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WITH

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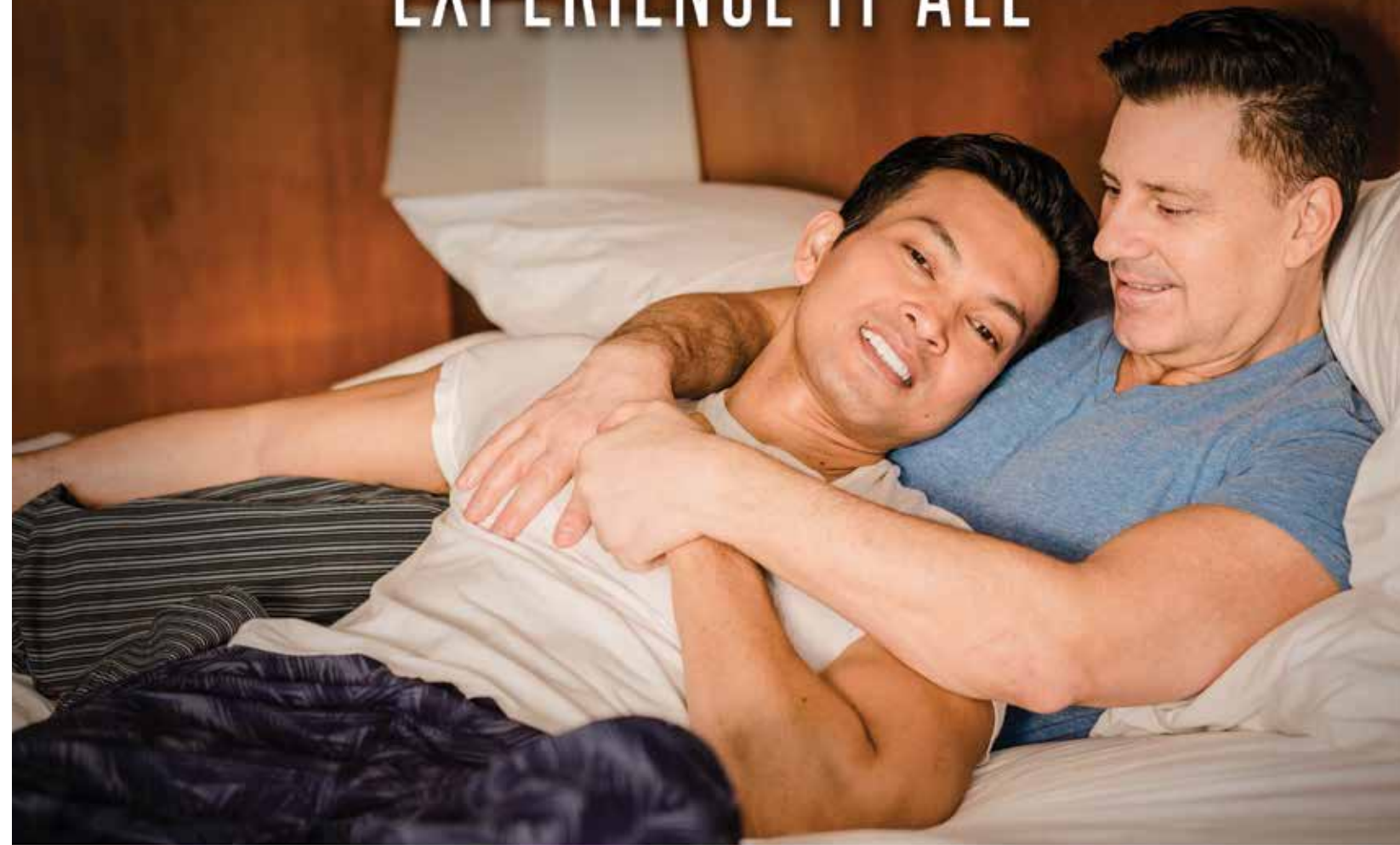
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# CONNECTICUT VOICE™

## EDITOR'S NOTE //



Welcome, Winter!

Cold weather and short days are characteristic for Connecticut winters. As we move indoors and celebrate the holidays, it's a time for reflection, togetherness, warmth, and the distinct pleasures of the season.

In my second issue as editor, we're continuing to gather diverse voices that reflect and support LGBTQ+ people in our state. If this issue has a theme, it's about expanding communities, opportunities for connection and caring and sensitivity for all.

We're particularly pleased to share with you the representatives of different faith

traditions—all of whom are reaching out to LGBTQ+ people looking for a place to practice their faiths. For many, this has been a difficult issue, and we're encouraged by the expansiveness, welcome and open invitations these leaders are providing. For those seeking a home in which to celebrate faith, many more doors are open.

Brian Lipton scored an interview with designer Christian Siriano, and he's, well, "fierce," a term he popularized in the *Project Runway* series that jumpstarted his career. He's also a man passionate about his art. Frank Rizzo talked to the largely nonbinary and gender expansive team at Elm City Games, another—and very different—community that welcomes anyone who wants to sit down and play. and Jane Latus profiles a program at Middlesex Health dedicated to teens finding their authentic selves.

In other coverage, we address a difficult but important subject for our community—financial planning. Over the next issues and online, we'll address the unique issues facing LGBTQ+ communities in this area. Michelle Cutrali kicks us off with an article on long-term care. Finally, Tedd Levine writes about some of the legal issues related to living together and some of the pitfalls people don't always considering.

I've been pleased and encouraged by the number of people who have reached out to me in the past few months. I am excited and inspired by the conversations that have been started, and I look forward to continuing. Please reach out to me at the Editor's Corner at [ctvoice.com](http://ctvoice.com).

From all of us at *CT Voice*, warmest wishes for a healthy and happy winter and holiday season.

*Chris*

Christopher Byrne, Editor  
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*When icicles hang by the wall  
And Dick the shepherd blows his nail  
And Tom bears logs into the hall  
And milk comes frozen home in pail,  
When blood is nipp'd and ways be foul,  
Then nightly sings the staring owl,  
Tu-whit;  
Tu-who, a merry note,  
While greasy Joan doth keel the pot.*

*When all aloud the wind doth blow  
And coughing drowns the parson's saw  
And birds sit brooding in the snow  
And Marian's nose looks red and raw,  
When roasted crabs hiss in the bowl,  
Then nightly sings the staring owl,  
Tu-whit;  
Tu-who, a merry note,  
While greasy Joan doth keel the pot.*

*From Shakespeare's  
Love's Labour's Lost*





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## CONTRIBUTORS //



### FRANK RIZZO

Frank Rizzo caught up with playwright Douglas Lyons (Page 10) and rolled the dice with Elm City Games (Page 40). 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.



### JANE LATUS

Jane Latus covers health and politics. She followed up on two breaking political stories in CT (Pages 19 & 22) and explored Middlesex Health's commitment to the LGBTQ+ community (Page 32). 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.



### BRIAN SCOTT LIPTON

Brian Scott Lipton talked with Christian Siriano for our cover story (Page 24) and he gave his fashion sense a seasonal turn with our piece on layering (Page 46). He has been a nationally renowned journalist for over 30 years. Among his many accomplishments, 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 such publications as *Forbes*, *The Wall Street Journal* and *Where*. He is a proud member of the LGBTQ+ community.



### DANIEL EUGENE KAMINSKI

Daniel Eugene is a visual artist, singer, and documentary photographer who is a native and resident of Bethany, CT. Outside of freelance work Eugene focuses his photographic pursuits documenting drag performance and grassroots stock car racing culture throughout New England. Eugene also keeps a daily drawing practice and performs regularly as drag queen Sorcia Warhol.



### DAWN ENNIS

Dawn Ennis talked with faith leaders around the state for our piece on faith and LGBTQ+ people. (Page 30) 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.



### RENEE DININO

Renee DiNino is our resident pet maven and wrote the piece dogs in community policing. (Page 72) She is the director of community affairs for iHeartMedia in Connecticut, the midday host on The River 105.9 and host of an hour-long syndicated talk show on all Connecticut iHeartRadio stations. She also appears weekly on WFSB Channel 3's "Better Connecticut." An avid animal lover and advocate, she and her husband Sal have a German Shepherd, Luke, they rescued in Hartford. Instagram @reneedinino.



### 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.



### ALEX ACQUARULO

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

## WHAT'S THE BUZZ?

# Getting Ready for the Senior Fling ... So To Speak

**D**on't let the title fool you. Steven Petrow's new book, *Stupid Things I Won't Do When I Get Old*, is more than just a laundry list of things older people do that annoy younger people and their families. It's a thoughtful collection of essays that just happens to have a waggish—and attention-getting—title.

Petrow says that the book is "all about the stupid things that my parents did wrong as they were getting into their seventies. And I was a smart 50-something who was taking notes. I'm a journalist and I became interested in how I might do things better when my turn came, and that list got bigger and bigger. It turned into a *New York Times* essay, and it turned into a book.

"And when I'm not being a smartass, I would say that it's really a manifesto about aging and the things that we can all do in our daily lives to sort of retrain our brains away from some of the anti-aging stereotypes that are part of our culture."

At the heart of Petrow's manifesto is the central admonishment for people not to "go gently into that good night," as Dylan Thomas wrote. For example, he won't stop rocking stylish clothing, including orange pants, because they don't fit external notions of what people his age "should" wear. He also won't color his hair—one of the funniest pieces in the book in which he learned what worked for Diane Sawyer didn't for him—or refuse a hearing aid, should the time come when he needs it. Bottom line: Petrow is a strong advocate for staying engaged in life at



Steven Petrow is smart about getting old. Photo by **Bethany Cabino**

any age and not buying into presumed cultural attitudes, or what others might think. To that end, he recommends having friends of all ages and being open to new ideas and the inevitable changes that time brings. He also advises living in the present and not worrying about things that are out of his control—great advice for everyone.

Like many middle-aged people, he had to come to terms with the realities of dealing with his aging parents and their deaths. Several chapters deal with end-of-life issues with the very good and practical advice that people should have as much control over the end of their lives as possible. Among these are making sure that you plan your own funeral and memorials, accepting physical challenges with grace, and being sure to say goodbye to people as they are dying. A significant

siblings to get their dad to use a walker, or even a cane. He cites statistics on how effective these are, and at the same time, he writes about how the device can become a fashion accessory—if you can convince someone to use it. All of it, though, is written with good humor, love and caring, even within the frustration he and his family often experience.

Some of Petrow's wisdom is hard-won. He is a cancer survivor, has gone through a divorce from his husband, has been living with HIV for many years, and as a result had to reset his path and identity on several occasions. He's particularly concerned that LGBTQ+ individuals stay active and involved in life. "You know, we become invisible in our culture whether it's at 40 or 50, and that's a detriment to everybody." The refusal to be invisible is what inspired the orange pants. "That was a lesson my mom taught me," he says. "She was always very

>>






fashionable well into the 70s and 80s. So, I've been a proponent of wearing skinny jeans and neon-colored clothes. It's part of who I am, but it's also a part of just being visible in the world.

Petrow also pledges not to be disappointed with his life. Writing about his very accomplished father, his heart breaks for a man who at the end, departed without a sense of fulfillment. Like many men of his generation, as the gay son, Petrow, had a cordial but somewhat distant relationship with his father, and there is a sense in the chapter about what was lost in that. Petrow refuses to go down the same path. As he observes, "We are only given a limited number of decades in our lives—it would be a terrible thing to come to their end with a sense of disappointment. I am in charge of how my life turns out, and I will make the most of it."

Always looking for the positive—and the possibilities—in any situation, Petrow says, "I won't stop believing in magic." I am a proponent of magic, but I'm a bigger proponent of science. I remember as a kid, the wonderment I had and a belief in the possibilities of the world.

"And as I got older, that kind of got beat out of me as it happens to many of us. We become pragmatists and, you know, everything seems incremental. One of the good things that came out of me having cancer in my twenties was a good friend, gave me this Fairy God Bunny. This was really a nonbinary gender-neutral bunny who had a tutu and a wand and so on. It was given to me as a talisman when I was going through treatment. And it was something that I came to believe in, held onto, took to all my appointments and kind of created this wonder again. That's where that thought about staying in this moment of possibility and magic and seeing where that takes us comes from."

As one reads Petrow's book, it's clear that rather than avoiding doing stupid things, the trick is to stay in the game, no matter how that may shift. These essays are a good start—and a useful roadmap.

You can hear my full interview with Steven Petrow on the Voice OutLoud podcast. 

—Christopher Byrne

## WHAT'S THE BUZZ?

### Hallelujah! Douglas Lyons's Comedy Made It To Broadway



Ebony Marshall-Oliver, Michael Urie, & Devere Rogers in a scene from *Chicken & Biscuits*. Photo by **Bethany Cabino**

**W**hen we last talked with playwright-actor Douglas Lyons, he was isolated at his New York City apartment during the pandemic, and crossing his fingers for some future life for his play *Chicken & Biscuits*, whose run at a small Queens venue was cut short when theaters shut down in mid-March 2020. (See VOICE Winter 2020/2021 issue.)

Flash forward to October when Lyons' comedy—which centers on a volatile African-American family during the funeral of its patriarch—pened at Broadway's Circle in the Square Theater.

The reviews were mixed, but even critics who had reservations about the New Haven-set family play that features LGBTQ characters, acknowledged audiences' enthusiasm, and the welcome uplift of the show.

"This family comedy, with its cheek and secrets and eulogies and amens, wants to offer audiences living in bad times an old-fashioned good one," wrote theatre critic Jesse Green in the *New York Times*.

New York Magazine's Helen Shaw wrote: "Going to *Chicken & Biscuits* does feel like being fed by loving but overweening relatives...it's a meal full of comfort dishes, difficulties resolved, and love required."

And this from Variety's Ayanna Pre-scod: "*Chicken & Biscuits* is a feast of a production, and there is enough sustenance and libation for the entire family...with a brilliant script that's fresh, relatable and laugh-out-loud funny."

"Opening Night felt like a wedding, though I'm very much single," says Lyons, 34, who was born and raised in the Fairhaven section of New Haven.



Ebony Marshall-Oliver, Michael Urie & Aigner Mizzelle in a scene from *Chicken & Biscuits*. Photo by **Emilio Madrid**



Cleo King & the Cast of *Chicken & Biscuits*. Photo by **Emilio Madrid**

I asked Lyons how he would describe his comedy: "The tone [of the play] would be *The Book of Mormon* meets Tyler Perry. Or, if you saw the film *Soul Food*, it's more like that; like a homecooked meal with a familiar family."

**Sounds delicious.  
Now pass the biscuits.**



"The love in the room was palpable. It was a joyous night I'll never forget."

*Chicken & Biscuits*, which is set in New Haven, draws from that community, Lyons' family, and their church. His mother is the first female pastor of the Thomas Chapel Church of Christ in New Haven on White Street.

Lyons wrote much of *Chicken & Biscuits* backstage when he was appearing in the long run of Broadway's *Beautiful*. (His previous Broadway show, *The Book of Mormon*, was a gig he landed after he graduated from the Hartt School at the University of Hartford.)


Lyons is one of eight Black playwrights being produced on Broadway this season, a record number. The show has also attracted many celebs, including Billy Porter, Lupita Nyong'o, Lea DeLaria and Nick Jonas, who also signed on as one of the producers.

Lyons says his play was written in part "to amplify and to

celebrate black women who are so often in mainstream media reduced to pain and suffering and taking care of everyone else. My goal to open up what blackness look like and for us to be the center of the story. There is so much joy and beauty that I've grown up among the black women in my life. I want to show the layers and the varieties and the laughter of that world that the American theatre has missed out on."

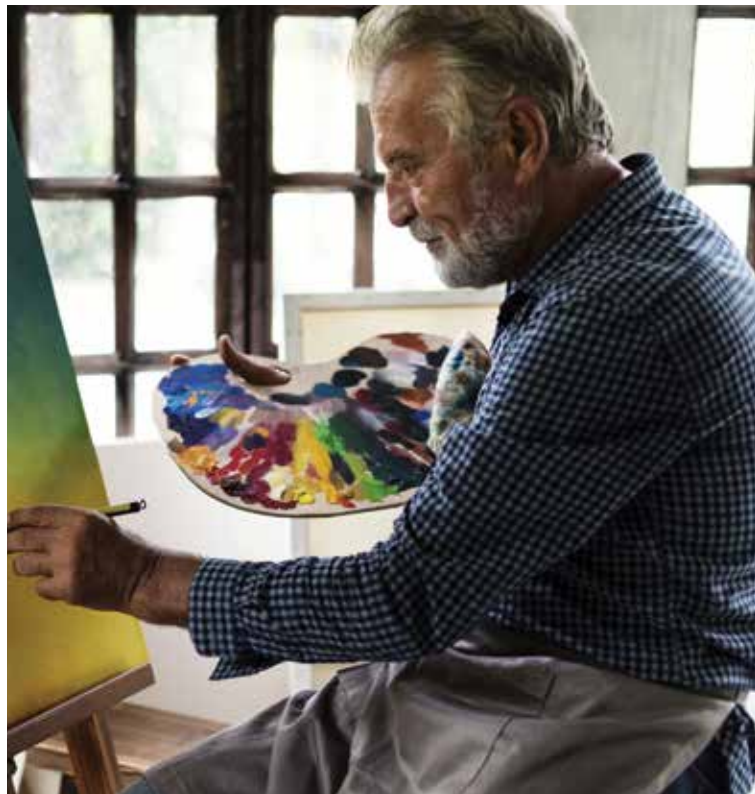
*Chicken & Biscuits*, which stars Tony Award-nominee Norm Lewis and Michael Urie, runs through Jan. 2.

And for the show's future?

"The church doors are open and who knows what blessings are in store," says Lyons. "We're already getting licensing requests, so hopefully a couple years from now *Chicken & Biscuits* will be in every community around the country." 

—Frank Rizzo





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## WHAT'S THE BUZZ?

### DRAWING ON EXPERIENCE: Artist Dan Crowley's New Book Celebrates Creativity

**E**ven as far as we've come as a society, coming out as LGBTQ+ is always a big deal. For kids of the Baby Boom generation, it was often even tougher, as the culture wasn't ready to accept kids who were "different." And yet, so many were.



Artist and author Dan Crowley.

Artist and author Dan Crowley, who spent part of his growing up in Wilton, knew that he was "different" from an early age, and he's taken that experience and put it into a new book *Danny, Growing Up Gay and Creative*. Over the course of fifty drawings with captions, the reader follows Dan on his journey from birth to age 18, how he expressed his difference, and how he grew into his own authenticity.

Crowley says the project was born out of the COVID lockdown. "I was working on several different book projects of my own, and then the lockdown happened last March. I decided that I wanted to use the lockdown time to create something important to me. I had been to a party years ago where I saw this old doll house, and

it turned out it was the host's grandfather made it during the 1918 lockdown. Wow.

"And so I, I thought, well, if I'm remembering the [current] lockdown, I want to create something. This was my chance, and so I decided to write a book or make a book about what it was like growing up gay and creative, and to make something that would help kids and families who are going through this or have gone through it."

The geography of Crowley's growing up was different as well. "I was born in New York, and then we moved to Sao Paulo, Brazil. And I spent a few years of my young life speaking Portuguese and living in South America. Then we come back to Connecticut, and I go into first grade in a Catholic school. This was a completely different world than anything I'd ever experienced in my life. So, I couldn't help but stand out. And the nuns used to think that I was trying to speak in tongues when, when Portuguese would come now, I kept getting punished for trying to be a class clown."

Crowley found his way to fit in as the class artist. His drawing talent made him popular, and as he says, it was his "weirdness" that made him different and at the same time gave him some power, and prestige, with his peer group.

That didn't solve all the problems, however. When he was in middle school, his family lived in a fairly remote

area, and so he turned to drawing and creativity as a means of expression, and he says he found teachers who supported and mentored him. Still his awakening as LGBTQ+ wasn't easy.

He says that seventh and eighth grade were particularly difficult. "I think for a lot of us who grew up gay, that was a pivotal time. We were aware that we were gay. We were aware that we were outside of what was happening with our peers who were starting to date members of the opposite sex. And because we're virtually of the same age, we were hiding completely.

"My peripheral vision really got developed during those early years. I didn't want anyone to know that I was looking over here." Crowley mentions one drawing in the

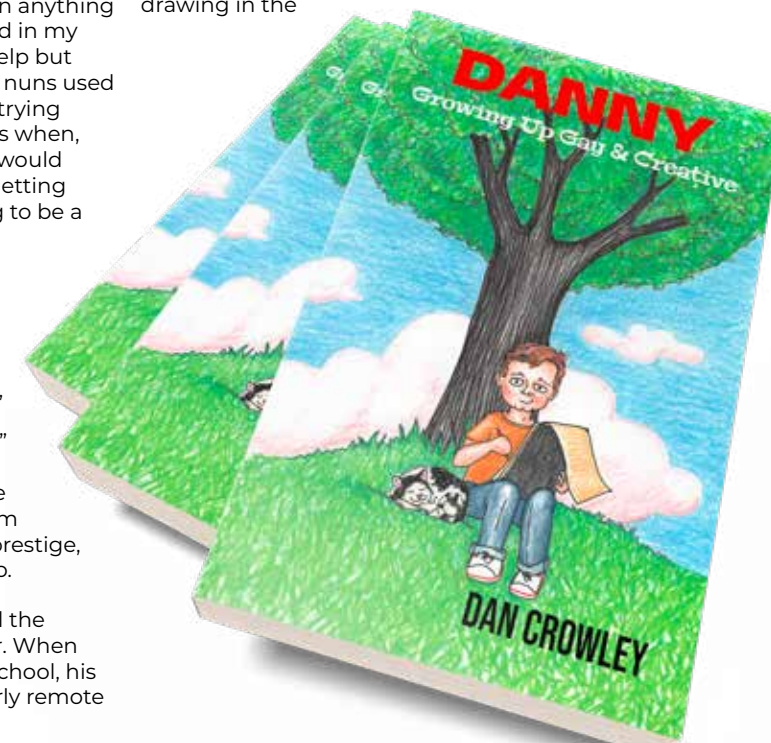
book where he is looking at the beauty of another boy but trying not to be noticed. He says, "I got really good at hiding."

Today, Crowley is no longer hiding, and he's sharing his stories in a warm, witty and highly approachable way. Readers may see themselves reflected in some of his vignettes, or they may recall their own. As Crowley says, he wants everyone—of every age—simply to be themselves, however that may be expressed.

*Danny, Growing Up Gay & Creative* is available on Amazon.

You can hear my entire conversation with Dan on the Voice Out Loud Podcast.

—Christopher Byrne





## Moving In Together? Think About Potential Legal Issues

In a relationship, few things are as exciting as the prospect of living together. It's a big step, and it's one that shouldn't be taken lightly. No one wants to be a buzz kill or undermine all the romantic parts of anticipating a shared home and a life together. At the same time, as you address the practical matters of cohabitation, you'll want to consider the legal issues that could arise if the relationship doesn't work out.



Attorney Ted Levine

This is particularly true if you choose not to marry. Marriage provides certain rights, which have only been available to same sex couples since the Obergefell decision legalizing so-called gay marriage in 2015. That said many couples, of all kinds, choose to live together without being married, and there are issues to be aware of. Whereas married couples would have to settle issues

in a divorce, couples who are merely cohabiting are vulnerable to legal action, which can be both financially and emotionally draining. In my practice, I've had to handle a number of cases of couples separating in which one party chooses to sue the other for distribution of assets and income. All these cases have a couple of things in common. Either the parties didn't set up a clear agreement of how assets and income would be handled, or one party thought they had set things up clearly, only to find an action brought against him or her that was never anticipated. Unfortunately, such cases dragged on for years after the relationships ended.

I know you may be thinking, "well, what really could happen if we're not married? Wouldn't we just go our separate ways? What's the big deal?" Well, buckle up because even though Connecticut has never had common law marriage—one of the issues I hear with some regularity—a partner can still make certain claims against the other's assets and income, and just because it may be tough to prevail in some of these claims, getting to a settlement (versus going to court) can be time consuming and expensive.

One of the more common claims we see is that an oral contract was formed, which provided for sharing income and assets into the future. This ends up as a "they said/they said" argument to some

extent, but oral contracts, if proven, can be as binding as written ones. Somewhat similar to this is the claim that a business partnership was formed, and the person suing is entitled to the assets of that partnership.

You can be accused of fraud. In other words, a partner can claim that the other partner somehow fraudulently induced them to live with him or her or they and gain access to their knowledge and efforts and are thus entitled to compensation and damages.

Another argument that I've also seen in my practice—and in some high-profile celebrity breakups—is the concept of "constructive trust." In this case the claim is that one partner is legally holding the other's assets. That partner somehow obtained control of the assets and is now denying them. The partner would then be unjustly enriched by not relinquishing the assets and instead keeping them for themselves. Since a constructive trust is implied rather than stated, there are four elements that must be proven: a confidential or fiduciary relationship, a promise, a transfer made on the basis of that promise, and unjust enrichment. Proving these can be messy. For instance, one partner may claim that they took care of property while the other earned the bulk of the alleged joint assets. That work, which benefitted both partners, could be called an asset

that was transferred to the relationship, even though no actual money was involved. The argument, then, is that the partner against whom the action is being brought was unjustly enriched by the efforts of the one who brought the action. Did that really happen? If so, what was it worth? As you can probably see, there's a lot of room (not to say a "yawning chasm") for interpretation and argument, which is why cases of this nature can drag on over time.

Finally, with regard to property, if you choose to put a partner's name on a real estate deed, you could be subject to an action of partition. The partner who brings the action would be entitled to half the asset, even if they never contributed a dime to it.

Now, the purpose of this is not to scare you off living together. Far from it. Couples need to address all the practical matters of their relationship in order to provide a strong foundation for growth and sharing; this is just one more component of that. In our next column, we'll talk about the steps you can take to ensure clear understanding and protection for each person.

In the meantime, if you have questions, please click over to the Editor's Corner on ctvoice.com, and we'll answer questions of general interest.

—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 many; instead, all information in this article is for general informational purposes only. Please contact your lawyer for advice based on your individual situation.

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## WHAT'S THE BUZZ?

### FATHERHOOD, HAMILTON AND NETFLIX: Talking with Rory O'Malley

For Tony- and Drama Desk-nominated actor Rory O'Malley, the pandemic took him offstage but not out of performing. His latest project is voicing the character of Daniel in the new, animated Netflix series, *Chicago Party Aunt*. Daniel is gay and struggling with whether or not to go to Stanford for college, and while his parents are encouraging him to go the traditional route, his aunt, Diane, is encouraging him to find himself. Diane herself was a hard partying young woman—and the party has never stopped for her. As O'Malley says it's an opportunity for both of them to grow and "learn some different lessons about life. And comedy ensues."



Rory O'Malley

O'Malley is proud of the work and thrilled to be working with a host of actors who identify as LGBTQ+, including RuPaul. "I am not over the fact that RuPaul is a part of something that I'm doing because I bow down to the queen, and I think that RuPaul's fantastic in

it. And it's just, it's been an incredible experience, to be playing a gay character, to be a gay man, playing a gay character and to have two generations of gay characters be portrayed in the same show because an 18-year-old now who's gay has a very different life experience for somebody who's middle-aged, and certainly a gay man of color. So, to have these two characters and to have RuPaul play it so perfectly is a real treat. And I got to be on zoom calls and table reads with RuPaul, and really trying to get any kind of spoiler about drag race out of them. So that was like beyond, beyond a dream."

O'Malley has been doing more than just recording in his garage in Los Angeles. He's been actively involved in Broadway Impact, an organization he founded with fellow Broadway star Gavin Creel. Originally formed with Broadway Cares/Equity Fights AIDS to promote marriage equality, O'Malley is proud of what this group of artists accomplished, though the work is not done. During the worst of the pandemic, the organization worked with Broadway Cares to raise money for the many actors who were out of work. There were, O'Malley notes, many people who work in all aspects of theater who didn't have resources, so he worked with the Actors' Fund to help raise money for those in need. He stresses how important—and appreciated—it was for the community to come together during the darkest period many theater people have ever known.

Now that theaters are open, O'Malley is back on stage. He just began performing



as King George in the Los Angeles company of *Hamilton*, and he's loving being back on stage. "We couldn't talk about how much we missed that feeling for the last year-and-a-half. We had to suppress it because there was a time when I thought it might be four or five years before we got back into a theater again." He says that the excitement of being on stage in front of a live audience sharing an experience is something everyone in the company is feeling—as are the audiences.

And as if all that wasn't enough to keep him busy, O'Malley with his husband is now a dad to a two-and-a-half-year-old son, which he calls "the greatest thing that ever happened to me. I'm a luck guy, and I've gotten to do so many cool things in my career, but to be a dad to our son, it's what I'm on this planet to do." Among all the other exciting parts of parenthood, O'Malley says his son has a great sense of

humor. "Sometimes were the butt of his jokes. But you gotta' hand it to him; the kid knows comedy."

Like so many others, O'Malley says he was fortunate to be able to make it through the pandemic. He says, "it's nice that we've been find other ways to create and communicate." At first, he says he wasn't comfortable with all the technology he had to master, but he says, "I've been able to figure out new ways to be creative. And that's the plus side of what we've all been going through as artists: we've found new ways to create."

The first season of *Chicago Party Aunt* is on Netflix. It's rated TV-MA. *Hamilton* is at the Pantages Theater in Los Angeles, slated to run through January 2022.

You can hear my full conversation with Rory on the Voice Out Loud podcast.

—Christopher Byrne



## Senator Murphy Expands Efforts To Help Transgender Youth

Senator Christopher Murphy has consistently worked to help mend and support the mental health system in the U.S. In late September, the Senator redoubled his efforts, addressing the Departments of Health and Human Services and Substance Abuse Services, calling attention to much-needed action on behalf of adolescents in general and transgender and nonbinary youth, in particular.



Senator Christopher Murphy

He cited a national survey of LGBTQ+ youth released by The Trevor Project that showed that more than half of transgender and nonbinary youth had serious suicidal thoughts in 2020. The survey sample included 45 percent youth of color and 38 percent identifying as transgender or nonbinary.

In his letter to the departments, Murphy wrote, "Nationally, adolescent mental health providers have expressed concern for the increasing need for adolescent behavioral health services. We have also heard from health care providers about the need to answer an urgent call for the unmet mental health needs for transgender and gender expansive (TGE) adolescents, including exploring, non-binary, agender, genderfluid and queer youth. As co-chairs, we encourage the Behavioral Health Coordinating

Council (BHCC), along with experts in the field of adolescent transgender care, to offer guidance on best practices for adolescent inpatient mental health care for these youth. Our goal is to help mental health providers offer the best care they can to the nation's TGE youth without a delay in treatment. The focus of this request is for the pressing needs of hospital or residential care even as we recognize the need for guidance across all settings of mental health care."

Murphy also notes the need for guidance on best practices for serving gender diverse youth, in all types of residential and treatment environments, and the essential need for gender-affirming care, understanding terminology, pronoun usage, and acknowledging patients by their chosen names and not their given

or legal names. The consequences of failing in these areas, Murphy writes, can result in delay in care or inappropriate care.

Approximately 2 percent of youth identify as transgender. In the United States, over 1.9 million youth are estimated to be LGBT between 13-17 years of age, with almost 150,000 self-identifying as transgender. TGE youth may experience a host of mental health burdens including anxiety, depression, and suicidal thoughts, largely due to societal stigma and lack of access to care.

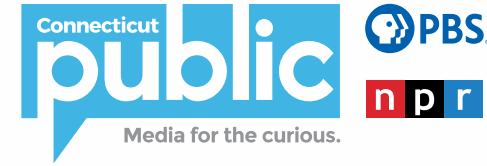
This effort is imperative to the health and wellbeing of transgender youth in Connecticut, as this remains a highly vulnerable population, too often treated as a political football and a platform

for fearmongering. In April, a federal judge dismissed a lawsuit that attempted to ban transgender participation in sports, though an appeal is in the works.

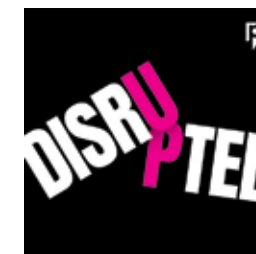
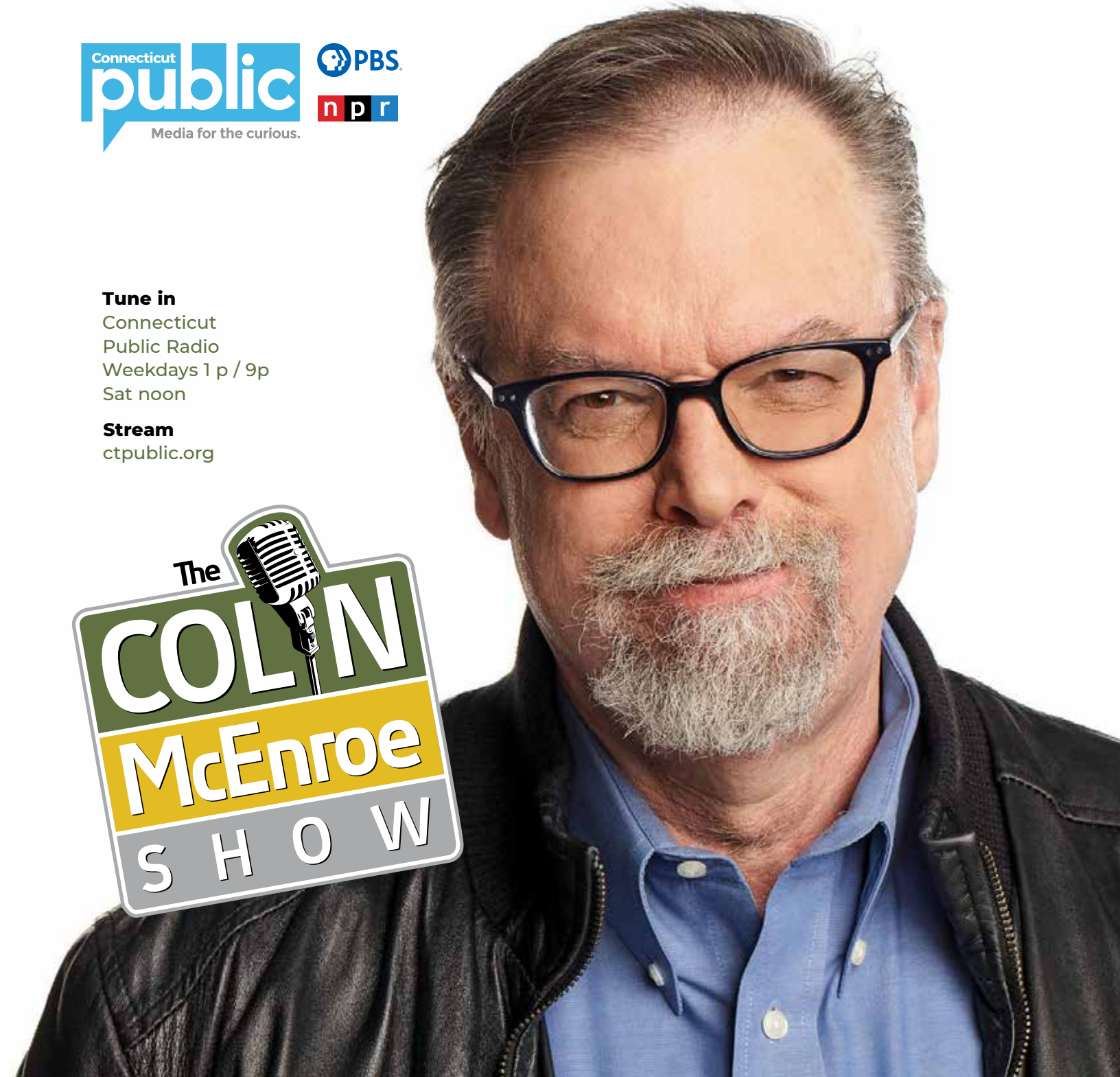
Connecticut has banned discrimination based on gender identity and expression for a decade, but that doesn't stop bills being put forward. While this is only one area of concern, 21 states nationwide have introduced bills that would deny gender-affirming healthcare to youth.

Senator Murphy's letter was co-signed by Senator Blumenthal, and stresses how important it is for this population to have a voice that is heard and receive the care they deserve. 🇺🇸

—Christopher Byrne



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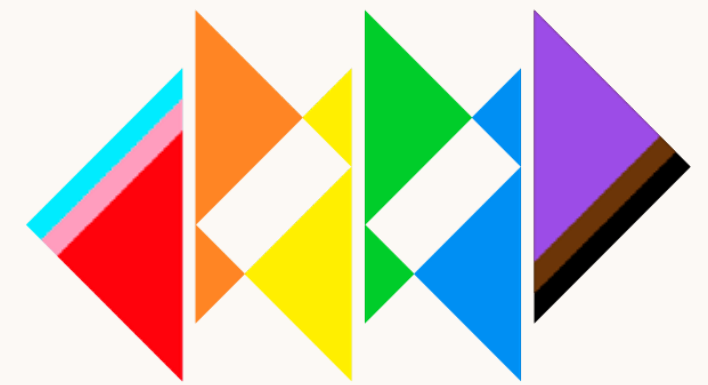
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## Plan for the Long Run

Long-term care is an important factor in the plans you create or continue to develop. You are doing that, right? And hopefully with the help of a professional.

For LGBTQ+ individuals, future planning is especially critical. Various studies, including one from Experian in 2018, showed that LGBTQ+ people spent more on discretionary items than on saving and planning for the future. There are many sociological and historical reasons we could explore as to why this is. Many of the extraordinary concerns of LGBTQ+ people in past years are no longer as pressing, including the acceptance of LGBTQ+



and nonbinary people, and the right to marry. Now, there may be the ability to have more conventional financial and estate planning.

That's where long-term planning is important. Approximately 70 percent of Americans turning 65 today will need some type of long-term care during their remaining years, according to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). Such care runs the gamut from assistance with the basics of daily living, to in-home assistance, to memory care, or to residential care. According to the Administration on Aging, women will require about 3.7 years of long-term care, while men will require 2.2 years, on

average. The Association for LTC Planning estimates that in-home care can cost more than \$50,000 per year, and nursing home costs can be upwards of \$100K per year. Such expenses deplete savings in a very short time, especially when coming out of a pre-tax IRA. These expenses can take an emotional toll as well as causing financial hardship.

At the same time, many people turn to their families for their long-term care needs, but many LGBTQ+ people don't have children. By the time they need care, there may be no one in the family willing or able to provide it. While this may sound grim, it's a reality. Clear-eyed planning can provide answers for the future—and peace of mind now.

### HOW TO PLAN FOR LONG-TERM CARE

Depending on your age, health, means and needs, there are several ways to address long-term care.

**Long-term care planning options:** **Standalone or traditional long-term care insurance** plans generally provide the most robust long-term care coverage based on the premiums paid, can be customized to suit your needs, and offer the option to receive care at home, in an assisted living facility, or a nursing home. These are age-

sensitive plans, however, and the premiums can be steep. Many experts suggest that the time to purchase these plans is between ages 45 and 55. And the sooner the better. It may seem simplistic, but it's easier to get insurance when the likelihood of needing it is further in the future. Plans vary, so it's best to talk with a financial professional who can guide you to the best possible solution for your unique case.

**Linked-benefit or hybrid plans** combine long-term care insurance with life insurance, providing broader coverage and greater flexibility usually at a slightly higher price point since you are insuring multiple risks. If you don't need the life insurance portion of this type of policy, or if you can meet your life insurance objectives through other means, this may not be the plan for you. For LGBTQ+ people considering who their heirs are and how they want to provide for them will be a factor in determining if the increased cost is the way to go.

**Self-fund** You may be able to pay for long-term care out-of-pocket if you have significant assets. If you have significant assets. While this may be an option for some, it's often valuable to weigh the benefits of private

insurance versus self-funding, as there are additional advantages that come with private insurance including care management and risk sharing, which can benefit you in the event of a catastrophic long-term care event.

**Medicaid** does cover some long-term care services (unlike Medicare, which most people are surprised to learn does not cover long-term care) but you need to spend down most of your assets to qualify and you need to receive care in an approved facility. In essence, you would have to bankrupt yourself before you are eligible to receive this. Medicaid also requires you to be unable to perform at least two of the six criteria for daily living. If you are eligible, however, Medicaid will likely cover the entire costs of care. However, Medicaid does not provide-in home care in many states.

As noted, many people are nervous or uncomfortable talking about these issues. They feel it's depressing or dark. It certainly can be a downer to think about end-of-life needs. But I like to take a "set-it-and-forget-it approach." By that I mean, if you spend a comparatively short amount of time facing the inevitable and many potential eventualities, you can make a plan to suit your life and your assets. Once the plan is in place, you can go back to your life, and you have the advantage of knowing you've taken care of part of your future. I'd always rather plan today than panic tomorrow.

I also like to think of long-term planning as a bet I hope I lose, but it's one that makes a lot of sense to take. 🍀

—Michelle Cutrali, CLTC

**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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# CHRISTIAN SIRIANO:

## A MAN *of* MANY TALENTS

BY BRIAN SCOTT LIPTON

**A**t age 36, Christian Siriano has already accomplished more than most people twice his age. A recent resident of Westport, Siriano first became one of the country's most coveted fashion designers after winning the popular television competition show, *Project Runway*, a decade ago. Since then, he has created multiple retail collections, been inducted into the prestigious Council of Fashion Designers of America (CFDA) and collaborated with a galaxy of the world's biggest celebrities—from Lady Gaga to Jennifer Lopez to First Ladies Dr. Jill Biden and Michelle Obama—to create memorable, news-worthy looks.

Moreover, in the past few years, Siriano has both returned to *Project Runway* as a “mentor” and executive producer and seen his work exhibited in museums nationwide (including the current “A Lexicon of American Fashion” at New York’s Metropolitan Museum of Art), created a highly anticipated coffee-table book, *Dresses to Dream About*, hosted the Bravo talk show, *So Siriano*, and even recently started his own interior design business. He also claims to sleep.

Siriano recently took some time from his ultra-busy schedule to chat with *CT Voice* about his many projects, his “favorite” celebrities to work with, how the Covid-19 pandemic changed his business and his outlook on life, and so much more.

*Note: This interview has been edited and condensed for clarity.*

CONTINUED ON PAGE 26



Whether he's designing couture collections that will be worn for years or glamorous one-night only dresses for celebrities, Connecticut resident Christian Siriano can be counted on to create memories for a lifetime ...

Photo by Shane Lavancher Studio



**V: What was your earliest recollection of “fashion”?**

**CS:** My earliest memories are being with my sister when she was studying to be a ballet dancer and going backstage and seeing all those costumes. I also loved watching the transformation from girls in warm-up clothes to becoming fairies on stage. That really sparked my interest. And my mom was quite fashionable and stylish. Instead of something traditional, she got married in a Diane Von Furstenberg wrap dress! I am lucky that my mom, who is a teacher, encouraged both her children to be creative and follow their passion, instead of doing something they really didn't want to.

**V: Now you inspire a lot of other young designers by being a mentor on *Project Runway*? What are the greatest rewards—and challenges—of working with these contestants?**

**CS:** What's great is these young designers are so obsessed with this world of fashion that it inspires me, especially when I have a hard day, by reminding me that there are so many people who would perhaps literally kill to do what I do. The biggest challenge of being on the show, however, is that it takes a lot of time and the one thing I don't have these days is a lot of time.

**V: That's an understatement! In the past few months, you designed an entire couture collection and created countless celebrity outfits for award shows and galas, among your many other projects. Is it really fun for you to work with celebrities, or is it just part of the game?**

**CS:** I definitely feel like working with celebrities is as true a collaboration as

you can have in this business. Of course, they're not all the same; sometimes it is very quick, practically off-the-cuff, and sometimes it takes weeks and months. Personally, it doesn't work, at least for me, when the celebrity or his or her team overthink the outfit. I am just not an overthinker by nature. I am reactionary; that's how I roll.

**V: At the risk of asking you about “favorites,” can you name a few celebrities you're particularly happy to work with?**

**CS:** Alicia Silverstone was my whole muse growing up, thanks to *Clueless*, and I still love working with her. Christina Hendricks is one of the nicest women on the planet! Billy Porter just works it, no matter what we come up with. Janelle Monae is wonderful because she's such a creative artist. She can be tough because she knows what she likes and she thinks about fashion differently than some other people, and I love that. I adore working with people like Kristin Chenoweth and Danielle Brooks, both of whom are always so fun to be with. It's honestly a big list.

**V: As that list also proves, you've been a big champion of body diversity in fashion! Why is that so important to you?**

**CS:** I made a very important decision early on that I didn't want to alienate any customer, famous or not. I feel like what I want to leave behind is being known for more than just designing great clothes, but for representing all women. Otherwise, to me, this business would be nothing more than packing up dresses and shipping them to stores. Trust me, the nitty gritty of the fashion business is not fun. I say to people, “You think this is all glamour? Do you want to see all the bills I have to pay?”

**V: You have both a career retrospective exhibition at the Savannah College of Art and Design (SCAD) this fall and you're releasing an updated version of your book, *Dresses to Dream About*. What has it been like looking back at your career this way?**

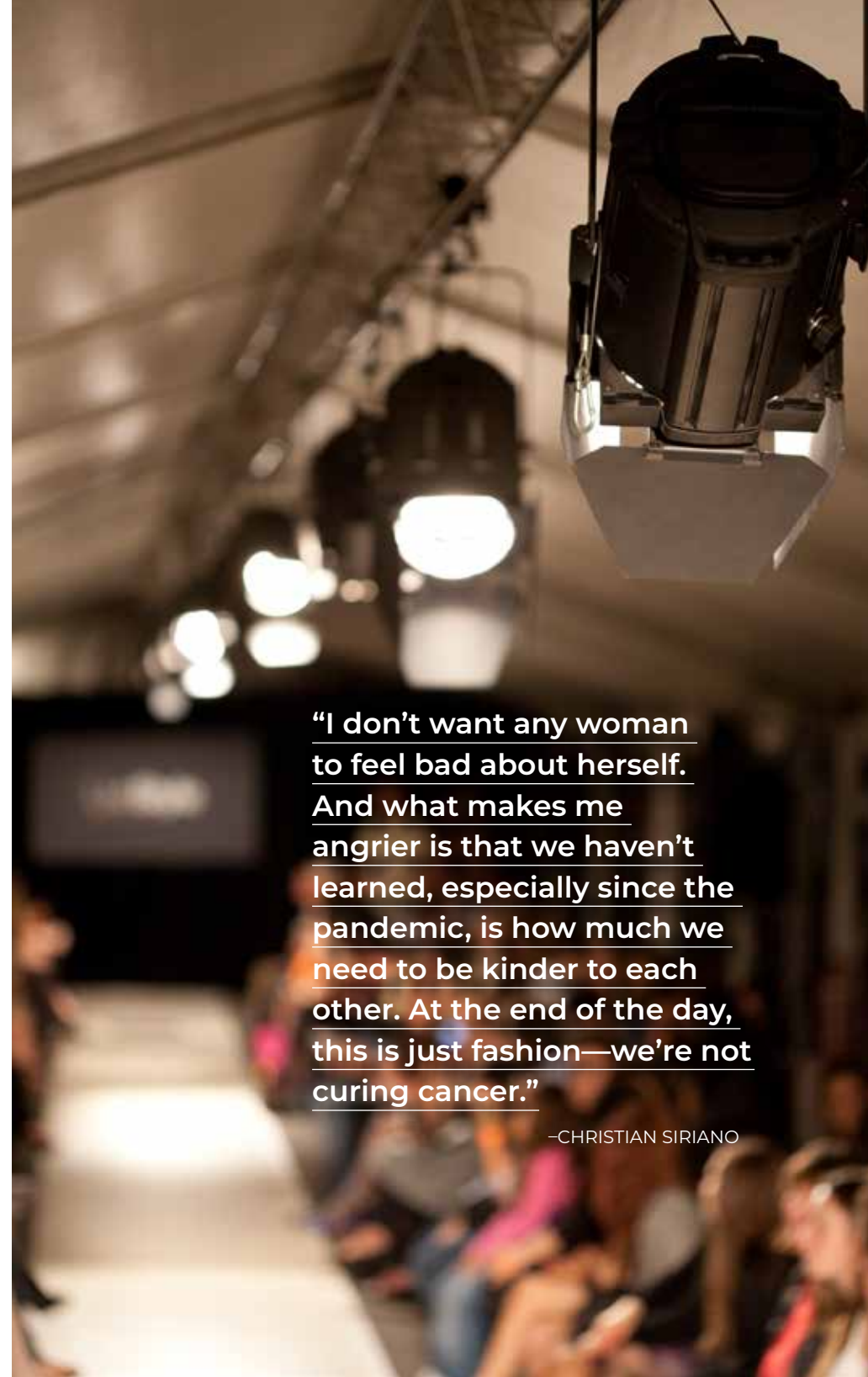
**CS:** What's good is I am not a regretful designer. In fact, sometimes, I get excited to see what I did just starting out, even knowing how much I've grown. And no matter what outfits I've designed, they all have memories—even the bad ones! So it's been fun!

**V: Speaking of “bad,” more than ever, the mainstream media really talks about fashion, especially red carpets like at the recent Met Gala. How does that affect you and your work?**

**CS:** I don't take the criticism of my work personally, but I don't like that the media seems to attack the person wearing something, whether I made it or not, by saying how it's doesn't flatter her, or it doesn't fit her. No one wants to hear they look fat or ugly in a dress, and I don't want any woman to feel bad about herself. And what makes me angrier is that we haven't learned, especially since the pandemic, is how much we need to be kinder to each other. At the end of the day, this is just fashion—we're not curing cancer.

**V: Speaking of the Covid pandemic, it was particularly hard on the luxury fashion industry. But you took the initiative to make over three million PPE masks. Why did you do that?**

**CS:** In the beginning, it was a completely emotional reaction to what was



**“I don't want any woman to feel bad about herself. And what makes me angrier is that we haven't learned, especially since the pandemic, is how much we need to be kinder to each other. At the end of the day, this is just fashion—we're not curing cancer.”**

—CHRISTIAN SIRIANO

happening. Then, once I got started, I felt like I had to hold up my end of the bargain by making more and more, and as the pandemic continued, it became even more important to keep doing this—even if we weren't making money from it! Eventually, we did find a way to a make some money from it, but ultimately, it's one of the things I've done that I am most proud of!

**V: So, do you think a lot about what the future holds in store for Christian Siriano, professionally and personally?**

**CS:** As far as fashion, I really admire what Donna Karan, Marc Jacobs, Oscar de la Renta and some of the other American houses were able to build. People don't realize American designers simply don't have the same amount of money to work with as the European designers. I really think people forget—or don't understand—how hard it is to survive in this industry, especially after this pandemic when people aren't shopping the way they used to be. That's one reason why I will never again put all my eggs in one proverbial basket and why I have taken on so many other projects. It's not only that I have to be stimulated in other ways than just making clothes; it's also that the pandemic taught me—and maybe all of us—that everything could be taken away just like that. These days, I focus more on my family, my health and my new house. That said, I do have to finish my pre-fall collection, which shows in December. I still have a lot of energy. I know that I can drive some people crazy. But for me, at least, that's a good thing! **V**

# CHRISTIAN SIRIANO



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# HAVE FAITH: How LGBTQ+ Clergy Are Welcoming Us Home for the Holidays

*Christian, Jews and Muslims practice different traditions but follow similar paths when embracing our community*

By DAWN ENNIS

**T**his is the season for holiday get-togethers, and for many of us, that includes attending services at houses of worship. While there is a widespread perception among opponents of LGBTQ+ rights that our community doesn't believe in God or attend religious

services, that's far from the truth. Just ask a gay reverend, or a transgender minister, or a lesbian rabbi. *CT Voice* did just that, and more!

But first, let's clear up any misconceptions. Researchers at the Williams Institute at UCLA found that nearly half of all LGBTQ+ adults consider themselves "religious." According to their 2020 study, the LGBTQ+ faithful come from all over, both rural and urban settings, both single and married, across all ages, racial and ethnic groups. Connecticut, too, boasts a rich tapestry of religions, and out clergy.

## UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST: Rev. Darrell Goodwin

"My desire is that everyone knows they have a right to be loved and they have a right to a relationship with God," said Rev. Darrell Goodwin, executive conference minister of the Southern New England Conference of the United Church of Christ. Originally from Chicago, Rev. Goodwin said he has been preaching since he was 15 and identifies as queer. "No one owns your right to be loved or your right to have a relationship with a higher power if that's what you want," he said. "No one should have a right to take that from someone."



Executive conference minister of the Southern New England Conference of the United Church of Christ, Rev. Darrell Goodwin.

Toward that end, Goodwin said he has considered a shocking idea that would send a clear message to everyone about where each of the conference's churches stand on LGBTQ+ and other civil rights issues, including the bigoted ones.

"I want our churches to state that they're homophobic, transphobic, racist, sexist, everything else," he said, noting most of the UCC churches do "extravagant work" to be welcoming. "We have an 'Open and Affirming' sticker; Let's create a 'I'm a bigot sticker.' And so when I ask you, 'Are you going to welcome all of God's people over?' And





you have all your reasons about why you don't think your church is ready, and the members are too old, and they are not ready for that? I want to say, 'God bless you. Let me give you your sticker that says, 'We are a discriminatory church and that's how we're going to worship.' I'm not here to change you, because I'm going to be your conference minister, too.' I just want people to know when you go to such and such in Hartford, you should just note that's a homophobic church. But if you want a non-homophobic church, we got about 15 others." Rev. Goodwin contributed our final page for this issue, as well. Read more on Page 80.

**METROPOLITAN COMMUNITY CHURCH IN HARTFORD: Rev. Aaron Miller**



In 2008, just a few weeks after going through a week-long interview process in Minneapolis to become ordained as a minister, Rev. Aaron Miller

made another important change: he started his gender transition, right here in Connecticut.

"God had put before me a really deciding moment, a defining moment, actually," Rev. Miller said. "I could not go on and preach and teach and minister in the name of God not being authentic. And so I came home knowing I had to transition as my part of my journey and in answering my call."

The Yale Divinity School graduate and Long Island native said he never questioned his path forward, and was pleasantly surprised that his employer at that time supported his transition and, more importantly, embraced it, instituting training for all employees. He spent 30 years working in corporate America, landing on a top rung of the ladder as a senior manager.

Miller left to become chaplain at Yale New Haven hospital for a decade and since 2011 has been pastor of the Metropolitan Community Church in

Hartford, which welcomes people of all sexual orientations, gender identities, and faiths, even non-Christians and non-believers.

"We have Hindu, we have people who are agnostic and atheist and Jewish," said Miller. "We're there because of love."

He challenges other faith leaders to throw open their doors, too. "How can you create that within your faith communities, so that what binds you together is not how you look, or how you dress, or where you live, or your Zip code, but rather how you love, who you love, and that you love?"

**CONGREGATION BEIT SIMCHAT TORAH, NEW YORK CITY: Rabbi Marisa James**



"I grew up in Connecticut thinking I was straight, like many people who grew up in Connecticut, and I was actually a co-founder of the GSA at my high school

in Woodbridge," said Rabbi Marisa Elana James of Congregation Beit Simchat Torah, the largest LGBTQ+ synagogue in the world. CBST is nondenominational, and like Miller's MCC church, welcomes everyone to its services.

Too often, Rabbi James said, temples are afraid to be inclusive, which she said is a heartbreaking misstep. "The minute that you treat somebody who's like a holy being, walking into your community, as a question mark, it's already a wedge, it's already a buffer, it's already saying, 'No, you're not quite human.'"

James, who was the first "officially sanctioned lesbian" at the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York, not only preaches about LGBTQ+ acceptance from the Torah, but also from *A Christmas Carol*.

"I literally read it out loud every single year to whomever will listen to me," she explained. "What really should be the root of any religious celebration should

be this idea, like Dickens said, that we are all creatures on the same journey to the same end. How can we not be taking care of each other and be generous with each other and have something each year that reminds us to be generous with each other, and to take care of each other, knowing that we're all on the same journey that we're all going to wind up in the same place?"

**TEMPLE ISRAEL OF WESTPORT: Cantor Julia Cadrain**

"As a member of the queer community, one of the ways I try to shine my light is by sharing about my family," said Cantor Julia Cadrain, a West Hartford native. "I talk about my wife, and our two children.

I am proud of us, and I am particularly proud of my wife Elana Arian, who is a well-known Jewish composer and musician, and spiritual leader. When we sing her music, I sometimes tell people,

'This is a song by my wife.' Talking about one's family is a typical way of connecting with people, but in my case, it necessarily includes a little 'coming out' each time. If I don't specify, people assume the heteronormative standard and ask me about my husband. My hope is that in being forthcoming about who I am, I give others permission to do the same."

Cadrain shared what she called "four small, accessible steps towards creating more inclusive and welcoming faith communities."

"As a member of the queer community, when I enter into a new place or meet new people for the first time, I don't necessarily assume that I will be accepted," she revealed. "I noticed on one of my first days at my new synagogue, Temple Israel of Westport, that there was a small rainbow flag in our building's entryway. Immediately, it made me feel safe and accepted. This is a small thing that sends a big message about inclusion and can be easily adopted by all faith communities.

"Second, we need to listen to our children and teens, and let them lead the way in the work of inclusion. The world they inhabit is very different from the world in which I grew up, as far as ideas

about gender and sexual identity. I want us to take our cues from them.

"Third, I am conscious of lifting up our tradition's female heroes. Although in ancient times, our tradition was progressive for its moment, many of our prayers and stories still historically center around men," said Cadrain, who said she'll adjust pronouns or add inspirational figures such as Miriam to stories and songs.

"Finally, representation matters. I am proud to be spiritual leader who is open about my family and about who I love. My hope is that in my simply being myself, and being honest and open about who I am, I will give others permission to do the same," she said. "The more we embrace diversity, the stronger we become."

**ISLAM**

In its guide to how Islam intersects with the LGBTQ+ community, the Human Rights Campaign concedes, "It is rare that an openly LGBTQ+ Muslim feels fully welcome at a mainstream mosque in the United States. Cultural norms and traditional readings of sacred texts often uphold a heteronormative binary of gender identification and sexual orientation that don't allow for the range of identities present in today's society."

But groups like Muslims for Progressive Values, Imaan LGBTQ+ Muslim Support Group and Queer Jihad are working to change that.

"Our LGBTQ+ members of society are equally human and deserve respect and dignity; After all, they too carry the spirit of God in them. So, celebrate together, as



Ani Zonneveld, founder and president of Muslims for Progressive Values



Cantor Julia Cadrain from Temple Israel of Westport. Photo courtesy of Temple Israel of Westport.

**"Our LGBTQ+ members of society are equally human and deserve respect and dignity; After all, they too carry the spirit of God in them. So, celebrate together, as equals."**

—Ani Zonneveld





Temple Israel of Westport.

equals,” Ani Zonneveld said. She is the founder and president of Muslims for Progressive Values, and a straight ally. “As people, the Quran is clear, we will be judged by our good deeds, and not by race, gender or sexuality.”

It may be surprising, but gender transition does not raise hackles in much of the Muslim world: “Transgender men and women are recognized and accepted in many Islamic cultures around the world,” according to HRC.

### THE ‘NONES’

The group that is far and above the most accepting of LGBTQ+ people turns out to be those who don’t believe in God at all. According to a 2015 study by the Pew Research Center, 94 percent of respondents who considered themselves agnostics said homosexuality should be accepted. Although most people around

**According to a 2015 study by the Pew Research Center, 94 percent of respondents who considered themselves agnostics said homosexuality should be accepted.**

the world identify with one faith or another, the number of people with no religious affiliation, often referred to as “the nones,” is expected to grow to 1.2 billion by 2060, according to Pew; right now, the “nones” account for about three in ten Americans, or 27 percent. That number has been growing since 2012, along with LGBTQ+ acceptance by self-described agnostics and atheists.

If one thing emerges from these conversations, it’s that the various faith traditions all have in common a desire for what Goodwin calls “extravagant welcome.” It’s a particularly important

message right now as so many high-profile religious people are delivering the opposite message to LGBTQ+ people. None of this has escaped those who are trying to be more inclusive.

As Miller says in response to those who cite scripture to justify division, “God does not make mistakes, and God intentionally and magnificently decided to make me this way,” he said. “Who am I to question how God has created me, and the fact that I am becoming, or as we all are, something more beautiful every day? I think that is absolutely God’s creative spirit.”

**We have Hindu, we have people who are agnostic and atheist and Jewish,” said Miller. “We’re there because of love.”**

—Rev Aaron Miller

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## HELPING TEENS FIND THEIR AUTHENTIC SELVES

By JANE LATUS

“It gets better,” says the famous slogan, and there’s proof at Middlesex Health. Adolescents in its new gender program are receiving expert, compassionate and multi-pronged help in beginning their identity journey—and young enough so that their journey may be much smoother than for those who start later in life.

It’s getting better for parents, too, who benefit from full inclusion in their children’s care. “In pediatrics, the patient isn’t your only patient. The parents are too,” says Middlesex family nurse practitioner Britta Shute, APRN. She says part of her job is caring for parents whose children have just shared with them their monumental realization about their gender identity.

“Parents often initially respond with fear, but their reaction is usually coming out of love,” says Shute.

In August 2021, Middlesex expanded its Center for Gender Medicine and Wellness program to include those under 18. There are already more than 1,200 transgender and gender non-conforming adults in the program, which employs a comprehensive, multi-disciplinary approach. Depending on their needs, a patient’s medical team might include a primary care doctor, endocrinologist, voice therapist, mental health professional, physical therapist, surgeon, and more.

In expanding the program, Middlesex was responding to its determination of a pent-up need for the new adolescent program, as patients report that the few similar programs in Connecticut have lengthy waiting lists.

The self-awareness that many patients arrive with is a hopeful sign that society is making life easier for gender non-conforming kids. “A lot of the kids are coming in with a self-assured certainty of who they are,” says Shute. “I just

saw a 13-year-old today who said, ‘When I was 8, I realized there’s a third box. I’m ‘other.’”

“One of the phenomena I’ve seen over the past few years,” she adds, “is that many patients are fully transitioned at school already. They’ve socially transitioned already. This is a marked change; I used to be the first to be giving them resources.”

Shute sees still another sign of progress. She used to get involved frequently with discrimination and bullying issues at school, but that happens less often now.

Shute says young patients are much more confident. “Their resiliency is amazing. Being transgender is such a small part of their identity as a whole. When I try to connect them with therapy, they say ‘It’s not important to me.’”

Shute recalls one girl who after being bullied in school, volunteered to take part in her school’s staff professional training. “It didn’t scathe her at all. She said to me, ‘I just want to help other kids.’”

Shute’s background is in primary care, and she began also providing hormone therapy many years ago when practicing in Boston. “I was very interested in HIV care, but more than half my patients identified as trans. So, I had to learn, very fast.” Being a primary care practitioner is a big asset, she says. “I have an understanding of treating the whole person.”

When children come to the program, she says, medical intervention is never the first step. The first step is to identify the child’s goals. For instance, she’s following her youngest patient, age 10, to “make sure we’re on top of things,” but even if medical intervention is eventually chosen, it wouldn’t happen until the onset of puberty.

Care is done in tandem with other disciplines, including mental health, primary care and speech therapy. “Voice



Britta Shute, APRN at Middlesex Health. Photo by Stan Godlewski



coaching is a huge quality of life issue," says Shute. "It is extremely important not to be outed by your voice."

The majority of patients arrive hopeful for cross-gender hormone replacement therapy when they reach the age of 16, says Shute. Until then, puberty blockers provide the time to make their decisions about transitioning, while preventing the emotional distress that an unwanted puberty brings.

Depending on when they are started, blocking hormones can prevent, or halt, the progress of unwanted physical characteristics like voice deepening, facial hair growth and breast development.

Those who transition as adults experience two puberties: one they didn't want, and eventually the one they do. It can be expensive, painful, difficult, or impossible to undo the sex characteristics wrought by that first puberty.

"The greatest thing about puberty blockers is that they are completely reversible," says Shute. That's reassuring to parents whose children have just hit them with the news of their gender realization.

Parents come with lots of questions. Others arrive misinformed by what they've read on the Internet. Either way, Shute educates them.

Because gender affirming care for minors legally requires parental consent, Shute acknowledges, "I'm fully aware I'm seeing a small part of families, ones with parental support."

Aside from her medical role, Shute finds herself serving as translator between children and parents. "Kids tell me very eloquently what they want, but they can't explain it to their parents."

Part of her work is to acknowledge that parents, too, have dreams for their children, and "there's sometimes some grief." They may even grieve, perhaps unnecessarily, the loss of future grandchildren.

Before beginning cross-gender hormones, Shute always discusses fertility with teens. "It's nothing they've considered,"

she says. "Adolescents don't usually do long-term family planning!" Trans teens are especially unlikely to contemplate their reproductive future.

Speaking of which: futures may be the main thing this program provides.

According to a 2018 American Academy of Pediatrics study, 51 percent of trans male adolescents attempted suicide, followed by 42 percent of those identifying as non-binary, 30 percent of trans females, and 28 percent of those questioning their gender.

That is in stark contrast to cisgender teens, whose attempted suicide rate was 18 percent for females and 10 percent for males.


Gender identity is such a powerful factor in suicide attempts that for trans or nonbinary teens, no other demographic characteristic was associated. Cisgender suicide attempts, however, are affected by factors like race, parents' education level, and family income.

The suicide rate of trans kids is cut in half if the child has even one supportive adult in their lives, according to the same AAP study.

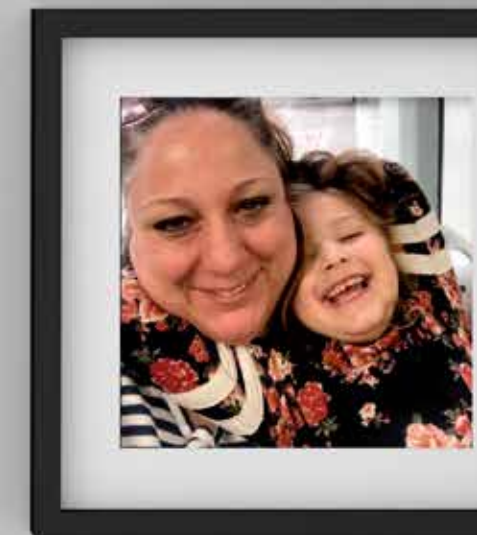
An AAP policy statement calls for "youth who identify as TGD [transgender or gender diverse] to have access to comprehensive, gender-affirming, and developmentally appropriate health care that is provided in a safe and inclusive clinical space."

Shute sees first-hand what this care means not to just patients, but to parents, who tell her how relieved they are to find Middlesex after being treated incompetently, or even mistreated, elsewhere.

And for kids, she says, "The moment they understand a prescription is coming, there's huge relief."

More information on the adolescent program is available at Middlesex Health's Center for Gender Medicine and Wellness ([MiddlesexHealth.org/transgender](http://MiddlesexHealth.org/transgender)). 

**An AAP policy statement calls for "youth who identify as TGD [transgender or gender diverse] to have access to comprehensive, gender-affirming, and developmentally appropriate health care that is provided in a safe and inclusive clinical space."**



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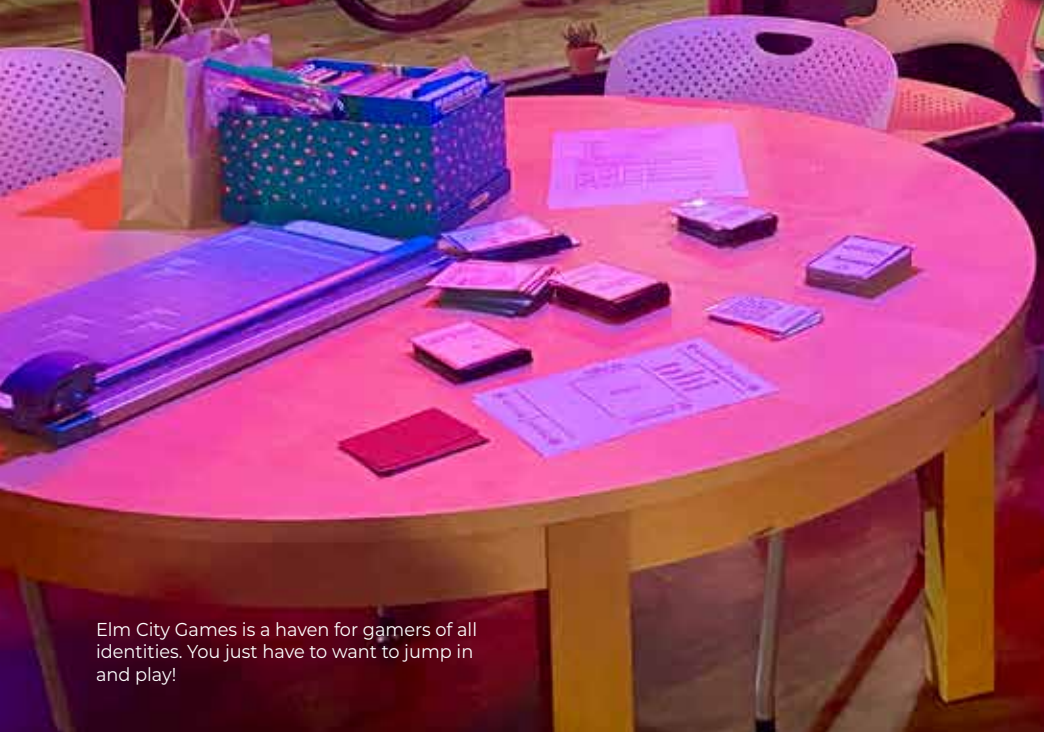
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# The Game Is Changing



Elm City Games is a haven for gamers of all identities. You just have to want to jump in and play!

## LGBTQ+ Community Now Part Of Hobby Game World

Written and photographed by **FRANK RIZZO**

**W**alk into the hot pink entrance of Elm City Games in the Ninth Square section of New Haven and enter a world of escape, fantasy and community — and a welcoming space for LGBTQ+ people headed by its like-minded staff.

In the main room there's an endless selection of games for sale that run the gamut from the classics — The Game of Life, Clue and more variations of Monopoly that you ever knew existed — to games from other countries, games inspired by films ("Star Wars" has an entire wall), to games that celebrate fantasy, test relationships and reflect LGBTQ+ life, created by LGBTQ+ designers.

It's Wednesday evening on Orange Street which means it's game-testing night and over in one of the storefront rooms is a group of players trying out a new tabletop game, Knights of the Realm, led by Larry Bogucki of Middletown and Larry Swan of Stamford who created it.

Go down a hall decorated with whimsical designs by local artists and into a side room and you'll find another group of competitors hunched over tables, focused on playing the same game, but in different round-robin couplings, over the course of the night.

In yet another room, there's a library featuring more than 1,500 titles where anyone can just take whatever interests them of the shelf, sit down — and, well, let the games begin.

Elm City Games is the creation of Matt Fantastic (that's his legal name), 39, who, with his ex-wife Trish Loter, own and manage the downtown complex since 2019.

"Games are for everybody," says Fantastic, who, with his shoulder-length hair, big grin and tats could be conjured as a knight's cool sidekick in Dungeons and Dragons.

"Not every game is for everybody," he says, "but there is a game for everyone."

That includes LGBTQ+ players, too,



Matt Fantastic, owner of Elm City Games, New Haven.

whether its Thirsty Sword Lesbians, Star Crossed ("the two-player game of forbidden love") or Fog of Love, which has editions for straight and gay fans.

Elm City Games began in 2016 in the back of a Chapel Street coffee house by Fantastic and Loter. They would charge a fee for folks to play games from their massive collection. It became so popular they eventually opened up its present hobby gaming center.

### OPEN COMMUNITY

But it's more than just a retail store.

"We are first and foremost an inclusive games community," Fantastic says. "We're big on 'Third Place Theory,' which is the idea we live our lives in three different places: home, work and the public space, which can be the local pub, a church, a bowling league. We are very much oriented around that community aspect of saying 'Hey, just show up and see



Don't expect any digital games in the shop. "Our expertise and passion is in tabletop." —Matt Fantastic

—Matt Fantastic



Game nights are a standard part of the Elm City Games experience.



The store showcases diversity...and games for everyone.



In addition to classics, you'll find games specifically for the LGBTQ+ community.

what's happening. See who's here. Let's hang out."

But don't expect any digital games in the shop. "Our expertise and passion is in tabletop," he says.

Adds game designer Bogucki: "With board games you're getting that human, face-to-face interaction that you can't get from a screen. Besides, electronic games are designed so they can eventually be beaten. Humans aren't, so it's more satisfying."

While still palling in comparison to the digital gaming industry at \$140 billion in U.S. alone — "which is bigger than the film and music industries put together," says Fantastic — tabletop games is less than \$5 billion. Helping fuel the growth of the board game industry is the fact that more people stayed home during the pandemic and weren't spending money on going out or for live entertainment.

While it sometimes takes many tens of millions of dollars to develop a new

digital game, it doesn't require a large investment to create a tabletop game, making it easier for local designers like Fantastic, Bogucki and Swan to enter the field as outliers. Their risk of introducing elements which may go against established norms and challenge its board game fanbase is low, says Fantastic.

### D&D FAN

Games have always been a part of his Fantastic life. Born and raised in Stamford, he grew up in a Greek-immigrant gaming family, which loved all board and card games. But Dungeons & Dragons became his personal passion, which led him to volunteer at game conventions, then as a paid worker there, where he fell in love with the atmosphere, the lifestyle and the progressive vibe of many of the fans. It also allowed him to tap into his playful personality.

"When I started out, I would wear princess dresses, which became a big

part of my persona in the game industry where it's important to be very visible," he says. "It wasn't me in drag. Just me as a princess, kind of a slutty Snow White." But now the standards to stand out have changed. "Now no one cares that a guy is in a dress — and I love that."

Fantastic is also a games designer, with several dozen published titles, including Team 3 — his take on the see/hear/speak-no-evil monkeys — which is sold at Target.

### FINDING A ROLE

He has a special fondness for role-playing games that are more than a just a roll of the dice. These games tap into players' creativity as they imagine themselves as Victorian gentry, soldiers in World War One or knights in armor, requiring letter writing, maps drawing or making up scenarios where gamers are imaging their places in worlds, both old, new and never was.

Role playing games have particularly



Tabletop games are what Elm City Games is all about, including strategy, role-playing, emotional and relationship games.



been attractive to LGBTQ+ people, says Fantastic “In games like Dungeons & Dragons, they can become whoever they want, creating safe spaces to explore things like gender.”

There are also relationship games, such as Star-Crossed which is about couples in love — gay and straight included — but with complicating real-world divides. “It could be I’m a Suni and you’re a Shia or I’m a mermaid and you’re a land-dweller or I’m a person and you’re a robot.”

Emotional games that could spur conflict include Fog of Love, a board game where couples trying to link up or another game where you’re in a contentious divorce and splitting up possessions, including your record collection, the dog and the kids. “It’s one that a lot of people have gotten up from the table crying because it can get really emotional.”

### MORE LGBTQ+ FRIENDLY

Though the games community has grown increasingly diverse, Fantastic says that stereotypes people make about gamers — of being predominantly white and male — are still valid. “They didn’t go anywhere. But the industry has grown that I’d say from 75 percent to 90 percent people now here are center-left, especially among the designers. There has always been the outsider side to the industry that has included a large amount of LGBTQ+ people.”

The characters on the game boards are changing too. “For years, they were a bunch of white guys and maybe one sexy lady. Now there’s a cornucopia of looks, body types, ethnicities and sexualities.”

While specific LGBTQ+ games might still not be plentiful, Fantastic says there’s a greater effort in trying to be more generally inclusive. “and less of ‘This is the gay game’ and more like, ‘Here are some characters and some are straight and some are queer and some are unclear.’”

He says Elm City Games is an “aggressively values first” business and has refused to work with people and companies that don’t share his outlook.

“We also are very strict about behavior and language [at Elm City Games] and we’ve banned people. If you’re going to come here and be casually misogynistic or homophobic or whatever — hit the road. We found that over the years of doing that we have created a very diverse community. We’re actually a place where a lot of people feel safe to be out.”



You'll find a wide range of gaming accessories as well.

## FANTASTIC THOUGHTS

### To those hesitating on D&D:

“If you are at all interested in Dungeons and Dragons and it’s a lot easier than you think it is. It’s ultimately collaborative story telling.” He suggests the entry level edition.

### Get games now:

The global supply chain logistical nightmare has dramatically impacted the tabletop board industry because the majority of games are manufactured in China. Buy now.

### A key to many popular games:

Their “intuitive design. Think of it as you’re at that summer cottage and the game you’re going to grab is the one you can teach everyone to play in two minutes.”

### What’s the difference between a game and a toy?

Sometimes it’s a thin line, he says. There can be games that are almost like toys, such as Jenga, “because it’s stackable blocks. There are also games where you’re trying to get things to light up or dealing with explosions (not the real kind).

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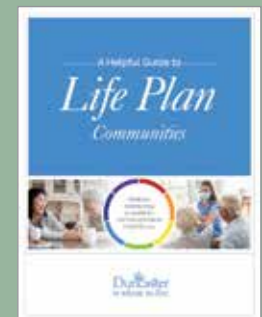
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# READY, LAYER, *Go!*

By Brian Scott Lipton

**L**s anyone really ready for winter? Well, if you're a Connecticut resident, you're probably more than used to braving the occasional blizzard—which can be followed with the rare 60-degree day that's more reminiscent of October than February. So, your mind may have adjusted to the changing of the seasons, but what about your wardrobe? Indeed, now that you may be venturing outside more than you did last year—or even heading back to your workplace—you likely also realize that, in addition to the now-constant variation in outdoor temperatures, you must also be prepared for overheated cars, underheated public transportation, and offices where temperatures can be unpredictable, not to mention aggressive air circulation. It's enough to make you want to stay snuggled in bed all day in your flannel pajamas while sipping hot chocolate and binging on Netflix. (But we've all had enough of that, haven't we?)

Fear not, the key to being—and staying—consistently comfortable over the next few months can be summed up in one simple word: layering. And no, we're not taking about cake! All this means is wearing a number of carefully chosen items which can easily be taken off or put back on depending on the temperature and the situation. It's a lot easier than it sounds.

"A layered wardrobe simply means having the right

group of core pieces that work just as well for long days, where the temperature might heat up, as they do for easy nights when the temperature drops," agrees Emmie Howard, CEO of Onward Reserve. "We all multi-task so much these days and your clothes should too!"

## COLD COMFORT

C'mon, what's wrong with just wearing that great overcoat or parka and leaving it at that. Really, everything!

"I think layering is really a more comfortable way of dressing," says Dan Farrington, GMM, Men's for the Mitchell's Family of Stores. "No one coat is going to be right all the time, especially if you are moving from outside to inside and back all day. When you layer by using a knit, a vest and a jacket, you can be comfortable in all settings simply by adjusting your layers. And let's face it, men are really trying to figure out how to dress casually yet stylishly in new settings where they may have to be dressed up more than they were before, and layering is the answer."

"We believe that layering delivers valuable comfort in concert with a fashionable mode of self-expression involving a variable presentation of apparel silhouettes, textures and patterns that are ideal for Connecticut's crisp weather," adds Louis Joseph, founder of Alps & Meters. "And one great thing about high-end layering pieces is that they are useful year-round and can easily transition back and forth from recreational to casual or even polished evening settings."



A complete outfit from Alps & Meters, and you're ready for all types of conditions.





Sweaters and jeans are stylish and appropriate for casual wear. Outfit by Alps & Meters.



A patterned parka from Nobis means you'll stand out and stay warm.

"I gave a lot of thought to my ideals as a designer for my new White Mountaineering collection for UNIQLO, which I know will be worn by all sorts of people," says designer Yosuke Aizawa. "Designing clothing around the premise that 'people move' has always been one of my principles, so I carefully considered using patterns and designs that wouldn't add stress when worn."

### PIECE BY PIECE

So, what wardrobe pieces should you be in your closet this winter? Depending on your space and budget, the list can be very long. Parkas, puffers, topcoats, quilted jackets and vests, lightweight wool suits, cashmere sweaters and hoodies, and cushy overshirts are just some of the suggestions of our fashion experts.

"Great layering is all about owning three key elements: your base, an insulative mid-layer and an outer protective shell, which come together to create a functional system," says Robin Yates, president of Canadian-based outerwear company Nobis. "That way you don't overheat, but you also have protective pieces that allow you to face

any weather element, including wind, water, snow."

Of course, most of us spend time each day in a variety of places, both indoors and outdoors, calling for even more creative solutions. "The trick to pulling off the perfect winter layering wardrobe, especially for women, is creating an unexpected mix of pieces," says Kate Bellman, Managing Fashion Editor for Nordstrom. "Not only is your quilted puffer vest great for a weekend hike, but you can layer it over a checked blazer for the return to work for a chic juxtaposition. Likewise, layering contrasting materials, such as a heavy cable knit cardigan over a silk blouse or a workwear canvas jacket over a soft cashmere sweater, provides your wardrobe with a cool mix and dimension."

Tailored clothing maker and retailer Indochino has given the layering question a lot of thought, including recently launching the Monza range, a selection of high-end 100 percent lightweight wool fabrics from the Guabello mill in northern Italy. "By having different weights of fall men's clothing in your closet, you can go through the season easily with style



**"The trick to pulling off the perfect winter layering wardrobe, especially for women, is creating an unexpected mix of pieces."**

—Kate Bellman,  
Managing Fashion Editor for Nordstrom.







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Suited for the season in this three-piece look from Indochino.

and comfort,” says Dean Handspiker, vice president of retail for Indochino. “A lightweight wool three-piece suit is a great item to own since you can just wear just the vest if you want or put a simple shirt underneath a warm suit jacket. We’re especially big on mixing knitwear with more traditional suiting for those who have to go to the office in colder climates.

“And we really love our new velvet tuxedos and jackets for our more adventurous customers,” adds Handspiker. “They’re perfect for holiday parties or winter weddings, but just wearing the jacket with a pair of jeans can be a great statement and add some needed boldness to your wardrobe!”

## SPEND CASH ON CASHMERE


Still, if there’s one thing almost every fashion expert agrees on, it’s that your winter wardrobe must include one or more pieces of cashmere!

“I tell everyone to invest in cashmere everything, from sweaters to beanies to socks, because cashmere keeps you warm, not hot, and it lets your body breathe.” notes Angela Pierietti, the women’s buyer at Mitchell’s. “You will change your layering pieces all the time, but when you find your favorite cashmere coat, it will be with you forever.”

Adds Leah Ranaudo, Senior Merchandising Director at high-end clothier Paul Stuart: “Cashmere’s best qualities are comfort, warmth, and timelessness. Furthermore, the better the



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Suits let you dress up or dress more casually, like this offering from Indochino.

quality, the less pilling you will have, and the sweater will keep its shape over time. And here's a fun fact for fans of cashmere, the lighter the color, the softer the hand.”

“What we love most about providing cashmere for men and women is that it provides such a luxurious sense of comfort and warmth,” says a spokesperson for online retailer Gobi Cashmere. “And it's so practical because you can conveniently just put our sweaters over a shirt or top without them being cumbersome and then take them off as you please.”

“The bottom line is when it comes to pieces you know you'll have forever, it's worth the investment in quality fabrics like cashmere,” adds Bellman. “We believe it's so important to every consumer that you own something that you can trust will stand the test of time!”

Perhaps the best part of a layering strategy is that you can start simply and build up as your needs—and budget—allow. Start with a great puffer/warm vest and a sweater that can go with many different looks. From there, let your personal style (and temperature) be your guide, and you'll own the season in style! ♡

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FEATURE //



# WHO ARE WE NOW?

Groundbreaking Survey Profiles The State's LGBTQ+ Population

By JANE LATUS

**F**or the first time, someone has asked Connecticut's LGBTQ+ residents about themselves. Who are you? How are you doing? What do you need?

The responses include a few surprises, but primarily confirm what providers and community members already know. The real news, though, is that having this data will enable providers to better tailor services to needs, and—this is huge—more easily obtain funding.

“More valuable than gold” is how the chair of the group behind the survey put it.

To many respondents, it was powerful and reinforcing just to be acknowledged. “I can't tell you what it means to be asked these questions,” is a typical comment.

The first Connecticut LGBTQ+ Health and Human Services Survey, which sought responses earlier this year from those 18 and up, is the first comprehensive, statewide collection of data on the community's identities and needs. Collected data includes age, race, language, homelessness, disability, income and more, but this is also the first time that gender identity and sexual orientation data have been captured statewide.

The survey is the first project of the Connecticut LGBTQ+ Health and Human Services Network, created by statute to serve as an advisory board to the legislature. It operates from within the Commission on Women, Children, Seniors, Equity and Opportunity. Commission Executive Director Steven Hernández says he hopes the Network will also become “a touchstone for the community.”





Network Chair Patrick Dunn, executive director of the New Haven Pride Center..  
Photo by **Daniel Eugene Kaminski**

**“This survey is more valuable than gold.”** —Patrick Dunn

The Network consists of representatives from many non-profit health and human services agencies, plus state agencies. Most representatives are LGBTQ+ community members.

The Network’s purpose is to make the state a safer and healthier environment for the queer community. The survey is meant to provide greater understanding of the community, what services it needs, and how it obtains them. It was conducted by the Consultation Center at Yale. “It’s one of the most rewarding things I’ve ever worked on,” says Amy Griffin, director of health evaluation initiatives for the center.

“The next step is to use that data to figure out how the Network can provide the community what it needs,” says Network Chair Patrick Dunn, executive director of the New Haven Pride Center. That will include using the data to develop a grant process, and the legislature funded the Network with \$500,000 over two years. Grants will go to LGBTQ+-specific programs and services that focus on what Dunn calls “closing the gap for queer Nutmeggers.”

“This survey is more valuable than gold,” Dunn says, because it will prove to out-of-state funders that needs really do exist in Connecticut. “I’ve been told, ‘Connecticut doesn’t need our help, because you’re a blue state and have all these protective laws.’”

However, Dunn and other service providers know from experience what the survey proves: Discrimination, violence, homelessness, food insecurity, lack of affirming health care and other problems exist in the state’s LGBTQ+ population at higher rates than for straight, cisgender residents.

### WHO IS IN CONNECTICUT’S LGBTQ+ COMMUNITY?

**Asked their sexual orientation, respondents said they are:**

- Bisexual (35%)
- Gay (32%)
- Lesbian (29%)
- Straight (5%)

**Asked to name their gender identity from these options, respondents said:**

- Cisgender (55%)
  - Transgender umbrella (40%)
  - Gender Diverse (5%)
- Respondents were also asked to provide

## “This document will go a long way in changing how we deliver our services.”

their own description of their identity, and the dozens of terms they submitted points out that the terminology on most forms doesn’t serve the community, says Griffin.

### Respondents reported their race as:

- White/ Caucasian (76%)
- Hispanic/Latinx (28%)
- Black/African American (13%)
- Native Indigenous, Asian, Pacific Islander, and/or Multiracial (8%)

### HOW ARE THEY DOING?

Generally, respondents say Connecticut is a safe place to live. But 69 percent have experienced discrimination. An astonishing 53 percent have endured physical violence because of their gender identity. And there’s a high rate of homelessness, especially for young adults.

Network members say the survey’s overriding message is the need for education and training across the board. “One of the barriers across every service is concern that service won’t be LGBTQ+ friendly, and that providers won’t be appropriately trained,” says Griffin.

Another key finding is that the 211 system needs improvement. “It shows the need for training. There’s a concern providers are not LGBTQ+ competent. People are misgendered, or deadnamed,” says Edson Rivas, executive director of the Triangle Community Center and a member of the Network committee.

Other key findings are:

- Rural areas lack services and social opportunities. “There are pockets not being served,” says Rivas.
- Accessing mental health care is especially difficult for trans and nonbinary people, and the need is tremendous and growing.
- Safety is an issue, even in “safe” Connecticut.

Says Dunn, “Two things jumped out at me as unexpected: individuals who ID as nonbinary experience physical violence at a much higher rate than people who identify as trans. And bisexual individuals ranked as the highest sexual orientation group experiencing physical violence. It reminds all of us that biphobia is extremely prevalent, even internally in the community.”

The survey asked community members for their experiences in the following areas.

### SAFETY:

- 53%** experienced physical violence based on their gender identity.
- 30%** experienced intimate partner violence.
- 34%** experienced sexual violence.



### The Survey Says: Here’s What’s Needed

1. Make changes to forms, documents, and data collection tools to be inclusive of gender identity and sexual orientations.
2. Include gender identity options on legal forms, documents, and identification cards.
3. Advocate for LGBTQ+ antidiscrimination policies.
4. Increase access to LGBTQ+ affirming health and mental health care.
5. Provide ongoing training and technical assistance programs to service providers about LGBTQ+-specific issues.
6. Institute school-based protections for LGBTQ+ youth.
7. Improve restroom access for all genders (gender inclusive restrooms) in public facilities.
8. Develop a community action plan for protecting/promoting LGBTQ+ rights.
9. Recruit LGBTQ+ providers to work in Connecticut, especially the healthcare and mental health sectors.
10. Assess the enforcement of Connecticut equity laws aimed to protect LGBTQ+ individuals.





Survivors of intimate partner violence are most likely to be bisexual (42%).

Those with intersectional identities are more likely to feel unsafe where they live.

**SOCIAL SUPPORT:**

96% consider themselves fully out.

Respondents are least likely to feel supported by neighbors (23%) and religious communities (17%)

Many would like more places to socialize in addition to Pride events and bars.

**YOUTH SERVICES:**

“Many respondents mentioned that LGBTQ+ youth need more mental health services, shelters for runaway homeless youth, social opportunities (e.g., mentoring), and gender and sexuality educational awareness in schools (K-12). Specifically, respondents highlighted the need for protection of trans youth (particularly in school sports),” according to the report.

**HOUSING:**

Young LGBTQ adults are the sole exception to an otherwise steadily

**“Even with health insurance, I can’t afford access to healthcare. I had to stop HRT due to this issue, and issues with harassment at the pharmacy any time I needed a prescription refill. It all became too stressful to continue.”**

declining number of homeless people in the state. (See Hitting Home - Connecticut Voice (ctvoice.com) in the Spring 2020 Voice.) Typically, about a third of the state’s homeless young adults are LGBTQ+, mostly because their families kicked them out and they can’t afford housing.

A third of respondents say they accessed housing services in the past 3 years.

The top concern was that services would not be LGBTQ+ friendly.

Older respondents cite concerns about inclusivity and affordability of senior housing or assisted living facilities.

Some reported being denied housing and being abused in shelters – especially trans and nonbinary people.

**HEALTHCARE:**

16% reported being refused healthcare services because of their identity.

64% have concerns related to accessing healthcare services, primarily: that services would not be LGBTQ+ friendly, that providers would not be trained for the needs of the community, not knowing where to access services, and lack of insurance coverage for gender affirming care.

Some reported negative experiences related to their race, immigrant status, ability, and weight. Some trans and non-binary people experienced malpractice and abuse.

There were reports of deadnaming, harassment, misgendering, unrelated questions, and uninformed providers.

**MENTAL HEALTH:**

70% sought some type of mental health service in the last three years.

15% were refused mental health, addiction, and/or substance use services because of their LGBTQ+ identity.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 58



PRESENTS

**Conversations With Dennis House**

A SEASONS MEDIA PODCAST

Seasons Media is proud to announce that Dennis House hosts a monthly podcast called “Conversations With ... Dennis House.” Dennis is one of Connecticut’s most respected news journalists. Aired in conjunction with Seasons Media, the podcasts will be monthly and distributed on all podcast platforms, including iTunes, Google, Amazon’s TuneIn, Spotify, iHeartRadio, SiriusXM, Apple, Stitcher, etc. In addition, each podcast will be videotaped and shared.

Dennis and Seasons Media believe strongly in the positivity of the people and state of Connecticut. And that is exactly what Dennis’ conversations are about. His focus is on the people, places and companies that are impactful throughout the state ... some that our audience may have heard of and some they have not. His conversations are interesting, insightful and entertaining.

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“Last time I met with my PCP and asked questions regarding safer sex practices between women, they actually told me to Google it because they didn’t know. While I appreciate that they acknowledged their lack of expertise, I find this highly problematic.”



Patrick Dunn in his New Haven office. Photo by Daniel Eugene Kaminski

Respondents report having to educate their doctors.

#### FINANCIAL AND LEGAL SERVICES:

44% used some type of financial or legal service in the last three years.

13% were refused such services because of their LGBTQ+ identity.

#### NOW WHAT?

The report’s bottom line: more needs to be done to advocate for safety of LGBTQ+ residents, including more expansive protective laws, more gender

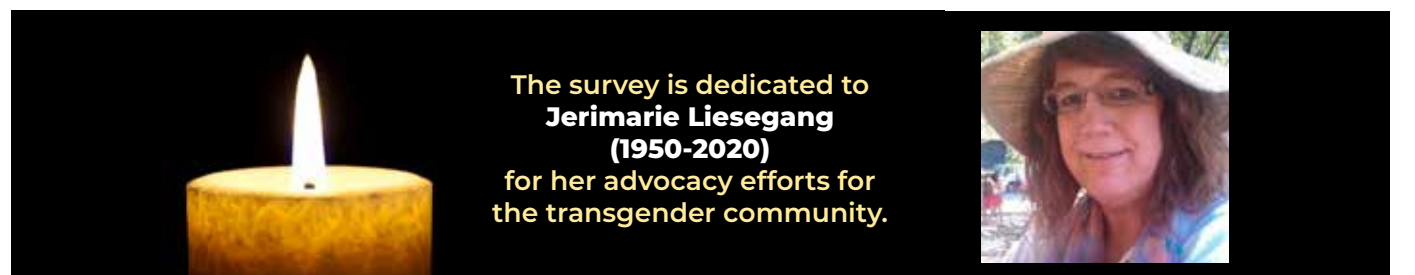
“CT needs to do a better job not only in training people to be more LGBTQ competent but actually attracting LGBTQ people trained in LGBTQ services to the state.”

and sexuality education in schools, and more education in every realm of health and human service provision.

Network members hope the survey will be an eye-opener. Dunn hopes to secure funding to print enough copies to hand to every elected official, from small town to U.S. Senate.

Even within the LGBTQ community,

this data will spur change. “This document will go a long way in changing how we deliver our services,” Dunn says of the New Haven Pride Center. “I’m already envisioning how this data will functionally change our programming – in particular addressing bisexual and non-binary services.”



The survey is dedicated to  
**Jerimarie Liesegang  
(1950-2020)**  
for her advocacy efforts for  
the transgender community.



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Rory O'Malley

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— JOHN BURROUGHS





DELICIOUS //



## THE CHARCUTERIE CRAZE:

# Entertaining Like a Pro

Written and photographed by ALEX ACQUARULO

**W**ith the colder weather upon us, the season of holiday gatherings with family and friends is rapidly approaching. What better way to spend our holiday time together than laughing, chatting, and enjoying ourselves over a holiday charcuterie board? Over the past year, you might have noticed the growing craze for all things charcuterie!

Charcuterie is a French term that is derived from the French words flesh (chair) and cooked (cuit). Using these French origins, the word “charcuterie” essentially translates to describe a delicatessen that specializes in cured meats and meat dishes.

In more recent times, charcuterie boards have evolved from not only displaying meat products, but also cheeses, fruits, jams, olives, crackers, nuts, peppers, and pretty much anything you can think of. It’s no wonder charcuterie boards have gained popularity: they’re easy to create and share, fun to put together, and there is no right or wrong way to make one.

### DESIGNING A CHARCUTERIE BOARD

When looking at how to design a charcuterie board, first, you’ll need to think about display, taste, and variety. But before diving into putting together your ingredients for a charcuterie board, first, think about the board itself. There are charcuterie boards displayed on just about anything, from massive pieces of wood to individual plastic cups, and even some displayed

right out on the countertop. Feel free to use whatever size, shape, and material you want for your individual board. Some find that a square or rectangular shape is the easiest to use, as it allows you to portion out your display and fill in the gaps. Once you have selected your board, it’s time to think about taste. Ashley Amendola is the owner and operator of Coven Catery. Ashley specializes in grazing tables, charcuterie boards, and picnic boxes for events in Connecticut.

Ashley shared her expertise on cheese selection for charcuterie boards. She explains, “I always like to make sure that I include a few different textures. At minimum, I like to include one soft cheese (something that is spreadable and can be used with dips or crackers) such as Brie or Camembert. Then one semi-hard cheese, such as Manchego. This is also a nice visual cheese since it’s usually sliced in large slender triangles and shows off its edible rind. Lastly, one hard cheese like an Aged Cheddar or Gouda. These can both be broken up with a cheese knife into messy pieces.”

Once Ashley has her main cheese on her board, she will then add a crumbly cheese if needed, like a Goat Cheese, Blue Cheese, or something more seasonal like a Cinnamon Toscano.

After you have your cheese selected and placed on your board, it is time to move on to charcuterie. Ashley has great advice for these next steps: “I take the same approach here as I do with the cheese,” she notes. “I include an assortment of charcuterie varieties and textures. I always like to include a hard sliceable salami. Right now, my two favorites are Columbus’ Salame Secchi, which has an extremely buttery flavor, and Creminelli’s Wild Boar Salami, which is extremely rich and flavorful. I also like to add a soft and pliable charcuterie, like a Coppa or Prosciutto de Parma.”





### THE FINISHING TOUCHES

Once you have your cheese and charcuterie selected and arranged on your board, it's time to add some fruits, vegetables, nuts, jams, and crackers to fill in the gaps. You might want to start with fresh strawberries, grapes, raspberries, and blueberries. Feel free to add any fruit, especially dried. You can add apricots, pineapple, figs, cherries, dates, or even some colorful red plums. For vegetables, consider starting with carrots, artichoke hearts, cucumbers, and cornichon pickles. You can place a lot of these fruits and vegetables directly on your board, or grab some of your favorite mini bowls to hold them and move your board items to surround the bowls.

Once your fruits and vegetables are placed around your charcuterie board, you can add

the nuts and jams. With nuts, you can keep it simple with pistachios, almonds, peanuts, walnuts and even cashews. Nuts are the perfect way to fill in those extra gaps around your boards, and jams will help to do the same. For the best jams to add onto your board, go for an apricot, fig, or spiced jam of some sort. Also, look for jellies or a compote to add a bit of sweetness to those cheeses and charcuterie. You'll love the way the jars of jelly and jam look on a board. Feel free to add honey and a wooden honey dipper, too!

Lastly, finish off your charcuterie board with crackers, and use different varieties of shape and taste, here. Triscuits work quite well, both in the original size crackers and the mini. You can use any flavors that they have, though sea salt always adds an extra hint of flavor. You may also want to add crackers that are round, like Ritz or Carr's







Table Water Crackers. Rectangle crackers work well for stacking, fanning out, or angling. For rectangle crackers, look for Club or Firehook's Rosemary Sea Salt Baked Crackers. If there are still gaps on your board, add dark chocolate pieces, fresh herbs like rosemary and thyme, both green and black olives, and cute cheese knives as well.

### ENTERTAINING MADE EASY

Whether you're having a small gathering of family and friends or a larger soiree, everyone is bound to be impressed with your charcuterie board skills, and nobody has to know that these boards are so much simpler

to put together than what the visual result indicates.

Here's another pro tip for you: If you don't want your guests hovering over the board for too long, add toothpicks and small serving spoons with more pre-sliced cheese and charcuterie. You can also add little flags to help your guests identify your selection as well.

Charcuterie boards make entertaining easy, fun, and they also bring a little bit of elegance and sophistication to your table. Be warned - you'll be hooked from your first board, and once you get the hang of putting one together, the sky's the limit on where charcuterie can take you. 🍷



# COMFORT DOGS AND COMMUNITY POLICING ARE WORKING!

Written by **RENEE DININO**

Photographed by **CARLA HERNANDEZ TEN EYCK**

**Y**ou may have seen stories about community policing and working comfort dogs. Working together as amazing K9 duo's breaking down barriers and spreading peace, comfort and joy.

Here, you'll meet just a few of the many teams already making change in our state. Sergeant Cheney and Officer Tildy from the UConn Public Safety Department, Officer Durette and K9 Indy from the Naugatuck Police Department, Officer Bodell and K9 Bear from the Middletown PD, Officer Simons and Officer Heidi from Yale Public Safety Department, Officer McClelland and Officer Chase from Groton PD and Officer Yabrosky and K9 Addison from Torrington PD.

The town of Groton is proud to have Community Policing Officer Heather McClelland and her K9 partner, a 2-year-old yellow lab, Officer Chase.

Officer McClelland shares, "Going through training at Bedford Hills Correctional Facility, working with the puppy raisers (inmates) and now working with Chase in the community, has shown me what a great opportunity we have to make a positive impact on people. What might have been a mundane call or interaction, is now so much easier and enjoyable. People light up when they meet Chase, and they actually seek us out in the community."

Officer Chase was trained and donated by Puppies Behind Bars which trains prison inmates to raise service dogs not only for law enforcement, but for wounded war veterans, first responders and

explosive-detection canines.

"Puppies enter prison at the age of 8 weeks and live with their inmate puppy-raisers for approximately 24 months. As the puppies mature into well-loved, well-behaved dogs, their raisers learn what it means to contribute to society rather than take from it." PBB

In fact, Puppies Behind Bars has trained and donated K9 Bear to Officer Bodell, a 2-year-old black lab and sibling to Officer Chase, K9 Indy a 2-year-old black lab to Officer Durette, Officer Heidi a 2.5-year-old yellow lab to Officer Simons and K9 Addison a 1.5-year-old yellow lab to Officer Hannah Yabrosky.

Patrolman Durette says, "Indy has changed the



Sargeant Cheney and Officer Tildy of UConn and Officer Chase of the Groton Police Department.



Officer Simmons and Officer Heidi of Yale Public Safety.



K9 Bear of the Middletown Police Department.



Goodies at the event.





**“Comforting and showing compassion to a victim involved in any form of a traumatic event is just as important as catching the bad guy.”**

–Officer Durette  
Naugatuck Police Department

Black lab in back: K9 Indy chases a tennis ball while (continue with dogs listed below)  
From left to right: Officer Heidi, Officer Tildy, UConn, Officer Chase, and K9 strike a pose.





Officer Bodell and K9 Bear from the Middletown Police Department, Sergeant Cheney and Officer Tildy from the UConn Public Safety Department, Officer McClelland and Officer Chase from the Groton Police Department, Officer Simons and Officer Heidi from the Yale Public Safety Department, Officer Yabrosky and K9 Addison from the Torrington Police Department.

way I see my job because he has proven to me that as police officers we serve and protect our communities in many capacities. Comforting and showing compassion to a victim involved in any form of a traumatic event is just as important as catching the bad guy.

Officer Yabrosky from Torrington has the newest addition of pups from Puppies Behind Bars. She says of her new partner, "Having Addison with me on patrol has been a huge asset to not only me, but our entire shift. Addison is a soft, cuddly dog that allows people to relax, even just a little, when they are going through their hardest days. Addison starts many conversations that



Officer Heidi makes new friends with UConn students.

simply would not happen if it wasn't for him."

This new way of policing is also gaining traction at our schools, colleges, and universities. Just ask Sergeant Justin Cheney of the UConn Public Safety Department and Officer Richard Simons from Yale Public Safety.

Sgt. Cheney spends his time on the UConn campus with Officer Tildy, a 5-year-old yellow lab/golden retriever cross breed donated by Canine Companions for Independence.

He says, "Tildy allows me to connect with so many more students, staff, faculty and various groups on the UConn campuses. She provides our community outreach unit with more opportunities to build trust and support with campus groups, sports teams, and

other campus partners."

Officer Simons is paired with 2.5-year-old Officer Heidi for Yale Public Safety Department, and you can find them not only in and around the campus but all around town and even at Yale New Haven Hospital.

"The inclusion of Heidi as part of the Yale Public Safety/Police Department has changed the way we have been able to reach our Yale community, as well as the broader New Haven community. I am much more focused on community engagement and interaction with Heidi bridging the gap between the police department and the community."

Officer Jay Bodell is hoping to make the same impact with his new partner, K9 Bear in Middletown. Bodell is even bringing his partner into his volunteerism with the Connecticut

Special Olympics and the Connecticut Law Enforcement Torch Run. In addition, The Hometown Foundation is helping to fund K9 Bear in his role with Officer Bodell in their community policing role.

K9 Officers are vital to police work in so many ways. The addition of working comfort dogs with officers provides an opportunity for law enforcement individuals to be seen in their community, connect with children and adults in a non-threatening situation and they are able to educate the public about their jobs, how they help both citizens and even other officers and first responders.

Officer McClelland speaks about Officer Chase within in the Groton PD, "I believe she has made a difference with our officers, dispatchers and other

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first responders. Chase provides an outlet to just unwind, play fetch, do some fun commands, or just get a quick snuggle. I also think she's been a bridge from our department into the community, not just for me, but for my fellow officers."

And Officer Durette offers insight into the role of K9 Indy at the Naugtuck PD and First Responders in town, "Indy has done more to benefit local first responders in the first year we have had him than I could have ever imagined. But he has also been called out by not only our PEER support team to provide comfort and assistance to a first responder, but also requested by other local first responders such as fire, EMS and communications during their time of

need for one of their own."

The Torrington PD is feeling the love too, "I get to watch officers, as well as the public, smile when they see Addison come in the room. He spreads nothing but positivity and happiness wherever he goes," says Officer Yabronsky.

Sergeant Cheney had this to say, "Tildy brings a significant amount of officer wellness within our department. She is very well received by officers and dispatchers and is constantly sought out by them. She is a big contributor to our department's morale and overall image."

At a recent on campus event at UConn all the teams in this article gathered for a Mental Health Check In day with students, just one of the

many pop up events you will find these teams working together to support each other and community policing.

One of the groups on site, the Jordan Porco Foundation for suicide prevention saw the clear benefit of involvement, and organizers said that the students became comfortable talking about mental health and appreciated being involved with the dogs."

The latest trend in community policing may just be a permanent addition to local and state agencies. Comfort dogs working behind the badge making a 'pawsitive' difference in their communities, one wagging tail at a time. ♡

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## Queering Faith: A call to the LGBTQ Community to Reclaim Our Spiritual Legacy

By **THE REV. DARRELL L. GOODWIN**

**H**istorically, many conservative interpretations of faith have encouraged the religious community to treat LGBTQ+ people harshly and unfavorably. This has led to a gross disconnect for many queer folks who have felt they had to abandon their faith to be fully and authentically who they have been created to be in society.

Some denominations, such as Reform Judaism and the United Church of Christ, have been actively working to heal that disconnect by becoming open and affirming of their LGBTQ+ members. In nearly every other religious denomination, there are support groups that have walked boldly into more accurate interpretations over LGBTQ+ people. As our world continues to shift to be more accepting of LGBTQ+ people, these denominations are starting to become LGBTQ+-inclusive as they are realizing that they also want to find themselves on the right side of history and the arc of justice. This changing of the guard offers hope that we might interrupt the narrative that LGBTQ+ folks can only be on the margins of the faith community or hide within its walls in a leather-bound, like the bible, closet.

In the fall of 2020, amid multiple pandemics, particularly a racial and health crisis in this country, I was elected to serve as the first African American, openly gay, executive conference minister of the Southern New England Conference of the United Church of Christ. In this

role, I was called to serve the historic roots of faith in this country. Most of our churches beautifully line the town greens all over Connecticut and New England, totaling more than 600 churches, 1,400 authorized ministers, and about 120,000 members. My election moved forward with an election vote of more than 99 percent, with delegates from a wide array of the Christian experience. It was truly a historic moment I could not have imagined happening in my life as a clergy person; especially for someone who was under 40. As I celebrated, I also queried “why did my arrival take hundreds of years? How is it possible that in 2020 I could still be a “first”?”


The reality of this watershed moment was more troubling when I realized that “according to a recent report from the UCLA School of Law’s Williams Institute, almost half of LGBTQ+ adults in the United States are religious”. In addition, these 5.3 million religious LGBTQ+ adults in America “are found across the age spectrum, in every racial-ethnic group, among married and single people, among those who are parenting, and among rural and urban dwellers.” This impressed upon me missionally that as the queer community we must reclaim our faith traditions as a social justice imperative, not staying on the sidelines as a guest but as a critical component of how we as humans experience deep relationship with a higher power of our own understanding.

The truth is that the queer community has been shaping faith in this country for generations; as theologians, musicians, and the financiers of some of our largest

faith communities. Inherent in queer identity is an invitation to blur the lines, welcome more people to the table, and stretch the margins that welcome some in and push others out. It is in the queer community that people are offered hope to be themselves, to be fully seen, and fully loved just as they are! This is and should be the preeminent mission of faith. What is the purpose of a faith that doesn’t make you fundamentally a better human?

If the queer community embodies this ethos, then it’s time to help the “church” to do the same. I call on these 5.3 million of my siblings, who can change the conversation about faith in this country, to rise in pulpits, faith community councils, denominational boards, and reclaim the story of LGBT+ people of faith. Rise up within the walls of their churches, and then help break those walls down. Bring faith back to the streets, back to the people, back to its first love where there are no “haves” and “have” nots.

This level of activism is centered around access, so even if a person is not spiritual or religious by nature, they still have a place in demanding, supporting, and fighting for religious freedom and diversity for ALL. I feel compelled to make it so that no LGBTQ+ person must live thinking they are rejected or abandoned by God because that lie couldn’t be any further from the truth.

Will you join me? The harvest is ripe, but the laborers are few. 

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