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WINTER 2025-2026

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EDITOR'S NOTE //



Wishing You Peace and Hope

In a chaotic time—and this is proving to be one—we are challenged to find peace and rest. A year ago when I was writing this note, we had no idea of what was to come. Since then, it has not been an easy time for many, particularly for members of the LGBTQ+ community who have been challenged in so many ways.

Throughout literature, winter is portrayed as a time of rest and rejuvenation, a time to look inward and seek for that peace, no matter what else may be going on. We strive to take a pause as “the busy world is hushed,” as the prayer goes, despite the external turbulence. It is not always easy, but even the smallest respite can reenergize us and help us to keep going.

We can also find hope in the work of people and organizations who maintain their commitment to service, preserving rights, and honoring the humanity of everyone they encounter. You’ll find, we hope, some inspiration in these pages. Jane Latus profiles many of the non-profits serving LGBTQ+ constituencies in Connecticut with an update on how they are faring in these times. I expect you’ll be inspired by these dedicated, passionate people.

Alex Dueben profiles Tony Palmieri and his boutique bakery/coffee shop The Flour Shop. Palmieri has devoted himself to

creating wonderful treats for his customers and—every bit as importantly—a safe space for people to gather, supported in being their authentic selves.

We are particularly honored to have Reverend Elder Aaron Miller of the Metropolitan Community Church in Hartford contribute our Last Word. His message of drawing community together through loving kindness and compassion is one we can all take to heart.

In Arts, Frank Rizzo profiles actor/author David Greenspan who in addition to all his accomplishments underscores the necessity of art and powerful storytelling.

In health and wellness, both the Leonard Litz Foundation and Mental Health Connecticut (MHC) are committed to serving LGBTQ+ individuals. Leonard Litz provides grants to organizations that support community programs, and MHC provides actionable tips for dealing with Seasonal Affective Disorder. Kim Adamski looks at the use of Ozempic in the LGBTQ communities, as well as the sensitive issue of non-traditional relationships including polyamory.

There’s so much more in these pages and online at ctvoice.com. Please write to us there if you have stories you’d like us to share or people who are making a difference for our communities throughout the state.

This year, as we gather with our biological and chosen families, we hope you can take time to revel in the joy of togetherness and the strength that brings.

On behalf of all of us at *Connecticut Voice*, warmest wishes for a happy holiday season.

Chris

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“I PRAY THIS
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GENTLE AND
KIND—A SEASON
OF REST FROM
THE WHEEL OF
THE MIND.”

—John Geddes, *A Familiar Rain*



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Belonging is baked into everything Tony's Flour Shop does.

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CONTRIBUTORS //



FRANK RIZZO
Frank Rizzo profiles David Greenspan (page 26) and true crime author Willam Mann (page 14). 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 tackles the complex issue of consensual non-monogamy (page 16) and looks at the use and challenges of weight-loss drugs in the LGBTQ+ community (page 36). 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 tells the story of a romantic proposal...and the special ring created for the event. (page 18) 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.



JANE LATUS
Jane wrote our story on non-profits (page 59) Jane profiles Dr. Kenneth Abriola (page 54) and is the force behind our Pride coverage and schedule (page 58). She and her wife live in Canton with an escalating number of cats. They have three grown children: two sons (one trans and one gay) and a foster daughter.



ALEX DUEBEN
Alex did our cover story on Tony's Flour Shop (page 46) and talked with author Susan Jane Bigelow (page 12). 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 compiled 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.



AMY S. WHITE
Amy shares the simple elegance of a frittata (page 56) She lives, teaches, cooks, eats, and writes in Eastern Connecticut. You can find out more about her at her website: amyswhite.com



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"SCIENCE FICTION IS BATHED IN QUEERNESS":

A Conversation With Susan Jane Bigelow



Susan Jane Bigelow

Being trans is such a weird experience," writer Susan Jane Bigelow said in a recent conversation.

I suggested that's why she writes fantasy and science fiction, and she said yes, but "Also just because it's cool. In the end, we write about what's fun and interesting to us." Bigelow is a writer of science fiction and fantasy novels and short stories including her recent books *Flight of the Scarlets* (2023) and *Siphany and the Whale* (2024), but the librarian is known to many in Connecticut for writing extensively about local politics, which she stepped away from a few years ago.

"I feel like I've always written fiction," Bigelow said. "It's

something that's always been part of me. I was this really lonely little weird kid, so I spent a lot of time by myself just making up stories," she said of her childhood in Newington. "In 2004, after Bush won a second term, I was extremely agitated. I did the National Novel Writing Month, and I wrote a book about fascism." That book was *Broken*, the first book in her four volume Extrahuman Union series, which combined science fiction and superheroes.

"The books got progressively more and more queer as I kept writing them," Bigelow said of the series. "I transitioned around in 2010-2011, and the further that I got into that, the more queer everything got. I think I'd always wanted to do that, but I gave myself permission to write queer stuff."

Bigelow's two recent novels are very different from each other. *Siphany* is a space opera about a character trying to be left alone, while *Scarlets* is magical girl fantasy story about a trans teenager in a boring town. The books also had very different processes. "For *Scarlets*, I thought, she can turn herself into a girl with a magic wand. Where can I go with this? And I started incorporating all these other things that I've thought about," she said. "*Siphany and the Whale* started as an experiment to see if I could build a world. I wanted to create a protagonist who was

autistic-coded, neurodivergent in some way."

"I came up with the idea of somebody who has a really comfortable spaceship. She's all alone and loves it. Then you throw a psychotic robot in, and the story flowed from there. Take a

character who's perfectly happy and content, and then you throw some chaos in," Bigelow said. "It's mean as hell, but it's great for stories."

"*Siphany and the Whale* came from an earlier version of myself, but over the decade that it took to get it published, I kept going back to it and changing it over time. Whereas *Scarlet* was something that I thought, I'm going to make something completely new and completely different from the

"I was this really lonely little weird kid, so I spent a lot of time by myself just making up stories."

other stuff that I've written. And I'm going to explicitly make it a trans story."

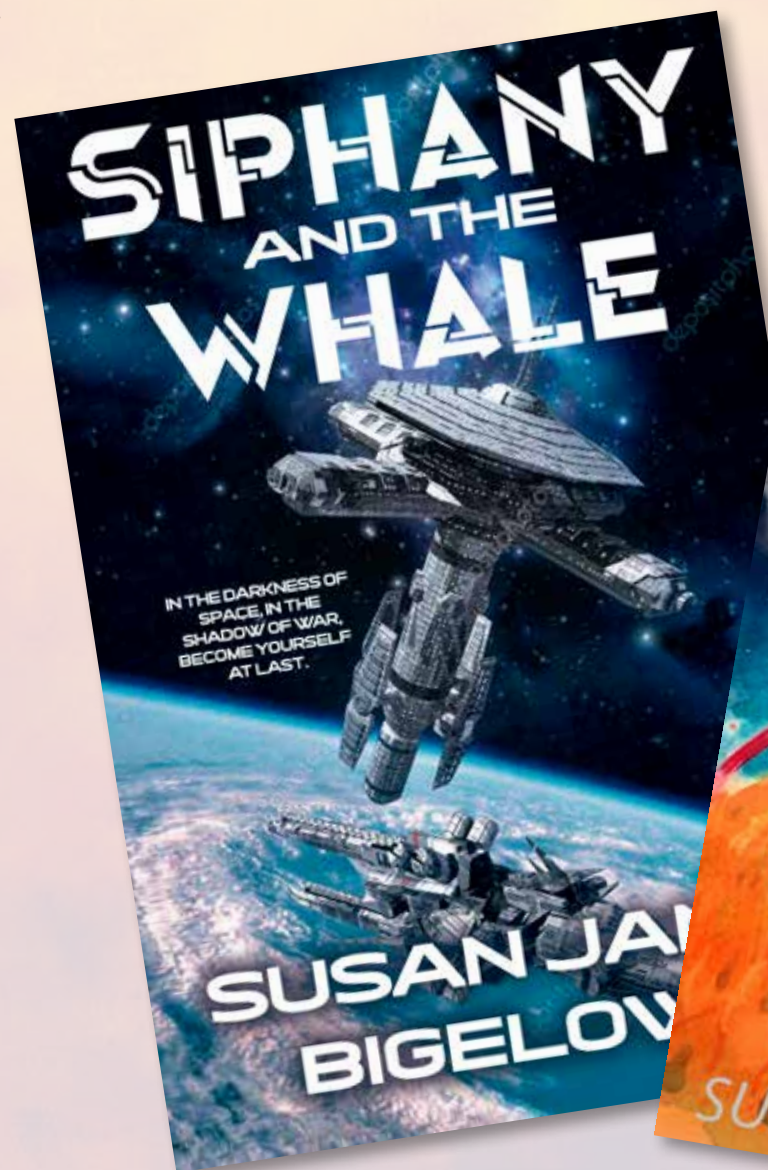
Bigelow said that she has plans for more of *Scarlet* and *Siphany* "and just more in general." The two recent books are her best work to my mind, and she agreed. "I feel like I'm getting better," she said. "I wish I had more time. I find myself busier than I thought I would be. I work with the Enfield Historical Society now. Everything that's going on in the world takes up space in my brain," she said.

"I've been playing around with genre a little bit and trying new things. I've got nine-tenths of a romance novel done. I've been reading nothing but sapphic romances for the past year and a half, and it feels a little embarrassing to admit, but I have so many ideas for romance novels."

Over the course of our conversation, Bigelow kept coming back to the frustration over publicity, working with small presses that went under, and trying to build a career as a writer despite her many books and being published in an impressive list of magazines and anthologies including *Lightspeed* and *Strange Horizons*. "It was very hard for a while to feel like I totally failed at it," she said.

"It took me a long time to understand that it's not me. It's just how the publishing world is. I have two choices. I can either wallow in it forever, which is a good option," Bigelow said with a laugh. "Or I can stay the hell with it and just keep writing what I want to write." 

—Alex Dueben





'Black Dahlia': A Cold Case Heats Up

Photo credit: Frank Rizzo

Biographer William Mann has a unique way of looking at his subjects—some famous, some infamous—through a more sensitive, sympathetic, and sometimes LGBTQ+ lens.

Mann is a *New York Times* best-selling author who has written about Hollywood's most glamorous stars, including Katharine Hepburn, Barbra Streisand, Marlon Brando, Elizabeth Taylor, Humphrey Bogart, and Lauren Bacall.

But he has also examined the city's dark side. In his popular 2014 book, *Tinseltown: Murder, Morphine, and Madness at the Dawn of Hollywood*, Mann chronicled the unsolved murder of legendary film director William Desmond Taylor.

Now in *Black Dahlia: Murder, Monsters, and Madness in Midcentury Hollywood*, Mann takes on another notorious cold case—the horrific murder in 1947 of 22-year-old Elizabeth Short. The book will be available in December.

The L.A. murder gained national attention because of the gruesome nature of the crime, which included the mutilation and bisection of Short's corpse. Over the years, the victim has been mischaracterized as a wayward sex worker, a gangster's gal, or as a deluded wannabe star. Even the media-invented name of the murder—"Black Dahlia"—evoked a *femme fatale* luridness that reflected the film noir of its day.

But Mann's book presents Short as a more complex and luminous character,

a portrayal brought together from various perspectives from people from her life and the years-long investigation that followed—and that later went off the rails—bringing her vividly to life, and showing "the real human being behind the myth."

In his book, Mann also explores "the male gaze" of the times, a trope that saw a pretty, single, independent, fun-loving woman with suspicion and a raised eyebrow. But as bits and pieces unfold in Mann's engrossing narrative, Short emerges

as a more complicated woman—one who survives by leveraging her wits, charm, and personality. If anyone, said Mann, Short reminded him of someone more like "a Tom Sawyer in ankle-strap shoes."

"I really wanted to get inside her character," Mann said during an interview in Provincetown, where the Middletown native now lives. "I also wanted sympathy for her, right from the start. I wanted people to like her—and she was very likable from all accounts. Everybody thought she was amazing."

Context of the Times

Mann also explores what the crime and its aftermath reveal about midcentury America "and why it's still relevant today." The book places Short's life in the context of the role of women in society, the rise of sexual nonconformity, and the undercurrents of homophobia—a salacious, lesbian angle was pursued by the press at the time, he said.

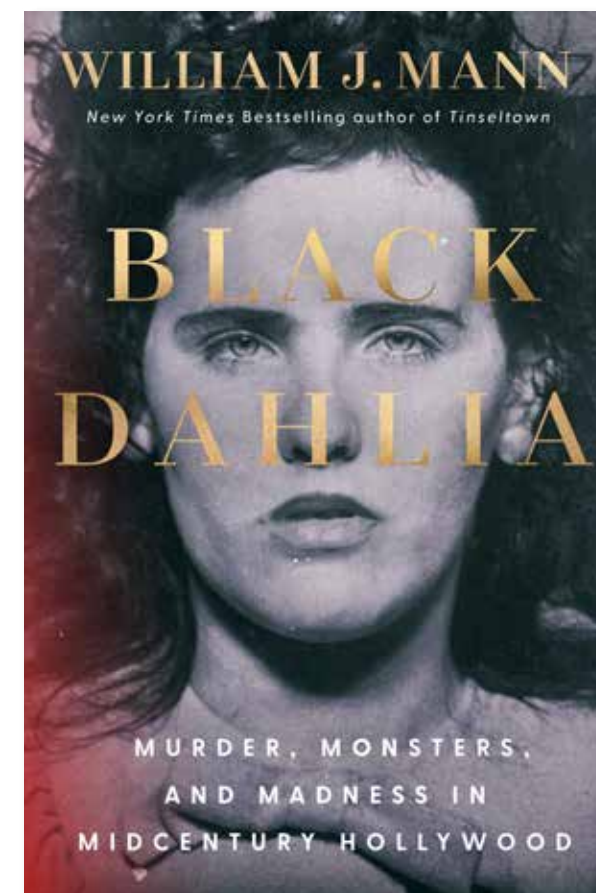
"The homophobia—as well as attitudes towards sex—was so prevalent in the way the investigation went forward," said Mann. "Elizabeth was either seen as a wanton woman who was out there trying to seduce men, or she was involved with predatory lesbians. Nobody could look at the fact that some man, some psychopathic man from his own twisted mind, committed this crime—and that it had nothing to do with Elizabeth."

Previous books and shows about the Short murder were always about advancing a solution to the whodunit and only presented the facts and perspectives that would support that theory, he said.

While Mann's research and writings do not lead to an "aha" moment where he suddenly reveals the murderer, he nonetheless clears many suspects typically named and comes up with some credible conclusions, based on a much fuller picture of Short's life, the times she lived, and more than 50 pages of footnotes in his book, based on five years of extensive research.

A reader could easily see in the way Mann has structured *Black Dahlia* into its gradually intensifying sections that one could imagine the book becoming the basis of yet another Netflix cold case documentary or dramatic series.

Tinseltown is now being made into a major documentary, reports Mann, "so, I could see something similar here," he said. Another of his books, 1998's *Wisecracker: The Life and Times of William Haines*, Hollywood's first "out" star, has been optioned for film for years, but Mann feels the current political climate is not right for that project to be made.



Memoir Next?

After many biographies and a half dozen novels—as well as a fantasy series under the pen name of Geoffrey Huntington, Mann said he is not sure what his next book will be, but he said it just might be about himself, adding that he's been working on a memoir.

It would no doubt make for a compelling read and a personal reflection of the changing times, including his work as a gay activist, journalist, and author from the '80s to the present. Mann has taught at New Britain's Central Connecticut State University, where he received his undergrad degree in 1984 and where he established its extensive LGBTQ+ archive.

Mann received his master's degree in 1988 from Wesleyan University in Middletown, and in the early '90s, was a co-editor and co-publisher at Hartford's first LGBTQ+ newspaper, *Metroline*. He also co-founded the first gay film festival in the state in 1987, Out Film CT. He met his husband, psychologist Timothy Huber, in 1988, and they have been married for the past 23 years.

In all of his books, Mann says, "My aim is to really get inside the person." Perhaps his next sensitive, sympathetic and LGBTQ+ lens will be on himself. 

—Frank Rizzo

Healthy, Happy, and Non-monogamous

Consensual, multiple-partner arrangements—a relationship style often referred to as “consensual non-monogamy” or CNM—are becoming increasingly common. One in five Americans report having engaged in CNM at some point in their lives, and that number is even higher for people in the LGBTQ+ community.

“We are seeing a lot more people reaching out for therapy to help navigate non-monogamy and polyamory,” says Kristen Dew, LMFT-S, CST, owner of Growth Therapy in Connecticut. Her work focuses on what some might call alternative sexual practices, like CNM and kink. “People seem really drawn to it because it is nuanced and allows for connections to develop in different ways.”

She’s right. There are many ways to structure a relationship within the CNM umbrella. One of the most widely known labels is polyamory. In simple terms, this means having multiple romantic or sexual relationships at one time. In a polyamorous arrangement, everyone is aware of each other’s relationships and may even interact with their “metamours” (the partner of your partner).

Other people may choose a don’t-ask-don’t-tell model, a closed multi-person relationship (such as a throuple), a hierarchical relationship structure, or a diversity of other options. The thing that each of these has in common is that the arrangement is pre-discussed and consented to by all parties and is responsive to the changing needs of the people

involved. This is what separates CNM from cheating, defined as having outside sexual relationships without your partner’s knowledge. Unlike cheating, CNM requires the knowledge and approval of all involved, and usually comes with a set of negotiated rules that satisfies each individuals’ needs and desires.

However, consensual nonmonogamy is no panacea. People practicing CNM experience relationship issues, just like those in more traditional relationships. In terms of physical health, people with multiple partners are at higher risk of STI and HIV infection. This is because the more sexual partners you have, the more chances you have to be exposed to an STI. There are, of course, ways to limit this risk. The simplest is to use condoms consistently. Condoms are cheap, easy to get, and effective in preventing STI’s and HIV. PrEP, or pre-exposure prophylaxis, is another useful precaution. It is more than 99 percent effective in preventing HIV transmission, but keep in mind that it does not prevent other STI’s. Internal condoms, dental dams, and lower-risk sexual activities are all valid ways to reduce one’s risk of infection, too.

Individuals with multiple partners should consider getting tested regularly for STI’s and HIV. If one

person in a non-monogamous relationship tests positive for an STI, or is exposed to one, everyone else in the arrangement should get tested, as well.

Now that I’ve covered physical health, I’d like to explore the aspects of CNM that can affect mental wellness. As with any relationship, communication is one of the biggest predictors of relationship health. However, in CNM, communication can be much more complicated, since there are more people. We need to consider person A’s relationship with person B, and at the same time, we also have to think about B’s relationship with C. There are A’s thoughts on B’s relationship with C and D’s relationship with A...You get the idea. Regular, clear discussion of feelings, concerns, and boundaries take on extra importance. “It’s easy to avoid sensitive topics of conversation until it reaches a breaking point,” says Kristen Dew. She recommends thinking about and processing your feelings before talking.



“Proactive communication and expressing feelings directly work best, even if it’s scary to have the hard conversations.”

Jealousy is a very normal emotion to feel. Within the CNM community, it may be construed as a moral failing, but that is simply untrue. Feeling jealous is a natural part of life. It doesn’t necessarily mean that CNM is wrong for you. Rather than bottling up these feelings, discuss them with your partners. You may just need reassurance, or you may need to renegotiate the terms of your relationship. Either way, communication is key.

At the same time, consensual nonmonogamy is not for everyone. Individual needs vary and some people prefer to have just one intimate relationship at a time. Maybe they don’t have the time to dedicate to

One relationship structure is not inherently better than the other! It’s vital that you build a relationship that meets your unique needs and expectations.

multiple relationships or aren’t interested in the complexities of multi-partner communication. It’s important to be honest with yourself about what type of relationship structure is healthiest for you. “Our society assumes that monogamy is the standard or ‘normal’ way to engage in sexual or romantic relationships,” says

Dew. One relationship structure is not inherently better than the other! It’s vital that you build a relationship that meets your unique needs and expectations.

Communicative non-monogamous relationships that consider the needs of everyone participating can be healthy and satisfying, just like monogamous ones. While societal norms and more complex communication patterns can add extra layers to these arrangements, they are not insurmountable! My number one rule when it comes to relationships is regularly talking about wants and needs, and this rule is applicable in CNM. If you’re considering a consensually non-monogamous relationship, remember to be safe, create healthy boundaries, and have fun!



—Kimberly Adamski



Putting a Ring on It

A rose may be a rose, may be a rose, but every engagement ring is far from the same. There's the choice of stone and setting, the differences in the cut, clarity, carat size, and color, and, most importantly, the story behind it. Did the couple pick it out together—or was it a complete surprise? Did it just come from a store (not that there's anything wrong with that) or is there some unusual family history behind it?

As it happens, there is a special background to the ring Patrick Hurst, a Connecticut-based insurance broker, gave to his fiancé Griffin Bartone, a competitive Irish dancer, earlier the year. Appropriately, it's an unusual ring for an unusual couple!

"Griffin and I have been together for 11 years," says Hurst. "We met at the University of Hartford as freshmen, and we've dating ever since. Shortly after we started dating, I became very close to his family, especially his grandmother. So not long ago, when she was on her deathbed, we told her we finally wanted to get married. And after she passed away, he was so sad about losing her that I wanted to do something special to make him really happy."

From there, an idea was born—with the help of Griffin's mother. "We knew that his grandmother was often at Lux Bond & Green; she had purchased everything from diamonds and gold to



Patrick (l) surprised Griffin with the proposal.

Rolexes and figurines at that wonderful jewelry store," says Hurst. "His mother told me that some of the grandmother's jewelry had been left to her family, and we decided that we could use the natural diamond from a pair of

her earrings to be the center of an engagement ring."

On top of the family's connection with Lux Bond & Green, Patrick was good friends with the store's marketing director, Sarah Grace Ward. She helped facilitate a



connection with Norma Green, a member of the founding Green family, who was instrumental in putting the ring together.

"Norma really helped design the ring with us," says Hurst. "Griffin is very particular; so, we all wanted to choose a ring that would really reflect him. I really liked the idea of putting little diamonds on the side. I thought that looked classic, timeless, very masculine—and just gaudy enough to be beautiful. Norma and the store's onsite gemologist, Terri Cinque, pulled out lots of diamonds for us to look through, which I admit was a bit overwhelming. Thankfully, we were able to meet with Norma three or four times, since I was constantly dragging my feet on making a decision. She never pressured us!"

Once Patrick made his final choice, the Lux Bond & Green team moved onto the final step, collaborating with world-renowned designer



Michael Bondanza, who created the CAD design and custom-crafted the ring. "It came out spectacularly," says Hurst. "It's such a fitting setting for such a precious family heirloom."

Just as no two rings are alike, the same goes for wedding proposals.

"We live in the historic district in Old Weathersfield, which is one of the oldest towns in the state. It is kind of like Salem, Massachusetts. We also had witch trials," says Hurst. "Anyway, there's a famous cove and beautiful gardens where we like to go on walks; the area is kind of hidden away. So, one night, I told him we had to go walk our dog—and Griffin just really didn't want to go out. But I convinced him he had to, and I just proposed to him there. He was very surprised. I think it was perfect."

While many of the wedding details have been finalized—it will take place in Ireland next May—there are still a couple of important decisions to still be made. "I don't have an engagement ring, and we don't know what we'll do about wedding rings," laughs Hurst. "We'll probably do something simple, but you never know!"

—Brian Scott Lipton

Photo Credit for engagement pics **Briley Bartone**. Other photos courtesy Lux, Bond & Green



Seasonal Impacts on Mental Health

Winter brings with it crisp air, snowy landscapes, and the anticipation of the holiday season. But it can also bring challenges for our mental health. Shorter days, colder weather, and the pressure of holiday expectations can intensify feelings of stress, sadness, or disconnection. For many, Seasonal Affective Disorder, loneliness, and holiday stress are especially difficult to manage during this time of year. These challenges can be compounded for LGBTQ+ individuals, who, due to external factors such as stigma and discrimination, face higher baseline risks of depression, anxiety, and social isolation. Understanding these factors, and the strategies that can help, can make a meaningful difference in navigating the winter months.

Seasonal Affective Disorder

Seasonal Affective Disorder, or SAD, is a type of depression linked to seasonal changes in daylight. Most people experience winter-pattern SAD, where symptoms begin in late fall or early winter and ease as spring approaches. Symptoms may include fatigue, loss of interest in activities, changes in sleep or appetite, increased anxiety, and feelings of hopelessness and guilt.

The risk of SAD increases with age and is more common in women. It also occurs more often in northern climates, such as New England, where winter days are especially short. Research suggests that reduced sunlight may disrupt the body's internal clock and lead to chemical changes in the brain.

The good news is that SAD can be effectively treated. Light therapy,

which mimics natural sunlight, has been shown to reduce symptoms. Vitamin D supplements, psychotherapy, and, in some cases, medication can also help. If you notice symptoms, reach out to a mental health professional.



Loneliness

Loneliness is more than simply being alone; it is the subjective feeling of being disconnected from others. A 2018 Cigna study revealed that nearly half of Americans report sometimes or always feeling alone, with younger generations reporting the highest rates of loneliness. Further research has shown that loneliness increases the risk of premature death by 26 percent and is as harmful to health as smoking 15 cigarettes a day.

Winter can intensify these feelings. Cold weather and shorter daylight hours reduce opportunities to connect, and the holiday season can magnify grief, missing loved ones, or strained family ties. Physical cold has even been shown to increase perceptions of loneliness, creating a cycle of isolation.

Experiences of stigma, discrimination, and rejection can put LGBTQ+ people at greater risk for loneliness. Many individuals report that winter and the holiday season amplify these feelings, especially when coupled with non-affirming environments or family rejection.

Combatting loneliness takes intention. Strategies include:

Invest in relationships: Schedule regular check-ins with family or friends. Even short daily interactions can help.

Stay active: Exercise, especially in a group setting, boosts both mood and connection.

Volunteer: Giving back provides purpose and builds community.

Make new connections: Participating in groups based on shared interests helps you meet new people and build a supportive network.

Limit social media: Too much scrolling often increases feelings of exclusion and comparison.

For All Ages, a nonprofit, creates meaningful opportunities for people of all ages to connect, learn, and thrive, improving mental and physical health along the way. Visit forallages.com for upcoming events and programs. If loneliness feels overwhelming, a mental health professional and peer support groups can provide safe spaces to share experiences.

The Holiday Season

The holidays are often painted as a joyful time, but research from the American Psychological Association shows that 89 percent of U.S. adults experience

stress during the winter holiday season. Nearly half say this stress interferes with their ability to enjoy the celebrations.

Top stressors include:

Financial strain: Nearly 60 percent worry about spending too much or not having enough to spend on gifts, travel, and celebrations.

Gift pressures: Finding “the perfect gift” is a source of stress for 40 percent of people.

Missing loved ones: For 38 percent, grief and absence make the holidays painful.

Overloaded schedules: From cooking to cleaning to traveling, 32 percent say the endless to-do lists feel overwhelming.

Family conflict and exclusion: Tensions and feelings of being left out can weigh heavily on mental health.

Overindulgence: Food, alcohol, and disrupted routines can affect both physical and mental wellbeing.

For LGBTQ+ individuals, these challenges often carry an added layer. Many report that the holidays amplify feelings of loneliness, stress, anxiety, and depression, particularly when returning to non-affirming family environments, concealing relationships to avoid conflict, or navigating rejection. The Trevor Project's “Holiday Crisis Trends” brief reveals that LGBTQ+ youth reach out less to crisis services during holidays like Christmas or Thanksgiving, followed by higher-than-average contacts immediately afterward. This suggests that being physically close to family, or in constrained, non-affirming settings, may limit access to help when it's needed most.



To cope with holiday stress, it's important to set realistic expectations, create and stick to a budget, and focus on experiences rather than material gifts. Allowing space for grief, asking for help when needed, and carving out moments of rest can ease pressure. Above all, try to embrace imperfection. The holiday season is about connection and meaning, not flawless execution.

Moving Toward Wellness

Winter can be a time of renewal, reflection, and connection when we intentionally care for our mental health. Whether you're navigating SAD, loneliness, or holiday stress, taking small, practical steps can reduce challenges and help restore balance. For LGBTQ+ individuals, affirming spaces, supportive

networks, and access to culturally competent mental health resources are particularly important.

For more resources, visit Mental Health Connecticut's Winter Wellness Toolkit, which includes more information, including a section on technology and mental health, activity sheets, stories of success, resources, and more. Follow Mental Health Connecticut on social media @mentalhealthct for uplifting tips and resources. The 2025-2026 Toolkit is presented by Nutmeg State Financial Credit Union.

Together, we can make this winter a season of wellness and connection. Visit mhconn.org/winter-wellness-with-mhc/

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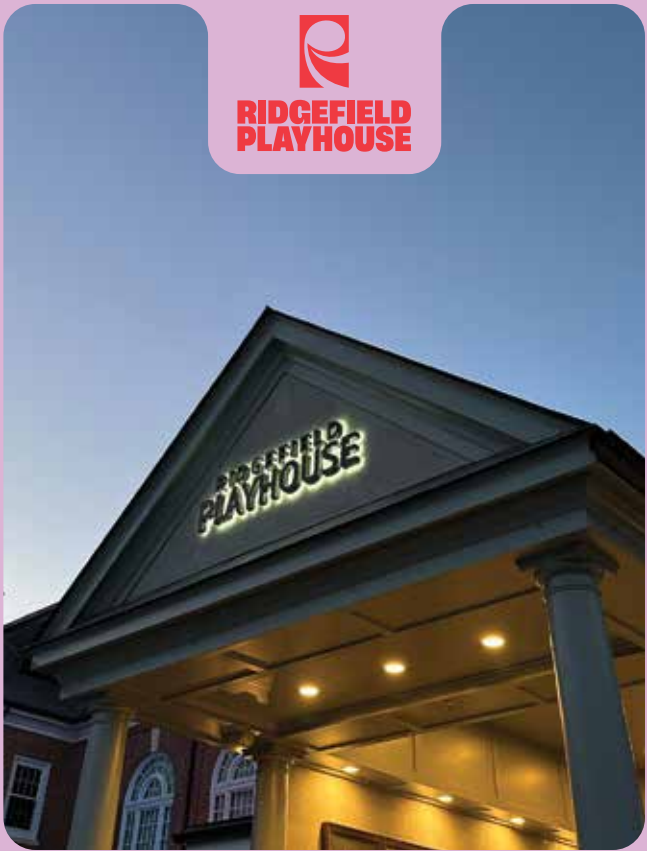
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AN ARTISTIC LIFE IN THE THEATER

David Greenspan's
Sui Generis Career

By FRANK RIZZO

First of all, I'm assuming you don't know David Greenspan. But if you do, you just might feel that you're part of a privileged sect, like wine connoisseurs who speak with breathless awe of a rare and rich vintage.

That's how some theater aficionados react when recalling a performance by Greenspan, whether it's his six-hour solo tour de force in 2017 of Eugene O'Neill's *Strange Interlude*, which it took him a year-and-a-half to memorize; his mesmerizing Harold in a 1996 revival of *The Boys in the Band*; or, most recently, as both an Anna Wintour-fierce media manager and a tender gay butler to a wayward royal in off-Broadway's *Prince Faggot* by Jordan Tannahill.

Greenspan's work as a writer has also earned fans and followers, and includes 2003's gender-playful farce *She Stoops to Comedy*, a 2009 collaboration with Stephin Merritt of The Magnetic Fields in a musical adaptation of Neil Gaiman's *Coraline*, his 2018 stage adaptation of Thornton Wilder's *The Bridge at San Luis Rey*, and his early breakout piece, the 1991 matricidal comedy *Dead Mother, or Shirley Not All in Vain*, in which he played a sensitive son as well as his Jewish mother returning from the dead to continue her harangues.

Playwright Tony Kushner (*Angels in America*) called that production "a masterpiece and one of the greatest evenings in the theater that I have ever spent. Kushner went on to later say: "I think David Greenspan is one of the most important theater artists of our time. I don't think it. I know it."

Greenspan has been a working theater artist for almost half a century, though he doesn't look his age. (He's in his late 60s.) In person, Greenspan has a worldview serenity of a humanities professor, a soft-yet-specific voice of a therapist, and a slender physique of a retired dancer, all which belies the striking figures he projects in characters that fill a life—and a stage.

Photo by Aaron Estrin



Strange Interlude. Photo credit Carol Rosegg

On his day off from Tannahill’s play—and rallying from days of being under weather, we meet at a cafe in New York City’s West Village, not far from the modest artist-subsided apartment which he shares with his longtime partner of more than 40 years, painter William Kennon.

The play’s dicey title is, in itself, a trigger warning for a production, which includes scenes of brazen and

scintillating sexual coupling, rough play and bondage. “It’s purposeful and all in the service of the work,” he says. The play is set a few years in the future and imagines Prince George of Wales—son of William and Catherine, and heir to the throne of England—as an 18-year-old libidinous, rebellious, and spiraling gay man in a relationship with a self-assured man of South Asian heritage. Jesse Green writing in

The New York Times called the play “inflammatory, nose-thumbing, explicit to the point of pornography, wild and undisciplined (except in its bondage scenes)—and thrilling.”

For more than 40 years, Greenspan has acted in his own shows and those of others—and as a writer of both solo works and ensemble productions. Over the decades, his body of work has earned him six Obie Awards, including one for sustained achievement in the theatre.

Greenspan has been called “a classicist in experimental clothing” and many of his works have derived from—or been inspired by—heady source material by writers such as Gertrude Stein, Aristotle, Aristophanes, and Homer. But with his transformative skills as an actor and his clarity of vision, Greenspan makes even the most esoteric theme accessible, beguiling and thought-provoking.

He also has a fondness for figures and works that have long faded from memory but have been resurrected and re-imagined by him, playing silent star Theda Bara, to writing about obscure actress Helen Twelvetrees to presenting a nearly forgotten romantic comedy from

Continued on page 32



(l) *The Ironing Board* and *Boys Who Are Boys*
Photos courtesy of David Greenspan



Photo credit:
Frank Rizzo

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Both photos from *On The Set with Theda Bara*. Photo credit: Emilo Madrid



the ‘20s (20th century ’20s, that is) called *The Patsy* in which he again played all the roles.

Some Assumption

But when playwright Mona Pinot asked him to perform in a multi-character solo play, it seemed this project was too much, indeed too meta, for even him to take on. It was a play titled *I’m Assuming You Know David Greenspan*, which Pinot specifically wrote for and was indirectly about Greenspan, whom she did not know personally, in which he knew nothing about, and in which could *only* be performed by him. “Well, I just didn’t know what to say,” says Greenspan, still agog at the initial proposal.

But Greenspan’s partner knew what to say: “It’s very funny, it reminds me of one of your early works—and you shouldn’t do it. You just can’t say these [laudatory] things about yourself.”

But as a courtesy to the playwright (“She’s a nice young woman, so I felt at least I should read it out loud for her.”), he participated in a reading, which snowballed eventually to a widely-praised production. Laura Collins-Hughes writing in *The New York Times* of its off-Broadway production this past spring called Greenspan a “downtown wonder” and described the play as “an attentive ode to Greenspan’s extraordinary artistry as a playwright-performer.”

Greenspan grew to accept that the work’s spotlight on his acclaimed-but-hardscrabble career was a potent means to talk about something greater than himself. The play’s millennial female characters—all performed by Greenspan with dazzling detail—discuss, argue, and ponder “what it is to be a theater artist in America and what one sacrifices in that personal pursuit.”

“When I speak to young writers and actors,” said Greenspan, “I



I’m Assuming You Know David Greenspan. Photo Credit: Mona Pinot

tell them one of the things they have to ask themselves is what are they willing to do [to be artists]? Uncertainty is built into everyone’s profession, but it’s really built into a performing artist’s profession. A painter can still paint, but a performer and playwright needs an audience for their work to be realized. So what are are willing to do? How do you navigate and manage working and not-working and earning a living?

“I’m always disenchanted when people get awards and then say to young people, ‘You have to hold on!’ because getting awards is not

the reason you hold on. You hold on because you have a passion for it—or you don’t and then you realize it’s just not for you. And there’s nothing wrong with that. When people hold up awards and go ‘Hold on!’ that suggests if you don’t stick with it, you’ve done something wrong. You failed.”

Starting Out

Greenspan has stuck with it his entire life.

He grew up in Los Angeles in the ‘60s and early ‘70s, the son, along with his brother, of an aeronautical

engineer and a mother who died when Greenspan was 12. His love of theater began when he watched the annual televised showings of the musical *Peter Pan* starring Mary Martin. “It had a tremendous impact on me,” he said. Broadway musicals on record and on the radio also tapped into his psyche from an early age. “I later became a musical geek, immersed in doing after-school drama programs.”

He went on to major in drama in at the University of California at Irvine, but he also took classes in ballet and modern dance, which gave him a sense of comportment, grace

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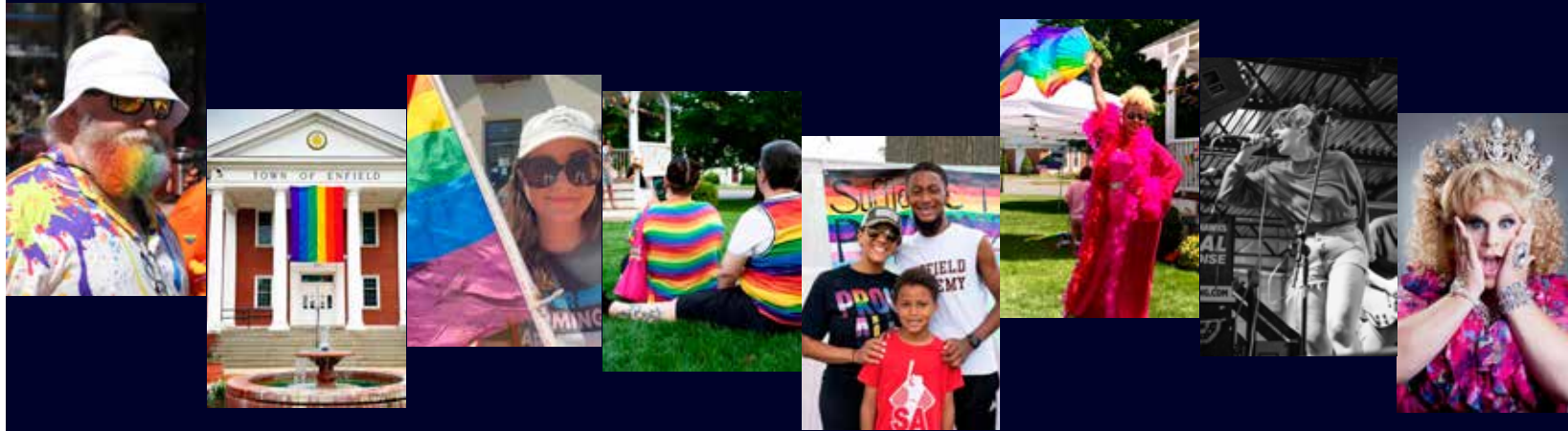
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and stylistic gesture he would later utilize to great effect in his work.

Greenspan found the theater scene in Los Angeles lacking, so after college in 1978, he headed to New York where he has primarily performed as an actor, which soon led to writing as well. There were a few regional gigs, along the way though, including David Grimm’s *The Learned Ladies of Park Avenue* at Hartford Stage in 2005 and David Adjmi’s *Marie Antoinette* at Yale Repertory Theatre in 2012. (“It was the second time I played a sheep.”)

He had a brief stint as an understudy in Broadway’s *Hairspray* in the early aughts, an experience he would like to forget. (“I basically spent a year in a dressing room, which was the theatrical equivalent to roadkill where you just lay there every night as the show rolls over

you.”) For most of his career though, he has been synonymous with off-Broadway and being the ‘quintessential downtown artist.’”

Greenspan’s next projects sound like yet another curious excursion into content and form.

In February at the Brick Theatre in Williamsburg, Brooklyn Greenspan will be performing in *Jerry Lieblch’s Without Mirrors*, which is described as a “new experimental language solo play that explores hopelessness, isolation and a perhaps misguided search for a fundamentally ‘true’ self.”

Also on tap is his new work *Odysseus*, a play with nine actors, “inspired by Joyce’s *Ulysses* and Homer’s *Odyssey*. The play is set among a group of family and friends over a week-end on Long Island and across the country in Portland, Oregon.” He plays Jerry,

“a classicist” in a work that includes a 35-minute lecture on Homeric authorship, a solo one-act play about the painter Caravaggio’s young lover Francesco Boneri, a 20-minute reverie about gay actor/dancer Harold Lang, and other Greenspanian elements.

“I don’t know if there is that much difference,” he said, “People were making the same complaints then that they are now. Artists are doing the same things to make their art, hanging their own lights, using tips from the waiter jobs to make things work, to make art. The only thing that’s changed really is real estate. It’s now Bushwick as opposed to the East Village. I find the young people no less determined in creating their own opportunities. There were no ‘good old days.’ It’s always been the same struggle.”

THIN

... But at What Cost?

The craze for weight-loss drugs and the LGBTQ+ community.

By KIM ADAMSKI

It's rare to see prescription medication cause the level of cultural controversy that Ozempic has. Endless online discussions about whether it's a miracle drug or "cheating" at weight loss proliferate in every corner of the internet. Internet users share their experiences with the medication, varying from extremely positive to nightmarishly negative...and everything in between.

Ozempic is categorized as a glucagon-like peptide-1 receptor agonist, which are commonly referred to as GLP-1 drugs. These drugs mimic the naturally occurring GLP-1 hormone, which signals to the brain that the stomach is full and triggers the release of insulin. Most GLP-1 medications are administered via injection once per week.

Although Ozempic is being touted as a weight loss drug, the drug's FDA approval is for management of type 2 diabetes. Given that the CDC reports almost 10 percent of Americans have type 2 diabetes, Ozempic is an incredible advance in diabetes care. By helping the body moderate blood sugar, it reduces dangerous blood sugar spikes. It's highly effective for this purpose. "I was prediabetic," says Naipaul, age 62, "[and Ozempic] controlled my blood sugar within weeks." Type 2 diabetes is also strongly associated

with obesity, and diabetics who take Ozempic tend to lose a significant amount of weight. In this case, weight loss is not the intended purpose, but rather an often-beneficial side effect. "I lost 30 pounds," observes Naipaul. "My Ozempic experience has been very positive overall."

For people who need help with weight loss but do not have Type 2 diabetes, accessing GLP-1 medications can be more complicated. Off-label use is rarely covered by insurance, and paying out-of-pocket can cost \$499 to \$1,200 per month, according to several retail sites. Insurers are tightening requirements for GLP-1 agonists, particularly Ozempic. CVS Health, for example, terminated coverage of Ozempic or Zepbound for weight loss. Their plans still cover the GLP-1 agonist Wegovy if the patient meets certain criteria. For weight management, most insurers require that a patient has a BMI of over 30 and has already tried healthy lifestyle changes before they will pay for GLP-1's.

GLP-1 drugs like Ozempic can have an immensely positive effect on the health of people who need them. At the same time, when a drug appears on the market that is purported to make losing weight effortless, it captures the public imagination. In the mid-20th century, for example, new medical uses for amphetamines were discovered.



They were originally approved by the AMA—the FDA was not yet the governing body for drug approval—for psychiatric conditions in the 1920s, but they were widely used off-label for weight loss. By 1949, the manufacture of amphetamines was a multi-million-dollar industry. Today, medical authorities recognize the clinical value of amphetamines like Adderall for the management of ADHD and other mental health conditions, but they are not regularly prescribed for weight loss. Despite this, amphetamines are still abused today for “easy” weight loss.

Ozempic and LGBTQ+ Individuals

Gay, bisexual, and trans people, in particular, are at higher risk of trying dangerous weight loss methods than the general population. LGBTQ+ men are increasingly pressured to conform to ideals that are impossible for most people to achieve. A 2022 German study found that gay and bisexual men had worse body image than heterosexual men. They also valued thinness over muscularity more often,



Anthony Crisci, CEO of Circle Care Center. Photo by John Gram Photos

use. “The monthly cost of Ozempic without insurance starts at around \$800,” says Anthony Crisci, CEO of Circle Care Center. “The vast majority of our patients could not afford that.” In addition, healthcare providers

Ozempic is taken by people from all demographics, many prescribers who work with the gay community have found that demand is very, very high among people who wouldn’t be considered appropriate candidates for the drug.

striving for a different body ideal more suited to the results promised or delivered by weight loss drugs.

Thus, it’s easy to see why Ozempic would be sought after in the gay community. Body image is an important part of self-esteem and mental well-being. When cultural views of the ideal body are skewed or unattainable, body satisfaction is negatively impacted. For some, this leads to disordered eating and exercise habits. For a smaller subset with greater economic means, it gives rise to an overuse of drugs like Ozempic.

Socioeconomic status is an important consideration with respect to off-label

like those at Circle do not prescribe Ozempic and other GLP-1 agonists to people for whom there would be no medical benefit. In wealthy areas, it’s not unheard of to pay out-of-pocket for weight loss drugs without medical need. According to Crisci, the primary way that inappropriate use of Ozempic and similar drugs comes about is via telehealth providers associated with manufacturers of unapproved generic versions of the drug.

The most common method for producing these generics is through compounding. This is where a manufacturer uses FDA-approved ingredients and creates a customized

drug for an individual consumer. Compounding has valid medical uses, such as removing an allergen or creating a specific dose that isn’t available with the standard version of the drug. Compounded drugs that mimic the original can also be manufactured legally during drug shortages. Ozempic was considered in shortage between 2022 and early 2025, so manufacturers were permitted to produce these unapproved generics.

Unfortunately, compounded GLP-1 agonists can be misused and mis-prescribed, posing risks to the public. Due to a lack of regulation, some products have been found to contain contaminants, while others are produced in unsanitary conditions. A recent study published in JAMA estimated that nearly half of the online pharmacies selling compounded GLP-1 drugs were operating illegally. Incorrect dosing also happens with alarming regularity with mis-prescribed compounded GLP-1’s. According to Brown University Health, 2023 saw a 1,500 percent spike in Poison Control Center calls associated with accidental injectable weight loss drug overdoses. Aside from these acute dangers, some less-scrupulous providers will prescribe compounded imitations to people for whom there is little medical benefit.

Despite these risks, the misuse of GLP-1 agonists persists. While the research on how the LGBTQ+ community uses Ozempic is lacking, anecdotally, it’s clear that this weight loss drug is culturally significant among gay men. Popular gay influencers joke on TikTok about being “Ozempic daddies.” Drag queens joke about how “gay” Ozempic is. And while Ozempic is taken by people from all demographics, many prescribers who work with the gay community have found that demand is very, very high among people who wouldn’t be considered appropriate candidates for the drug. Mark Bessler, MD and Chief of Bariatric Surgery at Columbia University, says that while GLP-1 agonists can be an incredible tool and effective alternative to bariatric surgery, he “know[s] a lot of people who are

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too. According to Dr. Judith Korner of Columbia University, the popular narrative about GLP-1 drugs is that they are “the easy way out,” while weight loss via exercise and diet are in some way morally superior. The blame society often assigns to overweight people, while also denouncing medical interventions as “cheating,” creates a no-win situation that may prevent people from accessing a drug that could benefit them.

Conversely, some people encounter pressure directly from medical providers to take GLP-1 drugs. One individual I spoke to, Jennifer*, age 43, said that she visited a nutritionist to discuss lifestyle changes that would help her lose weight. “The nutritionist only wanted to talk about Ozempic,” she said. She tried it, and when she lost 15 pounds, the nutritionist hugged her. While this action was certainly well-intentioned, it made Jennifer feel uncomfortable. It seemed like a value judgment on her weight.

It’s clear that the concern around Ozempic is a very complex issue. Unrealistic body standards, assumptions about weight, the desire for a “quick fix,” and economic status all play heavily into pressures around weight

loss. Obviously, most people want to feel attractive, and there’s nothing wrong with that. It’s when we create a very specific, rigid idea of what counts as attractive that people start going to dangerous lengths to attain it.

On a structural level, some changes have been made to discourage the overprescribing of GLP-1 agonists like Ozempic. “Ozempic [is] becoming harder to get due to its popularity and insurance providers tightening criteria for coverage,” says Crisci. Insurer restrictions such as prior authorization requirements have left millions of people who might benefit from GLP-1 agonists without access. While these restrictions are meant to prevent clinically inappropriate use of medications, applying them across the board may drive people to seek higher risk options, like poorly regulated compounding pharmacies or even counterfeit products.

What is the solution? Martin Binks, chair of the Department of Nutrition and Food Studies at George Mason University, believes that improving access to FDA-approved GLP-1 agonists is key, along with increased patient education from licensed clinicians. A

2025 review from the University of Utah recommends regulatory steps by the government, including aggressively prosecuting illegal compounding operations and tightening advertising standards for compounding pharmacies’ marketing.

You can protect yourself by remembering that if it seems too good to be true, it probably is. “Don’t rely on online sources that promise cheap or no prescription access,” says Binks. “Talk to a licensed healthcare provider about safe, approved options.”

Any time a new and effective weight loss intervention hits the market, the potential for misuse exists. Weight stigma, unrealistic beauty standards, and cultural pressure set the stage for weight loss drug abuse; popular media normalizes the practice. Through a combination of educating patients, removing stigma, and improving access to GLP-1’s to those with medical need, we can prevent Ozempic misuse while getting prescriptions into the hands of people for whom it may be lifesaving.



**Names have been changed to protect identities.*

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“I LOVE THE COMMUNITY THAT’S BEING BUILT HERE”: A CONVERSATION WITH TONY PALMIERI OF CROMWELL’S TONY’S FLOUR SHOP

By ALEX DUEBEN / Photography by
CARLA TEN EYCK PHOTOGRAPHY

Before he opened the award-winning bakery and coffee shop Tony’s Flour Shop in Cromwell, before he owned a flower shop in Middletown and worked as a florist for more than two decades, Tony Palmieri grew up in a family of artists.

“My dad painted motorcycles and did really fine woodworking, and he could do anything artistic. My mom’s medium was food,” Palmieri said in a recent conversation. “I grew up in an Italian family, and the boys didn’t usually get to cook or bake or clean or learn any of the important things like that, but my mom had a debilitating illness. I was the youngest by a lot, so fortunately for me I helped out with cooking and baking, and I liked it.”

For years baking was simply something that Palmieri did. “I owned a florist in Middletown, but I always liked to bake. When my kids got married, I made cookies for their weddings, like my grandmother did,” he said. “When I was stressed out, when I was happy, it was a thing that I went to.”

He had closed his florist shop before the COVID Pandemic, but as for everyone, the pandemic changed a lot. “I spent the whole summer outside planting food in the yard, landscaping. As soon as it became clear that the pandemic was gonna’ keep going, I was like, okay, comfort food. I was baking and

Tony Palmieri (center) and
the crew at Tony’s Flour Shop.



baking and baking,” Palmieri said, describing ordering 25-pound bags of yeast wholesale. “At that point I was in a relationship with a man and a woman, and the three of us only eat so much, so I was leaving food on my kids’ porches, on my sister’s porches.”

Opening a bakery, and opening a store, wasn’t something that he planned, but once he started thinking about it, a plan started to fall into place. “As soon as the name occurred to me, Tony’s Flour Shop, I was like, well, now I have to do it,” Palmieri said. “When I closed my floral shop, I was never ever going to be an entrepreneur again. Never. I’m never going to have an employee

again,” Palmieri laughed. “I have more employees now than I ever had.”

The cafe has gained a lot of attention on social media for its monthly specials. From Pride month, which had drinks named after Alison Bechdel and Oscar Wilde, to Christmas in July, to September’s County Fair inspired specials, to October’s Stephen King tributes. “My sisters who are older than me were like, what do you mean you’re opening a bakery? How are people going to know? I’m going to put it on Facebook and Instagram,” Palmieri said with a laugh. “It’s the only kind of promotion we do. I try to be myself on social media.”

Opening the coffee shop involved the same process that he used for baking, working with local companies and suppliers like Saccuzzo Coffee in Newington. “They’re a family business that runs the way we run. That’s important to me. We’re supporting them, and they train my staff. When I get new people, they’re welcome to go there and get training. I think that’s incredible. Our tea comes from Fable in Southington, and Tina blends the tea there. That’s the kind of care that I want to be able to pass on,” he said. “It was important to me that the coffee was done with the same care.”

Palmieri described the creation and

TONY'S FLOUR SHOP

ARTISAN BAKERY & COFFEEHOUSE

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naming of projects as a fun group activity with all employees collaborating on working out themes and names and ingredients, planning months in advance. “We try to have everything planned by the middle of the month before,” he said. “Creating the media takes me time, and we make some of the syrups ourselves, he said describing the two-week process they utilize to make some of the fruit-based syrups.

“Most coffee houses have a larger, regular menu, and do two or three specials a month, but this is fun for us,” he said. “What I want is for the baking to be as thematic as the drinks are. Some standards, but then also—he hesitated to find the right words. I suggested, fun?

“We’re working on going back to our roots. We found that we got stuck in a situation where we were baking like a coffee shop. The same things over and over again,” he said. “I think that what people really love that about us is that the menu is different.”

This means not just different pastries and varieties. “We try and always have one or two options in the case for vegans and gluten-free people. We keep testing recipes,” Palmieri said. “We’ll keep trying. But until then, I’m not going to sell it. Our peanut butter cookies happen to be gluten-free. My grandmother’s almond paste cookies, a batch that makes, I think, 12 dozen cookies has two tablespoons of flour. I wondered what happens if I put cornstarch in? They’re exactly the same.”

The Flour Shop

The shop itself has an aesthetic of its own. There are books for children and adults, Taylor Swift and Tori Amos, *Alexander McQueen: Savage Beauty* and *Where the Wild Things Are*. In the window a copy of his ex’s novel is on display. The walls feature family photos and seasonal decorations. A vertical chess board is on the wall. They fly a Pride flag outside.

In our conversation Palmieri spoke about his siblings and his children, his grandchildren and his exes, or his son bringing his grandchildren in for breakfast. How they had Thanksgiving dinner at the restaurant to accom-



modate the entire family. He’s built a queer, welcoming space that has managed to incorporate all the aspects of his life, but I was struck by what he said about growing up in a traditional family where the boys weren’t taught to cook or bake, despite the fact that many of the recipes Palmieri got from his mother came down from her father, who was a baker.

“Coming out was hard. I got married when I was eighteen to a woman, because that’s what you do. Then, I came out when I was twenty-four. If I had grown up in a more open environment, that wouldn’t have happened. I certainly don’t regret my children, but it wasn’t fair to the woman that I married.

It was hard to get my family to understand that I’m the same person they always knew. We’re there now,” Palmieri said when I asked about queerness.

“It was a struggle for me, and it’s part of the reason that having a safe space for queer people, queer youth, is really important to me,” Palmieri said, talking about seeing queer couples and trans people and families with children together in the cafe. “For Brianna’s book launch party—she’s my ex—we had a tea party. This woman who’s a regular came in with her son, who’s maybe four or five, and he’s wearing a skirt. She said, we’re so happy to come here, this is one of the only places he can come where he can dress how he wants

to dress, and no one’s going to make fun of him,” he said.

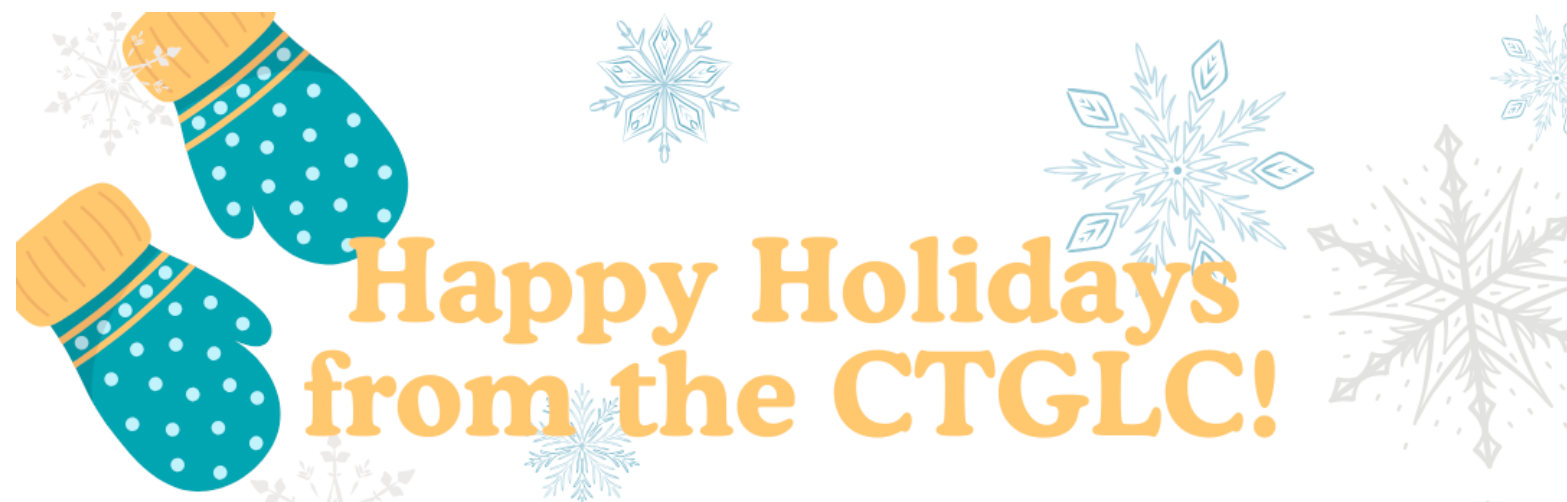
“That, as a counter to the way that I was raised, is a beautiful thing for me,” Palmieri said, clearly emotional. “I’ve lost some very good friends to suicide, some very good gay friends to suicide, and a lot of the way that they lived their lives was influenced by the fact that they were greeted as young people with opposition from their families. It’s something that unfortunately goes along with being a gay kid.”

Palmieri looked around the cafe. “Growing up with that, I just didn’t know what to do with the feelings. My therapist said, you’re doing it, you’re creating a safe space, this is how you’re combating it.”

He’s lived and worked in the area for much of his life, but Palmieri wanted to open the bakery in Cromwell. “This is where I grew up. I came back here to open this bakery, and I didn’t know how I would be greeted in this town, but it’s been great. I’ve had support from people I went to school with, support from the general community, outside the community, the queer community.”

“It’s been really, really moving, the way that people have reacted.”





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DELICIOUS //

Fabulous Frittatas

By AMY S. WHITE



Even when you're feeling the holiday crush, you can still pause for something hearty and delicious. Plus, when it's easy to make, versatile, and perhaps even a little showy, even a fast meal can have a little elegance. If that's what you're looking for (and we highly recommend it), a frittata may just be an ideal go-to.

So, what exactly is a frittata? This Italian, egg-based dish is a staple in kitchens around the world...for good reason. At the core, it is a thick, open-faced omelet that's cooked slowly over low heat on the stovetop and then given a quick finish in the oven. It is like a quiche, but without the hassle of making a crust. Unlike a regular omelet, it can feed more than one or two people. You don't stir or flip a frittata while cooking, so they set into a sliceable consistency. Frittatas are quick and easy to make; endlessly adaptable; and delicious hot, cold or at room temperature. Versatility is the secret to ease and creativity. Your Frittata can be made with nearly anything in the fridge: vegetables, cheeses, meats and even leftovers!

Best of all, they're perfect for a brunch, packing a picnic, or prepping lunches for the week. Paired with a garden salad, a side of roasted potatoes, or even just a slice of crusty bread, they make a simple yet satisfying meal.

Read on to discover the frittata basics, along with some creative, seasonal flavor combinations. 🍴

The Frittata Formula

Ingredients:

1 tablespoon butter or olive oil
1½ cups of mix-ins. (Whatever strikes your fancy: cooked vegetables, cooked or smoked meat or fish, cooked pasta, cheese, herbs)
6 large eggs
¼ cup half and half
Kosher salt, to taste

Steps of Frittata Making:

Preheat the oven to 400°F.

Melt the butter (or heat the olive oil) in a large, oven-safe skillet over medium heat.

If the mix-ins are not already cooked, cook them in the skillet (i.e., sauté vegetables, sear meats, etc.) or roast them in the oven. If you are using things that have already been cooked, place them in the skillet. Note: Using uncooked mix-ins, especially vegetables, releases too much moisture into the mix.

In a large bowl, whisk together the eggs, half and half, salt, pepper, and cheese or herbs, if using.

Pour the egg mixture into the skillet with the mix-ins.

Cook over medium heat for a few minutes until the egg mixture begins to set around the edges.

Transfer the pan into the pre-heated oven and bake for about 10 minutes, until the middle is set. To test, shake the pan gently to see if the middle jiggles. If it does, continue to cook.

Allow the frittata to cool and rest slightly (5-7 minutes), then carefully remove it from the pan, slice and serve.

Ten Fall Flavor Combinations:

Mushrooms, caramelized onions, gruyere, thyme
Butternut squash, kale, sausage, goat cheese
Potato, leeks, fontina, rosemary
Sweet potato, spinach, gruyere, sage
Pumpkin, gouda, cinnamon
Zucchini, goat cheese, dill
Bacon, apple, cheddar, nutmeg
Spinach, artichokes, feta, chives
Smoked salmon, capers, cherry tomatoes, red onion, dill
Leftover spaghetti, pancetta, parmesan
Bonus idea: Leftover pizza (chopped into bite-sized pieces), diced pepperoni, mozzarella.

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IN THE SPIRIT //



Queer Nonprofits In The New Political Era

By JANE LATUS

Directly and through ripple effects, actions and slurs out of Washington, DC are strongly impacting Connecticut's LGBTQ+ community and the organizations that serve them. Individual finances, mental health, and kids are taking the biggest hits, say the groups' leaders.

Connecticut Voice occasionally checks in with the state's nonprofits to see how they and those they serve are doing, especially during upheavals like the Covid epidemic. In this year of cutbacks and attacks, leaders say they're doing more with less money—but also with a surge of new volunteers. They expressed shock that the state's two largest medical institutions acquiesced to federal threats and abruptly stopped providing gender affirming care to almost 1,000 youths. Nonprofits have been helping families with the fallout.

The leaders we spoke with though, are adamantly hopeful.

"The queer community is not new to this. But in New Haven and all over the state, this community is *strong*, and we

are *powerful*. We will be okay," says Laura Boccadaro, operations director for the New Haven Pride Center. She continued, adding a qualifier: "But we're very tired."

Says Mel Cordner, executive director of Q Plus, which provides programs and safe spaces for queer youths, "We see the difference, so that's why we do what we do."

"It's a very challenging time. We're seeing a large increase in demand for our services," says Triangle Community Center Executive Director Rachel Simon.



Rachel Simon

Bridgeport Pride Center Executive Director Marcus Brown (who is also a state legislator) says the center is busiest helping with financial hardship—like providing microgrants to people one missed rent payment away from eviction, or a missed car payment away from losing transportation to their job.

Some hopeful news is that Connecticut is both a relatively safe state and in a financially sound enough position to be able to afford to guarantee services to marginalized communities, should elected officials choose to do so, says Equality Connecticut Executive Director Matt Blintribus. "We have the historic opportunity to make sure our most vulnerable populations have the care that they need. We are among the last lines of defense in a climate like this."

Other good news is the addition of an ambitious new nonprofit, expected to open in mid-2026: the Hartford Pride Center. It will fill a void in the northern half of the state and be the first to provide housing.

And in January, The Health Collective



Photo credit: Linda-Cristal Young



Mel Cordner

(formerly the Hartford Gay & Lesbian Health Collective) will move into a new Hartford location, doubling its space and accommodating more services.

ANXIOUS YOUTHS AND FAMILIES

First in need of defending, leaders say, are kids. “Families are scared they’re going to lose their kids, literally,” say Cordner of Q Plus. “Kids are not doing well. Not that queer kids are ever doing well because everything is stacked against them. But I’ve never seen the level of self-harm we have right now.”

“This generation isn’t used to having these fights,” says Tiffany Pippins, program manager for the Lighthouse, a peer-to-peer social support group for ages 12-18. Lighthouse works with municipalities and organizations in Fairfield County (including the Bridgeport Pride Center) to provide safe spaces for kids to socialize.

“Connecticut kids are very smart. They are well-educated and well-versed in what’s going on,” Pippins says. Thus,

they are anxious. “Our kids take solace in knowing there are adults here who support them.”

Parents whose children lost medical care have come into the New Haven Pride Center crying, says Boccadaro. “It’s been a devastating blow to see this happening in Connecticut. Referring to Yale New Haven Hospital and Connecticut Children’s Hospital, she says, “These multi-billion-dollar organizations are completely failing our community.” She adds, “I wish we’d seen [state government] reps call out these big health institutions.”

Cordner agrees, saying, “There’s no reason the state is not loudly standing up [for kids].”

Supportive statements only go so far, says Equality Connecticut’s Blinstrubas. “What concerns me is action, when it comes time to vote or open up the budget. Of course, vocal support helps young people, but kids also benefit from schools that are well-funded and safe.”

In Bridgeport, Brown has also had parents of about a dozen children who



The stocked food pantry at the New Haven Pride Cent

lost medical care “come in in tears. They feel helpless. That breaks me.” The center helped the families find care and, when needed, financial aid.

STRAINED PERSONAL FINANCES

Many people, disproportionately LGBTQ+, have been kicked off SNAP, housing and other federal aid this year. Community demand for the food pantry, housing assistance, clothing and the hygiene pantry has doubled at the New Haven Pride Center. “It’s not like our finances have doubled,” says Boccadaro, adding “We had a line today for our food pantry.”

When we spoke with her, the center was actively helping 22 people find housing. Most are young adults.

Demand for Triangle Community Center’s food pantry is up 89 percent over 2024, says Simon. Numbers are also way up at The Health Collective’s twice-weekly pantry in Manchester, says Executive Director Anthony DiLizia.

Homelessness is the biggest challenge in Bridgeport, says Brown. There aren’t enough housing units. The queer community’s housing instability rate is even higher, and, he adds, “We’re not even counting our homeless population



Laura Boccadaro

in the right way, so we can’t address it.” For example, he says, trading sex for housing, a survival tactic for youths kicked out of their homes because of their identities, isn’t counted.



Tiffany Pippins



David Grant

Nonprofits themselves have been impacted—and in unexpected ways—by the political climate. Three companies denied insurance to the New Haven Pride Center because they were deemed too high risk by being an LGBTQ+ organization. “Our youth programming was what they were concerned about,” says Boccadaro.

Some donors have started giving anonymously, says Simon. Some corporations have cut back on funding anything considered DEI-related. Brown says Bridgeport has lost some corporate sponsors this year, but says fundraising is still going well. “I think people see the seriousness of what’s going on in this country.”

WORSENING MENTAL HEALTH

Needs are acute, says Simon of the Triangle Community Center, and she has the numbers to prove it. The center’s needs assessment this year found that 70 percent of all respondents had suicidal thoughts in their lifetime,

but 67 percent of those thoughts occurred within the last 12 months for youths, and 48 percent for adults.

Simon adds that she hears anecdotal reports of more LGBTQ+ people seeking inpatient psychiatric care.

For gender nonconforming kids, every step—like taking puberty-blocking hormones—is a lifeline, says Cordner. “When that gets yanked out from under them, they don’t know what to do. The risk is higher. I’m referring more kids to higher levels of care than I was this time of year ago.”

Being constantly targeted is getting to kids, they add. “There’s a new thing every week trans people are being blamed for.”

“Something we’re seeing a lot is just loneliness,” says Boccadaro. New Haven Pride Center offers social groups for all ages, including a Rainbow Club for those 55 and up.

The Health Collective will launch a new mental health program next year. Says DiLizia, “The community is

calling for it. There are a lot of people who are scared. It’s a heavy emotion to carry with you every day. But it also gives you motivation to serve the community, when they need it most.”

COMING SOON: THE HARTFORD PRIDE CENTER

David Grant will be executive director of the new center when it opens, expected in summer 2026. Grant was LGBTQ+ liaison to Hartford Mayor Luke Bronin in 2020 when Bronin tasked him with organizing a commemoration of the Stonewall riots’ 50th anniversary. Recognizing the lack of services in the northern half of the state, that group evolved into the Hartford Pride Center committee.

The center will have two key differences from others, says Grant. It will provide housing, and it will be “a support and resource hub for other LGBTQ+ organizations,” offering staff support for projects like obtaining grants.



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INFLUX OF HELP AND HOPE

Simply moving to a new, more visible location two years ago was a boost for the New Haven Pride Center. The previous landlord didn't allow the center to post a sign outside the building, where it was located underground. Now, it has ground-level windows with signs-a-plenty. "Lots more people drop in and say we didn't know there was a Pride Center here," says Boccadaro. The center is now fully wheelchair accessible and has more room for programs. Now that more kids know about it, she says, "They just come here and hang out because they don't have anywhere else. They feel safe."

She also reports "a huge influx of community wanting to come in and volunteer, because of the political climate." Volunteers have launched new programs like the Stitch and Chat Club, Black Queer Women's Group, and

Queer Men's Book Club. Yale School of Medicine's Neighborhood Health Project stepped in when another donor lost funding and keeps the hygiene pantry stocked.

Brown has seen the same outpouring of support in Bridgeport. "Folks in the community are stepping up and organizing events held in our space," he says, and straight allies have been primarily responsible for donations to the food pantry.

Organizations are eager for volunteers and donations of items, food or money. Boccadaro also requests that folks "share our stuff online. The more we talk about these things, the more we know about them."

"Putting a bumper sticker on your car could be the thing that turns a kid's day around," says Cordner

Those seeking support or resources can contact any of the organizations

featured in this story. The City of New Haven worked with the Pride Center to create an LGBTQ+ Toolkit, available on the city website, listing resources including for immigration and legal aid. (Look for "chief administrative officer" then "LGBTQ+ liaison.")

Cordner suggests, "Find mutual aid and support. Start with your town's pride committee, or if you don't have one, look for one in the town next door." If that fails, she suggests asking a librarian.

Especially since kids aren't independent travelers, Q Plus offers both online and in-person events. Says Cordner, "We have programming that focuses on creating joy and building safe spaces and relationships. We need to keep on creating and inviting others into those spaces We're not gonna' stop just because people have been terrible."



LAST WORD //

Holiday greetings dear friends,

As an introduction, I am the Senior Pastor of the Metropolitan Community Church of Hartford (MCC Hartford) and an Elder in the global MCC denomination; a ministry and social justice movement that was founded in 1968 by a de-credentialed (because he is gay) Pentecostal minister named Troy Perry. Rev. Perry's divine calling was to provide love and support as a special ministry to those in the LGBTQ+ community who were not welcome in their places of worship and told that God does not love them because of who they are and who they love. MCC was, and is, called to share the **truth**—that God's love is unconditional and this divine love is for ALL; no exceptions, conditions, or exclusions.

Founded in 1973, MCC Hartford shares this calling; faithfully proclaiming a gospel of love and liberation, and sharing God's love with those in the LGBTQ+ community, who have been hurt by religious intolerance or suffer from rejection by family and society, more broadly. Like all MCCs globally, MCC Hartford shares a mission to seek social justice through activism and to advance queer civil and human rights; believing that spirituality, sexuality, and gender are divine gifts.

As a trans Pastor, I am particularly passionate about MCC Hartford's newest ministry TV365 (trans voice and visibility 365 days a year). This special outreach ministry is in its fifth year providing love and support to trans folx in real and tangible ways – while also providing spiritual care to the souls we meet as we live OUT the truth that trans and nonbinary people have dignity and worth and are beloved of God. TV365 has helped hundreds over the years find help to meet short term critical/emergent basic needs, change legal documents, access support groups, move from homelessness to homes, and much more.

The "least of these" designation is a human (not divinely) created phenomenon and we, at MCC Hartford, seek to make the "last first" by providing physical and spiritual care through its ministries—to alleviate suffering, physically and spiritually, within the queer community. That said, a true welcome and warm hospitality are a priority during Sunday worship services and fellowship after. Our hope is that each

leaves feeling loved, affirmed, and supported by those who gather to worship here. We affirm and celebrate that we are all created in the image of God as an expression of God's love in the world. Wherever you are on your spiritual journey and whatever religious experience you may have had (or not), MCC Hartford is a spiritual home where love lives, chosen family is a reality, and where ministry is life-affirming and sometimes even life-saving.

It will come as no surprise when I state the obvious: we are in difficult, often scary, and very uncertain times; however, it is important to remember the LGBTQ+ community is resilient and has had many victories over a long history. MCC was started months before the Stonewall riots, and we hold gratitude for our courageous queer ancestors upon whose shoulders we stand as we continue to fight for what *all* deserve: life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness...fundamental, inherent rights that are to be protected, not granted only to some. Remember also that MCC, along with many organizations and faith communities are working



Photo courtesy Aaron Miller

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worldwide in solidarity; though this rarely makes the 'headlines.'

At this holiday time, however we each choose to celebrate and observe, let us also remember that we are uniquely and intentionally created with joy (called "bundles of joy" at birth) and loved by those who surround us. Like our ancestors, we are stronger, more courageous, and more resilient than we realize. My prayer is that we draw closer to one another to face the current storms and challenges while we also remember we have survived such adversity many times before. May we choose, in radical response, to offer loving kindness and compassion, and share hopefulness through our words and actions to help encourage others. Love holds incredible power—power that hate fears. Love holds even greater power when we love *together*. It is time to believe in love and to believe in each other. I believe. My hope is that you will too. 

With love and hope for 2026,

Rev. Elder Aaron Miller (he/him)

Senior Pastor, Metropolitan Community Church of Hartford

Council of Elders, Metropolitan Community Churches

"Faith does not eliminate questions. But faith knows where to take them." — Elisabeth Elliot



Photo courtesy Aaron Miller



Photo by Michael Key



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