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CONNECTICUT VOICE™

EDITOR'S NOTE //



Happy Pride!

Welcome to our annual Pride issue. As you look through our calendar, you'll see the state of Pride in Connecticut. Our Jane Latus has once again put together a list of all the local events so you can show your own pride in your community. At a time that is challenging for LGBTQ+ people throughout the nation, this chance to get together, show our strength, and celebrate is more important every year.

We're also thrilled that Jane has been honored with a first place, 2025 Excellence in Journalism Award by the Connecticut Society of Professional Journalists in the General Column/Commentary division for her article "Hellene on Earth," which appeared in our Spring 2025 issue and which you can see online. Jane's commitment, insight, and talent are an integral part of our commitment to excellence in coverage.

In addition to our listing of events, Frank Rizzo rounds up many of the entertainment options happening in our state this summer. We promise you won't be at a loss for finding some great things to do. Frank also writes about travel to Colombia and why it's a haven for LGBTQ+ travelers.

D.R. Lewis provides a new look at playwright Thornton Wilder, who though he was not born in Connecticut, lived and worked here throughout his career, making Hamden his permanent home. Lewis looks at Wilder and the ways in which his clandestine gay life influenced his work, which includes the classic plays *Our Town* and *The Skin of Our Teeth*.

We also take a look at history in our state. Alex Dueben profiles Ilene Frank of The Connecticut Museum, the importance of preserving our state's history, and how she and her wife ended up in Connecticut.

During what are for many tough times, understanding your legal rights are critical, particularly when it comes to getting gender-affirming care in an environment when many states are looking to restrict access to these essential services. Beck Fineman of Pullman & Comley details how Connecticut "stands in stark contrast to these restrictive and punitive efforts."

In her regular Sex Talk column, Kimberly Adamski writes about the challenges of learning to love your body, how social media and impossible images make it tough, but she has some great tips on how to improve the relationship between yourself and your body.

Bethany Simmonds from Mental Health Connecticut provides some excellent insights on maintaining your spiritual and emotional equilibrium during Pride month, with a special emphasis on self-care.

If you're planning some R&R this summer, we have the tale of two, new books you'll want to add to your list. Brian Lipton talks to two theater icons—Marc Shaiman and Andrew Keenan-Bolger. Shaiman has some delightful stories about his amazing show biz career, and Broadway star Keenan-Bolger, has penned a terrific, gay coming of age story.

As always, you'll also find much more online at CTVoice.com.

Here's wishing you and yours a wonderful Pride month! Get out and celebrate. And don't forget the sunscreen!

Chris

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A photograph of two men embracing on a city street. The man on the left is wearing a teal tank top and khaki shorts, and has a rainbow-colored drawstring bag slung over his shoulder. The man on the right is wearing a white t-shirt and blue shorts. They are standing on a sidewalk with buildings and trees in the background.

“I LEARNED THIS, AT
LEAST, BY MY EXPERIMENT:
THAT IF ONE ADVANCES
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COMMON HOURS.”

—Henry David Thoreau



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The Marina at Saybrook Point Resort & Marina


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- ◆ **Severe liver problems,** which in rare cases can lead to death. Tell your healthcare provider right away if you get these symptoms: skin or the white part of your eyes turns yellow, dark “tea-colored” urine, light-colored stools, loss of appetite for several days or longer, nausea, or stomach-area pain.
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Legal Protections for Gender-Affirming Care in Connecticut

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Over the past several years the U.S. government and many state governments have undertaken a sustained series of actions aimed at restricting the legal rights and protections of transgender and non-binary populations. Access to health care has been a particular target, heightening anxiety for those who seek and provide gender-affirming care, and even prompting some gender-affirming care clinics to close as they face threats of adverse legal and financial consequences.

Connecticut stands in stark contrast to these restrictive and punitive efforts. Rather, the Connecticut legislature has been proactive on this front, making Connecticut one of the most protective states when it comes to gender-affirming care. Transgender and non-binary individuals seeking gender-affirming care, parents and guardians of those seeking such care, and gender-affirming care providers should know that they are protected in several significant ways.



Beck Fineman

What Are Connecticut's "Shield Laws"?

Connecticut has created legal safeguards for patients and providers of gender-affirming care, as well as those who "assist" with such care, through a series of "shield laws." Together, these laws protect people in Connecticut against out-of-state investigations, lawsuits, and other legal actions for seeking or providing gender-affirming care that is legal in Connecticut; protect licensing for providers of gender-affirming care; prohibit discrimination in health care settings; and, ensure access to medically necessary treatment that may include gender-affirming care.

How Does Connecticut Protect Medical Providers of Gender-Affirming Care?

Connecticut provides robust protections for health care providers who offer gender-affirming care:

- General Statutes § 54-162 prohibits the Governor from extraditing to another state individuals charged in that state with a crime relating to gender-affirming care. This means that if a state that is hostile to gender-affirming care were to issue an arrest warrant or extradition request for a Connecticut provider who delivered gender-affirming care, the Governor of Connecticut would be legally barred from complying with that request.
- General Statutes § 54-82i(b) prohibits Connecticut courts from ordering individuals to appear and testify in criminal proceedings in another state if the alleged crime involved "provision or receipt of or assistance with" gender-affirming care.
- General Statutes §§ 19a-17e, 19a-677, 20-579a and 38a-835 together prohibit Connecticut licensing agencies, employers, and liability insurers from taking adverse action against

a provider based on the provision of gender-affirming care in Connecticut or based on another state's disciplinary proceedings relating to the provision of gender-affirming care.

- General Statutes § 54-155b prohibits public agencies from cooperating with out-of-state efforts to impose civil or criminal liability upon any person or entity for having sought, received or provided gender-affirming care.

How Does Connecticut Protect Patients Seeking Gender-Affirming Care?

Individuals seeking gender-affirming care in Connecticut benefit from broad legal protections. Broadly speaking, Connecticut's anti-discrimination laws expressly cover "gender identity and expression," and in 2025, Connecticut extended these protections to health care settings, including to the provision of emergency medical care. Health insurers in Connecticut cannot impose blanket exclusions for gender transition services, and they are required to cover medically necessary treatment. Connecticut Medicaid (HUSKY) also covers gender-affirming care for both adults and children.

Connecticut has created legal safeguards for patients and providers of gender-affirming care, as well as those who “assist” with such care, through a series of “shield laws.”



Under General Statutes § 52-146x, Connecticut law also protects the disclosure of patient communication or information relating to gender-affirming care without written consent.


What About Parents and Guardians?

Many of the protections above cover parents and guardians of minors seeking or receiving gender-affirming care. Laws prohibiting extradition, compelling someone to testify in out-of-state proceedings and prohibiting public agencies from cooperating with out-of-state proceedings expressly extend their protections to those who “assist” with gender-affirming care, which would include parents or guardians who facilitate gender-affirming care for minors.

In addition to the protections mentioned above, by General Statutes § 52-571n, Connecticut also allows providers, patients

and parents or guardians to recover money damages from anyone who has obtained a judgment against them based on the “provision, receipt, assistance in receipt or provision, material support for” gender-affirming care. Damages under this statute can include compensation for costs, including attorney’s fees, incurred in defending the action that led to the adverse judgment and in bringing an action under § 52-571n. This statute serves as a remedy for those harmed by out-of-state legal actions, as well as a deterrent against the filing of such out-of-state actions.

Questions?

If you’d like to learn more about how Connecticut law protects gender-affirming care, reach out to one of our Family Law or Health Care attorneys at www.pullman.com. 

—Beck S. Fineman

Attorney Beck S. Fineman is a partner in the Family Law practice at Pullman & Comley, LLC. He can be reached at bfineman@pullcom.com



Marc Shaiman
Photo Credit Robert Trachtenberg

Marc Shaiman: Happy at Last?

With a mantle full of awards, including multiple Emmys, Tony and Grammys (and seven Tony Award nominations), not to mention a very happy marriage, Marc Shaiman should be sitting on top of the world. Sometimes, he is—but that's not always the case as he explains in his candid new memoir, *Never Mind The Happy: Showbiz Stories from a Sore Winner*.

In the book, Shaiman recounts his many professional triumphs, such as the Broadway show *Hairspray*, as well

as his lifelong friendships with Bette Midler, Billy Crystal, and the late Rob Reiner, among other personal topics. It's a fascinating read!

Connecticut Voice spoke to Shaiman about writing the memoir, and here are some excerpts from the conversation.

CV: What inspired you to write this book?

MS: After years of posting anecdotes online and telling some of these stories to friends, so many people would say that I should write a book. So, I finally did. Jane Fonda said when she wrote her memoir that she felt it

was time for a life review, and that stuck with me.

CV: Tell me a little about working on the book itself? Was it difficult for you?

MS: I did this in half a year. It came right out of me; the hardest part was editing it or figuring out how to fit three stories into one chapter. As I worked on the book, it became apparent a lot of what I did might be forgotten, and I wanted to remind myself—and other people—what I had done. I hope some of these stories inspire people and remind them that you don't ever take

no for answer; you need to be like a dog with bone if there's something you really want.

CV: The title comes from something your mother once said when you wished her "Happy Birthday." Do you share her philosophy?

MS: I don't see the glass as half full or half empty. I don't like the glass. But I am aware there have been endless situations in which I have been blessed and where I was in the right place at the right time, especially at the very beginning staying at Bette Midler's house as a teenager.

CV: Much of the book is devoted to your relationship—both personal and professional—with Bette. Why?

MS: Bette made the biggest difference in my life. I dreamt of us working together when I was 13. We first worked together when I was 17, and I have been part of her career for 50 years now. Personally, we have this brother-sister relationship, right down to the bickering. Professionally, I think there is no greater performer. She can turn on a dime emotionally. Whatever there is in her, I have in me. I am so blessed that our talents matched.

CV: Did you consider any of your life off-limits?

MS: I did tell some tales out of school, for example, like my use of cocaine in order to get so many jobs done at the same. In fairness, I learned that when I was at *Saturday Night Live* (where, among other things, he played the Sweeney Sisters' accompanist, Skip St. Thomas). So. I was taught by experts.

CV: There's a lovely chapter about your long friendship with Rob Reiner, which was written months before his unfortunate death. Are you glad you put that in the book?

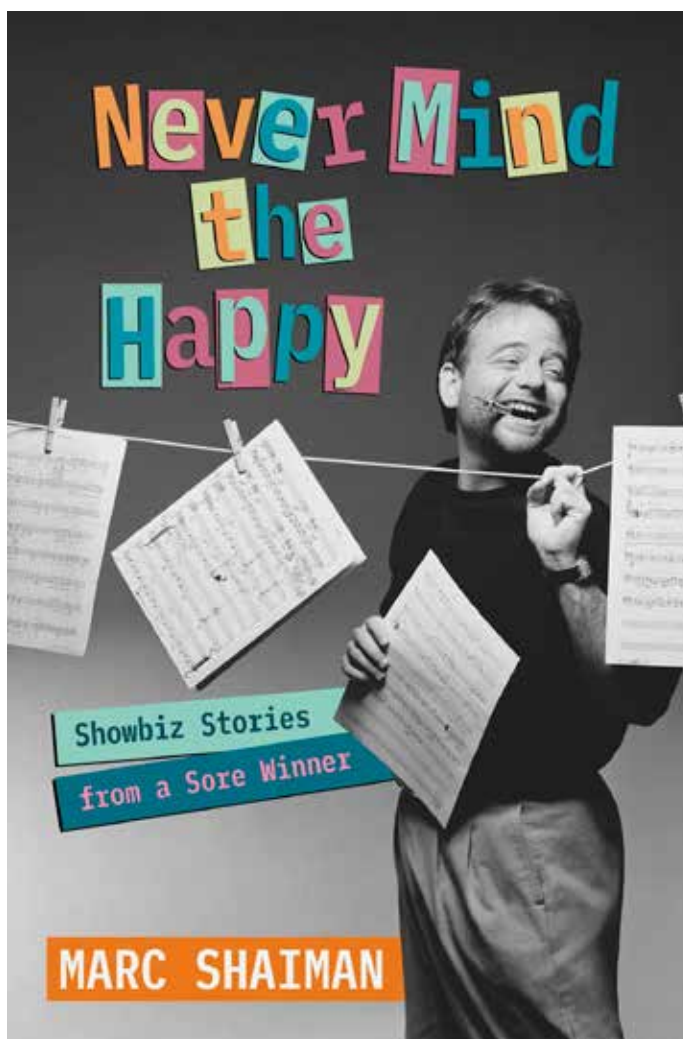
MS: Yes, and I am really happy I ended the chapter on the evening at the Sedona Film Festival when his wife Michele was there. I was watching

the movie *The American President* for first time on screen before I had to speak. And I had all these jokes ready—like all good Jewish guys—but then I started ugly crying all through the movie. Ultimately, I am grateful I was able to express my

gratitude for him in this book. But I have yet to fully grieve his death; it's still unfathomable to me.

CV: I think it's so lovely that you acknowledge you have two "soulmates" in the world: your romantic partner


"The fact I have had these two phenomenal love affairs—and that we can all hang out together—seems like a blessing, but not something unnatural. I don't know how I got so lucky."



of 25 years and longtime business collaborator Scott Wittman and your husband Lou Mirabal. Still, do you think some people might feel "two soulmates" is not possible?

MS: Soul and mate are singular words; I don't know who made up that rule. The fact I have had these two phenomenal love affairs—and that we can all hang out together—seems like a blessing, but not something unnatural. I don't know how or why I got so lucky

CV: Of course, we have to talk about your work on Broadway. You had a mega-hit with *Hairspray*, but your last few shows such as *Some Like It Hot* and *Smash* didn't fare as well. Is it true you may never write another Broadway show?

MS: I feel like I have been knocked out enough that I don't know if I want to get back into the ring. I love show people, but I may have had enough "show business." And the business is a big part of the problem. I know when I decide to go see Broadway shows—admittedly, in my case, usually at the last minute—I see the prices and feel like staying home to watch "Jeopardy," because that sounds just as good. I think a lot of people feel the same right now. 

—Brian Scott Lipton

SEX TALK:

When Loving Your Body is Challenging

Everyone has a body, and every body is different. That should be something to celebrate. Unfortunately, with the ubiquity of social media, Hollywood movies, and advertising, most of us are exposed to a very narrow representation of what is considered attractive by the mainstream. Our online algorithms push a specific ideal of beauty: white, fit, and able-bodied. Most of us don't even come close! A lack of representation can be damaging to the self-image, as well as to our perception of what is "normal." As a result, so-called ideals are continually reinforced in the media, and that can have far-reaching effects on our personal, romantic, and intimate lives.

Growing up, most of us hear from our parents that beauty is on the inside. I do believe that being kind and compassionate are more important traits than physical appearance. However, in real life, our looks are the first thing others see and judge us on. In terms of romance, a 2024 study from researchers at the University of Amsterdam found that attractiveness is up to 20 times more important, statistically, than intelligence in the online dating scene.

Social media, in particular, has an outsized effect on body image. A scientific review published in 2024 found that over the past 10 years, rates of body dissatisfaction have gone up significantly. This can be largely attributed to increased exposure to idealized, doctored, and even fake images that come with social media use. According to the Mental Health Foundation, research indicates that gay men are particularly affected by pressure to conform to unattainable standards. Trans women may experience intense pressure to pass, exacerbated by already-existing gender dysphoria. All segments of the LGBTQ+ population report feeling dissatisfied with their bodies at least as much as—if not more often than—the general population.

Not fitting into mainstream standards can be a tough pill to swallow, especially if you identify with a marginalized group. Feeling unattractive—whether or not others perceive you as such—has a negative impact on sexual confidence. People with poor body image tend to feel less sexually confident. They are more likely to experience anxiety during sex, making it hard for them to

focus on and enjoy the act and experience.

Sexual safety is also impacted by dissatisfaction with appearance. When people feel badly about their bodies, they are less likely to insist on steps to stay safe, such as condom use. If a partner does not wish to use protection, people with poor body image are likely to acquiesce, even if they would prefer to protect themselves.

Learning to accept your body can be a lifelong journey. It's very difficult when our society is constantly blasting you with such a limited view of who counts as attractive! For those who can access professional help, therapy can be extremely valuable in achieving body acceptance. There are many queer-affirming, body-positive therapists offering a range of treatment styles. They are trained to guide you in redirecting your thinking to increase self-esteem.

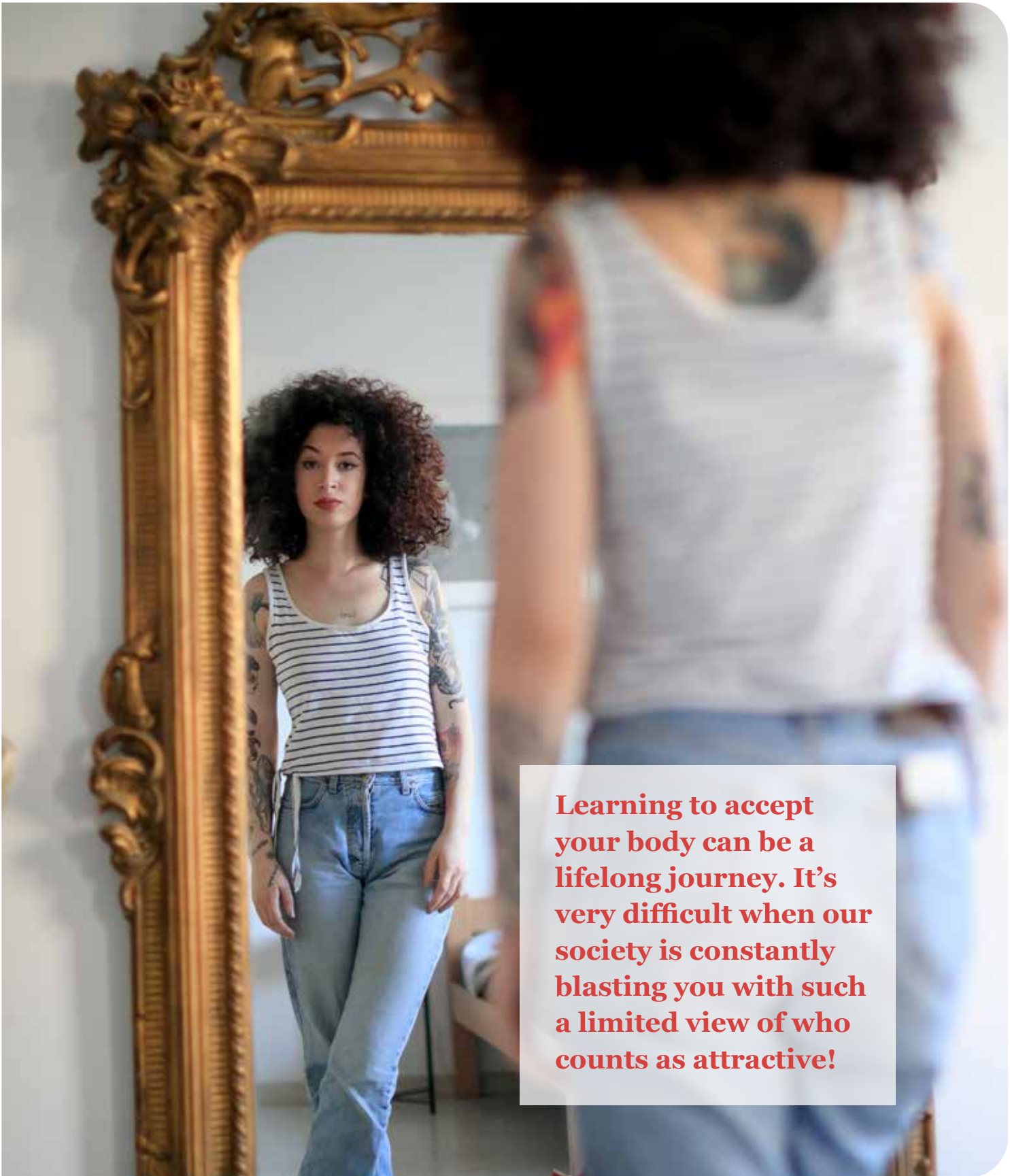
Another method that research has proven effective is the use of sensate awareness techniques. A 2018 study found that women whose anxiety around their bodies affected their sexual satisfaction saw great improvement when they were trained in mindfulness exercises.

Keeping a focus on the sensations and feelings of sex, while staying in communication with a partner, helps keep away anxious, self-defeating thoughts.

Masturbation is also associated with higher self-esteem! Spending intimate time with yourself helps you understand your body and enjoy it as it is, not as you wish it was. People who practice self-touch regularly experience increased self-esteem and sexual satisfaction when partnered. Rather than rushing through it to achieve orgasm, take time to get to know yourself. Explore nongenital parts of your body; admire yourself in a mirror; go slow. Self discovery and acceptance takes time.

Though none of these is a magic cure to negative body image, practicing each of these strategies regularly will gradually improve your relationship with your body. Focus on what your body can do, not where you think it's lacking. It's amazing to experience bodily pleasure, alone or partnered. How lucky we are to have bodies with which to experience all life has to offer! 🍷

—Kimberly Adamski



Learning to accept your body can be a lifelong journey. It's very difficult when our society is constantly blasting you with such a limited view of who counts as attractive!



A Community Canvas project at Wilton Pride in 2025. Photos courtesy of Mental Health Connecticut

Joy, Rest, and Resistance: Protecting Your Mental Health During Pride Season

A Mental Health Guide for Pride Season

Joy is more than a fleeting feeling; it is a powerful force that supports both our mental and physical health, helping us build resilience, connection, and hope. Right now, that kind of joy is especially important. For many, Pride is not only a celebration, but an act of survival, visibility, and solidarity. It is a reminder that being seen, supported, and affirmed matters deeply. Pride events, like any busy or high-energy season, can also bring emotional intensity or overstimulation, making it important to move through them with intention and care. As we celebrate, protecting our energy and preventing burnout is just as essential as showing up.

The Power of Joy

One of the most influential frameworks for understanding joy's impact on mental health comes from psychologist Barbara Fredrickson and her Broaden-and-Build Theory. This theory explains that positive emotions, such as joy, love, and interest, expand our thinking and attention, allowing us to become more open, creative, and flexible in how we engage with the world.

Positive emotions also directly influence brain chemistry and cognitive functioning. Research shows that experiences of joy and optimism can activate the prefrontal cortex, the part of the

brain responsible for reflection and emotional regulation, while also reducing levels of cortisol, the body's primary stress hormone.

Beyond the individual, group experiences of shared joy can increase feelings of belonging, deepen social support, and enhance emotional connection. In the context of Pride, collective joy becomes a powerful force for personal wellbeing and community resilience.

Preparing Yourself for Pride Season

While Pride is rooted in joy and celebration, it can also be emotionally intense, especially in

large, high-energy environments. Crowds, noise, and the personal significance of the moment can sometimes lead to overstimulation, social anxiety, or feelings of vulnerability. There may also be moments when setting boundaries becomes important, such as stepping away from unhealthy conversations or disengaging from environments that feel unsafe or draining.

Approaching Pride with intention can make a meaningful difference.

- Attend with trusted friends.
- Identify quiet spaces ahead of time.
- Build in breaks.
- Determine your boundaries ahead of time.
- Give yourself permission to leave when needed.

Activism Fatigue and the Need to Recharge

Pride does not look the same for everyone. For some, it unfolds in public celebration and community spaces. For others, Pride is quieter, held in private, within trusted circles, or in moments of personal safety. Regardless of how we celebrate and honor this time, Pride exists within a broader social and political climate that can feel heavy, urgent, and, at times, overwhelming.

For many LGBTQ+ individuals, especially those engaged in advocacy or community care, this can create a constant pressure to stay informed, speak out, and support others. Studies estimate that 50–60 percent of activists experience burnout at some point due to the cumulative demands of this work. As a result, rest and care are not separate from activism; they are essential to it. Sustainable advocacy requires space to recharge, reflect, and reconnect with what brings us joy. After Pride month, it can be especially

important to pause, check in with yourself, and give your mind and body time to recover.

Conclusion

Pride, joy, rest, and resistance are deeply intertwined. Pride creates space for joy, and for some, a sense of rest, as we gather in a community with people who affirm and support us. At the same time, both Pride and joy are acts of resistance in themselves.

As we celebrate Pride this year, may we hold space for all of it: the joy, the complexity, the connection, and the need for rest. By honoring both our energy and our limits, we help sustain ourselves and each other. We wish you a safe, joyful, and healthy Pride season. 🍷

–Bethany Simmonds



Luis B. Pérez, our President & CEO, and Lisa Marie Thalhammer, the artist, at the unveiling of the LOVE mural, which MHC organized, at Parkville Market.

Andrew Keenan-Bolger Steps Back Into The Limelight

Few people fit the description of “a man of many talents” as well as Andrew Keenan-Bolger. The 40-year-old gay actor has been seen in dozens of shows and films, including the Broadway productions of *Beauty and the Beast*, *Newsies*, *Tuck Everlasting*, and *Mary Poppins*.

In addition, Keenan-Bolger also co-created and performed in the popular web series *Submissions Only* with his friend Kate Weatherhead, with whom he wrote three books in the *Jack and Louisa* series.

Now, he's back on the bookstore shelves with *Limelight* (Penguin Workshop), a coming-of-age story set in 1996 about Danny Vittorio, an unhappy, naïve, closeted Staten Island teenager who ends up getting into Manhattan's prestigious LaGuardia High School for the Performing Arts, finding a new group of friends—and an eventual male lover, Christian—and even becoming briefly exposed to the legendary New York nightclub that gives the book its title.

Connecticut Voice spoke to Keenan-Bolger, whose own story was featured in these pages in our Winter 2023 issue, about the book's many inspirations, his writing process, and

his continuing devotion to theatre.

CV: Why did you choose to make *Limelight* a Young Adult novel?

A K-B: I love the young audience genre because you're able to tell coming-of-age stories, which I think are so important and inspirational. But now there are very sophisticated themes you can discuss in them that were not present back when I was reading YA novels!

CV: Will you continue writing in that genre?

A K-B: I don't know. I am currently writing a book for adults with my husband Scott Bixby. But I'm going to keep a lid on what it's about other than to say it is based on real people—we have been doing lots of interviews—but it is definitely fiction!

CV: Back to *Limelight*. Why did you set this book in 1996?

A K-B: I wanted to share the world of 1996 for those people who weren't around then. And for the people who were there, I hope they see the book as a love letter to those times. I moved to New York from Detroit in 1996 when I was 10, and it is the most vivid period in my memory. In fact, when I started writing the book

in 2020, all I had was the time. All the subject matter came later.

CV: How did you decide on the subject matter, besides the “coming out” of your lead character?

A K-B: Once I had some ideas, I did a blast on Facebook to interview people who were students at LaGuardia High School or had been on Broadway in *Rent*, which opened in 1996, or had been part of that club kid scene. The full story came out of those interviews. I would talk to one person, and they would recommend another person, and the book spiraled from there. Actually, the club scene was originally what I was most curious about. I talked to Michael Musto about it a lot, and he was so generous in sharing stories. But [that scene] ended up not becoming as huge a part of the book as I expected.

CV: Why the fascination with club kids?

A K-B: I think they were similar in how influencers and TikTok gods function now. They share how queer young people think and are our new leaders in taste and art.

CV: Why did you make Danny come from Staten

Island? Have you ever been to Staten Island?

A K-B: Yes! My ex-boyfriend, Brian, was from Staten Island, and he also attended LaGuardia. Also, my good friend Tommy Bracco (a noted Broadway dancer) had a similar story. Having Danny come from there and having never come into Manhattan felt like a good outsider perspective; someone who was always looking in and finally entering a place they always wanted to belong.

CV: You said you started working on the book in January 2020. Why is it just being published?

A K-B: I took a while to write, and then I finally sold it in 2023. And then I did edits throughout 2024. I know it sounds like a long time for a lot of people, but it's not dissimilar to developing a Broadway show. I am used to playing “the long game.”

CV: You came from a very accomplished family. Did you let any of them read the book before it got published?

My sister Celia (the Tony Award-winning actress) was the second person to read the book. I was so nervous! Thankfully, she immediately texted me, “I am 20 pages in and laughing.” I am



grateful she's been such a cheerleader throughout the process.

CV: Do you see being this “multi-hyphenate” for the foreseeable future: actor, author, director, playwright?

A K-B: I have never been the type of person who wants to get comfortable in any one field I work in. Still, theatre is my first love; it's what I'm trained to do. But now, I only get the itch to be on stage about once a year. It has to be right project. I don't do revivals. I am only really interested in doing something no one has done before. And while I know it's hard for producers to take a risk on something new, [revivals] often become the most commercial. Still, I am so glad there are people whose whole career is to fund theater! 🍷

—Brian Scott Lipton





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

Our LGBTQ+ Pride Coalition brings together organizers throughout Connecticut and New York's lower Hudson Valley to connect, collaborate, and strengthen their work—advancing community support, advocacy, and collective impact year-round

Our TransPLUS Resource Center centers, supports, and uplifts members of the TGNCNBI (transgender, gender non-conforming, nonbinary, and intersex) community

Our LGBTQ+ Advocacy Fund supports large-scale initiatives that drive meaningful progress in the movement for LGBTQ+ equality

Coming late 2026:

Let's Get Back Together (L.G.B.T.) On Campus will provide a comprehensive resource guide and toolkit to develop and support LGBTQ+ student centers on college campuses

The RISE Leadership Initiative, in partnership with CenterLink, is designed to support and develop the next generation of LGBTQ+ community leaders



Leonardlitz.org

A portrait of Ilene Frank, a woman with dark curly hair and glasses, wearing a bright yellow blazer over a dark floral patterned top. She is smiling and sitting in a blue chair. The background is a blurred interior setting.

Preserving Connecticut's History

By **ALEX DUEBEN** / Photos by **SAMANTHA SKEELS**

Ilene Frank, Connecticut
Museum of Culture and
History's new Executive
Director and CEO



“In 1825, there was this awareness that the nation was approaching the 50th anniversary of the American Revolution, and, by gosh, kids these days don’t know their history. We need a historical society,” Ilene Frank said with a laugh, giving an abbreviated account of the origins of the Connecticut Museum of Culture and History.

Formerly the Connecticut Historical Society, the Museum celebrated its 200th anniversary last year. This year, Frank, who has worked at the museum for more than a decade, takes over as the museum’s new Executive Director and CEO, and we sat down in her office to talk about her life and work. “I lovingly blame my career on my mother.”

“I was sixteen, and I was home in the summer and somehow there was a car at home. I decided I could take the car, drive to Metro, go downtown, visit some museums, and I’d be home before my mom and my stepdad found out. Well, I completely misjudged time, and so I had to call my mom on a payphone from the basement of the National Art Gallery. The way my mom tells the story is that in that moment, she was so, so angry that I took the car without permission. At the same time, she was like, ‘my daughter went to a museum,’” Frank said laughing.

“I’ve always loved history. I think part of that is because I’m Jewish, and so much of the religion is looking at the history of the Israelites. Even the stories that in the sacred texts are historical, to a point. I was always really fascinated with genealogy and my family’s history,” Frank said.

“I love the moment when

a visitor or a student or a participant in a program makes this connection to their own life. When individuals see documents or artifacts related to their own family members, that is a powerful, powerful moment. Or, there’s a story, a personal narrative from someone in the past, and they realize that their life has similarities. Or, that it’s so different that it makes them appreciate their life in a different way. That is such a treasured experience,” Frank said.

“One of the things that has changed in my ten-and-a-half years is really focusing in on the power of personal narrative. Whether that’s narrative that we can get from the past through diaries, letters, other forms of account. But also today, personal narrative and oral history. We’re so blessed that we have technology that can capture someone’s voice.” That focus on personal narrative, which can be seen in the Community History Project, a large-scale oral history project the museum launched during COVID, and in the ways that many of the exhibitions and events have sought to tell stories about the community.

For Frank this is a natural outgrowth of how the museum has always been at the forefront of collecting, and she repeatedly talked about museum employees and the creativity of all the departments, and that these ideas and concerns are embedded in how they work, which has led to the current exhibition “Drawn Here” and the publication of a children’s book last year, written and drawn by members of the Education Department.

“We were one of the first museums and historical societies in the nation that



Ilene (center) with Connecticut Museum Board president Sylvia Kelly and Harvey S. Kelly

collected objects, not just documents. We very early on collected objects related to women, which was uncommon for some of the other older historical societies. It's a really interesting mashup of being founded with elite intention, by elite members of society, but these attempts in an 1825 mindset of being small D democratic. If that's our foundation, then we have a responsibility to really be intentional."

Frank becomes animated when she talked about this aspect of her job, and about the museum's work. "I say this over and over, but museum collections are influenced by the people making the decisions about what to collect. Are you only collecting things that you're interested in?"

Let's talk politics. Are you only interested in collecting things that represent your political view? Sometimes you have to make sure that you're collecting the other side of an issue, whether you personally agree with it or not. If the historical record is going to even attempt to be representational, then that is a very active form of collecting."

"I think of this one ledger book that we've had since probably the late 1800s in our collection. It was from an attorney. It's a listing of all his accounts," Frank said of one of the more 4.7 million objects in the museum's collections. "But what's interesting is that Seth Terry represented the African Religious Society, which became Talcott Congregational Church, the oldest black Congregational church in Connecticut, which is now Faith Congregational."

"He also held in escrow the funds that Thomas Gallaudet collected with Prince Abduhl, who was a man from Africa who was enslaved, secured his freedom, and then went on a speaking tour in New England to raise funds to buy the freedom of his family members. So, all of a sudden, this same ledger book becomes this amazing document of African American history. It was not collected for that reason, but you ask a different question of the same object, and it gives you a different answer," Frank said.

"That's why history is interpretation and its perspective. There are facts. Seth Terry lived. He was a lawyer. Those facts don't change, but what you get out of his story can change."

MOVING TO CONNECTICUT

Frank had worked at various museums before coming to Connecticut, but had spent years in upstate New York, at the Cooperstown Graduate Program in museum studies, and working at museums in Schenectady and Troy. "It was a great opportunity, but personally, it impacted my relationship. Darlene thankfully said, okay, let's try this long-distance thing," Frank said. "We were long distance for about two years. I still don't know how it worked out, but miraculously we saw each other every weekend. Either I went to New York or she came here, or we met up sometimes in the Berkshires."

We joked about being "forced" to spend a lot of time in the



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Berkshires, but Frank still seemed a little amazed that they made their relationship work, and at the end of it, got married. “Darlene was able to work remotely two days a week, so she was here longer, and then eventually got a full-time job in Connecticut.”

“As a younger person, I remember telling my mom I was going to go do this crazy thing of working in museums. She was like, but what if you have to move for a job? I was like, mom, I make friends. It’s going to be fine. Don’t worry about it. That’s true in your twenties. I moved here in my forties, and it was a little bit harder. I’m not doing the bar scene. I don’t have children. So, I wasn’t meeting adults that way. It took a while to find community. But eventually we did. We’re pretty active at Congregation Beth Israel in West Hartford. We found an amazing community there. Eventually we found our people,” Frank said. “Connecticut’s been a really good home.”

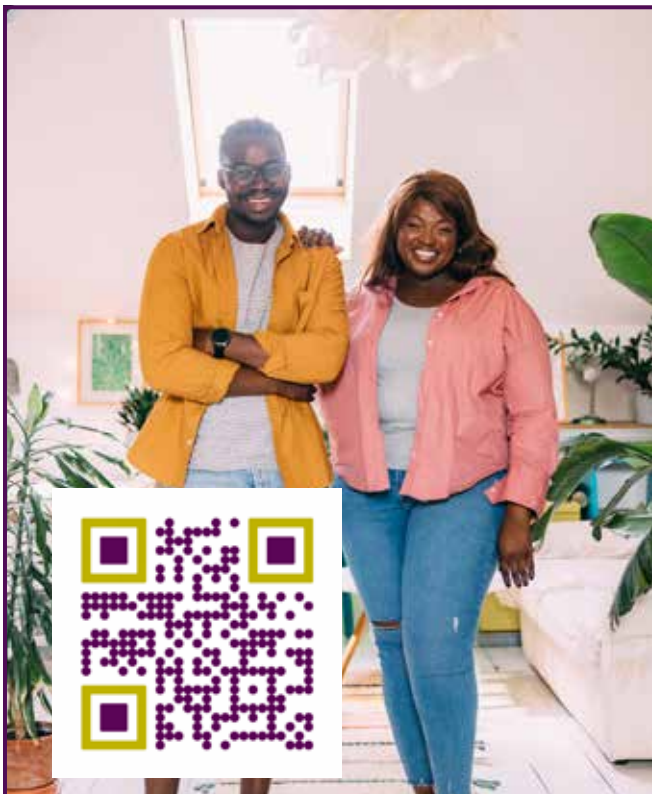
Over time Frank’s job has become less about the hands-on planning of exhibits and more “macro,” and she admitted this is something that she’s enjoyed, but has required an adjustment. “I was hired as chief curator, but from the beginning, I oversaw education exhibitions and the collection. I used to tell people that when you’re a visitor, the moment you walk in the door to everything you experience until you walk out of the door is what I am in charge of. From

a visitor perspective, it’s the objects you see on view, how they’re interpreted and displayed, the programs that are put on. I wasn’t in charge of our grounds or the parking lot or the HVAC system or even fundraising. And now as I become a CEO, it’s everything.”

“But everything is needed because just like any organism, it’s all connected. If we don’t have the funds, we can’t do any of the mission-related work. If our building and grounds aren’t maintained, we can’t serve the public. And so, I really see the interconnectedness of all the various departments that are at the museum.”

When I asked about the changing nature of her job and finding creativity as her new role, Frank taught me the Yiddish word “nachas.”

“It’s a mixture of joy and pride. It’s usually reserved for like when you see your children or your grandchildren do something that’s really amazing, you’re filled with nachas. I get filled with nachas when my staff does something amazing. They know this about me. Not that I’m their parent—thank God,” Frank added with a laugh, “But I do. As CEO, I hope to run a museum and have a positive culture and provide resources and space so that the staff can pursue things that they want to achieve. And that in turn gives me nachas.”



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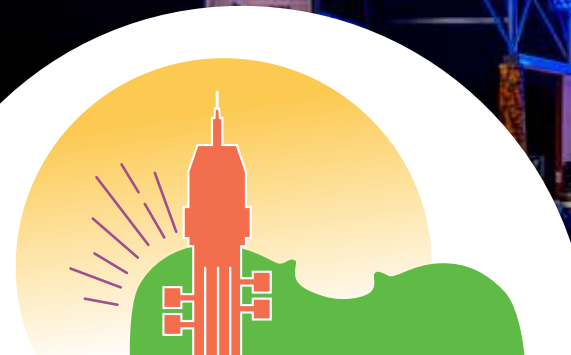
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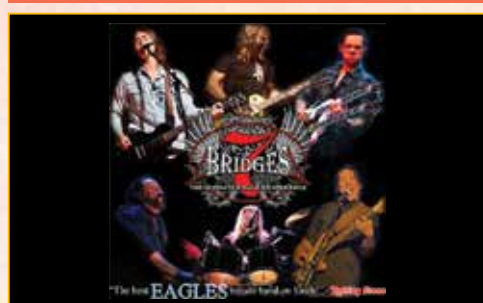
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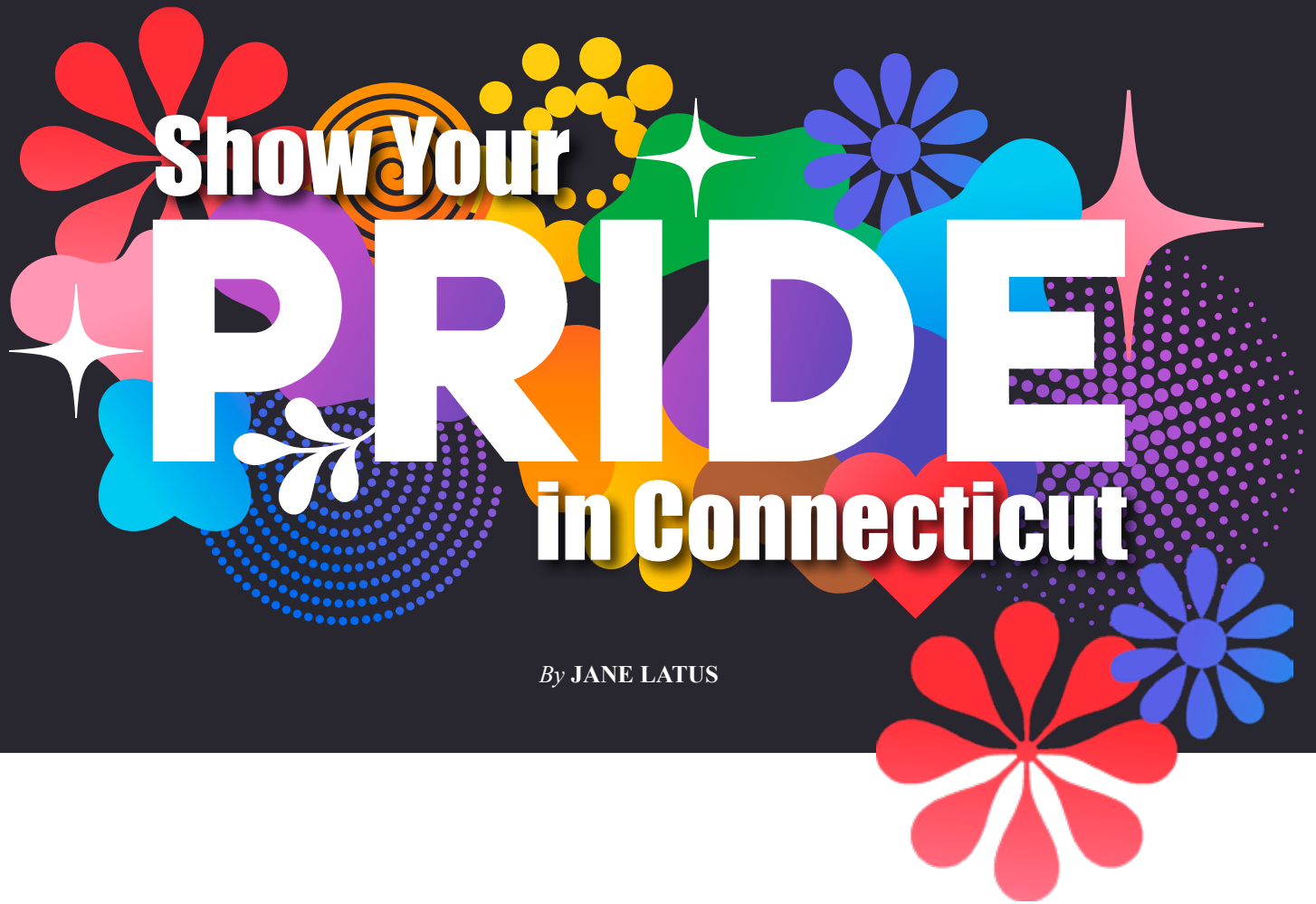
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By JANE LATUS

When you're making your Pride plans this June, you can thank the organizers who gathered in New Haven on the last day of February for making it all possible.

The annual Connecticut Pride Summit drew 76 people from about 35 organizations to the New Haven Pride Center.

There, representatives from small-town Pride committees, larger organizers like New Haven Black Pride, specialists like the Community Defense Brigade, and bigger groups like The Health Collective and Equality CT shared safety tips, organizing advice, history lessons, creative ideas and community outreach tips, and led discussions on allyship and inclusivity.

Greeting attendees was Connecticut Pride founder Richard Stillson of Hartford (also known by their drag name Mucha Mucha Placer.)

"Our community is under attack. The Oppressor-in-Chief ... wants to block our vulnerable trans kids from any medically necessary care, erase our history at

Stonewall and elsewhere, kill our citizens in Minnesota and elsewhere, ban our books, and scapegoat us whenever he can. We need to resist each and every day! Pride is one of those means of our collective resistance," they said.

"We will not hide and deny our existence! Would Marsha P., Sylvia, Storme, Miss Major have hidden in times like this? No! This is the challenge of living in this moment in history. This is what makes what we are doing here today so important!"

Stillson founded Connecticut Pride in 2020 when the pandemic necessitated organizing a virtual Pride event. It continues to serve as a collaborative of a growing number of organizers, with the goals of increasing visibility, sharing resources, and building a sustainable Pride network.

Towns with first-time Pride events this year include Manchester, Branford and Hartford Black Pride. One major change is that Hartford Pride, formerly held in the fall, is now being organized by the new Hartford Pride Center and will take place in June.

2026 Pride Events

CT Voice goes to press before all plans are finalized, so check for details and new events on Facebook @ConnecticutVirtualPride or ctpride.weebly.com.

May 30

Bethel Pride Parade & Celebration

Noon – 5 pm, Bethel Municipal Center. Sidewalk parade at 12:30 followed by music, vendors, food trucks, lawn games, kids' activities and more. Event is rain (inside) or shine (outside). bethelctpride.com

May 30

Fairfield Pride

Starts at 2 pm, Trevi Lounge. For all ages. Performances, vendors, DJs and more. trevilounge.com and Instagram @TreviLounge

May 30

Greater Waterbury Pride Fest

Noon – 4 pm, 16 Church St. Family-friendly music, art, drag, vendors and community resources. greaterwaterburypride.com

May 31

Pride Flag Raising and Block Party Bridgeport

Noon – 1 pm, 999 Broad St. Followed by 1:30 pm black party at Bridgeport Pride Center. bridgeportpride.com, Instagram @BridgeportPride, and Facebook @GreaterBridgeportPrideCT

May 31 (Rain date June 7)

Our Truth, Our Pride Wilton Pride Festival

11 am – 4 pm, Town Green. Details TBA. wiltonpride.org and Facebook @WiltonPride

June 1

Pride Flag Raising Norwich

6 pm, City Hall. Additional events TBA. Facebook @RoseCityPride

June 1

Pride Flag Raising Stamford

Noon, Government Center. With Mayor Caroline Simmons. Facebook @StamfordCTPride



June 1

Pride Flag Raising Torrington

9 am, City Hall. Facebook @TorringtonPride

June 3

Pride Month Beers & Queers Happy Hour Stamford

7 – 9 pm, location TBA. Facebook @StamfordCTPride

June 5

Mansfield Pride Storrs

4-7 pm, Betsy Paterson Square, 2 Dog Lane. mansfieldct.gov, select Youth Services Bureau



Darien Pride photos courtesy Robin Gilbert Photography

June 5
Pride Flag Raising
North Haven
10 – 11 am, North Haven Memorial Library.
Facebook @NorthHavenPride

June 5
Pride Shabbat
Stamford
5:30 – 7:30 pm, location TBA.
Facebook @StamfordCTPride

June 6
Danbury Pride
1 – 5 pm, Hatters Park. Food trucks, vendors, information, entertainment, Drag Queens and Drag Kings.
Facebook@DanburyPride

June 6
Pride Block Party
Stamford
Tentatively 1 – 8 pm, Hop & Vine Taproom
Facebook @StamfordCTPride

June 6
Pride by the Pond
Darien
Noon – 3 pm, Tilley Pond Park. Food trucks, music, entertainment, crafts, giveaways, speakers, vendors, and more. Free parking in the Koons lot across from the park. In case of rain, check for alternate location.
darienpride.org

June 6
Middletown Pride Fest
Noon – 10 pm, Main Street in downtown Middletown. Pride March, all-afternoon street festival, Pride Rally, Pride Showcase Concert, and Tea Dance. With vendors and food trucks, and a 21+ adult beverage area.
middletownpride.org

June 6
Ridgefield Pride in the Park
Noon – 3 pm, Ballard Park (rain location Yanity Gym.) Parade around the park starts at 1 pm. Music, games, activities, crafts, exhibitors and entertainment for all ages.
ridgefieldpride.org



**June 6
Watertown Pride**
11 am – 4 pm, Saltonstall Park.
Parade begins at 11:30 am at
Moxley Park. Live performers
and music
watertownpride.com

**June 6
Greenwich Pride**
1 pm at Greenwich Town Hall.
Flag raising, ice cream truck, rain
or shine.
Instagram @Greenwichpride

**June 7
Silent Auction and Pride Party
New Preston**
Party and fundraiser for Pride
in the Hills, at The Owl, New
Preston.
prideinthehillsfund.org

**June 7
Pride in the Pews
Stamford**
10:30 am, First Congregational
Church.
Facebook @StamfordCTPride

**June 8 – June 13
New Haven Black Pride Week
of Events**

June 8: Trans Empowerment
Discussion, 5:30 – 9 pm, at Blue
Orchid. A workshop focused on
POC expansive individuals.

June 9: Category Is ... Kuresha
Vogue, 6 – 9 pm, at APNH: A
Place to Nourish your Health. A
high-energy voguing class.

June 10: Community
Conversation, 6 – 8 pm, at
Blue Orchid. Addressing HIV
awareness, prevention, stigma
and care.

June 11: Variety Show, 6:30 pm
– Midnight, at 168 York Street
Café. Including spoken word and
performance art.

June 12: Greater New Haven Kiki
Ball, 6 – 11 pm, at The Building
Complex, West Haven.

June 13: New Haven Black Pride
7th Annual Pride Fest, 1 – 5
pm, APNH: A Place to Nourish
Your Health. Vendors, food and
entertainment.

**June 10
Hartford Yard Goats Pride Night**
7:10 pm, Dunkin' Park. Yard
Goats vs. New Hampshire.

**June 11
Tracey's Pride Ride
West Hartford**
6 pm, starting at Play It
Again Sports. Free 9-mile
ride to celebrate the life of
Tracey Wilson. Register at
bikewesthartford.org.
Facebook @WestHartfordPride

**June 12-20
Out Film Festival
Hartford**
At CineStudio, Trinity College.
39th annual.
outfilmct.org

**June 12
Movie screening: Pride
Stamford**
Noon – 2 pm, Stamford Senior
Center.
Facebook @StamfordCTPride

**June 13
Capitol City Pride
Hartford**

11 am – 2 am. Sponsored by Hartford Pride Center.

Pride on Pratt: 11 am – 5 pm. Drag performances, live visual art demonstrations, restaurants, and kid-friendly activities.

Hartford Pridefest and Concert: 5 – 9 pm, Mortensen Riverfront Plaza. For a more mature audience. Local LGBTQ+ artists, DJs, food trucks, drink specials and vendors. Free transportation between Pratt Street and the riverfront by @PedalPubHartford from 4:30 – 8 pm.

Pride Afterparty: 10 pm – 2 am, Chez Est. A ticketed event hosted by Hartford Pride board member Robin Fierce. Facebook @capitalcitypride

**June 13 and 14
Manchester Pride**

Sat. 10 am – 8 pm, and Sun. 10 am – 6 pm, North United Methodist Church. Speakers on mental health, legal rights, inclusive health care, spirituality and personal storytelling. Drum circle, drag story hour, live music, face painting, food, and activities for all ages. numc.axelhouse.com

**June 13
Pride on the Green
North Haven**

11 am – 3 pm, North Haven Town Green. With Drag Night After Party at Twelve Percent Beer Project, time TBA. northhavenpride.org and Facebook and Instagram @NorthHavenPride

**June 13
Pride in the Park
Norwalk**

2 – 8 pm, Veteran's Memorial Park and Marina. Vendors, performers, and food trucks. Sponsored by Triangle Community Center. ctpridecenter.org

**June 14
Glastonbury Pride Festival**
2 – 6 pm, Hubbard Green. Free shuttle buses from Glastonbury High School. Family-friendly games and activities, 100-plus vendors, food trucks, live music, drag performers and more. glastonburypride.org and Facebook and Instagram @GlastonburyCTPride

**June 14
Picnic for Pride
New Milford**
Noon – 3 pm, Town Green. Details TBA. Facebook @NewMilfordPride

**June 14
Westport Pride**
Details TBA. westportpride.org and Facebook @WestportPride

**June 19
Movie Screening: Moonlight
Stamford**
6:30 pm, Ferguson Library. Collaboration of Stamford Pride and The Avon Theatre. Facebook@StamfordCTPride

**June 20
Greater Bridgeport Pride**
1 – 6 pm. Pride March begins at 1 pm at the Broad Street Steps. The festival follows in Wheeler Park with music, performers, food, music, vendors and games. Followed by a free-admission After Party at Trevi Lounge bridgeportpride.com, Instagram @BridgeportPride, and Facebook @GreaterBridgeportPrideCT



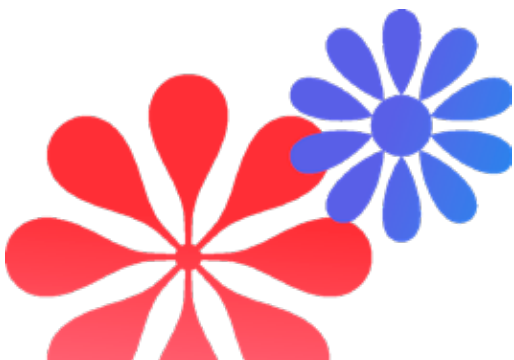
At Darien Pride



North Haven Pride



Mini DeLuxe, Iris, Amanda Brackett (one of the organizers for HK Pride) and Morgana



June 20
East Hampton Pride Stroll
At Village Center and East Hampton Church of Christ. A full day of family fun and an evening for adults only. Times TBA.
easthamptonpride.com

June 20
Pride in the Hills Friends and Family Day at Quassy Middlebury
Free food and free admission to rides and water park, Quassy Amusement Park. RSVP suggested at prideinthehillsfund.org

June 21
Picnic in the Park Newington
Noon – 4 pm, Churchill Park. Games, food trucks, vendors and music.
newingtonpride.org

June 22
Movie Screening: Brokeback Mountain Darien
6:30 pm, Darien Library. Collaboration of Stamford Pride and The Avon Theatre.
[Facebook@StamfordCTPride](https://www.facebook.com/StamfordCTPride)

June 26
Movie Screening: The Birdcage Stamford
6:30 pm, Ferguson Library. Collaboration of Stamford Pride and The Avon Theatre.
[Facebook@StamfordCTPride](https://www.facebook.com/StamfordCTPride)

June 26
CT Sun PRIDE Night Uncasville
7:30 pm, Mohegan Sun. CT Sun vs Washington Mystics
sun.nba.com

June 27
Enfield UCCC Pride Festival
10 am – 5 pm, Enfield United Church of Christ. Details TBA.
[Facebook@2026EnfieldUCCPrideFestival](https://www.facebook.com/2026EnfieldUCCPrideFestival)

June 27
Mansfield Pride
Details TBA.
mansfieldct.gov

June 27
Milford Pride on the Green
Noon – 4 pm, Milford Green. Vendors, food trucks, music, entertainment and more.
milfordctpride.org

June 27
Mystic Pride
Kids' event: 10 am – Noon, Union Baptist Church.
Pride Fest: 2 – 6 pm, behind Mystic Museum of Art. Vendors, entertainment and more details TBA.
mysticchamber.org

June 27
Stamford Burlesque Night Norwalk
7 pm, Troupe429, Norwalk.
[Facebook @StamfordCTPride](https://www.facebook.com/StamfordCTPride)



June 27

West Hartford Pride Festival and Rally

West Hartford Town Hall. Details TBA. 140 vendors, rally, live entertainment, family activities and food trucks.

westhartfordpride.org,

Instagram @PrideWeHa and

Facebook @WestHartfordPride

June 28

Easton Pride

Details TBA.

eastonctpride.org

June 28

HK Pride

Haddam, Higganum and Killingworth

10 am – 5 pm, Killingworth Courtyard, 176 Rt. 81,

Killingworth. Family-friendly with vendors, music, drag bingo brunch, activities, and open mic.

Facebook @HKPrideCT

June 28

SHAG with Pride in the Hills Washington

Live performers, TBA, at Spring Hills Arts Gathering. In collaboration with House of Yes, Brooklyn, NY,

prideinthehillsfund.org

June 28

Tipsy Tea

Watertown

Details TBA.

watertownpride.com

July 24-26

Hartford Black Pride

July 24: HBP Honors and Recognition, art ball and fashion show.

July 25: Festival and marketplace, Youth Black Pride event, and Late Night Club event.

July 26: Open and affirming church service, gospel house music, and brunch. Details TBA. Instagram @HartfordBlackPride

July 25

Festival of Rainbows

Naugatuck

2 – 6 pm, Naugatuck Green.

Performers, inflatable obstacle course, vendors, food and raffles.

Facebook @NaugatuckPRISM

July 25

Rose City Pride

Norwich

Details TBA.

Facebook @RoseCityPride

Aug. 2 – 8

New London Pride Week

Visibility & Existence: We Will NOT Be Erased

New London, Groton and area

A week of events hosted by outCT Inc. Details TBA.

Aug. 2: Black Indigenous People of Color Cookout, Washington Park, Groton.

Aug. 5: Queereoke Night

Aug. 6: A-Z Book Club. Books will be provided.

Aug. 8: Pride at Ocean Beach Park, starting at 11 am.

outct.org

August 15

Meriden Pride Fest

Noon – 5 pm, 328 Paddock Ave.

Live entertainment, vendors, community resources, food vendors, and family-friendly activities.

Facebook @PositivelyMeriden



Rebecca Degnan and Lisa Connelly, two of the organizers for HK Pride. Photo credit Lisa Connelly



COMING THIS FALL:

Sept. Date TBA

New Haven Pride

Facebook @PRIDENewHaven

Oct. 3

Madison Pride Fest

madpridefest.com

Oct. 14

Bristol Pride Ball

bristolpride.org

COLOMBIA: A Welcoming Gem for LGBTQ+ Travelers

By FRANK RIZZO

Our Branford friends John Allen and Keith Hyatte raved about the sun, fun and friendliness during their trip to Colombia, especially as gay men. “It’s very international, very welcoming, and very much a bargain,” said John. “We want to go back and do even more exploring.”

Intrigued, I reached out to a New Haven artist friend, Ricardo Gutiérrez, who grew up in Colombia, and he described the interconnectedness of the country as “a warm, colorful paradise where people actually see you.” He cited Bogota’s “amazing energy” and the Caribbean port city of Cartagena for its “sensuality and history.”

He was also encouraging and proud that Colombia, after years of internal violence among drug cartels in the

’90s, was now both stable and inviting for tourism and has become a beacon for LGBTQ+ travelers.

Despite being a predominantly Catholic country, Colombia is one of the most progressive countries south of our border. Homosexuality has been legal since 1981. Anti-discrimination laws were introduced in 2011, and gay marriage and adoption laws were passed in 2016. Updating gender on government IDs is a straightforward process for transgender people. In 2018 Bogota elected its first lesbian mayor. Bogota Pride, which began in 1982, is held every June along with Diverso Cinema Festival. In Cartagena, there’s a six-day Pride Festival which runs alongside Rumours Festival, the annual five-day circuit party attracting thousands.

Doing a bit more research we learned that it is a country of a rich, diverse and complex culture, influenced by its



Photo by Frank Rizzo



Photo Courtesy of Out Adventures



Photo by Frank Rizzo



Photo Courtesy of Out Adventures

geography and historic blend of Spanish, African and Indigenous peoples. We were already familiar with the magic realism of Nobel Prize-winning author Gabriel García Márquez (*One Hundred Years of Solitude*, *Love in the Time of Cholera*) and artist Fernando Botero (known for his voluminous figures in sculptures and paintings). John and Keith also reminded us that the film *Romancing the Stone* was filmed there, and we learned that Anthony Bourdain did two shows on Colombia's food, culture and politics.

However, just as we were packing for our January trip, Trump ordered an invasion of neighboring Venezuela, kidnapping its president, and dramatically raising the political temperature around the world as well as alienating our long-standing Latin allies. Friends assured us that we should not encounter any special problems—and we didn't. (We also figured we could always say we are Canadians, eh?)

Bogotá

We flew to the capital of Bogotá for a stay of a few days, followed by a short flight and week's visit to Cartagena. Traveling between the two cities by land would take more than 20 hours.

At the base of the Andres mountains is Bogotá, the country's capital. With an altitude of more than 8,500 feet—3,000 feet higher than Denver—it can literally take your breath away at first, but after getting acclimated, travelers should be good to go (though definitely take it easy for the first day for two).

All museums are free, and one of the most popular is the Museo del Oro (The Gold Museum), which has more gilt than Midas. Our favorite cultural day was an afternoon visit to the Botero Museum located in a complex of other museums and cafes. There is also the Museo LGBTI, homage to NYC's Stonewall Inn which features artifacts and exhibits related to queer global and Colombian

culture, history, and art.

Other tourist attractions include the Jose Celestino Mutis Botanical Garden, the Planetarium, and busy colorful squares of vendors, musicians and where for a small gratuity you can be pictured with a llama or two. A block from Plaza de Bolivar there's the tiny, limited menu La Puerto Falso, known for its ajiaco soup and tamales and operating since 1816. (Bourdain did a segment here.)

The Bohemian-like Chapinero—especially the neighborhood known as Chapinero Alto—is the most LGBTQ+—friendly section of the city. Party-people head to the largest gay nightclub in Latin America—and one of the largest in the world: Theatron. It's a high-energy mega-club with five floors, more than a dozen themed rooms, and separate dance floors offering different vibes and styles of music. (Note: It doesn't really get going until around midnight, and it's only open Thursdays to Saturdays.)

Other LGBTQ+ hotspots include the Bearlove Cafe Bar, Octava Club, El Mozo, Bar Chiquita Bogotá, Brokeback Mountain, the three-story Leos Bar, El Recreo de Adan, the bar El Perro y la Calandria and Videoclub. Friskier gays might want to check out the Dagoas Sauna Hostel, Complices Spa, and the Sauna Saint Moritz.

Cartagena

After a few days we were off to Cartagena., the country's fifth-largest city. Cartagena is a popular sunny-weather destination for not only for international but Colombian tourists, too, lured by two major draws.


The first are the gorgeous islands off its coast and just a short boat excursion away for a day trip of swimming, snorkeling, diving or just chilling. Landlubbers can check out Playa Hollywood in Bocagrande, a popular draw for all tourists. The gay friendly Hollywood Beach is located in front of the Hotel Caribe in El Laguito.

The other big draw is Cartagena's historic, coral-colored, walled city-within-a-city called Old Town (also Ciudad Amurallada, Old City or Walled City), which is a UNESCO World Heritage site. It's in dramatic contrast to the modern, high-rise, beachfront skyline just down the coast.

Old Town is a maze of cobblestone paths, colonial-style buildings, walls filled with colorful street art, bougainvillea-draped wooden balconies, and music wafting from majestic churches, expansive plazas and vibrant clubs and restaurants. On the darker side, there's the grand Palace of the Inquisition where you can see horrifying instruments of torture. Colorfully dressed women called Palenqueras stroll through the squares. They are the descendants of fugitive slaves brought from Africa, and you are invited to be photographed with them, though a monetary gift is expected.

Just a short stroll away is the slightly less touristy neighborhood called Getsemani. This area is colorful and filled with coffee shops, bustling cafes, and lively streets and squares. We were there in early January, and the holiday decorations were still up gloriously ablaze, though one worried about the city's power grid. Both areas are picture-ready, and you only have to go a few steps before you come across one joyful Instagram poser after another.

There is not "gay neighborhood" per se in Cartagena, but the LGBTQ+ bars and clubs include: The City Club (located at the western edge of the old town); Gabanna Club (located across the bridge outside the old town towards the east of the city); Taboo Disco Club (in Getsemani); and Avatar Disco Bar (at La Heroica, southeast of the old town. In Getsemani, overlooking Plaza de la Trinidad, there's Roma Club (at Avenida Santander on the second floor of Mega Tiendas.)

We took one fascinating side trip—another stop in Bourdain's explorations—but it's not for everyone. It's the Bazurto Market, an epic, working maze of a market with endless little stalls of all kinds, and shopped mainly by locals. It's crowded, intense, somewhat sketchy and a challenge to navigate—which is why we hired a guide who made the ins and outs so much easier. 

Safety: Progressive attitudes may not be as well-shared when traveling beyond major cities, and especially to the rural countryside, so discretion is advised. Of course, when traveling in a major city anywhere in the world, tourists should be aware of pickpockets and scammers. Don't flash your cell phone, wallet, and keep your expensive jewelry at home. Don't dress to impress. It's a casual vibe here.

Gay Tour Groups: Outadventures.com, OutinColombia.com, HeTravel.com, TheQueerScout.com, Coda-Tours.com.

Weather: While Colombia is near the equator, weather in Bogota can change abruptly going from sunny to rainy to chilly and back again during one day. (The rainy season begins in March, and it lasts several months.) In Cartagena it's the endless summer.

Transportation: There is no subway system in Bogota or Cartagena, so we skipped the bus system and opted for Ubers and taxis, which were inexpensive and easy with the apps, which also avoided negotiating with cab drivers who did not speak English.

Money: Colombia pesos is the currency, and you can exchange money at the airport or at exchange houses throughout the city. You'll probably get the best rate from an ATM, although your bank may charge you a fee for each transaction. In early 2026, the exchange rate was approximately 37,000 pesos to the dollar. The math of shopping took a while to get used to.

Food: There's fruit galore, including many you've never seen or heard of but are delicious. There's great coffee, but try the hot chocolate (with, yes, cheese on the side). Also, don't miss its tamales, chicharrón (fried pork belly or skin), carne asada (marinated and grilled thinly sliced smokey and charred beef), and ajiaco santafereño (a chicken and potato soup).

Also consider: The four-day Carnival in Barranquilla (February/March): about two hours from Cartagena, which holds one of the largest carnival events in the world. One day is dedicated to the LGBTQ community. In the week leading up to Easter in Cartagena there's Festival del Dulce (or 'candy festival'). Colombia exports its finest to Switzerland but here you have sample it at the source.



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At Saybrook Point Resort & Marina, the line between land and water seems to disappear. There is something immediately calming about the expansive property — a feeling that life naturally slows its pace here. But what truly sets Saybrook Point apart is the way the resort has learned to embody the shoreline itself: thoughtful, enduring, deeply personal and quietly luxurious without ever losing its connection to the character and soul of coastal Connecticut.

The cinematic view of where the Connecticut River meets the Long Island Sound is only part of what has made the resort endure for generations. It is also the sense that this property is profoundly connected to the shoreline around it.

Now, following a sweeping multimillion-dollar renovation, Saybrook Point is entering a new era—one rooted in sustainability, elevated hospitality and an elegant celebration of Old Saybrook itself.

“There was a strong desire to make sure the redesign remained connected to the area and environment,” explained

Kelsey Verillo of Jeffrey Beers International (JBI), the renowned New York design firm behind the interiors. The design team leaned fully into the textures, tones and character of coastal New England. “Our goal was to create something that feels deeply connected to this place—rooted in Connecticut, its history and its makers,” said Kelsey Verillo, Senior Interior Designer at JBI. “By collaborating with local artisans and drawing from the surrounding landscape, we were able to design an experience that feels personal, enduring and distinctly Saybrook Point.”

The result is sophisticated but comfortable—layered with warmth, authenticity and subtle nods to the surrounding landscape.

Touches of osprey as a tribute to one of the shoreline’s most beloved birds and a symbol of the area’s environmental resilience are in the newly constructed rooms. Color palettes are fitting for the seaside surroundings, with each accommodation carrying its own personality through soft coastal blues, sandy neutrals and weathered driftwood tones.

The Grandson of the founders, artist Joseph Tagliatela,

was commissioned to create five timeless prints of images from around Old Saybrook, depicting local landmarks, lighthouses and shoreline landscapes. There is at least one in each room, and they are displayed throughout the property.

That comfortable sophistication extends across the resort experience itself.

Guests staying in select luxury suites across the street from the Main Inn can access dedicated butler service designed to curate fully personalized stays. From dinner reservations and spa scheduling to local excursions and celebration planning, the butler team operates like hospitality storytellers helping guests shape experiences tailored entirely to their pace and interests.

Situated in easy distance between Boston and New York City, Saybrook Point naturally attracts travelers from both metropolitan hubs, but the demographic continues to expand. Weekend visitors from Connecticut, many of whom are regulars, mingle with boaters docking at the marina, couples escaping from New Jersey, wellness travelers, and multigenerational families returning year after year.

That authentic, local feeling extends into every part of the property, particularly at Fresh Salt, the resort's award-winning waterfront restaurant. The dining program embraces a sea-to-table and farm-to-fork philosophy centered around regional sourcing and seasonal New England flavors. The menu changes seasonally, with an emphasis on thoughtfully elevated coastal classics.

The resort is a wellness destination as well. The spa attracts both overnight guests and loyal local regulars. Treatments—and complete packages—range from deep




tissue massage and hot stone therapy to customized facials, red light therapy and advanced skincare services tailored specifically to individual needs all delivered with a highly personal touch.

Long before sustainability became a luxury industry buzzword, Saybrook Point had already established itself as a leader in environmentally conscious hospitality. The property became Connecticut's first Green Lodging-certified hotel and the state's first certified Clean Marina. Owner Stephen Tagliatela notes, "For our family, sustainability has always been rooted in stewardship and responsibility. This transformation was never simply about updating rooms, but about thoughtfully evolving the resort in a way that honors

the water, land, our history, and natural beauty surrounding us. The choices we make today reflect our long-term commitment to our guests, our associates, and future generations who will continue to enjoy and appreciate this special place."

In a world increasingly filled with interchangeable luxury destinations, Saybrook Point remains unmistakably connected to where it stands—to the water, the wildlife, the history and the community surrounding it.

What stays with you after a visit is the feeling of having briefly belonged to this small, windswept corner of the Connecticut shoreline where land, water and hospitality still feel beautifully intertwined. 



Revelation and Repression in Thornton Wilder's New Haven

By D.R. LEWIS

Thornton Wilder was not a nutmegger by birth, but he may as well have been. In the fifty years since his death, the Yale University alumnus and Pulitzer Prize-winning writer of *Our Town* and *The Bridge of San Luis*

Rey has become something of a literary mascot for greater New Haven, where his family home still stands on Hamden's Deepwood Drive. But Wilder's Connecticut connection began more than a half century earlier, and early letters held in Yale's Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library indicate that this nascent period in New Haven was pivotal to the author's creative—and perhaps sexual—development.

Thornton was born in Madison, Wisconsin to Isabella and Amos Parker Wilder, a newspaper publisher descended from a Derby-born great-grandmother raised only twelve miles west of Hamden and the “house *The Bridge* built.” The annual royalties from his international bestseller were so great that Thornton used them to purchase the land on Deepwood Drive for \$7,500 and to construct the family home in 1929 for \$21,500. The home remained a center for the Wilder family until well after Thornton's death in 1975, but its fame obscured the previously itinerant life of Thornton's childhood.

Thornton spent a significant portion of his boyhood in China, where his father's aspirations to public diplomacy took the family despite the personal financial strain of performing under-funded public

appointments. The ever-present specter of poverty and diasporic nature of the family's existence would provide emotional fodder for now-beloved works like *The Skin of Our Teeth* and his classic one-act, *The Long Christmas Dinner*, but the loneliness and unhappiness took a toll on the young Thornton.

Thornton was also stymied in his artistic expression. Amos Parker sought to suppress his son's “delicate, girl-playing, aesthetic” tendencies by enrolling him in boys' schools and farm labor programs. Thornton was especially crushed when his father forced him to withdraw from playing Lady Bracknell in *The Importance of Being Earnest* while at California's Thacher School.

Those adolescent years are typically formative for LGBTQ+ people, as opportunities to explore sexuality become more accessible. Speculation around Thornton's sexual orientation began during his lifetime and has remained a topic of interest for artists, biographers, and critics even in the absence of definitive evidence. Richard Goldstone's 1975 biography, *Thornton Wilder: An Intimate Portrait*, considers Thornton's rumored same-sex attractions and their implication on his platonic and familiar relationships in connection with gay writers like Oscar Wilde, Walt Whitman, and Thomas Mann. Linda Simon's 1978 *Thornton Wilder: His World* offers the first major link between Thornton and Samuel Steward, a writer and tattoo artist whose alleged sexual encounters with Thornton in Zurich have formed the basis for much of the debate surrounding physical consummations of his rumored



Wilder in the mid-1920s

desire. And Gilbert Harrison's 1983 book, *The Enthusiast*, puts the matter before Wilder's friends and colleagues, whose assessments go so far as to deem him a "neuter."

But in her definitive 2012 biography, *Thornton Wilder: A Life*, author Penelope Niven offers the most assertive assessment:

"A very private man who often saw his fame as an intrusion into his personal life, Thornton Wilder seems to have studiously kept to himself the details of his sexual experiences, whether homosexual or heterosexual or both...He would have instinctively protected his own privacy as well as that of his sex partners, not out of hypocrisy but out of affection, out of courtesy, out of propriety, out of respect for others, and himself."

Niven's analysis has drawn the objections of critics and scholars, including myself in *A Walk on the Wilder Side: A Queer Reading of Thornton Wilder*, published in January by the American Theatre Critics/Journalists Association with support from Foundation ATCA's Terry Helbing Fellowship.

In content, Wilder's writings about infatuations with classmates and artists are unremarkable. Given the long-time challenge of understanding his sexuality, however, these letters from the late 1910s and early 1920s are astonishing as some of the strongest indications of Wilder's potential same-sex attraction.

Wilder attended Yale by way of Oberlin, where he spent the first two years of his college education, and by the time he enrolled at New Haven, his parents had already settled there so his father could oversee the university's interests in China. Under their watchful eye, it's difficult to imagine Thornton finding freedom to carry on openly with men, even if he was experiencing mutual attraction.

At least one flirtatious correspondence with a gay ballet dancer named Hubert Stowitts occurred as early as 1915, but letters to Oberlin professor Dr. Charles Wager after the transfer prove much more effusive.

In one letter from October 1917, Thornton chronicles his attempts to join the staff of *The Yale Literary Magazine*, then edited by poet Stephen Vincent Benét. Waiting for his meeting with Benét in a small room reserved as a library for a

Thornton had been following in the news, earning Wager's teasing. Under the guise of discussing a potential role for Hughes in one of the Association's plays, the two men arranged a meeting in New York at the actor's Waverly Place apartment. The meeting lasted more than eight hours, well into the night, and when Wilder rose to go, Hughes seems to have protested. Describing the exchange, Wilder references the lark and the nightingale, a famous metaphor in *Romeo & Juliet*.

"He is Ariel, but more pathetic than Ariel," Thornton wrote. "And, when his glasses are off, the divinest thing to look upon that I have ever seen." Thornton introduced Hughes to his mother the following night. "No one can take his or her eyes off of him."

Thornton's time at Yale was briefly interrupted by the first World War, when he was drafted into the Army's Coast Artillery Corps in summer 1918. A December discharge allowed him to return to school for the Spring 1919 semester, but not without

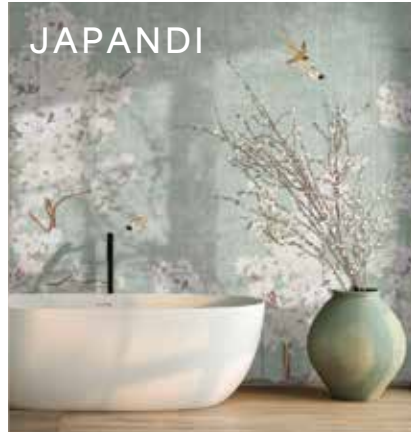
first meeting another actor, Glenn Hunter, whose own infatuation with Thornton mirrors that with Hughes. Unfortunately, Wilder's letters back to Hunter do not survive, even as Hunter's notes suggests, "their relationship could grow through letters," and includes an invitation for Wilder to rent a room in his building so they could be closer together.

"I wish I might have a long talk with you just tonight," Hunter wrote to Thornton. "I need patting on the shoulder by someone—like you—someone with whom I could tell what I hope and dream—how I loved being with you that night—more than you could know." Thornton seems to have sent a photo of himself to Hunter, which earned him praise. "I like your

"I like your picture so very much, Thornton, and am glad to have it. I'm going to find a neat little frame for it."

group of wealthy young men, Wilder watches a "most perfect of southern aristocrats" enter and change his clothing. Other "fair-haired" and "good-looking" students come and go, Wilder writes, exhibiting "proud subdued air," "wandering graciousness," and "golden casualness." A farcical search for a missing sock ensue, and Thornton concludes, "I don't suppose they ever let it occur to them that they are so perfect...And to think there was still a fourth I didn't see."

Wilder's involvement with another campus organization, the Yale Drama Association, provided cover for a more intimate encounter with Welsh actor Gareth Hughes, whose professional and physical movements



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A studio portrait of Thornton Wilder attributed to Danford Barney in the mid-1920s

picture so very much, Thornton, and am glad to have it. I'm going to find a neat little frame for it."

If the proximity to his parents in New Haven would have made fostering these budding connections difficult, Thornton's work teaching French at New Jersey's all-boys Lawrenceville School would have further complicated any efforts. But in addition to earning a master's from Princeton University, Thornton spent those New Jersey years honing his writing skills, culminating in the publication of his debut, *The Cabala*, in 1926, and *The Bridge of San Luis Rey* a year later. His life and fortunes changed forever.

Coupled with his curiosity, the opportunities afforded by Thornton's literary success would take him around the world, with extended stints in Hollywood, Chicago, Arizona, and various European cities. Aside from his meeting with Steward in Zurich, the extent of subsequent infatuations or romantic connections in such places is unclear, though open admission of same-sex attraction would have certainly threatened his literary celebrity and position as the family's primary breadwinner. What is clear is that Wilder, despite regular returns to Deepwood Drive, found more freedom in his time away from it:

"Explain to Ma that I go to Munich to write some long things—not because of any éloignement from Deepwood Drive or its occupants," Thornton wrote to his sister and literary executor, Isabel, "but because the tepid sociabilities [sic] of an American city like New Haven tinged with envy, detraction, etc. make work impossible."

Still, Hamden was always home, and Thornton died in his sleep there on December 7, 1975.

In *Our Town*, the inhabitants of Grover's Corners cherish and chafe at life in a single town as they look for their purpose, fall in love for the first time, and settle into death in a cemetery overlooking the community.

Unlike them, Wilder is not buried on a hilltop, but rather in the shadow of one known as "Sleeping Giant," seven miles north of the "house *The Bridge* built." The earth is encroaching on his headstone now, but every day people embody the characters he created, crack open the books he wrote, visit the Beinecke to read letters he never intended to be read, and wander past the Deepwood Drive desk that now stands as a memorial to him at Hamden's Miller Memorial Library. And for a moment they remember New Haven's favorite non-native son. 🍷

Thornton Wilder photographs courtesy of the Thornton Wilder Papers, Yale Collection of American Literature. Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library. With the consent of The Wilder Family LLC and The Barbara Hogenson Agency, Inc. All rights reserved. D.R. Lewis' complete piece is available at americantheatrecritics.org

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SUMMER ARTS PREVIEW

Dylan, Sweeney, Wynton and an Idol or two play on Connecticut stages.

By FRANK RIZZO

Ah, summer, the season of beaches, picnics, backyard barbecues, and all kinds of outdoor fun. But Connecticut also offers a rich abundance of arts and entertainment events to further heat you and brighten the season.

We present a few—quite a few—of performing arts temptations throughout the state:

One of the major events that kicks off the season in a grand way is New Haven's **International Festival of Arts & Ideas** that continues in June at various locations, neighborhoods and venues across the city. A festival highlight will be on June 18 at the Shubert Theatre with a performance by the modern dance company **Pilobolus**. The Connecticut-based group will present *Other Worlds*, a collaboration between theatre, music and dance artists, including award-winning playwright and director Aaron Posner, multi-instrumentalist and composer Stuart Bogie.

What do you do when you've just turned 90? If you're **Buddy Guy**, the rock and blues legend, Rock & Roll Hall of Fame inductee and nine-time Grammy winner, you go on tour. The pioneer of Chicago's explosive West Side sound plays **Waterbury's Palace Theatre** on **August 7**. Oh yes, he's also received a Lifetime Achievement Grammy, 38 Blues Music Awards, the Billboard Century Award, and the Presidential National Medal of Arts, and the Kennedy Center Honor.

Brace yourself for the mid-term, elections in the fall, then buckle your seatbelt and head to Hartford's **The Bushnell** where comedian **Jon Stewart** is sure to have a few pointed remarks, comic zingers and smart commentary on the state of the nation on **June 19**.

Speaking of funny men, now that he is wrapping up

his popular podcast *WTF with Marc Maron* after 16 years, the comedian arrives at the **Ridgefield Playhouse** **June 20**. His confessional, introspective and acerbic brand of humor is also showcased in a string of HBO comedy specials.

The one-two punch of great comedians happens happens with concert dates in mid-July at **Foxwoods Resorts and Casino**. **Seth Meyers** takes the stage **July 10** and **Jerry Seinfeld** on **July 18**.

She was a smash in NBC's *Smash* as triple-threat Ivy Lynn, she was one of the greater Glindas in *Wicked*, and she was a Tony Award nominee as glamorous Madeline Ashton in the hit musical *Death Becomes Her*. Broadway fans in search of a new generation of diva goddesses can catch **Megan Hilty** in concert at New Haven's **Shubert Theatre** **June 12**.

But Hilty isn't the only Broadway star in concert this summer. Tony Award winner **Beth Leavel** (*The Drowsy Chaperone* and a hoot in *The Prom*) will perform at Branford's intimate *Legacy Theatre* on **August 16**. In a Broadway career that spans back to 1975—including celebrated revivals of *My Fair Lady*, *Oklahoma!* and *On Your Toes*—**Christine Andreas** will be performing at Norwalk's **Music Theatre of Connecticut** on **July 18**.

Want to take a backstage look at one of the iconic rock bands on the '80s? If you can't call The Police, you can go to **The Kate** (aka The Katharine Hepburn Cultural Arts Center in Old Saybrook) on **July 6 and 7** where **Stewart Copeland**, founder and drummer of that multi Grammy winner and a Rock and Roll Hall of Famer will share his take on the band, its music and the industry. This is the first American spoken-word tour by Copeland, who is also a filmmaker, and composer of film scores, video games, and operas.



The always-incredible Megan Hilty at the Shubert June 12
PHOTO CREDIT: Leah Portis and Laura Matula.

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Even at 70, **Billy Idol** still has that rebel yell. The famously spiky-haired rocker will be in concert **August 8** at the **Mohegan Sun**. Idol began as front man for the British punk band Generation X before he launched his successful solo career in the new wave '80s. He became a staple of the then-new television channel MTV with the wildly popular music videos for his singles “Dancing with Myself,” “White Wedding,” “Hot in the City” and, of course, “Rebel Yell.”

Wu Tang Clan, the groundbreaking American rap collective known for its sharp lyricism, old-school rap influence, and gritty production will shake things up at the **Meadows Music Theatre** in Hartford **August 29**.

It would be hard to choose just one concert to highlight at the **Hartford HealthCare Amphitheater** in Bridgeport. The venue's summer line-up includes **James Taylor** on **June 22**, **Sarah McLachlin** on **July 8**, and **Rod Stewart** on **August 7**, just to name a few. But then there's the mike drop: **Bob Dylan** with **Jimmie Vaughan** and **The Tilt-A-Whirl Band** on **July 19**.

There's yet another gathering of greats—and the crowd will no doubt be celebrating all night long—when **Lionel Richie** and **Earth, Wind and Fire** perform at **PeoplesBank Arena** in Hartford on **July 10**.

Jon Batise will be the highlight of the summer series at the **Westville Music Bowl** in New Haven. The Oscar- and Grammy-winning musician, composer, singer and television personality will perform his joyous and eclectic style of genre-bending fusion of jazz, soul, gospel, blues, and classical on **August 13**.

The lineup hadn't been announced at press time, but circle the dates **July 17 to 19** on your calendar for the **Greater Hartford Festival of Jazz**, now in its 35th year. Free in Bushnell Park.



Broadway legend Christine Andreas in Norwalk July 18.
PHOTO CREDIT: Cliff Lipson



Stewart Copeland
plays *The Kate*
July 6 & 7.

PHOTO CREDIT:
Max Cardelli

Another jazz highlight is certainly **Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra with Wynton Marsalis** performing at the **Garde Arts Center** in New London **June 27**. The event is part of the lead-up to Wynton Marsalis' final season as artistic director of Jazz at Lincoln Center and music director of the Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra.

Lead vocalists and songwriters Jess Wolfe and Holly Laessig of the acclaimed indie band **Lucius**—best known for their sinuous harmonies and highly-original, pop-noir musical artistry—will play **June 20** at the **Levitt Pavilion for the Performing Arts** in Westport.

The most exciting theater event of the summer is a first-ever, joint production by **Hartford Stage** and **TheaterWorks Hartford** of the Stephen Sondheim's ***Sweeney Todd***. The show will play **June 5 to July 5** and will be presented as an intimate chamber production at Hartford Stage.

In need of an old-fashioned, first-class musical that will tap your troubles away? **Goodspeed Musicals** is presenting ***Crazy for You***, The show is loaded with Gershwin classics ("I Got Rhythm," "Embraceable You," "Someone To Watch Over Me" and many more) and will play **June 19 to August 9** at Goodspeed Opera House in East Haddam.

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There's *The Wild Party*—the off-Broadway version with music by Andrew Lippa, depicting the roaring 1920s “where jazz, lust, and danger collide.”

What better way to celebrate USA's Semiquincentennial than with a musical reminding us of our democratic heritage? *1776* plays the **Ivoryton Playhouse** in Essex **June 25 to July 28**.

There's *The Wild Party*—the off-Broadway version with music by Andrew Lippa, depicting the roaring 1920s “where jazz, lust, and danger collide.” It will play West Hartford's **Playhouse on Park** from **July 8 to August 9**.

There will be two outdoor summer productions of Shakespeare's romantic comedy *Much Ado About Nothing*. First up is a production from **Shakespeare on the Sound** at Pinkney Park from **June 10 to 28**. Then comes the annual free Shakespearean production by **New Haven's Elm City Shakespeare** at Edgerton Park that attract thousands every season. That company's version, set in 1945, will run **August 20 to September 6**.

If indoor theater is more to your taste, then **Westport Country Playhouse** will be presenting *Agatha Christie's The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*. The suspenseful mystery drama, which artistic director Mark Shanahan has adapted for the stage runs **July 14 to Aug. 1**.

Buddy Guy plays the Palace in Waterbury August 7

PHOTO CREDIT: Lyndon French





Marc Maron at The Ridgefield Playhouse June 20. PHOTO CREDIT: Elizabeth Viggiano

An advertisement for Pullman & Comley. The top half features a photograph of two women and a baby. The woman on the left is smiling, and the woman on the right is holding a baby. The background is a blurred indoor setting. On the left side of the image, there is white text: "COMMITTED TO FULL LIVED EQUALITY FOR ALL" in large, bold letters, followed by "Providing Personalized and Trusted Legal Counsel" in smaller text. At the bottom of the image, there is a teal banner with white text: "BUSINESS | FAMILY LAW | HEALTH LAW | EMPLOYMENT LITIGATION | REAL ESTATE | TAX | TRUSTS AND ESTATES".

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The **Warner Theater** in Torrington will present **Toto Kisaku's** one-man play, *Requiem for an Electric Chair*, which tells the harrowing true story of his persecution, imprisonment, and near execution in the Democratic Republic of Congo, where his musical comedies exposing child exploitation and government complicity put him on death row. The powerful show will be presented **June 20**.

A generation of theater fans have embraced the teen-centric story in the musical *Dear Evan Hansen*. Ridgefield's **A.C.T. of CT** (A Contemporary Theater of Connecticut) ends its season with the show, which will complete its run **June 21**.

Finally, a cornerstone of American theater development, the **Eugene O'Neill Theater Center** in Waterford hosts its **National Puppetry Conference (June 6 to 14)**, its **Playwrights Conference (June 15 to July 5)**, the **Music Theater Conference (July 6 to 18)** and the **Cabaret and Performance Conference (July 22 to August 1)**. While many events are developmental, select readings and performances are open to the public and often feature future Broadway-bound works. 

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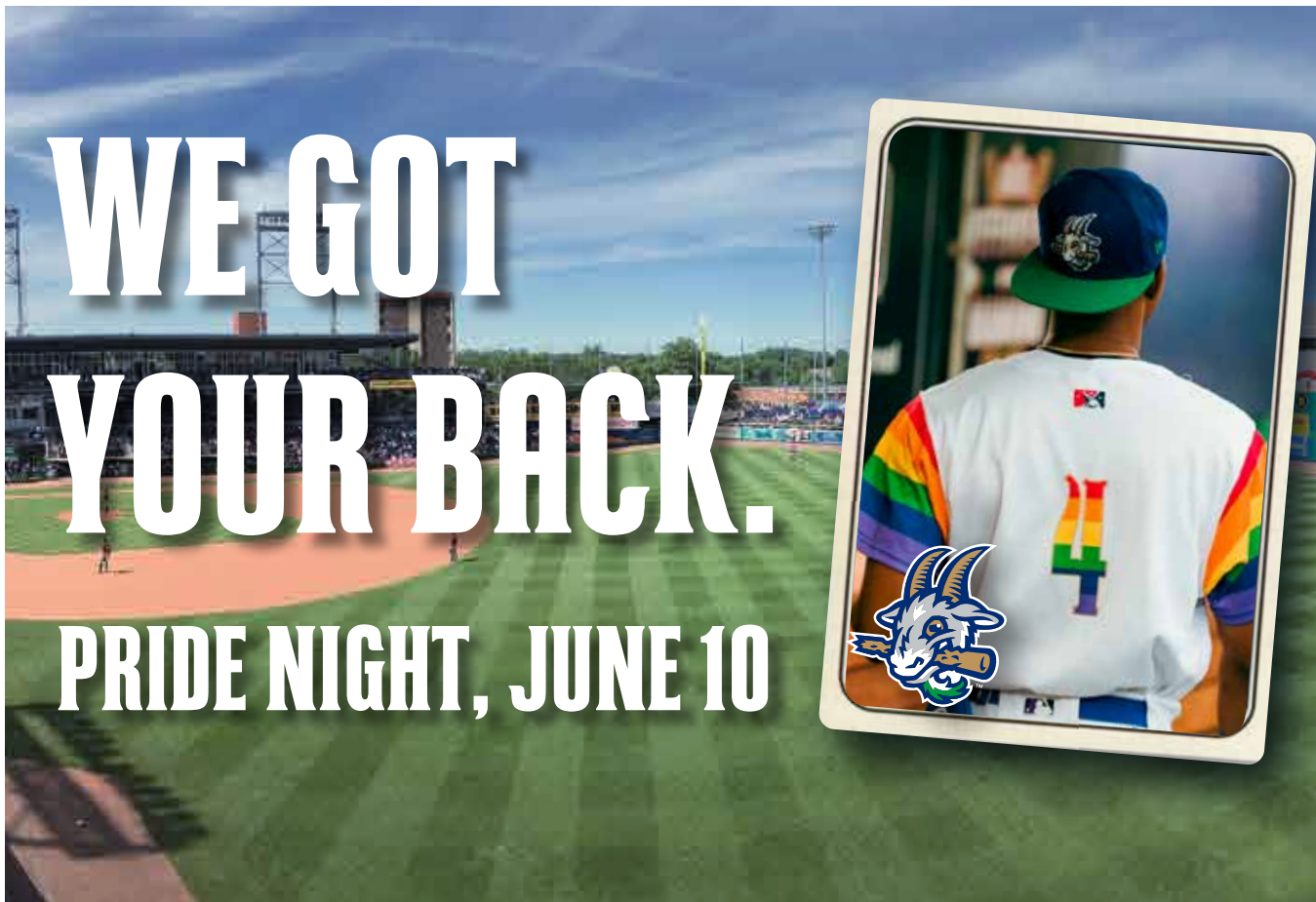
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Building Local Pride

By LAUREN TAGLIATELA

As we begin planning our 4th annual Pride on the Green event in North Haven, we have found ourselves reflecting on how far this effort has come in a few short years. What began as a conversation among a few parents has grown into a vibrant community initiative that supports LGBTQ+ residents and allies across the state.

My name is Lauren Tagliatela, and I volunteer as North Haven Pride's Development Chair. I have had the privilege of watching this organization grow from an idea into a movement that brings people together through visibility, support, and celebration.

North Haven Pride was created by a small group of parents in town who wanted their children to grow up in a more affirming, safe, and inclusive community. North Haven is a wonderful town with strong civic engagement and community pride, but like many small towns, it often leans conservative. For some families, that meant there were limited visible spaces where LGBTQ+ youth and adults could feel openly supported.

In early 2023, a group of six parents came together with a shared goal: to create that space. We knew that if we were going to build something meaningful and lasting, it would require collaboration and transparency. We began meeting monthly with First Selectman Mike Freda, as well as representatives from the North Haven Police Department, Parks and Recreation, Public



Lauren Tagliatela
Development Chair, New Haven Pride

Works, and the North Haven Memorial Library. We understood that organizing a public event of this nature would be a significant undertaking, and that communication and partnership with the town would be essential for both public safety and alignment of goals.

During our first meeting with all stakeholders, we immediately felt a sense of support and openness from the town and its departments. That moment gave us confidence that our vision could become a reality. Our initial goal was modest: host a Pride event that might attract 300 attendees. We were hoping to create a welcoming gathering where families, friends, and neighbors could come together in celebration and solidarity.

Very quickly, we realized there was much more involved behind the scenes. To operate responsibly and grow sustainably, we needed to formally establish a nonprofit organization. That meant creating a 501(c)(3), drafting a mission

statement, opening a bank account, applying for grants, and securing sponsorships from local businesses to help fund what we hoped would be a joyful and inclusive event for the community.

As the planning process continued, something exciting began to happen. What started as the idea for a single-day Pride celebration began to evolve into something larger. We recognized that our community needed more than just one event per year. Out of those conversations, Pride365 was born.

Pride365 is built on three core pillars: advocacy, community engagement, and education. These guiding principles shape everything we do. Rather than focusing only on a single annual celebration, we work year-round to provide opportunities for connection, learning, and support for LGBTQ+ individuals and their allies.

Over the past few years, we have hosted a variety of events that bring people together in meaningful ways. These have included a gender-affirming healthcare panel, presentations from the Stonewall Speakers, teen dances, drag shows, hikes, ice cream socials, and other informal meet-ups that help foster community. One of the programs we are most proud of is our youth programming, which we host in partnership with Q Plus. Our weekly youth gatherings regularly attract as many as 30 young people from across the state who come together for game nights, conversation, and a space where they can simply be themselves.

None of this work would be possible without the support of our sponsors and community partners. We are deeply grateful to the many businesses and organizations that have stepped forward to make North Haven Pride possible. Our generous sponsors include Franklin Communities, Liberty Bank, Comprehensive Gynecology of CT, Anchor Health, Ridge Hill Animal Hospital, Ameriprise (Jeff Jolly), Brescome Barton, Connex Credit Union, Circle Care, Excel Academy, Rousseau Plumbing



Lauren celebrating Pride!

& Heating, United Fitness, The Kitchen Company, Alphabet Academy, Salon Space, Small Talk, Jacobs & Jacobs, Tuff Gurl, Elm Tree Orthodontics, Home Run Realty, Jay Kaye Services, Family Fantasy Entertainment, and many others who continue to support our mission. We are also thankful for the grants we received from the Greater New Haven Community Foundation, the Leonard Litz Foundation, the LGBTQ+ Justice & Opportunity Network, and the It Gets Better Project.

Their support demonstrates something powerful: when local businesses and community members come together, we can create spaces where everyone feels welcome.

We are excited to continue that tradition this year. North Haven Pride on the Green will take place on Saturday, June 13th from 11:00 AM to 3:00 PM on the North Haven Town Green. The event will feature live entertainment, food, animals, a kids' area, vendors, community partners, and much more. Friendly dogs are welcome, and we encourage families, friends, and neighbors to come out and enjoy the day together.

What began as a small group of parents hoping to make their town more inclusive has grown into a celebration that reflects the best of our community. 🇺🇸

Lauren Tagliatela
 NorthHavenPride.org
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Photos courtesy Lauren Tagliatela

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