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James Tully

As the media landscape evolves, especially with the rise of digital platforms, Seasons Media remains a reliable source of high-quality content. Our success is a direct result of the dedication and trust of our advertising partners, who have been instrumental in shaping our journey. We extend our heartfelt gratitude to them for their ongoing support.

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an adaptive approach to media, ensures that Seasons remains the go-to platform for brands seeking to craft authentic, impactful messages.

As we celebrate this milestone, we look forward to the next chapter of innovation and storytelling, continuing to strengthen community bonds and deliver meaningful experiences for our partners and audiences. Here's to the next 20 years of shared success and excellence in journalism.

James Tully

James Tully
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"SPRING IS FAR MORE THAN JUST A CHANGING OF SEASONS; IT'S A REBIRTH OF THE SPIRIT."

-Toni Sorenson



UConn Health Stands at the Forefront of Comprehensive Sickle Cell Treatment in the U.S.

BIREE ANDEMARIAM, M.D.
GENICE T. NELSON, DNP, MSN, APRN, ANP-BC
OLADIPO COLE, M.D., MBA

Written by STEVEN BLACKBURN

UConn Health's New England Sickle Cell Institute (NESCI) was already

providing more comprehensive care for sickle cell patients than most U.S. clinics when the Farmington campus recently announced the expansion into a new, fully refurbished space.

"This new space gives us a permanent home to continue providing and even improving the individualized level of care we always have for even more of our sickle cell patients, particularly those who arrive with severe bodily pain," says Biree Andemariam, M.D., who founded NESCI in 2009. "It's another way for us to fast-track their management of pain for same-day urgent care rather than going through the Emergency Department."

Dr. Andemariam and her team have already gone above and beyond to ensure their sickle cell patients admitted into UConn Health's Emergency Department (ED) receive specialized, expedited treatment by linking their information and pain management plans to UConn Health's electronic records.

"When our patients come to the emergency room during an episode or crisis after hours, staff know exactly who they are, their treatment of choice, the required dose and what steps need to be taken," explains Genice T. Nelson, DNP, MSN, APRN, ANP-BC, an early member of Dr. Andemariam's team



Cutting the ribbon marking the opening of the new patient care facility for the New England Sickle Cell Institute and Connecticut Bleeding Disorders Center at UConn Health on January 29, 2025. Left to right: Nursing Director Genice Nelson, DNP; Chief Nursing Officer Caryl Ryan, BSN; CEO Andy Agwunobi, M.D.; Chief Administrative Officer Janel Simpson, MBA; Cancer Center Chair Pramod Srivastava, M.D. Ph.D.; Institute Director Biree Andemariam, M.D.; and Medical School Dean Bruce Liang, M.D. (Tina Encarnacion/UConn Health photo)

who helped establish NESCI. "It can be a disheartening event for our patients if the ED doesn't know what to do immediately, and we've helped address that."

PROVIDING WELL-ROUNDED, COMPREHENSIVE CARE FEW STATES OFFER

This transparency between UConn Health's NESCI and ED is just one integral part of the innovative program by Dr. Andemariam and Dr. Nelson. Another is their newest addition, Oladipo Cole, M.D. Dr. Cole recently finished his fellowship program at Washington University School of Medicine and residency at Florida Atlantic University's Charles E. Schmidt College of Medicine.

"Not a lot of programs offer what NESCI does," Dr. Cole says. To him, UConn Health is ahead of the curve

with its treatment of sickle cell disease. "Many clinics are only able to provide patients with pain management and don't have such a well-thought-out or well-rounded comprehensive program focused on the overall care of sickle cell patients. The team here is second to none, and that's paramount to this program."

UConn Health's Courage to Pioneer Sickle Cell Treatment

Before NESCI began trailblazing sickle cell treatment, it was common for patients across the U.S. to not receive constant care. This is what prompted Dr. Andemariam to change her area of focus from blood cancer to sickle cell disease. "Every time I made the rounds at the hospital, I kept seeing the same young people with sickle cell disease, who were in and out of the hospital in pain," she



UConn HEALTH

Top left: Genice Nelson, DNP, APRN, ANP-BC, is a board-certified nurse practitioner and the program director for the New England Sickle Cell Institute at UConn Health. (Tina Encarnacion/UConn Health photo)

Top right: Biree Andemariam, M.D., director of the New England Sickle Cell Institute at UConn Health, meets with a model patient. (Tina Encarnacion/UConn Health photo)

Bottom image: Oladipo Cole, M.D., speaks to the hematology oncology team in the sickle cell inpatient unit at UConn John Dempsey Hospital. Team members (left to right) are nurse practitioners Barbara Baron, APRN, and Judith Fox, APRN; fellow Joshua Van Allen, D.O.; Oladipo Cole, M.D.; and resident Anmol Singh, MBBS. (Tina Encarnacion/UConn Health photo)

remembers. “This is when I realized that I could make a difference in their lives and give them a voice.”

As she was treating and studying sickle cell disease at UConn Health, she identified five critical areas for improvement: build a transition program from Connecticut Children’s, develop a fast-track system of care in the ED, create a day hospital for managing acute complications, provide a clear pathway of care for pregnant sickle cell patients, and perform specialized blood transfusions.

Over time, UConn Health recognized Dr. Andemariam’s contributions and provided her with the means to expand officially, an initiative that eventually led to the NESCI.

“NESCI wouldn’t have been possible without UConn Health’s support,” says Dr. Andemariam. “It took courage from our executive leadership to do the right thing upfront without necessarily knowing if there was going to be any financial benefit.”

That leadership team includes Dr. Pramod K. Srivastava, director of the Neag Comprehensive Cancer Center; CEO Dr. Andrew Agwunobi; and Chief Nursing Officer Caryl Ryan.

CHILD-TO-ADULT PROGRAM ACHIEVES 99% SUCCESS RATE

In addition to collaborating closely with UConn Health’s ED, another major component of NESCI includes its innovative transition program in partnership with Connecticut Children’s. Since babies are born with this genetic disease, hospitals are required by law to screen for sickle cell at birth. The program places a dozen or so Connecticut newborns diagnosed with sickle cell disease every year into Connecticut Children’s pediatric sickle cell center. Since sickle cell is a lifelong disorder, those patients will eventually grow out of Connecticut Children’s once they turn 21.

NESCI developed a transition program for future patients that begins as early as 12 years old to familiarize them with UConn Health and the campus. “Our long-standing social worker, Teresa Works, is instrumental in ensuring that all children at Connecticut Children’s with sickle cell disease make their way to UConn Health to continue their care as adults,” Dr. Andemariam says. “She has really been the backbone of the transition process for the last 13 years.”

The NESCI team also confirms insurance and transportation. UConn

Health will provide funding for transportation if none is available. Today, NESCI currently boasts that 99% of young adults graduating from care at Connecticut Children’s have successfully transitioned over to NESCI at UConn Health.

“Until we developed this adult program at UConn Health, Connecticut Children’s patients didn’t have anywhere to go. It’s not just a Connecticut problem, either,” says Dr. Andemariam. “Very few hematologists in the nation are comfortable or willing to treat sickle cell disease.”

During the transition process, Dr. Nelson, Dr. Andemariam and their team meet with prospective patients virtually to get to know them. UConn Health also hosts on-campus tours in Farmington so incoming patients can familiarize themselves with their new place of care.

“We always encourage families to come to these tours, since it’s a time of high anxiety for everyone,” says Dr. Nelson. “Up until then, many of them had been with a team of providers for 21 years; now they are going to be taken to a completely different area with a different team. It’s important that families can rest assured that their loved ones will receive the same care and love they had at Connecticut Children’s. It’s a naturally difficult process, but we are trying to make it as seamless as possible.”

WORKING TIRELESSLY TO PROVIDE A NEW MEDICATION

Patients also travel to UConn Health from New York, Rhode Island and Massachusetts. Many patients come to Farmington for checkups every six months for heart ultrasounds, eye examinations, lung and kidney evaluations, and lab tests. Some patients visit as frequently as once per month, depending on their level of pain or need for blood transfusions and medications.

“There are many parts of the body that serve as markers or indicators of sickle cell,” explains Dr. Nelson. “Sickle cell disease is very painful. There are some who live with chronic pain every day.”

The team members at UConn Health can proudly say they provide every FDA-approved treatment for sickle cell disease. “Not every person with sickle cell has a physician who is knowledgeable enough or has the clinical resources to provide all the therapies as we do,” shares Dr. Andemariam.

CONDUCTING RARE CLINICAL TRIALS THAT PATIENTS TRUST

Even with a growing number of new treatments for sickle cell disease over the last few years, the condition is still wrought with many complications and reduced lifespan. The average life expectancy remains only around 42 years of age. In order to address this, NESCI conducts clinical trials and research to streamline medical innovations and expedite future releases of newer medications and therapies.

“There are a lot of things we still don’t know about sickle cell disease,” says Dr. Cole. “But the reason we know as much as we do is because we collaborate with basic scientists and pharmaceutical companies to conduct groundbreaking research and clinical trials.”

Very few clinics are even capable of conducting clinical trials. As a rare condition, a significant number of patients is required. UConn Health is one of the few centers that can, since it treats more than 300 patients with sickle cell disease.

Of course, not every patient is willing to participate in trials, a decision that Dr. Andemariam’s team always supports. But most of their patients are usually excited whenever an opportunity arises. “I think many of our patients volunteer because they trust us,” adds Dr. Cole. “They know we have their best interests in mind because we are always honest and transparent.”

A VISION OF STATE-OF-THE-ART TREATMENTS AND THERAPIES

As clinical trials and research help propel UConn Health into the future, Dr. Andemariam is optimistic about where UConn Health is headed because of her newest hire, Dr. Cole. He is committed to bringing the latest innovations to NESCI, such as gene therapy and bone marrow transplants.

“He is the future of our program,” says Dr. Andemariam. “When you’ve been doing it for as long as Dr. Nelson and I have, you need a fresh perspective like his. With Dr. Cole’s pedigree, he could have gone anywhere. And that says a lot about our program and its future.”

Steven Blackburn is a freelance writer with more than 10 years of journalism experience in various fields, including U.S. education and Connecticut community interest stories. He lives in Winsted.

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When Stars Shone Brightest in Connecticut, On Stage and Off with Photographer James Meehan

By FRANK RIZZO / Photography by JAMES MEEHAN

In the last quarter of the 20th Century, Connecticut hosted some of the biggest stars in the entertainment industry as well a colorful array of unique and offbeat performers. To many who were there, it was a golden age of entertainment, with audiences filling venues big and small throughout the state at college campuses, jai alai frontons, arenas, arts centers and nightclubs.

In front of the stage and behind the scenes was photographer James Meehan with his camera at the ready to capture that special moment of revelation.

The Meriden native got his start in photography following a stint in the U.S. Navy in the '60s when he took workshops with master photographer Paul Caponigro of Bethel. Until the '90s, Meehan worked throughout the state for the New Haven Journal-Courier, New Haven Register, Hartford Courant, NorthEast magazine, The New York Times and Parade magazine, among other publications. He was twice named Connecticut Photographer of the Year by the National Press Photographers Association.

Now living in Chester, Meehan has an extensive archive. He recalls the personalities and performances connected to a handful of his favorite images.

It was a challenge to choose just a few from the endless collection of stunning photographs. Among others were The Grateful Dead's Jerry Garcia and Bob Weil, Robert Redford, wrestler Andre the Giant, Tim Curry, Leontyne Price, Eubie Blake, Peter Tosh, Richie Havens, Muddy Waters, Dizzy Gillespie, Bonnie Raitt, Frank Sinatra, Cloris Leachman, James Taylor, Peter Frampton, Tom Waits, and Allen Ginsberg. The list goes on and on.

Here are some favorites that captured a moment of entertainment history in Connecticut when the stars of the era came out to shine.





STEVE MARTIN, ACTOR

JAI ALAI FRONTON,
HARTFORD'S NORTH
MEADOWS

"I had his albums and saw him on 'Saturday Night Live,' says Meehan, "so I was familiar with a lot of his stuff. But he was even greater in concert. This wasn't a newspaper assignment but my seat was fairly close to the stage, so I just went up closer to take some pictures for myself. Surprisingly, no one was restricting me so I just shot away. This photo is quintessential Steve Martin doing his 'King Tut' bit. Very emotive—and very hilarious."

TINY TIM, PERFORMER

SOUTHERN CONNECTICUT
STATE UNIVERSITY IN
HAMDEN

"This was in his dressing room. I knew somewhat about him: singing 'Tiptoe Through the Tulips,' playing his ukulele and his marrying Miss Vickie on 'The Johnny Carson Show.' There were other shots of him laughing but I got this one with him looking off-camera, a rare moment of him seeming more serious. I'm not sure what he was thinking in that moment, but I like it."

GINGER ROGERS, FILM LEGEND

IVORYTON PLAYHOUSE IN
ESSEX

"She knew exactly how she wanted to be photographed, and she was definitely in charge. She didn't want photos of her while she was talking because she didn't want her mouth to look weird. Here she's careful to hide any wrinkles in her neck with her hand. She knew exactly what she was doing, where her visual strengths were and how to pose. Smart woman."



BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN, SINGER
NEW HAVEN COLISEUM

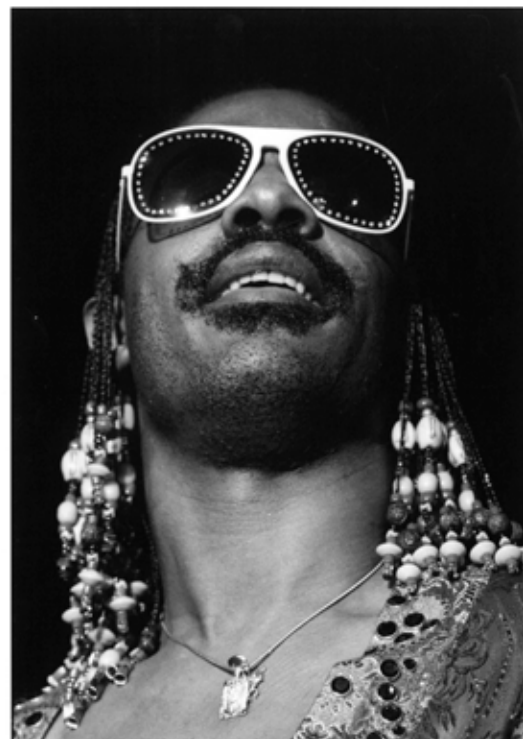
“This was in the mid-’70s and I think it was the first time he played arenas and his first time in Connecticut. It was the ‘Born to Run’ tour. I didn’t know that much about him so when I saw him perform, I just stood there with my mouth open. The security people put me way off in the area where the hockey players sat. It wasn’t close to the stage, so I had to use a long lens—I think it was on a tripod—to get this image. It wasn’t long after that he climbed to the top of the piano and jumped off playing his guitar. But I like this shot with his head against [saxophonist] Clarence [Clemons] because they were so close and made such a team.”



**“STRETCH” (MELVIN BURKHARDT),
SIDESHOW PERFORMER WITH THE
COLE BROS.**
CARNIVAL AT A STOP IN BRIDGEPORT

“I was taking pictures at the carnival and saw him as part of a side show that included a bearded woman and sword swallower. Stretch’s face was so elastic and he often performed this pose. But I wanted to photograph him in a more controlled setting. We went around to the back of the tent where he had a trailer with his wife. I had a black cloth that I used to carry around with me and I placed it behind him, and he contorted his face into this incredible image. He loved doing it.”





**STEVIE WONDER, SINGER/
MUSICIAN**
NEW HAVEN COLISEUM

“The situation was very unusual because the piano was at the edge of the stage and because I knew I wouldn’t be distracting to him because he couldn’t see me. I went right up the stage, even putting my elbows on the edge as I leaned in to take the picture. Because of that closeness, I was able to fill the frame with his face, which was so intimate and full of joy.”

**MICHU, WORLD’S SMALLEST
MAN AS PART OF RINGLING
BROS. AND BARNUM & BAILEY
CIRCUS**
NEW HAVEN COLISEUM

One of the challenges taking his portrait was how to get perspective of how little he actually was: 33 inches tall. So, I looked around back-stage and saw these concrete stairs. I remember that he liked the ladies and of him being a nice and funny guy. I also have pictures of him laughing uproariously, which I also love. But this was a more contemplative shot.

**MICK JAGGER, LEAD SINGER OF
THE ROLLING STONES**
HARTFORD CIVIC CENTER

This was in ’81 and, at that time, photographers were given just the first two or three songs to get their shots. I remember because of the loudness next to the speakers another photogra-





pher, Bob Childs from Associated Press, gave me cigarette filters to put in my ears. There was this runway where he did his solo bits, and this one was one of his crouching poses.”

**JAMES BROWN, SINGER/
MUSICIAN**

POWDER RIDGE, MIDDLEFIELD.

“He did this thing at all his shows where he would be nearly passing out from ecstasy and exhaustion as he staggered back, as if fainting, and his guys would run out to catch him in a flashy robe. He would get off stage and come roaring back, and he would do this again and again. It was brilliant stagecraft, and this shot shows the sweat and energy and why he was called the hardest working man in show business.”

ANN WILSON OF HEART, SINGER
NEW HAVEN COLISEUM

“This was the first show I was at as a photographer when they said I can go wherever I want. No restrictions. So, after they did their first set, they went off stage and so later I went there, too. I came across this door and opened it and there was the band in this little room. They must have thought at first, ‘Who the hell are you?’ But then they didn’t pay much attention to me, and I just started taking pictures. Then Annie started shaking and fussing with her hair as if getting ready to go back on stage. I wasn’t sure if she was doing it for me or not.”

TAJ MAHAL, BLUES MUSICIAN
TOAD’S PLACE IN NEW HAVEN

“We were backstage at the club, and he just loved being photographed. I understand that he’s now 82 but he looked pretty buff here and loved showing it off. Obviously, he was proud of his muscles because that was the first pose he did. He was very cool.”



**BUSTY HEART, AKA SUSAN SYKES,
ACTRESS**

STUDIO AT THE HARTFORD COURANT

"I never went to the strip club where she was performing. She came to the studio at the newspaper. She was very shy and quiet. She was this teenage girl, I think, or maybe just a little older. I wanted to give her a decent and respectful portrait. I had her feelings in mind when I took the picture, and I think it showed her vulnerability."

BOB DYLAN, SINGER/SONGWRITER
HARTFORD CIVIC CENTER

"From the '60s I was definitely a Dylan addict. I played those early albums all the time. For this show in the '80s, the security team held back the photographers far away from the stage. I guess Dylan didn't like having or seeing the photographers up close. I took this with a telephoto lens so it's not all that sharp but he's looking right at me. And not looking happy. But, then again, I guess it's hard to imagine what it would be like to be Bob Dylan." 📷



Frank Rizzo is a freelance journalist who writes for Variety, The New York Times, American Theatre, Connecticut Magazine, and other periodicals and outlets, including ShowRiz.com. He lives in New Haven and New York City. Follow Frank at ShowRiz@Twitter.



LEADING IN UROLOGIC ONCOLOGY: Ryan Dorin, M.D., Works on Expanding Patient Care

By **KIMBERLY LUCEY MILLEN** / *Photography by* **STAN GODLEWSKI**

When faced with choosing a path in the medical field, Ryan Dorin, M.D., F.A.C.S., wanted one that would allow him to help as many people as possible. Now, as a urologic surgeon, he treats patients for prostate, kidney and bladder cancers while working to create a comprehensive urologic cancer program for Trinity Health Of New England.

“Because these cancers affect so many lives, especially prostate cancer, you feel like you’re doing a lot of good,” says Dr. Dorin. “It’s a field where you can help a lot of people live longer, happier lives, as we continue to add more effective available treatments offering a cure to many of our patients.”

A COMMON CANCER

Dr. Dorin explains prostate cancer is the most common non-skin cancer for men in the United States, with one in six men facing a diagnosis in their lifetime. While 40,000 men die from prostate cancer every year in the United States, he says the majority of cancers can be caught early with

newer screening tests, allowing the cancer to be curable. “The main thing to know is that even though it’s common, it’s very simple to detect early,” states Dr. Dorin. “And as long as you detect it early, most prostate cancers will be cured.” He says these newer screening methods use simple blood and urine tests to identify which men are more prone to have prostate cancer, leading to earlier biopsies and MRIs to confirm the case and receive treatment.

IMPROVING TREATMENTS

Treatments for prostate cancer are also changing in more ways than one. The first focuses on localized prostate cancer. Robotic surgery is now making it possible for patients to go home the same day after a procedure and recover much faster. Focal ablation therapy for small prostate tumors allows for organ preservation and treatment of prostate cancer in a completely noninvasive manner. Additionally, there has been an explosion in the last 10 years of treatment options for metastatic cancer, or cases where the cancer has spread beyond the prostate.

“Historically, those patients only had two to three years to live once we discovered their cancer had spread,” explains Dr. Dorin. “Now, new treatments utilizing not just chemotherapy, but also immune-based therapies and prescription medications, can give the patient five to 10 more years of life. We see more benefits in personalizing the treatment for the patient. They’re not just in an assembly line. They know they’re being put first and given the best possible treatment for their individual case.”

ROBOTIC-ASSISTED SURGERY

One of the cutting-edge, robotic-assisted surgery systems being used to improve recovery times for localized prostate surgery is the Da Vinci 5 surgical system. Saint Francis Hospital is the first hospital in the greater Hartford area with the Da Vinci 5.

“Being part of a large, national organization like Trinity Health is special because we’re able to utilize their vast resources to provide this kind of state-of-the-art technology,”



Ryan Dorin, M.D., F.A.C.S.,
urologic surgeon at Trinity
Health Of New England.

says Dr. Dorin. “Locally, Trinity Health Of New England offers a more intimate environment where everybody knows each other, making it possible to provide patients with comprehensive, personalized care.”

By utilizing the Da Vinci 5, surgeons can shorten recovery time, reduce risk of complications and improve patient outcomes. More than 150 new enhancements have been developed on the system to support surgeons, allowing them to perform intricate procedures with greater accuracy and control. The next-generation 3D display and image processing partners up with new surgeon controllers, making it possible for the doctor to make smoother, more precise movements with the robot.

MORE THAN JUST CANCER

Assisting in more than just cancer treatment, Dr. Dorin explains robotics are helping in groundbreaking treatments for an enlarged prostate. Known as benign prostatic hyperplasia (BPH), the condition affects millions of men over the age of 50. An unfortunate reality of aging for half of all men ages 51-60, an enlarged prostate impacts urinary function, making it harder for men to urinate. Without treatment, it can lead to severe health issues, including permanent bladder or kidney damage and incontinence.

Trinity Health Of New England is the first health system in New England to offer Aquablation® therapy with the new HYDROS™ Robotic System, the next-generation platform to treat BPH. Located at Saint Mary’s Hospital in Waterbury, Aquablation therapy uses real-time,

ultrasound-guided, robotic-assisted waterjet technology, which allows surgeons to precisely target which prostate tissue to remove and which to preserve.

Aquablation therapy uses real-time, ultrasound-guided, robotic-assisted waterjet technology, which allows surgeons to precisely target which prostate tissue to remove and which to preserve.

“We’re very excited about the implications of this new technology,” explains Dr. Dorin. “Because of its computer precision AI platform and robotic arm, we’re able to more accurately remove prostate tissue and lessen side effects, allowing the patient to recover from their prostate surgery more easily and maintain sexual function afterward.”

EXPANDING CARE ACROSS THE STATE

Though Dr. Dorin is just getting started at Trinity Health Of New England, this California native has made a home and treated urologic cancer patients in Connecticut for 11 years now. After having two

daughters, he and his wife, who is from the Nutmeg State, decided they wanted to be close to family. Now, he’s excited to develop a high-level, comprehensive urologic cancer program for Trinity Health Of New England in the state they’ve chosen to call home.

Dr. Dorin is welcoming new patients at Trinity Health Of New England’s Men’s Health Institute locations in Enfield, Middlebury and Bloomfield. He is currently performing surgeries at Saint Mary’s and will begin surgical procedures at Saint Francis later this year.

“Uniting under a common program allows us to improve care and utilize these high-level technologies we have available for patients across the region,” concludes Dr. Dorin. “We want to expand our collaboration with Yale New Haven Health’s Smilow Cancer Hospital and improve upon existing clinical trials to help find more medical breakthroughs. We’ve already seen a lot of growth in our services and network, and we expect that to continue as we attract the best people to provide treatments and services for the patients who trust us with their care.” 📍

Kimberly Lucey Millen is a freelance journalist with more than two decades of experience in both print and broadcast media. She lives in New England with her husband and son, exploring all that each of the four seasons has to offer.

Stan Godlewski is an editorial, corporate and healthcare photographer based in Connecticut and working primarily between Boston and New York City.

For more information about urology services at Trinity Health Of New England, visit trinityhealthofne.org/urology.



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STAYING IN THE GAME:

How Aging Athletes Can Prevent and Recover From Injury

By ANDREW KELSEY

As we age, exercise can become more difficult as a result of everything from increasingly busy schedules to aging bodies breaking down. Exercise is also important for health reasons. Adult sports leagues are one way for men and women in their 20s or 30s on up into their 70s and beyond to keep active.

Preventing injury is essential. There are ways to at least cut down on the risk of injuries. And recovering from injury is also important for aging athletes who want to stay in the game.

Exercise is great for physical and mental health alike, notes Dr. Jeff

Brown, a sports medicine specialist at Trinity Health Of New England's Saint Francis Hospital and Medical Center in Hartford (part of the Connecticut Sports Medicine Institute). Dr. Brown is also a team physician at Central Connecticut State University, lead team physician for the Hartford Athletic soccer team, and supervising team physician for all nine Hartford public high schools.

A key part of engaging in physical activities is warming up. "Dynamic warmup before physical activity is really critical," Dr. Brown notes, adding that stretching after workouts is best.

He suggests for those getting involved with sports or returning to play that

they take it slowly initially and work their way up to longer increments. Crosstraining is a good way to stay in shape, mixing and matching walking, yoga or pilates, biking, or the elliptical machine, for example, Dr. Brown suggests.

For those who get injured, physical therapy is an important start to recovery. Once an athlete has graduated from physical therapy, they can start walking and working their way back to better fitness shape. Recovery can benefit from time in the water where athletes avoid the impact from running on the street or sidewalk.

"You have to be patient, listen to your

body, not overdo it too quickly and get reinjured,” Dr. Brown adds.

In addition to proper warmup and cross-training to build muscles, good foot support can also be helpful. Dr. Brown has worked with a variety of athletes, including marathon runners from the Hartford Marathon Foundation’s League of Injured Runners.

AGING ATHLETICALLY

“We’ve all heard the ‘age with grace’ adage,” says Dr. Robert Waskowitz, who serves as senior team physician for Central Connecticut State University (CCSU) and is the medical director for CCSU’s athletic training program. Instead, the mindset should be “age athletically,” he adds.

Dr. Waskowitz serves as a team

consultant for many local and regional school systems. He is team physician for Newington High School and assists in covering Kingswood Oxford School athletics. In addition, he is one of the primary physicians covering the X-Games, providing onsite coverage as lead physician now in his 24th year.

“Three fundamentals that can provide the pillars to success are joint/whole body stretching, muscular maintenance with strengthening and core stability, and cardiovascular fitness,” states Dr. Wasakowitz.

Concerning dealing with prior injury, he suggests people know their limits and respect their body. “If it barks, listen. Two simple guidelines are heat to warm up and ice to cool down,” he explains.

Sport and activities of choice are critical in selecting the appropriate path

to activity, Dr. Waskowitz notes.

“If you’re looking to start something new, find an appropriate group to introduce that specific activity. Your preseason is a necessity to increase cardio-fitness, flexibility and tone that will set you up for success; a gym, friend-group or personal trainer acts as the coach to get you where you want to be. Moderate to low impact activities (bike, swim, treadmill, hike, etc.) allow for initiating minimal risk activities,” Dr. Waskowitz said.

AN ATHLETIC TRAINER’S PERSPECTIVE

John Juniet, assistant athletic trainer at Albertus Magnus College, has several one-liners he keeps in mind when helping someone return to sport or physical activity after an



Connecticut Masters Games 60+ 2024 gold medal winning softball team. Photo courtesy of Jan Brown. First row: Laura Lonardelli, Pat Klammer, Jannett Macon-Williams, Jan Brown, Donna Conyers. Second row: Alice Carboni, Donna Cyr, Kathy Blewett, Noreen Kaim, Diane Lawrence. Third row: Kat Wallace, Mary Cavatario, Cathy Crowe, Jeanne Carney, Beth Campbell, Marie Dillon, Diane Zalewski.



Dr. Jeff Brown of Trinity Health Of New England, right, at the Hartford Marathon. Photo courtesy of Saint Francis Hospital/ Trinity Health Of New England.

injury or extended time off. “Time is an investment, use it wisely in your recovery and return process. Slow and steady wins the race. You cannot go from 0 to 60 in 10 feet; not even cars can do that. Remember to pay attention to what your body is telling you. Persistence is the key.”

Juniet points out that there’s a big difference for the average individual between a 20 something and a 50 something. The younger one, on average, is quicker to heal. “As we age, our recovery, mobility and capacity slow, especially those who have had little physical activity prior. Thus, the key is listening to what your body is saying and adjusting accordingly. If you’ve remained active up to the injury, you typically face a shorter recovery time, but it will still take time,” he says.

Although the majority of Juniet’s experience has been at the secondary school and collegiate-level athletics, he has helped a veteran teacher return to walking and jogging after knee replacement.

Juniet has recently been an athlete in recovery himself. He had open heart surgery for an aortic valve replacement

more than a year ago and did some resistance training with weights, swim, fast paced walk. Last summer, he began jogging a portion of his walking course, doing any combination of these about four or five days per week.

Having gone through major surgery, one of the toughest lessons Juniet learned was how to be a “patient” patient. “Like I was told in the hospital after my surgery, ‘No one gets better by sitting around waiting to get better.’ Remember, it is the little victories that win the war,” he says.

Juniet advises people stay connected with their health care providers—such as doctors, physical therapists, athletic trainers and occupational therapists.

SPORTS FOR ALL: FROM HOCKEY TO SOFTBALL

Playing sports is not only for student-athletes and young professionals. Many working adults stay active in team settings, both for the exercise and the camaraderie.

John Wetmore, in his late 30s, laces up the skates in the Southern Connecticut Hockey League for a team

called the Dragons which consists mainly of West Haven High graduates, and won a division championship in 2024.

“You feel like you’re part of something. It gives you something to look forward to outside of work,” Wetmore says.

Hockey at this level offers a mostly low impact source of rigorous exercise for those who want to break a sweat without pounding on a court or grass playing surface.

Salem resident Jane Stanton Grilley, 76, played sports for decades before multiple surgeries eventually ended her playing career.

“Team sports have always been a favorite of mine as a player and a coach. Never thought of sports as an avenue to better health. It was a social event for me as I was a mom to an actively involved athlete son and had many foster children who kept me busy at home and their activities. It was important to set an example for my kids through their athletic careers,” Grilley says.

Grilley played senior league basketball and softball for years, competing in many tournaments including national competitions. At nationals, she earned bronze metals as a basketball player and coach.

“I’ve had four knee surgeries, two foot surgeries—been in a wheelchair six weeks each time—and a shoulder surgery too. Even through all this, I have never missed a game or practice because of injury,” says Grilley, who transitioned into coaching after injuries piled up.

“I must say even through all that has transpired in my sports career, even with the surgeries, I have enjoyed every minute of playing every game or practice and would not change a thing. Life is still great,” continues Grilley, who played basketball at Penn State. She went on to play Connecticut Senior Basketball from age 57-64, earning a bronze metal as a player in the National Senior Games in 2011 at the age of 64 and was a standout adult softball player, winning a league championship MVP and competing in the Connecticut State Games.



Southern Connecticut Hockey League player John Wetmore of the Dragons, left, competes along with Dit Wylers player Dan Figel during a game at Milford Ice Arena. Photo by Andrew Kelsey.

SWITCHING SPORTS

Jan Brown of Newtown, 75, continues to play sports. Last summer, she competed in a weekend softball tournament in Prescott, Ariz., with her 75-plus team.

A longtime softball and basketball player, with numerous state game medals to her name, Brown recently picked up a new sport with track and field, running 50 meters. She excels at whatever athletic endeavor she gets into and won gold in Connecticut and Pennsylvania championships in the 75+ division.

In recent years, Brown has gotten heavily involved in pickleball, both as a player and coach. This is a popular sport for a variety of ages and a great alternative to tennis for older competitors, but a terrific sport for the younger athlete as well.

"Pickleball offers everyone the opportunity to play at whatever level they want," says Brown who, along with her husband and marathon running enthusiast Bruce Goulart, regularly teaches beginner pickleball players.

"The sport is exploding," explains Brown, noting that while all ages can play the sport has increased in popularity greatly among teens.

Brown says a key to playing basketball and

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softball for decades is to believe in yourself. “Ignore the people who don’t think you should be doing it. Surround yourself with those who are positive and support your efforts. There will be some injuries, but those occur 17 as well as 75,” Brown says.

“Staying in shape as we get older takes a lot more effort,” states Brown, who was diagnosed with Parkinson’s disease in 2023. “So, it is of major importance for me to keep moving daily with lots of exercise. So far, I am managing it well with movement.”

A WAKEUP CALL

Tim Parry, of Woodbury and in his mid-50s, has been involved in sports dating back to his school-playing days but had a scare that really changed his lifestyle.

“Work and family life make it tough to stay active, even when you work from home,” Parry says. “For me, it led to every excuse under the sun to not compete or even work out. Getting three

stents in January 2023 was a wakeup call and going to cardiac rehabilitation after that gave me the confidence to compete again.”

Parry and his son Will have both collected their share of medals in the Nutmeg State Games in track and field events. “I’m proud to be participating again; so to me they’re a symbol of the hard work it bravery it took to put myself back out there,” Parry says of the medals.

COMPETING AS ONE AGES REQUIRES PROPER PREPARATION.

“As I got older and got back into competition, I realized that it was more about getting better every day and not playing through pain to try and impress other people. If I feel a pain in my back, I’ll call it a day. Instead of stretching after a workout, I’ll stretch before, after, when I wake up and before I go to bed,” Parry said.

“For me, one of the best things about training is the stress release,” Parry adds. “You really can escape from the real world—work, family, and whatnot—and just focus on yourself for an hour or so at a time. It’s been really great for my mental health.”

“I think there’s something for everyone, regardless of age,” Parry concludes. He hopes adults who are looking to get back into the game or try a sport for the first time give it a go. “Not everyone is a 5k runner. I certainly didn’t have the desire to run after I was done with cardiac rehab, but I wanted to get back into sports. Having thrown in high school, I knew it was something I could pick up again and that I’d have a place to compete. But whether it’s track and field or bowling or pickleball or something else, it’s never too late to pick up or return to a sport.”

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*From Seasons Magazines
Spring 2013 Issue*



How Bananas Almost Destroyed My Marriage

By John Hartnett

Saturday night my son opened the freezer door, a frozen banana fell out, smashed him on the toe, and then my daughter bumped her head on the freezer door when she stood up quickly after retrieving the banana from the floor.

I submit to you that there is no greater window into the complicated dance that is marriage than deconstructing that small, relatively insignificant event.

In the 22 years and 313 days that I have been married to my wife, she has taken hundreds of overripe bananas and stored them in our freezers with the intention of someday making bread out of them. Sadly that day has never come.

I will admit that I am partly to blame, because when the opportunity to be alone in the kitchen presents itself, I surreptitiously remove the frozen bananas and bury them in the garbage. For you see, I was raised to believe that neither fruit nor deceased ball players such as Ted Williams should be placed in a freezer once they are past their prime.

Conversely, my wife, who came from a very large family, was raised to believe that overripe fruit should be frozen, not wasted. Her mother taught her to do this, albeit she is also a woman who stored bananas for decades and never made anything out of them—although legend has it that one was once used as an emergency blackjack during a family function that went awry.

Which one of us is right? Aha! All couples on the dance floor, please.

In the pursuit of marital bliss, one must learn to suppress opinions pertaining to a spouse's adherence to particular practices, beliefs, or tradition—no matter how ridiculous one thinks they may be.

Why? Why shouldn't two people who love and trust each other share their true feelings about such matters? A dumb question, but since I asked it—I'll answer it just this once. Because for every one silly or irritating habit or idiosyncrasy you can attribute to your spouse—your spouse can come up with two to attribute to you. It's like the arms race, and money spent on defense is money not spent on books, a habit of mine my wife believes borders on obsession, although of course she's never said it to my face. Still, a man can sense these things... but so what? That's a whole lot better than actually being confronted with it!

I will admit that very early in our marriage, when

I was still naïve, I poked fun at my wife's rationale for freezing mushy bananas rather than tossing them out. Her ice cold, steely eyed response? "I don't like to waste food, and I'm going to make banana bread with them." I never mentioned it again.

Since that time, I will state under oath that not once in our 22 years and 313 days together has my wife walked into the kitchen, opened the freezer door, and yelled, "What the heck happened to the bananas I had in the freezer? I was going to make bread today!"

Now I can understand that. I've been "researching" colors to paint our house for six years now and haven't even begun to narrow down the range of possibilities contained within the classification of "off white." It isn't easy—the color of your house tells people a lot about who you are. Right now, it's telling them that I'm lazy. I can live with that.

As we attempted to console our injured children who were howling and hopping about the room in an unintentional homage to the Three Stooges, I have to admit that I was a little perturbed that a frozen banana of a certain age (a phrase used to gracefully describe ancient individuals) had been the source of the commotion. I said to my wife, "What is it with you and this obsession with freezing bananas?"

But not out loud, of course.

Instead I said, "We have to find a better spot to store those bananas so they don't fall out like that again."

She searched my face for signs of sarcasm and when there was none to be found, she smiled and set about placing the bananas in a Tupperware container.

With calm restored and the pain of injuries subsiding, I announced that I was going to take a drive over to the bookstore and have a look around. My wife said, "What is it with you and your obsession with buying all these books you never find time to read?"

She said it out loud. Can you believe that?

*John Hartnett is a New Jersey native who works in the entertainment and publishing industries. He was the author of the comedy site monkeybellhop.com and is currently the executive recruiter for Jack Farrell & Associates. This essay is adapted from *The Barber's Conundrum and Other Stories: Observations on Life from the Cheap Seats* by John Hartnett (Early Bird Publishing, 2013).*

Drobec's Second Chance

By RENEE DININO

Officer Kristen Brousseau has been with the Connecticut Department of Corrections for 16 years as a correctional officer and K9 handler. Her current K9 partner is K9 Semper Fi, a 3-year-old golden retriever facility comfort dog for peer support within the department. You'll find them paired together giving fellow law enforcement team members a mental health break from their daily duties and offering an opportunity to reduce stress and anxiety.

Although not her first canine partner, K9 Semper Fi is Brousseau's first comfort canine assignment. Her first partner was K9 Drobec, a patrol dog certified by the Connecticut State Police K9 Unit. Drobec was a spectacular German shepherd. The two were assigned to the Department of Corrections K9 Unit from 2014 to 2023. Their roles and responsibilities were to patrol various correctional facilities throughout the state. They added a layer of safety and security to not only the incarcerated individuals, but to other law enforcement and staffing at the facilities.

"Over time, he ended up becoming my best friend; it got to a point when we worked together that we could predict each other's every move," Brousseau recalls what it was like working with K9 Drobec. "We were very in tune to each other. I could tell by the way his ears moved if someone was approaching us from behind. He was my protector and, in turn, protected everyone else."

K9 Drobec had a very successful

career. "We responded to several emergencies within the facilities where Drobec diffused what could have turned into a dangerous and volatile situation," explains Brousseau. "There seemed to be a mutual respect and understanding of the capabilities of a patrol dog," she says about when the incarcerated individuals would see them patrolling or called to a situation. "Even though Drobec was smaller than a typical shepherd, they always seemed to respect boundaries and his personal space."

Training and working with a K9



partner takes its toll on the handler and the dog. There are countless hours of training and certification to keep both partners fresh and up to date with proper procedures. The role of a K9 handler is around the clock. The dog usually lives with the officer, goes to work with the officer and spends more time with the officer than most people in their lives.


"On or off duty, you're always responsible for this trained working

dog. The bond between Drobec and me was inseparable. Off duty, he was my constant companion. He was by my side through both of my pregnancies, and he welcomed them as part of his pack too," says Brousseau. "Admittedly, I was nervous bringing my first child home thinking, 'how is this going to work?' He's a trained police dog! He's never been around a newborn before. He ended up being the most gentle, submissive dog for the children. It was if he knew he had to protect them too, because they were a part of me!"

The amazing K9 duo of Officer Brousseau and K9 Drobec worked for nine years. In that time, Brousseau became a part of the Connecticut K9 Olympics. She now sits on the committee to help organize the event each year at the Enfield Department of Corrections. This event is designed to let the public see the bond and the actual training drills K9 officers do as they compete in different categories in a friendly competition with all branches of law enforcement in New England.

"There is such a curiosity amongst the public about police dogs and what they see on TV. This event is an opportunity to see them and their capabilities in real life," says Brousseau. She and Drobec won first place overall at the 2021 competition battling multiple teams from all over New England. In 2022, she and Drobec came in third place overall.

Brousseau and Drobec also did school demonstrations and many community outreach events to show the community exactly what they did

A full-page photograph of Officer Kristen Brousseau, a woman with blonde hair tied back, wearing a dark blue hooded jacket and black pants. She is standing and looking off to the side with a focused expression. In the foreground, K9 Drobec, a German Shepherd, is standing alert, facing left with its mouth slightly open. The background is dark and out of focus, showing a white vertical pole.

“We responded to several emergencies within the facilities where Drobec diffused what could have turned into a dangerous and volatile situation. There seemed to be a mutual respect and understanding of the capabilities of a patrol dog.”

—Kristen Brousseau

Officer Kristen Brousseau and K9 Drobec. Photo by Kim Carino.



Officer Kristen Brousseau carrying K9 Drobec during a demonstration.
Photo by Sue Travers.

together and how K9 Drobec was an important asset to law enforcement and her job. As Drobec was getting close to his retirement age, the idea of adding a comfort dog to the agency was brought to Brousseau's attention.

"I knew that Drobec had served his time, and it was time for him to retire and enjoy his years as a member of my family. It was decided that I would get a comfort dog and lay the foundation for a new program with a focus on peer support and community outreach. K9 Semper Fi came into my life in January of 2023. We quickly were put to work, even being called to other law enforcement agencies to help in times of crisis."

Semper Fi and Drobec were buddies. However, Drobec wasn't that thrilled at first about Semper Fi. He wasn't too keen on sharing sticks and tennis balls, but they quickly grew to love each other as siblings do.

"One thing the public may not be aware of about retired working K9s is their aftercare," says Brousseau. "Once a K9 retires from service, the financial obligations fall into the hands of the handler and their family. This comes at a very vulnerable time in a dog's life—remember that these dogs have had a vigorous training life not typical of a house pet."

This can leave many K9 handlers and their families at a loss when medical

issues arise. Brousseau can speak from experience as Drobec was newly retired when he developed cancer and a serious episode where he had fluid around his heart. He was able to overcome this instance, but not without help. The cost of saving this hero's life was over \$6,000; Brousseau wasn't ready to let him go if there was a chance of saving him. After many phone calls, The Hometown Foundation stepped in to help. Brousseau was able to bring him home and make his last days special and memorable.

They were spent with swimming, whip cream shots in the kitchen, and hanging out with his human siblings and Semper Fi. He had another episode, which she knew would be his last. "I still knew I had to try to save his life; on my way

to the vet, I heard his breathing stop. I began doing CPR until I realized I was only prolonging his suffering and said goodbye," Brousseau sadly recalls.

It was not long after that moment, and because of the kindness and generosity of others, that Drobec's Second Chance was born. "Drobec got a second chance in life after his first emergency, which gave me and my family the opportunity to say goodbye to him," states Brousseau. "I know that many handlers like me may not be in the financial situation to do this. I wanted to help. So, in his honor and in a way to keep his name and memory alive, I decided to make it my mission to raise money so that no other Connecticut Department of Correction handler has to worry about medical expenses after their dogs retire. I strongly believe that these canines deserve the best preventative and medical care after their retire."

While there is legislation being presented to have stricter laws to protect our working K9 teams, there are things we can do to help right now. There are ways we can say thank you to these brave working canines by supporting programs and organizations that will take on helping retired working dogs, such as Drobec's Second Chance ([instagram.com/drobecs_second_chance](https://www.instagram.com/drobecs_second_chance)).

People and pets, when we're kinder to animals, we're kinder to people! 🐾

Renee DiNino, aka Wolfies Mama

Renee DiNino is host of Hello Connecticut on WFSB Channel and The WAX, Amazing K9 Duo's and Lost & Pound. Follow her on IG and FB @reneedinino.

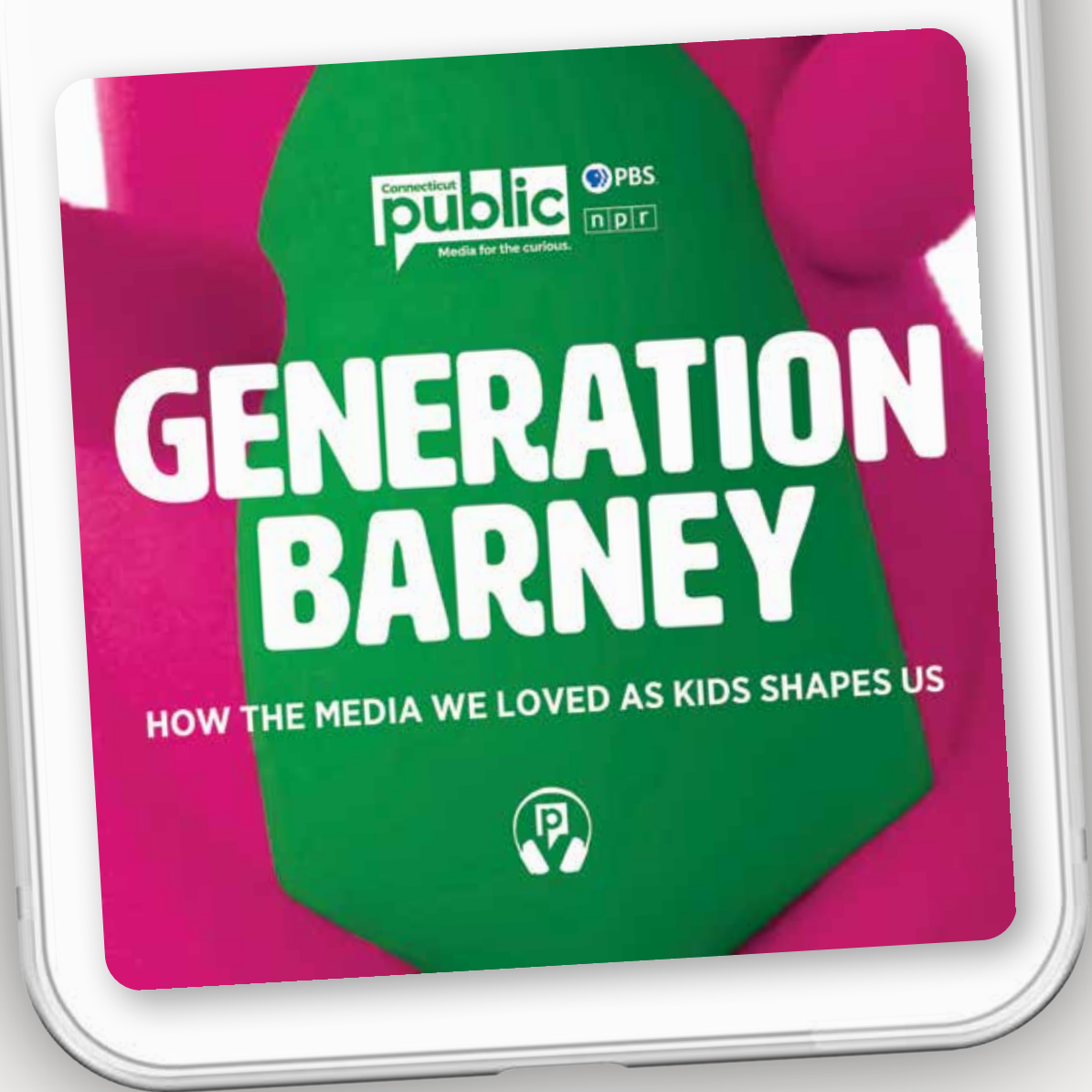


K9 Drobec and K9 Semper Fi. Photo by Kristen Brousseau.

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AT HOME

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Spring Cleaning with Darren Sweeney

By Kerri-Lee Mayland

Spring is here, and with it comes the perfect opportunity to refresh, renew, and—if you're planning to sell—get your home market-ready. Teaming up with a good friend and former NBC CT colleague, Darren Sweeney, brings you his expertise from forecasting the weather to navigating the real estate world.

We all know firsthand how New England winters can take a toll on a home. But a little editing and design magic inside can make a space feel brand new. Here are some ways you can get your home looking its best, whether you're selling or just want to enjoy a fresh, clean space this spring!

1. Start with a Spring Cleanup—Inside and Out

Darren's Take: Winter leaves behind a mess with salt, dirt, and moisture; buildup can wreak havoc on your home's exterior. Now is the time to power wash your siding; clean out gutters; and check for damage to your roof, windows and foundation. Catching these issues early can save you



money down the road and make a great first impression if you're selling.

Kerri-Lee's Tip: Inside, think of spring as a chance to edit. Pack away heavy winter throws; swap out dark decor for lighter, airier pieces; and clear off cluttered surfaces. A well-edited home looks more spacious and inviting, whether for guests or potential buyers.

2. Check for Winter Wear and Tear

Darren's Take: Snow and ice can lead to cracked walkways, loose shingles and clogged drainage systems. Walk around your home and inspect for damage. If you notice peeling paint or wood rot, address it before spring rains make things worse.



Kerri-Lee's Tip: Just like the exterior, the inside of your home might have taken a beating over the winter. Floors can get scratched from boots. Walls can show wear from all that indoor time. A little touch-up paint and deep cleaning go a long way in making your space feel fresh again.



3. Boost Your Curb Appeal

Darren's Take: Winter storms can leave behind branches, debris and muddy lawns. Raking up leaves, trimming overgrown shrubs and adding fresh mulch can give your yard an instant facelift. If you're selling, don't forget about your driveway and walkways—buyers notice cracks and stains!

Kerri-Lee's Tip: The front entrance sets the tone for your home. A new doormat, a few potted plants and a fresh coat of paint on the door make a huge impact. And don't forget to swap out that holiday wreath (it really is time!) for something bright and springy.

4. Lighten Up Your Interiors

Darren's Take: Longer days mean more natural light, so take advantage of it! Clean your windows inside and out to let in as much sunshine as possible. This makes a home feel warmer, more open and inviting.

Kerri-Lee's Tip: Sheer curtains, lighter bedding and swapping out heavy rugs for more breathable fabrics help your home feel in tune with the season. And don't forget to add a little greenery; fresh flowers or a new houseplant can breathe life into any space.

5. Declutter and Depersonalize

Darren's Take: If you're selling, less is more. Buyers want to imagine themselves in your home, so clearing out personal items and excess furniture makes rooms feel bigger and more welcoming.

Kerri-Lee's Tip: Even if you're not selling, a little decluttering can work wonders. My rule? If you haven't used it in a year, it's time to donate or toss it. Your home should be a reflection of you, but it shouldn't feel overcrowded.

Inspired? We hope so! This really is the perfect time of year to grab the momentum of longer days and warmer temperatures. Harness the new energy you have after saying goodbye to winter and let your home reflect your enthusiasm. Plus, it just may help you get into your new dream home faster or turn your current home into the house of your dreams. 🏡

Here's to a fresh and fabulous spring!

~ Kerri-Lee and Darren



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Sailing the Seas: Cruising from Connecticut

You can get there from here!

By ANASTASIA MILLS HEALY

If you don't know anyone who's been on a cruise to the Caribbean, the Bahamas or Bermuda, then you need to get out more. It's by far the world's biggest cruise market, with nearly 13 million passengers in 2023, according to the Cruise Lines International Association (CLIA). Especially from the East Coast, a cruise vacation to this region is easy and can be cost effective.

Nearly three-quarters of U.S. cruise passengers are on Caribbean itineraries; Alaska and the Mediterranean each come in as single digit percentages, and the rest of the world completes the pie chart with 17%. AAA

projects 19 million Americans will go on a cruise in 2025, which will be the third year of record cruise passenger volume. Globally, nearly 40 million

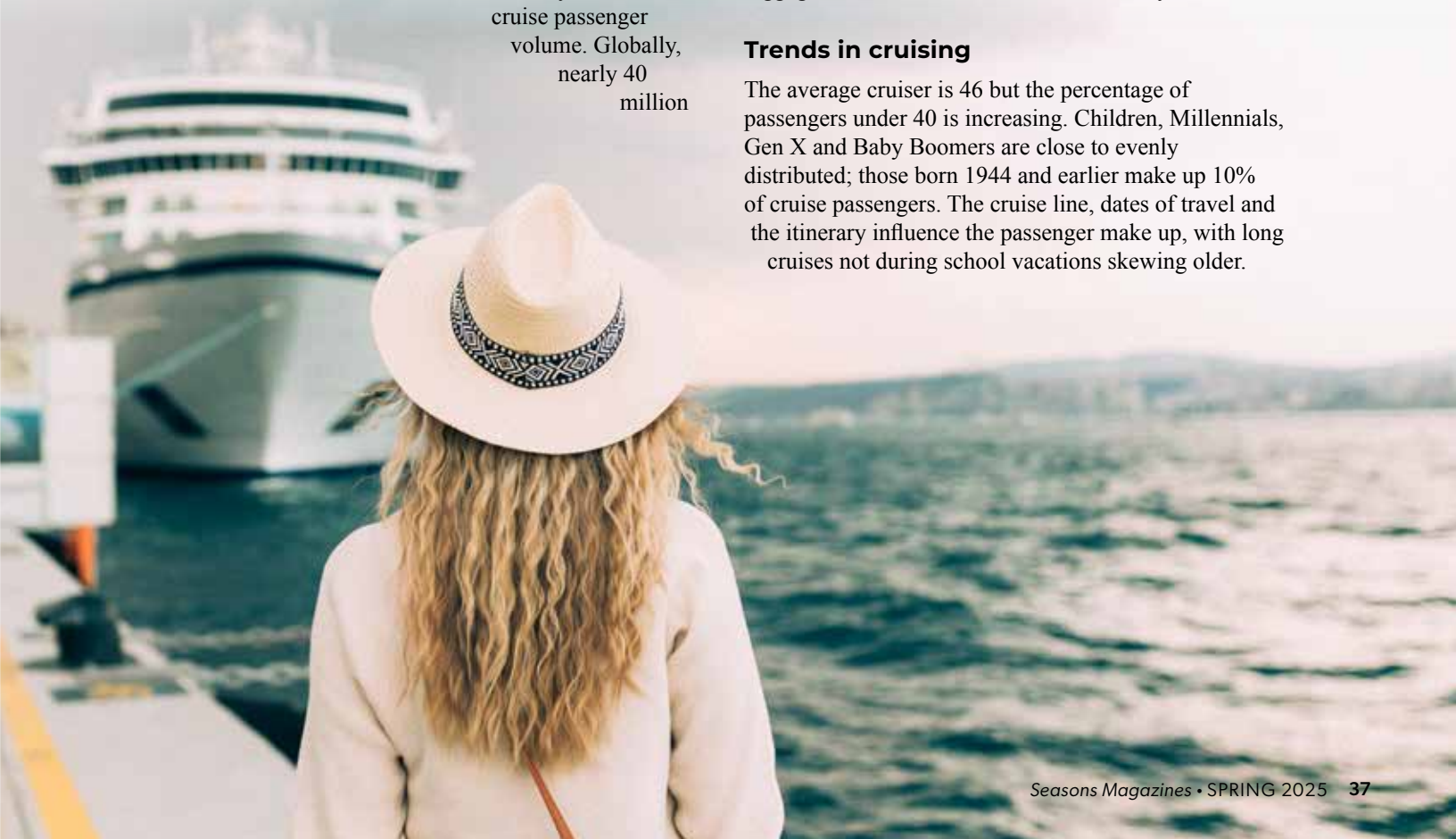
people are expected to be cruising annually in 2027, and the industry is keeping up. There are 56 more ships due for delivery by 2028.

You might be wondering how we got here after the logistical horrors and massive financial losses cruise ships experienced during the pandemic. The simple answer is that cruise travelers are an enthusiastic bunch. Of all past cruisers, 82% intend to cruise again; 12% cruise twice a year and 10% take between three and five cruises a year. Passenger volume now exceeds pre-pandemic numbers.

Why do Americans like to cruise so much? The top reasons cited are being able to visit multiple destinations without the burdens of planning logistics and dragging luggage around, and the value for the money.

Trends in cruising

The average cruiser is 46 but the percentage of passengers under 40 is increasing. Children, Millennials, Gen X and Baby Boomers are close to evenly distributed; those born 1944 and earlier make up 10% of cruise passengers. The cruise line, dates of travel and the itinerary influence the passenger make up, with long cruises not during school vacations skewing older.



Shorter Caribbean cruises are rising in popularity. As recently as 2023, only 2% of Caribbean cruises were two to five days; now that number is 18%.



Some lines don't accept children at all like Virgin Voyages and Viking River Cruises.

Multi-generational cruise travel is popular, with 30% of families traveling with at least two generations. Pick the right ship and itinerary for your needs and everyone, regardless of age, will have a great time with minimal stress.

Shorter Caribbean cruises are rising in popularity. As recently as 2023, only 2% of Caribbean cruises were two to five days; now that number is 18%.



Interest in sustainable travel is becoming more prevalent. Many cruise lines have done away with single-use plastic and are pursuing net-zero emissions by 2050. Some are moving towards mitigations like biofuels, fuel cells and fuel flexibility. Lines that stand out for their sustainability progress include Hurtigruten and Aurora Expeditions.

Expeditions are the fastest-growing sector of cruise tourism, increasing 71% from 2019 to 2023. Expedition ships carry fewer than 500 passengers and emphasize nature, adventure and education over shipboard amusements. They travel to destinations like Antarctica, the Arctic and the Galapagos Islands.

Embarkation ports in driving distance

In Connecticut, we're lucky to have multiple cruise embarkation points within driving distance. From Boston's cruise port, you could head north in August 2025 on a seven-night Princess cruise that stops in Maine and Atlantic Canada or take a five-night Bermuda cruise on Norwegian Cruise Line in April 2026, both with prices starting around \$900.

New York-area cruises include 10 nights on an MSC ship for \$733 departing from Brooklyn in April 2026 and ending in Lisbon, and a 13-night Celebrity sailing to Greenland and Iceland from Bayonne in June 2026 for \$2,450.

Norwegian has a 12-night New York roundtrip Southern Caribbean itinerary in February 2026, starting at \$1,375.

Cruise Critic is a comprehensive resource for consumer cruise information.

7 Tips for a Great Trip

1. **Consider using a travel advisor.** Three-quarters of cruise passengers use a travel advisor. Their services are usually free. They can often access perks not available to the general public like upgrades and ship credits, help you find the right ship and the right cabin to fit your needs, and be your point of contact for any issues that might arise. Find one through friends, an online community or CLIA.
2. **Book dining reservations and shore excursions ahead of travel.** Popular dinner seatings and shore excursions can sell out quickly.
3. **Beware of hurricane season.** Hurricanes are most active in U.S.-area sailing regions in August and September; the season stretches from June through November.
4. **If you're flying, arrive a day early at your embarkation port.** This ensures you don't miss your ship due to a weather event or flight cancellation. Also, when booking a return flight, know that because your ship gets into port at a certain time doesn't mean that you will be off the ship at that time.
5. **Choose the right ship and itinerary.** What are you looking for in your cruise vacation? Choose a larger ship if it's a variety of restaurants; nonstop entertainment; kids' clubs; and amenities like a spa, ice skating rink or surfing simulator. If you are more interested in the destination(s), value the historical and cultural information provided by guides, or don't care for crowds, a smaller ship is a better choice. Royal Caribbean's Icon of the Seas holds 7,600 passengers, whereas many expedition ships carry under 100.
6. **Download the app for your cruise line.** A phone app will help you keep track of your ship's multitude of daily activities and schedules.
7. **Consider travel insurance.** Insurance can cover your investment in case of unforeseen circumstances like sickness or weather events.

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Florida cruises are big business for Disney Cruise Line, which operates nearly constant back-to-back, three-night Bahamas roundtrip cruises from Port Canaveral that begin at about \$800.

Fly to ports nonstop from Connecticut

The world's three busiest cruise ports are in Florida: Miami, Port Canaveral and Fort Lauderdale. Port Canaveral is the one to choose if you want to combine your cruise with a Disney or Universal Park visit as it's about an hour from Orlando, whereas Fort Lauderdale and Miami are more than a three-hour drive.

Both Tweed and Bradley have nonstop flights to Fort Lauderdale, Orlando, Tampa and Jacksonville, which all have cruise ports. You can also get to San Juan from both; New Orleans from Tweed, and Bermuda and Miami, among other ports, from Bradley.

Florida cruises are big business for Disney Cruise Line, which operates nearly constant back-to-back, three-night Bahamas roundtrip cruises from Port Canaveral that begin at about \$800. Celebrity has a seven-night Western Caribbean/Mexico sailing from Tampa in mid-December 2025 beginning at \$634 and Regent covers a lot of area on a 16-night sailing from Miami that includes a Panama Canal crossing, Central American and Mexican ports, and ends in Los Angeles for \$9,500.

Carnival operates many affordable four-to-seven-night Mexico and Central America cruises year round from New Orleans, providing a great opportunity to get a dose of the Big Easy's culture and cuisine. 🍷

Anastasia Mills Healy is a Greenwich-based travel writer and author of 100 Things to Do in Connecticut Before You Die and Secret Connecticut: A Guide to the Weird, Wonderful, and Obscure.



For African Americans, Baseball More Foul than Fair in Connecticut

By RANDY B. YOUNG

American sports reveal the best and worst of our American values. From the Chicago “Black Sox” to 1980’s “Miracle on Ice,” sports have held up a mirror reflecting both the beauty and ugliness in our nature.

By the rulebook, baseball is fair. It’s 90 feet down the baselines in Fenway Park or Yankee Stadium. Three strikes is an out in Portland or Peoria. These principles have conspired to maintain a level playing field for over 150 years. For too long, however, these “fair” playing fields were less-than-level for many. Whereas Jim Crow laws were imposed in the American South, prejudice was rampant even in the North—even in Connecticut.

“Historically, Connecticut’s hands aren’t clean, by any measure,” wrote Andrea Maria Black, daughter of the late Gil Hernandez Black, a Stamford native who played locally and with the Indianapolis Clowns.

From all-Black and integrated teams of the 1800s to segregated teams and Negro League players in the early 1900s, discerning an absolute history is problematic. Even the team names featured slight-of-hand: the New York Cubans had only African American players—no whites, and *no Cubans*.

Legend and Lore

“Baseball fans are junkies, and their heroin is the statistic,” author Robert S. Weider wrote in *In Praise of the*



Hernandez Black

Second Season.

Baseball fans now ferociously follow teams. Early on, however, teams might emerge, thrive and perish in a year. During that span, a Black player might play for a dozen teams. Scores weren’t always written down, statistics were sketchy, and players’ deeds were often relegated to myth and lore.

“If baseball is America’s pastime, it has been Connecticut’s passion for more

than 150 years,” says Steve Thornton, creator of the Shoeleather History Project, and one of the leading experts on Black and Negro League baseball in Connecticut. “Towns, neighborhoods, factories and churches all had their own teams—from the Hartford Dark Blues to the New Britain Aviators. The history of African American baseball is right under our feet in Connecticut. It’s like archeology: you discover a little, but then you find a little more.”

“African Americans began to play baseball in the late 1800s on military teams, college teams and company teams,” notes the Negro League Baseball Museum in Kansas City, Mo. “However, racism would force them from these teams by 1900. In response, Black players formed their own units, ‘barnstorming’ around the country.”

In 1920, responding to Jim Crow laws and resistance to integration, former player Andrew “Rube” Foster spearheaded the formation of an official Negro League for Black players. The League thrived during the Depression but began to disappear following Major League integration in 1948.

Blacks weren’t the only targets of prejudice, Thornton says.

“There were American Indians, Cubans and even Hawaiian players that played in Connecticut as well. If your skin was brown, you were in the second-tier league.”

“During spring training with the (Boston) Braves, all the Black players had to sleep on the porches of the buildings while white players slept inside,” states Hernandez Black at a



Gil Hernandez Black

Connecticut Library “Third Thursday” appearance in 2018 (he died in 2023).

“In cities and small towns all across the country, there were African American teams and Black stars that may have been the greatest of the century, but whose deeds would live only in the memories of those who saw them play,” explains Ken Burns in his documentary *Baseball*.

But fans were watching—even white crowds—drawn by the love of baseball and style of play exhibited by Black stars, which Burns notes was “faster, more daring than that in the Majors, and just as competitive.”



Moses “Fleetwood” Walker

Hitting to All Fields

Black history in Connecticut baseball begins early on with players’ growing reputations for talent and spectacle after the Civil War.

Baseball Hall of Famer Ulysses “Frank” Grant, for example, was perhaps the best Black player in baseball in the 1880s. After playing with local semi-pro teams in Pittsfield, Mass., and in Plattsburgh, N.Y., Grant joined the team in Meriden, Conn.

Grant and Moses “Fleetwood” Walker played for integrated Meriden, Ansonia and Waterbury semi-pro clubs,”



Thornton said.

Born at a waystation on the Underground Railroad according to one biographer, Walker played for the Waterbury (Conn.) Brassmen and was the first African American to cross



over to the Major Leagues prior to segregation.

After 1920, new standouts emerged through the Negro Leagues, including Satchel Paige, Jackie Robinson and even 1933 Hartford Bulkeley High graduate Johnny “Schoolboy” Taylor. Taylor traveled the semi-pro circuit, pitching for Hartford’s Savitt Gems at Hartford’s Bulkeley Stadium and a Yantic team and later signing with the New York Cubans.

Connecticut baseball fans didn’t discriminate when it came to attendance, however.

“Working people took the days off in the middle of the week and packed Hartford’s South End Stadium with 4,000 fans,” Thornton said.

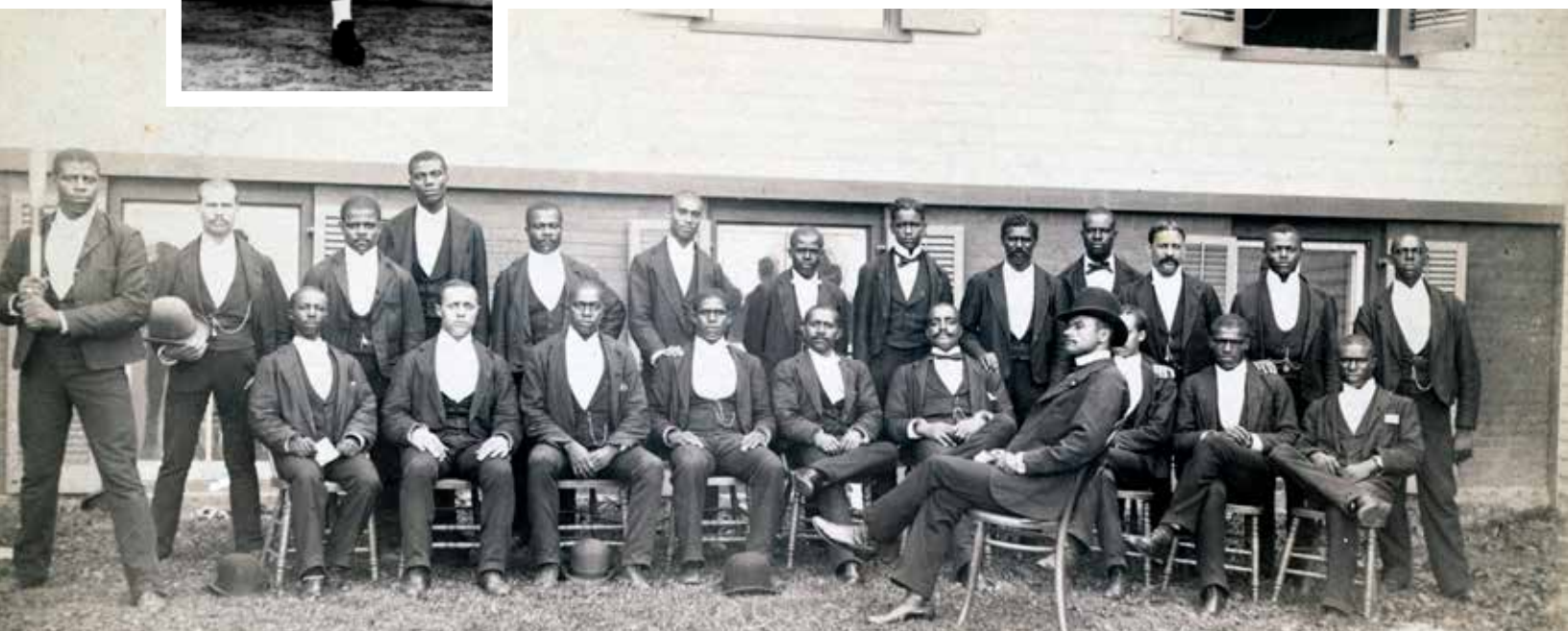
“Connecticut was baseball crazy anyway, and to see the Black players play was something to behold.”

A Wink and a Nod

While baseball was celebrated in Connecticut, Jim Crow was still the law of the South and northern sentiments, if not codified, echoed the same prejudices.

“Some teams simply wouldn’t play if there was a Black player playing,” Thornton says, explaining that the Major League Baseball Commissioner and team owners had a gentlemen’s agreement—a wink and a nod—not to allow Black players into the Majors.

“Black players had to find a dressing room at some facility that wasn’t near





the baseball field,” Thornton adds. “Players that played in the south end of Hartford had to travel back and forth by trolley just to get dressed.”

Long rides to games were common, says Hernandez Black, “...and if you missed the bus, your team might be (hundreds of miles) away.”

“Black ballplayers in this state established a proud tradition of excellence,” Thornton continues. “Still, an understanding of America’s game is not complete until fans know the names of Frank Grant and Moses ‘Fleetwood’ Walker just as well as they know Ted Williams and Mickey Mantle.

Without certified results or reliable statistics for Black players and teams, historians must scour the oral histories.

Where record books fail to paint a true picture, the best (and tallest) tales and legends came the players themselves.

Negro League standout and Major League Hall of Famer Leroy “Satchel” Paige once worked as a train station porter, toting bags of wealthy passengers, and resembling a “walking satchel tree.”

Paige once said of “Cool” Papa Bell that he was so fast he could flip the light switch and be in bed before the room got dark.

Similar attributions follow Norman “Turkey” Stearns (who ran like a turkey), Ernest “Boojum” Wilson (whose hits pounded outfield walls with a loud “Boojum”), Arthur “Rats” Henderson (co-workers once hid rats in

his lunchbox) or George “Mule” Suttles (who would kick 600-foot home runs like a mule).

What If...

Like America itself, baseball is about hope and second chances. Another game, another time at bat...another chance to *finally* get things right.

In 2020, on the 100th anniversary of the Negro Leagues’ founding, Major League Baseball began research to incorporate the statistics of more than 2,300 Negro Leagues players from 1920 to 1948, officially adding achievements of Negro League players to its official historical record ... “correcting a longtime oversight.”

The initiative still doesn’t account for players for Black or integrated teams in the 1800s, nor does it account for players on barnstorming teams in the early 1900s.

“Systematically for six decades, Black Americans were excluded from playing (in) the organized wing of America’s pastime,” says writer Daniel Okrent in Ken Burns’ *Baseball*. “What we are left with...is memory, legend, and an endless series of ‘What if’s.’” ■



Ulysses “Frank” Grant



Ulysses “Frank” Grant

A graduate of Dartmouth College, Randy B. Young worked in advertising in New England before relocating and working in communications for the University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill, N.C. Recently retired, he is a freelance writer and photographer.

DELICIOUS

Spring Pastas

By AMY S. WHITE





It's spring!

The sun is setting later. The air is filled with the promise of renewal. Our gardens are growing green with herbs and early sprouts. Our kitchens are beckoning us to put aside the heaviness of winter pot pies, roasts and braises, and embrace the season's vibrant flavors. With its abundance of fresh produce—spring onions, crisp asparagus, tender peas and fragrant herbs—spring inspires dishes that are as light and refreshing as the world blooming around us. And what better canvas for these ingredients than pasta?

For those who are gluten-free or cutting carbs, there are plenty of pasta substitutes out there. Vegetable “pastas” like zucchini noodles (zoodles), spaghetti squash or cauliflower gnocchi are just some options that offer a health-boosting additional serving of veggies. Currently trending legume-based “pastas”—made from chickpeas, lentils or black beans—come in various shapes and are packed with extra protein and fiber. Finally, there are plenty of pastas made from whole and alternative grains such as brown rice or quinoa, which will satisfy those who crave that pasta-like texture in their bowls while still avoiding carbs and adding fiber and other nutrients.

The following spring pasta dishes throw off their weighty blankets of dark sauce and lightly dress themselves in colorful brightness. The first two recipes are quite similar, using variations of spring alliums, lettuces and a touch of prosciutto for added depth of flavor (but can easily be left out for vegetarians). The third recipe makes use of spring's favorite herbs—parsley, sage, rosemary and thyme—and is named after the famous ballad in which they are prominently featured. The final recipe is a brighter, lighter, more refreshing take on the traditional Italian *pasta primavera*, or “spring pasta,” which certainly could not be left off the list.

Whether you're hosting a garden party, planning a casual weeknight meal or simply savoring the joy of seasonal eating, these recipes will bring a taste of spring to your table. 🍴

SPRING PASTA WITH PROSCIUTTO, LETTUCE AND PEAS

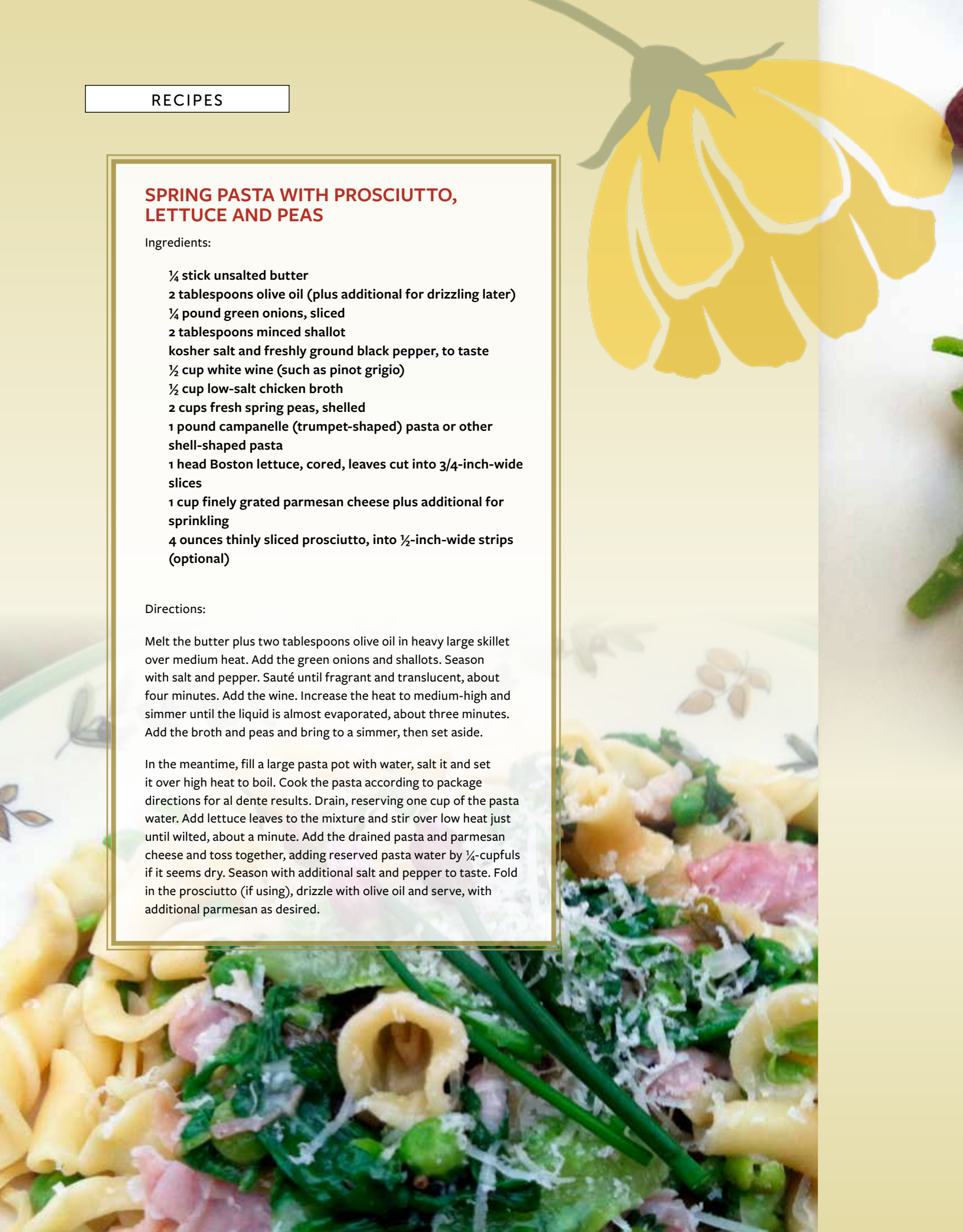
Ingredients:

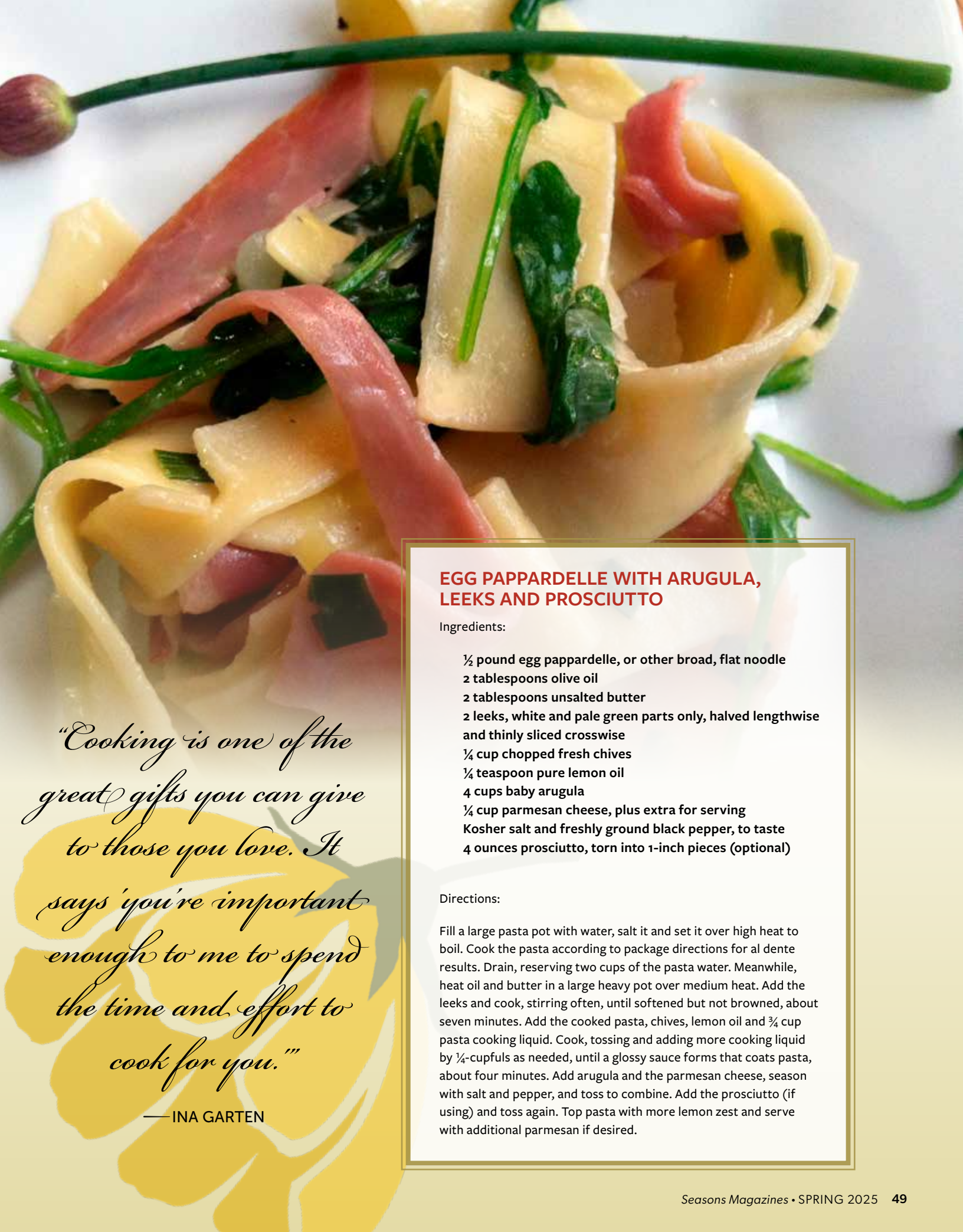
¼ stick unsalted butter
2 tablespoons olive oil (plus additional for drizzling later)
¼ pound green onions, sliced
2 tablespoons minced shallot
kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste
½ cup white wine (such as pinot grigio)
½ cup low-salt chicken broth
2 cups fresh spring peas, shelled
1 pound campanelle (trumpet-shaped) pasta or other shell-shaped pasta
1 head Boston lettuce, cored, leaves cut into ¾-inch-wide slices
1 cup finely grated parmesan cheese plus additional for sprinkling
4 ounces thinly sliced prosciutto, into ½-inch-wide strips (optional)

Directions:

Melt the butter plus two tablespoons olive oil in heavy large skillet over medium heat. Add the green onions and shallots. Season with salt and pepper. Sauté until fragrant and translucent, about four minutes. Add the wine. Increase the heat to medium-high and simmer until the liquid is almost evaporated, about three minutes. Add the broth and peas and bring to a simmer, then set aside.

In the meantime, fill a large pasta pot with water, salt it and set it over high heat to boil. Cook the pasta according to package directions for al dente results. Drain, reserving one cup of the pasta water. Add lettuce leaves to the mixture and stir over low heat just until wilted, about a minute. Add the drained pasta and parmesan cheese and toss together, adding reserved pasta water by ¼-cupfuls if it seems dry. Season with additional salt and pepper to taste. Fold in the prosciutto (if using), drizzle with olive oil and serve, with additional parmesan as desired.





"Cooking is one of the great gifts you can give to those you love. It says 'you're important enough to me to spend the time and effort to cook for you.'"

— INA GARTEN

EGG PAPPARDELLE WITH ARUGULA, LEEKS AND PROSCIUTTO

Ingredients:

½ pound egg pappardelle, or other broad, flat noodle
2 tablespoons olive oil
2 tablespoons unsalted butter
2 leeks, white and pale green parts only, halved lengthwise and thinly sliced crosswise
¼ cup chopped fresh chives
¼ teaspoon pure lemon oil
4 cups baby arugula
¼ cup parmesan cheese, plus extra for serving
Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste
4 ounces prosciutto, torn into 1-inch pieces (optional)

Directions:

Fill a large pasta pot with water, salt it and set it over high heat to boil. Cook the pasta according to package directions for al dente results. Drain, reserving two cups of the pasta water. Meanwhile, heat oil and butter in a large heavy pot over medium heat. Add the leeks and cook, stirring often, until softened but not browned, about seven minutes. Add the cooked pasta, chives, lemon oil and ¾ cup pasta cooking liquid. Cook, tossing and adding more cooking liquid by ¼-cupfuls as needed, until a glossy sauce forms that coats pasta, about four minutes. Add arugula and the parmesan cheese, season with salt and pepper, and toss to combine. Add the prosciutto (if using) and toss again. Top pasta with more lemon zest and serve with additional parmesan if desired.

RECIPES

PASTA PRIMAVERA 2025

Ingredients:

½ pound penne pasta, or other short tube-shaped pasta
1 cup fresh peas, shelled
¼ pound green beans, cut in half
¼ pound sugar snap peas
3 small carrots, cut into small rounds
1 small yellow squash, diced
2 tablespoons olive oil, divided
2 cloves garlic, minced
1 teaspoon red pepper flakes
½ cup grated parmesan cheese
¾ cup ricotta cheese
kosher salt, to taste
1 tablespoon chopped chives
1 tablespoon chopped mint

Directions:

Fill a large pasta pot with water, salt it and set it over high heat to boil. Cook the pasta three minutes less than package directs for al dente results. Add the peas, green beans, snap peas, carrots and squash in with the pasta and cook for the remaining time (three minutes), until pasta and vegetables are to desired tenderness.

In a large sauté pan, add the oil, garlic, and red pepper flakes. Put the heat on medium and begin to cook the garlic and pepper in the oil, taking care not to burn it. Drain the pasta and vegetables and add them to the sauté pan; toss well. Stir in the parmesan and ricotta cheese, and salt to taste. Toss with the remaining tablespoon of olive oil and serve sprinkled with chopped chives and mint.



“SCARBOROUGH FAIR” PASTA

Ingredients:

1 tablespoon butter
3 tablespoons olive oil, divided
1 clove garlic, chopped
½ cup panko-style breadcrumbs
½ pound bucatini, spaghetti rigati, or other thicker, longer pasta shape
1 tablespoon chopped fresh sage
1 tablespoon chopped fresh rosemary
1 tablespoon chopped fresh thyme
Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste
½ teaspoon red pepper flakes
½ cup chopped fresh parsley
1 teaspoon lemon juice
2 tablespoons grated parmesan cheese, plus extra for serving

Directions:

Fill a large pasta pot with water, salt it and set it over high heat to boil. In a large skillet, melt the butter with one tablespoon of olive oil over medium heat. Add the chopped garlic and stir for one minute, taking care not to burn it. Add the panko and cook, stirring often (about five minutes) until toasted. Transfer the breadcrumb mixture to a separate bowl and set aside, keeping the skillet out.

Cook the pasta according to package directions for al dente results. Drain, reserving one cup of the pasta water. Return the skillet to medium-low heat and add the second tablespoon of olive oil. Stir in the chopped sage, rosemary and thyme, then season with salt, pepper and red pepper flakes. Cook for a minute, then add the pasta to the skillet and stir to combine. Add enough of the pasta water to moisten the pasta, then add the last tablespoon of olive oil and toss until coated. Add the chopped parsley, lemon juice and parmesan; give it a final toss until well combined. Top with the garlic breadcrumbs and serve with additional parmesan if desired.



MASTERWORKS



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IN THE SPIRIT

SPECIAL OLYMPICS CONNECTICUT: Supporting and Inspiring a Special Community

By ARIANA RAWLS FINE

“Special Olympics Connecticut is about empowering people with intellectual disabilities and paving the way for them to demonstrate their potential and accomplishments through sports and leadership training,” says Michael Mason, president and CEO of Special Olympics Connecticut (SOCT).

“Participate once. Be forever changed and inspired.” The organization’s motto exemplifies how athletes, volunteers and staff are changed, inspired, respected and understood by being involved in events, trainings and other services. Like other Special Olympics state organizations across the nation, SOCT offers athletic training and sports competitions.

“Going to the Summer Games is like going on a small vacation. We meet all our Special Olympics friends, have fun with them and try our best to get

medals. We especially like the dance,” mentions athlete and global messenger Alicia Rostkowski.

Some of the spring and summer happenings in 2025 to increase awareness, raise funds and drive community involvement around the state include Penguin Plunges; basketball, football, soccer and soccer

games; golf tournaments; tip-a-cop events; and more.

Healthy Athletes

SOCT’s programs go beyond the competitions that many of us are aware of or have volunteered for in our youth. “Special Olympics Connecticut provides health screenings, education and preventative care to participating athletes through the Healthy Athletes program,” says Debbie Horne, SOCT’s senior director of communications and marketing. “At state competitions, Special Olympics athletes can receive free health screenings between events in a variety of disciplines including physical therapy, podiatry, preventative medicine, mental and emotional wellbeing, dental, vision, audiology, and sport physicals.”



In addition to health practitioners, the tools include healthy eating and nutrition tables. Special Olympics is the largest health organization for those with intellectual disabilities (ID). Sometimes, those with ID may not have health insurance, reliable transportation to medical practitioners or familiar doctors to treat them, explains Horne. The Healthy Athletes program enables them to gain important information and bolsters their health and well-being.

Angie D'Amico, an athlete, SOCT employee and athlete health leader, explains that Healthy Athletes has eight disciplines: Opening Eyes, Fit Feet, Fun Fitness, Health Promotion, Healthy Hearing, Strong Minds, MedFest and Special Smiles. "I think every athlete should experience Healthy Athletes at their local games. Special Olympics is not only about sports; it is about health. Every time I go to a Healthy Athletes activity, I learn something new and how to stay healthier," she adds.

"Special Olympics is also about providing our athletes with accessible, quality healthcare conveniently and at no cost to enhance their overall wellness," adds Mason. "Our offerings are life-changing and available to individuals throughout their lifetime."

In 2024, SOCT conducted 1,045 screenings in addition to hands-on training to nearly 250 healthcare professionals and students on how to treat individuals with ID during the events. Local universities partner with SOCT to train healthcare students on patient engagement through presentations, trainings and shared stories from athletes living with ID. Last year, close to 230 additional healthcare students received training at seven events in 2024.



Everyone Plays

In addition to the Special Olympics games we are traditionally used to seeing for many decades in our communities, SOCT also offers unified sports possibilities. Participants can train and compete in 26



Above: An athlete competing in gymnastics during Winter Games. Photo by volunteer photographer Rich Coyle.

Photo to left: An athlete competing in swimming during Summer Games. Photo by volunteer Helen Taylor.

Photos on opposite page: *Top:* President Mike Mason with the croquet coach and athletes at The Ocean House in Rhode Island for SOCT's Unified Sports' Fall Festival croquet competition. Photo by volunteer photographer Bob Olsen. *Below:* An athlete receiving a free dental screening at Summer Games through the Special Olympics Healthy Athletes® program. Photo contributed by Special Olympics Connecticut.



Special Olympics Unified Sports teammates from Rocky Hill High School receive recognition as a Unified Sports Champion School for the School's inclusive school climate. Photo contributed by Special Olympics Connecticut and the Connecticut Interscholastic Athletic Conference (CIAC).

sports through over 60 local programs across Connecticut. There are four statewide games happening each year: Winter Games (March), Summer Games (June), Unified Sports Fall Festival (September) and Unified Sports Holiday Classic (November).

Partnering with Schools

“Through our Unified Sports program, individuals at age 2½ years can begin by participating in our Young Athletes Program, continue with Special Olympics Unified Sports at schools and join our community-based local programs that serve children and adults ages 8 to 80+,” states Mason.

SOCT and Connecticut Interscholastic Athletic Conference (CIAC) have collaborated to bring the Special Olympics Unified Sports program to schools for over three decades. The inclusive programs enable students with ID to play with their elementary, middle and high school peers. And there are plenty of volunteering opportunities, including for teammates without ID, coaches, adult and child event volunteers, sponsorships and donor support, corporate team volunteering, interning, fundraising, and more.

Fostering Athlete Leadership

“Through our Athlete Leadership program, athletes—known as global messengers and health messengers—have opportunities to serve as spokespersons and ambassadors for Special Olympics Connecticut,” says Horne. “They share their Special Olympics stories to help others understand the power and impact participation in its programs has and also serve as decision-makers who provide input and recommendations that help guide the strategy and future of our organization.”

The athlete leaders participate in virtual and in-person training sessions that feature guest speakers and focus



Athletes who serve as Special Olympics Global Messengers are leaders, spokespersons and ambassadors for the organization. Photo by volunteer photographer Chad Lyons.

on leadership, public speaking, and building additional business and professional skills. Training sessions focus on health and wellness, nutrition, and personal enrichment. Two athletes also serve on SOCT’s board of directors.

“We have people who have been doing unified sports in their seventies. It helps them with their physical and emotional health, prevents isolation and keeps them engaged. It feels like a family; the staff and volunteers come back year after year. They see the athletes with intellectual disabilities grow up. You feel a sense of accomplishment volunteering, and the smiles you receive volunteering are the trophy,” adds Horne.

The breadth of what SOCT does for those with intellectual disabilities in Connecticut continues to expand beyond the traditional Special Olympics events in our state.

Learn more about volunteering, trainings, wellness offerings, SOCT efforts and more at soct.org.

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Beyond the Pit Stop: How Connecticut Became a Comedy Destination

By VANESSA WOJTUSIAK

For too long, Connecticut has been the overlooked middle child, caught between the bright lights of New York City and the historic charm of Boston, its suburban streets often seen as too quiet, too affluent and too stiff to house anything remotely edgy. Known as a place where the humor is reserved and jokes risk falling flat, it's easy to assume that the state's comedy scene is as buttoned-up as its residents.

But that perception couldn't be further from the truth. Connecticut's comedy roots run deep and in recent years, the state has undergone a dramatic transformation. What was once considered a quiet backwater for comedy has become a thriving hub for improv groups, stand-up comics

and open mic nights, with both A-list comedians and local talent making their mark.

The state is now more than just a stop between cities; it has become a comedy destination in its own right.

But Connecticut's legacy of laughter isn't a recent development; it stretches back to the state's earliest comedic pioneers. Mark Twain, born Samuel Clemens in Hartford, revolutionized humor with his satirical style, biting social critiques and keen observations of the human condition. His sharp wit, often laced with sarcasm, created a blueprint for the kind of intelligent comedy that still defines the state's comedic culture today. Twain's influence has also left a lasting mark on a national level; the prestigious

Mark Twain Prize for American Humor, awarded annually by the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, celebrates individuals who have had a profound impact on American society in ways similar to Twain. Since its inception in 1998, this award has recognized the contributions of comedy legends such as Steve Martin, Tina Fey and David Letterman, cementing Twain's lasting impact on American humor. Similarly, Katherine Hepburn, a Connecticut native, brought her own brand of screwball comedy to the big screen, with her impeccable timing and sharp-witted performances that helped shape the landscape of film comedy.

But the question remains whether Connecticut's wit evolved or stayed as sharp as ever. The truth is that while





the comedic landscape has expanded, the state has never strayed too far from its roots. Connecticut comedians, influenced by Twain and Hepburn, have long favored intelligent, observational humor over quick punchlines. It's a style that emphasizes delivery, nuance and wit—one that continues to shape both the craft and business of comedy today. Whether it's in the structure of a stand-up set or the clever commentary of an improv troupe, Connecticut's humor remains a testament to the timeless appeal of sharp, thoughtful comedy.

While Connecticut's comedic legacy is well-established, what does the modern-day scene actually look like from behind the mic? Local comedians say the state is anything but humorless; contrary to its buttoned-up reputation, audiences here are eager for a good laugh. Stand-up that blends sharp observational humor, relatable life experiences and social commentary tends to draw the biggest crowds.

Comedians with strong TV or podcast followings, as well as those who balance mainstream appeal with a bit of an edge, thrive in Connecticut's clubs and theaters. Name recognition and buzz certainly help fill seats, but what really resonates are the jokes that feel tailor-made for the state. New England rivalries are always an easy win. Jabs at Yankees vs. Red Sox fans, the Patriots' dominance (at one point) and even Connecticut's extreme passion about our college basketball team (The Basketball Capitol of the World. Go Huskies!). Hyperlocal references, like the glory days of iconic department stores like Caldor and G. Fox, the state's massive obsession with pizza, or the shared struggles of New England winters, tend to land the best. The more specific the joke, the bigger the laugh; it not only shows an understanding of the state but also connects on a personal level with the audience.

Despite Connecticut's reputation for being a bit reserved, local comedians say they rarely find audiences to be overly uptight. If anything, the state's crowds are engaged and appreciative, though not always the rowdiest. Heckling is relatively rare here, but Connecticut audiences have a different way of showing disapproval: silence. A tough room won't throw drinks or start shouting, as seen in some cities, but a dead room can be even more brutal. Comedians quickly learn that if the punchline doesn't land, the only sound they'll hear is their own heartbeat.

The state's appetite for live comedy has skyrocketed, making it a must-stop destination for touring comedians rather than just a



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Billy Matthews: Manager (left) Christopher O'Flaherty, Owner (right)

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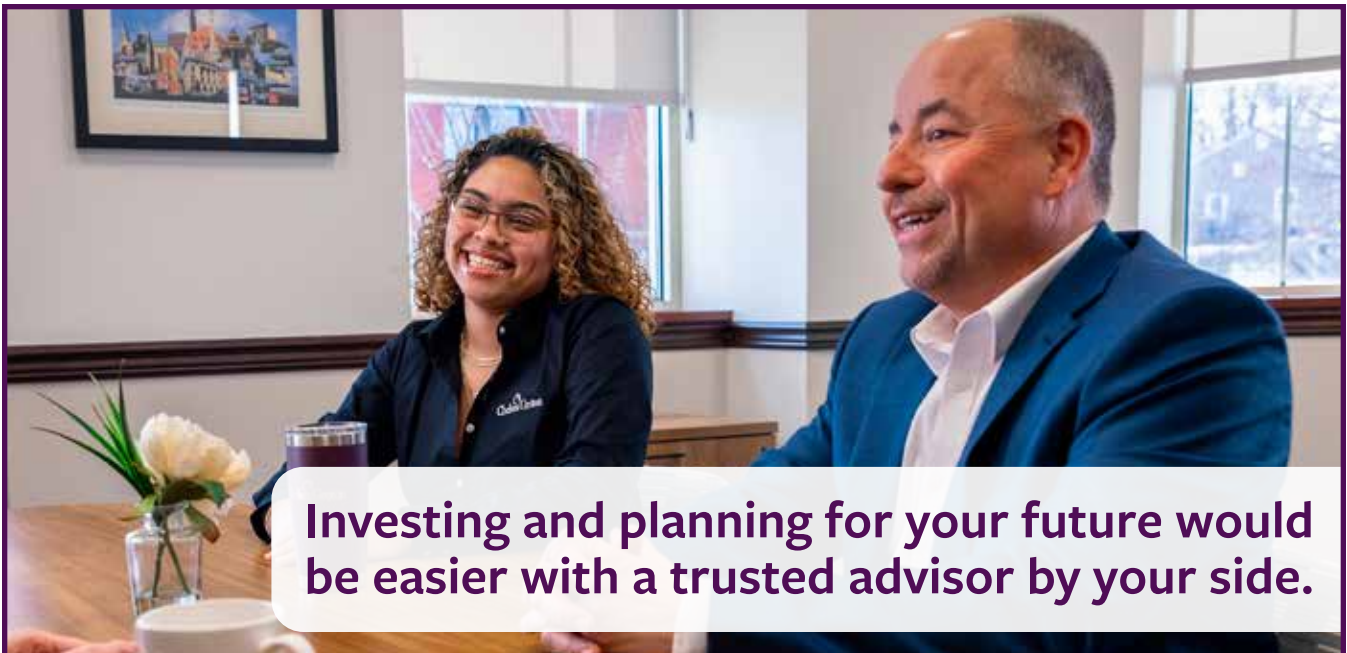
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convenient detour between New York and Boston. What was once an occasional draw has become a booming business, with venues of all sizes competing to book top talent and capitalize on the growing demand for stand-up.

One of the biggest factors fueling comedy's rise is accessibility. Compared to concerts, comedy shows are often more affordable while delivering just as much entertainment. With no need for elaborate stage production, comedians can easily tour, making it possible for venues to book multiple shows in one night, particularly for A-list talent. Some shows sell out instantly, prompting venues to add a second performance or even a back-to-back "one plus one" option. The competitive nature of the market has also led to more variety, with both large theaters and smaller, more intimate spaces catering to different styles of comedy.

But it's not just major venues fueling the scene. The rise of smaller comedy clubs, restaurants and bars hosting comedy nights and open mics has provided a crucial platform for up-and-coming comedians to test their material and build a following. These grassroots events have become launching pads for local talent, offering a low-risk environment for performers to refine their craft and connect with audiences. Improv organizations have also gained momentum across the state, helping comedians sharpen essential skills like timing, audience engagement and quick thinking - tools that translate not just to stand-up but also to writing, acting and public speaking.



Venues typically work with three to four major agency bookers, industry connections or sometimes talent directly to secure acts, carefully analyzing past ticket sales in similar markets and local demographics to predict success. Niche and demographic-specific comedians—whether catering to cultural communities, generational humor or distinct comedic styles—are thriving in Connecticut, where audiences show up in droves for performers they connect with. The post-pandemic surge in demand has only accelerated the momentum, as people are eager to laugh now more than ever.

From local comedians getting opening spots to national headliners packing rooms, Connecticut has officially secured its place on the comedy map.

Comedy in Connecticut isn't just thriving, it's evolving. The state has cemented itself as a true destination for both comedy fans and top-tier talent. A-list comedians

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are no longer just passing through; they're booking multiple nights, selling out venues and returning for encore performances. The enthusiasm from audiences has energized venues, creating a ripple effect where the demand for comedy continues to grow.

Streaming specials, viral social media clips and the rise of comedy podcasts have fueled this surge, turning once-niche comedians into household names and helping cultivate a broader audience eager to see their favorite comics live. With this heightened interest, some venues are looking to expand their comedy-friendly footprint by increasing stand-up bookings, launching dedicated comedy clubs and/or integrating more improv shows. Festivals and comedy nights are becoming regular fixtures in entertainment calendars, giving both seasoned and up-and-coming comedians more opportunities to perform.

Mohegan Sun's Walk of Fame features comedy giants like Kevin

Hart and Matt Rife, a testament to how major performers view Connecticut as a premier stop on their tours. However, with success comes challenges.

As competition for talent heats up, venues face bidding wars to secure top comedians, which inevitably drives up ticket prices for fans.

While Connecticut's comedy scene is booming, maintaining affordability and accessibility will be key to sustaining its momentum.

With its mix of major venues, grassroots comedy nights and a growing appetite for laughter, Connecticut's comedic future is bright. For audiences and comedians alike, the punchline is clear: this is no longer just a place to pass through, but a place to stop, stay and laugh.

Acknowledgments

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Vanessa Wojtusiak is a freelance journalist with more than 20 years of experience in media and marketing. She lives in West Hartford.








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Spring Cleaning: Who is Really Doing the Cleaning?

By **MATTHEW DICKS** / Illustrated By **SEAN WANG**

In the darkest hours of the night, when the house is quiet and all are asleep, I like to think about what it's like for other people. For the people who don't have to live with my people. Don't get me wrong, I love my people.

My wife, Elysha, is a beautiful and funny woman who makes an amazing macaroni and cheese, and when she plays the ukulele, sings, or dances, it makes me swoon. My daughter, Clara, is a smart, empathetic teenager who has the most interesting collection of friends and worries about anyone in trouble. She doesn't have a phone and doesn't want one. My son, Charlie, has annoyingly perfect pitch, takes apart devices to see how they tick and loves

attending Styx concerts with me.

I adore each one of them. They are also monsters.

When it comes to spring cleaning—the cleaning, culling and tossing away of unneeded and unwanted things—my family are like three blind mice. Completely oblivious to the steady acquisition of things in our home and ignorant to the idea that if you haven't touched something in more than a decade, *you might not need it*.

As a result, spring cleaning is a more complex process for me than most. It's not simply cleaning; it also involves subterfuge, obfuscation, negotiation and deception.

Making this process even more frustrating is that when it comes to

my own personal spring cleaning, it's almost unnecessary. Every day is an April day for me. I am constantly seeking out things to eliminate from my life and simplify my existence.

Haven't worn a shirt in six months? Apparently, I don't need it, so goodbye!

I find two of the same sized screwdrivers in my toolbox? Begone, you repetitive bit of steel and plastic!

Haven't opened a plastic bin in three years? I don't even look inside. Anything inside is clearly not needed. Toss it away!

As a result, I am always spring cleaning; I am always culling and editing and eliminating. In the unlikely event that I someday die, my children will ideally find a few things I was

using on a daily basis, a file cabinet of organized documents and mementos, and nothing more.

You're welcome, monsters.

This attitude is in diametric opposition to my family; they see no need to ever throw anything away. It's not that they are hoarders. They don't place emotional attachment to any item. They don't cling to material possessions for dear life. They simply don't care if it's in our home or not.

I have watched a Sephora bag sit in the corner of the living room for months, containing—at least at the time of purchase—some critical skin care product. But since arriving in our home and being arbitrarily placed in the corner, it has not moved. Other than a cat occasionally chewing on the handles, that bag has remained in the corner, untouched and unnoticed.

And therein lies the problem: it's not that the monsters think that a Sephora bag occupying the corner of a room for decades is a good idea. They just don't see it. The bag is a constant, glowing, radioactive, flaming lighthouse to me, tainting everything like the eye of Sauron from its unholy perch. But, to my family, it's invisible. They can't see it. This is what I live with.

So, when it comes to spring cleaning, not only do I need to excise the Sephora bag, but I need to do it in a way that actually makes its disappearance happen. Simply saying, "Can you take care of that Sephora bag?" will almost certainly yield nothing. That's because my plea for freedom from clutter often amounts to: "Can you remove that unseen thing from the unseen place that does not bother you in any way?"

It will never happen.

Instead, I remove the contents from the Sephora bag, wrap them up in a lovely box, affix an equally lovely card, and give the contents to my wife. I hope she has forgotten about the original purchase and now sees this skin care product as a gift, purchased just days ago, rather than my attempt

to manipulate her into getting rid of her mess.

My son receives his monthly science kit and builds a crossbow, electronic ice pick or fusion reactor. After playing with it for about 19 seconds, he drops it on the kitchen island, seemingly declaring this to be its new home. If I did not intervene, it would never be touched again. It would sit there for ages, collecting dust, interfering with cooking and eating but never put away.

Never even being assigned a place to put it away.

So, what do I do?

**"If it wasn't
for me, our
home would be
impenetrable.
A fortress of
objects. A solid
box of stuff."**

I move this item to a secret staging area in my home, where it will be quarantined with similarly ignored items for three months. If Charlie doesn't mention his fusion reactor during the quarantine period, it will disappear forever. If he asks about it prior to the end of its quarantine, I'll throw on my cape and mask and transform into a superhero, suddenly remembering having seen it a little while ago and emerging with it moments later, miraculously in my hands.

"Hooray for Daddy! He always saves the day!"

And when Charlie places it back on the kitchen island, which he will almost certainly do, the process will begin again until I can finally make it disappear permanently.


If it wasn't for me, our home would be impenetrable. A fortress of objects. A solid box of stuff.

My family believes that every empty surface is available for storage. Every expiration date on every food item in the pantry is irrelevant. Every drawer is designed for junk. They see the garage as a place to throw lots of stuff but never park cars. Every hamper is a secondary dresser.

Three years ago, I confiscated every hamper in the house. I couldn't take it anymore.

So, as spring arrives and I scan the landscape of my home, I will begin plotting against the monsters, finding ways to quietly remove books and clothing and toys and art supplies and cooking implements and everything else that was once put down by a member of my family, only to ever be seen again by me.

Is this how everyone lives? Is every family comprised of a collection of monsters alongside one brave, unheralded hero must battle every day lest the wave of stuff overwhelm them all?

If so, I salute you, fellow heroes and heroines. May your spring cleaning be accomplished with as little suffering and as much subterfuge as possible. 

Matthew Dicks is an elementary school teacher, bestselling novelist and a record 55-time Moth Story SLAM champion. His latest books are Twenty-one Truths About Love and The Other Mother.

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