COMMECTIC CONTROLL CO

# GET OUT THERE!

WITH OUR FALL ARTS PREVIEW

Plus, our exclusive interview with LGBTQ+ Country Star Brooke Eden





# On-Staff Opera Singer

Cleveland began his journey at Seabury in the culinary department. When we discovered his background in opera—having studied and performed around the world—he began sharing his talent at campus events. He started an Opera Club that meets to study and discuss all the components of select Met operas before attending local cinema broadcasts, as well as live performances in New York. Now Seabury's Off-Campus Experience Coordinator, Cleveland plans trips to cultural hotspots while continuing to lead the Opera Club. At Seabury, rich cultural and educational opportunities—on campus and beyond—help you create a life that's uniquely yours.

Please call us today at 860-286-0243 for more information or to schedule a tour.











CALL, VISIT A SHOWROOM, OR FIND US ONLINE TO SCHEDULE YOUR COMPLIMENTARY DESIGN CONSULTATION

Connecticut 48 W. Putnam Ave, Greenwich 203.924.8444 **New England** 997 Farmington Ave, West Hartford 860.258.3466 Westchester 16 Saw Mill River Rd, Hawthorne 914.592.1001 f O

@caliclosetsct





# Community thrives when we show up for one another.

Since 1825, **Liberty Bank** has helped to improve the lives of our customers, teammates, and the communities we serve.

Kindness starts with us, and we are committed to uplifting the voices in our communities to build a stronger and more inclusive future.



**Be Community Kind.™** 



# No Stigma, Just Care CITCLE care center

Connecticut's home for stigma-free medical services and sexual health.

Learn about our services and request appointments at circlecarecenter.org

# COMMECTICUT

#### EDITOR'S NOTE //



## Autumn Is Here!

This is the season when our state puts on a show. From all corners of Connecticut, the shorter days, crisper air, riots of color in the trees, and renewed energy in the cities, it's no surprise that people flock here to be part of the season.

And speaking of putting on a show, a major focus of this issue is all the exciting entertainment happening around the state this fall. Frank Rizzo has a roundup of the many wonderful performances, concerts, shows, and events to look forward to in the coming months (page 50).

Randy Young profiles Another Octave, the Connecticut Women's LGBTQ+ Chorus (page 45). Alex Dueben takes us into the creative mind of artist and activist Diane DiMassa (page 40).

Our cover story features an exclusive interview with out country star Brooke Eden (page 27) who sat down with Brian Scott Lipton. Brian also did an updated piece on dance company Pilobolous (page 24) and the challenges this breakthrough company is facing in a more conservative environment.

We're also always looking at the some of the more serious issues facing our state and our communities, as well. Dawn Ennis looks at "young, queer love" in the current environment (page 22). Our intrepid summer intern Morgan Shay has taken a look at current life on campus around the state for LGBTQ+ students with an emphasis on the trans community (page 60). In these challenging times, it can be reassuring to see how institutions are devoting themselves to ensuring that young people feel safe, comfortable, and are supported in living their lives authentically—and fearlessly.

Our sex columnist Kim Adamski has an important column on developing, maintaining and (sometimes) even expanding boundaries (page 18). Our friends at Mental Health Connecticut describe their efforts to ensure mental health parity to everyone in the state.

There's much more in these pages, as we continue our mission to shine a light on the rich and complex lives for our LGBGTQ+ communities in the state. These are indeed uncertain times, but even in the midst of that, it's good to know that somehow life goes on. Not only does it go on, but one of the things that makes Connecticut unique is that there are so many people committed to enhancing the quality of life for everyone... and that means everyone...from the governor's mansion to the legislature, to our arts and educational organizations.

And so we go on, finding joy, support, and community where we can. All of us at *Connecticut Voice* wish you and your families, chosen families, friends, and neighbors, a wonderful season.

Christopher Byrne, Editor chris@ctvoice.com

Visit us online at www.ctvoice.com

Follow us on Instagram
@ctvoice

**Like us on Facebook** facebook.com/CT-Voice











Connecticut VOICE™ is published by Seasons Media

Publisher /Owner James Tully

Editor

Christopher Byrne

Creative Director
Stacy Murray

Sales & Marketing Executive
Doreen Chudoba

Cover Photo

Brooke Eden Courtesy of BMG/Brooke Eden



To advertise in Connecticut VOICE contact

Jim Tully jim@seasonsmagazines.com





#### **32** HEALTH & WELLNESS

LGBTQ+ GenZers open up about the challenges of dating today.

## **40** FEATURE

Aritst, activist Diane DiMassa on her life and art.

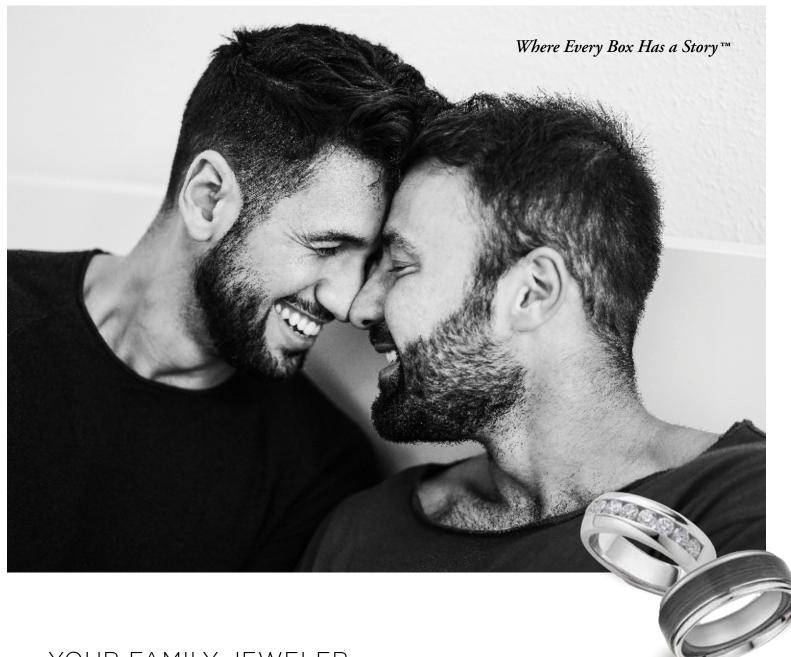
ARTS &
ENTERTAINMENT

Our guide to amazing entertainment around the state this fall.

## **60** EDUCATION

How colleges in Connecticut are committed to supporting transgender students.





#### YOUR FAMILY JEWELER

For 127 years, we've proudly helped couples celebrate their love with beautiful, lasting gifts. We're here to honor your story with natural diamonds, custom designs including bespoke rings, fine Swiss watches, and distinctive gifts for the home — all presented in our signature gold box Whether you're searching for the perfect engagement ring, a trusted jeweler for life's milestones, or a meaningful gift for any occasion, let our non-commissioned professionals make your experience unforgettable. Visit us in-store or online at LBGreen.com and discover the difference.

## **LUX BOND & GREEN**

**JEWELERS SINCE 1898** 

GLASTONBURY WESTPORT WEST HARTFORD MOHEGAN SUN WELLESLEY
SHOP ONLINE AT LBGREEN.COM



## CONTRIBUTORS //



**FRANK RIZZO** 

Frank Rizzo complied our comprehensive fall arts roundup (page 50) and used his in-depth knowledge to create our Wicked quiz (page 16). 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 the complex issues people have setting boundaries in relationships. 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@ gmail.com.



#### BRIAN SCOTT LIPTON

Brian did our cover story on Country star Brooke Eden (page 25) and checked in with Pilobolus (page 24). 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.



#### **MORGAN SHAY**

Morgan explored life for transgender people on campus (page 60). She is a journalist from Connecticut with a passion for covering arts, culture, and community. She is committed to amplifying underrepresented voices and highlighting the diverse communities around her. Her work has been featured in several publications, including the Fall 2024 issue of SlapStik Magazine and the Spring 2025 issue of Like Minded Zine fashion magazine, where she currently serves as one of the editors.



#### **DAWN ENNIS**

Dawn provides insight into LGBTQ+ dating for GenZ (page 32) and profiled CT's gay car guys (page 20). Dawn is also a member of CT Voice advisory board and an award-winning journalist, professor and TV producer. Dawn was America's first transgender journalist in a TV network newsroom when she came out more than 10 years ago. Follow her @lifeafterdawn on X, Facebook, and Instagram.



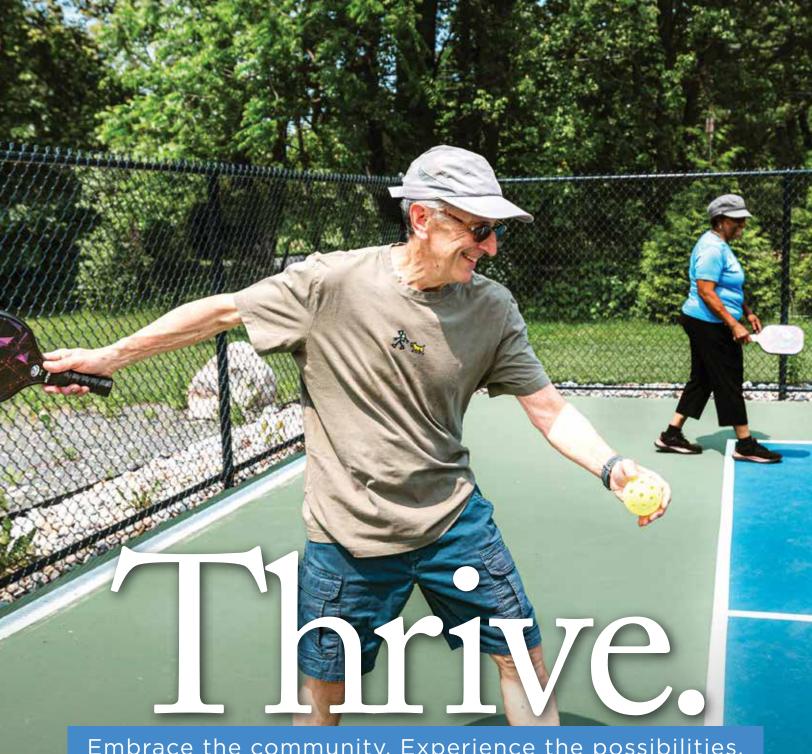
#### **ALEX DUEBEN**

Alex profiles activist and artist Diane DiMassa (page 40). 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.



#### **RANDY B. YOUNG**

Randy profiled the singing group Another Octave (page 45) and complied our Last Word (page 65). He is the author of And The Stars Flew with Us, a series of essays and meditations on the classic family road trip, He's won multiple awards as a journalist and advertising copywriter, and has been a regular contributor to regional and lifestyle sports publications.



Embrace the community. Experience the possibilities.

LIVE & PLAY VIBRANTLY.

Duncaster Residents live fulfilling lives through access to arts and culture with more than 40 clubs, and the security of Life Care.

For more information, visit us at **Duncaster.org** or call **860-735-3946**.



30 Loeffler Road | Bloomfield, CT 06002









#### **IMPORTANT FACTS FOR BIKTARVY®**

This is only a brief summary of important information about BIKTARVY® and does not replace talking to your healthcare provider about your condition and your treatment.

(bik-TAR-vee)

#### MOST IMPORTANT INFORMATION ABOUT BIKTARVY

#### BIKTARVY may cause serious side effects, including:

 Worsening of hepatitis B (HBV) infection. Your healthcare provider will test you for HBV. If you have both HIV-1 and HBV, your HBV may suddenly get worse if you stop taking BIKTARVY. Do not stop taking BIKTARVY without first talking to your healthcare provider, as they will need to check your health regularly for several months, and may give you HBV medicine.

#### **ABOUT BIKTARVY**

BIKTARVY is a complete, 1-pill, once-a-day prescription medicine used to treat HIV-1 in adults and children who weigh at least 55 pounds. It can either be used in people who have never taken HIV-1 medicines before, or people who are replacing their current HIV-1 medicines and whose healthcare provider determines they meet certain requirements.

**BIKTARVY does not cure HIV-1 or AIDS.** HIV-1 is the virus that causes AIDS.

#### Do NOT take BIKTARVY if you also take a medicine that contains:

- dofetilide
- rifampin
- any other medicines to treat HIV-1

#### **BEFORE TAKING BIKTARVY**

#### Tell your healthcare provider if you:

- Have or have had any kidney or liver problems, including hepatitis infection.
- Have any other health problems.
- Are pregnant or plan to become pregnant. Tell your healthcare provider if you become pregnant while taking BIKTARVY.
- Are breastfeeding (nursing) or plan to breastfeed.
   Talk to your healthcare provider about the risks of breastfeeding during treatment with BIKTARVY.

#### Tell your healthcare provider about all the medicines you take:

- Keep a list that includes all prescription and over-thecounter medicines, antacids, laxatives, vitamins, and herbal supplements, and show it to your healthcare provider and pharmacist.
- BIKTARVY and other medicines may affect each other.
   Ask your healthcare provider and pharmacist about medicines that interact with BIKTARVY, and ask if it is safe to take BIKTARVY with all your other medicines.

#### POSSIBLE SIDE EFFECTS OF BIKTARVY

#### BIKTARVY may cause serious side effects, including:

- Those in the "Most Important Information About BIKTARVY" section.
- Changes in your immune system. Your immune system may get stronger and begin to fight infections that may have been hidden in your body. Tell your healthcare provider if you have any new symptoms after you start taking BIKTARVY.
- Kidney problems, including kidney failure. Your healthcare provider should do blood and urine tests to check your kidneys. If you develop new or worse kidney problems, they may tell you to stop taking BIKTARVY.
- Too much lactic acid in your blood (lactic acidosis), which is a serious but rare medical emergency that can lead to death. Tell your healthcare provider right away if you get these symptoms: weakness or being more tired than usual, unusual muscle pain, being short of breath or fast breathing, stomach pain with nausea and vomiting, cold or blue hands and feet, feel dizzy or lightheaded, or a fast or abnormal heartbeat.
- Severe liver problems, which in rare cases can lead to death. Tell your healthcare provider right away if you get these symptoms: skin or the white part of your eyes turns yellow, dark "tea-colored" urine, light-colored stools, loss of appetite for several days or longer, nausea, or stomach-area pain.
- The most common side effects of BIKTARVY in clinical studies were diarrhea (6%), nausea (6%), and headache (5%).

These are not all the possible side effects of BIKTARVY. Tell your healthcare provider right away if you have any new symptoms while taking BIKTARVY.

You are encouraged to report negative side effects of prescription drugs to the FDA. Visit www.FDA.gov/medwatch or call 1-800-FDA-1088.

Your healthcare provider will need to do tests to monitor your health before and during treatment with BIKTARVY.

#### **HOW TO TAKE BIKTARVY**

Take BIKTARVY 1 time each day with or without food.

#### **GET MORE INFORMATION**

- This is only a brief summary of important information about BIKTARVY. Talk to your healthcare provider or pharmacist to learn more.
- Go to BIKTARVY.com or call 1-800-GILEAD-5.
- If you need help paying for your medicine, visit BIKTARVY.com for program information.





People featured are compensated by Gilead.

Dimitri at age 32

# A Treatment studied with you in mind

BIKTARVY® has been extensively studied in 9 clinical trials with over 3600 participants.

The #1 prescribed HIV treatment\* you may be able to start today and continue for the days to come.

Ask your healthcare provider if BIKTARVY is right for you.

\*Source: IQVIA LAAD, July 2018 through July 2024.

BIKTARVY® is a complete, 1-pill, once-a-day prescription medicine used to treat HIV-1 in certain adults. **BIKTARVY does not cure HIV-1 or AIDS.** 



Scan or visit **BIKTARVY.com** to learn more about BIKTARVY updates.

\*This information is an estimate derived from the use of information under license from the following IQVIA information service: /QVIA LAAD, for the period July 2018 through July 2024. IQVIA expressly reserves all rights, including rights of copying, distribution, and republication.

Please see Important Facts about BIKTARVY, including important warnings, on the previous page and at BIKTARVY.com.

### Darren Sweeney on Weathering Life, Love, a Second Act, and Living Authentically

o many in Connecticut, Darren Sweeney has long been more than a meteorologist. As a respected voice on **NBC** Connecticut for many years, and WFSB prior to that, he has helped quide viewers through everything from snowstorms to spring sunshine—always with warmth, clarity, and a deep connection to the community he grew up in. But while Darren is no longer full time on the green screen, his presence is still as strong as ever—not only as a tenured professor at Central Connecticut State University but as someone who has embraced his full identity and inspired others to do the same.

#### Coming Out in the Public Eye

As a public figure in local news, coming out as gay meant stepping into the somewhat unknown. "It wasn't just about personal acceptance," he says. "It was also about wondering how others—bosses, colleagues, viewers, even strangers—would respond."

What he found was unexpected: "I was met with so much love. Not just tolerance, but genuine support. It was humbling."

That support began at home. "I've always had the



unwavering love of my family, which I don't take for granted," Darren says. "I know many in the LGBTQ+ community don't have that foundation. That's why visibility matters. If I can be someone they see living happily and authentically, maybe it makes their path a little easier."

#### A New Year's Wedding with a Heartfelt Tribute

On New Year's Eve, Darren married his longtime partner of nearly 20 years, Dan Urlage, in a huge celebration that brought together friends, TV colleagues, local public figures, and family. The evening was filled with surprises like pink ponies (not kidding), lots of emotion, an incredible live band, lots of dancing, and a powerful tribute to someone whose presence was deeply felt—his late mother, Patricia.

"Everything about that night was a reflection of love—but most specifically, I wanted to honor my mom," Darren shares. "She was my biggest fan, my rock, and my fiercest advocate. Though she passed years ago, she was there, I carried her with me down the aisle."

The couple thoughtfully wove Patricia's memory into the ceremony and celebration, reminding everyone that love—like weather—can be both unpredictable and deeply beautiful.

#### **Educator and Mentor**

Darren continues shaping lives as he always has on camera...and in the classroom, too. At Central Connecticut State University, he teaches journalism and media studies to the next generation of

communicators. His approach to teaching is hands-on and heart-forward.

"I want students— especially those who might be questioning where they fit—to know there is room for everyone in this industry," Darren says. "There's space to be both successful and authentic."

For LGBTQ+ students in particular, Darren's visibility and mentorship have been invaluable. He both teaches skills and models what it means to lead with integrity and pride.

#### From Storms to Sunshine

Darren's story is not about a single moment of revelation. It's about the quiet, consistent courage of living truthfully and finding happiness. It's about letting go of



#### **A Wicked Quiz**

Wicked: For Good, the concluding chapter of the blockbuster film version of Wicked will be released on November 21.

To get in the spirit—and "greenify" your knowledge of all things "Ozian"—we thought it would be fun to test fans' knowledge of *Wicked* trivia. So you think you know a lot about the book, musical and movie? Think again and test yourself. Answers below:

#### 1. To what actress did Broadway director Joe Mantello first pitch the role of Elphaba?

- A. Audra McDonald
- B. Lea Michele
- C. Patti LuPone
- D. Alice Ripley
- E. Laura Benanti

# 2. What out-of-town musical, that began in Connecticut, replaced Idina Manzel, which allowed her to fly in to Wicked?

- A. Holiday Inn
- B. Summer of '42
- C. Compulsion
- D. My Paris
- E. Next to Normal

# 3. Kristen Chenoweth was hesitant about committing to the musical *Wicked* because..."

- A. She wanted to play Elphaba, not Glinda.
- B. Glinda dies in the end.
- C. She felt Glinda didn't have enough presence in the show.
- D. In the original version, Glinda just had one song.
- E. She didn't think the show had promise.
- 4. In Gregory Maguire's Wicked follow-up, Elphaba's presumed offspring is named Lir.

#### What was the name of Lir's daughter who stars in another series of books by Maguire?

- A. Autumn
- B. Rain
- C. Summer
- D. Poppy
- E. Emerald

# So you think you know a lot about *Wicked* ...

#### 5. Who was originally set to direct the film version of *Wicked* before Jon M. Chu got the gig?

- A. Wes Anderson
- B. Tim Burton
- C. Stephen Daldry
- D. Greta Gerwig
- E. Martin Scorsese

#### 6. Where did the name Elphaba come from?

- A. It was the name of author Gregory Maguire's aunt.
- B. In Greek, it means "elevated."

- C. It's an amalgam of the initials of the name of the author of "The Wizard of Oz."
- D. The original book's publisher of *Wicked* in 1995 made it up.
- E. It came to author Gregory Maguire in a dream.

#### 7. Fiyero's song "Dancing Through Life" wasn't in the San Francisco pre-Broadway run of *Wicked*. What was the name of the song that was cut?

- A. "Big Man on Campus"
- B. "Which Way's the Party?"
- C. "Life is Good"
- D. "Just a Handsome Fellow"
- E. "Bad Boy"

#### 8. In the pre-Broadway run in San Francisco, what plot point did the creators decide to change?

- A. In the end, Elphaba is alone in the world, strong and independent.
- B. Madame Morrible saves Elphaba at the very end.
- C. Dr. Dillamond is murdered.
- D. The Wizard turns out to be a woman.
- E. The show opens without a flashback as told by Glinda.

#### 9. What actor was NOT in the running to play or was rumored to play Elphaba in the film version of Wicked?

- A. Lea Michele
- B Lady Gaga
- C. Zendaya
- D. Anna Villafane
- E. Taylor Swift

#### 10. What actor was NOT in the running to play or was rumored to play Glinda in the movie?

- A. Amanada Seyfried
- B. Dove Cameron
- C. Saoirse Ronan
- D. Kristen Chenoweth
- E. Taylor Swift

#### II. What was a song cut from *Wicked* before the show made it to Broadway?

- A. "Making Good"
- B. "Goody, Goody"
- C. "Wicked"
- D. "Good Enough"
- E. "Something Wicked This Way Comes"

# 12. What actor below made a cameo appearance in Part One of the film *Wicked*?

- A. Gregory Maguire
- B. Liza Minnelli
- C. Jane Goodall
- D. Stephen Schwartz
- E. The greatgranddaughter of L. Frank Baum



The current Broadway cast. Photo credit: Joan Marcus

13. In the book Wicked, Elphaba's sister Nessarose was born with a different affliction than she has in the musical and film. What was it?

- A. She was blind.
- B. She could not speak.
- C. She was born without arms.
- D. She was deaf.
- E. She had terrible taste in clothes.

14. Who was originally cast as the Wizard in the pre-Broadway run of *Wicked* in San Francisco?

- A. Tom Bosley
- B. Robert Morse
- C. Kevin Chamberlin
- D. Sid Caesar
- E. Pinky Lee

15. What sign did composer Stephen Schwartz hang on the wall to keep librettist Winnie Holzman and him focused on the writing of the show:

- A. "It's the girls, stupid."
- B. "Think pink"
- C. "Keep the magic"
- D. "Believe"
- E. "Always Oz"

16. Which is not a real quote from critics on the 2003 Broadway opening?

- A. "Nothing really jells."
- B. "The merits of Stephen Schwartz' score are meager."
- C. "Bland, generic Broadway music."
- D. "Generically impassioned songs."
- E. "An inspiring, moving

show for the ages."

17. In which categories did the Broadway production of Wicked win Tonys in 2004?

- A. Best musical
- B. Best score
- C. Best book
- D. Best orchestrations
- E. Best choreography
- F. None of the above

If you got all 17 correct, you get to marry Jonathan Bailey; 12 to 16, you get the Grimmerie; 8 to 11, you get the magic broom; 4 to 7, you get to join the flying monkeys; none to 3, you just get a plain old broom.

–Frank Rizzo



**QUIZ ANSWERS** 

Answers: 1-A; 2-B; 3-C; 4-B; 5-C; 6-C; 7-B; 8-C; 9-E; 10-D; 11-A; 12-D; 13-C; 14-B; 15-A; 16-E (New York critic quotes from Howard Kissel, Michael Feingold, Clive Barnes and Ben Brantley of The last one is made up, at least after the original opening); 17-F.

Creating Satisfying Relationships with Boundaries

e all have boundaries, and we use them daily. When you turn your work phone off during certain times of day, you are reinforcing work boundaries. You may ask the kids not to eat something messy in the car—also a boundary. It goes the other way, too. Maybe one of your friends doesn't like being hugged, and you respect that boundary so they will feel safe and comfortable around you.

In my sex ed classes, when I ask what a boundary is, the answer I most often get is, "things you don't want to do." This is part of it, but I prefer to think of boundaries as a relationship framework. They are a map you create for another person. With the guidance of this map, others learn how to interact with you in a way that is comfortable and safe. In a healthy relationship of any kind—not just romantic—both parties have shared their "maps" with one another so that they can work together well.

There are two types of boundaries: hard and soft. A hard "no" would be something you absolutely do not, under any circumstances, want to do. A hard "yes," on the flip side, is something that HAS to be present for you to feel comfortable.

Soft boundaries, however, are situational and depend on context. For example: say you're not interested in having a brand new partner sleep over. As you get to know them more and feel a sense of safety with them, that boundary could change, and you may start feeling comfortable having them

stay the night. Soft boundaries can also be dependent on location, mood, time of day, or any number of contextual factors

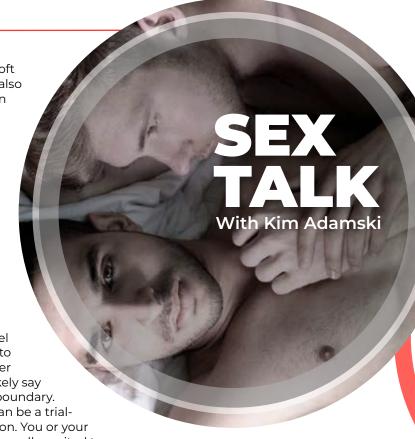
How do we find out what our boundaries are? Well, a lot of it is just the "vibe." If a partner asks, "do you want to try anal sex?" and it doesn't feel like a good idea to you—for whatever reason—you'll likely say "no," forming a boundary. Other times, it can be a trialand-error situation. You or your partner might be really excited to try something new and afterward find that one or both of you didn't like it all that much after all. Tada—new boundary found! Finding out you don't like something doesn't have to be a negative. Every time you discover a boundary, you learn something new about your relationship. You can use that information to strengthen the relationship moving forward.

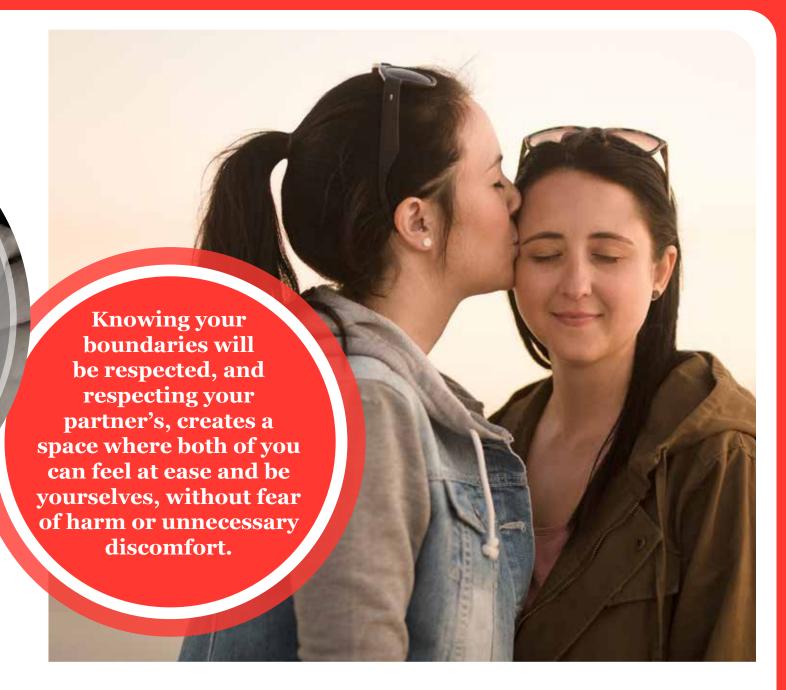
Given that human communication is imperfect, it's possible—likely even—that you will violate a boundary in some way. Maybe the way it was explained to you was unclear. Maybe the person didn't even realize it was a boundary until they were upset by it. What do you do when this happens? Well, first and foremost, an apology is warranted, even if the harm was

unintentional. Then, ask what they need. Do they want to snuggle? Do they need time alone?

Make sure that at some point before you have sex with them again, you talk about what happened and how you can prevent it from recurring. Treat it as a learning experience. Even if it is emotionally painful, it's also an opportunity to move toward a more comfortable and satisfying relationship for all involved.

Boundaries are often characterized as unchanging, but that's not always true, either. You may find that a boundary you had with a previous partner, or earlier in a relationship, may no longer suit you. As an example, say you have





been with a partner for five years. In the beginning, you established that you NEVER wanted to engage in bondage play (a kink activity involving restraints). However, in the years since, you have learned more about the many types of bondage, and some of it has begun to appeal to you. You have also built a trusting relationship where you feel confident your partner will be conscientious and not harm you. Look at that! Your boundary has changed, and that's

okay! Just remember, you'll still need to re-establish boundaries around bondage play, like what activities are and aren't okay for both of you and what safety protocols you plan to use.

All sexual relationships require an ongoing discussion of boundaries. Knowing your boundaries will be respected, and respecting your partner's, creates a space where both of you can feel at ease and be yourselves, without fear of harm

or unnecessary discomfort. They allow you to enjoy each other's presence fully and have satisfying, stress-free sexual encounters. Next time you have a talk about boundaries with your partner, try framing it as a way to care for each other, rather than a wall you are building between the two of you. You might find it's a much more positive, affirming experience.

—Kimberly Adamski

## **Three Gay Guys Talking Cars**



fter more than 100 episodes, Car-Pinionated quietly puts queer into gear. Every week since the fall of 2022, Doug Stewart has hosted an online conversation about "cars, the car industry and driving in general."

Sometimes it's with an expert from *Kelley Blue Book*, or AAA, or Consumer Reports Auto Test Center, colloquially known as Test Track, in East Haddam, on the Colchester town line.

Stewart has also chatted with the owner of a car dealer in Vernon about tariffs and a maternity nurse from Lawrence and Memorial Hospital about infant car seats.

He even sat down with Sen. Richard Blumenthal at the Hartford TV studio where he works as FOX61's digital executive producer. No surprise, they talked about cars; specifically, they discussed a bill to ensure used cars that have been recalled cannot be sold without first being repaired.

But most often, Stewart's weekly show features two longtime friends: Glenn Packman of Fairfield County and writer Geoff Buchholz of Chicago. Their program is called *Car-Pinionated* and appears on the streaming channels of TEGNA-owned TV stations

in Connecticut, Buffalo and Harrisburg, as well as on FOX61's YouTube channel.

Nary an episode goes by without a lot of laughter amid the banter.

"The C3 Corvette, the most uncomfortable car to make out in, ever," quipped Packman. "You need to get extremely creative!"

It's a true story, and what's also true—but never stated—is that Packman was talking about attempting to make out with a boyfriend.

Three years and more than one hundred episodes later, these three motorheads generally don't talk about that other thing they all have in common, in addition to a love of cars, trucks, and SUVs; Each one is an out, gay man.

"We don't talk about that kind of thing," Packman told *CT Voice*, and he made clear the show has never been advertised as "three gay guys talking about cars."

"At the end of the day, car fanatics are car fanatics," said Packman. Even so, he said he has literally been confronted by straight men, demanding he prove his automotive aptitude.

"I've had people who've just been shocked, almost dismayed, if you will, over the fact that I know cars," he said. "A rather rough around the edges, pickupdriving, hunting on the weekend. camouflagewearing friend of a friend once almost got in my face about the fact that I said that I know cars," recalled Packman. "And he literally just rapid-fired me questions about the car market, and I answered all of them promptly. And when he was done, he just sort of sized me up, and he said, and I quote, 'Huh!'"

"I kind of wanted to say to him, 'Am I your first gay?"

Packman and his husband, Bill, have been together 25 years this fall. He is a licensed and certified residential real estate appraiser and improv comedy performer in New York City.

He's known Stewart even longer; they met in 1987 at a restaurant in East Windsor where at that time Packman waited tables. He couldn't recall the exact year—Stewart did—but he did remember that it was after purchasing his first new car, a 1986 Volkswagen Golf, noting: "Boy, did I love that car!"

And you can probably guess what topic led to their 38-year-long friendship.

"You don't meet lots of people who are really up on car talk," said Packman. "So, when you do, it's kind of refreshing to sort of let the fun gates loose and talk a lot about cars."

He often leans into his improv background for off-

the-cuff observations that crack up his co-hosts.

"I've always felt like
Toyota's design language
is like the K-Tel record," he
said in a recent episode.
"All these great artists
mashed together on one
album!" Packman also
coined a new term for
what Buchholz described
as SUVs aimed at
attracting "the cool dad."

"There's a niche in the market that I'm going to call, 'The Chariots of the Dads,'" he said.

To describe Stewart, Packman didn't hold back.

"Doug is a golden

retriever," he said.
"Because he is that affable, lovable, friendly, decent kind-hearted man on so many different levels. I can never be there enough for him because I'm just way more selfish and more like a diva, but he's just an all-around terrific person."

What matters most about their show, he said, is how Stewart and his co-hosts treat other opinions.

"On Car-Pinionated, yes, it's our opinions, but yours matter, too, and we want to hear about them, and nobody's wrong here," said Packman. "That's the poison that is undoing our

society and I think Car-Pinionated is one tiny little step away from that. If you have a differing opinion, we're never going to say, 'Well, you're a jerk.'"

He offered this example: "We repeatedly bashed the [Tesla] Cybertruck on the show. But if somebody stepped forward and said, 'I drive one of these things, and here's the reasons why I love it,' I would definitely want to hear about this. It's contrary to everything I think and believe, but I still want to hear about it," he said. "And that's the heart of the show."

—Dawn Ennis



Doug and husband Bill over the years





#### **BREAKING ACCESS BARRIERS:**

#### Connecticut's Bold New Step Toward Mental Health Parity

#### A Win for Mental Health Equity

This summer, Connecticut took a major step toward making mental health parity real for the more than 515,000 residents covered by fully insured health plans. A new state law, championed by Mental Health Connecticut and allies, gives the Connecticut Insurance Department clear authority to hold insurance companies accountable when they break federal or state parity laws. That means better access to care, stronger oversight, and long-overdue accountability in a system that too often leaves patients behind.

For years, parity has been the law, but not the reality for patients. Enforcement has been limited, and insurers have operated with too little transparency. Connecticut's new law changes that, finally giving state regulators

Parity laws require that mental health and substance use services are covered on equal terms with physical health services. That means no extra hurdles, costs, or limitations. Parity eliminates discrimination in coverage, ensuring that individuals can access necessary treatment regardless of their health condition.

real authority to investigate and fine insurers that don't comply.

#### **How We Got Here**

The health insurance industry fought these reforms at every turn. They lobbied hard to keep the status quo: closed-door decisions, minimal oversight, and no consequences for blocking or delaying care.

But we fought back. A broad, unified coalition of advocates, clinicians, and people with lived experience stood up and said enough is enough. Together, we made parity enforcement a top priority in the 2025 session. Lawmakers listened and passed the bill with overwhelming bipartisan support.

#### What's Next: A Unified Voice for Behavioral Health

This win proves our model works. Mental Health Connecticut built a coalition that breaks through the usual silos, bringing together community advocates, psychiatrists, social workers, nurses, and more to speak with one voice.





Left: Dr. Kiki Kennedy, MD, speaks at a press conference in support of parity reform. Right: Key coalition advocates Tom Burr (NAMI-CT), Kathy Flaherty (CT Legal Rights Project), Christian Damiana (Mental Health CT)



# "Physical health and mental health are one and the same. We're going to make sure our insurance companies remember that every day."

— Gov. Ned Lamont has now signed two landmark parity laws during his tenure.

## Who Benefits from the New Law?

More than 515,000 Connecticut residents are covered by fully insured commercial health plans, meaning their coverage is directly affected by this law. For these individuals and families, the reforms bring:

- Stronger oversight of insurers
- Real enforcement of parity laws
- A clearer path to getting care

No other group in Connecticut is doing this. And now that parity enforcement is in place, we're turning to other significant barriers to care:

- Ghost networks that list unavailable or unreachable providers
- Network inadequacy that makes it challenging to find care nearby
- Affordability barriers
   like high out-of-pocket
   costs and annual rate
   hikes

We're building momentum to make sure every Connecticut family can access the highquality, affordable behavioral health care they deserve.

#### **Get Involved**

The fight isn't over. We need your voice. Visit mhconn.org:

- Learn more about your rights under the new law
- Take action to support better access to care
- Donate to fuel the next phase of our work

—By Christian Damiana

#### **Parity for All**

Connecticut's LGBTQ+ residents face especially steep disparities in behavioral health, and even greater difficulty finding affirming care. Real parity enforcement will help ensure that LGBTQ+ individuals can access services without unfair discrimination or delay.

### **Dancing in Hard Times**



or more than 50 years, the Connecticutbased modern dance company Pilobolus has entertained audiences all over the globe, from in-person performances at many of the world's leading entertainment venues to celebrated television appearances on The Academy Awards and The Oprah Winfrey Show. In addition, Pilobolus has collaborated with a host of legendary artists throughout the years, including Art Spiegelman, Maurice Sendak and Penn & Teller. The company is also renowned for its educational programs,

including *Pilobolus* at *Play* and *Chance* to *Dance*.

Featured on the cover of Connecticut Voice in Autumn 2021, the company was at the time charting new directions, embracing more diversity and LGBTQ+ themes. That vision—and the company's expanded new works building on an established repertoire—have come under fire recently. Since its founding, the company has been known for the artful ways it uses the bodies of its dancersmany of whom sometimes appear partially clothed. Conservatives objected both to the dancers'

"sexuality" and also the company's commitment to racial and sexual diversity.

Derion Loman, a long-time dancer and choreographer who is Pilobolus' associate artistic director, recently spoke to *Connecticut Voice* about the many challenges—sociopolitical as well as economic—currently facing the company, as well as what continues to make Pilobolus so special.

CV: You've been with Pilobolus since 2014. What do you feel has led to the lasting success of Pilobolus?

**DL:** We are celebrated for

pushing the envelope, but our vulnerability comes from showing these amazing bodies on stage, not in a sexualized way but as examples of the human form in peak physical condition. In many ways, watching Pilobolus is like watching sports. And like with sports, our audiences come to see incredibly human moments take shape in front of them.

CV: Yet, there is now some backlash about how the company displays these bodies. Can you elaborate?

**DL:** More and more, presenters are worrying about their audiences

accepting our bodies. Venues are asking us to cover up [dancers'] bodies more often. They sometimes ask for men not to be shirtless, which makes me wonder what these people do when their kids go to the beach? It also makes me call into question why they can look at the naked statue of David or a portrait of a nude woman in an art museum but not us as dancers. Personally, I don't understand the context of these requests, but we do our best to honor them while keeping the authenticity of our work. It's frustrating.

CV: Can you give me a specific example of how that happens? **DL:** We were recently commissioned by the Martha Graham Company to do a new version of *Lamentations*. To make some venues happy, we're using see-through costumes, yet the entire body is covered. We're following the rules we've been given but still doing our thing.

CV: Let's talk about the company's commitment to all forms of diversity. That has not changed, right?

**DL:** Embracing diversity is hugely important for our company. Our dancers have a wide variety of skin tones, different sexual orientations, even different-shaped bodies. Having this diversity helps

the company tell stories that identify with more people. Pilobolus is a completely collaborative company, with a lot of input from the dancers in the creation of every piece. Ultimately, we all like to see our own story told on stage, but while you may think you're making a piece about your life, you will soon find that everyone in the room is responding.

CV: Are you finding this to be a financially challenging time to raise funds for the company?

**DL:** I do think people who support the arts are coming out to help us, especially after the Trump Administration cut grants from the NEA. People

know companies like ours need to be saved. We had our annual gala fundraiser in Connecticut in early June, and it was one of our most successful ever. We are also putting ourselves out there in different ways, like performing at a recent activation event at Farm One in Brooklyn. Honestly, I wish the entire world would have to live through a day without art—no TV, no music, no live performances. I think that would be a hard pill for people to swallow. 🚺

For more information about the company and performance events, go to Pilobolus.org

—Brian Scott Lipton





# COUNTRY STAR BROCKE BROCKE LIVING OUT LOUD

**By BRIAN SCOTT LIPTON** 

Brooke Eden may not yet be a household name, but the out-and-proud country music singer has performed with more than a few of them, including Alan Jackson, Garth Brooks and Trisha Yearwood. She's also become a fixture at many Pride concerts, including this year's World Pride in Washington D.C. and tours in support of her own music, which includes numerous EPs and singles released over the last decade. Although she began her career as a straight woman, she began secretly dating her then-radio rep Hilary Hoover in 2015. Eden then came out publicly in January 2021, married Hoover in 2022, and the couple welcomed a son in 2024. Today, she is not just a performer and loving wife and mother, but also a proud advocate for LGBTQ+ rights.

## We live in a heteronormative society, and we're all brainwashed not to accept ourselves. Pride shows you that you are not alone, and that there are people who have come out and lived their lives authentically and they are ok.

Connecticut Voice recently spoke to Eden about her personal and professional journeys, why she considers Pride to be akin to "suicide prevention," the downside to being an "over-thinker," and what she hopes will come true for all of country music.

# CV: Is it hard to be a gay country singer? It's not been traditionally a welcoming genre for gay people.

BE: I think my story is a little different than other people's. When I got my first record deal in 2015, I didn't know I was gay. I thought of myself a straight woman; but then I fell in love with Hilary, who was my radio representative. We could both come off as straight, so people thought our chemistry was just friendship. I was nervous about finding a space in the country community. But luckily, my fear of coming out professionally ended up being worse than the reality. Still, I think things are drastically different now because, since then, a few of us have come out as queer and been accepted.

# CV: In fact, you've received a lot of support from the Grand Old Opry! Tell me about that.

**BE:** The Grand Old Opry has always been a pillar of our community. Not only have they welcomed Hilary; they even sent me a baby

blanket when my son was born. And back in 2021, I was singing "She's in Love with the Boy" at the Opry, and my friend Trisha Yearwood come onstage to sing it with me—and we changed it mid-song to "She's in Love with The Girl." The crowd loved it.

# CV: Speaking of performing, you sang at many Pride Events this year, especially World Pride. Did you feel a different energy this year?

BE: Oh my god, yes, there was the best energy this year. At every concert, people showed up and showed out in crazy numbers. One of the amazing things about Pride is that everyone in the crowd knows what it's like to feel unsafe, so people intentionally give each other space. It becomes beautiful chaos, rather than scary chaos. And World Pride was just amazing. Everyone was fighting the same fight! The energy was just so palpable, and the warmth of the community was really overwhelming.

# CV: I read on your Facebook page that you said Pride was "literally suicide prevention." Do you want to elaborate?

**BE:** I am usually a mentally stable person, but there were times during my coming out journey when I thought it might be easier if I wasn't here. It's a scary thought

that anyone, at any age, should ever have to feel like that—especially for just loving someone. We live in a heteronormative society, and we're all brainwashed not to accept ourselves. Pride shows you that you are not alone, and that there are people who have come out and lived their lives authentically and they are okay.

# CV: During your Pride concerts, you performed your newest single, "Giddy Up!" Tell me about the inspiration for that song and why it was important to perform and record it?

**BE:** My parents met dancing at this honky-tonk in Florida. And my dad is a drummer in a local country band. Anyway, I have been line dancing since I was five years old; it has always been part of my life. Right now, we have this cool time where you have people from big cities to small towns, people of all races, who appreciate country music. I know country can sometimes feel like an exclusive club, so this song is my invitation to everyone to get on the floor and join us. The dance part is really accessible, even for beginners.

## CV: I noticed that part of your "X" bio says: "Over Thinker." Is that true all the time?

**BE:** The smaller the situation, the more I overthink. Ask me what I





want for dinner, it's not happening, but I can make big decisions in the blink of an eye. I used to be such a people-pleaser and so worried about what everyone else thinks. But I've gotten better at that!

# CV: In 2022, you and Hilary got married. Was that a dream come true for you?

**BE:** When it came to relationships, I thought I would never get married. I figured I wasn't ever going to pick out a wedding dress; I would just pick out my red-carpet dress. Things changed about three weeks after I met Hilary! I asked her about how she felt about the word "wife."

CV: Last year, you and Hilary had your first child. How are you balancing the roles of performer and wife/mother?

**BE:** I am so lucky. I am basically a performer on weekends, so I can be a full-time mama during the week. And when I do go on tour, they come with me sometimes; Hillary is my tour manager now. We take it by show by show. Sometimes, my in-laws babysit for us. Having a village of people who love your baby is so important. It's been a beautiful thing figuring out how this all works. But the bottom line is we're raising him to get used to flying on planes. And he'll have an instrument in his hands by the time he is three. He already loves the drums; we beatbox with him. In the end, though, we'll support whatever he wants to do!

#### CV: Are you ready to have more kids?

**BE:** We are going to continue to grow our family at some point. I

feel lucky to have a partner where we can make those decisions together. I remember being mad at God for making me a lesbian because I thought I couldn't have children. But luckily, Hilary can carry my eggs and her eggs.

#### CV: What do you see in your future professionally?

BE: Country music is just getting started in really accepting anyone; it's why I start my shows with this song "Rainbow Radio." For me, it's about creating a safe and free community within country, which is my goal. I will continue to have hard conversations about how country can be more accepting. Yes, I know that's a pretty grand mission, but I really want there to be a time when everyone can feel safe, both as a performer as an audience member.

# Only One McLean.

There is only one place like McLean in the country and it's located here in the heart of the Farmington Valley.











Planning for an active retirement? Discover independent senior living at McLean! Offering luxury residences, 35,000+ square feet of





To Learn More, Call 860-658-3786, Scan, or Visit ExploreMcLean.org



# YOUNG, QUEEK LOVE:

# How Different Is It?

LGBTQ+ GenZers share their perspectives on dating today

By DAWN ENNIS / Photos courtesy of Dawn Ennis



like guys, so, I'm probably just straight." That's when she started attending GSA meetings with a seventh-grade classmate who came out as bisexual.

"That checked out," said Ruby.
"And from then on, that's what
I've identified as." She said she
was surprised to learn that a
Gallup survey earlier this year
revealed bisexuals are the largest
single group within the LGBTQ+
community, with more than half
of the respondents saying that they
were bi.

Ruby met her boyfriend through her friend group at college, and they've been dating since April. "He's also bisexual," she said. "We consider ourselves to be in a very queer relationship, even though technically it's a guy and a girl."

To Ruby, the relationship dynamic in her queer circle of college friends goes beyond male and female. "The fact is that gender is so removed from it; people are gay, and people are bisexual and people have various gender identities," she said. Yet that doesn't make dating any easier.

"For a lot of people in my generation, it's so much harder to meet in person and have relationships that start organically," she said. "It's hard, being queer, depending on what kind of a space you're in. Because if you're queer at Emerson College, you're going to meet people who are compatible with you. But if you're queer somewhere else, it's a lot harder."

Over the summer, Ruby invited two friends from school, Andy and Leif, to accompany her on a road trip, to meet young people like themselves whose lives were, as she said, harder. "I have friends—you know, queer friends—in central Maine, a very rural part of Maine, where my family's from," she said. "They have a very different experience of it because it's a lot harder for them compared to us."

How so? "Oh, it's just so different," said Ruby, comparing these rural folks to how Baby Boomers, millennials and GenX adopted swiping on apps in hopes of making a love connection.

"I think it would be so difficult for me to try to figure out if I was attracted to someone based on evaluating them through a profile," she said. "I need to see more than what you've curated. And even like things that you can put on your profile, like, you write a description of yourself that's specifically designed to make people want to date you, as opposed to when I meet people in person and it's just the whole person in front of me. And I get to figure out if I want to date them."



ANDY

Andy, 19, also eschews dating apps, viewing them as eliminating an important step in connecting with

another person.

"You meet somebody with the intention of dating them, not with the intention of getting to know them first, and then dating them," he said. Like Ruby, Andy is queer and a sophomore at Emerson. He's studying sound design and engineering, and he made it clear he is not cisgender.

"I am queer and transmasc," Andy told *CT Voice*. "I identified as a lesbian from 12 to 13."

"I knew I wasn't comfortable with my body, and I knew I had gender dysmorphia," he said, "but I hadn't really considered gender in that equation until maybe I was 13, 14 or 15, during quarantine." Andy explained he tried to find his identity by exploring the labels of bisexuality and nonbinary.

"And eventually," he said, "I kind of just ended up saying, 'Screw it. I'm queer! I like who I like. It doesn't really matter." He started on testosterone at 16 and had top surgery at 18. He says he's very happy with his transition and romantic life.

"I can't say I have a definable type," said Andy. "Bodies don't matter to me. It's the person inside that really matters. People who are kind and honest, that's kind of like what I'm attracted to. Androgynous and or masculine-leaning people are typically what I go for, what I'm attracted to."

Andy said he's already been involved in two serious relationships: one when he was 15, and his current relationship with a classmate he met on his second day of freshman year, who identifies as nonbinary and pansexual. They dated long distance over summer break but are now going on ten



## TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 4, 2025 3-7 PM

Michael J. Adanti Student Center Ballroom



#### **REGISTER TODAY!**

Grad.SouthernCT.edu/open-house

# GRADUATE OPEN HOUSE

Southern Connecticut State University

Join us to explore your program of

interest.

Meet individually with graduate faculty, staff, and graduate students committed to helping you achieve your personal

100+
nationally-ranked
Master's, Sixth Year,
Doctorate and
post-graduate
programs

and professional aspirations, plus, interact with distinguished facultyand admissions representatives.

#### Learn about:

- Affordable and flexible options for evening, weekend, and online courses.
- Fellowships, assistantships, and financial aid, plus graduate student services and support.
- The next steps to apply!

#### **REQUEST INFO**

Call (203) 392-9670 or email GradAdmissions@SouthernCT.edu



SOUTHERN CONNECTICUT STATE UNIVERSITY

School of Graduate & Professional Studies

Graduate Programs with Purpose.

months as a couple, and Andy said he considers this a long-term relationship.

However, Andy's first one, he said, was "certainly a wild ride," because he was dating a 17-year-old trans man.

"I was love bombed," said Andy. That phrase actually dates back to the 1970's! It's a manipulative behavior and tactic used by narcissists, abusers, and toxic individuals, characterized by wooing someone with excessive affection, attention, and flattery, particularly at the start of a relationship. And it escalated quickly, he said.

"I got proposed to in a public setting," he said. "I was in a very public setting. I said, 'Yes,' because I didn't know what else to say. And I felt pressured to do so."

But instead of marrying Andy, that trans man soon left for college, and ghosted Andy, for seven months.

Andy felt abused and neglected. And yet... "Queer love has been, to me and in my relationships, fulfilling, in a way," he said. "I've learned a lot."

"I'm a big proponent of loving as hard as you can, as much as you can, all the time, because anything could happen at any point, any time of day," he said, calling it a "no regrets scenario."

"Say the thing you want to say; love who you want to love," he said. "I feel like that's really important, especially now, especially when



loving who you want is becoming more and more difficult by the day. And I feel like it's really important that people continue to do that, even though it may be difficult."



# **LEIF**

"I have always been a passionate believer in love," Leif told *CT Voice*, "and I think I will, until love fails me and I die."

That may sound overly dramatic for someone who's only 18, but Leif said she has already been in six relationships, all "sexual in some way." Leif is a trans woman who describes herself as a bicurious lesbian.

She was single at the time of her trip to Maine with Andy and Ruby. Like her friends, she is a sophomore at Emerson, studying sound and a native of Greater Hartford.

For her generation, she said dating today is very dissimilar to how her parents courted in the 1980s and 90s.

"Very different. And I think in a bad way," said Leif, and to prove her point, she recounted the experience of a college friend. "She had completely given up on love and romance because everything now feels extremely artificial. It's all rushed; it's all burning out the candle before you lose it. It goes too fast. You completely waste it, and it's entirely focused on nothing but sex,

or nothing but feeling something, nothing but appearances."

Leif said she considered the cliché, "love conquers all," as telling "only half of the story."

"I think that is not an accurate description. I think that love on its own will not be enough unless we all learn to love, unless we actually put some work into it," said Leif. "I think we can't just love and hope and pretend like everything will be okay." These are words to live by.

#### **Advice From an**

# EXPERT

Sexual Health Educator and *CT Voice* columnist Kim Adamski said she understands why queer GenZ has spurned dating apps. "Because people are becoming really disillusioned by the Internet and how hateful it can be and how misleading it can be, and also how it's all ads, like...eww," she said. "That's also happening in part because there's so many people who are bots or just trying to redirect you to their OnlyFans," a subscription-based content channel.

Adamski works with the nonprofit organization Q Plus in assisting LGBTQ+ Connecticut youth, and recommends kids from 9 to 13, teens from 13 to 18, and young adults up to 24 check out their programs and join a social support circle.

As for dating, "Get to know people before dating them," she said. "If you have the foundation for healthy friendships and family relationships, then you will be able to have healthy romantic relationships later."

# and evaluation of the second s

Connecticut's Premier LGBTQIA+ Gala



SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 8<sup>th</sup>, 2025

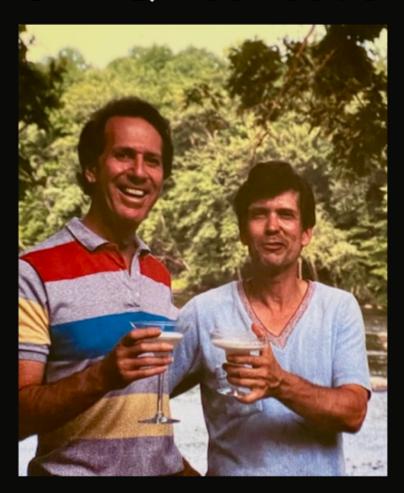
Hartford Marriott Downtown

www.HealthCollective.org





# **LGBTQ**<sup>♯</sup> foundation



Committed to helping LGBTQ+ people fulfill their potential



# **Our Community Grants program**

has awarded or approved over \$5 million to grassroots LGBTQ+ organizations since 2020

Our TransPLUS Resource Center seeks to center, support, and uplift the most vulnerable members of our community

Our SilverConnect program celebrates our community as we enter our golden years through meaningful connection and intergenerational learning

Our LGBTQ+ Pride Coalition allows organizers in the NY tri-state area to connect, network, and learn more about celebrating Pride in their local communities, not just in June, but every day

Our LGBTQ+ Advocacy Fund supports large-scale projects rooted in pivotal progress in the LGBTQ+ equality movement

# And Coming Soon: Let's Get Back Together:

A resource to support LGBTQ+ Student Centers on college campuses

# **LGBTQ+ Executives and Directors:**

Developing the next generation of LGBTQ+ community leaders

leonardlitz.org



# 'My anger problems became a success''

 Artist Diane DiMassa on the collection of her classic underground comic

Photos and art courtesy Diane DiMassa

# By ALEX DUEBEN

iane DiMassa is an artist who lives in the Black Rock neighborhood of Bridgeport. Born and raised in Connecticut, while living in New Haven in the 1990s, she made one of that era's iconic underground comics. Hothead Paisan: Homicidal Lesbian Terrorist ran for 21 issues and has just been collected by the New York Review of Books in a volume introduced by Sarah Schulman.

It's a very punk rock project for such a literary institution, and what's impressive is how visceral and angry and relevant the comics are decades after they were made. "I was going to therapy, and this therapist didn't like open-ended therapy, so she had her patients come up with goals, something that you wanted to work on," DiMassa said in a recent conversation. "I said anger and a creative block. She said, why don't you do some art around anger? So I went home, turned on the TV, and I got really upset within twenty minutes over whatever was on. I picked up my journal and I drew what are now the first four pages of issue number one."

Looking back on how it started, DiMassa seems amazed at how everything fell into place. "I was working at an independent book distributor at the time," she said. "I brought the four pages to work to pass it around. We all laughed, and I brought it home, and I didn't really think much about it. Then my girlfriend comes over and sees it and says, what is this? You have to finish a whole comic book. I'll find a printer."

Her then-girlfriend, Stacy Sheehan published the comic and others. "My boss said, we'll distribute whatever you do. Stacy found a woman-owned printer in New Haven. It all just fell in my lap," DiMassa said. "Issue one took off. Issue two. It snowballed."

"I'm telling you; it just came from above. I never knew what the next panel was going to be. It's like it was given to me panel by panel. It's crazy," DiMassa said. "It took me forever to do one panel, but I like that. I want you to be able to look at a panel and chew it up, and really look at the art."

"It was a little pre-email. We used to go to the mailbox every day," DiMassa said. "It would be packed with letters and drawings and presents and gifts and just this outpouring of enthusiasm. 'Oh, my God, I can't believe you're saying this out loud. It's exactly how I feel.' In the beginning, I was kind of like, isn't everyone thinking this?"

She said that the book was about women and about queer women, but she had readers from all kinds of backgrounds. "Any marginalized person

or any white cis male with any ounce of astuteness," DiMassa said. "Any oppressed minority. People who needed an anger outlet," she said. "People who are just like in mental anguish over society and what's happening to your people, or who you consider your tribe. Or people you like and accept and don't have any kind of prejudice towards, you know? I like to say our side and the other side. Anyone who's on our side sort of got in touch with Hothead."

The new book also fell into place with an out-of-the-blue email from editor Lucas Adams who collects DiMassa's comics, as well as letters people wrote in and other material. "I thought they were just going to reprint the comics," DiMassa said, but the publisher was so surprised that she and Stacey had kept everything and had it organized, they scanned it all. "I'm blown away," DiMassa said, amused but in awe.

DiMassa said that with some

amusement, but she also read everything that was sent to her, listened to the stories people told her about how the comic resonated with them, how it helped them. After all these years, she still knows many of those stories and remains amazed by them. "I don't think I ever completely got my head around this," she said, after repeating some of the decades-old stories that have stayed with her, about people who shared how the comic helped them through difficult, personal times.

"We do this stuff in our head all the time," DiMassa said. "You want to get violent, but, you read a comic book instead...and understand that you're not alone in your thoughts. That's the most healing thing."

I mentioned one letter in an issue of the comic, where the reader wrote in to say: "I, too, am a Hothead Paisan ('Tis better to be homicidal than suicidal.)" which I said was a sentiment that sums up the book so well. "Be angry at the fucking world. Don't take it all out on yourself," DiMassa said. "I got responses from men and women, gay, straight, everything. But the women—a lot of women were never allowed to be loud about their anger. You know, smile, be pretty. Probably less now, but when I was growing up, it was very much like that."

"I was in AA for a really long time. I'm still sober. Going there and hearing everybody else who had all these experiences that you had, you get this almost energetic connection," DiMassa said. "That to me is what a tribe is. That shared being on the same page kind of mentality about being in the world. And having a hard time with it. We really got together and bonded over being fucked by society."

The moments of violence when Hothead attacks Nazis or anti-abortion protestors may be what people remember, or Hothead arguing with God, who she asks at one point "is Earth hell?" It's angry in a way that time was not diluted, a righteous anger





at the state of the world and at what has been done to her. But the comic also demonstrates the only way the character can live in the world, her relationships with Roz and Daphne and her cat Chicken.

The comic came out during the zine explosion of the 80s and 90s, and I pointed out that just as a community coalesced around the comic, by making the comic she found an artistic community and in the interview included in the book and the acknowledgements DiMassa talked about the many artists and writers and creators she met and who were so important to her. "I had no idea when I started *Hothead* about the timing," DiMassa said. "It just became part of the whole thing.

"It was huge in San Francisco and bigger cities, and it was happening in New Haven too," DiMassa said. "I'd go to Kinko's at one in the morning and my friends would be in there copying and stapling. Some of them were great. Some were cartoons. Some of them were rambling poetry. It was like the rock scene; it was anything. It was really fun."

DiMassa lived in San Francisco and in Northampton for a year, and we talked about how Connecticut has changed since she grew up here. "It's really different," DiMassa said. "When I was in high school, there was no LGBT. Nobody said bisexual."

"The world is very, very different around gays, around trans people, and people of color. But as they say, the more things change, the more they stay the same. The more progress we make, the more violent backlash comes along with it," DiMassa said. "Black people are still getting shot by cops, by white cops, for no reason, even though there have been serious advances in civil rights and acceptance. I do think a lot more people are waking up, but there's still that dark side."

Over the course of 21 issues, the comic changed even if it never mellowed, which is a good way to think about the years since. And why despite being very grounded in the 1990s, the comic has aged well and is still angry and meaningful today.

"Things change in a lifetime. It's incredible," DiMassa said, before pointing out that some of the same problems persist. "The shit is still happening, and people are still pissed off about the shit that's happening," DiMassa said. "People need an anger release when frustrating things can be and how furious you get when someone you love gets murdered because they're trans or gay, or they got gay bashed."

"I think there's still plenty to get your claws into."  $\mathbf{V}$ 



You're here for that
sigh of relief. The peace
of mind that comes from
knowing you've got an
advisor working with you
– one on one – preparing
you with a thoughtful plan.

And we're here for you!

Call 860-572-4040 or visit Chelseagroton.com/more

# Chelsea Groton Financial Services

osaic

Investment and insurance products and services are offered through **Osaic Institutions, Inc.**, Member FINRA/SIPC. Chelsea Groton Financial Services is a trade name of Chelsea Groton Bank. **Osaic Institutions** and Chelsea Groton Bank are not affiliated. Products and services made available through **Osaic Institutions** are not insured by the FDIC or any other agency of the United States and are not deposits or obligations of nor guaranteed or insured by any bank or bank affiliate. These products are subject to investment risk, including the possible loss of value.



LITCHFIELD HILLS

# FROM RESERVATION TO RELAXATION

INDULGE IN OUR AWARD
WINNING SPA

"BEST LUXURY SPA IN THE U.S."
Condé Nast Traveler Readers' Choice Awards 2023







# Why Join the CTGLC?

The Connecticut Gay & Lesbian Chamber (CTGLC) is building an empowering community—once we encourage you to be a part of.

There is power in belonging. Join the CTGLC and connect with a vibrant network of LGBTQ+ and allied professionals, businesses, and organizations.

As a CTGLC member, you belong to a unique and dedicated community committed to bringing the LGBTQ+ community and its allies together to support one another through the exchange of business leads, networking, and fun! We strengthen community connections through impactful events and educational programs.

Congratulations to the following businesses, which are now Certified LGBTBE® through the National Gay & Lesbian Chamber of Commerce (NGLCC):

Adventures in Connection
The AMI Solution, Inc.
Anthony J. Santella Consulting, LLC
Babcock & Brown Securities
The Ballou Companies DBA Abrakadoodle
Burnham Sterling and Company, LLC
Capture Photography
Every Page Marketing, LLC
GOVSTREAM LLC DBA 360clean
Green Ink Marketing Communications

Kyber Security
Michele Wierzgac
Mike Daly, Realtor
Onyx Elite, LLC
Pilothouse Communications, LLC
Pinpoint Promotions
Resilient Land And Water, LLC
Teresa Nieves Coaching, LLC
Trampoline Group
WholePerson Therapeutics



ou can tell when an artist is enjoying every moment of their time spent shoulder-to-shoulder with other like-minded artists, unified in purpose in a worthy endeavor. There's a spring in their steps; there are smiles on their faces. Sometimes, there are songs in their hearts. When Another Octave Connecticut Women's Chorus members talk about their group dynamic and commitment to cause, it's easy to understand how the group has survived and thrived for decades. Beyond the music, these ladies are happy, humble, talented, clever, quick to laugh, and having a great time. When that rare alchemy happens, it's evident: the art form is elevated.



Founded in the fall of 1989, Another Octave (anotheroctave.org) is a member of GALA (Gay and Lesbian Alliance) international choruses, the Sisters Singers Network, the Association of Connecticut Choruses, the Shoreline Arts Alliance, and New Haven Arts Council. It is an auditioned singing group rooted in the lesbian community but open to all who support it.

Performances include both traditional choral works and contemporary pieces of particular relevance today, many tinged with a dose of wry humor and witty irony.

"When we first started, there were only eight of us," recalled Amy Weiss, one of the original Another Octave members. "Our first concert was a few songs at a concert of the Connecticut Gay Men's Chorus."

### **A Higher Purpose**

It was Weiss who came up with the group's name.

"There was a Connecticut men's chorus but not a women's chorus then," Weiss explained, "so I thought, 'Well, we're just another octave higher."

Weiss said Another Octave, which recently celebrated its thirty-fifth anniversary, was a testament to resilience, especially in the years since the COVID pandemic.

"We were at around 60 [members] before COVID," said Cindy Walwer,

Another Octave's artistic director since 2016. "The pandemic really decimated us, but now we're almost back to prepandemic levels."

Relatively new to Another Octave (if not new to GALA choruses), Cindy Chew said 2024 performances were yearbook themed: "It was looking back over the chorus history and highlighted some of the favorites."

# **Theme Songs**

Walwer said planning for a fall concert is underway.

Another Octave will begin its new season with a performance on Saturday, November 22 (the week before Thanksgiving) with the theme, "Seasons of Women's Lives."

"Our first act will be things like, 'Blue Skies, Shining on Me...' Walwer said, "and 'In the Bleak Midwinter,' and 'Summer Breeze'—an eclectic mix of pop tunes and choral songs. In the second act, we'll focus on the seasons of a woman's life."

Another Octave's plans for a Spring 2026 concert aren't set in stone.

"America's 250th birthday is coming up," Walwer said, "and we've got a lovely arrangement of the "Battle Hymn' by SHeDAISY, and we have 'Give Me Your Tired, Your Poor,' which seems very pertinent."

Though the group is not overtly political, its leanings are thinly veiled.

"We are trying to reclaim the term 'patriotism' because we love our country," Walwer said. "This is home... so we're also pointing out things that we need to do something about."

"It's about songs that are empowering to women—songs [about] issues of social justice, fairness, and connection to community," Chew said.

"We've got our serious pieces that will appeal to everybody," Walwer said, "and then we've got satire that will kick'em in the pants. Some members are politically motivated, but that's all the more reason to sing."

### **GALA Pride**

Chew, new to Another Octave, has long sung with GALA choruses.

"This is actually my fifth," she said.
"When I moved to Connecticut, this
was the first thing that my partner and
I looked for: it was not just a musical
outlet but a place of community."

GALA's signature events are its quadrennial festivals, which gathers LGBTQ+ choruses from around the world for singing, connecting, and creating.

The 2024 GALA Choruses Festival gathered more than 7,400 singers from 122 choruses. The next festival will be in Minneapolis in 2028, said Karen Kriner-Souris, Another Octave Publicity Coordinator.

"We try to either attend or perform

there," Walwer said. "It's just a wonderful experience."

# From "Gangsta" to GALA

Weiss said the group originally sprung out of hip-hop.

"We started out as a lesbian rap group," she said. "We were advertising in gay papers, but we never called ourselves a lesbian chorus."

"The joke is that the audition is not about 'Who do you sleep with?' but 'Can you sing?'" Weiss said. "Maybe a majority of us are gay, but if you're cool with that, we're cool with that. It's not like we're holding hands and saying lesbian things—there aren't lesbian prayers before concerts. Depending on the season, sometimes we're more gay, and sometimes we're less gay."

Currently, the only male involved is Bill Hively, Another Octave's accompanist. Weiss said the group had one transgender member.

"If they can hit the notes, carry a tune,

and identify as a woman, they're in,"
Walwer said, "but they have to be able to blend with our sound."

"Mindy Walwer checks to see what your range is and where you fit in best," said Chew, "not just musically, but also in terms of a social, emotional, psychological perspective."

Information about try-outs for Another Octave is available through the website at anotherocctave.org"

# Safety in (Musical) Numbers...

Another Octave members gather from all over Connecticut to rehearse, laugh, and create beautiful music at a safe space in the Unitarian Society Center of New Haven, but they fully understand that the world outside can be less accepting.

Walwer said rehearsals have become a haven: "This last season, the Unitarian Society have taken to locking their doors with a doorbell...and we have a door monitors, so that's helped."

Weiss said Another Octave provides

food for the soul and for the stomach.

"We're all foodies, so every season starts with a potluck, and we have snacks in rehearsals," she said. "Every week it's about who can one-up the last person with better snacks."

# **A Family Affair**

It would be easy to mistake an Another Octave performance for a family singalong, with all of the laughter, the hard work, and fun, and the harmony among the singers.

"Members might have your political beliefs or might not," Walwer said, "but when you come to chorus, you're a sister."

We are told never to doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world: indeed, it's the only thing that ever has." Add in a bit of fun and a bit of talent, and we are treated to some beautiful music...whatever the octave.





RANDY RAINBOW SEPT 25 & 26



THE SECOND CITY FRI, OCT 3



**LEA SALONGA**WED, OCT 22



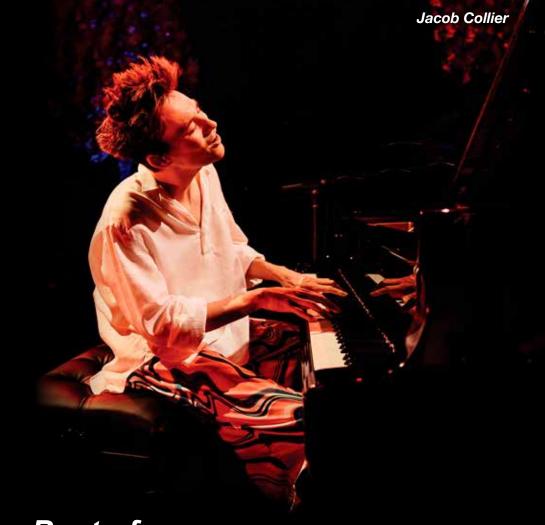
SUTTON FOSTER THU, NOV 20



80 E RIDGE RD · 203.438.4795 RIDGEFIELDPLAYHOUSE.ORG



# **CENTER FOR THE PERFORMING ARTS**



The Best of

# MUSIC, DANCE

# **Fall Events on Sale Now**

jorgensen.uconn.edu



Box Office: M-F, 10 am - 5 pm (860) 486-4226 | jorgensen.tickets@uconn.edu On the UConn Storrs campus















Compagnie

Hervé Koubi -Sol Invictus

Rainee Blake as Joni Mitchell

Disney's Moana: Live-to-Film Concert

Jorge Luis Pacheco

**Jorge Luis Pacheco Tribute to Buena Vista Social Club** Thu, Sep 18, 7:30 pm (\$30)

Valentin Magyar\* Tue, Sep 23, 7:30 pm (\$25-30)

**INVINCIBLE:** A Glorious Tribute to Michael Jackson\*\* Sat, Sep 27, 8 pm (\$35-45)

Take Me As I Am: A Joni Mitchell Tribute with Rainee Blake Sat, Oct 4, 8 pm (\$30)

Disney's: Moana **Live-to-Film Concert** Fri, Oct 10, 7 pm (\$20-25)

Ray Chen\* Julio Elizalde, Piano Fri, Oct 17, 8 pm (\$35-40)

An Evening with **Jacob Collier** The Djesse Solo Show Sat, Oct 18, 8 pm (\$45-65)

Compagnie Hervé Koubi Sol Invictus

Thu, Oct 23, 7:30 pm (\$35-40)

**ZOSO: The Ultimate** Led Zeppelin Experience Cabaret Sat, Nov 8, 8 pm (\$30-45)

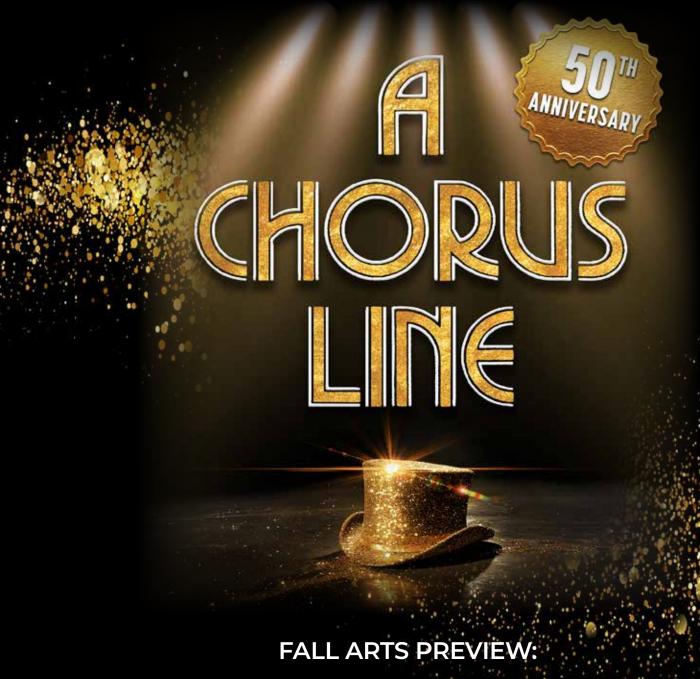
Phaeton Piano Trio\* Tue, Nov 11, 7:30 pm (\$25-30)

**Les Arts Florissants with Théotime Langlois de Swarte\*** Thu, Nov 20, 7:30 pm (\$35-40)

Holiday Pops **Boston Pops Esplanade Orchestra** Keith Lockhart, Conductor Sat, Dec 6, 8 pm (\$70-85)

<sup>\*</sup>Lenard Chamber Music Series

<sup>\*\*</sup> The Michael Jackson Estate is neither affiliated, nor associated or connected nor has it endorsed or sponsored INVINCIBLE: A Glorious Tribute to Michael Jackson Note: All artists, events, dates, programs and policies are subject to change.



Emus, Foxes and Eric Clapton, Too



# CONNECTICUT'S FALL LINE-UP SIZZLES WITH POP, ROCK, PLAYS AND MORE

By FRANK RIZZO

s summer winds down with the beach chairs stored away, the last of the ripe tomatoes devoured, and the tans finally faded, we now turn to the fall and those extra special shows to get us excited—and to divert us from work, school and troubling world events.

As always Connecticut offers us a wealth of

As always, Connecticut offers us a wealth of performing arts events, so get ready to mark these dates. Calendars ready?

Rob Ruggiero who's staged some of Goodspeed's best musicals, returns to direct a decidedly different kind of show for the jewel box of a theater on the river: *A Chorus Line*, which runs September 5 to October 26 at the **Goodspeed Opera House**, **East Haddam. goodspeed.org** 



This show's got our favorite title of the fall: *The Great Emu War*, and the musical gets a run October 3 to 26 at Goodspeed Musicals' **Norma Terris Theatre** in **Chester.** The plot? War is made against the large flightless birds which are feeding on the wheat of local Australian farmers. Enter the Army. Sounds like some feathers will be flying—and a lot of musical fun. **goodspeed.org** 

Playwright Ken Ludwig (*Lend Me A Tenor, Crazy for You*) pays tribute to the great English farces of the 1930s and 1940s with the golf-themed country club romp titled *The Fox On the Fairway.* The comedy runs November 7 to 23 at the **Music Theatre of Connecticut in Norwalk.** musictheatreofct.com

It's going to be quite the homecoming when **Justin Silva**, who was born and raised in New Haven, brings his comedy show to the **Shubert Theatre** on October 3. For more traditional Broadway fare, our favorite is the popular Neil Diamond Broadway bio-musical *A Beautiful Noise* December 2 to 7. And over at the theater's new upstairs performing arts space, **Elm City's Cabaret**, we're intrigued by *Deconstructing The Beatles' 'Rubber Soul'* with Scott Freiman who will walk Beatles fans through the creation the classic 1965 album. **shubert.com** 



Tamilla Woodard. Photo Credit: Edward Winter

Who doesn't like a thriller on stage? **Hartford Stage** has a crime tale that inspired Alfred Hitchcock's 1948 film *Rope* starring Jimmy Stewart. This is a Jeffrey Hatcher's fresh stage adaptation, based on the play *Rope's End* by Patrick Hamilton. It's not so much a whodunnit but will-the-killers-be-caught? My bet's on the detective. The world premiere runs October 10 to November 2. **hartfordstage.org** 

Meet Spunk Banks, a strong, confident and charismatic man known for his disregard for social norms, including seducing another man's wife. For artistic director and dean James Bundy's final season at **New Haven's Yale Repertory Theatre**, there's Zora Neale Hurston's rediscovered play *Spunk*, which is based on her short story. It will run October 3 to 25. There will be new songs, arrangements, and music for this theatrical fable about the triumph of love set in Eatonville, Florida, the first incorporated all-Black town in America. **yalerep.org** 

Talk about language barriers. Set in an English-learning classroom in Iran, Sanaz Toossi's Pulitzer Prize-winning play *English* has its Connecticut premiere at **TheaterWorks Hartford** October 2 to November 2.

The Tony Award-nominated play is in partnership with New Haven's itinerant **Long Wharf Theatre** which will present the play January 16 to February 1 at SCSU's Kendall Drama Lab. (For its fall show, Long Wharf Theatre will present in association with The Sol Project, Latinx Playwrights Circle and the WP Theater, Monet Hurst-Mendoza's play *Torera* at the **WP Theater in New York City.** It's about a Mexican woman who dreams of becoming a bullfighter. It will play September 20 to October 19 in New York City.) **twhartford.org** 

With seven Tony Award nominations and two wins, Sutton Foster (last seen in the Broadway revival of *Once Upon a Mattress*) returns to the **Ridgefield Playhouse** for a concert on November 20. **ridgefieldplayhouse.org** 

What's love got to do with it? Apparently plenty if you're talking about the Broadway tour of the musical *Tina*, which arrives at **The Palace Theatre** in Waterbury November 1 and 2. If one Tina Turner isn't enough there's a trio of Tinas in this bio-musical presenting the sizzling singer at three different stages of her career and tumultuous life. **palacetheaterct.org** 



To celebrate the 10th anniversary of *Hamilton*, the landmark musical (and still one of the top tickets on Broadway) makes a return run at **The Bushnell** in Hartford November 4 to 16. And, speaking of dynamic political leaders, **Pete Buttigieg** will speak on democracy and the future of politics as part of The Connecticut Forum at The Bushnell in Hartford on November. 20.

One more event you won't want to miss at **The Bushnell**. On October 26, the Tony Award-nominated (twice) **Jeremy Jordan** will be in concert. (His vocals in Broadway's *Floyd Collins* were thrilling. Hartford theater fans might remember him from an early career gig at TheaterWorks in *And a Little Dog Laughed*.) **bushnell.org** 

"More than half of modern culture depends on what one shouldn't read," says a character in Oscar Wilde's epigram-packed comedy, *The Importance of Being Earnest*, which will kick off **Playhouse on Park** in West Hartford's MainStage season running October 28 to November 15. This sparkling satire gleefully skewers love, marriage, and high society. **playhouseonpark.org** 

**A Contemporary Theatre of Connecticut** (A.C.T.) in Ridgefield presents the Broadway musical *Almost Famous*, based on the beloved Cameron Crowe film and with music and lyrics by Tom Kitt. Set in 1973, it follows a teenage journalist

who lands the assignment of a lifetime: touring with an up-and-coming rock band for Rolling Stone magazine. The show runs October 18 to November 23. actofct.org

Acoustic guitarist Leo Kottke, now 80, plays The Katharine Hepburn Cultural Center (AKA "The Kate") at Old Saybrook. Kottke, known for a fingerpicking style that draws on blues, jazz, and folk music, made his major label in 1971 with "Mudlark," and continued to demonstrate his instrumental skills with "Greenhouse," "My Feet Are Smiling," "Dreams and All That Stuff" and "Chewing Pine." thekate.org

Two rock giants come to the **Mohegan** Sun Arena in Uncasville: Eric Clapton on September 20 and Sting on November 18. As member of the bands The Yardbirds. Blind Faith and Cream as well as a stunning solo career, Clapton is a guitar god. Sting is legendary, too, selling more than 100 million albums from his combined work with The Police and as a solo artist.mohegansun.com

Over at Foxwoods Resort Casino in Mashantucket, the music legends continue to come to Connecticut with the still-fabulous Diana Ross on stage November 1, and John Legend on November 8 celebreates the 20th anniversary of his breakout album "Get Lifted." For those with a swinging rockabilly bent, there are those cool cats, the Stray Cats with Brian Setzer on November 7. foxwoods.com

Over at the Peoples Bank Arena in Hartford, there's another rockpop legend: Stevie Nicks performing in concert on October 25, one of only eight dates she'll be playing in the U.S. I'm feeling twirly already. peoplebankarena.com

Fans of Monty Python, Fawlty Towers and the film A Fish Called Wanda (and many other comic gems), rejoice! Brit wit John Cleese will present *Not Dead Yet*: John Cleese and The Holy Grail at 50 at Stamford's Center for the Arts at The Palace Theatre on October 16. It will include a screening of the original film, a conversation with Cleese "where he'll share behind-the-scenes stories, wit, and wisdom—assuming he remembers any of it." And keeping with our theme of touring rock and pop legends, Graham Russell and Russell Hitchcock of Air Supply ("Lost in Love," "All Out of Love," "Every Woman in the World," "The One That You Love," "Here I Am") perform its 50th anniversary celebration at the theater, too. palacestamford.org

Dubbed "the colorful Mozart of Gen Z" by The New York Times, Jacob Collier's radically joyous and genrebridging music earned him seven Grammy wins (and 15 nominations). He plays UConn's Jorgensen Center for the Performing Arts in Storrs on October 18. Then for something equally cool, there's Compagnie Herve Koubi performing in Sol Invictus. The









Jeremy Jordan

movement collective of 17 male and female dancers combines contemporary and urban dance movements, capoeira, ballet and martial arts with powerful imagery and inspired choreography. **jorgensen.uconn.edu** 

Just when you think there's not any more variations you can do with that holiday perennial *A Christmas Carol*, along comes *A Sherlock Carol*. No mystery why **Westport Country Playhouse** turned to this doubling of literary icons in a playful retelling by Mark Shanahan,based on characters created by Charles Dickens and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. It runs December 13 to 21.

There is yet one more variation of the Dickens classic at the **Legacy Theater** in Branford December 3 to 14. *Scrooge and Marley* is musical prequel, following how young Marley and Scrooge crossed paths, became business partners and "how one man's ultimate sacrifice is another man's redemption". It's based on the awardwinning book *Jacob T. Marley* by R. William Bennett.

Legacy Theater also winds up its popular Sunday Broadway Concert Series, a great chance to see terrific Broadway performers in an intimate setting, with stage, concert and cabaret star **Karen Mason** (pictured right) (Mamma Mia!, Hairspray,

Wonderland) on October 26. westportplayhouse.org

This is offbeat and intriguing—and I'm there at the College Street Music Hall in New Haven: Accomplished woodworkers Nick Offerman (from Parks and Recreation—he's known as an actor, too) and Lee Buchanan present "an evening

of conversation and tomfoolery" with *Little Woodchucks*, their illustrated woodworking guide, "chock-full of projects to engage the whole family and teach young craftsmen the satisfaction of a job well done." The book tour event on October 17 has a mixture of conversation, hands-on woodworking demonstrations, singing, laughs, and, hopefully, no slivers. On October 25 there's another blast from the past with **Bachman-Turner Overdrive**, famous for the hits "Let it Ride," "Roll on Down the Highway," "Takin' Care of Business,""Looking Out for #1," and "You Ain't Seen Nothin' Yet." **collegestreetmusichall.com** 

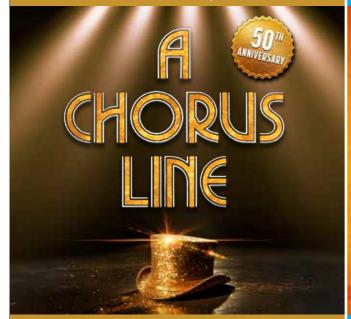
There's always something entertaining from a global perspective at Wesleyan University's Center for the Arts in Middletown. The menu is international this fall but a standout is *Ukraine Lives!* by the Ukrainian Bandurist Chorus of North America in its first Connecticut concert since 2007. Formed in Kyiv in 1918, the show will celebrate Ukraine's cultural heritage through music—and its survival against waves of tyranny—and will feature the traditional 60-stringed instrument, the bandura. wesleyan.edu

Remember the great 1999 documentary Buena Vista Social Club? How about the

terrific Broadway musical from last season of the same name? Did you miss it? Well, on September 28 at the **Garde Arts Center** in New London there's **The Buena Vista Orchestra**, under the direction of Jesus "Aguaje" Ramos, the original orchestra leader, composer and trombonist of The Buena Vista Social Club—and featuring key players from throughout the legendary Cuban



# GOODSPEED MUSICALS



**SEPT 5 – OCT 26** 

THE GOODSPEED, East Haddam



goodspeed.org • 860.873.8668

UNITED 
SENNHEISER
SMITH FARM GARDENS



group's history. gardearts.org

Speaking of dance, there's *Iluminate* on September 27 at the **Warner Theater** in Torrington. Named "Best New Act in America" by TV show *America's Got Talent* in 2011, the multi-sensory show is a fantastic fusion of cutting edge technology and dance with performers outfitted with customized LED suits synced to the choreography. warnertheatre.org

On September 27, the Yale Schwarzman Center in New Haven will present playwright and solo performer Priyanka Shetty with her one-woman show *The Elephant in the Room.* The play is described as "a witty, dark comedy about an Indian metalhead and software-engineer-turned-actor who must navigate life as an immigrant arriving in Trump's America."

For dance fans on October 25, there's *Visionary Steps: Balanchine & Beyond* with dancers from the New York City Ballet in a special event created by principal dancer **Adrian Danchig-Waring**.

As a huge fan of MacArthur genius grant recipient **Taylor Mac**, I look most forward to his annual holiday extravaganza, *Holiday Sauce* on December 13, which blends music, burlesque, "and random acts of fabulousness in the most subversive and cathartic event of the season." **schwarzman.yale.edu** 

We all know that King Lear is losing his mind. Dan Colley and Company take it a step further—make that two steps—in the stage production of *Lost Lear* on October 21 at the Quick Center for the Arts at Fairfield University. This moving and darkly comic interpretation of Shakespeare's play is told from the point of view of Joy, an elderly person with dementia, recalling when she was in her 30s when she played the title role in an *avant garde* production. On a lighter note, be sure to catch one of my favorite musicians at the center, the sublime John Pizzarelli and The Swing 7 on October 3. quickcenter.fairfield.edu

Catholic guilt, neighborhood gossip, and family secrets: What's not to like? And you can find them all in the '70s-set comedy



# ICONS + **LANDMARKS**

# A NEW 3-PART **PODCAST SERIES**

Episode 212:

# INGREDIENTS FOR REVOLUTION:

Feminist Restaurants Featuring **Bloodroot Restaurant** 

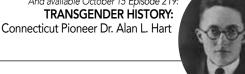






Episode 215: CONNECTICUT'S WILD VISIONARY: Children's Author Maurice Sendak

> And available October 15 Episode 219: TRANSGENDER HISTORY:



Streaming at ctexplored.org







With the generous support of







Incident of Our Lady of Perpetual Help plays October 2 to 28 at Ivoryton Playhouse in Essex. ivorytonplayhouse. org

If only walls could talk. But for the Madison Lyric Stage they sing. The company presents Four Murders in Forty Years, an evening featuring operatic excerpts and one-act operas arranged to follow a central concept: People in a tenement apartment over four decades and the events within those walls. The production features La Voix Humaine ("The Human Voice") by Francis Poulenc and Jean Cocteau, presented in English, followed by The Medium by Gian Carlo Menotti. The show runs September 19 to 21. madisonlyricstage.org

Boo! Hartford Symphony Orchestra's Pop Series will feature Tim Burton's The Nightmare Before Christmas, a fabulously wild PG film accompanied by the full lush sound of a symphony Orchestra. The music/ film event will play October 25 at The Bushnell's Mortensen Hall. For



traditional classical music, more there's Beethoven and Sibelius at the Bushnell's Belding Theater, on October 17 to 19. Under the direction of Viswa Subbaraman, the orchestra performs a program highlighted by Beethoven's Piano Concerto No. 3, a masterful balance of stormy intensity and lyrical beauty performed by guest artist pianist Drew Petersen. hartfordsymphony.org

Something stirring will emerge no doubt from Montgomery Variations, a

November 2 concert by the New Haven Symphony Orchestra at Woolsey Hall under the baton of conductor and music director Perry So. It promises to be a powerful program with themes of resilience and remembrance through Margaret Bonds' "Montgomery Variations," community singing, and "Sanctum" by NHSO Composerin-Residence Courtney Bryan. Also featured will be pianist Courtney Bryan. newhavensymphony.org 💜

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.



- -Preventative care such as routine physicals
- -Behavioral Health
- -Cancer screening
- -Gender-affirming hormone therapy
- -Hepatitis C treatment
- -HIV prevention and treatment (including PrEP)
- -Testing for sexually transmitted infections
- -Medication-Assisted Treatment (MAT) for Substance Abuse Disorders

For an appointment, call or text:

860-528-1359



Visit our website and follow us on social media for up-to-date information:

https://www.firstchc.org/ https://www.facebook.com/firstchc





EDUCATION //



# **Connecticut Colleges Work to Support Transgender Students**

By MORGAN SHAY / All photos courtesy of the named organizations.

mid recent policy changes—including the shutdown of DEI initiatives and LGBTQ+support groups across many states—transgender college students are facing increased uncertainty.

However, in recent conversations with DEI professionals, including Dr. John-Paul Chaisson-Cardenas, Vice President of DEI of the Connecticut

State Community College
System, and Kelvin Rutledge,
Associate Vice President for
Institutional Inclusive Strategies
& Change Management at
Southern Connecticut State
University, there is reason
for students to feel reassured.
On a federal level, there is
controversy and uncertainty,
which can leave students feeling
vulnerable. However, on the
state level, Connecticut remains
relatively protected in terms of
LGBTQ+ rights.

"At the state level, there's nothing particularly pressing or emerging right now that's causing concern. We're paying much closer attention to developments at the federal level specifically, how programs, policies, or practices that ensure access and opportunity for certain groups might be challenged," said Kevin

Rutledge, Associate Vice President for Institutional Inclusive Strategies and Change Management at Southern Connecticut State University. "We're actively tracking court cases to see whether those rationales will be used to target other policies."

Chaisson-Cardenas echoes Rutledge and explains his commitment to protecting the rights of his students. "My job is to reassure them that we will protect their civil rights as written in both federal and state law. Remember, state law is strong in this area."

Both Rutledge and Chaisson-Cardenas explain that within their DEI departments at their respective schools, they are going above and beyond to ensure transgender students feel supported and seen during the current political uncertainty. Whether that be encouraging students to come to their offices to voice their concerns, providing educational resources such as

guides on their website, or community-centered events through LGBTQ+ organizations on campus. Cardenas wants people to know "when our students are in our walls, we want to make it a safe space for all of them. Even though there's a lot of stuff going up federally that, quite frankly, none of us quite understand, this space is safe."



SCSU is dedicated to student support and engagement.





Students at the SCSU Involvement Fair

Chaisson-Cardenas says that Connecticut State
Community Colleges have and will continue to provide
the training to create safe spaces, as they recently
underwent special training to create these for all
campuses. "Many of our staff and faculty have gone
through training already, and people can recognize
the completion of this training because they'll see the
symbol either in a sticker or on their door. That is a
symbolic gesture that says, right here in this office, in
this space, you should feel safe."

Additionally, the Connecticut State Community College System published an educational guide that came out this past April. The guide, titled *Creating an Equitable and Inclusive Environment for Transgender Students at Connecticut State Community College*, provides information such as the gender-neutral bathroom policy, the importance of using the right pronouns, and additional resources such as those pertaining to mental health. "Those guides are really designed to support our faculty, staff, and students in supporting each other," said Chaisson-Cardenas. "It's about helping everyone find a sense of belonging."

Rutledge also wants students to know that "as an institution we are committed to supporting our students wherever they come from or whoever they are. If there's any fundamental message [we communicate], that is not changing."

Rutledge explains how one of his main commitments is to connect students to resources including their Sexuality and Gender Equality center (SAGE), specifically their PRISM LGBTQIA organization. Rutledge wants students to know the support that SCSU has to offer, specifically for their LGBTQ+ students. "With the PRISM experience, sometimes there's an activity, other times a meeting agenda that changes weekly throughout the fall and spring semesters," said Rutledge. "Additionally, there's an opportunity for trans students if they choose to come together and facilitate an ongoing weekly trans experience."



Additionally, SCSU has an LGBTQ+ faculty and staff network. "[It is] a collective group of faculty and staff who are available for student support and engagement. This allows faculty and staff to show up for trans individuals, whether that's connecting to resources off campus or just being able to have a support system oneon-one," said Rutledge.

Rutledge adds that his priority is having these one-onone conversations with students so that they can voice their concerns. "I always let people speak, and then I ask, were you speaking for me just to listen to you? Or were you speaking for a response and action? And if you can't come into the office a virtual interview is possible, too".

The possibility of shifting policies serves as a reminder now more than ever that the most important thing you can do is speak up, and stand up for what you believe in, whether you are a part of the transgender community or just an ally. As Dawn Ennis, Journalist and University of Hartford professor says, "Support your trans friends and peers. They need it. Maybe take one of us out to lunch, buy us a coffee, ask if there's anything they can do. The number one thing allies need to do is stand up when legislation has passed, contact representatives, go to town halls, go to protests and demonstrations when someone makes a joke that targets trans or non-binary people. Stand up, speak out, fight back, make people aware that that's not cool."

# **Connecticut is Here** to Support You

Triangle Community Center (TCC): Based in Norwalk, Connecticut, TCC is the region's largest non-profit for LGBTO+ people in Connecticut. Resources at TCC for those who are transgender include their gender affirming closet which provides gender affirming items such as chest binders, as well as a sewing machine, so people can also come in and alter clothing if need be. Additionally, TCC provides peer support groups both virtually and in person, open to anyone from the state. They are open Monday-Friday 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. There's also a form on their website that allows you to sign up to volunteer with TCC or to start a group or program if one isn't already offered. Visit ctpridecenter.org.

# **PFLAG Hartford**

PFLAG Hartford provides support, education, and advocacy for LGBTQ+ people and their families. They see what the community is going through now and how important it is not to just take things for granted. The rights that have been gained, are at risk if community support is not strong. PFLAG Hartford provides support groups online and in person, called Rainbow Group's





TCC's clothing swap.

(applicable to anyone who identifies as LGBTQ+.) Additionally, they provide support groups for parents, allies, or caregivers. Regarding the current uncertainty for transgender legislation, PFLAG Co-President Lindsey Pasquale said "We have people working in government affairs and staying actively engaged with everything happening both nationally and at the state level. They're able to share that information with our different chapters and coordinate with other national groups". With PFLAG, you're able to get the support you need locally, but you also have avenues to get involved in on the advocacy and for the different issues affecting our communities. See more at pflaghartford.org.

# Additional Support throughout the Connecticut State Community College System:

Northwestern administrative staff have partnered with the LGBTQ+ group, Flourish Club, for social programming and open dialogues during weekly club meetings.

Middlesex hosts a bi-weekly Relaxation Station that provides a safe space for relaxing activities and

open discussions. They also host monthly Courageous Conversations in the library.

Three Rivers hosts Brewed Thoughts once a month; students are invited to engage in conversation with their peers facilitated by a member of the mental health coalition. Free tea and wellness activities are provided for those who wish to listen or engage in calming activities. Three Rivers hosts a Here, Queer, No Fear: LGBTQ+ Support Group offered on campus, hosted by Norwich Human Services. Norwalk offers Our Space, a weekly drop-in group for students interested in LGBTQIA2S+ student success to come together and chat, get support, and build community.

# Additional Support Groups through 211 Connecticut:

Other groups doing work for transgender young adults include Q Plus, Prism and Middlesex Health through their Center for Gender Medicine and Wellness. Additional information for the support groups and resources provided by these organizations can be found through the 211 CT. Search for support groups at **211ct.org**. **V** 



# **POLL DANCING:**

**Just How LGBTQ+ Friendly is Connecticut?** 

By RANDY B. YOUNG

an underlying truth, as in Edgar Allen Poe's "The Telltale Heart." On a sailboat, however, "telltales" are visual indicators of how the wind is filling the sails. Usually made of ribbon, they are attached to sails to gauge the wind at different heights, aiding with a directional heading. Often, however, they give conflicting information, yielding one reading at the top of a sail and a different interpretation at the bottom.

"telltale" is a fact or admission that discloses

There are tons of polls assessing views on the LGBTQ+ community: where is the best city to live, where's the best Pride event, the best drag bar, the best place housing market, the friendliest place to vacation...or even the top Pride events at drag bars on your vacation."

June 2025 marked 10 years since the US Supreme Court effectively legalized same-sex marriage, but polls remain a skewed depiction of life for LGBTQ+ individuals—a group that remains proudly resistant to simplistic categorization.

The telltales related to Connecticut life for LGBTQ+ citizens are inconsistent and given to disparate interpretation.

# How "Clever"

A 2023 study by real estate data company Clever ranked Hartford, Connecticut as number two out of the top fifteen LGBTQ+-friendly US cities, ranking just behind San Franciso and just ahead of third-ranked Las Vegas.

Clever looked at 14 criteria including the LGBTQ+ population, the number of gay bars and Pride events, state and local laws, equality scores from the Human Rights Campaign, the percentage of residents opposing marriage equality.

While Hartford was only credited with 0.08 gay bars per 100,000 residents, it counters with a high number of PFLAG chapters, and just 11 percent of its residents opposing samesex marriage.

"From being the second state to legalize same-sex marriage in 2008 to passing the Parentage Act in 2021, Connecticut is a place for everyone—all our fun is LGBTQ+ friendly fun," the Connecticut Tourism Bureau website (CTVisits.com) boasted.

# From Poll to Poll

There have been other polls which place Connecticut in good standing.

"We were ranked second in the US for 'Best Place to Open a Business/Do Business," said Greater Connecticut Gay



Lesbian Chamber of Commerce (ctglc. org) executive director John Pica-Sneeden.

"Then we were ranked sixth in the country in a National Association of Realtors survey assessing the 'Best Place for LGBTQ People to Buy or Rent." Pica-Sneeden added.

Statistics can be ignored, bent, or warped to relate almost any message, however, and many studies don't even solicit opinions of actual LGBTQ+ populations.

### **Down to Business**

Many within the LGBTQ+ community feel that tourism, business, or even word-of-mouth are better gauges of good news for Connecticut's diverse population.

"Every few years we see different kinds of surveys," Connecticut Convention and Sports Bureau (CTMeetings.org) Communications Manager Laura Soll. "We also get them for other ethnic, racial, and political persuasions identifying top places to vacation or hold a meeting. I don't know if we're seeing a bump in groups that want to come here related to the (Clever) survey, but we have certainly worked with groups in the LGBTQ community."

# A Nice Place to Visit

Perhaps a truer gauge of support for the gay community is anecdotal evidence: the buzz within the Connecticut community, the attendance at festivals, or the rooms booked at hotels or B&B's.

Shane Engstrom, Director of Connecticut's "Out Film Festival," said 2,000 people attended the festival in June, either live or virtually.

"We had 700 films submitted for evaluation over the past year," he said, "and we've already received 58 movies to consider for next year."

"Attendance for the 2025 festival was 30 percent higher than last year," he added. "We're still not quite up to (prepandemic) levels, but even going out to (mainstream) theaters has dropped off since COVID."

The numbers also reflect a large audience from areas outside of Connecticut.

"Twenty-five percent of our tickets were sold to people from out of state," Engstrom said. "Those attendees have been mostly from surrounding states like Massachusetts or New York."

"The Out Film Festival is one of the few large events that people can flock to," Engstrom added. "Maybe they're more attracted to it now because of political environment, or maybe because there aren't a lot of LGBTQ spaces for people to go to."

Promoting events and places which could draw more from the LGBTQ+ communities to Connecticut, the State Tourism Bureau works to highlight pride events and attractions and is the first-ever state to join the LGBTQ+ Travel Association (IGLTA) at the global partner level.

Split into districts, central Connecticut tourism—including Hartford—is within the domain of the Middletown Events Coordinator, Marketing/PR and Tourism Office.

Central Connecticut tourism administrator Haley Stafford said she couldn't assess how various polls have gauged LGBTQ+ friendliness, but she can measure better by just looking out of her window.

"We're actually right in Middletown, and we have a rainbow crosswalk right where we're located, and there's also a sign that says how our Chamber hosts Middletown Pride," Stafford said. "We have visitors to our building saying that they were just driving through and had to stop to see the crosswalk and check out the downtown.

"Last year we had probably four or five people call us to specifically say they were moving here, and they knew they could be safe here."

# Who to Trust?

In 2023, Pew Research published research into the growing acceptance of the LGBTQ+ community beyond the Clever survey.

The Pew survey found social progress and acceptance are growing, but it also noted discrimination targeting transgender adults.

While the study presents another sign of progress, Pica-Sneeden remains skeptical that any studies prior to the 2024 presidential election remain a

valid indicator of LGBTQ+ life.

"We'll reshare [positive survey data] when it comes up," Stafford explained, "but we usually share more information from people—real life experiences. I feel like there's more credibility when the information is coming from real people."

"It's funny that we're looking at this question in 2025," Pica-Sneeden said. "With all of the turbulence we have in this country related to the issue of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI), I've been banging my head against the wall trying to connect with corporate partners, and no one takes my call, which is a disgrace."

"Are people moving into the state?"
Pica-Sneeden posed. "Real estate is so bloody expensive here, and my realtors in the Gay and Lesbian Chamber have good weeks and bad weeks; it's like a rollercoaster ride."

Progress, Pica-Sneeden said, is a painstaking process, particularly when the climate is so unpredictable.

"I'm in the process of trying to pass a new law through the state, but nobody answers my phone calls to sit down and talk about it," he said. "In terms of procurement diversity, the law includes black, brown, women, veterans, and the disabled, but it doesn't even include the queer community.

"I've been talking for over three years to different people, different politicians, and everybody looks at me like I'm some lobbyist," Pica-Sneeden said, "but my husband and I have a son who's bi-racial and aged 19. I'm doing it for him and everybody else who's marginalized. At the [Gay and Lesbian] Chamber of Commerce, we have about 200 members, and we have corporate partners, but we need more because of the stupidity happening in Washington."

# **Telling Tales**

If surveys and data can be easily manipulated, and it has become harder to predict national policies, where do we turn for guidance or even a measure of the measure of civility toward the LGBTQ+ community?

Perhaps we might take the polls with a grain of salt and ask a member of the actual LGBTQ+ community. They'll have plenty of tales to tell.













One consistent price for your internet

No strings attached

WiFi equipment and unlimited data included

All-in means all-in

No annual contracts

Flexibility guaranteed







