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Seasons' Greetings



James Tully

Spring always feels like a reward after a long, brutal winter. As the days grow longer and the first signs of new life appear, there's a renewed sense of energy, optimism and possibility. It's the perfect time to turn the page; it is something we at Seasons Magazines have been fortunate to do for many years now.

With this Spring 2026 edition, Seasons proudly enters its 21st year of publication and our third decade of sharing stories from the communities we serve. Over

the years, we've witnessed an incredible transformation in the media landscape. Platforms have come and gone, and technology has reshaped the way people connect with information and with one another. Yet, through all of those changes, one thing has remained constant: the power of a good story. Our passion, curiosity and commitment to telling interesting, meaningful stories have never changed. And it continues to be the heart of Seasons.

This milestone would not be possible without the extraordinary support of our advertising partners. Many of you have been with us for more than 15 years, believing in what we do and growing alongside us. Your loyalty and partnership have been invaluable, and we are deeply grateful.

I also want to extend sincere thanks to our contributors as the writers, photographers and creative voices bring every issue to life. Quite simply, they are among the best in the business. Their talent and dedication continue to elevate with every edition.

As we welcome spring and celebrate the beginning of our third decade, we raise a toast to the future, to more great stories, continued partnerships and the exciting years ahead. I am deeply grateful.

James Tully

James Tully
Owner/Publisher
Seasons Magazines



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Creative Director
Stacy Wright Murray

Editor
Ariana Rawls Fine

Sales & Marketing Executive
Doreen Chudoba

Cover Photography
iStockphoto

For advertising information,
please contact Jim
Jim@seasonsmagazines.com.

We want to tell our readers stories about the interesting people and places in our beautiful state. It's that simple.

– JIM TULLY

Spring

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2026

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Dr. Kelly Tyler and a multidisciplinary Saint Francis Hospital team are advancing surgery in Connecticut with a patient-centered approach that extends beyond the operating room.

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While there is joy watching your child play ball, you also experience the suffering and injustice of being a Little League parent, trapped by the whims of coaches, schedules and emotions.

“APRIL HATH PUT A SPIRIT OF YOUTH IN EVERYTHING.”

- William Shakespeare





Setting the Standard for Surgical Care at Saint Francis Hospital

HOW KELLY TYLER, M.D., AND A MULTIDISCIPLINARY TEAM ARE ADVANCING SURGERY IN CONNECTICUT

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

At Saint Francis Hospital, surgery is about more than procedures. It is about people, precision and a commitment to delivering the highest level of quality care to the community. That philosophy guides the surgical department, where expertise across specialties, advanced technology and a deeply human approach come together every day in operating rooms throughout the hospital. Now led by Kelly Tyler, M.D., chair of Saint Francis Hospital's Department of Surgery, this team is building on a long-standing reputation for excellence while continuing to grow and evolve to meet the needs of today's patients. "What stood out to me immediately was the people," Dr. Tyler says of her decision to come to Saint Francis. "There is a culture here where providers truly care about patients and about each other. That is something worth protecting and strengthening."

A DEPARTMENT BUILT ON COLLABORATION AND DEPTH

Surgical services at Saint Francis encompass a wide range of specialties, including acute care and trauma, bariatric, breast, cardiac, colorectal, ENT, endocrine, general, neurosurgery,

ophthalmologic, orthopedic, plastic, podiatry, oncology, thoracic, urologic, and vascular. Many of these specialists perform procedures using cutting-edge robotic technology. A multidisciplinary approach allows patients to receive coordinated, comprehensive care, whether they are facing a complex cancer diagnosis or an unexpected surgical emergency. Dr. Tyler brings decades of experience as a colorectal surgeon and academic leader, most recently serving as division chief of colorectal surgery at UMass Chan Medical School - Baystate. Her background in clinical innovation, quality improvement and physician leadership aligns closely with the department's mission. "Patients do best when teams communicate well and work together," she explains. "That collaboration is one of the strengths of this department."

LEADERSHIP ROOTED IN EXPERIENCE AND QUALITY

Dr. Tyler's path to leading a major surgical department reflects years of training, leadership and a sustained connection to Connecticut. A native of Bristol, she spent part of her childhood there and then in the state's rural northwest corner, experiences

that shaped her early understanding of community care. "I grew up seeing very different types of communities," Dr. Tyler adds. "That stays with you when you think about how people access care and what they need from their providers."

She earned her undergraduate degree at Colgate University before returning to the Nutmeg State for medical school at University of Connecticut School of Medicine. Her training then took her around the Northeast, including a general surgery residency at Boston University Medical Center and a colorectal surgery fellowship at Robert Wood Johnson University Hospital in New Jersey. Looking back, she says each stage of training added a new layer to her perspective. "You learn the technical side of surgery, but you also learn how teams work and how systems can successfully support patients."

THE PATH BACK HOME

Although much of her career took place outside Connecticut, Dr. Tyler says her connection to the state never faded away. She rotated through Saint Francis as a medical student and retained strong professional and personal ties to the region. "I still had



Kelly M. Tyler, MD
Chair
Service Line


Saint Francis Hospital
Trinity Health

Kelly Tyler, M.D., chair of Saint Francis Hospital's Department of Surgery

family members who worked here at the hospital, and even more who were cared for here as patients,” says Dr. Tyler. When the opportunity arose to lead the surgery department, the decision felt natural. “I loved what I saw here. The team, the culture, the people. It felt like a place where there was real opportunity to grow the department.”

Prior to coming home to Connecticut, Dr. Tyler spent 18 years up I-91 in Springfield, where she worked as a colorectal surgeon and held a variety of leadership roles. She was division chief of colorectal surgery for 10 years, serving on numerous committees focused on quality, safety and clinical operations. Throughout that time, she remained deeply involved in patient care and education. “I have always felt it is important to stay connected to clinical work,” she says. “That is how you understand what patients and providers are really experiencing.”

MEETING PATIENTS WHERE THEY ARE

In the surgical department at Saint Francis Hospital, emphasizing continuity of care and long-term relationships are top priorities. This is especially true in areas like colorectal surgery, Dr. Tyler’s specialty, where patients may be followed for years or even decades due to chronic conditions such as Crohn’s disease or ulcerative colitis.

Attention-grabbing headlines like the rising rates of colorectal cancer in younger adults have the entire medical world searching for answers. Researchers are working swiftly to find the cause. In the meantime, “education is everything,” says Dr. Tyler. “When patients know when to seek care, we can often make a meaningful difference. Many people dismiss symptoms like rectal bleeding or persistent abdominal pain; when they don’t seek help, we may see them at a more advanced stage of cancer.

We want to encourage everyone to understand that doctors have expertise and are comfortable talking about these things, and finding help is always the safest way to go.”

QUALITY, RESEARCH AND EDUCATION AT THE CORE

Beyond patient care, members of the department are actively engaged in clinical research, contributing to national efforts to better understand surgical disease and improve evidence-based treatment. Surgeons also play a key role in educating future physicians through mentorship, teaching and academic partnerships. This commitment to quality and learning is central to Dr. Tyler’s leadership philosophy. “Our responsibility is not just to treat today’s patients, but to continuously improve how care is delivered. That means following evidence, measuring outcomes and never losing sight of the human experience.”

Dr. Tyler’s involvement at the national level reinforces the importance of education, evidence-based care and collaboration. “Whether you are caring for patients locally or working nationally, the goal is the same,” she continues. “You want to make things better for patients and for the physicians caring for them.” Those principles now guide her leadership at Saint Francis as she brings decades of experience back to a department focused on quality, compassion and community trust.


TECHNOLOGY THAT SUPPORTS BETTER OUTCOMES

Saint Francis has invested heavily in advanced surgical technology, including an expanding robotic surgery program and minimally invasive techniques that can reduce pain, shorten recovery times and improve outcomes. From procedures addressing fecal incontinence to complex

oncologic surgeries, surgeons across the department are using state-of-the-art tools to deliver precise, patient-centered care. “Watching the expansion of the robotics program has been very exciting,” adds Dr. Tyler. “One of the things that impressed me the most here has been the support of our administration to grow technologically. It allows us to offer the safest and most effective options to our patients.”

A PROMISE TO THE COMMUNITY

As the surgical department continues to grow, Dr. Tyler hopes the community understands the breadth of expertise available at Saint Francis and the values that guide every surgical decision. “We want people to know this department delivers care with empathy, respect and the highest standards of quality. I take it personally to ensure that anyone in this state would consider Saint Francis a place they can trust for surgical care.”

This patient-centered approach extends beyond the operating room. Through education, thoughtful communication and a commitment to meeting patients where they are, the surgical department reflects Saint Francis Hospital’s mission to care for the whole patient: mind, body and spirit. 

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.

Learn more about surgical services at Saint Francis Hospital at trinityhealthofne.org/surgery.



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The Return of the Dinner Party

By KERRI-LEE MAYLAND / Photography by TODD FAIRCHILD

“People who love to eat are always the best people.” ~ Julia Child



Once upon a time, the dinner party was our social currency with menus carefully planned, drink pairings thoughtfully chosen, conversations designed to unfold over hours. From the 1960s through the 1980s, at-home entertaining was woven into the social rhythm. Cookbooks lined kitchen shelves. China cabinets brimmed with dish sets reserved for company. Invitations to supper were common, expected even.

By the 1990s, that ritual began to fade. Dual-career households, overscheduled calendars and the rise of casual dining out gradually shifted gatherings away from the home. Convenience edged out ceremony. Screens replaced place cards. Hosting became something we admired in theory but rarely had time to practice. The pandemic pressed pause even further, altering how we socialized and interrupting the natural flow of connection.

Now, something is shifting again. We are seeing a resurgence with a renewed appetite for setting a table and creating shared experiences that feel personal rather than performative. Today’s dinner party does not demand the perfection it once did. It requires only a bit of planning and a willingness to open the door. Guests are not expecting restaurant polish; they are craving the comfort and warmth of a real home.

With spring nudging us back toward color,

flavor and connection, we are reclaiming the table — not to impress, but to delight. Modern gatherings are looser, more personal and refreshingly unfussy. The goal is not spectacle, but welcome.

Consider this an invitation to linger awhile as we explore entrée ideas, experiment with pairings and rediscover how to dress a table with ease. After all, aside from your guests, those are the true ingredients of a memorable evening.

THE TABLE SETS THE TONE

“One cannot think well, love well, sleep well, if one has not dined well.” ~ Virginia Woolf

Before guests taste a single bite or sip, the table tells the story. For tableescape inspiration, I spoke with Lynne Einsel of The Weekend Home, known for her elegant yet unintimidating approach to design and entertaining. Her philosophy centers on a table that feels intentional, but never staged.

“A tableescape should feel inviting and relaxed — something that draws people in, not something they’re afraid to touch,” Einsel says.

Her two-story Avon shop is filled with pieces that balance beauty and utility: one-of-a-kind platters, vintage dishes, sterling serving pieces, and glassware that feels collected over time rather than perfectly matched. The effect is layered but approachable.





For a spring dinner party, she recommends beginning with a seasonal palette. “Linen tablecloths or runners instantly soften a space and signal that something thoughtful is about to happen,” Einsel explains. “But a bare wood table can feel just as welcoming when it’s layered well.”

She suggests white or cream dishes with minimal patterns, allowing the food and florals to lead. Chargers or textured placemats add depth without overwhelming the setting.

Candles are nonnegotiable. A mix of tapers for height and low votives for warmth creates a flattering glow that encourages guests to settle in. “Candlelight does more work than any centerpiece ever could,” she says.

Spring florals should feel loose rather than overly arranged. For our table, Einsel chose forsythia — one of the first blooms of the season — but she encourages hosts to look outside for inspiration. Clip budding branches, tuck herbs into small vessels or gather a few simple stems in clear glass. Restraint keeps the table fresh rather than fussy.

“When the table feels welcoming and the food is thoughtfully presented, that’s what people remember,” Einsel adds.

MAKE THE MENU MATTER

“After a good dinner one can forgive anybody.” ~ Oscar Wilde

Todd and Celeste Borelli, the husband-and-wife team behind Connecticut Personal Chef Services, specialize in making dinner parties feel elevated yet entirely achievable. With years of professional culinary training between them, they cook at a high level. What distinguishes their approach, however, is how they design menus for real homes and real hosts who want to enjoy their own party rather than perform through it.

“You don’t need our credentials to host a beautiful dinner,” Celeste Borelli says. “You need a plan that celebrates your skill level, whatever it may be.”

Both emphasize pacing as much as flavor. “When the host has the menu



under control, they can relax. And when the host is relaxed, the entire table feels it.”

Their formula is simple: choose one hero dish and allow everything else to support it. This works especially well in spring, when lighter, brighter ingredients naturally take center stage.

A few standout ideas include za’atar salmon with tapenade — as visually appealing as it is flavorful — featuring olive oil, lemon and a herby olive topping. Chicken Gruyère with peas, pancetta and garlic offers comforting richness balanced by spring vegetables. A green risotto layered with lemon, mascarpone, leeks, fennel, asparagus and peas brings both freshness and color to the table.

For coastal flavor lovers, Celeste Borelli suggests lowcountry shrimp and grits, a dish she mastered while working in Charleston. “The broth matters most,” she says. “The vegetables, bacon and shrimp build from there.”

The rest of the menu should remain streamlined: a light starter and no more than two sides, one fresh and one grounding. We paired Israeli couscous with a citrus arugula salad dotted with mozzarella pearls. Dessert can be simple — something homemade but not fussy.

The goal is not restaurant theatrics but generosity. A meal that encourages guests to linger, refill their glasses, and stay longer than planned.

WHAT TO POUR

“A meal without wine is like a day without sunshine.”
~ George Moore

Wine educator Lisa Hamel, owner of Wine Etc. in Simsbury, is known for making wine feel approachable rather than overwhelming. Her philosophy mirrors the



best kind of entertaining: relaxed and rooted in enjoyment.

“Wine should feel inviting, not intimidating,” Hamel says. “When people are comfortable, the table opens up.”

Her favorites in the shop are tagged “Lisa Loves,” offering confidence to both longtime customers and newcomers. She encourages hosts to pay attention when dining out.

“If you discover a wine you love at a restaurant, ask your local retailer to help you find it. Save it for your next gathering and share what you learned about it.”

Offering two wines — one white and one red — gives guests choice without complication. Hamel also encourages exploring old world wines from France, Italy, Spain or Portugal. “They’re shaped by the land and traditions where they’re made. They’re incredibly food-friendly and spark conversation.”

Equally important is recognizing that not everyone drinks alcohol. “A

nonalcoholic option should never feel like an afterthought,” she says. “When it’s presented with care, it becomes part of the experience.”

At Wine Etc., Hamel offers mocktail mixology guidance, complete with nonalcoholic spirits designed to pair beautifully with food. Thoughtful hosting means considering everyone at the table. “Guests don’t always know why they feel comfortable,” she says. “They just feel it.”

WHEN IT ALL COMES TOGETHER

“People will never remember what you said or what you did, but they will remember how you made them feel.” ~ Maya Angelou

If you are inspired but unsure whether you can pull it off, remember this: the measure of a successful dinner party is not the perfection of the tablescape, the complexity of the menu or the rarity of

the wine. It is what happens between the first bite and the last sip.

Plates left uncollected while conversation continues. Candles burned low. An extra chair pulled in. No one checking the time.

Returning to the dinner party is not about rules. It is about rhythm — the quiet choreography between preparation and spontaneity, elegance and ease.

In spring, when the days stretch longer and the air feels lighter, there is no better moment to gather. Conversations bloom. Laughter carries. And once again, the table becomes the place where connection begins.

Kerri-Lee Mayland is an Emmy Award-winning journalist, interior designer and TV show host who covers home, living and design for magazines and newspapers. A former news anchor, she brings a storyteller’s eye to beautiful, livable spaces. ■



The first graduating class of Albertus Magnus College pales in comparison to the hundreds each year who earn their degrees.

IN EVERY GENERATION, SHE ROSE

How Albertus Women Have Shaped a Century of Change

By **STEVEN BLACKBURN**

When the Dominican Sisters of Peace opened Albertus Magnus College’s doors in 1925, the Congregation of Catholic Sisters sought to expand women’s access to education, professions, leadership and public voice in a male-dominated world. The Sisters accomplished this and more. Ever since that first class, their graduates have exceeded even the founders’ boldest hopes, trailblazing across generations and shaping law, policy, scholarship and service far beyond the Prospect Street campus in Connecticut.

“One of the most powerful things you see when you study Albertus alumni is that their impact often extends far beyond their own success. These women became teachers, advocates, lawmakers, caregivers and leaders. Again and again, they took what they learned here and turned it outward,” says Catie White, interim director of library services and author of “Albertus Magnus College: Fearless Endless Truth: Celebrating a Century of Impact Through Education, Faith, and Tradition.”

THE CLASS THAT SET WOMEN’S CAPABILITY INTO MOTION

For most institutions just starting out, it takes years — sometimes generations — to fully see the impact of their founding vision. But Albertus’ inaugural graduating class of 1928, though made up of just 12 students, began making a difference immediately. Four graduates entered education as schoolteachers, two followed the Sisters’ Catholic teachings as religious sisters, two went on to Yale for advanced study, one became an actress and two entered the emerging telephone industry.

“In the 1920s, telephones were brand new,” says White.

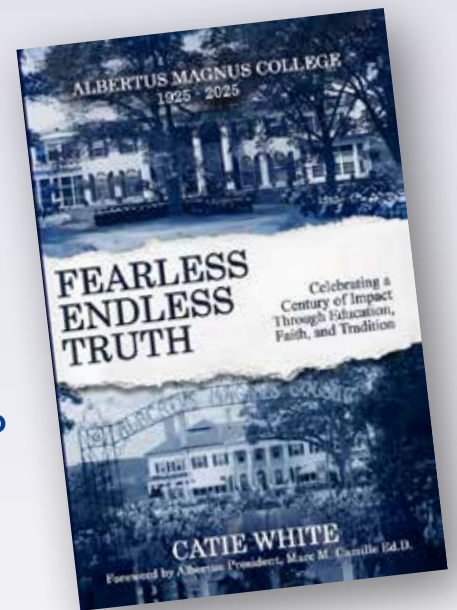
“Entering that profession then is the equivalent of students today going into cutting-edge fields like cybersecurity or artificial intelligence — industries that actively shape how society functions.”

A LEGACY ROOTED IN ONE FAMILY — AND MANY FUTURES

As the decades unfolded, Albertus women continued to press into spaces where women were rarely welcomed. Although women had earned law degrees as early as the 1920s, few were able to practice, let alone rise to the bench. Mary Goode Rogan ’36 pursued both.

“She promptly took her Albertus degree out for a drive directly down Prospect Street to Yale Law School, where she was one of only four women to earn a law degree in 1938,” says her great-niece Carolyn Behan, executive director of college events.

“Mary balanced raising six children with a demanding legal career and eventually served as a Superior Court judge for Los Angeles County until her retirement in 1990,” adds Behan, whose



Albertus history is women’s history. So much so, it inspired a book.

family legacy at Albertus stretches back to the inaugural class of 1928. “At all of about five-feet tall, she was both feared and revered.”



Ellen Bree Burns '44 became the first female District Judge in Connecticut.

BREAKING BARRIERS IN THE MID-CENTURY COURTS

A few graduating classes later, Ellen Bree Burns '44 would shatter multiple glass ceilings in Connecticut's judiciary. She became the state's first female Superior Court judge in 1974, its first female federal judge in 1978 and the first woman to serve as chief judge of the U.S. District Court of Connecticut.

“She was the first of many,” says Dr. Rosa E. Rivera-Hainaj,

vice president for academic affairs and dean of faculty. “I would put her firmly in the category of barrier-breaking individuals.”

Dr. Rivera-Hainaj notes that Burns' leadership was shaped in part by the expectations placed on Albertus students during World War II.

“The women at the college were keenly aware of what was happening in the world and felt obligated to do their part,” Dr. Rivera-Hainaj says, later citing Sister Mary Boniface Kriener in White's book. Kriener observed that there was, “a development in the maturity of mind on campus — a seriousness and a realization that college life meant hard work and future sacrifices.”



Margaret Heckler

MARGARET HECKLER AND THE POWER OF POLICY

One of the most nationally consequential Albertus alumnae is Margaret Heckler '32, whose life and career are chronicled in “A Woman of Firsts: Margaret Heckler, Political Trailblazer” by her daughter-in-law, Kim Heckler.

Margaret Heckler (O'Shaugnessy) built a far-reaching political career that spanned five presidential

administrations, working alongside Presidents Johnson, Nixon, Ford, Carter and Reagan. When she entered Congress in 1967, the barriers women faced were unmistakable. “Congress consisted of 70 men — and Margaret,” Kim Heckler says.

Margaret Heckler held numerous roles once considered unattainable for women, including becoming the first woman U.S. ambassador to Ireland. In this position, she was a trailblazer, organizing the first women's delegation from Congress to China. She also founded the first women's caucus in Congress and the first federalized hospice program — transforming end-of-life care into a Medicare benefit rather than a privilege reserved for those who could pay privately.

Her most enduring legislative legacy is the Equal Credit Opportunity Act of 1974, which gave women the legal right to obtain credit in their own names. “It was a significant and landmark piece



Kim Heckler is the author of “A Woman of Firsts” as her famous family member and Albertus alumnae, Margaret “Peggy” Heckler '32, inspired transformational change and established financial independence for women.

— not just socially, but financially and legally. That conviction was shaped by her education and by a college that taught women to think critically, ethically, and courageously.”

CARRYING THE LEGACY FORWARD



Chelsea Sherrod

Albertus' legacy of impact is not confined to its early decades. Contemporary alumnae continue to shape fields where women remain underrepresented, including sports media. Chelsea Sherrod '16 has already built a distinguished career in sports broadcasting.

Sherrod remains deeply connected to Albertus Magnus, mentoring students, visiting classes, serving on an intercollegiate athletics board committee and, most recently, returning to campus as keynote speaker for the 2024 Frangelico Leadership Luncheon.

“Albertus was founded on the belief that when women are educated, communities change,” says Dr. Rivera-Hainaj. “That truth has held for a hundred years — and it's still unfolding.”

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.

of legislation that changed the playing field for women,” says Kim Heckler. Margaret Heckler also co-sponsored Title IX, advancing gender equity in education, and elevated congressional focus on childcare and support for working women.

Margaret Heckler's influence extended beyond her own positions. Through private counsel, she persuaded President Ronald Reagan to appoint the first woman to the U.S. Supreme Court, Sandra Day O'Connor.


“Margaret understood policy as a tool for dignity,” Kim Heckler concludes. “She believed women deserved autonomy

TRAVEL

EUROPE IN THE SPOTLIGHT:

Why These Destinations Should Be on Your Radar This Year

By ANASTASIA MILLS HEALY



There are many compelling reasons to book a European vacation this year, such as seeing Notre Dame’s rebirth in Paris and celebrating the genius of Gaudí as Barcelona marks the centenary of his birth. Europe has 44 countries though! Here are some suggestions — two north and two south — for some less-visited spots with reasons to go now. >>

Baths of Aphrodite in Paphos, Cyprus.
Courtesy of Visit Cyprus.



Nissi Beach in Cyprus. Courtesy of Visit Cyprus.

CYPRUS

Cyprus is an appealing alternative to the crowded tourist areas of Greece. To the east of Crete, Cyprus is a large island in the eastern part of the Mediterranean near Turkey and Lebanon with gorgeous beaches, archaeological sites and mountainous regions. At the crossroads of Europe, Asia and Africa, it was a British territory until 1960 and is now a popular holiday spot for UK visitors. (It is important to note that Cypriots also drive on the left.) You won't encounter many other Americans. There are no direct flights from the U.S.; of the countries sending the most visitors, the United States comes in at number 13.

Experiencing only 40 rainy days a year, Cyprus is a sunny island with pristine beaches, resorts in places like Ammochostos and Larnaka, and clear water that entices divers with wrecks, a new underwater sculpture museum and new artificial reefs. Paphos is a UNESCO World Heritage site for its Roman and Greek temples, mosaics and other antiquities. You can find waterfalls, an 11th century monastery and painted Byzantine churches in the Troodos Mountains. Plan on visiting



A Byzantine painted church in Cyprus. Courtesy of Visit Cyprus.



Diving in Cyprus. Courtesy of Visit Cyprus.

medieval villages, wineries and a Knights Templar castle in Limassol, and thousands of flamingos at the Larnaka Salt Lake from November to March.

Nicosia, the island's capital, has an old section wrapped in Venetian fortifications and the modern Eleftheria Square designed by Zaha Hadid Architects. The city is divided between two countries. The Republic of Cyprus is in the European Union; the northern part of the island is occupied by Turkey. Look for flights that arrive at the Larnaca or Paphos airports.

Visit visitcyprus.com for more information.

COSTA BRAVA, SPAIN

Locals have protested the number of tourists in Barcelona, so an alternative is the Costa Brava, which is within day-trip distance. A coastline with hundreds of beaches like Lloret de Mar, fishing villages such as Cadaqués and cliffs with panoramic sea views, the Costa Brava also is known for art, archaeological sites and gastronomy. Salvador Dalí lived here and fans can see his homes, art and art subjects in The Dalí Triangle: Figueres, Portlligat and Púbol. The Greco-Roman ruins at Empúries is just one of 550 heritage sites in the Girona province. Girona's eponymous capital is known for its beautiful Jewish Quarter.

This region will already be on the radar of serious foodies as the home of star chefs Ferran Adrià and the Roca brothers as well as 13 Michelin-starred restaurants. El Bulli now exists as elBulli1846 in Roses and the three Roca brothers (a chef, a pastry chef and a sommelier) have blanketed Girona with epicurean experiences, including the three-star El Celler de Can Roca, which has made the list of the top restaurants in the world. Superlative food deserves to be paired with wine of the same stature. Vinophiles will want to check off at least a few of the 30 wineries on the DO Empordà Wine Route.

To work off the indulgences, it's easy to be active on the Costa Brava. Hike in the Pyrenees, kayak into sea caves, scuba dive at more than 60 sites, cycle picturesque paths, golf or skydive at Empuriabrava (one of the world's top parachuting centers). Ryan Air serves the Girona Airport and the Barcelona Airport is 62 miles away and connected via rail and bus.

Visit costabrava.org for more information.



Cyprus is known for its archaeological site. Courtesy of Visit Cyprus.



Serra Cavallera mountains in Ogassa. Credit: Toni-Vilches.-Arxiu-Imatges.



Cala de S'Alguer village in Palamós. Credit: Óscar-Vall.-Arxiu-Imatges-PTCBG.

ICELAND

This is a once-in-a-lifetime year for Iceland. On August 12, the island will be directly in the path of a total solar eclipse — the first visible from Reykjavík since 1433 and the last until 2196. Western regions like the Snæfellsnes Peninsula and Westfjords will experience more than two minutes of totality, celebrated with the four-day Iceland Eclipse Festival featuring music, astronomy events, glacier tunnels, lava-cave concerts and eclipse cruises positioned far from light pollution.

Iceland is in the most dramatic solar maximum in over a decade, bringing exceptionally frequent Northern Lights through at least 2029. Clear winter skies and rural hotels like Hotel Ranga (which has its own observatory) that have aurora wake-up calls make it one of the best periods in years to witness this otherworldly phenomenon.

Beyond the sky shows, Iceland delivers iconic landscapes: glaciers, volcanoes, black-sand beaches, geysers and waterfalls along routes like the Golden Circle and the epic Ring Road. Travelers can soak in geothermal lagoons in the wild or at destinations like the famous Blue Lagoon near the Reykjavík airport and the serene Sky Lagoon in the city.



Iceland Northern Lights over Hotel Ranga. Credit: Herman Desmet @shakemyview.



The sauna at Reykjavik's Sky Lagoon. Courtesy of Sky Lagoon.



Sky Lagoon in Reykjavik.
Courtesy of Sky Lagoon.

Reykjavík has also stepped into a new era with seven Michelin-recognized restaurants and stylish hotels like the Reykjavík Edition and Hotel Reykjavík Saga adding to the capital's bona fides.

Visit visiticeland.com for more information.

OULU, FINLAND

Oulu is the 2026 European Capital of Culture, a designation that is transforming this Arctic seaside city into one of Europe's most exciting creative hubs. More than 500 events, major new museums and innovative art trails are planned. Just south of the Arctic Circle on Finland's northwest shore, Oulu offers nature experiences with fresh air and water, 600 miles of bike paths, beaches on Hailuoto Island (one of the country's 50,000 islands — Finland has world's largest archipelago), forests and reindeer in Syöte National Park, and the dunes of the UNESCO Rokua Geopark. Winter brings snowshoeing, huskies and ice swimming. The midnight sun means more time for kayaking and hiking in summer. Sauna culture is strong year-round.

However, artistic culture is taking center stage. Highlights include the summer Solstice Festival at an Arctic fell where the sun never sets, the Climate Clock, a permanent eco-art route opening in June and an August dinner where hundreds of people eat at one communal table downtown. The beloved Air Guitar World Championships return, while Sámi exhibitions celebrate Europe's only Indigenous culture. In October, the vast, new Museum and Science Centre Tiima debuts with immersive galleries timed for peak aurora borealis viewing. Many art experiences incorporate technology like light art, sound installations, digital experiences and electronic music as Finland has a techie side and is the birthplace of Nokia.

Helsinki is well served by multiple airlines and cities; the flight from Helsinki to Oulu is only an hour. The compact city center is easy to explore on foot or by bike.

It is worth going to Oulu for arctic creativity, northern lights without crowds, sauna wellness, and a yearlong festival of art and innovation in one of the world's happiest countries.

Visit oulu2026.eu for more information.

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."



The Frozen People celebration in Oulu. Credit: Oulu2026 and Iina Tauriainen.



Electronic music is part of Oulu's European City of Culture celebrations. Credit: Oulu2026 & Harri Tarvainen.



Hundreds will gather for a communal dinner as part of the European Capital of Culture celebrations. Credit: Oulu2026 & Kevin Kallombo.



A FRESH SEASON FOR RETIREMENT PLANNING:

What to Do at Every Age

No matter your stage of life, thoughtful retirement planning helps turn long-term goals into long-term confidence. Whether you're building early habits or refining withdrawal strategies, each decade brings unique opportunities to move your financial plan forward. And with the guidance of a trusted advisor by your side, you don't have to navigate those decisions alone.

The Chelsea Groton Financial Services team believes that retirement readiness is a lifelong journey, and it's never too early or too late to make meaningful progress.

20s

Start smart and build strong habits

Your 20s are all about laying the foundation. Establishing consistent saving habits — even small ones — can have a powerful long-

term impact, thanks to compound growth. Be sure to set up automatic transfers each month, so money moves into savings accounts before you have the opportunity to spend it. And while retirement seems far away, be sure to start early with contributions to retirement accounts. Commit to gradually increasing your contributions as you're able to put you on the right track.

30s–40s

Take advantage of tax-advantaged accounts

By your 30s and 40s, life may include new family commitments, competing financial priorities and career growth. That's why maximizing tax-advantaged accounts becomes essential. Strategies like increasing retirement contributions, leveraging employer matches and considering HSAs can all help reduce your tax burden while boosting future savings.

50s–60s

Make catch-up contributions and review social security timing

As retirement gets closer, people in their 50s and 60s can benefit from catch-up contributions to help accelerate savings. It's also an ideal time to explore Social Security timing strategies to understand how claiming early or delaying benefits will impact your long-term income.

This life stage is also when individuals often face unexpected events that require adjustments to insurance, estate plans or long-term goals. "People may experience a change in marital status or a serious illness or disability. As they are understandably focused on navigating that situation, they may forget to share the change with their financial advisor, not realizing the impact these things can have on insurance coverage, estate planning and on strategies for reaching overall long-term financial goals," shares Al Dabiri, a VP at Chelsea Groton Financial Services and financial advisor for Osaic Institutions, Inc.

It's a reminder that even positive changes, such as paying off a mortgage or planning a major purchase, warrant revisiting your plan with a financial advisor to maintain alignment with your goals.

Retirees

Fine-tune withdrawal strategies

Retirement doesn't mean financial planning ends. It simply evolves. Retirees face the important task of determining how and when to draw from investment accounts, navigating Required Minimum Distributions (RMDs), and balancing income needs with long-term sustainability. Creating a thoughtful withdrawal strategy helps ensure your assets remain aligned with your spending priorities and lifestyle.

The power of partnership: why guidance matters

Across every stage of life, annual check-ins help ensure nothing slips through the cracks. "A regular

"A regular review helps us keep our clients' goals, risk tolerance and timelines aligned, especially as life changes..."

Paulette Retsinas

Vice President
Chelsea Groton Financial
Services

review helps us keep our clients' goals, risk tolerance and timelines aligned, especially as life changes," notes Paulette Retsinas, a VP at Chelsea Groton Financial Services and a financial advisor for Osaic Institutions, Inc. "These annual conversations help to identify life changes that may impact financial planning and empower clients to make informed decisions so they can move forward with confidence."

These ongoing touchpoints ensure your strategy reflects current circumstances, new opportunities and future plans. Having a professional ally can give you both accountability and greater confidence in your planning process.

Ready to take the next step?

Whether you're just starting out or optimizing a well-developed plan, the Chelsea Groton Financial Services team is ready to guide you through every chapter of your financial journey. If you're interested in scheduling an initial conversation or an annual review, contact 860-572-4040.



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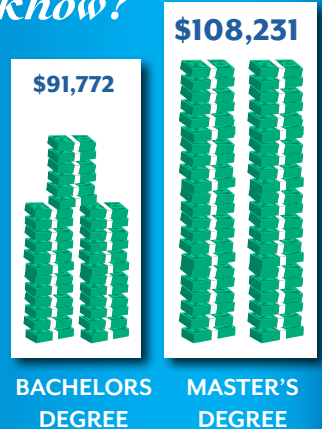


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Driven by Dedication to Excellence in Patient Care

Cornell Scott-Hill Health Center (CS-HHC) has a well-earned reputation for its dedicated, experienced professional staff with a passion to provide exemplary healthcare — essential not only for individuals and families, but for the region's quality of life. Comprehensive, integrated primary and specialty medical, dental and behavioral health solutions are provided to adults and children, strengthened by impactful community partnerships. CS-HHC served nearly 60,000 patients in 2025 and ranks in the top 10% of the nation's more than 1,500 community health centers.

Imperative to ensure quality healthcare

Quality primary care requires compassion, persistence, and a commitment that ensures everyone has access to and receives the care they need. That has never been more of an imperative than now, amid federal Affordable Care Act cutbacks and implementation of Medicaid work requirements; these changes would push costs beyond the ability to pay for thousands of people in our communities.

Foundation in support of mission earns support

CS-HHC is unwavering in its commitment to do everything possible to continue serving the health care needs of its patients, and those who turn to CS-HHC for care. To assist, the Cornell Scott Hill Health Center Foundation was established to broaden community support of the health center's mission.



The foundation has earned support from community partners, including Yale New Haven Health, and scores of area residents. It has received top-ranked Platinum status from Candid (formerly GuideStar), signifying transparency in fulfilling its mission. The foundation board and community members have an unwavering dedication to solid stewardship of contributed funds.

Patient Access Fund responds to increasing need

Contributions to the **Patient Access Fund** help subsidize the range of necessary medical and behavioral health services for patients. Every donation responds to the urgent need prompted by revisions to federal policies, uncertainty regarding continued access to healthcare coverage, and fears about the economic impact on families and losing access to basic health care services. *To donate, visit cornellscott.org/donate.*



"Our sustained high quality of healthcare services makes a life-changing difference in the lives of our neighbors, their families and our entire region," says Michael R. Taylor, CS-HHC's president and CEO. "We are determined to continue providing exceptional care. Invigorated community support will help enable us to assist our patients in navigating the way forward to better health."

The very first donors' story

Visionary philanthropists and community activists, Melanie Barocas Mayer and Rick Mayer, were impressed by CS-HHC's breadth and depth of services and the compelling need they fill for the center's patients. "We're passionate about health and wellness in our local communities," they explain. "That's why we were eager to support this important initiative that will meaningfully touch many of our neighbors and their families."

National recognition for quality care

CS-HHC's dedicated staff of over 700 earned recognition from the U.S. Health Resources and Services Administration in 2025 for delivering excellent outcomes, controlling per patient costs and deepening patient engagement through digital innovation. CS-HHC continues to expand and elevate transformative health initiatives, including training the next generation of healthcare professionals through academic partnerships. CS-HHC's comprehensive services include women's and men's health, pediatrics and senior care, dental and pharmacy, and school-based health centers in multiple communities. "Excellence is not just a goal, but a daily reality," says a CS-HHC nurse about the professional environment.

Advancing child and family guidance



Navigating childhood and adolescence can be challenging, with peer pressure, bullying, trauma, anxiety and depression. At CS-HHC's Child and Family Guidance (CFG), the support and tools to overcome these challenges are provided. A team of behavioral health professionals help children and teens through holistic individual, group and family therapy, with a range of services. Later this year, CFG will be relocating to a larger facility at ConnCAT Place in New Haven to serve more patients, particularly young adults.

Focused on Recovery and Wellness

CS-HHC's new Recovery & Wellness Center, on an expanded continuum of care campus in New Haven, offers a safe, short-term therapeutic living environment with integrated services, working with patients to interrupt the cycle of addiction, improve health and wellness, and achieve lasting positive changes in the lives of patients and their families.



Learn more at cornellscott.org.
To support the Patient Access Fund
or for tickets to upcoming events,
visit cornellscott.org/donate.



CSHHC Foundation Chair LindyLee Gold flanked by Shoreline residents Melanie Barocas Mayer and Rick Mayer.



UPCOMING EVENTS

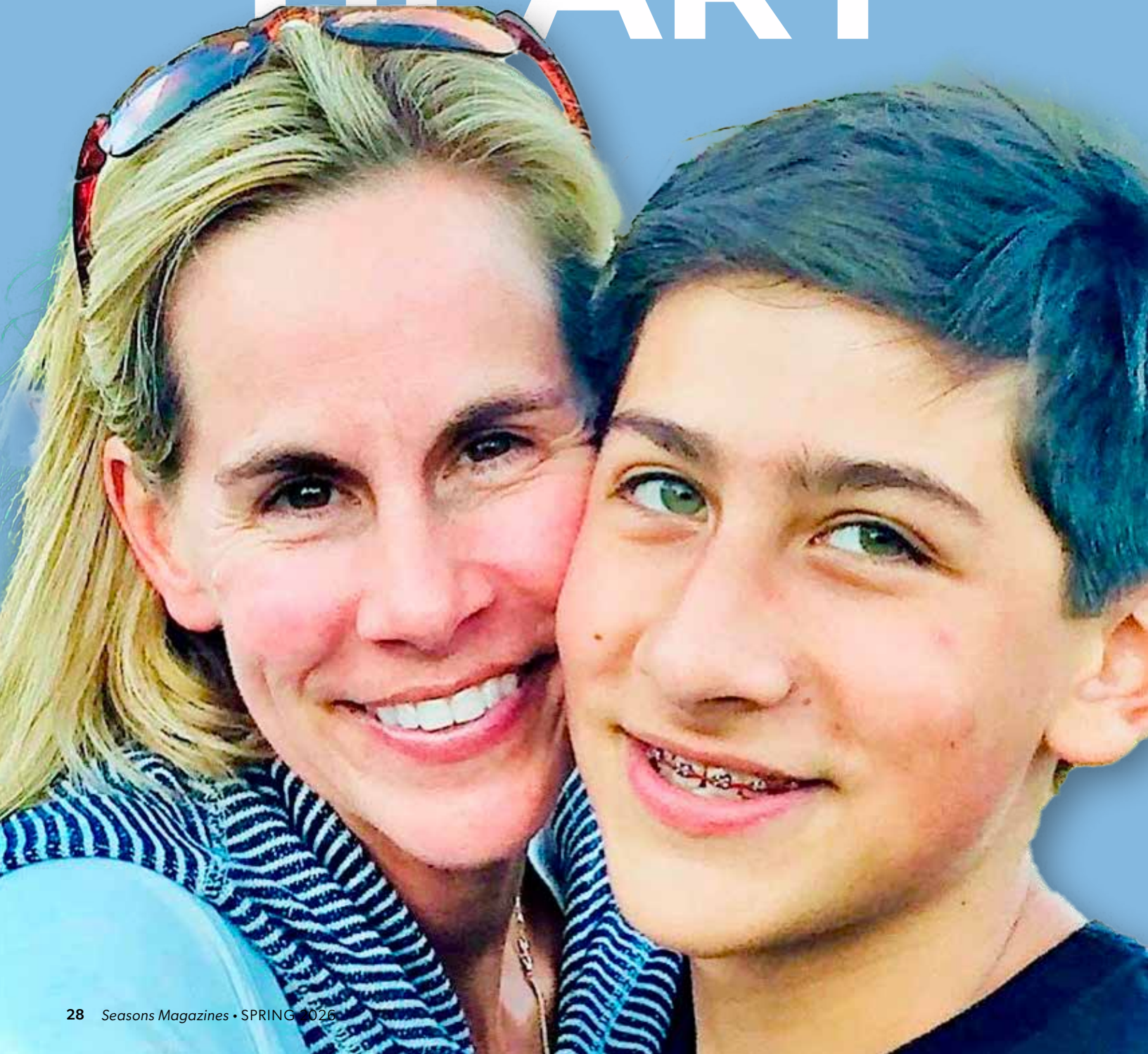
These events are a tangible beacon of hope for thousands of residents in Greater New Haven, the Shoreline and beyond.

The Cornell Scott Hill Health Center Foundation's second annual **Beacon of Hope Reception & Dinner** will take place on **June 10** at The Woodwinds in Branford to support CS-HHC's medical and behavior health services, co-chaired by LindyLee Gold, Hon. Jorge Perez and Deborah Dyett Desir, M.D.

On **May 3**, a special **Jazz Reception** in support of the Patient Access Fund will be held at The Old Lyme Inn, co-chaired by LindyLee Gold and Marna Wilber.

FEATURE

Connecticut Women Who Lead With
**VISION AND
HEART**



By ALIX BOYLE

It takes a leader to identify problems and come up with solutions. And it takes heart to lead with love and compassion. Here are four Connecticut women who are working on solving a variety of problems in business, philanthropy, social connection and legislative change.

KRISTIN SONG

Kristen Song of Guilford lost her son, Ethan, on January 31, 2018 when the 15-year-old went over to a friend's house and died from a gunshot wound to the head. The guns in the home were unsecured.



Kristin and Ethan Song. A motto describing her advocacy work.

“My journey of heartbreak is getting crowded,” says Song, referring to the increasing numbers of deaths of children by firearm. Guns are now the number one killer of children, and those deaths are preventable.

A mother of three and a lawyer by training, Song believes the best way to honor Ethan is to act to make children's lives better.

Shortly after his death, Song painted an “honor wall” in her office. On it, she wrote 50 things to do in Ethan's honor. The first was simply to get out of bed.

In less than a year, Song, along with her husband Mike and some supporters,

got Ethan's Law passed in Connecticut, mandating that all firearms, loaded or unloaded, must be safely stored to prevent access by kids under 18. The law also applies to guns stored in cars and homes. On what would have been Ethan's 16th birthday, the law was introduced at the federal level.

Song is working on getting safe storage laws passed state by state — like Bennie's Law in New Mexico — including in New Hampshire, Maine, Vermont, Rhode Island, Delaware, Virginia, New York, Nevada, New York, Washington, Oregon, Colorado, Connecticut, Maryland, Michigan and New Mexico passing

some form of a safe storage law. She's currently working on Illinois, Georgia, Pennsylvania, Minnesota and Wisconsin as well as strengthening the existing law in New York. “I did not work with every state; but through collective folks, we have raised the issue to be front and center,” explains Song.

The grief and heartbreak of losing a child never gets any easier, just different. “You wonder who they would be,” she says. “Would Ethan have been in love? Would he have followed his vision of the future with college, then the army, then marriage and seven kids? Ethan was deeply committed to

protecting marginalized people. He had empathy beyond his years.”

After Ethan died, one parent wrote to the Songs and told them how Ethan befriended their child, who was being picked on at school. Another said Ethan included a child with a disability at his lunch table. He fostered 95 dogs, took great pride in his Jewish heritage (his grandmother was a hidden child during the Holocaust) and was interested in helping veterans. The family established the Ethan Miller Song Foundation as a place to work on projects that help children and have some connection to Ethan.

“There's no manual for how to survive the death of a child,” says Song. “I was suicidal and action saved me.”

ELLEN SIUTA

With the increased reliance on social media to stay in touch, there are fewer opportunities to get out and meet people face-to-face for career networking or socializing. That's where the Town & County Club (T&C) in Hartford comes in. It's a third space — not home, not work — where women can come together to dine, attend a happy hour, learn from a speaker, or sit by the fire in the library with a glass of wine or cup of coffee.

Current president Ellen Siuta of Farmington aims to increase membership and to be inclusive, hoping to attract a wide variety of women. Currently, the women's club has about 200 members from their 30s to their 90s whose professions range from artists to doctors.

“The first thing I do is address what I can't do, what I need and who I need to empower,” Siuta states of her leadership style. “As women leaders, we have to identify our gifts, but also our weaknesses. And I am okay with identifying my weaknesses. I have a wonderful partner in our general manager, and I believe in letting her do her job.”

Loving the people and the organization is key. “I love the women



Ellen Siuta at the Town & County Club in Hartford with guest speaker Lhakpa Sherpa, a Nepalese mountain climber who summited Mount Everest 10 times. She is the subject of a Netflix documentary and holds the world record for most summits by a woman.

here,” she says. “Once I took over as president, I feel like they’re all my friends, and I’m responsible for them. I’m very appreciative of the women that helped me, because you can’t you lead alone.”

In addition to being focused on attracting new members and retaining current ones, Siuta is also marketing and rebranding the club. She created a marketing committee and recently oversaw a new website launch.

Founded in 1925 by a group of suffragists, the club is located in the Lyman House on Woodland Street, a stone’s throw from the Mark Twain

House. In addition to events and activities, it offers workspaces and overnight guest rooms, including one called the Barbara Bush room.

Siuta was wrapping up her tenure as chair of the Farmington Board of Education when a friend, who was a T&C member, suggested she get involved.

“Because we’re a sisterhood here, there’s a natural networking that happens all the time. Because we’re always looking out for each other,” Siuta continues. “We’ll always pull up a chair for you.”

KAREN DUBOIS-WALTON

As president and CEO of the Community Foundation for Greater New Haven, Karen Dubois-Walton is responsible for a \$700 million endowment that distributes \$30 million a year to nonprofits in the 20-town area in and around New Haven. She leads a staff of 48. But more than dollars and cents, Dubois-Walton is using her background as a clinical psychologist to bring people together, both inside and outside the organization.

“We had a day of racial healing after the Martin Luther King holiday,” she says. “These three floors were buzzing with people who came together around what we think builds strong community. Especially in times when there’s so much division at the national level, or even locally, it’s a time where community foundations are particularly well-positioned to try to build civic health, build a sense of connection and community.”

Many of the grants the foundation makes are to organizations that help with basic living needs like food pantries as well as organizations that help immigrants, like IRIS and Junta for Progressive Action.

One year into the job, Dubois-Walton has implemented a new strategic framework. She’s building the competency of the people who work at the community foundation in their knowledge of philanthropy as well as their knowledge of the communities they serve, helping them understand and live the core values of the organization and to understand their own strengths and the strengths of those around them.

“Leadership is about the ability to inspire others to want to learn more, do more, be more, become more. And that happens through people, not through the book I gave you, not through the course that I that I gave you, right? But it’s through that connection. And I also lead through an equity lens.”

Employees need to understand the 20 towns they serve because they are very different places.

“You have to understand and live our core values, because we say very colloquially, ‘we need to be who we



Karen Dubois-Walton chatting at the day of racial healing at the Community Foundation for Greater New Haven.

say we be,” Dubois-Walton says.

Small businesses can also receive help from the foundation. Dubois-Walton noticed that the foundation was not serving many Latino businesses, so she sent foundation staff down to Grand Avenue in New Haven, which is known for new immigrant and Latino businesses. They went literally door to door with Spanish-speaking staff, talking to business owners about what they could take advantage of. A few bakeries, barbershops and restaurants took them up on it.

“Our people are our greatest resource,” she concludes.

MARIETTA LEE

Marietta Lee, CEO of the Lee Company, which manufactures parts for the aerospace, medical and automotive industries, is on a hiring blitz.

In Connecticut, there are about 73,000 open jobs. But the labor force is shrinking, Lee says.

“People are moving out of state. People are retiring from the labor force, and if you hired every single unemployed person in the state there would still be job openings,” she explains. “Connecticut needs to attract more workers.”

The Lee Company offers a generous salary and benefits package, including profit sharing and a contribution toward daycare. But there is a crisis of affordable housing and day care in Connecticut. Until that is solved, potential employees won’t want to work here, she says. “We can make change, but I think it’s slow. I think things have to start happening now. Multifamily homes and apartment buildings need to be built now in order to have any positive impact within this decade.”

Lee, 56, has worked at the company her grandfather founded in the 1950s for 25 years, three as CEO. Among other things, the company is known for the Lee plug, a part that inserts into a hole in an airplane manifold.

“Any airplane that flies in the free world probably has hundreds, if not thousands, of our parts in them. You never see them. You don’t know that they’re there, but we’re sort of everywhere. Most of the parts are in critical applications so we go for the highest quality parts, zero defects, because any failure could be catastrophic,” she says.

A former newscaster with a law degree and a master’s in engineering management, she leads 1,100



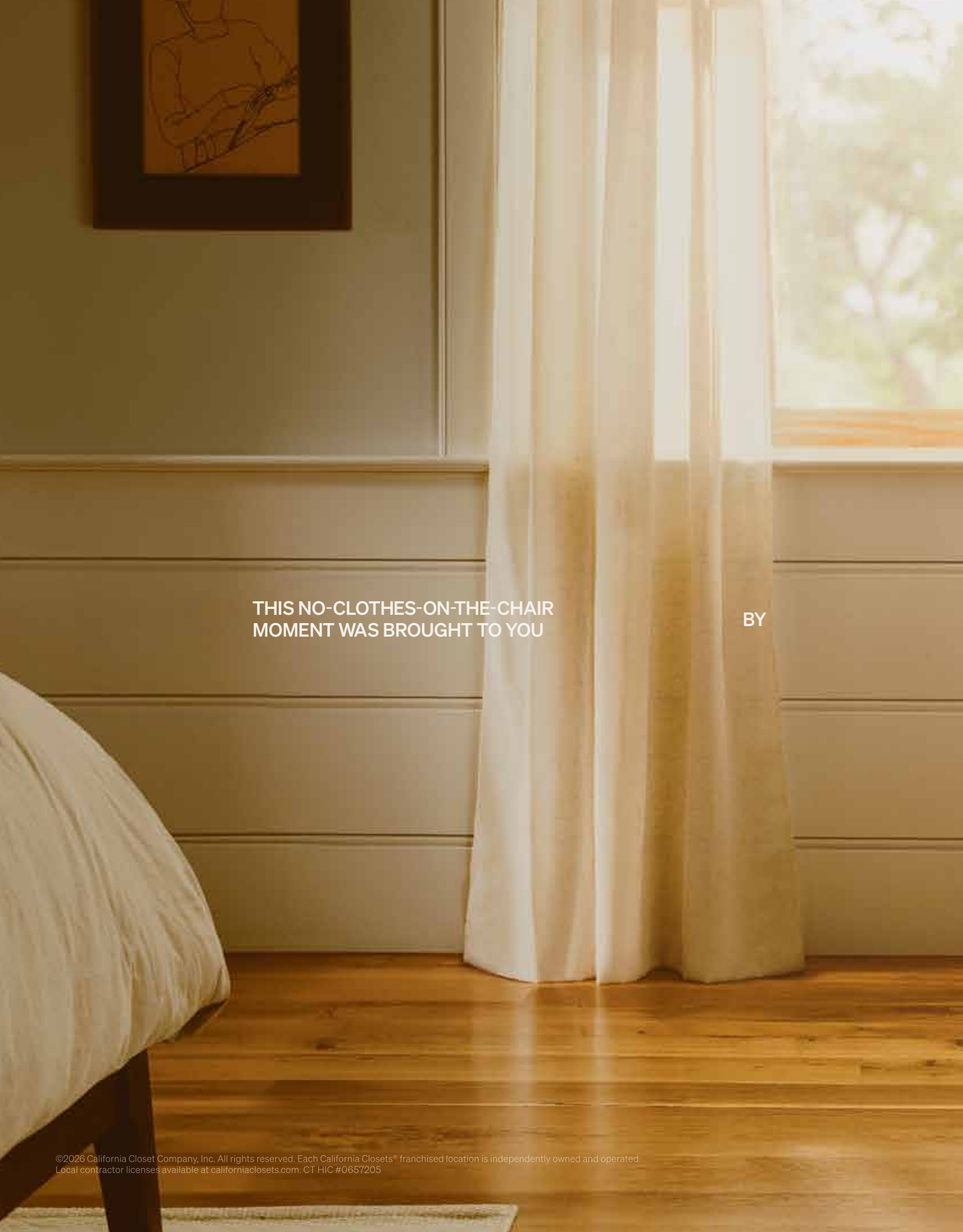
Marietta Lee

employees in Connecticut. The company has sales offices around the world. Women CEOs are rare in her industry.

“I try my hardest to surround myself with people who are smarter than me. I am the first one to acknowledge that I don’t know all the answers, but I have a team of people behind me who do. I want them to challenge me if I’m doing something that they disagree with,” she describes about her leadership style.

And when she retires, Lee states she would love to run for office.

“I have so much respect for the politicians who dedicate their lives to public service, because change is slow,” she concludes. “It took the state a long time to get in the mess that they’re in, and it’s gonna take us a long time to get out of it.” ■

A photograph of a room with a window, white curtains, a chair, and a framed picture on the wall. The room has light-colored walls with horizontal paneling and a wooden floor. A white chair is partially visible on the left. A framed picture hangs on the wall to the left of the window. The window is covered with white curtains, and a view of trees is visible through the window.

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A modern wooden armchair with a brown cushion is positioned in a sunlit room. The chair is the central focus, with its dark wood frame and thick, tufted brown seat and backrest. The room features light-colored walls with a decorative chair rail, a window with sheer white curtains on the left, and a framed abstract painting on the wall behind the chair. The lighting is warm and natural, creating a serene atmosphere.

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AT HOME

with KERRI-LEE

Bring In Spring!

Early Spring Ways to Invite Greenery Indoors

By Kerri-Lee Mayland

Early spring is less about full bloom and more about promise. The light shifts, we open windows for a few minutes at a time, and we start craving signs of life indoors — even if the ground outside isn't ready yet. I often find myself begging Mother Nature, in her brown, bleak and bland era, to please give us just a hint of green. Even a little.

This in-between moment is when strategically placed small, intentional plantings make the biggest impact.

Rather than waiting for the garden, early spring is the perfect time to work with nature on a smaller scale — thoughtfully, and often by hand. I'm a big believer in putting your hands in the dirt, not just to create, but to lift your spirits. There's actually science behind it. Contact with soil — specifically a naturally occurring bacteria called *Mycobacterium vaccae* — has been shown to trigger the release of serotonin in the brain. Serotonin, often called the "happy chemical," acts as a natural antidepressant and can even support the immune system. It's a win-win. But how do we bring that indoors?



Kokedama, a living sculpture

Kokedama, a Japanese planting technique that loosely translates to "moss ball," is one of the most elegant and practical ways to bring greenery indoors early in the season. Part plant, part sculpture, kokedama can rest in a shallow bowl or be suspended in the air, allowing nature to quite literally float into your space.

What makes kokedama so appealing is its restraint. There's no pot, no excess soil, no visual clutter — just roots, moss and form. In early spring, when homes are shedding layers, kokedama feels especially on brand.

Choose plants that enjoy moisture and indirect light: ferns, ivy, pothos, philodendron or even small hosta starts work beautifully. Displayed alone or grouped together, they feel organic without feeling overly decorative.

HOW TO

Make a simple kokedama

What you'll need:

- One small plant
- Potting soil
- Peat moss or bonsai soil (for structure)
- Sheet moss (available at garden centers or floral shops)
- Cotton twine or fishing line
- Bowl of water

Step-by-step

- Prepare the soil. Mix potting soil with peat moss until it holds together when squeezed but isn't muddy.
- Remove the plant. Gently take the plant out of its nursery pot and loosen the roots slightly.
- Form the ball. Pack the soil mixture around the roots, shaping it into a firm ball roughly the size of a grapefruit.
- Wrap with moss. Soak the sheet moss briefly, then wrap it around the soil ball, covering it completely.

- Secure gently. Wrap twine or fishing line around the moss to hold everything in place. Keep it snug, not tight.
- Water thoroughly. Submerge the finished kokedama in water until air bubbles stop rising. Let it drain well.

How to display

Place in a favorite shallow ceramic bowl or hang from a hook near a window with bright, indirect light, using the wrapped twine.

Care tip

Water every one to two weeks by soaking; spritzing won't do the trick. If the moss feels dry or lightweight, it's time to water again.

Other easy early spring plantings Kokedama pairs beautifully with other low-effort spring signals. Forced bulbs in shallow bowls, pots of rosemary or thyme on a windowsill, or clipped branches placed in water all help bridge the gap between winter and true spring.

Think less about arrangements and more about placement. Try one living element per room, a good design principle to integrate. (And for the plant-challenged among us, faux is OK in a pinch.) A kokedama, forced bulb or herb placed on

a nightstand, kitchen shelf or bathroom counter can quietly shift the mood of the entire home.

Let materials do the talking Early spring greenery feels best when paired with natural materials, such as stoneware, wood, linen and iron. Avoid glossy finishes and let texture take the lead. The quieter the vessel, the more powerful the plant.

A season of momentum

Early spring is brimming with anticipation, but it doesn't need to be bold. It asks for patience, intention and small acts of care. Bringing nature indoors now isn't about decorating as much as it is about noticing, nurturing and allowing your home to reflect the miracle quietly beginning outside.

Sometimes the simplest gesture — a plant wrapped in moss, resting in a simple bowl — is enough to remind us that the magic of spring is coming and growth is already underway. 🌱

Here's to a fresh and fabulous spring!

Keri-lee
KK



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Parenting in the Digital World: Fostering Confidence and Competence

Written and photographed by AUBREY SCHMALLE

Most parents have a simple goal for their children: to grow up happy, healthy and successful in life. The challenge is that all the research shows that children are experiencing greater struggles with emotional regulation, learning, social skills and developing independence than ever before. So how are the early experiences of Gen Z and Gen Alpha different from those of Gen X or even Gen Y? They didn't have a screen free childhood. Because humans are multisensory beings who thrive on movement and human interaction, the shift to engaging more with devices than the physical world and people has had major developmental consequences.

So, what should parents do? There are five key pillars around which parents can focus their energy to raise confident and competent children, ready to become the next generation of leaders and creators. None of them involve learning how to use AI. Children will figure that out. They are about setting up family habits and routines that foster the uniquely human skills that can't be outsourced to artificial intelligence.

PILLAR #1

Save yourself first

It's easy to see the glaring impact of excessive screen time on children, but equally important to reflect on the role adult screen use plays. Parents are encouraged to notice how often they engage with their phone, tablet, computer or smart watch to send a text message, answer work emails, coordinate playdates, scroll social

media, play a game, place an order, read a book, look up information, pay someone or listen to music. While these tasks have become commonplace in today's digital world, children watch adult behaviors closely. Over time, the minutes pile up, stretching into years. Once parents start noticing their own habits, they can reflect on how to be more intentional about presence when it matters most. For a parent who realizes that putting down the phone is especially difficult, it may be valuable

and practice presence. When children see parents choosing them over devices, they are more likely to model those choices in their own lives.

PILLAR #2

Connect and collaborate

The next step is showing up intentionally, even if it's only 15-20 minutes a day, to play with children or engage in meaningful conversations away from technology. When space is



to explore low-tech alternatives. Checking email in the pick-up line? No big deal. But limiting multi-tasking on a phone during times like meal preparation can create meaningful opportunities for connection and family interactions. While every family's situation is unique, there are always opportunities to show up intentionally

created for face-to-face interactions, children learn social skills such as how to read body language and the value of eye contact. Social media has long been a space where people chase significance, even when it carries the risk of judgement and trolling. Now the digital generation is turning to chatbots for relationships

instead of relationships with other people. Chatbots that feign real emotional intimacy are not where children will learn the social skills that allow them to build meaningful relationships with others or effectively collaborate in classrooms and on teams. Instead, involving children in household chores and playing together build the critical skills they need to connect and contribute to a community. In a world where artificial intelligence is trying to blur the lines between real life and the online world, parents must be intentional about creating as many micro opportunities as possible to build social skills, communication and emotional intelligence.

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PILLAR #3

Move with a purpose

After families begin practicing presence and collaborating with their children, the next step is being more intentional about how movement is built into daily life. Active or athletic families have a head start. But there is still room for growth. Research identifies three categories of movement that provide the greatest benefits for self-regulation, brain development and adaptability. First, rhythmic movement combined with breathing and/or pressure reduces stress hormones in the body that trigger cell death and shrink the limbic system, the part of the brain responsible for regulating emotions. Second, movement that increases heart rate and blood flow triggers the production of brain derived neurotropic factor (BDNF), promoting new connections in the brain. Once stress is reduced and brain growth is supported, the third type of movement sets the stage for building adaptability: goal-directed movement. Simple activities like keeping a balloon in the air as long as possible or as complicated as playing ice hockey foster the ability to move intentionally through the world. Every goal-directed game usually involves some degree of hand-



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eye coordination. Just adding a few small movements between homework assignments can make a difference if done consistently. Check out the Body Activated Learning Playlist @SensationalAchievements on Youtube to learn more.

PILLAR #4

Learn and grow sensationally

One of the most glaring shifts affecting children growing up in a digital world is the decline in hands-on learning tools. Schools purchase online reading and math programs that they encourage families to use at home. Everyday objects have been replaced by modern conveniences such as Apple Wallet, Spotify and camera apps. Each replacement reduces the number of opportunities for multisensory experiences essential for building the complex connections in the brain needed for thinking, reasoning and problem-solving. Returning to paper and pencil to build written communication skills, regularly checking out books from the local library to improve encoding of new information in the brain, and carrying cash around so children can understand that money does not exist in endless supply with the tap of a phone are small but important steps parents can take. Sweden publicly announced their return to cellphone-

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free classrooms, paper and books after watching their test scores decline steadily with excessive technology use. Parents in America are encouraged to not only advocate for the same but intentionally facilitate sensory-rich learning opportunities daily for their children.

PILLAR #5

Build digital awareness and safety

Children are great lobbyists when they want a cellphone, especially when friends start to disappear into their screens leaving them feeling alone in the same room. Children convince themselves and their parents that not being on social media or in chat rooms leaves them out of important social conversations and disconnects them from their peers. When parents give their child a cellphone, it's the part of the internet they don't talk about that becomes the most dangerous. Privacy controls and legal safeguards are insufficient to protect a child from online bullying and child predators. Parents must make it their business to protect their children, not just through parental controls, but through frequent conversations about the good, the bad and the ugly of life online. This includes discussing privacy, red flags in people's online behaviors and emotional readiness for online

interactions without direct supervision. The most critical safeguard is making sure parents have built a foundation of trust and compassion using pillars one and two. If a child feels safe enough to reach out to a parent when something negative happens online, families can take action together.

Final thoughts

Letting industry and consumerism drive child development sets children up to be consumers and followers of algorithms, vulnerable to the darker side of the digital and online world. Raising confident, competent and empowered children requires awareness of the way that children experience the world and intention. When children experience the right combination of multisensory opportunities and face-to-face interactions often enough, they can develop the uniquely human skills necessary to become the leaders and creators of tomorrow. 📖

Aubrey Schmalte, OTR/L is a sensory integrative occupational therapist committed to empowering families and children to thrive in today's fast-paced, digital world. She is the author of "Uniquely Human: Raising Leaders" and "Creators in an AI World."



Get Up and Get Out: Spring is Here!

By KIM LUCEY

As the days grow longer and temperatures rise, spring brings more than just blooming landscapes. It offers an opportunity to reset both physically and mentally. After a long New England winter, this seasonal shift can have a meaningful impact on mood, energy and overall well-being. And sometimes it starts with your first step outside.

GET OUTSIDE AND RECONNECT WITH NATURE

One of spring's greatest wellness benefits is the return of sunlight. Longer days and warmer temperatures make it easier to spend time outdoors, whether that means walking, biking, gardening or simply enjoying a cup of coffee on the deck.

"There's a real chemical component to being outdoors," says Dr. Michelle DiBlasi, chief of inpatient psychiatry at Tufts Medical Center. "Sunlight exposure allows the body to produce vitamin D, which is essential for serotonin pathways in the brain and helps stabilize and improve mood." Many people in New England experience low

vitamin D levels during the winter months due to limited sunlight. Dr. DiBlasi notes that as people spend more time outside in spring and summer, those levels often improve naturally. "Being outdoors is critical to our overall well-being," she says. "Exercise has significant connections to improving mood, and as the weather gets better, people also tend to be more social. That combination helps keep loneliness at bay."

TAKE A SPRING HIKE

Hiking is one of the simplest ways to combine movement, sunlight and time in nature. In spring, trails come alive with flowing water, budding trees and wildlife, offering both physical and mental benefits. "Even moderate physical activity can significantly improve mood," Dr. DiBlasi explains. "It does not have to be intense. Getting outside, moving your body and engaging your senses can have a powerful effect."

Spring is also a great time to take advantage of the natural byproduct of the big thaw: flowing streams, rivers and waterfalls. State officials say Connecticut is home to more than 5,800 miles of rivers and streams, including several



Chapman Falls at Devils Hopyard State Park. Credit: CT DEEP





Wadsworth Falls. Credit: CT DEEP

federally designated wild and scenic river systems, such as sections of the Farmington River watershed. “Springtime is an especially good time of year to explore our parks, particularly if you are interested in waterfalls,” says Brian Wilson, director of the state parks and public outreach division of the Connecticut Department of Energy & Environmental Protection. “Seasonal runoff really brings these sites to life.”

Here’s some of Wilson’s spring hiking recommendations you may not have heard of before (and some you probably have):

Campbell Falls State Park (Norfolk)

Off the beaten path and one of the most scenic waterfalls in the northwest corner of the state, Wilson describes Campbell Falls as a hidden gem.

Southford Falls State Park (Southbury)

Though relatively small, this park

offers about two miles of trails and features a covered bridge, observation tower, and picnic gazebo, making it a great option for families.

Devil’s Hopyard State Park (East Haddam)

Home to Chapman Falls, which drops more than 60 feet over a series of rocky steps, Wilson says, “this park really gives off a wild and mysterious vibe, riddled with rocks and stones.” It is especially striking in spring.

Wadsworth Falls State Park (Middlefield and Middletown)

Offering 4.5 miles of trails along the Coginchaug River, visitors can opt for a short walk to the falls from the parking area or enter from the main park entrance and put in some steps throughout the trail system.

Kent Falls State Park (Kent)

No secret here! This long-time favorite features a short trail that parallels the cascading Kent Falls and connects to a larger trail network. It is also a popular picnic spot.

Southford Falls State Park.
Credit: CT DEEP



Mad River. Credit: Kim Lucey

And if that's not enough...

In addition to state park locations, Wolcott's Peterson Park features a fantastic hike along the Mad River. Just a short walk away from the trailhead at a graffitied skate park, the scenery quickly changes to serene beauty; the Mad River flows around moss-covered rocks under a canopy of trees, making it feel like you've been transported to a fairy tale. The blue-blazed trail is part of the 42-mile Mattatuck Trail system, so hikers can decide just how long they'd like to hike out and back. And, if you're more into biking than hiking, the Air Line State Park Trail is lovely in all seasons, but especially in spring. It's a 50-mile rail trail route stretching across eastern Connecticut from Thompson to Portland crossing several babbling brooks, also providing easy access to Grayville Falls Town Park in Amston. While more of a cascade than waterfall, the spring surge still provides a nice sound, and a welcome lunch spot or break along the path.



Campbell Falls. Credit: CT DEEP

Here's a fun fact: this former railway got its name not from air travel, but instead from drawing an imaginary line in the air from New York to Boston, hence "air line."

PROGRAMS, EVENTS AND FAMILY-FRIENDLY FUN

If your family is trying to ease back into outdoor life, consider some Connecticut state parks that offer both indoor and outdoor programming. Education centers such as Dinosaur State Park in Rocky Hill, Meigs Point Nature Center at Hammonasset Beach State Park in Madison and the Kellogg Environmental Center in Derby offer year-round opportunities for both indoor and outdoor learning. Parks also regularly host educator-based programs, including bird walks, amphibian and reptile shows, and other nature-focused activities. 2026 will also feature the Sky's the Limit Hiking Challenge, kicking off around Memorial Day. "This year's theme will be celebrating America 250," says Wilson, "highlighting many of the culturally rich sites within our state park system." Keep an eye out for this year's chosen trails by Connecticut's DEEP. If hikers complete the challenge, they're eligible for several prizes.

A SEASON FOR SIMPLE RENEWALS

Spring wellness does not require dramatic changes or rigid goals. It begins with stepping outside, moving a little more, and paying attention to what your body and mind need as the season shifts. Whether it is a walk to a nearby waterfall, a visit to a state park or simply reconnecting with friends at your local playground, these small, intentional choices work together to support both physical and mental health. As spring unfolds, it offers a natural reminder that renewal can be simple, accessible and built into everyday life.

More information about these parks and others can be found at CTParks.com. 📍

Kim Lucey 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.



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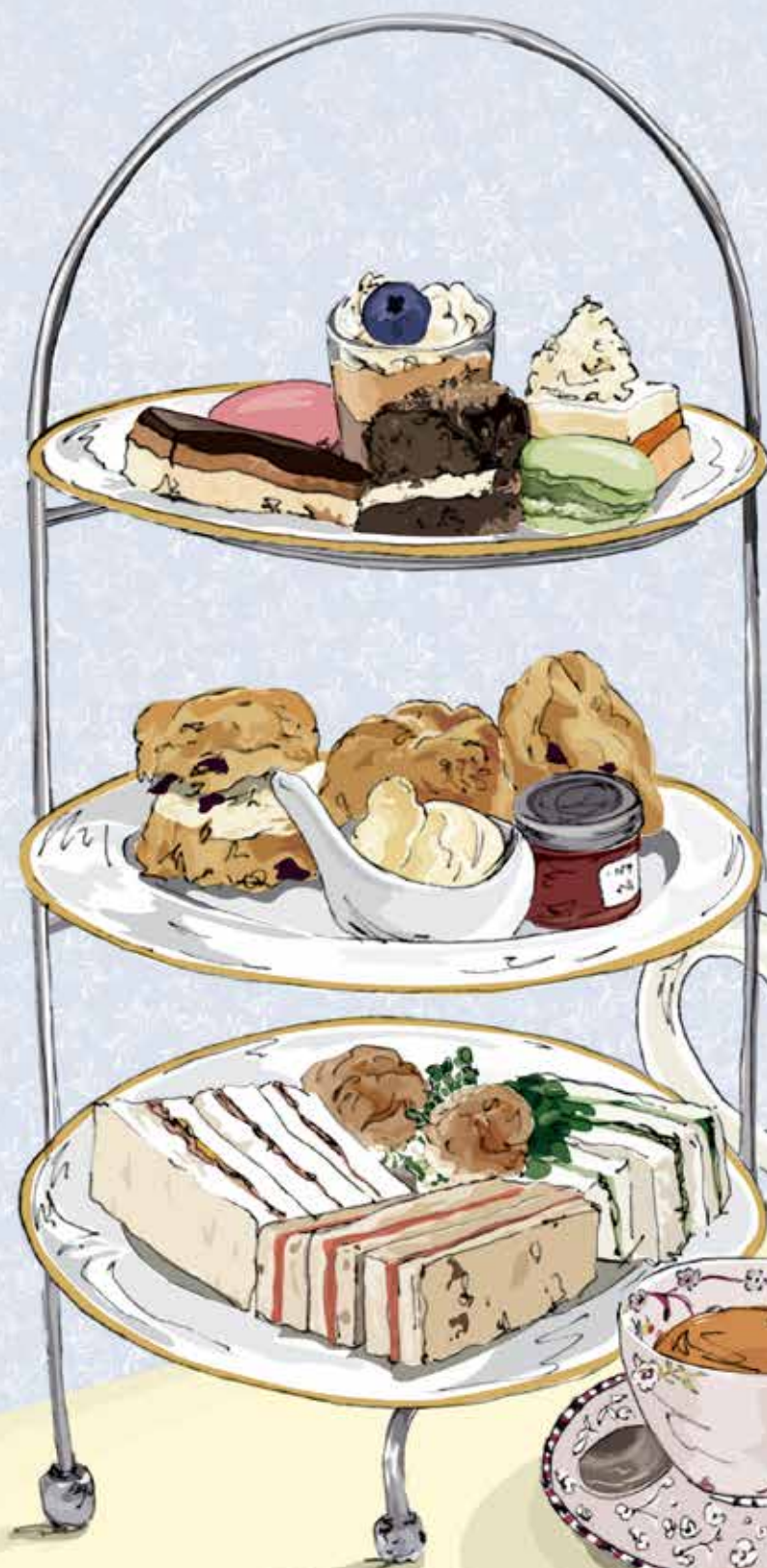
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While steeped in British tradition, today's tea ditches the gowns and gloves and blends in both sweet and savory offerings featuring modern flavor profiles.





THE ART OF
AFTERNOON
TEA
IN CONNECTICUT

By AMY WHITE

Few traditions capture elegance and comfort quite like afternoon tea — just ask any fan of “Bridgerton.”

This cherished ritual originated in Victorian England, when, according to stories, the seventh Duchess of Bedford found herself hungry around four in the afternoon as she wiled away the time waiting for her eight o’clock dinner. The duchess got into the daily habit of requesting that servants deliver tea, bread and cake to her chambers; eventually she began to invite friends to join her. The fashion spread, and soon most upper-class ladies were bridging the long hours between lunch and dinner wearing gowns and gloves while enjoying their cups, some sweets and tea talk. Ever since, afternoon or “high” tea has evolved into a symbol of grace, indulgence and, yes, lively conversation. With plated tiers of delicate crustless sandwiches, warm soft scones, and lavish cakes and bars served alongside steaming hot and fragrant tea in fine China cups, afternoon tea remains an experience in balance — sophisticated yet cozy, structured yet leisurely, fancy yet familiar.

While steeped in British tradition, today’s tea ditches the gowns and gloves and blends in both sweet and savory offerings featuring modern flavor profiles. Start with some classic finger sandwiches, daintily served on soft white bread, with crusts trimmed away, cut on the diagonal or into rectangular strips. Feel free to make the fillings ahead but refrain from assembling them until right before serving to avoid sogginess. Don’t forget scones! Chef Karrigan Pothier, pastry

chef and baking instructor at Forge City Works’ Fire by Forge in Hartford, gives up her secret recipe for a savory butternut, goat cheese and scallion version. Finally,

finish off with a sweet taste. Chef Carlos Perez of Litchfield’s @TheCorner and ATC South St. shares his lemon meringue tarts, while the LuAnn’s Bakery family, which operates locations in Ellington, Stafford Springs and (coming soon) Hartford, reveals founder LuAnn Hoffman’s own raspberry coconut bars. Finally, Catera Harrigan of Open Door Tea in Stratford suggests perfect tea pairings along with steeping directions to go with our chefs’ recipes.

If entertaining at home isn’t your bag, there are tea rooms of every shape and size in every county of the Nutmeg State, all of which will encourage you to stop, steep, savor and stay a while this spring. Some hold afternoon tea regularly, while others host special tea events. Be sure to check their websites and/or social media pages to confirm dates and times, and to make reservations, as they tend to sell out quickly.

Whether hosting tea at home or stepping out with friends, we hope this guide will help turn any ordinary spring afternoon into something tea-riffic. Pinkies up!

FIVE CLASSICALLY SIMPLE TEA SANDWICH IDEAS

- Cucumber and cream cheese with mint
- Egg salad with chives
- Smoked salmon with dill
- Ham and cheese with butter
- Bacon and watercress



BUTTERNUT GOAT CHEESE AND SCALLION SCONES

Recipe courtesy of Chef Karrigan Pothier of Fire by Forge, Hartford

Makes 8 scones

Ingredients

- 3 cups flour
- 1½ tablespoons baking powder
- 1 tablespoon granulated sugar
- ¼ teaspoons salt
- 1 teaspoon ground cinnamon
- ½ teaspoon ground ginger
- ½ teaspoon nutmeg
- ½ pound unsalted butter, cold and cubed
- 6 ounces cream cheese, cold and cubed
- 2 eggs
- ¼ cup whole milk
- ½ cup butternut squash puree, cold
- ½ cup crumbled goat cheese
- ¼ cup scallions, sliced

Directions

Whisk all the dry ingredients together in a large bowl and set aside.

Add the cubed-up butter and cream cheese to the dry mix. Cut the fat into the dry with your fingertips or a pastry cutter until the mix resembles wet sand with some small chunks remaining.

Fold in the goat cheese and scallions.

Whisk together the eggs, milk and butternut puree. Fold into the scone mix.

Knead very gently until the dough comes together. Form a ball and slightly flatten into a puck shape. Divide evenly into eight triangles.

Bake at 350°F for 15-25 minutes or until golden brown.

OPEN DOOR TEA PAIRINGS

Courtesy of Catera Harrigan, Open Door Tea, Stratford

Recommendation: 1 teaspoon of tea for every 6 ounces of water.

Cranberry Orange: An interesting fruit blend to balance out the overall savoriness of the scone. Tisanes (herbal teas) have the benefit of simplistic brewing. Water temperature should be at a rolling boil (212°F). Steep for 5-8 minutes.

Peach Oolong: A tea with fruitiness that will complement the scone and also has a mellow and smooth body. The water temperature should be slightly cooler than boiling (around 185°F-190°F), with the steeping duration slightly shorter (3-4 minutes) than herbal or black tea.



Photo by Karrigan Pothier

RASPBERRY-COCONUT BARS

Recipe courtesy of LuAnn's Bakery and Café

Makes 12-16 bars

Ingredients for the crust

- 2 cups graham cracker crumbs**
- ¼ cup granulated sugar**
- ½ cup melted butter**

Directions

Mix together the crumbs and sugar in a medium bowl. Drizzle in the melted butter and stir until well incorporated. Press the mixture into the bottom of a 13x9-inch baking dish.

Ingredients for the top of the bar

- 1 cup sweetened condensed milk**
- 1¼ cups raspberry preserves**
- 1½ cups shredded sweetened coconut**
- 1 cup white chocolate chips**

Directions

Heat oven to 325°F. Mix together all ingredients above and spread evenly over the crust. Bake for about 30 minutes until the edges are golden brown and the middle is set. Allow to cool completely before cutting.



OPEN DOOR TEA PAIRING

*Courtesy of Catera Harrigan,
Open Door Tea, Stratford*

Assam Black: This tea's rich boldness will pair well with the fruitiness of the raspberry coconut bar, especially if mixed with cream or milk for a smoother finish. Black teas are usually best enjoyed bold and earthy. To obtain the flavorful notes, steep 1 teaspoon of tea for every 6 ounces of hot water ranging from 195°F-212°F. It will take 3-5 minutes to see the appropriate malty and caramel hues in completed steeped black tea.





OPEN DOOR TEA PAIRING

*Courtesy of Catera Harrigan,
Open Door Tea, Stratford*

Earl Grey Darling: A black tea that will add to the citrus flavor present in the tart alongside a subtle creamy vanilla taste. Black teas are usually best enjoyed bold and earthy.

To obtain the flavorful notes, steep 1 teaspoon per 6 ounces of hot water ranging from 195°F-212°F. It will take 3-5 minutes to see the appropriate malty and caramel hues in completed steeped black tea.

Vanilla Creme Oolong: This tea will bring a smooth and elegant experience to the tart that is a bit less punchy than the Earl Grey Darling. The vanilla creme is smooth and elegant. Keep the 1 teaspoon of tea to 6 ounces of water ratio, but with the water temperature slightly cooler around 185°F-190°F and steeping time between 3-4 minutes.



Photo by Lisa Nichols of Bread and Beast Photography.

LEMON MERINGUE TARTS

Recipe courtesy of Chef Carlos Perez of @The Corner and ATC South St., Litchfield

Makes 4 tarts

Ingredients to make the dough

- 1¼ cups all-purpose flour
- ¼ cup granulated sugar
- ¼ teaspoon salt
- ½ cup unsalted butter, cold and cubed
- 1 large egg yolk
- 1-2 tablespoons ice water (as needed)

Instructions

In a food processor, pulse the flour, sugar and salt together until combined.

Add the cold butter cubes and pulse until the mixture resembles coarse crumbs (pea-sized pieces).

Add the egg yolk and pulse until incorporated. If the dough doesn't come together, add ice water 1 tablespoon at a time, pulsing briefly after each addition, until it forms a shaggy dough.

Turn the dough out onto a lightly floured surface, gently knead it a few times to bring it together, then flatten into a disk. Wrap in plastic wrap and chill for at least 1 hour (or up to 2 days).

Preheat your oven to 400°F. Lightly grease four 4-5-inch tart pans.

Divide the chilled dough into four equal portions. On a floured surface, roll each portion into a circle about ⅛ inch thick and 1 inch larger than your tart pan.

Gently press the dough into each pan, trimming excess from the edges. Prick the bottoms with a fork to prevent puffing.

Bake for 15 minutes until lightly golden. Let cool completely in the pans.

Ingredients to make the filling

- ½ cup fresh lemon juice (from about 3-4 lemons)
- Zest of 2 lemons
- ¾ cup granulated sugar
- 3 large eggs
- 6 tablespoons unsalted butter, cubed

Instructions

In a medium heatproof bowl, whisk together the lemon juice, zest, sugar and eggs until smooth.

Set the bowl over a saucepan of simmering water (double boiler method). Ensure the bowl doesn't touch the water.

Cook, whisking constantly, until the mixture thickens to a pudding-like consistency (about 8-10 minutes) it should coat the back of a spoon and reach 170°F if using a thermometer.

Remove from heat and whisk in the butter cubes one at a time until fully melted and smooth.

Strain the curd through a fine-mesh sieve into a clean bowl to remove zest and any lumps.

Cover with plastic wrap directly on the surface to prevent a skin from forming. Chill for at least 2 hours (or up to 3 days) until set.

Ingredients to make the meringue

- 3 large egg whites (room temperature)
- ¾ cup granulated sugar
- ¼ teaspoon cream of tartar (or ½ teaspoon lemon juice for stability)
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract (optional)

Instructions

In a clean, heat-proof bowl (preferably metal), combine the egg whites, sugar and cream of tartar.

Set the bowl over a saucepan of simmering water (double boiler method). Make sure the bowl is not touching the water.

Whisk constantly until the sugar dissolves and the mixture is warm to the touch (about 3-4 minutes) it should reach 160°F for safety.

Remove from heat and transfer to a stand mixer fitted with the whisk attachment (or use a hand mixer).

Whip at medium-high speed until stiff, glossy peaks form and the meringue is cooled to room temperature (about 5-7 minutes). Mix in vanilla if using.

Assembly and Finishing

Once the tart crusts are cooled, carefully remove them from the pans and place on a serving platter or individual plates.

Divide the chilled lemon curd evenly among the four crusts, spreading it smoothly to the edges (about ⅓-½ cup per tart).

Pipe or spoon the Swiss meringue on top of the curd in decorative swirls or peaks (use a piping bag with a star tip for a professional look).

Use a kitchen torch to lightly brown the meringue peaks for that classic toasted effect. (If you do not have a torch, you can briefly broil in the oven on high, watching closely to avoid burning, for about 1-2 minutes.)

Serve immediately or chill for up to 2 hours.





LARGER CONNECTICUT-BASED TEA PRODUCERS:

Bigelow Tea, Fairfield (bigelowtea.com)

Simpson & Vail, Brookfield (svtea.com)

CONNECTICUT LOCATIONS THAT REGULARLY OR OCCASIONALLY OFFER AFTERNOON TEA:

A Spoonful of Britain, 914 Hopmeadow Street, Simsbury (spoonfulofbritain.com)

Artisan, 275 Old Post Road, Southport (artisansouthport.com)

Artisan, 1 Memorial Road, West Hartford (artisanwesthartford.com)

Brits Brand, 11 Watertown Road, Morris (britsbrand.com/tearoom)

Elm, 73 Elm Street, New Canaan (elmrestaurant.com)

Gruel Britannia, 161 Cross Hwy, Westport and 2217 Post Rd, Fairfield (gruelbritannia.com)

Le Banh Patisserie, 542 Hopmeadow Street, Simsbury (lebanh.com)

L'Escale, 500 Steamboat Road, Greenwich (lescalerestaurant.com)

Old Lyme Inn, 85 Lyme Street, Old Lyme (oldlymein.com)

Open Door Tea, 3552 Main Street, Stratford (opendoorteat.com)

Posh Tea Room, 755 Main Street, Munroe (poshtearoom.com)

Savvy Tea Gourmet, 712 Boston Post Road, Madison (drinkgreatteamarketplace.com)

Stanton House Inn, 76 Maple Avenue, Greenwich (stantonhouseinn.com)

Take Tea, 19 East Main Street, Avon (taketeainct.com)

Tea With Tracy, 16 Bank Street, Seymour (teawithtracy.squarespace.com)

The Charles, 161 Main Street, Wethersfield (thecharlesct.com)

The Old Mill English Tea Room, 63 Maple Street, Somers (theoldmillenglish-tearoom.com)

Wadsworth Mansion and Long Hill Estate, 421 Wadsworth Street, Middletown (wadsworthmansion.com)

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Midlife Glow Up: Fifty, Nifty and Thriving!

By DREW MULVEY

Hormones and what is happening in your body

You're a little bit more on edge, pain is increased, you're fatiguing quicker, sleep has been a little bit of a challenge and your metabolism is changing. Welcome to the wonderful world of changing hormones in midlife. Why is this such a big deal?

During this time, two key hormones start to decrease: progesterone and estrogen. These are not only responsible for reproductive health but for bone mass, healthy cholesterol levels (estrogen increases HDL levels) and neurotransmitter production (estrogen aids in serotonin production while progesterone dopamine production). Each is incredibly important for mood, focus, sleep and bone growth. Growth hormone production also starts to decrease, making it harder to maintain and build muscle. In fact, after the third decade of life, this decreases around 15% every decade after.

Why should we take this to heart? Lowered estrogen and progesterone levels can lead to symptoms that could mimic ADHD; sleep disturbances; a lack of patience as dopamine levels are in charge of your focus, mood and sleep; and serotonin affecting your well-being. In fact, the term "patience is a virtue" resonates a little closer at this age as the ability to exercise this "virtue" is decreased. Lowered estrogen levels can also affect skin tone as it contributes to skin elasticity, which can really affect our mental well-being. On top of the wear and tear of all the stressors, our skin can truly feel the effects.


This shift can also come with decreased muscle tone, insulin resistance impacting weight management, amplified stress and a lot more fatigue. Does that mean that we must be a prisoner to these changes? Absolutely not. There are some measures we can take to thrive in our fifties.

Skin Care

Let's look at the underlying biology. As we age, skin loses hydration, elasticity, has less turnover and can be affected by oxidative species generated from the compounded effect of stress. Hydration will be key for that inner glow. Drinking enough water and providing moisture from quality body butters helps (with ingredients we can pronounce). Another way to add moisture back to the skin is to include products containing hyaluronic acid, which can provide extra plumpness and firmness.

Other popular supplements are collagen supplements and biotin. Supporting your gut by adding particular foods can help the body naturally synthesize biotin. For collagen supplements, look for a multi-collagen supplement as it contains all five forms of collagen.





Taking care of
yourself is one of
the least selfish
things that you
can do.

Stress management

Decreased estrogen levels and increased cortisol levels may diminish your body's ability to cope with physical and psychological stress. That doesn't sound like fun. Here are some lifestyle modifications to support your mind, body and spirit.

Self-care

Think about the things that make you tick. Taking that time out during the day to incorporate those things not only can help you to handle life's stress more effectively but is also beneficial for those around you. Taking care of yourself is one of the least selfish things that you can do. This is a time when your cup needs to

be filled. Whether it be escaping in nature, reading a good book, lighting a candle while sipping on tea or just being present, be sure to incorporate it.

Frequency healing

This has been a new one added to a list of alternative therapies that can support stress levels. Certain frequencies can provide stress relief and calm the nervous system. In a recent double blind, placebo-controlled study done on nurses during the COVID-19 pandemic, those exposed to music with frequencies at 432 and 440 Hz examined a statistically significant decrease in systolic blood pressure, increase in productivity and decrease in parameters of anxiety.



Muscle is incredibly important for energy production.

Strength training

With decreased levels of growth hormone and estrogen, it is harder for the body to make and retain muscle. Muscle is incredibly important for energy production, protects the body from injury and is a significant contributor to a healthy metabolism. What can we do to counteract this? Adding strength training into our exercise routines helps.

Typically, at least three strength sessions per week can suffice when every muscle is worked during the week. Incorporating compound movements such as squats, dead lifts, bench press and rows add significant benefit as they work multiple muscles and joints. You can do a three-day split including one lower body day, one upper body day and one total body day. When you lift, according to studies, anywhere from 6-15 repetitions can be beneficial for muscle development and strength. In particular, six to eight repetitions may increase maximal strength, while the 10-15 range may produce greater lean mass gains. Regardless, any repetition range that is challenging will yield muscle gains. (Please focus on proper form before lifting heavier weights.)

Supportive nutrients

Feeding your body the right fuel during this transition will make it much easier on the body. As mentioned above, the body is a little less insulin-sensitive, a little more stressed and probably more inflamed. With these in mind, here are some nutrients to support that shift.

Antioxidants and probiotic-rich foods

Usually these are talked about separately, but they actually go hand in hand. Specific antioxidants known as polyphenols not only help to decrease inflammation in the body and protect it from oxidative damage, but they can also act as a direct fuel source for beneficial probiotics that serve to improve digestion, immunity and even mood. Specific bacterial strains fed by these antioxidants can produce compounds that keep the gut lining intact, decrease inflammation further, and generate precursors to your GABA and serotonin, which are both involved in mood regulation. In fact, a study



showed that certain bacterial strains generate compounds known as short chain fatty acids, which can act on an enzyme tryptophan 5-hydroxylase to increase the production of serotonin. These are also important for glowing skin as they decrease the effects of increased oxidative stress. Pairing antioxidants and probiotic-rich foods in complex meals composed of proteins, fats, carbs, and colorful and non-starchy vegetables can also promote better blood sugar regulation.

Sources of polyphenols include cloves, cocoa powder, dark chocolate, berries (blackberries, blueberries, cranberries), black currants, coffee, green tea, flaxseeds, pomegranate and red wine. Yogurt, kefir, kombucha, pickled vegetables, sauerkraut, kimchi, tofu and tempeh are sources of probiotics.

Adaptogens

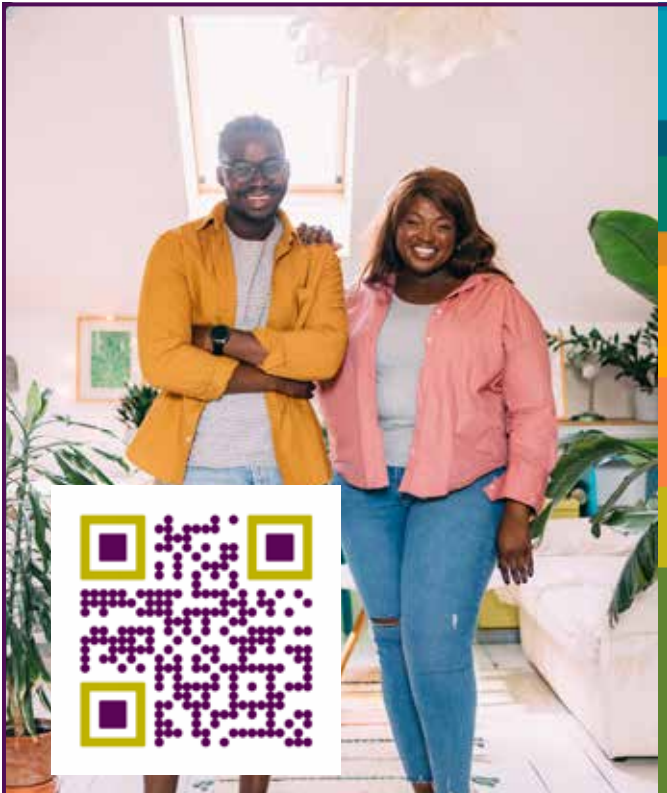
These compounds are key to helping the body adapt to the stressors placed on it. Adaptogens have the potential to balance gut function and support the stress response, especially cortisol production. They are also helpful for blood sugar regulation. Ashwagandha, rhodiola and eleuthero are examples of favorite adaptogens. Some foods have adaptogenic properties and are incredibly supportive for hormonal balance, including spices such as turmeric, cinnamon and ginger, as well as herbs like licorice. In studies, maca has induced a reduction in symptoms and increase in hormones at a ~2 g dose per day.



Meeting energy needs

With this insulin resistance and lower metabolism, practitioners commonly see people dropping their caloric intake significantly to make up for the changing metabolism, and sometimes it can go too far. Cutting calories ridiculously low is not the answer. This not only slows metabolism, but it places a significant stressor on a body that is already stressed. **Want to know how to nourish your body? Here is a general equation to figure out how much you need: $BMR + TEF + NEAT + Activity$. For a healthy deficit, decrease by 250 - 500 calories to ensure metabolism is supported.** 📌

Drew Mulvey, MS, CDN, CNS, CLT, PNL1 C1SN, is a board-certified nutrition specialist and certified integrative sports nutritionist. She helps youth and young adult athletes overcome disordered eating and autoimmune conditions through comprehensive plans, integrative nutrition and alternative lab testing.



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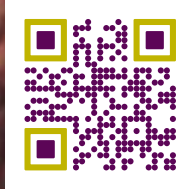


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The Worst Game I've Ever Loved

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

I'm sitting in a lawn chair along the first baseline. It's a warm, spring Saturday afternoon. The sun is high in the sky. The grass is a brilliant green. Nine boys in red uniforms are spread out across the diamond and outfield. They are still boys, but they are old enough to be locked in on the game. No picking daisies for these kids.

I love baseball. I grew up outside of Boston as a Yankees fan. My stepfather was a Red Sox fan; so, spitefully, I decided to become a fan of his team's mortal enemy. That spite evolved into a love for players like Don Mattingly, Dave Righetti and Willie Randolph.

I've been lucky enough to be sitting

in Yankee Stadium when David Wells and David Cone pitched their perfect games. There have only been 24 perfect games in Major League history — more than 235,000 games in total. I've seen two of them. Lucky me.

David Wells' perfect game happened on Beanie Baby Day at the stadium. At the beginning of the game, fans were handing their Beanie Babies over to small children. But by the seventh inning, they were demanding their Beanie Babies back in hopes that they might be worth something someday. Children wept as large men pulled plush toys from their tiny fingers.

I have lots of reasons to love baseball, but once my son Charlie started playing

baseball eight years ago, that love has been tested for many reasons, including right now.

Charlie is at the plate, bat in hand. The game is tied. His teammate is standing on third base, waiting to score. Two outs, of course. Also, bottom of the seventh, which is bottom of the ninth in Little League, because those extra two innings are apparently too much for today's fragile youth.

As a Little League player, I always wanted to be at bat in these moments. I wanted the game on my shoulders. Win or lose, I wanted to be the one to determine my team's fate.

I don't know how Charlie feels at this moment as he digs into the batter's box,

but I know how I feel: awful. This is a stupid game. My son is trapped on an island, with the fate of his team in his hands. Every player and spectator has their eyes on my boy. The only two options here are to win or lose. Succeed or fail. Help the team win or ruin their chances of winning forevermore. I hate it. What a stupid game.

And when you're emotionally invested and psychologically connected to a player on the field, it's a disaster. Every time your child stands at the plate or a ball is hit in his direction, it is a chance at abject, unadulterated, indisputable failure, and though it makes no sense, I think — no, I'm sure — it hurts me more than him.

What was Abner Doubleday — the inventor of this insidious game — thinking? I'll tell you what he was thinking: nothing. He had no children. He was never even married. No wonder he designed this torturous and cruel game. He was never forced to live or die with his son's performance.

But it's not just the game itself that torments me.

Little League is a monster. The coaches are remarkable human beings. They freely dedicate enormous amounts of time to thankless boys who complain about batting orders and fielding positions, and rotten parents who can't find the time to volunteer but make plenty of time during the game to contribute their meaningless two cents. I don't know how the coaches do it.

That said, I suspect that they have confused parents for people absent from lives beyond baseball. The baseball season schedule is released seemingly minutes before the first pitch of the first game, and games and practices are added whenever possible, despite our misguided attempt to have lives outside of baseball during the season.

Planned a trip to New York to visit the grandparents? Be prepared to cancel those plans halfway down I-95 when the coach sends out a group text

announcing a triple header that begins nine minutes ago.

It's 30 degrees with wind gusting to 50 miles per hour? Thank goodness it's not raining. Right? Bring a blanket, a space heater and perhaps some firewood, because...play ball!

Playoff schedule? Fear not. You'll receive that six days after the regular season has ended and six hours before the first game begins.

I love my son's coaches, but they make it hard to love them sometimes.

Every time your child stands at the plate or a ball is hit in his direction, it is a chance at abject, unadulterated, indisputable failure, and though it makes no sense, I think — no, I'm sure — it hurts me more than him.

Charlie is still standing at the plate. He has run the count to 3-2 after fouling off two pitches. In my fragile state, those foul balls are tiny victories. He hit the ball. The stupid thing went rolling up the first base line, but he didn't entirely swing and miss. Foul balls are practically hits in my state of mind.

The pitcher prepares to throw what will likely be the last pitch of the inning and maybe this game. It's a big one. This isn't a playoff game, but Charlie's team is 0-5. If he hits the ball, his team will finally win a game.

Charlie once went through an entire

season without winning a single game. It was educational and brutal. Even so, his team made the playoffs because it's 2026 and everyone makes it to the playoffs. Then, in a bizarre turn of circumstances, his team won their first game of the season — their playoff game — which propelled them to the championship game, where they lost by just a single run. I was almost rooting against him that day.

The pitcher winds and throws. The ball is wide of the plate. Charlie does not swing, thus earning him a walk, but the ball gets past the catcher and rolls to the backstop. His teammate sprints for home. The pitcher sprints to cover home but is too late.

Charlie's teammate touches home plate. "Safe!" the teenage umpire shouts. Charlie's team wins their first game.

And Charlie? Is he the hero of the game? Not really. He worked a walk, but it was a wild pitch that really saved the day. Did he fail at the plate? Also no. Working a walk is fine by me. Anything is better than a strikeout.

His teammates swarm the kid who scored the winning run. Charlie, too.

I breathe a sigh of relief. We survive another at-bat in this endless, unpredictable, spontaneous, glorious and horrible baseball season. Many more to go, but on this day, at this moment, I can breathe a sigh of relief...until the phone dings, alerting me to another game beginning in four minutes. 📞

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."

Sean Wang, an MIT architecture graduate, is author of the sci-fi graphic novel series, Runners. Learn more at seanwang.com.

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