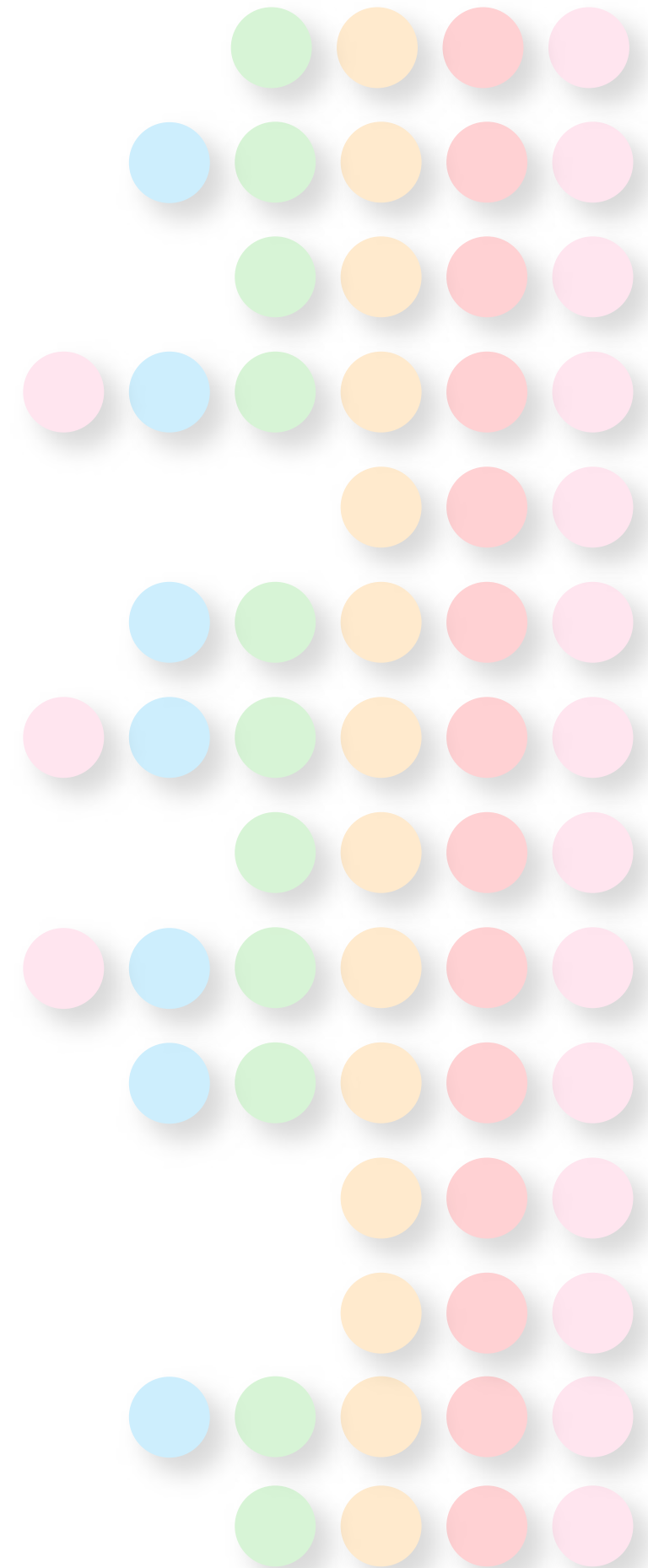


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# Confessions of A Legendary Drag Queen

Varla Jean Merman (aka Jeffrey Roberson)  
Has Not Been On RuPaul's Show—And She Knows Why

By **FRANK RIZZO**

“I never thought I'd do drag for a living,” says the six-foot-two muscleman wearing a Meat Rack cap, industrial strength necklace, a black tank-top and an anchor tattoo on his bulging bicep.

Jeffrey Roberson had just finished his daily workout at the gym—where he lifted weights, bench pressed 300 and squatted until his glutes cried “uncle”—and was now taking a breather from the sweat and the strain with an iced tea by the pool.

He was beginning his second week of his latest show in Palm Springs—his celebration of immunizing, called “Little Prick”—where he would transform himself from butch to bitch as Varla Jean Merman, his drag creation of meaty coquetterie that after more than three decades in bars, clubs and theaters worldwide has achieved drag pioneer status.

“Varla is truly a legend who achieved her success the old-fashion way: word of mouth,” says Jacques Lamarre, who has co-written many of Roberson's shows. “Not to diss RuPaul's queens who became instant international successes, but Varla achieved her success one fan at a time, with person after person saying to their friends, ‘You just have to see this performer.’”

Varla's ingenue days may be behind her—with those sizable guns, sleeveless chiffon frocks are definitely out—but the piercing wit and assassin asides are as dragtastic as ever. She has now aged into one tough

dame...yet one who can still giggle, wiggle and shine with a vengeance.

But in RuPaul's World of Wonder, can a 50-plus-year old gal still make it on her own?

## Southern Boy

Roberson was born and raised in Louisiana, the son of an FBI agent and a homemaker in a Southern Baptist household. Robertson went to a Louisiana School for Math, Science and the Arts, a boarding school in which he was to study chemistry, “but when I got there, I liked all the people who were in the arts.”

Roberson eventually changed his major and joined a musical choir where his unique high soprano range made him stand-out.

“But I was shy and very guarded with people I didn't know—and I still am—though I was wild and crazy with my friends,” he says when asked to describe what he was during his teen years.

Part of the shyness may have been due to his weight. “Obese, really. In fact, I would see ‘morbidly obese’ written down on my doctor's file and just cry.”

Roberson first slipped on a pair of heels for a high school auction when you could ‘buy’ a senior and make them do whatever you wanted. “We gave these girls some money to ‘make’ us go to school in drag. We acted like we hated it but we were so excited. We got wigs and everything from the Salvation Army. It was very goth.”





Varla in many guises, gowns and get-ups.



Roberson's first time in drag.

That was also the year he recognized that he was gay. “I didn’t quite surrender to it at that age, but I did by the time I went to college at Louisiana State University.”

It was in college on a vocal scholarship in the late ‘80s when he became obsessed with the works of filmmaker John Waters. “They were so wild and it was like nothing I had ever seen. I wanted to do that, too. And I wanted to be Divine.”

With a friend, Vid Kid Timo, who had a video camera (“which at the time was like carrying a microwave on your shoulder”), they began making their own short movie clips. (“Think of it as our Tik Tok.”)

“One was just me screaming in public places, like the French Quarter, while being chased by a plastic rat on a fishing wire. Another had me just drinking a gallon of milk with it spilling all over me and I’m just laughing madly. People loved them.”

His drag persona of Varla first emerged at a college talent contest when he presented himself as the secret offspring from the ever-so-brief marriage of Broadway diva Ethel Merman and macho character actor Ernest Borgnine.

Though he wasn’t doing drag to any great extent, when he heard about New York drag artist Coco Peru performing Wagnerian arias as part of her act in 1993, “I felt the great need to go there. I guess something deep inside me knew I wanted to do that, too.”

### Hello, New York

Roberson landed a job in the art department of at a top advertising agency, Ogilvy & Mather. But Roberson’s passion was elsewhere, drawn to the creativity of the downtown scene, led by club kids and drag queens like Lady Bunny, Lypsinka and a tall, dark, charismatic figure from the Atlanta



scene named RuPaul Charles.

“I couldn’t believe the artistry,” says Roberson “It was so well-crafted and so beyond what I thought was possible in drag. I was sometimes weeping and laughing at the same time because I found it all so amazing.”

A nightclub benefit in 1993 gave Roberson the opportunity to finally introduce his brand of drag madness, singing “If I Were Your Woman” “and then jumping in the air and landing on my belly—and I was more than 300 pounds at the time. After that I got booked all over New York as Varla.”

The Varla persona was still in its early stages of development. It was very “big-

girl brassy and all my jokes were fat-girl jokes. That’s what my personality was based on.”

His career path changed with party promoter Suzanne Bartsch, then-wife of [gym entrepreneur] David Barton. “She would just travel the world—London, Paris, wherever—with a bunch of queens and we were paid to just drink and go crazy. I couldn’t always go sometimes because I’d have an American Express ad pitch due the next day.

“That’s where things

changed. Until then, I was just performing in bars and where all you’re trying to do is get people’s attention. I would just do this great bellyflop. Why? Because that’s the only thing to do to get their attention. I also had a bit with a cow’s tongue that I got from Western Beef [butcher shop] and would make out with it—but that got to be too expensive, though I tried bringing it home and freezing it and then thawing it and then using it again, but that didn’t work out.

“That’s how the cheese bit happened,” he says of his signature schtick of singing an aria while downing *fromage*. “At first I would buy a block of Velveta, and I would eat the entire thing on stage which is just so gross that people would scream. But that got to be too expensive, too. God, you’d think it was gold. Then I discovered spray cheese so I switched to that because it was cheaper.”

Roberson also stood out because, unlike many other drag performers, Varla did not lip-synch but sang live with her uvula flapping and hitting the high notes for all their worth.

Bartsch was such a fan of Varla’s talents that she produced a full theatrical show for Roberson at Westbeth Theatre: *Varla and the Man That Got Away*.



Young Varla, early in her career.



Roberson as Roberson with his sometime co-star Jasper.

“It was all about Varla coming to New York City with a friend and you always think ‘the man’ is her boyfriend but it was the male side of Varla. It was a very heavy show.”

It was not a hit.

“There was a hideous review in *The New Yorker*—actually it was just a little blurb but it was so mean. It said something like: ‘If she had one glimmer of talent it might be a show worth watching.’ Boy, that was rough. But I was too young for something like that, and I thought, ‘What am I doing? I’m not ready yet for something like that. I needed to start smaller.’”

That included his size, and he reduced over time from 300 pounds to around 160, “which was way too thin. People thought I was dying. I weigh 255 now but it’s muscle.”

Roberson returned to small clubs, worked with other performers and learned the ropes, “like how to talk to an audience and craft a real show with a beginning, middle and end. I also included videos back when no one was doing that, and people loved it.”

### Expanding Her Gigs

Roberson also put his unique high register to use when he was hired to be standby for the role of Mary Sunshine in the 1996 Broadway revival of *Chicago*—while still keeping his day job at the advertising agency and also doing her drag act at clubs. “I was exhausted. I remember sometimes sleeping under my desk at work.”

When he was asked to join the first national tour of *Chicago* in 1997 where he got the role full-time—“Fran

Weissler [the producer] said I was ‘presentable’”—he finally quit his Madison Avenue job and hit the road.

But the extremely difficult song he had to sing eight times a week called for a high B natural and Roberson would be stressed out every night. After six months he called it quits on the tour and returned to New York.

With his reputation growing, work on many different stages and types of shows started to happen for Varla—and for Roberson, too.

Varla first appeared in the 1998 indie film *Franchesca Page* starring Rossy de Palma. Varla was one of the leads in 2003’s *Girls Will Be Girls*. “The movie still holds up. It’s a great campy film.” In 2011 one of Varla’s annual club shows was expanded into the indie film, *Varla Jean and the Mushroom Heads*. In 2015, she joined Mink Stole in the film *Hush Up, Sweet Charlotte*.

From the mid-90s, Roberson regularly performed in Tweed Theater’s Fractured Classic series, first playing a Honey in a take-off on *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolfe*, which further developed Varla’s character where he discovered she could get big laughs by playing her small. “That really changed everything.”

Other stage spoofs in New York and other cities included *Pig in Hot Tin Trough* with Jackie Hoffman; *Wah Wah*, a spoof on *The Miracle Worker* (“I was Helen Keller, and I was off book right away”); *The Bad Seedling*; *The Mailman Always Comes Twice*, *Mildred Fierce* and *The Phantom of the Oprah*. In *Caged* she joined Joan Rivers, Lorna Luft, Charles Busch, Isabella Rossellini, and Lypsinka in the cast.

In the early 2000’s Roberson stretched his acting chops beyond Varla and starred with James Lecesne [now Celeste Lecesne] in Charles Ludlum’s *The Mystery of Irma Vep* which was presented at Hartford Stage, New Haven’s Long Wharf Theatre and other venues. In 2012 Roberson was featured in Gian Carlo Menotti’s opera *The Medium*. Roberson starred off-Broadway opposite Leslie Jordan in the musical *Lucky Guy*.

Over the past two decades, Roberson has performed his annual new Varla shows in cities such as Boston, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Chicago, Palm

“I work all the time, writing a new show every year. It’s the best life ever!”

—Jeffrey Roberson



Springs, London, at the Sydney Opera House and in New Orleans, where he had lived for many years.

### The RuPaul Effect

The subject of how the RuPaul empire has changed drag is an obvious topic to bring up—and one with which Roberson has come to terms.

“People always ask me—not so much now, because I’m really old, but 10 years ago when I was as famous as you could get then— ‘Why aren’t you on that show?’

“I love the show, but it turned away from character drag, which was really popular for years. Think of Kiki and Herb, Miss Coco, Charles Busch, Dina Martina.”

For World of Wonder shows [the umbrella name for all of RuPaul’s media projects], Roberson says it’s about being an all-around singing, dancing, comedy and then-some entertainer. He explains it this way: “If Joni Mitchell goes on *American Idol* is she going to win?”

“RuPaul’s shows, I totally get it. But they totally changed things. All of a sudden, some of us are not getting booked.

“Back then I didn’t want to be on the show, but then you’re looking at the money these girls are making and, oh my god, of course I would want some of that.”

When I suggested that perhaps a “legends” series might be an interesting addition to RuPaul’s empire, Roberson says he would love to see it, but he doesn’t expect it.

“He’s a businessman,” says Roberson, pointing out that most of the contestants on the shows are young, mostly in their 20s, sometimes in their 30s and rarely much older.

“The biggest audience for the shows is teenage and 20-year-old girls—or younger and they don’t want to see a bunch of old ladies. I’m lucky that I can still perform and sell out a house. Still, people would rather see a RuPaul name whether the act is good or not. It’s not who does it first but who does it first on TV. That’s the way it is. TV wins. When I was younger, all I wanted to be was the most famous drag queen. Obviously, someone beat me to it—and then it wasn’t as important as it was anymore.”

Roberson likes his life today. “I’m married now, and I like to stay at home in Fort Lauderdale with my husband Dewitte and Jasper [a mini golden doodle, who has been worked into Varla’s act].

Roberson will once again be performing all summer at Provincetown, his 25th season there with *Varla Jean Merman: Ready To Blow*, joining a long list of puckish titles such as *Girl with a Pearl Necklace*, *Book of Merman*, and *Superspreader*.

“I have a great fan base, and I still get to do this for a living, and I work all the time, writing a new show every year,” he says. “It’s still the best life ever.”

*Varla Jean Merman will be performing at the Connecticut Voice Honors gala on September 17 at Foxwoods.*



Photo by **Christina Army**

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# 50 Years of Pride in Connecticut

By JANE LATUS

**H**e speaks deliberately and firmly, giving the three words their due significance. “I was there.” 85-year-old John Crowley of Hartford may be the only one able to say so. As far as he’s aware, he is the only person still around who took part in Hartford’s first Pride March 50 years ago in June 1972. “We started at Elizabeth Park, went down Oxford, took a left on Farmington and went down to the state capitol. We had a rally there. There were only 40 or 50 of us. There was nowhere to turn to

end the discrimination, so we just decided to do it ourselves. We outed ourselves. Some covered their faces, several of us didn’t. There were a lot of gay people who didn’t march because they didn’t want their family to know.” Many observers cheered them, says Crowley. He remembers only one heckler. “A guy was saying, ‘You guys are sick! You’re sick!’ I looked at him and said, ‘I think you’re sick, because you don’t have any idea what you’re talking about, and we can’t help who we are.’” The march evolved from weekly discussions at the Kalos Society. “People were complaining about discrimination.

Nothing will happen if you just sit and talk,” says Crowley, so they took to the streets. Crowley, who worked at Travelers, had decided “I was going to be me. I wasn’t going to pretend I was something I wasn’t. I came out to my boss. Just before the march, I told him the march was coming up, that I was gay, and it was going to come out. They were very good about it at Travelers. I never had a problem there.” They marched every subsequent year, he says. 10 years later, participants numbered around 400. Keith Brown, host of Gay Spirit Radio at WWUH, was at that 1982 rally, where

he says many people still wore masks (he didn’t.) Fifty years later, Brown notes that Pride events are still important because “visibility remains an issue.” He’s glad they’ve even “saturated” the state, happening even in the smallest towns. One major plus of these hometown Prides is that it makes Pride accessible to kids unable to travel to bigger events. Another is it shows them who has their backs. Or, unfortunately, who doesn’t.

Take Southington. Last year under a Democratic-majority Town Council, the town held its first Pride flag raising ceremony. This year, just after Southington Pride submitted a request to again fly the flag, the new Republican-dominated council announced it would freeze all flag requests, and proposed an ordinance allowing only four official flags. What if, said one council member, someone asks the town to fly the Russian flag?

Many Southington residents subsequently spoke at council meetings, saying they felt their identities were being politicized, and that youths’ mental health was being undermined. “I think most people see what’s truly going on here,” Southington Pride member Walter Grover told the council. “It really has to do with appeasing a small minority group who oppose having a Pride flag raised.” He added that the flag “is something that we need now more than ever” because the community is being bullied.

The nationwide onslaught of hate bills aimed at LGBTQ+ people is one motivation for organizers to promote these small-town Prides. Susan Falzone of Easton, population 7,600, says having a nonbinary child “opened my eyes. Similar to what we are seeing across the country, there has been a lot of divisiveness in the past year in our small farm town of Easton, over DEI (diversity, equity and inclusion) efforts in our community and schools. The youth in our schools and community deserve to be seen, respected and celebrated for their whole selves.”

Bethel Pride organizer Emily Denaro says,



John Crowley. Photo by Todd Fairchild

“Not only does Pride seem vital in light of national issues but also to counter what Bethel experienced in 2021. Last spring, a rainbow flag was burned on the steps of Molten Java, which is an LGBTQ+-owned cafe and also our primary meeting and programming space. In response, so many people spoke out on social media, hung flags on homes and businesses—many of which are still hanging—and donated to us in solidarity, but there was still a sense (to me) of disconnection because of the pandemic. Being able to finally gather is strength, comfort, resilience

all at once. It’s the hug we all need.” If you need proof there’s demand for Pride celebrations, ask Middletown Pride’s organizer Christopher Forte. He was the chief organizer of the first event in 2019. “I’ll never forget the night before. We’re all sitting at the Chamber [of Commerce office], talking about logistics. We thought if we could get 5,000 people here, that would be huge.” 15,000 attended. “The beautiful thing is, I think it was a lot of people’s first Pride. It was like a lightning-in-a-bottle day.”



John and a former lover lying on the ground at an early PRIDE event.



Kalos Society members march in Hartford, 1972

# Pride in Connecticut



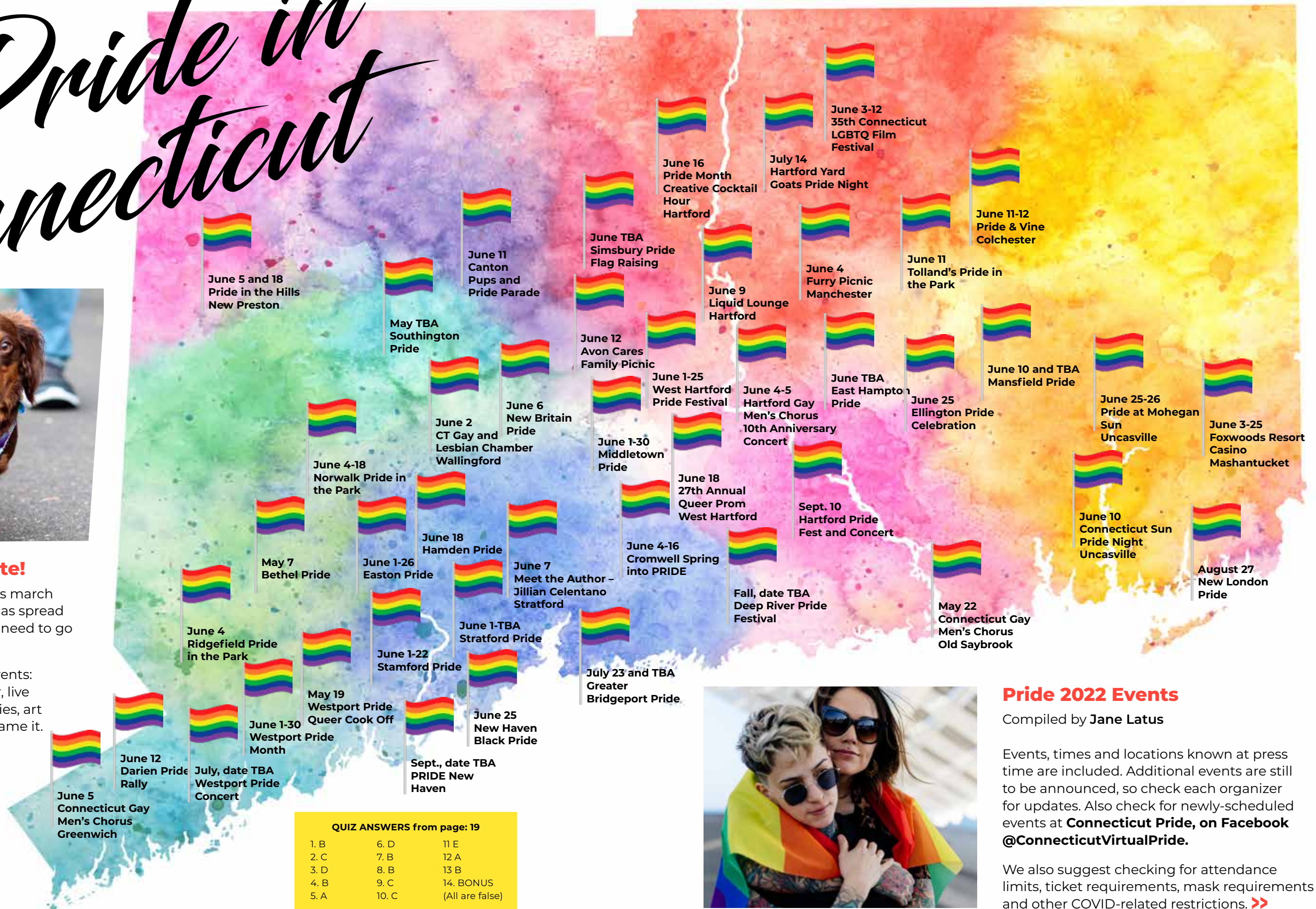
## Get Ready To Celebrate!

From one-just one-spontaneous march in Hartford 50 years ago, Pride has spread throughout the state. You don't need to go far. Or, you could hit them all!

There's also a huge variety of events: parades on both land and water, live music, drag performances, movies, art shows, bike rides, dances—you name it.

There are also events for many communities: New Haven Black Gay Pride, the Queer Prom for teens, the Furry Picnic, and a parade especially for dogs.

**Happy Pride! It's going to be a busy one!**



**QUIZ ANSWERS from page: 19**

1. B	6. D	11 E
2. C	7. B	12 A
3. D	8. B	13 B
4. B	9. C	14. BONUS
5. A	10. C	(All are false)



## Pride 2022 Events

Compiled by Jane Latus

Events, times and locations known at press time are included. Additional events are still to be announced, so check each organizer for updates. Also check for newly-scheduled events at **Connecticut Pride, on Facebook @ConnecticutVirtualPride.**

We also suggest checking for attendance limits, ticket requirements, mask requirements and other COVID-related restrictions. >>

May 7

**Bethel Pride**

Noon-5, Bethel Municipal Center. Rain or shine. Pride Parade, 1 pm, starting across from Bethel Train Station. Pride Celebration, 1:30-5 pm, front lawn of Bethel Municipal Center. Music, food trucks, speakers, vendors, "Kids' Korner" and interactive breakout sessions. **BethelCTPride.com, Instagram, Facebook, Twitter and Telegram @BethelCtPride**

May/June

**Southington Pride**

More events TBA. **May 14:** Youth and Family Pride Festival. Carnival games, crafts, activities, inflatable park, and a Drag Queen Story Hour for children and families. **May 21:** #PUPSTRUT for Pride, 1 pm. Puppy parade, booths and vendors, amateur dog show. Proceeds support local shelters and veterinarian clinics. #PRIDEPASS restaurant passport, **May 1-June 30.** A chance to win \$250 gift card. Proceeds support Southington Pride's free programming for youth and families. **SouthingtonPride.org and Facebook @SouthingtonPRIDE**

May 19

**Westport Pride Queer Cook Off**

6-8:30 pm, at Aitoro Appliance, Norwalk. Teams of four pair off with local chefs for a "Chopped"-like experience. **WestportPride.org and Facebook @WestportCtPride**

May 22

**Connecticut Gay Men's Chorus Old Saybrook**

"The British are Coming", 3 and 7 pm at the Katherine Hepburn Cultural Center. Singing British hits that have topped the charts for decades. Tickets at **Ctgm.org**

June

**East Hampton Pride**

Events TBA **Facebook @ EastHamptonCTPride**

June

**Simsbury Pride Flag Raising**

Date TBD **Simsbury-CT.gov**

June 1 and month long

**Stratford Pride**

June 1: Pride Flag Raising and Ceremony, 9 am at Stratford Town Hall



TBD: Pride Fest **StratfordCt.org and Facebook @MayorLauraHoydick**

June 1-22

**Stamford Pride**

June 1: Pride banners and flag displayed monthlong at Ferguson Library **June 1:** Light Up Old Town Hall and group, 9 pm **June 2:** Flag Raising at the Government Center, Noon **June 9:** Stamford Art Association. Stamford Pride Art Show and reception, 5:30-7:30 pm at Ferguson Library **June 12:** Drag Brunch, 12:30 pm at Mexicue **June 15:** *Disaster*, the Musical, 7:30 pm at Curtain Call **June 22:** *Quantum Girl Theory* reading, 6:30 pm at Ferguson Library More events TBA, including a Rainbow Rave for Youth **StamfordCTPride.com and Facebook @StamfordCTPride**

June 1-25

**West Hartford Pride Festival**

**June 1:** Flag Raising, 6 pm at Unity Green **June 2:** Pride Kickoff, 4-9 pm at Gastro Park **June 17:** Laugh With Pride, New Park Brewing

**June 24:** Tell Me Another, LGBTQAI+ Experience, New Park Brewing **June 25:** WeHa Pride, Drag Fest and Pride Night **June 25:** Queerflix film festival **Date TBA:** Bike Ride with Hartford Gay & Lesbian Health Center. For bike ride updates: **Facebook @HGLHC and Instagram @hglhc\_1983 WestHartfordPride.org and Facebook, Instagram and Twitter @PrideWeHa**

June 1-26

**Easton Pride**

**June 1:** Pride Flag Raising & Celebration, 5:30 pm at Easton Town Hall. Outdoor celebration to follow at Easton Public Library from 6-8 pm, featuring music, food and kids' crafts. Bring a picnic or visit the food truck on site. **June 25:** Visions of Pride. Pride Themed Art Exhibit, opening reception 4-5 pm at Easton Public Library. Exhibit will continue through July. **June 26:** Pride Themed Concert, outdoors at Christ Church. Bring the family and a picnic, or visit the food truck on site. Gates open 5:30 pm. Opening act: uncis at 6 pm. Main event:

Hitch and the Giddyup, 6:30-8:30 pm. \$7 adults, \$5 seniors, kids/teens free. **EastonCtPride.org and YouTube, Instagram and Facebook @EastonCTPride**

June 1-30

**Middletown Pride**

**June 1:** Pride Flag Raising and Kick-off of Pride Month at City Hall **June 1:** Drag Queen Story Hour, 6 pm, McCutcheon Park at Crystal Lake **June 4:** PrideFest, 2-10 pm (rain date June 5) includes: Pride March, 2-3:30, beginning at intersection of Spring Street and Main Street **Pride Rally**, 4-6:30 on the South Green, with local activists and performers **Pride Showcase** 7-10 pm, on the South Green, with the state's best drag artists and LGBTQIA2S+ performers **After Party**, 8 pm at Chez Est, featuring Mx. Chez Est Natalia Fierce and other drag performers **June 9:** Middletown Pride Band Night 5-9 pm, Wadsworth Mansion at Long Hill Estate **June 11:** Cinder + Salt Downtown Cleanup **June 12:** Silent Dance Party in partnership with Q+, 5-8 pm, First Church **June 22:** Craft Night in partnership with Q+, 5-8:30 pm, McCutcheon Park at Crystal Lake **June 23:** Drag Queen Story Hour, 7 pm at Wadsworth Mansion at Long Hill Estate **June 23:** Family Movie Night, 7:30 pm at Wadsworth Mansion at Long Hill Estate **June 26:** Youth Open Mic, in partnership with Q+ **June 30:** Event to Honor Activists **MiddletownPride.org and YouTube, Instagram and Facebook @ MiddletownCtPride**

**June 9:** Middletown Pride Band Night 5-9 pm, Wadsworth Mansion at Long Hill Estate

**June 11:** Cinder + Salt Downtown Cleanup

**June 12:** Silent Dance Party in partnership with Q+, 5-8 pm, First Church

**June 22:** Craft Night in partnership with Q+, 5-8:30 pm, McCutcheon Park at Crystal Lake

**June 23:** Drag Queen Story Hour, 7 pm at Wadsworth Mansion at Long Hill Estate

**June 23:** Family Movie Night, 7:30 pm at Wadsworth Mansion at Long Hill Estate

**June 26:** Youth Open Mic, in partnership with Q+

**June 30:** Event to Honor Activists **MiddletownPride.org and YouTube, Instagram and Facebook @ MiddletownCtPride**

June 1-30

**Westport Pride Month**

**June 1:** Pride kick-off with fun, family-themed movie at The Remarkable Theater **June 3:** Pride celebrations at Westport Public Schools **June 4:** Family Drag Show, 6-8 pm, at Westport Museum of Contemporary Art. Featuring Desmond is Amazing and Fierce Queens. Q&A with kings and queens, food trucks,

cocktail hour with performers and drag performances. **June 12:** Westport Pride Rally, 1-3 pm on Jesup Green. Featuring local speakers, students, musicians and family activities. Raising of Pride flag on the green. **All month:** Merchants of Pride partnering with local merchants offering discounts and promotional products to benefit Westport Pride. **WestportPride.org and Instagram and Facebook @ WestportCt.Pride**

June 2

**CT Gay and Lesbian Chamber of Commerce Foundation Cabaret Wallingford**

6-9 pm at the Square Feet Theater, Wallingford. Silent auction, cash bar and 10 performers including Leah Juliett, Kielty Wintersteen, The Sweetest Key Acapella group, Ali Gauthier, Patrick Laffin and Carrie Ashton. Proceeds fund scholarships to empower young LGBTQ and allied leaders. Tickets at **CTGLCFoundation.org**

June 3-12

**35th Connecticut LGBTQ Film Festival**

Hartford and virtually In-person at Cinestudio, Trinity College and online **OutFilmCt.org and Facebook, Instagram and Twitter @ OutFilmCT**

June 3-25

**Foxwoods Resort Casino Mashantucket**

June 3: Wanda Sykes, 8 pm **June 25:** Sal Vulcano, 7 pm **Drag Brunch**, TBA **Binglow**, TBA, glow-lit bingo, with drag performances **Foxwoods.com and Foxwoods.com/LiveOutLoud/**

June 4

**Furry Picnic**

Wickham Park, Manchester. All ages, all are welcome. **FurryPicnic.com and Twitter @FurryPicnic**

June 4

**Ridgefield Pride in the Park**

Noon-3 pm at Ballard Park **RidgefieldCtPride.com and Facebook and Instagram @ RidgefieldCTPride**



# Proud to Support Equality

Berkshire Bank is a purpose-driven organization committed to supporting community initiatives that foster acceptance and nurture individuality.



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**June 4-5  
Hartford Gay Men's Chorus  
10th Anniversary Concert**  
"Singing from the Heart of  
Hartford"

June 4 at 8 pm, and June 5  
at 3 pm, at Aetna Theater at  
the Wadsworth Atheneum  
Museum of Art, Hartford  
**Tickets at Hgmc.org**

**June 4-16  
Cromwell Spring into PRIDE**

**June 4:** Family Event, 10 am  
at Cromwell Belden Public  
Library

**June 4:** Middletown Pride  
Parade

**June 9:** *Names I've Been  
Called* Performance Art, Noon  
at Cromwell Town Hall dining  
room

**June 13:** Pride Yoga, 6 pm at  
Pierson Park

**June 16:** Movie Night, 7 pm  
at Cromwell Belden Public  
Library

**All Month:** LGBTQ+ Art Show  
in Cromwell Town Hall atrium

**TBA:** LGBTQ+ Trivia Night  
**Facebook @  
CromwellLGBTQCommittee**

**June 4-18  
Norwalk Pride in the Park**

**June 4:** Pride Silent Disco, 7-10  
pm for ages 18+

**June 11:** Pride in the Park,  
Noon-9 pm, Mathews Park,  
Norwalk. Family-friendly  
kid zone, live music and  
entertainment, food vendors  
and, from Noon-2, Pride Family  
Field Day.

**June 18:** Pride Parade of Sail,  
Noon-6 pm, Norwalk Harbor.  
Private motor and sail boats  
of all sizes may participate  
in this colorful parade. No  
boat ownership is necessary:  
ferry rides are available. Boat  
registration is free; lobster  
bake dinner on Sheffield Island  
is \$85; round-trip ferry and  
lobster bake is \$125. Tickets are  
limited, so reserve early.

**CtPrideCenter.org and  
Facebook, Twitter and  
Instagram @CTPrideCenter**

**June 5  
Connecticut Gay Men's  
Chorus  
Greenwich**

*The British are Coming*, 3 pm  
at the Berkley Theater, main  
Greenwich Public Library.  
Singing British hits that have  
topped the charts for decades.  
Free, but reservations are  
strongly suggested.

**Reservations at  
GreenwichLibrary.org.**

**June 5 and 18  
Pride in the Hills  
New Preston**

**June 5:** The Owl Pride Party  
Online bidding begins May 25  
at 32Auctions.com. Event is 2-6  
pm at the Owl Wine and Food  
Bar.

**June 18:** Shag Festival With  
Pride, 7-11 pm, with hostess  
drag artist Shequida Hall,  
headliners Betty Who and  
Deborah Cox, a TBA celebrity  
shift and DJ Arvolyn Hill. At  
Spring Hill Arts Gathering,  
Spring Hill Vineyards.

**Date TBA:** Friends and  
Family Fun Day at Quassy  
Amusement Park.  
Proceeds from all events  
fund scholarships, grants and  
programming for local schools,  
libraries and LGBTQ+ youth.  
**PrideintheHills.org and  
Instagram and Twitter @  
PrideInTheHill1**

**June 6  
New Britain**

Pride Flag Raising Ceremony,  
9:30 am in Central Park  
**NewBritainCt.gov and  
Facebook**

**June 7  
Meet the Author -  
Jillian Celentano  
Stratford**

6:30-8 pm, Stratford Public  
Library. Celentano will  
discuss her life and memoir,  
"Transitioning Later in Life: a  
Personal Guide". Registration  
required.  
**StratfordLibrary.org**

**June 9  
Liquid Lounge  
Hartford**

Starting at 5:30 at the  
Connecticut Center, in  
collaboration with Hartford  
Pride and CT Pride. Ages 21 and  
up only.  
**CtScienceCenter.org and  
Facebook @HartfordPride**

**June 10  
Connecticut Sun Pride Night  
Uncasville**

7 pm at Mohegan Sun  
**ConnecticutSun.com and  
Facebook @ConnecticutSun**

**June 10 and TBA  
Mansfield Pride**

**June 10:** Pride Movie Night  
With other activities TBA.  
Pride Flag Raising Ceremony  
TBA  
**MansfieldCt.gov/Pride**

**June 11  
Tolland's Pride in the Park**

Noon-6 pm, Crandall's Park  
Pavilion. A family-friendly  
picnic with a food truck,  
games, music and prizes. Come  
in your most boisterous outfit if  
you wish.  
**Facebook @Tolland's2ndAnnu  
alPrideinthePark**

**June 11 (rain date June 12)  
Canton**

**Pups and Pride Parade**  
11 am-2 pm.  
Meet at 10:30 at Canton Dog  
Park, where parade will begin  
at 11 am. Parade ends at Shops  
at Farmington Valley with a  
celebration of Pride featuring  
music, local artists from the  
Canton Arts Council, a digital  
art display, kids' activities,  
and snacks for dogs and  
humans. Prizes will be awarded  
to costumed/colorfully-  
accessorized pups and owners,  
including "most spirited."  
**TheShopsatFarmingtonValley.  
com and Facebook @  
DogParkCanton**

**June 11-12  
Pride & Vine  
Colchester**

11 am-6 pm both days, at Priam  
Vineyards. 70 vendors, food  
trucks, live music and drag  
shows both days.  
Priam-Vineyards.com and  
**Facebook @PriamVineyards**

**June 12  
Darien Pride Rally**

Noon-4 pm at Tilley Pond  
Park. Darien's first Pride  
Rally will feature music, food,  
entertainment, and inspiration.  
More events TBA.  
**DarienPride.org**

**June 12  
Avon Cares Family Picnic**

1 pm at Avon Congregational  
Church. For all area LGBTQ+  
residents and allies. Bring a  
picnic and gather on the lawn  
for music, guest speakers and  
fun.  
**Avon-Church.org  
and Facebook @  
AvonCongregational**

**June 16  
Pride Month Creative Cocktail  
Hour  
Hartford**

6-10 pm at Real Art Ways.  
Live music, DJ, art exhibition  
openings, food, drinks and  
community.  
\$15 at the door, \$10 for  
members or bicyclists, free for  
members on bikes  
**RealArtWays.org and Twitter,  
Facebook, tumblr and  
Instagram @realartways**

**June 18  
Hamden Pride**

10 am-2 pm, Town Center Park  
**Hamden.com and Facebook  
@TownofHamdenCT**

**June 18  
27th Annual Queer Prom  
West Hartford**

*Once Upon a Time-A Fairytale  
Prom*, 6-9 pm at West Hartford  
Town Hall, with live DJ, food,  
snacks and soda. For ages 13-18.  
\$20 admission.  
Sponsored by Hartford Gay and  
Lesbian Health Collective  
**HGLHC.org and Twitter,  
YouTube and Facebook @  
HGLHC**

**June 25  
New Haven Black Pride**

1-4 pm, Goffe Street Park.  
Hosted by A Place to Nourish  
your Health, for LGBTQIAA+  
people, family and friends.  
Engage with community  
members and receive  
information on PrEP, HIV,  
mental health, financial  
literacy, substance abuse  
and general health services.  
Featuring dance, drag and  
poetry. Goal is to spread  
awareness to an underserved  
community.  
**Facebook @  
NewHavenBlackGayPride**

**June 25  
Ellington Pride Celebration**

2-4:30 pm, Arbor Park. Family-  
friendly, fun activities, music,  
resources and more.  
**EllingtonEquality.com**



**June 25-26  
Pride at Mohegan Sun  
Uncasville**

Pride on the Patio. June 25,  
4-8 pm. Live music, food  
trucks, drink specials at the  
bar, and vendors. Benefitting  
organization is OutCT.  
Cocktails and Queens at the  
Cabaret: June 25, 8-10 pm.  
Featuring the finest Drag  
Queens across the country. A  
famous guest host is TBA. \$40  
includes a drink.  
Pride @ Night: June 25, 11-2  
am in the Avalon Nightclub.  
Cocktails & Queens at The  
Cabaret ticket holders can skip  
the line and pay no cover.  
The You Better Work Diva  
Brunch: June 26, 11 am-3 pm in  
the novelle lounge.  
**MoheganSun.com**

**July 14  
Hartford Yard Goats  
Pride Night**

7 pm at Dunkin Donuts Park  
**YardGoatsBaseball.com**

**July, date TBA  
Westport Pride Concert**

At Sport Hill Farm, Easton. An  
afternoon featuring local talent.  
A family-friendly outdoor event.  
**WestportPride.org and  
Facebook @WestportCtPride**

**July 23 and TBA  
Greater Bridgeport Pride**

July 23: OUTwork Exhibit  
opening at City Lights Gallery  
TBA: Pride March and  
performances  
**CityLightsGallery.  
org and Facebook @  
GreaterBridgeportPrideCT**

**August 27  
New London Pride**

Noon at Ocean Beach Park  
Music, vendors, games, Youth  
Pride, and more. HIV testing  
and COVID-19 vaccinations will  
be available.  
**NewLondonPride.com and  
Facebook, Instagram and  
Twitter @outCt**

**Sept. 10  
Hartford Pride Fest and  
Concert**

A family-centered event  
showcasing entertainment,  
food, local businesses,  
giveaways, activities and  
numerous community  
organizations.  
**HartfordPride.com and  
Facebook @hartfordpride**

**Sept., date TBA  
PRIDE New Haven**

At North Haven Fairgrounds.  
Family fun activities, food  
vendors, artist booths,  
information booths, and  
performers.  
**NewHavenPrideCenter.  
org/2022Pride/ and Facebook  
@PrideNewHaven**

**Fall  
Deep River Pride Festival**

Featuring music, performers  
and vendors.  
**Facebook and Instagram @  
DeepRiverPride**

**Hamilton**  
The Art of Remaking History  
JUNE 24-SEPTEMBER 11

John Trumbull, *The Capture of the Hessians at Trenton, December 26, 1776 (detail)*, 1831. Oil on canvas. Purchased by Daniel Wadsworth and members of the Atheneum Committee

See how art informed the costume and set designs brought to life on stage in the award-winning musical *Hamilton*

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wcsu.edu/pridecenter/

# Show Your Pride!

What to do,  
Where to go  
and What to Buy  
this Pride Season!



**Isaac Mizrahi's  
Cabaret Show**  
The Ridgefield Playhouse  
Saturday, June 18, 2022  
at 8pm  
80 East Ridge  
Ridgefield, CT 06877  
203.438.5795  
[www.ridgefieldplayhouse.org](http://www.ridgefieldplayhouse.org)

**Isaac Mizrahi in his only area  
appearance with a brand new show!**  
Accompanied by his band of six jazz  
musicians led by Ben Waltzer, Mizrahi  
will perform a range of tunes by the  
likes of Billie Holiday, Barbra Streisand,  
Cole Porter and Madonna. He'll share his  
hilarious musings on everything of the  
moment from politics to dieting to his  
latest Instagram obsessions. For tickets  
visit: [www.ridgefieldplayhouse.org](http://www.ridgefieldplayhouse.org)



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The Pride Lucky You includes a  
unique Pride pin. Every Lucky You  
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[www.luckyyouflowers.com](http://www.luckyyouflowers.com)



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Your 15ml bottle is only \$40. Lasts for over 50  
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a FREE eBook on *100 Uses for Essential Oils*.  
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<http://calendly.com/wayneleiss>.



**Center Stage  
Center Stage Theatre**  
54 Grove Street, Shelton  
203-225-6079  
[centerstageshelton.org](http://centerstageshelton.org)

Center Stage Theatre is an inclusive and  
intergenerational community-based theatre providing  
high quality and affordable performances, educational  
programming and volunteer opportunities. The  
501©3 non-profit Theatre produces five full scale  
productions a year as well as year-round theatre  
education for students grades K-12 and adults. Center  
Stage is a diverse, equitable and safe place where all  
staff, board members, students, cast members and  
volunteers feel valued and respected. Up next running  
July 22-31 is *Footloose*, the annual Youth CONNecTion  
summer musical featuring performers ages 14-23. For  
tickets, visit [centerstageshelton.org](http://centerstageshelton.org), or Facebook or  
Instagram (@centerstageshelton)



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paradise exclusively for  
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Developed by producer Ken Davenport,  
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White Way.

## TRANSITIONING ON THE JOB IS SEAMLESS AT MIDDLESEX HEALTH

By JANE LATUS

**I**magine the relief of transitioning without fear of repercussions at your job.

Even better, imagine having unwavering—and educated—support from your supervisors and coworkers. And that your medical insurance will cover most aspects of your transition that you choose to pursue. And, finally, that your employer is a health system that has been designated for seven consecutive years a “Leader in LGBTQ+ Healthcare Equality” by the Human Rights Campaign.

“I was finally at the point where I said I need to be who I’m gonna’ be,” says trans man Kelly Merrill, a CT Scan Technologist in Middlesex Health’s radiology department, who began their transition in fall 2021. (They began the medical phase, that is, by starting testosterone; their “inner work” had long been underway.)

Merrill already knew Middlesex was renowned for its care of patients in its Center for Gender Medicine and Wellness. “I know we have amazing care for LGBTQ+ patients, and I know if you work at Middlesex, you have to be open to that. You’re caring for all sorts of people. I knew I’d be accepted,” they say.

But they had just moved from working at Middlesex Health Marlborough Medical Center to the Middlesex Hospital in Middletown, with all new coworkers, just

before starting their transition. “I didn’t know people well. It was nerve-racking when I started [testosterone]. I didn’t know how fast my body would change. I didn’t know how I would be perceived,” Merrill says. “Not really knowing anyone and outing yourself to everyone is a lot.”

So, Merrill approached Human Resources. “I asked if there was a way to come out to the whole department.” HR helped them do so. The result? “I have nothing but respect and support. People actually came up to me and congratulated me. People said, ‘You’re really strong.’ It was a relief.”

Merrill says they’ve been fortunate to have support from family and friends as well but can’t overestimate the importance of the support at work. “You spend more time with your coworkers than you do with your family most of the time.”

And now that Merrill has also become a patient at Middlesex, they say they have a broader appreciation for the care it provides. “It’s awesome to be part of the organization and experience it as a patient as well. As a patient, I feel completely comfortable with my providers, along with the staff we have in endocrinology for trans care.

Around the time this magazine goes to press, Merrill will be having top surgery. Post-surgery, they’ll

**“I was finally at the point where I said I need to be who I’m gonna’ be.”**

—Kelly Merrill



Kelly Merrill, a CT Scan Technologist at Middlesex Health. Photo by Stan Godlewski

take advantage of Middlesex's physical therapists, who are experienced in the needs of top surgery patients, like maintaining range-of-motion and managing scar tissue. "I'm really, really excited!" Merrill says about the upcoming surgery. Following top surgery, Merrill will be changing their pronouns to he and him.

### Middlesex Health Employee Pride

When Merrill contacted HR for help in announcing their transition, "I wanted to be very upfront and stave off questions like 'What's happening with Kelly's facial hair? Why is their voice cracking like a young boy?'"

Merrill, their supervisor, and HR collaborated on a letter that outlined the health system's standard of care and respect for all. Merrill's manager sent the letter out in an email of support. "It was nerve-racking during the process, because it did take some time," they say. In the end, Merrill is the one who was surprised, because the coworkers they'd guessed might have negative opinions were instead highly supportive. "It was very eye-opening. I'd prejudged people for no reason."

Soon, other Middlesex employees won't have to start from scratch if they need assistance when transitioning at work. A new employee resource group, called MH+PRIDE, is creating a resource guide for use by employees, supervisors, and HR. The guide is just one effort of the new group, whose purpose is to foster a welcoming community for LGBTQ+ employees.

"The resource guide will be something everyone can go to for questions like: 'Where do I get a new badge? Who do I talk to if someone gives me difficulty?' It will include sample letters that can help employees announce their transition," says Lisa Gramlich, physical therapist, and co-chair of MH+PRIDE.

With these tools, says Gramlich, future employees "should have a seamless transition. We want to make it as easy as possible for all."


MH+PRIDE also intends to provide and promote visibility, support, understanding, education, mentoring and community. Even little things make a big difference. "We rolled out pronoun badges for any employees who want to wear them," says Gramlich.

They also have fun: they'll be marching again (at long last!) in the Middletown Pride March. "It's an incredible feeling, people cheering for you and backing you," says Gramlich.

Merrill is participating in MH+PRIDE. They say they're thrilled to pay it forward. "I wouldn't even be able to transition at work if it wasn't for all of the elders in the LGBTQ+ community who've worked toward and fought for equal rights and allowed ourselves to be who we are freely in the world. Now maybe others will see this and may be comfortable enough to come out or ask for support."

"We're known for our patient care," says Gramlich. "Now we've turned the camera, so to speak, to look within and be sure we're treating our employees as well. It's a systemwide belief that everyone is allowed to live their life."

Says Merrill, "It's really amazing to be a bedside worker, and work with patients daily, and also know we have people at the top working for these changes—and to see the eagerness from the top level."

Middlesex's award from the Human Rights Campaign is based on its policies and practices dedicated to equitable treatment and inclusion of not only LGBTQ+ patients, but also employees. 



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THE GAYBY GUIDE:

# How To Talk To Your LGBTQ+ Kids

EXPERTS, EDUCATORS, MOMS, DADS, GROWNUPS, AND A TEEN OFFER ADVICE ON REACHING ACROSS GENERATIONS

By DAWN ENNIS



**L**et's not kid ourselves. We remember how "out of touch" our parents seemed when we were younger. And now, today's "Gen Z" looks at us and thinks the same, or worse.

Sure, their fashion, their style, music, and distractions are different. Their expressions of gender are wildly at odds with what many of us experienced, or wished for, at their age. And their rebellion against what we consider norms nowadays is unlike anything seen at Stonewall. Also, they laugh when we use terms like "nowadays."

The good news is, there are ways to cross the divide, bridge the "Gayby gap" between generations. What follows are recommendations from everyday LGBTQ+ folks and physicians, social workers and school principals, and even a 15-year-old teen who came out in

December, to me: She is my transgender child. Even though I'm marking nine years being out this month, I've also been learning from her every day since.

Of course, this guide isn't just for our communities. We encourage you to share this with the cisgender and straight folks in your circle, too. First, read what some grownups who identify as bisexual suggest in terms of starting a conversation.

**"LISTEN TO YOUR KID. REALLY LISTEN"**

"There is no 'special conversation.' It's letting them lead and when they ask questions, answering them honestly," said Cynthia Rutt of Branford. "It's raising them in a space where they feel safe to speak. They aren't forced to declare anything. They just know they're loved and respected no matter what. I've counseled my hetero kids the exact same

way I raised my questioning and queer kids. As long as kids know they're loved and safe, they'll communicate and grow."

"Stay open minded. They're still the same kid you knew 20 minutes before this conversation happened," suggested Connecticut resident Jesse Lynn. "Don't worry about how young they are or how they know. They're figuring themselves out right now, and the best thing you can do for them is to love them, to treat them with dignity and respect, and give them the room to figure out who their best, most authentic selves are. When I came out to my parents as a teenager, they gave me the best response possible: 'Ok. I love you.'"

"Listen to your kid, like, really listen when they tell you who they are," recommended Eleanor Jones, a former school teacher in Washington State and the mom of a trans boy who made headlines in his hometown by fighting to

compete in soccer with the other boys on the team. "Use positive language, like, 'Thank you for sharing. That was really brave of you. I'm here for you and support you always. You'll always be my kid, and I'm so proud of the human you are. I love you always.' Things like that set the stage of love and support even when you might not be ready or know what the future holds for any of you."

"I made it really clear to my kids that they didn't have to 'come out' to me. They are who they are, and whoever that it is ok with us," librarian Amy Case Rosenfield of Farmington told CT Voice. "I think Eleanor said it so well. Listen. Love."

"Don't assume your kid is cishet in the first place," suggested Alex Andra, also of Connecticut.

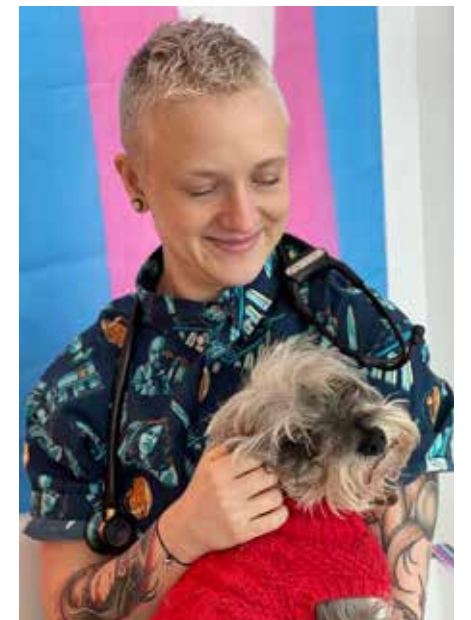
"Let them know it's ok to be different, to explore, discover, and can discuss what they are experiencing," offered Jennifer

Knight of Toronto. "Yes, you'll always be my kid. I am proud of you and only want you to succeed in whatever direction you're going."

**THE DOCTORS' PRESCRIPTIONS**

"My best advice is to listen to and support your children," said Dr. A.J. Eckert, medical director at Anchor Health in Hamden and an assistant clinical professor at Quinnipiac University's Frank H. Netter M.D. School of Medicine. "Be a safe person to talk to without judgment. If you find yourself putting your personal beliefs and values on your child, do the work either on your own or with a therapist to reconcile these views."

Eckert himself is nonbinary. "If your child comes out to you as LGBTQ, don't react in a way that will make them feel judged and othered," they told CT



Dr. A.J. Eckert





Leif and Dawn Ennis

gay. “Listen for the tone of your voice, the content of your messages to listen for how many judgments versus validations you detect. Adjust accordingly, so they have the validations that far outweigh the judgments. And always have a daily dosage of telling them how you love them for who they are.”

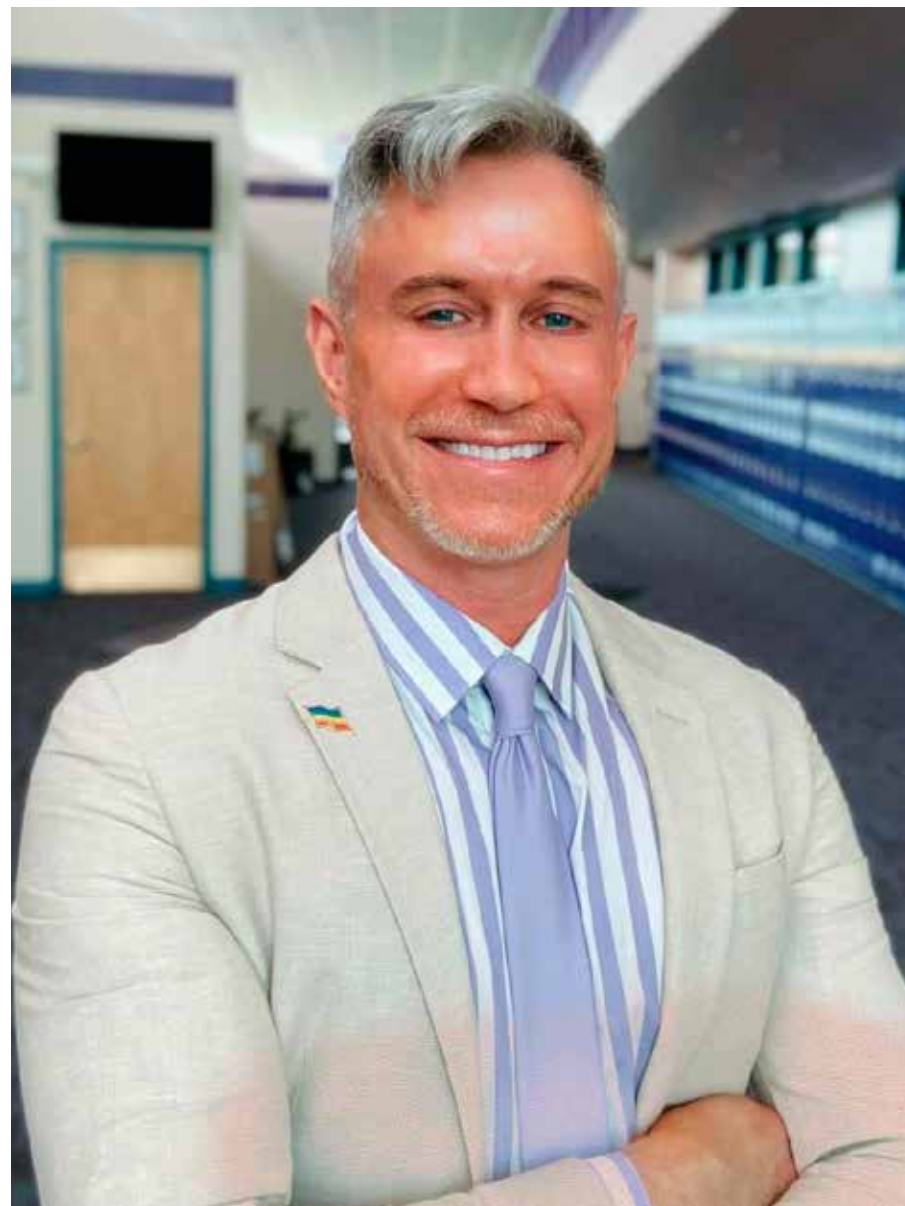
**WHAT THE EXPERTS SAY**

“I think that the most important thing we can do is talk to our kids, whether they are cisgender or transgender, whether they are LGBT or straight,” said Sam Ames of San Francisco. They’re trans masculine and the director of advocacy and government affairs at The Trevor Project, the world’s

*Voice.* “Don’t be your child’s bully, don’t interrogate them or make them go to therapy. If your child uses terms you don’t understand, look for resources and educate yourself. Do the work so your child knows you care for and support them. Build a relationship in which your child feels seen and heard. Affirm them, and support their identity and sexuality exploration. Love them no matter what because family support and acceptance can make the difference between a depressed, anxious, and suicidal teen and one who thrives.”

“Try very hard to check the initial knee jerk reaction which sometimes leads one to want to shut something down or think an identity is not real,” advises Britta Schute, nurse practitioner at Hartford Healthcare in Canton. “Rather, take a pause. Do some research. Do not expect your child to educate you, and allow more time for the child to share what that identity means for them. It is less important why or how someone developed an LGBTQ+ identity and most important that they shared it with you. There is no reason to believe that your child will not live life to the fullest as their true, authentic self, but possibly the opposite if they do not try!”

“I would encourage parents to audiotape themselves in their interactions with their queer youth. Play it back when they have complete privacy,” advises Richard Stillson, Ph.D. of Hartford, who is also known as Mucha, a drag queen. Dr. Stillson identifies as nonbinary and



Associate principal Micah Allen Porter



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largest suicide prevention and crisis intervention organization for LGBTQ+ youth. Their organization has its own *Guide to Being an Ally to Transgender and Nonbinary Youth*. No matter how younger people identify, “They need to know that what is happening in the country right now is wrong and that they are worthy of love and support,” said Ames, referring to the scores of anti-LGBTQ+ bills and laws being enacted across the United States this year. “We know how powerful a factor acceptance is in the lives of LGBTQ youth. The truth is that’s not unique to LGBTQ youth. Good parenting is about love and acceptance and support. Our research shows that LGBTQ youth who report feeling supported and accepted by the adults in their lives have significantly lower odds of attempting suicide. And what we try really hard to remind

people is, that’s true for all youth. All kids deserve acceptance. All kids deserve support.” The GenderCool Project is another organization working to help replace misinformed opinions about transgender and nonbinary youth, by arranging positive experiences in workplaces nationwide. It’s youth-led—Eleanor Jones’ son, Bobby, is one of the GenderCool Champions—and was co-founded by Jennifer and John Grosshandler. He’s the board chair, a straight cis ally and a tech industry account executive in Chicago. Together, they’re raising four children, one of whom happens to be transgender. “Being supportive of your child’s sexual orientation and gender identity is the best way to improve communications with them,” Grosshandler told *CT Voice*. “Showing them that no matter what, they’re

still your child, and you’ll love them unconditionally, will naturally lead to mutual trust, empathy and candid conversations. In the end, you don’t have to be able to relate to their experience in order to accept them and support them.” Getting called to the principal’s office is not usually the start of an affirming conversation, but associate principal Micah Allen Porter in Denver isn’t your usual principal. He’s out, proud and gay, and offered this advice for conversing with LGBTQ+ youth: “The evidence shows that a single trusted adult outside of their home is critical for young LGBTQ+ people. Encourage or help them find that person. Be intentional and transparent with:

- Conversations as a family about supporting the LGBTQ+ community
- Reading about raising and

supporting LGBTQ+ youth

- Attending events supporting your local LGBTQ+ center
- Shift your house of worship membership to a religious center that’s LGBTQ+ (if you’re not already doing so).

“Being open and vocal around your child or children about supporting the LGBTQ+ community will make a world of a difference,” Porter told *CT Voice*.

**“GIVE ME TIME TO WORK MYSELF OUT”**  
“I just appreciate space,” my 15-year-old, who now goes by Leif, told me. She came out to me and her siblings as trans femme five months ago. She is still slowly rolling it out, at her own pace. “I want understanding and awareness that I can come to you any time,” she said. “I appreciate my

parent who gives me space but also is there for me. I want someone who understands what I’m going through and is not trying to pressure me into doing anything. I want someone to just give me time to work myself out and not try and put anything on me.” “A lot of parents are kind of clueless,” Leif told me. “They give space, but, like, in a bad way, and they don’t do anything for their kids. They just let them be on their own, which sounds good in theory, but kids still do need guidance. So, as much as parents don’t exactly know everything about LGBT if they’re not LGBT, they should still try to be the leaders that they signed up to be.” Some of Leif’s friends are still in the closet, at least to their parents, and she had this advice for parents who suspect their child is LGBTQ+: “Don’t be so invasive. Not you, but a lot of parents try to ‘crack the code,’

meaning they try to figure it out. ‘Aha! You’re gay! I knew it!’ I don’t think parents should do that, and what they should be like is, ‘If you are: Cool. If you aren’t: Also cool. We’re open and we’re fine with everything.’ And I feel like that would just make people a lot safer and feel a lot better about coming out.” “But I feel there’s societal pressure to come out, with a big, explosive statement: ‘I’m gay!’ or ‘I’m trans!’ A big coming out thing is just kind of unnecessary,” said Leif. “You shouldn’t be required to come out and make a big deal of it. A lot of kids nowadays, at least in my case, are just laid back. ‘Yeah, I am trans. So what? So what?’” And look at that: She said “nowadays.” Sometimes, perhaps they really are listening to us. The question is, are we actively doing enough to listen to *them*?

# Bristol Health

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# Baked into the Community

## Small State Provisions is more than a bakery.

By ALEX DUEBEN

“I’ve been baking and cooking my entire life,” Kevin Masse explained as we sat outside of his bakery Small State Provisions in West Hartford’s Gastropark. “The first time I cooked dinner for my family I was twelve. I’ve baked with my parents and my grandparents. But it wasn’t until we moved to Connecticut that I really got into sourdough.”

The Gastropark is a food truck park with indoor seating and event space along with a bar, a branch of Perkatory Coffee and the 213-square foot micro bakery Small State. And while for many the bakery has been an essential part of the Gastropark, it marks a change of pace for Masse.

Sourdough became popular among home bakers during the pandemic, who know how difficult baking without yeast can be. It takes skill and patience to spend two days making bread—let alone more than four hundred loaves a week as Masse and his team do. It was only after he moved to Connecticut and met local cookbook author and Terry Walters that Masse started working with sourdough.

As far as why he ended up in Connecticut, “He got a faculty job here,” Masse said of his husband Michael, who he met thirteen years ago and is now an Associate Professor at Trinity College.

“We came here and saw Trinity and had lunch at Bricco in West Hartford Center with some of the faculty. It took



Photo by Meg Miller



Photo by Julie Bidwell



us two-and-a-half-hours to get back to New York,” Masse said. “We’ve been here in the Hartford area for almost six years now, and we just love it here.”

“I think what drew me to Kevin is his love of connecting people. And his love of how food brings people together,” said Sarah Leathers. The Founder and CEO of Healing Meals, which provides meals to families in health crisis and empowers youth, she’s known Masse for years, first as a volunteer and now a board member of the organization.

The two met because of Masse’s previous job, where he had been in contact with Leathers’ sister. “She said, you live in West Hartford? You need to talk to my sister Sarah,” Masse said. “We went back and forth for probably a year before we actually met in person,” Leathers said, “and then as soon as we met, Kevin started to get involved with us as a volunteer.”

Leathers talked about the work that

Masse has done as a board member, citing him as instrumental in making connections and creating relationships with sponsors, but what’s impressed her most is how he works with student volunteers.

“We say all the time that we want our youth to be exactly who they’re supposed to be in the world. And bring that into our kitchen. So, you have kids of all different personalities and struggles that they’re bringing with them. To be cooking alongside these kids and producing something, but also honoring who each of those kids are and bringing your love of cooking along with it, is so multi-layered,” Leathers said. “That role as an adult mentor is multi-layered as well, and [Kevin] just brings his very best energy into everything that he does.”

The way that Masse talks about it, he clearly shares Leathers’ values, but he there’s an added dimension for him in the work. “As a high schooler—and especially as a gay high schooler—I

didn’t have anywhere that I could go. Not that they just cater to queer teens at Healing Meals. It’s for all teens. It’s a very safe space,” Masse said.

“You take kids out of high school, and all the high school politics are set aside. Kids that may not be friends in the classroom develop friendships. To see these kids come out of their shells is really incredible. And they learn the art of cooking at the same time. It’s been something that I’ve just loved.”

When West Hartford legalized cottage businesses in 2019, Masse was one of the first people who signed up to bake bread out of his home. After months of slowly building a customer base through word of mouth, the pandemic hit.

“Once we were all locked down, I decided it would be very easy for me to bake every single day and to donate all of the proceeds to Healing Meals,” Masse said. “So, the first two months of the pandemic I kind of went into baking mania. We did all deliveries,



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so it was completely touchless. Everything was done through Venmo. And one of our customers was Tate Norden.”

Norden has been operating the food truck and catering business Iron & Grain, which works with a lot of local businesses, but Norden had more in mind than buying more bread. “It became very apparent that this guy had a special product, Norden said. “As I was working on the Gastropark, I approached him about opening up a micro bakery within the Gastropark.”

Talking with Norden and Masse, it’s easy to see how the two share many of the same principles. “The mission statement of the Gastropark is to let food unite, empower, and celebrate our community,” Norden said.

“He said, you should come down and check out what I’m doing because I think there might be a potential fit for you,” Masse said. “I hadn’t really started to think about the next step yet, but there’s a cap on how much you can do out of your house with a cottage bakery. This was the next evolution. It was a small enough space where I felt I could make it work, but not so big that I was going completely out on a limb.”



I spent part of a morning behind the counter at the bakery, which is a very small space, though Masse and three employees make it work. There’s a precision to how Masse works. Sitting down with him or watching him stamp bags with the bakery names, check and rotate bread, talk with customers, there’s no nervous energy. He cites measurements from memory, talks about the delivery schedule and talks about his day off between explaining procedures and answering questions from me.

The bakery is known for its bread, and while Masse said that his granola was something people have been saying that he should sell, he did not plan for the volume of cookies and scones



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Photo by  
Julie Bidwell



and other baked goods when he envisioned the bakery. “We asked, what can we sell to complement the coffee shop next door? They don’t sell baked goods, and we don’t sell coffee so we don’t step on each other’s toes, but we sell things that are very complementary. Our roots will always stay in bread. That’s my first and foremost focus but we’ve had a lot of fun with different scones and cakes.”

I mentioned to Masse that I know many people who follow him on social media because they may love his baked goods, but they love his posts about his dogs and running. “I’m not sharing every single moment with people, but I want them to have an understanding of who I am,” he said, clearly delighted.

“This has been a great community,” Masse said. “As an out gay man who’s married, to be able to own a business and be completely who we are has been great. I’ve never once felt, ‘oh God, I’ve got to tone it down,’ or change the way that we interact with people because of our circumstances. That’s been really phenomenal.”

It’s the community he talks about most in our conversation. Greeting customers he knows by name—and their regular order. Describing seeing people getting to know each other while they sit with their dogs drinking coffee and eating scones animates him in a way that even baking does not.

“I have a tremendous amount of respect for Kevin, not just as a baker but the way he operates his small business,” Norden said. “We want this place to be a collaborative space that’s all about supporting small business and bringing people together from all different types of walks of life.”

I let Masse go to prepare for lunch. He also still makes all the deliveries to customers in West Hartford himself, but I couldn’t let him go without asking about the name of his business. “I don’t even know. I just thought of it and thought this could be a really interesting name for a bakery.”

“I wanted it to be encompassing of the provisions that we have because it’s more than just bread and baked goods. We sell jams and nut butters and olive oil. I wanted it to encompass the state of Connecticut. I feel like people that live in Connecticut are very attached to Connecticut.”

“I wanted it to be all encompassing.”



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## Making Pride a Priority

As part of broad Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Belonging efforts at Hartford HealthCare, a LGBTQ+ Colleague Resource Group (CRG) was created in 2021. Other CRGs include Black and African-American, Hispanic and Latinx, and Asian-American and Pacific Islander.

**Our Goal:** To provide an equitable, affirming and supportive environment for LGBTQ+ patients, families and staff by cultivating a culture in which healthcare is delivered to all with sensitivity, kindness and respect.

### Who We Are

LGBTQ+ CRG is 40 Hartford HealthCare allies and LGBTQ+ community members who volunteered because they feel passionate about ensuring high-quality care is available to all. Executive sponsor is Dr. Jeffrey Cohen, executive vice president and chief clinical operating officer.



“It has been a joy to see colleagues work together in generating, advocating, and implementing change as it relates to LGBTQ+ health. We continue to be the spark that creates change within HHC that will allow us to provide safe, affirming care.”

—Dr. Derek A. Fenwick, co-chair



“I am thankful to be involved in the process of ensuring HHC is visibly inclusive to the LGBTQ+ community through our actions, processes and environments. Every person deserves to feel safe, respected and supported in being their authentic selves.”

—Valerie Martin, co-chair

### What We're Doing

- Earned **LGBTQ+ Healthcare Equality Leader** designation [for 7 of the 8 facilities] and the **LGBTQ+ Healthcare Equality Top Performer** designation [for SVMC] from the Human Rights Campaign Foundation.
- Creating a **database** of LGBTQ+ sensitive primary care providers and specialists on the Hartford HealthCare website.
- Planning **educational initiatives** such as “Building Gender Literacy: Gender Affirmative Care across the Lifespan” on June 3, 2022.
- Adding **Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity (SOGI)** tools to our electronic medical record to collect more accurate patient sex and gender information to be more respectful of transgender and gender non-conforming patients.
- **Being more visible allies** by adding pronoun preferences to badges, new employee applications, email signatures and Zoom profiles, and advocating for inclusive artwork and marketing efforts.
- **Mentoring** CRG members to increase LGBTQ+ visibility and leadership at Hartford HealthCare and on community organization boards.
- Supporting launch of a **Gender Health Center**, a compassionate, comprehensive healthcare service for transgender adults headed by Drs. Fenwick and Laura Saunders.

We are proud to take  
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Hartford HealthCare recently earned national recognition for its leadership in the equitable treatment and inclusion of LGBTQ+ patients, employees and visitors. The designation of Hartford HealthCare’s hospitals as **LGBTQ+ Equality Leaders and Top Performers** came in the Human Rights Campaign Foundation’s 2022 Healthcare Equality Index. We are extremely proud of this recognition, and of our unwavering commitment to equity and inclusion — for every person, every day.

  
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# DIVING IN WITH Greg Louganis

The Olympian and activist talks about his life and his commitment to the LGBTQ+ community.

By BRIAN SCOTT LIPTON

**B**y the summer of 1988, Greg Louganis was in the history books, having become the first male diver to win gold medals (four in total) at consecutive Olympics. Moreover, he had done so in 1988 after striking his head on the springboard, suffering a concussion in the process—an accident that was watched around the world with horror and trepidation.

Louganis made history again in 1995 by becoming the first Olympic athlete to come out as gay and HIV-positive in his autobiography *Breaking the Surface*, and in doing so, became an inspiration to millions of people all over the world.

The past 27 years have not always been easy, or even lucrative, for the now 62-year-old Californian. But Louganis has never given up on trying to help others by speaking on a variety of important topics and sharing his story in the hopes that he can help others on their own journey to peace and contentment.

For this Pride issue, Louganis took the time to speak to *Connecticut Voice* about his past, present and future; his advice for those struggling to come out or move forward; and the issues still facing his beloved LGBTQ+ and sports communities.





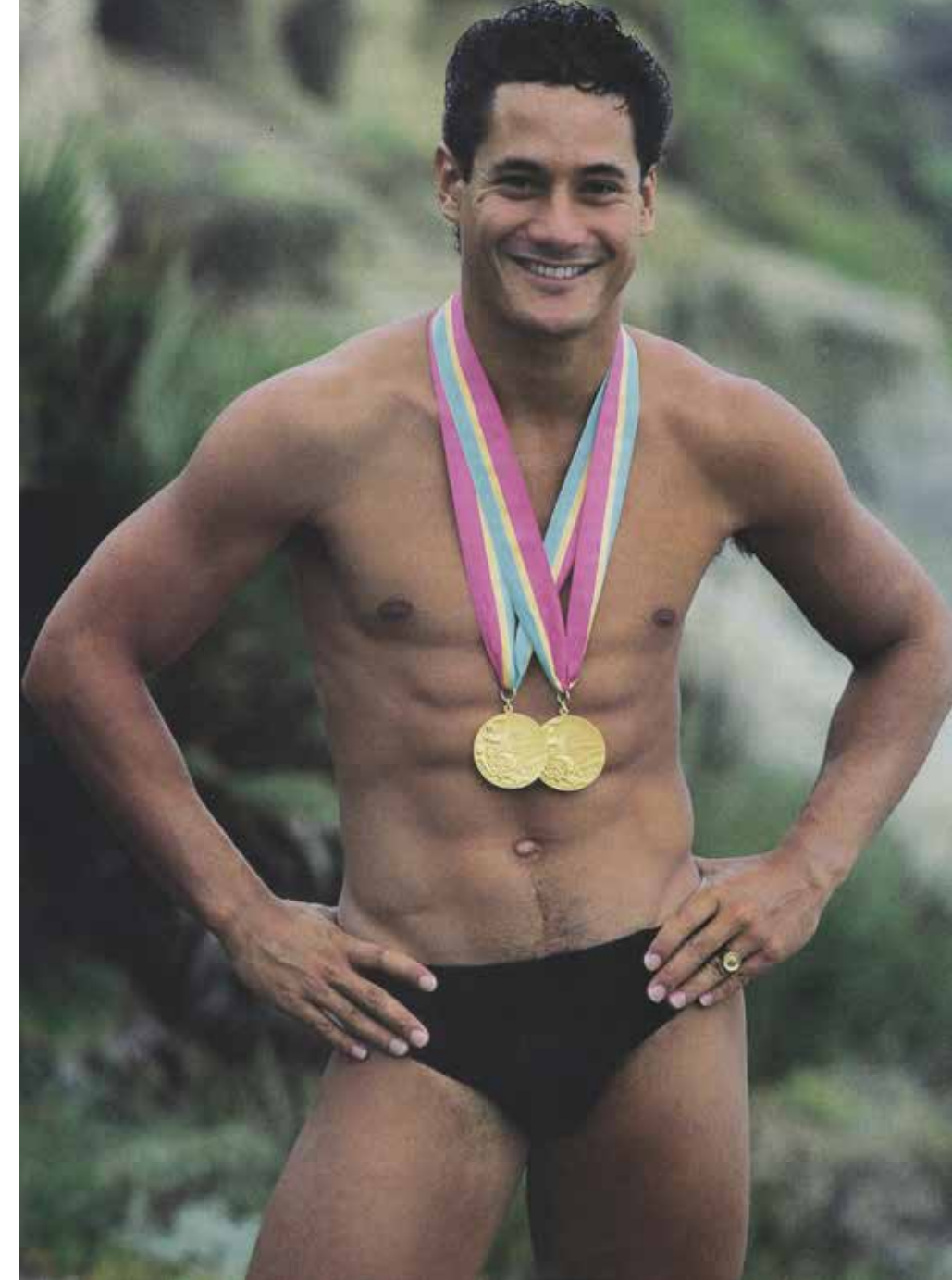
**V: Congratulations on using your celebrity for good! Was doing any of this something you could imagine nearly 35 years ago?**

**GL:** It's such a different space I am in now as opposed to then. I didn't think I'd get here. I was diagnosed with HIV at 28 and I was just grateful to make it to 30. I thought I had two years to live, which was the common diagnosis at the time. When 30 came and went, I felt like I was living without a phone or any form of communication, because that's what secrets do; they isolate you. And then I became confident I wasn't the only one feeling like this. That was the push for me to do the book, *Breaking the Surface*. I realized I needed to let go of the secrets. And I am so glad I did because it was so freeing to not worry about who I said what to whom. I was able to share whatever was going on at the time with whoever I chose and talk about my challenges living with HIV. Being able to share that and not be afraid such was a gift. And better yet, letting go of my secrets allowed other people to be supportive.

**V: Even in 2022, there are still people out there who are afraid to come out, especially in their workplace. What advice would you give someone in this position?**

**GL:** It's important to examine what the workplace means to you; if it's a place to just clock in your hours, maybe it's not so important. But if you love your job, and that workplace is part of your community, then I would advise someone that it is good to be open and authentic and let the people around you know who you are.

**V: You recently wrote "It is never how far you fall or how**



**many times you do so; it is all about getting back up and getting back in the game." You've managed to do that so many times and in many arenas from entertainment to activism. What do you say to people who just want to give up?**

**GL:** As it happens, I just went through a real emotional upheaval recently. The event that broke the ice of me dealing with everything going on in my life was my dog got hit by car. I've been reading this book *Radical Brilliance*

by Arunja Ardagh, and one of the things he said is that in the evenings you might want to schedule yourself a breakdown. It gave me permission to do just that because often after a breakdown you have a breakthrough. I had to untie this whole bundle of tangled yarn, and I had no idea of how to proceed. In sobriety, they say to just do what's in front of you; but if your yarn is so tangled, you simply don't know how to start to untangle it. I realized what you need to do is decide what's most important to you, which gives you the focus and the energy you need to move forward.

**V: Do you think we're all succumbing to the pressure of living via social media?**

**GL:** Yes. I think there's a lot of pressure we feel from social media. We're seeing these other people's lives and it looks like they've got everything all together. We need to remind ourselves it's just a snapshot; it's not real life. Nonetheless, we go on and start to compare our lives to theirs and judge ourselves and become hypercritical. We wonder if they can do everything, why can't I? But I bet if we could talk to them, they would tell us that their lives are not that great. We need to get away from that kind of self-judgment. One thing I've learned is my mind is going to lie to me and tell me stories, but my body always tells me the truth. If I take a deep breath, it really helps me learn what's the next positive step I need to take.

**V: Here's another recent quote of yours that really resonates: "Don't look outside of yourself for the validation you are seeking, turn inside and find that love within." How long did it take you to believe that?**

**GL:** These things come in waves. Some days you do really good, some not so much. It could just be you didn't sleep enough or eat enough. What helped me move forward is this book, *Loving What Is* by Byron Katie. He talks about how you feel when you think a particular thought or what if you didn't think that thought? And not only do you then realize your mind is telling stories that are untrue, as I said, but you also realize you may be trying to read the mind of someone else or reading in something to a gesture or even a non-response to text. You don't know what someone else is thinking—or going through.

**V: What gladdens—and saddens you—most about how this country treats the LGBTQ+ community in 2022?**

**GL:** In many ways, we've come a long way, but what recently happened in Florida (the passage of the "Don't Say Gay" bill) is also exposing how much bad behavior and bad thinking still exists. Studies prove that most aggression and hatred comes out of fear. It's more a commentary about what's inside other people and not about the LGBTQ+ community. People just need to open hearts and educate themselves and there would be far less fear.

**V: Let's talk about the sports world. Has there been enough progress?**

**GL:** Again, I think that the sports community still has far to go; it's been kind of unfair to the transgender athletes. My question is how can we be inclusive and embrace each other,

even if there are issues like breaking records involved [when transgender athletes compete against cisgender athletes]. Too often, people forget there are real people at the end of these discussions and conversations, and we discuss this subject like real people aren't involved.

**V: Clearly, you are a major influence on so many people right now. Who were some of your influences when you were growing up?**


**GL:** I can tell you I didn't have heroes in sports. I remember watching people like Wayne Gretzky and Michael Jordan, and while I admired them, I am not sure I agreed so much with them about their views in other areas of life. I always hoped I could be better—and do better—than the people I grew up with. I owe a lot to my

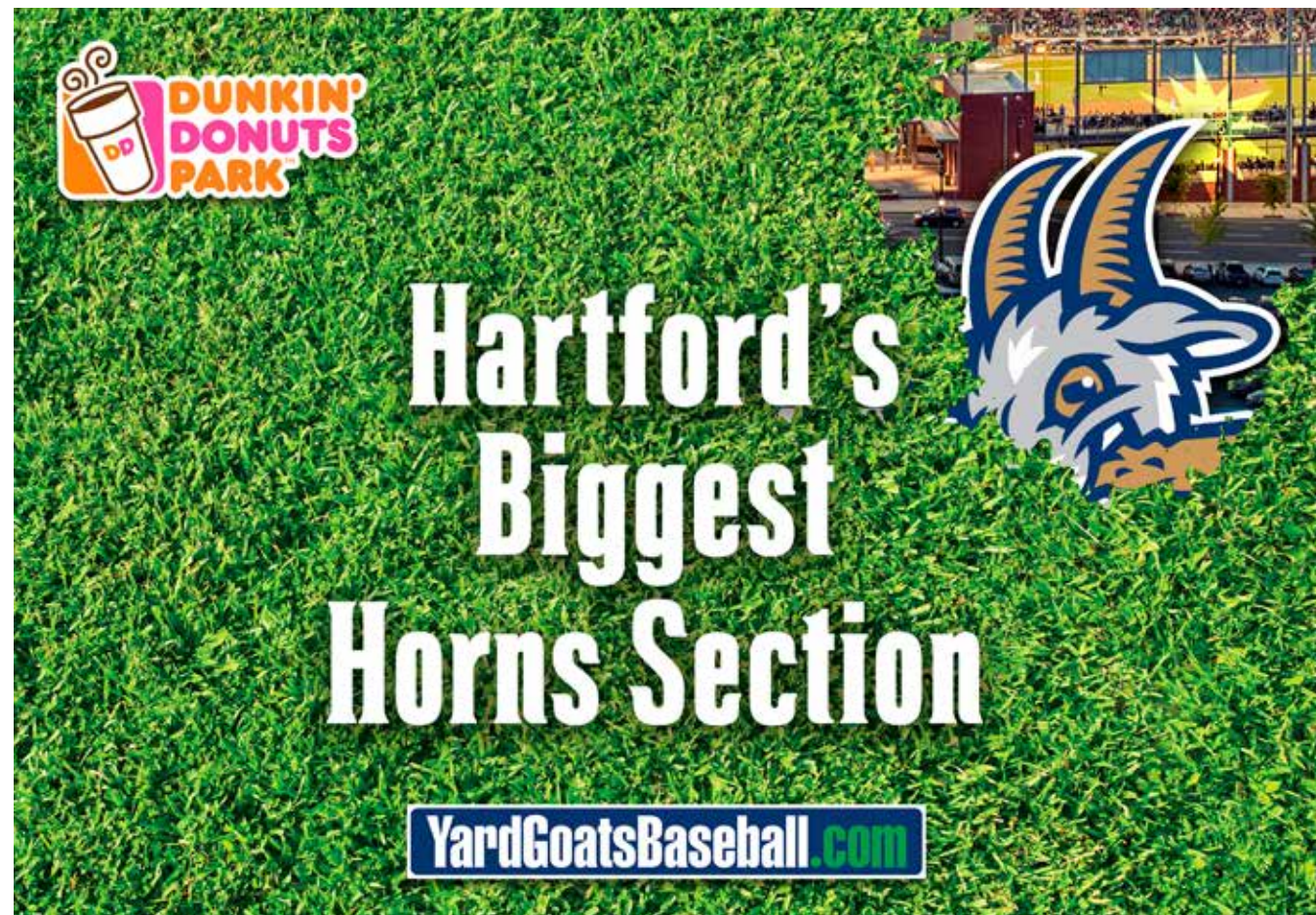
LGBTQ posse, including my editor Mitchell Ivers and co-author Eric Marcus on *Breaking the Surface*. They both knew I needed an education, so they set up meetings with people like Armistead Maupin and Paul Monette and Larry Kramer. And later on, in 1999, I was on stage with Alexandra Billings in Larry's play, *Just Say No*, —he actually called me and asked me to do the play out in Chicago—and she was the first transgender person I ever really knew. Talking to her at lunch about HIV and our medications was such an education. She was so supportive, and it was so wonderful to talk about these things without the fear of being judged. That experience really changed my life.

**V: What does your future hold for you?**

**GL:** I have my own podcast in

development called *Breaking the Surface*, which is really exciting! I hope to be able to cover so many different topics, from being bullied as a kid, to what's happening in Russia and Ukraine to the role of steroids in professional sports. And I think I am getting to a place in my life where I am okay respecting other's views and opinions more than I used to. I've also been writing a musical for years, and we're finally putting it together. And there's probably another book somewhere in my computer, but I am just not good at organizing.

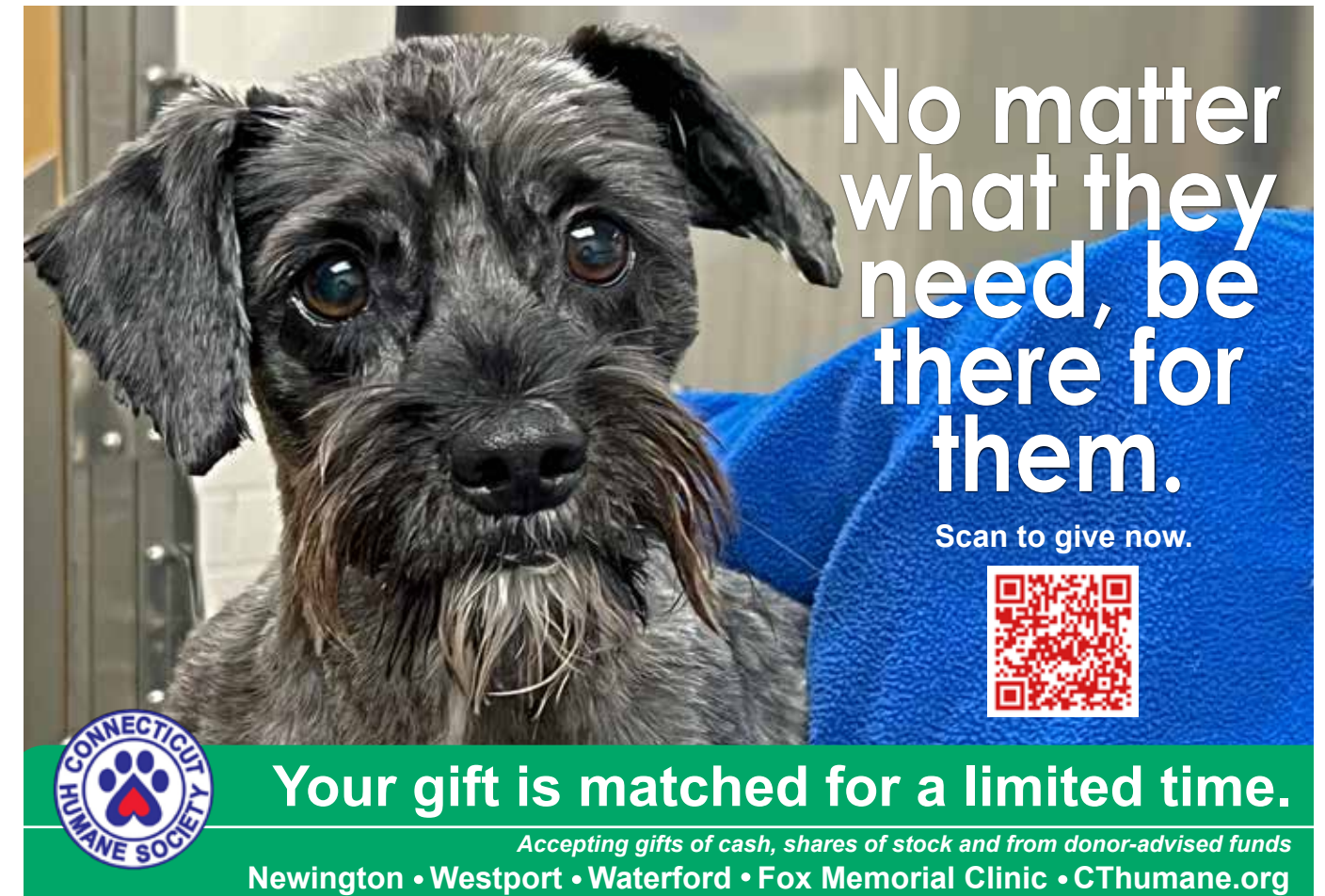
It's clear with all that he's got going on, Louganis is committed to doing good in the world and for the LGBTQ+ communities. He's used his celebrity to be heard, and it's a safe bet that he'll continue making waves. 



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# 22 CONNECTICUT SEAFOOD PLACES TO TRY IN '22



By AMY S. WHITE

Grilled, fried, baked, broiled, steamed, or raw, seafood is the go-to food of summertime.

With so much of our great state on or close enough to the shoreline, there are plenty of options to enjoy the freshest, locally caught fish and shellfish available. Here are twenty-two of the best seafood places from across the state for you to enjoy all summer long. Some are seasonal, and most have outdoor seating with water views. We've also included three recipes that show that cooking seafood at home is not the daunting task it seems to be.

**Note:** *This list was crowd-sourced, does not include chain restaurants, and does not follow any particular order.*

### **Maine Fish Market and Restaurant**

**60 Bridge Street, East Windsor.**

Maine Fish is located in one of the oldest commercial buildings in East Windsor; it dates back to the 1790s. Their most recent renovation/expansion includes a much larger dining room and beautiful outdoor eating area. The extensive menu offers seafood cooked every way and in just about any combination possible. You can also purchase local seafood at market price at their retail counter. **MUST TRY:**

**Maine Seafood Market's Famous Fried Seafood Platter of fried shrimp, pollock, whole-belly clams, scallops, and seafood salad served with a salad and two sides.**

**Mickey's Oceanic Grill**  
**119 Pitkin Street,**  
**East Hartford.**

An institution since 1953, this diner serves its seafood specialties with counter ordering and mostly outside tables. Besides some of the best fried seafood around, they serve breakfast and lunch with plenty of non-seafood options like burgers and hot dogs. Watch for specials like LobsterFest Thursday, Friday and Saturday, when lobster rolls are buy 2 save \$5, buy 4 save \$10. **MUST TRY: Fried Fish Sandwich.**

**Donahue's Clam Castle**  
**1324 Boston Post Road, Madison.**

This seasonal shoreline spot has been serving seafood-shack favorites just down the street from Hammonasset Beach for sixty years. It's BYOB and dog-friendly, with indoor and outdoor seating, and award-winning clam chowder. You might even catch a glimpse of Chef Jacques Pepin who is known to be a fan. **MUST TRY: Scallop Taco**—fried, broiled, or blackened wild-caught scallops with pico de gallo, cilantro, cabbage slaw, and lime crema.

**Saybrook Fish House—2165 Silas Deane Highway, Rocky Hill.**

At this busy restaurant in Rocky Hill, you can enjoy a complete meal of your choice of seafood entrée served with warm bread, salad, and a fresh fruit basket. Besides their dinner options, Saybrook Fish offers a lighter lunch menu, early bird specials, a children’s menu, and a lounge menu that make this a popular family dining spot. **MUST TRY:** *Surf and Turf of three baked stuffed shrimp served alongside grilled Angus sirloin.*

**Primavera Pub  
271 Newington Avenue, Hartford.**

While this Portuguese-American restaurant is not a seafood place *per se*, their seafood dishes are well-known and beloved. Clams, shrimp, cod, and other seafood options can be found in both their appetizer and entrée lists often served in flavorful wine sauces that will make you think you’re jet-setting on Portugal’s Silver Coast. **MUST TRY:** *Pasta Primavera—Sauteed shrimp and steamed clams with white wine and garlic over pasta.*

**Max Fish  
110 Glastonbury Boulevard, Glastonbury.**

For a more upscale seafood experience, visit Max Restaurant Group’s Max Fish. Their extensive raw bar is nearly unparalleled and includes sampler, hi-rise, and “skyscraper” options. Seafood is highlighted on their lunch, dinner, happy hour “shark bites,” and brunch menus, which include appetizers, entrees, and poke bowls. **MUST TRY:** *Bouillabaisse—shrimp, mussels, clams, and hake in a saffron broth with roasted fennel and tomato and saffron rouille.*

**Lenny’s Indian Head Inn  
205 South Montowese Street, Branford.**

This bustling family-owned spot is popular with locals, visitors, and boaters who flock to its outdoor deck and “boat bar” that offer a beautiful view of Sybil Marsh. From lobster bisque and clam chowder to fried and broiled seafood to hot and cold lobster rolls, Lenny’s has it all. Their



“takeout trays” are great for parties and picnics, too. **MUST TRY:** *Ultra-local Montowese Cove oysters.*

**The Place Restaurant  
901 Boston Post Road  
Guilford.**

What began with a sailor hosting an informal clambake along Route 1 has become perhaps the most unusual restaurant on our list. The Place opens for the season in May and closes in late October. Visitors sit on tree stumps around bright red painted tables while cooks roast clams, lobsters, and corn on

the cob over an 18-foot open fire pit. The a la carte menu is posted, and guests are invited to BYOB along with their own side dishes, tablecloths, and candles. A truly unique experience. **MUST TRY:** *Roast Clam Special—littleneck clams bathed in a cocktail sauce and butter mixture then roasted directly over the fire.*

**CT Chowder Co.  
268 Quinnipiac Avenue,  
North Haven.**

As the name implies, chowder is a staple at this newcomer. That said, there are

several other distinctive options on this place’s menu, including a surf and turf burger (stuffed with cheese and topped with lobster), lobster pot pie served in a bread bowl, cod fish Reuben, and specials that change weekly. **MUST TRY:** *CT Clam Chowder—a hearty mix of New England, Rhode Island, and Manhattan clam chowders.*

**Oyster Club  
13 Water Street, Mystic.**

With its zinc bar and roomy deck, Mystic’s Oyster Club delivers boat-to-table fine dining from a seasonal

menu that features locally sourced ingredients. The in-house butcher cuts sustainably and locally raised meats, and the raw bar menu features clams and oysters from CT, RI, and NY. For obvious reasons, the menu changes often. **MUST TRY:** *Oysters Rockefeller made with creamed spinach, sourdough breadcrumbs, and Finback Cheese from The Mystic Cheese Company.*

**Lenny and Joe's Fish Tale**  
86 Boston Post Road, Westbrook or  
1301 Boston Post Road, Madison.

With two locations, Lenny and Joe's is the shoreline favorite for its countless "fin-atics." The Westbrook location has both a dining room and enclosed heated porch while the one in Madison features an indoor dining room, outdoor picnic area, and a carousel whose proceeds go to charitable causes. The menus and hours vary by location, so check online before you go. **MUST TRY:** *Fried Whole Belly Clam Dinner.*

**Bill's Seafood**  
548 Boston Post Road, Westbrook.

Shoreline seafood fans gather at Bill's near the "singing" bridge to feast on seafood and more at the outside picnic tables and dining room overlooking the Patchogue River. The menu is wide-ranging and includes a steamed and raw bar as well as fried seafood platters, sandwiches, and Italian-inspired seafood entrees. Try to save room for a visit to the ice cream and gift shop. This is a cash-only restaurant. **MUST TRY:** *Bill's Own Seafood Platter with shrimp, clam strips, scallops, cod, French fries, onion rings, and cole slaw.*

**Fresh Salt**  
2 Bridge Street, Old Saybrook. Fresh Salt serves breakfast, lunch, and dinner at the Saybrook Point Resort and Marina. Diners come to enjoy local, seasonal seafood and other specialties with a breathtaking view of Long Island Sound. There is indoor and outdoor dining as well as the Fresh Salt Porch, which are the most longed-for seats. **MUST TRY:** *Lobster Pot Pie—lobster, shrimp, scallops, asparagus, carrots, leeks, tarragon, and lobster cream sauce in puff pastry.*

**Captain Scott's Lobster Dock**  
80 Hamilton Street, New London.  
Another seasonal favorite, Captain Scott's has plenty of outdoor seating in the sun or under their

large pavilion on Shaw's Cove. Fans rave about their hot lobster roll, which comes in two sizes, with plenty of lobster meat drenched in hot butter with a sprinkle of Old Bay on a perfectly soft bun. BYOB and hours, especially in spring, can change depending on the weather, so call ahead. **MUST TRY:** *Clam fritters.*

**Shell and Bones Oyster Bar and Grill**  
100 South Water Street, New Haven.

Shell and Bones offers waterfront dining amidst romantic fireplaces in historic City Point. That it is CT's only restaurant acknowledged by the James Beard Foundation for being "Committed to the goal of the Smart Catch Program" proves their dedication to serving only fresh and sustainable seafood. Their daily selection of boutique farm-to-table oysters is as dazzling as the view.

**MUST TRY:** *Alaskan black garlic cod with bok choy, bamboo tacu tacu, and ginger lemongrass broth.*

**Lobster Landing**  
152 Commerce Street, Clinton.

A seafood shack at its very core, Lobster Landing sits at a marina, is decorated with buoys, and has crushed clamshells instead of pavement. It lacks pretension as well as an actual website, but the service is fast and friendly, and the lobster rolls are rumored to be among the state's best. Dog-friendly and BYOB.

**MUST TRY:** *Lobster roll—¼ lb. hot lobster meat on a toasted sub roll with lemon and melted butter.*

**Ford's Lobster**  
15 Riverview Avenue, Noank.

What was once a small gas dock and bait shop is now a bustling seafood restaurant with both indoor and outdoor seating on the water in Noank. Ford's is open year-round (except February), is pet-friendly, BYOB, and does not accept reservations. The wait is worth it, however, for the views, the ambience, and the famous bisque bomb. **MUST TRY:** *Bisque Bomb—½ lb. hot lobster meat served in a bread bowl and topped with creamy lobster bisque.*



**S and P Oyster Restaurant and Bar**  
1 Holmes Street, Mystic.

New England meets South America at this chic hot spot on the Mystic River. The food here is perfectly seasoned, beautifully presented, and skillfully served by a top-notch staff, several of whom have been there more than a decade. Catch the scent of the wood fired grill as you savor some of Mystic's best cuisine, all with a view of the town's famous drawbridge. **MUST TRY:** *Seafood Paella—monkfish, shrimp, mussels, little neck clams, Spanish chorizo, and Bomba rice.*

**The Whelk**  
575 Riverside Avenue,  
Westport.

This seafood restaurant and bar on the Saugatuck River has an ever-changing menu featuring sustainable seafood and local produce. Find buck-a-shuck Copp's Island oysters during happy hour (starting at 4:30 Tuesday-Friday). While you're there, indulge in grilled octopus, a rarity in this state's seafood scene. **MUST TRY:** *Deviled eggs with fried oysters and pickled onions.*

**The Fish Market**  
1307 West Main Street,  
Willimantic.

Eastern CT's best retail seafood market, The Fish Market also carries prepared seafood lunches and dinners for takeout. Soups including chowder, gumbo, and bisque are available by the pint or quart. The menu also has fried seafood platters, rolls, and sides. **MUST TRY:** *Fish and chips.*



**Flanders Fish Market and Restaurant,  
22 Chesterfield Road, East Lyme.**

A second-generation, family-run business, this restaurant and retail market runs buck-a-shucks from 3-5 daily, and a \$7 fish and chip special on Tuesdays. The market carries fresh fish and shellfish, as well as offerings from the restaurant such as their lauded lobster pot pie, soups, dips, seafood salads, and their own “Tears of Joy” cocktail sauce. They do catering and clambakes too. **MUST TRY: Cappy’s Combo—crab cake, shrimp, stuffed clam, stuffed flounder, stuffed shrimp, fish filet, and bay scallops served blackened or broiled with a choice of side.**

**City Fish  
884 Silas Deane Highway,  
Wethersfield.**

Recognized as one of the best fresh fish markets in southern New England, City Fish is retail, wholesale, restaurant, and takeout counter all in one. They have been delivering the highest quality seafood products throughout the state for over 85 years. Their extensive website includes FAQs and recipes along with their vast seafood offerings. **MUST TRY: Soft Shell Crab Sandwich (available from April to August).**

**Curried Mussels with Coconut  
and Lemongrass Appetizer  
(Serves 2-4)**

Ingredients:

- ½ tablespoon olive oil**
- 1 ½ tablespoons red curry paste**
- 1 cup hot water**
- 1 stalk lemongrass, chopped**
- 1 tablespoon chopped fresh ginger**
- 1 tablespoon fish sauce**
- ½ tablespoon sugar**
- 1 13.5-ounce can light coconut milk**
- 2 pounds fresh mussels**

Directions:

Heat the olive oil in a large pot. Add the curry paste and stir to heat for about one minute. Stir in the water, then add the lemongrass, ginger, fish sauce, sugar, and coconut milk. Bring to a boil, then turn heat to low to simmer for 15 minutes. Add the mussels, stir to coat, then put a lid on the pot. Cook, covered, over low heat until all the mussels open, about five minutes. Serve with crusty bread.

**Sweet Chili and Coconut  
Corn and Shrimp Soup  
(Serves 4-6)**

Ingredients:

- 3 ears fresh corn**
- 1 tablespoon olive oil**
- 1 onion, diced**
- 2 cloves garlic, minced**
- 1 teaspoon ground coriander**
- 2 cups chicken or vegetable broth**
- 1 13.5-ounce can light coconut milk**
- 3 tablespoons sweet chili sauce**
- Juice of one lime**
- Kosher salt, to taste**
- 1 lb. cooked frozen shrimp, thawed and roughly chopped**
- Chopped cilantro for garnish**

Directions:

Shuck the corn and remove the kernels from the cob. Set aside, keeping the cobs. Heat the oil in a large pot. Add the diced onions and cook until translucent. Stir in the garlic and coriander and cook about one minute. Stir in the broth and coconut milk. Add the corn kernels and the cobs and bring to a boil over medium high heat. Lower heat and simmer for two minutes. Remove and discard the corn cobs. Add the sweet chili sauce, lime juice, and salt. Use an immersion blender to thicken slightly, then add the chopped shrimp. Garnish with chopped cilantro.

**Individual Lobster Pot Pies  
(Makes 6)**

Ingredients:

- 2 1.25-lb. lobsters**
- Water for cooking lobsters and for making stock**
- 2 tablespoons unsalted butter**
- ¼ cup minced shallots**
- ¼ cup brandy**
- 1 tablespoon flour**
- ½ cup milk**
- ½ cup heavy cream**
- 1 teaspoon kosher salt**
- 1 teaspoon dried thyme**
- ½ teaspoon dried tarragon**
- ¼ teaspoon ground nutmeg**
- ¼ teaspoons cayenne pepper**
- 1 green onion (scallion), chopped**
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste**
- 1 package Pepperidge Farm Puff Pastry Shells**

Directions:

To cook the lobster and make the stock:

Fill a large pot about two inches high with water. Add a small handful of kosher or sea salt. Bring the water to a full boil. Grasp a lobster around the abdomen, behind the claws, and lower it into the pot, head-first. Put the second lobster in the pot. Immediately cover the pot and let the lobsters steam for about 12 minutes, until outer shell is bright red and meat is white, not opaque. Remove lobsters from the pot and discard the water. Allow the lobsters to cool, then remove the meat from the shell, placing the shells back in the pot. Cut meat into bite-sized pieces and set aside in the refrigerator. Cover the lobster shells with water and bring to a boil. Simmer for twenty minutes then strain the liquid, discarding the shells. Return the stock to the heat and simmer for 2 hours until reduced to about 1 cup of stock.

To make the pot pie mixture and puff pastry shells:

Melt the butter over medium heat in a heavy saucepan. Add the shallots and cook until softened, about one minute. Add the brandy and cook until almost evaporated. Sprinkle in the flour, stir, and cook for two minutes. Add the cup of lobster stock and the milk, and whisk until smooth. Continue to cook until thickened. In the meantime, prepare the puff pastry shells according to the package directions. While the puff pastry shells are cooking, add the heavy cream, salt, thyme, tarragon, nutmeg, and cayenne pepper to the pot pie mixture and cook for 15 minutes until sauce is thick enough to coat the back of a wooden spoon. Remove from heat and add the lobster meat, chopped green onions, salt, and pepper to taste. Ladle the pot pie mixture into the cooked puff pastry shells and serve.



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THE FINAL WORD //

## Representing for Our Communities

By **REPRESENTATIVE JEFF CURREY (D)**  
State Representative 11th Assembly District

**A**lthough the Connecticut General Assembly's LGBTQ+ Caucus is small (Hey Rep. Allie Brennan!), we have proven to be mighty, again and again.

One may infer that the caucus was unofficially formed in 1991 when State Representative Joseph S. Garbarz Jr., a Bridgeport Democrat and friend, publicly announced himself to be gay, making him Connecticut's first openly gay lawmaker. Garbarz's announcement coincided with the Connecticut General Assembly's passage of legislation prohibiting

discrimination against LGBTQ+ individuals. After 18 years of failed attempts, on May 1, 1991, the Nutmeg State became the fourth state in the country to enact these protections, following Wisconsin, Massachusetts, and Hawaii. Legislative leaders acknowledged the shift in social attitudes in debating this groundbreaking bill from LGBTQ+ individuals' "worthiness" of basic human rights to the harm discrimination in any form has on society.

While the bill wasn't perfect—because, well, no bill is—and though we continue the work even today, this law began laying the rainbow bricks in Connecticut's foundation to

advance human rights both socially and legislatively. Our state's residents' and lawmakers' perspectives on LGBTQ+ issues continue to evolve, becoming increasingly more accepting and understanding and in turn, more committed to affirming and acknowledging our community and safeguarding our rights.

Today, the legislature's LGBTQ+ Caucus is 50 percent larger than it was 20 years ago. While that may sound like a win; in real numbers, with State Representative Raghib Allie-Brennan and me serving as its only openly gay members, it's grown from one person to two. Over the last eight years, I've had the privilege of helping to lead the efforts that have

## “Today, the legislature's LGBTQ+ Caucus is 50 percent larger than it was 20 years ago.”

continued to build the LGBTQ+ Caucus' evolving voice, growing louder and more powerful with every election cycle, but we are still only the beginning.

When it comes to safeguarding basic human rights, Connecticut has broken its steady habits to become more welcoming and safer for LGBTQ+ folks, no matter their age, socioeconomic situation, or family makeup. In 2017, Connecticut banned the practice of Conversion Therapy. In 2018, the state enacted a law to ensure the fair treatment of trans individuals who are incarcerated, enabling inmates whose gender identity differs from their assigned sex at birth to be treated in a manner that is consistent with their gender identity. In 2019, the governor signed legislation that ended the use of Gay and Transgender Panic Defense in criminal proceedings, which historically has been used to justify violence against LGBTQ+ individuals. We also made significant strides that year to expand access to health care. The biennial state budget act established the country's first statutorily created LGBTQ Health and Human Services Network to make recommendations about how Connecticut can improve the

delivery of health and human services for this community, both young and seasoned. We also enacted a law that enables minors at risk of exposure to the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) to access preventative and prophylactic (PrEP) interventions without parental or guardian consent.

During the 2021 legislative session, the caucus, which then included former state Senator Alex Kasser, our little caucus of three successfully shepherded the historical modernization of the Connecticut Parentage Act (CPA) through the legislative process, ensuring all CT children—regardless of the marital status, gender, or sexual orientation of their parents—have equal access to the security of a legal parent-child relationship.

The CPA bill wasn't the only LGBTQ+-focused bill Governor Lamont signed in 2021. He also signed legislation to expand the definition of "Veteran" to allow individuals who were separated from military service under the discriminatory "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy to qualify for state veterans' benefits, prohibit life insurance discrimination based on someone's sexual orientation or gender identity, and include LGBTQ


and SOGIE studies in a model curriculum to be made available for grades K-8.

These were milestones for the Constitution State, but when we look at 2021 nationwide, it's clear Connecticut was among the outliers. More than 250 bill proposals were introduced across the United States with the intent to erode protections for the LGBTQ+ community with a vengeful emphasis on our trans friends. That year was deemed to be among the worst years for LGBTQ+ legislation. In light of recent events in Texas and signing of Florida's "Don't Say Gay" bill, 2022 isn't looking any better. But we will stand our ground here in CT to ensure our kids, our residents, and our rights are protected.

As I reflect on our history, especially the past several years, I'm proud of how far our state has come and continues to lead by example. We should not have to fight for basic human rights, but every year we do, and this work would not happen if we didn't have allies and accomplices inside and outside of our community. And it is a true privilege to have so many on both sides of the aisle, within the General Assembly...and it makes our caucus of two mighty.

So long as violence in any form exists against the LGBTQ+ community and other marginalized groups, our work will not be done. Like the work of the 1991 General Assembly, our work yesterday, today, and tomorrow will set the foundation



for the generations that come after us, who will bring it further than we could ever imagine. 



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