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# Harvey Fierstein

ON LIFE, LOVE,  
LGBTQ+ HISTORY,  
AND HIS NEW  
MEMOIR





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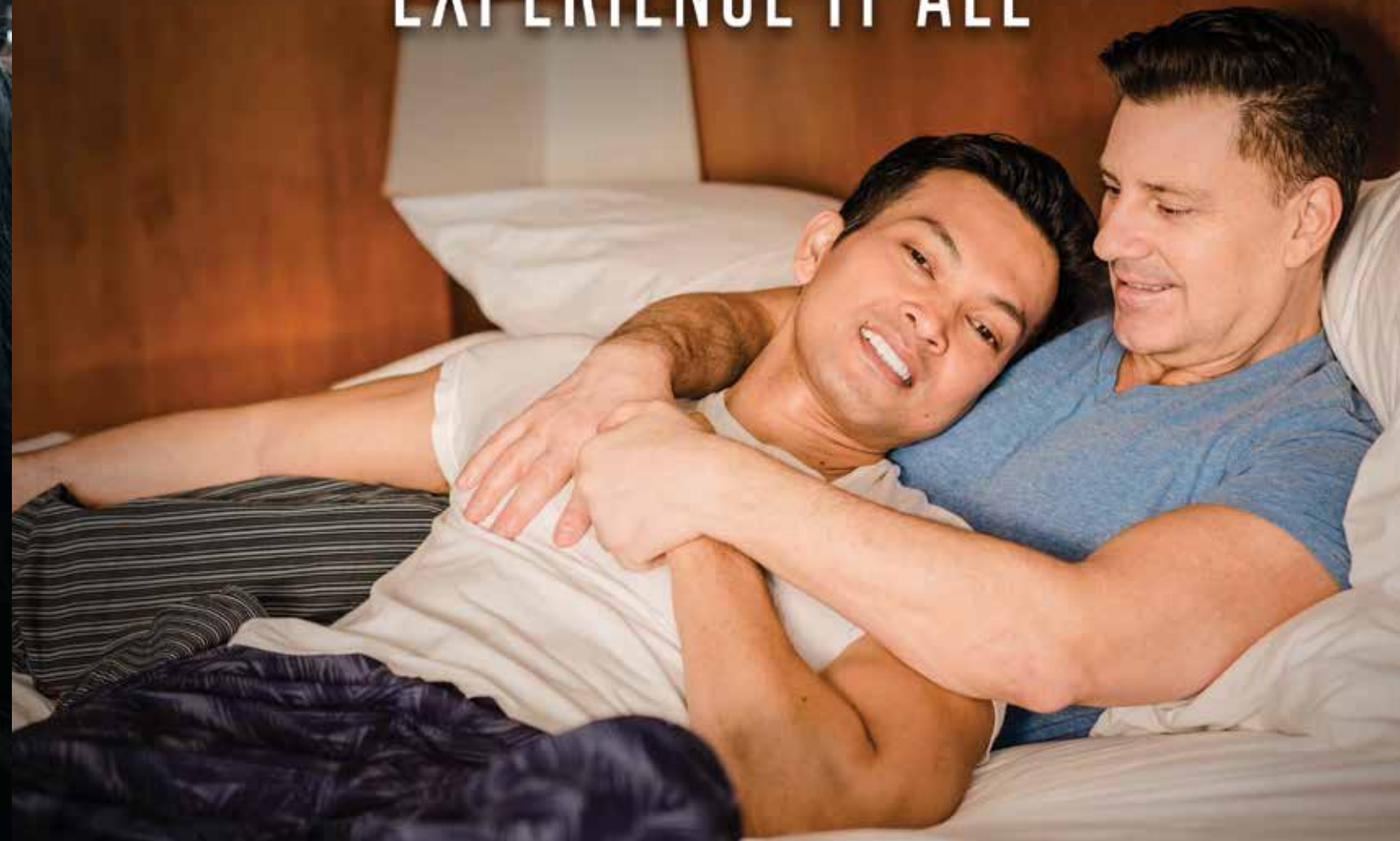
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## EDITOR'S NOTE //



Happy Spring!

I'm going to go out on a limb here and suggest that *all* of us are particularly grateful for the arrival of spring this year. As the pandemic continues to recede and warmer weather brings us out of our hibernation, we are, as Dickens wrote, "recalled to life."

There is plenty of life in the pages of this issue. We celebrate weddings, look at the opportunities and challenges of aging, hear a great theater story from Broadway star Claybourne Elder, and catch up with playwright Paula Vogel, just to get you started.

Our fashion maven Brian Scott Lipton picks up the trend in bags for everyone as both stylish and practical. Celebrity chef Bobby Flay talks about his new venture...pet food. And as you get out, if you've got a taste for tacos, you'll want to plan trips to the top 22 sources in the state put together by Amy White. And there's so much more.

On the Voice Out Loud podcast, we hear from Elder about the Broadway hit "Company" and his unlikely transition to food influencer, and our own Dawn Ennis has a terrific, funny, and heartfelt conversation with Jeopardy champ Amy Schneider. And there's much more to come, as well as on our Voice Out Loud TV show.

Finally, it seems that COVID-19 is not quite done with us yet, so we've moved our Connecticut Voice Honors to September 17 at Foxwoods. There is great stuff in the works for that, and we hope you'll make plans to join us. More information is available in the magazine and on ctvoice.com.

Thanks to all of you who have reached out to me directly. I really enjoy hearing your stories, insights, comments, and suggestions. Please keep it up as we continue to build our CT Voice community.

The quote we chose for this month is a personal favorite by Shakespeare from *As You Like It*. Now get out and enjoy the spring. That is, as soon as you're done reading this issue.

*Chris*

Christopher Byrne, Editor  
chris@ctvoice.com

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“And therefore take the present time,  
With a hey, and a ho,  
and a hey nonino,  
For love is crownèd  
with the prime  
In springtime, the  
only pretty ring time,  
When birds do sing,  
hey ding a ding, ding;  
Sweet lovers love  
the spring.”

— William Shakespeare

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*For those special memories*

A photograph of two men on a rocky outcrop overlooking a forest. One man is kneeling and holding a ring box, while the other stands looking down at him. The scene is set against a backdrop of evergreen trees and a hazy sky.

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# CONTRIBUTORS //



## FRANK RIZZO

Frank Rizzo wrote our cover story on Harvey Fierstein (Page 44) and chatted with playwright Paula Vogel (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 followed the trend in bags for our fashion story (Page 36) and profiled award-winning actor Marsha Mason (Page 16). 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 talked with seniors around the state for our piece on aging LGBTQ+ people. (Page 56) 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.



## STAN GODLEWSKI

Stan Godlewski is a photojournalist who has worked for magazines and newspapers for 30 years covering news, sports, features and celebrities. His favorites thing to photograph is his next thing to photograph.



## CARLA TEN EYCK

Carla Ten Eyck is a Queer Hartford CT native who focuses on storytelling, inclusivity and joy. She has been photographing weddings, events and families for 20 years. She is a two time published author and a podcaster and loves sharing stories.



## JANE LATUS

Jane Latus covers health and politics. She found out what's new at Equality Connecticut (Page 19) and explored Middlesex Health's commitment to cancer screening LGBTQ+ community (Page 52). She also wrote our weddings story. (Page 70) 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.



## ASHLEY RODGERS

Ashley Rodgers, an ex-pat herself, outlines the opportunities of living abroad. (Page 26) Ashley is a former marketing director and an award-winning network television producer and documentary filmmaker from NYC and LA. In 2010, she moved to Cuenca, Ecuador for "a new adventure" and found her next career passion as a real estate agent, founding the company, Ecuador At Your Service (ecuadoratyourerivce.com). She also continues with freelance writing and production.



## RENEE DININO

Renee DiNino is our resident pet maven and wrote the piece on Bobby Flay and his new line of cat food. (Page 90) She is the director of community affairs for iHeartMedia, the midday host on The River 105.9 and host of an hour-long syndicated talk show on all CT iHeartRadio stations. She also appears weekly on WFSB Channel 3's "Better Connecticut." An avid animal lover and advocate, she and her husband Sal have a German Shepherd, Luke.



## 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.

## WHAT'S THE BUZZ?

# "Power" and "Joy" At Equality Connecticut

**E**quality is vital, but joy must come first.

So says the new community-based group Equality Connecticut, "dedicated to advancing LGBTQIA+ equality and fostering a sense of queer joy and belonging in every corner of Connecticut," as the organization's announcement states.

The group has identified its themes as "Power" and "Joy".

"We see these two priority areas as deeply connected. Our power comes directly from our joy. It is only by being together, by truly seeing each other, and by sharing our experiences that political change becomes possible," says the announcement.

Therefore, social events will be a big priority. "Stay tuned," says Matt Blinstrubas, long-time LGBTQ+ and HIV activist and member of the advisory board. Blinstrubas is also running the group's daily activities until staff is hired.

The board's other immediate goal is to listen, he says. "We want to be really intentional in building out a truly community led policy center that is very deliberative and intersectional. So this year is really about knowledge building, research, and dialogue on a future policy platform, while finding ways to rally to work already in progress."

Under its "power" focus, the group's plans are: "rigorous research and advocacy on the needs of LGBTQ+ people; mobilizing the collective



voice of LGBTQ+ people to advance laws and policies necessary to protect our community; mobilizing the LGBTQ+ community to meaningfully show up in solidarity for social change; increasing public and private resources for LGBTQ+ organizations and services, and supporting a leadership pipeline of young LGBTQ+

social justice leaders."

And in the "joy" category: "developing initiatives, events, and special projects to bring LGBTQ+ people together to socialize and experience joy; celebrating our histories of LGBTQIA+ people in Connecticut; supporting LGBTQ+ arts, culture, and creative expression, and educating the public on the lives and experiences of LGBTQ+ people in Connecticut."

The group says that "Equality Connecticut stands on the shoulders of countless activists and decades of organizing and positive change in Connecticut."

The board invites anyone to write [meeting@eqct.org](mailto:meeting@eqct.org) to schedule a discussion, either one-on-one or at a bar, place of worship, barber shop, etc.



—Jane Latus



Advisory board member Matt Blinstrubas

**In addition to Blinstrubas, the advisory board includes:**

**Kia Baird**, job developer, president of the New London County Section of the National Council of Negro Women and president of OutCT

**Ryan Borowy**, organizer of the Instagram live event CT Stands Against Police Brutality

**Alberto Cifuentes**, social work team leader for Vot-ER's Healthy Democracy Team, doctoral candidate and instructor at the University of Connecticut School of Social Work

**Stefan Keller**, queer organizer, baker, facilitator, and amateur Instagram meteorologist

**Sarah Locke**, executive director of the Connecticut Democratic Party

**Gretchen Raffa**, vice president of public policy, advocacy and organizing at Planned Parenthood of Southern New England

**Sana Shah**, chief of staff of Connecticut Voices for Children

**Bilal Tajildeen**, manager of membership and culture for the Connecticut Council for Philanthropy.

## Broadway Magic ... In Real Life

It's a Broadway story that if you saw it in a show or movie you'd think, "Well, that couldn't happen in real life." And yet, it really happened to Claybourne Elder...and it changed the course of his life.

Today, Elder, now a star on stage and screen, is in the hit, gender-reversed revival of Sondheim's *Company* on Broadway as Andy, the handsome but no-so-bright flight attendant. He is featured in the HBO Max series *The Gilded Age*. Fifteen years ago, however, Elder was a hopeful actor, and on a visit to New York was only able to afford standing room on Broadway.

As he tells it, "I saw a show, and a stranger walked up to me after the show and said, 'You looked like you were having such a good time, here's two hundred dollars, go buy yourself a ticket to *Sweeney Todd* with Patti LuPone, and that was it."

"He didn't want anything, and I was like this kid from Utah, and I was 'uh-okay.' Can I take a picture with you? So, we took a picture, he said goodbye, and that was it. I went and bought a ticket." The production starred LuPone and Michael Cerveris, and it was directed by John Doyle.

Fast forward to a move to New York, and in 2008 Elder was cast in the Sondheim musical *Road Show*, directed by John Doyle and starring Michael Cerveris. So, as Elder explains, "the next time these people worked together, I was in the room with them." Elder would go on to work with John Doyle again in a revival of *Allegro* at Classic Stage, for which he received

enthusiastic reviews. He would star in the Sondheim show *Passion* at Signature in Washington, DC, and receive a Drama Desk nomination for his role in the Tennessee Williams play *One Arm*. And, he adds, there was no way his mysterious benefactor would have ever known how his career had taken off from that chance encounter.

COVID-19 happened, and Elder got sick, and he decided that since he had no way of thanking the man who had given him that gift, when the production resumed, would buy two tickets to *Company* and give them away on Instagram, which he did. At the same time, he posted the picture from 15 years ago. He picks up the story, "All of a sudden, a guy reaches out to me and says he would like to give me more money so I could buy more tickets to give away. Then my Venmo account got leaked, and all these people were giving me money to buy tickets to give away, and now I'm giving away about 60 tickets to the show."

As wonderful as that is, the story doesn't stop there. Elder's friend, actor Douglas Sills, sees the picture, and contacts Elder saying, "Contact me right away." Not knowing what the matter might be, he did, and Sills told him, "I know that guy. I can connect you." From there, a Facetime call put Elder and his benefactor together. "I got to tell him fifteen years ago you walked up to me outside a theater... and he immediately started crying. I started crying, and I got to tell him he actually changed my life. And now because of what he did, 60 people are going to get to see *Company* for



Claybourne Elder

free, people who couldn't afford theater otherwise. That's the only stipulation is that you couldn't afford to go. And now we're in constant contact, and I'm going to buy him tickets to the show. It's one of the strangest coincidences, and one of the most heartwarming things that has ever happened to me."

COVID-19 did stop the production of *Company* for nearly 18 months, and during that time, Elder got to be home with his husband and his now 4-year-old son. They restored a house, and through a chance through a set of seemingly random events, Elder became a social media food influencer and spokesperson for the Dash brand of kitchen equipment.

Yet he was thrilled to return to Broadway where *Company* is playing again to packed houses—and with Patti LuPone headlining the cast. And so, it all comes full circle in the kind of story that well, backstage legends are made of.



You can hear my entire conversation with Claybourne Elder, and hear this and many other great stories on the *Voice Out Loud Podcast*, which you can find on [ctvoice.com](http://ctvoice.com) and on most major podcast networks.

—Christopher Byrne



Claybourne Elder starring in the hit Broadway revival of *Company*. Photo by Ahmed Klink

# What Drives Paula Vogel

## PANDEMIC PROJECTS ABOUND AS HER PULITZER PRIZE-WINNING PLAY FINALLY MAKES IT TO BROADWAY

Sometimes the road to Broadway can take many turns. In the spring of 2020, Paula Vogel's Pulitzer Prize-winning play, *How I Learned to Drive*, was in rehearsal and set to open in New York when theaters across the country suddenly closed due to the pandemic.

But would this challenging play about sexual abuse—which took more than two decades to mount a Broadway production return when theaters reopened?

On April 19, the production will open on Broadway starring Mary Louise Parker and David Morse both back from the play's Obie-winning, off-Broadway production 25 years ago, staged by its original director Mark Brokaw. After a long career of being one of the leading female American playwrights, *How I Learned to Drive* is only Vogel's second play to make it to Broadway. The other was *Indecent*, which also began its life at the off-Broadway Vineyard theater before moving to the main stem.

"In many ways, I was grateful for this time," says Vogel of the pandemic pause from her home in Wellfleet on Cape Cod, where she lives with her wife, author Anne Fausto-Sterling.

For Vogel, the time gave her the chance to work on a wave of projects, including producing a dozen works on-line by other playwrights in the "Bard at the Gate" project for the McCarter Theatre Center in Princeton, N.J.

Another was writing her first memoir, *Travels Without Carl*, based on her cross-country



How she learned to drive. Photo courtesy Paula Vogel

road trip when she visited women's bars through the Deep South and West, following the death of her brother from AIDS in 1988. She also continued her playwriting workshops on-line, including a one specifically for veterans. Vogel, an acclaimed playwriting professor, mentor, and theatrical guru (with many students going on to earn Pulitzer Prizes and Tony Awards of their own) is also halfway through a book on the art of playwriting.

Not enough? Waiting in the wings is a project for directors Marianne Elliott (*Company*) and Steven Hoggett (*War Horse*), based on the novel *They Shoot Horses, Don't They?* which was made into a Sydney Pollack film in 1969 starring Jane Fonda. And, oh yes, she even started a new play. Too early to talk about that one, she says.

### PEDOPHILIA REVISITED

Right now, Vogel is focused on the Broadway bow of *How I Learned to Drive* and is curious to see how this provocative story would be received in the context of a much

he sexually molests after he becomes her stepfather.

"The benefit of making a drama from a young girl's point of view is that it's something that we process publicly as a community," says Vogel. "So my question was: Do we, as survivors, gain more agency and more power if we can work our way towards empathy for the predators? That was the major question for me, and I thought about it for 15 or 20 years before I felt I had the ability to tell the story. I had traveled far enough away from the trauma to reach that point of empathy."

The play opened off-Broadway in 1997 in at a time when discussions of sexual predators and pedophilia were rarely publicly discussed, and when they were, it didn't go well for the victims.

Vogel points to Anita Hill who made headlines during the confirmation hearings of U.S. Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas, accusing him of sexual harassment when he was her supervisor. Since then there have been countless stories of sexual predatory actions by clergy, coaches, politicians and educators, and by such high-profile men as Jeffrey Epstein, Harvey Weinstein and Donald Trump. Often the victims speaking out are the ones who are attacked because of the lapses of time until they step out to tell their stories.

"That's the thing in revisiting trauma," says Vogel. "Like the question of why did it take Christine Blasey Ford so long to come forward [against the nomination of Brett Kavanaugh when he was a nominee

different time.

The play centers on a Li'l Bit, a woman who tells the story of the complex relationship between herself and her aunt's charming husband, Uncle Peck, who sexually abuses her in this memory play that runs backwards her teenage years to her pre-adolescence.

Ben Brantley of *The New York Times* wrote in his review of the original production of Vogel's "clear-eyed empathy in portraying the incalculable damage done by damaged people."

Vogel says she wrote the play because she wanted to tell her own story, "But I couldn't tell it directly back then of my own uncle." When the play premiered in the '90s she promised her mother that she wouldn't say it was autobiographical.

Vogel says she became fascinated with the Vladimir Nabokov novel *Lolita* and the author's portrayal of the character of Humbert Humbert, a man who becomes obsessed with a 12-year-old girl whom

for the U.S. Supreme Court]. There is a need to let your intimates know and then trying to get beyond it. But there also comes a time when it's your responsibility to make it public. I'm very curious to see how an audience responds today to the play today.

### THEATER CHANGED BY THE PANDEMIC

"How can we not come back into the theater after what we've all gone through and not have a different perspective?" asks Vogel. "The isolation that we're all feeling [due to the pandemic] is something Li'l Bit—and all of us—have. When we're burying all our sorrows, secrets, and wounds, we feel that isolation. We're only going to process it by coming forward and being with other people. So, I am hoping *How I Learned to Drive* tells us we are not alone, that no one is facing this alone, that you can tell your secrets and what you're bearing to other people, and it makes it lighter."

The theatrical landscape has changed, too, she says, because of the #MeToo stories, Black Lives Matter movement and women's renewed calls for equality in the workplace.

"Though hardly a few seasons go by without another revival of a play by David Mamet, it's very rare for women to get revivals during their lifetime."

But she notes this season seen significant change for female writers. There are revivals of Adrienne Kennedy's *Ohio State Murders* and Ntozake Shange's *for colored girls who have considered suicide/when the rainbow is enuf*; Lynn Nottage's *Intimate Apparel* is re-crafted as a chamber opera; and Alice Childress's *Trouble in Mind* finally made it to Broadway decades after her death.

The pandemic has accelerated change when it comes to virtual connections in the theater.



Playwright and mentor. Photo courtesy Paula Vogel

"We've been very small-minded about this," she says. "I feel we've been insisting on how superior and unique live performances are, and that's true. But the notion of digital theatre just being 'heads in a box' isn't true anymore.

"For the last 19 years I've lived in a small fishing village and in the dead of winter I have been able, should I wish, to walk to a small theatre and watch the Metropolitan Opera [live and on an HD screen]. Is it as wonderful as being there in person? Well, it's different.

"If only we had embraced broadcasting theatre the way, for example, baseball and football do. Is watching it on screen a different experience than sitting in a stadium in freezing cold weather surrounded by thou-

sands of people? Of course it is. But would we have the accessibility to sports without that broadcast? By insisting theater only be live is making it inaccessible and unaffordable. We're not getting the diversity of choices out there because we're insisting that it can be only live. This is a completely wrong-headed way to go. In the arts, supply creates demand. We have been cutting off the supply by insisting that it be live."

There's one major change, however, that concerns her.

"As a long time out writer who just turned 70," Vogel notes a striking unawareness by Generation Z and Millennials of the LGBTQ+ history that came before them.

"It might not be a permanent state," she says. "But with-

out the knowledge of the struggles that came before them, younger people in our community may not be aware of how transitory our rights can be. We need vigilance in terms of our voting rights and Black Lives Matter. These aren't just someone else's struggles. These are our struggles, too. Our world right now is turning and I'm very worried about our status as citizens."

*How I Learned to Drive* begins performances March 29 at the Samuel J. Friedman Theatre, produced by Manhattan Theater Club. Tickets from \$79-\$299 (premium seats) are available through [telecharge.com](https://telecharge.com).

—Frank Rizzo



## Moving In Together? The Importance of Protecting Yourself

In the last issue, we talked about the potential pitfalls of living together if you're not married. (There are pitfalls even if you are, but that's another topic altogether.) In this column we'll talk about things you can do to protect yourself and your assets in the event that a relationship ends.



Attorney Ted Levine

As I noted in the previous column, it may seem a bit unromantic when you are in the midst of the excitement of living together to focus on the financial or business aspects of a relationship, but unfortunately, I've seen what happens when couples don't take care of these issues. Trust me, you don't want to end up in costly and lengthy litigation. In any relationship, clarity is a benefit and provides a strong foundation for growth over time. If you set yourself and your partner up with honesty and respect for one another and an appreciation of what you each bring to the relationship, that's as important as your romance.

The first thing you'll want to

do is create a clear, written partnership agreement. You'll want to review it with a lawyer to ensure that it's binding and enforceable. This will cover things like assets each party brings into the relationship, rights and responsibilities of cohabitation, and how mutual assets will be divided should the relationship end. You can update this document as needed and circumstances change if, for example, there are children, and you want to provide for them. An important consideration is the relatively recent development as to how to deal with pets in a breakup. There are reports of couples spending thousands of dollars to litigate who gets a pet after a relationship ends, including visitation rights. These and other issues you may not be thinking about at the outset could come back to bite you (pun intended) later on.

The two most important areas for you to have absolute clarity are real property and finances. If one party owns real estate and is the sole source of funds to purchase and support that property, the other party should not be put on the deed. If the relationship ended, the other party could bring a partition proceeding and be awarded half the property even if they had not contributed a cent. (Issues of survivorship and estate planning will be addressed in our next column.) If there are going to be monetary contributions toward the mortgage on the property, the owning party should create a lease for the other party so that it's clear any such payments are rent and not towards

an ownership interest. In addition, the parties should also document all expenses paid to maintain or renovate the property with a clear understanding in writing that such contributions do not create an entitlement of ownership. Similarly, shared ongoing expenses, such as utilities, should be well-documented.

You may also want to consider how to handle "in-kind" contributions. For example, if the non-owning partner does a lot of work on the house (improvements rather than maintenance), you'll want to consider how to value and account for that. In one breakup case I was involved in, the non-owning partner claimed that he was owed for cleaning and caretaking while the owning partner was working in his career. Ultimately, this argument was rejected because the non-owning partner benefitted from the maintenance, and that effort would be expended in any living situation. Though this might seem obvious, it's the type of argument a lawyer might make in a contested breakup.

As far as finances are concerned, over and above what you stipulate in your partnership agreement, it's a good idea to keep separate bank and investment accounts and keep good records. Many couples create a joint checking account for shared expenses. Each party can contribute the same amount, or you can provide otherwise in your partnership agreement. Make sure that you keep accurate records of what that joint money is used for and clearly

stipulate in your agreement the implications of such contributions.

Many LGBTQ+ couples also work together. This is another area that requires a clearly structured agreement. For example, if one partner owns a business and the other works for it, you'll want to create an employment contract or partnership agreement that clearly defines the ownership arrangement. This is to avoid claims of "constructive trust". In the marital or cohabitation context, constructive trusts have been imposed when the party seeking this relief has demonstrated a transfer of funds or expenditure of effort, in reliance upon a promise, over and above that which could normally be attributed to the give and take of the relationship. While the mechanism of a constructive trust is not to be employed to bring about a judicially coerced community property law, nevertheless, it is an available equitable device, in actions between former partners, when the requisite elements have been proven.

The goal of all this is not to scare you but to encourage you to go into a life partnership with clear parameters and expectations. As your relationship grows and develops, you may want to make changes, and you can always do that. Still, the process of developing these agreements and safeguards can be beneficial as well, encouraging you to talk clearly and forthrightly about expectations. And that's a great foundation for a relationship. ♡

—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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## Marsha Mason Has Found Her Calling

For more than five decades, Marsha Mason has triumphed as an actress in every medium, earning four Oscar nominations and two Golden Globes for her film work, an Emmy nomination, and endless accolades for her stage work, which includes plays by Tennessee Williams, Terrence McNally, and Harold Pinter

A longtime resident of New Mexico, Mason moved to Litchfield County in 2019 and is finally working on her new home turf. This April, she brings her talents to Hartford Stage, where she will co-direct and star in their production of *Lost in Yonkers*, written by Mason's late ex-husband Neil Simon.

She recently spoke to *Connecticut Voice* about why she relocated, her reasons for working on this play, and why she has found fulfillment in becoming a director.

**V: Why did you choose to move to Connecticut after your time in New Mexico?**

**MM:** I chose it to come back east after 20 years because I really wanted to focus on working in theater; I love everything about it—from the process to the sense of community. But because I had spent all those years in a rural area, I was indelibly attached to nature, which is one reason Connecticut made sense. And I have a lot of close friends in the general area of where I live now. So first, I rented a barn on my friend Jack O'Brien's property and then I found this hayfield



Marsha Mason. Photo by Rob Lang

where I was able to build this house. I just love everything about it!

**V: How did the pandemic change your life and your thinking?**

**MM:** It made me want to focus even more on just doing theater. In New Mexico, I built a business selling medicinal herbs, and I had thought about starting another business, but I

realize I'm not sure I want to split my time doing more than one thing. I want to simplify my life. And because the world is so uncertain, it made it even more important for me to find what's within.

So, I do a lot of meditation. I think it's so important to just create time for ourselves and tune out the outside world.

**V: Even though *Lost in Yonkers* was written by Neil, this is your first experience with this play. Tell me about playing Bella?**

**MM:** First off, it's really beautiful writing. And as you get older, it's harder to get challenged as an actor. I feel like I really have a lot to offer at this point, but so many people don't think about what older people possess, such as wisdom, experience, and a history of moral living. Other cultures are much better at revering their elders.

The part of the grandmother, who I play, is just so wonderful. And because of all the migration and immigration issues that are brought up in the play (Grandma is a German immigrant), there's a kind of prescience in doing this now. And there's also the lesson in the play of the need to have warmth in your family and the need to be loved, which matters to me. Grandma is tough, and in preparing I thought a lot about my



Mason starred in Terrence McNally's *Fire and Air* in 2018 Marsha Mason, John Glover, Douglas Hodge, Marin Mazzie. Photo by Joan Marcus

maternal grandmother from Lithuania who was a lot like her.

**V: Was there a specific reason you wanted to also direct the play?**

**MM:** I wanted to direct it to make sure the material had depth. With Neil's work, too often people just go for the laughs. But I am so grateful to have Rachel Alderman co-directing because I need someone to direct me. And finally, we have an all-female

creative staff, which is so exciting. We have to find more work for women. The parity is still not there.


**V: How does being an actor influence your directing?**

**MM:** I think one thing I bring is that I understand what the actor is going through. I understand how to help them when they're stuck, or when they need to play. I think a lot of the success I had in *Cinderella Liberty*,

was because I was directed by Mark Rydell, who was an actor.

Also, the 20 years of managing a working farm and handling all these men working for me, and then becoming an entrepreneur. That all means I can make decisions quickly easily and quickly. I am not an ambivalent person. That really helps in directing.

**V: So, we'll see you directing more, especially in Connecticut?**

**MM:** I really hope this is beginning of ongoing relationship with Hartford Stage. At the end of the day, I've discovered I find directing more fulfilling than anything else I've done. I feel like I am a big engine, and I am firing on all pistons! 

**Lost in Yonkers runs from April 7- May 1 at Hartford Stage. Find complete show information at [hartfordstage.org](http://hartfordstage.org).**

—Brian Scott Lipton





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## WHAT'S THE BUZZ?

### Meet Leah Juliett: Pageant Queen, Poet, Activist and Author

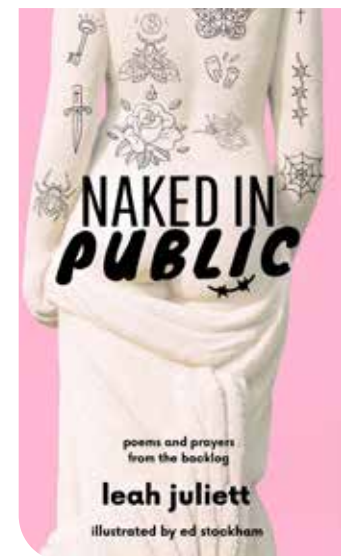
Leah Juliett turned 25 just about a month ago, and the queer, nonbinary native of Vernon, Tolland and Wolcott already has accomplished more than most of us do in a lifetime, including starting and running an international nonprofit, March Against Revenge Porn.

As *CT Voice* reported in June 2021, they were the first nonbinary area contestant in the history of the Miss USA pageant. But even that trailblazing moment is just one of many major distinctions for Juliett, including internships at the state capitol and for a congresswoman as well as work writing for Senator Chuck Schumer. It was not long before they found their voice as an activist, fighting human trafficking, gun violence, domestic violence, cyber violence and LGBTQ+ rights.

Because of their activism, *Glamour* magazine named them college student of the year, L'Oreal Paris recognized



Leah Juliett



them as A Woman of Worth, the *Advocate* magazine chose them as its Champion of Pride, the George H.W. Bush Points of Light Foundation selected them as A Daily Point of Light, Free Mom Hugs hailed them as a National Hero, GLAAD honored them as a Rising Star, Delta Airlines awarded them its Accelerating Acceptance Grant, and the NLGJA, The Association of LGBTQ+ Journalists, recognized them with its award for Excellence in Student Journalism.

Juliett graduated from Western Connecticut State University in 2018 with an honors degree in political science and the goal of becoming the first nonbinary legislator in Connecticut. Now, Juliett has published their first book, a collection of poems and prayers that got its start as an internet post, titled *Naked in Public*.

"I started writing *Naked in Public* as a young college graduate working as a writer in the United States

Senate," Juliett told *CT Voice*. They described their self-published book in an Instagram post as featuring "notes on mental health, queerness, fatness, trauma, violence, and gender."

"I was suffering deeply from depression and suicidal ideation and writing about my experiences was my only lifeline," they said, having suffered unimaginable trauma when photos of their naked body were circulated on the internet. "As a victim of revenge porn and child sexual exploitation, my whole life has been a series of experiences being 'naked in public,' but to me, being truly naked means being vulnerable about all of the grief, strife, and hardship you've experienced without fear and with abandon. That's what I have tried to do in *Naked in Public*."

They've been talking about their experience since 2019, in the first of two powerful TedTalks. Now, in her book, she writes frankly, "I am more than this."

"Writing *Naked in Public* and unveiling the darkness I've experienced kept me alive during my suicidal ideation, and I hope that reading it will help other young, queer, trans folks to realize that they are not alone in their hardships."

*Naked in Public* is available at *Barnes and Noble's* website. Follow Leah Juliett on Instagram at @leahjuliett and at her website [leahjuliett.com](http://leahjuliett.com).

—Dawn Ennis

## SEXUAL HEALTH & ADVANCES IN PREP: HGLHC is an Important Community Member



Staying at the forefront of sexual education and health is the goal of the Hartford Gay and Lesbian Health Collective (HGLHC), an important resource and member of the community since 1983 when it was founded by volunteer healthcare workers. They have been treating and supporting the community since then, including staying on top of such recent developments as advances in PrEP for reducing the risk of HIV infection through sexual contact.

In December of 2020, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approved the drug Apretude for pre-exposure prophylaxis (aka PrEP) to prevent sexually acquired HIV among high-risk populations. The drug is designed to be administered initially in two doses one month apart and then every two months thereafter.

According to the FDA, the safety and efficacy of Apretude to reduce the risk of

acquiring HIV were evaluated in two randomized, double-blind trials that compared Apretude to Truvada, a once daily oral medication for HIV PrEP. The FDA found that the injectable drug was 69 percent more effective than Truvada daily PrEP pills in reducing HIV transmission among cisgender men and transgender women, and 90 percent more effective among cisgender women. (Truvada pills have been shown to be lower the risk of sexual transmission of HIV by 99 percent, so the effectiveness of the injection is greater than pills.)

This is good news for many reasons, according to Kim Adamski who is the HIV prevention specialist for HGLHC. She notes, "the appeal of this is that it can be helpful for folks who don't have great access to medical services.

Adamski does say that PrEP is expensive. Without insurance, pills are several hundred dollars a month, and the injectable version can cost as much as \$3,700 per dose, but

not a lot of insurance plans are covering it yet, unlike pills. Adamski says the HGLHC has many assistance programs, so most people are able to get the drugs (whether pills or injectable) for no, or very little, out-of-pocket expense, and the center provides it after an intake and screening process that ensures that a client is getting the right medicine, and the right insurance coverage or financial assistance.

Yet, whatever choices one makes for their sexual health and PrEP, Adamski and other sexual health professionals strongly advised that people still practice safe sex, which means use of condoms. PrEP offers no protection against other STIs.

Beyond PrEP, HGLHC is a resource and care provider in Hartford. Located at 1841 Broad Street near Trinity, the center runs STI clinics and provides all kinds of sexual health care. Adamski says, that gay men make up the largest cohort that uses the center, but they also serve lesbians, bisexuals, and, yes, even straight people.

"Sometimes people come to us because they just like it better. I like to think that we have a nice, accepting atmosphere, and we get a lot of positive feedback about that." Trans people, in particular, appreciate the care they get, and they might feel uncomfortable going to an OB GYN in a very gendered environment.

Education is a big part of Adamski's role at HGLHC. Though most of the center's clients are adults, she does do outreach to kids. "We have a TikTok for enriching younger folks, and that's really fun.

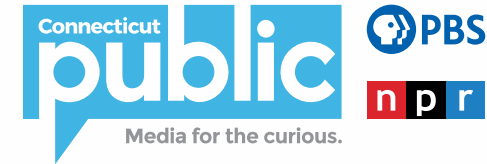
I make a fool of myself every day to teach kids." One of her most widely viewed videos was about a female condom, and while some people are critical, many others comment that they never got this information in their sex ed classes, and it's invaluable to them. She also posts an "Ask Kim" column on the HGLHC website, where people can ask questions confidentially.

When asked about the pushback in other part of the country about sex ed, Adamski gets somewhat frustrated. She says there is data that shows young people who get comprehensive sex education actually delay their first sexual experience. "So, when people worry that we're going to create 'sex maniacs' if we teach them about sex, that's absolutely not true."

For parents or adults who interact with children—and who may get some questions that might be offputting if they're unprepared—Adamski recommends the book *Talk to Me First* by Deborah M. Hoffman. She says, "It's about providing sex education basically form the time a child is able to understand it in an age-appropriate way."

For those looking to find out more about PrEP, injectable PrEP or any issues related to sexual health, the open, accepting people of HGLHC are dedicated to helping. Their motto—with which Adamski signs off every post—is "Be well, be yourself." These are the words Adamski and her colleagues live by, and the community is better for that.

—Christopher Byrne

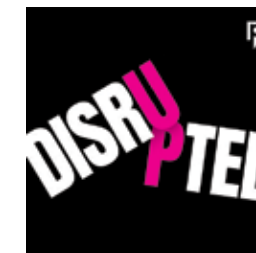


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## Building a Solid Retirement Foundation

Winning the lottery is not a retirement strategy. Yet every year, one survey or another finds that a significant percentage of people say that's their retirement plan. That may be a PR stunt, and the responses may be intended as a joke, particularly since the odds of hitting the lottery are something like one in 270 million, and the odds of needing money in retirement is a sure thing.

The point is, planning can be daunting for many people, particularly Millennials, but time is something you can't joke away or hide from. Acknowledging that there are many expenses and that people are stretched thin, saving for retirement may become a lower priority, and in all cases, doing something no matter how small, is better than doing nothing. The point is to get started.

For LGBTQ+ people, retirement planning becomes more important. There may not be family members to provide care, and while there are more options for senior living (See our special section on that topic in this issue.), those are not cheap.

There are many models you can use to plan your savings. For years, financial planners talked about the "three-legged stool." This is a metaphorical way of encouraging diversity, and if you're employed one of the legs—defined benefit pensions—are not as common as they



once were. Instead, those have been replaced by 401K plans—defined contribution plans. However, only about 51 percent of employers offer those. That's still excellent compared to the 8 percent who use traditional pensions. If you're self-employed, consider creating a SEP IRA plan. You'll receive a pre-tax deduction now and pay taxes on the money when you withdraw it, presumably at a time when you're in a lower tax bracket. Even so, you'll still need the other two legs of the stool for a solid program.

Social Security benefits, the second leg, replace about

40 percent of the average worker's salary, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. What's more, under current conditions, The U.S. Department of Treasury says the Social Security trust fund is expected to deplete its reserves by 2034 and will be able to fund approximately 77 percent of benefits after that.

Creating the final leg of the stool is where you have the most flexibility and choice and where you'll need a thought-out strategy. One option is to purchase a lifetime income annuity, essentially creating your

own pension. Though these are not bought with pre-tax dollars, you only pay taxes when you withdraw, which can facilitate accrual of your principal. Many annuities also die with you so this is where diversification comes in, particularly if you're planning on leaving an estate.

Life insurance is also an option. Yes, life insurance. Although the primary purpose of life insurance is to deliver death benefit protection, many permanent life policies accumulate cash value. If your need for protection decreases over time, you can borrow against this cash

value—tax-free in most cases—and use the money to supplement your retirement lifestyle. That loan will accrue interest and is paid back on your death, which will decrease the death benefit of the policy.

No two people—and no two families—are alike. However, one concern shared by many LGBTQ+ individuals is that they want to have enough money not to be a burden to anyone. After that, you'll have your own objectives. The important thing is to create a plan for yourself that's reflects your goals and desires and will allow you to enable—and afford—the lifestyle you want in retirement. Whether you want to "die broke," as some do, or if you want to be able to leave inheritances, take the time to figure out what you want and then make a plan. And don't buy into the myth that "it's too late." Start where you are and build from there.

by the credit agency Experian found that 62 percent of LGBTQ+ respondents said that they had experience financial challenges based on their identity. There are other issues as well, such as how to protect a partner, if you choose not to marry. Don't be shy when you interview financial planners. Ask if they've worked with LGBTQ+ clients, same-sex couples, trans or non-binary individuals. Find out if they are aware of some of the special challenges our communities might face. Remember, this is—or should be—a very personal conversation and relationship, so finding someone with whom you feel comfortable is important. And don't be afraid to shop around.

Remember, you're building this three-legged stool to support yourself. Make sure it fits you. Oh, and if you still want



It's also a good idea to work with a financial planner who can help you explore options—and who understands the special challenges of the LGBTQ+ community. For instance, a survey

to play the lottery, go ahead...just for fun. But place your major bets on yourself and your plan.

— 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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# Thinking of Becoming an Expat?

WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW

BY ASHLEY ROGERS



Valencia, Spain

**I**f the pandemic has taught us anything, it is how precious life is, how important our surroundings are, and why living a quality life filled with joy, purpose, health and prosperity should be on the top of our list of priorities.

For many, that means moving abroad. What once might have been an “I’ll do that later” idea is now becoming a real and viable choice...and one that is not

just for retirees anymore.

Digital nomads and young families are among the new expats pulling up roots and finding adventure, better financial and personal opportunities, and a happier and more meaningful life. However, anyone considering such a big move should be prepared to do their homework (in all senses of that word) in advance, and, to the extent possible, go into a new situation with eyes open. For LGBTQ+ people, there are potentially

different challenges awaiting. In a changing world, these may not be as daunting as they once were, but you’ll want to think about all aspects of your life before you make the jump.

## Becoming An Expat

Post-pandemic more than 3 million Baby Boomers were pushed into premature retirement, according to *International Living’s* executive editor

Jennifer Stevens. “Millions of additional workers were fired or furloughed. And, it spawned the Great Resignation. More than 24 million people quit their jobs between April and September, 2021.” Now, many of them are wondering, “what’s next?”

“We’re reconsidering what’s important,” says Stevens of these people. “We’re asking questions like what am I doing with my life?”

And the resounding answer for many

is to shake up the *status quo* and move overseas where money can be stretched and the quality of life, significantly increased.

Susan Burke-March and her husband Ken embarked on their overseas journey, first moving to Cuenca, Ecuador and then to Valencia, Spain. They used Home Exchange (homeexchange.com) as a way to visit and test the waters of various countries, before making any permanent moves.

“We had done three previous home exchanges in Spain, the most recent in the late summer-early fall of 2019 where we spent almost two months visiting different cities, and decided that Spain, as part of the European Union, would be the perfect place to continue our travel adventures via doing home exchanges for some of that.

“Spain’s diverse cultures, the quality of life including citizen’s access to healthcare and education,



A collection of Edd and Cynthia Staton's books.

their restrictions of possessing firearms, and their straightforward path to obtaining legal residency were important considerations in making our decision to move to Spain.”

When choosing an overseas home destination, experts agree that checklists are essential. Important considerations are entry requirements, cost of living, ease of residency and citizenship, political climate, weather, availability of good healthcare, cost of purchasing or renting a home, language concerns, ease, and ability to work and “fit in,” cultural, social and outdoors activities; children’s education, and vary by country and should be carefully considered in making this decision.

And, the best time to evaluate these is *before* you arrive to your new destination.

Edd and Cynthia Staton are among America’s most recognized experts on expat life and retiring overseas. Their website ([eddandcynthia.com](http://eddandcynthia.com)) offers a wealth of information about moving abroad and features “Retirement Reimagined”—a step-by-step master course to becoming a successful expat.

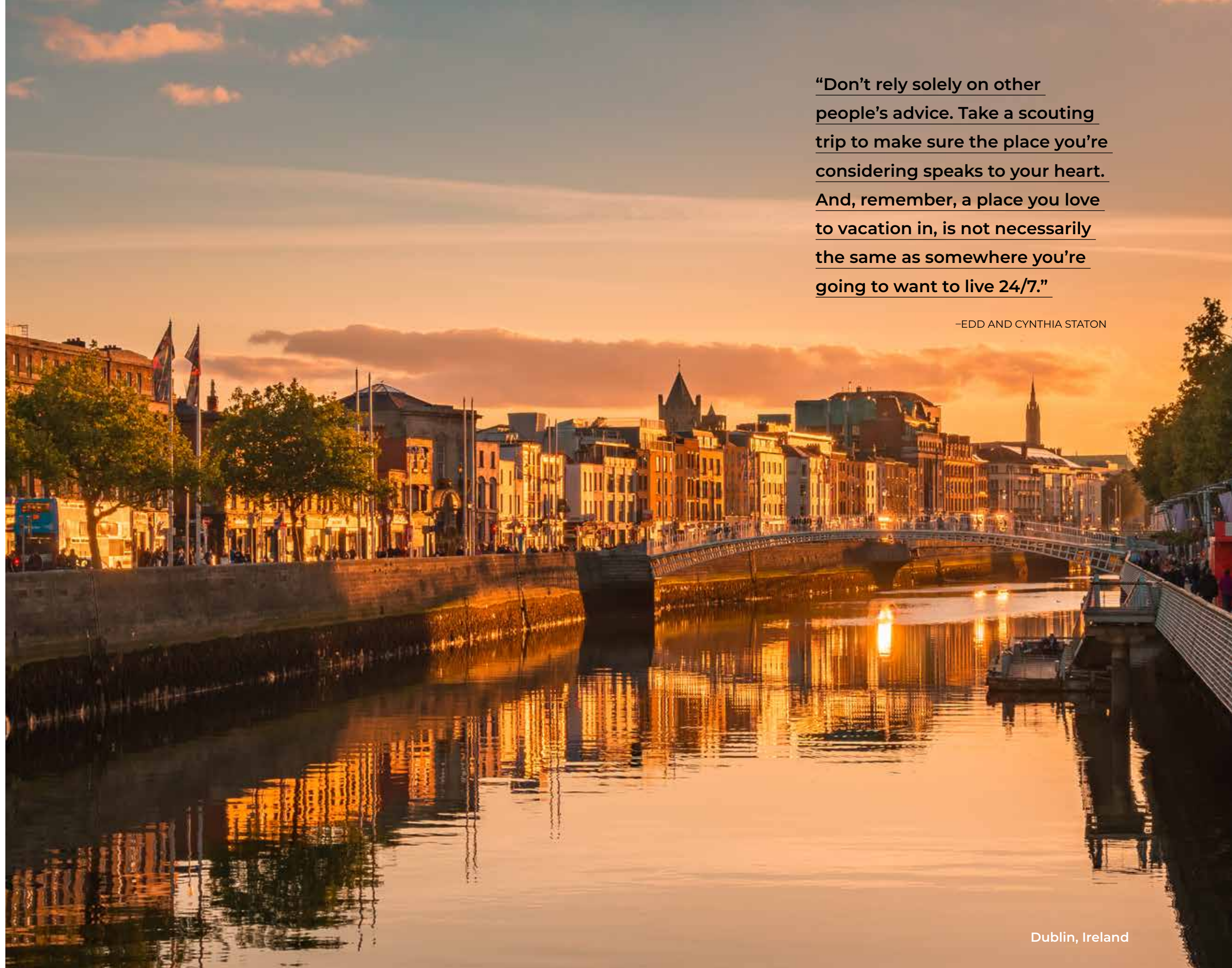
Among endless recommendations, how-to’s and personal accounts of being an expat, the Stantons also recommend, “Don’t rely solely on other people’s advice. Take a scouting trip to make sure the place you’re considering speaks to your heart. And, remember, a place you love to vacation in, is not necessarily the same as somewhere you’re going to want to live 24/7.”

Ellen Baker, who moved to Dublin, Ireland in 2015 agrees. “I would suggest that expats become very familiar with the country through regular visits, remembering that you won’t be on holidays; you would be living there. While we were in Dublin visiting, we would rent a furnished apartment and pretend we were living there, buying groceries, using facilities like a gym, getting our laundry done, everyday things to try our city out for livability.

“My husband has family in Ireland,” says Baker, “and we had been here many times and were hopelessly in love with the country and were looking for the ideal place to spend the rest of our lives as we were on the verge of retirement. Being a European socialist country meant that we would save tens of thousands of dollars each year

**“Don’t rely solely on other people’s advice. Take a scouting trip to make sure the place you’re considering speaks to your heart. And, remember, a place you love to vacation in, is not necessarily the same as somewhere you’re going to want to live 24/7.”**

—EDD AND CYNTHIA STATON



Dublin, Ireland





Cuenca, Ecuador



Ellen Baker and husband James at Dublin Pride.



The Oxfam charity shop where Ellen volunteers.

just on medical insurance and medical expenses, not to mention other financial perks given to people over 65.

“We did loads of research, especially on medical issues. We opened a bank account in Ireland long before we moved and put regular deposits in it and used it for cash needs when we were visiting. I also listened to Irish radio on the Internet as much as possible, weekly talk shows and podcasts just to get more familiar with the politics, people, and lifestyles. And, we talked quite a bit with family members

who helped steer us in the right direction when needed. Finally, we settled on where we wanted to live and what kind of lifestyle we wanted, e.g. rural, suburban, or city life. (We chose the latter).”

Mary and Tod Freeman, who moved to Salinas, Ecuador in 2011 from California, thought beach life was for them. After a year they discovered that they missed the cultural and social aspects that a city has to offer, so they moved to the UNESCO World Heritage Site city of Cuenca, Ecuador. Cuenca is the third largest city

in Ecuador and its cultural capital. This stunning Andes Mountain town has consistently been listed in various top expat destination roundups over the last ten years.

“We moved to Ecuador because it was less expensive and had safer living conditions than the U.S.,” explains Mary. “The U.S. dollar economy, the climate, the inexpensive and first-rate healthcare, and the varied terrain of Ecuador from beaches to mountains, to rainforests appealed to us, and we also had a true desire to experience a different lifestyle and culture.”

Getting involved in your new home country is a great way to ease the transition and can be one of the most meaningful parts of moving abroad. The Freemans started a foundation, “Helping Kids in Ecuador” (HKIE) ([helpingkidsinecuador.org](http://helpingkidsinecuador.org)) that to date has helped more than 700 children, providing life-changing and life-saving medical care.

Baker has also found being a part of the local culture changed her overseas life experience. “I work as a volunteer at a charity shop one day a week and I lead tours of St Patrick’s Cathedral in Dublin. I also do volunteer work with a youth organization and each year we march in the Pride parade. All of these opportunities are a dream come true.”

Among the many questions, expats ask themselves, is “will I stay overseas?” That depends on many factors, according to studies of why expats return to their home country. Missing family and friends, the death of a spouse, the birth of a grandchild, and longing for the familiar are the top reasons why expats return.

“I think that those expats who move to another country and are not prepared for it to be different in oh, so many ways, might find it difficult,” says Burke-March. “Think about the language, things like what time the shops are open? Do they close for siesta? Can you get your favorite brand of milk? Do you have to drive on the other side of the road? We’re always laughing about Spain’s culture and especially time differences. Here in Valencia, in the area we’re living, the work day begins at about 8 am, everyone goes to the cafe for a coffee/pastry at about 9 - 9:30, then at 11 another coffee. Everything closes around 2 pm where people go home for lunch; then businesses reopen at 5 and close at 8 pm. THEN people eat dinner. “

Some expats, who are enamored with their new overseas life during the “honeymoon phase,” find that after a while what was once an adventure, is now an annoyance.

Say the Statons, “Remind yourself why you made the move in the first place. Focus on what’s right instead of what’s wrong. But if you do decide to leave, think of your time abroad as a learning experience, not as a failure.”

Many expats also keep contacts back home, such as U.S. address with friends or family and take advantage of friends and family to send or bring things they miss.

As you consider such a big change, you can access numerous expat blogs, Facebook pages, e-letters, books, videos, and magazines designed for people going through this process.

Since 1979, *International Living* ([internationalliving.com](http://internationalliving.com)) has been helping people discover the

world’s best places to live, travel and retire through their website, free and paid for publications and events, and in their daily e-letter, *Daily Postcards*.

Each year in January, *International Living* also publishes its “Global Retirement Index,” which ranks 25 countries according to 10 categories. This year’s winners featured 12 Countries to Retire to in 2022. In ascending order, the publication’s choices were Panama, Costa Rica, Mexico, Portugal, Ecuador, Colombia, France, Malta, Spain, Uruguay, Thailand and Ireland.

Similar publications like *Live and Invest Overseas* ([liveandinvestoverseas.com](http://liveandinvestoverseas.com)) also publish their top picks for expat destinations each year, and in their recently published “Overseas Retirement Index 2022” they highlighted their 15 top international cities they deemed best for retirement.

Nomad List ([nomadlist.com](http://nomadlist.com)) is a community of nearly 40,000 remote workers around the world who rank their new home countries on overall guideposts, but also rank items such as Internet speed, places to work, freedom of speech and LGBTQ+ friendly cities.

### Special Concerns for LGBTQ+ People

Probably the biggest challenge LGBTQ+ expats will find are the varying attitudes towards them around the world. (You can find that in the U.S., too, depending on where you live, so don’t let that stop you.) Some nations are accepting; others not so much. The ILGA (International Lesbian, Gay, Bi-Sexual, Trans and Intersexual Association) ([ilga.org](http://ilga.org)) is a good resources, and a January 2022 report from Expatica ([expatica.com](http://expatica.com)) highlights “The Most Friendly LGBTQ Countries in the World.” (See sidebar).

There are cultural issues unique to LGBTQ+ people, such as whether you can be openly affectionate with one another, and legal issues include



The Netherlands

## EXPATICA “TOP 10 LGBTQ+ FRIENDLY COUNTRIES FOR EXPATS” JANUARY 2022

1. The Netherlands
2. Belgium
3. Spain
4. Malta
5. Hong Kong
6. Taiwan
7. New Zealand
8. South Africa
9. Argentina
10. Canada



Hong Kong



Bruges, Belgium




Cuenca, Ecuador

applying for spousal visas. In some countries, members of a couple may have to apply for visas separately. You'll also want to see what kind of LGBTQ+ community may be available to you in your new home.

Many other resources are available. If you're planning to move to Europe, publications like "The Rainbow Report" (find it at [ilga.org](http://ilga.org)) highlights the best cities for LGBTQ+ travelers. For the sixth year in a row, Malta continues to occupy their number one spot on the Rainbow Europe Map, with a score of 94 percent out of 100.

Author and publisher of *Live and Invest Overseas*, Kathleen Peddicord, also published a 2020 report on "The Most LGBTQ+-Friendly Places to Retire Overseas."

This only begins to scratch the surface of what to consider, but if you take away anything from this article, it's that this is not a decision to be made lightly. Joking references such as "If the politics get any worse, I'm moving to Canada," may relieve a little stress, but the reality is a little more complex than loading up the U-Haul and going. Still, if you're looking for adventure and go into it with your eyes open, it may be your best next move. 



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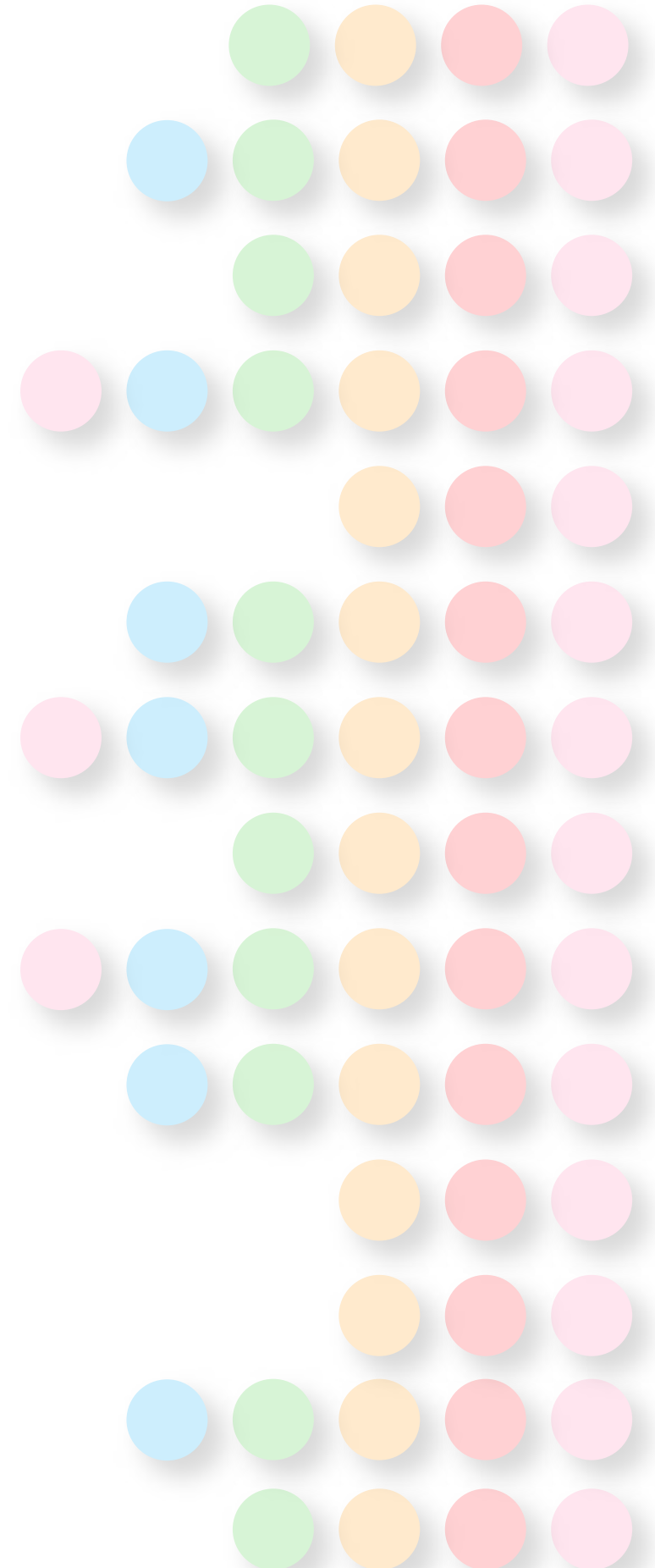


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# It's in the Bag

By Brian Scott Lipton



Ricardo Beverly Hills' bags combine high quality, thoughtful innovation and functional innovation.

A

s the Omicron surge of COVID-19 kept so many of us stuck inside this winter, especially as this contagious strain of the virus forced many companies to reconsider letting workers return to their offices, the last thing on our many of our minds were “what bag will I use today?”

Even when we did go out, so many of us relied simply on a reusable store bag— Target’s canvas carryalls were ubiquitous—to carry our daily necessities. For all their practicality, however, these utilitarian bags robbed us of our individuality, as what sort of bag is in our hands, crosses our body, or is slung over our shoulder says so much about an individual’s personal style. It remains one of the most versatile fashion accessories there is. Bags are easily changed, practical, and come in sizes and functions to suit almost any day, as well as a way to convey status or fashion sense.

And there’s been a cultural change, too, at least in terms of gender. In recent years as more and more men carry bags, it’s less likely to hear someone criticized for carrying a “man bag” or a

“murse.” It’s ironic because bags morphed from merely useful to fashion statement for both men and women in the Middle Ages only to become “uncool” in the 1990s, in part due to derision directed at the ubiquitous fanny pack. Only the “safely masculine” backpack was okay for guys. Fortunately today, “acceptable” options for men go way beyond a backpack. One guy who has carried a bag for years says, “People used to tell me I was trying to be ‘European. Yet, when I dressed up every day for work, I didn’t want a wallet or keys or anything else to ruin the line of my suits. It just made sense.” It’s something women have known for years.

“I see the bags I make as a true form of self-expression,” says Australian-based bag designer Aimee Kestenberg, who is noted for her appealing cross-body styles.

So now that spring has sprung, and the world is brighter again, both figuratively and literally, we will start heading back to the office (or at least go to the neighborhood café where we can work among others), go out to lunch and dinner more often with friends, or just stroll in public. Accordingly, our bag “wardrobes” will need replenishment, especially since one might use two or three different bags each day (or week), depending on our activities.

For example, it’s completely logical to carry something large enough to hold a laptop when you’re heading off to work; while a large tote is the perfect choice for a weekend stroll when you



Australia-based designer Aimee Kestenberg sees her popular cross-body bags as a major form of self-expression—as do her customers.



Bags from Ricardo Beverly Hills allow women a variety of options so they can choose the one that suits their specific daily needs or express their own personal style.



never know what you might pick up in your travels and something small and fashionable, like a crossbody bag that simply holds your wallet, phone or ID, is probably a more preferable option for a night on the town.

### UTILITY, NOT FUTILITY

Whether you're purchasing one bag or several, the biggest factor for most customers is utility. "Our customers search for stylish bags, but above all, they must provide utility and help them fill whatever needs they may have," says Mark Kohlenberg, CEO of Moral Code.

That sentiment is echoed by Timm Fenton, Vice President of Design and Development, at Ricardo Beverly Hills. "Our customers always expect a balance of high quality, thoughtful design, and functional innovation in all of our products," he notes.

Still, if "utility" is the overriding quality that consumers are seeking when purchasing a new bag, it's far from the only one. "Attractiveness always plays a huge part, as most people would only buy a



Mack Weldon's bags are perfect for the man on the go, wherever he may be going.



The famed Hermes Birkin bag is a timeless option and is extremely popular on the resale market.



Nomatic prides itself on the utility of its entire line bags, including its very popular Travelpack.



Moral Code's bags are designed with providing customers a product that is both useful and stylish.

bag that aesthetically appeals to them—even if it doesn't check any of the other boxes," says Ashley Stanton, head of handbags at mygemma.com, which specializes in pre-owned luxury goods such as Hermès bags such as Birkins and Kellys.

"I would say utility and comfort are key when we have clients shopping for specific styles like work bags," she continues. "For our trend-seeking clients who are always on the hunt for the latest 'It Bag,' we believe that innovation is paramount. Finally, when people buy pre-owned goods, they are choosing sustainability as a factor, since that's what the luxury resale industry is all about."

Adds Jesse Blackburn, senior product merchandiser at Nixon: "We've recently pioneered the use of reclaimed ocean plastics in almost every bag we make. That said, we realize that being environmentally friendly isn't enough to win the hearts of the consumer. Each of our bags is packed with the considered design features and the subtle details people expect from our brand. And if a bag isn't comfortable or doesn't look great, no one wants to carry it, so those factors are just as important."



Milly Kate bags are big hits with its consumer because they look convenient, are easy to carry, and make the wearer feel confident and stylish.



Says Susan Kelly, owner of Milly Kate, "Our customer is choosing our tote bag for two main reasons: first, because it is attractive to her and will make her feel stylish and put-together, and second, because she wants it to be really useful, which means it's convenient to carry and it's easy to find her items in the bag, thanks to its pockets and roomy opening."

### GENDER REPEAL

Another factor that used to be important to consumers, but is quickly fading, is which gender the bag was made for. "Unisex" is definitely the word of the day, as is evidenced on the streets where more and more men and women can be seen carrying the exact same handbag or tote bag, gender norms be damned.



Briggs & Riley's bags are bought by customers of both genders who find the product suits their personal style.



Nordstrom is banking that consumers will flock to high-end brands like Proenza Schoueler (left, white) and Cult Gaia whose bags are super-stylish as well as totally practical.



The trend has even extended to Hollywood where Jonah Hill was seen frequently in the popular movie "Don't Look Up," carrying a Hermès Birkin bag—an idea the actor told *W* magazine was his own (in order to prove his emulation for his onscreen mother, played by Meryl Streep).

Or just take a look at Nordstrom's website. While their spring bags are still divided by gender, offerings by such top-name brands as Fear of God, Paco Rabanne, Beis, Longchamp and Proenza Schoueler are likely to be purchased by men and women alike, no matter how they're being merchandised.

Many other companies, such as Stuart & Lau and Nomatica, are also aware that buying patterns have changed and are encouraging this dynamic. Serkan Anders, VP of US Marketing for Briggs & Riley, notes that





“My overall goal is to provide items for everyone. I think it’s great to be a woman-led brand in the luxury industry and to be able to encourage diversity amongst my customers in wearing my items. That is a major goal of mine.”  
—Hogoè Kpessou



▶▶▶ Hogoè Kpessou bags combine luxury, high design, and practicality for all genders.



▶▶▶ Customers of all genders can be seen wearing TJIN’s bags on social media platforms including TikTok and Instagram.

◀◀◀ Adelante’s tote bags are hand-made in Guatemala, designed for unisex appeal, and can be custom-made to suit the buyer’s individual needs.

Paco Rabanne’s geometric, multi-colored tote bag, available at Nordstrom, will definitely put a spring in your step.



“our products are absolutely gender neutral. We find our customers tend to seek products and collections that resonate with their personal style, not just their gender.” Adds June Meng, Director of Marketing for TJIN: “We have customers for both genders for our shoes and bags. You’ll even find some of those “real looks” on our Instagram and TikTok channels.”

Going even one step further is Adelante, which is known for its hand-made products from Guatemala. “All of our products are deliberately unisex, from bags to shoes,” says Peter Sacco, the company’s president. Adelante is a company focused on customer

inclusivity, and our made-to-order products allow for both aesthetic and size customization to accommodate either gender in any purchase.”

Perhaps the final word on this subject belongs to up-and-coming designer Hogoè Kpessou, “My overall goal is to provide items for everyone. I think it’s great to be a woman-led brand in the luxury industry and to be able to encourage diversity amongst my customers in wearing my items. That is a major goal of mine.”

The bottom line: If a bag looks good on you, fulfills you daily needs, and makes you feel better in any way possible, then it’s the right bag for you!

# Hello, Harvey

*In a new memoir, Harvey Fierstein looks back at life, loves, and LGBTQ history—and looks forward to the Funny Girl revival*

By FRANK RIZZO

**F**or more than 50 years, Harvey Fierstein has been a keen observer of gay history, he's made a lot of it.

In the just-published memoir, *I Was Better Last Night*, the 67-year-old actor-playwright-activist reflects with sass, affection, and introspection

on his early days in the downtown NYC theater scene, his rise as actor and playwright in theatre, film and television, and his work during the gay rights movement and the AIDS epidemic.

*In Torch Song*

*Trilogy, La Cage Aux Folles, and Kinky Boots*, Fierstein broke new ground in high-profile representation of the LGBTQ+ and drag communities.

In his 2014 play, *Casa Valentina*, he explored gender identity years before binary issues emerged in streaming series. In his solo show in which he also starred *Bella Bella* he put a spotlight on the legacy on the feminist leader, Bella Abzug.

Even in works by others, his iconic cultural presence is felt. In Martin Sherman's *Gently Down the Stream*, he played a gay elder in a romantic relationship with a younger queer man who had a different perspective of life and love. As Edna Turnblad in the musical *Hairspray*, he stepped into Divine's heels to celebrate the outsider, the outsized and the outlandish. His latest project this spring recrafting *Funny Girl*—which made Barbra Streisand a star—for its first Broadway revival.

As he quips in his book: “No bad for a fat, cocksucking drag queen from Bensonhurst.”

“I didn’t want to write a celebrity tell-all,” says Fierstein about his book from his home in Litchfield County. The *sui generis*, honeyed-gravel voice over the phone is unmistakably his. The outspoken, truth-telling, wise-guy attitude is, too.

“I’m certainly in a position where I know a lot of stuff that other people don’t know. A lot. Someday I may steal some of that, but that’s not what I wanted this book to be. I leaned over backwards to make sure that it was as fair as I could be to everyone I wrote about.”

## Madonna Moment

Still, Fierstein managed to get in just a dash of dish about icons, celebs and divas he’s encountered over the decade, such as the time in the early ‘90s when he pitched a film idea to Madonna to play Warhol superstar Candy Darling.

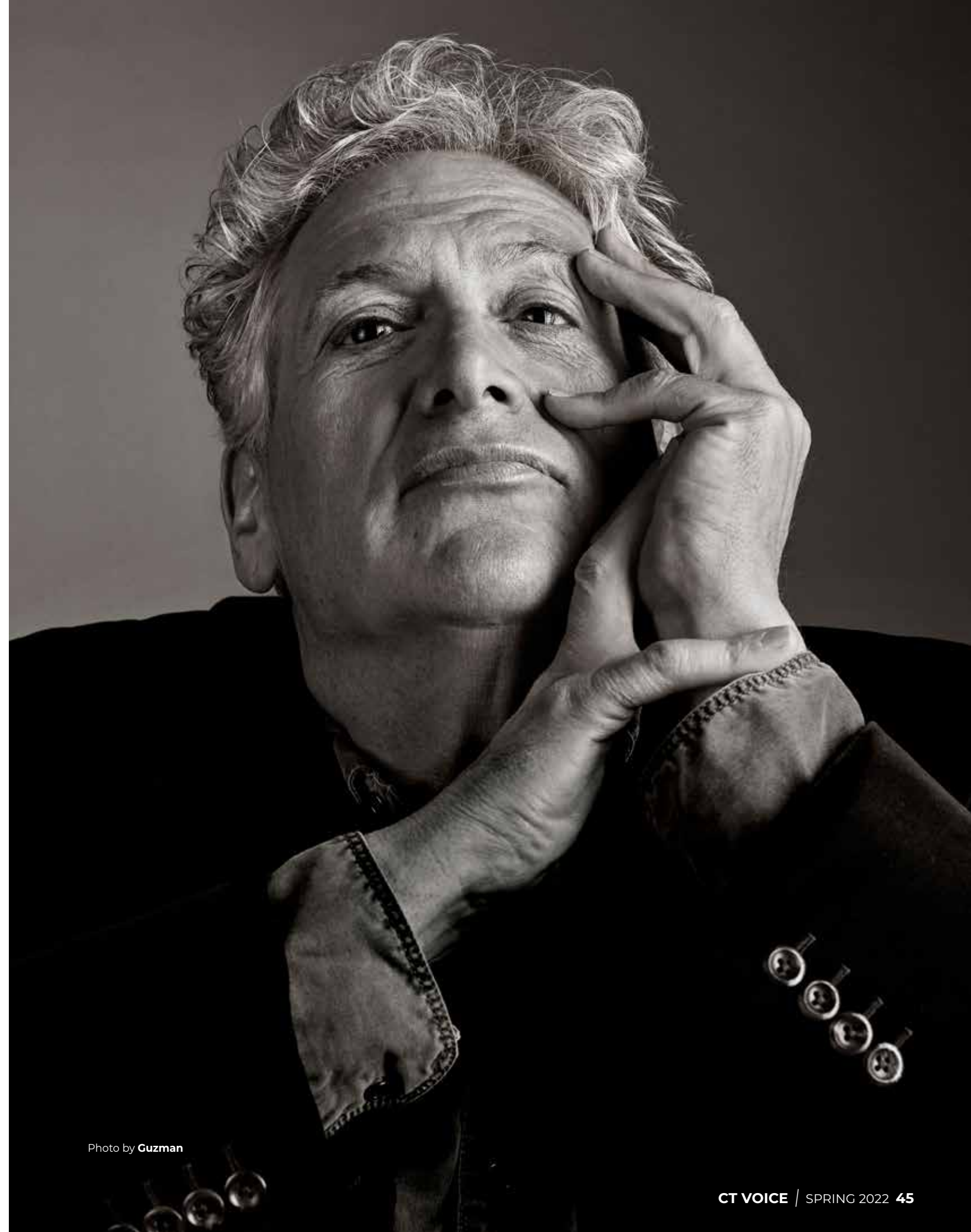
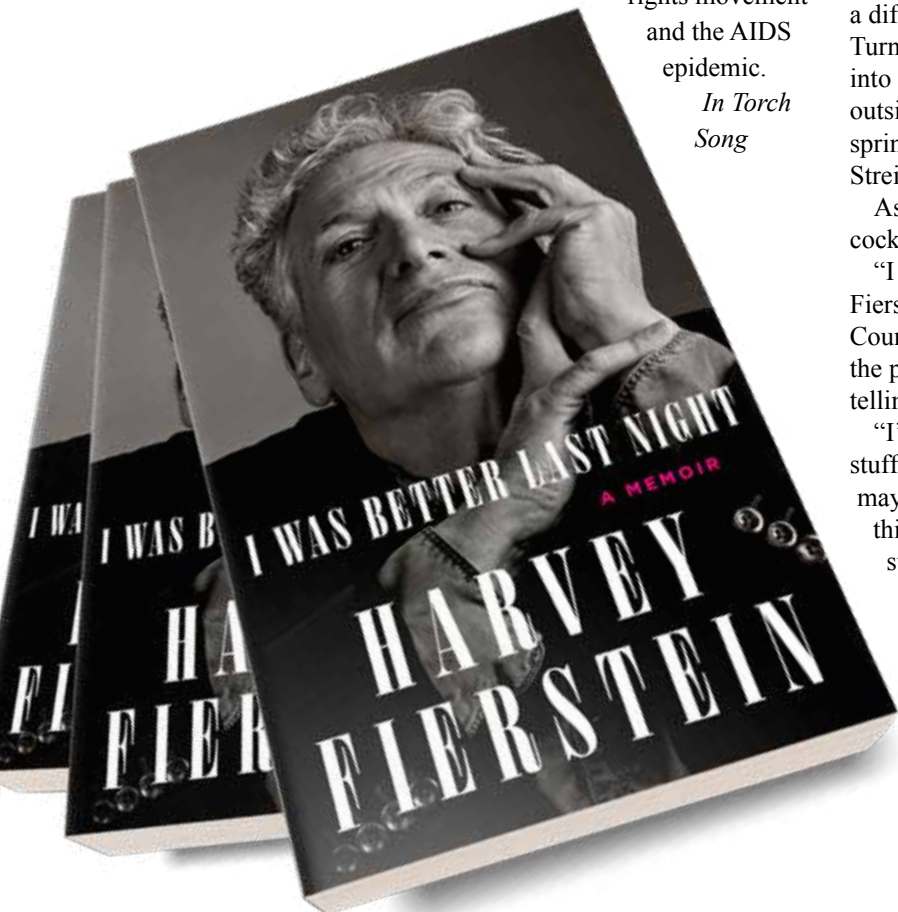


Photo by Guzman



Fierstein perhaps let his wicked sense of humor go too far after she asked him, “Do you really think I can play a drag queen?”

“Of course, he said. “Everyone’s already seen your pussy. It’s time to show them your dick.”

One can only imagine the stony pause.

“She did not laugh uproariously,” he deadpans.

When I note Madonna is not famous for her generous sense of humor, Fierstein passes on the bait.

“Whatever she has she has. I don’t think not having a sense of humor has held her back. She’s certainly survived where most others didn’t. I was more shocked that she decided not to do [the film]. Listen, she’s a very smart woman, obviously, who has a

real idea of what she wanted her career to be at the time. She had a path she wanted to travel, he says, and I guess this was not the right thing for her.”

Another anecdote—a sweet one—was when one of his boyhood crushes—Richard Chamberlain of TV’s *Dr. Kildare* and later *The Thorn Birds* fame—came backstage to congratulate him in *Torch Song* in 1983.

Fierstein confessed his pubescent affection for Chamberlain and asked the handsome, albeit closeted, actor to indulge him in a bit of fantasy fun, asking him to go out and re-enter the dressing room as if returning from a hard day’s work. When Chamberlain returned to a dimly lit room, he found Fierstein laying on the couch feigning sleep. The actor gave him a warm kiss on the cheek, adding, ‘Hi, hon, I’m home.’

“He was such a doll,” says Fierstein. “He still is.”

It was a sweet thing he did, I said, but I told Fierstein I have difficulty coming to terms with closeted stars during the AIDS epidemic who didn’t come out until the crisis had passed, after their careers had long ago peaked, and they were in their 70s or older.

“My attitude is the same, but we can’t really judge someone else’s journey,” says Fierstein. “But I certainly can’t help but feel that we were just left out there to dry. The [excuse] that [closeted actors] used—and is still being used—and this just kills me, is, “I don’t want people to know about my sex life because I want them to be able to fantasize that what they’re seeing on screen is real.’ You know what? Nobody cares that fucking much about you anyway.”

## Long lasting *La Cage*

Fierstein, however, was always fiercely out and proud and became the first openly gay man to acknowledge his partner when he received his Tony Award for *La Cage Aux Folles*.

That show, which is perhaps his greatest triumph, was the first time gay characters—not to mention drag characters—were celebrated on the Broadway stage. The show opened at the beginning of the AIDS epidemic and subsequently took the lives of many in that original cast. But the show and its themes of family, acceptance and inclusion continue to live on in productions around the world, including two Tony Award-winning Broadway revivals.

Fierstein says he’s turned down many offers to make *La Cage Aux Folles* into a film musical. “It’s true you don’t reach the amount of audience as a theater piece that you would as a film, but a bad movie would just be a bad movie. I just assume that some day somebody’s going to call me up and say, ‘I would really like to do *La Cage* and when they speak to me about it, they will talk about doing *La Cage*— and that will be exciting.”

As an example of one of the foul pitches, Fierstein says one filmmaker envisioned a scene where one of the drag queens was beaten up in the street. “And then all of the other drag queens sing ‘The Best of Times’ as they march with candles to the hospital. I said, ‘What the hell show are you talking about?’ That’s the thing a lot of people don’t understand about *La Cage*. The gay people are the normal ones. The heterosexuals are the weird ones.”

Fierstein, who wrote teleplays for NBC Live’s versions of the musicals *The Wiz*, *Hairspray* and the yet-to-be-produced *Bye Bye Birdie*, says he also hopes one day *La Cage* might be done as one of the network’s live productions.

For now Fierstein’s theatrical focus is on *Funny Girl*, which had a rocky road to Broadway in 1964. Streisand made the show a sensation, despite what was generally seen as a sketchy script.

“The show, in some ways, did not work, so I came in and restructured it,” says Fierstein of his work on the musical for the London revival in 2015. “The job of rewriting is to fix things and not show your fingerprints too much, to not lose the essence of what made it a hit. It’s what I did with the script of [the Broadway musical] *Newsies* and the same thing with *Funny Girl*. I restructured it some, took out a couple of songs, put in a couple, changed a couple of things around. A lot of it just has to do with dialogue. We understand a little bit more about emotional psychology than we used to.”

He says after the London show and tour were a



Fierstein has revamped the book for the highly anticipated revival of *Funny Girl*. Photo by Bruce Glikas

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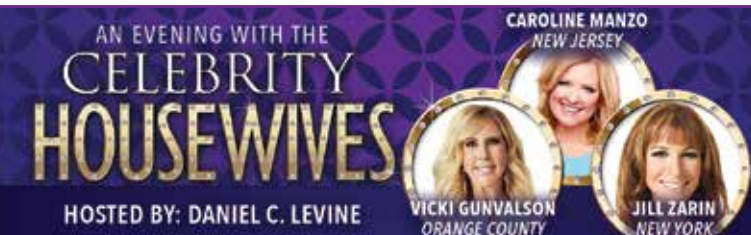


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success, the families of the estates trusted him more “so they’ve let me do a little bit more this time. I’m hoping it will be just wonderful, but we’ll see. I love the script I just delivered to the producers. Knock wood, we did the rights things and Beanie Feldstein is an exciting idea because she’s a comedian and she’s funny and we have a gorgeous guy to play Nick [Ramin Karimloo] and we also have Jane Lynch.”

### Gay Generation Gap

Fierstein dedicates his memoir “To the radical fairies who flew before me.”

But does he feel subsequent LGBTQ+ generations know of these previous flights, too?

“Listen, us old folks are always going to feel like the kids don’t know what they’re doing. But it’s just not true. Does our generation remember everything [of what went on before it]? I tell the story when I was writing [the musical] *A Catered Affair*; one of

my producers said, ‘Gay people didn’t live together in the ‘50s. They didn’t live together until Stonewall.’ And I said, ‘Well, I’m going to have to call Gertrude Stein up.’ We’re so bad about our history—and especially gay history.

“But this generation probably knows more than our generation did [at that age]. At least there are books and podcasts and documentaries, so if they want to avail themselves of the knowledge, at least it’s there. But in the long run every generation has to decide what its priorities are and what it’s going to do. They have their own path.

“I tell in the book about the first time I saw marriage equality have a large contingency at the gay pride march, and I thought to myself that we have so many other things to fight for,” he says, pointing to gay men and women not being able to give blood, adopt children and serve in the military. “I thought, ‘What the hell are you messing around with marriage for?’ Then I thought to myself, you know what? This is

their generation, their fight, and they need to decide for themselves, and my job as an elder statesperson, if that’s what I am, is to support them in their struggle. And guess what? They turned out to be right because straight people understood gay marriage and wanting to be in a relationship, wanting the laws of marriage to be on their side. They may not understand gays in the military or transgender problems but that they understood because it was something close enough to them. And we got not only gay marriage but a whole bunch of other good stuff, too.”

*Harvey Fierstein will be talking about his memoir at the Mark Twain House & Museum in Hartford on March 14 at 7 p.m. He will also be “in conversation” with New Yorker cartoonist Roz Chast at the Ridgefield Playhouse March 15 at 7:30 p.m. Information: [marktwinhouse.org](http://marktwinhouse.org) and [ridgefieldplayhouse.org](http://ridgefieldplayhouse.org).*

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## THE IMPORTANCE OF CANCER SCREENING FOR THE LGBTQ+ COMMUNITY

By JANE LATUS

**T**ransgender and intersex individuals, Middlesex Health has an urgent message for you: do not let the pandemic delay your cancer screenings.

The staff at Middlesex also wants you to know they will do all they can to resolve any obstacle keeping you from getting care, whether it's lack of insurance or lack of transportation.

And importantly, they assure you that the entire Cancer Center staff has been trained in treating LGBTQ+ patients by Kathryn Tierney, the medical director of Middlesex Health's Center for Gender Medicine and Wellness.

"We want to be sure people feel supported, welcomed and affirmed when they come to Middlesex for cancer care," says Amber Kapoor, Health Education, Grants, and Survivorship Coordinator for Middlesex Health Cancer Center.

Kapoor also stresses this fact: "Cancers are still growing. They didn't stop with the pandemic. We want to catch them early, when they're most treatable."

In fact, she adds, cancer screenings are important for everyone but "particularly so for members of the transgender community" because of several risk factors that are more prevalent among — or even specific to — them.

Some screenings do more than detect early cancers: they prevent them (as is the case with pre-cancerous polyps located during colonoscopies, and pre-cancerous cells identified during cervical cancer screenings.)

In 2020, the pandemic interrupted everyone's preventive care when many non-emergent health care services were

temporarily put on hold across the country as health systems grappled with a sudden surge in COVID-19 cases. When non-emergent services were reinstated after several weeks, Middlesex worked hard to catch up with those routine—but critical—services, such as cancer screenings.

The world is now seeing the expected outcome of these screening delays, and Middlesex Health is no exception. Says Kapoor, "As a result of people not having screenings, we are currently seeing higher volumes of cancer cases than we typically do, and also more advanced cases than we typically see."

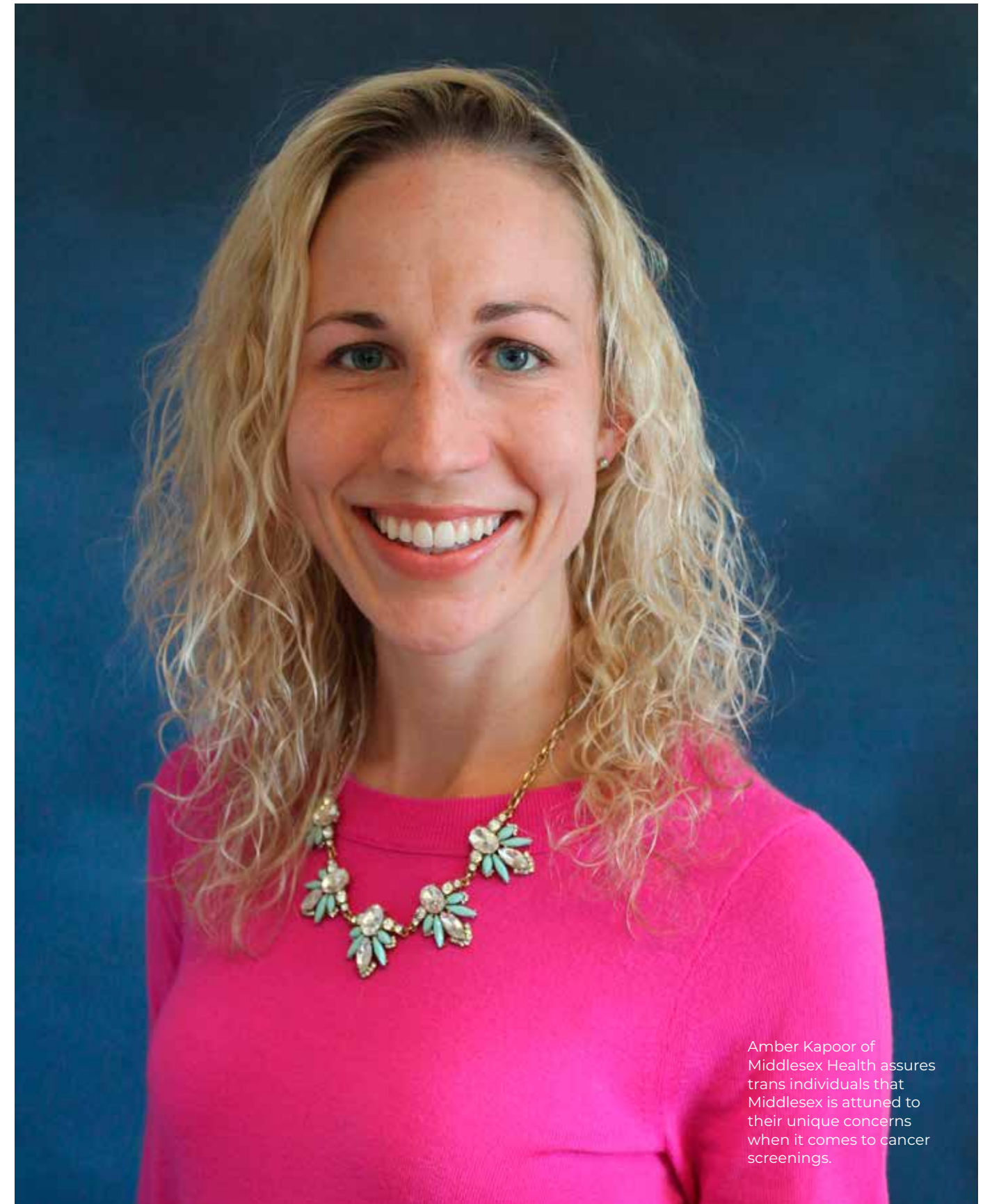
Middlesex has been working to catch up with screenings, including adding Saturday hours for some services. They follow strict COVID-19 precautions, and staff members are vaccinated. "It is safe to come in," says Kapoor.

Still, Kapoor realizes that COVID-19 anxiety isn't the only factor making people reluctant to come in. "The pandemic has impacted the trans population disproportionately," she says, with respect to unemployment, reduced work hours and personal finances. "We work very hard to identify barriers to access to care. We have social workers and other support people who will do whatever they can to help people access services," says Kapoor.

### IF YOU HAVE IT, SCREEN IT.

In most health care settings, certain cancer screenings are "highly gendered," says Kapoor. Breast and cervical cancer

**"We work very hard to identify barriers to access to care. We have social workers and other support people who will do whatever they can to help people access services."**



Amber Kapoor of Middlesex Health assures trans individuals that Middlesex is attuned to their unique concerns when it comes to cancer screenings.

screenings are geared toward women, and prostate screenings toward men. But trans men may need breast and cervical exams, and trans women may benefit from prostate screenings. Newly constructed organs, like a neovagina or neophallus, also may be at risk for cancer.

“If you have a body part for which there is a recommended screening, it should be screened,” says Kapoor. By and large, screening recommendations are the same as for cisgender individuals.

Fear that health professionals won’t understand their specific needs is reasonable, considering that caring for trans patients commonly gets little to no attention in medical schools, Kapoor says. Middlesex’s Cancer Center staff is trained in the latest

guidelines for all LGBTQ+ patient care—and in compassion. For example, says Kapoor, “Going in for a colonoscopy is extra tough for someone who’s not comfortable with their body.” That patient should feel free to discuss other options with their doctor, such as an at-home stool collection. Patients also may be able to collect their own sample for an HPV test while in a medical provider’s office.

“Just talking through those fears and barriers, you find there may be ways around them,” says Kapoor.

Several factors make cancer screenings particularly important for transgender individuals, says Kapoor:

- The LGBTQ+ community is disproportionately affected by mental health issues, which are correlated with behavior risks like smoking, obesity, and drug and alcohol use—all of which increase cancer risk.
- Long-term testosterone use is speculated to increase the risk of ovarian, breast and endometrial cancers among trans men, though there is a lack of confirming data for this.
- Similarly, estrogen use may increase breast cancer risk among trans women, though additional data is needed on this topic.
- Organs constructed surgically should be screened.

It’s important that providers know when a patient is on hormone therapy because this can impact the results of some screening tests. Pap smears have a higher false positivity rate in trans men taking testosterone long-term; PSA levels in trans women on estrogen will be very low compared to cisgender men.

“By and large, screening recommendations are the same as for cisgender individuals,” says Kapoor, but there are some guidelines that are specific for the LGBTQ+ population, including:

- Breast self-exams are not recommended for trans women due to a high number of false alarms.
- Those engaging in anal sex should have digital rectal exams.
- Mammograms are recommended for trans women who have been on hormone therapy for 5 years or more.

## OF PRIMARY IMPORTANCE

It’s obvious why Kapoor says that for trans and intersex people, “It’s really important to have a primary care provider you trust.”

Middlesex Health has more than 1,200 patients in its Center for Gender Medicine and Wellness, which includes primary care doctors at twelve locations and a full array of other providers. Last year, the program expanded to include children and teens.

Middlesex Health has two cancer center locations, in Middletown and Westbrook.


Statisticians are just starting to get a handle on quantifying the pandemic’s impact on cancer cases and predict that it will be several years before the number of missed cases is known.

A study reported in the April 2021 issue of *JAMA Oncology* (Journal of the American Medical Association) found that even after resumption of breast, colorectal, and prostate cancer monthly screenings, by the end of 2020 “there remained an estimated screening deficit of 9.4 million associated with the COVID-19 pandemic for the U.S. population.”

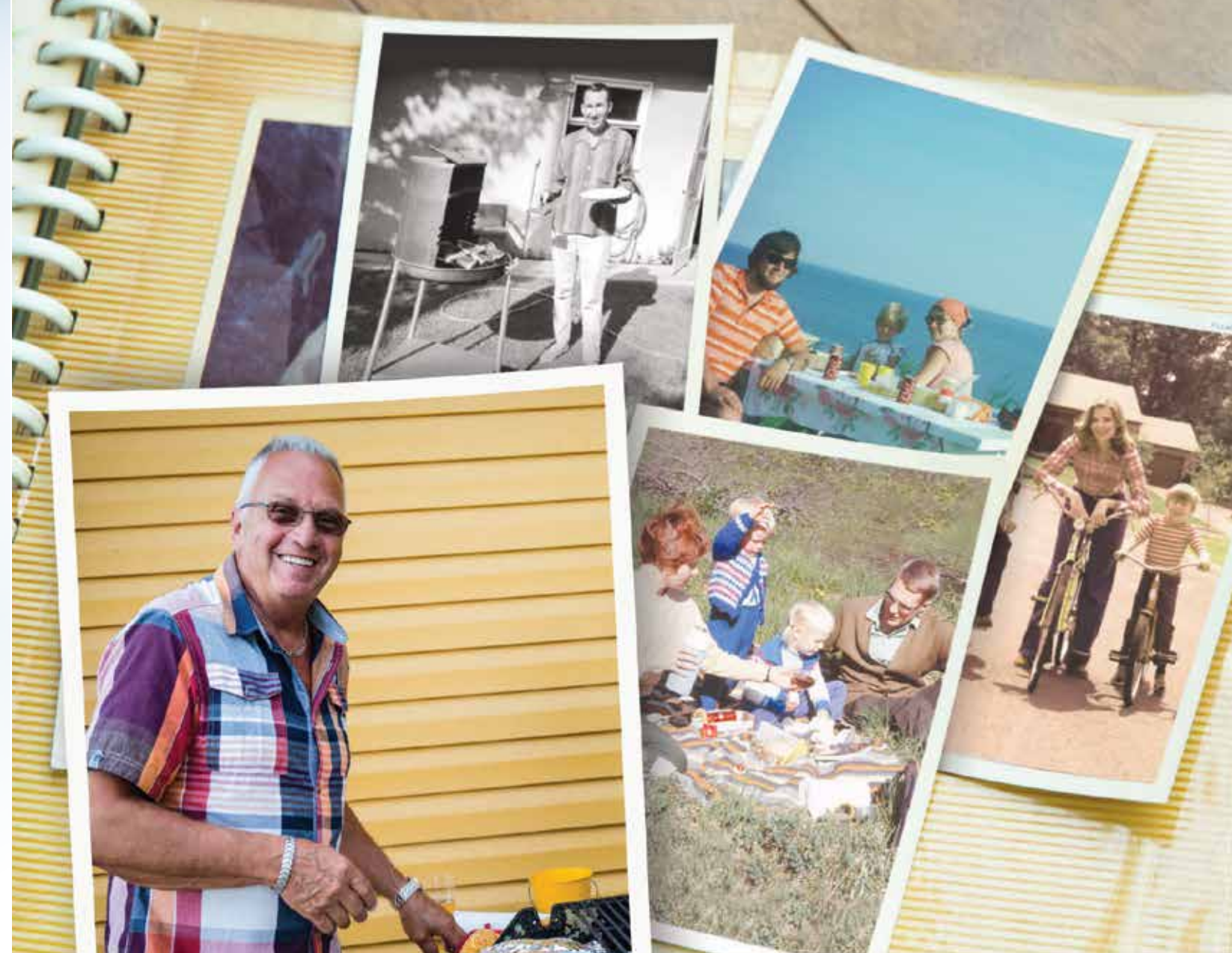
Kapoor laments the fact that Middlesex is seeing not just more cancer cases, but more cases with an “increased complexity of later-stage diagnoses with an increased complexity.”

Considering there tend to be better treatment outcomes among cancers detected early, and some cancers may even be prevented by routine screening, many of those were preventable, she says, “It’s so important for people to come in and to know we’re ready for them.”

Visit [MiddlesexHealth.org](https://MiddlesexHealth.org) for up-to-date COVID-19 precaution information, including requirements for proof of vaccination, mask-wearing, visitor policies and more.

It’s so important for people to come in and to know we’re ready for them. 

**“Cancer screenings are important, particularly for the transgender community, due to unique risk factors.”**



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# A Little Gray in Their Rainbow, But No Less Gay

Written by DAWN ENNIS / Photography by STAN GODLEWSKI

Identical twins Denyse Burke and Geraline Burke



FROM ACROSS CONNECTICUT, LGBTQ SENIORS SOUND-OFF: "WE'RE NOT ELDERS. WE'RE JUST PEOPLE."

“I delight in men over 70. They always offer one the devotion of a lifetime,” Oscar Wilde wrote in his 1893 play, *A Woman of No Importance*.

Of no importance” is how some LGBTQ+ seniors feel the larger, younger members of the community perceive them. That isn’t a universal attitude, of course, but that concern was common among several topics that they discussed in a series of interviews.

“I crossed an age barrier, and maybe it came with my retirement, and suddenly, I started feeling invisible,” said Caren Dickman, 68, a single lesbian in West Hartford who, until COVID-19, was teaching ESL to adults. “I felt like I was seen as less relevant because I’m not part of what’s going on in so much of the world right now.”

“As with any older person, we just fade into the woodwork,” said Stephanie Hutter, 62, a queer horticulturist and former book editor in New Haven. She’s experienced the generation gap at social gatherings sponsored by the Triangle Community Center. “We don’t have the same experience or even knowledge of each other’s experience, like AIDS. I talk about watching many of my friends die and coming out at the same time, and that’s like World War Two to them.”

“I’m older than dirt, let’s face it,” said Natalie Campbell, 75, of New Britain. She’s bisexual and a widow. “Back in the day, we had so many bars that we could go to where we could relate with people that we knew were the same as we were. They don’t have many places where they can go to meet others, other than online.”



Stephanie Hutter



Natalie Campbell

Caren, Stephanie and Natalie are among more than a dozen gays, lesbians, bisexuals, transgender and queer Connecticut elders, ranging in age from 62 to 79 and living in towns from Enfield to New Haven and all across the state, spoke to us about their lifetimes, their loves and their letdowns.

Among their disappointments: What we call them.

### “We’re Just People”

“First of all, when you get to my age, we’re not elders. We’re just people,” said Diana Lombardi, 73, of Berlin, executive dir. of the Connecticut TransAdvocacy Coalition. “You don’t feel ‘old.’ Your body might say, ‘Yes, you’re old,’ but your brain is still thinking you’re 20.”

Bill Petrovsky, 68, of Bloomfield agreed.

“Just because we’re retired doesn’t mean we stop thinking,” said Petrovsky,



Diana Lombardi

who has been with his 72-year-old partner for 21 years. He retired in 2020 as Director of HIV Prevention and Care Services for The Hartford Gay & Lesbian Health Collective. “No, I’m still very involved with my music, my HIV knowledge, things like that, and I’m willing to share it with anybody who asks,” he says.

“I worry for them,” Elizabeth, 77, told *CT Voice*. “Younger people in the LGBTQ+ don’t know their history. This lack of connection with the past, the accomplishments of the past, they’re taken for granted, whatever freedoms we do have now. They could be taken away when we elect the next president.”

The retired pathologist from the Greater Hartford area spent much of her career studying cancer and lost her own wife to lung cancer 20 years ago. Grief is something with which she’s all too familiar.

“Five of the women I’ve been closest with have all died,” Elizabeth said, including one who was murdered. “Another one of them died of dementia.” Author and activist Dr. Sally Miller Gearhart was 90. “She was very well known in the lesbian community.”

### Aging Issues

Elizabeth is one of more than 2.7 million Americans age 50-plus who identify as LGBTQ+, according to AARP. By 2030, as more Baby Boomers hit retirement age, the total number of LGBTQ+ people is expected to grow, too, to around 7 million nationwide.

Where are they are going to live? SAGE counts only 13 states with LGBTQ+ friendly housing. Massachusetts and New York offer them; Connecticut, where only 1.1 percent of the state’s LGBTQ+ population is 65 or older, does not.

“I worry about things like housing,” Dickman said. “There are those of us that are not in that upper echelon financially who are looking down the road—not too far at changing housing. How are we ever going to get in there? And once we get in there, are we going to be cut off from our LGBTQ+ community, a community of pride? The baby boomer generation is getting to that point where we’re all going to need a place to go, and there



Retired school teacher John Anderson will celebrate 42 years with his husband, retired principal Garrett Stack.

are very few places that are specifically welcoming to LGBTQ+.”

(While these concerns are very real, great strides of acceptance and diversity across the state are being made. See our piece on Senior Living on page 62.)

More than one-third of LGBTQ+ older people worry about having to hide their identity to access senior housing, like Denyse Burke, 79, of Wallingford.

Burke, who goes by “Denny,” came

out more than 40 years ago, but knew since the age of 15 she was gay. Even though her right to housing is protected by state and federal law, she said she’s afraid to come out to the management of her senior housing facility.

“I’ve never, ever brought it up, that I’m gay,” Burke said. “I would feel like I’d end up defending myself if I came out to someone here.”

But Burke, who works part time at the

Yale Repertory Theater in New Haven, has confided in one neighbor, a cisgender resident in her building.

“She’s great. She knows that I’m gay and it has made absolutely no difference in the world,” said Burke. “She is like the person I wish that I had met and could have married. That’s how much fun we have together.”

Burke has one other confidante: Her identical twin sister, Geraldine, who is

also gay and single, and like her sister, is still working in this, their 80th year.

"I retired from teaching in '99, and I now have my own business," said Geraldine, a certified dementia practitioner.

The Burke sisters, identical in so many ways that they are sometimes confused for one another by their friends, are different in that Geraldine lives in her own home in West Hartford and is very open about being gay.

"I'm not afraid to say who I am," she said. "I was coming out of the doctor's office, going to my car, and I have a Volvo station wagon, and some guy in the next parking spot over says to me, 'Well, you'll never get a man driving a station wagon.' And I said to him, 'What makes you think I'm looking for a man?'"



Beth Kerrigan and her family.

## Aging Activists

This July, retired school teacher John Anderson will celebrate 42 years with his husband, retired principal Garrett Stack. "I paid my dues in terms of activism," he said. Together, they spoke out against an anti-gay federal amendment in 1994 that would zap funding from any school presenting a positive view of homosexuality. That amendment was dropped from the act signed into law by President Clinton. Anti-LGBTQ+ legislation like that, however is not a relic of another time; it keeps being introduced right now across the United States, in Florida, Georgia, North Carolina, Tennessee and Texas.

Anderson, who turned 79 in January, was asked about activism then, and now.

"I've done my bit," he said. "We were one of the eight couples to push for marriage right on through the state Supreme Court. Now, do I feel invisible? Or, frankly, that young'uns should be kowtowing to me? No! They're too busy living their lives. So, I don't feel slighted at all. I feel proud."

## Finding Joy and Community

"There's only one way to go through life, and that's happy," said Anderson's husband, Garrett Stack, 74. Stack hosts a radio show of oldies music on WMNR in Monroe, called American Jukebox.

"I've got a neighbor whose

granddaughter is 13. She came out to me," Frank Manna of Bristol told *CT Voice*. Manna is 64, gay, divorced and also a widower. "People say, 'Well, do you think she's a little young to know?' No. When I was her age, I felt that way. You know what you know." Manna enjoys sharing that message through public speaking as part of the Connecticut Stonewall Speakers bureau.

Beth Kerrigan and her wife Jody Mock were also one of those history-making couples back in 2008 to fight for the right to marry in Connecticut. As of March, she and her wife are each 67. They call West Hartford home. Kerrigan, a former town councilor and deputy mayor has given up tennis for what she considered an "old people's sport:" Pickleball.

"It's extremely addictive," Kerrigan said. "I realized that now I have like 17 new friends I've never met, and all of us have one thing in common: We all love pickleball. Having to come out to them, that never is over. It's always there, and I'm always very aware of it. Except now, at my age, I don't care at all, which is liberating."

Aidan Whittel, a lifelong resident of West Hartford, turns 60 in March and is a trans man. He works as a short-term disability analyst at The Hartford and runs their transgender training. His hope is to bridge the generational gap between

young and old in the community.

"I think there should be a way, a clearinghouse, or a Facebook group or whatever group is popular, to have a place where LGBTQ+ youth, trans elders, can all meet and hook up and learn from each other, so that they hear each other. The youth don't have to reinvent the wheel of what the elders have already done. If they just listened and learned, I think we could learn from each other. That would be my initiative."

No matter your lifestyle or identity, aging presents challenges. To do so effectively and as happily as possible requires some work, but issues such as community, intellectual stimulation, engaging and, perhaps most of all, attitude, can make this stage of life positive and productive.

Among the resources available to LGBTQ+ seniors is the LGBT Movable Senior Center, which is the result of a partnership between Connecticut senior centers.

You'll find more resources at SAGEusa.org, AARP.org, Triangle Community Center, New Haven Pride, HGLHC, Yale University Office of LGBTQ Resources, Jewish Family Services and Connecticut Community Care. 

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# TODAY'S SENIOR LIFESTYLES: The LGBTQ+ Community Is Aging on Their Own Terms

By MARY HAWKINS

Whether it's a decision someone makes alone or with an adult child overseeing decisions for a parent, the question of how and where one is going to age and live out the latter years of their life is inevitable. Decades ago, the main choices for older adults were either living with their adult children or other family members, or reluctantly going into a nursing home. But it's safe to say that the landscape for senior living has changed dramatically, especially in the past 10 years or so. Today's seniors have many more options and choices, and a great deal more choice in what those choices are. That's particularly good for the LGBTQ+ community.

A recent study\* conducted by the American Advisors Group found that 82 percent of seniors want to remain in their homes for the duration of their lives. Besides the emotional attachment people have to the place where they've spent most of their adult lives, there are also additional reasons why the senior LGBTQ+ community, in particular, is opting to age in place at home for as long as possible. One main factor is that some are concerned about being accepted in a senior living community. As a result, a



Seabury in Bloomfield

familiar home feels safe and comfortable. In-home care becomes an attractive option for many as they age and their need for help increases.

## FINDING THE RIGHT IN-HOME CAREGIVER

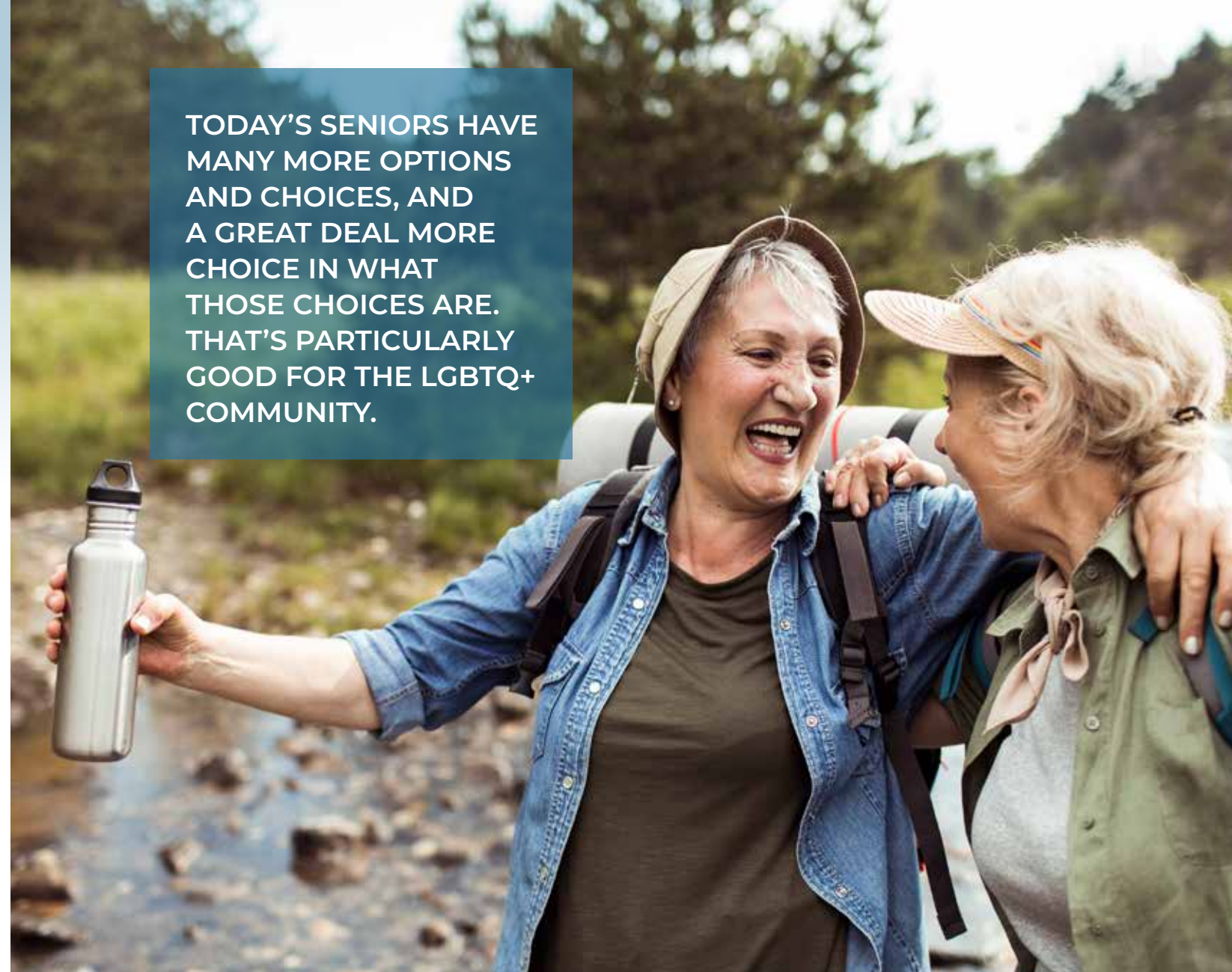
Justin Michaud is the director of M.R. Home Care Inc., an elder care company that has been providing quality care in Connecticut for more than 30 years. M.R. Home Care's staff is specially trained in providing an inclusive service for the LGBTQ+ community.

Michaud explains how many people

don't realize that the aging LGBTQ+ population needs help, especially when there is someone whose partner has passed on. He says, "Everybody wants to stay in their home, and nobody wants to go into assisted living since it would be a challenge. We are finding people that may have been fully out in their life, and they go back into the closet as they age. They've lost their spouse or partner, and they are all alone and are scared. They don't know if they are going to be judged, and they're scared to say who they are and be who they are."

He adds, "Our motto is to keep you

TODAY'S SENIORS HAVE MANY MORE OPTIONS AND CHOICES, AND A GREAT DEAL MORE CHOICE IN WHAT THOSE CHOICES ARE. THAT'S PARTICULARLY GOOD FOR THE LGBTQ+ COMMUNITY.



Director of M.R. Home Care Inc.  
Justin Michaud

in your home as long as possible, in a safe, clean, non-judgmental environment, where you can keep your routine."

M.R. Home Care trains their staff through Connecticut's "Getting It Right" program. Getting It Right works with both home care and facility-based aging care providers "to create welcoming and intentionally inclusive services for LGBTQ+ clients and families."

Michaud notes that the staff at M.R. Home Care are trained to create an inclusive environment right from the very contact a client has with the agency, saying, "We trained all of our clerical staff on the rules and regulations of the program, and on what to ask and what not to ask in order to find the appropriate caregiver for that person."

In turn, Michaud makes sure that all prospective staff members understand that

they could potentially be caring for members of the LGBTQ+ community. He explains, "When I interview caregivers, I am upfront with them and ask, 'How do you feel about gay people? Would you have a problem going into the home of a gay or transgender person and taking care of them?' You have to prepare people for that."

He also adds that the intake papers the agency uses were redone to be more comprehensive, saying, "We are asking additional questions to make everybody comfortable. Caregiving is an inclusive system, and you have to find the right person. We take pride in finding the right caregiver for the community as a whole."

Seabury at Home is a program that provides a full range of services for those who choose to stay home. Christine duPont,



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vice president of marketing and communications for the company, notes that their services are now state-wide, begun as an offshoot of the Seabury residential facility in Bloomfield. Seabury is dedicated to diversity and servicing all people with respect and sensitivity. Every client has a personal health coordinator who oversees all aspects of care and becomes the main point of contact for the client and/or adult children or others involved with the client. They can provide everything from companion care to deliveries and transportation, live-in care, and more. (See more about Seabury's program below.)

**SENIOR LIVING COMMUNITIES ARE EVOLVING**

Many within the LGBTQ+ community chooses to remain in their own homes and receive care in a familiar environment, but there are others who do embrace the idea of moving to a residential community, whether for the convenience of no longer having to manage the upkeep of a house, or because they're feeling isolated and are looking for more social interaction.

Today's communities are a far cry from the images the term "nursing home" conjures up, as they are just that—communities. They're modern, diverse, and strive to create an environment that's accepting, inclusive, and caring to all residents. They also offer different levels of care that progress as needed.

Seabury, mentioned above, is affiliated with the Episcopal diocese of Connecticut, and reflects the welcome and inclusion of the church. duPont says, "openness and inclusion are part of our fabric and culture. The residential community provides all levels of service from independent living to memory care and more as needed. There is also a vibrant community around the arts, culture, activism, and other interest areas.

What makes Seabury different, however, is how they structure the financial plans. duPont notes that as part of the intake process, Seabury does a complete financial and care review, essentially a complete underwriting process. Then, the client pays a membership fee and an ongoing monthly service fee, which duPont notes provides predictability and ensures that the client will always get an appropriate level of care at all stages of life. Moreover, this structure makes it easier to allocate—and preserve—assets either for other uses or to leave as a legacy.

McLean in Simsbury is another life plan community that offers assisted living, memory care, independent living, as well as short-term skilled nursing rehab for post-acute rehab services, long-term skilled nursing, and a home care agency and hospice. McLean also strives to create a community of inclusion for all. Carlene Rhea, the director of assisted living and resident services at McLean, says, "We really believe everybody's story is unique. Everybody coming through our door has a concern of one kind or another. And we have a resident-centered philosophy of care, and we provide residents and family and staff with person-centered care. We are mindful of a person's body, mind and spirit." McLean's Home Care and Hospice program is also certified through the Getting It Right program, and Rhea notes, "They certainly are a resource to us at any time as we all try to practice an inclusive lifestyle

and an inclusive commitment to care."

Today, moving to a senior living community is not largely seen as an end-of-life transition. In fact, it can offer people a new, exciting chapter for their lives. Greene notes, "What makes senior living different today than 30 years ago is recognizing that people want to learn and grow all throughout their lives, and this is a community. Moving to a retirement community is not a place to go away. It's a place to go and grow, and 'starting' happens at all stages of life. It's what keeps us vibrant and young."

**BEING PREPARED AHEAD OF TIME IS KEY**

Choosing how and where you want to age or making that decision on behalf of a loved one can be extremely overwhelming, as most people aren't quite sure where to begin when it comes to researching different options. The good news is that you don't have to go it alone, and there are people out there who are ready and willing to help to ensure that you select the right choice.

Liz Cornish is the owner of New



New Season in Life owner Liz Cornish

Season in Life, which offers guidance about independent living, assisted living, memory care, in-home care, and senior support services. After spending more than 30 years as a physical therapist, Cornish decided to start New Season in Life as a means of helping people navigate the overwhelming landscape of senior living options. If you aren't sure

where to start when it comes to research, turning to someone like Cornish can be such a welcome relief.

She explains, "I have a network of people that want to age in place and stay at home. I have skilled resources and non-skilled resources, elder care attorneys, and of all different types of other companies to refer people to so that we can provide them with exactly what they need."

Cornish also notes that the conversation of how someone wants to age should happen long before they're in a position where they need to make a decision, saying, "I try to tell people, ideally, to start to have the conversation before you're even thinking of [making a move]. Say, 'Hey, Mom, I know we're not ready now. But just looking ahead, how do you want to age, and what are your thought processes as you age?'"

She notes that it's important to reassure an aging parent that they aren't making a move right away, but if they start to forget medications, there are changes in hygiene, or bills aren't being paid, there needs to be a plan in place for what those next steps might be.

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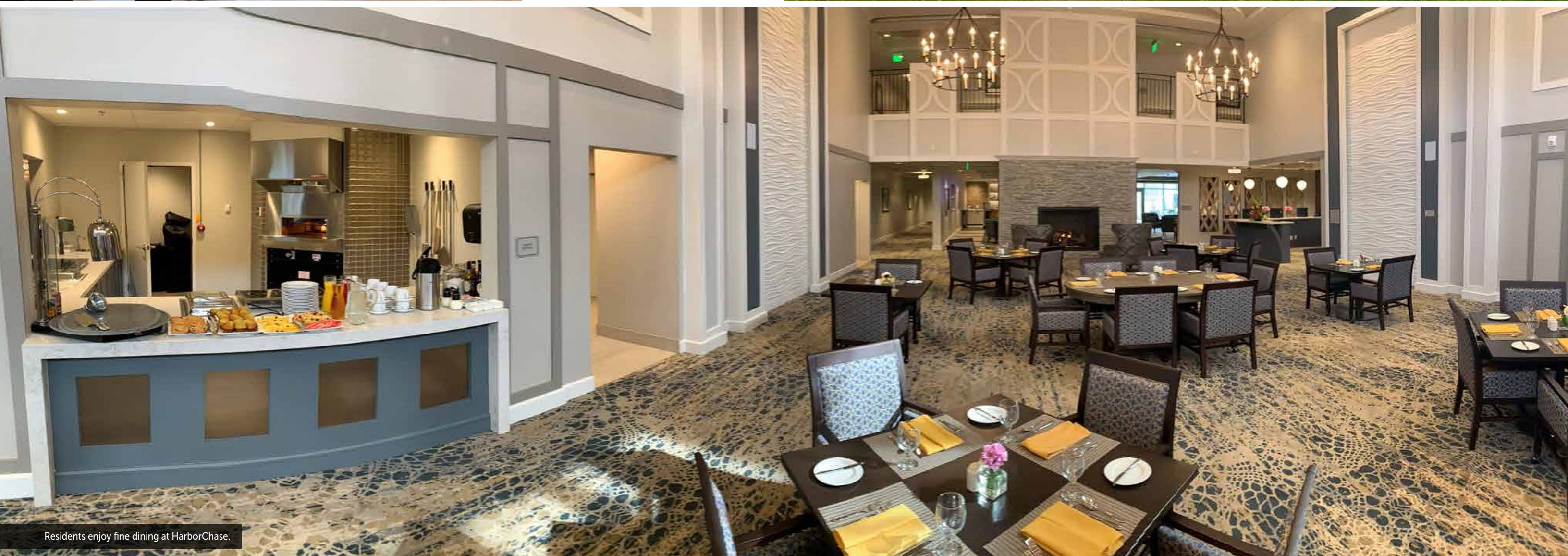
Staying fit is easy in Duncaster's on-site gym.

duPont from Seabury agrees, saying that “this is a complex decision that takes a lot of planning. We stress the ‘education piece’ of the process so that people really know what their options are.” She invites people to take a tour, and she says that adult children are often very impressed. “We’re now seeing the second generation of residents,” she says. “Seabury has been open since 1992, and these are the people who had their parents here in the 90s.” duPont also stresses that attitude is critically important, she says that those people who are happiest are those that engage in a community, who look at moving to a residential community as a new chapter or adventure.

As you research communities, it’s important to pay attention to all



HarborChase at Evergreen Walk.



Residents enjoy fine dining at HarborChase.



Friends enjoying a lobster dinner at Duncaster.

the needs and desires of the individual who will be living there. Cornish is proud to note that “All the communities I work with are open and accepting and welcoming of all people.” She adds that these are also diverse communities, and for LGBTQ+ people it’s essential that they express what they would like to see as part of their experience, no matter what that is. Cornish encourages people to speak up and notes that the communities are very accommodating, “after all, they want the community to be the resident’s home.” For those for whom starting those conversations may be difficult, Cornish says that she can help facilitate the process.

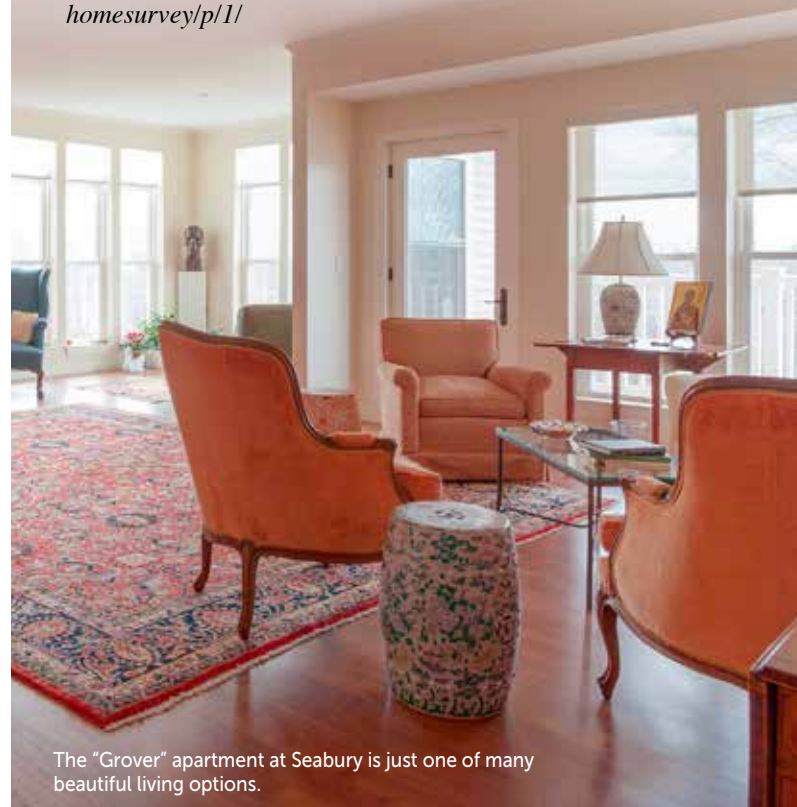
**SENIOR LIVING IS NOT ONE SIZE FITS ALL**

Making the choice of how and where to age is a personal decision and it looks different for everyone. Perhaps the best way people can help their loved ones prepare for the future is to start the conversations early and to keep them going as time progresses and the need for care approaches. Rhea explains, “It’s good to remember that a discussion is a process and not an event.”

Whether it’s remaining at home and relying on home care services or entering a senior living community and starting a new chapter, everyone deserves to live out the latter years of their lives in an environment that feels comfortable, safe, secure, and like... home. 🍷

For more information on M.R. Home Care, visit [ctmrhomecare.com](http://ctmrhomecare.com). Information about Seabury and McLean can be found at [seaburylife.org](http://seaburylife.org) and [mcleancare.org](http://mcleancare.org). To learn more about Liz Cornish, visit [newseasoninlife.com](http://newseasoninlife.com).

\*Source for study referenced - <https://www.aag.com/homesurvey/p/1/>



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# WEDDINGS 2022

## *Celebrations for Everyone*

By JANE LATUS

**W**eddings today are like fingerprints or snowflakes: no two alike, and each intriguingly, uniquely styled. There are only three rules: that it be a highly personalized event that reflects the couple, an experience that guests will remember...and that there are no rules. All of these apply for every wedding, but they are especially relevant to LGBTQ+ weddings.

"A lot of traditions are kind of out the window," says wedding planner Roger Spinelli of RJS Event Designs in Watertown.

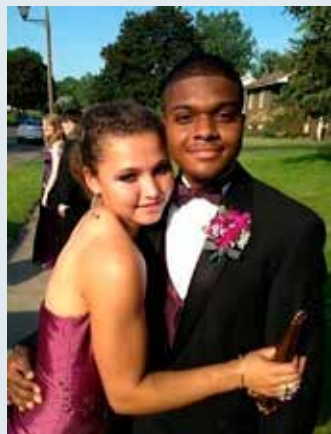
Things to consider include where you marry, and that location's history. You'll also want to figure out the size and scale, who to invite, and how you invite them. For the ceremony itself, you'll want to consider what you call it, who takes part, menus, and even how much trash is created. These are things couples care about, Spinelli says.

What they don't care for are bouquet and (especially not!) garter tosses, outdated gender roles, or anything cookie-cutter.

It looks like COVID-19 will have a lasting influence on wedding planning. "Micro-weddings", sometimes followed by larger parties, may stick around, as couples find they enjoy having the people who mean most to them share the ceremony itself. That doesn't mean large weddings are over. Saybrook Point Resort & Marina is again consistently seeing guests sizes up to 175, says wedding sales manager Danielle Bailey.

One Covid adaptation likely to remain is live streaming. Castella Copeland and Chris Smith of Windsor are inviting 110 people to their wedding this summer at The Society Room in Hartford and expect at least 100 more to attend online. It's a great option for those who live far away and those at higher risk from Covid. Copeland, a math teacher, says, "If I've learned anything from being a teacher and being remote last year, it's how to do things online!" Copeland, who identifies as pansexual, adds that she's seen her gender non-confirming friends come out, and "it's a relationship ender." So, she feels especially blessed with Smith, who is straight.

Weeknight weddings are another pandemic



Castella Copeland and Chris Smith



Becca Putnam & Kara Korengold's ceremony and reception at Saltwater Farm. Photo by Jennifer Bach Photography



Phoenix Hoang and Sinéad Miller's engagement photo

by-product. “Before Covid, if you couldn’t book a Saturday night, it was devastating! Now couples have learned you can have a stunning wedding on a Thursday night,” says wedding planner Lisa Antonecchia of Creative Concepts by Lisa in Hamden.

For traditional, in-person weddings, there are more venues to choose from than ever in Connecticut, and that’s good for couples like Sinéad Miller and Phoenix Hoang of Windsor, who chose Historic Events & Banquets (in the Hilliard Mills building in Manchester, where wool was spun for George Washington’s inaugural suit). “We chose it because it’s gorgeous—that’s the main thing. Plus, it’s LGBT-owned,” says Miller. Hoang adds, “We really researched the places we were looking at,” dismissing one that once held slaves. “We want a history, but a good history,” she says.

Drew Angelo, owner of Historic Events & Banquets, plans weddings for all kinds of couples, but says LGBTQ+ weddings “feel different – the intimacy is different. The couple’s chosen family is there. And they’ve been through more. There’s more of an appreciation for the ability to marry.”

## THE LGBTQ+ INFLUENCE STATEWIDE

It will come as no surprise to many that the wedding business boasts many out, proud LGBTQ+ professionals.

Chatham Hollow Inn in Killingworth is owned by Ken Metz and his partner Forrest King. Spinelli of RJS Designs has been married to husband Steve since 2013. Highly renowned photographer Carla Hernández Ten Eyck identifies as queer. The list of Connecticut LGBTQ+ wedding vendors is growing.

Priam Vineyards in Colchester is a member of the CT Gay and Lesbian Chamber of Commerce, and its tasting room manager, Christopher Barone-Flemke, married his long-time boyfriend (retired NASCAR racer Ed Flemke, Jr.) last October. The vineyard also holds the state’s largest outdoor pride event every June, with a weekend of vendors, food, live music and drag shows.

When Halley Gmeiner, owner of Rose and Baldwin event planning, married her wife several years ago in New York state, she says, “I was sad we didn’t have wedding vendors who were more attuned.” So-called simple things, like forms asking for the “bride’s” and “groom’s” names, were so hetero-based that “I found in my wedding experience, my wife and I were not in the equation. Fluidity is missing in the wedding industry—every couple is different.”




Word also gets around about who in the business is an ally, people like Shiran Nicholson, owner of The Knowlton in Bridgeport. It’s an historic building where the first hybrid car, the Armstrong Phaeton, was built in 1896. When Nicholson renovated, he was so intent on being welcoming to all that he spent many thousands extra to provide gender neutral bathrooms. (State building codes say “separate facilities shall be provided for each sex,” meaning that gender-neutral bathrooms must be additional.)

Planner Antonecchia is straight but has been immersed in the gay community since she was a very young girl taking dance lessons from gay teachers. Now, as a planner and justice of the peace, she says, “I get choked up, knowing how hard people have fought for that right and opportunity.”

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Edward Flemke, Jr. and Christopher Barone-Flemke at their Priam Vineyards wedding. Photo by Jewel Photo

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## IT'S ABOUT THE COUPLE

Every professional we spoke with had the same answer to the question, "What do couples care most about when planning their wedding?" All said: that it's unique and reflects the couple.

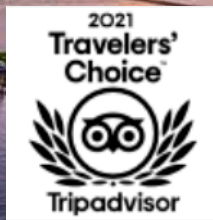
"They're creating weddings based on who they are and how they experience life," says wedding planner Chelsea Suddes, owner of Pearl Weddings and Events in West Hartford. "One of the most creative weddings I was able to work on was at Chatfield Hollow Inn, for a couple that travels all over the world." There was a Turkish lounge, a lemonade stand, and alpacas, and every table represented a location the couple had visited.

Chatfield Hollow owner Metz says that wedding was memorable, as was a summer camp-themed one, with picnic tables, food trucks, and a chandelier that the groom made with a canoe and strung lights.

Spinelli recalls, "I did a Halloween wedding where the grooms dressed as a ghoul and zombie, and their guests came in costumes."

Suddes remembers an exceptionally beautiful outdoor May 1st wedding of a nature-loving couple. The bride was barefoot, the band played country-folk, and the tent was clear-topped.

Miller and Hoang will have two flower-bearers: a girl of almost three, and a 6-foot-tall man who Hoang says is "an amazing makeup artist. I know he's going to come in glam, and vogue it up in style." The couple will also have a pre-wedding tea ceremony to



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Lindsey and Amanda Sebas at their colorful wedding. Photo by **Carla Hernández Ten Eyck**

honor Hoang's Vietnamese ancestry.

Priam Vineyards had a wedding with 400 guests, plus elephants. Couples can stomp grapes for engagement or save-the-date photo shoots, but some choose to do it at their wedding.

Weddings don't need to be elaborate to speak for the couple, though.

Merrily Connery, who with husband Michael owns Saltwater Farm Vineyard in Stonington, says "Some keep the ceremony and décor extremely simple. Others are much more elaborate. But they're all looking for something unique."

Couples usually start by choosing a venue with an atmosphere where they feel comfortable, a place with a character that suits their character.

## LOCATIONS WITH CHARACTER

Most ceremonies take place at the same site as the reception. Few are held in houses of worship anymore. A high priority for many couples are venues with

both indoor and outdoor areas. There are many options in Connecticut, and here are those planners say are most popular:

**Rustic chic:** more working farms also host weddings, and some offer farm-to-table catering. Family-owned barns are also popular.

**Industrial chic:** these include Saltwater Farm Vineyard, which combines a refurbished airplane hangar with vineyard and water views, and The Knowlton, the refurbished Armstrong Manufacturing Co., with views of the Housatonic River.

**Mansions and estates:** "Lord Thompson Manor – that's my absolute favorite. It is stunning!" says photographer Hernández Ten Eyck.

**Vineyards and breweries:** "Breweries especially have taken off," says Antonecchia.

**Inns:** for most inns, weddings aren't their sole business. Chatfield Hollow Inn only hosts weddings in May, June, and September – and it is booked far ahead. A look at their gardens gives you a clue why it's so popular.

**Shoreline:** coastal locations like the Saybrook Point Resort & Marina are popular, but there are very few venues in that part of the state. Antonecchia warns. "If you're looking for a wedding on the Long Island shoreline, you better book it far ahead."

**The beach:** if you can find one (most likely a municipally owned beach), it will be beautiful, but remember it will also be windy, and possibly hard to hear the ceremony.

**Hartford City Hall:** popular for elopements, and its architecture makes for fantastic photographs, says Hernández Ten Eyck.

**Backyards:** always popular, but especially so during a pandemic.

**Riverside:** there are serene views of the Connecticut River from venues like The Lace Factory in Deep River and the town-owned Glastonbury Boathouse.

**Parks:** Wickham Park in Manchester, Elizabeth Park in Hartford, and state parks like Kent Falls offer a wide range of atmospheres.



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Jasmine and Jenna Daly become emotional at their backyard Glastonbury wedding. Photo by **Carla Hernández Ten Eyck**

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**Historic ballrooms:** these include Hartford's G. Fox Ballroom and The Society Room of Hartford, Copeland and Smith's choice for what Copeland calls its "old-fashioned romance."

**Museums:** remember they aren't just for art. Photographer Todd Fairchild of West Hartford shot a wedding in a hangar at the New England Air Museum. The groom was a pilot, and the museum houses a plane just like the one his grandfather flew in World War II.

### SOCIAL MEDIA IS PROMINENT

Also not surprisingly, an online component has become important to wedding planning. Beyond registries and sites, couples are increasingly organizing their events entirely online, including sending invitations electronically. Copeland and Smith are doing this on the site With Joy. "It keeps cost down, and it's very efficient," says Copeland.

Couples look for planners, vendors, and venues on sites like The Knot. They join Facebook groups specific to their locality, or to similar-minded interests like zero-waste weddings.

### PLANNERS AREN'T JUST FOR BIG WEDDINGS

Suddes has planned weddings for as few as nine guests. "Truly, people are looking to hire planners more often than ever to eliminate stress so they can really enjoy the wedding."

Christopher Barone-Flemke, who is the manager of Priam Vineyards and his husband, Edward Flemke Jr, were married at the venue in October. Photos by **Jewelphoto**

Antonecchia has planned elopements. There are even planners who specialize in them.

It isn't about the size, she says. It's about "creating an event that really speaks to them."

Hernández Ten Eyck shot a wedding with more than twice as many vendors as wedding members. There were two brides and two friends, and: an event designer, photographer, cinematographer, florist, lighting designer, DJ/officiant, caterer, and a hair and makeup stylist.

### A MOVE TO GENDER NEUTRALITY

Even at many straight weddings, bridesmaids and groomsmen aren't a thing anymore. More are mixed-gender "wedding parties", and couples come up with their own names for the roles they want their closest friends and family members to play. "Person of Honor" is the new Best Man or Maid of Honor.

Especially at LGBTQ+ or ally-owned venues, you won't find gendered terms. "We have bathrooms. We state pronouns. We don't have bridal suites, we have VIP suites" says Historic Events & Banquets owner Angelo.

As for what those in the wedding parties wear, tuxes have been replaced by suits, ranging from blue to pink. Hoang will have a suit custom made by a tailor who is familiar with masculine-presenting women. She and Miller will be the only ones wearing color at their wedding; they're asking guests to wear black.

Lookalike dresses are also less common now. Instead, women are wearing shades of the same color, in different style dresses or pantsuits that suit their body type and own tastes.

### INSISTENCE ON SUSTAINABILITY

Planners say that many couples today are insisting on green weddings. Hiring companies to manage composting and recycling at the reception is just one part of that.

Suddes says couples ask for products that are biodegradable or recyclable. They want every item that's used from seating charts to welcome signs to be rented, or able to be reused or recycled. "We're always trying to be really creative so that every single detail has an intention, including its outcome.

Graphic designer Kendra Meany of Lebanon, owner of Whole Weddings, designs custom invitations and every type of print material a couple might want, using plantable seed paper made from recycled paper, and printed with water-based ink. And people do plant them; they send her photos of the wildflowers and herbs they have grown with the paper.

Plantable seed paper is available online as well, but couples willing to spend a little more for customization seek out Meany – like the couple who met in math class and ordered a geometric-designed invitation for their Pi Day wedding.





Photo by Carla Hernández Ten Eyck



Photo by Carla Hernández Ten Eyck

## OFFICIANTS

Rabbis and ministers still occasionally officiate, but the most common officiant is a best friend. “It’s such a lovely personal touch,” says Nicholson of The Knowlton.

The content of a ceremony is highly personal as well, with handwritten vows and readings from poems, books, lyrics or the Supreme Court’s Obergefell vs. Hodges decision. That was read at journalist Ernest Owens’ wedding (as he wrote in “The Year of the Black Queer Revolution” in *Rolling Stone* magazine).



Edward Flemke, Jr. and Christopher Barone-Flemke chose a “cake” made of cheese for their Priam Vineyards wedding.

## “FOOD WORTH TALKING ABOUT”

“Food worth talking about; that is so important now,” says Antonecchia. That includes drinks: you need a full-fledged bartender up for any request.

At Saltwater Farm Vineyard, Connery increasingly sees “roaming” weddings where guests don’t sit for dinner.

Food trucks are replacing the buffet tables at many outdoor venues. At indoor venues, food stations are the thing, and they are hugely varied and can include anything from raw bars to mashed potato bars.

Wedding cakes are still a cherished tradition... kind of. Many couples have a small “cutting cake”, and they don’t stop the dancing to slice it. But a “cake” might actually consist of dozens of cupcakes or cookies. At Barone-Flemke’s Priam Vineyards wedding, it may have looked like cake, but was really cheese, which makes sense for a pairing at a vineyard.

Dessert stations are popular, and don’t be surprised to find a wall of donuts. “Donut walls are the best!” says The Knowlton’s Nicholson.

## WELCOME TO “WEEDINGS”

Now that it’s legal for recreational use, marijuana is making its way into weddings. This January, Hemp Mountain CBD

of Vermont was at the Connecticut Bridal Show, showcasing marijuana products for wedding couples and their guests to enjoy.

Miller and Hoang plan to incorporate marijuana into their day, with a “unity smoke” right after the ceremony. Miller says it’s their version of smashing a glass, lighting candles, or jumping the broom. “Cannabis has been important for us for health reasons, and it’s part of our culture.”

They’re calling it both their wedding and weeding.

## ENTERTAINMENT

Entertainment is as important as good food, says Antonecchia. She has arranged for roaming magicians, aerial scarf artists, jugglers, drag queens, and strolling human champagne-and-dessert-tables.

“Rarely do you see a DJ alone anymore,” as they’re usually accompanied by a sax player or singer, she adds. “And today bands that play weddings are truly magnificent musicians.”

The Knowlton offers an aerialist who hangs from a chandelier, dispensing champagne.

## BUT THE MOST IMPORTANT MEMBER OF THE WEDDING ...

... is the dog. Well, after the marrying couple. Sometimes dogs are Ring Bearer or Flower Dog, but more often Best Man or Best Woman. After all, who’s your best friend? 🐾

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DELICIOUS //

# Taco Tour of Connecticut

## 22 LOCAL TACOS TO TRY IN 2022

By AMY S. WHITE

There is much that can be said about the allure of the humble taco. Relatively cheap. Ubiquitous. Portable. Of endless variety. So satisfyingly delicious to almost every person's palate that "Taco Tuesday" is a thing. To help you celebrate every week, here are 22 of the state's best tacos to try in 2022. >>

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

### Fuego Picante

280 Park Road, West Hartford

Fire, indeed! What started as a food truck now has a spot in food-friendly WeHa. Run by a couple originally from Mexico's smallest state, Fuego serves traditional fare that is made from scratch. This includes the birria, or braised Angus beef, which takes ten hours to cook and for which Fuego is famous. Home-made tortillas are filled with beef, cheese, onions, and cilantro, then dipped in the fat from the braising liquid and grilled. They are served with consommé for dipping. **MUST TRY:** Birria Quesitacos. (If you haven't had these yet, social media insists that you do. Honestly. Go now.)

### Salsas 4 Taqueria

2434 Berlin Turnpike, Newington

Simple and unassuming, this spot is located in a strip mall on the Berlin Turnpike. Tacos here are soft corn tortillas topped with cilantro, onions, salsa, and guacamole, or can be upgraded to the "supreme" version, which adds lettuce, tomato, cheese, and sour cream, and can be crunchy or soft. Fillings come in "selected" (including chicken, portabellas, chorizo, tongue, barbacoa) or "premium" (red snapper, shrimp, ribeye). **MUST TRY:** Short rib taco with grilled cabbage.

### El Pollo Guapo

1866 Berlin Turnpike, Wethersfield

26 Front Street, Hartford

347 New London Turnpike, Glastonbury

Billing themselves as a "neighborhood rotisserie joint," El Pollo Guapo currently has three locations. Not surprisingly, all their tacos are made with chicken. They can be purchased individually or as two-taco combinations served with rice or another of their delightful "side chicks" for an additional charge. **MUST TRY:** Bahn mi (sweet chili chicken diced cucumber and jalapeno, pico, and cilantro) taco combination with a side of cucumber salad.

### Sayulita

865 Main Street, South Glastonbury

This place, once barely known, seems to be on everyone's radar these days. Although only a few tacos exist on the regular menu, creative specials are added regularly. As an added bonus, they carry more than 100 different tequilas/mezcal. But beware, they do not take reservations and wait times can feel as long as that liquor list. **MUST TRY:** Buttermilk fried chicken taco with bacon sautéed kale and maple peppercorn aioli.

### ATC South Street

3 West Street, Litchfield

Associated with, but separate from, the popular restaurant @TheCorner, ATC South Street lures guests with its farm-to-table tacos made with fresh, local, seasonal ingredients. These tacos are as beautiful as they are inspired. **MUST TRY:** Japanese tuna taco with sesame-seared ahi, pickled carrot and seaweed slaw, sticky rice, kimchee aioli, and a nori wrap.

### Agave Grill

100 Allyn Street, Hartford

Agave is a long-running restaurant in downtown Hartford across from the XL Center. Their regular and specialty tacos are plated and served with a choice of refried or vegetarian black beans and rice. If you're planning a Taco 2s-day party, they have taco kits available for purchase. **MUST TRY:** Agave Street Tacos made with blue corn tortillas, barbecue pulled pork, melted Chihuahua cheese, shredded cabbage, and pico de gallo.

### TJ's Burritos

3 Turkey Hills Road, East Granby

Breakfast, bakery, lunch, dinner, marketplace, this place has it all, including tacos. In this case, you're in charge, using their choose-your-own menu categories: hard or soft corn taco, protein, cheese, and finish (up to four). So many possibilities! Three tacos come in each order. **MUST TRY:** Smoked chicken soft taco with Cabot cheddar, cumin-stewed black beans, sautéed peppers and onions, and jicama slaw.

### Moran

534 Middle Turnpike East, Manchester

Moran is a gem, hiding in plain sight in a strip mall in Manchester. The restaurant started as a food truck, then expanded to this brick-and-mortar. It is mostly takeout, although there are a few tables in the small dining room. Every employee is a member of the family, who brought their authentic recipes from El Salvador. **MUST TRY:** Chicharron (fried pork) tacos topped with chipotle mayo, pico de gallo, avocado, mozzarella, and jalapenos.

### El Paso

6 East Main Street, Plainville

For truly authentic Mexican tacos, this family-run restaurant is the place to go. In addition to the typical taco offerings of chicken, beef, and shrimp, El Paso offers more adventurous fillings such as tripe, beef tongue, and pig's head. Eat there, as the dining room is pleasantly colorful. **MUST TRY:** Cebeza de Puerco (pig's head) taco.

### Las Tortas MX

Parkville Market, 1400 Park Street, Hartford

Located in Parkville Market, CT's first food hall, Las Tortas is known for Mexican sandwiches known as tortas. However, around the market, their tacos are just as famous. Check out the rest of the market if you haven't yet. **MUST TRY:** Adobada (marinated) chicken taco.

### Camacho Garage

36 Fountain Street, New Haven

For contemporary Mexican street food in bright, fun, unusual surroundings, try this place. The chef's dad owned a garage in Mexico, and he has created a vintage garage theme for this restaurant as a tribute. The garage doors open up to an outdoor dining space. Local, seasonal ingredients are highlighted as well as gluten-free, dairy-free, and vegetarian options. **MUST TRY:** Duck confit taco.



### Sarapes

95 High Street, Enfield

The Chavez-Mellado family has been offering up traditional Mexican cuisine at various iterations of their Serapes restaurant since 1999, and this location is their third. Having lived in various regions of the country, family history is one of the secret ingredients that go into every dish. While their chicken mole is the best around, their tacos still make the list. **MUST TRY:** Tacos de Carne Asada (grilled steak).

### El Camion

308 Sherman Hill Road, Woodbury

Food truck-turned-restaurant, El Camion has a simple and straightforward menu: quesadillas, tacos, and burritos. Using locally-grown produce, their food is packed with big flavors. Have a special event planned? They offer a taco-truck party! **MUST TRY:** Fish taco, marinated in coconut milk and lime, crusted with cornmeal, topped with mango salsa.

### La Joya Fresh Mexican

834 Hopmeadow Street, Simsbury

The executive chef of Sayulita left there and took his passion and personal style to Simsbury where he opened La Joya. With a fast-casual approach and plenty of culinary experience behind the line, this "jewel" really sparkles. Beware that the dine-in and takeout menus differ slightly. **MUST TRY:** Citrus pork belly taco with apple jicama slaw and white truffle.

### Lucky Taco

829 Main Street, Manchester

81 East Street, Vernon

Now with two locations, Lucky Taco just gets more popular with time. One of the reasons for this is the sheer number of taco varieties on the menu, many of which are fused with other cuisines of the world. They often hold special events, and they also do catering. **MUST TRY:** Blackened Ginja Ninja Marinated Fish Tacos, with a ginger-infused IPA, citrus slaw, and cilantro crema.

### Taqueria La Grande

985 West Main Street, New Britain

169 Park Road, West Hartford

Another taqueria with two locations, at these you will find a menu of basic fillings but all are exquisitely seasoned. As an added bonus, they come with both red and green salsa, and that green salsa is as amazing as their homemade soft flour tortillas. **MUST TRY:** Chorizo taco.

### La Placita

173 East Main Street, Middletown

This mom-and-daughter restaurant-and-market has a menu that changes daily depending on what's available. That's because everything is done from scratch, including the irresistible tortillas. Each bite possesses that made-at-home deliciousness, and customers are treated like family. **MUST TRY:** Lengua (beef tongue) taco.



### Taquerio

30 Broadway Avenue, Mystic

In a Mystic gas station converted into a bar, you will find Taquerio, a newcomer to the taco scene. Their tacos come in either “traditional” or “anything but traditional” types. A loyalty rewards program entices guests to return. Fill up at Taquerio! **MUST TRY:** Fried avocado taco with black bean puree, pickled red onions, green chili aioli, and cilantro on a corn tortilla.

### Rivas Taqueria

25 South Colony Road, Wallingford

Eating from Rivas is like eating street food in Mexico. Informal, straightforward, and authentic. Tacos are served in doubled-up corn tortillas with standard fillings (chicken, beef,

pork) as well as more unusual offerings (tongue, pork stomach) and served with salsa and lime wedges. Don't forget to visit the meat market while you're there. **MUST TRY:** Tacos al pastor (grilled pork).

### Hot Taco Street Kitchen

As the name implies, this one is a food truck. It began in 2020 but has quickly become a staple at local vineyards, breweries, and WeHa's Gastropark. If you do happen to see them while you're out and about, definitely stop by. Or look for them online @hottacostreetkitchen to experience bold flavors with Mexican and Asian influences. They also do catering! **MUST TRY:** Chicken BLT taco with chipotle aioli.

### Food Truck American and Mexican Tasty Flavors.

This food truck can usually be found on Summit Street in Hartford, where it has become renowned for its fresh and tasty offerings which include breakfast items. The menu changes often, and it is a cash-only business. **MUST TRY:** Shrimp tacos.

### Long Wharf New Haven Food Trucks.

If you have driven through New Haven on I-95, chances are you noticed a convoy of food trucks parked along the water's edge known as Long Wharf. While this food truck paradise has plenty to offer, a large majority of them are selling Mexican food. The trucks and their menus vary day by day, with more appearing on weekends, but since you've read this far, you must be a taco lover, so go visit. **MUST TRY:** Pretty much any taco. These are the real deal. 🍋



# PERFECT PAIRINGS

BY ALLEGRA TEDESCO



Making tacos at home can be such a fun way to get the whole family involved in preparing dinner. While the main course is simmering, here are some suggestions from our friends at **Simpson & Vail**, for iced teas that pair well with any meal. Homemade teas are not only crisp and refreshing, they're easy to make and can be sweetened by adding honey or colorful, fresh fruits.

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### Lemon Quencher:

This organic black tea blend brews to a deep copper color with a fresh lemon aroma and a smooth, refreshing taste. It's perfect for quenching your thirst on a hot summer day.

*Ingredients: Organic black tea, organic lemon peel and natural lemon flavor.*



### Moroccan Mint:

Transport yourself to a land of desert sands, caravans and palm tree filled oasis, with this delicious blend of organic spearmint and organic green tea. Traditionally, Moroccan Mint tea is served sweetened with sugar, although you can always substitute honey, agave, syrup or whatever sweetener you prefer. This tea brews to a golden cup with a smooth mint flavor.

*Ingredients: Organic green tea and organic spearmint.*

### Traditional:

Our full 1-ounce "Texas-sized" bags make it easy to prepare delicious, refreshing iced tea – perfect any time. This brisk black tea blend is made from orange pekoe and broken orange pekoe leaves that don't cloud when brewed cold, making it the perfect iced tea choice for you and your guests. With or without sweeteners, this traditional black tea is bright and refreshing.

*Ingredients: Black Teas*

### Brewing:

Put teabag in a gallon container. Pour boiling water over the teabag to cover, steep for 5 minutes then remove the bag. Add cold water to fill the container and stir. Refrigerate. Serve over ice as is or with your choice of sweetener.





## A PASSION FOR FOOD AND ANIMALS

BOBBY FLAY BRINGS TOP-QUALITY NUTRITION TO PETS, WITH THE HELP OF HIS CAT, NACHO

Written by **RENEE DININO**

**T**o quote chef Bobby Flay, “Food is the center of my universe,” however, it’s safe to bet that his human daughter, Sophie, and cat kids, Nacho and Stella, are included in that space!

From The James Beard Foundation to the Culinary Hall of Fame, to being an Emmy award-winning chef and personality, to being recognized as a renowned restaurateur—and the first chef to receive a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame—you might say that Bobby is very well known in the culinary world. However, in 2019, Flay expanded his world and his creativity by developing a line of at-home food...for cats. Called Made by Nacho, the venture was inspired by his two Maine Coon cats, Nacho and Stella.

“While many know I am passionate about cooking, I am equally as passionate about the cats in my life,” notes Flay.

### MADE BY NACHO

Flay recognized that there was a distinct need for high-quality cat food in a market where most upscale pet foods are designed for dogs. He noted that while a lot of attention and investment had gone into developing premium, nutritionally sound dog foods, there was an opportunity in the market to

do the same thing for cats. After all, pet parents have been investing in the health and well-being of their feline family members. Flay and his team began development, turning to Nacho’s trusted vet, Dr. Katja Lang, who helped create the formula. The line went into production, and Made by Nacho launched to consumers in April 2021.

The line was inspired by Bobby’s love of Nacho and the desire to create food that would be appealing to a cat and provide healthy feline nutrition. So, how did they combine Bobby’s passion for food for humans into a passion for developing a new cat food line with Nacho? Bobby knew he had to create something he could be just as proud serving his cat kids as the food he creates and serves to humans.

Flay adds that while he may influence the recipes and create what he thinks will appeal to a cat, it’s Nacho who gives the final sign off on the menu and the ingredients, though Flay’s influence is felt in the recipes that push the boundaries of what would be “traditional” cat food.

Assisting in the research, formulation and product development for the brand is Bobby’s human friend, Elly Truesdell.

Truesdell explains, “Made by Nacho is made by a cat, just for cats. Cats are unique, so they require very specific nutrition from their food and have distinct flavor preferences. That’s why we focus 100 percent on cats and cats alone.” Of

course, romance aside, the cat is not doing the actual cooking, so the human assistants use thoughtfully sourced ingredients to deliver exceptional quality, and appeal to the famously fickle tastebuds of cats.

The result is a premium cat food with a premium price tag. Servings of Made by Nacho food can cost two-to-three times that of traditional store brands. However, as more and more pet parents make

investing in the feline family member’s health a priority, the expense can be well worth it. Moreover, these foods are as exclusive as Flay’s human dishes. Recipes featuring duck liver, wild salmon, ahi tuna, and more would sound appetizing to many foodie humans, but here they’ve interpreted for a cat’s dietary needs. For many cat parents, the health benefits—and a happy cat—are well worth the extra investment.

### GOOD FOR CATS. GOOD FOR ANIMALS IN NEED

The Made by Nacho brand is also committed to social responsibility and supporting animals in need. Flay is keenly aware of the challenge of pets that are strays, homeless or, worse, abandoned and has implemented programs to help these animals. Under Flay’s direction, the brand provides assistance to shelters, adoption initiatives, cat health research,



Bobby Flay and his cat Nacho, the inspiration for a line of high-end cat foods designed for famously fickle feline tastebuds.

and more. Last year, the brand commemorated two special occasions in October 2021, World Animal Day and Nacho's seventh birthday, with the donation of more than 180,000 meals for kittens and cats in need.

### WHERE TO BUY

Made By Nacho is available in wet and dry food formulations, as well as a selection of treats. The line is sold on [madebynacho.com](http://madebynacho.com), with a subscription option available. The site also includes a blog that includes important information for cat parents on such topics as hydration, keeping cats happy, and preventing anxiety. Cat parents can also find Made by Nacho products at retail at PetSmart and [petsmart.com](http://petsmart.com)

### ...AND A STAR IS BORN

In addition to becoming a food wizard like his famous father, Nacho is also a social media star. You can follow his adventures and see amazing moments from his #catpack on Instagram, Facebook, and TikTok @MadebyNacho.

*"To hear the complete interviews with Bobby Flay and Elly Truesdell, you can find them on Renee's iHeartRadio blog via her social media platforms, where you can also find more pet adventures and stories. Follow her on Facebook and Instagram @reneedinino."*

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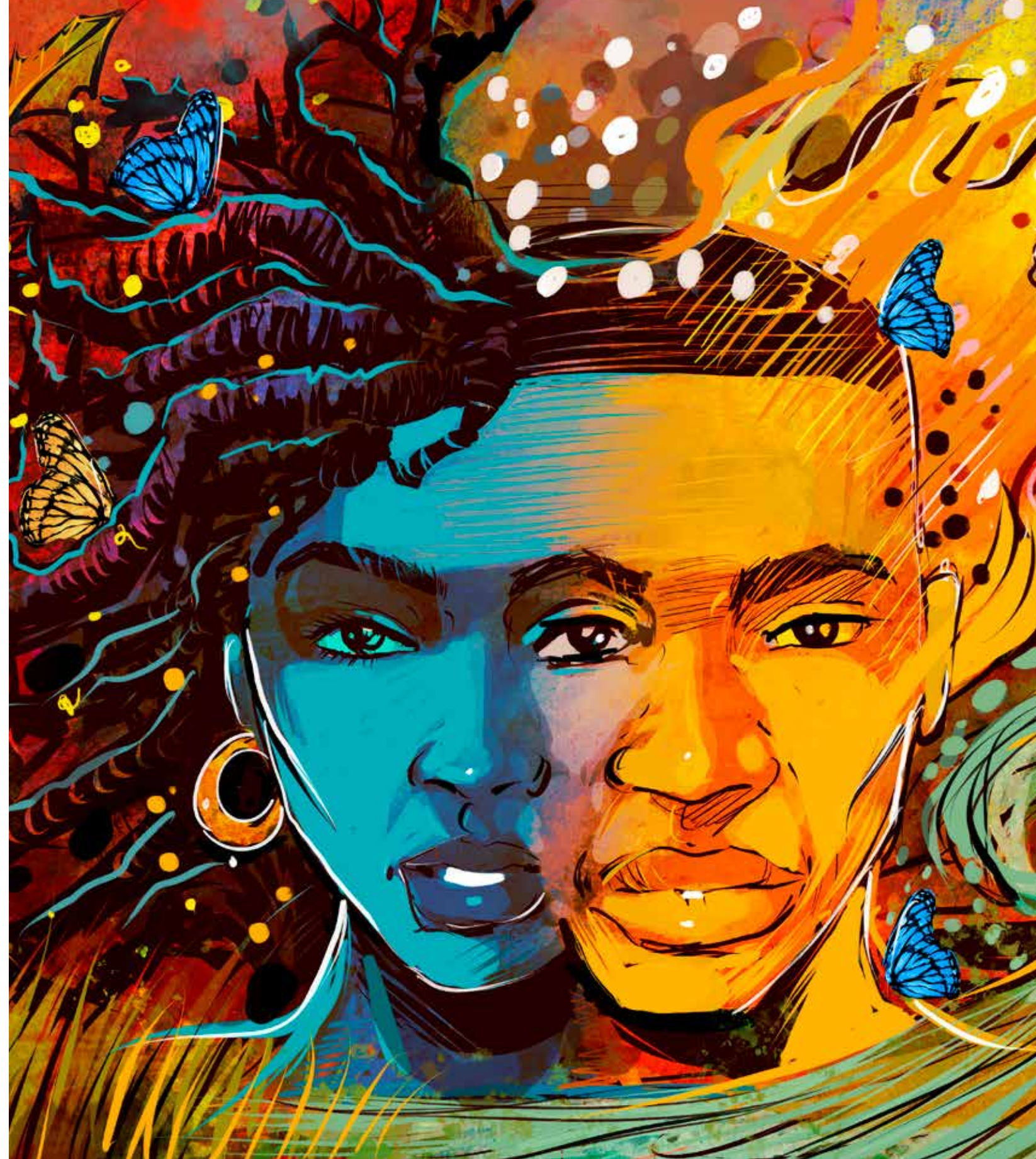
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THE FINAL WORD //

## A University's Commitment to Social Justice

By JOE BERTOLINO



**S**outhern Connecticut State University's students come from a variety of racial, ethnic, religious, gender and economic backgrounds. Many have had to overcome life's obstacles to reach their goal of a four-year degree: working jobs while studying, supporting children or elderly relatives; taking those initial, uncertain steps into higher education as the first in their families to attend college.

So when we help empower students to achieve their goals, we understand that this personal achievement means a great deal. These young men and women know what it means to persevere, and they know what it means to sacrifice.

But the needs of our students cannot be addressed, and their goals cannot be achieved, without an institutional commitment to access, social mobility, and closing equity gaps: in short, ensuring that social justice is a core value of our university.

That commitment has been tested at Southern and at institutions across the country during the last two years, with emotions frayed by the COVID-19 pandemic, high-profile incidences of racial injustice, and an ongoing debate over transgender rights nationwide.

At a time when cultural, racial and economic boundaries have hardened across our country, it is critical that we engage in courageous conversations, taking time to listen and to hear and allowing individuals to tell their stories so we may continue elevating diverse human experiences and perspectives. It is also important that we take concrete steps to right wrongs and correct systemic problems when they occur.

Certainly, if one of the prime purposes of a liberal education is to engage students in critical thinking—so that they can forge a career, and become engaged citizens in

society—then being exposed to conflicting points of view is a necessity. History has taught us time and again that the stifling of debate and dissent leads to autocracy.

Indeed, the hallmark of an anti-racist, social justice university like Southern is not that we are perfect, but rather that we are transparent in revealing our imperfections: then talking about them and taking action to correct them.

As the product of a Jesuit education, I was taught the importance of the Ignation tradition of *Cura Personalis*—“care for the entire person”—which includes distinct respect for another's unique circumstances and concerns and an appreciation for their individual gifts and insights.

This ethic of care for the entire person is the guiding force behind social justice. As president of Southern, from day one I have stated and continue to state that every voice at our institution matters. Every member of our community should be treated with dignity, respect, kindness, compassion, and civility.

Our social justice commitment, therefore, also extends to supporting our students who are in need. And during this pandemic, the financial pressures have never been greater: nearly 80 percent of Southern students rely on jobs to provide for life's essentials, yet many are still coming up short.

We took a large step to meet that need with the creation of our Food Pantry and Social Services Center, funded in large part by a remarkable \$530,000 that a record number of donors contributed during our 2020 Day of Caring.

The center is symbolic of a commitment that we will continue to make to ensure our students success in the classroom and in their personal lives.



Joe Bertolino is President of Southern Connecticut State University

Because social justice is also about strengthening communities, we have made considerable outreach into Greater New Haven and beyond.

Recently, for example, the National Science Foundation awarded Southern \$1.4 million over five years to help bolster science and math education in the state's high-needs school districts by recruiting and training a diverse, high-quality pool of STEM teachers.

In addition, the Community Alliance for Research & Engagement (CARE), based at Southern and partnered with Yale, has spearheaded the implementation of a \$571,000 grant from the CDC to help understand and counter COVID-19 vaccine reluctance in New Haven's communities of color.

On campus, we must also acknowledge that systemic racism and oppression and bias exist in our own community and work tirelessly to identify and eradicate them.

Recently, we welcomed Diane Ariza, Southern's first vice president for diversity, equity and inclusion—not in response to a major campus incident, but rather in thoughtful recognition of the need for ongoing strategic leadership to help us achieve our goals.

With the increasingly diverse range of intersectional identities reflected in our student body, it is only by taking on the mantle of social justice that we will build an environment where equity, inclusion, and diversity become a part of our everyday campus life.

And in doing so, our actions will be a model for society as a whole.

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