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Seasons' Greetings



We've all had the experience of having the long-awaited summer season "fly by." After weeks spent taking care of countless work and family obligations, we wake up on Labor Day to realize that we didn't have (or make) the time to soak up all the warm-weather adventures that Connecticut has to offer.

Then we vow that next year will be different.

With "next year" now at hand, we thought we'd help you make a "to do" list that's a little more fun.

Doug Maine clues us into Connecticut's sizzling jazz scene, which serves up a variety of concerts - indoors and out - to keep music lovers of all ages tapping their toes. John Torsiello takes us behind the scenes of the Farmington Polo Club, where folks can watch a match, ride a horse, learn to play polo, or enjoy one of FPC's charity events. Dawn Ennis introduces us to boating enthusiasts from all over the state. Even if you don't own a boat, there are countless opportunities to get on the water this summer - what could be more fun?

If you're looking for romance, you might want to audition at a local theater. Not convinced? Read Joel Samberg's story about seven Connecticut couples whose "meet-cute" - onstage or backstage - led to true love.

Love to cook? If you'd like to pair some spicy dishes with the hot summer temperatures, check out Amy White's column on her favorite secret ingredient: the Salemme Pepper. Learn its history, try Amy's original recipe for a spicy salad, and whip up a Salemme-inspired cocktail, invented by a talented mixologist especially for *Seasons*.

We hope you enjoy these and other stories in our summer edition - while stretched out on a chaise lounge, wearing fashionable shades, and sipping your favorite cold drink, of course! Oh - and don't forget the sunscreen.

Carol

Carol Latter, Editorial Director



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AUGUST 17





Summer

2019

page 8.

Music

The state's jazz scene is thriving, and is easily accessible, particularly during the summer months.

“Cause a little bit of summer is what the whole year is all about.”

— JOHN MAYER

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Health & Wellness

Dr. James Bittner is bringing new advances to Saint Francis Hospital and Medical Center.

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Home

For one couple, home renovations became a memorable family adventure.

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Adventure

For many Connecticut residents, the best season of the year has finally arrived: boating season.

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Sports

Special Olympics Connecticut celebrates, and reflects on, 50 years of inclusion.

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Fun

The Farmington Polo Club is helping to make the community - and the state - a better place, adding a big dose of philanthropy and fun.

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Delicious

Discover the unexpected pleasures of Connecticut's "secret ingredient" - the Salemme Pepper.

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Feature

Talk about a meet-cute: These area couples fell in love through theater.

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Final Thoughts

In a time when so many events are overblown, not everything has to be a "thing." Sometimes, simple pleasures are best.



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MUSIC



Trombonist Delfeayo Marsalis headlines opening night of the Greater Hartford Festival of Jazz on July 19 in downtown Hartford.

All that Jazz

Connecticut's jazz scene is huge – and historic

By DOUG MAINE

The Monday night jazz series in downtown Hartford's Bushnell Park – now known as the Paul Brown Monday Night Jazz series – has featured some stellar performances by some of the biggest names in jazz, but surely none has been more electrifying than one that took place on August 4, 1997.

By the time the headline act, Mark Elf Guitars Inc., took the stage, an unrelenting torrent of rain was drenching the park and a good part of the park pavilion's covered stage. Technicians had moved cables and electronic equipment into dry spaces, while Elf and fellow electric guitarists Melvin Sparks and Roni Ben-Hur, plus bassist Marcus McLaurine and drummer Jackie Williams, were set up close to the back wall of the stage.

A half dozen or so water-logged fans stuck it out, leaning on the front of the stage. At stage right, two volunteer radio announcers, including this writer, and the radio station's engineer, nearly jumped out of their skin when lightning struck between the back of the pavilion and the embankment on which trains move in and out of Hartford's Union Station. Fortunately, the only sparks to fly that night were creative.

Weather forecasts that morning had convinced series founder and organizer Paul Brown that the show could go on outdoors, and once that decision was made, there was no turning back; sound and lighting crews went to work. Once the musicians took the stage, their determination as artists to create and share their work took over, even if it was mostly for a radio audience.

MONDAY NIGHTS IN THE PARK

The Monday night jazz series is just one of multiple jazz festivals and events that are available to fans of this music genre, many of them started or maintained by musicians whose talents and expertise are known far beyond Connecticut's borders.

Brown, an esteemed and beloved educator, community activist and bassist who played in New York and toured with many of the top musicians in jazz, founded the Hartford series in 1967, under the auspices of the Garden Area Neighborhood Council, a grassroots organization formed to enrich the lives of residents of the city's North End.



Smooth jazz saxophonist Jazmin Ghent performs July 20 in Bushnell Park in Hartford, part of the Greater Hartford Festival of Jazz.

The first three outdoor concerts were held at Fred D. Wish school on Barbour Street. They featured the great saxophonist Cannonball Adderley with his quintet, blues legend Muddy Waters, and trumpeter Clark Terry's big band. It was an auspicious start.

The concerts were held in various locations until the series settled into its permanent home at Bushnell Park. Despite perennial struggles to obtain funding, Brown managed to bring many of the most highly regarded jazz musicians to Hartford. After 41 years, he stepped down at the end of the 2007 series.

The nonprofit Hartford Jazz Society took over production in 2008, assuming responsibility for fundraising, securing permits and the countless other details that make the series happen. This year's series runs from July 8 through August 12.

Paul Brown passed away in May 2016, and the series was renamed in his honor. Today, Maurice D. Robertson, a member of the jazz society's board of directors and the committee that plans the series, emcees each show and has to make the sometimes agonizing decision as to whether the expected weather warrants moving that night's show indoors. The rain location for the concerts is the Asylum Hill Congregational Church, 814 Asylum Avenue, Hartford.

Every concert is a team effort, says Robertson. "The board members show up, take charge and do what they



With music packed into a single weekend, the Greater Hartford Festival of Jazz often packs Hartford's Bushnell Park with music fans.

have to." The evening's opening band hits at 6 p.m. After their set and a short break, the headliners take the stage at 7:30 p.m.

The crowds are congenial and diverse, and some people are more attentive to the music than others, but that's okay, he says, "as long as you're considerate of your neighbors."

All concerts in the series are broadcast live by WWUH 91.3 FM, the University of Hartford radio station, and streamed live at wwuh.org. The broadcasts are hosted by members of the station's volunteer staff, who interview the performers during the breaks between sets.

MORE JAZZ WHEN YOU LEAVE THE PARK

Park-goers can get more jazz just by crossing the street from Bushnell Park to Black-eyed Sally's at 350 Asylum Street. Every Monday night, a featured band – usually local musicians but not infrequently big-city jazz names – plays the first set; after a break, a jam session ensues, and other musicians are welcome to test their mettle. On most Mondays, the music happens from 8 to 11 p.m. On the six Mondays of the Paul Brown Monday Night Jazz series, the start time is pushed back to 8:30 p.m. Musicians under 21



Bassist Julian Vaughn will be part of a day of smooth jazz July 20 at the Greater Hartford Festival of Jazz.



Singers, from left, Angela Clemmons, Darryl Tookes and Cindy Mizelle of the group Run N' Fly perform at the 2018 Branford Jazz on the Green concert series. Photo by Bill O'Brien.

are welcome. The series is also sponsored by the Hartford Jazz Society.

On the east side of downtown, near the Connecticut Convention Center, the 16-piece Hartford Jazz Orchestra has been performing every Monday night at the Arch Street Tavern since 1998. In 2016, band members told Michael Hamad of the Hartford Courant that what makes the HJO sound unlike that of any other big band are the 150 or so charts, or arrangements, given exclusively to the band by Charles “Chic” Cicchetti, an orchestrator, trombonist and pianist who led the aggregation from the late-1970s until his passing in 2000.

Since then, the band has been directed by jazz pianist and arranger Donn Trenner, a New Haven native whose career has included playing with Charlie Parker and Stan Getz, participating in seven of comedian Bob Hope’s Christmas USO tours, working as pianist-conductor for Lena Horne, Nancy Wilson, Vicki Carr and Jack Jones, and serving as musical director for television’s “The Steve Allen Show,” before moving back to Connecticut in 1996.

The Hartford Jazz Society’s biggest annual fundraising activity is its annual jazz and blues river cruise, and this year’s cruise, the 58th annual, is scheduled for Saturday, September 7. The seven-hour floating jazz party travels from the State Pier in Haddam, down the Connecticut River to Long Island Sound and back. It will feature continuous music as two bands alternate, Ronnie Burrage & Holographic Principle and Liviu Pop & Friends. Riders can bring their own picnic baskets, drinks and coolers, although hot dogs and free ice and cold drinks are available on board. Reserved table seating is available. The event is for adults only, and pets are not permitted.

AN ENTIRE WEEKEND OF JAZZ

The Greater Hartford Festival of Jazz packs free jazz in Bushnell Park into one weekend. The crowds are big, and there will be a variety of food for sale and other vendors offering items like art, crafts and apparel. Concerts are held rain or shine.

Like the Monday night series, the festival was created by Paul Brown, who researched weekend jazz festivals around the country before proposing a summer weekend event that would bring additional business to downtown Hartford. The new festival debuted in 1992.

The 2019 festival will get underway at 6:30 p.m. July 19, with the Funky Dawgz Brass Band, followed by an octet led by trombonist Delfeayo Marsalis, a member of the famous family of musicians from New Orleans. On July 20 and 21, performances begin at 2:30.

BRANFORD IS BUZZING

The Branford Jazz on the Green series is celebrating its 11th year of free summer concerts. The 2019 series will consist of nine weekly shows beginning at 6:30 p.m., from June 27 through August 29.

Dale Izzo, assistant director of the town’s recreation department, says the lineup of performers is put together by a committee of town employees and local residents, some motivated by their love for the town and others who love jazz.

“The crowds are anywhere from 2,500 to 4,000 or 5,000. Some of the artists have a big following. We’ve really put Branford on the map. We get people that come from all around the state and sometimes beyond.”

Some bring chairs and sit enjoying the music, while others bring picnic suppers, Izzo says. The children of some

concertgoers get up and dance to the music. Most sit on the main part of the green or in front of the Town Hall. There's an ice cream shop across from the green, and restaurants where diners can dine al fresco and listen to the music.

Izzo says the committee "tries to choose performers in a variety of jazz genres," and an effort is made not to present the same groups year after year. She adds, "we're really thankful to our sponsors, most of whom have been with us from the beginning."

In case of rain or other bad weather, the concerts are canceled. The status of each show will be posted on the website branfordjazz.com. No dogs or alcoholic beverages are permitted.

If you're spending time by the shore, be sure to also check out The Side Door Jazz Club at the Old Lyme Inn, which presents some of the top touring jazz acts from New York and beyond, on Friday and Saturday evenings. The club really is the Connecticut's heavyweight venue for year-round jazz performances, attracting audiences from all throughout the state. Seating is limited but reservations are available.

LITCHFIELD JAZZ FESTIVAL HAS A NEW HOME

The Litchfield Jazz Festival, long the brightest star in Connecticut's constellation of summer jazz activity, has left its longtime home at the Goshen Fairgrounds and will be held July 26-28 in the intimate, air-conditioned Emerson Performing Arts Center at the Gunnery, a private school in Washington, Connecticut.

"The 2019 festival will keep up the star quality for which it has become famous while it begins a transition to a new location with a more intimate setting and a closer connection to its teaching arm, Litchfield Jazz Camp," according to festival organizers.

Friday, July 26 will include a "Friends of the Festival Gala" starting at 5:30 p.m., at the Judy Black Memorial Park and Gardens in Washington Depot. At 7:45, the music begins in the Emerson PAC, with the Litchfield Jazz Orchestra and guest vocalist Alexis Cole. Saturday's lineup includes Duchess (vocalists Amy Cervini, Hilary Gardner and Melissa Stylianou), Randy Brecker & The Chad LB Quartet, the Carmen Staaf Sextet, and guitarist Mike Stern's band.

Stern was relatively unknown in 1981 when he became a member of Miles Davis' "comeback band," the trumpeter's return to recording and performing after more than five years out of the public eye. The guitarist has been a favorite of Litchfield audiences in recent years.

While space is limited and all seating is ticketed for performances inside the Emerson PAC, other elements of the festival – such as student concerts, artist talks and clinics, food, drink and family entertainment – will be part of a new



The Paul Brown Monday Night Jazz series consistently draws big crowds in downtown Hartford. Photo by **Maurice D. Robertson**.

"OuterFest," next door to the concert hall, on Saturday, July 27 from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. This part of the festival is free.

Sunday, July 28 will feature a jazz brunch with vocalist Antoinette Montague and the Don Braden Band, followed by trombonist Wycliffe Gordon at 1 p.m., and an encore performance by the Mike Stern Band.

Trad jazz and swing on the mountain

Music Mountain may seem an unlikely location for Saturday evening jazz concerts. Founded in 1930 and set on a 120-acre mountaintop campus in Falls Village, in the state's northwest corner, its primary mission is "the performance and teaching of the string quartet literature," which it realizes as a summer center for music education and performances.

Still, jazz is no Johnny-come-lately to this serene, verdant picture, according to Music Mountain's artistic director, Oskar Espina-Ruiz, a noted classical clarinetist. "It started as an experiment about 35 years ago by a board member who wanted to diversify our programming," he said.

The series – now called "Twilight Jazz & More," and with an earlier starting time of 5 p.m. – isn't 100-percent jazz; there are evenings of Gilbert and Sullivan, show tunes and a cabaret singer.

All concerts are held in the 348-seat Gordon Hall, which was built in 1930 and had air-conditioning and heating added eight years ago to extend the performance season. "The concerts are intimate," Espina-Ruiz says. After they perform, "the artists come out, they mingle with audience members."

Anyone under 18 can attend performances at Music Mountain for free if they accompany a paying adult; those planning to bring a young guest should notify the box office in advance, to ensure that that seating is available.

For more information on the Paul Brown Monday Night Jazz series, the Jazz River Cruise, and The Side Door Jazz Club, visit hartfordjazzsociety.com. Information on other events is available at branfordjazz.com, litchfieldjazzfest.com and musicmountain.org. Also check out newhaven.jazznearyou.com and hartford.jazznearyou.com. 📍

Doug Maine is a writer and educator who hosts a weekly jazz program on WWUH 91.3 & wwuh.org.



Dr. James Bittner

James Bittner, M.D., who joined the staff of Saint Francis Hospital and Medical Center in February, has hit the ground running. The general surgeon, who specializes in hernia repair and bariatric surgery, is revamping the institution's advanced GI minimally invasive surgery fellowship program to include more exposure to clinical research. He is creating – and will be directing – a new comprehensive hernia center. And as the institution's new director of robotic surgery, he is rekindling the hospital's robotics program and has already established a multi-disciplinary robotic surgery collaborative to develop standards for robot-assisted surgery.

"I enjoy program development and saw great possibilities at Saint Francis Hospital," says the surgeon, who spent the past five years developing similar programs at a major university hospital. "I like leaving a place better than I found it from a programmatic and academic standpoint."

CREATING A CENTER OF EXCELLENCE

Born and raised near Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, Dr. Bittner earned his undergraduate degree at nearby Washington & Jefferson College, attended medical school at the University of Cincinnati College of Medicine, and then completed surgical residency at the Medical College of Georgia at Augusta University – the nation's eighth largest and 13th oldest medical school. He spent an additional year in St. Louis, receiving fellowship training in minimally invasive and bariatric surgery at Washington University School of Medicine before taking an academic position at Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU) in Richmond.

Dr. Bittner, who served as assistant professor of surgery and director of VCU's advanced minimally invasive surgery fellowship, says that in taking the reins of the Saint Francis Hospital fellowship program, he is "looking to train surgeons that are interested in not just clinical practice, but also in teaching and contributing to the scientific literature." Not only will future surgeons be exposed to a variety of surgical disciplines that perform complex robot-assisted operations, he says, but they will have the opportunity to conduct cutting-edge clinical research.

Dr. Bittner, in fact, has added significantly to the existing body of research on complex hernia disease, and brings this expertise to Saint Francis, where he is charged with developing a comprehensive hernia center for patients suffering from complex abdominal wall issues. His goal: "To develop a hernia center of excellence, one that not only competes statewide but will be recognized by peers in the national and international community."

HERNIA DISEASE: A COMMON HEALTH PROBLEM

A hernia is a defect – or hole – in the muscle or connective tissue wall that normally contains the organs and fatty tissue, allowing that tissue to protrude through the wall of the abdomen, chest, groin, back, or flank. Hernias are a common health problem in the United States. More than a million hernia repairs are performed here each year. In fact, repair of an inguinal hernia – one that occurs in the groin – is one of the most common operations done by general surgeons.

Men are more likely to develop inguinal hernias, while women are more likely to suffer from umbilical (belly button) hernias, particularly during or following pregnancy, when the abdominal wall muscles tend to stretch and weaken. A family history of relatives with hernias also predisposes people to the problem, as does smoking – not only because it decreases blood flow to areas of the fascia (connective tissue) and to muscles that are innately weak, Dr. Bittner says, but also because the chronic cough that is sometimes associated with tobacco use results in repeated strain to the abdominal wall. Patients in high-impact occupations that cause increased strain on the groin and abdomen, as well as patients with clinical and severe obesity, are also more susceptible, as are those who've had previous hernia repair, he adds.

Though a majority of patients suffering with hernia disease present with a painless bulge, Dr. Bittner says, "hernias can cause pain, bowel obstruction, difficulty breathing or swallowing, and depending on their location, can make you acutely ill." While an asymptomatic umbilical hernia might not require an operation, he says, even small umbilical hernias can become symptomatic, or possibly cause major



A FOCUSED APPROACH:
Dr. James Bittner
specializes in hernia
repair and bariatric
surgery.

problems like bowel obstruction or strangulation. “For adults with an umbilical hernia, it is advisable to speak to your doctor or surgeon to determine the likelihood for problems or the need for operation,” he adds.

According to Dr. Bittner, the advent of laparoscopic and robotic-assisted approaches has made hernia repair much less invasive than it was previously. Though in certain situations surgeons might prefer to do an open operation – if, for example, a hernia is very large, or the surgeon wants to do another operation, like a tummy tuck, at the same time – most hernias can be fixed using a robotic-assisted approach.

“The growing body of literature, some of which I contributed to while at VCU, has documented that the robotic-assisted approach to ventral [abdominal] hernia repair not only lowers the risk for wound complications and postoperative pain, but also decreases a patient’s hospital stay by an average of three days,” says Dr. Bittner. “Not only does that have value to patients, but also to the payers – and the health system at large.”

Dr. Bittner emphasizes the importance of seeking out specialized care when it comes to treating hernias. “As we would encourage patients with breast cancer to seek a women’s health center that specializes in breast cancer, so, too, do we encourage patients with hernias to make good choices and search out centers that specialize in hernia disease,” he says. “When managed correctly, hernia repair can give people their quality of life back, but when hernia disease is not managed in a comprehensive manner, patients may suffer pain, hernia recurrence, and other problems that require re-operation.”

Dr. Bittner says that his experience as a bariatric surgeon makes him a more comprehensive hernia surgeon, because very often these patient cohorts are one and the same. “Patients who suffer clinical obesity tend to form hernias, so we are often seeing patients with multiple medical diagnoses at once – clinically severe obesity, diabetes or metabolic syndrome, high blood pressure and hernia disease,” he says.

BARIATRIC SURGERY: LESS INVASIVE AND MORE IN DEMAND

Though more and more patients are seeking surgical weight loss every year, Dr. Bittner says that unfortunately, surgical weight loss still has some stigma associated with it. “While we try to rail against that, there is still persecution for those patients who suffer clinically severe obesity, and even some pushback from friends, family and strangers when they elect to take their health in their hands,” he says. “These patients should be encouraged and not discouraged to seek care.”

He points out that if a patient had a malignancy, they would be encouraged to seek as much medical care as they needed to get better. “Why do we treat clinically severe obesity any different?” he asks. Medical experts have, in fact,

designated surgical weight loss as a treatment for diabetes and metabolic syndrome, as both conditions are linked to obesity. Thus, notes Dr. Bittner, employers in some states are now required to offer employees insurance coverage for surgical weight loss, and slowly but increasingly, more insurance companies are paying for the operation. “We have a long way to go in making surgical weight loss as easily available as getting blood pressure medicine,” he adds, “but at least we are moving in the right direction.”

In the U.S., says Dr. Bittner, sleeve gastrectomy is now the most popular choice for surgical weight loss, followed by gastric bypass. During a sleeve gastrectomy, the surgeon removes a significant portion of the stomach, creating a banana-shaped pouch, or “sleeve,” that holds much less food. The procedure is typically performed using a minimally invasive approach, either laparoscopically – that is, using a long, flexible instrument with a camera attached that is inserted through a series of tiny incisions in the abdomen – or with the assistance of a robot.

During a gastric bypass operation, the surgeon creates a baseball-sized stomach pouch, and connects the small intestine directly to the stomach pouch, bypassing a major portion of the stomach and a short portion of the intestine. This not only decreases the amount of food that can be held in the stomach, but also reduces the body’s absorption of that food. Gastric bypass, too, is usually performed either laparoscopically or robotically.

According to Dr. Bittner, even less invasive approaches may be on the horizon. Endoscopic sleeve gastroplasty is a relatively new approach to weight loss in which instruments are inserted through the mouth, eliminating the need for external incisions. Also known as the accordion procedure, this procedure uses a suturing device to reduce the size of the patient’s stomach. Early studies suggest that endoscopic sleeve gastroplasty is safe and effective in the short term, Dr. Bittner says, but long-term data are yet to be published.

Regardless of which bariatric procedure a patient chooses, the operation is only one step in the treatment of obesity, diabetes, and metabolic syndrome, according to Dr. Bittner. Patients also must make healthy lifestyle choices if they want to sustain weight loss and maintain good cardiovascular health.

“The operation is nothing more than a tool,” he says. “You don’t buy a hammer at Target, bring it home, put it on your counter, and expect the hammer to build the shelves. It is truly the patient and their commitment and their support network – which includes friends, family, physicians, dietitians, health psychologists and, obviously, the surgeon – that contribute to the long-term success of patients.” ■

Lori Miller Kase is a freelance writer living in Simsbury.

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FUN

Horsing Around

The historic Farmington Polo Club
is once again up and running

Written by **John Torsiello** / Photography by **Todd Fairchild**



ALL MATCHED UP: Lyndsey Masterson, Rafael Castillo, Brendan Tetreault, Heather Souto, and their trusty steeds are ready for action at FPC.



FAITHFUL FRIENDS: Heather Souto shows her canine pal Fergie a little affection near the horse stalls.

Ah, sweet summer. The grass has turned a bright green, billowy clouds float across an azure sky, and horses frolic in the field. Well, not just any field – the expansive piece of property that serves as the grounds of the Farmington Polo Club.

It’s a scene that has been played out countless times, but for the Farmington club, it’s indeed a welcome sight. The once vibrant club, originally founded in 1929 and affiliated with the United States Polo Association in 1938, was anything but a bucolic scene on many summer mornings during the past two decades. Oh, the green grass was there all right, but the horses weren’t, and the polo matches (the former club won the 12-Goal Championship one year) were non-existent. No sounds of hooves pounding over the ground or fans cheering on their favorites during matches.

In fact, the club hadn’t hosted polo since the mid-1970s, but three years ago, that all changed. A new, dedicated owner purchased the property and the club is once again active, with matches held on Saturdays during the warm weather

months and the club also hosting myriad other events. The 60-acre parcel along the Farmington River on Town Farm Road is again a fun place to be. It has also become a focus for the community – not only for polo and riding lessons, but as a backdrop for corporate events, fundraisers, and just good old family fun.

“I’m proud of the work and improvements that have been done at Farmington Polo Club in such a short period of time,” says owner Michael Bozzuto. “Our leadership and staff have worked incredibly hard towards making FPC one of the premier clubs in the U.S.”

He says the club is starting to attract top polo talent and teams, and is pleased to offer a full summer schedule of events. “This year, we will be hosting our first international team from Poland. Besides the polo matches, we will have many top chefs visiting and providing unique culinary experiences



BARN BUDDIES: Michael Bozzuto, CEO of Cheshire-based Bozzuto’s Inc., greets Canela at the stables. Town Farm Development LLC, a subsidiary of the wholesale food distributor, purchased the polo grounds in August 2015.



HERE COMES THE GROOM: From left, Rafael Castillo, Heather Souto, and Brendan Tetreault help keep the horses tidy and well looked after.

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throughout the season.”

Bozzuto’s vision is for FPC to become an internationally recognized polo facility, while remaining an epicenter for community, social and charitable events. “We invite everyone to come out to watch a practice, a match, meet the players, and enjoy the grounds.”

In 2017, the club held only one polo match as the new ownership and management set about bringing the field and grounds back into top condition. Side boards around the field were constructed, the field was leveled, and the pH in the soil was balanced to create ideal playing conditions. The club launched a full series of matches last year, and 2019 will see another full slate of matches, in addition to other events.

The club’s owner has been dedicated to philanthropic work through the Hometown Foundation, established by Cheshire-based Bozzuto’s Inc. in 2002, and charitable initiatives are at the forefront of every public polo game and special event at Farmington Polo Club. In August, Dream Ride – an event founded by Bozzuto and now one of the largest charity motorcycle rides in the state – will mark its 19th year on the FPC property, where the bikers rally after their police-escorted 40-mile cruise through the Connecticut countryside. Dream Ride, which benefits Special Olympics and the foundation, raised \$2 million last year alone.



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8 Poland vs. USA	13 Dream Ride Day	10 1st Annual Wild Appleton Day	14 Jubilee of the Jocks
15 Sponsorship Cup	20 Karate Nightly	17 Field Closed for Dream Ride	21 Farmington Valley Classic
22 Connecticut Cup	27 Poles & Poles	23-25 Dream Ride Weekend	28 FPC Goals
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READY TO RIDE: Lyndsey Masterson (left) helps make a child secure in the saddle.

In addition to two polo fields, a stick and ball area, and multiple riding rings, the club offers a polo school, complete with a string of well-trained ponies. The USPA issued a \$1,500 Polo Development Initiative grant to the club for the purchase of bridles and foot mallets for the school. The horses are well groomed and cared for, and are worked twice a day. FPC is also open to boarders (of the equine variety), thanks to its ample stalls and paddocks.

EVERYONE WELCOME

The club’s manager, instructor and skilled player, Heather Souto of West Hartford, has been working tirelessly to get the word out about the club and its lineup of events to attract the public and encourage new membership. She believes she is succeeding on all accounts.

While the club is open to all who are interested in playing polo, Souto wants the community to know that the property offers more than just polo. It’s a family-friendly facility with an emphasis on charitable and community events. “We source and support local businesses as much as possible, from food trucks to vendors and charities at our matches and events. Polo can be seen as an elite kind of group, but really, anyone can pack a picnic, bring a cooler, and dress it up or down to their liking. It’s

about getting outside, getting to know your neighbors with a really cool backdrop.”

The club currently has 10 playing members and 25 horses, including 15 boarders at its stables. The goal is to build up the number of active players, which will be done by enticing individuals to come and watch the contests and perhaps try their hand at the game by taking lessons.

Contrary to popular belief, polo is not a particularly difficult sport to master. “The horses are trained to actually do most of the work,” says Souto. Of course, there are highly skilled players at some of the elite clubs – many of them from Argentina, which produces numerous professional players who demand top dollar to strut their stuff for rich patrons of the sport.

The players who represent Farmington Polo Club may not be of the caliber of those players from South America and elsewhere, lured to posh clubs in places like Palm Beach, Florida and Beverly Hills, California. But they are nonetheless lovers of the sport and stage highly entertaining and competitive matches with visiting clubs. The season runs from June through September and matches are usually held at 5 p.m. – and an hour earlier starting in September.

A PROUD HISTORY

Polo is said to have its origin in what was then Persia and dates back to somewhere between the sixth century BC and first century AD. It was first a training game for cavalry

units, usually the king’s guard or other elite troops. It is now played around the world, with well over 100 member countries in the Federation of International Polo.

The game is played by two opposing teams with the objective of scoring goals by using a long-handled wooden mallet to hit a small, hard ball through the opposing team’s goal. Each team has four mounted riders, and the game usually lasts one to two hours, divided into periods called chukkas. There is a ranking system for players, ranging from that for amateurs to the top professionals. The major event of the year in the United States is the U.S. Open, which is played in Palm Beach, Florida.

Polo has been called “The Sport of Kings,” and is perceived by many as a spectator sport for society’s elite, with big-time players often supported through sponsorship and well-heeled patrons of various clubs. Well, that is considered a misconception by Granby’s Brendan Tetreault, a member of the Farmington Polo Club, who often helps out around the grounds and is an avid and talented player who keeps his own corps of horses (usually several horses are used during a match so as to not wear them out).

“There are many smaller clubs in the Northeast alone and there is a real sense of camaraderie and community involvement between the various clubs,” he says. “In the grand scheme of things, we have a relatively small club and we are happy to bring the sport to the people of the area towns.” The spectators are even invited out to the field



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BIG PLANS: The Farmington Polo Club has set its sights on becoming a significant player in the polo world. It hosts the New England Pro-Am in August.

between chukkas to replace the divots kicked up by the horses. Try doing that at a National Football League game.

Lyndsey Masterson of Ellington is a new member of the Farmington Polo Club and says that even though it is a bit of a drive for her to train and compete, it is worth it. “I try to come about two days during the week, usually Saturday and Sunday. I fell in love with the sport since starting at FPC. It’s not just about riding the horse but creating the connection with your team and a passion for the game. You have to ride many different horses and it has really helped me grow as a rider.”

Masterson became interested in polo because of her passion for horses, the fact that it is a team sport, and the fact that it is highly competitive. “I learn something new each time I walk into the barn at FPC.”

The staff at FPC wins high praise from Masterson. “They take every opportunity to stop what they are doing and use it as a teaching experience. Any question I have ever asked, they make a point of answering. They take pride in the care and commitment of the FPC horses and

the facility.” She says the grounds and barn are “extremely” well maintained and it is an environment that is welcoming. “Heather Souto is taking FPC to the next level. She is an amazing person and rider, and someone I look up to.” She called Souto’s commitment to her job “contagious,” adding “FPC is a family.”

She, and others, are “excited” about the future at FPC. “It is not just a facility for horse people but for families to come and make memories, and a place to go to on the weekends to watch a match.”

Souto, who often mixes it up and more than holds her own against male players (there’s a Battle of the Sexes match scheduled for September 21 and polo is a sport where men and women can compete on an equal stirrup), says the club has “an open-door policy.” She adds, “We have lessons for both adults and juniors, and we will have summer camps.”

Among the matches this year is a meeting with a team from Poland on June 8, the Dream Ride Cup on July 13, the New England Pro-Am on August 3, and the Farmington Polo Club Finals on September 28. The Dream Ride weekend is scheduled for August 23-25.

Visit www.farmingtonpologrounds for more information and a complete schedule of events. 📌

John Torsiello was a horseboy as a youth until his parents stopped taking him to the stable after he fell from “Black Fury.” He did get back on, though.

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TRADITION AND PROGRESS

The University of Saint Joseph continues to evolve after 87 years

Written by CAROL LATTER

In 1932, the Sisters of Mercy of Connecticut established the state's first liberal arts college for women in West Hartford.

In the 87 years since then, many things have changed. The college is now a full-fledged university, it has a downtown School of Pharmacy in addition to its bucolic West Hartford campus, and its curriculum has continued to evolve. In the fall of 2017, the women's institution of higher learning became coeducational.

But Dr. Rhona Free, president of the University of Saint Joseph (USJ), says the underlying tradition and mission remain the same.

"The Sisters of Mercy founded Saint Joseph College during the Great Depression and it was really a reflection of

the origin of the [religious] order, so their emphasis was on alleviating poverty among women and children. One of the primary ways of doing that was to make sure that women got educated, so that regardless of their marital status or if they became widowed, they could support their family themselves if they had to," Free says.

"The focus was on preparing women for careers but with a solid foundation in the liberal arts, which is really part of the Catholic intellectual tradition. That's been a relatively recent phenomenon at most liberal arts colleges, but it's been at USJ since 1932." By having a good liberal arts foundation, graduates are prepared to switch careers if they need or want to, and they have a good understanding of art and culture, so they can become involved citizens, she adds.

In addition to programs that are specifically geared to today's job market, USJ now offers graduate programs, and in fact, "we are more than 50 percent graduate students. So that was another transition – again, keeping up with workforce needs and what employers required in terms of qualifications for jobs."

GOING COED

The decision to open the doors to male students had been discussed for some time, but the



university wanted to be sure it had the financial resources to make the necessary additions and changes to programming and its physical amenities. In 2016, says Free, “we realized we were in a very solid financial position, and so we felt as though the timing was right.”

A task force and targeted sub-committees were assembled to weigh the opportunities and potential drawbacks, and after getting input from all stakeholders, the board of trustees made a unanimous decision to move forward. They predicted that the change would result in increased enrollment across the board – not only from male students but from women, “because we knew that about 97 or 98 percent of female high school graduates say they don’t even look at a women’s-only college.”

That prediction proved accurate. USJ saw significantly increased enrollment in both 2017 and 2018, and many students decided to live on campus, further boosting the school’s financial base.

As a result, USJ was able to create four new coed academic programs last year – health science, computer and data science, sports management and promotion, and bioinformatics – in addition to establishing men’s sports teams, and additional women’s teams.

The university was also able to tackle some much-needed campus upgrades, including a significantly expanded sports center and an overhaul of its student center, McGovern Hall, to modernize it and make it better suited to students with ADA accessibility needs.

“We’ve done a lot of renovation to individual areas in the last few years – Lourdes Hall, the Collaboration Center in the library, the nursing simulation lab, and a lot of service offices and residence halls,” explains Diana Sousa, director of the Office of Marketing and Communications.

“But renovating the student center, a building that really will become the focus of student life, will be a big change. It will be a complete gutting of the building and turning it from a 1950s structure into a very modern building – what students expect to see in a student center and dining hall. And then the addition to the sports center will be a completely new gym and a strength and conditioning room, an athletic training room, a new student wellness center, and classrooms.”

She says today’s college students are generally very interested in fitness, “but our one gym just couldn’t accommodate the increased number of sports teams and still



USJ President Rhona Free. Photo by Steve Laschever

be available for students who wanted to use it for intramurals and just for their own fitness, so we really had to expand that.”

Free says female students already on the campus were asked what they needed to be comfortable with the change to coed, and they requested that USJ still offer a women-only residence hall. “We agreed. We also created a new Women’s Leadership Center that focuses on empowering women, making sure that women – from the time they graduate and throughout their careers – are encouraged to take leadership roles, if they want, and to learn the skills to be able to move into leadership.”

One key part of the transition to a coed facility, she says, “was making sure that nobody could say, ‘You have reduced your commitment to women.’ We wanted to make it very clear we continue our commitment to advancing women’s interests.”

Although the task force identified several *potential* drawbacks to the change, “I wouldn’t say we have found any drawbacks at all. Most of our students went to coeducational high schools, so for incoming first-year students, it was a very familiar and comfortable setting.”

Free says in response to concerns that male students might dominate classroom conversations, professors were provided with development workshops “so that faculty who weren’t used to teaching in a coeducational environment had the tools at hand to make sure that women did continue to be as visible in the classroom, and leaders in the classroom as much as they wanted to be.”

She feels that USJ offers students amazing opportunities. These include a beautiful campus within easy reach of Hartford, where they can pursue internships, social and cultural activities, and an arrangement through the Hartford Consortium for Higher Education that allows them to cross-register to take courses at any of the 11 member schools, at no extra charge.

While USJ has evolved a great deal on many fronts in recent years, says Free, “a lot of what we are doing now is really going back to our roots – emphasizing a really high-quality educational experience, with a focus on ethics, values, service to the community, and excellence.” ■

Flipping It

A couple learned a lot – and made a profit –
by reinventing their home

Written by CAROL LATTER

On one of the first nights after John and Asia Muth bought their first home, John was home alone, trying to get the home's hot water radiators working. A company had come by earlier that day to start the furnace, which hadn't been on for six months.

The task at hand seemed simple enough – one by one, he would open the nozzles on the old-fashioned radiators just long enough to release the trapped air, and then close them again. Or, at least, that was the plan.

"I accidentally unscrewed the nozzles all the way, and boiling hot water started shooting out and pouring all over the floor. There I was, all by myself, frantically trying to fill up the nozzles with old wallpaper and calling my friends for help on my wet cell phone, thinking, 'Why did we buy a house?' Eventually, I was able to get through to a friend who lived up the street. They came over

and brought towels, and we had to empty the whole furnace [holding tank] because it was over-pressurized."

That may have been the Muths' first renovation misadventure, but it certainly wasn't their last. After watching countless home improvement shows on HGTV that made house flipping look relatively simple, they were learning the hard way that sometimes, fixing a "fixer-upper" isn't easy as Chip and Joanna Gaines might make it appear.

Asia and John, who both grew up in Simsbury and went to school together, were still in their early 20s when they first viewed the house six years ago. Asia recalls that the house "looked awful when we first walked in, but it was our plan to do all the work ourselves and find our forever home."

They decided that, with two very young children, they would complete the most critical and messiest renovations over the course of a few months before moving in. First up was removing the old carpets, taking the wallpaper off the walls, and



gutting and rebuilding the 1940 home's only bathroom. "We wanted to make the main spaces safe for our kids," Asia says.

What they expected to be a shorter-term project would eventually extend to more than five years – and there were plenty of other surprises along the way.

"We did have to learn one thing," says Asia. "In the beginning, we would get agitated every time something went wrong. Eventually, we just started laughing and saying, 'This is our luck.' Fortunately, we always had friends helping us. They never stopped helping and they never stopped picking up our calls."

In February 2013, the couple woke up one morning to four feet of snow outside, thanks to a record-breaking blizzard – and to a loud creaking sound coming from the screened-in front porch. "It turned out there was no foundation under it. It was just bluestone on dirt," says John. Fearing the porch would collapse, he ran out to get support beams to temporarily shore it up until it could be properly reconstructed.

When the weather improved, John and Asia built a larger porch that was open to the front yard, then topped it with composite decking. "The front porch is how we met all of our neighbors," says Asia. "They would all come over and help John pour cement."

"The new porch looks a lot more welcoming from the street," he says with satisfaction. "It kind of became the place where friends would visit and kids would come over to play."

Over the next few years, the pair tackled projects big and small – renovating the kitchen, painting walls, tearing up linoleum to expose the original wide-plank floors, and redoing the sunroom, where they hoped to take a few welcome breaks from their to-do lists.

They hired contractors to help them with their wood stove and chimney – safety first – "but all of the major work was done by us."

With little experience in home renovation, the young couple just figured it out as they went, notes John. "A lot of stuff I learned on YouTube, and from how-to manuals that I bought at Home Depot. Or I asked friends. I never thought I'd be one of those guys buying the how-to books, but they really helped," he says.

Some projects definitely proved more challenging than others, he says. A case in point: their basement.

"That was really tough because half was finished, and half was not. There was insulation on some of walls, and

others had none. They used the paper from 20-pound bags of powdered milk for insulation. And potato sacks. It was such an odd thing to find. Some of the timbers were 2x4s, and some were 1x3s."

The goal was to create extra living space for the family by "making it look nice without tearing absolutely everything out," says Asia. As the debris piled up, a neighbor – knowing that the Muths only had a minivan and a Yaris – "offered to come and take things to the dump."

As they continued to check things off of their renovation list, their family grew – and then grew again. "When we first moved in," says Asia, "we had a 3-year-old and a 1-year-old, and we just kept adding a baby every two years to add on top of our projects."

"Just to make sure we'd stay busy," jokes John.

Unfortunately, having four children also meant their already-small house was becoming a little too tight. "For a long time, we thought we would add onto our house to make it our forever home. We got a lot of estimates to see what it would cost to do the work. We wanted to add another 1,000 square feet, and the quote for that was \$160,000, which was more than we paid for the house in the first place," Asia says.

The house was a poor fit in other ways as well. "My husband is 6'4" and he couldn't fully stand up in the upstairs bedrooms. The bedrooms upstairs couldn't fit two twin beds, so the kids were sharing beds. Everyone told us to flip it – to sell it and buy a bigger house in the neighborhood."

Wanting to keep their children in the same elementary school where Asia herself had gone, they began to investigate what houses might be available in the neighborhood. By coincidence, she learned from a childhood friend of her sister that her parents were selling their much larger home – and it was not yet on the market.

The couple's next move was to call a realtor. "When the realtor came over, she said we can list right now," John says. "I remember thinking, 'all of the projects I had planned for the next year or two will have to be done in the next six weeks.'"

There was no time to spare. "It took about four coats of paint to change the bright orange bedroom that my son



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had requested to a light gray. We redid the bathroom a second time over a weekend, less than a week before the first showing. We had re-glazed the bathtub and it was still drying. We had to open up all the windows and doors because the smell of the glazing was so intense,” recalls Asia. “And we were cutting pieces of trim up until the night before we left.”

Their frantic efforts paid off, with the house selling very quickly last June. “The first people who saw it first ended up buying it. We had actually gone to school with them,” she says.

John explains that the new buyers “were not very handy, but I told them, ‘Don’t worry, we took care of that for you.’”

The Muths say that despite some unexpected setbacks, they’re very happy with their first flip. “I think we bought and sold the house at the perfect time. Nobody else wanted it, but our goal was to do as much renovating as we could and to make as much money as possible,” says John.

Adds Asia, “our renovations cost us \$25,000 tops, but we ended up making \$65,000 on the house. And all of those expenses were just over five years, out of pocket.”

And do they have any advice for someone thinking of flipping a house?

“It’s definitely a challenge and stressful but if you can be patient and have the time and the ability to do it, it’s worth it,” says John. “Maybe tackle the kitchen first and then do one room at a time so it doesn’t seem as overwhelming. Every project you do, tack an extra three months onto your initial estimate. We thought our kitchen would take three weeks; instead, it was six months. Whatever you think is going happen, you have to let that go, and go with the flow.”

Adds Asia, “I think it’s something that first-time buyers should definitely consider – but treat it as if you’re staying there forever. Don’t rush, and do it right the first time.”

While they love their new house – which had very few “projects” awaiting them – both feel a little wistful about their old place.

“I really miss that house, especially since we put so much work into it,” says Asia.

John agrees. “You do get attached to it. We did a lot to fix up the porch – and I only got to sit out there once.”

While the work involved in their flip was more than they ever bargained for, both agree they’d do it again, given the right circumstances.

“If I had the choice, I would do it again,” John says. “It was very cost-effective to buy a house in that condition and it really worked out well for us. If we hadn’t had four kids in a 1,300-square-foot house, we probably would have stayed there.”

To see more “before” and “after” pictures of this renovation, visit www.seasonsmagazines.com.

Carol Latter is the editor of Seasons Magazines. She has plenty of experience in renovating old houses, and the bad back to prove it. She currently writes and edits from her home office in a largely rejuvenated 1950s Cape in West Simsbury. (If you visit, don’t go into the basement.)

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Spice Up Your Summer

Salemme Pepper can bring the heat to any dish

Written by **AMY S. WHITE** / Photographed by **WINTER CAPLENSON**

In homeopathic medicine, there is a theory called the law of similars. Very basically, it proposes that like can be cured by like. I'm not a doctor, homeopathic or otherwise, but this theory might explain why I love to eat spicy food in the summertime. In my summer kitchen, heat is an antidote for heat, and one of the most fiery yet flavorful spices I've cooked with is one grown exclusively here in Connecticut, a spicy little red number called the Salemme Pepper.

Several generations of the Salemme family grew this unique pepper species in their home gardens, first in Italy, then in Connecticut, to use in their own dishes. But thankfully, Tom Salemme and his sons Mike and David were persuaded that this family secret was too good to keep to themselves. Instead of a few plants, they grew a few dozen, drying the peppers in their home dehydrator, and gifting jars of the precious flakes to relatives and friends. Many of these grateful and enthusiastic recipients encouraged the Salemme family to market and sell their pepper to the public, and in 2006, they founded the Salemme Pepper Company – which now runs out of Milford, with Tom as the Executive Spice President.



CHILI-MARINATED FLANK STEAK

Courtesy of Chef Lise Jaeger, Chef for Hire, LLC

Makes four to six servings

Ingredients:

- 1 cup red wine vinegar
- 1 cup olive oil
- ½ cup chili powder
- 1/3 cup garlic powder
- 1/3 cup Hungarian sweet paprika
- 1 tsp Salemme Pepper (coarsely ground variety)
- ¼ cup brown sugar
- 1 Tbsp kosher salt
- 1 white onion, diced
- 3 bay leaves
- 3 sprigs fresh thyme
- 2 sprigs fresh rosemary
- 1-2 lbs flank steak

Preparation:

Whisk together the vinegar, olive oil, chili powder, garlic powder, paprika, Salemme Pepper, brown sugar and salt in a medium bowl; the mixture will be thick. Add in the onion, bay leaves, thyme and rosemary. Place the steak in a large glass baking dish or zip-type bag. Spread the marinade over the steak and turn or toss to coat thoroughly. Marinate for at least one hour or up to two days in the refrigerator.

Heat the grill to medium-high heat. Brush the grill rack with oil. Scrape most of the marinade from the steak and grill to desired doneness, about 5-8 minutes per side, depending on the thickness. For medium-rare, the internal temperature should be 125-130 degrees. Transfer the steak to a cutting board and allow to rest before slicing on a diagonal.

A LOT AT STEAK: This dish brings the beef ... and plenty of spicy flavor.



FLAKES OF FIRE: Salemme Peppers, grown only in Connecticut, can add a welcome heat to a wide variety of foods, from salads and meat to cookies and cocktails.

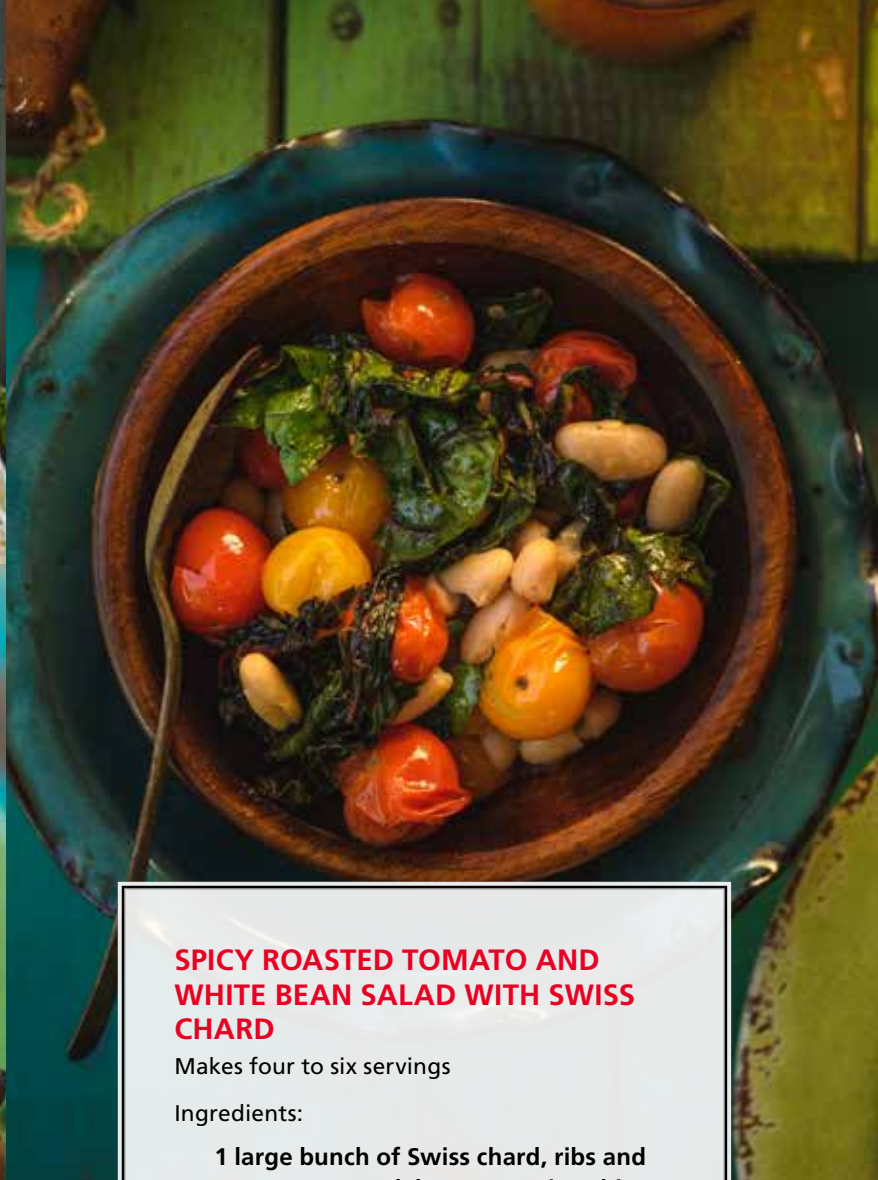
These days, the company grows as many as 50,000 plants in a partnership with Joe Arisco at T & D Growers in Cheshire. Mike describes the plants as “compact, bushy small peppers, about a half inch long – bright, bright red, and very beautiful!” He says that when the peppers are ready to be harvested in the fall, the growers rely on family and friends who volunteer to help with the work. Each pepper plant is pulled from the ground whole, hung in greenhouses to dry, then cleaned and picked by hand. The peppers are cleaned again, and then are dessicated, ground, and packed into jars that sport the Salemme Pepper Co. label. And yes, they are definitely hot, with a Scoville heat unit higher than a habanero. Mike says, “Yes, it’s about the heat, but also there’s a different flavor. It’s not what you find at your average pizza parlor.”

That heat and flavor are why fans, including myself, rave about Salemme Pepper and foodies adore it so much that the company usually sells out of its annual yield. It has shown up in popular cocktails like the Forth and Clyde at New Haven’s 116 Crown, and local products such as the Firefly, a savory shortbread cookie produced by Savor Fine Foods in Thomaston. But other than the workers at the nursery

and the volunteers during harvest season, Mike explains that whole company is made up of his father, his brother, and himself, exclaiming with a light chuckle, “And we all have day jobs!” But he adds that this labor of love gets them away from their respective computers and offices: “There’s a saying that in the spring, your hands should smell like dirt. This is how we do that.”

Mike also hints at the possibility of expansion, that perhaps there’s more in store for the Salemme Pepper Co., and soon. He says, “We are thinking up different products, growing more than we have in the past. It may be a big year for us. It’s aligning with our personal lives as well.” That’s something to look forward to, indeed.

The recipes in this article have all been inspired by Salemme Pepper, which has been the only red pepper flake to grace my kitchen since I bought my first bottle at the suggestion of the staff at the now-closed Caseus cheese shop. The first is my own summer salad that I think is great for picnics and barbecues, as it is best served at room temperature. You’ll find the pepper really converges nicely with the garden-fresh summer vegetables in that one. The second is a versatile marinade that comes courtesy of



SPICY ROASTED TOMATO AND WHITE BEAN SALAD WITH SWISS CHARD

Makes four to six servings

Ingredients:

- 1 large bunch of Swiss chard, ribs and stems removed, leaves torn into bite-sized pieces
- 2 cups grape or cherry tomatoes
- 2 large sprigs fresh oregano
- 2 garlic cloves, thinly sliced
- 2 Tbsp olive oil
- 1 tsp kosher salt
- ¼ tsp Salemme Pepper (coarsely ground variety)
- 1 tsp freshly ground black pepper
- 1 15-oz can cannellini beans, drained and rinsed

Preparation:

Wash and chop the Swiss chard into bite-sized pieces. Place the chard leaves, tomatoes, oregano, and garlic slices in a large baking dish. Drizzle with olive oil and season with kosher salt, Salemme Pepper and black pepper. Bake at 425 degrees for about 20 minutes, or until the tomatoes burst slightly. Add the beans and bake for five more minutes to heat them through. Allow to cool to room temperature and serve.

personal chef and caterer Lise Jaeger of Chef for Hire, LLC in Middletown. I use it here to give a hot pepper kick to grilled flank steak, but it works just as well with pork loin or chicken. Finally, award-winning Connecticut mixologist Mary Quinn shares a refreshing cocktail she created especially for *Seasons Magazines*. It features the pepper contrasting beautifully with some seasonal tropical flavors. Serve all three together for a spiced-up summer supper that is sure to help you beat the heat.

Salemme Pepper can be purchased online at salemmepepper.com. The one-ounce jars come in two varieties – coarsely ground or finely ground – and cost \$8 plus shipping. 📦

Amy S. White is a teacher by day and wannabe chef by night. She lives to eat and loves to write about it. In summer, she spends her afternoons eyeing her neighbor's garden, plotting what to cook next. Read more by Amy at www.amyswhite.com.



MIXING IT UP: Mary Quinn prepares a refreshing cocktail she created especially for *Seasons Magazines*.



SALEMME ALL DAY

Created by United States Bartenders' Guild member Mary Quinn, who can currently be found behind the bar of The Cook & the Bear (West Hartford)

Makes one cocktail

Ingredients:

- 3-4 fresh basil leaves**
- 1 oz Hotel California Anejo Tequila**
- 1 oz Hotel California Reposado Tequila**
- ¼ oz Orange Curaçao Liqueur**
- ¾ oz pineapple/mango purée or juice**
- ½ oz lime juice**
- ¼ oz rich demerara syrup (*see below)**
- 1 pinch Salemme Pepper (coarsely ground variety)**
- Sprig of basil for garnish**

Preparation:

Muddle the basil leaves gently in a cocktail shaker. Fill shaker with ice and add the remaining ingredients. Shake well and serve in a glass garnished with a basil sprig.

*To make rich demerara syrup, heat two parts demerara sugar and one part water until it becomes syrupy.

PERFECT PAIRINGS

By SCOTT CLARK

Pairing beverages with hot and spicy foods can be daunting, not least because of the many layers of flavors and ingredients involved. By following a few simple guidelines, we can find an array of drinks that not only work with “hot and spicy,” but actually (and more importantly) enhance both.

The prevailing flavors of this type of cuisine tend toward a combination of hot, spicy, sweet, sour, bitter and, often, an added richness from the incorporation of butter or dairy ingredients. These are the aspects to focus on when choosing a match, and not whether the dish is based on beef, chicken, fish, or vegetables.

Chilis add flavor and sweetness to dishes, in addition to heat, although capsaicin, the chemical that gives chilis their heat, is soluble in alcohol. Alcohol elevates the spicy sensation brought on by capsaicin so, if you’re not careful, you’ll end up feeling the burn — and just the burn. After all, when your mouth is on fire, it’s difficult to taste anything else, so opt for wines and low-alcohol beer. Cocktails and summertime go together like spicy food and summertime – but cocktails and spicy food? That match-up is a bit trickier to navigate. But don’t despair! There’s hope yet for this pairing, whether your tippie of choice is sweet and fruity, citrusy, or bone dry.

WINE:

The wines most suited to this spectrum of flavors are those that are medium to low in alcohol, refreshing, and have a crisp acidity. Acidity provides an enhancing contrast to both heat and richness, while also lifting the many layers of flavor in the dish. Little or no oak treatment is another rule I adhere to when choosing a white wine. Heavy oak dominates and can really dumb down the flavors.

WHITES

Fruity, aromatic and off-dry whites are some of the best options to consider. Sweetness from the residual sugar in off-dry wines offers a contrast and balances the heat and spicy flavors. The sweetness also serves to showcase the many different flavors in the dish.

Fruity and aromatic dry whites are also excellent candidates. These wines can give the impression of sweetness that works to balance and complement heat and spice.

REDS

For red wines, the things to watch out for are alcohol and tannin. I find that low to medium tannin wines work best, as wines with a lot of tannin can accentuate bitterness and overpower the dish. As a rule, look for reds that are fruitier and/or spicy in style and have a good level of acidity.

BEER:

Of all the alcoholic beverage options out there, beer is probably the best at quelling the heat and quenching chili-induced thirst. For starters, beer tends to be fairly low in alcohol – five to seven percent ABV, compared to 10 to 15 percent for wine and 40 percent for spirits. Carbonation also helps remove the fiery heat of capsaicin

from the palate. But not all beers are created equal, just like not all spicy foods are created equal. The key to finding the best suds for the dish at hand is to pair like with like. When the weight and mouthfeel of a beer matches the dish it is served alongside, something fantastic happens – complementary flavors in both the food and beer are accented, making the combination far better than the sum of its parts.

COCKTAILS:

Sweet and fruity flavors are actually spicy food’s ideal mates, as the sugar mutes the burn brought on by high-proof spirits and spicy food, and adds refreshment. Cocktails don’t have to be syrupy-sweet to quench the fires of spicy food: Bright citrus flavors offer similar relief. Classics like gimlets, greyhounds, and even lemon drops are perfect, thanks to lively citrus that tames the flames.

Herbal cocktails, like gin-based martinis or a Vesper, are ideal because they combine lively floral aromatics with a clean finish that preps palates for the next bite. Sake and wine-based cocktails create a similar effect, and their lower alcohol content doesn’t highlight capsaicin’s burn.



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ADVENTURE



TAKE A BOW: Raja Arabolu stands atop his beloved vessel, anticipating the start of boating season. Photo by ALLEGRA ANDERSON

Sailing Away

Whether Near or Far, Connecticut Boaters Love Life on the Water

By DAWN ENNIS

Boaters love to boast about the benefits that being a boater brings. That's no less true for Connecticut's boating community.

"It's decompression," explains Don Harwood of Wallingford, as he waxes his 2007 35-foot cabin cruiser. "It helps me disconnect."

Says West Hartford native Christine Arabolu: "I enjoy the social life of boating. I remember as a kid going boating with my father. Most of our family vacations revolved around going to the shoreline. It's very relaxing."

"The salt air, the wind coming through the partition in the windshield, the sun streaming through the windows of the cabin in the morning," adds her husband, Raja. "There's nothing like it."



READY OR KNOT: Lawrence Stewart installs the diving platform onto the stern of his classic wooden boat, dubbed "Gypsy Soul." Photos by DAWN ENNIS

THE YACHTSMAN

"I spend a lot of time, and life, on the river," Lawrence Stewart of Deep River told me, as I helped him install the diving platform onto the stern of the "Gypsy Soul," his classic 1987 wooden boat. We stood in Midway marina in Haddam, on the shore of the Connecticut River, 10 miles from Long Island Sound. The river itself runs 410 miles, from the New Hampshire side of the Canadian border, south through Vermont and Massachusetts, down to the sound.

A cabinetmaker by trade, Lawrence has handcrafted exquisite cherry wood panels and features in the restoration of his yacht. With the platform firmly attached to the hull, he started to secure a new ladder, and began to spin a few fish tales, of growing up around boats.



SUMMER'S COMING: Boats docked in Deep River await prepping by their owners for the season ahead. Photo by **DAWN ENNIS**

“My grandfathers, both of them, were fishermen, so we’d always go to Scituate, Massachusetts, and go fishing,” he says. “I always had a love for boats. It’s never, ever stopped.”

He remembers finding a submerged wooden boat when he and his brother went snorkeling in a lake in the Berkshires.

“We pulled it ashore and dragged it halfway around the lake to where we were staying, where we patched the holes and dried it out and refloated it,” he says, smiling. They added their grandfather’s antique outboard motor. “It would push the boat just about as fast as you could row it, and it was loud as hell. But we just went everywhere in that thing, you name it. That’s where I really got hooked.”

In his song “Boats,” country singer Kenny Chesney calls them “vessels of freedom, harbors of healing.” And that certainly has been the case for Lawrence, 54. Forging a new

life after a divorce, then a breakup, boating has long been a bond between him and his children, now adults. His son is with the Coast Guard, his daughter is a paramedic, and Lawrence works as a charter captain.

He doesn’t call himself a boater, but a yachtsman, and like his grandfathers before him, he’s given his children a lifetime of memories on the water. A favorite time was when he sailed them across the sound from Noank to Flat Hammock.

“We dropped anchor and the kids thought we were in Africa,” he said. He’s now living his dream of living on the water, something that – you’ll be surprised to learn – the vast majority of boaters in Connecticut don’t do.

THE TEACHERS

Joyce Bonney of Coventry grew up around powerboats. Her husband, Bill, is a lifelong sailor, starting with the Sea

Scouts as a young boy. Living more than 50 miles from the mouth of the Connecticut River at Long Island Sound, Joyce confessed that, these days, they mostly canoe. But when they do sail, she makes sure Bill gives them a wide berth from other boaters. She doesn't like for other ships to get too close.

"I need my space or I don't enjoy and relax," says Joyce, 69. After we're underway, the stress is over, and it's relaxing and enjoyable. That's sailing. Powerboating, on the other hand, is fun and adventurous."

While it's clear that Joyce prefers powerboats, it was obvious that a silly thing like a motor could never keep them apart. Joyce and Bill have many memories of ocean adventures from Connecticut to Mexico – some good, some in 21-foot swells.

The Bonneys work together as instructors for the United States Power Squadrons (USPS) chapter in Manchester.

"We teach a safe boating course which is so that people can get their certificate," something that's required in the state of Connecticut,

says Bill, 68. "There's a lot of people out there that don't necessarily know what they're doing."

The USPS is rebranding as "America's Boating Club," focusing on the social aspects. But the Bonneys remain true to their calling, to educate boaters on water safety, basic navigation, and proper planning for emergencies. Their girls, now in their 20s and 30s, are blessed to have a seadog for a dad and a mom who loves adventure to provide a free education in sailing and canoeing.

THE NEWBIE

For those not so lucky as the Bonney girls, seafaring is not so simple.

There are "rules of the road" to obey, just like in driving a car – except you obviously can't "walk away" from a mishap, as you would after a minor automobile accident.

And unlike most cars, a boat can cost as much as a house to own and maintain, and that's on top of the premium that boaters pay for marine fuel.

Now, if you can afford all that, owning a boat is like having a second home, a floating getaway with room to entertain, with space for overnight guests and scenery that is only limited by how far that tank of gas – or the wind – will take you.

And part of the experience, says Raja, 62, is getting there.

"It's similar to when you go on vacation," said the West Hartford insurance executive. "It starts as soon as you get into your car and start your engine."

He invited me to join him in his minivan for a 45-minute trip from his hometown to Old Saybrook, to look over his three-year-old Monterey powerboat.

"Route 9 is beautiful," he said as we cruised along. "It's a very calming parkway, and the drive puts me in the mood."

So why does he keep his dreamboat so far from home? West Hartford does not permit homeowners to store boats of any kind on their property.

While many towns do allow boats on residential property, it turns out most boaters in our state choose to commute. After all, there's only so much shoreline.

Along the way to Old Saybrook, we stopped at the shop where Paul Zable and his wife, Diane Bassett Zabel, sold the 35-foot cabin cruiser to Raja in 2016.



CRUISING: Bill Bonney of Coventry started sailing at age 8. He and his wife Joyce have been teaching boating safety for almost 25 years. This is a cherished photo from 2002, from a memorable outing with friends.



Taking the suggestion of one of their friends, Raja Arabolu and his wife Christine named their boat "Indian Summer." Photo by ALLEGRA ANDERSON



355

Summer

ROOK, CT



CABIN COMFORT: Raja and Christine's boat offers luxe accommodations. Photo by ALLEGRA ANDERSON

“About 90 to 95 percent of my customers are people who live far away,” Paul says. The day we visited him, another customer was on his way from Yonkers, N.Y., to look over his new purchase.

Paul and Diane own Bassett Yacht and Boat Sales, an offshoot of a family business started by Diane’s parents, who began making wooden boats in 1944. Diane and Paul met Raja in 2016, when he and wife Christine visited the Norwalk boat show to celebrate his 60th birthday.

“It was a dream of his, a passion, to want a boat,” Christine said, and being out there was something she’s enjoyed since she was a young girl. “I’ve always been drawn to the water.”

Her father – and their neighbor, Mark Kotyla – shared that feeling, too. They have since passed, and Raja and Christine talked about not only fulfilling his dream but honoring their memory while giving something to the next generation. Raja said Christine and their children, Sarah-



Anjali, 25, and Krishna, 20, know that this is something he didn’t just do for himself.

“His decisions are to bring the family together,” says Christine, 59, “so that everyone can come together and enjoy it.”

With his children finally charting their own courses in life, Raja embarked on his own navigation. But he zigzagged, at first planning to partner with his neighbor Mark on buying a boat together, then to deciding to buy his own used boat.

That was, he says, until he stepped aboard the Monterey at the Norwalk boat show, where all the boats are already in the water. That’s where he met Diane.

“She threw the fishing line and hooked me,” he recalls. “She asked me, ‘Why would you want to sleep in someone else’s bed?’ We drove back home that day and I was talking to myself,” says Raja, who had realized he had to buy a brand-new boat. And so he did.

In December 2016, Raja and Christine held a Christmas



PRICELESS: Although boating is an expensive hobby, Raja and Christine wouldn't trade it for the world. Photo by ALLEGRA ANDERSON



THAT'S KNOT ART: When not in use, "Indian Summer" is kept securely, and decoratively, tied to the dock. Photo by ALLEGRA ANDERSON

party and asked friends and family to help them come up with a name. Given his Indian heritage, "Raj-Mahal," was an early favorite.

But the winner turned out to be something another neighbor suggested. It's the one that popped into Raja's head when Diane asked him what name he'd chosen, just before they took delivery: "Indian Summer."

Raja still recalls the purchase date – "It was April 28, 2017" – as proudly as he remembers the birthdays of his two children.

THE PRICETAG

The dream of sailing, boating, yachting, or whatever you call it, doesn't come cheap. Beyond the purchase price is a mooring, marina slip, or at least a trailer to get you to a boat ramp, plus that expensive special fuel boat engines require, and all the accessories: from life jackets to wax, and adult beverages to fenders, and more.

"I did the math, and from the loan to the marina fees, fuel, maintenance and upkeep," Raja confided, "it all adds up to just about \$100 a day per year to own my boat."

There's also the cost of state registration, a state boating certificate, and the safety lessons required to obtain one, like those the Bonneys offer.

"We took a condensed course offered by the Coast Guard Auxiliary,"



FULL STEAM AHEAD: Christine Arabolu at the helm of "Indian Summer,"cruising the waters of the Long Island Sound. Contributed photo.

says Raja. He, Christine and their son Krishna crammed a lot into two long days, rather than take several classes. "It doesn't give you the practical experience of learning to operate a boat. Most of that I learned at the helm."

Sometimes the best lessons are learned by making mistakes. Like that time last summer when he was rushing around and fell into the water; that was just one of three mishaps that made 2018 a painfully short season of boating. Raja said he's learned his lesson: "No more rushing!"

We finally reached Island Cove Marina in Old Saybrook, which "Indian Summer" calls home year-round. From October until mid-May, it sits shrink-wrapped from bow to stern.

It has to be said, living here in Connecticut, you have to make peace with the fact that the climate makes this pricey sport a seasonal adventure. You'll see the sea as few as five, perhaps six, months out of the year.

Raja drove up alongside the 35-foot vessel, which was perched upon wooden blocks and metal stands, ready to return to the Connecticut River.

His boat has already taken him to Block Island, Newport, Greenport, Montauk and Mystic.

"The seas were unbelievably calm, just gorgeous that day," he recalls about a memorable trip with his marina

DESPITE THE DISTANCE FROM RAJA'S STREET ADDRESS, "INDIAN SUMMER" PROVIDED NOT JUST AN ESCAPE, BUT ANOTHER KIND OF HOME.

neighbors. As he spoke, he reclined deeper into the cushions lining his cabin in the bow of the "Indian Summer."

"This is my deflation, my decompression point of enjoyment," Raja said with a satisfied grin, already planning new destinations to visit in the weeks to come.

After a pause, and a glance around at his floating palace, he confirmed that despite the distance from his street address, "Indian Summer" provided not just an escape, but another kind of home. "I am totally home when I'm here." ■

Dawn Ennis is an award-winning writer and a journalism professor at the University of Hartford. She has fond memories of boating on Long Island Sound as a child, and a not-so-fond memory of falling into it, while trying to tie off the family boat.

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Upstaged by Love

For these theater folks,
“A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Altar”

By **JOEL SAMBERG**

When Dan Pavone auditioned for the part of Captain von Trapp in “The Sound of Music” at the Windham Theatre Guild in Willimantic, there was only one thing on his mind. Not love, not marriage, not a brand-new baby carriage. What mattered was getting the part.

As an audition exercise, the director asked him to say whatever came to mind. Affecting the persona of a stern naval officer, he turned to the actress beside him and loudly bellowed, “Who are you?!”

The actress, Annette LaCasse, who had already been cast as Maria, was shocked by his ad-libbed snarl.

Three years later, they were married.

It happens more times than we may think. Many couples in Connecticut start out on one stage and end up on quite another. While there are no official statistics, they’re not hard to find. What’s more, it seems as if Connecticut’s stage spouses really seem to have the clues to marital success.

“Know that your first responsibility is to your family,” offers Annette, underscoring the first of two common denominators mentioned by almost all of these theater couples. The other is to learn how to communicate well. “Also, do as much as you can together,” she adds, “but don’t be afraid to take a step back from time to time and let your spouse be the star.”

Annette, an accounting manager at UConn, and Dan, who owns an awards and engraving business, live in Mansfield and still look for opportunities to perform together. But with three children now in the mix, it’s not always as easy as it was during their von Trapp days. “Everyone knew there was chemistry when we did that show,” Annette recalls. “It was obvious when we kissed on stage.”

Ah, chemistry. That’s what inevitably kicks it off – though sometimes, like a good play, it develops slowly, with one dramatic scene building on another. Take the case of Kate and Jim Buffone.

Kate (née Samberg) was a recent college graduate in Avon who had to decide what her next move would be. She sought a pleasurable diversion before making that choice

and settled on auditioning for community theatre. A skilled improv performer who had already acted in many plays, Kate won the part of a secretive nun in “Drinking Habits” at the Phoenix Stage Company in Naugatuck (which has since moved to Oakville). Jim, an IT manager who had performed on several Connecticut stages, stopped by the theater one night to drop off something he had borrowed.

“Kate was on stage, in her street clothes, wearing a nun’s habit. That seemed a little bizarre,” Jim admits. Despite that, he was unable to stop watching her rehearse from the wings. “I guess that meant either there was something about Kate that was appealing, or I had a secret attraction to nuns.”

A few months later, Jim and Kate auditioned for “It’s a Wonderful Life: A Live Radio Play” at the Phoenix. Kate won the role of the floozy Violet, and Jim was cast as George Bailey. They began to hang out together after rehearsals.

“He made me laugh,” Kate says. “Sometimes he said things that were a little inappropriate in a funny way, which I found refreshing. And even though he was the lead, he never acted pretentious or obnoxious, like some people I’ve known in the past.”

She started to come to rehearsals early just to have more



Kate and Jim Buffone with their daughter Ella.



Amy and Ray Michaud

time to be with him.

As for Jim, he was not actively looking for a relationship, mostly because he was ending one that had been something of a challenge.

“One night backstage,” he shares, “when Kate was at the far side of the room, I wearily mumbled how I’d love to find someone really special. An older woman in the cast leaned over to me and whispered, ‘No need. You’ve got one right over there.’ I looked at her and smiled.”

Kate and Jim are now married and living in Milford. They have two daughters, a two-year-old and a two-month-old. They, too, attribute the strength of their marriage to putting their love of family above their love of theater. But soon they’ll be ready to get back on stage – maybe this time to play a married couple.

That doesn’t always happen, of course. The first time



Roxie and John Quinn

Roxie Floyd and John Quinn acted together, she played a would-be stripper and he played her would-be stepfather. The show was “Gypsy,” at the Thomaston Opera House. Roxie, now a project manager for Aetna, was only 21 at the time. John, a machinist, was 36. Now married for more than a decade, they recently did another “Gypsy” at the Warner Theater in Torrington, with John once again as Herbie, but this time with Roxie as the inimitable Mama Rose.

“The first time I saw John, at the audition, I didn’t know him at all since he wasn’t part of my circle of theater friends,” Roxie recalls. “But I was impressed because he showed up with his two children. That seemed really sweet. Then he auditioned and I was impressed again because he was so good.”

He was there with his kids because it was his daughter

who wanted to audition – not him. “In fact,” John admits, “in my previous marriage I practically wasn’t even allowed to do theater!” Something compelled him to hop on stage and give it his best shot. “My daughter was shocked. She never even knew I could sing.”

Rehearsals progressed. Love blossomed.

“I was a little more reticent than him at first,” Roxie says. “After all, he was older and had children, and I wasn’t sure if it was just a showmance, or the real thing.”

Showmance is one of those terms that every theater couple knows. If two performers are sad to be apart when a show is over, then it’s not a showmance.

For Roxie and John, it wasn’t a showmance - it was true love.

What’s more, they found value in their romance beyond the fun they had on stage. John, who admits to being obstinate at times, learned to tamp down the obstinacy thanks to Roxie’s influence. He’s thankful for that. And Roxie is grateful for John’s candor. When they first met, for example, she wasn’t confident enough to make some important life decisions. “He actually yelled at me – politely – to stand up for myself and be strong,” Roxie says. “That was a good lesson.”

Speaking of lessons, after a patent paralegal named Cathy Wilcox sang a song called “Learn Your Lessons Well” at the Act 2 Theater in New Haven, she discovered that love

can bloom on stage. The show was “Godspell,” and Cathy thought the man playing Judas was a warm, sweet and affectionate guy. That was Kevin Sturmer, now a creative director for a market research firm. He thought she was just as sweet.

“She was very nice,” Kevin says. “She even gave back rubs to all the cast members.” (Cathy has a degree in physical therapy.)

A year later, in a production of “Man of La Mancha” in which Cathy played, among other roles, a Spanish prisoner and Kevin a mule driver, the lead actor stopped the curtain calls and asked the audience to halt their applause. Kevin walked over to Cathy, took a ring out of his pocket, and proposed. As he recalls, “A woman in the front row leaned over to her friend and said, ‘Is this for real?’”

It certainly was.

Before that happened, neither was entirely certain that a relationship was a great idea. Though rehearsals went well, Kevin didn’t want to do anything that might change the cast dynamic before the show opened. But it was an impossible dream the two of them made possible with common sense and mutual sensibility.

They’ve done about 20 shows together since then. Now they have a special-needs child, which naturally has taken theater out of their family spotlight because of the enormous amount of time it takes to care for him. But here, too, a



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Cathy and Kevin Sturmer

theatrical intuition and musical background come in handy for Cathy and Kevin from time to time, if only for their ability to put on little extemporaneous shows that elicit a few extra smiles and laughs from their child.

“Life is short,” Cathy says. “If you find someone you have a connection with, go for it.” From the day they became engaged (while covered in stage mud), that’s just what they’ve been doing.

But it’s not always acting that brings couples together. Robin Frome and Stacy-Lee Erickson met doing a series of short plays collectively called “Almost, Maine” at TheatreWorks New Milford, half of which Robin directed and in which Stacy performed. At one point he gave her a direction that involved running up a narrow stairway behind the stage. “Not a chance!” she shouted in no uncertain



Jim and Kate Buffone

terms. That’s when he fell in love.

Robin, the artistic director for the Sherman Playhouse, and Stacy, a customer service representative for a technology firm, confirm they have a lot of common interests outside of theater, which they feel is what makes their marriage work.

Neither Sharon nor Stephen Houk are actors, but they still could win an award for the most theatrical performance by a theater couple about to get married.

Sharon is the production manager for the Warner Theater in Torrington. Stephen is a manager at nearby Taylor Rentals. After a production of “A View from the Bridge,” Sharon (then Wilcox) needed as much help as she could get because the set was enormous and had to be taken apart quickly. Stephen volunteered – and that was the beginning



Robin and Stacy Frome



Sharon and Steve Houk

of a beautiful friendship. Certainly Sharon was attracted to him, but also readily admits that his competence with tools was the dealmaker!

She says she's consumed by theater. For her, art doesn't imitate life; they are one and the same. So when she saw that Stephen seemed not just to understand, but also to truly respect and appreciate that passion, she knew she had found a life partner.

But the partnership came about only because Stephen did something sneaky behind her back.

The Warner was doing a festival of short plays. Stephen privately wrote one of his own, borrowing and modifying a few lines and situations from a play on which he and Sharon had worked the year before. He had it cast and directed without her knowledge. Then, on one of the performance nights, he slipped the play into the night's agenda.

Stephen and Sharon watched from the lighting booth at the back of the theater. There were several clues in the

story that made Sharon realize the characters on stage were actually stand-ins for the two of them. When the actor got down on his knees to propose to the actress, he stopped talking for a moment to allow Stephen a chance to do it for real up in the booth. Then the characters finished the scene.

Sharon was stunned, mesmerized, thrilled – and perfectly happy to let life imitate art.

Today, the couple lives happily in Goshen.

Amy Allen doesn't act, either, but that didn't stop her and Raymond Michaud from taking on the real-life role of husband and wife. The Darien Arts Center was doing "Getting Away with Murder," where Amy was on the production management team. (She's now its executive director.) The lead dropped out suddenly and the producer recommended Raymond, a member of the Actors Equity Association. Amy knew that the theater didn't have the budget for a professional and was reluctant to cast him. But she did anyway. A few chance meetings later, they realized they belonged together.

Raymond, who mixes theater with his work in the financial services sector, met Amy later in life, and both felt more secure in who they were than many other couples in similar situations. For one thing, they knew the value of allocating enough time to truly understand one another. "Like it is for good acting, listening is what's really important for a good marriage," Raymond says.

With that rule firmly in play, all of these stage partners have gotten to know each other so well that nobody has ever had to say, "Who are you?" 📖

Joel Samberg is a Connecticut journalist and author. His new novel, "Blowin' in the Wind," will be published later this year. Two of his short plays were performed in New York and Connecticut. They prompted no marriages ... but no divorces, either.



Amy and Ray Michaud

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UConn HEALTH

Aging Well

The UConn Center on Aging helps patients preserve function and well-being

By **JAMES BATTAGLIO** / *Photography by CONNECTICUT HEADSHOTS*

Mention the word “aging” to most people and it conjures up thoughts of aches, pains, diseases, and a reduced quality of life.

Though many older adults live happy and fulfilling lives, medical illness and associated disability become more common with increasing age. But as the thousands of elderly patients from Connecticut and neighboring states who have entrusted their physical and mental well-being to geriatricians at the UConn Center on Aging have learned, the negatives that come with aging can be well managed with the right medical care, allowing people to find more enjoyment and fulfillment in their senior years.

Geriatric medicine, which began in the United Kingdom, emerged as a field in this country in the 1980s, around the time that the UConn Center on Aging was established, making it one of the first and largest multidisciplinary centers of its kind in the country.

Focusing on treating patients with kindness and compassion, listening to their concerns and involving them in their own care, the center’s team of board-certified geriatricians provides comprehensive, individualized care for aging adults. These physicians “consider the full picture of each patient’s medical, social, family, and psychological needs and help coordinate the services that are needed to lead a healthy, fulfilling life,” notes the center’s website.

The center also operates a nationally recognized, interdisciplinary research program aimed at minimizing or preventing disability in older adults and finding better ways to preserve patients’ physical and cognitive function.

George A. Kuchel, M.D., FRCP, AGSF, director of the center, points out that people “don’t all age the same way.” So while the bulk of the center’s patients are well

over age 65 – six of every eight patients are over age 85, many are in their 90s, and still others have passed 100 – there are younger adults with medical and psychological needs who also qualify for this care.

Patrick Coll, M.D., a geriatric specialist at the center, says “the signature syndrome for our specialty, which we term multiple co-morbidity, involves four or more medical conditions that can, at times, impact each other and must be measured carefully.” These conditions include the most common maladies seen by the center’s physicians – memory disorders, hypertension and urinary incontinence – as well as mobility issues, falls, frailty, and excessive use of medications.

“Co-morbidity and fragility, functionally or mentally, are very much at the core of what geriatrics is all about,” he adds. “We also know there will never be enough geriatricians to take care of the growing number of older patients. There are not that many of us nationwide, a fact that drives a big part of the center’s mission to do research and subsequently educate other [non-geriatric] providers on how to take care of older patients.”

The human population has doubled over the past 50 years, in part because we’re living longer. So it has become crucial that the center’s physicians work more and more with colleagues in other disciplines to help with case co-management and to coordinate care of older adults in areas such as orthopedics, cardiology, cancer, dementia and memory disorders.

“As the population ages, there’s more need for well-trained physicians to manage and treat the primary care conditions facing the geriatric population 65 years and older – primarily for memory loss and dementia evaluation, diagnosis and long-term care, and support to the patients, their caregivers and families” says Yazeed Maghaydah, M.D., FACP, an assistant professor of medicine and board-certified internist and geriatrician.



ALL FOR ONE: Among the medical professionals collaborating at the UConn Center on Aging are, from left, Dr. Patrick P. Coll, Dr. Lavern A. Wright, Dr. Yazeed S. Maghaydah, and Dr. George A. Kuchel.

Are we really living longer?

"Life expectancies for people over 65 are expanding by approximately three months per year, and the age group 85 years and older is the fastest growing population in the country – even more than newborns," says Dr. Kuchel.

As life expectancies continue to rise, many of us will spend more years as older adults than past generations did. That being the case, our quality of life remains the most important part of growing older.

"Years ago, we used to say, 'If you want to age well, you need to pick your parents carefully,'" says Dr. Kuchel. "That's not quite true. Genetics only play 20% to 30% in the aging process – and that's the good news – but what actually plays a much bigger role is one's lifestyle and environment."

Lavern A. Wright, M.D., is an associate professor of medicine and a board-certified physician in geriatric medicine. In addition to treating UConn Health's clinic patients, she sees patients in their home environment, such as at Seabury skilled nursing facility in Bloomfield.

"For more than half my patients, I am their primary care provider (PCP). They have common conditions such as high blood pressure, diabetes, cardiac, and memory issues. But I also have a few older patients who have aged successfully and have none of the more common maladies," says Dr. Wright.

She says that while urinary incontinence is a common health condition in older patients, they are frequently embarrassed to discuss the topic, and the condition has far-reaching social stigma.

"With incontinence comes a reluctance to go out because patients are afraid of wetting themselves," says Dr. Wright. "You can have social isolation and mood-related issues associated with incontinence. Those with incontinence issues sometimes become institutionalized because it's difficult to deal with this issue at home."

The field of geriatrics is the exception to the commonly held "rule" that a physician is either a PCP or a specialist.

"A big part of what we do, in addition to primary care, is consultative care," says Dr. Coll. "Those of us in medicine sometimes think that a doctor is either a specialist or one who provides primary care. In geriatrics, we have to do both in order to do geriatrics well."

He says with the exception of pediatricians or neonatologists, every physician who provides health care for adults takes care of some older patients. The patients who really benefit from seeing a geriatrician are "those who struggle with more complex issues."

Dr. Maghaydah says there are two major ways a patient comes to see a member of his team. In many instances, patients themselves decide they need coaching and guidance through a healthy and successful aging journey, or they may have numerous complicated issues and they and/or family want their care transferred to a geriatric specialist. Or, the patient's physician and/or family may seek the consultative services of a physician at the Center on Aging or its Memory Disorders Clinic, where a multidisciplinary team will provide an opinion and memory disorders focused management. In the latter scenario, the patient may remain with his or her PCP as that physician and UConn Health work in tandem.

"We're available to do both – primary and consultative care – but we're certainly not out to take patients away from their PCPs, particularly when the patient is happy and everything is going well," says Dr. Kuchel, adding, "our role is to add life to years rather than years to life."

The Center on Aging's active research program is multifaceted, focusing on mobility, cognition and behavior, the ability to fend off infection, and voiding and incontinence, thereby helping people to live independently. Research ranges from laboratory work to clinical trials involving the community and large patient populations – such as people in long-term care facilities – all designed to help people age better. For instance, the Center on Aging is currently seeking participants for a hip fracture recovery study.

Each physician agrees there has not been as much progress as they would like surrounding memory issues. Dr. Kuchel says science has "cured Alzheimer's disease in mice about 300 times

now, but getting this cure from mouse models to people is extremely difficult, and we don't fully understand why."

"On the basic science level, a lot of work has been and is being done, but unfortunately nothing has materialized, in terms of clinical options," says Dr. Coll, explaining that Alzheimer's tends to take a toll on caregivers. "In some cases, the family becomes our patient."

Are there any breakthroughs in areas involving aging?

"There are a lot," says Dr. Coll. "In the past, doctors may have traditionally treated patients for diabetes or high blood pressure, and not necessarily thought of the whole person – where they live and work, who they interact with, or what kind of care they have. We've done a lot to improve that." ■

James Battaglio is a writer living in Glastonbury.

"We know there will never be enough geriatricians to take care of the growing number of older patients. There are not that many of us."

**– Patrick P. Coll, M.D,
UConn Center
on Aging**

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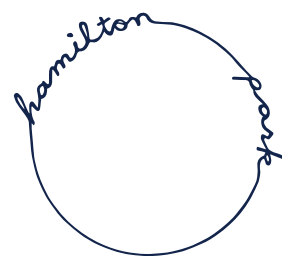


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GAME ON

For 50 years, Special Olympics Connecticut has fostered inclusive competition

By TERESA M. PELHAM

If Justin Mazza didn't have Special Olympics in his life, he figures he'd probably spend a lot of his time playing video games. Instead, he practices and trains and competes nearly every month of the year, has forged strong friendships, and is making memories to last a lifetime.

Mazza began training with Mary-Jane Hussey when he was six years old, when Hussey was his special education teacher at South Elementary School in Windsor Locks, and began competing two years later. Now 26, he competes in track and field, floor hockey, bowling, bocce, and croquet. Although the state Summer Games (held annually each June in New Haven) are the highlight of his year, his shining moment was winning the silver medal in the 4x100 relay at the USA Games in Seattle last year.

"To see where he started, when he couldn't run 50 meters, to where he is now, is just amazing," says coach Hussey. "But it's not just the athletics. It's also how he's grown socially and confidently."

Mazza proudly wore his medal for this interview, during which he and Hussey shared their experiences with Special Olympics Connecticut, now in its 50th year.

The Hamden-based program has grown to include 6,651 athletes and 5,885 partners enrolled in its traditional sports, Unified Sports, and Young Athletes programs. Nearly 14,000 volunteers and 769 certified coaches donate their time and energy to ensure that individuals with intellectual disabilities have opportunities to develop physical fitness, demonstrate courage, and experience the joy of sports.

Special Olympics Connecticut is led by Beau Doherty, who began working with Special Olympics in the 1980s and

became president of Special Olympics Connecticut in 1993. He's driven by the philosophy of Special Olympics Founder Eunice Kennedy Shriver, a pioneer in the fight for equality for people with intellectual disabilities.

Shriver, angered by the discrimination people with intellectual disabilities faced, spearheaded efforts to create Special Olympics. Following years of her work and advocacy, the first International Special Olympics Summer Games took place on July 20, 1968 at Soldier Field in

Chicago. Those first games, which included more than 200 events, resulted from a partnership between the Kennedy Foundation and Chicago Park District. Later that year, governing organization Special Olympics, Inc. was formed, and the games have only grown – in scope and popularity – since.

"I've noticed that volunteers get just as much out of it as the athletes," Doherty says. "Something happens when you do something good for

someone else but volunteering with us is a lot more hands-on than doing a walk for charity or raising money. That's where we're different."

Several decades ago, institutions for people with intellectual disabilities began closing, leaving many people without opportunities for exercise and socialization, Doherty says. Special Olympics Connecticut helped fill that void. Now with 74 local programs, it has evolved to offer athletes opportunities in dozens of sports.

Doherty was instrumental in the creation of the Unified Sports program, made up of 2,300 athletes and 3,500 non-disabled partners. In Unified Sports, athletes with and without disabilities train and compete as teammates.



HONORING DEDICATION: Special Olympics Connecticut has been celebrating the accomplishments of athletes with intellectual disabilities - and their allies - since its inception. Here, coach Mary-Jane Hussey receives an award for Outstanding Local Program.



ON TRACK: Justin Mazza competing in the track and field event at the 2018 Special Olympics USA Games in Seattle.

“With Unified Sports, the athletes and non-disabled partners form these incredible bonds,” he says.

Hussey, now in her 37th year of volunteering with Special Olympics, says the program has special meaning.

“When you see the athlete and the partner together, everybody is equal,” she says. “To see how they help each other is just so cool.”

Special Olympics also has expanded over the years to include health and wellness in its mission. The Healthy Athletes initiative began in 1997 after Special Olympics leaders learned from athletes and their families about the lack of quality health care for people with intellectual disabilities from athletes and their family members.

The unique health challenges of those with intellectual disabilities historically were not on the radar for most health organizations, policymakers, universities, and health care associations. Special Olympics began to explore ways to address these disparities, and to date has provided more than 1.4 million free health exams to athletes and trained more than 120,000 health care professionals worldwide.

For athletes like Mazza, Healthy Athletes events are fun, and often include plenty of giveaways. But exams at Healthy Athletes events have also uncovered significant preventable health issues, such as skin conditions, obesity, poor oral health, low bone density, and reduced vision and hearing. As an example, in 2008 the global adult obesity rate was 12 percent compared with 30.9 percent for adults with intellectual disabilities examined by Special Olympics.

Locally, Jean Herzog, PhD., senior director of health and wellness for Special Olympics Connecticut, notes that Special Olympics Connecticut offers seven of the eight Healthy Athletes programs and will offer all eight later this year. Programs offer a wide variety of services, including hearing exams, podiatric screenings, physical therapy, guidance on self-advocacy and making healthy lifestyle choices, free vision assessments, dental examinations, tactics on how to manage stress during competition and daily life, and other physical screenings.

“This is a medically underserved population,” says Herzog. “For many years, people were kind of warehoused. People got ignored. People were on Medicaid or had no health insurance. Special Olympics has made inclusion and equity in health care a focus.”



LEADING THE WAY: Special Olympics Connecticut President Beau Doherty, shown here with an athlete, began working with the organization in the '80s and became its leader in 1993.

More than 1,800 health screenings are now done each year in Connecticut, and there have been 2 million screenings internationally. One of Herzog's goals is to help educate those who provide health care to offer better care for people with intellectual disabilities.

"The standard of care still applies," she says. "Everyone deserves the same level of care. It's been very rewarding to watch our health care students who come to volunteer get comfortable and have such a wonderful experience."


Herzog says Special Olympics now holds the world's largest data set on the health status of people with intellectual disabilities. Moving forward, Special Olympics is evolving from providing screenings to the larger goals of inclusive and equitable healthcare through partnerships and education, so that not only athletes but everyone with intellectual disabilities can be healthy.

Despite the high number of volunteers who donate their time to Special Olympics Connecticut, Doherty says more volunteers are needed. Coaches and partners are particularly difficult to secure, given the time commitment. But once that bond is formed, these relationships often last for decades.

"When I started coaching, there was nothing here in Windsor Locks for the kids," says Hussey. "There was no Special Olympics program. So we started our own program. Now we're in our 23rd year in Windsor Locks, and it's the 21st year for Justin. It definitely keeps us busy."

For Mazza, the games present opportunities to keep pushing himself.

"I like to compete in different sports, cheer for my teammates and go to the states," he says. "I always try my best."

For more information on a Special Olympics program near you, visit soct.org/get-involved/local-programs. 

Teresa M. Pelham is a freelance writer and children's book author from Farmington. Her newest book, "Stuey & Veronica," addresses anxiety and is available at www.roxysforeverhome.com.

UPCOMING SPECIAL OLYMPICS EVENTS

Dream Ride

August 23, 24 and 25
The Farmington Polo Club
Farmington

The Dream Ride Experience is more than an event - it is a movement that makes dreams come true. Dream Ride benefits Special Olympics and The Hometown Foundation, Inc. and provides a weekend packed with fun activities, extraordinary cars, motorcycles and entertainment for guests of all ages. The largest philanthropic endeavor of Bozzuto's, Inc. and The Hometown Foundation Inc., this three-day event brings thousands of attendees and hundreds of athletes together to participate. The event will take place August 23-25 at The Farmington Polo Club, 152 Town Farm Road in Farmington. To find out more, see a schedule of activities, register your car/motorcycle, and purchase passes online, visit DreamRide.org. Questions? Call 844-DRM-RIDE. Sponsorship and volunteer opportunities are also available.

Over the Edge

September 6
Mohegan Sun
Uncasville

Over the Edge is a fundraiser (to benefit Special Olympics Connecticut) that gives participants the awesome opportunity to rappel more than 30 floors and see amazing sights from atop Mohegan Sun's Sky Tower!

Participants must pre-register and raise a minimum of \$1,000 through online fundraising. No experience is necessary, as training and guidance throughout the descent are provided. Individuals and teams are welcome, and spectators are encouraged to come out and join Special Olympics athletes in cheering on the fearless!



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Simple Pleasures

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

When I was 16 years old, I marched in the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade as a member of my high school band. I pounded on my bass drum as we made our way down a frigid Sixth Avenue while mobs of people lined the streets and enormous balloons danced overhead.

I remember being excited and cold that day. Mostly cold. I also had to pee for much of the parade, and given that it was New York City, peeing was not really an option.

Mostly I was cold and had to pee. But the balloons were amazing.

When I was 17 years old, I marched in the Rose Bowl in Pasadena on New Year's Day. We stood alongside enormous floats made entirely of flowers. A small earthquake shook the bridge beneath us while we waited to begin marching.

Californians laughed as we New Englanders trembled in fear. Two teenage girls sitting on a curb remarked that I looked a lot like Tom Cruise. I've clung to those words for the past three decades. I loved those girls despite their obvious visual impairment. I still love them.

These were big parades. Possibly the most notable and famous parades in the entire world, and I was fortunate enough to march in both. My high school marching band also paraded down Main Streets in both Disneyland and Disney World.

I also marched in many hometown parades throughout my childhood, first as a Cub Scout and later as a flutist and drummer. Too many hometown parades, if I'm being honest. Once you march down Main Street a few times, it gets pretty old.

Years later, I would stand on a sidewalk in Willimantic,

Conn., watching the world-famous Boom Box Parade march by. This tradition began in 1986 when local residents learned that there would be no parade that year because the high school had no marching band. In lieu of live music, the local radio station was convinced to broadcast two hours of marching band music on the Fourth of July. Residents then obtained a parade permit, dressed in red, white, and blue, and carried boom box radios with them.

More than 30 years later, this parade has grown into a hilarious and unorthodox spectacle featuring trucks that spray water from hoses onto paradegoers, fire-breathers and fire-eaters, and a little girl campaigning for the presidency in 2048.

But the Macy's Thanksgiving Day parade, the Rose Bowl, and even the Boom Box Parade pale in comparison to the parade I've witnessed for the past five years on the Fourth of July.

On that most patriotic of days, my family and I travel to Monterey, Mass., home of my in-laws, for their Fourth of July hometown parade and celebration. It's fantastic. The best parade in the country, in my humble opinion.

The parade itself lasts about nine seconds. It's about 47 feet long. It consists of a single high school band that marches two blocks to the center of town, where it stops and faces a church. Moments later, the band members erupt into the Star-Spangled Banner, reading the music off those small, portable music stands attached to horns, clarinets, and drums.

(I hate those little music stands. When I was marching, we didn't read music. We memorized our music. Committed it to our hearts and minds. And don't you think for a minute that I sound like an old man lamenting the good old days. Those stupid, little music stands existed in my day, but no self-respecting marching band would've been caught dead with them.)

When the band is finished playing, a couple of local officials tap on the microphone of an aging, failing sound system and attempt to stir the gathering of folks with some unprepared, stumbling sentences. Last year, the sound system failed completely, forcing officials to shout their uninspiring remarks to all who would listen. Thankfully, the

"The best parade in the country, in my humble opinion. The parade itself lasts about nine seconds."



town's center is tiny. It consists of a post office, a library, the church, and a general store, which is inexplicably closed, seemingly, every Fourth of July.

After those few remarks, the band turns and marches up the hill. Fire trucks pass by. Maybe a Boy Scout troop or two. An ambulance or a police car. Candy is sometimes tossed. Small American flags are handed out. Children laugh.

A few years ago, the drag queen son of the town cop drove through in a convertible. People cheered. It might've been the most exciting thing that had happened to Monterey in years.

Paradegoers follow the trucks up the hill to the firehouse, where firefighters are standing by to give away free hot dogs and soda to all who arrive. An ice cream truck is parked alongside the firehouse, waiting to give free ice cream to anyone willing to wait in line.

Hot dogs, soda, and ice cream are amazing foods in their own right. Some of the best ever created. But when they are free and attached to a parade and patriotism, they are elevated to new heights.

Monterey residents and the occasional interloper like myself sit on the lawn and eat. We aggressively ignore our children. Face painters and balloon artists sometimes offer their wares free of charge. One year, my son arrived back at our blanket with what was supposed to be a balloon sword but was so phallic in nature (not to mention flesh colored) that I was sure the balloon artist had made it on purpose. Who makes penis-colored balloons?

It's all over in less than an hour. Parade. Hot dog. Ice cream. Penis balloon. Then we turn and head home, feeling like we've had a real adventure. A day filled with memories to last a lifetime, and photographs that we will treasure forever.

All in the span of about 60 minutes.

The Fourth of July parade in Monterey, Mass. is a reminder that not everything has to be a "thing." It's also a perfect reminder that there is nothing better on a summer day than a free hot dog and a couple of small children waving tiny American flags as a band marches by.

**Mark Zinni &
Erin Connolly**



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