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EDITOR'S NOTE //



Happy Pride!

Welcome to our annual Pride issue. As you look through our calendar, you'll see how much Pride resonates through Connecticut. It's not just in June, and you'll see dates and events that go on through the fall.

It's also a chance to see many of the organizations that tirelessly work for our rights and representation year-round, not just during Pride celebrations. That's more important than ever this year as LGBTQ+ rights are being challenged around the country. These are potentially dark times for all of us, and we are called to stand up for our rights in the face of people who would marginalize us an all in our communities. I especially encourage you to check out *The Voices of Pride* (pages 70 & 71) to hear from people who have devoted themselves to service and who articulate so beautifully what Pride means in 2025.

We're fortunate to be in Connecticut. We're honored to have Governor Ned Lamont contribute our Last Word again. Governor Lamont has been a staunch ally and a defender of everyone's rights, as he feelingly writes, "We don't diminish lives because of who someone is, or who they love." It's a message we especially need to hear this year.

We're especially pleased with this issue as it showcases a full range of LGBTQ+ experience, from advocacy and caring to the indelible contributions LGBTQ+ artists make to our lives—and the lives of everyone in our culture.

Jane Latus profiles Dr. Kenneth Abriola, medical director of Circle Care, about his

illustrious career fighting for health and compassionate care for people with HIV/AIDS for nearly 25 years. It's an honor to shine a light on the work he's done—and what's left to do.

We also profile the Connecticut Sun, president Jen Rizzotti and Coach Analisee Rios (page 42) and their commitment making a positive social impact on and off the court.

Frank Rizzo profiles the new Mister Connecticut, Jean Carlo Salazar (page 36) and his journey from Columbia to our state, to a career in nursing, and now as a competitor in the national Mister USA competition. Both an immigrant and identifying as LGBTQ+, he hopes to use this platform to inspire others to go for their dreams.

Frank also writes about the movie *Sex Love Venice,* about finding deeper connection in a world of easy-access sex and profiles one of the stars, the iconic John Waters star, Mink Stole.

Brian Scott Lipton reviews the new book *Theater Kid* about Broadway producer Jeffrey Seller (page 16) and takes us on a tour of the Madison B&B The Homestead (page 44).

If you're looking for a deluxe summer getaway, join our travel writer Ashley Rogers, as she takes a trip to the world-class Winvian hotel and spa, in Litchfield (page 51).

Plus, Kim Adamski has some insights on mental health and sex. In her farewell column, Meghan Crutchley has some sound advice for grounding yourself in these challenging times. Meghan is on to new adventures, and we'll miss her in these pages.

Most of all, we wish you a happy Pride celebration. As Governor Lamont says, Pride in our state is a year-round affair. Our vision, resilience and dedication to our dreams can carry us through whatever is ahead.

Christopher Byrne, Editor chris@ctvoice.com

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Jeanette Winterson

Queer author Jeanette Winterson has developed a loyal following around the world for her works Oranges are not the Only Fruit, Written on the Body, The Passion, and many others.

IN THIS ISSUE //

14-23 WHAT'S THE BUZZ

MHC on Navigating Stress. Leonard-Litz on trans representation, a great theater book...and more.

24 ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

The streaming film Sex Love Venice and the search for personal connection. Plus, an interview with Mink Stole..

30 ARTS & **ENTERTAINMENT**

Theater company Live & In Color devotes itself to new work and inclusion.

36 **FEATURE**

Mister Connecticut and his journey as an immigrant and gay man.

42 **FEATURE**

The Connecticut Sun and their commitment to making a difference on the court and off.

47 TRAVEL

Step inside the world-class Litchfield resort, Winvian.

54 **HEALTH & WELLNESS**

Dr. Kenneth Abriola and his lifelong commitment to care and service for LGBTQ+ individuals.

72 **HISTORY**

Activist, author, and radio personality David Rothenberg on his career and a new book.

76 **FEATURE**

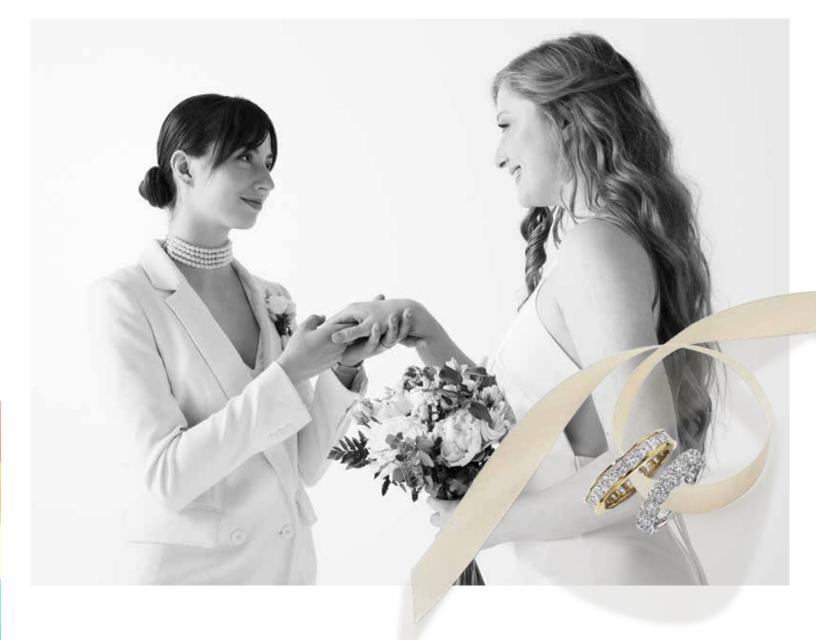
Check in to The Homestead in Madison, a unique B&B.

81 LAST WORD

Governor Ned Lamont on why Connecticut is a haven for LGBTQ+ communities.

58 **COVER STORY**

Pride in the state in 2025. See why it's more important than ever...and plan your celebrations.



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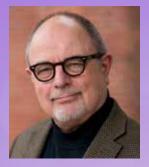
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CONTRIBUTORS //



FRANK RIZZO

Frank Rizzo looks at love and romance in his feature on the film Sex Love Venice (page 24). He also interviewed Mister Connecticut (page 36). 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.



KIM ADAMSKI

Kim Adamski continues her frank columns on sex. In this issue, she talks about engaging in sex for trans folks. She is a Hartford-based sexual educator. Kim loves answering the questions people are afraid to ask, and that's what motivated her to go into sex education. If you have questions about sex, contact her at adamski.kimberly@ amail.com.



BRIAN SCOTT LIPTON

Brian reviews the new book Theater Kid (page 16) and writes about The Homestead in Madison (page 76). He has been a nationally renowned journalist for more than 30 years. He has been editor-in-chief of TheaterManiacom and Resident Publications. Managing Editor of men's fashion magazines DNR and MR, and his byline has appeared in Forbes and the Wall Street Journal.



ASHLEY ROGERS Travel writer Ashley keeps it closer to home as she visits Litchfield's Winvian (page 47). She is a former marketing director and an awardwinning network television producer and documentary filmmaker. In 2010, she moved to Cuenca Ecuador and founded real estate company Ecuador at Your Service. She continues freelance writing and film and TV production.



JANE LATUS Jane profiles Dr. Kenneth Abriola (page 54) and is the force behind our Pride coverage and schedule (page 58). She and her wife live in Canton with an escalating number of cats. They have three grown children: two sons (one trans and one gay) and a foster

daughter.



MEGHAN CRUTCHLEY

Meghan Crutchley (they/ them) is a National Board Certified Health and Wellness Coach, speaker, educator, and CEO/Founder of Wisdom Body Health. With over a decade of experience helping individuals create lasting change through mindfulness- based strategies. Meghan believes in the transcendent potential of the human experience, and their work with both individuals and groups combines expertise in Buddhist philosophy with nutrition, sleep, stress management and recovery, and movement to offer a unique approach to cultivating sustainable health.



ALEX DUEBEN

Alex covered the Connecticut Sun (page 42). Dueben has written about books and art. comics and poetry for The Believer, Vulture, The Millions, The Los Angeles Review of Books, The Brooklyn Rail, and many other publications. He is the writer and editor of the artist monograph Hurricane Nancy, and his debut novel is forthcoming.

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R-E-P-R-E-S-E-N-T: Find Out What It Means to Me

xhibiting at two major conferences for the trans community this year has shed light on how trans people are represented in LGBTQ+ leadership. I spoke with trans leaders in Massachusetts, at the First Event conference, and Pennsylvania, at the Keystone conference, to see if my experiences were unique, or if trans folks were doing better in other areas. Sadly, the answer was no. The same pattern that transgender, gender non-conforming, non-binary, and intersex (TGNCNBI) individuals have faced for decades is happening in LGBTQ+ centers, advocacy groups, and activist organizations elsewhere. There's a clear lack of trans representation in leadership roles at both the board and staff levels.

My own experience highlights this issue. Too often, I've been the only trans voice in the room. When trans issues come up, I have had to fight for change, which has been tough and has often brought me criticism. Let's say I do not win any awards for Miss Congeniality! employees, preventing them from rising within the LGBTQ+ organizations they served. Some pointed out that charitable giving expectations were unrealistic for trans individuals, who typically earn less than their cisgender counterparts doing the same work. Additionally, there was a recurring sentiment

When trans issues come up, I have had to fight for change, which has been tough and has often brought me criticism. Let's say I do not win any awards for Miss Congeniality.

Others I met at the conferences shared similar stories. Many described a glass ceiling for trans among cis-led LGBTQ+ organizations that the trans community did not appreciate their efforts. This hints at a troubling paternalism.

At the Leonard Litz LGBTQ+ Foundation, I advocate for examining the leadership makeup of our grant applicants. What percentage of their staff is TGNCNBI? How many hold leadership roles? If the numbers are low, what are these organizations doing to recruit more trans individuals? Unsatisfactory answers may significantly impact their applications, because diversity, equity, and inclusion must include **TGNCNBI** people. In today's social and political climate, we are the most marginalized members of the LGBTQ+ community, and our absence in staff and board positions will shape the future of the movement.



REPRESENT. To me, it means real, not tokenized, representation in organizational leadership. It means actively recruiting more TGNCNBI individuals to decision-making roles. It means providing robust genderaffirming employee healthcare. And it means that cis allies must speak up when trans advocates face targeting for their support. For those of us still grappling with the trauma of being ostracized for our gender identity or expression, being further marginalized and silenced with our own community is a playbook we must reject, not repeat. 🕅

Robyn Schlesinger is a Trustee & Director of the Leonard Litz TransPLUS Resource Center

Theater Kid

he so-called "rags to riches" story endures as one of Americans' most popular literature genres, strenathenina our lonaheld belief that with hard work, a little luck, and perhaps some sort of special motivation, anyone in our country can accomplish their dream, obstacles be damned. These books serve as much-needed inspiration for those young enough to still be chasing fame or fortune, as well as offering insight into the lives of public figures whose coming-of-age tales have yet to be told.

Without question, *Theater Kid* (Simon & Schuster) succeeds spectacularly on both counts, detailing more than 50 years in the life of Tony Award-winning Broadway producer Jeffrey Seller-best known (at least in theatrical circles) as the man who brought us *Rent*, followed by *Avenue Q*, *In the Heights*, and, perhaps most importantly, *Hamilton*.

Indeed, much of this incredibly sincere yet open memoir focuses on Seller's decades-long career, which began right after he graduated from college and started with a lengthy stint working in the office of colorful producers Barry and Fran Weissler (who would eventually strike mega-gold with the revival



Jeffrey Seller

"These books serve as muchneeded inspiration for those young enough to still be chasing fame or fortune ..."

of *Chicago*), before placing Seller on some circuitous professional path.

As it goes on for approximately 350 pages, *Theater Kid* continues through Seller's deep friendship with the late composer/lyricist Jonathan Larson—which led to Seller producing *Rent* as well as his legendary partnership with fellow producer Kevin McCollum, before finally branching out his own (where his greatest collaborator and friend becomes a young Latino writer named Lin-Manuel Miranda). While the book can sometimes feel a bit too "inside baseball" for those not in the industry, it is never less than informative, honest and entertaining

But for many readers, the most identifiable sections of the book involve Seller's complicated childhood and coming to terms with being a gay man (although those readers expecting something graphic will be disappointed in Seller's rather tame descriptions of his sex life).

Growing up relatively poor in Oak Park, Michigan—a neighborhood he nonetoo-affectionally describes as "Cardboard Village"-Seller has the cards stacked against him. His father Mark, emotionally and physically damaged after a car accident, is a hot-tempered, irresponsible, sometimes loving father who barely ekes out a living (first as a process server, then briefly as a circus clown!) and who engages in a love-hate relationship with Seller's hard-working mom, Caroline. Jeffrey often feels stuck in the middle of their endless battles, getting little support from his depressed older sister Laurie, and eventually becomes the protector of his much younger brother, Aaron.

"While the pair's initial months together are romantic and seemingly steamy, the relationship falters as their goals and feelings change."

It doesn't help matters that Jeffrey is adopted something he always knows-and is not only physically different from his parents but feels emotionally different. Eventually, he realizes some of that distance is connected to his sexuality. and while his parents don't disown him or take any other drastic actions, his attraction to men does become a further barrier between Jeffrey and his mother.

As for those men, Jeffrey is a so-called "late bloomer," who doesn't even experiment with neighborhood boys. He does eventually befriend, move in with, and fall madly in love with a fellow Detroiter named Andrew Lippa (Yes, that Andrew Lippa, who would write such musicals as John & Jen and The Wild Party.) While the pair's initial months together are romantic and seemingly steamy, the relationship falters as their goals and feelings change; Andrew (who will remain a lifelong friend) wants to explore other options, while Jeffrey is practically ready to tie to the knot. It's a scenario most gay readers of the book can probably identify with.

The same might be said of one short scenario that lingers most vividly: Seller spent a brief time during his 30th birthday involved in a "three-way" of sorts in a gym steam room, before heading home to celebrate this major life milestone completely alone.

Perhaps understandably (presumably for privacy reasons), Seller doesn't devote much space to his life with his former partner, Josh Lehrer, with whom he raised two children, and one wishes he had given us a closer look into that relationship and the challenges of fatherhood. (His most recent partner, Yuval Sharon, is mentioned only in the book's acknowledgments).

But as Hamilton asks

repeatedly, "who gets to tell your story?" In Jeffrey Seller's case, he tells his own as he wants to – something one must respect and hopefully enjoy!

Editor's note: The starstudded audiobook of "Theater Kid" (also Simon & Schuster) is being read by Seller, with appearances by Annaleigh Ashford, Kyle Beltran, Steven Boyer, Danny Burstein, Darren Criss, Jesse Tyler Ferguson, Sas Goldberg, Renée Elise Goldsberry, Lindsay Mendez, Lin-Manuel Miranda, Alex Newell, Andrew Rannells, Conrad Ricamora, Jonathan Marc Sherman, and Christopher Sieber. The program also features original music composed by Tony and Pulitzer Prize Award winner Tom Kitt.

JEFFREY SELLER

-Brian Scott Lipton

TRANSFORMING SEXUALITY: It's (Not) All In Your Head: Mental Health And Sex

ental illness is a widespread concern. In the United States, it's estimated that 1 in 5 adults live with a mental illness: the rate among LGBTO+ folks is twice that. The numbers are likely even higher for folks living with subclinical mental distress. It's not hard to see why mental health issues are so common: we live in a fast-paced, productivity-focused world where we are constantly exposed to negative news, cruel behavior on social media, and loneliness. It's tough out there!

Poor mental health has a serious impact on sexual wellness. This metaphor from Emily Nagoski, Ph.D. perfectly illustrates the effect of mental distress on sexuality. According to Nagoski, our sexual desire is affected by two components: the accelerator and the brakes. Accelerators are the things that put you in the mood for sex, like foreplay, candles, or sexy music. Your brakes, on the other hand, are things that take you out of the mood. Stressors put the sexual brakes on big time! For example, if you are worrying about your personal safety in your everyday life, that's going to make it much harder to get in the mood for sex.

When we are in distress, our sexual function and satisfaction suffer. Our sex lives are put on the back burner to deal with more pressing issues. Mental health issues are associated with decreased desire and lower sexual satisfaction; in addition, the medications commonly used to treat mental illness carry sexual side effects, like inability to orgasm or maintain an erection. For some people, their nowdissatisfying sex life becomes yet another weight on their mental state.

Among LGBTQ+ folks, long-term discrimination can add another layer on top of all this. Anti-queer, religious upbringings and social stigmas about LGBTQ+ sexuality have a profound affect on sexual wellness. When we are exposed over and over to social narratives that portray queerness in a negative light, we unconsciously internalize them. Mainstream cultural disgust about anal sex is one such example. If you're repeatedly told explicitly or implicitly that there is something wrong with anal, that will plant that idea in your psyche, and it's incredibly difficult to unlearn. The resulting feelings of shame can interfere with being present in the moment during sex, exploring sexual pleasure, or seeking healthy, intimate relationships.

For many LGBTQ+ folks, this stress has been heavily impacted by the current political climate. Not only is anti-LGBTQ+ legislation demoralizing and frightening adding to the dogpile of other stressors in everyday life—it's criminalizing positive queer sexuality. For example, attempts to restrict gender-affirming care will likely lead to increased rates of gender dysphoria and negative self-image, both of which are associated with decreased sexual satisfaction. Bans on LGBTQ+ sexual identity topics in schools lead to low-quality sex education, leaving queer students with few resources to help them stay safe and healthy in sexual relationships. Politicizing gender and sexuality is a public health crisis when it comes to sexual wellness.

Nith Kim Adamski

While I can't change our entire society singlehandedly, I do have a few recommendations for coping. First and foremost, address the stressors in your life. Happily, some stressors can be removed easily. If you can't stop worrying about the chores that need to be done, finish them before you plan to have sex. Other stressors are a bit harder to change, like experiencing homophobia and You deserve a pleasurable and satisfying sex life. Use the tools available to you to make it happen!

transphobia in everyday life. In this case, you'll need to develop coping mechanisms. A good therapist can help you with this; you can also come up with your own remedies, such as avoiding stressful social media posts or media stories.

Next, work on consciously unlearning negative sexual narratives. It can be really difficult at first to rewire the way we think about sex, but with practice, we can gradually improve our sexual self-image and satisfaction. Say you're a woman who grew up with messaging that sex has to involve penetration, and now you are in a relationship with another woman. As a result, you may have feelings that the sex you are having with your partner is not "real" sex. Once you are able to identify these feelings, you can reframe them positively. Maybe the sex you're having is super creative, or perhaps you feel empowered to ask for what you want without the expectations set up by our heteronormative world! Mental wellness upkeep is, admittedly, a lot of work and a lifelong endeavor. It can feel overwhelming at times. At the same time, it's important to your overall well-being and closely tied with sexual wellness. Despite all that's going on, coupled with the stress that comes with being human, you deserve a pleasurable and satisfying sex life. Use the tools available to you to make it happen!

—Kim Adamski

Grounding in Daily Purposeful Actions

here's no mistaking it even at the time of writing this a few months ahead of when you'll read it—we're in the middle of a massive upheaval and reordering of major world systems and our own government. There's so much changing around us so quickly it can be destabilizing and scary. There will always be things outside of our control. and what's happening now is a reminder that we have to take responsibility for where we put our energy and how we take care of our own health and wellbeing. The chaos of the times is calling for us to look within and recognize the real, life sustaining power that lives in each of us, and tap into that to create our own stability and agency.

Reconnecting with our inner life force will create greater alignment with our inner and outer lives, and initiate three big shifts during this turbulent time:

- 1. Ability to access our inner resources: strength, peace, and joy, no matter what is happening outside around us.
- 2. Cultivating an inner sanctuary: connecting and validating ourselves first builds self-trust and lessens the tendency to look outside of ourselves for validation

3. Self-care is community care: addressing our deepest needs first and then showing up for others.

Before we're able to ground in our own inner knowing, and our inner sanctuary, we need to be willing to acknowledge and face our own suffering because if we don't. our unconscious won't allow us to be at peace. This can be hard to do for several reasons, and research shows that our capacity to turn towards our own suffering and that of others, known as "compassionate engagement," is impacted by our attachments style, our stress tolerance level, experiences with anxiety, depression, grief, and whether we grew up in a family where our feelings were validated.

If you're someone who struggles to sit with difficult emotions, you're not alone. That's where most humans are, especially in the West. When you turn off the tap for feeling the hard stuff, you turn off the ability to feel the good stuff, too! Practicing being present with ourselves and with what is coming up for us is literally the doorway between being able to feel our strong emotions and no longer being ruled by them.

Once we've brought awareness to our internal state, we need to bring the energy of self-compassion to whatever we find there. We do this in meditation or other forms of stillness practice where we can open and allow what's there to exist. We're not trying to get rid of any emotions or push them aside. From validating our own emotions, we must then move towards "compassionate action." Compassionate action is the exploration of what might help alleviate our own suffering, or that of others.

This is a vital part of the equation because if we stay in the anger or the fear, then those feelings get amplified and we stay stuck in a self-destructive loop, until we reach exhaustion and shut down. We can't access joy, peace, and rest if we are in a fear-based, survivaldriven state.

Compassionate action is about what you're drawn to that feels good, what gives you joy, and what helps you detach from the outside and reconnect with the energy within. In my health coaching practice, I call these lifegiving habits "Purposeful Daily Actions." Studies show that when we feel our actions have personal meaning and purpose, we're more likely to do them, to keep doing them, and to have more positive emotions and experiences. Here are some guidelines for coming up with your own purposeful daily actions:

Spending time being

still moves us into our parasympathetic nervous system to de-stress, repair and recover. We can also practice mindfulness meditation, slow deep breathing for three-to-five minutes, boxed breathing (inhale for four counts, hold for four counts, exhale for four counts).

Daily movement helps us expend excess energy in the body due to stress and anxiety. It should feel good and be sustainable.

Examining focus and mindset encourages looking for the bright spots, savoring positive experiences, practicing being in the present moment.

What's just for YOU

includes time to create, explore your interests, what's your vision for your life, hobbies that get you into flow states.

Spend five minutes a day doing something that's aligned with your unique self and watch what unfolds. Send me an email and share what's working! <u>Meghan@gmail.com</u> (V)

-Meghan Crutchley

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Navigating Stress and Supporting LGBTQ+ Mental Health during Challenging Times

GBTQ+ individuals experience higher rates of mental health conditions, not because of their identity, but due to stigma, discrimination, rejection, violence, and legislative barriers to lifesaving care. This phenomenon, known as minority stress, was coined in 1995 and is defined by the American Psychological Association as the physiological and psychological effects of adverse social conditions on marginalized communities.

Jacquilyn Davis, CDP, Director of Learning and Workforce Development at Mental Health Connecticut (MHC), underscores, "Being a part of the LGBTQ+ community is not a mental illness. Mental health challenges arise from factors like our environment, brain chemistry, and negative thought patterns but not from our identity. In our community, these challenges are often exacerbated by stigma, discrimination, rejection from loved ones, hate speech, violence, and laws that create barriers to lifesaving and affirming care."

The Impact of Anti-LGBTQ+ Legislation

Since January 2025, executive orders and ongoing anti-LGBTQ+ legislation at federal and state levels have intensified minority stress. These policies have fueled a surge in hate speech, creating increasingly hostile social and digital spaces and directly impacting LGBTQ+ mental health. According to The Trevor Project, 90 percent of LGBTQ+ young people report that politics has negatively affected their wellbeing.

As harmful federal policies threaten access to gender-affirming care and recognition for transgender individuals, many in Connecticut are standing up to protect LGBTQ+ rights. Despite the Trump administration's efforts to ban federal funding for youth gender-affirming care, restrict medical research in this field. and erase federal resources on transgender health, Connecticut continues to push back against these rollbacks.

Also, despite a surge in anti-trans bills in 2025, making Connecticut one of the top states with the most introduced legislation, none are expected to advance. Attorney General William Tong has consistently challenged discriminatory policies in court, while state lawmakers work to enshrine protections into the Connecticut Constitution, including a proposed amendment safeguarding genderaffirming care.

Christian Damiana, Public Policy Manager at MHC, affirms, "Advocacy organizations like MHC and state leaders are working together to send a clear message: Connecticut will not back down in the face of attacks on LGBTQ+ rights. Nonetheless, nationallevel actions continue to perpetuate stigma and limit access to care in various ways across different states, ultimately affecting mental health."

MHC Takes Action in Support of LGBTQ+ Mental Health

MHC has announced a new partnership with OurTransLife.org (OTL), an emerging organization dedicated to fostering fellowship, community education, and advocacy for transgender and gender-diverse individuals in the Greater Bridgeport, Waterbury, and Hartford areas. MHC is the official fiscal sponsor of OTL, enabling the organization to secure funding, expand programming, and increase awareness to support its mission.

OurTransLife.org **Executive Director Julia** DiCola notes, "We have witnessed within our community overall a much higher sense of anxiety. The added stress is particularly difficult for our community, which lived with societal insecurities even before the avalanche of directives geared towards repressing any previous advances the trans and gender-diverse community. The situation is rapidly deteriorating as schools, health care organizations, and general social service organizations, both public and private, are adjusting to extreme regulations complicated by the weaponization of funding."

Together, MHC and OTL launched a five-week art-based program that blends MHC's Art of Wellbeing series with OTL's TRANScend Arts Programming. This initiative creates a safe and supportive space where Transgender, Non-Binary, Gender Diverse adolescents, and their allies can explore selfexpression through art,

MHC offers these guidelines for helping to cope with these issues.

Rest and Reflect

- Recognize the toll stress takes on both mental and physical health and prioritize peace and self-care.
- Practice self-compassion by knowing your limits and setting boundaries.

Practice Self-Care and Healthy Habits

 \cdot Give yourself permission to pause and step back when needed.

- Meet your basic needs by checking in with yourself regularly, hydrating, taking breaks, and eating when hungry.
- Maintain a nutritious diet but allow a treat on tough days.
- Prioritize healthy sleep habits. Poor sleep can worsen mental health.
- Practice deep breathing, meditation, or yoga to center yourself.
- Take a walk with a friend and soak up the benefits of sunlight and Vitamin D, which support mood regulation.
- Be mindful of social media use. While it can foster community, constant exposure to negative news can increase stress and anxiety.
- Engage in hobbies that bring you joy: read, listen to music, spend time in nature, or enjoy the companionship of a pet.

Find and Lean into Community

 Seek out safe spaces and supportive networks. The Human Rights Campaign offers mental health resources. This June, engage with your local Pride events and inquire about ongoing offerings, or stop by MHC's Art of Wellbeing Studio in Hartford to learn a new art technique and create in a safe, inclusive environment.

• Lean into your community by surrounding yourself with trusted friends and family who empower and uplift you.

Use Your Voice

 Get involved in advocacy efforts to channel your energy into meaningful action, fostering empowerment, affirmation, and community. Check out ACLU's LGBTQ+ advocacy efforts.

Seek Professional Support

- It's okay to seek help. A therapist or mental health provider who practices affirming care can offer a safe space to navigate the impact of political and societal stressors on you and your loved ones. Find help here.
- MHC's Mental Health Concierge provides flexible in-person and telehealth therapy, case management, and in-home support throughout the state of Connecticut for individuals with and without insurance.
- At MHC, we believe education is key to creating safe, inclusive, and mentally healthy spaces.
 Our workshops, trainings, and coaching empower individuals to build stronger, more supportive communities. Bring our LGBTQAI+ Inclusion Training or other expert-led community education sessions to your workplace or community today!

connect with mental health resources, and discover their inner voice.

Building Resilience at Home through Coping Strategies and Resources

Even in a state that champions LGBTQ+ rights, national discrimination, rapid policy changes, and arowing instability can fuel anxiety. Patricia Seaver, L.M.S.W., Clinical Care Coordinator at MHC, offers guidance, stating, "Feeling angry, anxious, depressed, or fearful are all natural responses to navigating an intense political climate. At MHC, we are committed to providing support, resources, and self-care strategies to be a safe place for the LGBTQ+ community."

Moving Forward Together

By prioritizing mental well-being, building strong community connections, and advocating for LGBTQ+ rights, we can work towards a future where everyone feels seen, valued, and supported. Luis Pérez. President & CEO of MHC. states. "Despite ongoing political uncertainty, Connecticut and organizations like MHC remain steadfast in creating a safe, affirming environment where LGBTQ+ individuals can access care, find support, and thrive."

Access resources and learn more about MHC's work at mhconn.org.

—By Bethany Simmonds, Christian Damiana, Jacquilyn Davis, and Patricia Seaver

The Gay Search for Deeper Connections

'Sex Love Venice' Looks at One Man's Journey

By FRANK RIZZO / Photos courtesy DKIENGA FILMS

ow can a gay man find true intimacy in an easy-access world of online sex?

The answer may be an honest reckoning with oneself—and perhaps even a trip to Venice.

At least that's the narrative of the indie film *Sex Love Venice*, written and directed by Steve Balderson.

The ceators describe the story as follows: "Healing from a breakup, Michael escapes to Venice where he unexpectedly finds a love that awakens his spirit and expands his heart, promising to profoundly alter the direction of his life forever."

Daniel Bateman plays Michael, a handsome, 30ish gay man who finds sex easy enough following a devastating breakup, but he is also increasingly emotionally empty, making him all the more miserable.

Michael's supportive mother played by filmmaker John Waters' star Mink Stole; see sidebar. She suggests a change of scenery and a trip to romantic, sensual and transformative Venice. There Michael meets Marco (Alexander Ananasso), a sultry, soft-spoken bear of an Italian with a compelling presence who teaches Michael patience, intentionality, and what it means to have a soulful intimacy.



Director Steve Balderson

"There's nothing wrong with hooking up as long and you're honest with yourself and if it's making you happy," says Bateman in a Zoom interview from Los Angeles. "But do you feel better when you are leaving that intimate encounter with someone? Are you needing more meaning?"

In the film, Michael at first seeks counseling for his malaise and anxiety from his L.A. friends, family and a mentor, all to no avail.

"We can listen to all the self-help words in the world but they don't always stick," says Bateman. "Sometimes that advice just goes in one ear and out the other because it's just something you've heard before, feels unattainable, or you don't know the tools to make change happen.

For Michael, it also includes a change from his American attitude and pace.

"That mindset," says Bateman, "is like, 'We've gone here, now let's go there, and then there. And where am I going to find parking? Is it where I need to be? Is it closer to my next meeting?" But in Venice, it's more like, 'Let's enjoy this restaurant we're in right now. Let's be happy here. Now. Let's take in this moment.""

Of course, it is Italy, and perhaps easier to take in.

Most of the film was shot in Venice during the month of November when it isn't so filled with tourists with more room to explore the city—and oneself.

"Venice is beautiful and moody," says Bateman. "One moment it's sunny and then not. Then, the water's rising, and the wind's blowing, and waves are hitting the walkways. It's a metaphor for life itself, as if to say, 'Life itself is beautiful in all the messiness.""

In Venice, Michael meets Marco, a mesmerizing man whom he finds compellingly authentic, grounded and with a deeply felt philosophy of life, love, and sex that he's all too happy to share.

"For Michael" says Bateman, "it was, "Whoa, this is a person I'm sexually desiring? But he is also someone who [Michael is] emotionally resonating with,



Welcome Back, Mink Stole

ou know this is not the first time I've played the mother of an unhappy gay person," said Mink Stole on a recent Zoom call from her home in Los Angeles.

A regular in the idiosyncratic films of John Waters, Stole, now 77, was talking about a new, independent film *Sex Love Venice*. Written and directed by Steve Balderson, in which she has a scene as a mother of a gay son who is questioning his ability to have a real relationship.

Previously she had been in four sequels to the 2004 gay sex comedy *Eating Out*. "Being a sympathetic elder to gays is completely in my wheelhouse," she says laughing.

She first worked with Balderson in his 2009 indie film *Stuck!* which was an homage to film noir women-in-prison melodramas.

But it's the films of John Waters whose archives are held at Wesleyan University in Middletown that has given her a special place in independent films history—not to mention her name. (She was born Patrica Paine Stoll.)

She has appeared in all of Waters' feature films, beginning as a party guest in his 1967 film *Roman Candles*, and one critic called Stole "the Barbara Stanwyck of Baltimore filth."

Stole looks back happily at her prime Waters years as a time of fun and wildness, "in which the work just carried us through without thought of where it was all leading.

"I'm glad we didn't know what we know now because if we had,



it would have changed us. Plus, I would have been insufferable."

Like Waters, who is now 79, Balderson makes films with little resources, but the indie scene has changed dramatically, Stole says. Then there were midnight movie events, drive-ins and underground showings where beginner filmmakers could—if they were lucky—gradually find a following.

"Now anybody with a decent iPhone can make a movie," she says. "But that doesn't mean it's going to be good. What happens after the movie is made depends on what kind of play it gets, and Steve hustles. He gets his movies in festivals. He works it."

Stole is also a regular performer at Camp John Waters in Kent. Since 2017 it has been a rural gathering spot for Water's devoted adult fan base where they "relive their sleep-away camping days" with an "extra-campy theme weekend."

"I thought it was the silliest thing when I first heard it," she says. "I thought it was the stupid idea but I was wrong. The people who go there—and there's hundreds of them —are some of the nicest people in the world. What they have established there is a community that is very tight knit.

Despite her reputation from the movies, Stole was not always the independent rebel, she says.

"I was a kid from the Baltimore suburbs from a very conservative neighborhood, not necessarily Republican, but conservative knee highs with matching cardigan sweaters and madras outfits. But, anyways... I was looking to break away from that environment. I was certainly looking for adventure."

Before our talk ended, Stole had a kind of a news flash.

"Oh, did you know I got married? In August of 2023. I love being married—and I have married the nicest man. We've known each other for a very long time, then lost touch and then reconnected. I never made an official announcement. People just either know or they don't."

(See Frank Rizzo's extended interview with Mink Stole at ctvoice. com)





too. It's that combination that is key for Michael, and he gradually learns to trust again that results in a deep desire for personal change.

Marco spends Michael's vacation time with him but resists having immediate sex with him. For Michael, it might not look like it would happen at all before he returned home. But he would learn that the waiting was part of his life lesson, too.

"For Michael, it was discovering a person who is just excited to be alive and to be present and to be intimate," Bateman says. I think that's what made the switch for him in learning that he could connect the two: being present and intimate."

Real life story

For writer/director Balderson, the story was inspired by his own self-help journey following his own breakup when he turned 40. He turned to books and motivational talks, but it was his own trip to Venice that changed his life. "When I have told people about my experience in Venice, they would say, why don't you turn this into a movie?"

Balderson met a deeply feeling man who had a profound effect on his life.

"It literally felt like it was the first time I've had sex in my life because it was bringing me into all of my senses. I was feeling things I never felt and not just tactile, but internally."

Balderson says that he brought that sense of presence when he returned to the U.S., even if the sexual encounters after that were fleeting, and even if the feeling wasn't reciprocal. "I still tried to go there," he says. "But even if the other person doesn't go there, it's healthier, for me, with that feeling of intentionality, and it makes it a better experience. The great thing is to be reminded that whether it's about sex or about anything, how important it is in life just to be present."

For Bateman, the film has prompted in-depth conversations with friends and associates.

He notes in contemporary life there's

a paradox of seemingly endless online opportunities for connections and sex, but at the same time it can be devastatingly lonely, too.

Bateman says for many in the gay community the focus is on the superficial "and not having to go deeper, thinking, 'Well, this this is what gay dating looks like. Compartmentalizing things like: 'I have this wild side that I do in my own time, and then I go back, and I get my affection from my mother or friends or whoever.'

Balderson adds that sees a generation or two of gay men who are adrift in terms of real connections and hope the film can help them see deeper meaning.

"Superficial sex is so easy but once you've had [a more intimate connection], it's a little bit like, why would you go back to the other way?"

And not just for gay men.,

"I think if people learn how to be present with their lover," says Balderson, "that would be revolutionary for most everybody."

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GOODSPEED MUSICALS





RAISING VOICES

Live & In Color is a small but mighty theater company making a difference

By CHRISTOPHER BYRNE

he future of the American theater is developing at a small camp in Salem, a small town of just over 4,200 people north of New London. It's a home and incubator new and exciting work.

Salem is the home of Live & In Color, a theater company now entering its eleventh year. Run on a shoestring—with a staff of just five—and under the direction of founder and artistic director Devanand Janki, the company has nonetheless become an important developer of new work, a pipeline to regional theaters and other producing organizations and giving voice and opportunity to a diverse group of artists.

In fact, diversity and inclusion is the "core mission" of the group, according to Janki. Janki, who identifies as South Asian, has performed on Broadway and around the world and throughout his career has been keenly aware of the lack of opportunity for many individuals who may



Live & In Color Class of 2024, Photo Credit Andrew Young



Catherine Gloria, Photo Credit Sharon Cooke

not conform to traditional casting ideas, whether BIPOC, transgender, individuals on the autism spectrum, or more. Janki talks about how all these perspectives together create an environment of "empathic inclusion," that is enlightening and enriching for everyone involved.

The core of the program is the annual two-week retreat at The Bingham Camp in Salem. In this idyllic environment the work is fast, intense, and highly creative. Each year the company develops one new play and one new musical, and at the end of the fortnight, they are presented to an audience. After all, Janki notes, that's the point: to get audience feedback and see how the work resonates.

"We live together for two weeks. We house people. We feed them, and you get so much work done."

It's not always smooth sailing. Janki says that in summer 2024, a snafu threatened the musical that they had



Michael Lazarus in *Howdyland* Photo Credit Andrew Young

planned. Two days before the camp was supposed to begin, they had to start over, and in the kind of plot twist that could be right out of a classic musical, in three days the team wrote three quarters of a new musical...and it was good. Kim Jinhyoung, whose show Zombies, Inc. was developed last year was also produced in New York in May. It's a one-man musical that Jinhyoung says got a huge boost from his participation in the program. It's the story of a disheartened man trapped in a zombie apocalypse in New York City who, ironically, discovers what it means to be truly alive. Jinhyoung said that his time at the camp was incredibly helpful in nurturing him and his show.

Other New York transfers include Songs of Light & Joy, a Diwali Celebration, conceived by Janki and the play developed last year I Know Why Iris Chang Died by Esmé Maria Ng both slated for the fall.

Making It Work

Now, you may raise your eyebrows at the notion of a musical for a solo performer, but that, too, is at the core of the work Live & In Color does.





Present Perfect ensemble. Photo credit Dennis Corsi

As Janki explains, the mission of the company is to create pieces that can get productions at the regional or Off-Broadway (someday maybe even Broadway) levels. That means acknowledging the economic realities of production.

Casts of two to four are the norm for Live & In Color. As Janki explains, that's what regional companies can afford to produce. Combined with pieces that speak to the heart and reflect the world honestly, it's become their formula for success. Janki adds that he certainly meets writers who want to create a "magnum opus," but he counsels them to create works that could be produced as well.

One of the company's most visible and produced—pieces to date is *Little Girl Blue: The Nina Simone Musical.* The show charts Simone's journey from classical piano prodigy to world famous soul singer. After development during the retreat, the musical played the George Street Playhouse in New Jersey, where it attracted mostly a black audience. Immediately after the pandemic, the show was produced at Goodspeed, and as Janki says, the company took a risk, as the show is not typical Goodspeed fare. The reception, however, was tremendous. "So many board members came up to me and said, 'We're so glad this is here, we should be doing more of this. And audience members said, 'We've never seen Goodspeed do something provocative.' That was really wonderful to hear."

What Janki and his theater continue to demonstrate is that it is the shared humanity of the narratives that matter most—and giving voice and visibility to the wide range of individuals that make up our culture benefits everyone. But it's not always easy...

Headwinds in the Current Climate

Live & In Color, like many arts organizations in the current political environment, is losing some of its grant money on both the federal and state levels because of the nature of the work the company does. This presents financial challenges, and the company is working to fill those gaps.

As Broadway actress and Live & In Color board member Andrea Burns noted at a recent gathering, the company is telling stories that need to be told and amplifying voices that need to be heard, and that no matter what the political situation, Live & In Color is committed to providing the platform and the outlet for artists.

Storytelling is a fundamental human need, and taking the longer view of history, people have always found ways to share those stories through theater. The irony is that whether the English theater was shut down by the Puritans in 1642 or the Soviets banned "prohibited subjects" in the mid-20th Century, somehow voices have always been heard—and the show has gone on, sometimes underground or in secret, but the voices have never been completely silenced.

Keeping it Going

Undaunted, the company is full speed ahead for the 2025 season. The annual retreat and performances will be at Bingham Camp in Salem. The play will be presented on September 4 and the musical on September 6.

In addition, fundraising is gearing up, and they are planning their next Broadway on the Vines concert at Sunset Hill Vinyards in Old Lyme this August.

For more information and to become actively involved as an audience member, contributor, or both, check out the organization's website at liveandincolor.org.

The journey of this company over the past decade-plus is a clear illustration of what vision, dedication, and perseverance can accomplish. What began as Janki's vision to provide work and voices for his friends who were facing challenges being seen and heard has gone so far beyond his original idea, giving voice, development, and powerful experiences for audiences—what the theater has always done...and will continue to do.

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FEATURE //

CALL HIM MISTER CONNECTICUT

Jean Carlo Salazar's Journey as Nurse, Model and Pageant Contestant

By FRANK RIZZO / Photos courtesy of JEAN CARLO SALAZAR

ometimes, and against what appears to be insurmountable odds, you just have to believe in yourself.

That's the creed of Jean Carlo Salazar.

"You have to have faith in yourself because if you don't, you have nothing," says Salazar, 26, who lives in East Haven.

Salazar is in a downtown New Haven coffee shop telling me about his challenging immigrant journey from Colombia to Connecticut and how it led to a career in nursing, work as a model and now as a representative of Connecticut at the Mister USA pageant in Los Angeles in July.

Dressed casually in a white waffled long-sleeved jersey, jeans, and white New Balance sneakers, Salazar is strikingly handsome with piercing green-hazel eyes but also approachable with an open, easy-going manner and welcoming smile.

He was born in Cali, Colombia and raised by a family of women—a single mother, grandmother, aunt and older sister. "Even our dogs were female," he laughs.

At the age of 10, his family—now including a stepfather—emigrated to Connecticut. In 2018 he became a naturalized citizen.

They lived in West Haven before moving to Middletown where he was bullied as a gay teenager unsure of himself, leading him to finish school early. "Kids can be evil, and it was very tough."

Coming from a conservative Catholic family, his coming out process as a gay teen was rough, too, he says, "It took some time for my family to say, 'We love you. You are our child. And we don't care what our religion or society says.""

Because his family was struggling to fit in with its new country, Salazar had to figure a lot of things out for himself, especially his route to college and finding a career path.

"I knew I was on my own, but something beautiful my mom instilled in me was that in this country education is key to success."

While working at Dunkin' Donuts and Starbucks, he studied at Middlesex Community College in Middletown to become a phlebotomist. He then earned a Bachelor of Science







degree in psychology at Southern Connecticut State College and followed that by earning a second Bachelor of Science degree in nursing at UConn. That led to positions at Stamford Hospital and Yale-New Haven Hospital, "which shaped me to be the nurse I am today."

In 2023, he became a board-certified ICU nurse, and he currently works for Option Care Health in Shelton. He is also purusing master's degree at Quinnipiac University to become a Psychiatric Mental Health Nurse Practitioner.

Two years ago, a New York photographer saw a picture he posted on Instagram and reached out to him to see if he would be interested in modeling.

"I had no idea who this person was, and though I was shy and scared, I took a risk and said yes. Thankfully, he was a really nice person."

Those professional photographs led to his work for a modeling agency, portfolio photo shoots, and even covers for *Ardent* and *Vero* magazines and *Vero's* online platform, *HoN* magazines.

He learned about the Mister USA competition through his sister, Maria Camilla Medina, a marketing specialist, who won the Reina Latina 2024/2025 pageant earlier this year in Danbury.

Salazar sent in an application and received a phone call the next day for a pageant interview on Zoom. In February, he was chosen to represent Connecticut and will compete in Los Angeles in July for a \$50,000 modeling contract. The winner will compete for Mr. Universe in Los Angeles in November for a six-figure cash prize. He describes the experience so far as "surreal."

The Mister USA program describes itself as a "quest for male excellence" and celebrates "diversity, beauty, intelligence, and empowerment." The winners, called "ambassadors," are fit, intelligent, socially aware, and charismatic.

"They're truly looking for people who do advocacy work," says Salazar. "That's where I want to bring in my own unique story." He says his immigrant narrative, his LGBTQ+ identity, and the challenges he faced, along with his passionate advocacy on behalf of healthcare and nursing, is what he hopes will make him stand out.





He adds, "for me, that means recognizing failure and using those experiences to ultimately succeed," says Salazar. "It requires facing challenges head-on and embracing them to foster perseverance and personal growth.

"They're truly looking for people who do advocacy work. That's where I want to bring in my own unique story." He says his immigrant narrative, his LGBTQ+ identity and the challenges he faced, along with his passionate advocacy on behalf of health care and nursing, is what he hopes will make him stand out.

"I want to raise some awareness about how nurses are a catalyst to the healthcare industry," he says.

Style is also one of the competitive categories, and that includes formal wear and swimwear (i.e. Speedos). He describes his fashion sense as "stylish relaxed athletic."

If there is a talent segment, which hasn't been confirmed yet, Salazar, who also plays piano, would like to perform a piece by composer Ludovico Einaudi.

Even prior to applying for the competition, Salazar, who is single, had been working out at Powerhouse gym in North Haven just to get in better shape for himself, working on nutrition, gaining muscle and bulking his sixfoot frame to around 180 pounds.

All along the way over the past 10 years, he says, there were naysayers who told him he couldn't pursue his dreams. "But you have to do what you have to do and grow a thick skin. Life isn't always fair, and we know that, but you can't continue to victimize yourself."

Jean and "Team Salazar," will embark on a cross-country road trip to the nationals. He is still seeking sponsorship via his Instagram @ salazarj_98.









WNBA

CONNECTICUT SUN Playing for Good

By ALEX DUEBEN / Photos Courtesy of CONNECTICUT SUN

think that [the WNBA] is probably as player-led as any professional league can be," Jen Rizzotti said in a recent conversation with *Connecticut Voice*. A member of the Women's Basketball Hall of Fame, Rizzotti spent years playing professionally and two decades coaching at the University of Hartford and George Washington University, but for many, the Connecticut native will always be remembered for her years at UConn, which

included the team's first championship. Since 2021, Rizzotti has been President of Connecticut Sun.

"Our players are from everywhere, and players' opinions across the league can become a national discussion," Rizzotti said. "What has been interesting for us is we've caught the attention of state employees and state politicians who have wanted to collaborate with us on messaging that's important. I think because it's a small state, we've captured the attention of a lot of people and a lot of fans. It feels like we can actually make a difference, rather than just having an opinion," Rizotti said citing projects in recent years with the Governor and Attorney General around gun violence prevention and discrimination.

"I just feel like the conversations have been started easier and the support has been there because we can capture the attention of a lot of people in such a small area," Rizzotti said. "I think the WNBA used to just be a professional basketball league, and now the WNBA is <image>

key. "The role of my staff and me is really important—one to creating a very safe and inclusive space for our players and our front office staff. I think visibly showing our players that there are a lot of people behind the scenes working for them that also look like them and represent them...and them seeing the work that we're doing in the community," Rizzotti added. "They can see that these social justice issues are important to us. Standing for the women of the WNBA

> is important to us. Working to give back to underprivileged communities is important to us.

> "I think it's important for the women that are thinking about coming to Connecticut as a free agent or that are getting drafted into our organization feel safe and feel comfortable and feel empowered to make a difference because that's the work that we're doing on a regular basis."

> Rizzotti may always be known in the state for her time at UConn, but she admits that's one of the ways that she can be of help. "One of the positives of me coming back to take on this role is it brings an immediate attention to the franchise in a way that wasn't there before. Regardless of whether or not I do a good job as a team president, I can publicly bring attention to the work that our organization is doing," Rizzotti said, mentioning that the same is true of the team's new General Manager, the former UConn player Morgan Tuck.

"The common denominator for both of us is that we came from

standing for so much more. That has been much more prevalent in the last five years since COVID, since the Black Lives Matter movement, and since the players all got together and decided that they were going to use their voice for good."

For the former player and coach, that focus from the top of the organization down is one of the roles she believes is a program where doing things the right way, and winning the right way, was a focal point. It wasn't 'win at all costs.' It was about how we treated people. It was about how we worked as a team and collaborated and had a selfless mindset. It was about having a growth mindset that we didn't know everything and that we were willing to be pushed to





Meet Coach Analisse Rios

nalisse Rios has been the Strength and Conditioning Coach for the Connecticut Sun for years, but only last season has it become a fulltime, year round position. Previously she worked for the team during the season while also working full time at Connecticut College. A former member of the Bolivian National Soccer team, Rios and her wife are foster parents, and were for many years, Sun season ticket holders.

"As of last season, I was full time. So that means I was able to leave my job at Connecticut College and just focus solely on the Connecticut Sun. If you look at the growth of just my position, it gives you a sense of how quickly in six years the league has grown. This past season, we're traveling charter flights and playing sold out arenas and seeing little kids wearing jerseys of some of the athletes that I work with on a daily basis. As a female athlete myself, growing up, I never thought that there would be such a focus on a women's sport. I've always wanted that, but I never saw that happening. But it is happening and I'm in the middle of it, and I absolutely love that."

"Growing up in in Bolivia, being gay was also not an option for me, so when I came to college, I struggled a lot with who I was and who I knew I was deep down. But wasn't comfortable in showing that. I felt like I had to live within a certain norm, and I tried really hard to live within that norm—until I got to a point where I knew that I wasn't happy living a lie, basically, and I knew that I had to do something different. It was at that time I met my wife, and we started dating. To be able to go to a Pride game, as a fan at first, was something that I had never experienced. To see people like wearing rainbow gear and outwardly supporting the community, or being part of the community themselves, that was something that I had never seen in Bolivia. To be part of that environment was huge for me in my journey of accepting myself and living truthfully."

"To walk out onto the court [now] when it's Pride night and know that everyone is out there and supporting pride and supporting love who you love. The Connecticut Sun did a feature on me and my wife three years ago, and they played it on the jumbotron, telling our story. It literally gives me goosebumps. That support is not something that I ever grew up with. To be able to walk into an arena and know that everyone who's there, in one way or another, is supporting you and believing that people should like live truthfully. And my story could be affecting a young girl or young boy who's like, oh, this is okay, I'm going to be okay—it really does mean a lot to me." our limit and driven to be great," Rizzotti said. "A lot of those characteristics really translated to success in the front office for both of us."

Before becoming the General Manager, Tuck spent years running the Sun's Community Department, an experience she described as eye-opening. "Obviously people do a ton of great work in the community, but when you're seeing people every day where this is what they have dedicated themselves to, to me, it just felt like, we have to find a way to get involved," Tuck said.

"Part of what the team can do is connecting the players to the community and letting them know what's happening and what they can do and what they might be interested in. When you want people to have buy-in, you explain what you're doing, but you also try to take in their interests and their passions and try to weave that into what we're doing," Tuck said. "You don't want to have players feel like they can only talk about things when it's in the news or when it's more pressing."

"We're not going to make them do anything they don't want to do. And also going, okay, this is what you're passionate about? Here's an organization that really focuses on it. How do we connect them? How can you get involved? How can you amplify what they're doing? We try to get creative. But at the end of the day, we always try to make sure that it is supporting what our players want to do."

Tuck admits that this is happening at a time when more people than ever are focused on women's basketball, which she wouldn't trade. But also, that noise can't distract form the bigger job. "We've put a big emphasis on giving back to the community, because obviously we want our communities to support us. So, we always felt like we have to support them, too."

"I just hope throughout my job in this position that I may always have a lot going on and I'm not as available as I was when I was working in the community, but that I never lose that," Tuck said. "That thought process is: you can

have a positive impact, no matter how big or small. I want to be remembered as someone who made a positive impact, not just because I played basketball, but that I used the attention or the platform to have a positive impact on others."

Rizzotti echoed the sentiment. "It's almost an unwritten job responsibility."

"That you're consistently conscious of the impact that you're making on your players' lives, on your coaches' lives, on the front office staff, on the Mohegan community, the New London County community, all the way throughout the state, and all the way throughout the country when it comes to WNBA fans," Rizzotti said. "We understand the responsibility we have in creating an impact and a space where we can be really proud of. It is something that's always on our minds. I think that what makes being in the WNBA right now really special is that we really can be a vehicle for change." Ŵ



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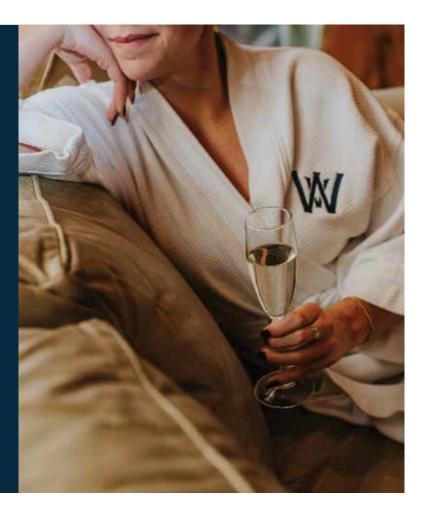


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A LOVE LETTER TO CONNECTICT

By ASHLEY ROGERS

The Winvian farm supplies much of the produce used at the resort.

Winvian Farm– An Inclusive Relais & Chateaux Resort with Heart, Soul, Sophistication and Whimsy

ucked away in the rolling Litchfield Hills of Connecticut, just two hours north of New York City and 2.5 hours west of Boston, is Winvian Farm...a Relais & Châteaux, AAA Five Diamond

resort that blends understated elegance with a sense of playfulness and pure luxury, making it an

irresistible escape for discerning visitors and locals alike.

For the LGBTQ+ traveler, Winvian is not just another 5-star luxury resort. It is an oasis of warmth and inclusivity and a world of wonder, where timeless New England charm meets dreamlike fantasy. With 18 eclectic, storybook cottages, a world-class spa, exquisite farm-to-table cuisine, and an array of immersive indoor and outdoor experiences, this alluring retreat offers an enchanting getaway for those seeking relaxation, personalized experiences, and an inviting environment.

Originally the estate of Winthrop and Vivian and inspiring the resort's name Winvian—the property was transformed under the watchful eyes of Maggie Smith and her daughter, Heather Smith Winklemann, into a plush resort, opening in December 2006. Their unified vision for the resort was to make each guest feel like they are welcomed, cherished and seen. The property is one of the only awardwinning U.S.-based resorts that is women owned and operated, as well as privately owned.

"I am proud of the fact that Winvian remains privately-owned and family

operated," says Maggie Smith, the resort's proprietor, who credits much of her success to her staff, many of whom have been with her from the beginning. "Our goal has always been to create an intimate sanctuary where our guests' needs are anticipated and exceeded in an understated, elegant way. I consider the people on my team, family. We all work together to make the property shine, and the team brings the resort to life every day with spectacular warmth and intuitive understanding of the needs of a vast variety of guests."

WHERE NORMAN ROCKWELL MEETS ALCIE IN WONDERLAND

Winvian boasts eighteen uniquely designed cottages and the historic family home, the Hadley Suite. Fiffteen different architects were commissioned to design these one-of-a-kind cottages, each depciting the designers' own visions of Connecticut landscapes, history, and the state's unrivaled natural beauty. Guests can stay in the







The living room in the Library Cottage

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The world-class spa

The exterior of the Library Cottage

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Treehouse, perched 35 feet above the forest floor; cozy up in the Beaver Lodge or in the Connecticut Yankee cottage—a tribute to Mark Twain and his literary legacy; or revive a childhood dream in the Helicopter cottage, a meticulously restored 1968 Sikorsky HH-3F Sea King Pelican helicopter inside this beautifully appointed cottage-turned-high-end-hangar. Each visit offers a completely fresh experience—and encourages repeat visits, says Maggie. Forty percent of Winvian's guests return, eager to try a different cottage, a new season, or simply to re-experience the deep sense of serenity the resort provides.

For LGBTQ+ guests, this authenticity is everything. It's not just about feeling safe—it's about feeling celebrated and part of the family fold.

Whether you visit with a partner, a friend group, or are flying solo...privacy, intimacy and exclusivity are paramount at Winvian. "There is a sense of privacy and anonymity at the resort," Maggie notes. "All guests sign a confidentiality agreement upon check-in—allowing for total respect and honoring guests' solitude." Smiles, Maggie, "you'd be surprised at who has entered these gates!"

Cottages range in size from 900 to 1200 square feet and feature radiant heated floors, oversized, jetted soaking tubs, rainfall steam showers, and woodburning fireplaces. "When our front gate opens, visitors look around for a moment," Maggie says. "You can see their awe and wonder. They feel like they've arrived at a sanctuary and an oasis while also wondering if they've fallen down the rabbit hole, not in a Disney kind of way, but as if you stepped back in time, into a sweet life with no distractions and a sense of ease, calm and whimsy." Winvian delights both the inner child and their adult counterpart, she adds. Nightly rates start at \$899, including a delicious homemade breakfast.

A CULNARY JOURNEY—FROM SEED TO TABLE

Dining at Winvian is also an event. Executive Chef Chris Eddy (see sidebar), whose career includes time with such culinary legends as Alain Ducasse and Daniel Boulud, has curated the resort's renowned "seed-to-table" philosophy. Nearly three-quarters of the produce used at the on-site restaurants come from Winvian's own three-acre organic farm and four greenhouses.

"Chef Chris is a miracle worker who just keeps getting better and better," Maggie boasts. "Years ago, he said he wanted to 'garden responsibly', while taking stewardship of our beautiful land, and more control of the types of food he served, and he has done just that. I love seeing guests walk through our lush gardens, watch our kitchen staff pick fresh herbs and produce that will be on their plates for lunch and dinner, and occasionally grabbing a berry or two for themselves."

Dining at *The Restaurant at Winvian* is an elegant yet unpretentious affair, with an ever-evolving seasonal menu that celebrates fresh, local ingredients. For a more casual experience, *Maggie's Tavern* offers craft cocktails, locally brewed beers, and pub-style cuisine in a warm, inviting setting—where even four-legged friends (on a leash) are welcome.

Winvian's wine cellar has a *Wine Spectator* Award of Excellence and features more than 350 labels at the present time, ensuring every meal is paired with the perfect vintage.

A SPA TO REMEMBER

Winvian's 5,000-square-foot spa is an oasis of tranquility. Voted the #1 Best Resort Spa in the U.S. by Condé Nast Traveler Readers' Choice Awards in 2024, it offers six treatment rooms, including





A perfect breakfast spot



The Treehouse Cottage



Elegant but relaxed dining

two couple's suites with wood-burning fireplaces, a sun-filled relaxation area that provides a serene ambiance with a "country- meets-urban" vibe, and a variety of body and facial treatments including Ashiatsu and exclusive selections of specialty products and procedures. "We call it our happy place," quips Maggie. The spa will soon introduce yoga and ballet barres, further expanding its wellness offerings. Guests can also relax at the garden side pool, open from Memorial Day through Columbus Day."

A REASON, A SEASON, AND IMMERSIVE EXPERIENCES FOR EVERY TASTE

Wivian is an oasis of calm and provides the perfect get-away for locals in Connecticut, to celebrities and business royalty from afar. Everything from LGBTQ+ weddings and galas, to corporate and team-building retreats are offered, as are an array of activities that invite guests to embrace both adventure and nostalgia. Outdoor enthusiasts can explore hiking trails that connect to the vast 4,000-acre White Memorial Conservation Center; try their hand at fly-fishing, go snowshoeing in the winter or take in the stunning Litchfield Hills from a hot air balloon. Each guest room includes two complimentary bicycles, to tour the beautiful grounds, or visitors can go antiquing in some of the best antique shops in the country.

For those who prefer indoor entertainment, Winvian delivers ... with, hands-on workshops such as mixology classes, wine tastings, and pastrymaking lessons with the resort's own pastry chef.

"Winvian's unique blend of activities encourages guests to embrace a sense of play and guests become kids again," Maggie says. "Grown men find themselves racing bikes, walking away from their devices to discover something like stained glass making. They've stopped 'the noise' and are immersed in a quieter, more delightful time, reminiscent of bygone years."

As Winvian continues to evolve, Maggie's vision remains clear: expanding the resort with new cottages and multi-bedroom accommodations to welcome even more guests into this extraordinary retreat. "What drives me is that Winvian gives me energy, intimacy, and a ready-made family," she says. "I love to see guests of all persuasions, all ages, families, and their grandchildren come and return again to experience the magic. It keeps me young."

For LGBTQ+ travelers seeking an experience that blends luxury with caprice, and where inclusivity is not just a promise but a practice, Winvian offers something rare: a destination where you can indulge in life's finer pleasures while feeling entirely, effortlessly yourself.

For more information please visit Winvian's website at: winvian.com, or call <u>1-860-567-9600</u>

INSIDE WINVIAN'S KITCHEN WITH EXECUTIVE CHEF CHRIS EDDY



t Winvian Farm, the AAA five Diamond culinary experience is foundational to the luxury hospitality that permeates this amazing property. Dining isn't just a meal—it's an experience, deeply rooted in the land itself. And, behind every plate is the creative genious of Executive Chef Chris Eddy.

For nearly two decades, Chef Eddy has championed a true "seed-to-table"

philosophy, letting ingredients not trends—shape the menu. Nearly 70 percent of the food served at the resort comes directly from Winvian's organic gardens, greenhouses, herb beds, orchards, and even a root cellar.

"Unless you've grown your own food, it's easy to overlook the labor behind a single dish," says Chef Eddy. "It's quite a process. We germinate, nurture, plant, amend the soil, irrigate, maintain, harvest, clean, prep, cook, and finally serve. Every step is equally important to achieving success."

This devotion to the land translates into a menu that evolves daily, inspired by the bounty of the seasons and the creativity of Chef Eddy and his team. "We change our menu every day. It's a smaller menu, constantly evolving. New ideas, new dishes—always in a state of transformation. Seasonality falls in perfect sync with this style of cooking, and naturally, we identify ourselves with 'the place' concept—where we are—and that is New England."

Adds, Chris, "This has been my favorite part of the work. I'm always striving to make the simple, into something exquisite, and we love hearing comments

from the guests like 'Hey, guys, it just keeps getting better!'" Chef Eddy also credits his skilled and passionate team for the success of the restaurant and his joy of cooking.

Presentation is also critical to the dishes but fresh food remains king. "Our idea with plating is that it should arrive at the table humming," says Chef Chris. "We have all had plates that looked amazing but the flavor was absent. We want our food to look natural and clean and cared for, but ideally once the plate was enjoyed, the presentation becomes a distant memory. "

So where does his creativity come from? "My inspiration essentially comes from three places. The first is what role the ingredient plays in a dish? Is it central, is it more complementary and can it contribute to the success of a plate? Second, where is the ingredient indigenous to and how does whatever respective culture use that item? This is very useful information. Third, simple creativity and imagination where we try to connect flavors in a way that works beautifully."

Additionally, with a Wine Spectator Award of Excellence under his belt, Chef Eddy has a deep appreciation for perfect pairings. His current favorite? "Arietta wines from Napa. Citrus and fish with the whites, and anything from roasted duck to oxtail to rib steaks with the luscious reds."

"This is my dream job," says Eddy, who trained under Alain Ducasse and Daniel Boulud before putting down roots in Connecticut. "I've hit the jackpot. I've kind of created my own reality here and the incrdible family of owners have allowed me that freedom."

At Winvian Farm, culinary excellence is where each bite tells the story of the land, Chef Eddy's creativity and the many hands that cultivate and elevate natural elements into fine dining and a meal to remember.

Locals, not just hotel guests, are invited to enjoy this culinary experience, and in-room and private dining, special celebration catering for two or 200, and corporate events are all part of the food experience at Winvian. Whether it's the welcoming breakfast room, a seat at the bar in Maggie's Tavern, a cocktail and a snack on the patio overlooking a sweeping view of the grounds, or a coveted spot in the main dining room, Winvian has the ideal place for you to sit back and enjoy a memorably delicious meal in beautiful, Litchfield, Connecticut.



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Meet Kenneth Abriola, MD

By Jane Latus



Dr. Kenneth Abriola and APRN Martha Donovan while volunteering at a medical clinic in rural Haiti. enneth Abriola, MD, has been treating people with infectious diseases in Greater Hartford for more than 30 years. It's no exaggeration to call him a local legend in the field of HIV medicine and in the LGBTQ+ community. Get to know him a

little, and you'll know why. He battled through the worst of the AIDS crisis, first as a medical student in the late 1980s, volunteering for the Hartford Gay & Lesbian Health Collective (HGLHC, now called The Health Collective). After completing his medical training in New Orleans, he returned to Hartford in 1993 as director of the AIDS program at the Mt. Sinai Hospital Burgdorf Clinic. He then became assistant director of the AIDS program at Hartford Hospital. While practicing full-time, he also volunteered as medical director of the HGLHC for about 30 years. He went into private practice in 2004, specializing in LGBTQ+ primary care, and in 2023 merged his practice with Circle Care Center, which provides primary care, HIV prevention, sexual health management, and gender affirming care. He is now Circle Care's medical director and volunteers to educate nursing and medical students in LGBTQ+ care.

He lives in Moodus with his partner George Teran and their two Golden Retrievers.

Before getting to our questions for him, there are some key things to know about Abriola.

While an undergrad at Boston College, he went on a medical mission to Haiti that inspired his life-long interest in tropical disease. After UConn Medical School and then a residency at St. Francis Hospital, he went in 1991 to Tulane University Medical Center for his fellowship year. Tulane had a Master of Public Health and Tropical Medicine program that interested him, and at the time he envisioned himself in a Doctors Without Borders sort of career.

His plans changed while at Tulane, where his clinical responsibility was in its AIDS unit.

"We were managing and treating opportunistic infections, but most of the

time it was a losing battle. We couldn't fix the immune system. So, they'd succumb to one thing after another. That was a change for me. I turned away from tropical diseases," he says. "Men having sex with men—that was my community."

The same curiosity and knack for detective work that interested him in infectious disease in general was especially handy when treating HIV. "Infectious disease doctors don't really have 'a procedure;' our procedure is the questions we ask," Abriola says. When there was no medical means to block HIV transmission or prevent AIDS, they had to investigate and improvise. "There was so much *learning* around it, coming up with treatment strategies."

A former colleague points out two more traits that make Abriola an outstanding doctor: kindness, and intolerance for anything less than a diligent effort on patients' behalf.

Anne Duncan of Canton worked with him for most of the 1990s in the AIDS clinic at Trinity Hill Nursing Home in Hartford (now the Trinity Hill Care Center). Duncan was a counselor, and Abriola worked at the clinic as part of a cooperative agreement with Mt. Sinai Hospital.

"It was a very hard job" and a tight, highly functioning team, says Duncan. "Ken is one of the nicest people that I know and has a heart beyond beautiful." As a doctor, she says, "He was lovely. He was gentle." Duncan recalls an AIDS patient picking up her guitar and bursting into, "Wild thing, you make my heart sing," as Abriola walked into her room.

"He said to me, 'Is she singing about *me*?' I said, 'Of course she is! Pay attention!""

Duncan also recalls, "He had a temper, but it was only at things he absolutely should have been mad about," like errors or incompetence. She recalls him throwing a pencil so hard that it smashed a window." (Says Abriola: "I definitely have a reputation for having a temper. I'm not in the least bit proud of it.")

Perhaps the best testimonial to him as a doctor is that most of his patients have stuck with him for decades. One man, who has full-blown AIDS, has been with him 30 years. >>>

How do you explain to those who were born more recently what the AIDS crisis was like?

We have a whole generation of young adults who weren't alive for 9/11 and don't realize what it was like and what it meant to the country. People my age in general probably know a friend or acquaintance who passed from HIV. I can think of several of my high school friends who passed away. I don't think Pearl Harbor impacted me the way it did my parents.

Back in 1991 when you started caring for AIDS patients at Tulane, did you ever think the day would come when HIV could be kept in check and AIDS prevented?

There's been a sea change in HIV. Vaccine strategies are still 10 years away. It's *always* 10 years away. But I'm so excited about everything we have done. It would be *amazing* to get to a vaccine. But to think where we were– that people would give up because the medications were so hard to use–and now with one pill a day you can sail along with no infection.

What did care consist of in your earliest years of practice?

It was a very hard time. In the window when some treatments started to become available, there were definitely success stories. There were folks who'd come in with end-stage AIDS, and you'd support them. We ran the gamut from implementing the most aggressive care possible for some people, and for other people realizing we had to focus on helping them to have a good death.

1991 to 1996 were years we weren't so good at treatment. It was at a 1996 conference when the first combination of therapies came out that were *finally* blocking HIV replication.

We went from having no good therapies to those that were *potentially* helpful, and I say potentially because you needed multiple pills, multiple times a day, and not everyone could handle it.

How did you manage to cope?

Humor's good medicine. Especially at Trinity Hill, where we had a really hard-working team, we'd find the humor



Abriola at work at the AIDS Clinic at Trinity Hill Nursing Home, where he earned a reputation for sticking up for patients, loudly if that's what it took.

in a situation. We had one guy who was deteriorating, and Anne Duncan walks into the room to check on him, and he opens his eyes and says, "Not dead yet. Only sleeping." Other times, certain things would push my buttons. I remember going to see the movie where Tom Hanks plays a man with AIDS. Watching this movie, I was sobbing uncontrollably. There were these moments when unexpected releases of raw emotion would just overwhelm you.

What made you angry?

I don't have patience for mediocrity, even now. I used to get so angry when you'd see a patient deteriorate again. You could send someone home and six to eight months later they're back. At Trinity Hill, they were getting help with this complex regimen. You'd see them again, and they'd lost weight and were having fevers and night sweats again. Maybe they couldn't handle the regimen. Maybe they were discharged to a less-than-optimal housing situation, or they relapsed into substance abuse. Things got in the way of their ability to stay well. That was very frustrating. I used to call it the revolving door. The system was the problem. [I would say]

I can give you these meds, but you need a warm, dry place to keep them. There were just all these moving parts to keep people well. Sometimes you'd just blow.

What about the political side? Were you angry at the government for ignoring AIDS?

Thank God activists were doing their part while I was doing mine.

What now concerns you most about HIV transmission?

Now there are still more infections among men having sex with men (MSM) than any other group. But there's also this tragic situation where the greatest rates of transmission among MSM are men of color. The greatest uptake of pre-exposure prophylaxis [PrEP] is among white MSM, but the greatest risk is among men of color who are also MSM.

Do you know why?

It's multifactorial. You have to be educated that pre-exposure prophylaxis exists. If you aren't out, if you're living down low, you may not have the connections to know about it. There are cultural and economic factors.

There's a newer HIV prevention that's a 60-day injection, but it's hard to get. That would be a great tool for people who don't want a pill bottle in their house for other people to see.

What's the current state of HIV treatment?

I'm not worried anymore about opportunistic infections, which is a *wonderful* thing. HIV causes inflammation, and people with HIV have twice the risk of heart disease than those who are HIV negative. So now I'm telling patients, your HIV is undetectable but let's talk about your cholesterol. Women with HIV are at greater risk for cervical cancer.

What infectious diseases are now most problematic?

STIs. The management of HIV cuts both ways. When you can no longer expose your partner to HIV, the consequence is a decline in condom use. Syphilis is an epidemic now in MSM. We're even



seeing neonatal cases now, and it's impacting nearly every age group.

In 2022, I was involved in diagnosis and treatment of Mpox, and helped dispense the vaccine at the Health Collective and Circle Care. It slowed down, though there was a slight uptick in 2024, and it's still circulating.

We talk with everyone about PrEP. We discuss patients' whole health, Mpox, HPV, hepatitis and meningitis. There's a kind of meningitis that's spread by close personal contact so crowding, like large parties, is a risk. The Meningitis B vaccine has some cross-protection against gonorrhea, so we encourage that.

Anyone who has receptive anal sex, even HIV negative people, should be screened after age 45 for anal cancer.

What worries you most about the future under an anti-science government?

There's been an evolving vaccine hesitation even before the current administration, which is why we're seeing things like the measles outbreak. The administration is an exacerbation. I'm all for prevention, so resistance makes me sad. It's not new historically; there was smallpox vaccination hesitancy in the 1700s. I think some damage will be done.

How can you convince people to have faith in vaccines?

It's partly a leadership problem but also an educational problem. You need to get the right message out. Vaccines aren't perfect, but aspirin isn't either.

What do you see in your future?

I really like what I do. The merger with Circle Care infused new life into me. I don't have to work weekends at hospitals, and I'm working fulltime but have the chance to enrich myself. I recertified my infectious disease boards and am now working on my internal medicine boards. I also recertified as an American Academy of HIV Medicine HIV specialist. You don't go through all that pain and think about retiring!

Looking back, what are you most proud of?

I was very proud to be a part of a team tackling HIV care in the Greater Hartford area. I have to emphasize "team."

These days, what about your work is most satisfying?

There are just these moments when I realize: oh, I nailed that! I have a young man with AIDS who was having unexplained fevers and night sweats. First, you look for the typical opportunistic infections, and nothing's coming up. You have to go back to basics. Who have you lived with, did you travel, what did you eat, who have you had sex with? Do you have any pets? Does your cat ever scratch you? Oh my God, it was Bartonella, cat scratch fever. That's what infectious disease doctors do!

More Than Ever, Pride as Resistance, Visibility and Unity

By Jane Latus

ow's it going out there? About as you'd expect during a fusillade against your rights, health, job and mere existence, according to the Pride organizers and activists

we spoke with getting ready for this year's celebrations.

"People in our community are feeling extremely cautious and have an understandably amplified concern for their safety," says Steph Heine, chair of East Hampton Pride. "The large-scale divide in our country has trickled down to our small towns and seems to have emboldened people against the queer community to abandon all sense of common decency and appreciation for all humans to live happily or even simply exist."

"To be honest, it's grim," says Bliss Kern, cofounder and deputy executive director of OurTransLife.org and counselor focusing in queer and trans mental health, of the mental health of Connecticut's young queer adults. "There's a massive front of aggression against their very existence."

Younger kids "don't really know how at risk they are, and that's a good thing," says Kern. But for their parents, it's a different story. "This is terrifying for them. We need to be supporting our parents of trans kids a lot."

> Kern is also concerned about the safety and health of trans veterans. "Heretofore they have been relatively supported and been provided with services. Now they're being called traitors."

> > Bethel Pride Chair Emily Denaro describes people in her area as on-alert. "They're waiting to freak out".

The key to survival, say many we spoke with, is for every identity in the alphabet to show up for every other one-and not just in June.

> Rachel Simon, executive director of the Triangle Community Center, means business, speaking emphatically. "At a moment when the federal government is threatening violence

against those who are most vulnerable in our community, like trans children, it is very important that we resist that message and send *our* clear message that we support *all* members of our community and want to see them *thrive*.

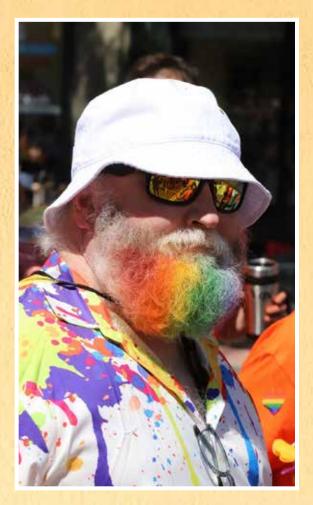
"There needs to be a clear message from *everyone* who doesn't support the federal policies of divisiveness and hate, especially from people who enjoy *any* privileges like race, wealth, or being cisgender. *They're* the most important people to stand up," says Simon.

Showing up isn't just for the government's benefit, she adds. "It's powerful to see people within your own community show up and support populations under attack. It also shows youth who are the safe adults in the neighborhood." It's also vital for youths to see the government showing up for *them*, Kern says. "The older generation can be really skeptical about government officials who come and talk at events, but when young people see representatives of government standing up for them, it matters."

Kern says it's crucial for all to show up for each other, yearround. She especially would like to see more cisgender presence at trans events.

Year-round community is Bethel Pride's focus. It holds a June celebration but provides safe spaces all year. They host a weekly open mic at Molten Java coffee shop, and monthly events like book clubs and plant swaps.

Says Nora O'Neill, head of logistics for Bethel Pride, of the open mic, "Literally, there





are people who only make it through the week because they have this one thing to look forward to. We're not a support group. Your cup is full of poison now. All we can do is dilute it."

Bethel Pride Chair Emily Denaro says, "Big events pump you up, but then you feel let down. You have to deal with the other months of the year." She says the open mics consistently draw young trans adults, nonbinary folks and lots of straight cis people. "It's also welcoming to allies. It lessens the otherness."

Many young, small-town events are returning this year, like the second Quiet Corner Pride, which drew an astonishing 2,000 people to Putnam last year. It was the first Pride event in Windham County and founder Ross Johnson believes it's the first in the state to be fully funded by the town. [This year's event took place prior to *CT Voice's* publication date, so isn't listed in our round-up of Pride events.]

Glastonbury Pride President Anthony DiLizia says of last year's first event, "We told ourselves that if even 200 people attended, we would consider it a success. So, imagine our astonishment when over 1,000 people showed up ... and, as if by fate, a double rainbow appeared at the end of the ceremony."

Check out our listing of events, and make plans to get out and show your support. It is meaningful in so many ways.



2025 Events Across Connecticut

CT Voice goes to press before plans are finalized, so check for new events and details online at CTVoice.com and on Facebook @ConnecticutVirtualPride.

May 30 Small Town Pride Hebron

5 –7 pm, St. Peter's Episcopal Church Parish Hall.

www.code-diversity.org/small-town-pridect and Facebook @CoalitiononDiversity& Equity

May 31 Bethel Pride Parade & Celebration Bethel

Noon, rain or shine, Bethel Municipal Center. Sidewalk parade followed by music, food, artists, vendors, kids' activities, open mic with local performers, and more. www.bethelctpride.com and @

bethelctpride on all social media.

May 31

Southington Pride 2 – 4 pm, YMCA Camp Sloper. Facebook @southingtonPRIDE

May 31 Trans Pride Flag Raising Bridgeport

3 – 5 pm, Bridgeport Government Center. Organized by OurTransLife, Bridgeport Pride Center and Triangle Community Center.

www.bridgeportpridecenter.org and www. ourtranslife.org

June 1 Ridgefield Pride in

Ridgefield Pride in the Park

Noon – 3 pm, Ballard Park (rain location Yanity Gym). Parade around the park starts at 1 pm.

Activities, crafts, entertainment and informational tables for all ages. More details TBA.

www.ridgefieldctpride.com and Facebook and Instagram @ridgefieldctpride

June 1

"Be You" Wilton Pride Festival

11 am – 3 pm, 101 Ridgefield Rd. For all ages. Details TBA. www.wiltonpride.org and Facebook @ WiltonPride

June 1 Drag Gospel Fest Waterbury

11:30 am – 12:30 pm, Hopeville Church. Featuring Summer Orlando and other guests.

www.greaterwaterburypride.com and Facebook @GreaterWaterburyPride

June 1

6th Annual Pride Flag Raising

Easton 3 pm at Town Hall.

June 2

New Britain Pride Flag Raising 9:30 am, New Britain City Hall. More events TBA for the month of June. Facebook @NewBritainPride

June 3 Waterbury Pride Flag Raising and Mayor for the Day

10 am – 11:30 am, Waterbury City Hall. Continues indoors in Veteran's Memorial Hall. Guest speakers and refreshments. www.greaterwaterburypride.com and Facebook @GreaterWaterburyPride

June 5

Pride Open Mic Night Waterbury

Time and sign up info TBA, Cuppa Tea. All ages.

www.greaterwaterburypride.com and Facebook @GreaterWaterburyPride

June 5 and throughout June Pride Flag Raising to kick off A Month of Pride

West Hartford

5:30 pm, Town Hall. A month of events TBA, including the West Hartford Pride Festival on June 21. www.westhartfordpride.org

June 6

Mansfield Pride

Details TBA. https://www.facebook.com/ MansfieldYouthServices and https:// mansfieldct.gov/pride



June 7 "You Belong" Pride Celebration Darien

Noon – 7 pm, Tilley Pond Park. Music, food trucks, crafts, family fun, swag and more. Co-hosted by The Darien Depot. www.darienpride.org

June 7 Hamden Pride Fest

Noon – 4 pm, Town Center Park. Family fun featuring kids' activities, vendors, food trucks, music, community organizations, pet adoptions and more. www.hamdenpride.org, Facebook @HamdenGayPrideFestival, and Instagram @HamdenPride

June 7

Middletown PrideFEST

Noon – 10 pm, downtown Middletown. An all-afternoon street festival with fun and activities for all ages. PrideFEST includes the Middletown Pride March, Pride Rally, Pride Showcase Concert and a tea dance. Vendors and food trucks will be located on Main Street, and a 21+ area will offer adult beverages with a view of the South Green Stage. www.middletownpride.org/pridefest

June 7

"An Address to the Florida Legislature" and "It Goes Without Saying" Merryall Center for the Arts

New Milford

7:30 pm. Playwright Doug Wright's 10-minute play, "An Address to the Florida Legislature", followed by Bill Bowers performing his one-person play, "It Goes Without Saying". Part of a month of Pride events sponsored by Pride in the Hills and the New Milford Commission on the Arts.

www.merryallcenter.org

June 7 Stonington Pride Pride in the Park Westerly, RI

Noon – 2 pm, Wilcox Park. Details TBA. www.stoningtonpride.org and www. westerlylibrary.org

June 7 Washington Pride

Noon – 3 pm, Washington Green, 6 Kirby Rd. Games, booths, food, information, music and more for all ages. www.firstchurchwashingtonct. org and Facebook @ FirstCongregationalChurchofWashington

June 8 Danbury Pride

1 pm, Kenosia Park. Details TBA. Facebook @DanburyPride

June 8 Glastonbury Pride

2 – 6 pm, Hubbard Green. Live music, performers, games, food trucks, vendors and activities for all ages. www.glastonburypride.org and Facebook @GlastonburyCTPride

June 8 – June 14 Mystic Pride Week

Details TBA. Hosted by the Mystic Chamber of Commerce in collaboration with businesses across Mystic, Stonington and Groton, culminating in a June 14 Pride Festival. www.mysticchamber.org/home-2/mysticpride-week

June 12

Hartford Yard Goats Pride Night

7:10 pm, Dunkin' Park. Yard Goats vs. Akron Rubberducks. www.milb.com/Hartford

June 13

The Greater New Haven Visibility Ball Hamden

6 – 11 om, Whitneyville Cultural Commons. APNH (A Place to Nourish Your Health) and New Haven Black Pride present the 3rd Annual Greater New Haven Visibility Ball. www.apnh.org and Facebook and Instagram @nhvblackpride

June 14

Pride in the Vines Colchester

11 am – 6 pm, Priam Vineyards. Food trucks, vendors and entertainment including live music by Carrie Ashton and a drag show with Miss Summer Orlando. www.priam-vineyards.com

June 14

Mystic Pride Festival

3 – 7 pm, details TBA. DJ, vendors, local artists, drag show, local restaurants, health resources, and an award ceremony recognizing members of the LGBTQIA+ community. www.mysticchamber.org/home-2/mysticpride-week

June 14

New Haven Black Pride

1 – 5 pm, APNH (A Place to Nourish Your Health), 1302 Chapel St. Celebrating 6 years of New Haven Black Pride. Vendors, food and hours of live entertainment on stage. An afternoon of celebration and community. www.apnh.org/events/ and Facebook and Instagram @nhvblackpride



June 14 Furry Picnic Manchester

11 am – 6:30 pm, Wickham Park, Wickham Pavilion. Furry fun, food and games. \$20 at door or \$15 with preregistration. www.furrypicnic.com

June 14 Lisa Stephen Friday Merryall Center for the Arts New Milford

7:30 pm. A performance by Lisa Stephen Friday, trans singer/songwriter. Part of a month of Pride events sponsored by Pride in the Hills and the New Milford Commission on the Arts. www.merryallcenter.org

June 14

New Milford Pride Picnic

Noon – 3 pm, Town Green. Details TBA. Facebook @NewMilfordPride

June 14

North Haven Pride's 3rd Annual Celebration

Noon – 4 pm, North Haven Town Green, rain or shine. Entertainment, delicious food, tons of great vendors, and affirming community partners to discover.

www.northhavenpride.org and Facebook and Instagram @NorthHavenPride

June 14 Pride in the Park Norwalk

2 – 8 pm, Veteran's Memorial Park, Norwalk. Details TBA. www.ctpridecenter.org/pride-in-the-park/



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June 15 Pride Party at The Owl Pride in the Hills New Preston

2 – 7 pm, The Owl, 18 East Shore Rd.. Featuring the conclusion of an online auction. Other Pride in the Hills events TBA, including SHAG with Pride at Spring Hill Arts Gathering. www.prideinthehillsfund.org/ww24

June 20-28 Out Film Festival

Hartford

The 38th annual showcase of LGBTQ+ films. At Cinestudio, Trinity College. www.outfilmct.org

June 20

Connecticut Sun Pride Night Mohegan Sun Arena

7:30 pm vs. Dallas Wings. Halftime appearance by a "popular 'Idol.'" www.sun.wnba.com

June 21

15th Annual Greater Bridgeport Pride

Details TBA including Pride March, festival and more. www.bridgeportpride.com, Instagram @BridgeportPride, and Facebook @ GreaterBridgeportPrideCT

June 21

East Hampton Pride At East Hampton Village. Details TBA.

www.easthamptonpride.com

June 21 West Hartford Pride Festival

West Hartford Town Hall. Details TBA, along with a month of events. www.westhartfordpride.org

June 21 Quassy Friends and Family Day Middlebury

www.prideinthehillsfund.org

June 22 Cromwell Pride

Noon, Pierson Park Pavilion. With music, free pizza donated by Mayor James Demetriades, rainbow-colored powder tossing, and more TBA. Facebook @Cromwell LGBTQ+ Committee

June 22 HK (Haddam-Killingworth) Pride Killingworth

Tentatively 2 – 5 pm, location and details TBA, including drag bingo with Lady Morgana and Mini DeLuxe, 5 – 6 pm, The BarrelHouse. Facebook @HaddamKillingworthPride

June 22 Summer Pride Picnic Newington

Noon – 4 pm, Churchill Park. Bring a picnic if you like, but food will be available – plus music, activities, and an opportunity to connect with members of the community. All are welcome - families, friends and neighbors. www.newingtonpride.org

June 22

Westport Pride

Noon – 3 pm, Jesup Green. Details TBA. www.westportpride.org

June 26

Pride Youth Skate Night Waterbury 6 pm, Roller Magic. Co-sponsored by PFLAG Waterbury.

www.greaterwaterburypride.com and Facebook @GreaterWaterburyPride

June 28 Bristol Pride Ball

5: 30 – 10 pm, The Carousel Museum. For 21 years and up. Dinner, cash bar, dancing and silent auction. www.bristolpride.org/prideball/2025

June 28

Milford Pride

Noon – 4 pm, Milford Green. Vendors, music, food trucks, entertainment and more, for all ages. www.milfordctpride.org and Facebook and Instagram @MilfordCTPride

June 28

Greater Waterbury Pride Fest

Noon – 4 pm, ACES at Chase School Grounds, 565 Chase Pkwy. Art, drag, food trucks, music and vendors. www.greaterwaterburypride.com and Facebook @GreaterWaterburyPride

June 29

The Golden Girls Pride Brunch and Drag Show

Derby Noon – 3:30 pm, Twisted Vine Restaurant. Facebook @ DerbyCTTheGoldenGirlsPrideBrunch

June 29

Easton Pride Concert and Celebration w/Concerts on the Hill Easton

Details TBA. www.linktr.ee/concertsonthehilleaston and Instagram @ConcertsontheHillEaston





OTHER JUNE EVENTS TO BE SCHEDULED:

Check for dates of these events not scheduled at press time:

Easton Pride

www.ctpridecenter.org and Facebook @EastonPride

Enfield Pride

www.enfieldpride.org and @ enfieldpride on social media

Weston Pride

www.ctpridecenter.org and Facebook @TownofWestonCT

August 9 New London Pride 11 am, details TBA. www.outct.org

August 16 Meriden Pride Fest

11 am – 5 pm, 328 Paddock Ave. Vendors, DJs, food trucks and drag show. Facebook @ MeridenPrideCommunityCenter

AND COMING THIS FALL:

Sept. 6 (tentative) New Haven Pride www.newhavenpridecenter.org

Sept. 13 Madison Pride www.madpridefest.com

Hartford Pride Date TBA www.hartfordpride.org





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What Does Pride Mean in 2025?

CT VOICE | SUMMER 2025 69



Anthony DiLizia, Glastonbury Pride Fear is a detriment to the physical and mental well-being of our marginalized and vulnerable. This festival will be a safe space to celebrate queer joy and strengthen support systems.



John Board, New Britain Pride Republican Mayor Erin Stewart has championed pride events and proven that it's possible to bridge political divides.



Bliss Kern,

OurTransLife.org We need to show a united front right now because the call for LGB without the T is getting louder. I'd like Pride organizations to show up at trans visibility events around the state.



Rachel Simon, Triangle Community Center

In this political moment, we're thinking of Pride more as resistance. They're trying to inflict exhaustion on us. We have to dance.





Emily Denaro, Bethel Pride That your community shows up for you – especially for kids, it's vital.



Jason Coombs, Bridgeport Pride In a time of uncertainty and ongoing attacks on the trans community, creating a safe, affirming space is more vital than ever. Pride is more than just a party.



Tim Mack, New Haven Black Pride Pride events are more important than ever since the attack on our queer communities. People are scared with how far we are digressing. It feels like a diversion intended to distract attention from the main issues.



Nick Guillermo, Waterbury Pride

Pride events allow residents to see each other as individuals rather than stereotypes. I am often the only Hispanic/Native and openly gay man in the room and use these moments to educate.



Ross Johnson, Quiet Corner Pride

A Pride event can be a lifeline for those who feel all alone and unworthy of love. They were to me as a queer youth in Virginia just as they are now in northeastern CT.



Nora O'Neill, Bethel Pride

Having a lot of helpers involved—businesses, town government, police —shows that everyone is good with this, that everyone thinks this is a good, fun time. Sean Vasi, Newington Pride

Newington Pride In our small town, we've been historically invisible. Our goal is to increase visibility and build community. We need to build each other up instead of living in isolation and without hope.

Steph Heine, East Hampton Pride It is more important than ever to have a clear presence locally to show our queer community members that they are not alone in their fight.



CLUB

Rachel Duffy, Cromwell LGBTQ+ Committee

Pride is especially important this year, as rights are being stripped away and violence and discrimination persists.

PRIDE

Johanna Schubert, West Hartford Pride

This year is *very* important because the feeling of isolation is being amplified more than ever—especially for kids. There are bills in our own legislature right now that aim to erase trans identity.



LOOKING BACK

By David Rothenberg

hose who cannot remember the past are doomed to repeat it," writes George Santayana. Looking back at the evolving gay liberation, I celebrate that many young people are open and self-accepting, oblivious of closets behind which millions hid.

In the last 57 years, post Stonewall, a countless number of men and women fought to remove the stigma and legal barriers, a battle which included sit-ins, marches and visiting city, state and federal offices. We entered rooms and corridors of power once denied us. Change comes slowly. It took time but today there's a gay governor, a member of the Biden cabinet, CEOs and sports stars, nonexistent when I was a college student in the 1950s, living a life of lies and shame. Colleges and high schools across the map have gay organizations.

There's a catch in all of this. It is becoming painfully apparent that what was fought for and achieved could be lost with the stroke of a Presidential pen. The forces of evil and ignorance that thrived before Stonewall never vanished. Just pay heed to the insidious implications emanating from our nation's capital and attempts to erase the history of all marginalized groups. The demonization of transgenders is a hint of the fear and tactics being suggested and imposed.

Homophobia was deeply entrenched in our society until people boldly came forth, putting a face on the issue... and America had to take notice of their sons and daughters, their work partners and childhood pals.

Let me recall a historic tale which took place, a story which must not be lost in the reshaping of history.

In the 1980s, the gay male community was devastated by a disease, originally called GRID (Gay Related Immune Deficiency). An early meeting of activists and Ginny Apuzzo, director of the National Gay Task Force, alerted the CDC that naming a disease after a group of people, a demographic, if you will, would have negative consequences. Her words of wisdom were heeded, and the virus was then identified as AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency).

AIDS became the catalyst for unapologetic homophobia, overtly and in subtle ways. *National Review* publisher and TV host William Buckley advocated that gay men be tattooed, which had echoes of Auschwitz.

Of much greater significance was that during the first three years, after AIDS was identified and thousands of men were dying, the august and influential *New York Times* had printed but a single story. This was emerging as the major health story in the second half of the 20th century, and the homophobic policy at the paper of record was one of silence.

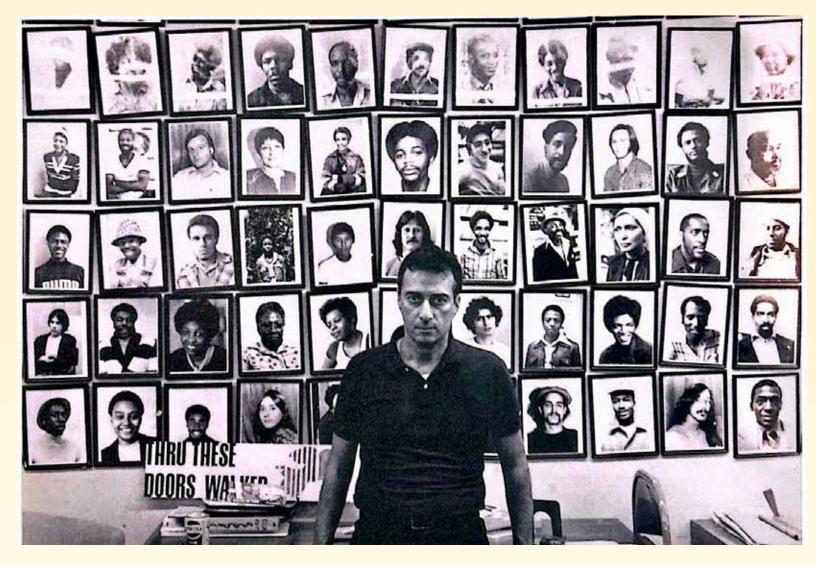
In the 1980s, the *New York Times* had a policy of "no coverage of gay events"...

or even use of the word "gay". This irrational policy evolved after Iphigene Sulzberger, dowager head of the family that owned *The Times*, sent a note objecting to a freelance travel page story by Cliff Jahr about a gay cruise ship to nowhere. Editors heeded the complaint and gays disappeared from the pages of the *New York Times*.

At the same time, US President Ronald Reagan had yet to acknowledge the health threat devastating American lives. NYC Mayor Ed Koch had his own convoluted personal issues, a condition which Larry Kramer effectively dramatized in his play, *The Normal Heart*.

It was the *New York Times*, though, with its far-reaching influence that had to be confronted. There were threats of picketing the paper. Four of us drafted a letter and sent it to the publisher asking for a hearing. The signers were the aforementioned Ms. Apuzzo, Judge Richard Faila, activist and journalist Andy Humm... and myself, at the time a member of the NYC Human Rights Commission. We suggested that institutional homophobia was preventing the *Times*, the self-proclaimed paper of record, from covering a major health story.

The four of us had also been meeting with elected officials and religious leaders, most of whom were hesitant to be associated with gays and a virus. One religious "leader" told us he objected to



our lifestyle... and we all responded that our lifestyle included work, paying taxes and being good citizens. We suggested that it was sex he found objectionable, and we noted that we were all alive as a result of two heterosexuals having sex. He was visibly offended by this and dismissed us.

To the credit of the *New York Times*, we received an invitation to meet with Sydney Gruson, Associate Publisher of the paper known as a close colleague of the many Sulzbergers.

Gruson was comfortable with it and responsive. He stated the next step would be a meeting with *Times* Managing Editor, the ferocious and feared Abe Rosenthal... He was also one of the most influential men in NYC.

We determined that we would not burden Rosenthal with complaints of the past but to use the opportunity with suggestions of pertinent stories, not the least of which was the ominous presence of AIDS.

A week later, Rosenthal ushered

us into the fabled *Times* dining room, where Presidential candidates and Nobel Peace Prize winners were interviewed. We were prepared for battle and stunned when Abe said to us, «We need your help... where do we begin?"

We suggested stories and told them they had talented gay writers and editors who could ably cover them. I said, "They are fearful of coming out." and Rosenthal replied, "We would never fire anyone because of their sexual orientation!" and I said, "Perhaps not, but they could end up as the correspondent from Caspar, Wyoming."

He smiled and said, "You've done your homework."

The *Times* published two stories in the next two weeks, one about the Gay Men>s Health Crisis and the "buddy system." The second was covering a Pflag conference (Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays).

The *Times* evolved into a responsible newspaper covering gay organizations and gay lives. Other media outlets

followed suit, and political and business leaders had permission to be supportive. Most significant was that money could be advocated for science to research and find a cure for AIDS.

Recalling that episode today, with history being rewritten and a Damocles sword hovering over our community, it is essential not to bypass what was when it might provide a guideline for what could be.

People without a history lack a foundation to prepare for the next threat. \heartsuit

David Rothenberg has been a Broadway producer, co-founder of The Fortune Society, served on many commissions in New York and around the nation advocation for human rights. He has hosted a weekly radio show on WBAI for more than 50 years and recently published Manhattan Mayhem, a collection of short fiction based on his nine decades. First Choice Health Centers, Inc. is proud to meet the healthcare needs of the LGBTQ+ community at our East Hartford center located at 809 Main Street, 1st Floor.



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CONNECTICUT'S NEWS LEADER

THE HOMESTEAD— A place to unwind in Madison

By BRIAN SCOTT LIPTON / Photos courtesy of The Homestead

ne of the joys of being in Connecticut is discovering its charming small towns– and the even more charming treasures found within them. This adage applies doubly to Madison–a coastal town in New Haven County with lovely beaches

and a lively, pedestrian-friendly downtown—as well as the Homestead, the 12-room bed-and-breakfast run by the Guardiano family.

Connecticut Voice recently spoke to The Homestead's owner, Ralph Guardiano–a filmmaker and owner and coowner of the multi-faceted Option A Group–about the past, present and future of this great getaway property. >>

CT VOICE | SUMMER 2025 77

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Nikki (I) and Ralph (r) with his mother who inspired the venture.

CV: So, how did you become the owner-and creator-of The Homestead?

RG: The property has been part of our family for nearly 40 years. My parents, both Italian immigrants,

moved here from Glen Cove, New York many decades ago. One day, my mother met this man who had a shoe store in Madison: his mother was in the Homestead, which was then a senior residence, and he asked my mom to be a sort of an aide to her. When the place needed to be sold, my mother bought it, but then realized she didn't know how to run a senior facility. Except she ran it successfully for 25 years; we had a huge waiting list of people wanting to get in. It became like a family business, I was the repairman and walked the ladies to their cars; while my young daughter, Nikki-who now helps run the Homesteaddelivered mail to the rooms and even read Harry Potter books to these women.

CV: What happened next?

RG: About 10 years ago, my mother couldn't run the business anymore, so I bought it. I thought about selling the place, but my mom still lived here, and I

didn't want to uproot her. I also realized I had to hire seven people to replace her, and that wasn't going to work. So, then I thought about turning it into a B&B, even though I was the guy who traveled all over the world for decades and hated B&Bs. Anyway, I put a listing on Airbnb and we immediately sold rooms three times in one day. Shortly after that, someone called to make a reservation for all 12 rooms. Suddenly, I realized people needed a place like this in Madison-the only other hotel is a 33room Hilton-since they needed a place to stay for weddings, not to mention weekend vacations. Plus, we have this great downtown less than a mile away and these wonderful beaches nearby. So, I met with the town, and even though I thought I would get lot of push back, everyone loved the idea. Even the Hilton owner offered to help me!

CV: What were your first steps in transforming the property?

RG: We had to get rid of anything that made it look like an assisted living facility, which included narrowing the doorways and making some bathrooms smaller. Because I am a filmmaker; I thought of dressing every room as a set, but one that was also comfortable. I had





done a lot of work over the years with Sol Kerzner (a South African magnate and famous hotelier), and he was always so into the details. I remember him arguing for hours about the thread count of sheets. Ultimately, I applied what I learned from him.

CV: Is that one reason you have a record player in every room?

RG: We all live in this digital world, but I realized having a record player allows you to slow down. You hear this hiss, the record starts, and suddenly you don't want to turn on the TV or check your phone. We have this enormous record library, so on the day that guests are ready to check in, we call or text them and ask about their musical tastes, so they have the records they want in their rooms when they get here. Before they even set foot on the property, they're already excited to come. We always have a lot of new vinyl; and we'll buy more if we get specific requests. And people sometimes bring their own records and donate them to our library before they leave. Actually, we have way too many records right now!

CV: Tell me about some of your other amenities?

RG: I put in these shower heads with Vitamin A, B, and C. I found them on Amazon; I joke that I singlehandedly put Jeff Bezos into space. The result is this super-soft water that women really love for their hair. I put in heated bidets, as well–and I stress-tested all the toilet seats to make sure how well they work. I also put in heated towel-warmers, which I had never thought about, but now I couldn't live without them! People are expecting this grandmotherly experience, but it's not.

CV: You're leaving out one special "amenity." Right?

RG: Yes, there's our house dog Hartman–he's a snorkie (a schnauzer and Yorkshire terrier mix) –and everyone loves him. All guests can bring their dogs. We technically have a 35-pound limit, but I won't fight with customers who bring bigger ones. You can even take your dog to one of the nearby beaches at certain times. I have to note that some of the beaches are technically for residents only, but we buy beach passes for all our guests, which is another plus!

CV: Let's discuss the breakfast part of The Homestead

RG: First, we have a window of time

for breakfast, and instead of one big table, people can sit in various rooms and outdoor spaces. And we know there are also people who come who want to eat in their room while they work-especially writers -so each room has a table and chairs. As for the food, there's a local farm, Bishop, and they make these amazing quiches that we found our customers love. We also use great bakeries and other locally sourced farms for breakfast foods. But we have discovered that some of our guests who stay for more than two or three days, especially the Europeans, want more variety. So, we're trying to start cooking breakfast as well on some days.

CV: Tell me about some other upcoming changes?

RG: Last year, we had this elderly

German couple come and we helped them create this huge Oktoberfest in our backyard. It was this big party, and we invited our guests and our neighbors. Honestly, it was so fun we might have to do it every year.

I want to do a kitchen expansionnot only inside but one that could flow to an outdoor kitchen, so we could do cooking classes, wine tastings, and pizza making. I'd love to do book signings. For example, the chef Jacques Pepin, who I worked with right out of college, is one of our neighbors.

Finally, I want to produce a murdermystery weekend, perhaps combined with a scavenger hunt in town, which would help promote Madison. I think making things experiential is a big key to our future success.





Make It Here, Just As You Are

By GOVERNOR NED LAMONT

Photos courtesy of Connecticut Office of Statewide Marketing & Tourism

hen I think about what makes Connecticut so special, it's much more than our quaint towns, the nation's best pizza, and championship banners flying in the XL Center. What really sets us apart is the welcoming nature of the people in our state.

At a time when too many people are being made to feel like outsiders in their own homes, Connecticut is doing something different. We're choosing inclusion and dignity. I proudly say we're the most welcoming state in the country because anyone can live, work, and visit freely, fully, and safely.

It Starts With a Visit

Connecticut is the only U.S. state that's a member of the International LGBTQ+ Travel Association. That's not just symbolism; it's a commitment. From rainbow-painted crosswalks in towns like Stamford and Ridgefield to vibrant Pride events in Middletown and West Hartford, we've built communities where LGBTQ+ travelers can feel recognized and celebrated.

Planning a weekend getaway? Sure, you can enjoy the many things to do in towns like New Haven or New London, but you can also steep yourself in queer culture—from one end of the state to the other.

Visit Troupe 429 in Norwalk, one of our premier LGBTQ+ nightlife spots. Unwind at a queer-owned B&B in the Quiet Corner. Catch a show by the Connecticut Gay Men's Chorus. In Mystic, drag brunches by the Sea Queens at The Port of Call are local legends. At the Mashantucket Pequot Museum, visitors can learn about Indigenous history in a place that values inclusive storytelling. When you visit Connecticut, you're not just welcome—you're wanted.

Make Your Home—and Your Future—Here

Annie and I chose Connecticut to work, live, and raise our three children here, because it's a place where people build strong careers, loving families, and lives that feel true to who they are.

We were the second state in the country to legalize same-sex marriage. Today, we're ranked #2 for LGBTQ+ business climate by *Out Leadership*. That recognition isn't accidental. It's the result of decades of work to pass firm anti-discrimination laws, ensure inclusive healthcare access, and expand protections for youth and families.

In 2011, Connecticut became one of the first states to pass a comprehensive anti-bullying law that included protections based on sexual orientation and gender identity. In 2021, I proudly signed the Connecticut Parentage Act, ensuring legal equality for all families regardless of how they're formed or who's in them.

We've also worked to right historic wrongs. We restored state benefits to veterans who were unjustly discharged under "Don't Ask, Don't Tell." We banned the so-called "gay and trans panic" defense—a shameful legal loophole that should never have existed.

Connecticut will never excuse violence or prejudice. We don't diminish lives because of who someone is, or who they love.

Why It Matters

Across the country, we're seeing a troubling wave of rhetoric and policy designed to exclude, erase, or harm LGBTQ+ people. In some places, they're banning books. In others, they're banning the word "gay." In Florida, they even removed LGBTQ+ content from the state's tourism website.

We have responded with a simple message: *Come to Connecticut. It's where you belong.*

I've always believed that government has a moral obligation, not just to protect rights, but to affirm dignity. That's why we keep showing up—for the student who doesn't feel safe at school, the parents navigating systems that weren't built for their family, and the workers and entrepreneurs who just want to build a life without having to hide who they are.

Connecticut is that place and we're trying to be better every day by being more even more welcoming and living up to what it really means to say, *"You can make it here."*

We believe what happens in a community, state, and a nation starts with how we treat one another. So, whether you're visiting, relocating, or just looking for a place that sees you for who you are, know this: you can make it here, just as you are. *Always have. Always will.*





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