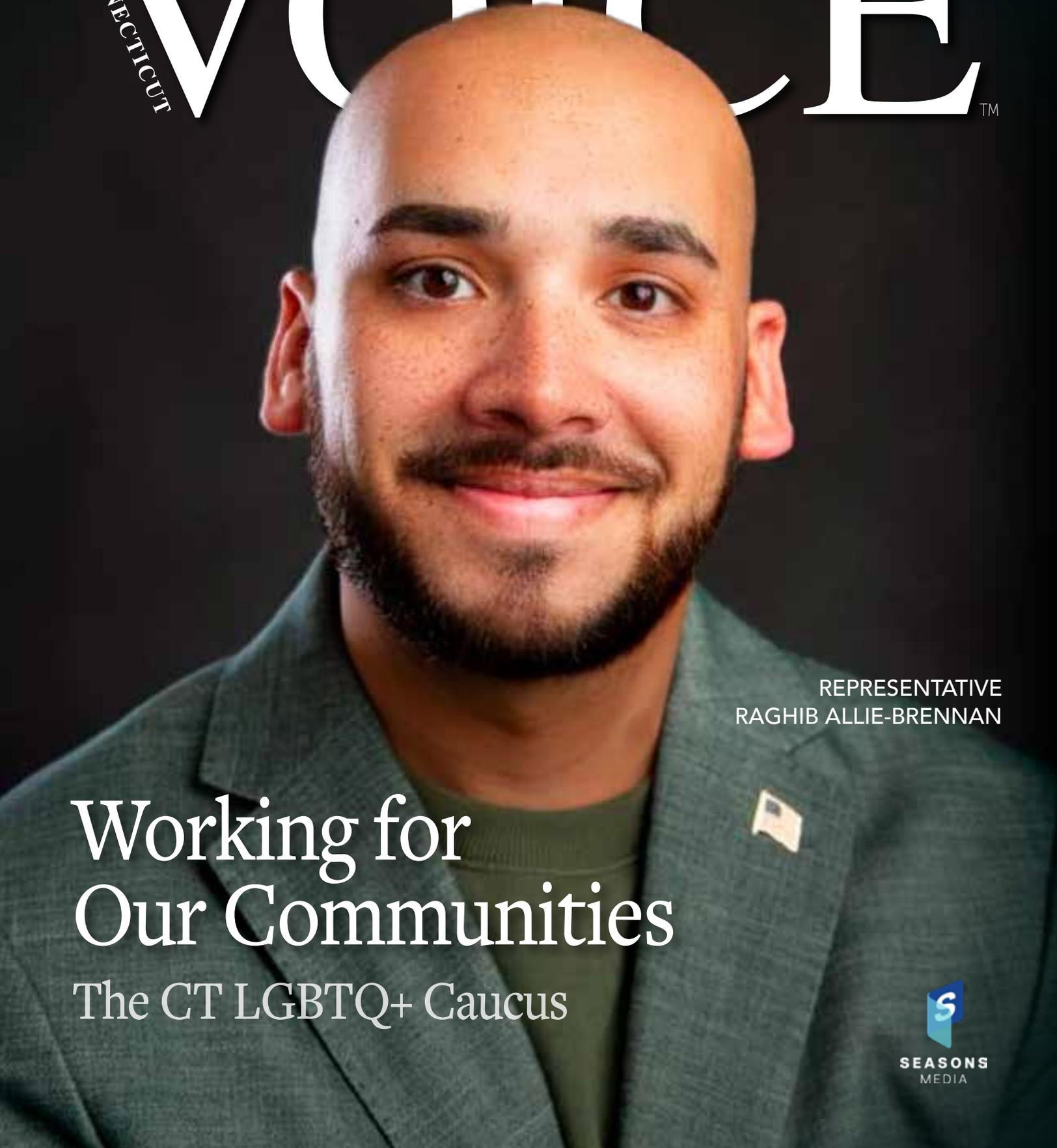


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# CONNECTICUT VOICE™

## EDITOR'S NOTE //



### **The New Season Arrives**

**B**y the time this issue reaches your home, spring will have begun in earnest. It's a wonderful season in Connecticut. We emerge from the cold and darkness into the new season with, one hopes, a feeling of possibility and excitement.

Nature may have been napping over the cold months, but folks in our state have been busy, especially in the legislature. Just a year ago, we profiled Rep. Dominique Johnson who along with Raghieb Allie-Brennan, co-chairs the LGBTQ+ caucus in Hartford. In this issue, Jane Latus catches up with both of them—and the other members of this “small but mighty” group—to get an inside look at the work the caucus is doing on behalf of LGBTQ communities and all of their constituents.

Spring is also an exciting time for the arts. Brian Scott Lipton profiles The Jorgensen Center, which has been presenting diverse and exciting artists since 1955. Alex Dueben digs into the GLBTQ archives at Central Connecticut State University to see how important LGBTQ+ history is being preserved and what that means for our shared legacy.

Alex also talks to Jacques Lamarre at TheaterWorks Hartford about his career and artistic vision. The company will present a new piece *Circus Fire* about the 1944 fire

in Hartford's North End. It is their biggest and most extensive project to date. I have a personal connection to that tragedy. My father grew up in the North End, and when the fire happened, one of the first things the roustabouts did was get the animals as far away as possible. My father remembers having an elephant tied to their front fence for a time.

Frank Rizzo looks at aging in Connecticut and specifically options and opportunities for elder LGBTQ+ individuals to live freely, safely, and in a warm and supportive community.

In the front pages of this issue, we celebrate Mental Health Awareness Month with Mental Health Connecticut. Find and register for some of their outstanding activities and programs here. We also shine a light on the True to You coalition, which has been established to help young LGBTQ+ people live tobacco-free. The law firm of Pullman & Comley shares important information on DeFacto parentage, and our sex columnist Kim Adamski talks about weathering (and successfully managing) a breakup.

We are also pleased to have Anthony H. Crisci, CEO of Circle Care Center, contribute our Last Word stressing the importance of regular healthcare for everyone in our communities.

As we all celebrate the arrival of the new season, we hope this issue will entertain and inform you about our great state and the dynamic LGBTQ individuals who help to make it even greater.

Please also visit us online at [ctvoice.com](http://ctvoice.com) for expanded coverage of arts and news. We wish you joy this spring and thank you for being part of the Connecticut Voice family.

*Chris*

Christopher Byrne, Editor  
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—Henry David Thoreau



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LGBTQ+ Caucus Members: (l to r) John Santanella, MJ Shannnon, Marcus Brown, Dominique Johnson, Raghieb Allie-Brennan. Photo credit: Brian O'Connor

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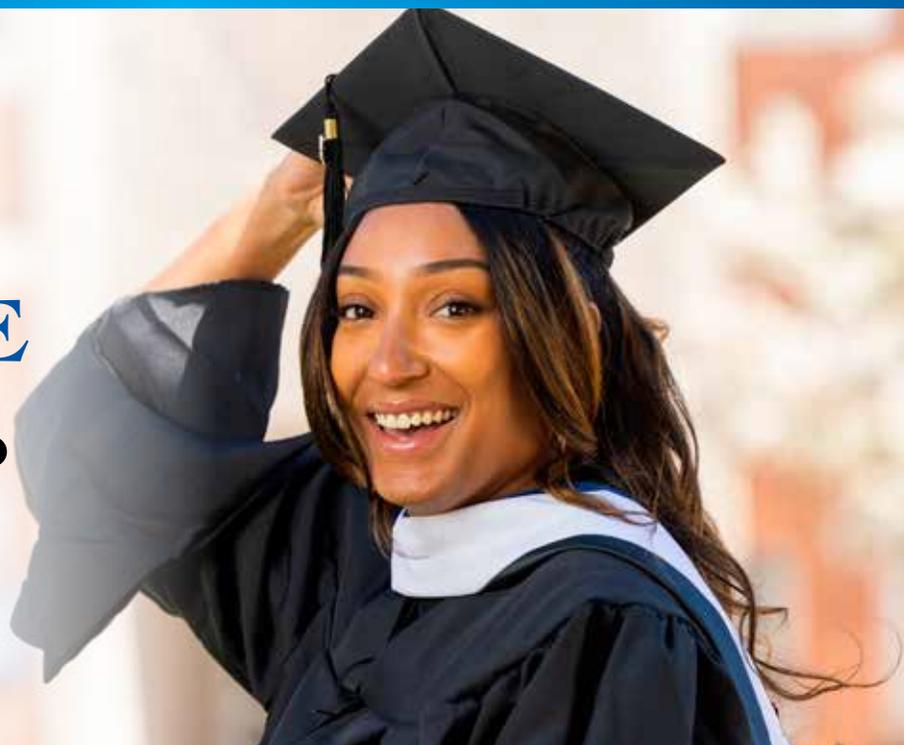
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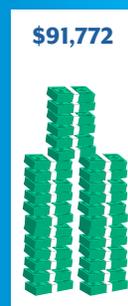


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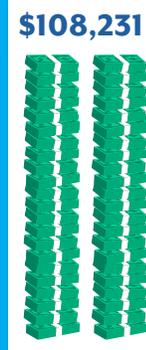
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## DeFacto Parentage & LGBTQ Families

For many LGBTQ families, the path to parenthood does not always follow traditional, legal routes. Whether you are a stepparent, a non-biological parent in a same-sex relationship, or someone who has stepped into a parental role through other circumstances, Connecticut law now offers a way to formalize your relationship with a child you have been raising: de facto parentage.

Under the Connecticut Parentage Act, you can become a legal parent to a child even if you are not biologically related to them and have not formally adopted them. This is a meaningful step forward for LGBTQ families. Nevertheless, it is important to understand what de facto parentage means for your estate planning.

### How Do You Become a De Facto Parent?

To establish de facto parentage, you will need to prove all of the following to a court by “clear and convincing evidence”:

- You have lived with the child as part of their household for at least one year (Courts may accept a shorter period if there is a good reason.)
- You have consistently cared for the child and helped make decisions about their upbringing.
- You have taken on full parenting responsibilities

without expecting to be paid for it.

- You have held the child out as your own.
- You have developed a bonded, dependent relationship with the child that is parental in nature.
- Your parent-child relationship with the child has been supported and encouraged by an existing legal parent to the child.
- Your continuing relationship with the child is in the child's best interests.

There are a few important things to keep in mind when determining how to become a de facto parent. Only you (the person seeking to be recognized as a de facto parent) can file this petition, and you must do so while both you and the child are living. The child must also be under 18 when you file.

Once a court recognizes you as a de facto parent, you have the same legal status as a biological or adoptive parent. However, unlike some other paths to legal parentage, de facto parentage requires going through the court system; there is no other way to establish it.

### What Does This Mean for Your Estate Plan?

Once you have been recognized as a de facto parent, it is a good idea to review your estate planning documents and update them if needed. This



Danielle A. Erickson



Stacie L. Provencher

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includes your will, any trusts, and beneficiary designations on life insurance policies or retirement accounts.

In some cases, your existing documents may already reflect your wishes, especially if you have already named the child as a beneficiary. If so, additional updates may not be necessary.

### What If Your Documents Reference “After-Born or Adopted Children”?

Many wills include language that automatically extends benefits to children born or adopted after the will was created. But because de facto parentage is relatively new under Connecticut law, it is unclear whether this language would apply to a child recognized through de facto parentage. To avoid uncertainty, it is best to update your estate plan after establishing de facto parentage, whether your goal is to include or exclude the child in the estate.

### What If You Have Not Established De Facto Parentage?

Even without a formal legal parent-child relationship, you can still include a child in your estate plan. One of the great things about estate planning is that you get to decide who benefits from your estate. You can name anyone you choose, including a child you've helped raise—regardless of whether you're their legal parent.

### Questions?

If you'd like to learn more about de facto parentage or how it might affect your estate plan, reach out to one of our Family Law or Trusts & Estates attorneys at Pullman & Comley, LLC at [pullcom.com](http://pullcom.com). 

*By Danielle A. Erickson, an attorney in Pullman & Comley's Trusts and Estates practice, and Stacie L. Provencher, an attorney in the firm's Family Law practice.*

  
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## Helping LGBTQ+ People Live Smoke Free

Despite general knowledge of its dangers, tobacco use is a major issue in the LGBTQ+ communities. According to Holly Giardina, project coordinator True to You Coalition at Wheeler Health in Plainville, members of these communities are more than twice as likely to turn to the products—cigarettes, cigar, snuff, vapes, etc.—than the general population.

Giardina says that one of the main reasons LGBTQ+ individuals, and youth in particular, turn to tobacco consumption is as a means of managing stress. As she explains, it's the nicotine in all of these products that is so addictive. "Within ten seconds, nicotine hits the brain," she says. "The brain releases dopamine,

a chemical that creates a surge of pleasure and calm, and temporarily reduces feelings of stress. But those feelings of pleasure don't last long. Some people continue to smoke or vape to 'manage' feelings of stress; the risk is their brains can become dependent on nicotine."

Giardina also notes that stressors that make people turn to tobacco products are particularly pronounced in the LGBTQ+ communities. These include peer pressure, discrimination, stigma, possible rejection by families, and more. In addition, she adds many in these communities may have limited access to healthcare providers—and healthcare that is affirming and equitable—whether they are uninsured or under-

insured. This is amplified by, in some cases, distrust of healthcare providers.

Giardina runs the True to You (T2U) coalition, which is dedicated to helping people in the LGBTQ+ communities stop smoking. The organization received funds in 2023 from the Connecticut Department of Public Health, under the CDC prevention funding program. Over its first two years, finished in April of last year, the coalition initiated a three-tiered program, which raised awareness about the harms of tobacco and encouraged prevention or cessation. The program, delivered through digital platforms focused on reasons for not using tobacco products, including relationships and mental health.

Key in these communications was helping people understand that the people who answer the telephone Quit Line are not medical professionals but real people who have extensive experience helping people through the process of quitting.

The coalition also prepared materials that were distributed to 111 healthcare providers in more than 50 facilities around the state. Waiting room cards encouraged LGBTQ+ patients to ask about quitting and make it more comfortable for them to do so.

The organization has also been visible in the communities. Lawn signs, in five communities last year, encouraged people not to smoke. As Giardina explains "one of the harms

we were looking at is secondhand smoke.” In addition, T2U has been highly visible at Pride events around the state, supporting event sponsors in migrating towards tobacco-free events.

The coalition is currently moving into its second phase with new funding through the Tobacco and Health Trust Fund through a contract from the Connecticut Department of Public Health. Over the next three years, Giardina says, “What we’re hoping to do now is to promote tobacco-free living as the norm. What we want to do is promote ‘whole person health.’” Along those lines, she adds that while

many people understand the risks with traditional tobacco, the don’t consider vapes in the same category, but they are. They are considered tobacco products because of the nicotine content.

It’s not necessarily an easy task. Giardina cites work by The Truth Initiative, an anti-smoking organization, that cites the increasing presence of tobacco products in entertainment and the aggressive push by tobacco marketers into the LGBTQ+ communities. The organization cites research that shows that use of tobacco by LGBTQ+ youth is often twice the incidence of use among

cis-gender youth. When trans youth alone are considered, incidence of use is even greater versus other cohorts.

What Giardina calls “positive social norming” can be effective—and makes sense. As she explains if 22 percent of people are smoking, that means 78 percent are not. However, she acknowledges that over and above the physical dependence, this can be a hard habit to break. So, as it moves into its next phase, T2U will be talking about why people would not want to smoke and to help them develop alternative behaviors and practices

to deal with the stress and anxiety that triggers the desire to consume tobacco products. T2U is also planning to develop community presentations and create Freedom From Smoking groups where people can share their experiences and get support on their journeys.

For today, if you would like help quitting, call 1-800-QUIT-NOW (800-784-8669). It’s a national number, but it’s answered by people in your area.

Giardina knows it’s not easy—as does anyone who has tried to quit. But she says, the goal is to keep trying and not give up. 

**True to You Coalition**  
  
**Live Life Tobacco-Free**

# VOLUNTEERS NEEDED

## LGBTQIA+ YOUTH & ADULTS

Do you want to champion LGBTQIA+ health and wellness by promoting tobacco-free living as “the norm” in our community? Join the True to You (T2U) Coalition!

LGBTQIA+ individuals have higher rates of tobacco use and vaping than non-LGBTQIA+ individuals. Let’s make a difference together!

**JOIN US!**

[www.ctruetoyou.org](http://www.ctruetoyou.org)

T2U is a program of Connecticut Clearinghouse and is supported by the Tobacco and Health Trust Fund through a contract with the CT Department of Public Health.



# SEX TALK:

## Breaking Up is Hard to Do

**T**here's no getting around it—breakups can be tough. Few people start a romantic relationship with the goal of breaking up later! But as they say, every relationship ends until one doesn't. With that perspective, each relationship a person has can function as a learning experience. It is a way to evaluate what works for you and what doesn't, hopefully leading to a better romantic fit the next time.

Breakups themselves also help us learn. Think about your first relationship's end. Maybe you were a teenager. Chances are you and your ex-partner exhibited some pretty unhealthy behaviors! Yelling, meanness, and rumor spreading are par for the course. (If this wasn't you, congrats on your high levels of teen maturity. You certainly did better than I did.)

Now, think of your most recent relationship. More than likely, you managed to keep it a little more grown-up than back in your teens or early twenties. That's because you gained a better sense of empathy and respect for your fellow human and probably figured out that unhealthy breakup

behaviors are way more stressful for everyone involved.

Before I start talking about guidelines for healthy breakups, I want to preface it by addressing abusive relationships. If you are ending a relationship because your partner is physically, sexually, or emotionally abusing you, these suggestions may not apply. I recommend putting your safety first, even if that means leaving in the middle of the night and ghosting the person. You should also consider seeking professional or even legal support when leaving an abusive relationship.

**Whether you initiated the breakup, or they ended the relationship, blowing up their DM's or calling them constantly is not healthy for either of you.**

In most cases, however, breakups happen because the people involved are simply not a good romantic fit for one another. This can happen early in the relationship,

as the honeymoon period ends, or much later, as you discover your needs are different than they were years ago. Either way, ending the relationship respectfully will help you both move on and grow from the experience.

Looking at it statistically, there's a 50 percent chance you're the one who initiated the breakup. When this is the case, make a plan to open the conversation. Avoid bringing it up in a fit of anger. Choose a time when neither of you is preoccupied with something else. (And please, do not do it on a long car ride. You don't want to be stuck in a

closed space together for hours after!) Avoid accusations, even if you truly feel like the reason for the breakup is their fault. Statements that start with "I" are best.

They'll be less likely to elicit a defensive or combative response.

The person being broken up with will likely feel hurt, but don't make them feel worse than you must. Being unnecessarily mean is just disrespectful. You cannot control their actions, and it's possible they'll get nasty. If that's the case, state your boundaries. For example, "I am going to leave the room if you keep shouting" sets a reasonable boundary with clear consequences. Make sure you follow through, if needed.

Afterwards, it is incredibly important to allow your now-ex some space. Whether you initiated the breakup, or they ended the relationship, blowing up their DM's or calling them constantly is not healthy for either of you. Before interacting again, you both need space to process your feelings. While I can't give you a shortcut to getting rid of the pain, know that it will eventually fade, and you may even be able to be friends in time.

Finally, do not attempt to socially isolate them. Have you been approached by a friend's ex before, telling you about all their horrible misdeeds and



shortcomings? It was probably a pretty bad look for the ex, right? If you do this, not only will you look like a huge jerk, but if you do succeed in turning their friends against them, your ex-partner will lack the social support they need to move past your former relationship. This is particularly important in queer communities, since they tend to be relatively small. It's best to vent

your seething complaints to your own close friends. You may feel resentful for a time, and that's okay; it's all about how you manage those feelings. If you are truly unable to contain your vengeful impulses, it may be time to seek the help of a therapist.

If your ex is the one trying to retaliate, it may be hard to stay level-headed. Again, this is where

social support comes in handy. Turn to your loved ones to talk about how you're feeling and even, yes, to sound off about everything that's wrong with the ex-partner.

Another option is to write a letter that you will never send. Writing has helped me personally on many occasions.

In the moment, it may feel almost impossible

to keep your cool and remain respectful during a breakup. Take a deep breath or even a break from the conversation if you feel it getting heated. Ending a relationship is stressful for everyone; keeping your behavior respectful will help with healing and moving on for both of you. 

—Kimberly Adamsk

## May is Mental Health Awareness Month

### LGBTQIA+ Mental Health

For many LGBTQIA+ individuals, mental health challenges are not experienced in isolation; they are shaped by stigma, discrimination, and the fear of not being accepted for who they are. National data shows that LGBTQIA+ youth are more than four times as likely to attempt suicide and twice as likely to experience suicidal thoughts compared to their heterosexual peers, while transgender adults report some of the highest rates of suicide attempts and ideation. Behind these statistics are real people, neighbors, family members, and colleagues, who too often struggle in silence. Even when someone is ready to ask for help, barriers such as discrimination, cost, mistrust of providers, and a lack of affirming care can stand in the way. These realities make visibility, compassion, and connection essential and underscore why sharing stories of lived experiences, building

understanding, and creating safe, supportive spaces can truly save lives.

### Why MHC hosts *Let's Face It* Each Year

Mental Health Connecticut hosts *Let's Face It* annually because stories have the power to create change. Through this campaign, we share the real stories of individuals across Connecticut who are facing or actively addressing mental health challenges.

By lifting up these voices, *Let's Face It* helps reduce stigma, increase understanding, and remind people that they are not alone. Change begins with awareness and education and with brave individuals who are willing to share their experiences, opening the door for others to do the same and to seek support when they need it. Each story shared is an invitation to compassion, connection, and hope.

### Light It Up Green: Take Action This May

One simple way to show your support during Mental Health Awareness Month is to Light It Up Green. Light your home, business, or workplace with green lights (string lights, spotlights, or green lightbulbs) to spark conversations and visibly demonstrate your commitment to mental health.

Join organizations like ConnectiCare, Stamford Health, Mystic Aquarium, The Hartford, and more! Green lights serve as a reminder that mental health matters and that support is available.

To participate, email Christina Smith at [csmith@mhconn.org](mailto:csmith@mhconn.org) and share photos of your green lights. Participants will be featured on MHC's social media and in our newsletter.



## Free Mental Health Awareness Month Lawn Signs

Mental Health Connecticut is also offering free Mental Health Awareness Month lawn signs to help spread the message even further. Displaying a lawn sign is an easy and visible way to show support, reduce stigma, and encourage conversations in your community. To request a sign, email Christina Smith at [csmith@mhconn.org](mailto:csmith@mhconn.org). Lawn signs are available while supplies last.

## Community Documentary Screenings & Conversations

Mental Health Connecticut is proud to collaborate with community and campus partners to present two documentary screenings that explore mental health, identity, and advocacy.

### CURED

#### Documentary Screening & Panel Discussion



Until 1973, the American Psychiatric Association classified homosexuality as a mental illness. CURED

tells the powerful and inspiring story of the activists, many of them LGBTQ+, who challenged this harmful diagnosis, transformed the field of mental health, and changed history. This screening is presented by Mental Health Connecticut and Quinnipiac University's Department of Social Work, The Center for Interprofessional Healthcare Education, and the Netter Library.

#### Monday, March 30, 2026 5:00 – 8:30 PM

Quinnipiac University – North Haven Campus  
MNH 101, Auditorium

#### *Mom, I Have Something to Tell You* Documentary Screening & Conversation with the Director

Many people know what follows the words, "Mom, I have something to tell you." For LGBTQ+ individuals, coming out is not a single moment, but a lifelong process, one deeply influenced by family response and support. This award-winning 30-minute documentary by Gay Sons & Their Mothers explores the experiences of gay sons and their mothers, highlighting how

acceptance, communication, and unconditional love profoundly shape mental and emotional well-being.

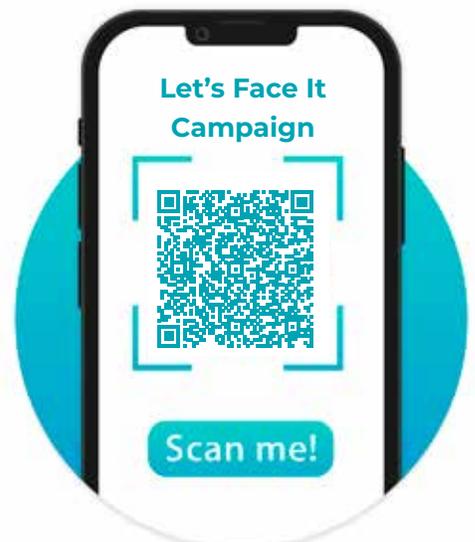
#### Thursday, May 7, 2026 7:00 - 8:30 PM

The Mark Twain Library



These screenings are open to the community and designed to spark dialogue, reduce stigma, and promote understanding around mental health and LGBTQ+ experiences. For more information on these and all our programs, visit [mhconn.org](http://mhconn.org) or follow Mental Health Connecticut on social media @mentalhealthCT. 

–Bethany Simmonds



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ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT



# THE JORGENSEN CENTER

*By* BRIAN SCOTT LIPTON

**S**ince it opened in December of 1955, the Jorgensen Center for the Performing Arts—the largest college-based presenting program in New England—has attracted countless numbers of students, faculty and staff from both the University of Connecticut, as well as thousands upon thousands of residents from Connecticut, Massachusetts and Rhode Island. Located on the University of Connecticut campus in Storrs, the multi-venue complex consists of a 2,300-seat auditorium, the 500-seat Harriet S. Jorgensen Theater, and the Jorgensen Gallery.

Unlike many other local institutions, Jorgensen presents a wide variety of nationally and internationally acclaimed artists and ensembles annually, ranging from classical music to world music, classical and contemporary dance, comedy, family programming and contemporary entertainment. (For this season’s calendar, visit <https://jorgensen.uconn.edu/>)

Among the many great artists who have appeared on the Jorgensen stage in the past seven decades are Itzhak Perlman, Marian Anderson, Dave Brubeck and Duke Ellington. In addition, Jorgensen has also presented many of the country’s most prestigious dance companies, including the American Ballet Theater, the Paul Taylor Dance Company, Pilobolus, and Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater.

In addition to performances, visiting artists augment the university’s formal educational process with master classes for the Department of Music, informal Q & A’s and panel discussions. Plus, the Jorgensen Outreach for Youth (JOY!) program provides more than 1,000 free tickets to select cultural events at Jorgensen to disadvantaged youth in Eastern Connecticut.

*Connecticut Voice* recently spoke to the Center’s longtime director Rod Rock about the many triumphs of the Center, as well as its many challenges, as it continues to provide top-notch entertainment for New England residents.

**CV: How did you get involved with the Jorgensen Center?**

RR: My wife and I moved to Connecticut in 1988. We were both opera singers, and our teacher went to UConn. So, our idea was to get our master’s degrees there, and then we would go to New York City. At some point, they had an opening for a house manager position, and I got the job. Around 1990, we started to have children, and I got the job here as the Center’s business manager. Then, eventually I became the coordinator for six months, and



Rod Rock. Photo by Scott Fisher.

eventually was hired as the Director of the Center. I had no real experience, but I wanted to restore the Center to what I considered its golden age, which was really the 1980s.

**CV: Have you been able to do that?**

RR: Not yet. Back in the 1980s, we didn’t have casinos like Foxwoods and

Mohegan Sun nearby. Because of them, it has become much more competitive for us to get certain artists, especially more popular entertainers, as well to get audience attention. Often, one of the casinos will block us from hiring someone we want. So, we have to find ways to work around that.

**CV: You just mentioned audience attention. Has your audience changed?**

RR: Yes. Audiences who love the cultural performing arts we used to present are aging out. In fact, I had to go through a period back in 2005 when I was told to program more things just for students, but my feeling was that everything we program should be interesting to students as part of their well-rounded education. Eventually they bought into my idea. Still, over the years, I have had to create a new reality for Jorgensen for many reasons. Bringing in a whole orchestra is too expensive, but we can bring in five or six chamber ensembles every year, thanks in part to a special endowment. Presenting dance has become harder, since few touring ballet companies exist. Fortunately, we have a lot of great dance troupes at U Conn, and we try to present some student groups as part of our programming.

**CV: Especially since the Covid pandemic, a lot of theaters have changed from using a subscription model to something more flexible. Did you?**

RR: Absolutely. About 40 percent of our audience was through subscriptions. but eventually, it became easier to do single ticket models, with occasional discounts. Sometimes, we even give credit for future performances if a buyer has to miss a show. The bottom line is: you have to work with where people are in their lives; right now, that means not asking them to commit to a whole year of performances so far in advance.



The Jorgensen Center from the organization's archive.

**CV: I am assuming the way you sell tickets has changed as well.**

RR: Yes. In the past, we used to use brochures, sometimes two or three different ones every year. While we still do one brochure each year, we really lean into all forms of social media, and the bulk of our tickets are sold online rather than through our own box office. We've also done some local TV commercials, and they proved to be very effective.

**CV: Acquiring customers isn't cheap! Let's talk about how the Center gets funded.**

RR: Fundraising is hard, especially since there are no really large local businesses in our area. Fortunately, we've had some success with banking foundations and charitable foundations, but most of our money now comes from private donations. I have also worked very hard to integrate the Jorgensen Center into the fabric of

the university. For example, we automatically reserve two weekends where we allow university organizations to use our space. Of course, we charge them a facility fee because there can be a lot of clean up, some wear and tear on our equipment, and we need to recoup the expenses of labor, many of whom are university students. I think it's a nice program.

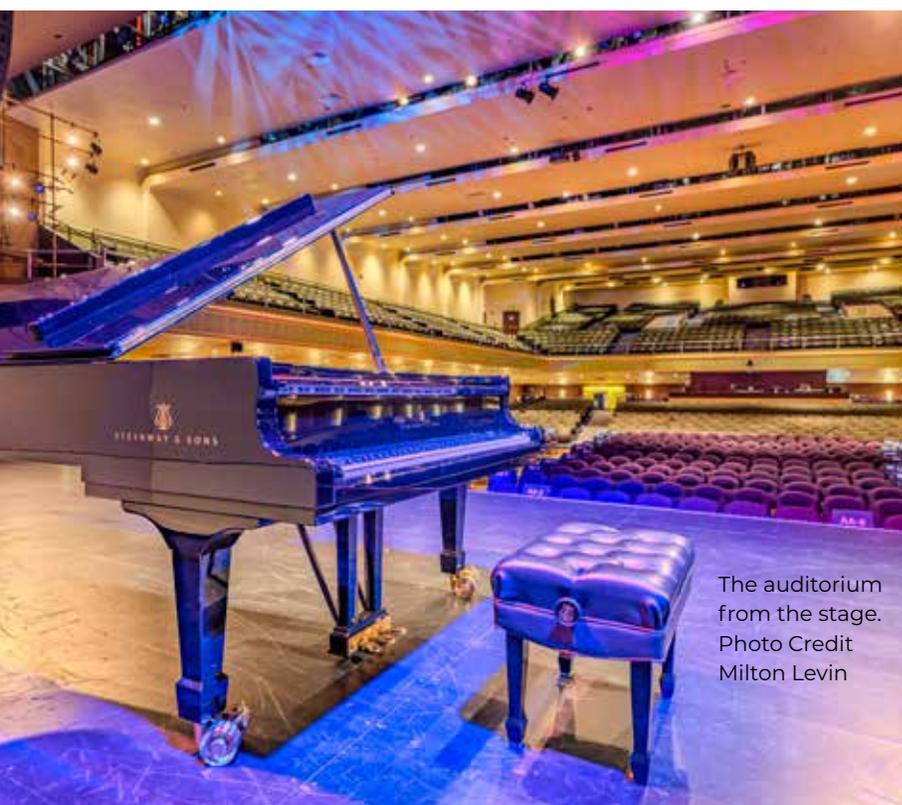
**CV: How do you find the acts you're going to present at Jorgensen?**

RR: Admittedly, I am not going out as much as I used to. But I have a good grasp of what's out there musically. In the past, automatic name recognition was what sold tickets; but that's not as important today. Television and the internet and YouTube have helped; not only can I get a good impression of what's out there, but so can our audiences. Some years ago, I saw Jacob Collier on TV on the PBS program *Austin City Limits*, and I thought he was different. I knew





Body Traffic dance troupe. Photo Credit Guzman Rosado

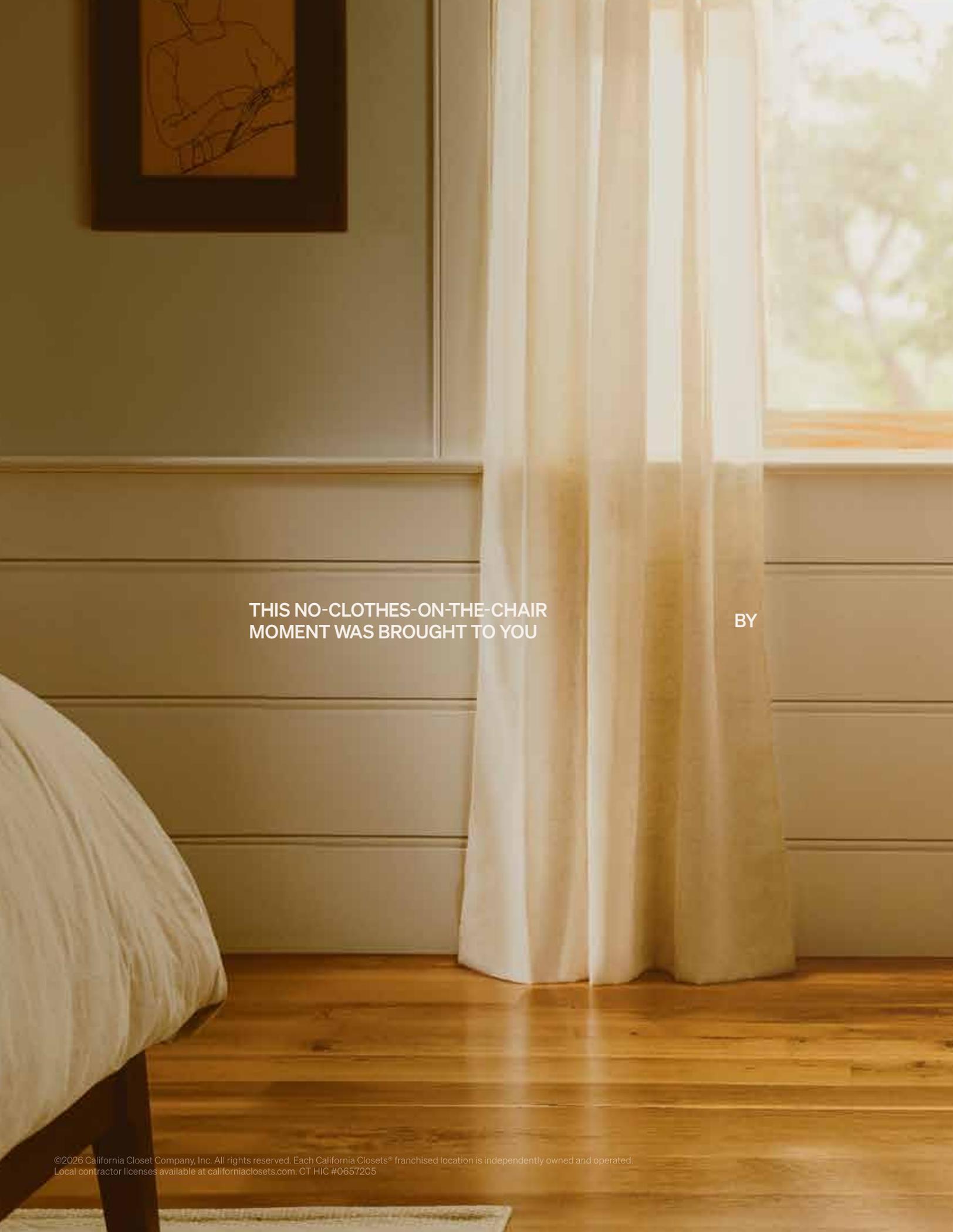


The auditorium from the stage. Photo Credit Milton Levin

he was trying to break into the market, so we booked him. He turned out to be a much tougher to sell than I originally thought, but we did sell out.

**CV: Do you have a “bucket list” of performers you would like to present?**

I would really like to present Cynthia Erivo; we had the opportunity to bring her after she won the Tony Award for *The Color Purple*, and I turned it down. I would love to present Norah Jones; we had her booked once, but I ended up arguing with her manager. I’d love to have Alex Warren and Laufey, who are both amazing young singers. And I would love to bring Kristin Chenoweth back; we had her before, and the audience loved her. We’ve made her an offer for the 2026-27 season. Fingers crossed. 🍀



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## The GLBTQ Archives at Central Connecticut State University

# Preserving the Past and Looking to the Future

By ALEX DUEBEN

*Archival photos courtesy of CCSU's Elihu Burritt Library*

“It is really the best collection—most inclusive, most comprehensive collection—of queer materials in the entire state,” William Mann said in a recent conversation about the GLBTQ Archives at Central Connecticut State University in New Britain. “Yale has a great collection of queer materials, so does UConn, but if we want to talk about community, the local queer communities, CCSU’s archive is by far the most extensive.”

William Mann has taught at CCSU for many years, and he is one of the people who helped to build the collection over decades. “There are collections that date back into the early 1960s from the Kalos society, which was one of the very first gay rights organizations in the country, all the way up through marriage equality and trans rights,” Mann said.

“The collection is so diverse and so comprehensive that for anything you might be interested in terms of Connecticut’s queer history; it’s there. If you wanted to research the history of the drag balls in Connecticut, there’s stuff there

**“The collection is so diverse and so comprehensive that for anything you might be interested in terms of Connecticut’s queer history; it’s there.”**

for you. If you wanted to research mental health that was available to queer people, it’s there. If you want to look at police and government oppression of queer people in the 50s and 60s and the 70s, it’s there. There’s nothing that we can say at this point that we don’t have. We want more, certainly. Some identities, some experiences are not as well represented as others. But we’re getting there. That’s what makes this collection so special.”

Mann’s relationship to the collection dates back to its beginnings and to the founder of the project, archivist Frank Gagliardi, who recently passed away. Carl Antonucci, the current Director of Library Services at CCSU called Gagliardi “a pioneer” and talking to both men, it was clear the great respect they have for him and his work.

“He was a gay man who came out late in life,” Mann said.

“This was a passion project for him. He wanted to make sure that LGBTQ history was preserved in the way other histories are preserved.”

This is an approach that continues at the library today. “It’s very important to us here at the Elihu Burritt Library to be a repository for the entire community,” Antonucci said recently, before listing the many archives and collections that are housed there. For him, it’s a very simple reason why they do this. “It’s people’s history.

“It’s important to people in the community, and it’s important for us to curate it, and to maintain it. I think people feel security with that in a lot of ways. That it’s here, and it’s cared for. Especially now, once it is digitized,” Antonucci said.

“The little historical details make the historical study that you’re doing more rich. It helps students because they can study not just what the history textbook says, but how a real person went through that,” Antonucci said. “One of our new projects is to have a digitization lab where we want to open it up to the community so we can have people come in so we’re not just digitizing faculty and staff publications, but life stories of people.”

That is one aspect of the collection, because it doesn’t just feature the papers and writings of John Loughery, Richard Cardarelli, George W. Henry, Christine Pattee, and others, not just papers of organizations, but oral histories. “It’s a living, growing collection,” Mann said.







Renata Vickery, Frank Gagliardi, E. Wolynska, E. Centano at the 2018 Rainbow Award celebration for Gagliardi.  
Photo credit: Courtesy of CCSU Marketing and Communication Department.

“I don’t know how many times I’ve been out in the community and people were saying, a lot of the pioneers in our community are dying,” Antonucci said. “Now more than ever, it’s very easy for us to go out there with a cell phone or a tape recorder to interview people. We want to be part of this, to bring the community into the library. Because a lot of these things you can’t find in AI.”

“The oral history collection is growing all the time. This semester I’m teaching

a course in which we are collaborating with Preservation Connecticut to identify queer historic spaces around the state,” Mann said. “To do that, we are conducting this massive outreach oral history project. Having those oral histories is so vital, because we can have pamphlets and meeting notes and minutes and those kinds of things, which are all super important, but to have the voices of the people who were actually involved in, say, the Kalos Society, or the passage of

the Gay Rights Bill, or the passage of the Trans Rights Bill. All of these voices are so important to get now. We just lost a major figure, Carolyn Gabel-Brett. I’m glad that we did get an oral history from her a few years back.”

Mann pointed out that this is important beyond just individual stories. “This is a period in which our history is actively being erased. People are actively trying to erase this history. After so many years of it being obscured and hidden,” Mann said. “It’s really up to the community. We have to save it ourselves. And thankfully, even though Frank has passed on, Renata Vickrey is an incredible archivist and completely supportive of building this collection.”

Having taught for so many years, Mann knows what incorporating the archival collection into his classes can do for students. “Learning the history is very empowering for young people in general, and queer people in particular,” Mann said.

“Queer students would say to me, I’m just so glad to know it’s there. That those papers are there. Some of the really best papers that I’ve had for my students, I’ve put them in the archive, with the students’ permission, because this was great work, and it should be archived. Queer history is not taught in high schools. When they get to college, this is the moment where, before they go off into the world, I want to make sure they know about their history. I shouldn’t just focus on queer



students, because half of my classes, perhaps even three quarters of my classes, would be straight students. They were equally as interested in this. They asked, why didn't we know this about the gay community? Why have we not learned this?"

The archive is vast and having spent some time with it, I know that I only scratched the surface, and I had to ask Mann what he thought were some of the highlights. Besides, of course, his own papers, which are part of the archive.

**"The collections are so great, and I think they're also important. Having lived through the AIDS epidemic, the papers with the Health Collective, with AIDS Action Council. That's so vital because those voices we lost way too early,"**

"The collections are so great, and I think they're also important. Having lived through the AIDS epidemic, the papers with the Health Collective, with AIDS Action Council. That's so vital because those voices we lost way too early," Mann said before listing friends and colleagues whose lives and works are a part of the archive. "I'd also have to add the collection of the Connecticut Coalition for Lesbian and Gay Civil Rights. It was an amazing period in which people finally started coming out and saying, we've got to do this. The rallies were getting bigger and bigger and bigger. It was really the blossoming of Connecticut's queer culture. Those papers are vital as well."

Antonucci spoke at length about the many aspects of the archive and the library as a whole, but the reason for doing this, and how he sees the university library as a part of the community was very simple. "It happened right here."

"It's important for people. They want their history kept and curated, and people trust us that we're going to keep it in good shape," Antonucci said. "Your history is not going to be forgotten. That's what we're trying to accomplish here." 

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# “It’s very scary and very exciting”

Jacques Lamarre on the world premiere of *Circus Fire*  
and building a life in Hartford

By ALEX DUEBEN

*Historic photos courtesy of Michael Skidgell and circusfire1944.com*



“Circus Fire is easily the biggest, most complicated thing I’ve ever worked on,” Jacques Lamarre said in a recent conversation about his new play, which goes up at TheaterWorks Hartford in April.

“It started over ten years ago. I was working at the Twain House, and someone suggested that we do something in conjunction with the 70th anniversary of the Hartford Circus Fire,” Lamarre said. The 1944 fire killed at least 167 people and injured more than 700 others, most of them children, and remains one of the city’s defining events.

“I realized, this community has not necessarily moved on. This fire, that happened at that point 70 years ago, is very much still with this community,” Lamarre said. “I didn’t think it would be anything easy to stage, and I didn’t necessarily have a clear vision for what it would be, but [TheaterWorks’ Artistic Director] Rob Ruggiero and I started the conversation over ten years ago. We tabled it for various reasons, but my interest in the Circus Fire did not dwindle.”



Lamarre is a familiar figure to many in the region. Besides being a playwright, he's a marketing professional, is active in the art and culture scene, and if you don't recognize his face, you might know his voice from his many appearances on *The Colin McEnroe Show*. His new play *Circus Fire* is a centerpiece of the 40th anniversary season of TheaterWorks Hartford, the latest in a number of Lamarre's shows that have appeared there including *I Love, I Lost, I Made Spaghetti*.

*Circus Fire* is not just the biggest production he's been involved with to date, but Lamarre admits that it's also a departure for him, as a writer best known for his work writing for Varla Jean Merman and comedic plays.

"I had two interests. One is showing what happens when these two communities intersect in a tragic way and forever changed each other. Hartford was a very good city for Ringling Brothers. It was a stop that was a reliably good audience for them. For Hartford, when the circus would come to town, it was like Christmas. Especially because this is happening during World War II. To have levity and joy come in and then have that turn into a tragedy," Lamarre said.

"Also, knowing that survivors have been dying," he continued. Knowing that the memorial is hard to find. It's in the North End of Hartford, so a number



of people won't go there. To me, part of it is also about remembering. Keeping the memory of the Circus Fire alive. Remembering those that died. Remembering those that survived. Remembering the heroes. There aren't a lot of villains in the story," Lamarre said. "It's how people responded. It's about how the circus and Hartford, to a certain extent, worked together in the face of the tragedy."

"I want to make sure that I mention



Jacques Lamarre, and Lamarre with the poster for *Circus Fire*. Photo Credit Arthur Galinat



A workshop reading of *Circus Fire*, January 2025 Photo Credit: Hartford Film



Circus Fire Table Read: TheaterWorks Producing Artistic Director Rob Ruggiero, Director Jared Mezzocchi, Playwright Jacques Lamarre. Photo by Hartford Film

the partnership with not only Rob but TheatreWorks. Rob's a co-conceiver on the piece and he has been involved in the shaping of the script. It was his vision to have a larger cast. It was his vision to have it in a space outside of TheatreWorks. It's going to be performed in the round, like a circus."

"The artist directing the show, Jared Mezzocchi, is really why the play came back to life. He directed a piece at TheatreWorks called *Sandra*. I was blown away by the projections and the technical aspects of it," Lamarre said. "I went up to Rob afterwards and I said, this is how we could do *Circus Fire*. I didn't say it has to be this director. Because this year is the 40th anniversary of TheatreWorks, I think Rob wanted to go big with this. If we're going to do this, let's pull out all the stops. And so the show is going to have multimedia components on top of an unusual location and on top of a large cast."

"I've been in Hartford now over thirty-five years. I moved here after I graduated

from college to work at Hartford Stage. My college roommate was from South Windsor and was living in West Hartford. He said, why don't you move down here?"

"I was working at Hartford Stage. Then I went to Rome from 1991 to early '93. I had been accepted to study in the Catholic seminary. I was there for a year and a half and then dropped out of the seminary and came back," Lamarre said. "Other than a brief respite at the Vatican, this has been home."

One reason that he considers Hartford home is because this is where he met his husband, Arthur. "We actually met at Tisane when he was on a date with someone else," Lamarre smiled.

"It was with a friend of mine, who I was giving a tremendous amount of shit too. I felt bad, because they were on a date, so I bought them both a drink, and then wandered away. And promptly forgot about him, because he was on a date with someone else," Lamarre said. "Months later, I was having drinks with

some people who said that I needed to start dating younger people. I changed my age range down by ten years. Arthur is, almost to the day, ten years younger than me. He was literally the first person who popped up. That was twenty years ago. Which is about the amount of time I've been working with Varla. Two of my most important relationships started in 2005."

Lamarre said that he owes his writing career to Varla Jean Merman.

"When I came back from Rome, I had come out of the closet and had made good friends in the queer community here in Hartford. One of them was a drag performer named Tastee Places, who was a Hartford legend. She was the mother of the house of Trailer Park Trash. She took me under her wing. A bunch of friends went to New York to go to Wigstock," Lamarre said, where he first saw Varla perform, and after seeing her perform in shows for years, Lamarre's suggestion led to Varla being hired by Hartford Stage to perform in the Charles Ludlam play, *The*



Lisa Lamarre, Jasper the Dog, Varla Jean Merman, Jacques Lamarre and husband Arthur Galinat.

*Mystery of Irma Vep*, where the two got to know each other.

“We bonded over a lot of shared reference points, and he invited me—without seeing anything that I had written, and I hadn’t written anything in years—to write for him. This was 2005. Last year was 20 years of writing for Varla. He took me in and showed me the ropes. We’ve had our ups and downs, but it’s been twenty shows. We’re starting work on our twenty-first,” Lamarre said.

“These shows will have an out-of-town tryout, but then they’re in Provincetown for the whole summer, and then they’re toured for a year. It’s led to me writing for other drag performers. I currently have three shows that I’ve worked on running in Puerto Vallarta. Four shows that I’ve worked on are running in Provincetown this summer,” Lamarre said, a little amazed by this. “Varla’s opened so many doors for me.”

Lamarre leaned into the recorder sitting between us. “I should be very clear; there are no drag queens in *Circus Fire*. No

drag queens will be hurt in the making of this play,” he said with a smile, familiar to those who know him, and those who have heard his appearances from the radio know what it sounds like.

TheaterWorks has produced several of Lamarre’s plays over the years, but the circumstances that led to *Circus Fire* was a combination of many factors...and a little luck. “Rob asked me to lunch. There was a change in leadership at TheatreWorks, and he had to reprogram half of the season. He wanted to pick my brain about plays that they could do. Just as a person who’s involved with theatre,” Lamarre said. “I had met the author of a memoir called *I Loved, I Lost, I Made Spaghetti*. I had read it, and contacted her and said, I could see this becoming a play. Would you be open to it?”

“Rob said, ‘sounds great, but there needs to be a script.’ I’m like, hold that thought. Literally, Saturday I wrote Act 1. Sunday, I wrote Act 2. It wasn’t the version that ended up on stage, but it gave him a sense of what I wanted to do,

how I envisioned it,” Lamarre said. “It was a big success, for them and for me. Then the next thing was *Christmas on the Rocks*, which I’ve been featured in with a varying number of pieces for thirteen years. They did my play *The Raging Skillet*, and then the sequel to *I Loved, I Lost, I Made Spaghetti, Secondo*. That was one of the first things coming out of the pandemic for them. And now *Circus Fire*.”

“I usually write very small, somewhat traditional plays. Even though this is a historic incident, it’s being approached in a non-traditional fashion. Aside from the use of technology, which isn’t really baked into the script much, the director Jared Mezzocchi has got this unique ability to blend human stories and technology,” Lamarre said. “I’m in the best hands possible with the team at TheatreWorks. I’m just nervous because drama is outside my comfort zone.”

The rehearsal process has helped Lamarre shape the play. “There were little tiny changes, and some fairly sizable changes, but I have to say, the heart and soul of it was already there. It was very illuminating and a chance for me to see Jared work and work with actors because he and I have not had a ton of time together,” Lamarre said.

“To see this amazing artist work, to be on the ground floor watching him work on something I wrote! There’s a certain amount of imposter syndrome going on here. Like, how did this happen to me? The way his brain works is completely different than mine. He just sees things in a very different way. I’m in awe of that.”

One moment early in the process set the tone for the project. “Rob, Jared, and I met to go over the first pages that I had written around the Fourth of July weekend. I said, this is the anniversary.” Last year because of nearby construction, there was no ceremony to mark the anniversary there, but the three visited the site.

“It was kind of haunting to be there at that time. I’m not one looking for signs, but there was a dude hanging out there next to an empty plastic gasoline can. Apropos of nothing, a balloon was going across the sky. Then we went to do something which I’ve never done, to find the graves of the unidentified. There was a weird energy, but also, it felt like we’re doing the right thing.” 🍷

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# Small Caucus, Mighty Legislative Agenda

By JANE LATUS

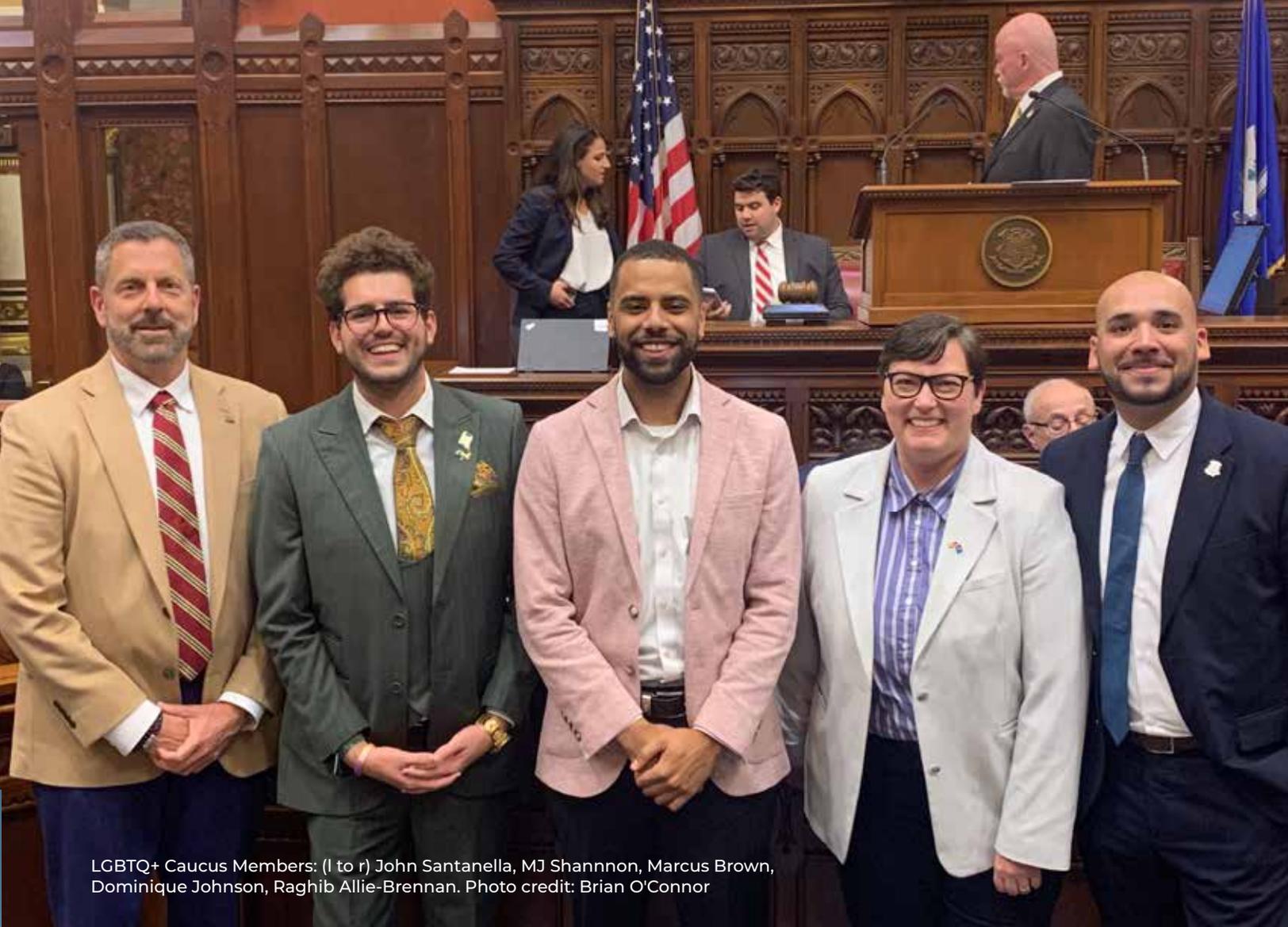
If you're expecting less progress from this year's legislative session just because it's a short one, leaders of the legislature's LGBTQ+ caucus—also small, at only five members—urge you to raise your expectations. “When we work together, we can get *really* big things done,” says Rep. Dominique Johnson of Norwalk and Westport. “We’re punching above our weight,” adds Rep. Raghiv Allie-Brennan of Bethel and Danbury

The two are co-chairs of the caucus, which also includes representatives John Santenella of Enfield, Marcus Brown of Bridgeport, and MJ Shannon of Milford, Orange and West Haven.

“Right now we’re having to put our shoulders into things we didn’t think we’d have to, but I believe in progress,” says Johnson. Allie-Brennan stresses that despite current attacks on LGBTQ+ rights, the caucus is proactive. “We’re not reacting to headlines. We’re making sure laws focus on people’s lives, especially access to healthcare and education.”

Current elected officials and candidates should take heed that Connecticut residents expect progress on LGBTQ+ issues, says Matthew Blinstrubas, executive director of Equality CT, the nonprofit working to advance LGBTQ+ rights and culture. “We expect results on LGBTQ+ issues, and we expect resources.” Last November saw what





LGBTQ+ Caucus Members: (l to r) John Santanella, MJ Shannon, Marcus Brown, Dominique Johnson, Raghieb Allie-Brennan. Photo credit: Brian O'Connor

he calls “a mini queer wave” in local elections, he adds. “LGBTQ+ people are running and winning.”

Johnson and Allie-Brennan say caucus members spent the past few months meeting with individuals, advocates and organizations to hear their needs and to prioritize goals for this session, which began February 4 and ends May 6.

Their strategy is necessarily different during short sessions, when procedural rules are different. Some long-term goals likely won’t be achieved—like a constitutional amendment prohibiting discrimination based on gender identity or sexual orientation. On the other hand, less time should be wasted on fending off attack bills, since only committee chairs are allowed to introduce bills.

“Our approach is to stay focused on policy and facts and the impact on people’s lives. Part of our job, too, is humanizing the LGBTQ+ community,”

says Allie-Brennan. Putting a face on policy is why it’s so important for individuals to testify, he adds, especially on trans issues, since the caucus doesn’t include anyone who is trans.

Speaking of which: Johnson hopes that transgender candidates will come forward. She recalls being in junior high school when the state passed the gay rights bill. “We stand on the shoulders of those who worked to pass that bill,” she says, and she hopes current events will spark interest in others becoming future leaders, and that LGBTQ+ representation will become increasingly diverse.

Despite its size, the caucus has a broad reach, with members serving on these committees: Government Administration and Elections; Energy and Technology; General Law; Insurance and Real Estate; Environment; Joint Commission on Judiciary; Commerce; Planning and Development; Public

Safety and Security; Finance, Revenue and Bonding; Appropriations, and Transportation. Johnson also serves as deputy majority leader.

“We’re really lucky to have such a strong caucus,” says Equality CT’s Blinstrubas. The caucus’s agenda in most part overlaps that organization’s own 2026 legislative agenda, which can be seen at [eqct.org](http://eqct.org).

*Following are the caucus’s goals for this session.*

### **FERTILITY TREATMENT FOR ALL**

This effort to require that insurers cover fertility treatment for everyone is bipartisan. Johnson is working with Republican Tammy Nuccio to modernize this statute that “has outdated assumptions about who forms a family,”

says Johnson. “It excludes single women, queer women, and gay men.”

She has heard from queer women who want to start families but have to choose between paying for fertility care, a home down payment or a wedding.

Johnson expects this bill to be an easy win, and one that “would make an immediate impact for people who have insurance but can’t access it. Insurance covers it, but for other people.”

## **STRENGTHENING HEALTHCARE PROVIDER PROTECTION**

A chief caucus goal is to update the existing shield law to include telehealth providers of reproductive and gender affirming care, no matter where the patient is located, and to clarify that anti-gender affirming care and anti-reproductive care laws in other states cannot apply in Connecticut.

The proposal would also shield providers from out-of-state subpoenas and requests for data.

“Providers are nervous. There are providers who are not doing this because of the uncertainty,” says Allie-Brennan.

## **EASING ACCESS TO HORMONES**

No matter the reason a person is prescribed hormones, the caucus’s goal is to require the ability to obtain a 12-month supply to help ensure stable, uninterrupted care.

Additionally, Equality CT is advocating that providers of both gender affirming and reproductive care be allowed to write prescriptions using their clinic’s or practice’s name, rather than their personal name. Equality CT also advocates that testosterone be made more accessible by removing it from the controlled substance list.

## **FUNDING THE LGBTQ+ JUSTICE & OPPORTUNITY NETWORK**

Increasing funding for this first-of-its-kind in the nation network is a top priority, says Allie-Brennan, who along with past State Rep. Jeffrey Currey introduced the bill that created it in 2017.

Funded and administered by the state, the network funds and collaborates with LGBTQ+ organizations statewide and

advises the legislature on queer issues. It conducted the first needs assessment on statewide health and human services issues.

You can learn more about the network in “Queer Joy and Resilience” in the June 2025 issue of *CT Voice* and at [ctlgbtqnetwork.org](http://ctlgbtqnetwork.org).

**Planned Parenthood is already a really important healthcare provider for our LGBTQ+ community,” and has become even more so as other providers “pre-comply” with federal policy.**

## **SUPPORTING PLANNED PARENTHOOD**

In last fall’s emergency session, the legislature approved a \$500 million emergency relief fund to replace federal cuts to healthcare, housing and social services programs. The caucus is particularly concerned, looking ahead to 2027, that money be available for Planned Parenthood.

“Planned Parenthood is already a really important healthcare provider for our LGBTQ+ community,” and has become even more so as other providers “pre-comply” with federal policy says Johnson, referring to the decisions by Yale New Haven Hospital and Connecticut Children’s Medical Center to end gender affirming care for approximately 1,000 youths.

## **SAFE EDUCATIONAL ENVIRONMENT**

“There are gaps in how anti-discrimination laws are applied. We want to ensure that students in every school district are safe from discrimination,”

says Allie-Brennan.

The problem, according to Melissa Combs, founder of the Out Accountability Project (which seeks safe, affirming schools), is a loophole that allows schools to process discrimination complaints via federal Title IX or Section 504 policies, rather than via state statute. Even without the current federal antipathy toward queer rights, federal processes are cumbersome, inefficient and—adds Combs—tilted toward an outcome that protects the school rather than the student.

Combs says this loophole leaves 67 percent of Connecticut’s children, including about 6,471 queer kids, without protection at a time when bullying is on the rise. And not only from peers. “I got a call from a nonbinary child whose principal told them, ‘My president says there are only two genders.’”

## **TRAINING 211 OPERATORS**

“Calls to 211 from LGBTQ+ people, especially youth, have gone up drastically” since the end of federal funding for LGBTQ+ youths’ calls to the 988 suicide hotline, says Johnson.

“Not only do we need to keep funding it, but we need to be sure operators are culturally competent and supportive,” she says.

Allie-Brennan points out that shoring up the 211 service is an example of progress that could be achieved without legislation, but instead through conversation.

One additional ongoing priority of the caucus is to be vocal and visible on behalf the trans community, says Allie-Brennan. Stay tuned, he says, for opportunities for community members to engage with legislators and officials including Attorney General William Tong. “We want people to know we stand with them. 



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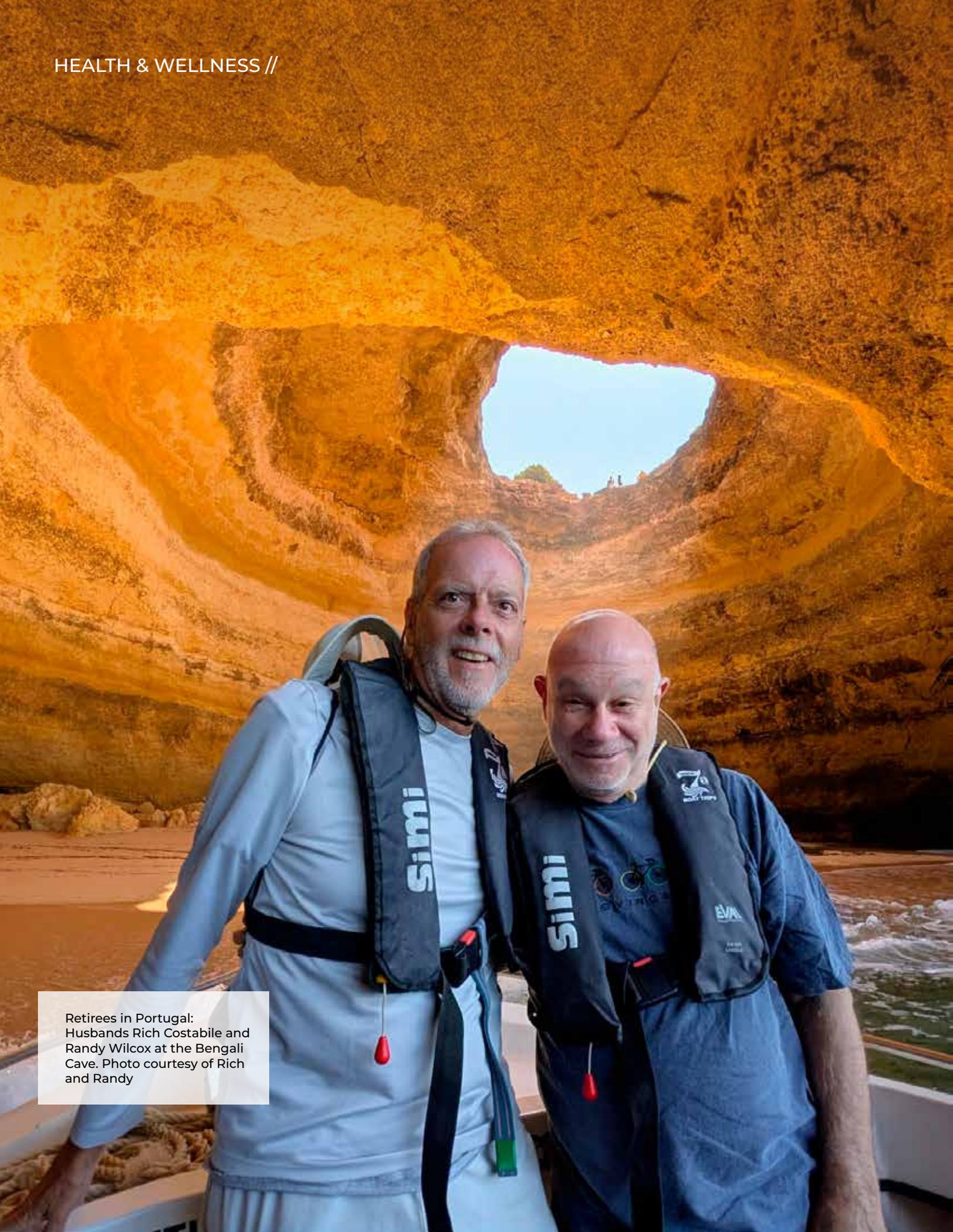


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Retirees in Portugal:  
Husbands Rich Costabile and  
Randy Wilcox at the Bengali  
Cave. Photo courtesy of Rich  
and Randy

# Where The (Elder) Gays Are

— and still feel part of a safe,  
supported and active LGBTQ+  
retirement community

By FRANK RIZZO

**Y**ears ago I had a great idea for a television series. It would be called *Lavender Heights* and it would set at a senior living complex—but a deluxe retirement compound specially tailored for the LGBTQ+ community. Think of it as *White Lotus* for gay seniors.

The stunning enclave would have breathtaking views (mountains or sea, or both), gorgeously designed cottages (think Nate Berkus), there would be a model waitstaff (literally), beautiful pools (and pool boys), top entertainment (RuPaul's finest queens), a screening room premiering the hottest shows (*Heated Rivalry* would have previewed here), a spa and gym to die for (not to mention hunky masseurs and star trainers), and the food would be *haute cuisine* with Top Chefs overseeing the menu. The place would be so sought-after that heterosexuals would pretend to be gay just to get in.

But wait. It may already be here—or close to it.



The pool. All Living Out photos courtesy of Living Out

## Living Out

Here's the scene last year: John Waters looked out at an audience of LGBTQ+ fans eager for his delightfully trashy stand-up routine. But the iconic film director, writer and gay icon wasn't performing at a concert hall but rather an outdoor stage at Living Out, the Palm Springs residential complex, which describes itself as "an elegant apartment community for active LGBTQ 55+ adults and their allies." In less than two years, the complex is nearing capacity for its 122 rental apartments.

Against a stunning backdrop of the San Jacinto Mountains, residents had reserved front row seats for the outdoor show, one of the many perks of living in a compound on a nine-acre site. Living Out ([livingout.com](http://livingout.com)) features an epic pool, a pet park, putting green, bocce courts, an indoor/outdoor gym, game

room, urgent care center, and screening room, among its attractions. It also boasts Alice. B.'s, a first-class restaurant on site created by James Beard Award-winning chefs Susan Feniger and Mary Sue Milliken (Food Network's *Two Hot Tamales* series).

"It was obvious that as our [LGBTQ+] community aged we needed our own place," says Quincy, Mass. native Loren S. Ostrow, visionary and developer of Living Out. "Many existing senior living [complexes] were not always welcoming."

Some may say Palm Springs and its neighboring desert cities (such as Cathedral City and Rancho Mirage), are like one big gay community anyway, so why is such a facility needed? After all, Palm Springs has the highest per-capita, queer, year-round population in the U.S., with estimates around 50 percent of the population. You can't swing a

rainbow flag without hitting a drag brunch in the city where in one year the mayor and the entire city council were all LGBTQ+.

"For many, it doesn't matter how welcoming a city or town may be there's still loneliness and isolation," says Ostrow who is also on the executive board at SAGE, the nation's oldest and largest organization serving the older LGBTQ+ community,

At 74, Ostrow says he is not looking to do further developments but hopes to encourage other developers to use the Living Out template in other locales around the country.

## What to look for

The senior LGBTQ+ demographic is indeed growing.

According to a 2024 Gallup poll, nearly 10 percent of the U.S. population



Bocce courts





Kitchen view in Living Out apartments.



Living area in Living Out apartments.

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identified as LGBTQ+, with more than 3 million LGBTQ+ adults aged at least 55. That number is expected to more than double in the next five years, according to SAGE.

According to an AARP survey of older LGBTQ+ adults, 41 percent said they were concerned about hiding their identity to avoid housing discrimination as they age; the figure was 58 percent of trans and nonbinary respondents.

Overall, older LGBTQ+ people look to many of the same things their heterosexual allies do: To live in an area with reasonable prices and taxes, an agreeable climate, walkability, an abundance of cultural and recreational activities, access to good health care—and safety.

But gays look to other factors, too: an active LGBTQ+ social scene, gay-friendly businesses nearby, a community-wide welcoming spirit, the protection of non-discrimination laws, and a medical infrastructure sensitive to the needs of their community.

## Top States

According to Retirement Living, among the top states for safety and inclusivity in-

clude: California, Oregon, Washington, New York, New Jersey, Colorado, Massachusetts, and our own Connecticut.

Cities known for their prominent LGBTQ+ communities: New York City, San Francisco, Los Angeles and Washington, D.C. are at the top, though cost of living there is high.

LGBTQ+ residential senior complexes around the country can range from apartment clusters, assisted living or continuing care compounds and as well as affordable care housing. (In Palm Springs, there's also Stonewall Gardens, an assisted living complex.)

A partial list of other progressive, gay-friendly cities with a thriving LGBTQ+ base include: Minneapolis, MN; Seattle, WA; Denver, CO; King City and Portland, OR; Sante Fe, NM Asheville, NC; Philadelphia, Boston, Tucson, AZ; and Palm Springs, CA.

"I think because of culture shift and visibility, people are seeing that LGBTQ+ people are aging in need of culturally responsive, affirming housing," says Sydney Kopp-Richardson, director of the National LGBTQ+ Elder Housing Initiative at SAGE. "Housing developers—both nonprofit and for-profit, and affordable housing

developers—are seeing this market and are really capitalizing on it."

The list of gay-centric places is growing yearly and varies widely. A partial listing includes: Village Hearth (Durham, NC); Fountaingrove Lodge (Santa Rosa, CA); The Palms of Manasota (Palmetto, FL); Birds of a Feather Resort Community (Pecos, NM); Rainbow Vista (Gresham, OR); Open House Community at 55 Laguna (San Francisco, CA); Town Hall Apartments (Chicago); Crotona Pride House (Bronx); Bay Shore Senior Residences (Bayshore, NY)

Also: The Resort on Carefree Boulevard (North Ft. Meyers, FL); Stonewall House, (Brooklyn, NY); The Pryde (Boston, MA); The Residences at Equality Park, (Wilton Manors, FL); The Connie House ALF, (Boynton Beach, FL); John C. Anderson Apartments, (Philadelphia, PA.); Law Harrington Senior Living Center (Houston, TX); Pride Place, (Seattle, WA); The Opal (Portland, OR); and A Place for Us (Cleveland, OH).

Something that many take into consideration is that although some cities that are ranked high with many positive factors—Ft. Lauderdale, and Tampa,

FL, for example—they are in states with governmental bodies that are not supportive of the LGBTQ+ community, or are even viewed as hostile.

## International

Seeking retirement settings outside of the U.S. is an increasingly appealing option for many, especially in the present polarizing landscape. Frequently cited as the most accepting countries for gays are Iceland, Norway, The Netherlands, Sweden, and Canada.

Western Europe and the U.K. as a whole have been in the forefront of gay rights and acceptance for decades. In many European cities, such as Stockholm, acceptance has been so complete that there isn't even a specific LGBTQ+ neighborhood because gays have been so integrated into the city as a whole.

Other countries with progressive rights, legal protections, and vibrant gay scenes include: Australia, Mexico (Puerto Vallarta and Mexico City are most popular); Colombia (particularly in Bogotá, which houses the massive Theatron nightclub); Costa Rica (the first Central American country to legalize same-sex marriage); Uruguay (especially in Montevideo and Punta del Este); Brazil (besides Rio de Janeiro, the world's largest Pride parade is in São Paulo); Chile (recently achieving a perfect score on Equaldex's Legal Index) and Argentina. (Buenos Aires is a major hub for queer nightlife.)

The United States is ranked 23rd out of 136 countries for LGBTQ+ legal rights in the most recent survey by the Williams Institute at UCLA University.

Henry Scott, a journalist who lived in West Hartford early in his career before relocating to New York City, Miami and Los Angeles, now lives in Buenos Aires.

"The city has dozens of gay bars, nightclubs, bathhouses, and cafes

dedicated to LGBTQ+ people," says Scott. "Its annual Pride events, which take place in November attract hundreds of thousands of people. The city has a gay arts and culture center (Casa Brandon) and an LGBTQ+ retirement center (Puerta Abierta), and it offers free health services to those with HIV. There are many expat groups in Buenos Aires—including gay expats—who have retired here and meet regularly to share their stories and advice."



"Protection for same-sex marriage has been in Portugal's constitution since 2010," says Rich Costabile, 78, who with his husband Randall Wilcox, 71, moved to Tavira, Algarve, in southern Portugal four years ago.

"Now there's the EA Rainbow Club with 400 LGBTQ+ members, friends, and allies who get together every month to socialize and network," says Costabile, a retired theatrical stage manager. "We feel very comfortable in our

neighborhood, in Tavira, in the Algarve, and in Portugal as a whole. Lisbon and perhaps Porto, being more populous, have more of a gay presence."

## Connecticut

There may not be any senior complexes specifically created for the LGBTQ+ community in Connecticut, but the state has strong LGBTQ+ protections, and there are high-end facilities that are

welcoming to gays, such as Seabury in Bloomfield which describes itself as "an active life plan community."

"We're affiliated with the Episcopal Church, which has a long and renowned history of openness in terms of the gay community in terms of its base, clergy and leadership," says Christine T. DuPont, vice president of marketing and communications.

For those who feel they are more comfortable in their established communities, Dupont points to its Seabury At Home program, where people can have care and services in their own home throughout the state.

Similarly, Marc Zirolli, vice president of sales and marketing at Duncaster in Bloomfield, says that its large, full-service complex of more than 300 residences in its independent and further-care apartments offer a welcoming home to the gay community. "Our DEI committee is actively engaged here," he says.

## Resources

For more information on gay seniors in retirement and housing the U.S. and internationally, check out the in-depth guidance on the website and podcast *Where Did Gays Retire*. (wheredogay-sretire.com). Other resources include: queermoneypodcast.com/gay-retirement-communities/; lgbtqseniorhousing.org; and retire retirefabulously.com. 

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# Healthcare is Loving Care

By ANTHONY H. CRISCI

**A**s we prepare to celebrate Pride in 2026, we cannot do so without acknowledging the many challenges to hard-won rights, freedoms, and cultural acceptance of LGBTQ people in our country. It goes without saying that these feel like hard times, especially as we understand the amount of work ahead of us. Some of the best advice I have heard, regardless of what the future may hold, is to take the best possible care of ourselves and our loved ones. Particularly regarding physical and mental health.

Health is the greatest gift we can give ourselves and our community during this time. To be in the best possible

condition to navigate whatever challenges the future may hold. Going to a primary care provider to have an annual physical done may not feel like the most urgent priority, but I would encourage everyone to make it a priority if you don't already have an appointment scheduled for the year. Most health insurance plans cover a free annual physical exam or an "annual wellness visit" for patients on Medicare. Annual exams can lead to early detection of life-threatening or chronic diseases, which often have higher success and less negative effects when they are treated early.

Aside from annual exams, prevention services are a great way to care for yourself and achieve the healthiest





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version of you. Whether that includes HIV prevention treatment, cervical cancer screenings, STI testing, or birth control, these are all treatments that may have benefits, particularly to sexually active members of our community. Cancer screening in general, as well as cardio fitness tests, are great ways to identify potentially fatal diseases at an early stage. If you have a family history of either, you should make a point to see a primary care provider and ask about referrals for screening and/or tests that are appropriate for your individual risk factors. Even with no family history, many cancer screenings are recommended for everyone of a certain age. It's great to be in the know about what tests or screenings are recommended for you and to take advantage of these preventative health tools whenever you can.

Don't have health insurance? Many nonprofit providers throughout the

state offer sliding-scale or free services for people without insurance. You can Google your closest "federally qualified health center" or check out nonprofit health centers like Anchor Health or Circle Care Center that specialize in serving members of the LGBTQ community. Aside from receiving medical services, there are many ways we can improve our health simply by changing daily habits in both small and large ways. Maybe it's incorporating more walks or physical activity into our day or looking for a way to reduce a harmful habit, such as scaling back or giving up smoking. You do not have to make a huge change to have a positive impact on your health. Being more active than you currently are and reducing harmful habits are methods you can use to set your own individual goals for what a healthier version of you may look like in 2026. It's not about achieving the same level of fitness as someone else; it's just

about making progress for yourself.

While some of this advice may sound tedious and dull, especially given a world that feels in some ways like it is on fire, preventative healthcare is an expression of love. A loving act you can bestow upon yourself. And as RuPaul's old adage goes, "If you can't love yourself, how in the hell you going to love somebody else?" 

*Anthony H. Crisci is the CEO of Circle Care Center. Founded in 2011 as a center of excellence for the treatment and prevention of HIV, Circle Care Center is Connecticut's first public health center specializing in stigma-free primary care and sexual health. Since its inception, Circle Care Center has evolved into a leading provider of comprehensive healthcare services. They have locations in Norwalk and Glastonbury Contact them at [circlecarecenter.org](http://circlecarecenter.org)*

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